

# Colourful microstructures: How Italian dictionaries see colour terms

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*A Color stands abroad  
On Solitary Fields  
That Science cannot overtake  
But Human Nature feels.  
(Emily Dickinson)*

## **1. Introduction**

This paper aims to analyze how different Italian dictionaries (mainly digital monolingual dictionaries) deal with colour-related terms, in particular as concerns:

- the attribution of parts of speech;
- the treatment of new chromonyms and compound colours.

The association of colour with fonts and microstructure design has massively entered the world of digital dictionaries. As Dziemianko (2015) demonstrated in a recent publication, this kind of information in every microstructure significantly increases the speed and effectiveness of online dictionary searches.

Though this is an important aspect of colour use in lexicography, it is not the primary topic of our research. Our main aim is to analyse how different dictionaries deal with the attribution of more than one part of speech, usually a noun and an adjective, to the same headword, and whether they supply the necessary morphosyntactic information.

At a methodological level, we worked with full text queries in digital dictionaries and with queries exploiting part of speech (POS) labels in annotated corpora (see § 3).

## 2. Colours in Italian dictionaries

A complete analysis of dictionary definitions of colour terms is discussed in Casati (1990), who defends an Aristotelian paradigm of definition (colour names are introduced by pointing to objects of a specific colour) against the scientific paradigm used by most Italian dictionaries. In his opinion, the state of conceptual confusion in Italian lexicography derived from a tendency which first appeared in Tommaseo–Bellini (1861-1879) and, due to its authoritative influence, was passed on in many subsequent works, whereas correct reference to a prototype was characteristic of our early lexicographic tradition (see *Vocabolario della Crusca*). The lack of homogeneous criteria is documented by the range of possible definitions, as outlined in the following scheme:

- a definition starting from typical substance<sup>45</sup>, which refers to a prototype, as for example *viola* = *il colore della viola mammola* (Palazzi 1986), ‘the colour of wood violet’

- a definition starting from thesaural association with idiomatic expressions (like *rosso come il fuoco* ‘red as fire’) which are vague and not always true or sufficient;

- a definition starting from the spectrum position in terms of wavelength (i.e.: “radiazioni di lunghezza d’onda comprese tra 7500 e 6540 Å” / “che sta tra il giallo e il blu”).

Consider that in our digital era such variety is decreasing because series of headwords sharing the same features are dealt with using the same microstructure model.

Looking at Italian paper dictionaries, Marconi (1997: 300-301) observed that illustrations could be added to colour definitions to clarify fine shade distinctions; otherwise, in some cases they become almost unintelligible. For example, users’ referential competence is not really supported by definitions like:

*magenta* = [...] color porpora carico venuto di moda dopo la battaglia di Magenta (1859), con riferimento al colore dei pantaloni degli zuavi francesi [Treccani 1989] ‘intense purple colour, which became fashionable after the Battle of Magenta (1859), referring to the colour of French Zouave trousers’

We can find the same definition in Zingarelli 1970 (*magenta* = [...] colore cremisi carico, Eng. ‘intense crimson’): a comparison with the most recent edition (Zingarelli 2016) shows a revision, in an attempt to refer only to basic colours, like *rosso* ‘red’ and *violetto* ‘violet’:

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<sup>45</sup> Some attention should also be devoted to websites where people post images they associate with feelings and colours, because nowadays defining colours according to the “typical substance” of that colour, as Casati (1990) suggests, might reserve some surprises and reveal shifts in typicality.

magènta / ma'dʒɛnta/

[da Magenta, luogo della sanguinosa battaglia (1859), con allusione al sangue che vi fu sparso ☀ 1872]

agg.; anche s. m. inv.

- di colore rosso molto intenso, tendente al violetto

In Zingarelli 2008 in the internal part of the cover the publisher provided an atlas of colours and indicated the name of each colour and the percentage of the four-colour process for each hue.

In the Merriam Webster online Learner's Dictionary we find (see <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/magenta>):

**magenta** /mə'dʒɛntə/ noun

plural magentas

Learner's definition of MAGENTA [count, noncount] : a bright, deep purplish-red color — see color picture on [this page](#)

**magenta** adjective

Clicking on the link “*this page*” we can see a table of colours where magenta is placed near fuchsia: an undeniable advantage of e-lexicography on line.

### 3. Searching for colour terms (without getting lost somewhere over the rainbow...)

Initially, our methodology worked with full text queries within digital dictionaries, running the risk of also obtaining articles which contained examples where a colour adjective is mentioned as any other adjective might be. Overall the method worked well and offered more results than a search for the word *colour* in the field “definition” of the advanced search mode. Then we used annotated corpora of Italian in order to verify the frequency and use of some particular cases: *ItTenTen*<sup>46</sup> and *NUNC-It*<sup>47</sup> corpora were the main sources.

Grossmann (1988) already dealt with most topics we are interested in because her research was (also) based on paper dictionaries. We will deal with these points mainly through digital online dictionaries since they allow the abovementioned “full text” search mode which helps to discover unexpected occurrences of colour terms in microstructures as well. In any case, we noticed that colour term microstructures

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<sup>46</sup> The Italian *TenTen* corpus (v. 1.0, 2010) is available in Sketch Engine (<https://www.sketchengine.co.uk/>) with 3.1 billion tokens. It is tagged with TreeTagger using Marco Baroni's parameter file.

<sup>47</sup> The NUNC suite of multilingual corpora (*Newsgroups UseNet Corpora*) is based on newsgroups' language: it was implemented at Turin University by the research group led by Carla Marello and Manuel Barbera and is freely searchable at [www.corpora.unito.it](http://www.corpora.unito.it). The Italian subset of data NUNC-It has 237.401.299 tokens.

have not undergone major restyling since Grossmann's study, so it can be said that most of what she observed remains true.

A preliminary note is related to what we cannot find when searching *colore*: in some cases, dictionary glosses have the plural form *colori* or words like *riflesso* (= glare, reflection); for example, the entry **posterizzare** 'to posterize' whose definition contains *colori* in the plural in Zingarelli 2016.

We examined whether Italian dictionaries always treat every colour or colour category the same way.

Basically we face different levels of lexicalisation of colour terms, as outlined in the following exemplifications:

- (1) *verde* 'green'
- (2) *verde scuro* 'dark green': the term is followed by a characterization given by another adjective; *verdolino-verdino* 'light green', allowed by the rich palette of Italian suffixes of endearment
- (3) *verde smeraldo* / *verde bottiglia* 'emerald green' / 'bottle green': the term is followed by a characterization given by an invariable noun<sup>48</sup>
- (4) *verdeoro* 'green and gold' (in particular when referring to Brazilian sport teams): the term is composed by two juxtaposed colour terms whose meanings remain distinct<sup>49</sup>
- (5) *verd(e)azzurro* 'bluish green': the term is composed of two colour terms, indicating a new colour between the two
- (6) *smeraldo* / *sabbia* 'emerald' / 'sand'

In the following discussion we will analyse some aspects of their linguistic (and lexicographic) behaviour.

Predictably, moving towards the last classes, which represent the less lexicalised types, the likelihood of finding definitions and examples such as "(di) color(e) + X" 'of colour X, X-coloured' before the colour term itself (a situation potentially occurring also for type (1)) grows: e.g. *una maglietta color albicocca* 'an apricot-coloured t-shirt' is more common than *una maglietta albicocca* 'an apricot t-shirt' both in corpora and in dictionaries.

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<sup>48</sup> Colour terms are sometimes hapax, intended to create a brilliant style and therefore they are not recorded in dictionaries (Sergio 2010: 248); type (3) terms in particular are more likely to be occasional neologisms. An Italian research paper focusing on children's categorization of colours has shown that colour vocabulary enrichment in early childhood is mainly due to compound expressions made up of a basic colour + a noun which is generally related to real objects, e.g.: *giallo formaggio* 'yellow [like] cheese'; *rosso guancia* 'red [like a] cheek'; *blu grembiule* 'blue [like a] smock' (Mecacci/Serafini 1987: 82).

<sup>49</sup> The difference between type (4) and type (5) is clearly illustrated by D'Achille/Grossmann (2013), distinguishing respectively *additive* and *intersective* relations.

#### 4. Part of speech attribution

As concerns the categorization of word classes, we are mainly dealing with adjectives. Grossmann already argued (1988: 35) that these terms express qualities or features of people, objects, and ideas which can also be named by nouns (*color sabbia*), compounds (*verde bottiglia / fumo di Londra*), elements derived from verbs (*verdeggiante* it. adj coming from present participle of verb *verdeggiare* ‘to be verdant’), acting as an ADJ from a syntactic and semantic perspective.

However, we can note that some forms are more or less adjectival. A prototypical ADJ is formally defined by a series of properties; for example, +/-agreement with its head is an interesting aspect to be considered in our analysis. The terms here considered can be variable or invariable lexemes.

Given the normal number and gender agreement of colour terms of what we called type (1) (*pantaloni bianchi* ‘white trousers’; *penne rosse* ‘red pens’), let us consider type (2):

- (1) la gonna gialla chiara / le gonne gialle chiare / gli abiti gialli chiari
- (2) \*la gonna gialla chiaro / le gonne gialle chiaro / gli abiti gialli chiaro
- (3) la gonna giallo chiaro / le gonne giallo chiaro / gli abiti giallo chiaro

- ad (1) la [[gonna] [[giallo] & [chiaro]]. Both *chiaro* ‘light’ and *giallo* ‘yellow’ are adjectives and modify *gonna* ‘skirt’.
- ad (3) la [[gonna] [[giallo] chiaro]], i.e. *chiaro* (adjective) modifies *giallo* (noun) and *giallo chiaro* modifies *gonna*. *Giallo* is meant as *colore giallo* and *giallo chiaro* is invariable, being an attribute of *colore* (though *colore* is not expressed).

Italian behaves differently from Russian, another language rich in morphological agreement markers, where we have to deal with compound adjectives:

- светло-желтая юбка - светло-желтая ← composed by светл(ая) (light) + желтая (yellow) ; linking morpheme 'o'; светло-желтая (It. *giallo chiaro*) agrees in number gender and case with the noun head of the nominal phrase.

Moving towards the less lexicalised cases, we can observe different behaviours for types (3), (4), (5) and (6):

- (4) *Le calze verde bottiglia* / \**verdi bottiglia* / \**verde bottiglie* / \**verdi bottiglie* ‘bottle green socks’
- (5) *Le calze verdeoro* / ?*verdioro* / \**verdeori* / \**verdiori* ‘green and gold socks’
- (6) *Le calze verdeazzurro* / ?*verdiazzurro* / ?*verdeazzurre* / ?*verdiazzurre*<sup>50</sup> ‘bluish green socks’
- (7) *Le calze smeraldo* / \**smeralde* ‘emerald socks’

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<sup>50</sup> This last form (*verdiazzurre*) would be easily accepted in the case of, e.g., socks with stripes of both green and blue, which is a case belonging to type (4) with an additive relation.

Generally dictionaries do not devote enough attention to these cases of agreement.

### 5. Nouns turning into colour attributes

Let us now consider those colour terms which come from natural elements (e.g. *avorio*, the Italian correspondent of ivory), or particular stones (e.g. coral, jade, ruby), minerals and metals (e.g. bronze, copper), fruit and vegetables (e.g. apricot, eggplant), food (e.g. cream, mustard), fauna (e.g. lobster, salmon) or flowers (e.g. cyclamen, lilac), and are used for denominating their typical colour.

Thornton (2004) considers such colour terms, which are very frequent in the field of textiles and fashion, under the process of NOUN → ADJ conversion. However, she remarked that they do not behave like adjectives in traditional tests (number/gender agreement, comparative, superlative, adverbial use, anteposition in front of N), unlike most basic colours:

- (a) i. una maglia rosa / fucsia / salmone / albicocca / panna  
 due maglie rosa / fucsia / salmone / albicocca / panna  
 due maglie \*rose / \*fucsie / \*salmoni / \*albicocche / \*panne  
 vs una maglia rossa / nera, due maglie rosse / nere
- ii. un maglione rosa / fucsia / albicocca / panna,  
 una maglia salmone  
 un maglione \*roso / \*fucsio / \*albicocco / \*panno  
 una maglia \*salmona  
 vs un maglione rosso / nero, una maglia rossa / nera
- (b) i. la mia maglia è più rosa / <sup>?</sup>salmone / <sup>?</sup>albicocca / <sup>?</sup>panna della tua  
 ii. la mia maglia è \*rosissima / \*salmonissima / \*albicocchissima /  
 \*pannissima  
 vs la mia maglia è nerissima / rossissima
- (c) \*rosamente / \*albicoccamente vestito  
 but also: \*rossamente / \*neramente vestito
- (d) la <sup>?</sup>rosa / \*fucsia / \*salmone / \*panna maglia  
 vs le nere chiome, le bianche vesti, i verdi pascoli

Thornton (2004: 530)

Consequently, this category of modifiers seems to have, on the whole, a “null grade of adjectivity” and it should be classified as nouns modifying nouns, according to Thornton.

This leads to the problematic decisions lexicographers need to take: how should the attribution of more than one part of speech to the same headword to be managed and how should the necessary morphosyntactic information be provided.

We can take into consideration those nouns entered as recent chromonyms in our dictionaries, beginning with the term *sabbia* ‘sand’, used in expressions like “un golfino color sabbia”.

Most cases in the *ItTenTen* corpus present the form *color sabbia* (with some variants but the same structure: *tonalità sabbia*):

- (8) Tre rustici di tufo dal **colore sabbia chiaro** che ricorda la terra dei deserti  
 ‘Three **sand coloured** tuff cottages’

- (9) I frutti sono acheni **color sabbia**, e spesso vengono scambiati per semi.  
‘The fruit are **sand coloured** achene, and often are mistaken for seeds’
- (10) giocano sull'accostamento della **tonalità sabbia** e del beige  
‘they play with the combination of **shades of sand** and beige’

However, some examples are documented where *sabbia* is not preceded by “colour”:

- (11) moquette **sabbia** e selleria in pelle beige con copricapote  
‘**sand** carpeting and beige leather upholstering with slipcovers’
- (12) Questa farina si ottiene in primo luogo essiccando le castagne, [...] macinandole [...] così da ridurle in farina finissima. Questa si presenta con un caratteristico color avorio dalle possibili sfumature **sabbia**.  
‘The flour is obtained by drying the chestnuts first, [...] grinding them [...] into a very fine flour. This should be ivory colour and may be tinted with various shades of **sand**.’

This kind of information is actually included in Zingarelli 2016 (B refers to the possible role of invariable adjective), but it is provided with a bad example:

◆ sàbbia /  'sabbja/

[lat. s̄abula, nt. pl. di s̄abulum ‘sabbia’, prob. di orig. indeur. ☀ 1440]

A s. f.

[...]

B in funzione di agg. inv.

- (posposto a un sost.) che ha il colore tra il beige e il grigio chiaro caratteristico della sostanza omonima: *un golfino color sabbia*

The singular form *un golfino color sabbia* cannot really illustrate the invariability of the form – whereas corpora data clearly show that also plural words (like *cappotti* in 13.) are followed by the singular *sabbia*:

- (13) cappotti **sabbia** da imprenditore con sani principi. (La Stampa Moda)  
‘Sand coloured coats typical of businessmen with sound principles’

See also the case of *ardesia*, ‘slate’. Under the headword **ardesia** in Zingarelli 2016 we find the following definitions and examples:

ardèšia /  ar'dɛzja/

[fr. ardoise, di etim. incerta ☀ 1741]

A s. f.

1 roccia scistosa argillosa facilmente divisibile in lastre sottili di colore grigio o verdastro; è usata per la copertura di tetti, per lavagne ecc.

2 colore grigio bluastro caratteristico della sostanza omonima: cielo d'ardesia

B in funzione di agg. inv.

- (posposto al sost.) nella loc. *grigio ardesia*, detto delle tonalità di grigio tendente al blu, tipica dell'omonimo minerale: *abito, tessuto grigio ardesia*

The examples given in B. do not belong to the use of the adj. *ardesia* but to the multiword *grigio ardesia*. This is not surprising because even in large modern digital corpora of Italian we cannot find many examples where *ardesia* is alone, as a totally lexicalised colour term:

- (14) la cupola delle **nuvole di ardesia** (NUNC-It)  
'the dome of **slate** (grey) clouds'
- (15) cieli temporaleschi **di ardesia** in un miscuglio di sguardi impigliati e brividi dell'aria (NUNC-It)  
'stormy skies of slate in a mix of entwined expressions and shivers of air'
- (16) Il cielo prendeva una **tinta di ardesia** (ItTenTen)  
'The sky became **the colour of slate**'

Contexts (14-16) show the prepositional phrase *di ardesia*; we found only one context in a scientific description where the colour term alone is an adjective:

- (17) nel Canarino bianco o **ardesia** il dato ha una utilità ben maggiore (ItTenTen)
- (18) 'for white or **slate-grey** canary the datum is much more useful'

Most terms of this type are classified as invariable adjectives; for instance, *cachi* or *kaki* 'khaki' and *albicocca* 'apricot' in Zingarelli 2016, but no examples are provided.

This is not valid for *melanzana* 'eggplant' (which is a colour term in Grossmann's list), described as a NOUN (s.f.) with the meaning of plant/vegetable/etc., but with no mention of the corresponding colour in Zingarelli, Nuovo De Mauro or Sabatini-Coletti. Devoto-Oli 2011 registers the adjectival use in fashion jargon but gives the example: *accessori color melanzana*, 'eggplant-coloured accessories' where *melanzana* actually is used as an apposition of *color*.

Under the definition of *prugna* 'plum' the Nuovo De Mauro online distinguishes both the noun and the invariable adjective:

prù|gna s.f., s.m.inv., agg.inv.av. 1320; lat. tardo prūnīa(m), der. di prunus  
"susino".

#### AD

1. s.f., susina: *marmellata di prugne*
2. s.m.inv., colore rosso violaceo simile a quello di tale frutto | agg.inv., di tale colore: *cappotto prugna*

Zingarelli 2016 gives two examples: *una borsa color prugna* 'a plum-coloured bag'; *un vestito prugna* 'a plum dress'. Only the second one is a true example of the adjectival use.


As concerns type (3) of our classification, it needs to be determined whether cases like *giallo zafferano* 'saffron yellow' are independent lexicographical entries or whether these shades are specified among the co-occurrence strings of a lemma, and in particular, of a basic colour.



In GRADIT we find the phraseology within the microstructure instead of an independent headword - see e.g. under *giallo*:

4. s.m., il colore del limone o dell'oro: *un maglione di un bel giallo, quest'anno va di moda il giallo* | seguito da un sostantivo che indica una cosa o un animale di tale colore che individua la tonalità: *giallo limone, giallo oro, giallo canarino, giallo zafferano*; anche seguito da un aggettivo o da un altro colore: *giallo carico, vivace, intenso, allegro, tenue, delicato; giallo arancio, giallo verde* | **TS** fis. colore primario compreso nell'iride tra l'aranciato e il verde

In Zingarelli 2016, on the other hand, the independent colour term *zafferano* 'saffron' is lemmatized without any reference to *giallo* 'yellow' (with no recording under the headword *giallo*):

zafferàno /  \*dzaffe' rano/  
[dall'arabo za'farān 'croco' ☀ 1303]

A s. m.

[...]

B in funzione di agg. inv.

- (posto a un sost.) detto di colore giallo intenso: *vestito zafferano* | *gabbiano zafferano*, piccolo gabbiano dal vivace e intenso colore giallo che vive a gruppi sulle coste nord-europee (*Larus fuscus*)

Studies such as Fresu (2006) and D'Achille (2014) might help Italian lexicographers to revise and enlarge the phraseological part of the microstructure. Fresu (2006)<sup>51</sup> in particular tries to verify how new chromonyms relate to existing terms of colours.

Note that looking for *colore* in e-dictionaries using the full text search mode produces a list of lemmas with the word in the etymology, but with very specific meanings:

enrosàdira /  enroza' dira/

[ladino dolomitico enrosadōra e rosadūra, propr. 'il farsi di colore rosa', da rōsa '(color di) rosa' ☀ 1924]

s. f.

- la graduale colorazione rosa che sfuma verso il viola, che le pareti dolomitiche assumono al tramonto

Full text queries for *colore* identify verbs related to colours as well, such as the rare *arrubinàre* 'to become ruby-coloured', the still used *azzurreggiàre* 'to become, to be blue-coloured', *imporporare* 'to become purple-coloured'.

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<sup>51</sup> Fresu (2006) remarks that in Italian *nero*, *bianco*, *rosso* are very "productive" and stable. More recent colours like *arancione* or *viola* have not (yet) developed their metaphorical domain.

The dictionary definition of *imporporare* does not contain the figurative meaning which is attested in some corpus data, connected to high church positions: Fresu (2006: 78) considers it a “high grade of semantic specialization” (*il porporato* = cardinal), actually recorded under the lemma *porpora* ‘purple’, for example in Zingarelli 2016:

pórpōra / ◀ 'porpora/  
 [vc. Dotta, lat. Pūrpura(m), dal gr. Porphýra, di etim. Incerta ☀ av. 1250]  
 s. f.  
 1 sostanza colorante rossa usata dagli antichi, secreta da ghiandole del tegumento di gasteropodi marini del genere *Purpura* e *Murex*  
 2 colore vermiglio: *cielo di porpora* | *essere, diventare, farsi di porpora*, (fig.) arrossire violentemente  
 3 drappo, tessuto tinto con la porpora | (est.) veste realizzata con tale tessuto: *la porpora regia, prelatizia* | (est.) la dignità e il titolo di cardinale: *aspirare alla porpora; essere innalzato alla porpora* | *indossare la porpora*, essere eletto cardinale  
 4 (med.) macula rosso-violacea della pelle dovuta a una piccola emorragia: *porpora emorragica* | *porpora retinica*, rodopsina

In ItTenTen we find only 5 cases out of 206 occurrences (+ 1 case in NUNC) in which the word *imporporato* refers to cardinals as, for instance, in:

- (19) *farcita dalla presenza di autorità graduate e **imporporate***  
 ‘filled by the presence of military [lit. graduated] and ecclesiastic [lit. cardinal red] authorities’

## 5. Compound terms

Special attention is devoted in Italian to compound colour terms related to the field of sport, football in particular.

Teams, players, supporters and related lemmas are frequently denominated with terms designating colours of team kits<sup>52</sup>: a simple word like *granata* or *viola*; more often compounds, like *bianconero*, *rossonero*, *nerazzurro*, *biancoceleste*, *rosanero*, *giallorosso*,<sup>53</sup> etc.

Similar Italian adjectives agree in number and gender with nouns (*la squadra nerazzurra*; *i campioni bianconeri/rossoneri*; *l'allenatore bianconero*), whereas, for example, Catalan *blaugrana* (= of/or relating to the football team FC Barcelona) is invariable.

A special case mentioned by D'Achille (2014) is represented by *rosanero* (referred to Palermo's players), recorded also - and mostly - as invariable: *i rosanero*.

<sup>52</sup> See the very detailed analysis proposed by D'Achille (2014) and his bibliographical references.

<sup>53</sup> The mentioned examples refer respectively to the football teams Torino, Fiorentina, Juventus, Milan, Inter, Lazio, Palermo and Roma.

Among the examples presented by D’Achille such colour terms have a nominal value. However, their use as adjectives is highly frequent: actually, they probably emerged as adjectives - see the ellipsis process suggested by Nascimbeni<sup>54</sup> and mentioned in D’Achille (2014: 117, footnote 38): *i giocatori in maglia viola* → *i viola* ‘the players with violet t-shirt → the violets’, which lets us presume an intermediate step: *i giocatori viola* ‘the violet players’.

GRADIT has considered *viola* as a noun, with the meaning of ‘supporter of the Fiorentina team’, also used as an invariable adjective. On the other hand, it recorded the compound *giallorosso* as an adjective also used as a noun.

In Zingarelli 2016 we find both categorizations: an invariable adjective (‘that is playing on the football team Fiorentina or is a supporter of the team’) and an invariable noun (‘person playing on the football team Fiorentina or a supporter of the team’):

◆viòla (1) / ▼ vi'òla/

[...]

B in funzione di agg. inv.

[...]

2 che gioca nella squadra di calcio della Fiorentina o ne è sostenitore

C s. m. inv. (anche f. nel sign. 2)

[...]

2 chi gioca nella squadra di calcio della Fiorentina o ne è sostenitore

## 6. Closing remarks: colourful microstructures might be better

Colour terms are presently studied by linguists because they are deeply tied to emotions and visual experiences. In the past century they were mainly investigated because they showed a high degree of language (and culture) specificity, in spite of the fact that human beings share the same organ of sight.

Italian linguists have written many interesting papers and books about colour terms, both from a diachronic perspective and from a morphosyntactic point of view.

The knowledge gathered about the first written occurrence of a colour term is now fairly represented in dictionaries because almost all monolingual Italian dictionaries give the date of the first appearance of a word. Lexicological studies on “new” colours are facilitated by large corpora, including newspapers and fashion magazines. We mentioned specialised studies such as the one by D’Achille 2014 about bicolor compounds in football press reports.

From our survey, it appears that monolingual dictionaries are rather quick in hosting new (sub)entries for new colours, all the more so when the new colour is a semantic neologism, like *apricot*, meaning ‘apricot-coloured’ added as an adjective

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<sup>54</sup> Nascimbeni, G. (1992-1993). “La lingua del calcio”. In *Ludus. Sport & Loisir*. I, 3-4. 26-31.

to *apricot* fruit noun. They often do not give examples for such adjectival use without the company of the word *color*. It should be important to stress that *apricot* can be an ADJ of colour in its own right, without *color* in front of *apricot*.

Dictionaries are slower in registering morphosyntactic features of colour terms coupled with *chiaro* ‘light shade’ or *scuro* ‘dark, deep shade’; yet, we know that languages vary in the way they show agreement between the adjective shade and the colour noun/adj with the head of the noun phrase.

If dictionaries register many shades of basic colours, they do not follow the same microstructure schema in the whole dictionary for all the articles devoted to colour terms. The Zingarelli dictionary (2016) is probably the only Italian desk dictionary which has massively applied the following formula to colour adjectives deriving from a noun:

In funzione di agg. inv (posto al sost)  
(‘Used as an adj. it is invariable and follows the noun’)

In the Zingarelli dictionary 2016 out of 395 entries containing this formula, 83 are colour terms. A query on the web shows that the invariability of these adjective + noun couplets, as for instance *giallo ocra*, *verde bottiglia*, *rosso fuoco*, is not always observed in the use of the native speaking/writing community. If dictionaries play a key role in defining the morphology of difficult verbs and unusual plural, in the same way, they should note that not only the second member is invariable but that also the colour adjective “becomes” invariable because it is meant as an attribute of elliptical *colore* : *occhi verdi* (literally eyes plural green plural) but *occhi verde bottiglia* (literally ‘eyes plural green singular bottle singular) and not \**occhi verdi bottiglia* (literally ‘eyes plural green plural bottle singular).

In the French monolingual lexicographic landscape, we find that Le Petit Robert 2013 more accurately registers the difference between what is called APPOS. INV. i.e. apposition invariable, in cases such as *bleu*, *gris ardoise* ‘slate blue, grey’ or *vert bouteille* and what is labelled ADJT INV. “adjectivement invariable” i.e. invariable adjectival use of a word which usually is not an adjective in cases such as *abricot*, *aubergine*, *ivoire*, *prune*, *sable* (‘apricot, eggplant, ivory, plum, sand’) and registers the distinction when both behaviours are possible, as for *safran*: APPOS. INV. *Jaune safran* ‘saffron yellow’- ADJT INV. “*Le soir safran qui sur les quais déteint*” Aragon ‘The saffron evening which discolours on the riverwalks’.

In the Spanish monolingual lexicography, the authoritative Diccionario de la Real Academia Española registers two adjectival uses of *azafrán*: no. 4 is the apposition; no. 5. is the invariable adjectival use, but its being invariable is signalled only through the example, where *túnicas* is plural<sup>55</sup>. *Albaricoque* ‘apricot’ and *marfil* ‘ivory’ are dealt in the same way: the invariable use of the adjectives is conveyed

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<sup>55</sup> DRAE online <http://dle.rae.es> sub voce **azafrán** [...] 4. adj. Dicho de un color: Rojo anaranjado semejante al que se saca del estigma del azafrán. U. t. c. s. m. 5. adj. De color azafrán. *Túnicas azafrán*. U. t. c. s. m. is the shortening of *usado también como sustantivo masculino* and means that *azafrán* can also be used alone as a noun meaning ‘saffron colour’ without being accompanied by the word *color*.

through plural nouns *sedas albaricoque* ‘apricot silks’, *sábanas marfil* ‘ivory savannahs’<sup>56</sup>.

This small sample of comparison with dictionaries of two other Romance languages shows that there is not just one way to deal with this type of morphological behaviour, though the French Le Robert approach appears more consistent. The English language, with its invariable adjectives and with the prenominal position of nouns used as adjectives, handles this lexicographic issue more easily.

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<sup>56</sup> Berenjena ‘eggplant’, *ciruela* ‘plum’, *pizarra* ‘slate’ do not register a color meaning in DRAE.

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