

An Impossible Dialogue! Nominal Utterances and Populist Rhetoric in an Italian Twitter Corpus of Hate Speech against Immigrants

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Abstract

The paper proposes an investigation on the role of populist themes and rhetoric in an Italian Twitter corpus of hate speech against immigrants. The corpus has been annotated with four new layers of analysis: *Nominal Utterances*, that can be seen as consistent with populist rhetoric; *In-out-group* rhetoric, a very common populist strategy to polarize public opinion; *Slogan-like nominal utterances*, that may convey the call for severe illiberal policies against immigrants; *News*, to recognize the role of newspapers (headlines or reference to articles) in the Twitter political discourse on immigration featured by hate speech. The results show that populist themes compose 1/3 of the hate speech, displaying not only In-Out-group rhetoric, but also authoritarianism, mostly carried by Slogan-like nominal utterances. It also appears that news don't convey much hate speech, while they compose almost half of the non hateful tweets.

1 Introduction

Political populism is a pervasive phenomenon observed in several different world regions and ages, but it recently gained increasing attention due to the growing electoral consensus around populist parties in many countries. Even if it is difficult for scholars to converge on a precise definition of populism, a phenomenon which is intrinsically featured by an ever-shifting nature, multifaceted national varieties and unexpected electoral trajectories (Mazzoleni, 2014), most scholars agree in defining it as an ideology considering society to be separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, *the pure people* versus *the corrupt élite*, and arguing that politics should be expression of the “general will” of the people (Mudde, 2004). However, “the people” is a vague concept denoting an artificial group: on one hand, everyone can identify themselves, projecting their identity on it

(Reinemann et al., 2016; Sauer et al., 2018), on the other hand anyone can be the enemy of “the people”, as they just need to be presented as hostile, dangerous and foreign to an apparently homogeneous people group. Populist rhetoric heavily relies on these themes and can be empirically understood through its communicative strategies (Kriesi, 2014). Usually, it is based on “dividing people according to national, ethnic, religious belonging or according to their gender and sexual orientation into ‘good’/‘bad’, ‘us’/‘them’ or ‘the élite’/‘the people’ (Sauer et al., 2018). Thus, it is featured by an *in/out-group* rhetoric (Sauer et al., 2018), where the out-group is perceived as uniform and depicted as a threat, being also regarded as inferior (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018).

Such rhetorical strategy has been observed by scholars in several political debates in different word regions and languages, from US to Italy, where political leaders exploit such dichotomy to polarize public opinion, using a repetitive discourse, simple syntax and vernacular lexicon (Wodak, 2018).

Another worrying aspect which is featuring the political discourse on social media is hate speech. Hate speech dehumanize its targets, reinforcing the sense of identity of the haters (Gagliardone, 2014). This places hate speech near the rhetorical strategies of populism: in fact, we can recognize an in-group (haters) and an out-group (hated) in hate speech too. Moreover, when hate speech is produced by leaders of populist parties, it targets a very specific group of people in order to create a scapegoat, see for instance the case of *immigrants*, having a role in several contemporary political debates.

Given such theoretical framework from social sciences, this work proposes an extension of the Italian Twitter corpus of Hate Speech (HS) against immigrants (Sanguinetti et al., 2018). This new

extension, named POP-HS-IT, is oriented to offer a new dimension of analysis to understand how the political discourse on immigrants and hate speech convey populist views (RQ1), how it is conveyed by the spontaneous writings of individual citizens or by the reference to newspapers (RQ2), or eventually through slogan-like nominal utterances (RQ3).

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we will present some background studies on populism and hate speech in social media and on nominal utterances. In Section 3, we will describe the *Italian Twitter Corpus of Hate Speech against Immigrants*, its original annotation scheme and the sample we analyzed, POP-HS-IT. In Section 4, we will illustrate the new annotation layers we used to investigate the relationship between populism and hate speech in POP-HS-IT, describing every layer individually and reporting information on the inter-annotator agreement. In Section 5, we will present and discuss the results of the annotation, analyzing the presence of *news* and nominal utterances, then focusing on the role of slogan-like nominal utterances and, in the end, on the dualistic constructions of *in/out-group rhetoric*. In the Conclusions results are summarized in the light of the initial RQs and some proposals of future works are discussed.

2 Background

Populism and hate speech in social media. Although there are many definitions of hate speech, for the current study we will refer to it as a language “*that is abusive, insulting, intimidating, harassing, and/or incites to violence, hatred, or discrimination. It is directed against people on the basis of their race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, age, physical condition, disability, sexual orientation, political conviction, and so forth* (Erjavec and Kovai, 2012).

In the last years, in many countries Twitter has become a very prominent online space for sharing knowledge and opinions, becoming a privileged medium also for political communication, and a powerful tool in the hands of populist leaders. In fact, social networks like Twitter are, on the one hand, “distributed, non-hierarchical and democratic” and, on the other hand, an alternative to the mainstream media, which many supporters of populist parties strongly distrust (Bartlett, 2014).

Thus, Twitter is a good ground for observing populist rhetoric, and therefore populism-driven hate speech (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018). But even without populist themes, xenophobic hate speech against immigrants is consistent on Twitter. When we focus on Italy, as described in (Sanguinetti et al., 2018), in the *Italian Twitter Corpus of Hate Speech against Immigrants* 13% of the tweets have been annotated as hate speech. The phenomenon is monitored daily on the <http://mappa.controlodio.it/> platform, where its diffusion can be observed at different geographic levels of granularity (entire Italian territory, regions, provinces) (Capozzi et al., 2018).

Nominal utterances. For the annotation of nominal utterances, we will use the definition and the annotation framework of a specialistic corpus, COSMIANU (Corpus Of Social Media Italian Annotated with Nominal Utterances) (Comandini et al., 2018).

Nominal utterances (NUs), intended as syntactic declarative constructions built around a non-verbal head, are a very ancient and a very common linguistic phenomenon. In fact, we can find NUs in many ancient and current Indo-European, Slavic and Semitic languages (such as Latin, English, Spanish, French, Italian, Hebrew, Arabic and Russian) as well as in Finno-Ugric and Bantu languages (Benveniste, 1990; Simone, 2013).

Some past investigations (Cresti, 1998; Landolfi et al., 2010; Garcia-Marchena, 2016) have shown that NUs occur with a moderately high frequency in spoken language. Moreover, it has been proved that NUs are very common in journalistic writings (especially in the headlines) (Mortara Garavelli, 1971; Dardano and Trifone, 2001) and in social media texts, (Ferrari, 2011; Comandini et al., 2018), which are a fertile ground for NUs. Indeed, the informal and fast nature of this kind of communication media probably makes the expression via short messages, often without any explicit hierarchical relationship, preferable.

A first experiment on the annotation of NUs in an Italian computer-mediated communication dataset is presented in (Comandini et al., 2018) and resulted in the development of the COSMIANU corpus, with 20,6% of the sentences containing an NU. A set of preliminary experiments on automatic NUs identification has been performed relying on this corpus, using an SVM classifier.

The best configuration of features analyzed (two-word window context, tokens, lemma and Part-Of-Speech) provided results that, in terms of *Precision*, *Recall*, and *F1* (79.80, 67.96, 73.40), outperformed the baseline by over 43 points (33.80, 27.13, 30.10) (Comandini et al., 2018).

Analyzing the hate speech on a Twitter corpus with NUs should provide more information about the way in which aggressive messages are conveyed by an economical, sharp and fast linguistic phenomenon. In fact, with their simple syntactic form and their inclination to assemble cumulative expressions, NUs can be seen as consistent with populist rhetoric. In this way, we could investigate the relationship between populist themes/rhetoric strategies and hate speech, identifying stylistic feature that could be useful for hate speech detection, and for the comprehension of hate speech’s underlying connection with populist political discourse. This seems to be a new approach to hate speech’s study and we are not aware of other similar researches.

3 Hate Speech Corpus Description

Our starting point is the *Italian Twitter Corpus of Hate Speech against Immigrants* (HSC henceforth) described in (Sanguinetti et al., 2018) and recently exploited in the Hate Speech Detection shared task proposed at the Evalita 2018 evaluation campaign (Bosco et al., 2018). The dataset includes Twitter messages gathered with a classical keyword-based approach by filtering the corpus using neutral keywords related to three social groups deemed as potential HS targets in the Italian context: immigrants, Muslims and Roma. The corpus has been manually annotated partly by experts and partly by Figure Eight contributors and consists of 6,928 tweets. The main feature of this corpus is its annotation scheme, designed to encode a multiplicity of factors contributing to the definition of the hate speech notion. The scheme includes, besides HS tags (no-yes), also HS intensity degree (from 1 to 4 if HS is present, and 0 otherwise), the presence of *aggressiveness* (no-weak-strong) and *offensiveness* (no-weak-strong), as well as *irony* and *stereotype* (no-yes). All the information about the inter-annotator agreement concerning these tags can be found in (Sanguinetti et al., 2018).

Sample Analyzed To investigate the role of NUs in Twitter racist hate speech and to study the re-

lationship between hate speech, populist rhetoric and NUs, we selected, annotated and analyzed a sample of tweets from HSC. This sample (named POP-HS-IT henceforth) includes all the messages that convey hate speech in HSC, for a sum of 794 tweets, which has been complemented by a random selection of a proportional number of non hateful messages (949) from the same corpus, as in Figure 1 (left).

4 The New Annotation Layers

Starting from the conviction that when we study the hate speech against immigrants on Twitter, we need also to analyze its relationship with populist rhetoric, we aim at investigating, on the one hand, the general behavior of NUs in POP-HS-IT. Furthermore, since we are observing a solid presence of newspapers headlines on the tweets in POP-HS-IT, we will enrich the annotation to investigate how much of Twitter’s communication about immigrants is conveyed and refers to newspaper’s articles and headlines, with the twofold aim to study the way populist press is presenting these themes, and to reflect on how different communication channels interact in the discourse on immigration featured by hate speech. On the other hand, we intend to study the use of the in-group - out-group dichotomy, in order to see how populist themes are expressed in the informal written production of Twitter users and also how this relates with the expression of hate.

In order to investigate on the role of populism and nominal utterances on hate speech, in POP-HS-IT we added four new layers of analysis (*news*, *nominal utterances*, *in-group - out-group*, *slogans*) to those already existing (*hate speech*, *aggressiveness*, *offensiveness*, *irony*, *stereotype*, *intensity*). All of these novel annotations have been applied manually by at least two expert annotators (linguists, different genders) according to the scheme described below¹.

4.1 Nominal Utterances

This layer of annotation has been applied to the whole sample of tweets. It shows if a tweet contains at least one NU; thus it has a binary value (*yes* or *no*), in which *no* reveals a tweet without NUs. The tweet marked as *yes* are also annotated with

¹The new guidelines for the annotation of *news*, *in-group - out-group* rhetoric, *slogans* and NUs can be found here: <https://github.com/GloriaComandini/Corpora>

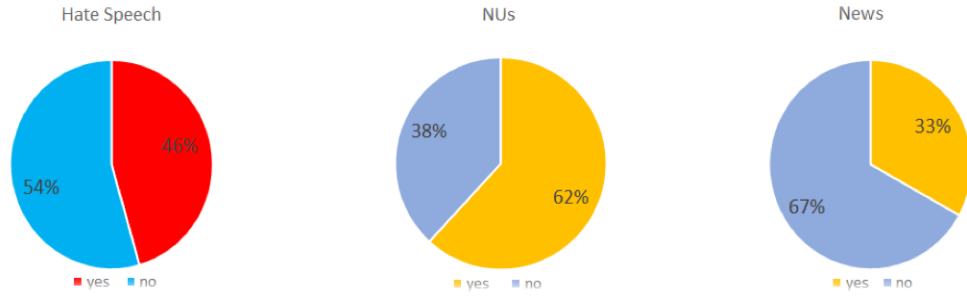


Figure 1: Distribution of hate in the initial dataset (left), including a subset of tweets from the Hate Speech Corpus (Sanguinetti et al., 2018). Distribution of the tags related to the presence of *News* (right) and *Nominal Utterances* (NUs, center) in the final version of the POP-HS-IT corpus.

the following information: number of their NUs and number of their NUs that convey hate speech.

For the annotation of NUs in the POP-HS-IT corpus, we mostly referred to the annotation framework provided for COSMIANU (Comandini et al., 2018).

However, the peculiar Italian’s variety found in Twitter, non-standard and heavily filled with hash-tags, links and other unique strategies of communication, made clear that some adjustments were needed.

First of all, we needed to decide how and if links, hashtags and strategies to address other users (like the use of @ + username) should have been included in the NUs. Since some links, hash-tags and username addressed are an important part of the message, but without any explicit syntactical connection to the rest of the tweet, in cases like (1) and (2), they were excluded from the NU.

(1) #agorarai <NU>Cavolo!
</NU>[...] <NU>O solo gli italiani?
</NU>@gennaromigliore
(#agorarai Heck! [...] Or only Italians?
@gennaromigliore)

(2) <NU>Manco allo zoo dai
</NU><https://t.co/GkkqViN7wN>
(Not even at the zoo, come on
<https://t.co/GkkqViN7wN>)

On the contrary, hashtags well integrated in the syntactic structure of the sentence were included in the NU, as in (3).

(3) <NU>#Roma, avviato l’iter per il
superamento dei campi #rom </NU>
(#Rome, started the practice for the
overcoming of #Roma’s camps)

The annotation strategy applied on POP-HS-IT is for the most part the same as in COSMIANU. We marked as NU every utterance whose main clause is non-verbal, that is to say an utterance whose main clause doesn’t have a verb in a finite form. The major difference with COSMIANU’s annotation framework is the treatment of subordinate clauses with a verb in a finite form: where in COSMIANU they were excluded from the extension of the NU, in this study we included them in the NU, as in (4). In fact, while in a specific study of NUs the exclusion of the verbal subordinate may be useful to an automatic recognition of NUs, in this research being able to read the full length of a NU is important for a faster comprehension of hate speech and the role of NUs in hate speech.

(4) <NU>Un sottilissimo filo che separa una “goliardata” dal #razzismo
</NU>
(A very thin line that separates a joke
from racism)

Verbal and non-verbal clauses with a coordination relation to the NU are treated in the same way as in COSMIANU, with verbal coordinates separated from the NU (see (5)) and non-verbal coordinates included in the NU (see (6)).

(5) <NU>Casa popolare assegnata all’inquilina, </NU>ma una rom incinta la occupa...
(House for working class people assigned to the tenant, but a pregnant Roma woman occupies it...)

(6) <NU>4 nomadi arrestati per furti, colpito anche il Vicentino </NU>

(4 nomads arrested for thefts, damaged also the Vicentino)

4.2 News

This layer of annotation has also been applied to the whole sample of POP-HS-IT’s tweets. Annotators had to distinguish tweets written by private users with spontaneous comments, from tweets reporting news from newspapers; thus, it has a binary value (*no-yes*). A tweet from a newspaper (or that is just the retweet of a newspaper headline), usually presents the title of the newspaper and/or a very recognizable structure, as for instance in (7):

(7) Corriere: Tangenti per gli appalti nei campi rom: chiesto il rinvio...

([The] Courier: Bribes for contracts in Roma’s camps: requested the indictment)

4.3 In-group vs Out-group

This annotation has been applied only to tweets featured by hate speech. Indeed it is meant to isolate the most common theme of populism, since we assumed it was also present in hate speech. This layer has a binary value (*no-yes*), where *yes* is typical of messages like (12):

(8) L’Italia e gli italiani prima di tutto. L’Europa si faccia carico degli immigrati. L’Italia ha altri problemi da risolvere

(Italy and Italians first. It’s Europe that should take on immigrants. Italy has other problems to solve)

4.4 Slogan

Also this last layer has been applied only on hate speech tweets with at least one NU, since we were interested in analyzing how NU in hate speech can convey populist slogans and a sharp adherence to a point of view, that the writer doesn’t want to question or discuss (see (13)). This layer has a binary value (*no-yes*). The slogans are always NUs.

(9) <NU>RIMPATRII IMMEDIATI FORZATI </NU>

(FORCED IMMEDIATE REPATRIATIONS)

4.5 Annotation process and inter-annotator agreement

All of these novel annotations have been applied manually to the data by an expert annotator (Italian native speaker, linguist). A second independent annotation has been applied to the data for the *news* and *in-group - out-group* labels. The resulting inter-annotator agreement in terms of Cohen’s kappa is 0.98 for both *news* and *in-group - out-group*. Moreover, as explained in Section 4.1, we modified the guidelines for NUs’ recognition with respect to the ones used in (Comandini et al., 2018)². Thus, for this task we applied a second human annotation to the 30% of the POP-HS-IT dataset. Three expert annotators were employed on different slices of the data. The resulting agreement in terms of Cohen’s kappa are 0.96, 0.90 and 0.88, respectively. Disagreement has been solved by fact-checking (for the *news*) and by constructive discussion among the annotators. Figure 1 shows the final distributions of the labels for the NUs (center) and *News* (right) annotation layers in POP-HS-IT. When we focus only on *hateful tweets* in POP-HS-IT, the final result concerning all the annotation layers applied is summarized in Table 1. Discussion of results follows.

Table 1: Distribution of the labels (*NUs*, *News*, *Slogans* and *In/Out-group rhetoric*) in the hateful tweets of the POP-HS-IT corpus. Slogans are a sub-set of NUs.

	Hateful tweets
NUs (all)	415
NUs (only slogans)	136
no NUs	379
News	93
no News (personal comments)	701
In-out group rhetoric	165
no In-out group rhetoric	629

5 Results and Discussion

Firstly, the investigation of the reference to newspaper’s articles showed us that they compose the 33% of POP-HS-IT, as showed in Figure 1 (right). More exactly, news are remarkably prominent in non hateful tweets, while they are only a minor part of the hateful messages.

²For an in-depth description of this framework, see the annotation guidelines (in Italian) available here: <http://tiny.cc/auhvvy>

In fact, the non hateful sample (949 tweets) contains 484 news (51%) and 465 comments from single users (49%), while the hateful sample (794 tweets) exhibit only 93 news (11,71%) and 701 comments from single users (88,29%), as showed in Table 1.

So, of course in the non hateful discourse about immigration the spontaneous opinion of the single user is still very consistent, but the percentage of headlines shows us that Twitter's communication on this subject is considerably featured by publishing or re-tweeting newspapers articles or headlines. On the contrary, it seems that hate speech is not particularly conveyed by references to newspaper's articles, or at least newspaper's headlines are perceived as more neutral and less hateful.

The presence of NUs is consistent in both the hateful sample and the non hateful sample, emerging in 62% of POP-HS-IT, as shown in Figure 1 (middle). However, it appears that hate speech has less NUs than non hate speech.

In references to newspaper's articles, both hateful and non hateful, NUs play a significant role. Non hate speech news (484) have 425 (87,8%) tweets with NUs and 59 (12,2%) tweets without NUs, for a total NU's number of 668 and an average of 1,57 NUs for each tweet. Similarly, hate speech news (93) (see Table 1) have 72 (77,42%) tweets with NUs and 21 (22,58%) tweets without NUs, for a total NU's number of 111 and an average of 1,54 NUs for each tweet. This results are not surprising, because NUs have already been know to be very common in newspaper's articles, and even more in articles headlines (Mortara Garavelli, 1971); but we are not aware of any other corpus-based studies on the matter.

Users' comments, both hateful and non hateful, have less NUs than newspaper's articles, and hateful comments have less NUs than non hateful comments. Non hateful tweets from single users are 465 and have 238 (51%) tweets with NUs and 227 (49%) tweets without NUs, for a total NU's number of 298 and an average of 1,31 NUs for each tweet. Hateful comments from single users are 701 (see Table 1) and have 343 (48,93%) tweets with NUs, and 358 (51,07%) tweets without NUs, for a total NU's number of 463 and an average of 1,35 NUs for each tweet.

This distribution of NUs probably means that this linguistic phenomenon is merely very common in Twitter's Italian discourse about immi-

gration, and possibly in Twitter's Italian in general, while Italian hate speech about immigrants on Twitter doesn't rely heavily on NUs as we expected.

5.1 Nominal Utterances and Hate Speech against Immigrants

As expressed in the previous paragraphs, NUs are a stable characteristic of Twitter's Italian discussion about immigrants, and especially they are typical of newspaper's headlines (contained often in both hateful and not hateful tweets). Even if their presence is not higher in hateful tweets, still, NUs convey a significant part of hate speech: of 570 total NUs, 329 (57,72%) convey hate speech (see (10)), while 241 NUs (42,28%) convey other, non hateful meanings (see (11)). Therefore, most of the NUs in hate speech are the focus of the hateful message of the tweet. We can find these hateful NUs in 270 tweets (the 34% of all hate speech tweets) for an average of 1,21 NUs for each tweet.

(10) <NU>vivere in sicurezza senza la
feccia di questi IMMIGRATI e rom im-
puniti che gira in ITALIA </NU>

*(Living safely without this scum of un-
punished IMMIGRANTS and Roma who
goes around in ITALY)*

(11) <NU>Aumento casi mor-
billo? </NU><NU>Ok.
</NU></NU>Colpa dei vaccini?
</NU>

*(Increase of measles cases? Ok. Vac-
cines' fault?)*

These hateful NUs have a close relationship with slogans. 124 (37,38%) of them can be classified as slogans. Slogans' numbers amount to 136 (see Table 1), so the 91,17% of them are composed by hateful NUs (see (12)), while only 12 (8,83%) of them don't convey hateful messages (see example (13)).

(12) <NU>tutti fuori clandestini e rom
! </NU>

*(illegal immigrants and Roma people,
all out!)*

(13) <NU>w l'Italia!! </NU>

(go Italy!!)

Slogans are an interesting investigation's subject, because they are brief and concise formulae, easy to memorize and with high expressive value. Thus, it is interesting to notice that most of these slogans are used to convey an hateful message, making it the most highlighted and emphatic part of the tweet.

Of these slogans, 45 (33,33%) are calls to action for expelling immigrants from Italy (see (14)), and almost all them (33) have an Intensity of 3, while 4 have an Intensity of 1, 6 have an Intensity of 2 and 2 have an Intensity of 4. The other slogans vehemently ask for the killing or the imprisonment of immigrants (see (15)), while slogans with Intensity 1 are usually more descriptive, than exhortatory (see (16)).

(14) <NU>RIMPATRII IMMEDIATI di clandestini rom e stranieri criminali tutti!!! </NU>

(IMMEDIATE REPATRIATION of illegal immigrants Roma people foreigners criminals everyone!!!)

(15) <NU>pena capitale x tutti musulmani in Europa immediatamente! </NU>

(death penalty for all the Muslims in Europe immediately!)

(16) <NU>SUBIRE e essere islamizzati </NU>

(ENDURING and being Islamized)

Collectively, these slogans convey a particular way to express the populism's in-group - out-group way of thinking called *authoritarianism*, that is the call for "severe political measures or illiberal policies against those who threaten the homogeneity of the people" (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018).

5.2 In-group and Out-group: Dualistic Constructions

The annotation of in-group - out-group rhetoric shows us that tweets with this dichotomy are not as recurring as we thought. In fact, only 165 (20,15%) of the hate speech comments have an in-group - out-group rhetoric, as showed in Table 1.

This dualistic construction mostly shows an opposition between Italians, often described as poor

and abandoned by the government, and immigrants, depicted as privileged and protected by the leftist government (see (17)). Thus, unsurprisingly, the analysis' dimension of stereotypes exhibit a noteworthy score in these tweets: 138 of them (83,63%) display a stereotyped point of view (see (18)).

(17) Neanche dopo i disastrosi sismi in Centro Italia, Renzi blocca i clandestini per devolvere i soldi risparmiati agli Italiani #migranti

(Not even after the disastrous earthquakes in Central Italy, Renzi stops illegal immigrants to hand over the saved money to Italians #migrants)

(18) Gli immigrati africani in Italia, invece, sono ospitati a oziare in alberghi a 3-4 stelle. Bella differenza.

(Instead, African immigrants in Italy are hosted to laze in 3-4 stars hotels. Nice difference.)

In 16 cases, this rhetoric is also conveyed by newspaper's headlines, illustrating many kinds of Italians' struggles caused by immigrants (see (18)).

(18) #Libero: "Dieci milioni di euro buttati per i rom. Schiaffo all'Italia: guardate questi numeri

(#Libero: "Ten millions of Euros thrown away for Roma people. A smack for Italy: look at these numbers)

It is interesting to see that 75% of these dualistic tweets contain at least one NU, for a total of 127 NUs, 77 (60,62%) of which convey hate speech. This means that, even with a small number of newspaper's articles in their ranks, tweets with in-group - out-group rhetoric are a very fertile ground for NUs.

Still, these tweets don't contain slogans very often: only 26 tweets exhibit both slogans and dualistic rhetoric, see for instance (19):

(19) Vergogna, prima pensare agli italiani

(Shame, first think of Italians)

This could mean that this rhetoric doesn't tend to use slogan-like constructions. Instead, it seems to rely on more diverse syntactic structures, even if their lexicon is remarkably limited and with an hammering repetition of "Italians" and "Italy", while the out-group tends to be mentioned exploiting a slightly wider variety of terms (e.g., foreigners, illegal immigrants, immigrants and so on). This high repetitiveness is also typical of populist rhetoric.

Still, populist slogans and dualistic tweets, together, reach a sum of 262 populist hate speech's tweet (i.e., 33% of the entire POP-HS-IT). Therefore, we can say that populism in Twitter's hate speech is present, but it tends to acquire more than one form and to convey non only in/out-group rhetoric, but also authoritarianism rhetoric.

6 Conclusions and Future Work

In this paper we proposed a novel study of an *Italian Twitter Corpus of Hate Speech against Immigrants* (HSC) extended with four new levels of annotations: nominal utterances, in/out-group rhetoric, slogans and role of news. We named this new sample of HSC enriched with new annotation layers POP-HS-IT. Our goal was to investigate how the political discourse on immigrants and hate speech convey populist views (RQ1), how these populist views are impacted by newspaper's articles (RQ2) or by the spontaneous writings of single users, and how these populist views are conveyed through slogan-like nominal utterances (RQ3). The following answers emerge from our analysis.

Populist views are present in Twitter's hate speech against immigrants (RQ1), but they are not the majority of it; still, with a total of 257 populist hate speech's tweet, populist slogans and in/out-group dualistic tweets compose a third of the hate speech in the corpus. They also display the two most frequent populist themes of Twitter's hate speech against immigrants: in/out-group rhetoric that puts Italians against immigrants, and authoritarianism that calls for violent and illiberal actions against immigrants.

The reference to newspapers articles is very frequent in POP-HS-IT, but they are not perceived as bearer of hate speech, and therefore they are less represented also in slogans and in/out-group rhetoric (RQ2).

Slogan-like NUs are not the majority of the NUs

in the corpus, but most of them convey hateful contents and are the semantic and pragmatic focus of the tweet. Also, they exhibit the populist rhetoric of authoritarianism, often with a medium-high level of hateful incitement, due to their nature of violent calls to action (RQ3).

For a complete analysis of this matter it is necessary to investigate more populist themes and the role of NUs in populist rhetoric. Still, this research starts to shed some light on the role of populist themes in hate speech: populist themes are remarkably present in hate speech against immigrants, and they need to be investigated to understand and challenge hate. Moreover, these populist themes are likely present in the rhetoric of populist politicians from all over the world as suggested in (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018). Thus, the annotation framework of POP-HS-IT can be used to study the relationship between populism and hate speech in different social media corpora and in many languages. In fact, we plan to apply our analysis also on different available corpora in several languages (Basile et al., 2019; Waseem and Hovy, 2016), in order to study differences and commonalities in different cultures and domains.

Finally, the preliminary analysis of annotation results proposed opens new perspectives for the exploitation of the data set and of the new annotation layer for the development of HS detection systems, which is matter of future investigations.

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