

Colour terms and intensifying constructions in Italian

Termes de couleur et constructions intensifiantes en italien

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Abstract

This investigation proposes a corpus-based description of Italian intensifying constructions including colour terms. Colour terms may be employed as intensification markers in *intensifying colour constructions*, i.e., ready-made syntactic patterns containing colour terms that have an intensifying function. The paper aims at identifying and classifying different patterns of Italian intensifying colour constructions using syntactic/semantic parameters. These constructions can convey different types and degrees of intensified meanings and can be arranged along an intensification cline. Taking into account data gathered from the *ITTenTen16* corpus, the analysis identifies the abstract semantic schemata underlying intensifying colour constructions (e.g., the metonymic/metaphoric scale association), and explores the relation between colour terms and schemata, in terms of degrees of lexicalisation/constructionalisation and pattern productivity.

Keywords: intensification, reduplicative colour constructions, effect-cause colour constructions, constructionalisation, schematicity

Résumé

Cette étude propose une description, basée sur corpus, des constructions intensifiantes de l'italien comprenant des termes de couleur. Ces derniers peuvent être employés comme marqueurs d'intensification dans des constructions intensifiantes, c'est-à-dire dans des schémas syntaxiques préexistants contenant des termes de couleur ayant une fonction intensifiante. Cet article vise à identifier et à classer différents modèles de constructions en utilisant des paramètres syntaxiques et sémantiques. Ces constructions véhiculent en effet différents types et différents degrés de sens intensifs et peuvent être disposées le long d'une échelle d'intensification. En tenant compte des données recueillies dans le corpus *ITTenTen16*, l'analyse identifie les schémas sémantiques abstraits qui sous-tendent les constructions intensifiantes de couleurs (par exemple, l'association des échelles métonymique et métaphorique) et explore la

relation entre les termes de couleur et les schémas en termes de degrés de lexicalisation/constructionnalisation et de productivité des modèles.

Mots clés : intensification, constructions réduplicatives de couleur, constructions de couleur effet-cause, constructionnalisation, schématicité

1. Intensification strategies and constructional intensifiers

Intensification strategies are generally described as linguistic devices that are used to convey the intensifying (or the mitigating) value (Bolinger, 1972). Intensification is a functional-semantic category (of amplification or attenuation) and encompasses different scales (Van Os, 1989). As Bolinger (1972, p. 17) points out, it is possible to “distinguish intensifiers according to the region of the scale that they occupy”. An intensifier is a “device that scales a quality, whether up or down or somewhere between the two” (Bolinger, 1972, p. 17). Generally speaking, intensifying tools may change in nature depending i) on the language features, ii) on the speaker’s choice, or even iii) on the type of intensified element. Indeed, “il existe une foule de lexies pouvant exprimer l’intensification, mais le choix de la lexie appropriée dépend de la lexie dont le locuteur veut intensifier le sens” (Mel’čuk & Polguère, 2007, p. 20).¹ Furthermore, beyond being open to the acquisition of new (category) members (Labov, 1984, p. 48), the set of intensification markers is very large and heterogeneous, and includes peripheral categories (e.g., prosodic variation) as well as the most central elements of grammar (e.g., reduplication, quantifiers) (Labov, 1984, p. 48). As Figure 1 summarises, the most common intensification strategies in the languages of the world include phonological intensification (e.g., intonation), morphological intensification (e.g., prefixes, superlative suffixes, partial reduplication), syntactic intensification (e.g., dislocations, topicalisations, etc.), as well as lexical intensification (e.g., full reduplication):

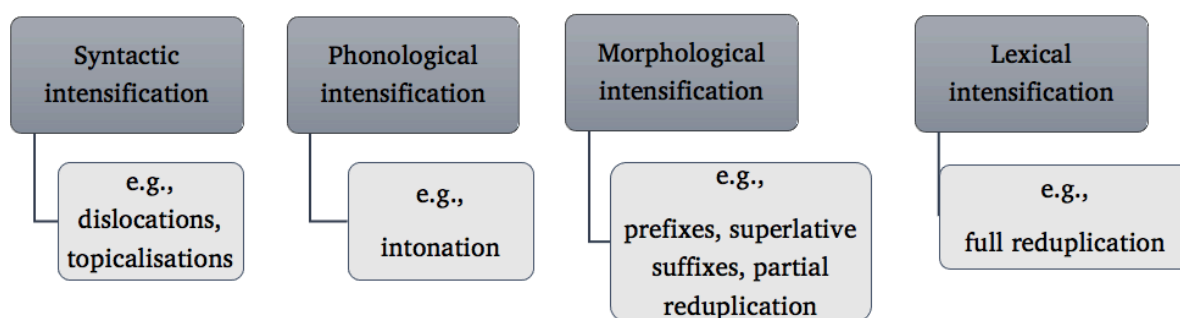


Figure 1. Intensification strategies

In many languages, intensifiers are mainly lexical in nature (Labov, 1984): thus, *lexical intensifiers* are among the most common and productive strategies of intensification. Lexical

¹ “There are several lexemes that can express intensification, but the choice of the appropriate lexeme depends on the lexeme whose meaning the speaker wants to intensify” (translation mine).

intensifiers are able to intensify the meaning of the lexemes they co-occur with. They are generally single out gradable items, even though in some cases, they coerce the semantics of the intensified non-gradable items to scalar use. Several kinds of linguistic items may co-occur with lexical intensifiers (Labov, 1984; Paradis, 2008), as for instance nouns (1), adjectives (2), adverbs (3), verbs (4), pronouns (5), but also word combinations (6), predicative items (7), questions (8), and negated structures (9):

- (1) *deep*_{intensifier} *interest*_{intensified}
- (2) *dead*_{intensifier} *tired*_{intensified}
- (3) *truly*_{intensifier} *never*_{intensified}
- (4) *like*_{intensified} *a lot*_{intensifier}
- (5) *absolutely*_{intensifier} *nothing*_{intensified}
- (6) *terrible*_{intensifier} *Monday morning feeling*_{intensified}
- (7) I am *so*_{intensifier} *tired* of this!
- (8) What *the hell*_{intensifier} is going on here?
- (9) I cannot see *a bloody thing*_{intensifier}

Thus, lexical intensifiers may be represented as co-occurrence patterns requiring an intensifier (A, typically an adjective or an adverb) and an intensified item (B), as in (10).

- (10) Intensifier A + Intensified B
*deep*_{intensifier} *interest*_{intensified}

The syntactic and semantic features of co-occurrence patterns can be common to different word combinations: in these cases, some slots of the patterns may show variation and a schematic slot can arise in the originally lexical pattern. This means that it is possible to associate the patterns to more general and abstract combinatorial schemata. The more specific and more abstract patterns are closely related to each other and form a cognitive structured network (Langacker, 2008; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013); they may be described as *constructions*, in the terms of Construction Grammar (Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor, 1988; Goldberg, 1995, 2006) and of Categories and Constructions Grammar (Simone, 2007) frameworks. These theoretical frameworks concur in the idea that constructions are “stored pairings of form and function, including morphemes, words, idioms, partially lexically filled and fully general linguistic patterns” (Goldberg, 2003, p. 219). Through an increasing frequency of use (Bybee & Thompson, 1997; Bybee & Hopper, 2001) and a process of routinisation (Langacker, 1987; Haiman, 1994; Detges & Waltereit, 2002), constructions become fixed and specialise in conveying specific constructional meanings (Kay & Michaelis, 2012). This means that the meaning of constructions is not strictly predictable from their components (Goldberg, 2003,

p. 219),² and is thus *constructional*, in the sense that it is specifically associated to the construction and “fades away outside of it” (Simone, 2007, p. 215).

The starting assumption of this work is that constructions can be linguistically instantiated by single *constructs*, i.e., individual linguistic sequences. The former concern the cognitive-conceptual (pre-linguistic) level, while the latter are related to the linguistic level (Simone, 2007).

For the purpose of this analysis, *constructional intensifiers* (Berlanda, 2013; Piunno, 2021) can be defined as stable and recurrent combinations of patterns that convey the specific semantic value of intensification and show variable degrees of productivity (Bybee, 2010, p. 94) in terms of syntactic patterns. Constructional intensifiers can be only partially lexically specified (Fillmore et al., 1988; Goldberg, 2006; Michaelis, 2019), and for this reason they fall under the group of the so-called *partially lexically specified* or *partially filled constructions*.³ These word combinations have common syntactic and semantic features and derive from the same patterns. They show a semi-fixed syntactic pattern, but are different from all other combinatorial phenomena, since they are partially variable from the lexical point of view. The list of examples in (11) illustrate the category of constructional intensifiers, as it shows different instances of the constructional intensifier pattern [Noun + Adjective_{INTENSIFIER}] including the colour term *nero* ‘black’:

(11)	a. periodo <i>nero</i>	lit. period black	‘bad/difficult period’
	b. giornata <i>nera</i>	lit. day black	‘bad/difficult day’
	c. momento <i>nero</i>	lit. moment black	‘bad/difficult moment’
	d. anno <i>nero</i>	lit. year black	‘bad/difficult year’
	e. settimana <i>nera</i>	lit. week black	‘bad/difficult week’
	f. semestre <i>nero</i>	lit. semester black	‘bad/difficult semester’

The word combinations are lexically filled constructions showing the same fixed (thus, filled) slot, represented by the adjective *nero* ‘black’, and expressing the extended meaning of ‘bad/difficult’ in all sequences. The noun is the element subject to variation and always expresses a time unit. This morpho-syntactic and semantic pattern metaphorically conveys the general semantics of ‘bad/difficult time’. The representation in (12) summarises the morphosyntactic and semantic features of the intensifying construction:

² It is worth noticing that, depending on their frequency of use, fully predictable patterns can also be included into the class of constructions (Goldberg, 2006).

³ The two denominations are fully equivalent (see Piunno, 2018a), and are used alternatively throughout the article.

- (12) Structure: [X_{NOUN} <time unit> + *nero* 'black']
 Meaning: 'difficult X<time unit>'

From the syntactic viewpoint, partially filled constructional intensifiers show a regular (and repetitive) syntactic pattern, having both fixed and empty slots (e.g., in (12) *nero* 'black' is the fixed element and X is the empty position). From the lexical point of view, the pattern is flexible because it admits the partial variation; this slot only admits a certain number of fillers (e.g., in (12) the fillers belong to the semantic class of <time unit>). It is worth noting that the configuration may show different degrees of productivity (Barðdal, 2008; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013), depending on the number of new forms and semantic classes that are admitted (e.g., the construction in (12) has a rather low productivity, since it admits a restricted semantic range of fillers). From the semantic point of view, the different examples representing the intensifying construction share similar semantic properties, and respond to the same restrictions (e.g., all the examples in (11) show a time unit in the first position). Thus, the pattern shows a constructional semantics, which is somehow predictable from the set of different types of morphosyntactic and semantic information associated with the pattern (Piunno, 2018a). In (11) the constructional meaning associated to the pattern is 'difficult time'; such a meaning decays when the combination dissolves. As Goldberg points out, "[a]ny linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency" (2006, p. 5). The more the semantic predictability, the greater the diagrammatic transparency (i.e., the relationship between the morpho-syntactic form and the meaning of a construction is biunivocal.⁴ Beyond the morpho-syntactic and semantic features, the construction in (12) also shows a pragmatic function, namely the intensifying value, thus partially filled constructions can also play the role of constructional intensifiers. Since they show different degrees of fixedness and lexicalisation, they are not prototypical multiword expressions. However, as multiword expressions, they belong to the *regular* area of the lexicon, where regular pairings of forms and meanings can emerge. As prototypical constructions i) "they have to be learned separately as individual whole facts" (Fillmore et al., 1988, p. 504); ii) they "may be idiomatic in the sense that a large construction may specify a semantics (and/or pragmatics) different from its single components" (Fillmore et al., 1988, p. 501); iii) they are partially schematic constructions, whose semantic-syntactic pattern is able to convey specific constructional values.

The interest in word combinations showing open slots dates back to the studies by Bally and the Saussurian structuralism (Bally, 1951[1909]; Sechehaye 1950[1926]). Syntactic templates

⁴ For the notion of diagrammatic iconicity, we refer to Casadei (1995).

having an idiomatic meaning were the interest of many German studies of phraseology (Häusermann, 1977; Fleischer, 1997; Feilke, 1996). However, it is since the constructionist analysis suggested by Fillmore et al. (1988) that this kind of sequences has attracted the attention of construction grammarians,⁵ and more recently of European scholars studying phraseology.⁶ As far as Italian is concerned, different recent works were devoted to partially filled constructional intensifiers, as for instance, superlative constructions (Berlanda, 2013), the *sì che* construction (Schafroth, 2015), multiword adjectivals and adverbials having a prepositional phrase structure and an intensification value (Piunno, 2015, 2018a), negated intensifying patterns (Piunno, 2018b; Mellado Blanco, 2020b), intensification of multiword patterns with an adverbial function (López Meirama, 2020), coordinated intensifiers (Piunno, 2021). It is also worth noting the contrastive analyses of prepositional intensifiers (Benigni, 2017) and comparative constructions (Mollica & Schafroth, 2018). These studies generally refer to a broad constructionist perspective, which is also the one applied in this study. However, until now, little attention has been devoted to the interaction between intensifying constructions and colour terms, at least in Italian: intensifying structures involving colour terms are sometimes discussed in typological works describing reduplication, as for instance, in Anderson (2018, p. 53), where examples containing colour terms in Munda languages are discussed. Although the semantics of colour terms in Italian has been extensively analysed since the end of the previous century (at least Grossmann & Mazzoni, 1972; Grossmann, 1988), and several insightful studies concern the analysis of adjectival constructions – e.g., colour compounds (D’Achille & Grossmann 2009, 2010), and their diachronic evolution (D’Achille & Grossmann, 2013) – the relationship between colours and intensifying strategies in Italian still deserves further attention. As a matter of fact, most of the existent investigations on colour terms deal with colour terminology from linguistic, perceptive, cognitive, and cultural points of view (Grossmann, 1988, p. 8; and, as far as Romance languages are concerned, Giacalone Ramat, 1967). Further research on this topic provides useful material for the identification of different Italian constructional formats of intensification, while developing an analysis and classification methodology that considers interdependent parameters.

This paper aims at describing and classifying the particular class of partially lexically specified constructional intensifiers of Italian employing colour nouns. Through the analysis of data extracted from an Italian corpus of texts collected from the web, the investigation provides

⁵ See, at least, Goldberg (1995, 2003, 2006, 2013), Lasch and Ziem (2011), Ziem and Lasch (2013), Michaelis (2019).

⁶ For the constructional approach applied to phraseology and in particular to partially lexically specified units, among others, Dobrovolskij (2011, 2022), Mellado Blanco (2015, 2020a, 2020b), Ziem (2008, 2018), Schafroth (2015, 2019, 2020), Steyer (2018), Mellado Blanco and López Meirama (2018), Piunno (2018a).

a qualitative and quantitative analysis. On the one hand, the abstract semantic schemata underlying intensifying colour constructions (e.g., the metonymic/metaphoric scale association) are identified and examined, and semantic and syntactic parameters (i.e., constructional meaning, function and structural properties) are used for their classification. On the other hand, the paper explores the relation between colour terms and schemata, in terms of degrees of lexicalisation/constructionalisation and pattern productivity.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2 gives a short overview of the method of analysis and data extraction. Section 3 is devoted to the discussion of the types of intensifying colour constructions identified in the corpus of Italian: Section 3.1 analyses the properties and the functions of reduplicative colour constructions, while Section 3.2. considers EFFECT-CAUSE colour constructions. Section 4 contains the discussion of findings related to a constructional network, and Section 5 is devoted to the general conclusions.

2. Method of analysis

This investigation is grounded on a corpus-based approach. In particular, the *ITTenTen16* web-based corpus was used to extract the combinatorial patterns and the phrasal structures of colour constructional intensifiers. We used the statistical methods offered by Sketch Engine, an online text analysis tool facilitating the extraction of lexical chunks and syntactic word clusterings from corpora (Kilgarriff, Baisa, Bušta, Jakubíček, Kovář, Michelfeit, Rychlý & Suchomel, 2004; Kilgarriff, Baisa, Bušta, Jakubíček, Kovář, Michelfeit, Rychlý & Suchomel, 2014). PoS-grams patterns (i.e., sequences of part-of-speech tags in a specific order, e.g., Adj+Noun, Adj+Prep+Noun, etc.) containing a colour term were extracted through i) a simple concordance query; ii) the CQL advanced query, which can include lexical and PoS patterns at the same time, such as [*black* + Noun], [*black* + Preposition + Noun], [Adjective + *black*]; and iii) the Word Sketch query, which allows the extraction of the word's most frequent lexical and grammatical collocates, e.g., *cielo nero* 'black sky', *nero di rabbia* 'black of rage'. Corpus-driven results were also compared with two monolingual lexicographic works: the *Grande Dizionario Italiano dell'Uso* (De Mauro, 1999), an Italian dictionary of language usage containing a large number of words and a fine-grained description of fixed combinatorial sequences, and the *CombiNet* lexicographic tool, an Italian combinatory dictionary that was recently developed (Simone & Piunno, 2017; Lenci, Masini, Nissim, Castagnoli, Lebani, Passaro & Senaldi, 2017; Piunno, 2016).

Only the *basic colours*⁷ were considered, as the cline in (13) shows:

(13) *white, black* > *red* > *green* > *yellow* > *blue* > *brown* > *purple, pink, orange, grey*

⁷ For the notion of basic colour, see Berlin and Kay (1969, p. 3).

It is worth noting that, as pointed out by Grossmann and D’Achille (2016), the English term *blue* may correspond to both Italian *blu* ‘blue’ and *azzurro* ‘azure’, both basic terms; thus, both terms were included in the analysis. Figure 2 records the raw frequency of occurrence of each colour adjective in the *ItTenTen16* corpus.⁸

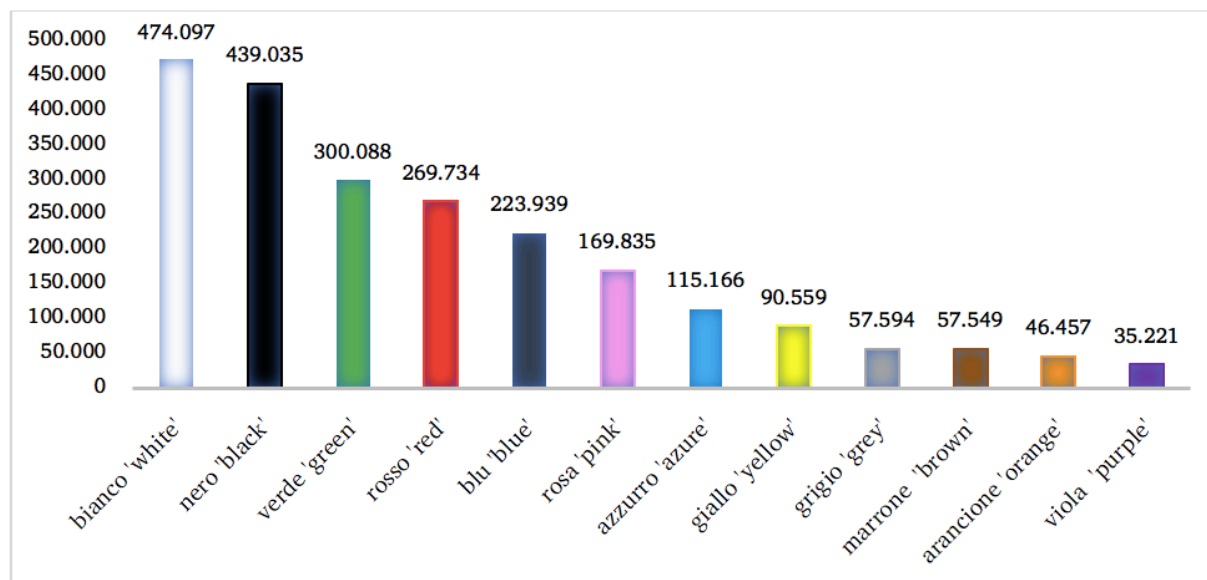


Figure 2. Frequency of use of basic colours terms in the *ItTenTen16* corpus

The data extracted from the corpus were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed according to different parameters. First, the constructional structure (that is to say, the specific morpho-syntactic constructions the colour terms occur in) was considered. Secondly, the context of use and the constructional meaning/function were examined because “intensifiers are context-dependent: [...] they assume different textual and pragmatic meanings on the basis of context-related factors” (Napoli & Ravetto, 2017, p. 3), thus they can mitigate or strengthen the meaning of the element they modify (Bolinger, 1972). Thirdly, constructional intensifiers were evaluated against their frequency of occurrence in the selected corpus. In particular, the frequency of use of each instance of a construction was compared to its relative abstract schema: as Traugott and Trousdale (2013, pp. 18-19) note, the relationship between a construction and its instances may be compared to the type/token distinction (Baayen, 2001; Bybee, 2003). Finally, these parameters were connected to the evaluation of the degrees of schematicity and productivity of different constructions: an increase in the frequency of use of a construction and the emergence of new instances produced from it may correspond to an expansion of domains

⁸ As one of the editors has noticed, it is worth highlighting that the frequency cline of Figure 2 does not entirely follow the basic colour cline sketched in (13).

of use of that construction and a consequent increase in productivity (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 18).⁹

3. Data analysis: colour constructional intensifying strategies

As Napoli and Ravetto point out, “intensifiers have neither exactly the same semantic and pragmatic properties [...] nor the same intensifying force” (2017, p. 3). Moreover, as already noticed in Section 1, several constructional intensifying formats exist. Different types of colour constructional intensifying strategies were identified in the corpus, as the following examples show:

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| (14) | Reduplicative constructions | [X _{1<colour term>} + X _{1<colour term>}] |
| | e.g., una montagna di riccioli <i>neri neri</i> ‘a lot of very black curls’ (lit. black black curls) | |
| (15) | Nominal Polar extreme constructions | [Noun + X _{<colour term>}] |
| | e.g., fame <i>nera</i> ‘a giant appetite’ (lit. hunger black) | |
| (16) | Adjectival Polar extreme constructions | [Adjective + X _{<colour term>}] |
| | e.g., arrabbiato <i>nero</i> ‘very angry’ (lit. angry black) | |
| (17) | Adjectival EFFECT-CAUSE constructions | [X _{<colour term>} + Prep + Noun] |
| | e.g., <i>verde</i> di invidia ‘green with envy’ | |
| (18) | Coordinated constructions | [X _{<colour term>} + e + Adjective] |
| | e.g., <i>nera e profonda</i> ignoranza ‘black and deep ignorance’ | |

While the reduplication pattern in (14) represents a well-known and common intensification pattern (i.e., reduplication and comparative constructions), the other examples exemplify less popular devices of intensification, namely, polar extreme enforcement phrases (15–16) (Lehmann, 2005), whose function is comparable to the superlative (Berlanda, 2013), adjectival EFFECT–CAUSE constructions (17), and coordinated intensifiers respectively (18). For reasons of space, this study does not provide a complete analysis of all the possible sets of colour intensifying constructions existing in Italian, but it only examines reduplicative colour constructions (Section 3.1) and EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions (Section 3.2), to better understand their peculiarities. Their pattern, distributional properties, context of use, meaning, and frequency of use in the corpus are discussed in the following sections.

3.1 Reduplicative colour constructions

Reduplication is generally intended as one of the most productive intensifying strategies of the world languages (Marantz, 1982; Rubino, 2005), with most of the languages of the WALS (85%) using it as a strategy of intensification (Rubino, 2005). Reduplication as such is associated with

⁹ On this, also Ziem and Lasch (2013), López Meirama and Mellado Blanco (2018).

different functions, depending on the language and on the reduplicated element (Simone, 2014, p. 22).¹⁰ Furthermore, several reduplication formats may exist (Moravcsik, 1978). For instance, reduplication may concern either morphological features (*partial* reduplication, involving morphemic units) or lexical ones (*full* reduplication, involving lexical units). As far as reduplication in Italian is concerned, some more general considerations are explained in De Santis (2011) and Grandi (2017). Full reduplication clearly involves intensifying (analytical) constructions. Interestingly, as Rozhanskiy (2015, p. 992) points out, “a reduplicated sign demonstrates a correlation between form and meaning”. Thus, in the case of reduplicated constructions, the intensifying value is conveyed by the syntactic format of the combination itself (that is, the construction), rather than by the semantics of the single lexical elements involved: in such cases, the presence of more lexemes in form implies a reinforced meaning.

Through Sketch Engine, 1474 exemplars of reduplicative colour constructions emerged from the *ItTenTen16* corpus. In the following, some examples are shown:

- (19) una montagna di riccioli *neri neri* [token number 1148274707]
 ‘a lot of very black curls’ (lit. black black curls)
- (20) un saluto [...] da una Trento *bianca bianca* [token number 294453965]
 ‘a greeting from a very white Trento’ (lit. white white Trento)
- (21) Apriva e chiudeva una bocca quanto quella di un forno, con doppie file di dentacci e una lingua *rossa rossa* [token number 3365653252]
 ‘(it) opened and closed a mouth (which was) as the one of an oven, with double rows of bad teeth and a very red tongue’ (lit. red red tongue)

In such cases the quantitative reduplication of the lexeme *iconically* (Rozhanskiy, 2015) corresponds to the intensification (or quantitative increase) of the adjectival meaning (De Santis, 2010; Simone, 2014). All the examples can be traced back to the constructional schema in (22):

- (22) Structure: [X_{<colour>} + X_{<colour>}]
 Meaning: ‘very X_{<colour>}’

In this configuration, the meaning of the repeated element is intensified (‘very ADJ_{<colour>}’) by means of the identical item occurring in the second slot. It is worth noting that, according to

¹⁰ Next to intensifying meanings, other values are also possible: e.g., iterativity, continuativity, distributivity (Key, 1965), future tense (Stolz, Stroh & Urdze, 2011), imperfective aspect (Hardy & Montler, 1988), plurality (Dixon, 2004); for a comprehensive list of functions of reduplicative constructions Stolz et al. (2011), Inkelas and Downing (2015a, 2015b), as well as Michaud and Morgenstern (2007a, 2007b).

other theoretical perspectives, these kinds of constructions are considered as instances of syntactic reduplication (Wagner, 1957; Stolz et al., 2011), instead of lexical constructions.

In the corpus, reduplicative colour constructions are more frequently characterised by full reduplication, that is the mere repetition of the colour adjective occurring in the examples (19-21), covering the majority of occurrences (97% of reduplicative examples). However, this is not the only reduplication pattern extracted from the corpus analysis. Indeed, reduplicated colour constructions may also combine with suffixation, particularly with the superlative suffix, as in (23)-(24):

- (23) quell'uccello [...], *azzurro azzurrissimo e arancione arancionissimo* [token number 3938674166]
 'that very very azure and very orange bird'
- (24) gli attori sono magnifici, *neri nerissimi*, *ultradark* [token number 5336714866]
 'the actors are magnificent, very very black, ultradark black'

In such instances the superlative is used to even more intensify the (already intensified) value of the colour adjective (typically, to underline its proximity to the prototype of the colour category). Nevertheless, this case of reduplication based on both suffixation and lexical repetition only covers the 3% of the occurrences, against (simple) total reduplication, proving to be the most frequent reduplication type in the corpus. This suggests that different constructions may show diverse degrees of productivity, in the sense of attracting new forms (see also Section 4). Furthermore, reduplication may sometimes affect parts of a multiword expression, as in the following examples: *terrore di essere ricaduto nel buco nero nero* 'terror of falling back into the *black black* hole', *giardinaggio tutto in nero nerissimo* 'gardening all under the table (lit. 'in very *black black*'). When the multiword unit (e.g., *buco nero* 'black hole' or *in nero* 'under the table') is decomposed, each element acquires its original meaning and is intensified by the reduplicated lexeme. Reduplicative colour constructions applied to multiword expressions may also lexicalise into new fixed units, as in "auto di rappresentanza (*auto blu blu*), delle auto di servizio (*auto blu*)" 'representative cars (*blue blue cars*), service cars (*blue cars*)', where *auto blu* 'service car' (lit. blue car) becomes *auto blu blu* 'representative car' (lit. blue blue car).

As far as distributional properties are concerned, reduplicative colour constructions may occur with either concrete or abstract nouns. The reduplicated adjectives, denoting a colour concept, may refer to a physical state, as in (25–26), or to a psychological one (27–28):

- (25) un cielo *azzurro azzurro* e limpido [token number 256701971]
 'a clear blue sky' (lit. azure azure sky)
- (26) c'era una volta un bel ranocchio *verde verde* [token number 1428249580]
 'once upon a time there was a beautiful green green frog'

- (27) Scappa via *rosso rosso* carico di vergogna [token number 5185440256]
 ‘(he) runs away red red loaded with shame’
- (28) quando mi arrabbio lo faccio molto in fretta e sono proprio [token number 3266344438]
nera nera
 ‘when I get angry I do it very quickly and I am really black black’

According to the corpus data, reduplicative colour constructions tend to be most frequently associated to concrete entities and to the description of a physical state (88.5% of all the occurrences in the corpus). Thus, in reduplicative colour constructions, concrete uses are more frequent than metaphorical ones, which only appear in the 11.5% of examples.

This means that the functional value of these constructions is context-dependent, since their semantics depends on the type of nouns these constructions modify. In colour intensifying constructions, reduplication may be used to convey both qualitative and quantitative aspects (on the semantic patterns associated to reduplication in general, see Rozhanskiy, 2015; on other values of reduplication in Italian, see Bonacchi, 2017). Thus, in the construction [$X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle} + X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle}$] the values of X and of the combination $X X$ are similar, but not identical (Rozhanskiy, 2015). Three main different functions can be identified and associated to the construction, namely:

- a. the qualitative-prototypical (likeness) value: ‘really/prototypically $X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle}$ ’
- b. the quantitative value: ‘totally/completely $X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle}$ ’
- c. the qualitative-superlative value: ‘very $X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle}$ ’

Function a. is associated to the notion of likeness. In this instance, the intensification is based on a relation of similarity involving semantic prototypicality (Rapatel, 2015) and categorisation of the intensified item as the prototype (Anscombe & Tamba, 2013). The following example represents this qualitative value:

- (29) Il 305 è un bellissimo rosso che da un po’ sull’amarena, non è [token number 260850609]
rosso rosso diciamo
 ‘The 305 is a beautiful red that has a bit of a black cherry hue to it, not a red red, let’s say’
- (30) non sapevo che si trovassero anche qui le rape rosse, ma *rosse* [token number 817538877]
rosse, proprio come quelle che vendono precotte
 ‘I didn’t know you could find red turnips here too, but red red ones, just like the ones they sell pre-cooked’

The construct [$X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle} X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle}$] refers to the most prototypical value of $X_{\langle \text{colour} \rangle}$. Since colour terms are traditionally placed on a prototypical scale “that specifies the maximal value in the middle and other members corresponding to increasingly lower non-maximal values at both sides” (Cacchiani 2017), the construction *red* in the examples (29–30) can be intended as “the

best representative of the *red* category” (Rosch, 1978) and refers to the highest degree of ‘redness’ in the red intensity scale. Thus, even though the two adjectives are associated to the same grading scale, reduplication evokes an upper limit of the colour intensity scale and refers to its highest degree.

Function b. relates to quantity intensification, and reduplication foregrounds scalarity and a degree configuration. In particular, the iteration of the lexeme evokes the metaphor of a container (Reddy, 1979): the more the repetition of a linguistic expression, the more content it acquires (also Cacchiani, 2017). In such uses, reduplication makes the intensified item quantitatively gradual along a scale marking of completeness, as the following examples show:

- (31) da personalizzare [...] con l’aggiunta di marmellate o [token number 5587113607]
cioccolato per chi non lo gradisce *bianco bianco*¹¹
‘to be personalised [...] by adding jams or chocolate for those who don’t like it white white’
- (32) apriamo la tenda e il cielo e [sic] completamente sereno, [token number 3556521685]
blu blu perfettamente
‘we open the curtain and the sky is completely clear, perfectly blue’
- (33) E oggi c’è un cielo *azzurro azzurro*, limpido limpido [token number 5284925247]
‘And today there is a blue blue sky, clear blue’

In such examples, reduplication evokes totality: it adds to the simplex adjectival form the meaning of ‘characterising completely’ the entity it refers to. Thus, the repetition of *bianco* ‘white’ in (31) adds the reading ‘totally’ white, as well as *blu blu* ‘blue blue’ (32) and *azzurro azzurro* ‘azure azure’ (33) mean ‘completely blue/light blue’. This value seems to be often used as a contrastive focus in the meaning of ‘completely, *and not partially*, white’: in such examples, the quantity value introduces the idea of a quantitative difference in the scale of completeness.

Function c. is clearly associated to the notion of intensification, since the construction expresses the superlative degree of the adjectival item:

- (34) alle volte si infervorava così tanto, da diventare *rosso rosso* [token number 1897821745]
‘sometimes he got so angry that he became red red’

The two adjectives have identical semantic properties, but the intensifier is the implicit superlative of the first element (see Berlanda, 2013 for this issue). As happens with the qualitative-prototypical values, also in this case we can talk about colour intensity. In

¹¹ As the anonymous reviewer has noted, in this example the colour term does not refer to the colour itself, but to the taste of a food (*bianco* ‘white’ here refers to the taste of the yogurt and stands for *plain*). It could be interesting to better analyse the impact that the semantics of these adjectives may have (or not) on the whole construction. However, due to the lack of space, I will not mention these kinds of semantic differences.

particular, this value expresses the attitude of the speaker to the referent (e.g., ‘he’, in (34); the speaker is impressed by the quality of being X). For an overview on the emphatic function associated to the superlative degree, see Stevenson (1969, p. 161), who analyses this function in Bagirmi (for instance, the repetition *mbas(a) mbas(a)* ‘very small, too small, smallest’).

As it emerges from the examples, there is a strict correlation between quantity and quality patterns: such semantics are not mutually exclusive (Rozhanskiy, 2015, p. 1012). They frequently overlap, as they may simultaneously appear in reduplicative colour intensifying constructions: as a matter of fact, “[m]ost instances of reduplication can be easily explained by either one or both semantic patterns” (Rozhanskiy, 2015, p. 1012).

3.2 EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions

The second type of constructions discussed here is represented by the so-called *EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions*. They are phrasal in nature, and may contain sequences of two or more elements, belonging to different parts of speech. Among the most interesting sequences, it is worth analysing adjective phrases, and particularly those composed of an adjective followed by a prepositional phrase, as in examples (35)-(36):

- (35) Il giorno tanto atteso si rivelava *grigio di tristezza* [token number 2020190706]
 ‘The long-awaited day turned out to be grey with (lit. of) sadness’
- (36) Marco il mio compagno di stanza era *bianco dalla paura* [token number 885408572]
 ‘Marco my roommate was white with (lit. from the) fear’

Although being structurally similar, the two constructs differ for the prepositional element (in the first case the construction requires the preposition *di* ‘of’, while the second requires *da* ‘from’ plus a determiner).¹² Nevertheless, both constructs use a prepositional phrase to introduce a cause, in which a noun of emotion occurs. In both instances, the colour identifies the effect provoked by this emotion. Thus, in (35) the ‘effect of the grey colour’ is caused by ‘sadness’, and in (36) the ‘effect of white (‘pale’) colour’ is due to ‘fear’. Thus, the colour construction has the specific pragmatic function of intensifying a psychological or physiological state through a metaphor. It can be represented as follows:

- (37) [X_{<colour>} + PREP + NOUN_{<emotion>}] = ‘very ADJ_{<emotion>}’

¹² The preposition *di* is typically classified as a highly generic one, while the preposition *da* covers a limited set of semantic values. Both prepositions in Italian can be used to express a cause (Serianni, 1997, p. 235 & p. 240). The two prepositions are generally interchangeable in this context, although their syntactic combinatorial features, on a syntactic level, vary: while the preposition *di* has to be directly linked to a noun, without the interposition of any article, the preposition *da* must be obligatorily followed by an article (e.g., *dalla*).

The EFFECT–CAUSE colour construction is not peculiar to Italian, as it is also commonly used in other languages (cf. Poncin & Van Goethem, 2023, for the analysis of Dutch, English and French). However, the construction is not frequently represented in the corpus, since only 86 occurrences were found. This construction comes from more concrete uses, where the cause of the acquisition of a colour is a concrete entity, and the colour is perceived as a real visual sensation,¹³ as in the following examples:

- (38) Il cielo, *grigio di fumo* [token number 2878270340]
 ‘The sky, grey with (lit. of) smoke’ → smoke CAUSES the sky to be grey_{effect}
- (39) Roma era *bianca dalla neve* [token number 2029987737]
 ‘Rome was white with (lit. from the) snow’ → snow CAUSES Rome to be white_{effect}

In (38) the smoke causes the sky to be grey, while in (39) the snow causes Rome to be white. The use of a noun of emotion turns the construction into a metaphorical one, with an intensified meaning. Thus, here we have the association of two different scales: i) the metonymical CAUSE–EFFECT relation (that in this case is the other way round, as suggested by the name of the construction); and ii) the metaphorical association EMOTION IS COLOUR (Apresjan, 1997; Poncin & Van Goethem, 2023). Consider the following examples:

- (40) Me ne andai in camera, *nera di rabbia* [token number 5025672781]
 ‘I went to my bedroom, black with (lit. of) rage’
- (41) Fece due curve pericolosissime e i bambini erano *bianchi* [token number 5478640125]
 dalla paura
 ‘He made two dangerous turns and the children turned white with (lit. of) fear’

On the one hand, both (40) and (41) contain the metonymical CAUSE–EFFECT association, where [‘NOUN_{<emotion>} causes X to be Y_{EFFECT <colour>}’]: in (40) ‘rage causes being black’, and in (41) ‘fear causes being white’. On the other hand, a *metaphorical pattern* is realised (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980): “[a] metaphorical pattern is a multi-word expression from a given source domain (SD) into which one or more specific lexical item from a given target domain (TD) were inserted” (Stefanowitsch, 2006, p. 66). Furthermore, beyond the identification of a general mapping between two semantic domains, metaphorical patterns “establish specific paradigmatic relations between target-domain lexical items and the source-domain items that would be expected in their place in a non-metaphorical use” (Stefanowitsch, 2006, p. 67). Thus, in the examples shown, explicit relations between source domain and target domain are established, and the following metaphorical mapping can be identified:

¹³ This also holds for examples (35)-(36): a grey day, white skin.

- (42) a. Target domain: Emotion (e.g., *rage*, *fear*)
 b. Source domain: Colour (e.g., *black*, *white*)
 c. General mapping: EMOTION IS COLOUR
 d. Specific relation: *rage* ≈ *black*, *fear* ≈ *white*

This means that the intensified value is expressed by the interaction between the metonymic scale and the metaphorical one. In Italian, two different constructs which are completely synonymous can be associated to a more general intensifying construction, where the metaphorical association between colour and emotion noun is regular:

- (43) [X_{<colour>} + *di* + Noun_{<emotion>}]
 a. *rosso di vergogna* ‘red with shame’ (lit. red of shame)
 b. *verde di invidia* ‘green with envy’ (lit. green of envy)
 c. *bianco di terrore* ‘white with terror’ (lit. white of terror)
- (44) [X_{<colour>} + *da* + Det + Noun_{<emotion>}]
 a. *blu dalla rabbia* ‘blue with rage’ (lit. blue from the rage)
 b. *bianco dalla paura* ‘white with fear’ (lit. white from the fear)
 c. *nero dalla disperazione* ‘black with despair’ (lit. black from the despair)

In fact, the metaphorical association employing a colour term as a source and an emotion noun as a target seems to be typical in many languages. This was proven by several studies, such as Steinvall’s (2007, p. 350), who demonstrates that “speakers maintain a system of preference by which they link colours and emotions”. This suggests that frameworks for the conceptualization of emotions through colour lexemes exist, and such frameworks can be linguistically identified via constructions. Therefore, as done for English by Steinvall (2007), the lexical fillers of the Italian [X_{<colour>} + *di* + Noun_{<emotion>}] construction were classified according to the emotion categories which have been identified by Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson & O’Connor (1987, p. 1084): “the emotion lexicon can be reasonably portrayed as a hierarchy with a basic level, and both typical and actual emotion episodes can be meaningfully characterized in terms of basic-emotion prototypes”.

Each construct was evaluated against its fillers and their frequency of occurrence in the construction. Fillers were classified and included in the six macro-categories of the basic emotions of *love*, *joy*, *surprise*, *anger*, *sadness*, *fear*. Finally, to put the frequency of use of a colour in relation to the emotion noun, the observed frequencies were normalised by dividing the actual number of occurrences of a certain construct by total occurrences of the whole set of occurrences of the different constructs. Data can be represented in the form of a graph showing the type of emotions typically codified by the [X_{<colour>} + *di* + Noun_{<emotion>}] construction, as in Figure 3, where each colour term is quantitatively connected to the different emotion nouns.

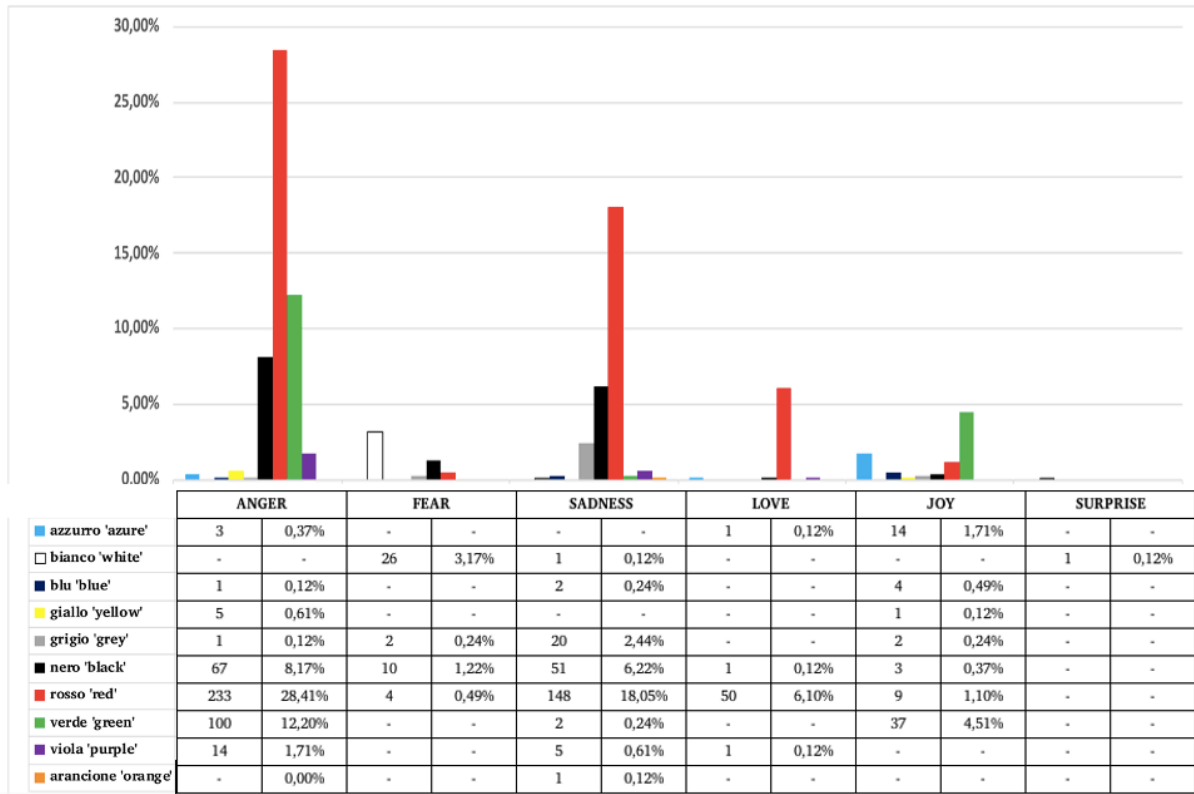


Figure 3. Frequency of occurrence of EFFECT-CAUSE colour constructions and emotion nouns

In the graph, the different columns refer to the colours (i.e., *azzurro*, *bianco*, *blu*, *giallo*, *grigio*, *nero*, *rosso*, *verde*, *viola*) occurring with the emotion categories that have been considered (i.e., *anger*, *fear*, *sadness*, *love*, *joy*, *surprise*). Among them, the ones that most frequently occur in combination with each emotion noun emerge. Below the histogram graph, the absolute frequency of occurrence (left column) and the normalised percentage (right column) appear. First, Figure 3 highlights a predominant use of the EFFECT-CAUSE colour constructions for negative emotions (i.e., *anger*, *sadness*). Secondly, there is a predominant use of a small range of colours (i.e., *red*, *black* and *green*) for the codification of emotions. Quantitative data show that *red* is the most frequently occurring colour in this construction. It is often employed to refer to anger and sadness; as Steinvall (2017) suggests, this could be related to facial colour. Furthermore, the examples containing the colour ‘red’ are also the ones showing the highest raw frequency of occurrence: for example, the frequencies of occurrence of *rosso di vergogna* ‘red with shame’ and *rosso di rabbia* ‘red with rage’ together cover the 31% of all occurrences of the construction. This may suggest a higher degree of lexicalisation of these sequences as autonomous units (Bybee, 2001). A cultural motivation of co-occurrence with nouns referring to anger and sadness may be given for the use of *black*, usually denoting “death and mourning in European and American cultures” (Steinvall, 2017, p. 357-358), and *grey* is often associated with sadness due to its metaphoric link to the weather (Poncin & Van Goethem, 2023). *White* most frequently occurs with nouns referring to fear: this colour typically refers to the physical

effect of being scared and points to the colour of the face of the person who is scared. *Green* is frequently associated with anger, envy and jealousy. *Green* also occurs, together with *blue*, with nouns denoting joy.

The examples show that “speakers have an active command of the kinds of grammatical unit that are acceptable in the construction” (Hilpert, 2014, p. 7), meaning that speakers’ knowledge of this construction does not only entail the presence of empty slots, but also the potential metaphorical meanings and restrictions associated to each filler.

4. Further quantitative data and discussion

The analysis has shown that the two kinds of colour constructional intensifiers, i.e., the reduplicative colour construction and the EFFECT–CAUSE colour construction, exhibit different structural and combinatorial properties, and, as a consequence, different intensifying functions. Table 1 summarizes the differences and analogies.

Type of construction	Reduplicative colour construction	EFFECT–CAUSE colour construction
Structure	[X ₁ <colour> + X ₁ <colour>]	[X<colour> + Prep + Noun]
Combinatorial properties	concrete nouns, (emotion nouns)	emotion nouns
Semantic relation	metaphoric scale association	metonymic/metaphoric scale association
Type of intensification	quality and quantity intensifier	quality intensifier

Table 1. Structural, distributional, and semantic analogies/differences

The function of the two intensifying constructions is strictly related to the abstract semantic schemata associated to them (e.g., the metonymic/metaphoric scale association). The corpus-based analysis gives clear evidence for reduplicative colour constructions to appear mainly in combination with concrete nouns. They play the role of both qualitative and quantitative intensifiers and are based on a metaphoric association. EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions are mainly linked to abstract nouns (i.e., emotion nouns), they are quality intensifiers, based on a metonymic/metaphoric scale association.

The two constructions also differ in their lexical and semantic features. On one hand, reduplicated intensifying constructions are strictly constrained in terms of lexical specificity: only a colour adjective may occur in the construction, and the set of colours is however closed. On the other hand, EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions allow the presence of different emotion nouns in the variable slot. Table 2 records the frequency of occurrence of individual

instantiations (token frequency) of both constructions, as well as the number of unique distinct constructs (type frequency) instantiating them.

	Reduplicative colour constructions	EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions
Token frequency	1474	820
Type frequency	47	69

Table 2. Type and token frequency of the selected constructions in the corpus

On the one hand, reduplicative colour constructions show a higher token frequency, but a lower number of forms (type frequency). On the other hand, EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions exhibit a lower number of tokens and a greater range of types. Type frequency can be taken into account to evaluate productivity: “the higher the type frequency the greater the productivity or likelihood that a construction will be extended to new items” (Bybee, 2010, p. 67).

Furthermore, as Taylor (2002) points out, type frequency is also useful to determine the degree of abstractness of a pattern: since many types make the emergence of a schematic slot in the construction more probable, the higher the type frequency the greater the schematicity of the construction. This means that type frequency can also be considered to measure lexical flexibility and degrees of lexicalisation (Gries, 2003) or constructionalisation (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013). In this case, the likelihood for a sequence to be productive may depend on the degree of lexical specificity, which is low in the case of productive units. Beyond productivity, low degrees of lexical specificity are also likely to be semantically predictable (more schematic constructions are often endowed with greater diagrammatic transparency (Casadei, 1995), i.e., the relationship between morphosyntactic form and meaning is biunivocal.

Summarising, reduplicative colour constructions are less productive than EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions; this is mainly due to the class of colour adjectives, which is closed (indeed, the reduplicative construction in general is much more frequent and productive in terms of types). The type frequency parameter can be related to the total number of occurrences of each construction to better characterise the combinatorial sequences.¹⁴ Table 3 summarises the type/token ratio scores.¹⁵

¹⁴ As Bybee (2001) points out, the higher the token frequency the greater the autonomy of linguistic units (thus, their inclusion in the lexicon and their lexicalisation degree).

¹⁵ See Baker, Hardie & McEnery (2006). As pointed out in Francis and Kučera (1982), the relation between types and tokens is generally used to quantitatively investigate the richness of vocabulary of a text.

	Reduplicative colour constructions	EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions
Type/token ratio	0,032	0,084

Table 3. Type/token ratio

Summarising, the relation between raw frequency of occurrence of individual instantiations and the number of different constructs reveals (i.e. tokens and types):

- a) a repeated use of a small set of constructs (naturally restricted to the number of colour adjectives) of reduplicative colour constructions;
- b) a greater entrenchment of EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions schemata, i.e., a higher degree of schematicity of the construction;¹⁶
- c) a higher productivity of EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions: new combinatory forms can be created from the partially lexically-empty patterns, and new non-lexicalised constructs may arise.¹⁷

Consequently, it could be better to analyse intensifying structures as *constructional sets* (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013), “a series of related constructions at different degrees of schematicity, clustered around a particular node in the constructional network” (Traugott & Trousdale, 2013, p. 28). As Fillmore et al. (1988, p. 37) point out, “[t]he grammar of a language can be seen as a repertory of constructions, plus a set of principles governing the nesting and superimposition of constructions into or upon one another”. Therefore, intensifying constructions may be represented in the constructional network as a network of abstract constructions or as subschemata (or constructs). As Figure 4 shows, each construct may be represented by several single instantiations:

¹⁶ Even though some scholars, such as Schafroth (2015), question the relevance of the relationship between frequency of use and entrenchment of the construction.

¹⁷ However, productivity is limited to the specific pattern and does not extend to variation of grammatical forms or semantic classes, as reduplication does.

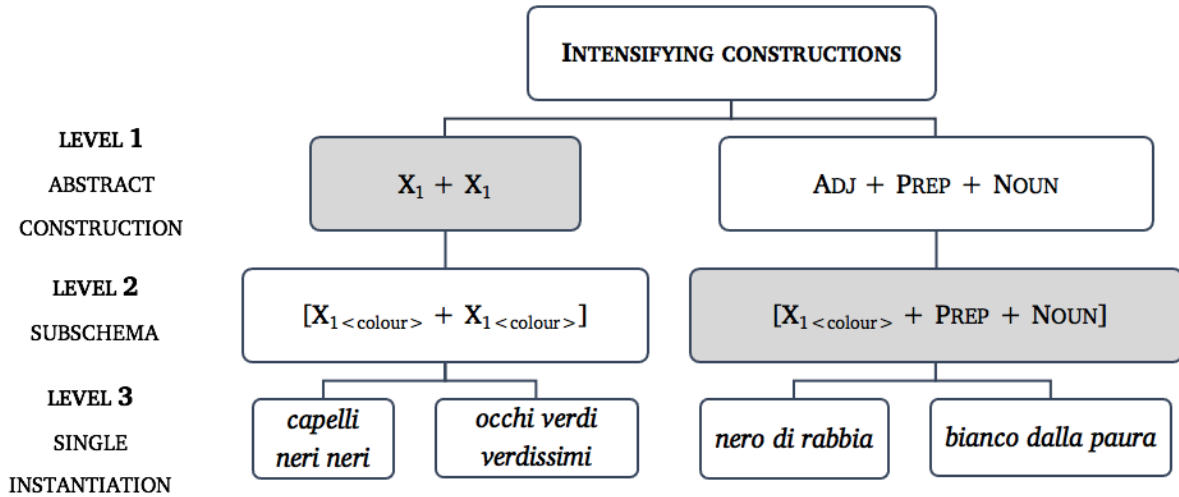


Figure 4. Intensifying constructional network

In Figure 4, fully schematic constructions are abstracted away from underspecified subschemata (i.e., partially schematic constructions), which have been formed from fully lexically filled ones (thus, the information is inherited by subschemata starting from single instantiations). This justifies the differences between the two constructions in terms of type/token frequency and productivity, as the different hierarchical levels can be attributed different degrees of productivity and schematicity. Type frequency interacts with the degree of schematicity (Bybee, 2001, 2010; Clausner & Croft 1997), namely the level of dissimilarity of the members of a class. Since “[h]ighly schematic classes cover a wide range of instantiations” (Bybee, 2010, p. 67), reduplicative colour constructions can be intended as more schematic and productive only in their more abstract representation (level 1 grey cell on Figure 4), and less productive and schematic in the subschema including colours (level 2 white cell). However, lower degrees of schematicity may limit productivity, “since it limits the candidate items that extension could apply to” (Bybee, 2010, p. 67). As such, EFFECT–CAUSE colour abstract construction (level 1 white cell) is less productive, even if its subschema (level 2 grey cell) admits more types. Therefore, variation can be interpreted as an index of routinisation and conventionalisation (Bybee & McClelland, 2005; Bybee, 2010; Traugott & Trousdale, 2013), through which new items can arise. Thanks to a high frequency of use, they can become lexicalised.

5. Conclusions

This paper analysed Italian intensifying constructions including colour terms. Among the different intensifying structures involving a colour term, reduplicative colour constructions and EFFECT–CAUSE colour constructions were selected for discussion. The two intensifying constructions were differentiated into different types, according to their distributional features, and semantic and pragmatic values. Both constructions represent instances of partially filled patterns, namely more abstract constructions from which possible constructs may originate.

They are ‘partially filled’ or ‘partially lexically specified’ in the sense that they contain both fixed and empty slots, the latter to be filled with semantically related items. The two partially lexically specified intensifying constructions were evaluated against their lexical variability, productivity, and degree of schematicity by means of corpus data. Constructional schemata can be put in the middle position of a *continuum* of constructionalisation (Figure 5), having at the opposite poles non-productive configurations (to the left pole of the scale), and highly schematic and productive patterns (to the right pole) (Piunno, 2021):

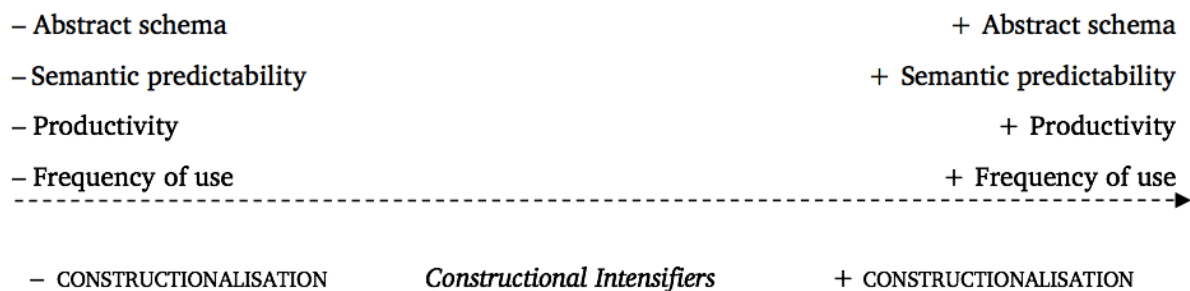


Figure 5. *Continuum* of constructionalisation

High degrees of constructionalisation correspond to greater levels of semantic predictability: this means that the higher the entrenchment of a construction, the more predictable its meaning.

These groups of constructions represent only a small set of possible intensifying strategies of Italian, thus only one of the several pieces of a more complex (and “chaotic”, Grandi, 2017, p. 58) domain was considered. From the methodological viewpoint, further work could be done on colour intensifying constructions to better evaluate the co-occurrence of words and constructions in terms of attractions/repulsions, with respect to i) other semantically or functionally equivalent constructions; and ii) other words occurring in the empty slots (see the collostructional analysis by Stefanowitsch and Gries, 2003). Finally, only Italian was selected for the purpose of this investigation, but this phenomenon is not peculiar to this language. Thus, further investigation is still needed from a cross-linguistic and contrastive perspective.

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