

# The emerging Italian affix *-iota* between blending and derivation: A corpus-based analysis

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This article investigates the emerging affix *-iota* in Italian, whose development is related to the morphological reanalysis of the word *italiota* as a blend of *italiano* ‘Italian’ and *idiota* ‘idiot’. Based on data extracted from a web corpus, the analysis addresses the morphological properties of blends containing the adjective *-(id)iota* and the usage contexts of *italiota*, focusing on the semantic fields of its collocates. We found that blends with both *-(i)diota* and *-iota* are productive and that *-iota* displays affix-like properties and a derogatory meaning, especially in political discourse. This study confirms that the parts of blends belonging to extra-grammatical morphology (Dressler 2000; Mattiello 2018) can undergo a change that leads them to acquire affix-like properties and get closer to more regular morphology.

KEYWORDS: word-formation, blending, Italian, political discourse, lexical fields.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of new bound forms (e.g. affixes, affixoids, combining forms, secreted affixes) is a well-studied topic within the literature devoted to word-formation: many studies have investigated the processes through which a linguistic element gradually acquires the status of a morpheme, e.g. reanalysis (cf. Hopper & Traugott 2003: 56), the grammaticalisation of a compound constituent (cf. Booij & Hüning 2014), and morphological re-segmentation (such as Eng. *hamburg-er* > *ham-burger*, cf. Booij 2005: 272). In particular, the grammaticalisation of compound constituents has been studied quite extensively in the last decades (cf. van Goethem 2010 on French; Arcodia 2011 on Mandarin Chinese; Booij & Hüning 2014 on Dutch; Micheli 2019 on Italian). Less attention has been paid to other processes occurring within other types of complex words, such as blends (cf. Mattiello 2018).

This paper aims at describing an emerging affix in Italian, i.e. *-iota*, whose development is related to blending. As exemplified in (1), it expresses a pejorative meaning, namely ‘acting like the average member of a given group of people’.<sup>2</sup>

- (1) a. *Il grilliota medio invece è*  
 the Grillo + IOTA average instead be.3SG.PRS  
*convinto che il diritto di voto*  
 convinced.PTCP.PST that the right of vote  
*tocchi solo a lui e a quelli come lui.*  
 be\_up.3SG.SUBJ only to him and to those like him  
 ‘The average Grillo’s voter is actually convinced that the right to vote belongs only to him and to those like him’.
- b. *Passo per caso sul tg1 e chi*  
 turn.1SG.PRS for chance on\_the Tg1 and who  
*ti ritrovo? Rasparri, intervistato dal solito*  
 you.DAT find.1SG.PRS Rasparri interviewed.PTCP.PST by\_theusual  
*scecco ‘asino’ di giornalista RAI [...].*  
 donkey donkey of journal(ist) + IOTA RAI  
 ‘I turn by chance on Tg1 [Italian TV news program] and guess who I find? Rasparri interviewed by the usual *scecco* ‘donkey’ RAI [Italian TV channel] average Italian journalist’.

In (1a), *grilliota* refers to B. Grillo’s typical voter, whom the speaker considers obtuse/ignorant. Similarly, in (1b), *giornalista* refers to the category journalist, towards which the speaker expresses a pejorative evaluation, also emphasised by the dialectal word *scecco* meaning ‘donkey’. In both cases, the element *-iota* conveys a derogatory value related to the ignorance and obtuseness of the typical member of a given group of people.<sup>3</sup>

We argue that the emergence of *-iota* as a productive morpheme is due to the interaction of several processes, namely the semantic reanalysis and the morphological re-segmentation that the adjective/noun *italiota* shows in political contexts, and the spread of blends and (to a lesser extent) compounds containing the adjective *idiota* ‘idiot’ (or a shortened form of it) as the second element. For this purpose, we will analyse a sample of complex words containing the adjective *idiota* as both compound constituent (e.g. *turisti-idioti* ‘idiot tourists’) and blend’s part (e.g. *carabidiota* ‘idiot policeman’, *carabi(niere)* ‘policeman’ + *(i)diota* ‘idiot’), as well as the emerging morpheme *-iota* conveying the meaning illustrated in (1).

As we will observe in more detail in section 3.2, the adjective/noun *italiota* is a learned loanword from Latin (cf. also French *italiote*), attested from 1806 according to the Nuovo De Mauro dictionary;<sup>4</sup> initially, it refers to an inhabitant of the Greek colonies founded in Southern Italy since the fifth century BC. From the morphological standpoint, it is made up of the proper noun *Italia* ‘Italy’ and the suffix *-ota* (cf. also the variants *-oto* and *-iota*), which occurs in a few ethnic nouns/adjectives, especially in learned loans from Latin and Ancient Greek (e.g.

*cipriota* ‘Cyprian’, *cairota* ‘Cairene’, *siceliota* ‘Siceliot’), but also in native forms (e.g. *keniota* ‘Kenyan’, *marateota* ‘inhabitant of Maratea’). The Italian suffix *-ota* comes from Latin *-ōta(m)* (e.g. *Phthiōta* ‘inhabitant of Phthia’), which is in turn borrowed from the Ancient Greek suffix *-ōtēs* (e.g. στρατιώτης ‘soldier’). As will be illustrated in the following sections, the use of *italiota* in texts discussing political issues is crucial to shed light on the emergence of *-iota* as a morpheme. Given the importance of the usage context to account for the emergence of the new meaning of *italiota*, our investigation will be carried out taking into account both the morphological and the contextual level. This article aims to offer a morphological and semantic account of the emerging morpheme *-iota*, whose new meaning has not yet been described in reference works on Italian word-formation (e.g. it is not mentioned in Grossmann & Rainer 2004).<sup>5</sup> In doing so, we aim to contribute to the study of the formation of new affixes and the interaction among word-formation mechanisms, specifically blending and derivation.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses some theoretical issues concerning word-formation and illustrates the data extraction and classification. Section 3 contains the core of the analysis. It encompasses the description of the morphological features shown by the morphological complex words which have been included in our dataset, as well as the semantic account for their behaviour in context, with a focus on the noun/adjective *italiota*. In section 4, the results of our analysis are summarised and discussed. Some concluding remarks follow in section 5.

## *2. Theory and data*

### *2.1. Morphological landscape*

In this paper, we analyse compounds,<sup>6</sup> derived words and blends. While compounding and derivation are considered as the result of a regular (i.e. productive) word-formation mechanism, blending is generally ascribed to the so-called ‘extra-grammatical morphology’ (cf. Dressler 2000; Mattiello 2013). The term ‘extra-grammatical morphology’ (introduced by Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 34-41;<sup>7</sup> cf. ‘expressive morphology’ in Zwicky & Pullum 1987) has been applied to a set of heterogeneous morphological elements obtained by processes which are “not clearly identifiable and [whose] input does not allow a prediction of a regular output” (cf. Mattiello 2013: 1).

Blends,<sup>8</sup> acronyms, clippings, and hypocoristics are widely considered as examples of non-grammatical phenomena. Blending, in particular, is considered a “creative technique” (cf. Ronneberger-Sibold, 2008)

through which speakers create new (often funny) words by merging two or more words into one (e.g. Eng. *brunch* < *br(eakfast)* + *(l)unch*; It. *cantautore* ‘singer-songwriter’ < *canta(nte)* ‘singer’ + *(a)utore* ‘song writer’).<sup>9</sup>

In Italian, blending is considered a minor word-formation mechanism that has been mostly exploited for the creation of names of companies or associations (e.g. *Polfer* ‘railway police’ < *pol(izia)* + *fer(roviana)*; cf. Thornton 1993: 148). However, as observed by Cacchiani (2016), the transfer of blends from English has led to their gradual increase in terms of productivity, especially in specific domains such as children’s literature (e.g. *Bianconiglio* ‘White Rabbit’ < *Bian(co)* ‘white’ + *Coniglio* ‘rabbit’) and brand naming (e.g. biscuits such as *Farfallegre* < *farfa(lle)* ‘butterflies’ + *(a)llegre* ‘happy’), where creativity is widely exploited.<sup>10</sup> As already observed in previous works (cf. Thornton 1993), Italian blends show a strong tendency to shorten only the first element, the second element remaining intact (e.g. *cantautore* < *cant(ante)* + *autore*).<sup>11</sup> These formations are not considered prototypical blends but rather ‘partial blends’ in that the second constituent does not undergo modification.<sup>12</sup> This also means that, in Italian, the boundaries between neoclassical compounding (specifically, compounds whose structure is ‘combining form + word’) and blending are considerably blurred.

Although blending is regarded as an unpredictable mechanism, recent studies on English have highlighted that it shows some (sub)regularities, especially from a phonological and prosodic perspective (cf., among others, Cannon 2000; Gries 2004; Bertinetto 2001). Moreover, as pointed out by Mattiello (2018), regularities in blend formation are linked to the frequent occurrence of some splinters (i.e. blend’s part, cf. Lehrer 2007: 116) or secreted affixes (cf. Fradin 2000) / combining forms (cf. Warren 1990 on English; Iacobini 2015 on Italian). Although these three types of bound elements are often confused and conflated in the literature on word-formation, they actually show some relevant differences since they are very close phenomena. Notably, while splinters are parts of blends (i.e. non-morphemic segments which do not involve any semantic change and do not occur frequently), secreted affixes and secreted combining forms generally involve the development of a secondary meaning (triggered by high levels of frequency and productivity), through semantic generalisation (e.g. *-(a)holic* in *coffeeholic* or *tweetaholic* generally refers to ‘a person addicted to X’) or specification (e.g. *-exit* in *Brexit* or *Grexit* has developed the specific meaning ‘the exit from the European Union’), and trigger a schema model for the creation of new words. According to Mattiello (2018: 14), these three types of bound forms can represent “different phenomena at different stages”, in that they reflect three different

stages of a gradual process, ranging from extra-grammatical morphology (i.e. splinters) to marginal morphology (i.e. combining forms)<sup>13</sup> and possibly to regular word-formation (i.e. affixes).

This phenomenon can be fruitfully analysed from a perspective that combines the synchronic and the diachronic point of view, depending on whether one wants to focus on (respectively) the current status of given morphological units or the morphological change that they are undergoing. This paper will provide a (mostly) synchronic account of an emerging morpheme,<sup>14</sup> whose development is connected with blending. Our analysis will focus on the current status of words containing the elements *-idiota*, *-(i)diota* and *-iota*, extracted from a web corpus, as illustrated in the following section.

## 2.2. Data extraction

The analysis is based on data extracted from a corpus of Contemporary Italian, i.e. the itTenTen16 corpus (cf. Jakubíček *et al.* 2013), a 5-billion-word corpus of texts from the web accessed through the SketchEngine interface (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014). The corpus has been queried for forms ending with the string *<iota>* in order to recall both compounds<sup>15</sup> and blends containing the adjective *idiota* (e.g. *turista-idiota* ‘idiot tourist’; *carabidiota* ‘idiot policeman’) as well as words where *-iota* can be considered as an emerging affix (e.g. *giornaliota* ‘average Italian journalist’). These procedures ensured high recall but needed a manual check in order to exclude false positives (e.g. *microbiota* ‘id.’). The size of the final dataset is illustrated in Table 1.

TOKEN TOTAL	5,748
TYPE TOTAL	116

**Table 1.** Word dataset under investigation extracted from the itTenTen16 corpus.

As far as the usage contexts of *italiota* are concerned, the analysis was carried out through the SketchEngine toolset: firstly, we used the Word Sketch tool in order to extract the frequency list of the Parts-of-Speech assigned to *italiota* as well as its collocates, i.e. its modifiers and the nouns that it modifies; secondly, we checked the data resulting from the Word Sketch analysis through the Concordance tool. Notably, the last step has been crucial to find another not-standard graphic form in which the lexeme occurs (*itagliota/itagliotta*), which is not lemmatised by the software and, thus, impossible to be detected in other ways. The

kind of websites from which the data have been extracted was also taken into consideration.

The lexeme *italiota* represents 4,812 of 5,748 occurrences of the word ending with the string < *iota* >: particularly, 4,708 occurrences in the graphic form *italiota* (4,679 as adjectives and 29 as nouns),<sup>16</sup> and 104 occurrences of the graphic form *itagliot(t)a* (61 as adjectives and 43 as nouns).

The websites in which *italiota* mainly occurs are blogs and forums of news websites (such as *La Repubblica* and *Il Giornale*). Figure 1 illustrates<sup>17</sup> its usage as an adjective:<sup>18</sup> the biggest words are the most frequent collocates; Figure 2 shows the lists of the top ten websites with the highest number of *italiota* and *itagliot(t)a* occurrences.



Figure 1. Collocates of *italiota*<sub>ADJ.</sub><sup>19</sup>

italiota		itagliot(t)a	
Website (e.g. cnn.com)	↓ Frequency	Website (e.g. cnn.com)	↓ Frequency
1 <input type="checkbox"/> bepegriilo.it	823	1 <input type="checkbox"/> rischiodalcolato.it	36
2 <input type="checkbox"/> repubblica.it	243	2 <input type="checkbox"/> bepegriilo.it	21
3 <input type="checkbox"/> blogspot.cz	108	3 <input type="checkbox"/> robertocorradi.it	4
4 <input type="checkbox"/> daniemartinelli.it	103	4 <input type="checkbox"/> chatta.it	4
5 <input type="checkbox"/> conflittiestrategie.it	90	5 <input type="checkbox"/> scappo.it	3
6 <input type="checkbox"/> ilblogdellestelle.it	80	6 <input type="checkbox"/> ilgiornale.it	3
7 <input type="checkbox"/> paologuzzanti.it	75	7 <input type="checkbox"/> ilblogdellestelle.it	3
8 <input type="checkbox"/> rischiodalcolato.it	70	8 <input type="checkbox"/> bassanonet.it	3
9 <input type="checkbox"/> aduc.it	56	9 <input type="checkbox"/> termometropolitico.it	2
10 <input type="checkbox"/> beniculturali.it	54	10 <input type="checkbox"/> frontediliberazioneidaibanchieri.it	2

Figure 2. Frequency lists of the top ten websites where *italiota* and *itagliot(t)a* occur.

The analysis presented in the following sections is twofold. Firstly, it focuses on the morphological properties of both the whole words and the bases extracted from the itTenTen16 corpus: particularly, the word-formation mechanism (compounding, blending, derivation), the internal complexity of the base (simple vs complex), and the presence of proper names as bases will be considered.

Secondly, it focuses on the use of *italiota*. After a brief history of its occurrences witnessed in literary works and newspapers, its semantic features are outlined through a description of the contexts of use, with particular reference to the most frequent lexical/semantic fields to which the collocates belong. The political lexicon will be proven to be the most productive lexical field of *italiota* collocates.

### 3. Analysis

This section illustrates the results of the corpus-based analysis, starting from the morphological data and following the contexts of use.

#### 3.1 Morphological analysis

As already mentioned in section 2.1, our analysis focuses on different types of complex words. Particularly, our dataset includes the following lexical units:

- (i) compound words (native type) where *idiota* represents the second constituent (e.g. *ironico-idiota* ‘both ironic and idiot’);
- (ii) compound words (neoclassical type) containing a combining form and *idiota* as the second constituent (e.g. *telediota* ‘idiot TV viewer’, lit. *tele-* ‘television’ + *idiota* ‘idiot’);
- (iii) blends where *(i)diota* occurs as rightmost splinter (e.g. *polidiota* ‘idiot politician’, *poli(tico)* ‘politician’ + *(i)diota* ‘idiot’; *cretidiota* ‘both stupid and idiot’, lit. *cretino* ‘stupid’ + *idiota* ‘idiot’);
- (iv) words showing the final string *-iota* (e.g. *giornaliota* ‘average journalist’, *grilliota* ‘typical Grillo’s voter’).

In order to investigate these mechanisms from a quantitative point of view, we have considered the type frequency, the token frequency, and the number of hapaxes: as pointed out by many studies (among others, cf. Baayen 2005; Plag 1999; see Gaeta & Ricca 2015 for an overview), these values contribute to describe the different facets of morphological productivity. The analysis of both type and token frequency is crucial since, on the one hand, productive mechanisms show a large number of low-frequency types, while on



the other hand, the high token frequency of given words can trigger a process of analogy, whereby new words are created on the model of specific frequent lexical units. Moreover, besides the measurement of type and token frequencies, we have also taken into consideration the number of hapaxes, which provides further information on the rate at which speakers use a given word-formation mechanism to create new words in contexts.<sup>20</sup> These three parameters are illustrated in Table 2.

	Native compounding	Neoclassical compounding	Blending with <i>-(i)diota</i>	<i>-iota</i> words
TYPE FREQUENCY	18	18	25	58
TOKEN FREQUENCY	22	31	127	5,569
HAPAXES	17	15	14	36

Table 2. Type frequency, token frequencies and hapaxes of each word-formation mechanism under investigation.

Table 2 illustrates that both type and token frequency grow as we move from the first column to the rightmost one: while native compounding is the least attested type, the most productive word-formation mechanism involves the element *-iota*. The high number of tokens with *-iota* indicates the presence of one (or more) well-entrenched words; on the other hand, it should be noted that *-iota* words also show a significant number of hapaxes, which testifies that the speakers use this mechanism to create occasionalisms.<sup>21</sup>

According to the classification provided by Bisetto & Scalise (2005), native compounds attested on our dataset can be ascribed to the endocentric attributive type (12 types; e.g. *turista-idiota* ‘idiot tourist’, *imprenditore-idiota* ‘idiot entrepreneur’) as well as to the endocentric coordinative type (five types). Remarkably, while attributive compounds are always nouns, coordinative compounds can function both as nouns (one type, *coglione-idiota* ‘asshole-idiot’) and as adjectives (four types, e.g. *sorrisino ironico-idiota* ‘ironic-idiot smirk’). It is noteworthy that in five cases (three occurrences of *italiano-idiota* and one occurrence of *romanzo-idiota*), the compound word serves as a clarification provided by the speaker to explain the meaning of a word containing the element *-iota*, as exemplified in (2).



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- (2) a. *Da buon tifoso italiota (italiano-idiota) prima*  
 As good supporter Italian + IOTA Italian-idiot first  
*viene il risultato, poi il gioco.*  
 come.3SG.PRS the result then the game  
 ‘As a good average Italian (idiot-Italian) supporter, the result comes first, then the game’.
- b. *Nasco come scrittore di “romanzioti”, ossia romanzi-idioti*  
 be\_born.1SG.PRS like writer of novel + IOTA namely novel-idiot  
*raccontini surreali, pieni di elegante nonsense.*  
 tales surreal full of elegant nonsense  
 ‘I started as a writer of stupid novels, namely idiot-novels, surreal tales, full of elegant nonsense’.

In (2a), the compound *italiano-idiota* ‘idiot-Italian’ is used by the speaker to clarify the meaning of *italiota*: as we will see in more detail in section 3.2, the reanalysis of *italiota* as a blend between *italiano* and *idiota* is crucial for the emergence of *-iota* as a morpheme. In the second example, *romanzi-idioti* ‘idiot-novels’ testifies that the speaker is aware that the word *romanzioti* ‘idiot, bad novels’ is an occasionalism whose meaning may not be clear. As far as the first constituents are concerned, they are always common nouns, being *Berlusconi-idiota* the only exception; moreover, they are morphological simplex words, except for *imprenditore-idiota* ‘idiot entrepreneur’ and *neocons-idiota* ‘idiot neocon’.

Within neoclassical compounds, the word *idiota* represents the head of the compound modified by a combining form (e.g. *tecnoidiota* ‘technological idiot’, where *tecno-* means ‘technology’). The combining forms that occur in our sample are illustrated in Table 3.

COMBINING FORMS	TOKEN FREQUENCY
<i>astro-</i> < <i>astronauta</i> ‘spaceman’	1
<i>cyber-</i> < <i>cybernetic</i>	1
<i>fanta-</i> < <i>fantastico</i> ‘fantastic’	1
<i>italo-</i> < <i>italiano</i> ‘Italian’	2
<i>nazi-</i> < <i>nazista</i> ‘nazi’	1
<i>penta-</i> ‘five’	2
<i>psico-</i> ‘psychology’	1
<i>radio-</i> ‘radio’	1
<i>semi-</i> ‘half’	1

<i>tecno-</i> < <i>tecnologia</i> ‘technology’	3
<i>tele-</i> ‘television’	10
<i>termo-</i> ‘thermo’	1
<i>troglo-</i> < <i>troglodita</i> ‘troglodyte’	1
<i>uber-</i> ‘super’ <sup>22</sup>	1
<i>video-</i> ‘video’	3

Table 3. Combining forms that bind to *idiota*.

The compounds illustrated in Table 3 are made up of a combining form, which can be a neoclassical (e.g. *termo-* ‘thermo-’) as well as a native (e.g. *fanta-* ‘fantastic’) element. They are mostly hapaxes (hence, occasionalisms); the only exception is *tele-idiota* (where *tele-* ‘television’), which is exemplified in (3).

- (3) *Tele-idioti, vittime un tempo di Mike Bongiorno come oggi*  
 TV-idiot victims one time of Mike Bongiorno like today  
*di Barbara D’Urso.*  
 of Barbara D’Urso  
 ‘TV-idiot, once victims of Mike Bongiorno as today of Barbara D’Urso [both popular TV presenters]’.

In (3), *tele-idioti* refers to Italians who spend much time in front of TV shows on Mediaset channels (i.e. television company owned by Silvio Berlusconi, then Prime Minister) which the speaker considers low quality, trash TV.

An interesting case is represented by *pentaidioti* where the neoclassical combining form *penta-* (‘five’) refers to the Movimento Cinque Stelle (‘Five Star Movement’) founded by Beppe Grillo (cf. also *pentastelati*, lit. ‘five’ + ‘starry’, used to indicate the Five Star voters).

As far as blends are concerned, they are made up of a first shortened element and the splinter *-(i)diota* (from the adjective *idiota*), e.g. *bambidiota* ‘dumb kid’ (lit. *bambi(no)* ‘kid’ + *(i)diota* ‘idiot’). The only exception is *trinartaliota* which is made up of *trinar(iciuto)* ‘who has three nostrils’ (a pejorative epithet referring to communists) and the splinter *-(i)aliota* from *italiota*.

The blends attested in our sample are illustrated in Table 4.

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BLEND WITH <i>-(I)DIOTA</i>	TOKEN FREQUENCY
<i>bambidiota</i> ( <i>bambi-</i> < <i>bambino</i> 'kid')	1
<i>carabidiota</i> ( <i>carabi-</i> < <i>carabiniere</i> 'policeman')	1
<i>cretidiota</i> ( <i>creti-</i> < <i>cretino</i> 'moronic')	3
<i>defidiota</i> ( <i>defi-</i> < <i>deficiente</i> 'idiot')	1
<i>forzidiota</i> ( <i>forzi-</i> < <i>Forza Italia</i> [Italian party])	4
<i>forzitalidiota</i> ( <i>forzitali-</i> < <i>Forza Italia</i> )	2
<i>francidiota</i> ( <i>franc-</i> < <i>francese</i> 'French')	1
<i>giuventristadiota</i> ( <i>giuventrista-</i> < 'Juventus fan')	1
<i>giuvidiota</i> ( <i>giuvi-</i> < <i>juventino</i> 'Juventus fan')	1
<i>governantidiota</i> ( <i>governant-</i> < <i>governante</i> 'governor')	1
<i>itaidiota</i> ( <i>ita-</i> < <i>italiano</i> 'Italian')	3
<i>italianidiota</i> ( <i>italian-</i> < <i>italiano</i> 'Italian')	5
<i>italdiota</i> ( <i>ital-</i> < <i>italiano</i> 'Italian')	3
<i>italidiota</i> ( <i>itali-</i> < <i>italiano</i> 'Italian')	78
<i>liberidiota</i> ( <i>liberi-</i> < <i>libero</i> 'free')	9
<i>mer-idiota</i> ( <i>mer-</i> < <i>meridionale</i> 'Southerner')	1
<i>patridiota</i> ( <i>patri-</i> < <i>patriota</i> 'patriot')	1
<i>polidiota</i> ( <i>poli-</i> < <i>politico</i> 'politician')	2
<i>politidiota</i> ( <i>polti-</i> < <i>politico</i> 'politician')	1
<i>reliodiota</i> ( <i>reli-</i> < <i>religioso</i> 'religious')	2
<i>sicilidiota</i> ( <i>sicili-</i> < <i>siciliano</i> 'Sicilian')	1
<i>televidiota</i> ( <i>televi-</i> < <i>television</i> 'television')	3
<i>trinartaliota</i> ( <i>trinar-</i> < <i>trinariciuto</i> + <i>(i)taliota</i> )	1

Table 4. Blends containing the splinter *-(i)diota*.

As shown in Table 4, the splinter *-(i)diota* always occurs on the right and combines with a shortened word (e.g. *creti-* < *cretino* 'moronic', *reli-* < *religioso* 'religious'). It is noteworthy that the first splinter usually takes the form of the minimal prosodic word in Italian (i.e. a foot of two syllables with stress on the first one, cf. Thornton 1996), e.g.

*defi-* < *deficiente* ‘idiot’, except in some cases where the leftmost splinter consists of more than two syllables (e.g. *politi-* < *politico* ‘politician’).

The overlap of constituents mostly includes the vowel *-i-* which is shared by both words (e.g. *poli(tico)* ‘politician’ + *(i)diota* > *polidiota*). According to the classification of blends proposed by Gries (2004: 646),<sup>23</sup> the blends illustrated in Table 4 belong to the second type, which is characterised by (i) the truncation of the first word, (ii) the linearisation and (iii) the overlap of constituents. As we have already mentioned, partial blends where the truncation applies only to the first constituent are particularly common in Italian, as shown by several examples, such as *mandarancio* (< *manda(rino)* ‘tangerine’ + *arancio* ‘orange’), *pantacollant* (< *panta(loni)* ‘trousers’ + *collant* ‘tights’).

As far as the originals are concerned,<sup>24</sup> they are always common nouns/adjectives, except for *forzidiota* and *forzitalidiota*, both from the proper name *Forza Italia* (Silvio Berlusconi’s party). Moreover, they can be both morphologically simple (e.g. *creti(no)* in *cretidiota*) and complex (e.g. *televi(sione)* in *televidiota*). Finally, it should be noted that the most frequent blends are made up of a shortened form of the noun/adjective *italiano* ‘Italian’, which represents the leftmost splinter: as shown in Table 4, four truncated forms are attested, i.e. *ita-*, *ital-*, *itali-*, *italian-*.

The last type of complex words attested in our sample show the final element *-iota*; from a formal point of view, these words are similar to blends analysed above in that they contain a potential shortened form of *idiota*. However, they differ from them since they contain an even smaller (and less recognisable) string, namely *-iota*, and show a less clear semantic link to the adjective *idiota* ‘idiot’. As illustrated in (4), *-iota* conveys a pejorative interpretation towards something perceived as ‘average, obtuse, stereotypical’ within the Italian context.

- (4) a. *In generale tutta la retorica sinistriota dei buoni*  
in general all the rhetoric left\_wing+IOTA of the good  
*sentimenti* è *strettamente coordinata con il*  
feelings be.3SG.PRS closely coordinated with the  
*progetto fascista di distruzione dei nostri diritti economici*  
project fascist of destruction of the our rights economic  
e *politici.*  
and political  
‘In general, all the typical left-wing rhetoric of good intentions is closely coordinated with the fascist project of destruction of our economic and political rights’.

- b. *La sostenibilità del sistema pensionistico era*  
The sustainability of the system pension be.3SG.IPFV  
*in Italia garantita in pratica dal sistema delle*  
in Italy guarantee PTCP.PST in practice by the system of the

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*imprese*    *su*    *cui*    *l'*    *ottusità*    *sindacaliota*    *e*  
 companies on REL the obtuseness trade\_union + IOTA and  
 la *complicità*    *giudiziaria*    *avevano*    *scaricato*  
 the complicity judicial have.3PL.IPFV discharge.PTCP.PST  
*l' intero costo del sistema.*  
 the whole cost of\_the system

'Basically, in Italy, the sustainability of the pension system was guaranteed by the system of companies on which the typically Italian trade-union obtuseness and judicial complicity had discharged the entire cost of the system'.

In examples provided in (4), both words containing the element *-iota* are characterised by a derogatory interpretation: notably, in *retorica sinistriota*, the use of *-iota* reveals that the speaker does not appreciate the typical rhetoric of the Left, characterised by (hypocrite) good intentions; in (4b) *ottusità sindacaliota* refers to the obtuse and typically Italian practices of unions. In both cases, *-iota* refers to something that the speaker considers as stereotypical, average within the Italian context, with a strong derogatory nuance.

The words to which *-iota* attaches can be both common nouns/adjectives (e.g. *vacanziota* < *vacanza* 'holiday'; *europiota* < *europista* 'pro-Europe') and proper names, especially of politicians (e.g. *delriota* < [*Graziano*] *Delrio*) or companies where words like *Italia* / *italiano* occur (e.g. *alitaliota* < *Alitalia*; *trenitaliota* < *Trenitalia*; *posteitaliota* < *Poste Italiane*). As far as the output categories are concerned, the *-iota* words can be both nouns (specifically, agent nouns) and adjectives.

The internal structure of the leftmost element can be both simple (e.g. *vacanziota* < *vacanza* 'holiday') and complex (e.g. *fantacalcio* < *fantacalcio* 'fantasy football'); moreover, in some cases, the base can also be represented by a multiword expression (e.g. *centrosocialiota* < *centro sociale* 'community centre').

From a quantitative point of view, the most frequent *-iota* words are illustrated in Table 5.

-IOTA WORDS	TOKEN FREQUENCY
<i>italiota</i>	4,812
<i>PDiota</i>	354
<i>forzitaliota</i>	307
<i>renziota</i>	9
<i>silviota</i>	6

Table 5. The most frequent *-iota* words.

All the most frequent words containing *-iota* refer to supporters/voters of Italian political parties; they contain the proper name of a political party (*PDiota* < *PD* ‘Democratic Party’, *forzitaliota* < *Forza Italia* [Silvio Berlusconi’s centre-right party]) or of a party leader (*renziota* < [Matteo] *Renzi*; *silviota* < *Silvio* [Berlusconi]). From a morphological point of view, *PDiota* represents a particular case in that its structure is also compatible with that of blends containing *-(i)diota*. The high frequency with which speakers use this word and the graphic form with which it occurs (*PD* in capital letters, while *-iota* in lower case) may have contributed to the dissemination of *-iota*.

The case of *italiota* is crucial and requires an in-depth analysis: as we have already observed in (2a), the interpretation of *italiota* as a blend between *italiano* and *idiota* represents the first step towards the emergence of *-iota* as a morpheme. Due to its high frequency and usage and interpretation in political contexts (that we will deepen in the following sections), it can be considered the leader word that serves as a model for creating (both political and non-political) novel words. Interestingly, although the most frequent words are related to the Italian political context, *-iota* also occurs in some occasionalisms which are not linked to politics, as shown by the examples mentioned above (among which *giornaliota* ‘typical Italian journalist’, *fantacalcio* ‘typical fantasy football player’). In these words, its meaning cannot be traced back to the adjective *idiota* but conveys a more specific value, namely ‘typical, average’, which always entails a pejorative nuance. The semantic features shown by *italiota* and other *-iota* words will be deepened in the following sections.

### 3.2. Semantic analysis

#### 3.2.1. A brief history of *italiota* and its uses

The first evidence of *italiota* dates back to 1806, as reported by the GRADIT dictionary (*Grande Dizionario Italiano dell’Uso*). According to it, the term has two meanings: 1. adjective used in the historians’ language, referring to the Greek colonies established in Southern Italy, starting from the fifth century BC; 2. in common language, it can be used as an adjective as well as a noun, related to an Italian person, characterised by dullness and low culture (cf. GRADIT, s.v. *italiota*). The second derogatory meaning is attested even in literary works such as *Su Alessandro Manzoni* (1891) by Carducci, *Il libro di Don Chisciotte* (1885) by Scarfoglio e *Filosofia e letteratura* (1961) by Papini, as reported by the *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*.

To provide an overview of its use, the archive of an Italian newspaper, namely *La Stampa*, was searched.<sup>25</sup> It shows a significant increase in its use in newspapers around the Eighties and Nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as illustrated in Figure 3.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 3.** The number of *italiota* occurrences (singular form on the left side, plural masculine form in the middle and plural feminine form on the right side) per years in the newspaper archive.

The etymological meaning is attested in articles on archaeological finds (e.g. a title claims “Scoperti in Calabria resti di città «italiota»”, ‘Remains of *italiota* cities have been found in Calabria’);<sup>27</sup> the derogatory meaning is frequent, both as adjectives and as nouns, in articles on political, music, sports and lifestyle, especially in the Seventies.<sup>28</sup> For example, in (5-6), *italiota* refers to, respectively, a type of affected language and a particular view of sport:

- (5) *Qui in redazione stiamo seguendo corsi accelerati di Italiota.*<sup>29</sup> *Una decisione urgente e importante, presa nell’interesse dei lettori: ci siamo resi conto che non è possibile seguire la produzione editoriale nostrana senza conoscere l’Italiota. [...]* (*La Stampa*, 1976, n. 49, p. 21). ‘[...] Here in the editorial office, we are following accelerated Italiota courses. An urgent and important decision, made in the readers’ interest: we have realised that it is not possible to proceed with our local editorial production without knowing the Italiota language. [...]’.
- (6) *Tomba è il perdente, anche se non è con lui che dobbiamo prendercela, ma con noi, con il nostro bioco fornicare con gli eccessi, tipico dello sport italiota* (*La Stampa*, 28/03/1993) ‘Tomba is the loser, even if we do not have to blame him; we have to blame ourselves, our creepy being passionate for excesses, typical of italiota sport.’

Finally, in (7), we can observe an explicit reinterpretation of the word as a blend in a music article:



- (7) *Mina, l'importante è sparire tra le «parole parole» dell'italiota. [...] Pare che i due abbiano impiegato l'intera giornata, perché gli veniva da ridere: era scritta in italiota, per l'italiano idiota. [...] (La Stampa, 1996, n. 22, p. 23).*  
'Mina, the important thing is to disappear among the *parole parole*<sup>30</sup> of the Italiota man. [...] It seems that the two of them spent the whole day laughing because of the song: it was written in Italiota language, for the Italian idiot [...].'

### 3.2.2. Italiota in the ItTenTen16 corpus

Within the ItTenTen16 corpus, both the etymological and the derogatory meaning have been found: as expected, and as it happens in the newspaper, the former is attested in websites devoted to historical issues, while the latter appears to characterise the political discourse to define a particular political attitude. Indeed, the top ten websites with the highest concentration of its forms (cf. Figure 2) are political platforms or websites dealing with content related to politics. The majority of them are associated to specific political parties: three are related to the Movimento Cinque Stelle (*beppegrillo.it*, *danielemartini.it*, *ilblogcinquestelle.it*), one is a website linked to a Left-wing sympathiser extra-parliamentarian group (*conflittiestrategie.it*), one to a Forza Italia member (*paologuzzanti.it*) and one associated to the Fronte Sovranista Italiano ('Italian Sovereign Front', i.e. *frontediliberazionedaibanchieri.it*). The others are newspapers' websites (*bassanonet.it*, *ilgiornale.it*, *termometropolitico.it*, *repubblica.it*), a personal webpage of a comedian (*robertocorradi.it*), three blogs unavailable nowadays (*blogspot.cz*, *rischiocalcolato.it*, *scappo.it*),<sup>31</sup> one social network (*chatta.it*), a humanitarian association about human rights (*aduc.it*) and the official Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities' websites. In this latter case, *italiota* has to be intended in the etymological meaning (see above).

The blog of the Movimento Cinque Stelle's leader Beppe Grillo shows the highest number of occurrences of the lexeme (823), which covers 17.48% of its presence in the whole corpus. In this blog, *italiota* is often a modifier of words such as *popolo* 'people' and *politico* 'politician', with a pejorative value: specifically, *people* and *politicians* are described as corrupted tax cheaters, in (8-9), while in (10) they are insulted with obscene language.

- (8) *Lo scempio più grave e dannoso per il Paese Italia lo sta facendo Berlusconi ed il suo popolo italiota che lo vota interessato a non pagare le tasse, a commettere soprusi ed illegalità, a curare interessi personali [...] (beppegrillo.it).*  
'The most serious and damaging disaster for Italy is being made by Berlusconi and his Italiota people, who vote him interested in not paying taxes, committing abuses and illegalities, in taking care of personal interests [...].'
- (9) *Gli stessi autori che in questi anni hanno fuorviato l'attenzione da fatti gravissimi che i nostri*

*malfamati politici Italioti stavano compiendo ai nostri danni (beppegrillo.it).*

'The same authors who in these years have misled the attention from the dire deeds which our infamous Italiota politicians were making to our detriment'.

- (10) *Bisognava far ingrassare quel demente di Salvini con tutti i gonzi verdi per capire che questa è l'unica via per conquistare il merdoso popolo italiota ! Fuori dal' io concordo (beppegrillo.it).*  
'It was necessary to fatten that demented Salvini up with all the green<sup>32</sup> dupes in order to understand that this is the only way to conquer the shitty Italiota people! Out of "I agree".'

This linkage between *italiota* and political discourse goes beyond Beppe Grillo's writing. Observing the collocation lists, one can note that the nouns modified by *italiota* are mostly related to the politics' lexical field: among the nouns that appear with > 2 frequency, we find *democrazia* 'democracy', *destra* 'Right-wing', *governo* 'government', *massa* 'mass (of citizens)', *nazionalismo* 'nationalism', *nazionalista* 'nationalist', *parlamento* 'parliament', *partitocrazia* 'particracy', *politico* 'politician', *politica* 'politics', *politicante* 'petty politician', *politiciume* 'political filth', *popolino* 'common people', *popolo* 'people', *regime* 'regime', *repubblica* 'republic', *sinistra* 'Left-wing'. An example is illustrated in (11).

- (11) *Gli imbecilli politicanti italioti (anche un ladruncolo che "finì" a Montecitorio, altri suoi compari, incluso uno spione che s'inventava fiamme multicolori) inveirono contro la "rivelazione", dando dei visionari ai due (circolovegetariani.it).*

'The Italiota political imbeciles (also a thief who "ended up" in Montecitorio, others of his cronies, including a snoop who invented multicoloured flames) railed against the "revelation", calling the two visionaries'.

In (11), the politicians are called *politicanti* 'politicians that do not have an appropriate competence for the role which they hold', a word derived from the adjective/noun *politico* 'politician' through the denominational suffix *-ante* (which often conveys a derogatory value, e.g. *teatrante* 'low-level actor').<sup>33</sup> The words *imbecille* 'imbecile' reinforce this pejorative value, *ladruncolo* 'petty thief', *compare* (which means 'godfather' but, in this context, takes the sense of 'an accomplice who helps someone to commit a fraud or a steal'), *spione* 'snitch'.

Indeed, the derogatory meaning of *italiota* triggers the use of words belonging to lexical fields related to mediocracy and stupidity: in particular, among the *italiota* nominal collocates, we find words such as *becero* 'boor', *credulone* 'gullible', *deficiente* 'deficient', *ignorante* 'ignorant', *imbecillità* 'idiocy', *lobotomizzato* 'brain-dead', *medio* 'average', *mediocre* 'mediocre', *solito* 'ordinary', *stupidità* 'stupidity', *stupido* 'stupid', *tipico* 'typical', as shown in the following examples:

- (12) [...] di italioti ignoranti e cornuti, di femmine lascive e corrotte, di una umanità laida e ladra, traditrice, avida e codarda (retitidedalus.it).  
‘[...] ignorant and horned Italioti, lascivious and corrupt women, a filthy and thieving, treacherous, greedy and cowardly humanity’.
- (13) Siete sempre i soliti italioti che aspettano il messia, il salvatore [...] (periodicoliberopensiero.it)  
‘You are always the usual Italioti who await the messiah [...]’.
- (14) Cerchiamo solo per cortesia di non avere il classico atteggiamento da Italiota medio voltagabbanae pugnalatore alle spalle di chi fino al giorno prima era un eroe o un amico... (ttribe.it).  
‘Let us just try not to have the typical attitude of an average Italiota, a turncoat and backstabber of who was a hero or a friend until the day before...’.

The examples show the collocation *italiota medio* modelled on the collocation *italiano medio*, which is usually adopted with the meaning close to *everyman*. It indicates a simpleton, ignorant, gullible person who cannot understand reality and decide for the common good.

In some cases, the same graphic form is a way to underline this derogatory value as well. In the graphic variant *itagliota*, the group <li> is realised as <gli>, which represents the voiced palatal lateral approximant. The interchange between <li> and <gli> is due to the influence of the phonological system of the writer’s dialect on that of Standard Italian (cf. Cortelazzo 1972: 123-130). It can be interpreted both as a typical mistake of speakers/writers with an inappropriate competence of all the varieties of the Italian language and as a consequence of a written form inaccuracy typical of online writing, which is a well-known phenomenon documented by the studies on Italian netspeak (cf. Pistolesi 2004; Tavosanis 2011; Prada 2015; Fiorentino 2018; Patota & Rossi 2018).<sup>34</sup> It represents a feature characterising the non-standard variety of Italian, called *italiano popolare*.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the graphic variant *itagliota* frames its referent in a low culture profile. Sometimes, the wrong spelling is emphasised by the upper case, as the following example shows:

- (15) [...] siamo davvero in una DITTATURA MEDIATICA ... si MEDIATICA , perchè l’ ItaGliota è TELEGUIDATO dalla TV e GIORNALI ... (eusoft.net).  
‘[...] We are truly in a media dictatorship...yes, “mediatic”, because the ItaGliota is teleguided by TV and NEWSPAPERS...’.

Therefore, the lexeme *italiota* is preferentially used to describe the incompetence, stupidity, and illegality of politicians and their voters. The ignorance of its original meaning and the derogatory value could probably affect the speaker reinterpretation of the word as a blend, allowing the creation of forms as those illustrated in (16-18):

The emerging Italian affix *-iota* between blending and derivation

- (16) *Questo Galantuomo [...] ha mantenuto tutte le promesse fatte agli Italioti ( semplificazione di italiani idioti ?) (beppegrillo.it).*  
 ‘This gentleman [...] has kept all the promises he made to Italioti (a simplification of Italian idiots?)’
- (17) *[...] eccovi l' aeroporto bello che fatto . insomma ero lì in attesa dell' imbarco per bergamo con altri italianidioti [...] (tentatividifuga.com).*  
 [...] here it is, the airport off-the-peg. In short, I was there, waiting for boarding to go to Bergamo with other italianidioti [...].<sup>36</sup>
- (18) *[...] rampanti ed intraprendetenti, ultra trentenni, che vogliono rappresentare il nuovo e che filosofeggiano o parlano di politica, mi viene in mente una subcultura tutta italdiota [...] (dantepaoloferraris.it).*  
 [...] climber and enterprising, people over thirty, who want to represent the ‘new’ and philosophise or talk about politics, remind me of an all italiota sub-culture.

Political discourse turns out to be the context in which the blend forms are most frequently used, especially in Beppe Grillo’s blog, where the occurrences of *italdiota* and *italidiota* are mostly found, as shown in Table 6.<sup>37</sup>

BLEND FORMS	TOKEN FREQUENCY	BEPPEGRILLO.IT FREQUENCY
itaidiota	3	1
italianidiota	5	2
italdiota	3	3
italidiota	78	18 <sup>38</sup>

Table 6. Blend forms in *beppegrillo.it*.

Therefore, the linkage of *italiota* to political discourse and its lexical field seems to have transferred to the blend forms. The same happens to the emerging affix *-iota*. Indeed, *-iota* is used to form other new words indicating political actors and roles that an *italiota* can play in his/her life, as already noted in section 3.1: it activates the same lexical fields connected to mediocrity and illegality. It is possible to verify it in occurrences of words indicating party members or political sympathisers, as well as types of workers or consumers: e.g. *berlusconiota* ‘typical sympathiser of Silvio Berlusconi’, *destriota* ‘typical member or sympathiser of right-wing parties’, *fasciotta* ‘a member or sympathiser of Fascism’, *forzaitaliota* ‘typical member or sympathiser of Forza Italia’, *giornaliota* ‘typical journalist’, *meridionaliota* ‘typical person who lives in the South of Italy’, *milanesiota* ‘typical Milanese’ *pdiota* ‘typical member or sympathiser of Democratic Party’, *precariota* ‘typical temporary worker’, *sinistriota* ‘typical member or sympathiser of left par-

ties', *televisioti* 'typical person who usually watches much television', *vacanziota* 'typical holidaymaker', *weekendiota* 'typical weekend maker'.

- (19) *Tuttavia è innegabile che la responsabilità [...] sono imputabili ai meridionali di ieri e di oggi (vokedimegaride.it).*  
'However, it is undeniable that the responsibility [...] are to ascribe to the southerners + IOTA from yesterday and today'.
- (20) *Il precariota , Franco Parlacchia o della stupidità, [...] pezzi narrativi accomunati, pur nella diversità espressiva, da un punto di convergenza [...] (campania.it).*  
'The temporary worker + IOTA, Franco Parlacchia or about stupidity [...] narrative pieces united, despite the expressive diversity, by a point of convergence [...]'.  
(21) *P.S. per chi é interessato esiste anche vacanziota, weekendiota , votazioniota ecc divertitevi e passate parola! (beppegrillo.it)*  
'P.S. for those who are interested, there is also holiday-maker + IOTA, weekend-maker + IOTA, voter + IOTA etc., have fun and spread the word!'.

To sum up, a fine-grained analysis of contexts suggests that *italiota* and the affix *-iota* share some essential semantic features, all referring to 'a mediocre everyman who wants to satisfy his/her needs', and related to political discourse.

#### 4. Discussion

The analysis provided in previous sections allowed us to highlight the morphological and semantic properties shown by words containing three types of morphological element, i.e. the compound constituent *-idiota*, the splinter *-(i)diota* and the emerging affix *-iota*. While the *-idiota* compounds represent the result of a regular word-formation mechanism (namely, the formation of coordinative or left-headed attributive compounds in Italian), blends and *-iota* words have drawn our attention due to their extra-grammatical status.

The synchronic analysis provided in section 3.1 has revealed that blends and *-iota* words represent two related phenomena. Notably, it has highlighted that *-(i)diota* can be considered a splinter that does not involve semantic reinterpretation but only shortening. The quantitative analysis has revealed that it does not represent an isolated abbreviation, but rather it occurs in a series of words, where it expresses the same meaning as the adjective *idiota*. Moreover, we have noted the frequent use of *-(i)diota* in combination with a shortened form of the adjective/noun *italiano* (e.g. *italidiota*). On the other hand, our dataset reveals the presence of several words (58 types) containing *-iota* attached to a non-

shortened word (e.g. *lombardiota* ‘typical Lombard citizen’ < *Lombardia* ‘Lombardy’ + *-iota*), being the adjective/noun *italiota* the most frequent. Particularly, we have pointed out that *italiota* can be considered the leader word (namely, a word that serves as a model for creating new words) for the rise of a new morphological mechanism.

From a semantic point of view, we have found that the meaning of *-iota* is not directly linked to that of the adjective *idiota* ‘idiot’ (although, from a formal point of view, it may represent an abbreviation of it), but rather it conveys a more specific meaning, namely ‘typical of the average Italian’, which shows a derogatory value. Hence, both the formal (i.e. its disyllabic structure) and the semantic (i.e. the evaluative, particularly pejorative, meaning) properties are comparable to those of an affix. The morphological analysis of *-iota* words suggests that it is undergoing a change that leads a splinter to gradually acquire the status of a productive morpheme, as already observed in other cases investigated in English (cf. Mattiello 2018). The coexistence of both blends and *-iota* words testifies that it is a still ongoing change, resulting in the formation of a true affix.<sup>39</sup>

This kind of change, which leads to the emergence of a new morphological schema based on very frequent and entrenched specific words, can be fruitfully dealt with through the theoretical tools provided by Construction Morphology (cf. Booij 2010; Masini & Audring 2019). This model has proved to be effective in explaining the emergence of new constructions by considering both qualitative (i.e. formal properties and semantics) and quantitative parameters (cf., e.g., Micheli 2019 and Masini & Micheli 2020 on Italian). From a constructionist perspective, the case of *-iota* can be treated as an emerging construction expressing the value ‘typical Italian X’ with a pejorative nuance, i.e. <  $[[x]_{N|Aj} -iota]_{N|Ai} \leftrightarrow [TYPICAL\ ITALIAN/PEJ\ SEM_j]_i >$ .<sup>40</sup>

As it has been shown in section 3.2, a turning point in this story is represented by the wide employment of the word *italiota* in political discourse, where the lexeme has been mainly used with the derogatory meaning to refer to the language, customs and attitudes of the Italian *everyman*, according to the journalistic language. This spread may have possibly favoured the interpretation of *italiota* as a blend between *italiano* and *idiota*, and, at least in online writing, the specialisation as a word of political discourse, mainly characterising the Movimento Cinque Stelle and its leader’s vocabulary. Not surprisingly, the lexical fields of *italiota*’s collocates (namely the lexicon related to the mediocracy and illegality) are the same adopted to define politicians and their voters in the political language of populist propaganda (cf. Bagaglini & Vallauri 2018: 63-82). Nevertheless, the website list of extracted occurrences reveals that the lexeme is used by both right-wing and left-wing members and supporters.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have conducted a morphological and semantic analysis in order to describe the emergence and the dissemination of the affix *-iota*. The analysis has revealed a coexistence and a correlation between blends with *-(i)diota* and *-iota* words due to a still-ongoing morphological change, whereby a splinter that frequently occurs gradually develops morpheme-like properties. These two morphological elements show some differences: particularly, while *-(i)diota* conveys the meaning ‘idiot’, *-iota* conveys a more specific meaning (namely ‘Italian everyman’), although it can be considered an abbreviation of *idiota*.

While the etymological meaning of *italiota* has remained marginal as a specific term of the language of history, the derogatory one has been used, especially in the last decades, in political contexts to refer to Italian people focused on their interests and incapable of understanding the reality deeply. The pejorative value of *italiota* in the political discourse has been transferred to *-iota*, used as a morpheme-like element. It allows creating other derived words describing different kinds of a ‘typical whatever man’ (such as *giornaliota*, *vacanziota*). The morphological and semantic features showed by *-iota* words lead us to argue that it can be considered an emerging morpheme, which is gradually getting closer to regular morphology.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of close collaboration between the two authors. Exclusively for academic purposes, Veronica Bagolini is responsible for sections 2.2, 3.2, 5 and M. Silvia Micheli for sections 1, 2.1, 3.1. Section 4 was written by both Authors.

<sup>2</sup> Examples taken from the itTenTen16 corpus, queried through the SketchEngine interface (cf. section 2.2).

<sup>3</sup> As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, *-iota* represents an expressive element, in that it shows the speaker’s attitude towards the person denoted (cf. the discussion of *expressive expressions* proposed by Potts 2005: 16-22).

<sup>4</sup> The Nuovo De Mauro dictionary is currently available at the following link: < [dizionario.internazionale.it](http://dizionario.internazionale.it) > (accessed 18/06/2020).

<sup>5</sup> The only brief reference to *-(id)iota* within blends can be found in Thornton (1993: 152), who mentions *vidiota* (*video* ‘video’ + *idiota* ‘idiot’) ‘vidiot’ whose meaning is described as ‘person who became an idiot by watching videos’.

<sup>6</sup> Particularly, we will analyse both native Italian compounds (i.e. compounds made up of two words, e.g. *capostazione* ‘station master’, lit. ‘chief’ + ‘station’) and Italian neoclassical compounds (specifically, the type containing a combining form as first constituent and a free word – e.g. *narcotrafficante* ‘drug dealer’, where *narco-* < *narcotico* ‘narcotic’ – described by Iacobini 2015: 1668-1671).

<sup>7</sup> Most studies on extra-grammatical morphology have been carried out within the framework of Natural Morphology (cf. Dressler *et al.* 1987; 1999).

<sup>8</sup> In the literature devoted to blending in Italian, blends are frequently referred to with



the term *parole macedonia* (lit. 'fruit-salad words') introduced by Migliorini (1949).

<sup>9</sup> Although a limited number of blends are attested already in the 16th century (e.g. *blatterature* – *blatter* + *literature* – dates back to 1512, cf. Cacchiani 2007: 103), this mechanism becomes popular due to the extensive use of blends by Lewis Carroll (e.g. *slithy* 'lithe and slimy', attested in his poem *Jabberwocky*).

<sup>10</sup> As already pointed out by Mattiello (2018), blends show a high level of creativity, which can be considered as a scalar concept.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that this represents a tendency (not a strict rule) within Italian word-formation, since the modification of the second constituent is also attested, as illustrated by words such as *immigrano* 'the variety of Italian spoken by immigrants', *immigr(ato)* 'immigrant' + (*ital*)iano 'Italian' (cf. Thornton 2004 for other examples).

<sup>12</sup> Thornton (1993: 147) also includes haplogy among mechanisms which are close to blending in Italian, e.g. *eroicomico* < *eroico* 'heroical' + *comico* 'comical'.

<sup>13</sup> Within the Natural Morphology framework, 'marginal morphology' (cf. Dressler 2000) concerns non-prototypical phenomena which are in between morphology and another linguistic level (e.g. morphology and syntax) or sublevels of morphology (e.g. compounding and derivation).

<sup>14</sup> A more in-depth diachronic analysis will be addressed in future work. However, in section 3.2, we will provide some diachronic remarks on the word *italiota*.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that this procedure allows one to collect only compound words where the two constituents are graphically unverbated as well as hyphenated.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that a margin of error is always possible due to the tagging software (in this case, Treectagger).

<sup>17</sup> As we can see in Figure 1, the core of the circle is divided between the etymological meaning and a new, more recent meaning (as we will explain in section 3.2), and on which we have focused our analysis.

<sup>18</sup> Due to the impossibility of detecting the variant *itagliota/itagliotta* through the Word Sketch tool, figures of collocates only refers to the graphical form *italiota*. However, a qualitative analysis of the concordance of *itagliot(t)a* has revealed the same collocates, as we will show in section 3.2.2.

<sup>19</sup> Translations: *tradizione* 'tradition', *politica* 'politics', *chiamare* 'to call', *tipicamente* 'typically', *lega* 'alliance' (it refers to the *Lega italiota*, 'a military and political alliance among the Greek colonies in Italy'), *mentalità* 'mindset', *popolo* 'people', *povero* 'poor', *stile* 'style', *città* 'city', *politico* 'politician', *media* 'mass media', *ceramica* 'pottery', *governo* 'government'. The prepositional phrase *italiota a 'italiota at'* occurs 18 times and it always conveys the etymological meaning. It is used to describe the Greek colonies' artifacts, e.g. «Tra i crateri di ceramica italiota a figure rosse spicca, per il suo notevole valore artistico e storico, un cratere di produzione protoapulica [...] / Among the red-figured Italic ceramic vases, a proto-Apulian production vase stands out, for its notable artistic and historic value [...]».

<sup>20</sup> Particularly, the number of hapaxes can be used to calculate the 'potential productivity' (i.e. a measure given by the ratio between the number of hapaxes and the number of tokens, cf. Baayen 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Following the usual terminology in literature devoted to the lexicon, we will use the term 'occasionalism' (or 'nonce word') to indicate a complex word created by a speaker in a specific context to fulfil a communicative need; on the other hand, we will refer to new words which have been integrated and institutionalised within the lexicon of a language as 'neologisms'.

<sup>22</sup> *Über-* is a German prefix (combining with both verbs, nouns and adjectives, such as in *überfliegen* 'to overfly', *Übereifer* 'overeagerness', *überängstlich* 'overanxious'). In the last decades, its use as a prefix has extended to European languages other than German (cf. Majtényi 2012 on English and Hungarian). In Italian, the dissemination of *uber-* as an intensifying prefix (meaning 'super') has not yet been thoroughly investigated; notably, it

does not occur among the formatives provided by Grossmann & Rainer (2004). However, it is attested in web corpora such as itTenTen16 in combination with both adjectives and nouns (e.g. *cittadina ubercattolica* ‘super Catholic citizen’, *uberofferta* ‘super offer’).

<sup>23</sup> This classification is based on three parameters: (i) the truncation of one or both constituents; (ii) the linearization of constituents; (iii) the overlap of constituents. For a discussion on each type of blend, see Fradin (2015).

<sup>24</sup> Following Fradin (2015), we will refer to source words (namely splintered words) as ‘originals’.

<sup>25</sup> The archive, available online, collects articles from 1807 to 2006. Cf. <www.archiviolaStampa.it> (accessed 06/07/2020). We decided on *La Stampa*’s archive for two reasons: the long period covered by the archive, and the permeability of the journalistic writing to the language change.

<sup>26</sup> It has to be considered that some of the occurrences are false positives, since, in some cases, the software recognises as *italiota* other graphic forms (e.g. *Italfoto*, a name of a photo agency cited in a legend of a photo).

<sup>27</sup> The article is dated 03/07/1987.

<sup>28</sup> For example, the word is used to define a typical suitor’s attitude in an article dated 20/03/1999, about what kind of Italian men is preferred by women.

<sup>29</sup> From now on, our emphasis unless otherwise indicated. The Italian examples have been exactly quoted: spelling or spacing errors are all attributable to their writers.

<sup>30</sup> *Parole parole* (lit. ‘words words’) is the title of a song. The article is about its recording.

<sup>31</sup> Accessed 06/07/2020.

<sup>32</sup> It is referred to the Lega’s flag colour: the expression *green dupes* here stands for ‘supporters of Lega Party’.

<sup>33</sup> As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, it may be worth investigating the competition between *-iota* and other (sometimes) agentive suffixes conveying a pejorative nuance, e.g. *-aiolo* or *-aro*. We found some occurrences of *grillaiolo* on the web where the suffix conveys a derogatory value comparable to that shown by *-iota*. However, an in-depth analysis on this issue is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>34</sup> On Italian netspeak and its features see also Malagnini (2019).

<sup>35</sup> On the *italiano popolare* variety see among others Cortelazzo (1972); D’Achille (1990); Berruto (2012 [19871]: 127-162). On the overlapping between *italiano popolare* and internet Italian language see Fresu (2016).

<sup>36</sup> The writer appears to consider himself as one among other *italiano-idioti* waiting for the flight.

<sup>37</sup> An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the great number of blends occurring in a specific blog (i.e. Beppe Grillo’s blog) may weaken our hypothesis about the affixal status of *-iota*; however, it should be noted that *-iota* occurs in combination with other words than *italiano*, as shown in section 3.1 (e.g. *fantacalciota*, *lombardiota*, *stivaliota*). Moreover, the occurrence of blends made up of the word for ‘idiot’ is also attested in other languages, e.g. English (cf. Eng. *covidiot*, see section 4).

<sup>38</sup> Other websites in which the form occurs more than two times are *blogspot.icz* (15), *aduc.it* (13).

<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that our analysis is based on data extracted from a web corpus collected in 2016. However, occasionalisms showing *-(i)diota* and *-iota* are currently created, as testified by words like *covidioti* (cf. also Eng. *covidiotics*) meaning ‘(Italian) people who, during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, did not respect the social distancing measures, exposing themselves and others to contagion’.

<sup>40</sup> According to the constructionist perspective, constructions are pairings of form and meaning: the formal features are represented on the left side of the construction, and the semantics on the right side. The arrows represent the symbolic association between form and meaning and angle brackets delimit the construction.

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