Latinate Loan-Cognate Word Pairs in English and Italian: Patterns of Meaning Variation and Change

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show the existence of regularities in word meaning variation and change between Latinate borrowings in present-day English and their cognates in Italian, such as *gross/grosso*, *lecture/lettura* and *rumour/rumore*. Starting from an original and shared meaning core, the semantics of these etymologically related words has evolved in different directions in the two languages, often producing what are commonly known as 'false friends'.

Despite their 'false-friendship', however, there appear to be some recurrent patterns in meaning evolution: through a qualitative analysis of 30 pairs of English and Italian cognate words, five main processes have been identified, namely meaning bifurcation, original meaning retention, non-figurative meaning extension, figurative meaning extension (via metaphor and metonymy) and meaning inversion.

Keywords: lexical semantics, meaning variation, semantic change, Latinate words, English, Italian

1. Introduction

Although English and Italian belong to two distinct language families, they share several lexical roots that are ultimately derived from Latin (Note 1). This explains the existence of many correspondences between words in the two languages, which are often similar in form, but different in meaning, e.g., En. *gross* vs It. *grosso/a*, En. *lecture* vs It. *lettura*, and En. *rumour* vs It. *rumore*. In the context of EFL teaching and learning, these lexical items have traditionally been called 'false friends', because, despite their formal similarity, they do not overlap semantically (Note 2). As a result of language evolution, they have become 'cognates', i.e., etymologically related words exhibiting different degrees of meaning proximity. While in English words such as *gross*, *lecture* and *rumour* are borrowed from Latin and French (Note 3), their Italian counterparts, *grosso/a*, *lettura*, and *rumore* cannot be treated as loanwords, simply because they are derived from Latin, which is the ancestor of Italian. The members of these word pairs are thus related, but their meaning has evolved from a common semantic core and followed different paths in the two languages.

The literature on cognates between languages is vast (Note 4); it varies according to the language pair under examination and the study perspective, i.e., translation, language acquisition/learning, language teaching, etc. For the English-Italian pair, the phenomenon has been examined primarily with reference to the differences in the collocational behaviour of false friends (Partington, 1998, pp. 48–64), from the perspective of ~~what constitutes~~ linguistic units and functional equivalents (Tognini-Bonelli, 2002; Tognini-Bonelli & Manca, 2004), with specific reference to vocabulary misuse in the context of language learning (Bonsegna, 2000; Franceschi, 2018; Prat Zagrebelski, 1997; Pulcini, 1997), in discussions on language contact (Bombi, 2005, 2009, 2020; Iamartino, 2001; Pulcini, 2019, 2023, pp. 17–50) and in bilingual lexicography (Browne, 1987; Browne & Natali, 1989; Browne, Natali, & Mendes, 1995; Hayward & Moulin, 1984). However, a systematic study of the lexical-semantic relations between cognate words in present-day English and Italian and of the patterns of meaning differentiation between them is still missing.

The aim of this paper is thus to provide an initial classification of the ways in which the semantics of cognate words in English and Italian has evolved and diversified over time and on the nature of their 'false-friendship'. While in several cases cognates are still relatively 'good friends', the most likely scenario is that with time they have developed distinct senses and that one of these senses has gained prominence, relegating the others to the

background; the backgrounded senses have then been lost or gone through a process of semantic bleaching.

As an example of close semantic similarity, consider the English word *consideration* and its Italian counterpart *considerazione*. Their proximity is confirmed by the fact that they may even appear in analogous phrases, e.g., *take into consideration* and *prendere in considerazione*, with an almost identical meaning. However, it is not possible to say that their semantics coincides completely. In legal English, the word *consideration* has taken on a different sense (it refers to 'anything regarded as recompense or equivalent for what one does or undertakes for another's benefit') (Note 5), which does not have an equivalent in form or meaning in Italian (Note 6). This confirms Partington's claim (1998, p. 63) that cognate words seldom coincide perfectly:

There is tentative evidence to suggest that the number of wholly reliable true friends […] is probably fewer than is generally imagined (Partington, 1998, p. 63).

More commonly, cognate words in contemporary English and Italian show significant meaning differences, even though they may share a common semantic component which, however, has usually faded in different degrees in the two languages. An example is English *aperitive* vs Italian *aperitivo* as nouns. Both words derive from Latin *aperitivus* (from *aperire* 'to open/uncover'), i.e., they have the same meaning core, but while an *aperitive* is a laxative, an *aperitivo* is a drink taken before a meal to stimulate the appetite. The original 'medicine capable of opening or dilating' sense that was also part of the semantic makeup of the Italian word *aperitivo* has lost ground in favour of a more figurative sense, whereby 'opening' is understood as 'preparing oneself for dinner' by stimulating or whetting one's appetite with a drink and nibbles. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) does not lemmatise the latter sense for *aperitive*, which is instead defined only as a medicine, as all the examples confirm (e.g., The other physicians..all insisted on the use of the strongest aperitives. *Chamber's Journal* vol. 10 260) (Note 7). Albeit related, *aperitive* and *aperitivo* now refer to distinct concepts resulting from a process of meaning specialisation:

Under a host of influences, internal and external, languages evolve inexorably. The same root planted in different soils will develop in more or less diverse directions (Ferguson, 1994, p. 10).

The internal factors responsible for meaning differences between cognates may be cultural. Although English *fiscal* corresponds to Italian *fiscale* to a large extent, for instance, since they both indicate something related to financial matters, taxation, public revenues or debt (e.g., *fiscal transactions* = *transazioni fiscali*; *fiscal policies* = *politiche fiscali*; *fiscal year* = *anno fiscale*; *fiscal crisis* = *crisi fiscale*), the Italian adjective has also acquired a negative connotation and a figurative interpretation (*essere fiscale* or *comportarsi in modo fiscale* = 'to be or act in a very strict, petty, officious or nitpicking way'), possibly due to the widespread feeling in Italy that tax collectors and their exactions are odious. The cultural aspects affecting meaning change however will not be examined in this paper, where the focus remains linguistic.

Section 2 presents and discusses the data examined and the methodology followed for the analysis. The study conducted is qualitative and thus purposeful sampling was utilized. For this reason, the number of English-Italian cognate pairs under investigation is small, but sufficient for a preliminary account on the nature of meaning difference between them. Section 3 illustrates the patterns of semantic change and variation that have been identified in the analysis of the data, in an attempt to map the recurrent trends in the diachronic evolution of lexical meaning from a common core that cognate words share. Section 4 concludes the paper with some final observations and considerations for future research.

2. Data and Methodology

The data set consists of 30 pairs of English-Italian cognate words (Table 1), extracted from already existing glossaries and lists of false friends (Note 8). The selection might have included many more lexical items, as there is indeed a great abundance of lookalikes with different meanings in the two languages (Note 9). Lists can typically be found in teaching materials (Note 10), alongside practice activities, and in usage boxes in learner's dictionaries (Note 11), but it seems problematic to systematically collect false friends as they seem to be lurking at every corner. For the purpose of the present study, the sample was randomly selected to conduct a first exploration on the nature of meaning differentiation between cognate words.

Each member of the word pairs selected was looked up in the *OED* (Note 12) and in the *Vocabolario Treccani Online* (Note 13), respectively, which both contain detailed information about the etymology of lexemes. In addition, the *Online Etymology Dictionary* (Note 14) and the *Vocabolario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana* (Note 15) were consulted for cross reference.

Table 1. Pairs of English-Italian cognates

abusive	*abusivo/a*
accommodate	*accomodare, accomodarsi*
actually	*attualmente*
affluence	*affluenza*
annoy	*annoiare, annoiarsi*
argument	*argomento*
attend	*attendere*
cognate	*cognato*
demand	*domandare*
educated	*educato/a*
eventually	*eventualmente*
fabric	*fabbrica*
factory	*fattoria*
fungus	*fungo*
gross	*grosso*
legal	*legale*
lecture	*lettura*
library	*libreria*
magazine	*magazzino*
morbid	*morbido/a*
parent	*parente*
paviment	*pavimento*
preservative	*preservativo*
pretend	*pretendere*
romance	*romanzo*
rumour	*rumore*
sensible	*sensibile*
sympathetic	*simpatico*
terrific	*terrificante*
vacancy	*vacanza*

The meaning evolution of the members of each pair, from their origin to the present day, was then investigated, compared and contrasted in order to understand when and how cognate words became false friends. However, the study ultimately focuses on the end result of semantic change that can be observed in present-day English and Italian.

3. Results and Discussion

Five main semantic processes were observed during the analysis of the data, namely meaning bifurcation (Note 16), original meaning retention or non-figurative meaning extension, figurative meaning extension (via metaphor and metonymy) and meaning inversion (Note 17). In other words, certain cognates scope over different reference domains; in other cases, just one member of the word pairs, either the English or Italian one, remains closer in meaning to the original semantic core from which both cognates are derived; when meaning expansion takes place, instead, word semantics can be extended, non-figuratively, figuratively or through the production of a new, opposite sense.

3.1 Variation of Reference Domain

One of the patterns of variation observed is the tendency for cognate words in present-day English and Italian to scope over different domains of reference and to activate distinct frames (Note 18).

Consider the pair *abusive/abusivo*. Both words are derived from Latin *abusivus*, from *abus-*, past-participle stem of *abuti* with the meaning of 'misuse' or 'use up'. However, the idea of using something wrongly or improperly has been applied to different contexts in the two languages. In English, the adjective *abusive* may refer to the excessive and harmful use of a drug or substance (1), to someone corrupt (2), or to injurious and damaging behaviour, inflicting physical, emotional or sexual harm (3); *abusive* also indicates bad and scurrilous language (4) (Note 19):

1   *Their abusive relationship with drugs.*

2   *Democracy is often a transition from one abusive, corrupt party to another inept, corrupt party.*

3   *[…] abusive men and sexual predators.*

4   *[…] had received abusive or insulting internal e-mail.*

On the other hand, Italian *abusivo* is associated to the idea of illegality, e.g., in real estate (5) or when referring to unauthorised jobs (6):

5   *costruzioni abusive* (= illegal buildings/constructions) (Note 20).

6   *posteggiatori/tassisti abusivi* (= unlicensed parking attendants/taxi drivers).

A *posteggiatore abusivo* in Italy is not only someone you pay in cash, without getting a receipt in return, in order to be allowed to park somewhere, but also someone who checks on your vehicle so that it will not get stolen or damaged; a *posteggiatore abusivo* typically controls a certain area and can often be a threatening figure that people do not want to argue with. This is very much part of the Italian culture, mostly in the south of the country.

Let us consider the semantics of *lecture/lettura* and of *library/libreria* as other exemplifications of reference domain variation. *Lecture* and *lettura* originate from Latin *lectus*, the past participle form of *legere* 'to read', which initially had the meaning of 'collecting' and 'gathering'. Therefore, to *read* etymologically indicates 'picking out words' (Note 21). In English *lecture* has come to indicate 'a speech on a given subject before an audience, for purposes of instruction', typically in an academic setting; the Italian word *lettura*, instead, has a more generic meaning and simply involves the concept of 'reading', either out loud or not (Note 22). *Fare una lettura interessante* (= lit. 'to do an interesting reading'), for instance, simply means to 'read' something interesting.

Similarly, *library* and *libreria* descend from the Latin words *liber* ('book', 'paper', 'parchment') and *librarium* ('bookcase' or 'chest for books'), but *library* prevalently indicates the building where books are kept for people to read, use or borrow, while *libreria* is a shop where books are sold. However, both words may be equivalent in meaning when referring to 'a collection of books', either public or private, or to a 'book series' (7):

7   a. *[…] the first person in Greece who collected a library.*

        b. *libreria medica/legale* (= a collection of medical/legal texts).

Yet, the perceived level of naturalness of a word in a language is the result of its frequency of use and vice versa. Unless we carry out corpus research, the fact that a certain word sense is attested in the dictionary does not tell us whether it is widespread or not. The *OED*, for instance, provides information about the frequency of *library* in different time periods, but it does not specify which word sense appears more/less commonly than the others. Therefore, although *library* and *libreria* may present some degree of semantic overlap, it remains to be ascertained whether the 'collection of books' and 'book series' senses of the two cognates are also comparable in terms of frequency.

Other instances of reference shifts can be observed with *pavement/pavimento*, *preservative/preservativo*, *rumour/rumore* and *sympathetic/simpatico*. The semantics of these cognates has obviously evolved following idiosyncratic paths (Note 23), but it also seems to have varied further to a bifurcation process, whereby their core meaning has developed in two parallel, distinct directions, as in the cases of the word pairs discussed above.

3.2 Core Meaning Retention

Present-day Italian appears to be more conservative than English with respect to the maintenance of the original, core meaning from which Latinate words are derived (Note 24). Let us consider what happens, for instance, with the pair *argument*/*argomento*. The 'act of reasoning or discussing' sense from Latin *arguere* ('make clear/known' or 'demonstrate') and the meaning of *argumentum* ('logical argument' or 'evidence/proof') are best preserved in the Italian word *argomento*, which indicates 'what is being talked about' (8), i.e., the topic or subject of a conversation, lesson, or of something written:

8   a. *Su qualsiasi argomento lo interroghi non lo trovi mai impreparato.* (= whatever subject you question
        him on, you never find him unprepared)

        b. *L'argomento di una tesi di laurea* (= the topic of a dissertation).

In English, the meaning of *argument* has developed from 'evidence/ground/support/proof', now considered as archaic, to 'subject of contention/debate' and has eventually come to indicate 'a quarrel' (9) (Note 25), a sense which is instead not part of the semantics of Italian *argomento*:

9   a. *Anny described how she got into an argument with one of the marchers.*

        b. *[…] a heated argument.*

Another instance of how closely the semantics of the Italian member of the cognate pairs examined still adheres

to the original Latin meaning can be exemplified with the words *actually/attualmente*. Both adverbs are derived from Late Latin *actualis* ('active', 'pertaining to action'); in Italian, the adjective *attuale*, from which we get the adverb *attualmente* ('now', 'at the present moment'), has retained the original sense of *actualis* and indicates a state or condition that is 'true', 'unfolding' or 'currently the case' (10). This meaning in English was attested at the end of the 17th century (11a), but as of 1762 *actually* started to be used as an intensive added to a statement suggesting 'as a matter of fact', 'really', 'in truth' (11b). In present-day English, it is still a synonym for 'in fact' and it is often associated with an expression of mild wonder or surprise (12).

10   *Un lavoratore edile, attualmente disoccupato* (= a construction worker, currently unemployed).

11   a. *Workmen, actually employed in every work* (1663 B. Gerbier, *Counsel to Builders* 60).

    b. *I had some dispositions to be a scholar, and had actually learned my letters* (1762 O. Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World* vol.II, 218).

12   *Actually, I can't remember you ever playing a single game with me.*

The other Italian words examined whose semantics still resembles that of the corresponding Latin element from which they are derived are *accomodare/accomodarsi*, *attendere*, *domandare*, *eventualmente*, *fabbrica*, *fattoria*, *fungo* and *sensibile* as opposed to English *accommodate*, *attend*, *demand*, *eventually*, *fabric*, *factory*, *fungus* and *sensible*.

In a more limited number of cases, however, the opposite trend can also be observed, i.e., some English words of the pairs under investigation have remained closer in meaning to the Latin element they originated from. This process concerns *annoy* vs. *annoiare/annoiarsi*, *educated* vs. *educato* or *educate* (Note 26) and *parent* vs. *parente*.

In Late Latin *inodiare* meant 'make loathsome', from *(esse) in odio* '(it is to me) hateful', where *odio* was the ablative of *odium* 'hatred'. In Middle English the verb *annoy* indicated 'causing a feeling of irritation, displeasure or distaste' (13a), which is the meaning that lingers today (13b):

13   a. *Þis gode man was anuyed of þis liþer answere* (c1300 Judas Iscariot (Harley MS.) l. 79 in F. J. Furnivall, Early English Poems & Lives Saints (1862) 109 (Middle English Dictionary)).

    b. *The cool long-haired boys..were seriously annoyed by the success of Dark Side of the Moon* (S. Fry, Fry Chronicles 370).

This semantic component has instead evolved in Italian, since *annoiare/annoiarsi* entails the idea of boredom (14):

14   *Mi annoio a non far niente tutto il giorno* (= I get bored doing nothing all day).

Similarly, both *educated* and *educato* derive from Latin *educatus*, past participle of *educare* 'bring up, rear', which unlike *educere* did not refer to the bodily nurture or support given to a child, but had the meaning of 'drawing out and unfolding the powers of the mind'. The latter sense lingers in English today (15a), although *educated* now more typically refers to someone who has received schooling and instruction (15b); on the other hand, the adjective *educato* in Italian indicates a 'polite' or 'well-mannered' person (16); it can even be further specified that someone has good manners by attaching the prefix *ben-* to the adjective (*beneducato*) (Note 27):

15   a. *Ordinary people whose lives and actions—bearing children whom they educate as Jews, celebrating brit milah, [etc.]..—express a commitment to being Jewish.*

    b. *Schools increasingly fail to educate children properly by the time they leave.*

16   *Un giovane educato e gentile* (= a kind and polite young man).

Finally, Latin *parens*, and then *parentem*, from which we obtain the cognates *parent* and *parente* in English and Italian, respectively, either referred to the 'mother or father' or to an 'ancestor', because the word is related to *parere* 'bring forth, give birth to, produce'. This sense can now be found only in literary or poetic Italian (17), but it has remained in English (18), which preserves the original and etymological meaning of Latin *parentem*:

17   *Non è questa la patria in ch'io mi fido, Madre benigna e pia, Che copre l'un e l'altro mio parente?* (Petrarca) (= This is not the country in which I trust, benign and gentle Mother, that covers both my parents) (Note 28).

18   *The government had extensive records of both of the adoptees' biological parents and their adoptive parents.*

By contrast, *parente* in present-day Italian means 'relative' and may also refer to a 'non-blood relative'. Therefore, a person who joins a family by marriage or adoption can be described as a *parente* of those born into the family.

3.3 Non-Figurative Meaning Extention

When the semantic core of the Latin element evolves and expands, this may happen via non-figurative meaning extension.

An example of this process can be represented by English *accommodate*, which from the beginning of the 18th century started to indicate 'furnishing with suitable room and comfort'. This is still today the default literal meaning of the verb in English (19), an extension of the original sense of Latin *accomodare* ('make fit for, adapt, fit one thing to another'). The latter is best preserved in Italian *accomodare*, i.e., 'to repair' (20), even if it is possible to come across the 'provide lodging for' sense in Italian too (21), which is however archaic:

19   *The camps are established in different girls and boys schools of Swabi and Mardan to accommodate dislocated persons*

20   *Accomodare una strada* (= To fix a road).

21   *Accomodare la figlia con uno* (= Make one's daughter move in with a man, i.e., marry him).

Interestingly, as we will see in section 3.4, alongside non-figurative meaning extensions, the semantics of certain Latinate cognates, including that of *accommodate/accomodare*, may also develop in different directions, often taking on figurative senses. In other cases, instead, we observe only a shift from literal to non-literal meanings.

Let us consider, for the time being, two other cases of non-figurative meaning extension, i.e. the cognates *factory* and *fattoria* that stem from Latin *factor* ('doer, maker'). At the end of the 16th century a *factory* was an 'establishment of merchants and factors in a foreign place', but in the 1610s the 'building for making goods' sense of the word emerged. This is because the meaning of post-classical Latin *factorium*, which was originally a place for making oil, i.e., an oil press/mill, expanded to refer to any building where goods are produced or assembled (22). Such semantic expansion has not taken place in Italian, where *fattoria* still refers to a 'farm' (or 'farmer's office', i.e., the administration of country property) and typically evokes a countryside scenario (23):

22   *The only thing that didn't come with the car when it left the factory..is the license plate*.

23   *Parleremo di uva e del caseificio di una antica fattoria dove si produce pecorino* (Note 29) (= We will talk about grapes and the dairy of an ancient farm where pecorino cheese is produced).

Similarly, Italian *fungo* ('mushroom') has a wider referential scope than English *fungus*, in that the former can refer both to what we eat (24) and to the pathological growths that we can have on our skin (25), for instance. On the other hand, the semantics of English *fungus* is more restricted; the word was first used as a learned alternative to 'mushroom', but *fungus* and *mushroom* now have different meanings and are no longer interchangeable (26). As a matter of fact, *mushrooms* are edible *fungi* that can be used as a source of food.

24   *Risotto coi funghi* (= mushroom risotto)

25   *Prendersi i funghi in piscina* (= to get the athlete's foot at the swimming pool).

Fungi may only refer to yeasts, molds, mildews and disease-causing organisms (27):

26   **A fungus risotto*.

27   *He describes and illustrates the successful extirpation of a large fungus from the ear*.

The meaning extension process of English *factory* and Italian *fungo*, with respect to the original Latin word from which they stem, involves semantic generalization. This pattern has also been observed with the cognate pair *romance/romanzo*, where the Italian member generically indicates a narrative (28), while the English one refers to a 'novel or story about a love affair' (29):

28   *Romanzo storico/ epistolare/erotico...* (= historical/epistolary/erotic romance novel).

29   *[…] he still sells a considerable number of 'romances' to young females*.

The other Latinate words whose semantics has expanded in a non-figurative sense, thus scoping over a broader field of reference, are Italian *annoiare/annoiarsi* ('to bore/get bored'), *educato/a* ('polite') and *parente* ('relative'), as discussed in section 3.2 above, as well as *vacanza* ('holiday'), which now indicates free time away from work and not just the condition of being vacant or unoccupied, as in the case of English *vacancy* that can either refer to a job or position that has not been filled or to the rooms in a hotel that are available to rent.

Lastly, in addition to *accommodate*, *factory*, *fungus* and *romance* discussed in this section, the semantics of the English words *actually*, *demand*, *eventually*, *pretend* and *sensible*, was also subject to an extension process whereby new non-figurative senses have emerged from their Latinate meaning core.

3.4 Figurative Meaning Extention

Figurative meaning extension as a factor in semantic change appears to concern primarily the English members of the pairs selected. This is not to say that the Italian words examined may not evolve metaphorically or metonymically from their initial meaning core. If we observe the Italian word *affluenza* in its different uses, for instance, it is evident that in addition to a literal sense, i.e., the flowing of a liquid (30), it is also commonly, and now perhaps more frequently, associated to abundance of people, money, or other material goods (31):

30   *L'affluenza del sangue nelle vene* (= the flow of blood in the veins).

31   a. *Al discorso ci fu molta affluenza* (= the speech was well attended).

         b. *L'affluenza del denaro nelle casse dello stato* (= the inflow of money into the state coffers).

The corresponding English *affluence* seems to have the same semantic contour, although the 'abundance of people' sense is now rare, according to the *OED*. This is a case of language variation which has taken place in a similar manner to what we have observed in section 3.1, namely on the basis of a process of reference bifurcation. In other words, from the meaning of 'moving (of a liquid) toward or into a particular place', the Italian word *affluenza* now tends to indicate the getting together of many people, while its English counterpart *affluence* more naturally indicates abundance of money or possessions.

Similarly, from Latin *attendere*, literally 'to stretch toward', from *ad* 'to, toward' and *tendere* 'stretch', the first figurative sense of 'directing one's mind and energies' first developed, but then this verb in English has come to indicate prevalently 'being present, presenting oneself'. On the other hand, Italian *attendere*, in addition to referring to the action of 'taking care of something' (32a), more commonly means 'to wait' (32b):

32   a. *Attendere alla casa* (= take care of the house).

         b. *Sono stanco di attendere* (= I am tired of waiting).

On several occasions, however, only the Latinate words in English and not their Italian counterparts express figurative meanings, as can be observed with *cognate* vs. *cognato*. In this particular case, there is also a difference in word class, because the former is prevalently an adjective (Note 30), while the latter can only be a noun. Most importantly though, *cognate* in English means 'related (in origin)' and may be applied to a number of situations (e.g., *cognate tribes, cognate knowledge, cognate words, cognate languages*, etc.), which metaphorically indicate the idea of 'having the same stock or family' or of 'being related' somehow, while *cognato/a* in contemporary Italian only means 'brother-/sister-in-law'.

Metaphorical meaning extension may also be observed with the English word *gross* as opposed to its Italian counterpart *grosso/a*. The two cognates are related to Latin *grossus* 'thick, coarse', which in Medieval Latin started to indicate also something 'large, big'. The meaning of 'thick, stout, massive or big' is now obsolete in English though, where it can either indicate comprehensiveness in different respects, e.g., of an amount, value, weight, number, etc. (as opposed to *net*) or, more typically, something or someone inspiring disgust or distaste. Therefore, the semantics of *gross* forked in English: from its original meaning of 'thick, coarse' and 'big' came the senses of 'unrefined' or 'coarse in texture and quality' and eventually the modern figurative meaning of 'vulgar or disgusting'. We can instead argue that Italian *grosso* has remained closer to the original sense of the word, despite the existence of certain uses in which the adjective is in fact deviating from a strictly literal sense. However, English appears to exhibit a greater level of metaphorical extension in the case of *gross* as opposed to Italian *grosso*, in that the connection between 'being vulgar, rude or disgusting' and the notion of a 'large amount' or 'coarse texture' is less obvious.

Lastly, the meaning of *magazine*, albeit related to Italian *magazzino*, i.e., a 'warehouse or place for storing goods', builds on a figurative interpretation whereby a publication or periodical is viewed as a 'storehouse of information'.

The data analyzed has shown that a process of metonymic extension may also be at the root of meaning variation. Let us consider the word *fabric*, from Latin *fabricare* 'to make, construct, fashion, build' and *fabrica* 'workshop', which is also related to *faber* 'artisan'. While *fabbrica* still refers to someone's activity or, more typically, to the place where the latter takes place, the meaning of English *fabric* has first evolved to indicate 'manufactured material' and, eventually, 'textile, woven or felted cloth', i.e., it has progressively come to indicate what is produced inside a factory. Therefore, the original sense of the word, that of 'building', which was still attested in late 15th century-English texts, has progressively narrowed following a whole-to-part process of meaning reduction.

Something similar happens with the Italian noun *legale* as opposed to English *legal*, which, incidentally, is only an adjective. Both words are derived from Latin *legalis* 'pertaining to the law'. However, in addition to retaining

this sense as well as that of being 'permitted by law', which are also part of the semantics of *legal*, the Italian word *legale* also indicates 'someone who practices the legal profession' (33):

33   *Mettere la faccenda nelle mani di un legale* (= put the matter in the hands of a lawyer).

Therefore, through a process of zero derivation the Italian adjective *legale* is converted into a noun whose meaning does not generically indicate something that 'relates to the law' or that 'is allowed or required by law', but rather someone who exercises the legal profession. This process consists in a generic to specific meaning transfer, i.e., it is also metonymic in nature.

3.5 Meaning Inversion

Meaning development may sometimes result in the production of new senses which stand in opposition to the original one(s) that a certain word had. In the data examined, this process of semantic change usually consists in a shift from a negative to a positive meaning rather than vice versa.

Let us consider the pair *morbid/morbido*, for instance. Both adjectives are derived from Latin *morbidus* 'diseased', which in turn is linked to *morbus* 'sickness, disease, ailment, illness'. In English this disease-related sense is maintained to refer to pathological processes (34). In Italian, however, it has evolved to indicate either softness or delicacy and even refinement. Therefore, *morbido/a* is no longer associated to disease, but to something essentially pleasant (35):

34   *Life events have been related to a number of morbid events, especially to those of the cardiovascular system.*

35   *Stoffa morbida; pelle morbida; capelli morbidi* (= soft fabric/skin/hair)

A similar process concerns English *terrific* and Italian *terrificante*. Although they both derive from Latin *terrificus* 'causing terror or fear, frightful', this meaning is being lost in English, because of the emergence of the colloquial sense of 'excellent' associated to *terrific* (36). The Italian adjective, instead, still indicates something that makes you feel afraid or anxious (37a), but it may also be used in a hyperbolic sense to emphasize the entity of something (37b):

36   *[…] terrific reef dive sites close to the island.*

37   a. *Uno spettacolo terrificante* (= a horrible/scary scene).

       b. *Fa un caldo terrificante* (= it is terribly hot).

Both Italian *morbido* and English *terrific* have gone through a process of semantic amelioration in that their original meanings have acquired a positive sense.

4. Conclusions

The analysis conducted in the present paper has shown the existence of some possible regularities in word meaning variation and change between English and Italian, which often present etymologically related vocabulary items, i.e., cognates, whose semantics has however evolved in different directions from their original Latinate nucleus. The data set examined is limited, but it still provides some indications about the recurrent patterns of sense differentiation in the two languages. These patterns may also characterise the development of lexicons across other languages. It is possible, for instance, that other Romance languages, such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, etc., will present the same regular word meaning shifts of Italian when compared to English.

Future studies of word meaning variation and change between language pairs or across several languages necessarily need to examine a wider data set and adopt a computational approach for the analysis. Although manual examinations provide interesting qualitative results, they can only explore a small part of the lexicon and do not tell us, for instance, which patterns are more frequent than others. In addition, the aspect of directionality should be explored in detail in order to observe what languages are more prone to introducing innovations with respect to a certain source meaning.

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Notes

Note 1. Latin was a huge contributor to the vocabulary of English, via the Norman Conquest and successive deliberate borrowing, to the extent that some linguists have even argued that despite its Germanic origin, English should be treated as a semi-Romance language (Barfield, 1962, p. 59).

Note 2. Cf. Ferguson (1994) for a rather comprehensive lexicographic treatment of false friends in English and Italian.

Note 3. As Grant put it (2009, pp. 365–366), "Given that most French lexicon is of Latin origin, and that not all sounds changed in the period between the documentation of Latin and the rise of Old and Middle French, it is simply impossible to distinguish many borrowings from French from those taken from Latin […]". Hence, my decision to generically refer to these lexical items as 'Latinate'.

Note 4. Cf. Minkova and Stockwell (2021) for a detailed discussion on the composition of the English lexicon.

Note 5. Retrieved April 2024, from https://www.oed.com/

Note 6. The best match would probably be *compenso*, *pagamento* or *remunerazione*.

Note 7. The English language has opted for the word *aperitif* to refer to a drink (most probably after the French *apéritif*), a doublet of *aperitive* with which it is also etymologically connected.

Note 8. The two main sources are Wikipedia's bilingual glossary of false friends in English and Italian (Retrieved

April 2024, from https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aiuto:Traduzioni/Glossario_dei_falsi_amici_della_lingua_inglese) and Ferguson's volume (1994), which does not just provide a list of cognates in the two languages, but also detailed explanations of meaning similarities and differences.

Note 9. Cf. Browne, Mendes & Gabriele Natali's dictionary of English-Italian false friends (1995), which lists over 1,300 pairs of cognates. Although this is the most comprehensive work as of today, it is now almost 30 years old and in need of an update.

Note 10. Cf. as an example. https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/course/intermediate/unit-10/session-1. Last access: April 2024.

Note 11. Check the difference between *sensible* and *sensitive* in the *Oxford Advanced American Dictionary Online*, for instance: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/sensible?q=sensible. Last access: April 2024.

Note 12. https://www.oed.com/. Last access: April 2024.

Note 13. https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/. Last access: April 2024.

Note 14. https://www.etymonline.com/. Last access: April 2024.

Note 15. https://www.etimo.it/. Last access: April 2024.

Note 16. Meaning bifurcation occurs when a word acquires a new meaning in addition to the original one. This process is also known as 'semantic split' (Crowley, 1992, p. 149).

Note 17. Cf. Weinrich (1974) and Rohde et al. (1999, 2000) for discussions and taxonomies of semantic change.

Note 18. The concept of 'frame' (Fillmore, 1982) is used to refer to the fact that lexical fields are conceptually grounded in our socio-cultural experiences and practices.

Note 19. All the examples that appear in this section have been taken from the *OED* and the *Vocabolario Treccani Online*.

Note 20. If not otherwise indicated, the translations of the Italian examples are mine.

Note 21. https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=lecture/. Last access: April 2024.

Note 22. Interestingly, the *Vocabolario Treccani Online* also lists the 'conference' and 'lesson' sense under *lettura*, but glosses it as *non com.* (= 'not common'). This might be a calque from English, a hypothesis that needs to be verified through corpus research and statistics.

Note 23. For obvious reasons of space, it is not possible here to examine in detail the process of semantic variation and change affecting all the word pairs listed in Table 1. For the purposes of this initial investigation, it suffices to identify the types of meaning changes occurring between related items in the two languages in order to group the lexemes examined accordingly.

Note 24. Although this is obvious, since Italian is a descendant of (Vulgar) Latin, there are also many instances of Italian words whose semantics has considerably distanced itself from that of the Latin words they are derived from. Cf. Osimo's (2019) illustration of Leopardi's analysis of translations from Latin into Italian.

Note 25. Strangely enough, this latter sense is still not properly attested in the *OED*. Therefore, the examples in (9) were taken from the *Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's Dictionary Online* (Last access: April 2024).

Note 26. Italian is a gendered language, so the adjective takes different suffixes depending on whether the noun it refers to is masculine singular (*educato*), feminine singular (*educata*), masculine plural (*educati*) or feminine plural (*educate*).

Note 27. By the same token, _mal_educato means 'bad-mannered'.

Note 28. http://petrarca.letteraturaoperaomnia.org/translate_english/petrarca_canzoniere.html.

Note 29. Since there are no example sentences in the *Vocabolario Treccani Online*, this one was taken from an online newspaper. https://www.lanazione.it/grosseto/cronaca/convertini-con-linea-verde-porta-la-maremma-sui-raiuno-ppf8qmjh/. Last access: April 2024.

Note 30. Apart from when we speak of cognates to refer to 'cognate words'.