

An Italian Verb Lexicon for Sentiment Inference

Manfred Klenner¹, Dylan Massey¹ and Susanna Tron²

1. Computational Linguistics, University of Zurich, Switzerland

2. Zurich, Switzerland

klenner@cl.uzh.ch, dylan.massey@uzh.ch, tron.susanna@gmail.com

Abstract

English. Verb-centered sentiment analysis provides a fine-grained perspective on the polar impact a situation has on its participants. It is good for a person to be honored for e.g. some achievement and we know in advance that such an achievement is expected to have positive polarity. Also, there is a positive relation between the honorer and the honoree. We introduce an Italian verb lexicon that specifies the polar relations a verb expresses and the effects and expectations that the roles of the verb bear.

Italiano. *L'analisi del sentiment centrata sul verbo fornisce una prospettiva dettagliata sull'impatto polare che una situazione ha sui suoi partecipanti. È positivo che una persona sia onorata, ad esempio, per un certo risultato e sappiamo in anticipo che tale risultato dovrebbe avere una polarità positiva. Inoltre, esiste una relazione positiva tra chi onora e chi viene onorato. Introduciamo un lessico verbale italiano che specifica le relazioni polari che un verbo esprime, e gli effetti e le aspettative che i ruoli del verbo possono avere.*

1 Introduction

A sentence is not just positive or negative, it moreover sheds a (polar) light on its participants. Given a sentence like *I mourn my freedom* (It. *Piango la mia libertà*), a negative effect is cast on the subject and we expect a positive filler of the direct object. Furthermore, we might conclude that the subject is in favour of the object. We have created an Italian verb lexicon comprising 307 verbs with up to 3

frames per verb in order to enable such kind of inferences. Such a lexicon might be useful for stance detection or even for lexicon induction (e.g. from the object expectation of *mourn* we can conclude that *libertà* is a positive concept).

In this short paper, we discuss the ingredients of our lexicon both, from a practical and theoretical point of view.

2 Related Work

There are quite a number of approaches to Italian sentiment analysis, be it for social media e.g. (Bianchi et al., 2021), stance detection e.g. (Moraca et al., 2020) or in the context of aspect-based sentiment analysis e.g. (Basile et al., 2018). Recently, deep learning approaches have conquered the field, but there are lexicon-based approaches as well. To the best of our knowledge, our lexicon is the first for Italian sentiment inference based on a verb resource. In the past, we have created resources and prototypes e.g. (Klenner et al., 2015), (Klenner and Amsler, 2016) and (Klenner et al., 2017) for German sentiment inference¹ and we have started to augment this to the other national Swiss languages: French and Italian. We have also applied our model to gender profiling in order to find out how male or female denoting nouns are distributed in the context of polar verbs (Klenner, 2023). For English, various approaches for sentiment inference are available, see (Neviarouskaya et al., 2009), (Deng and Wiebe, 2014), but also (Rashkin et al., 2016) and (Park et al., 2021). Also LLMs like ChatGPT are capable of doing it, see (Zhang et al., 2023).

3 Theoretical Framework

A polar verb often expresses a polar relation like *in favour* or *against*. Given the sentence *Lei lo critica* (Eng. *She criticizes him*), we conclude that the

¹For a German demo see: <https://pub.cl.uzh.ch/demo/stancer/index.py>.

referent of *lei* (Eng. she) is (in a situation-specific way) against the referent of *lo* (Eng. him). We can fix this directed relation by qualifying the subject (the agent) of the verb as the source and the direct object (patient or theme) as the target. We do not claim that these relations are - in general - intentional. Our ultimate goal is to enable (transitive) sentiment inference on the basis of our lexical specifications. Take the sentence *She is against the contract because it prevents a solution*. From this we can directly learn that a) she is intentionally against the contract and that b) the contract is (non-intentionally directed) against a solution. Only the presence of b) allows us to draw the transitive inference that she is in favour of a solution. The underlying rule is: if X is against Y and Y is against Z, then X is in favour of Z. Thus, the source and target can be animate or non-animate. If it is animate, then the relation might indicate an intentional polar relation originating from the source towards the target. A non-animate source just counts as a cause.

Some polar verbs do not cast a polar relation, but yield a positive or negative perspectivation. For instance, the intransitive usage of the verb *soffrire* (Eng. suffer) like in *Lui soffre* (Eng. He suffers) just tells us that the referent of *lui* is experiencing a negative effect. A polar effect is a positive or negative connotation associated with a verb role (comparable to *good/bad for* effects of (Deng et al., 2013)). A verb expressing a polar relation might also cast effects, but not in any case. In *Lei lo punisce* (Eng. she punishes him), besides the negative relation there is also a negative effect casted onto *lo* (Eng. him). However in *Lui soffre del suo capo* (Eng. he suffers from his boss) although a negative relation from *Lui* towards *suo capo* holds, there is no negative effect on it. This becomes even clearer if we replace the animate filler by a non-animate one like in *Lui soffre per questa situazione* (Eng. He suffers from the situation). It makes no sense to claim a negative effect on the situation.

In sum: our annotation scheme for polar verbs specifies which roles of a verb do have a positive or negative (directed) relation given an affirmative usage of the verb. Also, we specify whether a verb casts a positive or negative effect on its roles.

So far in our discussion, we have used dependency labels or grammatical functions in order to refer to the roles of a verb. We claim, for instance,

that the subject of *criticare* (Eng. criticise) is against the direct object. Even if we assume some normalization, namely passive voice normalization, this might lead to problems. In both cases, *The famous chef cooks* and *The rice cooks* there is a subject, but in the first case it realises an agent in the second a theme. Although in principle semantic role labelling (SRL) might be regarded a better basis for such specification, we have found in (Klenner and Göhring, 2022) that at least for German the available SRL approaches are not suited. Among others, the problem is that the agent role is assigned not exclusively to animate objects (or metonymically used inanimate objects) but also to plain physical objects. For example, the semantic role labeller InVeRo (Conia et al., 2021) using VerbAtlas² assigns the theme role to both (German) subjects: a) *Vergeltung droht ihm* (Eng. retribution threatens him) and b) *Er (animate) droht ihm* (Engl. He threatens him). Only in b) a negative relation should hold (i.e. He against him). For our German model, we stucked with dependency labels and specified coarse-grained selectional restrictions for each verb frame. We then used an animacy classifier, see (Klenner and Göhring, 2022), in order to select the right verb frame. For Italian, the quality of semantic labeling has to be evaluated first in order to come to a final decision about the role inventory.

Detecting polar relations and effects in sentences on the basis of a lexicon (and a parser) might be regarded antiquated in the age of deep learning. However, that there is no need to learn these patterns from annotated data. If the trigger conditions of a verb (frame) are met, then the relations and effects can safely be asserted. Nevertheless, lexicon-based approaches suffer from out of vocabulary cases. Here deep learning (e.g. word embeddings) might actually be useful.

4 Corpus: Data Format

We have created a json version of our resource and placed it at Zenodo³. For each verb⁴ a dictionary is given with the verb lemma, all (subcategorization) frames, the verb polarity, the relations expressed, the effects and expectations and one or more sample sentences. For instance the verb *interrompere* (Eng. e.g. cut off) (only one frame is shown), see

²<https://verbatlas.org>

³<https://zenodo.org/record/8195009>

⁴See the appendix for a list of all modelled verbs.

Fig. 1. The English translation of the sample sen-

```
{ "verb": "interrompere",
  "frame": ["Subj", "Obj"],
  "polarity": "NEG",
  "relation": [ ("Subj", "against", "Obj") ]
  "effects": [ ("Obj", "neg") ],
  "expectations": [],
  "example": "Hanno interrotto gli aiuti umanitari" }
```

Figure 1: Sample entry for *interrompere*

tence is *They have cut off humanitarian aid*. According to the verb frame, a subject and a object are required. Given this, a negative effect is cast on the object (humanitarian aid) and an *against* relation is drawn to the object. In the case of non-overt pronouns the arc of the finite verb is annotated, see the *against* relation in Fig. 2.

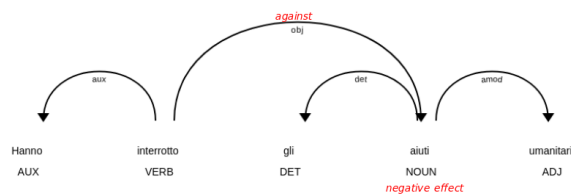


Figure 2: Annotated example (Spacy parse tree)

Some roles of a verb seem to carry a polar expectation. For instance if we hear that somebody is suffering from something, we immediately know that this something is (regarded as) negative. We have integrated expectations in our lexicon, since it might be useful for e.g. lexicon induction.

5 Further Details and Restrictions

First of all, verb disambiguation cannot be totally replaced by subcategorization checks. Take an English example: the two sentences a) *he won the race* and b) *he won the trophy* have the same subcategorization frame (also VerbAtlas assigns the same semantic roles), but the (polar) meaning is different due to verb ambiguity. In a) *he* receives a positive effect, but has no relation to the race, while in b) we can conclude that *he* is in favour of the trophy. This is to say that using our resource in a system demands additional functionalities.

We have not provided an evaluation of our resource so far. Although annotator agreement was an option, we decided to wait until our Italian sentiment inference system is in place. We have carried out an evaluation of our German resource in

the same end-to-end manner, which proved useful.

Some verbs need further checks for them to get triggered. Take for instance the verb *impedire* (Eng. *impede*). If someone impedes something negative (a struggle), this is good of her (a positive effect and negative relation), but if it is positive (e.g. a solution), it is bad of her (a negative effect and - again - a negative relation). We can determine polar restrictions on the basis of a traditional polarity lexicon. Though, sometimes sentiment composition is needed as in a *failed solution* which is negative. Our manually created Italian polarity lexicon⁵ (3538 lemmas) can be used for such sentiment composition. Nouns and adjectives have been specified on the basis of the appraisal theory (Martin and White, 2005): a word might be positive or negative wrt. to one of three dimensions: moral, emotion, appreciation. This allows even to distinguish between cases where a negative effect depends on the appraisal type of the filler. *sick* and *cheating* are both negative, but the former is an appreciation while the latter is morally negative adjective. While the sentence *she admires her sick colleague* proves that she is compassionate, the sentence *she admires her cheating colleague* makes her a morally questionable person.

Both resources, the verb lexicon and the polarity lexicon have been released upon submission of this paper. There is no former reference to it. Here we have focussed on the verb resource, because many Italian polarity lexicons⁶ are available, but as far as we know our verb lexicon is the only one.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have described an Italian verb lexicon and the theory behind it. The resource has been released together with a traditional polarity lexicon (nouns, adjectives). The verb lexicon can be used for sentiment inference, finding out who is in favour of or against who or what. Also, the polar perspective which we call effects can be determined: to answer the question whether a text is positive or negative towards a animate or inanimate object. This might be useful for stance analysis. We have not realised such a system for Italian yet, this is future work. But we have created the basis for it and hope that our two lexicons might be useful for Italian sentiment analysis in general.

⁵<https://zenodo.org/record/8194906>

⁶see: <https://www.ai-lc.it/en/affective-lexica-and-other-resources-for-italian>

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Appendix: Verbs with Number of Frames

verb	#frame	verb	#frame	verb	#frame	verb	#frame
abbandonare	2	abbassarsi	1	divertire	3	domare	1
abbattere	2	abolire	1	dubitare	1	eliminare	1
abusare	1	accettare	1	entusiasmare	2	esaltare	2
accusare	2	adattare	2	esaudire	1	escludere	3
adeguare	2	adempiere	1	espandere	1	espellere	1
adorare	2	affascinare	1	esplodere	2	evolversi	1
affaticare	2	affidare	2	facilitare	1	fallire	1
affliggere	2	affondare	1	favorire	1	felicitarsi	1
aggravare	2	aggredire	1	ferire	2	festeggiare	1
agitare	2	aiutare	2	forzare	2	fuggire	2
alimentare	3	alleare	2	garantire	3	godere	2
alleviare	1	allontanare	3	ignorare	3	illuminarsi	1
amare	2	ammazzare	2	imbrogliare	2	impedire	2
ammettere	1	ammirare	1	impegnarsi	1	imporre	2
animare	1	annullare	2	incantare	2	incitare	1
apostrofare	1	applaudire	1	incolpare	2	incoraggiare	3
apprezzare	1	approfittare	2	indebolire	2	indignare	2
approvare	1	arraffare	3	infrangere	2	ingannare	2
arrendersi	1	arrestare	1	inquietare	2	integrarsi	1
arricchire	2	assalire	1	intensificarsi	1	interessare	1
assaltare	1	assassinare	2	interrompere	2	invadere	1
assicurare	2	attaccare	1	irritare	1	isolare	3
augurare	2	aumentare	1	ispirare	2	lacerare	2
autorizzare	1	avvantaggiare	2	lamentare	2	lasciare	1
battere	2	beneficiare	1	liberare	2	licenziare	1
bloccare	2	bruciare	3	limitare	2	lottare	2
cacciare	2	calmare	2	manicare	3	mantenere	1
cancellare	2	castigare	1	mentire	2	meritare	2
cedere	2	celebrare	1	migliorare	3	minacciare	1
cessare	1	chiudere	2	modernizzare	2	molestare	1
colpire	2	coltivare	1	moltiplicare	2	morire	1
combattere	4	condannare	1	nascondere	2	naufragare	1
confortare	2	congratularsi	1	negare	4	nuocere	1
conquistare	1	consacrare	2	nutrire	3	obbligare	2
conseguire	1	consentire	4	occultare	2	odiare	1
conservare	1	consigliare	2	offendere	2	offrire	5
consolare	2	contentare	2	onorare	2	opporre	2
contestare	2	contrastare	1	ostacolare	1	pagare	2
contribuire	1	convalidare	1	patire	1	penalizzare	1
convincere	1	correggere	2	perdere	3	perdonare	2
costare	2	costringere	2	perire	1	permettere	3
crescere	1	criticare	1	perseguitare	1	piacere	2
curare	2	danneggiare	2	piangere	1	picchiare	2
declinare	2	dedicare	2	precipitare	2	preoccupare	2
deludere	1	denunciare	2	preservare	1	privare	2
deplorare	1	desiderare	1	privilegiare	1	progredire	1
desistere	1	detestare	2	promettere	1	promuovere	1
deviare	1	dibattersi	1	proteggere	2	protestare	1
difendere	2	diffidare	2	provocare	1	punire	1
dimenticare	2	dimettersi	1	raccommandare	2	raddoppiare	1
diminuire	1	dimostrare	1	rafforzare	2	rallegrire	2
disgustare	2	dissimulare	2	rassicurare	2	ratificare	1
distuggere	2	disturbare	1	recuperare	1	regolare	1
				resistere	2	respingere	1
				ricompensare	1	riconoscere	2

verb	#frame	verb	#frame
ridere	2	ridurre	4
rifiutare	2	rimpiangere	1
rimproverare	3	rinchiudersi	1
ringraziare	1	rinnovare	2
rinunciare	1	riposare	2
rischiare	1	risentire	3
risolvere	2	risparmiare	1
rispettare	1	ristabilire	2
ritirare	3	riuscire	2
rivelarsi	2	rompere	4
rovesciare	2	rubare	3
sacrificare	2	salutare	1
salvare	3	sanzionare	1
sbagliare	3	sbarazzare	2
scappare	1	scatenare	2
schiacciare	2	scioccare	1
sciupare	2	scombussolare	1
scomparire	1	scompigliare	2
sconvolgere	1	scoppiare	2
scoraggiare	2	scordare	2
scuotere	2	sedurre	1
separarsi	1	sfidare	1
sfuggire	1	sgomberare	2
sgridare	1	smarrire	3
smentire	4	smettere	1
snobbare	2	soddisfare	1
soffrire	3	sopportare	1
sopprimere	1	sorridere	2
sospendere	1	sospettare	3
sottomettere	2	sottrarsi	1
sperare	1	spezzare	4
stancare	2	stigmatizzare	1
stimare	1	strappare	2
stravolgere	1	stuprare	1
subire	1	suggerire	1
suicidarsi	1	suscitare	1
temere	3	tormentare	1
tradire	2	trascinare	2
trascurare	2	trasgredire	1
truffare	2	turbare	1
ubbidire	1	uccidere	2
urtare	2	vantare	2
vegliare	1	vietare	1
vincere	1	violare	1