

Islands Isles Isole A Sketch Engine Based Corpus Analysis

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Abstract

According to Van Dijk (2018) it is feasible to delineate the mental model of the underlying notion held by an epistemic community by looking at the occurrences of a lexical item in a representative corpus. In this socio-cognitive study, the Sketch Engine platform's tools are used to describe the collocational patterns of the English lemmas ISLAND/ISLE and their Italian equivalent ISOLA in two large corpora, following the model offered by Arroyo Hernández (2020). The investigation of semantic preferences and perceived semantic prosody shows an insular narrative, which is widely shared in both languages, in which the island is portrayed as a desired area defined by beauty and suggestion while also being vulnerable.

Key Words – island; isle; semantic preference; corpus linguistics; sketch engine; collocation

Secondo Van Dijk (2018) è possibile delineare il modello mentale della nozione sottostante detenuta da una comunità epistemica guardando le occorrenze di un elemento lessicale in un corpus rappresentativo. In questa analisi socio-cognitiva, gli strumenti della piattaforma Sketch Engine sono utilizzati per descrivere i modelli situazionali dei lemmi inglesi ISLAND/ISLE e del loro equivalente italiano ISOLA in due grandi corpora, seguendo il modello offerto da Arroyo Hernández (2020). L'indagine delle preferenze semantiche e della prosodia semantica percepita mostra una narrazione insulare, ampiamente condivisa in entrambe le lingue, in cui l'isola è ritratta come un'area desiderata definita dalla bellezza e dalla suggestione, pur essendo anche vulnerabile.

Parole chiave – isola; preferenza semantica; linguistica dei corpora; sketch engine; collocazioni

1. Introduction

*No man is an Iland, intire of itselſe; every man
is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine*
John Donne

Chevalier and Gheerbrandt described islands as centers of primeval spirituality in their celebrated *Dictionary of Symbols* (2001 [1969]: 556), particularly in Anglo-Saxon imagery, where we find paradises such as the Celtic green island that gives Ireland its name and Monsalvat, the island where the Holy Grail is kept according to Arthurian legends. Besides, some mysterious islands have been depicted as being inhabited by groups of only women, most likely based on the sacerdotal communities of Mona in Anglesey. Because of their sacredness, islands can represent the entire world on a small scale, a complete and perfect cosmos concentrated in its primeval centre, which is white in colour. It is no coincidence that Great Britain, the island for antonomasia, is called Albion – the White One. Furthermore, in Western imagery, the Fortunate Isles were semi-legendary Atlantic Ocean islands considered a winterless earthly paradise inhabited by Greek mythological heroes such as Achilles, who was taken there after his death by his mother Thetis. The poet Hesiod described the Isles of the Blessed, ruled by Apollo, in *The Works and Days* as amazing places where heroes «live with a carefree heart» (170) enjoying «a honey-sweet harvest / that comes to fruition three times each year, produced by the life-giving land» (172-173).

More recently, psychoanalytic exegesis has interpreted islands as shelters, where consciousness seeks refuge from the attacks of our unconscious, much like a drowning sailor grasping the nearest rock. However, islands are not unquestionably positive symbols of an infinite range of possibilities, tabulae rasae that become «laboratories for any conceivable human project, in thought or in action» (Baldacchino 2006: 5-6). Small islands also experience «peripherality, being on the edge, being out of sight and so out of mind: situations which both expose and foment the weakness of mainstream ideas, orthodoxies and paradigms».

These various interpretations have influenced how the word *island* is used, and how it is used differs depending on the epistemic community. Therefore, following Arroyo Hernández (2020) who studies ISLA/ISOLA¹ in Spanish and Italian, it seems particularly useful to adopt for the present study a Sociocognitive Discourse Studies (SCDS) approach, which, «deals with the ongoing communicative Common Ground and the shared social knowledge as well as the attitudes and ideologies of language users as current participants of the communicative situation and as members of social groups and communities» (Van Dijk 2018: 28).

The Sketch Engine platform is used to carry out a contrastive analysis of the collocations of the words denoting ISLAND in English and Italian. According to the OED, an island is «A piece of land completely surrounded by water»², but also an isle is «A portion of land entirely surrounded by water; an island. Now more usually applied to an island of smaller size, except in established appellations, as ‘the British Isles’»³. These definitions correspond to that found in the Treccani Online Dictionary for ISOLA: «Porzione di terraferma completamente circondata dalle acque di un oceano, mare, lago, fiume, palude»⁴.

¹ In the present article, ISLA/ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA are capitalized when used as lemmas.

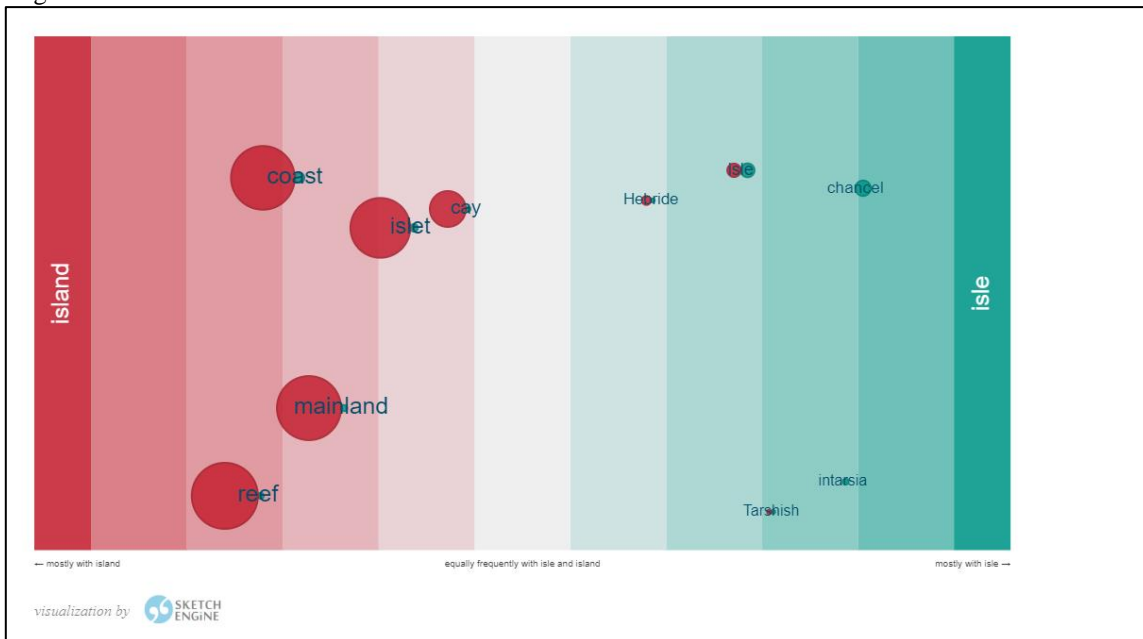
² <https://www-oed-com.proxysbauniss.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/99986?rskey=J2S7JF&result=1> (accessed 01/02/2022).

³ <https://www-oed-com.proxysbauniss.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/99995?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=zKJzS3&> (accessed 01/02/2022).

⁴ <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/isola>.

Several studies tried to determine whether ISLAND and ISLE can actually be considered synonyms and the semantical domains when they are used – it may here suffice to mention Sara Gesuato’s ‘How (dis)similar? Telling the difference between near-synonyms in a foreign language’ (2007) – but this is not the purpose of the present study. However, after using the Sketch Engine’s Thesaurus function to compare the two words, it seemed necessary to include both near synonyms in this analysis, as both are required to effectively compare the usage of the words denoting ISLAND in the Italian and English languages⁵.

Figure 1. ISLAND vs ISLE



Finally, the definitions of «a piece of land completely surrounded by water» are not sufficient to distinguish, for instance, an island from a rock. This seemingly futile observation has in fact been the cause of legal actions – such as the China-Philippines arbitration – which has finally led to recognize that: cultural aspects like the possibility to be inhabited by human beings need to be added (Mirasola 2015).

The present study aims to investigate the subjective representation incarnated in the lemmas ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA through lexicon analysis, using Arroyo Hernández’s model (2020). The following paragraphs sketch the lexical representation of this mental framework in English and Italian by examining the occurrences traced with Sketch Engine of the three terms. As Van Dijk (2018) recommends, this sociocognitive study aims to relate, the elements of discourse, cognition and society, eliciting the ideological patterns shared by epistemic communities and outlining, through the analysis of semantic preferences, the semantic prosody (Hunston 2007) of the terms analysed in a large corpus. The contrastive perspective allows us to propose an ‘insular semantics’ with respect to the English-Italian language pair. Section 2 provides an account of the methodological aspects related to the data analysis, presented in Section 3. The paper closes with concluding remarks in Section 4.

⁵ It is my intention to devote a future study to a thorough contrastive analysis of the two lemmas ISLAND / ISLE because, as the current study results show, the difference in word usage is not necessarily related to the size of the island.

2. Methodology

The representation of islands in the English and Italian language communities is examined using the online corpus text analysis tool Sketch Engine⁶ and the functionality it offers to analyse the grammatical, positional and syntactic patterns of the consulted lemmas. Among the integrated corpora available in Sketch Engine, which extract their texts from the Internet, the English Web 2020 (enTenTen20) was selected for the English language, composed of 38,149,437,411 words, and the Italian Web 2016 (itTenTen16), composed of 4,989,729,171 words⁷. Because of their size, they can offer an interesting representation of the collective imagination of the English-speaking community and the Italian-speaking community today⁸.

With its numerous tools, Sketch Engine enables in-depth analysis. For example, the Word Sketch function allows to investigate the syntactic and positioning patterns of a given lemma, providing information on the position and syntactic function where the lemma appears. Thus, for the nominal headwords examined, information about the most frequent modifiers, the verbs that take them as object, the verbs that take them as subject, the most frequent attributes can be retrieved.

Semantic preference and semantic prosody are projected onto the results of Sketch Engine's textual analysis tools. As Firth (1957: 196) points out, a lexical unit's 'collocability' with other units contributes to its meaning. As a result of a series of words' proclivity to recur with a specific unit, there is a transfer of meaning from those to it (Louw 1993). Semantic prosody refers to the evaluative semantic aura that a unit possesses as a result of its collocations and that serves a discursive function (Sinclair 1998; Hunston 2007; Stubbs 2007; McIntyre and Walker 2019). Semantic prosody would therefore be a consequence of recurrent associations between words, some of which carry with them an evaluative meaning that is thus transferred to their collocates, as a semantic extension of it. The examination of the combinatorial patterns of the lemmas ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA in the reference corpus delineate the aura of meaning – positive, negative, attitudinal, ideological, political, etc. – that accompanies these terms in their appearances. Due to space constraints, the observations are kept on the surface of the data, with the exception of specific incursions, without the examination of specific occurrences.

3. A Sketch Engine analysis of ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA using Word Sketch

3.1. Modifiers of Island/Isle/Isola

The study of collocations is a valuable common tool for discourse analysis because it can shed light on the ideological use of language (Baker et al. 2013: 36).

Table 1 presents the main modifiers of ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA, recorded as lemmas. The order of the items does not correspond to their frequency, but to the strength of the positioning, calculated

⁶ Accessible via www.sketchengine.eu.

⁷ The disparity in volume between the two corpora, that might affect comparability in quantitative terms, does not affect the qualitative terms in which, by the nature of this work, the analysis was set up. In any case, these are two large corpora, and even the smaller Italian one offers sufficient representativeness.

⁸ The collective imaginary is necessarily an abstraction. Especially in the case of the English corpus this abstraction raises questions about the variability of representations of the island in the extensive geography of the English language (e.g., are there differences in the British variant, considering that all the speakers live on islands?). Sadly, the corpus information indicates the origin of only the 21,5% of the words (8.160.153.643 words): australian domain.au 2,9%, Canadian domain .ca 1,9%, English Wikipedia 6,7%, Irish domain .ie 0,5%, New Zealand domain .nz 0,7 %, UK domain .uk 7,9, US domain .us 0,9%, the remaining are of undefined origin. The diatopic variant will therefore not be taken into account in the quantitative analysis.

using logDice⁹. As Arroyo Hernández (2020: 363) notes, although the positioning behaviour of a term can be assessed with reference to the frequency of positioning, from the sociocultural point of view it is more reliable to calculate the statistical significance of positioning. Frequency is in fact not an indicator of placement strength in itself: if the words that are part of a placement are often combined with other words, the placement strength will be low and, conversely, if the placement coincides with the base much more frequently than with other words, the placement strength will be high. The volume of the corpus discussed here makes it possible to relate the examination of English and Italian language elements to the linguistic collectivities that generate them, and, by considering them as epistemic communities – with the caution required by internal heterogeneity – to abstract from the data mental archetype traits linked to the ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA lemmas.

The examination of the ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA modifiers placed, of which the first fifty in the table are presented, provides a good number of toponyms, of relational origin, in appositive position (for ISLAND *Hawaiian, Indonesian, Mediterranean, Aegean, Japanese, Philippine, Scottish, Pacific*; for ISLE *Hebridean, Aegean, Grecian, Caribbean, Ionian, Balearic, British, Greek*; for ISOLA *Canarie, Baleari, britannico, eolie, ionico, Pontine, siciliano, indonesiano, mediterraneo*). Moreover, some modifiers are geonyms indicating the proper name of the island referred to, such as *Presque, Scilly, Orkney, Shetland, Tandhus, Jaypee* in English; *Borromee* and *Tremiti*, in Italian. As the table shows, these geonyms in English are typically associated with ISLE.

Finally, other modifiers have an eminently denotative description of the geological or geographical characteristics of the territory of the island: e.g., for ISLAND *barrier, volcanic, remote, tiny, offshore, small, floating, artificial*; for ISLE *sea-girt, far-off, rocky, volcanic*; and *vulcanico, galleggiante, lontano, corallino, lacustre* for ISOLA. As can be seen, the parallelism between the two languages in the elements listed so far is rather elevated.

Table 1. *Adjective modifiers of ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA*

	ENGLISH ENTENTEN20						ITALIAN ITTENTEN16		
	ISLAND	Freq	Score	ISLE	Freq	Score	ISOLA	Freq	Score
		1043980	35.7		24576	39.3		51042	9.08
1	Caribbean	19375	9.040	sceptred	184	7.920	pedonale	5459	9.950
2	barrier	12664	8.460	emerald	413	7.590	ecologico	6652	9.860
3	Greek	17110	8.080	sceptered	124	7.350	deserto	2927	9.330
4	uninhabited	8706	8.060	belle	72	6.290	Canarie	2621	9.330
5	tropical	13888	8.020	uninhabited	107	8.060	felice	3305	8.860
6	desert	9179	7.850	sea-girt	55	6.180	greco	4106	8.820
7	volcanic	8270	7.720	Hebridean	64	6.160	caraibica	1326	8.340
8	remote	16442	7.650	PRESQUE	45	5.900	Baleari	1296	8.330
9	tiny	12851	7.560	paradise	70	5.870	britannico	2103	8.190
10	offshore	7913	7.530	tropic	53	5.700	minore	3760	8.070
11	kitchen	8879	7.400	Scilly	44	5.630	tropicale	1168	7.820
12	nearby	10393	7.350	Presque	43	5.510	vulcanico	1055	7.750
13	Hawaiian	5868	7.290	uncharted	79	5.450	sperduto	871	7.670
14	small	71332	7.260	Orkney	49	5.310	disabitato	685	7.370

⁹ The most common measure of positional strength is the "mutual information score" (MI). Sketch Engine used MI until 2006 when it decided to replace it with logDice, for technical reasons which can be found at the following link: <https://www.sketchengine.eu/documentation/statistics-used-in-sketch-engine/>.

15	Pacific	9361	7.140	desert	310	5.170	meraviglioso	1696	7.370
16	Indonesian	5212	7.070	far-off	43	5.130	Borromee	642	7.320
17	floating	5330	7.040	Aegean	39	5.110	splendido	2262	7.230
18	beautiful	16428	6.940	Grecian	37	5.070	eolie	581	7.180
19	artificial	7022	6.920	Caribbean	186	5.050	compreso	1429	7.150
20	isolated	4827	6.880	windswept	34	4.970	vicino	3019	7.140
21	center	6418	6.810	Shetland	47	4.920	piccolo	8466	7.020
22	neighboring	4123	6.690	Ionian	29	4.920	omonimo	908	7.010
23	rocky	4038	6.690	idyllic	82	4.880	artificiale	830	6.930
24	Mediterranean	3588	6.600	misty	45	4.820	incantevole	678	6.910
25	Pacific	3045	6.490	tropical	628	4.800	Tremiti	467	6.870
26	outer	5039	6.410	presque	21	4.790	caraibiche	469	6.860
27	outlying	2805	6.400	nigei	20	4.730	misterioso	749	6.770
28	Aegean	2711	6.390	Balearic	29	4.720	galleggiante	452	6.690
29	resort	3132	6.380	syde	18	4.580	remoto	640	6.660
30	southern	5753	6.240	British	2162	4.560	verde	1403	6.570
31	main	19996	6.220	rocky	183	4.520	paradisiaco	380	6.520
32	coral	2810	6.220	isle	19	4.520	lontano	1113	6.330
33	heat	4108	6.060	fair	917	4.470	ionico	360	6.330
34	large	34347	6.050	fabled	32	4.470	selvaggio	455	6.330
35	man-made	2223	5.970	desolate	41	4.410	bello	3788	6.300
36	oceanic	2078	5.930	Tandhus	16	4.410	corallino	341	6.290
37	Japanese	5096	5.920	verdant	31	4.360	Pontine	313	6.290
38	disputed	2093	5.920	sun-drenched	19	4.330	siciliano	594	6.250
39	CpG	1935	5.920	Emerald	59	4.320	indonesiano	304	6.200
40	adjacent	2597	5.860	lonely	133	4.300	incontaminato	356	6.180
41	paradise	1819	5.810	shaky	48	4.290	stupendo	441	6.130
42	northern	4512	5.800	supermarket	73	4.140	pontine	279	6.120
43	Philippine	1953	5.800	produce	53	4.110	mediterraneo	455	6.000
44	Scottish	2587	5.780	sunny	165	4.100	lacustre	269	6.000
45	traffic	3499	5.750	volcanic	138	4.080	incantato	273	5.910
46	mysterious	2456	5.750	septic	57	4.080	affascinante	413	5.890
47	idyllic	1798	5.730	fortunate	37	4.080	intero	1872	5.860
48	granite	1929	5.680	Greek	516	4.020	Un'	262	5.860
49	entire	9064	5.670	jaypee	12	4.000	minuscolo	271	5.830
50	Ocean	2106	5.610	resplendent	15	3.970	linguistico	411	5.760

Excluding the previous cases, the main modifier of ISLAND in English is the qualifying adjective *uninhabited* (4)¹⁰, also associated to ISLE (5) and the Italian ISOLA (14). This adjective acquires particular importance in the corpus, especially if one considers its association with *desert*, with ISLAND (6) and ISLE (15) and ISOLA (3). While indicating a lack of human population, these modifiers are definitely anthropocentric. Curiously, of the several million islands existing on Earth,

¹⁰ Each table's and corpus' relative location is indicated by the number in brackets.

only about 11,000 are inhabited¹¹: the deprivation of the human population would therefore not be pragmatically informative, since such deprivation corresponds to the standard of normality. Yet, a very high positioning strength, which is to be found in both languages (8.060 for *uninhabited island*, 6.190 for *uninhabited isle*, 7.370 for *isola disabitata*; 7.850 for *desert island*, 5.170 for *desert isle* against 9.330 for *isola deserta*), sets the idea of the island as characterized by the absence of human beings, as a horizon of possibilities for peace and serenity.

The concept of a shelter island, which alludes to escapes from overcrowded cities, is sometimes associated with remoteness (especially in tourism narration). As a result, it is not unusual in the English corpus to see the collocations *remote* (8) and *isolated* (20) *island*, *uncharted* (13) and *far-off* (16) *isle*, and in the Italian *isola sperduta* (13), *remota* (29) or *lontana* (32), frequently used without a prepositional complement. Although the antonym modifier, *neighbour* (10) or *near* (20) is recorded in both corpora, in this case it is a precise and denotative geographic indication, as in «At the same time, a religion called Santería was developing and had soon spread throughout Cuba, Haiti and other nearby islands» or «Altrettanto coinvolgente è la vicina isola di S. Pietro» in Italian (there are no records of this kind in the first 50 positions for *Isle*).

Remoteness encompasses not only geographical isolation, but also ambiguity, imprecision, and the ability to conjure up stories with the mind. This Romantic heritage reverberates in another significant block of collocations in both lists, which is made up of qualifying adjectives that highlight enchanting qualities of the islands: *beautiful* (18), *paradise* (41), *mysterious* (46), *idyllic* (47) for *Islands*, and *paradise* (9), *idyllic* (24), *misty* (25), *fabled* (34), *sun-drenched* (38), *fortunate* (47), *resplendent* (50) for *Isle*, match with the Italian *meraviglioso* (15), *splendido* (17), *incantevole* (24), *paradisiaco* (31), *bello* (35), *incontaminato* (40), *stupendo* (41), *incantato* (45) and *affascinante* (46) for *Isola*.

It should be noted that neither list contains adjectives conveying negative meanings, whether denotative or not, except, for *misty* (25) and *desolate* (35), referred to *Isle*. These adjectives may refer to the cold weather and the destitute condition of an island, but more often are linked to the aura of mystery surrounding the island in the collective imaginary and mythology such as in Tennyson's famous «Lords of waste marches, kings of desolate isles» (1859: v. 525) and in the name of *Skye* which derives from the Norse for «isle of cloud or misty isle».

Three modifiers are singled out for their not belonging to the semantic domain of nature, *traffic* (45) for *ISLAND* and *pedonale* (1) and *ecologico* (2) for *ISOLA*: they all refer to specific elements found in cities: traffic islands are solid or painted objects used to channel traffic in a road, *isole pedonali* are pedestrian areas, where cars are not allowed, and *isole ecologiche* are specific fenced and/or supervised areas, equipped for separate waste collection for recycling. Isolation, which is perceived positively because it offers the value of an ecological or pedestrian haven from a sea of pollutants and traffic, is the most important island content attribute passed to the three phrases. Isolation, is also the common semantic trait retained in the phrases *CpG Island* (39), *supermarket isle* (42), *isola linguistica* (50).

Finally, the first collocation for *ISLE*, *sceptred* (1), is also noteworthy, as its graphic variant *sceptered* (3), which is a reference to England derived from Iohn of Gaunt's famous speech in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (Act 2, Scene 1):

This royall Throne of Kings, this sceptred Isle, [...]
 This other Eden, demy paradise,
 This Fortresse built by Nature for her selfe,
 Against infection, and the hand of warre: [...]
 This precious stone, set in the siluer sea, [...]
 This blessed plot, this earth, this Realme, this England.

¹¹ <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/how-many-islands-are-there-in-the-world.html>.

Such an identification between England and ‘this sceptred Isle’ is common in the English language, to the point of becoming the title of a BBC radio series¹² and of a forthcoming TV series¹³ on Covid19 pandemic. With this title, the TV show’s creators plainly meant to reflect Shakespeare’s reference to a «Fortresse built by Nature [...] Against infection».

To conclude, the lemmas ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA in both corpora indicate a semantic preference for:

1. toponymic, physical, and geographical modifiers
2. evaluative modifiers.

The second block exhibits a positive semantic prosody, distinguished by a strong laudatory nature and links with beauty, purity, and charm. As we will see in 3.3, the meaning suggested by ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA, formed by semantic preferences, is well matched with a functional image of the island as an excellent trip location.

3.2. Verbs with ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA as object

The Word Sketch feature allows the tracing of verb lemmas that occur with the phrases ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA, when the noun performs the syntactic function of a verbal object. Table 2, presents the first 50 lemmas in order of their positioning strength, as calculated with logDice. Phrasal verbs will not be considered here due to space constraints, but this may be an interesting topic for future studies.

Table 2. Verbs with ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA as object

	ENGLISH ENTENTEN20						ITALIAN ITTENTEN16		
	ISLAND	Freq	Score	ISLE	Freq	Score	ISOLA	Freq	Score
		506089	17.3		6929	11.1		51042	9.08
1	inhabit	9720	8.740	shiver	134	7.710	circondare	949	8.080
2	desert	6767	8.500	enchant	155	5.920	visitare	3026	7.970
3	neighbour	4381	7.570	sun-kiss	14	5.280	abitare	773	7.800
4	surround	11228	7.290	shroud	29	5.080	esplorare	779	7.600
5	visit	18634	6.980	people	14	4.740	situare	835	7.400
6	populate	2339	6.800	inhabit	155	4.390	popolare	399	7.370
7	explore	10862	6.680	desert	71	4.380	collegare	1060	7.010
8	occupy	3946	6.540	wander	78	4.270	circumnavigare	180	6.820
9	invade	2275	6.440	peruse	24	3.810	robotizzare	173	6.710
10	conquer	1647	6.110	stroll	12	3.730	girare	590	6.710
11	separate	2450	6.070	neighbour	72	3.210	raggiungere	3181	6.620
12	colonize	1108	6.020	bless	60	2.750	costeggiare	225	6.570
13	devastate	1109	5.940	scour	14	2.740	interrare	216	6.440
14	situate	2003	5.930	cruise	26	2.650	invadere	252	6.310
15	locate	8333	5.850	fling	10	2.610	occupare	590	6.290

¹² *This Sceptred Isle* is a BBC radio series about the history of Britain’s lands and peoples, authored by historian Christopher Lee. It aired on Radio 4 in 1995. In 1999 an extension was made to cover the 20th century: from 1901, where the original series had ended, to the end of the millennium. Further, two spin-offs were aired in 2001 and 2005/2006 respectively: *This Sceptred Isle: Dynasties* and *This Sceptred Isle: Empire*.

¹³ *This Sceptred Isle* is a five-part television drama that will air in autumn 2022 on Sky Atlantic and Now. It will tell the story of the first wave of the COVID-19 epidemic in the UK, based on testimony from government officials, the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, care homes, and hospitals.

16	tour	1525	5.830	roam	24	2.600	colonizzare	137	6.290
17	connect	5006	5.750	crowd	17	2.460	separare	318	6.180
18	divide	2722	5.750	browse	47	2.400	devastare	156	6.120
19	annex	913	5.720	cede	9	2.290	attraversare	621	6.060
20	rule	1445	5.700	round	35	2.270	abbandonare	463	5.980
21	discover	3951	5.670	walk	181	2.260	dominare	266	5.890
22	dot	941	5.650	retake	8	2.200	scoprire	926	5.890
23	fortify	923	5.580	lie	66	2.190	scorgere	135	5.860
24	circle	864	5.560	ravage	9	2.180	ammirare	306	5.830
25	sight	790	5.510	knit	24	2.170	lasciare	1391	5.720
26	lie	1335	5.490	shimmer	7	2.170	dividere	264	5.700
27	scatter	1003	5.470	invade	48	2.140	comprendere	1142	5.680
28	flee	1072	5.450	listen	28	2.090	governare	159	5.610
29	leave	13770	5.430	scent	8	2.020	spargere	128	5.590
30	settle	1402	5.420	conquer	34	2.000	sorvolare	84	5.580
31	cede	727	5.410	frequent	9	1.990	escludere	310	5.450
32	strike	1588	5.370	grace	11	1.930	colpire	408	5.400
33	isolate	990	5.350	behold	10	1.890	avvistare	78	5.400
34	reach	6593	5.330	wing	11	1.890	conquistare	333	5.370
35	own	3272	5.270	bake	55	1.730	estendere	201	5.310
36	evacuate	729	5.210	annex	7	1.730	affollare	87	5.310
37	seize	1086	5.210	raid	11	1.720	dell'	140	5.300
38	circumnavigate	582	5.200	fortify	13	1.690	fortificare	93	5.270
39	defend	1751	5.180	haunt	14	1.600	sorgere	192	5.260
40	claim	2189	5.160	rule	34	1.450	bagnare	85	5.180
41	name	5005	5.120	circle	8	1.440	chiamare	788	5.130
42	approach	1696	5.100	surround	145	1.370	percorrere	258	5.110
43	encircle	580	5.080	dot	8	1.240	toccare	246	5.100
44	round	747	5.050	float	10	1.210	incantare	63	5.070
45	colonise	524	5.040	populate	12	1.090	lambire	61	5.070
46	escape	1080	5.000	traverse	8	1.070	caratterizzare	299	5.060
47	float	624	4.990	navigate	21	0.920	trasformare	255	5.060
48	enchant	568	4.990	flee	17	0.900	doppiare	56	5.040
49	roam	607	4.980	scatter	13	0.830	ricoprire	171	5.010
50	ravage	533	4.950	sweep	12	0.740	immergere	95	4.990

Following the paradigm presented by Arroyo Hernández (2020), it is feasible to group verbal occurrences into three semantic categories, which occur in a generally sequential and parallel manner for both languages:

- (i) geographical indications
- (ii) access
- (iii) intervention.

Depending on the context, some phrases may belong to more than one category, and attribution is here based on the most frequent interpretation in the analysis of occurrences.

The first category, geographical indications, is at the top of the table, and it contains several collocations that, like the modifiers, allude denotatively to the island's physical and demographic characteristics, over which an anthropic filter is placed as one might expect: *inhabit* (1) / *inhabit* (6) / *abitare* (3), *populate* (6), *settle* (30) an island / *people* (5) or *populate* an isle / *popolare* (6) un'isola, *crowd* (17) an isle / *affollare* (36) un'isola, *surround* (4), *circle* (24), *encircle* (43) and *round* (44) an island / *surround* (42) / *circondare* (1), *scatter* (27) / *scatter* (49) / *spargere* (29), *situate* (14) and *locate* (15) an island / *situare* (5), *separate* (11) an island / *separare* (17), *connect* (17) an island / *connettere* (7), *bagnare* un'isola (40), *isolate* an island (33). Civilization and nature further characterize islands – *dot* (22) / *dot* (43) – as in «sugar mills and plantation houses dot the island» and in «i boschi di querce e macchia mediterranea che caratterizzano la nostra isola» – *caratterizzare* (46), *ricoprire* (49). To find islands, it is necessary to establish where they are – *lie* (26) / *lie* (23) / *sorgere* (39) – in which archipelago they are *scattered* (39) / *spargere* (29) and what is near – *neighbour* (3) / *neighbour* (11)¹⁴. More verbs belonging to this category are often collocated with *Isola*: *comprendere* (27), *estendere* (35), *toccare* (43), *lambire* (45), *immergere* (50).

The second group primarily refers to the human being's physical or cognitive access to the island – such as *visit* (4) / *visitare* (2) – confirming, as previously observed with the modifiers, that the island is seen as a space of Otherness, a space beyond, a point of arrival, rather than a point of departure. This is hardly surprising from a social standpoint, given that just 11% of the world's population lives on islands. As a result, the exoticism of *exploring an island* (7) / *esplorare un'isola* (4) is connected with visiting. The island can be seen from afar – *sight* an island (25) / *avvistare* (33), *scorgere* (23); and *discovered* (23) / *scoprire* (22) – or visited by the traveller, who will then be able to *approach* (42) and *reach* the island (34) / *raggiungere* (11), to *overfly* / *sorvolare* (30), to *circumnavigate* the island (28) / *circumnavigare* (8), *costeggiare* (12) and then *tour* (16) / *roam* (49) / *wander* (8) / *peruse* (9) / *stroll* (10) / *browse* (18) / *walk* (21) / *girare* (11). At the end of the visit, or if any problems happen, the island is to be left: *flee* (28) / *flee* (48) / *lasciare* (25) and *abbandonare* (20).

In the third semantic category, intervention, verbs alluding to more or less articulated events in which human collective action appears to be the protagonist are grouped. From this category becomes manifest what Baldacchino (2005: 247) called «an obsession to control, to embrace an island as something that is finite, that may be encapsulated by human strategy, design or desire». The ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA as a verbal object appears as something to be controlled and subjugated: one can *occupy* (8) an island / *occupare* (15), or *invade* (9) / *invade* (27) / *invadere* (14), *conquer* (10) / *conquer* (30) / *conquistare* (34), *colonize* (13) / *colonise* (45) / *colonizzare* (16), *dominate* (21) / *rule* (20) / *rule* (40) / *governare* (28), and *divide* (18) / *dividere* (26) islands. The simple assignment of a name is a further reflection of coming into possession: when you *own* (35) an island, you can *name* (41) / *chiamare* (41) it. The owner of an island will then feel it necessary to *fortify* (23) / *fortify* (38) / *fortificare* (38) the island, or may decide to *cede* (33) / *cedere* (19) it.

The result of human action, which adds to and causes atmospheric phenomena and health emergencies, is reflected in English in collocations such as *devastate* (13) / *devastare* (18), *strike* (32) / *ravage* (50) / *ravage* (24), or *sweep* (40) an Isle – which can explain the need to *evacuate* (36) and *escape* (46) / *flee* (48) / *abbandonare* (20). The semantic prosody associated with these preferences is clearly negative: the island is portrayed as prey or victim of coercive and violent actions that negatively alter its nature and try to submit it to external powers.

Singled out of this analysis is *enchant* (48) / *enchant* (2) / *incantare* (44). When the island has been enchanted, the uses that Word Sketch collects can correspond to participative verbal forms, or to

¹⁴ Position 47 for island (44 for isle) is *float*, which would fit in in this group, except for the fact that islands are in this case the subjects of the action, not the objects.

relational possessive adjectives. In the latter case, it would be the only positively connoted element on the list of the 50 most powerful positionings for ISLAND and ISOLA, a significant impact. On the contrary, ISLE shows a more positive connotation, often deriving from literary connotations, where the island can be the object of verbs like *sun-kiss* (3), *bless* (12), *shimmer* (26), *scent* (29) and *grace* (32). Yet, an *isle* can be shroud[ed] (4) in *mystery*, and also *haunt*[ed] (39).

Finally, *robotizzare* (9) and *interrare* (9) of the Italian corpus belong to a specialized language, in the form of specific clusters: *isola robotizzata* and *isola interrata*. An *isola robotizzata* is a robotic cell, a complete system that includes the robot, controller, and other peripherals, characterised by its autonomy. An *isola interrata* is a waste container which, by burying it, is isolated from the outside. Isolation is then the key feature of ISLAND applied to these phraseological units, as in the cases of *supermarket isle*, *isola ecologica*, etc.

3.3. Verbs with ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA as subject

The synthetically subordinate position of the ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA as verbal object was reflected in a series of collocations that illustrate the conception of the island territory as prey, endowed with strategic value and thus the victim of ambitions and desire for human conquest. This completely changes when ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA is used as a subject, with the semantic prosody becoming positive, particularly in the Italian corpus language, as shown in Table 3¹⁵.

Table 3. Verbs with ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA as subject

	ENGLISH ENTENTEN20						ITALIAN ITTENTEN16		
	ISLAND	Freq	Score	ISLE	Freq	Score	ISOLA	Freq	Score
		390016	13.3		5344	8.54		8521	1.52
1	hop	1714	7.030	knit	101	6.680	Egadi	51	7.600
2	lie	4394	6.290	teem	7	3.170	dell'arcipelago	35	7.060
3	boast	1214	5.850	excel	12	2.470	ospitare	270	6.910
4	belong	1917	5.730	afford	14	1.920	godere	108	6.900
5	develop	4052	5.560	render	12	1.200	vantare	95	6.850
6	dot	501	5.230	float	13	1.180	offrire	845	6.650
7	float	636	5.180	sink	12	1.160	Solomon	26	6.630
8	form	1754	5.100	abound	8	0.910	Lofoten	26	6.630
9	stretch	596	5.060	lie	80	0.850	distare	53	6.630
10	sink	568	5.050	scream	7	0.550	divenire	174	6.510
11	attract	656	4.770	boast	13	0.490	sprofondare	26	6.450
12	surround	1375	4.580	await	10	0.190	conservare	73	6.400
13	disappear	591	4.510				custodire	29	6.260
14	offer	4071	4.440				Hawaii	20	6.260
15	rise	1172	4.360				attirare	36	6.160
16	become	5295	4.320				dell'Arcipelago	18	6.100
17	teem	245	4.290				formare	47	6.080
18	house	305	4.250				Cicladi	17	6.030
19	experience	840	4.210				racchiudere	28	5.990

¹⁵ Word Sketch restricts the results for ISLE in the English corpus to the top 12 in this case.

20	overlook	393	4.210				appartenere	122	5.950
21	remain	2449	4.200				attrarre	21	5.900
22	host	820	4.090				possedere	91	5.880
23	shelter	213	4.090				contare	68	5.800
24	consist	1067	4.070				regalare	58	5.800
25	separate	334	4.020				estendere	45	5.710
26	call	2853	3.970				nascondere	40	5.690
27	bear	428	3.910				scomparire	30	5.540
28	suffer	724	3.870				affascinare	16	5.540
29	cruise	252	3.840				abbondare	14	5.500
30	comprise	648	3.790				risplendere	14	5.440
31	protect	409	3.750				meritare	53	5.430
32	measure	359	3.750				pullulare	13	5.430
33	face	1018	3.680				galleggiare	12	5.400
34	divide	235	3.660				cimbra	11	5.390
35	enjoy	578	3.650				prestare	31	5.360
36	sit	727	3.620				popolare	12	5.360
37	lack	357	3.590				accogliere	56	5.330
38	be	195306	3.570				splendere	19	5.320
39	recover	254	3.560				affondare	17	5.280
40	extend	441	3.530				assomigliare	15	5.260
41	contain	1446	3.520				subire	70	5.260
42	abound	182	3.510				Vergini	10	5.260
43	feature	1088	3.480				errare	13	5.190
44	possess	249	3.480				raggiungere	99	5.140
45	retain	244	3.470				rimanere	99	5.120
46	resemble	216	3.470				vivere	121	5.100
47	appear	1414	3.450				trovare	427	5.100
48	have	45736	3.450				svuotare	11	5.070
49	inspire	399	3.400				arare	9	4.990
50	jut	130	3.400				distinguere	22	4.980

Slightly modifying the categories proposed by Arroyo Hernández (2020) for the language pair Spanish/Italian, it is possible to group the semantic preferences of collocations referring to:

- (i) geographical indications,
- (ii) material and human receptivity and availability,
- (iii) beauty.

This search has proved the most difficult among those with Word Sketch, by giving some results to be expunged. The three first positions in the two languages are in fact misleading and therefore need to be excluded: *hop* (1) refers to island hopping, going from one island to the other, *knit* (1) refers to fair isle knitting, a technique for making knitwear, and *Egadi* (1) is the name of an Italian archipelago. In the Italian corpus, other island names must be bypassed – *Solomon* (7), *Lofoten* (8), *Hawaii* (14), *Cicladì* (18), *Vergini* (42)¹⁶ – two geographical collocations – *dell'arcipelago* (1),

¹⁶ To this group also belongs the verb *arare* (49) which has been mistaken by WordSketch with 'Aran'.

dell'Arcipelago (16) – and the *isola cimbra* (34), which is a linguistic enclave in Luserna. From the English corpus, the concordances of *develop* (5) are actually from the acronym SIDS (Small Island Developing States), and *cruise* (29) is part of the phrase *island cruise* – a trip to the island. Finally, *isle scream* (2) must be ruled out for being actually used in sentences like: «they had ushers dress up in Halloween masks and run up and down the isles screaming», where the subject is not the isle. The geographical aspects include verbs like *belong* (4) / *appartenere* (20), placing the island in an eminently non-agent role: it is a territory that is part of a superior whole, be it an archipelago, or a political entity to which it is subordinate. The island, coveted and disputed, can *float* (7) / *float* (6) / *galleggiare* (33), it can *form* (8) / *formare* (17) archipelagos, and among their geographical characteristics is *measur[ing]* (32), *extend[ing]* (40) / *estendere* and occupying a certain portion of space – *lie* (2) / *lie* (2) / *trovare* (47) and *rimanere* (45). Relative spatial isolation refers to the Italian position *distare* (9), hinting to the fact that the coordinates of the island are relative to a second point, the origin of the calculation and the journey leading to the territory of the island: the ruler's gaze (Arroyo Hernández 2020: 370).

Mystery, which as we have seen is a modifier of great positional strength, is alluded to in the Italian corpus by verbs like *custodire* (13), *racchiudere* (19) *nascondere* (26): the island hides vestiges, secrets, jewels, landscapes, and curses. Folklore abounds with stories about enchanted islands, places where heroes relax and come back one day, islands that attract and never let people leave, «islands that appear and disappear» (Stephanides and Bassnett 2008) and this is reflected in both language corpora: *disappear* (13) / *scomparire* (27) or *sink* (10) / *sprofondare* (11), *affondare* (39). Sometimes they do *rise* (15), *appear* (47), and *float* (7) / *float* (6) / *galleggiare* (33) and *wander* / *errare* (43). Like a shrine, by virtue of their isolation, islands can *boast* (3), *shelter* (23), *protect* (31), *contain* (41) or *retain* (45) – and in the Italian corpus *conservare* (12) – species of flora and fauna, uncontaminated spaces, linguistic characters or ancient rites and traditions, which can attract tourists and other visitors.

Material and human receptivity and availability is in fact the second category used to group the verbs deriving, in the majority of cases, from tourism discourse. The island is regarded as a desirable otherness and, as a result, as an ideal tourist destination. The impact of tourism on island territories is reflected in the corpus of semantic preference for verbal collocations where the islands, as agent subjects, can *house* (18) *host* (22) / *ospitare* (3), *accogliere* (37), *attract* (11) / *attirare* (15), *attrarre* (21), *inspire* (49) and *affascinare* (28) tourists thanks to the charm and resources they *have* (48). Treasures (natural and artificial) are also the objects of verbs like *boast* (3) / *boast* (11) / *vantare* (5); *teem* (17) / *abound* (8) or *teem* (2) / *abbondare* (29), *pullulare* (32); *offer* (14) / *afford* (4) / *offrirre* (6); *feature* (43) and *have* (48) / *possedere* (22); *enjoy* (35) / *godere* (4); *contare* (23) and *regalare* (24).

Hosting, enjoying, boasting and offering occupy the first places in the Italian corpus, where the vision of the island as a place worth – *meritare* (31) – visiting seems stronger. Possibly because of the nicer weather enjoyed by the Italian islands, that naturally shine – *risplendere* (30), *splendere* (38), just like «Greek islands experience a phenomenal thirteen sunshine hours per day during July» (19). The semantic prosody of the verbal patterns examined here reveals an evocative, suggestive, and captivating sound for those who contemplate the island from the outside, or from the *mainland*, particularly among Italians¹⁷.

An island, however, in the English corpus may be seen as superior to all others: England. As John Dryden wrote in his English Restoration poem *King Arthur* (1691) Albion is a «Fairest Isle, all Isles Excelling»¹⁸.

¹⁷ This data is consistent with Arroyo Hernández's (2020) findings, which show that Italians have a more positive perception of the islands than Spaniards.

¹⁸ *Excel* is the third collocation for *isle*, all the concordances found by WordSketch are actually quotes from this poem or from a song by Purcell which quotes Dryden's line.

3.4. Nominal attributes ‘the ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA is a...’

In Table 4, the most important positions for indefinite nominal attribute ‘the ISLAND is a’ are mainly geographic terms with a neutral semantic prosody: the tautological *island* (1) *Island* (2) / *island* (2) / *isola* (21); *territory* (9) / *territorio* (11); *archipelago* (7), *park* (15) / *parco* (4); *place* (25) / *place* (6) / *posto* (15); *site* (13) / *luogo* (16); *area* (42) / *area* (9), *zona* (10), *land* (35) / *terra* (23), a *spot* (16) / *punto* (26), a *centre* (44) / *centro* (22), *base* (34) / *base* (25), *regione* (24)¹⁹.

Small islands can be identified with their main attraction, a *volcano* (17) / *vulcano*, or a *beach* (18), *park* (27), *village* (29), *lighthouse* (32), *forest* (38), *peak* (46).

Table 4. Nominal attributes ‘the ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA is a...’

	ENGLISH ENTENTEN20						ITALIAN ITTENTEN16		
	ISLAND	Freq	Score	ISLE	Freq	Score	ISOLA	Freq	Score
		34788	1.19		143	0.23		884	0.16
1	island	694	8.380	folk	7	5.090	paradiso	103	10.870
2	Island	403	8.350	island	9	3.130	meta	100	9.640
3	destination	806	7.960	mile	20	1.710	riserva	20	9.370
4	paradise	332	7.920	home	29	1.330	parco	29	9.310
5	home	2938	7.860	piece	8	1.140	destinazione	27	9.180
6	reserve	250	7.670	place	25	0.510	rifugio	17	8.880
7	kilometre	343	7.660				colonia	13	8.740
8	km	731	7.580				gioiello	14	8.630
9	territory	254	7.500				area	16	8.420
10	mile	1235	7.420				zona	15	8.150
11	sanctuary	197	7.310				territorio	14	8.130
12	haven	219	7.260				sede	35	8.130
13	site	583	6.990				habitat	8	8.100
14	colony	156	6.920				vulcano	9	8.080
15	park	210	6.780				posto	26	7.750
16	spot	287	6.770				luogo	99	7.690
17	volcano	126	6.770				ideale	15	7.640
18	beach	148	6.720				mondo	18	7.540
19	location	316	6.700				teatro	11	7.430
20	kilometer	189	6.670				patria	8	7.400
21	km2	137	6.570				isola	18	7.150
22	habitat	108	6.370				centro	20	7.070
23	rock	139	6.330				terra	16	6.710
24	refuge	97	6.290				regione	22	6.700
25	place	1417	6.250				base	8	6.570
26	resort	114	6.130				punto	21	6.460
27	Park	101	6.130				parte	35	6.320

¹⁹ In this case, Word Sketch limits the results for *isle* in the English corpus to the top 6 and for the Italian corpus to the top 27.

28	acre	104	6.080						
29	village	127	6.030						
30	ride	97	6.030						
31	remnant	76	5.940						
32	lighthouse	69	5.940						
33	hectare	76	5.920						
34	base	120	5.920						
35	land	129	5.900						
36	metre	144	5.890						
37	m	123	5.840						
38	forest	79	5.840						
39	reef	63	5.840						
40	coast	63	5.840						
41	atoll	61	5.820						
42	area	378	5.810						
43	attraction	109	5.780						
44	centre	117	5.760						
45	preserve	60	5.730						
46	peak	64	5.700						
47	ruin	62	5.680						
48	host	102	5.660						
49	plateau	55	5.640						
50	ground	93	5.620						

In literature and folklore, islands are often seen as earthly paradises, probably as a consequence of the Renaissance, with European expansion and the colonization of other lands. Prospero's island and Utopia had a tremendous impact on the history of literature and ideas – and position 17 in the Italian corpus is a utopian *ideale* (17). The island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where Prospero lives in his exile, contested by the native Caliban, has become the archetypal island of the European colonial era «for here a kind of magic that would not be permissible in urban society is used to control the destinies of those who inhabit the island, both as its natives and as its conquerors» (Stephanides and Bassnett 2008).

Throughout the centuries Caliban's passionate words for his island (Act 3, Scene 2) have been interpreted as patriotic love for one's homeland (particularly with regard to England) or the regret of a subjugated local inhabitant of the island:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
 That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me; that, when I waked,
 I cried to dream again.

This monologue was also delivered in the opening ceremony of London 2012 by Kenneth Branagh, the famous Shakespearian actor and director, testifying of its unending influence on contemporary

culture. Further, Prospero's last monologue, generally considered Shakespeare's farewell to theatre, identifying the island with a small world – whole in itself – may have given semantic ground for collocations like *teatro* (19) e *mondo* (18). Thus, it is not surprising that in Table 4 *paradise* (4) / *paradiso* (1) in a prominent position 12. The island is a desirable *destination* (3) / *meta* (2), *destinazione* (5) for tourists, an *attraction* (43), a jewel / *gioiello* (8), ready to disclose its amazing nature and ancient *ruins* (47).

The view of the island as an idealised place of pre-anthropocentric nature is reflected in the table, where it is seen as *home* (5) / *home* (4) / *patria* (20), *habitat* (22) / *habitat* (13), *reserve* (6) / *riserva* (3) for animals and plants living in *colony* (14) / *colonia* (7), a *refuge* (24) / *rifugio* (6) of biodiversity, *sanctuary* (11) or *haven* (12).

Finally, all occurrences of *folk*, the first position for *Isle*, are derived from quotations from Sir John Mandeville's mid-fourteenth-century description of the East, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, in which the titular protagonist describes the people he met throughout his trips – «In one of these isles be folk of great stature, as giants». This explains why this noun was not found in any of the other groups.

4. Concluding remarks

The present study has revealed how the multifarious nuances of the term ISLAND/ISLE/ISOLA are reflected in the English and Italian speaking communities. However, the analysis carried out with the Sketch Engine platform has revealed a sort of 'insular semantics', shared by the two epistemological communities that generate it.

The image of the island as a distant geographical space renders it mysterious, and attractive as a tourism destination. The laudatory narration of the island, more evident in the Italian corpus and not contrasted by semantic preferences emanating negative evaluations of the island itself, is functional to its promotion as a tourist destination. Moreover, its natural attractions recurrently identify it as a paradise. The only negative examples come from the perils that derive from atmospheric phenomena, which may devastate an island. Not surprisingly, such examples occur more often in the English corpus: the communities where it is used live in countries where the weather is notoriously not as benevolent as in Italy.

On the contrary to the results obtained by Arroyo Hernández (2020), who contrasted the Spanish and Italian corpora, in the English/Italian language pair it was not found a vision of the island as hell, as an ideal prison because of its isolation. However, a negative prosody is to be registered also here as a consequence of the vulnerability to human invasion, which today translates into the demand for standards for sustainable tourism.

There is a need of further studies to reveal the differences between the various English speaking communities to evaluate possible intralingual variations, by means of the study of geographical or territorial subcorpora, to qualify conceptual representations and to reflect the internal diversity contained in languages. Also, the repetition of the same study with different corpora would be needed, in order to confute or confirm the present analysis, which represents a mere islet in the ocean of corpora research.

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