

“Shades of Green”

Greenness in Sustainability Discourse in British and Italian Media

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Abstract

Within sustainability discourse, *green* is frequently employed in combination with a wide range of nouns, acting as a versatile signifier of attention to environmental issues (Fuoli and Beelitz 2023; Bevitori 2012). Its literal meaning metonymically grounds it in the physical environment, allowing it to stand in for the natural world, and this mapping underpins the conceptual metaphor GREEN AS GOOD FOR THE PLANET (Augé 2019) or GREEN AS SUSTAINABLE. This study aims to understand how greenness is constructed in sustainability discourse, through the analysis of a comparable corpus of articles in British and Italian newspapers containing the words *sustainability/sustainable development* and the Italian equivalents. The collocational behaviour of *green* was examined to uncover patterns of usage, which were further investigated through concordances.

Findings show that metaphorical uses predominate, with collocations relating predominantly to the semantic domains of economy and finance, policy, energy and technology. While both languages also present a number of literal uses for, respectively, *green* and *verde*, Italian divides its semantic space by employing the borrowed adjective *green* with the exclusive function of unambiguously signalling a connection to sustainability. The notion of greenness is in a few cases extended creatively, with the aim of conveying more nuanced understandings of sustainability efforts. Nonetheless, overall lexical patterns suggest that *green* operates as a floating signifier, similarly to *sustainability* (Catenaccio 2019), evoking ethicality while simultaneously avoiding engaging concretely with environmental issues.

1. Introduction

The association between the colour green and environmental sustainability concerns has become firmly established in contemporary discourse (Duarte Silva and Almeida 2020; Bevitori 2012). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), these ties can be traced back to political movements in the 1970s in West Germany such as the Grüne Aktion Zukunft (Green Campaign for the Future) (OED *green*). The Brundtland Report (WCED 1987, 98), which introduced the current notion of sustainable development, references a “Green Revolution,” while climate science policy documents use the expression “Greening government” as early as

1995 (Shaw and Nerlich 2015, 37). More recently, the term has been used in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis in "Green New Deal," coined by New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman (2007), and "green recovery" (Shaw and Nerlich 2015, 37), referring to economic stimulus packages aimed at addressing environmental problems and exemplifying the prevailing tendency to integrate environmental action with the imperatives of economic growth. Since its inception, the use of *green* in sustainability discourse has relied upon the principle of the "greening of growth" (Feindt and Cowell 2010, 191), the assumption that the best means to address environmental problems are technological improvements and market mechanisms (Jänicke 2008). Climate change mitigation is conceptualised as a driver of growth and a source of competitive advantage (Shaw and Nerlich 2015). This discursive framing contributes to a narrative of a "painless 'transition' to low carbon world" (Shaw and Nerlich 2015, 38), achievable without requiring major structural changes. The transition is framed as constituting an opportunity rather than a disruption to current mechanisms: individuals and countries could be "richer by being greener" (Nerlich 2012, 40) and "make healthy profits as an ethical investor" (*The Daily Mail* 2015 qtd. in Diprose, et al. 2018, 677).

The same tendencies are reflected in green marketing. In 1988, *The Green Consumer Guide* (Elkington and Hailes 1988) consolidated this trend by identifying the emerging figure of the environmentally responsible consumer. Since then, a company's environmental reputation has exerted increasing influence on consumers' purchasing behaviour, leading companies to position themselves as *green* in order to build brand loyalty (Sahakyan 2016). Corporate discourse has been shown to employ *green* as a flexible marker of environmental commitment, collocating with a wide variety of business-related terms (Fuoli and Beelitz 2023). Green products are often promoted as sustainable, encouraging a form of "green consumerism" (Atanasova 2019, 701). British media, for instance, were found to frequently use both *green* and *sustainable* in headlines, contributing to the consolidation of a false sense of progress with regard to the reduction of carbon emissions (Koteyko 2012). The term has thus been established as a shorthand that enables businesses to present an environmentally conscious attitude, and consumers to become part of the solution by buying products that are sanctioned as being 'good for the environment.' Overall, green discourse appears to be characterised by an overarching notion of "turning 'green into gold'" (Nerlich 2012, 33), consolidating a discursive tendency where labelling something as *green* simultaneously endows it with the positive marker of environmentalism while still ensuring that it will contribute to growth and profit. This operates across levels, from international and national policy to market dynamics.

These framings have been however subject to sharp criticism: evaluating the impact of the Green New Deal, Feindt and Cowell note that these schemes maintained consumption and failed to promote more fundamental changes necessary for genuine "ecological restructuring"

(2010, 195). The market-based approach to climate change is unlikely to actually contribute meaningfully to sustainable climate mitigation (Nerlich 2012). Similarly, green advertising has been criticised for relying on "the subjective perception of the producer and the consumer" (Akenji 2014, 16), rather than objective sustainability metrics, and for placing an undue burden on individual consumers and their choices, as though they alone could determine the success of the transition (Akenji 2014). This prevailing approach is criticised due to the inherent conflict between the lifestyle oftentimes marketed as 'green' and the actual demands of environmentalism. As Monbiot (2007) observes, "giving things up is an essential component of going green." These fundamental contradictions between the messaging being conveyed and the actual changes required to address climate issues lead to widespread misuse of the *green* label. It is often invoked without substantial proof to back the claim, contributing to the establishment of greenwashing (Pérez-Sobrino 2013). In Italian, the adjective *green* is used to provide a generic semantic link to the environment (Niceforo 2023), while the presence of Anglicisms in promotional texts has been recognised as a sign of greenwashing that projects an image of authoritativeness and reliability (Caimotto and Molino 2011).

Newspapers often uncritically reproduce the rhetoric of corporate advertising (Koteyko 2012, 33). Mass media serve as a crucial mediator in this communication process, functioning not merely as a conduit for reporting events but rather providing interpretative portrayals that reflect underlying ideological perspectives (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013, 3). A significant link between the focus of media attention and public perceptions on the relevance of an issue has long been identified (Atwater, Salwen and Anderson 1985) and media discourse thus remains a privileged vehicle for introducing dominant views into society (van Dijk 2005). When newspapers unquestionably transmit 'green growth' and 'green consumerism' narratives, this concept becomes established in public discourse and less likely to be challenged by counter discourses.

2. Metonymy and metaphor

Metonymy is generally understood as "a process which allows us to use one well-understood aspect of something to stand for the thing as a whole, or for some other aspect of it, or for something to which it is very closely related" (Littlemore 2015, 4). Different types of metonymies, leveraging different kinds of relations between the referent and the element chosen to metonymically represent it, can be identified, with two over-arching categories: WHOLE AND PART and PART AND PART (Radden and Kövecses 1999). Within the former, one possible metonymy type entails the salient property of a category being used to refer to the category as a whole (Littlemore 2015). A specific SALIENT PROPERTY FOR CATEGORY metonymy,

COLOUR FOR OBJECT, motivates the use of *green*, which stands for vegetation and the environment more generally (Duarte Silva and Almeida 2020; Hamilton 2016), instantiating a "GREEN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT metonymy" (Augé 2019, 1). Since this metonymy has become so entrenched in language, its positive associations are now systematically exploited when it collocates with abstract words such as economy, taxes and rhetoric (Augé 2019). Attributing to something the property of greenness equates to positively characterising it as environmentally-friendly; therefore, when the referent to which greenness is attributed does not inherently possess any material connection to the colour, the interaction between metonymy and metaphor is used to establish the conceptual metaphor GREEN AS GOOD FOR THE PLANET (Augé 2019, 1), or GREEN AS SUSTAINABLE.

This constitutes a "metonymy-based metaphor" (Deignan 2005, 67): the term has a literal sense, describing entities that are physically characterised by the colour green, and a figurative sense, denoting something that is "of, relating to, or supporting environmentalism, esp. as a political issue" or "of a product, service, etc.: designed, produced, or operating in a way that minimizes harm to the natural environment" (OED *green*). The metaphor is based on the metonymy inasmuch as it is grounded in the association between the colour and nature; however, there is no "continuum of meaning between the two senses" (Deignan 2005, 68), since, when contextualised, the collocates can readily be associated with either one sense or another.

3. Data and methodology

To investigate the use of *green* and *verde* in sustainability discourse, two comparable corpora of Italian and English news articles were created. The articles were collected in a three-month timeframe, starting on the 2nd of May 2022, when the 8th EAP, Environment Action Programme to 2030, entered into force as the "EU's legally agreed upon common agenda for environment policy until the end of 2030" (European Commission 2022), and ending on the 31st of July 2022. Four British and four Italian newspapers were selected: *Financial Times (FT)*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *Corriere della Sera (CdS)*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Giornale*.

The selection was designed to capture a reasonably broad range of perspectives within each country's media landscape, with each sample including a right-leaning newspaper (*The Telegraph*; *Il Giornale*), a left-leaning one (*The Guardian*; *La Repubblica*), a centrist publication (*The Independent*; *CdS*), and a business-oriented outlet (*FT*; *Il Sole 24 Ore*), drawing on reader perception surveys (Massara 2019; Smith 2017) and classifications adopted in previous studies of the British and/or Italian press (Koller 2024; Mancini et al. 2017). For each newspaper, all articles mentioning the search terms *sustainability* or *sustainable development* and the Italian

equivalents were collected (through the database *MyDesk24* for *Il Sole 24 Ore*, with the *Bootcat* toolkit for *Repubblica* and *Il Giornale*, and through the database *Nexis Uni* for the remaining five), resulting in two comparable corpora of, respectively, 1,106,277 tokens for the Italian corpus (ITA) and 808,402 tokens for the English corpus (ENG). Table 1 details the composition of the corpora.

Newspaper	Articles	Tokens
<i>Il Sole 24 Ore</i>	479	317,529
<i>Financial Times</i>	138	138,156
<i>Corriere della Sera</i>	533	326,001
<i>The Independent</i>	281	281,156
<i>Il Giornale</i>	90	80,584
<i>The Telegraph</i>	83	86,757
<i>La Repubblica</i>	441	382,163
<i>The Guardian</i>	213	302,333
TOTAL (ITA)	1543	1,106,277
TOTAL (ENG)	715	808,402
TOTAL	2,258	1,914,679

Tab. 1: Corpus composition: number of articles and tokens for each individual newspaper source and for the two corpora

The analysis aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the collocational behaviour of *verde* and *green* in ITA and ENG, and what does it reveal about their discursive functions in sustainability discourse?
2. What are the shared patterns and the differences between English and Italian newspapers in their use of these terms?
3. What is the role of linguistic creativity, and what rhetorical or persuasive functions does it serve beyond conventional usage?

To this end, the SketchEngine platform (Kilgarriff et al. 2014) was used to obtain Word Sketches of *verde* and *green* in ITA, and *green* in ENG. Word Sketches are tools that provide a synthetic overview of the grammatical and collocational behaviour of words by processing the context in which a word usually occurs (Kilgarriff et al. 2010). Focussing on the analysis of the words with which a word of interest frequently collocates can help shed light on the discourses surrounding it and the landscape of concepts with which it is associated (Brookes and McEnery 2020).

The collocational behaviour of these adjectives was compared at two levels: an intra-corpus comparison contrasting *verde* and *green* within ITA, and an inter-corpus comparison examining *verde/green* (ITA) against *green* (ENG). Political orientation was a criterion at the level of corpus construction, ensuring representativeness across the mainstream spectrum, but the primary

variable under investigation in the analysis is cross-linguistic, since the study aims to provide a better understanding of language-level patterns in the discursive construction of sustainability. While SketchEngine also offers a Sketch Difference function, which allows pairwise comparison of two items within a corpus, the present study opted for individual Word Sketches. Since the analysis involved a three-way comparison across two corpora (*verde* and *green* in ITA, *green* in ENG), individual Word Sketches provided a more consistent and transparent analytical framework, applicable to both the intra-corpus and the inter-corpus level of comparison. The analysis examines the nouns modified by *green* and *verde*; this represents the consistently most productive category, both by total frequency and by number of collocates, for all three adjectives, and is the grammatical pattern that most directly identifies what entities, processes, and concepts are labelled as *green*.

After identifying general collocational patterns and investigating them through concordances, examples of more creative instantiations were identified.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The collocational behaviour of *verde* and *green* in the Italian corpus

Noun (_verde)	Frequency	Score	Noun (_green)	Frequency	Score ¹
transizione (‘transition’)	21	9.69	deal	41	11.5
area (‘area’)	19	9.94	transizione (‘transition’)	20	9.52
spazio (‘space’)	18	10.1	<i>economy</i>	14	10.22
energia (‘energy’)	15	9.53	svolta (‘turn’)	8	9.37
Spighe (‘wheat spikes’)	15	10.6	rivoluzione (‘revolution’)	8	9.22
polmone (‘lung’)	14	10.49	ottica (‘perspective’)	8	9.42
investimento (‘investment’)	8	8.8	<i>bond</i>	7	9.23
rivoluzione (‘revolution’)	7	9.2	tecnologia (‘technology’)	5	8.03
bandiera (‘flag’)	7	9.42	estate (‘summer’)	5	8.61
oasi (‘oasis’)	4	8.74	turismo (‘tourism’)	5	8.55
svolta (‘turn’)	4	8.62	mobilità (‘mobility’)	5	8
misura (‘measure’)	4	8.38	progetto (‘plan’)	5	7.82
città (‘city’)	4	8.07	energia (‘energy’)	4	7.5
fisco (‘taxation’)	3	8.34	ambassador	4	8.48
tassonomia (‘taxonomy’)	3	8.33	trasformazione (‘transformation’)	4	8.07
anima (‘soul’)	3	8.27	trasporto (‘transport’)	4	8.05
tetto (‘roof’)	3	8.27	futuro (‘future’)	4	8.05
edilizia (‘construction industry’)	3	8.16	iniziativa (‘initiative’)	4	8.05
gas (‘gas’)	3	7.98	vessillo (‘banner’)	3	8.05

¹ The typicality score is logDice (Rychlý 2008), quantifying the strength of the association between the keyword and the collocate within a given grammatical relation by comparing how often the two words co-occur in that relation against how often each occurs independently in any grammatical relation.

percorso ('path')	3	7.74	building	3	8.07
spiga ('wheat spike')	2	7.76	skill	3	8.05
cintura ('belt')	2	7.75	community	3	8.05
contabilità ('accounting')	2	7.75	costume ('swimsuit')	3	8.03
Stella ('Star')	2	7.75	ambito ('sphere')	3	7.64
speranza ('hope')	2	7.75	tema ('topic')	3	7.5
bollino ('sticker')	2	7.75	prodotto ('product')	3	7.17
vessillo ('banner')	2	7.73	gas ('gas')	2	7.18
<i>obbligazione</i> ('bond')	2	7.73	<i>technologies</i>	2	7.49
onda ('wave')	2	7.71	jobs	2	7.49
nota ('note')	2	7.71	rooftop	2	7.49
corridoio ('corridor')	2	7.71	station	2	7.48
cuore ('heart')	2	7.66	claim	2	7.48
superficie ('surface')	2	7.57	rivestimento ('coating')	2	7.48
via ('route')	2	7.43	campus	2	7.45
Italia ('Italy')	2	7.35	filosofia ('philosophy')	2	7.44
tecnologia ('technology')	2	6.86	packaging	2	7.42
<i>economia</i> ('economy')	2	6.68	opzione ('option')	2	7.42
sostenibilità ('sustainability')	2	6.55	lato ('side')	2	7.42
			acquisto ('purchase')	2	7.39
			moda ('fashion')	2	7.36
			tematica ('theme')	2	7.31
			offerta ('offer')	2	7.21
			visione ('vision')	2	7.2
			design	2	7.19
			tessuto ('fabric')	2	7.14
			impegno ('commitment')	2	7.14
			intervento ('intervention')	2	7.12
			sede ('headquarters')	2	7.09
			competenza ('expertise')	2	6.99
			evento ('event')	2	6.93
			soluzione ('solution')	2	6.68
			impresa ('company')	2	6.61
			azienda ('company')	2	6.27
TOTAL	197		TOTAL	233	

Tab. 2: Collocates for *verde* and *green* in ITA, with absolute frequencies and typicality scores²

Table 2 shows the collocates for *verde* and *green*, with the frequency threshold ≥ 2 . In the table, collocates in bold appear with both adjectives, while those in italics constitute cross-linguistic pairs: English loanwords collocating with *green*, and their Italian equivalents collocating with *verde* (e.g., *green economy* and *economia verde*). Three collocates were excluded as irrelevant to

² The "nouns modified by" column within the WordSketch identifies collocates on the basis of grammatical relations rather than a fixed collocational window. The rule, as stated in the Sketch Grammar for Italian, comprises two patterns, reflecting both pre-nominal and post-nominal adjective positions. In the former, *verde* (tagged as a non-possessive adjective) precedes an optional proper noun and then the target noun. In the latter, the target noun is followed by an optional adverb and then *verde* (again tagged as a non-possessive adjective). Both patterns also apply to *green* in ITA.

environmental discourse: references to the composer *Giuseppe Verdi*, *numero verde* (toll-free telephone number), and *Green Pass* (Italy's digital COVID-19 certificate system). Conversely, proper names with environmental meanings were retained. This methodological choice was guided by the intention of documenting as accurately as possible the establishment of green terminology within Italian, which has extended to numerous proper names that sanction environmentally friendly practices. However, it is important to note the differences between constrained and free lexical choices: while proper names may employ similar semantic mappings and discursive constructions, their usage reflects prior naming decisions rather than speakers' active selection among available options. For *verde*, this concerns 4 collocates totalling 31 occurrences: *Spiga Verde* ('Green Spike') and *Bandiera Verde* ('Green Flag'), awards recognising Italian localities promoting sustainable practices; *Michelin Stella Verde* (Michelin Green Star), an award for restaurants committed to sustainable gastronomy; and *rivoluzione verde*, referring to "Green Revolution and Technological Transition," one of the six missions of Italy's PNRR (National Recovery and Resilience Plan). For *green*, proper names encompass 4 collocates totalling 48 occurrences, dominated by the *Green Deal* (41 occurrences), the European Commission's flagship climate neutrality initiative targeting 2050, followed by the considerably less frequent *vessillo green* (3 occurrences), an alternative name for the Bandiera Verde award; *World Green Rooftop Day* (2), an international awareness campaign for sustainable urban infrastructure; and *Green Station* (2), a sustainability hub.

4.1.1 The intra-corpus comparison of *verde* and *green*

How does the English loanword *green* structure the semantic space alongside *verde*? Notably, *green* has substantially more collocates (53) than *verde* (38), and collocational patterns reveal a functional division between the two adjectives. *Verde* exhibits both metonymic and metaphorical uses, while *green* functions exclusively metaphorically. 10 of *verde*'s 38 collocates, such as *area* ('area') or *spazio* ('space'), designate physical spaces containing greenery, accounting for 69 of 197 total occurrences (35%). Three of the six most frequent collocates fall into this category:

- (1) Arbolia, società benefit impegnata nella creazione di nuove aree verdi in Italia, ha realizzato un bosco urbano con oltre 3.600 piante a Roma (La Repubblica 26 May 2022)
Arbolia, a benefit company committed to the creation of new green areas in Italy, has created an urban forest with over 3,600 trees in Rome³

³ In the examples, the node (*green/verde*) appears in italics, and the collocate is underlined. The English translation is presented in italics; consequently, the node appears in roman type within the translation so as to preserve the same visual distinction.

As example (1) shows, uses typically reference public spaces such as urban parks and nature reserves, a function that is allocated entirely to *verde*. The remaining collocates for *verde*, and all collocates for *green*, operate metaphorically, referring to more abstract notions relating to environmental sustainability rather than literal greenery.

Excluding the proper name *Green Deal*, the most frequent collocate for both adjectives is *transizione* ('transition,' 21 with *verde*, 20 with *green*). *Transizione* qualifies an array of measures constituting the broad shift toward a low-carbon economy, resource efficiency, and environmental sustainability. It functions as a deliberately vague umbrella term, bundling heterogeneous processes together, from policies to research and development, under a single forward-moving narrative. The framing emphasises steady, controllable change toward a new economic model, highlighting solutions as achievable and reasonable:

- (2) "Eni, nessuna frenata nella transizione verde" (Il Sole 24 Ore 13 July 2022)
"Eni, no slowdown in the green transition"
- (3) Cresce l'impegno delle imprese per la transizione verde: sono 441.000 quelle che negli ultimi cinque anni hanno investito in prodotti e tecnologie green (CdS 7 giugno 2022)
Corporate commitment to the green transition is growing: 441,000 companies have invested in green products and technologies over the past five years

In (2) Eni, the Italian energy company, though still primarily an oil and gas company, is discursively positioned as a proactive participant in the energy transition, since it has begun diversifying into renewables. The transition is operationalised as forward progress, implicitly suggesting continuity with the existing system rather than a break from it, reinforcing the framing of transition as incremental progress rather than structural rupture, and establishing Eni's commitment through the notion that there will be 'no slowdown.' This framing is extended in (3) by presenting it as a general trend embraced by an increasing number of companies, with commitment substantiated through concrete investment in 'green products and technologies.' This example additionally foregrounds another prominent semantic field in the results, that of energy and technology; *energia* ('energy'), *gas*, and *tecnologia/technologies* appear with both adjectives, totalling 7 collocates, with 20 occurrences for *verde* and 13 for *green*.

- (4) Con il *Green Deal* sono cominciati i primi segnali di risveglio, poi la pandemia ha innescato la solidarietà tra i Paesi e ha indicato la strada della doppia transizione verde e digitale per rendere l'economia più forte (Il Sole 24 Ore 20 giugno 2022)

With the Green Deal, the first signs of awakening began; then the pandemic triggered solidarity among countries and pointed the way toward the twin green and digital transition to make the economy stronger

Where (2) and (3) reflect the tendency, well documented in the literature, for newspaper discourse to reproduce a corporate register in which green functions as a marker of ethical positioning and environmental commitment, (4) introduces two further dimensions. The Green Deal, the single most frequent collocate overall with 41 occurrences, is identified as the initial impulse of the 'green and digital transition,' which, crucially, is not an end in itself but rather the mechanism through which the economy can be strengthened. Equally significant is the pairing of the green and digital transitions as twin processes: by placing them in an explicit parallel relationship, the example frames the implementation of green measures as inseparable from technological advancement and digitalisation, positioning environmental progress as part of a broader modernising trajectory

However, critical counterpoints to these predominantly positive framings emerge.

- (5) Ma per affrontare la sfida della transizione verde occorre ci vengano dati gli strumenti per raggiungere gli obiettivi (Il Sole 24 Ore 31 May 2022)
But to face the challenge of the green transition, we need to be given the tools to meet the objectives

- (6) Sulla transizione verde è emerso il timore dell'impatto sull'occupazione: la forza lavoro va riqualificata e va data particolare attenzione alle pmi (Il Sole 24 Ore 21 June 2022)
Regarding the green transition, concern has emerged over the impact on employment: the workforce needs to be retrained, and particular attention must be paid to SMEs

Example (5) frames the green transition as contingent: its success is presented as dependent on the provision of adequate instruments, implicitly acknowledging that these may currently be lacking. Example (6) extends this critical dimension to the social sphere, foregrounding concerns about the employment impact of the transition and the need for workforce retraining, with particular attention directed at SMEs (small and medium enterprises) as a potentially vulnerable category. Despite the prevailing tendency to frame the transition as a series of necessary and beneficial measures paired with economic development, newspaper discourse also registers awareness of its risks and unresolved challenges.

Issues also emerge in connection with the finance world, represented by collocates such as *investimento* ('investment') and *economia* ('economy') co-occurring with *verde*, totalling 17 occurrences, and *economy* and *bond*, co-occurring with *green* and totalling 21 occurrences.

(7) Investimenti verdi per finta? (Il Sole 24 Ore 1 June 2022)

Make-believe green investments?

The article addresses a greenwashing investigation into Deutsche Bank, following a whistleblower's accusation that products were being presented as greener than they actually were, exploiting ambiguities to attract sustainability-oriented investors without genuinely meeting the criteria those investors expected. Although the interrogative form allows the newspaper to signal that the allegation remains unproven, the rhetorical force of 'make-believe' in the headline foregrounds doubts about the validity of the green investments in question, pointing to the measurable financial consequences of definitional ambiguity.

Other collocates frame sustainability in aspirational rather than instrumental terms. Terms like *anima* ('soul'), *futuro* ('future'), and *filosofia* ('philosophy') construct environmental discourse as a matter of values and worldviews. Furthermore, *green*'s 15 additional collocates enable connections to semantic domains absent from *verde*. These include references to mobility, work, consumerism, and tourism. This concentration of consumer-oriented and lifestyle collocates reinforces the notion that newspapers promote a form of 'green consumerism' in which environmental sustainability is enacted by individuals primarily through market-based choices.

In summary, within Italian sustainability discourse, *verde* functions both metonymically and metaphorically, with a prevalence of the latter function, while *green* is allocated a semantic space connected to environmental discourse, operating exclusively in the metaphorical register.

Despite this more focused semantic range, *green* appears more frequently overall (233 vs. 197 occurrences) and collocates with more lexical items (53 vs. 38), enabling broader discursive reach across multiple domains. Notably, all English loanwords appear exclusively with *green*, whether as proper names (*Green Deal*), technical terminology (*green bond*, *green economy*), or domain-specific terms (*green skill*, *green claim*). This pattern suggests that Anglicisms function to confer technical authority and international legitimacy within Italian environmental discourse, as noted by Caimotto and Molino (2011), positioning *green* as the privileged marker of globally shared sustainability frameworks.

4.2 The collocational behaviour of green in the English corpus

Noun	Frequency	Score
credential	13	10.21
space	11	9.57
strategy	11	9.54
economy	11	8.86
energy	10	8.04
claim	9	9.55
Deal	9	8.66
investment	9	8.36
bond	7	9.43
transition	7	8.87
technology	6	8.57
finance	6	9.25
future	6	9.06
roof	5	9.11
trade	5	8.85
job	5	8.8
cement	4	8.79
hydrogen	4	9.06
agenda	4	8.65
field	4	8.62
flag	3	8.31
guide	3	8.3
activist	3	8.17
option	3	7.82
policy	3	7.56
development	3	7.55
way	3	7.44
revolution	2	7.73
candelabra	2	7.83
upgrade	2	7.76
thinking	2	7.75
recovery	2	7.7
island	2	7.68
campaigner	2	7.64
resort	2	7.61
skill	2	7.61
power	2	7.45
infrastructure	2	7.45
initiative	2	7.36
rating	2	7.15
practice	2	7.12
fuel	2	6.89
issue	2	6.88
TOTAL	199	

Tab. 3: Collocates for green in ENG, with absolute frequencies and typicality scores⁴

Table 3 shows the collocates for *green*, with the frequency threshold ≥ 2 , resulting in 43 collocates overall. Similarly to Italian, collocates unrelated to environmental discourse were removed:

⁴ The rule applied for the “nouns modified by” column, as stated in the Sketch Grammar for English, is the following: *green* (tagged as an adjective) followed by up to three modifying elements (adjectives, adverbs, or commas), then up to two nouns, and finally the target noun, followed by a non-nominal element.

green tea and *green light*. Only one proper name appears in the results: *Green Deal* (9 occurrences). Generally speaking, English *green* necessarily demonstrates broader functional range than either Italian *verde* or *green*, encompassing both metonymic and metaphorical uses.

Green designates literal green spaces through collocates like *space* or *field*:

- (8) In some circumstances, *green spaces* can even mitigate natural disasters by, for example, absorbing flood water (The Guardian 4 June 2022)

The most frequent collocate, *credentials* (13 occurrences), refers to the domain of business and work and reveals a predominantly critical discourse. Although the term might suggest straightforward validation of environmental practices, *green credential* functions instead as a site of contestation. In 10 of 13 instances, the phrase appears in sceptical contexts involving greenwashing accusations, regulatory scrutiny, or authenticity challenges.

- (9) Regulators have launched a probe into whether fashion giants Asos, Boohoo and George at Asda are misleading their customers over their *green credentials* (The Independent 29 July 2022)
- (10) Interest in environmental, social and governance (ESG) investing has taken off in recent years, with assets managed in ESG-labelled funds globally reaching \$2.7tn, but the industry has also been hit by claims its *green credentials* are inflated (FT 15 June 2022)

Instead of representing assurances of sustainability, in (9) and (10) *credential* collocates with adjectives and verbs of doubt and deception (*misleading*, *inflated*), which, together with other instances of negatively connotated verbs, *touting* and *overstated*, establish a markedly negative semantic prosody. *Fashion giants* are presented as potentially *misleading* customers in (9), and *ESG-labelled funds* as inflating their green credentials in (10), pointing to systematic problems across sectors. Only a minority of instances presents credentials as unproblematic achievements (e.g., established restaurants or festivals), linking them to *solid ethics* and *environmentally friendly approach*. This critical viewpoint echoes the questioning of purported green investments identified in (7).

These tensions around legitimacy and representation extend into the treatment of the transition, where financial terminology frames environmental action as economic opportunity or financial instrument through collocates such as *economy*, *investment*, or *finance*.

- (11) Transitioning to a *green economy* will create new industries and new jobs - and avoid costs down the track (The Guardian 3 June 2022)
- (12) The *green transition* cannot come at the cost of basic security. And if the situation forces us to do so, then we must not hesitate to return temporarily to traditional sources of energy (FT 5 July 2022)

The transition is framed as much as a potential burden as an opportunity, with divergent perspectives being voiced. Example (11) foregrounds optimism, presenting the transition as a generator of *new industries and new jobs*, reinforcing the connection of environmental action with economic opportunity. Example (12) introduces instead a conditional note: the transition must be weighed against *basic security*, and, if the two come into conflict, the latter concern should prevail, reverting to relying on traditional sources of energy. This choice is presented as the most responsible one. The juxtaposition of these two framings reflects a broader tension between opportunity and caution in the treatment of the transition, with economic and security considerations remaining central to the framing of sustainability.

4.3 The inter-corpus comparison

Noun	Absolute Frequency	Normalised frequency	Noun	Absolute Frequency	Normalised frequency
<u>transizione</u> (‘transition’)	41	37.06	credential	13	16.08
<u>Deal</u>	41	37.06	<u>space</u>	11	13.61
area (‘area’)	19	17.17	strategy	11	13.61
<u>energia</u> (‘energy’)	19	17.17	<u>economy</u>	11	13.61
<u>spazio</u> (‘space’)	18	16.27	<u>energy</u>	10	12.37
<u>economia/</u> <u>economy</u>	16	14.46	claim	9	11.13
Spighe (‘wheat spikes’)	15	13.56	<u>deal</u>	9	11.13
<u>rivoluzione</u> (‘revolution’)	15	13.56	<u>investment</u>	9	11.13
polmone (‘lung’)	14	12.66	<u>bond</u>	7	8.66
<u>svolta</u> (‘turn’)	12	10.85	<u>transition</u>	7	8.66
<u>obbligazione/ bond</u>	9	8.14	<u>technology</u>	6	7.42
<u>tecnologia/</u> <u>technologies</u>	9	8.14	finance	6	7.42
<u>investimento</u> (‘investment’)	8	7.23	<u>future</u>	6	7.42
ottica (‘perspective’)	8	7.23	roof	5	6.19
bandiera (‘flag’)	7	6.33	trade	5	6.19
Gas	5	4.52	<u>job</u>	5	6.19
<u>vessillo</u> (‘banner’)	5	4.52	cement	4	4.95
estate (‘summer’)	5	4.52	hydrogen	4	4.95
turismo (‘tourism’)	5	4.52	agenda	4	4.95

mobilità ('mobility')	5	4.52	field	4	4.95
progetto ('plan')	5	4.52	flag	3	3.71
oasi ('oasis')	4	3.62	guide	3	3.71
misura ('measure')	4	3.62	activist	3	3.71
città ('city')	4	3.62	<u>option</u>	3	3.71
ambassador	4	3.62	policy	3	3.71
trasformazione ('transformation')	4	3.62	development	3	3.71
trasporto ('transport')	4	3.62	way	3	3.71
futuro ('future')	4	3.62	revolution	2	2.47
iniziativa ('initiative')	4	3.62	candelabra	2	2.47
anima ('soul')	4	3.62	upgrade	2	2.47
fisco ('taxation')	3	2.71	thinking	2	2.47
tassonomia ('taxonomy')	3	2.71	recovery	2	2.47
tetto ('roof')	3	2.71	island	2	2.47
edilizia ('construction industry')	3	2.71	campaigner	2	2.47
building	3	2.71	resort	2	2.47
percorso ('path')	3	2.71	<u>skill</u>	2	2.47
<u>skill</u>	3	2.71	power	2	2.47
community	3	2.71	infrastructure	2	2.47
costume ('swimsuit')	3	2.71	initiative	2	2.47
ambito ('sphere')	3	2.71	rating	2	2.47
tema ('topic')	3	2.71	practice	2	2.47
prodotto ('product')	3	2.71	fuel	2	2.47
			issue	2	2.47

Tab. 4: Collocates for *verde+green* in ITA and for *green* in ENG, with absolute and normalised frequencies (per million)

Table 4 shows the cross-corpus comparison with aggregated frequencies for *verde* and *green* in the Italian corpus. While Italian combined occurrences total 430 across 84 collapsed collocates, only those with frequency ≥ 3 are shown here, resulting in 42 collocates displayed. All collocates for *green* in English are shown instead, with 199 occurrences across 43 collocates. Given the differing corpus sizes (ITA: 1,106,277 tokens; ENG: 808,402 tokens), normalised frequencies per million tokens are provided to enable meaningful comparison. Underlined items appear in both ITA and ENG; bold items collocate with both *verde* and *green* in ITA; italicised items represent loanwords pairs in ITA, where the English form collocates with *green* and its Italian equivalent collocates with *verde*. Comparing normalised frequencies reveals a higher overall tendency to use *verde/green* in the Italian corpus. *Green Deal* appears 41 times in Italian (37.06 per million) versus 9 times in English (11.13 per million), while *transizione/transition* (aggregating *verde* and *green*) appears 41 times in Italian (37.06 per million) versus 7 times in English (8.66 per million).

Commonalities include the metonymic function fulfilled by *verde* in Italian and *green* in English, both referring to physical spaces. Both corpora foreground systemic transformation

through *transition* and *revolution*, while Italian *svolta* ('turn') has no direct English equivalent in the data. Both corpora frame environmental action through financial mechanisms, with shared collocates including *economy/economia*, *bond/obbligazione*, and *investment/investimento* appearing at broadly comparable normalised frequencies. Similarly, business and employment appear across both corpora through *skills* and *jobs*. While *credentials*, the most frequent collocate in English, is entirely absent from Italian, *claim* appears in both corpora, though more prominently in English (11.13 per million) than in Italian (1.81 per million).

Energy and technology constitute another major focus in both corpora. While Italian favours generic terms (*energia*, *gas*), English gravitates toward more specific energy sources and technologies (*hydrogen*, *fuel*, *power*). Alongside these technological framings, policy-related collocates appear in both corpora with different frequencies. In ENG, *agenda*, *deal*, *policy*, and *recovery* total 18 occurrences (22.27 per million), while Italian policy terms total 48 occurrences (43.39 per million), a higher frequency which is almost entirely attributable to *Green Deal*. Additionally, *tassonomia* ('taxonomy,' 2.71 per million) appears only in ITA. This pattern can be linked to the UK's post-Brexit position: although the Green Deal was announced while it still technically remained an EU member state during its transition period, the UK did not participate in its implementation. Thus, while still affected by EU decisions, the UK was already less directly engaged with EU policies.

4.4 Creative elaborations

Due to the literal meaning of the colour adjective, an intuitive extension of the basic mapping exploits one of the main features of the source concept to introduce nuance in the target: just as a colour can have hues, and thus objects can be different shades of green, so can green concepts be more or less intense. This is most evident in the use of the following variants, that rely on a general mapping INTENSITY OF COLOUR IS INTENSITY OF CONCEPT. The comparative form appears with different frequencies across corpora:

- ITA *più green*: 34 occurrences (30.73 per million), *più verde*: 10 occurrences (9.04 per million); 44 combined (39.77 per million)
- ENG *greener*: 39 occurrences (48.24 per million)

In Italian, the loanword is adapted to grammatical rules with *più green* rather than *greener*. The comparative form is relatively more frequent in English than in Italian, notwithstanding the combined use of *più green* and *più verde*. This usage introduces two ideas simultaneously: that a quality of *green* has already been reached, signalling implemented progress, but also that the activity has been intensified, indicating a higher level of commitment. In Italian, the use is

further reinforced by the addition of *sempre* ('always') and *ancora* ('even') 13 times, foregrounding the constant effort to improve. The comparative appears across several semantic domains, where it can be applied to intensify, for instance, technological solutions, consumption practices, business operations, financial mechanisms, and mobility infrastructure. One notable collocate is *future*, reinforcing aspirational framing through phrases like *greener future*.

Beyond the comparative form, more creative instantiations exploit colour gradation as a shorthand for varying degrees of environmental commitment. The phrase *shades of green* in (13) constructs the notion of multiple approaches rather than a binary green/not-green distinction.

- (13) *Shades of green* on a voyage to the Arctic; Cruise holidays. On a small ship with a focus on sustainability, Patricia Cleveland-Peck is smitten by Norway (The Telegraph 16 July 2022)

This title employs a metaphor that is also topic-triggered, connecting to the aurora borealis visible in the Arctic. The article emphasises multiple environmental practices such as fuel sustainability, a smaller environmental footprint, and plant-based and locally sourced dining. In the article, the ship in question, MS Maud, is positioned as *greener* than cruise "behemoths which, in one day, can belch out more noxious emissions than a million cars," presenting the wider cruise industry as less green-tinged, a foil against which MS Maud's green credentials can be measured. *Shades* thus operates on two levels. First, it refers to different ways this cruise operator demonstrates environmental responsibility. Second, it establishes an implicit comparison between the greener MS Maud and its sustainability practices, and other operators; their varying degrees of commitment to sustainability 'colour' them different shades of green. The feature of colour gradation in the source domain is thus exploited as shorthand for constructing varying degrees of seriousness in approaches to environmental issues, suggesting multiple possible levels of engagement.

The colour gradient also maps onto scales of environmental commitment in regulatory and political contexts, with *dark green* and *light green* in (14) representing different levels of intensity, a coherent approach with *shades of green*, where darker conveys stronger commitment and lighter indicates less stringent requirements.

- (14) La quota di fondi azionari è la più alta sia per i prodotti classificati come articolo 9 del regolamento Sfdr (sono i fondi con un esplicito obiettivo di investimento sostenibile, i cosiddetti *dark green*) [...] sia per quelli classificati come articolo 8 (sono i fondi che promuovono caratteristiche ambientali e sociali, i cosiddetti *light green*) (CdS 13 June 2022)

The share of equity funds is highest both for products classified as Article 9 of the SFDR regulation (these are funds with an explicit sustainable investment objective, the so-called dark green) [...] and for those classified as Article 8 (these are funds that promote environmental and social characteristics, the so-called light green)

In sustainable investing, these terms designate different commitment levels based on the EU's SFDR (Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation): while *dark green* funds have explicit sustainable investment objectives, *light green* ones promote environmental and social characteristics, without having sustainability as the main objective.

The following expressions in (15-17) extend the mapping beyond colour, to include features of paint. In (15), the expression *tingere* ('to tinge') in the title emphasises environmental transformation as a process rather than a state.

(15) Beachwear sostenibile: l'estate si tinge di verde (Repubblica 16 May 2022)

Sustainable Beachwear: summer is tinged with green

A temporal dimension is added, mapping the adoption of sustainable practices onto the gradual process of colour spreading or infusing, thus presenting change as incremental rather than radical. Just as dye permeates textile material, environmental sustainability permeates the summer season. The expression *si tinge di verde* ('is tinged with green') indicates that the summer season, particularly beachwear fashion, is embracing ecological values through recycled materials and sustainable practices.

While *tingere* suggests genuine and lasting permeation with far-reaching effects, *paint* conveys superficiality and deception. The idiomatic expression *paint itself green* in (16) means to falsely portray oneself as environmentally friendly.

(16) The industry uses a range of corporate social responsibility initiatives to *paint itself green* (The Guardian 26 May 2022)

The article details how the tobacco industry is significantly contributing to pollution through mining of materials for batteries and the production of waste leaching into soil and water. However, the industry uses CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiatives such as reforestation projects and sustainability index listings (Dow Jones Sustainability Index, Climate Disclosure Project) to create the pretence of an environmental consciousness. *Paint* emphasises the superficial nature of these efforts, comparable to applying a coat of paint to cover what lies underneath rather than making genuine improvements.

This usage extends to financial contexts:

- (17) Even some former industry insiders have broken ranks *to paint ESG as mere "greenwashing."* Tariq Fancy, BlackRock's former chief investment officer for sustainable investing, now calls sustainable investing "a dangerous placebo." (FT 28 May 2022)

Here there is direct reference to the term most commonly used to qualify such deceptive practices, "*greenwashing*." Similarly to tobacco companies' CSR initiatives, ESG becomes a deceptive coat of paint misrepresenting underlying actions and consequences. The criticism identifies ESG not merely as inadequate or ineffective, but as decorated or disguised to appear sustainable when it is not, resulting in hollow performance of sustainability rather than substantive environmental action. Tariq Fancy's characterisation of sustainable investing as *dangerous placebo* further compounds this assessment, strengthening the notion of its inefficacy. Thus, *tingere* and *paint* occupy opposite poles: the former suggests environmental values genuinely permeating an industry or season, while the latter exposes superficial greenwashing that conceals unchanged practices beneath cosmetic initiatives.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the collocational behaviour of *verde* and *green* in Italian and English newspaper discourse on sustainability, revealing how these terms structure environmental framings through both conventional and creative usage. The findings confirm and extend previous research on green discourse while offering a systematic comparative account of both *verde* and *green* in Italian sustainability discourse and their functional distribution.

The analysis substantiates key claims regarding the "greening of growth" framework (Feindt and Cowell 2010). Both corpora demonstrate that *green* operates primarily within market-based sustainability models, where environmental action is presented as compatible with, and indeed driving, economic growth. This manifests through dominant collocational patterns with financial mechanisms and business strategy, positioning sustainable practices as embedded within capitalist frameworks rather than challenging them. The emphasis on technological solutions is equally pronounced. Energy and technology-related collocates appear consistently, reinforcing the framing of technology as the ultimate solution for environmental issues. This aligns with the principle that technological improvements and market mechanisms, rather than fundamental structural change, constitute the primary means of addressing environmental problems (Jänicke 2008). The presence of consumerism-related collocates, particularly in

Italian, substantiates Diprose et al.'s (2018, 683) characterisation of media discourse as promoting sustainable consumerism as a "panacea for problems caused by overconsumption."

However, closer examination of concordances reveals critical voices challenging these dominant framings. The transition, though often presented as an opportunity, is at times contested, raising concerns about the provision of adequate policy instruments and possible damaging effects on companies and workers. The authenticity of green investments and commitments is frequently contested; *credential* carries a predominantly negative semantic prosody, appearing in contexts involving greenwashing accusations, regulatory scrutiny, and authenticity challenges. Similarly, *claim* appears in sceptical contexts questioning corporate environmental assertions. These critiques are echoed by the creative uses of *paint itself green* and *paint ESG as "mere greenwashing,"* exposing corporate social responsibility initiatives and ESG investing as deliberately misleading and superficial, concealing unchanged practices rather than genuine environmental improvements.

Within Italian, the English loanword *green* substantially outranks *verde* (233 vs. 197 occurrences) despite *verde*'s broader semantic range. Critically, *verde* retains exclusive metonymic function for physical green spaces, while *green* operates solely metaphorically for environmental sustainability. Creative instantiations extend the basic colour metaphor to convey nuanced sustainability gradations. The comparative forms (*più green/più verde/greener*) introduce the INTENSITY OF COLOUR IS INTENSITY OF CONCEPT mapping, signalling both progress achieved and intensified commitment. *Shades of green* constructs multiple approaches rather than binary distinctions, while regulatory *dark green* vs. *light green* categories formalise commitment hierarchies. Overall, although creative elaborations and critical counterpoints introduce more nuanced understandings, lexical patterns suggest *green* generally operates as a floating signifier (Catenaccio 2019), evoking ethicality while simultaneously avoiding concrete engagement with environmental issues. The recognition that genuine environmental action demands real sacrifice (Monbiot 2007) is largely absent from newspaper discourse, which tends to emphasise painless transitions, profitable sustainability, and consumer-driven solutions. *Green* terminology thus predominantly perpetuates, rather than challenges, the contradictions between environmental messaging and the structural changes climate action actually requires.

Bionote

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