Computational Humanities Research

www.cambridge.org/chr

Decoding the conqueror's gaze: A computational approach to Ennio Flaiano's (post)colonialism

Silvia Lilli[1] and Daniel Raffini[2]

[1]Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, Rome, Italy and [2]Sapienza Università di Roma, Rome, Italy

Research Article

Cite this article: Lilli Silvia and Daniel Raffini. 2026. "Decoding the conqueror's gaze: A computational approach to Ennio Flaiano's (post)colonialism" *Computational Humanities Research*, **2**:e10, https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026

Received: 7 October 2025
Revised: 30 January 2026
Accepted: 3 February 2026

Keywords:
computational narratology; Ennio Flaiano; focalization; postcolonial literature

Corresponding author:
Daniel Raffini;
Email: daniel.raffini@uniroma1.it

Abstract

Ennio Flaiano's Tempo di uccidere (1947) has long divided critics over whether it challenges or merely aestheticizes Italian colonialism. This study applies computational narratology methods to investigate this ambivalence through systematic analysis of narrative focalization. Through manual annotation of 5,793 text segments across four narrative categories (Narrator, Conqueror, Indigenous and Description) and their subcategories, we examine how quantitative analysis of focalization patterns illuminates Flaiano's complex stance toward the Ethiopian colonial campaign. We combine multiple analytical methods with an exploratory bottom-up approach: qualitative analysis of lexical distribution, part-of-speech distribution analysis to identify grammatical signatures of each narrative category and their semantic implications and syntactic role analysis to examine agency patterns in character representation. Statistical testing confirms that narrative categories exhibit robust grammatical distinctions, validating the annotation schema. The analysis reveals a deliberate ambiguity: syntactic role analysis shows comparable levels of agentivity between Indigenous and Conqueror characters, contrasting with traditional colonial discourse where colonized subjects are typically represented as passive. Lexical analysis exposes asymmetries in how characters are individuated and how different types of knowledge are attributed to each group. Rather than confirming a straightforward colonial or anti-colonial position, the analysis reveals how Flaiano through narrative techniques, exploiting and subverting genre conventions, consciously deconstructs the propagandistic reassuring ideology. This study contributes both methodologically – by developing an annotation schema for narrative focalization in Italian prose that can be applied to other texts – and interpretively, by demonstrating how computational narratology can document ideological complexity, revealing patterns invisible to traditional close reading alone.

Plain language summary

This study examines Ennio Flaiano's 1947 novel *Tempo di uccidere* ("A Time to Kill") to investigate the author's stance on Italian colonialism in Ethiopia as expressed in his book. The novel tells the story of an Italian lieutenant during the 1935–1936 Ethiopian campaign who kills an Ethiopian woman and then commits other crimes while trying to escape his sense of guilt. Scholars have long debated whether it criticizes colonialism or simply follows the exotic adventure genre popular at the time. The ambiguity stems from the narrative structure: the story is told from the lieutenant's perspective, which alternates between repeating fascist propaganda and expressing disgust for colonial violence. In addition, the protagonist only heals after confessing his crimes to an Ethiopian man (probably the father of the girl killed), yet ultimately escapes punishment. This ambiguity is compounded by the novel's complex narrative technique, where the perspective shifts between the narrator-I and the experiencing-I, and through the latter's identification with other characters, both conquerors and colonized.

To investigate this question, we manually annotated the entire novel, identifying different narrative perspectives (focalizations): passages focused on the narrator, Italian soldiers, Ethiopian people and descriptions of landscapes and people. The annotated text was then analyzed using computational methods, including word frequency analysis, stylometric clustering, part-of-speech tagging and syntactic role analysis.

The computational findings reveal an unexpected result. At the grammatical level, Ethiopian and Italian characters receive comparable agency: both groups appear with similar frequency as subjects of active sentences performing actions. Lexical analysis offers other interesting insights. Ethiopian characters are often described using generic terms suggesting passivity – "woman" and "old man" – while Italian soldiers are depersonalized as "types" through the military rank (soldier, sergeant and major), yet being more often associated with active, transitive verbs indicating intentional action (to teach, to convince, to accumulate). On the contrary, when the experiencing-I imagines Ethiopian perspectives, he attributes to them active verbs of perception and internal states (to recognize, to desire, to know), suggesting psychological depth.

This article was awarded the Open Materials badge for transparent practices. See the Data availability statement for details.

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

Despite the attempt of exploring more in-depth the indigenous interiority, the content of these "perspectives" is often self-referential: rather than genuinely attempting to understand others, the protagonist projects his own anxieties and desires onto them, seeing himself reflected back. However, the protagonist himself appears with diminished agency, suggesting he views himself as subjected to military forces beyond his control rather than as an active agent – a pattern that deflects personal and historical responsibility.

Together, these patterns reveal that Flaiano's ambiguity was not evasion but deliberate narrative strategy. By refusing to provide clear patterns or fixed representations, the narrative forces readers to confront the instability of colonial categories themselves – exposing how propaganda's stereotypes and colonialism's role assignments rely on simplification rather than genuine encounter.

Introduction

In 1947, Ennio Flaiano (1910–1972), an Italian journalist and writer particularly active since the Thirties as prolific critic (especially cinematographic) and screenwriter, with his only full-length novel *Tempo di uccidere* (Flaiano 1947), won the first edition of Premio Strega.[1] It was a controversial and unexpected win:[2] not only Flaiano was not a full-time novelist, but the book is set during the Ethiopian campaign (1935–1936), the colonial enterprise massively propagandized by Mussolini's regime (Collotti 2000; Deplano 2015; Stefani 2007) to win to the Italians a "deserved" *posto al sole* ("place in the sun"); a campaign the author experimented in first person in his youth. While the campaign garnered wide consensus at the beginning – leveraging imperialist feelings dating back to the very first years of Italian unification[3] – with the overthrow of the Fascist regime the liberal and democratic parties in power resolutely distanced themselves from the responsibility of the colonial enterprises – not only from the one promoted by Mussolini, but also from the ones driven during the previous liberal government.[4] This resulted in a gradual fading from the public memory of the colonial occupations and the crimes perpetrated in the African countries under Italian control, which lasted at least until the Seventies within the historical debate,[5] and even today in the public opinion: indeed, public discussion on the topic are rare,[6] and it is widespread a common superficial opinion that Italians were good people ("italiani brava gente"), and their dominion was less cruel and impactful than the one of other powers (Calchi Novati 2008; Del Boca 1992, 1998; Filippi 2021).

In this context of general suppression of colonial memory, the victory of Flaiano's novel seems curious, especially as we consider the plot, that engages directly with the themes of guilt and atonement.[7] While this fact might be interpreted as reflecting an intention to publicly discuss the experience of colonialism, the historical setting was underestimated, and the novel was probably interpreted as a derivation of the colonial literary genre (heir of the oldest exotic literature, see Bongie 1991), which was largely popular in Italy at the turn of 19th and 20th centuries,[8] or in the

[1] The competition was instituted by the writer Maria Bellonci and her husband Guido Alberti, owner of the liqueur's factory which gave its name to the prize (https://www.fondazionebellonci.it/premio-strega/). It is still active, and it is generally considered the most prestigious Italian literary prize (Trevisan 2024).

[2] For an overview of the critics at the time of publication, see Sabatini (2017) and Trubiano (2010).

[3] Even though public opinion often relegates the Italian colonial experience to Mussolini's aggressive policies, the desire for colonial expansion emerged just a few years after the political unification of Italy in 1861, with Italian trading companies establishing their commercial bases in the Horn of Africa by 1869. By 1890, Eritrea had fallen completely under Italian control, and from there, Italy extended its expansionist ambitions to build an Italian African Empire. Somalia came under Italian dominion in 1908, while the Ethiopian campaign that started in 1895 was interrupted by a brutal defeat at the Battle of Adwa (1896) – one of the worst defeats ever suffered by a European colonial power in Africa. In 1911, Italian ambitions turned toward Libya and Albania, both of which it managed to control, albeit with difficulty. Italian colonialism received new impetus with Mussolini's rise to power: after another intervention in Libya, Mussolini attempted to conquer Ethiopia again in 1935, this time successfully, leading him to declare the birth of the Empire of Italian East Africa in 1936. Control over the colonies ended in the Second World War, with the British occupation. It survived only through the UN Italian Trusteeship Administration of Somalia (AFIS), which lasted until 1960 (see Calchi Novati 2008; Del Boca 1984).

[4] It was the republican parties, however, which requested after the war the restitution of the colonies conquered before Fascism; the victorious powers rejected the request, finally deciding the end of Italian colonial rule (see Rossi 1980; Del Boca, 1984, vol. 4, 3–75).

[5] The real face of Italian colonialism remained underestimated until a deeper and objective investigation was conducted by the historians Giorgio Rochat (1973) and especially Angelo Del Boca (1984), who revealed the brutality of the Italian occupation and the perpetration of several crimes, including the use of chemical weapons in Ethiopia. They also denounced the difficulty of accessing primary sources in the archives, as they were kept closed for decades, guarded by military figures who had participated in the last colonial campaign in Ethiopia and who claimed a monopoly on access to those sources (Del Boca 1998, 591–2). This attitude also led to the absolution of all the major perpetrators of the crimes committed in the colonies, who were instead often exalted for their patriotic merits and showered with honors.

[6] It should be mentioned, however, that in November 1997, during his official visit to Addis Ababa, President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro publicly admitted Italian responsibilities, defining the pages written during the Ethiopian occupation as "bloody ones." Nevertheless, the promised restitution of the Axum obelisk was fulfilled only in 2005. Significant efforts to keep the debate on Italian colonialism alive have also been carried forward by second-generation writers, such as Igiaba Scego and Gabriella Ghermandi.

[7] The story begins with an unnamed Italian lieutenant in the Ethiopian campaign of 1935–1936, who, suffering from a severe toothache, takes a shortcut to reach the nearest city and find a doctor. During his solitary detour, he gets lost, until he encounters an Ethiopian young woman bathing in a pool. Attracted to the girl, he slowly approaches her, and after having forced a sexual intercourse, he spends the night with her in the forest. During the night, frightened by shadows and unsettling noises, he fires his gun at what he believes to be a wild animal, but accidentally injures her. Instead of helping her and seeking assistance, he decides to end her life fatally shooting her. From this moment, the lieutenant embarks on a harrowing journey, attempting to flee his guilt, committing further crimes and deserting the army, all while fearing that he has contracted leprosy from the girl due to an unhealing wound. Redemption and healing come only in an encounter with Johannes, presumably the father of the girl, and only after he confesses him his crime and reveals her burial site. Despite its seemingly eschatological conclusion, the last chapter of the novel shifts the overarching narrative: a second lieutenant, to whom the lieutenant has confided his entire story upon returning to the army, reinterprets the entire story from a "rational" perspective, undermining the lieutenant's responsibility in the chain of events, mocking his assumed protagonism and attributing the entire story to a larger sequence of chance that is beyond comprehension. In the end, aboard the ship that will take him home, the lieutenant even questions his own healing.

[8] Beyond the African setting, Flaiano's novel features the romantic encounter with the indigenous woman, the loss of identity, the fascination and repulsion toward the Other, the Eurocentric perspective of the protagonist/narrator (see Tomasello 1984; Pagliara 2001; Stefani 2007, 79–108). This interpretation is also evident in the second U.S.-translated edition of the novel, which features cover art by Stanley Meltzoff. The artwork depicts a sensually posed, half-nude woman bathing in a provocative and submissive pose and includes the subtitle:

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vein of existential novels, such as Camus' *L'Étranger* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (Baraldi 2004; Comparini 2017). Perhaps the widespread rumor about the author's closeness to the right-wing circles of his publisher Longanesi also contributed to the failure to recognize the "historicity" of the setting, and consequently the little attention paid to a possible critical attitude toward the Ethiopian Campaign.[9]

Beginning with the pioneering work of Sergio Pautasso (1992), first published in 1976, and continuing with Orlandini (1992) and Domenichelli (1997), the interpretation of the novel substantially changed. These analyses stressed the historical significance of the setting and the plot and strongly recognized Ennio Flaiano's critical stance toward colonialism. Following this path, throughout the 2000s, many studies flourished which connected *Tempo di uccidere* with postcolonial criticism, proclaiming the novel as the first postcolonial work in Italian literature (Baraldi 2004; Bazzocchi 2012; Benvenuti 2012; Brunetti 2010; Maxia 2010; Mengozzi 2016; Nasson 2012; Palumbo 2002; Prisco 2012; Re 2017; Skocki 2012). This interpretation is strengthened by the war journal written by the author during his participation in the Ethiopian campaign: now published under the title *Aethiopia: appunti per una canzonetta* (*Ethiopia: Notes for a Ditty*) (Flaiano 2020). In it, through the forms of short notes or aphorisms, Flaiano subtly ironizes the expectations of colonial enterprise as conveyed by fascist propaganda versus the reality faced by the soldiers, and with a clear stance emerging from a stinging sarcasm rather than open declaration, he denounces the violent crimes committed during the military operations. The existence of this war journal and the fact that some episodes reported here were later incorporated into the novel suggest that Flaiano had been reflecting on the material for years before deciding to shape it into a book.

Research question

Even though the cultural context and the progression of the studies may justify the differing interpretations, it is true that the novel itself provides ample room for discussion, and it is still debated whether Flaiano's position in the book can truly be considered anti-colonial. Ambiguity arises first from the narrative construction of the novel: the story is told from the lieutenant's point of view, whose inner voice describes and comments on the events as they occur. His thoughts, however, oscillate between a propagandist mindset which declares white superiority over the colonized, stereotypically reproduced, and a harsh intolerance toward the members of the Italian army and their behaviors and attitudes. The plot development, as mentioned, recalls some of the topical elements of the existential novel – such as the encounter with the other as a destabilizing element which challenges the mental sanity of the conqueror – while other elements appear to convey a critic toward colonialism: the protagonist only heals when forced to confront his crime recognizing the other's autonomy and individuality. In addition, the perspicuity of the message – as it seems to be driven by the plot development – is called into doubt by the very last chapter, in which individual guilt is downplayed by a second lieutenant (interpreted as the author alter-ego[10]) who blames fate and the unpredictable sequence of events for the crimes committed, for which, indeed, the lieutenant is never charged.

Several questions arise: Did Flaiano choose the African setting to consciously convey critical elements toward colonialism, or merely to comply with the tradition of a literary genre? Does he deconstruct the reassuring interpretation of the eschatological end for transferring the blame from the individual to the society who planned and performed the colonial occupation? Or is it instead a way for declaring non-culpability for crimes that occurred during the campaign, as they are related to accidents and the story refers more to a path in the inner consciousness (where the others are nothing but a part of landscape)? Even if the textual and contextual elements strongly discourage interpreting the novel within the traditional framework of the colonial literary genre,[11] the question still arises: Why would the author have omitted to clarify his position on colonialism, concealing his criticism behind the ambiguous and elusive moral stance of his character?

This study positions itself within the literary debate concerning Flaiano's stance toward colonialism in his novel *Tempo di uccidere*. Without the claim of reaching a definitive solution, its primary goal is to contribute to the debate by introducing new evidence derived from computational analysis. By exploring closely the diegetic level of the novel with a bottom-up approach, this research aims to integrate quantitative data and close reading to attain a more solid and nuanced conception of the novel, stimulating new interpretative perspectives.

Research focus and setting

As mentioned, several contradictory elements emerge from the narrative level. Summarizing:

- The agent has a propagandist mindset.
- The agent experiences disgust and blame for the way the relationship with the other is constructed (despite being himself framed by the same biased perspective).
- The agent only heals when he admits his guilt to the indigenous.
- The agent escapes condemnation with the Italian authority for his crimes (committed not just against the woman, but also against other soldiers).

Even more prominently, the diegetic level itself complicates the interpretation. While focalization belongs to the experiencing-I, internal and homo-diegetic, occasionally a narrator-I (extradiegetic), distanced from the agent by an uncertain amount of time, reveals its presence. These intrusions are made clear by indexical reference to the narrator's storyworld (e.g., shift of verbal tense) or by anticipations or judgmental comments about the limited perspective of the experiencing character. The intrusion is in fact quite scattered, and while the narrator's presence pushes the reader to expect a higher degree of knowledge and interpretation of the events in progress, the narrator basically hides himself within the agent perspective, rarely commenting and leaving the

"The Hunting Story of a FORBIDDEN LOVE" (Flaiano 1951). The cover can be viewed at the following link: https://flic.kr/p/aNp4vz (accessed January 2026).

[9] In fact, it was precisely his editor Leo Longanesi who commissioned the novel, as remember the author himself (Flaiano 1988a, 544–6), though it seems without suggesting the content or the setting.

[10] Several elements convey this idea: the military rank – same as Flaiano's during the campaign, the reference to a notebook similar to the war journal Flaiano wrote, and a higher display of awareness regarding the events.

[11] Beyond the war journal, Flaiano expressed his criticism on other public occasions. See, for instance, the interview released to Aldo Rosselli in 1972 (Flaiano 1988b, 1210).

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

erroneous thoughts and actions of the agent unjudged.[12] This creates a disturbing effect of uncertainty: the perspective of the experiencing-I comes out diminished and weakened, and both the narrator and the experiencing-I end up appearing unreliable.[13]

Another much more frequent kind of embedded focalization enriches this complex picture: connecting with other characters as the plot unfolds, the experiencing-I identifies with the secondary characters he encounters, expressing their (supposed) feelings, thoughts and reflections. In this way, the perspective moves dynamically across these focalizing windows, shifting the point of view in a play of refraction. In this subtle and complex play, once the narrator's moral reliability is compromised, what remains missing and doubtful is the author's perspective. Ambiguity, therefore, seems precisely the deconstructive effect that Flaiano pursues through narrative techniques.

From the hypothesis that the subtle interplay of focalizations is crucial in shaping this deliberate ambiguity, functional to the construction of the novel's narrative and meaning, we have focused the analysis on the diegetic levels, first conducting a manual annotation to distinguish the different focalizations present in the novel. Then, we analyzed the annotated segments with several supervised and unsupervised methods. The fully exploratory bottom-up approach is described in the following paragraphs. In the end, through qualitative analysis of the results, we will draw some conclusions that may advance the comprehensive interpretation of the novel.

Theoretical framework

Before delving into the annotation process, we will clarify the concept of "focalization" as developed in narratology studies. Generally conceived as "the submission of (potentially limitless) narrative information to a perspectival filter" (Jahn 2007, 94), the coinage of the term dates back to Gérard Genette in 1972 (Genette 1980), whose distinction between "who sees?" and "who speaks?" posed the basis for all the following theorizations. It was Mieke Bal in 1985 (Bal 2009) who reduced Genette's triadic division (internal, external and zero focalization) into a binary (character-bound or internal, and external, merging Genette's zero and external focalization), also highlighting the existence of focalized objects: imperceptible (thoughts, feelings, etc.) and perceptible (actions, appearances, etc.). Bal's revision criticizes the confusion in Genette's model between the point-of-view and the knowledge paradigm (the "restriction of narrative information"), as the external focalizer is supposed to know more than the other characters in the story, on which the distinction between external and zero focalization found reason. O'Neill (2002), later pointed out the complexity of focalization techniques in action, speaking about "compound" and "embedded" focalizations, which particularly fit our case study. Leaving aside the complex debates following Genette's theorization and O'Neill and Bal's revisions,[14] we adopt the term focalization as it highlights not only that the story is told from the point of view of a single character, but also that the narrative information is designed "to create other effects such as suspense, mystery, puzzlement, etc." (Niederhoff 2011).

The aim of this study is not to challenge the theoretical concept, which has been fruitfully debated also in the light of post-narratology,[15] but rather to demonstrate that such compound focalization exists in Flaiano's novel, and it is rather informative for the comprehensive interpretation of the novel, especially with regard to the anti-colonial perspective. Following Bal's and O'Neill's schemas, we may say that the external narrator (F1) acts as a focalizer to transfer the primary point of view by which the story is told to the experiencing-I (F2), who in turn yields his focalization to secondary characters (both indigenous and Italians), acting as a focalizer for episodic third degree focalizations (F3). In this way, the agent processes reality by transferring his perspective through another's eyes, trying to give meaning to the people and the natural elements he encounters, and conjecturing about their motivations, thoughts, expectations and feelings.[16] Notably, there are no clear boundaries between these three layers of focalization, and the distinction can only be inferential by looking at linguistic and semantic signals, as listed in the following table.

Before digging further, one important preliminary clarification is needed: even when critical elements toward colonialism are recognized in the novel, the term "postcolonial" when associated with Flaiano's work must be considered a general synonym for "anti-colonial," given the precise cultural orientation and the ongoing debate surrounding the label "postcolonial" in this field of study. It is evident that the reflection on colonialism in the Forties could not have been enriched with a mature and conscious opposition to the colonial discourse as it is now conducted – even if it may serve today as testimony and a stimulus within the postcolonial studies – but it should rather be considered in connection with anti-fascism and with the historically situated experience of the Ethiopian campaign as promoted by Mussolini.

Methodologies

This section will go through the annotation process and the computational analysis conducted on the annotated text.

Annotation coding

Given that the main research question of this study is to investigate the novel's stance toward the colonialist campaign, the annotation[17] focused on three different types of focalization which are considered informative of the relationship between colonizers and colonized as depicted in the novel:

[12] We disagree with Orlandini (1992) who sees a constitutive gap between the mature perspective of the narrator, open to cultural difference, and that of the protagonist, translated into a consistently ironic attitude toward the acting self.

[13] On unreliable narrators in narrative fiction, see Booth (1961, 158–9), Zerweck (2001), and Sternberg and Yacobi (2015).

[14] For a quick overview of the debate, see Niederhoff (2011).

[15] Palmer (2002, 2004) and Zunshine (2006) moved Genette's fundamental question "who sees?" to the question "who thinks?", thus from a perception matter to a cognitive one. It is, indeed, the representation of "fictional minds" that stimulate reader's identification with the character.

[16] Curiously, this process is applied not just to humans, but to animals too, that the experiencing-I humanizes by mental identification. Emblematic of this humanization process is the encounter with the chameleon: "Camminavo forse da un'ora quando vidi il camaleonte. Brava bestiola. [. . .] Calmo, onestamente spaventato da quell'Africa piena di insidie, metteva una zampetta dietro l'altra con delicatezza. [. . .] 'Una sigaretta?' Gli infilai la sigaretta accesa in bocca. Se ne andò fumando, da buon diplomatico, sempre più spaventato di vivere, pronto a gettare la cicca per una mosca, pronto a tutto, ma talmente pigro anche lui!" (Flaiano 2016, loc. 10.27–10.28).

[17] To support the legitimacy of narrative level annotation and for guidelines in developing the annotation schema we consulted the *Annotation Guidelines For Narrative Levels* developed within the shared task for the Systematic Analysis of Narrative levels Through Annotation (SANTA), published by the *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, and in particular Kearns (2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

1. *Narrator:* Focalization on the narrator-I, who occasionally interrupts the agent's focalization. This category was divided into three subcategories, according to the linguistic and semantic triggers which made the perspective shift detectable: Indexicals (referring to mentions of place/time or other references not referable to the agent's storyworld, see Klauk, Köppe, and Onea 2012), Knowledge (showing a higher degree of knowledge than the agent) and Judgment (commenting or expressing judgment on the character's thoughts/actions).[18]
2. *Conqueror:* Focalization on one of the members of the Italian army, as filtered through the experiencing-I's identification.
3. *Indigenous:* Focalization on indigenous men and women, as filtered through the experiencing-I's identification.

The annotation is made under the hypothesis that each focalization differentiates from the other, in a way that contributes to the effect of unclarity and uncertainty of ideological stance conveyed by the novel, which, as we will argue, gives shape to the expression of anti-colonialism. We included in the annotation a fourth class:

4. *Description:* Within this category, we distinguished between Landscape, Indigenous and Conqueror[19] descriptions, according to the object depicted.

Although descriptions occupy a distinct narratological status within the narrative and diegetic framework, we decided to include this additional annotation category considering that no part of the novel appears to exhibit a "zero" focalization. Since everything is filtered through the experiencing-I – when not through one of the listed embedded focalizations – it seemed interesting to detect the way the experiencing-I actually sees and describes the objects in his reality, whether they are colonizers or colonized, or mere elements of the natural and artificial landscape. In other words, the hypothesis is that in the descriptive sequences, as well as in the embedded focalizations, the protagonist transfers his own perspective toward external elements, which may thus function as an extension of focalized passages. A fifth category, Peritext,[20] labeled the chapters' titles and numeration for exclusion. Once the categories of interest were defined, we developed a set of annotation rules to ensure consistency in the process. The rules are reported in Table 1.

The plain text was derived from the 2016 digital edition in the BUR collection published by Rizzoli (Flaiano 2016). The annotation was performed at sentence level to ensure consistency, given the difficulty of clearly attributing single words to a certain focalization; moreover, using the sentence as a unit would ensure a better balance between the categories for the computational analysis. We used the software INCePTION (Klie et al. 2018), as it allows for hierarchical tagging and has an integrated parser for sentence splitting. For multiple categories within simple sentences (very rare), we avoided overlapping and we assigned the sentence to the category to which the higher number of words referred. For multiple categories in complex sentences, we divided complex sentences into simple sentences, assigning each segment to the category to which the highest number of words referred.

The annotation was performed in a two-round manual process by two annotators, corresponding to the authors of this study. Annotator 1 annotated the entire text, while annotator 2 annotated four chapters out of seven.

Inter-annotator agreement was measured using Cohen's Kappa at sentence level. Agreement was calculated on a predefined subset of the corpus that included sentences 1–1,005; 1,598–2,175; 3,069–3,853 and 5,283–5,601, corresponding to chapters 1, 3, 5 and 7, that were annotated by both authors. Inter-annotator agreement was computed separately for each annotation layer. For the Description layer, global multi-class agreement was almost perfect ($\kappa = 0.83$), while for the Focalization layer it was substantial ($\kappa = 0.80$). At the level of individual labels, the per-label binary Cohen's Kappa values show consistently high agreement across both annotation layers when interpreted using the same scale adopted for the global analysis. In the Description layer, agreement is almost perfect for Indigenous and Soldier ($\kappa = 0.84$ in both cases), indicating a very stable and shared understanding of these descriptive categories, while Landscape achieves substantial agreement ($\kappa = 0.74$), suggesting slightly greater interpretive flexibility in identifying environmental descriptions. A similar pattern is observed in the Focalization layer, where Indigenous ($\kappa = 0.88$) and Conqueror ($\kappa = 0.84$) reach almost perfect agreement, confirming strong alignment in the identification of narrative point of view, whereas Narrator shows substantial agreement ($\kappa = 0.80$), likely reflecting borderline cases between explicit narrator focalization and more neutral perspectives.

We then discussed the divergent annotations, reached agreement on which to use in the analysis and prepared the annotations for the full novel.[21]

Explorative analysis

Once the annotation process was completed, the annotated segments were imported into a Python environment[22] and prepared for the analysis. To generate the code, we manually prompted the Claude.ai chatbot (model Sonnet 4.5) (Anthropic 2024) with single session for each analysis, and then we verified the alignment of the resulting code with the outcome expected.[23]

Below are listed the methodology applied for each analysis conducted:

1. We explored category summaries to verify correspondence with the counts directly available in INCePTION's statistics tool and to test the data frame structure. The results are reported in Tables A1–A4. The only divergent category, Peritext, showed discrepancies because chapter numbers and titles were merged into a single span when adjacent. Since peritexts were excluded from the analysis, this issue was not addressed further.

[18] The division into these three subcategories originates from an initial hypothesis following Longoni (1994) and Orlandini (1992), which postulate a systematic dissociation between the narrator-I and the experiencing-I. However, as emerged from the annotation process, the narrator's presence proved far less widespread and decisive then expected. Consequently, the subcategories were not particularly informative, given the scarcity of sentences annotated with these labels.

[19] In the original annotation file, this category is labeled as Soldier. The term was revised to Conqueror following a reviewer's suggestion for consistency with the main category, identifying the same category of people.

[20] In the original annotation file, this category is labeled as Metadata. The term was revised to Peritext following a reviewer's suggestion for better theoretical precision.

[21] The annotations used for the analysis are available in the project's GitHub repository under the filename `admin.tsv`.

[22] Code and sources, as well as the outcomes of the following computational analysis, are available on a public repository on GitHub (https://github.com/slilli23/Flaiano-Computational-Narratology).

[23] AI-generated code was used due to the lack of funding for a programmer. The procedures rely on standard libraries and were verified manually by the authors.

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1. Annotation guidelines

Tag	Rules
Peritext	• Numbers and titles of chapters and subchapters
Description	• Description of physical objects of the landscapes, natural or artificial; description of climatic and atmospheric conditions (subcategory: Landscape) • Description of indigenous people (subcategory: Indigenous) • Description of members of the Italian army (subcategory: Conqueror)
Narrator	• Mention of references of narrator's storyworld (subcategory: Indexicals) • Anticipations of future events (subcategory: Knowledge) • Comments or judgments about the events and the agent's behavior (subcategory: Judgment)
Indigenous	• Thoughts and feelings attributed by the experiencing narrator to the indigenous people (derived from inferences and not observations) • Thoughts and feelings of Ethiopians reported by the experiencing narrator • Free indirect speech attributable to Ethiopian characters • Not: descriptions, actions or reported direct speech
Conqueror	• Thoughts and feelings attributed by the experiencing narrator to the Italian soldiers • Thoughts and feelings of the Italian soldiers reported by the experiencing narrator • Free indirect speech attributable to Italian characters • Not: descriptions, actions or reported direct speech

2. We identified the most frequent words (MFW) for each focalization category, setting a threshold of 80 words to obtain interpretable lists. We chose not to apply stopword filtering, except for articles and prepositions. Conjunctions and pronouns were retained as they may provide valuable information at the syntactic and semantic levels. For cross-category comparison, we extracted unique words for each category and performed a qualitative analysis of the results. This approach was preferred over statistical significance testing, as methods such as the Log-Likelihood Ratio and TF-IDF tend to foreground context-dependent elements – such as character names, character-specific pronouns and verbal forms associated with first or third person – which could reflect whether the focalization is anchored in the experiencing-I or transferred to another character. While statistically significant, these features do not necessarily highlight patterns of interest for this analysis.
3. We applied an unsupervised approach using the Stylo package for stylometric analysis. The aim was to determine whether distinctions between focalization categories were linguistically motivated and thus detectable through cluster analysis, and at which lexical level (most frequent function words versus less frequent content words). The Narrator category was excluded due to its limited size, which was not comparable with the other categories. For the analysis, we segmented annotated sentences into 100-word chunks and then randomly combined five chunks into single units. This procedure ensured sufficient textual density for each sample and independence from narrative sequencing. The analysis was performed on two different corpora: a balanced corpus with equal numbers of chunks per category (8) and an unbalanced corpus using the full dataset. Cluster analysis was tested with various parameters, with optimal results obtained using the full corpus and cosine Delta as the distance measure.
4. We then moved to the syntactic level, exploring the part-of-speech (POS) distribution for each category. POS distribution is particularly informative for semantic aspects, such as agency, topics and modality. POS tagging was performed with Stanza (Qi et al. 2020), due to its updated curation and good performance proven for Italian texts (98.4% UPOS accuracy; see https://stanfordnlp.github.io/stanza/performance.html). To assess whether POS distributions differed significantly across categories, we performed a chi-square test and calculated effect size using Cramér's V; results were then evaluated applying Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Subsequently, we conducted a qualitative analysis of three grammatical categories with higher semantic content: nouns, verbs and adjectives. We compared only the two contrasting categories of Indigenous and Conqueror, to which we also merged segments labeled as Indigenous and Conqueror within the Description category. To identify the most distinctive words for each focalization category, we applied a simple distinctiveness ratio: $(\text{count}_{\text{category_A}} + \text{smoothing})/(\text{count}_{\text{category_B}} + \text{smoothing})$, and assigned a distinctiveness score (distinctiveness ratio × frequency) based on the following thresholds: ratio >= 5.0: VERY HIGH; ratio >= 3.0: HIGH; ratio >= 2.0: MODERATE; ratio < 2: LOW. We analyzed only words with the two highest scores through close reading.
5. The final analysis examined syntactic role distribution to quantify agency representation across narrative categories. Following discourse analysis approaches to agency (Hart 2010; Leeuwen 2008), we used dependency parsing to identify how Indigenous and Conqueror categories are positioned syntactically as agents (doers of actions) or patients (recipients of actions).[24]

   Dependency parsing was performed using Stanza (Qi et al. 2020),[25] which assigns syntactic dependencies to each word in a sentence. We operationalized agency through the following syntactic roles:
   - *Agent roles:* Segments where nominal subjects appear in active constructions (`nsubj`), indicating entities actively performing actions.
   - *Patient roles:* Segments where entities appear as direct objects (`obj`), or subjects in passive constructions (`nsubj:pass`), indicating entities affected by or undergoing actions performed by others.

[24]This analysis focuses on syntactic positioning rather than semantic properties of agency (Dowty 1988). While Dowty's proto-role approach identifies agency through entailments, such as volitionality and causation, this study examines the surface syntactic realization of who acts versus who is acted upon within focalized narrative discourse.

[25]Stanza's performance on the ISDT corpus: UAS 93.29 percent and LAS 91.61 percent (see https://stanfordnlp.github.io/stanza/performance.html).

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This analysis measures syntactic role distribution within segments annotated by focalization category. Since focalization reflects the experiencing-I's perspective, Indigenous-focalized segments predominantly feature Indigenous characters as subjects and agents, while Conqueror-focalized segments position the colonizer in these roles. However, it should be noted that not every grammatical subject or object in a segment necessarily corresponds semantically to the assigned focalization category.[26] The agent/patient ratios thus reflect how each perspective is syntactically constructed: whether Indigenous or Conqueror focalizations are characterized by more agentive (subject-oriented) or patient-oriented (object-oriented) syntactic structures. For each segment, we calculated the agent/patient ratio as the number of agent roles divided by the number of patient roles. A ratio greater than 1 indicates predominant active agency, while a ratio less than 1 indicates more frequent patient positioning. We additionally analyzed verb transitivity patterns: transitive verbs (with direct objects) indicate actions performed on others, while intransitive verbs represent self-contained actions. Statistical significance of differences in agent/patient ratios between categories was assessed using the Mann–Whitney U test ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Results and discussion

In this section, we summarize and discuss the results obtained from each of the explorative analysis conducted and listed above.

Summary of annotations

Tables A1–A4 summarize the number of annotations, total words and average word count for each category. This overview is useful for evaluating group comparability: notably, the most frequent focalization shifts from the experiencing-I is toward Indigenous people, both by number of annotated sentences and total words. This suggests an attempt to engage the protagonist more intensively with Indigenous people, not merely through actions or verbal exchanges, but through efforts at intellectual and emotional identification. Descriptive passages are also well represented (233 annotations), predominantly Landscape descriptions (A3), with Indigenous descriptions ranking second. Focalization shifts to the narrator's perspective are less frequent and equally distributed among the three subcategories.

The identification of the Judgment subcategory proved particularly challenging, as it was not always clear whether judgments stemmed from the narrator's retrospective reflection or from the protagonist's inconsistent purposes and intentions throughout the plot.[27] Contrary to what has been claimed elsewhere (Orlandini 1992), the ethical framework's uncertainty does not appear to result from opposition between narrator and experiencing character, but rather from the main focalizer's continuous attempts to escape his own perspective by inferring and inventing others' experiences. However, close reading reveals that the content of these embedded focalizations is often self-referential: these are not genuine attempts to understand the other, but rather efforts to see himself from outside by projecting his vision onto his interlocutors.

Most frequent words comparative analysis

The first exploratory analysis compared MFW and identified unique words for each category. Table A5 reports a shortened version of the frequency tables, showing the 20 MFW per category. Full results are available in the GitHub repository (https://github.com/slilli23/Flaiano-Computational-Narratology).

Qualitative analysis of lexical distribution reveals distinctive patterns of focalization and agency attribution. At the highest frequencies, the adversative conjunction *ma* ("but") shows marked frequency in Narrator segments (1.32%) compared to Description (0.69%), suggesting narratorial intervention in embedded passages with a corrective attitude. Modal expressions pervade the text, creating an atmosphere of epistemic uncertainty that characterizes the focalizer's perspective. The adverb *forse* ("perhaps") appears consistently across categories (0.7%–0.8%, except Description), as do conditional forms *avrebbe* ("he/she/it should have") and *sarebbe* ("he/she/it should be") (0.3%–0.4%).

The verb *voleva* ("he/she wanted") appears predominantly in Conqueror segments (0.71%) compared to Indigenous segments (0.25%) and is absent from the Narrator's top frequencies. More significantly, despite the substantial quantitative disparity between unannotated segments (experiencing-I focalization) and annotated segments, the ratio of *volevo* ("I wanted") (61 occurrences) to *voleva* ("he/she wanted") (38 occurrences) remains relatively balanced. This distribution contradicts expectations for an internally focalized narrative, where *volevo* ("I wanted") should predominate given the protagonist's subjective perspective. This pattern suggests that the protagonist attributes agency to the Other – particularly the colonial apparatus – in disproportionate measure, as if perceiving himself as subject to a superior will emanating from the military machine.

Epistemic privilege manifests through the verb *sapevo* ("I knew"), which appears 53 times in unannotated segments (focalized on the agent) compared to 10 occurrences in Conqueror-focalized segments and 13 in Indigenous-focalized segments. This distribution marks the agent's privileged access to knowledge within the narrative framework. Gender marking reveals a process of objectification operating through taxonomizing language. The term *donna* ("woman") distributes across categories with highest frequency in Indigenous segments, while *uomo* ("man") appears exclusively in Description segments related to soldiers. This pattern indicates that generic gender terms function as classificatory tools rather than individuating markers: the colonized are identified through the "passive" gender, the colonizer through the stereotypical "active" gender. This reduction to categorical types (*donna*, *uomo*) effectively strips individuals of particularity and reinforces the power asymmetry inherent in the colonial encounter.

[26]The analysis included segments from both the Indigenous and Conqueror main categories, as well as their thematically related subcategories from the Description group (Description > Indigenous and Description > Conqueror). While these descriptive passages lack explicit internal focalization markers, they represent the protagonist's observational perspective on Indigenous people and Italian soldiers, respectively, and thus contribute to understanding how each group is syntactically positioned within the protagonist's perceptual field. Additionally, preliminary analysis excluding these subcategories yielded substantially similar results (agent/patient ratios of 0.76 vs. 0.78, $p = 0.95$), confirming that their inclusion does not alter the overall findings while providing a larger and more robust sample.

[27]This oscillating intentionality is typical of the protagonist: the inconsistency between purpose and action, continuous changes of intention, illness and related hypochondria and inability to achieve predetermined objectives characterize the lieutenant as the archetypal *inetto* (inept figure), which has illustrious precedents in Italian modernist literature, particularly in Svevo's novel *La coscienza di Zeno*. For this interpretation, see Sergiacomo (1994).

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Stylometric analysis

Stylometric cluster analysis using the R package Stylo (Eder, Rybicki, and Kestemont 2016) explored whether the annotations reflect linguistically detectable frequency-based differences, continuing the exploration begun with the qualitative MFW analysis. Cluster analysis revealed a clear distinction of Description chunks at default settings (100 MFW, no culling, Classic Delta), as shown in Figure A1. This indicates clear linguistic divergence between descriptive passages and narrative passages with focalization shifted to external characters, which is readily explained by the different syntactic constructions characteristic of descriptive versus narrative discourse.

Differentiation between the two focalization categories (Indigenous and Conqueror) was achieved only when the entire corpus was used, with performance improving as the MFW threshold increased (see Figure A2). Optimal performance, with correct distinction of all three categories, was reached at 300 MFW using Classic Delta (see Figure A3). Cosine Delta improved performance, achieving satisfactory results at 150 MFW, while culling showed no beneficial effect. These results indicate that at the syntactic level (lower MFW thresholds), only the Description category shows relevant characterization. However, as the threshold increases to include more content words – moving toward the semantic level – the two focalization categories also differentiate. While this merged quantitative analysis does not reveal which specific features ultimately distinguish the two focalizations, the unsupervised approach provides solid evidence of the robustness of both the research design and the annotation process.

Part-of-speech distribution analysis

POS distribution analysis (see Figure A4) aimed at detecting whether there are significant differences in POS distribution across categories. Significance test revealed that 11 of 13 POS categories have significant associations with narrative categories, which remained significant after stringent Bonferroni correction ($\alpha = 0.00385$). Unsurprisingly, description passages are characterized by over-representation of descriptive elements (ADJ: $+8.43, p < 0.001$; NOUN: $+7.16, p < 0.001$) and under-representation of dynamic narrative elements (VERB: -6.63, PRON: -6.63, both $p < 0.001$); results confirmed by effect size analysis (ADJ: $p = 2.81 \times 10^{-24}$, NOUN: $p = 1.30 \times 10^{-20}$; VERB, PRON: both $p < 10^{-16}$). This pattern clearly aligns with the functional distinction between static landscape description and dynamic character interaction.

Continuous measures analysis also revealed significant differences in linguistic complexity between narrative categories. Description passages showed the lowest lexical diversity ($M = 0.843$) but highest content word density (Function/Content = 0.955), consistent with descriptive vocabulary and low usage of function words. Conversely, Indigenous passages demonstrated the highest grammatical complexity (Function/Content = 1.076) while maintaining high lexical diversity ($M = 0.874$), suggesting more varied interactive language (Kruskal–Wallis tests: both $p < 0.001$).

These results, even if predictable and not informative for semantic differences between the categories, still are fundamental as they once again confirm the robustness of the annotation schema for all the categories identified.

Part-of-speech qualitative analysis

The second phase of POS analysis examined the MFW within each grammatical category, focusing exclusively on the two focalization categories (Indigenous and Conqueror), merged with their respective Description subcategories. The frequency tables reported in Tables A6–A11 reveal several interesting patterns.

Within adjectives, Indigenous characters are depicted – both through internal focalization and external description – with a perception of the world marked by wonder and naivety (*chiaro* "clear," *bello* "beautiful," *assurdo* "absurd," *meraviglioso* "marvelous"), as well as through more direct contact with natural existence (*nudo* "naked," *pieno* "full," *cupo* "dark"). Adjectives referring to moral qualities and values are also well represented (*buono* "good," *giusto* "just," *severo* "severe," *ospitale* "hospitable"). Conversely, Italian army members appear characterized by more superficial attitudes, embodying a petty bourgeois perspective (*giovanile* "youthful," *cordiale* "cordial," *sciocco* "foolish," *scontento* "discontent").

Noun analysis offers equally interesting insights. The conqueror representation shows insistence on military positions (*soldato* "soldier," *generale* "general," *maggiore* "major," *dottore* "doctor," *carabiniere* "carabineer," *sergente* "sergeant"), which is understandable given that Italian characters receive no proper names, unlike Ethiopians (Johannes, Mariam and Elias).[28] This strengthens the depersonalization of soldiers, who are regarded as "types" rather than individuals, embodying negative qualities, such as laziness, trickery, machismo and careerism. In Indigenous passages, the most frequent nouns show high generalization (*donna* "woman," *vecchio* "old man," *corpo* "body," *tempo* "time," *presenza* "presence") and close connection with nature and material existence (*capanna* "hut," *villaggio* "village," *spiazzo* "clearing," *animale* "animal," *odore* "smell"). Most significantly, several terms relate to relational dynamics between colonizer and colonized, particularly in the novel's final section when the lieutenant recuperates with Johannes in the "ghost" village (where inhabitants have been killed in retaliation): *signore* ("sir/lord"), *colpo* ("blow"), *rifiuto* ("refusal"), *fastidio* ("annoyance"), *curiosità* ("curiosity") and *volontà* ("will").

Verb analysis reveals markedly different patterns between categories. Conqueror-related verbs show higher transitivity (*amare* "to love," *insegnare* "to teach," *convincere* "to convince," *accumulare* "to accumulate"), while Indigenous-related verbs express actions primarily involving the subject and often modifications of internal state and perception (*lavare* "to wash," *andare* "to go," *riconoscere* "to recognize," *sorridere* "to smile," *desiderare* "to desire," *conoscere* "to know"). Some verbs reveal mediation and response dynamics in the colonial encounter, showing alternating attitudes (*seguire* "to follow," *ammettere* "to admit," *respingere* "to reject," *offrire* "to offer," *rifiutare* "to refuse").

This qualitative analysis reveals that colonizer and colonized are represented through stereotypical elements associated with both groups, yet simultaneously demonstrates the author's effort to interpret Indigenous interiority through focalization techniques. The higher number of distinctive verbs associated with the

[28]Notably, these are all biblical names, continuing the biblical reference in the title (Ecclesiastes 3:3). This has profound narrative significance: rather than assigning an eschatological function, it places these characters on a different plane of reality – outside colonial contingency's temporal framework (the clock time that the lieutenant gives Mariam, which repeatedly stops) and evocative of an eternal present. This temporal distance is explicitly expressed in one focalized passage: "Nei miei occhi c'erano duemila anni di più e lei lo sentiva" ("In my eyes there were two thousand more years and she felt it") (Flaiano 2016, loc. 10.84).

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Indigenous category – despite comparable segment size – suggests that stereotypical representation affects colonizers more than colonized. Ethiopian thoughts and feelings provoke the author's curiosity, employing immersion and imagination to recreate their inner world and render it accessible to Europeans. This process, however, remains incomplete: when the soldier finally leaves Africa, his acquired consciousness amounts to nothing more than a faint, disgusting smell that he can easily ignore along with accountability for his actions.

Syntactic role analysis

Syntactic role analysis explored agency attribution to the contrasting categories of colonized and colonizer. The analysis revealed no significant differences between the two groups, as shown in Table A12 and Figure A5. Agency appears equally distributed between characters regardless of group affiliation. Both Ethiopians and Italians occupy more patient than agent roles (agent/patient ratios: Indigenous 0.77, Conqueror 0.78), suggesting that characters are represented as subjected to historical and social forces beyond their control. Both categories also exhibit predominantly intransitive verb usage, reinforcing this pattern of limited agentive capacity.

Notably, Conqueror-focalized passages show slightly higher passive construction rates (0.07 vs. 0.04 per segment), although this difference is not statistically significant. This syntactic framing reflects the occupiers' paradoxical position: despite their role as invaders, they find themselves as impostors, incapable of becoming meaningful participants in the occupied land or of providing significant knowledge to native inhabitants. This mirrors the plot's trajectory, in which the protagonist progressively relinquishes control and places himself in Johannes' hands. Reading the protagonist's individual experience as emblematic of national defeat illuminates the novel's final chapter: guilt and responsibility lose accountability as the perpetrators of colonial violence position themselves as victims of historical forces. While contemporary readers might interpret this as an evasion of honest reflection on colonial crimes, at the time of publication (1947) this representation challenged fascist propaganda's portrayal of colonial soldiers as a monolithic, infallible entity. By revealing the occupiers' vulnerability and confusion, Flaiano offered a counter-narrative to official colonial discourse.

As noted in the methodology section, this analysis captures agency distribution within focalized segments but does not track character-specific agency throughout the entire narrative. A comprehensive account would require extending the analysis to the complete text using lexical filters, co-reference resolution and Named Entity Recognition to track specific characters across all narrative modes, including non-focalized passages. Such character-based analysis would distinguish between focalization-based agency (whose perspective dominates) and character-based agency (how specific individuals are syntactically positioned regardless of focalization). This distinction is particularly relevant for colonial discourse analysis, where power asymmetries may manifest through both narrative perspective and grammatical framing of character actions.[29]

Conclusion

The exploratory analysis conducted provided interesting insights for interpreting Flaiano's novel *Tempo di uccidere* within the framework of postcolonial literature. On the one hand, it demonstrated how the author constructs a subtle play of embedded perspectives that destabilize the reader's search for a clear ethical stance within the novel, obscuring a definitive authorial point of view. The diminished authority of the experiencing/narrator-I deliberately fails to provide a solid interpretative guide, while the layering of reflected perspectives succeeds in representing the complexity of the colonial experience. This complexity lies not only in the actual dynamics of confrontation and clash between conquerors and indigenous people, but especially in the controversial tension between inner conscience and external actions, between individual motivation and historical constraints. The consistency of these focalization processes is demonstrated by unsupervised cluster analysis and POS distribution analysis, where the focalizing categories emerge with statistical significance.

On the other hand, our analysis revealed how – despite Flaiano's incorporation of stereotypical elements from the colonial and exotic genre – the focalization through the Other's perspective represents an attempt to fill the epistemological gap that the conqueror experiences in confrontation with indigenous people. Although this identification process occurs through the colonizer's gaze, as embedded focalizations, it still testifies to an effort of understanding and decoding the colonized from within, moving beyond the epistemic certainty that derives from presumed cultural and material superiority. POS qualitative analysis illuminates the complex representation of Indigenous characters, revealing a larger and more varied set of verbs denoting perceptive and cognitive acts referred to Ethiopians, as well as numerous nouns and adjectives with moral connotation. Conversely, the most distinctive words referred to Italian soldiers picture a scarce willingness for in-depth analysis, basically revolving around objects of everyday life or reflecting a mentality typically bourgeois. Moreover, Italians lack proper names and are identified only by their military rank, which contributes to depersonalize them and reduce them to functional roles within the military apparatus. For the same reason, colonizers show higher frequencies of passive voice and intransitive actions than active and transitive ones in sentences where they are the embedded focalizers: both categories, colonizers and colonized, appear thus impotent in the face of the abstract military machine that reduces soldiers to blank labels and makes the colonized victims by their mere existence.

In conclusion, the analysis shows how the representation of indigenous people and conquerors does not rely peacefully on stereotypical patterns, but rather exploits those literary and propagandist conventions to subvert the familiar comfort that they traditionally emanate. In this interpretative light, the final chapter – where the lieutenant loses accountability for his crimes – can be coherently read as an ironical overthrow expressed through the voice of the author's alter-ego: the military machine ridicules and nullifies the protagonist's journey through his conscience, a journey where the relation with the Other had been confronted and resolved through mutual recognition. The lieutenant can peacefully

[29] In addition, future research could extend this analysis by examining specific character references to test Dowty's (1988) proto-role properties. Dowty's framework distinguishes Agent Proto-Role properties (volitional involvement, sentience/perception, causing events and movement) from Patient Proto-Role properties (undergoing change of state, incremental theme, causal affectedness and stationarity). Applying Dowty's semantic framework to character-specific syntactic roles would reveal more nuanced dimensions of colonial power representation. Beyond identifying who occupies subject or object positions, this approach would distinguish between volitional and non-volitional agents, between characters who cause events versus those who merely move and between patients who undergo change versus those who are causally affected by others.

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

return home and pretend nothing has happened – exactly as Flaiano himself experienced after the colonial campaign. The crimes he denounced with his characteristically ironic mark in the war journal remain nothing but a note: "Non mi sono mai così divertito come in questi giorni. Ricordarsene."[30]

Data availability statement. All data and code supporting this study are openly available. The annotated corpus, the output files and analysis results, and Google Colab notebooks for replication can be accessed at https://github.com/slilli23/Flaiano-Computational-Narratology. The original novel *Tempo di uccidere* (Flaiano 1947) is under copyright and must be obtained separately.

Disclosure of use of AI tools. The authors declare that generative AI tools were used for this study in the following phases: brainstorming, Python programming, statistical analysis, stylistic and formal revision and copy-editing. The intellectual content (research idea, research design, annotation, qualitative analysis, interpretation of results, draft writing and references) originates entirely from the human authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

Author contributions. Conceptualization: S.L.; Formal analysis: S.L. and D.R.; Methodology: S.L.; Validation: D.R.; Writing – original draft: S.L.; Writing – review and editing: D.R.

Funding statement. The authors declare that no specific funding has been received for this article.

Competing interests. The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical standards. The authors affirm that this research did not involve human participants.

References

Anthropic 2024. "Large Language Model." Claude. https://claude.ai.

Bal, Mieke. 2009. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Baraldi, Matteo. 2004. "Il cuore di tenebra di un uomo ridicolo." *Quaderni del '900* 4: 97–104.

Bazzocchi, Marco Antonio. 2012. "Il corpo e le piaghe: L'Africa di Flaiano." *Narrativa* 33–34: 301–9.

Benvenuti, Giuliana. 2012. "Da Flaiano a Ghermandi: riscritture postcoloniali." *Narrativa* 33–34: 311–21.

Bongie, Chris. 1991. *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism and the Fin de Siecle*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Booth, Wayne C. 1961. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brunetti, Bruno. 2010. "Modernità malata. Note su *Tempo di uccidere* di Ennio Flaiano." In *Fuori centro. Percorsi postcoloniali nella letteratura italiana*, edited by **R. Derobertis**, 57–71. Roma: Aracne Editrice.

Calchi Novati, Gian Paolo. 2008. "Italy and Africa. How to Forget Colonialism." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 13, no. 1: 41–57.

Collotti, Enzo. 2000. *Fascismo e politica di potenza. La politica estera 1922-1939*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.

Comparini, Alberto. 2017. "Flaiano Twenty Years Later. Re-Reading Tempo di uccidere." *Modernità letteraria* 10: 51–63.

Del Boca, Angelo. 1976–1984. *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Del Boca, Angelo. 1992. *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani. Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.

Del Boca, Angelo. 1998. "Il colonialismo italiano tra miti, rimozioni, negazioni e inadempienze." *Italia contemporanea* 212: 589–603.

Deplano, Valeria. 2015. *L'Africa in casa. Propaganda e cultura coloniale nell'Italia fascista*. Firenze: Le Monnier.

Domenichelli, Mario. 1997. "Il contagio della terra straniera." In *Lo straniero. Atti del Convegno di Studi (Cagliari, 16-19 Novembre 1994)*, Vol. 2, edited by **M. Domenichelli and P. Fasano**, 645–60. Roma: Bulzoni.

Dowty, David. 1988. "Thematic Proto-Roles and Argument Selection." *Language* 67, no. 3: 547–619.

Eder, Maciej, Jan Rybicki, and Mike Kestemont. 2016. "Stylometry with R: A Package for Computational Text Analysis." *R Journal* 8, no. 1: 107–21.

Filippi, Francesco. 2021. *Noi però gli abbiamo fatto le strade. Le colonie italiane tra bugie, razzismi e amnesie*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

Flaiano, Ennio. 1947. *Tempo di uccidere*. Milano: Longanesi.

Flaiano, Ennio. 1951. *The Short Cut*. New York: Signet Book.

Flaiano, Ennio. 1988a. "La solitudine del satiro." In *Opere. Scritti Postumi*, edited by **M. Corti and A. Longoni**. Milano: Bompiani.

Flaiano, Ennio. 1988b. *Opere. Scritti postumi*, edited by **M. Corti and A. Longoni**. Milano: Bompiani.

Flaiano, Ennio. 2016. *Tempo di uccidere*. Milano: BUR Rizzoli (ebook).

Flaiano, Ennio. 2020. *Aethiopia. Appunti per una canzonetta*. Milano: Adelphi (ebook).

Genette, Gérard. 1980. *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method, Foreword by Jonathan Culler*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Hart, Christopher. 2010. *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science: New Perspectives on Immigration Discourse*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jahn, Manfred. 2007. *Focalization*, Cambridge Companions to Literature, 94–108. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kearns, Edward. 2021. "Annotation Guidelines for Narrative Levels, Time Features, and Subjective Narration Styles in Fiction (SANTA 2)." *Journal of Cultural Analytics* 6, no. 4: 53–68.

Klauk, Tobias, Tilmann Köppe, and Edgar Onea. 2012. "Internally Focalized Narration from a Linguistic Point of View." *Scientific Study of Literature* 2, no. 2: 218–42.

Klie, Jan-Christoph, Michael Bugert, Beto Boullosa, Richard Eckart de Castilho, and Iryna Gurevych. 2018. "The INCEpTION Platform: Machine-Assisted and Knowledge-Oriented Interactive Annotation." In *Proceedings of the 27th International Conference on Computational Linguistics: System Demonstrations*, edited by **E. M. Bender, L. Derczynski and P. Isabelle**, 5–9. Association for Computational Linguistics. Event Title: The 27th International Conference on Computational Linguistics (COLING 2018).

Leeuwen, Theo van 2008. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Longoni, Anna. 1994. "*Tempo di uccidere* e la narrazione frantumata. Il romanzo e L'altro' Flaiano." In *Tempo di uccidere: Atti del Convegno Nazionale (Pescara, 27-28 maggio 1994)*, edited by **Associazione culturale Ennio Flaiano**, 23–34. Pescara: Ediars.

Maxia, Stefano 2010. "Una stagione in Etiopia. *Tempo di uccidere* di Ennio Flaiano. Appunti di lettura." In *L'occhio e la memoria. Miscellanea di studi in onore di Natale Tedesco*, Vol. 2, 225–49. Caltanissetta: Editori Del Sole, Edizioni Lussografica; Salvatore Sciascia Editore.

Mengozzi, Chiara. 2016. "Lo sguardo e la colpa: *Tempo di uccidere* di Ennio Flaiano e la dialettica servo-signore alla prova del colonialismo." *MLN* 131, no. 1: 174–95.

Nasson, Leah. 2012. "Alla base di ogni espansione, il desiderio sessuale. Negotiating Exoticism and Colonial Conquest in Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere*." *Italian Studies in Southern Africa/Studi d'Italianistica nell'Africa Australe* 25, no. 1: 40–58.

Niederhoff, Burkhard. 2011. "Focalization." In *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by **P. E. A. Hühn**. Hamburg: Hamburg University.

O'Neill, Patrick. 2002. "Points of Origin: On Focalization in Narrative." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 19: 331–50.

Orlandini, Roberta. 1992. "(Anti)Colonialismo in *Tempo di uccidere* di Ennio Flaiano." *Italica* 69, no. 4: 478–88.

[30]The quote is taken from the exemplary recounting in *Aethiopia* (Flaiano 2020) of the massacre that occurred on 7 March 1936, when the inhabitants of an entire village were killed en masse, and the most attractive woman was repeatedly raped and brutally tortured. Flaiano offers no explicit commentary or moral condemnation; he simply reports the facts with the detachment of a dispassionate journalist. However, as a title below the date, he added these words: "I never had as much fun as these days. Remember it." The stark contrast between the violence narrated and this absurd comment underscores the brutality of the crime even more powerfully than an outright denunciation would have.

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pagliara, Maria. 2001. *Il romanzo coloniale tra imperialismo e rimorso*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
Palmer, Alan. 2002. "The Construction of Fictional Minds." *Narrative* 10, no. 1: 28–46.
Palmer, Alan. 2004. *Fictional Minds*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
Palumbo, Patrizia. 2002. "National Integrity and African Malaise in Ennio Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere*." *Forum Italicum* 36: 53–68.
Pautasso, Sergio. 1992. "Attualità di un romanzo." In *La Critica e Flaiano*, edited by **L. Sergiacomo**, 107–10. Pescara: Associazione Culturale Ennio Flaiano, Ediars.
Prisco, Mario. 2012. "Il significato dello svelamento dei crimini del colonialismo italiano in *Tempo di uccidere*, *Regina di fiori e di perle* ed *Oltre Babilonia*." *Quaderni del '900 12*, 103–8.
Qi, Peng., Yuhao, Zhang, Yuhui, Zhang, Jason, Bolton, and Christopher D. Manning. 2020. "Stanza: A Python Natural Language Processing Toolkit for Many Human Languages." In *Proceedings of the 58th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics: System Demonstrations*, edited by **A. Celikyilmaz and T.-H. Wen**, 101–8. Association for Computational Linguistics.
Re, Lucia. 2017. "Italy's First Postcolonial Novel and the End of (Neo)Realism." *The Italianist* 37, no. 3: 416–35.
Rochat, Giorgio. 1973. *Il colonialismo italiano*. Torino: Loescher.
Rossi, Gianluigi. 1980. *L'Africa Italiana verso l'indipendenza (1941-49)*. Milano: Giuffrè.
Sabatini, Gabriele. 2017. "Settant'anni Fa / Ennio Flaiano. Tempo di uccidere." *Doppiozero*.
Sergiacomo, Lucilla. 1994. "Il tema dell'inettitudine in *Tempo di uccidere* e la narrazione frantumata. Il romanzo e l'ʻaltro' Flaiano." In *Tempo di uccidere: Atti del Convegno Nazionale (Pescara, 27-28 maggio 1994)*, edited by **Associazione culturale Ennio Flaiano**, 35–55. Pescara: Associazione Culturale Ennio Flaiano, Ediars.
Skocki, Tomasz. 2012. "Il soldato italiano in colonia e il suo rapporto con l'altro. *Il giovane maronita* di Alessandro Spina e *Tempo di uccidere* di Ennio Flaiano." *Narrativa* 33–34: 333–42.
Stefani, Giulietta. 2007. *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale: una storia di genere*. Verona: Ombre Corte.
Sternberg, Meir., and Tamar Yacobi. 2015. "(Un)Reliability in Narrative Discourse: A Comprehensive Overview." *Poetics Today* 36, no. 4: 327–498.
Tomasello, Giovanna. 1984. *La letteratura coloniale italiana dalle avanguardie al fascismo*. Palermo: Sellerio Editore.
Trevisan, Marco. 2024. *Il Premio Strega: Storia del trofeo letterario più famoso d'Italia raccontata anno per anno*. Santarcangelo di Romagna: Diarkos.
Trubiano, Marisa S. 2010. *Ennio Flaiano and His Italy: Postcards from a Changing World*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
Zerweck, Bruno. 2001. "Historicizing Unreliable Narration: Unreliability and Cultural Discourse in Narrative Fiction." *Style* 35, no. 1: 151–76.
Zunshine, Lisa. 2006. *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Appendix

Tables

Table A1. Number of sentences (or segments) annotated and sentence length

Main category	Num annotations	Total words	Avg words per segment
UNLABELED	4,831	63,841	13.21
Indigenous	367	7,435	20.26
Description	233	5,092	21.85
Conqueror	224	4,099	18.30
Narrator	100	1,563	15.63
Peritext	38	71	1.87

Table A2. Number of words

Main category	Num annotations	Percent annotations	Total words	Percent words
UNLABELED	4,831	83.39	63,841	77.76
Indigenous	367	6.34	7,435	9.06
Description	233	4.02	5,092	6.20
Conqueror	224	3.87	4,099	4.99
Narrator	100	1.73	1,563	1.90
Peritext	38	0.66	71	0.09

Table A3. Description subcategories

Subcategory	Num Annot	Total words	Avg W per Seg	% of Cat	% Words of Cat
Landscape	140	3,180	22.71	60.09	62.45
Indigenous	60	1,159	19.32	25.75	22.76
Conqueror	33	753	22.82	14.16	14.79

Table A4. Narrator subcategories

Subcategory	Num Annot	Total words	Avg W per Seg	% of Cat	% Words of Cat
Knowledge	37	544	14.70	37.0	34.80
Judgment	32	508	15.88	32.0	32.50
Indexicals	31	511	16.48	31.0	32.69

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table A5. Most frequent words by narrative category (top 20)

Category type	Main category	Word	Rank	Count	%
Main	Narrator	che	1	54	4.2
Main	Narrator	e	2	44	3.42
Main	Narrator	non	3	37	2.88
Main	Narrator	era	4	18	1.4
Main	Narrator	ma	5	17	1.32
Main	Narrator	mi	6	17	1.32
Main	Narrator	l	7	16	1.25
Main	Narrator	più	8	14	1.09
Main	Narrator	quel	9	13	1.01
Main	Narrator	si	10	12	0.93
Main	Narrator	forse	11	9	0.7
Main	Narrator	soltanto	12	9	0.7
Main	Narrator	ho	13	8	0.62
Main	Narrator	quella	14	8	0.62
Main	Narrator	o	15	8	0.62
Main	Narrator	questo	16	8	0.62
Main	Narrator	questa	17	7	0.54
Main	Narrator	i	18	7	0.54
Main	Narrator	avrei	19	7	0.54
Main	Narrator	mai	20	7	0.54
Main	Description	e	1	221	5.68
Main	Description	che	2	109	2.8
Main	Description	era	3	87	2.23
Main	Description	non	4	49	1.26
Main	Description	si	5	42	1.08
Main	Description	l	6	37	0.95
Main	Description	i	7	34	0.87
Main	Description	più	8	33	0.85
Main	Description	erano	9	31	0.8
Main	Description	ma	10	27	0.69
Main	Description	come	11	24	0.62
Main	Description	suo	12	24	0.62
Main	Description	mi	13	23	0.59
Main	Description	aveva	14	22	0.57
Main	Description	c	15	22	0.57
Main	Description	sua	16	17	0.44
Main	Description	sempre	17	17	0.44
Main	Description	senza	18	17	0.44
Main	Description	alberi	19	16	0.41
Main	Description	due	20	15	0.39
Main	Conqueror	che	1	126	3.89
Main	Conqueror	e	2	116	3.58

Table A5. Continued

Category type	Main category	Word	Rank	Count	%
Main	Conqueror	non	3	87	2.69
Main	Conqueror	si	4	45	1.39
Main	Conqueror	era	5	44	1.36
Main	Conqueror	l	6	36	1.11
Main	Conqueror	mi	7	32	0.99
Main	Conqueror	ma	8	30	0.93
Main	Conqueror	i	9	27	0.83
Main	Conqueror	forse	10	25	0.77
Main	Conqueror	voleva	11	23	0.71
Main	Conqueror	aveva	12	22	0.68
Main	Conqueror	sua	13	20	0.62
Main	Conqueror	anche	14	19	0.59
Main	Conqueror	suo	15	18	0.56
Main	Conqueror	come	16	17	0.53
Main	Conqueror	più	17	17	0.53
Main	Conqueror	o	18	17	0.53
Main	Conqueror	avrebbe	19	17	0.53
Main	Conqueror	quella	20	15	0.46
Main	Indigenous	e	1	252	4.23
Main	Indigenous	che	2	231	3.88
Main	Indigenous	non	3	167	2.8
Main	Indigenous	si	4	78	1.31
Main	Indigenous	era	5	77	1.29
Main	Indigenous	mi	6	69	1.16
Main	Indigenous	ma	7	67	1.12
Main	Indigenous	l	8	61	1.02
Main	Indigenous	aveva	9	56	0.94
Main	Indigenous	forse	10	47	0.79
Main	Indigenous	come	11	47	0.79
Main	Indigenous	se	12	40	0.67
Main	Indigenous	suo	13	39	0.65
Main	Indigenous	perché	14	39	0.65
Main	Indigenous	senza	15	38	0.64
Main	Indigenous	i	16	38	0.64
Main	Indigenous	più	17	38	0.64
Main	Indigenous	johannes	18	38	0.64
Main	Indigenous	mia	19	34	0.57
Main	Indigenous	sua	20	34	0.57

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table A6. Most distinctive adjectives in Conqueror corpus (top 20)

Word	Freq	Distinctiveness	Level	Exclusive
maggiore	12	4.3	HIGH	
vicino	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
simpatico	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
giovanile	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
ufficiale	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
cordiale	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
pratico	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
pronto	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
sciocco	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
guasto	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
scontento	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE

Table A7. Most distinctive adjectives in Indigenous corpus (top 20)

Word	Freq	Distinctiveness	Level	Exclusive
nudo	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
bello	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
assurdo	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
unico	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
chiaro	8	4.5	HIGH	
pieno	7	4.0	HIGH	
buono	7	4.0	HIGH	
cupo	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
socchiuso	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
meraviglioso	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
giusto	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
elementare	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
stesso	9	3.3	HIGH	
severo	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
ospitale	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
sopportabile	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
eccessivo	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
silenzioso	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
fiducioso	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
vivo	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE

Table A8. Most distinctive nouns in Conqueror corpus (top 20)

Word	Freq	Distinctiveness	Level	Exclusive
dottore	8	9.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
generale	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
sergente	4	5.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
cura	4	5.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
faccia	4	5.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
immaginazione	4	5.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
sigaro	4	5.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
soldato	21	4.4	HIGH	
carabiniere	7	4.0	HIGH	
contrabbandiere	7	4.0	HIGH	
storia	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
camion	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
tappa	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
argomento	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
berretto	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
mese	6	3.5	HIGH	
tenda	9	3.3	HIGH	
giovane	5	3.0	HIGH	
aria	5	3.0	HIGH	
ritorno	5	3.0	HIGH	

Table A9. Most distinctive nouns in Indigenous corpus (top 20)

Word	Freq	Distinctiveness	Level	Exclusive
capanna	15	16.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
villaggio	10	11.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
signore	9	10.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
vecchio	9	10.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
spiazzo	9	10.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
albero	8	9.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
pelle	8	9.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
curiosità	7	8.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
animale	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
boscaglia	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
piede	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
palo	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
odore	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
capo	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
rifiuto	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
presenza	10	5.5	VERY_HIGH	
donna	33	4.2	HIGH	
tempo	21	3.7	HIGH	
mano	33	3.4	HIGH	
modo	11	3.0	HIGH	

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table A10. Most distinctive verbs in Conqueror corpus (top 20)

Word	Freq	Distinctiveness	Level	Exclusive
insegnare	4	5.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
cantare	4	5.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
indignare	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
consigliare	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
partecipare	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
rammentare	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
rinunciare	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
accumulare	3	4.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
amare	6	3.5	HIGH	
convincere	5	3.0	HIGH	
infondere	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
fumare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
telefonare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
ingannare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
illuminare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
addormentare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
obbligare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
finsire	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
toccare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
medicare	2	3.0	HIGH	EXCLUSIVE

Table A11. Most distinctive verbs in Indigenous corpus (top 20)

Word	Freq	Distinctiveness	Level	Exclusive
lavare	11	12.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
muovere	7	8.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
riconoscere	7	8.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
alzare	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
indicare	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
ammettere	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
respingere	6	7.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
desiderare	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
ricordare	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
accorrere	5	6.0	VERY_HIGH	EXCLUSIVE
cominciare	9	5.0	VERY_HIGH	
offrire	8	4.5	HIGH	
rifiutare	8	4.5	HIGH	
sorridere	12	4.3	HIGH	
seguire	11	4.0	HIGH	
capire	11	4.0	HIGH	
andare	19	3.3	HIGH	
considerare	9	3.3	HIGH	
prendere	17	3.0	HIGH	
tenere	11	3.0	HIGH	

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table A12. Syntactic role distribution by category

Category	Seg.	Agent	Patient	A/P ratio	Pass.	Pass. rate	Trans.	Intrans.
Indigenous	427	493	639	0.77	15	0.04	160	433
Conqueror	257	277	356	0.78	17	0.07	93	150

Figures

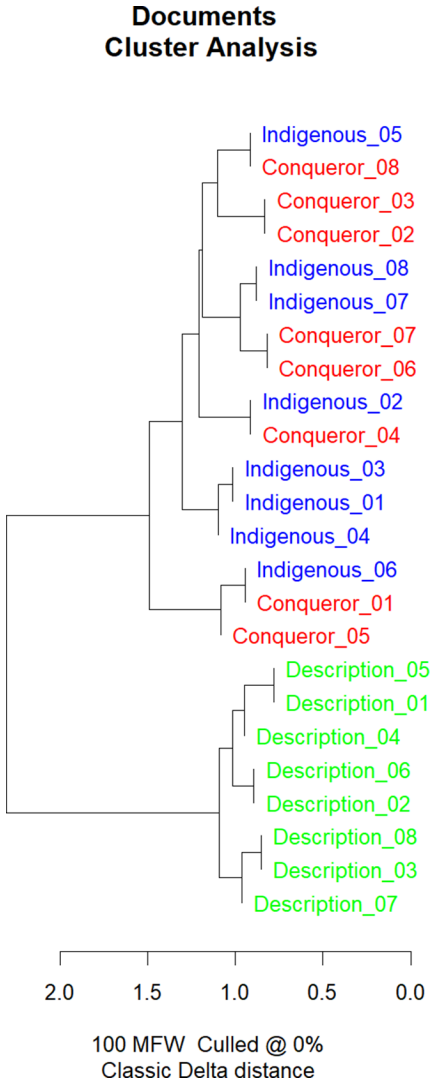


Figure A1. Cluster analysis with balanced corpus (100 MFW, Classic Delta).

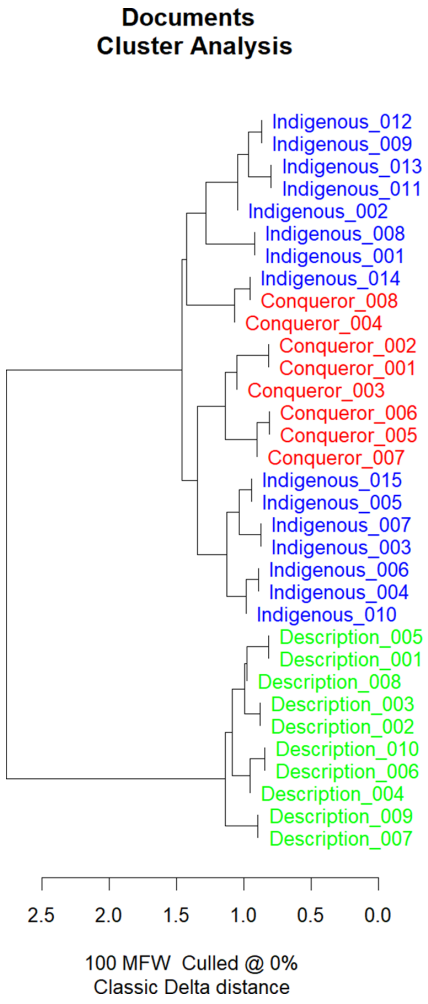


Figure A2. Cluster analysis with full corpus (150 MFW, Classic Delta).

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

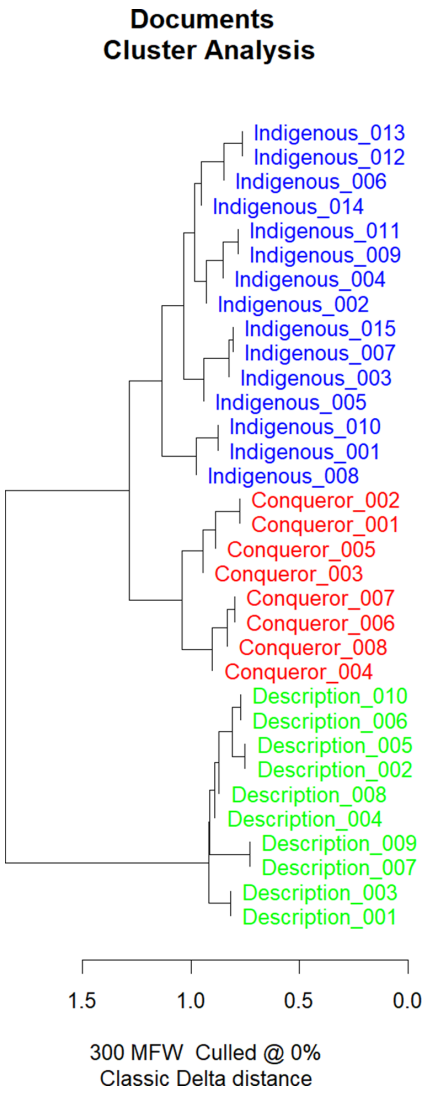


Figure A3. Cluster analysis with full corpus (300 MFW, Classic Delta).

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press

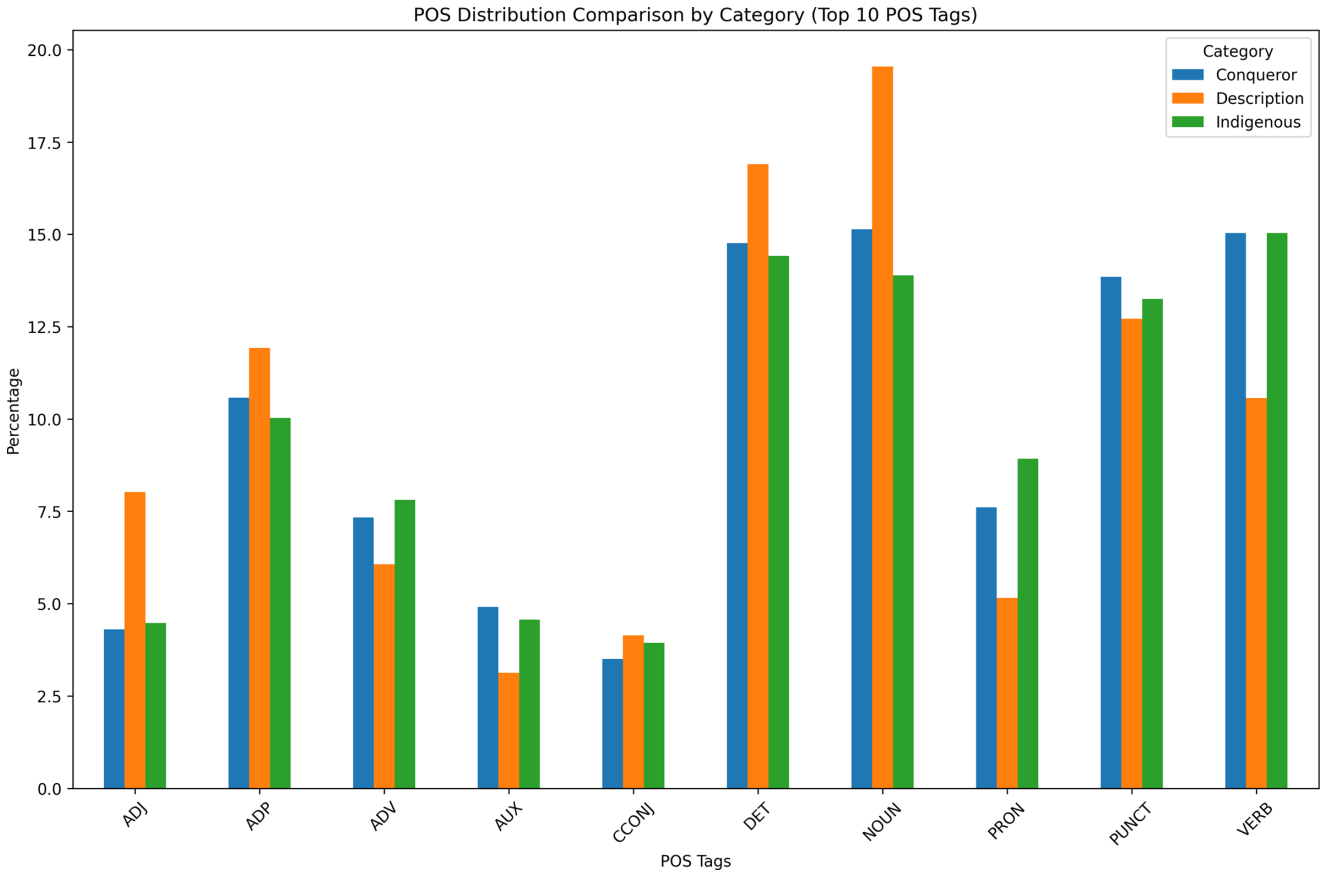


Figure A4. POS distribution comparison by category.

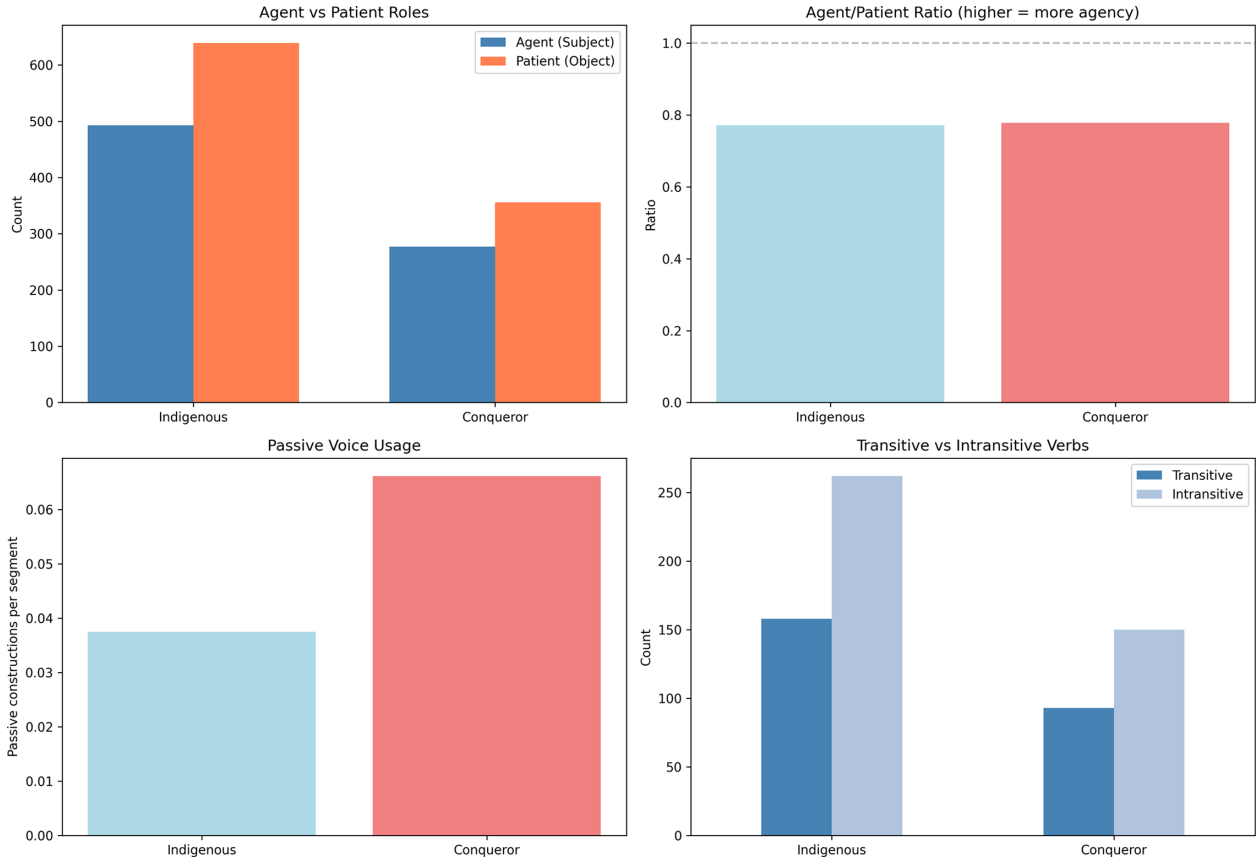


Figure A5. Syntactic role analysis: Agent/patient ratios for Indigenous and Conqueror categories.

https://doi.org/10.1017/chr.2026.10026 Published online by Cambridge University Press