



# Difference and incrementality: a study of the polysemy of "altro" ('other') in Italian

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## Abstract

The Italian word *altro* ‘other’ exhibits a complex semantic behaviour and provides a window on the interaction between logical meaning and linguistic structure.

Besides a lexical meaning related to qualitative difference, *altro* has a two-sided logical meaning:

(i) *D*(ifference)-value (e.g. *Gianni no longer is himself, but un altro uomo ‘another man’ with un’altra vita ‘another life’*)

(ii) *M*(ore)-value (e.g. *Can I have un altro caffè? ‘another coffee’*)

Cinque (2015) focuses on cardinal NPs: there is a correlation between the *D*-value and the *M*-value and different syntactic positions of *altro* within the NP (e.g. *due altre persone* ‘two different types of person’ / *altri due minuti* ‘two more minutes’).

Gianollo & Mauri (2020) pay more attention to discourse relations: *altro* is lexically ambiguous between ‘different’ and ‘more’; each of these values is triggered by a different discourse relation, i.e. additive or contrastive.

### Our proposal:

- (a) *altro* always means  $\neq$ ,
- (b) the terms *x* and *y* to the two sides of  $\neq$  can be of any ontological type (token-level or type-level entities),
- (c) the discourse context determines the ontological type of *x* and *y*,
- (d) whatever the ontological type of *x* and *y*, the *M*-value only emerges in an additive context.

## Introduction: The variety of uses of *altro*

- *Altro* has a variety of uses, ranging from lexical to functional:

### Adjectival & nominal uses (only *D*-value)

- (1) a. Left-wing politics at that time was *altra* ‘qualitatively different’ from today’s. (Adjective)
- b. The respect for *l’altro* ‘the Other’ is fundamental. (Noun)

### Logical uses, 1: *D*(ifference)-value

- (2) a. Not this book, *un altro* ‘another one’ please.
- b. If they survive, they will be *due altri individui* ‘two other individuals’.

### Logical uses, 2: *M*(ore)-value

- (3) a. I’d like to have *un altro caffè* ‘one more coffee’.
- b. Give me *altri cinque minuti* ‘five more minutes’.

We focus on the logical uses.

- *Altro* is both anaphoric and relational:

(a) anaphoric: an antecedent must be contextually accessible

(b) relational: *altro* introduces a relation between two entities *x* and *y*

(4) I’ve already read [*this book*]<sub>*x*</sub>. I’ll pick [*un [altro]<sub><x,y></sub>*]<sub>*y*</sub> ‘another one’.  
 $\leadsto \text{book}_x \neq \text{book}_y$

(5) [*The time you granted me*]<sub>*x*</sub> is not enough. Give me [*[altri]<sub><x,y></sub> cinque minuti*]<sub>*y*</sub> ‘five more minutes’.  
 $\leadsto \text{time}_x \neq \text{time}_y$

## Cinque (2015): 2 syntactic positions & 2 kinds of non-identity

(H) **High position of *altro* within the NP**: *x* and *y* are **numerically different** but of the **same relevant type**  $\Rightarrow$  ***M*-value**

Ex: Give me [<sub>NP</sub> *altri cinque minuti*] ‘five **more** minutes’.

(L) **Low position of *altro* within the NP**: *x* and *y* are **qualitatively different** individuals  $\Rightarrow$  ***D*-value**

Ex: If they survive, they will be [<sub>NP</sub> *due altre persone*] ‘two **different** persons’.

But the association with the syntactic position is not deterministic:

(6) A policeman has been killed on Thursday at Champs Élysées and *due altri* ‘two more policemen’ have been seriously injured in a shooting.

## Gianollo & Mauri (2020): 2 kinds of discourse relations

Gianollo & Mauri (2020): *altro* is lexically ambiguous between *M*-value and *D*-value; these values are triggered by different discourse relations (Asher & Lascarides 2005):

(A) **Additive relation**: a discourse item *y* is added to an item *x* which is similar to *y*  $\Rightarrow$  ***M*-value**

Ex: Tracing contacts is crucial to defeat the pandemic. *Un’altra misura* ‘one **more** measure’ to be implemented, **moreover**, is social distancing.

(C) **Contrastive relation**: a predication about *y* is contrasted to a parallel predication about *x*  $\Rightarrow$  ***D*-value**

Ex: The virus is believed to have been transmitted to humans by bats. *Un’altra ipotesi* ‘a **different** hypothesis’ traces back the spillover, **instead**, to pangolins.

## Our claim: Negation of identity is the core meaning of *altro*

- *Altro* always means  $\neq$  (no matter the syntactic or discourse context)

- *D*-value is the default interpretation of *altro*:

(2) a. Not this book, *un altro* ‘another one’ please.

Reading 1 (*whatever book different from this one*):

{presupposition: BOOK(*x*)}  $\exists y$  [*x*  $\neq$  *y*  $\wedge$  BOOK(*y*)  $\wedge$   $\neg$ Φ(*x*)  $\wedge$  Φ(*y*)]

Reading 2 (*a book of a different type from this one*):

{presup.: BOOK- $\tau_1$ (*x*)}  $\exists y \exists \text{BOOK-}\tau_2$  [BOOK- $\tau_2 \neq$  BOOK- $\tau_1 \wedge$  BOOK- $\tau_2$ (*y*)  $\wedge$   $\neg$ Φ(*x*)  $\wedge$  Φ(*y*)]

[N.B.: BOOK- $\tau_n$  is a type variable for a subtype of BOOK]

- *M*-value is a special interpretation emerging in **additive contexts**:

(3) a. I’d like to have *un altro caffè* ‘one more coffee’.

{presup.: COFFEE(*x*)  $\wedge$  Φ(*x*)}  $\exists y$  [*x*  $\neq$  *y*  $\wedge$  COFFEE(*y*)  $\wedge$  Φ(*y*)]

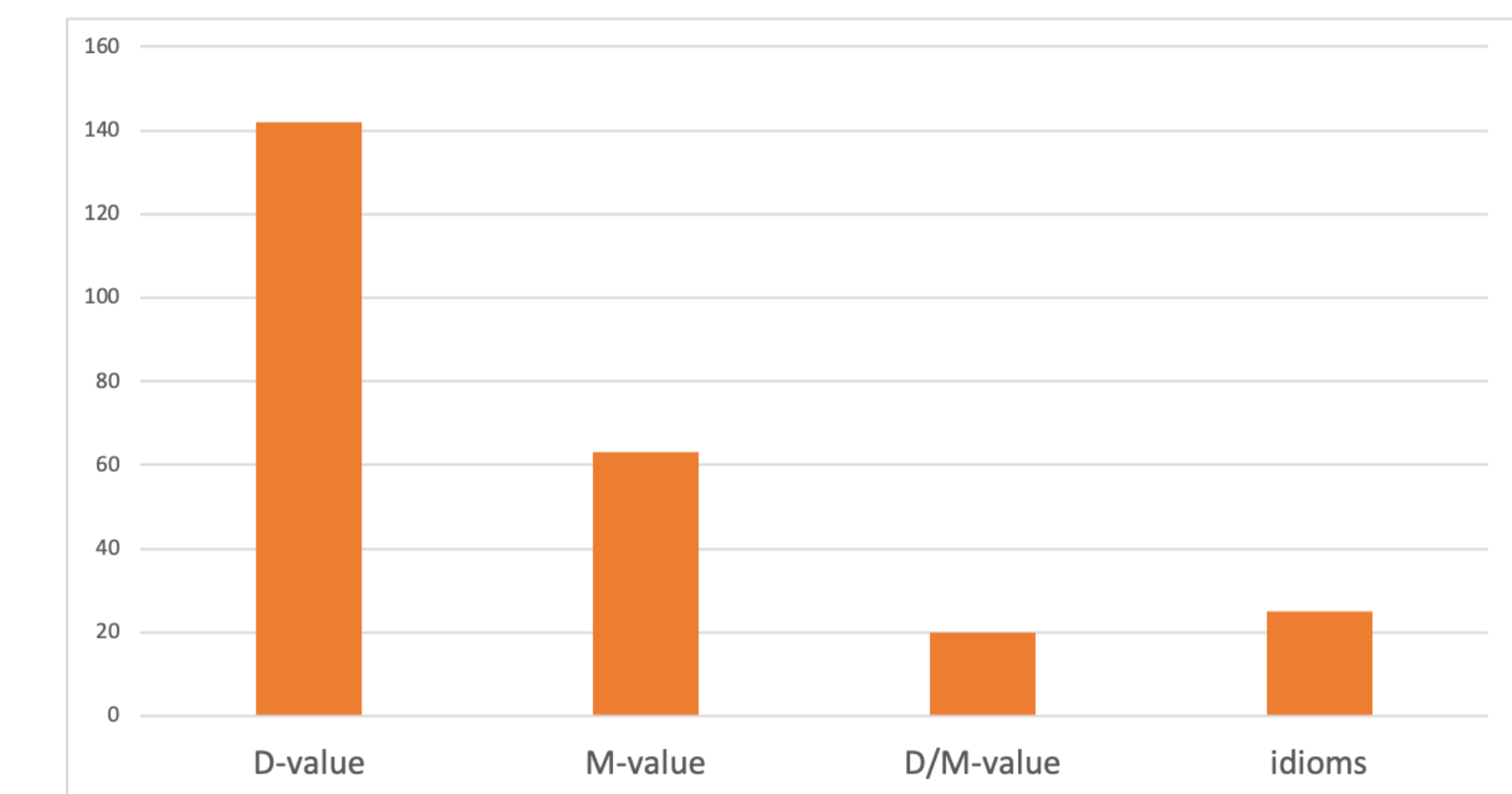
- In the *D*-interpretation, the antecedent entity *x* has a certain role in the predication at issue, Φ( ), but the other one *y* does not: Φ(*x*) vs  $\neg$ Φ(*y*).

- The *M*-value emerges when both *x* and *y* have the same role in the predication at issue: we have both Φ(*x*) (in the presupposition) and Φ(*y*) (in the assertion).

## Results

- We manually annotated 250 occurrences of *altro* randomly extracted from the CORIS corpus (Rossini Favretti et al. 2002) for the features *D*(ifference) / *M*(ore) and *To*(ken) / *Ty*(pe).

- We found 142 instances of *D*-value, 63 instances of *M*-value, 20 ambiguous *D*/*M*-value instances (entanglement of *D*+*M*-values) and 25 idioms (e.g. *da un giorno all’altro* ‘from one day to the next’).



- We did not find any alignment *D*-*Ty* / *M*-*To*: in some cases of *D*-value the relevant ontological level is *Token*, in some cases of *M*-value the relevant ontological level is *Type*.

### *D*-value

#### *Token*

(7) He used to move from one party *all’altra* ‘to the other’.

#### *Type*

(8) Giolitti’s cold calculation had *un altro effetto* ‘another effect’, maybe an unexpected one.

### *M*-value

#### *Token*

(9) [This service] will be offered by the city of Rome together with *altri autorevoli partner* ‘other authoritative partners’, among which Università Sapienza and the other Roman universities, Tor Vergata and Roma 3.

#### *Type*

(10) In many Southern Iraqi cities the electrical systems have been bombed in Anglo – American raids, which caused a chain of *altre tragedie* ‘other tragedies’: breakdowns of the pumping systems, therefore shortage of drinking water and risk of serious epidemics.

### *D*+*M*-value

(11) The computer is the most important working instrument of meteorologists. But meteorologists also need to collect empirical data and for this they need *altri strumenti* ‘other instruments’, such as thermometers and barometers.

## Conclusion and discussion

- A non-ambiguous lexical analysis of *altro* in which *altro* always means  $\neq$ .

- The observed *D*/*M* polysemy is the effect of an interaction between the lexical meaning of *altro* and the discourse context.

- In *M*-interpretation the  $\neq$  relation is present in the semantic representation but does not make any non-trivial contribution to at-issue content.

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