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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*]_{*x*}. I'll pick [*un altro*]_{<*x*,*y*>}_{*y*} 'another one'.
 $\leadsto \text{book}_x \neq \text{book}_y$

(5) [*The time you granted me*]_{*x*} is not enough. Give me [*altri*]_{<*x*,*y*>} *cinque minuti*_{*y*} '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 [_{NP} *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 [_{NP} *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: $\text{BOOK}(x)$ } $\exists y [x \neq y \wedge \text{BOOK}(y) \wedge \neg\Phi(x) \wedge \Phi(y)]$

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

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

[N.B.: $\text{BOOK-}\tau_n$ 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'.

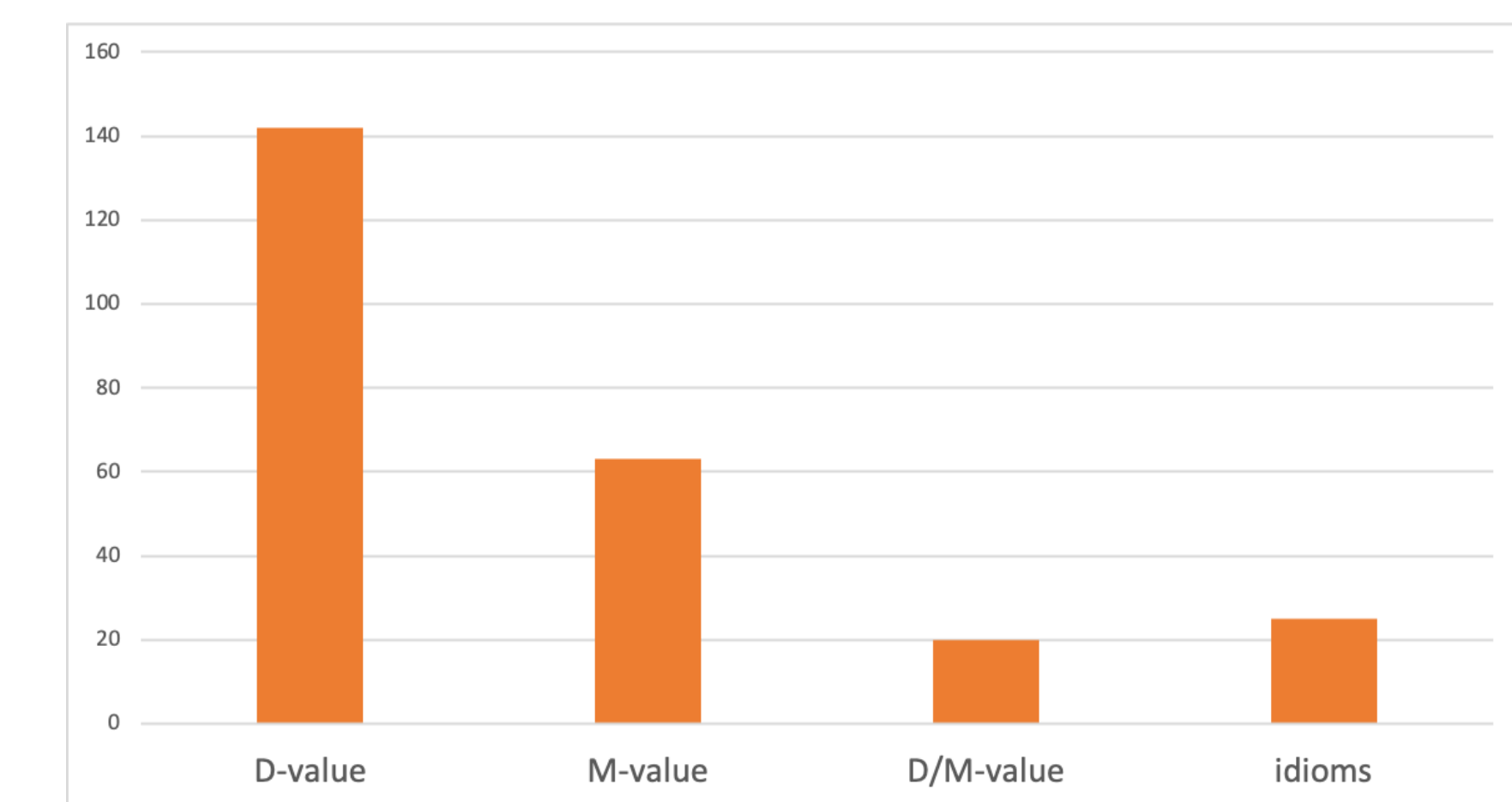
{presup.: $\text{COFFEE}(x) \wedge \Phi(x)$ } $\exists y [x \neq y \wedge \text{COFFEE}(y) \wedge \Phi(y)]$

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

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