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Approximation through suffixation: -*ḍḍu*/-*a* in Sicilian

Abstract: This article investigates the use of the Sicilian suffix *-ḍḍu*/-*a* for the expression of approximation. On the basis of a survey of a corpus of ethnotexts and the outputs of a translation questionnaire, we propose that approximation is a core value in the semantic network of the suffix, expressing a certain distance from the default values conveyed by the base. In terms of prototypicality, this distance may occur from the categorial centre (internal approximation): the suffix modifies the semantics of the base but does not alter the categorial status of the referent. Alternatively, the suffix may impact on categorial membership tout court (external approximation), questioning the categorial properties of the base. Based on this classification, the semantic cores of the suffix are represented in a map showing the connections between the various meanings identified in the corpus.

Keywords: Sicilian evaluative suffixes, approximation, attenuation, high specificity, diminution, pragmatic nuances

1. Introduction*

This article explores a little investigated phenomenon in the existing descriptions of Sicilian, namely the use of evaluative suffixes for the expression of approximation (cf. classical accounts such as De Gregorio 1907; Rohlfs 1969: 374–375, 402–404; Varvaro 1988: 724). Only recently, Emmi (2011: 267, our translation) has pointed out “an attenuative meaning [...] tending towards approximation” for some evaluative suffixes. A case in point is *-ḍḍu*/*-ḍḍa* (*-/ḍḍu/*, */-ḍḍa/*), as in (1) and (2):

- (1) *Tinia a criata pi ffàricci coccu ssuvvizziedḍu* [ALS 36, 199]
'(S)he kept a maid for her to do a few **minor housework**'

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- (2) *Nun jera cafè, era **acquicedḍa** marruncina* [from the questionnaires]

‘It was not coffee; it was **a sort of** brownish **water**’

In (1) and (2), rather than expressing smallness, the suffix appears to attenuate the categorial membership properties of the output noun (respectively, a ‘not really demanding housework’ and ‘a sort of water, difficult to recognise as coffee’).

The use of *-ḍḍu/ḍḍa* is investigated by analysing a corpus consisting of a selection of ethnotexts published by the *Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani* and the answers to a translation-type questionnaire administered to speakers from different parts of Sicily. Data analysis is conducted against a framework which combines the polysemic model developed within cognitive linguistics (in particular, Jurafsky 1996) and the morpho-pragmatic approach to diminutives (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994; Grandi 2002, 2011, 2015, 2017 *inter alia*; Grandi & Körtvélyessy 2015). In this perspective, diminutive suffixes express a subjective evaluation that is not necessarily diminutive in a concrete sense. Based on this, we propose that the central value in the semantic network of the suffix *-ḍḍu* is approximation. In general terms, this notion refers to the state of proximity to a reference value, where exact knowledge of the degree of distance between an approximating entity and an approximated entity is lacking (see, for example, Hamawand 2017). When expressed through morphological means, approximation can be understood more precisely as a certain degree of distance from the default values expressed by the base. This definition can be rearticulated in terms of prototypicality and, on this basis, we propose that *-ḍḍu* expresses two levels of approximation:

- a) Distance from the categorial centre (*internal approximation* or *attenuation*). The suffix modifies the semantics of the base X, but does not alter the categorial status of the referent: X-*ḍḍu* is a non-prototypical example of X, but it’s still a X. A case in point is *ssuvviḍḍiedḍu* ‘minor housework’ in (1); other examples are *chilicedḍu* ‘about one kilo (a little less, a little more)’ (< *chilu*) and *muzzucuniedḍu* ‘small bite’ (< *muzzucuni*). All these cases are in fact hyponyms of X, whose categorial properties are *attenuated*.
- b) Impact on categorial membership tout court (*external approximation*). The suffix questions the categorial properties of the base and this can occur at two levels. First, X-*ḍḍu* exhibits such specific characteristics as ends up being considered as an entity autonomous from X, e.g., *figuredḍa* ‘holy card’ < *figura* ‘figure’, which conventionalises a

specific value other than X (even if still referable to it). Second, X-*ḡḡu* is linked to X only by a similarity relationship ('a sort of X, a X-like', but not a X). We have already seen *acquicedḡḡa* in (2); another example (with a greater degree of semantic autonomy since the derivative's meaning is conventionalised rather than context-dependent), is *lattuchedḡḡa* 'seaweed' < *lattuca* 'lettuce'; in both cases the derivative forms can hardly be interpreted as hyponyms of the base.

In both a) and b), the categorial interpretation depends on the subjective perspective of the speakers; when subjectivity is no longer at work, we are dealing with lexicalised and opaque examples of the suffix, to be discussed separately.

The paper is organised as follows: in Sections 2 and 3, we report, respectively, on the etymology of the suffix and the existing studies on its uses in Sicilian; the theoretical premises on which the analysis is carried out are made explicit in Section 4, while Section 5 is devoted to the description of the corpus; the data analysis is carried out in the next Sections and includes a schematic representation of the possible types of approximation (Section 6) and the description of specific cases (Sections 6.1 to 6.3); a semantic map of the various meanings expressed by -*ḡḡu/ḡḡa* is proposed in Section 7, together with some final remarks.

2. Etymology

The Latin ancestor of -*ḡḡu/-a* is the suffix -*llus*, -*a*, -*um* (Lat. -*ll-* > Sic. -*ḡḡ-*), generally traced back to the Indo-European suffixes **lo* and **ko* (cf. Haverling 2011 inter alia). While the former was more frequent and multifunctional than the latter, they could combine in the form -*culus/-a/-um* in words of the third, fourth and fifth declension (e.g., *navicula* 'little boat' < *navis* 'boat'). In other cases, **lo* occurred alone, producing themes in -*olo/-ulo-* and in -*ll-*. Therefore, at least originally, -*culus*, -*olus*, -*ulus* and -*llus* were in complementary distribution, since the occurrence of one or the other was determined by paradigmatic facts, related to the inflectional class to which they belonged, and by syntagmatic facts, motivated by the phonotactic context. More precisely, -*llus* is formed by adding -*lo-* to lateral, vibrant or nasal roots; the contact between -*r*, -*n*, -*l* radicals and -*l* of the suffix results in an assimilation that produces the gemination of the lateral -*ll-*, while outcomes in -*e*, -*i* or in -*u* (i.e., -*ellus*, -*illus* or -*ullus*) depend on the root vowel, as in *libēllus* 'small

wrap, booklet' < *liber* 'book', *catillus* 'bowl' < *catinus* 'plate, *satillus* 'sated' < *satur* 'sated'. This distribution changes throughout the history of Latin, as *-llus* increases its productivity regardless of inflectional class (*novellus* 'new, young' < *novus* 'new', *nepotilla* 'niece' < *nepos* 'nephew' etc.).

On the semantic level, the Indo-European suffixes **lo* and **ko* and their Latin outcomes have been the subject of numerous hypotheses since Brugmann (1906), who argued that they originally had no diminutive meaning, but served to express similarity and/or belonging to a species or type. Brugmann's hypothesis is generally accepted in the relevant literature. For instance, Hakamies (1951) provided a list of words showing the use of the suffixes to form nouns and adjectives denoting relationships of similarity and belonging. Based on Brugmann (1906), Magni (1999) proposed that the two suffixes were markers of (inalienable) possession; this original semantic nucleus would then have been articulated in historical languages, including Latin, through metaphorical processes that produced relational marks of inclusion ('of the same species/type as X') and metonymic connections resulting in the expression of meronymic relations ('part/all'). Through these processes, the suffixes **lo* and **ko* lost their original motivation, spreading to wider domains that also include diminutive and hypocoristic uses. A different etymology for **ko*, which overturns Brugmann's approach, has been proposed by Jurafsky (1996), who, based on cross-linguistic observation, traced the suffix back to an original concrete meaning 'child' (not attested in historical Indo-European languages), from which all others would have irradiated out through abstraction processes of various kind; this model will be discussed, with a critical eye, in Section 4.

3. Existing studies on Sicilian diminutive suffixes

The first attempt to describe forms and uses of Sicilian diminutives is a work by De Gregorio (1907: 216), who listed the following suffixes: *-areḍḍu*, *-a*; *-eḍḍu*, *-a*; *-icchiu*, *-a*; *-icedḍu*, *-a*; *-iḍḍu*, *-a*; *-itedḍu*, *-a*; *-ittu*, *-a*; *-olu*, *-a*; *-uḍḍu*, *-a*; *-ulidḍu*, *-a*; *-ulu*, *-a*; *-uzzu*, *-a*. According to De Gregorio, *-eḍḍu*/-*a* is the most used suffix to form Sicilian diminutives, even more frequent if we also include what he called "secondary formations", that is, ante-

suffixal interfixed derivatives such as *-ar-eḍḍu*, *-ic-eḍḍu*, *-it-eḍḍu*, *-ul-iḍḍu*, mainly involving bisyllabic words¹.

De Gregorio's description is supported by a more recent study by Emmi (2011: 240–260; 272–273). Based on wide sampling of modern and contemporary texts², she observed both the greater frequency of *-eḍḍu* compared to other suffixes and the preference of interfixes for bisyllabic bases (*panz-ar-eḍḍa_N* 'little belly', *picc-ar-eḍḍa_{Adv}* 'a little bit'). Furthermore, consistent with De Gregorio, she treats *-eḍḍu*, *-iḍḍu* and *-uḍḍu* separately rather than as allomorphs of the same morpheme (see also Rohlf 1969: 402–404; Varvaro 1988: 724). In fact, sometimes the two forms appear as free variants added to the same base (cf. *mascul-eḍḍu*/*mascul-iḍḍu* 'little male, little boy'). However, this more frequently results in different words, as in *caruseḍḍu* 'moneybox' and *carusiḍḍu* 'little boy', which would suggest – Emmi claims – that *-eḍḍu* and *-iḍḍu* are different suffixes. Emmi (2011: 291) also notes the different behaviour of *-eḍḍu*/*-iḍḍu* with interfixes, which may combine with *-eḍḍu* and not with *-iḍḍu*, sometimes producing synonymous pairs such as *muss-iḍḍu*/*muṣsi-c-eḍḍu*, both of which lemmatised in Piccitto & Tropea's *Vocabolario Siciliano* (1985: III, 923) as diminutives of *mussu* 'snout, lips'.

Mainly based on the etymological reasons discussed in Section 2, in what follows, we will consider *-eḍḍu*, *-iḍḍu*, *-uḍḍu* as variants of the same suffix *-ḍḍu*. However, the distribution of these variants of the suffix undoubtedly still needs to be investigated.

4. Theoretical premises

The analysis proposed here is characterised by a radically semantic interpretation of the suffix and its uses, which also involves a polysemic approach to them (Grandi & Körtvélyessy 2015; Jurafsky 1996; Mutz 2015; Prieto 2015 inter alia). The starting point is the radial model proposed by Jurafsky (1996, based on Lakoff 1987) to describe the semantic network of diminutives, which is said to be organised around a centre, represented by

¹As Merlini Barbaresi (2004: 276) points out, these phonic segments “are devoid of denotative meaning, even though they may contribute to autonomous connotative meanings and strategic uses in discourse”.

² The corpus studied by Emmi (2011) contains the works in Sicilian by Luigi Pirandello (1915–1918), Luigi Capuana (1895) and Nino Martoglio (1903), the sectorial dictionaries of the *Atlante Linguistico della Sicilia* (ALS) and the *Vocabolario siciliano* by Piccitto and Tropea (1985).

the value ‘child’, and its most immediate extension, that is, ‘small’, from which other more peripheral values progressively radiate (see also Mutz 2015: 149). This network is shown in Fig. 1:

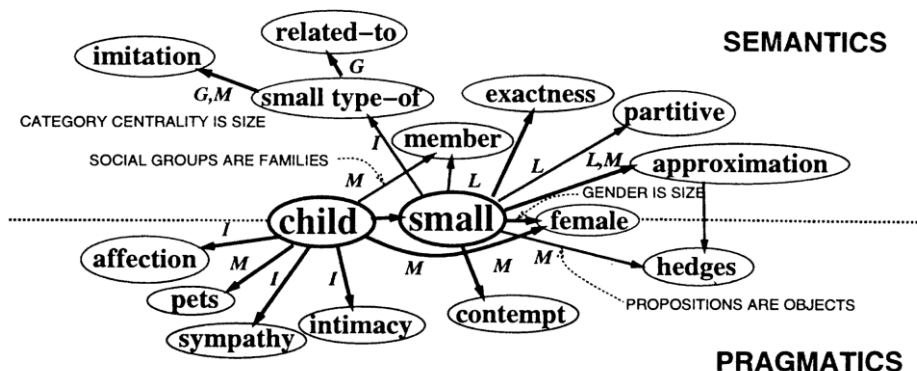


Fig. 1: Semantic network of diminutives (Jurafsky 1996: 542)

According to Jurafsky (1996: 537, 552, 565), Fig. 1 has crosslinguistic validity and shows both synchronic and diachronic relationships. In other words, where not attested, as in the case of Indo-European **ko* and its various historical developments, the diachronic priority of ‘child’ must still be reconstructed or inferred (Jurafsky 1996: 568–569). All other more abstract meanings would be later developments based on mechanisms such as metaphor (M), generalisation (G), conventionalisation of inferences (I) and what Jurafsky (1996: 554) called lambda-abstraction (L), an abstraction mechanism that quantifies not on objects but on predicates (e.g., *red* → *reddish*, where the suffixed adjective approximates the meaning of the unmarked base). However, as already noted by Magni (1999), data do not always support the diachronic priority of the ‘child’ meaning postulated by Jurafsky, nor do they explain the semantics of Indo-European and Latin diminutive suffixes. As for the latter, on the basis of the analysis of the suffix *-llus* in Plautus’ comedies, Brucale & Mocciaro (2020; see also Prieto 2015: 26) argued for the synchronic centrality of the meaning ‘small’, which is actually a core value also in Jurafsky’s map and one of the most commonly attested cross-linguistically. However, despite being well attested (55 out of 67 occurrences), this meaning hardly corresponds to a mere and concrete (i.e., physical) smallness in Plautus’ corpus. Rather, *-llus* is always associated to a range of other ‘small’-related senses, which Brucale & Mocciaro (2020: 78) arranged in a synchronic network incorporating both semantic and pragmatic values. Semantic values instantiate in two core areas, namely attenuation (‘small or non-prototypical exemplar of’) and approximation (‘similar to, sort of’). The pragmatic

values (e.g., affective or playful attitude, emotion, familiarity, courtesy, euphemism, irony, modifications of the illocutionary force etc.; see Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 173–380 and the subsequent morpho-pragmatic literature) are facets of the value ‘small’ in its attenuative specification or, to put it in another way, the attenuative value is never expressed in Plautus unless linked to a pragmatic dimension. What connects all these senses is a schematic meaning of ‘generic relation’, which acts in synchrony as the network’s *fil rouge* (but could also have – as Brucale and Mocciaro 2020: 80 suggest – a diachronic validity in the spirit of Brugmann’s proposal). In fact, the notion of ‘small’ is inherently relational since it implies the existence of related non-small entities (the unmarked or central examples of the category modified by the suffix). In other words, *-llus* may indicate ‘a less prototypical exemplar of, a specimen subordinated to, a small version of; a sort of etc.’ In this sense, ‘small’ is only one of the possible specifications of a meaning of ‘generic relation’, to which all attested meanings can be traced³.

Brucale and Mocciaro’s (2020) analysis, which is a premise for the study presented here, is supported by several studies on evaluative morphology which have assigned a central role to values such as attenuation, vagueness and imprecision in the description of the semantics of diminutives (e.g., Grandi & Körtvélyessy 2015; Grandi 2017). We will refer here mainly to Grandi (2017), who proposed two substantial revisions to Jurafsky’s model. First, whereas Jurafsky (1996: 554) linked attenuative values to gradable concepts and thus primarily to adjectives and verbs, Grandi (2017: 146–147) observes that even nouns can be assigned an evaluative suffix that does not alter the referential ability of the base (e.g., *-ino* in *maritino* ‘hubby’ and *-accio* in *ragazzaccio* ‘bad boy’, which are still a ‘husband’ and a ‘boy’). As Grandi (2017: 147–148, our translation) claims,

any evaluative form with a compositional and transparent semantic reading, i.e., not lexicalised, is subordinate with respect to the base noun. In other words, any evaluative form designates an object, an action, a property, etc. with a certain degree of approximation with respect to what is expressed by the base noun, i.e., it represents an object, an action, a property, etc. in a way that is, so to speak, inaccurate.

³ The schematic sense of ‘generic relation’ could also explain the 12 *-llus* words in the corpus that cannot be attributed to ‘small’, such as *capillus* ‘hair’ < *caput* ‘head’, *suillus* ‘pertaining to, belonging to pigs’ < *sus* ‘pig’, *flabellum* ‘fan’ < *flabrum* ‘blow’, all examples of ancient, sometimes morphologically opaque words, such as *stella* ‘star’ from the same root of *sternere* ‘to spread, scatter’ (Brucale & Mocciaro 2020: 61–62).

An internal articulation of the evaluative notions used emerges from Grandi's discourse. While every evaluation implies an *approximation*, the latter can be either by excess and thus encoded by augmentatives, or by defect and encoded by diminutives. This approximation by defect coincides, according to Grandi (2017: 148, our translation and emphasis), "with an *attenuation* of some characteristic attributed to the value identified as a norm or standard". In this sense, attenuation would be a specification of the broader category of approximation. Based on this premise, Grandi reverses the directionality of the 'small → attenuative' relationship postulated by Jurafsky (and this is the second fundamental revision to the radial model) and instead assigns a primary (archetypal) role to the latter (see also Hakamies 1951). This is explained as follows:

[A] *tavolino* obviously indicates a small table; but a small table is nothing more than an approximation by default to the standard image of a table (within a specific culture, of course). Hence, in fact, an attenuation of the size property of a 'standard' table. [...] The decrease or, rather, the semantic function 'small' would in this view be a special case of attenuation, which, in turn, would be a special case of approximation. (Grandi 2017: 148, our translation)

Grandi's description also has an impact on the diachronic primacy of the value of 'child' postulated by Jurafsky. Although it is undoubtedly true that diminutives originating from forms indicating the parental relationship ('child, puppy of X') are attested in many Indo-European and other languages, the sense 'child' cannot necessarily be considered as originating. This is evident from the history of the Latin suffix *-īnus* < **-īno-* (Grandi 2003: 122), which is the basis of the main Romance diminutives (e.g., It. *-ino*, Sp. *-ín*, Port. *-inho*) and which was used with a multiplicity of functions traced back to a generic relational value (similarly to what has been described for *-illus* above). Hence, a form such as *castōrīnus_A* would have had an original relational sense ('resembling a beaver'), then, via conversion, would have developed the meaning of 'young exemplar of a beaver', in line with Hakamies' (1951: 9) observation that "l'adulte est le prototype d'une espèce; par conséquent ce qui ou celui qui ressemble à l'espèce sans atteindre toutefois au prototype ne peut être que plus petit". In short, Grandi (2011: 16) reconstructed the following development: *castor_N* 'beaver' > *castōrīnus_A* 'resembling a beaver' > *castōrīnus_N* 'young beaver' > *castorino_N* 'small/little beaver', in which the value 'child' is said to occupy only an intermediate position in the development chain.

By recognising the primacy of approximation, Grandi overcomes the articulation into descriptive (i.e., “physical, hence therefore tangible, concrete, observable, testable” (2017: 141); in other words, *objective*) and qualitative (i.e., *subjective*) evaluation proposed in previous works (e.g., Grandi 2011 and Grandi & Körtvélyessy 2015: 10), on which also Emmi’s (2011) classification of the Sicilian suffix is partly based), and traces back all possible ‘deviations’ from the default meaning of the unmarked base that are encoded by the evaluative suffix to the expression of the speaker’s *subjectivity*. As Voghera (2023) explains, the subjective meanings expressed by diminutives can be arranged along a continuum that goes from a shared *intersubjectivity* to a *high subjectivity*:

Intersubjectively shared meaning	—————▶	Highly subjective meaning
<i>fazzolettino</i>		<i>maritino</i>
‘handkerchief+dim, tissue, kleenex’		‘husband+dim, hubby’

She clarifies that

[i]f Italian speakers use the word *fazzolettino* (‘handkerchief’.DIM), we can reasonably assume that they have a shared representation ‘small handkerchief’, but if we use the word *maritino* (‘hubby’, lit. husband.DIM), it is much more difficult to establish a shared representation, if there is a shared representation at all, also because in this case the diminutive can have both a positive and ironic connotation. (Voghera 2023: 267)

The key notions that emerged from the outline presented in this section will be rearticulated in more detail in the following sections, along with the description and commentary of the data.

5. The corpus

The analysis is based on two different sets of data:

- a. Data derived from a selection of the ethnotexts of ALS (*Atlante Linguistico della Sicilia*)⁴, which are more or less extensive texts whose production has been stimulated by

⁴ Most of the ethnotexts, collected for various research purposes, have been published in the approximately 50 volumes of “Materiali e ricerche dell’ALS” (‘ALS Materials and Research’), edited by the *Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani* (CSFLS). Cf. Sottile (2019) for a comprehensive description of the ALS project. For this study, we selected the texts contained in ALS 1, 2, 32, 36, 37, which are among the quantitatively largest and qualitatively richest.

interviewers' questions (therefore it is semi-spontaneous) and have a largely monological and narrative character, as the speaker recounts or describes facts, experiences or traditions (Paternostro & Sottile 2010: 603).

- b. Data derived from a questionnaire administered to 115 individuals (from different areas of Sicily, different ages and educational backgrounds). The questionnaire consists of 26 translation input questions (Italian to Sicilian, Sicilian to Italian), largely formulated on the basis of our native intuition. Input questions propose nouns, adjectives, adverbial formations, accompanied by some attenuative forms for translations from Italian into Sicilian (diminutive suffixes, periphrases, indefinite markers, prefixes etc.) and constructed with the suffix -*ḍḍu* in those from Sicilian into Italian⁵.

The data obtained from translation questions, in which the input sentence to some extent determines the presence of a given form, are qualitatively different from those collected from ethnotexts. While the latter allow us to record the presence of a form in the informants' semi-spontaneous production, in translation questions we can observe the extent to which it is a conscious response. In this way, we hoped to activate different aspects of the speakers' competence and thus obtain more varied data⁶.

For both datasets, we adopted a generic (and preliminary) *pan-Sicilian* approach, that is, we tried to draw a picture that, while representing different areas of Sicily, could provide

⁵ However, we proposed especially nouns and this is reflected in the data obtained:

1. (Ital. > Sic.) 7 Ns (*discorsetto* 'serious discourse, speech', *più o meno un'ora* 'about one hour', *freschetto* 'a little cool', *acqua marroncina* 'brownish water', *muratore di modeste capacità* 'mason of modest ability', *ramanzina* 'telling off', *fatterelli* 'facts of little importance, anecdotes'); (Sic. > Ital.) 7 Ns (*discurseddu* '(serious) discourse, speech', *fattareddu* 'fact of little importance, anecdotes', *mastriceddu* 'mason of modest ability', *uricedda* 'little hour, about one hour', *acquicedda* 'sort of water', *cauliceddi* 'type of wild edible vegetable').
2. (Ital. > Sic.) 5 ADJs (*un tantino difettoso* 'a little defective', *semi-infossati* 'sunken', *un po' ammaccati* 'beated up', *tipo scimunito* 'kind of idiot', *leggermente ammaccato* 'slightly beaten up'); (Sic. > Ital.) 2 ADJs (*scimuniteddu* 'kind of idiot', *svinturateddu* 'a little hapless').
3. (Ital. > Sic.) 3 ADVs (*tardi* 'late', *un po' tardi* 'a little late', *per circa un'ora* 'for about an hour'); (Sic. > Ital.) 2 ADVs (*pristuliddu* 'a little early, quite early', *ppi faureddu* '(little) please').

⁶ An anonymous reviewer notes that translation fosters a strong impact in terms of calquing from Italian. This is undoubtedly plausible. However, it must be borne in mind that the interference between Sicilian and Italian goes far beyond the explicit translation tasks: it is a normal phenomenon for speakers who are bilingual, like our informants and like all speakers of Sicilian by now. In everyday linguistic practice, Italian and Sicilian alternate according to the context and, not infrequently, mix in the same discourse context. The choice to work simultaneously with (semi-)spontaneous data and with data that, on the other hand, reveal a metalinguistic awareness, such as translation tasks, reflects this pluri-linguistic situation and is inspired by a deep-rooted tradition of field research such as that of *Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani* and the *Atlante Linguistico della Sicilia* (cf. D'Agostino and Ruffino 2005, 2013; Sottile 2019).

information on what is recurrent and systematic in the use of the suffix and allows us to leave aside for the moment (micro)diatopic issues⁷.

Mainly because only a limited sample of the ALS corpus was used (especially in the case of ethnotexts), the description of the data carried out in the next sections will be exclusively qualitative⁸.

6. Data analysis

The suffix forms mainly nouns (250 out of 262 suffixed words in *-ḍḍu*). Adjectives are much rarer and even fewer the other classes (i.e., markers of indefinite quantity, e.g., ‘a little’). At least in part, this distribution might depend on the characteristics of the corpus itself, in particular the textual types represented especially in the ethnotexts, where suffixed nouns largely belong to specialised lexicons (sea, mining etc., according to the research conducted). However, one cannot ignore the existence of what Merlini Barbaresi (2004: 267) described as a “universal preference” in the selection of the basic category by the evaluative suffixes, with the noun in first place, followed by adjective, verb, adverb, indefinite, exclamation and finally numeral.

From a formal point of view, nouns are almost always derived from nominal bases (e.g., *sciccariedḍu_N* ‘little donkey’ < *sceccu_N* ‘donkey’), with a few exceptions, namely, a few deverbal suffixed nouns, such as *cuḡeḍḍa* ‘steel needle for sewing creels’ < *cusiri* ‘to sew’ and *tummar(i)eḍḍu* ‘seagull/dolphin/tadpole’ < *tummari* ‘to fall head over heels, to dive’, and a few deadjectival nouns, such as *russuliḍḍa_N* < *russu_A* ‘red’, *russeḍḍu_N* < *russu_A*, *stuppatedḍi_N* < *stuppata_A* ‘clogged’, all designating specimens of marine fauna. However, these cases should be considered as lexicalised forms rather than productively constructed forms in speech (see Section 6.3). On the other hand, adjectives are all derived from adjectives, and adverbs from adverbs.

⁷This is particularly relevant as Sicilian lacks a standard variety. The data collected account for varieties from all the Sicilian provinces (Palermo, Catania, Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Enna, Messina, Ragusa, Siracusa, Trapani), but without any attempt to be systematic or balanced. The diatopic (micro)variation issue will deserve specific attention in the near future.

⁸ In addition to the impossibility of quantitative generalisations, which only an analysis of the entire ALS database could legitimise, other considerations prompt a preference for the qualitative approach, that is, the textual specificities, which affect the types of data that emerge, and the lack to date of a micro-diatopic differentiation that could reveal differences in distribution of the suffix.

From a semantic point of view, corpus data can be described on the basis of Fig. 2. This is a way of schematically representing the semantics of -*ḍḍu*, which is inherently relational because it implies the existence of another reference entity that is unmarked and unmodified by the suffix. We describe this relational semantics in terms of prototypicality. The figure shows category X (e.g., ‘donkey’), enclosed in the larger circle, and its members, enclosed in smaller inner circles. These members exhibit categorial properties to varying degrees, from the highest degree corresponding to the prototypical exemplar (X_1 , the non-suffixed base, which is the centre of the category, e.g., *sceccu*_N ‘donkey’) to the lower degrees represented by the more peripheral members (the possible meanings expressed by the derived form in -*ḍḍu*, e.g., ‘little donkey’, ‘manger donkey’ or even ‘dunce’ or ‘jackass’). Within the larger circle, all members other than X_1 are equally referred to as X_2 , as they coexist synchronically in the semantic periphery of X as non-prototypical members. We will refer to this semantic periphery in terms of “internal approximation”. This means that the X_2 members only *approximate* to the centre of the category, i.e., they embody the categorial properties in an imprecise or attenuated form (which can in turn be instantiated as a diminished or non-prototypical or highly specific form, or a form marked pragmatically in an affective or ironic sense, etc.). Internal approximation (or attenuation) is, in line with Grandi’s (2017) analysis, a specification of the higher-order semantic category “approximation”⁹. The adjective “internal” refers to the fact that the deviation from or non-coincidence with the categorial centre does not, however, exceed the boundaries of the category itself (thus a *sciccariedḍḍu*_N is a non-central example of *sceccu*, but still a donkey; in other words, it is a hyponym for ‘donkey’).

Moving towards the left-hand side of Fig. 2, we find examples (X_3) that only *approximate to the category* as a whole, that is, they resemble the category but do not in fact belong to it or at least, their actual belonging to it is not clear-cut. We refer to this situation as “external approximation”. This is another specification of the higher-order category approximation, where, unlike X_2 , the relationship is between outside and inside the category. In other

⁹ The term approximation suggests a ‘movement towards’, but it is worth emphasising that the use of the term here is neutral in this sense, as indicated by the bidirectionality of the arrows in Fig. 2. Here centripetal orientation reflects the notion of approaching predefined values by members that do not fully meet those values; in contrast, centrifugal orientation expresses *dis*-proximation, that is, deviation from default values (see also Cappelle, Daugs & Hartmann 2023).

words, the presence of the suffix has an impact on the categorial membership: it does not produce hyponyms of X, but indicates exemplars that resemble X but are distinct from it ('similar to X', 'resembling X', 'sort of X'). This can occur at different levels: X-*ḍdu* shows such highly specific characteristics as ends up being intersubjectively recognised as autonomous from X (e.g., *figureḍda* 'holy card' < *figura* 'image' discussed in Section 1; see also the already mentioned case of *fazzolettino* 'kleenex' < *fazzoletto* 'handkerchief' reported by Voghera 2023, where the attenuated form is somehow conventionalised as a new meaning, while easily still traceable to the meaning of the base). A true case of semantic autonomy from the base, such that X-*ḍdu* is only related to X by a similarity relationship, is for example *lattucheḍda* 'seaweed', which is not a hyponym of (i.e., a 'type of') *lattuca* 'lettuce', although described in relation to this. However, even in this case, membership is largely dependent on the perspective of the speaker (S, in Fig. 2), which may be highly subjective (and possibly induced by specific discursive coordinates, as in the case of the attenuated forms X₂) or shared, as in the case of X₃, within a cultural-linguistic community (i.e., *intersubjective*, in the terms used by Voghera 2023).

Outside the area of subjectivity, on both the left and the right side, we find examples (X_n) for which the sense of (internal or external) approximation has been lost. Here the suffix can be considered lexicalised and the semantic relationship between the X-*ḍdu* words and the bases is opaque. For instance, *vaccareḍda* '(edible) snail' is based on *vacca* 'cow', but it does not refer to a non-prototypical example of a cow nor an entity resembling a cow; it is something that at some point, for reasons no longer clear, was described in terms of a cow and thus crystallised in the lexicon (cf. Lanaia 2013).¹⁰

Following the schema in Fig. 2, from the inside to the outside, the different semantic outputs of suffixation with -*ḍdu/a* will be described in Sections 6.1 to 6.3.

¹⁰ Lexicalised forms of this type (not limited to the present case) may or may not share one or more characteristic traits with the base (e.g., in the case of *vaccareḍda*/*vacca* we could perhaps think of horns), but in other cases they are united not by semantic but textual factors, e.g., by childish nursery rhymes (Lanaia 2013: 86). However, these are relations that can only be reconstructed.

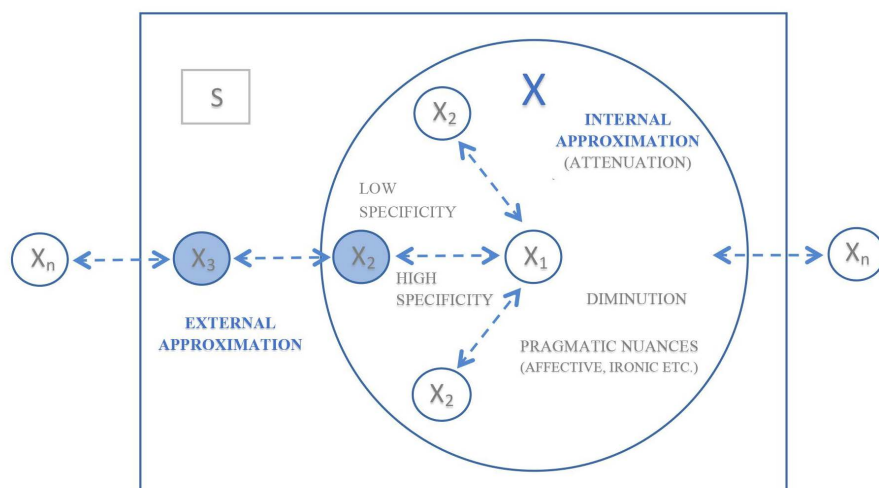


Fig. 2: Degrees of approximation expressed by -*ḍḍu*/*ḍḍa*

6.1 Internal approximation or attenuation (X_2)

In a substantial group of words in the ethnotexts, -*ḍḍu* has attenuative value (X_2). This value can be specified as diminution. In this case, the derivative designates a specimen that is smaller (or younger) than that denoted by the base, as *faragghiunedḍi* (< *faragghiuni* ‘sea stack’) in (3) and *picciuttedḍu* (< *picciottu* ‘boy’) in (4):

- (3) *All’ùttimu poi cci su ḍḍi quatṭru scogghi ca di ccà mancu si vèdonu. Si chiàmanu **faragghiunedḍi*** [ALS 37, 113]

‘At the end there are those four rocks that you can’t even see from here. They are called **little sea stacks**’

- (4) *Io era **picciuttedḍu** ma a mmia m’arṛistaru tutto impresso chidḍu chi faḍianu idḍi* [ALS 32, 121]

‘I was a **little boy** but the things they did all stuck in my mind’

In many cases, attenuation is associated with a set of pragmatic values pertaining to affective attitude, such as endearment, euphemism, irony, politeness. This means that the suffix expressing such meanings has scope on the entire speech act and work as *pragmatic index* that modulates the tone of the utterance (Brucale & Mocciaro 2020: 65). Cases in point are the nouns *punintedḍu* ‘light westerly breeze’ (< *punenti* ‘westerly breeze’) and *vizziciedḍu* ‘little vice’ (< *vizziu* ‘vice’), in (5) and (6):

- (5) *u **puninteddū** u ccumpagnava comu fidili cumpagnu di sotta e di svintura* [ALS 37, 490]
 ‘The **light westerly breeze** accompanied him as a faithful companion of fate and misfortune’
- (6) *A Ccisarò s’ammàzzunu a urpi e ss’a màncinu, cci l’annu ssu **vizzicieddū*** [ALS 32, 211]
 ‘In Cesarò they kill foxes and eat them: they have this **little vice**’

In these cases, the suffix operates at the level of the utterance as a mitigating device (see Caffi 2007). In particular, in (5), the attenuated derivative functions as “an intimacy accelerator” and empathetically brings the listener closer to the content of the utterance (Brown & Levinson 1987: 103). On the other hand, in (6) the suffix is used to mitigate (possibly ironically) an overly sharp categorical attribution. Indeed, ‘vice’ inherently conveys a negative meaning and would be placed in a taboo context (i.e., fox-hunting). By using the attenuated form, the speaker makes her assessment of the event explicit by describing it as a marginal or minor case of vice.

Within the same domain of attenuation, we can place the few adjectival and adverbial formations in *-ddū* in the corpus. The former are gradable adjectives or participial formations expressing attenuation of the quantity or the positive or negative quality expressed by the base (cf. Emmi 2011: 237, based on Merlini Barbaresi 2004), e.g., *lungaredḍa* ‘a bit long’ < *longa* ‘long’, *grossuliddi* ‘a bit thick’ < *grossi* ‘thick’, *ammaccateddū* ‘slightly dented’ < *ammaccatu* ‘dented’. Also in this case, attenuation may result in a pragmatic modulation of the general tone of the utterance, as in (7):

- (7) *Giovanni è **scimuniteddū** ma è un travagghiaturi* [from the questionnaires]
 ‘Giovanni is **a bit dumb**, but he is a hard worker’

As in the case in (6), the speaker is making an assessment, more specifically giving a negative evaluation of a person. By choosing the attenuated form, the speaker weakens the predictable unpleasant effects of the speech act and, thus, shows empathy because s/he is able to calculate the implications of what is being said (Caffi 2007: 82–83).

Adverbs play similar functions. They are all derived from generic quantifiers, e.g., *(t)anticchiedḍa* ‘a little’ < *(t)anticchia* ‘a little’ and *cchjessanieddū* ‘a little more’ < *cchiossai* ‘more’. These forms attenuate the meaning of the (mainly adjectival) base (which may itself be suffixed with *-ddū*), possibly adding a pragmatic specification. This is the case in (8),

where the suffix is used with both the adverb and the adjective to attenuate the possible impoliteness of the utterance:

- (8) *Avi l'ùocchi anticchieḍḍa scavatieḍḍi ma è bieḍḍa u stissu* [from the questionnaires]
 'She's a bit sunken-eyed but she is still beautiful'

If in (6)–(8) the negative sense is contained in the lexical meaning of the bases ('vice', 'dumb', 'sunken') and is attenuated by the suffix. Other times it is instead the suffix itself that suggests a negative interpretation of the situation described. This can be observed in (9), where the suffix is used to attenuate not the tone of the utterance but the categorial properties of the base, so that a *mastriceḍḍu* is a mason with poor skills, a mediocre mason (i.e., not what a prototypical mason should be):¹¹

- (9) *Pino è mastriceḍḍu ma a picca a picca...* [from the questionnaires]
 'Pino is a **mediocre mason**, but little by little... (he is improving)'

Pragmatic attenuation can also be observed in what can be called 'just' or 'merely' meaning¹². This is shown in (10), where the suffix does not attenuate or alter the categorial properties of the base, since *uovicieḍḍu* (< (*u*)*ovu* 'egg') is not a little or non-prototypical egg, but simply an egg. What the suffix attenuates here is the importance of the act recounted by the speaker (who barely ate an egg). The speaker here intends to make the hearer grasp the general meaning of the utterance and *uovicieḍḍu* is to be intended as a pure example of frugal meal in general¹³:

¹¹ Elsewhere in the corpus, the assessment is more overtly negative by virtue of the presence of other contextual elements that reinforce this interpretation, as in the case of the adjective *scarsu* 'poor, mediocre' in *Pinu jè un mastriceḍḍu scarsu ma sta addivintannu cchiù migliu* 'Pino is a poor mason, but he is improving.' Here the use of the attenuated derivative is actually more similar to that in (6) and (7), where it is employed to make the assessment less sharp and more acceptable and empathetic. Context always plays a crucial role in the interpretation of these nuances.

¹² Jurafsky (1996: 556–557) explains this type of meaning as a declination on the pragmatic level of what he calls 'lambda-abstraction', i.e., the specific mechanism of attenuated sense construction by virtue of which second order predicates develop, marking approximation. Among the operators that induce lambda-abstraction, Jurafsky lists expressions such as loosely speaking, only, just, merely etc., which contain a second speech act, i.e., a metalinguistic comment that serves to modulate the illocutionary force of the utterance and to limit its scope.

¹³ Of particular note is the co-occurrence with the element *panuzzu* 'bread', itself characterised by the attenuative suffix *-uzzu*, and with a quantifier of a mass noun, *um-muccuni* 'a morsel', both emphasising quantitative scarcity.

- (10) *Siempri ddà simu: panuzzu sciuttu, n uovicieddu, chiddu era u manciari. L'uvicieddu e um-muccuni i vinu e ffinisci dduocu* [ALS 36, 202]

‘Always the same: dry bread, **barely an egg**, that was the meal. Barely an egg and a sip of wine and that’s it’

Sometimes, rather than producing pragmatic mitigation effects as observed, with various nuances, in (5) to (10), the suffix may serve to underspecify the meaning of the base, expressing a value approximating (by default or excess) the prototypical value of the category. This is the case of *uricedda* (also *uratedda*) < *ura* ‘hour’, in (11):

- (11) *Vignu nni tia ‘nt’a n’uricedda* [from the questionnaires]

‘I’ll come to you in an **hour or so**’

Here *uricedda* (like the already mentioned *chiliceddu*, see Section 1) does not indicate ‘a little hour’ or ‘less than an hour’, but rather ‘approximately an hour (maybe a little less, maybe a little more)’. In other words, it is an inaccurate, therefore not prototypical specimen, of ‘hour’.

Quite the opposite, attenuation may end up developing meanings (intersubjectively) perceived as denoting specific exemplars of the category. This can be seen by comparing the use of *mastriceddu* in (12) with that already observed in (9):

- (12) *Pinu è un mastriceddu ma sa fida* [from the questionnaires]

‘Pino is a basic/non specialised mason, but is capable’

Unlike (9), here *mastriceddu* simply describes the competence of the referent, the scope of his specialisation, without conveying a negative sense (which would be contradictory: ‘Pino is scarce but skilful’); in other words, *mastriceddu* denotes a specific type of *mastru* ‘mason’. A similar case is *discurseddu* (< *discursu* ‘discourse, argument, speech’), which is not ‘a little discourse’ but always ‘a scolding (or at least a speech with serious content)’, without any reference to its duration, as exemplified in (13):

- (13) *Ci fici un discurseddu e mi dissi ca unnu fa cchiù* [from the questionnaires]

‘I gave him a telling off and he said he won’t do it again’

While in the case of *mastriceddu* the specific nuance remains context-dependent, as the cases in (9) and (12) (and in fn. 11) show, in (13) the value of ‘high specificity’ conveyed by

the suffix is more firmly associated with the derived form *discursedḍḍu*. We will come back to this example in 6.2.¹⁴

6.2 From internal to external approximation (X_3)

The case of *discursedḍḍu* in (13) is situated in an area of transition to another semantic sub-domain, in which the suffix does not attenuate the categorial properties of the entity denoted by the base, as in the cases in 6.1, but challenges them. In other words, the exemplar encoded by the suffixed word is perceived as so specific or non-prototypical that it may end up being considered something else, outside the category. These are the cases represented as X_3 on the left-hand side of Fig. 2: such specimens are external to the category X and, in fact, do not approximate the centre of X , but the category as a whole. A clear example of X_3 is *figuredḍḍi* ‘holy cards’ in (14):

- (14) *Nn'avivavu santi a cui tinivavu particolarmenti? Santi protettori, **figuredḍḍi**...* [ALS 32, 91]
 ‘But didn’t they have saints they particularly cared about? Patron saints, **holy cards**...’

Similar to the case of *fazzolettino* reported by Voghera (2023) (see Section 4), we can assume an “intersubjectively shared representation” for *figuredḍḍi* in (14), whose membership to the category ‘figure’ cannot be said to be clear-cut. In fact, *figuredḍḍi* is still a type of figure, but so specific that it tends to embody an autonomous entity (with recurring properties that make it partly different from other figures, e.g., small size, the type of subjects represented, the context of use etc.)¹⁵.

An entity independent of the one denoted by the base is certainly that expressed by *lattuchedḍḍa* with the meaning ‘seaweed’ (e.g., ALS 37: 462), which originates from a (metaphorical) extension of the base *lattuca* ‘lettuce’: a *lattuchedḍḍa* is ‘a sort of lettuce’, ‘an entity resembling a lettuce’, but it is not a lettuce. The speakers are aware of the similarity relation

¹⁴ An anonymous reviewer observed that an implication of smallness would be maintained here. However, it is actually the attenuative function that remains in the background, which is used to downplay, for ironic or sarcastic purposes, the strength of the utterance. In any case, *discursedḍḍu* is to be considered broadly (intersubjectively) conventionalised in its sense of ‘serious discourse’.

¹⁵ The corresponding Italian words *immaginetta* (< *immagine* ‘image’ + evaluative feminine suffix *-etta*) and *santino* (< *santo* ‘saint’ + evaluative suffix *-ino*) function in the same way. Another relevant example, which may help interpret X_3 cases, is the Italian *figurina* in its meaning of ‘sticker’, that is, a small colour image, typically sold in sachets, of which one makes a collection’. Another transparent case is Sic. *bambinedḍḍu* ‘child’ + evaluative, hence par excellence ‘Christ child’ (cf. Italian *bambinello* ‘child’ + evaluative suffix, with the same meaning). Cf. Jurafsky (1996: 552), who described similar lexical drifts for various languages, including non-Indo-European ones.

(the referent is also known as *lattuga marina* ‘sea lettuce’; ALS 37: 463) and use this similarity to name a referent as ‘sort of X’ or ‘X-like’, which is a full example of “external approximation”¹⁶.

The slightly different readings of the types *figuredda* and *lattuchedda* compared to the cases discussed in 6.1. lies in the shift from a purely subjective dimension of evaluation (whereby the individual speaker decides on a case-by-case basis whether to use a suffix to express specific nuances of meaning) to an intersubjective one (on some level already present in *discurseddu*, but here unequivocal), which is anchored to representations that are likely to be shared by a community of speakers. Although qualitatively different, the examples X_2 in 6.1 and the two types X_3 are linked by a relation of continuity, as they express an increasing distancing (indicated by the dashed arrows in Fig. 2) from the central properties of the category X and then from the category itself (with several uncertain cases at the boundaries, as is normal in the prototypical approach), which in any case remains a transparent point of reference for the interpretation of the suffixed word. In other words, the suffixed words of the types X_3 remain fully compositionally transparent. Precisely because of this transparency, we include in this area the numerous metaphorisations attested in the corpus, e.g., words denoting different specimens of marine fauna by referring to bases with the trait [-animate], such as *ancileddu* (also *anciuliddu*) ‘owl fish’ (ALS 37: 369) < *anci(u)lu* ‘angel’ (the fish has large pectoral fins resembling wings).

However, since examples X_3 tend to undergo lexical drift, they may overstep the boundaries of intersubjectivity and end up conveying meanings no longer referable to the base at the synchronic level. These cases, which are placed outside the area in which S has its scope, are therefore classified in the group of lexicalisations that will be discussed in 6.3.

¹⁶ Of course, elsewhere *lattuchedda* (as well as the other derivatives that have conventionalised specific meanings) may retain an effectively attenuative value of ‘lettuce’, ‘lettuce sprout’ etc., alongside other specific meanings such as ‘wild lettuce’ or even entirely autonomous ones such as ‘specific cut of beef’, recorded in Piccitto & Tropea (1985: II, 458). This depends very much on the variety of Sicilian observed and, in any case, the co-presence of several meanings cannot be surprising in a prototypical view of semantic categories.

6.3 From EA to the loss of transparency (X_n)

Many nouns in -*ḍḍu* found in the ethnotexts are lexicalised formations at different levels of opacity, i.e., the relationship between the base and the suffix is no longer transparent from a synchronic point of view. We can identify different cases, among which:

1. Suffixed nouns with a different gender than the base (masculine to feminine or feminine to masculine). The change of gender (a fact already observed for Sicilian, cf. Emmi 2011: 234–235) is often accompanied by a change of referent; for instance, if *puttedḍḍ(r)u* (m) ‘hatchway’ (ALS 37: 191) could still be analysed as a highly specific type of *porta* (f) ‘door’, *calamaredḍa* (f) ‘squid fishing bait’ (ALS 37: 286) exhibits only a generic relationship with the base *calamaru* (m) ‘squid’ (something related to squids).
2. Formations that change the lexical category of the base, such as *cuḥḍḍa_N* ‘steel needle for sewing creels’ < *cusiri_V* ‘to sew’, *tummar(i)ḍḍu_N* ‘gull, dolphin, tadpole’ < *tummar_V* ‘going underwater while already at sea’; *ṛṛussedḍu_N* ‘red mullet or strawfish whitebait’ (ALS 37: 326) < *rus_{ADJ}* ‘red’.
3. Non-transparent formations. At least in principle, the suffix -*ḍḍu* could be formally segmented, but its semantic contribution is not clear, as in *vardeḍḍa* ‘packlesaddle or saddlebag’ (< *varda* with the same meaning) or went lost. In many cases, in fact, the process of word formation can only be reconstructed by going back to different phases of the language (cf. *picciridḍu* or *piccilidḍu* ‘small, child’, based on the root **pikk* ‘tip’, hence ‘small’, probably through a now obsolete *picciulu* ‘small’¹⁷).

In all these cases, we are outside the domain of subjectivity, hence of the speaker’s evaluation (S). The relationship between the suffixed forms and the bases from which they derive is opaque, or it is not possible to recognise the referent of the base; therefore, the meaning

¹⁷ In the early Sicilian texts collected in ARTESIA, we already find *picculillu_{ADJ}* ‘small, irrelevant’ (*MuntiXVC*, 8.32.1), *picchulilli_N* ‘children’ (*QuaedProfXIVC*, 21.24.5), *pichirillu_{ADJ}* ‘small’ (*ThesaurusXVR*, 155.5, 82.16; *MeditacioniXVGQ*, 9.41.4) and *pichirillu_N* (*MeditacioniXVGQ*, 9.40.25). According to TLIO (*Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini*, <http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/>; the etymology is based on DEI), *pichirillu* is to be traced back to *picciolo* ‘small’. However, Sic. *picciulu* ‘small’ is rare and no longer transparent for most varieties, where the adjective *nicu* ‘small’ prevails. *Picciulu* (as well as *picciottu* ‘boy’, see Varvaro 2014: 759) < **pikk* ‘small’ (Meyer-Lübke 1911: 483) or ‘tip’ hence ‘small’ (cf. for instance Battaglia 1986: 352, 355, 364). According to Di Gregorio (1936: 253), *picciridḍu* is to be traced back directly to this root. In both the reconstructions, the base is opaque.

of the *-ḍdu* form is totally memorised (significantly, these words are usually lemmatised in lexicons or vocabularies, as opposed to those productively derived; cf. also Emmi 2011: 238). Even when it is possible to identify a semantic relationship between base and suffixed word, it is still a generic relationship quite different from approximation (an entity somehow connected to the meaning of the base, e.g., having the colour indicated by the base or doing what the base indicates etc.).

7. (Provisional) conclusions

The analysis conducted in Sections 6.1 to 6.3 was based on the representation of approximation proposed in Fig. 2 in terms of prototypicality and allowed us to isolate three groups of derivatives in which the function of the suffix *-ḍdu/ḍda* can be observed. The first group (X_2), which is also the most numerous, contains productively derived words in which the suffix plays an attenuative function, that is, it indicates that the referent of the derived word exhibits the categorial properties of the base to a reduced degree. Attenuation is instantiated variously, depending on the context, as diminution (*sacchiteḍdu* ‘small bag’ < *saccu* ‘bag’, *fimminieḍda* ‘small exemplar of woman, young woman’ < *fimmina* ‘female, woman’), mitigation for the purposes of affection or empathy (*mischineḍdu* < *mischinu* ‘unfortunate’), courtesy (e.g., *scimuniteḍdu* ‘a little dumb’), etc. Sometimes the attenuation of categorial properties may result in under-specification (e.g., *uriceḍda* ‘about one hour’ < *ura* ‘hour’) or in a reduction in the extension of the meaning of the base X, such that the suffixed word expresses a specific exemplar of X, the semantic representation of which is likely to be intersubjectively shared (e.g., *discurseḍdu* ‘telling-off, harsh argument’ < *discursu* ‘speech, discourse’). This latter case marks the transition to external approximation (X_3), i.e., an area that contains exemplars that are no longer hyponyms of the base, because their specificity is, in intersubjective evaluation, so pronounced as to denote autonomous entities distinct from X rather than non-prototypical examples of X (*figureḍda*) or entities which only resemble X (*lattucheḍda*). Beyond this area, on the left and right peripheries of the schema, we find the (rather numerous) examples in which the suffix has lost any form of productivity and transparency and is, instead, fully lexicalised. Even when the suffix is formally identifiable, the relationship with the base is only generic (e.g., *calamareḍda*

‘squid fishing bait’, *rṛussedḍu* ‘red mullet’) or the base is not recognisable (e.g., *picciridḍu* ‘child’). Examples X_n , which presumably survive from other phases of the language, are therefore beyond the (evaluative, hence subjective) domain in which approximation operates and, in fact, are placed in the scheme in Fig. 2 outside the box marked S(ubject).

Based on this classification, we can extract a semantic-functional map for the suffix *-ḍḍu/-a*, as represented in Fig. 3. In the map, the various meanings attested in the corpus (in grey) can be arranged around two semantic cores (in blue), that is, ‘ X_2 , attenuation’ (internal approximation) and ‘ X_3 , similar to’ (external approximation). The map does not include the examples X_n , which are not derived by means of a productive use of the suffix, that is, the role of the suffix is not transparent in these cases.

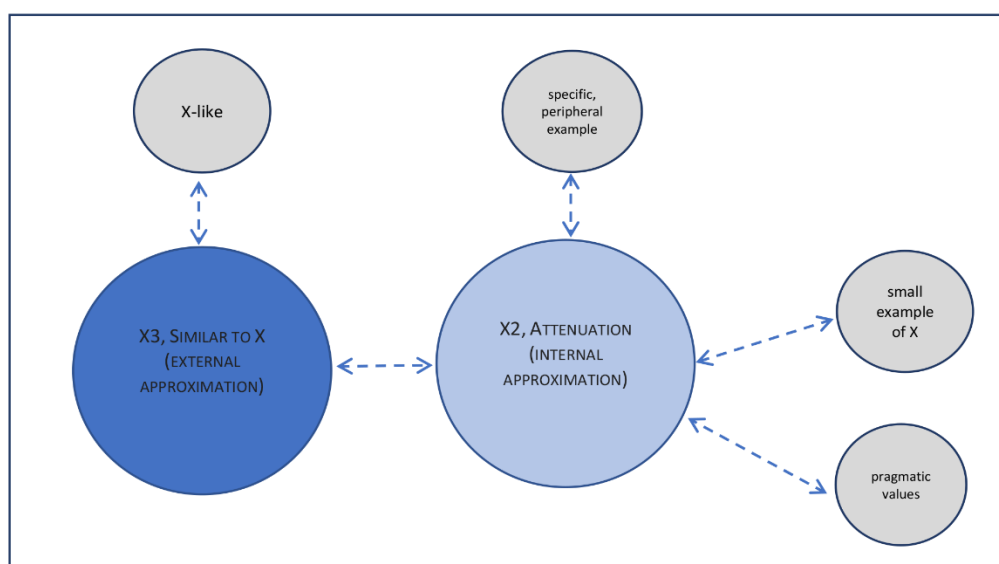


Fig. 3: Towards a semantic map for *-ḍḍu/-a*

Several aspects of the analysis deserve further investigation in the near future, which will allow a more comprehensive description of the range of meanings of the Sicilian suffix *-ḍḍu/-a*. Among these:

1. A systematic diachronic analysis of individual lexicalised words in order to assess whether other functions of the suffix can be traced as productive mechanisms in different phases of the language (e.g., the generic relation function observed for Latin and only residual and not very transparent in contemporary Sicilian).
2. The evaluation of possible local differences, to be conducted by means of new questionnaires targeted at different points in Sicily.

3. Competition with other evaluative (diminutive) suffixes in the expression of approximation (e.g., *-ignu* ‘-ish’, e.g., *umitignu* ‘dampish’ < *umitu* ‘damp’) or with different means (e.g., generic markers of quantity, among which indefinite adverbial items *tanticchia*, *nna picca* ‘a bit’, ‘half items’, e.g., *mezzu* ‘half’, etc., or other means, e.g., *tipu* ‘type’, as emerges from the responses to the questionnaire).

This is food for further research.

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