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Derivational networks in Italian

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Livio Gaeta

25 Derivational networks in Italian

25.1 General notes

With regard to the main questions discussed in the introductory chapter devoted to the Romance languages, a maximization approach has been adopted throughout this chapter on Italian (cf. Grossmann and Rainer 2004 for a detailed description of Italian word-formation). In particular, while – in accordance with the general design of the project – blatant cases of transflexion have been left out from the sample (such as *bere* ‘to drink’ > *bevuta* ‘drink’, *discendere* ‘to descend’ > *discesa* ‘descent’, *nuotare* ‘to swim’ > *nuotata* ‘swim’, etc., which directly correspond to the feminine form of their respective past participles: *bevuto* ‘drunk’, *disceso* ‘descended’, *nuotato* ‘swum’, etc.), derivatives like *frustata* ‘lash’ and *martellata* ‘hammer blow’ have been included because a denominal interpretation is available. This is because of the suffix *-ata* that is found in denominal nouns like *pagliaccio* ‘clown’ > *pagliacciata* ‘farce’, which diachronically results from the reanalysis of the feminine past participle of 1st conjugation verbs (cf. Gaeta 2000). In these cases, a double motivation can be appealed to because we might take either the (denominal) verbs *frustare* ‘to lash’ and *martellare* ‘to hammer’ or the nouns *frusta* ‘whip’ and *martello* ‘hammer’ as a derivational base, relating the derivatives respectively either to the nominal base (via suffixation) or to the verbal base (via conversion). A similar approach has been adopted for cases in which an adjective can in principle be derived either from a verb via conversion (e.g. *occhiello* ‘eyelet’ > *occhiellare* ‘to eyelet’ > *occhiellato* ‘eyeletted’), possibly accompanied by prefixation as in *osso* ‘bone’ > *disossare* ‘to debone’ > *disossato* ‘deboned’, or directly from a noun via suffixation (*occhiello* > *occhiell-ato*), possibly in combination with prefixation, as in *osso* > *dis-oss-ato*, on a par with clearly denominal nouns like *fortuna* ‘luck’ > *fortun-ato* ‘lucky’ and *grazia* ‘grace’ > *s-grazi-ato* ‘ungraceful’. Notice that, in several cases, the intermediate verb does not occur or is rather infrequent with regard to the *-ato* derivative, as for instance in the case of *dente* ‘tooth’ > *dent-ato* ‘dentate’ and of the scarcely frequent conversion *dentare* ‘to provide with teeth’. This makes a denominal derivation more plausible.

In accordance with the maximization approach, a number of patterns have also been included in the sample that are traditionally considered at the edge of the continuum between inflection and derivation. This concerns, for instance, the suffix of the so-called absolute superlative *-issimo*, which is traditionally assigned to inflection but is largely irrelevant for syntax, as shown by a

comparison with the so-called relative superlative: *Gianni è bellissimo* ‘Gianni is very beautiful’ vs. *Gianni è il *bellissimo / più bello di tutti* ‘Gianni is the most beautiful of all’ (cf. Gaeta 2003), as well as the old form of the present participle, which has become in fact a suffix for AGENT nouns or adjectives (cf. Luraghi 1999). Finally, all instances of evaluative affixations have been included in the sample in spite of their problematic status with regard to prototypical derivation. A similar maximization approach has also been adopted for the difficult cline running from neoclassical compounding down to affixation. Following Iacobini (2004: 88), elements like *inter-*, *multi-*, *para-*, etc. have been included in the sample as they are commonly held to share the same properties of the prefixes with which they often form paradigmatic series. In contrast, other combining forms such as *tele-*, *video-*, *-fero*, *-logo*, etc. have been excluded because their behaviour is heterogeneous with regard to normal affixation.

The data mainly come from the two largest Italian dictionaries, the GDIU and the GDLI, and have been further enriched with the help of direct searches on the internet, while derivatives marked as rare, archaic or dialectal were mostly excluded.

25.2 Maximum derivational networks

Table 25.1 displays the maximum derivational networks per order of derivation that are relevant for the saturation value.

Table 25.1: Maximum derivational networks per order of derivation for all three word-classes.

	1st order	2nd order	3rd order	4th order	Σ
Nouns	35	43	11	4	93
Verbs	29	43	28	5	105
Adjectives	31	24	9	3	67
TOTAL	95	110	48	12	265

Note that the values for derivational networks are roughly similar in the 1st order, but they sharply decrease in the other orders for adjectives, while the opposite is true for verbs and nouns, where the values are even higher in the 2nd order than in the 1st. It is interesting to observe that the value for verbs in the

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3rd order is quite high and in fact similar to that found in the 1st one. At any rate, the values for the 4th order are quite low for all word-classes.

25.3 Saturation values

In this section, the saturation values for the single word-classes are reported as they were elaborated in the general design of the project.

Table 25.2: Saturation values per order of derivation, nouns.

Nouns		Saturation value (%)	1st order (%)	2nd order (%)	3rd order (%)	4th order (%)
<i>bone</i>	<i>osso</i>	18.07	25.00	20.00	0.00	0.00
<i>eye</i>	<i>occhio</i>	30.72	35.94	37.14	8.70	0.00
<i>tooth</i>	<i>dente</i>	36.14	40.63	41.43	21.74	0.00
<i>day</i>	<i>giorno</i>	28.92	15.63	37.14	43.48	22.22
<i>dog</i>	<i>cane</i>	11.45	25.00	4.29	0.00	0.00
<i>louse</i>	<i>pidocchio</i>	13.86	26.56	8.57	0.00	0.00
<i>fire</i>	<i>fuoco</i>	48.80	39.06	51.43	52.17	88.89
<i>stone</i>	<i>pietra</i>	19.88	32.81	17.14	0.00	0.00
<i>water</i>	<i>acqua</i>	24.10	35.94	24.29	0.00	0.00
<i>name</i>	<i>nome</i>	18.67	18.75	18.57	21.74	11.11

It is interesting to observe that at least one top scorer is found in each of the three word-classes that displays a saturation value neatly surpassing or approximating the half of its derivational capacity: *tenere* ‘to hold’ for the verbs and *fuoco* ‘fire’ for the nouns, while among the adjectives, *lungo* ‘long’ and *nuovo* ‘new’ score equally and are closely followed by *caldo* ‘warm’. Moreover, two members of this latter word-class clearly underexploit their capacity, namely *angusto* ‘narrow’ and *dritto* ‘straight’, with the effect of downsizing the general saturation value of this word-class with respect to the others. While this barely comes as a surprise given their lower frequency compared to their English correspondents, it is quite striking to observe that the verb *dare* ‘to give’ and the noun *cane* ‘dog’ score quite low, exploiting about – or even less than – one tenth of their derivational capacity in spite of their high frequency and familiarity. As for *dare*, this can arguably be

Table 25.3: Saturation values per order of derivation, verbs.

Verbs		Saturation value (%)	1st order (%)	2nd order (%)	3rd order (%)	4th order > (%)
<i>cut</i>	<i>tagliare</i>	35.80	51.92	45.90	7.69	0.00
<i>dig</i>	<i>scavare</i>	16.05	23.08	16.39	10.26	0.00
<i>pull</i>	<i>tirare</i>	26.54	32.69	31.15	17.95	0.00
<i>throw</i>	<i>gettare</i>	9.88	13.46	13.11	2.56	0.00
<i>give</i>	<i>dare</i>	6.79	11.54	8.20	0.00	0.00
<i>hold</i>	<i>tenere</i>	64.81	36.54	77.05	82.05	70.00
<i>sew</i>	<i>cucire</i>	13.58	21.15	16.39	2.56	0.00
<i>burn</i>	<i>bruciare</i>	16.77	26.92	16.39	7.50	0.00
<i>drink</i>	<i>bere</i>	22.36	36.54	18.03	15.00	0.00
<i>know</i>	<i>conoscere</i>	35.40	25.00	40.98	35.00	62.50

Table 25.4: Saturation values per order of derivation, adjectives.

Adjectives		Saturation value (%)	1st order (%)	2nd order (%)	3rd order (%)	4th order (%)
<i>narrow</i>	<i>angusto</i>	4.65	8.33	3.13	0.00	0.00
<i>old</i>	<i>vecchio</i>	36.05	52.78	25.00	28.57	0.00
<i>straight</i>	<i>diritto</i>	4.65	11.11	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>new</i>	<i>nuovo</i>	43.02	27.78	43.75	64.29	100.00
<i>long</i>	<i>lungo</i>	43.02	44.44	56.25	21.43	0.00
<i>warm</i>	<i>caldo</i>	39.53	33.33	43.75	50.00	25.00
<i>thick</i>	<i>spesso</i>	25.58	30.56	31.25	7.14	0.00
<i>bad</i>	<i>cattivo</i>	20.93	36.11	15.63	0.00	0.00
<i>thin</i>	<i>sottile</i>	20.93	27.78	25.00	0.00	0.00
<i>black</i>	<i>nero</i>	26.74	30.56	34.38	7.14	0.00

related to its reduced phonological size, which makes it a bad derivational basis. On the other hand, for *cane*, one might tentatively see the reason for its reduced saturation values in the 2nd and 3rd orders in its concrete reference, which is only

partially exploited in the 1st order to convey more abstract and/or metaphorical meanings, similarly to the other noun *pidocchio* ‘louse’, which also scores quite low. Derivatives based on these extended meanings, however, are rarely open to further derivation. In addition, one should also consider the suppletive effect of the learned stems *cino-* and *pediculo-*, which are commonly used in terminologies and scientific or technical metalanguages. Concrete references that are rarely expandable metaphorically can also be held responsible for the reduced derivational capacity of the verb *cucire* ‘to sew’, while for *gettare* ‘to throw’, the competition with its near-synonym *lanciare* ‘to launch, throw’ can be invoked. At any rate, in the following table, the average saturation values per order of derivation are reported for all three word-classes.

On average, the values are quite homogeneous across the three word-classes.

Table 25.5: Average saturation values per order of derivation for all three word-classes.

	1st order	2nd order	3rd order	4th order
Nouns	29.53	26.00	14.78	12.22
Verbs	27.88	28.36	17.75	15.00
Adjectives	30.28	27.81	17.86	12.50

25.4 Orders of derivation

In the following table, the difference between the richness of nouns and verbs as derivational bases clearly stands out against the reduced derivational capacity of adjectives.

Table 25.6: Maximum and average number of orders of derivation for all three word-classes.

	Maximum	Average
Nouns	8	2.33
Verbs	9	2.63
Adjectives	6	1.69

25.5 Derivational capacity

This difference is also reflected in the following two tables, in which the maximum and the average derivational capacities for the three word-classes are reported with regard to the 1st order derivatives for all three word-classes.

Table 25.7: Maximum and average derivational capacity for all three word-classes.

	Maximum	Average
Nouns	26	18.9
Verbs	27	14.5
Adjectives	19	10.9

Table 25.8: Average number of derivatives per order of derivation for all three word-classes.

	1st order	2nd order	3rd order	4th order
Nouns	18.9	18.2	3.4	1.1
Verbs	14.5	17.3	7.1	1.2
Adjectives	10.9	8.9	2.5	0.5

25.6 Correlation between semantic categories and orders of derivation

There seems to be a certain correlation between saturation value and paradigmatic strength – the latter expressed by the total number of derivatives of the 1st order – in the 2nd order for all three word-classes ($N_{2nd} = 0.46$, $V_{2nd} = 0.62$, $A_{2nd} = 0.63$), while the correlation weakens and even becomes negative in the other orders ($N_{3rd} = -0.03$, $V_{3rd} = 0.34$, $A_{3rd} = 0.34$; $N_{4th} = 0.19$, $V_{4th} = 0.17$, $A_{4th} = -0.05$). This confirms the expectation that Italian apparently does not like long chains of affixes exceeding the 2nd order of derivation (cf. Gaeta 2005). Notice that the less robust correlation value obtained for nouns arguably depends on the low derivational capacity of *cane* and *pidocchio* discussed above.

Semantic categories typical of the 1st order of derivation are AUGMENTATIVE (present in 10 lexemes) MANNER (9), and DIMINUTIVE (7). It must be added that the other semantic category typical of adjectives in the 1st order is ABSTRACTION (10), but the suffixes mainly used to form abstracts, namely *-ità* and *-ezza*, are only marginally open to further derivation (cf. Gaeta 2005). This means that only verb-forming semantic categories, namely CAUSATIVE (6) and INCHOATIVE (3), provide bases which are further derived in the 2nd order for semantic categories like ACTION (8), ABILITY (7), AGENT (6), INSTRUMENT (5) and AGENT/FEMALE (4) with the addition of the semantic category MANNER (8), which is normally combined with bases displaying the elative suffix *-issimo* discussed above. Note the frequent occurrence of the conjoined categories AGENT/FEMALE, which is due to the highly productive suffix *-trice* (e.g. *nuovo* ‘new’ > *innovare* ‘to innovate’ > *innovatrice* ‘innovator (fem.)’; cf. Gaeta 2010).

The picture for nouns and verbs is radically different. With regard to nouns, besides those relating to evaluative suffixes, namely DIMINUTIVE (10), AUGMENTATIVE (10) and PEJORATIVE (8), we observe a rich number of semantic categories typical of the 1st order which are distributed across different output word-classes: RELATIONAL (8), PRIVATIVE (7), QUALITY (7), AGENT (6), COLLECTIVE (6), LOCATION (6), ORNATIVE (6), SINGULATIVE (6), CAUSATIVE (5) and INSTRUMENT (5). This is reflected in 2nd order derivatives relating to semantic categories like ACTION (10), ABSTRACTION (7), AGENT (6), MANNER (6), ABILITY (5) and DIMINUTIVE (5). As for verbs, the semantic categories typical of the 1st order are ACTION (10), AGENT (10), ABILITY (9), AGENT/FEMALE (9), ITERATIVE (8), INSTRUMENT (7), DIMINUTIVE (6) and RESULTATIVE (6), which are reflected in 2nd order derivatives relating to semantic categories like ABILITY (10), ABSTRACTION (10), ACTION (9), AGENT (8), AGENT/FEMALE (8), and INSTRUMENT (6), which again give rise to 3rd order derivatives relating to ABSTRACTION (8) and, less typically, to ACTION (3) and AUGMENTATIVE (3).

25.7 Semantic categories with blocking effects

A certain number of factors of different natures can be held responsible for constraints on the derivational capacity of the lexemes. One factor of a phonological nature is the length of the base, as already pointed out for *dare*. Another factor is of a categorial nature, being connected either to the properties of a certain word-class or of a certain class of affixes. In this regard, the immensely productive suffix *-mente*, which is also the only suffix that forms adverbs, systematically excludes any further suffixation: *posteriore* ‘posterior’ > *posterior-mente* ‘posterior-ADV’ > **posteriorment-eggiare* (on productivity in Italian

word-formation, cf. Gaeta and Ricca 2006). In terms of the derivational network adopted here, this restriction must be seen as a closing effect of the semantic category MANNER, which hampers any further derivation. More generally, adverbs are seldom possible bases of derivation: minor exceptions include *subito* ‘immediately’ > *subit-aneo* ‘sudden’, *indietro* ‘backwards’ > *indietr-eggiare* ‘to move backwards’ > *presto* ‘soon’ > **prest-aneo*, and *avanti* ‘forwards’ > **avant-eggiare*. The limited derivational capacity of *diritto* observed above also has to be seen from this viewpoint, since it is mainly used as an adverb.

On the other hand, the immense productivity of *-mente* must cede to bases displaying evaluative suffixes that generally hamper further derivations: *bello* ‘beautiful’ > *bell-ino* ‘beautiful-DIM’ > **bellina-mente*, *caldo* ‘warm’ > *cald-uccio* ‘warm-DIM’ > **calduccia-mente*, *cattivo* ‘bad’ > *cattiv-one* ‘bad-AUG’ > **cattivona-mente*, etc., unless a morphopragmatic trait [non-serious] is involved in the utterance, as in Manzoni’s coinage *lung-etta-mente* ‘long-DIM-ADV’. Remarkably, the elative suffix *-issimo* does normally form adverbs: *cattiv-issima-mente* ‘bad-AUG-ADV’, *lung-issima-mente* ‘long-AUG-ADV’, etc. The closing effect is not limited to *-mente*, but appears to be a general property of evaluative suffixes: *bellino* > **bellin-ezza*, *dolce* ‘sweet’ > *dolci-astro* ‘sweet-PEJ’ > **dolciast-ificare*, etc. Again, in the terms adopted here, this restriction has to be seen as a closing effect of the semantic categories relating to evaluative meaning, namely DIMINUTIVE, AUGMENTATIVE (with the mentioned exception of *-issimo*) and PEJORATIVE.

25.8 Typical combinations of semantic categories

A number of chain-effects witnessing the derivational potential of the system can be observed, which are arguably related to the selective properties of the single affixes with regard to the input/output of the word-class.

- CAUSATIVE/ITERATIVE-ABILITY-ABSTRACTION: e.g. *caldo* ‘warm’ > *scaldare* ‘to warm (up)’ > *scaldabile* ‘warmable’ > *scaldabilità* ‘warmability’; *cucire* ‘to sew’ > *ricucire* ‘to re-sew’ > *ricucibile* ‘re-sewable’ > *ricucibilità* ‘re-sewability’ (overall 7 cases)
- ABILITY-ABSTRACTION/PRIVATIVE-MANNER/ABSTRACTION: e.g. *conoscere* ‘to know’ > *conoscibile* ‘knowable’ > *conoscibilità* ‘knowability’ / *inconoscibile* ‘unknowable’ > *inconoscibilmente* ‘unknowably’ / *inconoscibilità* ‘unknowability’ (overall 7 cases)
- RELATIONAL-CAUSATIVE-ABSTRACTION(/ABILITY-ABSTRACTION): e.g. *fuoco* ‘fire’ > *focale* ‘focal’ > *focalizzare* ‘to focalize’ > *focalizzazione* ‘focalization’ / *focalizzabile* ‘focalizable’ > *focalizzabilità* ‘focalizability’ (overall 3 cases)

- QUALITY-PRIVATIVE-MANNER: e.g. *dente* ‘tooth’ > *dentato* ‘toothed’ > *sdentato* ‘toothless’ > *sdentatamente* ‘toothlessly’ (overall 3 cases)

These chains exploit the high productivity of verb-forming procedures as well as of certain affixes and affix combinations reflected in semantic sequences like ABILITY-ABSTRACTION and ABILITY-PRIVATIVE, which occur 43 and 13 times respectively in the sample.

25.9 Multiple occurrence of semantic categories

Cases of multiple occurrences of the same semantic category are negligible, on the whole.

25.10 Reversibility of semantic categories

This phenomenon is non-existent in Italian.

25.11 Conclusions

To sum up, in Italian, the first two orders are considerably crowded with regard to the others, while no 5th order derivations occur. Verbs and nouns (in this order) clearly exhibit the highest number of derivational networks compared to adjectives, probably because of the closing effect of evaluative meanings (DIMINUTIVE, PEJORATIVE and, to an extent, AUGMENTATIVE) and of other semantic categories like MANNER and, to an extent, ABSTRACTION, which are particularly common with adjectives, especially in the 1st order. As a consequence, while the value for derivational networks of adjectives is quite high in the 1st order and sharply decreases in the others, the opposite is true for verbs and nouns, where the values are even higher in the 2nd order than in the 1st (Tables 25.1, 25.7 and 25.8). This is confirmed by the maximum and average number of orders of derivation, which are clearly lower for adjectives than the equivalent figures found for verbs and nouns (Table 25.6). In contrast, since the limits on the derivational capacity of adjectives result from the closing effects of certain meanings typically occurring in the 1st order, no repercussions are observed on the saturation value, which reflects the degree of actualization of the semantic categories that

are activated at any order of derivation. In fact, similar values are obtained for all word-classes (Table 25.5), with the exception of nouns, where some misalignment has to be recorded (Table 25.2), probably because of the idiosyncratic properties of single lexemes that are due to the reduced size of the base or to the suppletive effect of learned stems.

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