Looking back and looking ahead: Some thoughts on the suffix *-ata* in Romance

Martin Becker – Universität zu Köln
martin.becker1@uni-koeln.de

1 Introduction

With his study of the Italian suffix *-ata*, Klaus von Heusinger (2002, 2005) explored an intriguing research topic in the field of derivational morphology. The more one dives into the intricacies of *-ata*, the more mysterious the suffix becomes. In his seminal study on *-ata*, the author makes the case for an abstract and unified semantics of *-ata*, trying to model the relationship between the suffix and the different readings it systematically produces in interaction with the conceptual properties of the underlying bases.

The suffix *-ata* yields deverbal (e.g. *lavare* → *lavata*, 'washing') as well as denominal (*ombrello* → *ombrellata*, 'blow with an umbrella') derivatives. In order to provide a unified account, Klaus von Heusinger claims that the base for all derivation types contains an event argument (though this does not mean that the base has to be verbal or a virtual verbal base). Following his account, the function of the suffix is to shift the referent argument to the prominent event argument and to profile the single character of the event (i.e. 'single event of or instance of the event').

This approach has its appeal and it has its cruces: most importantly, it provides a unitary (or 'monosemous') account for all derivations of *-ata* by matching relevant conceptual features of the base with the abstract operation(s) ascribed to the suffix. This comes with the price that different specific templates based on particular event predicates have to be spelled out in accordance with the conceptual semantics of the base (see von Heusinger 2002: 122).
For the denominal derivations, the author specifies the following event-like patterns:

Event of hitting with N: *librata* ('with a book')
Event of typically acting as N: *ragazzata* ('as a child')
Capacity that can be carried by/in N: Event of transporting with N: *boccata* ('in/with the mouth')
Meal prepared on the basis of N: Event of preparing with N: *fungata* ('with mushrooms')
(formalizations, see in von Heusinger 2002: 123)

2 The functions of *-ata*

In this birthday paper, I want to provide a more complex picture by casting some light on the functions of *-ata* from a comparative and a diachronic perspective. Comparing the Italian *-ata* formations with their equivalents in Spanish, Portuguese (*-ada*) and French (*-ée*), it becomes clear that the functional range of the suffix is quite different across the Romance languages. In addition, the various readings, though they may converge semantically, do not have the same salience within the semantic structure of the derivational category in question. Let's have a closer look at the different *-ata* patterns in Romance. Surprisingly, Grossmann & Rainer (2004: 253f.) deal with the denominal and the deverbal formations in different sections of their comprehensive monograph on Italian word formation. They identify at least three main readings for the Italian denominal derivations with *-ata*, ranking them according to their frequency and salience as follows:

1. A stroke/blow with the instrument N designated by the base: *bastonata* ('with a stick'), *sassata* ('with a stone'), *zampata* ('with a paw');

2.   Typical negative act committed by the person N: *stronzata* ('by an idiot'), *bambinata* ('by a child');
3.   Quantity contained in the object designated by N: *bicchierata* ('in a glass'), *boccata* ('in the mouth'), *nidiata* ('in a nest');

The remaining readings (or subcategories) are either much less prominent (especially the group 'social events' that revolve around N, e.g. *bicchierata* ('beer'), *chitarrata* ('guitars/ guitar music') or they are no longer productive but only motivated, as is the case for the duration group (*mattinata, nottata, serata*), the 'meals and drinks' reading (e.g. *spaghettata* ('spaghetti meal')), and for the group of collective architectural terms (such as *arcata* ('arcade') and *travata* ('solid girder'). Yet the most productive group in Italian is the deverbal one. This central group is characterized by its typical semelfactive reading referring to 'singole istanziazioni del processo verbale' (Grossmann & Rainer 2004: 340) as in *chiamata* ('a call'), *dormita* ('a nap'), *bevuta* ('a drinking') and *accelerata* ('an acceleration'). These word formations typically combine with light verbs like *dare* (*dare un'ordinata alla casa*, 'to clean up') and *fare (fare una dormita*) (ibid.: 341).

Interestingly, the equivalents of -*ata* in Spanish and Portuguese present quite a different picture. In addition, there are very conspicuous contrasts when it comes to comparisons between the Ibero-Romance languages (irrespective of their typological proximity).

In contrast to Italian, the most prominent -*ada* reading in Spanish turns out to be 'typical negative act committed by the person N', with examples like *bobada* ('stupidity'), *cacicada* ('abuse of power'), *gamberrada* ('unruly behavior') and *bravuconada* ('behavior of a blowhard'). What may have contributed to the centrality of this reading is the extension of its domain to proper names, as in *quijotada* and to ethnic terms, e.g. *andaluzada* and *gringada* ('typical act of Don Quijote', 'of an Andalusian', 'of a gringo').

Only in second place comes the stroke reading – stroke with an instrument N, e.g. *cabezada* ('with the head'), *escobada* ('with a broom'), *tacada* ('with the heel of a shoe') – which nowadays seems to be of minor productivity (see Rainer 1994: 389). The semantic extensions of the pattern may also refer to the body part affected by the blow (*cabezada*, 'blow on the head') or the result of the violent action (*navajada*, 'a knife wound'). In addition, a systematic extension to the political field has taken place which turns -*ada*-formations based on distinguished proper nouns into designations for (failed) coups, as in *carlistada* ('a coup attempted by the traditionalist claimant to the throne Don Carlos and his supporters'), *Sanjuanada* ('coup attempt against Primo de Rivera in the night of Saint John in 1926'), *sanjurjada* ('coup attempt by general Sanjurjo in 1932') (see Rainer 1994: 388). However, this political sub-type fell out of use after the Second World War, the suffix being supplanted by the competing suffix -*azo*, which designates successful political coups such as *bogotazo* ('the military coup in Bogota in 1948'), *pinochetazo* ('Pinochet's coup d'état in 1973'), but also *derechazo* ('punch with the right hand') (see Becker 2003: 103f.). This competing suffix seems to replace -*ada* from the domain of blows and strokes in general.

A further prominent reading, which is clearly lacking in Italian, is the collective reading with animate individuals. Though it referred to herds of animals in Old Spanish (e.g. *manada*, *yeguada*; see also below), it is nowadays particularly prominent when referring to social groups whose members are discriminated against or even outcasts of society, e.g. *indiada*, *negrada*, and *gringada*. Spanish -*ada* also includes the meal pattern ('meal based on the ingredient N'), which – in contrast to Italian – is still very productive (e.g. *ajada, caracolada, garbanzada*, 'with garlic', 'with snails', 'with chickpeas').
Given their fully lexicalized and thus unproductive status, we leave aside the quantity reading (quantity contained in N: *cucharada*) and the duration reading (*invernada*).

A striking contrast in Spanish compared to Italian and also Portuguese (!) is the fact that Spanish *-ada* does not produce deverbal formations like *chiamata* ('call') in Italian or *lida* ('reading event') in Portuguese. Both languages display an impressive list of deverbal items with an event reading, which typically combine with light verbs, yielding expressions like *dar uma lida (no artigo)* ('read the article'), *dar uma martelada (no prego)* ('hammer the nail), *dar uma olhada* ('have a look at'), *dar uma caminhada* ('go for a walk') (see Scher 2006: 31f.).

Interestingly, the picture we have presented so far can be traced back to the linguistic situation in Old Spanish and Old Portuguese. This boils down to the fact that their evolutions display a high degree of continuity over the course of time.

For one thing, both languages shared the most prominent patterns from the very beginning. This can be seen from a query of *-ada* based on the two relevant diachronic corpora (Davies, Corpus del Español and Ferreira & Davies, Corpus do Português), from which emerge the following common patterns relevant in the Middle Ages (13th and 14th century):

- the blow/stroke-group: Span./Ptg. *lançada* ('with a javelin'), Span./Ptg. *espadada* ('with a sword'), Span./Ptg. *pedrada* ('with a stone'), Span./Ptg. *espolada/esporada* ('of the spurs') etc.;
- the collective reading: Span. *celada* ('emboscada de gente de armas', 'ambush'), *manada de cabras*, *manada de ovejas* ('flock of goats, sheep'), *peonada* ('group of auxiliary workers/labourers'), *vacada* ('herd of cows'); Ptg. *boiada* ('herd of oxen'), *assuada* ('group of armed rioters'), *cercada* ('fish corral');
- quantity contained in N/unit of measurement based on N: Ptg. *braçada* (→ 'arm'), *colherada* (→ 'spoon'), *polegada* ('inch'), Span. *yugada* ('el espacio de tierra de labor, que puede arar un par de bueyes en un día', 'yoke'), *pulgada* ('medida que es la duodecima parte de un pie', 'inch');

On the other hand, the contrast in the deverbal domain clearly emerges in the oldest records. While Portuguese displays an important number of deverbal event nominalizations (and might even have been the most prominent pattern at that time), the small number of deverbal formations in Old Spanish emerging from the records are fully lexicalized (e.g. *mirada*, 'a look', *jugada*, 'a move in a game') and *cabalgada* ('the ride')), which means that we are dealing with a completely unproductive pattern. To make a long story short: it seems that, from the outset, Spanish has never had a relevant productive deverbal pattern of *-ada* formations.

Finally, French comes with very different patterns of specialization given that the corresponding suffix *-ée* (lat. *-ata* > *-eδe* > *-ée*) basically presents denominal formations with collective meanings of three different types (Dubois & Dubois-Charlier 1999: 208f.):

1. The first type refers to an ensemble of animate beings, i.e. the unspecified quantity of persons or animals contained in the place N, for example: *la chambrée* ('a room full of people'), *la maisonnée* ('a house full of people'), *la ruchée* ('a beehive (of bees)');

2. The second type is based on container nouns and designates the quantity of substance contained in N, e.g. *une assiettée de soupe* ('a plate (full) of soup'), *une pellettée de terre* ('a shovelful of soil'), *une fournée de pain* ('a batch of bread', lit. 'an oven full of').

Some of these formations have turned into units of measurement, e.g. *la coudée* ('cubit/ell') and *cylindrée* ('cubic capacity').

The blow/stroke reading, highly prominent in other Romance languages, is restricted to some very specific expressions designating a stroke (*la peignée*) or yields synonymous

expressions for the notion of 'a thrashing', for instance *tabassée, rossée, dérouillée* and *pâtée* (all synonyms with the meaning 'a thrashing').

It must be stressed that French *-ée* also yields deverbal nominalizations, though they are not very prominent in the language system. Ferret, Soare & Villoing (2010) list some (rarely used) examples of deverbal *-ée* formations such as *chevauchée* ('the ride', p. 2), *pesée (de l'enfant)* ('weighing (of the baby)', p. 4), *(pendant la) trainée* ('(during) the dragging', p. 5) and *percée (de l'abcès)* ('the bursting (of the abscess)', p. 9). As the authors emphasize, the suffix *-ée* introduces the perfective aspect linked to the feature of 'boundedness'/'global perspective' (Ferret, Soare & Villaloing 2010: 6).

   Please note that the suffix *-ade*, which entered the French language via borrowings from Occitan (see Lüdtke 1978: 151, Dubois & Dubois-Charlier 1999: 40f., TLFi: *-ade*[1]), has been competing with *-ée* in the domain of the deverbal event readings (*baignade* ('swimming'), *glissade* ('sliding'), *balade* ('a walk') and the blow/stroke reading (*bastonnade* ('beating, caning')) since the end of the 15th century.

3 Conclusion

In what way do these pieces of comparative and diachronic evidence contribute to the overall *-ata/-ada* puzzle?

1. From a synchronic and a diachronic point of view, it becomes clear that *-ata/-ada* comes with a robust deverbal event-designating pattern in the derivational system of Italian and, to a minor degree, of Portuguese. In contrast, in the derivational system of French, the deverbal pattern of *-ée* has always been much less productive, while in Spanish deverbal *-ada* turns out to have always been marginal. In the later systems, the collective readings – group of N, quantity contained in N, but also blow/stroke with N – rather constitute the prototypical center of the word formation category. This boils down to the conclusion that the event reading(s) and the collective readings cannot be derived from each other, at least not on the basis of the available diachronic data. Therefore, it is problematic to derive all readings from an underlying event-like pattern in order to provide a unitary and comprehensive analysis.

2. If we want to postulate an overall abstract semantics of all *-ata/-ada* formations, the aspectual feature of 'boundedness' (derived from the past participle in Latin and Romance; see Meyer-Lübke 1894, Ferret, Soare & Villoing 2010) and the feature of 'internal plurality' (in line with Collin's etymological analysis of *-ata* as a neuter plural form (see Collin 1918) seem to be paramount. The feature 'internal plurality' accounts for the internal plurality of collective entities and for internal phases of event realizations (but see Gaeta 2000: 211). This description amounts to analyzing *-ata* as a 'portioning' suffix ('a portioner'), which cuts out a unit from a whole.

3. This analysis endorses the idea of an abstract semantics for *-ata* but does not derive the different readings/patterns exclusively from conceptual properties of the base. It lays emphasis on the role of encyclopedic knowledge and the role of analogy which is at work when it comes to coining new lexical units in accordance with prototypical items of each reading group or 'subcategory' of the overall derivative category. The *-ata/-ada/-ée* formations can thus refer to an instance of an event (with a verbal base), a group of persons or animals (with N designating an animate entity), a quantity contained in N (with 'containers') or a stroke with an appropriate object or body part N. The coherence of each group (or 'subcategory') is ensured by the ties

---

[1] Cf. http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=635106060;r=1;nat=;sol=0;

between the members (their *family resemblance*) and with the prototypical instantiation(s) of the relevant pattern, which foster the creation of new analogical formations and allow for the accommodation of less prototypical items of the group.

The suffix -*ata*/-*ada* remains an intriguing puzzle in terms of the relationship between the deverbal and denominal readings in synchrony and diachrony. In addition, the fundamental question remains: How can we account for the interpretation of the manifold patterns developed by this productive and complex suffix in Romance?

References

Becker, Martin. 2003. *Die Entwicklung der modernen Wortbildung im Spanischen: Der politische und soziale Wortschatz seit 1869*. Frankfurt: Lang.

Becker, Martin. 2014. O sufixo -*ada* em português: Aspectos semânticos e diacrônicos. In Mário Eduardo Viaro (ed.), *Morfologia histórica*, 118–153. São Paulo: Cortez.

CdE – Davies, Mark. 2002. Corpus del español. 100 million words, 1200s-1900s. https://www.corpusdelespanol.org (<30.05.2021>)

CdP – Davies, Mark & Michael Ferreira. 2006. Corpus do Português. 45 million words, 1300s – 1900s. https://www.corpusdoportugues.org (<02.06.2021>)

Collin, Carl S. 1918. *Étude sur le développement du suffixe* -ata *(it.* -ata*, prov., esp., port.,* -ada*, frz.* ée-*,* -ade*) dans les langues romanes*. Lund: Lindstet.

Dubois, Jean & Françoise Dubois-Charlier. 1999. *La dérivation suffixale en français*. Paris: Nathan.

Ferret, Karen, Elena Soare & Florence Villoing. 2010. Rivalry between French -*age* and -*ée*. The role of grammatical aspect in nominalization. In Maria Aloni, Harald Bastiaanse, Tikitu de Jager & Katrin Schulz (eds.), *Logic, language and meaning. Proceedings of the 17th Amsterdam Colloquium*, 284–294. Berlin & Heidelberg: Sorin.

Gaeta, Livio. 2000. The interaction between morphology and semantics: The Italian suffix -ATA. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 47. 205–229.

Gaeta, Livio. 2015. Action nouns in Romance. In Peter O. Müller, Ingeborg Ohnheiser, Susan Olsen & Franz Rainer (eds.), *Word formation* (HSK 40.2), 1209–1229. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Grossmann, Maria & Franz Rainer. 2004. *La formazione delle parole in italiano*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

von Heusinger, Klaus. 2002. The interface of lexical semantics and conceptual structure: Deverbal and denominal nominalizations. In Ewald Lang & Ilse Zimmermann (eds.), *Nominalisierung* (ZAS Papers in Linguistics: ZASPiL 27), 109–124. Berlin: Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft.

von Heusinger, Klaus. 2005. Morphology and the interface between conceptual structure and lexical semantics: The case of Italian nominalization of -*ata*. *Lingua e linguaggio* 4(2). 229–242.

Lüdtke, Jens. 1978. *Prädikative Nominalisierungen mit Suffixen im Französischen, Katalanischen und Spanischen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Meyer-Lübke, Wilhelm. 1894. *Grammatik der Romanischen Sprachen: Formenlehre*, vol. 2. Leipzig: O. R. Reisland.

Rainer, Franz. 1993. *Spanische Wortbildungslehre*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Scher, Ana Paula. 2006. Nominalizações em -*ada* em construções com o verbo leve dar em português brasileiro. *Letras de Hoje, Porto Alegre* 41(1). 29–48.

TLFi. Trésor de la Langue Française informatisée. http://atilf.atilf.fr (<02.06.2021>)