

# Proto-agentivity as an expression of causal dependency in a name of event

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In this talk we will look at event nouns built with the suffix ATA in Italian as an example of how the identification of an entity as a participant plays a crucial role in creating the possibility of referring to an event. More specifically, we want to explore the different ways in which forms of agentivity are used to build an event which is going to be introduced in the discourse *via* a nominal expression.

We study ATA nominalizations of the type  $N \rightarrow N$ . They are expressions that can be used to refer to an event (a dynamic entity) and are formed on a nominal base denoting an object (a static entity).

Ragazzo 'boy' → Ragazzata 'action typical of a boy'

porco 'pig' → porcata 'dirty, or silly/clumsy thing'

Berlusconi → berlusconata 'action typical of N'

Ombrellata 'umbrella' → ombrellata 'a blow with an umbrella'

We make the assumption that the change in the ontological nature of the possible referents of ATA nouns with respect to the base is the result of associating a thematic role to the meaning of the base. The hypothesis is that this change is licensed through the morphosyntactic operation of suffixation and that there is a restriction on the role selected, namely it can only be proto-agentive. The selection results in a double impact on the interpretation of the nouns. On the one hand, it can explain the fact that the interpretation of ATA event nouns is restricted to *nomen vicis*, and activity and result readings are ruled out. On the other hand, this *nomen vicis* reading is instantiated in a variety of nuances, e.g. quality of an action (e.g. ragazzata), instrument (e.g. ombrellata). The notion of proto-agent allows us to cover the range observed.

Agentivity can be read as one way of encoding a form of causal relation in natural language. In this sense, the study of ATA nouns contributes to the more general discussion of how we use causality in speaking of events.