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Author

La Mattina, Nicco Amedeo

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"Giving the Meaning" as a Social Practice on Pantelleria:

The Metasemantics of Attunement

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Anthropology

by

Nicco Amedeo La Mattina

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Giving the Meaning" as a Social Practice on Pantelleria:

The Metasemantics of Attunement

by

Nicco Amedeo La Mattina

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Alessandro Duranti, Chair

In this paper, I understand metasemantic practices (usually understood to give the meaning of an expression) as social practices that unfold interactionally according to pragmatic criteria. By examining verbal interactions centering on the toponymy and dialect of the Sicilian island Pantelleria, I show that metasemantic statements may (*a*) exhibit Pantelleria as an Orientalized "tourist place" through Arabic etymologies or (*b*) disclose it as a "place-world" through attunement to the singularity of what William James called the "tissue of experience". By attending both formally and pragmatically to metasemantic constructions, I show that beyond their propositional content (expressing the equivalence of at least two expression-forms), translations may encode affective attunement and participate in place-making.

Keywords: *Pantelleria*, *Italy*, *translation*, *metasemantics*, *epistemics*

The thesis of Nicco Amedeo La Mattina is approved.

Aomar Boum

Erin Debenport

Alessandro Duranti, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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INTRODUCTION

Critical scrutiny is only rarely directed to the social practice of requesting and giving a

meaning, even though most ethnographers and field linguists are intimately familiar with this

question-response sequence. Questions such as "what does *x* mean?", when employed as an

interview technique by social science researchers, are intended to elicit responses (such as

glosses or translations) that are culturally or linguistically informative (Samarin 1967, cf.

Bowern 2008:77-78, Mithun 2001). However, the matter of the interviewee's own

"metacommunicative norms and routines", as Charles Briggs (1986) puts it, is seldom addressed

even though a wide variety of social practices other than elicitation are metasemantic, involving

talk about the meanings of expressions. As William Hanks and Carlo Severi point out:

> Not only experts translate, but ordinary speakers do too, in the course of everyday
> activities. Bi-or multilingualism, code switching, blending, crossing, paraphrasing, reported
> speech, and giving accounts are all well-established sociolinguistic phenomena, and all
> may involve the same key elements as canonical translation. The fact that they are part of
> everyday practice, and not only of social science research, is a good reason to pay close
> attention to translation as a process endogenous to social life. (Hanks and Severi 2015:2)

Building on these observations, in this paper, I start from the assumption that "giving the

meaning"—or, more exactly, "metasemantic characterization" (Silverstein 1993:42)—is a social

practice that occurs within particular activity frames and according to epistemic as well as

broader dialogical and pragmatic criteria (Du Bois 2007, 2014, Heritage 2012, 2013).

Interactional processes of making sense always involve collaboration and negotiation. For this

reason, I will consider glosses and translations as "interactional achievements," in the sense

proposed by Schegloff (1981, 1986). By examining verbal interactions centring on the toponymy

and "dialect"[1] of Pantelleria (a small Sicilian island northeast of Tunisia), I will argue that

metasemantic equations occur in recognizable social interactions, such as those in which

translations exhibit Pantelleria as an Orientalized "tourist place" (Bærenholdt et al. 2004) and

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those in which "giving the meaning" discloses the island as a singularly-lived "place-world" (Basso 1996). So, I will attend both formally and pragmatically to metasemantic syntagmas to show that beyond their propositional content (expressing the equivalence of expression-forms), glosses and translations may also participate in place making and encode affective attunement.

On the basis of my fieldwork on Pantelleria over the summers of 2016 and 2019, and in particular on the basis of my own participation in conversational metasemantics during that time, I advance a perspective that foregrounds the interactional constitution of glossing and translation practices: the dialogicality of metalingual function. This involves attending to the pragmatics of "giving the meaning" and the social uses of metasemantic discourse. To demonstrate the dialogicality of metasemantics, I draw on recent work on epistemically-driven interactional sequences (those which aim to resolve information or experience imbalances). Interactions between islanders and tourists in the small Pantesco town of Sibà sometimes occasion characterizing nearby place-names as Arabic, such as when islanders are asked to translate local toponyms into Italian. On the other hand, some older rural islanders with whom I spoke rarely treated translations as interlingual, but instead as disclosing an attunement to the singularity of existence, what William James called the "tissue of experience" (cf. 1905:116). On Pantelleria, not only may islanders disagree on the meanings of expressions, but metalinguistic negotiations occur within and alongside activities and projects, such as representing island life as part of a commercial transaction or explaining a poem. This perspective accords with Charles Goodwin's thesis on the interactional nature of semiosis, in which "determining what will and will not count as a proper referent for a category in a specific setting is lodged within larger activity structures" (2018:373). Calibrating, assessing, and negotiating the *meaning* of an expression is likewise an interactional affair, one which occurs within larger activity structures.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF METALINGUAL FUNCTION

Of Roman Jakobson's (1981) six functions of language, it is the metalingual function that focuses on the linguistic relationship that signs have to each other (their paradigmatic relations). So, the metalingual function concerns the translatability of signs (cf. 1981:27). Jakobson, for instance, attributes the insight to Charles S. Peirce that "the meaning of a sign is the sign it can be translated into" (1971:566). To drive the point home, William Hanks describes Jakobson's position this way: "the intralingual translation of an expression quite simply *is its meaning*" (2015:26 emphasis in original). Consider, as an example, Jakobson's illustrative metalingual sequence: "The sophomore was plucked". "But what is *plucked*?" "*Plucked* means the same as *flunked*". "And *flunked*?" "*To be flunked* is *to fail an exam*" (1981:25). As Leavitt (2015:261) sees it, what is at issue is the referential function—namely, for the questioner, the expression-forms *plucked* and *flunked* do not have referential content and it is the job of the answerer to fill this in with the help of other signs. For this reason, Jakobson also described the metalingual as the "glossing function" of language: "synonymic expressions" are explicitly connected, i.e., denotationally-equivalent expressions are linked in metasemantic syntagmas. Following Michael Silverstein (cf. 1976, 1993), Jakobson's metalingual function, when explicit, is metasemantic discourse, or "giving the meaning" (Silverstein 1993:42).

From an ethnographic perspective, the range of social activities that centre around metasemantics are quite diverse. M. Goodwin and Cekaite, for instance, demonstrate how children and their caregivers may explore the meanings of words as a form of verbal play (2018:191-194) whereas Jane Hill discusses how arguments about an expression's etymological meaning may function to affirm or deny that it counts as a "slur" (2008:72-74) and ecolinguist Wilhelm Trampe identifies certain uses of scare-quotes as metalinguistic resistance (2001:239)

that indexically-undermines a metasemantic equation. In a particularly illuminating case, Erin Debenport (2015) details the complex negotiations and creative labour behind the lexical articles of the Keiwa Dictionary at San Ramón. In this case, metasemantic glosses set the stage for example sentences designed to convey norms and to guide speakers (2015:60, cf. 55 ff.). Members of the San Ramón dictionary committee dispreferred elicitation as a metalinguistic practice and instead prioritized the co-operative creation and assessment of "good examples", written in the appropriate register, that could attune dictionary users to Pueblo ways of being. These researchers have foregrounded collaboration and negotiation in the processes of making sense, or what I refer to in Bakhtinian (1981) terms as the dialogicality of metalingual function. Additionally, these researchers have shown how various activities and social practices can centre on metalingual function and how metasemantic forms function beyond their propositional content in a range of social activities and projects.

Similarly, in this paper, I draw on my Pantelleria fieldwork to examine islanders' metasemantic interactions, attending to their dialogical and social constitution. On Pantelleria, some islanders are called upon to "give the meaning" of local expressions and place-names during conversations and commercial transactions. These interactions are sensitive to tourists' and researchers' expectations about the sorts of meanings that can be prompted. Under Orientalistic expectations, for instance, this may involve etymologizing practices that intend to exhibit Pantelleria to Italian and other European tourists as exotically Arabic and North African. Furthermore, and crucially, some islanders' metasemantic practices do not frame equivalence as an interlingual relationship between expressions, but rather as an emplaced relationship across lived experience. In such cases, metasemantic characterization may disclose not linguistic relations in the strict sense, but rather an attunement to Panteschi ways of being. So, researchers

engaging in the description of language, I argue, must take account of the role of socially-situated interaction and the pragmatics of metasemantics in the production of meaning statements, how such statements are collaboratively constituted and what sorts of relations they encode (e.g., temporal, racial, and/or strictly linguistic).

Metasemantic statements occur in interactions, often as the products of epistemically-driven collaboration (cf. Heritage 2012, C. Goodwin 1979). In formal linguistic interviews—such as those I conducted during my 2016 fieldwork on the island—, elicitation is the technique of employing some question with the aim of receiving a linguistically-informative response in return. In the prototypical form of direct (also called "translational") elicitation, the interviewer asks the interviewee to proffer a gloss. Consider, for example, an excerpt from a formal linguistic interview I conducted with Mariano in Khamma, a village on the western coast of Pantelleria:[2]

(1)   9 August 2016: formal linguistic elicitation interview with Mariano in Khamma.

> 1   *Nicco;*   *némusa?*
>   'némusa'?
>
> 2   *Mariano;*   *a névusa* (.) *pane* ⌈*qua::-*
>   'névusa': bread   ⌊that-
>
> 3   *Nicco;*   ⌊((slightly furls lip and looks down at list))
>
> 4   *Mariano;*   *ah! a némusa este una zanzara!*
>   ah! 'némusa' is a mosquito!

After I asked if he recognized the expression-form *némusa*, in line 2 Mariano begins to offer a meaning paraphrase of an expression he pronounces *névusa*. However, when I heard him mention bread, in line 3 I initiate a conversational repair by furling my lip and looking away. This is because I had already expected that *némusa* would be glossed as mosquito and was surprised to hear Mariano begin by mentioning bread, for which I cannot easily account. In response, Mariano indexes that his turn in line 4 is a repair by exclaiming "*ah!*" followed by a

prototypical metasemantic statement "a *némusa* este una zanzara" [*némusa* is a mosquito]. This

statement is metasemantic because its meaning is the meaning of the expression-form *némusa*.

Mariano's statement was responsive to my expectations and to the activity frame of direct

elicitation, including my preconceived translation of *némusa* by *zanzara* and my other-initiated

repair. Another example, this time excerpted from a formal linguistic interview with Gaspare

conducted in the north-western village Mursia, also demonstrates the basic point that

metasemantic equations are collaboratively constructed. My question in line 1 occurred after a

succession of similar questions in which I merely wanted to find out whether or not Gaspare

would recognize certain expressions collected in the 1960s by Sicilian dialectologist Giovanni

Tropea:[3]

(2)   11 August 2016: formal linguistic elicitation interview with Gaspare in Mursia.

> *1   Nicco;*   *rruncuni?*
> 'rruncuni'?

> *2   Gaspare;*   *rruncuni. è un angolo*
> 'rruncuni' is an angle

> *3   Nicco;*   *ah* ((uncertainly and with furrowed eyebrows))

> *4   Gaspare;*   *l'angolo della casa per esempiu si chiama rruncuni*
> the corner of the house, for example, is called 'rruncuni'

Usually Gaspare would simply repeat the expression-form if he recognized it; only rarely did he

proffer a gloss. However, in this case, in line 2 he repeated *rruncuni* and then immediately

developed his turn into a metasemantic syntagma, giving the meaning as "un angolo" [an angle].

I wore a look of confused surprise at this response, since I had forgotten how Tropea defined

rruncuni and had presupposed that, as in Sicily more generally, "un angolo" would be offered to

gloss *angulu* instead. In the next line, realizing that the epistemic asymmetry had not been

resolved, Gaspare qualifies his previous statement: *rruncuni* is a corner, for example of a house

or of a room. Both transcripts (1) and (2) are examples of how metasemantic utterances are in fact situated in larger sequences that regiment them.

But meanings are not always agreed upon. Take, for instance, Don Kulick's attempt to elicit an expression in Tayap equivalent to the expression *rainbow* (Kulick and Terrill 2019:343-345, cf. Kulick 2019:122-130). When Kulick first asked "a fluent speaker of Tayap" how to say *rainbow* in Tayap, the response he was given was *renbo*; however, Kulick judged this to be "the Tok Pisin word – the Tayap word had to be something else" (Kulick and Terrill 2019:344). Subsequently, Kulick was given different glosses that he accepted as belonging to Tayap, such as *akɨn tamtiek*, *mɨnuomb*, and *wagurmos*, but on each such occasion he discovered that other villagers rejected the equation, dismissing each other's epistemic authority regarding the language. Even when Kruni, who "had been universally respected and vaguely feared as an elder who knew everything about Gapun's history and who spoke flawless and eloquent Tayap" had given Kulick the gloss *mamar*, the other villagers initially rejected it, alternatively providing the metasemantic characterization "It means 'banana'" (Kulick and Terrill 2019:345, Kulick 2019:127). Only after a month of disagreement, annoyed with Kulick's persistent questioning, did villagers agree to gloss *rainbow* as *mamar* (Kulick 2019:127-128).

These episodes show that conversational metasemantics cannot be divorced from questions of epistemic access and rights (Heritage and Raymond 2005, Heritage 2013). This is especially the case since, as I will discuss in this paper, such interactions are not always straightforwardly about denotational equivalence. Instead, when translation is a matter of calibrating to an associational tissue in lived experience, then "giving the meaning" can occasion a comparison between an emplaced now and then.

(3)   4 August 2016: formal linguistic elicitation interview with Rosalia, in her nineties at this time, in Scàuri. Her son, Alberto, in his seventies, had joined us.

1   *Nicco;*   ((to Rosalia)) *come si dice zanzara?*
               how do you say 'mosquito' (in Pantesco)?

2   *Alberto;*   *la zanzara nun è un insetto che qua::-*
               the mosquito is not an insect that-

3   *ora c'è qualche zanzara, prima nun er- non c'erano zanzar'*
               now there are some mosquitos, before there were no mosquitos

4   *Nicco;*   *ma non è una pa- una parola* ⎡*come 'nemùs' o 'némusa'?*
               but isn't there a wo- a word ⎢like 'nemùs' or 'némusa'?

5   *Alberto;*   ⎢*zanzara zanzara* ((shaking head))
                                           ⎢'zanzara' 'zanzara'
                                           ⎣

6   *Nicco;*   ((nodding with furled lip and swinted eyes))

7   *Rosalia;*   *zanzar' è di quannu cuminciata anni fa* ⎡*ca bbenni piscine*
               mosquites are from when it began, years ago, ⎢that pools came

8   *Alberto;*   ⎢*muschitte* (0.7) *ecco*
                                                        ⎣'muschitte'… that's it

9   *c'è- ci sono le muschitte*
               there is- there are gnats

10 *Nicco;*   *muschitte* ((nodding))
                                           'muschitte'

11 *Alberto;*   *che sono una specie di zanzarina* (.) *cu è piccola che:-*
               that are a species of little mosquito, which is small that-

→   12   *ma non è una zanzara proprio come:* (.) *çi abituati a vidir'*
               but it is not exactly a mosquito, as we are used to seeing

13   *muschitta è una musca piccolina tipo moscerino del vino*
               'muschitta' is a tiny fly like a wine gnat

The interaction begins with me asking Rosalia how to say mosquito in Pantesco, positioning

myself as unknowing relative to her even though I already expected (hoped) that she would

respond with *némusa* (on account of her age). However, since for much of the interview her son

Alberto had taken to answering my questions in her place, instead of glossing mosquito in line 3

he tells me that "now there are some mosquitos, [but] before there were no mosquitos". In line 4, I epistemically upgrade my elicitation attempt with the negative interrogative (cf. Heritage and Raymond 2005) with "but isn't there a word like *nemùs* or *némusa*?", hoping to invite agreement. This attempt fails in line 5 with Alberto shaking his head and insisting on the expression-form *zanzara*, which I judged linguistically to be Standard Italian rather than Pantesco or even Sicilian. In line 7, Rosalia similarly offers an interpretation of my metasemantic query in terms of the island's past. However, by line 8 Alberto begins a string of turns in which he tentatively offers *muschitta*, though he will insist on an experiential distinction: in line 12, *muschitta* is a type of mosquito, but "non è una zanzara proprio come çi abituati a vidir'" [it is not exactly a mosquito, as we are used to seeing]; instead, in the prototypical metasemantic statement in line 13, it is "a tiny fly like a wine gnat". While I attempted to leverage my epistemic access to the local "dialect", Alberto and Rosalia appealed to their experience as islanders, to which they have epistemic rights *as Panteschi* (cf. Raymond and Heritage 2006). Temporal, rather than strictly linguistic, stratification.

ORIENTALIZING SIBÀ

While my linguistic fieldwork on Pantelleria in 2016 took me all over the island for formal linguistic interviews, my ethnographic fieldwork in 2019 was conducted in Sibà, a small village of about 150 people in the centre of the island. This second ethnographic experience was chiefly person-centred (cf. Levy and Hollan 1998), the majority of my time spent with three elderly women—Amelia, Rita, and Giulia—, and their families and guests in Sibà. During that time, I recorded nearly ninety hours of audio and roughly one hour of video, some of which is supplemented by hand-written notes and photographs. The majority of the interactions I will discuss in this paper are drawn from my time with Giulia.

Sibà has a reputation for being "archaic" both among tourists as well as many islanders. For instance, one tourist guide that circulated in the 1970s described Sibà as "conserving all the ancient characteristics of the Panteschi villages". The highest settlement on the island, separated from the main harbour town by a 320m climb over 10km of road, which for decades was in disrepair, Sibà did not have electricity until the mid-1960s. Before electricity, there were over 300 residents in Sibà, though already in the 1970s many Sibbaioti were selling their land and settling in Nettuno and Aprilia south of Rome (Casano 1978). Sibà did not receive much attention from tourists until the 1980s, when tourists started arriving especially for its natural attractions. By the time of my fieldwork, there are now several vacation rentals in Sibà converted from traditional dammusi, a building type particular to the island and associated aesthetically and discursively with Arabic North Africa. One dammuso up for sell was advertised for its panoramic view of the Mediterranean Sea and "on African sunsets". So, while many tourists with whom I spoke described getting away from "city life" as their motivation for staying in Sibà, many were also clear about the traditional, rustic, and even "Arabic" charm of the small town.[4] It is not merely by virtue of being viewed in this way that Sibà is a "tourist place", not only the expectation that Sibà will prove to be rustic and Oriental, but also the social practices of displaying this to be the case. As several tourists privately expressed to me, they could not understand the local way of speaking, calling it "practically Arabic".

Sibà, through the mediation of the Arabic ṣabāḥ, is regularly referred to as *la contrada del mattino* [the land of the morning], especially by tour-guides and other cultural experts. And nearly the entire toponymy of the island is similarly mediated (on the basis of philological work, e.g., De Gregorio and Seybold 1901, De Fiore 1930, D'Aietti 2015 [1978], Staccioli 2015).[5] For tourists, these metasemantic equations (Sibà = *la contrada del mattino*) exhibit Pantelleria as an

Oriental place perched upon an Arabic bedrock (Sibà < ṣabāḥ). Following Keith Basso's (1996) insights on how places are imbued with meaning, such practices can be understood as instances of place-making in which visitors endow Sibà with a timeless Orientalized history. This is an etymological history that is anticipated by visitors and performed with locals in the course of various sorts of encounters and transactions in which place-making practices conjure a "tourist place" (Urry and Larsen 2011, Bærenholdt et al. 2004). This collaborative achievement, as a tourist place, operates Orientalistically to the extent that Sibà is exhibited as the expression of the fixed figure of Arab and North African alterity, translatable *into* Italian rather than itself being Italian. Though such a perspective is at odds with how most locals view themselves and with their views on such things as migration and modernity, the collaborative Orientalization of Sibà continues to characterize its aesthetic appeal promoting tourist consumption (cf. Dematteo 2020 for how the *dolce vita* style of the sixties similarly appeals more to Chinese consumers "in search of romanticism").

In her seventies and recently widowed, Giulia frequently interacted with tourists, many of whom would eventually purchase passito from her. Sitting on her patio, she might engage some passers-by stopping for a photograph of the tomatoes hanging in bunches behind where she sits or she might converse with tourists, reporters, or researchers, some of whom would come to her patio specifically to see her. These interactions sporadically occasioned metasemantic glosses of local expressions, but I noticed that in such interactions tourists would most often ask about local place-names. Normally, in such circumstances, she was asked to "translate" the name Sibà, even by those who, in my estimation, already knew the answer they expected her to give. In these interactions, both Giulia and her guests collaboratively Orientalize Sibà as a tourist place; consider, for instance, the following excerpt from an interaction with tourists from the Northern

city of Verona culminating in Giulia selling a bottle of passito:

(4)   29 August 2019: I was sitting with Giulia on her patio when two tourists from Verona
        approach and take a seat with us. We converse for roughly thirty minutes, culminating in
        the purchase of a bottle of passito. After Linda, one of the tourists, asks what are the local
        place-names around Sibà, Giulia begins listing them; 'Tikirriki' catches Linda's attention:

1   Linda;   ma cosa vuol dire Tikirriki poi?
                    but what does 'Tikirriki' mean then?

2   Giulia;   Tikirriki è una zona di campagna
                    Tikirriki is an area of the countryside

3   Linda;   ma cosa vorrebbe dire? è un nome forse-
                    but what does it mean? maybe it is a name-

4   Giulia;   queste àrbbi sunnu (.) ⌈*su nomi àribbi*
                    these are Arabic   ⎹ they are Arabic names
                                            ⎹
*5   Linda;   ⎹ *ah è arabo*
                                            ⌊ ah, it is Arabic

6   Giulia;   nui àrbbi ⌈*semu   sì sì sì*
                       we are Arabs ⎹   yes yes yes
                                    ⎹
*7   Linda;   ⎹*barberi*
                                    ⌊ barbarians

This interaction is particularly revealing because it achieves closure even without answering

literally the metasemantic question in line 1, where Linda asks "cosa vuol dire *Tikirriki?*" [what

does Tikirriki mean?]. Tikirriki is never translated as "path of the wind" mediated by the Arabic

ṭarīq al-rīyaḥ. (Since asking for this particular place-name was perhaps less common for Giulia,

she actually may not have been prepared to "give the meaning" of Tikirriki in this way). Instead,

epistemic closure is initiated in lines 4 and 5 simply by stating that the place-name is Arabic,

revealing that the "epistemic engine" (Heritage 2012) driving this interaction was Linda's

attempt to exhibit Sibà and its surroundings as Arabic, i.e., to Orientalize Sibà. In line 6, Giulia

appends the remarkable statement "nui àrbbi semu" [we are Arabs] in a self-assessment that

brings her into alignment with the crux of Linda's metasemantic request. When Linda and her

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husband left, after purchasing a bottle of passito, Giulia privately complained to me about the burden of such interactions. Nevertheless, such metasemantic interactions between tourists and islanders may facilitate certain transactions by contributing to the performance of an aesthetic package in which tourists experience the island as an Oriental Italy, one that needs to be mediated and made intelligible.

DISCLOSING SIBÀ

Sibà and its neighbouring villages and landscape are disclosed in a quite different way through other metasemantic practices. This may also be occasioned through the conversational use of place-names, which, as Keith Basso insisted (1996:44, 76), may powerfully function to invigorate the landscape, flushing it with history. Whereas "path of the wind" is not generally a part of islanders' memories of Tikirriki (see footnote 5), there is a much more affectively-grounded link between local place-names and lived experience, disclosable not so much in metasemantic translation as in song, poetry, narrative, and even semantic repair:

(5)   2 August 2019: informal conversation with Giulia on her patio. She had asked me if I had been into town, which prompted a conversation about my plans to go to the areas Monastero and San Vito, though I discover that I had mistaken Khannaki for San Vito:

1	*Nicco;*	*perché non son' andato mai nella pianta- nella piana di San Vito* beacause I have never been in the plant- in the plain of San Vito
2	*Giulia;*	*eh∷ San Vito un c' è piana* eh, San Vito is not a plain
3		*San Vito è per la strada* San Vito is along the road
4		*e dev' andar' a ħannachi* and you have to go to Khannaki
5	*Nicco;*	*o∷* oh

6   Giulia;   *ħannachi si chiama*
                                                 it is called 'Khannaki'

7   Nicco;   *sì:*
                                                                   yes

8   Giulia   *dalla curva dove c'è l'acqua* (0.5)   *il rubinetto* (0.5) | *l'hai presente?*
            from the curve where there is water,   the tap, | do you know it?

9   Nicco;   *sì::* | *sì: sì sì sì sì*
                                                 yes | yes, yes yes yes

10 Giulia; *allora fai la curva così* ((glides left palm right and downward))
            well, you take the curve like this

11   *scendi scendi e lì c'è la piana*
            go down and there is the plain

→   12   *e lì in fondo c'è una pianura di tanti alberi*
            and there at the bottom is a plain with many trees

→   13   *e lì a tempo di guerra scoppiaru le bombe*
            and there, during the war (WWII), the bombs exploded

14   *e non so quanto pirsuni sono morti*
            and I don't know how many people died

15 Nicco;   *o::*
                                                 oh

16 Giulia;   *hai capito?*
                                                         did you understand?

17 Nicco;   *sì::*
                                                                 yes

18 Giulia; *pure animali c'erano e sono morti*
            also there were animals and they died

19   *pure perché scoppiau* (2.8) *eh*
            also, because it exploded… eh

I had incorrectly called the plain adjacent to the nearby town of San Vito "the plain of San Vito",

which occasioned Giulia to repair my infelicitous reference, noting in lines 2 and 3 that San Vito

names only the village along the road above the plain. The plain I intended, she corrects me, "is

called Khannaki". However, lines 12 and 13 are of particular importance because they mark a shift from present to the past, made to resonate in what John Du Bois (2014) calls their dialogic syntax; consider the following "diagraph" (a representation of their structural parallelism):

(6) *12 Giulia;   e lì in fondo   c'è   una pianura di tanti alberi*

 13   e lì a tempo di guerra   scoppiaru   le bombe

Notice the strong parallelism at the beginning of both lines constituting their structural pairing, followed by two dimensionally-opposed prepositional phrases: the spatial *now* of "*in fondo*" [at the bottom] and the temporal *then* of "*a tempo di guerra*" [at the time of the war]. This opposition itself is further paralleled in what follows: the present inflection of the existential "*c'è*" [there is] and the past inflection of "*scoppiaru*" [they exploded] and the noun phrases "*una pianura di tanti alberi*" [a plain with many trees] in strong affective opposition to "*le bombe*" [bombs]. Lines 12 and 13, then, transition between two disjunct accounts of Khannaki, between an emplaced *now* and *then* in the place-world of Pantelleria, of beauty and of tragedy, in an example of what Rasmus Dyring (2020) has recently referred to as an "experiential index of anthropological interruption": older islanders like Giulia see in Khannaki not only what it is, but collaterally also the very limits of its being anywhere in particular, of it becoming scorched earth. Between these limits is Khannaki as a singular place, its aesthetic and emotional quality uniquely and continuously determined, and thus irreplaceable. Indeed, what started off as a semantic repair develops into a lament of those who died, people and animals alike, in the bombings of 1944 when Giulia was a young child.

My experience with older, especially rural, islanders was essentially similar when it came to more straightforward examples of metasemantic conversation: rather than defining a linguistic relationship between two expressions (e.g., the translatability of a "dialect" expression by an Italian expression and vice versa), metasemantic equations functioned pragmatically to calibrate

(Silverstein 1993) expression-forms and their referents as indexical of positions relative to each

other in lived experience. As such they typically occasioned explicit comparisons of the present

with the past. Consider the following rather concise examples. Without being prompted by a

metasemantic question (i.e., "what does *x* mean?"), Valero, from the island's main harbour town,

explained to me that "*mmuccature* si usava frequent' una volta; pallo di quaranta, çinquant'anni

fa" [*mmuccature* was once used frequently; I'm talking about forty, fifty years ago] before

glossing it "è un fazzoletto, un semplice fazzoletto" [it is a handkerchief, a simple handkerchief].

Likewise, in 2016, during my first meeting with Giulia (which was a formal linguistic interview),

I asked her how to say *mela* [apple] in Pantesco and she informed me that "al antico è *pumu*, pur

antichie vecchie vecchie; noi or'adesso diçamo la *mela*, ma è *pumu*" [The old way is *pumu*, for

the very very old; now we say *mela*, but it is *pumu*] and explained that "macari una si dimentica

dice *pigghia u pumu che è fràdiçu*, pigghiau u pumu e lu bbuttau" [maybe if someone forgets

(*mela*) they will say "go pick the *pumu* that is rotten" and he will pick the *pumu* and throw it

out]. In these cases, then, it is not simply the case that *fazzoletto* [handkerchief] = *mmuccature*

and *mela* [apple] = *pumu*, but that in "speaking the past into being" (Basso 1996:32) islanders

disclose the singularity of their emplaced expressive practices, stratified temporally (*fazzoletto* :

mmuccature :: *mela* : *pumu* :: now : then) and not linguistically (i.e., Italian : "dialect"). So, to

say *pumu* instead of *mela* is to forget.

In the following example, Giulia has asked me to read to her some poems from a small

book of poems I had recently gifted her. In this interaction, I read to her the poem *Catu e vaçili*,

written in Pantesco "dialect" by Brescian poet Beatrice Cornado, whose father was from

Pantelleria. This poem is part of a collection entitled *Eco di suoni panteschi* (2018). (During my

fieldwork, it seemed to me that this little book of twenty-six poems had a very limited

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circulation). This poem, like the others, is printed without an Italian translation.

(7) 24 August 2019: informal conversation with Giulia on her patio in Sibà. I had gifted her a
     small book of poems, from which she asked me to read a few.

> 1 Nicco;   ((reading)) *si ji:nch- jinchi*
>   "is filled"
>
> 2 Giulia;   *inchie* (0.6) *riempie*
>   'inchie': fill up
>
> 3   *invece è inchi* (.) *chista l'antichi diçìnnu inci*
>   but it is 'inchi'; those from the past would call this 'inci'
>
> 4   *inchie* (0.2) *dell'aqua dâ isterna si pigghia*
>   'inchie': it's taken from the water from the cistern
>
> 5 Nicco;   ((reading)) *u vaçile*
>   "the washbowl"
>
> 6 Giulia;   *u vaçile si mette l'acqua però cû catu inchi l'acqua da la jisterna*
>   water is put in the washbowl, but with the bucket
>   the water is filled from the cistern

→ 7   *nautri diçemu u secchiu nvece chistu era u catu*
>   we say 'secchiu', however this was 'catu'
>
> 8   *u catu sa cum'è?*
>   do you what a 'catu' is like?
>
> 9   ((grasping)) ⌈*cusì cû manicu* | *e s'inci l'aqua dâ isterna*
> |like this, with a handle, |and it draws water from the cistern
>
> 10 Nicco; |*sì* | *sì sì*
>   ⌊yes | yes yes

→ 11 Giulia; *ccà u catu cu a co:rda s'inci l'aqua dâ isterna* ((pulling-up-rope gesture))
>   here, the bucket with the rope draws water from the cistern

→ 12   *or' adessu tutt' è rubinetta* (.) *tutt' è 'lettricu*
>   nowadays it is all (from a) tap, it is all electric

After I stumble on the expression *si jinchi* in line 1, Giulia offers me a metasemantic gloss in line

2 to help me achieve a reading. The form of the metasemantic syntagma in line 2 is not

uncommon for Giulia—indexing the equational frame only syntactically (see below), by the

apposition of the subject and its complement (in this example, accompanied by a 0.6 sec. pause).

In line 3, Giulia positions the expression-form *inc*(*h*)*i* in the past ("chista l'antichi diçìnnu *inci*"

[those from the past would call this *inci*]) and in line 4 she either paraphrases it or provides an

example of its use. My continued reading prompts Giulia to initiate another related metasemantic

explanation, describing in line 6 the associational tissue in which *u vaçile* derives its meaning

(see below), explaining the roles of *u vaçili* and *u catu* in drawing water [*inchiri*] from the well.

Line 7 is of particular interest because it explicitly demonstrates how Giulia temporally frames

the activity of metasemantic glossing. She begins line 7 by saying that "nautri diçemu u *secchiu*"

[we say *secchiu*], but develops this line into a metasemantic syntagma lexically indexed by the

copula *essiri* inflected for the past (i.e., *era*) in "nvece, chistu era u *catu*" [however, this was

catu]. In line 8, she asks me if I know what a *catu* is like, and before I can respond, in line 9 she

makes a grasping motion with her hands and describes how it is used. Most importantly, this gloss

occasions a further reflection in lines 11 and 12: the glossed expression *catu* embodies a

remembered past in which "the bucket with the rope is drawn from the cistern", which she

gesturally embodies, but "nowadays it is all from a tap, all electric". The temporal rift in lines 11

and 12 parallels and descriptively repeats the temporal rift expressed in the metasemantic

statement in line 7. In transcript (7) as in (5), the resonance between the two positions affectively

polarizes the interaction's ongoing contextualization, attuning participants to the

metasemantically disclosed place-world of Sibà. Here, translation discloses affective attunement.

THE NEGOTIATION OF MEANING

Nevertheless, conversational metasemantics cannot be divorced from questions of

epistemic access and rights (Heritage and Raymond 2005, Heritage 2013) in the interactional

negotiation of meaning and the fact that these epistemic negotiations are embedded within

broader activities (Sidnell 2012). For the remainder of this paper I will now turn to a single

complex metasemantic interaction to examine more attentively the strictly interactional and

formal dimensions of metalingual function and of metasemantic discourse more specifically.

Lorenzo, Giulia's childhood friend, now lives with his wife Sofia in her hometown of

Bolzano in Northern Italy, but the two have come to visit Pantelleria after a long absence and are

sitting with Giulia and me on her patio. Roughly one hour into the reunion, Giulia decides to

show Lorenzo and Sofia the book of poems I had gifted her a week earlier. Sofia begins reading:

(8)   1 September 2019: informal gathering on Giulia's patio, a reunion with her childhood
       friend Lorenzo and his wife Sofia, who is from Bolzano; they both live in Alto Adige.
       Giulia shows Lorenzo and Sofia the book of poems I gifted her a week earlier.

1   Sofia;   ((reading)) <u>*mi*</u> *nonna.* <u>*mi*</u> *dicia* (0.6) [*chi u-*
                   "my grandmother told me | that the-"

2   Nicco; | *no. diçìa*
                                                        ⌊no, 'diçìa'

3   Sofia;   *diçìa* (0.4) [*dicia* | ((to Lorenzo)) *veni qua*
                   'diçìa'… | "she told me" | come here

4   Giulia;   [*eh*

5   Nicco;   *la- la çediglia là è* | *una* sh:
                                        the cedilla there is ⌊a /ɕ/

6   Sofia;   ((reading)) *catu e.* ((to Lorenzo)) <u>*te*</u> *tu sei pantesco*
                   "bucket and" you, you are Pantesco

7   Giulia;   ((reciting)) *u cat' e* [*lu vaçili* (1.2) *u cat' e lu vaçili*
                   the bucket and | the washbowl, the bucket and the washbowl

8   Sofia; | ((to Lorenzo)) *metti gli occhiali*
                                         ⌊put on your glasses

9   ⌈*cosa son' i vacili?*
         what are 'vaçili'?

10   Giulia;   ⌈*u vaçilə* (1.2)   *quello che se ve- che se* ⌈*mette-*
             ⌊'vaçili'   the one which, which is ⌊put-

11   Lorenzo;   *vaçile è* (0.7)   ⌈*la baçi*⌈*nella che-*
                   'vaçili' is   ⌊a basin⌊that-

12   Sofia;   ⌈*la baci*⌈*nella*
                                              ⌊basin

13   Giulia;   ⌈*baçinella*
                                                   ⌊basin

14   Lorenzo;   no   ⌈*no non è baçinella*
                   no   ⌊no it is not a basin

15   Sofia;   ⌈((reading)) *il catu e*::
                  ⌊"the bucket a::nd"

16   Giulia;   <u>*u catō*</u> *secchiu* (.) *chiddrō secchiu*[6]
                                   'catu' (is) bucket, it (is) bucket

Sofia's attempt to read the opening line of the poem is hampered by her unfamiliarity with the Sicilian orthography (which is adapted in some respects to Pantesco), occasioning me to correct her pronunciation of the letter *ç*. However, I am unable to gain her attention and she attempts to continue, but when she comes across the same letter in *vaçili* she asks her husband to take over. She explicitly justifies this on the basis of his Pantesco identity in line 6. However, when Giulia recites the line "*u cat' e lu vaçili*" from memory, Sofia asks "what are *vacili*", initiating an epistemically-driven sequence centred on assessing the expression *vaçili*. This portion of the interaction will be analysed more fully in the following section, but for now it is sufficient to point out that this sequence is embedded in the broader activity of reading (which is itself embedded in the larger activity of conversing on a wide variety of topics over the course of a reunion). When Sofia believes that she has understood the meaning of *vaçili*, glossing it as *bacinella* [basin], she reinitiates her attempt at reading the poem, even over Lorenzo's protestation

that *vaçili* is not equivalent to *bacinella*. Giulia attends to Sofia's impasse by proffering another

metasemantic gloss in line 16, this time explaining that *catu* is *secchiu* [bucket].

Nevertheless, neither Giulia nor Lorenzo treat Sofia as if she had truly understood *vaçili*.

Both Giulia and Lorenzo, at the same time, overlapping each other, begin again to offer an

answer to Sofia's question (from line 9):

17 *Lorenzo;*   [*u vaçili è* (0.7)
            'vaçili' is

18 *Giulia;*   *u vaçili è chiddru chi* [*bbeni çiattu*
            'vaçili' is one that   comes sturdy

19 *Lorenzo;*   *allora il vaçili ora ti dico che* [*cos'è*
                            okay, 'vaçili', now I'll tell you   what it is

20 *Giulia;*   *a mastella è cchiddra*
                                                that is a tub

21 *Sofia;*   ((to Giulia)) *e*::
            that's it

22 *Lorenzo;*   *la-* (1.5) *il vaçile non è la baçinella*
            'vaçili' is not a basin...

23   *il vaçile* (0.8) *allora ora ti dico che cos'è quello*
            'vaçili'… okay, now I'll tell you what that is

24   *noi, nell- lavandino, quan* [*do çi lavemmo la faccia* [(0.6) *c'è una*::*- u vaçili*
            we, in the sink, when   we wash our face,   that is a- 'vaçili'

25 *Giulia;*   ((to Lorenzo)) *eh*
                            that's it

26 *Sofia;*   *sì*
                                                yes

27 *Giulia;*   *eh, chid* [*dru*
            eh, that   one

28 *Lorenzo;*   *u vaçili,* [*quel-*
                  'vaçili'

29 *Sofia;*   *è la bacinella* ((frustrated))
                            that is a basin

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Lorenzo attempts to eclipse Giulia's efforts to describe and gloss *vaçili*, though Sofia aligns with Giulia when she indexes uptake of *mastella* [tub] in line 21. Competing with Giulia's contribution in lines 18 and 20, in line 19 Lorenzo explicitly frames the epistemic sequence as a matter of his metasemantic activity: "okay, *vaçili*, now I will tell you what it is". Here, he positions himself not only as knowing, but as monologically authoritative. He repeats more fully, in line 22, his negative metasemantic equation from line 14, as if to more formally restart the "epistemic engine", and again explicitly frames this sequence as if to resolve by repeating "*vaçili*… okay, now I'll tell you what that is". It is, he says, associated with washing one's face, to which Giulia agrees. Sofia, however, insists in frustration that what he described is actually a *bacinella* [basin]; i.e., that, on the basis of Lorenzo's description in line 24, *vaçili* and *bacinella* are linguistically different but referentially equivalent. But, what line 24 accomplishes is not merely a denotational clarification (i.e., that some such thing may be referred to with the expression-form *vaçili*), but rather an explanation of the activities and experiences determining its more singular acceptation (see below). Still, Sofia continues to pursue a simple one-to-one gloss (in line 34):

30 Giulia;	[*no baçi* no,	*nella è quella cu a mastella a usu sba- sbagn*[*ina* basin is the one with a tub used for getting	wet
31 Lorenzo;	*no*:: no,	*è- è vaçili* (1.6) it is 'vaçili'…	*baçinell' è più grande* a basin is bigger

32 *Giulia;*   ⌈((to Lorenzo)) *sì*
              yes

33 *Lorenzo;*   *il va*⌈*çile-*
              'va⌊çili'

34 *Sofia;*   ⌈*catinella* (0.6) *cattinel*⌈*la*
               ⌊bowl… bowl

35 *Giulia;*   ⌈*no*:: *catinella neanch'*
                                     no, it's not a bowl either

36 *Lorenzo;*   ⌈*no*::: (0.6) *no no* (0.4) *è vaçile*
                                     ⌊no… no, no… it is 'vaçili'

37 *Giulia;*   ⌈*u vaçili, u latu mmutu* ((inaudible))
              'vaçili', the funnel side…

38 *Lorenzo;*   ⌈*una parola* (0.4) ⌈*che sostituisce il vaçili* ⌈*non c'è*
              ⌊there is not a word⌊that substitutes for   ⌊'vaçili'

39 *Giulia;*   ((to Nicco)) ⌈*voi- tu non lo conosc'?*
                                ⌊you do not know it?

40 *Sofia;*   ⌈*non è di qua*
                                     ⌊he is not from here

41 *Nicco;*   *ma io sento-* ((laughing))
              but I feel-

Giulia is now more aligned with Lorenzo. In line 13, Giulia consented to gloss *vaçili* by *bacinella* in part to facilitate Sofia's reading and in part because she may have thought she was aligning with Lorenzo. By lines 30-31, Lorenzo and Giulia simultaneously reject this gloss (insisted on by Sofia in line 29). Giulia's attempt to explain why the gloss is insufficient is partly obstructed by Lorenzo's performance of epistemic authority, overlapping her turn and proffering an alternative explanation, to which Giulia assents. The heart of this sequence repeats itself when Sofia again attempts to find a simple denotationally-equivalent gloss, this time smaller than a basin: *catinella* [bowl]. Again, both Giulia and Lorenzo reject this approach and again Giulia attempts to offer an explanation only to be overlapped by Lorenzo who authoritatively and

conclusively asserts that "there is no word that substitutes for *vaçili*" (line 38), striking at the very core of Sofia's metalingual appeals.

When Giulia asked me if I know the word, Sofia quickly dismissed the possibility, since, in stark opposition to her explicit justification of Lorenzo's authority in line 6, I am not from there ("*non è di qua*"). This leads to me beginning a very epistemically downgraded assessment before I am cut off by Sofia, who again turns the floor over to Lorenzo, to have him read for her:

42 *Sofia;*   ((to Lorenzo)) *'spetta, leggi qua* (0.5) *leggi tu che-* (1.4)
                      leggi bene (0.9) *i- in pantesco*
                      hold on, read here… read, you who (can)… read well… in Pantesco

43 *Lorenzo;*   ((reading)) *cato* (0.7)⌈*e vaçile*
                      "bucket ⌊and washbowl"

44 *Giulia;*   ⌈*senti*
                              ⌊listen

45 *Lorenzo;*   *u catu è quello che si* ⌈*attinge l'acqua* (0.3) *dalla çisterna*
              bucket is the one that ⌊draws water from the cistern

46 *Giulia;*   ⌈*s'inci l'aqua dâ* ⌈*isterna*
                              ⌊draws water from ⌊the cistern

47 *Sofia;*   ⌈*cisterna*
                                   ⌊cistern

Here, Sofia again attempts to exit the epistemically-driven sequence prompted by her metasemantic question "what are *vacili?*" in line 9. Rather than allow me to contribute, she reorients the interaction onto the text by insisting that Lorenzo read it. Lorenzo reads the line that troubled Sofia one more time before offering a final explanation, now of *catu* (see below), before this sequence is fully closed.

How, then, to gloss *vaçili*? In my own translations in the transcripts, I have elected to translate *vaçili* as "washbowl" in the context of Beatrice Cornado's poem, though I have often left it untranslated in the metasemantic conversation. Consider the first lines of *Catu e vaçili* (a

septenary and a hendecasyllable) as written by Cornado: "Me nunna mi diçia / chi u catu / e u vaçili / stannu nzémmula" [My grandmother told me / that the bucket / and the washbowl / go together]. Lexicographers and dialectologists similarly confronted with the task of "giving the meaning" can sometimes offer some pretty straightforward metasemantic equations; the following definition was provided by Giovanni Tropea in his *Lessico del dialetto di Pantelleria*: "**vaçíli** m. bacile, catinella" (1988:328). Giovanni Tropea (1928–2007) was a key figure in the field of Italian Dialectology, and is without a doubt the most important contributor to the study of Pantesco: "all subsequent literature on the dialect so far depends on Tropea's data" (Loporcaro 2012:749). The Pantesco material that Tropea collected was the result of fieldwork, apparently through questionnaires, conducted on-and-off from 1964 to 1967 (Tropea 1988:x). Like prototypical dictionary entries more generally, Tropea's entry for *vaçili* contrasts sharply with the epistemically-negotiated interaction between Sofia, Lorenzo, and Giulia presented above, presenting this equation as a matter of linguistic (denotational) fact rather than of lived experience and the interactional achievement of meaning (in Schegloff's [1981] terms). The paraphonic association with *bacile* is of particular interest, in part because it presumes a referential equivalence (functional homology) on the basis of sound texture similarity (paraphony), and in part because it is never mentioned by Giulia, Sofia, or Lorenzo, though I nearly suggested it in line 41 on that very basis.[7] The complex interplay of interaction, epistemic rights, paraphony, and general interpretation are made invisible by translations and definitions such as the one cited above (cf. Duranti 1997:154), though metasemantic statements, like all assessments (Du Bois 2007), do not occur in isolation, but rather in dialogic contexts where they are negotiable.

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PRAGMATICS OF METASEMANTICS

In order to more fully appreciate the dialogical nature of metalingual function, it is important to recognize how metasemantic utterances are syntactically and sequentially organized. It is also essential to distinguish more from less context-presupposing meaning and how participants have different epistemic rights and affective attunements to these meanings.

Metasemantic syntagmas are equivalence frames that express paradigmatic relations (i.e., from "*the axis of selection*"; Jakobson 1981:27). That is, they function to "give the meaning" of some expression (Silverstein 1993:42). Prototypically, such syntagmas are indexed by a lexicalized "emic" representation of semanticity (*means*) or the presence of the copula (*is*), but may also more austerely involve apposition:

(9) a. *Sibà* vuol dire contrada del mattino.   [*Sibà* means land of the morning.]
     b. a *némusa* este una zanzara.   [*némusa* is a mosquito.]
     c. u *catō* secchiu   [*catu*: bucket]

According to linguist Line Mikkelsen (2005), these minimal syntagmas are equative (or identity) clauses in virtue of the fact that in each case the subject and its complement are both referential (as opposed to predicational). More exactly, they are metalinguistically referential, since the object of each is an expression. For instance, *u catu* and *u secchiu* in (9c) do not refer extra-linguistically to buckets, but reflexively refer to the linguistic expressions of which they are citations (i.e., expression-forms "employed to express metalinguistic (including metasemantic) propositions" [Harris 1970:255]). While both the subject and complement of these clauses are metalinguistically referential, they are so in importantly different ways. Following Wilfred Sellar's (1950a, 1950b) critical insights on meaning statements, the subject refers to the expression in its formal dimension and its complement refers to the expression in its functional dimension; Sellars marks this distinction by using single quotes for the former and dot quotation for the latter: e.g., "a '*némusa*' este una ·*zanzara*·". So, (9b) states that instances of the form

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némusa are functionally (here, referentially) equivalent to instances of the form *zanzara*—where I might refer to something using *zanzara* in one set of circumstances, I might equally use *némusa* in another. In this case, a metasemantic statement asserts that two or more expression-forms share a function, that they are functionally identical. If this function is narrowly construed as reference, then what both expression-forms share is said to be a *sense*.

Tullio De Mauro has done the most to operationalize the notion of *acceptation,* i.e., as a subdivision of an expression's sense into clusters of referential potential. Italian lexicographers refer to the different (numbered) definitions of the same expression as its acceptations [*accezioni*], and so we might qualify a meaning by specifying that an expression is to be taken "in the economic sense", "as it is used among Dutch fishermen", "in the manner of Boas", etc. So, distinctive acceptations emerge from an expression's associative ties in the different contexts of its use (De Mauro 1982a). Whereas *sense*, as Silverstein defines it, is an expression's "context-independent referential potential" (1997:147), *acceptation* is an expression's referential potential entailed by its position in some contextualization (i.e., in an indexical structure). The expression *link*, for instance, will have a different acceptation if it is being used in a discussion of sausages or of websites. De Mauro, accordingly, defines acceptation as:

> the grouping of a part of the "referential meanings" in a family [of such meanings] connected by affinity of reference to extra-linguistic objects or to the socio-culturally distinct areas [*ambiti*] of use, and therefore a special articulation, a special subset of the general "sense" of a word. (De Mauro 2005:81)

Crucially, for De Mauro, acceptations must be perceived in some way as acceptations of one and the same expression, or else they diverge, becoming homonymous expressions (1982b:489). This is why acceptations are subsets of an expression's sense: it is by virtue of their shared sense that acceptations cohere (1971:149). Now, whereas a metasemantic equation (i.e., gloss) defines an "equivalence of sense" between distinct expression-forms (Silverstein 1993:42), an equivalence

defined between acceptations is a metasemantic abstraction. In the latter case, multiple acceptations are subordinated to a single sense. Whether it refers to a sausage or to a clickable text on a website, *link* is endowed by metasemantic abstraction with the broader sense of being or establishing a unit of connection. But, in what way, then, is the metasemantic equation "*il collegamento* means *link*" appropriate? Certainly, *il collegamento* and *link* share an abstract sense, but the former does not always function like the latter: for instance, there is no acceptation of *il collegamento* such that it can refer to *la salsiccia* [sausage] except, perhaps, as a "commensuration" (Hanks 2010) in which *il collegamento* comes to mirror the polysemy of *link*.

To take an example from the monumental five-volume *Vocabolario siciliano* (Piccitto et al. 1977–2002), an expression-form (i.e., lemma) may have different acceptations that emerge from regionally- and temporally-specific associative ties; consider the entry for *vacili*:

> **vacili** m. (pl. *vacila* and *vacili*) ([widely attested throughout Sicily, including Pantelleria as *vaçili*]) basin [*bacinella*], concave vessel that is round and of various materials used for special domestic purposes, and at one time used in particular to wash one's hands and face. […] **2.** ([attested around central Catania]) terracotta basin [*catino*] in the shape of a truncated inverted cone used for washing dishes. […] **4.** ([Marsala]) copper vessel used by shepherds to put ricotta into fiscelle. […] **6.** ([Paternò]) terracotta vase in the shape of a truncated inverted cone used to beat eggs, prepare creams, etc. […] (*VS* 5:965)

While the Catanesi and Marsalese acceptations given share a general sense with the more broadly distributed acceptation, all of these differ markedly in their correlated associational tissue: from washing dishes (central Catania), to getting ricotta into wicker fiscelle (Marsala), to beating eggs and preparing creams (Paternò). Importantly, the first-listed acceptation, which includes Pantelleria, has a temporal qualification—"at one time used in particular to wash one's hands and face"—and it is this experiential background that Lorenzo draws from.[8] It is also the acceptation of *vaçili* as it appears in Beatrice Cornado's poem *Catu u vaçili*, especially in the final couplet, when, after filling up the *vaçili* with water from the cistern, she recollects: "Jè lavava i manu lordi / prima di manciari" [I would wash my dirty hands / before eating]. Lillo di

Bonsulton, the most celebrated Pantesco poet, similarly attunes to this experientially-circumscribed associative tissue in his poem *Jurnata* when, writing on getting up in the morning and preparing for the day's work, he recalls: "lu vacili 'nta ducchena / acqua all'occhi, ju ci mettu" [the washbowl on the stone bench / I place the water in my eyes], this time including its placement on his ducchena, a characteristic stone bench attached to the outside wall of farmhouses. For many islanders, this acceptation is less a matter of linguistic knowledge than of emplaced past experience to which they are attuned. This singularity is epistemically and affectively unavailable to Sofia (cf. Heritage 2011), who instead relies on metasemantic equations to expressions taken relatively abstractly: *bacinella* [basin] and *catinella* [bowl]. When Lorenzo explains that "we, in the sink, when we wash our face, that is a *vaçili*" (line 25), and in her counterstance Sofia contends in frustration that "è la *bacinella*" [that is *bacinella*] (line 30), she is insisting that *bacinella* would be equally felicitous if it substituted for *vaçili* in line 25. However, what would be lacking is the associational tissue that determines the acceptation of *vaçili* for many islanders, which would be lost in such a substitution: thus, Lorenzo authoritatively states that "there is no word that substitutes for *vaçili*" (line 39).

It is crucially important, then, to account for the dialogicality of metalingual function and in particular to how metasemantic equations are collaboratively constituted. Sequentially organized by an epistemic asymmetry (Heritage 2012), conversational metasemantics involves one or more shared stance object (Du Bois 2007) across parallel syntactic structures (Du Bois 2014). For instance, consider lines 9-15 of (8), reproduced here for convenience:

(10) 9 *Sofia;*   *cosa son' i vacili?*
              what are 'vaçili'?

     10 *Giulia;*   *u vaçilə* (1.2)   *quello che se ve- che se* ⌈*mette-*
              'vaçili'   the one which, which is ⌊put-

     11 *Lorenzo;*   *vaçile è* (0.7)   *la baçi*⌈*nella che-*
              'vaçili' is   ⌊a basin that-

     12 *Sofia;*   *la baci*⌈*nella*
                                              ⌊basin

     13 *Giulia;*   *baçinella*
                                                       ⌊basin

     14 *Lorenzo;* *no* ⌈*no non è baçinella*
              no ⌊no it is not a basin

     15 *Sofia;*   ⌈*il catu e∷* ((reading))
                  ⌊"the bucket a∷nd"

This stretch of interaction is initiated when Sofia overtly positions herself as unknowing relative

to Giulia and Lorenzo with the metasemantic question "cosa son' i vacili?" [what are *vacili*?].

This establishes the expression *vaçili* as the stance object: the target of evaluation that Sofia,

Giulia, and Lorenzo begin the work of converging on in order to resolve the epistemic asymmetry.

Both Giulia and Lorenza begin assessments that they will not finish: Giulia begins a meaning

paraphrase in line 10 and, during her long intra-clausal pause, Lorenzo also begins a paraphrase

in line 11 to specify the acceptation necessary to disclose the place-world of the poem/of the

island. However, in line 12, Sofia marks her alignment to only a fraction of Lorenzo's emergent

syntagma by overlapping his turn in approval. The effect of Sofia's recognitional overlap

(Jefferson 1984) is a hybrid assessment expropriating Lorenzo's authoritative "*vaçile* è la baçi-"

and joining it to her completion "*la bacinella*". This initiates a collaborative turn sequence

(Lerner 2004) in which Giulia likewise assents with a completive overlap in line 13. Lines 14

and 15 represent two competing sequence closures: in line 14, Lorenzo closes the collaborative

turn sequence with the negative metasemantic gloss "non è *baçinella*" rejecting Sofia's overlap

as deficient; but, in line 15, Sofia indexes epistemic closure (i.e., that the epistemic asymmetry

has been adequately resolved) by overlapping with Lorenzo to continue reading past *vaçile* in the

poem. Compare this to the final lines of the interaction:

(11) *45 Lorenzo; u catu è quello che si* |*attinge l'acqua (0.3) dalla çisterna*
                     bucket is the one that |draws water from the cistern

    46 Giulia;   *s'inci l'aqua dâ* [*isterna*
                                     [draws water from [the cistern

    47 Sofia;   *cisterna*
                                                 [cistern

Lorenzo begins a metasemantic predication that Giulia collaboratively completes. Sofia again

approvingly overlaps, but this time Lorenzo is able to maintain his authoritative epistemic stance

by finishing his syntagma so that only his voice is present therein. Instead of collaboratively

translating *u catu*, in this segment of the interaction participants collaboratively manage

Lorenzo's epistemic right to proffer an account of its acceptation: not simply a bucket (*secchiu*,

cf. line 16), but that with which water is drawn from the cistern.

CONCLUSION

Isn't it a mistake, however, to conflate what Boas called "secondary re-interpretations" of

meaning with the meaning as it can be uncovered analytically? My argument in this paper is

emphatically not that expression-meanings are the outcome of talking about talking, of

metasemantic discourse, or of any specific linguistic acts. *Catu* does not mean *bucket* because

people like Giulia say things like "*u catō secchiu*", which is to say that metalingual function does

not unilaterally determine meaning; so long as it is used to talk about buckets, *catu* will be

functionally similar to *bucket*, it will be translatable as *bucket*, and so it will in some sense

"mean" *bucket*. But, as Bruce Mannheim (2015) has made clear, denotational equivalence is not

always enough: "radical translation" grounded in ethnography may be required to attend to the expressive-range of a concept that overflows attempted translational equivalence (also, cf. Leavitt 2015:288). In this paper, I drew on the concept of acceptation as developed by De Mauro to capture a similar dynamic, one in which affectively-charged "tissue of experience" likewise exceeds the meaning given through translational glossing. Such associational tissue can be disclosed in and through metasemantic discourse, as when Giulia says that "water is put in the washbowl [*u vaçile*], but with the bucket [*u catu*] the water is filled from the cistern" and when she illustratively gestures holding and lowering a bucket for this purpose. In such cases, metasemantic syntagmas may function as the nucleus calibrating the gloss-expression with the to-be-glossed (e.g., "nautri diçemu u *secchiu* nvece chistu era u *catu*" [we say *secchiu*, however this was *catu*]). Translation as disclosing attunement. Metasemantic statements, especially in isolation from epistemic posturing and other dialogic considerations, do not determine expressions' meanings and meanings aren't just simply what people say they are (cf. Hanks 2015:31, 43). Nevertheless, metasemantic discourse is not simply an epiphenomenon of ideological rationalization.

"Giving the meaning" is a social practice that occurs within particular types of activities and interactions. It can be fun (Goodwin and Cekaite 2018), political (Hill 2008), or moral (Debenport 2015) and it is not everywhere and always the same. So, in this paper I shift attention from metasemantics as a regimentation device to metasemantics as itself socially and interactionally regimented (cf. Fatigante, Fasulo, and Pontecorvo 2004). It is, for instance, subject to an epistemic ecology centred around "the public organization of knowledge, including what one can expect others to know,"—as is true for Sibbaioti who are asked to etymologize their landscape—"what one is responsible for knowing, and knowledge that is to be hidden from

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particular kinds of participants" (C. Goodwin in Heritage 2013:394, cf. Debenport 2010); and it

mediates between territories of knowledge in such an ecology and the various "territories of

experience" in which "an interlocutor can reach toward moments of genuine singularity"

(Heritage 2011:183). "Giving the meaning" is shaped by semiotic constraints on metapragmatic

awareness (Silverstein 2009 [1981]) as well as social and cultural practices that shape this

awareness in various ways (e.g., Rumsey 2015:162-163). Hanks and Severi put it clearly when

they remind us that "not only experts translate, but ordinary speakers do too, in the course of

everyday activities" (2015:2). And indeed, the majority of the examples given in this paper are of

metasemantic discourse as it occurred outside of contexts of formal linguistic elicitation. I have

aimed in this paper to attend to metasemantics as "part of everyday practice" embedded in more

or less "everyday activities". It is not so much a view of the native as linguist, but an appeal to

de-centre the linguist and "the translator as expert and arbiter of equivalence" (Hanks 2015:44):

simply put, people talk about meaning, linguists or not.

Drawing on what Husserl called "phenomenological modification", Alessandro Duranti

(2015:198 ff.) distinguishes between a "natural attitude" of practical engagement in the world

and a "theoretical attitude" in which we objectify some aspect of our experience by reflecting on

it and evaluating it. This distinction is likewise true of linguistic practice, which becomes the

object-language of our metalinguistic reflections. In this way, we can recognise metasemantic

questions (i.e., of the form "what does *x* mean?") as occasioning phenomenological

modifications that prompt participants to "step out" of (while remaining embedded in) the larger

activity to reflect upon something in the flow of discourse. As Duranti (2018) goes on to clarify,

theoretical attitudes are an everyday affair, occurring in the midst of practical doings of which

they are a critical part, a way of being with others. So too, metasemantic (sense-making)

practices are social affairs in their own right. Consider, for instance, "metalinguistic repair" as described by Jan Hauck (2016) in which an expression may have its own attentional pull (Throop and Duranti 2015) on the basis of some or another indexical incongruity (for Hauck, its infelicitous languagedness), becoming salient as an object of repair and of amusement. As Giulia explains, "maybe if someone forgets (*mela*) they will say "go pick the *pumu* that is rotten" and he will pick the *pumu* and throw it out".

It is not uncommon for linguists and anthropologists to credit language with being uniquely reflexive, but it is less common to actually take this reflexivity as an object to be linguistically or ethnographically scrutinized in practice; but, as Silverstein reflected:

> It is interesting that metasemantic speech events are a natural occurrence in everyday speech, a culturally learned speech function. In our society, parents are constantly glossing words for children by using grammatically complex but semantically equivalent expressions, expressions that make the same contribution to reference of utterances as the glossed items. (Silverstein 1976:16)

Handbooks and guides for conducting linguistic and ethnographic fieldwork often contain information about how researchers can elicit wordlists, grammatical patterns, or narratives but do not ordinarily touch upon the question of local metalinguistic practices. However, Briggs (1986) directs interviewers to attend to just such practices when he emphasizes the importance of calibrating research methods to native meta-communicative routines and norms. One way, for instance, that Sibà emerges as a tourist place is through metasemantic interactions in which Orientalistic anticipations and etymologizing practices exhibit an exotic Arab and North African alterity, from "*Sibà* vuol dire contrada del mattino" [*Sibà* means land of the morning] to "nui àrbbi semu" [we are Arabs]. Also, it is not inconsequential that many islanders with whom I spoke, especially older islanders, rarely treated metasemantic equations as interlingual, but instead as disclosing an attunement to their emplaced life experiences, to Pantelleria, or more specifically to Sibà and its surroundings, as a place-world imbued with social and personal

significance. Expressions as pragmatically calibrated to the "existential position" (Ingarden 1973:70-71) of their objects, which resonate with the present moment of speaking: so, for Lorenzo and Giulia, the meaning of *vaçili* is not merely a synchronic matter of referential equivalence, but a matter of "attuned-entanglement" (Zigon 2014:22) in a world "in which echoes and traces of that which is not yet or no longer, take their hold" (Throop 2018:203). So, "the bucket [*catu*] with the rope is drawn from the cistern", Giulia remembers, but "nowadays it is all from a tap, all electric".

NOTES

[1] Islanders almost exclusively refer to their singular way of speaking as *il dialetto* [dialect] and will describe utterances or text-artefacts as being said or written *in dialetto* [in dialect], which is occasionally (albeit rather rarely) qualified as *in dialetto pantesco* [in Pantesco dialect]. The technical sociolinguistic and dialectological acceptation of *il dialetto* in Italy is quite complex, but for an overview cf. Marcato (2007:13-15) and Trumper (1993). While many Italian researches associated with these fields have put forward acceptations of *il dialetto* in a technical and neutral manner, attempting to positively define their object of study, the term nevertheless circulates and is subject to evaluation outside of strictly academic circles, where its acceptation is continually up for negotiation. For instance, Palermitano linguist Alberto Varvaro rejected the possibility of neutrally defining the terms *la lingua* and *il dialetto*, drawing attention to the fact that "in Italy, it is often thought [*si ritiene*] that dialects are corrupt and vulgar forms of Italian" (1978:41). Still, while some regional groups in Italy have consequently advocated that their distinct ways of speaking be recognized as "languages", others romantically embrace the term "dialect" as quaint and local but rich with history and identity. So, I use scare-quotes around "dialect" to emphasize that I am not using the term as a sociolinguistically- or dialectologically-fixed term, but rather as an ethnographically-relevant term that is dynamically and interactionally constituted: i.e., I use "dialect" here not as a classification, but to reflect that Italian tourists and islanders on Pantelleria use the expression *il dialetto*.

[2] The names of everyone with whom I conducted my fieldwork are pseudonyms.

[3] One research question my interviews addressed during my 2016 fieldwork was to what degree could Giovanni Tropea's lexicographical data be re-elicited roughly six decades later. This was in part motivated by Giuseppe Brincat's doubt that the findings of the 1960s could be repeated at present on the island (2003:99). To this end, one portion of each interview was devoted to checking whether or not uniquely Pantesco expressions (determined as such by way of the *Vocabolario siciliano*) were recognized by interviewees.

[4] The enthusiasm of tourists for "peasant authenticity" was not necessarily shared by other islanders: one man from the main port town on the island, upon hearing that I was staying in Sibà, squinted, leaned in and said to me "French… Spaniards… Arabs… Turks…" each name

said with a more sinister tone of voice and angled tilt of the head, as if each was a revelation of a dark past and the reality that the people of Sibà were, racially, Other. However, I rarely encountered such inter-islander racializations and most islanders with whom I spoke had generally positive feelings about other islanders. However, during his fieldwork on the island in the late 1960s, Anthony Galt (1972:7-8) took notice of considerable *campanilismo* in which islanders negatively characterised those from different parts of the island.

[5] It is perhaps important to stress that the circulation of such etymologies has origins in philological work rather than popular memory. There is no evidence that Sibà was called *la contrada del mattino* [the land of the morning] by Sibbaioti until somewhat recently, and I suggest that this translation was probably popularized by Angelo D'Aietti in the 1970s (e.g., D'Aietti 1974), especially in his monumental *Il libro dell'isola di Pantelleria*, where he explains that Sibà received its name from Arabic *ṣabāḥ* because "for the whole island west of the Montagna Grande"—in the foothills of which is Sibà—"the sun appears [in the morning] from the crest of this mountain" (D'Aietti 2015:419). And though this etymological translation is widely accepted now (though cf. Rodo 2014:352), earlier translations instead equated Sibà with *lion*, mediated by the Arabic *sibāʿ* (e.g., Calcara 1853:8, Gigante 1966:133).

[6] "u catō secchiu (.) chiddrō secchiu" is an 'allegroform' analysable as appositional syntagmas *u catu u secchiu* and *chiddru u secchiu* as in transcript (7) line 2. However, another possible analysis would have it, for instance, as *u catō secchiu < u catu è secchiu* with a copular index of the metasemantic frame. I have opted for the former analysis, in part to maintain the metalinguistic use of the determinate article, but I cannot rule out that careful study of metaplasmic alternation on Pantelleria won't reveal the latter to be the case.

[7] It is worth noting that Tropea has described the avoidance of *bacile* and its replacement by *bacinella* as a "hypercorrection" among Sicilians when speaking Italian because it is perceived as an Italianization of the "dialect" form *vacili* (1976:127); i.e., where the introduction of "dialect" expressions into Italian is stigmatized, Sicilians may avoid using paraphones of "dialect" forms.

[8] The primary acceptation of *bacile* in De Mauro's *Grande dizionario italiano dell'uso*, which is categorized as 'commonly understood', is very similar to what is given for *vacili* in the *Vocabolario siciliano*: "round container, wide and low, so that it can contain water and other liquids, used in the past especially for washing oneself" (De Mauro 1999 I:564). This acceptation is very broadly distributed throughout Italy in various paraphones from *bazzill* in Modena and *bagile* in Garfagnana further north, to *uacile* in Lecce and *vaciajele* in Molfetta in the south (cf. Pfister 1992:171-181).

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