

This thesis analyses the words which, beside their basic (or denominative) function, have the power to express various grades of emotional emphasis of the user of the language. In the Italian terminology these words are called "alterate" and are formed mainly by augmentative and diminutive suffixes and prefixes. The Italian language, indeed, has a rich source of "alterate words" that allow the speaker not only to identify objects or facts of extra-linguistic reality; but also to express speaker's emotional involvement, mood, temper or feelings. This phenomenon is not characteristic in every modern language. Among the European languages, only Slavonic languages seem to be able to compete with Italian in the examined field. One of the basic problems of augmentative/diminutive expressions is to distinguish their denominative and evaluative characters. Borderlines between the stylistically neutral (denominative) and the stylistically coloured (connotative) augmentatives/diminutives are rather blurred. Especially for the non-native user of the Italian language, it can be very enigmatic to understand the nuances conveyed by such words as casa (house), casone (big house), casaccia (bad house), casetta (little house), casuccia (nasty house). For this reason the representative lexical material obtained from available sources (Italian literature, newsletters, magazines) has been collected and has been consequently examined from the view of different semantic connotations. Anyway, when dealing with the problem of the lexical meanings of "alterate words", the context plays a decisive role. The output of the presented thesis could thus be a useful didactic auxiliary instrument for teachers and students of the Italian language.