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Casting a new 'eye' on an elusive suffix: The use and origin(s) of Japanese dialectal suffix '*-me*'[1]

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Abstract: In several regions of Japan, various dialects exhibit a peculiar suffix *-me*, which mostly attaches to animal names, and seems to carry out various functions. The exact nature of its use is, to some extent, still unclear, since this *-me* is alternatively described as expressing endearment, familiarity or smallness, or, on the contrary, depreciation, fear or distance (which lead to some authors regarding it as two different homophonous suffixes). On a more grammatical scale, its relationships with definiteness, with plural and collective number and with animacy have also been questioned. Thus, this article aims at examining the different uses of *-me* in Japanese dialects, and its possible connection with other suffixes, in order to tackle the question of its origin(s).

Keywords: Japanese, dialectology, lexicology, suffixation, lexical semantics

Introduction

Although they are separated by hundreds of kilometres, several Japanese varieties or topolects reportedly exhibit a peculiar *-me* suffix that appears to be unused in the standard dialect of Tōkyō. This suffix usually attaches to animal names, as in: *ushi* 'cow' → *ushi-me*. However, its exact function(s) and origin remain somehow problematic, as well as its relationship with other homophonous suffixes.

An animal *-me* suffix has been observed in Japan since premodern times. For instance, it is mentioned as early as 1775 in Koshigaya's *Butsurui shōko* that people from the Sashima district of Shimōsa province (now Ibaraki prefecture) 'call [animals] by adding a *-me* mora to the end [of their names]', as in *mā-me* 'horse', *ka-me* 'mosquito' or *tonbo-me* 'dragonfly' (Koshigaya 1775: 1). A similar observation was quickly made about

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eastern Tochigi dialects by Ōta (1829: 472), then about Hachijō (Kondō 1855: 328). Later on, this suffix was gradually observed in other prefectures: Shiga in 1907, Ōsaka (Higashinari-gun) in 1922, Fukushima in 1932[2], Nara in 1936 (Tachibana 1936: 153), some parts of Ishikawa, Fukui, Saitama, Tōkyō and Kanagawa prefectures (Morishita 1981: 175), and, finally, in some parts of the Gifu prefecture (Yamada 1984: 1).

Overall[3], the reported distribution of the animal suffix *-me* in the Japanese archipelago can be mapped as represented on Figure 1[4]:

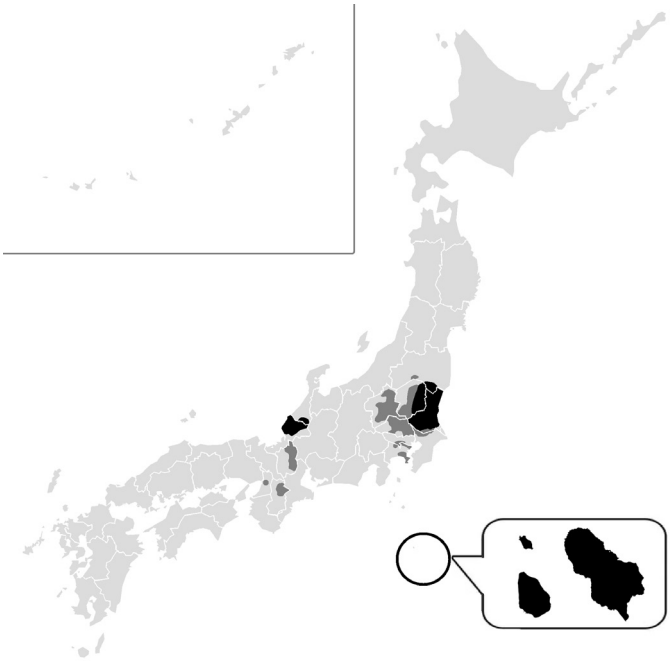

Figure 1: Map of the distribution of the *-me* suffix, with a zoom on the South Izu islands.
(The regions where an animal suffix *-me* was reported vivid in the 20th century are displayed in black, regions where it was reported moribund are displayed in dark grey.)

[2] According to the entry 虻 of the *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (Shōgakukan 2001: 1069).

[3] According to Yamada (1984: 6), it is also not impossible to consider that traces of a comparable suffix are also attested in other places, since animal names ending in *-me* (and whose cognate do not end in *-me* in in standard Japanese) are attested on a few dialect maps; namely: Shimane (Izumo) *gyā-me* 'frog' (SJ *kaeru*) or *mokuro-me* 'mole' (SJ *mogura*), North Okayama *mokura-me* 'mole' (SJ *mogura*), and Miyazaki *kanchorome* and Kumamoto *ogami-me* 'praying mantis' (SJ *kamakiri*).

Similarly, a couple of animal names ending in -me can be observed in the *Gendai nihongo hōgen daijiten* (Hirayama et al. 1992-1994), such as Miyazaki *chocho-me* 'butterfly' (SJ *chō*), or Shimane *mokuro-me* 'mole'; and there are several similar occurrences in the *Nihon hōgen daijiten* (1989), such as Yamagata (Akumi-gun) cha-me 'cat' (SJ *neko*), Yamagata (Hidaka-gun) *ari-me* 'ant', Shimane (Yatsuka-gun) *kuchinā-me* 'snake' (SJ *kuchinawa*), etc. A list of such animal names can also be found in Hino (1946: 146-149).

However, as such, this data is probably too shallow an evidence to include those topolects to the scope of this article.

[4] This map was made using a Wikimedia blank background, and is mostly based on Morishita (1984: 175), with additional data from the other quoted sources.

In a nutshell, that distribution can roughly be divided into 3 main non contiguous regions, namely, from West to East and North to South:

1. parts of Fukui, Shiga and Ishikawa prefectures (with traces in neighbouring Nara and Ōsaka prefectures),
2. parts of Tochigi, Ibaraki and Fukushima prefectures (with traces in neighbouring Kantō prefectures),
3. the South Izu islands (Hachijō, Kojima, Aogashima).

In all those areas, this suffix seems to have been widespread until recent times. However, due to the pervasion of standard Japanese, it is now gradually falling out of use[5]. For instance, among the roughly 120 animal names in the six-volume *Gendai nihongo hōgen daijiten* (Hirayama et al. 1992-1994), only four varieties appear to have more than one occurrence of a *-me* suffix, namely: Hachijō (55 occurrences), Ibaraki (10), Shiga (8) and Fukui (6).

Nevertheless, its large distribution in non contiguous areas raises some questions:

1. Are all observations of dialectal *-me* occurrences the same phenomenon? If so, what function(s) does this suffix seem to have in the said topolects?
2. If this suffix is indeed a shared feature from those Japanese varieties, is it a shared archaism or a parallel innovation? More generally, what origin can be proposed for this suffix?

These two questions are to be the main considerations of this article, which will mostly focus on data from the South Izu islands (Hachijō, Kojima and Aogashima). However, since the details of this question exceeds by far the scope of this article, no definitive answer to the origin of *-me* will be provided in the second part, but rather preliminary hints that may serve as a starting point for future research.

1. The uses and functions of *-me* in Hachijō

1.1. The animal suffix *-me*

According to the specialist Morishita Kiichi (1979a; 1979b; 1981; 1984), there is no doubt that all of the aforementioned Japanese varieties exhibit one and the same suffix *-me*, rather than coincidental homophones. His definition of this suffix can roughly be summed up into 6 points:

1. *-me* is only used with animal names (1979a: 811),
2. it can be attached to all kinds of animal names, regardless of the animal's type (1979a: 790) or size (1979a: 813). However, different phonetic rules might restrict its use, depending on the variety (1979a: 812-813; 1979b: 141),

[5] See Morishita (1979a: 816) and Hayano (1991: 94) on its decline in Ibaraki and Tochigi prefectures. See Morishita (1984) on its decline in the Fukui prefecture, and (1979b: 139-142) on its decline on Hachijō island.

3. *-me* is more commonly used with familiar animals (1979a: 813), and possibly more common in appellative occurrences (1979a: 816; 1979b: 135),
4. there is an 'emotional difference' in the use or absence of *-me* (1979b: 135). Namely, it would express some kind of endearment (1979a: 789). Therefore, Morishita calls it 'the *-me* of endearment' (親愛の「メ」, *shin'ai no 'me'*),
5. *-me* could possibly express finer nuances as well, such as plural (1979a: 816) or diminutive (1981: 172-173), but those connotations are much less clear,
6. its function is essentially different from the homophonous depreciative suffix *-me* (which Morishita calls 罵詈の「メ」, *bari no 'me*' – lit. 'the *me* of invective') encountered in Middle Japanese, which also exists in most of those Japanese varieties, but usually attaches to human names and pronouns (1979a: 789; 1979b: 144).

This definition seems quite widely accepted. For instance, the idea that it is more common for familiar animal names and would express some kind of endearment was seconded by Yamada (1984: 3), Nakamoto (1980: 100), Iitoyo et al. (1984: 74) or, more recently, by Iannucci (2019: 94). However, it is probably not useless to check those assertions with the Hachijō data I compiled while preparing my PhD dissertation[6].

The first thing that can be noted is that the suffix *-me* is (or was) undoubtedly very productive in Hachijō, since it can be found in all kind of utterances, from all topolects, by all genders and all social classes including in the oldest sources[7]. Overall, it can be found in at least one quarter of the roughly 800 animal names I gathered so far. Namely, it can attach to words from all *strata* of Japanese lexicon alike, for instance: *hebi-me*[8] 'snake' (native), *chōchō-me* 'butterfly' (Sino-Japonic), *kokko-me* 'robin' (onomatopoeic), *horusutan-me* 'Holstein cow' (foreign loan). It also occurs both in the oldest inherited lexicon, such as *nuse-me* 'black kite' (OJ *nose*), as well as in recent loans such as *kingyo-me* 'goldfish' (a recent loan from Tokyo Japanese). However, *-me* appears to be more frequent in distinctly local words, for instance *hototogisu* 'lesser cuckoo' rarely occurs with *-me*, while its more local synonym *kokkenkokejō-me* does in most occurrences[9].

In addition, *-me* can attach on words of any length in Hachijō, for instance *ba-me* 'cow' (1 mora), vs. *dēgodanekurē-me* 'oriental greenfinch' (8 morae, lit. '*daikon*-seed eater'). However, it can be observed that it is usually avoided in compounds: for instance, *tori* 'bird' and *mushi* 'insect' systematically occur with *-me* when used as a bare root; but without suffix when they are second element of a compound, as in *katō-dori* 'streaked

[6] See the appendix of my PhD dissertation (Baudel: forthcoming) for the complete data.

[7] At this stage, the oldest occurrence I could find was *zoku-me* 'bull' in Takahashi (1802). A few years later, the famous Hachijō wordlist found in Ōta (ca. 1811), contains no less than 9 occurrences of *-me*. See Baudel: 2024 for more information on premodern Hachijō sources.

[8] For simplicity purposes, I use modified Hepburn transcription for both Hachijō and standard Japanese within this article (although the exact realisation of the written forms might locally differ), and Kunrei transcription for Middle and Old Japanese. For other varieties, I simply follow the quoted reference's conventions.

[9] Similarly, *dēgodanekurē-me* 'oriental greenfich' also has a more 'standard' variant *daikondanekurai* (found in Asanuma 1999), which has no *-me* and an uncontracted pronunciation of the vowel sequence /ai/.

shearwater', or *bun-mushi* 'beetle'. This rule bears almost no exception[10]; thus, an occurrence of *-me* after a compound might indicate that it is not synchronically analysed as such any more, for instance *shōto-me* 'turtle dove' (from **shiro+hato* 'white'+'dove'), *nyattori-me* 'chicken' (from *niwa+tori* 'garden'+'bird') or *mimizuku-me* 'horned owl' (from *mimi+tsuku* 'ear'+'owl').

In addition, one can observe that in Hachijō, *-me* can also attach to words that already end with the mora *me* (as in *same-me* 'shark' or *kame-me* 'turtle'); which, according to Morishita (1979a: 812) is not the case in some other varieties. However, the sequence *-me-me* seems to be avoided in longer words: for instance, **tsubame-me* 'swallow' does not occur (while both *tsubame* and *tsubakura-me* do), and *suzume-me* 'sparrow' is a rather rare form (*suzume* being much more common).

More generally, it can be noted that the occurrence of *-me* in Hachijō appears to be largely lexicalized, since many words (in fact, a majority) occur either only in their suffixed version, or only without suffix[11]. Besides, it can also be noted that *-me* cannot co-occur with an honorific suffix, which is most most visible in *kona-sama* 'silkworm' (in which *-sama* is now obligatory) and *nezumi-dono* 'mouse' (which also has a non-honorific variant *nezumi-me*). It can also be noted that *-me* often triggers syncope in suffixed words, causing a variety of sound change (for instance in **shirami* 'louse' > *shan-me*, *numi* 'flea' > *nun-me*, or *heijigara-me* > *heijigo-me* / *heiju-me* 'Japanese tit'), which might play a role in its lexicalization.

In this perspective, it can also be noted than in some rare but notable occurrences, *-me* seems to occur in free variation with an element of composition, such as:

- *tori* 'bird' (for instance in *hiyo-me* ~ *hiyo-dori* 'chick', *uno-me* ~ *uno-tori* 'cormorant', etc.),
- *yo* 'fish' (e.g. *tobi-me* ~ *tobi-yo* 'flying fish', *kingyo-me* ~ *kingyo-yo* 'goldfish'),
- *mushi* 'insect' (e.g. *uji-me* ~ *uji-mushi* 'maggot', *aka-me* ~ *aka-mushi* 'harvest mite'),
- another word (e.g. *goma-me* ~ *goma-fugu* 'tiger puffer', *chōsen-me* ~ *chōsen-ushi* 'red cow' [lit. 'Korean cow']).

In all those occurrences the *-me* form seems to be more common, and it seems most likely that those forms result from a clipping (*u-no-tori+-me → *unome*; *chōsen-ushi+-me → *chōsen-me*); clipping being a very frequent phenomenon in Hachijō.

Due to these clippings, it can also be noted that in Hachijō, in synchrony, adding a suffix *-me* to a human name (such as a kinship term) or an adjective might give it an animal meaning, and more specifically make it refer to cows or to chickens. For instance, *ba-me* 'cow' can synchronically be analysed as *ba* '(grand)mother / aunt' + *-me* (probably from a clipping of *ba-ushi+-me 'mother-cow'). Similarly, there are forms such as

[10] Similar examples include *kubona-me* 'spider', vs *ye no kubona* 'house spider', *yama-kubona* 'wild spider'; *chaccha-me* 'warbler', vs *aka-chaccha* 'robin'; *ushi-me* 'cow', vs *chichi-ushi* 'milking cow', etc.

[11] So far, I found only four examples, namely: *ushi(-me)* 'cow', *zokku(-me*) 'bull', *nezumi(-me*) 'mouse', and *yagi(-me*) 'goat'. It is possible that this scarcity is due to a lack of data.

onnago-me ‘young cow / hen’ (lit. ‘woman’+-*me*[12]; from *onnago-ushi+-me and *onnago-dori+-me), *onokogo-me* ‘young bull / rooster’ (lit. ‘man’+-*me*, from *onokogo-ushi +-me and *onokogo-dori+-me), *ko-me* ‘(cow) calf’ (lit. ‘child’+-*me* from *ko-ushi+-me). This phenomenon was especially productive in the case of cows, as *-me* can attach to:

– a place name: *horusutan-me* ‘Holstein cow’*, chōsen-me* ‘red cow’ (lit. ‘Korean-*me*’),
– an adjectival root: *kuro-me* ‘black cow’, *hēta-me* ‘tired cow’,
– a verbal noun: *tsukē-me* ‘working cow’, *hijike-me* ‘skinny cow’,
– any noun which acts like a qualifier: *konnyaku-me* ‘spotted cow’ (lit. ‘konjac’+-*me*), *madara-me* ‘pretty cow’ (lit. ‘elegant clothes’ + *-me*).

In most of those occurrences, *-me* is in free variation with either *ushi* ‘cow’ or *zoku* ‘bull’, which seems to indicate that they all result from a productive form of clipping.

Finally, regarding the type of animals, it seems that there is no strong restriction in Hachijō. As a matter of fact, *-me* can attach to all kinds of animal names:

– wild and tamed (e.g. *kamo-me* ‘wild duck’, vs *ahiru-me* ‘domestic duck’),
– positively and negatively perceived (e.g. *nekko-me* ‘cat’, vs *uji-me* ‘maggot’),
– big and small (*kujira-me* ‘whale’, vs *ari-me* ‘ant’),
– unique and in flocks (*pochi-me* ‘doggy’, vs *yuwashi-me* ‘pilchards’), etc.

So far, the only tendency that I could observe is that while *-me* is almost ubiquitous in non-compound bird, reptile, mammal, insect[13] and crustacean names, it is more rare in fish names[14] and almost unused for shellfish[15].

Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that Morishita’s point 1 and 2 are quite strong in the case of Hachijō. However, the points 3-6 to appear much less clear. As a matter of fact, *-me* does not seem particularly more frequent in ‘familiar’ animal names than in rarer ones[16], and while both Nitta (2006: 131-133) and Morishita (1979a: 816) consider that the suffix *-me* might also be linked to the expression of plural or collective, it appears that this connotation does not show up in the data either, since I could find no statistical correlation between plural meaning and the use of *-me* (the singular use being slightly more frequent). However, it is possible that what Nitta and Morishita implied when mentioning a ‘collective’ or a ‘familiar’ meaning of *-me* is that this suffix could be more common for *generic* animal names rather than *specific* animal names (for instance in *fugu-me* ‘pufferfish [in general]’, vs *goma-fugu* ‘tiger puffer’, *jiri-fugu* ‘brown-lined puffer’, *bunpei-fugu* ‘purple puffer’, etc.). This last statement is true, but it actually does not say anything about the semantic value of the *-me* suffix *per se*, since (as illustrated with the example of pufferfish names) generic words are most commonly single-root words, while specific animal names are very often compounds; and, as showed earlier, *-me* tends to be avoided in compounds.

[12] It can also be noted that *onna-me* (lit. ‘woman’+-*me*) is a common dialect word for ‘cow’ in Kyūshū, Kansai and some parts of Kantō (see Tachibana 1933). While a striking parallel, this form is however more probably an alteration of the more common *uname* (probably from *ushi-na-me ‘cow-GEN-female’).

[13] I use ‘insect’ in a broad sense here; that is, including arachnids, worms, myriapods etc.

[14] For instance, some very common generic fish names such as *katō ~ katsū* ‘bonito’, *tē ~ chā* ‘sea bream’ or *shake* ‘salmon’ never take *-me*. Besides, the generic word for ‘fish’ *yo* does not either.

[15] The only clear exception seems to be *uni-me* ‘urchin’.

[16] *Cf*, for instance, very common *hototogisu* ‘lesser cuckoo’, vs very uncommon *hya:daka-me* ‘goshawk’.

Furthermore, Morishita's idea that *-me* would be more common in appellatives and express an 'endearment' meaning is not that clear either. As a matter fact, while *-me* does occur in some appellatives (as in *kan-me, kan'yo-me* 'kitty', or *pochi-me* 'doggy'), this use does not appear statistically more common than any other use in Hachijō, and is, in fact, overall quite rare. Similarly, while the interpretation of *-me* as a diminutive suffix (as suggested in point 5) could make sense on a diachronic perspective (*cf infra*); on a synchronic level however, there does not seem to be an opposition of size between suffixed and unsuffixed animal names, the two forms being used seemingly interchangeably:

(1) nezumi-**ME**=ga anā ake-tā=de
mouse-**ME**=SBJ hole.ACC open-PST.RT=CIRC
Since the mice made a hole... (Asanuma 1999: 78)

(2) nezumi=ga kabe=ni anā ake-tā=nte
mouse=SBJ wall=LOC hole.ACC open-PST.RT=CIRC
Since the mice made a hole in the wall... (Asanuma 1999: 179)

Finally, while it is true that many occurrences of *-me* concern animals that are likely to receive some kind of endearment, such as cattle and pets, one could wonder if there truly is an endearment meaning in words such as *mushi-me* 'insect, pest', *uji-me* 'maggot' or *gejigeji-me* 'millipede', which are highly negatively-perceived animals, the latter even being used as an insult in Hachijō (cf. Asanuma 1999: 86). Besides some occurrences of *-me* clearly show a fearful or negative attitude toward the animal, perhaps showing some overlapping with the homophonous human depreciative *-me* (*cf infra*):

(3) same-**ME**=ni kam-are-te tenpō d-ara
shark-**ME**=A eat-PASS-CONJ armless be-PST.SS
He is armless because he was bitten by a shark. (Asanuma 1999: 154)

(4) nekko-**ME**=ga [...] katsū-busho hikizuridashi-te bun-nige-tara
cat-**ME**=SBJ bonito.flake.ACC drag-CONJ INT-run-PST.FIN
The cat stole my bonito flake and ran away.

kondo tsukamē-te buk-koroshi-te yar-u
Next.time catch-CONJ INT-kill-CONJ do-PST.SS
Next time I catch him, I'll kill him! (Asanuma 1999: 249)

Finally, it is interesting to observe that the suffix *-me* can occur even when talking about the inanimate representation of an animal, for instance in:

(5) kono tsuru-**MĒ** tsukur-o=wa ezu-kya
this crane-**ME**.ACC prepare-RT=TOP difficult-SS
Making this [paper] crane is difficult. (Asanuma 1999: 47)

which means that synchronically, the use of *-me* is not necessarily linked with animacy in the speakers' mind.

In a nutshell, the animal *-me* suffix in Hachijō can be defined as follows:

1. *-me* is found after most animal names, regardless of the type of utterance,
2. it is used for all kinds of animals, with the notable exception of some fish and of all kinds of shellfish,
3. it is usually not found after compounds, and triggers frequent clippings
4. it cannot co-occur with another suffix, and tends to be avoided after the mora *me* in longer words (> 3μ),
5. its distribution is largely lexicalized, and appears to have undergone (at least partial) semantic bleaching.

Because of this semantic bleaching, the animal suffix *-me* appears to occasionally interfere to some extent with the homophonous human suffix *-me* (Morishita 1984: 183). Some authors like Naitō (1979: 108), Yamada (1984: 3), and Nitta (2006: 127-129) even consider that both could, to some extent, be considered two uses of the same phoneme.

Thus, it is probably not useless to take a closer look at the human uses of *-me*, in order to assess on a synchronic level to what extent the two appear to be linked or different; and on a diachronic level whether they share the same origin.

1.2. Other uses of *-me*

A human suffix *-me* also seems to be attested in many Japanese varieties, including the ones which also exhibit an animal suffix *-me*. This suffix is more difficult to observe than its animal counterpart and was possibly less productive. Plausible examples I could find[17] so far include: Shiga (Takashima-gun), *nana-me* 'child', Nara (Uchi-gun) *kogo-me* 'child', Fukishima *yaya-me* 'baby', Yamagata *gakki-me* 'brat', Ibaraki *oto-me* 'child', Tochigi *ani-me* 'big brother' (Nitta 2006: 143), Hachijō *appa-me* 'baby'. As can be seen in these occurrences, this suffix appears particularly common in kinship terms and has a very clear diminutive meaning, since it is mostly found after words that are used to denote or call infants.

In Hachijō, this human diminutive *-me* suffix does seem to have been quite productive, since it attaches to various lexical *strata*: *kodomo-me* 'child' (native), *chōnan-me* 'eldest son' (Sino-Japonic). It is used after several synonyms for 'children' (such as *kodomo-me* 'child', *appa-me* 'baby', *mago-me* 'grandchild'), especially after 'kin numerative'[18] appellatives, such as: (for boys) *tarō-me* '1st son', *jō-me* '2nd son', *sabō-me* '3rd son', *shō-me* '4th son', *gorō-me* '5th son' or (for girls) *nyoko-me* '1st daughter', *naka-me* '2nd daugther', *tego-me* '3rd daughter'; as well as their non-appellative equivalents: *chōnan-me* '1st son', *jinan-me* '2nd son, *sannan-me* '3rd son'*; chōjo-me* '1st daughter', *jijo-me* '2nd daugther', *sanjo-me* '3rd daughter', *yonjo-me* '4th son'. Interestingly, these series illustrate that *-me* is only found after the most common of these words, since the other forms of these series (such as *kusu* '4th daughter', *jīrō* '5th daughter', *kūrū* '6th daughter') are usually

[17] Unless stated, the following forms are quoted from the *Nihon hōgen daijiten* (Shōgaku tosho 1989).

[18] *Cf* Baudel: forthcoming a, for an overview of 'kin numeratives' in Hachijō.

not suffixed. Similarly, it can be noted that *shiko* 'great-grandchild' and *yashago* 'great-great-grandchild' are usually not suffixed either; which could either be due to their rareness, or to their perception as a compounds (that is, if this human *-me* has the same restriction as its animal counterpart).

Besides, it can be noted that in Hachijō, the human *-me* appears as less lexicalized than its animal equivalent, since it is appears completely facultative in most cases:

(6) kodomo-**ME**-ra=ga heya=no nakā hoger-o=wa
child-**ME**-PL=SBJ room=GEN=middle.ACC scatter-RT=EMPH
The children are scattering inside the room. (Asanuma 1999: 209)

(7) kodomo-ra=ga urusa-ku-te tsun-noboser-o=wa
child-PL=SBJ noisy-ADV-CONJ INT-get.dizzy=RT=EMPH
The children's noise is making my head ache. (Asanuma 1999: 149)

(8) mago-**ME**=wa kawai-ke=nte dēji=ni sh-o=wa
grandchild-**ME**-TOP cute-RT=CAUS important=CIRC do-RT=SS
My grandchildren are cute, so I cherish them. (Asanuma 1999: 209)

(9) mago=ga bō-ku nar-o=wa
grandchild=SBJ big-ADV become-RT=EMPH
My grandchildren are growing up. (Asanuma 1999: 209)

As shown from the example above, *-me* can co-occur with other suffixes, especially with the plural marker *-ra*, and the honorific marker *-do*, for instance in *asei-do-me* 'big brother'. In this context, it should be noted that the order of those suffixes appears to be fixed, since **-me-do* or **-ra-me* do not occur. I also found no occurrence of suffix-induced syncope with this suffix (on contrary to the animal suffix in **shirami* > *shan-me*, or *numi* > *nun-me*).

Beside kinship, another very common use of the human *-me* suffix in Hachijō and other varieties is in derogatory words and insults, such as *dongo-me* 'fool', *yakko-me* 'bastard', *fungī-me* 'idiot', etc. In a few Hachijō occurrences, such as *teren-me* 'liar', *yakkē-me* 'troublemaker', this *-me* occurs in free variation with *-mono* 'guy', 'person' and seems to work as an agentive meaning (*teren* meaning 'lie' and *yakkē* 'trouble'). It is likely that similarly to the animal *-me*, this use originates from a clipping (*teren-mo-no-me > *teren-me*, *yakkai-mono-me > *yakkē-me*).

This derogatory *-me* is equivalent to a well-known derogatory or humbleness suffix *-me* (sometimes written as <奴>) which was very common in Late Middle and Early Modern Japanese, and in now given as old-fashioned in dictionaries and grammar books. This suffix is well attested at least since the *Heike monogatari* (early 14th century), in which it can attach to human and animal nouns and proper names alike:

(10) この程親しき奴めに 盗まれて候ふ
kono hodo sitasiki yatu-**ME**=ni nusum-are-te saurafu
PROX INT close-RT guy-**ME**=AGT steal-PASS-CONJ be-SS
That so very dear fellow stole from us. (Imaizumi 1900: 505)

(11) その仲綱めに　　鞍　　置け
so=no Nakatuna-**ME**=ni　　kura　　ok-e
MED=GEN Nakatsuna-**ME**=LOC　　saddle　　put-IMP
Put a saddle on that Nakatsuna. (Imaizumi 1900: 497)

Occasionally, *-me* is interpreted as having an endearment meaning, especially when following a word referring to a child, for instance in the *Soga Monogatari* (14th century):

(12) あの童めを　　おとうと　　おぼしめせ
a=no wappa-**ME**=wo　　otouto=to　　obosi-mes-e
DIST=GEN child-**ME**=ACC　　little.brother=SIM　　think-HON=IMP
Consider this child like a little brother. (Anayama 1940: 117)

Later on, there are also many occurrences of *-me* after pronouns. For instance, in the *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam*, Rodriguez gives a short description of *-me*, which he describes as 'a particle that attaches to nouns and depreciates a lot' (1604: 162 *recto*), as in: *<vonoreme> onore-me* 'you (pej.)'*, <aitçume> aitsu-me* 'that guy'*, <coitçume> koitsu-me* 'this guy'. He also provides a long example sentence from a lost folktale (the *Kurofune Monogatari*)[19]:

(13) nauo　　vchixumeramo
naʷo　　uti-syu-**ME**-ra=mo
ADV　　interior-folks-**ME**-PL=COM
Besides, even the people inside,

corenofutariga　　amari nurusani　　ano yatçubara
kore=no hutari=ga　　amari nurusa=ni　　ano yatu-bara
PROX=GEN 2.ppl=SBJ　　such leniency=LOC　　DIST guy-PL
The two of them, being so lazy, those guys,

votocome mo,　　vonagomemo　　xŏdainai
ʷotoko-**ME**=mo　　ʷonago=**ME**=mo　　syoodai na-i
boy-**ME**=COM　　girl-**ME**=COM　　shape is.not-SS
Neither the boy or the girl are any good. (Rodrigues 1604: 162 *recto*)

As can be seen in those examples, *-me* seems to be linked to definiteness in Middle Japanese, since it very often occurs after a deictic (*kore no, kono…*) or after a proper noun, which both behave like determinatives (Anderson 2004: 470). Thus, it usually does not occur in an indefinite context. Besides, it can be noted that at this stage, I found no occurrence of *-me* after a completely inanimate noun.

Interestingly, the use of *-me* with a pronoun is not common in contemporary Hachijō, and the only occurrence I could find so far is the premodern *unu-me* 'you (pej.)', which

[19] Interestingly, Rodrigues also provides an example of *-me* following an animal name: *inu-me* 'dog'.

occurs several times in Kakusō (1858 [1984:75]). However, as stated before, *-me* is quite commonly used after names in Hachijō, especially kin numeratives (which are most commonly used as appellative names), and it also appears to be rather rare in indefinite context, as illustrated by the examples below:

(14) wa=ga e=ni=wa kodomo-ra ga shōbu ar-o=wa
I=GEN house=LOC=TOP child-PL=SBJ many be-RT=EMPH
There are *many* children in my house. (Asanuma 1999: 117)

(15) kodomo-**ME**-ra=ga warusā shi-tā=nte sāg-o=wa
child-**ME**-PL=SBJ mischief.ACC do-PST.RT=circ=TOP scorn-RT=EMPH
I'll scorn *the* children: they did mischief. (Asanuma 1999: 103)

Similarly, the use of derogatory *-me* is more frequent in either appellative/vocative use or in definite context altogether, than in other kinds of utterances:

(16) urya dongo d-ara
DIST.TOP fool be-SS
That guy is *a* fool. (Asanuma 1999: 194)

(17) dongo-me=ga anshī sogan d-ā kotō sho?
fool-**ME**=SBJ why such be-RT thing.ACC do-RT
[*You*] fool, why do you do such things? (Asanuma 1999: 29)

Later on, this Late Middle Japanese suffix also became especially common in Early Modern Japanese following the humble first-person pronouns such as 某 *soregashi*, 拙者 *sessha* or 私 *watakushi*, in order to reinforce (sometimes ironically) their humbleness meaning. This can be seen for instance in Jippensha's picaresque novel *Tōkaidōchū Hizakurige* (1822 [1935: 31]):

(18) 下拙の私めが 相方の おやまさんは
gesetsu=no watakushi-**ME**=ga aikata=no oyama-san=wa
humble=COP I-**ME**=GEN2 partner=COP girl-HON=TOP
The darling companion who will accompany my humble self...[20]

Similarly, the *-me* suffix is said to be especially common when talking about one's family or children, for instance in the Japanese translation of *The Last Days of Pompeii*:

(19) どうぞわたくしの息子めを まもりくださいませ
dōzo watakushi=no musuko-**ME**=o mamori kudasai-mas-e
please I=GEN son-**ME**=ACC protect bestow-HON-IMP
Please, protect my son. (Shibata 1951: 122)

[20] The sentence is interrupted in the original.

It is most likely that this use is the origin of the kinship *-me* in Hachijō. However, interestingly, the use of *-me* with the first person pronoun is not attested in Hachijō, and it is quite clear in several examples that the kinship use of *-me* is not limited to one's own family in that variety:

(20) omi-ra=ga e=no mago-**ME**=wa soccha=n ik-ara
you-PL=GEN house=GEN grand.son-**ME**=TOP MED=LOC go-PS.RT
Your grandson went this way. (Asanuma 1999: 130)

(21) omi=ga nyoko-**MĒ** wa=ga tarō=n
you=GEN2 1st.daughter-**ME**.ACC I=GEN2=DAT
yome=ni ke-nnō=ka
wife=SIM give-NEG.RT=INTER
Would you give *your* eldest daughter to my eldest son as wife? (Asanuma 1999: 89)

Thus, while it is less lexicalized and bound than the animal *-me*, the human *-me* suffix also appears to be undergoing some semantic bleaching in Hachijō. Interestingly, it can also be noted that this human suffix *-me* was also productive after names of (usually negative) supernatural beings in Hachijō, since there are several forms, such as *kinchi-me* 'ghost', *oni-me* 'demon', *tenji-me* 'spirit', which rarely occur without suffix[21].

Perhaps more surprisingly, it also occasionally occurs (in a minority of occurrences) with names of meteorological phenomena, such as *tatsu-me* 'tornado', *kumo-me* 'cloud', and *niji-me* 'rainbow', in which a derogatory meaning is not perceptible any more. This use might somehow be ancient, since there are occurrences such as *arashi-me* 'storm' in the *kyōgen Setsubun*, dated from the end of the 16th century (Sasano 1956: 406)[22].

Finally, there is one last peculiar use of *-me* in Hachijō which makes it function like a bound noun[23], not unlike standard Japanese 者 *mono*. Namely, *-me* cannot occur as an independent word, but it can be qualified by a demonstrative, a proposition or an adjective:

(22) oso s-o=**ME**=ga ar-i
lie do-RT=**ME**=SBJ be-NOM
Since there are *people* who lie… (Kaneda 1998: 27)

(23) so=no waka-ke=**ME**-ra=ga
MED=GEN young-RT=**ME**-PL=SBJ
these young *guys*… (Kindaichi & Shibata 1967: 231)

[21] Nitta (2006: 127) also relates the same kinds of occurrences in Ishikawa.

[22] Alternately, it is also possible that in those few occurrences, human and animal *-me* conflated together, since *tatsu* originally means 'dragon', and rainbows in the Chinese mythology are said to be two-headed dragons.

Besides, there are also a couple of occurrences of facultative *-me* for body parts, namely: *hesso-me* 'navel' and *chinchin-me* 'penis', which probably show a recent extension from humans to human body parts.

[23] Ōshima (1984: 18) sums up that it is 'used as a formal noun. It may also function as a quasi-substantive particle.' (形式名詞として使われたもの。さらに準体助詞的働きをする場合がある。)

In the two examples above *-me* acts like a classifier with a plural meaning, but this bound *-me* can also express contrast between two individuals, not unlike English *one*:

(24) so=no ane=no hō=ga kyoudē d-ō=**ME**=i
MED=GEN big.brother=GEN side=SBJ younger be-RT=**ME**=LAT
The elder brother [said] to the younger *one*… (Kaneda & Naitō 2002: 28)

Besides, it can also take an animal or even an inanimate meaning:

(25) ware=mo mitsuke-tā, nobot-t-ar-o=**ME**
I=COM find-PST.RT climb-CONJ-be-RT=**ME**
I also found some climbing *ones* [goats]. (Ōshima 1986: 69)

(26) ki=no futō-ke=**ME** hoso-ke=**ME** ja=nai darou
tree=COP large-RT=**ME** thin-RT=**ME** CIRC=NEG CONJECT
The big *one* of the trees, not the thin *one*. (Ōshima 1986: 23)

(27) seiro=wa adan d-ō=**ME** tsuka-i yar-ō, omē-ra
tree=COP how be-RT=**ME** use-NOM do-PST.RT you-PL
What *kind* of a steamer did you guys use? (Ōshima 1986: 45)

Finally, this *-me* can also have an exclamative function, or simply serve as a nominalizer for the proposition, not unlike Japanese *koto* こと or *no* の:

(28) ō, okkana-ke=**ME**=no
yes scary-RT=**ME**=TAG
Yes, how scary! (Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education 1986: 22)

(29) meibo=ga ar-u-**ME**=ga
register=SBJ be-RT_2=**ME**=ADV
The thing is, I have a register, but... (Aoyagi 1973: 87)

(30) tor-u=no=wa oku=ni hē-te ar-o=**ME**
take-RT_2=NOM=TOP deep=LOC go.in-CONJ be-RT=**ME**
To collect [abalones], [one has] to go deep. (Nakamoto 1984: 160)

To the best of my knowledge, this use appears to be specific to Hachijō, and it might very well be a recent development[24]. More specifically, given the fact that Hachijō is prone to clippings, I suspect that it originates from a truncation of originally derogative *yatsu-me or *mono+-me (which can refer to humans and objects alike), which then underwent grammaticalisation semantic bleaching.

[24] Ōshima (1984: 18) explains that it in the 1980s, this form was most common amongst younger speakers, which might be a hint of its recent formation.

In this perspective, it is not impossible that other dialects exhibit a parallel relexification of the suffix *-me*. For instance, the *Kojima chihō no hōgen-shū* (Togawa 1966: 142) reports a noun '*me*' in Okayama prefecture, which is translated as 奴 *yatsu*, 人 *hito,* 者 *mono* (lit. 'guy', 'person', '-man'), and as *koto* in such syntagms as *ii me / ee me* = いいこと (Togawa 1966: 10, 27). However, no example is provided, and more research is needed in order to asses whether this word shares the same properties with its Hachijō counterpart.

– In a nutshell, it is clear that regardless of their origin, there are at least three different uses of *-me* in Hachijō:
– *-me*$_1$ (as in *ushi-me*), a generic animal suffix that appears to have a very weak semantic value and to be highly lexicalized
– *-me*$_2$ (as in *kodomo-me, dongo-me*), a more rare but less lexicalized human diminutive / derogatory suffix
– *=me*$_3$ (as in *okkanake=me*), a nominalising element that lacks any clear semantic value, and probably originated from *-me*$_2$ through clipping

Now, the question remains whether the first two suffixes *-me* share the same origin, and what hypotheses can be formulated on that matter.

2. The possible origins of *-me*

The dominant idea among the various authors that examined the dialectal *-me* suffixes (such as Nakamoto 1980: 100; Nitta 2006: 134-135) is that, although those two elements differ in synchrony, they are most likely sharing the same etymology. While this does seem to be a parsimonious hypothesis, it is also possible that those two forms were originally unrelated but interacted and conflated over the centuries. Besides, there are many possible candidates for their origin, which need to be examinated one by one[25].

2.1. An origin as a derogatory suffix?

The first root we need to consider as a potential candidate for grammaticalisation is *mé↓* 'eye' < OJ *me*$_2$ (< PJ *may) which is quite remarkable for its polysemy and diversity of use. Without being exhaustive, we can roughly list the following meanings:

1. 'eye', 'eyesight', 'vision', 'judgement' (眼, 目),
2. 'object of vision', 'target', 'goal' (目),
3. 'dot', 'point' (目),
   → 'dots of die' → 'possibility', 'experience', 'moment' (目),
   → 'graduation', 'unit', 'item', 'weight', 'coin', 'value' (目, 匁),
4. 'small hole' (目),
5. 'joint', 'meeting point', 'intersection', '(biology) genus' (目),

[25] It must be noted that since my main source of data, Hachijō, is an accentless variety, it was not possible at this stage to take the pitch-accent into consideration.

6. 'bud, sprout' (芽),
7. 'face', 'expression', 'appearance'[26], 'grain (of a surface)', 'pattern' (目).

Furthermore, this root is said to have been grammaticalised in several ways in MJ (Kawaguchi 1998), and to occur synchronically as various suffixes (Kō 2004: 230-237):

1. (already in OJ[27]) as a suffix indicating the place, the moment or the result of the process of a verb root after a verbal noun (from the meaning 'point'):
   – 切る *kiru* 'to cut' → 切り目 *kiri-me* 'end / cutting mark' (lit. 'cutting point'),
   – 縫う *nuu* 'to sew' → 縫い目 *nui-me* 'stitch' (lit. 'sewing point'),

   (by extension) as a suffix indicating the process itself after a verbal noun:
   – 落ちる *ochiru* 'to fall' → 落ち目 *ochi-me* 'decline' (lit. 'falling point'),
   – 控える *hikaeru* 'to hold back' → 控え目 *hikae-me* 'restraint' (lit. 'restraining point').
2. (roughly since the 11th century[28]) as a degree or approximation suffix after an adjectival root, not unlike English *-ish* (from the meaning 'appearance'):
   – 多い *ō-i* 'numerous' → 多め *ō-me* 'quite numerous',
   – 綺麗 *kirei* 'neat' → 綺麗め *kirei-me* 'very neat'.

   If the adjectival root is monomoraic, *-me* attaches to the adnominal form instead:
   – 濃-い *ko-i* 'strong' → 濃いめ *ko-i-me* 'somewhat strong, strongish'.
3. (since the mid 15th century at least[29]) as an ordinal marker after a numeral compound (from the meaning 'item'): 一年 *ichinen* 'one year' → 一年目 *ichinen-me* 'first year'.

Besides, as shown by its meanings 'hole' and 'point', this *'me'* is also possibly etymologically linked to, or conflating with ma 間 'gap', 'interval', 'place' (Kawaguchi 1998: 266-267). Similarly, it might have interacted with the OJ and MJ volitional suffix *-m-*, which was used to create many de-adjectival verbs that were gradually reshaped into vowel verbs in *-eru* (first 下二段, then 下一段) in MJ; yielding verbal nouns in *-me*:

– 高 *taka* 'high' → 高める *taka-meru* 'to raise' → 高め *taka-me* 'raising',
– 確か *tashika* 'certain' → 確かめる *tashika-meru* 'to ascertain' → 確かめ *tashka-me* 'confirmation'.

All of those uses of *-me* are attested in Hachijō, e.g.:

1. *mūka* 'six days' (SJ *muika*) → *mūka-me* 'the sixth day'
2. *mushiru* 'to pluck' → *mushiri-me* 'plucking mark' (lit. 'plucking point')
3. *katē* 'hard' → *kata-me* 'quite hard'
4. *nagē* 'long' → *naga-meru* 'to lengthen/lie down' → *nagame* 'lengthening/lying down'

However, the category (3.) is overall quite rare and possibly unproductive in Hachijō, as I found no compelling occurrence after a monomoraic adjective or after a Sino-Japanese adjective. Still, one can note the striking structural similarity in synchrony between

[26] In which *me* is often said to have conflated with 見え *mié* 'appearance', the *ren'yōkei* of the OJ verb 見ゆ *miyu* 'to be visible' (modern *mieru* 見える). See Martin (1975: 830-831).

[27] For instance, *MYS,* XII, 2967 already has 縫目 *nupi-me*, OJ form of 縫い目 *nui-me*.

[28] For instance in *The Tale of Genji*, 26 (*Tokonatsu*), 細目 *hoso-me* 'rather thin' (Murasaki 1927:259).

[29] References dictionaries such as the *Daigenkai* (Ōtsuki 1939: 568) and the *Daijiten* (Heibonsha 1935: 294) quote a first occurrence in a commentary of the *Shiki* dated from the Bunmei era (1469-1487).

the *-me* in standard Japanese *koi-me* ‘strongish’, and the *-me* in Hachijō *okkanake=me* ‘how scary’; both occurring after the adnominal form of an adjective.

Among all those forms and meanings, the ‘face’, ‘appearance’[30] one (7. in the list above) seems to be most plausible candidate for a grammaticalisation as a derogatory suffix, if one assumes that it was originally used in insults and subsequently reanalysed as a derogatory suffix[31], e.g.:

– *aho* ‘fool’ → *aho-me* *‘idiot-face’ → (reanalysed) *aho* + *-me* ‘idiot-DER’

This derogatory meaning would then have been extended to express humility or self-contempt and would have been subsequently extended to talk with humility about one’s children. Finally, the suffix would have been reanalysed as a diminutive, allowing its extension probably first to cattle animals, then to all animals in some varieties:

– ‘face’ → contempt → self-contempt → endearment → animality

This hypothesis seems plausible, but it supposes that the ‘face’ meaning was lost quite early on, since it is not perceptible any more already in the first occurrences, especially the ones that follow a proper name. However, one problem with this hypothesis is that whereas the endearment meaning is already attested very early on (as shown in the example (12) from the *Soga Monogatari*), the self-contempt one is not very common at that time, and is totally absent from some varieties like Hachijō.

2.2. An origin as a directive / focus marker?

Another possibility is to consider that the derogatory meaning of *-me* is secondary and that it was originally a directive or a focus marker. As a matter of fact, as stated earlier, the suffix *-me* is attested after a deictic in a large number of older occurrences, and is said to be especially productive in this use in some varieties such as the Sendai dialect from Miyagi (Doi 1919: 76).

Besides, several Japanese dialects[32] have an element *-me* that works as a directional marker, as in *oki-me* ‘off-shore’, *higashi-me* ‘to the east’, *nishi-me* ‘to the West’, and a homophonous adverb *me* seems to exist in at least some Ryukyuan languages[33]. Thus, it is possible to suppose that a **me* deictic element (possibly originating from the meaning ‘target’, ‘goal’ of the root ‘eye’) was used in prehistoric Japanese with a meaning such as ‘there’, ‘over there’, and was reinterpreted as derogatory suffix because of it frequent use in apostrophe:

– **ano aho me* ‘that fool *over there’* → (reanalysed) *ano aho-me* ‘that fool-DER’

While not completely implausible, this hypothesis remains quite speculative, since there is no proof that the directive element found in those varieties is ancient. Alternate-

[30] Not unlike like in English *-face* in *fatface, prickface, jerkface*; French *tête de …*, etc.

[31] Theoretically, the meaning ‘value’ could also be a potential candidate, as in:
aho ‘fool’ → *aho-me* *‘idiot-worth’ → (reanalysed as) *aho* + *-me* ‘idiot-DER’
However, this meaning is likely too recent and too limited to have played any role in this grammaticalisation.

[32] Namely, Yamaguchi prefecture (Shigemoto 1937 [1976]: 71; Yamanaka 1967: 166), Tsushima island (Takiyama & Yanagita 1944: 94) and Kimotsuki-gun, Kagoshima prefecture (Nomura & Yanagita 1942: 75).

[33] For instance in Taketomi island (Yaeyama). See (Maeara et al. 2011: 1206).

ly, it could very well be a rebracketing of the approximative suffix found after adjective roots, since the *-me* in *taka-me* 'high-ish' or *hiku-me* 'lowish', is very easily reanalysable as a kind of a locative ('on the high side' → 'facing up', 'on the low side' → 'facing down'), which could have led to its extension to direction names.

Quite in the same way, it is also possible to suppose that the original meaning of the derogatory *-me* was some kind of a focus particle, originally used for emphasis or contrast, not unlike English *very*. As a matter of fact, a *me* assertive particle (similar to standard よ) is found in some Ryukyuan languages, such as Yaeyama Ishigaki (Miyagi 2003: 1116), and a focus particle me_2 is said to occur in one occurrence of Eastern Old Japanese:

(31) 須流河乃祢良波　　苦不志久米阿流可
Suru^{n}ga-no$_2$ ne$_1$-ra pa　　kupusi-ku=**me$_2$** ar-u=ka
Suruga=GEN cliff-PL=TOP　　be.longing-ADV=FOC be-RT=EMPH
How I long / for the cliffs of Suruga... (MYS, XX, 4345, 4-5)

Besides, this hypothesis would work quite well with the oldest attestations of *-me*:
– *kono [...] yatsu-me* 'that *very* fellow'
– *sono Nakatsuna-me* 'that *very* Nakatsuna'
– *ano wappa-me* 'that *very* child'

Then, this putative *-me* could have specialised as a humble 1st person marker meaning 'me *personally*' in a devoted way, and, since the focalisation after a deictic was often negative, it would have gradually become a derogative marker, leading to its specialisation in animal names:
– focus → contempt / self-contempt → animal

While this hypothesis is also not completely implausible and would explain the high frequency of *-me* with deictics, it is also very shallow. As a matter of fact, EOJ *më* is a *hapax legomenon*, and might very well be a mere graphic variant of OJ mo_2 due to phonetic peculiarities of the Suruga OJ variety (see Kupchik 2023: 31-32). Besides, the assertive particle *me* in Ishigaki does not have the same semantic and syntactic properties as a focus particle, and is most likely unrelated to the derogatory *-me*.

2.3. An origin as a composition element?

In addition to all those homophonous roots[34], it has also been noted for a long time (for instance by Suzuki 1816: 1-2) that an element *-me* was also very common common in bird names such as 雀 *suzume* 'sparrow', 鴎 *kamome* 'seagull' or 燕 *tsuba(kura)me* 'swallow', although it is usually not displayed in the spelling, all those birds having there own *kanji*. The same was also noted for fish names, in which this is even more common, for instance in 油女 *aburame* 'fat greenling', 泥目 *dorome* 'gluttonous goby' or 平目

[34] There is yet another homophonous root *me* (藻) meaning 'seaweed' (for instance in *waka-me* 'edible brown seaweed') which will not be discussed here since it is highly unlikely to have played a role in the emergence of the animal and human suffixes.

hirame ‘flounder’, in which the *-me* element is usually graphically visible and noted with a phonetic use of either <女> ‘woman’ or <目> ‘eye’.

Besides, it was noted as early as 1775 (Koshigaya 1775: 1), and more recently by Maeda (1988: 27-29) that those animal names ending in *-me* used to be even more common in Old and Middle Japanese, with such bird names as 小雀め *kogarame* ‘willow tit’ (now 小雀 *kogara*), 鸊鷉 *uyome / iyome* ‘grebe’ (now 鸊鷉), 機織め *hataorime* ‘weaverbird’ (now 機織鳥 *hataori-dori*), 山雀め *yamagarame* ‘varied tit’ (now 山雀 *yamagara*); and fish names like 赤女 *akame*[35] ‘sea bream’ (now 鯛 *tai*) or 口女 *kuchime* ‘young striped mullet’ (now 鯔 *bora* or *nayoshi*). However, to the best of my knowledge, such an element *-me* does not seem attested in Ryūkyū bird and fish names.

This lead several scholars to suppose that there were yet two other roots **-me* in Old Japanese or pre-Old Japanese, respectively meaning ‘bird’ and ‘fish’. Thus, several *koku-go* dictionaries, such as the *Daigenkai* (Ōtsuki 1939: 568) and the *Daijiten* (Heibonsha 1935: 294) came to treat those two *‘me’* elements as separate entries.

Remarkably, several of those animal names seem to be analysable as semantically and structurally sound compounds, namely:

- *suzu-me* = ‘chirping sound[36]’ + *-me* = ‘chirping bird’
- *tsuba-kura-me* = ‘wing’ + ‘black’ + *-me* = ‘black-winged bird’
- *hataori-me* = ‘weaving’ + *-me* = ‘weaver bird’
- *kogara-me* = ‘small + tit[37]’ + *-me* = ‘small tit bird’
- *yamagara-me* = ‘mountain + tit’ + *-me* = ‘wild tit bird’

And for fish:

- *abura-me* = ‘oil, fat’ + *-me* = ‘fat fish’
- *doro-me* = ‘mud’ + *-me* = ‘mud fish’
- *hira-me* = ‘flat’ + *-me* = ‘flat fish’
- *aka-me* = ‘red’ + *-me* = ‘red fish’

The words *kamome* (OJ *kamame*)*, uyome* and *kuchime* are more difficult to analyse, but it is not impossible that the first two are linked with other aquatic bird names (namely *kamo* ‘duck’ and *u* ‘cormorant’), while the second could be either a clipping of compound containing 口 *kuchi* ‘mouth’, or perhaps a compound with an unvoiced variant of the element *kuji-* found in 鯨 *kujira* ‘whale’ and 久慈目 *kujime* ‘spotbelly greenling’.

Remarkably, while those words are all seemingly analysable as compounds, *-me* does not seem to have the same semantic meaning in all of them. Namely, in the case of *kogara-me* and *yamagara-me -me* is semantically superfluous, since tits are birds by definition. Thus, in these two words, *-me* seems to be a facultative suffix, which may be acting like a categoriser. On the contrary, *-me* appears to be a necessary component conveying the [animal] meaning in the other words, especially in all fish names.

[35] The word 赤目 *akame* still exists in contemporary Japanese, but means ‘red mullet’, which is a visually quite similar but much less common fish.

[36] According to Suzuki (1816: 1). This hypothesis seems to be corroborated by the various dialect forms *chichi(-me), chinchin(-me), choncho(-me)*, etc.

[37] This root is not found in isolation, but seen in several compounds: *shijū-gara* ‘black tit’, *eboshi-gara* ‘tufted tit’, *hi-gara* ‘coal tit’, *hige-gara* ‘bearded tit’, etc.

In addition, it can be noted that several of those words frequently occur without *-me* in some varieties, especially in compounds, for instance[38]:

– *tsubakura / tsubakuro* 'swallow' (common)
– *niwa-suzu* 'garden sparrow' (Chiba, Shimane)
– *shiro-gamo / shira-gamo* 'white gull' (Kumamoto, Shimane)
– *abura* 'fat greenling' (Kagawa)
– *de-bira* 'flounder' (Kagawa, Hiroshima, Ehime)

The fact that *-me* seems to be less common in compounds is a remarkable parallel with Hachijō. Besides, it is interesting to note that, if the analysis of *-me* as an element of composition is correct, the modern form *tsubame* 'swallow' is most likely the result of a clipping of *tsuba-kura-me*, since 'winged bird' is by no means a specific bird name.

Based on all these elements, it was theorised by several scholars (such as Tachibana 1933: 35-36; Kindaichi 1973: 172) that the *-me* element in birds and fish names was likely to be a word meaning 'animal' that was used as a suffix or an element of composition, and was gradually lost and lexicalized in standard Japanese, but was preserved in more conservative varieties as a facultative suffix.

In this case, the derogatory meaning would be secondary, and due to a pejorative comparison of the suffixed word with animals, namely:

– 'animal' → contempt → self-contempt

This hypothesis seems perhaps more plausible than the preceding ones. However, it is also quite speculative, given the fact that occurrences of the derogatory suffix *-me* precede the occurrences of the animal *-me*. Besides, one could still wonder about the origin of this putative animal marker **me*.

2.4. An origin as a collective marker?

In this regard, a hypothesis was already well established in the Edo period (Suzuki 1814: 2), claiming that the *-me* that is found in animal names was originally a collective suffix 群れ *-mure* 'flock'. In this case, *-me* could be cognate with the Ryukyuan plural suffix *-buri / -mmi* (Shimoji 2022: 506), with Taketomi *-me* (Maeara et al. 2011: 1206), and with a plural *-me* found in a few Kyūshū topolects such as Kuboizumi:

(32) koton-**ME**=nya kimon tsukut-te
child-**PL**=DAT.TOP clothes prepare-CONJ
Preparing clothes for the children... (Kindaichi & Shibata 1966: 126)

More precisely, the meaning 'flock' would have been used for animals as a collective, and for humans as a derogatory plural (as in English 'bunch of'), leading to its split into two suffixes:

– 'flock' → human plural → contempt → self-contempt → endearment → animal plural → animality

[38] All forms are quoted from the *Nihongo hōgen daijiten* (Shōgakukan 2003).

This hypothesis has several qualities. First of all, it is quite satisfactory in explaining with one form the origin of the two suffixes. Besides, it would make sense for gulls, sparrows and swallows (which most often move in flocks) to be referred to as a collective, which is the case in all occurrences of those words in the *Man'yōshū.* However, the shift **-mure* > **-me* would require a rather irregular phonetic development quite early on in the history of the language, and would therefore need further research in order to be confirmed or infirmed.

2.5. An origin as a diminutive?

Finally, there is one last hypothesis which might be worth considering, namely that the original meaning of *-me* in Japanese varieties was a diminutive marker. As a matter of fact, as shown for instance by Jurafsky (1996), diminutives can come to express a variety of meanings beside smallness, among which endearment or familiarity, contempt, humility, specification and approximation, all meanings that, as we saw, can be expressed by the different *-me* suffixes in Japonic varieties. This can also be seen in Japonic for instance with the different meanings of Miyako diminutive *-gama*[39]:

(33) ba=ga ffa-gama=a kanasï-munu
I=GEN child-DIM=TOP lovely-thing
'My little child is lovely' (Michinori 2008: 247)

(34) uma=nu junsja-gama
MED=GEN policeman-DIM
'That *bloody* policeman there...' (Michinori 2008: 247)

Besides, Antonov (2007: 195-198) showed that the diminutive *-ra* in Old Japanese was also linked with the expression of plural and locative, and Pellard (2010: 140) indicated that the diminutive in Ōgami was also frequently used with deictics in order to indicate 'imprecise direction', which could explain several of the specific uses that were discussed in the above.

In addition, as noted by Jurafsky (1996: 568), diminutives are also especially common in animal names, and can very easily get lexicalized. Thus, we can assume that the fossilised animal names in *-me* are lexical traces of a former diminutive suffix that was only preserved in some varieties, and which was specialised in standard Japanese as a derogatory suffix when following a noun, and (possibly) as an approximation suffix when following an adjective. A good argument in favour of this hypothesis could be the existence of a diminutive *-be* in some eastern varieties (already noted by Morishita 1981: 176-178), which could easily be a cognate of *-me*, as well as the existence of several dialect forms in which *-me* is replaced by the more common diminutive suffix *-ko*, as in[40]:

[39] As shown by Jarosz (2015), there is as least one lexicalized bird name in *-gama*: ssumi:-gama 'white-eye'.

[40] All forms are quoted from the *Nihongo hōgen daijiten* (Shōgakukan 2003).

– *tsuba-me* 'swallow' (standard) = *tsunba-ko* (Chiba)
– *suzu-me* 'sparrow' (standard) = *chichi-nko* (Ōita)
– *abura-me* 'fat greenling' (standard) = *abura-ko* (Yamagata)
– *yama-me* 'masu trout' (standard) = *yama-nko* (Hyōgo)
– *dō-me* 'round herring' (Hyōgo, Tottori, Shimane) = *don-ko* (Ishikawa)

Similarly, it can be noted that the Hachijō of Japanese *kamome*, *kabuna(-me)* exhibits the Eastern Old Japanese diminutive *-na*.

In this case, there is still to explain the origin of such a diminutive. In this perspective, a good candidate would probably be the homophonous root *mé↓* < Old Japanese *me*$_1$ (< PJ *mya), meaning 'woman' (女), 'female' (雌), as already suggested by Nakamoto (1980: 100) and Martin (1975: 831). As a matter of fact, as shown again by Jurafsky (1996: 536), the concept of 'girl' is frequently associated with smallness or youth, especially in Japan[41]. For instance, it can be observed already in Old Japanese that *me* serves as a diminutive prefix, for instance in 女滝 *me-daki* 'small waterfall' (lit. 'girl waterfall'), vs 雄滝 *wo-daki* 'large waterfall' (lit. 'boy waterfall'), or 女波 *me-nami* 'small wave' (lit. 'girl wave'), vs 男波 *wo-nami* 'large wave' (lit. 'boy wave').

In compounds, *-me* also regularly occurs in parallel with *-ko* 'child' in Old Japanese:
– *oto-me* 'girl' vs *oto-ko* 'boy'
– *musu-me* 'daughter' vs *musu-ko* 'son'
– *iratsu-me* 'lass', vs. *iratsu-ko* 'lad'
– *hi-me* 'princess' vs *hi-ko* 'son'

Given the fact that *-ko* grammaticalised as a diminutive suffix in many Japanese varieties, it is not implausible to suppose that *-me* underwent the same grammaticalisation as *ko* (either by parallel development or as the result of a chain shift), but specialised in animal meanings or derogatory diminutive due to usually inferior position of women in the traditional Japanese society[42]. Besides, given the fact that *-ko* often marks an inanimate diminutive (as in *furi-ko* 'pendulum', *hashi-go* 'ladder'[43]), it is also not impossible that *-me* specialised early on as an *animate* diminutive, which would have made it specialisation in animal names even easier.

If this hypothesis is correct, *-me* would be comparable with the English suffix *-ster*, which was originally feminine in meaning, got fossilized in a few animal names (such as *lobster*), and went on to become a derogative agent suffix, for instance in *gangster, scamster, prankster* etc.:

– 'woman' → (animate) diminutive → animality
→ endearment
→ contempt / self-contempt

[41] For example, the Yamagata hōgen kenkyū-kai (1970: 603) relates that the word *me* (etymologically 'female') now fully means 'child' in this variety.

[42] If one needs examples of the perception of women in ancient East Asia, one can for instance observe that the *kanji* radical <女> is also often pejorative, for instance in compounds such as <妋> 'quarrel' or <姦> 'wicked'.

[43] Compare the Chinese suffix <子> *-zi* for a similar phenomenon.

This hypothesis is, in my opinion, the most economic one, since it manages to bring back almost all meanings of *-me* to one single original meaning. However, it does remain quite shallow, given the fact that this putative diminutive does not occur in Old Japanese. Thus, at this stage, more research is needed in order to confirm or infirm this hypothesis.

Conclusion

In this article, we have showed that several Japanese dialects, and especially the varity of Hachijō exhibit a peculiar suffix *-me*, which raises a lot of questions, both synchronically and diachronically.

Synchronically, three main uses of *-me* can be distinguished in Hachijō:

1. a generic animal suffix, which looks quite lexicalized,
2. a less bound diminutive suffix, that is specialised in kinship terms and insults,
3. a nominalising element that lacks any clear semantic value,

However, it seems plausible that all of those elements share the same origin.

Finally, I have showed that there are several possible scenarios in order to explain the origin of these suffixes, namely:

1. ‘face’ → contempt → self-contempt → diminutive → animality
2. *focus → contempt / self-contempt → animality
3. *‘animal’ → contempt → self-contempt
4. ‘flock’ → human plural → contempt → self-contempt → endearment → animal plural → animality
5. ‘woman’ → diminutive → animality
   → endearment
   → contempt / self-contempt

At this stage, more research is needed in order to disentangle these possibilities. Especially, more historical evidence from Old and Middle Japanese will have to be considered for further research, as well as more comparative evidence from other Japonic varieties.

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