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Diminutives and Augmentatives in the Languages of the World

Introduction

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Introduction

When Scalise [1984] came up with an idea of evaluative morphology as the third level of morphology, distinct from both derivational morphology and inflectional morphology, he gave an important impetus for research in this field. While it was demonstrated by, for example, Stump [1993] and Katamba [1993] that Scalise’s assumption is language-specific rather than of universal nature, Scalise succeeded in pointing out the importance of this field of morphology. Research into various languages of the world has revealed an unequal status of morphological diminutives and augmentatives on the inflection – derivation scale.

At the same time, our cross-linguistic data shows that evaluative morphology does not play the same role in each language. About one-third of the languages of the world can do without any morphological instruments to express the meaning of diminutiveness and/or augmentativeness. On the other hand, Slavic languages and also languages like Slavey, Wichí, and West Greenlandic abound in evaluative affixes. In addition, it has been shown (Universals Archive, Stekauer, Valera, Kortvelyessy, to appear) that the category of diminutiveness is morphologically much more widespread than that of augmentativeness, which has been captured as an implicational tendency saying that if a language has augmentatives it has diminutives.

There are many not yet resolved issues concerning diminutives and augmentatives, including, inter alia, the scope of evaluative morphology in terms of semantic categories; synchronic and diachronic aspects of research; evaluative morphology from the perspective of langue and parole; the relation between the morphological and the genetic type of language, on one hand, and the way of expressing evaluative categories, on the other; the typology of diminutives and augmentatives, and the related cross-linguistic aspects of research; evaluative morphology and word-classes; phonetic symbolism in relation to the categories of diminutiveness and augmentativeness; homonymy/polysemy of evaluative affixes; productivity of morphological processes (suffixation, prefixation, compounding, reduplication, etc.) used for the formation of diminutives/augmentatives; evaluative morphology and recursiveness; etc.

The articles in this volume aim to discuss some of these open questions, and thus contribute to this intriguing field of linguistics.

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