

Evaluative Meanings of Diminutives in Croatian

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Objectives

This study investigates the evaluative meanings conveyed by diminutives in Croatian, focusing on their pragmatic functions beyond size reduction. Diminutives often express affection, irony, or intensification. The primary aim is to delineate their semantic and attitudinal spectrum, addressing gaps in Croatian linguistics where diminutives are underexplored compared to Slavic counterparts like Russian or Polish.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach combines corpus analysis with experimental elicitation. We analyzed 500 instances of diminutives from contemporary media texts (2020–2025), categorizing forms via morphological tagging. Additionally, 50 native speakers from Osijek completed forced-choice rating tasks and open-ended interpretations of 40 stimuli sentences, assessing connotations on scales of affection, derogation, and intensity.

Results

Diminutives exhibit multifaceted evaluations: 62% convey endearment (e.g., *mamica* for 'mommy'), 28% irony/derogation (e.g., *glupić* for 'little fool'), and 10% intensification without affect (e.g., *vrućica* for 'hot stuff'). Gender and context modulate meanings; feminine forms favor positivity, while informal speech amplifies pejoration. Speaker ratings confirm pragmatic ambiguity, with 45% variance tied to relational dynamics.

Discussion

Findings reveal diminutives as versatile attitudinal markers in Croatian interpersonal communication, aligning with appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005). Croatian variants thrive on contextual inference, influencing language pedagogy and translation. Limitations include regional biases; future work could incorporate dialectal data. This contributes to Slavic pragmatics by highlighting diminutives' role in constructing social rapport.