

## 85. The semantics and pragmatics of Romance evaluative suffixes

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### Abstract

The article provides an historical outline of the theoretical work on evaluative suffixes in Romance. The discussion spans over the first efforts made within stylistics (Leo Spitzer), early pragmatics (Amado Alonso), European structuralism (Eugenio Coseriu) and recent pragmatic and morphopragmatic approaches. It will be shown that the respective theories account for crucial shortcomings.

Key words: Evaluative suffixes, diminutives, augmentatives, pejoratives, mitigation, intensification, idealism, ingroup-outgroup behavior, modification, subjectivity

### 1. Introduction

Essentially, *evaluative suffixes* are used to vary in a subjective way and for specific pragmatic purposes the concept expressed by a word (e. g. Sp. *abogado* ‘lawyer’ → *abogadillo* ‘strange, bad and possibly ridiculous lawyer’). Subjectivity may be faded out when the new word is meant to denote a specific object, as in Sp. *tornillo* ‘screw’ < *torno* (13<sup>th</sup> century) ‘turning instrument’ or It. *telefonino* ‘mobile phone’ ← *telefono* ‘telephone’. In this case, the diminutive suffix loses its subjectivating pragmatic force, and even the conceptual restriction of ‘smallness’ may be reduced in favor of the naming of a special type (variety) of object, although smallness is generally respected in terms of prototypicality, that is, Sp. *tornillo* will usually and prototypically refer to a small screw. The traditional terms *diminutive* and *augmentative* focus on a semantic concept, but ignore important pragmatic aspects. In this sense, the generic term *evaluative suffix* opens the perspective for subjective and pragmatic aspects. Moreover, scientific research was traditionally concentrated on *diminutives* and, eventually, their conceptual counterpart, the *augmentatives*, consigning other evaluative suffixes to the sidelines. Hence, the term *evaluative suffix* itself sheds new light on a group of morphemes that was basically considered as the class of diminutives plus satellites.

In view of this, Charles Bally’s (1965: 248-252) consideration of the entire group of evaluative suffixes (Fr. *suffixes appréciatifs*) marked a theoretical progress in history. The Swiss linguist defined them as suffixes ‘that express emotions or evaluations triggered by the concept of the stem’. This matches with his morphological analysis: evaluative suffixes modify (‘determine’) the stem, which functions as head of the word formation. In line with this, Romance evaluative suffixes usually overtake the gender of the noun that underlies the stem, but gender variation is not excluded (Dressler and Merlini 1994: 94-96; e.g. Port. *uma mulher* f. ‘a woman’ → *um mulherão* m. ‘impressive woman’). Bally subcategorized evaluative suffixes into diminutives and augmentatives, on the one hand, and amelioratives and pejoratives, on the other. The first group associates positive or negative affection with a dimensional concept, whereas the second group apparently relates to affective evaluation only, but *dimension* and *intensity* play a certain role in the second group as well (e.g. Fr. *faiblard*

‘too weak’ ← *faible* ‘weak’). Most authors opt for a ternary subcategorization into diminutives, augmentatives, and pejoratives (e.g. Real Academia Española 2009, Lázaro Mora 1999). Mihatsch (2010: 114-118) underlines the semantic and pragmatic effect of ‘approximation’. If the successors of the Latin relative *-issimus* are included, as I claim, a fourth group of intensifiers appears, whereas amelioration seems to be a secondary effect of diminutives, augmentatives and intensifiers. Amelioration as a primary effect falls essentially into the domain of prefixation (e.g. Fr. *super-*, *hyper-*, *méga-*, *extra-*).

Evaluative suffixes display an important morphological and functional variety. It is difficult, therefore, to give a brief account of the relevant morphemes. Lüdtke (2011: 453-486) provides a recent diachronic and synchronic synthesis of evaluative suffixes in Latin and Romance (see also the classic study by Hasselrot 1957). Depending on the context, all productive diminutives and augmentatives may convey negative (pejorative) or positive (ameliorative) evaluation, with suffix-specific preferences. In Romance, and especially in Brazil, augmentative suffixes are not restricted to pejorative functions, as Schneider (1991: 239) assumes from a universal point of view. Hence, *evaluation* is the central axis of the group from which positive or negative evaluations emerge as connotative *variations* according to established preferences, context and interpretation (cf. Merlini 2004: 283, for It. *-ino*). We can even say that the axis has one endpoint where negative evaluation passes from connotation to denotation. This is the case of pejoratives. Curiously, the positive denotative equivalent, that is, amelioration, does not exist in the domain of suffixation. *Intensity* appears to be a second axis, since upgrading and downgrading are possible variants, and the forms that developed from Lat. *-issimus* may be considered a denotative endpoint for high intensity. Finally, we might view diminution and augmentation as variations situated on the axis of dimension, with denotational diminution and augmentation as the two opposed endpoints. This axis includes the metaphorical interpretations ‘diminution → mitigation’ and ‘augmentation → intensification / emphasis’, which bring them in touch with the second axis. If we exclude lexicalized words, we may say that along all three axes, all variants, including the denotational ones, involve a personal, subjective interpretation or belong to a language marked by familiarity that allows for subjectivity. In fact, dimension, degree and intensity are not expressed as descriptive (objective) but as evaluative (subjective) features. Hence, subjective evaluation belongs to the class-meaning of these suffixes.

The subjective implicatures of all evaluative suffixes have direct consequences for the commitment of speaker and hearer. While the speaker may emphatically convey a strong personal commitment, the hearer’s commitment is left up to him, since it is personal and subjective in the case of evaluative suffixes. The other side of the coin is the lack of commitment with truth or, in semantic terms, with description, that is, the subjective effort to represent things with a maximum of objectivity. Even if not intended by the speaker, the hearer may infer a rather loose relation to truth and objective description. Therefore, the effect of approximation may affect both the semantic description and the personal attitude of speaker and hearer. This is not the case with evaluative adjectives, for example in Sp. *Juan es tonto* ‘Juan is stupid’, where the speaker does not only express a personal point of view but affirms it in terms of truth. This affirmation challenges the hearer, while evaluative suffixes create mutual tolerance. No matter if one uses *pequeñito* (← *pequeño* ‘small’ + diminutive) or *pequeñazo* (‘small’ + augmentative), the judgment is subjective, be it placed on the conceptual, the affective or the interactive level of commitment. In the case of evaluative suffixes, communication is not committed and not committing. Hence, mitigation and approximation cannot be exclusively reduced to metaphorical extensions of the concept of smallness, as held by Jurafsky (1996), but have to be related to the categorial function of subjective evaluation. Again, the fact that most studies only focus on diminutives accounts for methodologically biased results. The only thing we can say is that diminutives are particularly suitable for mitigation, as minoration and lack of commitment go hand in hand, thus

reinforcing the mitigating effect. Dressler and Merlini (1994: 144) and Waltereit (2006: 112-118) underline that diminutives are prototypically used in “non-serious” communication. While mitigation may be more prototypical for diminutives, the lack of gravity certainly is valid for all evaluative suffixes. Textlinguistic data reflect the subjective intention of evaluative suffixes. The more objective a text is intended to be, the less (productive) evaluative suffixes are used (Würstle 1992: 233). In legal texts, for example, no productive evaluative suffixes should be found.

## 2. Pragmatic analysis *ante litteram*

### 2.1. Idealism and early pragmatics: Amado Alonso

The Spanish-Argentinian linguist Amado Alonso published two articles on diminutives in Spanish. This first (1930), which was a first version of the second (1961 [=1935]), is almost never quoted, whereas the second turned out to be the landmark study on the topic for Spanish and even Portuguese until today. Interestingly, this first theoretical essay on evaluative suffixes in Romance adopted a radical pragmatic point of view. In contrast to the general tendency of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where pragmatics followed structuralism, Alonso (1961 [=1935]) claimed very early that diminutives have no conceptual fundament but only context dependent pragmatic functions driven by emotion. He thereby challenged the traditional assumption that affectivity develops metaphorically from conceptual smallness. Alonso did not use the term *pragmatics*, nor did he refer to Karl Bühler, but his analysis was clearly inspired by Bühler’s (1982 [=1934]: 24-33) communicative semiotic triangle (“Organonmodell”), which is today considered as a precursor of the communication models used in pragmatics. Alonso was a disciple of Menéndez Pidal, the *spiritus rector* of historical linguistics in Spain, but as far as the relevant theory is concerned, he was strongly influenced by the idealistic approach of Karl Vossler and the psycholinguistic theory of Karl Bühler (see Neumann-Holzschuh 2009). Both theories appear to be fruitful for the analysis of evaluative suffixes, but conflict on a crucial point, as we shall see below. As for the primacy of emotional functions, Alonso was inspired by Wrede’s analysis of German diminutives (1908: 127-144). Wrede claimed that all Germanic diminutives derive from hypocoristic names without original diminutive function. It should be noted as well that Alonso, despite overtly claiming to analyze only the function of diminutives, integrated examples of all evaluative suffixes into his work. Hence, his theory should be valid for the entire group.

According to Bühler, a linguistic sign *represents* a real world object or state of affairs (symbolic function), *reflects* the state of mind of the speaker (symptomatic function), and *appeals* to the hearer (signaling (appealing) function). Alonso stressed the *appealing function*, alluding to the ‘active’ force of diminutives, a function we might now name *illocutionary force*. Moreover, diminutives are supposed to *highlight* the referent, providing exceptional communicative relevance to the symbolic dimension as well. Finally, the evaluative suffix is symptomatic insofar as it mirrors the emotional attitude of the speaker. In sum, evaluative suffixes provide a subjective-emotive perspective on the referent that aims at exerting a perlocutionary effect on the interlocutor.

Consequently, Alonso’s analysis combines the pragmatic strategies directed to the interlocutor with the idealistic standpoint that views the object as a subjective creation of the speaker rather than a representation of an independently given object. More than *representing* a referent, a word like Sp. *abogadillo* indeed creates a subjectively colored *thing meant*. This is the point where the idealistic approach conflicts with semiotic models that consider meaning as a mere symbolic representation of a referent. Dressler and Merlini (1994: 50, 87) recognize the pioneering work of Alonso for the analysis of pragmatic strategies, but they overlook his not less important idealistic approach. Notwithstanding the justified critiques directed to linguistic idealism in other domains, it is essentially adequate for the study of evaluative suffixes. Though the symbolic function presupposes a sign specific fusion of

objectively represented and idealistically projected semantic features, the second prevails with evaluative suffixes (cf. recently Fretel 2010, for a not overtly declared idealistic analysis).

Obviously, nouns like *idiot* express subjective evaluations as well. In the case of evaluative suffixes, however, the thing meant is rather *suggested* by language and context than concretely *expressed*. This is the point where Alonso's idealistic view meets pragmatics. The fact that the interlocutors are obliged to retrieve a vaguely suggested subjective thing meant explains the manifold iridescent implicatures of evaluative suffixes, and especially the difficulties of interpretation that immediately create an 'active' suspense between speaker and hearer. Using *abogadillo*, the speaker playfully invites the hearer to find out what he could mean, creating a situation of intimate complicity (see section 8.). Excluding polemically the conceptual function of evaluative suffixes, Alonso completely eliminated the symbolic function itself, at least insofar as the representative function is concerned. In Dressler and Merlini's (1994) one-sided reception of Alonso's analysis, evaluative suffixes are considered linguistic signs that are functionally loaded by the communicative tension that links speaker and hearer in a given situation. For Alonso, evaluative suffixes are more than coined pragmatic strategies: they are linguistic signs that convey emotions, albeit not concepts.

Alonso's classification of the pragmatic effects and situations was almost tentative (cf. Walsh's 1944 similar classification of American Spanish examples; for Portuguese see Skorge 1956/1958):

- Politeness: *¡Entre usted despacito!* 'Come in. Take your time' (← *despacio* 'slowly')
- Intimacy: *Ya estamos los dos solitos* 'Now we are finally alone' (← *solo* 'alone')
- Tenderness: *Juanito* (hypocoristic name) 'dear Juan' (← *Juan*)
- Mockery: *abogadillo* 'lousy lawyer' (← *abogado* 'lawyer')
- Begging: *¡Una monedita, por favor!* 'Some money, please!' (← *moneda* 'coin')
- Modesty (cf. mitigation): *bastantito* 'a good deal of something' (← *bastante* 'quite a lot', *un favorcito* 'a (small) favor' (← *favor* 'favor'))
- Humour: see Spitzer's example in 2.2.
- Ludic variation: *chiquito, chiquitiquito, chiquitiquillo*, etc. (← *chico* 'small')

## 2.2. Stylistics and early textlinguistics: Leo Spitzer

The playful idealistic projections of evaluative suffixes on referents are richly explored in literature. Consequently, Alonso's pragmatic starting point joins the prior tradition of stylistic analyses in Romance philology, namely the positions of the Austrian Leo Spitzer. In fact, Spitzer (1921) motivated Alonso (1930), to which Spitzer (1933) in turn replied. Spitzer underlined the ludic character of evaluative suffixes and their capacity to reflect the speaker's mood. In the following Spanish *canto popular*, a mother prays to Saint Christopher, asking him to give her a good son-in-law, and, having got one, gives a sad mood variant of the same poem (Spitzer 1921: 202):

San Cristobalito	Dear Saint Christopher
Manitas, patitas,	Nice hands, nice feet
Carita de rosa,	Sweet, rosy face
Dame un nobio pa mi niña, que la tengo mosa.	Give me a son-in-law for my daughter, 'cause she's unmarried
San Cristobalón	Damned Saint Christopher
Manazas, patazas,	Rough hands, rough feet
Cara de cuerno,	Horned face
Como tienes la cara me distes el yerno.	How could you do this to me and give me this son-in-law

In the first verse, the diminutive *-ito* matches the hopeful praying of the mother, while in the second, the augmentatives *-ón* and *-azo* convey her disappointment. To put it in Spitzer's terms: tonality changes from major to minor. In the example, the evaluative suffixes do not only modify the word they belong to, as one would expect according to Bally's definition, but a whole sentence or text. Spitzer therefore suggests the terms *Satzdiminutive* (sentential diminutives) and *Satzpejorative* (sentential pejoratives) that are located in one word but 'color' a whole sentence (1918: 108-110, 1921: 201-202, and 1933).

Analogously to Alonso, Spitzer explicitly focuses on diminutives but considers all other evaluative suffixes. More specifically, Spitzer (1918, 1921, 1933) and Alonso (1961 [=1935]) claimed that sentential coloring is a general feature of evaluative suffixes that combine with adverbs, which almost always involves diminutives. In Spanish, adverbial diminutives are usually perceived as an American Spanish peculiarity, e.g. *Si acaso muero* 'If I should die for some reason' (← *acaso* 'by chance'), probably because the American varieties have better conserved the original rural traditions than European Spanish. Spitzer's examples show that adverbial diminutives are also commonplace in Portuguese. Modern linguistics extends the sentential function to that of "pragmatic markers" in the interactive situation of speech (e.g. Günthner / Mutz 2004, Mutz 2000). Merlini (2004: 280) even claims that this is a general feature of all productive usages. The inclusion of sentential evaluative suffixes determined by text and pragmatic evaluative suffixes determined by situation invalidates Bally's definition that limits the functioning to two components of the word: the stem and the suffix.

In his review of Alonso (1930), Spitzer (1933) points out that Alonso's position differs from his own insofar as the Spanish-Argentinian linguist does not limit the function of the evaluative suffixes to the speaker's mood, but stresses its active role towards the hearer. Spitzer (1933) essentially coincides with Alonso, although he argues that the symptomatic and signaling functions are two sides of the same coin. According to Spitzer, it is difficult to decide if linguistically expressed emotion reflects the speaker's mood or is used as a strategy that acts on the hearer. Consequently, evaluative suffixes color discourse as a whole. The different positions of these authors can be attributed to the fact that Alonso's argumentation is based on (a vision of) real communication, whereas Spitzer's style studies focus on literary communication where a fictitious real life communication is mediated by both the narrator's external presentation and the reader's external perception. Hence, Bühler's appealing function cannot be negated if we consider Spitzer's example as real acts of communication. However, in literature the appeal is not directed to the reader but to a character of the text. Yet, from a stylistic point of view, the reader's outside perception is decisive. Hence, they are felt as mirrors of mood rather than 'active' devices.

### **3. European structuralism**

On the one hand, structural linguistic analysis enclosed an increase of theoretical coherence compared to Alonso and Spitzer. On the other hand, it had to pay the price for its theoretical limitations, especially those that should be pointed out by modern pragmatics. Not surprisingly, Alonso's pragmatic standpoint provoked a lively theoretical discussion amongst structural linguists following the tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure (1983). Again, the argumentation was mainly based on Spanish, and secondarily on Portuguese. Max Leopold Wagner (1952) was the first to oppose Alonso's view that diminution cannot be ruled out as a function of diminutives, as diminutives occur without affective connotations as conceptual diminishers. He recognizes, however, that the affective function can stand alone as well. In the same vein, Monge (1965) claimed that Alonso was correct insofar as the level of *Parole* (speech, utterance) is concerned. At the level of *Langue* (language system), however, the Spanish linguist claimed that diminutives have both a subjective and a diminishing function,

and, alluding to Bally, that they share the first feature with all evaluative suffixes. Monge exposed this standpoint in 1962 at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Romance Linguistics and Philology. During the discussion of Monge's paper, the upcoming leading authority of structural linguistics in Romance, Eugenio Coseriu, held that the 'objective' diminishing function should be considered the basic meaning of diminutives at the level of system, and the affective component an occasional feature at the level of utterance. He argued that different values like affection, irony, aversion, and disdain are necessarily determined by context, not by the language system, since they can be expressed by the same diminutive (Monge 1965: 147). Later, the Romanian linguist specified that the affective features are triggered in those cases where objective conceptual diminution is not possible (1988: 189-192).

Coseriu's position was criticized by Hummel (1995), still from a structural linguistic standpoint. Affective evaluation, Hummel argued, is often combined with objective diminution. Moreover, all linguists agree that diminutives like It. *-ino*, Pg. *-inho*, and Sp. *-ito* prototypically combine both features, 'small' and 'nice'. Hence, there is clear empirical evidence against the assumption that the affective 'meaning' is triggered only in those cases where objective diminution is impossible. Hummel (1995) suggested an empirical approach. According to the principles of Saussure, the linguistic function and meaning should appear as an invariable feature in representative linguistic data. Ettinger (1980) tested Coseriu's hypothesis on the basis of a large corpus of literary data from French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Romanian (for Romanian he used an inverse dictionary). In his conclusion, he stated that linguistic research had not been able to describe diminutives and augmentatives at the level of language system (1980: 198). Hummel (1995) argued against Coseriu and Ettinger that two features might be considered invariable: productive evaluative suffixes always *highlight* a word and *signal* to the hearer that a subjective evaluation has to be chosen according to the context and the pragmatic conditions of the utterance. These features are not specific for diminutives but categorial features that hold for all evaluative suffixes. Consequently, instead of considering affectivity to be an occasional feature of diminutives at the level of *parole*, as assumed by Coseriu and Monge, Hummel attributed it not only to the system meaning of diminutives, like Monge, but to the category of evaluative suffixes, that is, to a level superior to the subgroup of diminutives. As for diminutives, Hummel argued that the contextual effects can be explained by the interplay of general categorial features, the subgroup specific concept of diminution (including metaphor, irony, etc.), contextual and situational factors. Coseriu's argumentation was based on the evidence that contradictory values like affection, irony, aversion, and disdain could only be attributed to context. This evidence is clearly misleading, since it fails if more abstract features like subjective evaluation and highlighting, which are shared by affection, irony, aversion, and disdain, are taken into account. The highlighting function is assumed by Spitzer for Romance ("Individualisierung"), by Alonso for Spanish ("el destacar la representación del objeto"), and as the most important feature of French diminutives by Weber (1963; "surparticularisation"). Alonso was inspired in this respect by Wrede's (1908: 135) analysis of German suffixes ("verschärfte Individualisierungen").

#### **4. The shortcomings of structural linguistic analysis**

In a certain sense, the shortcomings of the structural linguistic approach to evaluative suffixes provide more insights into the phenomenon than its results.

##### **4.1. The exclusion of the referential function of linguistic signs**

Structural analysis yields systemic linguistic relations and excludes reference to the extra-linguistic reality. Thus, the referential and pragmatic motivations of using a linguistic sign are not focused by research, even if the theoretical concept of *parole* would include them. Now, referential and pragmatic features are crucial for the understanding of evaluative suffixes. In

the Spanish NP *casa pequeña* ‘small house’, the diminishing adjective *pequeño* does not modify the word *casa*, but its referent, that is, the house that is referred to in a given utterance. In contrast to this, in *casita* the diminutive suffix *-ito* modifies first the stem (cf. Coseriu himself in Monge 1965: 147; Schneider 1991: 234). This explains why words that are modified with an evaluative suffix tend towards lexicalization, while NPs like *casa pequeña* do not. The only point in common is that *casa* is the head for both *casa pequeña* and *casita*. With evaluative suffixes, the type of modification that first concerns the stem and then the possible referents supports the idealistic standpoint of Alonso. This does not apply to *casa pequeña*, which provides a more descriptive representation of the object. The same holds for the opposition of the relative superlative to the elative (e.g. It. *il piú alto* ‘the highest’ vs. *altissimo* ‘extremely high’). Now, if the structural analysis ignores the referential function, the notion of *modification* becomes unspecific, since it is not clear what is modified, the stem or the referent. The specific function of evaluative suffixes is better reflected by terms like *alteration* (Dressler and Merlini 1994, by analogy to the usual term It. *alterazione*) or *variation* (Gauger 1971: 124-125, 136). *Variation* seems to be more adequate, since it insists on the active role of the speaker, and it is traditionally open for two types of results: productive *variants* and lexicalized *varieties*, whereas *alteration* has passive and even negative connotations.

#### 4.2. The limitation to diminutives

The second shortcoming stems from the fact that the scope of interest was reduced to the study of diminutives, and, occasionally, augmentatives. This reductionist approach certainly has a longer tradition, but, in the case of structural linguistics, we also have to relate it to the exclusive interest for semantics at the expense of pragmatics. From the four groups mentioned by Bally (see section 1.), only diminutives and augmentatives may easily be considered from a semantic conceptual point of view, whereas amelioratives and pejoratives entail rather vague concepts, if any at all. They are more oriented towards pragmatic conditions than to semantic concepts. In this context, it does not seem to be coincidental that the structural approach opted for a narrow view on diminutives and augmentatives, since these are exactly those evaluative suffixes that are closest to a conceptual definition. In fact, structural linguistics aimed at excluding the emotional features (Monge 1965: 138). The exclusion of emotional (subjective) and referential features reduces the analysis to what might be identified as ‘meaning’ or ‘concept’. As we have seen, this attempt fails. Yet, this does not necessarily mean that semantics has no role to play. The very problem concerned the limitation to rational, anti-affective concepts like those of tallness or smallness. Features such as ‘of little value’, ‘meager’ or ‘measly’ are not less semantic. If emotion could not be conceptual, words like *love* and *hate* would not exist.

Be this as it may, the analysis of single evaluative suffixes has to be integrated into a categorial view that accounts for general features like ‘highlighting’, ‘subjective evaluation’ and ‘variation’. The early approach of Bally, Hummel’s balance of structural analysis, and the morphopragmatic approach of Dressler and Merlini (see section 6.) coincide on this point, not to speak of their implicit treatment as a group by Spitzer and Alonso. In the same vein, the new grammar of the Real Academia Española (2009: 627-662) dedicates a chapter to evaluative suffixes (“derivación apreciativa”). In his chapter on semantics, Bloomfield (1963: 146) suggested the almost forgotten term *class-meaning* as a complement for the analysis of word meaning. This is clearly the case for evaluative suffixes in Romance. Highlighting, subjective evaluation, and variation are constant semantic features of evaluative suffixes. From a methodological point of view, the theoretical focus that structural linguistics placed on ‘functional oppositions’ of signs seems to be co-responsible for the fact that the class-meaning was ignored in favor of the differentiating features.

### 4.3. Word-orientation

The third shortcoming deals with a rather word-oriented analysis that reduces the role of context and situation to triggers of semantic information given by the word. In the same vein, Bally's definition of evaluative suffixes only refers to the stem (see section 1.). By contrast, Spitzer clearly pointed out that evaluative suffixes may color utterances and discourse as a whole. In addition to that, Alonso argued that evaluative suffixes are used to negotiate the speaker's relation with the interlocutors. However, as we have seen in section 4.1., there is evidence for the fact that evaluative suffixes are more word-oriented than adnominal adjectives. They are also able to create a range of ideas about the object that subsequently guide the specific pragmatic features of communication. Consequently, the solution is neither to reject word-orientation nor to refute pragmatic specification, but to admit the interplay of a (rather suggestive) idealistic input given by the word, a series of possible semantic-pragmatic patterns for interpretation, and the concrete features of co-text and situation.

### 5. Morphopragmatics

The shortcomings of structural linguistic analysis provide indirect evidence for pragmatically based approaches. Indeed, Merlini's (2004: 279) observation that the best guide to the meaning of evaluative suffixes in Italian is context in its broadest sense starts at the point where structural linguistics falls short. Dressler and Merlini (1994: 52-54; 84) suggested an ambitious "morphopragmatic" theory of Romance evaluative suffixes that relates morphology with pragmatics. They define morphopragmatics as "morphologized pragmatics", that is, "a certain type of grammaticalized pragmatics". Thus, they are less interested in the grammaticalization process than in its result. Further, priority is given to rule-guided results over lexical idiosyncrasy. Moreover, the semantics of evaluative suffixes is minimized in favor of predictable pragmatic strategies. Finally, despite the focus on diminutives and suffixes, these are considered a part of the general group of evaluative suffixes, including the relative It. *-issimo*.

Dressler and Merlini's analysis proceeds step by step from denotation and connotation to morphopragmatics. At the level of denotation, the stem conditions possible effects for connotative or pragmatic effects. To give an example, the intensifying function of It. *-ino* is only possible if the basic concept of the stem is that of smallness: *piccolo* 'small' → *piccolino* 'very small' or 'a bit small', in contrast to *altino* 'a bit tall' ← *alto* 'tall', where the basic concept of tallness excludes the intensification 'very tall' (1994: 118). As for Spanish, this may reflect a general tendency as well, but *fresquito* always means 'very fresh' (← *fresco* 'fresh'), *blanquito* may mean 'very white' (← *blanco* 'white'), and *grandecito* (← *grande* 'big, tall') may be ironically intensifying, including denotative effects: *grandecito* may refer to a small child, signaling that s/he is quite tall for his/her age (cf. Real Academia Española 2009: 653). The same applies to the corresponding adjectives in Portuguese: *fresquinho* / *fresquito*, *branquinho*, *grandezinho* (cf. Sten 1944: 72 and Skorge 1956/1958: 80-81, 261-263, 285-293). Hence, Portuguese and Spanish differ insofar from Italian as intensification occurs frequently, even in those cases where minoration and intensification do not behave like vectors that add conceptual features included in the stem to those of the suffix.

By contrast, Wagner (1952: 465) argued that the intention of the Portuguese (*fresquinho*) and Spanish (*calentito* 'very hot' ← *caliente* 'hot') diminutives is not intensification but the highlighting of a property. Given the importance of inference, it is hard to separate highlighting from intensification, especially because speakers perceive the intensifying effects and may reinforce them with intensifying prosody. However, Wagner's observation allows us to explain the intensifying effect with the class-feature of highlighting, which in turn would explain the larger extension of intensification in Spanish and Portuguese. Highlighting effects seem to be possible with It. *altino* as well, at least if [i] is reinforced by

prosody. In any case, it is certainly true that the general highlighting function of evaluative suffixes meets intensification, especially when notional diminutive or augmentative features reinforce the effect, that is, when ‘smaller/bigger’ parallel intensification, as in Sp. *pequeñito* ‘very small’ (← *pequeño* ‘small’) and *montón* ‘very much’ (← *monte* ‘mountain’).

Importantly, this analysis supports the assumption that available semantic features overlay specifically. Hence, the combination of intensification with stems referring to something big seems to be natural, whereas the pragmatic strategy is necessarily more complex with stems denoting small entities. Sp. *pequeñito* ‘very small’ clearly offers other conditions for pragmatic strategies than *grandecito* ‘a little bit tall’. According to Lüdtke (2011: 480-481), the intensification of Sp. *-ito* only occurs with adjectives that denote a positively connoted quality. Contrariwise, we might suppose that negatively connoted concepts are intensified with augmentatives, like in Sp. *cabrón* ‘bastard’ (← *cabro* ‘male goat’). However, intensifying effects are possible in Sp. *¡Qué feíto!* ‘how ugly!’ (← *feo* ‘ugly’), but it is correct that the context should be positively connoted, e.g. in *baby-talk*. Consequently, the denotation and the connotation conveyed by the stem are relevant for the semantic and pragmatic effects, but probably not fully determining, as intonation ([i]) would receive high pitch in *feíto*) and situation are relevant as well.

## 6. Semantics and pragmatics

The fact that each evaluative suffix guides specific pragmatic strategies calls into question Dressler and Merlini’s exclusive focus on pragmatics. The theoretical problem is that we do not exactly know where semantics begins and pragmatics ends, or vice-versa. Fundamentally, meaning always is morphologized pragmatics. Even a word like *apple* concentrates and coins pragmatic experience in a morpheme. *Meaning* is, essentially, a heuristic device to explain reference. Now, reference is a pragmatic category. Children acquire meaning through referential experience. So meaning in language acquisition is coined by pragmatic experience. Processes of semantic abstraction, extension, extrapolation, metaphor or metonymy may follow and create semantic realities of their own, but pragmatic input cannot be negated, and the same would apply for evaluative suffixes.

The concept of *meaning* tries to explain reference in terms of coined semantic features that allow for reference. Evaluative suffixes have to be considered as meaningful linguistic signs, since they not only accept and convey pragmatic strategies determined by co-text and situation, but allow for, control and guide these strategies. If this were not so, no difference could be observed between It. *-ino* and *-one*. Dressler and Merlini agree with this, since they assume morphologized pragmatics. But what is the difference between morphologized pragmatics and meaning? There must be a crucial overlap of both. However, the present paper encounters a similar aporia, since, on the one hand, I have argued that a pragmatic approach is needed because the semantic approach of structural linguistics has failed. Now I argue that the definition of morphologized pragmatics is not far from that of semantic meaning. Hence, it would be premature to declare that semantics or pragmatics is the dominant force. But how can this quandary be resolved?

The problem and its solution depend crucially on the kinds of semantics and pragmatics that are used. The structural semantic approach failed because it was restricted to descriptive conceptual semantics based on features like ‘small’ or ‘big’, thus excluding affective features. On the other hand, Dressler and Merlini (1994: 132) object to the hypothesis of “emotive or affective invariant connotation” on the grounds that this semantic feature would be “clearly pragmatically based”. This is accurate, but is it not exactly this kind of semantic feature that would be needed for evaluative suffixes? A similar case is deixis, where semantic features of signs like *now*, *there*, *he*, etc. are bound to be directed from the speaker’s *hic et nunc* to the surrounding situation. If meaning and pragmatic function were contradictory, deictic signs would not be possible. In a certain sense, evaluative suffixes may

be viewed as deictic devices for subjective evaluation based on the speaker's *hic et nunc*. Hence, linguistic analysis has to account for both, the sign based semantic features of evaluative suffixes and their utterance specific interplay with stem, context, discourse strategy and situation. Features like 'subjective evaluation' and 'highlighting' clearly belong to class-meaning of evaluative suffixes (cf. Rainer 1993: 198-199). They convincingly explain the alleged "imprecision of meaning" of evaluative suffixes (Dressler and Merlini 1994: 130-132 and *passim*). On the one hand, subjective *evaluation* with evaluative suffixes may be perceived as less precise than the objectified *description* with adjectives. On the other hand, using evaluative suffixes speakers are voluntarily imprecise insofar as the exact determination of the pragmatic strategy is left to the hearer. Hummel (1995) therefore qualifies them as *interpretive suffixes*. Hence the lack of precision belongs to the intension of evaluative suffixes, that is, semantics. The point is that evaluative suffixes subjectively evaluate, conveying an *idea* of the referent, in contrast to the corresponding adjectives that describe more objectively, that is, try to *represent* a referent. This explains why Sp. *un añito* 'a short or insignificant year' (← *año* 'year'), *un litrito* 'a liter perceived as something harmless' (← *litro* 'liter'), *un quilito* (← *quilo* 'kilo') or It. *milioncino* (← *milione* 'billion') are commonplace, whereas \**un pequeño año* or \**un pequeño litro* are not.

If (semantic) class-meaning and the (pragmatic) principle of co-text-, situation- and experience-guided determination of the communicative strategies associated with evaluative suffixes come out clearly from the analysis of the bibliography, there still remains the thorny issue of the distinctive features that allow for the specific properties of each evaluative suffix. In the case of diminutives and augmentatives, the semantic features 'subjective diminution' and 'subjective augmentation' account for their basic properties, including mitigation, intensification and emphasis. The differences between competing series of diminutives like Sp. *-ito*, *-illo*, *-ico*, *-uco*, *-ino*, *-iño*, etc. can be explained as affinity for additional features like dialect, negative/positive evaluation, animate/inanimate referents, etc. They appear as variationist contrasts rooted in the combined effect of class-meaning with subjective diminution. The same holds for augmentatives. The latter has been demonstrated by Spitzer (1921) for *-one* (< Lat. *-o*, *-onis*) in Romance. But what about pejorative evaluative suffixes? The problem disappears if we do not consider pejorative or ameliorative effects only as *connotations*. Although negative evaluation is connotative or contextual in Sp. *abogadito*, as the suffix itself is not pejorative, this is not the case for pejorative suffixes like Sp. *-ete*. Pejorative suffixes have a pejorative *meaning*, that is, what 'subjective diminution' is for diminutives translates as 'negative evaluation' for pejoratives. In other cases, the concept of debility may be associated with pejorative connotations (e.g. Fr. *-ard*).

Possibly, a more polysemic approach would be needed to account for parallel, internally analogous functional series based on the same suffix, such as the downgrading of It. *-ino* (cf. Rainer 1993: 584-585). However, it would be impossible to separate polysemic differentiation from polifunctional pragmatic strategies. Possibly, Dressler and Merlini's focus on coined pragmatic strategies would have more explanatory force if it was not applied to morphologized pragmatic strategies in general, which implicitly refer to the complete semantic and pragmatic potential of one suffix (= the morphologizing morpheme), but restricted to the internal polysemic-pragmatic differentiation of a suffix and the corresponding creation of analogous series of words.

Historically speaking, early pragmatic and stylistic approaches like those of Alonso and Spitzer often provided better results than recent analyses in structural semantics and pragmatics. The latter two may be considered superior to the former insofar as they are based on explicit theories. On the other hand, the clear-cut theoretical separation of semantics from pragmatics explains the shortcomings of these approaches. Hence, the theoretical effort has not only been dedicated to formulate semantic or pragmatic theory, but also to separate them. However, linguistic theory cannot ignore the interfaces of semantics and pragmatics.

Consequently, the study of the interfaces between semantics and pragmatics seems to be a major desideratum for modern investigation on evaluative suffixes.

### 7. Denotative variation and lexicalization

Denotative variation is one of the patterns systematically realized by evaluative suffixes. In this case, the word denotes a specific class or subclass of objects, e.g. Sp. *tornillo*, *carrito* ‘shopping cart, trolley, (baby) stroller’ (← *carro* ‘cart’), It. *telefonino*, *libretto* ‘libretto’ (← *libro*), Pg. *kitchinete* (French loan word), Fr. *cigarette* ‘cigarette’ (← *cigare* ‘cigar’), Fr. *jeton* ‘token’ (← *jeter* ‘to calculate’), etc. The objects usually are small, at least when compared to other subclasses (e.g. Fr. *cigarette* vs. *cigare*), but effects of subjective evaluation are not intended. Speakers would have to add a second suffix in order to add evaluative features (e.g. Sp. *tornillito*). Dressler and Merlini (1994) and other authors exclude this pattern from their analysis, claiming that these words are lexicalized, and thus not productive. However, there must be an underlying productive basis. In the case of evaluative suffixes, referential effects are directly linked to the categorial functions of variation and highlighting, which are used to select a special referent and to stress its subjective communicative relevance. The highlighting of a special type of object is productive in *ojillos* (← *ojos* ‘eyes’), which in standard Spanish refers to peculiar eyes whose peculiarity is determined by context. In cases like *tornillo*, we have to assume that the lexicalization of a peculiarity was intended at the very origin. Words like *tornillo* are often intentionally created as names of classes of objects, just as Ger. *handy* or It. *telefonino* ‘mobile phone’. In this sense, *naming* has to be considered a productive variant of a denotative pattern that specifies a variety of objects.

Now, productive reference is a basic aspect of pragmatics, since it takes place in communicative situations. Hence, Dressler and Merlini (1994) inappropriately exclude this pattern. What could be excluded from pragmatics is the development from productive reference to general usage. This is in fact the very domain of lexicalization, since the name one productively gives to an object does not necessarily enter into common vocabulary. Furthermore, frequency itself does not drive lexicalization, since frequent diminutives like Sp. *hijito* ‘dear son’ (← *hijo* ‘son’) are common but not semantically specified, that is, they correspond to what would be expressed by productive use. Consequently, lexicalization necessarily refers to the common use of a semantic or denotative variety that develops from the basic concept expressed by the stem. This could not happen if semantic or referential specification was not productively intended during the lexicalization process. Curiously, structural linguistics excluded or neglected reference for theoretical reasons, whereas pragmatics seems to prefer all contextual aspects of language (situation, discourse, interaction of speaker and hearer, register, politeness, etc.) to reference, possibly because reference and naming are too traditional. The consequence is that the crucial linguistic function of reference is located in between linguistic approaches and tends to be thrown to the oubliettes or taken for granted.

Most authors assume that the lexicalization properties of Sp. *-illo* are rooted in the fact that it is older than *-ito*. However, just as with frequency, age does not obligatorily imply lexicalization, since the productive process is certainly not younger and would not lead to specifications if they were not productively intended at some time in concrete speech. In the case of Spanish, the argument fails because *-ito* has the same etymology as Cat. *-et*, Fr. *-ette*, It. *-etto/-itto*, and Port. *-ito*. In studies dedicated to Spanish, *-ito* is normally not considered a Romance suffix (cf. González Ollé 2007, Skorge 1956/1958: 55), probably due to a confusion involuntarily caused by Menéndez Pidal (2007: 69) who declared it as ‘not Latin’. As a matter of fact, *-ittu* was used in Latin for hypocoristic names (e.g. *Julitta*, *Bonitta* (possibly > Sp. *bonito*)), as pointed out by Menéndez Pidal himself. Hence, what he intended to say is that authors like Meyer-Lübke (1972: § 505) considered the Latin suffix as ‘unlatin’, that is, not looking like a Latin word and probably loaned to Latin from an unknown source. Later, the

suffix was transmitted from Latin into Romance. Therefore, neither Menéndez Pidal nor Meyer-Lübke intended to say that Spanish did not inherit the suffix from Latin.

## 8. Familiar ingroup- and outgroup oral communication

Prototypically, evaluative suffixes belong to oral colloquial communication between persons who are familiar to each other. Hence, their interpretation presupposes an intimate knowledge of a familiar world shared by the speakers. The affinity of evaluative suffixes with informal oral conversation comes out clearly in novels, where they prevail in direct speech (Lukas 1992: 155-156). As a consequence, evaluative suffixes are generally associated with words that belong to a familiar domain. From a broader perspective, the social psychological distinction of ingroup and outgroup behavior seems to be crucial (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987: 107-112). The Sp. suffix *-ito* tends to produce hypocoristic effects when it is directed to a member of a group, but pejorative effects when it is directed to members of a negatively perceived outgroup (e.g. *Ha venido con sus abogaditos* ‘He has come with his lousy lawyers’). In this case, *-ito* has the same pejorative function as *-illo* and does not necessarily refer to small persons. The concept of objective smallness is not relevant in this context, but is transposed metaphorically to a minorative appreciation. This analysis provides objective evidence for the stress Alonso put on the ‘active’ character of evaluative suffixes. Dressler and Merlini (1994: 233) recognize the ingroup effect but neglect the outgroup effect.

In familiar ingroup communication, *-ito* is often lexicalized with hypocoristic functions, especially with names of persons, pets, etc. *Juanito* may be a name for a person that everybody uses in a given family. Similarly, pets will receive evaluative suffixes, but unknown animals will not, especially when they do not have a usual name (Skorge 1956/1958: 251-254, Ettinger 1980: 146, 194, Waltereit 2006: 115-117). By contrast, evaluative suffixes rarely combine with abstract words (Lázaro Mora 1976), with Italian behaving less restrictively (e.g. *weekendino* ← *weekend*; cf. Merlini 2004: 267, 269, 282). Again, the suffixes behave specifically, that is, they are signs that produce effects of contrast in a given domain. In standard European Spanish, *-ito* tends to express positive feelings toward small objects (e.g. *ojitos* ‘small (and nice) eyes’), whereas *-illo* appeals to create a rather strange representation of an object (e.g. *ojillos* ‘strange eyes’) (cf. Rainer 1993: 540-542). However, this process also depends on the emotions associated with the type of object involved. To give an example, the probability to find positive emotions associated with *abogadito* is lower than with *ojito*, but *abogadillo* and *ojillo* should almost always have a pejorative function (for Italian, see Merlini 2004: 284). According to Rainer (1993: 582), *abogadito* shares the pejorative effect with masculine professional designations (cf. however *abogadita*). Importantly, these communicative effects cannot be fully explained by the properties of the word stem and the suffix. When *ojito* refers to an object that is regarded unemotionally, for instance a painting in a museum, it may simply express ‘small eyes’. In the same vein, *pedrecilla* ‘small stone’ (← *piedra* ‘stone’) may refer to a small or a small and strange stone. On the contrary, a nickname like *El abogadito* may be a sign of respect in a given community (cf. Placencia 2010). Hypocoristic features are automatically relevant, when *ojitos* refers to one’s children. The interpretation depends thus on the emotional attitude towards the object one looks at. This means that the ingroup situation and the emotions felt or not felt towards the referent are decisive for the interpretation. The fact that hypocoristic evaluative suffixes are characteristic for the language adults direct to children can be explained as an extension of the familiar domain. However, the hypocoristic interpretation would change if the word referred to an annoying child.

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