Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies • Vol. 4 (53) No.1 – 2011

EVALUATIVE SUFFIXES IN SLAVIC

Renatá PANOCOVÁ[1]

Abstract: *Characteristic properties of evaluative affixes defined by Scalise present a starting point of my research. Nominal and adjectival diminutives and augmentatives were paid most of the attention. Verbal diminutives and augmentatives were of marginal interest, which may be related to their considerably lower frequency of occurrence in individual languages compared to nouns and adjectives. The aim of this paper is to analyse the above properties in the selected sample of evaluative verbal suffixes in Slavic languages and evaluate the validity of Scalise's claims for these languages.*

Keywords: *diminutive suffixes, evaluative morphology, Slavic, verbs.*

1. Introduction

The term evaluative morphology refers predominantly to morphological processes of diminutivization and augmentativization and has been a subject of extensive research in the last decades. It is well-known that diminutivized forms of words in many languages primarily indicate positive or negative evaluation and not a small size. Scalise went even further and proposed to establish evaluative morphology as an independent component in his stratal conception of mophology with its intermediate position between derivational and inflectional morphology (132). In addition, Scalise described the following six properties of evaluative affixes:

(a) they change the semantics of the base; they allow the consecutive application of more than one rule of the same type, and at every application the result is an existent word;
(b) they are always external with respect to other derivational suffixes and internal with respect to inflectional morpheme;
(c) they allow, although to a limited extent, repeated application of the same rule on adjacent cycles;
(d) they do not change the syntactic category of the base they are attached to;
(e) they do not change the syntactic features or the subcategorization frame of the base (132-133).

As Scalise points out properties (c) and (d) are neither inflectional nor derivational and therefore make evaluative suffixes distinct from both types of suffixes (133). However, most of the evidence for the above evaluative properties or rules consists of data belonging to the major categories of nouns and adjectives, rarely verbs. This may be due to the fact that diminutive and augmentative nouns are more frequent crosslinguistically than other word classes. In Grandi's words "while evaluative forms with a nominal base word

[1] Department of British and American studies, Faculty of Arts, P.J. Šafárik University, Košice, Slovakia.

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)

are almost universal, the behaviour of other syntactic categories is crosslinguistically less homogeneous“ (47). Nieuwenhuis captured this fact in the following implicational hierarchy of base types for diminutivization and augmentivization valid for European languages (217):

Noun > Adjective, Verb > Adverb, Numeral, Pronoun, Interjection > Determiner

(Universals Archive, #2009; http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/intro originally proposed in Nieuwenhuis 217, revised in Bauer 540)

In accordance with the Universals Archive comment, it should be interpreted as follows: if augmentatives/diminutives can be formed from Determiners, then they can also be formed from Adverbs, Numerals, Pronouns, or Interjections; if from Adverbs, Numerals, Pronouns, or Interjections, then also from Adjectives or Verbs; if from Adjectives or Verbs, then from Nouns (http://typo.uni-konstanz.de). Moreover, the hierarchy suggests that productivity of evaluative morphology declines when shifting to the right of the hierarchy. Following Grandi (48) the same applies to frequency as it also decreases from the left to the right.

Scalise's statements are based on evidence from one language (Italian). On the other hand, Stump (1993) and Bauer (1997) argued against Scalise's claims on the basis of crosslinguistic research. Since Slavonic languages were not included in their sample of languages, I decided to examine the situation there. The scope of analysis in this paper is restricted to verbal affixes because these are usually left out from the research and priority is given to nominal ones. Therefore the aim of this paper is to examine the properties of evaluative affixes formulated by Scalise (1984) in verbal evaluative (more precisely diminutive) affixes from five Slavonic languages: Slovak, Czech, Russian, Serbian, and Croatian.

2. Data

The data were collected from several sources. Firstly, the data sheets from our previous research into phonetic iconicity in evaluative morphology of European languages (Štekauer et al. 2008; Gregová 2009; Körtvélyessy and Kolaříková, 2009) were used. The data sheets included the core vocabulary comprising 35 lexical items assumed to exist in nearly all languages. The items covered 4 major word classes: nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. The data sheets were completed by linguists who were native speakers of the object language.

Secondly, for the purposes of the present paper it was necessary to acquire more detailed information on evaluative verbs in several Slavonic languages. Therefore, additional data were collected from grammar books, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and available research articles related to diminutivization and augmentativization in the selected Slavonic languages. The sources with complete bibliographical data are included in the references.

3. Analysis

All Slavonic languages display rich inventories of evaluative, i.e. diminutive and augmentative, affixes. The common base types for the morphological process of diminution include nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. The hierarchy of the bases is in line with the Universal 2009 from Plank and Filimonova's Universals Archive (see section 1.). In this section, verbal diminutive affixes in Slovak, Czech, Russian, Serbian and Croatian will be examined in relation to each of the six properties of evaluative affixes defined by Scalise (132-133).

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)

3.1. Evaluative suffixes change the semantics of the base

The validity of the first property seems obvious and self-explanatory. A diminutive marker is added and as a result there is at least a small alteration in form and meaning. However, Bauer finds this criterion not convincing enough and "not relevant to defining evaluative morphology" (544) as it modifies the meaning of the base rather than changes it. A similar approach is taken by Aksakov and Shachmatov cited in Vinogradov (100-101) with respect to evaluative nouns in Russian. This property will be examined in more details in verbal diminutive affixes in Slovak, Czech, Russian, Serbian and Croatian. Verbs in all these Slavonic languages are formed by means of evaluative suffixes or a combination of prefixes and suffixes. Interestingly, a diminutive morpheme -k- was observed in all included languages. The richest inventory of different verbal evaluative suffixes is found in Serbian and Croatian. Verbal diminutivization by means of suffixation is illustrated in (1).

(1)

Slovak
bežať: bežkať: run: run + DIM
kopať: kopkať: dig: dig + DIM
robiť: robkať: do: do + DIM

Czech
běžet: běžkat: run: run + DIM
ležet: ležkat: lie: lie + DIM
spát: spinkat: sleep: sleep + DIM

Russian
spať: spateňki: sleep: sleep + DIM
gryzť: gryzkať: bite: bite + DIM
dremať: dremkať: snooze: snooze + DIM

Serbian
grisati: grickati: bite: bite + DIM
smejiti se: smejuljiti se: laugh: laugh + DIM

Croatian
govorati: govorkati: speak: speak + DIM
pjevati: pjevuckati: sing: sing + DIM

The Slovak linguists Bosák (1980), Pisárčiková (1981), Bartáková (1995) carried out research into several aspects of Slovak diminutive verbs and they also hold the position that verbal diminutive suffix -k- adds modification to the meaning of the base. Another modification of the meaning usually with intensifying effect results from prefixation of a diminutive verb with prefixes po- and pri-: poklepkať: knock +DIM, pricupkať: patter about +DIM. The following prefixes might be used with diminutivized verbs in Slovak: za-, od-, s-, u-, v-, vo-, vy-, do-,; zachrumkať: crunch + DIM, schrumkať: crunch + DIM, ucapkať: pat + DIM, vyzobkať: peck + DIM, dokyvkať: swing + DIM. Similarly in Russian, Serbian and Croatian a combination of prefixation and suffixation of certain verbs results in a diminutive meaning: Russian: po-, pochochatyvať: chuckle + DIM, poščipyvať: pinch + DIM, Croatian: po-, pri-, pro-: porazgovarati: chat + DIM , pozabaviti se: entertain + DIM, prikriti: cover up + DIM, pridržati: hold on + DIM, promuckati: stammer + DIM. However, these prefixed diminutivized verbs in Croatian are not considered to be proper or typical diminutives (Barić et al. 375).

3.2.Evaluative affixes allow the consecutive application of more than one rule of the same type, and at every application the result is an existent word

Evidence from Italian is exemplified by fuoco: fuocherello: fuocherellino „fire – little fire – nice little fire" (Scalise 132). This property may also be illustrated by numerous examples from our sample of Slavonic languages. Our data follow the

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)

above rule since traditionally in Slavonic languages a distinction is made between diminutives of the so-called first degree and second degree, sometimes even of the third degree:

(6)

Slovak

oheň: ohník: ohníček (fire – fire +DIM first degree – fire + DIM first degree + DIM second degree)

Czech

kladivo: kladívko: kladívečko (hammer – hammer + DIM first degree – hammer + DIM first degree + DIM second degree)

Russian

cvet: cvetok: cvetoček (flower – flower + DIM first degree – flower + DIM first degree + DIM second degree)

Serbian

oko: okce: okance (flower – flower + DIM first degree – flower + DIM first degree + DIM second degree)

More details on Slovak diminutives can be found in a recent comparative study by Kačmárová (2010).

Moreover, it is possible to attach rival suffixes in order to form a diminutive of the same degree, which may be illustrated by the following example from Slovak and Czech and Croatian:

(7)

Slovak

strom: stromček/stromík
tree: tree+DIM/tree+DIM; little tree
kameň: kamenček/kamienok
stone: stone)+DIM/stone+DIM, small stone

Czech

oko: očenko/ očinko/ očičko
eye+DIM/eye+DIM/eye+DIM
oheň: ohýnek/ ohník fire+DIM/fire+DIM

Croatian

ruka: rukica/ručica
(hand+DIM/hand+DIM)

A similar distinction between diminutive verbs of the first and the second degree is maintained in Slovak, Czech, Croatian and Serbian as exemplified in (8).

(8)

Slovak

ležať: ležkať: ležinkať lie: lie DIM first degree: lie DIM DIM second degree
spať: spinkať: spinočkať: sleep: sleep DIM first degree: sleep DIM second degree

Czech

ležet: ležkat: ležinkat lie: lie DIM first degree: lie DIM second degree

Croatian

kopati: kopkati: kopuckati dig: dig DIM first degree: dig DIM second degree

Serbian

pevati: pevkati: pevuckati sing: sing DIM first degree: sing DIM second degree

Interestingly, Russian diminutive verbs do not seem to differentiate between verbal diminution of two or three degrees.

3.3. Evaluative affixes are always external with respect to other derivational suffixes and internal with respect to inflectional morpheme

This property is illustrated by Scalise with the example taken from Italian: contrabbandierucolo „small time smuggler“ = contrabbando (contraband) + derivational suffix –iere (agentive) + evaluative suffix –ucolo + inflectional morpheme –i (masculine, plural) (113). Similar instances can be found in Slavonic languages, for instance, in Slovak:

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)

(9)
Slovak
učitelík (teacher diminutive or pejorative), učitelíci = učiť (teach) + derivational suffix –eľ (agentive) + evaluative suffix –ík (pejorative) + inflectional suffix -i (plural, masculine, alternation of consonantal segment /k/ to /c/)

Considering the position of verbal evaluative affixes in Slovak, Czech, Serbian and Croatian, they always precede inflectional suffixes:

(10)
Slovak
spinkať: sleep + DIM, driemkať: snooze +DIM,

Czech
spinkat: sleep + DIM, ťapkat: patter + DIM,

Russian
spateňki: sleep + DIM, gryzkať: bite + DIM,

Serbian
pevuckati: sing + DIM, prosjakati: beg + DIM

Croatian
pjevuckati: sing + DIM, govorkati: speak + DIM

This corresponds to the claim that derivational suffixes tend to occur closer to the base than inflectional suffixes, which are more peripheral (Plank, 1994, 172). On the other hand, prominent linguists including Vinogradov, Aksakov and Potebňa (cited in Vinogradov, 1986) suggest that Russian diminutives should be regarded as a result of an inflectional process (the so-called slovoizmenenje) not a derivational one (slovoobrazovanje) based on the facts that neither significant semantic change nor word-class change takes place. The opposite view as for Russian was expressed by Manova (2005), who investigated, apart from other phenomena, the nature of diminutive nouns in three inflecting Slavonic languages – Russian, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian. Her detailed examination of traditional demarcation criteria assigning the category of diminution either to inflection or derivation revealed that diminutives in these three languages behave more derivation-like than inflection-like. Therefore, following Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi (1994), Manova (2005) considers diminutivization a case of non-prototypical derivation.

The field of morphology in general lacks agreement regarding the derivational or inflectional character of evaluative suffixes. Evidence based on the data from certain languages, e.g. Fula (Katamba, 228) points to the inflectional nature of diminutives, whereas the data from other languages are clearly in favour of derivational character of diminution, e.g. Dutch (Booij, 1996). Bybee (1985) expressed the model of morphological continuum with pure inflection and pure derivation at two ends. Italian diminutives are assumed to form a separate category (Scalise, 1984). Combining and developing further Scalise's and Bybee's approach Melissaropoulou and Ralli (2008) suggest that diminutive suffixes are placed between inflection and derivation in a continuum and the fact whether they are closer to one end or another is a matter of linguistic variation and of the properties of the particular suffix. This accounts for the fact that certain processes or features may be derivational in one language but inflectional in another. The authors also suggest that word formation processes and affixes occur in a scalar hierarchy within the continuum, which explains that some diminutive suffixes do not behave like typical derivational suffixes.

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)

3.4. Evaluative affixes allow, although to a limited extent, repeated application of the same rule on adjacent cycles

Apparently, repetition of the same affix does not apply to verbal evaluative suffixes in any of the five Slavonic languages, or at least I failed to find evidence in the available sources. The only exception may be represented by repetition of Czech sufix – in in the verbal diminutive of the third degree capininkat: pat + DIM + DIM. However, the diminutive Czech verb stylistically belongs to mother-child talk.

3.5. Evaluative affixes do not change the syntactic category of the base they are attached to

This feature of evaluative affixes is undoubtedly the most peculiar and difficult to explain. Not only evaluative suffixes rarely change the syntactic category of the base word but also they can be attached to words belonging to different syntactic categories. This results in violation of the Unitary Base Hypothesis (Aronoff, 1976). According to the Unitary Base Hypothesis one and the same affix cannot be combined with two or more categories but obviously there are evaluative suffixes which do not select bases of a unique category.

The examples in (12) from Slovak, Czech, Russian and Serbian demonstrate that certain evaluative suffixes select the bases belonging to different word class (syntactic category) without changing the category of the base word. On the other hand, the number of other verbal evaluative suffixes conforming to the Unitary Base Hypothesis is considerably higher, especially in Serbian and Croatian.

(12)
Slovak
N-DIM > N oč-k-o
eye-DIM-neuter nominal suffix
V-DIM > V bež-k-a-ť
run-DIM-thematic vowel-infinitive suffix

Czech
N-DIM > N kladiv-k-o
hammer-DIM-neuter substantival suffix
V-DIM > V lež-k-a-t
lie-DIM-thematic vowel-infinitive suffix

Russian
N-DIM > N noč-eňk-a
night-DIM-feminine nominal suffix
V-DIM > V spať-eňk-i
sleep-DIM-verbal infinitive suffix

Serbian
N-DIM > N trav-k-a
grass-DIM-feminine nominal suffix
V-DIM > V kop-k-a-ti
dig-DIM-thematic vowel-infinitive suffix

As Bauer points out, "it does seem generally to be the case that evaluative morphology does not change the syntactic category of the base. This might be expected from the function of evaluative morphology. A noun which is noted as being of a particular size is still a noun; a noun which is stated to be liked or disliked is still a noun; an adjective which does not apply with its full force still remains an adjective" (549). This statement obviously holds in the above examples.

3.6. Evaluative affixes do not change the syntactic features or the sub-categorization frame of the base

The previous property is closely interrelated with the last characteristic suggesting no change of syntactic features of the base. Scalise's evidence is exemplified by idea: ideuzza = idea - little idea, both having the feature of abstract

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)

nouns, mangiare: mangiucchiare = eat - nibble, both being transitive verbs. Stump pointed to the fact that this statement is too rigid and suggested that „it is not necessary to preserve all morphosyntactic feature specifications of the base“ (13). As for Slavonic languages, occasional change of verb class accompanied by a change of a conjugation class was observed. The Slovak verb robiť belongs to the 5. verbal class whereas diminutivized verb robkať has a thematic vowel -a- and belongs to the 1. verbal class. This applies to all verbs in Slovak and Czech formed with a diminutive morpheme -k-. In Russian, for instance, the verb gryzť (bite) is included into the 7. nonproductive verbal class, while gryzkať (bite + DIM) belongs to the 1. productive verbal class.

4. Conclusion

Scalise's statements regarding properties of evaluative affixes were investigated in verbal diminutive affixes from five Slavonic languages: Slovak, Czech, Russian, Serbian and Croatian. The properties (a) and (b) make evaluative affixes similar to derivational affixes and are applicable to verbal diminutive affixes in all included Slavonic languages. The properties (e) and (f) make evaluative affixes similar to inflectional affixes. Although syntactic caterory of the base is not affected, there might be the cases where certain syntactic features, i.e. verb class or conjugation type, might change. The remaining properties (c) and (d) are considered specific for evaluative suffixes. However, the property (d) in general does not apply to Slavonic verbal evaluative affixes, with the exception of a fairly limited number of examples. With respect to the criterion of the position within a word (c), the behaviour of Slavonic verbal evaluative affixes is more derivational than inflectional since they always precede inflectional suffixes. However, this does not reflect their suggested specific intermediary position. It may be concluded that the results in verbal diminutive suffixes from Slovak, Czech, Russian, Serbian and Croatian cast doubt on the validity of Scalise's claims.

References

1. Aronoff, Mark: *Word formation in Generative Grammar.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1976.
2. Barić, Eugenia et al.: *Hrvatska gramatika*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1997.
3. Bartáková, Jarmila: *Modifikované slovesá s morfémou -k- v slovenčine a češtine.* Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty Brněnské univerzity Studia Minora Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Brunensis A 43 (1995): 105-111.
4. Bauer, Laurie: Evaluative morphology: in search of universals. *Studies in Language* 21.3, (1997): 533-575.
5. Booij, G.: Inherent vs. Contextual Inflection and the Split Morphology Hypothesis. *Yearbook of Morphology.* Ed. G. Booij & J. van Marle. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996. 1-16.
6. Bosák, Ján. Z analýzy sufixálnych morfém. *Jazykovedné štúdie* 15, Bratislava. (1980): 43 – 46.
7. Bybee, Joanna: *Morphology. A Study of the Relation between Meaning and Form*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1985.
8. Dressler, Wolfgang U. & Lavinia Merlini Barbaresi: *Morphopragmatics. Diminutives and Intensifiers in Italian, German, and Other Languages*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994.
9. Grandi, Nicola: Restrictions on Italian verbal evaluative suffixes: The role of aspect and actionality. *York Papers in Linguistics* Series 2 – Issue 10, (2009a): 46-66.

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)

10. Gregová, Renáta. On Phonetic Iconicity in Evaluative Morphology of West Slavonic Languages. *Sučasni doslidžennja z inozemnoji filologiji* vypusk 7: zbirnik naukovych prac. - Užgorod: Užgorodskij nacionaľnyj universitet, (2009): 90-93.
11. Kačmárová, Alena: A short survey of diminutives in Slovak and English. *English matters: a collection of papers by the Department of English language and literature faculty*. Ed. Alena Kačmárová. - Prešov: Prešovská univerzita v Prešove, (2010): 17-21.
12. Katamba, Francis: *Morphology.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
13. Klajn, Ivan: *Tvorba reči u savremenom srpskom jeziku.* Drugi deo. Beograd: Zavod zaudžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Matica srpska, 2003.
14. Körtvélyessy, Lívia and Zuzana Kolaříková: On Phonetic Iconicity in Evaluative Morphology of Germanic, Romance and Finno-Ugric Languages. *Galicia English Teachings: Old Pittfalls, Changing Attitudes and New Vistas.* - Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Universytetu Rzeszowskiego (2009): 77-82.
15. Manova, Stela: Derivation versus inflection in three inflecting languages. *Morphology and its Demarcations.* Ed. Dressler, Wolfgang U., Dieter Kastovsky; Oskar Pfeiffer & Franz Rainer. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2005: 233-252.
16. Melissaropoulou, Dimitra and Angella Ralli: Headedness in Diminutive Formation: Evidence from Modern Greek and its Dialectal Variation. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 55 (2008): 183-244.
17. Nieuwenhuis Paul: *Diminutives*. PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985.
18. Pisárčiková, Mária: Slovesá s príznakom zdrobnenosti a ich synonymické vzťahy. *Kultúra slova*, 15 (1981): 33–38.
19. Plank, Frans: Inflection and derivation. *The encyclopedia of language and linguistics*, vol. 3, Ed. R. E. Asher / J. M. Y. Simpson, 1994, 1671-1678.
20. Plank, Frans and Elena Filimonova: *The Universals Archive*. Available at: http://ling.uni-konstanz.de/pages/proj/sprachbau.htm, 2006 (2000).
21. Scalise, Sergio: *Generative morphology*, Dordrecht, Foris, 1984.
22. Štekauer, Pavel et al.: On phonetic iconicity in evaluative morphology. Languages of Europe. *Culture Language and Literature Across Border Regions.* Proceedings of the International Conference, Košice 28 - 29 April 2008, Krosno (2009): 123-132.
23. Vinogradov, Viktor Vladimirovič: *Russkij jazyk. Grammatičeskoje učenije o slove*. Moskva: Vyššaja škola, 1986.

BDD-A20185 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:37:11 UTC)