

Second-grade diminutives in Czech and Slovak: A contrastive study with data from corpora

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Diminutivization is so productive in Slavic that it is even possible to attach more than one diminutive suffix on adjacent cycles: Czech / Polish *dom* ‘house’ → *dom-ek* ‘small house’ → DIM2 *dom-eč-ek* ‘very small house’. In the literature, diminutives with two diminutive suffixes (DIM1-DIM2) can be found under second-grade, secondary or double diminutives.

A Slavic language has about ten DIM1 suffixes on average. Since all DIM1 suffixes derive the same meaning, one expects them to combine freely with each other in secondary diminutives but of all DIM1 suffixes only a few can be used as DIM2 suffixes. Manova and Winternitz (2011) (hereafter M&W) report heavy restrictions on the combinability of the diminutive suffixes in double and multiple diminutives in Bulgarian and Polish. M&W claim that only productive DIM1 suffixes surface as DIM2 suffixes and that all combinations of the DIM-DIM2 suffixes are fixed, in the sense that there are also phonological and morphological constraints on the combinability of the suffixes. In this study, we check M&W’s observations against data from Czech and Slovak but go beyond M&W in validating DIM1-DIM2 combinations in corpora. Since a major problem with the analysis of double diminutives is the verification of the examples and one tends to believe that double diminutives are hardly used in written texts, we decided to turn to corpora. The 100 most frequent Czech and Slovak second-grade diminutives were extracted from the respective national corpora: SYN2015 and Prim-7.0-public-all. Both corpora were released in 2015 and are lemmatized and morphologically tagged. All words ending in a sequence of letters that coincides with a DIM1-DIM2 combination were collected and manually checked to ensure a step-by-step derivation as found in double diminutives: noun → noun-DIM1 → noun-DIM1-DIM2. In other words, we have two types of nouns: 1) expressing smallness, e.g. the above-cited *dom-eč-ek* ‘house-DIM1-DIM2’, as well as 2) expressing affection, e.g. Czech *děd-eč-ek* ‘grandfather-DIM1-DIM2’.

In the talk, we contrast the formation of first- and second-grade diminutives in Czech and Slovak. The established DIM1-DIM2 patterns are compared with those in Bulgarian, Polish and Russian double diminutives as reported in Szymanek and Derkach (2005), M&W and Manova (2015). Additionally, based on our corpus data, we draw conclusions about the prototypical semantics of double diminutives (in written texts), i.e. whether such diminutives are more frequently used for expression of smallness or for expression of affection. Thus, the results of our research are of relevance not only to linguistic theory but also to foreign language learning and can serve for mastering the formation and use of double diminutives in a number of Slavic languages.

2.793 characters

Selected references

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- Manova, Stela and Kimberley Winternitz. 2011. Suffix Order in Double and Multiple Diminutives: With Data from Polish and Bulgarian. *Studies in Polish Linguistics* 6: 115–138.
- Szymanek, Bogdan and Tetyana Derkach. 2005. Constraints on the Derivation of Double Dminutives in Polish and Ukrainian. *Studies in Polish Linguistics* 2: 93–112.

Corpora

Czech National Corpus, version SYN2015, available at:

<https://wiki.korpus.cz/doku.php/en:cnk:uvod>

Slovak National Corpus, version Prim-7.0-public-all, available at:

http://korpus.sk/structure1_en.html