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This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Grandi, N. (2026). EVALUATIVE MORPHOLOGY: 40 YEARS AND NOT FEELING IT. LINGUE E LINGUAGGIO, 1/2026, 11-29 [10.1418/121388].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/1076111> since: 2026-08-05

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1418/121388>

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EVALUATIVE MORPHOLOGY: 40 YEARS AND NOT FEELING IT

NICOLA GRANDI

ABSTRACT: This paper surveys the studies on evaluative morphology over the forty years since its formal recognition as an autonomous field in Scalise (1984). After revisiting the foundational assumptions concerning the morphological status, semantic properties, and pragmatic profile of evaluative constructions, the paper reviews the major theoretical debates that shaped the field in its early decades, including the position of evaluatives between derivation and inflection, their polysemous semantic organization, and their intrinsic morphopragmatic dimension. It then considers more recent developments, highlighting the expansion of empirical coverage and the emergence of new research directions, such as approximation, the interaction between evaluative morphology and pluractionality, and the acquisition of evaluative morphology. The final section outlines a non-exhaustive set of promising topics that remain comparatively underexplored: the relationship between evaluative morphology and sociolinguistic variation, evaluative morphology in contact situations, evaluative constructions in sign languages, and the role of evaluatives in language disorders.

KEYWORDS: evaluative morphology, diminutives, approximation, pluractionality, word formation.

1. 'TRADITIONAL' TOPICS¹

Most of the contributions in this volume were presented at a workshop organized as part of the annual conference of the Italian Society of Linguistics (SLI) held in Catania, Italy, in 2024 (*Nuovi fenomeni semantico-valutativi nello spazio linguistico italiano*). The explicit mention of the date is not accidental and I deliberately highlight it because studies on evaluative morphology are one of the very few cases, at least in linguistics, for which it is possible to uncontroversially identify a 'foundational' date. In fact, although studies on single evaluative morphological processes such as diminutive or augmentative formation have comparatively ancient origins, it is only in 1984 that the existence of a homogeneous area of word formation processes is first hypothesized.

¹ I would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their suggestions and advice, as well as Ivan Lacić for carefully reading the text. I take full responsibility for any errors or inaccuracies.

The foundational moment of the field is conventionally attributed to Scalise (1984), who proposed an autonomous morphological component that is neither fully derivational nor inflectional. He identified a distinct set of “evaluative rules” governing the behaviour of evaluative affixes ± such as diminutives, augmentatives, pejoratives, and amelioratives ± on the basis of specific syntactic, semantic, and morphological properties. Scalise’s defining properties of evaluative morphology soon became a reference point. Among them are the so-called categorial neutrality (i.e., evaluative affixes neither change the syntactic category nor the subcategorization frame of the base); the characteristic semantic features of evaluative morphemes; their position with respect to inflection and derivation (evaluative affixes are generally external to other derivational morphemes and internal to inflectional ones); the readjustments they can trigger; and the possibility of multiple application of the same evaluative affix. According to Scalise, some of these properties are typically inflectional (e.g., categorial neutrality), others are typically derivational (e.g., changes in the meaning of the base), while others are specific to evaluatives, distinguishing them from both inflection and derivation. This led Scalise to posit a “third morphology”, namely a dedicated set of evaluative rules placed after word formation rules (derivation) and before inflectional rules. Although these generalizations were based primarily on Italian diminutives, they proved influential in stimulating broader cross-linguistic and typological research.

In Grandi (to appear) ± referenced also for bibliographical guidance ± I reconstruct the salient historical stages of this field of study. Here I simply highlight the central topics in the decades following Scalise (1984). Interest in evaluative morphology grew rapidly, first leading to an expansion of the empirical record, then to increasingly refined descriptions of evaluative processes, and finally to a broadening of research agendas. Within this trajectory, three themes recur with particular prominence. It must be emphasized that early work focused on suffixes, especially diminutives. The scope subsequently expanded to augmentatives and, to a lesser extent, to pejoratives. Moreover, it became clear that evaluative morphology covers a much wider set of phenomena, including prefixes (e.g., in Bantu languages). Thus, although Scalise speaks of evaluative suffixes, for the early post-1984 period it is often more appropriate to speak of evaluative affixes.

The second topic concerns the semantics of evaluative affixes or, more pertinently for this period, the semantics of diminutives, since most studies were based on diminutive formation. A key result is that the polysemy of diminutives is far less irregular than previously assumed. Instead, diminutive meanings tend to form a structured network of partially distinct but cross-linguistically stable senses, modelled as a radial category in Jurafsky (1993,

1996). Finally, research established the eminently pragmatic nature of many evaluative effects. Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi (1994), for instance, show that evaluatives are a paradigmatic case of morphopragmatics, arguing that evaluative morphology systematically encodes pragmatic effects $\pm$ such as endearment or irony $\pm$ that are not incidental but inherent to the morphological rule. These insights shifted the focus toward a richer interpretative framework in which semantic and pragmatic functions are viewed as co-constitutive of evaluative constructions.

These three topics provide the backbone of most descriptions and theories of evaluatives in the first two decades or so after Scalise (1984). Alongside them, a wide range of new themes gradually emerged, driven by the growing availability of data drawn from an increasing number of descriptions of typologically diverse languages. We can say that the most appropriate label for the object of the earliest studies is evaluative affixes, given that the focus was almost exclusively on suffixes and, later, on prefixes. At this later stage, however, the broader label 'evaluative morphology' becomes more appropriate, as non-affixal evaluative phenomena $\pm$ such as reduplication and compounding $\pm$ enter the picture.

The first twenty years of the 21st century witnessed substantial growth in both the empirical database and the theoretical scope of evaluative morphology. For a detailed overview, I again refer to Grandi (to appear). Here I simply note a crucial step: the first attempt to define evaluative constructions in a way that goes beyond the relatively intuitive notions guiding much earlier work. This definition (Grandi 2002) is based on a functional-semantic condition and a formal condition. The functional-semantic condition states that a construction qualifies as evaluative if it assigns to a concept a value other than its standard one (within the relevant semantic scale), either from a descriptive perspective (i.e., based on a physical, observable, objective property) or from a qualitative perspective (i.e., based on the speaker's subjective assessment). The formal condition requires an explicit expression of the standard (via a lexically autonomous form recognized by speakers as a word) and an evaluative marker that signals deviation from that standard. This definition is particularly well suited to comparative work because it provides a semantic-functional basis for cross-linguistic comparison without tying evaluation to language-specific formal criteria. It therefore delineates the core of evaluative constructions clearly and, in doing so, helps identify peripheral or non-prototypical instances of the category.

If, as seen above, we can consider 1984 as the moment when evaluative morphology achieved the status of a fully autonomous field of study, we can conclude this summary and non-exhaustive reconstruction of its early years by conventionally setting 2015 as the date when this field of research reached full maturity, with the publication of the *Edinburgh Handbook of Evaluative*

Morphology, by Grandi and Körtvélyessy. This handbook represents the first ± and at the moment only ± work which offers an overview of all perspectives of inquiry that have hitherto emerged and of all phenomena attributable to evaluative word formation. Evaluative morphology has now gained its own full autonomy not only within morphological studies but also within the broad spectrum of linguistics.

2. NEW HORIZONS IN THE STUDIES ON EVALUATIVE MORPHOLOGY

As mentioned above, the articles included in this volume originate from a workshop held as part of the SLI annual conference in 2024, i.e., exactly forty years after the date conventionally taken as the founding moment of evaluative morphology studies. A glance at the workshop programme and the table of contents of this volume reveals something striking: the near absence of explicit discussion of the topics that most characterized the field in its early decades. From my perspective, this is important for three interrelated reasons. First, it suggests that a broad scientific consensus has emerged on many foundational issues. Second, it allows scholars to devote sustained attention to phenomena that were initially neglected, without implying that they are secondary. Third, the area has seen rapid growth in data availability in just a few years, a clear indication of its continuing potential. Evaluative morphology is therefore a young but well-established field with considerable prospects for further development.

Below I offer a short, albeit far from exhaustive, list of research areas that have emerged in recent years and have opened up new research perspectives in this area of study, contributing significantly to its growth.

2.1 *Approximation*

The first issue I would like to mention concerns some semantic functions of evaluative markers that have been shown to be far more relevant than previously thought. I am referring, in particular, to semantic functions that express deviation from the standard in the qualitative dimension, namely approximation, attenuation, and intensification. Among them, approximation has long remained relatively overlooked compared to attenuation and intensification, which have been surveyed, among others, in Grandi (2017) and Napoli & Ravetto (2017) respectively. However, recent works, particularly the 2023 special issue of *Zeitschrift für Wortbildung* (ZWJW), edited by Masini *et al.*, have provided a crucial theoretical and empirical foundation for approaching approximation as a

distinct evaluative function, rather than merely a by-product of diminutivization. And it is no coincidence that approximation is also the subject of many of the contributions in this volume.

At its core, morphological approximation involves the encoding of imprecision, borderline category membership, or non-prototypical instances of a concept. It allows speakers to refer to entities that are not quite fully instantiations of a category but are close enough to be contextually recognized as such. This semantic space overlaps with vagueness, attenuation, and analogy, yet maintains a distinct cognitive profile centred around gradience and partial category membership.

Masini *et al.* (2023), in the introductory article to the ZWJW volume, argue that approximation should be understood as a scalar phenomenon involving proximity to prototypical meanings or referents. They emphasize that approximation often interacts with $\pm$ but does not collapse into $\pm$ functions like attenuation (which involves measurable reduction in intensity or size), imitation (which entails deliberate non-identity), or vagueness (which denotes epistemic uncertainty). Approximation is thus best described as a grammatical and morphological encoding of semantic proximity without categorical completeness. What makes the linguistic expression of approximation interesting is the absolutely asymmetrical distribution of the formal strategies that realize it. At the theoretical level, approximation can coincide with an element that does not realize the prototypical image of a category, but merely approaches it, either by default or by excess. That is, if an item narrowly misses the target or narrowly exceeds it, we can say it has approached the target in both cases. Yet, linguistically there is a clear and quite surprising bias toward the first situation, i.e., attenuation seems to coincide with a failure to reach the target, not with exceeding it. This bias is confirmed by the frequent cross-linguistic correlation between approximation and diminutivization. In fact, diminutives are one of the most frequent morphological strategies used to express approximation cross-linguistically, and this explains why in the radial models proposed by Jurafsky (1993, 1996) and Prieto (2015), approximation is included among the possible semantic extensions of diminutives. While diminutives are traditionally associated with size reduction or affectivity and endearment, they also function regularly to mark referents that are not fully standard, typical, or complete versions of a concept. As stated above, what is significant is that cross-linguistically this approximative function is asymmetrically distributed: diminutives are commonly used for approximation, while augmentatives rarely express anything resembling approximation (cf. Stošić & Amiot 2023). Augmentatives tend to push beyond the category norm rather than hover near its boundaries. This asymmetry supports the hypothesis that approximation is

cognitively tied to downward scalar movement. That is, toward the categorical core without reaching it.

A further indication of the expression of approximation's place within the evaluation is given by the diachronic dynamism of the elements used to express it. As is well known, one of the characteristics of evaluation is the tendency for renewal of the formal elements used to express it (cf. Grandi 2011). It almost seems that evaluative morphological markers are particularly prone to wear and tear, perhaps because of the particular expressive charge that accompanies them. For example, the diminutive suffixes of Latin have not retained this value in Romance languages and have been replaced in the expression of diminutive value by suffixes that were not evaluative in Latin (cf. Hakamies 1951). A very similar tendency seems to characterize approximation. Micheli (2023) examines the Italian prefixes *semi-* and *para-*, both of which have undergone significant semantic drift in contemporary journalistic Italian. Originally tied to technical or spatial meanings $\pm$ *semi-*, denoting partial quantity, and *para-*, indicating adjacency or falsehood $\pm$ these prefixes have increasingly come to serve approximative and evaluative functions in common usage. For instance, a term like *semirivoluzione* 'half revolution' is used not merely to denote an exact 50% measure but to signal something that has the appearance or partial effect of a revolution without fulfilling all the criteria of the term. Similarly, *paragiornalista* 'para journalist' does not necessarily imply spatial or professional adjacency but rather someone who approximates the role of a journalist, often with a pejorative tone. Micheli's analysis thus illustrates how forms used to express approximation follow renewal mechanisms in diachronic change, very similar to those described in the literature for other evaluative forms, starting with diminutives.

So, data suggests that approximation, although sometimes overlapping with attenuation and comparison, represents a distinct function within morphology. It typically signals partial category membership, non-prototypicality, or gradated likeness. Unlike attenuation, which primarily denotes less intensity or quantity, approximation deals with ontological incompleteness, the idea that a referent is 'almost X' but not quite.

This insight introduces a broader typology of language approximation strategies. While many languages exploit evaluative morphology to mark approximation, the precise mechanisms vary typologically. Moreover, the degree to which these markers are conventionalized or context-dependent remains an open question. The field thus stands to benefit from more cross-linguistic corpus studies and experimental semantics research that systematically test the boundaries and functions of morphological approximation.

2.2 Evaluative markers and pluractionality

The second issue concerns the relationship between evaluative markers and verbs. Evaluative studies have long been heavily skewed toward the noun and, to a lesser extent, the adjective. The other parts of speech have been less studied and only in recent years have they begun to attract scholarly attention (cf., for example, Castiglione (to appear) for some notes on adverbial evaluative morphology). The literature on the relationship between evaluative morphology and verbs is now quite rich. However, a possible correlation between verbal evaluative morphology and pluractionality has emerged only recently. In the past, evaluative morphology and pluractionality have traditionally been studied as distinct domains: evaluative morphology concerns size, intensity, and affective value; while pluractionality expresses multiplicity of events (Cusic 1981; Mattiola 2019). However, recent research reveals convergences between these categories, particularly in their interaction with aspectual and scalar parameters (Grandi & Körtvélyessy 2015; Tovenä 2015; Tovenä & Kihm 2008). The relationship between evaluative morphology and pluractionality suggests a possible evaluative nature of pluractionality itself. This perspective hinges on the idea that the expression of repeated or distributed events is not only aspectual or quantificational but may also reflect the speaker's stance or pragmatic assessment of the event structure. This hypothesis can be supported by the fact that in some languages (for example Romance languages) pluractional markers are formally identical to evaluative morphemes and such syncretism suggests a deeper morphological affinity, possibly due to shared cognitive and grammatical pathways.

Grandi (2008, 2009, 2015) suggests that when verbal evaluative suffixes encode pluractionality $\pm$ by multiplying events, participants, or affected objects $\pm$ they may also imply a subjective judgment. For example, in Italian, *picchiettare*, 'to knock repeatedly/lightly', from *picchiare*, 'to hit', does not merely pluralize the base event but may also convey a sense of lesser intensity, increased annoyance, or triviality. The morphologically encoded plurality of events thus comes with a scalar and/or affective nuance: the repeated action is often perceived as weaker, scattered, or excessive, depending on context.

Mattiola (2019) does not classify pluractionality as evaluative per se, but his typological surveys show that pluractional constructions often carry non-neutral interpretative effects, especially in terms of agentive control, affectedness, or event prominence. For instance, pluractional constructions in some languages signal either an impact mitigation of each event (as in distributive contexts), or a heightening of intensity due to cumulative repetition. These semantic nuances open the possibility that certain pluractional forms act as implicit evaluations

of the action, even if the morphological process is not overtly evaluative in a traditional morphological sense.

In many languages, morphological reduplication is a frequent pluractional strategy. Reduplication, however, is also known cross-linguistically as a means of encoding affective or expressive content (for example, in contact languages, to which I will return in the last section of this article). This overlap suggests that reduplicative pluractionality may inherit some evaluative force, especially when used in child-directed speech, pejorative contexts, or emotionally charged narratives. Moreover, pluractionality often interacts with scalarity, which is a core component of evaluative morphology. Scalar interpretation arises when multiple sub-events are perceived as elements that either increase or decrease the prototypical intensity of the base verb. For example, in some contexts, repeating an action may weaken its force (as in tentative or hesitant motion), while in others, it may intensify the event through accumulation. Thus, pluractionality can be semantically ambiguous between attenuative and augmentative readings, an ambiguity typical of evaluative morphology. Consider the following example:

- Italian: *corricchiare* ‘to jog lightly, now and then’ (from *correre* ‘to run’), implies a casual, perhaps unserious repetition of motion ± evaluative in its trivialization of the base activity;
- Hebrew: *kifcec* ‘to jump around’ (pluractional from *kafac* ‘to jump’), can have playful or chaotic connotations, suggesting not just repetition but a speaker stance toward the manner of the action.

In both cases, the pluractional form may index speaker evaluation, even when the morphology is not explicitly affective. This supports Grandi’s claim that pluractionality and evaluation may share not only formal morphology but also deeper cognitive and communicative functions, since both express deviation from a prototypical event, often for pragmatic or expressive purposes.

Thus, while not all pluractional constructions are evaluative, the semantic and pragmatic overlap between the two domains is significant. It invites a broader conception of evaluation in language, one that includes not just diminutive and augmentative values but also judgments of repetitiveness, dispersion, triviality, or excess. Pluractionality, in this light, may be seen as a bridge between aspect and evaluation, contributing to a unified theory of morphologically encoded speaker perspective.

2.3 *The acquisition of evaluative morphology*

A third issue I want to focus on concerns the acquisition of evaluative morphology. In this case, recent literature is almost exclusively dedicated to diminutives. Evaluative morphology seems to be a key area of early language acquisition.

In particular, diminutives stand out for their early and frequent use in child-directed speech across a range of languages. The cross-linguistic research by Savickienė & Dressler (2007), along with further studies by Dressler *et al.* (2012), and Dressler & Korecky-Kröll (2015), provides crucial insight into how and why diminutives are acquired early and relatively easily by children.

Diminutives are salient due to their phonological transparency, high frequency, and morphological regularity, especially in languages with rich inflectional morphology. The 2007 volume by Savickienė & Dressler presents a typologically diverse set of studies showing that children acquiring languages such as Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, Dutch, Spanish, and German often begin using diminutive forms at an early stage, frequently before age two. These forms are not only part of the input but also serve as cognitive and linguistic scaffolds that facilitate the segmentation of words, the identification of morphological patterns, and even emotional bonding.

Dressler & Korecky-Kröll (2015) argue that evaluative morphology exemplifies how morphology interacts with pragmatic and cognitive factors in acquisition. Diminutives, for example, often carry affective meanings that align with the emotional context of child-directed speech, making them particularly resonant for young learners. Their formal properties – typically involving suffixation – are accessible due to their prosodic salience and consistent phonotactics. Thus, diminutives serve as a bridge between lexical and grammatical development.

Dressler *et al.* (2012) examine the acquisition of German diminutives and compounds, highlighting the role of morphological type and frequency. German, a language with a productive diminutive system (e.g., *-chen*, *-lein*), shows early child use of diminutives that often outpaces compound formation. This supports the hypothesis that frequent, regular, and semantically transparent morphological patterns are acquired earlier. Moreover, cross-linguistic comparisons indicate that in languages where diminutives are both highly frequent and morphologically transparent (e.g., Lithuanian or Russian), children show earlier and more robust acquisition patterns than in languages where evaluative morphology is less prominent or more irregular.

In conclusion, the acquisition of evaluative suffixes, especially diminutives, reveals the interplay between linguistic structure, cognitive readiness, and input frequency. These forms, far from being marginal or ornamental, play a central role in early morphological development and exemplify how children exploit formal regularities and socio-pragmatic cues to acquire complex linguistic structures. It would be interesting to understand whether evaluatives could also play a central role in second language acquisition, especially in cases where the target language has rich evaluative morphology.

3. POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As we have seen, studies on evaluative morphology have grown considerably in recent decades, from all points of view: the number of scholars working on it has increased; the number of languages analysed and thus the availability of data has grown; the perspectives for investigation have increased; etc.²

However, this field of inquiry is still relatively young and, therefore, there is a rather large number of topics that have only been touched upon in the literature and that await further investigation. The following are some areas on which the literature is still very limited and which, in my opinion, show great promise. Of course, the indication of these areas is the result of my subjective choice and, therefore, cannot be exhaustive.

3.1 *Evaluative morphology and sociolinguistic variation*

The first issue I want to mention concerns evaluative morphology and sociolinguistic variation. Anyone who speaks a language rich in evaluative morphology knows very well that the use of diminutives, augmentatives, etc., is strongly conditioned by the context in which communication takes place, by its participants, by the type of texts that are produced, etc. For example, it is definitely more likely to use evaluative constructions in an informal context than in a highly formal one. In addition, evaluative morphology is known to be widely used in communicative situations involving children. These are obvious considerations, verging almost on the trivial. Yet there is a lack of systematic studies on correlations between the occurrence of evaluative constructions and social parameters. This is, in my view, the most striking gap in this field of research.

In my opinion, evaluative morphology could offer a crucial contribution in the study of interface between word formation and sociolinguistic variation. The few studies devoted to this issue have emphasized social and pragmatic dimensions of evaluative constructions, illustrating how they can function as markers of identity, register, and interpersonal stance. In this perspective, I want to mention the contributions of Gaeta (2015) and Bernal (2012), who underscore the relevance of evaluative morphology in expressing diastatic and diaphasic variation, particularly in contexts of fictive orality and informal registers.

² This growth, as mentioned above, is largely due to technological development. It is important to remember how technology today has also contributed to changing research methodologies. Studies on evaluative morphology are no exception. Today, there are studies on evaluatives from a computational and quantitative perspective that cannot be discussed in detail but are nevertheless worth mentioning, at least cursorily, such as Kamber & Huyghe (2023), Micheli & Pellegrini (2025), and Lacić (2025, 2026).

Gaeta (2015) provides a systematic account of how evaluative morphology operates as a sociolinguistic variable. He argues that evaluatives are not merely tools for modifying the denotative content of nouns but also serve as stylistic devices that index speaker attitudes and social positioning. For example, in Italian, suffixes like *-ino* or *-accio* do more than express smallness or pejoration – they convey familiarity, irony, contempt, or intimacy, depending on context. These nuances are strongly shaped by the speaker's regional background, age, gender, and communicative intent. Gaeta demonstrates that evaluatives are often deployed in informal registers and may contribute to the construction of in-group solidarity or expressive distancing, thus participating actively in the negotiation of social identities.

Bernal (2012) investigates appreciative derivation in the translation of fictive dialogue, particularly in literature and audiovisual media. Her analysis shows that evaluative suffixes are frequently used to replicate diastatic variation ± especially colloquial or substandard speech ± when translating characters' voices. For instance, in Spanish, suffixes such as *-ito*, *-illo*, or *-azo* can signal class, age, or emotional involvement, rendering them critical tools for representing sociolinguistic nuance. Bernal underscores the translator's challenge of preserving not only meaning but also the social indexicality encoded by evaluatives in the source language.

Other data supports these findings. Studies in Spanish, Russian, and Portuguese have highlighted the social and emotional density of evaluative forms, often linked to regional dialects or generational speech. For example, in Spanish, the pervasive use of diminutives is not merely stylistic but embedded in politeness norms and affective strategies (cf., among others, Mendoza 2005). Similarly, Russian diminutives encode a wide range of social meanings, from endearment to sarcasm, mediated by gender, age, and relationship (cf., among others, Andrews 1999 and Trubnikova 2021).

Partially linked to the relationship between sociolinguistic variation and evaluative morphology is Grandi's 2010 research on the diffusion of the augmentative suffix *-one* in Italian literary texts belonging to different genres. The study shows how the stylistic choices of authors influence the occurrence of the suffix, which is very frequent in texts that tend to reproduce spoken language patterns and whose protagonists belong to "lower" social strata.

Evaluative morphology thus functions as a site of sociolinguistic negotiation, where grammar intersects with identity, power, and emotion. It plays a key role in shaping linguistic variation across registers and social groups, offering insight into how morphologically encoded meaning is entangled with the social fabric of language use.

3.2 Evaluative morphology and language contact

A second area in which studies are, quite surprisingly, still sporadic is that of language contact. In this context, at least two distinct areas of research can be identified.

Evaluative morphology in Pidgins and Creoles

The first research area is that of contact languages, i.e., Pidgins and Creoles. The only attempt to provide a systematic and coherent framework is, to my knowledge, Turchetta (2015). In general, there is a certain widespread belief that in Pidgin and Creole languages evaluative meanings are the almost exclusive domain of reduplication (for example, Haitian Creole *timoun* ‘child’ > *timoun timoun* ‘just a little child’ or ‘little kids superficially’; Jamaican Creole *soon-soon* ‘pretty soon’ or ‘in a minute’, often with an informal or affectionate tone).

However, some evidence suggests that the actual picture is more complex and that it would be worthwhile to conduct more systematic investigations of large samples of contact languages. In fact, these languages often rely on derivational strategies such as affixation or compounding to convey evaluative meanings. Consider, for example, Tok Pisin, in which we observe a substrate-influenced preference for analytic and reduplicative patterns, as in *pikinini liklik* ‘small child’ (lit. ‘child small’, cf. Smith 2002). Nevertheless, in some cases the cohesion between the *liklik* form and its nominal head is such that we are led to think that these constructions are turning into compounds, that is, they are acquiring a more synthetic status. Similarly, in Haitian Creole, evaluative morphology operates through words like *ti*, which originates from French *petit* and is fully grammaticalized, functioning as a diminutive marker in expressions such as *ti gason* ‘little boy’ (Lefebvre 1998). In Portuguese-based creoles like Cape Verdean Creole, speakers often use suffixes such as *-zinh* and *-ão*, adapted from Portuguese but phonologically integrated into the creole, to form diminutives and augmentatives respectively (Lang 2002).

These forms seem to reveal that in the expression of evaluative meanings, the ‘recreation’ of morphology travels at higher rates, producing essentially synthetic structures, despite the overall analytic tendency of Pidgins and Creoles. Moreover, even in Pidgins and Creoles, evaluative constructions have a wide range of meanings, covering both quantitative and qualitative dimensions (consider, for example, the Nigerian Pidgin word *kina* ‘kind of’, which can carry an attenuative, slightly evaluative function as in *kina small* ‘a bit small’, sometimes conveying also affect or nuance). This multifunctionality is significant, as it shows that even in languages with reduced morphological systems,

speakers develop rich means of conveying nuanced interpersonal meanings. So, while Pidgin and Creole languages are generally considered as morphologically 'poor', evaluative morphology demonstrates that they are far from devoid of creative and expressive potential. Moreover, in Pidgins and Creoles, evaluative morphology can offer valuable insights into how such languages develop expressive tools despite their frequently simplified grammatical profiles.

The rapidity with which the processes of grammaticalization occur in contact languages allows us to observe the origin of evaluative markers from a perspective that can be termed 'microdiachronic'. These data could challenge the idea, much entrenched in the literature, that diminutive marks originate, almost universally, from forms initially used to encode the parental relationship or, more generally, the meaning 'son/puppy of X' (Matisoff 1991; Grandi 2011).

Borrowing of evaluative affixes

Also worth mentioning in the context of linguistic contact is the topic of borrowing of evaluative affixes, which has recently emerged in literature. As is well known, evaluative morphology is particularly receptive to innovation and undergoes constant renewal. Recent studies on Italian and Germanic languages show that borrowing is a strategy that often plays a role in this renewal.

As shown by Micheli & Verdelli (2025), in Italian the prefix *uber-* represents a clear case of morphological borrowing from German via English. Corpus and questionnaire data indicate that *uber-* has entered Italian as an intensifying prefix mainly in informal registers, an aspect tied to the relationship between evaluative morphology and sociolinguistic variation mentioned above, and in combination with nouns and adjectives, often of English origin. Despite its productivity and creativity, *uber-* has not acquired the over-the-top intensifying value it has in English. Instead, it occupies a peripheral position in the Italian system, where established prefixes such as *super-* and *mega-* remain dominant. This shows that borrowed evaluative affixes may integrate structurally while remaining pragmatically and semantically constrained.

German data, presented by Schlücker (2024), reveals a different but complementary scenario. Adjectives formed with *-like* constitute a new, productive word formation pattern, modelled on English but reshaped within German. These formations show minimal formal restrictions and high creativity, especially with proper names, yet their use is largely confined to interaction-oriented internet discourse. Frequent quotation marks signal speakers' awareness of novelty and expressiveness, suggesting that borrowed evaluative patterns often carry marked pragmatic values during early stages of integration.

A broader comparative perspective from German, Dutch, and Swedish (cf. Battefeld *et al.* 2018) highlights that evaluative morphemes ± whether borrowed prefixes, prefixoids, or native nouns ± are interconnected in constructional networks. Evaluatives regularly appear as compound non-heads, adjectival intensifiers, and free predicative forms, facilitating re-categorization into often defective adjectives. Borrowed elements such as *super-* and *mega-* behave similarly to native evaluatives, indicating that the output of evaluation is more important than the lexical origin of the morpheme.

Taken together, these findings suggest that evaluative morphology offers a privileged window onto how linguistic contact reshapes grammatical systems beyond simple lexical transfer. For this reason, this topic deserves to be explored in greater depth with more systematic analysis.

3.3 *Evaluation in sign languages*

A third area where much remains to be said concerns sign languages, in which evaluation (the label evaluative morphology in this case is perhaps not entirely appropriate) seems a rich domain. Of course, evaluative functions and meanings are not realized through affixation but through visual-gestural strategies.

In this picture, Italian Sign Language (LIS) has been the subject of recent studies and offers compelling evidence for a structured, grammar-governed use of evaluative constructions, both manual and non-manual.

Fornasiero (2023) provides a detailed analysis of evaluative formation in LIS, showing that evaluative meanings are encoded via movement modification (e.g., reduced amplitude for diminutives) and through non-manual markers, such as facial expressions. These non-manual markers, rather than merely affective overlays, are grammatically encoded. Fornasiero (2024) further distinguishes between low and high diminutive non-manual markers: the former affect the phonological layer (e.g., cheek puffing, reduced mouth gestures); while the latter carry higher syntactic or pragmatic functions (e.g., expressing endearment or irony).

These findings align with broader sign language typology. In American Sign Language (ASL), for instance, Wilbur (2009) observes that prosodic modulation, particularly size and repetition, can serve evaluative purposes. Similarly, facial expressions in sign languages across modalities have been found to contribute grammatical and pragmatic content, not unlike spoken language suffixes (Pfau *et al.* 2012).

The acquisition of these structures is also revealing. Morgan *et al.* (2002) report that children acquiring sign languages quickly master the evaluative use of spatial and non-manual features, suggesting that evaluative formation is both

salient and early-developing. An interesting analogy seems to emerge here with what has been observed in verbal languages.

Overall, LIS and other sign languages illustrate that evaluative formation is richly encoded across multiple articulatory channels, reinforcing the cognitive and grammatical significance of evaluative meaning in human language. In this area, it would be crucial to acquire data from different sign languages and analyse them through the comparative perspective.

3.4 Evaluative morphology and language disorders

The last possible direction for future research I mention here is represented by the relationship between evaluative morphology and language pathologies and disorders. In fact, evaluative morphology, particularly diminutives and other affective affixes, offers an insightful perspective into the functioning of morphological competence in people with language disorders. Studies of aphasia and agrammatism suggest that the processing and production of evaluative forms are not only linguistically complex but also sensitive to morphosyntactic and pragmatic deficits.

Franceschet *et al.* (2013) compare the use of diminutives in Italian-speaking children and adult aphasic patients, finding that both groups display significant challenges in applying diminutive suffixes such as *-ino* and *-etto*. However, while children's errors are largely developmental and often regular (e.g., over-generalizations), aphasic patients tend to produce more severe omissions or substitutions, reflecting impaired morphological processing rather than developmental variability. This contrast highlights the diagnostic value of diminutives as markers of morphological integrity.

Franco *et al.* (2013) present a detailed case study of an Italian agrammatic patient and demonstrate a selective impairment in producing evaluative morphology. Despite preserved lexical access, the patient showed difficulty in applying evaluative suffixes appropriately, especially in syntactically constrained contexts. This suggests that evaluative morphology, although often considered peripheral, is deeply integrated within the grammatical system and vulnerable to morphosyntactic breakdown.

Exactly like evaluative morphology, clinical linguistics is also a comparatively young field of study. The interplay between these two areas of inquiry is almost completely unexplored and, therefore, warrants more future attention than others. The findings of the studies mentioned here suggest that evaluative morphology is a sensitive domain for exploring the interface between morphosyntax, semantics, and pragmatics in language disorders. As such, it holds both theoretical relevance and clinical diagnostic potential.

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