Spanish Diminutive Strategies in Evaluative Morphology: A Semantic-Pragmatic Study of *Mini-*, *Micro-*, and *-ito/a*

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Diminutives are known to convey meaning along both a quantitative (size) and a qualitative (affective) dimension, building on the basic concept of smallness. Despite studies showing that diminutives can be expressed by both prefixes and suffixes (Grandi & Montermini 2005; Grandi 2015), diminutive prefixation remains under-analyzed in comparison to the vast literature on suffixation. Building on our previous corpus-based work on Spanish *mini-* and *micro-*, we proposed an evaluativeness scale, whereby *micro-* is typically descriptive and evaluatively neutral, the suffix *-ito/a* is strongly evaluative, and *mini-* occupies an intermediate position, capable of either purely descriptive uses or a combination of descriptive and a variety of evaluative meanings.

Our study brings evaluative prefixes into the picture by examining *mini-*, *micro-*, and diminutive *-ito/a* across the same lexical bases. Specifically, we address two main research questions: (i) How do *mini-*, *micro-*, and *-ito/a* differ in their productivity and semantic-pragmatic contribution when individually combined with the same lexical bases? (ii) To what extent can *mini-*and *micro-*prefixed bases occur with the suffix *-ito/a*, and does this evaluative stacking capacity differ systematically between the two prefixes?

We investigate these questions through a corpus-based study in the Spanish TenTen Corpus. We select 20 high-frequency nominal bases, drawn from both concrete object nouns and event nouns, each independently attested with *mini-*, *micro-*, and *-ito/a*. For each base, we compare the frequency of the two prefixed forms and the suffixed form to assess the relative distribution of *mini-*, *micro-*, and *-ito/a* across the same lexical bases, and examine the availability of *-ito/a* suffixation on each prefixed form. We further analyze a sample of corpus contexts for each attested form to investigate their syntactic properties, semantic and evaluative values.

Our findings confirm the evaluativeness scale and reveal systematic differences in the distribution and semantic-pragmatic contribution of *mini-*, *micro-*, and *-ito/a*. While *micro-* is strongly associated with descriptive uses and is more commonly used to construct denominations, *mini-* and *-ito* have a broader evaluative range, ranging from affection and endearment to derogation and irony. In terms of their co-occurrence on the same base, *micro-* shows limited compatibility with further suffixation, while *mini-* is substantially more compatible with *-ito/a*. Furthermore, the analysis of corpus contexts suggests a narrowing effect in evaluative range. When *mini-* and *-ito/a* co-occur on the same base, the evaluative

interpretation of the resulting prefixed-and-suffixed form (*mini*-BASE-*ito*) is more likely to be restricted to a positive and affectionate meaning.

References

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