

# Small-scale comments on Uralic and other evaluatives

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The present article takes another look at the Mansi diminutive *-riś~-rəś*, considers why there has been some unclarity surrounding the status of this element in many grammars of Mansi, takes note of some recent (and not so recent) literature on the diminutive in general, reflects on some ensuing implications for the description of the diminutive in Mansi, as well as on some Uralic (and Ewen) implications for Daniel Jurafsky's universal structure for the semantics of the diminutive, and finally has a brief look at augmentatives in Uralic and Ewen.

**keywords:** Mansi, Komi, Ewen, diminutive, evaluative

**kulcsszavak:** manysi, komi, even, kicsinyítő képző, evaluatív

## 1. Introduction

The 60<sup>th</sup> birthday of my friend Katalin Sipőcz would in principle have been the perfect occasion to once more examine the Mansi diminutive *-riś~-rəś*. However, recently Bíró (2021) has masterfully done exactly that, reviewing the use and semantics of the Northern Mansi diminutive *-riś~-rəś* using Jurafsky's Radial Category Theory and his proposed universal structure for the semantics of the diminutive. So, what is there left for me to do? At first sight nothing. However, this diminutive suffix in Mansi is an intriguing element that keeps on capturing the attention of Uralic linguists; no doubt this is at least partially so because of its widespread use, in addition to its customary application in nouns, in verbs and other

parts of speech, which makes it relatively unusual, at least within Uralic. In the present article therefore, I nevertheless want to take a slightly closer look at the verbal use of *-riś~-rəś* in Mansi, then consider some Uralic (and Ewen) implications for Jurafsky's universal structure for the semantics of the diminutive, and finally have a brief look at augmentatives in Uralic and Ewen.

## 2. Verbal diminutives in Mansi

As is well-known, Mansi has two diminutive suffixes, *-riś~-rəś* and *-kwe*. Their origin and use have already been thoroughly described (cf. e.g., Rombandeeva 1973: 76–79; Rombandeeva 1974; Riese 2001: 107–108; Bíró 2021; for an overview of other works on Mansi nominal derivation cf. Riese 2001: 23–29). Their use in nouns need not concern us here.

To begin with, it is worth mentioning, as Bíró (2021: 83, footnote 5) points out, that many grammarians of Mansi have bestowed mood status on verbal diminutives; Bíró here refers to e.g., Munkácsi ('kedveskedő, illetőleg precatív mód'; 1894a: 40) and Kálmán ('kedveskedő mód/präkativ/gefällige Aussageweise'; 1989: 57, 61). This is in itself still a relevant issue, as its status has been and still is a matter of some debate, and while a number of grammarians have simply deemed it a mood, e.g. Murphy ('precative'; 1968: 63–64), Veenker ('[modus] praecativus/precative/ласкательное наклонение'; 1969: 6, 51), there is a great deal of variety in its description. Thus, e.g., Chernecov ('просительно-повелительное наклонение'; 1937: 185) considers it one of two variants of the imperative, whilst Collinder (1969: 326–327), though listing it among the moods ('hypocoristic'), realizes it is somewhat problematic: "The hypocoristic is a mood insofar as it implies a mental attitude (on the part of the speaker) towards the action expressed by the verb stem; but from the viewpoint of formation it is a diminutive of the indicative or the imperative". Pirotti is similarly slightly unclear; he lists it among his moods as the 'modo precativo' (1972: 137, 145), but, similar to Chernecov, also lists it as subvariant of the imperative ('imperativo precativo'; 1972: 157), and also still calls it a conjugation: 'coniugazione diminutiva', 'coniugazione precativa' (1972: 159). Gulya deems the verbal diminutives emphatic variants ('эмфатические формы наклонения'; 1976: 293). Even Kálmán, who notes it as a mood in his chrestomathy (see above), lists it separately from the other moods in his text collection (Kálmán 1976: 43). Interestingly, the recent Oxford handbook of the Uralic languages refers to verbal forms with *-kwe* or *-riś* as 'hypocoristic forms', and points out that 'this usage' has been called the 'precative mood' or 'hypocoristic mood' by Kálmán and Murphy, respectively (see above), but does not itself take a clear stand as to whether it agrees with this definition or not (Bakró-Nagy et al. 2022: 549), whilst it also states that the 'morpheme order in a non-imperative verbal form is as follows: preverb—particles

(negation, discourse)—stem—derivation—voice—tense/mood—diminutive—person.’, i.e. the diminutive is there not considered a mood (Bakró-Nagy et al. 2022: 547). In a similar vein, Bíró (2021: 83), pointing out that verbal forms with diminutive suffixes can additionally take mood markers, does not consider it a mood, with which we concur.

In a recent monograph on Russian diminutives, verbal diminutives in general are divided into two major groups, which the author calls ‘lesser intensity’ verbs and ‘emotional and discourse verbs’ (Makarova 2014: 22). The first group are also often called ‘attenuative verbs’, but Makarova claims here that such verbs are actual diminutives. In her analysis she claims that ‘diminutives represent reference point constructions with an implicit standard of comparison serving as a reference point.’ (Makarova 2014: 5). The ‘reference point’ here is a term established in cognitive linguistics by Langacker (1993), which refers to an entity which is used to establish mental contact with another entity, as in, e.g., the possessive construction *the dog’s tail*, where the entity ‘dog’ is established, after which the entity ‘tail’ has been anchored (note also here the asymmetry: *\*the tail’s dog* is infelicitous). Makarova uses the ‘reference point construction’ posited by Langacker to claim that (nominal, adjectival and verbal) diminutives also have reference points, i.e., the non-diminutive form with which the diminutive form is compared, even if not manifestly. In the relationship between a canonical diminutive and its non-diminutive source the main difference is size, which explains why non-nominal diminutives are less common. In order therefore to explain why in some languages verbs can also easily have diminutives, Makarova avails herself of two metaphors, namely ATTENUATED IS SMALL, and EVENTS ARE OBJECTS (cf. Makarova 2014: 18, 25). These allow her to conceptualize events as having sizes, so they then in turn can more easily be diminutivized. If one considers events as having size, then the ‘lesser intensity’ verbs, such as e.g., Bosnian *jeduckali* ‘we ate (DIM)’ (Makarova 2014: 24), are easily explained (i.e., there is less of something), but it also allows to more easily understand the ‘emotional and discourse verbs’; namely, the metaphor SMALL IS INTIMATE/AFFECTION/SYMPATHY (see Jurafsky 1996: 542) and all other metaphors linked to SMALL can now be connected to objectified verbs.

It has long been known that there is a hierarchy (nouns > adjectives > verbs > numerals > interjections > pronouns; Nieuwenhuis 1985: 223) of where diminutives tend to occur; Nieuwenhuis (loc.cit.) also writes that the further down the hierarchy a diminutive occurs, the less it functions as a prototypical diminutive (i.e., indicating smallness) and the more it has other (evaluative) functions. More recently Audring et al. (2021: 227, 248), in their typological overview of verbal diminutives (with a sample of 248 languages), have also been confronted with the problem that grammars use a profusion of terms to denote verbal diminutives, and refer to the ‘theoretical difficulties in situating the phenomenon (i.e., verbal diminutives; RB) in

a particular grammatical subsystem.<sup>1</sup> This goes some way to explain the difficulty the abovementioned grammarians have had with the status of the Mansi verbal diminutive: diminutive suffixes used in nouns are clearly just derivational denominal suffixes, but in parts of speech further down the hierarchy their status is then less clear. However, we now see, if we agree with Makarova, that in verbs their diminutival use straightforwardly ensues from the metaphorization of verbs as objects, and so there is no need to accord verbal diminutives mood status.

The hierarchy perhaps also allows us to explain the use of certain instances of a verbal diminutive in Mansi. Bíró (2014: 89) states that when a diminutive is found in personal pronouns it is nearly always found in the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular, occasionally in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular, but hardly ever in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, suggesting that this is because diminutive pronouns generally have a connotation of modesty (cf. Mansi *mān-riš* we-DIM ‘we, poor people’; Rombandeeva 1973: 111), and they are therefore logically more common for the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular. However, if it is used pejoratively there is no reason to not use it for third persons, and so in Bíró’s example (1), about sisters-in-law who are lazy, and for whom a pejorative diminutive is therefore fitting, the diminutive is perhaps placed on the verb and not on the pronoun with which the sisters-in-law are referred to because pronouns are much further down the hierarchy than verbs and so the verb is more propitious place for it<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) *tanānəl̩nə*          *at*          *tēli-riš*          *wārnut wār-uŋkwə*  
 they.DAT          NEG          arise-DIM          work          do-INF  
 ‘They are unable to do any work.’ (Bíró 2021: 87 < Munkácsi 1894b: 58)

So how unusual is the Mansi diminutive? An overview of augmentative marking in Uralic is given in Todesk (2022: 22-29), where she also mentions a number of suffixes used in verbs with diminutive/attenuative meaning, but these tend to not be the same suffixes as those used in nouns, and verbal diminutive forms which are the same as the nominal diminutives are not very common at all. Most similar to the Mansi verbal diminutive is probably the so-called diminutive optative in the Karksi subdialect of Mulgi South Estonian (which is used only in caretaker speech):

<sup>1</sup> Grandi (2015) is an overview of how evaluative morphology has generally been described in the literature and the problem of whether it belongs to inflection or derivation or both or neither (cf. e.g., Scalise’s ‘third morphology’; cf. Grandi 2015: 75), but ultimately Grandi (2015: 88) is also forced to state the following: ‘The properties of evaluative affixes surveyed in the previous sections do not allow us to answer the question concerning the place of evaluative morphology in a univocal and universal manner, since too many language-specific factors are at stake.’

<sup>2</sup> Without referring to such hierarchies Bauer (1997: 554) calls the use of the diminutive in e.g., a verb whilst it applies to an argument of that verb, common in the indigenous languages of North America, ‘transference of diminutivisation’.

*veřtaķķest* take.DIM ‘take!’ (Pajusalu 1989: 142; 1996: 161–162); cf. *võta* take.IMP.2SG ‘take!’ in Mulgi South Estonian and standard Estonian. Historically this seems to be the partitive singular of a form in the nominal diminutive in *-ke* (cf. Mulgi South Estonian *poiss* ‘boy’ > *poisik* ~ *poisike* boy.DIM ‘young boy’ > *poisikest* boy.DIM.PART). Apart from the examples from Karksi and an unsure one from Häädemeste (cf. Blokland 1998: 407–408), it occurs nowhere else in Estonian. The parishes of Karksi (and Häädemeste) border on Latvia, and Vaba (1997: 61) has pointed out that this diminutive optative is probably a borrowing from Latvian caretaker speech. Velta Rūķe-Draviņa, in her 1959 monograph on the diminutive in Latvian, corroborates Nieuwenhuis’ hierarchy, in stating that verbal diminutives occur only rarely (and then only in caretaker speech), and numeral and pronominal diminutives even more rarely (Rūķe-Draviņa 1959: 343). In Latvian the verbal diminutive uses the diminutive suffix *-iņ-* (cf. e.g., *bērn-s* child-MASC.NOM ‘child’ > *bērn-iņ-š* child-DIM-MASC.NOM ‘little child’), where it occurs immediately after the verb stem: *nāk-t* come-INF ‘to come’ > *nāk-iņ-āt* come-DIM-INF ‘id.’ > e.g. *nāk-iņ-ā!* come.DIM.IMP ‘come, little one!’ (Rūķe-Draviņa 1959: 27). This evaluative use seems very similar to the use of the verbal diminutive in Mansi, but, as Bauer (1997: 539) and Savickienė and Dressler (2007: 2) point out, children already use diminutives before they have learnt to differentiate word classes, so their use of diminutives in other word classes than nouns is not surprising, especially in a diminutive-rich language such as Latvian; here the direction could therefore be from children’s use to that of their caretakers rather than vice-versa.

### 3. Jurafsky’s universal structure

Bíró’s (2021: 94) adaptation of Jurafsky’s proposed universal structure for the semantics of the diminutive to North Mansi immediately brings to mind two desiderata (which to some extent approach the same issue from different directions): (i) drawing up similar structures for the other Uralic languages<sup>3</sup> and (ii) enriching Jurafsky’s universal structure with data from other languages. Space does not permit to attempt to do this here in any detail, but I cannot resist mentioning some examples that could pave the way.

#### (i) Drawing up similar structures for the other Uralic languages.

Already more than 35 years ago Heine–Hünemeyer (1988) discovered that the grammaticalization pathway CHILD > DIMINUTIVE is especially common in languages of West Africa; later (cf. Heine–Kuteva 2002: 65–67) this was found in a number of African languages (belonging to different families, ranging from Atlantic-Congo

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<sup>3</sup> Jurafsky’s universal structure has been used to describe diminutives in Seto (Saar–Todesk 2022) and non-suffixal diminutive derivation in standard Estonian (Kehayov–Blokland 2006).

languages in West Africa to Kx'a languages in southern Africa), but also in Chinese and Sepik-Ramu (Papua New Guinea). In Uralic the word 'son' is often used to denote animal young (e.g. Fi. *kananpoika* 'chick', Hung. *galambfi* 'squab', Mansi *āmp̄piŋ* 'puppy'; cf. Fokos-Fuchs 1937: 301), but in Komi, especially in Permyak and Yazva Komi, its use is more widespread. According to the 1985 Permyak Komi-Russian dictionary the word *пиян*<sup>4</sup> has the following meanings: 'child; cub, young; branch, twig, shoot' (KPRS 1985: 346b). It occurs mostly with humans and animals (e.g., *кань* 'cat' > *кань пиян* 'kitten', *мӧс* 'cow' > *мӧс пиян* 'calf', *пон* 'dog' > *пон пиян* 'puppy', *сьӧдкай* 'starling' > *сьӧдкай пиян* 'starling', *порсь* 'pig' > *порсьпиян* 'piglet'; *кӧз* 'fir' > *кӧз пиян* 'small fir, fir shoots'; all examples from KPRS 1985)<sup>5</sup>. In Yazva Komi, though it also occurs with animals (*вӱрпийан* 'wild animal, lynx', lit. 'forest cub'; Lytkin 1961: 49, 104), the use of *пиян* (< *пийан*) as a diminutive suffix has developed even further, and is used with non-animates too: cf. *зӱрпийан* 'rain.DIM' (cf. *зӱр* 'rain'), *йӱлпийан* 'milk.DIM'; *милт* (cf. *йӱл* 'milk'), *сипийан* 'hair.DIM' (си 'hair'), *жӱжпийан* 'shelf.DIM' (*жӱж* 'shelf'), *з'ул'пийан* 'button.DIM' (*з'ул*, *з'ул* 'button'), *вимпийан* 'seed, kernel' (вим 'brain') (Lytkin 1961: 54). In Zyrian Komi it is most commonly used with animates, but there are also occasional examples in the new Zyrian Komi dialect dictionary of use with trees: *ельпийан* 'spruce and pine shoots' (KSK I: 497a), *пияна кӧз* 'branched spruce' (KSK II: 126b), *понӧльпийан* 'spruce shoot' (KSK II: 154b). Permyak and Yazva Komi (and to a lesser extent Zyrian Komi) are therefore good Uralic examples of the grammaticalization path CHILD > SMALL > SMALL TYPE OF (cf. Jurafsky 1996: 542).

It would therefore be a worthwhile task to trawl through more grammars, dictionaries and texts of Uralic languages in order to chart the use and semantics of diminutive suffixes in more detail. This could then be used to compile a Uralic version of Jurafsky's universal structure. An example that comes to mind immediately that does not occur in Jurafsky is from Forest Enets, which has a diminutive *-kuji+PX* which is used only when talking about the deceased, especially about deceased family members (e.g. *ää-kuji-b* mother-DIM-PX.1SG 'my deceased mother' (Siegl 2013: 169).

(ii) *Enriching Jurafsky's universal structure with data from other languages*

However, it would obviously also be worthwhile to enrich and update Jurafsky's universal structure with data from other (non-Uralic) languages. Here I would like to mention a use of the diminutive in Ewen which so far has not been used in

<sup>4</sup> Probably originally a diminutive in *-an* of *pi* 'son' (cf. Bartens 2000: 77).

<sup>5</sup> In the dictionary these examples are open compounds as lemmas, but also closed compounds occur within the word articles.

Jurafsky's universal structure or its revised<sup>6</sup> versions. Specifically, the Lamunkhin and Bystraja dialects of Ewen, a North Tungusic language spoken in Siberia, are an instructive example as they have diminutive (and augmentative) suffixes which have developed new functions. Whilst the primary meaning of the diminutive suffixes in Ewen remains evaluative, in the Lamunkhin dialect the two suffixes *-kAn* and *-čAn* can be used to (additionally) denote the differing referential status of noun phrases. Thus, e.g., in (2), the little boy is introduced (as a non-identifiable referent) using the diminutive suffix *-kAn*, but when he is referred to for a second time, and therefore already identifiable, the diminutive suffix *-čAn* is used; these suffixes are in complementary distribution (see Pakendorf–Krivoshapkina 2014 for more details).

- (2) *velosiped-e-lken omolgo kuŋa-kkan em-e-g-ge-ri-n*  
 bicycle[R]-EP-PROP boy child-DIM come-EP-PROG-HAB-PST-3SG  
 '... **a little boy** came on a bike.'

*omolgo-čan šljapa-j tipke-nidzi*  
 boy-DIM hat[R]-PRFL.SG drop-ANT.CVB  
*naŋti-hi-ssi-ča-la-n velosiped-a-n*  
 grab-LIM-CONAT-PF-PTCP-LOC-POSS.3SG bicycle[R]-EP-POSS.3SG  
*iŋa-duk hōr-ra-n*  
 stone-ABL get.caught-NFUT.3SG  
 '... when **the little boy** tried to grab his hat which he had dropped, his bike got caught on a stone.'  
 (Pakendorf–Krivoshapkina 2014: 297)

Pakendorf–Krivoshapkina (2014: 324–327) note that the use of diminutive suffixes to express (in)definiteness does not occur in other Tungusic languages; neither does it seem to be a borrowing from a neighbouring language. At present it seems to be an independent development in Ewen, and it is not specifically mentioned as any of the typical senses of the diminutive in Jurafsky 1996 nor in Mutz's 2015 revised version.

#### 4. The augmentative

When thinking of the diminutive one also automatically thinks of the augmentative, which, however, has received less attention than the diminutive, perhaps because augmentatives are less common than diminutives (cf. Ponsoinet 2018: 37), and possibly because it does not tend to be used as a verbal augmentative.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Mutz (2015: 149; the changes she has made are based on research on the diachrony of diminutive suffixes, rather than on data from additional languages) and Prieto (2015: 27).

Prieto (2015: 28) has developed a universal structure for the augmentative (see Figure 1). It is less detailed than Jurafsky's for the diminutive, probably because augmentatives tend to have a less complicated network of meanings.

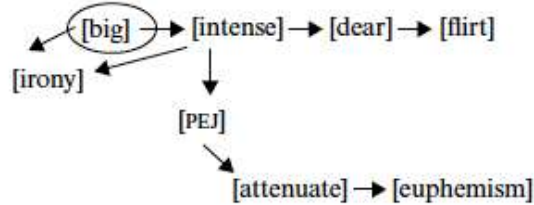


Figure 1. Prieto's universal structure for the augmentative

A brief look at descriptions of Uralic languages shows that nominal augmentatives are said to occur (at least) in Kildin Saami (*peerht-bii'hk* house-AUG 'big house'; cf. Rießler 2022: 231–232), Mansi (*kol kapaj* house AUG 'large house'; cf. Skribnik 2014), Khanty (Kazym *ikŷ-šřwŷ* person-AUG 'old person'; cf. Honti 1984: 68), Nenets (*wen'ako-qya* dog-AUG 'big/bad dog'; Nikolaeva 2014: 138–139), Forest Enets (*logri-je* mountain-AUG 'huge mountain'; Siegl 2013: 170), Nganasan (*kora-ŋa* box-AUG 'big box'; cf. Wagner-Nagy 2019: 509–513), and Selkup (*mɔt-ŋra* house-AUG 'big house'; Kazakevič 2022: 806).<sup>7</sup> In addition to the basic meaning LARGE, the most common additional meaning is PEJORATIVE (cf. the Nenets example above). A number of additional meanings gleaned from the grammars, plus a cursory look at the non-Uralic language Ewen, already allow us to further develop Prieto's universal structure:

LARGE

> OLD

(Ewen *dʒu-mkar* house-AUG 'old, decrepit house'[Pakendorf–Krivoshapkina 2014: 294])

> PEJORATIVE

(Kildin Saami *peerht-biigg-enž* house-AUG-DIM 'worthless/bad (big) house' [Rießler 2022: 231–232]; Surgut Khanty *sört-liŋki* pike-AUG 'really big pike' vs. *iki-liŋki* person-AUG 'poor fellow'; [Csepregi 2023: 718]; Tundra Nenets *wen'ako-qya* dog-AUG 'big/bad dog'[Nikolaeva 2014: 138–139])

<sup>7</sup> Kiefer–Laakso (2014: 492) claim that 'productive augmentative derivation is only known in Samoyedic', but we see here that it in fact occurs outside of Samoyedic too.



## &gt; SELECTIVITY

(Ngasan *taa-ʔa-gümü-rü?* domestic.reindeer-AUG-EMPH-2PLPOSS ‘your reindeer’ [cf. Wagner-Nagy 2019: 510 for details])

## &gt; REFERENCE STATUS

(Ewen *abaga-maja* grandfather-AUG<sup>1</sup> ‘a big bear’ vs. *abaga-ńdza* grandfather-AUG<sup>2</sup> ‘the big bear’ [Pakendorf–Krivoshapkina 2014: 297; *abaga* ‘grandfather’ is here a euphemism for ‘bear’])

## &gt; RESPECT

(Ewen *abaga-ńdza-t* grandfather-AUG-POSS.1PL ‘that grandfather of ours’ [Pakendorf–Krivoshapkina 2014: 296; the translation shows that here the grandfather is accorded respect])

The Kildin Saami and Forest Enets examples with concurrent use of both a diminutive and an augmentative suffix would merit a closer look, as in general such concurrent use does not appear to be especially common, and when it does occur there are language-specific ordering rules; in e.g., Basque the order AUG-DIM is permissible but DIM-AUG not (cf. *etxe-tzar-txo* house-AUG-DIM ‘little big house’ vs. \**etxe-txo-tzar* house-DIM-AUG ‘big small house’; Artiagoitia 2015: 202). In Kildin Saami the same order applies: *peerht-biigg-enž* house-AUG-DIM<sup>1</sup> ~ *peerht-beagg-a* house-AUG-DIM<sup>2</sup> ‘worthless/bad (big) house’ (Rießler 2022: 231–232), whilst in Enets the order is DIM-PEJ: *adu-ku-je* louse-DIM-PEJ ‘a nasty little louse’ (Siegl 2013: 170). Rießler (2022: 232) states that the difference in function between the Kildin Saami AUG-DIM forms is not yet completely understood; i.e., here we have an additional task for the future.

## 5. Final thoughts

The observant reader will have noticed that Mansi has played a relatively negligible role here, and for this I’m sorry. However, the diminutives and augmentatives in Mansi could play a role in the typology of evaluatives; a brief look at the literature, both Uralic and typological, has shown us that there is as yet no consensus as to their exact status and functions. More in-depth explorations of the evaluative suffixes in Uralic are therefore a desideratum. It is also hoped that it has been shown that the Uralic languages can make valuable contributions to the general typology of evaluatives and specifically to the development of the Jurafskyan and Prietoan universal structures for the semantics of evaluative morphological forms.

### Abbreviations

3	third person
ABL	ablative
ANT	anterior
AUG	augmentative
CONAT	conative
CVB	converb
DAT	dative
DIM	diminutive
EP	epenthetic vowel
HAB	habitual
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitive
LIM	limitative
LOC	locative
MASC	masculine
NEG	negative
NFUT	non-future
NOM	nominative
PART	partitive
PEJ	pejorative
PF	perfect
POSS	possessive
PRFL	reflexive-possessive
PROG	progressive
PROP	propriative
PST	past
PTCP	participle
PX	possessive suffix
R	Russian copy
SG	singular

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