

DIMINUTIVE SUFFIXES IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT:
A CROSS-LINGUISTIC STUDY

Jonathan M. Watt
Geneva College, Beaver Falls, PA, USA

Abstract: Diminuted word forms in the Greek New Testament have much in common with their counterparts in other languages, and typically convey smallness, slightness, affection, or derogation. In some cases their meanings are “faded” or “bleached” and do not convey anything different from the base form of the word, as happens also in other languages. Diminutive usage can express solidarity and common values in certain speech communities, and may be doing so in some New Testament passages. (Article)

Keywords: diminutives, affixation, sociolinguistics, theory of language.

1. *Introduction to Diminutive Affixation*

Diminutive word forms occur throughout the world’s languages, more often in oral than written communication, and typically convey smallness, slightness, affection, and even derogation. Diminution can be accomplished by means of an auxiliary word (e.g., the English adjectives “wee” and “tiny”), by suffixation (e.g., *-ie/-y* suffixes on names and nouns in English, or the alternative noun suffix *-let*, as in *coverlet*), by prefixation (e.g., *ti-mounn* “child” in Haitian Creole), by infixation (e.g., Turkish, see below), or by clipping (shortened root morpheme). Some diminutives are created through a combination of these (e.g., a clipped noun along with a suffix, as in Australian English *brek-kie* ← “breakfast”), or by means of conglutination (e.g., Greek

suffixes *-ar* + *-id* + *-ion*, as in βιβλαρίδιον “small book/scroll”).¹ This study centers on diminution via affixation. Nouns (including names) are by far the most common root to which diminutive morphemes are affixed, and suffixation that marks diminution—as with most inflection in Indo-European languages—provides “the principal machinery of derivation...and [is] responsible for most of the morphophonemic alteration of root morphemes.”² However, while diminution may be common fare in the world’s languages, it continues to present semantic problems that are yet to be solved. Mary Haas noted some decades ago that:

It is safe to say...that the notion of the diminutive is a language universal, or at any rate, a near universal... The diminutive also usually carries with it a number of affective connotations which range from endearment to tenderness through mild belittlement or depreciation to outright derogation and insult. Although this fact is fairly generally recognized, there are very few careful studies of the range of connotations in a particular language. The problem is deserving of wider attention.³

In the years since her comments, some studies have contributed significantly to filling the void. Ancient Greek diminutives have drawn their share of attention, though the two primary studies of ancient Greek are quite dated. A landmark monograph published by Walter Petersen in 1910, *Greek Diminutives in -ION*, centered on the Classical period, and in 1958 Donald C. Swanson published “Diminutives in the Greek New Testament.” Given the passing of a century, and half a century, respectively, revisiting the topic from within the context of world languages seems appropriate, especially since that broader landscape may contribute to understanding diminutives in the biblical texts.⁴

1. See Smyth, *Grammar*, 235, for more Classical examples.

2. Cowgill, “Search for Universals,” 134.

3. Haas, “Expression of the Diminutive,” 82.

4. The author wishes to thank Rod Decker for directing me to these two foundational sources. This present work brings together papers presented at the Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics sections of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2010, 2011, and 2012. It does not delve into the related subject of diminutives in the context of baby talk and first language acquisition, though

The fact that diminutives occur in different language families attests to their productivity in the human mind, even if their specifics differ. Dressler and Barbaresi offer a sizeable cross-linguistic study of diminutives and claim that “Among all morpho-pragmatic devices within derivational morphology, diminutives represent the category which has the widest distribution across languages and has stimulated the greatest number of studies.”⁵ Much of what they cite post-dates Haas’s comments. They state: “Early grammarians often noted pragmatic conditions for the use of diminutive suffixes, particularly when they were of dialectal origin,”⁶ and especially when used for jocular purposes. Their study of European languages (particularly Italian, German, and English) offers five summary observations on diminutive affixes:⁷

1. They are derivational, not inflectional;
2. They are alterative, that is, in contrast to augmentatives which increase quantity, diminutives involve some kind of decrease;
3. They usually carry a positive connotative change;
4. They contravene general derivational morphology rules by being applicable to multiple base categories, e.g., nouns *and* adjectives; and
5. They evidence a preference for “iconic expression via morphological rules” (or what might be called morphophonemic restriction).

some of the discussion in that realm is quite helpful; see Savickiene and Dressler, *Acquisition of Diminutives*. They observe that diminutives are “acquired early because they belong to non-prototypical derivational morphology, which is easier to acquire than proto-typical derivational or inflectional morphology,” and that they serve “pragmatic functions of endearment, empathy, and sympathy, which make diminutives particularly appropriate for child-centred communication,” as they play a particular role in the development of a child’s grammar (2). That book and *Morphopragmatics* by Dressler and Barbaresi are among the most comprehensive studies on the subject.

5. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 85.
6. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 85–86.
7. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 91–93.

However, as Dressler and Barbaresi demonstrate extensively, each language has its particulars.⁸ Italian, for example, prefers to diminute nominal bases, and the change often involves a gender switch, usually from a feminine base to a masculine derivative. Diminutives in many languages are especially suited to child-centered, and even pet-directed, speech situations. Diminutives carry high emotional connotation, and are thereby useful for encoding sympathy and empathy (on 29 using the phrase “affective morphology,” which would be especially suitable if indeed “all social interaction...is emotionally colored” [32]). Consequently, diminutive constructions may convey informality, familiarity, and even intimacy. Additionally, the authors note that diminutives may facilitate euphemism and understatement and consequently may connote politeness when making a request.

Dressler and Barbaresi also observe that particular social circumstances provide the conditions for a reversal of otherwise positive connotations, thereby converting descriptive smallness into irony or sarcasm.⁹ An example they offer is from German: *Dein Freund bat mich ihm das Summ-chen von \$100,000* (“Your friend asked me [to give] him the sum-DIM of \$100,000”)—the request is hardly a small one. Such examples highlight the disagreement that remains as to whether diminutives should be construed as a basic *semantic category* (a position tacitly assumed in many modern grammars) or as a *pragmatic function* dependent upon speech situations, as Dressler and Barbaresi argue, adding “This book is devoted to affixes and other morphological devices whose meaning appears to be primarily located in pragmatics. These devices exhibit no stable semantic value and their meaning seems to be often elusive.”¹⁰ We shall return to the issue of situational relevance at a number of points further along.

8. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, passim.
9. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 337–38.
10. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 4, 1, respectively.

1.1 *Literal Meanings of Diminutives*

Languages from around the world evidence diminution. Balto-Slavic languages (such as Bulgarian, Polish and Russian) have a diverse assortment of diminutive suffixes, which typically are gender-sensitive; Celtic varieties are formed similarly. Diminutive suffixes occur throughout Indo-Iranian languages: Hindi, for example, suffixes *-u* to nouns and proper names, and Persian does likewise with *-cheh* and *-ak*. Dravidian languages, such as Tamil, have diminutives, as do Semitic languages: Modern Hebrew can accomplish this with reduplication (*kelev* “dog” → *klavlav* “puppy”) while Arabic diminutes via infixation (*hirra* “cat” → *hurayrah* “kitten,” inserting *-u-* and *-ay-* after the first and second root consonants, respectively). Chinese, in the Sino-Tibetan family, can form a name diminutive by replacing the first character (usually of two) with *xiao-*, which then prefixes the second character, or by addition of a *-zi* suffix to the second character. On the other hand, Japanese generates diminutives by means of gender-specific *-chan* and *-kun* suffixes: e.g., the girl’s name *Miki* → *Miki-chan*, while a boy’s name, *Ryo*, becomes *Ryo-kun*.¹¹ Turkish, an Altaic language, employs the suffix *-cik* to mark endearment (especially with infants), but *-cegiz* when conveying empathy; both suffixes then undergo vowel harmony with the root morpheme.

Germanic languages abound in diminutives. Dutch employs a considerable variety of suffixes (*-je*, *-tje*, *-pje*, *-etje*, and *-kje*, along with dialectal variants) that can be added to adjectives as well as nouns (and some Dutch words, such as *sneeuwkllokje* [lit. “snow-clock-small”], exist only in diminutive form; this word refers to a “snowdrop” flower). German diminutives are usually marked by suffixes *-chen* or *-lein* (e.g., *Haüschen* “small house” and *Röslein* “small rose,” both of which umlaut the vowel sound

11. Examples of diminutive have been drawn from many published sources, including Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, and Savickiene and Dressler, *Acquisition of Diminutives*, and from personal interviews. Data taken from popular or unattributed sources have been cross-checked with informants for accuracy whenever possible.

of the root morpheme), though sometimes they use *-l* or *-erl* instead (e.g., *Mädchen* “girl” → colloquial *Madl* “cute”; we will return to this matter of lexical semantic shift in connection with diminution). Other Germanic languages, such as Swedish, Yiddish, and Frisian, similarly abound with diminutives.

Romance languages also present a wealth of diminutives. French constructs feminine noun diminutives using *-ette* or *-elle* suffixes (e.g., *mademoiselle* ← *madame* “woman”; *fillette* ← *fille* “girl”), while masculine nouns receive *-ot*, *-on* or *-ou* (*chiot* “puppy” ← *chien* “dog”). Italian diminutives infix *-in* before the word-final vowel (for masculines and feminines) while using other forms for inanimates. Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish also yield many possibilities. Latin employed case-sensitive variations with suffixes *-(c)ulus*, *-(c)ula* and *-(c)ulum*, along with an *-ell-* variety seen in words such as *libellus* ← *liber* “book” and *gladiolus* ← *gladius* “sword,” both of which illustrate features of clipping combined with semantic shift.

It is worth noting that some languages permit multiple affixation for diminutives. For example, Polish *kot* (“cat”) can be diminuted to *kotek* (“kitty”) and then still further to *koteczek* (“tiny kitty”). Furthermore, Polish permits alternate diminutive suffixes on the same root word, especially with personal names (e.g., *Grzegorz* “Gregory” → *Grzes*, *Grzesiek*, *Grzesio*, *Grzesiu*). Or, conversely, diminution can be accomplished by clipping, with or without affixation, thereby creating alternate forms based on the same root, as English does (e.g., *Katherine* → *Kat*, *Kit*, *Katy*, *Kathy*, etc.). Modern languages evidence no shortage of examples.

1.2 Social Implications of Diminutives

Modern language studies have given some attention to the use of diminutives for reasons other than the customary ones (smallness, endearment), and these studies open up possibilities of interpretation for the New Testament. For example, so-called “faded diminutives” in modern languages can be perceived as having little to do with literal smallness and much with the emblematic representation of shared community values. One monograph that suggests this dimension is Brown and Levinson’s

Politeness (1987). Their comments are brief and easy to miss, falling as they do under the heading of “in-group identity markers,”¹² and mentioned along with formal pronouns and honorifics. The authors suggest that English can mark in-group identity by diminutives such as *duckie*, *blondie*, and *cutie*, and offer examples from Tzeltal and Tamil, arguing that “Diminutives and endearments...have a similar function of claiming in-group solidarity” since such forms “soften” what they call “face-threatening acts” (FTAs).¹³ Brown and Levinson mention use of the Tenejapa diminutive adjective *?ala* “a little” as a positive politeness technique that is part of a larger “interactional ethos,” which includes issues of “vertical and horizontal social distance.”¹⁴ They explain that a “lower” person can reduce the imposition of a request made to a more powerful person by means of minimization (see 177; they label this a “negative interactional marker”) so long as their language community already interprets this technique as emphasizing the emotional bond between interactants.¹⁵

Other modern language situations seem to confirm these observations. For example, native Dutch speakers I interviewed in North America described similar social values, as did Dutch expatriates living in Canada.¹⁶ Dutch diminutive suffixes (-*je*, -*tje*, -*pje*, -*etje*, and -*kje*, along with dialectal variants) can be added to nouns or adjectives, as with *kindje* (“small child”), *autootje* (“small car”), and *huistje* (“small house”). A small animal is not necessarily a young one: *hondje* identifies a “small (adult) dog” but not a puppy. Some words, such as *sneeuwkllokje* (lit. “snow-clock-DIM” → snowdrop flower), exist only in diminutive form, while others are regionalisms, such as *groentjes* (“greenish”) ← *groen* (“green”). Diminutives once used for children may prevail into adulthood: endearment (also known as

12. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 107–10.

13. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 95.

14. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 251.

15. See also discussion in Sifanou, “Use of Diminutives,” 156.

16. These interviews took place across a three year period, coincident with the preparations of my original papers on this subject.

hypercoristic) labels, as in the names *Paul* and *Juriaan* → *Paultje* and *Juurtje*, like their English counterparts, often take on a life of their own with no respect to age or size.

But there is still more to the Dutch picture. Popular writers Colin White and Laurie Boucke humorously describe “the compulsive-obsessive use of diminutives in daily speech” of the Dutch: “The use of diminutives is an integral part of the Dutch language and usually adds a positive and cosy [sic] feeling to what is being said.”¹⁷ They warn: “But beware because the ‘little’ factor can at times ‘belittle the bespoken’ by denoting sarcasm, irony or anger.” A Dutchman drinking *pils* (“beer”) at the local pub will invite a friend to join him for a *pils-je*, according to these authors, even though it has nothing to do with the size of the brew. The issue is friendship, a fact confirmed during an interview with PT (a Dutch engineer now residing in Ottawa, ON), who commented that he routinely requests a *kopje* of coffee anytime he happens to be conversing with other native Dutch speakers. “If I wanted a huge mug of coffee [he motions with exaggeration], I would ask for a *kop*, but any other time it is always a *kop-je*.” His Dutch-born wife agrees, and both agree that use of diminutives marks Dutch speakers as “kinder [and] more polite,” while laughing about their own frequent use of diminutives (“It’s just what we do”). In a separate interview, native speaker CdeB, who lives in a town just outside Rotterdam, likewise said (in translation): “Everybody does it. It’s the thing to do.” When she and her family members were asked what would happen if a Dutchman did not make frequent use of diminutives, they pointedly responded: “We would take note of him!” as they joked about their suspicion that such a person was actually German. She playfully added: “If Hitler had won the war, everything would be big.” PdeB reasoned the “necessity” of regular diminution this way: “The Netherlands is a small country, so everything we talk about is small.” Other native Dutch speakers I interviewed in the United States and Canada viewed diminution as symbolic of nationalism, and one of them offered

17. White and Boucke, *Undutchables*, 214.

to continue our discussion of the subject in an *email-tje*, spontaneously amused at his addition of the Dutch diminutive to the English word.

Dressler and Barbaresi (citing Wierzbicka) suggest that certain conditions favor the use of diminutives, intimacy being one of them, because it involves a “readiness to reveal some particular aspects of one’s personality and of one’s inner world that one conceals from other people; a readiness based on personal trust and on personal ‘good feelings.’”¹⁸ This corresponds positively with statements made by the above-mentioned Dutch informants. Dressler and Barbaresi similarly claim that “in many societies, women seem to be more contact-oriented than men... [hence, they observe] the greater use of diminutives by women than by men.”¹⁹

Native Australians I interviewed in Sydney expressed sentiments similar to the Dutch regarding the use of diminutives, which occur most frequently with speakers of Broad Australian, a socio-economic rather than regional dialect.²⁰ To foreign ears, Broad Australian is the most easily recognizable form of Australian English, even if incomprehensible, and it stands apart from “Educated-” or “British”-Australian varieties. The vernacular abounds in slang, of which diminutives are one type. The pattern usually involves shortening of the root morpheme and then suffixation of *-ie* or *-y* (e.g., breakfast → *brekk + ie*; television → *tell + y*). The *Oxford Companion to the English Language* identifies this “Standard Australian English” as *the* national variety, though many Australians perceive its working class association as something best avoided. Some informants consider themselves above the use of vernacular diminutives and have described the dialect (and these forms) as “lazy” and “uneducated” speech. Popular or not, the dialect’s distinct features

18. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 214; Wierzbicka, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*, 105.

19. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 413.

20. My interviews with Dutch and Australian English speakers took place on various occasions between 2009 and 2012. See Delbridge on “Standard Australian English.”

are ubiquitous,²¹ and as one expatriate (RV) from Melbourne put it: “It’s simply the way we talk; I never even thought about it until I moved [to America].”

When I initially asked Dutch and Australian English speakers what the habitual use of diminutives meant to them, most responded with shrugs and comments along the lines of “That’s just the way it is.” When I redirected, reminding them how frequently the forms are used in daily speech in contrast to other language communities, their explanations invariably drifted toward common values. Some informants in New South Wales attributed Australian diminutives (and slang in general) to the country’s “laid back lifestyle” and to its highly valued egalitarianism. CB, a highly educated hospital administrator in Sydney, said the diminutives even she uses periodically “make us all equal.” NW, an elderly woman living in Sydney, who speaks British Australian and studiously avoids diminutives in her own speech, nevertheless affirmed that diminutives have a “democratizing effect.”

Though diminutives are more typical of oral communication, they certainly appear in writing too. A comparison of the January 5, 2011 editions of *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph* proved informative. The former, in publication nearly 175 years and circulated worldwide, uses a formal register of standard English with British spellings and the occasional idiom. One article refers to the aging population with the frozen phrase “oldies” and “goldies,” while another identifies sports star Chris Houston as “Housou” (citing direct quotation from his private

21. Winston Churchill is known to have regarded the Australian English dialect with disdain. Its diminutives take two common forms: those that add *-ie* to the shortened stem (e.g., Australian → *Aussie*; biscuit → *bikkie*; breakfast → *brekkie*; budgerigar → *budgie*; chocolate → *chockie*; football → *footie*; tin/can of beer → *timmie*; lad/lass → *laddie/lassie*; mosquito → *mozzie*; sick day → *sickie*; sunglasses → *sunnies*; shock absorbers → *shockies*; truck driver → *truckie*; university → *uni*; trade unionist → *tradie*; and those which add *-o* (e.g., garbage collector → *garbo*; Aborigine → *Abo*; slacker → *slacko*; Salvation Army personnel → *Salvos*; avocados → *avos*).

conversations that were recorded by the police), as he allegedly sought access to street drugs, which he referred to as “lollies” and “chippies.” But for the most part, *The Sydney Morning Herald* avoids these colloquialisms. The popular tabloid *The Daily Telegraph*, on the other hand, is not so sparing: its front page headline refers to the approaching *footy* (football) season, and subsequent stories highlight *fireys* (fire-fighters), *pommies* (British persons), *greenies* (environmentalists), *unis* (universities), *bookies* (betting agents), *Guineas* (horse racing currency), and even a *dunny* (toilet). Media personality Shane Warne is referred to as *Warnie* and a soccer player named Ronaldinho as *Ronnie*, and there are numerous appearances of the obligatory *Aussie* (Australian). This tabloid, unlike its international counterpart, pitches to a wide national readership using words that fall in line with Arthur Delbridge’s observation on the vernacular spectrum of antipodean English:

The Australianness of Australian English is, of course, a highly variable factor. It is most obvious in spoken language, especially among speakers at the broader end of the speech spectrum. But in written language it depends more on register and subject matter: *the closer one comes to the personal and social heart of Australian life the more idiomatic and indigenized is the language in use*. The Australianness of Australian literature, especially in dialogue in drama and other fiction holding up the mirror to the intimacies of Australian life, is at one extreme, and close by are the columns of (especially) the week-end newspapers. There is a gradient then towards the other end, where one finds expository or business writing in prose. This is where one might expect writers to make their language choices constantly from within the limits of Standard Australian English.²²

The comments I elicited from Dutch and Australian English speakers in some instances connected diminutives with politeness. Even though speakers from both language communities indicated they had previously given the matter little thought, they concluded in interviews that their use conveyed respect and group identity. Wierzbicka affirms with this picture, though rather than labeling them “diminutives” she suggests that these

22. Delbridge, “Standard Australian English,” 268 (italics mine).

characteristically Australian abbreviations...have a function quite different from the main function of diminutives... Formally, they differ from English diminutives because they are abbreviations...a suffix [added] to a truncated form of the base word. Semantically, they differ from diminutives in expressing, essentially, not endearment but good humor... [T]he semantic complex explicated above reflects many characteristic features of the Australian ethos: anti-sentimentality, jocular cynicism, a tendency to knock things down to size, “mateship,” good-natured humour, and love of informality...²³

In short, Australian English diminutives play a depreciative function, often effected humorously, and according to Wierzbicka, thereby express cohesion around national values.

This socially oriented dimension to some diminution also occurs in Modern Greek, and it offers a minimizing function in the service of politeness. Sifanou argues that Modern Greek’s frequent use of diminutives, along with *liyo* “a little,” are “elements [that] serve as markers of friendly, informal polite-ness... [T]he use of diminutives mainly serves to establish or reaffirm a solidary [*sic*] framework for the interaction...[and] a tendency for intimacy and informality in Greek.”²⁴ Daltas notes the inverse correlation between frequency of diminution and formality of a situation, and correlates this with Brown and Levinson’s observation (cited above), adding that even “Adjectives having negative connotations, such as *ksinos* “sour,” can be diminutized as *ksinutsikos* “sourish”; similarly, *askimos* “ugly” can become *askimulis* “ugly-ish,” thus endearing or softening its negative force.”²⁵ This wording would be recognized by native speakers as ways in which Greeks “express politeness either by claiming common ground and showing solidarity towards the addressee, or by showing affectionate concern for imposing on his/her freedom of action.”²⁶ Native Cypriot KS, in an interview with me, says she has watched for years as “everything” now seems to be diminished in her native country. She commented that even

23. Wierzbicka, “Different Cultures,” 169–70.

24. Sifanou, “Use of Diminutives,” 155.

25. Daltas, “Patterns of Variability,” 63, 159.

26. Daltas, “Patterns of Variability,” 159.

personal names are actually being replaced by the suffix that was originally appended to their name: e.g., *Kalliope* → *Kalliopitsa* → *Pitsa*, and *Xenophon* → *Xenakis* → *Akis*. KS suggests that, for many Cypriots, diminution has come to signify “genuine Greekness.”

Something similar shows up in Polish diminutives, as discussed by Wierzbicka, who argues that, “In Polish, warm hospitality is expressed as much by the use of diminutives as it is by the ‘hectoring’ style of offers and suggestions,”²⁷ and that these can be used in combination, as in this example:

Wez jeszcze sledzika! Koniesznie!
 “Take some more dear-little-herring. You must!”

She explains that

The diminutive praises the quality of the food and minimizes the quantity pushed onto the guest’s plate. The speaker insinuates: “don’t resist! it [*sic*] is a small thing I’m asking you to do—and a good thing!” ... The diminutive and the imperative work hand in hand in the cordial, solicitous attempt to get the guest to eat more... [A] request that is formulated in the imperative mood would often be softened by means of the diminutive. Thus, while it would be more natural for a wife to use an imperative than an interrogative-cum-conditional request when speaking to her husband, she would be likely to soften that imperative by a double diminutive form of his name (as well as by the intonation).²⁸

Among her examples is this sentence, with its complex diminution indicating politeness in connection with a request:

Jureczku, daj mi papierosa!
 George-Dim.-Dim., give me a cigarette!

Wierzbicka elsewhere states: “We are so used to traditional labels such as ‘diminutive’...that we tend to forget their arbitrary character and to mistake them for genuine statements of meaning.”²⁹ The same might have been said of ancient Middle

27. Wierzbicka, “Different Cultures,” 167.

28. Wierzbicka, “Different Cultures,” 167.

29. Wierzbicka, “Diminutives and Depreciatives,” 130.

Easterners as well, for readers of Jewish biblical narratives can recognize in, for example, Gen 18:4, 5, that Abraham extends hospitality to mysterious visitors by offering “a little water” and “a piece of bread.” Likewise, a second-language Spanish speaker commented to me on the frequent use of diminutives she hears in Puerto Rican Spanish, especially when people address or refer to children: in her opinion, it is evidence of the culture’s high regard for children. And a native Japanese informant reported to me that diminutive *o-* prefix in his native language (e.g., *o-kashi* “snack(s),” *o-kane* “money,” *o-namae* “name”) is used to mark politeness (though he notes that not all *o-* constructions are diminutive). These anecdotal perceptions of diminutive meanings appear to support the idea that patterned usage is associated with community values in the minds of native speakers.

The plethora of diminutive data, then, bends not under the strain of morphological variety or regularity but under the burden of meaning. Savickiene and Dressler discuss the “subjectivity of diminutives” due to the fact that they “indicate the speaker’s fictive approach, that is, his transition from the real world to an imaginary world.”³⁰ Determining what constitutes a “real” diminutive can be difficult because the subject suffers the proverbial form-function dilemma that haunts many paradigms and typologies. It appears that certain Lithuanian “diminutives” actually function as augmentatives (amplificatives), and in English, diminutive-like formations such as *flaky*, *pasty* and *dodgy* are in fact adjectival. Similarly, Greek ἱμάτιον “garment/cloak,” among other words appearing to have a diminutive suffix, in fact does not.

The survey provided thus far permits a preliminary working list of meanings for diminutive forms in various languages, even if qualifications need to be offered later. We can say that diminutives can do the following.

30. Savickiene and Dressler, *Acquisition of Diminutives*, 156, 154, respectively.

a. Convey Physical Smallness in Contrast to Something Larger

Small size appears in the Scottish English word *bairn-ag* (“child-small”) and *wif-ockie* (“small woman”); also, Dutch *kindje* (“small child”), *autootje* (“small car”), *huistje* (“small house”). *Hondje* identifies a “small (adult) dog.”

b. Demonstrate Like Quality

Examples that convey a quality of one thing that is found in another include Dutch *groen* (“green”) → *groentjes* (“greenish”) (regionalism); this shift in meaning also occurs in Scottish Gaelic *bodach* (“old man”) with *-an* suffix, which comes to mean “manikin,” and Czech *stul* (“table”) with *-ek* suffix coming to mean “stair/step” (*stolek*). Clearly, “diminution” may involve factors other than smallness—a *manikin* can be life-size, and certain stairs are larger than some tables—qualities of human shape and of flatness, rather than size, are at issue in these examples, respectively. Sometimes the quality is, however, of a lesser degree, as in Italian *alt-ino* (“less high”), *lung-etto* (“less long”), and *vin-ello* (“weakish wine”, i.e., less alcohol than other wines).

c. Convey Affection, Endearment, Intimacy (Hypercoristic use)

Hypercoristic diminutives occur in many languages, seen for example in Dutch names (e.g., *Paul* and *Juriaan* → *Paultje* and *Juurtje*) as well as English, as in the case of a cousin of this writer who is still referred to in the family as “Wee Johnny” even as he approaches retirement. Dutch friends can visit with each other for *uurtje gezellig* (“a little hour”) or take *een straatje om* (“a little stroll [lit. ‘street’]”) through town together, regardless of the length of time taken. The diminutive points to the friendship, not the duration of the walk.

d. Demean (derogation)

Derogation is conveyed when a diminutive form is created from prominence or magnificence, e.g., when the fourth-century Western Roman emperor was referred to as “Romulus *Augustulus*” (i.e., “little Augustus”), or the former British Prime Minister is labeled “*Maggie Thatcher*,” or a deviant jetsetter is headlined as “that poor little rich kid.” The dissonance creates the disrespect.

Similar disdain occurs in Italian *Vai come una lumach-ina* (“You walk like [are as slow as] a baby-snail”).³¹

e. To Generate Reference to Something Else

Diminution that results in semantic difference occurs, for example, in Scots English: *kilt-ie*, literally “small kilt” but designating the soldier who wears the garment; Persian *mard* (“man”) with *-ak* suffix creates demonstrative force, as in *mardak*, “this fellow” rather than some other; and Dutch *broodje* (←*brood* “bread”) specifically designating a “(dinner) roll,” not a small loaf of bread.

Additionally, diminutives in some settings appear to convey shared values, solidarity, and politeness, at least for some speech communities. Now, we consider how these observations compare with the diminutives of the New Testament.

2. Overview of New Testament Greek Diminutives

There are 33 different diminutive forms appearing in the New Testament (34, if one includes the *πινακιδιον/πινακίς* variant in Luke 1:63; see Appendix, which is based on Swanson), with 27 of them appearing in the Gospels. The most common in the Gospels are *παιδιον* (49x), *αρνιον* (25x), *παιδίσκη* (13x), *νεανίσκος* (11x), *τεκνιον* (8x) and *πλοιάριον* (6x). All but six of the lexical forms underlying the diminished variation also appear somewhere in the New Testament; those which appear in the New Testament only in a diminuted form are: *στρουθιον*, *σχοινιον*, *ψυχιον*, *ψωμιον*, *οψαριον*, and *κοράσιον*. They appear to align under three categories: animals, people, and familiar objects (e.g., ear,

31. This Italian example appears in Savickiene and Dressler, *Acquisition of Diminutives*, 132, where they propose (116–18) that diminutives be arranged under three headings: morphosemantic denotation (general literal meanings), morphosemantic connotation (e.g., including irony and sarcasm), and morpho-pragmatic (in which meaning is attached specifically to a certain speech act or situation).

island)³² prevalent in the daily life of many communities. Among the Gospels, Mark has the highest frequency of diminutives, as both Swanson and Turner observed independently, the latter adding that “we can detect a tendency [in Mark] towards the vernacular,” including the use of faded diminutives.³³

Diminutives that occur outside the Gospels include *ἀρνίον* (28x in Rev), *νησίον* (Acts 27:16), *παιδίον* (7x in epistles), *τεκνίον* (8x in epistles), *γυναικάριον* (2 Tim 3:6), *βιβλαρίδιον* (4x in Rev), *νεανίσκος* (6x in Acts and 1 John), *παιδίσκη* (7x in Acts and Gal), *θύρις* (Acts 20:9; 2 Cor 11:33) and *κεφαλίς* (Heb 10:7). If we factor out the frequent use of *ἀρνίον* in the Apocalypse, vocative use of *τεκνίον* in some epistles, and citations based on the LXX (e.g., *παιδίσκη* in Galatians 4), the frequency of diminutives *outside* the Gospels plummets to a mere handful of the 181 total New Testament appearances.

Swanson contrasts the New Testament as a whole with the Septuagint, noting that the entire LXX has just 74 different diminutives, i.e., little more than double the New Testament despite the considerable difference in text length. Even earlier Greek writers such as Euripides, Aristophanes, Polybius and Herondas did not rival the New Testament in diminutive frequencies.³⁴ Swanson says: “The inevitable conclusion (based on this evidence) is that, contrary to the dogma, the New Testament has more diminutives...than the comparable texts of the period.”³⁵ The impression is that the daily life of common people provided many opportunities to employ these forms, and that the Gospel writers in particular appear quite willing to retain them. Many of these words were used to convey smallness, but other meanings begin to appear as well. Swanson’s work tends to agree with Petersen, whose expansive survey of Classical literature devotes

32. The numbers provided in this paragraph, drawn from Swanson, correlate with my own word counts.

33. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 143; see also Turner, *Grammar*, 28.

34. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 148–50.

35. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 150–51.

chs. 4–13 to nouns “in *-ion* which have no diminutive meaning.”³⁶ Yet Petersen suggests that

The use of *-ion* [in Classical Greek] to express similarity was the one [denotation] that gave rise to the diminutive meaning... After the diminutive meaning, however, had become well established, new words...could be formed with the idea of small size uppermost, and old ones could be reinterpreted as diminutives, or at any rate the diminutive idea could be combined with the notion of similarity...the diminutive, like the deteriorative...use of *-ion*, is derived from its function of designating “something like, but not the same” as the primitive.³⁷

In other words, Petersen concludes that the association of diminutive forms with smallness was just one purpose located within a broader semantic range—a quite different understanding from much of the current literature. Moulton and Howard were inclined the same way.³⁸ Nevertheless, the categories listed above line up roughly with Petersen’s: physical smallness (a) equals his ch. 15; conveying a quality of one thing found in another (b) is his chs. 9, 10, 12, 13; hypercoristic (c) is his ch. 16; and derogation (d) appears in his ch. 14, being identified there as “deteriorative” meaning. Semantic shift (e) examples can be drawn from different parts of Petersen, and overlap with what are his “faded” diminutives. As Swanson frames the problem: when does *παῖδιον* cease to mean “little boy” and become simply “boy”?³⁹ (Swanson reduces Petersen’s arrangement to a four-part classification that includes deteriorative, endearing, physical smallness, and a combined category of true and faded meanings.)⁴⁰

Swanson regrets that, even when the literature scope is narrowed to the New Testament, “Drawing up a list of diminutives...is not a simple procedure,” because like form does not always entail like meaning (e.g., *-ις* and *-ιδ-* can identify tools)

36. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 135.

37. Petersen, *Greek Diminutives*, 101–102, 132.

38. Moulton and Howard, *Grammar*, 344–45.

39. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 135.

40. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 146.

and less common forms (e.g., *-ισκος/-ισκε/-ισκον*) may also convey diminutive meaning. He organizes the 33(34) true New Testament diminutives (see Appendix) with endings in *-ιον*, *-αριον*, *-ιδιον*, *-αριδιον*, *-ασιον*, *-ισκος*, *-ισκε* and *-ις*, distinguishing them from words of like form that he labels “non-diminutives” which, in some cases, betray the larger semantic picture of similarity that Petersen had kept on the table (e.g., *πρεσβυτέριον* “council of elders” obviously related by quality to *πρεσβύτερος* “elder”). Differing from Turner, Swanson points out that *σανδάλιον* (← *σανδάλον*; see Mark 6:9) probably had nothing to do with size in that context, and that *ποιμνιον* (“flock,” Luke 12:32) had never been diminutive, and observes that New Testament diminutives mostly pertain to three things: people, animals, and tangible objects.⁴¹ His list and the cross-linguistic summary given above align, each suggesting that diminution may convey:

- Smallness (e.g., *νησίον* [“small island”] — Acts 27:16; *κλινάριον* [“cots”] — Acts 5:15);
- Quality alternation of some kind (e.g., *σχοινίον* [“slender rope”] — John 2:15; Acts 27:32);
- Endearment/hypercoristic (e.g., *τεκνίον* [“child”] — 1 John 2:21, incl. vocatives, e.g., Gal 4:19);
- Derogation/deteriorative (e.g., *γυναικάριον* [“weak/foolish women”] — 2 Tim 3:6); or
- Change of reference to something else (e.g., *θύρα* [“door”] → *θύρις* [“window”] — Acts 20:9; 2 Cor 11:33).⁴²

And last, it appears that some instances of diminution mark common values and politeness. What is striking about the New Testament data, with its 33(34) different words and 181 total appearances, is that virtually all occur in the Gospels. Factoring out the extensive use of *ἀρνίον* in the Apocalypse, vocative use of *τεκνίον* in various epistles, and materials that cite or interact with the Septuagint (e.g., five appearance of *παιδίσκη* in Galatians 4), the appearance of diminutives plummets to a mere handful in the

41. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 141, 147, respectively.

42. Contrast this odd statement in BDF 70: “Diminutives are not frequent in the New Testament because they are not suited to a language even slightly elevated.”

New Testament literature outside the Gospels. Even if these other uses are included in the tally, Swanson is able to demonstrate that, in proportion to text length, the Gospels have more than two-and-one-half times more diminutives than all the remaining New Testament literature.⁴³ Narratives (and apocalyptic) that are anchored in Jewish Palestinian settings and presumably drawn from reports by local participants in the events show a markedly higher frequency of diminutives than materials intended for a more geographically diverse readership across the Roman world, such as the epistles. Turner is thinking along these lines when he writes, “we can detect a tendency [in Mark] towards the vernacular, that he uses some diminutive words which bear no diminutive force,”⁴⁴ but that fact alone arises in other literature (and speech) as well, and he offers no examples to support the claim.

More concretely, however, Swanson calculates that, among the Gospels, Mark has the highest frequency of diminutives relative to length of text.⁴⁵ Pauline literature, on the other hand, shows the lowest frequency (and this writer notes that, if we discount influence from Old Testament materials and pastoral vocatives, Pauline usage almost drops right off completely, with only three remaining diminutives: 1 Cor 14:20; 2 Cor 11:33; 2 Tim 3:6. Despite this unevenness, Swanson argues “contrary to the dogma,” which alleges that the New Testament has few diminutives, providing evidence that in fact their overall frequency is more than double that of the LXX or Polybius.⁴⁶ Swanson has offered for New Testament studies a helpful simplification of the comprehensive taxonomy Petersen had compiled for the Classical materials. However, with additional attention to environments, i.e., of the original settings and with reference to other languages, a symbiotic picture emerges. Meanings of diminutive suffixes in the New Testament generally coincide with the

43. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 142–43.

44. Turner, *Style*, 28.

45. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 143.

46. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 150.

diversity of their counterparts in modern languages, and some convey social rather than literal or metaphoric implications.

3. *Interpretation of Diminutives*

It has been shown that diminutives of the Greek New Testament function “as expected” when compared with modern languages. However, as Haas notes, more studies are needed on their range of connotation, for one does not have to look hard to find examples of the problems they pose.⁴⁷ The English diminutive suffix *-y/-ie*, for example, can express literal smallness (*puppy*, *kitty*) or insult or derogation (Prime Minister *Maggie* Thatcher), or even in-group conversation (*tradie*, see below)—all in the same time period of a single speech community. The key to determining the appropriate nuance must be located outside the morphology and somewhere in the living context (and in the minds of both speaker and hearer). Since the primary studies of Greek diminutives to date have been conducted from a morpho-semantic approach, the effect has been the sidelining of analyses sensitive to contextual influences, and work remains to be done on their possible *relational* implications, particularly (it seems) in the Gospel narratives. The lack of direct access to living speakers and situations in the New Testament is problematic, since morphopragmatics and sociolinguistics thrive on sensitivity to the vicissitudes of social environment. However, to pretend that this dimension does not exist would be to simplify the challenge of translation at the cost of consideration of what is demonstrably a factor in language usage, namely, the particulars of human relationships. Porter sees this:

The task for a “purely epigraphic language”...such as ancient Greek is made more difficult because there are no native speakers to give opinions on the use of their language, the corpus of available material is limited, a skewing of registers (the oral level is completely missing) results, and the social context is difficult to recover. These factors, however, rather than causing despair should make more

47. Haas, “Expression of the Diminutive,” 82.

pressing the need to reevaluate constantly the interpretive models employed and to rely more heavily upon formal linguistic features of the extant corpus.⁴⁸

He notes subsequently the necessity of considering word choices “within a framework of actual language usage,” the best understanding made possible when one “deals with language as it is actually evidenced in usage...[for] an element is only meaningful if it is defined wholly in terms of other elements.”⁴⁹ His concerns, directed as they are toward verbs and syntax, apply also to morphology, especially given the semantic extremities entailed in diminutives. How can one small derivational morpheme mean both “dear” *and* “foolish,” “small” *and* “normal-sized,” derogation *and* politeness, in-group *and* marginalized—at the same time and in the same speech community? To attempt an explanation for these Janus words gone wild, we shall begin by summarizing the problems with reference to the New Testament, consider some cross-linguistic assessments in recent literature, and then propose application for specific New Testament occurrences.

The first problem we shall note regarding diminutive semantics in the New Testament is the apparent non-functionality, even redundancy, of what has been called “faded” forms (also called “bleaching,” “generalization,” or “desemanticization”). The very morpheme that apparently marked smallness at some point in its lifetime ceases to do so in certain instances, as Petersen describes for Classical Greek. In the New Testament, faded forms may include ὠτίον (“ear-DIM”, Matt 26:51; Luke 22:51; John 18:26) when used of adults; πινακίδιον (“writing tablet-DIM”), which, along with its base form πίνακις, designated pocket-sized writing tablets even in Classical Greek.⁵⁰ The diminished form continues even when it carries no unique functional value in writing, as it presumably did in speech. Faded animal or people diminutives include δνάριον (“donkey-DIM”), παιδίον/παιδάριον

48. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 4.

49. Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 7, 12, respectively.

50. BAG 664.

(“child-DIM”), κοράσιον (“girl-DIM”), νεανίσκος [“boy-DIM,” Matt 19:20, 22—per Moulton and Howard; see listing], and θυγάτριον (“daughter-DIM”).

Are these truly faded, i.e., having no distinct meaning? Or could they actually reflect size scaling, designating smaller offspring of someone/something else of the same genre? They may indicate something that is small for its type but is not necessarily young (i.e., a small dog may not be a puppy, even though puppies are usually small for their kind). Unfortunately, ancient contexts leave relevant details unspecified for the modern reader. This potential use of diminutives involves subjectivity, the speaker/writer having to decide what is small for its genre. For example, the use of βιβλαρίδιον in Rev 10:2, 8, 9, and 10 indicates a document that is more than a single sheet but less than a book. Petersen may wrestle with this, having observed in his discussion of “faded” Greek diminutives that “In various languages there exist such pairs of adjectives as μειλίχιος and μειλίχος ‘mild,’ ‘gentle’...in which the *-(i)io-* seems to be a formal extension to the primitive, bringing with it no change of meaning.”⁵¹ He saw that certain “diminutives” already were carrying no diminutive force in the Greek Classical literature. Swanson echoes this in his New Testament treatment: “A further semantic complication is that of ‘faded’ diminutives. The question about παιδίον for example is: ‘When does it cease to mean ‘little boy’ and become simply ‘boy’?’”⁵² Both authors opened the door for seeing diminution as a type of gradation. A similar issue can be cited for English: when does a *leaflet* upgrade to a document, a document to a *pamphlet*, a pamphlet to a *paperback* (in this lexical compound, *paper* implies a smaller book)? The choice of word resides in the mind of the beholder.

The second problem involves the Janus-like contrast between endearment and derogation. The diminutive θυγάτριον surely implies endearment in Mark 5:23 and 7:25, as do certain uses of παιδίον (e.g., in address form, 1 John 2:14, 18; 3:7) and νοσσίον

51. Petersen, *Greek Diminutives*, 28.

52. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 135.

(“young bird-DIM”) in Matt 23:37 being a metaphor of the people of Jerusalem that Jesus wants to protect. However, other diminutives are derogatory. The *γυναικάριον* of 2 Tim 3:6 has been variously translated: “weak/foolish/easily-misled women”; see also *κεράτιον* (“pod”), i.e., a poor man’s food (Luke 15:16), and *στρουθίον* (“sparrow,” Matt 10:29, 31), which has negligible value in contrast with God’s children. What is endearing in one context becomes dismissive or derogatory in another.

The third problem involves shifts of reference in connection with diminution. Quality changes, typical of *σχοινίον* (John 2:15; Acts 27:32), which is a “*slender* rope,” or even *κλινάριον* (Acts 5:15) and *κλινίδιον* (Luke 5:19, 24), which seem to indicate portable alternatives to the more common *κλίνη* (“bed”), are not problematic because they involve gradation. But the diminutive *θύρις* (Acts 20:9; 2 Cor 11:33) indicates something quite different, a “window” not a “door.” The same goes with *περύγιον* (“pinnacle”), the “tip, extremity” in contrast to the thing from which it protrudes.⁵³ Such diminutives imply a highly specific designation, “this not that,” a move beyond relative gradation to designation of another thing altogether.

The fourth problem involves a social value that attaches to certain diminutives in particular speech communities, the diminuted form of a word becoming the customary, even preferential, way to designate something familiar. The use of “head-DIM” in Heb 10:7 with *κεφαλής* (specifically, *κεφαλίδι βιβλίου*) may be such a case, as perhaps also the “pinnacle” of the temple (*πινακίδιον*)—as in modern languages and the Gospels, with things that often pertain to home and family, or at least are common property.⁵⁴ Whatever reasons are located in the minds of the users (and these certainly vary between language communities), a preference for particular diminutive forms appears to connect positively with a community’s perceived values and relationships, but when and how a diminutive ceases to have its

53. See BAG 734.

54. See Moffatt, *Hebrews*, 138, on the designation of the head, i.e., tip of the stick to which scroll is attached.

customary meaning (smallness, dearness, etc.) and becomes a communal marker is yet to be explained.

Overall, New Testament diminutive meanings parallel their counterparts in other languages, and any advancement in understanding them will require consideration of contexts, as Porter, Dressler and Barbaresi, and others have insisted. Various solutions have been proposed in fields as diverse as linguistics, anthropology, and cognitive psychology (to name the more prominent ones), though three recurrent approaches seem to dominate consideration. One is to see something inherent within a word leading to its meaning and therefore its usage; a second proposes that the speaker's current state of mind and intent, located within a social setting, prompts diminutive usage; and a third approach invokes something transcendent and inherently experiential in order to explain them.

3.1 *Traditional/"Root Meaning"*

Not a few grammars of Greek and other languages state (or tacitly assume) there is meaning inherent in words (or parts of words), despite the revolution in diachronic lexical semantics over the past half-century that suggests quite to the contrary. Quite a number of modern language grammars I have perused simply report something along the lines of "diminutives mean smallness" (and sometimes "endearment"), with no attempt made to place them in a broader semantic paradigm. D.A. Carson and others discuss this "root fallacy," the idea "which presupposes that every word actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components."⁵⁵ This tacit misapprehension remains in many language grammars, but will not be considered further, in deference to the next two more profitable options.

3.2 *Morphopragmatics*

A different starting point for assessing diminution lies in the area of intent and context. Pragmatics is concerned with the effect of context upon meaning, as are its related fields of speech act

55. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 26; discussion taken from 26–32.

theory and conversation-related implicature. At the forefront of these approaches are the knowledge and intentions of the speaker and the listener in particular social environments. Dressler and Barbaresi address “affixes and other morphological devices whose meaning appears to be primarily located in pragmatics. These devices exhibit no stable semantic value and their meaning seems to be often elusive.”⁵⁶ Their work in modern European languages, which has been discussed already, begins with the speaker’s desired purposes and effects and then considers which morphemes are suitable to the speaker’s intended outcomes. For example, if one wishes to communicate smallness, a number of possibilities present themselves to the mind of the speaker, such as adjectives that convey small size (e.g., little, tiny, small), affixation (usually suffixes in Indo-European languages, such as English *-y/-ie* endings, possibly with root-morpheme changes: William → *Billy*; dog → *puppy*; cat → *kitty*), or the use of a qualifier such as an adverb (just, only, merely). The speaker considers from the possibilities what “does the job” most suitably in that situation and utterance.

This morphopragmatic approach looks for “predictable, strategic uses in speech acts and speech situations,”⁵⁷ and may help explain the diversity of diminutive meanings. It suggests that diminutives are not a fixed grammatical category like the primary concepts of noun, verb, adjective, etc., though even these items evidence a degree of fluidity. For example, English allows concepts like smallness and derogation to be conveyed in different ways: by the use of adjectives, such as *little* and *tiny* or *foolish* and *stupid*, respectively. It permits endearment to be conveyed via such vocatives as *dear* or *darling*. Quality adjustments can be done with other words, such as *like* and *similar to*, or by use of a suffix, such as *-ish*. Each concept exists apart from the morphemes and is selected in the mind of the speaker before a particular morpheme is used. Meaning and purpose, while conveyed through a root morpheme or affix of some sort, are not

56. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, ix.

57. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 84.

inextricably tied to any one of them—a fact that becomes even more apparent as lexical semantics are tracked diachronically. So, in contrast to the traditional morphosemantic approach, which views diminutives as fundamentals, the pragmatic approach asks what purposes are attached to specific speech situations and events, for these are basic categories. Savickiene and Dressler argue there is “external evidence for the priority of pragmatic over semantic meanings of diminutives...”⁵⁸

This outside-in approach may prove useful for New Testament consideration because even Swanson (like C.H. Turner) was prompted to speculate on what he called the “colloquial” use of diminutives in the Gospel of Mark,⁵⁹ noting that it is “difficult to distinguish completely the true from the faded meanings, even in context” in the New Testament.⁶⁰ He argues that, “contrary to the dogma, the New Testament has more diminutives...than comparable [Greek] texts of the period,” that is, if every form is considered regardless of meaning.⁶¹ Part of the evolutionary picture of living languages is the potential for a familiar form to change function, as Swanson saw in the development of Greek:

It is difficult to distinguish completely the true form from the faded meanings, even in context; it is possible that even as new words were being coined with diminutive suffixes, older words with the same suffix(es) were losing their diminutive meaning. Words for children and young people seem particularly to belong to the category of faded diminutives. It is also possible that the rise of double and triple diminutives is due to the process of fading. This process would, however, have begun early [i.e., in the Classical period]...⁶²

Daltas labels these faded forms “fossilized,” being “those in which the degree of cohesion of the string *stem* + *D suffix* is high enough to create the impression of new lexemes so that now some have replaced their non-diminuted equivalents in common

58. Savickiene and Dressler, *Morphopragmatics*, 4.

59. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 137, 143.

60. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 146.

61. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 150–51.

62. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 147.

usage...”⁶³ Dressler and Barbaresi claim their morphopragmatic offsets that semantic “elusiveness” that haunts morphologists who offer “vague and impressionistic” descriptions of meaning by factoring in semantic dependence on the speech situations in which a diminutive is being used.⁶⁴ And they claim it also goes beyond pragmaticists, who “have largely disregarded the autonomous pragmatic value of productive morphological operations. In both fields, very little effort has been made to account systematically for their dependence on, and contribution to, the speech situations in which they typically occur.” The authors cite Levinson to the effect that speech situation and communication become mutually relevant via social deixis, which involves “those aspects of language structure that are anchored to the social identities of participants (including bystanders) in the speech event, or to relations between them, or to relations between them and other referents.”⁶⁵ They urge consideration, among other things, of “speakers’ feelings and attitudes towards addressees and objects,”⁶⁶ as well as an awareness of “those pragmatic goals of speech acts which the speaker wants to achieve by strategically using diminutives,” which can even serve as “an in-group marker.”⁶⁷

If Levinson is correct that speech situations and communication become mutually relevant via social deixis, then more attention must be given to the *relational networks* in which diminutives are being used in the New Testament. We need to address speakers’ attitudes, feelings, and relationships to their addressees, per Dressler and Barbaresi, and factor into translation “those pragmatic goals of speech acts which the speaker wants to achieve by strategically using diminutives.”⁶⁸ Daltas argues that

63. Daltas, “Patterns of Variability,” 76–77.

64. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 1.

65. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 18; cf. Levinson, “Pragmatics,” 206.

66. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 90.

67. At this point, the authors are critiquing Sifanou’s “Use of Diminutives.”

68. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 90.

such a “variationist” approach permits “contextual meaning to permeate all statements of form.”⁶⁹ Steven Runge comes at this same issue in *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*: “It is very important to distinguish between the inherent meaning of something (its semantic meaning) and the effect achieved by using it in a particular context (its pragmatic effect).” He offers as an example the English phrase *your children*, which usually would emphasize possession or belonging—i.e., not mine but yours. But if a wife, speaking to her husband, refers to the kids as “*your children*,” the pragmatic effect of “distancing” (with a strong connotation of displeasure) occurs because the expected pronoun was not used. He cites Stephen Levinsohn’s example of the difference between the sentence *John is polite* and *John is being polite*—the latter verb form, which normally carries progressive aspect, here has the pragmatic effect of conveying insincerity.⁷⁰

Repeatedly used diminutives (such as *παιδία* in 1 John), which can be classified as “faded” types, along with some from the Gospel narratives, are functioning as reflectors of relationship, being an in-group marker.⁷¹ The following diagram provides a visual framework for conceiving of the interaction between general semantic meaning and situation-dependant pragmatic effect. The horizontal axis provides possible meanings of morphemes (including affixes and some roots), which would be familiar in a traditional morphosemantic approach to denotation (e.g., smallness, youthfulness, insignificance, endearment). The vertical axis shows that the speaker’s intentions can then construe specific morphological forms in different nuanced directions (with connotations such as derogation, irony, community values), depending on context:

69. Daltas, “Patterns of Variability,” 63.

70. Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 8; cf. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, ix.

71. See also Sifanou, “Use of Diminutives.”

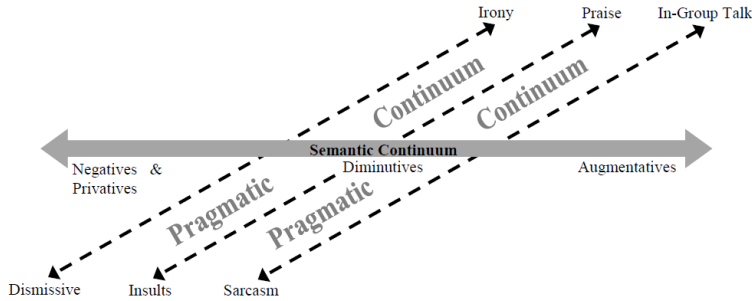


Figure 1: Semantics and Pragmatics of Diminutives

This attempt at sensitivity to social and literary context, i.e., pragmatics, offers a step forward to explaining how a single morpheme can function so diversely, even if more remains to be clarified.

3.3 Categorization

Another starting point, explored by anthropological linguists and cognitive psychologists in particular, involves the concept of *categorization*. Categorization starts with the fact that the human mind groups certain things together, and then subordinates other items underneath or within those groupings. The mind does this with tangible things, actions, qualities, and abstract concepts, thereby highlighting affinity with “like” concepts and identifying contrastive features that distinguish them from “unlike” ones. Categorization is the process by which concepts get related *and* differentiated; it involves affinity *and* dissimilarity.

But how does this cognitive process of categorization actually work? A *classical Western* approach to categorization began with Plato and Aristotle; by identifying similarity of properties and using successive, narrowing criteria to include (or exclude) items from a category, the classical approach aimed to distinguish categories from each other and to put items in only one category. A variant that has been developed in recent decades involves *conceptual clustering*, which begins by generating a concept (i.e., class or cluster) description for a category on the basis of some inherent property that, as it were, generates its own classification—the twist being that objects may belong to more than

one category (per Fuzzy Set Theory). A third approach is *prototype theory*, in which the criteria for categorization are rarely derived from the natural world “out there” but arise from one’s internal cognitive experience and are subject to one’s framing culture(s) and language(s). Cross-linguistic studies, it is argued, show that categorization is more complex and culture-sensitive than mere feature-grouping, and that the language functions of the human mind are more than reflectors of the environment, being active interpreters that impose order onto their environment. Categories are therefore rooted in experience and will necessarily vary cross-culturally.

A proponent of the prototype approach to categorization, George Lakoff, builds his version of the theory in connection with developments in cognitive science that involve a move away from what he labels the traditional “objectivist position” (i.e., human thought is largely abstract and involves mechanical manipulation of abstract symbols) to a position he calls “experiential realism” (thought is embodied, highly imaginative, social, and ecologically-sensitive).⁷² Human linguistic categorization was traditionally based on commonality of abstract features of things (i.e., the “shared properties of the *members*”), whereas prototype theory investigates how human imagination influences reason, thereby *creating* categories.⁷³ Whereas the classical approach emphasizes “the set” of what is in- versus out-side a certain category, prototype theory involves not only human creativity but also *gradation* within categories. Certain items in a category are more central to it (i.e., proto-typical), while other items constitute “deviations from the central case.” Interacting with Eleanor Rosch, Lakoff argues that certain items are “better examples” of a category, while others are less effective representatives of that category, evidencing what he labels a “radial structure within a category...[in which] less central

72. Lakoff, *Women, Fire*, xi–xiv.

73. Lakoff, *Women, Fire*, 8, where he introduces prototype theory.

subcategories are understood as variants of more central categories.”⁷⁴

This radial feature characterizes how prototype theory diverges significantly from other theories of categorization: although *radial structures* (or *radial categories*, in particular) stand around a central case, “conventionalized variations on it...cannot be predicted by general rules.” Lakoff cites the concept of “mother” as an example; it includes variations such as stepmother, adoptive mother, biological mother, surrogate mother, and so forth, though “not all possible variations on the central case exist as categories.”⁷⁵ He offers as an example of the latter the case of “birth-mother who becomes transsexual,” or “legal guardian mother who does not supply nurture.” In other words, there is a “*central* subcategory, defined by a cluster of converging cognitive models (the birth model, the nurturance model),” and there are extensions and variants—but these *cannot* be generated from the central model *by rules*. They are conventional to a language community and must be learned individually by those wishing to speak that language in that community.

To substantiate the active role taken by the human mind in this process of categorization, Lakoff discusses the Australian aboriginal language Dyirbal, which has four noun classifiers, none of which seems obvious to other language speakers.⁷⁶ One category (Bayi) includes such things as men, kangaroos, most snakes and fishes, rainbows and boomerangs. Another category (Balam) includes edible fruit, tubers, honey, and cigarettes, among other things. Still another (Bala) includes meat, wind, yamsticks, mud, stones, and language. In the fourth category (Balan) are such things as scorpions, fire, sun and stars, platypus and echidna, bandicoots, and women, and given the exotic diversity of things (to the Western mind, anyway) in the Balan category, a catchy book title was to loom imminently on the academic horizon. Lakoff argues that the traditional explanation of

74. Lakoff, *Women, Fire*, 83, 40–46.

75. Lakoff, *Women, Fire*, 83–84, 91–114.

76. Lakoff, *Women, Fire*, ch. 6, particularly 92–94.

categories as deriving from shared objective characteristics of the items included in that category simply fails when it comes to Balan; he concludes that this radial feature of categorization would require that “one must learn which domains of experience [and which myths and beliefs] are relevant to categorization and which are not.”⁷⁷ His 600-page *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, like the bushman Xi’s appeal to the baboon that had snatched his Coke bottle in “The God’s Must Be Crazy,” is “long and arduous.” Lakoff does not discuss anything diminutively.

Daniel Jurafsky, however, offers a bridge with a shorter span between mind and morpheme in his “Universal Tendencies in the Semantics of the Diminutive.” He calls the diminutive “any morphological device which means at least ‘small,’” with that device being near-universal and carrying a “bewildering variety of meanings.”⁷⁸ He observes that the diminutive is connected with children but gets extended by metaphor, abstraction, and inference to many other things; diminutive semantics show an “astonishing cross-linguistic regularity,” even as certain language-specific extensions present an “extraordinary, often contradictory range of its senses.”⁷⁹ Leaning on Lakoff, Jurafsky aims to “model the synchronic and diachronic semantics of the diminutive category with a radial category”⁸⁰ in which the “central case” or quality is physical smallness. Other meanings, which subsequently get conveyed by the diminutive, arise by extension, hence they may be idiosyncratic to that language community. He proposes that diminutive pragmatic implications be construed under a “structured polysemy” model that captures the diachronic growth of a category while offering a synchronous “archaeology of meaning,” as he puts it.

On the one hand, then, commonality of human experience addresses the cross-linguistic similarities between diminutives, while connections between the experiences and beliefs of a par-

77. Lakoff, *Women, Fire*, 96.

78. Jurafsky, “Universal Tendencies,” 534.

79. Jurafsky, “Universal Tendencies,” 533, 541.

80. Jurafsky, “Universal Tendencies,” 533.

ticular language community lead to proprietary diminutive meanings unique to that specific community. Jurafsky notes, for example, that the Cantonese diminutive for “woman” indicates social marginalization.⁸¹ Richard Rhodes in a similar vein refers to “a significant number of forms which occur *only* as diminutives” in the native American language Ojibwa, commenting that “the grounds for considering the referents of many of these diminutives small are not immediately obvious to the casual observer.”⁸² Perhaps the same can be said for the New Testament.

4. Implications for New Testament Diminutives

To apply the foregoing to New Testament diminutives, we return to some observations. The most frequently used New Testament diminutives are *παιδίον* (46x in Gospels, 7x in epistles), *νεανίσκος* (9x in Gospels and Acts), *τεχνίον* (1x in John, 8x in epistles), *παιδίκη* (8x in Gospels and Acts, 5x in Galatians) and *κοράσιον* (8x in Gospels)—these five words pertaining to people comprise one-half of all New Testament occurrences. All but one of the 29 occurrences of *ἀρνίον* appear in the Apocalypse. The remaining 27 diminutive forms in the New Testament occur one to six times each. Following are some suggestions relevant to the issue of how New Testament occurrences fit into the bigger picture of world languages.

First, we shall assume that many New Testament diminutives carry “garden variety” meanings, from the young daughter who is healed to the portable bedding (*κλινίδιον*, Mark 5:23, 7:25) by which a paralyzed man was let down before Jesus through a hole in the roof. The same is probably true for the small fish (*ὀψάριον*, John 6:9, 11) that miraculously fed crowds and the portable writing pad (*πινακίδιον*, with wax on wood, Luke 1:63) onto which

81. Jurafsky, “Universal Tendencies,” 534.

82. Rhodes, “Lexical Hierarchies,” 154. I wish to thank Richard Rhodes for directing me to his research, and that of Jurafsky, and for helpful comments offered in response to one of the three conference papers I presented on the subject.

Zacharias scratched his thoughts. We should not rule out the likelihood that younger persons appear in the Gospel narratives and were identified by the writers who intended reference to their smallness. However, even when small size is indicated (e.g., *νησίον*), it must be remembered that smallness is relative to other things in the same genre, and something can be smallish without being tiny.

Second, the appearance of twelve possibly-faded diminutives involving family members in 1 John is noteworthy, especially since all are vocatives. In an epistolary environment in which the sender is appealing pastorally to friends he cares for and wishes to protect, the preferable translation is “dear” (NIV), as also with children/young men (for *τεχνία* and *νεανίσκοι*), rather than “little” (NASB), for this reflects the writer’s affection for his pastoral charges. The pastoral nature of the context encourages this conclusion. As Petersen and Swanson note, certain New Testament diminutives are “faded” and have become conventional and may no longer carry particular size implication (e.g., *παιδίον*, *ἀρνίον*, *νεανίσκος*). In other words, form is never the final determiner of literal function but, like the proliferation of Dutch, Australian, and Polish diminutives discussed previously, they are being used as in-group markers relating to value perceptions. Swanson’s caution regarding the difficulty of distinguishing faded meanings, that “words for children and young people seem particularly to belong to the category of faded diminutives,” along with the fact that taken together these tend to occur in three categories (animals, youths, and tangible objects) may indeed point to community values apart from literal smallness.⁸³ Again, a Dutchman drinking *pils* “beer” at the local pub will invite his friend to a *pils-je* because the issue is friendship, not cup size. This factor may explain some of Petersen’s “faded diminutives” (and in the New Testament, words such as *παιδίον*, *τεχνίον*, *νεανίσκος*, *ἐρίφιον*, and the process labeled variously “bleaching,” “generalization,” “desemanticization” or “downgrading”), and would be accounted for in the La-

83. Swanson, “Diminutives,” 146–47.

koff and Jurafsky approaches in which extension beyond a common word or form becomes customary to a speech community even when it is no longer distinctly meaningful. When something starts to “sound right” and becomes customary to community ears, it tends to stick around.

Third, it is possible that Jairus’s urgent appeal for Jesus to help his ailing daughter (Mark 5:23)—like the Markan reference (7:25) to the account of the Canaanite woman that comes next—identifies the girl specifically as a *θυγάτριον* perhaps to evoke compassion for both offspring *and* parents. The fact that even a sparrow (*στρουθίον*) worth no more than a small copper coin is on God’s radar (Matt 10:29, 31) is highlighted by the diminutive. The imposition of need and importunity of request invites minimization, even between friends, so if diminutives “mark a high degree of familiarity between the participants in a situation,”⁸⁴ as Daltas suggests, their use at these places may be intentionally evocative of feeling. Addressing one’s readers as *τεχνία* in 1 John surely is a hypercoristic technique, given the epistle’s pastoral intent. Perhaps further research will identify other hypercoristic terms elsewhere in the New Testament.

Fourth, the juxtaposition of diminutives in the account of Jesus and the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:2–28/Mark 7:24–30) invites comment, given the fact that one diminutive is used to answer another in a poignant request involving great personal need. When the mother seeks Jesus’ help for her demon-possessed daughter, he responds that it would not be right to give children’s bread to the *κυνάρρις* (dogs-DAT-DIM < *κύων*)—by most accounts, using an insulting reference to Gentiles that presumably would be familiar to him and her. She answers that diminutive with another, noting that even *κυνάρρια* get to eat from the *ψιχίλων* (crumbs-GEN) that fall from the table. In response, Jesus commends her faith and heals her daughter. Dressler and Barbaresi observe that certain conditions, such as intimacy, favor the use of diminutives. Intimacy involves a “readiness to reveal some particular aspects of one’s personality and of one’s inner

84. Daltas, “Patterns of Variability,” 63.

world that one conceals from other people; a readiness based on personal trust and on personal ‘good feelings.’”⁸⁵ The collocation of diminutives connected to a poignant request amidst family vulnerability is explained best as pragmatic intent rather than semantic literalness. It is not irrelevant that “in many societies, women seem to be more contact-oriented than men... [hence] the greater use of diminutives by women than by men.”⁸⁶

However, as Brown and Levinson caution, “societies are *not* the same interactionally, and...[there are] innumerable possibilities for misunderstanding...[with] endless daily reminders of the social/cultural relativity of politeness and of norms of acceptable interaction.”⁸⁷ Is the diminutive of *dogs* on Jesus’ lips *reference* or *use*? If the former, Jesus is saying in effect: “We both know that my people refer to yours as dogs.” Or are there specific social rules of conversation at work between them that are simply unknown to the modern reader? Whatever the case, the mother responds to Jesus’ diminutive with another diminutive and Jesus responds positively to her quick comeback by healing her daughter; personal difficulty is resolved felicitously with a little word-play. Sifanou’s observations are pertinent:

Requests are among the best examples of [Modern] Greek diminutives exhibiting pragmatic force in polite interaction. For Brown and Levinson, requests always involve some type of imposition, which always requires some kind of minimization. Being polite, therefore, is largely a matter of being on the alert to minimize impositions by using the proper mitigating devices... Perhaps this is more typical of Greek society, where members of in-groups tend to depend on each other rather than on institutions (for instance, in obtaining loans) than of some other Western societies...⁸⁸

Sifanou also notes the use of the dubitative marker *-μιπος* “by any chance” in order to indicate uncertainty and hesitation in

85. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 214; cf. Wierzbicka, *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics*, 105.

86. Dressler and Barbaresi, *Morphopragmatics*, 413.

87. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 253.

88. Sifanou, “Use of Diminutives,” 160–61.

Modern Greek, thereby helping to mitigate the impact of a request, especially in cases of uncomfortable social distance. As to the strategy, she suggests that

[B]y representing the item requested as a “dear little thing” necessary for her, the speaker is expressing her feelings, though not necessarily to the item itself. Like all positive politeness markers, the diminutive in this context does not address the particular act, but the satisfaction of positive-face needs in general.⁸⁹

Brown and Levinson argue that minimizing strategies are especially useful when the speaker making a request is unclear about the degree of difference in the variables of power, social distance, and ranking of imposition.⁹⁰ Per Sifanou, “[D]iminutives convey informality and solidarity characteristic of positive politeness... [T]he presence of a diminutive either reaffirms an existing in-group framework or expresses the speaker’s wish to be treated within such a framework.”⁹¹ Perhaps similar dynamics were at work in Jesus’ interaction with the Canaanite woman.

Fifth, diminutives connected with familiar household matters may reflect customary, even provincial—and possibly faded or redundant—diminutive markers. A hint of this comes from certain New Testament texts in which base and diminished forms of the same word occur in proximity. Malchus’s severed ear (Matt 26:51//Luke 22:51//John 18:26), for example, is referred to by *ὠτίον* in three Gospels, one of which (Luke 22:50) had just identified it specifically as his *right οὖς* in the immediately preceding verse. Base and diminished forms would be interchangeable in the case of fading. Various references to a *πλοῖάριον* on Lake Galilee (Mark 3:9; also John 6:22, 23, 24; 21:8) would be redundant since few, if any, boats would have been large anyway; and besides, Jesus subsequently climbs back into a *πλοῖον* (Mark 4:1). Other examples include the Syro-Phoenician *θυγάτριον* (“daughter-DIM,” Mark 7:25), who moves Jesus to compassion,

89. Sifanou, “Use of Diminutives,” 163.

90. Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, 176–78.

91. Sifanou, “Use of Diminutives,” 171, 172.

being identified in the next verse (v. 26) by the base form. At the judgment day (Matt 25:33), the Son of Man is said to separate πρόβατα (“sheep”) from ἔριφιον (“goat”-DIM); sheep is a base lexical form yet goat is diminuted. When Jesus exhorts Peter to shepherd others, the first exhortation involves the diminutive ἀρνίον (John 21:15), while, in the majority of manuscripts, the next two are simply sheep in the base lexical form (John 21:16–17).

And there are more. In John 12:14, Jesus locates an ὄναριον, which, in the next verse (citing Zech 9:9), is labeled by the base form ὄνος, leaving open the question of whether he was riding the offspring of a nearby donkey, a donkey that was particularly small, or possibly just a donkey being labeled with a faded form.⁹² There are also Synoptic examples where the word in one Gospel is from the base form, while its parallel reference uses a diminutive form, such as ὄψαριον in John 6:9, 11 appearing as ἰχθύας in Matt 14:17, 19//Mark 6:38, 41//Luke 9:13, 16. These may reflect fading, or conversely, that certain communities preferred a diminutive form even when a base form was readily understood. Sifanou, among others, observes that “diminutives are not normally used in formal speech”⁹³ and cites Daltas as reporting that the frequency of diminutives increases as situational formality decreases.⁹⁴ If there is any commonality of social economy between ancient peoples and our world today, we might tentatively conclude that these kinds of references in the Gospels reinforce the authenticity of their first-hand source material.

Sixth, perhaps morphologically complex/redundant diminutives, like βιβλαρίδιον, evidence “the semantic paths” words sometimes take over time (per Jurafsky), and may be evidence of a metaphoric shift to a new domain. The earlier reference gradually gets conventionalized, until a new and more generalized sense is acquired, and the diminuted form becomes less specific

92. See BAG 573.

93. Sifanou, “Use of Diminutives,” 168.

94. Daltas, “Patterns of Variability,” 85.

than the earlier one. Perhaps many diminutive forms have resulted (as implied in my earlier discussion of the range of sizes, i.e., between pamphlet level and lengthy manuscript) from perceived differences in size gradations, eventually ceasing to have much literal specificity. A faded form may reflect the trajectory (as Jurafsky calls it) that eventuates in semantic shift.

Seventh, Dressler and Barbaresi's morphopragmatic approach appears to account for the fact that many New Testament diminutives relate to hearth-and-home, as evidenced by words such as ὀπίον, ψωμίον, σχοινίον, στρουθίον, ὄψάριον, and κλινίδιον. Their prevalence may reflect vernacular speech underlying the written Gospels, being vestiges of community speech habits in which social identification was flagged by diminution of familiar household words. Yet pragmatics alone cannot explain why there is so much cross-linguistic similarity of diminutives in genetically unrelated languages. However, a centralized household proto-concept relevant to infancy and childhood that has undergone extensions that made sense to a once-living language community goes a long way toward explaining the vicissitudes of diminutive semantics. The universality of diminutives may evidence (per Lakoff) the perception that certain items are more central and typical to a category than others. Faded diminutives likely conveyed smallness at some point in their history. *Things pertaining to the infancy of humans or animals seem to lie universally at the center of diminutives*, the central concept being smallness.

So whether the morpheme should be understood as a marker of smallness, endearment, or derogation, a means of politeness, or something pertaining to community values and solidarity, diminutives—*particularly in the Gospels*—need to be explored further with reference to their contextual implications and pragmatic strategy. Further consideration of LXX diminution may help in the pursuit, as would additional data from ancient and modern languages, and hopefully this study will facilitate that.

Bibliography

- Blass, F., and A. Debrunner. *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Translated by Robert W. Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics 4. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Carson, D.A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
- Cowgill, Warren. "A Search for Universals in Indo-European Diachronic Morphology." In *Universals of Language*, edited by Joseph H. Greenberg, 114–41. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968.
- Daltas, P. "Some Patterns of Variability in the Use of Diminutive and Augmentative Suffixes in Spoken Modern Greek Koine." *Glossologia* 4 (1985) 63–88.
- Delbridge, Arthur. "Standard Australian English." *World Englishes* 18 (1999) 259–70.
- Dressler, Wolfgang U., and Lavinia Merlini Barbaresi. *Morpho-pragmatics: Diminutives and Intensifiers in Italian, German, and Other Languages*, edited by Werner Winter. TiLSM 76. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994.
- Haas, Mary R. "The Expression of the Diminutive." In *Language, Culture, and History: Essays by Mary R. Haas*, edited by Anwar S. Dil, 82–88. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978.
- Jurafsky, Daniel. "Universal Tendencies in the Semantics of the Diminutive." *Language* 72 (1996) 533–78.
- Lakoff, George. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Levinson, Stephen. "Pragmatics and Social Deixis: Reclaiming the Notion of Conventional Implicature." *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistic Society* 5 (1979) 206–23.
- Levinsohn, Stephen H. *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Informational Structure of New Testament Greek*. 2nd ed. Dallas: SIL International, 2000.
- Moffatt, James. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. ICC. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1963 (1924).

- Moulton, James Hope, and Wilbert Francis Howard. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. 2, Accidence and Word Formation*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976 (1920).
- Petersen, Walter. *Greek Diminutives in -ION*. Weimar, Germany: R. Wagner Sohn, 1910.
- Porter, Stanley E. *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*. SBG 1. New York: Peter Lang, 1989.
- Rhodes, Richard A. "Lexical Hierarchies and Ojibwa Noun Derivation." In *Meanings and Prototypes: Studies on Linguistic Categorization*, edited by S.L. Tsohatzidis, 151–58. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Runge, Steven E. *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010.
- Savickiene, Ineta, and Wolfgang U. Dressler, eds. *The Acquisition of Diminutives: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007.
- Sifanou, Maria. "The Use of Diminutives in Expressing Politeness: Modern Greek versus English." *Journal of Pragmatics* 17 (1992) 155–73.
- Simpson, J.I. "Hypocoristics of Place-Names in Australian English." In *English in Australia*, edited by David Blair and Peter Collins, 89–112. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001.
- Smyth, Herbert Weir. *Greek Grammar*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Swanson, Donald C. "Diminutives in the Greek New Testament." *JBL* 77 (1958) 134–51.
- Turner, C.H. "Marcan Usage: Notes, Critical and Exegetical, on the Second Gospel." *JTS O.S.* 29 (1928) 346–52.
- Turner, Nigel. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek. Vol. 4, Style*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976.
- Vervaeke, John, and Christopher D. Green. "Women, Fire, and Dangerous Theories: A Critique of Lakoff's Theory of Categorization." *Metaphor and Symbol* 12 (1997) 59–80.
- White, Colin, and Laurie Boucke. *The Undutchables*. Lafayette, CO: White Boucke, 2006.

Wierzbicka, Anna. *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991.

———. “Different Cultures, Different Languages, Different Speech Acts.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 9 (1985) 145–78.

———. “Diminutives and Depreciatives: Semantic Representation for Derivational Categories.” *Quaderni di Semantica* 1 (1984) 123–30.

Appendix: Diminutives in the Greek New Testament

Based on list given by Swanson, with many references and one correction added. Primary forms marked with an asterisk do not occur in the New Testament.

-ιον

ἀρνίον	John 21:15; Rev 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3	(< ἄρην)
ἐρίφιον	Matt 25:33//Luke 15:29	(< ἐρίφος)
θυγάτριον	Mark 5:23; 7:25	(< θυγάτηρ)
κεράτιον	Luke 15:16	(< κέρας)
νήσιον	Acts 27:16	(< νήσος)
νοσσίον	Matt 23:27	(< νόσσος)
παιδίον	Matt 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 13, 14, 20, 20, 21; 11:16; 14:21; 15:38; 18:2, 3, 4, 5; 19:13, 14; Mark 5:39, 40, 40, 41; 7:28, 30; 9:24, 36, 37; 10:13, 14, 15; Luke 1:59, 66, 76, 80; 2:17, 27, 40; 7:32; 9:47, 48; 11:7; 8:16, 17; John 4:49; 16:21; 21:5; 1 Cor 14:20; Heb 2:13, 14; 11:23; 1 John 2:14, 18; 3:7	(< παῖς)
πρόβατιον	John 21:16, 17	(< πρόβατον)
πτερύγιον	Matt 4:5; Luke :9	(< πτερύξ)
στρουθίον	Matt 10:29, 31//Luke 12:6, 7	(< στρουθός*)
σχοινίον	John 2:15; Acts 27:32	(< σχοίνος*)
τεχνίον	John 13:33; Gal 4:19; 1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21	(< τέκνον)
ψίχιον	Matt 15:27//Mark 7:28	(< ψίξ*)
ψωμίον	John 13:26	(< ψώμος*)
ώτιον	Matt 26:51//Luke 22:51//John 18:26	(< οὔς)

-αριον

γυναικάριον	2 Tim 3:6	(< γυνή)
κλινάριον	Acts 5:15	(< κλίνη)
κυνάριον	Matt 15:26, 27//Mark 7:27, 28	(< κύων)
ὄναριον	John 12:14	(< ὄνος)
ὄψάριον	John 6:9, 11; 21:9, 10, 13	(< ὄψον*)
παιδάριον	John 6:9	(< παῖς)
πλοιάριον	Mark 3:9; John 6:22, 23, 24; 21:8	(< πλοῖον)
ῶτάριον	Mark 14:47; John 18:10	(< οὖς)

-ιδιον

ἰχθύδιον	Matt 15:34//Mark 8:7	(< ἰχθύς)
κλινίδιον	Luke 5:19, 24	(< κλίνη)
πινακίδιον	Luke 1:63 (or: πινάκεις)	(< πίναξ)

-αριδιον/-ασιον

βιβλαρίδιον	Rev 10:2, 8, 9, 10	(< βιβλος)
κοράσιον	Matt 9:24, 25; 14:11; Mark 5:41, 42; 6:22, 28, 28	(< κόρη*)

-ισκος/-ισκη

βασιλίσκος	John 4:46, 49	(< βασιλεύς)
νεανίσκος	Matt 19:20, 22; Mark 14:51; 16:5; Luke 7:14; Acts 2:17; 5:10; 23:18, 22; 1 John 2:13, 14 ⁹⁵	(< νεανίας)

95. Cf. Moulton and Howard, *Grammar*, 380, who classify as a faded diminutive.

παιδίσκη	Matt 26:69; Mark 14:66, 69; Luke 12:45; 22:56; John 18:17; Acts 12:13; 16:16; Gal 4:22, 23, 30, 30, 31	(< παῖς)
-ις		
θύρις	Acts 20:9; 2 Cor 11:33	(< θύρα)
καφαλίς	Heb 10:7	(< κεφαλή)