

Comparative aspects of the development of diminutives in Finnic and Baltic languages

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The use of diminutives in modern Estonian and Finnish is comparatively rare and there is not much variation inside languages (Rintala 1980, Liivak 2023). But there is more variation between Finnic languages, as diminutives are significantly more frequent in the languages of the eastern Finnic peoples (Arukask, Saar 2021). Suffixal derivation prevails, but in some languages non-suffixal diminutives are also extant (Kehayov, Blokland 2006). Suffixal diminutives mostly express tenderness, affection, diminutiveness, or sometimes disdain or irony, depending on the context (Jurafsky 1996). It has been argued that diminutives in Finnic may also express respect and attentiveness, which are addressed to the non-human world (Arukask, Saar 2021).

On the other hand, diminutives in the Baltic languages are an essential part of lexical and grammatical variation, and they play an important role in both everyday language use and cultural expressions (Ambrazas 1993). Baltic diminutive suffixes are old, the origin of several suffixes derives from Proto-Indo-European (Grandi 2011).

The difference of Estonian diminutive use compared to Baltic and Slavic languages is manifested both in translating and language acquisition (Tälberga 2023, Kazakovskaya, Argus 2021).

A comparison of the development of Baltic and Finnic diminutives shows the typological similarities in their use and a possible Baltic influence in Finnic.

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