

**Paulina**



# Polish and English

**diminutives**

**in literary translation:  
Pragmatic and cross-cultural  
perspectives**



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# **Polish and English diminutives in literary translation:**

**Pragmatic and cross-cultural perspectives**

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Paulina Biały

# Polish and English diminutives in literary translation:

Pragmatic and cross-cultural perspectives

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*To my children—Witold & Kinga*

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## Introduction

Diminutives are often described as the morphological means used for expressive purposes such as communicating different sorts of emotions, attitudes, connotations, and evaluations (Szymanek 2010: 202). That is why diminutivisation is often treated as a separate area of morphology, referred to as expressive/evaluative/affective morphology (see Bauer 1997; Volek 1987). Yet, Dressler and Barbaresi (1994: 55) introduce the term *morphopragmatics* (characterised as morphologised pragmatics), which can be defined as “the area of the general pragmatic meanings of morphological rules, that is, of the regular pragmatic effects produced when moving from the input to the output of a morphological rule”. They also explain that “a morphological rule is relevant for morphopragmatics if it contains a pragmatic variable which cannot be suppressed in the description of its meaning” (Dressler and Barbaresi 1994: 55).

When discussing diminutive forms, it is essential to stress the correlation between semantics, which deals with the meaning of diminutives without the context, and pragmatics, which deals with the use and function of diminutives within context. Dressler and Barbaresi (1994: 4) support a pragmatic view, which includes semantics within pragmatics as meaning in context. Nevertheless, as they do not want to investigate areas of morphological meaning which can be discussed within morphosemantics only, they believe that “despite the pragmatic basis of semantics and the impossibility of drawing sharp boundaries—pragmatics and semantics can be treated as separate disciplines which complement and enrich each other” (see Leech 1983: 6–7; Levinson 1979: 217–218). They are of the opinion that semantics is “what remains of meaning if all pragmatic variables [...] are ignored”, whereas pragmatics deals with all the aspects of meaning determined by the introduction of such variables” (Dressler and Barbaresi 1994: 4). Thus, they claim that “pragmatic meaning [...] is global meaning (meaning as use) minus semantic meaning” (Dressler and Barbaresi 1994: 4). It may be stated that a particular meaning of a given diminutive form depends on the circumstances in which it is applied in conversation. Therefore,

when it comes to diminutives, pragmatics is of prime importance, since it is important to understand how interlocutors use diminutive forms in their language. Following Dressler and Barbaresi (1994: 1), it should also be emphasised that the meaning of such morphological devices as diminutive suffixes “appears to be primarily located in pragmatics”, as they “exhibit no stable semantic value and their meaning seems to be often elusive” (Dressler and Barbaresi 1994: 1).

Nevertheless, because of the fact that diminutives almost never express only their fundamental meaning of smallness, as usually they are accompanied by some emotional tinge (see Gawroński 1928; Zarębina 1954; Handke 1995: 93–94; Wierzbicka 1999), each area of study emphasises the fact that diminutives are by all means linked with the speaker’s positive or negative emotions (see Foolen 1997; Gąsiorek 2000), when, by using a particular language, he/she wants to a) express his/her attitude towards reality or the present state of affairs, or b) he/she wants to achieve something (Data 2000: 246). As mentioned above, diminutives belong to the group of expressive linguistic forms, which are most often used in colloquial language (Skubalanka 1973: 180–181; Zgólkowa 1991: 49; Dunaj et al. 1999: 236; Podracki 2012: 180; Liseling Nilsson 2012: 123)<sup>1</sup>. Familiar character of diminutive forms stems from the fact that, in most cases, they are employed in informal situations, such as family gatherings or small talks with neighbours. Grabias (1988: 37) writes that a linguistic expression may be defined as the mechanism in which the speaker becomes apparent in a given utterance. Emotions which accompany this process, constitute a particular type of expression, which consists in the manifestation of feelings. Therefore, expressive linguistic forms are the ones by means of which the speaker expresses his/her emotional attitude towards the world he/she lives in, or the features of his/her personality (Lubaś 2003: 181; Przybyła 2001: 188). Kaproń-Charzyńska (2007: 149) adds that they also help the speaker judge particular phenomena “as to value” (Dressler and Barbaresi 1994: 153; see also Puzynina 1992; Laskowska 1992; Bartmiński 2007: 103), and signal a given way of speaking.

Kryk-Kastovsky (1997: 155) defines emotions as “spontaneous human reactions to reality” and points out that the understanding of the term *emotion* differs from culture to culture and from language to language, thus, the labels for particular emotions are language-specific and difficult to compare cross-linguistically.

Nevertheless, the following work constitutes an attempt to examine the ways in which diminutives may express emotions in both Polish and English by comparing English and Polish diminutives, their formation, frequency of usage, their

<sup>1</sup> Dąbrowska (1992: 151) stresses the fact that diminutives in many cases function as euphemisms in colloquial language, expressing positive attitude of the speaker towards the designatum.

functions and meanings in language, in language communication, and sociolinguistic contexts in which they occur in both languages<sup>2</sup>.

As it is worth examining by means of which methods English translators provide equivalents for Polish diminutives (e.g., in the case of multiple diminutives such as Polish *mamusieńka* when referring to a mother), Chapter 7 aims at analysing chosen examples of Polish and English literary works.

It seems necessary to analyse diminutives comprehensively, as mostly only the morphology of diminutive forms has been thoroughly discussed (Quirk 1979; Adams 2001; Plag 2003—in English, Grzegorzczkova 1984; Dobrzyński 1988; Szymanek 2010—in Polish), whereas the issues concerning the influence of culture on the presence of diminutives in a given language, pragmatic functions of diminutives in language communication or translation equivalence of diminutives have not been given much attention.

The theoretical part of the book is illustrated by examples of non-literary data, that is, spontaneous spoken utterances taken from authentic dialogues which were witnessed in such places as a restaurant, bus or market and from everyday conversations of parents with their children aged 2–10.

The analytical part of the book is based on literary works<sup>3</sup>, as literary style is considered to be “the only complete usage of the means of language” (Dressler and Barbaresi 1994: 380). Moreover, I agree with Dressler and Barbaresi (1994: 393) that the pragmatics of diminutives in literary style is the same as in the general use of diminutives.

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<sup>2</sup> Chapters 1, 4, and 6 of the work are based on papers by Biały (Biały 2016a; Biały 2016b; Biały 2016c).

<sup>3</sup> I analysed chosen literary works in their entirety.

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Паулина Бялы

## **Польские и английские диминутивы в художественном переводе Прагматический и межкультурный аспект**

### **Резюме**

В книге поднимаются вопросы перевода диминутивов с польского языка на английский язык и с английского на польский. Автор рассматривает использование уменьшительных форм в обоих языках в прагматическом, культурном и социолингвистическом аспектах, а также описывает языковые возможности создания диминутивов с помощью аналитических и синтетических механизмов. Предыдущие исследования в этой области указывают на необходимость проведения всестороннего анализа вопросов, связанных с уменьшительными формами, прежде всего касающихся влияния культуры на присутствие этих элементов в языке. Посвящая многие исследования морфологическим процессам образования диминутивов, авторы меньше внимания уделяли проблемам переводческой эквивалентности уменьшительных форм или прагматическим аспектам их использования в речи. Книга адресована лингвистам, теоретикам и практикам перевода, лингвокультурологам, а также социолингвистам.

**Ключевые слова:** диминутивы, прагматика, перевод, культура

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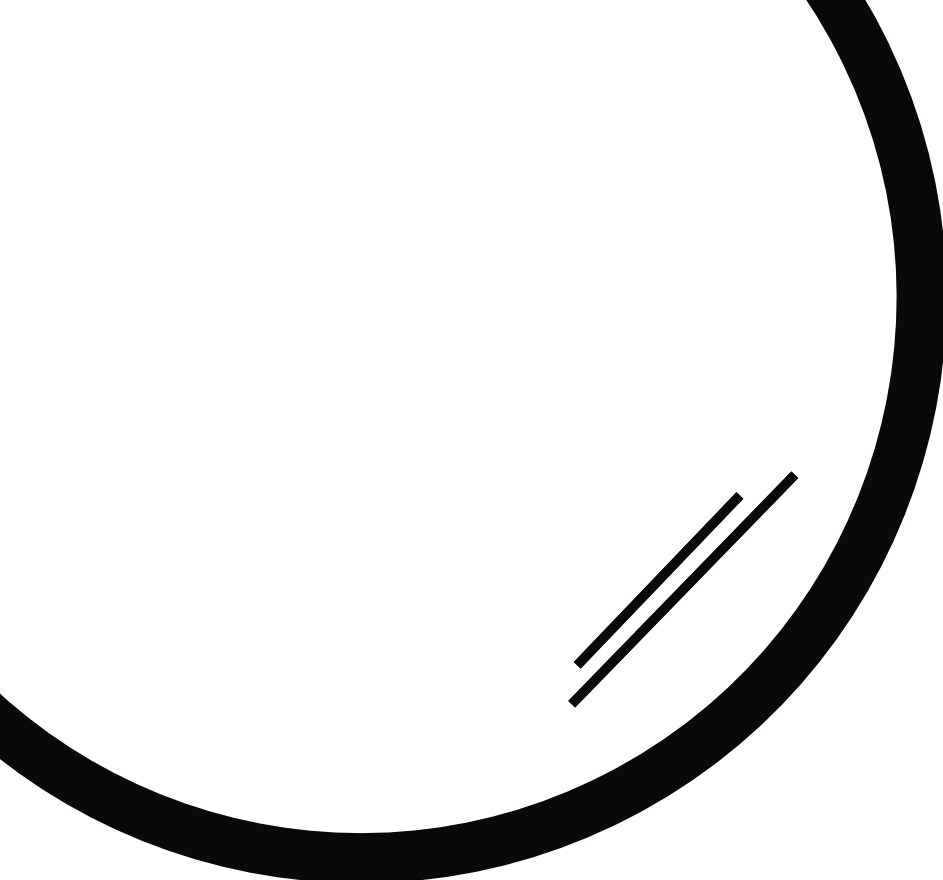
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