

TRANSLATING PRAGMATICS: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY ON ARMENIAN, ITALIAN AND RUSSIAN DIMINUTIVES

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although diminutive morphology is a common feature across languages, its semantics does not vary significantly across languages (Jurafsky, 1996). According to Ponsonnet (2018), the main functions of diminutives are the following:

1. Denotational – when the diminutive signals the reduction of a property of the referent (e.g., in Italian *pall-in-a* ‘ball-DIM-F.SG³’ is a small ball).
2. Emotional – when diminutive morphology is used to express emotions like affection, sympathy, etc. (e.g., in Russian *мам-очк-а* [*mam-očk-a*] ‘mum-DIM-F.SG.NOM’ is the diminutive-hypocoristic word for mother, similar to the English “momy”).
3. Interactional – when the diminutive morphology has the only function of mitigating the effect of a speech act in order to convey a politeness effect.

In our study, we focus on this latter type of function expressed by diminutive morphology. Whereas the semantic categories related to diminutives do not vary substantially cross-linguistically. What is different across different languages and cultures is their emotional connotation, which entails diverse effects according to the contexts.

In order to study how diminutive morphology varies in terms of pragmatic effects across languages, we have decided to investigate the use of diminutives in translations, with the ultimate aim of checking whether the maintenance or a lack of diminutives in the source and the target texts correspond to different pragmatic readings in the source and target languages.

In particular, in our study we have decided to focus on Armenian-Russian and Italian-Russian translations. Firstly, all the three languages considered display diminutive morphology – albeit with different pragmatic readings (cfr. 1.1, 1.2., 1.3) – thus offering a good testing ground to investigate how diminutives are rendered in translation. Secondly, for historical and cultural reasons⁴, translations from Armenian into Russian and vice versa, as well as translations from Italian into Russian and the other way round, are numerous. Furthermore, two large parallel corpora of Armenian-Russian translations and Italian-Russian translations are stored in the National Corpus of the Russian Language (*Национальный Корпус Русского Языка* [*Nacional’nyj Korpus Russkogo Jazyka*], NKRJa); the NKRJa and its subcorpora are precious sources for studies in contrastive

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³ Here and elsewhere, examples in languages other than English are presented in italics in their original alphabet, followed by their scientific transcription between square brackets (when the alphabet is not Latin), and by a glossed translation in single quotes. Glosses are in line with the Leipzig Glossing Rules.

⁴ Translations from Armenian into Russian and vice versa have been very common in the last centuries, as Armenia was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Italian translations of Russian authors and Russian translations of Italian writings have always been very intense since the 1920s.

linguistics in general, and for our research in particular, as the corpora are annotated and can thus be investigated by queries and search tools.

1.1. *Diminutives in Armenian*

In Armenian, an account of diminutives as affixes expressing the speaker's attitude was given as far as in the 5th century when the groundwork for Armenian grammar was laid through the invention of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots (Khachatryan, 1995: 158). The use of diminutives grew in frequency in Middle Armenian notably. A plethora of diminutives can be found in medieval Armenian poems, such as *հայրեններ* [*bayrenner*] 'love verses' by Nahapet Kuchak (16th century). In that period the usage of diminutives grew to such an extent that even loanwords got diminutivized: *ծոցիկ* [*tsots-ik*] 'bosom', *հարսուկ* [*harsn-uk*] 'bride', etc. (Khachatryan, 2019: 9).

Studying the concordances of the major works of early Armenian historiography as well as a series of seminal dictionaries, Khachatryan (1995: 158) notes, "diminutives – in common usage in Classical Armenian, were mostly derivatives or derivational compounds consisting of two stems formed by combining a stem and a derivational suffix". He identifies 388 words with the diminutive suffixes *-սկ* [*-ak*] (150), *-իկ* [*-ik*] (180), *-ուկ* [*-uk*] (58). Analyzing those morphemes in the light of modern Armenian vocabulary, Abeghyan (1965: 238; 257; 268) observes that they are compatible with different parts of speech – nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs. Those suffixes convey a sense of smallness, endearment or disdain to nouns, intensify, weaken or modify the meaning of the adjectives they are added to or give them a touch of affection.

To convey the smallness of the object, the diminutive suffix *-սկ* [*-ak*] is mostly attached to nouns e.g., *գետսկ* [*get-ak*] 'small river', *դռսկ* [*drrn-ak*] 'small door', *նավսկ* [*nav-ak*] 'small ship'. However, in some nouns not only does it denote tininess but also evokes feelings of tenderness and affection such as *սղջնսկ* [*sg'jn-ak*] 'young girl', *թռչնսկ* [*tr'cn-ak*] 'small bird', etc. Some words ending in the diminutive suffix *-ak* have a derogatory connotation expressing irony and derision such as *արվեստսկ* [*arvest-ak*] 'talentless artist', *իմաստսկ* [*imast-ak*] 'illiterate person', *գրչսկ* [*gr'c-ak*] 'ungifted writer', etc. In contrast, the diminutive suffix *-ուկ* [*-uk*] when used with nouns mostly conveys a sense of intimacy and fondness: *աչուկ* [*ac'-uk*] 'small eye', *մարդուկ* [*mard-uk*] 'small man', *սղբուկ* [*sgb-uk*] 'small boy', *սղջուկ* [*arj'-uk*] 'small bear', etc.

In the same fashion, the suffix *-իկ* [*-ik*] is added to nouns to point out the small size of an animal or inanimate object as in *շնիկ* [*šn-ik*] 'small dog', *մկնիկ* [*mkn-ik*] 'small mouse', etc. On the other hand, they are also used as terms of endearment and often arouse feelings of love and intimacy.

It should be noted that diminutive suffixes are typically applied in informal, somewhat humorous contexts to signal the speaker's affection, empathy, psychological proximity towards the listener.

Diminutive adjectives are formed from the suffixes *-իկ* [*-ik*] and *-ուկ* [*-uk*]. The former is used to convey either a sense of affection and endearment or smallness as in *սիրունիկ* [*sirun-ik*] 'dainty', *լավիկ* [*lav-ik*] 'pretty' and *երկարիկ* [*erkar-ik*] 'longish', *փոքրիկ* [*poqr-ik*] 'petite', respectively. The primary function of the latter is to intensify the meaning of the adjective as in *սևուկ* [*sev-uk*] 'blackish', *խղճուկ* [*xg'c-uk*] 'miserable', etc. (Galstyan, 1978: 174).

Noteworthy is the diminutivization of personal names. Although it practically does not affect the semantic sphere, yet those names become stylistically charged. Diminutive

suffixes are sometimes added to the names of children, e.g., *Կարենիկիկ* [*Karen-ikik*], *Մարիամիկիկ* [*Mariam-ikik*] to convey a sense of endearment and point to their young age, but interestingly enough when used while addressing adults they aim to belittle, humiliate men, e.g. *Նարեկիկիկ* [*Narek-ikik*], *Արամիկիկ* [*Aram-ikik*], and quite the reverse, emphasize the emotional closeness to women, e.g. *Լիանիկիկ* [*Lian-ikik*], *Անուկիկ* [*Anul-ikik*].

In Armenian, there are also double diminutives, as with the word for ship: *նավ* [*nav*] ‘normal-sized ship’, *նավակ* [*nav-ak*] ‘small ship’, *նավակիկ* [*nav-ak-ikik*] ‘very small ship’; *պատանի* [*patani*] ‘adolescent’, *պատանյակ* [*patan-jak*] ‘adolescent boy’, *պատանեկիկ* [*patan-ek-ikik*] ‘young boy’. As it can be seen, the diminutive suffix has caused a spelling change to the original word. To add, most double diminutives stem from Classical Armenian (Khachatryan, 1995: 162).

It is worth noting that diminutives are usually used in informal, colloquial registers. In Armenian diminutives are mostly employed as a positive politeness strategy. They prevent a violation of the hearer's face and impart a sense of intimacy and affection. Although diminutive suffixes hardly ever occur in words denoting time, under the influence of Western Armenian they might be used, rarely though, in a “non-serious” context to convey a jocular connotation or in a verse to ensure rhyming as in the poem by Komitas:

<i>Ոգի-ոգի</i>	<i>նվագելով,</i>	//	Պահիկ-պահիկ	<i>հավաքելո՞ւ:</i>
<i>vogi-vogi</i>	<i>nvagelov</i>	//	pahik-pahik	<i>havaqelov?</i>
‘soul-to-soul	playing	//	instant-DIM instant-DIM	collecting?’

1.2. Diminutives in Italian

Italian has a rich system of derivational affixes, and diminutives belong to a wider class of alterative morphology, alongside augmentatives, elatives, pejoratives, and attenuatives. Among the numerous diminutive suffixes (*-in-*, *-ett-*, *-ell-*, *-(u)ol-*, *ucc-/ -uչչ-*, *-ott-*, *-onչol-*), the more frequent and productive is *-in-*.

Diminutive morphology can be attached to almost all lexical categories, although nouns and adjectives – and to a certain extent adverbs – are the most common bases used with diminutives (De Marco, 1998a: 211).

Beyond the denotative meaning of smallness, diminutives in Italian are often metonymically read as endearment (Schwarze, 1995), as in *man-in-a* ‘hand-DIM-F.SG’, i.e., a pretty hand. However, the meaning of diminutive morphology that is more salient for the scope of our analysis is the pragmatic one. Diminutives are used as a negative politeness strategy to downgrade the imposition on the hearer – as in (1).

- (1) *Posso chiederti un piacere-in-o?*
 Can.PRES-1.SG ask=2.SG.DAT a favour-DIM-M.SG
 ‘Can I ask you a little favour?’

However, Dressler and Merlini-Barbaresi (1994) claim that this strategy entails a ‘non-serious’ reading of the context, as the use of diminutives is typical of child-centred speech settings or situations that have a metaphorical reference with the child world, like a talk between lovers (cf. De Marco, 1998b).

Interestingly, the fact that in Italian diminutive morphology serves as a negative politeness strategy allows the formation of words whose diminutive versions have a purely pragmatic reading, as they refer to non-scalar entities. This is the case of time references like *minut-in-o* ‘minute-DIM-M.SG’, which cannot be interpreted as a chronological entity

shorter than sixty seconds, and its only function is to downgrade the imposition of the speech act, as in (2).

- (2) *Mi=guard-i un minut-in-o il forno?*
 1.SG.DAT=look-2.SG a minute-DIM-M.SG the oven
 ‘Can you check the oven for me for a minute?’

1.3. Diminutives in Russian

Derivational noun morphology in Russian is known to be particularly rich, and diminutives play a pivotal role in it. The most frequent diminutive affix is *-#k-* [*-#k-*], which originates several allomorphs, i.e., *-ик-* [*-ik-*], *-ок-* [*-ok-*], *-ек-* [*-ek-*], *-онюк-* [*-onok-*], *-ёнюк-* [*-enok-*], *-ичк-* [*-ičk-*], *-ечк-* [*-ečk-*], *-оньк-* [*-on’k-*], *-еньк-* [*-en’k-*], *-ушк-* [*-ušk-*], *-ишк-* [*-išk-*], *-ышк-* [*-yšk-*], some of which are semantically specialised. Diminutive morphology is particularly productive and, along with its prototypical combination with nouns, it can occur even with uninflected parts of speech, as in *нет-ушк-и* [*net-ušk-i*] ‘no-DIM-PL’, the diminutive form for *нет* [*net*] ‘no’ (Protassova and Voeikova, 2007: 45).

Compared to Italian, Russian diminutives have a wider range of emotional readings, i.e., personal, evaluative, caressing, hypocoristic, and pejorative (Švedova, 1980: 208), and they can be combined in chains according to the different nuances that diminutives can convey. Such variation is also found in a wide spectrum of pragmatic meanings and situations in which diminutive morphology is used.

In Russian, diminutives can express emotional closeness and physical proximity (Protassova and Voeikova, 2007: 49), thus suggesting a positive politeness strategy. Conversely, diminutives are often used as a negative politeness strategy to mitigate the imposition of directive speech acts, especially when the head act is expressed by an imperative (Wierzbicka, 1991; Larina, 2003; Brehmer, 2006), as in (3).

- (3) *Подожд-и минут-к-у!*
Podožd-i minut-k-u!
 wait-IMP.2.SG minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC
 ‘Wait a minute!’

Remarkably, in her data Ogiermann (2009: 205) has noticed that all the diminutives occurred in requests with an imperative were time references, i.e., diminutives whose smallness reading is ruled out by the semantics of the referential noun and thus have a pure pragmatic function.

2. OUR STUDY ON TRANSLATION

2.1. Methodology

Within the scope of this study, we aim to explore pragmatically motivated diminutives across three languages and identify the methods through which they have been rendered from one language into another. As all three languages under investigation possess varying degrees of emotionality, the linguistic means to express it vary greatly. Yet, diminutivization functions as an effective method for doing that cross-linguistically.

It is difficult to infer what pragmatic functions or intentions diminutives perform without taking into consideration the cultural context, the interaction setting, the

relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor, the prosodic and paralinguistic features of the interaction, etc. In that respect, diminutives denoting units of time are of particular interest since their primary meaning cannot be denotative and their pragmatic features may vary greatly depending on the context. In addition, it is especially difficult to render them from language into another, as not in all languages diminutive suffixes are used with units of time as distinct from the parts of speech. Hence, within the scope of this research, we seek to carry out both qualitative and quantitative analysis on diminutivized forms of time units in Armenian, Italian and Russian and focus on their translation peculiarities.

For the quantitative analysis, relevant data will be retrieved from two subcorpora of the Russian National Corpus (NKRJa), namely the Armenian-Russian Parallel Corpus⁵, and the Italian-Russian Parallel Corpus⁶. Parallel corpora are multi-lingual corpora made from translated texts; they are frequently used in translation studies and contrastive linguistics as rich sources for translated linguistic materials. The Armenian-Russian parallel corpus consists of Armenian texts and their translation into Russian and Russian texts and their translation into Armenian. The Italian-Russian parallel corpus is structured in the same way with Italian as both a source and target language.

The two parallel corpora are made of a vast number of translated texts and the output of any search within the corpora⁷ are displayed in two columns, which allow a quick comparison between the original and the translated passages. For this reason, the Armenian-Russian and the Italian-Russian parallel corpora are precious sources and suitable tools to investigate whether diminutive morphology in the source text was maintained in the target text and, if not, what strategies were used in the target text to maintain the pragmatic value of diminutives.

2.2. Query problems in the parallel corpora of NKRJa

Although the two above-mentioned subcorpora of the NKRJa have been a crucial source for our data, they have some limitations that affected our analysis.

First, the size of the two corpora is unbalanced, in that the Armenian-Russian parallel corpus consists of 1,570,738 words, whereas the Italian-Russian parallel corpus is composed of 4,930,991 items. Secondly, the NKRJa allows the automatic search for the grammatical feature ‘diminutive’ only in its Russian database, whereas diminutives are not tagged as a specific grammatical feature in the Armenian and Italian subcorpora, and thus cannot automatically be searched for. Furthermore, the query “*r:concr & d:dim*” that should search for the tag ‘diminutive’ in the Russian texts is solely based on the pattern ‘consonant+[k]’ without any further disambiguation; as a result, many words including a [k] preceded by a consonant, like *в парке* [*v parke*] ‘in the park’, are tagged as diminutives even if they are not. For these reasons, it was impossible to proceed with a quantitative analysis based on the total amount of diminutives in the two subcorpora, as any search would fail in retrieving the exact numbers of diminutives in the corpora.

In order to investigate how the pragmatic meaning of diminutives is conveyed in translations, we have thus decided to concentrate our analysis on diminutives whose ‘smallness’ reading is not possible and thus diminutive morphology becomes exclusively

⁵ <https://ruscorpora.ru/new/en/search-para.html?lang=hye>.

⁶ <https://ruscorpora.ru/new/en/search-para.html?lang=ita>.

⁷ The searching tool provided by the NKRJa itself and integrated in its website allows the search within the corpus (or subcorpora) for exact words, lemmas, grammatical and/or semantic features, as well as more complex queries with search rules and operators.

driven by pragmatic considerations. Time-related diminutives are of this type, and therefore we have focused solely on them, by searching the corpora for their lemmas.

Table 1 presents a list of lemmas that we scrutinized across the three languages. All the items within this list pertain to units of time and are distinctly marked by diminutive morphology.

Table 1. *List of lemmas referring to time with diminutive morphology in Armenian, Italian, and Russian*

ARMENIAN	ITALIAN	RUSSIAN	
Պահիկ [pahik]	momentino	моментик, моментичек, моменточек [momentik, momentiček, momentoček]	‘moment-DIM’
Վայրկյանիկ [vajrkjanik]	secondino	секундочка [sekundočka]	‘second-DIM’
Բոպեիկ [ropeik]	minutino	минутка, минуточка [minutka, minutočka]	‘minute-DIM’
Ժամիկ [žamik]	oretta	часик [časik]	‘hour-DIM’

As shown in Table 1, the Armenian and Italian lemmas display their prototypical diminutive morphology, i.e., *-իկ* [-ik] and *-ino* (or *-etto*) respectively, whereas the various allomorphs of the Russian diminutive affix *-и́к* [-#k-] allow different combinations, and thus more lemmas with the same lexical base.

2.3. Analysis

2.3.1. Translation strategies in the Armenian-Russian parallel corpus

The results of the time references in the Armenian-Russian parallel corpus are summarised in Table 2. Starting from the leftmost column, the table shows the lemma, the number of tokens in translations where Armenian is the source language, the number of tokens in translations where Russian is the source language, and the total amount of tokens of the lemma.

Table 2. *Number of tokens per diminutivized time references in the Armenian-Russian parallel corpus*

LEMMA	ARM > RUS	RUS > ARM	TOT
Պահիկ [pah-ik]	0	0	0
Վայրկյանիկ [vajrkjan-ik]	0	0	0
Բոպեիկ [rope-ik]	0	0	0
Ժամիկ [žam-ik]	0	0	0

Моментик [momentik]	0	0	0
Моментичек [momentiček]	0	0	0
Моменточек [momentoček]	0	0	0
Секундо́чка [sekundočka]	0	0	0
Минутка [minutka]	0	13	13
Минуточка [minutočka]	0	5	5
Часик [časik]	0	0	0

At first glance, Table 1 shows that not even a single case was identified in Armenian where a word denoting time occurred with a diminutive suffix. On the one hand, no diminutives are used in texts where Armenian is the source language; on the other hand, all diminutivized forms of time units in the Russian source texts were lost during the translation process. They were mostly rendered with the numeral *մի* [*mi*] ‘one’, as in (4) in Armenian which seemed to perform the pragmatic function of mitigating negative politeness only partially.

- (4) Александр Фадеев. Разгром (1924-1926) | Փաղեն Ալեքսանդր.
Ջախջախում (Բարիսյան Ս., 1986)
- [RUS] *Ид-и=ка сюда на МИНУТ-К-У*
Ид-и=ка сюда на минут-к-и
 come-IMP.2.SG=ka here on minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC
- [ARM] *Եկ մի թուփ այստեղ*
Էկ մի թուփ այստեղ
 come one rope minute here

As a result of the search for the Russian diminutive *минуточка* [*minutoč-k-a*] in the Armenian-Russian Parallel Corpus, five sources were identified along with their Armenian translation. All of them follow the same pattern in terms of lexical-grammatical and semantic features. The use of a diminutive in Russian seeks to attenuate imposition on the referent and minimize the face-threatening effect. Let’s look at the example (5) located in the system, contained in Anatoly Rybakov’s novel *Children of the Arbat*:

- (5) Анатолий Рыбаков. Дети Арбата (1966-1983) | Ռիբակով Անատոլի.
Արբատի զավակները (Հովհաննիսյան Արմեն, 1988)
- [RUS] *Юрочка, [...] я вынул на МИНУТОЧКУ*
Юрочка [...] я вынул на минут-к-и
 Jurij. DIM I take out on minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC
- [ARM] *Յուրա, [...] մի թուփ-ով հանել*
Yura, [...] mi rope-ov banem
 Jurij one minute-DAT take out

As it can be seen, in the original, the diminutivized form of the time unit *минута* [*minuta*] performs a pragmatic function. The hero desires to take her legs out of hot water just for a second. Other than its objective meaning, i.e., brevity of time, here it also acts as a negative politeness strategy to make the addressee more ready to grant her request. It should be noted that in Russian we have a double diminutive *минута* > *минут-к-а* > *минут-оч-к-а*, which occurs in a collocation with the preposition *на* [*na*] and is placed in the accusative case. As regards its Armenian translation, the diminutive is somewhat lost. The adverbial phrase *վի րոպեով* [*mi ropeov*] ‘for a moment’ has no stylistic markedness with the time reference placed in the instrumental case and occurring with the numeral *վի* [*mi*] ‘one’, which only implicitly denotes the brevity of the action to be performed. The translator has applied an oblique translation technique and has lexically adapted the phrase to the norms of the target language.

To add, in Russian texts, most time diminutives were employed along with diminutivized personal names – as *Юрочка* [*Juročka*] ‘Jurij-DIM’ in (5) – to further amplify the speaker's positive attitude. They had not been rendered into Armenian either though. This can be explained by the fact that personal names are markers of socio-cultural identity. Hence, Armenian diminutive suffixes couldn't be randomly attached to them. The only applicable method could be transliteration in which case they would sound bizarre given the context.

As regards the single-diminutivized counterpart of *минута* [*minuta*]– *минут-к-а* [*minut-k-a*], the examples outnumber, namely thirteen with the source language being Russian in all cases. In Russian, the derivational time adverb occurs either alone or in a phrase *на минут-к-у* [*na minut-k-u*]. Yet, it performs the same pragmatic function of mitigating the imposition on the listener. It is mostly preceded by a verb placed in the imperative mood (*потерпи* [*poterpi*] ‘be patient!’, *подожди* [*podozdi*] ‘wait!’, etc.). In some other instances, the speaker's positive attitude towards the addressee is amplified with the emphatic particle *-ка* [*-ka*], as already shown in (4).

It should be noted that the particle *-ка* [*-ka*] is appended to verbs in Russian to soften the request and adds a sense of urgency to it. It does not cause any semantic changes, but it is used as a positive politeness strategy. It is particularly used in a ‘subordinate’- or ‘child’- directed speech as in this case, which is evidenced by the fact that in the text it is used to refer to a subordinate – an assistant (*помощник* [*posoščnik*] ‘assistant’). However, it is worth mentioning that no irony or derision is implied. Quite the reverse, the author attempts to communicate the connotation of intimacy and friendliness between the speaker and the addressee.

The Russian diminutive *минут-к-а* [*minut-k-a*] has been translated as *վի րոպե* [*mi rope*] ‘a minute’ in most cases. Only in two sentences, the time unit *րոպե* [*rope*] ‘minute’ has been replaced by its ‘smaller’ counterpart – *վայրկյան* [*vajrkjan*] ‘a second’ and its synonym *պահ* [*pah*] ‘an instant’. The last two are used in a non-diminutivized form and are devoid of any stylistic features. Only the numeral *վի* [*mi*] ‘one’ emphasizes the brevity of the action. To note, the fact that the Russian *րոպե* [*rope*] ‘minute’ has been translated into *վայրկյան* [*vajrkjan*] ‘second’ or *պահ* [*pah*] ‘instant’ in Armenian, no semantic changes have occurred. Neither has it resulted in any pragmatic alterations. Besides, the diminutivized form of Russian personal names has not been appropriately transferred into the target language either. Diminutive suffixes are commonly applied to personal names in Armenian. However, if the translator were to maintain these diminutives in Armenian, through naturalization by selecting a diminutive ending that aligns with Armenian morphological norms, it could sound unusual or out of place.

2.3.2. Translation strategies in the Italian-Russian parallel corpus

The results related to diminutivized time references in the Italian-Russian parallel corpus are summarised in Table 3. From the leftmost column, the table presents the lemma, the count of tokens in translations originating from Italian, the count of tokens in translations originating from Russian, and the overall total of tokens for the lemma.

Table 3. *Number of tokens per diminutivized time references in the Italian-Russian parallel corpus*

LEMMA	ITA > RUS	RUS > ITA	TOT
Momentino	1	7	8
Secondino	0	0	0
Minutino	0	4	4
Oretta	1	21	22
Моментик [momentik]	0	0	0
Моментичек [momentiček]	0	0	0
Моменточек [momentoček]	0	0	0
Секундо́чка [sekundočka]	0	3	3
Минутка [minutka]	12	21	33
Минуточка [minutočka]	3	9	12
Часик [časik]	1	15	16

Unlike the data from the Armenian-Russian parallel corpus, the Italian-Russian corpus shows that diminutives are used in both languages and in texts with either Italian or Russian as a source language.

With regard to Italian as a source language – i.e., when the original passage is in Italian and its translation is in Russian – only two diminutives, namely *momentino* and *oretta*, are used in the original source texts. A larger usage of diminutives is found in the Russian translations, i.e., N= 12 *минутка* [minutka], N=3 *минуточка* [minutočka], and N=1 *часик* [časik]. The fact that the diminutives in the Russian translations outnumber those in the Italian original ones implies that most diminutives found in the Russian translations are not diminutives in the corresponding Italian original versions. For instance, the example in (6) shows how the non-diminutivized *attimo* ‘moment’ was translated using the diminutive *минут-к-у* [minut-k-u] ‘minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC’.

- (6) Giorgio Faletti. Io uccido (2002) | Джорджо Фалетти. Я убиваю (Ирина Константинова, 2005)

[ITA]	<i>Aspett-a</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>attimo</i> ,	<i>Poliz̄ia</i>
	wait-IMP.2.SG	a	moment	Police

[RUS]	<i>Подожд-и</i>	<i>МИНУТ-К-У</i> ,	<i>Полиция</i>
	<i>Подожд-и</i>	<i>minut-k-u</i> ,	<i>Policija</i>
	wait-IMP.2.SG	minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC	police

Regarding texts with Russian as a source language, the presence of diminutives is found in both languages. Not surprisingly, Russian source texts do use a large variety of diminutives with time references, i.e., N= 3 *секундо́чка* [sekundočka], N= 21 *минутка* [minutka], N=9 *минуточка* [minutočka], and N=15 *часик* [časik].

Though, from the perspective of translation studies, it is interesting to notice whether and how a diminutive in a Russian source text is translated into the Italian target text. We have thus observed three main translation strategies. The first strategy is to translate the time reference without any diminutive morphology. For instance, the example in (7) shows how *минут-к-у* [minut-k-u] ‘minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC’ was translated with the non-diminutivized *minuto* ‘minute’.

- (7) Владимир Сорокин. Очередь (1985) | Vladimir Sorokin. La coda (Ilaria Sara Riccio)

[RUS]	<i>Тогда я</i>	<i>отойду</i>	<i>на</i>	<i>минутку</i>
	<i>Tогда ja</i>	<i>oto-jdu</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>minut-k-u</i>
	So I	away-go	for	minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC

[ITA]	<i>Allora</i>	<i>m'allontano</i>	<i>per</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>minuto</i>
	So	REFL=go away.1SG	for	a	minute

The second strategy is to translate the Russian diminutive with *momento* ‘a moment’, a time reference that is not diminutivized, but whose semantics is punctual. This strategy can be seen in the example in (8), which is quite peculiar, in that it is taken from the same work (Sorokin’s *Очередь* [Očered’]) and with the same predicate (*отойму* [otojti] ‘go away’)– but with a different translation strategy – as the example in (7).

- (8) Владимир Сорокин. Очередь (1985) | Vladimir Sorokin. La coda (Ilaria Sara Riccio)

[RUS]	<i>я</i>	<i>отойду</i>	<i>на</i>	<i>минутку</i>
	<i>ja</i>	<i>oto-jdu</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>minut-k-u</i>
	I	away-go	for	minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC

[ITA]	<i>sì</i> ,	<i>m'allontano</i>	<i>per</i>	<i>un</i>	<i>momento</i>
	yes	REFL=go away.1SG	for	a	moment

The third – and most problematic – strategy consists in maintaining the diminutive in the Italian translation too. However, given the different contexts in which the two languages allow the presence of diminutives, this strategy may result in a translation that is not felicitous in the target language, as demonstrated in (9), where the diminutive *minutino* in Italian suggests a non-serious reading in a context that is meant to be formal.

- (9) А. П. Чехов. Степь (1888) | Anton Cechov. La Steppa (Polledro, 1951)
[RUS] – Нет, ваше сиятельство! [...] попросите, чтобы он ко мне заехал на **минутку**.
– Net, vaše sijatel'stvo! [...] poprosite, čtoby on ko mne zaechal na **minut-k-u**
No, Your Excellence! [...] ask, that he passes by at my place for a
minute-DIM-F.SG.ACC
[ITA] – No, eccellenza! [...] pregatelo di passar da me per un **minut-in-o**
No, Excellence! [...] beg him to pass by for a minute-DIM-M.SG

The translation strategy in (9) is particularly interesting from a translation theory perspective, in that it preserves a morphological element that is present in both the source and the target languages; however, from a pragmatic perspective, the diminutives might play a different role in these languages, thus resulting in a translation that violates the principle of equivalence.

3. CONCLUSION

Our research on the translation of diminutive morphology in Armenian, Italian, and Russian has highlighted the significance of considering pragmatically motivated morphology in translation practice. This underscores the vital role that pragmatics plays in the field of translation (cf. Paronyan, 2021).

The examination of diminutive morphology in these three languages through our case study has revealed intriguing differences. Despite the presence of diminutives with similar denotative meanings in Armenian, Italian, and Russian, they exhibit distinct limitations when it comes to their pragmatic usage. Specifically, to disentangle the pragmatic aspect from the fundamental denotative meaning of diminutives, we opted to scrutinize diminutivized elements, where the denotative interpretation is constrained by their semantics. This was exemplified by our focus on diminutives affixed to time references.

Russian is a language where diminutives in time reference are more frequent, in that it can occur in a wider range of contexts; Italian restricts diminutives to non-serious situations, and Armenian allows them in the very peculiar case of poetic discourse. For this reason, it was interesting to notice how the numerous instances of time diminutives registered in Russian have been translated into Italian and Armenian.

To sum up, we have noticed that Russian diminutives tend to be rendered in Armenian either with the numeral *մի* [*mi*] ‘one’ followed by non-diminutivized time reference or by using a smaller unit of time, as *վայրկյան* [*vajrkjan*] ‘second’ for *минут-к-а* [*minut-k-a*] ‘a minute-DIM’. In Italian, alongside the non-diminutivized version of the time reference, we have noticed an extensive use of *momento* ‘moment’, which has a punctual reading, and the maintenance of the diminutive form in Italian. This latter choice, which triggers a non-serious reading in the Italian-speaking audience, has resulted in translations that are not always pragmatically adequate. The scarcity of contexts in which Armenian and Italian allow pragmatically motivated diminutivized time references and their highly marked readings explain why no occurrences of them are found in Armenian source texts and only a couple of them are registered in the Italian original ones.

To conclude, this study suggests that translators should be aware of the pragmatic differences triggered by morphosyntax in source and target languages, and how resorting to similar elements might result in non-equivalent translations. Our future research would benefit from larger data sets, that include texts in which Armenian would use diminutivized time references, like fairy tales.

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