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THE SYNTAX OF INDIVIDUATING DIMINUTIVES
IN ROMANIAN

Abstract. The paper investigates a special use of diminutive affixes in Romanian. In this use, when attached to mass nouns of the type *unt* 'butter', *carne* 'meat', *pască* 'Easter cake', diminutives yield countable nouns of the type *untulețe* / 'butter.DIM.PL' / 'packets of butter', *cărnițe* / 'meat.DIM.PL' / 'steaks', *păscuțe* / 'Easter cake.DIM.PL' / 'pieces of Easter cake'. These countable nouns unambiguously refer to units of stuff, as opposed to kinds of stuff. Following in essence De Belder (2008, 2011), the paper proposes that, in contexts where the count-unit reading arises as a result of diminutive affixation, the respective affixes head their own projection SizeP. In all other cases of diminutive affixation, diminutive affixes are specifiers of a ClassP projection (Fábregas 2013).

Keywords: diminutives, augmentatives, Size, Romanian

1. Introduction

The central focus of the present paper is represented by diminutives of a special kind in Romanian. Illustrated in (1) to (3), this type of diminutives will be referred to in this paper as 'individuating' diminutives.

(1) Câte   *păscuțe*   ies   din toată compoziția?[2]
    How-many Easter cake.DIM.PL come-out from whole dough?
    'How many pieces of Easter cake can you get from this dough?'

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[2] https://www.laurasava.ro/pascute-cu-branza-din-aluat-de-cozonac/

(2) noroc că nu   mâncăm   noi foarte mult,
luck that not   eat.PRES.1PL we very much
câteva *untulețe,*   gem …[3]
a few   butter.DIM.PL, marmalade…
'It's a good thing we don't eat much, a few little packets of
          butter, some jam…'

(3) Rețetele   noastre de cârnați   și *cărnițe*[4]
Recipes.DEF our   of sausages and meat.DIM.PL
'Our recipes of sausages and meat bites'

The basic intuition behind the diminutives exemplified in (1) to (3) is
that they hep to turn the mass nouns *pască*[5] 'Easter cake', *carne* 'meat', and
unt 'butter' into countable nouns, in a manner similar to classifier-noun
sequences, thus performing an individuating function[6]. Parallel examples
using classifiers are given in (4) to (6).

(4) Au   copt   1.300 de *bucăți de pască.*[7]
Have.3PL baked 1.300 of pieces of Easter cake.
'They have baked 1300 pieces of Easter cake.'

(5) Bărbatul   a   furat peste 700 de *pachete de unt.*[8]
Man.DEF has stolen over   700 of packets of butter.
'The man has stolen over 700 packets of butter.'

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[3]   https://amfostacolo.ro/impresii9.php?iid=109219&d=danube-delta-resort--crisan
[4]   https://www.facebook.com/61553626087288/videos/ezen-grill-doner-face-diferen%C8
%9Ba-re%C8%9Betele-noastre-de-c%C3%A2rna%C8%9Bi-%C8%99i-c%C4%83rni%C8%9
Be-u%C8%99or-afum/3879377648997081/
[5]   An anonymous reviewer points out that the noun *pască* 'Easter cake' has the plural
păști 'Easter cakes' in DEX 1998, which argues against its interpretation as a mass noun.
However, spoken Romanian clearly prefers its mass usage, and it is spoken Romanian,
where the diminutive performs its individuating function, that the paper focuses on.
[6]   For more on Romanian classifiers used with mass and/or count nouns, see Tănase-Dogaru
(2007, 2013, 2022).
[7]   https://www.scoala9.ro/mii-de-bucati-de-pasca-si-oua-incondeiate-facute-de-profeso
rii-ucraineni/1227
[8]   https://alba24.ro/povestea-hotului-care-a-furat-peste-700-de-pachete-de-unt-din-fabri
ca-albalact-din-alba-a-fost-prins-dupa-o-postare-pe-facebook-1054807.html

(6) Secretul   celor mai fragede *bucăți de carne*[9]
    Secret.DEF DEF.GEN more tender pieces of meat
    'The secret of the most tender pieces of meat'

This specific function of diminutives has been investigated for Dutch by De Belder (2008, 2011), for German by Ott (2011), Wiltschko (2006), Alexiadou and Lohndal (2023), for Italian and Modern Hebrew by De Belder, Faust and Lampitelli (2014), for Russian by Wiltschko and Steriopolo (2007), for Spanish by Fábregas (2013), for Maale, Walman, Kolyma Yukaghir, and Itelmen by Steriopolo (2013). The present paper closes a gap in the research on Romanian diminutives by identifying and analyzing individuating diminutives and, as discussed in the following sections, individuating augmentatives.

The paper is organized as follows. Section **2** offers some theoretical background related to diminutives cross-linguistically and discusses previous analyses of individuating diminutives in several languages. Section **3** proposes a syntactic analysis of Romanian individuating diminutives and augmentatives. Section **4** gives the conclusions.

2. Background: perspectives on diminutives

The aim of this section is to offer some theoretical background on diminutives and their individuating function in particular, from a cross-linguistic perspective.

2.1. On the functions of diminutives

Research in the domain of diminutives has always acknowledged a degree of difficulty in circumscribing the domain of study. According to Schneider (2013) for instance, diminutives pose a two-fold challenge, in the sense that both the diminutive meaning(s) and the formal means of

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[9]   https://adevarul.ro/stil-de-viata/bucatarie/secretul-celor-mai-fragede-bucati-de-carne-de-porc-1672022.html

expressing diminutive meanings(s) are quite difficult to spell-out. Still, a prototypical 'meaning' of diminutives emerges, *i.e.* an expression of 'smallness'. As for the formal means of expressing 'smallness', diminutive formations typically exhibit overt markers, such as suffixes (see Jurafsky 1996; Schneider 2013; Grandi & Körtvelyessy eds. 2015, a.o.). In addition to the 'smallness' component, an evaluative dimension has been identified and analyzed. To account for evaluative diminutives, Scalise (1986) proposes an additional component of analysis called evaluative morphology (see also Bauer 1997); Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994) propose that diminutives should be dealt with in a separate component called morphopragmatics; Steriopolo (2009) talks about expressive morphology. Cinque (2015) places diminutives and augmentatives in the extended nominal projection, while Gouskova and Bobaljik (2022) identify a complex functional affix that serves as both a head and a modifier (see also Körtvélyessy 2014; Manova, Grestenberger & Korecky-Kröll eds. 2024).

In Romanian grammars, diminutives are considered a class of suffixes that may attach to nouns, adjectives and adverbs, yielding nouns, adjectives and adverbs showing the smallness of the object, person or quality (Avram 1999; DSL 2005: 180). Romanian analyses thoroughly identify the morphological means of forming diminutives as well as insist on the pragmatic, evaluative dimension of meaning implied by diminutives (see Carabulea 1972, 1973, 1975; Chircu 2010, 2011; Zafiu 2001, 2010, 2011, 2013; Iluț 2002; Vrabie 2017; Leu Hanganu 2021, Lăscuș 2022, a.o.). Although the evaluative dimension sometimes cross-cuts the syntactic analysis proposed in the present paper (as shown in (7) below, where the diminutive *berici* 'beer.DIM.PL' serves both to individuate the stuff denoted by the mass noun *bere* 'beer'[10] and to show a degree of fondness on the part of the speaker), the morphology and pragmatics of diminutives in Romanian lies outside the scope of the present analysis, which mainly focuses on the syntax of individuating diminutives.

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[10]   An anonymous reviewer suggests that the plural form of the noun *bere* 'beer' is *beri* 'beers', which would argue against its interpretation as a mass noun. However, it has long been acknowledged that pluralization serves to recategorize a mass noun into a countable noun, a change which does not affect the original classification of the noun as a mass noun. In other words, the plural form *beri*, similar to pairs like *cafea* 'coffee' – *cafele* 'coffees' or *vin* 'wine' – *vinuri* 'wines', triggers a reading of the type 'servings of beer' or 'types of beer'.

(7) Bine   c-am   *berici*   la frigider[11]
    Good that-have.1SG beer.DIM.PL at fridge
    'It's a jolly good thing that I have several beers in the fridge'

The following subsection briefly looks at previous analyses of individuating diminutives cross-linguistically, with the aim of paving the way towards a syntactic analysis for Romanian.

2.2. On the individuating function of diminutives

The literature dealing with the types of diminutives illustrated in (1) to (3) seems to follow one of two lines of investigation.

    The first line of investigation aims at assigning a special syntactic status to these diminutives, analyzing them either as classifiers (Wiltschko 2006; Ott 2011) or as heads of an additional projection in the extended nominal architecture, dubbed SizeP (De Belder 2008, 2011; De Belder, Faust & Lampitelli 2014).

    The second line of investigation focuses on the specific position these diminutives may occupy, seeking to determine whether they are heads or adjuncts (Wiltschko & Steriopolo 2007; Steriopolo 2013) or heads or specifiers (Fábregas 2013), respectively.

    The present paper follows in essence the analysis in De Belder (2008, 2011), according to which diminutive affixes head their own projection SizeP.

    According to De Belder (2008, 2011), count readings of mass nouns (see (8)) can further be subdivided into a count-kind reading (8a) and count-unit reading (8b).

(8) a.   I studied two chocolates: a low-fat variety and a normal one.
     b.   Grandma gave me two chocolates: one for me and one for sister. (De Belder 2011: 173)

The same holds for Romanian. In (9a) below, the count-kind reading can be paraphrased as *two kinds of beer*, while in (9b), the count-unit reading refers to 'units', 'portions' of beer.

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[11]   https://forum.fanclub.ro/viewtopic.php?f=287&t=11808&p=288526.

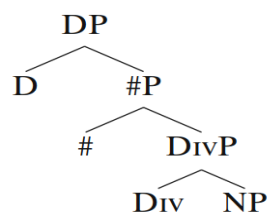(9)   a.   Studiez   două *beri*:   una   cu   hamei și alta
              fără.
              Study.1SG two beers: one.DEF with hop and another.DEF
              without.
              'I am studying two types of beer: one with hop and one
              without'

       b.   Cumpăr două   *beri*:   una   pentru mine și una
             pentru el.
             Buy.1SG two   beers: one.DEF   for me and one.DEF
             for   him
             'I am buying two beers: one for me and one for him'.

The tripartite distinction between a mass reading, a count-kind reading, and a count-unit reading can be accounted for in terms of the interaction between the feature [DIV] responsible for the division of the mass denotation of nouns (Borer 2005) and a new feature called Size, hosted in a SizeP, and whose overt realization is the diminutive (De Belder 2008, 2011).

DIV is embedded in a projection #P (= a Quantity Phrase), which offers a specifier position for elements that count, such as numerals (see the structure in (10) below, from Borer 2005: 96).
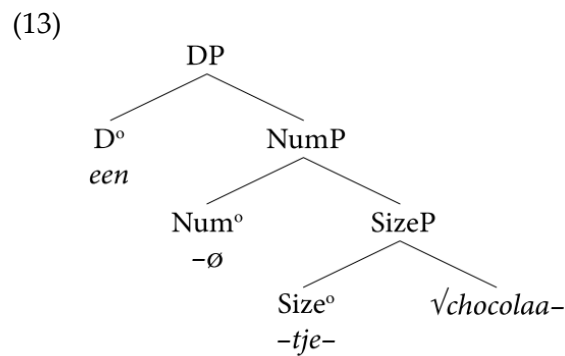
(10)

```
              DP
             /  \
            D    #P
                /  \
               #   DivP
                   /  \
                 Div   NP
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As for the feature Size, it was originally proposed to account for the fact that, in Dutch and German, the count-unit reading (8b, 9b) is absent. In order to express it, Dutch and German have to use the diminutive form (De Belder 2008, 2011; Ott 2011; Alexiadou & Lohndal 2023).

(11) a. Ik bestudeerde twee chocolades.   Dutch
        I   studied   two chocolates.
        'I studied two kinds of chocolate'
     b. Ik at   twee *chocolaatjes*.
        I   ate two chocolate.DIM.PL
        'I ate two pieces of chocolate'

(12) a. Ich mag zwei Biere besonders.
        I   like two   beers especially
        'There are two kinds of beer that I like'
     b. Ich habe gestern   zwei *Bierchen*   getrunken.
        I   have yesterday two   beer.DIM drunk
        'I drank two beers yesterday'   (Ott 2011:5)

As De Belder (2008) puts it, "absence of the diminutive forces kind readings, the presence of the diminutive results in unit readings" (De Belder 2008: 118), the idea being that the Dutch diminutive affix is a head projecting its features, as in (13):

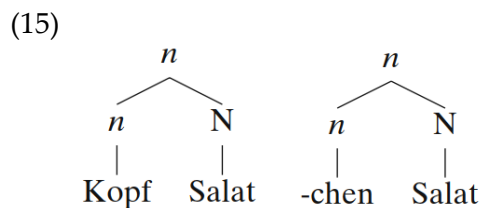(13)

De Belder (2011), in Cloin-Tavernier (2024: 156)

In (13), the diminutive head *-tje* heads a SizeP, which embeds the root *chocolaa-*; SizeP is further embedded in the functional architecture if the nominal expression, which contains NumP, DP, etc. The fact that the diminutive affix heads its own projection, being labelled $Size^0$, shows that the diminutive morphology is believed to make an important

semantic contribution. According to De Belder (2011), in nouns like *chocolaatje* 'chocolate.DIM', the diminutive affix *-tje* attributes the size 'small' to a root by projecting a [Size] feature. In turn, the [Size] feature forces the unit reading (see also Cloin-Tavernier 2024 for a [Size] feature present in the structure of Dutch manner adverbs).

Alternatively, individuating diminutives have been analyzed as classifiers (Wiltschko 2006; Ott 2011). For instance, Wiltschko proposes to analyze diminutive suffixes as numeral classifiers, which are structurally equivalent to the classifiers *Stück* 'piece', *Blatt* 'sheet', *Kopf* 'head' in (14):
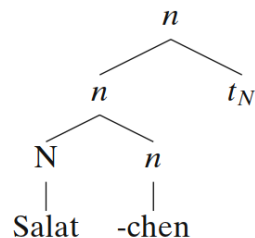
(14) a. zwölf   Stück Vieh
          twelve piece cattle
          'twelve heads of cattle'
      b. drei   Blatt   Papier
          three sheet   paper
          'three sheets of paper'
      c. vier   Kopf   Salat
          four   head   lettuce
          'four heads/pieces of lettuce'.

Wiltschko (2006) analyzes both the classifiers in (14) and the German diminutive affix *-chen* as 'light nouns' that take N-complements, where N is taken to be a categorized root. This is illustrated in (15).

(15)

What differentiates between a classifier-noun sequence of the type *Kopf Salat* 'head lettuce' and the diminutive noun is the fact that, in the latter case, the head noun undergoes head movement to *n*, a movement triggered by the affixal nature of the diminutive head (16)

(16)

```
              n
            /   \
          n      t_N
        /   \
       N     n
       |     |
     Salat  -chen
```

This section has looked at various proposals for the analysis of both diminutives that serve to turn mass nouns into count nouns, i.e. individuating diminutives and non-individuating diminutives. The following section looks at individuating diminutives in Romanian and proposes an analysis according to which Romanian individuating diminutive affixes head their own projection.

3. Romanian individuating diminutives

This section proposes an analysis for Romanian individuating diminutives that runs along the lines of De Belder (2008, 2011), De Belder, Faust & Lampitelli (2014). In this analysis, diminutive affixes head their own projection SizeP.

As shown in (17) below, the diminutive makes two types of contributions. On the one hand, it serves to establish the count-unit reading, *i.e.* a reading where there are separate portions / units of cheese. On the other hand, the diminutives imprints the idea of 'small' units of cheese, hence the meaning of size.

(17) *brânzici*   mucegăite comercializate în magazine[12]
      Cheese.DIM.PL rotten   sold   in shops
      '(small) packets of cheese sold in shops'

Although Romanian has a specific plural inflection typically used to turn mass nouns into count nouns, i.e. *-uri*, food-denoting nouns derived

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[12]   https://mednews.md/branzici-cu-lapte-condensat-si-mucegai-ajungeau-pe-mesele-consumatorilor/

with this plural affix do not trigger the count-unit reading, but only the count-kind reading, as shown in (18).

(18) Descoperă *brânzeturi* special alese[13]
      Discover   cheeses   special chosen
      'Discover specially selected cheeses'

The same contrast is illustrated in (19 a-b). In (19a), the diminutive creates the count-unit reading, while in (19b), the plural *-uri* gives rise to the count-kind reading.

(19) a. Câte   *untulețe*   vrei?
          How-many butter.DIM.PL want.2SG
          'How many (little) packets of butter would you like?'
      b. Diversifică gustul   mâncării folosind *unturi* naturale[14]
          Diversify   taste.DEF food.GEN using   butters natural
          'Diversify the taste of food using natural butters'

However, in a few cases, the diminutive affix combines with the plural suffix *-uri* to give rise to the count-unit reading for a typical mass noun, like *somn* 'sleep' in (20).

(20) *somnicuri*   de zi separate[15]
      Sleep.DIM.PL of day separate
      'daytime separate periods of sleep'

Additional evidence for a SizeP in the extended projection of the noun comes from recent formations in Romanian that typically use the augmentative suffix *-an*, which basically serve the same functions: the individuating function and the evaluative function, in (21).
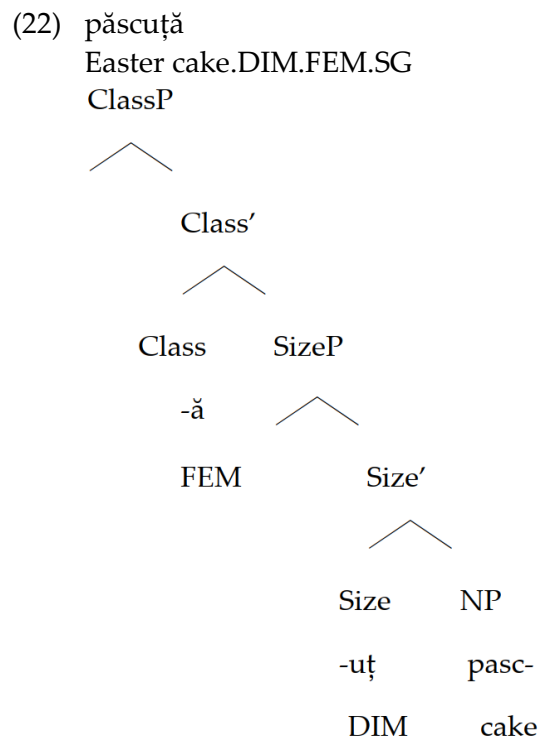
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[13] https://feelolio.ro/categorie/bacanie/branzeturi/

[14] https://ararawveg.ro/magazin/unturi-naturale/

[15] https://asociatiaprematurilor.ro/cum-facem-sleep-coaching-pentru-gemeni/

(21) a. *bericioaică*   *bericioaice*[16]
          Beer.AUG.SG   beer.AUG.PL
          '(big) can(s) of beer'
      b. *șprițan*   *șprițane*
          Spritz.AUG.SG   Spritz.AUG.PL
          '(big) glasses of wine with sparkling water'
      c. *whiskian*   *whiskiane*
          whisky.AUG.SG   whisky.AUG.PL
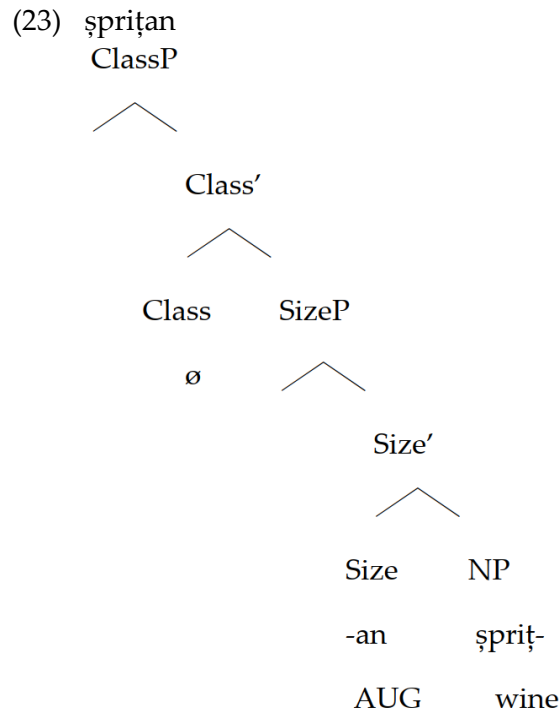   '(big) glasses of whisky'

Capitalizing on what has been said so far and following in essence De Belder (2008, 2011) and Fábregas (2013), the proposed syntactic structure for Romanian individuating diminutives is given in (22).
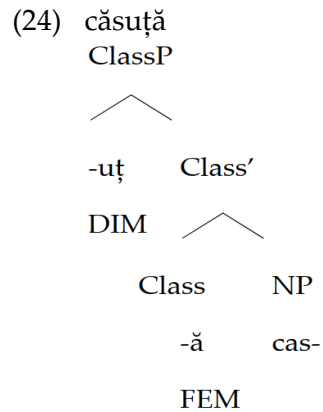
(22) păscuță
      Easter cake.DIM.FEM.SG
      ClassP

              Class′

          Class   SizeP

           -ă

          FEM   Size′

                  Size   NP

                  -uț   pasc-

                  DIM   cake

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[16] It seems the form *bericioaică* was formed by a contamination between the augmentative suffix *-oacă* and the motional suffix *-oaică*, stacked onto the diminutive suffix *-ică*. This stacking phenomenon can also be seen in Romanian in an example like *cățelandru* 'dog.DIM.AUG'.

In (22), ClassP represents the class marker of the noun. Following Fábregas (2013: 21), the NP contains gender information, which motivates the selection of the class marker hosted in ClassP. The root *pasc-* is embedded in the SizeP, which hosts the diminutive affix, which in turn identifies countable entities.

The same representation can be assumed for the individuating augmentatives in (20) (see 23).

(23) șprițan
    ClassP

          Class′

     Class   SizeP

      ø

             Size′

           Size   NP

           -an   șpriț-

          AUG   wine

The diminutive suffix will be considered a head that projects its own phrase SizeP only when it performs its individuating function, *i.e.* when it helps to turn mass nouns into countable nouns with the count-unit reading. In all other cases, following Fábregas (2013: 21), the diminutive suffix will be hosted in the specifier of the ClassP (see (24)):

(24) căsuță
      ClassP
     ╱‾‾‾‾
    -uț   Class'
    DIM   ╱‾‾‾‾
          Class   NP
           -ă   cas-
          FEM

This section has proposed an analysis of Romanian individuating diminutives according to which diminutive affixes that give rise to count-unit readings are heads of a projection SizeP. This conception accounts at the same time both for the special syntactic behavior of these affixes and for their semantic contribution in terms of 'small' size.

4. Conclusions and further research

The paper has looked at the behavior of a special class of diminutives in Romanian, which have been referred to as individuating diminutives. It has shown that, when attached to a mass noun, these diminutive affixes give rise to count-unit readings, paralleling examples from Dutch and German. In order to account for the count-unit readings of diminutive affixes, the paper has shown that the latter project as heads of a SizeP projection, which accounts both for their individuating function and their evaluative function.

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