

# Convergences and divergences in the use of the diminutive in Medellín, Caracas and Madrid

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This article analyzes the differences and coincidences in the uses of the diminutive found in three varieties of Spanish. Based on the classification of the pragmatic functions of the diminutive by Reynoso (2003), and the analysis of 5355 cases of non-lexicalized diminutives, it may be observed that the three varieties converge greatly in the production of the diminutive forms of *-ito*. There is some divergence in the variety of lexical bases that support the diminutive since the people of Madrid use (and listen to) more diminutives than Americans, but they use (and listen to) them in a smaller number of different words. The social factors contained in the sample have shown a reduced effect on the functions of the suffix, and a partially differentiating behavior among the three communities: in Caracas, age has a strong influence on the functions while, in Madrid and Medellín, the level of education is the factor that exerts more influence on these functions.

**Keywords:** sociolinguistics, diminutive, speech community, Spanish of Madrid, Spanish of Caracas, Spanish of Medellín

## 1. Introduction

One of the characteristics of Spanish is to schematically express semantic content, associated to the diminutive, by using variants of suffixes that may acquire different values. The main appreciative diminutive suffixes in Spanish are: *-ito, -ita; -ín, -ino, -ina; -ico, -ica; -ejo, -eja; -illo, -illa; -uelo, -uela; -ete, -eta*, among others. The diminutive is used to express a reduction in the size of the referred entity – the so called referential value – and to express an array of affective values towards the diminitivized entity, towards the interlocutor, towards the speaker, or towards both of them (Real Academia Española y Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española 2009, 651–656). The notional or affective nature of the

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diminutive suffix has been a central topic of debate due to its function in language and, probably as a consequence of what Nández Fernández (1973, 379) calls the “functionally chameleonic character” of diminutives. In this regard, one of the most interesting aspects of research is to define its semantic and pragmatic values, and this is the point that has been debated the most since Amado Alonso’s classic on diminutives (1930, 1954).

From a socio-pragmatic point of view, affective values respond to attenuation or intensification strategies. The former, attenuation,

consists in minimizing the illocutionary force of the speech acts and which frequently regulate the interpersonal and social relations between the participants of the enunciation. [...]. Some of the values that describe this linguistic operation more concretely are related to softening the message, minimizing importance, mitigating, repairing or hiding the real intention.

(Albelda y Briz 2010, 238) (The translation is ours)

Regarding the latter, intensification is used to emphasize or highlight that the speaker does what s/he means:

the speaker, obeying a personal impulse, highlights parts of the utterance with the interlocutor (this may be an action, a quality, an object, a subject, etc.) or his/her own attitude towards communication.

(Vigara Tauste 1992, 131) (The translation is ours)

Both of these strategies may be observed in what Reynoso (2003, 2005) proposed regarding the functions of the diminutive. She orders the values of the diminutive on a scale according to the values that correspond to three functions of the suffix, two which refer to the value of the diminutivized entity, and the other to the relation of the speaker regarding the reduced object. The functions referring to the entity are called “quantifying value” and “qualifying value” by the author, and the one referring to the relation of the subject, regarding the reduced entity, is the “relational value” (a) The quantifying function represents the value of the speaker regarding the dimension (size) of the referred entity, or the degree to which the reduced object fits into the prototype represented by the lexical base (more or less central); (b) the qualifying function manifests the value of the referred entity (positive, negative); and (c) the relational function expresses the value the speaker awards to the entity (irony, attenuation, respect). The qualifying and relational functions encompass the expression of an affective value that carries the diminutive since it is with these functions that greater subjectivity is expressed, i.e., the speaker shows positive or negative feelings, attitudes, beliefs or judgments towards different people. According to these functions, there are more objective uses (referential) and more subjective uses: the maximum degree of objectivity is produced in those cases in which the diminutive implies a reduction in size

(quantifying function) and from then on, more subjectivity is established; this degree is obtained with the functions of irony, attenuation and respect (Chart 1).

**Chart 1.** Pragmatic functions of the diminutive (Reynoso 2003)

Uses	Macro functions	Valuing aspects of the reduced entity	Types/functions
+ OBJECTIVE	QUANTIFYING VALUE	Valuing the dimension of the reduced entity	– Quantifying (referential use) – Decentralizing – Centralizing
	QUALIFYING VALUE	Valuing of the qualities of the reduced entity	– Negative – Positive
+ SUBJECTIVE	RELATIONAL VALUE	Valuing of the speaker's relations with the entities of the discourse	– Irony – Attenuation – Respect

Regarding the dialectal differences in the use of the diminutive, several studies have insisted on the fact that the Spanish from America presents a higher frequency of use than peninsular Spanish, mainly in the adverbial forms. The examples provided by Aleza Izquierdo (2016) for American Spanish are sufficient:

Except for what happens in relations, diminutive forms have been documented in nouns, adjectives, adverbs, nominal forms of verbs, interjections, etc., this is why words such as the following (or similar) are very common in the whole of the Hispano-American geography:

Nouns: *pueblito, abuelita, sobrinita, chiquitos, hermanito, niños (...)* hormigueta, cantaito, dejaito, añito, cabineta, grupito, bandidito, fiestecita, pueblecito (...)

Adjectives: *pequeñito, chiquita, cortico, bajito, chiquitico, chiquitito...*

Adverbs: *ahorita, ahoritita, poquito, poquitico, despacito, lueguito...*

(Aleza Izquierdo 2010, 196) (The translation is ours)

The Real Academia Española (2009) also highlights the frequency of diminutives in nominal and adverbial bases in American varieties:

*acacito, adiosito, ahicito, ahorita, allacito, alredecorcito, antesito, apenitas, aquicito, chaucito, despuesito, detrasito, nomasito, suavemente, así como algunos demostrativos, posesivos y numerales (estito, suyita, cuatrito).* (RAE 2009, 165)

Regarding prior sociolinguistic research that has used the PRESEEA corpus, in terms of the varieties of the Spanish from Spain, studies have been reported in Madrid (Paredes García 2012, 2015) and Granada (Manjón-Cabeza Cruz 2012,

2016), although it has to be mentioned that only the first author analyzed semantical-pragmatic functions. There are several studies regarding the American geolects that should be taken into account: about Mexico City, Martín Butragueño (2018) presented a complete study focused on the use of the variant *-ito*, which is compared to other varieties of European and American Spanish, and Broodcoorens (2013–2014) contrasted adverbs with the diminutive suffix *-ito* between Mexico City and Santiago de Chile. Three studies have been carried out taking into account the speech community of Caracas. The first on the adverb *ahorita* (Malaver 2017); the second, on *igualito* with a comparative and discursive function (Malaver 2018a), and the third on the general functions of the diminutive (Malaver 2018b). There have also been extensive studies regarding the speech community of Monterrey by Silva Almanza (2011), who used a pragmatic approach, from the perspective of gender studies and discourse analysis. In the case of the speech community of Medellín, no research has been reported on the use of the diminutive, which is why this study in particular will be the first to address this phenomenon.

In this paper, data from three speech communities is gathered and contrasted in order to unfold the patterns of convergence and divergence in the uses of the diminutive in varieties that present very different characteristics. The varieties which are taken into consideration in this paper are interesting for sociolinguistics and dialectology: on the one hand, the peninsular variety is contrasted with two American varieties and, on the other hand, in the Hispano-American region, each of the geolects corresponds to two macro-systems clearly differentiated in terms of consonantism which, by simplification, may be described as a maintained system (Medellín) and a weakened system (Caracas), in the Andean and Caribbean region respectfully, following Moreno Fernández (2010). Regarding the diminutive, the dialectal situation of these three speech communities may be observed in the research carried out in the field of linguistic geography. The ADiM (García Mouton y Molina Martos, 2015) reveals that in Madrid, the predominant form is *-ito*, even when, in the traditional forms, the more traditional suffix *-illo* is notably important. According to data collected by Alvar (2001), Caracas is located in an area in which the suffix *-ito* is reported without exceptions, and the data collected by ALEC (Flórez 1981–1983) also reports that the use of the suffix *-ito* is to be found.

The differences among these varieties are not limited to them belonging to an inventory, since they also affect the socio-pragmatic functions of the diminutive. Company Company (2002) notices the differences between the referential value (size) and the relational value (pragmatic) which may be found in the peninsular Castilian Spanish and Mexican Spanish in order to consider that there is not only an isogloss that separates both areas, but she also manages to establish that “the different grammatical behaviors of the two dialects which were studied

reflect very distinct visions of the world” (2002, 55). The author, who based her work on the corpus gathered by Reynoso (2003), found that Mexican Spanish uses the diminutive with a relational value 72% of the times, compared to 42% of the peninsular Spanish; in contrast, the Mexican variety uses it 28% of the times with a referential value, compared to the Castilian variety which uses it 58% of the times. For Company Company, Mexican speakers “seem to be more interested in talking about how they see reality and not speaking about, or describing, reality itself, [whereas the Spaniards] preferably adopt a more objective or distant plane, and codify entities by observing their referential properties more than anything else” (2002, 67). However, as reported by Paredes García (2015, 149), it is possible that the differences observed in the studies are related more to the real differences in the use, than in the characteristics of the materials and the corpus being compared. In this regard, in this paper, the data that is analyzed is gathered by using the same methodology in order to contrast the uses given in the speech communities.

These are the hypotheses that were formulated for the purposes of this study:

- Hypothesis 1: The socio-pragmatic functions of the diminutive will essentially be the same in the speech communities that are being studied;
- Hypothesis 2: The observed differences in the use of the diminutive will fundamentally be of a more “epidermic” nature, inasmuch as they will affect only three aspects: (a) a preference for one form or another of the suffix, (b) the frequency of use in the discourse, and (c) the application of suffixes to specific lexical bases in each speech community.
- Hypothesis 3: In each speech community, social factors will have a similar influence on the functions of diminutives.

This article is organized in the following manner: in the first place, and as a means of establishing a context and theoretical framework, some articles related to the interpretations given to the diminutive are described, pausing particularly on the PRESEEA Project’s contributions. Then the methodological criteria are explained, followed by an analysis of the diminutive present in the PRESEEA corpus of Caracas, Medellin and Madrid. These analyses are applied only in the cases of non-lexicalized diminutives in order to try to determine the presence of suffixes in the discourse for each speech community, the generalization of the grammatical categories, and the semantical-pragmatic functions of the morphemes; and finally, the possible influence of social factors in the variations is studied in order to determine the convergence or divergence of the patterns of behavior. The results of these comparisons will allow the researchers to extract the final conclusions of the study.

## 2. Methodology

The results presented in this paper are based on corpus sociolinguistics obtained within the framework of the “Project for the sociolinguistic study of Spanish from Spain and America”, PRESEEA for its acronym in Spanish, obtained from the speech communities of Caracas, Medellín and Madrid.<sup>1</sup> It is hoped that one of the most ambitious goals of PRESEEA may be accomplished: to foster coordinated studies as a means of delving into, and moving forward with, a description of phonetic, grammatical and discursive phenomena in Spanish. The sample that will be analyzed is made up of cases of the diminutive found in 216 interviews. In order to ensure comparability, the same number of interviews has been used in each community, and also respecting the proportion of stratification of the sample. In this regard, 72 interviews were selected from each of the communities of Caracas, Medellín and Madrid.

The cases of the diminutive were codified following the proposal by Paredes García (2012, 2015), who foresees the possible influence of 27 variables in the use of the diminutivized form (12 linguistic, 8 stylistic and 7 social). However, given the specific objectives of this study, only those pertinent to the comparison will be analyzed: the variations of the suffix, the grammatical categories, the lexical bases and the semantical-pragmatic functions.

In order to adequately make a comparison, it is necessary to take into account the number of words in each corpus, apart from the number of informants. This will serve to help contrast the relative importance of the diminutive in each of the speech communities. The interventions of the informants interviewed added up to 913,119 words (Table 1), the corpora from Caracas and Madrid are approximately the same in numbers, while that of Medellín is significantly smaller.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1.** Number of words used by interviewees in 72 recordings from each city

Caracas	562,485
Medellin	350,634
Madrid	572,394
<b>Total</b>	<b>913,119</b>

1. See Moreno Fernández (2006) for the methodological criteria used in the PRESEEA Project.

2. This difference in the number of words may be explained by how the interview developed; some of the interviews in Medellín are more dialogical in nature, of the question-answer type between the interviewer and the informant. In the speech communities of Caracas and Madrid, more monological and extended interventions may be observed.

In order to identify the examples, the following conventions: the code begins with the letters that correspond to the identification of the city (PRESEEA\_CAR: Caracas, PRESEEA\_MED: Medellin, PRESEEA\_MAD-SAL: Madrid, Salamanca District and PRESEEA\_MAD-VAL: Madrid, Vallecas District), then the sex is identified (H for men, *Hombre*, and M for women, *Mujer*), the age of the informant (group 1: 20–34 years old; group 2: 34–55 years old; group 3: 55 years old or more) and degree of instruction (1: primary; 2: secondary and 3: university); finally, the three digit number identifies the interview.

### 3. Analysis of the data and results

#### 3.1 The non-lexicalized diminutive

In Spanish, the diminutive suffix is sometimes affected by lexicalization processes. When the diminutive is desemantized and it loses its referential value, the base and the morpheme merge to form a new unit; the appreciative suffix therefore behaves similarly to the rest of the suffixes, and is converted into yet another of the resources of lexicogenesis. These derived units (*cerilla*, *bocadillo*) constitute new lexical items that are incorporated into the language – and sometimes into dictionaries – and the fact that one recurs to the addition of a new suffix, when there is a need to refer to the reduction (*cerillita*, *bocadillito*), is a clear indicator that the speaker has stopped perceiving the bases as diminutivized derivatives.

In this regard, in order to adequately study the real function of the diminutive in a speech community, it is important to leave aside the analysis of those cases in which the suffix has lost its evaluative capacity to acquire only a referential value. This is precisely the corpus that will be taken into account for this study.

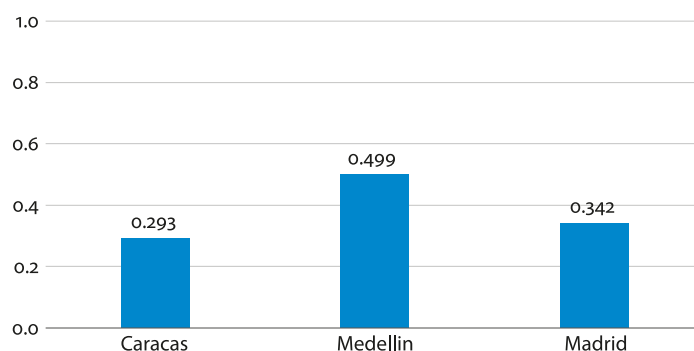
**Table 2.** Cases of non-lexicalized diminutives in Caracas, Medellin and Madrid

	Caracas		Medellin		Madrid		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<i>ito</i>	1536	93.2	1599	91.4	1647	84.2	4781	89.3
<i>illo</i>	0	0.0	0	0.0	229	11.7	229	4.3
<i>ete</i>	0	0.0	0	0.0	30	1.5	30	0.6
<i>ico</i>	112	6.8	151	8.6	3	0.2	268	5.0
<i>uelo</i>	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	0.5	9	0.2
<i>in(o)</i>	0	0.0	0	0.0	37	1.9	37	0.7
<i>uco</i>	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.1	1	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1648</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1750</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1957</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5355</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 2 shows the first substantial difference between the three speech communities that is related to greater uses of the suffixes in each area: in the American capitals, only *-ito* and *-ico* are present, with a clear predominance of the first case in Caracas, as well as in Medellín. The presence of *-ico* in both American cities is evidence that *-ito* is not the only variant, according to data presented by Alvar (2001) and ALEC (Flórez 1981–1983). On the contrary, in Madrid, different allomorphs of the suffix may be encountered, although there is some coincidence with the Hispano-American cities in the preference for the variant *-ito*, which appears on 1647 occasions (84.2%) and, in second place, *-illo* which is present on 229 occasions (11.7%); while the rest of the allomorphs are present as a mere testimony of the phenomenon.

Regarding *-ico*, it has a noteworthy value in Caracas and Medellín, while it is totally residual in Madrid, where it only appears in *chiquico* y *pobrecico*. The most frequent words carrying *-ico* in the two American corpora were: *ahoritica*, *momentico*, *ratico* y *poquitico*.<sup>3</sup>

Quantitatively, Madrid again is reported as the city with the most number of diminutive suffixes, above Medellín and Caracas, which immediately questions the generalized belief that there is a greater permeability of the use of diminutives in the American dialects. However, this quantitative approximation has to be defined based on the relative burden of the diminutive in each speech community, for which the proportion of the total number of non-lexicalized diminutives (cf. Table 2) may be seen in relation to the total number of words that conform each corpus (cf. Table 1).



Graph 1. Proportion of diminutives in interviews

3. In Granada (Manjón-Cabeza Cruz 2012), the most productive suffix is *-illo* ( $N=606$ , 46.8%), followed by *-ito* ( $N=533$ , 41.1%) and *-ico* ( $N=157$ , 12.1%). In this speech community, suffixes present social stratification: *-ico* is related to low education levels and its use is in regression, while *-ito* is advancing in the speech community's society, in those people with high levels of education, configuring what seems to be a top-down change.



This data (Graph 1) allows one to establish a first impression on the frequency of the diminutive morpheme in the discourse. What the image shows is that the discourse of the Medellín speech community has a higher proportion of diminutives than that of Madrid or Caracas. In this Colombian city, its value is 0.499 which, when translated, means that the speakers of Medellín's speech community use a diminutive approximately every two hundred words; the discourse of Madrid's speech community is less impregnated with diminutives – one every three hundred words approximately –, which is more than the speech community of Caracas, that proportionally uses less morphemes – one every three hundred and fifty words –. This data thus questions the theories that believe there is a greater relation of the use of the diminutive in American varieties, and which present derivative morphemes more like idiosyncratic traits of each territory.

### 3.2 Diminutives and grammatical categories

Diminutives may be grouped into several grammatical categories (Table 3).

**Table 3.** The distribution of the grammatical categories according to the diminutive suffix in Caracas, Medellín, and Madrid)

	Caracas		Medellin		Madrid		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Nouns	1071	65.0	1060	61.0	879	44.9	3010	56.2
Adjectives	348	21.0	307	18.0	550	28.1	1205	22.5
Adverbs	126	8.0	119	7.0	249	12.7	494	9.2
Pronouns	66	4.0	175	10.0	100	5.1	341	6.4
Determinants	32	2.0	82	5.0	170	8.7	284	5.3
Proper names	2	0.12	7	0.4	9	0.5	18	0.3
Gerunds	3	0.18	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1648</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1750</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1957</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5355</b>	<b>100.0</b>

When analyzing the distribution by categories, it may be observed that, on the whole, in the data of the three cities, almost ninety percent of the cases of suffixation occur in nouns and adjectives, and to a much less extent adverbs and

pronouns.<sup>4</sup> Nouns represent 56.2% of all of the cases, duplicating adjectives by far, at 22.5%, while adverbs represent 9.2% of the cases and pronouns 5.3%.<sup>5</sup>

The data illustrates that in all of the varieties which were analyzed, entities are diminutivized more than attributes and that, when they are charged with affective nuances, they are subjectivized and highlighted. In this regard, a scale with a degree of prototypicality of the grammatical categories, related to appreciative suffixation, may be established and it would be conformed somewhat like this:

noun > adjective > adverb > pronoun > determinant > verb

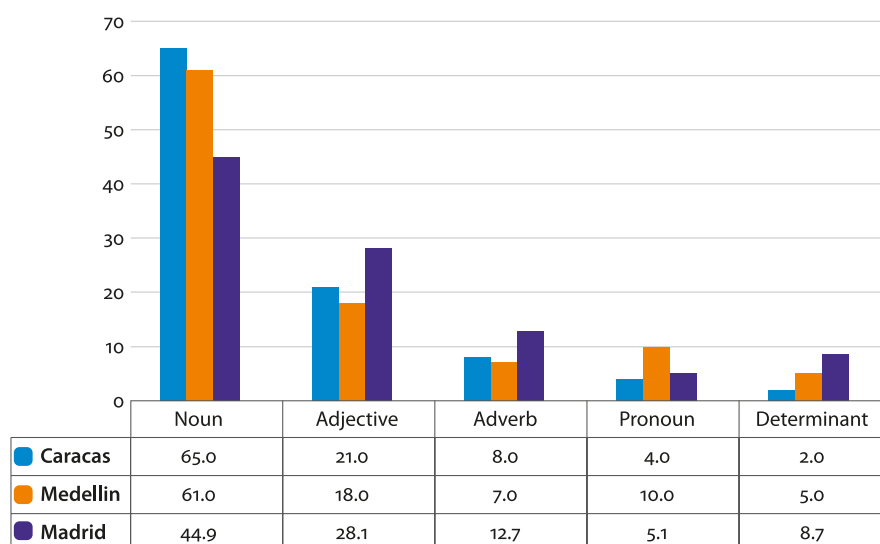
To this point, the values of the analyzed set do not conceal significant inter-urban differences and the fact that every one of them establishes its own characteristics (Graph 2).

As previously indicated, the grammatical category which appears more frequently with a diminutive suffix is the noun, although with certain differences depending on the territory: the proportion of nouns reaches 65.0% in Caracas and 61.0% in Medellín, while, in the corpus from Madrid, it is present in only 44.9% of the cases. The second grammatical category is the adjective, even when there are, percentually speaking, more cases in Madrid (28.1%) than in Medellín and Caracas (18% and 21% respectively). In terms of adverbs, they are the third category in the number of diminutivized cases in Caracas and Madrid, but not in Medellín, where this position is occupied by pronouns.

It is worth pausing in the category of adverbs. The analysis identifies uses of the diminutive suffix with adverbs of time (*antes, ahora*), place (*abajo, arriba, afuera, cerca, lejos*) and doubt (*apenas*) in both of the American corpora; in Madrid, the diminutive is applied to adverbs of time (*temprano, pronto*), place (*cerca, enfrente, lejos*), mode (*despacio*) and quantity (*poco*). There are more

4. The similarities between the corpora coincide with the study by Manjón-Cabeza Cruz (2012) on the speech community of Granada regarding the predominance of the noun and adjective bases with diminutive suffixes. The same occurs in Mexico City, according to Martín Butragueño (2018), where the noun bases represent 57.6% of the cases, followed by adjective bases with 24.9%.

5. Regarding the verbal forms, only diminutives of the gerund appear in the corpus of the speech community of Caracas (*caminandito, comenzandito*), which may be considered a permeability index of these elements to access more formal registers, different to what occurs in the corpora from Madrid and Medellín. In Mexico City, Martín Butragueño (2018) found only one case of the periphrasis, *vamos a comenzarcito*, which coincides with the speech community of Caracas.



**Graph 2.** Distribution of diminutives by grammatical categories according to speech community

different adverbs in Medellin (13) and Caracas (12) than in Madrid (7) but the diminutivized adverbs, which occur at higher frequencies, are found in these last two corpora: *ahora* in Caracas and *poco* in Madrid (Table 4).

In Madrid, the adverb used the most is (*un*) *poquito*, which appears as an adverb on 191 occasions, i.e., 77.0% of the total of suffixed adverbs (and 9.8% of the total of diminutives of the corpus from Madrid). *Ahorita* stands out the most in the two American dialects, but it is in Caracas where its presence is overwhelming.

Broodcoorens (2013–2014), in a comparative study on diminutivized adverbs between Mexico City and Santiago de Chile, registered 44 cases of these adverbs in the Chilean corpus compared to 805 cases in the Mexican corpus, and 80% (647 cases) corresponded to *ahorita*. On the contrary, there is not even one case in the speech community of Santiago de Chile. Malaver (2017) reports that *ahorita* alternates with *ahora* in the speech community of Caracas, and that *ahorita*, being the most frequent diminutivized word in the corpus from Caracas, has started to be extended to all of the temporal meanings of *ahora*. In this study, it is also the most frequent adverb in the Colombian corpus, although the number of cases is drastically less than in Caracas.

**Table 4.** Adverbs with diminutive suffixes in Caracas, Medellin and Madrid

	Medellin	Caracas	Madrid
1. ahorita	43	ahorita	653 poquito/-illo 167
2. cerquita	13	igualito	18 cerquita/-ina 14
3. arribita	8	clarito	11 despacito 4
4. lejitos	6	cerquita	12 prontito 3
5. abajito	4	rapidito	8 enfrentito 1
6. antecito	4	tempranito	6 lejitos 1
7. bastantico	3	ahí mismito	3 tempranito 1
8. afuerita	2	afuerita	2
9. ahoritica	2	apenitas	2
10. enseguidita	2	alantico	1
11. atrasito	1	debajito	1
12. bajito	1	abajito	1
13. cerquitica	1		
14. poquitico	1		
15. tardecito	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>		<b>778 231</b>

### 3.3 Lexical bases: A dispersion index of diminutives

Until now, the distribution of the allomorphs identified in each corpus, and how they have been distributed into categories, may be observed. This allows one to get a general idea of the presence of these morphemes in the discourse. However, not much is known regarding how much the lexical units permit diminutivization in each territory. In order to do so, it is important to observe what lexical bases are affected by diminutivized suffixes (Table 5).

In terms of the percentages of the three most frequent categories, the numbers related to nouns are similar in the three corpora, approximately seventy percent. In this particular point, Madrid is at an intermediate position, between Caracas, the city with the highest figures, and Medellin, where they are the lowest. The situation of the American cities is inverted when it comes to the case of adjectives: the Colombian city occupies the first position, followed by the Spanish city and finally the Venezuelan city. In relation to adverbs, the American varieties come before the peninsular variety, while the corresponding bases of the rest of the categories obtain irrelevant figures, quantitatively and percentually speaking. However, this data on its own sheds very little light.

The contrast between the lexical bases and the number of diminutives of each category offers a new perspective to analyze the convergence and diver-

**Table 5.** The distribution of grammatical categories according to the bases of suffixes in Caracas, Medellin and Madrid

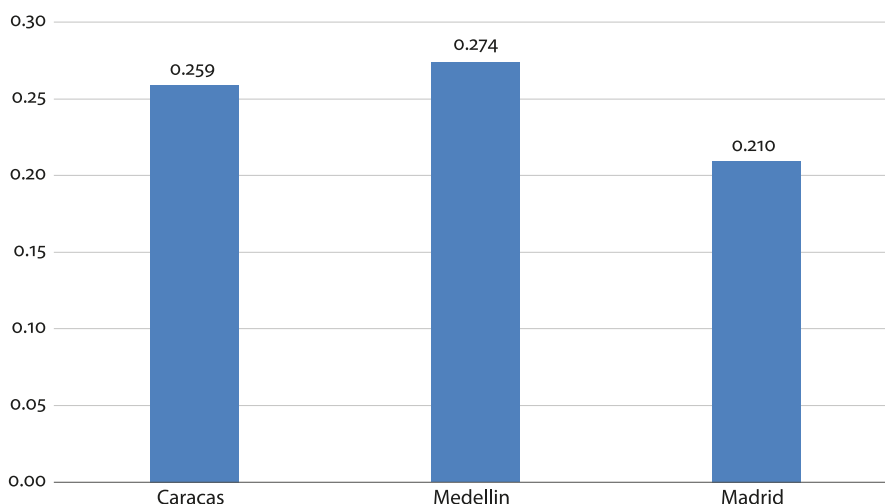
	Caracas		Medellin		Madrid		Total	
	Bases	%	Bases	%	Bases	%	Bases	%
Nouns	315	73.8	319	66.6	293	71.5	927	70.4
Adjectives	95	22.2	135	28.2	102	24.9	332	25.2
Adverbs	10	2.3	16	3.3	6	1.5	32	2.4
Pronouns	2	0.5	2	0.4	2	0.5	6	0.5
Determinants	2	0.5	2	0.4	2	0.5	6	0.5
Proper names	2	0.5	5	1.0	5	1.2	12	0.9
Gerunds	2	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>479</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1316</b>	<b>100.0</b>

gence processes between the varieties of dialects. The ratio between the lexical bases to which the suffix is applied, and the number of cases found, allows researchers to obtain an index – which has been called “The lexical dispersion index of diminutives” –, with which a synthesis can be made of the degree to which suffixes are applied to different linguistic units, which in turn, points out to whether suffixes are concentrated in very few units or distributed in the lexicon,<sup>6</sup> i.e., it gives an idea of whether the presence of the diminutive in the discourse is related to the fact that these may be applied to any lexical unit or if, on the contrary, the suffixes are concentrated in a concrete set of units, which may appear more or less frequently.

As observed in Tables 3 and 6, the 1648 diminutives of the corpus from Caracas correspond to 427 different lexical bases; the 1750 of the corpus from Medellin are found in 479 bases, and the 1957 of the corpus from Madrid, in 410 bases.

In terms of the lexical dispersion index found in each community (Graph 3), Medellin is the city with the highest index rate, which should be interpreted in the sense that the speech community of that region, applies diminutives to a larger variety of lexical units. Something similar occurs in Caracas, which is located in the second position, very close to the Colombian city. However, the index obtained by Madrid’s speech community reveals that it concentrates the use of diminutives to a reduced number of units.

6. The lexical dispersion index is a value that ranges between 0 and 1. The more proximal it is to the value of 0 indicates a greater concentration of suffixes in a reduced number of units, i.e., fewer words susceptible of receiving an appreciative suffix.



**Graph 3.** The lexical dispersion index of diminutives

Let us now have a look at what happens by grammatical categories (Table 6). Regarding nouns, two aspects need to be highlighted: firstly, that the values are relatively very similar in the three contrasted variables, and secondly, that Madrid is the community that applies the diminutive to more different nouns. In the case of adjectives and adverbs, the situation is inverted: Medellin is the city that is more prone to adding suffixes to different adjectives and adverbs, while the diminutivization of adjectives and adverbs in Madrid is subject to more restrictions. To sum up, entities (nouns) are susceptible to diminutive suffixation more or less in equal proportions in the territories; where the real differences are produced is in the reduction of the attributes (adjectives, adverbs), in which the American varieties seem to prefer a greater suffixation of lexical units.

**Table 6.** The lexical dispersion index of diminutives

	Caracas	Medellin	Madrid
Nouns	0.294	0.301	0.333
Adjectives	0.273	0.440	0.185
Adverbs	0.079	0.134	0.024
Pronouns	0.030	0.011	0.020
Determinants	0.063	0.024	0.012
Proper names	1.000	0.714	0.556
Gerunds	0.667	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.259</b>	<b>0.274</b>	<b>0.210</b>

In order to summarize, apart from how diminutivization is carried out (i.e., with which suffix), the differences that may be observed between territories are due to the entities that are reduced, more than how many suffixes are diminutivized (the number of diminutives that appear in the discourse). Medellín seems to be the most differentiated community.

### 3.4 The semantical-pragmatic functions of the diminutive

As mentioned previously, diminutives help speakers achieve different effects (Reynoso 2003). Some of these functions are exemplified in Chart 2.

**Chart 2.** Examples of pragmatic functions of the diminutive

Function	Example
Quantifying	pues yo me fui andando de aquí a Vallecas y luego desde desde / del puente de Vallecas hay una <i>callecita chiquitita</i> para arriba (PRESEEA_MAD-VAL_3M1_052)
Decentralizing	meterse en tiendas no es muy / no es muy rentable para uno que / es una persona que / bueno / está su <i>sueldito</i> / por lo menos cuando le llegó la quincena (PRESEEA_CAR_H11_005)
Centralizing	a mí es que de siempre me ha gustado mucho el campo y todo eso e ibas por la mañana <i>tempranito</i> y estar todo el día (PRESEEA_MAD-VAL_3M2_040) pero ya eso es <i>cerquita</i> del Metro (PRESEEA_CAR_H22_054)
Negative	los <i>viciositos</i> que, ni siquiera son de por allá, son visitantes, ni siquiera tienen su mamá ni su papá en la cuadra, sino que van a la esquina aa, molestar, no son de por allá (PRESEEA_MED_H22_4)
Positive	a pesar de su problema que tenía, se fue para donde su <i>amiguita</i> y después la acompañaron hasta donde tenía que coger y subió, pero eso prácticamente fue como un descuido de la familia, de nosotros (MEDE_H21_2)
Irony	“yo / yo con yo con el piquito me conformaba” <risas=“E”/> yo siempre digo eso cuando “joder yo con el <i>piquito</i> ” (PRESEEA-MAD-VAL_2M1_046)
Attenuation	también pienso que uno, tiene la responsabilidad, de decirle a la otra persona, así sea charlando así seaa, ee, e, en medio, <i>guebonaditas</i> , decir hombre vea, a mí me parece que por ahí no es ((PRESEEA_MED_H13_1)
Respect	me hubiera gustado mucho ayudar los <i>enfermitos</i> ((PRESEEA_MED_M21_2) la reconoció que era la <i>monjita</i> que estaba desaparecida (PRESEEA_CAR_M12_044)

The semantical-pragmatic functions that diminutives serve in each of the speech communities are reflected in Table 8, where the relative importance that

each function acquires in the speech community may be seen, and this is measured in terms of frequency.

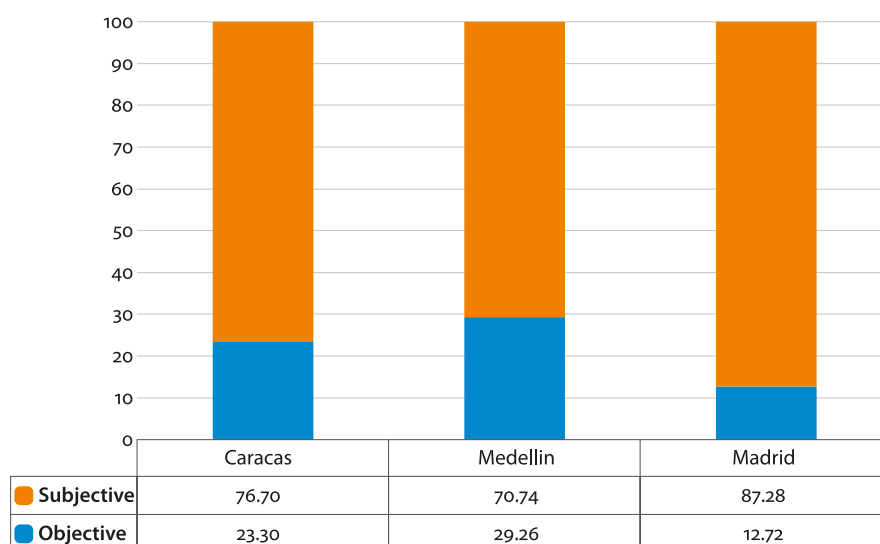
**Table 8.** The lexical dispersion index of diminutives ( $\chi^2$  sig. = 0.000; Cramer's  $V = 0.446$ )

	Caracas		Medellin		Madrid		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Quantifying	384	23.3	512	29.3	251	12.8	1147	21.4
Decentralizing	174	10.6	164	9.4	754	38.5	1092	20.4
Centralizing	469	28.5	532	30.4	420	21.5	1421	26.5
Negative	12	0.7	16	0.9	7	0.4	35	0.7
Positive	535	32.5	485	27.7	248	12.7	1268	23.7
Irony	28	1.7	0	0	19	1.0	47	0.9
Attenuation	37	2.2	33	1.9	202	10.3	272	5.1
Respect	9	0.5	8	0.5	56	2.9	73	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1648</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1750</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1957</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>5355</b>	<b>100.0</b>

There are several aspects that need to be highlighted regarding the data presented in Table 9. In the first place, one needs to consider the differences between the objective value, represented by the quantifying function – i.e., when the suffix is used to indicate a reduction in size –, and the subjective values, which appear to a greater or lesser extent in the rest of the functions. In this regard, there is a coincidence in the three cities in the sense that the diminutive is used less in the objective function, or in describing the reality, than in the subjective or evaluative function (Graph 4).

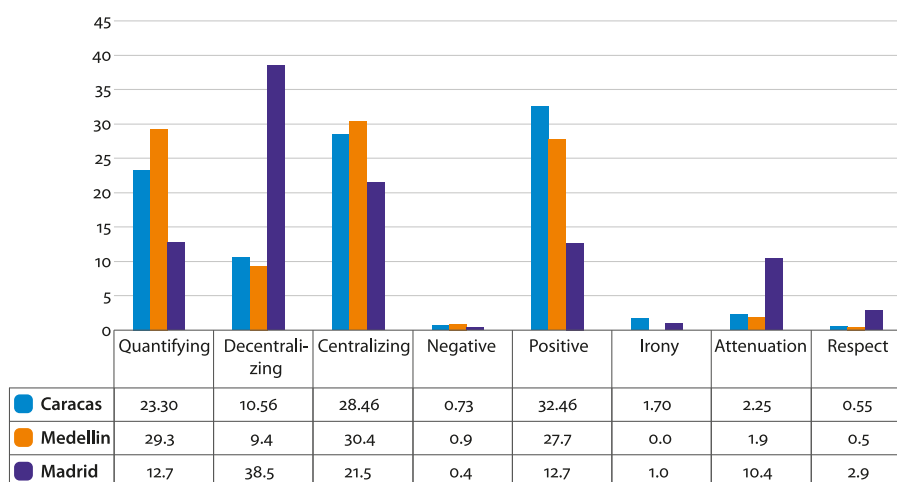
Convergence practically ends with this aspect since, with the rest of the parameters, mostly divergences are observed. When faced with what hypothesis 1 established in this study, results show that there are substantial differences in the function of diminutives. This contrast shows, in first place, that the diminutive used in a quantifying function is employed much more frequently in the Hispano-American cities than in the Spanish Capital. In Madrid, the diminutive is used in a quantifying function or situation 12.8% of the time (249 cases), while it serves to evaluate the reduced object or the situation in 87.3% of the occasions (1708 cases). In Caracas, the diminutive is used in objective functions 23.1% of the times and in Medellin 29.3% of the cases, compared to the evaluative use which occurs 76.9% of the times and 60.7%, respectively. These results, which may be classified as quite unexpected, refute the thesis established by Company Company (2002), which stated that subjective values are more associated to America than to Spain.





**Graph 4.** Semantical-pragmatic functions of the diminutive ( $\chi^2$  sig. = 0.000; Cramer's  $V = 0.169$ )

A detailed analysis of the pragmatic functions carried out by the diminutive allows one to establish a more comprehensive idea of what occurs in each territory.



**Graph 5.** Pragmatic functions of the diminutive in Caracas, Medellin and Madrid ( $\chi^2$  sig. = 0.000; Cramer's  $V = 0.316$ )

A relative similarity may be observed in all of the pragmatic functions, and especially in the most frequent ones, between Medellín and Caracas, in contrast to what occurs in Madrid (Graph 5). Some of the notorious differences need to be highlighted between the two shores: the diminutive is merely used in the decentralizing function in America compared to its frequent use in Madrid; in the same token, the attenuation function is relatively frequent in the Spanish capital, while it barely reaches noteworthy values in Caracas and Medellín, probably because this function is accomplished through other procedures in these speech communities. In both American cities, they prefer the centralized uses and the positive value compared to what happens in Madrid.

### 3.5 The burden of the social factors

Finally, in order to obtain a vision of the social patterns that work in each of the speech communities, what follows is an analysis of the influence of external factors, taking into account the semantical-pragmatic functions of the morphemes. These have been grouped into only two categories: referential, in which the main function of the diminutive is to indicate a reduction in size, and evaluative, used to show different degrees of subjectivity of the speaker. The evaluative function, which seems obvious, groups the rest of the functions (Table 9).

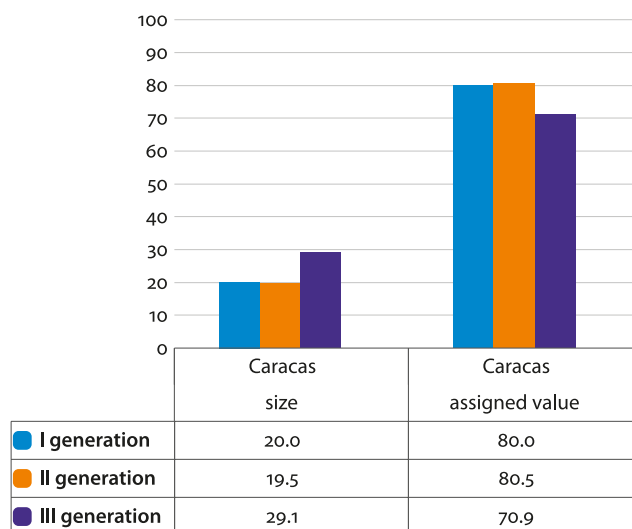
The sex of the participant does not establish significant differences in any of the cities which were studied. This means that men and women of the three territories use the diminutive similarly to quantify, or to give value to the entities. However, there is a need to take into account the predominance of the evaluative function of the speech community of Madrid, and at an interurban level, the percentual predominance of the men of Caracas and Medellín.

Regarding the age of the participants, no observable differences between generational groups in Medellín and Madrid were noted. It is a significant factor only in Caracas, and, according to the data gathered (Graph 6), older individuals tend to use suffixes more to express objective values than to evaluate the world.

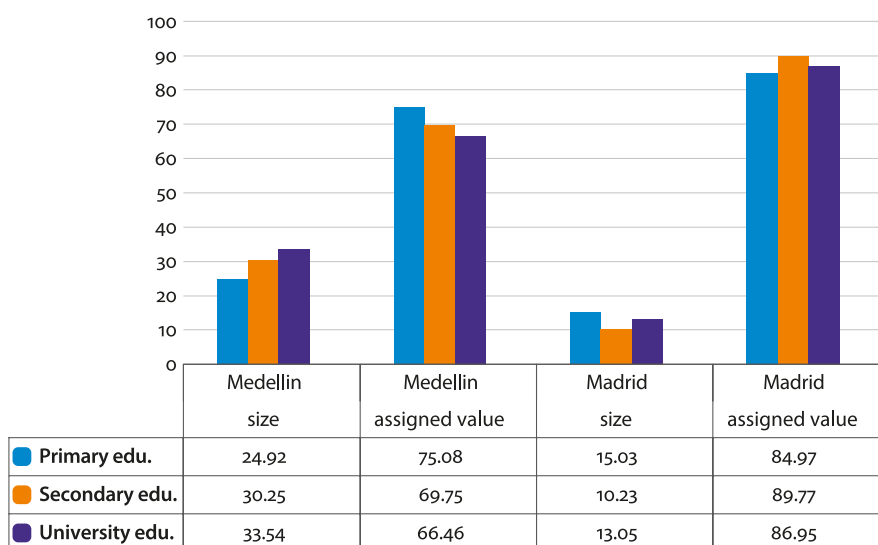
Finally, the educational level of the participants is irrelevant in Caracas regarding the functions that the diminutive plays, contrary to what happens in Medellín and Madrid (Graph 7). In the Colombian city, a linear pattern marks how the objective use of diminutives increases as the level of education rises in the people of Medellín. The explanation of this behavior probably resides in the fact that, as educational levels rise, there are more strategies available to individuals to evaluate their surroundings, and, in this regard, the diminutive is no longer that important. Regarding Madrid, the curvilinear pattern indicates that the intermediate group more frequently uses the diminutive more than the other groups as a tool to evaluate their surroundings.

Table 9. The correlation between the lexical dispersion index of diminutives (Shaded areas:  $p < .05$ )

	Caracas						Medellin						Madrid					
	size		value		size		value		size		value		size		value			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Male	155	22.11	546	77.89	205	27.33	545	72.67	102	12.85	692	87.15						
female	229	24.18	718	75.82	307	30.70	693	69.30	149	12.81	1014	87.19						
I Generation	84	20.0	335	80.0	143	29.2	347	70.8	84	11.4	652	88.6						
II Generation	116	19.5	480	80.5	180	28.9	443	71.1	95	14.4	567	85.6						
III Generation	184	29.1	449	70.9	189	29.7	448	70.3	72	12.9	487	87.1						
Primary edu.	137	23.5	447	76.5	157	24.9	473	75.1	113	15.0	639	85.0						
Secondary edu	125	23.5	406	76.5	190	30.3	438	69.7	70	10.2	614	89.8						
University edu	122	22.9	411	77.1	165	33.5	327	66.5	68	13.1	453	86.9						
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>1264</b>	<b>76.7</b>	<b>512</b>	<b>29.3</b>	<b>1238</b>	<b>70.7</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>1706</b>	<b>87.2</b>						



**Graph 6.** Functions of the diminutive according to age in Caracas ( $\chi^2$  sig. = 0.000; Cramer's  $V = 0.108$ )



**Graph 7.** Functions of the diminutive according to level of instruction in Medellin and Madrid (Medellin:  $\chi^2$  sig. = 0.006; Cramer's  $V = 0.077$ ; Madrid:  $\chi^2$  0.025; Cramer's  $V = 0.061$ )

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#### 4. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the diminutive is an idiosyncratic trait which makes it possible for researchers to characterize a speech community from the observed parameters: the allomorphic variety, frequency in the discourse, the distribution of lexicon, and the pragmatic functions that the suffix plays.

In terms of hypothesis 2, which states that the observable differences in the use of the diminutive are mainly due to their frequency in the discourse and the lexical bases in each speech community. Some divergences have been noted in the production of the suffix forms, although the one which is more predominant in all of them is *-ito*. The variant *-ico* is quantitatively important in America, but not in Madrid, which in turn, conserves historical allomorphs of the diminutive, some with certain vigor (*-illo*) and others with less intensity (*-ino*, *-ete*, *-uelo*, *-uco*).

The quantitative differences observed between the three varieties affect both the quantity of diminutives present in the discourse as well as the lexical bases that support the morphemes, being the second more important than the first. In the discourse of the speech community of Madrid, there appear more diminutives than in that of Caracas, but the number of words that receive suffixes is more varied in Medellin and in Caracas. In other words, the people of Madrid use (and listen to) more diminutives than Americans, but they use (and listen to) them in a smaller number of different words. This may be seen, above all, in the less prototypically diminutivized categories, i.e., in adjectives and adverbs. In this aspect, the people of Medellin are more advanced than those of Caracas and Madrid.

These considerations, apart from reconciling the postures of the prominence of the Spanish from Spain or America regarding the use of diminutives, adequately harmonizes the consideration of America as an area which is prone to using the diminutive. What really occurs is that in the American varieties analyzed, the diminutivized lexicon is not to be expected that much as in that of Madrid. The speakers of Medellin and Caracas apply the suffix to categories less prototypically suffixable by diminutivization, which makes the diminutive in these places a feature that is extremely marked and, in this regard, more cognitively and communicatively prominent.

In terms of the semantical-pragmatic functions that diminutivizations play, it can be observed that, in all of the cities, the morpheme is multifunctional, as hypothesis 1 stated. Madrid is shown as the city in which the diminutive is used the most with an evaluative function. This also constitutes a finding in this study, which contradicts the hypothesis that the diminutive is used more in America to evaluate the world than to describe it.

Finally, regarding what hypothesis 3 states, this study has determined that there is a reduced effect of social factors on the pragmatic functions of suffixes:

in Caracas, age has a strong influence on the functions while, in Madrid and Medellín, the level of education is the factor that exerts more influence on these functions.

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