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DIMINUTIVITY AND EVALUATION IN COURTROOM INTERACTION: PATTERNS WITH *LITTLE* (PART 2)

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a corpus-assisted discourse study into the use of the diminutive marker *little* in an adversarial trial. It explores the recurrent patterns and the evaluative meanings associated with the use of *little*, and furthermore looks at the broader interactional context in which these patterns and meanings are found. Drawing on the concepts of *stance* (du Bois 2007), *evaluation* (Hunston 1994) and *semantic prosody* (Louw 1993), it demonstrates how interactants in the courtroom setting lay claim to epistemic priority by stressing the relevance of their own testimony while discrediting the opponent and diminishing the importance of unwanted evidence. The analysis also shows that patterns with *little* are linked to politeness and mitigation, and that they soften the austerity of communication. The data seem to suggest as well that the evaluative uses of *little* are more common in references to the primary reality of the courtroom than in references to the out-of-the-courtroom reality, in the case of which denotative meanings prevail. Most importantly, however, the study reveals that despite the formality of courtroom interaction, analytic diminutives with *little* are a frequent interactional device and, further, that their polarities depend on interplay with other discourse elements as well as the interpersonal goals that the speakers are trying to achieve.

*Mary, what is this? I find that you have had a baby!
Please, ma'am, it's only a little one.*¹

¹ I quote this supposed exchange between a Victorian mistress of the house and a housemaid after the Opinion of Advocate General Sharpston dated 15 September 2011. The full text of the Opinion is available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A62010CCo465> (date of access: 5 May 2017).

In Part 1 of the article I explained the theoretical underpinnings of the current study and I presented a general overview of patterns with *little* attested by the data. In Part 2, in turn, I focus on selected patterns with *little* and demonstrate their role in negotiating evaluative meanings in courtroom interaction.

4.2. Selected patterns with *little* in courtroom talk (continued)

4.2.2. *little* + references to spoken and written communication

Firstly, it was noted that *little* co-occurred with a wide range of references to different forms or elements of spoken and written communication (i.e. different types of oral accounts or different types or elements of written records/evidence). As predicted, in this context, the diminutive marker *little* helped the speakers to express politeness and modesty, especially when they offered their own arguments or interpretations (Examples 1 and 2). Elsewhere, *little* was found in pre- and post-*but* sequences that marked disagreement, where it appeared in acknowledgements of anticipated criticism (Example 3) or in countermoves introducing the speaker's preferred stance (Example 4). Clearly, in all such instances, *little* was found in the environment of words denoting some form of spoken or written communication or evidence (e.g. *point, hint, clue, clip, word, comment, warning, explanation, parable, handwritten note, notice, sheaf, summary, passage, written statement*).

- (1) Now I want to move to something else, if I may. Again **it is only a little point**. My Lord, what I am going to do, if I may, is spend a little time just clearing up some loose ends [Counsel → Judge]²
- (2) [Counsel] My Lord, can I hand in **my little note** on the inadmissibility of expert witness statements?
[Judge] Thank you very much – yes, please.
- (3) This was by way of introduction to the table talk, Mr Irving. **It is a little point, but** I am going to suggest at the end of this case that every time Hitler floats into the picture in your books, it is in order for him to be, as it were, conferred innocence. [Counsel → Claimant]
- (4) [Claimant] Is this commonly accepted or do most historians now accept that there was no homicidal plan?
[Expert witness] This is accepted, **but I made a little comment** there at the end, and I said, well, actually, if you look at the so-called territorial solution, one should actually say, and this is my argument, that this increasingly offers a perspective of the physical end of the Jews in Europe.

As pointed out above, *little* was purposefully deployed most particularly in the various references to spoken and written communication that was produced by the speakers themselves or attributed to other discourse participants. This seems logical, given that the parties' primary objective was to undermine the narrative

² Here and in the following examples the emphasis is mine.

presented by the opposing party, that is, to dismiss or belittle its relevance. At the same time, they sought to stress the validity of their own accounts and to win the judge's positive regard for their own evidence. Along these lines, though rather unexpectedly, *little bundle* turned out to be a recurrent device; its frequency in the data was relatively high (98 tokens, including 54 tokens of *the little bundle*). As emerged after a closer examination, *little bundle* was used chiefly by the claimant (84 out of 98 occurrences) when he was advancing his line of argument and presenting his own evidence, and it was especially frequent in polite requests (Examples 5 and 6). It also emerged that the adjective *little* was used rather sparingly in combination with two other nouns that denoted documents, i.e. *file* and *document*, and that the denotative descriptions *small bundle* and *small file* were also infrequent (Table 3). Interestingly, the noun *clip*, in turn, collocated with *little* a bit more frequently (34 tokens), e.g. in such phrases as: *the little clip of documents*; *a little clip of extracts* and *the little clip of utterances*. On the other hand, when found in the counsel's or the judge's references to *files*, *bundles* or *documents*, the diminutive marker *little* was used either to convey negative evaluation, as in Example 7, or to denote physical smallness, as in Example 8. This seems to indicate that when *little* was used in reference to the opposing party's evidence (be it *file*, *bundle* or *document*), it was not used to draw the interlocutor closer to the speaker's deictic centre in order to create some kind of communicative proximity, but, conversely, to demonstrate the "badness" or irrelevance of such evidence (Example 7), or simply to denote its size (Example 8). However, since such examples were sparse, more data would be needed for any general conclusions to be attempted. At the same time, there was ample evidence to suggest that the claimant himself did not use the cluster *little bundle* merely to denote smallness. Rather, it can be plausibly posited that he repeated the phrase *little bundle* (linked to directives and polite requests) to decrease the formality of the interaction, i.e. to lessen the communicative distance between himself and the audience (especially the judge), and, possibly, to secure the judge's sympathy and positive assessment of the evidence presented.³

³ It would perhaps be interesting to note here that diminutive forms like the English *little bundle* would not be used in the courtroom setting in Polish, which, like other Slavic languages, abounds in diminutives. Although I do not have any empirical data to support my claim, based on my Polish native speaker's intuition and knowledge of the Polish court system, I would argue that the Polish (morphological) diminutives of *akta sprawy* (pl.) (*case files*) and *tom/pakiet* (sing.) (*bundle*), that is *akciki sprawy* and *tomik/pakiecik*, respectively, are not ordinarily used during courtroom proceedings (unless in off-the-record communication and for purposes other than the presentation of evidence). Likewise, it would be highly inappropriate to use such diminutives together with the honorific *Wysoki Sądzie* (*Your Honour*), contrary to what the current study shows, where *little bundle* was found in requests co-occurring with the address forms "my Lord" and "your Lordship". I would posit, however, that Polish trial participants try to achieve a similar pragmatic effect, i.e. that of creating social nearness in a bid to win the judge's positive regard for the evidence they present, by resorting to other linguistic resources. For instance, the sentence: *Wysoki Sądzie, czy Sąd mógłby zerknąć na tom...?* (*Your Honour, could you have a quick glance at the bundle...?*) would be a conceivable functional equivalent of: *Your Honour, can I ask you to look at the little bundle...?* Thus, in the Polish example, the effect of diminutivisation that reduces the communicative distance between the questioner and the judge – with a view to eliciting sympathy – is achieved by the co-occurrence of the

Co-occurrences	Raw score	Normed score
BUNDLE		
<i>little bundle</i>	98	68.7
<i>small bundle</i>	7	4.9
CLIP		
<i>little clip</i>	34	23.8
<i>small clip</i>	3	2.1
FILE		
<i>little file</i>	4	2.8
<i>small file</i>	1	0.7
DOCUMENT		
<i>little document</i>	3	2.1
<i>small document</i>	1	0.7

Table 3. Co-occurrences of *bundle/clip/file/document* with *little* and *small*

- (5) You are still critical, of course, of my methods of obtaining information from Hitler's private staff. Would you see, please, pages 83 to 5 of the **little bundle**? [Claimant → Expert witness]
- (6) Can I ask you to look at the **little bundle** I just gave you? My Lord, this is on page 14 of the **little bundle** which is in sections. [Claimant → Judge]
- (7) Mr Irving, that is characteristic, what I just read, of the importance which you attach to **this little document**, I mean little in terms of significance, not of size, **this little document** as evidence of, as you propose, the fact that Adolf Hitler neither ordered nor knew about any massacring of Jews, at any rate up until late 1943? [Counsel → Claimant]
- (8) – this **little bundle**. I am making this point at this stage because it is going to crop up time and again. I am rather anxious not to have little one issue bundles cropping up at odd stages because, frankly, in a case of this length, it is all going to get lost and tangled. I imagine that all these documents are in one or other of the existing files. [Judge → Claimant]

4.2.3. *a little (bit)*

Turning now to the other patterns, it was likewise found that the clusters *a little* and *a little bit* were relatively frequent in the data. Before looking at the individual instances of *a little (bit)*, however, it is useful to draw a distinction between its use

verb *zerknąć* (*have a quick glance at*), used instead of the more formal *spojrzeć* (*look*), and the polite form *czy Sąd mógłby* (*Your Honour, could you/would you/would you mind*). Of course, since the above observations are intuitive, more cross-linguistic research would be needed to determine the similarities and differences between the ways diminutivity is expressed in legal discourse in English, Polish and other languages.

as an adverbial modifying an adjective and its use as an adverbial modifying a verb. Both uses, it was noted, were linked to mitigation and the softening of the austerity of communication, although they appeared in different contexts. With regard to the first use of *a little (bit)*, this tended to co-occur with negative polarity adjectives, i.e. those marking a negative evaluation or signalling some kind of problem (e.g. *facetious, unorthodox, suspicious, painful, confused, frightened, complex*). To see this more clearly, consider Examples 9–12, where the overall mitigating effect is achieved through the co-occurrence of *a little (bit)* with evidential and epistemic markers (e.g. *it sounds, probably, I think*) as well as politeness markers (e.g. *can I tell you, if I may*).

- (9) Right. This is very helpful to know that, but can I tell you why I am **a little puzzled**?
[Judge → Counsel]
- (10) So much more so, Mr Irving, if I may be **a little cynical** for a moment, if you should go on trumpeting the 200 to 250,000 figure, and these two documents should be brought forth by somebody else. [Counsel → Claimant]
- (11) It sounds **a little bit obsessive**, otherwise, probably **a little bit exaggerated**. [Claimant → Judge]
- (12) I think we are getting **a little bit bogged down** in the Muller document. Yes, Mr Irving. [Counsel → Claimant]

A little (bit) was also found to co-occur with comparative forms of adjectives and adverbs, including those referring to size, space and time. This should not come as a surprise, given the fact that some of these instances were found in the turns of expert witnesses, who – aware of the liability for providing untrue accounts under oath – relied on qualified (hedged) statements rather than definite assertions (Example 13). Similar approximations were also found in references to various parts of the written documentation discussed during the examination (Example 14) as well as in polite requests (Example 15). Finally, *a little (bit)* was also identified in the judge's references to procedural matters (mainly the time and duration of adjournments), as illustrated by Example 16.

- (13) Mr Irving, the whole of the width of what you call the alleged gas chamber I think is something like, what is it, **a little less** than 20 feet. [Expert witness → Claimant]
- (14) Hofmann's testimony begins on this printed version, that is on seventh day, it begins on page 540, and goes on to page 545 I think, **a little bit further**. [Expert witness → Judge]
- (15) It would be useful if you could keep your answers **a little bit shorter** and more to the point. [Claimant → Expert witness]
- (16) So quarter to four. When you reach a convenient moment around quarter to four or **a little earlier**, we will break off then. [Judge → Claimant]

Similarly, when used as an adverbial modifying a verb, *a little (bit)* served to attenuate precision (i.e. as an approximator⁴) and to decrease the degree of imposition (i.e. as a politeness marker). The latter use was particularly frequent in the judge's turns, where it, again, tended to co-occur with requests (Examples 17 and 18). It was also identified in the turns of other trial participants addressing the judge and offering politely to take some kind of action, as in *Shall I wind back my argument a little bit?* or *Would it be helpful if I said a little bit...* (Examples 19 and 20).

- (17) If we dart from one topic to another, I have not spent 30 or 40 years on this, so can you help me **a little bit**? [Judge → Claimant]
- (18) Mr Irving, this is getting a bit discursive. Can we just pin it down **a little bit**? [Judge → Claimant]
- (19) Shall I wind back my argument **a little bit**? [Claimant → Judge]
- (20) Would it be helpful if I said **a little bit** more about how Schafler arrived at his figures? [Expert witness → Judge]

4.2.4. *this little* and *the little*

Moving on to *this little* and *the little*, these two clusters pointed to the here-and-now orientation of the ongoing interaction and focused the listener's attention on the evidence in hand, which, in some cases, was being negatively assessed or even ridiculed. This is plain, for instance, in the interaction shown in Example 21, where the counsel challenges the reliability of the evidence presented by the claimant, requiring that the latter provide the exact number of eyewitness accounts that he relied on in his testimony. However, it is only in the broader interactional frame and thanks to co-occurrence with other subjective markers (*It is a deliberate exaggeration, is it? You got some good laughs...*) that the negative polarity of *this little story* becomes apparent. This evaluative use of *this little* can, on the other hand, be contrasted with Example 22, where, conversely, *this little* is used neutrally in the witness's technical description to denote a physically small object. It is noteworthy here that whenever *the little* collocated with nouns that denoted physical objects (buildings or structures) which represented the out-of-the-courtroom reality (e.g. *building, vestibule, corridor*), the meaning of *little* seemed literal. On the other hand, co-occurrences of *this little* with nouns that denoted some form of communication or written evidence which belonged to the primary reality of the courtroom (e.g. *clip, bundle, file, summary, comparison, phrase, sentence, dispute*) were either denotative or evaluative (cf. Examples 8 and 22 with Examples 7 and 21).⁵ Similarly, *the little* – which in fact was twice as frequent as the cluster *this little* – either indicated the small size and

⁴ Biber et al. (1999: 780) call such extent/degree circumstance adverbials *diminishers*, that is, clause elements which lower the intensity of the clause proposition.

⁵ For a distinction between *primary* and *secondary reality* in the discourse of police interviews, see Gibbons (2005: 142–150).

the definite status of the referent (Example 23) or reflected, it can be argued, the speaker's attitude and attempt to create social nearness in collocations with nouns that denoted evidence (Examples 5 and 6).

- (21) [Counsel] How many eyewitness accounts and who were the people that told those stories?
 [Claimant] Alleged survivors of Auschwitz.
 [Counsel] How many?
 [Claimant] Certainly one account.
 [Counsel] Eyewitnesses, plural?
 [Claimant] That, obviously, is a slip of the tongue.
 [Counsel] Yes, it is not. It is a deliberate exaggeration, is it? You got some good laughs with **this little story**?
 [Claimant] I think it is such a ludicrous story and it so clearly exaggerates the problem, it so clearly illustrates the problem with the eyewitness accounts of Auschwitz –
 [Counsel] Oh, really?
- (22) – columns would be going through the roof completely because the columns themselves were wider. They had these three concentric layers, but what would have happened is that there were a hole through the roof, and then on the top of it you get a kind of chimney like structure, and as long as the hole is connected to the innermost, to the innermost kind of column inside and of the same width so that **this little thing** can be brought up and down which ultimately allowed people to retrieve the earth in which the Zyklon was absurd during transport. [Expert witness → Judge]
- (23) Whether that means the big filing box or **the little box** of glass plates, I cannot say. I have absolutely no idea. I am afraid I was not there.
 [Counsel → Claimant]

4.2.5. *little* + evaluative adjectives

Unsurprisingly, the diminutive marker *little* was also found in the environment of other adjectives, some of which were plainly evaluative. As I intuited, the prosodies of these configurations were predominantly negative; although, it needs to be admitted, such patterns were rather infrequent (Table 2). It should also be observed that the evaluative meanings were not equally distributed in the two patterns identified in the data. More to the point, the *little* + evaluative adjective + noun pattern did not seem to indicate much negativity, whereas the evaluative adjective + *little* + noun pattern betrayed more tangibly the speaker's negative assessment, which, too, resulted from the interplay with the co-occurring discourse items.⁶ For instance, as is discernible in Example 24, the speaker tries to diminish the value of the information provided by the expert witness (*this rather amusing little footnote you put in*), while,

⁶ Cf. Dressler and Barbaresi's (1994: 115) observation that the usual order for the weak form *little* in premodifier position is adjective + *little* + noun, as in *You pathetic little man!* said sarcastically and menacingly and, further, that it rarely admits substitution by *small*.

at the same time, stressing the significance of his own report (*Do I not describe (...) and is that not more significant?*). In Example 25, similarly, the claimant seeks to dismiss the relevance of “other” evidence, by accusing a group of lawyers of being too fastidious (*they sat around all day talking about **pernickety little details**, did they not?*). Both examples instantiate competing epistemic stances involving positive internal attribution and negative external attribution (my vs. your/their account). Examples 26 and 27 (illustrating the *little* + evaluative adjective + noun pattern), on the other hand, cannot be interpreted unequivocally. It is equally plausible that the phrases *his only little benevolent mind* and *the little racist ditty* can be interpreted literally or sarcastically.⁷

- (24) You are still critical, of course, of my methods of obtaining information from Hitler’s private staff. Would you see, please, pages 83 to 5 of the little bundle? This is the complete passage from that interview you have just quoted, the one where I was allegedly conducting interviews as a six year old. Why did you not pay more attention to the surrounding three pages of that interview instead of **this rather amusing little footnote** you put in? Do I not describe in those three pages (and this is the question) how I have persuaded Hitler’s private staff to reveal to me ugly secrets of their memories of their times with Hitler, if I can put it like that, and is that not more significant? [Claimant → Expert witness]
- (25) [Irving] Yes, these lawyers, they sat around all day talking about **pernickety little details**, did they not?
[Expert witness] I am afraid they did a lot of the time, yes. But for them, of course, it was very serious.
- (26) Would you agree that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish when Goebbels is referring to what somebody has told him and when **his only little benevolent mind** takes over? [Claimant → Expert witness]
- (27) [Expert witness] Again, it is not a deliberate assumption, assumption of deliberativeness, that it was done deliberately. I cannot say this because I have no proof of it, so I will not. But, of course, there are crucial speeches not there. One of them we will get in the next hour or so.
[Claimant] Yes, because, of course, if I had edited the diaries or the speeches, then I would have taken out **the little racist ditty** that Mr Rampton thinks I should be horse whipped for.
[Judge] It is not suggested you have doctored them.

4.2.6. *little* and double diminutivity

Just as revealing were the several instances of double diminutivity, which took either the form of “*little* + diminutive adjective + noun” or “*little* + diminutive noun”. At this point, it must however be explained that the label “diminutive noun”, as used for the purpose of this study, does not apply to analytic or morphological

⁷ This, however, cannot be determined without an assessment of the speaker’s tone of voice or intonation.

diminutives, but to nouns where the component of [smallness] or [non-importance] is included in their semantics. Thus, as is clear for instance in Examples 29 and 30, smallness/non-importance is encoded twice.⁸ The phrase (*this*) *little snippet* could then be decomposed as: (*this*) *little* + “small fragment”, whereas *little tweaks* would be paraphrasable as: *little* + “small improvements”. Analogous examples included: *a (neat) little fib* [i.e. *a (neat) little* + “small lie”] and (*my only*) *little quibble* [i.e. (*my only*) *little* + “small objection”]. All of the above-mentioned instances were found in contexts where the speaker’s evaluation of the communication or evidence produced by his interlocutor was negative. By contrast, in Example 31, where diminutivity is marked twice with the use of two adjectives (*tiny little questions*), the speaker is trying to create the impression that the questions he is about to ask do not address anything serious or significant.⁹

- (28) How much do you say Mr Irving of **this little snippet** is a report of what Hitler said to the gaulierter? [Judge → Claimant]
- (29) You see, all your little fictions, **your little tweaks**, of the evidence all tend in the same direction, exculpation of Adolf Hitler, do they not? [Counsel → Claimant]
- (30) [Claimant] So there is no documentary evidence relating to scale then?
[Expert witness] Not to scale, to mode of killing. What we do have is documentary evidence concerning the emptying of Poland of Jews to these three camps, which are **teeny little villages** which do not accommodate one and a half million people.
- (31) First of all, I want to ask one or two **tiny little questions** about this air raid shelter thesis. This is, according to Mr Irving, the alternative use for Leichenkeller 1, hence the spy hole and the gas tight door and all that kind of thing. How far are K2 and K3 from the SS barracks? [Counsel → Expert witness]

4.2.7. Other uses of *little*

Apart from the contexts discussed above, *little* was also found in structures marking contrast, such as: *we do not need leap to giant conclusions from little inferential sketches*, where the adjectives *giant* and *little* are juxtaposed for intensification. Other instances which deserve a mention include occurrences of *little* in metaphorical references to, or evaluations of evidence, as in: *a little piece of gold* (valuable evidence), *a little bit of flesh on the bones* (more concrete evidence), *a little alarm light in my brain* (sudden realisation [that something is wrong with the evidence in question]) and, not so infrequent, references to the physical smallness of various structures and (parts of) buildings, such as, e.g. *little sentry shelters*, *a little funnel*, *a little stool* and *a little vestibule*. As noted earlier, all these descriptions serve denotative rather than evaluative purposes and they pertain to the out-of-the-courtroom (i.e. secondary)

⁸ Cf. analogous examples of positive polarity, where “niceness” is encoded twice, as e.g. in: *nice little*. In the dataset analysed, there were only two tokens of *nice little* (i.e. *nice little rooms*, *nice little housing estates*), both of which referred to the out-of-the-courtroom reality.

⁹ It should however be admitted that the speaker’s negative attitude could have been detectable in his tone of voice or intonation.

reality. Finally, there were several instances of *little* in child-related contexts, which, again, concerned spatially and temporally remote participants (more precisely: the claimant's daughter), as in: *humming a little song to her* or *urging my nine month old little girl not to marry outside her own people*. Though not central to the current analysis, all of the above-mentioned uses provide more evidence in support of the claim that *little* serves a multitude of pragmatic purposes.

5. Conclusions

From the current study several points arise regarding the use of *little* in the dataset analysed. Firstly, it was found that, contrary to what might be expected of a formal institutional setting, diminutive forms with *little* were a common phenomenon and served a number of pragmatic purposes, rather than just denoted a small size. Secondly, it was established that *little* co-occurred most frequently (app. 40% of all occurrences) with references to spoken and written communication (as in: *a little comment, a little clip of extracts, this little story, this little digression, that little bigger file, that little paragraph*), which, in turn, testifies to the significance of diminutivity in the discursive construction of evidence, consisting in saying “what has been and is being said in prior texts, in present texts and across texts and contexts” (Holt, Johnson 2010: 35). What is more, as the data indicate, the negative polarity of patterns with *little* was visible in references to the opposing party's testimony, where they occurred in negative assessments whose goal was to query or discredit unwanted evidence (as in: *one little phrase, this little story, this little document*). At the same time, *little* seemed to be used to create social nearness and to decrease the communicative distance whenever the speaker (chiefly the claimant) presented his own evidence, which was best exemplified by the repeated nondenotative use of *little bundle*. Thirdly, *little* was linked to politeness and mitigation; in particular the cluster *a little (bit)*, which, on the one hand, tended to co-occur with negative polarity adjectives, thus mitigating their unwelcome effect on the hearer (as in: *if I may be a little cynical, it sounds a little bit obsessive*) and, on the other, appeared together with comparative forms of adjectives (as in: *a little less than 20 feet, a little bit further*), thus attenuating precision. In addition, the adverbial *a little (bit)* decreased the degree of imposition in requests and offers (as in: *Can we just pin it down a little bit? or Shall I wind back my argument a little bit?*). Fourthly, the evaluative meanings of *little* – especially the dismissive use – were manifest both in the evaluative adjective + *little* + noun pattern (e.g. *a cynical little joke, this rather amusing little footnote, pernickety little details*) and patterns with double diminutivity (e.g. *this little snippet, your little tweaks, a neat little fib*). Even though such instances were rather infrequent, they demonstrate, in line with earlier studies (Schneider, Strubel-Burgdorf 2012: 30), that “[s]peakers use diminutives in acts of positioning by which they aim at achieving superiority and express condescension, contempt or similar attitudes and emotions” as well as serve “as strategic ‘weapons’ in the discursive struggle for power”. What follows is that such evaluative uses of *little* seemed more

prominent in references to the primary reality of the courtroom, especially the evidence being discussed, than in references to the secondary reality in descriptions of spatially and temporally remote referents. However, in order to establish whether this is a regular pattern, data from more courtroom examinations would have to be compared. Finally, it is also necessary to point out the absence of the affectionate or hypocoristic meanings of diminutives with *little* – attested, e.g., in child-centred speech situations or in children’s literature – which does not surprise given the formality of courtroom interaction and the lack of familiarity between the (adult) interactants. Notwithstanding the above, however, it may be convincingly argued that *little* sits comfortably among an array of evaluative devices which are recruited in courtroom talk. As the data plainly demonstrate, patterns with *little* are linked to a variety of pragmatic functions and not just to the mere expression of smallness and thus, it may be argued by analogy to diminutive suffixes, they, too, work similarly to key signatures in music, determining the “key” of courtroom communication¹⁰ and contributing to its overall evaluative harmony.

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¹⁰ I use this metaphor after Spitzer (1921: 201–202 quoted in Dressler, Barbaresi 1994: 86), who argues that diminutive suffixes “wirken wie Vorzeichen in der Musik, sie bestimmen die ‘Tonart’ der menschlicher Rede” (‘work like key signatures in music, determining the “key” of human speech’).

