



---

## A COGNITIVE AND PRAGMATIC DIMINUTIVE IN ENGLISH NAMES

**Hamidov Nodirbek Zokirjonugli**

**Teacher of Department of English Phonetics, Andijan State University, Andijan,  
Uzbekistan**

**Abstract:** this article analyses some aspects of English diminutives in terms of the cognitive and pragmatic perspective of language. The concatenation of morphological units of morpheme builds up a word whether it is derivational or inflectional. Inflections undertake the syntactic facets of tense for verbs, plural for nouns, and case for nouns. Neither the grammatical category of base word nor its core meaning is changed in inflection by any means.

**Key words:** *diminutives, morpheme, nouns, category, affixes, process, prefixes, word formation*

### Introduction

Derivational affixes undertake the morphological facets of the change of grammatical category of base word and the significant change of its meaning. They also concern the degree of productivity. Suffixes like *-ter* in laughter, *-ric* in bishopric and *-erel* in cockerel are the least productive type of bound morpheme in English. They appear only once like in these examples. Contrastively, prefixes such as un- in unconscious, non- in nonsense, -ness in highness and *-ment* in agreement agree among the most productive types of bound morpheme.

The morphological process of word formation has thus far been discussed structurally. Its basic structural frame is where Base is either a morphological root or stem. The root is used for derivation and the stem for inflection. In addition, prefix and suffix can be multifold as in indispensable and colonization. The rather long word of disestablishmentarian consists of the prefix *dis-*, the base word establish and the multiple concatenation of the three suffixes *-ment, -al and -(i)an*.

In English, they are morphemes that convey a meaning of smallness or endearment or both. The most common suffixes are: *-ie, -i, -y, -ette, -kin, -ikini, -kins, -ling, -et and -let*. The vowels of these diminutive suffixes are three front vowels /i/, /I/, and /ε/. However, these



---

vowels have often reduced to /ə/ in English because of lack of stress. The first suffix /i/ is highly productive. It is frequently attached to one-syllable first names to suggest endearment and intimacy or smallness as in: *Johnny, Jamey, Jackie*. Similarly, it is attached to common nouns, sometimes indicating a diminutive notion about a participant in a discourse more than about one person or thing being referred to, as in *doggie, sweetie, birdie, or mommy*. In addition to these six diminutives, many others have come into English as a part of borrowed words. These are diminutives in their own or parent language but are no morphemic in English.

Diminutives can be considered ubiquitous in languages. They are small in linguistic form but they undertake a significant cognitive function in communication. For example, *Johnny* is derived from the proper name *John*. When a mother talks to *Johnny (or Johnnie)* called *John*, she represents in this form some feeling of fondness, intimacy and love in so far as the diminutive suffix *-y/-ie* undertakes the speaker's (or mother's) subjective and evaluative attitude to the boy.

The function of words tends to be realized in utterance. Morphology, as a linguistic component, deals with the inner structure of word. A morpheme, free or bound, is a unit of word, and the combination of morphemes enables us to coin a word according to the basic rules or constraints of word formation. It is worthwhile to pay attention to the function of affixation. A structural analysis is not enough to explain adequately the basic concept or the essential features or "**qualia**" of affixes. For example, *duckling* which is a kind of duck and structurally consists of the base word *duck* and the diminutive suffix *-ling*, has the speaker's subjective and evaluative attitude to the base word in terms of the reflection of the essential features of smallness, fondness, intimacy of the diminutive suffix.

When we say *duckling* for a *duck* or *bracelet* for a *brace*, we show our feeling of fondness, smallness and sympathy to these base words. In order to make our communication successful, we are requested to take advantage of the stored knowledge of language where a division of labor between grammatical structure and mental lexicon works. In this set of the stored knowledge of language are some kinds of affix, which undertake the pragmatic factor of derivational affixes, including diminutives. First, we will raise the definition of diminutive and survey the variety of English diminutives in terms of mental lexicon in English. Second, we will touch upon some aspects of the diminutive marker of lexical free form. Third, we will



---

propose the cognitive and pragmatic model of the mental process of producing and understanding diminutives.

A diminutive is to be defined as an affix, which undertakes the cognitive and pragmatic function of speaker's subjective and evaluative attitude to its base word in terms of its essential features, or "qualia" of smallness, intimacy, fondness, lovability and sarcasm. There are some statement of diminutives in such a way as they are "demonical noun denoting a smaller version of the base noun such as the following:

- Paula was already in bed, reading a paper *novelette*.
- Let me kiss you once ere you go, my *princeling*.
- Well, here's a delicate tender *lambkin* and a careful shepherd.

The above word elements such as *-ette*, *-ling*, *-kin*, are diminutive suffixes. In, *novelette* is a short novel or "not a highly-qualified novel" rather than an ordinary novel, and the base word is modified in meaning by the diminutive suffix of *-ette*. As a result, *-ette* undertakes the evaluative function of the entire word. In the entire word is embellished by the suffix of Old Norse, *-ling*, and its meaning is "a prince judged to be of minor status or importance." In, *lambkin*, which consists of the base word lamb and the Dutch-originated diminutive suffix *-kin*, also reflects the speaker's cognitive and evaluative attitude to the base word.

### **The Variety of English Diminutives**

The diminutive suffix *-let* undertakes the concept of being "small and unimportant" in words such as *booklet*, *leaflet*, *piglet* and *starlet*. *-Ling* refers to the concept of being "minor" and an "offspring of" as in *princeling* and *duckling*. This diminutive is sometimes characteristic of being "somewhat contemptuous" as in *hireling* and *underling*. Significantly, the familiar forms of personal names also have diminutive forms in words such as *Charlie*, *Freddy*, *Johnnie*, *Katie*, *Molly*, *Peggy* and *Susie*. This diminutive suffix *-y/-ie* represents the addresser's subjective attitude to the basic personal name in terms of the cognitive meaning of smallness, fondness, intimacy and so on, although there lies a slight difference of usage between *-ie* and *-y*. For example, the first names of *Anny*, *Betty* and *Sally* are conventionally preferable to *Annie*, *Bettie* and *Sallie*. This diminutive suffix sometimes takes the role of nicknaming.

*Billy* stands for a roving machine and *Jemmy* (or *Jimmy*) is used for burglar's weapon.



Also phonologically, the vowel [i] is appropriate to express that which is small, weak and insignificant. It is found in diminutive suffixes of a variety of languages as in -ie/-y in English. They tend to be acquired at the early stage of language acquisition.

Diminutives are not necessarily morphological bound form. Some free forms are apt to be used as a diminutive element in word formation. Morphological free forms such as *little, small, petit, wee, tiny* and *baby* sometimes function as diminutive marker which has been called analytic diminutive. Idiomatic compounds such as *small talk* and *little finger*.

Although these diminutive markers of free form could be discussed in the matter of compounding process of word formation, they functionally and cognitively work in fact as affixed to the effect that the resultant combination of word entity turns out to be an idiomatic and independent word. *Small talk* is not a talk, which is small. *Little finger* is more than a finger, which is little. It is a part of human body, and there could be a big little finger compared with that of other people.

Some linguists and feminists have been concerned with the social fact that diminutive and juvenile forms tend to be used for women as in *Winnie* and *sweetie*. This is considered a reflection of the women's social status in history. However, this is not the case to the effect that we have the English cases of *Johnny, Charlie* and *Freddy*, which are all diminutive forms for men. Thus, we are requested to pay attention to the assumption that a linguistic form does not have a single and constant meaning, but rather a range of potential significances-in-context. It is the case that, along with other affixes, some diminutive suffixes are derived from free form lexes, and they turn out to be diminutive markers.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to explore some aspects of English diminutives in terms of the cognitive and pragmatic perspective of language. The combination of the lexical units builds up a word whether it is derivational or inflectional. Diminutives are to be explored in pragmatic perspective in addition to structural perspective. A diminutive is to be defined as an affix which undertakes the cognitive and pragmatic function of speaker's subjective and evaluative attitude to its base word in terms of its essential features, or 'qualia' of smallness, intimacy, fondness, lovability and sarcasm. It was raised that the definition of diminutives and made a typological survey of the variety of diminutives in terms



of the mental lexicon of our language faculty. There were some aspects of the diminutive markers of prefix such as *mini-* and *micro-* and of lexical free forms such as *small*, *little*, *tiny* *petit* and proposed the cognitive and pragmatic model of diminutive formation.

### References

- American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2003, Harlow & London: Longman Group.
- Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles, 1992, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aronoff, Mark. 1976. Word Formation in Generative Grammar, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.
- Bauer, Laurie. 2001. Morphological Productivity, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.