

NOMINAL DIMINUTIVES IN SLOVENE AND ENGLISH

The present article deals with diminutiveness in Slovene and English nouns within the frameworks of semantics and word-formation; the focus is on word-formational and syntactic characteristics of diminutive nominal derivatives in the two languages concerned. On grounds of language-typological differences between English (analytic language) and Slovene (synthetic language), diminutiveness as language phenomenon is often expressed differently in these two languages: in Slovene, diminutiveness is primarily expressed within one single lexeme, while in English it is primarily expressed syntactically, extending over the boundaries of one single lexeme. In both languages, however, regardless of the either lexemic (word-formational) or syntactic aspect of diminutiveness, the semantic aspect also needs to be taken into consideration, i.e. denotative and connotative diminutiveness as well as diminutiveness in the role of terminological metaphor.

0 INTRODUCTION

A contrastive analysis of nominal diminutives used in modern Slovene and English clearly shows that diminutive formation and use of diminutives in Slovene remain tied to the morphological characteristics of nouns and, consequently, their morphological-lexemic features. On the other hand, the focus of diminutive formation and use in English remains bound to the syntactic use, or rather, the respective syntactico-semantic use of a given lexeme; however, the context also needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing and contrasting expressions of diminution. In all languages, diminutiveness is a basic meaning-forming element, which can, however, be realized predominantly morphologically, as is the case in Slovene, or predominantly syntactically, as is the case in English. As semantic expansion diminutiveness also plays a crucial role in the development of terminology – in this case the diminutive as language metaphor gains semantic independence and becomes a technical term.

In the following analysis, ways of expressing diminutiveness in Slovene and in English will be contrasted. While in the Slovene language diminutiveness is primarily expressed by means of suffixal endings within a lexeme, the English language

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only occasionally expresses diminutiveness in this same, synthetic, way. More often, expressing diminutiveness in English demands going beyond the borders of a lexeme, stretching over an entire syntactic structure or even sentence.

1 DIMINUTIVENESS AND CONNOTATION

Basically, two types of nominal diminutive can be distinguished in both languages: diminutives with the denotative meaning of ‘smallness’, e.g.

gumbek [small button],
račka [little duck or duckling],

and diminutive nouns with the predominant connotative or expressive shade of meaning, used by speakers when they intentionally modify the object,¹ e.g.

advokatek [unimportant lawyer],
revček [helpless person],
ženička [helpless, unimportant woman],
člančič [worthless, unimportant article].

The expressive value of connotation becomes even clearer when used in the context:

Takle advokatek ti lahko naredi veliko škode!
My second telephone call produced a lecturette on the regulations governing the use of Elastoplast in hotels. (Guardian 1995, quoted in Adams 2001: 13)

However, in most cases of nominal diminutives, a double semantic value can be observed: apart from the inherent denotative meaning, practically always some connotative meaning is expressed too. Denotation and connotation usually overlap with in one and the same diminutive lexeme, which accounts for blurred boundaries between denotation and connotation.²

Two other important elements also play a role in expressiveness, namely datedness and standardness or (in)formality of the diminutive, as can be observed in the following Slovene examples, derived from two bases *dekle* and *punca* [girl]³:

¹ The theory of expressiveness by the Czech linguist Zima (1961), distinguishing between *inherent expressiveness* (i.e. expressiveness in the lexical meaning) and *adherent expressiveness* (i.e. expressiveness acquired from the text), was first introduced to Slovene linguistics by Vidovič Muha (1971/72, 1972).

² More on this aspect of diminutiveness in Slovene is to be found in Vidovič Muha (2000: 97 ff).

³ Markedness of content is indicated in the *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika* (1970-1991) by the following labels: *ekspr(esivno)* [expressive], *evfem(ično)* [euphemistic], *iron(ično)* [ironic], *ljubk(ovalno)* [endearing], *slabš(alno)* [pejorative], *šalj(ivo)* [facetious], *vulg(arno)* [vulgar] and/or temporal-frequency labels such as *raba narašča* [frequent], *raba peša* [rare], *star(insko)* [archaic], *zastar(elo)* [dated]. Vidovič Muha (1971/72) specifically comments on lexemes with combined labels expressive and standard as well as expressive and colloquial.

dekle > *dekletce/deklica* (standard)
deklič > *dekliček* (dated)
deklinica (dialect)
punca > *punči/punčica/punčka* (standard)
punče (n) / *punček* (m) (dated)
punčika (dated)

The examples listed above illustrate the immense word-formational potential of the Slovene language in this respect; it seems that English needs to compensate for its lack of similar synthetic means by employing other, more analytic (syntactic) methods of expression (e.g. *Ta punčka že kaže talent.* – *This little girl is already showing talent.*).

In the present analysis, diminutiveness, and along with it frequent expressiveness, is limited to the framework of word-formation and semantics of Slovene nouns, or, rather, Slovene (suffixal) derivatives, contrasted with their English equivalent expressions in specific syntactic use. The starting point is therefore the Slovene diminutive, compared with its English parallel expression; however, these English equivalents mostly have to be expressed syntactically and not word-formationally due to the specifics of the English language (see also Klinar 1996).

2 SEMANTIC AND WORD-FORMATIONAL PATTERNS FOR EXPRESSING DIMINUTION IN SLOVENE (WITH THEIR ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS)

In Slovene the following endings are primarily used to express diminutiveness: *-ek* (*gumbek* [small button]), *-ica* (*mizica* [low table], *kozica* [kid] - [goat], *babica* [granny]), *-ika* (*mucika* [kitten]), *-ka* (*nitka* [thread]), *-ca* (*klopca* [bank]), *-ko* (*dečko* [little boy]), *-ec* (*bratec* [baby brother]), *-e* (*otroče* [kid - child]), *-ce* (*mestece* [small town]), *-ič* (*tatič* [little thief]), *-i* (*babi* [granny]) (prim. Bajec 1950, Toporišič 1976, Vidovič Muha 1995).⁴ In Slovene, all nominal suffixal derivatives, regardless of the original declension-type of their base, enter the first nominal declension pattern of their respective gender, the only exception being the feminine diminutives ending in *-i* (e.g. *mami*, *babi*).

Qualitative adjectives, or, more precisely, qualitative adjectives with a positive emotional value ('nice, pleasant') or a negative emotional value ('unpleasant') and the dimensional spatial adjective *majhen* [small] or the temporal adjective *mlad* [young] are transformed into a suffixal ending⁵:

otrok-ec ← [prijeten] otrok[-ø], []→-ec, otrok-
 profesor-ček ← [neprijeten] profesor[-ø], []→-ček, profesor-
 grič-ek ← [majhen] grič[-ø], []→-ek, grič-
 medvedek ← [mlad] medved[-ø], []→-ek, medved-

⁴ The productivity and frequency of these suffixes have been commented on in the word-formational studies by Bajec (1950: 125–126) and Stramljič Breznik (2007, 2010).

⁵ See Vidovič Muha (1995: 158).

The English language only occasionally expresses diminutiveness in this same, synthetic, way by means of suffixation. Recent works on English word-formation seem to deal somehow perfunctorily with diminution; thus, for example, Plag (2003: 13, 120-121) comments on diminution only in terms of pet forms where clipping is combined with suffixation. Adams (2001: 55-58) covers diminutives in more detail, listing eight nominal suffixes with (partly) diminutive meaning. Further, Bauer (2002: 1677-8) lists five regular suffixes, two prefixes, and a few “irregular” or historical forms. Schneider (2003: 78), on the other hand, enumerates as many as 86 different formatives that can be classified as diminutive suffixes of English, but, admittedly, many of these are only rarely used or are decidedly foreign in origin. Schneider therefore analyzes the following fourteen suffixes as present-day diminutive English suffixes (see Schneider 2003: 85 ff): *-a*, *-een*, *-er*, *-ette*, *-ie/-y/-ey/-ee*, *-kin*, *-le*, *-let*, *-ling*, *-o*, *-peg*, *-poo(h)*, *-pop*, *-s*. Like in Slovene, the suffix is attached to a nominal base to produce a diminutive form:

[small] kitchen > kitchen-ette	(kitchenDIM)
[baby] boot > boot-ee	(bootDIM)

In some other Slovene diminutive lexemes (e.g. *metuljček*, *ježek*, *polžek*, *miška*), the regular suffixation from the underlying paraphrase as described above (e.g. [majhen] metulj[-ø] – [small] butterfly) is further developed by means of terminological suffixation from a syntactic base following the pattern [tisti, ki je kot] metulj[-ø] ([that which is like a] butterfly), producing the term *metuljček* in the meaning of ‘bow-tie’. This can lead us to conclude that connotative similarity and productivity of the suffix which is used with the nominal base are crucial in the transition of a lexeme into a term.

From the point of view of lexicographic treatment in the *SSKJ*, diminutives – lexemes (i.e. dictionary entries in diminutive form) are even more interesting. The same morphological form can express denotative as well as connotative meaning (and use). In these cases the importance of the context is more clearly emphasized, e.g. *črvič* – *črviček* meaning ‘small child’, *gospodek* – *gospodič* meaning ‘young gentleman’, and this feature is also noticeable in English, as can be exemplified by the following illustrative contexts:

Dolgo je pazila na tega črvička. – She took care of that helpless little baby for a long time.
Ta gospodič je zelo zahteven. – The young gentleman is most demanding.

Within diminutiveness in Slovene gradation of the diminutive quality can be expressed:

fant [boy] > *fant-ič* [boyDIM] > *fantič-ek* [boyDIMDIM]
hip [moment] > *hip-ec* [momentDIM] > *hipč-ek* [momentDIMDIM]
kmet [farmer] > *kmet-ič* [farmerDIM] > *kmetič-ek* [farmerDIMDIM]

Such multiple diminution occurs very rarely in English, and if it does, it is formed analytically and is marked in emotionality (e.g. *a tiny little cottage* as used in fairy tales).

3 TYPOLOGY OF DIMINUTIVES IN SLOVENE

Within word-formational stylistics in Slovene (Vidovič Muha 1986, 1988, 1995), nominal diminutives can be described from different viewpoints:⁶

1. the underlying paraphrase contains a unit with the denotative meaning ‘small, young’

mlad fant > *fant-ič/fant-ek*,
nedorasel piščanec > *pišč-e*,
majhen čevelj > *čevelj-č-ek*.

or a unit with the connotative meaning ‘emotionally positive’ or ‘emotionally negative’

ljubek/majhen stric > *strič-ek*,
prijazna/dobra stvar > *stvar-ca*,
majhna/ljubka grdobna > *grdob-ica*,
slab/majhen človek > *človeč-ek*.

2. the markedness of the base is not necessarily transferred to the derived form, as in:

baraba (negative) > *barab-ica* (endearing),
norec (negative) > *norč-ek* (endearing),
drek (negative) > *drek-ec* (euphemistic),
napaka (negative) > *napak-ica* (euphemistic).

3. within the category of diminutiveness, three Slovene suffixes are marked for either positive or negative value:

-ek (griček):

Ta griček je res lep. – That little hill is indeed pretty.

A samo na ta griček si zlezel? – You have only climbed that small hill?

-ica (knjižica):

To je koristna knjižica. – This is a useful little book.

V vsem življenju je napisal samo to knjižico. – In his entire life, he has only produced this piffling book.

-e (fante, človeče, siromače, mače)

4. Double diminutiveness or gradation of the diminutive quality is expressed by means of double suffixation; such gradation intensifies the markedness or expressiveness of the diminutive:

⁶ The examples cited here have been taken from the digitalized corpus at the Institute for Slovene Language SRC SASA (Gložančev et al. 2009); <http://bos.zrc-sazu.si> (accessed June 2011).

fant-ič-ek,
otroč-ič-ek,
perut-nič-ica

5. In most cases the grammatical features (gender and number) of the base are transferred to the diminutive. Exceptions to this rule can be found in the following cases:

žrebe (n) > *žreb-ič(-ek)* (m); tele (n) > *tel-ič(-ek)* (m)
vino (n) > *vince* (n) > *vinček* (m); mleko (n) > *mlekce* (n) > *mlekec* (m)
dekla (f) > *deklica* (f) > *deklič* (m) / *dekliček* (m); punca (f) > *punčka* (f) > *punček* (m)
reva (f) > *revše* (n); krava (f) > *kravše* (n)

As for the English language, the distinctions of the above kind are not to be found in English synthetic diminutives, but need to be expressed differently and are often found expressed elsewhere in a specific, actual context, as can be inferred from the sample sentences under 3. above.

4 DIMINUTIVES AS LANGUAGE METAPHORS OR TERMS

The word-formational and semantic productivity of the Slovene diminutive suffixes such as *-ek* and *-ica* and the existence of 'productive' nouns based on metaphoric (associative) extension are a good starting point for the formation of terminology. In such cases, the diminutive as language metaphor gains semantic independence and becomes a technical term.

Regular suffixation, based on the pattern [tist-i/-a/-o kot] ('the one like') with its encoded analogy creates conditions for the emergence of the so-called language metaphor, which is also a semantically independent term, e.g.

besedica (linguistic)⁷ [grammatical word],
blazinica (zoological) [pad],
bobnič/bobenček (medical) [eardrum],
cekinček (zoological) [Scarce copper, *Heodes virgaureae*],
dimek (botanical) [hawksbeard, *Crepis*],
the two forms *dimec* and *dimček*, however, remain unmarked terminologically.

It is interesting that sometimes diminutive forms of both degrees are used terminologically, e.g. *čebrič/čebriček* (gastronomical), *dežnik/dežniček* (botanical), *kolence/kolenček* (botanical). Grammatical differences, however, may sometimes lead to terminological differentiation, as in *copatek* (m) (ballet shoe) as opposed to the non-terminological expression *copatka* (f) (small slipper).

⁷ The labels in brackets for terminological fields are quoted after the *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika* (SSKJ) I-V.

When equivalent English terms for Slovene lexicalized diminutives are sought for, it is very rare that the corresponding English terms also have diminutive suffixes, as in the pair *bradica* – *goatee* or *kipec* – *statuette*. The equivalents in English are in most cases lexemes with no diminution expressed in them, as is clearly shown by the examples quoted above.

5 CONCLUSION

An analysis of the diminutives confirms that syntax and word-formation can complement each other transformationally via the meaning, and this can be observed inter- as well as intralinguistically. Apart from that, diminutives also point out to the potential of semantic expansion of the already existing lexemes.

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Abstract

NOMINAL DIMINUTIVES IN SLOVENE AND ENGLISH

This contrastive treatment of diminutives in Slovene and English aims to comment on the productivity of diminutive formations in both languages; in Slovene diminutives are particularly productive also in the field of terminology. Diminutiveness can be expressed in both languages in different ways: in Slovene lexemic word-formation is prevalent, while in English the same content is usually expressed syntactically. However, a combination of both is possible as well, as for example in *hišica – majhna hiša – majhna hiška*. A dual nature of diminutiveness can also be detected in graded cases like *hiša – hiška – hiškica, hči – hčerkica – hčerkica*. In English the formation of diminutives is less productive, however, the expression of diminutiveness is thus transferred to the syntactic level and is, as such, limitless. Since Slovene is a highly morphemic language it is only natural that diminutiveness should be expressed morphemically. The aim of the article is to highlight some differences in the ways diminutiveness can be expressed in both languages by means of examples.

Povzetek

SAMOSTALNIŠKE MANJŠALNICE V SLOVENŠČINI IN ANGLEŠČINI

Kontrastivna obravnava manjšalnic v slovenščini in angleščini izkazuje porast tovrstnih tvorjenk, zlasti v slovenščini so zastopane tudi v terminologiji. Sicer se manjšalnost v obeh jezikih izraža na več različnih načinov; v slovenščini prevladuje leksemsko izražanje, v angleščini pa skladenjsko, možna je tudi kombinacija obeh, npr. *hišica – majhna hiša – majhna hiška*. Dvojnost izražanja manjšalnosti se kaže v primerih kot *hiša – hiška – hiškica, hči – hčerkica – hčerkica*. V angleščini je sama tvorba manjšalnic precej manj produktivna, vendar je zato izražanje manjšalnosti preneseno na skladenjsko raven in tako neomejeno. Ker je slovenščina izrazito morfemski jezik, je tudi manjšalnost izražena morfemsko. Namen razprave je s primeri poudariti ravno razlike izražanja manjšalnosti v obeh obravnavanih jezikih.