SOME FEATURES OF DIMINUTIVES IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

Mamatkulova Nodira
UzSWLU

This article will introduce the topic of diminution in English and Spanish and acts as a foundation. Fundamental concepts of diminutive formation will be discussed in this article, and issues concerning e.g., the "myth of English unproductiveness" will hopefully become a little bit clearer after this article. Throughout the discussion special emphasis will be given to synthetic diminutive formation, as this is the main concern of the present study. Other diminutive processes will only be mentioned.

English diminutives, mainly carried out from aview and consequently, the focus of this chapter is on English diminution. Spanish has been included as a point of comparison in most places. Other Indo-European languages will be mentioned as additional points of comparisons, but the emphasis is logically on English and Spanish. Unfortunately, much diminutive research is still introspection-based, which means that the present chapter may not portray English in a good light concerning productiveness.

Diminutives in English and Spanish

Diminutive meaning can either be expressed synthetically, most commonly through suffixation (Sp. jpobrecito! or pobretin!), or analytically, through periphrastic constructions (Eng. poor little thing!). English is predominantly an analytical language, expressing diminution primarily through periphrastic constructions. Spanish, on the other hand, is a prototypical example of a language expressing diminution through suffixation, which is a general characteristic of all Latinate languages (Compare Sp. besito, It. bacetto, Por. beijito, to Eng. little kiss). In this respect, these two languages act as opposite poles in a continuum of diminutive expression. This chapter aims to shed light on the synthetic devices, i.e. diminutive suffixation, actually being used in English today, as many linguists claim this phenomenon to be poor, if not wholly non-existent, in the English language.

What are diminutives?

Diminutive formation is a near-universal concept attested across languages (Jurafsky 1996: 534; Haas 1972: 148; Schneider 2003: 2). In language, the diminutive category can serve many functions, both semantic and pragmatic ones (Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994: 84: Augustyn & Gniecka 2011: 32). The present study will primarily focus of the semantic denotations expressed by diminution. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the semantic property of diminutives is to 'denot[e] something little' (2015). Cross-linguistic research confirms that the general function of diminutives is to express smallness (Jurafsky 1996: 534; Sifianou 1992: 157; Taylor 2003: 312). Diminutives are secondly known to express endearment and affection, often by suffixation as in hypocoristic forms and kinship terms, e.g. Eng. Johnn-y, grann-y, dadd-y-kin-s and Sp. Juan-ita, abuel-ita, papa-ito

(Gooch 1967: 40). English also expresses diminution analytically through periphrastic constructions as in dear little child.

Diminutive formation is often said to originate from the domain of child language (e.g. Jurafsky 1996: 553, see 2.2.3). In the world of children, diminutives are applied as a means to signal affection, as expressed by e.g. Petey, Gabrielito (synthetic diminution). It is said that diminutives make the world less frightening by making it smaller and friendlier, and is thus used in conversations with children depicting the world as such (Sifianou 1992: 158). This use of diminutives can be seen in example (1), where as much as three different diminutive expressions is applied in the one and same sentence, i.e. suffixation, reduplication and analytic periphrastic construction:

(1)   Daddy will only be away for a teeny-weeny little week, dear.

Diminutive use has thus spread from child language to other domains of language. Its resourceful nature makes (e.g. anything can be cute; small is relative) the diminutive category prone to serve different functions in language, though largely restricted to informal areas of language. The Spanish language has an extremely well-developed set of meanings included in its diminutive repertoire, and can be used to "to produce a favourable reaction in the person addressed" (Gooch 1967: 2), act as "mitigators", which reduce the amount or the effect of something, making the situation "emotionally manageable" as Gooch (1967: 3) terms it. Spanish diminutive can also mark social distance and politeness by their application in requests, offers and orders, as in Un momentito, porfavor 'Just one moment, please'. Also, another diminutive function in Spanish is that of diminutives which have acquired a

specialised or changed meaning, as e.g. mesa 'table'< meseta 'tableland'. This type of diminutives is not expressive like most other diminutive types, but denotes rather factual meaning. The special use of diminutives says much about the extent to which diminutive suffixes, or for that matter, the role of derivational suffixation in Spanish.

English can also be said to be innovative as the language applies diminutives for pragmatic effects in the language (see e.g. Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi 1994). Augustyn and Gniecka (2011) look at such pragmatic functions of diminutives.

Such pragmatic meanings are best understood from the context, as the meaning of computie in isolation could have referred to, e.g. 'a cute computer' (the suffix -ie/-y/-ey typically expresses affection, see 2.2.6). Thus, as argued by Augustyn and Gniecka (2011), to account for the full range of possible meanings for diminutives, one has to include semantic, as well as pragmatic meanings (2011: 32). In addition, Schneider (2003) lists the following range of pragmatic functions of diminutives, i.e. "'playfulness', 'sympathy/empathy',

'understatement', 'euphemism', 'sarcasm', and 'stylistic choice'" (2003: 51). According to Schneider (2003: 51), the study of such pragmatic diminutive uses is most successfully accomplished through the study of corpus data, not dictionary listings, as has been the traditional approach to diminutives in research.

Nine diminutive strategies

The diminutive category as synonymous with diminution through suffixation stems from "traditional grammars originally used in description of Latin" (Schneider 2013: 137). To

be able to treat the concept of diminution in world languages, not only in Latinate ones, a much broader definition is necessary. Diminution should include all linguistic forms denoting the semantic property of 'smallness' (Schneider 2003: 57), including phenomena such as syntactic modification, reduplication and compounding, all of which are formal means used to express diminution in language. This thesis acknowledges this distinction, but will, for the sake of simplicity, apply the term diminution more loosely.

Haas (1972) and Rosiak (2013) together name nine different diminutive expressions, which are the diminutive strategies attested so far in languages.

Some languages prefer morphological expressions, conveying a lot of information through a single morpheme, while other languages instead apply periphrastic constructions to express new meanings rather than forming new words. Is it the same way with diminution. It can either be expressed synthetically through different morphological strategies or analytically through syntactic modification. These two categories may again be classified according to the form the expressions take either within the synthetic or analytic type. Different classifications of the various diminutive expressions tend to include roughly the same repertoire of strategies (cf. Haas 1972; Rosiak 2013). Haas (1972) lists six, while Rosiak (2013) describes eight diminutive strategies, and they concur on syntactic modification being the only analytic example of diminution. Thus, according to these two accounts, eight morphological diminutive expressions are attested in languages, namely consonant/vowel symbolism, reduplication, derivational suffixation, inflectional suffixation, compounding, suppletion, grammatical displacement and truncation (Haas 1972: 148; Rosiak 2013: 291).

Diminutive suffixation - form and meaning

Derivational suffixation is, however, the method that is the most commonly associated with the diminutive category (Schneider 2003: 7) and is the one that has received the most attention in research so far.

Derivational suffixation is the most widespread synthetic method in Indo-European, with special prevalence in Mediterranean and Slavic languages, among them Spanish, whose structural make-up encourages this type of word-formation, which is being given special attention in this chapter. As the term relates, diminutive suffixation consists of the suffixation of a diminutive morpheme to the word base, thus adding a meaning of smallness to the original sense of the base word. Standard diminutive suffixation in Spanish has the following form: casita 'small house, (delightful) little house; cottage' (casa 'house' + -ita 'DIM.'), pobretin 'poor wee laddie (noun)' (pobre 'poor person' + -ete 'DIM' + -in 'DIM') (Goosh 1967: 57; 78; Collins Spanish Dictionary 2005).

USED LITERATURE:

1. Augustyn, R. and Gniecka, A. (2011). 'Irony behind diminutives: a cognitive linguistic analysis of popular technical terms', in Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature

2. Chesterman, A. (1998). Contrastive functional analysis. Amsterdam: Benjamins. Collins Spanish Dictionary (2005). London: HarperCollins Publishers.

3. Robins 1958: 13 - 14, Haas 1972:148 - 151 and her own field notes (of the Natchez language), Rosiak 2013: 291/

4. Rusek, M. (2005). 'That English has no diminutives is a common myth - based on Klaus P. Schneider's book "Diminutives in English"', Munich, GRIN Verlag, http://www.grin.com/en/e-book/77184/that-english-has-no-diminutives-is-a-   common-myth-based-on-klaus-p-schneider-s

5. Whitley, M. S. (1986). Spanish/English Contrasts: A Course in Spanish Linguistics. Washington D. C.: Georgetown University Press.