Formation of Diminutives in Tangkhul and English:
A Contrastive Analysis

Rinyaphy Khangrah, Research Scholar
Manipur University
rinyaphy@yahoo.com

N. Pramodini, Ph.D.
Professor
Dept. of Linguistics
Manipur University, Canchipur-795003
Imphal, Manipur
npdini@yahoo.co.in

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Abstract

The topic of diminution is approached mainly through the formation processes of derivational suffixation, compounding and other morphological systems as well as periphrastic or analytic constructions in Tangkhul and English contrastively. The domains of occurrences of diminutives in the two languages, their grammatical aspects and semantic denotations are also briefly discussed.

Keywords: Tangkhul, diminutives, word formation, contrastive analysis

1. Introduction

Diminutive is a term used to refer to something diminished in size or quantity as opposed to augmentative used to refer to augmented forms of objects or quantities. According to Reznitchenko (2000), "Diminutively is a generalised meaning of diminished size or degree, expressed via language means of different levels (from lexeme to word combination), which are accompanied either by expressive or emotive/evaluative shades, or by both at a time". The central semantic features of diminutives are 'child' or 'small'. Diminutives can be realised primarily through two processes; morphologically i.e. through suffixation and analytically/syntactically through periphrastic constructions. Other than denoting the size of the object, diminutives serve other functions, pragmatically, such as conveying endearment and affection, politeness, or use in hypocoristic terms, baby talk, as well as a means to express negative connotations such as belittlement or contempt. The present study will attempt to explore the formation trends of diminutives in Tangkhul and English. The data used in the study will be mainly intuitive data supported by various literatures in contemporary forms of both the languages.

2. Discussion

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 19:5 May 2019**
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Diminutive strategy	Tangkhul	English
i. Derivational suffixation	koŋ(river)+ra>koŋra(rivulet) ʃim(house)+ra>ʃimra[h](small clan/house)	drop>droplet cigar>cigarette dad>daddy aunt>auntie sap>sapling mom>moms Michael>Mikeypoo
ii. Compounding	fɯ(dog)+nao(child)>fɯnao(puppy) thingrong(tree)+nao(child)>thingrongnao(small tree) phei(leg)+nao(child)=pheinao(little leg) ŋəla(lady)+nao(child)=ŋəlanao(lady) mikthek(gaze)+nao(child)>miktheknao(little gaze)	baby+kangaroo>baby kangaroo dwarf+man>dwarf man
iii. Periphrastic/Syntactic construction	otlom(bundle)+kateonao(small)>otlom kateonao(small bundle) mi(person)+kateonao(small)>small person harnao(chick)+kateonao(small)>harnao kateonao(small chick) ʃɯnao(girl)+kateonao(small)>ʃɯnao kateonao(small girl)	little+girl>little girl small+favour>small favour wee+little+coffee>wee little coffee itsy+bitsy+teeny+tiny+word>itsy bitsy teeny tiny word
iv. Consonant/vowel symbolisation		tiny>teeny
v. Reduplication	aŋaŋnao(baby)>ŋaŋa/ŋaŋanao(baby) kateo(small)>kateoteonao(very small/tiny) Tonmayo>Tonton	mummy>mama Joanna>Jojo
vi. Grammatical displacement	nawui apaŋ pheomi haokei(I'll wash your hand)>awui apaŋnao pheomi haosei(let's wash his/her little hand)/ŋaŋanaowui apaŋnao pheomi haosei(let's wash the little hand of baby)	do you want mommy to wash your hands?>does she/he want mommy to wash her/his little hands?/does it want mommy to wash its little hands?
vii. Truncation	Wonreila>Awon Ningshimla>Ashim Vareso>Aso	Alison>Ally Elizabeth>Liz Michelle>Chelle

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Using the division of Haas (1972;148) and Rosiak (2013;291) as shown in Hägg (2016;11), the diminutives found in Tangkhul and English can be classified under the following types, as shown in the table:

i) Derivational suffixation is the prototypical formation process of diminutives. This formation consists of the suffixation of a diminutive morpheme to the word base. In Tangkhul, the derivational suffix *-ra* is attached to words to add a meaning of smallness to the original sense of the word. However, there are specific words to which this suffix can only be attached. As opposed to its opposite *-rei* (augmentative), there are words like *koŋrei*(big river), *ʃimrei*(big clan/house), *otrei*(big load/thing), *kʰairei*(big fish); but not *otra** or *kʰaira**. As a consequence, *-ra* has a limited usage. As for English, suffixes *-let, -ette, -y/-ie/-ey, -ling, -s, -poo* etc. can be attached to words to derive diminutive forms of the base words. Suffixes *-let* and *-ette* are mostly used to refer to non-human objects, e.g., *droplet, leaflet, applet, cigarette, bralette, roulette.* While the suffix *-ling* is used for both human and non-human objects, e.g., *sapling, seedling, underling, starling,* the suffixes *ie/-ey/-y, -s, -poo* are used largely for human entities, e.g., *auntie, Archie, Billy, nanny, moms, pops, Mikeypoo, Katiepoo,* etc., most often forming hypocoristic terms. These suffixes, as a whole, can be very productive when forming diminutives in English. As compared to Tangkhul, English has far richer diminutive formation in this category.

ii) In compounding, two or more whole words are combined to form diminutives. In Tangkhul, *-nao* 'child/small' may be attached to words to indicate the young ones of animals, e.g., *funao* 'puppy', *hərnao* 'chick', *hoknao* 'piglet', *seinao* 'calf'. It may also refer to something diminished in size, e.g., *thingrongnao* 'small tree', *lairiknao* 'little book', *chonshinao* 'piece of cloth', *pheihopnao* 'little shoe'. Or may be used as a term of endearment or affection, e.g., *Yoyonao* (personal name), *pheinao* 'little leg', *miktheknao* 'little gaze', *masinao* 'little air'. Words like *aŋaŋnao* 'baby', *naoʃinao* 'child', *ŋəsotnao* 'friend', *leikaʃinao* 'lover', *vanao* 'bird', *funao* 'girl' are lexicalised items. Whereas in words like *ŋəlanao* 'lady', *mayarnao* 'boy', *yaronnao* 'young man', *ʃəŋnao* 'clan', the second element *-nao* can be removed from the compound words while still retaining their meaning. English is limited in this category and rather resorts to syntactic constructions e.g., *baby kangaroo, dwarf man*.

iii) The periphrastic construction uses syntactic means to express diminution. This is the only analytic type. The process involves the combination of an adjective and a noun wherein the adjective inflicts this diminutive marker on the noun. *Kateo* 'small' may be combined with *nao* 'child/small' to form *kateonao* (double diminution) to function as adjective in Tangkhul to give *otlom kateonao* 'small bundle', *mi kateonao* 'small person', *harnao kateonao* 'small chick', etc. In English, *little, small, wee, itsy bitsy,* etc. are used to form periphrastic constructions. The adjective precedes the noun in English whereas the position is reversed in Tangkhul. *Kateo* is used largely to refer to quantity just as little in English. For example, *turu kateonao/kateokha(akhə'one'>khə)* 'little water' and not *turunao* 'small water'*.

iv) The diminutive strategy of consonant/vowel symbolism has the function of increasing the diminutive meaning of an already diminutivised lexeme through replacing a consonant/vowel for another. For example, [ai] is substituted to [i] in *tiny>teeny* (Hägg 2016:15). This type is only found in English and not in Tangkhul.

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v) A strategy which co-occurs with consonant/vowel symbolism is reduplication. Typically, in child language the reduplication of first names occurs. *Aŋaŋnao,* a lexicalised term meaning 'baby' is partially reduplicated to form *ŋaŋ,* a diminutivised term of endearment, which can be further attached with *-nao* to form *ŋaŋanao,* a more enhanced term of endearment for 'baby'. In the same way, *kateo* meaning 'small' may be partially reduplicated to form *kateoteo* which gives an intensifying effect of 'smallness' and this may be further attached with *-nao* to give *kateoteonao*, a highly diminutivised term of endearment, familiarity or unimportance depending on the context of occurrence.

vi) Grammatical displacement comprises the act of substituting the second person pronoun for the third person pronoun. This occurs mainly when speaking to toddlers, for example, instead of saying "*Nawui apang pheomi haokei"* 'I'll wash your hand', we find "*awui apangnao pheomi haosei"* 'let's wash his/her little hand' in Tangkhul. This speech almost comes across as a request for participation to the addressee, making the speech less imposing and friendlier. In English, instead of saying "*Do you want mommy to wash your hands?"*, we find "*Does she/he want mommy to wash her/his little hands?"* An even more intensified diminutive meaning by grammatical displacement can be achieved through changing the grammatical gender of the personal pronoun to the neuter instead of the third person- "*ŋaŋanaowui apaŋnao pheomi haosei"* 'Let's wash the little hand of baby' in Tangkhul and *"Does it want mommy to wash its little hands?"* in English (Hägg 2016:15).

vii) Truncation also referred to as clipping is another type of synthetic word formation process used to form hypocoristics. The truncated form is applied to signal familiarity or for want of informal name of address, common in both Tangkhul and English. It has the function of decreasing the social distance in the relation. The prefix *A-* is attached to the truncated names in Tangkhul, e.g., *Wonreila>Awon, Ningshimla>Ashim, Vareso>Aso.* Examples in English are *Alison>Ally, Elizabeth>Liz, Michelle>Chelle.*

3. Domains

There are different ways in which diminutives function. A most common appearance is in informal speech context. Jurafsky notes that diminutives form part of the informal inventory of language, and they are most frequent in spoken informal registers (Spasovski, 2012; 44). Diminutive forms with more emotive contents are employed in casual conversation and informal settings.

Another area where diminutives play a key role cross-linguistically is in child language, "variously termed baby talk, motherese, (nursery) teacherese and child centred speech. In general, diminutives appearing in this domain are applied as a means to signal affection to the child presenting the world as a friendly place, and thus making it smaller" (Hägg 2016;17). Diminutivisation of first names as kinship terms is found in Tangkhul and English. This can be seen in the truncated forms- *Wonreila>Awon, Ningshimla>Ashim, Vareso>Aso, Alison>Ally, Elizabeth>Liz, Michelle>Chelle.* The diminutivised first names are often termed hypocoristics or pet names. This diminutivised version of the first name often becomes the only term of reference when addressed by close friends, family or relatives (Hägg 2016;17).

Diminutives are also employed when referring to food and drink as a personal opinion or an invitation. They perform the function of expressing affection or desire for food and drink, minimising its amount and making the invitation for food and drink less of an effort. For example,

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in Tangkhul, the invitation "*Canao mangkhui fusei."* 'Let's have a little tea.' by attaching *-nao* to the tea, indicates that the tea is only a little quantity and therefore hard to turn down by the addressee. Similarly in English, "*Shall we go and have a little drink?"*(Gooch 1967: 58) has the same effect with the use of 'little'. Sometimes, the use of diminutivity can go beyond informal contexts into formal situation.

Speakers use diminutives to make their speech sound softer, give a friendly tone to an utterance or make an unfavourable condition less so. For example, in Tangkhul, "*Otnaohi kasamihaoro."* 'Please do this task for me.', by attaching *-nao* to the noun, it diminishes the size of the task being requested to fulfil thereby making the speech sound softer and less unfavourable. Similarly, in English, "*Mind if I smoke a little cigarette?", "Care for a little drink?"* with the use of 'little', the situation is made less unfavourable in the first case and friendlier in the second.

Some diminutives can perform several of these functions at once.
Diminutives are also employed in jocular or ironic situations. For example, *"Fuwui khameinaochi!"* 'The dog's little tail!', *"Hinaohi!"* 'This little thing!'.

Speakers also use diminutives in acts of positioning by which they aim at achieving superiority and express condescension, contempt or similar attitudes and emotions (Schneider & Strubel-Bergdorf 2012: 30). Examples are- *"Ana ili otkasoŋanaofu ida."* 'He/she dare to order me around.', "Well, speak to your little wifelet, your little bunny, for God's sake." (Schneider & Strubel-Bergdorf 2012: 27).

4. Semantic denotations

In general, smallness in size comes with various semantic associations- cuteness or youthfulness, childlike, weakness, tenderness, familiarity or unimportance. Diminutivity presents a modified smaller version of the original word. Apart from diminishing the size, diminutively can come attached with emotional attitude. In the words of Lockyer (2014), "Diminutives do not necessarily have to convey smallness but rather the feature of non-seriousness, which could be labelled as metaphorical smallness". The suffixes *-let, -ette, -ling* in English and *-ra* in Tangkhul indicates only the feature of smallness. Whereas suffixes *-ie/y/ey, -poo, -le, -s,* in English and *-nao* in Tangkhul have hypocoristic connotations e.g., *cutie, homey, granny, kissipoo, Debs, Miminao* 'personal name'*, thingpheinao* 'shade of a tree'. In periphrastic constructions, *small, little, wee, tiny, teeny* in English and *kateonao* in Tangkhul have attached emotional attitude, their meaning depending on the context of their occurance and choice of the speaker. The use of these terms make one's production emotional, expressive and most of all subjective (Kacmarova 2010: 21). Mintsys & Mintsys (2015: 32) have laid out some characteristics for describing the category of diminutivity based on binary oppositions: object/not object, person/not person, diminished size/not diminished size, youthfulness/un-youthfulness, adulthood/un-adulthood, emotional attitude/unemotional attitude, importance/unimportance, sympathy/unsympathy, familiarity/unfamiliarity. The logical constituent of the main concept of category of diminutivity is presented by an object or a person small in size, usually young, who is treated emotionally, with sympathy-based attitude or with feelings related to unimportance, insignificance, familiarity with this object or person. For instance, *funao* is a young one of a dog, whereas *fu kateonao* refers to a small dog regardless of its age, both while having the characteristic of smallness, can be referred with emotional attitude of the speaker.

There are, however, words like *tablet, bully* in English and *vanao* 'bird', *ʃunao* 'girl' in Tangkhul that are lexicalised terms.

5. Grammatical aspects

Some grammatical aspects like multiple diminution and choice of primitive base are discussed below:

5.1. Multiple Diminutivisation

Several consecutive suffixes are added to the base variously termed multiple diminutivisation or recursive diminution. Multiple diminutivisation can occur in the form of the same affix applied twice as in *kateoteo* 'very small', *otnaonao* 'little things', *naonao* 'a hypocoristic term for a younger sibling'. This form does not exist in English. Two or more different suffixes can also be attached to the base, as in *kateonao* 'very small' in Tangkhul. English is more productive in this case. For instance, *Mikeypoodles* is derived from the truncated name Michael>Mike, the suffix *-ey* is then attached followed by *-poo, -le and -s* in that order. Common patterns of suffixal combination in English occur in the form of -ie, -s and -o, e.g. *preggers, Katiepoo, fatso, Rosiepops* (Hägg 2016: 22, Baiły 2012: 117). Multiple diminutivisation can also occur in syntactic construction like *itsy bitsy teeny tiny word.* This process reinforces the semantic meaning of smallness or endearment of the word.

5.2. Choice of primitive base

Diminutive suffixes predominantly attach to nominal primitives as bases. This is evident in the examples discussed so far. Proper names and common nouns are more likely to be diminutivised as compared to abstract or less tangible objects; though cases of them exist: *miktheknao* 'little gaze', *zingyatnao* 'little weather' in Tangkhul and *little trouble*, *feels* in English.
In a less common occurance, diminutives are found to attach to adjectival bases- *weakling, brownie, dearie i*n English and *hungpingnao* 'very red', *kaotheknao* 'very thin' in Tangkhul. The diminutive marker is attached after an expressive (here meaning 'very') is combined with the adjectival base in Tangkhul.

Verbal bases are also found in both the languages- *cookie, hireling* for English and *zatŋanao* 'walk casually', *ʃaiŋanao* 'eat casually' for Tangkhul. The diminutive *-nao* when attached to verbs shows unseriousness/playfulness of the action. Verbs are largely unconstrained to take this diminutive in Tangkhul unlike English where verbal bases are more restricted.

English is observed as changing the word class from adjective or verb to noun: *sweet>sweetie, surf>surfie.* However, there is retaining of word class in Tangkhul. English and Tangkhul morphological suffixes mostly form bisyllabic words. Some words expressing feelings, times of the day, week, year or seasons are less likely to accept diminutivisation.

6. Conclusion

Diminutives constitute a peripheral part of the vocabulary of a language. Yet they form an interesting study. Diminutives have the central semantic feature of 'child' or 'small'. The languages under study, English and Tangkhul, appear unproductive in diminutive formation as compared to other more expressive languages like Spanish or Macedonian (Hägg 2016, Spasovski 2012). In fact,

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Tangkhul only has *kateo* and *-nao* as diminutive markers. Yet *-nao* is seen as highly flexible in its ability to attach to words for diminutive formation.

In derivational suffixation, the suffix *-ra* is used in Tangkhul and *-let, -ette, -ie/y/ey, -ling, -poo, -s, -pops* etc. in English. This process is very productive in English as opposed to Tangkhul. On the other hand, compounding with *-nao* is most productive in Tangkhul. Reduplication, grammatical displacement and truncation are other morphological processes found in the two languages. English employs an additional consonant/vowel symbolisation. Periphrastic construction is another widely used formation process found in the two languages, specifically realised by the use of *kateonao* in Tangkhul and *little, small, wee,* etc. in English.

Diminutives are found to function in the domains of informal registers, child language, terms of endearment and kinship terms, with reference to food and drink, to give a friendlier, subtler tone and as acts for positioning oneself.

The suffixes *-let, -ette, -ling* in English and *-ra* in Tangkhul indicates smallness without emotional attitude. Whereas, *-ie/y/ey, -poo, -le, -s* in English and *-nao* in Tangkhul have hypocoristic connotations.

Multiple diminutivisation in the form of the same affix applied twice can be found in Tangkhul but not in English. Combination of two or more different derivational suffixes is more productive in English. Multiple syntactic constructions exist but are rare in both the languages. Diminutives are typically generated by affixation and occur with nominal categories. There are adjectival and verbal bases as well. Change of word class from adjectival or verbal bases to nominal category is observed in English. However, there is strict retaining of word class in Tangkhul.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **19:5 May 2019**
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