

Topic: Formation of Diminutives in English and Swahili Languages: A contrastive Analysis

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Résumé: le présent travail s'articule autour d'une analyse contrastive sur la formation des Diminutifs dans ces deux langues, Anglais et Swahili. Cependant, il a été observé pendant notre investigation qu'il y a beaucoup de différences que ressemble dans la formation des diminutifs entre ces deux langues en confrontation. Ces deux langues sont radicalement différentes dans leur processus morphologique. La langue Anglaise forme le Diminutif avec le préfixe et suffixe, tandis que le Swahili forme le Diminutif seulement avec le préfixe ou certaines règles sont essentiellement déterminées par la morphologie de mots.

Mots Clés: Diminutif, similitude, analyse contrastive, préfixe et suffixe.

1. introduction

The present research paper focuses on formation of diminutives in English and Swahili languages as far as form and morphological processes are concerned. Further, it sheds some light on the meanings of these forms in English and Swahili. It has been found that there are more differences than similarities between the two languages on formation of diminutive. However, they are drastically different concerning the morphological process involved. English basically uses suffixations and prefixations while Swahili depends entirely on prefixations where some strict patterns that are essentially determined by the morphology of words to be diminished are followed.

Accordingly, this form can express intimacy, familiarity, endearment and even lack of respect (Aziz, 1985:145). On the other hand, in speech this form can be used as a replacement form (Clark & Clark, 1977:322; Ibrahim, 2003:28). However, mere smallness devoid of some or any kind of feeling, to extent, is to be found somewhere else, i.e. in adjective like: minute, tiny, few; low, minor, less (Z and voort, 1972:302).

Diminutive forms exist in many languages; yet each language has its own unique way of realizing and expressing these forms. For instance in Swahili the diminutive form of “kuku” (a hen) is “kakuku” (a small hen). Anyhow, the diminutive forms underlie, in one way or another, some important process of word formation and they are undoubtedly loaded with a rather range of meaning besides smallness, of course.

2. Aim

The aims of this research paper are the following:

- ✓ To analyze the way diminutives are formed in both English and Swahili;
- ✓ To present some rules required to the formation of diminutives in both English and Swahili;
- ✓ To point out commonalities and differences existing between these languages (English and Swahili) as far as diminutives are concerned.
- ✓ To provide the English and Swahili readers and writers with some information in the grammatical structures related to the formation of diminutives.

Since diminutive forms exist in many languages, the present research is critically intended to compare and contrast these forms in the two unrelated languages

English and Swahili in an attempt to investigate how they are formed, which morphological process they undergo and which parts of speech they incorporate. Consequently, some points of similarity and difference will be highlighted. Moreover, this research paper is also expected to shed light on the meaning (s) these forms impact.

3. Diminutive forms in English

Most linguists distinguish four (4) major processes of word formation: prefixation, suffixation, compounding and conversion (Zandvoort, 1972: 298; Adams, 1973: 120; Crystal, 1988: 209; Katamba, 1993: 41; O'grady et al, 1996: 340). Consequently, a large number of nouns in English is created and produced by the combination of a free morpheme and a derivational suffix (Scout et al, 1968: 25

Diminutive suffixes

Therefore, one way by which diminutive forms can be realized is through the use of derivational diminutive suffixes. It is often emphasized that the attachment of a derivational suffix to a base may result in some major grammatical change involving shifting the base from one work class to another as in "milkless" where: "less" turns a noun into an adjective (Katamba, 1993: 48). English exhibits a remarkable set of diminutive suffixes including: **-een**, **-erel(rel)**, **-et**, **-ette**, **-ie** (-i, -y), **-kin**(-ikin, -kins) **-ling** and **-let** (Marchand, 1969 : 269; Zandvoort, 1972 :298). Nevertheless, the number is minimized to six only due to the fact fact the first two are really in actual use nowadays (Stageberg, 1971: 102).

Now, it seems quite convenient to tackle these suffixes in some detail:

1. Suffix – een

This suffix is of an Anglo-Irish origin used with individualizing or diminutive force. It exists only in few coined words (Marchand, 1969: 269). Here are some examples:

- Squire = Squireen,
- Jack = Jackeen,
- Girl = Girleen,

It is noticeable that this suffix is attached exclusively to nouns. It often competes with other diminutive suffixes and is considered a regional variant.

2. Suffixes: erel; rel

This suffix is typically originated in loan words from French (ibid: 281). It does exist in many nouns, mostly denoting animals, as in the following:

- Kest = kestrel,
- Cock = cockrel,
- Mack = mackerel.

3. Suffix –et

This suffix is also of a French origin and it exists in words like the following:

- cabin = cabinet,
- Circle = circlet.

It is mainly used with common nouns and it is partly diminutive and partly individualizing (Zandvoort, 1972: 304).

4. Suffix – ette

It comes from French and it is still in active use (Marchand, 1969: 281; Strageberg, 1971: 102). Here are examples:

- Sermon = sermonette,
- Room = roomette,
- Statue = statuette,
- Balcon = balconette,
- Kitchen = kitchenette,
- Novel = novelette,
- Letter = letterette,
- Launderer = laundrette,
- Cigar = cigarette,

It is used for diminutivisation of object nouns, that is nouns referring to architecture, interior design, furnishings, and furniture (balconette, kitchenette), which gain the feature of being small.

5. Suffixes: -ie; -y

This suffix has a Scottish spelling and it is uniquely added to many nouns. For illustration, below are some instances:

- John = johnny,
- Ann = Annie,
- Robert = Bobbie,
- Catherine = Kitty,
- bird = birdie,
- sweet = sweetie,
- Dark = darkie.

From these instances, it is evident that this suffix is added to masculine and feminine personal proper nouns, common nouns and adjectives as well.

6. Suffix – kin; -ikin; -kins

Here are some examples:

- Simon = Simkin,
- Thomson = Tomkin
- Cat = Catkin
- Baby = Babykin,
- Fir = Firkin,
- Nap = Napkin,
- Lambkin = lambkin,

It carries the meaning of ‘small’ and ‘charming’. It can also be used in ironic contexts or for diminutivisation of first names in order to form address terms.

7. Suffix – ling

For Marchand (1969: 321) this suffix is simply the extended form of the –ing suffix; particularly with stems ending in ‘l’. Is extensively used with different kinds of words denoting animals and plants (Zandvoort, 1972: 304). Below are some examples:

- Prince = princeling,
- Nurse = nurseling,
- Weak = weakling,
- Suckle = suckling
- darling = dear + ling (a cherished or a person who is dear to one),
- sterling = star + ling (from the small stamped on the coin),
- shilling = shield + ling,
- gosling = goose + ling (a young goose),
- a duckling = duck + ling (a young duck)
- catling = cat + ling
- seedling = seed + ling,
- Princeling = prince + ling.
- Underling = under + ling

It is often replaced by other diminutive suffixes in contemporary English as it is now considered old-fashioned and comical. It is attached to nouns referring to humans, animals, and plants.

- Diminutives referring to animals and plants mean “young one of the category denoted by the base word” (e.g. catling, seedling),
- Diminutives referring to adult humans gain negative connotations of being “petty, unimportant” (princeling).

8. Suffix – let

It is frequently used with nouns denoting things rather than persons (Zandvoort, 1972: 303), as in the following:

- a piglet (= a young pig)
- circlet (= a small book)
- a wavelet (a ripple or small wave)
- a rivulet (a small brook or stream)
- an eyelet (a small hole)
- a droplet (a tiny drop)
- a booklet (a small book)
- a bosslet (a small boss)

- a froglet (a small frog)
- a leaflet (a small plant leaf)
- a paylet (a short play)
- a starlet (a young actress with a promising career ahead of her)
- a streamlet (a small stream)

It is used for diminutivisation of object nouns. Diminutives represent entities which are smaller than prototypical members of a particular category (droplet). It is also used for diminutivisation of animal noun.

In addition to these suffixes, Stageberg (ibid: 103) states that a handful of other suffixes have come into English as borrowed words. Actually, they are diminutive suffixes in their parent language but non-morphemic in English. These include examples like: mosquito, flotilla, scalpel, cookie, particle, puppet, morsel, capsule, quartet, citadel, muscle, colonel, falsetto, etc.

4.2. Diminutive Prefixes

Besides the diminutive suffixes discussed so far, a large number of diminutive prefixes are used concurrently to refer to the concept of smallness in size and status, and relative smallness as well. Now, we proceed to shed some light on these prefixes.

1. Demi-

This prefix occurs in many words to imply smallness in size, meaning of ‘half’ or ‘partly ‘ in particular, and it is usually added to nouns (Sinclair, n.d.: 34), as in the following:

- Demigod,
- Demidevil,etc.

2. Hemi-

This is originally a Greek prefix added to nouns to convey the meaning of ‘half’ as in: ‘hemi sphere’ (Eckersley and Eckersley, 1960: 430; Hornby, 1974: 400).

3. Micro-

It is usually attached to nouns to indicate smallness and it is often found in technical and scientific terms as in these instances:

- Microorganism,
- Microbe,
- Microwave, etc. (Sinclair, n.d.:110).

4. Mini-

This prefix combines freely with nouns to form new nouns, as in:

- Minimarket,
- Minibus,
- Miniskirt (Quirk et al, 1985:1542).

5. Mono-

This prefix is of Greek origin and it implies the meaning of single as in:

- Monocle,
- Monogram, etc. (Eckerley and Eckersley, 1960: 430).

Further, it not only combines with nouns, but with adjectives as well as in: 'monolingual, monogamous', etc. (Hornby, 1974: 547).

6. Semi-

Adjectives to form new counterparts. Words formed in this way often express the idea that something is partially equal or is equal to one half of something else (Sinclair, n.d.: 152), as in these instances:

- Semicircle,
- Semi-circular, semi-tone and semi-annual.

7. Sub-

This prefix combines with nouns and adjectives. Words formed in this way to refer to or describe people or things that are inferior to smaller or less powerful than whatever is referred to or described by the original nouns or adjectives (ibid: 161), as in the following:

- Subcommittee,
- Subtitle,
- Subnormal,
- Subsonic.

8. Under-

This prefix means 'to little' and it combines largely with many parts of speech, namely nouns, verbs and adjectives (Quirk et al, 1985: 1542), as in:

- Under-provision,
- Underpayment,
- Under-act,
- Undercharge,
- Underbid,
- Underfed,
- Underpaid,
- Under-privileged, etc.

9. Uni-

It basically means 'one' and in this sense it is possibly the same as 'mono'. It can be attached to nouns and adjectives equally (Hornby, 1974: 1017) as in these examples:

- Unicycle,
- Unilateral,
- Unidirectional, etc.

10. Vice-

This prefix is frequently attached to nouns to convey the meaning of being secondary, deputy, i.e. being lower in rank and status (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973: 435). Here are some examples:

- Vice president,
- Vice chairman,
- Vice-captain, etc.

Obviously, the above stated prefixes can combine with nouns, common nouns in particular, to give the meaning of smallness. However, some of them, i.e. ‘mono, semi, sub, uni’, can combine with adjectives as well, and only ‘under’ can combine with verbs besides nouns and adjectives. Moreover, they are unlike suffixes since they are unlikely to combine with personal proper nouns.

1.3. Swahili diminutives

2. Therefore, Swahili diminutives are formed by using a prefix “**ka**” and “**tu**” to the noun.

Examples:

- **kanyumba** = a small house,
- **kameza** = a small table,
- **kakiti** = a small chair,
- **kagari** = a small car,
- **katoto** = a small child,
- **kadada** = a small young sister,
- **kamasomo** = a small school,
- **kamuziko** = a small parcel,
- **kakinga** = a small bicycle,
- **kabibi** = a small spouse,
- **kasaani** = a small plate,
- **kangombe** = a small cow,
- **kakidjiko** = a small spoon,

It is obviously seen here that Swahili diminutives are formed by adding a “**ka**” prefix to the noun to indicate “small”. This section has been focused deeply on the presentation or formation of diminutives in both languages. In fact, the diminutives are the main items within this dissertation.

Similarities and Difference:

A large number of diminutive prefixes are used concurrently in both languages to refer to the concept of smallness in size and status, and relative smallness as well.

However, there is another point of similarity is in fact that diminutives exist in two languages and they use affixes or affixation to form diminutives. Both languages contribute to the richness of language in diminutive formation to get a new or an additional vocabulary.

As far as prefixes are concerned, they surpass suffixes in number on the one hand and being attached to more than one part of speech, i.e. nouns, adjectives and verbs, on the other. More specifically, the prefixes '**mono-**, **semi-**, **sub-** and **uni**' are mostly combined with verbs. On the other hand, the remaining prefixes are exclusively combined with proper nouns as is the case with '-ie' and 'kin', but such a case is not detected concerning prefixes.

In respect of meaning, diminutive forms in English usually show smallness, endearment, familiarity and, very rarely, contempt.

On the other hand, in Swahili the diminutive forms are expressed and realized by following some fixed or rather strict procedures, i.e. patterns that are unlikely be violated. In this respect, one clear-cut pattern is identified according to the morphological structure of any word to be diminished in Swahili. The morphological process involved, here, is referred to as prefixation [ka] since an initial change is actually taking place.

It is notable that the diminutive forms in Swahili incorporate a wide range of parts of speech. Besides adjectives, some nouns and all nouns, irrespective of number, gender and whether it is count or non – count can freely be diminished in accordance with the pattern stated before. Nevertheless, some diminutive forms are not admitted at all. Conversely, in English only some parts of speech can be diminished, i.e. the singular number of the proper and countable nouns is only pointed out. Furthermore, not instances of diminished adjectives and verbs are revealed.

Conclusion

This article focuses on contrasting the English and Swahili languages on the formation of relative diminutives. The main purpose of this article is to point out similarities and differences existing between English and Swahili on the formation of some selected diminutives.

After the analysis, some similarities and differences have been discovered between these two languages at the morphological, semantic, and syntactic levels.

The importance of the present article lies in that it can be used as handy tool for Swahili speakers learning English as a second language and, conversely, for an English speaker learning diminutives in Swahili. This is a scientific way of improving language learning.

From the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that the diminutive forms in English can be produced either by suffixation or prefixation where only some parts of speech are included to express some affective meanings. On the other hand, these forms in Swahili are partially produced by prefixation where many parts of speech are involved to express to a large extent, many other meanings besides smallness.

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