

Uralic studies, languages, and researchers

Edited by Sándor Szeverényi

Studia uralo-altaica 54

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Uralic studies, languages, and researchers

Proceedings of the 5th Mikola Conference
19–20, September 2019

Edited by Sándor Szeverényi

Szeged, 2021

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Department of Altaic Studies,
Department of Finno-Ugrian Philology

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Printed in 2021.

Printed by: Innovariant Ltd., H-6750 Algyő, Ipartelep 4.

ISBN 978-963-306-803-8 (printed)

ISBN 978-963-306-804-5 (pdf)

ISSN 0133-4239 (Print)

ISSN 2677-1268 (Online)

Table of contents

Foreword.....	9
<i>Sándor Szeverényi</i>	
Notes on Nicolaes Witsen and his Noord en Oost Tartarye.....	11
<i>Rogier Blokland</i>	
Undiscovered treasures: From the field research archive to the digital database.....	27
<i>Beáta Wagner-Nagy, Chris Lasse Däbritz, and Timm Lehmborg</i>	
On the language use of the first Finnish medical text	45
<i>Meri Juhos</i>	
Sajnovics, the responsible fieldworker	55
<i>Sándor Szeverényi</i>	
The life and work of the Saami theologian and linguist: Anders Porsanger	71
<i>Ivett Kelemen</i>	
The use and semantics of the Northern Mansi diminutive <i>-riś~rəś</i>	81
<i>Bernadett Bíró</i>	
The event of “giving” and “getting” in Siberian Uralic languages	99
<i>Katalin Sipőcz</i>	
A word-formational approach to neologisms in modern Northern Mansi	119
<i>Susanna Virtanen</i>	
Word and stem repetitions in the heroic epic songs collected by Antal Reguly	131
<i>Mária Sipos</i>	
The use of body part terms in expressing emotions in Udmurt	149
<i>Rebeka Kubitsch</i>	
The characteristics of responses given to compliments in Udmurt.....	173
<i>Zoltán Németh</i>	
On some Chuvash–Mari shared lexemes and Agyagási’s “Late Gorodets” hypothesis ..	185
<i>Christopher Culver</i>	

“Сувениры Севера” Minority identity and discourse. Representation of indigenous minorities of Northern Russia in the digital media. The case of Dudinka	201
<i>Zsuzsa Várnai and Ágnes Hámori</i>	
Reconsidering the Nganasan vowel system	229
<i>László Fejes</i>	
New aspects in the study of Mari, Udmurt, and Komi-Permyak: The <i>Typological Database of the Volga Area Finno-Ugric Languages</i>	255
<i>Erika Asztalos, Nikolett F. Gulyás, Laura Horváth, and Bogáta Timár</i>	
Ethnosyntax in Siberian Uralic Languages (a project report)	275
<i>Bernadett Bíró, Katalin Sipőcz, and Sándor Szeverényi</i>	

The use and semantics of the Northern Mansi diminutive *-riś~rəś*¹

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1. Introduction

In my paper I discuss the use and the various meanings of the Northern Mansi diminutive suffix *-riś~rəś* and propose a structure for its semantics applying Jurafsky's Radial Category Theory (1996).

I restrict my investigation to the Northern Mansi dialect, which is the only remaining dialect of Mansi² and a seriously endangered language with cca. 1000 speakers. The data used for this research are taken from written sources dated between the 1890's and 2019.

In what follows, at first I discuss the notion of the diminutive as well as present the various and often contradictory meanings it can express cross-linguistically (Section 2). Section 3 deals with the Mansi diminutives while in Section 4 the use and the different meanings of the Northern-Mansi diminutive suffix *-riś~rəś* are presented. Finally, after introducing Jurafsky's Radial Category Theory, I propose a structure for the semantics of the diminutive suffix *-riś~rəś* within Jurafsky's theory (Section 5).

2. The diminutive

The diminutive function seems to appear universally, diminutives are used in many languages and they can express a wide range of semantic (and also pragmatic) content cross-linguistically (cf. Jurafsky 1996, Schneider 2013). As Schneider points it out (Schneider 2013: 140) "A standard description of diminutive meaning is that the meaning of the base word is essentially retained, and that the semantic component

¹ The research reported on in this paper is funded by NKFIH (National Research, Development and Innovation Office, Hungary) in the frame of the project *Ethnosyntactic Analysis of Siberian Uralic Languages* (K129186, 2018–2021) at the University of Szeged, Hungary.

² Mansi is a Uralic/Finno-Ugric language, its closest related languages are Khanty and Hungarian. It is spoken in Western-Siberia, along the river Ob and its tributaries (Keresztes 1998). It is a highly endangered language, almost all of its speakers are Russian-Mansi bilinguals (cf. Bíró and Sipőcz 2006, 2009, Pusztay 2006: 45).

DOI <https://10.14232/sua.2021.54.99-118>

small is added through the diminutive marker. This additional component does not change the meaning of the base word, but merely modifies it.” Thus, *cubelets* and *droplets* are still cubes and drops, however smaller than the “normal” or prototypic cubes and drops; and their meanings can be glossed as ‘small cubes’ and ‘small drops’. So this standard description may well apply to cases like those of *cubelet* and *droplet*, but it is not always adequate, let us think of words like *wifelet* and *princelet*, for example. The meanings of these words cannot be glossed as ‘small wife’ and ‘small prince’. Here, instead of the component small, the diminutive adds a negative component to the base word, expressing the negative attitude of the speaker towards the referent (Schneider 2013: 140–141). Thus, beside smallness, the diminutive can express an extreme variety of meanings – as it has been mentioned before –, some of them being even contradictory. Among these meanings are imitation, exactness, approximation, individuation, partitive, intensification, attenuation as well as such pragmatic senses like affection, contempt, playfulness, politeness etc. (cf. Jurafsky 1996). Let us see some examples of these various meanings of the diminutives cross-linguistically:

(1)

imitation:	Mandarin <i>fo zhur</i> ‘monk’s beads’ (< <i>zhu</i> ‘pearl’);
exactness:	Mexican Spanish <i>llegandito</i> ‘immediately after arriving’ (< <i>llegando</i> ‘arriving’ < <i>llegar</i> ‘arrive’);
approximation:	Mexican Spanish <i>altillo</i> ‘tallish, rather tall’ (< <i>alto</i> ‘tall’);
individuation/partitive:	Yiddish <i>dos zemdl</i> ‘grain of sand’ (< <i>der zamd</i> ‘sand’);
intensification:	Mexican Spanish <i>ahorita</i> ‘immediately, right now’ (< <i>ahora</i> ‘now’);
attenuation:	Cuban and Dominican Spanish <i>ahorita</i> ‘soon, in a little while’ (< <i>ahora</i> ‘now’);
affection:	<i>Jimmy</i> ;
playfulness:	Colombian Spanish <i>monstrico</i> (< ‘monster’) (used jokingly by a woman when addressing her husband);
politeness:	Spanish <i>¿Gusta un cafecito?</i> ‘Would you like some coffee?’ (< <i>café</i> ‘coffee’);
contempt/derogative:	Cantonese <i>sek²² nui³⁵</i> ‘frigid woman’ (< <i>nui²⁵</i> ‘woman’).

(The examples are taken from Gladkova 2015: 38, Jurafsky 1996: 534, 536, 548 and Mendoza 2011: 137, 141, 150, 153.)

I will discuss the problems related to the various meanings of the diminutive cross-linguistically in more detail in Section 5. For the purposes of this paper, following

Jurafsky, I define the diminutive as a morphological **device which means at least ‘small’** (Jurafsky 1996: 534).

Regarding the formation of diminutives, prototypical diminutives are considered to be created by morphological devices, namely by derivation, cf. e.g. Schneider (2013: 137–138): “Prototypical diminutives, i.e. diminutives generally considered to be the “best” examples of this category, are nouns derived from nouns by attaching a suffix which functions as the diminutive marker (or ‘diminutivizer’) [...]” Beside derivation, however, there are other morphological and also non-morphological devices and processes as well to form diminutives, such as prefixation, reduplication, compounding, truncation, inflection and periphrastic constructions (Štekauer et al. 2012: 237–303, Schneider 2003: 7–10).

3. Diminutives in Northern Mansi

In Mansi two diminutive suffixes are used: *-riś~-rās* and *-kwe (-ke)*³. Both diminutive suffixes are very productive and can be likely attached to any word with the exception of conjunctions (Rombandeeva 1973: 76)⁴. These diminutive suffixes occur also in verb conjugation attaching to any verb stem, with the possibility that then voice, tense and mood markers can also attach to them. When attached to verbs, they serve to express subjectivity and speaker’s stance. The diminutive *-kwe (-ke)* expresses the speaker’s positive stance and adds a meaning of affection and politeness to the verb, e.g.

- (2) *toti-ke-n!* (bring-DIM-2SG.IMP) ‘Bring some, dear!’
 (3) *toti-ke-m* (bring-DIM-1SG) ‘I bring willingly, gladly, cordially’.

While *-riś~-rās* expresses regret and scorn, e.g.

- (4) *tājə-riś-en!* (eat-DIM-2SG.IMP) ‘Eat (you poor, pitiable hungry wretch)!’,
 (5) *toti-riś-əm* (bring-DIM-1SG) ‘I bring, poor me (it is hard for me)’.

(Examples are taken from Kálmán 1989: 61.)⁵

³ The suffix *-kwe (-ke)* has several allomorphs: *-ka*, *-kă*, *-kə*. (cf. Riese 2001: 73)

⁴ According to Rombandeeva (1973: 77), however, the suffix *-riś~-rās* can hardly be attached to the names of villages, towns, rivers and lakes.

⁵ Munkácsi (1894) and Kálmán (1989) describe these verb forms as a distinct mood in the Mansi verbal system, namely as the “precative” mood. According to other linguists (e.g. Rombandeeva 1973, Rombandeeva and Vahruseva 1989, Riese 2001), these verb forms are considered simple derivative forms. The fact that the verbs containing these derivative suffixes can also take mood markers definitely supports the view that these are “simply” diminutive suffixes and not mood markers. Thus, I agree with those authors who claim that there is no precative mood in Mansi.

In the case of nouns derived with the two diminutive suffixes, the positive and negative meanings are not conveyed necessarily, cf. *piyriś* ‘little boy’, *piykwe* ‘little boy’.⁶

Beside these two diminutive suffixes, there are so called “diminutive words” in Mansi as well⁷, for example:

ōwl ‘beginning, end’ (e.g. *tulōwl* ‘small finger’ < *tul* ‘finger’),
sup ‘piece, part, half’ (e.g. *χāpsup* ‘small boat’ < *χāp* ‘boat’),
sow ‘fur, leather, skin, bark, crust, skin, dress’ (e.g. *pūsow* ‘small kettle/cauldron’ < *pūt* ‘kettle, cauldron’). (Cf. Riese 2001: 147–149)

4. The Northern Mansi diminutive suffix *-riś/-rās*

This suffix originates from an independent word probably with the meaning ‘piece’ which is of Finno-Ugric origin: FU **räčz* ‘piece, bite, part’ (Uralonet, UEW No. 854⁸, Riese 2001: 107). This word is no longer traceable in Mansi. The development of this word into a suffix began early, possibly already in Proto-Mansi.⁹ (Riese 2001: 107)

The suffix occurs mostly in the form of *-riś* although there are less common variants like *-rās/-rās*. In the Northern parts it can appear also as *-liś*. This diminutive suffix is most common in the Northern dialect and absent from the Southern (or Tawda) dialect. As Riese states it (Riese 2001: 108), in contrast to the other diminutive suffix (*-kwe/-ke*), *-riś/-rās* often has a pejorative, contemptuous undertone. This semantic development is presumably secondary and has led to a semantic differentiation regarding the use of the two diminutive suffixes. Riese also notices, however, that this differentiation has never gone as far as it is sometimes described, especially in the non-Northern dialects. He also points it out that in case of some words, the diminutive suffix does not have a pejorative meaning at all, e.g. *āyiriś* ‘little girl’, *piyriś* ‘little boy’, *kūūwriś* ‘little dog, doggy’. (Cf. Riese 2001: 108)

⁶ In this paper I examine the semantics and use of only the diminutive suffix *-riś/-rās*. It is noteworthy, though, that the exact rules guiding the use of the other diminutive suffix need further research, too.

⁷ Riese has a more restrictive view considering the diminutive words. Thus, contrary to other researchers he does not consider such words like *sam* ‘eye; grain, berry’, *lōmt* ‘piece, part, stain’, *pāl* ‘side, area, half etc.’, *śiśkwe* ‘mother, darling (loved one)’, *tārās* ‘hair, vein, thin root’ diminutive words because the original meaning of these words are still clearly recognizable in the compounds formed with them. (Cf. Riese 2001: 147)

⁸ http://www.uralonet.nytud.hu/eintrag.cgi?id_eintrag=854&locale=hu_HU

⁹ This change of meaning is also supported by the diminutive function of the Komi cognate, e.g.: *nañ-reć* ‘a piece of bread’.

(http://www.uralonet.nytud.hu/eintrag.cgi?id_eintrag=854&locale=hu_HU)

The suffix can express several semantic and also pragmatic contents, as it has been mentioned before. These contents are the following:

- a) ‘small’
 e.g. *pukiriśe* ‘his small belly’ (belly-DIM-PX3SG)
kwol sisriśəmna ‘to the back of my little house’
 (*sis-riś-əm-nə* house back-DIM-PX1SG-LAT)¹⁰
- b) ‘child’/‘young’/‘offspring’
āyiriś ‘little girl’ (*āyi* ‘girl’)
pāsiyriś ‘reindeer calf’ (*pāsiy* ‘id.’)
Mān ij māñriśit ōlsūw. ‘We were still very small/young.’
 (LS 2014/13: 14) (*māñ-riś-it* small-DIM-PL)
- c) affection
apiyriśəm ‘my dear grandson/granddaughter’
 (grandson/granddaughter-DIM-PX1SG)
Am saka āyiriś ōñsuykwe taḡsum.
 ‘I wanted to have a daughter very much.’
 (LS 2014/5: 7)
- d) indefiniteness, approximation
kwot’liḡ ēt kwot’əlriśət ‘around midnight’
 (*kwot’əl-riś-ət* middle-DIM-LOC)
taw mināmā jui-pālriśət ‘not long after s/he has left’
 (*jui-pāl-riś-ət* back-part-DIM-LOC)¹¹
 (cf. Szabó 1904: 77)
- e) The suffix appears also in some lexicalized forms:
ōpariś nam ‘patronymic’ (*ōpa, ōpa-riś* ‘grandfather’ + *nam* ‘name’)
ūjriś ‘bird’ (*ūj* ‘animal’)
mātāpriś ‘mouse, mole’.

Since the pejorative or negative meaning of the suffix raises several questions, I discuss this subject in more detail. As it has been mentioned before, the pejorative or negative undertone is clearer in the case of verbs. When attached to verbs, the suffix can express regret and pity (and in connection with these feelings, sometimes also

¹⁰ In the postpositional phrase sometimes the postposition takes the diminutive suffix instead of the noun.

¹¹ The postposition *jui-pālt* ‘after’ originates from the word *jui-pāl* ‘back side’ (*jui-pālt*: back side-LOC).

sympathy) or scorn and disdain. Regret and pity can be seen in the following examples:

- (6) *wāytal pat-əm-riš-əm*
 weak become-PTCP.PST-DIM-PX1SG
 ‘poor me, I have become weak’
 (Kálmán 1989: 61)
- (7) *jā naŋ kuñər rūpiytə-nə χum, mēt-χum,*
 well you poor work-PTCP.PRS man wage-worker
*naŋ χuj-əriš-en!*¹²
 you lie-DIM-IMP.2SG
 ‘Well, you poor, working man, wage-worker, you just lie down!’
 (VNGy IV: 334)
- (8) *ań min-əriš-en jūw!*
 now go-DIM-IMP.2SG inside
 ‘And now, just go inside, poor you!’
 (VNGy IV: 329)

In case of example (8) the field-worker who collected the tale translated this sentence like this: ‘Just go inside now, my dear!’. In my opinion both translations can be correct since this sentence is addressed to a poor man who has been beaten up and is in a very bad condition. (In the previous sentence he is addressed as *naŋ kuñər* (you poor) ‘poor you’.) Thus, the speaker can feel both regret and sympathy towards this man who is the protagonist of the tale, actually.¹³

In the following examples (9–10) *-riš/-rəš* clearly expresses scorn and disdain:

- (9) *Vōl’iŋ nē āmp-ərəš woss sus-s-nū-rəš.*
 [proper noun] woman dog-DIM let watch-PST-COND-DIM
 ‘The woman of Vōl’iŋ-village, the dog, just would watch it.’
 (VNGy IV: 46)

¹² The suffix *-riš/-rəš* is often attached with an epenthetic vowel (-ə) to stems ending with a consonant.

¹³ It is noteworthy that in the tale this poor man’s belongings are also referred to by using the diminutive suffix *-riš/-rəš*, e.g.: *kwolriš* ‘[his] wretched little house’, *ēntəprišä* ‘his wretched little belt’, while otherwise the diminutive suffix *-kwe* is used: *ujkwe* ‘little animal’, *nājkwe* ‘small fire’ etc. Here the differentiation between the two diminutive suffixes seems intentional, *-riš/-rəš* has a negative undertone and it expresses bad quality and, in addition, perhaps sympathy and regret as well.

Here the negative, pejorative undertone of the suffix is underlined by its double use, once with a verb and once with a noun. The woman (the woman of Vōl'ij-village) is referred to as an *āmpərəś* (dog-DIM) and here it is clearly not a nickname or an endearing expression since in the song this woman – who is most probably the singer's wife – is the one who keeps the singer from obtaining the desired and loved other woman (who is referred to as *āyikwə* (girl-DIM) throughout the song).¹⁴

Another example for the pejorative use of *-riś/-rəś* is also taken from a faith-song, here the singer speaks about her sisters-in-law who are of a very bad nature, lazy and mean with her:

- (10) *tanānəlnə* *at* *tēli-riś* *wārnut* *wār-uŋkwə*.
 they.DAT NEG arise-DIM work do-INF
 'They are unable to do any work.'
 (VNGy IV: 58)

In the case of nouns the negative or pejorative undertone of the diminutive suffix is not as dominant as it is in the case of verbs. There are some examples, however where *-riś/-rəś* clearly expresses bad quality or scorn and disdain. This meaning of the suffix is the most obvious in those cases where *-riś/-rəś* and *-kwe* are used in contrast with each-other, the former expressing the negative while the latter expressing the positive content. A good example of this is a Mansi tale, namely *The Tale of the Mōś-Woman and Por-Woman* (*Mōś-nēy*, *por-nēy*). In this tale the protagonist (at first the Mōś-Woman and after her death her daughter) is always marked by the diminutive suffix *-kwe* while the antagonist is marked by *-riś/-rəś* (however, she is marked by the suffix only once). Then there is a scene where the daughters of the two women meet and there is a clear difference in the quality and beauty of their clothes consequently marked by the two different diminutive suffixes: *māstər šaxikwet*, *māstər wājikwet* [the Mōś-Woman's] 'masterly [made] fur-coat, masterly [made] boots'; *matər-mat sūlnəl wārim šaxiriśt*, *sālnəl wārim wājriśt* [the Por-Woman's] 'some shabby fur-coat made of bark, shabby boots made of shuck'.

There is another good example of the contrastive use of the two diminutive suffixes in a faith-song where the singer talks scornfully about the man who would like to marry her: *ti mān Xal-pauliŋ χumriś* 'this little man from Xal-village' (VNGy

¹⁴ The example is taken from a so-called "faith-song" which is a typical genre of the Mansi folk poetry. In a faith-song the singer speaks about his or her life, about the things which are important to them, and the subject of these faith-songs is often the marriage or the difficulties for men to get a wife or for women to be given to a stranger or to an unkind man as a wife. (In older times Mansis used to maintain a strict exogamy so men had to get a wife from another tribe, from another village. Thus, for women marriage was not always a happy event since it meant that they were taken away from their family and brought to an unfamiliar place.)

IV: 60) while the man who she loves is marked by the diminutive suffix *-kwe*. In another faith-song when the singer talks about herself and her things, she often uses the diminutive suffix *-kwe* while when she talks about that after her death who will replace her, she uses the suffix *-riś/-rəś*:

- (11) *ti* *pasān* *woipi* *χūrəm* ***ńōr-kə-m***
 this table similar three hill-DIM-PX1SG
ti *ulās* *lūl'it* *χūrəm* ***ur-kə-m***
 this chair high three mountain-DIM-PX1SG
χoti ***nē-riś-ən*** *jōma-we-t?*
 what.sort.of woman-DIM-LAT walk-PASS-3PL
 ‘These three dear little hills of mine, similar to tables these three dear little mountains of mine, tall as a chair, what kind of a woman will walk on them?’
 (VNGy IV: 2)

Beside the contrastive use of the two suffixes, there are also some cases where only *-riś/-rəś* is present and it clearly has a negative meaning, see (12) for example:

- (12) *χonal* *woss* *joli-oul* *māń*
 some.day most lower.end small
pant-kā-nəm *mat-χūrīp* *sajim* *χul*
 brother.in.law-DIM-PXPL.1SG what.kind.of rotten fish

sān-riś *wiy-ət;* *ēriy* *tanki*
 birch.bark.box-DIM take-3PL maybe they.EMP
as-riś-ānl *ut* *wērm-eyət.*
 hole-DIM-PX3PL thing be.able-3PL
 ‘Some day my dear youngest (lit. last) brothers-in-law will marry some birch bark box of rotten fish (worthless woman) who perhaps will not be able to [sew] their own clothes (the holes in their clothes).’ (VNGy IV: 15)
 (Note that the word ‘brothers-in law’ is marked by the diminutive suffix *-kwe* (*-kā*).

Other examples for the pejorative or scornful meaning of the suffix are when a woman calls her lover’s wife *kul’riś* (devil-DIM) (accompanied by a very vulgar adjective) or when a man calls the woman he does not love *āmpərəś* (dog-DIM) (see example (9)) and also when a woman calls her husband who she does not love and wants to leave *χum-piyriś* (man boy-DIM).

In some cases when the suffix has a negative meaning it expresses rather regret and pity or bad quality, not scorn or disdain. See some examples in Footnote 8 and also in example (13) where a woman speaks about herself and her bad life with her husband’s sisters and family:

- (13) *ti sāt χum ḍñiy-riś aj-elāl-eγəm*
 this seven man sister.in.law-DIM drink-FREQ-1SG
 ‘[As] these seven men’s (poor) sister-in-law, I am just drinking
 [brandy].’
 (VNGy IV: 59)

In example (13) the diminutive suffix clearly expresses self-pity, similarly to example (14) where the Moś-woman’s daughter is moaning after her little brother’s death:

- (14) *amt’-t’e-riś-əm tit jōm-iyt-ēγəm*
 me.EMP-DIM-DIM-PX1SG here walk-FREQ-1SG
 ‘Poor me, I am just wondering here, on my own.’

Here both diminutive suffixes (*-ke/-t’e*¹⁵ and *-riś*) are added to the word *amki* (*amt’i*) ‘I myself’. This is not a unique case, there are some other examples of words marked by both diminutive suffixes, e.g. *piγ-riś-akwē-γ* ‘two little boys’, *āyi-riś-kwe* ‘little girl’. According to Rombandeeva (1973: 78) if both diminutive suffixes are attached to the word then *-kwe* normally follows *-riś/-rəś* and in this case the meaning of both diminutive suffixes is positive. This statement concerning the order of the two diminutives seems to be supported by my examination as well. If the suffixes are attached to the word in the reverse order, however, then they have the following meaning: ‘something what we used to like has become a negative thing’ (Rombandeeva 1973: 78). In example (14) we can find the reverse order of the diminutives but in my opinion they do not have the meaning proposed by Rombandeeva. It also has to be noted that in the case of personal pronouns almost only the first person pronouns (mostly in singular, i.e. ‘I’) take the diminutive suffix and they rather take *-riś/-rəś* than *-kwe* (*-ke*). (This may due to the fact that one usually talks about oneself with modesty and not with affection.) There are some examples with the second person pronouns as well (again, mostly in singular) but examples containing the third person pronouns are very scarce. The vast majority of the examples thus contain the first person singular personal pronoun and if both the diminutive suffixes are present then the order of them seems to be always *-kwe* (*-ke*) and *-riś/-rəś* (like in example 14). The reason for this together with the case of personal pronouns marked by the diminutives, however, needs further research as do the possible differences between the different orders of the two diminutives.

¹⁵ In the Sygva subdialect of the Northern dialect there is a *t’* instead of *k* before palatal vowels (*ē, i*), e.g. *tēr* ‘iron’, *tīwər* ‘inner part’ vs. *kēr, kiwər* in the other subdialects (Kálmán 1989: 12).

In the newer texts there are only a very few examples where *-riś/-rəs* has a negative meaning, one of them is example (15) (taken from the Mansi newspaper) where the meaning of the suffix is ‘bad quality’:

- (15) *Māk māńśi ākań jūnt-uńkw* *χosa,*
 proper Mansi doll sew-INF long
mol'ax māγəs mān kūstər ***ākań-riś-ət***
 quick for we quick doll-DIM-PL
wār-s-ūw.
 prepare-PST-1PL
 ‘It takes long to sew a proper Mansi doll, so in order to be quick, we made quick Mansi dolls.’
 (LS 2015/1: 14)

However, in example (15) the meaning ‘bad quality’ can be attributed to the diminutive suffix only on the basis of the context, in my opinion. A similar situation appears in a tale (published also in the newspaper), where Nenets people are referred to as *jōmriśət* (Nenets-DIM-PL). Here only the context tells us that Nenets people act as bad persons in this story (as it is often the case in Mansi tales but not always), thus here the meaning of the diminutive cannot be ‘small’ or ‘dear’ or it cannot have any other interpretation than a negative one.

Beside those examples where *-riś/-rəs* has a negative meaning, there are a lot more examples where it definitely expresses a positive content, mostly affection.¹⁶ In (16) I list a few of these examples. (These examples are taken mostly from older texts collected at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century since in the newer texts diminutives appear mostly with kinship-terms only.)

- (16) *Tūpəl ūsəriśəmnə* ‘to my beloved town of Tobolsk’,
Pētərrəsəm ‘my dear Peter’,
kwolriś ‘dear little house’,
jiwriś ‘dear little tree’,
jāmsəkrəsəm ‘my dear wagoner’,
āwiriśəm ‘my dear little door’,
tōrriśəm ‘my dear little kerchief’,
jānriśəm ‘my dear little bow’,
māń χumriś ‘dear little man’,
nanriś ‘you (PL), dear’.

¹⁶ Rombandeeva (1973: 77–78) mentions that there are such constructions where the subject is marked by the suffix *-riś/rəs* while the verb is marked by *-kwe*. According to her in these constructions *-riś/rəs* has a positive meaning, too, it expresses pride or respect.

In addition, we can mention the kinship terms which can take either *-riś/-rəś* or *-kwe* for expressing affection (or the meaning ‘small’), see some examples in (17):

(17)	<i>āyiriś</i>	‘dear daughter’ or ‘little daughter/girl’,
	<i>piyriś</i>	‘dear son’ or ‘little son/boy’,
	<i>jaγriś</i>	‘dear father’,
	<i>jiyriś</i>	‘dear (younger) sister’,
	<i>apiyriś</i>	‘dear grandson/granddaughter’, ‘dear nephew’
	<i>mañriś</i>	‘dear daughter-in-law’.

Concerning the use of the diminutive suffix *-riś/-rəś* in conclusion we can say the followings:

In the case of verbs, the suffix expresses regret and pity (and in connection with these feelings, sometimes also sympathy) or scorn and disdain. When attached to nouns it can have both positive and negative meanings. In older texts it is clear that when the intention was to express scorn and disdain or regret and pity or ‘bad quality’ then the suffix *-riś/-rəś* was used. The other diminutive suffix (*-kwe*) does not have this function at all. In newer texts, however, there are only a few examples where *-riś/-rəś* has a negative meaning and in these examples the role of the context supporting the negative undertone is much stronger than in the older texts. There are a lot more examples, however, where *-riś/-rəś* has the meaning ‘small’ or it expresses affection, in older texts it attaches to various base words while in newer texts it is mostly used with kinship terms. (This is also true for the other diminutive suffix.) It is noteworthy that in older texts (tales, songs, riddles etc. collected from native speakers in fieldworks at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century) it is clearly observable that some informant most probably favoured *-riś/-rəś* over *-kwe* so they used this diminutive suffix expressing affection (or the meaning ‘small’) throughout their texts instead of *-kwe*. But in the vast majority of the texts *-kwe* is used far more often than *-riś/-rəś*. The only exceptions are the words *piγ* ‘boy’ and *āyi* ‘girl’ which are used almost equally with both diminutive suffixes. (The words *piyriś* and *āyiriś* may have been lexicalized forms, actually.) In newer texts *-riś/-rəś* appears almost only with kinship terms and cca. 70% of its use consists of the words *piyriś* and *āyiriś* (boy/son-DIM, girl/daughter-DIM).

5. The Radial Category Theory

As Jurafsky (1996: 534–535) points it out, the description of the semantics of the diminutive causes several problems both synchronically and diachronically. From a synchronic perspective, it is difficult to explain the varied and often contradictory meanings of the diminutive (like the fact that it can express both intensification and attenuation, for example). The wide scale of meanings expressed by the diminutives

cannot be considered language-specific idiosyncrasy because these meanings appear with surprising frequency cross-linguistically. Beside the various semantic contents, the diminutive can express a number of pragmatic senses as well, as it has been mentioned in Section 2. These pragmatic senses usually co-occur with the semantic ones. Diachronically the problem lies in that no consistent proposal for a semantic reconstruction of the diminutive has been made so far, although there are proposed reconstructions for individual languages. These reconstructions lead back the semantics of the diminutive to small/child, approximation, resemblance and various emotional connotations. On the other hand, even if there was a consistent reconstruction, it still would prove difficult to explain the development of the original meaning into the astonishingly varied senses of the diminutive. As Jurafsky states it (1996: 535): “Previously proposed mechanisms of semantic change (metaphor, conventionalized implicature, generalization) can explain the development of some of the senses [...] But for some senses, such as 'approximation' or 'exactness', previous methods are insufficient.”

In order to solve these problems, Jurafsky (1996) proposes a structured polysemy model based on the radial category (George Lakoff 1987). Radial categories are networks of senses which arise due to the metaphorical conceptualization involved in the structuring of a particular domain or a grammatical category. The central sense in this network is connected to other senses through metaphorical and metonymical extensions, image schematic transfer and inference. The prototypes of senses are represented by nodes and the metaphorical extensions, inferences etc. are represented by links. (Jurafsky 1996, Mendoza 2011: 140) “Thus when interpreted as a synchronic object, the radial category describes the motivated relations between senses of a polysemous category. When interpreted as a historical object, the radial category captures the generalizations of various mechanisms of semantic change.” (Jurafsky 1996: 542)

Figure 1 shows Jurafsky’s (1996: 542) proposal for a universal radial category for the diminutive.

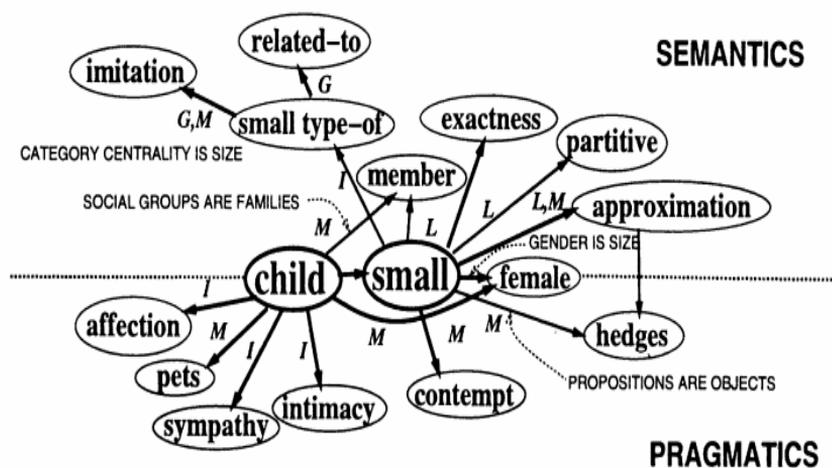


Figure 1. Jurafsky's proposed universal structure for the semantics of the diminutive (Jurafsky 1996: 542)

As it can be seen in Figure 1, Jurafsky (1996) proposes that the diminutive cross-linguistically originates from words which semantically or pragmatically are linked to children. Other meanings of the diminutive in a given language will develop diachronically from the central senses towards the senses of the edge through the mechanisms of semantic change, i.e. metaphor (M), inference (I), generalization (G)¹⁷ and lambda-abstraction (L) (Jurafsky 1996: 542–543).

Jurafsky introduces a new mechanism for semantic change related to generalization, namely lambda-abstraction-specification. This mechanism creates quantificational and second order meanings from propositional ones by taking a predicate in a form and replacing it with a variable. “For the diminutive, this process takes the original concept ‘small(x)’, which has the meaning ‘smaller than the prototypical exemplar x on the scale of size’, and lambda-abstracting it to ‘lambda(y)

¹⁷ Metaphor: “A meaning shifts to a new domain, based on a general metaphor which maps between the old and new domains. The mapping will preserve certain features of the old domain.” (Jurafsky 1996: 544)

Inference: “A morpheme acquires a new meaning which had been an inference or implicature of its old meaning. The historically earlier meaning of a morpheme causes the listener to naturally draw some inference; this inference gradually becomes conventionalized as the literal meaning of the morpheme.” (Jurafsky 1996: 544)

Generalization: “A new sense is created from an old one by abstracting away specific features of meaning. The new meaning is more general and less informative than the old one.” (Jurafsky 1996: 544)

(smaller than the prototypical exemplar x on the scale y).” (Jurafsky 1996: 555) The approximation sense of the diminutive, for example, developed from the sense ‘small’ by lambda-abstraction. Thus, the semantics of the diminutive form *reddish* can be captured as ‘dim (point x , scale y) = lower than x on y ’ where the scale is the scale of redness and the point is the prototype of red. In other words, a reddish object is a marginal member of the category of red objects, and the predicate *red* does not fully apply to it. (Jurafsky 1996: 555, Mendoza 2011)

On the basis of the Radial Category Theory, I propose the following structure for the semantics of the diminutive suffix *-riš/-rās*:

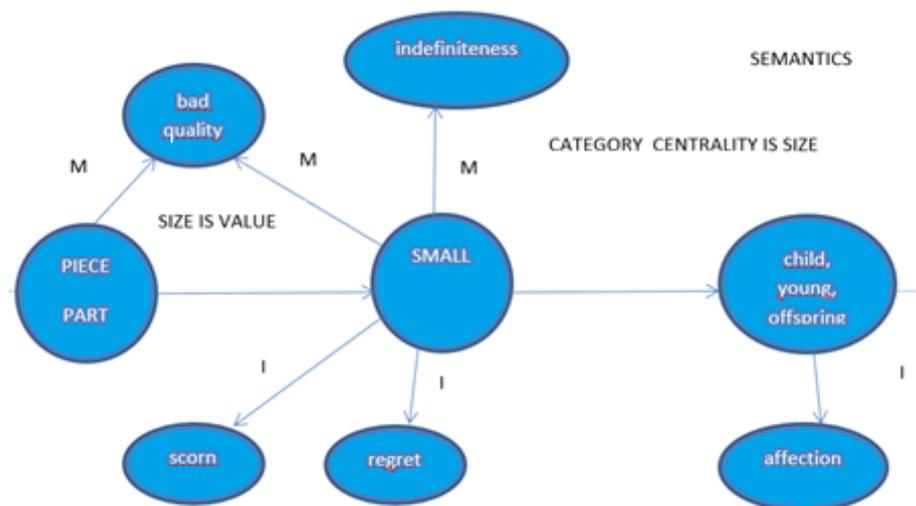


Figure 2. Proposed structure for the semantics of the diminutive *-riš/-rās* within the Radial Category Theory

The original meaning of the diminutive was ‘piece, part’ which gave rise to the meaning ‘small’ and thus the prototypical diminutive function. From the meaning ‘small’ originate the meanings ‘child, young, offspring’. The meaning ‘bad quality’ can originate both from the meanings ‘piece, part’ and ‘small’ through the conceptual metaphor SIZE IS VALUE. (Small things are of a worse quality while bigger things are of a better quality.) The ‘indefiniteness’ sense could develop from the meaning ‘small’ via the metaphor CATEGORY CENTRALITY IS SIZE. This metaphor links the marginal members of a category to small size while the central or prototypical members are associated with big size.

Regarding the pragmatic senses, the ‘affection’ sense developed from the meaning ‘child, young, offspring’ via inference. It is a natural tendency that we feel affection

towards children. Thus, hearing a diminutive referring to children causes the hearer to draw the natural inference that the speaker feels affection towards the diminutized object (child). (Cf. Jurafsky 1996: 551) Similarly, the senses ‘scorn’ and ‘regret’ both can originate from the meaning ‘small’ via inference. Towards small objects (which often can be of a bad quality, cf. the metaphor SIZE IS VALUE) we often feel scorn and/or regret thus the hearer can again draw the inference that the speaker feels scorn and/or regret towards the person or object marked by the diminutive.¹⁸

Abbreviations

COND	conditional
DAT	dative
DIM	diminutive
EMP	emphasis
FREQ	frequentative
IMP	imperative
INF	infinitive
KM	Konda Mansi dialect
LAT	lative
LOC	locative
NEG	negative
PASS	passive
PM	Pelym Mansi dialect
PL	plural
PST	past
PTCP.PRS	present participle
PTCP.PST	past participle
PX	possessive suffix
SG	singular
ULM	Upper Lozva Mansi dialect

¹⁸ It must be mentioned that according to Rombandeeva (1973: 78–79) the diminutive suffix *-riś/rəś* originates from the Mansi word *rus* [*ris*] ‘weak, fragile, soft’ (a Komi loanword, cf. Munkácsi and Kálmán 1986), cf. *ris jiw* ‘a weak tree’, *ris* ‘something weak’. I consider Riese’s and the Uralonet’s etymology more convincing, in the case of the other etymology there are phonetic problems as well. (How and why has changed the original *-s* into a palatalized *-ś*?) But if the original meaning of the suffix was ‘weak, fragile, soft’ then the meanings ‘small’ and ‘bad quality’ could develop from this meaning as well.

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