

Northern Mansi diminutives in a cultural linguistic framework

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Introduction

My aim is to show two Northern Mansi diminutive suffixes from a cultural linguistic point of view. I discuss their use and their various meanings applying Jarofsky's (1996) Radial Category Theory.

Mansi (or Vogul)

- Uralic > Finno-Ugric > Ugric
 - Western Siberia, cca. 1000 speakers
 - the only dialect today: Northern Mansi, seriously endangered
- The data used for this research are taken mainly from written sources dated between the 1890's and 2018.

Background – Diminutives

- “[P]rototypically, [...] express smallness.” (Schneider 2003: 10)
- but can express an extreme variety of meanings
- used in many languages and present interesting examples of language phenomena which encode cultural rules and meanings (cf. Gladkova 2015, Wierzbicka 1979, among others)

Here I discuss two Northern Mansi diminutive suffixes:

-ke/-ka/-te/-kwe and *-riś/-rās*

- they are very productive and can be likely attached to any word except for conjunctions (Rombandeeva 1973: 176)
 - they occur also in verb conjugation to express subjectivity and speaker's stance:
 - *-ke* expresses the speaker's positive stance (affection and politeness)
 - *-riś* expresses regret and scorn
- (Rombandeeva and Vahruseva 1989: 140, Riese 2001: 59)

-ke/-ka/-te/-kwe

Origin: Identical with the denominal suffix *-k* which forms non-diminutive nouns. (The exact semantics of the derived nouns is unclear.)

Meaning:

1. lexicalized forms

pupa 'idol' > *pupa-kwe* 'bear' (a term used by women)
tal-kwə 'short (person)'

2. small

māñ pāwəl-kwe 'small village'
kwol-kwe '(small) house'

3. child/young/offspring

māñ ut-kwet 'small children' (lit. 'small creatures')
āyi-kwe 'girl'

4. affection/admiration/respect

a) family members:

jiji-kwe 'younger sister' (also 'female bear')
oma-kwe 'mother'

b) affection/love

ās-ke-m 'my dear/beloved river Ob'
jomas pāwəl-kwe 'nice village'

c) admiration/respect

simiñ nē-kwe 'brave woman'; *mūtrañ χōtpa-kwe* 'clever person'
kwol sis-kə-m-nə 'behind my nice little house' (*sis* 'back')
In postpositional phrases diminutives are often attached to the postposition instead of the noun.

In verb conjugation:

„*āyit jōmne l'ōχ-jasakwe, piḡkwet jōmne l'ōχ-jasakwe, n'irn (aya) at tēlantawēkwe, pumn(a) at tēlantawēkwe.*”
'Dear path, being walked by girls, dear path being walked by boys, is not overgrown by twigs, not overgrown by grass.'
(Chrest. 79.)
(*tēlanta-wē-kwe*: overgrow-PASS[3SG]-DIM)

-riś/-rās

Origin: from an independent word: < FU **rācíz* 'piece, bite, part'
It often has a pejorative, contemptuous undertone, this semantic development is probably secondary (Riese 2001: 107-108).

Meaning:

1. lexicalized forms

ōpa-riś nam 'patronymic' (*ōpa-riś* 'uncle' + *nam* 'name');
ūj-riś 'bird' (*ūj* 'animal')

2. small

puki-riś-e 'his small belly'
kwol sis-riś-əm-nə 'to the back of my little house'

3. child/young/offspring

pāsiy-riś 'reindeer calf' (*pāsiy* 'id.')

Māñ in māñ-riś-it ōlsūw. 'We are still very small/young.'
(LS 2014/13: 14)

4. pejorative

a) pejorative

jōrn-riśət 'bad/nasty Nenets people'

b) bad quality:

Māk māñsi ākañ jūntuḡkw χosa, molaḡ māγəs māñ kūstər ākañriśət wārsūw.
'It takes long to sew a proper Mansi doll, so in order to be quick, we made quick Mansi dolls.' (LS 2015/1: 14)

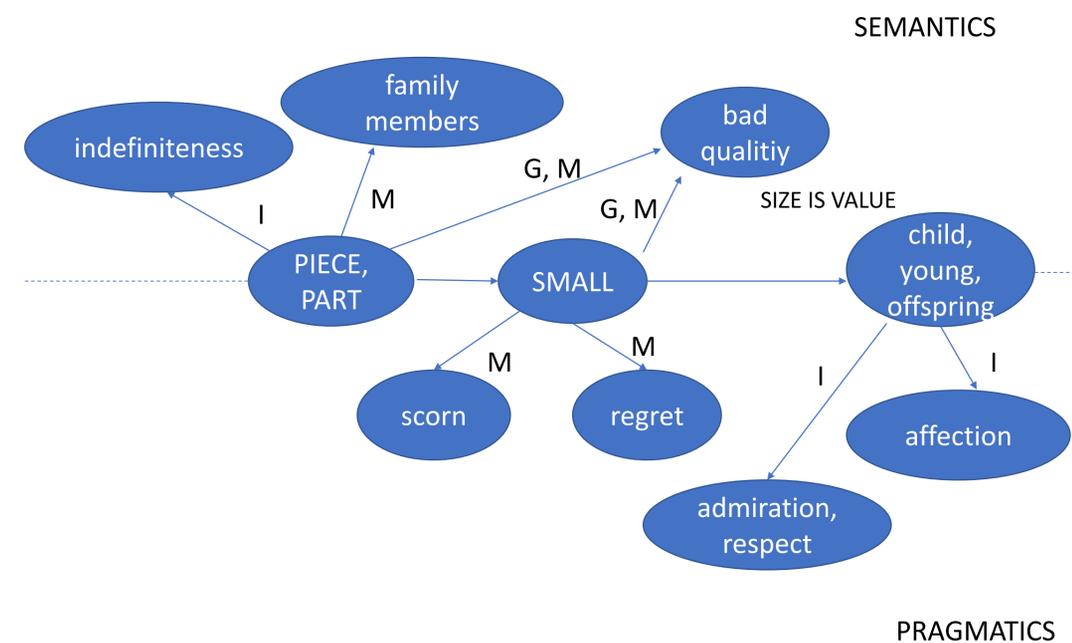
c) with verbs → scorn, regret

wāyṭal patəmriśəm 'Poor me, I have become weak.'

5. indefiniteness

kwotliñ ēt kwotəlriśət 'around midnight' (*kwotəl-riś-ət* middle-DIM-LOC)
taw minämä jui-pālriśət 'not long after s/he has left'
(*jui-pālt* 'after' < *jui-pāl-t* back-side-LOC) (cf. Szabó 1904)

III. Proposed structure for the semantics of the diminutive *-riś/-rās* within the Radial Category Theory



G – generalization, I – inference, M – metaphor

Since the exact meaning/function of the original *-k* denominal derivational suffix is unclear, proposing a structure for the diminutive *-ke/-ka/-te/-kwe* within the Radial Category Theory needs further research.