

On the use of diminutives in Present-Day Welsh

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Diminutive expressions form a complex, supposedly universal semantic category covering a wide range of senses synchronically; often contradictory ones. The contradictory senses are inherent in the lexical heritage of the (denotation of the) term itself. It derives from Latin *dēminuere* meaning ‘diminish, decrease, lessen, reduce or impair’ leading to conceptual meanings concerning dimension, e.g. small size, approximation, as well as evaluative or expressive and stylistic connotative meaning, e.g. affection, intensification. Thus, diminutives denote the diminishing of animate or inanimate objects, events, properties and relations and/or convey affection on the part of the speaker and personal assessment, that is, they can express appreciative or derogative, or jocular meanings.

Diminutive expressions constitute a productive paradigm also in modern Celtic languages. Modern Welsh, for instance, possesses thirteen affixes, namely *-ach*, *-an*, *-cen*, *-cyn*, *-ell*, *-ig*, *-os*, *-yn/-en*, *-i*, *-ws*, *-o*, *-w* and *lled-*, that can be employed to express a wide range of such meanings.

However, despite the profusion of the means to form diminutives morphologically, Welsh speakers exhibit a propensity to express diminutive meanings analytically by adding the word *bach* ‘small’ to the word designating the diminutivized object or concept.

The aim of this paper is to discuss a preliminary survey of the use of diminutives by native speakers of Welsh from North Wales. The informants fall into three age groups: 18-26, 40-55 and over 60 year olds. Both, the use of diminutives in their oral interviews as well as subjective judgement on the use of diminutives will be discussed.

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