



Diminution in Arabic: A suggested strategy to Mona Baker's non-equivalence problem "differences in form"

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Abstract

The study aimed at looking into the phenomenon of diminution in Arabic language as compared to affixes in English language in terms of structure and meaning. The study also investigates the relevance of diminutives in Arabic language to the problem of "differences in form" that Mona Baker discusses in her influential book, in *Other Words*. Baker argues that Arabic, among other languages, lacks a ready mechanism to overcome this equivalence problem of differences in form such as suffixes and prefixes at word level. By reference to benchmark books written by founding grammarians of Arabic language grammar and morphology as well as to recent relevant studies, the study concludes that diminutives in Arabic language possess a semantic and an aesthetic value and exhibit a host of meanings such as smallness, reduction, belittlement, endearment, approximation (time, distance), pity, and gentleness. Further, the study recommends that diminutive forms be incorporated as a strategy proposed to overcome the problem of differences in form, at some instances.

Keywords: Diminution; Mona Baker; strategy; mechanism; aesthetic value; belittlement

1. Introduction

In a world conspicuously characterized by global communication, translation plays a pivotal role, not least in the exchange of information and facilitating the access of information among languages. Understandably, there are differences among languages that only a proficient language user may distinguish. In spite of this expected disaccord of used forms among languages, each language has its own unique way of expressing and understanding the precise meaning of these forms.

Though there are copious examples, diminution has many forms in many languages, including Arabic, English, Spanish, Italian, to name but a few. For example, in Arabic language, the diminutive form of the word (bab) is (buwayb) (a small door). In any case, a wide range of meanings lies behind all forms of diminutives besides smallness, of course. Some diminutives are intended to express contempt or endearment, among other meanings. This study is intended to deal with diminutives formation process, their intended meanings in Arabic language, and compare them with the English language with their relevant applications to translation.

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1.1 Literature Review

Diminution is an ancient phenomenon common in most languages. However, because diminution is essentially a description, this phenomenon has been replaced at the present time by direct description (Hazimy, 2006), and only a few forms have remained. Highlighting the similarities and differences of diminutive forms in Arabic and English and shedding light on the meanings conveyed by them, Hamid; Faiq (2009) conclude that the two languages are very similar in terms of parts of speech and meaning, but they differ greatly in terms of the morphological process. Thus, while English resorts to prefixes, in the first place, and suffixes, Arabic relies on infixation, which is derived according to fixed rules determined by the morphological structure of the word to be minimized. English language forms diminutives either analytically by preceding a given word with an analytical marker (*small*, *little*, and *tiny*), or by adding a derivational affix (Bin Mukhashin, 2018). The latter is classified by some scholars as synthetic diminutives (-ie, -ette, -let, -kin, -een, -s, -poo) (Schneider, 2003). This formation process of attaching a derivational affix to mainly nouns does not change the word class of a given word. Consequently, while the meaning of the word undergoes changes, its word class remains intact. Only the form, the phonological shape, and the meaning of the word are modified. Though different in the formation process of diminutives, English and Arabic languages are similar in the meanings these diminutives impart. According to Bin Mukhashin (2018), diminutives in English language connote pejorative meaning, or meanings that indicate different aspects of smallness, affection and endearment. For instance, adding a derivational suffix to like -ette to a noun derives a new noun that conveys the meaning of “smaller in size”; the word *kitchenette* resultant from the addition of the derivational morpheme -ette is a smaller kitchen and *cigarette* is a small cigar (Katamba: 1993).

Most Arab grammarians agree that diminution in Arabic language serves a number of functions, and hence has a descriptive value (Ibn Usfur, 1972; Sibaweh, 1988; Ibn Ya’eesh, 643). Hazimy (2006) maintains that diminution is, after all, meaning, and meanings are not specific to a certain language or nation. Diminution is not merely a change in the form of a given word, but it connotes a specific meaning.

Diminution serves a variety of semantic functions such as preference, ridicule, affection, endearment, and contempt (Sibaweh, 1988; Ghazalli, 2012). Some scholars (Sibaweh, 1988; Yahya, 2012) argue that the use of diminution in Arabic is predominantly geared toward expressing contempt or belittlement. For them, the main dimension of diminution is decrease. Thus, it either indicates reduction of a person’s respect (disparagement), reduction of size, reduction in number, quantity, time period (approximation), reduction of spatial distance (approximation), or reduction of psychological barriers (pity, endearment, gentleness).

Diminution combines two means of expression in Arabic language, namely, derivation and formula (Yahya, 2012). It requires the addition of a consonant -y) in the middle of a word and consequently changes its pronunciation, so it is closer to a fixed formula than derivation.

As far as meaning is concerned, differences in form among languages can be considered as one of the problems that trainee students are likely to encounter at the word level (Baker, 2001). According to Baker (2001), English language uses forms such as prefixes and suffixes that, in addition to their propositional meaning, have an aesthetic significance. The problem arises when trying to reproduce this aesthetic value in other languages, among which is Arabic that lacks a ready mechanism that may preserve this aesthetic dimension.

1.2 Research questions

The status of Arabic language as a language equipped with tools that can be used as strategies to solve problems encountered by translators has yet to be understood. The problem of the study is mentioned in Mona Baker's influential book, *In Other Words*. There are many languages, including Arabic, which have no tools to solve the problem of differences in form in English language (Baker, 2001.p.24).

The present study is crucially intent on showing that Arabic language has certain forms that can be suggested as strategies to overcome some problems of equivalence.

1. Method

The study relies on two sources of information: primary and secondary sources. Equivalence problems at word level mentioned in Baker's book provide the primary sources. Secondary sources are obtained from books and articles related to the scope of the study. The study also draws on the descriptive model that consists of three steps: collecting information, objective comparison of collected information, and recourse to references, and primary and secondary information. Information analysis is carried out through looking into concepts related to translation problems and strategies in both Arabic and English languages.

2. Discussion

Diminution is a linguistic process that has long persisted and identified by linguists as a common practice in almost every language. Among the four major word-formation processes in English language is suffixation through which diminutive forms are produced (Hamid & Faiq, p. 2). Diminutive forms in English are created by adding suffixes like: -ette, -et, -let, -een, -erel (-rel), -ie (-i, -y), -kin (-ikin, -kins), and -ling to personal proper nouns or common nouns (Hamid & Faiq, p. 2; Marchand, 1969, p. 269; Zandvoort, 1972, p. 298). Italian is no exception in which evaluative affixes are employed to create a number of categories, including the diminutive (Hamid & Faiq, 2008, p. 2). The insertion of these evaluative suffixes to words in Italian neither changes the " syntactic category of the base (casa ' house' – casina ' little house') , nor its subcategorization (such as gender, number, actionality...) (Taine -Cheikh, 2018 , p.1).

Diminutives in English

Table 1. Native English Diminutives

Function	Diminutive Suffix	Example
Smallness	-let	Droplet, booklet, leaflet
Productive	/i/, -y, ie, i	Movie, Sally, Maggie, Dani
Accusative or feminine	-n, -en, -on	Chicken, kitten, maiden
Frequentative(express attitudes)	-le	Puddle, sparkle
disparative	-ish	Largish, reddish, smallish, tallish,
Babytalk assimilative	-sie, -sies, -sy	Bitsy, footsie, halvesies, onsies, popsy, teensy-weensy, tootsie, twosies, Betsy, Patsy, Robsy
American nicknaming	-o	Bucko, daddio, garbo, kiddo,

		smoko, wacko, Jacko, Ricko
Hypocoristic (affective meaning, normally used by men)	-er, -ers, -ster	Bonkers, preppers, starkers, Becker, Lizzers, Hankster, Patster
Geordie assimilative	-a	Gazza, Macca
Nicknames or endearment	-s	Lyds
Endearment	-poo	Katiepoo
Address between people with a close relationship	-pop	Rosiepops
Nursery words or sometimes pejorative	-peg	Daddypegs

Diminutives in English

Table 2. Loanwords and native English words using foreign-language diminutives

Patrinominative (Norse)	-ling	Darling, duckling, fingerling, gosling, underling
Insignificance (of humans)	-ling	peinceling
Small architectural feature (French)	-ette	Balconette, kitchenette
Comparative, pejorative (Franco-Latin)	-erel, -rel	Cockrel, coistrel, doggerel, ditterel, gangrel, hoggerel, kestrel, mackerel, minstrel, mongrel, pickerel, puckerel scoundrel, suckarel, taistrel, tumbrel, whimbrel, wastrel'
Hypocoristic/ Parent-child connection (Dutch)	-kins	Laurakins, Sallykins
Commercial miniature compound	Mini-, micro	Minibar, miniblind, miniboss, microcosm, microscope
Irish flavor	-een	Girleen, houseen

As tables (1) and (2) above show, diminutives in English language are formed either by preceding a noun with a prefix, or by adding a derivational affix. Affixes such as (-ie, -ette, and -let) are typical of contemporary English Language (Bin Mukhashin, 2018). Others are borrowed from other languages such as those that have a Germanic origin (-kin, -ling), or of an Irish origin (-een). They can exhibit a wide array of expressive meanings. Some of these affixes are inflected to express the meaning of smallness. Other affixes add an emotional dimension that expresses a pejorative stance of the language user, endearment, or depreciation and contempt. However, the most salient semantic aspects for which this large inventory of diminutive affixes is used are smallness and pejorative stance. The tables also show some affixes which are called familiarity markers that possess an expressive or evaluative attitude such as -s, -er, -o, -a, and -le, rather than showing qualities like smallness. (ibid.257-259)

Arabic language also has evaluative affixes that, once inflected, serve to create categories like the diminutive. In resemblance to Italian, Arabic diminutives have an inflectional specificity of changing only the semantics of the word, and no change in the syntactic or grammatical function of the word is in play, "Indeed, it is a type of double derivation which applies more or less similarly (infixation of the diphthong -ay-) to a very large number of different patterns without modifying their category or subcategory" (Taine - Cheikh, 2018, p.1). According to Zewi (2006, p. 638), the very process of

diminution that Arabic conducts is also found in other semitic languages such as Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, and Akkadian.

Diminution in Arabic

Diminution in Arabic language is a technique equivalent to description in any other language. The word that undergoes diminution in Arabic helps qualify the referent more specifically. According to Ibn Usfur (1972, p.317), " taṣḡīr is inherently a description. For example, Rujail means a vile man" (Hazimy, 2006, p.6). If buyayt (a small house) is used in place of bayt (a house), the quality of size is emphasized here (Hazimy, 2006, p.6). Even more, some Arab authors paired description with diminution in their literary works, such as Taha Hussein, " ويوم القيتني هذه لفتي أصغرأ " " One day, I found a small booklet" (Hazimy, 2006, p.8).

Table 3. Diminutives of Feminine Names in Arabic Language

Sing.F	Sing.F.Dim	Plur.F	Plur.F.Dim
Kalba(t) / bitch	Kulayba (t) / little bitch	Kalbat / bitches	Kulaybat/ little bitches
Waraqa / leaf	Wurayqa/ small leaf	Waraqat / leaves	Wurayqat small leaves
Ukht / sister	Ukhayya / little sister	Akhawat / sisters	Ukhayyat / little sisters

Forming Diminution (taṣḡīr) in Arabic

Diminution (taṣḡīr) is a process that involves the insertion of the diphthong -ay- " in a given position and for a given pattern" (Taine - Cheikh, 2018, p.21). These patterns vary depending on the root; trilateral, quadrilateral, or quinqueliteral " It is to be noted that (taṣḡīr) has three patterns, 'fu'ayl', 'fu'ay'il', and 'fu'ay'eel'" (Sibaweh, 1988, p.105). The morphological process by which diminutives are formed is infixation, i.e. it takes place internally by inserting an affix to the root of a word (Abu-Mughli, 1987, p. 411). Understandably, the morphological structure of a given form restricts the user to certain fixed patterns for diminution to take place. The first basic pattern is 'fu'ayl', as in ' jabal' (a mountain)/ 'jubayl' (a small mountain), and 'kalb' (a dog) / ' kulayb' (small dog) . The second pattern, which is inflected based on the quadrilateral root of the word, is ' fu'ayil', as in ' aqrab' (a scorpion) becomes 'uqayrib' (a small scorpion. The third pattern, which is used with quinqueliteral roots, is ' fu'ay'eel', as in ' usfur' (a sparrow) that is diminuted as ' usayfeer' (a small sparrow).

Table 4. Diminutive Patterns in Arabic

Noun	Diminutive	Diminutive Pattern
Jabal	Jubayl	fu'ayl
kateb	kuwaytib	fu'ayil
dinar	dunayneer	fu'ay'eel

Table 5. that indicate

Diminutives Place Names

in Arabic Language

Place Name	Diminutive	Meaning
jayb	juwayb	A village name
Hujra(t)	Hujayra(t)	Small room
Ghurfa(t)	Ghurayfa(t)	Small room

Expressive Value of Diminution (taṣḡīr)

The notion of (taṣḡīr) is closely linked to evaluative morphology which was proposed by Scalise (1984: 132-3). According to Hazimy (2006), diminution is, after all, meaning, and meaning is not specific of one language than the other. In the same vein, Jakobson contends that "languages differ essentially in what they must convey and not in what they may convey" (Munday, 2001, p.37). (Taṣḡīr) involves a change in the form of a word by adding a morpheme, and this mere addition aims at conveying an aspect of meaning. The diminutive –y is a morpheme that has a semantic value in Arabic, that when added to a word for diminution, it incurs an inevitable shift from one situation to another, and hence a change in meaning. In this regard, Ibn Jinni (1952) maintains, "If forms are taken to be the vehicle of meaning, and undergo some change by addition, such addition should ultimately indicate a new aspect of meaning" (p. 268).

Overall, Arab grammarians (Ibn Usfur, 1972; Al-Ghalayini, 2002; Sibaweh, 1988) enumerated a plethora of meanings that diminutives serve. The first evaluation relates to minimizing the number of something, as in tumajraat (a few dates). The second function which diminution serves is more or less similar to minimizing the status of someone or something, as in kuwajtib (a less well-known writer) and kutajib (a short book). Third, to show contempt, such as rudʒail (a little man / in status or respect). The fourth and fifth functions deal with approximation of time (qubajl (a little before), buʒaid (a little after and of place (fuwaiq (a little above)), respectively. Later, Al-Ghalayini (2002) added the meaning of endearment and affection, as in bunaj (my little son).

Table 6. Arabic Diminutives: Meanings

Function	Examples
Small size	Jamal : camel / Jumayl : small camel
Small amount	Luqma :a morsel / Luqayma(t) :a nibble
Belittlement	Shurti : policeman / Shurayti: an insignificant policeman
Approximation of time	qabl: before / qubayl: a little before
Approximation of place	Fawq: above / fuwayq: a little above
Close relationship	Sahib : friend / suwayhib : a close friend
Grandeur	Dahiya(t) : shrewd / duwayhiya(t) : excessively shrewd
Endearment	Fahd : name of a person / fuhayd : nickname
enhancement	Malik: king/ Mulayk: a great king

However, some old Arab grammarians (Sibaweh, Ibn Ya'eesh, Ibn Al-Hajib, Al-Ulaymi, Al-Khalil) hold the view that the aspect of contempt is regarded as nearly the overriding feature that distinguishes diminution. "It is to be noted that diminution and belittlement are interchangeable, for they are the opposite of grandeur." (Ibn Ya'eesh, 643, p.289). "A word to which a diminutive is added indicates belittlement", (Nahwi, 1982, p.196-197). Yahya (2013: 17) concludes that the core dimension of diminution is the semantic one as it indicates belittlement (contempt or degradation), diminishment in size, decrease in number or quantity, decrease of time period or distance, or alleviating psychological barriers (pity or endearment). Furthermore, diminutives are systematically devised based on fixed patterns where this choice largely depends on phonetic, semantic, or even rhythmic scales that contribute to enhancing the aesthetic element.

The aforementioned purposes and semantic aspects of diminutives that the grammarians listed were not absent from Sibaweh's regard as he discussed them in his book. Yet, he reckons that belittlement and contempt are predominantly the prime expressive values for which diminutives are mostly resorted to in Arabic language. Diminution or (taṣḡīr), for that matter, means in Arabic belittlement and decrease, so if something becomes small, it will decrease in size.

Difference in form among languages is an inevitable outcome in any incident of cross-linguistic transference. In his attempt to explore the nature of equivalence, Jakobson concludes that in any message equivalent in meaning between two languages, "the code-units will be different since they belong to two different sign systems which partition reality differently, (Munday, 2001, p. 37). For Jakobson (1959, p. 129), obligatory grammar and lexicon result in cross-linguistic differences among languages. However, languages can still communicate the intended meaning by using a host of equivalent forms, "...the problem of meaning and equivalence thus focuses on differences in the structure and terminology of languages rather than on any inability of one language to render a message that has been written in another verbal language"(Munday, 2001, p.37)".

Addressing the issue of equivalence, Mona Baker in her influential book, *In Other Words, A coursebook on translation*, devotes one of the chapters to exploring equivalence at word level. "Potential areas of difficulty in translation" are pinpointed through the discussion of problems that are caused by "lack of equivalence at word level" (Baker, 2001, p.10). Differences in form is a problem that arises from lack of equivalent forms (affixes) in the target language. The difficulty that these forms pose is not grounded on any inability of rendering the propositional meaning. This can be coped for by an appropriate paraphrase. What is intricate here is that these affixes are used based on their aesthetic value; "contribute to evoked meaning (washateria, carpeteria, and groceteria)" or those which "convey expressive meaning (journalese, translationese, and legalese)"(Baker, 2001, p. 24). Arabic, among other languages, is exemplified as lacking a ready mechanism to deal with such forms, and ends up with the Arab translator to only render the propositional meaning by paraphrase. At other instances, such as the case with forms that convey evoked or expressive meaning, even paraphrase is unattainable.

What this paper intends to prove is that Arabic does have ready mechanisms to relay additional aspects of meaning in addition to a given form's propositional meaning. Diminution, for instance, is one such mechanism that can be proposed as a strategy for the problem of differences of form that Baker mentions in her book. If a word like "translationese" refers to "a stilted form" of writing that often reflects "disapproval", the Arabic word "turaijimah" may be used as an equivalent. Clearly, turaijimah is a diminuted form of the word "tarjamah" and it is inflected by the infixation of the diphthong - ay -. Equally obviously, this change from tarjamah to turaijimah incurs changes on the semantic level of the word. The diminuted form "turaijimah" suggests a form of writing lower in status than tarjamah.

3. Conclusion

The preceding discussion on diminution reveals that diminutive forms in Arabic language have a host of meanings that, in addition to reduction, express smallness, contempt, approximation (time, distance), pity, endearment, and gentleness. The study also shows that diminutive forms in Arabic, like affixes in English, are also a type of derivation. It further suggests that diminutives can be used as a solution to some equivalence problems at word level. The problem of differences in form suggested by Baker in her influential book, *In Other Words*, provides a prime example. Due to their semantic and aesthetic character, diminutive forms may serve as a ready mechanism to overcome the problem of differences in form.

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