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# Cultural meanings of 'small': Similar yet different semantic networks of diminutives in Thai and Korean

Kultida Khammee<sup>1</sup>

Seongha Rhee<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Phayao, Thailand,*

<sup>2</sup>*Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Thailand,*

<sup>3</sup>*Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea*

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## Abstract

Lexemes denoting 'small' typically undergo a range of semantic or functional extension either as free-standing lexical forms, or weakly-grammaticalized derivational morphemes, or even fully grammatical forms (such as classifiers). There is a body of literature analyzing diminutives in individual languages and across languages. However, comparative analyses between typologically and genealogically distinct languages have been largely underrepresented.

This research analyzes an isolating, Kra-Dai language (Thai) and an agglutinating, Transeurasian language (Korean). A comparative analysis reveals that the smallness concept in Thai forms an elaborate conceptual network in five major domains, i.e. YOUNG & LOWER DEGREE, SMALL SIZE, LOW DENSITY, and LOW CONFIGURATIONAL COMPLEXITY; whereas Korean network involves WEAK & INFERIOR, NON-HUMAN, MEMBER, and PARTIAL. Semantic extension directionalities in Thai and Korean diminutive lexemes exhibit certain similarities but also a number of differences in the motivating inference patterns, e.g., 'small therefore cute' in Thai and 'small therefore contemptible' in Korean. In particular, Thai diminutives lean toward the more neutral or positive meanings, whereas Korean diminutives toward the largely negative and pejorative meanings including animal and animal body-part naming.

Drawing upon corpus data this paper examines the conceptual extension patterns behind the evaluative morphopragmatics of diminutives from crosslinguistic and grammaticalization perspectives.

**Keywords:** *diminutive, Thai, Korean, semantic extension, conceptual network*

## Introduction

Size assessment evidently constitutes a fundamental dimensional perception, and thus the lexemes denoting size, e.g. 'small', 'big', etc., surface as members of the basic vocabulary (cf. 'the Swadesh 207 list', Huang et al. 2007; Leipzig-Jakarta 100, Haspelmath & Tadmor 2009). These lexemes are closely associated with evaluative notions in language for their practical or aesthetic values. Among such lexemes are those that denote 'smallness' which typically undergo a range of semantic or functional extension either as free-standing lexical forms, or weakly-grammaticalized derivational morphemes, known as the diminutives, or even fully grammatical forms, such as classifiers. There is a body of literature analyzing diminutives in individual languages and crosslinguistic patterns of the diminutive meanings (Nichols 1971, Wierzbicka 1984, Nieuwenhuis 1985, Trigo 1991, Jurafsky 1996, Mendoza 1998, 2005, Rhee 2001, Gillis 2008, Taine-Cheikh

2018, Vanhove & Ahmed 2018, Rebrus and Szigetvári 2021, among many others). However, comparative analyses between typologically and genealogically distinct languages have been largely underrepresented (cf. Matisoff 1992, Dressler & Barbaresi 1994, Chappell 2000, Ponsonnet 2018), and this research intends to fill this gap, with an isolating Kra-Dai language (Thai) and an agglutinating Transeurasian language (Korean).

Since words encoding the notion of ‘smallness’ tend to be in the borderland of grammar and lexicon and the affix-word boundary is fuzzy in Thai and Korean, we will focus on the productive ‘diminutive expressions’ in Modern Thai and Modern Korean, without discussing their morpho-syntactic behavior. The objectives of this paper are twofold: (i) to take inventory of reasonably established diminutive expressions, and (ii) to compare Thai and Korean to identify commonalities and differences in semantic and functional extension patterns.

The data sources are various dictionaries and lexica for initial inventory building, and the quantitative analysis is based on contemporary corpora, i.e., the Thai National Corpus (TNC) for Thai and the Drama and Movies Corpus (DMC) for Korean. TNC is an online searchable, 33.4 million word corpus, developed by Chulalongkorn University. The corpus texts are mostly dated from 1988 through 2017, accounting for 75.8%, but the corpus data also includes the texts of unknown date (18.6%) and pre-1988 texts (5.7%). The Drama and Movies Corpus consists of 24.2 million words and is a collection of 7,454 scenarios of dramas, sitcoms, and movies dating from 1992 through 2015, developed by Min Li while at Seoul National University (currently at Tsinghua University). The search engine used is UNICONC, developed by Jinho Park of Seoul National University.

The rest of this paper is organized in the following way: section 2 addresses the sources and semantic extension of diminutive expressions of Thai; section 3 addresses the sources and semantic extension of diminutive expressions in Korean; section 4 discusses some issues of theoretical significance; and section 5 summarizes and concludes the paper.

## Semantic extension in Thai

Thai has a large number of diminutive expressions; the inventory taken from the primary sources consists of 32 items. Among the most common diminutive expressions are *luk* ‘child’ based on the dimensions of SIZE and AGE, *noi* ‘little’ based on the dimension of SIZE, and *lek* ‘small’ based on the dimensions of SIZE, AGE, and ORDER. These expressions tend to carry positive evaluation of the object being described in addition to the objective, thus, neutral description of the said object (cf. ‘morphopragmatics’ Dressler & Barbaresi 1994, Appah & Amfo 2011; ‘pragmatics of diminutive’ Badarneh 2010, Spasovski 2012; ‘expressive use’ Bratus 1969, Taine-Cheikh 2018; ‘emotive meaning’ Lockyer 2014; ‘emotional connotations’ Ponsonnet 2018). For instance, as shown in (1), *noi* primarily denoting ‘little’ carries the ‘small’ meaning as the core diminutive semantics as in *mu noi* ‘small pig’ evokes positive evaluation associated with being ‘small, young and cute’. Similarly, *luk* ‘small’ as in *luk ta* ‘eyeball’ usually carries the positive connotation of being ‘cute and round’. *Lek* is also among the common diminutive expressions as in *dek lek* ‘a small kid’. This usually carries the connotation of being ‘young in age’.

### Example Set 1

- a. *luk: luk ta* [small eye] ‘eyeball’ (> ‘cute and round’)
- b. *noi: mu noi* [pig small] ‘a small pig’ (> ‘small, young, and cute’)
- c. *lek: dek lek* [kid small] ‘a small kid’ (> ‘young in age’)

As shown above, the tendency of positive connotation being associated with the diminutive expressions is common and strong, but there are also a number of instances in which the opposite directionality is associated with them. For instance, *lek* ‘small’ as listed in (1c), by virtue of operating on the order dimension, may evoke negative evaluation, as in *ban lek* ‘concubine (< ‘small house’). Even in terms of physique, smallness of body and body-parts is typically associated with the negative evaluation, such as *tua lek* ‘small/thin body’, *nom lek* ‘small breasts’, etc. since these are, or have been, the sign of poverty and malnutrition. Note, however, that in the common practice of Thai’s nickname-making, *lek* is also used to invoke the endearing connotation based on the last-born child or small child. All this points to the fact that evaluations are dependent on the context in which the forms occur. It is also noteworthy that *luk* ‘child’ is fully grammaticalized as a classifier, which is used in quantifying fruit or round objects (cf. Matisoff 1991). The conceptual connection between a child and a round object is well-motivated, because a child’s overall shape with less developed extremities is more round than that of an adult. Similarly, the ‘roundness’ is not strictly configurational, because some geological formations like mountains (but not mountain ranges) can be counted with the classifier *luk*, as well.

The diminutive expressions are divided according to evaluative connotations they are typically associated with. Evaluative connotation is classified on a ternary classification: positive, neutral and negative, the decision of which is largely impressionistic and is necessarily based on the native speaker’s intuition. The groups are shown in Tables 1-3. In the tables, the frequency statistics taken from the TNC are also shown, along with the item’s sources, dimensions, and evaluative connotation, among others. In the designation of the evaluation, the virgule (/) is used for listing the second item being lower than but still comparable to the level of the preceding item, and the square bracket ([..]) is used for the item that is less frequent level than the preceding designation. The parentheses ((..)) are used to indicate the prominent feature of the evaluation. The lexical strengths of the 32 diminutive items in Thai are of varying degrees, i.e., they are used at different frequency. The frequency is based on the ratio of per million words (pmw). One caveat with the frequency data is that the given figure does not represent the number of instances displaying positive or negative evaluation; it only represents the use frequency of the form with the diminutive meaning in the corpus (note that all homophones have been hand-sanitized). Since the frequency of encoding negative- or positive attitude by a form is proportionate to the frequency of the form, in the event of dealing with a large number of instances and analyzing individual forms is practically impossible, this comprehensive statistic should, at least, be indicative of the state of affairs being investigated.

Table 1 lists the diminutive expressions that are positively oriented, i.e., Positive, Positive/Neutral, or Neutral/Positive. This group has a total of 13 forms, with the 2,290 pmw aggregate token frequency. The positive evaluation is mostly based on the qualities of being cute and, less commonly, being competent.

| Form          | Source/<br>primary<br>meaning | Typical example         | Dimension | Evaluative<br>connotation | Freq.<br>(pmw) |
|---------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|----------------|
| <i>noi</i>    | little                        | small pig               | SIZE, AGE | Positive<br>(cute)        | 881            |
| <i>luk</i>    | child                         | eyeball, bullet, kitten | SIZE, AGE | Positive<br>(cute)        | 647            |
| <i>nong</i>   | younger                       | younger sister/brother  | AGE       | Positive<br>(cute)        | 383            |
| <i>on</i>     | soft                          | (soft) baby             | HARDNESS  | Positive<br>(cute)        | 156            |
| <i>la-iat</i> | fine                          | fine sand               | SIZE      | Neutral/<br>Positive      | 87             |

|                      |                         |                                |                       |                                |       |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| <i>bang</i>          | thin, fine              | skinny woman                   | VOLUME                | Neutral/<br>Positive           | 69    |
| <i>yom</i>           | small                   | small bag                      | SIZE                  | Positive                       | 33    |
| <i>chio</i>          | tiny                    | a tiny book                    | SIZE                  | Positive<br>(cute)/<br>Neutral | 17    |
| <i>la-iat on</i>     | delicate                | elegant weaving                | SIZE, EXTENT          | Positive<br>(elegant)          | 15    |
| <i>yomyao</i>        | cheap                   | low-priced goods               | PRICE                 | Positive                       | 2     |
| <i>non</i>           | younger                 | younger sister/<br>brother     | AGE                   | Positive<br>(cute)             | 0     |
| <i>lekphrikkhinu</i> | small but co<br>mpetent | young but competent<br>child   | AGE +<br>SIGNIFICANCE | Positive<br>(competent)        | 0     |
| <i>ai tao</i>        | cute little             | cute man, chubby cute<br>thing | AGE                   | Positive<br>(cute)             | 0     |
| Total                |                         |                                |                       |                                | 2,290 |

Table 1. Positively-oriented diminutive expressions in Thai

Thai diminutive expressions (Table 2), numbering 13, that are neutral, i.e., not oriented toward either positive or negative evaluation. The aggregate token frequency of this group is 579 pmw. It is evident that positively-oriented diminutive expressions their use frequency outnumber those of the neutrally-oriented expressions by a great margin.

| Form              | Source/<br>primary<br>meaning | Typical example              | Dimension                   | Evaluative<br>connotation | Freq.<br>(pmw) |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| <i>bao</i>        | light                         | light material               | DENSITY, WEIGHT             | Neutral                   | 180            |
| <i>yoi</i>        | small                         | retailer                     | SIZE, DEPENDENCY            | Neutral                   | 130            |
| <i>lek noi</i>    | little                        | cry a little                 | QUANTITY, DEGREE            | Neutral                   | 120            |
| <i>nitnoi</i>     | little                        | a little Spanish             | QUALITY                     | Neutral                   | 43             |
| <i>numsao</i>     | young                         | teenagers                    | AGE (MATURITY)              | Neutral                   | 40             |
| <i>nit nueng</i>  | little,<br>approximate        | cry a little                 | QUANTITY, DEGREE            | Neutral                   | 24             |
| <i>pon</i>        | powdered                      | ground chili pepper          | SIZE                        | Neutral                   | 11             |
| <i>(kh)thao</i>   | ash                           | ash                          | SIZE                        | Neutral                   | 10             |
| <i>chun</i>       | micro-                        | microorganism,<br>microscope | SIZE                        | Neutral                   | 10             |
| <i>baobang</i>    | sparse                        | light traffic                | DENSITY                     | Neutral                   | 8              |
| <i>lukchang</i>   | elephant calf                 | 'I' (in prayers)             | SMALL, HIERARCHY            | Neutral                   | 1              |
| <i>khiphong</i>   | infinitesimal                 | dust problems                | SIGNIFICANCE,<br>DIFFICULTY | Neutral                   | 1              |
| <i>krachidrit</i> | small                         | tiny apartment               | SIZE                        | Neutral                   | 1              |
| Total             |                               |                              |                             |                           | 579            |

Table 2. Neutrally-oriented diminutive expressions in Thai

One aspect to be noted is that *lukchang* ‘elephant calf’ is typically used as a humilific first-person pronoun by the people praying to deities to humbly refer to himself or herself, in analogy to a young child before mighty beings, in order to acknowledge their subordinate status and to win favor from them (for discussion of politeness marking with diminutives, see Mendoza 2005 for Spanish and Matsumoto 1984 for Japanese).

Table 3 lists negatively-oriented diminutive expressions that are either Negative, or Neutral [Negative]. There are 6 members in this group and their aggregate token frequency is 555 pmw. The number of the members in this group is much smaller than the positive and neutral group. In terms of the frequency, the negatively-oriented expressions are nearly the same as the neutrally-oriented expressions. The negative evaluation tends to be derived from the lexical meaning of the source lexemes, e.g., *khi* ‘feces’, *phon* ‘dust’, *lek* ‘small, inferior in order’, among others.

| Form                | Source/<br>primary<br>meaning | Typical example                             | Dimension                   | Evaluative<br>connotation | Freq.<br>(pmw) |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| <i>lek</i>          | small                         | small car, small kid                        | SIZE, AGE, ORDER            | Neutral<br>[Negative]     | 449            |
| <i>khi</i>          | feces                         | fine dust, fine shavings,<br>always panicky | SIZE, TIME                  | Negative                  | 69             |
| <i>phon</i>         | dust                          | fine dust                                   | SIZE, SIGNIFICANCE          | Neutral<br>[Negative]     | 33             |
| <i>khrae</i>        | tiny (dwarf)                  | dwarf                                       | SIZE                        | Neutral<br>[Negative]     | 3              |
| <i>kai on</i>       | baby chicken                  | inexperienced person                        | COMPETENCE                  | Negative                  | 1              |
| <i>thaokhiphong</i> | dust-like                     | dust-like problems                          | SIGNIFICANCE,<br>DIFFICULTY | Neutral<br>[Negative]     | 0              |
| Total               |                               |                                             |                             |                           | 555            |

Table 3. Negatively-oriented diminutive expressions in Thai

From the tabulated data, it is obvious that, in general, Thai diminutives that are productively used signal positive attitudes or neutral attitudes. The positively-oriented items are more than four times more frequent than either the negatively- or neutrally-oriented items.

It is also interesting that Thai diminutive meanings form an elegant conceptual network (cf. for other languages, see Contini-Morava 1995, Jurafsky 1996, Bosanac et al. 2009). As is obvious from the source lexemes in the Tables, the primary diminutive expressions carry the meaning of ‘small/little’ and ‘baby (human and non-human)’, but there are many other meanings that emerged and are in conceptual affinity with them. The semantic and conceptual network, involving such dimensions as YOUNG & LESSER DEGREE, SMALL SIZE, LOW DENSITY, and LOW CONFIGURATIONAL COMPLEXITY are shown in Figure 1. Also based on the frequency information from the Tables, the prominent concepts in Thai diminutives are highlighted with a circle.

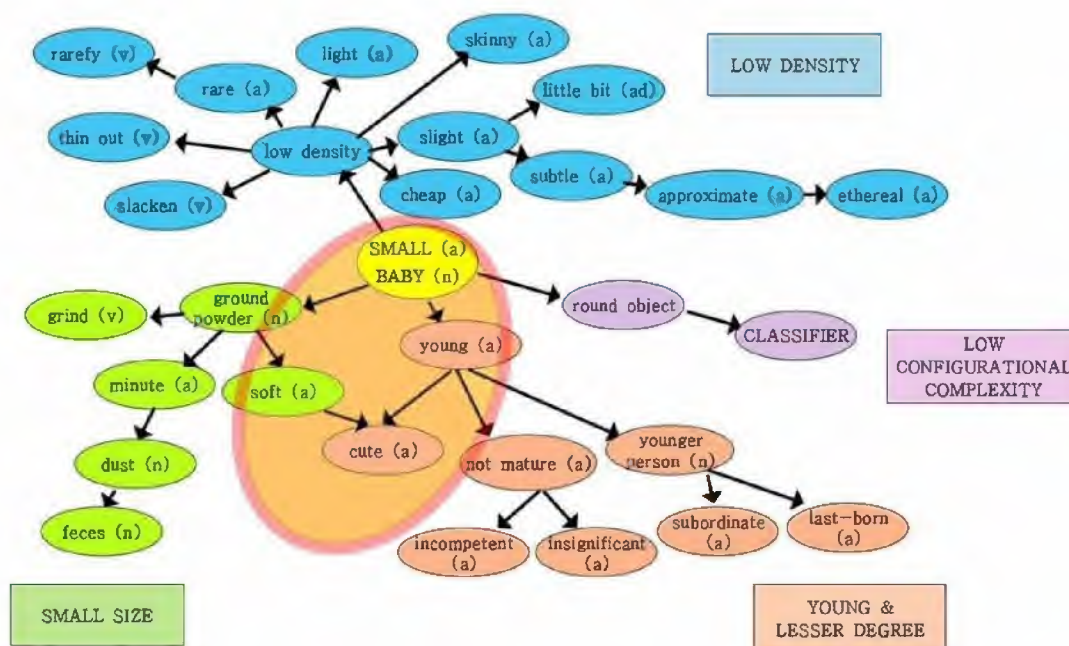


Figure 1. Conceptual network of Thai diminutives

From the statistics of use frequency, there are eight diminutive expressions out of 32 that are used at the frequency of 100 pmw or higher, i.e., *noi* 'small, little', *luk* 'child', *lek* 'small', *nong* 'young(er)', *bae* 'light-weight', and *on* 'soft'. These are the major diminutive descriptors and they tend to contribute to the positive connotation of being 'cute' (note, however, that *lek* 'small' also creates the negative connotation, as alluded to in the preceding elaboration), from such denotative meanings as SMALL, BABY, YOUNG, LIGHT, and SOFT.

### Semantic Extension in Korean

Korean diminutive expressions tend to be bound morphemes, i.e., a number of prefixes and suffixes, numbering 16 in total. There are some diminutive descriptors that border on autonomous lexemes, such as *casik* 'child' and *saykki* 'child', but these also tend to be, but not always, used with a demonstrative 'this' or 'that' instead of completely standing alone. Korean diminutive expressions are listed in Example Set 2:

#### Example Set 2

- Prefixes: *cakun*- 'small', *so<sub>1</sub>*- 'small', *so<sub>2</sub>* 'young', *elin*- 'young', *ay*- 'baby', *aki*- 'baby', *ayki*- 'baby', *saykki*- 'animal baby', *al*- 'egg', *kkoma*- 'small person'
- Suffixes: *-aci* 'baby', *-aki* 'baby', *-ay* 'child', *-saykki* 'animal baby', *-ali* 'egg'
- Minimally root-forms: *casik* 'child', *saykki* 'child', *kkoma* 'small person'

Examples Set 3 below show prefixes. *Cakun* 'small, little', when used as an unbound form, is an adjective, modifying a following noun. As a diminutive prefix, i.e., a bound form, it denotes something small or secondary as in *cakun-cip* 'small house', i.e., 'concubine', 'younger sibling's or second uncle's house or family'. Similarly, *elin* is an adjective, meaning 'young', but as a diminutive prefix it means 'young, innocent, weak'. *So* is a Sino-Korean homophone; *so<sub>1</sub>* meaning 'small' and *so<sub>2</sub>* meaning 'young'. As a prefix it denotes 'small, young, weak, inferior'.

### Example Set 3

Diminutive prefixes

- a. *cakun-* ‘small, little’ (e.g., *cakun-cip* [small house] > ‘concubine; younger sibling’s or second uncle’s house’)
- b. *elin-* ‘young’ (e.g., *elin-yang* [young sheep] > ‘lamb; Jesus’) (> ‘young, innocent, weak’)
- c. *so-* ‘small’ (e.g., *so-may* [small-sale] ‘retail’) (> ‘small, young, weak, inferior’) (etymologically *so*<sub>1</sub> ‘small’, *so*<sub>2</sub> ‘young’)

More importantly, Korean has suffixes *-aki*, *-aci*, *-angi* and *-ali* (and their variants) that are highly grammaticalized as derivational diminutive markers, as listed Example Set 4. For example, *songaci* in Example 4a means ‘cow baby’ or ‘calf’. These suffixes mean ‘small, offspring, imitation, weak, exactness, individuation, part, animal body-part, animal’. The suffix *ali* in Example 4b originated from ‘egg’, e.g., ‘rooster-egg’ meaning ‘chick’. The diminutive suffix has the meanings similar to those in Example 4a.

### Example Set 4

Diminutive suffixes

- a. *-aki/-aci/-angi* (< ‘baby’) (e.g., *songaci* ‘calf’ < *sho-aci* [cow-baby]) (> ‘small, offspring, imitation, weak, exactness, individuation, part, animal body-part, animal’)
- b. *-ali* (< ‘egg’) (e.g., *pyengali* ‘chick’ < *piyuk-ali* [rooster-egg]) (> ‘small, offspring, exactness, individuation, part, animal body-part’)

The fully grammaticalized suffixes nearly always signal negative attitude. For example, *kkolaci* (*kkol-aci*) is derived from *kkol* ‘shape’, and it means ‘contemptible appearance’. Also, *mokaci* (*mok-aci*) is from *mok* ‘neck’, and it means an ‘animal’s neck’ or pejoratively, a ‘contemptible person’s neck’ (for a discussion of pejorative use of diminutives in Spanish, see Gooch 1967; ‘depreciatives’ Wierzbicka 1984). More examples are shown in Example Set 5 below:

### Example Set 5

Fully grammaticalized diminutive suffixes

- |                         |                                      |                                |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. <i>kkolaci</i> :     | contemptible appearance              | (< <i>kkol</i> ‘shape’)        |
| b. <i>mokaci</i> :      | animal’s neck, contemptible neck     | (< <i>mok</i> ‘neck’)          |
| c. <i>ssakaci</i> :     | contemptibly narrow mind             | (< <i>ssak</i> ‘sprout’)       |
| d. <i>pcphwulaki</i> :  | bothersome nap (on cloth)            | (< <i>pcphwul</i> ‘nap, shag’) |
| e. <i>cecthayngki</i> : | contemptible breast                  | (< <i>cec</i> ‘breast’)        |
| f. <i>ssuleyki</i> :    | trash, garbage                       | (< <i>ssul-</i> v. ‘sweep’)    |
| g. <i>ssalaki</i> :     | broken (useless) rice                | (< <i>ssal</i> ‘rice’)         |
| h. <i>congali</i> :     | calf (body-part; often too informal) | (< <i>cyong</i> ‘heel’)        |
| i. <i>akali</i> :       | contemptible mouth                   | (< <i>ak</i> ‘mouth, jaw(?)’)  |
| j. <i>cwutwungali</i> : | contemptible mouth                   | (< <i>cwutwungi</i> ‘mouth’)   |

It is interesting to note that Korean diminutives are not closely associated with positive evaluation. There are instances where certain diminutive expressions are used as endearment terms, e.g., *nay-saykki* ‘my child’ or *nay-kangaci* ‘my puppy’, both for one’s child, but such instances are extremely rare and cannot be generalized as a tendency.

Table 4 lists Korean diminutive expressions that carry neutral connotations, a total of 16 forms in 20 categories, in the descending order of use frequency. Note that unlike Thai diminutive expressions, the evaluative polarity of which is strongly determined by the context, the evaluative connotations of Korean diminutives are largely lexically determined. Thus, the forms are listed with differentiation of diminutive meanings that host the noun.

| Form                   | Source/<br>primary meaning | Typical example                      | Dimension    | Evaluation | FREQ<br>(pmw) |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>cakun-</i>          | small                      | small intestines                     | SIZE         | Neutral    | 249           |
| <i>-aci</i>            | baby                       | puppy                                | REPRODUCTION | Neutral    | 201           |
| <i>(-)casik</i>        | child                      | child                                | REPRODUCTION | Neutral    | 159           |
| <i>cakun-</i>          | small                      | second<br>older/younger<br>sister    | ORDER        | Neutral    | 117           |
| <i>so<sub>1</sub>-</i> | small                      | small drum                           | SIZE         | Neutral    | 106           |
| <i>-aki</i>            | baby                       | crumb                                | SIZE         | Neutral    | 101           |
| <i>so<sub>2</sub>-</i> | young                      | young girl                           | AGE          | Neutral    | 63            |
| <i>elin-</i>           | young                      | young sprout                         | AGE          | Neutral    | 63            |
| <i>ay-</i>             | baby                       | young squash                         | MATURITY     | Neutral    | 24            |
| <i>al-</i>             | egg                        | pill                                 | SHAPE        | Neutral    | 13            |
| <i>-al</i>             | egg                        | go-stone                             | SHAPE        | Neutral    | 13            |
| <i>-ali</i>            | egg                        | edge                                 | SIZE         | Neutral    | 5             |
| <i>kkoma-</i>          | small person               | little light-bulb                    | SIZE         | Neutral    | 5             |
| <i>so<sub>1</sub>-</i> | small                      | retail                               | SCOPE        | Neutral    | 0             |
| <i>so<sub>1</sub>-</i> | small                      | young child                          | AGE          | Neutral    | 0             |
| <i>so<sub>1</sub>-</i> | small                      | urine, lower-case,<br>minority party | ORDER        | Neutral    | 0             |
| <i>so<sub>1</sub>-</i> | small                      | humble servant                       | COMPLETENESS | Neutral    | 0             |
| <i>aki-</i>            | baby                       | baby angel                           | MATURITY     | Neutral    | 0             |
| <i>ayki-</i>           | baby                       | young pupa                           | MATURITY     | Neutral    | 0             |
| <i>saykki(-)</i>       | animal baby                | pinky finger                         | SIZE         | Neutral    | 0             |
| Total                  |                            |                                      |              |            | 1,119         |

Table 4: Neutrally-oriented diminutive expressions in Korean

As Table 4 shows, the source meanings are largely ‘small’, ‘baby’, ‘young’, and ‘egg’, and the dimensions involved are SIZE, REPRODUCTION, ORDER, AGE, MATURITY, SHAPE, SCOPE, and COMPLETENESS.

Table 5 lists negative diminutives, which are rank-ordered by the use frequency, a total of 9 forms in 10 categories. The items are smaller in number than the neutrally-oriented diminutives but their total use frequency is comparable to the latter (cf. 1,119 vs. 1,069).

| Form             | Source/<br>primary meaning | Typical example                 | Dimension              | Evaluation | FREQ<br>(pmw) |
|------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|------------|---------------|
| <i>(-)casik</i>  | child                      | contemptible child              | HONOR                  | Negative   | 716           |
| <i>-aci</i>      | baby                       | animal body-part                | HUMANNESS              | Negative   | 127           |
| <i>(-)saykki</i> | animal baby                | bird chick,<br>contemptible rat | REPRODUCTION,<br>HONOR | Negative   | 80            |
| <i>-ay</i>       | child                      | immature child                  | MATURITY               | Negative   | 51            |
| <i>soj-</i>      | small                      | timidity                        | STRENGTH               | Negative   | 42            |
| <i>-aki</i>      | baby                       | trash                           | SIGNIFICANCE           | Negative   | 32            |
| <i>elin-</i>     | young                      | immature person                 | MATURITY               | Negative   | 16            |
| <i>-saykki</i>   | animal baby                | bird chick,<br>contemptible rat | REPRODUCTION,<br>HONOR | Negative   | 5             |
| <i>cakun-</i>    | small                      | concubine                       | ORDER                  | Negative   | 0             |
| <i>al-</i>       | egg                        | naked body, poorest<br>beggar   | QUALITY                | Negative   | 0             |
| Total            |                            |                                 |                        |            | 1,069         |

Table 5. Negatively-oriented diminutive expressions in Korean

As Table 5 shows, the negativity is associated with the negative value of the item being described in the conceptual dimensions of HONOR, HUMANNESS, REPRODUCTION, MATURITY, STRENGTH, SIGNIFICANCE, ORDER and QUALITY. Since the source semantics are more or less the same as the neutrally-oriented diminutives, it can be deduced that the directionality of the negativity is a matter of subjectivity. For instance, if a ‘child’, who, by definition, is immature, is viewed objectively as a young human being, the diminutive may simply mean ‘young’, whereas, if the child is viewed as a person who has not yet mature and is regarded incompetent or less than a real human, the diminutive may mean ‘inferior’. This type of negativization, whereby a negative evaluation is acquired by a form, has advanced to a great extent with many of these diminutive forms.

Korean diminutives also form a conceptual network, in which the members are metonymically related. The source concepts are ‘small’, ‘child’, and ‘egg’, from their etymology. The concepts are extended along the threads of NON-HUMAN, SECONDARY, MEMBER, PARTIAL, and most importantly, INFERIOR. In consideration of the use frequency, which reflects productivity and conceptual salience, Korean diminutives are primarily leaning toward INFERIOR, NON-HUMAN and SECONDARY, all negative concepts. The conceptual network reflecting semantic-functional extension is shown in Figure 2. Also, based on the frequency information in the Tables 4 and 5, the prominent conceptual extension pattern is highlighted in a circle.

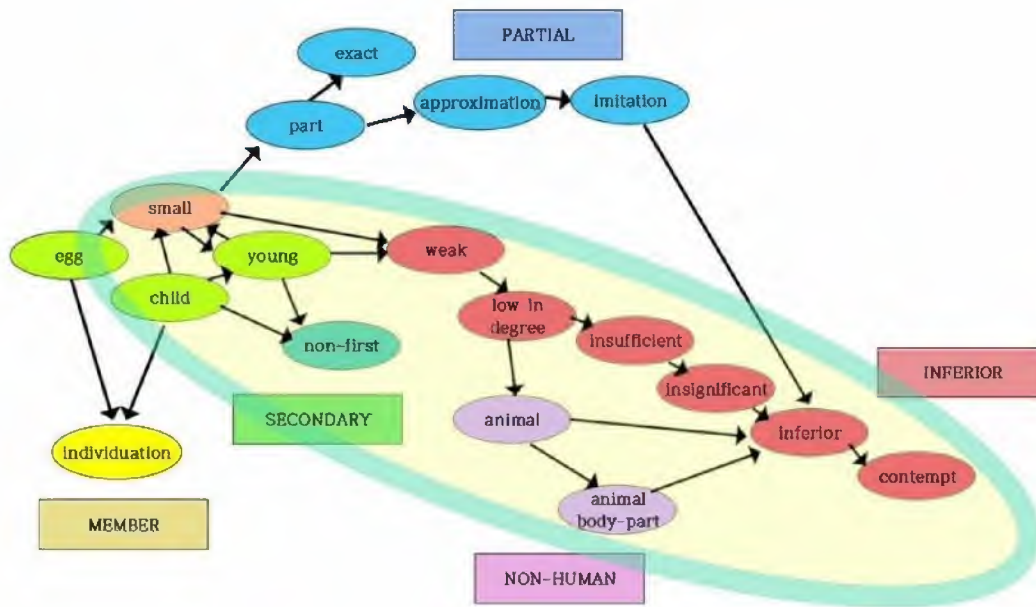


Figure 2. Conceptual network of Korean diminutives

## Discussion

In the foregoing sections, we have looked at the diminutive expressions in Thai and Korean focusing on their lexical origins, their functions and functional extension patterns, and their lexicogrammatical strengths. In the present section, we address some issues of theoretical importance in relation to the diminutives in the two languages.

### *Commonalities*

As elaborated in the preceding discussion, Thai and Korean have some notable commonalities. First of all, the sources of diminutive expressions are remarkably similar, ‘small, little’, ‘young’, and ‘child’, even though there are other sources, not shared by the two languages (see ‘Differences’ below). Furthermore, the conceptual developments of the diminutives in the two languages also show a great level of similarity. In other words, they both have the core extensional patterns from the source lexemes, as shown in Example Set 6:

#### **Example Set 6**

- a. From BABY to diminutive
- b. From SMALL to YOUNG to IMMATURE to INSIGNIFICANT
- c. From YOUNG to INSIGNIFICANT
- d. From SMALL to PART to APPROXIMATE

The commonalities of sources and extensional patterns strongly suggest that linguistic forms and their organization are motivated and, further, that the motivation is in human cognition that share operative mechanisms regardless of the individual languages in terms of their typology or genealogy. It is also noteworthy that the extensional nodes bear similarities between the previous (source) notion to the later (extended) notion, the networks are primarily the product of metonymization.

## *Differences*

A comparison of the two languages presents a number of differences as well. Most prominently, Thai diminutives are strongly inclined to the [Small, so Cute] thread of extension, the positively-oriented pattern, as is evidenced by the facts that a larger number of diminutive expressions show such a pattern (e.g., 13 members in the positive group vs. 6 members in the negative group; cf. Tables 1 and 3), and that the use frequency of the positive group far exceeds that of the negative group (e.g., 2,290 pmw of the positive group vs. 555 pmw of the negative group in their aggregate frequency).

This presents a sharp contrast with Korean. Korean diminutives are strongly inclined to the [Small, so Bad] thread of extension. This pattern is more pronounced with the highly grammaticalized diminutives. As discussed in section 3, Korean diminutives have not developed in the positive direction. The neutrally-oriented diminutive group consists of 15 members in 20 categories, with the total frequency of 1,119 pmw, whereas the negatively-oriented diminutive group consists of 9 members in 10 categories, with the total frequency of 1,069 pmw. The prominence of the negative orientation in Korean is in vivid contrast with the positive orientation in Thai.

There are also other differences, observable from the states of affairs in the two languages. These differences are summarized in Table 6 below:

- a. In Thai, [Baby] and [Small] are the central concepts, whereas in Korean [Baby] and [Egg] are the central concepts.
- b. In Thai, the [Small to Cute] extension is dominant, whereas in Korean, the [Small to Bad] extension is dominant.
- c. Thai has the [Small to Ground to Fine] extension, but Korean does not.
- d. Korean has the [Child and Egg to Individuation] extension, but Thai does not.
- e. For the development of Contemptibility, Thai has the [Feces to Contemptible] extension, but Korean has the [Animal to Inferior to Contemptible] extension.
- f. Thai has the grammaticalization of a classifier from the diminutive, and Korean has the grammaticalization of suffixes and prefixes from the diminutives.

Table 6

## *Crosslinguistic Comparison*

There is a body of literature addressing diminutives in individual languages as well as across languages, e.g., lexica by Heine et al. (1991) and Kuteva et al. (2019), and the crosslinguistic research by Heine et al. (1991) and Jurafsky (1993, 1996). Considering the findings in these studies, the development of diminutives in Thai and Korean also shows interesting aspects.

Crosslinguistically, it has been reported that diminutives develop into, among others, Female Gender, Pet, Sympathy, and Euphemism, but these common extensional routes are not attested in Thai and Korean.

Furthermore, some findings in the present research have not yet been reported elsewhere. For instance, Thai has the extension pattern to [Low Density], which is not attested across languages. Similarly, Korean has the ‘egg’ as a diminutive etymon, which is not attested across languages. In addition, Korean has the extension pattern to [Contemptible], which is a step further from ‘insignificant’.

## Summary and Conclusion

This paper addressed the diminutive expressions in Thai and Korean, with reference to their form and meaning. Thai and Korean both have a number of diminutive expressions, i.e., Thai has 32 forms and Korean has 16 forms in total. Thai has many autonomous lexical forms carrying diminutive meanings, and a highly grammaticalized classifier from one of them. On the other hand, Korean has some prefixes and a few highly grammaticalized diminutive suffixes. The present investigation shows that Thai and Korean diminutives have a number of common sources and extensional patterns. However, most prominently, the diminutives in the two languages show a big contrast: the predominant Thai extension pattern is one characterizable as [Small, so Cute], i.e., positively-biased, whereas the predominant Korean extension pattern is [Small, so bad], i.e., negatively-biased.

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