

A MORPHO-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF DIMINUTIVES IN EKEGUSII LANGUAGE KISII, KENYA

Jane M. Ombati^{1*}, Philes N. Onchieku²

¹MaasaiMaraUniversity, Kenya

²Mount Kenya University, Kenya

*Corresponding Authors: Jane M. Ombati, MaasaiMaraUniversity, Kenya

Abstract: *Diminutives can express different meanings in different contexts. However, there is little documented evidence on morpho-pragmatic analysis of diminutives in Ekegusii language. This study therefore morpho-pragmatically analyzed the diminutives of Ekegusii language with the view of exploring their markers, examining various meanings that they convey within and outside contexts in Ekegusii language and establishing the various contexts that determine their meaning. To guide the research, the following theories were used: morpheme-based theory, politeness theory, cooperative principle theory and referential theory of language. A descriptive research design was employed to achieve the stated objectives owing to its ability to provide information. The target population for this study comprised all Ekegusiinative speakers. The researchers purposively sampled Bobasi clan of Gusii community. Then a simple random sample was taken in the clan which comprised 38 females and 38 males. The study employed both interviews and questionnaires (semi structured) to gather information from the study respondents. Four native speakers (two males and two females) were sampled purposively, interviewed and information was tape recorded. The data was transcribed and translated to make the information of diminutives clear. The data was coded and entered in the computer for analysis using the computer packages. Qualitative data was analyzed by arranging responses according to the research questions and objectives. Tables, bar graphs and pie charts were used to present quantitative data. The study showed that diminutives in Ekegusii are formed through prefixation attached to the roots of nouns, determiners, verbs and adjectives. The prefixes attached to the various word classes should indicate agreement throughout the sentence. This study further indicated that diminutives in Ekegusii language carry both denotative and connotative meanings. The research also showed that context determined the meaning awarded to a diminutive in the study language. The findings of this paper will inform the users of the language and those interested to learn the language, on the various meanings conveyed by the addition of the affixes and the appropriate usage depending on the context.*

Keywords: *Morpho-pragmatics, context, prefixes, diminutives, connotative*

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper was to analyse the formation and interpretation of diminutives in Ekegusii language using a morpho-pragmatic approach. Ekegusii is a Bantu language with distinct segmental morphemes. Diminutives fall under the domain of evaluative morphology Di Garbo (2013). Ekegusii language has prefixes attached onto nouns plus a set of prefixes on the determiners, verbs, adjectives, pronominals and all words associated with nouns. The language group that was purposively sampled and studied using a descriptive research design, for instance, is classified as an agglutinating language. It was expected that distinct morphemes making up the words could easily be identified and the meanings associated with the diminutive affixes examined in order to avoid communication breakdown, if the correct interpretation of the word forms according to context, would not be provided.

A diminutive is a word, an affix, or a name usually indicating smallness of the object or quality named or convey a sense of intimacy or endearment. Diminutives further indicate attitude depending on the linguistic and situational aspects in a given context. The diminutive form meaning is a solely additive one (Schneider, 2003). Schneider further argues that in diminutive formation the word class is retained and this process is considered more of modification than derivation. The meaning of the base is modified and not changed completely.

The findings of this paper will inform on the pragmatic use of language in order to avoid misinterpretations of meaning leading to communication breakdown amongst interlocutors. The findings will further enhance effective intercultural communication once the interpretations are made clear in relation to context. Since languages interact in complex ways, this paper will provide universities that offer Linguistics courses with a framework to serve as a reference in analyzing various languages and as they employ some approaches such as Contrastive analysis in the study of languages.

This paper was however limited in scope as only diminutives were dealt with. Due to time and resources constraints, augmentatives were not studied. It is therefore recommended that a further study be conducted on the same. In this respect, it will be beneficial to establish how augmentatives are formed in Ekegusii, and interpretation in relation to context. It will also be important to expand the study population to include other Bantu groups in Kenya and also other clusters of language such as Nilotic and Cushitic groups. Diminutives and augmentatives in isolating languages such as the Nilotic ones may unfold and provide different patterns of their formation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Diminutives fall under a branch of morphology known as evaluative morphology (EM). Most languages in the world have evaluative affixes that are attached to roots of words to express a number of meanings. Some of these languages include Slavic languages (Kortvelyessy & Stekeaur, 2011). Languages of the world have diminutive affixes which are usually fastened to nouns to indicate a smallness of the noun and endearment. (Wierzbicka, 1984; Jurafsky, 1996).

Diminutives represent an unmarked class unlike its counterpart, augmentative which is marked. Dressler and Barbaresi (1994:430). Their argument is that diminutives are more common than augmentatives across all languages. An implicational correlation which is universal explains this argument. A language with augmentatives must have diminutives too. The opposite is not true. A survey on augmentatives in the Mediterranean area shows that augmentatives are less wide-spread than diminutives Grandi (2002). Schneider (2003) also indicates that some forms of diminutives are used as depreciatives to negatively assess the holder of the titles and convey disrespect when they are used to refer to titles. According to Wierzbicka (1984), diminutive systems in Italian, Spanish and Greek languages are perceived to perform important functions in cultures where affection and emotions are to be shown. This study examined the various interpretations that can be assigned to diminutive forms in Ekegusii language.

Studies done previously have discussed the diminutive uses in particular languages. Mendoza (2005) explains that in Spanish the diminutive lessens an utterance's illocutionary force hence indicating politeness. Rudolph (1990) says that in Portuguese diminutives indicate emotions showing the speaker's emotions to what is said, and to the interlocutor. Eshreth (2016) argues that diminutives in Palestinian Arabic are likely to accompany positive rather than negative emotions. Emotions that seem to disfavour the diminutive functions include fear, pain and anger thus used for mitigation. Little attention is given to the study of the diminutive pragmatically. Generally, diminutives have not been studied from the area of pragmatics (Schneider, 2003) which was a motivation for this paper. Most research on diminutives in Bantu languages is mainly in Swahili, (Appah & Amfo, 2007). This therefore indicates that an analysis on diminutives in Ekegusii, which is a Bantu language is relevant to fill the missing gaps.

Dressler and Barbaresi (1994) have discussed the affectionate and pejorative uses of diminutives. According to Stefanovski (1997), diminutivity is a way of apologizing. This implies that to interpret the sense of a diminutive, extra-linguistic factors may be considered. This paper therefore established the different contexts within which diminutives are used to converse different meanings. The Luganda diminutive prefixes (lu-,ka-,bu-,tu) derogation diminutives are mostly used derogatively (Namugala, 2014). This study explored the markers of diminutives of Ekegusii language and the various meanings that they express in various contexts.

Ekegusii is a Bantu language spoken in the Kisii highlands of Western Kenya by more than two million people. Like most Bantu languages, it is highly agglutinating. Diminutives therefore are one of the inflectional categories among Bantu languages and more specifically Ekegusii language which is the focus of this paper.

Pragmatics refers to the study of meaning in context (Grice, 1975). It is a sub-field of linguistics that studies how context affects meaning. There exist different contexts that affect meaning including physical context, linguistic context, social context and epistemic context. There is no clarity on which meaning and interpretation is activated in the conceptual world when a diminutive form is employed (Schneider, 2013). Sometimes it becomes hard to infer the pragmatic intentions or functions such as affection and endearment each time a diminutive is used (King & Melzi, 2004). Diminutives can express diverse meanings in various contexts. This creates conflict in interpretation of meaning, which can lead to a breakdown in communication. Many people have difficulties in interpreting meanings of diminutives, that is, the intended meaning of the speaker is not communicated because of the effect of context in meaning. Sometimes the listener's interpreted meaning is different from what the speaker intends to communicate. This creates misunderstanding among/between parties.

Evaluative morphology refers to morphological ways that languages use to predetermine the semantic notion of "less than/more than" the standard size of substances, qualities, actions and circumstances, with the idea of standard size being a relative one (Kortvelyessy, 2012). There are two dimensions of evaluative morphology: descriptive and qualitative. Descriptive deals with the use of evaluative markers in connection with size while the qualitative covers the encoding of the speaker's attitudes to real objects of the word (Grandi, 2015). Evaluative morphology is the marking of the subjective appreciation (Diminution, augmentation and intensification) of the referent via bound affixes (Prieto, 2015). Evaluative morphology is therefore the study of diminutive and augmentative formation and meaning.

This study analyzed the diminutives of Ekegusii language with the view of exploring their markers, examining their meanings and establishing the contexts that enable them to convey various meanings.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Morpheme-Based Theory

This study was guided by Leonard Bloomfield's (1933) morpheme based theory. This theory holds that word forms are examined as arrangements of morphemes; and a morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of a word made up roots and affixes. This way of examining word forms is called item and arrangement approach. This theory was therefore used to explore the markers of diminutives of Ekegusii Language.

Co-operative Principle Theory

This study was also guided by Grice's co-operative principle (CP). Grice (1975) proposes that participants in an exchange observe a common co-operative principle which is likely to be in force every time an exchange unfolds. According to the CP, one should make one's conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which one is engaged. According to Grice (1975), there are two types of implicatures: conventional – which convey the same extra –meaning regardless of context and these are usually lexicalized; and conversational implicatures- that express diverse meanings according to various contexts. In this CP theory communication is based on shared knowledge of text and one's ability to use context to make inferences. Conversational implicatures only arise in a specific context of utterance. This theory established how diminutives of Ekegusii communicate diverse meanings in various contexts by use of conversational implicatures.

Politeness Theory

This study similarly used Leech's (1987) politeness theory which advocates that one should "minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs and maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs. One of the maxims of modesty states of the Politeness theory requires one to "minimize praise of self, and maximize dispraise of self". This notion was relevant in assessing to what extent diminutives in Ekegusii language can be applied to minimize self-praise and avoid boasting.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design. According to Mugenda (2003), descriptive research determines and reports the way things are and also help researchers to describe a phenomenon in terms of attitude, values and characteristics.

3.2. Sampling Design and Sample Size

This study used purposive sampling to sample Bobasi clan of Gusii community. A random sample was then taken from the clan to form the sample size. The researchers used simple random sampling to select 36 females and 36 males aged 20 and above years from the clan. This study focused on both genders who are native speakers of Ekegusii. This is because such speakers are more likely to use diminutives and comprehend them fully. Four interviewees (two females and two males) were purposively sampled.

3.3. Research Instruments

This study used both questionnaires (semi structured) and interviews to gather data from the study respondents. The structured questionnaires included closed and open ended questions. Four interviewees were purposively sampled from Bobasi clan. They were interviewed and information was tape recorded. The questionnaires and interviews mainly gathered data from respondents on the following key areas of study: diminutive formation in Ekegusii language, the diminutive meaning within and outside context and the different contexts where the same diminutives are used to communicate different meanings.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected by interviews and questionnaires. Questionnaires were administered and collected by the researchers. The responses were tape recorded to serve as a back-up to the main main data collection tools.

3.5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed according to objectives from the interviews and questionnaires. The recorded tape was also played to provide further data. Qualitative data was analysed using content analysis and an explanation of emerging trends was made.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Diminutive Markers

According to the data collected, prefixation was established to be a major demunitive marker in Ekegusii language. The process does not alter the class of the word but changes its meaning for example to mean smallness or tininess from the standard form. The following prefixes were found to be the diminutive markers in Ekegusii language: *aka-* and *eke-andaga-* or *ege-* in singular, attached to the root nouns and depending on their phonetic environment. But *aka-/eke-* is most commonly used. For instance, *aka-/eke-* will precede most words with a root noun beginning with the velar consonant /*k/* and the bilabial nasal /*m/*. Their plural variants are *ebi-/ebie-* or *obo-* attached to the roots of nouns. The prefix is inflected to all the words that are associated with the noun in order to mark agreement in a sentence.

See the list of examples below:

Prefix	word		diminutive		meaning
	Singular	plural	Singular	Plural	
<i>aka</i>	+ <i>emesa</i>	<i>-chimesa</i>	<i>akamesa</i>	<i>-ebimesa</i>	a small table
<i>aka</i>	+ <i>agetenda</i>	<i>-ebitanda</i>	<i>agatanda</i>	<i>-obotanda</i>	a small bed
<i>aka</i>	+ <i>ekerogo</i>	<i>-ebirogo</i>	<i>akarogo</i>	<i>-oborogo</i>	a small chair
<i>aga</i>	+ <i>egekabu</i>	<i>-ebeikabu</i>	<i>agakabu</i>	<i>-obokabu</i>	a small basket
<i>aga</i>	+ <i>omosacha</i>	<i>-abasacha</i>	<i>agasacha</i>	<i>-ebisacha</i>	a small man
<i>ege/aga</i>	+ <i>esese</i>	<i>-chisese</i>	<i>agasese</i>	<i>/egesese</i>	a small dog
<i>aga</i>	+ <i>egechiko</i>	<i>-ebechiko</i>	<i>agachiko</i>	<i>/obochiko</i>	a small spoon

Table1. Comments of the QR on diminutive markers in Ekegusii Language

The following were the responses from the tools of data collection with their possible interpretations:

QR	DIMINUTIVE MARKER	ROOT WORD (singular)	ROOT WORD (PLURAL)	DIMINUTIVE (singular)	DIMINUTIVE (PLURAL)	MEANING
QR 1	aka-	emesa, egetanda, ekerogo	Chimesa Ebitanda ebirogo	Akamesa agatanda akarogo	Ebimesa Obotanda Oborogo	small, low table small bed small chair
QR 2	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo	Same as above	Akamesa agatanda akarogo	Same as above	small, tiny table small bed small chair
QR 4	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo	Same as above	Akamesa agatanda akarogo	Same as above	small, ugly table small bed small chair
QR 5	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo	Same as above	Akamesa agatanda akarogo	Same as above	table with short legs. small bed small chair
QR 6	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo	Same as above	Akamesa agatanda akarogo	Same as above	low table ugly table small bed small chair
QR 13	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo	Same as above	Akamesa agatanda akarogo	Same as above	high table with small top small bed small chair
QR 28	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo		Akamesa agatanda akarogo		table with tiny legs small bed small chair
QR35	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo		Akamesa agatanda akarogo		table with narrow top small bed small chair
QR42	aka-	Emesa egetanda, ekerogo		Akamesa agatanda akarogo		table with a small top small bed small chair

Further examples from the interviews included the following words *akamwana/ekemwana* (small child, young child, naughty child, tiny child, small child with endearment) from *Omwana* (child), *akamote* (small tree, short tree, a small tree not worth to hurt) from *omote* (tree), *akamonto* (small person, useless person, tiny person) from *omonto* (person), *akamori* (young calf, small calf) from *mori* (calf.) The words *omwana*, *omote*, *omontoamo ne emori*. “Child, tree, person and calf.” are standard form of nouns

Table2. Comments of AR on diminutive markers in Ekegusii Language

The following are responses from the subjects and their possible interpretations, through the interviews conducted:

IR	PREFIX	ROOT WORD	DIMINUTIVE	MEANING
AR1	aka- eke-	omwana, emori omonto omote omwana	akamwana, akamori, akamonto, akamote, ekemwana	small child small calf small person small tree small unattractive child.

AR2	<i>aka-</i>	<i>omwana emori omonto omote omwana</i>	<i>Akamwana akamori, akamonto, akamote, ekemwana</i>	small child small calf small person small tree small abusive child
AR3	<i>aka-</i>	<i>omwana emori, omonto, omote omwana</i>	<i>Akamwana akamori, akamonto, akamote, ekemwana</i>	small child small calf small person small tree small, bad behaved child.
AR4	<i>aka-</i>	<i>omwana emori, omonto, omote omwana</i>	<i>Akamwana akamori, akamonto, akamote, ekemwana</i>	small child small calf small person small tree Small unhealthy child.

From the foregoing it is evident that diminutives in Ekegusii Language are formed by fastening prefixes to root words at the beginning through a process known as prefixation. The prefixes **aka-/eke-** or **aga-/ege-** in the singular forms and **ebi-, obo-** in plural forms are added to the roots to indicate smallness in the words, tiny, unworthiness. According to Kortvelyessy&Stekaur (2015), majority of world languages are bound in evaluative affixes to express the sense of diminutiveness or augmentativeness. This is the case with Ekegusii language which forms diminutives through addition of prefixes. This is consistent with Bloomfield (1933) whose argument in the Morpheme Based Theory is that word forms are morphemes arranged together. This is also contrary to Kramer (2003) and Friedman (2002) who explain that diminutives in Macedonian are formed through suffixation.

4.2. Semantic Meaning of Diminutives

The researchers examined the various meanings conveyed by diminutives especially the semantic meaning. In determining the conceptual meaning, both the questionnaires and interviews were used. Using the questionnaires the researchers asked the respondents to give the meaning of the diminutive *akamesa* ‘small table’ *agatanda* ‘small bed’ and *akarogo* ‘small chair’. All the 56 respondents representing 100% gave the meaning as small/tiny /low table, small sized low bed, and very small chair. Other respondents explained that the bed and the chair were so low and small that they belonged to young children. That is a cot and a baby chair. Some respondents argued that the table was low; it had a small / narrow top while others said that the table was tiny. All the 56 respondents described the entities as being small in one way or another. This is similar to (Sifiannou, 1992) who argues that the prototypical function of diminutives is to express smallness. This is shown in table 3 above.

The researchers also used the interview to determine the semantic meaning of diminutives. The researchers asked the interview respondents to explain the meaning of the word *akamwana, akamori, akamonto, akamote, and ekemwana*. All the interview respondents gave their meanings as ‘small child’, ‘small calf’, ‘small person’, ‘small tree’ and ‘small child/, tiny child/, young child/beautiful young child, respectively. Their responses agree with Jurafsky (1996) who explains that the term diminutive is interpreted as a category expressing smallness and endearment across all languages.

Table3. Singular and plural forms

AR	DIMINUTIVE	MEANING
All of them gave similar responses	Singular- plural <i>Akamwana-ebimwana</i> <i>Akamori-ebimori</i> <i>Akamonto-ebimonto</i> <i>Akamote-ebimote</i> <i>Ekemwana-ebimwana</i>	small, tiny, young child small calf small person small tree small child

The researchers also created a sentence with a diminutive and asked the respondents to briefly explain its meanings. The dialogue from the interview appears below.

Interviewer: *Eng’enchoyaamang, anaayaninki?* “What is the meaning of the following utterances?”

- a) *Akamwanaakwonakang’o?* “Whose (small) child is that?” while the standard form is: *Omwanaoyionoyoong’o?*

- b) *Ebimwanaebionebiang'o?* Whose (small) children are those? The standard form is: Abanaabwonabaang'o?

According to the above respondents the above sentences can be interpreted to mean a small bodied child or young child. A person can also ask this if the child is bad or well behaved, selfish, dirty, disobedient, weak, abusive, mean, ill-mannered, rude, lazy, abusive or handsome, or even well-behaved depending on the context. Other respondents described the child as short, slim, young or slender to denote smallness in quantity or size.

4.3. The Pragmatic Meaning of Diminutives

To determine the pragmatic meaning and interpretation of diminutives in Ekegusii language, the researchers created a dialogue between speakers A and B where possible Ekegusii words which mean 'house' and 'land' were used. The role of the respondents was to explain what speaker B meant by using the words in question which are *akaremo* 'small piece of land' and *akanyomba* 'small house'. The dialogues appear below.

DIALOGUE 2

A: *Ng'aiomenyete?* "Where do you stay?"

B: *Nagoraakaremochiekaikominaisano aria Ogembo, nkaagachaakanyombagechirumuikominoimenyete.* 'I bought a small piece of land measuring 15 acres at Ogembo and built a small house of ten rooms, I stay there.'

The respondents were asked to explain what speaker B meant in relation to the underlined words which are *akaremo* 'small piece of land' and *akanyomba* 'small house'.

Of the 56 respondents, 54 respondents representing 96% explained that speaker B had bought a big land measuring 15 acres built a big house of ten rooms but had used the diminutives so as not to be seen as boasting. The respondents said that she used the words *akaremo* 'small piece of land' and *akanyomba* 'small house' as a sign of politeness. This is similar to Eshreth (2017) who explains that diminutives in Palestinian Arabic act as a hedging device to encode the speaker's downplaying of his/her own material possession, achievements and characteristics to show modesty and avoid self-praise and bragging. This concurs with Leech's politeness theory (1987) where the modesty maxim says that a speaker should minimize self-praise and maximize dispraise of self. Schneider (2013) also says that diminutives can be employed to play down the speaker's own achievement.

Two of the respondents representing 4% explained that speaker B had indeed bought a small piece of land measuring 15 acres and built a small house of ten rooms. They explained that maybe speaker A's land and house were bigger than speaker B's and that is why she had used the diminutives *akaremo* 'small piece of land' and *akanyomba* 'small house' to refer to hers in comparison with speaker A's. The two respondents confirmed the denotative meaning of diminutives as being small.

The researchers also worked on the meaning and interpretation of diminutives in Ekegusii that arise from one's attitude and mood. The researchers created a dialogue between two speakers Q and R whereby possible Ekegusii words which mean "boy" are interchangeably used. The dialogue appears below.

DIALOGUE 1

Q: *Ning'ooriaoraire aria?* "Who is that sleeping there?"

R: *Akwonaakamuraka Jason.* 'That is Jason's son'.

The respondents were required to identify the prefix forming the diminutive, state speaker R's mood in the dialogue and also state the likely physical appearance in which the boy being referred to could be. They were also required to state other attributes of the boy. All the 56 questionnaire respondents identified *aka-* as the prefix fastened at the beginning of the noun *omwana* 'child' to form the diminutive *akamwana* 'small child'. 46 questionnaire respondents representing 82% agreed that speaker R's mood was offensive while 5 respondents representing 9% said that speaker R was in a normal mood. The other 5 respondents representing 9% did not say whether R was in a normal or offensive mood or not. All the respondents described the boy to have been thin/slim/short/ slender /small/ tall. They also gave other attributes ranging from handsome, ugly, liked, disliked, attractive

, bad behaved , dirty, nice looking , weak, unhealthy, stubborn , selfish , obedient, Well behaved. The attributes were both negative and positive thus communicating pejorative and ameliorative meanings. This is consistent with Badarner (2010) who found out that in colloquial Jordan Arabic, diminutives are pragmatically employed to show affection, endearment and express a pejorative attitude. Khachkyan (2016) too asserts to this claim.

Table5. Comments of QR on dialogue 1

QR	WORD	MEANING	MOOD	PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	OTHER ATTRIBUTES
QR1	Akamura	small boy	offensive	thin and small	ugly, bad behaved
QR2	Akamura	small boy	offensive	thin , short , small	dirty , unhealthy
QR3	Akamura	small boy	offensive	thin and short	disobedient, disliked
QR6	Akamura	small boy	offensive	Small and slender	weak , unhealthy
QR8	Akamura	small boy	offensive	short and small	handsome, well behaved
QR24	Akamura	small boy	offensive	short and slim	unhealthy , weak
QR28	Akamura	small boy	offensive	small	attractive
QR44	Akamura	small boy	offensive	tiny	liked obedient, handsome
QR52	Akamura	small boy	offensive	Tiny	attractive , well behaved
QR55	Akamura	small boy	offensive	Small	disobedient , ugly
QR56	Akamura	small boy	offensive	slender	weak, unhealthy

4.4. Context of Ekegusii Diminutives

In the quest to determine the context of diminutives and their interpretation in Ekegusii language which are marked by the prefix *aka-* the researchers created sentences whereby two of the sentences had the common noun *agakungu* ‘small wife/woman’. The sentences appeared as in 3 b and c. Respondents were required to tick on the one which they found not insulting. The sentences appear below:

b. *Agakungukarianabokare*. ‘That wife is that way’.

c. *Agakungukayenakaya*. ‘His wife is good.’

The role of the respondents was to identify the sentence that they found insulting, give relevant context in which each sentence could be used, and describe how the wife/woman being talked about should look like.

All the 56 respondents representing 100% found sentence b, insulting thus rendering sentence c not insulting. This proves that diminutives express both semantics and pragmatic meanings.

Out of the 56 respondents, 51 respondents representing 91% said that sentence b can be used when the speaker is annoyed while 5 respondents representing 9% said that sentence b can be used when the speaker is happy/when making a statement that is praising the wife. To comment on the possible context of sentence c, all the 56 respondents representing 100% said that the sentence can be used by the speaker when giving different pragmatic meanings of diminutives.

The researchers asked the respondent to explain the various meanings of the sentence he had created before when the same sentence is used in different contexts. The dialogue appears below

Interviewer: *Ndiririomontoaratumieamanganaayaneng’enchoyayenererierabe*. ‘In which contexts can the utterance below be used and what are its corresponding meaning.’

a). a) *Akamwanaakwonakang’o?* ‘Whose child is that?’

AR2:

a) *Ekeroomwanaoyoakogechirinayeotageteomogechi. Gosenaendenaboogotebaekeroogogetekomotogia aseeng’enchoakororekanabuya, abwateamasikanibunaomontomonenegoseakorireegentoekiyaabanabangebatakore*. ‘When the child has annoyed you and you also want to annoy the referent. You can also make this utterance when happy to praise and admire the child for being attractive, respectful, or for doing something extra ordinary.’

All the 4 interview respondents representing 100% said that the sentence can be used by speakers when they are annoyed so as to diminish the child. They also said that the sentence may be used when

making a statement to offend one maybe the listener or the child. Two of the respondents also added that the sentence can be used by a speaker when happy, to admire the child for being attractive or because the child has done something extra –ordinary. They gave the child personal attributes ranging from attractive, unattractive, beautiful, ugly, bad behaved, well behaved, unhealthy, weak, abusive, liked, disliked. This is equivalent to Grice (1975) who explains that the conversational implicatures in the co-operative principle express different meanings according to various contexts. He further argues that communication in the CP is based on the shared knowledge of the text and one’s ability to use context to make inferences. Eshreth (2017) also says that diminutives in Palestinian Arabic are used to increase the speaker’s positive attitudes and emotions, communicate the speaker’s sense of appreciation and admiration for something the addressee has.

Table6. Comments of AR on the meaning of sentence a

AR	WORD	SEMANTIC MEANING	MEANING IN CONTEXT
AR1	Akamwana	small child	ugly , weak, disliked , beautiful , handsome
AR 2	Akamwana	small child	unhealthy, abusive , disliked , bad –behaved
AR 3	Akamwana	small child	bad behaved , arrogant , ugly , weak
AR 4	Akamwana	small child	Weak, ugly, unhealthy, attractive, well behaved, liked.

Here the respondent confirmed that sentence c can be used to praise the referent while sentence b can be used to diminish minimize /abuse or offend the referent. This confirms the argument made by Schneider (2003) who argues that diminutives can be used in a contemptuous way.

When describing the entity referring to *agakungu* ‘small wife’ all the 56 respondents representing 100% agreed that the wife being referred to was a small/tiny /slim/slender /thin/short/tall wife. In terms of the woman’s attributes the 56 respondents differed in their descriptions ranging from ugly, beautiful, liked, disliked, bad behaved, well behaved, selfish, stubborn, unattractive, attractive, nice, welcoming, generous, pleasant, weak, unhealthy, healthy and many others.

Table7. Comments of the QR on interpretation of sentence b

QR	WORD	MEANING	PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	OFFENSIVE	ATTRIBUTES
QR 1	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	tiny and tall	√	ugly and weak
QR2	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	slim and tall	√	abusive unattractive stubborn
QR3	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	tiny and short	√	Unwelcoming, bad behaved, selfish
QR12	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	tiny and short	√	Unhealthy,disliked,
QR21	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	short and slim	√	Arrogant, Contemptuous,nagging
QR35	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	tiny	√	generous welcoming nice, liked
QR43	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	Short and slender	√	well behaved, beautiful, pleasant
QR54	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	tall and slender	√	stubborn

Table8. Comments of the QRs on the interpretation of sentence c

QR	WORD	MEANING	PHYSICAL APPEARANCE	CONTEXT (PRAISING)	ATTRIBUTES
QR 1	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	small and short	√	nice looking
QR6	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	tiny and short	√	considerate
QR12	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	thin and tall	√	well behaved
QR23	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	slim and short	√	beautiful
QR35	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	small and short	√	welcoming, bad-behaved
QR42	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	short and small	√	good looking
QR50	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	slender and tall	√	generous,well behaved
QR53	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	thin and short	√	Attractive
QR53	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	tiny and tall	√	nice
QR54	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	short	√	attractive,liked
QR55	<i>agakungu</i>	small wife	small	√	good looking

The researchers found out the different possible contexts in which Ekegusii diminutives could be used. The researchers used the sentence which he had created and asked respondents to explain the different contexts where the sentence could be used. The sentence appears below.

Akamwanaakwonakang'o? “Whose child is that?”

All the four respondents explained that the sentence can be possibly used by a speaker when they are annoyed, when they want to offend somebody. Two of the respondents further added that the sentence can also be used when one is happy to appreciate or admire the referent for being, smart, attractive or for doing something extra ordinary. This agrees with Ponsonnet (2016) who explains that diminutives express admiration and respect.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that diminutives in Ekegusii language are formed through prefixation. The prefixes *aka-* and *eke-*, and *aga-/ege-* are added to the root word which is a noun, to form diminutives in their singular while their plural counterparts are *ebi-/obo-* forms. A set of prefixes are added to the determiners, verbs, adjectives and pronominals to mark agreement with the nouns in a given sentence.

Diminutives in Ekegusii language convey both denotative meanings and various connotative meanings depending on the context where used. Denotatively, Ekegusii diminutives are used to refer to SMALLNESS of an entity. Connotative meanings that diminutives convey include; expression of endearment and affection, indication of contempt and other negative attitude towards the referent, and expression of admiration for the referent and what the referent has or does. Context determines the meaning of a diminutive. The mood and attitude of the speaker also constitute the context. The context includes when one is annoyed or happy, when one is praising or wants to offend an addressee and when one does not want to be seen as bragging about his/her achievements that is: in anger, happiness and modesty contexts. These determine the meaning awarded to a diminutive in use in Ekegusii language.

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