

Radosław Pytlik

Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Tarnowie
e-mail: r_pytlik@pwszta.edu.pl

Diminutives in Polish, English and German: formation, function, state of research

**Deminutywa w języku polskim,
angielskim i niemieckim:
morfologia, zastosowanie, stan badań**

Introductory remarks

This paper deals with the question of how noun diminutives are formed in three Indo-European languages, i.e. Polish, English and German and what their function is. At the same time, it is meant to give a brief outline of the current state of research on the units to be discussed. In many of the sources consulted¹, linguists agree that diminutives are used primarily with the purpose of indicating the smaller size of an object in comparison to what is commonly accepted as its standard size. A further part of the definition, which usually follows and is predominant in literature on Polish diminutives, refers to numerous functions being assigned to the units in question,

¹ Cf. e.g. *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego. Morfologia*, eds. R. Grzegorzczkova et al., Warszawa 1999, p. 425. J. Kubaszczyk, 'Dziecinniejesz w uścisku, malejesz w pieszczocie', czyli o deminutywach i hipokorystykach w kontekście dialogu kultur i przekładu polsko-niemieckiego, [in:] *Tłumacz wobec problemów kulturowych*, ed. M. Piotrowska, Kraków 2010, p. 187. H.-J. Schwenk, *Substantivische Diminutiva im Deutschen – Versuch einer Kategorisierung*, [in:] „Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny“ 2010, nr 3, p. 276.

such as emotive, positively or pejoratively² evaluative, expressive and ironic. The subsequent sections of this paper should shed some light on the issue of noun diminutives, as seen from the systemic perspective.

Polish noun diminutives

Words like *czapeczka* /small cap/, *drewienko* /kindling/, *gołąbek* /small dove/, *mandacik* /lit. 'fine + dim.'; 'ticket + dim.'/, *obłoczek* /cloudlet/, *sekundka* /sec, jiffy/, *talerzyk* /small plate/, *okularki* /specs/ and many others are examples of noun diminutives of each gender and either number in which (non-dialectal³) Polish is commonly said to be particularly abundant. This gives rise to the assumption that noun forms belonging to the category of diminutives have been repeatedly the subject of thorough discussions over the past decades and therefore must be well documented. Even a brief look at available bibliographic materials clearly shows that the issues have been indeed the centre of interest of a great number of linguists who have been dealing with diminutives from both diachronic and synchronic point of view. Furthermore, some publications have been aimed at likening diminutives with analogous units in other languages, being not necessarily part of the Slavic language group. Finally, there are researchers who ascribe a stylistic function to most diminutives in Polish and treat them as a device for expressing the speaker's attitude to either a person, an object or a phenomenon which they sympathize with or voice an ironic or contemptuous opinion.

Going into a little detail about what has been outlined above, it ought to be noted that one of the earliest publications about Polish diminutives dates back to the first half of the 20th century. In this context, a name that needs to be mentioned is that of Doroszewski,⁴ who in edited papers dealing with the processes of word formation in Slavic languages. In one of his volumes, he pointed out that nearly eighty articles about diminutive and hypocoristic noun forms had been written on this very subject.

² Cf. R. Pytlik, *On the question of the pejoratively evaluative function of Polish noun diminutives and their equivalents in English*, [in:] „Radomskie Studia Filologiczne” 2015, nr 1-2, pp. 171-180.

³ Even more diminutive (and augmentative) forms can be found in Polish dialectal vocabulary, which is characterized by unique expressiveness.

⁴ Due to difficulty in accessing any publication by W. Doroszewski, I drew on the information established by N. Długosz, *Słowotwórstwo polskich i bułgarskich deminutywów rzeczownikowych*, Poznań 2009, p. 15.

Doroszewski was also the first to record information about the morphological structure of diminutives. As far as diachrony, i.e. the historical development, of Polish diminutives is concerned, it was Dobrzyński⁵ who provided a focus for research in this area. Synchronic investigations, i.e. studies of diminutives as they exist at a point in time, were initiated by Kreja⁶, who gave an accurate description of Polish noun diminutives and, twenty years later, i.e. in Kreja⁷, he contributed to broadening the knowledge about the distribution of the suffixes *-ek* and *-ik*. Apart from the research conducted within one language, there is also a wealth of comparative studies in this field in which Polish diminutives are likened to diminutives not only in other Slavic⁸ languages (e.g. Bulgarian or Macedonian) but also to those present in languages from a different group belonging to the Indo-European language family. A prime example of such an approach, comparing diminutives in Dutch, German and Polish, is a publication written by Klimaszewska⁹. Another study, a Ph.D. thesis by Koecke¹⁰ published in book form, deals with translating issues within Polish and German diminutives. Similarly positioned is the monograph by Kubaszczyk¹¹, which handles Polish

⁵ W. Dobrzyński, *Z badań nad rozwojem polskich deminutywów*, t. I. *Historyczny rozwój rzeczowników z formantem '-ę' na tle słowiańskim*, Wrocław 1974. W. Dobrzyński, *Z badań nad rozwojem polskich deminutywów*, t. II. *Apelatywne spieszczania dezintegracyjne*, Warszawa 1988.

⁶ B. Kreja, *Słowotwórstwo rzeczowników ekspresywnych w języku polskim. Formacje na: '-ik', '-isko', '-ina'*, Gdańsk 1969.

⁷ B. Kreja, *Problem dystrybucji przyrostków deminutywnych -ek i -ik*, [in:] *Z morfologii i morfotaktyki współczesnej polszczyzny*, ed. B. Kreja, Wrocław 1989, pp. 25-37.

⁸ E. Siatkowska, *Deminutywa rzeczownikowe we współczesnych literackich językach zachodniosłowiańskich*, [in:] *Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej*, t. 6, ed. Z. Stieber, Warszawa 1967, pp. 157-170. S. Warchoń, *Geneza i rozwój słowiańskich formacji ekspresywnych z sufiksalnym -k- i -c-*, Warszawa 1984. J. Sokołowski, *Z problematyki opisu konfrontatywnego deminutywów w języku macedońskim i polskim (na tle innych języków słowiańskich)*, [in:] *Wyraz i zdanie w językach słowiańskich*, t. 5. *Opis, konfrontacja, przekład*, eds. M. Sarnowski, W. Wysoczański, Wrocław 2005, pp. 339-344. J. Sokołowski, *Mechanizmy deminucji i hipokoryzacji w języku macedońskim i polskim na tle innych języków słowiańskich*, [in:] *Z polskich studiów slawistycznych*, seria 11, Językoznawstwo. *Prace na XIV Międzynarodowy Kongres Slawistów w Ochrydzie 2008*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 211-219. N. Długosz, *Porównanie wybranych typów słowotwórczych w zakresie rzeczownikowych formacji deminutywnych z różnymi formantami w języku polskim i w języku bułgarskim*, [in:] „Linguistica Copernicana”, nr 2, pp. 273-286; and N. Długosz, *Słowotwórstwo polskich i bułgarskich deminutywów rzeczownikowych*, op. cit.

⁹ Z. Klimaszewska, *Diminutive und augmentative Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten des Niederländischen, Deutschen und Polnischen – eine konfrontative Darstellung*, Wrocław et al. 1983.

¹⁰ B. Koecke, *Diminutive im polnisch-deutschen Übersetzungsvergleich. Eine Studie zu Divergenzen und Konvergenzen im Gebrauch einer variierenden Bildung*, München 1994.

¹¹ J. Kubaszczyk, *Wortbilder und Übersetzungsbilder. Eine Untersuchung zur Wortbildung als Bildbildung im Kontext der Übersetzungswissenschaft*, Poznań 2011.

diminutives extracted from chosen pieces of poetry translation into German. A few pages on diminution in German and Polish can also be found in the two-volume German and Polish contrastive grammar by Engel¹². Yet another category of publications makes an attempt to present Polish diminutives as stylistic devices. Such a point of view is supported by at least two authors, i.e. Reczek¹³ and Sarnowski¹⁴. The latter, for instance, perceives the application of diminutives as a sign of irony. An acquisitional perspective is provided by Haman¹⁵, who links diminutives with the way children acquiring Polish are often addressed.

As the above overview of the current state of research shows, Polish diminutives have been subject of discussion over a reasonable period of time, so it would probably be correct to assume that the field is quite satisfactorily examined. Below, two basic methods of forming the diminutives in Polish, particularly the synthetic way, will be worked out in detail.

Synthetically formed Polish noun diminutives

Polish, as a prime example of inflectional languages, makes a wide use of affixes, i.e. prefixes and suffixes that might be attached to the root of a noun, to form new words and new meanings. The vast majority of Polish noun diminutives are generated synthetically and, to be more accurate, by means of a specific suffix, the application of which depends on one of the three main genders, i.e. masculine, feminine and neuter and the two numbers, i.e. singular and plural. It is worth noticing that the gender of the diminutive noun usually equals that of the base, i.e. non-diminutive, noun¹⁶. Some of the examples of synthetically formed noun diminutives in Polish might be the following words on the right:

¹² *Deutsch-polnische kontrastive Grammatik*, Band 2, ed. U. Engel, Heidelberg 1999, pp. 738-742.

¹³ S. Reczek, *Deminutywa polskie. Charakterystyka, rozwój funkcji stylistycznej*, [in:] „*Rocznik Naukowo-Dydaktyczny*” 1968, nr 3(5), pp. 373-386.

¹⁴ M. Sarnowski, *Deminutivum jako znak ironii*, [in:] *Wartości w języku i tekście*, t. 3, eds. J. Puzynina, J. Anusiewicz, Wrocław 1991, pp. 41-49.

¹⁵ E. Haman, *Early productivity in derivation. A case study of diminutives in the acquisition of Polish*, [in:] “*Psychology of Language and Communication*” 2003, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 37-56.

¹⁶ Probably, the noun *książę* /prince/ has to be treated as an exception. This noun is unquestionably masculine as opposed to its diminutive form *książętko* /princeling/ being neuter.

kot /cat/ → *kotek*¹⁷ /pussycat/

hotel /hotel/ → *hotelik* /small and usually nice hotel/

chałtura /work on the side/ → *chałturka* /lit. 'work on the side + dim.'/

gniazdo /nest/ → *gniazdko* /small nest/

However, not every derivation typical of diminutives must automatically indicate a diminutive form. Some of those items have lexicalized over time, losing partly or wholly the original meaning of their root form, e.g. *pogłoska* is certainly not a little *secondary sound* /pogłos/ but 'a rumour'; *pokrzywka* is not necessarily merely a small *nettle* /pokrzywa/ but more often 'a nettle rash'; *rosiczka* is not light *dew* /rosa/ but 'sundew', and finally *stolek* is certainly not a small *table* /stół/ but 'a stool'.

Besides, a group of diminutives worthy of comment is created by such forms like *aktoreczka* /aktorka 'actress' + '-eczka'/,¹⁸ *inżynierek* /inżynier 'engineer' + '-ek'/, *doktorek* /doktor 'physician' + '-ek'/, *profesorek* /profesor 'professor' + '-ek'/ and a few more.¹⁹ In general, names of profession do not allow diminution in Polish, so the above examples are to be perceived non-literally. Their usage is frequently of disparaging character. By speaking about *aktoreczka*, an actress is meant who has had no success yet in her career. *Inżynierek* means simply 'an incompetent engineer', while *doktorek* refers to 'a not exactly good physician'. In turn, *profesorek* implies 'an unsuitable professor'.

Basic indicators of Polish diminutives are the following suffixes:

-ek and **-ik**²⁰ for masculine diminutive noun forms:

nos/nose/ → *nosek*

notes /pocketbook/ → *notesik*

-ka for feminine diminutive noun forms:

plama /stain/ → *plamka*

ściana /wall/ → *ścianka*

¹⁷ Frequently encountered forms like *kociak* /kitten/ and *kociątko* /kitty/, however, should be treated as secondary diminutives functioning as terms of endearment. In such cases, the above observation seems not to apply.

¹⁸ There is a reduction of the morpheme *-ka*, because some diminutive formations are created by the addition of the suffix *-eczka*.

¹⁹ Cf. U. Engel, *Deutsch-polnische kontrastive Grammatik*, Band 2, Heidelberg 1999, p. 741.

²⁰ Whichever suffix, i.e. *-ek* or *-ik*, is applied is not a free choice, but it depends on the phonetic character of the root sound in the word-final position. Further information on the specifics can be found, e.g., in. *Gramatyka współczesnego języka polskiego. Morfologia*, op. cit., pp. 425-426.

-ko for neuter diminutive noun forms:

mięso /meat/ → *mięsko*

piwo /beer/ → *piwko*

Except for the above suffixes, occasionally the following groups of morphemes can be applied to form a diminutive²¹:

-aszek for masculine diminutive noun forms:

kij /stick/ → *kijaszek*

zapach /scent; smell/ → *zapaszek*

-iszek for masculine diminutive noun forms:

brat /brother/ → *braciszek*

kielich /goblet/ → *kieliszek*

-uszek for masculine diminutive noun forms:

leń /lazybones/ → *leniuszek*

malec /little boy/ → *maluszek*

-eczka / **-i(y)czka** for feminine diminutive noun forms:

książka /book/ → *książeczka*

motyka /hoe/ → *motyczka*

polędwica /sirloin/ → *polędwiczka*

-uszka for feminine diminutive noun forms:

kaczka /duck/ → *kaczuszka*

paczka /parcel/ → *paczuszka*

-uszko for neuter diminutive noun forms:

cacko /trinket/ → *cacuszko*

serce /heart/ → *serduszko*

²¹ Note that in some cases a reduction and/or an addition of certain morphemes is necessary. E.g. the non-diminutive form *serce* loses *-ce* and requires an extra *-d* before it can take the diminutive marker *-uszko*.

A part of so called prototypical diminutives can also be produced by way of a specific prefix²² that by itself implies a small size of the word it modifies, e.g. *mikro-* as in *mikrobus* /microbus/, *mikroelement* /microelement/, *mikrofilm* /microfilm/ and *mini-* as in *miniesej* /mini-essay/, *minirozmówki* /mini-phrasebook/, *miniprzed szkole* /mini nursery school/. *ISJP*²³ delivers under the entry *mikro-* an explanation about what the prefix conveys. By means of *mikro-*, it is possible to produce numerous names of an entity that is small or very small. As examples, three compounds could be given, namely: *mikrobus* /microbus/, *mikroorganizm* /microorganism/ and *mikrospołeczność* /microcommunity/. There is also an addendum to the above explanation having to do with a slight difference in meaning between *mikro-* and *mini-* in a situation in which from the same word two new words are created, one with *mikro-* and the other with *mini-*. The former names a smaller object than that being named by the latter, so *mikrokomputer* /microcomputer/ would be smaller than *minikomputer* /minicomputer/, and similarly *mikrowieża* /compact stereo system/ is expected to have a smaller size than *miniwieża* /compact stereo system/.

In the case of prefix *mini-*, *ISJP* supplies us with such a piece of information: *mini-* creates numerous names of something that is small, short or it lasts for a short time, e.g. *minispódniczka* /miniskirt/, *minibar* /small bar/ and *minirecital* /short recital/. Especially, the compound *minispódniczka* needs some commenting on, because the noun comprises affixes (*mini-* and *-ka*), both of which indicate a relative shortness of the object. All the more so, it would suffice to say *spódniczka*, as it is already a diminutive form derived from *spódnica* or, at least theoretically, *minispódnica*.

Analytically formed Polish noun diminutives

Noun diminutives formed in the analytical way are usually restricted to the application of a specific adjective placed immediately before the noun which has to be referred to as small, short or lasting for a short time, e.g. *mały dom* /small house/, but also possible *mały domek* /small house/, *mały pies* /small dog/ or *mały piesek* /small dog/. So, there is a kind of redundancy in that case, because diminution is realized twice.

²² In relevant literature on the Polish word formation system, e.g. in H. Jadacka, *System słowotwórczy polszczyzny (1945-2000)*, Warszawa 2001, p. 136. *mikro-* and *mini-* are alternatively referred to as *prefixoids*.

²³ *Inny Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN*, t. I, II, ed. M. Bańko, Warszawa 2000.

Analytically formed diminutives are without doubt correspondingly frequent in Polish but unlike the prototypical diminutives, i.e. those that are created through derivation, are unable to communicate some extra information, like the positive or pejorative connotation. E.g. *kotek* is not necessarily a small/young cat, it can be even quite big. The synthetic diminutive form expresses in that very case the speaker's positive feeling towards the animal. On the other hand, such a diminutive form as *piesek* might mean either the same about a dog like in the above example of the noun *kotek* /cat/ or it may metaphorically suggest a negative personality trait of a human being, namely 'an informer'. That additional meaning of *piesek* would be not possible to achieve when using the analytic form of the diminutive, i.e. *mały pies* or *mały piesek*.

English noun diminutives

Amazingly, in several sources²⁴ considered an authority on descriptive grammar, there are no reference marks of any kind to the diminution in English. Nevertheless, Schneider²⁵ states openly what follows:

Contrary to popular belief, present-day English has diminutives, which are frequently created on the spur of the moment and frequently used not only "in the nursery" but also in informal everyday communication. English diminutives are formed analytically or synthetically. Inherent diminutives also exist [...].

As observed by Kiełtyka²⁶, "a regular and productive expressive derivation in English" does not exist²⁷, and although in the English language system there are a va-

²⁴ e.g. R. Huddleston, *Introduction to the Grammar of English*, Cambridge 1984. R. Quirk et al., *A University Grammar of English*, London 1976. R. Quirk et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, London 1985.

²⁵ K. P. Schneider, *Diminutives in English*, Tübingen 2003, p. 85.

²⁶ R. Kiełtyka, *On morphology-semantics interface*, [in:] *Galicja English Teachings: Old Pitfalls, Changing Attitudes and New Vistas*, eds. G. A. Kleparski, E. Rokosz-Piejko and A. Uberman, Rzeszów 2009, p. 52.

²⁷ This view is also supported, among others, by N. Grandi, *Renewal and innovation in the emergence of Indo-European evaluative morphology*, [in:] *Diminutives and Augmentatives in the Languages of the World*, eds. L. Körtvélyessy, P. Štekauer, 2011, [on:] http://lexis.univ-lyon3.fr/IMG/pdf/Lexis_6.pdf, p. 7 (April 12th 2014).

riety of synthetic ways (e.g. *dog* → *doggie*; *duck* → *duckling*; *goose* → *gosling* etc.) to produce diminutives from most noun categories on the pattern of Polish, it is not very common, with the possible exception of first names like *Johnny*, *Sally* and *Suzie* etc., to encounter many or many non-analytic diminutive forms in standard English.

Despite the circa 150-year long extensive study of diminutives²⁸, there still seems to be no unequivocal answer found to the question as to why English diminutives are not “as frequently in use as diminutives in such languages as Spanish, Italian, Russian and Polish”²⁹. In the view of Schneider³⁰, the argument often put forward by some pragmatists claiming that a low number of prototypical diminutives in English would reflect the lack of emotionality and cordiality of English speaking cultures appears rather biased, unconvincing and cannot be taken for granted.

A well-grounded observation is made by Kiełtyka³¹ who asserts that synonymic³² and polysemic³³ formations might be seen as a kind of extension of diminutive meanings to compensate for the limitations of expressive derivation.

In Schneider’s³⁴ investigation substantiated by the monograph “Diminutives in English”, the author attempts “to provide an in-depth account of the status of diminutives and diminutive-based forms in present-day English”³⁵, but he advocates treating these units as an onomasiological category, i.e. a category located within semantics, and simultaneously advises against approaching them only in terms of morphology. Such a method would allow us to perceive suffixation³⁶, i.e. the grammatical aspect, as an option. Hence, alternative ways to express the meaning of diminution in English ought to be sought and scientifically documented. As suggested by Schneider³⁷,

²⁸ K. P. Schneider, *Diminutives in English*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²⁹ K. P. Schneider, S. Strubel-Burgdorf, *Diminutive ‘-let’ in English*, [in:] “SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics”, 2012 vol. 9, no. 1, p. 15.

³⁰ K. P. Schneider, *Diminutives in English*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

³¹ R. Kiełtyka, *On morphology-semantics interface*, *op. cit.*

³² *cat* > *kitten*, see *Ibidem*, p. 58.

³³ *kitten* ‘young cat; darling or object of sexual desire’, see *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ P. Cap, K. P. Schneider, *Diminutives in English*. Book Review, [in:] “Anglia”2004, vol. 122:3, p. 484.

³⁶ In the view of, e.g., P. Štekauer, *On some issues of diminutives from a cross-linguistic perspective*, [in:], *Rahmen des Sprechens. Beiträge zu Valenztheorie, Varietätenlinguistik, Kreolistik, Kognitiver und Historischer Semantik*, eds. S. D. Schmid, U. Detges et al., Tübingen 2011, p. 434. Suffixation is throughout the world’s languages perceived as “the most widespread technique in diminutive-formation”.

³⁷ K. P. Schneider, *Diminutives in English*, *op. cit.*, p. 137

not only formal but also pragmatic and semantic factors should be taken into consideration while investigating the English diminutives in a given context.

What follows is some basic information on the formation of noun diminutives in English.

Synthetically formed English noun diminutives

Like in Polish, to form an English noun diminutive in the synthetic way, specific affixes are attached to the root of the base word. It is conspicuous that the creation of diminutives by means of suffixation predominates. Stageberg and Oaks³⁸ differentiate six such suffixes but without specifying their origin:

<i>-ie, -y</i>	as in <i>auntie, doggie</i> /in baby talk: <i>aunt, dog, Betty</i>
<i>-ette</i> ³⁹	as in <i>kitchenette</i> /tiny kitchen area/, <i>sermonette</i> /short sermon/
<i>-kin</i>	as in <i>cannikin</i> ⁴⁰ /small can/, <i>lambkin</i> /baby lamb/
<i>-ling</i>	as in <i>princeling</i> /minor prince/, <i>spiderling</i> /young spider/
<i>-et</i>	as in <i>cabin^{et}</i> /small private room/, <i>falcon^{et}</i> /small falcon/
<i>-let</i>	as in <i>hamlet</i> /small village/, <i>piglet</i> /young pig/

Following the information found in *Microsoft's Encarta Reference Library*, it becomes clear that most of the suffixes quoted above are borrowings from other languages: *-ie, -y* are of Scottish-Dutch origin, *-ette, -et* and *-let* come from Old French, whereas *-kin* originates from Middle Dutch and *-ling* from Old English.

According to Stageberg and Oaks⁴¹, *-ie* and *-y* are regarded highly productive, because they relate to first names like, e.g. *Johnny* and *Jackie*, being often monosyllabic, and common nouns like *auntie*, thus expressions used to address or talk about people with whom one has good relations⁴². Not less productive is the suffix *-ette*

³⁸ N. C. Stageberg, D. D. Oaks, *An Introductory English Grammar*, Boston 2000, pp. 105-106.

³⁹ As stated by K. P. Schneider, *Diminutives in English*, *op. cit.*, p. 121, in all formations with *-ette* the main stress lies on the suffix.

⁴⁰ Borrowed from the Middle Dutch word *canne*.

⁴¹ N. C. Stageberg, D. D. Oaks, *An Introductory English Grammar*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁴² As remarked by B. Kopecka, *On Gallant Johns and Plain Janes – names and their axiological potential*, [in:] *Galicia Studies in Language. Historical Semantics Brought to the Fore*, eds. B. Kopecka, M. Pikor-Niedzialek and A. Uberman, Chelm 2012, p. 71, the meaning of some diminutive forms derived from English first names is purely figurative, e.g. *Johnny* might stand for 'a fellow/chap' or 'a young man of idle habits'.

which, when attached to the root, can be a sign of a small-size area or object, like in the case of *roomette*, i.e. a small sleeping compartment in a railway sleeping car. Also, there are some seeming diminutive forms, for instance such words as *cabinet* and *toilet*, whose diminutive meaning is either of no importance now or it has totally faded over time.

Stageberg and Oaks⁴³ list a few more loanwords obtained by English from other languages, whose diminutive character, however, has been lost in present-day English and they are treated as nonmorphemic⁴⁴ words, e.g. *armadillo* (mammal with hard-plated body), *damsel* (young or unmarried woman), *particle* (tiny piece), *violin* (stringed instrument played with a bow), *stiletto* (small dagger), *formula*, *capsule* and *calculus*.

Analytically formed English noun diminutives

Analytic diminutive formation is regarded to be the alternate way to express diminution in English. Such diminutives comprise two components: the base word, i.e. a noun, and an adjective from the word field SMALL, serving as the diminutive marker. Usually, it is the adjective *little*, especially its weak variant, that is employed. It is positioned next to the left of the base noun and may be substituted by other synonymous adjectives belonging to the same word field, e.g. *tiny*, *wee* or *teeny-weeny*. However, the application of these potential synonyms poses a certain problem due to some stylistic tinge contained in them and their expression of a higher degree of intensity. The adjective *small*, which is devoid of affective connotations, cannot operate here as a replacement of *little*⁴⁵.

Schneider⁴⁶ additionally differentiates between nouns referring to persons, objects and to abstract nouns and proves in what way the application of the adjectives mentioned above modify the meaning of those nouns. It can be noted that among the examples particularly striking is the diversity of the adjective *little* when used in various groups of nouns, e.g.⁴⁷:

⁴³ N. C. Stageberg, D. D. Oaks, *An Introductory English Grammar*, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

⁴⁴ Morphemes in words acting as suffixes in their native languages have been underlined.

⁴⁵ Cf. K. P. Schneider, *Diminutives in English*, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 131-134.

⁴⁷ Some of the examples have been adjusted by R.P.

<i>There goes a <u>little</u> girl.</i>	= young
<i>There goes a <u>little</u> lady.</i>	= a little girl /expresses appreciation/
<i>Come here, you <u>little</u> brute.</i>	/The pejorative value is lessened due to <i>little</i> ./
<i>He is a <u>little</u> terror.</i>	= He is a terrible boy.
<i>A <u>little</u> cigarette?</i>	/used in offers and expresses politeness/

In a comparable manner to Polish, also in English it is possible that analytic and synthetic markers expressing diminutives merge in one form, e.g. *a little chappie* or *real lady-like little drinkies*.

German noun diminutives

The rationale for the existence of diminutives in German would be very similar to the justification of their application in Polish and English. As noticed by Nekula⁴⁸, in German the repertoire of suffixes responsible for the formation of diminutives is larger than in English. However, taking into account Hentschel and Weydt's⁴⁹ examples indicating a multitude of limitations in this respect, that circumstance does not give rise to higher productivity of German diminutive forms than in the case of their English counterparts. The same authors, i.e. Hentschel and Weydt,⁵⁰ make a notable observation which supplements the traditional definition of diminutives with an important aspect, i.e. the positive emotional component that is contained in most diminutive forms is usually blended with such values as attention, liking towards the object shown by the speaker, a sense of security or familiarity. Therefore, it is unusual to talk, e.g. of a small rodent from the species *rattus* in the diminutive: *Ratte* /rat/ → *⁵¹*Rättchen* or **Rättlein*. Equally hardly acceptable are forms like *Giftschlange* /poisonous snake/ → **Giftschlänglein*; *Stechmücke* /mosquito/ → **Stechmücklein*. On the other hand, it is possible to put nouns naming such living creatures as *mouse* or *ladybird* in the German diminutive: *Maus* /mouse/ → *Mäuschen* or *Mäuslein*; *Glückskäfer* /ladybird/ → *Glückskäferchen*.

⁴⁸ M. Nekula, *Diminution im Deutschen und Tschechischen aus typologischer Sicht*, [in:] *Bilingualer Sprachvergleich und Typologie: Deutsch – Tschechisch*, eds. M. Nekula et al., Tübingen 2013, p. 48.

⁴⁹ E. Hentschel, H. Weydt, *Handbuch der deutschen Grammatik*, Band 4, Berlin 2013, p. 182.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

⁵¹ In synchronically oriented studies, an asterisk (*) is used to mark a form or structure that is wrong or ungrammatical.

Another feature of German diminutives worth mentioning here is the fact that they are derived generally from concrete rather than abstract nouns. To confirm this claim, Hentschel and Weydt⁵² quote a couple of abstract singular nouns put in the diminutive, two of which are incorrect, i.e. **Ängstlein* /anxiety/ and **Freundchen* /friend/. Yet, provided they are used in fixed expressions, such abstract nouns as *Mütchen* and *Schläfchen* behave differently. Namely: *sein Mütchen an jemandem kühlen* /=to take it out on somebody/, *ein Schläfchen halten* /=to take a little nap/. Still, it is possible to create diminutives from some abstract nouns which are perceived as physical quantities. This is the case with *Stunde* /hour/ as a unit of measurement, whose diminutive form *Stündchen*, for instance, in utterances like *Würden Sie sich bitte noch ein Stündchen gedulden?* /lit. ‘Would you mind waiting another hour + dim., please?’/ is entirely correct.

In spite of close scrutiny, I failed to encounter any monograph on Modern German diminutive forms, but as luck would have it, they have been not wholly overlooked by individual authors, who devoted them some place in their grammar books⁵³, articles and even dissertations. At least two papers about German and Czech diminutives have been contributed by Nekula⁵⁴, who discusses diminutives from both typological perspective and from systemic and functional point of view. Moreover, Schwenk⁵⁵, dealing in his article with German diminutives, aims mainly at proposing a classification of various noun diminutive formations. Yet another contrastive study worthwhile reading is a monograph by Mahmod⁵⁶, who in his Ph.D. dissertation thoroughly investigates the systems of German and Arabic, the latter of which prototypically employs not suffixes but infixes to produce diminutives.

In the following subsections, ways of forming German diminutives will be shortly discussed.

⁵² E. Hentschel, H. Weydt, *Handbuch der deutschen Grammatik*, op. cit.

⁵³ e.g. W. Boettcher, *Grammatik verstehen*, Band 1, *Wort*, Tübingen 2009. U. Engel, *Deutsch-polnische kontrastive Grammatik*, op. cit.; E. Hentschel, H. Weydt, *Handbuch der deutschen Grammatik*. 4. Auflage, Berlin 2013.

⁵⁴ M. Nekula, *System und Funktionen der Diminutive. Kontrastiver Vergleich des Deutschen und Tschechischen*, [in:] „Brücken“ NF 11, 2003, pp. 145-188; M. Nekula, *Diminution im Deutschen und Tschechischen aus typologischer Sicht*, [in:] eds. M. Nekula et al., *Bilingualer Sprachvergleich und Typologie: Deutsch – Tschechisch*, Tübingen 2013, pp. 47-70.

⁵⁵ H.-J. Schwenk, *Substantivische Diminutiva im Deutschen – Versuch einer Kategorisierung*, op. cit., p. 276.

⁵⁶ U. H. Mahmod, *Die Diminution im Deutschen und im Arabischen*, Heidelberg 2011. [Ph.D. Dissertation].

Synthetically formed German noun diminutives

A major part of diminutive forms in present-day German are created by means of suffixes. There are generally two suffixes that can be attached to the root of a noun, namely: *-chen* and *-lein*. Both suffixes stem from Middle High German⁵⁷ and have the same meaning. Whichever suffix is applied depends on the geographical region. The more frequent form *-chen* has become commonly used in the most German territory, except for the southern parts, where *-lein* predominates. Nouns created in this way are always neuter. The base for the formation of diminutives is the nominative singular which takes one of the aforementioned suffixes. In addition, some vowels in the root become umlauted, e.g. *Korb* /basket/ → *Körbchen*; *Maus* /mouse/ → *Mäuschen*⁵⁸.

Occasionally, the diminutive form is created by the morpheme *-i* which is especially, though not exclusively, attached to first names or some common nouns that become a sort of pet names, e.g. *Berti* → *Bert*; *Hansi* → *Hans*; *Mutti* → *Mutter* /mother/; *Vati* → *Vater* /father/, etc. Other pet names can be produced by the so-called reduplication, i.e. by the repetition of the root, e.g. *Papa* → *Vater*; *Dodo* → *Doris*. It is peculiar to both of the two formations that the new nouns keep their grammatical genus.

Other dialectal diminutive suffixes are: *-le*, *-el*, *-erl*, *-li* and *(-s)ken*⁵⁹.

Similarly to Polish and English, also in German there are some seeming diminutive forms, whose diminutive character has faded and they do not express diminution any more. Some examples might be: *Herrchen* and *Frauchen* /owner of a dog, respectively a male and a female/, *Mädchen* /girl/, *Stiefmütterchen* /pansy/, and a few more.

As observed by Klimaszewska⁶⁰, Mahmod⁶¹ and Nekula⁶², not only suffixes but also some prefixes can form diminutives, two of which are probably the most

⁵⁷ *Das Herkunftswörterbuch*, ed. G. Drosdowski, Mannheim 1989, p. 110 and p. 414.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Handbuch der deutschen Grammatik*, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 182.

⁶⁰ Z. Klimaszewska, *Diminutive und augmentative Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten des Niederländischen, Deutschen und Polnischen – eine konfrontative Darstellung*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁶¹ U. H. Mahmod, *Die Diminution im Deutschen und im Arabischen*, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

⁶² M. Nekula, *System und Funktionen der Diminutive. Kontrastiver Vergleich des Deutschen und Tschechischen*, *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 157.

common, i.e. *Mini*⁶³- and *Mikro*⁶⁴- like in *Minirock* /miniskirt/, *Minigolf* /minigolf/, *Mikroklima* /microclimate/, *Mikroorganismus* /microorganism/. According to Mahmud⁶⁵, this kind of diminutives indicates especially reduction in size rather than affective meaning.

Analytically formed German noun diminutives

In the same way as in English, diminution in German can also be performed attributively with such adjectives as *klein*, *winzig*, *jung*, *gering*, *kurz*, *minimal* etc., e.g.:

<i>das Brüderchen</i>	–	<i>kleiner Bruder</i>	–	<i>kleines Brüderchen</i>
<i>das Büchlein</i>	–	<i>kleines Buch</i>	–	<i>kleines Büchlein</i>
<i>das Türchen</i>	–	<i>kleine Tür</i>	–	<i>kleines Türchen</i>

However, it is also possible that synthetic and analytic diminutive forms are merged, as the above examples on the very right indicate. A similar observation has been made by Klimaszewska⁶⁶.

Analytical forms of German diminutives come in handy especially in the case of nouns that disallow the synthetic way of diminutive creation, e.g. *Glück* /luck/, where neither **Glückchen* nor **Glücklein* constitute correct forms. As remarked by Boettcher⁶⁷, it is an attributive adjective that could turn out useful for a diminutive meaning to be communicated despite the limitation of the analytic method, cf. *kleines Glück* /a little luck/. In addition, the degree of diminution can be slightly modified by means of the intensifying particle *sehr* /very/, cf. *sehr kleines Glück* → *sehr, sehr kleines Glück*.

As noted *inter alia* by Mahmud⁶⁸, analytic, also known as syntactic way of forming German diminutives is verbalized by means of the so-called closed compounds with *Klein*- /small/ and, alternatively, *Zwerg*- /midget/ as their first element. However,

⁶³ It is a shortening of *miniature*.

⁶⁴ Greek origin, [on:] <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikro> (June 30th 2016).

⁶⁵ U. H. Mahmud, *Die Diminution im Deutschen und im Arabischen*, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Z. Klimaszewska, *Diminutive und augmentative Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten des Niederländischen, Deutschen und Polnischen – eine konfrontative Darstellung*, op. cit.

⁶⁷ W. Boettcher, *Grammatik verstehen, Band 1: Wort*, Tübingen 2009, p. 244.

⁶⁸ U. H. Mahmud, *Die Diminution im Deutschen und im Arabischen*, op. cit., p. 59.

as stressed by Klimaszewska⁶⁹, there is no synonymy between the individual constructions, e.g.:

<i>Städtchen</i> /not only a small but also a nice town/	– <i>Kleinstadt</i> /small town/
<i>Tierchen</i> /not only a small but also a cute animal/	– <i>Kleintier</i> /small animal/
<i>Kleinanzeige</i> /classified advertisement/	– <i>kleine Anzeige</i> /short advertisement/
<i>Kleinfußball</i> /football game played on a small pitch/	– <i>kleiner Fußball</i> /small ball/

The first two pairs of the above examples, i.e. *Städtchen* – *Kleinstadt* and *Tierchen* – *Kleintier*, clearly demonstrate that only the synthetic diminutives are able to convey an affective connotation except for indicating smallness. The meaning of the remaining analytic examples, i.e. *Kleinanzeige* – *kleine Anzeige* and *Kleinfußball* – *kleiner Fußball*, definitely differs and there is no emotional factor contained within them.

Conclusion

In this paper, attempts have been made to illustrate the phenomenon of diminution in three Indo-European languages, i.e. Polish, English and German. In particular, the formation of diminutives, their function and the current state of research were discussed.

As far as Polish is concerned, it turned out that the majority of diminutives is created by derivational processes, i.e. synthetically. Though, as it appears, analytic formations are far from being rare, and a combination of both types is possible, as well.

In English, whose inflectional system is practically non-existent, the meaning of diminution is achieved via analytic constructions with attributively used adjectives belonging to the word field SMALL. There are a couple of diminutive suffixes, indeed, but they collocate only with a certain (and probably countable) number of nouns, which testifies to little productivity of the synthetic method.

As the last group, German diminutives were examined. As an interesting con-

⁶⁹ Z. Klimaszewska, *Diminutive und augmentative Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten des Niederländischen, Deutschen und Polnischen – eine konfrontative Darstellung*, op. cit.

clusion, it was noticed that those forms which create diminution analytically, i.e. by means of closed compounds, as well as by attributively used adjectives, are devoid of affective connotations which, in turn, accompany practically all formations produced synthetically, i.e. by way of suffixation.

Based on the above discussion backed by numerous examples, it can probably safely be concluded that a comparison of both Germanic languages (English and German) to the Slavic one (Polish) comes out quite disadvantageous to the former, because in spite of distinguishing the category of noun diminutives, the synthetic way of forming them, regarded as prototypical, is evidently less developed in English and German. Also, the range of use of diminutive forms in both groups of languages seems to differ. Especially in English, they appear to make a closed word class and are usually employed to indicate a small size (*kitchenette*, *wavelet*), or point to the young age of the relevant object (*lambkin*). In German, they are additionally part of fixed phrases like *sich ins Fäustchen lachen* /to laugh up one's sleeve/, *aus dem Häuschen geraten* /to go berserk/, or they denote the owner of a domesticated animal, who is then referred to as *Frauchen* /mistress/ and *Herrchen* /master/.

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Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu dostarczyć podstawowych informacji na temat morfologii i funkcji deminutywów rzeczownikowych w językach polskim, angielskim i niemieckim oraz zwięźle przedstawić stan badań nad tymi jednostkami. Pomimo faktu, iż w obrębie każdego z trzech omawianych języków deminutywa formalnie istnieją i mogą być tworzone zarówno w sposób syntetyczny jak i analityczny, to największą złożoność i najszersze spektrum zastosowania zdają się wykazywać jedynie deminutiwa polskie. Niejednokrotnie bowiem komunikują one więcej niuansów znaczeniowych niż deminutywa angielskie i niemieckie, które z reguły nie zawierają dodatkowych treści wykraczających poza prymarną funkcję deminutywów, jaką jest wskazywanie na niewielki rozmiar czy też młody wiek odnośnego obiektu.

Słowa kluczowe: deminutywa, zdrobnienia, morfologia, zastosowanie, język polski, język angielski, język niemiecki

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to provide basic information on morphology and function of noun diminutives in Polish, English and German. It also gives a brief overview of the state of research conducted so far on the units discussed. In spite of the fact that, in each of the three languages, diminutives formally exist and can be formed in both synthetic and analytic way, it is merely Polish diminutives that are characterized by the greatest complexity and the broadest spectrum of use. They often communicate more niceties of meaning than English and German diminutives do, in the case of which an additional content going beyond their primary function, i.e. the indication of smallness or the young age of the relevant object, is usually not included.

Keywords: diminutives, morphology, use, Polish, English, German