

# بچوو ککر دنه وه له زمانى کوردیدا: تووژینه وه یه کی پراگماتیکیه

## التصغير في اللغة الكردية: دراسة تداولية

### Diminutives in Kurdish Language: A Pragmatic Study

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#### پوخته:

ئامانج له م تووژینه وه یه بریتیه له لیکۆلینه وه له ئه رکه پراگماتیکیه کانی بچوو ککر دنه وه له زمانى کوردیدا. تووژهران مۆدیلى ریزگرتنى زمانه وانى (براون و لیفئسن) ی گرتوه ته بهر بۆ به ده سه ته پینانى ئه نجامه کان. داتا کان له رینگه ی ئه و چاوپیکه وتن و گفتوگویانه به ده سه ته اتوون که به شیوه یه کی سروشتی روویانداوه. بچوو ککر دنه وه له زمانى کوردیدا بۆ هه ر دوو ستراتژی کانی ریزگرتنى ئه رتیی و نه رتیی به کار دیت، سه باره ت به ستراتژی ریزگرتنى ئه رتیی، هاوریه تی و خۆشه و یستی و لیبوردی نیشان ده دات، به لام سه باره ت به ستراتژی ریزگرتنى نه رتیی، ئامانج لێ که مکر دنه وه ی خۆسه پاندى ونه رمترکردنى وته ی نه رتیه. ده رئه نجامه کان ئه وه نیشان ده دن که سه ره رای ئه وه ی به کاره پینانى سه ره کی بچوو ککر دنه وه بۆ مندالانه، به لام کورد ئه رکی پراگماتیکى پیده ده ن به مه به ستی که مکر دنه وه ی خۆسه پاندى و گوزارشتکردن له خۆشه و یستی و په یوه ندى دۆستانه.

کلپه وشه: (پراگماتیک، بچوو ککر دنه وه، زمانى کوردی، ریزگرتن، خۆسه پاندى)

#### المخلص:

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو التحقيق عن الوظائف التداولية للتصغير في اللغة الكردية. تبني الباحثان نموذج براون وليفينسون للإحترام اللغوي في التحليل والمقارنة. تم جمع البيانات من خلال المقابلات والمحادثات التي تحدث بشكل طبيعي. يستخدم التصغير في اللغة الكردية كاستراتيجيات مهذبة إيجابية وسلبية على حد سواء، بالنسبة لاستراتيجية الإحترام الإيجابية تمثل تفاعلاً ودياً وتضامناً وتعبيراً عن المودة والتسامح. أما بالنسبة لاستراتيجية الإحترام السلبية، كانت تهدف إلى تقليل الفرض وتخفيف التصريحات السلبية. تظهر النتائج أنه على الرغم من الاستخدام المركزي للتصغير مع الأطفال، إلا أن الأكراد أخذوا على عاتقهم وظائف تداولية لتقليل الفرض والتعبير عن الألفة والترابط.

الكلمة المفتاحية: (التداولية، التصغير، اللغة الكردية، الإحترام، الفرض)

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**Abstract:**

The aim of the study is to investigate the pragmatic functions of diminutives in Kurdish. The researchers adopted Brown and Levinson's model of linguistic politeness in the analysis. The data has been collected through interviews and naturally occurring conversations. The diminutives in Kurdish are used both as positive and negative politeness strategies, for the positive, it marks a friendly interaction, solidarity, expressing affection and endearment. For negative politeness strategy, it aims at minimizing imposition and softening negative statements. The results show that in spite of the central use of diminutives with children, Kurds have taken on the pragmatic functions of minimizing imposition and expressing intimacy and connectedness.

**Keyword:** (Pragmatics, diminutives, Kurdish, politeness, imposition)

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In everyday interactions, people express their ideas and thoughts through language, pragmatics explores the use of language. Verschueren (1987: 68) states that "social role relationships as determined by social structure, including role conflicts and the notion of social power definable as the extent to which a participant can impose his/her wants on another participant." When participants speak, they disclose their cognitive properties (biographies, experiences, previous knowledge, etc.), beliefs, attitudes, motives, emotions, and sympathy vs. antipathy (Dressler & Merlini-Barbatesi, 1994: 19).

Diminutives exist in almost every language (Jurafsky: 1996). It is used for expressing smallness and endearment. In Kurdish, it is a productive word formation of nouns via one or several suffixes. Diminutives are derivational nouns considered the largest group of suffixed nouns. Basically, diminutives convey the idea of smallness, but it is possible to be used in communicating a variety of pragmatic meanings, that is, what is beyond the notion of smallness. Mendoza (2005: 171) states that the diminutive is a linguistic device with socially motivated meanings.

Diminutives are a feature of child-directed speech (CDS), i.e. the first linguistic forms children acquire and use in their speech. A few studies are made about their use in adult interactions (adult-directed speech-ADS). In most studies the use of diminutive by adults are highly child-directed speech, followed by lover- and pet-directed speech. Adults also use diminutives as they talk to their dear friends, especially women when they talk to their female friends. The dominant meaning of diminutive use comes from emotions such as love and kindness, especially when an addressee is a dear person in non-serious situations (Dressler & Merlini-Barbatesi: 1994). In addition, there are some other situations where it is employed with strangers in adult-directed speech (ADS), it has pragmatic functions like requests, offers, services, etc. This paper shows how diminutives behave in speech acts in different situations with different participants and investigates the different pragmatic functions beyond their use.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are studies about the uses of diminutives in certain languages; the researchers examined similarities of diminutives use cross-linguistically. It is important to investigate the usage and the pragmatic functions of diminutives to see how this linguistic device is used in social interactions.

Wierzbicka (1984: 168) states that "rich and productive systems of diminutives in languages, such as those found in Greek, Spanish and Italian, seem to play a crucial role in cultures in which emotions in general and affection in particular, is expected to be shown overtly". According to Dossena (1998: 34), studying the pragmatic functions of diminutives can be useful:

An analysis of the pragmatic function of diminutives thus presents us with another aspect of the multi-faceted structure of spoken language: in speech the cohesiveness of the texture is such that even one morpheme (apparently unimportant, like a diminutive-*ie*) may shift the overall balance of discourse and move its focus onto the speakers' role, the listener's perceptions, or the connotational assumptions that they both share.

In a study of diminutives in Spanish, Mendoza (2005: 165) states that "the diminutive can be used to soften or weaken the illocutionary force of an utterance, and therefore, as a politeness marker." Similarly, Travis (2004: 250) argues that "diminutives in Spanish play an important role in personal interactions, as they can be employed as a vehicle for the expression of good feelings." Furthermore, Jurafsky (1996), made a cross-linguistic research, by conducting a large-scale study to systematically explore the universal tendencies in the semantics of the diminutive.

There are several other studies, which have explored the pragmatic functions of the diminutive. In comparison with other Western European Languages, the largest number of studies has been made in Greek and Spanish, as they have complex and productive systems of diminutives. Sifianou (1992) has investigated the pragmatic functions of diminutives in English and Greek within Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, she collected the data from contemporary Greek and English plays and recorded conversations as well. She found that diminutives in Greek function as a positive politeness strategy to show informality and solidarity, whereas in English they are used to minimize impositions.

Alexopoulos (1994) could observe the same findings based on a questionnaire given to 50 native Greek speakers. Alonso (1961) explored the pragmatic functions and uses of diminutives in Spanish. He noticed that diminutives have many pragmatic uses. He also observed that the meanings and effects of diminutives are dependent on context, the participants' attitudes and the speech act itself.

Travis (2004) analyzed the pragmatic functions of diminutives in a corpus of conversation in Colombian Spanish. The findings support the exact claims made by Wierzbicka (1984; 1992) that frequent use of diminutives in languages such as Russian and Polish plays a valuable role in realizing the cultural goal of expressing good feelings toward others. Rudolph (1990) found that diminutives in Portuguese function as

indicators of emotions, expressing the emotions of the speaker towards what is said, and interlocutor. Salmani Nodoushan (2008a: 257) asserts that the interesting work of Brown and Levinson (1978) on "politeness" and its relation to "face" lead to increase its role in conversational analysis (See also Allan & Salmani Nodoushan, 2015; Capone & Salmani Nodoushan, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan, 2006a,b; 2007a,b,c; 2008b; 2013a,b; 2014a,b,c; 2015a,b; 2016; Salmani Nodoushan, in press; Salmani Nodoushan & Allami, 2011). According to Salmani Nodoushan (2012: 119), face "suggests that each and every speech act is issued as a result of the interplay between self's intention and his motivation, with the intention being the ignition, and motivation the fuel." Diminutivisation is one such speech act. Brown and Levinson consider the diminutive as a politeness marker. They discuss diminutives merely as address terms having a "function of claiming in group solidarity" and as forms used to soften face-threatening acts with directives (1987: 108). They also refer to diminutives as having "hedging functions" in languages with diminutivizing adjectives or adverbs (1987: 157).

Based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, diminutives may function as a positive politeness strategy to focus on the emotional bond between the speaker and the hearer, or as a negative politeness strategy to minimize impositions.

This study discusses the diminutives as interactional devices in Kurdish, which have pragmatic functions and form positive and negative politeness markers. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will fill a gap in Kurdish pragmatics studies in general and explain the pragmatic functions of diminutives in particular.

### **3. METHODOLOGY AND THE CORPUS**

The corpus of the study is 30 spontaneous recorded conversations, collected by the researcher between November 2021 and May 2022. Each conversation was approximately 35 minutes long. The participants were visited in their homes, offices, workplaces, family gatherings, campus, coffee shops, etc. and informal conversations were recorded. The data for this study were drawn from that corpus. The participants were not aware of that their speech was recorded for the study purposes so as to be natural, because in Kurdish, as in every other language, diminutives are more likely to occur in natural conversational settings that involve communicating more than what is being said.

### **4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

The present study's first aim was to present a basic description of the most common used diminutives in Kurdish by speakers of different ages and gender. The results showed that diminutives are employed for various pragmatic functions. The findings support the above-mentioned reviewed studies that confirm the value and pragmatic functions of diminutives, especially in social interactional contexts like informal

conversations, where interlocutors resort to diminutives in expressing their emotions and attitudes toward others and things.

To analyze the conversations, they were transcribed, put down on paper, and then all the diminutivized words were identified, extracted and labeled for the pragmatic function for which it was used in the conversation. King and Melzi (2004: 242) states that “it is sometimes difficult to infer exact pragmatic functions or intentions (e.g., endearment and affection), for every instance of diminutive use.” Therefore, a broad classification of diminutive realizations was adopted, by considering the sequential context of an utterance, its paralinguistic and prosodic features. In addition, the researcher is a native speaker of Kurdish and is thus familiar with the local social relations and social interactions, which was helpful in identifying and analyze the potential pragmatic purpose of diminutive usage. The following four labels were adopted as broad classifications of pragmatic functions for diminutive use:

#### 4.1 Addressing/referring to children

Like many other observed cultural contexts in the world (cf., Andrews, 1999; Badarneh, 2010; King & Meliz, 2004; Sifianou, 1992; Travis, 2004), Kurds use diminutives in addressing and referring to children to show endearment, affection and small size. It indicates of the fact that the addressee/referent is a child by using the diminutivized forms of children’s names, endearment concepts, adjectives and nouns related to the addressee. In the Kurdish society, such uses are often limited to those who have a close relation with children, including relatives and friends. Example (1) shows the way that children are referred to by diminutivized forms of their first names and their belongings (e.g., toys) (the Kurdish diminutive is italicized).

(1)

[Mother talking about her own young child]

berxokekeman çenda jwane!

Lamb-Dim our how beautiful!

‘How beautiful our lamb-Dim is!’

In the above example, the situation is informal, the mother is talking to her neighbor, refers to her child as if he is a small lamb to show small size, affection, endearment and positive politeness.

#### 4.2 Pejoration

Diminutives in Kurdish are not restricted to communication with children. They could be employed in contexts and topics related to adult-directed speech. Kurds might employ diminutives to indicate a negative assessment and attitude towards the listener/referent. This can be performed through using diminutivized forms of the referent’s name, shape, and belongings, as well as common nouns and adjectives that describe

the addressee or the referent.

This includes using diminutivized forms of the referent's name, shape, and properties, as well as common nouns and adjectives that describe the addressee or the referent. Example (2) shows how this function is used in Kurdish:

(2)

[A woman is criticizing her 18-year-old son]

to kêşet çya le taqikrdneweket, şêtoke?

You wrong what's with in exam your, fool-Dim?

'What's wrong with your exam, fool-Dim?'

In the above example, a mother criticized her 18-year-old son Ari for not doing well in his exams. Pragmatically, the woman uses the diminutive in a context where she shows her anger and dissatisfaction, because the son is not studying hard for his upcoming exams, which will determine whether he will or will not go to college. The indication of the mother's dissatisfaction is that she does not address her son by his real name, i.e. Ari, but by the diminutive şêtoke. Through this diminutivized form, the mother insults her son that he behaves like children in not taking his own responsibility or care about his own future. The insult is not explicit; the tone of the mother's words is indirect by employing a diminutive to become less offensive.

Example (3) is another similar case where a man tries to stop his 16-year-old son from talking in the presence of the aged siblings.

(3)

[A man is talking to his son]

hewaş e'aqtoke.

Quiet be smart-Dim.

'Be quiet smart-Dim.'

In brief, in such situations, the speaker tries to avoid giving the impression that he/she does not like the manner of children/adults, by mitigating the utterances with the use of the diminutives. Without using the diminutives, utterances like that would sound harsh, and threaten their own positive face in front of others. By using the diminutive, the complaint tends to be on the children's behavior rather than the children themselves.

### 4.3 Intensification

In Kurdish, diminutives are pragmatically used to increase the speaker's positive attitudes towards the addressee/referent. In intensification, the diminutive expresses endearment, intimacy and affection; it sometimes expands to show sympathy and empathy towards the addressee/referent.

In some cases, the speaker communicates his/her sense of appreciation and admiration towards something the addressee/referent has. This can often be performed through using diminutivized forms of the referent's proper names, terms of endearment, and fictive kin terms. It can be employed to address or refer to adults and children. The use of diminutives in Kurdish in relation to children is a part of this universal function of the diminutives. The following two examples illustrate the case:

(4)

[A woman is playing with her seven-month-old daughter]

eme xoşewistokey daikyeti.

This lover-Dim mother her is.

'This is the lover-Dim of her mother.'

In the above example, the mother uses the diminutive to add a connotative meaning of affection to the denotative meaning of smallness toward the infant.

In addition, these diminutives show the people who are present in the context how much the mother loves and cares about her child. The mother tries to "represent the world as a friendly place" (Sifianou, 1992: 158) by creating a love and endearment atmosphere to affect herself and the infant positively, and perhaps the people who are around her as well. In Kurdish, this diminutives use is in agreement with their use in other cultures to create "attachment and intimacy" and make "emotional bonding" between the mother and the child (King & Melzi, 2004: 257). Example (5) can illustrate more:

(5)

[A woman is talking to her daughter about a meal that she just has eaten]

befasti ew çeştequloke xoş bû.

Really this food-Dim good was.

'This food-Dim was really good.'

Diminutives in speech acts are used with lovers and pets, they usually convey an emotional aspect, including tenderness, compassion, pleasantness, and even soft irony. Usually in a conversation and creating intimate exchange, only two persons (speaker and hearer) participate. Another person or more participants would disturb the nature of a lover directed speech situation and the nature of the emotions. In example (6) below there is a wife addresses her husband as Rîze "Rîzgar Dim" instead of Rîzgar.

(6)

[A wife is talking to her husband, Rîzgar]

Rîze, çî dexoit?

Rîzgar Dim, what eat you?

'Rîzgar Dim, what would you like to eat?'

In the case of the above example, it is the lover-directed speech, the vocative forms are most frequently used, that is, the noun forms lovers use in calling each other. A characteristic feature of the language of love is Playfulness; as concerns the linguistic creativity of lovers, the phenomenon of the 'childish behavior of lovers' is often observed. Therefore, special words and names are fabricated for certain purposes when two persons share intimate experiences and memories.

It is noticed that in the situation of lovers' speech, women use more diminutives than men. This could be interpreted from the inequality of their status. In example (7), a man is ordering his wife, Gelawêj, to bring him some tea:

(7)

[A man is talking to his wife, Gelawêj]

Gele, çayekm bo bêne.

Gelawêj Dim, a tea bring to me.

'Gelawêj Dim, bring me some tea.'

In the culture of Kurdish, women are usually regarded as weaker and smaller than men, therefore, they need support. Metaphorically, women are considered children because both of them are weaker, and the stronger party always has the right to use diminutives. Thus, it can be assumed that, even in very intimate speech situations where two close adults interact, one of them benefits from it and marks a superior status by using the linguistic form of diminutives. Diminutives are mostly used for the benefit and advantage of the speaker.

#### 4.4 Pragmatic hedging

In the culture of Kurdish, diminutives may make conversational interaction easier as in the example (8) below. Diminutives are sometimes used as pragmatic hedges by lessening the illocutionary force of an utterance, especially the speech act of request, offer and command. In such cases, diminutives act as negative politeness markers by lessening imposition on the hearer. Similar usages are found in some other languages, diminutives that function as a hedging device extends in Kurdish to encode the speaker's understating of his/her own possessions, achievements and characteristics in order to demonstrate modesty and avoid boasting and showing off. Example (8) illustrates the use of a diminutive (cantayoke 'bag') as a pragmatic hedge to weaken the imposition of the request.

(8)



[An old woman is talking to a boy]

Detwanî em cantayokem leget hatgrî?

Could you this bag Dim me with carry?

'Would you help me carry this bag Dim?'

In the context of the above example, the older woman tries to convince the boy whom she is asking for help that the bag is light by employing the diminutive form of (bag). Hypocorisms in Kurdish are mainly used to express warm feelings of love and kindness. The basic forms of names used in the data are common. In fact, the base form of the girl's name used by her mother can acquire different pragmatic values:

(9)

[A mother is talking to her daughter, Nazdar]

Naze were le tenîştî danîşe.

Nazdar Dim come to next me sit.

'Nazdar Dim, sit next to me.'

The situation portrayed in the above example, a mother is using a diminutive form of the basic form of the name, in order to tell the girl to behave well, as her behavior is a face-threatening act to the mother. In addition to that, most of the time, mothers use the hypocoristic form to stress their love and tender feelings. In such situations, the basic form of the name acquires a very different negative pragmatic meaning. When mother calls her daughter Naze (or Nazdar) she emphasizes the fact that the girl is doing something wrong. Therefore, example (9) above shows that diminutives in children's language situations often occur in orders, requests, prohibitions and questions and mitigate the strictness of the speech act.

Sometimes, Kurds use diminutives to minimize the value of an offer to convince the hearer to accept it. In this case, the host attempts not to usurp the invitee's freedom of action. Actually, diminutives might be used as markers of solidarity and connectedness as in the case of example (10):

(10)

[A man offering his married sister some more meat]

Bo em parçûke goşte naxorî?

Why this piece Dim meat don't eat you?

Why don't you eat this small piece Dim of meat?

Being polite is almost something to do with lessening impositions using appropriate mitigation devices. Certain devices should be employed, especially in speech act of requests. The case of example (11) below, a diminutive might decrease the severity of a face-threatening act when a speaker tends to extend a request that limits the listener's freedom of choice.

(11)

[An old woman is talking to her daughter]

E'aqtoke, dergake bkewe.

Smart Dim, the door open you.

Smart Dim, open the door.

As mentioned before, women use hypocorisms frequently while addressing their beloved children. The mother's utterance clearly shows that she requested her daughter to perform something by using an imperative verb form.

Diminutives are expected to be used in informal situations with familiar people and intimate interactions, i.e. among people close to each other. In such situations the language of love is used and presents a high degree of cooperativeness. In formal situations on the other hand, the used language presents a high degree of psychological distance, which is not in favor of using diminutives.

Through the current study, it has been noticed that, diminutives are most frequently used in familiar settings, like at home between close interlocutors. It is rarely used with strangers in formal contexts, like at a hospital, at a bank, in supermarkets, etc. The use of diminutives in formal situations reduce the psychological distance and marks the playful character of the exchange.

Diminutives usually accompany positive emotions rather than negative ones, such as fear, pain and anger. If diminutives are used in connection with negative emotions, they are aiming at mitigation. Sympathy is another aspect that demonstrates the use of diminutives. Dressler and Merlini-Barbatesi (1994: 206) state that "sympathy is a direct, dyadic relation between speaker and referent." It represents the speaker's affinity to, and positive attitude towards, persons or things."

Diminutives in Kurdish serve as a politeness strategy either by claiming common ground and showing solidarity towards the addressee or by showing affectionate concern for imposing on his or her freedom of action. In other words, the use of diminutives marks the interaction as "positive and polite" (Sifianou, 1992: 159).

To sum up, in speech situations where the pragmatic feature nonserious involves, the primary function of diminutives is to mitigate the request, in making the request more acceptable by lessening the obligation of the addressee. Actually, a speaker in making a request, may fulfil his needs, but at the same time may seem arrogant or obtrusive. Via diminutives, the speaker concerns the negative effect and still gets what he or she needs. According to Sifianou (1992: 161), diminutives in everyday interactions do not mainly function to soften impositions, but "to express the speaker's wish to maintain or establish a common ground and solidarity with the addressee."

## 5. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that Kurds use diminutives in informal situations and contexts with familiar and intimate people. They try to make their communication more friendly and attempt to decrease the psychological distance. Kurds challenge hierarchies, making attempts to become more equal by removing the barriers of social status such as power, age or gender. Although there were superior status of some of the speakers as discussed above, but still very close and intimate exchanges can be observed.

It can also be concluded that Kurds through using diminutives can modify the pragmatic values of asking questions, giving orders, or making requests and offers. They are very often used for the benefit of the speaker. It is not easy to observe these features directly, but this study shows that even the relationship of love aimed at children or adults involve manipulation and control.

Although the sample of the study is not a big one, one of the advantages of the study is that its data were naturally occurred which assign validity to the identified patterns and the conclusions drawn from these patterns. There are also some other social and cultural factors that may contribute to speakers' variation in using diminutives. This study, opens the gate for future research to investigate and widen people's understanding of the effects of other macro social factors, such as region, social class and education, and micro social factors, including power, distance and other situational factors, about the use of diminutives at a variety of levels of analysis using a range of data in different interactional settings.

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