With ups and downs
Verbal diminutives in Dutch and Afrikaans

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Introduction

- ▶ 2 verbal diminutive suffixes in Germanic: *-el* and *-er*
- ▶ These suffixes indicate that an event is iterative or attenuative.

Consider these Dutch examples:

(1)   *hupp-**el**-en* 'to skip' (repeatedly)

(2)   *stuit-**er**-en* 'to bounce' (repeatedly)

(3)   *krabb-**el**-en* 'to scratch lightly'

(4)   *dobb-**er**-en* 'to float while rocking lightly'

Introduction

Our study:

- ▶ focuses on both *-el* and *-er* morphemes
- ▶ acknowledges that these morphemes can be iterative or attenuative
- ▶ investigates the fact that these morphemes can indicate both a lower intensity and a higher intensity
- ▶ extends to Afrikaans

Introduction

Previous studies on verbal diminutives:

- ▶ Weidhaas & Schmid (2015)
- ▶ Audring, Booij & Jackendoff (2017)

Introduction

Weidhaas & Schmid (2015)

- *-eln* verbal diminutives in German
  - Semantics:
    - iterativity
    - low intensity
    - small pieces
  - Pragmatics:
    - contempt
    - trivialization
    - affection

Introduction

Audring, Booij, & Jackendoff (2017)

- ▶ *-el* verbal diminutives in Dutch
- ▶ Features of verbal diminutives
  - ▶ attenuative
  - ▶ iterative
  - ▶ onomatopoeic

Introduction

Audring, Booij, & Jackendoff (2017)

- ▶ Three of their main findings:
    - ▶ the derivational pattern is unproductive
    - ▶ non-lexical roots are highly prevalent
    - ▶ structural ambiguities due to homophonous suffixes

The data

- ► Native speaker annotation of an extensive collection of verbal diminutives.
- ► Data extracted from *De Dikke Van Dale* for Dutch and the *Woordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal* for Afrikaans.

The data: annotation

Annotation categories

- ► Semantic
  - ► Iteration (YES/NO)

(5)   *Hupp-el-en* 'to skip'

(6)   *Zwend-el-en* 'to scam/fraud'

The data: annotation

Annotation categories

- ► Semantic
  - ► Low intensity (i.e. attenuation, YES/NO)
  - ► High intensity (YES/NO)

(7) *Babb-el-en* 'to babble/chat'

(8) *Buff-el-en* 'to sweat one's guts out'

(9) *Knev-el-en* 'to bind'

The data: annotation

Annotation categories

- Pragmatic
  - Endearment (YES/POSSIBLE/NO)
  - Pejorative (YES/POSSIBLE/NO)

(10)   *Bomm-el-en* 'to buzz (of a bumblebee)'

(11)   *Baz-el-en* 'to twaddle'

(12)   *Kruim-el-en* 'to crumble'

The data: annotation

Annotation categories

- Morphological: base-type
  - Type I: verbal base
  - Type II: nominal base
  - Type III: non-lexical root as base
  - Type IV: verbal/nominal base

(13) *Hink-el-en* 'to hop' – *hinken* 'to limp'

(14) *Klung-el-en* 'to skimp' – *klungel* - 'duffer'

(15) *Rons-el-en* 'to recruit'

(16) *Prikk-el-en* 'to stimulate' – *prikken* 'to prick' – *prikkel* 'stimulant'

The data: results (semantic)

	DU -*el*	DU -*er*	AF -*el*	AF -*er*
Total number of verbs	299	109	130	53
Iterative	80,6%	86,2%	84,6%	88,7%
Not iterative	19,4%	13,8%	15,4%	11,3%
High intensity	56,9%	41,3%	56,2%	43,4%
Low intensity	17,7%	50,5%	20,8%	52,8%
Neutral	25,4%	8,2%	23,0%	3,8%

Table: Iterativity and intensity

▶ Comparable results for both languages

▶ Large majority of verbs is iterative

▶ *Er*- verbs are more often of low intensity than *el*- verbs

The data: results (pragmatic)

	DU -*el*	DU -*er*	AF -*el*	AF -*er*
Total number of verbs	299	109	130	53
Endearing	7,0%	1,8%	4,6%	3,8%
Possibly endearing	27,1%	29,6%	21,5%	1,9%
Not endearing	65,9%	68,6%	74,9%	94,3%
Pejorative	24,7%	11,9%	13,1%	17,0%
Possibly pejorative	27,1%	27,5%	40,0%	30,2%
Not pejorative	48,2%	60,6%	46,9%	52,8%

Table: Endearing and pejorative readings

▶ Like nominal diminutives (Jurafsky 1996), verbal diminutives can have expressive meaning

▶ In Afrikaans, a pejorative meaning is more likely than endearment

The data: results (morphological)

	DU *-el*	DU *-er*	AF *-el*	AF *-er*
Total number of verbs	299	109	130	53
Type I	17,1%	21,1%	15,4%	22,6%
Type II	17,1%	4,6%	26,2%	20,7%
Type III	41,1%	63,3%	53,1%	49,1%
Type VI	24,7%	11,0%	3,3%	7,6%

Table: Morphological base type

▶ Unlike in German (Weidhaas & Schmid 2015), type III is the most frequent base type for verbal diminutives in Dutch and Afrikaans

▶ Do these morphemes still have suffixal status, or have they become integrated in the lexical entries of verbal diminutives?

Towards an analysis of high and low intensity

Proposal in a nutshell

- ▶ The *er-* morpheme is a differential amount marker (cf. Kennedy & Levin 2008; Morzycki 2007)
- ▶ It marks only a difference, rather than the orientation of the intensity
- ▶ This is analogous to the comparative use of *er-*, which functions as a differential amount marker, its direction (up or down) depending on the adjective to which it is attached

(17) Mary is 5 centimeters taller than Bill.

(18) Bill is 5 centimeters shorter than Mary.

Towards an analysis of high and low intensity

Proposal in a nutshell

- ▶ There is cross-Germanic diachronic evidence that the *el-* suffix was used as a differential amount marker (e.g. Old and Middle English *lȳtel/litel* and *micel/muchel*)
- ▶ The fact that this use is no longer present in modern Dutch and Afrikaans, accounts for the fact that high intensity is much less frequent in *el-* verbs compared to *er-* verbs

References

Audring, J., Booij, G. and Jackendoff, R. 2017. *Menscheln, kibbelen, sparkle.* Verbal dimunitives between grammar and lexicon. *LiN 2017*, 1-15.

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Weidhaas, T. and Schmid, H.-J. 2015. Diminutive verbs in German. Semantic analysis and theoretical implications. *Morphology* 25(2). 183-228.