

Diminutive as an Inflectional Category in Walman*

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Abstract: Walman, a language in the Torricelli language spoken in Papua New Guinea has an inflectional diminutive affix which occurs in agreement slots in various words, including verbs and adjectives in opposition to third person singular masculine, third person singular feminine, and third plural. It contrasts with diminutive affixes in most languages in that (1) it cannot appear on nouns; and (2) it is clearly inflectional. The closest analogue in other languages that we are aware of is diminutive noun classes in Bantu languages. However, the Walman diminutive exhibits rather different agreement patterns from masculine and feminine and can be shown not to be a third gender.

Keywords: diminutive, gender, agreement

Diminutive affixes are not uncommon among the languages of the world, but they are mostly derivational affixes, being added to nouns to denote a small instance of what the noun denotes, often with some additional emotive content of endearment (Wierzbicka 1984, Jurafsky 1996). In some languages, such as Dutch (Donaldson 1997: 52-53), diminutive marking is not restricted to nouns, but occurs on adjectives, numeral, and adverbs. Crosslinguistically, however, diminutive marking is generally associated with nouns.

In this paper, we describe a diminutive category in Walman, a language in the Torricelli family spoken in Papua New Guinea, which is not derivational, but is clearly an inflectional category that is realized, not on the noun itself, but on various words that agree with nouns or with noun phrases¹. The examples in (1) illustrate a third person singular diminutive subject prefix *l-* on the verb, which contrasts with third person singular feminine, third person singular masculine, and third person plural forms in (2) to (4).

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¹ Walman is spoken on the north coast of Papua New Guinea, about 160 km east of the border between Papua New Guinea and the Indonesian part of New Guinea, now called 'West Papua'.

- (1) Pelen **l**-aykiri.
 dog **3SG.DIMIN**-bark
 ‘The puppy is barking.’
- (2) Pelen **w**-aykiri.
 dog **3SG.FEM**-bark
 ‘The female dog is barking.’
- (3) Pelen **n**-aykiri.
 dog **3SG.MASC**-bark
 ‘The male dog is barking.’
- (4) Pelen **y**-aykiri.
 dog **3PL**-bark
 ‘The dogs are barking.’

Note that the four sentences in (1) to (4) differ only in the subject prefix on the verb, without any difference in the form of the subject noun phrase, despite the fact that different referents are denoted in the four cases².

Diminutive marking in Walman also contrasts with masculine third singular, feminine third singular and third plural categories for object affixes, illustrated by the suffixes in (5) to (8). The verb in (5) ends in the suffix *-l*, contrasting again with the feminine singular, masculine singular, and plural object forms in (6) to (8). Note that the diminutive morpheme is always /l/, whether it is a prefix, as in (1) above, or a suffix as in (5).

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| (5) | Kum m-eter e-l
1SG 1SG.SUBJ-see- 3SG.DIMIN.OBJ
‘I saw a puppy.’ | pelen.
dog |
| (6) | Kum m-eter e-∅
1SG 1SG.SUBJ-see- 3SG.FEM.OBJ
‘I saw a female dog.’ | pelen.
dog |
| (7) | Kum m-eter e-n
1SG 1SG.SUBJ-see- 3SG.MASC.OBJ
‘I saw a male dog.’ | pelen.
dog |

² The closest analogue to the Walman diminutive that we are aware of is diminutive noun classes in Bantu languages. We discuss in section 5 below the similarities and differences between the Walman diminutive and the diminutive noun class in the Bantu language Shona.

- (8) Kum m-etere-y pelen.
 1SG 1SG.SUBJ-see-3PL.OBJ dog
 ‘I saw some dogs.’

Diminutive marking also occurs on a number of modifiers of nouns, again contrasting with feminine, masculine, and plural. This includes five descriptive adjectives that we are aware of, two demonstrative words, and two numerals meaning ‘one’, shown in Table 1.³

Table 1
 Forms of Noun Modifiers with Diminutive Forms⁴

<i>fem.sg</i>	<i>masc.sg</i>	<i>plural</i>	<i>diminutive.sg</i>	
nyopu	nyopun	nyopuy	nyopul	‘good’
wolue	woluen	woluey	woluel	‘bad’
lapo	lapon	lapoy	lapol	‘large’
rorani	ronrani	royrani	rolrani	‘long, tall’
kolue	koluen	koluey	koluel	‘short’
paten	panten	payten~paytey	palten	‘that’
yapa	yanpa	yaypa~yapa	yalpa	‘that’
ngo	ngon	ngony	ngol	‘one’
alpa	alpan	alpay~alpany	alpal	‘one, alone’

The example in (9) illustrates the diminutive form *ngol* of *ngo-* ‘one’ modifying a noun, contrasting with the masculine singular form *ngon* in (10).

- (9) Pelen ngo-**l** l-aykiri.
 dog one-DIMIN 3SG.DIMIN-bark
 ‘One puppy is barking.’
- (10) Pelen ngo-**n** n-aykiri.
 dog one-MASC 3SG.MASC-bark
 ‘One male dog is barking.’

Agreement with adjectives also shows up on adjectives serving as predicates, either with or without the copula verb *-o*, as in (11) and (12); the diminutive form *woyuel* in (11) contrasts with the plural form *woyuey* ‘bad’ in (12).

³ Other words that modify nouns, including other descriptive adjectives, other demonstratives, and other numerals, do not vary in form at all. In other words, all forms that can vary for gender and/or number also have diminutive forms.

⁴ The plural forms for the two words meaning ‘one’ are used as follows: *ngony* and *alpay* ~ *alpany* are used with pluralia tantum, and *alpay* ~ *alpany* is also used in the sense of ‘alone’ or ‘only’ with semantically plural noun phrases.

- (11) Pelen (l-o) woyue-**l**.
 dog (3SG.DIMIN-be) bad-**DIMIN**
 ‘The puppy is naughty.’
- (12) Pelen (y-o) woyue-**y**.
 dog (3PL-be) bad-**PLUR**
 ‘The dogs are naughty.’

Finally, there are two sets of pronouns in Walman that have diminutive members. The set of third person personal pronouns illustrated in (13) to (16) includes a diminutive member *rul* ‘it (young one)’, illustrated in (13).

- (13) **Rul** l-oruen.
3SG.DIMIN 3SG.DIMIN-cry
 ‘It (young one) is crying.’
- (14) **Ru** w-oruen.
3SG.FEM 3SG.FEM-cry
 ‘She is crying.’
- (15) **Runon** n-oruen.
3SG.MASC 3SG.MASC-cry
 ‘He is crying.’
- (16) **Ri** y-oruen.
3PL 3PL-cry
 ‘They are crying.’

The example in (17) is a text example illustrating the diminutive personal pronoun *rul*.⁵

- (17) L-ara *pek*, kon **rul** l-oruen l-oruen
 3SG.DIMIN-come back night **3SG.DIMIN** 3SG.DIMIN-cry 3SG.DIMIN-cry
 l-oruen ...
 3SG.DIMIN-cry
 ‘and when it [the baby] gets back home, at night it will just cry and cry and cry...’

The same applies to the demonstrative pronoun *ypate* ‘that’, illustrated in (18) to (21). Note that this pronoun inflects for gender/number/diminutive in two places within the word, once inside the stem and once at the end; both occurrences of /l/ in (18) are instances of diminutive marking.

⁵ The diminutive pronoun *rul* appears not to be used frequently. The example in (17) is one of only two instances of *rul* in the texts that we have collected.

The word *pek* ‘back’ in (17) is placed in italics to indicate that it is actually a Tok Pisin word. The use of Tok Pisin words is very common in contemporary Walman.

- (18) Ypa<l>te-l w-kum.
 that<DIMIN>-DIMIN GEN-1SG
 ‘That little one is mine.’
- (19) Ypa<ø>te-ø w-kum.
 that<FEM.SG>-FEM.SG GEN-1SG
 ‘That (feminine) is mine.’
- (20) Ypa<n>te-n w-kum.
 that<MASC.SG>-MASC GEN-1SG
 ‘That (masculine) is mine.’
- (21) Ypa<y>te-y w-kum.
 that<PLUR>-PLUR GEN-1SG
 ‘Those are mine.’

In (22) to (26) are examples from texts that illustrate diminutive forms. In (22), the last two verbs both bear diminutive subject prefixes, the first verb is the verb *-an* ‘be at’, functioning here as a marker of progressive aspect, the second verb *-oruen* ‘cry’.

- (22) Nyanam nngkal pa l-an l-oruen.
 child small that 3SG.DIMIN-be.at 3SG.DIMIN-cry
 ‘The little child was crying.’

In (23), the subject is a conjoined noun phrase, in which the word *warol* ‘and’ is morphologically a verb, bearing a feminine third person singular subject prefix *w-* for the first conjunct *wru chuto rounu alpa* ‘only one old woman’ and a diminutive object suffix for the second conjunct, *nyanam nngkal ngol* ‘a small child’, in which the word *ngol* ‘one’ contains a diminutive suffix *-l*.⁶

- (23) Wru chuto rounu alpa-ø w-aro-l
 3SG.FEM woman old one-FEM 3SG.FEM-and-3SG.DIMIN
 nyanam nngkal ngo-l pa y-an nakol.
 child small one-DIMIN that 3PL-be.at village
 ‘Only one old woman and a small child were left behind.’

The example in (24) is similar with the word *warol* ‘and’ again containing a diminutive object suffix for the second conjunct.

- (24) Y-na y-apu-ø chuto rounu w-aro-l
 3PL-want 3PL-kill-3FEM.SG.OBJ woman old 3SG.FEM-and-3SG.DIMIN
 nyanam nngkal.
 child small
 ‘[They were] planning to kill the old woman and the little baby.’

⁶ See (HIDDEN) for discussion of the verb *-aro* ‘and’.

Example (25) also contains the same form *warol* ‘and’, but in addition, the main verb *yalpu* ‘they killed’ contains a diminutive object affix, which for this verb, like a number of other verbs in Walman, occurs inside the verb stem, rather at the end.

- (25) o chuto rounu ke w-aro-l nyanam
 and woman old also 3SG.FEM-and-3SG.DIMIN child
 nngkal y-a<l>pu.
 small 3PL-kill<DIMIN>
 ‘And [they] killed the old woman too along with the child.’

Finally, in (26) the verb *wnarel* ‘talk to’ bears a diminutive object suffix *-l*, agreeing with the object *nyanam nngkal* ‘the little baby’.

- (26) ru w-an w-akie w-ama pa
 3SG.FEM 3SG.FEM-be.at 3SG.FEM-sing 3SG.FEM-like that
 w-nare-l nyanam nngkal.
 3SG.FEM-talk.to-3SG.DIMIN.OBJ child small
 ‘She was singing like this and talking to the little baby.’

2. Meaning

The basic meaning of diminutive in Walman is that of ‘small’. However, with higher animals, including people, it denotes the young of that animal, rather than any small instance, such as a small adult. Thus, (8) repeated here as (27), would not be appropriate to refer to an event in which a small adult dog is barking, but only if a puppy is barking.

- (27) Pelen l-aykiri.
 dog 3SG.DIMIN-bark
 ‘The puppy is barking.’

The fact that diminutive forms denote the young with higher animals explains why it is possible to have diminutive forms of the adjectives *lapo* ‘large’ and *ro_rani* ‘long, tall’. Thus (28) does not involve a contradiction, but says that a puppy is large.

- (28) Pelen pa<l>ten l-o lapo-l.
 dog that<DIMIN> 3SG.DIMIN-be large-DIMIN
 ‘That puppy is large.’

Similarly, (29) attributes tallness to a child, without contradiction. Note that with the adjective *ro_rani* ‘long, tall’, the marking of gender, number, or diminutive occurs inside the adjective stem.

- (29) Nyanam pa<l>ten l-o ro<l>rani.
 child that<DIMIN> 3SG.DIMIN-be tall<DIMIN>
 ‘That child is tall.’

Diminutive forms are specifically singular in meaning. Thus (1) repeated here as (30) can only mean that one puppy is barking.⁷

- (30) Pelen l-aykiri.
 dog 3SG.DIMIN-bark
 ‘The puppy is barking.’

Diminutive forms are never required either by the grammar or by the context. Thus (2), repeated here as (31), with feminine agreement rather than diminutive agreement, is appropriate even if it is a puppy that is barking.

- (31) Pelen w-aykiri.
 dog 3SG.FEM-bark
 ‘The dog (female) is barking’

An additional element of meaning often but not always associated with diminutive forms in Walman is an emotive element involving expression of affection or sympathy towards the referent, as has been reported for derivational diminutive categories for other languages (Wierzbicka 1984, Jurafsky 1996). Note, however, that affection is not a necessary part of the meaning of forms exhibiting diminutive agreement. For example, (32) is an appropriate way to describe an event involving a small cockroach, without any intention of expressing affection towards the cockroach.

- (32) Kum m-etere-l pirinyue.
 1SG 1SG-see-3SG.DIMIN cockroach
 ‘I saw a small cockroach.’

Almost any noun can occur with diminutive forms, as long as the meaning makes sense. It can occur with inanimate nouns, as in (33) and (34).

- (33) Kal l-an wochu.
 leaf 3SG.DIMIN-be.at bucket
 ‘There is a small leaf in the bucket.’

- (34) Kum m-a<l>wul selenyue.
 1SG 1SG-buy<3SG.DIMIN> axe
 ‘I bought a small axe.’

It can even occur with mass nouns, with the meaning ‘a small quantity of’, as in (35).

⁷ But see footnote 7 below.

- (35) Tantan l-an wochu.
 sand 3SG.DIMIN-be.at bucket
 ‘There is a small quantify of sand in the bucket.’

3. More complex agreement patterns

The diminutive category behaves differently from the other three third person categories in that where two words grammatically associated with the same referent in a sentence inflect for gender or number, the two forms must agree with each other, being both feminine singular, or both masculine singular, or both plural. Thus, given that the verb *wata* ‘bite’ in the examples in (36) bears a feminine third person singular prefix *w-*, the demonstrative modifier of the subject *pelen* ‘dog’ must also be feminine, as in (36a); the masculine and plural forms, as in (36b) and (36c) respectively, are ungrammatical here.

- (36) a. Pelen paten w-ata kum.
 dog that.FEM 3SG.FEM-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘That (female) dog bit me.’
- b. *Pelen pa<n>ten w-ata kum.
 dog that<MASC> 3SG.FEM-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘That dog bit me.’
- c. *Pelen pa<y>ten w-ata kum.
 dog that<PLUR> 3SG.FEM-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 intended meanings: ‘That dog bit me.’ or ‘Those dogs bit me.’

Conversely, when the verb bears a third person singular masculine subject prefix *n-*, the demonstrative modifying the subject noun must also be masculine, as in (37a), and cannot be feminine, as in (37b), or plural, as in (37c).

- (37) a. Pelen pa<n>ten n-ata kum.
 dog that<MASC> 3SG.MASC-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘That (male) dog bit me.’
- a. *Pelen paten n-ata kum.
 dog that.FEM 3SG.MASC-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘That dog bit me.’
- a. *Pelen pa<y>ten n-ata kum.
 dog that<PLUR> 3SG.MASC-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘That dog bit me.’ or ‘Those dogs bit me.’

And if the verb inflects for a third plural subject, only the plural form of the demonstrative is possible, as shown in (38).

- (38) a. Pelen pa<y>ten y-ata kum.
 dog that<PLUR> 3PL-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘Those dogs bit me.’
- b. *Pelen paten y-ata kum.
 dog that.FEM 3PL-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘Those dogs bit me.’
- c. *Pelen pa<n>ten y-ata kum.
 dog that<MASC> 3PL-bite.NON3OBJ 1SG
 ‘Those dogs bit me.’

The diminutive category, however, behaves differently from feminine and masculine. For one thing, there are no nouns that are inherently diminutive, in contrast to gender, where every noun is either masculine or feminine, except for nouns denoting higher animals, where the choice of gender depends on the sex of the animal. What this means is that nouns of a particular gender can occur either with forms of the appropriate gender or with diminutive forms. For example, the word *ngolu* ‘cassowary (a large bird that is like an ostrich)’ is grammatically masculine, regardless of the sex of the bird, and thus requires masculine agreement. Thus, in (39a), both the verb *no* ‘be’ and the adjective *lapon* ‘large’ both bear masculine agreement marking, while (39b) is ungrammatical with feminine forms for these two words.

- (39) a. Ngolu pa n-o lapo-n.
 cassowary that 3SG.MASC-be large-MASC
 ‘That cassowary is large.’
- b. *Ngolu pa w-o lapo-∅.
 cassowary that 3SG.FEM-be large-FEM
 ‘That cassowary is large.’

However, this noun can occur with diminutive agreement, as in (40), where *lo* ‘be’ and *lapol* ‘large’ both bear diminutive agreement.

- (40) Ngolu pa l-o lapo-l.
 cassowary that 3SG.DIMIN-be large-DIMIN
 ‘That baby cassowary is large.’

In one sense, this is analogous to the fact that this noun can also occur with plural agreement, as in (41).

- (41) Ngolu pa y-o lapo-y.
 cassowary that 3PL-be large-PLUR
 ‘Those cassowaries are large.’

However, there are two differences between the possibility of using diminutive agreement forms in (40) and the possibility of using plural agreement forms in (41). First, plural agreement in (41) is required if the referent of *ngolu pa* ‘that cassowary’ is plural. In contrast, diminutive agreement is not required if the referent of *ngolu pa* is a baby cassowary; thus (39a) above is appropriate even if the cassowary referred to is a baby.

The second difference between the option of diminutive forms and the option of plural forms is that if two agreement forms occur where both are associated with the same referent, then both forms must be plural or neither plural, as illustrated in (36) to (38) above. But this is not the case with the diminutive; diminutive forms can co-occur with feminine singular or masculine singular forms, even when the two forms are associated with the same referent. For example, it is possible to have a feminine or masculine subject pronoun in (42), while still having diminutive subject marking on the verb.

- (42) a. Ru l-oruen.
 3SG.FEM 3SG.DIMIN-cry
 ‘She (little) cried.’
- b. Runon l-oruen.
 3SG.MASC 3SG.DIMIN-cry
 ‘He (little) cried.’

And it is possible to have a feminine or masculine form of the adjective *woyue* ‘bad’ modifying the subject noun, while still having diminutive subject marking on the verb, as shown in (43).

- (43) a. Wuel woyue-∅ l-arul.
 pig bad-FEM 3SG.DIMIN-run.away
 ‘The naughty little female pig ran away.’
- b. Wuel woyue-n l-arul.
 pig bad-MASC 3SG.DIMIN-run.away
 ‘The naughty little male pig ran away.’

The reverse situation is also possible. In (44), it is the adjective modifying the noun that occurs in diminutive form, while the subject prefix on the verb is either feminine, as in (44a), or masculine, as in (44b).

- (44) a. Wuel woyue-l w-arul.
 pig bad-DIMIN 3SG.FEM-run.away
 ‘The naughty little female pig ran away.’

- b. Wuel woyue-l n-arul.
 pig bad-DIMIN 3SG.MASC-run.away
 ‘The naughty little male pig ran away.’

The example in (45) from a text in Becker (1971) shows diminutive agreement co-occurring with masculine agreement: the form *alpal* ‘one’ is diminutive (with the diminutive suffix *-l*), while the form *nama* ‘like’ is masculine (with the masculine prefix *n-*), as is the subject prefix on the verb *nayukul* ‘lift’.⁸

- (45) ako nyanam nngkal-Ingkal alpa-l n-ama Riak pa
 then child small-small one-DIMIN 3SG.MASC-like Riak PTCL
 n-ayukul kulkul.
 3SG.MASC-lift<3PL> fireplace
 ‘But one small boy like Riak lifted the fireplace.’

While diminutive forms can co-occur with feminine singular or masculine singular forms, diminutive forms cannot generally co-occur with plural forms, as illustrated in (46) and (47).⁹ In (46), the adnominal demonstrative *palten* is diminutive in form, while the copula *yo* and adjective *lapoy* ‘large’ are plural in form.

- (46) *Ngolu pa<l>ten y-o lapo-y.
 cassowary that<DIMIN> 3PL-be large-PLUR
 ‘Those little cassowaries are large.’

Similarly, (47) is ungrammatical because the subject pronoun is plural, while the subject prefix on the verb is diminutive.

- (47) *Ri l-oruen.
 3pl 3sg.dimin-cry
 ‘They are crying.’

⁸ The *l-* at the beginning of the second half of the reduplicated form *nngkal-Ingkal* (*nngkal* by itself also means ‘small’) is also in some sense diminutive, since this form contrasts with the more common *nngkal-nngkal*. However, this does not reflect any general morphological process in that there is no general process of reduplicating adjectives and changing the first sound of the second half to /l/, nor, as far as we know, are there feminine or plural forms *nngkal-wngkal* or *nngkal-yngkal*.

⁹ Our primary Walman consultant has occasionally accepted sentences combining plural and diminutive forms, though with some hesitation. He suggested that (i) could be used when the speaker did not know whether there was one or more than one puppy barking.

- (i) Pelen nka-y l-aykiri.
 dog young-PLUR 3SG.DIMIN-bark
 ‘The puppy/puppies were barking.’

However, an exception to the incompatibility of diminutive and plural arises with pluralia tantum, nouns which are grammatically plural though apparently with singular referents (or with referents that would normally be singular in other languages).¹⁰ Pluralia tantum in Walman are not themselves marked as plural, but are plural in the sense that forms agreeing with them must generally show plural inflection. Some examples are given in (48) to (50). The noun *nyi* ‘fire’ is grammatically plural, as reflected by the third plural subject prefix on the verb *yiri* ‘blaze’ in (48).

- (48) *Nyi y-iri.*
 fire 3PL-stand.up
 ‘The fire blazed up.’

Similarly the noun *ranguang* ‘laplap (piece of cloth)’ is grammatically plural, as reflected again by the plural agreement on the verb *yan* ‘be at’ in (49).

- (49) *Ranguang y-an Tom rpia.*
 laplap 3PL-be.at Tom under
 ‘The laplap (piece of cloth) is under Tom.’ (J)

In (50), the noun *chrikiel* ‘net’ is grammatically plural, as reflected by the third plural object suffix *-y* on the verb *yeliey* ‘throw’.

- (50) *To rim y-elie-y chrikiel y-orou y-otokru-ø wuel*
 then 3PL 3PL-throw-3PL.OBJ net 3PL-go 3PL-cover-3SG.FEM pig
 ‘They threw their net over the pig.’

The plurality of *chrikiel* ‘net’ is also reflected by the fact that it triggers third plural subject agreement on the serial verbs *yorou* and *yotokru* in (50); a more literal translation (but using the singular pronoun *it*) would be ‘They threw their net, it went, it covered the pig’. The example in (51) shows the same noun *chrikiel* ‘net’ occurring with plural agreement in three places, once on the adnominal demonstrative *payten* ‘that’, once on the copula verb *yo* ‘be’, and once on the predicate adjective *nyopuy* ‘good’.

- (51) *Chrikiel pa<y>ten y-o nyopu-y.*
 net that<PLUR> 3PL-be good-PLUR
 ‘That net is good (useful).’

¹⁰ For most of these nouns, one can tell a story why they might be plural. For example, *nyi* ‘fire’ is grammatically plural, and this might be related to the plurality of flames, and the plurality of *ranguang* ‘piece of cloth, clothing’ might be related to the multiplicity of fibres. However, as we will see shortly, the diminutive treats pluralia tantum differently from other plurals.

This noun *chrikiel* ‘net’ cannot occur with feminine singular agreement, as shown in (52), or with masculine singular agreement, as shown in (53).

(52) *Chrikiel paten w-o nyopu-∅.
 net that.FEM 3SG.FEM-be good-FEM.SG
 ‘That net is good.’

(53) *Chrikiel pa<n>ten n-o nyopu-n.
 net that<MASC.SG> 3SG.MASC-be good-MASC.SG
 ‘That net is good.’

However, significantly, it can occur with diminutive agreement, as in (54).

(54) Chrikiel pa<l>ten l-o nyopu-l.
 net that<DIMIN> 3SG.DIMIN-be good-DIMIN
 ‘That tiny net is good.’

In other words, diminutive marking is apparently semantically singular, not grammatically singular.

4. A comparison of the diminutive in Walman with the diminutive noun class in Bantu languages.

The closest analogue that we are aware of to the Walman diminutive is the use of noun class prefixes in Bantu languages to denote diminutive meaning. What is traditionally called Noun Class 13 in Bantu languages is a diminutive noun class. The discussion here will be based on the Bantu language Shona (Fortune 1955). The prefix associated with this noun class in Shona, *ka-*, can occur on nouns in other noun classes, as in (55); the number in parentheses in the first column denotes the usual noun class of that noun.

(55)	munhu (1)	‘person’	kamunhu	‘small person’
	muti (3)	‘tree’	kamuti	‘small tree’
	cigaro (7)	‘seat’	kacigaro	‘small seat’
	rurimi (11)	‘tongue’	karurimi	‘small tongue’

One difference between Shona and Walman is that the noun class prefix *ka-* does not replace the inherent noun class prefix, but is attached before it. For example, the form *munhu* ‘person’ contains the Noun Class 1 prefix *mu-*, which is retained when the Noun Class 13 prefix *ka-* is attached. While the fact that the inherent noun class prefix is retained when the Noun Class 13 prefix is attached might suggest that it is not a noun class prefix at all, the fact that it is a noun class prefix is clear from the fact that any forms agreeing with such nouns also take *ka-* as the agreement prefix, as in (56), and the inherent noun class of the noun is not marked on the agreeing forms.

- (56) ka-mŋ-ana ka-ŋgu ka-diki
 NC13-NC1-child NC13-my NC13-little
 ‘my little child’ (Fortune 1955: 95)

Crucially, however, Noun Class 13 in Shona is like the diminutive in Walman in that there are no nouns that belong to Noun Class 13. One might even be tempted to say that Noun Class 13 in Shona is not a noun class at all, just as there is no reason to say that the diminutive in Walman is a gender, apart from the fact that the diminutive morphemes occur in the same morphological position as gender morphemes.¹¹ However, there are some differences between Shona and Walman that make it clear that the diminutive in Shona really is a noun class. First, Noun Class 13 in Shona is like other noun classes in Shona in that it is paired up with a plural noun class. The plural of (55) is given in (57), where the *ka-* is replaced by *tu-*, which, following standard Bantu terminology, is called Noun Class 12.

- (57) tu-u-ana tw-aŋgu tu-diki
 NC12-NC2-child NC12-1SG.POSS NC12-small
 ‘my little children’ (Fortune 1955: 95)

Second, the diminutive in Shona is only one instance in which a noun in one noun class can occur with noun class markers of a different noun class with an added element of meaning. For example, prefixes in Noun Class 7 can replace prefixes on nouns in other noun classes to express the added meaning ‘short and fat’ (and for some nouns, other meanings), as illustrated in (58), where the Noun Class 7 prefix replaces the Noun Class 1 prefix on the noun for ‘child’, to yield the meaning ‘fat child’.

- (58) a. mŋ-ana b. c-ana
 NC1-child NC7-child
 ‘child’ ‘fat child’ (Fortune 1955: 82)

Similarly, Noun Class 5 forms replace other noun class forms to express augmentative meaning, Noun Class 11 forms replace other noun class forms to express the meaning ‘long and thin’, Noun Class 14 forms replace other noun class forms to express abstract nouns, and Noun Classes 16, 17 and 18 replace other noun class forms to express locatives. And crucially in most of these cases, but unlike the Noun Class 13, the diminutive noun class, there are some nouns that inherently belong to these noun classes mentioned, in some instances many nouns. For example, the inherent noun class of the

¹¹ Although we use the term ‘gender’ in referring to the contrast in Walman between masculine and feminine, and the term ‘noun class’ in referring to the different classes of noun in Walman, we assume that these are two names for what is essentially the same phenomenon (Corbett 1991), though we follow common usage in using ‘gender’ to refer to a noun class system that is small and includes a contrast between masculine and feminine, and ‘noun class’ to refer to a system that is larger and that does not include a contrast between masculine and feminine.

noun *cirongo* ‘water pot’ is Noun Class 7, the noun class illustrated in (58b). Thus, it is clear these other noun class prefixes really are signals of noun class, unlike the diminutive in Walman, which does not behave itself as a gender. And while Noun Class 13 in Shona has no inherent members, the fact that it otherwise behaves like the other noun classes which are associated with some additional element of meaning and that these other noun classes do have inherent members suggests that it too should be considered a noun class.

Furthermore, related to this point is the fact that there is reason to believe that when the Noun Class 13 prefix in Shona is added to a noun to give diminutive meaning, the noun class has changed, since all agreements with that noun must also be Noun Class 13 forms. But there is no reason to believe that the use of diminutive forms in Walman involves a change in gender. The fact that diminutive forms can co-occur with masculine or feminine agreement forms suggests that these noun phrases are still masculine or feminine regardless of whether some or even all of the agreement forms are diminutive. In short, although there are clearly similarities between the Walman diminutive and the Shona diminutive expressed by Noun Class 13, they differ in that the Shona diminutive is a noun class, while the Walman diminutive is not a gender.

5. Diachronic source

There is some comparative evidence that suggests that the diminutive category in Walman may derive historically from a neuter gender, which has been lost in the language. The related Torricelli language Sreengge (called Aruop in sources like Gordon 2005) has a third neuter gender in addition to the two genders, masculine and feminine, of Walman, and the morpheme associated with the neuter gender in Sreengge is *-l-*, identical to the diminutive morpheme of Walman. Note that the markers of feminine and masculine in Sreengge are *-w-* ~ \emptyset and *-n-* respectively, the same as those in Walman.

While it could be thought that a diminutive category might have been extended to become neuter gender in Sreengge, rather than a neuter gender becoming a diminutive category in Walman, there is one fact internal to Walman that supports the latter hypothesis. Namely, the interrogative pronouns in Walman are *mon* ‘who’ and *mol* ‘what’, where the difference is similar to that in English, with *mon* occurring with humans, *mol* with nonhumans. The *-n* in *mon* ‘who’ is plausibly related historically to the masculine marker *-n*, and the *-l* in *mol* could be cognate to the diminutive *-l*, except that it lacks diminutive meaning, and only has neuter (or more accurately, nonhuman) meaning, approximately the meaning we would expect if the diminutive was originally a marker of neuter gender.

If the diminutive gender did arise from a neuter gender, then the direction of this change runs counter to both the specific claim of Jurafsky (1996: 561ff) that diminutives arise historically from words meaning ‘child’ and to the general claim that semantic changes in grammatical morphemes normally go from specific meanings to

more general meanings (Givón 1975, Heine and Reh 1984, Bybee et al 1994). But some of the ways in which the Walman diminutive differs from typical diminutives make the scenario which we have proposed more plausible. The fact that the Walman diminutive is in paradigmatic opposition to feminine and masculine, throughout the Walman agreement system, is quite unsurprising if it arose from a neuter gender. Note that if it arose from a neuter gender, this probably means that the original neuter gender would have collapsed with the feminine gender (since almost all inanimate nouns in Walman are feminine). While this collapse was occurring, there are various ways in which surviving neuter forms could have been reinterpreted as diminutive. We don't know what sorts of nouns might have belonged to the earlier neuter gender, but if many of them were small inanimate objects, then a change from neuter gender to diminutive would not be unnatural.¹² Furthermore, if two genders collapse into one, it would be natural that forms associated with the gender being lost would be associated with a meaning narrower than neuter gender. In other words, the specific situation of two genders collapsing into one is a situation in which it would be natural for a more general meaning to acquire a more specific meaning. It is quite unclear, in contrast, how a noun meaning 'child' could have developed into an affix consisting of a single consonant that appears throughout the agreement system, sometimes as a prefix, sometimes as a suffix, and sometimes inside stems. Clearly, however, further comparative evidence is needed to determine the likelihood of the Walman diminutive arising from a neuter gender.

It is interesting, however, that the Walman diminutive has the same emotive content of endearment associated with diminutives in many languages.¹³ On the analysis of Jurafsky (1996), this aspect of the meaning of diminutives normally arises from their originating from words meaning 'child', and the meaning 'small' represents an extension of the meaning of 'child' in a second direction. In other words, diminutives often both have a meaning 'small' and serve as expressions of endearment only because they represent two ways of extending the meaning 'child'. But if the Walman diminutive arose from a neuter gender, this scenario would not appear to work for Walman. Rather, if the meaning of neuter gender narrowed, it cannot have narrowed to a meaning as specific as 'child'. It is more plausible that it narrowed to something like 'small', which then extended to the meaning 'young of the species' (independent of size), which included children, which then extended to express endearment. But if this is correct, it would be an exception to Jurafsky's claim that the

¹² Our data for Sreenge is based on about two hours elicitation, and we do not know what semantics is associated with neuter gender in Sreenge. Further data from Sreenge is required to determine whether the neuter gender in Sreenge has, or can have, diminutive implications.

¹³ It is worth noting that the fact that the Walman diminutive forms often have an implication of endearment is not something we found out from asking whether these forms have such an implication, but was mentioned by a speaker that we were trying different forms on.

meaning ‘small’ arises from an extension of ‘child’. Rather, in the case of Walman, the direction of semantic change would have gone from ‘small’ to ‘child’.¹⁴

6. Conclusion

The Walman diminutive differs from diminutives in other languages in only occurring on words that are not nouns, in being unambiguously inflectional, in occurring in an agreement slot (even if there are no rules requiring diminutive agreement), and in being in paradigmatic opposition to masculine, feminine, and plural. It is worth noting, however, that the last of these differences is shared by at least one other language, even though in that language, the diminutive is not inflectional. Namely, in Khasi, a Mon-Khmer language spoken in northeast India, and rather divergent typologically from other Mon-Khmer languages, nouns are commonly accompanied by words we will call noun phrase markers. There are four of these words, and their meanings are apparently identical to the four-way contrast we find in Walman. Namely, these words mean ‘masculine singular’, ‘feminine singular’, ‘plural’, and ‘diminutive’, as illustrated in (59).

(59) a. u brieu
 MASC man
 ‘the/a man’ (Nagaraya 1985: 87)

b. ka khinna?
 FEM girl
 ‘the/a girl’ (Nagaraya 1985: 88)

c. ki dieŋ
 PLUR tree
 ‘trees’ (Nagaraya 1985: 9)

d. i khu:n
 DIMIN child
 ‘the/a child’ (Nagaraya 1985: 9)

Because these noun phrase markers are separate words, however, diminutive is not an inflectional value in Khasi, unlike Walman.

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¹⁴ It is worth noting, however, that all of the instances of diminutive forms both in our own texts and in those in Becker (1971), are associated with referents that are human children.

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