



# The Analysis of Diminutive in Lingchuan Dialect from the Phonological and Morphological Aspect

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the diminutive noun, appellations, verb and adjectives in Lingchuan dialect from the aspects of phonology and morphology. The “ge” prefix word and “er” rhyme change are the main formation methods of diminutive noun, the overlapping and tone sandhi are the secondary method. The “ge” prefix word and overlapping are the main verb word-forming way.

## Subject Areas

Linguistics

## Keywords

Lingchuan Dialect, Rhyme Change, Overlapping, Tone Sandhi

## 1. Introduction

Lingchuan County, part of Jincheng City, is located at the southeastern Shanxi Province. Lingchuan dialect is located at the border of Jin dialect and Central Plains mandarin. Its vocabulary has certain regional characteristics, and the diminutive word is the typical vocabulary. The diminutive refers to the smallness and loveliness in noun [1]. With the expansion of meaning, the diminutive category has expanded into other parts of speech. The diminutive words mean tiny in adjectives and quantifiers, temporary and slight in verbs. The main approaches to show diminutive function in Lingchuan dialect are tonal sandhi, “er” rhyme change, the “ge” prefix word and reduplication.

Lingchuan dialect has 22 initials including zero initial and 38 finals, for details, please read **Table 1** and **Table 2**. There are 6 tones, like dark level [33],

**Table 1.** Consonants

| Manner    | Place | labial | alveolar         | retroflex          | palatal                             | velar |
|-----------|-------|--------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|
|           | Stop  |        | p p <sup>h</sup> | t t <sup>h</sup>   |                                     |       |
| Fricative |       | f      |                  | ʂ                  | ç ç                                 | x ɣ   |
| Affricate |       |        |                  | tʂ tʂ <sup>h</sup> | te te <sup>h</sup> c c <sup>h</sup> |       |
| nasal     |       | m      | n                |                    |                                     |       |
| lateral   |       |        | l                |                    |                                     |       |

**Table 2.** Vowels.

|    |          |      |     |      |      |     |      |         |     |      |      |
|----|----------|------|-----|------|------|-----|------|---------|-----|------|------|
| -ɿ | -e       | -ei  | -a  | -ai  | -au  | -æ  | -aŋ  | -ə      | -əŋ | -ʌ?  | -ə?  |
| -i | -ie -ie? |      | -ia |      | -iau | -iæ | -iaŋ | -iə     | -iŋ | -iʌ? |      |
| -u | -ue      | -uei | -ua | -uai |      | -uæ | -uaŋ | -uə -əu | -uŋ | -uʌ? | -uə? |
| -y | -ye -ye? |      |     |      |      |     |      |         |     | -yʌ? |      |

light level [53], contour tone [213], departing tone [24], dark entering tone [32] and light entering tone [34].

## 2. The Diminutive Tonal Modification

The diminutive tonal modification mainly expresses intimate feeling, which is used in relative appellations and person names. It can be formed in the process of transplanting children language into adult language [2]. Relative appellations refer to the address of relatives who have blood relationship with us, which can be divided into face-to-face addressing and back appellation. Face-to-face addressing refers to the relatives being addressed at the scene, most of them is the respect of the elders to the elders, in addition, to show closeness and respect, the face-to-face addressing can also be used for non-relative elders, such as mom [ma24]. Back appellation refers to the title when referring to a relative, the person being addressed is not present, such as mom [ma53].

The relative appellations in Lingchuan dialect mainly have two forms: monosyllabic words and overlapping words, for detail, please read **Table 3**. Overlapping words are mostly used by children, while adults use monosyllabic words.

In the monosyllabic words, the tone of face-to-face addressing change into a rising tone, the number is 24. The tone of back addressing can become a falling tone, the number is 53.

In the overlapping words, the front character of face-to-face addressing keep original tone, the behind character will become a rising tone; In the back appellation, the front character holds its original tone, the behind character becomes a light tone. Among these overlapping words, “sister” “grandma<sub>1</sub>” and “grandma<sub>2</sub>” obey the sandhi of combining of two contour tones, the first character changes into a falling tone. Although there are differences in tones between monosyllabic terms and overlapping terms, there is a neat correspondence between

**Table 3.** Relative appellations.

| monosyllabic words |          | overlapping words      |                 |
|--------------------|----------|------------------------|-----------------|
| face-to-face       | back     | face-to-face           | back            |
| dad [pa24]         | [pa53]   | dad [pa33 pa24]        | [pa33 pa0]      |
| mom [ma24]         | [ma53]   | mom [ma33 ma24]        | [ma33 ma0]      |
| grandpa [je24]     | [je53]   | grandpa [je53 je24]    | [je53 je0]      |
| uncle [teju24]     | [teju53] | uncle [teju53 teju24]  | [teju53 teju0]  |
| sister [teje24]    | [teje53] | sister [teje21 teje24] | [teje213 teje0] |
| grandma [lau24]    | [lau53]  | grandma [lau21 lau24]  | [lau213 lau0]   |

**Table 4.** The correspondence table.

| rhyme   | basic vowel  | example  |   |
|---------|--------------|--|---|
| ɔ̃, iə̃ | ʌʔ/ə/ai/ia/a | wei bo er [pɔ̃>pʌʔ] scarf<br>hang jia er [teiɔ̃>teia] expert | po er [pʰɔ̃>pə] slope<br>shua er [ʃuɔ̃>ʃua] brush |
| uə̃     | ua           | Hua er [xuə̃>xua] flower                                     |   |
| ə̃-iə̃  | ɻ/ian        | he er [xə̃>xɻ] box   | yang er [iə̃>ian] gesture                         |
| iə̃     | i/in/ɿ       | jīn er ge [tẽiə̃>tẽin] today                               | si er [siə̃>sɿ] silk<br>yan er [jə̃>jin] hole     |
| uə̃     | uei          | yi hui er [xuə̃>xuei] for a moment                           |   |
| ɿ̃ər    | əŋ/iŋ        | shuang sheng er [ʃɿ̃ər>ʃəŋŋ] twins                           | ming er ge [mɿ̃ər>miŋ] tomorrow                   |
| ə̃ur    | əu           | kou er [kʰə̃ur>kʰəu] button                                  | gou er [kə̃ur>kəu] nickname                       |

the monosyllabic forms and the overlapping forms in face-to-face addressing [3].

Tonal patterning refers to the phenomenon that the tone of whole or partial syllable of a word are fixedly read as a high or low, strong or weak pattern in the absence of phonological condition [4]. The relative appellation of Lingchuan dialect is a manifestation of the mode of face-to-face addressing, and it is pronounced in high-rising tone in monosyllabic and disyllabic appellations. The face-to-face mode only follows its own patterning rules, does not comply with the constraints of phonetic conditions, and is not constrained by grammatical conditions.

### 3. The Diminutive Er Rhyme Change

Er rhyme change is common in Lingchuan dialect, and it is the weakening result of er-suffixation, the er-suffixation loses original syllable position in bisyllable, its retroflex feature mend into the rhyme of previous syllable. The correspondence between er rhyme change and basic vowels is as **Table 4**.

The er rhyme change can refer to the objective diminutive, such as volume, height, and can express the subjective diminutive, for example to show affection.

|                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| po er [pʰɔ̃>pə] gentle slope  | yan er [jə̃ > jin] small hole |
| gou er [kə̃ur > kəu] nickname | he er [xə̃ > xɻ] small box    |

With the continuous development of vocabulary, its grammatical meaning is constantly expanding. The diminutive semantics in Lingchuan dialect have begun to generalize. The generalized vocabulary expression is casual and friendly, and it can also appear in the nouns that express time.

#### 4. The Diminutive Suffix

In Lingchuan dialect, there is the usage of “person name + zi”, for detail, please read **Table 5**. The diminutive meaning of “zi” is not obvious, mainly expresses intimate feelings, limited to single word names or nicknames [5].

The ordinal number of siblings can also be suffixed with “son” as a nickname. In a person’s name or nickname, the minor suffix “zi” and the diminutive tonal modification can be used in a superimposed manner. “zi” becomes high-pitched in face to face addressing, and light tone in back addressing. The superposition of the two methods can better show the intimacy and enhance the feelings.

#### 5. The Diminutive Prefix

The words that combine diminutive prefix “ge” and base (word or root). The base can be divided into free and bound. According to the part of speech, it can be divided into nouns, quantifiers, adjectives and verbs. The nouns and quantifiers in the Lingchuan dialect represent small or subjective feelings of objects. Adjectives represent the state of things, and the degree of nature is low, basically expressing derogatory colors. Verbs indicate a slight degree and a short duration of action.

The semantics of diminutive prefix “ge” gradually changed from real to virtual, and the diminutive meaning gradually expanded into temporary and low-level degree.

The usage is the affix ge plus base form the type “ge + A”, and then expanded into other types “ge + A ge + A”, “ge +ge A +A”. About the specific example, Wang Zhipeng [6] conducted a detailed analysis. About the origin of diminutive meaning of prefix ge, Mr. Li Lan believes that it is evolved from partial words. Prefix “ge” as a word formation component is the reanalysis of initials in monosyllable words, and then appear a new affix with word formation and configuration meaning. Shen Ming [1] further speculated that the prefix “ge” in the Shanxi dialect is the result of a reanalysis of the diminutive functions of the noun.

#### 6. The Diminutive Overlapping

Overlapping is one of the common forms in small scales, which may be related

**Table 5.** Diminutive suffix “zi”.

| face-to-face       | back        | face-to-face        | back        |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|
| li zi[li24 tə24]   | [li53 tə0]  | fang zi[faŋ33 tə24] | [faŋ33 tə0] |
| mei zi[mei24 tə24] | [mei24 tə0] | xia zi[cia33 tə24]  | [cia33 tə0] |

to the characteristics of children's language, so overlapping words may come from the influence and penetration of children's language. The structural types of overlapping words in Lingchuan dialect mainly include AA, ABCC, AABB, ABB, and Jia + AA. Overlapping words mainly express the compactness of nouns, the weakness of adjectives, the short-term and progressive nature of actions.

### 6.1. Overlapping Nouns

The number of overlapping nouns in Lingchuan dialect is relatively small, and the structure is AA style, mostly referring to small and subtle daily articles. The prefix “ge” cannot be added before overlapping nouns. For nouns, overlap is the smallest form to express diminutive.

|                                       |                                  |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| zhu zhu [tɕu33 tɕu0] micro glass bead | die die [tie24 tie0] small plate |
| jian jian [tɕin33 tɕin0] small tip    | pi pi [pʰi24 pʰi0] small plastic |
| guan guan [kuan53 kuan0] small jar    | dao dao [tau53 tau0] tiny vulnus |

### 6.2. Overlapping Adjectives

The structure of overlapping adjectives is more diverse, mainly ABB, ABCC and AABB. The overlapping form is used to express the adjectives to a low degree and weak. Among them, the ABB type can add the affix “ge” to form the “A + ge + BB” type, which is used to further emphasize the low degree of adjectives.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| ping zhan zhan [pʰiŋ53 tan33 tan33] flat | hei dongdong [xa33 tuŋ51 tuŋ51] black    |
| fen nen nen [fn213 nn33 nn33] pink       | rou du du [iou53 tu33 tu33] cute         |
| qin bu da da [tʰi33 p33 t24 t0] cute     | bu bu lai lai [p33 p33 lai213 lai0] wave |

### 6.3. Overlapping Verbs

Overlapping verbs are mostly presented in AA structure, mainly expressing the lightness and shortness of actions, indicating the continuation of a certain state or action. The structure can add the prefix “ge”, or add the infix “yi” to form the form of “A+ yi+ A”, where the AA type is used to express faster actions, and “A+ yi+ A” is used to express slower actions. In terms of expressing tenses, overlapping verbs mainly appear in the present tense and future tense sentences, and basically do not appear in the past tense and the perfect tense sentences.

|                                |                            |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| kao kao [kʰau53 kʰau0] lean on | nuo nuo [nuo53 nuo35] move |
| ken ken [kʰən21 kʰən13] bite   | gan gan [kan21 kan13] roll |

### 6.4. The Relationship between Prefix “ge” and Overlapping

The verb in Lingchuan dialect can be added after the prefix “ge”, which means the action is short and slight. The prefix “ge” in front of overlapping verbs means that the action is deepened. The structure of “ge+ verb” can also overlap, indicating the slightest movement. The minor order of overlapping verbs is “A + A” < “ge + A” < “ge + A + A” < “ge + A + ge + A”.

The overlap and the affix “ge” in Lingchuan dialect are the main expressions of small verbs and adjectives. The number of words overlapped on the expression of verbs and adjectives is equivalent to the prefix “ge”. These two methods can combine to deepen the degree. But the number of overlapping diminutive noun is less than the noun that contains prefix “ge”.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper discusses the diminutive noun, appellations, verb and adjectives in Lingchuan dialect from the aspects of phonology and morphology. Shen Ming’s study mainly refers to the basic form of diminutive noun, and finds that the overlapping is the major way to show diminutive. But there is less overlapping noun, which is different from other regions of Jin dialect. The “ge” prefix word and “er” rhyme change are the main formation methods of diminutive noun, the reduplication and tone sandhi are the secondary method. The “ge” prefix word and reduplication are the main verb word-forming way. It is helpful to know Lingchuan dialect by realizing the diminutive vocabulary. The article mainly discusses vocabulary changes at the synchronic level, and lacks diachronic comparisons. In the future, we can conduct a research in this area, and through the investigation, we can find the law of diachronic changes.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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