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On the formation of diminutives in Modern Hebrew morphology

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On Diminution Devices in Modern Hebrew Morphologyⁱ

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Abstract

Of the various diminution devices in Modern Hebrew (+*it*# and +*iya*# suffixation, reduplication, etc.), +*on*# suffixation is the most productive, and often functions as the default case for diminution. Its productivity is emphasized by the fact that it can be appended **after** forms that have already been derived by other diminution strategies. The feminine alternant is +*ónet*# (non-generic feminine +*ónet*# forms have no masculine counterparts). Diminution of the +*on*#/+*ónet*# variety often also denotes affection. Since only about a fourth of all *on*# realizations listed in Even-Shoshan's dictionary have transparent bases, it is argued that the hearer first eliminates bound stems (including CiCaCon, CiCCon, etc.). When an independent base can easily be discerned, the default reading is 'diminutive/affectionate;' if excluded by the context, a number of minor readings are also possible (e.g. 'collections,' 'periodicals,' 'temporary structures,' 'instruments,' etc.). The colloquial diminutive *_ik*, though restricted to the informal register, is quite productive, and can also be appended to prior diminution devices, including +*on*#.

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On Diminution Devices in Modern Hebrew Morphology

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Segal (1925) distinguishes four types of morphological diminution strategies in Hebrew: realization in a potentially-diminutive discontinuous (his "internal") pattern, diminution resulting from linear suffixation, a combination of both (i.e. a discontinuous pattern accompanied by suffixation), and reduplication. While admitting that discontinuous diminutive formation is not as productive in Hebrew as it is, for instance, in the Arabic dialects (as, for instance, in the CuCayC pattern, e.g. *kalb* 'dog' ~ *kulayb* 'little dog,' *rajul* 'man' ~ *rujayl* 'little man'), he does introduce a limited list of such cases, e.g. *miz`ar* 'a little, trifle' ~ *ze`eyr* 'a little, tiny bit, 'umlal 'miserable' ~ 'ameylal 'miserable, dimin.'ⁱⁱ Most of them do not reflect productive morphological patterns; his data suggest only two marginally-productive *miškalim*ⁱⁱⁱ that may denote diminution: CCiC+a, as in:

(1)	Noun	Gloss	CCiC+a	Gloss
	<i>kinam</i>	insects	<i>knima</i>	small insect
	<i>kufa</i>	basket	<i>kfiḥa</i>	small basket
	<i>'éres</i>	bed	<i>arisa</i>	cradle
	<i>lev</i>	heart	<i>leviva</i>	heart-shaped baked product
	<i>nétef</i>	(water) drop	<i>netifa</i>	drop-shaped jewel

and CCóC+et, referring to small/inferior remnants, as in:

(2)	Base	Gloss	CCóC+et	Gloss
	<i>psl</i>	carve; disqualify (root)	<i>psólet</i>	refuse, waste
	<i>n`r</i>	shake (root)	<i>ne`óret</i>	tow (of flax)
	<i>nsr</i>	saw (root)	<i>nesóret</i>	sawdust
	<i>grd</i>	scratch, shave off (root)	<i>gródet</i>	filings, shavings

Only the latter, however, is (somewhat) productive in Modern Hebrew (henceforth MH), as indicated by post-Segal (1925)

creations like:

(3)	Base	Gloss	CCóC+et	Gloss
	<i>npl</i>	fall (root)	<i>nefólet</i>	fallout
	<i>nšr</i>	fall out (root)	<i>nešóret</i>	fallout; droppings
	<i>špk</i>	pour, spill (root)	<i>šfóxet</i>	(geological) debris

Segal (1925) also discusses reduplication as a diminution device, but the data available to him were essentially restricted to a limited set of historical precedents (often involving expansion of biradical to triradical roots) that synchronically may be considered 'frozen,' as in:

(4)	Noun	Gloss	Redupl. Gloss
	<i>xor</i>	hole	<i>xarir</i> small hole
	<i>'el/'al</i>	god/nothingness	<i>'elil</i> idol
	<i>sal</i>	basket	<i>slil</i> spool (related by shape)
	<i>tel</i>	mound	<i>tlulit</i> little mound
	<i>bacal</i>	onion	<i>b(e)calcul</i> a type of small onion
	<i>n`c</i>	prick (root)	<i>naacuc</i> a type of thorn
	<i>'sp</i>	gather (root)	<i>asafsuf</i> riffraff

In current Hebrew, however, there are cases in which the relationship between the base and the reduplicated form is quite transparent, suggesting that the use of reduplication as a diminution device has acquired a degree of productivity. The list is less extensive for nouns, most of which are animals (the reduplicated form gloss is always 'little N'):

(5)	Noun	Gloss	Redupl.	Noun	Gloss	Redupl.
	<i>kélev</i>	dog	<i>klavlav</i>	<i>xatul</i>	cat	<i>xataltul</i>
	<i>xazir</i>	pig	<i>xazarzir</i>	<i>géver</i>	man	<i>gvarvar</i>
	<i>dag</i>	fish	<i>dagig</i>			

than it is for adjectives, where the reduplicated form sort of 'attenuates' certain attributes, particularly ones denoting colors and physical characteristics (the reduplicated form gloss is always '...ish,' as in 'bluish'):^{iv}

(6)	Adjective	Gloss	Redupl.	Redupl. F.
	<i>kaxol</i>	blue	<i>kxalxal</i>	<i>kxalxala</i>
	<i>yarok</i>	green	<i>yerakrak</i>	<i>yerakraka</i>
	<i>adom</i>	red	<i>adamdam</i>	<i>adamdama</i>
	<i>cahov</i>	yellow	<i>cehavhav</i>	<i>cehavhaba</i>
	<i>katan</i>	small	<i>ktantan</i>	<i>ktantana</i>
	<i>šamen</i>	fat	<i>šmanman</i>	<i>šmanmana</i>
	<i>agol</i>	round	<i>agalgal</i>	<i>agalgala</i>

Most of the diminutive linearly-appended **suffixes** listed by Segal are not productive: +*ay*# (*dod* 'love' ~ *duday* 'mandrake'), +*VL*# (*gavía* 'chalice, cup' ~ *giv`ol* 'stalk, stem'), etc. His data become particularly interesting, though, when he suggests that feminine suffixes are often associated with diminution. In the early stages of language formation, the marking of gender appears to have been intended to distinguish not sex, but rather size and/or connotative value. In languages which distinguish 'masculine,' 'feminine' and 'neuter,' 'neuter' was preferably used for lifeless things, and since the latter were considered inferior to living organisms, neuter also tended to carry some depreciatory or belittling sense (see Jespersen 1924, p. 239) -- even when it actually applied to humans and animals. The same evaluative measure apparently also determined the use of neuter for diminutives, even if the words from which they were derived have another gender (e.g. Gr. *paidion* 'little

boy' from *pais*, G. *fräulein*, etc.). In languages without 'neuter,' the 'feminine' suffix denoted particularly lifeless objects (see also Hetzron 1967) or objects of small size, such as grain and fruit (e.g. *xita* 'wheat,' *teena* 'fig'), or an individual member of a mass noun (e.g. *oni* 'ships, fleet' ~ *oniya* 'ship'), or borrowed meanings (e.g. *yarex* 'thigh' ~ *yarxa* 'side'), or narrowing down from the general to the particular (e.g. *malon* 'a place to stay over' ~ *meluna* 'a temporary structure for sleeping in the field', *xélek* 'part' ~ *xélka* 'a plot of land'). Only because sex in living organisms was so evident (and because living organisms were so central) did it later become the main criterion for gender distinction. It was the initial 'primitive' conception of the suffixed forms as smaller or subordinate that gave rise to some diminution by means of 'feminine' suffixation:

(7)	Base	Gloss	Base + Fem. suff.	Gloss
	<i>dag</i>	fish	<i>daga</i>	small fish
	<i>'ec</i>	wood, tree	<i>eca</i>	small trees
	<i>xéres</i>	clay, clay container	<i>xarsit</i>	fractions of clay; clay matter
	<i>caláxat</i>	plate	<i>cloxit</i>	small jar or bottle

Diminution by feminine suffixation maintains a certain degree of productivity in MH. One type of realization involves *+it#* suffixation, as in:

(8)	Noun	Gloss	Noun+ <i>it#</i>	Gloss
	<i>kaf</i>	tablespoon	<i>kapit</i>	teaspoon
	<i>kos</i>	glass	<i>kosit</i>	wineglass
	<i>mapa</i>	tablecloth	<i>mapit</i>	napkin, small tablecloth
	<i>kar</i>	pillow	<i>karit</i>	small pillow
	<i>pax</i>	can, tin	<i>paxit</i>	small can
	<i>cnon</i>	radish	<i>cnonit</i>	small radish
	<i>mapúax</i>	bellow	<i>mapuxit</i>	harmonica

<i>aron</i>	cupboard, closet	<i>aronit</i>	small cupboard, closet
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One of the semantic correlates of the *+iya#* suffix is 'a unit, or realization, of some matter,' as in:

(9)	Noun	Gloss	Noun+<i>iya#</i>	Gloss
	<i>sukar</i>	sugar	<i>sukar(i)ya</i>	candy
	<i>beyca</i>	egg	<i>beyciya</i>	fried egg
	<i>šaava</i>	wax	<i>šaavaniya^v</i>	waxed tablecloth

Occasionally, this 'unit' may also constitute a diminutive:

(10)	Noun	Gloss	Noun+<i>iya#</i>	Gloss
	<i>naknik</i>	sausage	<i>naknikiya</i>	frankfurter, hot dog
	<i>uga</i>	cake	<i>ugiya</i>	cookie
	<i>maca</i>	unleavened bread	<i>maciya</i>	cracker
	<i>néšef</i>	ball	<i>nišpiya</i>	small ball, party
	<i>gúmi</i>	rubber	<i>gumiya</i>	rubber band
	<i>léxem</i>	bread	<i>laxmaniya</i>	(bread) roll
	<i>maase</i>	deed, tale	<i>maasiya</i>	a (?little) tale

It appears, however, that in today's Israeli Hebrew, speakers **do not conceive of the shift from masculine to feminine in itself as involving diminution**. In other words, the somewhat-productive use of *+it#* and *+iya#* for diminution in MH is associated with these particular endings as suffixes, and has nothing to do with their feminine gender.

Of all diminution devices available to the contemporary speaker of Hebrew, linear suffixation with *+on#* is the most

productive. Segal notes that this diminution device is very productive in Syriac (under the influence of *+on#* in adjectives, but also in analogy to comparable devices in Greek), but rather limited in Hebrew, based on the data available to him at the time:

(11)	Base	Gloss	+on# Form	Gloss
	<i>'iš</i>	man	<i>išon</i>	little man
	<i>xalav</i>	milk	<i>xelbon</i>	egg white
	<i>sáhar</i>	moon	<i>saharon</i>	crescent

In current MH, however, it appears that any masculine noun that may have a diminutive version in the real world either already has a diminutive alternant with *+on#*, or could **potentially** have one (i.e., when such a form is introduced for the first time -- be it by a normative authority, an author, or any 'lay' innovative speaker -- it will be used, or understood, as a diminutive alternant of its base). Below are a few illustrations from the numerous instances of *+on#* diminutives found in the Even-Shoshan (1975) dictionary:

(12)	Noun	Gloss	Noun+on#	Noun	Gloss	Noun+on#
	<i>'af</i>	nose	<i>apon</i>	<i>barvaz</i>	duck	<i>barvazon</i>
	<i>argaz</i>	crate	<i>argazon</i>	<i>arnav</i>	rabbit	<i>arnavon</i>
	<i>arnak</i>	purse	<i>arnakon</i>	<i>baxur</i>	young man	<i>baxuron</i>
	<i>bakbuk</i>	bottle	<i>bakbukon</i>	<i>gavía</i>	cup	<i>gvi'on</i>
	<i>gaviš</i>	crystal	<i>gvišon</i>	<i>géšer</i>	bridge	<i>gišron</i>
	<i>dov</i>	bear	<i>dubon</i>	<i>dégel</i>	flag	<i>diglon</i>
	<i>tipeš</i>	fool(ish)	<i>tipšon</i>	<i>yehudi</i>	Jew(ish)	<i>yehudon</i>
	<i>yéled</i>	child	<i>yaldon</i>	<i>yašiš</i>	old man	<i>yešišon</i>

<i>sus</i>	horse	<i>suson</i>	<i>pil</i>	elephant	<i>pilon</i>
<i>pinkas</i>	notebook	<i>pinkason</i>	<i>pésel</i>	statue	<i>pislon</i>
<i>pakid</i>	clerk	<i>pkidon</i>	<i>pišpeš</i>	bug	<i>pišpešon</i>
<i>caríax</i>	tower	<i>crixon</i>	<i>crif</i>	shack	<i>crifon</i>
<i>ekdax</i>	handgun	<i>ekdaxon</i>	<i>tapúax</i>	apple	<i>tapuxon</i>

The 'default' unmarked manner of forming new diminutives that are not found in any dictionary **also** involves adding the suffix *+on#*. Thus, for instance, the diminutive of *acic* 'potted plant' can only be *acicon*, and the form *acicon* can only be understood as 'small potted plant.' Similarly:

(13)	Noun	Gloss	Noun+on#	Gloss
	<i>sir</i>	pot	<i>siron</i>	little pot
	<i>cav</i>	turtle	<i>cabon</i>	little turtle
	<i>pinkas</i>	notebook	<i>pinkason</i>	little notebook

In generic (or 'natural') nouns (i.e. when the male and female coexist in the natural world) the feminine ending *+ónet#* coexists alongside with a parallel masculine form with *+on#*, as in:

(14)	Base N.	Gloss	M. Dimin.	F. Dimin.
	<i>yéled</i>	boy	<i>yaldon</i>	<i>yaldónet</i>
	<i>baxur</i>	young man	<i>baxuron</i>	<i>baxurónet</i>
	<i>yašiš</i>	old man	<i>yešišon</i>	<i>yešišónet</i>
	<i>sus</i>	horse	<i>suson</i>	<i>susónet</i>
	<i>pišpeš</i>	bug	<i>pišpešon</i>	<i>pišpešónet</i>
	<i>barvaz</i>	duck	<i>barvazon</i>	<i>barvazónet</i>

<i>kélev</i>	dog	<i>kalbon</i>	<i>kalbónet</i>
<i>xatul</i>	cat	<i>xatulon</i>	<i>xatulónet</i>

In such cases, *+ónet#* may be regarded as concatenation of *+on+* and the feminine ending *+t#* or *+et#*.^{vi} But in non-generic nouns, in which no masculine *+on#* counterparts exist, e.g.

(15)	F. Noun	Gloss	N+ónet#	F. Noun	Gloss	N+ónet#
	<i>giv`a</i>	hill	<i>giv`ónet</i>	<i>simla</i>	dress	<i>simlónet</i>
	<i>dira</i>	apartment	<i>dirónet</i>	<i>mizvada</i>	suitcase	<i>mizvadónet</i>
	<i>maxbéret</i>	notebook	<i>maxbarónet</i>	<i>xavila</i>	parcel	<i>xavilónet</i>
	<i>tipa</i>	drop	<i>tipónet</i>	<i>medina</i>	state	<i>medinónet</i>
	<i>mimxata</i>	handkerchief	<i>mimxaónet</i>	<i>nešika</i>	kiss	<i>nešikónet</i>
	<i>misada</i>	restaurant	<i>misadónet</i>	<i>psi'a</i>	step	<i>psi'ónet</i>
	<i>prusa</i>	slice	<i>prusónet</i>	<i>xavit</i>	barrel	<i>xaviyónet</i>

but no **simlon*, **diron*, **mizvaddon*, etc., it might be more appropriate to regard *+ónet#* as a single, atomic unit.

The diminutive suffixes *+on#* or *+ónet#*, in MH as in other languages, also serve to express either affection or depreciatory tinge when attached to adjectives and to nouns embodying the qualities concerned. Such emotive expressions may also involve diminution, but not necessarily so. Some illustrations:

(16)	Base	Gloss	Base+on#	Base+ónet#
	<i>xamud</i>	cute, nice	<i>xamudon</i>	<i>xamudónet</i>
	<i>xaviv</i>	pleasant, darling	<i>xavivon</i>	<i>xavivónet</i>
	<i>misken</i>	poor, miserable	<i>miskenon</i>	<i>miskenónet</i>

<i>ca'ir</i>	young	<i>ceiron</i>	<i>ceirónet</i>
<i>tamim</i>	naïve	<i>tmimon</i>	<i>tmimónet</i>
<i>tipeš</i>	a fool, foolish	<i>tipšon</i>	<i>tipšónet</i>

Whether the emotive *+on#*/*+ónet#* diminution is affectionate or derogatory may be determined either by context, or by whether the base noun carries positive or negative connotation to start with.^{vii} In the following, for instance, the diminutives are based on negative readings of *yehudi* and *pakid*:

(17)	Base	Gloss	Base+<i>on#</i>	Gloss
	<i>yehudi</i>	Jew(ish)	<i>yehudon</i>	Jew boy (with all racist connotations)
	<i>pakid</i>	clerk	<i>pkidon</i>	small(-minded) clerk

Occasionally, the emotive feminine diminutive with *+ónet#* does not have a masculine counterpart, which can serve as an argument for the atomic status of *+ónet#* even in some adjectives (reduplicated ones included):

(18)	Base	Gloss	Redup. M.	Redup. F.	Base+<i>on#</i>	Base+<i>ónet#</i>
	<i>raze</i>	thin			* <i>razon</i>	<i>razónet</i>
	<i>zona</i>	prostitute			* <i>zanzon</i>	<i>zanzónet</i>
	<i>šamen</i>	fat	<i>šmanman</i>	<i>šmanmana</i>	?? <i>šmanmon</i>	<i>šmanmónet</i>
	<i>katan</i>	small	<i>ktantan</i>	<i>ktantana</i>	?? <i>ktanton</i>	<i>ktantónet</i>

The absence of **razon* may be attributed to clash with the homonymous *razon* 'thinness, scarcity;' **zanzon* may be due to the prejudice that 'there are no male prostitutes.' ??*šmanmon* and ??*ktanton* occur in the literary register, but hardly ever in the colloquial. Their marginality in the latter possibly results from a sense of redundancy, since the 'regular' reduplicated counterparts only differ in one segment: *a* vs. *o*.

There are also one or two cases in which the feminine ending is not +*ónet*#, but rather +*óCet*# (as in *tinok* 'baby' ~ *tinóket* 'baby, f.^{viii}):

(19)	Base	Gloss	Base+<i>ónet</i>#
	<i>šaxor</i>	black	<i>šaxarxóret</i>
	<i>nexmad</i>	cute, nice	<i>nexmódet</i> ^{ix}

The true uniqueness of the ending +*on*##/+*ónet*# suffix, though, is in that it belongs to the 'B-group' of suffixes, whose relationship to the base is less tight than typical derivational suffixes of the 'A-group.' The initial distinction was made in English:

(20)	Group A:	Suffixes:	+ion, +ity, +y, +al, +ic, +ate, +ous, +ive
		Prefixes:	re+, con+, de+, sub+, pre+, in+, en+, be+
	Group B:	Suffixes:	#ness, #less, #hood, #ful, #ly, #like
		Prefixes:	re#, sub#, un#, non#, de#, semi#, anti#

Generally, a suffix of Group B can be added to the base after a suffix from Group A has already been appended, but not vice versa -- e.g. nervousness, nervously, but not *beautifuly. In our case, not only do the reduplicated forms have alternants with +*on*#, it is even possible to add +*on*##/+*ónet*# to the reduplicated forms themselves -- particularly in generic nouns, as in:

(21)	Base	Gloss	Redup.	Base+<i>on</i>#	Redup.+<i>on</i>#	Redup.+<i>ónet</i>#
	<i>kélev</i>	dog	<i>klavlav</i>	<i>kalbon</i>	<i>klavlavon</i>	<i>klavlavónet</i>
	<i>xatul</i>	cat	<i>xataltul</i>	<i>xatulon</i>	<i>xataltulon</i>	<i>xataltulónet</i>

<i>xazir</i>	pig	<i>xazarzir</i>	<i>xaziron</i>	<i>xazarziron</i>	<i>xazarirónet</i>
<i>dag</i>	fish	<i>dagig</i>	<i>??dagon</i>	<i>dgigon</i>	<i>??dgigónet</i>
<i>kof</i>	monkey	<i>kofif</i>	<i>kofon</i>	<i>??kofifon</i>	<i>??kofifónet</i>

Similar suffixation is not allowed in the following, though:

(22)	Base	Gloss	Redup. M.	Redup. F.	M. Affec.	F. Affec.
	<i>šamen</i>	fat	<i>šmanman</i>	<i>šmanmana</i>	<i>*šmanmanon</i>	<i>*šmanmanónet</i>
	<i>katan</i>	small	<i>ktantan</i>	<i>ktantana</i>	<i>*ktantanon</i>	<i>*ktantanónet</i>
	<i>zona</i>	prostitute			<i>*zanzanon</i>	<i>*zanzanónet</i>

The reason is probably phonological: a sequence of three *n*'s in such proximity is avoided owing to its clumsiness.

It is also possible to add *+on#* to forms ending with the diminutive suffix *+it#* -- at least potentially, but recognizable as such as further diminution. Since nouns ending with *+it#* are all feminine, so are the further diminutions, which all end with *+ónet#*:

(23)	Base	Gloss	Base+<i>it#</i>	Base+<i>i(t)ónet</i>
	<i>pax</i>	can	<i>paxit</i>	<i>paxiyónet</i>
	<i>kar</i>	pillow	<i>karit</i>	<i>kariyónet</i>
	<i>kaf</i>	tablespoon	<i>kapit</i>	<i>kapiyónet</i>
	<i>mapa</i>	tablecloth	<i>mapit</i>	<i>mapiyónet</i>

The same applies to *+iya#* diminution:

(24)	Base	Gloss	Base+iya#	Base+iyónet
	<i>naknik</i>	sausage	<i>naknikiya</i>	<i>naknikiyónet</i>
	<i>uga</i>	cake	<i>ugiya</i>	<i>ugiyónet</i>
	<i>maca</i>	unleavened bread	<i>maciya</i>	<i>maciyónet</i>
	<i>maase</i>	deed, tale	<i>maasiya</i>	<i>maasiyónet</i>

Potentially, it might be argued that +on# may even be appended to another diminutive +on#, as in:

(25)	Base	Gloss	Base+on#	Base+on#+on#
	<i>barvaz</i>	duck	<i>barvazon</i>	?? <i>barvazonon</i>
	<i>argaz</i>	crate	<i>argazon</i>	?? <i>argezonon</i>

but these are essentially just one-time, potential innovations that may be used jokingly by well-educated speakers to express extreme diminution.

The unmarked diminutive-formation device in MH is +on# suffixation, then. If a feminine diminutive is required, one adds +(e)t#, and the stress stays (or falls) on the +on# syllable; in non-generic cases, the feminine ending is replaced by the atomic unit +ónet#. If the plural alternant involves reduction or loss of a vowel, the suffix +on# is added to the reduced form:

(26)	Base	Gloss	Plural	Form+on#
	<i>pakid</i>	clerk	<i>pkidim</i>	<i>pkidon</i>
	<i>gavía</i>	cup, chalice	<i>gvi`im</i>	<i>gvi`on</i>
	<i>yašiš</i>	old man	<i>yešišim</i>	<i>yešišon</i>
	<i>makel</i>	stick	<i>maklot</i>	<i>maklon</i>

In segolate nouns, *+on#* is added to the segolate base rather than to the form in isolation:

(27)	Form	Gloss	Seg. base	Form+<i>on#</i>
	<i>séfer</i>	book	/sifr/	<i>sifron</i>
	<i>kélev</i>	dog	/kalb/	<i>kalbon</i>
	<i>dégel</i>	flag	/digl/	<i>diglon</i>

To this point we have talked of the creative aspect of diminution. A separate question is a perceptual, concerning the hearer's point of view: how do speakers distinguish between words ending with *+on#* or *+ónet#* which constitute diminutives and those that do not, even though they end with the same suffixes? In the case of *+ónet#* the difficulty is minimal: of the 41 words in Even-Shoshan that end in *+ónet#*, only 7 forms are not diminutives, and of those, 5 are realized in specific *miškalim*:

(28)	tiCCóCet:	<i>tismónet</i> 'syndrome'	<i>tizmónet</i> 'synchronism'
	maCCóCet:	<i>matkónet</i> 'measure'	<i>matmónet</i> '(hidden) treasure'
	miCCóCet:	<i>mixmónet</i> '(hidden) treasure'	

The problem is in discriminating diminutive forms with *+on#* from other *on#* forms that are not diminutive. From the speaker's perspective, potential diminution would always end up with *+on#*,^x but when one looks at the total lexicon, one finds that of the approximately 680 forms ending with *on#* in Even-Shoshan, only about 130 are diminutives. With *+on#* being the unmarked diminution device, one would expect that when coming across a form with *on#*, the hearer's first intuition to be that it constitutes a diminutive, and if that interpretation fails in context, other, more focused alternative analyses will be tried. The relatively-low proportion of diminutives in the total number of forms ending with *on#* suggests a different procedure, though. It appears that the hearer's first impulse is to look for semantic transparency. Of the 680 cases

with *on#*, over 500 are **not** transparent -- including a significant number of CiCaCon (e.g. *zikaron* 'memory') and CiCCon (e.g. *signon* 'style') realizations,^{xi} in which **an independent base cannot be easily identified**. In the initial processing phase, then, it would make sense to assume that speakers first eliminate these 500-odd cases by attempting to discern a free, independently-standing noun or adjective before *+on#*, or a plural alternant, or a segolate base of an independent noun or adjective. This way they immediately exclude most non-transparent forms with *on#*, including all or most CiCCon and CiCaCon realizations, and other forms such as:

(29)	<i>aron</i> 'closet'	<i>arxiyon</i> 'archive'	<i>beton</i> 'concrete'
	<i>navon</i> 'clever'	<i>ga'on</i> 'genius'	<i>garon</i> 'throat'
	<i>zadon</i> 'malice'	<i>mazon</i> 'food'	<i>xason</i> 'sturdy'
	<i>matmon</i> 'treasure'	<i>yešimon</i> 'wilderness'	<i>kidon</i> 'lance, javelin'
	<i>maxon</i> 'institute'	<i>naxon</i> 'correct, ready'	<i>malon</i> 'hotel'
	<i>lašon</i> 'tongue, lang.'	<i>midron</i> 'slope'	<i>mamon</i> 'capital'
	<i>ma'on</i> 'residence'	<i>mukyon</i> 'clown'	<i>maškon</i> 'pawn'
	<i>sabon</i> 'soap'	<i>silon</i> 'jet'	<i>alon</i> 'oak'
	<i>cafon</i> 'north'	<i>karon</i> 'carriage'	<i>rimon</i> 'pomegranate'
	<i>šfifon</i> 'snake'	<i>ason</i> 'catastrophe'	<i>asimon</i> 'token'
	<i>apiryon</i> 'canopy'	<i>afarsemon</i> 'persimmon'	<i>armon</i> 'palace'
	<i>aton</i> 'ass'	<i>melafefon</i> 'cucumber'	<i>tiron</i> 'novice'
	<i>savyon</i> 'dandelion'	<i>salon</i> 'parlor'	<i>patron</i> 'patron'
	<i>pasyon</i> 'pheasant'	<i>šipon</i> 'rye'	

Of those forms with *+on#* that **are** transparent, most are diminutives. About 35-40 cases are not, and can be subdivided into coherent semantic groups, such as 'collection':

(30)	Form	Gloss	Base	Gloss
	<i>alfon</i>	primer	<i>'álef</i>	aleph
	<i>xidon</i>	quiz	<i>xida</i>	riddle
	<i>yedi'on</i>	newsletter	<i>yedi'a</i>	news item
	<i>mexiron</i>	price list	<i>mexir</i>	price
	<i>taarifon</i>	price list	<i>taarif</i>	price
	<i>šeelon</i>	questionnaire	<i>šeela</i>	question
	<i>šuron</i>	line-pattern	<i>šura</i>	line
	<i>širon</i>	song collection	<i>šir</i>	song
	<i>sixon</i>	dialog collec.	<i>sixa</i>	dialog
	<i>takanon</i>	code	<i>takana</i>	ordinance
	<i>nivon</i>	expression coll.	<i>niv</i>	expression
	<i>taarixon</i>	schedule	<i>taarix</i>	date
	<i>pa'oton</i>	nursery school	<i>pa'ot</i>	baby

'events or entities related to time-units, especially publications':

(31)	Form	Gloss	Base	Gloss
	<i>yomon</i>	daily	<i>yom</i>	day
	<i>šavu'on</i>	weekly	<i>šavúa</i>	week
	<i>yarxon</i>	monthly	<i>yérax</i>	month
	<i>alon</i>	bulletin	<i>ale</i>	leaf
	<i>mekomon</i>	local paper	<i>makom</i>	place
	<i>šabaton</i>	sabbatical	<i>šabat</i>	sabbath

'temporary structure' (apparently in analogy to *crifon* 'little shack'^{xii}):

(32)	Form	Gloss	Base	Gloss
	<i>badon</i>	cloth strucure	<i>bad</i>	cloth
	<i>paxon</i>	tin structure	<i>pax</i>	tin
	<i>azbeston</i>	asbestos struc.	<i>azbest</i>	asbestos
	<i>meguron</i>	temporary struc.	<i>megur(im)</i>	housing

'instruments':

(33)	Form	Gloss	Base	Gloss
	<i>ša'on</i>	watch, clock	<i>ša'a</i>	hour
	<i>da'on</i>	glider	<i>da'a</i>	glided
	<i>ecba'on</i>	thimble	<i>ecba</i>	finger
	<i>sfaton</i>	lipstick	<i>safa</i>	lip
	<i>teyon</i>	tea-essence pot	<i>tey</i>	tea
	<i>ašpaton</i>	garbage container	<i>ašpa</i>	garbage
	<i>(h)alixon</i>	walker	<i>(h)alixa</i>	walking
	<i>mešivon</i>	answering machine	<i>mešiv</i>	answer (v., pres.)

statistical terms:^{xiii}

(34)	Form	Gloss	Base	Gloss
	<i>xecyon</i>	50% section	<i>xéci</i>	half
	<i>asiron</i>	10% section	<i>éser</i>	ten

<i>me'on</i>	1% section	<i>me'a</i>	hundred
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or geological ones:^{xiv}

(35)	Form	Gloss	Base	Gloss
	<i>šlišon</i>	third of geological period	<i>šliš</i>	third
	<i>revi'on</i>	fourth of geological period	<i>réva</i>	quarter

Since these are minor semantic groups, it can safely be assumed that unless it is identified as belonging to any of them, semantically-transparent *+on#* suffixation tends to denote diminution. Perceptually, there are two possible procedures for the processing of semantically-transparent suffixation with *+on#*: (a) the hearer opts for diminution; if the context proves him/her to be wrong, other semantic analyses are attempted. (b) the hearer goes through the minor group features first; if none applies, the default interpretation is diminution.

Another diminution device to consider: the diminutive suffix borrowed from Russian, *+_ik#*, which may serve as a lower-register replacement for *+on#*, and usually involves expression of affection:

(36)	Form	Gloss	Form+čik#	Form	Gloss	Form+čik#
	<i>baxur</i>	young man	<i>baxúrčik</i>	<i>katan</i>	small	<i>katánčik</i>
	<i>šamen</i>	fat	<i>šaménčik</i>	<i>xatul</i>	cat	<i>xatúlčik</i>

+čik# is of particular interest because like *+on#*, it too can occasionally be appended to other diminution devices:

(37)	Form	Gloss	Dimin.	Dimin.+čik#
	<i>yéled</i>	boy	<i>yaldon</i>	<i>yaldónčik</i>

<i>dov</i>	bear	<i>dubon</i>	<i>dubónčik</i>
<i>gag</i>	roof	<i>gagon</i>	<i>gagónčik</i>
<i>kétem</i>	stain	<i>kitmon</i>	<i>kitmónčik</i>
<i>kélev</i>	dog	<i>klavlav</i>	<i>klavlávčik</i>
<i>klavlav</i>	doggy	<i>klavlavon</i>	<i>klavlavónčik</i>
<i>xatul</i>	cat	<i>xataltul</i>	<i>xataltúlčik</i>
<i>xataltul</i>	kitty	<i>xataltulon</i>	<i>xataltulónčik</i>

although not to monosyllabic stems:

(38)	Form	Gloss	Form+čik#	Form	Gloss	Form+čik#
	<i>kof</i>	monkey	* <i>kófčik</i>	<i>dov</i>	bear	* <i>dóvčik</i>
	<i>sus</i>	horse	* <i>súsčik</i>			

nor to words that are not finally stressed, since the stress must always fall on the syllable before +*ik*#, and stress is usually invariable in words involving borrowed suffixes:

(39)	Form	Gloss	Form+čik#	Form	Gloss	Form+čik#
	<i>kélev</i>	dog	* <i>kélevčik</i>	<i>yéled</i>	child	* <i>yéledčik</i>

But in spite of the relative productivity of this diminution device, one should bear in mind that it is a colloquial phenomenon, restricted to marginally-standard contexts. In no way is it likely to push aside the predominant diminution strategy of +*on*# suffixation.

Another colloquial -- usually vocative -- diminution involves suffixation with +*iko*# (a suffix borrowed from Judeo-

Spanish), as in:

(40)	Base	Gloss	Base+íko#
	<i>xaver</i>	friend	<i>xaveríko</i>
	<i>kof</i>	monkey	<i>kofíko</i>
	<i>moše</i>	Moshe	<i>mošíko</i>

It too can potentially attach to other diminutive endings, as in:

(41)	Base	Gloss	Dimin. Variant	Base+íko#
	<i>kélev</i>	dog	<i>klavlav</i>	<i>klavlavíko</i>
	<i>šamen</i>	fat	<i>šmanman</i>	<i>šmanmaníko</i>

But these are more like one-time innovations than stable creations, and are usually limited to vocative uses.

It appears, then, that the most reliable criterion for determining the productivity of particular diminution devices is the extent to which they can be applied successfully to the consequences of earlier diminution. By this criterion, the two most productive diminution devices in MH are suffixation with +*on*# and with +*ik*#. The former is normative, the latter colloquial. The essentially-linear character of such derivational devices makes the relationship to the base quite transparent, which facilitates discrimination of those forms with +*on*# that constitute diminution from other forms with *on*# that do not.

Endnotes

i. An earlier version of this article was read at the Hanchalat Halashon Post-Congress, Jerusalem, June 29-July 1, 1993, following the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies. I wish to thank

Ora Schwarzwald, Shraga Asif, Micha Peleg and Uri Melammed for their useful comments.

ii. Stress is word-final, unless marked otherwise. ' refers to optional realization of a glottal stop (replacing either *?álef* or historical *'áyin*) before (heavily) stressed vowels in Modern Hebrew; it also

represents a slot in an abstract root.

iii. Discontinuous word-formation patterns.

iv. On variants of the feminine which end in *+ónet#*/*+óCet#* in some of the forms in this list, see below.

v. Alternatively, *šaavanit*.

vi. */+t#* would be assumed if an [e]-insertion rule is independently required to account for segolate stress.

vii. As suggested to me by Professor Menahem Kaddari.

viii. The similarity was pointed out to me by Ora Schwarzwald.

ix. *nexmadónet* is also possible, though.

x. Or with *+_ik#* in semi-standard contexts -- see below.

xi. See Bolozky (1990). 129 occurrences of CiCaCon and 95 of CiCCon were found in Even-Shoshan (1975). Although some CiCaCon and CiCCon realizations are abstract nouns, even that

generalization is too broad (since there are other abstract nominalization devices that are far more productive). The only partially-useful semantic generalization is that CiCaCon includes a number of

illnesses (e.g. *šigarón* 'arthritis') and other heavily-negative abstractions (e.g. *xidalón* 'ceasing to be; nothingness').

xii. As pointed out to me by Shraga Asif.

xiii. As pointed out to me by Shraga Asif.

xiv. As pointed out to me by Shraga Asif.

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