

Alsea Diminutive Formation

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1. Alsea is an extinct language of the central Oregon coast, often classified as Penutian although that relationship remains debatable.
2. Frachtenberg (1918: 249) identifies the Alsea suffix *-au* as the **diminutive**:

“This suffix denotes SMALLNESS and, when added to a noun indicating sex or gender, it assumes the function of a term of endearment.”
3. Although he notes an occasional “vocalic change” in the stem (discussed below), only in the higher-quality transcriptions of Melville Jacobs can we see several **significant phonological modifications** that accompany the suffix.
4. The forms cited here all come from Jacobs’ manuscript notes at the University of Washington, based on fieldwork with **John Albert** in 1935; he was the last known speaker of Alsea when he died in 1951.
5. For ease of reading, a few **notational changes** have been made: Jacobs’ sibilant <c> is written [s], and the allophonic “lenis” stops <B, D, G, Ġ> are written [p, t, k, q]. Hyphens before the suffixes under discussion are not in the original transcriptions, but are added here for clarity.

Simple suffixation

6. These first transcriptions do not show the processes seen in other examples, but illustrate the **basic suffixation**.

la· ^(s) wəs	‘yellowjacket’	tskε ^{in’} (i)tsi ⁿ	‘mountain’
la· ^(s) wəs–au	‘little yellowjacket’	tskε ^{in’} itsiy–au	‘hill’
t̥si ^(s) yε’lk̥włən	‘spruce root’	aki ^{n’}	‘dangerous thing’
t̥si ^(s) yε’lk̥włən–au	‘little piece of spruce root’	aki ^{n’} hy–au	‘little aki ^{n’} ’
ha’mi’	‘pigeon’	k̥wa’li’	‘poor orphan’
ha’mi’y–au	‘little pigeon’	k̥wa’li’hy–au	‘poor tiny little orphan’
ł̥a’mi’	‘owl’	ł̥k̥wi ⁿ hi ^{n’}	‘elbow’
ł̥a’mi’səw–au	‘moth’	ł̥k̥wi ⁿ hi ^{n’} hiy–au	‘tiny elbow’
mukwa’	‘woman’		
mukwa’sliy–au	‘girl, young woman’		

7. Some observations: (i) apparent word-final /h/ is typically deleted (or hard to perceive) but is transcribed when the suffix follows; (ii) a transitional glide [w, y] is found when the stem ends in a high vowel; (iii) the transcription of some glottal stops is inconsistent.

Vowel glottalization

8. In the majority of diminutives recorded by Jacobs, we find **glottalization of the stressed vowel**, written as a doubled vowel [V'V] with stress usually on the second element.

k̄y'ᵢ ^(s) p	‘grandchild’	t'saisi'ⁿs	‘pimple’
k̄y'ᵢ'ᵢp–au	‘little grandchild (5 or 6)’	t'saisi'ᵢ'ⁿs–au	‘small pimple’
ta ^(s) 'p	‘wing’	tku'ⁿts	‘niece’
ta'ⁿ'ap–au	‘little wing’	tku'ⁿ'uts–au	‘little niece’
si'ᵖal	‘bracelet’	si'ⁿk̄yᵐ	‘red cedar’
si'ᵢ'ᵖl–au	‘tiny bracelet’	si'ⁿ'ᵢ'ⁿk̄yᵐ–au	‘tiny red cedar’
spa'ᵢ	‘woman’s privates’	mihi'ⁿkwifi	‘grouse’
spa'a'y–au	‘girl’s vagina’	mihi'ᵢ'ⁿkwifiy–au	‘little grouse’
na ^(s) 'tk ^y	‘river’	siya ^{n'}	‘leg’
na'a'tk ^y –au	‘creek; spring’	si'a'u ⁿ	‘little leg’

9. **Nasalization** is maintained in the glottalized (laryngealized) vowel. Note that **stem-final [a]** regularly merges with the suffixal [a]. The case of *siya^{n'}* ~ *si'a'uⁿ* ‘leg’ may better be classified with the next set, as [siya'ⁿuⁿ].

Sonorant glottalization

10. As a (presumed) expression of the same process, Jacobs sometimes writes glottalization next to a **sonorant consonant** — including a transitional glide between the stem and suffix. It can be found by itself, or together with the [V'V] notation.

payə'm	‘fox’	fi'ⁿxayu	‘adze’
pa'a'yə'm–au	‘little fox’	fi'ᵢ'ⁿxai'w–au	‘little adze’
ti'k̄yε'li'm	‘vine maple’	sa'tiyu	‘comb’
ti'k̄yε'li ^(s) 'm–au	‘small vine maple’	sa'a'ti'w–au	‘tiny comb’
la'ᵖaxan	‘wart’	sa'yū	‘basket (?)’
la'a'ᵖaxan'ⁿ–au	‘little wart’	sa'a'yū'w–au	‘tiny basket’
ma'təl	‘pheasant’	kli'yū	‘maul’
ma'a'tə ^(s) 'l–au	‘little pheasant’	kli'yū'w–au	‘little maul’

11. The Alsea pattern suggests a **glottalization feature** that can be realized (or perceived) on various [+sonorant] segments in the string (cf. Cole 1987).

12. The [V'V] transcription might better be seen as a **laryngealized vowel** [V̤], although doubling of the vowel with insertion of an actual glottal stop, plus some sonorant glottalization, is described for Twana with somewhat similar patterns in Upper Chehalis and Quinault (references in Nichols 1971) and Coeur d'Alene (Reichard 1938).

13. Diminutive glottalization is found in many other languages of the Northwest, especially **Salish**. In her survey of diminutive symbolism, Nichols (1971: 838f, 840) notes that

“Glottalization is a northern, typically Salish, form of shift, concentrated particularly in the state of Washington and spread at least to neighboring Wishram.”

14. Alsea can be added to this list; but the nearest Salish language, Tillamook, does not appear to have this process. In fact, no language **as far south as Alsea** is mentioned by Nichols as having diminutive glottalization. Its **source** of transmission, therefore, is uncertain.

15. Nichols suggests that glottalization is an **expression of markedness** as attested for various sound types in diminutive symbolism (including shifts to non-phonemes).

“[The Salish] languages variously use glottalization of **all sonants**, glottalization of initial sonorants of reduplicated words, insertion of a glottal stop after reduplicative syllables without apparent conditioning factors, and glottalization of **vowels**.” [emphasis added]

16. Unlike in Salish, the Alsea glottalization is not associated with **reduplication**. It also never affects **obstruents**, as attested for Wishram.

Uvular raising

17. The uvular consonants /q, q̣, q^w, q̣^w, ɣ, ɣ^w/ **raise to the velar** equivalents in the presence of the diminutive suffix. The **higher frequencies** associated with velars are claimed as the basis of the shift, representing smaller size sound-symbolically.

qwi''	'boat, canoe'	yε'ɬqwəɬ	'loon'
kwi'ɣ-au	'child's small canoe'	yε'ε'ɬkwəɬ-au	'young little loon'
sa'qal	'fish tail'	p̣sa'ɣ	'fish spear'
sa'a'kəl-au	'tiny fish tail'	p̣sa''aɣ-au	'little spear'
si'q ^u	'abalone'	ɣa'ɬəɬ	'timber squirrel'
si'i'kw-au	'small abalone'	ɣa'ɬəɬ-au	'little timber squirrel'
tsqali'm	'willow'	kwa'i'ⁿɣal	'butter clam'
tskal'i'm-au	'little willow'	kwa'i'ⁿɣa ^(s) l-a'u	'little butter clam'
ḳ'ina'q	'snake'	tsqε'ⁿɣ	'dog'
ḳ'in'a'k-au	'tiny snake'	tski'i(·)'ⁿɣ-au	'puppy'
q̣i''ya	'torchlight'	ɬḳ'yaqa'uxamt	'dove'
ki'i'yau	'tiny torchlight'	ɬḳ'yaqa'a'uxamt-au	'little dove'
q̣u'ya''	'sardine'	q̣a ^(s) la'ɣat	'butterfly'
ḳu'u'yau	'tiny sardine'	ka ^(s) la'ɣat-a'u	'little butterfly'
qatsi''li'	'wolf'		
katsi'i ^(s) li ^(s) y-au	'little wolf'		

18. **Frachtenberg** does not record this change in place of articulation, potentially because he was unsure of what he heard and imposed paradigm leveling in his analysis. Jacobs (1954) describes him as “phonetically untrustworthy”. In other contexts, there are certainly examples of Frachtenberg’s handwritten <k> that become <q> in the published texts.

19. Nichols reports raising of at least some uvulars to velars in Wishram, Sahaptin, and **Tillamook** — which, as an adjacent language, is a **likely source** for transmission of this areal feature to Alsea.

Stem alternation

20. Some diminutives show a **longer stem form** than the simple noun.

təma' ms	‘nephew’	tʃa' mtsu	‘tail’
təma' ma' s-au	‘little nephew’	tʃa' ma' tsu ^(ʔ) w-au	‘little tail’
nu' ns	‘elk’	tuqłənu' is	‘joint’
nu' nu' s-au	‘tiny elk’	tukłənu' yu' s-au	‘little joint’
fú' lǝ̀l	‘fish backbone’	ya' ixa' it	‘tracks’, ‘trail’
fú ^(ʔ) lu' tǝl-au	‘tiny fish bone’	ya ^(ʔ) ya' xai t̥x-au	‘little tracks’
q̥a' iɬiyu	‘grey squirrel’		
k̥a' ya' ɬiy-au	‘little grey squirrel’		

21. In most cases, the change is **insertion of a vowel after the medial consonant** that follows the stressed vowel in the short stem. These phonemicized examples omit glottalization.

/tmáms/	‘nephew’	/t̥úł̥l/	‘fish backbone’
/tmamás-aw/	‘little nephew’	/t̥ulúł̥l-aw/	‘tiny fish bone’
/núns/	‘elk’	/tuqłnúys/	‘joint’
/nunús-aw/	‘tiny elk’	/tukłnuyús-aw/	‘little joint’

22. A similar alternation is robustly attested in the Alsea **verb system**, where (simplifying a bit) the long stem contains a vowel absent from the short stem (Buckley 1989, 2004). Interestingly, one common context for the similar stem is the continuative suffix –aw, **homophonous** with the diminutive (though not accompanied by glottalization or raising).

/yáls-x̥/	‘go home!’	/t̥im̥ ^w m-t/	‘make fun of him!’
/yalás-aw/	‘is returning’	/t̥im̥í ^w m-aw/	‘is making fun’

23. The semantic force of the stem alternation for verbs requires further investigation, but seems largely **aspectual**. This stem choice for the diminutive may be the result of **analogy based on the suffixal homophony**.

24. However, a **deeper connection** is not impossible; for example, the Coeur d’Alene diminutive and “repeated action” are expressed by the same processes of reduplication and glottalization (Reichard 1938).

Augmentative

25. Frachtenberg (1918: 250) identifies the Alsea suffix *-tsLō* as the **augmentative**:

“It expresses LARGENESS and is also used as a derogatory suffix, especially when following nouns that denote age and sex.”

26. Jacobs most often writes the suffix *-t'slu* with an ejective affricate. **No changes to the stem** in glottalization or raising are attested, since those processes form part of the diminutive symbolism.

si'q ^u	‘abalone’	ha'mi''	‘pigeon’
si'qwə'-t'slu	‘big abalone’	ha'mi''i-t'slu	‘big pigeon’
na ^(s) tk ^y	‘river’	kwa'li'	‘poor orphan’
na''tki-t'slu	‘the Siletz River’	kwa'li'hi-t'slu	‘nasty little orphan’
kwa'i'nal	‘butter clam’	tsqε'nx, tsqi'nx	‘dog’
kwa'i'nal-t'slu	‘big butter clam’	tsqi'nxə'-t'slu	‘ugly dog’
fa'paʒan	‘wart’	fku'u'xst	‘it’s light’
fa'paʒa'n-t'slu(·)	‘big wart’	fku'u'xsti-t'slu	‘it’s very light’
sa'tiyu	‘comb’	qsa'u ^{n(s)} t	‘it’s heavy’
sa ^(s) tiyu-t'slu'	‘big comb’	qsa'u ^{n(s)} t'slu	‘it’s too heavy’
si ⁿ k ^y əm	‘red cedar’	yahaya ^(s) t	‘a big one’
si ⁿ k ^y əm-t'slu	‘big red cedar’	yahaya ^(s) t'slu	‘biggest, too big’
psa'x	‘fish spear’		
psa'xa-t'slu	‘big spear’		

27. A few forms occur with **both suffixes**; the diminutive is to my knowledge attested only inside the augmentative.

fa'u'a'i ^(s) y-au	‘little horse, colt’	tski'i(·)'nx-au	‘puppy’
fa'wa'i ^(s) y-au-t'slu	‘ugly little horse’	tski'i(·)'nx-au-t'slu-	‘ugly puppy’

28. Since limited examples are available, it is perhaps unknowable whether the **opposite ordering**, with the diminutive taking scope over the augmentative (e.g. ‘small ugly dog’), was a grammatical possibility.

Residue

29. A few words have complications in the length of the stem: **elements added or deleted** under suffixation, of uncertain function or meaning. In this regard, the diminutive and augmentative pattern together.

fa'wa'y _u	‘horse’	fa'wa'y _u	‘horse’
fa'u'a'i ^(s) y-au	‘little horse, colt’	fa'wa'i-t'slu	‘ugly horse’

ki·'l	'rock', 'stone'	qa·'tsəmsf	'spider'	
ki·'lhuw–au	'seed'	qatsəms <th>h</th> a–t'stu	h	'big spider'
ta·'tik'yau	'deadfall trap'	t'saisi·'ns	'pimple'	
ta·'tik'yiw–au	'little deadfall trap'	t'saisi·'ns <th>ɛ</th> –t'stu	ɛ	'big pimple'
ta·'pəsk'y, ta(·)'p	'wings'			
ta'a(·)'ps–au	'little wing'			

30. Some of these forms may simply be **irregular**, but a combination of **phonological and morphological factors** might account for others. For example, the final /u/ of 'horse' is likely the element found in the sometimes-nominalizing suffixes *–ayu*, *–iyu*; it can also be seen to drop in *qa'ihiyu* 'grey squirrel' above, although not in *sa·'tiyu* 'comb'.

Conclusions

31. Because Frachtenberg's published data do not include either the glottalization or the uvular raising in diminutives, these processes are **available for study only in Jacobs' notes**.

32. The two processes are individually **well-attested** in the Northwest, although they do not seem to occur together with great frequency. Their presence in Alsea is presumably from **contact**, but while uvular raising is plausibly from Tillamook, glottalization may be from a more distant source, or from a nearer language that is not well recorded.

33. The precise relation between the diminutive and continuative *–aw*, and the role of **stem augmentation** (i.e. its source and exact function) remains a topic for future study.

With the assistance of a University of Pennsylvania Research Foundation grant, almost all of Jacobs' notes on Alsea have now been digitized; the data was carefully typed by Ron Kim from microfilm copies, and I verified uncertain items at the archives in July 2004.

References

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