

Diminutive suffixes in modern greek dialects

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1. Introduction

Suffixation by diminutives in Modern Greek and in its dialects belong to the morphological processes that occupy a central role in recent linguistic research, as far as both its morphological features (cf. Symeonidis 1968, Babinotis 1969, Koutita-Kaimaki 1984, Melissaropoulou & Ralli (in press), Ralli & Melissaropoulou 2007, Melissaropoulou 2009) and its pragmatic features are concerned (cf. Daltas 1985, Sifianou 1992).

The aim of the present paper is to present and analyse the diminutive suffixes in certain Modern Greek dialects and, more specifically, to examine whether the distinction between Northern and Southern dialects is accompanied by a relative differentiation as far as diminutives are concerned. The research continues a previous one (Giannoulopoulou 2006) about the different occurrence of compounding in Northern and Southern dialects, in which it was confirmed that compounds appear more frequently in Southern dialects than in Northern ones. That confirmation has been related with the syntheticity / analyticity features of the Modern Greek dialects.

Lexical units from ten (10) glossaries of Modern Greek dialects, which represent the distribution in Northern and Southern dialects are examined in the present study. More specifically, the Northern dialects of Agiasos (Lesvos), Veroia, Litochoro, Kozani and Pelion, the Southern dialects of Helia (Peloponnese), Zante, Xiromero, Crete and the Southern-east dialect of Pyrgi (Chios) are examined.

2. Frequency of diminutized lexical units in Northern and Southern Modern Greek dialects

The survey of suffixed by diminutive lexical units in the glossaries of dialects is a difficult process for two reasons: a) because not all diminutive formations are lemmatized in the glossaries, but just the ones that have a semantic salience; this happens not only with the glossaries but also with the linguistic vocabularies of Modern Greek and b) because the diminutive suffixes are lemmatized in just a few glossaries. In any case, glossaries are a useful source for the diminutive formation in dialects.

In a relatively extensive glossary of the Northern dialect of Veroia (2,552 words) just 9 diminutive formations are lemmatized, in which 5 different diminutive suffixes occur:

-aci, e.g. spaθ- 'sword', spaθ**aci** lit. 'little sword', metaphorical meaning 'lily', because the shape of the leaves resembles that of a sword,
-uði, e.g. litury- 'cake', litur**yuði** 'little cake which was given to the kids',
-itsa, e.g. kap- 'capote', kapi**nitsa** 'little capote',
-uli, e.g. kumats- 'piece', kumatsi**uli** 'little piece',
-iði, e.g. skaf- 'tub', ska**fiði** 'little tub for the preparation of bread'.

In an equal-sized glossary of the Southern dialect of Zante (1,716 words) 61 diminutive formations are lemmatized, in which 7 different diminutive suffixes are found:

-aci, e.g. anem- 'spinning-wheel', anemi**δaci** 'little spinning-wheel',
neut. -uði, fem. -uða, e.g. maθit- 'pupil', maθi**tuði** 'little boy who follows the priest',
vosk- 'stay in the same place', voska**ruða** 'bird that stays in the same place',
-itsa, e.g. pa**pitsa** 'iron',
neut. -uli, -fem. ula, e.g. yats- 'cat', ya**tsuli** 'little cat',
bal- 'ball', ba**lula** 'small ball',

-iði, e.g. xe- derivational prefix, cip- 'garden', xeci'piði 'remains of the harvest',
-opulo, e.g. cera'topulo, used to express admiration to kids,
-eli, e.g. kampan- 'bell', kampa'neli 'small bell'.

Comparison of the two glossaries shows that, although there is a difference between the two glossaries as far as the number of diminutive formations is concerned (9 / 61), this does not necessarily imply a similar difference in the number of the diminutive suffixes that are found in each case (5 / 7).

In the glossary of the Northern dialect of Agiasos (Lesvos) (2,700 words), where 62 diminutive formations are lemmatized, 4 different diminutive suffixes are found:

neut. -uði, fem. -uða, e.g. kupil 'girl', kupi'luð 'little girl',
neut. -uli, fem. -ula, e.g. krivats- 'bed', kriva'tsul 'small bed',
babak- 'cotton', babakula 'cotton thread',
-iði, e.g. akli'sið 'small church', akli- 'church'
-eli, e.g. sts'lupsar- 'shark', sts'lupsa'rel 'small shark'.

It is worth mentioning that in the glossaries of all the dialects there are found diminutive formations with the suffix -iði, which do not occur in the Standard Modern Greek.

E.g. akli- 'church', akli'sið 'small church' (Lesvos),
amps- 'nephew', am'psið 'little nephew' (Kozani),
skaf- 'tub', ska'fiði 'little tub for the preparation of bread' (Veroia),
xe- derivational prefix, cip- 'garden', xeci'piði 'remains of the harvest' (Zante),
kofin- 'basket', ksekofi'niði 'narrow and long basket' (Chios).

As shown from the above examples and as found in all the examined glossaries, it does not exist a remarkable difference between Northern and Southern dialects of Modern Greek as far as the productivity of diminution is concerned, regardless of the diminutive suffixes that are found in each case.

In a previous research (Giannouloupoulou 2006) on the differentiation between Northern and Southern dialects as far as compounding is concerned, it was shown that there does exist a prevalence of compounding in the Southern dialects compared to the Northern ones and this prevalence is connected with the growing analyticity of the Northern dialects compared to the Southern ones.

In the study of diminution a similar difference is not observed. This is not contradictory with the growing syntheticity of the Southern dialects and the growing analyticity of the Northern ones, because diminution is a process that takes place in derivation in Modern Greek (cf. Melissaropoulou & Ralli 2008, Karra 2006). This means that diminution concerns the co-existence of a lexical and a grammatical morpheme and not the co-existence of lexical morphemes and the concomitant syntheticity.

In certain cases of the examined data, diminutive suffixes function more grammatically than pure derivative suffixes, that is, they assign neither the purely diminutive nor the connotative affective meaning to the base of the word, but they function just as a marker of the class, they function as morphemes that enlist a word in the system just like the inflectional morphemes. E.g. The lexical unit *xasuli* (from the dialect of Veroia) meaning 'unripe cane of grain', which does not refer to something small, but the suffix -uli adjusts the Turkish loan word *hasil*.

Also worth mentioning is the lexical unit *γaδuli* (from the dialect of Zante), which has the unpredictable meaning 'big bucket', while there also exists the word *γaði* meaning 'bucket with holes'. This particular function of the diminutive suffixes is frequent in the adaptation of loan words and is also noticed in Standard Modern Greek. E.g. the lexical unit *bar* 'bar' is not adapted in the inflectional system of Modern Greek via another inflectional morpheme, but by means of the diminutive suffix -aci. The word *baraci* 'bar / little bar' is not different from the word *bar* as far as the size is concerned, but in the intimacy that the word assigns in the whole utterance.

Thus, it is observed that apart from their diminutive and affective meaning, diminutive suffixes also have another use by speakers as a strategy of adaptation in the system.

3. Do certain dialects have certain diminutive suffixes?

The prevalence of certain diminutive suffixes in certain dialects is an often-referred phenomenon in the literature. E.g. it is known that in Italian the suffix *-ino* prevails in the dialect of Toscana, while the suffix *-etto* prevails in the dialect of Venice.

In the Greek literature the suffixes *-uði* and *-eli* are considered as restricted in Macedonia and Lesvos (Dietrich 1928: 138-9), the suffix *-akos* restricted in Mani, while the common *-aci* is considered to have a special presence in Crete, where it is used for the formation of the family names in *-acis*. Correspondingly, the suffix *-opulos* is considered (cf. Dietrich op.cit.: 155) as a specific feature of family names in Peloponnese.

Prevalence of certain diminutive suffixes in certain dialects is confirmed in the data of the present research, but this does not mean that certain diminutive suffixes are excluded from certain dialects. E.g. the suffix *-eli* is found in the Southern dialect of Zante perhaps because of Italian influence: *kampaneli* 'small church bell', *katsuriðeli* 'small tree branch' diminutive of *katsuriða* 'long tree branch', *kurtunelia* 'bed curtains'. The same happens in Zante dialect with *-uði*: *apofauðia* 'food remains', *voskaruða* 'bird that stays in the same place'.

But both these suffixes are more frequent in Northern dialects. More specifically, the suffix *-eli* is extremely frequent in Lesvos.

The case of the suffix *-opulo*, which is more frequent in the Southern dialects, is a similar one. The original meaning of the suffix was patronymic and it was found in neuter gender, with the meaning 'offspring of humans or animals' (Dietrich, op.cit.: 154). Its expansion to bases meaning something inanimate rendered it a suffix with generalized diminutive meaning. This expansion is obvious especially in Southern dialects: *skia'dopulo* 'a sort of grape' (Zante), *kaðopula* 'small bucket', *masto'ropulo* 'young craftsman', *porto'pula* 'small door' (Akarnania).

But there are some exceptions. While in the data from Northern dialects suffixation with *-opulo* is rare, in the Northern dialect of Kozani several diminutivized with *-opulo* words are found: *ðimu'noplu* 'naughty boy', *ciara'toplu* 'naughty boy', *paraði'roplu* 'small window', *spi'toplu* 'small house', *klistoi'pula* 'young fighters'.

Certain suffixes are not exclusively connected with certain dialects and this is probably due to the fact that the glossaries of the present research are recent products and, thus, the influence of Standard Modern Greek to the dialects is strong. Probably, too, that has never been so.

It is also worth mentioning that in the dialect of Zante there exist loan suffixes from Italian. There are found lexical units as *γatsulinos* 'cat, small dogfish', *biskurðini* 'small delicacy' < Ital. dim. *-ino*, *bo'tsoni* 'small bottle' (*botsa* 'bottle'), *portoni* 'iron door', *stra'toni* 'small and narrow door' < Ital. augm. *-one*.

Such suffixed words are not found in the Northern dialects. There are also found in some Southern dialects, e.g. in Helia the words *stra'toni* and *por'toni* with the same meaning as in Zante, in Akarnania the word *stra'toni* meaning 'half an acre of a vineyard'.

Although most of these words are analyzable, namely their base is a theme of a free word in the dialect, these suffixes are not expanded in many themes of Greek words. In other words, the situation is in the boundaries between loaning of words and loaning of suffixes.

4. Accidental sequences of phonemes or reanalysis?

In the examined data several lexical units are noticed to end to sequences of phonemes which coincide with certain diminutive suffixes, without the possibility to separate the base from the suffix and to recognize morphological and semantic boundaries of suffixation. Most of these cases are loan words that end to *-itsa* and *-aci*. Linguistic research has been particularly occupied with the suffix *-itsa* from an etymological point of view and more specifically with its Slavic or Greek origin (cf. Georgakas 1982).

Anastassiadi-Symeonidi (1994: 205) states for the suffix -aci: “the affixoid bit -aci functions as a marker of incorporation, namely it is used in order to incorporate a non-adapted loan noun to the class of nouns in -aci. The element that plays a similar role in Corbin’s model, which has been applied in French, is called *intégrateur paradigmatique*”.

Our data present a complicated co-existence of diminutive suffixes with “accidental” sequences of phonemes, which has to be explained. E.g. in the dialect of Veroia there exist side by side suffixed words in -aci, (such as *spa’θaci* ‘little sword’ with the meaning ‘lily’, *pi’naci* ‘plate’) and words in -aci such as *tsiar’δaci* ‘small cottage’, *va’raci* ‘very slight piece of paper’. It is obvious that in this second category the element -aci functions as a marker of class, which incorporates in the Greek linguistic system the loans from Turkish in -ac. My proposal is that the co-existence with the diminutive suffix -aci urges speakers to morphological reanalysis of the adapted loans and to a gradual assignment of diminutive features to these.

By morphological reanalysis in the framework of Grammaticalization is meant “a new way in which speakers understand the structure of a word by relating it to other words in a different, novel way” (Haspelmath 1994: 1).

From the point of view of morphopragmatics in the above examples we may discern traces of meaning that are typical of diminutive suffixes. The morphopragmatic approach is proposed by Dressler & Barbaressi (1989, 1994) and consists in the incorporation of pragmatic meanings in the morphological rules. The study of diminutives in Italian has been fruitful for the development of morphopragmatics. Crocco-Galeas (2002: 153) shares the same point of view and assigns to the diminutive suffixes the following allo-pragmatic meanings: “1. Ludic character, 2. Meiosis, 3. Diminutivum puerile, 4. Child/lover/pet-centred speech situations, 5. Emotivity. 6. Familiarity and intimacy, 7. Sympathy and empathy”.

In our examples, the word *varaci* means ‘very slight piece of paper’, namely it is close to the diminutive meaning, while the word *tsiar’δaci* means ‘cottage’, namely it contains pejorative connotation.

Reanalysis has a pragmatic starting point. Speakers reanalyze by assigning diminutive connotative meaning to the sequence of phonemes -aci, since the majority of the words in -aci are diminutives. It is also possible that reanalysis obtains morphological status. In the case of *tsiar’δaci*, it is attested the word *tsar’δi*.

Similar observations can be made for the lexical units in -itsa, although the suffix -itsa has a complicated etymology. Some researchers –among them Chatzidakis and Andriotis– state that the suffix -itsa is a loan suffix from Slavic, where the suffix -ica is andronymic and in Greek is rendered a diminutive one. Others researchers, such as Koukoules and Georgakas, state that the suffix -itsa comes from the Medieval Greek suffix -icion. Regardless of the etymology, lexical units of Slavic origin with the suffix -itsa are found in the dialectal data. E. g. in the dialect of Kozani there is the word *gusta’ritsa* ‘big green lizard’ < Slav. *Guesteritsa*, side by side with the word *gustiaras*, which is coined with the supposed theme and the augmentative suffix -aras. In the same dialect the word *virvi’ritsa* ‘squirrel’ is found, which is probably of Slavic origin, and which in the dialect gains the metaphorical meaning ‘charming woman’ not only because of the referent ‘squirrel’ but also because of the diminutive suffix and its morphopragmatic connotations.

5. Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above research:

- a) Diminution is an extremely productive derivative process in the dialects of Modern Greek, where both diminutive suffixes of Standard Modern Greek and special derivative dialectal suffixes are found.
- b) There is not to be observed a significant difference between the Northern and the Southern dialects as far as the productivity of diminution is concerned, in contrast with the observations that had been made in compounding.

- c) There do exist some diminutive suffixes which are typical of certain dialects, but these are not excluded from other dialects.
- d) In cases of co-existence of diminutive suffixes and homophone sequences of phonemes, especially in loan words, reanalysis of the loan words and assignment of diminutive features to the sequences are observed.

Further research of diminution in dialects will be useful for the study of the autonomy of this derivative process and for the development of morphopragmatics as a sub-discipline of morphology especially in languages, as Modern Greek, with rich derivative and inflectional morphology.

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