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*B. D. Joseph: MORE ON THE ORIGIN OF THE -ITS-
SUFFIXES IN GREEK*



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BRIAN D. JOSEPH
Department of Linguistics
204 Cunz Hall
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
USA 43210

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MORE ON THE ORIGIN OF THE *-its-* SUFFIXES IN GREEK

Abstract: A central question in the debate on the origin of the diminutive (etc.) suffix *-itsa* in Greek is the claim that a foreign suffix can be borrowed only from a donor language that enjoys some prestige with regard to the borrowing language. Two Balkan examples — the borrowing of the Turkish occupational suffix *-cl/-çl* into Greek and more particularly the borrowing of the diminutive suffix *-zē* from Arvanitika into Megarian Greek—are presented here as counterevidence to this claim.

The origin of the Greek suffixes with the nucleus *-its-*, especially the feminine *-itsa* which forms, among other things, diminutive nouns, has been, for a long time, a hotly disputed question. A recent monograph by Georgacas (1982) seemed to have provided a definitive solution to the problem, arguing that for the most part, the suffix is of Greek origin (formed from the neuter suffix *-itsi*, itself from earlier Greek *-ikion*), but that at least a few individual lexical items with *-itsa* are probably loan words from Slavic. However, Ilievski 1982 has given a rebuttal to Georgacas' position, countering the four main arguments that Georgacas gives in support of his claims. The matter is still, therefore, somewhat of an open question, and any additional data bearing on this issue needs to be brought forth. It turns out that both Ilievski and Georgacas overlooked some evidence that is relevant to the evaluation of one of Georgacas' arguments and Ilievski's counter — arguments.

Georgacas claims that a foreign suffix is generally only borrowed into one language from another language which enjoys some political or cultural prestige in the borrowing speech community (p. 12); since the Slavs did not have such a place in the Greek world, borrowing of the *-itsa* suffix could not have taken place. Ilievski counters this with the observation that an „absorbed population, especially if it is large like the Slavs in Greece were, spontaneously transfers features from its mother language into the adopted language“ (p. 69); a Slavic population, therefore, shifting to Greek, could very well carry over the use of a suffix into their Greek, from which it could spread, or else Greeks could have extracted the same suffix from Slavic words in common use, most likely place names. In fact, within the Balkan, and specifically Greek, context, it appears that Ilievski is correct on this point, and it is here that some additional data becomes relevant.

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There is one very common and generally productive suffix in Modern Greek that is clearly a borrowing from another language. This is the suffix *-dzís*, borrowed from Turkish *-ci/-çli*, and used in Greek now to form a number of nouns for occupations and the like, as in *taksidzís* 'taxicab driver'. This is clearly a case of a foreign suffix entering a language and becoming widespread, something Georgacas claims does not usually happen. However, there is a problem with taking this as a counterexample to Georgacas' claims. In particular, it is not clear that the contact situation between the Greeks and the Turks in the 16th to 19th centuries was parallel to that of the Slavs and Greeks several centuries earlier. That is, even though there is some evidence to suggest that the Greeks enjoyed a certain degree of prestige during the Turkish occupation¹, still the Turks were the dominant group politically at that time.

A more relevant piece of data on this issue comes from Furikis (1918). In his study of weaving terms from Megara, an area of Greece in which a number of Arvanitika (Albanophone) speakers are to be found, Furikis gives two forms in the Greek of Megara which bear directly on the matter of borrowing of suffixes from a group with low prestige. In particular, the Megarian Greeks had two words for 'a little', *liýáza* and *liýátšiza*. Each of these is built from the Greek word *lýo* 'little' (more properly, probably, from the avdverbial neuter plural from *lýa*, with *liýátšiza* reflecting a Megarian palatalization of the Greek diminutive suffix *-áki* (cf. *tše* for Standard Greek *ké* 'and', *tšina* for Standard *kína* 'those' (NTR. PL); however each one also contains the Albanian feminine diminutive suffix *-z(ə)* (as in Standard Albanian *lule-z* '(pretty) little flower' or *folezə* '(warm) little nest'; see Newmark et al. (1982: 172)). The Greek realization of this suffix, with the vowel *-a*, represents either the Greek interpretation of the Albanian mid-central vowel *-ə* or else is taken from the definite form.

Thus, the Greeks of Megara borrowed a suffix from their Albanophone neighbors and attached the suffix to native Greek lexical material. What makes this example of particular interest is that the Albanians in Greece have never enjoyed any sort of prestige among the Greeks, either economically, socially, or politically. The borrowing evident here, then, is clearly from a group with low prestige in all respects into the language of a group with higher reanking. This suffix of course seems not to have spread to other Greek dialects nor did it even become particularly productive in Megarian Greek—no other examples are to be found in Furikis' studies. However, it does provide an example of the type of borrowing that Georgacas says did not occur, and thus undermines that particular support for his conclusion

¹For example, the 1675 travel report of André Georges Guillet (Sr. de la Guilletiere) notes that the Turks adopted Greek dress, at least in Athens: „L'habit ne sert guere à les discerner; car excepté le Turban, ils sont tous vestus à la Grecque. Mais pour les femmes des Turcs, rien ne les distingue exterieurement de celles des Grecs“ (p. 155). This suggests that the Turks felt that there was something about the Greeks that was worthy of emulation.

of Greek origin for *-itsa*. Whether his other arguments hold up is a different question, one that can be debated further, but the force of his first argument is less compelling in the light of this example from Megarian Greek.

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