

RE-EVALUATING GEORGACAS

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on the Occasion of His Retirement**

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Re-evaluating Georgacas: The *-ίτσα* Controversy Once Again

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Preamble

It is my very great pleasure, for several reasons, to be able to include this little piece in a volume honoring my dear friend and long-time collaborator, Victor Friedman. For one thing, my inspiration for the observations contained herein developed in the context of the long-term project that Victor and I have worked on for what seems like an eternity (Friedman and Joseph 2016)¹ and indeed some of this material is to be found, in a highly condensed form, in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.8) of that work. But regardless of the source for what I write here, the opportunity to honor Victor in this way was one I could not pass up. Even if I did not know Victor personally, based on the extraordinary contributions he has made to Balkan linguistics and contact linguistics over a career that stretches back over 40 years, I would want to and indeed would have to recognize him, but being able to do so is all the sweeter since he *is* such a good friend. Thus on personal grounds but also academic grounds, I salute Victor for all he has done for the field and all he has done to enrich my own understanding of the Balkans.

1. Introduction

A long-standing crux in study of the lexicon of the Balkan *Sprachbund* is the feminine-gender diminutive suffix with the phonetic form [-itsa].² It is found across the languages; examples from Albanian, Balkan Slavic and Balkan Romance are given in (1), in native orthography for Albanian and Romanian:³

- (1) Albanian: kokërdhicë ‘small object’ (cf. *kokërdhi* ‘droppings’)
rrugicë ‘alley’ (cf. *rrugë* ‘road’)

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Bulgarian: *ribčitsa* ‘little fish’ (cf. *ribka* ‘small fish’ (< *riba* ‘fish’))

saksijčitsa ‘little flower pot’ (cf. *saksijka* ‘small flower pot’ (< *saksija* ‘flower pot’))

Macedonian: *sestritsa* ‘little sister’ (cf. *sestra* ‘sister’)

glavitsa ‘clove’ (cf. *glava* ‘cocksfoot grass’)

Romanian: *mînușița* ‘little hand’ (cf. *mînă* ‘hand’, with -uș- diminutive as well)

As to origins, at least as far as Balkan Slavic is concerned, this suffix is a native development. In particular, [*itsa*] is the regular outcome, via the 3rd (progressive) Slavic palatalization, of a feminine suffix with the form **-īkā* (whether from **-ei-kā* or **-iH-kā*). Moreover, it is found elsewhere in Slavic, mostly as a feminizing suffix (e.g., Russian *tsaritsa* ‘tsarina’), but in some instances with diminutive(-like) value, at least in origin, as in Russian *jagoditsa* ‘buttock, nipple’ (cf. *jagoda* ‘berry,’ thus literally ‘little berry’) or *bessmyslitsa* ‘nonsense’ (where the diminutive value is evident in the dismissive or belittling sense⁴). It is generally agreed that the origin of the suffix in Albanian and in Balkan Romance is that it is a borrowing into each of the languages ultimately associated with the *-itsa* of South Slavic.

There is also an [*-itsa*] suffix in Greek. It is found in a variety of different types of words, most importantly in the following three word classes:⁵

- (2) • hypocoristic names, e.g., *Τεμουλίτσα* (< *Τεμούλη* < *Ἀρτεμις*), *Ελενίτσα* (< *Ελένη*)
- diminutives, e.g., *φουσκίτσα* ‘little bubble; round little face’ (cf. *φούσκα* ‘bubble’), *λεμονίτσα* ‘little lemon tree’ (cf. *λεμονιά* ‘lemon tree’), *πετρίτσα* ‘pebble’ (cf. *πέτρα* ‘stone’)
- place names, e.g., *Καρδίτσα* (< **Καρυδιά* ‘walnut-tree’ + *-ιτσα*)

Unlike the situation with [-*itsa*] in the other languages, there is considerable controversy over the origin of -*ιτσα* in Greek, in particular as to whether it derives from a native Greek source or instead is a borrowing from another language. This is of course a common type of controversy all over the Balkans, for any of the features that are similar across the different languages, but with this suffix, as already noted, it is not so much an issue for Balkan Romance or Albanian, as there are no native suffixes that are possible sources. However, the native-versus-borrowing question is potentially an issue for Greek because there are diminutive suffixes in Ancient Greek, especially -*ικιον*, but also -*ισκ*- or even -*ιδιον*, that, based on plausible changes that sounds in general can undergo, would appear to be possible inputs into a stop-plus-sibilant “nucleus” for a diminutive suffix in later stages of the language.

Over approximately the past century, there have been numerous conflicting opinions on the origin of Greek -*ιτσα*. Emblematic of the controversy is the fact that the noted Greek linguist, George Hatzidakis, changed his mind several times throughout his career (Georgacas 1982:31), vacillating between taking -*ιτσα* as a Slavic borrowing and treating it as a Greek-internal development. Authoritative etymological dictionaries for Greek offer mixed results, with Andriotis (1969/1983:s.v.) being convinced that it is a borrowing from Slavic -*itsa* while Babinotis (2008:s.v.) takes it as being of Greek origin.

The massive, thorough and exhaustive study by Demetrius Georgacas (Georgacas 1982), with its detailed survey of all forms and different dialects and such, spread over 435 (large) pages, would seem to settle the issue, in favor of Greek origin and specifically identifying -*ικιον* as the source of -*ιτσα*. However, in this piece honoring Victor, who has done so much by way of questioning orthodox positions in Balkan linguistics, I would like here first of all to raise several points that counter some of Georgacas’s conclusions and interpretations, and generally, then, to reevaluate the issue of the origin of -*ιτσα* in Greek.

2. *Points of Agreement, Points of Controversy*

First, it must be noted that there is general agreement on at least some data pertaining to -*ιτσα* in Greek. It is recognized by all concerned, for instance, that there are indeed some -*ιτσα* words in Greek that are of Slavic origin, as many as 250 perhaps (Georgacas 1982:45), though most are not in common use now and are best attested in northern dialects, *e.g.*, *βερβέριτσα* ‘squirrel’ (*cf.* Bulgarian *Balkanistica* 28 (2015))

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ververica), *μούσιτσα* ‘gnat, midge’ (Slavic *mъšica*, diminutive of *muxa* ‘fly’) and *νούζιτσα* ‘leather strap, belt’ (cf. Serbian *uzdica* ‘rein, bridle,’ via resegmentation of (τη)ν ούζιτσα)). Also, there are many toponyms that can be recognized as being of Slavic origin (Vasmer 1941), e.g., *Γράνιτσα*, *Στέμνιτσα*, *Τσέρνιτσα*. But beyond these recognized Slavicisms, there are numerous Greek words with *-ιτσα*, and related suffixes, and it is these that are the subject of controversy as to origins. For these words, or really for these suffixes, many possible arguments can be made both pro, i.e., for Greek origin (and thus against borrowing), and con, i.e., against Greek origin (and thus for borrowing), but for almost all of these arguments there are caveats that limit the value of each point, and show what makes them – and the whole issue – both controversial and complicated. I survey these arguments and counter-arguments and the additional relevant considerations for each in the sections that follow.

2.1. The Con Arguments and Associated Caveats

One argument against Greek origin has to do with the chronology of appearance of *-ιτσα* in written materials in Greek. Forms with *-ιτσα* are found for the first time in ordinary vocabulary (i.e., in common nouns and adjectives) in the 12th century poems of Theodoros Prodromos (Ptochoprodemos), e.g., *μικροτεριτζιν*⁶ ‘very small,’ and in personal names the suffix is found as early as the 9th century, e.g., *Βοϊδίτζης*, which occurs in a document dated 838 AD (Georgacas 1982:39). If the suffix were a native element, then it might well be expected to show up earlier in the rather long and extensive documentary record of post-Classical Greek. However, as a counter to that argument against Greek origin, one can reasonably note that attestation is never a sure thing; words or forms can be missing from a corpus through accident and not necessarily as a result of any systematic fact about them. And, it is known that there are cases of words that have to be old and yet are unattested for centuries; as discussed in Janda and Joseph (2003:§1.2.1.2), there is a reflex in Greek of the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) word **swesr-* for ‘sister,’ *ἑορ*, which, although it had to have been part of the Greek lexicon since PIE, does not show up in Greek texts until the 5th century AD⁷ and then only accidentally, as it were, in the catalogue of odd words found in the work of the glossator Hesychius. Moreover, *-ιτσα*, as a diminutive suffix, might very well have been part of a more colloquial level of usage which would not necessarily be expected to occur in written records. Thus the absence of evidence for an early occurrence of *-ιτσα* in

post-Classical Greek cannot necessarily be taken as evidence of its absence. As a result, the chronology argument is not fatal to the hypothesis of a Greek origin for *-ιτσα*.

More problematic, however, for taking *-ιτσα* to derive from an earlier Greek suffix is the fact that there is no obvious source in Greek that fits generally accepted developments that post-Classical Greek sounds undergo. The three ancient suffixes mentioned above, *-ικιον*, *-ισκη* and *-ιδιον*, for instance, would be expected to develop into *[-ici]*, *[-iski]* and *[-idi]*, respectively.⁸ Nonetheless, Joseph 1987, ultimately siding with Georgacas regarding *-ικιον*, argues for *-κ(C)ι-* as the source, based largely on the sound symbolic value of that sequence in Ancient Greek and of *-(ι)τσ-* in Modern Greek. In that case – since the suffix involves an iconic element and thus a form which can be viewed as a meaning-bearing morphological entity – the emergence of a nucleus *-ιτσ-* in a diminutive may be more a matter of a morphological development than a sound change in the strict sense. Thus this other argument, too, against a Greek origin for *-ιτσα* ends up being less compelling than it might at first seem.

2.2. *The Pro Arguments and Associated Caveats*

On the pro side, arguing for a Greek origin, one can point to the geographic distribution of *-ιτσα* within Greek, in that it is found all over the Greek-speaking world. As Georgacas (1982:30-31) points out, this widespread, truly pan-Hellenic, distribution of *-ιτσα* contrasts with the far more localized (mostly northern) dialect geography of clear Slavic loans. Similar to this argument is Georgacas's observation (p. 31) that Slavic loans are absent from several parts of the Greek-speaking world, *e.g.*, southern Italy and the Pontic areas, where *-ιτσα* nonetheless occurs; he notes that this would mean that it is hard to consider *-ιτσα* to be a Slavic loan, as its distribution is different in this respect too from other Slavic loans in Greek.

However, both of these apparent arguments in favor of a Greek source could instead be considered to be neutral as to the origin of Greek *-ιτσα*, if one supposes that Slavic *-itsa* could have gone from Slavic into northern Greek and then from there into other Greek-speaking areas and eventually into the rest of Greek. Moreover, it need not have followed the same paths of diffusion as other Slavic loans, especially those that are more culturally based, as opposed to the expressive derivational nature of *-itsa/-ιτσα*. Indeed, even Georgacas himself in some

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instances (p. 31) endorses such a scenario of internal spread within Greek, from dialect to dialect, for some other words and elements other than *-ιτσα*.

Another pro-Greek-origin argument that Georgacas advances, at least implicitly, is that Greek has a full array of gendered suffixes derived from the nucleus *-(ι)τσ-*, and other related forms, *e.g.*:

- (3)
- neuters, *e.g.*, *-ιτσι*, as in *κορίτσι* ‘girl,’ *cf.* *κόρη* ‘girl, daughter’
 - masculines, *e.g.*, *-ιτης*, as in the male proper name *Θεοφιλίτης*, derived from *Θεόφιλος*, and *-ιτσας*, as in the male proper name *Ζαχαρίτσας*, derived from *Ζαχαρίος*
 - other feminines, *e.g.*, the extended feminine form *-ίτσαινα*
 - various adjectival suffixes, *e.g.*, *-ίτινος* and *-ίτικος*⁹

This plethora of apparently related suffixes is unique to Greek within the Balkans and would appear to locate the source of *-ιτσα*, and thus of all these suffixes, within Greek itself. That is, one could argue here that this clustering of *-ιτσ-* suffixes suggests that in a sense, speaking somewhat loosely admittedly, having an *-ιτσ-* nucleus for diminutives struck a responsive chord for Greek speakers as quite appropriate.¹⁰ In this way, an argument for native origin could be based on a sense that speakers would not be so responsive to a suffix with a foreign feel to it. However reasonable this may seem, it is nonetheless true that languages can in fact elaborate foreign material and create a cluster of related items, and this phenomenon can be seen even within Greek itself. That is, Greek has borrowed the occupational (etc.) suffix *-τζης* from Turkish, as in *μπογιατζής* ‘painter’ (a derivative of *μπογιά* ‘paint’), but has created a feminine *-τζου* to go along with it; *cf.* *καταφερ-τζής/καταφερ-τζού* ‘one who gets things done’ (M/F, from *καταφέρω* ‘manage’). While the expansion shown by the *-ιτσ-* suffixes in Greek goes well beyond that seen with *-τζης/-τζου*, nonetheless the masculine/feminine occupational suffix pair shows that such expansion is possible in principle, so that this pro argument based on the forms in (3) is weakened somewhat.

Ultimately, as noted above, Georgacas looks to the suffix *-ικιον* as the source of the nucleus *-ιτσ-* that is the basis for *-ιτσα*. Sensitive to the fact that *κ > τσ* is not a regular sound change throughout all of Greek, though it is found in some

dialects,¹¹ Georgacas argues for deriving *-ιτσα* from earlier *-ικιον* by positing a colloquial late Koine (c. 4th century AD) palatalization and affricativization of the *-κ-* before a high front vowel, evidence for which, he says, can be seen in Coptic borrowings from Greek, e.g., Coptic *σιβωτος* ‘ark’ (< Greek *κιβωτός*), Coptic *σιθαρα* ‘lyre’ (< Greek *κιθάρα*), Coptic *επησι* (< Greek *εποίκιον*) ‘farmstead, hamlet’). These Coptic loans are interesting and do show that something was going on with *κ* in that environment. However, this pro argument is only as strong as the Coptic evidence, and it turns out that a reassessment of the Coptic situation is called for. In particular, the Coptic evidence is not as compelling as Georgacas suggests: the forms he cites come from the Sahidic dialect of Coptic and are spelled with the grapheme called *shima*,¹² a letter that in Sahidic seems to represent a Coptic palatalized velar. These loans, therefore, could simply reflect some degree of fronting, but not anything like affricate value, for a velar in Greek before a front vowel, as found in all of the loans. And indeed, a fronting of *-κ-* before *-ι-* is found in Greek today, so that *κοιτάζω* ‘I look at’ is actually best rendered in IPA as [citazo].

Finally, Georgacas is skeptical about the borrowing of morphology in general, a contact-related phenomenon he judges to be rare. While such a consideration would speak in favor of a Greek origin for *-ιτσα*, we now know much more about what can happen in language contact situations than at the time Georgacas wrote his book. In particular, thanks in large part to Thomason and Kaufman (1988), it is clear that under the right social conditions (especially with intense contact), borrowing of morphology is nothing unusual. And in fact, the borrowing of productive derivational suffixes is well attested in the Balkans, with the prime example being the Turkish-origin occupational suffix *-cI/çI* cited above in §2.2, found not only in Greek (*-τζης*) but in all the other Balkan languages (e.g., Albanian *-xhi*, Macedonian *-џија*, Romanian *-gi*, etc.).

The net result of the apparent pro arguments is that they too can be defused, as it were, and are not as persuasive as they might seem at first, once some countervailing considerations are taken into account.

3. Some Additional Points

Besides all that is discussed in *Section 2.2*, there are a few further relevant points that can be brought forth here. For one, it is clear that *-itsa* can spread, since it is universally agreed that the Slavic suffix is the source of the [-itsa] found in Balkan *Balkanistica* 28 (2015)

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Romance (*e.g.*, Daco-Romanian and Aromanian) and in Albanian, so it is fair to ask why could it not have spread into Greek, especially since it did spread in some clear loans. Moreover, as already noted, there need not be direct Slavic influence in each part of the Greek-speaking world where an element of Slavic origin is found; that is, an element could go from Slavic into some part of Greek (say, into the north or into central Greece or the Peloponnesos even) and from there into other parts of Greek via Greek-to-Greek dialect contact. Further, the fact that there are Greek dialects with $-\tau\sigma$ ¹³ as a regular outcome of $-\kappa$ - before $-\iota$ - means that in some dialects, earlier $-\iota\kappa\iota\omicron\nu$ would have yielded $-\iota\tau\sigma$ - via regular sound change, and those dialects in principle could have been a basis for the spread of this form of the suffix, without resorting to claims about an early Koine-era palatalization and affricatization. Finally, just by way of making it clear that a possible Greek source need not be irrelevant to the overall assessment of $[-itsa]$ in the rest of the Balkans, if Greek $-\iota\tau\sigma\alpha$ is of native Greek origin, then in principle at least some of the instances of the diminutive $[-itsa]$ in Albanian and in Balkan Romance could be borrowings from Greek.

The bottom line about $[-itsa]$ in Greek, it seems, is that the existence of a Greek-derived suffix with the form $[-itsa]$ and a Slavic-derived suffix with the same form occurring in the same general territory is a huge coincidence that many linguists would find to be too coincidental to be believable, unless there is some relationship between the two.

4. Reconciling Different Strands of Evidence

In conclusion, it must be noted that even if there is a plausible Greek source, it could still be the case that the Slavic suffix, which clearly was not unknown in Greek as the evidence of proper names and loanwords shows, enhanced the adoption of an affricated variant of the $-\iota\kappa\iota\omicron\nu$ suffix and allowed it to emerge and take hold in its affricated form. Such a view would be consistent with the chronology of the first actual appearances of $-\iota\tau\sigma\alpha$ in written materials in Medieval Greek. Moreover, this enhancement scenario squares with what is known about other contact-related developments in the Balkans, most notably the development of the verbal category of evidentiality in Balkan Slavic: evidentiality arose out of Slavic seeds but its taking hold so strongly in the grammar of Bulgarian and Macedonian was enhanced by contact with Turkish, a position argued for, in Friedman 2003, by none other than the honorand Victor Friedman himself.

Notes

1. Work on this book is finally drawing to a close as I write this in late December 2014, hence the expected publication date (fingers crossed) of sometime in 2016.
2. Here and throughout, I represent the consonantism in this and related suffixes by *ts*, even though the exact phonetic realization of this stop-plus-sibilant may vary slightly from language to language (*e.g.*, affricate versus cluster, though there are other possible differences – *cf.* Joseph and Tserdanelis 2006 on this).
3. Slavic forms with [ts] are often transliterated from the Cyrillic alphabet with <с>, though I opt for <ts> here.
4. See Jurafsky 1996 on the wide range of semantics associated with diminutivity, most of which can be found with Balkan *-itsa*.
5. Given the notoriously difficult question of how to render the relationship between orthography and pronunciation for Modern Greek, I resort here to the device of simply presenting Greek forms in the Greek alphabet and leave it to all readers, in most cases, to work out the pronunciation themselves. Where exactitude as to the phonetics is essential, I give a rendering of the phonetics in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).
6. Medieval Greek orthography typically uses <τζ> for what is later spelled <τσ>, though in some instances, Modern Greek <τζ>, which has the phonetic value [dz], with voicing, may be represented in this way in Medieval usage. For the suffixes in question, however, there is no indication that Medieval <τζ> spells a voiced sound.
7. Rather, the word used for ‘sister’ in Greek from earliest times is ἀδελφή (from **sm-g^welbh-* ‘having a womb in common’). In Hesychius’s listing, ἑὸς refers to a cousin, and thus shows a semantic shift.
8. These forms are given in IPA, so <с> here stands for a voiceless palatal plosive.
9. Some seemingly related suffixes may have a foreign origin, especially adjectival *-ούτσικος*, as in *καλούτσικος* ‘good-ish’ (*cf.* *καλός* ‘good’), generally agreed to be from Italian *-uccio*.
10. See Joseph 1984 for an argument on cross-linguistic grounds for the appropriateness of *-ιτσ-* as a basis for a diminutive suffix.
11. This is the development referred in the Greek dialectological literature as *τσιτακισμός*.
12. Lower case *shima* looks like a Greek sigma.
13. And also [tʃ], which could be realized for nondialect speakers as [ts].

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