

COMMON PATTERNS OF WORD-FORMATION IN BALKAN LANGUAGES: THE CASE OF DIMINUTIVE SUFFIXES

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses some linguistic features which are common to Albanian, Slavic languages in the Balkans, Modern Greek and Romanian with a special emphasis on the use of diminutive suffixes, which are not only used to express smallness but also affection. The paper argues that the use of such word-formation devices is not simply a linguistic choice, but it is also a spiritual and psychological manifestation. It also explores the influence these diminutive suffixes have on each-other in these different Balkan languages. The paper concludes with a discussion of which Balkan language has influenced the other languages the most and which languages display more similarities than others.

Keywords: Balkan Sprachbund, word-formations, diminutive suffixes, linguistic bonds.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship which exists between the Balkan languages has often become the focus of many papers ever since Jernej Kopitar famously remarked in his monography “*Albanische, walachische und bulgarische Sprache*” (1829): “Only one grammar dominates but with three kinds of language material”, or “...one grammar with the three lexicons” according to Friedman (1997).

With the major advances in comparative linguistics during the XIX century, especially the second half, the common phenomena witnessed in the Balkan languages could not fail to attract the increasing attention of different linguists. These phenomena became the object of systematic study especially after the publication of Franz Miklosich’s work (1861). N.S. Trubeckoi (1928), whose views helped shape those of another linguist of “The Prague circle”, R. Jakobson, put forth the proposition that some languages might be considered an integral part of a “linguistic bond”, which was referred to with the German term “Sprachbund”. The “linguistic bond” (Sprachbund) comprises those linguistic groups created by languages which exhibit a marked similarity in terms of syntax, a similarity in the morphological structure, a number of common culture words and, sometimes, a surface similarity in the phonetic structure.

The Balkan Sprachbund, the typological linguistic bond created historically, has acquired its true meaning through shared morpho-syntactical features such as:

- a. Forming the future tense by means of the verb *want* in Serbian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Modern Greek and Albanian.
- b. Falling into disuse of the infinitive and its replacement with a subjunctive form in Bulgarian, Modern Greek, Albanian and Romanian and partly in Serbian.

- c. Using the same case form for genitive and dative case in Bulgarian, Romanian and Albanian.
- d. The postposition of the definite article in Bulgarian, Romanian and Albanian.
- e. The presence of the vowel *ě* in Bulgarian, Romanian and Albanian.
- f. Referring back to objects by means of unstressed forms of personal pronouns in Bulgarian, Romanian, Modern Greek and Albanian.
- g. The formation of cardinals 11-19 by means of a preposition placed between the smallest cardinal number and the cardinal number *ten* in Romanian, Albanian and in Slavic languages.

Many linguists have continuously dealt with the clarification of the above mentioned features which are essential for this linguistic bond, but they have also noticed other more subtle features. During the third decade of this century, a rich trove of studies on Balkan linguistics has been produced in the form of focused books and articles such as Sh. Demiraj (2004) on Balkan linguistic features, Fiedler (1975), Rohlf's (1958) etc. on the loss of the infinitive in these languages, Civj'an on syntax (1979), Sawicka (1997) on phonology, Mišeska (2006) on morpho-syntactic features etc, to name a few.

What gives real meaning to this typological linguistic relationship developed historically and corroborated by a great deal of research work in this field is the common morpho-syntactic features. Nowadays, it would be of interest to know whether these features still continue to show interaction despite the historical development of these Balkan languages. Hence, in addition to the similarities, the differences between these languages need to be looked into in order to gain better insight into the origin of these common features and to anticipate their future trends.

Objective of Research

What has attracted our attention the most is the use of diminutive suffixes in the Balkan languages. It is not just a matter of identifying the same suffixes serving the same function in these languages but explaining the origin of each one of them, as well. Identifying the suffixes that function as diminutives in these languages poses more difficulty than indentifying other kinds of suffixes.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Suffixation is one of the most productive ways of forming new words in the Balkan languages, which indicates a tendency toward synthetic inflection. The same suffixes have been identified in these Balkan languages since the Roman influence: The Latin suffixes – *ar/-are* have helped form the following words:

Albanian: *blet-ar* ‘beekeeper’

Greek: *βαρκ-αρ-ης* ‘boatman’

Bulgarian: *koz-ar* ‘shepherd’

Romanian: *albin-ar* ‘beekeeper’

There are other suffixes that have entered a language together with the loanword creating a wordformation pattern even for the native words. This is apparently the most common way.

For suffixes to be migrating alone from one language to another, be them even from neighboring languages, is practically impossible. Shaban Demiraj (1985:42) arguably states that “*We must bear in mind that the influence of a language on the grammatical patterns of another is an extraordinary phenomenon*”.

This is explained by the fact that besides the word-formation function they perform the diminutive suffixes also carry some meanings which are related to the psychology and spiritual world of these peoples. These meanings, according to Crocco-Galeas (2002:153), are: “ludic character, meiosis, diminutivum puerile, child/lover/petcentred, speech situations, emotivity, familiarity and intimacy, sympathy and empathy.” All of these are closely linked with the mentality and the spiritual constitution of a people, which is hard to borrow; hence their original source should be sought in the spoken language. It is there that the spread of Balkanisms must have taken place.

We have noticed that these suffixes are used with inanimate nouns when they express diminution and animate nouns when they express affection, tenderness or intimacy. Of the Balkan languages, Greek and Bulgarian are very rich in such suffixes compared to Albanian and Romanian. This does not have to do only with the number of these suffixes, but also with the frequency of their use in everyday language.

Nearly every noun can take such a suffix in the Greek language. They do not only [show that something is smaller than things of that type usually are](#), but they also denote a hint of familiarity, intimacy, or tenderness.

Thus, for small size the following suffixes are used: *-aki*, *σπίτι*, *σπιτάκι* ‘small house’, *λάθος*, *λαθάκι* ‘minor mistake’.

To denote affection, tenderness or intimacy, especially in family life, the following suffixes are used: *-oula*, *μάνα*, *μανού-λα* ‘mother’.

The most common suffixes are *-άκης* (*akis*) and *-ούλης* (*oulis*) for masculine gender, *-ίτσα* (*itsa*) and *-ούλα* (*oula*) for feminine, and *-άκι* (*aki*) for neuter.

Bulgarian also has a developed system of diminutive suffixes. It has three suffixes for feminine gender: *κα* (*ka*), *-чка* (*cka*), and *-ица* (*ica*): *zhena* - *zhenica* - *zhenička* ‘woman’, *riba* - *ribka* - *ribička* ‘fish’, *glava* - *glavica* - *glavička* ‘head’. For neuter there is only one suffix: *-nce*: *dete-detence* ‘child’.

The following diminutive suffixes for small size and affection are used to mark the feminine form in Romanian: *-ea jucărie* - *jucăr-ea* ‘game’, *-ică bucată* - *bucăț-ică* ‘small piece’, *-ioară inimă* - *inim-ioară* ‘heart’, *-ișoară țară* - *țărișoară* ‘small place’, *-iță fată* - *feti-ță* ‘little girl’, *-uță bunică* - *bunic-uță* ‘grandmother’.

For masculine gender: *-aș iepure* - *iepur-aș* ‘rabbit’, *-el băiat* - *băieț-el* ‘boy’, *-ic tată* - *tăt-ic* ‘father’, *-ior dulap* - *dulăp-ior* ‘closet’, *-ișor pui* - *pu-ișor* ‘bird’, *-uleț urs* - *urs-uleț* ‘bear’, *-uș câțel* - *cățel-uș* ‘dog’, *-uț pat* - *păt-uț* ‘bed’.

What is noticed in these languages is that there are two word-forming elements of this kind placed one after the other. This is one way to enrich derivation. However, placing one suffix after another is done for different reasons in different languages. Thus, in Greek, due to the frequency of use, the diminutive meaning of a suffix may have faded with the passing of time and so another diminutive suffix is added: *ημάνα* (*mana*) ‘mother’, *μαν-ούλα*, *μαν-ουλι-ίτσα* ‘mother (in an affectionate way)’, *μικρός* (*mikro*) ‘small’, *μικρ-ούλης* ‘smaller’, *μικρ-ούλι-κο* ‘very small’.

A similar phenomenon occurs in Bulgarian as well: *rac-ica* ‘small hand’, *rac-ic-ka* ‘very small hand’; *kniž-ka* ‘small book’, *kniž-c-ica* ‘very small book’. The reason for this double use in Bulgarian is the fact that masculine nouns have double diminutive forms. The first suffix gives the noun the neuter gender, whereas the second gives it the diminutive meaning.

The first suffix is *-çe*, and then *-nyçe* is added, preserving the neuter gender: *nosh nozh-çe nozh-çe-nçe* ‘small knife’, *stol-stol-çe* ‘small chair’, *stol-çe-nçe* ‘very small chair’.

The Albanian language used to be rich in diminutive suffixes, so much so that V. Dançetoviq (1960) counted around 60 for masculine gender alone (including the ones with a pejorative meaning as well, as in the word *frik-acak* ‘coward’), but almost all of them were encountered in dialect use. Two diminutive suffixes may be added to the noun even in Albanian, but this rarely happens: *lepur-ush-kë* ‘little rabbit’. The reason is different from that in other languages. It serves to show feminine gender in addition to smallness. This feature of the Albanian language is found in the Romanian language as well: *rață răț-uș răț-uș-că* ‘duck’; *cățel, cățel-uș cățel-uș-că* ‘puppy’.

In modern Albanian it is strange that the use of diminutive suffixes is limited to dialect use only. Even in dialect use it can be noticed that they don’t have the previous frequency of use. In the past, three different diminutive suffixes could be added to the same dialect word: *gjel-osh-ush-uc* ‘rooster+diminutive suffixes’. There is still a massive use of them in southeastern regions where a peripheral Slavic influence is present: *mama-kë, doç-kë, korbec-kë, Taq-kë, Maq-kë*. Old Albanian Literature abounds in them. Thus, in Pjetër Bogdani’s “Çeta e profetëve” (1685) the following are found: I 92 24 e posi koqe n'gruni pa *lëkurë-zë*, II 4 10 atë gjak të kulluem t'asaj *vajzë-zë*; II 89. Naim Frashëri, a Renaissance writer, made use of them in “Bagëti e bujqësia” (1886). There are 28 cases: *vend-th* ‘small place’, *vathë-zë* ‘small cattle pen’, *manar-ez* ‘little lamb’ etc.

In contemporary Albanian such suffixes are being revived in children’s literature (Lloshi, 1999), but, still, very few are being used compared to their frequency in the past, e.g.: *lepur-ush* ‘little rabbit’, *ar(i)-ush* ‘little bear’.

In the Greek language any noun can take a diminutive suffix. If we ask ‘Can the meaning of any word in Albanian be diminished/made softer with any diminutive suffix whatsoever?’, the answer is ‘No!’ There are cases in Albanian when the diminutive suffix added shows neither small size nor affection or intimacy. Thus, it is difficult for someone nowadays to see the diminution in words like *kokërr* ‘grain’ (compare *i vocërr* ‘very small/little’), *dorashkë* ‘glove’, *urith* ‘mole’, *feçkë* ‘snout, trunk’, let alone in proper nouns like *Gjel-osh, Kost-aq, Kol-ec* etc.

In all the other languages the diminutive suffixes are used even with proper nouns with a hint of tenderness or intimacy or with hypocoristic formations:

Bulgarian: *Georgi- Gosh/Goçe, Ivan -Vanko, Vänkata, Vasil/Vasko*; Greek: *Ana-ula, Jorgo-aq*; Romanian: *Elena/Lenuta, Ion, Ioan/Lonel, Lonut, Nikolae/Niku, Nikusor*.

While in the above languages every gender has its diminutive suffixes, in Albanian the gender division does not include them all. The suffix *-th* is typical of nouns of masculine gender in words such as *gur-th* ‘pebble’, whereas *-zë* marks the feminine forms: *vashë-zë* ‘very young girl’, but the same suffix is used to refer to both genders: *djal-kë* ‘little boy’ and *doç-kë* ‘tiny hand (grammatically feminine)’.

The affixes *-zë* and *-th* are old Albanian suffixes which are found in both Albanian dialects and, according to G. Pasku (1916), the former has even entered Romanian via Albanian. This was noticed even by Çabej and Xhuvani (1980) who argue that this affix has entered Romanian together with the Albanian word: *coacă-ză, pupă-ză*.

Based on our observations this suffix has been used to create microtoponyms even by the Arvanitas of Greece (Albanians who immigrated to Greece before the 14th century). In Athens today there are nouns denoting place such as *Varki-za*, *Kiki-za* etc.

Even the diminutive suffix *-th*, which is used with masculine nouns in Albanian, goes back in time and, with the exception of the cases mentioned above, it is also used by the Arbëresh of Italy (Albanians who emigrated to Italy in the 14th – 15th centuries). According to Dançetoviq (1960:69) “Meyer and Dozon present evidence that Arbëresh of Italy diminish even first, second and third person personal pronouns with *-th*”, which is also noticed by Çabej and Xhuvani (1980:555) who give the example *tith* for *ti* (you). It is found even in adverbs like *sontenith* ‘tonight’. In Albanian this affix⁹⁸ displays a surface similarity with the one found in words like *kalimthi*, *fluturimthi* etc. However, as Xhuvani pointed out (1980:240) “the origin of these suffixes must be looked into to find out whether there is an etimological affinity between them”.

The language which has had the greatest influence on diminutive suffixes in Albanian and, to some extent, in other languages, as well, is Bulgarian and Serbian. There are few such suffixes that have entered the Greek language via Bulgarian. This somehow runs against the opinion of some Balkanologists such as Mišeska (2006) who argues that it is difficult to find a single donor of the Balkan Sprachbund features because they result from convergence of languages in a multilingual environment.

Bulgarian has contributed with the following suffixes: *-aç*, sometimes expanded with the Slavic suffix *-kë* in the south of Albania: *berth-aç-kë*, *hund-aç-kë*. From this same language Romanian has coined (Çabej-Xhuvani new edition 1980) *luv-aç* (hunter) and surely Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian have it, too, *ков-ач* ‘blacksmith’.

-ashkë, a suffix of Slavic origin, is also found in Bulgarian and Romanian (Bulgarian: *gareg-aska*, Romanian: *bud-ască*)

*-çe*⁹⁹ is a suffix of Bulgarian origin and in Albanian it is used for small size or to indicate affection or intimacy as in *bir-çe*, *nip-çe* or *top-çe*, and to soften proper nouns: *Braçe* (Ibrahim). The suffix has also entered Romanian via Bulgarian (Çabej & Xhuvani, 1980:459).

-ec is of Bulgarian origin, as well: Albanian: *burr-ec*, *gur-ec*, Bulgarian: *grad-ec*, Romanian: *brin-ec*

-icë (a) is found in all the Balkan languages:

Albanian: *rrug-icë* ‘alley’; Bulgarian: *răč-ica* ‘small hand’, *kniž-č-ica* ‘very small book’;

Greek: *kap* ‘capote’ *kapi’nitsa* ‘little capote’, (Giannouloupoulou, 2009); Romanian: *lingur-ița* ‘small spoon’.

Similarly, the suffix *-kë*, of Slavic origin, is encountered in Albanian, Romanian and Bulgarian.

In Albanian it is used as a diminutive suffix to indicate small size: *lul-kë* ‘small flower’, *mëshqer-kë* ‘young cow’; to form affectionate nouns: *shqer-kë* ‘small lamb’, *djal-kë* ‘small boy’ etc; to form feminine nouns from masculine nouns: *fshatar-kë* ‘peasant girl’, *arush-kë*

⁹⁸ During a private communication with Professor Francesco Altamari (Italy), he argued that in the Arbëresh language (The language of Albanians who immigrated to Italy 5 centuries ago) this suffix is a common one and not diminutive, thus holding an opinion different from that expressed by the above- mentioned scholars.

⁹⁹ This suffix shouldn’t be confused with the suffix *-çe* which derives from Turkish and has created adverbs from nouns: *fsha-çe*, *shqiptar-çe*

‘she-bear’ etc; to soften some proper nouns: *Le-kë*, *Dhor-kë* etc; to create ethnonyms: *korçar-kë* ‘a girl from Korça’, *shqiptar-kë* ‘Albanian girl’. It is also found in Romanian in words like: *casni-că* ‘small house’, *tuf-că* ‘bunch (of flowers)’. Çabej & Xhuvani (1980:510) argue that “...this suffix, especially in its diminutive use and its use to form feminine nouns from masculine ones, is of Slavic origin”. In Romanian it is found even as an ethnonym just like in Albanian: *romîncă* (Romanian girl).

-*ko* is of Bulgarian origin: *brat-ko*, *sin-ko*, (where it indicates the vocative case; the use of the diminutives would result in *bratçe*, *sinçe*).

In the south of Albania it is used to denote affection and tenderness: *daj-ko* ‘uncle’, *vëlla-çko* ‘brother’. It is rarely used in Greek, as well: *μικρ-ούλι-κο* ‘very small’

Nowadays the suffix *-ush*, which Çabej (1976) compares to Romanian *-us* in words like *lemn-us* ‘small piece of wood’, is gaining frequency in Albanian: *engjëll-ush* ‘little angel’, *bab-ush* ‘daddy’, *ar-ush* ‘little bear’, *vogël-ush* ‘little kid’. It is also found in Serbo-Croatian, but with no diminutive meaning: *gakusa* ‘crow’. Regarding its origin, different opinions are held. Pasku (1916) argues that it has entered Romanian via Slavic. In our opinion, Romanian might have inherited it from the Thracian language and this is the reason why it intersects with Albanian. The conviction becomes stronger when even Çabej & Xhuvani (1980) assert that Albanian has inherited it from the Illyrian language (as in the words *Ebusius*, *Picusus*) and it has later encountered the new Slavic suffix. This suffix, expanded with the suffix *-kë* as a hypercharacteristic element, is used in Albanian and Romanian: Albanian: *engjëllush-kë*, *arush-kë*, Romanian: *femeiuș-că*.

There are suffixes like *-ash*, found in Bulgarian, Albanian, Romanian (Romanian *aș*), with a diminutive meaning only in Romanian, and despite the debates that it might have entered Albanian via Romanian (V. Dançetiviq, 1960 p.9), Çabej & Xhuvani (1980) argue it must have been borrowed from Slavic with which they coincide in meaning.

CONCLUSIONS

All the languages that are part of the Balkan Sprachbund make use of diminutive suffixes. Greek and Bulgarian use them considerably in everyday life, whereas Romanian and Albanian less. These diminutive suffixes’ function is to express smallness and affection.

Most diminutive suffixes that appear common to the Balkan languages derive from Slavic.

What mostly attracts attention is the fact that even though they are not languages in contact there are some suffixes which are the same in Albanian and Romanian. In these two languages they are even used to express diminution or to form feminine nouns from masculine nouns while in Slavic or Modern Greek sometimes they are not.

On the other hand, even though there are other suffixes in Albanian that are of Greek origin, there are no diminutive suffixes in Albanian borrowed from this language, even though they are languages in contact. In conclusion, it can be said that even in the field of word-formation there are similar features among Balkan languages, and in particular between Albanian and Romanian.

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