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líyo: TOWARDS GRAMMATICALIZED VERBAL DIMINUTIVIZATION?¹

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ABSTRACT

I argue that líyo has undergone semantic attenuation, losing most of its literal meaning in certain constructions, and has grammaticalized from a lexically independent quantifier to a verbal diminutivizer. Part and parcel of this change is the (inter)subjective interpretation of líyo in certain construction. Motivation for this process is provided by MGr interactional ethos, a factor discussed in universal tendencies in the semantics of diminutives. Moreover, primary evidence on the equivalents of líyo in other Balkan languages suggests that verbal diminutivization with líyo may be an area feature. Therefore, líyo may present us with a case of semantic change motivated by sociopragmatic considerations.

1. Introduction: Setting the Scene

Modern Greek *líyo*, typically rendered as ‘(a) little’, has a number of well-known idiomatic uses beyond the relatively straightforward (1) and (2), where it functions as an adjective and adverb, respectively:

- (1) *évala líyo yála ston kafé su* (but cf. *évala líyo_n/líyo_f záxari_f ston kafé su*).
‘I put a little milk in your coffee’ (but cf. ‘I put a little sugar in your coffee’).
(2) *se íða polí líyo*.
‘I saw very little of you.’

Such uses of *líyo*, exemplified in (3), along with morphologically transparent diminutivization, have been identified as “exhibiting pragmatic force in polite interaction” (Sifianou 1992a: 160, 1992b); specifically, Sifianou argues that they function as positive politeness markers rather than mitigating devices in an attempt to minimize the imposition arising from requests (Sifianou 1992a: 170-172; cf. also Makri-Tsilipakou 2003: 700):

- (3) *mu pjanis líyo to stilo? / mu pjanis to stilo líyo?*
‘Can you grab the pen for me?’

According to Sifianou (1992a), *líyo* here, rather than minimizing the imposition by minimizing the action requested, is rather an informal variant of *parakaló* ‘please’ and can be used instead of or along with it; especially as it is positionally flexible just like *please*. She also mentions that this use of *líyo* is not peculiar to Greek: Brown and Levinson (1987) in Tamil and Malagasy the words for *please* literally mean ‘a little’ (Ibid.: 169; Jurafsky 1996: 558). On the other hand, she suggests that “[t]he Greek *líyo* seems to be more flexible than its English equivalent. It can also collocate with various verbs, and the grammatical constructions within which it can be employed are less restricted” (Sifianou 1992a: 169).

¹ Many thanks are due to Mary Sifianou, Eleni Antonopoulou, and Angeliki Athanasiadou for their help in this paper, earlier versions of which have been presented at graduate seminars at the Universities of Leuven, Aarhus, and Thessaloniki. I have benefited from the insightful comments of these audiences and discussions with colleagues Bert Cornillie, Nicole Delbecque, Marianthi Makri-Tsilipakou, Argiris Archakis, and Kiki Nikiforidou.

Based on these findings regarding examples such as (3), I will argue that *líyo* here serves an unambiguous hedging or diminutivizing function on the verb of request. In this sense, *líyo* in (3) has lost most of its original lexical meaning and has grammaticalized into a marker of verbal diminutivization. Moreover, this function seems to be related to particular contexts, in other words to specific constructions. This is in keeping with Sifianou's (ibid.: 169) claim that in certain contexts *líyo* seems to "ha[ve] lost its literal force and serves strictly politeness purposes."

However, in other instances, exemplified in (4) and (5), *líyo* is ambiguous between a grammaticalized hedge and a *bona fide* adverbial quantifier:

(4) *aníyis líyo tin porta? / aníyis tin pórtá líyo?*

'Can you get the door? / Can you open the door just slightly.'

(5) *éla líyo na se do! / éla na se do líyo!*

Literally: Come over so I can see you, 'Come over to see me!'

Thus, (4) may be construed as a request to open the door a little or a polite request to open the door (irrespective of degree of openness). Along the same lines, (5) may be construed as a request for a brief period of one's time or as a polite request for a visit of indeterminate length. Note that the quantifier interpretation is not available for (3).

On the other hand, *líyo* is also used with a variety of verbs that have nothing to do with requests and in constructions that function mostly as statements, as in (6) through (9) below:

(6) *dulévo líyo*. 'I am working.'

(7) *tróo líyo*. 'I am eating.'

(8) *δjavázo líyo*. 'I am reading/studying.'

(9) *ksirízome líyo*. 'I am shaving.'

In (6) through (9) –where, incidentally, *líyo* is positionally inflexible, in contrast to examples (3-5)– word stress plays a crucial role in disambiguation and, therefore, in interpretation. When main stress is on *líyo*, it functions as an adverbial quantifier and the interpretation is that one works, eats, or reads or little.² On the other hand, when main stress is on the verb, it is interpreted as a hedge, indeed as a verbal diminutivizer comparable to (yet distinct from) the increasingly used prefix *psilo-* (literally 'thin' in the sense of 'a little' or '(s)lightly') as in *psilodulévo* '-work', *psilotróo* '-eat', *psilodjavázo* '-read', or even *psilomalakízome* '-being a jerk/wanker', etc. (cf. Makri-Tsilipakou 2003: 700).³ In (10), where we have an overt object, *líyo* is flexible but the same restrictions regarding stress apply:

(10) *mazévo líyo to spíti. / mazévo to spíti líyo*. 'I am tidying up the house.'

1.1 Summing Up: Aims and Thesis

Sociolinguistic research has so far dealt with *líyo* in the context of diminution and routinely offered cogent interpretive accounts relating to politeness in informal discourse (Sifianou 1992a, 1992b, Badarneh 2010) and gender issues (Makri-Tsilipakou 2003 and the bibliography listed there). Moreover, Jurafsky (1996), in a detailed cross-linguistic treatment of diminutives, has offered further insights on the semantics of diminutive forms, especially mechanisms relating to semantic change, such as bleaching (among others).

However, even the actual examples used in Sifianou (1992a) seem to allow for additional directions as well, namely in terms of grammaticalization and subjectification in the context of certain constructions motivated by Greek "cultural ethos" (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987) which is the main focus of her research. These become more apparent if one considers preliminary evidence from corpus data, as obtained for the purposes of the present analysis, from the CGT and GWAC.⁴

² Note, incidentally, that a quantifier interpretation is not available in (9).

³ Cf. note 12.

⁴ *Corpus of Greek Texts* (see Goutsos 2003) and Sketchengine's *Greek Web as Corpus*.

Specifically, I will show that *líyo* (and related, further diminutivized forms *liyáki* and *liyuláki*) has undergone semantic attenuation (cf. bleaching), losing most if not all of its literal meaning (along with its stress) in certain constructions, and has grammaticalized from a lexically independent quantifier to a verbal diminutivizer. Part and parcel of this change is the subjective interpretation of *líyo* in (6)-(9) above. Moreover, I will investigate whether this process is motivated by Greek interactional ethos and the importance attached to friendly, informal politeness (as argued for in Sifianou 1992a, 1992b), a factor discussed in the context of universal tendencies in the semantics of diminutives (Jurafsky 1996). Indeed, primary evidence from data on the equivalents of *líyo* in other Balkan languages, such as BCMS⁵ and Albanian, suggests that verbal diminutivization with *líyo* may be an area feature. Crucially, then, *líyo* may present us with a case of semantic change motivated by sociopragmatic considerations.

2. On Grammaticalization

Over the last two decades, there has been a boom of functionally geared research on phenomena described by the term *grammaticalization*, credited to Antoine Meillet. Despite differences, such treatments share an understanding of lexical items progressively losing (at least part of) their lexical status and acquiring grammatical or function word status. To quote from Meillet (1912/1926 quoted in Cambell and Janda 2001: 95 in their translation), who has influenced more recent researchers,

[Besides analogy], another process consists in the change of an autonomous word into the role of a grammatical element Th[is]...process...[, involving] the attribution of grammatical character to a formerly independent word...[, is one of] only [two] ways by means of which new grammatical constructs are formed (Meillet 1921/1926: 131).

The ‘grammaticalization’ of certain words creates new forms, introduces categories that did not use to receive linguistic expression, [and] transforms the overall system (Meillet 1912/1926: 133).

Campbell and Janda (2001: 95) note that grammaticalization is seen as typically involving “a concurrent ‘weakening’ of both meaning and phonetic form” and as represented by the overall cline *lexical* > *syntactic* > *morphological*. That is, a lexical item becomes a form word with syntactic function and may end up as a morphological marker, an affix. Grammaticalization is then a change from less to more grammatical status.

In a similar vein, Hopper and Traugott claim that grammaticalization is “the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions” (2003: xv). They caution the reader that in the first edition of their book, in 1993, they defined grammaticalization as *a process* instead of *a change*. However, as work on grammaticalization “has progressed, it has become clear that the definition of grammaticalization as a process has been misleading. To some it has suggested that grammaticalization is conceived as a force with an impetus of its own independent of language learners and language users. This was never intended” (Ibid.: xv).⁶ They argue that students of grammaticalization encounter data showing that “morphosyntactic changes are replicable across languages and across times; furthermore, they have a very strong tendency to go in the same direction [...]” (Ibid.: xv).

In examples (3-9), and especially (6-9), we see evidence of the weakening of both the semantic content and the phonetic form of *líyo*. Motivation for the grammaticalization of *líyo* as a diminutivizer in such cases seems to be high for, in effect, *líyo* “names” diminution (cf. Jurafsky 1996: 542-543): it stands in a

⁵ Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, Serbian. It usually appears as BCS in the relevant literature.

⁶ Cf. the special issue of *Language Sciences* (2001, vol. 23) devoted to a scrutiny of grammaticalization, especially Campbell and Janda (2001), Campbell (2001), Joseph (2001), Janda (2001), and Newmeyer (2001). Campbell (2001: 113) notes that grammaticalization is derivative and “relies on other processes and mechanisms of linguistic change which are independent of” it. Yet, these criticisms do not question the value of research on this phenomenon but rather claims for a self-contained “grammaticalization theory”. I make no such claims here.

metonymic relationship to it,⁷ similar to the relationship attested for volitional verbs to modals or/and future tense markers documented in the literature for many languages, and for Balkan languages in particular: cf. MGr *thélo ina* ‘want to’ > *thélo na* > *thena* > *tha* ‘will’ future marker (cf. Joseph 1983, 2001,⁸ Veloudis 2005); BCMS *hoću* ‘want’ > *ću* future marker cf. ‘will’ (cf. Sandfeld 1930).

I would like to argue that *liyo* is grammaticalized in Modern Greek (MGr). Primary evidence suggests that *liyo* has undergone a first round of grammaticalization functioning as a positive politeness marker (predominantly though not exclusively) in requests in informal settings. The function as a verbal hedge or diminutivizer could then be a further, even more general step in this process, whereby use of *liyo* with verbs is progressively generalized and comes to weaken their illocutionary force. This step is motivated by two factors. On the one hand, in MGr diminutive morphology does not extend to verbs. On the other hand, *liyo* is, in effect, a metonymy for diminution and a prime candidate for such a role as an adverbial. In other words, given structural restrictions and sociopragmatic exigencies *liyo* has come to fill a gap – to quote Meillet, again: it has come “to introduce a category that did not use to receive linguistic expression”.⁹

Justification for this claim can also be found in Jurafsky (1996: 541-542), who proposes a universal radial category for the meaning of the diminutive in which ‘small[ness]’ serves as the prototype while many other meanings are extensions from the prototype. He also notes the tendency for “meaning changes from the more informative and specific to the more abstract and vague” (Ibid.: 540), a process variously known as bleaching, generalization, or desemantization. Moreover, he suggests that the meanings of the diminutive in a particular language will develop diachronically from central to peripheral senses of the category (Ibid.: 543). Specifically, the diminutive may shift from smallness to approximative hedges to metalinguistic hedges, from the physical to the linguistic or textual world (Ibid.: 560), which is what I claim to be the case with *liyo*.

Last, Jurafsky (Ibid.: 541) draws on Traugott and König (1991) who “propose three tendencies for meaning to become more removed from the external world, and more subjective or evaluative”, summarized here as a) external situation → internal situation; b) external/internal situation → textual/metalinguistic situation; and c) external/internal/textual situation → speaker’s subjective belief state. In section (3), I show that subjectification is another relevant way of looking at *liyo*, especially as it correlates strongly with grammaticalization, although it does not entail it (Traugott 2010: 38, Athanasiadou et al. 2006: 5).

3. On (inter)subjectivity and (inter)subjectification

Research on subjectivity and subjectification, and more recently intersubjectivity and intersubjectification (Traugott 2003, 2010, Cuyckens et al. 2010), has mostly developed along with work on grammaticalization. According to Finegan (1995: 1), “*subjectivity* [...] concerns the expression of the self and the representation of a speaker’s (or, more generally, a locutionary agent’s) perspective or point of view in discourse – what has been called a speaker’s imprint. In turn, subjectivisation (or *subjectification*) refers to the structures and strategies that languages evolve in the linguistic realisation of subjectivity or to the relevant processes of linguistic evolution themselves.” He further specifies that subjectivity has to do with the effect of the involvement of a locutionary agent *on the linguistic expression of self*, an effect which is registered in the formal shape of discourse (Ibid.: 1, italics mine).

This view of subjectification aptly describes the use of *liyo* in examples (3-5) above, where the speaker employs it as a positive politeness (solidarity) marker or in (6-10), where it marks speaker attitude towards

⁷ Jurafsky (1996: 555), in his discussion of the diminutive as a radial category, he proposes a mechanism he calls *lambda abstraction* (related to the generalization mechanism) “which takes one predicate in a form and replaces it with a variable” yielding second-order predicates.

⁸ Although Joseph (2001) is critical of grammaticalization as an independent process, I refer to his work here as I make no such claim. On the other hand, cf. Veloudis (2005: 306), who cautions that grammaticalization poses problems which are tacitly or/and arbitrarily solved in other theories.

⁹ Note that the productive prefix *psilo-* tends to be used with a trivializing intention (cf. Makri-Tsilipakou 2003: 700) (cf. Jurafsky’s 1996 *approximative*) and although it may share some of its meaning with *liyo* it cannot be equated with it.

his/her utterance, weakening its force. What is common in both cases is that *liyo* is used to express affect. As MGr verb morphology does not allow for morphological diminutive marking on the verb in the form of an affix, *liyo* is used as a verbal diminutivizer, not unlike the diminutivized nominals *kafedáki*, *neráki*, etc. This use seems to be motivated by MGr cultural ethos as attested in the work of Sifianou (1992a, 1992b).

In more recent research it has been noted that there are two competing notions of subjectivity and subjectification, as developed by Traugott (e.g., 1995, 2003, 2010) and Langacker (e.g., 1990, 2006). Although not incompatible, they have different genealogies and their similarity is probably the result of both scholars having anchored subjectification to grammaticalization (Athanasiadou et al. 2006: 5). However, as work on subjectification has progressed, both authors have increasingly clarified matters. Specifically, Traugott (1995: 31-32) has used the term to refer to “a pragmatic-semantic process whereby ‘meanings become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude towards the proposition’, in other words, towards what the speaker is talking about (Traugott 1989: 35).” She concedes that this is a very broad characterization (contrasting with a more narrowly defined process described by Langacker (1990: 17) as “the realignment of some relationship from the objective axis to the subjective axis”). Traugott claims that

Subjectification is evidenced in lexical as well as grammatical change. Examples in the lexical domain include the development of illocutionary speech-act verb meanings from locutionary (and ultimately often non-locutionary) meanings, for example: *agree* (originally ‘be pleasing, suitable’) [...]. ‘Subjectification in grammaticalisation’ is, broadly speaking, the development of *a grammatically identifiable expression of speaker belief or speaker attitude to what is said.*” Traugott (1995: 32, italics mine)

Considering the examples with *liyo* in this light, we can make the following points. Already in (1) we have traces of the process of subjectification of *liyo*. One can ask for a little sugar using the form *liyi*, which expectedly modifies the feminine noun *záxari*, or the neuter form *liyo*. One can even ask for *liyi zaxarítsa* or *liyo_n zaxarítsa_f* diminutivizing the nominal. This violation of, otherwise strictly observed, gender agreement between modifier and nominal is an indication of the more subjective meaning of *liyo* in this construction. Moreover, as it obscures the distinction between adjectival and adverbial *liyo*, it may be argued that in *liyo záxari* we do not have a *bona fide* quantifier, but a quantifier-plus-affect marker. We may, moreover argue that, in this construction, the form *liyo* could modify either the verb or the nominal (indeed, if we stick to its form, then we have to assume that it is an adverbial, syncretically construed as an adjective). This indeterminacy of word class is also indicative of grammaticalization. On the other hand, habitual coding of speaker-attitude or/and affect with *liyo* in examples (3-5) and (6-10) offers further evidence of subjectification, indeed of *intersubjectification*, to which I turn next.

More recently, Traugott (2003, 2010) revisits her work on subjectification, intersubjectification, and their relation to grammaticalization. She defines subjectivity as “the development of expressions the prime semantic or pragmatic meaning of which is to index the speaker’s viewpoint on what she or he is saying or speaking about” and distinguishes it from intersubjectivity, “cases [where] expressions also develop marking attention to the addressee’s self-image” (2010: 29). Her hypothesis is that both of these “involve the reanalysis of pragmatic meaning as coded semantic meanings *in the context of speaker-hearer negotiation of meaning*” (Ibid., italics mine). She further claims that, although subjectification and intersubjectification are independent of grammaticalization, they are linked to it “for reasons relating to the various functions of grammar” (Ibid.).

On this basis, *liyo* in examples (6-10), where it expresses the speaker’s viewpoint about his/her utterance, is an instance of subjectification, whereas examples (3-5) are identifiable instances of intersubjectification, as “the development of the speaker’s attention to addressee self-image” (Ibid.: 60) or as “expressing attention to the hearer’s self” (Cuyckens et al. 2010: 1). In the latter case, the speaker is tending to the addressee’s face needs. While both of these processes arise in the context of the negotiation of meaning between interlocutors, a question that could be asked is whether they are somehow ordered. Traugott (2010: 35-36, cf. also Traugott and Dasher 2002: 225) suggests that the relation of these mechanisms can be schematized as *non-/less subjectivized* > *subjectivized* > *intersubjectivized* and used heuristically. If the above syllogism is correct, then intersubjective uses of *liyo* (3-5) are more likely to have developed from subjective ones (6-10). Last, as I have been arguing for grammaticalization of *liyo*, it is worth noting that, for Traugott (2010: 41), “[i]ntersubjectification intersects less extensively with

grammaticalization. In most languages it is grammaticalized only into some discourse markers and interjections.”

I have shown that *líyo* has a range of uses crucially tied to subjectivity. It is not only used as a quantifier but also habitually employed in coding speaker-attitude, affect, and/or solidarity. I argue that the former is a more objective and the latter a more subjective interpretation linked with an ongoing process of grammaticalization through subjectification of *líyo*. This claim receives serious support given the high degree of productivity of *líyo* in this diminutivizing function in examples (6-10), which is, arguably, linked –if not ultimately traced– to its use in requests. However, it has been repeatedly observed that it is not isolated lexical items that grammaticalize, but rather lexical items in *constructions* (Trousdale and Traugott 2010: 13, Noël 2007), a point to which I turn next.

4. *líyo* Constructions

From the beginning of this paper, I have been talking of non-literal uses of *líyo*. A closer look at its distribution seems to warrant a constructionist approach: there are a number of distinct, yet related, *líyo*-constructions, each a form-and-meaning pairing that could not be attributed to the lexicon without missing out on crucial generalizations regarding linguistic structure (cf. Goldberg 1995, 2006) as well as sociolectal variation. I will attempt to briefly outline an account of subjectification and grammaticalization of *líyo* as crucially linked to specific constructions.¹⁰

According to (Lehmann 1992: 406)¹¹ “grammaticalization does not merely seize a word or morpheme [...] but the whole construction formed by the syntagmatic relations of the elements in question”. Trousdale and Traugott (2010: 13) note that “[d]ifferent models of construction grammar have made it possible to define more explicitly in what kind of construction grammaticalization starts, what semantic-syntactic mismatches arise as a result of gradual decategorialization, and what kinds of alignments are made. These issues rest on the crucial premise that constructions are grammatical primitives, and as such are both the source and outcome of grammaticalization.”

Goldberg (1995: 1), in her seminal work on constructions argues that “[p]articular semantic structures together with their associated formal expressions must be recognized as constructions independent of the lexical items which instantiate them.” This view is based on the assumption that there is no strict division between the lexicon and syntax: although lexical and syntactic constructions differ in internal complexity, they “both pair form with meaning” (Ibid.: 7). Constructionist approaches to language rest on the view that languages are constructed “on the basis of the input together with general cognitive, pragmatic, and processing constraints.” (Goldberg 2006: 3). It is assumed that constructions, i.e., “learned pairings of form with semantic or discourse function,” appear at all levels of grammatical analysis (Ibid.: 5). A linguistic pattern is a construction to the extent that “some aspect of its form or function is not strictly speaking predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist”. Moreover, “patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency” (Ibid.: 5). This last point is of particular relevance here, for frequency spells out entrenchment and the *líyo* constructions I have focused on are highly entrenched.

There are several *líyo* constructions as exemplified in (11) below, featuring both fixed, idiomatic expressions (a-f) as well as highly productive constructions (g-h) where a quantifier reading may be unavailable:¹²

- (11) examples of *líyo* constructions
 a. *úte líyo úte polí* ‘more or less, in effect’
 b. *líyo elipse [na]* ‘X got close [to]’
 c. *akóma líyo kai* ‘short of’

¹⁰ Cf. Athanasiadou (2006) for an account of the meanings of English adjectives as based on specific constructions.

¹¹ Quoted in Trousdale and Traugott (2010: 13).

¹² Marianthi Makri-Tsilipakou (p.c.) has suggested to me that *líyo* in these constructions may retain traces of its original meaning. Yet, conceding to this, as I must, does not thwart my claim for diminutivization via attenuation. Jurafsky (1995) has shown that the diminutive is a radial category with smallness in its core and several extensions. Indeed, the prefix *psilo-* seems to instantiate his “approximative” sense (Ibid.: 549), which distinguishes it from *líyo*.

- d. Def.art._i + N_i + copula + *líyos/liyi* ‘X is insufficient/ineffective; s/he leaves something to be desired’
 e. *?líyo líyo* ‘little by little, slowly, easy’
 f. *? líyo malákas* ‘kind of a wanker/jerk/idiot’
 cf. *metá esθánθikes líyo malákas ótan su éskase to paramíθi.* (GWAK, 91729)
 Then you-felt a-little wanker when to-you s/he-burst the fairy-tale
 ‘Then you felt like an ass when s/he let the cat out of the bag.’
 g. V dir. + *líyo* (cf. examples (3-5) above)
 h. V [1/3p]+[main stress] + *líyo* (cf. examples (6-10) above)

I will focus on the last two cases here. In (g) I offer a schematic representation of a construction instantiated by examples (3-5). I argue that Sifianou’s (1992a, 1992b) claim for *líyo* as a positive politeness marker is brought to bear in precisely this context, i.e. in directive utterances. This can be thought of a general schema covering a range of well-known forms of requests. On the other hand, (h) is instantiated by examples (6-10) functioning as hedged statements with first or third person verb forms and main stress on the verb. Although *líyo* can be described as a non-quantifying hedge in both cases, its function is different. In (g) it is intersubjective and analogous to *parakaló/please*, as corroborated by its flexible position. In (h) it is subjective and inflexible: it marks speaker attitude/affect towards one’s own utterance. One could hypothesize that (h) is a further development on the basis of (g) which is functionally salient, but more limited. This needs further investigation of a kind that might not be possible, as it requires diachronic comparison of informal conversational data. However, it is worth noting that this development would disagree with Traugott and Dasher’s (2002: 225) heuristic ordering of subjective and intersubjective meanings. Therefore this question remains open. Be that as it may, it is in specific, entrenched constructions that *líyo* has undergone semantic change (attenuation) and grammaticalized as a hedging device.

5. A Balkan all purpose diminutive out of a quantifier?

Primary evidence from Albanian and BCMS suggests that it may be possible to add yet another item to Sandfeld’s (1930) long list of common traits for the Balkan languages.¹³ If this is so, then we can potentially gain new insights into the interaction of cognitive and social factors in language contact situations. Many of the uses of *líyo* in MGr have parallels in Albanian and BCMS as seen in examples (12-14), often word-for-word equivalences (cf. 12 and 13):

- (12) MGr: *éla líyo/liyáki na se ðo , [de]!*
 ALB: *eja pak/një çik të të shof, [pra/de]!*
 BCMS: *dođi malo da te vidim!*
 Come! a-little/a-little that you I-see, [voc.partcl.]!
 ‘Come over [so I can see you a little]?’
- (13) MGr: *éla na se ðo líyo/liyáki, [de]!*
 ALB: *hajde të të shof pak/një çik [pra/de]!*
 BCMS: *dođi da te vidim malo!*
 Come! that you I-see a-little/a-little [voc. Prtcl.]
 ‘Come over [so I can see you a little], will you?’
- (14) MGr: *vále mu líyi/líyo záchari ston kafé.*
 Put! to-me a-little(f.)/a-little sugar (f.) in-the coffee
 ALB: *Më vër pak/një çik sheqer ne kafe.*
 to-me put! a-little sugar in-the coffee
 BCMS: *Stavi mi malo šećera (Gen.) u kafu.*
 Put! to-me a-little sugar in coffee
 ‘Put a little sugar in my coffee.’

¹³ I would like to thank Nesim Kaloshi for his help with the Albanian data.

The most striking similarity is the formal fusion of adjective and adverb (syncretism) in the specific examples for all three languages. According to my bilingual informant, Albanian and Greek, in particular, allow for strikingly similar constructions in many other cases that we shall not get into here. Sifianou's (1992a) observations regarding use of *líyo* as a positive politeness marker seem to extend to Albanian and BCMS where *pak* or/and *një çik* and *malo* appear in constructions schematized in (11g). According to Jurafsky (1996: 535) diminutives are cross-linguistically associated with a number of pragmatic senses, among which he lists affection and metalinguistic hedges. These meanings develop diachronically from central to peripheral senses of the category (Ibid.: 543), from the physical to the linguistic or textual realm (Ibid.: 560), which is what I have shown to be the case with *líyo* (and very likely for the Albanian *pak/një çik* and BCMS *malo*), which is a metonymy for diminution (and a radial category of related senses in itself (cf. Lakoff 1987) like most entrenched linguistic expressions). Moreover, cultural ethos has arguably played a role in this development which is anchored to specific constructions.

6. Conclusions and perspectives

I have argued that that *líyo* has undergone semantic attenuation, losing most of its literal meaning (along with its stress) in certain constructions in colloquial use, and has grammaticalized from a quantifier to a metalinguistic hedge (a politeness marker and a verbal diminutivizer, i.e., a hedging device). Part and parcel of this change is the (inter)subjective interpretation of *líyo* in certain constructions. Overall motivation for this process is provided by MGr interactional ethos and the importance attached to friendly, informal politeness, a factor discussed in the context of universal tendencies in the semantics of diminutives. Last, I have shown that data on the equivalents of *líyo* in other Balkan languages, such as BCMS and Albanian, suggest that verbal diminutivization may be an area feature. Crucially, then, *líyo* may present us with a case of semantic change motivated by sociopragmatic considerations.

At this stage, a general search for *líyo* in CGT yields the following results: For 25,929 texts totaling 29,511,849 words frequency of occurrence is 0.0338846949237 % (the commonest word is *kai* 'and' with 918,730 tokens). The frequency for *liyáki* is 0.00664140020505 % and for *liyuláki* 0.000237192864466 %.

A general search for *líyo* in GWAC from a total of 149,067,023 tokens yields a frequency of 75,552 hits. The frequency for *liyáki* is 3,292 and for *liyuláki* 140 hits. This suggests that *líyo* and related forms have an overall high frequency in the language which, in turn, speaks in favor of function word status.

At a future stage, and as MGk corpora become richer (especially as regards codification of text types more or less directly relating to registers), research could benefit from a more thorough look at quantitative distributional information. Special attention should be paid to collocations of specific verbs in what we may call, generically, the *V + líyo construction* in (11h); i.e., which verbs allow/favor a diminutive construal and which do not as well as variations on this general schema. Further investigation and specification of *líyo* constructions is a prerequisite for both a rigorous account of its grammaticalization and for a continuum of (inter)subjectivity. Last, development of richer MGr corpora will allow serious investigation of sociolinguistic/stylistic distribution of *líyo* constructions.

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