

Two suppletive adjectives in Megleno-Romanian¹

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Abstract

This study involves the existence in Megleno-Romanian dialects of a lexically suppletive distinction between singular and plural forms of the adjectives meaning ‘small’ and ‘big’. The phenomenon has gone largely unnoticed both by comparative Romance linguists and by morphological theorists yet it is both typologically surprising and theoretically significant. Analysis of a remarkably similar phenomenon in mainland Scandinavian languages led Börjars and Vincent (2011) to propose a considerably attenuated version of Maiden’s claim (2004) that lexical synonymy can drive the diachronic emergence of suppletion. My close investigation of the the source of the suppletion in Megleno-Romanian, and consideration of the Scandinavian facts in the light of the Megleno-Romanian data, will show that in fact the emergence of suppletion in just these adjectives constitutes excellent evidence for the claim that lexical synonymy favours suppletion.

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1. Introduction

This study is intended as a contribution both to knowledge of the comparative morphology of the Romance languages, and to theoretical understanding of the forces leading to the emergence of suppletion in inflexional paradigms. On the descriptive level I draw attention to a fact which has apparently not been noticed outside the confines of Daco-Romance dialectology, namely that in Megleno-Romanian dialects two adjectives, meaning respectively 'small' and 'big', display suppletion correlated with number. This phenomenon is all the more remarkable because on all otherwise available evidence in the Romance languages suppletion involving the historical conflation of historically unrelated etyma (as in the present case) is wholly alien to the inflexional paradigms of nouns or adjectives. While unique of its kind in Romance, this suppletion finds a striking parallel in Mainland Scandinavian languages, recently the object of a penetrating theoretical analysis by Börjars and Vincent (2011). Their conclusions bear, in part, on earlier work by Maiden (e.g., 2004), in which it was suggested that suppletion arises when two originally distinct lexemes become synonymous, or at any rate cease to be clearly distinct to speakers; an assumed universal tendency to avoid synonymy leads to the loss of one of the coexisting lexemes, and sometimes this can happen in such a way that one lexeme prevails in one subpart of the inflexional paradigm, whilst the other prevails elsewhere. Börjars and Vincent argue, on the basis of their Scandinavian data, for what is effect a weakening of the role attributable to synonymy in the emergence of

suppletion. My analysis of the Megleno-Romanian facts, and of their relevance to the Scandinavian data, will lead to the conclusion, however, that in both cases it is really synonymy that is at issue, although one of an interestingly different kind from that invoked in my earlier work.

2. Two suppletive adjectives in Megleno-Romanian

Suppletion in inflexional paradigms has two general kinds of diachronic provenance: phonological changes whose regular effects have been such as to render originally identical forms irreducibly² different in synchrony, and the conflation of etymologically distinct lexemes, such that some cells of the inflexional paradigm are occupied by continuants of one etymon, and others by continuants of another etymon. My concern here is with the latter type. The phenomenon is well-attested in Romance languages for a small number of highly frequent and semantically basic verbs (see, e.g., Maiden 2004), of which the best-known example is the verb ‘to go’. French, for example, has a reflex of Latin AMBULARE ‘walk’ in most of its paradigm (*nous allons, j’allais*, etc.) , of UADERE originally ‘go’, make ‘an impressive, terrifying, threatening, rapid, dangerous or showy advance (especially into dangerous situations)’³ in the singular and third person forms of the present indicative (*je vais tu vas il va ils vont*) and of IRE ‘go’ in the future and conditional (*j’irai*, etc.). It appears to be the case that virtually all of the examples of such suppletion cited in the comparative Romance literature involve verbs. A significant

² That is to say that the phonological processes which gave rise to the difference have long disappeared from the language and cannot be posited synchronically.

³ I owe this characterization to Jim Adams.

exception, recently brought to light in work by Cappellaro (2011), involves the domain of stressed third person pronouns in Italo-Romance, where reflexes of the Latin pronouns *IPSE* and *ILLE* may be paradigmatically conflated in different ways.⁴ I am unaware of any report in the comparative Romance literature of such suppletion emerging in the inflexional paradigm of a *noun*, and hitherto the same seems to have been true of those of adjectives.⁵

Megleno-Romanian (MR) is one of the four major sub-branches of the ‘Daco-Romance’ group of the Romance languages. The largest group, in area and speakers, is ‘Romanian’, comprising the dialects spoken in the modern territories of Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and adjacent areas. The other two groups are: Aromanian (also known as Macedo-Romanian) whose speakers are scattered over wide areas of northern Greece, Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and parts of Bulgaria, with perhaps half a million speakers, and Istro-Romanian, spoken in the southern part of the Istrian Peninsula, in Croatia, whose speakers number a few hundred at most. Megleno-Romanian is spoken by some five thousand people, principally in the Pella and Kilkis prefectures of northern Greece, north of Salonika, and over the frontier in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the area around Huma (Umă); in the 1920s the

⁴ Note also the emergence of suppletive *noi* ‘we’ vs. clitic *ci* ‘us’ in Italian (with parallels in other Italo-Romance varieties), where the clitic originates as a locative pronoun.

⁵ Romance languages (but not the Daco-Romance branch), do show some suppletion in synthetic comparative and superlative forms, particularly the words for ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (e.g., Italian *buono* ‘good’ comparative *migliore*; *cattivo* ‘bad’ comparative *peggiore*), and in words indicating size (e.g., Italian *grande* ‘big’ comparative *maggiore*; *piccolo* ‘small’ comparative *minore*). For details of the use of such comparatives in Italian, see however Maiden and Robustelli (2007:344).

(Muslim) population of the village of Nânti was forcibly displaced into Turkish Thrace (see Kahl 2006). Unfortunately we lack detailed documentation of the language before the turn of the twentieth century, when linguists (Weigand 1892, P. Papahagi 1900;1902, Candrea 1924;1925, Capidan 1925;1928) begin to gather texts and to undertake the linguistic descriptions. What follows draws extensively on the fairly substantial body of descriptive studies and in particular textual material gathered by these scholars. Their work has been continued in recent years notably by Petar Atanasov (1990;2002), and it is his linguistic atlas of Megleno-Romanian (2009) which furnishes the most visually conspicuous example of the phenomenon with which I am concerned. Maps 164 and 165 of this atlas display, respectively the masculine and feminine forms of *mic* ‘small’. I reproduce the data in table (1), transposed into IPA⁶ (the place names are as given in the source):

Table (1)

location	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	MASCULINE	FEMININE	MASCULINE	FEMININE
Umă	mik <i>or</i>	'mikə <i>or</i>	mi'nuts <i>or</i>	mi'nuti <i>or</i>
	mitʃ'kət	mitʃ'kətə	mitʃ'kəts	mitʃ'kəti

⁶ The rendering into IPA of the special system of transcription used in the sources is intended as a reasonable approximation to the original, and is done for convenience of exposition. Nothing in the present study depends on questions of phonetic or phonological detail.

Łumniṭă	mik	'mikə	mi'nuts	mi'nuti
Cupa	mik	'mikə	mi'nuts	mi'nuti
Oṣiń	mik	'mikə	mi'nuts	mi'nuti
Birslăv	mik	'mikə	mi'nuts	mi'nuti
Lunḍiń	mik	'mikə	mi'nuts	mi'nuti
Ṭărnareca	nitʃ'kət	nitʃ'kətə	nitʃ'kəts	nitʃ'kəti

For comparison I give in table (2) the — regular — paradigm of the word for ‘dead’ (see Atanasov 2009, maps 582 and 583):

Table (2)

location	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	MASCULINE	FEMININE	MASCULINE	FEMININE
Umă	'mortu	'mɔ̃artə	'mortʃə <i>or</i> 'mortsə	'mɔ̃arti
Łumniṭă	mwort	'mɔ̃artə	mwords	'mɔ̃arti
Cupa	mwərt	'mɔ̃artə	mwerts	'mɔ̃arti
Oṣiń	mwort	'mɔ̃artə	mwords	'mɔ̃arti
Birslăv	mwort	'mɔ̃artə	mwords	'mɔ̃arti

Lunđin	mwort	^l mɔrtə	mwords	^l mɔrti
Țărnareca	^l mortu	^l mɔrtə	^l mortsə	^l mɔrti

The example in table (2) is fairly typical of Megleno-Romanian adjectives, most of which mark masculine singular by final -u (or zero, according to dialect and to phonological environment), feminine singular by -ə, and feminine plural by -i (< *-e); the original masculine plural ending, now generally deleted at the end of a phonological word, was -i, which originally produced various palatalizing and/or affricating effects on preceding root-final consonants (e.g., mworts < ^lmortsi < ^lmorti). There is a second, less numerous, inflection class which only distinguishes number (and not gender) and is characterized by -i (< *-e) in the singular and usually zero in the plural (although originally the plural ending was *-i): e.g., SG ^lratsi PL rəts ‘cold’.⁷ There are signs, however, of a tendency to introduce the distinctively feminine plural inflectional marker -i into the feminine plural of words of this class as well (cf. Atanasov 2002, p. 208).

While there is extensive root allomorphy in Megleno-Romanian adjectives, attributable in the main to the regular effects of sound change, the *suppletive* pattern of mik stands out as quite exceptional. No MR dialect has a plural form etymologically corresponding to singular mik, in contrast to all other Daco-Romance dialects, which do: e.g., Romanian

⁷ Cf. Romanian MSG *mort* FSG *moartă* MPL *morți* FPL *moarte*; M/FSG *rece* M/FPL *reci*; Italian MSG *morto* FSG *morta* MPL *morti* FPL *morte*; M/FSG *verde* ‘green’ M/FPL *verdi*.

MSG *mic* (mik) FSG *mică* ('mikə) MPL/FPL *mici* (mitʃ).⁸ Candrea (1934, p. 166) explicitly states that the expected corresponding Megleno-Romanian form of the plural, namely ***mits*, is unknown, although Weigand (1892, p. 27) observes that this word persists as a *noun* meaning 'young people'. In Țărnareca, the southernmost outpost of MR, *mik* appears absent, to judge from Atanasov's map, having been replaced by a diminutive form *nitʃ'kət* (cf. Papahagi 1900, p. 53; Candrea et al. 1908, p. 167; Candrea 1934; Atanasov 2002 p. 76; cf. Mărgărit 2000, p.100), a form which corresponds to the *mitʃ'kət* of Umă (for the phonological development see, e.g., Capidan 1925, p. 126). The geographical distribution of the suppletive form perhaps suggests an innovation emanating from the more central dialects. The fact that *mik* has apparently been replaced altogether in Țărnareca by a diminutive form of that word, indicates that *mik* may be generally in retreat. Needless to say, the pattern of suppletive alternation is robustly confirmed by the extensive body of Megleno-Romanian textual material that we possess. For example:⁹

⁸ In this word the usual inflexional distinction between masculine and feminine plural is neutralized throughout Daco-Romance. Replacement of feminine plural *-e* by *-i* is not uncommon after root-final /tʃ/ in nouns and adjectives: cf. Romanian *bunic* /bu'nik/ 'grandfather', *bunică* /bu'nikə/ 'grandmother', but *bunici* /bu'nitʃ/ as plural of both.

⁹ In the following examples, rather than glossing every word I have limited myself to translating (very literally) the sample phrases and underlining, both in the examples and in the translation, the elements that mean 'big'/'small' and the nouns they modify.

(1) pun un mik fi'tʃor ku 'mumə ʃi 'tatə (Candrea 1925, LXV)

they put a little child with mother and father

(2) 'tsista ʒok la 'kəntə la mi'nutsiʌ fi'tʃor (Candrea 1924, XIV)

this game they sing to the little children

(3) un mik vi'tsəl 'negru

a little black calf (Capidan 1928, 41:14 Oşani)

(4) si ts leg un per de 'ʒəzitu mik (Capidan 1928, 40:38 Oşani)

I'll tie a hair to your little finger

(5) aʌ 'dɛadi 'la:pti ʃi doi rəs'laŋ mi'nuts (Capidan 1928, 40:21 Oşani)

she gave him milk and two little lions

(6) kən ram 'mikə jo (Atanasov 2002:359; Huma)

when I was little (young)

(7) la sfir'firea maj mi'nutili rəp si pu'ŋeau di'suprə (Atanasov 2002, p. 351; Umă)

at the end the smaller stones were put on top

(8) jəl ra maj mik (Atanasov 2002, p. 359; Umă)

he was more little (younger)

(9) ram mi'nuts (Atanasov 2002, p. 360; Umă)

we were little (young)

There is, in addition, a second Megleno-Romanian adjective which displays suppletion for number. This is the antonym of mik, namely 'mari 'big' (M/FSG), whose expected regular plural form would be mar (cf. Romanian M/FSG *mare* 'mare - M/FPL *mari* mar^j), but which displays instead a MPL mətʃ'kats and a FPL mətʃ'kati. The suppletion in this

word¹⁰ seems less well established than for mik. While Candrea (1934, p. 164) simply states that its (masculine) plural is mətʃ'kats, implying that the adjective is always suppletive for number, Weigand (1892, p. 27f.) affirms that the expected plural form occurs as well, but only rarely. In contrast, the texts gathered by Atanasov in the 1970s and later show no sign of such suppletion, and present various examples of the expected plural form, mar.¹¹ Yet the extensive materials gathered by Weigand, Candrea and Capidan in the first decades of the twentieth century show this suppletion very clearly (examples 10-20), and I find only one example (out of nine) of the regular¹² plural in Capidan.

(10) anvi'tsau ʃi n psal'tir ʃi n 'mari 'karti (Candrea 1924, V)

they learned both from psalters and from [the] big book

¹⁰ Note that it is suppletive not only lexically but also in the sense of being ‘heteroclite’ (cf. Stump 2006), in that singular and plural belong to different inflection classes.

¹¹ See Atanasov (2002, pp. 351, 360, 384). The fact that Atanasov (2009) does not present maps for this word perhaps also implies that he considers it morphologically regular.

¹² The exception is from Țărnareca (68, p. 27) 'dɔwə 'mari 'kərfii ‘two big nails’, where 'mari also shows analogical generalization of the feminine plural ending -i into expected plural mar. Compare also Atanasov’s example from Țărnareca: vɛam 'mari kə'zani ‘we had big cauldrons’ (but also mar 'k'etri ‘big stones’).

(11) 'niʃti fi'tʃor kən'taʊ an fi'lada 'niʃti an maj mətʃ'kati kɔrts (Candrea 1924, V)

some children sang from a pamphlet, some from more big books

(12) maj 'mari buku'riʎa əʎi (Candrea 1925, LXV)

there is more great (greater) joy

(13) 'kɔti tɔr mətʃ'kati 'uŋʎi ts əʎi (Candrea 1925, LXVIII)

what great big nails you have

(14) 'kɔts tɔr mətʃ'kats ʎi əʎi 'dintsiʎ (Candrea 1925, LXVIII)¹³

what great big teeth you have

(15) aʎ 'zisi la 'tsela maj 'marli 'fra:ti (Capidan 1928, Cupă 25:4)

he said to most big (eldest) brother

¹³ For this and the preceding example, cf. also Weigand (1892, p. 65).

(16) 'tsista 'ʒeʒi vɛa 'angə 'doɿ frats mai mətʃ'kats ʃi 'tʃiʃta nu la 'vrɛau 'tsela mai
'miku 'frati (Capidan 1928, Cupă 55:1)

this Jeji had another two more big (elder) brothers and they did not want their more
young (younger) brother

(17) si skap di tʃea mai 'ma:ri 'mɒnkə (Capidan 1928, Oşani 49:4)

I shall get out of the most big (biggest) job

(18) a fi'tʃorlui min'tʃun sa 'mai mətʃ'kati (Capidan 1928, Cupa 63:3)

the child's lies are more big (bigger)

(19) 'zitsi kə gə'ʎina kət unə 'ka:sə əɿ 'ma:ri (Capidan 1928, Lugunța 18:9)

he says that the hen is as big as a house

(20) la noɿ gə'ʎinili sa kət unə 'ka:sə mətʃ'kati (Capidan 1928, Lugunța 18:7)

with us the hens are as big as a house

3. Where do the suppletive forms come from?

I have established that suppletion exists (or at any rate existed, for the word for ‘big’), in the Megleno-Romanian adjectives meaning ‘small’ and ‘big’. What is their origin? The singulars *mik* and *'mari* are the common Daco-Romance words for ‘little’ and ‘big’ (cf. Romanian *mic*, *mare*). The former has no known etymology in Latin, and Ciorănescu (1958) is probably right in assuming that it has an ‘expressive’ origin. The latter is generally reckoned to derive from Latin *MAS* (accuative *MAREM*) ‘male’ plausibly, as Ciorănescu suggests, via a line of semantic development from ‘male’ to ‘grown man’ and thence, metonymically, to ‘big’ (cf. Sala 2005, p. 163f.).

The plural *mi'nuts* is from Latin *MINUTUS* (see, e.g., Meyer-Lübke 1935), and is cognate with Romanian *mărunt*.¹⁴ Latin *MINUTUS*, the past participle of *MINUO*, in addition to the meanings ‘small in size’, ‘small in degree or importance’, also signifies ‘consisting of small particles, fine’ and ‘possessing or involving minute knowledge’, while derivationally related forms have meanings such as ‘a dish of minced food, stew’; ‘one bit at a time; singly’; ‘into or in small pieces’; (see *OLD* s.v. *MINUTAL*, *MINUTATIM*, *MINUTE*, *MINUTIM*, *MINUTUS*^{3,4}). Although generally presented in Romanian dictionaries as meaning ‘small’, and sharing many of the senses of *mic* (‘small’, ‘young’, ‘unimportant’) the word continues to carry particular connotations of being ‘finely divided’, ‘cut up

¹⁴ For the phonological development in Romanian see, e.g., Rothe (1957, pp. 25, 43); Sala (2006, pp. 180f.).

small', 'in little pieces': thus *DEX* gives 'with very small component elements', 'cut up, crumbled, broken into pieces of small size', (of rain or snow) 'having small, frequent, drops or flakes'; see also *DLR* s.v. *mărunț*^{1:4,5,6}. Note the nominalized plural *mărunți* 'small change', and the related noun *amănunt* 'detail'.

The meaning 'composed of small pieces' is also present in Megleno-Romanian, and this is apparent in the fact that there are attestations of *minut* in the *singular*,¹⁵ with this kind of meaning. In (21) the singular noun 'stokə is glossed, in Romanian, by Atanasov as *vite* (plural of *vită* 'head of cattle') and the sense seems to be that each head of cattle is small; in (22) the context is precisely that of threshing to break down grain into smaller parts:

(21) 'kətə mi'nutə 'stokə 'ari (Atanasov 2002, p. 349: Umă)

as much small livestock as he has

(22) 'poja kə vɛa si 'fakə maj mi'nut vɛa s ou tur'nəm ku kərpə'lək'ɫə (Atanasov 2002, p. 364: Țărnareca)

then [so that] it would become smaller we would turn it over with pitchforks

¹⁵ The relationship in MR between *mic* and *mărunț* is therefore 'asymmetrical': the former has no plural, but the latter has both a plural and a singular, and therefore a full inflectional paradigm.

The origin of mətʃˈkats is truly curious, but also ultimately very revealing as to the nature of the suppletion. Its source is a Romance word meaning ‘club, mace, heavy stick’ (cf. Romanian *măciucă*, French *massue*), for which Meyer-Lübke (1935) proposes an etymon **matteuca*. The word mətʃˈkat (to give its MR singular form), is closely cognate with the Romanian adjective *măciucat*, an adjective derived from the noun *măciucă*. The primary meaning in Romanian as given in *DEX* (s.v. *măciucat*, *măciulie*) is (of a stick) ‘having a rounded, enlarged end’, ‘knobbed’.¹⁶ The apparently related¹⁷ noun *măciulie* is defined as ‘the enlarged and rounded head of some objects’, but also as ‘dehiscent fruit with a dry, hard casing, in which the seeds of some plants develop and are kept; capsule’. The adjective *măciucat* has further developed¹⁸ in Romanian into *mășcat*, in which we more clearly recognize the cognate of the MR form. This word is defined by *DEX* as ‘(of cereals) having a large seed [...] (of the seeds of cereals, of granules, etc.) That which is bulging, large, full’. *DEX* also quotes an example of the adverbial¹⁹ use of this word in

¹⁶ A semantic generalization in the direction of ‘heaviness’ is apparent in T. Papahagi (1974), which gives for Aromanian an apparently derived masculine form of this word, *măciuc*, meaning ‘tare’, ‘weight on scales’.

¹⁷ *DLR* s.v. *măciulie* suggests, in effect, that it is a blend between *măciucă* and *gămălie* ‘pin head’. But see also Avram (2000, p. 55).

¹⁸ The phonological development of unstressed /tʃu/ > /tʃ/ > /ʃ/ preconsonantly is unproblematic. See, e.g., Capidan (1925, pp. 129, 132).

¹⁹ Romanian adverbs are usually identical to the masculine singular form of the adjective.

the phrase *Ploua repede și mașcat*,²⁰ apparently meaning ‘It was raining hard [lit. ‘fast’] and in big drops’.

The association with ‘large seeds, grains, capsules’ of plants is, I shall suggest, significant and is also observable in the MR *singular*. Like *minut*, MR *mășcat* stands in an ‘asymmetrical’ relationship to *mare*, since while *mare* tends to lack a plural, *mășcat* has a singular — even if, as Candrea (1934, p. 163) observes, *mășcat* more often appears in the plural (unsurprisingly, given that in the plural it is the general word for ‘big’). Consider the following examples, which include an adverbial use of the singular form. The exact glossing of *mətʃˈkatə* in (23) and (24) is not easy, and I have left it here untranslated, but the sense is clearly that the grass (i.e., each blade or stalk) is well-developed and ready for mowing.

(23) ˈflarə un tʃair tse vɐ ˈjarbə ˈmultə ʃi mətʃˈkatə (Capidan 1928, 14:3 Lugunța)

they found a field which had plenteous and *mətʃˈkatə* grass

(24) vez muˈɫari tse ˈjarbə mətʃˈkatə ʃi prikupˈtsitə (Capidan 1928, 14:4 Lugunța)

do you see, wife, what *mətʃˈkatə* and fine/rich grass

²⁰ *Mașcat* is a variant form of *mășcat*.

In the singular the word can also mean ‘composed of large parts’. In (25) the context is that of cutting up mulberry leaves to feed silkworms, the leaves being cut into larger and larger pieces as the worms grew larger:

(25) kət mai kriʃ'tɛu, 'kɔta mai mətʃ'kat la dru'bɛm 'frundza (Atanasov 2002, p. 400:
Lunđin)

the more they grew, the bigger we chopped up the leaf for them

Candrea (1934, p. 163) gives the adverbial example 'amnə mai an mətʃ'kat lit. ‘he walks more in big’ — in other words, each component of his walking (each step) is greater. There is also a case of mətʃ'kat apparently being used as a noun with the meaning ‘(large?) piece’, in the riddle cited by Capidan (1925, p. 155): am un 'fɔali plin de alb mətʃ'kats and glossed as ‘I have a belly/bag full of white pieces’.²¹

What, then, are the characteristics of the words which have intruded into the inflexional paradigms of Megleno-Romanian mik and 'mari? One point not to be neglected is phonological, in that the phonological resemblance (shared initial /m(i)/) between the

²¹ The answer to the riddle is given by Capidan as ‘flour of white grain’ (‘făină de grâu alb’), but what seems to be implied is surely some kind of container, perhaps even the ear of corn itself?

newer and the older form might have favoured suppletion. However the main point of interest is semantic. Both words indicate size, but they are originally, and continue to be (at least in the singular), of more specific meaning than *mik* and *'mari*. Both express what might be termed ‘component size’: *mi'nut* means that some entity is made up of small components; *mətʃ'kat* can mean that some entity is made up of large components. The former originates in a Latin word one of whose principal meanings is ‘chopped up small’. The latter has a rather more complex development. *Măciucat/mășcat/mətʃ'kat* is primarily and originally associated with the size of heads of corn, wheat, barley or maize, or the capsules of poppies and other plants (cf. Tiktin 1903-1925 s.v. *mășcat*; *DLR* s.v. *măciucat*²⁴; *mășcat*). Its use in this connection involves the metaphorical description of large ears of corn (or similar) as being ‘knob-like’. Now corn, wheat, barley, poppies, etc., generally grow as a collective mass of plants, so to describe them as *mășcat* is to depict a situation in which *each of the component parts of the whole is ‘big’*. It is presumably this fact that permits the extension of *mətʃ'kat* in MR into other contexts where component parts are presented (‘instantiated’ to use Acquaviva’s terminology – 2008, pp. 80, 108) as ‘big’ (see also Candrea 1928 s.v. *bob*). This development is equally clear in Romanian. An informal inspection of the first ten *Google* pages showing the Romanian feminine²² singular form *mășcată* reveals the word repeatedly being used with reference to ‘seed’, ‘hail’, ‘salt’, ‘raspberries’ and ‘beans’ (note that all of these are grammatically singular nouns in Romanian). The sense is clearly that the seeds /

²² Inspection of the masculine singular is hampered by the fact that many hits yield lexicographical lemmata, rather than actual examples of usage. The search was carried out on 12th April 2012.

hailstones / grains / raspberries / beans constituting the whole are ‘large-sized’. A prominent use of the masculine singular form in the same source involves *cărbune mășcat*, which I believe to mean ‘lump coal’.²³ Despite the fact that the singular form of the adjective clearly refers to the physical size of the components of some entity, there does not appear to be any sense of *mik* and *'mari* which cannot now be expressed in Megleno-Romanian by the plural *mi'nuts/mi'nuti* and *məʃ'kats/məʃ'kati*, so that the semantic domain of the adjectives is certainly not limited to physical dimensions.²⁴ This is true, noticeably, in the meanings ‘young’ and ‘old’ (cf. examples 6, 8, 9, 15 and 16), and also in the meanings ‘major/minor’, ‘(un)important’ (cf. examples 12, 17, 18). Plural *məʃ'kats/məʃ'kati* is truly a lexical synonym of singular *'mari*, as is plural *mi'nuts/mi'nuti* of singular *mik/'mikə*, covering symmetrically the entire range of associated senses.

²³ Another context in which this adjective seems to be used rather often (cf. *DLR* s.v. *mășcat*) involves handwriting, and refers to the size of the letters composing someone’s script.

²⁴ An anonymous referee suggests that it would be desirable to check whether the suppletion were equally insensitive to the differential ‘intersective’ vs ‘non-intersective’ interpretations associated with prenominal and postnominal positions of adjectives in Romance languages (Cinque 2005; cf. also Ledgeway 2011:398-400). The semantics of adjective position in Megleno-Romanian seems to me to require a more detailed study than is possible here. It is not clear in any case that pre-positioning of the adjectives for ‘small’ and ‘big’ in the Megleno-Romanian texts necessary carries the kind of semantic distinctions associated in other Romance languages. Many of the examples seem to mean simply ‘small’ or ‘big’ regardless of their position, and one suspects the influence of Greek or Macedonian (both of which regularly pre-pose adjectives). I see no evidence that the suppletion is sensitive to adjective position.

Among Romance languages, to my knowledge, suppletion in the inflexional paradigm of an *adjective* is unique to Megleno-Romanian. Indeed, suppletion for number in adjectives seems to be universally rare and unexpected (cf. Mel'čuk 1976, p. 68;²⁵ Börjars and Vincent 2011, p. 261). The Megleno-Romanian development finds, however, a quite striking parallel in Mainland Scandinavian languages, and specifically in respect of the adjective meaning 'little'.²⁶ The facts are described and analysed in detail by Börjars and

²⁵ Interestingly, Mel'čuk alludes to a possible suppletion in the Russian word for 'big'. However, the phenomenon he apparently has in mind does not involve any kind of grammatical complementarity between the lexemes involved, and in any case suppletion for number is not at issue. *Большой*, unlike its near synonym *великий*, lacks a 'short' form, and it is normally the short form of an adjective which is used in predicative contexts. But *большой*, like *великий* can in fact be used predicatively. The distributional differences between the two words are associated, rather, with particular semantic contexts (for example, only *великий* is used of clothes which are (too) big). I thank Mary MacRobert for discussion of this point. Corbett (2007, p. 32, n44) cites (after Heath 1981) an example showing suppletion for number in the words for 'big' and 'little' in the Mara language (North Territory, Australia).

²⁶ There are no parallels in Scandinavian for the word for 'big'. In MR, too, the word for 'big' seems less susceptible to the suppletion, suggesting perhaps that 'little' may be universally more liable to such a development? In general, it seems to be the case that reference to entities' having 'small parts/pieces' is very significantly more common than reference to entities' having 'large parts/pieces'. A *Google* search revealed the following raw, approximate, number of hits for expressions such as 'small parts' and 'big parts' and 'small pieces' and 'big pieces' in English:

'small parts':	26 100 000
'little parts':	603 000
'big parts':	557 000
'large parts':	6 090 000

Vincent (2011). Briefly, the modern Danish and Swedish²⁷ lexemes meaning ‘small’ show a continuant of old Scandinavian *lítill* ‘small’ in the singular, but of the unrelated, but semantically very close, *smár*, in the plural. Thus Danish:

(26a) en lille / **små pige

a small girl

(26b) to **lille / små piger

two small girls

‘small pieces’: 11 200 000

‘little pieces’: 5 020 000

‘big pieces’: 932 000

‘large pieces’: 2 950 000

²⁷ The situation in Norwegian is rather more complex, because the feature of definiteness is also relevant to the distribution, and in some varieties involves a third kind of suppletion in the definite singular. See Börjars and Vincent (2011, p. 252f.). I detect, by the way, no corresponding sensitivity to definiteness in the MR data.

Another precise parallel with MR is that the adjective used in the Scandinavian plural can also be used with singular nouns and that in this case, as with MR *mi'nut* and *mætʃ'kat*, the nouns are 'are often collectives and the adjective has a distributive meaning [...] or it means "consisting of small parts"' (Börjars and Vincent 2011:250; also 255). The fact that these closely similar developments have emerged quite independently and in only remotely related languages clearly points to some deeper universal motivation for the changes. It is evidently not just a peculiarity of the history of Scandinavian that the adjective indicating (small) 'size' is the locus of suppletion, nor that the source of the plural form is a word which, in the singular, tends to refer to the size of the component parts. In fact, there exists²⁸ yet another language-group, Middle Breton and Middle Cornish, in which the adjective 'small' reveals a suppletive plural, e.g., early seventeenth-century Breton *buguel bihan* 'little child' vs. *bugale munut* 'little children'. This phenomenon has recently been brought to light and described in ongoing work by Anders Richardt Jørgensen (2011; 2012), and I shall do no more here than observe that the suppletive plural form used in the plural seems to have the basic meaning 'fine', 'chopped up small' and, indeed, that its etymon is Latin MINUTUS which, as we shall see shortly, is also that of Megleno-Romanian *mi'nuts*. Leaving aside the Breton and Cornish data for further investigation,²⁹ in the following section I ask why the suppletion arose in

²⁸ I am grateful to Stephen Hewitt for drawing my attention to these facts.

²⁹ The Celtic data raise the intriguing possibility, adumbrated by Jørgensen (2011), that such a distribution of the two lexemes might have existed in early Gallo-Romance. Closer scrutiny of the reflexes of MINUTUS in Gallo-Romance and in Romance generally might be revealing.

MR, and what insights, also taking into account the Scandinavian data, the MR facts might give us into the genesis of this kind of suppletion.

4. The genesis of the Megleno-Romanian suppletion

Why has our suppletion occurred in MR? One possibility which it seems possible to rule out is language contact. Although MR speakers are generally bilingual, also speaking either Macedonian or Greek, I have been unable to discover any evidence in these two languages for suppletion of this kind. Nor is there any sense in which the plurals of *mik* and *'mari* are likely to have been morphologically or phonologically ‘deficient’, for example by being excessively reduced phonologically or somehow already irregular or archaic (cf. Rudes 1980, Aski 1995 and also the discussion in Börjars and Vincent 2011, p. 144). The plural of *'mari*, as we have seen, actually does exist and it is simply *mar*, while that of *mik* should be **mits* (in fact attested by Weigand, as a noun). These forms are similar, and often identical, to the cognate forms in other Daco-Romance varieties, where they appear utterly robust (cf. Börjars and Vincent 2011, p. 263 for similar considerations regarding the Scandinavian data), so that it seems unlikely that there is any inherent ‘deficiency’ in the plurals of these words that might have precipitated their demise. In a general way, there is evidence for a tendency in some Daco-Romanian dialects for *mărunt* (the cognate of *mi'nut*) to oust *mic*, and this is noticeable in southern Romania (particularly Muntenia and Dobrogea, see, e.g., Saramandu 2005 for *mic*), at least when it indicates the small stature of people. This fact perhaps points to a general propensity for the two words to compete for the same semantic space. As to why particularly in the Megleno-Romanian branch of Daco-Romance these words should

come to the fore as rivals to *mik* and *'mari*, it is perhaps not irrelevant that the Megleno-Romanians — whose territory is significantly a compact area amid a kind of archipelago of Aromanian-speaking islands — stand out by being sedentary agriculturalists rather than nomadic pastoralists (see, e.g., Kahl 2006, p. 187). In their world, then, crops, and the size of crops as indicators of a good harvest, may have a salience not matched elsewhere in the Daco-Romance domain. Perhaps especially in the case of *mətʃ'kat*, this fact may have promoted the word as a rival to plural *'mari*.

I suggest that the best clue to understanding the emergence of our suppletion is to be found in examining more closely the remarkable parallels between Mainland Scandinavian and Megleno-Romanian. In particular, the fact that the source of the suppletive plural form in both is a word which expresses the size of the components of some entity is highly significant to our understanding of how the suppletion arose and why the innovatory form established itself in the plural rather than in the singular. In the singular, the distinction between ‘X is small/large’ and ‘X has small/large parts’ is perfectly clear. One can very easily conceive of a situation in which ‘X is large’ and yet ‘X has small parts’ (the reverse seems pragmatically rather odd, but still perfectly possible). If such adjectives are applied to nouns used in the plural, matters are different. Then these adjectives are interpretable in two different ways: either with reference to the internal composition of each individual within the plurality, or to the internal composition of the plurality itself, i.e., directly to its individual components. There is a clear conceptual parallelism between the two cases, but in the latter a distinction that is clear (as I have argued) in the singular may become indistinct, because saying that a plurality is

made up of small/large individuals is tantamount to saying that individuals in the plurality are small/large. Consider possible MR sentences such as (27) and (28):

(27) bu'retsiʎ sa mətʃ'kats

the mushrooms are /mətʃ'kats/

(28) 'waʎli sa mi'nuti

the eggs are /mi'nuti/

The meaning could be distributive, so that each mushroom/egg has large/small parts, or it could apply to the plurality of eggs/mushrooms, meaning that each component part of it (i.e., each individual mushroom/egg) is large/small. On the latter reading (and it is probably the more natural), the plurals of mi'nut / mətʃ'kat are effectively synonyms of the plurals of mik / 'mari, and the main semantic difference between the two lexemes becomes elusive. Note also that while in the singular the range of nouns susceptible of taking adjectives with such a meaning is presumably restricted to those whose referents

have a salient internal part-structure³⁰ (not, for example, ‘a speck’ or ‘a hair’), there seems to be no such semantic restriction on plural uses. I suggest that what facilitates the establishment of *mi'nuts* / *mətʃ'kats* as the suppletive plural of *mik* / *'mari* is precisely the fact that in the plural, unlike the singular, there are frequent circumstances in which the difference in meaning between the two lexemes vanishes, and indeed many cases in which only one meaning would be possible, because the referent has no internal part-structure (‘coins’, ‘specks’, ‘hairs’, ‘grains’, etc.). Presumably similar arguments apply to the Scandinavian facts with regard to the continuants of *smár*. Of course, none of this explains why the outcome should be specifically resolved in favour of the suppletive outcome, and I do not have an answer to this question. But this account gives a clear sense of why suppletion emerges within just such lexemes, having just such meanings, precisely in the plural.

5. On the role of synonymy in suppletion

In Maiden (2004, 2006) I argued that the primary driver of lexical suppletion in diachrony is a universal tendency to avoid ‘synonymy’, and that one strategy followed by speakers faced with different lexemes having identical or at any rate indistinct meanings is to allocate each of them a complementary sets of cells within the paradigm of the lexeme having that meaning.³¹ In this connection it is important to emphasize that it is not

³⁰ Here Krecz’ distinction (1986) between ‘parts’ and ‘pieces’ would seem to be useful. Obviously these things can have ‘pieces’, but they do not evidently have ‘parts’.

³¹ In the Romance verb cases, I suggested that the ‘template’ for the conflation of the lexemes is provided by certain ‘morphomic’ abstract paradigmatic patterns originally created mainly by sound change. Clearly

the case that synonymy does not, or cannot, exist in language (see also Ullmann 1962:141f.). It can easily *emerge*, but it tends not to *persist*. One source of synonymy may be borrowing, as in the southern Italian case I discuss in Maiden (2006), where the indigenous verb ‘to give’, from Latin DARE, encounters a rival Romance form for ‘to give’ (introduced via Norman French) continuing Latin DONARE, originally ‘grant, bestow, donate’. This, I suggest, seems to have created a transient state of synonymy, where speakers encountered two verbs apparently having the same meaning, a situation resolved in many varieties by the innovatory verb suppletively replacing DARE in various parts of the latter’s inflectional paradigm. I have ruled out ‘borrowing’ as a source of our Megleno-Romanian suppletion, but I have argued above that it arises under circumstances where the ‘rival’ adjectives are indistinguishable in meaning. In both cases, I submit that synonymy, or rather speakers’ tendency to eschew synonymy, is what leads to elimination of one of the alternative forms, and may result in suppletion.

This is not, however, how Börjars and Vincent see things, in the light of their Scandinavian data. They write that:³²

Unlike Maiden (2004), we do not think it appropriate to describe this as synonymy. Nor does hyponymy seem quite the appropriate term since the element which would in this case be the hyponym, *små*, had

in the present MR case the ‘template’ is morphosyntactically determined, being associated with number, and the introduction of the innovatory form precisely into the plural (rather than into the singular or just into one gender rather than the other) has, as I suggest, a clear semantic determinant.

³² See also Börjars and Vincent (2011, pp. 243, 245).

meanings which *liten* did not have at all, for instance the meaning of ‘mean-spirited’. However, we do agree that the development of a suppletive relation is driven by a semantic asymmetry. In particular, one of the members in the asymmetric pair will have a more general meaning, we refer to this as the dominant element, and another will have a partly overlapping but also more specific meaning, the recessive member of the pair. The dominant element forms the basis for the new suppletive paradigm, with the recessive lexeme providing the suppletive forms. In other words, the suppletive pattern resolves the asymmetry in favour of the more general item. This in turn means that suppletion always involves semantic ‘loss’ or generalization. (Börjars and Vincent 2011, p. 262)

We have argued that a suppletive relationship is likely to rely on a semantic asymmetry, where the donating lexeme has a more narrow meaning than the receiving one and also has some specific meaning which may predispose it towards filling certain cells in the receiving paradigm. (Börjars and Vincent 2011, p. 263)

There is much to concur with here, and it is obvious that the lexemes *mi'nut/mətʃ'kat* in the plural display clear semantic generalization of their meanings with respect to their fairly specific singulars. However, if all that is involved in the emergence of the suppletion is a relationship of semantic ‘asymmetry’, then my claim that a driving force behind lexical suppletion is, precisely, speakers’ aversion to *synonymy*, seems to be severely, and perhaps unhelpfully, weakened. After all, relationships of semantic ‘asymmetry’ (hyponymic or other) are perfectly commonplace in language and it becomes difficult to see why a suppletion should have emerged in the specific case of these particular asymmetrically related adjectives in the domain of ‘smallness’.

I think that a closer scrutiny of both the MR and the Scandinavian cases reveals a situation fully consistent, after all, with the notion that ‘synonymy’ is a crucial, and perhaps necessary, condition for the emergence of suppletion. The type of synonymy at issue is particularly likely to emerge in the plural of a word which refers to the nature of the components of some entity. The plurals of such adjectives offer two possibilities with regard to their scope, allowing reference either to the components of each member of the entities denoted, or instead directly to each member. In a situation (as is the case in MR) where the semantic distinction between the two lexemes principally resides in the ‘size of components’ meaning, the plural is a potential locus of effacement of that difference, with consequent synonymy. It appears to be true that speakers generally eschew synonymy (cf. especially Clark 1993, pp. 115, 119-122 for some morphological consequences), and it is therefore unsurprising that in the plural speakers should end up preferring one form over the other. My general prediction, indeed, is that cross-linguistically the place to look for suppletion in adjectives will be precisely where number and part-whole reference intersect.

The Megleno-Romanian and Scandinavian data certainly prompt a revision of the position I adopted in Maiden (2004, 2006). There I appealed simply to a notion of general synonymy, or at any rate perceived indistinctness, between *lexemes*. The data considered here point up the role in the emergence of suppletion of what I might term ‘paradigmatically local’ lexical synonymy, namely cases where some subdomain of an inflectional paradigm, by virtue of some meaning peculiarly associated with that subdomain, is liable to obfuscate lexical semantic distinctions which elsewhere remain more robustly differentiated. This provides fertile ground for the emergence of suppletion

even if it does not, I fully admit, wholly explain why speakers eliminate one of the alternative forms in favour of a suppletive result. Nor is it wholly isolated in Romance languages. A similar development is perhaps to be found³³ on the rather more familiar ground of French indefinite articles. In the singular there is a clear ‘whole’ vs ‘part’ distinction between the indefinite article *un* and the partitive article *du*, historically comprising a partitive marker *de* and the definite article; in the plural *des* does suppletive duty as the plural of the indefinite article, a distribution made possible at least in part by the fact the plural form denotes a subset (i.e., a part) of the entire plurality.³⁴ A development of a quite different semantic kind but displaying the same principles of development as those observed in Megleno-Romanian ‘size adjectives’ is apparent in the history of the verb *ir* ‘to go’ in Spanish and Portuguese whose preterite (past perfective)³⁵ is a suppletive form taken over from the preterite of the verb *ser* ‘to be’ (e.g., 3SG.PRS.IND *es* ‘he is’, 1SG.PRT *fue* ‘he was’; 3SG.PRS.IND *va* ‘he goes’, 3SG.PRT *fue* ‘he went’). The reason seems to lie in the semantic indistinctness of ‘be’ and ‘go’ used in the past perfective, particularly in contexts where a destination is specified (cf. English ‘he has been to London’). Juge (1999, p. 192) writes, of the Ibero-Romance phenomenon, that

³³ I am grateful to JC Smith for drawing my attention to this parallel.

³⁴ The parallel with adjectives meaning small cannot be pursued too far however. The indefinite article *un* historically lacked a plural (save in certainly fairly clearly circumscribed circumstances: see Foulet 1965, p. 62), and the plural indefinite of a noun was originally expressed simply by the plural form of the noun. Unlike the suppletive encroachments in Megleno-Romanian words for ‘small’ and ‘big’, the French partitive plural *des* effectively moves into a ‘case vide’.

³⁵ For the particular reasons why, in Spanish, this suppletion also affects the (aspectually neutral) non-present subjunctive forms, see Maiden (2001).

'having gone to a place entails having been there, but while the converse is not necessarily true (one may have spent one's entire life in a place without having gone there), it typically holds. This slight asymmetry seems to correlate with the fact that the influence was from BE to GO, rather than vice versa'.

In previous work (e.g., Maiden 2004, 2006) I have observed that fertile ground for suppletion is the emergence of 'synonymy', understood simply as perceived referential identity between lexemes — arising typically, I have suggested, in circumstances of linguistic borrowing. Speakers, unable clearly to distinguish semantically between the co-existing forms, tended to eliminate one of them, a procedure which was liable to result in suppletion. In such cases I argued that the *paradigmatic distribution* of the resulting suppletive alternation was independent of the motivation of the suppletion itself, and attributable to the organizing force exercised by abstract, 'morphomic', templates of paradigmatic organization already established in the language. In the case of the Megleno-Romanian and Scandinavian size adjectives (as in the case of the Ibero-Romance preterite of the verb 'go') the synonymy arises for purely internal reasons attributable to the interaction between the meaning of the relevant lexemes and a meaning morphologically encoded by a subpart of the their inflectional paradigm (plural, past perfective). In the specific case discussed above, it is the fact that the components of a plurality can be considered as it 'parts' which makes it possible to apply to that plurality an adjective meaning 'having small/large parts'. The accidental result of this is, effectively, synonymy, limited just to the plural cell of the paradigm, between adjectives meaning 'small/large' and adjectives meaning 'having small/large parts'. A common reaction to synonymy is elimination of one of the synonyms, and this may lead to

suppletion. In such cases, however, the distribution of the suppletion is clearly a predictable function of specific parts of the paradigm.

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