

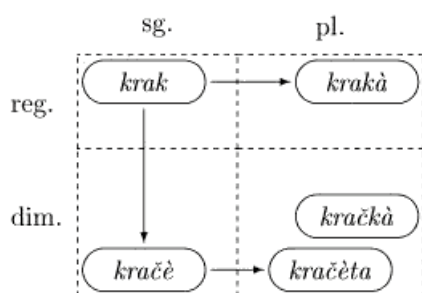
On Diminutive Plurals and Plural Diminutives*

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The present book may not be snapped up by a public mistakenly eager for the latest contribution to number theory. But if a few stray mathematicians read it, I hope they will find that the linguistic number systems analysed here show the elegance and complexity they are accustomed to in their area of enquiry. – Greville G. Corbett, *Number*

‘What is the singular of *kračkà*?’

A mathematician of my acquaintance asked this question of another in the course of a long train journey that I chanced to be sharing with them. I was too tired to join the conversation at the time, but the matter rested in my mind.



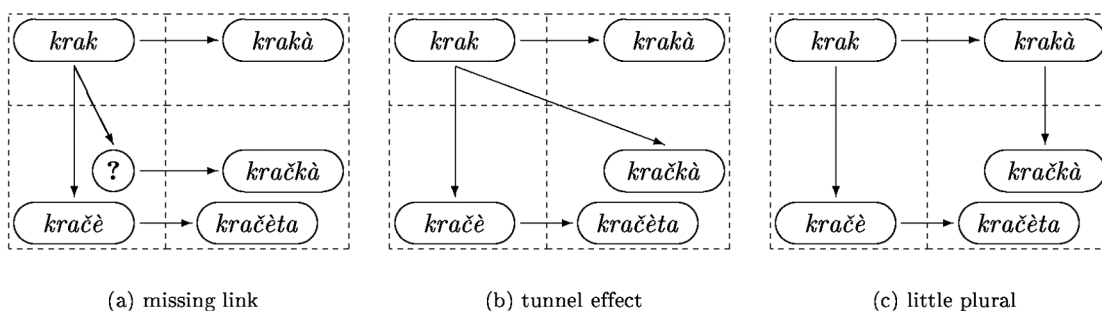
The word in question means ‘little legs/feet’, and it has, in fact, no apparent singular correlate. In this it differs from *kračèta*, the plural form of *kračè*, which is a diminutive derived from *krak* ‘leg/foot’. In most contexts the two are freely interchangeable. The form *kračèta* is more common except in the context of cooking, where *kračkà* is used as the technically correct term for trotters of pork or lamb. On the other hand, *kračkà* does not cooccur easily with cardinal numerals, so if one is present, *kračèta* is preferred even in that sense: *tja nosi 4 [...] kračeta ot svinče* (HS) ‘she is carrying four pig’s legs’. In other words, *kračkà* acts as a collective plural and *kračè* as the corresponding singulative.

The figure doesn’t try to show the full array of diminutives and plural forms, and it is conceivable that *kračkà* is the plural, or more likely the erstwhile dual, of another diminutive of *krak*, whose singular is perhaps unattested (the circle with the question mark in the diagram labelled ‘missing link’ on the next page).¹ If so, we are dealing

* My main sources of data are Arnott (1995) (Fula), Elanskaja (1980) (Coptic), Green www (Dakelh), Hemon (1995) (Breton), Koval’ (1997) (Fula), Leont’ev (1974) (Asmat), Maslova (2002) (Kolyma Yukaghir), Sova (1989) (Bantu), Stump (2001) (Southern Barasano, Yiddish), Sylestine et al. (1993) (Alabama), Volodin (1976) (Itelmen), Wolgemuth (2002) (Isthmus Nahuatl), Wright (1981) (Classical Arabic). The authors of Bulgarian texts identified by their initials are Kiril Hristov, Hristo Smirnenki and Peyo Yavorov.

¹ This possibility was suggested to me by Vladimir Plungian (p.c.).

with a highly abnormal development. The Proto-Slavic diminutive suffix **-ik-* yields Old Bulgarian *-ič-* (owing to the Third Palatalisation), Modern Bulgarian *-ec*, in all forms of masculine nouns. A case in point is *kračec*, a rare hypocoristic derivative of *krak*, which is *singulare tantum*, like most diminutives in *-ec*. If this existed in Old Bulgarian, it must have had the form **kračiči* in the singular and **kračica* in the dual, the latter being close to both *kračkà* and *kračicà* (another *plurale tantum* diminutive of *krak*, an obsolete one), but still significantly different from both.



Dictionary entries for *kračkà* label it as ‘dim. pl. of *krak*’ or ‘pl., dim. of *krakà*’. Taken literally, the former implies that the two operators, derivation of a diminutive and inflexion for plural number, are applied cumulatively, in a single morphological process (‘tunnel effect’), whereas the latter suggests that *kračkà* is not the outcome of the pluralisation of a diminutive noun, but is itself a diminutive derived from a plural noun form (‘little plural’). Either way imaginary (and aberrant) forms are eschewed, but an unusual mechanism is assumed.

This makes three hypotheses. The uncountability of the term can’t help us to choose among them, because they all correlate with it. The plurals of non-human masculine nouns don’t normally cooccur with cardinal numerals, as those nouns have corresponding count forms, whose purpose is to do exactly that (cf. *dva_M kràk-a_{CT}* ‘two legs, two feet’). On the other hand, a noun that has no singular form is *plurale tantum*, and by virtue of that fact uncountable.

At this point it is expedient to ask two questions:

What other lexical items in Bulgarian behave in similar ways (that is, what other *pluralia tantum* diminutives are there, and if they have synonyms that do have singular correlates, are there any more or less consistent differences in usage as between *kračkà* and *kračèta*)?

What will a search for comparable phenomena elsewhere yield?

1. The Bulgarian Data

Bulgarian is a highly fusional language, in which a word form’s morpheme structure can be controversial. For most categories of stems from which diminutives can be formed it has a variety of diminutive suffixes, some with a marked preference for a certain denotative (undersize entity, young of a species) or connotative (hypocoristic, pejorative) interpretation. Diminutivisation may preserve gender, or it may involve conversion from masculine or feminine to neuter gender. Some suffixes permit the further formation of secondary and even tertiary diminutives: *momà* f. ‘lass, maiden’ >

mom-ič-a f. dto. (a rare hypocoristic diminutive) > *mom-ič-e* n. ‘girl’ > *mom-ič-e-nc-e* n. ‘little girl’.

The words from which *pluralia tantum* diminutives are derived fall into the following groups, which shall be considered in order:

- masculine and neuter nouns with irregularly formed plurals;²
- other masculine nouns with regularly formed plurals, almost all of which fall into two semantically motivated subgroups (*viz.*, edible stuffs and kinds of footwear);
- *pluralia tantum* nouns, also including some semantically motivated subgroups (e.g., kinds of legwear);
- numerals.

1.1 Masculine Nouns

As I said in the Introduction, the plurals of non-human masculine nouns don’t cooccur with cardinal numerals or with *kòlko* ‘how many?’. However, the diminutives formed from them, which correspond to no singular or count forms, are not countable either.

There are four masculine nouns in the language with plurals (erstwhile duals or collectives) in *-à*; three of them have corresponding diminutive plurals (1–3). (The fourth one is *gospodìn* ‘gentleman, mister’, pl. *gospodà*, from which no diminutives are derived, evidently for semantic reasons.)

The noun *čovèk* ‘person, human being’ (4) is exceptional in having three plural forms. The regular plural *čovèci* is used seldom, and only in the sense ‘human beings *par excellence*’ (as in the adage *xora mnogo, no čoveci malko* ‘[the] people [are] many, but [the] human beings [of any virtue are] few’) or occasionally ‘humans as opposed to other sentient beings’ in fictional settings (as Rudyard Kipling uses the English plural *men* in *The Jungle Books*, where there are numerous non-human species of *people*³). One of the suppletive plural forms, *ljùde*, is antiquated (and stylistically marked). The commonly used plural is *xòra*, from which the diminutive *xòrica* ‘poor, harmless people’ is derived. Since the hypocoristic diminutive *čovèčec* ‘poor, harmless person’ has no regular plural, it effectively forms a suppletive paradigm with *xòrica*.

The noun *bodil* (5) means ‘thorn’ in the sense of either ‘thistle’ or ‘prickle’, but the two meanings are differentiated in the plural, and from *bodli* ‘prickles’ a diminutive can be formed. Depending on how one looks at it, *bodil* : *bodli* can be considered as one of the two instances of fleeting *i* in Bulgarian (the other one is in the numeral *edìn* : *edn-* ‘one’) or a case of partial suppletion. (Diachronically the latter is correct: originally ‘prickle’ was *bodèl*, but as that word went out of use, *bodil* took over both its meaning and its regularly formed plural).

As I said above, hypocoristic diminutives in *-ec* don’t usually have plural forms. But in some speakers’ usage some of those that are formed from monosyllabic nouns do (6). The plural diminutive form *grošòvce* is more readily used metaphorically for ‘little money, small change’ than literally for ‘(dear) little piastres’, though the latter may also have been likely whilst the piastre was in circulation. There is a theory that the

² Indeed, the more unlike a plural form something is, the more likely it is to manifest behaviour not normally associated with plural forms, such as feeding derivation.

³ Tsvetan Stoyanov aptly renders *men* as *čovèci* in his partial Bulgarian translation of *The Jungle Books* (1967).

morpheme *-ovce* is composed nonlinearly from the diminutive suffix *-ec* and the plural ending *-ove*.⁴

Diminutive plurals (nearly always in *-ki*) are also derived from masculine nouns with regular plurals (in *-i*). Some of these are names of edibles⁵: *domàt* ‘tomato’ (7), *kartòf* ‘potato’, *mòrkov* ‘carrot’, *badèm* ‘almond’, *lèšnik* ‘hazelnut’, *òrex* ‘walnut’, *fòstók* ‘peanut’; also *makaròn* ‘strand of macaroni’, where the singular form is a back-formation from the collective *makaròni* (originally a *plurale tantum*). Others are kinds of footwear: *botùš* ‘boot’ (8), *nalóm* ‘patten’, *čoràp* ‘sock, stocking’. The plural of *čèxøl* ‘slipper (without back)’ (9), namely *čèxli*, forms the diminutive *čèxlički*. In all cases there is a plural diminutive as well, e. g., *domàtčeta* ‘little tomatoes’, which tends to describe the size of the individual vegetables, as opposed to *domàtki*, which conveys the speaker’s attitude to a salad of them perhaps; such differences in the likely interpretation obtain throughout.

Two names of body parts, one paired (10), the other one plural (11), also belong here; the latter also has the diminutive plural form *zòbìci*, but that one hardly ever occurs except in poetry: *da bjaxa margar mønista tvoite beli zòbìci* (PY) ‘would that thy (dear) white teeth were pearl beads’.

	sg.	dim.	pl. dim.	pl.	dim. pl.	
1	<i>krak</i>	<i>kračè</i>	<i>kračèta</i>	<i>krakà</i>	<i>kračkà</i> , <i>kračicà</i>	leg, foot
2	<i>rog</i>	<i>rògče</i>	<i>rògčeta</i>	<i>rògòve</i>	—	horn
				<i>rogà</i>	<i>rogcà</i>	
3	<i>nòmer</i>	<i>nòmerče</i>	<i>nòmerčeta</i>	<i>nomerà</i>	<i>nomercà</i>	(ordinal) number
4	<i>čovèk</i>	<i>čovèče</i>	<i>čovèčeta</i>	<i>čovèci</i>	—	person, human being
		<i>čovèčec</i>	—	<i>xòra</i>	<i>xòrica</i>	
5	<i>bodil</i>	<i>bodilče</i>	<i>bodilčeta</i>	<i>bodili</i>	—	thorn, thistle
				<i>bodli</i>	<i>bodlički</i>	thorn, prickle
6	<i>groš</i>	<i>gròšec</i>		<i>grošòve</i>	<i>grošòvce</i>	piastre, obsolete Lv
		<i>gròšče</i>	<i>gròščeta</i>			0.20 coin
7	<i>domàt</i>	<i>domàtče</i>	<i>domàtčeta</i>	<i>domàti</i>	<i>domàtki</i>	tomato
8	<i>botùš</i>	<i>botùšče</i>	<i>botùščeta</i>	<i>botùši</i>	<i>botùški</i>	boot
9	<i>čèxøl</i>	<i>čèxølče</i>	<i>čèxølčeta</i>	<i>čèxli</i>	<i>čèxlički</i>	slipper
10	<i>mustàk</i>	<i>mustàče</i>	<i>mustàčeta</i>	<i>mustàci</i>	<i>mustàčki</i>	moustache
11	<i>zòb</i>	<i>zòbče</i>	<i>zòbčeta</i>	<i>zòbi</i>	<i>zòbki</i>	tooth
				<i>zòbì</i>	<i>zòbìci</i>	
12	<i>okò</i>	<i>očè</i>	<i>očèta</i>	<i>očì</i>	<i>očìci</i>	eye
13	<i>uxò</i>	<i>ušè</i>	<i>ušèta</i>	<i>ušì</i>	<i>ušìci</i>	ear
14	<i>detè</i>	<i>detènce</i>	? <i>detènca</i>	<i>decà</i>	<i>dečìca</i>	child
15	<i>nèšto</i>	<i>nèštičko</i>	—	<i>neštà</i>	<i>neštìcà</i>	(some)thing

⁴ ‘It can be said that the diminutive marker is inserted into the plural marker in these rare forms’ (Maslov 1981: 137). Historically the *ov* in both *-ove* and *-ovce* is a vestige of the fact that in Proto-Slavic *u*-stems ended in *-aũ* before vowel-initial suffixes and endings.

⁵ Note that *kračkà* ‘trotters of pork or lamb’ is one also.

1.2 Neuter Nouns

The diminutives formed from the plurals of neuter nouns are countable (that is, they can cooccur with cardinal numerals), but it is difficult to draw any conclusions from this, due to the scanty number of nouns involved.

There are two neuter nouns with plurals (erstwhile duals) in *-i* (12–13). The hypocoristic forms *očici* and *ušici* are rare, though they do occur, esp. in poetry: *da bjaxa ogøn elmazi tvoite černi očici* (PY) ‘would that thy (dear) black eyes were fiery diamonds’. However, the secondary diminutive *očički* is common enough.

The noun *detè* ‘child’ (14) was originally a singulative (*dæte* from the collective *dæti* ‘children’). Its partially suppletive plural *decà* is a contraction of Old Bulgarian *dætica*, attested in the thirteenth century (Mirčev 1963: 57). The regular plural diminutive *detènca* is very rare, so for most practical purposes *detènca* and *dečica* form a (partially) suppletive paradigm. Of some interest is the expression *màmino detènca* ‘Mummy’s little child; mother’s darling, milksop, mollycoddle’, whose plural is *mamini dečica* in the literal sense and *mamini detenca* in the idiomatic one; the derivation through *deca* ‘children’, which mollycoddles are not almost by definition, would be inappropriate.

The indefinite pronoun *nèšto* ‘something’ (< *næ-* ‘some-’ + *što* ‘what’) has been degrammaticalised to mean ‘thing’ (15) and inflects as a noun when so used. As such it forms the plural *neštà* ‘things, stuff’, whence the diminutive *neštica*. The singular *neštice*, as in *tam ni edničko neštice ne sveti* (KH) ‘there [*sc.* in the skies] not a single (little) thing is shining’, is quite rare, and is as likely to be a back-formation of *neštica* as a diminutive of *nèšto*. The *singulare tantum* form *nèštičko* ‘little something’ is an adjectival diminutive, and more readily used as a pronoun than as a noun.

1.3 Pluralia Tantum

Semantically speaking, the relatively restricted class of *pluralia tantum* nouns in Bulgarian presents no surprises, compared to other languages. It includes the names of numerous kinds of legwear (16–18; also *potùri* ‘breeches’, *šalvàri* ‘shalwars’, *šòrti* ‘shorts’ etc.) as well as the word *obùšta* ‘footwear, shoes’ (19), twosome tools (20–22) and mass terms (23). There are also names of mountains, diseases, festivals and financial terms, but those are outside our present scope, as they form no diminutives.

The language finds such nouns an inconvenience and strives to eliminate them, either by back-forming singulars from them, with the same meaning or a different one, or, when the phonological shape permits it, by reinterpreting them as singulars (the modest size of the nominal paradigm, given the loss of case marking, makes this a good deal easier than it is in other Slavic languages). Examples of the former scenario are *nòžica* ‘scissors’ from *nòžici* *dto.*, *pantalòn* ‘trousers’ from *pantalòni* *dto.* and *očilò* ‘spectacle lens’ from *očilà* ‘spectacles’. The latter accounts for *vratà* ‘gate; door’ (24), *kolà* ‘waggon, ox-cart; car’ (25) and *ustà* ‘lips, mouth’ (26), originally *pluralia tantum* after the manner of plural neuters, but currently feminine nouns with plurals in *-i*. (In the glosses of the three words the semicolons separate the older meanings from the newer ones.) However, their old diminutives have not been so reinterpreted; rather, they have been superseded by new ones, with the suffix *-ic(a)*.

The cardinal numerals from two onwards, general and masculine personal, constitute a special class of *pluralia tantum* words. A few of them have diminutive forms (27–31).

	pl.	dim. pl.			pl.	dim. pl.	
16	<i>gàšti</i>	<i>gaštèta, gàštički</i>	pant(ie)s	24	<i>vratà</i>	<i>vratcà</i>	gate
17	<i>pantalòni</i>	<i>pantalònki</i>	trousers	25	<i>kolà</i>	<i>kolcà</i>	ox-cart
18	<i>plùvki</i>	<i>plùvčici</i>	swimming trunks	26	<i>ustà</i>	<i>ust(i)cà, ustènca</i>	mouth
19	<i>obùšta</i>	<i>obuštèta</i>	shoes, footwear	27	<i>dve</i>	<i>dvèčki, dvènki</i>	2 (gen.f./n.)
20	<i>klèšti</i>	<i>klèštički</i>	pincers	28	<i>tri</i>	<i>trički, trìnki</i>	3 (general)
21	<i>nòžici</i>	<i>nòžički</i>	scissors	29	<i>četiri</i>	<i>četirki</i>	4 (general)
22	<i>očilà</i>	<i>očilcà</i>	spectacles	30	<i>dvàma</i>	<i>dvàmca, dvàmka</i>	2 (m. pers.)
23	<i>trìci</i>	<i>trički</i>	bran	31	<i>dvamìna</i>	<i>dvamìnka</i>	2 (m. pers.)

1.4 Patterns

Three of the most opaque plural nouns and the masculine personal numerals form their diminutives as singular feminine nouns do, except that they have no secondary diminutives (there are such words as *kóštička*, *rekička*, *živinčica*, but no **xòrička* etc.), and the nouns that *krakà* patterns with are all formed from adjectives by the suffix *-in(à)*.

	reg.	dim.			reg.	dim.	
m. pl.	<i>xòr-a</i>	<i>xòr-ic-a</i>	people	f.	<i>kóšt-a</i>	<i>kóšt-ic-a</i>	house
n. pl.	<i>dec-à</i>	<i>deč-ìc-a</i>	children	f.	<i>ovc-à</i>	<i>ovč-ìc-a</i>	sheep, ewe
					<i>rek-à</i>	<i>reč-ìc-a</i>	river
m. pl.	<i>krak-à</i>	<i>krač-k-à</i>	legs, feet	f.	<i>živin-à</i>	<i>živin-k-à</i>	live being, animal
num.	<i>dvàm-a</i> <i>dvam-in-a</i>	<i>dvàm-k-a</i> <i>dvam-in-k-a</i>	two (people)	f.	<i>žil-a</i>	<i>žil-k-a</i>	tendon, vein

Now *xòra* is a loan from Greek, where *χώρα* is the citation (singular) form of a feminine noun meaning ‘country, nation’, *dèca* ‘children’ can behave as a singular feminine noun in Serbo-Croat, and *-in(a)* in *dvamìna* etc. is a derivational (usually augmentative) suffix. This puts the erstwhile dual *krakà* with the associated diminutive *kračkà* in unusual company.⁶

Most other diminutive plurals have the form of plural diminutives, except that they have no corresponding singular forms. They can be divided into four groups.

⁶ The final *-ma* in *dvàma* etc. is also in origin an Old Bulgarian dual ending, but of the dative and instrumental cases. With the disintegration of the case system it ceased being associated with any particular syntactic functions, then was copied from ‘two’ to several higher numerals.

	reg.	dim.	redim.	
f. sg.	<i>žil-a</i>	<i>žil-k-a</i>	<i>žil-č-ic-a</i>	tendon, vein
f. pl.	<i>žil-i</i>	<i>žil-k-i</i>	<i>žil-č-ic-i</i>	
m. pl.	<i>zób-i</i>	<i>zób-k-i</i>		teeth
pl. t.	<i>pantalòn-i</i>	<i>pantalòn-k-i</i>		trousers
pl. t.		<i>plùv-k-i</i>	<i>plùv-č-ic-i</i>	swimming trunks
num.	<i>čètir-i</i>	<i>čètir-k-i</i>		four
	reg.	dim.	redim.	
f. sg.	<i>dàrb-a</i>	<i>dàrb-ic-a</i>	<i>dàrb-ič-k-a</i>	talent
f. pl.	<i>dàrb-i</i>	<i>dàrb-ic-i</i>	<i>dàrb-ič-k-i</i>	
m. pl.	<i>čexl-i</i>		<i>čexl-ič-k-i</i>	slippers
pl. t.		<i>nòž-ic-i</i>	<i>nòž-ič-k-i</i>	scissors
pl. t.	<i>gàšt-i</i>		<i>gàšt-ič-k-i</i>	pant(ie)s
pl. t.	<i>klèšt-i</i>		<i>klèšt-ič-k-i</i>	pincers
	reg.	dim.	redim.	
f. sg.	<i>glav-à</i>	<i>glav-ìc-a</i>	<i>glav-ič-k-a</i>	head
f. pl.	<i>glav-ì</i>	<i>glav-ìc-i</i>	<i>glav-ič-k-i</i>	
m. pl.	<i>zøb-ì</i>	<i>zøb-ìc-i</i>		teeth
m. pl.	<i>bodl-ì</i>		<i>bodl-ič-k-i</i>	prickles
n. pl.	<i>oč-ì</i>	<i>oč-ìc-i</i>	<i>oč-ič-k-i</i>	eyes
pl. t.		<i>tr-ìc-i</i>	<i>tr-ič-k-i</i>	bran
num.	<i>tr-i</i>		<i>tr-ič-k-i</i>	three
pl. t.	<i>klešt-ì</i>		<i>klešt-ič-k-i</i>	pincers

The first and largest group is composed of those that look like plurals of feminine diminutives formed from feminine nouns. The various types are illustrated in the table; they employ the suffixes *-k(a)*, unstressed and stressed *-ic(a)* and their combinations *-[k>č]-ic(a)* and *-i[c>č]-k(a)*. The inclusion of the numeral *tri* ‘three’ is provisional; I shall return to this point later.

In fact some of the corresponding singular forms do exist. Compare *bonbòn* ‘sweet, candy’, whose extant (though dated) alternative form *bonbòna* (with the same plural form *bonbòni*) and its diminutive *bonbònka* might explain the plural diminutive *bonbònki* even in the speech of those who don’t use the two feminine singulars, to *pantòf* ‘slipper (with back)’, which lacks the first of the two ‘intermediate’ forms, and to *botùš* ‘boot’, which lacks both.

m.	f.	dim. f.	dim. pl.	
<i>bonbòn</i>	<i>bonbon-a</i>	<i>bonbòn-k-a</i>	<i>bonbòn-k-i</i>	sweet, candy
<i>pantòf</i>	—	<i>pantòf-k-a</i>	<i>pantòf-k-i</i>	slipper
<i>botùš</i>	—	—	<i>botùš-k-i</i>	boot

The second group is made up of the diminutive derivative of the *plurale tantum* noun *gàšti* ‘pant(ie)s’, which has the form of the plural of a neuter diminutive derived from a feminine noun, and of *obùšta* ‘footwear, shoes’, which is exceptional in that the diminutive is related to the base as the plural of the neuter diminutive is to the singular of the feminine noun from which it is derived.

	reg.		dim.	redim.	
f. sg.	<i>kóšt-a</i>	n. sg.	<i>køšt-è</i>	<i>køšt-è-nc-e</i>	house
f. pl.	<i>kóšt-i</i>	n. pl.	<i>køšt-è-ta</i>	<i>køšt-è-nc-a</i>	
pl. t.	<i>obùšt-a</i>		<i>obušt-è-ta</i>	<i>obušt-è-nc-a</i>	footwear, shoes
pl. t.	<i>gàšt-i</i>		<i>gašt-è-ta</i>	<i>gašt-è-nc-a</i>	pant(ie)s

The diminutive plurals in the third group are shaped as plurals of neuter diminutives formed from neuter nouns. The unusual case is that of the masculine personal numerals: the words they pattern with have more than two syllables, whereas *dvàma* ‘two (people)’ and *trìma* ‘three (people)’ contain precisely two each.

	reg.	dim.			reg.	dim.	
n. sg.	<i>mjàst-o</i>	<i>mest-ènc-e</i>	place	n. sg.	<i>kopìt-o</i>	<i>kopìt-c-e</i>	hoof
n. pl.	<i>mest-à</i>	<i>mest-ènc-a</i>		n. pl.	<i>kopìt-a</i>	<i>kopìt-c-a</i>	
pl. t.	<i>ust-à</i>	<i>ust-ènc-a</i>	mouth	num.	<i>dvàm-a</i>	<i>dvàm-c-a</i>	two (people)
	reg.	dim.			reg.	dim.	
n. sg.	<i>per-ò</i>	<i>per-c-è</i>	feather	n. sg.	<i>lic-è</i>	<i>lič-ic-è</i>	face
n. pl.	<i>per-à</i>	<i>per-c-à</i>		n. pl.	<i>lic-à</i>	<i>lič-ic-à</i>	
m. pl.	<i>rog-à</i>	<i>rog-c-à</i>	horn	m. pl.	<i>krak-à</i>	<i>krač-ic-à</i>	legs, feet
m. pl.	<i>nomer-à</i>	<i>nomer-c-à</i>	numbers	n. pl.	<i>nešt-à</i>	<i>nešt-ic-à</i>	things
pl. t.	<i>očìl-à</i>	<i>očìl-c-à</i>	spectacles	pl. t.	<i>ust-à</i>	<i>ust-ic-à</i>	mouth
pl. t.	<i>vrat-à</i>	<i>vrat-c-à</i>	gate				
pl. t.	<i>kol-à</i>	<i>kol-c-à</i>	cart				

The diminutive plurals or plural diminutives in *-ovce* constitute a class of their own.

The last case to consider is that of the cardinal numeral *dve* ‘two’ (feminine or neuter) with its diminutives *dvèčki* and *dvènki*, where the initial vowel of the diminutive suffix *-ičk-* or *-ink-* (an uncommon suffix generally restricted to adjectives) is missing, as though it has been reanalysed as something other than part of the suffix—and in this case the only other thing it could be a part of is an inflected stem *preceding* the suffix. The same analysis can arguably be applied to the diminutives of *tri* ‘three’, as an alternative to the classification proposed above.

2. The Crosslinguistic Situation

This section reports the results of my search of the world’s languages for diminutive plural forms that are not obtained by pluralisation of diminutives.

2.1 Missing Links

I don’t have many examples of missing link derivations. My best example is from Polish.⁷ In that language diminutives in *-e*, pl. *-et-a*, and singulatives/rediminutives *-qt-k-o*, pl. *-qt-k-a*, are formed from names of animal species and a few ethnic and racial groups (and then denote young animals and children, respectively) as well as some

⁷ There are exact parallels in Ukrainian and Belorussian (but not Russian).

other words for live beings (e.g., *wnuk* ‘grandson’, *wnucz-ę* ‘grandchild’; *zwierz* ‘beast’, *zwierz-ę* ‘animal’). However, the plural form in *-ęt-a* (with no corresponding rediminutive) is used as a *plurale tantum* diminutive of the names of some body parts (*oko* ‘eye’, *ręka* ‘arm, hand’, *noga* ‘leg, foot’, colloquially a few other body part and paired clothing items as well), especially when referring to a child’s or a woman’s eyes or limbs, and only in the literal (anatomical) sense, never for any metaphorical meanings that the base noun or other diminutives may have.

		reg.	dim.	dim.	redim.
Polish	sg.	<i>kot</i>	<i>kot-ek</i>	<i>koci-ę</i>	<i>koci-ąt-k-o</i>
	pl.	<i>kot-y</i> cat	<i>kot-k-i</i> little cat	<i>koci-ęt-a</i> kitten	<i>koci-ąt-k-a</i> little kitten
	sg.	<i>ok-o</i>	<i>ocz-k-o</i>	—	—
	pl.	1. <i>ocz-y</i> , 2. <i>ok-a</i> 1. eye; 2. cell (of net)	1. <i>ocz-k-i</i> , 2. <i>ocz-k-a</i>	<i>ocz-ęt-a</i>	—
	sg.	<i>ręk-a</i>	<i>rącz-k-a</i>	—	—
pl.	<i>ręc-e</i> arm, hand	<i>rącz-k-i</i> 1. little arm, hand; 2. handle	<i>rącz-ęt-a</i>	—	
	pl.	<i>but-y</i> shoes	<i>but-k-i</i>	<i>buci-ęt-a</i>	—
	pl.	—	<i>port-k-i</i> pants	<i>porci-ęt-a</i>	—
Isthmus Nahuatl	sg.	—	<i>tao-tz̄in</i>	<i>tao-l̄in</i>	
	pl.	—	<i>tao-tzi-tz̄in</i> little girl	<i>tao-li-l̄in</i>	
	sg.	<i>chacalin</i>	<i>chacal-tz̄in</i>	—	
	pl.	<i>chacalimej</i> prawn	<i>chacal-tzi-tz̄in</i> little prawn	<i>chacal-li-l̄in</i>	

The addition of the data from Isthmus Nahuatl (Uto-Aztecan) is provisional: there is the form *chacal̄in* ‘prawn(s)’, which can be considered a variant of *chacalin* or a diminutive; in the latter case *chacal-li-l̄in* would not appear to be a missing link derivation. (The diminutive suffix *-l̄in* occurs only in a few nouns; beside *tao-l̄in* ‘little girl’ there are *choo-l̄in* and *huen-l̄in* ‘little boy’, all *diminutiva tantum*.)

2.2 Tunnel Effects

It is rare for a language to express diminution and plurality cumulatively, but it does happen. In Fula (Atlantic-Congo), as well as Swahili and many other Bantu languages, number marking can’t be separated from the formation of evaluatives, which is done by conversion, so that the forms in the four positions in the paradigm are equally distant from one another. Anderson’s (1985: 177) statement made in regard to Fula: ‘This process is (in principle given – semantic limitations) completely productive, and its full integration into the noun-class system [...] makes its inflectional status clear’ is applicable to the Bantu languages as well.

In Asmat (Trans-New Guinea) regular nouns do not distinguish number (*pok* ‘thing, things’), as is generally the case in the Papuan languages, but the diminutive markers express singularity (*mu* ‘water’, *mu-nakap* ‘a little water’) or plurality.

Diminutives can be formed from phrases as well as words, which Leont'ev 1974: 65 brings up as evidence of their non-derivational status (*amas* 'sago', *amas nec* 'raw sago', *amas nét-nakap* 'some raw sago').

	reg.	pl.	dim.	dim. pl.	
Fula	<i>wur-o</i>	<i>gur-e</i>	<i>gur-el</i>	<i>ngur-on</i>	compound
Swahili	<i>m-nyama</i>	<i>wa-nyama</i>	<i>ki-nyama</i>	<i>vi-nyama</i>	animal
Asmat	<i>pok</i>		<i>pok-nakap</i>	<i>pok-nakas</i>	thing

2.3 Little Plurals

The idea that *kračkà* and some of the other *pluralia tantum* diminutives in Bulgarian are derived from plural forms is in line with the peculiarities of their semantics and usage. It is, however, at variance with Greenberg's Universal 28: 'If both the derivation and inflection follow the root, or they both precede the root, the derivation is always between the root and the inflection' (Greenberg 1966: 93). By extension, all derivation ought to take place before the word can be inflected.

Croft (1990: 176) comments:

Derivational morphology alters the lexical meaning of the root, sometimes drastically, whereas inflectional morphology only adds semantic properties or embeds the concept denoted by the root into the larger linguistic context.

The formulation allows for exceptions if a token derivational process does not alter the lexical meaning. This is arguably the case with the formation of connotational (as opposed to denotational) evaluatives: the size of an entity is a more substantial property than its quantity, but the latter is, in turn, more stable than the speaker's attitude. Thus it is to be expected that evaluatives will time and again give occasion for digressions from the universal, as indeed they do.

In the course of his discussion of the Nootka (Wakashan) stem *inikw-ihl-'minih¹-'is²-* 'little² fire-s¹ in the house, burn plurally¹ and slightly² in the house' Sapir (1921: 104–105) comments:

the plural element precedes the diminutive in Nootka [...], which at once reveals the important fact that the plural concept is not as abstractly, as relationally, felt as in English [...]; and may not the Nootka diminutive have a slenderer, a more elusive content than our *-let* or *-ling* or the German *-chen* or *-lein*?⁸

The question is asked on behalf of the reader, but the author agrees, in a footnote:

The Nootka diminutive is doubtless more of a feeling-element, an element of nuance. This is shown by the fact that it may be used with verbs as well as with nouns. In

⁸ It is remarkable that Nootka is here contrasted to German, whose diminutive markers share at least one prominent feature with the Nootka one, that of being able to stand closer to the periphery of the word form than the plural marker (cf. Subsection 2.4). Besides, the German diminutives surely 'have a slenderer, more elusive content' (that is, are more readily used to impart the speaker's attitude) than the English ones have.

speaking to a child, one is likely to add the diminutive to any word in the sentence, regardless of whether there is an inherent diminutive meaning in the word or not.⁹

In other words, in Nootka it is not the case that diminutive formation and pluralisation are ordered as instances of derivation and inflexion, respectively. Sapir also makes the point that in Nootka ‘neither the plural nor the diminutive affix corresponds to anything else in the sentence’, which might have argued for their derivational character.

The same morpheme order is also obligatory in Dakelh, also known as Carrier (Athabaskan), and in Southern Barasano (Tukanoan): evaluative (diminutive and augmentative) markers are located closer to the periphery than number markers. This is what Stump (2001: 98f) calls head marking, not an uncommon phenomenon on a global scale, though most often observed in compounding or derivation by means of word-like affixes (that is, such as retain their adverbial, pronominal etc. character to a greater or lesser extent), and, as he acknowledges (p. 283, n. 6), seldom where an inflexional marker ends up linearly between the root and a derivational formative, as in this case.

In Kolyma Yukaghir (Paleo-Siberian) the diminutive marker *-die/-tie* follows the plural marker *-p(ul)/-pe*. Maslova (2000: 91) calls this relative order of the two markers a ‘noteworthy distributional feature’. She also notes that in many cases the diminutive is used to express affection, so that, if the intended meaning is ‘little’, forms of the verb *juko:-* ‘be little’ are used in conjunction with diminutive marking. There is also a diminutive form of the negative pronoun *n’e-leme* ‘nothing’ which has ‘emphatic impact’: *n’e-leme-die* ‘nothing at all’ (p. 92; cf. Bulgarian *ništičko*, diminutive of *ništo* ‘nothing’ < *ni-* ‘no-’ + *što* ‘what’). A further use of the diminutive marker is to merely make recent Russian loans ‘more Yukaghir-like’, as in Russian *šuka* ‘pike’ > Yukaghir *šu:ka:-die* ‘pike’, and in this case the plural marker follows the diminutive one (p. XXIV). Thus the relative position of the two markers is influenced by the function of the diminutive.

Classical Arabic¹⁰ is another language in which the use of the diminutive is by no means restricted to size.¹¹ Its nominal morphology is notorious for its large variety of plural formations, with many nouns exhibiting alternative plurals. Diminutive plurals are derived from the four ‘broken’ (transfixal) plurals which, when they are not the only plural form of a noun, have a paucal interpretation (being used with numerals in the range 3–10, etc.).¹² None of the other plurals are diminutivised; however, singular diminutives can form ‘sound’ (suffixal) plurals. Remarkably, Brockelmann (1985: 100) states that both plural diminutives (*sunayyāt* “Ge. ein Paar Jährchen”, ‘a few years’, from *sunayya*, diminutive of *sana* ‘year’) and diminutive plurals (*nusayya* “Ge. ein Paar Weiber”, ‘a few women’, from *niswa*, suppletive paucal plural of *imra’a* ‘woman’) can

⁹ And also, as he attests elsewhere (Sapir 1915), in speaking about children or speaking to or about people with various bodily deformities or disabilities. Another similar suffix, namely *-aq’*, is used when addressing or discussing excessively tall or overweight people. Clearly any denotational interpretation is out of the question.

¹⁰ I thank Ali Idrissi for drawing my attention to this language and Tat’jana Frolova for providing excerpts from Wright (1981).

¹¹ Witness its formation from the demonstrative pronoun *ḏā* ‘this’, dim. *ḏayyā*, and Wright’s (1981: 167) testimony that diminutives ‘cannot be formed from nouns which have already the measure of a diminutive, as *ḡumayl* “a kind of a small bird”, *kumayt* “a bay horse”’, implying that from all others they can.

¹² Since the exponent of the diminutive is also a transfix, the vowels of the paucal plural are lost; however, the prefix *’a-* in those forms that have it contributes an additional radical consonant, and the ending *-a* is retained.

express the same meaning as paucal plurals. This is an uncommon case of a reference grammar calling attention to what is beyond doubt a common phenomenon (cf. Bulgarian *godinki* ‘little years’, obviously used, like German *Jährchen*, only for pragmatic impact), but one that is seldom brought up,¹³ conceivably because the paucal plural is not a self-sustained category in most languages.

This subsection started with a generalisation based on an intuition formulated in Croft (1990). To my knowledge, the closest thing to a counterexample to that is found in Itelmen (Chukotko-Kamchatkan), in whose noun the number marker (a suffix of order 13 in Volodin 1976’s model) is located farther from the root than any of the several unproductive pejorative or hypocoristic diminutive suffixes (order 3), but closer to the root than the productive denotational diminutive suffix *-c[(a)χ]* (order 14) and the pejorative augmentative suffix *-aj* (order 15). (The two derivational processes can take place together: *qow-sk’ele*_{PEJ-CχDIM} ‘little good-for-nothing deer skin jacket’, pl. *qow-sk’ele*_{PEJ-7h_{PL}-C_{DIM}}.)

Although the central meaning of the diminutive in *-c[(a)χ]* is stated to be smallness, words such as *laccax* ‘little sun’ (cf. *lac* ‘sun’), *juñjucχ* ‘whale’ (lit. ‘little whale’, but the non-diminutive noun **juñjuñ* is never used), *qisχcaχ* ‘sky’ (lit. ‘little sky’) show that there is more to it than meets the eye. (Volodin 1976: 133 attributes the high productivity of the diminutive to the speakers’ desire to lessen at least the perceived size of large objects in their environment.)

In Alabama (Muskogean) the diminutive suffix *-(o)s(i)* (which can be repeated to form secondary diminutives: *poskòosi* ‘child, baby’, *poskòososi* ‘infant’) and the plural marker for human nouns *-ha* can occur in either order (a kind of variation seldom seen in the morphology in any language). Admittedly pluralisation and diminutivisation are not quite on a par, since only the former can correlate with something else in the sentence (to wit, the plural distributive form of the verb, marked by *ho-*, if the term is its subject). However, neither the noun suffix *-ha* nor the verb prefix *ho-* are obligatory, and their co-occurrence hardly constitutes agreement.

¹³ In Jurafsky (1996) it is only cursorily alluded to, and illustrated by Zulu pl. *amazwi* ‘words’, pl. dim. *amazwana* ‘a few words’, cf. the corresponding sg. *i(li)zwi* ‘voice; order, command; word’, dim. *i(li)zwana* ‘word’.

	reg.	dim.	pl. dim.	pl.	dim. pl.	
Nootka	<i>inikw-ihl-</i>	<i>inikw-ihl-'is-</i>	—	<i>inikw-ihl- minih-</i>	<i>inikw-ihl-'m inih-'is-</i>	fire in the house
Dakelh	<i>lhi</i>	<i>lhi-yaz</i>	—	<i>lhi-ke</i>	<i>lhi-ke-yaz</i>	dog
South. Bar.	<i>wi</i>	<i>wi-aka</i>	—	<i>wi-ri</i>	<i>wi-ri-aka</i>	house
Kol. Yuk.	<i>terike</i>	<i>terike-die</i>	—	<i>terike-pul</i>	<i>terike-p-tie</i>	wife, old woman
	(Russian) <i>šuka</i>	<i>šu:ka:-die</i>	<i>šuke-die-pe</i>	—	—	pike
Class. Ar.	<i>bayt</i>	<i>buyayt</i>	<i>buyayt-āt</i>	<i>buyūt</i>	—	house
	<i>bayt</i>	<i>buyayt</i>	—	<i>'abyāt</i>	<i>'ubayyāt</i>	verse
	<i>fatā</i>	<i>futayy</i>	<i>futayy-ūn</i>	<i>fīty-ān</i> (usual) <i>fīty-a</i> (paucal)	<i>futayy-a</i>	young man
Itelmen	<i>quwa</i>	<i>quwa-cχ quwa-sk'el</i>	<i>quwa-sk'el-7</i>	<i>quwa-7n</i>	<i>quwa-7ñ-c</i>	trousers
Alabama	(<i>posko-</i>)	<i>poskò-osi</i>	<i>poskò-osi-ha</i>	<i>poskoo-ha</i>	<i>poskoo-ha-s i</i>	child

2.4 Double Plurals

In some languages evaluatives are pluralised twice, both before and after the derivation. In Breton diminutive plurals are formed by adding the diminutive suffix *-ig* followed by *-où*, a productive plural ending characteristic of inanimate nouns¹⁴, to the plural form of the noun, whether the formation of the latter is productive, unproductive or suppletive. A similar situation obtains in Yiddish, where plurals are by and large formed as in German, although nouns of Hebrew origin retain the plural forms they have in the source language, which are suppletive from the point of view of Yiddish. The diminutive suffix is *-l(e)* (cf. German *-lein*); diminutive plurals also acquire the ending *-ex* of unknown origin, perhaps another diminutive suffix (cf. German *-chen*).

Another parallel, if only a superficial one, is found in many Bantu languages (the examples in the table are from Lamba and Mabiha), where there are different diminutive markers for the two numbers, but the original class and number marker is retained (in a reduced form or in its entirety), effectively becoming part of the stem of the diminutive noun, so that the latter has different stems for the two numbers.¹⁵

In Isthmus Nahuatl this affects one noun, – *piltzīn* ‘son, daughter’ (never used without a possessive prefix). This word is also unusual in that it has a diminutive suffix in the singular even without diminutive semantics, though this is not so in the plural.

¹⁴ Note that inanimacy is correlated with diminutivity in Breton as the feminine and especially the neuter gender are in Bulgarian.

¹⁵ This is potentially an unstable situation. In some other languages of the same family the singular prefix is retained within the forms of the diminutive noun for both numbers, so the double number marking is eliminated, and the plural diminutive correlates only with the corresponding singular, cf. Nsenga *mu-ntu* ‘person’, pl. *wá-ntu*, but dim. *ka-mu-ntu*, pl. dim. *tu-mu-ntu*. A similar development takes place occasionally in Fula as well, cf. *kor-dó* ‘slave girl’, pl. *hor-bé*, but dim. *kor-d-el*, pl. dim. *kor-d-on*.

The German form *Kinderchen* ‘little children’ is a classic example of a diminutive plural derivation, though there is a case for considering it a double plural (*Kind-er_{PL}-chen-0_{PL.NOM}*, gen. *Kind-er_{PL}-chen-0_{PL.GEN}*, cf. sg. *Kind-chen-0_{SG.NOM}*, gen. *Kind-chen-0_{SSG.NOM}*). Although the contrary is stated sometimes in the literature (e. g., Bauer 1983: 26), in contemporary German such diminutive plurals in *-er-chen* and *-er-lein* can be formed (without necessarily being very common) from many nouns that pluralise by *-er*, neuter as well as masculine.¹⁶ Some of these nouns have another plural form as well. One such word is *Wort* ‘word’, pl. *Worte* (mostly collective) or *Wörter* (mostly distributive), dim. *Wörterchen*.

The availability of the plurals in *-er* for subsequent morphological processes has parallels elsewhere in the languages that constitute German’s close kin, where they acquire further plural marking (cf. Middle English *child-er*, Modern English *child-r-en*, African American Vernacular English *child-r-en-s* > *chilluns*). In Dutch the old plurals of such words, reinterpreted as uninflected stems, give rise not only to new plural forms, but also to alternative diminutive plurals, used side by side with the ones obtained by pluralisation of the diminutives. In a sense what has happened here is just the opposite to what we saw in the Bulgarian diminutive plurals in *-ovce* as per fn. 4: there a part of one form of the stem has been reinterpreted as a part of a compound ending, whereas in Dutch an ending has been reinterpreted as part of an allomorph of the stem.

Many speakers perceive no semantic difference between *kindjes* and *kindertjes*; there is, however, a tendency for the former to be preferred as an individualising plural, esp. when talking of someone’s offspring, and for the latter to be interpreted as a collective form, a fact arguably related to its derivation from a plural.¹⁷ An unusually complex case is that of the noun *kleet* ‘cloth, (rarely) garment’. This word has three plural forms: *kleden* ‘cloths’, *klederen* ‘garments’ (an archaic or elevated form) and *kleren* ‘clothes’ (etymologically a syncopated version of the former, but now effectively a *plurale tantum* lexeme). The diminutive plural *kleertjes* corresponds to *kleren*; the plural diminutive *kleedjes*, to *kleden*.

A remarkable situation arises in Portuguese, where evaluatives formed by /z/-initial suffixes (diminutive *-zinh-* or *-zit-*, augmentative *-zão*) from nouns and adjectives whose stem undergoes one of several kinds of morphophonological change before plural *-s* (also /z/) have alternative plural forms in which the same changes take place before the evaluative suffix. In light of the existence of corresponding /z/-less evaluative suffixes in the language (diminutive *-inh-* and *-it-*, augmentative *-ão*) it is tempting to think that the standard orthography is misleading, and that the /z/ in *florezinhas* is neither the /z/ (written *z*) of *-zinh-* nor ‘a formative which does not realise a morpheme’ (as according to Bauer 1983: 26), but the /z/ (written *s*) of *flores*.

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that the masculine nouns involved tend to be animate (*Geist* ‘ghost’, *Gott* ‘god’, *Mann* ‘man’, *Wurm* ‘worm’). This suggests that the language sees in these forms a remedy for the conflict between animacy and the number syncretism that is characteristic of diminutives in all cases except the genitive. Another kind of remedy is explored with overt double plurals such as *Kinderchens* and *Kinderleins* (much less often formed from other nouns); a further one with *Fräulein* ‘young lady, miss’ (formally a diminutive from *Frau* ‘lady, woman’, pl. *Frauen*), which forms in the colloquial language the plural *Fräuleins*, being thus the only noun with a diminutive suffix to get the plural ending *-s* in the absence of another plural marker.

¹⁷ ‘Since the word is derived from a diminutive and has no singular, it refers to a group (e. g., a class in kindergarten)’ (Alexander Lubotsky, p.c.).

	reg.	dim.	pl. dim.	pl.	dim. pl.	
Breton	<i>bag</i>	<i>bag-ig</i>	—	<i>bag-où</i>	<i>bag-où-ig-où</i>	boat
	<i>merc'h</i>	<i>merc'h-ig</i>	—	<i>merc'h-ed</i>	<i>merc'h-ed-ig-où</i>	daughter girl
	<i>den</i>	<i>den-ig</i>	—	<i>tud</i>	<i>tud-ig-où</i>	person
Yiddish	<i>xet</i>	<i>xet-l</i>	—	<i>xatoim</i>	<i>xatoim-l-ex</i>	sin
	<i>kind</i>	<i>kind-l</i>	—	<i>kind-er</i>	<i>kind-er-l-ex</i>	child
Lamba	<i>umu-si</i>	<i>ka-mu-si</i>	—	<i>imi-si</i>	<i>tu-mi-si</i>	village
Mabiha	<i>mu-uto</i>	<i>ka-mu-uto</i>	—	<i>mi-uto</i>	<i>tu-mi-uto</i>	river
Isth. Nahuatl	<i>-pil-</i>	<i>-pil-tzīn</i>	—	<i>-pil-ohuān</i>	<i>-pil-ohuān-tzi-tzīn</i>	child
German	<i>Kind</i>	<i>Kind-chen</i>	<i>Kind-chen</i>	<i>Kind-er</i>	<i>Kind-er-chen-(s)</i>	child
Dutch	<i>kind</i>	<i>kind-je</i>	<i>kind-je-s</i>	<i>kind-er-en</i>	<i>kind-er-tje-s</i>	child
	<i>kleed</i>	<i>kleed-je</i>	<i>kleed-je-s</i>	<i>kled-en</i> <i>kled-er-en</i> <i>kler-en</i>	<i>kleer-tje-s</i>	cloth garment clothes
Portuguese	<i>flor</i>	<i>flor-zinha</i>	<i>flor-zinha-s</i>	<i>flor-es</i>	<i>flor-ez-inha-s</i>	flower
Italian	<i>bracci-o</i>	<i>bracc-in-o</i>	<i>bracc-in-i</i>	<i>bracc-i</i> <i>bracci-a</i>	<i>bracc-in-e</i>	arm
Egyptian > Coptic	<i>šm(ə)</i>	<i>šm-εə</i> <i>šimmo</i>	<i>šm-εə.w</i> <i>šimmōou</i>	<i>šm(ə).w</i>	<i>šm(ə).w-εə.w</i> <i>šimmoi</i>	stranger

In Italian¹⁸ there is a group of nouns which are masculine (and have the ending *-o*) in the singular, but can be pluralised into either gender, typically with a differentiation in the meaning: the masculine plural (ending *-i*) may have an abstract, figurative or idiomatic sense and the feminine (ending *-a* or, more rarely, *-e*) a concrete (frequently anatomical) one, or the former may be distributive and the latter collective. An example is *braccio* 1. (pl. *braccia* or occasionally *bracce*) ‘arm (of human body)’, 2. (pl. *bracci*) ‘arm (of chair), protruding part of a building etc.’. The plural form of the diminutive derivative *braccino*, namely *braccini* (m.), can have both meanings, as Merlini-Barbaresi (2004) attests. There is also a diminutive formed, in her analysis, from the feminine plural: it is *braccine*, which can be considered a double plural (once pluralised by the conversion to feminine gender and once by the regular ending *-e*).¹⁹

In Coptic some descendants of Egyptian noun-adjective compounds with *εə* ‘great’ in second position (in effect, augmentatives, though not all of them have recognisable augmentative semantics) have two different plural forms. An example is *šmmo* ‘stranger’ (from Egyptian *šm-εə* = *šēmēōə > *šēmōə), plural *šmmōou* [-o:w] or *šmmoi* [-oj]. Elanskaja (1980: 100f) argues that the Egyptian prototype of *šmmōou* is a plural form treated as a unit, whereas in the prototype of *šmmoi* both the noun and the adjective are pluralised: the former is descended from *šm-εə.w* = *šēmēōəēw > *šēmōə(ēw) and the latter from *šm.w-εə.w* = *šēmōəēw > *šēmōəj(ēw), with loss of the Egyptian plural ending *-ēw* in both cases (as always in Coptic). To this she attributes the lower frequency of most forms in *-oi* as compared to their correlates in *-ōou*: ‘the doubly marked forms are, in a manner of speaking, twice as inflecting and by

¹⁸ I am indebted to Franz Rainer for bringing the facts of this language to my attention and for providing the relevant passage from Merlini-Barbaresi (2004).

¹⁹ The plural form *braccina* (also f.), though judged incorrect, also occurs in contemporary usage.

virtue of that are more archaic'. Already in Ancient Egyptian, that is, the lexicalisation of a compound such as *šm-εə* would have made the plural form *šm-εə.w* more common and *šm.w-εə.w* less so. This example is particularly interesting in that it lets us trace the making of an evaluative along with the variation in its plural form, which is why I am taking the liberty of including it here, although it is not about diminutives.

3. Conclusions

The languages in which parallels can be found to the several unusual diminutive plural formations in Bulgarian are not very many, but neither are they trivially few. There may be only one or two such forms (as in Isthmus Nahuatl), or this may be the general rule (as in Nootka); however, in the languages that are between these extremes the lexical items involved tend to form morphologically or semantically delineated classes (Portuguese is an example of the former, Polish of the latter, and Bulgarian of both).

The opposition between the distributive interpretation of plural diminutives and the collective interpretation of diminutive plurals (cf. especially the comments to examples (1, 6, 7, 14, 17), as well as the Dutch, Polish and Yukaghir evidence), though rarely sharp, is also revealing.²⁰ It supports the idea that these enigmatic forms are indeed connotational diminutives formed from plurals, which contrast with plurals formed from primarily denotational diminutives. This ambivalent interpretation of the diminutive, a derivational category, arguably leads to the apparent conflict with Greenberg's Universal 28.

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²⁰ Remarkably, all types of diminutive plurals (missing link, tunnel effect, little plural and double plural derivations) behave alike in this respect.

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