

Old Lithuanian *plėšti*

Wojciech Smoczyński

Jagellonian University, Cracow, Poland

Abstract. Old Lithuanian *plėšti* ‘rejoice, jump in joy, dance’ may be interpreted as a back-formation from **plėšoti*, a verb borrowed from Old Polish *plęsać*.

Keywords: borrowing, back-formation, primary vs secondary verb formation

The verb *plėšti*, *plėšiu*, *plėšiau* ‘rejoice, jump in joy, dance’ is only attested in Old Lithuanian monuments (Mažvydas, Bretkūnas). *Knyga nobažnystės* has – alongside <plėšti> – a variant with the vowel *a*, <plašti>: *Tegul po jo veidu švenčiausiu upės plašti ne perstoja* 83₁₂ ‘May rivers dance joyfully in the Lord’s presence’. Documentation is provided by ALEW 795 and Palionis (2004, 348). The spelling <ęsch> occasionally alternates with <ensch>, cf. from Bretkūnas’ Bible: <plensche> ‘(she) danced’ (a gloss for <schokineio>) and <o kaip... plenschimą ischwjda> ‘and when he saw the dancing’ (a gloss for <schokineghimą>). LKŽ accentuates *plėšti*, *-iù*, *-iaũ*.

The etymology of the verb still remains controversial. Many scholars claim that the Lith. stem *plėš-* is inherited and related to Proto-Slavic **plęs-*, cf. OCS *plęsati*, *plęšŏ* ‘dance’, Ru. *pljasátb*, *-šú* ‘dance a folk dance’, Cz. *plesat*, *plesám* ‘rejoice, cry with joy; dance’, OPol. *plęsać*, *plęszę*, Pol. *plęsać*, *plęsam* ‘dance, shuffle one’s feet; rejoice, jump in joy, clap one’s hands’, see Būga (1959, 516f.), Trautmann (1923, 225) (reconstructs a Proto-Balto-Slavic present **plęšjō*), Vasmer (1955, 379), Fraenkel (1962, 619f.), Boryś (2005, 439). There are, however, certain circumstances that weaken the hypothesis that *plėšti* is of Balto-Slavic origin. First, PS. **plęsati* does not have any Indo-European counterparts, except for the alleged Lithuanian one. Go. *plinsjan* ‘dance’ with its *p-* and limited Germanic reach is better accounted for as a Slavicism, see

Vaillant 1966, 325 and ALEW 795. Second, Lith. *plęšti* is completely isolated in the Baltic family; there is no Latvian counterpart *plies- (cf. *mīezu* : Lith. *męžū*), nor any Old Prussian attestation. Third, the evidence provided by Old Lithuanian authors has no continuation in more recent times; in particular, it is not supported by Lithuanian dialectal material.¹

It should be borne in mind here that in the past at least two eminent authors rejected the Balto-Slavic origin of *plęšti* and instead considered it a borrowing from Slavic. Brückner (1927, 417) wrote s.v. *pląs, plęsy, pląsac*: «[OLith.] *plęszti* is suspicious as regards its native character». Vaillant (1966, 325) was the first to point out a Polish source of the borrowing, cf. «le lituanien *plęšti*, *pląšti* paraît être... un emprunt au polonais *pląsze-, pląsac*, ancien *pląsze-, plęsac*».

As is well-known, the oldest Slavicisms in Lithuanian are of Belorussian or Old Polish origin. Assuming that the OLith. sequence $\epsilon\check{s} < *enS$ is a faithful rendering of the Slavic nasal vowel ϵ before a fricative, it is easier to match Lith. *plęš-/ *plenš-* with the 15th-c. Old Polish form *plęsac* 1. ‘clap, hit one’s hands together’, 2. ‘jump, dance’ (*Słownik staropolski* VI, 148), than to OBr. *pljasati* (var. *plesati*) ‘dance, jump’, where the root vowel does not have a nasal resonance. As regards the difference $\check{s} : s$, it is due to generalization in the Lithuanian paradigm of the consonant - \check{s} - characteristic of the Polish present form: *pląszę, pląszesz, pląsze* (cf. OBr. *pljašu*, OCS *plęšō*). The Lithuanian form is thus a kind of hybrid: its vocalism is that of the OPol. infinitive *plęs-*, Pol. *pląs-*, whereas its consonantism goes back to the Pol. present *pląsz-*.

There is, however, a certain detail that makes it difficult for a student of Lithuanian ultimately to accept the status of *plęšti, pląšti* as a borrowing. It is the primary form of the verb under study.² Specifically, verbs borrowed from Slavic are not usually disyllabic but trisyllabic, with the suffixes *-yti* or *-oti* corresponding to Sl. *-iti, -ati*, cf. e.g. *slūžyti* ‘serve’ (not *slūžti), *pléntoti* ‘tangle, e.g. a thread’ (not *plęsti). In Lithuanian transposition, OPol. *plęsac*, Pol. *pląsac* should have assumed the forms *plenšoti, *planšoti. That this is not the case might be due to the original transpositional forms *plenšoti, *planšoti

1 I ignore here the Žemaitian verb *plenszti* ‘talk a lot, complain, backbite’ (Būga (1959, 517), from *Lituanica* by Kossarzewski); its origin still remains undetermined.

2 I owe this observation to Jurgis Pakerys (Vilnius).

having been modified in Lithuanian; more precisely, they would have undergone back-derivation to *plęšti, pląšti*. There does not seem to be an exact parallel for this alleged process in the class in *-oti*. On the other hand, one might point out two fairly certain quasiprimary formations in the class in *-yti*, cf. *tróti* \Leftarrow *trōtyti* ‘lose’ (from Br. *trácicъ*) and *túžti* [*jtúžti* ‘become angry’] \Leftarrow *tūžyti* ‘worry, be sad’ (from OBr. *tužiti*, Br. *tužycъ*).³

Finally, one has to mention a synonymous word *tañcius, tañčius* ‘dance’, which is also a Slavicism in Old Lithuanian (i.a. in the texts of Daukša and Bretkūnas), and comes from OBr. *tanecъ, -nca*, Br. *tánec, -nca* (\Leftarrow Pol. *taniec, -ńca*).

The current explanation updates the entry *plęšti* included in LED 989, a work – let me add – to which Professor Axel Holvoet selflessly devoted his precious time and creative effort as an editor.

Abbreviations

Br.	Belarusian
Cz.	Czech
Go.	Gothic
OBr.	Old Belarusian
OCS	Old Church Slavic
OLith.	Old Lithuanian
OPol.	Old Polish
Pol.	Polish
PSl.	Proto-Slavic
Ru.	Russian
Sl.	Slavic

3 N.B. The OLith. Slavicism *dboti* (Chyliński) ‘be careful about, care about, be wary of’, which is exceptional owing to its disyllabic structure, becomes trisyllabic as *dabóti* and *atbóti*; these forms place the borrowing in the verbal class in *-oti*. Superficially, this may appear as if the transposition were a phonetic change with the aim of resolving a foreign word-initial cluster (anaptyxis: *db-* > *dab-?* prothesis *db-* \Rightarrow *adb-?*). However, this is in fact a morphological adaptation, whereby a disyllabic verb is fitted with a prefix *da-* or *at-*. This leads to the development of a neosimplex *bóti, -ju. -jau* ‘take note of, be careful about, care about’.

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Submitted: 6 January 2021