

THE SEMANTIC VALUE OF THE LEXEMES *LIČITI SE* AND *POSOBITI* IN THE LANGUAGE OF PETAR I PETROVIĆ

Branislav Ostojić

1. Introduction

The lexeme *ličiti se* and its derivatives have interested not only lexicographers but also linguists working in other fields, and has been singled out for both direct and indirect attention in separate articles of varying length by Yugoslav linguists.¹ The lexeme *posobiti* and its derivatives have also been a subject of interest to Yugoslav linguists, both in dictionaries and in separate studies.² Linguists differ with respect to their analysis of the latter lexeme, but broadly fall into two groups: some find it difficult to determine its origin and meaning; others see in it a compound of *po* + *sobiti* and assign it an appropriate meaning. All tend to see its origin as foreign to Serbo-Croatian. Nobody has apparently written about the occurrence of these lexemes and their meanings in the works of Petar I Petrović.

Individual opinions and approaches are not discussed here. Rather, having recorded what Serbo-Croatian dictionaries have to say about the semantic value of this lexeme, we give concrete explanations of its use in the literature, and explain both its use by writers from Montenegro and its fate in the contemporary standard language. Certain theoretical linguistic questions will of course arise, and these will be examined; in particular, the fate of the two lexemes is considered as a single problem, given their semantic interrelationship. The etymology of the lexeme is mentioned only in passing.²

Three examples of the use of these two lexemes in the writings of Petar I Petrović are as follows:

“Suviše i to neka znate, da sam ja pisa gospodi d’eneralima od obadva imperatorska dvora, kako smo učinili i kako se jesam *otličio* od svakoga posla i djela grofa Vujića.”

“. . . da se ja od grafa Dimitrija Vujića od njegova svakoga maloga i velikoga djela pred Bogom i pred cijelim svijetom *otličih* u vijek, tako se ličim i odričem od svakog Crnogorca . . .”

“. . . da mu dopusti povratak u zemlju koju turci bjehu *posobili* . . .”²

2. Dictionary evidence.

There are differences among the available dictionary definitions: these differences are often slight, but we should note that the sources adduced are sometimes incomplete.

The Yugoslav Academy *Rječnik hrvatskog ili srpskog jezika* defines *ličiti se* as “odricati se, prohoditi se,” i.e., ‘to renounce.’ It also states that the origin of the word is unknown, but quotes the Vuk Karadžić dictionary to the effect that it is the reflexive of *ličiti* and is therefore related semantically to *stidjeti se* ‘to be ashamed,’ involving a possible derivation from *lice* ‘face’ and the physical connection of embarrassment with blushing. It was first used in Serbo-Croatian in the 15th century. The same Academy Dictionary defines *posobiti* as “posvojiti, prisvojiti, osvojiti,” i.e., ‘to adopt, usurp, conquer.’ The root is also recorded in Czech; and the verb also appears in the Vuk Karadžić dictionary, where the reader is referred to “pokoriti, uzeti, primiti” (‘subjugate, take, receive’). The Academy Dictionary

gives examples of both verbs from literary works, ordinary written documents and the vernacular; the examples are from Montenegrin territory.

The Serbian Academy *Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog i narodnog jezika* is still in progress and has not yet reached *posobiti*. The lexeme *ličiti (se)* is categorized as ‘archaic and regional,’ and is defined as follows: *ličiti* “deliti, izdvajati” (‘divide, separate’); *ličiti se* (a) “prekidati vezu, ogradjivati se, odvajati se” (‘break off relations, dissociate oneself, separate oneself’); (b) “izdvajati se, iskazivati svoje neslaganje, odricati svoju pripadnost nečemu” (‘stand out, express one’s disagreement, renounce one’s affiliation’). All the examples (except one) for this verb are taken from the works of Vuk Karadžić and Montenegrin writers, including one example from Petar I Petrović.

The Dictionary of the Serbo-Croatian Literary Language published by the Matica srpska and the Matica hrvatska defines *ličiti se* as “odricati se” and *posobiti* as “pokoriti, osvojiti, posvojiti;” both are categorized as ‘regional’. For both, examples are taken from the work of S.M. Ljubiša.

First, we note that the dictionary definitions are close, but are not identical. Although all give “odricati se” for *ličiti se*, and “osvojiti” and “prisvojiti” for *posobiti*, additional meanings are supplied: “čuvati se” and “pokoriti” in the Yugoslav Academy Dictionary, “iskazati svoje neslaganje” and “odricati svoju pripadnost nečemu” in the Serbian Academy Dictionary. Yet, if one considers the examples given, one is struck by the fact that most of their written sources, and all of their vernacular sources, are from Montenegro. The Yugoslav Academy Dictionary does cite written examples from elsewhere on Serbo-Croatian speaking territory.

We note also that the Matica srpska/Matica hrvatska Dictionary and the Serbian Academy Dictionary categorize *ličiti se* as ‘archaic’ and ‘regional’, and the first-named puts *posobiti* in these categories too.

3. Other Evidence

The definition of *ličiti se* given by all the dictionaries—“odricati se”—is difficult to reconcile with the phrase in the second quotation above from Petar I Petrović: “. . . otljih se u vijek, tako se ličim i odričem . . .,” where the last two verbs can in no way be read as synonymous. Nor are these verbs synonymous in the Montenegrin vernacular, e.g., in the speech of Žabljak and the surrounding area, which is my own native region: here, the lexeme *ličiti se* is extremely rare, and is used mostly by older speakers, in instances when someone wants to disown something or somebody and at the same time express disgust (“gnuša se”). The same non-synonymy may be assumed for the example from Petar I Petrović.

The meanings of *posobiti* in the works of Petar I Petrović do not coincide with the dictionary definitions, either. Like all others, this lexeme has undergone changes in meaning: in the language of Petar I Petrović, and viewed in the historical and textual contexts, it meant “pokoriti i u potpunosti držati” (‘to treat as one’s own property’).

We may assume the same kind of semantic differentiation in S.M. Ljubiša and Vuk Vrčević, given the fact that the literary examples in the dictionaries are almost exclusively from the works of these two writers. We can not however associate the use of these lexemes exclusively with Montenegrin-speaking territory and the written language there; for similar conclusions apply to *ličiti se* in the language of the folk songs and folk tales collected by Vuk Karadžić, and in the language of writers from the Dalmatian coastal and Dinaric regions, where the national epic was preserved longer;⁵ and similar conclusions apply to *posobiti* in the folk tales collected by Vuk Karadžić.

4. Conclusion

We finish with some speculations, as follows. Both lexemes *ličiti se* and *posobiti* had a wide range of original meanings, including (respectively) the meanings of *odricati se* and *izdvajati* on the one hand, and *osvojiti*, *posvojiti* and *pokoriti* on the other. Among the speakers of the language, therefore, incomplete synonyms developed, with competition between the members of the synonymic sets. It was natural that lexemes with a wide range of meanings should prevail, although it would have been more expedient for the language if the earlier ranges of meanings had been maintained.

The linguists who attribute a non-Serbo-Croatian origin to the lexeme *posobiti* presumably base this conclusion on the fact that the root-verb *sobiti* has not been observed in Serbo-Croatian, but has been noted in, e.g., Czech and Russian. The identity of the Russian form *posobit'* can not be taken as grounds for assigning the verb a Russian origin; I suggest that this is erroneous, and that the verb is an inherited, autochthonous item.

Nikšić University

REFERENCES

1. Thus, by dialectologists, e.g. J. Ribarić, "Razmještaj južnoslavenskih dijalekata na poluotoku Istri," in *SDZb* 9: 172; and by linguists interested in theoretical and methodological assumptions about the Serbo-Croatian literary language and the process of its standardization, e.g., A. Belić, in "Srpskohrvatski književni jezik," *Naš jezik* OS 1: 86; while Danilo Vušović has studied some of its derivatives in *Naš jezik* OS 2: 95.
2. See e.g. Dj. Grubor, "Značenje riječi 'posoba'," *Južnoslovenski filolog* 13: 187-90.
3. The origins of the morpheme have received sufficient attention in Petar Skok, *Etimologijski rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika* II: 300, and Max Vasmer, *Russisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*.
4. The first two quotations are from *Letters to the Montenegrins of the Highlands and the Coast*, ed. D. Vuksan, 38; the third is from *A Short History of Montenegro*, Grlica 1835, 63.
5. Cf. examples in the *Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog i narodnog jezika* (Yugoslav Academy of Sciences).

POVZETEK

POMENSKA VREDNOST LEKSEMOV LIČITI SE IN POSOBITI V JEZIKU PETRA I PETROVIĆA

Avtor obravnava pomen dveh glagolov, omenjenih v naslovu, predvsem z vidika standardnih definicij v srbohrvaških slovarjih, narečij okoliša Žabljaka v Črni gori, in z vidika del Petra I Petrovića.

