

perhaps the less sophisticated user, who is not aware of which words are loans.

Therefore, the dictionary can be recommended to those who would like a compact, one-volume source of Slovene etymologies, which is clearly up-to-date in terms of recent vocabulary and loan words. The scholar who is seeking a comprehensive treatment of Slovene etymologies can use this volume as a first start, before moving on to more specialized works.

Ronald Feldstein, Indiana University

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bezljaj, France. *Etimološki slovar slovenskega jezika. I. A-J. II. K-O.* Ljubljana: SAZU, Inštitut za slovenski jezik, 1977, 1982.

Bezljaj, France, Marko Snoj, and Metka Furlan. *Etimološki slovar slovenskega jezika. III. P-S.* Ljubljana: SAZU, Inštitut za slovenski jezik, 1995.

Bernard Nežmah. *Kletvice in psovke.* Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1997. 183 pp., 2990 SIT (= \$17.75) (paper).

This is an entertaining but rather disappointing book; a demonstration of considerable erudition, yet haphazardly put together. The author, a well-known journalist, was trained in several disciplines, including sociology, literature, linguistics, and classical philology, and these several backgrounds are apparent in the book, a reworking of his doctoral dissertation. The study of verbal abuse is a subject that is awkward to treat scientifically for two reasons: first, it is difficult to describe one of its very typical components, namely, obscenities, in non-dysphemistic tones and terms; and, second, the subject requires a good knowledge of several disparate disciplines. It is difficult to fault Nežmah on the first count: the book is easy to read, but does not descend to gratuitous ribaldry. On the second count, he succeeds in general, but there are omissions of information that would complete the picture; although he wrote the book for both the "humanistični izobraženec"

and the “navadni radovednež” (6), I suspect, and argue below, that he could have at least included more technical linguistic information.

Moreover, there is one unfortunate terminological lacuna: the fact that Nežmah uses the words *psovka*, *kletvica*, and *žaljivka* and does not try to define them or strictly distinguish among them until halfway through the book. Attention to terminology right at the beginning would have simplified the exposition. For this review, I will use terms as follows: *verbal abuse* as a generic term, *obscenities* for lexical items denoting body parts and bodily functions that are generally considered indecent, and *curses* for expressions in which harm is wished upon an interlocutor or third party. It may be noted that verbal abuse includes expressions that are neither obscenities nor curses, for example, *Idiot!*, and that curses may or may not involve obscenities. In chapter X, Nežmah defines the difference between *psovka* and *kletvica* in syntactic/semantic terms: the former for expressions equating someone or something with a term of abuse (*Hudič!*), the latter as I have defined *curse* (*Hudič te vzemi!*).

After a brief preface, there are fifteen chapters, ranging in length from two to forty pages, a six-page “English summary,” an index of the lexica comprising verbal abuse occurring in the book, and a useful and informed bibliography. (Strangely, the English summary, entitled “Swearing and cursing,” 157–63, summarizes only four of the fifteen Slovene chapters, namely III, IX, X, and XII.) This reviewer is not competent in all the disciplinary areas concerned, and this review will therefore not do equal justice to all the book’s chapters; it will not discuss, for example, II (“Uvod,” 7–19), a solid (although not always consistent) introduction to the subject from the point of view of speech act theory, IX (“Preklinjanje v času vojn,” 77–79), a very cursory sketch reprinted from the journal *Maledicta*, and XIV (“Izvor moči—Sumerska civilizacija,” 141–43) and XV (“Wrongdoer,” 145–51), in which the author uses, respectively, a cuneiform inscription and then the Martin Krpan story to exemplify his arguments. Similarly brief is chapter XIII (“Moške vs. ženske kletvice/psovke,” 137–39). These chapters illustrate both the breadth of Nežmah’s approach and also his volatility—the last-named, particularly, presents but a passing glance into a very complex subject that requires closer scrutiny.

Chapter III (21–46) discusses the suggestion that Sln¹ does not have its own—so to speak, autochthonous—*kletvice*, a suggestion made by the late Anton Trstenjak: “Slovenci imamo prav svojo kletvico le v ‘prekletem hudiču’. Vse druge ‘močne izraze’ smo vselej uvažali od sosedov.”² (Another example of the presumption of Serbian guilt for the origin of Sln obscenities is quoted by Nežmah in a footnote [much later, on p. 94], an editorial comment in the journal *Ognjišče* from 1990.) It should be noted that Trstenjak and Nežmah are actually talking, in the main, about obscenities rather than curses (using the definitions provided above). Linguists will expect scholarly arguments about the origins and history of words to be carried out by etymologists and diachronists on the basis of empirical data; but neither was Trstenjak, nor apparently is Nežmah, trained in diachronic linguistics. Trstenjak’s book was not available for this review; in defence of its author, I should point out that his should not be viewed as anything more than a hypothesis, given that it is surely impossible to prove the previous non-existence of a given group of words. Nevertheless, the hypothesis is a strange one: if this lack of native obscenities is true of Sln, it would make it a very unusual language indeed, at least in Europe, where it appears typologically normal for a language to have its own characteristic lexicon of this kind.³

It is however clear that Nežmah, too, lacks the training to investigate linguistic history; if he had had that training, he would have better interpreted the evidence from that obvious investigatory tool, etymology. After all, if there is any evidence that three of the “basic” Sln obscene words with Slc cognates do *not* derive according to normal diachronic developments from PSI **jebati*, **kurьcbь* and **pizda*, this will support Trstenjak’s hypothesis; and—given sufficient sound-changes that are specifically Sln—evidence to the contrary will disprove it.

¹ Abbreviations: FSC = Former Serbo-Croatian; PSI = Proto-Slavic; Slc = Slavic; Sln = Slovene.

² Quoted by Nežmah (21); Trstenjak lists Austrian German, Italian, and FSC as the sources of Sln obscenities, during what may be called the Imperial, the post-Imperial, and the Yugoslav periods of Slovene history, respectively.

³ For a demonstration of this fact with respect to twenty-one languages of Europe, see Burgen. Indeed, I suggest that this degree of lexical purity (or, perhaps, lexical weakness, given that obscenities are “močni izrazi”?) would make Sln unique.

Regrettably, the evidence appears to be insufficient. Two of the words (the second and the third listed) are of a phonetic form that could have derived normally within Sln;⁴ but they could equally well have fallen out of use and then (following the Trstenjak theory) been reborrowed—a possibility implicitly discounted by Nežmah when he asserts (23) that “Ta splošnoslovenska pojavitev *pizde* učinkovito pobije trditve o njeni neslovenskosti in domnevnem prevzemu iz srbskega besednjaka.” For the first-listed word, Nežmah cites Bezljaj (1977: 223) as recognizing its Sloveneness; but not only did Bezljaj reproduce the word with the incorrect vowel (/e/ instead of the occurrent /ɛ/), but he also omitted some vital information, as follows. The phonetic shape of this word does, indeed,⁵ appear to be non-Sln, inasmuch as (i) it does not bear the stress on the /a/ but rather (like FSC) on the first syllable; and/or (ii) if derived according to Stang’s Law with stress-retraction, given an original verbal suffix */-aje/, it would have /e/ rather than /ɛ/ as its first vowel—and not only does it have /ɛ/ in Contemporary Sln, but it had this vowel a century ago, see Pleteršnik (*I* 361). The phonetic form of the vowel suggests that the word was indeed a probable borrowing from FSC. On the other hand, there are forms which point to the autochthonous Sln existence of this etymon, such as the Obirsko Carinthian dialect fem. pl. form listed by Karničar: /tlè wtróc spí:j tlè s pa nà:jnɛ jɛbà:lɛ/ “Here the children sleep and here’s our [du.] bedroom” (160). All in all, the evidence seems to suggest that the original PSI word was lost in Sln, except in some limited localities, and its function was taken over by **fukati*, a word that both Bezljaj (1977: 133) and Snoj (133) convincingly argue to be of “onomatopoetic,” that is, delocutive, origin (cf. the list of 37 verbs derived from interjections, including the delocutive *hmkati* with the requisite *-ka-* suffix, in Toporišič 160). The autochthonous existence of the latter (“f”) verb argues strongly against Trstenjak’s hypothesis; and in any case, of the three above-cited “basic” words, apparently only one, the “j” verb, may

⁴ See, respectively, Bezljaj 1982:122 and Snoj 285; and Bezljaj, Snoj, and Furlan 44-45, Snoj 447.

⁵ Marko Snoj, personal communication. Dr. Snoj suggests that the /e/ in the form cited by Bezljaj is simply a misprint; given Bezljaj’s other error, perhaps he is too generous. He also points out that the occurrent present tense has a circumflex accent on the /e/, which, in his words, is “velika redkost in ... dodatni lingvistični znak za domnevanje izposoje.” I am greatly indebted to Dr. Snoj for this information.

be said to have probably been borrowed; the forms of the two "basic" nouns are such that borrowing from FSC can be neither demonstrated nor disproved. Although far from conclusive, all of this evidence should have been collected and cited by Nežmah, whose concluding remark to his survey of the etymological evidence is, therefore, misleading: "Bezljaj v etimološkem slovarju pokaže, kako so glavne psovalne oz. kletvene besede pristno slovenske in ne isposojenke iz sosednjih jezikov" (24).

One other etymological clue is mentioned (8, footnote 3) but not given the attention that it probably deserves: the fact that the normal word for obscenity, *psovka*, which is well-known elsewhere in Slc (see Bezljaj, Snoj, and Furlan 133), is so common in Sln that Pleteršnik gives fifteen derivatives with the same stem; and compare the use by Dalmatin of *psuje*. Nežmah writes, "lahko sklepamo, da je moral biti med starimi Slovenci udomačena psovka: *pes!*" As pointed out elsewhere by this reviewer, the (euphemistic) use of words for household and farmyard animals and birds to refer to human body parts is widespread in Europe and well-known in Sln (Priestly 116, citing *cucek*, *cuca*, *cuk*, and other forms). The possibility of an originally euphemistic function for the word for "dog" is surely relevant to the history of obscenities in Sln, and deserves more than a footnote. The same usage is also referred to in Chapter IV ("Preklinjanje v spisih protestantov)," where Krelj refers to *pes* and *psica* as derogatory terms (52); there is, however, no cross-reference to page 8.

Another linguistic piece to the puzzle is not discussed by Nežmah, namely, the potential function of obscene words as PRO-nouns and as PRO-verbs; in other words, the way in which speakers of a language can substitute obscene nouns for non-obscene nouns, and obscene verbs for non-obscene verbs. This function can be potentially indiscriminate; compare for Russian the rewritten version of a complete narrative paragraph in Dreizin and Priestly (247), in which every single noun and verb is replaced with an obscene word, with no loss of communicative function. A recent discussion between this reviewer and a native speaker elicited the opinion that the same can be said for Sln, given the appropriate context. I suggest, given the restricted scope of this phenomenon in English, that the extent to which these PRO-nouns and -verbs may function varies from language to language; and, if indeed Sln enjoys the same potential as Russian in this respect, that this

fact may be a further demonstration of the “autochthonous” existence of obscene words in Sln—for, if they had been borrowed, and especially if this borrowing were recent, it could be argued that they would not have developed this richness of function.⁶ Several examples of this kind of function are cited by Nežmah, but its (non)-systematicity is not discussed.

Most of the remainder of chapter III (24–39) is a thorough demonstration of the way in which Sln obscenities (and, occasionally, curses) were glossed in various dictionaries of the language. The catalog runs in chronological reverse—from Breznik and Ramovš’s dictionary of 1938 to Megiser’s of 1603—and mentions four lexica from the twentieth century, six from the nineteenth, three from the eighteenth, and three from the seventeenth. Nežmah convincingly demonstrates the frequent correlation of the omission of obscenities from dictionaries with prevailing prudishness and/or the philosophical leanings of the publishers. He then explains—again, quite satisfactorily—that, although the earliest gloss for the “j” verb is in Pohlin 1781, this fact does not demonstrate that the verb was a borrowing. First, there are several records of surnames with the same root (and other obscene roots) from the late fifteenth century (40–44) and, second, the public use of “bad language” was forbidden (e.g., in the *Vinodolski zakon* of 1288) and there are recorded cases of official punishment as evidence of this fact, for example, from 1546 (44–46). All in all, then, the chapter achieves its aim, namely a refutation of Trstenjak’s hypothesis, but without presenting the full range of evidence. In most instances, Nežmah restricts his survey to obscenities; for dictionaries by Pohlin, Hipolit, and Alasia di Sommaripo, however, he also reports their listing of curses. In the next chapter he lists references to bad language by the Protestant writers of the 16th century and these are—as, surely, was to be expected—all instances of curses rather than of obscenities (except perhaps *pes*, *psica*, see above). The point of this chapter is not however primarily lexical; rather, the author is now turning his attention to the semantic function of “bad language,” and therefore broadens his scope to include all kinds of derogatory remarks. So, in the next brief chapter (V, “Preklinjanje pri Janezu

⁶ It is also possible, however, that the PRO-function is inherent in this kind of vocabulary, and its scope depends on grammatical structure; in which case, this argument no longer applies.

Svetokriškem,” 55–58), he only has expressions like the relatively mild *leni tat, norec, glava peklena* to discuss; but they serve his purpose, which is to demonstrate the aggressive (and not simply blasphemous) function of this layer of the lexicon. This then leads into VI (“Preklinjati, ne da bi preklinjali,” 59–65), in which the aggressive function of euphemisms (substitutes for obscenities and curses) is treated.⁷

This is followed by an interlude. In the two-page chapter VII Nežmah explains the part-of-speech classification of interjections; and in chapter VIII he (i) demonstrates the grammatical irregularity of, specifically, obscene words, then as a non-sequitur (ii) relates a rather ill-fated campaign in *Nedeljski Dnevnik* of February–March 1993 to collect items of homegrown Slovene abuse to replace the alleged borrowings from the South (*južnaške kletvice*). The first part of this chapter would have benefited from the inclusion of a page from chapter XII, namely 121–22, where the apparent non-Slovene form of *oča* (as it occurs, rather than *očeta*, in a well-known obscene curse) is discussed.

Chapters XI–XII (89–135) are, I suggest, the best-researched and most informative part of the book: an analysis of the semantics of curses (especially, obscene curses), which begins with their superficial, literal meanings and explains their underlying cultural and psychological import. Several sub-classes of curses are examined in detail to show the extent to which they embody expressions of a power relationship between the speaker and the addressee.⁸ Nežmah thus satisfactorily fulfills an undertaking made at the beginning of the book: “V naši razpravi bomo predstavili niz možnih razmerij med govorečimi,

⁷ One error may be pointed out: the translation of a sentence by Ducrot (59, footnote 161) renders “situeés sur une même échelle de signification” as *stojita na isti stopnici pomena*, and then “il occupe un degré supérieure de cette échelle” as *ena stoji na višji stopnici tej lestvici*; this is followed by some critical remarks that could not have been made if *échelle* had been translated as *lestvica* in the first phrase.

⁸ Here, the parallel with the use of *ti* and *vi*—the “pronouns of power and solidarity,” as sociolinguists now call them—comes to mind; the function of the solidary relationship between speaker and hearer should also be explored in the context of verbal abuse, compare for example the twofold function of English *bastard*, which, in some countries at least, may be used as verbal abuse and also as an expression of solidarity.

ki izhajajo iz uporabe posameznih tipov kletvic. Skratka, pokazali bomo, zakaj se govorec odloči za konkreten kletveni obrazec in kakšne posledice na odnos med govorcami ima zamenjava enega kletvenega obrazca z drugim" (7). Along the way, he proves himself generally discursive, sometimes superficial and underinformed, and occasionally even slipshod; but, at the same time, entertaining and informative.

Tom Priestly, University of Alberta

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bezljaj, France. *Etimološki slovar slovenskega jezika. I. A–J. II. K–O.* Ljubljana: SAZU, Inštitut za slovenski jezik, 1977, 1982.
- Bezljaj, France, Marko Snoj, and Metka Furlan. *Etimološki slovar slovenskega jezika. III. P–S.* Ljubljana: SAZU, Inštitut za slovenski jezik, 1995.
- Burgen, Stephen. *Your Mother's Tongue: A Book of European Invective.* London: Gollancz, 1996.
- Dreizin, Felix and Tom Priestly. "A systematic approach to Russian obscene language," *Russian Linguistics* 6 (1982): 233–49.
- Karničar, Ludwig. *Der Obir-Dialekt in Kärnten. Die Mundart von Ebriach/Obirsko.* Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990.
- Pleteršnik, Maks. *Slovensko-nemški slovar I–II.* Ljubljana: Knezoškofijstvo, 1894.
- Priestly, Tom. "On the etymology of the ethnic slur *Tschusch*," *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 4.1 (1996): 109–32.
- Snoj, Marko. *Slovenski etimološki slovar.* Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1997.
- Toporišič, Jože. *Slovenska slovnica.* Maribor: Obzorja, 1984.