Old Lithuanian \textit{plęšti}

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\textbf{Abstract.} Old Lithuanian \textit{plęšti} ‘rejoice, jump in joy, dance’ may be interpreted as a back-formation from *\textit{plenšoti}, a verb borrowed from Old Polish \textit{plęsać}.

\textbf{Keywords:} borrowing, back-formation, primary vs secondary verb formation

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

The etymology of the verb still remains controversial. Many scholars claim that the Lith. stem \textit{plęš}- is inherited and related to Proto-Slavic *\textit{plenš}-, cf. OCS \textit{plęsati}, \textit{plęšo} ‘dance’, Ru. \textit{pljasáto}, -\textit{šú} ‘dance a folk dance’, Cz. \textit{plesat}, \textit{plesám} ‘rejoice, cry with joy; dance’, OPol. \textit{plęsač}, \textit{plászę}, Pol. \textit{pląsać}, \textit{pląsam} ‘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 *\textit{plenšjō}), Vasmer (1955, 379), Fraenkel (1962, 619f.), Boryś (2005, 439). There are, however, certain circumstances that weaken the hypothesis that \textit{plęšti} is of Balto-Slavic origin. First, PSl. *\textit{plenšati} does not have any Indo-European counterparts, except for the alleged Lithuanian one. Go. \textit{plinsjan} ‘dance’ with its \textit{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. *miez* : Lith. *mež*), 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, plęs, pląsać* : «[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*, *plęsti* paraît être... un emprunt au polonais *pląsz-, pląsać*, ancien *pląsz-, plęsać*».

As is well-known, the oldest Slavicisms in Lithuanian are of Belorussian or Old Polish origin. Assuming that the OLith. sequence *ęS* < *enS* is a faithful rendering of the Slavic nasal vowel *ę* before a fricative, it is easier to match Lith. *plęš-*/*plenš-* with the 15th-c. Old Polish form *plęsać* 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 *š* : *s*, it is due to generalization in the Lithuanian paradigm of the consonant -š- characteristic of the Polish present form: *pląszę, pląszesz, pląszę* (cf. OBr. *pljašu*, OCS *plęšǫ*). The Lithuanian form is thus a kind of hybrid: its vocalism is that of the OPol. infinitive *plęš-, 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. *slůžyti* ‘serve’ (not *slůžiti*), *plęntoti* ‘tangle, e.g. a thread’ (not *plęsti*). In Lithuanian transposition, OPol. *plęsać*, Pol. *pląsać* should have assumed the forms *plenšoti, planšoti*. That this is not the case might be due to the original transpositional forms *plenšoti, planšoti*

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\(^1\) I ignore here the Žemaitian verb *plenštzi* ‘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 under-
gone back-derivation to plęsti, pląsti. There does not seem to be an exact paral-
lel 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
⇐ trótyti ‘lose’ (from Br. trácicь) and tūžti [jtūžti ‘become angry’] ⇐ tūžyti
‘worry, be sad’ (from OBr. tužiti, Br. tužýcь).

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. tanecь, -nca, Br. tâneč, -nca (⇐ Pol. taniec,
-ńca).

The current explanation updates the entry plęsti 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**

| Abbreviation | Language       |
|--------------|----------------|
| 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 dabótí and atbótí; 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- ⇒ 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 de-
velopment of a neosimplex bóti, -ju, -jau ‘take note of, be careful about, care about’.
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