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THE WORDS FOR "THUMB" IN BALTIC

The most common variant of the word "thumb" in Literary Latvian is *īkšķis* [cf. Latv. lit.val.vārd., 447; Zemzare, 1972, 63]. This form, however, is analogical for the well attested *īkstis* whose gen. sg. *īkšķa* < **īkstjā* [cf. Zubatý, 1894, 137; Leskien, 1902–1903, 174; Endzelin, 1905, 188; 1922, 262] gave rise to the nominative form *īkšķis*. Dialectally the consonant cluster was often simplified yielding *īkšis*, *īškis* [Mühlenbach, 1923, 835], *īksis*, *iksis* and even *īkis*, *ikucis* or further suffixed: *īksnis*, *ikstenis*, *īksteris* [cf. Zemzare, 1972, 63; Топопов, 1980, 52]. A variant of *īkstis* is *iksts* and Scheftelowicz [1929, 187] citing Bezenberger mentions a form *ēksts* which is only a dialectal variation of *īksts*, *iksts* (gen. sg. -s). On the other hand, *nišķis* attested in dialects bordering on Žemaitic territory probably has borrowed its nasal from Lith. (Žem.) *nýkštis* (*ninkštis*) [cf. Zemzare, 1972, 63].

Old Prussian *instixs* [EVoc., 114] has a *k*-suffix which is neither metathetized from word-internal position nor a misspelling, but according to Eckert [1974, 231–232] simply a *k*-suffix reflecting a common method of Prussian word formation: many old *i*-stems were in Prussian extended by a *k*-suffix. That the word for "thumb" in Baltic originally was an *i*-stem is borne out by the fact that Latv. (dial.) *iksts* (gen. sg. -s) is an *i*-stem and that an *i*-stem is also attested by Žemaitic Lith. *ninkštis* (gen. sg. -ies) [cf. also Schmalstieg, 1976, 186]. Old Prussian and Latvian thus seem to indicate a Common Baltic **in(k)sti-* or **in(k)šti-* (masc. or fem.) which in Old Prussian was extended by a *k*-suffix, but thematized in most dialects of Latvian.

This preform appears to be confirmed by the existence of the word *inkštys* in Old Lithuanian. There are, however, reasons for doubting the authenticity of this word. It is attested only three times — always in the texts of Bretkūnas. Bretkūnas, whose father was German and mother Prussian and whose first language was German, himself confesses that his command of Lithuanian and Prussian was not the very best („cum Lituanicam et Pruthenicam linguam mediocriter teneam“ [cf. Forstreuter, 1930, 132]). He worked for a long period of time as priest in the parapy of Labguva (Labiau), a largely bilingual (trilingual) Prussian and Lithuanian (and German) speaking community [cf. Liet. encikl., 245], so that one should

not be surprised at finding an occasional Prussianism in his Lithuanian texts. Žu-lyš [1966, 151–161] points out a few such cases and Specht in 1933 [p. 104–106] expresses some doubt concerning our word *inkštys* („Oder hat sich Bretke etwa hier versehentlich eines apr. Wortes bedient?“, p. 106). The fact that once [Br. II Mos., 29, 20] a marginal gloss *Nik fchczio* has been added as an explanation of *Ink fchczio* [cf. Bezenberger, 1877, 287; Specht, 1933, 106] also indicates that *inkštys* may not have been commonly understood by Lithuanian speakers. Thus, all things considered, this word is perhaps best classified as a Prussianism.

The common Lithuanian word for “thumb”, also attested in old texts, is *nykštys* (3. accent. class) with the dialectal variant *ninkštys*. Another variant is *nykštis* (1. accent. class) corresponding to *ninkštis* [cf. Būga, 1961, 866; Daukantas, 1845, 181; Geitler, 1875, 97–98] and an *è*-stem variant is *nykštė* (Alsėdžiai) corresponding to *ninkštė* (Kartena). An *i*-stem *nykštis -ies* (masc.) is recorded in Ru-hig’s [1747] lexicon and a fem. *i*-stem *nykštis -ies* is found in the dictionary of Juš-kevičius [ЮШКЕВИЧ, 1897–1922] and in that of Mielcke [1800], cf. also Pran-ciskus, 1864, 98 and Leskien, 1891, 541. These forms correspond to contempora-ry dialectal (Salantai) Lithuanian *ninkštis -ies* (masc., fem.). Diminutive forms denoting either “thumb” or “small person (esp. in fairy tales)” are the following: *nykštėlė, nykštėlis, nykštinė, nykštinis* (subst. and adj.), *ninkštinis, nykštukas, nykš-tūkinis*.

The Lithuanian forms derive in the first instance from **ninkšti-* (thematized **ninkšt(i)ja-*) which is tantalizingly similar to the preform reconstructed for Lat-vian and Old Prussian, i. e. **in(k)šti-*. In order to explain the difference between these forms secondary analogical development has been assumed in the case of the variant represented by Lith. *nykštys* etc. [cf. Топоров, 1980, 52], whereas **in(k)šti-* has been considered the original Baltic form. Thus Fraenkel [1956, 158; 1962, 503] takes the initial *n-* of **ninkšti-* to be an anticipation of the internal one under the influence of the verb *nykti* “to disappear, become feeble”. The intonation-al difference between *nykštis* and *nykti* may not constitute a serious argument against Fraenkel’s anticipation hypothesis. The fact, however, that his hypothesis does not bring the forms in question any nearer to an etymological explanation rather diminishes its value. Therefore, it would be better if one could do without it. I hope to be able to show in this paper that these Baltic words can be explained without any such assumption.

Fraenkel’s etymological proposal [1962, 108, 503] based on Johansson [1892, 20 ff.], Mühlenbach [1923, 835] and especially Specht [1933, 101, 106] is not at all convincing. He maintains that the underlying I.-E. root here is **eid-* : **id-* “to swell” (cf. OHG *thūmo* “thumb” : Lat. *tumēre* “to swell”) and that **inkšti-* acquired its nasal through the influence of **intiā*, **entiā* “entrails” represented

by Lith. *įščios*, Latv. *iekšas* “entrails”, OPr. *instran* “fat” [EVoc., 133], whose -s- is the result of contamination with the Baltic word for “kidney” : Lith. *inkstas*, Latv. *īkstis*, OPr. *inxcze*. Fraenkel thus presumably (he does not state this explicitly) reconstructs **id-tjo-s* as the I.-E. preform of the Baltic thumb-words. It seems, however, rather unlikely that a word meaning “thumb” would suffer the analogical influence of words meaning “entrails, inner parts, kidneys”. At least I fail to see the motivation for such analogy.

Another approach was tried by Scheftelowicz [1929, 187] who associated the thumb-words with Baltic **inskas* “short” represented in Latvian and Old Prussian. The source of these words was in his opinion I.-E. **enk-* as seen in Skt. *ámśa-* “part” and Av. *niš-qs-* “to divide”. This thought was recently taken up by Toporov [Топоров, 1980, 53–54] – though on different grounds – who suggests that OPr. *instixs* etc. may continue I.-E. **enk-* : **onk-* : **ŋk-* “reach, attain, grab, carry” which in Gk. *ὄγκόω* “swell, broaden, increase”, *ὄγκος* “sum, mass, body, greatness” shows a meaning quite parallel to that of Lat. *tumēre* “to swell” (cf. OHG *thūmo* “thumb”).

I think that in principle Toporov is right. The etymology of the Baltic words is probably to be sought in a derivation from the I.-E. root **enk-*. Semantically the meaning “grabber, seizer” seems fitting as an appellation of the thumb. A similar semantic development is attested in Icelandic where *greip* means specifically “the space between the thumb and the forefinger” (from the verb *grípa* “to grab, seize”). Also the thumb is the only finger that offers a grip against all the other fingers.

Phonologically, however, Toporov’s explanation does not cover every aspect because two important details are not accounted for. One is the question of the so-called “secondary” initial nasal in Lithuanian (Toporov accepts Fraenkel’s anticipation) and the other is the question of the acute intonation as witnessed by both Lithuanian and Latvian. Any direct derivation from **ŋk-* ought to yield circumflex intonation of the initial syllable. Although **ŋk-* is probably more correctly reconstructed as **ǰ₁ŋk-* (cf. Gk. *᾿ενεγκεῖν*), the initial laryngeal would of course not affect the length of the following vocalic element.

At this point it is legitimate to ask whether an analogical explanation of *nykš-tỹs* is really warranted. Taken at face value **inkšti-* and **ninkšti-* (for a discussion of the internal guttural see further below) can indeed be reduced to a common denominator. Such pairs as Lith. *brizdis* : *birzdis* „Heidekraut, calluna vulgaris“, *irščiai*, *irščià* : *risčià* “quickly, hastily” etc. show that syllabic resonants in Baltic developed an auxiliary vowel (*i*, more seldom *u*) either before or after the sonant. The latter development was admittedly far from usual, but it is none the less uncontestedly attested. Thus both **in-* and **ni-* of our reconstructed Baltic forms may

derive from a nasalis sonans $*\eta$ -. Žemaitic forms, such as *ninkštis*, show that there was a second nasal involved, which Lithuanian (Aukštaitic) *nykštys* from ($*nīkštis <$) $*ninkštis$ does not contradict. This second nasal can also have been inherent in $*inkšti$ - which then should be interpreted as $*innkšti$ -. The geminate would of course be simplified immediately and automatically.

Although both postulated Baltic preforms, $*inkšti$ - and $*ninkšti$ -, are thus seen to have contained two original nasals, the etymological connection with I.-E. $*\varrho_1enk$ - : $*\varrho_1\eta k$ - — semantically plausible as it is — need not be given up. Rather, bearing in mind such forms as Gk. $\epsilon\nu\epsilon\gamma\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$, Lat. *nancīscor*, one may assume that Baltic $*inkšti$ - and $*ninkšti$ - are founded upon an original (zero grade) reduplicated formation of the root $*\varrho_1enk$ -, i. e. that they derive from I.-E. $*\varrho_1\eta\text{-}\varrho_1\eta k\text{-}ti$ -.

As already indicated this preform would explain the two nasals of the Lithuanian forms and the single nasal of the Latvian and Old Prussian forms need be no paradox. Furthermore, this preform may also offer a solution to the other problem: the acute intonation of the initial syllable.

Further development of the somewhat unusual sound sequence seen in $*\varrho_1\eta\varrho_1\eta k$ - is not completely clear. Both nasals being interconsonantic, this form might perhaps have been expected to yield Baltic $*in\text{-}in(k)\acute{s}$ - (or $*ni\text{-}ni(k)\acute{s}$ -) which is curiously similar to the form postulated by Bezzenger [1877, 287] as the source of Žem. *ninkštis* which he understood as a contamination of $*inkštys$ and $*(i)nik\acute{s}\text{-}tys$ without, however, explaining further what he meant by that form.

Assuming, however, that the laryngeals dropped before $*\eta$ yielded *in-/ni-*, the development of $*\varrho_1\eta\varrho_1\eta k\acute{t}i$ - might be seen as follows: $*\varrho_1\eta\varrho_1\eta k\acute{t}i$ - > $*\eta\eta(k)\acute{s}ti$ - > $*\eta\eta(k)\acute{s}ti$ -, i. e., with the loss of the laryngeals, the second vocalic nasal, being postvocalic, immediately assumed consonantic value. Thus the structure of the word was changed as a syllable was lost in the process. This entailed *metatonie rude* of the remaining (preceding) syllable much the same as witnessed in such (probably more recent) cases as *vėlnias* as opposed to *vėlinas*, *kėlnės* : *kėlinės*, *dvėitas* : *dvėjetas*, *sėntėviai* : *sėnas*, *dvārs* : *dvāras*, *tām* : *tāmui*, *gāl* : *gāli*, *dukrėl* : *dukrėle* [cf. Stang, 1966, 157, 167].

In short, by assuming that both reconstructed Baltic preforms, $*inkšti$ - and $*ninkšti$ -, are authentic reflexes of Proto-Baltic $*\eta\eta(k)\acute{s}ti$ - from I.-E. $*\varrho_1\eta\text{-}\varrho_1\eta k\text{-}ti$ -, both problems implied by these forms are resolved: first, $*\eta\eta$ - yields either *inn-* > *in-* or *nin-* neither of which is in any way irregular, and second, the loss of a syllable entailed *metatonie rude* of the preceding one which explains the acute intonation.

A few comments are required as to the nature or rather origin of the cluster *-kšt-*. According to Stang [1966, 208–211] the insertion of a guttural before a sibilant (especially if followed by another consonant) had its point of departure in a regular (gesetzmässige) metathesis of *sk/zg* before a consonant. Thereupon the

thus metathetized guttural was interpreted as an insertion without being identified with the unmetathetized prevocalic guttural in other words of the same family. From then on a secondary expansion of an inserted guttural could take place. In the case of *nykštỹs* etc. the Prussian word *instixs* makes the assumption probable that the guttural simply is a secondary insertion and not the result of a metathesis. The Baltic words would thus derive from I.-E. $*\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\text{-}\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\mathfrak{k}t\text{-}i\text{-}s$. However, the evidence of the Prussian word is not entirely reliable. A secondary dissimilation may have taken place in it. In that case the internal guttural may of course still be secondary. If not, one might assume a preform $*\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\text{-}\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\mathfrak{k}\text{-}sk\text{-}ti\text{-}s$ (cf. Lat. *nancīscor*) which would yield the same forms in Baltic as $*\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\text{-}\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\mathfrak{k}\text{-}ti\text{-}s$.

As for the structure of the thus reconstructed I.-E. $*\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\text{-}\mathfrak{z}_1\mathfrak{n}\mathfrak{k}\text{-}ti\text{-}s$ and eventual parallels in other I.-E. languages than Baltic, cf. Skt. *carkṛtī-* “praising”, *jígarti-* “a swallow”, *(su)dīditi-* “flaming brightly”, *dīdhiti-* “brightness”, *yayāti-* (name of a monarch) all of which are attested as early as the Rig Veda. Later one finds also *cikiti-* “shining”, *juhōti-* (technical name for a certain type of ceremonies), *vīvitti-* “gain” etc. In Homeric Greek this formation is not met with, but the classical authors show numerous examples, cf. (κατ)ανάγκασις “reduction of dislocated limbs”, δίδαξις “teaching”, μέμψις “blame”, μίμησις “imitation”, βίβασις (a Spartan dance) and even — though probably secondarily formed — (ἐπ)ένεγξις “adding” from the verb (ἐπ)ένεγκα.

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