On the Role of Verbal Abuse in the Struggle against the Phanarion Constantinople Patriarchate in Macedonia during the Nineteenth Century

During the middle of the last century, Slavic-speaking Christians in the Ottoman Empire were attempting to free themselves from Greek influence and to obtain education in some sort of Slavic language. This movement was actively opposed by the Greek Church and the Turkish State. Documentary evidence of the verbal violence of this opposition is to be found in a letter written by the Macedonian educator Jordan Hadži Konstantinov-Dzinot, dated Skopje, April 23, 1856. In this letter he quotes the words of the Bishop of Veles and the local Turkish official, Ali-beğ Körü, when they ordered that he be prevented from teaching in Veles. Their words are given in a Latin transliteration of the Cyrillic. A normalized Turkish transcription is given for Ali-beğ’s statement. It is interesting to note that the Greek bishop was not satisfied with such Hellenisms as eretig ‘heretic’, farmazon ‘freemason’, ğavolos ‘devil’ and anatema nemu ‘cursed be he’ for purposes of abuse. He thus turned to Turkisms:

Vladikata: Da go ispudite toj čapkân učitel, toj Jordan kopil sefti pušt! – The Bishop: “Kick that skirt-chasing teacher out, that Jordan whoreson pimp faggot!”

Ali-beğ Koro: Dişari pušt! Sefi pezeveng, bân zâr kâfir! Kalkasân mebtupten zere šejtana seni verârâm! Kujunus hapsi o şenabeti! (Balkan Turkish).

Ali-beğ Körü: Dişari pušt! Safa pezevengi, hinzir kâfir! Kalkasn mebtupten zere şeytana veririm! Koyunuz hapsi o cenabeti! (Literary or Standard Turkish) – Ali Bey the One-eyed: “Get out, faggot! Pimp, infidel swine! Leave the school, or else I’ll send you to the Devil! Throw him in jail, the abomination!”
It is interesting to note that in some dialects the verb ispudi can mean 'fuck', as well as a number of other things. The term sefi (safl) is normally translated as 'pleasure', but in this context the word denotes one who does business with pleasure.


**II**

On the Fate of Turkish Verbal Abuse in Macedonia

In my preceding note, I mentioned the penetration of Turkish obscenity into the speech of a Greek bishop residing in Macedonia. While many Turkish obscenities entered literary Macedonian relatively unhindered, e.g. pušt (pušt) 'faggot', pezevenk (pezevenk) 'pimp', others did not go unaltered. Thus Turkish siktir 'get fucked' became siker 'scram' in Macedonian, with a derived verb sikerdisuva 'throw out.'

A most interesting development in this process of semantic change can be seen in the term for the last bit of food or drink, usually coffee, served to a guest to indicate that it is time for him or her to terminate the visit. This item is called sikermandza in Macedonian. The term is considered merely colloquial and no longer carries the strength of its historical meaning, i.e. 'fuck-off food.'

**III**

Notes on Turkish Interlingual Taboo

A particularly interesting example of interlingual taboo is cited by Sir Gerard Clauson in his *Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Turkish-Century Turkish* (Oxford, 1972, 155, 818). Mahmud al-Kašgari in his Turkish-Arabic dictionary *Divān luğat at-turk* (MS, 1073 A.D.), as cited by Clauson, states that the Oğuz, i.e., Turks, when reciting the Koran aloud, omit verses containing the Arabic conjunction *am* 'or', because this word means 'cunt' in Turkish. In fact, any Arabic word containing the syllables am, sik (Turkish 'prick'), or tūlak (Turkish 'clit', also occurring as dūlak and dīlčik—all diminutives of dīl 'tongue') was omitted from public Koran readings before Turkish audiences for fear of provoking ribald ejaculations.

In a similar vein, an incident is cited by John R. Krueger (Journal of American Folklore 77, no. 303 [1964], pp. 78-79): An organization called the American Military Government of Occupied Territories was going to be acronymed AMGOT, until someone pointed out that am goy in Turkish means 'cunt ass (asshole).'

Considering the sensitivities to Turkish taboos, it is all the more curious that they had so little impact on the Slavic-speakers of Macedonia, a Turkish province for 500 years. In my preceding note, I observed that Turkish siktir 'get fucked' had become merely 'scram' in Macedonian. In fact, the reaction of the average South Slav to being told that Slavic sikermandza 'the last cup of coffee before leaving' is Turkish for 'fuck-off food' is one of indignant incredulity. Another example of the desemanticization of sik in Macedonian is the 'meaningless' expression shouted by children playing in the streets of Bitola, viz. sikanani sikin. This has as much semantic content for a Macedonian as bībīdī bobbidī boon has for an American. In Turkish, however, sik ananı (or anneni) means 'fuck your mother!', while sikim is most likely a contraction of the optative sikeyim 'let me fuck' (cf. West Anatolian sikem). So perhaps the original meaning of the expression was something like 'fuck your mother and let me fuck her too.'


**IV**

On the Problems of False Cognates in Slavic

The phenomenon of semantic reinterpretation can result in a number of difficulties for someone who tries to work with a Slavic language other than one he already knows. Most of these problems are of no particular interest to the scatologist or
pornolinguist, but a few are worthy of note.

The Slavic *kurs ‘chicken’ and its derivatives retained the original meaning in Russian, but came to be used as the obscene word for ‘penis’ in South Slavic. (Admittedly, chicken-like words based on *kurs survive in South Slavic, but they are not widespread.) For example, a Russian-speaking relative of the author married a Bulgarian whose father was a chicken farmer. When the newlyweds went to visit the Bulgarian family, the young bride endeavored to make a good impression by using her Russianized Bulgarian to ask her new father-in-law about his occupation. The result was that she asked the old man a number of embarrassing questions about how he raised kury, and how many did he have, and where did he keep them, and could she see them.

The root meaning ‘moisture’, *mok-, has also suffered a number of vicissitudes. Those who delight in ethnophallic witticisms directed against the Lekhitic group of the West Slavs would do well to take note of the fact that to many Slavic speakers močenje means ‘urination’, but in Polish moczenie means ‘foot-bath.’

It should be noted that the phonetic similarity of the Russian spička ‘match’ and the Serbo-Croatian and Macedonian pička ‘cunt’, a source of much discomfort to inadequately prepared travelers, is the result of mere coincidence, not semantic reinterpretation.