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## A MIXTURE WITHOUT MIXING: FEARS OF LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN THE SLOVENIAN-ITALIAN BORDERLAND

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### ABSTRACT

*This article explores the recent trend of avoiding the terminology of “mixing” and “mixture” and accordingly replacing it with the term prepletanje (“interweaving”) in current Slovenian social scientific literature as well as in public language use. The avoidance is especially remarkable in the Slovenian-Italian borderland where the studies of linguistic and cultural contact, of bilingualism and multiculturalism are flourishing on both sides of the state border, in particular among the ethnic Slovenians from the Adriatic coast. The paper brings forward evidence of the systematic “mixophobic” nature of this rejection of the terminology and imagery of mixing and hybridization, replacing it with the notion of linguistic and cultural interaction in which interwoven strands can always be separated again, if necessary.*

*Keywords: mixtures (linguistic and cultural), interweaving (linguistic and cultural), hybridity, mixing, Italian-Slovenian borderland*

## UNA MESCOLOANZA NON MESCOLOATA: PAURE DELL'IBRIDISMO LINGUISTICO E CULTURALE AL CONFINE ITALO-SLOVENO

### SINTESI

*L'articolo prende in analisi l'attuale tendenza ad evitare la terminologia relativa alla “mescolanza” sia nella letteratura delle scienze sociali che nel linguaggio pubblico di lingua slovena. Questa terminologia viene rimpiazzata, piuttosto, con il termine prepletanje (“intreccio”). Ciò concerne soprattutto la zona del confine italo-sloveno, dove, da entrambi i lati (in particolare tra gli sloveni del litorale adriatico), prosperano studi sui contatti linguistici e culturali, sul bilinguismo e multiculturalismo. L'articolo porta degli esempi della “fobia della mescolanza”, che sistematicamente rigetta la terminologia e l'immaginario della mescolanza e dell'ibridizzazione. Al massimo,*

*la rimpiazza con la nozione di interazione linguistico-culturale, grazie alle quale gli elementi intrecciati posso pur sempre essere disgiunti nuovamente, qualora necessario.*

*Parole chiave: mescolanze (linguistiche e culturali), intrecci (linguistici e culturali), ibridismo, confine italo-sloveno*

## INTRODUCTION

In this article I explore the tendency of avoiding the terms “mixing” and “mixture” in current Slovenian scholarly literature dealing with linguistic and cultural interactions of the type commonly described as mixing. This avoidance is especially remarkable in Western Slovenia, or more precisely, in the Slovenian-Italian borderland where the studies of linguistic and cultural contact, of bilingualism and multiculturalism are flourishing on the both sides of the state border, in particular among the ethnic Slovenians from the Adriatic coast, on the Slovenian as well as on Italian side.

*Mešanje* and *mešanica*, “mixing” and “mixture,” is being overwhelmingly replaced by the gerund *prepletanje* (“interweaving” or “intertwining”) and the noun *preplet* (the result of such action). This replacement has generally occurred since the independence of Slovenia in 1991. What is perhaps especially striking is the fact that it has taken place in a rather discreet manner, under the radar, as it were. I could not find any trace of scholarly discussion regarding the relative value or use of the metaphors of mixing and interweaving, not to mention an argument in favor of introducing the term interweaving.<sup>1</sup> How the consensus – or just the habit – of using “prepletanje” instead of “mešanje” managed to establish itself with such success is outside the scope of this essay. Surveys of the metaphors and terms for linguistic and cultural mixtures used in relevant Western literature seldom include “interweaving.” Anthropologist Melville Herskovits, for example, who had made great use of a wide range of the metaphors of linguistic and cultural interaction, is a rare exception but he referred to interweaving in only one of his works (Baron, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Other recent Western overviews of the relevant literature do not register its usage at all (e.g., Stewart, 2007; Burke, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

This frequent use of the *preplet*- metaphor may certainly be surprising in an age that is celebrating mixtures, hybridity, fusions and syncretisms. What makes

1 By contrast, this does not apply to those scholars who prefer to use “usual” metaphors for interacting. An excellent case in point is the discussion of the notions of hybridity, mixture, translation, collage, *métissage*, creolization, transculturation and several others by the group of sociologists and anthropologists working on migrant and borderland identities (Sedmak & Zadel, 2015; Milharčič-Hladnik, 2015; Jurić Pahor, 2015; Janko Spreizer, 2015).

2 Herskovits claimed that it is necessary to sort our African threads amidst a mess of yarn. Elsewhere in his writings about African Americans in the United States, he indicated that the European sources (or “threads,” if you will) are more prominent and easier to identify. The metaphor of rewoven threads apparently represents an interweaving of European and African cultural elements, through acculturative processes, for which “mechanisms” must be adduced (Baron, 2003, 107–108).

3 The sociolinguistic notion of *intertwined* languages as a very special and rare case of *mixed* languages, introduced by Bakker (1997), is rather idiosyncratic in its terminology and therefore not suitable for our purpose: “I call this process language intertwining. Basically this is the combination of the grammatical system (phonology, morphology, syntax) of one language with the lexicon of another. Intertwined languages are genetically related to two languages and therefore they do not fit into the family tree model.” (Bakker, 1997, 203).





Fig. 1: The linguist Hugo von Schuchardt, 1842–1927 (Wikimedia Commons).

*preplet* and *prepletanje* so different from all of these is that the components (perhaps best imagined as strands), interwoven or intertwined in the *preplet*, do not blend, do not fuse, do not dissolve: they retain their previous separate identity. The Slovene verb *plesti*, “to weave, to braid, to ply,” has its origin in the IE \*plek-, similar to the Greek *plékein*, Latin *plecto*, *plectere*, English *plait*, German *flechten*, Albanian *plectö* and so forth.

There is another verb in Slovene that translates into English as “to weave” and into German as “weben” and that is *tkati* with its link to the Latin *texere*. The result of the action is *textile* (noun), “fabric, cloth”: *tkanina* and *tkivo* in Slovene. The meanings of *textus* (noun) are similar. The English distinction between interweaving and intertwining does not really apply in Slovene since the focal meaning of intertwining (“firmly bind the strands together”)

is not metaphorized in Slovene (and for this reason I will consistently use “interweaving”). Both strands, the one originating from *plectere* and the other from *texere*, adequately translate as *plesti*, (*pre*)*pletati*, *preplet*.

The avoidance of the terminology of mixing and mixtures is not equally systematic in all relevant disciplinary fields. The two fields that are arguably (see the methodological remark below) most affected by the frequent usage of the *prepletanje* terminology, seem to be the (socio)linguistic studies of contact languages in the Western Slovenian borderland and the Slovene Studies (*slovenistika*) in general. When it comes to “interweaving of cultures,” also ethnology and folkloristics come in the foreground although most visibly on their margins where the discipline in question is morphing to its applied, didactic and divulgated forms.

The conspicuous preference for the *prepletanje* terminology in the Western Slovenian borderland might give the impression that this is a straightforward Italian import. As a matter of fact, the popular notion of *intreccio*, ‘interweaving,’ in Italy is very similar to the Slovene *preplet(anje)*.<sup>4</sup> *Intreccio di lingue e culture* and *prepletanje jezikov in kultur*, “interweaving of languages and cultures,” is a revered formula in both language communities. (By contrast, the French equivalent “l’entrelacement des langues et des cultures,” as well

4 I am grateful to the Italianist scholar Martina Ožbot Currie for turning my attention to the *intreccio* metaphor.

as “l’enchevêtrement des langues et des cultures,” is a rare occurrence.) I nevertheless have my doubts about the possibility of such an import but I will not go into the issue of origins and possible diffusions here.

The bilingual, often trilingual, area around Trieste (Karst, Istria, Friuli) as well as in the city itself, where *intrecci* and *prepletanja* are currently flourishing, is the very same area whose linguistic practices and processes had been studied by the famous linguist, Hugo von Schuchardt. German by birth but Austrian in character, Schuchardt was very interested in language mixtures and mixing (*Sprachmischung*, *Mischsprache*). Better known as a pioneer of creolistics, he also established the study of contact languages. His fascinating booklet, titled *Slavo-German and Slavo-Italian* (Schuchardt, 1884), offered as a gift to the prominent Slovene philologist and linguist Franc Miklošič (Franz von Miklosich) for his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, was based on a rich collection of very heterogeneous materials, including information provided by his correspondents from the region. One of them was Karel Štrekelj, a linguist and ethnologist from the Karst countryside above Trieste, a specialist for Slovene Karstic dialects and professor of Slavic Philology at the University of Graz at the time Schuchardt was teaching there.<sup>5</sup>

Schuchardt offered his book to his friend Miklošič because the latter was also interested in language mixing and the resulting language change. At the time, the leading Slovenian philologists and linguists, regardless of their feelings about language mixing, did not avoid the time-honored terminology of



Fig. 2: Schuchardt's booklet, titled Slavo-German and Slavic-Italian language, studies the phenomena of language mixing in the Italian-Slovenian borderland.

5 In the *Hugo Schuchardt Archiv*, his letters to Schuchardt have not yet been edited. [Http://schuchardt.uni-graz.at/id/letter/5337#\\_ftn6](http://schuchardt.uni-graz.at/id/letter/5337#_ftn6). Accessed: 3 November 2019.

mixing and mixtures.<sup>6</sup> How could they avoid it when Luther himself – a very important figure for the Slovenian nation-builders of the time – had already claimed that *alles sprachen sind vermischt*?<sup>7</sup> Writing in 1981, a century after Schuchardt's book, Jože Toporišič, then the leading national linguist, commenting on the trend of code-mixing and code-shifting between the Slovene and Serbo-Croatian could still exclaim “But this is the mixing of languages and nothing good can come from it” (Toporišič, 2011, 246).

In the region in question, Hugo Schuchardt is still largely ignored. While elsewhere, from the 1980s onwards, Schuchardt has been steadily rediscovered and his rediscovery has prompted a new wave of interesting scholarship on his contribution to the studies of languages in contact, the impact of the “interweaving” metaphor seems to efficiently block his rediscovery.<sup>8</sup>

## METHODOLOGICAL CAVEAT

Due to the relative scarcity of a corpora of contemporary Slovene language, additional techniques and tools had to be used, in particular intense internet searches and long-term systematic observation of the usage of relevant terms. The titles of the social scientific publications and conference presentations, the titles of PhD, MA and BA theses in selected disciplines but also the titles of various events such as museum exhibitions have proved to be a fruitful source. None of them could, of course, replace an extensive reading of relevant philological, linguistic and cultural (in particular ethnological) literature in the Slovene language, dealing in particular with the region of my choice but not exclusively.

## PROMOTING *PREPLETANJE* IN SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

The next step is to present some selected evidence of the avoidance of *mešanje* by replacing it with *prepletanje*. I will limit myself to two particularly clear cases suggesting that the promotion of the use of the interweaving metaphor in linguistic terminology is of a determined and systematic character.

6 Jernej (Bartholomeus) Kopitar wrote thus “[d]a also die walachische Sprache nicht wie die neugriechische nur eine durch die Länge der Zeit in ihren Formen etwas veränderte Originalsprache, sondern eine durch Vermischung zweier in Materie und Form verschiedener Sprachen entstandene Mengesprache ist...” (Kopitar, 1857, 187).

7 “Alles sprachen sind vermischt und unter einander gemenet, denn die Länder sind benachbart, und eins stösst an das ander; darum borget eins vom andern etliche Wort.” (Luther, 1846, A 578, 569).

8 In the wealth of Schuchardtian studies dealing with the contact languages, I find the following especially rewarding: Baggioni, 1988; Swiggers, 1989; Venier, 2012; 2015; Nicolai, 2014; 2016. Ethnologists and anthropologists are only rarely aware of Schuchardt's work but see Jöhler, 2012. Recently, a selection of Schuchardt's theoretical texts, also including the book in question, have been translated into French and published in a bilingual edition (Nicolai & Tabouret-Keller, 2011).

## First case

Soon after independence, Neva Godini, an ethnic Slovene teacher from the small town of Aurisina (Nabrežina) north of Trieste, published an article about the Central Karstic vocabulary in the time of Karel Štrekelj (1859–1912), the above-mentioned specialist for the Central Karstic (or “Gorizian”) dialects and also her fellow Karstian (Godini, 1994). Štrekelj wrote his PhD thesis under the guidance of Fran Miklošič, the holder of the chair for Slavic Philology at the University of Vienna. By the end of the century, Štrekelj was based in Graz, where he became professor of Slavic languages in 1896. Hugo von Schuchardt, who held the chair for Romance philology at the same university, was already familiar with his contribution to the study of Slavic elements in the Friulian vocabulary (Štrekelj, 1890), to which he reacted in the following issue of the journal with a note, the title of which signaled the problematic of Slavic-Italian mixtures (Schuchardt, 1891).

Godini maintained that in the 1990s, the Karstic lexicon was still abounding with Germanic and Romance loanwords, though in different proportions than in Štrekelj’s time. In order to illustrate the current linguistic situation of the Slovene Karstic dialect in and around Aurisina, she concluded the article with the local *Vagrant’s hymn* which “sounds rather archaic but was actually composed only in 1946, when a group of local internees returned from Germany. It became so popular that it was later considered a folk song.” To this she added: “In its simplicity, almost naivety, [the song] clearly and tangibly displays the interweaving (*prepletanje*) of the Slovenian expressive stock with the Romance and Germanic stock” (Godini, 1994, 272). The last two lines of the poem refer to the decrease in the Romance and Germanic loanwords in the new postwar era:

*Ki su bučardə, špicə, məcuała in pəncot?  
Adijo njəmška Mica, oj servus, kristigot!*

(Where have *bučarde*, *špice*, *macole* and *pančoti* gone?  
Goodbye the German *Mice*, *servus*, *kristigot!*)<sup>9</sup>

These two lines are so strongly reminiscent of the poem *L’Eco del Klutsch* that one cannot but suspect that the anonymous author of the “hymn” must have been acquainted with it. *L’Eco del Klutsch* (The Echo of the Klutsch)<sup>10</sup> was written by the Triestine regional poet Polifemo Acca (his real name was

9 The nouns from the first verse are all Romance loanwords, denoting the tools that were used by the workers in the marble quarry of Aurisina.

10 Klutsch is the name of a brook in Trieste while it also seems to be a Germanized form of the Slovene word *ključ*, “key”.

Giglio Padovan). In literature on Padovan, 1885 is invariably given as the year of the publication of the song. Curiously, Schuchardt published this sonnet in its entirety a year earlier, without revealing the source, in his book (Schuchardt, 1884, 74). Indeed, he had good reason to publish it in its integral form since the poem offered a fascinating list of Slovene and German, or Slavic and Germanic and Friulian, loanwords that Padovan actually considered barbarisms. By exposing them as characteristic of the Triestine idiom, he simultaneously expressed his hope that they would soon be swept away.

Unlike the purist Padovan, Schuchardt delighted in this “Barbarisierung [sic] des Triestiner Italienisch” (Schuchardt, 1884, 74) and went on explaining every hybrid word in each line. Just to convey an idea of the poem and to show its similarity to the Vagrant’s Hymn, let me reproduce here the second quatrain of the sonnet:

*O fraile, o juzche, o mlecherze, o berschizze,  
Pech, pinter, clanfer, bogneri e sinteri,  
Cuguluf, presniz, crapfeni e sparheri  
E zvitichi e giarizzi e cluche e spizze.*

The two poems address the same phenomenon of *Sprachmischung* (to put it in Schuchardt’s terms), of the same *contact languages* in the same linguistic area, here defined as the Italian-Slovenian borderland in and around Trieste, above all Istria and the Karst. The common trait of both poems, enumerating the hybrid words and possibly a common message (though the intent of the Vagrant’s Hymn is not necessarily purist), is that by themselves they prove that ethnic and linguistic boundaries within the area are not an obstacle. Their contact is more a prerequisite for the mixing of languages, consistent with the Schuchardt’s claim that “the *Sprachmischung* [language mixing] is directly proportional to *Berührung* [contact], to the level of its daily recurrence, its stability and its depth” (Venier, 2015, 107).

Godini therefore studies the same phenomenon as Schuchardt and she studies it in the same region as Schuchardt who actually made it widely known as a region of language contact and mixing (or hybridization).<sup>11</sup> Schuchardt and Štrekelj are the founders of the studies of language contact and mixing in this area, yet Godini had nevertheless turned the central notion of mixing into *prepletanje*, “interweaving.” She did so without any theoretical supporting argument; even without clarification or a warning that the central notion and thereby the very nature of the phenomenon had been renamed. That this move was far from random, is supported, in the German summary (Zusammenfassung)

11 Schuchardt clearly preferred *Mischung* to (*sprachliche*) *Hybridität*. The latter appears in the book only twice. See Schuchardt, 1884, 10, 35.

of the article, by the German translation of *prepletanje* with *Verflechtungen*.<sup>12</sup> The fact that Schuchardt and the whole German speaking tradition used the terminology of *mischen*, *Sprachmischung*, *Mischsprache*, *Einmischung*, etc., has suddenly stopped being relevant. The Slovene speaking linguists in the area seem to have suddenly felt entitled to overthrow the scientific terminology of another language in an entirely arbitrary manner.

Some might of course argue that *prepletanje* is actually nearly synonymous with *mešanje*, supporting their argument with various dictionaries that list some meanings of mixing as nearly synonymous with some meanings of interweaving (never before the fourth or third meaning listed in the line). This holds true only for a small segment where some similar meanings of both words meet or intersect. For the rest, this claim is totally wrong. Except for the small intersection where, for example, both

*the writer sheds light on the interweaving of the folk beliefs with the official Church Creed*

and

*the writer sheds light on the mixture of the folk beliefs with the official Church Creed*

are in line with the standard language, an overextended “interweaving” in place of “mixing” is literally out of place. It is the wrong word for the context: a suitable definition of the catachresis.

## Second Case

In 2014, two scholars from the University of Udine published a book on bilingualism in children (Crescentini & Fabbro, 2014a). The publication was financed by the European Foundation for Regional Development and was part of the Programme for the Transborder Italo-Slovenian Cooperation. This explains why it was simultaneously published in the Slovene translation (Crescentini & Fabbro, 2014b). In the penultimate chapter, the authors (a neuropsychologist and a neuropsychiatrist) first introduce mixing (*mescolamento*) and switching (*commutazione*) of languages as the phenomena characterizing bilingual persons. In the second paragraph of the chapter, they move from switching to mixing, duly maintaining that “il mescolamento delle lingue (*code-mixing*)” is quite a frequent phenomenon in bilingual people. In the rest of the paragraph, they strictly refer to “i fenomeni

12 “Verflechtungen der slowenischen Sprachelemente mit germanischen und romanischen” (273). Also the translation of “prepletanje” with “Verflechtung” is inaccurate since the latter conveys the meanings of tightly interwoven, interconnected, interdependent, integrated phenomena (this is the reason why *l’histoire croisée* or *entangled history* is called *Verflechtungsgeschichte* in German), entirely absent in the vacuous notion of *prepletanje* as used by its new practitioners. For the concept of *Verflechtung* (entanglement) in modern social science, see Christ et al. 2016.

di *mixing*.” In the Slovene translation, “*mescolanza delle lingue (mixing)*” from the initial paragraph is correctly translated as “*mešanje jezikov* (t.i. *mixing*).” In the second paragraph however, mixing of languages suddenly becomes “*prepletanje jezikovnih kodov* (t.j. *code-mixing*),” “*interweaving of language codes* (i.e. *code-mixing*)” (Crescentini & Fabbro, 2014b, 46). Mixing becomes interweaving. As *mescolamento* is correctly translated as *mešanje* also in the contents of the book, it seems less likely that this surprising switch can be ascribed to an extremely careless translator. It seems more likely that a careless *editor*, who was implementing the unwritten decree that *mescolanza* had to be turned into *prepletanje*, incidentally caught sight of the second paragraph without reading the text in its entirety.

What might look like an arbitrary intervention, is most likely indicative of the systematic character of a certain language policing (or censorship) that suppresses *mešanje* and replaces it with *prepletanje*.

## INVADING THE COMMON USE OF LANGUAGE

Many more cases of the academic usage of the term *prepletanje* could easily be found. As mentioned before, they abound especially in the Western Slovenian borderland. The center (the capital) seems to be somewhat less affected. However, this does not seem to also apply to non-academic usage. In common use – in particular in advertising in the cultural sphere – the word *prepletanje* has become irresistible. This trend that I will outline in the following also interferes with scholarly usages where academics have their own reason for using the word. The interference can easily be detected in the titles of university theses such as “*Bosniaks in Slovenia: the Interweaving of Language and Culture – the Case of the Bosniaks of Velenje*” (a BA thesis). The “fatal attraction” of this word that the current students of ethnology seemingly cannot resist has, in this case, most likely submerged the reasons responsible for its introduction in the academia in the Western Slovenian borderland. What things are actually *interweaving* in this title? Are language and culture of the Bosniaks being interwoven like two strands? Or is language and culture of the Bosniaks being interwoven with that of their ethnic Slovenian counterparts? Or is there a third, undisclosed possibility? Considering that such a BA thesis as a rule does not show any interest in the issues of language at all, even less in their interweaving or any other known interaction, it is even more obvious that it does not promote “*interweaving*” against “*mixing*.” Here, *prepletanje* is just a *flatus vocis*. Its aim seems to be to evoke “*cosmopolitan*” images of coexistence.

The mainstream media go even further in the same direction. There is an apparently rich imagination of the cases of interweaving. One would never expect that so many and so variable phenomena are capable of interweaving but besides naming and enumerating these phenomena, the question as to *what* precisely is being interwoven and *how* this interweaving is taking place, is never asked. This means that also the question as to *what* is actually interweaving and *how* precisely does it differ from mixing and other similar phenomena is never asked.

Let me briefly illustrate a segment of a wider array of things that can typically indulge in interweaving according to the media and advertising (with tourism and travel advertisers as possibly the most “creative” promoters). Here are some examples of things that may be of special interest to anthropologists and linguists, gathered from the web pages:

1) Interweaving of languages and cultures: This is arguably the most popular cliché concerning interweaving:

*[...] it also encompasses the musical traditions of the Eastern Adriatic where the interweaving of languages, primarily Slavic, and cultures, primarily Latin and Levantine, is very conspicuous.<sup>13</sup>*

While this is an instance of the cultural tourist marketing of a region, the following case originates from the academic environment of the borderland and shows to what extent the academic communication can be permeated with the language used in advertising:

*The focus of the conference will be intercultural contacts and the situation of the language and literature at the point of contact since the conference will take place in Nova Gorica, a city where the interweaving of languages and cultures is reflected in everyday life.*

2) Interweaving of languages only:

*From Ljubljana to the quadri-lingual Kanalska dolina (Val Canale), where in everyday life, the Italian, Slovene, German and Friulian interweave in a perpetual and entirely natural process.*

*The tight interweaving of the English and Spanish in the USA has resulted in a special combination of languages, known as Spanglish.*

The second statement comes close to the proper linguistic statement. However, what about the first one? Are the four languages of Val Canale, like four strips or strands, being woven together into a multilingual braid? Or are they being combined into something? Or, more likely, are they just “peacefully coexisting” alongside one another?

3) Interweaving of peoples/nations:

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13 For the reasons of commodity and discretion, this and the following examples, all gathered from the internet, are quoted without references.



*The week of India's culture – One could hardly find in this world a country where so many cultures, nations and peoples are being interwoven [...] as in India.*

*The interweaving of peoples mirrors a language mosaic of the predominantly Slavic interior of Istria, consisting of the two Istrian languages, Slovene and Croatian, while the linguistically diverse towns eventually chose the official Venetian Italian as their language.*

(Difficult to understand anything in this “cryptic” ethnological declaration, including the direction of mirroring.)

#### 4) Interweaving of “races”:<sup>14</sup>

*In Asia, diverse races are interweaving. These two pictures show the members of the two predominant races.*

The writer of the travel reportage blog most likely did not intend diverse races to mix in Asia. They could have simply said that diverse races live (or coexist) in Asia. But why speak in plain language?

*Yet the Vikings, despite ever more intense interweaving of diverse cultures and races, cannot really go against their football roots.*

Here, the “interweaving” comes to some extent closer to “interaction”—or even “mixing”—than in previous statement.

*The interweaving of different cultures and races has given the city a special character.*

Again, do different races of the city undergo the process of interweaving (whatever that may mean) or do they just coexist in the city, *nebeneinander*?

#### 5) Interweaving of foods, cuisines, and tastes:

A recipe for beef ribs in coffee sauce:

*If we envisage coffee as a spice and if we substitute salt for sugar, we get a delicious food in which wine and coffee interweave.*

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14 The term *race* is put here in scare quotes only for the sake of anticipating and repelling possible criticism aimed at censoring the notion of race. The word race is not inherently evil and today it badly needs a critical analysis of its usage. This is not to deny that the notion of race in the case of the human species (i.e. human race) actually denotes a non-existent entity (since the human species does not happen to be subdivided into sub-species or races). This is also not to deny that talking about human races is outdated, regressive and potentially dangerous.

Another culinary suggestion:

*Waters also excellently interweave with foods.*

It is not a coincidence that one finds the most incongruous occurrences of “interweaving” precisely in the domain of foods and drinks (and of liquid and certain non-liquid substances more generally). In our culture, as well as in numerous others, the liquids, and the drinks in particular, are the paragon of the substances that *are mixed* and that *have to be mixed*. Don’t we *mix* water with wine, oil with vinegar, milk with sugar, coffee with brandy, and different wine or spirits among themselves? Don’t we mix different coffees, if we want to get an excellent coffee mixture?

#### WHERE *PREPLETANJE* REIGNS, NOTHING ELSE GROWS

One does not need to google the morpheme *-plet-* and its different variants for long in order to establish that, in the current Slovene usage, virtually all things, all phenomena, material as well as immaterial, are capable of “interweaving.” This means that the word has undergone a semantic (over)extension. Thus extended, the word is used in a wider sense than is possible in ordinary speech. It acquires meanings that it does not have in standard language. Due to its semantic extension, the frequency of its occurrence in certain sectors of common language use has correspondingly increased.

Considered from the point of view of ordinary language usage, there is no need to sound the alarm. The vogue of *prepletanje* may be seen as a silly fashion. Fashions come and go and many of them are silly. Moreover, fun may be poked at those who suddenly discover that wine and coffee are interweaving in the beef ribs sauce. They would not be the first to be ridiculed for their mannerist ways of speaking. Who knows? – someone might find out someday that mineral water and wine are interweaving in the glass of *spritzer* or *gemischt*, a drink well-known throughout the Eastern Adriatic as *gemišt* or *špricer*. The way things stand, it is quite possible, even likely, that this will happen someday. Consequently, someone might propose that the name of the drink should be corrected accordingly, perhaps into *pletenac* (in Croatian) or *prepleteneč* (in Slovenian). *Intreccio* in Italian?

The susceptibility of regional scholarly discourses for this invasive catachrestic word is, on the contrary, far from amusing. In anthropology, ethnology and neighboring disciplines, we definitely need to develop deeper historical and epistemological understanding of the metaphors and concepts that we make use of for describing, analyzing and theorizing the most diverse forms of cultural interaction among different collectivities. To do so, we possess an impressive store of concepts and metaphors, some of which are more useful for certain ends, some of which are less useful. In

order to select and evolve optimal analytical tools, we need to work permanently on them. Some of these concepts are also older than others; some even happen to be very old, in particular the concept of mixing and mixture. Mixtures continue to be widely suspected of having unpleasant characteristics, if not being utterly bad. This may arguably be the strongest single reason for their avoidance. Some people seem to find this concept outdated, too old, not sophisticated enough. Anthropologists with their presentist bias are among those most inclined to discard “outdated” concepts. Even those among them who seriously study concepts such as hybridity, creolization, métissage (with its equivalents in the Spanish and Portuguese language), syncretism, (cultural) translation, transculturation, bricolage, and so forth, sometimes seem to lack the awareness that mixing and mixture, too, are concepts and not just plain words. (How many times do *mixing* and *mixture* appear in indices of such books?)

Even fewer are aware that mixing and mixture, together with some related concepts, were the two concepts intensely elaborated from the very beginning of Ancient Greek philosophy and continuing through the centuries of its development until its end. As Richard Sharvy (1983) has argued, “[q]uestions about mixture and combination were among the most central topics discussed by the earliest philosophers.” Aristotle’s thought on conceptual distinctions between *mixis* (mixture) and *krasis* (fusion) and some others, as developed in particular in his breathtaking work of philosophy of nature titled *De generatione et corruptione*, is perhaps the acme of all philosophical thinking of mixtures. Aristotle is also arguably a philosopher whom current anthropologists find the least interesting.

Avoiding the systematic and in-depth analysis of the relevant concepts of relations that some prefer to describe in terms of mixtures, others in terms of hybridization, and others again in terms of creolization or translation or entanglements or bricolage, anthropologists and ethnologists tend to become an easy prey for the predators speaking PC language. Virtually every metaphor or concept from the store can be denounced as “politically incorrect”, “racist,” “xenophobe,” “sexist,” etc. This has happened with hybridity, with mixing, with *métizaje*, more recently with creolization. All are made suspect because of their “biological roots,” so the exorcism of everything resembling biology becomes the paramount and often the only one, obligation of the scholar.

#### IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION: WHAT HAPPENS TO HYBRIDITY?

Avoiding the terminology of mixtures (and hybrids) and opting for the rhetoric of interweaving may thus *also* turn out to be a PC strategy. Namely, if “mixing of languages” is a term bearing a pejorative connotation, then its replacement with “interweaving of languages” (or peoples, or cultures, or races) elegantly solves all the problems. Its connotation is highly positive, its message is optimistic; the word itself looks so innocent and untainted and free of any “biology” that nobody could possibly expose it to PC suspicions.

This is not to argue that the fear of the “PC predators” has played a very significant role here. In any case, in this Mediterranean region the passion for political correctness has been incomparably weaker compared to its North Atlantic birthplace. In my view, it is fear of mixing that is critical: the time-honored perception that mixing is bad but also the fear of losing one’s identity, the fear that a new identity might arise out of two previous identities. Interweaving, on the contrary, is a promise of a happy and colorful “multicultural” future for the diverse linguistic and cultural communities of the borderlands; something resembling a patterned *intreccio* woven from the threads of vivid colors, or an equally colorful fabric of a *pleteni vzorec*, or even a wildly optimistic interweaving partying of fabrics and human phenotypes of the United Colors of Benetton.

This might help to explain why the devotees of interweaving remain impermeable also to the discourses of *hybridity*. This resistance is naturally perfectly consistent with the resistance to mixing. However, the thing is that many devotees of interweaving and of hybridity work side by side in the same academic institutions, share the same cabinets and the classrooms at the same university departments and publish their articles in the same journals, both in the borderland and, to a lesser extent, in the capital. Considering that the discourse of hybridity, especially in its postcolonial edition, has its reception and enjoys certain popularity also in the borderland, it would be a reasonable expectation that the devotees of interweaving might borrow a thing or two from it. None of that happens, however. Where *prepletanje* reigns, there is no room for mixtures, hybridity, blends, compounds, and syncretism. This notion is not just one among many equals, all working towards the same goal.

The article by Neva Godini on Karel Štrekelj and the Karstic dialects that was discussed above is an excellent illustration of the exclusionary nature of the discourse of interweaving. Godini is totally silent about *Sprachmischungen* despite the fact that Schuchardt had described the same area as an area of language mixing. The word *hybrid* nevertheless appears in her article. It appears only once, and this in the footnote where she comments on the dialectal word *tèr* for the tower or the church tower (*torre* in Italian and *turn*, a loanword from German, in neighboring villages), expressing hope that it is not “a weird hybrid of the two loanwords” but an autochthonous phonetic development of a Romance loanword (Godini, 1994, 269). A hybrid cannot be but “weird”. This can be seen as a strong signal that the discourse of hybridity (and by extension mixing) should not be *mixed* with the discourse of interweaving.

## MEŠANICE BREZ MEŠANJA: BOJAZNI PRED JEZIKOVNO IN KULTURNO HIBRIDNOSTJO NA SLOVENSKO-ITALIJANSKEM MEJNEM OBMOČJU

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### **POVZETEK**

*Članek raziskuje sodobno težnjo izogibanja terminologiji »mešanja« in »mešanic« ter njenega nadomeščanja z izrazom »prepletanje« v tekoči slovenski družboslovni literaturi kakor tudi v javni rabi. To izogibanje je posebno očitno na italijansko-slovenskem obmejnem območju, kjer so preučevanja jezikovnih in kulturnih stikov, dvojezičnosti in multikulturalnosti v polnem razmahu na obeh straneh državne meje, še zlasti med etničnimi Slovenci na jadranski obali. Članek prinaša dokumentacijo, ki kaže na sistematično »miksofobno« naravo zavračanja terminologije in podobja mešanja ter hibridizacije in njenega nadomeščanja s pojmi jezikovnih in kulturnih interakcij, v katerih je prepletene niti po potrebi zmeraj mogoče znova razplesti.*

*Ključne besede: mešanice (jezikovne in kulturne), prepletanje (jezikovno in kulturno), hibridnost, mešanje, italijansko-slovenski obmejni prostor*

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