

Jan Cosinka

Teach Yourself Malkielese.

Berkeley: Ian Jackson, 2006. 162 pp.

US\$ 15

Reviewed by: Anders Ahlqvist, Helsingfors.

This is a very enjoyable book. It can be read as pure spoof, directed at linguists and philologists. There may also be some serious lessons to be learnt from it. As Cosinka states (p. 2), the term ‘Malkielese’ seems to have been first used in print by Robert Hall Jr (1911–1997), of the sort of English the late Yakov Malkiel (1914–1998) not only used in his own scholarly work, but also imposed on colleagues contributing work edited by him. Cosinka’s contention (p. 17) is summarised as follows. ‘In short, Malkielese is a language, and should be carefully distinguished from the many contemporary pidgin or macaronic idiolects of émigrés.’ He (p. 21) has this to add. ‘There are two main creoles in North American Romance philology: Malkielese and Spitzerian. The latter is now apparently extinct: usage was voluntary. It remained an auxiliary language of no very striking peculiarities, having never obtained the public funding that has kept Welsh, Irish and Malkielese alive in the twentieth century.’

The book is written in a splendidly erudite style. There are numerous quotations (notably in German, English, Spanish, French, Greek, Italian and Latin); they seem genuine and accurate. The footnotes are abundant. A major part consists of an Appendix (pp. 83–153) that contains a ‘Glossary of Malkielisms’. One short extract (p. 145) will give the flavour:

Titillation

When Rebecca Posner glosses the phrase ‘**titillating** semantic characteristics’ with the remark: ‘scatological or obscene items are of special appeal to some etymologists’,[...] she hints at the equivocal position that the word **titillate** has come to occupy in the English language. [...] In Malkielese, [... t]he piquancy of **titillation** is entirely cerebral, [...].

It is worth noting that **boldface** is used (‘for ease of instruction’, see p. vi) for all instances of Malkielisms. Naturally enough, they are quoted profusely. Otherwise, the book appears to be very professionally produced. Apart from those few listed in the sheet of errata supplied, I have noted these two misprints (both in footnote * on p. 35): ῥοδοδακτυλος for ῥοδοδάκτυλος ‘rosy-fingered’ and and ὀνοψ for οἶνωψ ‘wine-dark’ ‘wine-dark’.

Now for the serious lessons. The first is that this could be taken as an unwarranted attack on someone no longer able to defend himself. Sadly, we shall never know, but one must hope that Malkiel himself might have found the book interesting and even somewhat amusing. The second rather more weighty one is that it furnishes all of us scholars with a sound warning about the advisability of taking a very close look at the way we express ourselves. Finally, in congratulating the author, may I therefore express the hope that he will live long enough to experience the

publication, one day, of an even more deftly-balanced book-length study entitled *Teach Yourself Cosinkan*.

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