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The early chronology of long vowels in Balto-Slavic

As Ferdinand de Saussure observed at the end of the 19th century, "à part deux ou trois cas spéciaux (allongement du nominatif, allongement de l'aoriste sigmatique, etc.), l'alternance *e* – *ē* n'est pas indo-européenne" (1894: 428), and in these few cases we do not find an acute tone in Balto-Slavic. The original distribution has been obscured by various types of metatony and analogy.

A few years later, Jakob Wackernagel pointed out that Sanskrit *vṛddhi* is found in three categories with seven subdivisions (1896: 66-68):

(1) Secondary nominal derivation.
(2) Roots with a full grade vowel,
  (a) in monosyllabic nouns, e.g. *-hārd-* 'heart',
  (b) before primary suffixes, e.g. *hā́rdi* 'heart',
  (c) in the singular of some root presents, e.g. *mārṣṭi* 'wipes',
  (d) in the active forms of the sigmatic aorist, e.g. *ajaiṣam* 'I won'.
(3) Final syllables of nominal stems, e.g.
  (a) nom.sg. *sákhā* 'friend',
  (b) loc.sg. *agnā́* 'fire'.

He concludes that *vṛddhi* is a variety ("Spielart") of the full grade which arose phonetically in monosyllabic word forms, for which he refers to parallels in Germanic and Afghan. The third category is best explained as phonetic lengthening before word-final resonants (cf. Kortlandt 1975: 85).

Most 20th century scholars "accept the existence of an archaic layer of PIE formations characterized by apophonic or invariant lengthened grade" (Villanueva 2011: 7) such as Narten presents (Vedic *stáuti* 'praises') and causatives (Latin *sōpīre* 'put to sleep'), heteroclitics (Hittite *šēḫur* 'urine' < *sēH₂ur*), s-stem nouns (Greek *γῆρας* 'old age'), *vṛddhi* derivatives (OHG *swāgur* 'brother-in-law'), thematic nouns (OHG *āz* 'food') and *ā*-stem nouns (Greek *κώμη* 'village'). In Balto-Slavic Villanueva finds evidence for Narten presents, causatives and desideratives, lengthened grade iteratives, root nouns, "Narten nouns" and *vṛddhi* derivatives with an acute tone (2011: 21-32). He acknowledges that we do not find an acute tone in word-final position (Lith. *akmuõ, duktẽ*) and in monosyllables (Latvian *sàls, gùovs*, Lith. *duõs*, SCr. *dònijeh* 'I brought'), for which he assumes a type of metatony. Thus, he effectively agrees with the present author on the data identified by Saussure and Wackernagel as representing original lengthened grade vowels, albeit at the cost of introducing an additional rule of metatony. In the following I shall not give a detailed account of the many differences between the two of us (for which I refer to a forthcoming article by Tijmen Pronk) but rather focus the attention on the methodological issues underlying these differences. It appears that there are two basic issues where I find myself in disagreement with the majority of my 20th century colleagues.

Firstly, my approach is reductionist in the sense that the number of possible reconstructions must be kept to a minimum. Thus, I reconstruct two, not three PIE velar series, viz. palatovelars and labiovelars, as found in Circassian (e.g. Kuipers 1960: 18), Ubykh (Vogt 1963: 13), and in Salish and Wakashan languages. There are two reasons for this. First, the alleged plain velar series is largely in complementary

distribution with these two series and can be derived from them (cf. Meillet 1894, Steensland 1973). Second, there are many dozens of examples of alternation between the plain velars and the other two series. As far as I know, these two points have never been properly addressed by proponents of the theory that the proto-language had three original velar series. In a similar vein I reject the reconstruction of a PIE phoneme *a (cf. Lubotsky 1989), long vowels *ā, *ī, *ū, semivowels *y, *w, and phonemically distinct syllabic resonants and laryngeals. The great merit of the laryngeal theory is precisely that it renders such reconstructions superfluous and therefore incorrect. Thus, I derive both Latin *sine* and Toch. B *snai* 'without' from PIE *snH₁i and attribute the syllabification to the separate languages.

Secondly, my reconstructions always refer to a specific stage in the development of a linguistic system. While the necessity of a strict chronological ordering is commonplace among philologists, there appears to be a general tendency for historical linguists to date prehistoric developments as far back in time as they possibly can. Clear examples are Grimm's law in Germanic, Saussure's law in Lithuanian, and Dybo's law in Slavic, all of which can be dated to no more than a few centuries before the beginnings of a written tradition. Another example is the frequent reconstruction of the acc.pl. ending *-ons* as *-ōns* or *-ōs* in spite of the Old High German distinction between *-a* < *-ons*, *-ā* < *-āns* and *-o* < *-ās*. An extreme example is Kapović's reconstruction of paradigm (a) for Slavic *zvěrъ* 'beast' (2009a: 240) on the basis of the Serbo-Croatian dialectal form (Sandžak) *zvȅr* beside *zvȅre*, *zvjȅre*, gen. *zv(j)ȅreta*, also *zvére*, *zvijère*, *zv(j)èreta* and *zvîre*, *zvȉreta*, where the short vowel is the phonetic reflex of a falling circumflex in polysyllabic word forms, as in *vréme*, *vrijème*, *vrȅmena* 'time'. (Incidentally, I have reconstructed a laryngeal in *ǵʰueH₁r- since 1976.) Another extreme example is Kapović's derivation of the Slavic 1st sg. pronouns *ja* (a) and *jazъ* (b) from two distinct PIE forms *eǵ and *eǵHóm (2009b: 65) in spite of the facts that there is no semantic difference and that the two forms never cooccur in the same Slavic dialect. Villanueva reconstructs a long vowel in the word for 'liver' on the basis of Greek ἧπαρ in spite of the short vowel in Sanskrit *yákr̥t* and Latin *iecur* (2011: 7), rejecting the simple analogy after κῆρ and ἦτορ 'heart'. He assumes Lith. *várna* 'crow' and *vìlkė* 'she-wolf' to be *vr̥ddhi* derivatives of *vařnas* 'raven' and *vìlkas* 'wolf' (2011: 30) though the former pair can hardly be separated from Latin *corvus*, *cornīx* and Greek κόραξ, κορώνη and the latter pair is identical with Sanskrit *vŕ̥kas*, *vr̥kī́s* (cf. Kortlandt 2009: 7, 106, 131). And so on and so forth.

The attractiveness of projecting a variety of formations back in time lies in the freedom it allows the investigator to choose between different reconstructions in accordance with his theoretical preconceptions. The history of Indo-European reconstruction can to a large extent be seen as a gradual limitation of this freedom. The obvious identity between Latin *habēre* and German *haben* or between Latin *caput* and German *Kopf* could no longer be maintained after the discovery of Grimm's law. Many comparisons have become unacceptable as a result of the laryngeal theory. It is therefore advisable to be cautious when a new theory enlarges rather than restricts the number of possible reconstructions. A case in point is Villanueva's statement that "the lack of direct cognates can be compensated by a recent finding of comparative grammar", viz. what he calls the "Narten derivational system" which "allows us to go a step beyond the limits of the comparative method" (2011: 21). As an example he adduces Vedic *sādád-* 'sitting' (allegedly from *sēd-nt-*), which is a nonce form, beside Old Irish *sáidid* 'thrusts' (rather than "sets, fixes", cf. Thurneysen 1946: 336, allegedly a

causative *sōd-eie- but more probably a denominative *sōd-ie-), Latin *sēdēs* 'seat' (allegedly an *s*-stem but probably a root noun and possibly an *ē*-stem, cf. Schrijver 1991: 376) and Old Irish *síd* 'peace', where the long vowel is secondary in view of Welsh *hedd*. This does not inspire great confidence in the methodology. I shall not discuss the putative evidence for Narten presents and causatives in Balto-Slavic here but only note that the theory does not explain the actual distribution of the attested reflexes. The alleged Narten desideratives Lith. *ieškóti* 'look for' and Hittite *ganešš-* 'recognize' must also be explained differently (cf. Pronk 2011: 314 and Kloekhorst 2008: 435).

As I have shown elsewhere (2010: 125-137), the ablaut patterns in the Vedic aorist support Wackernagel's theory and are at variance with the postulates of the Narten system. On the one hand we find a full, not lengthened grade vowel in the 1st sg. sigmatic aorist injunctive *jeṣam* 'conquer', *stoṣam* 'praise' (cf. also Kortlandt 2007: 110). On the other hand we find lengthened grade vocalism in the 3rd sg. root aorist, e.g. Toch. B *śem* 'came' < *gʷēm-, Latin *vēnit*, Gothic *qem-* (cf. Kortlandt 2011: 420), Greek *ἔσβη* '(the fire) went out' < *gʷēs-, Vedic *āraik* 'left' < *lēikʷ-, also Lith. *ẽmė*, OCS *jętъ* 'took'. I therefore reject the idea of a Narten system and the loose reconstructions which are based on its assumptions. For similar reasons I reject Eichner's law, which is another device lacking a proper foundation but simplifying the task of the historical linguist because it widens the range of possible reconstructions at no cost (cf. Kortlandt 2010: 365-368). Like the Narten system, Eichner's law plays a major part in Villanueva's reconstructions (e.g. 2011: 7, 16, 27). While Villanueva easily dismisses root nouns without an acute tone (2011: 12-14, cf. Kortlandt 2009: 55), he is eager to adduce possible reflexes of an acute as actual reflexes of an original long vowel (2011: 27-32). These include Slavic iteratives with a shortened falling circumflex (e.g. SCr. *ùmirati*, *pòvraćati*, cf. Kortlandt 2011: 322), clearly recent formations (e.g. Lith. *kýboti*), iteratives with a metatonical "acute" (e.g. Latvian *nẽsât*, *tẽkât*, *lẽkât*, *mẽtât*, cf. Derksen 1996: 335-343), forms with zero grade *u*-vocalism (Slavic *myšь* 'mouse', *nyně* 'now'), and nouns with a metatonical "acute" (e.g. Lith. *núoma*, Latvian *nuõma*, *ruõta*, also *siẽva* 'wife', cf. already Trautmann 1923: 301). All these examples are quite irrelevant for a reconstruction of the original state of affairs.

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Summary

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