

ON REDUCED VOWELS IN SLAVIC

FREDERIK KORTLANDT

The origin of the Slavic alternation between *e* and soft jer is heterogeneous. Most of the instances can be derived from the PIE. alternation between full and zero grade and its analogical spread, e.g. OCS. верѣ, вѣрати, where the soft jer arose as an epenthetic vowel before a syllabic resonant in late Balto-Slavic times. Other cases are less clear. There are a number of forms where the soft jer appears to have originated from a reduced variant of *e*. The most important instances are the following: (1) пѣци, рѣци, тѣци as opposed to перѣ, рерѣ, терѣ. (2) жерѣ next to жегѣ. (3) довьлѣж, довьлѣ-, 3 pl. довьлѣтъ, довьлѣтъ next to велѣж, велѣ-, велѣти. (4) шѣлѣ, Po. *szedł* next to ходити. (5) Cz. *čtyři, čtvrtý*, Po. *cztery*, Ru. *četyre*, SCr. *četiri*, OCS. четъриѣ, четърѣтъ. (6) вѣчерѣ but вечерѣ. (7) жѣзѣлѣ but SCr. *žezlo*. (8) мечѣ but SCr. *měč*.

Since all of these words have a palatal consonant which is contiguous to the reduced vowel, it is reasonable to assume that the reduction is the result of a comparatively recent sound law. It is reminiscent of the raising of PIE. **ei* in OCS. трѣиѣ, ростѣиѣ < **-eies*, which can be dated to stage 13 of my chronology (1979: 269). The conditions of the law are not quite clear, however. Holger Pedersen suggested that "ъ aus *e* in diesen Fällen immer unmittelbar vor der tonsilbe steht" (1905: 420). This is not only inaccurate, but also insufficient, as is clear from e.g. Ru. *četa, žená, čeló, žestókij, česát'* (жерѣвь), *žestókij, česát', želát'*. Pedersen sought to circumscribe the law by a narrower definition („unmittelbar vor einer betonten mit einem geräuschlaut oder mit einem geräuschlaut + einem sonoren laut anfangenden silbe") and concluded that the exact conditions cannot be established.

Reconsidering the problem eighty years later, we are in a much more advantageous position because the history of Slavic accentuation has largely been clarified. We now know that the non-initial stress of Ru. *četa, žená, čeló, žestókij, česát'* arose around 700 AD at the stage which I have called Young Proto-Slavic (1979: 263), and the same can be assumed for *želézo* and *želát'*. In the case of *žurávl'* we find the reduced vowel in SCr. *ždrào, ždrâl* next to *žërāv*. This word belongs to the Proto-Slavic type with mobile stress.

I now put forward the hypothesis that pretonic **e* was raised in a palatal environment at the same stage as original **ei*. This rule largely explains the instances listed above.

(1) According to the rules of Slavic accentuation, we expect desinential stress in the imperative of accentually mobile verbs. This is in accordance with the comparative evidence (cf. Stang 1957: 137).

(2) The verb 'to burn' has Proto-Slavic mobile stress.

(3) The stem alternation of 3 sg. ДОВЫЛАЕТЪ, 3 pl. ДОВЫЛАТЬ betrays its optative origin (cf. Vaillant 1966: 34). The stem belongs to the type with mobile stress.

(4) The accentuation of 'went' is ambiguous. The quantitative difference between Slovak *mohol* 'could' (not ***móhol*) and *šiel* 'went' suggests that the former word had root stress before the Proto-Slavic progressive accent shift whereas the stress was retracted from the final jer in the latter: **mòglò* vs. **šbdlò*.

(5) On the basis of Gr. *téssares*, Skt. *catúr-*, Lith. fem. *kėturios* 'four' next to Gr. *Turtaios*, Skt. *turīya-*, Lith. *ketvirtas* 'fourth' we expect Ru *četyre* (with Proto-Slavic progressive accent shift) and Cz. *čtvrtý*. The vocalism of these forms was apparently generalized.

(6) The word for 'evening' has Proto-Slavic mobile stress.

(7) Ru. *žezl*, gen. *-á* points to the Proto-Slavic type with root stress before the progressive accent shift. Since the phonological shape of the stem corresponds with that of **šbdlò*, one wonders if the word belongs to a minor type which had final stress at an earlier stage already. The etymology is unclear.

(8) The same holds for Ru. *meč*, gen. *-á*. The hypothesis that this word was borrowed from Germanic does not explain the short root vowel.

It may be objected to the rule proposed here that there is no evidence for other vocalic developments which depended on the place of the stress at the same stage. The objection is not decisive because there are two developments which actually point to a different treatment of pretonic syllables on the one hand and stressed and posttonic syllables on the other. First, the PIE. laryngeals were lost earlier in pretonic syllables than under the stress and in the first posttonic syllable, as I have argued on several previous occasions. The analogical elimination of the laryngeals in barytone forms of paradigms with mobile stress led to the characteristic absence of acute mobilia in Slavic, e.g. SCr. *sīn*, acc. sg. *glāvu*, Lith. *sūnu*, *gálva*. Second, vocalic quantity was neutralized in pretonic syllables, but not in other positions. This rule, which is still reflected in the absence of pretonic long vowels in modern literary Serbo-Croat, accounts for the short root vowel of Cz. *malina*, *jazyk*, *ruka*, SCr. *màlina*, *jèzik*, obl. pl. *rùkama*. (The length of SCr. *rùka* was taken from acc. sg. *rùku*.)

Leiden

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