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Initial Vowels in Slavic and Baltic

by
Henning Andersen

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Abbreviations

Arm.	Armenian
Av.	Avestan
B	Baltic
Bg.	Bulgarian
Br.	Belarusian
Bret.	Breton
ChS	Church Slavonic
CS	Common Slavic
Cur.	Curonian
Cz.	Czech
d.	dialect (E-d. eastern dialect, etc. kaj-d., ča-d. Croatian dialects)
E.	Elbing Vocabulary
Est.	Estonian
Eng.	English
Fi.	Finnish
Fr.	French
Gaul.	Gaulish
Gk.	Greek
Gm.	German
Go.	Gothic
Hesych.	Hesychius
Hitt.	Hittite
IPA	International Phonetic Association
Ir.	Irish
Ka.	Kashubian
La.	Latvian
Lat.	Latin
Li.	Lithuanian
LS	Lower Sorbian
M	Macedonian
Mak.	Ancient Macedonian
MHG	Middle High German
Mlr.	Middle Irish
Mod.	modern
Mor.	Moravian
o.	old, obsolete
OCS	Old Church Slavonic
OE	Old English
OFi.	Old Finnish
OHG	Old High German
Olr.	Old Irish
OLi.	Old Lithuanian
ON	Old Norse
OPr.	Old Prussian
OR	Old Russian
OSw.	Old Swedish
P	Polish
Pb.	Polabian
PB	Proto-Baltic
PGmc.	Proto-Germanic
Pom.	Pomeranian
Pre-	See section 9.1.2.
Ps.	Psalter
PS	Proto-Slavic
R	Russian
RChS	Russian Church Slavonic
Rum.	Rumanian
Sc.	Slovincian
SC	Serbo-Croatian
Sk.	Slovak
Skt.	Sanskrit
Sn.	Slovenian
SS	South Slavic
st.	standard
Tm.	Tememathian
top.	toponym
U	Ukrainian
US	Upper Sorbian
W	Welsh

Graphic and reference conventions

I. Attested forms

Forms cited from the modern languages follow the spelling of the sources with these exceptions: (1) standard forms in the Cyrillic alphabet are not transliterated, but represented in a phonemic notation; (2) dialect forms in the Cyrillic alphabet are converted to a phonetic transcription in Roman letters. Both these deviations are aimed at a consistent representation of word-initial vowels with and without prothesis, a difference often obscured by the several Cyrillic spelling conventions.

2. Reconstructed forms

Elements from reconstructed stages of the different languages are marked with an asterisk and italized in a basically phonemic notation. Individual phonemes and phoneme sequences will occasionally be written in slants where matters of phonemic interpretation are discussed. Slants are also used for phonemic interpretations of Old Prussian forms.

Reconstructed Proto-Slavic and Proto-Baltic forms are written in small capitals without an asterisk; see further section 9.1.3.

3. Cross references

Cross references are to chapters (e. g., chapter 3), sections (e. g., section 3.1), tables (e. g., table 3.1), and figures (e. g., figure 3.1). In all four types of reference, the initial digit identifies the chapter.

Examples are numbered consecutively within each chapter and referred to by numbers in parentheses, e. g., (3.1).

Numbers in square brackets index the lexemes discussed in this study and refer to the sections of chapter 7 where they are analyzed; e. g., the etymon PS EMELA- 'mistletoe' [18] is analyzed in section 7.18. A full inventory of these lexemes is presented in table 7.1.

Introduction

0.1. Common Slavic and the Slavic Migrations

This study undertakes the difficult task of shedding light on the Slavic dialects that existed before the Slavic Migrations.

The Slavic Migrations, the territorial expansion of the Slavs which peaked in the 500–600s, divide the prehistory of the Slavic languages into two separate periods – a recent period, Common Slavic *post migrationes*, fully accessible and amenable to the historical dialectologist's methods of analysis and interpretation, and an earlier period, Common Slavic *ante migrationes*, seemingly out of reach.

Historical sources record the Slavic conquest of the Balkan Peninsula from north to south in the 500–600s and a practically contemporary expansion of Slavic territory towards the northwest, where the Slavs crossed the river Oder around 400 and reached the lower Elbe around 700. In Eastern Europe, archaeological evidence attests to the Slavic infiltration of the cultural areas associated with Baltic peoples in what is now Belarus and contiguous parts of Russia from the 400s on and to the establishment of Slavic colonies around Pskov and Novgorod, in the West Finnic cultural areas north of these Baltic territories, already in the 500s, but with especial vigor during the subsequent two or three centuries.

It is the period after about 500 that sees the differentiation of post-Migration Common Slavic into the groupings of languages and dialects that are known from modern times. The historical dialectologist who examines this diversity easily recognizes isoglosses that cut across the Slavic territory, delimiting one segment from another, or which circumscribe a central portion of the territory, delimiting it from outlying, peripheral areas. The phonological changes that gave rise to these isoglosses, which criss-cross the Slavic lands, interacted in intricate ways and differently in different parts of this vast territory. This permits us to establish their relative chronology. But they are reflected as well in Slavic lexemes and, especially, names which are recorded in dated medieval texts – first and foremost Byzantine Greek and Latin sources – long before

the Slavic textual attestation begins to flow after the Christianization of the Slavs. The sound changes that we can infer from the isoglosses have left their imprint in thousands of place names, some of them adopted by the Slavs from other peoples, others coined by the Slavs and subsequently taken over by the successor populations in the regions where Slavic speech was later superseded by other languages (e. g., Greek, Albanian, Rumanian, Hungarian, German). These rich data allow the historical linguist to date the phonological differentiation of post-Migration Common Slavic in absolute terms (see, for instance, the useful sections on chronology in Shevelov [1965]; or Lamprecht [1987: 161, English summary, 192]).

By contrast, the period before the Migrations is largely a black box. True, there is plenty of evidence that there were dialect differences in the Common Slavic speech area in this period. To mention just one clear example, there are several dozen pairs of synonymous Common Slavic lexemes, of different provenience, which must owe their origin to prehistoric loan contacts between Slavs and other language communities (Italic, Iranian, Celtic, Germanic; cf. Martynov [1985]). In such contact situations, one can imagine, borrowings spread across the ante-Migration Common Slavic speech area from diverse points of entry, in various directions, reaching different extents. But the modern distribution of the reflexes of these lexemes has not yielded any coherent conclusions about areal divisions in the ante-Migration Slavic territory. Nor is it likely to, for – as Gaston Paris taught – each word has its own history, and so it is almost certain that this lexical variation did not divide the Slavic speech area into neatly distinct dialects.

For clear-cut dialect boundaries one would rather look to areal differences in morphology, or preferably phonology, for the systematic character of these parts of a grammar typically allows any difference between dialects to be manifested with great regularity in numerous tokens.

In this study I investigate a phonological peculiarity of the modern Slavic languages which probably goes back to a clear-cut dialect difference in the ante-Migration Common Slavic speech area. I think one can make a strong case in favor of this thesis. But I recognize it is a genuine problem how to go about defining isoglosses in a speech area that has long since ceased to exist, and whose existence came to an end by a major displacement of its people. Consequently, in addition to marshaling whatever evidence I think may be relevant to the substantive issues I will discuss, I will pay more attention than is usually done in studies of historical dialectology to questions of method, both concerning such general

problems as the relation between assumptions, data and (hypothetical) conclusions and the more particular issues that arise out of the lack of temporal continuity between the modern dialects and the dialect divisions that may be discerned in the ante-Migration Common Slavic speech area.

0.2. LCS *jezero || *ozero, La. ezars, Li. ẽžeras || ãžeras, OPr. Assaran 'lake'

The topic of this study is the lack of regularity in both Slavic and Baltic of the reflexes of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) initial **e-*, **a-*, and **o-*. While word-internal reflexes of PIE **-e-*, **-a-*, and **-o-* are quite regular (cf. table 0.1), each of the Proto-Indo-European initial vowels **e-*, **a-*, and **o-* is represented by both of the short low vowels in both Slavic and Baltic, with lexical distributions of the reflexes varying widely from language to language and from dialect to dialect.

Table 0.1. Slavic and Baltic reflexes of PIE **e, *a, *o*

	Word-initial			Word-internal		
PIE	**e-*	**a-*	**o-*	**-e-*	**-a-*	**-o-*
LCS	**je-* || **o-*	**je-* || **o-*	**je-* || **o-*	**-e-*	**-o-*	**-o-*
CB	**e-* || **a-*	**e-* || **a-*	**e-* || **a-*	**-e-*	**-a-*	**-a-*

This irregularity is a striking common characteristic of Slavic and Baltic, which was noted in the nineteenth century (cf. Bezzenberger [1897]; see Endzelin [1923] for additional references), but which has not played any role in discussions of the common inheritance or shared innovations of Slavic and Baltic. And yet – as I intend to show in this study – it is a feature which it is fruitful to examine in precisely such a genetic perspective.

The reason, or at least the main reason why this feature has not been viewed as a significant similarity between Slavic and Baltic, is probably the fact that it is not a simple, clear-cut similarity, but a fuzzy one that apparently results from more than one layer of innovation. One of these layers has been the subject of a long tradition of scholarship in comparative Slavic phonology, which predominantly has regarded such corre-

spondences as Late Common Slavic (LCS) **jezero* || **ozero* 'lake' as the results of an internal Slavic development, an East Slavic (some have thought Old Russian) change of LCS **je-* > **o-*; for some examples, see

Table 0.2. Sample correspondence sets for PS E-: LCS **jedinŭ* || **odinŭ* 'one', **jedva* || **odva* 'hardly', **jelenĭ* || **olenĭ* 'deer', **jesenĭ* || **osenĭ* 'autumn', **jesetrŭ* || **osetrŭ* 'sturgeon', **jezero* || **ozero* 'lake'

LCS	US	LS	Sk.	Cz.	P	Pm.	Pb.	Sn.	SC	B	M	OCS	R	Br.	U
**jedinŭ*	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
**odinŭ*								D		D		D	S	S	S
**jedva*	(S)	(S)	(S)	S	O			S	S	S	S	S	S	D	O
**odva*								D		D	D	D	D		
**jelenĭ*	S	S	S	S	S			S	S	S	S	S	D	D	D
**olenĭ*										D			S	S	S
**jesenĭ*			S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	D		D
**osenĭ*			O	O									S	S	S
**jesetrŭ*	S	S		S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S		D		D
**osetrŭ*													S	S	S
**jezero*	S	S	S	S	S	S	T	S	S	S	S	S	D		D
**ozero*			D	D				T		(T)		(T)	S	S	S

S marks exclusive or standard forms, D marks dialect forms, O marks old attestations or obsolete forms, and T marks toponyms. The toponyms indicated under Bulgarian and Old Church Slavonic are actually in Romania and Greece, respectively.

table 0.2. Adherence to this approach has created the impression that the similar irregular correspondences which can be observed in Latvian, Lithuanian, and Old Prussian (e.g., La. *ezars*, Li. *ẽžeras* || *ãžeras*, OPr. *Assaran* 'lake') have an independent, Baltic origin. At the same time, it has been apparent – to some scholars, at least – that the correspondences between Slavic and Baltic initial **e-* and **a-* and PIE **e-*, **a-*, and **o-* present deeper irregularities, which are distinct from those that may have produced the correspondences of the LCS **jezero* || **ozero*, La. *ezars*, Li. *ẽžeras* || *ãžeras*, OPr. *Assaran* type. But without a coherent understanding of the later layer or layers of innovation it has been difficult even to define this putative earlier layer.

Meanwhile, the explanations that have been proposed to account for the supposedly narrowly Slavic innovation exemplified in table 0.2 have all been quite unconvincing. They have been based on antiquated meth-

ods of analysis and antiquated assumptions about linguistic change, and, in addition, most of them have viewed the hypothetical East Slavic sound change in an erroneous chronological perspective. Fortunately – one might say – as more and more detailed information about the dialects of the Slavic languages has accumulated over the years, it has become possible to maintan these old-fashioned explanations only at the cost of disregarding or explaining away more and more of the relevant data. This is very much apparent in the most recent major publication on the issue, Popowska-Taborska (1984), which provides a meticulous and conscientious compilation and scrutiny of the available data, but shows a remarkable reluctance to acknowledge their relevance (see chapter 8).

In this study I will make a fresh start and examine first of all the Slavic side of this Slavic and Baltic feature from a new point of view.

I will first consider the chronological perspective in which the Slavic data need to be understood (chapter 1).

Then I will try to clarify the phonological nature of the relevant Slavic sound changes by drawing a typological parallel between the presumable prehistoric Slavic developments and similar actual developments in the prehistory of Lithuanian (chapter 2).

Against this background it becomes possible to interpret the geographical distribution of the Slavic **jezero || *ozero* reflexes and eventually to see these isoglosses as connected, spatially and temporally, with the Lithuanian *ẽžeras || ãžeras* reflexes (chapter 3).

The following chapter (chapter 4) considers the wider Baltic context of the La. *ezars*, Li. *ẽžeras || ãžeras*, OPr. *Assaran* isoglosses and concludes that these may be part and parcel of the same relatively recent layer of innovation that has had Slavists puzzled for so long.

Only when this has been done can one draw up a complete list of the layers of innovation that have produced the modern reflexes of initial PIE **e-*, **a-*, and **o-* in Slavic and Baltic and define the earliest of these layers, which accounts for the diachronic correspondences between Proto-Slavic and Proto-Baltic word-initial **e-* versus **a-* and Proto-Indo-European **e-* versus **a-* versus **o-* (chapter 5).

A separate chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the change that resulted in these correspondences (chapter 6).

The lexical material, Slavic and Baltic, on which the investigation is based is surveyed lexeme by lexeme in chapter 7.

Since a new approach is being advocated here, it makes sense to put off discussion of the scholarly tradition dedicated to the individual Slavic and Baltic sound changes to a later point (chapter 8), when the contribu-

tions made in this tradition can be reviewed and evaluated in relation both to the alternative methods of analysis and assumptions that are applied here, and to the relevant data.

The perspectives discussed in chapter 9 have the status of brief excursuses on questions of theory, of method, and of terminology that appear relevant at several points in the exposition, and are referred to there, but which are more conveniently collected in one place; see, for instance, the introductory section of chapter 9 and section 9.1.

The conclusion (chapter 10) provides a summary of the exposition and a statement of the main results of this study.

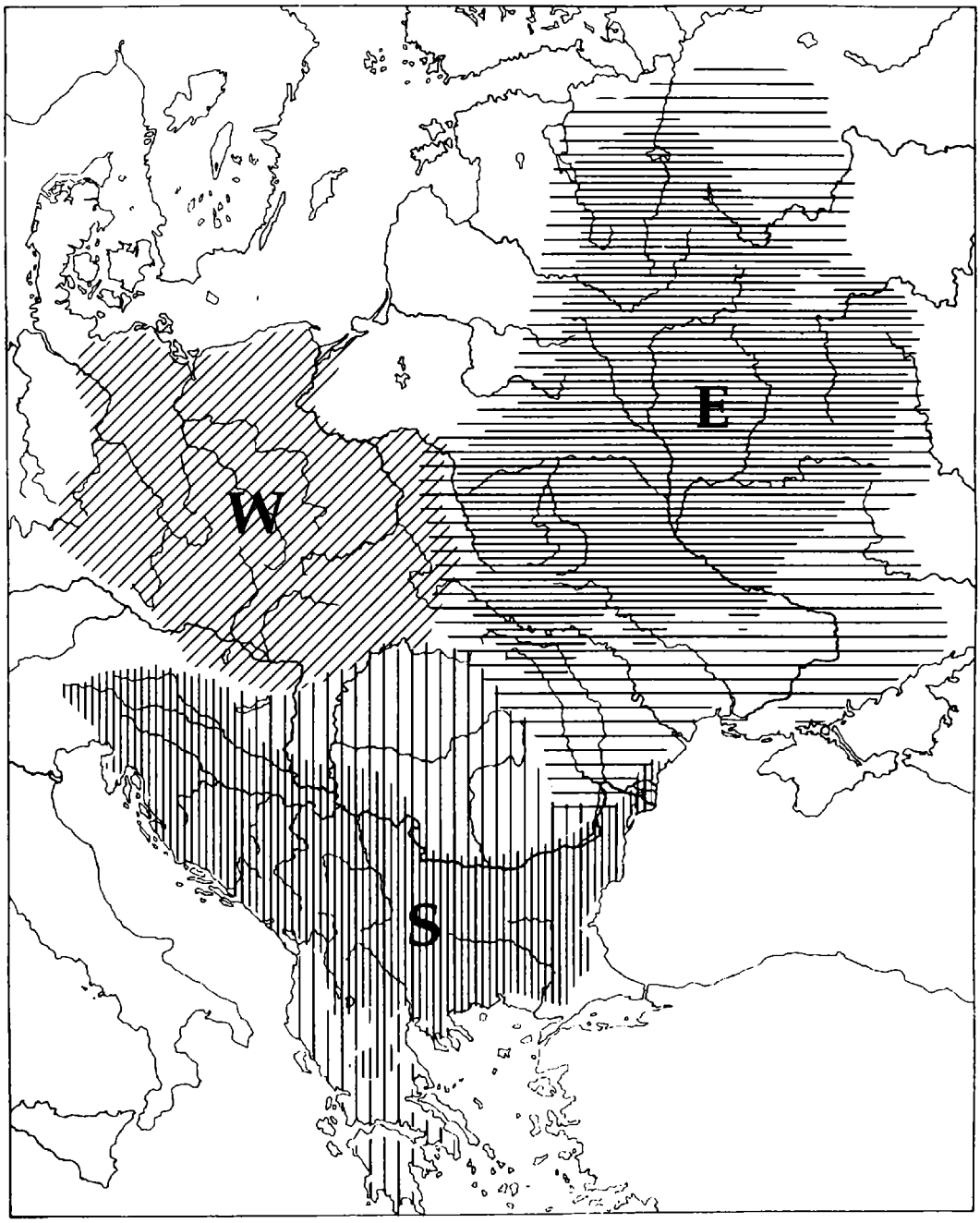

Figure 0.1. Slavic territories ca. AD 900 (based on Diels 1970). W = West Slavic, E = East Slavic, S = South Slavic.

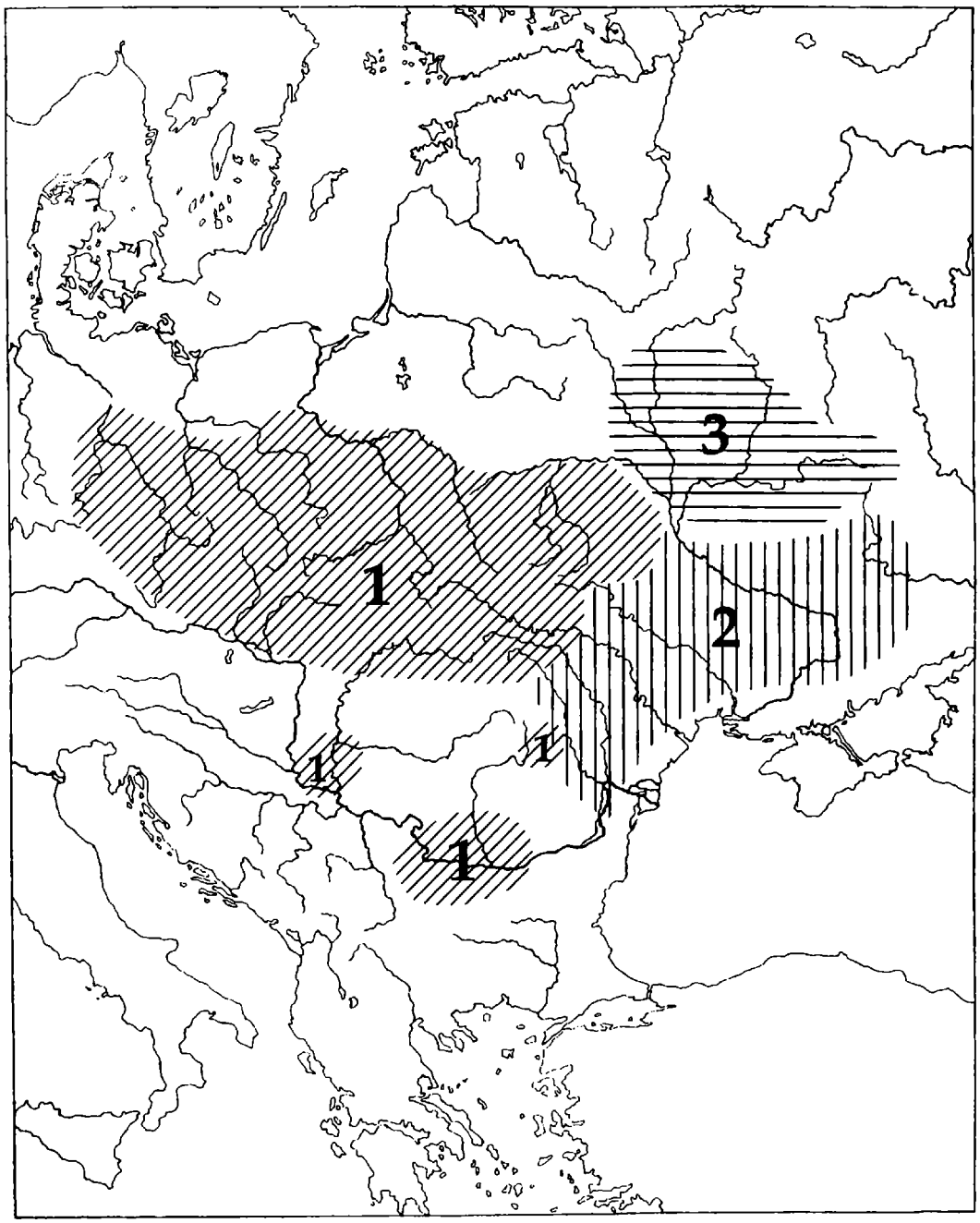

Figure 0.2. Cultural areas associated with the Slavs ca. AD 500–750 (1) Prague culture; (2) Pen'kovo culture; (3) Koločino culture (based on Baran et al. 1991, figure 37).