

Vowel-zero alternation in Slavic roots or the mismeasure of Slavic yers

Proto-Slavic yers disappeared during 10th-12th century. First they were centralised and subsequently lost in certain positions for reasons not properly understood: in a sequence of consecutive yers, every other yer vocalised and every odd one lost (Havlík's rule). Thus the forms NSg. **pъsъ* "dog", GSg **pъsa* developed to Old Czech *pes-psa* which caused the vowel-zero alternation in paradigmatic forms. The paradigmatic irregularity provoked by the loss of yers was later leveled in favour of the forms with a root vowel, e.g. NSg **blъcha* "flea"- GSg *blъchъ* > Old Czech *blcha-blech* > *blecha-blech*. Therefore, there exist forms with alternating vowels *pes-psa* together with forms without any alternation, e.g. *les* "wood"- *lesa* < *lěsъ-lěsa* as well as forms, where the original alternation was lost: *mech* "moss" -*mechu* < Old Czech *mech-mcha* < **mъchъ* -*mъcha*. While a historical linguist would consider all those forms a mixture of paradigmatic leveling with the relics of the original vowel-zero alternation, there has recently been a strong challenge to such a traditional approach: generative phonologists postulated yers from the synchronic point of view, as if they would exist in modern languages. The argument is that /e/ in *pes* which alternates with zero in *p0sa* must be derived from the underlying representation other than /e/ in *les-lesa* where it does not alternate. Thus, synchronic yers have nothing to do with historical yers because the difference between *pes* and *les* occurs only in the current language system. The *government phonology* (Scheer 2004/2011) takes the step further and explains the difference between *pes-psa/les-lesa* as the difference between a regressive lateral relation of the closed syllables (no vocalisation) and open syllables (vocalisation). Therefore, yers which appear in the open syllables are underlyingly floating and their phonetic value is determined by its neighbor to the right. However, by this approach completely ignores the fact that there is no historical reason to postulate two e's (or, one phoneme with two different qualities). The distorted interpretation of Slavic yers spreads into representative handbooks (e.g. *The Blackwell Companion to Phonology* 2011) corroborated by the lack of proper criticism from historical linguists which widens the gap between synchronic and diachronic linguistics much more.

I my paper I would like to deal with several points in defence of historical linguistics:

- explain the possible scenario for the Havlík's rule in Late Proto-Slavic: the reason why only even yers vocalise is metrical and is accompanied by the change of Late Proto-Slavic accentual system into the new, stress-quantity dependent system;
- show, how the lack of historical approach and the *government phonology* theory distorts interpretation of vowel-zero alternation and yers: that vowel zero alternation in Slavic languages depends on the phonotactics, historical relics of some forms as well as grammaticalisation of most forms.

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