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Evaluation of

*Proto-Slavic and language contact/ Protoslovanština a jazykový kontakt*

by Vít Boček (SEB 17, Praha 2014)

submitted for a Habilitation at the University of Brno

Vít Boček's monograph is a comprehensive presentation of the history of research on Proto-Slavic in the context of language contact. The first three chapters mainly focus on the history of linguistic ideas about language contact, language dispersal, and reconstruction of Proto-Slavic until the migration times. The fourth chapter describes contacts of Proto-Slavic with (in the corresponding subchapters) Iranian, Thracian, Celtic, Germanic, Altaic, Romance, Uralic and (in an excursus) Baltic languages according to the scheme: history and prehistory, the involved languages, lexical influences, phonological and grammatical influences, summary. The presentation has a consistent and transparent order and the argumentation is very clear.

After a general introduction in the first chapter, the second chapter presents the complexities of the research field and discusses the model for classifying research paradigms proposed for Proto-Uralic by Janhunen (2002). This model classifies research paradigms as either traditional or revisionistic or revolutionary or contra-revolutionary. Boček adopts this model to classify the proposed reconstructions of Proto-Slavic, but he also correctly points out that different aspects of research paradigms may lead to different classifications. At this point one would have wished to obtain a more language-data-driven analysis, showing whether the different paradigms are capable of solving some outstanding problems.



After deciding on this meta-level model, the author discusses dispersal models of Slavic, mainly with reference to Slavic as *lingua franca* in Central and Southern Europe vs. as a *koine*. Somewhat surprisingly, dispersal independently of such assumptions (described in several writings by Henning Andersen) is not discussed. The author describes several major theories (Slavic as *lingua franca* in the Avar khaganate, discussed by Pritsak, Lunt, Nichols and Curta; or as a *koine*, discussed by Holzer) and discusses the possibility of dialectal variation already in the Proto-Slavic homeland proposed by Nikolajev (together with Dybo) and Andersen. In addition, the author compares these insights about Slavic developments with a more general (but fully hypothetical) model for Indo-European dispersal proposed by Zimmer, which he prefers for reasons of incorporating language-contact parameters and socio-cultural considerations. This chapter shows the author's impressive knowledge of the relevant literature, presented in a transparent and comprehensive manner, but at the same time little language-data-based evaluation of the theories apart from evaluations found in the literature. The term *koine/koineization* for the spread of Slavic in presumably Avar areas used by Holzer and marginally elsewhere is left as such in the descriptions, although it does not correspond to the common use of this terminology, defined e.g. by Merriam-Webster as follows:

"In linguistics, the word *koine* is applied to a language developed from contact between dialects of the same language over a large region. Basically, a *koine* adopts those grammatical and lexical elements from the dialects of the region that are easily recognized by most area speakers and dispenses with those that are not."

The process of *koineization* would have changed the Slavic dialects in the migratory areas in Central and Southern Europe drastically compared to the homeland and Eastern Europe; the author only briefly hints at that instead of discussing it as a full argument. Generally, one would have wished to see a more critical approach by Boček in addition to reporting about stages of *koineization* discussed in the general literature and their possible application to Slavic.

The third chapter contains a presentation of general theories of language contact, with a special focus on Thomason and Kaufman (1997, 1998 etc.) and Van



Coetsem (1995, 1997 etc.). It is descriptively extremely comprehensive and very valuable for linguistic historiography. After a general introduction including a survey of the different terminologies, the author describes and compares the model of Thomason and Kaufman with Van Coetsem's model on pages 111-2000. The description includes citations showing the basic tenets of these models, how these models developed over the years and how the reviewers' perception changed. The last section of this highly informative (albeit in parts too lengthy) comparative description of the chosen models comes as something of an anticlimax, when Boček (in line with Janhunen) calls these models revisionistic and decides to apply these revisionistic models in his own research. Such simplistic classifications are below the otherwise highly knowledgeable line of presentation; the author could have presented a conclusion of his own in a much more convincing way. We should also mention that e.g. Andersen's (2001) more sophisticated classification of contact-related changes could have been mentioned as a refinement usable for further analysis.

The fourth chapter discusses Proto-Slavic language contacts. Following Janhunen, the discussed models are arranged from traditional to revisionistic to revolutionary. The author is here more critical, and rightly so, by noticing inconsistent terminology in Paliga's works (in fact resulting from inconsistent methodology), but still calls his work revolutionary. In a similar way, Pisani's works are correctly criticized for being achronistic (which in fact undermines the results), but this is still called revolutionary. The author could have taken these examples for criticizing Janhunen's classificatory basis as well. We may also notice that Gamkrelidze and Ivanov's (e.g. 1984) studies of Indo-European dialectal differentiation (including stages at which Slavic was in contact with e.g. Germanic) are surprisingly not taken into account in this otherwise very knowledgeable research history. At the same time, research is sometimes evaluated from a one-sided Indo-Europeanist point of view, e.g. when the author criticizes Dixon's disregard of the historical comparative method, whereas Dixon's equilibrium vs. punctuation model was mainly developed based on Australian



languages with very different socio-cultural and linguistic circumstances and a much shallower degree of documentation compared to Indo-European. True, this is discussed in the context of Brackney's work, but such digressions do not necessarily improve the overall impression of the work. Boček makes only a brief statement that biological models cannot be simply taken over; this could have been elaborated based on language data, especially in view of so-called "phylo-linguistics" (including the lexicostatic method and other quantitative approaches), mainly developed for double-checking the internal structure of a linguistic family previously established by classical historical linguistics.

The second part of this chapter discusses concrete data on language families relevant to a reconstruction of Proto-Slavic language contacts. The report on the language families and the linguistic properties possibly transferred due to language contact is also in this part centered around previous investigators, thereby being mainly a linguistic history which adds classifications of types of contact based on Van Coetsem's and Thomason's models.

The text is informative and comprehensive, but at times one would wish the author to pay more attention to the difference between reconstructed linguistic history based on (sometimes indirect) linguistic and distributional evidence vs. the (archeologically or linguistically) actually attested history. For example, the discussion of possible influences of Celtic on Slavic before the end of the first millennium AD is hampered by relative scarcity of texts on both sides, compared to relative abundance of archeological and historical materials. Venetic, which occupies an intermediate position between Celtic and Italic (with some older grammatical properties relating it to Celtic, but with a majority of phonological and lexical properties, including word formation, relating it to Italic), left texts until the early centuries of the first millennium AD, when it (as also Gaulish) became overlaid mainly by Romance. Other varieties potentially pertaining to the same dialectal group were attested only much later, if at all. Their similarity can be evaluated only typologically (as done by Gvozdanović 2009), framing the set of possible conclusions about classification and language



contacts. These conclusions can never be certain, but only a set of hypotheses with a certain degree of likelihood. If, for example, Old and Middle Breton had no specific orthography to denote palatalization, this neither necessarily means that there was none nor that it must have arisen only when written, in the medieval period due to contacts with Romance (as contested by the author). The clue is to be found in the specificity and distribution of palatalization: the regressive palatalization, similar to Romance, is found in the east of Breton (neighboring to Romance), but progressive palatalization, not found in Romance, occurs throughout Brittany (cf. Jackson 1967: 400). Concerning the dating, it is relevant to mention that Gallo-Romance had developed palatalization probably between the third and the fifth centuries AD, and that this property was well attested in Celtic. Even the High German Consonant Shift started (presumably between the third and the fifth centuries AD) in southern *Oberdeutsch* areas in which Gallo-Romance speakers had switched to German and pronounced their palatalized consonants as affricates in the positions in which their language would have the palatalization (cf. Schrijver 2013). Such indirect evidence may be quite telling and should not be discarded while making claims based only on textual artefacts. In line with writing a linguistic history of contact research, the author reports about the opinions; more evaluation would occasionally have been welcome.

Overall, the fourth chapter gives a comprehensive history of research on the languages possibly participating in contacts with Proto-Slavic. As an open desideratum, the diversity of the involved languages would enable a more extensive critical examination of the applied models (than briefly done in the final conclusion), especially Thomason's model by which the decisive factors for the outcome of contact change are: typological distance, universal markedness and degree of integration of the involved elements. These factors remained insufficiently defined in previous research and it would have been a major achievement to shed more light on them. This will hopefully be left for future research of this highly gifted author.

In conclusion: Vit Boček demonstrated in his book an impressively comprehensive knowledge of contact linguistics and more generally historical linguistics, accompanied by a high scholarly performance. He certainly deserves to be honored by a Habilitation.

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