

Word-internal “thorn” clusters and the dative singular of the PIE 1st person pronoun

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Any attempt of reconstructing the personal pronouns of Proto-Indo-European (PIE) must deal with their well-known tendency to come under analogical influence of each other. The application of the comparative method is further complicated by the fact that the individual Indo-European (IE) branches vary greatly with regard to the precise phonological shape of any form in question (cf. the dative singular of the 1st person pronoun: Gk. ἐμοί, Ved. *máhyam*, OAv. *maⁱbiiā*, OLat. *mihei*, Goth. *mis*, Arm. *inj*, OCS. *mǐně*, Lith. *mán*, Hitt. *ammuk*). Consequently, reconstructions of the PIE archetype (or rather reconstructions of concrete pronominal forms) are highly divergent.

However, a convincing reconstruction of PIE personal pronouns is possible, if we dare to focus on very old layers of the proto-language, and if we apply both the historical-comparative method and internal reconstruction side by side. Special attention should also be given to hitherto inexplicable forms which, at least in some cases, need not be the result of some opaque analogy, but which may be fully regular descendants of the respective PIE pronoun. This shall be exemplified by focusing on the PIE dative singular of the 1st person pronoun. Based on data from the Indo-Iranian, Italic, Armenian and Germanic branches, our picture of their common PIE predecessor can be plausibly refined.

The weak spot of the usual reconstructions (i.e. $*(h_1)méǵ^h\dot{\iota}o(m)$, $*(h_1)méǵ^he\dot{\iota}$ and similarly) is the fact that they are only suitable for the Indo-Iranian, Italic and Armenian forms. All other forms must be explained as analogical innovations. Although this can be true, it does not need to be in this entirety. A reconstruction which would be able to explain the forms of other, additional IE branches as fully regular would certainly be more elegant and economical than the standard explanations.

To cut a long story short: early PIE probably had a stressed dative singular $**(h_1)méd^h\dot{\iota}o$ for the 1st person pronoun. Already before the breakup of PIE, this $**(h_1)méd^h\dot{\iota}o$ underwent a regular simplification of its consonant cluster due to the *métron*-rule ($*VC.CRV \rightarrow *V.CRV$), which led to late PIE $*(h_1)méǵ^h\dot{\iota}o$. This reduced form was the base for Vedic *máhyam*, Wakhi *maž*, Old Latin *mihei*, Umbrian *mehe* and Armenian *inj*.

The rationale for the reconstruction with former $**d^h\dot{\iota}o$ - instead of simpler $*-ǵ^h\dot{\iota}o$ - is the Germanic evidence, as Proto-Germanic **miz* (Goth. *mis*, ON *mér*, OE *me*, OHG *mir*) with its final sibilant can plausibly be combined with the Ir., It. and Arm. forms by means of a former ‘thorn’ environment. As the word for ‘thousand’ (e.g. Goth. *þusundi*, OSwed. *þúsand*) demonstrates, a non-initial ‘thorn’ sequence

(as in the reconstructed strong stem dialectal PIE **tuH-dkómt-* ‘thousand’) evolved into a sibilant within (Proto-)Germanic.

A similar environment, i.e. a non-initial ‘thorn’ sequence, must have been present in the pronoun’s dative, too, because Germanic at some point in its prehistory lost final **-jo*. This is clearly visible in the masculine or neuter genitive singular of various pronouns; cf. e.g. Ved. gen. *tásya*, Gk. *τοῖο* < PIE **tósjo*, but PGmc. **bas*, as reflected in OE. *þæs*, OS. *thas*; similarly, but with *e*-grade, Goth. *þis*, OHG. *des* < PGmc. **þes* < PIE **tésjo*.

If this loss occurred very early – i.e. already in PIE times, in the dialect of PIE which was to evolve into Germanic –, it would imply that the pre-Germanic dialect could not participate in the otherwise common PIE reduction of early PIE ***(h₁)méd^hǵ^hjo* to late PIE **(h₁)még^hjo* and that early PIE ***(h₁)méd^hǵ^h-jo* was reduced to dialectal PIE **(h₁)méd^hǵ^h*. The latter form would then be a plausible predecessor of Proto-Germanic **miz*.

A former ‘thorn’ cluster could thus not only – in theory – be the base of Vedic *máhyam*, Wakhi *maž*, Old Latin *mihei*, Umbrian *mehe* and Armenian *inj*, but it is also indicated by the Germanic forms.

Selected literature

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