

**The prosodics of local adverbs in Balto-Slavic –  
a test for conversational priming in language change**

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The Balto-Slavic branch of Indo-European is characterized by a highly complex prosodic system, as can still be seen in modern languages like Lithuanian or Russian. Indeed, ‘Balto-Slavic accentology’ constitutes a whole research area all by itself, predictably encompassing both well-understood matters and rather desperate problems. In this paper I will deal with a particularly prohibitive issue – the development of local adverbs (prepositions, preverbs and prefixes).

The system of Balto-Slavic local adverbs is essentially unremarkable in an Indo-European perspective. Many local adverbs, however, display unexpected length and/or unexpected acute (a prosodic feature variously reconstructed as a rising tone or as creaky voice). In addition, we also have unexpected shortenings. To give two examples from Lithuanian, *priē* ‘by, at’ / *prie-das* ‘addition’ / *pri-dėti* ‘add’ continues Indo-European *\*prei*, whereas *prō* ‘through, by’ / *prō-trūkis* ‘outburst’ / *pra-trūkti* ‘burst’ continues Indo-European *\*pro*. The acute and length of *prie-* and *prō-* are unexpected and probably go back to Balto-Slavic (cf. Ru. *prá-sol* ‘merchant [of salt]’ beside *pro-solít* ‘to salt’). The non-acute of the prepositions *priē* and *prō* can be due to an inner-Lithuanian rule of deacutization of monosyllables, but the prefix *pri-* shows a shortening that is unexpected in this position.

Function words are sometimes affected by irregular lengthenings and shortenings, but in Balto-Slavic local adverbs these phenomena are just too widespread. One gets the impression that there must be a systematic explanation behind them. Although this topic has received some attention in recent years (Le Feuvre 2011, Petit 2011, Piperski 2013, Hill, Kölligan, Scheungraber, Frotscher 2019), we are still far from a generally accepted account. We are even far from a consensus concerning what exactly has to be explained and where the solution should be sought. In this paper I intend to test whether ‘conversational priming’ and other new concepts not traditionally employed in the study of language change may help solve some of the riddles posed by the local adverbs in Balto-Slavic.

References

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