

The Proto-Slavic prosodic system

Abstract

It is generally agreed that the traditional reconstruction of the Proto-Slavic phonological system as a slightly modified form of Old Church Slavic is in many respects historically inaccurate. As indicated by loanwords to and from early stages of Slavic and its neighbouring languages, the phonological system of the last stages of the Slavic proto-language significantly differed from that attested in Old Church Slavic manuscripts. The proto-form of the nominative singular of the word for 'water', for instance, is traditionally reconstructed as **vodà* in accordance with Old Church Slavic (and other Slavic languages). Evidence suggests, however, that a form such as **wa'dā* would come closer to the actual proto-form.

Taking evidence from loanwords and other sources into consideration in the reconstruction of the Proto-Slavic phonological system has important consequences for the reconstruction of the prosodic system. In a paper from 1963 Roman Jakobson gave an account of the Proto-Slavic prosodic system in better harmony with the external and internal linguistic evidence. The hypothesis proposed by Jakobson drastically reduced the number of relevant prosodic features of Proto-Slavic as compared with the number of features traditionally assumed. Jakobson, however, took into account only disyllabic word-forms, thus leaving a number of questions unanswered.

This paper provides a discussion of the reconstruction of the Proto-Slavic phonological and prosodic systems and examines the consequences of applying Jakobson's prosodic system to all possible Proto-Slavic word-forms.