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More on the Place of Slovak Among the Slavic Languages

Slovak - the native tongue of the prolific and versatile scholar we honor with this volume - while acknowledged to have complex and in part controversial ties to other Slavic languages, is by general consensus a member of the western branch of the Slavic linguistic group. Within West Slavic, Slovak, along with Czech, forms its southern subdivision, separate from the northern West Slavic languages usually, though rather infelicitously, referred to as Lekhitic and today comprised only of Polish and Kashubian. The latter never achieved full literary status which would have made it one of the Slavic standard languages. Moreover, it is currently in the process of being integrated into the complex of North Polish dialects. As is well known, Lekhitic once included some further regional variants of Slavic speech, notably Slovincian, extinct at the beginning of this century and closely related to Kashubian; in fact, some experts consider it to have been merely another local variety of essentially the same speech community as Kashubian. Other Pomeranian, or Baltic Slavic, dialects seem never to have been recorded and today can only be recovered incompletely, primarily on the basis of topo- and hydronymic (as well as some anthropo- and ethnonymic) data. This procedure is further complicated by the necessity of first sorting out those elements reflecting the massive interference by various German dialectal superstrata. Still farther west we find the sparse Polabian linguistic evidence, dating from the late 17th-early 18th centuries, which represents the westernmost form of Slavic as spoken over a continuous, compact area of settlement. In a recent article, W. Mańczak (1987 [1989]), based on a variant of his usual lexical count, denies the existence of a separate Lekhitic branch of West Slavic and considers Kashubian and Slovincian more or less Polonized forms of a Polabian substratum. Transitional, as it were, between Polish and Czech - though historically believed (by such authorities as O. N. Trubačev and H. Schuster-Šewc) to form a separate entity resulting from migration to the region from earlier sites farther east and/or southeast - are the two "micro-languages" of the Sorbians, known as Upper and Lower Sorbian (or Lusatian), in a southeastern district of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Clearly, the Sorbian-speaking territory once covered a considerably larger area, extending to what is now Upper Saxony (or Saxony proper) and Thuringia. Generally, on early Slavic migration to and settlement in present-day Germany, see Herrmann 1985.

Located in the southeastern portion of the West Slavic language area, Slovak has fairly close - and, synchronically, well-defined - ties with both Polish, East Slavic (specifically, Ukrainian), and South Slavic (primarily, Slovenian and Kajkavian Serbo-Croatian), particularly at the dialectal level. The picture just sketched is in general keeping with the traditional and, on the whole, well-founded view of the tripartition of the Slavic languages into a western, eastern, and southern branch, based on the reconstructed preliterate and historically attested evolution. However, this evolution cannot be conceived in terms of an oversimplified, rectilinear family tree (*Stammbaum*) model of exclusively divergent linguistic change. For further discussion, see Birnbaum 1965, 1966; Ivanov 1982; on the complex relationship and interface of divergence and convergence in linguistic evolution, cf. Birnbaum 1985a, 1985b.

Yet it should be noted that the overall tripartite division of the Slavic languages as a whole is by no means the only one conceivable. Thus, leaving aside various hypotheses about an initial split into merely two areal complexes yielding the subsequent three-way division, a "tetrachotomic", or fourfold, division of Slavic has also been suggested in the course of the last few decades. The two-way split either groups the Late Common Slavic dialects underlying South and East Slavic together, and contrasts this presumed entity with the ancestral form of West Slavic (so originally J. Dobrovský; cf. more recently Bernštejn 1961, 61-73), or it opposes prehistoric North Slavic to South Slavic (so earlier, e.g., F. Mareš). Also, the ridge of the Carpathians (and possibly of their northwestward extension, the Sudetes) was considered to have formed the earliest watershed, thus grouping pre-Czecho-Slovak with the Slavic linguistic south (cf. Braun 1947, 29-40, 48-50, 53-55; Birnbaum 1987a). R. Jakobson (1963, 153-178), has proposed to distinguish four subtypes of Slavic based exclusively on prosodic data, an eastern (Bulgarian-Russian), a southern (Serbo-Slovenian), and two western ones (Czech-Sorbian and Slovak-Lekhitic), projecting this synchronic typological distinction diachronically into the Late Common Slavic phase. For an even more differentiated, purely accentologically based dialectal division of Common Slavic, see Bulatova et al., 1988. A more comprehensive "tetrachotomic" or "double dichotomic" classification of the Slavic languages, taking into account both suprasegmental (prosodic) and segmental phonological as well as morphosyntactic - but, understandably, not lexical - criteria and claiming synchronic (typological) in addition to diachronic (genetic) validity, was sketched by F. Mareš (1980). There, Slovak is grouped together with Czech, Upper and Lower Sorbian, and Polish (as only the contemporary standard languages are

considered) among the Northwest Slavic languages, for which a number of specific criteria are listed (of which fixed stress is characteristic of Macedonian as well and the Dsgm ending *-ovi* also of Ukrainian, but not of Sorbian, while concessive clauses introduced by *ačkoli/aczkolwiek* are not found in Lower Sorbian either). With Southwest Slavic (Serbo-Croatian and Slovenian) Czech and Slovak share the retention of (phonemic) vowel quantity, and Slovak also has the generalized present tense ending *-m* in the 1sg in common with the standard languages of that subgroup (see *ibid.*, 36-7). However, in this general classification, Mareš does not treat the "controversial issue of the internal subdivision of Northwest Slavic" (*ibid.*, 44, sub 7); nor does he discuss the isoglosses that unite Slovak with Polish, Ukrainian, or Slovenian-Kajkavian. The two other subgroups of Slavic standard languages in Mareš's scheme are Southeast Slavic (Bulgarian and Macedonian - constituted as a separate division only after Macedonian was afforded official status in 1945) and Northeast Slavic (Ukrainian, Belorussian, Russian).

If the traditional tripartite division of the Slavic languages as well as quadripartite classifications devised to supersede it fall short of determining and singling out the specific place of Slovak among its sister languages, perhaps another approach to achieve this goal would prove more successful. This is particularly true if we take into account not only the standard form of Slovak (established relatively late, in the 1840s, by Ľudovít Štúr, after earlier attempts by Anton Bernolák had failed) but also consider the full range of its dialectal variation, essential for a proper understanding of the emergence and development of the literary language. What I have in mind is the important distinction between central and peripheral languages within a given language group or, for an earlier, as yet less differentiated evolution, between central vs. peripheral phenomena (innovations as well as retentions). These can be ascertained within an essentially continuous language area such as that which we can assume for the Late Common Slavic period (c. 500-1000 A. D.), or at any rate, for the time up to the advent and permanent settlement of the Hungarians, or Magyars, in the mid-Danubian basin (10th century).

To exemplify this approach, we may recall that many scholars (among them, T. Lehr-Splawiński, N.S. Trubeckoj, R.I. Avanesov, O.N. Trubačev, and A.V. Isačenko) have argued that within Early East Slavic it is possible to distinguish between two major regions, a northeastern and a southwestern, roughly corresponding to the subsequent (initial) territories of Russian and Ukrainian, respectively. Of these, only the southwestern group

of East Slavic dialects remained in direct contact with the Late Common Slavic dialects underlying Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian (or, more accurately, Slovenian-Kajkavian and Štokavian-Čakavian) as well as probably Proto-Sorbian. By the same token, it is unlikely that the southwestern East Slavic dialect group was initially contiguous to pre-Polish or pre-Czechoslovak given the striking absence of any early West Slavic-East Slavic transitional dialects. Still, while linguistic innovations first developing in the East Slavic northeast usually remained limited to this area (thus eventually unfolding only in Russian proper or some of its dialects), other novel features originating in the Slavic south would subsequently spread to the west and from there in part also to the East Slavic southwest (Proto-Ukrainian) and only thereafter - at most sporadically and with considerable delay - to the East Slavic northeast (Proto-Russian). As a consequence, Russian, although obviously the most significant of all the Slavic languages as regards the number of its speakers and given its political, international, and cultural weight, is in typological and genetic terms a markedly peripheral (and as such generally archaic-conservative) Slavic language when compared to the other members of that language family. For discussion and exemplification, see Issatschenko 1980, 44-51.

To take another example, the tendency of CS *ě* to develop to a ('a) in certain environments (while reverting to *e* in other positions) can be considered a peripheral feature of Late Common Slavic, the result of which is found in the *e/a* alternation of Bulgarian and Polish, which is suggestive of an open *ä/a*-like pronunciation of Late Common Slavic *ě* in the peripheral zones of pre-Lekhitic and pre-Macedo-Bulgarian; cf. also the denotation of etymological *ě* and *ja* by one and the same letter symbol in Glagolitic Old Church Slavonic.

In terms of the central vs. peripheral contrast as applied to Slavic as a whole, Slovak must clearly be considered a typically central language, most probably even the most central language of Slavic altogether. To be more specific, there can of course be no doubt that of all the Slavic languages Slovak is most closely related to Czech. Nonetheless, it would be erroneous to suggest that Slovak is merely a further development of a regional (eastern) portion of Old Czech, a suggestion occasionally still voiced owing to the late date of the final crystallization of literary (standard) Slovak and, moreover, due to the significant impact that Czech has clearly had on the development of Slovak as a literary language (and to some extent even on that of some of its dialects). As a matter of fact, when compared to Czech,

Slovak is primarily characterized by a number of striking *a r c h a i s m s*. The most important of them are the following: (1) the distinction of quantity in syllabic liquids (just as in vowels); (2) the retention of syllabic *l* (*l̥*) in all environments (as contrasted with the Czech reflexes *lu*, *lú*, graphically *lou*, in certain positions); (3) partial retention of *čr-*, *žr-* (where Czech usually has the reflex *čer-*, *žer-*); (4) the diphthongs *ie*, *ia*, *uo*, graphically *ô* (preserved also in Old Czech but later monophthongized to long *i*, *u* graphically *í*, *ú*); (5) the lack of "umlaut" (*přehláska*) characteristic of Czech since the 12th century (cf. already in the 11th-century *Prague Fragments*: Gsg *cělenie* < *cělenija*): *a* > *ě*, *e*; *u* > *i* after soft consonant, as well as of the shift *aj* < *ej* (among Czech dialects also not found in Lach); (6) the lack of diphthongization: *ú* > *ou*, *ý* > *ej* (the former characteristic of literary, the latter of dialectal and colloquial Czech); (7) the retention of *dz* (< CS *dj*, as in Polish, but in Czech, except Lach, and in Sorbian simplified > *z*); (8) the depalatalization *ř* > *r* (while in Czech > *ř*, Polish *ż/ź*, graphically *rz*); (9) the continued use of the toponymic suffix *-ov-ce* (dial. CS *-ov-ěci*).

Among the generally less significant Slovak *i n n o v a t i o n s* (in comparison to Czech) we note: (1) the constraint on vocalic length: of two long vowels in consecutive syllables the second one is shortened; (2) the triple reflex of strong jer (front and back: *e*, *o*, *a*; in Slovak dialects even more differentiated; cf. Greenberg 1988); (3) *ä*, *ia* < CS *ę* (Oz *ja/a*, *ě*, *í*); (4) the establishment of virile as a separate gender in the adjectival declension of the plural; (5) the endings *-ia*, *-ovia* in the Npl of virile nouns; (6) the generalization of the ending *-m* in the 1sg of the present tense; (7) the loss of the preposition *pro* and the prefix *pro-* (preserved in Czech) and their replacement by *pre*, *pre-*.

In general it can be stated, then, that Slovak shares a considerable number of features with Czech (which, in turn, Czecho-Slovak to a large extent has in common with either South or East Slavic and the listing of which is here dispensed with) - especially medieval Czech (diphthongs, lack of "umlaut", lack of secondary diph- and monophthongization) - but that it also has some characteristics not found in Czech yet with counterparts in Polish (or Lekhitic at large) and partly in Sorbian (retention of *dz*, loss of *pro*). More broadly, we may note the specific ties of Slovak and South Slavic, notably Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian (the reflexes of strong jers, short and long syllabic liquids, 1sg present in *-m*, the suffix *-ovce/-ovci*), on the one hand, and East Slavic (reflexes of strong jers, *-ovce/-ovci*), on the other.

Of the three major Slovak dialect groups - Central Slovak (south of the High Tatra mountain range), West Slovak (in western Slovakia, including the capital city of Bratislava), and East Slovak (east and southeast of the Tatras) - the Central Slovak dialects on which, with some secondary West Slovak admixture, the standard language, codified by Štúr, is based) continue the earlier South Slavic dialects, reaching back to Late Common Slavic times. They therefore exhibit the closest ties with South Slavic; cf. in particular their so-called Yugoslavisms. The Moravian-Slovak dialect belt constitutes a distinct transitional linguistic variety linking Slovak and Czech, while some local Slovak speech communities just south, west, and east of the High Tatra range display certain features otherwise also found, albeit secondarily, in Polish dialects, notably south of the Carpathians (cf. Małecki 1938). In addition, there seem to exist some closer links between East Slovak and Polish. For further details and some examples, see, e.g. Sławski 1988, 934-935 and 942-947. Many relevant controversial issues, particularly as regards the mutual relationship of the Slovak dialects and their Late Common Slavic basis, were treated by J. Stanislav (esp. 1958), E. Pauliny (esp. 1963), R. Krajčovič (esp. 1974 and 1975), and Z. Stieber (esp. 1965, 53-74, and 1974, 143-161, 174-211). On the so-called Yugoslavisms of Slovak, see further Małecki (1931), Lekov (1937) and Kniezsa (1948). A critical assessment of pertinent work up to 1970 is found in Horálek (1971). See now, however, Udolph forthcoming, rejecting the hypothesis of a South Slavic substratum in Central Slovak and suggesting instead parallel development in originally adjacent regions with subsequent southward spreading.

More by way of curiosity it can be mentioned here that the "micro-language" of the Yugoslav Rusini, spoken primarily in the Vojvodina, which both typologically and genetically shows a genuine blend of West, East, and South Slavic characteristics, in its core goes back to an East Slovak dialect which was subsequently overlaid with Ukrainian and Serbo-Croatian linguistic peculiarities; cf. Birnbaum 1983 (esp. 10-15, 19) and 1981/83 [1985].

The mistaken but still fairly widespread notion that Slovak is no more than a mere extension, as it were, of Czech has to do, obviously, with the fact of its late, mid-19th-century codification as a literary language and the strong impact Czech has had on Slovak throughout its history. The very first documentary text that by some scholars - our honoree among them - is considered an essentially Slovak language monument is the Žilina town

book, *Žilinská kniha*, from the second half of the 15th century; cf. Ďurovič 1980, 212.

At first glance, the case of Slovak vis-à-vis Czech seems comparable to that of Macedonian in its relationship to Bulgarian. Yet while Macedonian is today, beyond a doubt, a fully autonomous literary language in its own right, i.e., different from (though closely related to) Bulgarian, its separate evolution did not begin before the late 18th century and gained momentum only throughout the 19th and in the early 20th century. Thus it is not, in my opinion, justified to regard the Old Church Slavonic textual evidence (or even its western segment, focused on the literary school of Ohrid) as linguistically anything other than Old Bulgarian (considering also the fact that for that period we can only speak of one, namely, Bulgarian, ethnic entity) - Old Bulgarian, however, being the ancestor both of modern Bulgarian and present-day Macedonian. The fact that in Constantine-Cyril and Methodius' pronunciation the reflexes of CS *tj* (*kt'*), *dj* may indeed not have been identical to those attested in the extant Old Church Slavonic manuscripts and inscriptions as well as in modern Bulgarian, viz., *št*, *žd* - this being the only major feature where there may have been a substantial difference between the speech of eastern Bulgaria (with its center in Preslav) and western Bulgaria, or Macedonia proper (notably in and around Ohrid) - does not yet warrant the distinction of two different languages in this area during early medieval times. It is, in other words, not possible to ascertain a significant number of isoglosses separating Old Bulgarian from what by some scholars has been styled "Old Macedonian"; for discussion, see Birnbaum 1987b, 1988.

By comparison, the situation in the Czecho-Slovak area is substantially different. Here, as we have seen, several of the isoglosses setting off contemporary Czech from Slovak amount to Slovak archaisms with roots in a distant, Late Common Slavic period. How old, for example, the *dz/z* (< CS *dj*) isogloss presumably is becomes evident if we recall that the earliest continuous Slavic text, the *Kiev Folia*, consistently and exclusively has the reflex *z* which may point to a Czech (or Czech-Moravian) rather than to an early Slovak origin of the scribe of this missal. Possibly, though, the *Kiev Folia* do in fact reflect a transitional Slavic dialect actually spoken in Pannonia (say, in the region of Lake Balaton), which therefore would suggest that this dialect at least in this respect was closer to present-day Czech than to standard Slovak. Cf. Stieber 1969, 11-12; 1974, 130-133; 1978; Rott-Žebrovsky 1987, 52-53 and 89; Schaecken 1987, 90-92 (where,

however, following other scholars, the reflex of CS *dj* is not considered necessarily diagnostic for a Proto-Czech rather than a Proto-Slovak origin of the text), 104-121, and 203 (where the author even suggests that the language of the *Kiev Folia* reflects a transitional dialects between Croatian and Slovak). In this context it should be noted, though, that in some Moravian-Slovak and West Slovak dialects the reflex of CS *dj* is indeed *z* rather than (preserved) *dz*. In the Moravian-Slovak dialect area the reflex *z* is widespread (except in the southeast) and of the West Slovak dialects *z* is found frequently in the speech of the Morava Valley; cf. Stieber 1965, 55, 64, 65. Whatever the proper interpretation of the reflex *z* (< *dj*) in the *Kiev Folia*, there can be no doubt that, notwithstanding the late codification of literary Slovak, its beginnings point to a conglomerate of several Late Common Slavic dialects.

In closing, it may be noted that the significant dialectal differentiation of present-day Slovak - exemplified by the range of reflexes of the strong jers - has several underlying causes. The central position of Slovak amidst the Slavic languages is borne out by its multiple ties with both Czech, Polish, Ukrainian, and Slovenian-Kajkavian. Slovak thus forms a bridge, it may be argued, spanning several focal regions within the Slavic linguistic territory. Another contributing factor is its geographic-ecological setting: Slovakia is a mountainous area with many isolated valleys, and it is, generally speaking, a country without any major urban communities comparable to the large metropolitan population centers found in the rest of the Slavic world. The only exception today is Bratislava, with a population of at present 417,000, up from a mere 242,000 in 1961.

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