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WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'CONSERVATIVE' AMONG INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES?

We declare, with linguistic and anthropological authority, that all languages and cultures change. We believe that they change somewhat constantly, and yet they seem to change by unequal quanta. We have not yet succeeded in correlating important linguistic Gesetze with great human events: The history of Old and Middle English does not match the year 1066, nor the years of King Alfred, the synod of Whitby, the birth or floruit of Chaucer, nor the building of Offa's dyke to keep the poisonous Welsh out of the English language – a measure which never succeeded. The stadial developments (if you believe in them) of Baltic do not mark the movements of the eastern Slavs, nor the northern Fenni, nor the coming of Christianity, nor Hanseatic phonology, nor the slumber of reason at the end of the 1930s, nor, I predict, the ineptitude of Western Europe and North America in the years 1989+. We have yet to solve and formulate the notions of change, and to assign them persuasively to their social place and role. The Praguians, following Baudouin de Courtenay and Saussure, as well as working with Hjelmslev and Paris, came to results which agree well with North Americans such as Edward Sapir, Leonard Bloomfield, Charles Hockett, and Paul Kiparsky; I refer now to the notion, incorporated in many divergent theoretical claims, that change in small socially unnoticed increments goes on all the time (perhaps forgetful of the surrounding culture-laden society), yet interrupted (irrelevantly? blindly?) by cataclysmic, arresting, formative, seminal revaluations which can lead to a new career for a language (or a culture, or an economy?), or a new tomorrow for a society, by virtue of a juxtaposition or opposition that almost no one would notice.

I wish to leave the subject of the nature of change; that has been addressed many times and in different theoretical frames. I turn now to the perception, the cultural (or folk) evaluation, and the social (or national) identification or espousal of change. We speak often and readily of innovation and of conservatism. If we can ever define change satisfactorily it should be relatively easy to identify aspects of innovation. But what can conservatism mean? What do we mean by the notion „less change than expected“? We say that all languages which have been studied are seen

to have undergone change; thus we know that conservatism cannot be total, equally absolute in all components of a grammar. In what way, then, does the notion **conservatism** tolerate change?

We all agree that the Baltic languages of IE are considered to be conservative. We will inspect briefly here in what that characteristic consists. I believe also (to cite a useful contrast) that Albanian is genetically close in relation to Baltic and Slavic; yet most scholars would not class Albanian as a notably conservative IE language. I discuss those characteristics of Albanian elsewhere, but we might cite here for contrast: *diell* = *saule*, *dīrsē* = *sviedri*, *vaj-zē* 'meitene' = Lith. *sesuō*, *vē-lla* 'brālis' = *laudis*, *nj-ē* = *v-ien-s*, *gjash-tē* = *seš-i*, *shta-tē* = *septiņ-i*, *te-tē* = *astō-ņi*, *s* 'ne-' = OPruss. *ka* (*kas*), *hē-n-gr-a* 'ēdu' = *dzer-t*. Yet on other grounds it is possible to point to remarkable archaisms in Albanian.

I will argue here that the basis for the common claim that the Baltic languages (especially East Baltic) are conservative inheres especially in two clear facts of their diachrony:

1. the conservation, non-componentially, of IE surface phonological segments (therefore diphthongs not conserved in Greek; syllabics not conserved in Latin; vowel quality relations not kept in Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, or Slavic; vowel length not in Italian; syllabic nuclei distorted in English and West Germanic; consonants lost in Irish and French or assimilated in Spanish; and without the multiple displacements of Armenian, Persian, Pashto, Breton, Indo-Aryan, Afrikaans, or Yiddish);

2. the simple orthogonal changes by replacement of relatively non-overlapping distinctive features in the phonology. This second characteristic is true also for Italian, less so for Spanish and Icelandic, somewhat for Serbo-Croatian, and I have claimed it for Romany (Gypsy) in contrast with Latin and with French.

In Baltic we see this orthogonality strikingly in the case of the IE obstruents, including Winter's lengthening with the mediae; cases like *egle* (= OPruss. *addle*), Lith. *žėnklas* (NB *gurkdys*, OPruss. *gurcle* ≠ Pol. *gardło*) or *sėkmas* are relatively rare. Such phenomena as Latin *ruber*, *iubeō*, *celsus*, *crībrum*, *candēlabrum*, *arātrum*, *pōculum*, *sepulcrum*, *fībula*, *scāla* represent only a part of the major obstacles to a compact and lean historical grammar of that much studied yet perennially embarrassing language.

We proceed now to our first point above by way of a selection of illustrations for which this learned audience can surely supply the operative formulations linking IE to Baltic. To emphasize this aspect of conservatism I present the illustrations in their Latvian shapes precisely to show also that the language which is usually called less conservative (and wrongly neglected by hasty books) exemplifies admirably the point we wish to make.

We first notice the high degree of IE segmental conservation: *te*, *daīkts*, *aūgt*, *āuss*, *aūksts*, *ļaudis*, *slatīna*, *dzīmt*, *jeņt*, *glābt*, *kvīest*, *dzīvs*, *tikrs*, *ligzds*, *migla*,

pērkūns, mazgājos. With some debate on the diphthong: *dļevs* (scarcely), *snļegs, piēns, māize*.

With mild contextual rephonemicization: *acs, kacēt, mātēt, lācis* (*tl-), *varš*; and with morphological loss, *mežs* (= Lith. *mėdžias*, OPruss. *median*; cf. *mets* = *mettan* etc.).

With further regular phonological change: *zivs ~ zivs* (NB a regular -i- stem), *dibins*. With full conservation of information: *ziņis, siņis, vīrsus, plūsts, zvērs*. With more intrusion of phonology: *l(u)ōgs* (: Lith. *lāngas*), *ūdens* (on morphology see below).

These phonological considerations intersect morphological facts: *liētus, vidus* of course have -a- stem plurals. *debess, zoss* are regularly -i- stems, but, archaically, not in the genitive plural.

Remodelled on old elements is *dāvana*. An orderly development of syllabics is seen in *asara* (*<d>(r)akru(r)) and *asins*, two old heteroclitics. On the other hand, we find dissimilation and then epenthesis in the ancient -i- stem *uguns* (*ngni-s).

The remains of old morphology remain visible in *sun-s*, where the nominative sg. (: Lith. *šuo*) is an -a- stem against the other -ja- inflexions (< *i- < C-stem). Even *māte* shows its old nominative.

Albanian keeps notable traces of old morphology, but an impressive transparency is also here evident in Latvian:

<i>balt-s sun-s, liel-s</i>		<i>vilk-s = ujk</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>madh</i>
	<i>-u</i>	<i>-u ujk</i>	<i>tē</i>	"
<i>-a-is</i> "	<i>-a-is</i>	<i>-s ujk-u</i>	<i>i</i>	"
	<i>-o</i>	<i>-u ujk-un</i>	<i>e</i>	"

The relation *velk-/velc, deg-/dedz* has been dealt with above. But in both Albanian and Baltic an old IE ablaut alternation, each of a different sort, subsists in the verb. Thus *līek-/līk-* functionally mirrors Alb. *pjek/poq-* 'cept', *vdes/vdiq* '(no)mirt' (v- is 'no-').

On the other hand, Latvian shows two old inherited suppletive verb paradigms:

<i>ei-/ej-</i> ,	<i>iēt ~ West Latv. iēt (3.), gāja, iē-t</i>
<i>es-</i>	<i>ir bija bū-t</i>

By contrast, modern Albanian conserves practically all the suppletive verb paradigms that we can reconstruct for PIE, the repertory in Albanian numbering some ten or a dozen: 'be', 'have', 'carry/bring', 'strike', 'fall', 'sit/stand/lie', 'eat', 'go', 'come', 'see', 'give', perhaps 'wish', 'know'. Albanian moreover has many very small classes of verb paradigms. Latvian, like PIE, has no 'have'.

But I see the conservation of Baltic noun paradigms as closely tied to principle 1 above.