THE DEVELOPMENT OF AKAN’JE IN RUSSIAN: NEW DATA

Sergey Kniazev, Evgeny Shaulskiy
Russian Department, Philological Faculty, Moscow State Lomonosov University
svkni@gmail.com, shaoulskiy@ya.ru

Abstract

The paper deals with the problem of historical development of unstressed vowel systems in Russian. A phonetic explanation for the development of existing types is suggested on the basis of a hypothesis that assumes the priority of the non-dissimilative type. A new, probably most archaic, type of unstressed vowel system in Russian is shown to provide another argument in favour of the suggested explanation.

Introduction

The main difference between all Russian dialects is the presence or absence of a prosodic nucleus (formed by stressed and pretonic vowels opposed to all other vowels in quantity and quality).

Northern dialects have no such a thing, Southern and Central (including Standard Russian) do have it:

Dialects with prosodic nucleus have vowel reduction in unstressed syllables and neutralization of unstressed non-high vowels (which may result in [a], called okan’je).

Dialects with no prosodic nucleus usually have no reduction and no neutralization (at least in the pretonic syllable, called akan’je).

There are two main types of akan’je in Russian:

- **Dissimilative** (D) where the quality (originally quantity) of pretonic vowels ([i] or [u]) depends on the quality (originally quantity) of stressed vowels (some Southern Russian dialects);
- **Non-dissimilative** (ND) with no such relation (other Southern and all Central Russian dialects, Standard Russian).

Main types of dissimilative akan’je after hard consonants are: D1) [a] before low [a], [a] elsewhere; D2) [a] before low [a] and mid-low [i], [u], and [a] before high [i], [u], and mid-high [e], [o]; D3) hypothetical [a] before high [i], [u], and [a] elsewhere was recently attested for the Boyanovichi dialect (1999):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D1-type dialect</th>
<th>Assumed D3-type dialect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black letters: stressed vowels</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured letters: pretonic vowels for each D-type resp.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 proto-dissimilative.

- **Dissimilative (D)** type dialect

- **Non-dissimilative (ND)** type dialect

Conclusions

Thus, texts previously supposed to show D3-type of akan’je display a completely different situation from those of contemporary D-type: qualitative and quantitative differences of pretonic vowels depending on the stressed vowel duration and quality are small, gradual and irrelevant.

It can be suggested that this dialect shows the most archaic type of “dissimilative” akan’je with vague courtiaural dependence of the pretonic vowel on the length of stressed vowel, which has not yet been fixed in the phonological system.

The existence of such a type may be regarded as another argument in favor of suggested explanation of the development of akan’je and this type itself may be called

Examples

D1) [a] before low [a], [a] elsewhere:

- [b’a’yu] / [ba’yu] / [kik ras podd’i’yaju] ‘I run, run and finally arrive’;
- [sa’çam] ... [kok ras] ‘meeters’ ‘exactly’.

Proto-D Almost any vowel from [a] to [a] may be found before every stressed vowel:

- [pa’la] ‘went’;
- [pa’la] ‘put’;
- [bu bu’la] ‘old woman’;
- [poda’dre] ‘will come’;
- [nak’ætæxæ] ‘on potatoes’.

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