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Evaluation of Habilitation thesis

"The development of the IE clusters *obstruent* + *t/s*(d^h)"
submitted by **Ondřej Šefčík** to Masaryk University, Brno (2020)

Reviewer:
Dr. habil. Irén Hegedűs, PhD, associate professor
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Ondřej Šefčík's thesis contributes to the diachronic study of a set of biconsonantal clusters in Indo-European languages by analysing the evolution such clusters in each of the individual branches of the language family. This topic is highly complicated and requires a widescale knowledge of the historical phonology (especially phonotactic constraints) of languages both ancient and modern. The author has clearly expressed his stance concerning the alternative (competing) models that exist in the reconstruction of the Proto-Indo-European consonant inventory. With regard to the long-standing, wexing 'guttural' dilemma, the author subscribes to a variant of the triadic model in which the primary opposition of plain velar::labiovelar developed into a triadic opposition in the *satəm* dialects and later the primordial opposition of plain velar::labiovelar was neutralized.

The thesis provides a panoramic overview of the developments of the target clusters in each Indo-European branch with emphasis on analysing the *satəm* developments. The survey shows that the author is conversant with the relevant literature, and it also demonstrates the author's ability to deal with a massive amount of publications and to synthesize the conflicting views critically. The main findings – clearly summarised in the last chapter – include establishing a typology of the processes affecting the consonant clusters examined: the three main types that the author distinguishes are *shared* processes, *drift*-processes and *zero*-processes (i.e. retention). Furthermore, the conclusion of the thesis identifies the main trajectories of consonant cluster changes and the underlying strategies assumed.

Comments on various aspects of content and form

1. Some additions/corrections to Nuristani data
   Although Nuristani data are not in the focus of interest in the thesis, I find it important to mention the following points (Ad p. 42):

   K+t = Nuristani *0t*:
   > the Kati word is cited by Nelson (1986: 99) in an orthographically deficient form; correctly it is *yitə*, or rather *itə* (the Kamviri dialect has *it'a* 'suit; pair; kind (measure)'.

g[h]+t = Nuristani *0g*:

> Prasun *ḍogū* 'milk' (and its variants) cannot directly descend from PIE **dheu̯g-* because the regular development would yield initial *l* in Prasun. Initial *ḍ* in Prasun develops via assimilation from Pre-Prasun **dr-*, so Morgenstierne's (1949: 258) suggestion positing metathesis: **dhrogga-* < **dhōghra-* is most probably right. This suggestion was integrated by Turner under lemma № 6579, **dōghra* 'milk'.

d[h]+t = N. *ṛ/0d*:

> Prasun *büd(ü)*, *büt* 'mind, intention' is obviously a loanword, so it is not a cognate of Kati (Kamviri) *bidi* 'mind', Ashkun *bad'i* 'wisdom' < Proto-Nur. **bud-* < PAryan *buddhi-* 'intelligence'.

I would challenge the statement (p. 41, fn. 25) that the situation with the description of Nuristani languages has not improved for a century after Morgenstierne (1926), see the monographs by Degener 1998, Buddruss & Degener 2015, 2017, as well as Strand's website (http://nuristan.info/) and numerous papers published. It is undeniable though, that the data available for research is still rather limited.

The symbol ϑ in the first line of the table on p. 44 should be deleted (typo?).

2. Language use and spelling:
- The thesis was written in appropriate academic style. Yet the text will require a native speaker's review before publication. The occasional incorrectness of the use of the English language, however, does not diminish the scientific value of the work.
- Spelling of the term *Nūrīstānī*: Although macrons used in spelling the term Nuristan/i are frequently seen in the linguistic literature, I would discourage this orthographic representation since Nuristani languages do not distinguish length opposition in vowels. The use of the macron reflects association with the Perso-Arabic pronunciation rather than with native Nuristani articulation. The leading expert, Richard Strand, writes *Nuristân*, where he uses the symbol <â> to mark an open central vowel as opposed to <a> ("articulated with the jaw more open"[1]), so basically we are dealing with a height difference like that in Hungarian (marked in spelling as **á** versus **a**), not a length contrast.
- Occasional typos occur in the text, but these are mere spelling mistakes, e.g. Mayrhoffer = Mayrhofer, Weba = Werba (p. 17, Note), Orel = Orël (footnotes 139, 140, 142, 143, 145, 151, 154), Budruss = Buddruss (p. 41), assilation = assimilation (p. 42). I have not noticed typos in the analysis of the language data.
- On p. 21 the title "Clusters of velar palatal …" should be "Clusters of velar/palatal …".

3. Format:
- The *Contents* page should precede the main text, rather than be placed at the end. I would also suggest a more informative presentation of the contents showing the subchapters as well.
- There is a list of abbreviations for language names (p. 267, which is not mentioned in the *Table of Contents*) but – more importantly – other abbreviations (e.g., AFT, GET) are not resolved and thus can be problematic for the reader.

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[1] For details see Strand (2007).

- I do not see the relevance of distinguishing "in-text" notes (marked off by smaller font size) from footnotes.
- Tables in the text should be numbered and not referred to as "the following table"; this is relevant for future publication because typography may place a table before it is mentioned in the text.

4. Citation and referencing:
- The recurring references to Sturtevant 1933 (see pp. 224-227, as well as footnote 228) should be corrected as Sturtevant 1933b.
- Some sources referred to in the text are missing from the list of references (e.g. Hegedűs 2012, Kümmel 2015).

Questions for discussion

1. The "thorny" problem of IE reconstruction "was deliberately and willingly omitted" (p.14) from the investigation, what is indeed justifiable by the fact that this issue would deserve a thesis of its own. Yet it would be interesting to know the Author's position on the reconstructability of PIE *b (at least referring to the view(s) that he finds most compelling).

2. The use of the terms 'trajectory' and 'strategy' appears to me somewhat inconsequent. I wonder how the Author would define the difference between 'affricativization trajectory' versus 'affricativization strategy'. A related issue is the alternating use of *affricativization* and *affricatization*, of which the latter may simply be a recurring typo (27 cases), I assume.

3. The monic model of the 'guttural question' (p. 8) would have deserved at least a footnote mentioning Illič-Svityč[2] and his explanation of the emergence of the three series of Indo-European velars. I understand though, that attempts at linguistic reconstruction going deeper than PIE are not generally welcome in academic circles, yet it can provide a challenging, alternative explanation. I was wondering if the author of the thesis would consider it a viable (maybe simpler?) alternative to posit that the three series of 'gutturals' were only positional allophones in PIE and they phonologized in the early period of disintegration into *centum* vs. *satəm*.

The author of the thesis is a linguist of international visibility. He has published articles related to the topic of the present thesis, what shows that the thesis is the outcome of a longer period of scrutiny and gestation. The thesis meets the formal criteria of citation etiquette. The future publication of the thesis as a monograph would be a relevant contribution to the field of Indo-European historical comparative linguistics.

Ondřej Šefčík's thesis proves the author's academic competence and high scholarly skills in dealing with complex theoretical issues (such as that of diachronic phonotactics discussed in the thesis), therefore, I recommend his habilitation thesis to be accepted.

Pécs, 07.29.2021

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[2] Illič-Svityč 1964, as well as later works by him.

References:

Buddruss, Georg & Almuth Degener. 2015. *Materialen zur Prasun-Sprache des Afghanischen Hindukusch. Teil I: Texte und Glossar* [Harvard Oriental Series, 80] Cambridge, MA – London: Harvard University Press.

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Degener, Almuth. (1998). *Die Sprache von Nisheygram im afganischen Hindukush.* [Neuindische Studien, 14] Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Illič-Svityč = Иллич-Свитыч, Владислав М. (1964). Генезис индоевропейских рядов гуттуральных в свете данных внешнего сравнения. *Проблемы индоевропейского языкознания. Тезисы докладов*, 22–26. Москва: Наука.

Morgenstierne, Georg. (1949). The language of the Prasun Kafirs. *Norsk Tidskrift for Sprogvidenskap* 15: 188–334.

Nelson, David. (1986). *The Historical Development of the Nuristani Languages.* Minneapolis–St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota (PhD-dissertation, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI).

Strand, Richard. (2007). Transcription and Pronunciation of the Nuristâni Languages. http://nuristan.info/Nuristani/phon.html (last modified 2016)

Turner, Ralph L. (1962–1966). *A Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages.* London: Oxford University Press. Vols. 1–4.