

## REMARKS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESIAN VOWELS

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## 1. Introduction

The Slovene dialect of Resia, spoken in several localities in the far northeast of Italy, was brought to the attention of Slavists by Baudouin de Courtenay [henceforth BdC], who in 1875 published a detailed phonetic description of the Resian sound system and its most important grammatical desinences, mentioning inter- and intralocal variation as well; and it is thanks to Professor Lencek's study of BdC's views (1977) that we have come to understand his ideas on the genetic and linguistic character of Resian.

BdC established a distinction between the so-called 'clear' and 'dark' vowels in Resian, and considered this feature crucial for its linguistic classification. His notation of this vowel distinction reflects much variation, however, variation that not only separates the location of **G**<sup>1</sup> from the others, but also occurs within localities. I shall here make an attempt to reconstruct the development of this feature in Resian, and of the stage attested by BdC.

## 2. Statement of the problem

Resian is now known (cf. Logar 1963, Rigler 1963, 1972) as a Slovene dialect without quantity or tone, having in most of its localities the following accented vowel system, where /i̇ ɛ̇ ɔ̇ ʉ̇/ are the dark vowels, and the others are clear:

## TABLE I:

i̇				u̇		i̇	ɛ̇	ɔ̇	ʉ̇
	e	ë	ö	o	+				
			a						

Unaccented vowels harmonize in the feature **dark** vs. **clear** with the accented non-low vowels.

According to Logar (1963:20) Resian has lost its length and tone distinctions, and the contemporary vowels in **S**, studied by him, have the following origin: /i/ from long \*ë; /u/ from long \*o; /e/ from the jers and nasal \*ę; /o/ from nasal \*ɔ; /ɛ/ from short \*i̇ in word-final syllable; /ɔ/ from short \*u and \*a in word-final syllable; /a/ from other instances of \*a; /j/ from long \*i; /ʉ/ from long \*u; /ɛ̇/ from acute (rising) \*ě and neoacute (rising) \*e; and /ɔ̇/ from neoacute (rising) \*o. In addition thereto, \*e \*o under newly retracted accent also became 'dark' (the type *okô* → *ǫkǫ* 'eye').<sup>2</sup> Logar remarked also that [ɛ] and [ɔ], which were originally short positional variants of /i/ and /u/, became phonemes after the loss of quantity distinctions. This was supported by borrowings from neighbouring Romance Friulian which contained these kinds of vowel.

For the locality of **N** Rigler (1963:71 ff.) established the same vowel system, though originating in part from a different development: in **N** the short nasals (as well as short \*i \*u) yielded /ɛ ɔ/; the jers yielded /a/; and \*a in a nasal environment resulted in /ɛ/. For

the locality of **G** Rigler established a different development, whereby short \*i \*u and the jers resulted in 'dark' vowels.

Logar (1981) found the additional vowel /ə/ in **S**, which originated from final short accented \*i and unaccented \*i and \*e.

How did the dark vowels [i ɛ ɔ ʊ] become phonemes in Resian?

Probably, the phonetic character of these vowels indeed originates in Friulian, as is now usually assumed in dialectological studies. Friulian exhibits a comparable distinction between what can be called tense vs. lax vowels (cf. Francescato 1970:ix, etc.), and lax vowels are phonetically shorter than tense ones. But there are considerable differences between the two vowel systems: most of Friulian has a full correspondence between the five cardinal tense vowels and the corresponding lax ones; and diphthongization, where present, eliminates all the non-low tense monophthongs. Whereas it is probable that the Resian dark phonetic quality is due to the influence of the Friulian lax phonetic quality, the structural conditions under which this influence took place must be assumed to have been specifically Resian. And it is there that investigators still mention insufficient clarity, even though important steps towards the solution have been made by Logar and Rigler.

### 3. A way to solve the problem

In order to investigate the subject, we can base ourselves on BdC's description of 1875 in order to formulate working hypotheses. These can be tested on the basis of the texts published by BdC in 1895, and possibly also on the basis of the (mostly unpublished) lexical material collected by BdC and preserved at the Academy of Sciences in Leningrad. The analysis thus obtained of the system as it was one century ago can then be related to the contemporary system.

I restrict myself here to the first source and to a formulation of several working hypotheses.

On the basis of BdC (1875) the following observations can be made:

- [ɛ] [ɔ] occur regularly in words of Slavic origin, corresponding with former short \*ě \*e and \*o; this holds for all short accented syllables, not only the acute and neoacute ones, on the grounds that there were no tone distinctions in short syllables (as falling vowels had been lengthened at the beginning of Slovene language-specific history);
- [ɛ] [ɔ] also occur morphologized, in grammatical endings which were accented in combination with some stems and unaccented in combination with others; an example being the first person plural present tense ending *-mɔ*, which occurs whether or not this syllable bears the accent;
- [ɛ] [ɔ] occur in all the localities in Resia;
- [i] [u] occur irregularly, are not morphologized, and are possibly lacking in the dialect of **G**;
- [ɛ] [ɔ] are not rendered in BdC's writings.

These data lead to the formulation of the following hypothetical stages, stated against the background of length developments in Resian:

(i) [ɛ] and [ɔ] were introduced as positional variants of \*ě \*e and of \*o in short accented syllables when length was still distinctive in final and non-final accented syllables;

(ii) [i] and [u] were introduced when length was distinctive only in word-final accented syllables; and

(iii) [ɛ] and [ɔ] were presumably introduced when length was distinctive only in word-final accented syllables.

For stage (ii) it can be assumed that /ɛ ɔ/ were phonemes, phonologized through the loss of non-final length distinctions, whereas [i ʊ] and [ë ɔ̃] were still positional variants. Only when length was lost also in the word-final position could the phonologization of these four occur.

BdC's description can be assumed to reflect the process of length neutralization in non-final syllables, such that the result is rendered as phonetically long in the accented position (comparably with other Slovene dialects). BdC used three length diacritics: ' ' ' for short, ' ^ ' for long, and ' ' ' for a length that he could not identify. In his notes the last-named varies with both of the other two. Later Bajec (1921-22) on the basis of diachronic and comparative Slovene evidence came to the conclusion that BdC's ' ' ' diacritic occurs on secondarily lengthened accented syllables of the type *lâkat* → *lakât* → *lâkat* / *lâkat* 'elbow'. It is presumably in these syllables that the process of length elimination discussed here may be observed, affecting also non-final short unshifted accented syllables. BdC's variable notation may be assumed to reflect this language change in Resian.

A further step in this development was, presumably, attested by Ramovš (1935), if he based this on fieldwork, which—as Groen pointed out in his valuable survey of the Resian vowels (1984)—is uncertain. In Ramovš' notation there are length distinctions in word-final syllables, whereas in other syllables he places the diacritic for length where BdC put the diacritic for short vowels (e.g., 'eye': Ramovš *òkò* vs. BdC *òkò*; 'road': Ramovš *cěsta* vs. BdC *cěsta*).

Finally, Logar and Rigler did not attest any vowel-length during their field-trip to Resia in 1962. The vowel-system at that time (Logar 1963, Rigler 1963, 1972) was the one described in the present paper (see 2. above). Vowel-length had apparently been completely eliminated.

The basic hypothesis suggested here, therefore, is that Resian had vowel-length distinctions at the time when Friulian borrowings introduced the tense vs. lax distinction, which were rendered in Resian as 'light' vs. 'dark'. The quality of the Friulian lax vowels, which were phonetically short in comparison with the corresponding tense ones, was then adopted by the Resian short vowels (note the different incidence in **G** as compared with the other localities); and this quality became phonological in Resian after the loss of phoneological length distinctions.

This hypothesis states that borrowing in itself was a necessary but insufficient condition for the rise of the 'light' vs. 'dark' vowel distinction in Resian. If true, this would mean that borrowings which are not characterized by length distinctions in their accented syllables are also not unequivocally characterized by the given vowel quality. And this is in fact exactly what can be said about Friulian and other Romance borrowings in Resian, as can be seen from an investigation of these borrowings by J.J. Steenwijk,<sup>3</sup> who investigated the texts in BdC (1895) and showed that the dark vowels can not with certainty be established as phonemes in the Romance borrowings in Resian, as their quality may vary.<sup>4</sup> The length of the accented syllables in such words may vary also.

The main hypothesis and subsidiary hypotheses formulated here should be tested on the basis of a complete survey of BdC's material, with fieldwork control of the same material now, a century after its collection. Specifically, the following must be tested:

- what—if any—are the length distinctions, and how these relate to diachronic and comparative Slovene evidence;

- what is the phonological status and distribution of [ɛ ɔ i u] (and, with reference to the contemporary dialect, of [ɛ ɔ] also); and how does this distribution relate to the diachronic evidence mentioned by Logar on the one hand and by myself on the other;
- whether these vowels are morphologized, especially in grammatical endings; and
- what is the interrelationship between words of Slavic origin and words of Friulian origin in Resian.

What I have tried to formulate here are some necessary preliminaries for further investigation of the Resian vowels.

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## REFERENCES

1. The following abbreviations are used for the localities and their dialects: **G** = Břila/San Giorgio, **N** = Nřva/Gniva, **S** = Stolvizza/Sòlbica.
2. ' ^ ' denotes long falling accented syllables, ' ' ' long rising ones, and ' ' ' short ones. Note Logar's terminology, following Ramovř 1935; the term 'dark' means 'breathy.'
3. A student working under the supervision of B.M. Groen at the University of Utrecht.
4. The same holds true for [ɛ] [ɔ].

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## POVZETEK

### PRIPOMBE K RAZVOJU REZIJANSKIH SAMOGLASNIKOV

*Avtorica na podlagi Baudouin de Courtenayevih podatkov (1875, 1895) o rezijanščini izoblikuje hipotezo o samoglasniškem sistemu za časa B. de Courtenaya in jo primerja z nedavnimi opisi rezijanščine. Nato izoblikuje skupek hipotez o razvoju rezijanskega glagolskega sistema in predlaga nadaljnje raziskovanje te teme.*