

ON THE CHANGE OF JAT' TO E AFTER JOT

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A still argued, but more often ignored, problem of Russian historical phonology is whether or not the phoneme /ě/ changed to or coalesced with /e/ after jot at an early date. Many of the historical phonologies and historical grammars of Russian ignore the question completely, others simply state the change as an undisputed fact, and only a minority consider the question in any detail (above all Sobolevskij 1907 and Durnovo 1924). Vlasto (1986:126) simply says, "The sg. fem. gen. *eě* → *eé* → *eě*," with no source cited, and never considers it in terms of a general sound change.

The evidence most commonly cited includes the modern Russian gen. sg. fem. *eě*, the acc. sg. fem. *samoě*, and the pronunciation of the adj. pl. as [ijə] rather than [iji], which assumes an earlier */ijo/ rather than /ijě/. Sobolevskij (1907:65) assumes that *eě* etc. are by analogy to *meně* (← *mene*), whereas Durnovo (1924:182-83) argues for the change of [ě] to [e] after [j].

Deciding the question is complicated by several factors. First of all, the combination [jě] occurred only in a small number of instances. Because the "first jat'" after jot changed to /a/ (e.g., **stoyětey* → *stojati*) and the diphthongs which gave the "second jat'" changed to /i/ after a jot (e.g., *na stolě* but *na kra[j]i* from a presumed locative ending **-oy*), only the so-called "third jat'" could occur after [j].

Second, since this "third jat'" was an East Slavic feature, it would not be expected to occur (except as a "scribal error") in any documents which closely followed the usual rather Bulgarianized orthography of early Old East Slavic documents. Forms with jat' are clearly not rare, but the number of cases in documents of the 11th and 12th centuries is very small as a percentage of the total: for a listing of some instances, see Sobolevskij 1907:152-53. We might well expect to find more examples of the "third jat'" in original East Slavic documents (as opposed to those copied directly or indirectly from South Slavic originals), but since we have a very limited number of extant original East Slavic documents from the 11th and 12th centuries, we cannot expect to find a large number of attested occurrences of [jě].

Third, there were a limited number of instances in which the combination of [j] + [ě] could occur, because the "third jat'" was restricted to a limited number of grammatical categories: the gen. sg. and nom.-acc. pl. of feminine *ja*-stem nouns; the acc. pl. of masc. *jo*-stem nouns; the gen. sg. fem., nom.-acc. pl. fem., and masc. acc. pl. of the definite adjective; and the feminine gen. sg. pronominal forms, such as *eě* 'her', *toě* 'that one', *samoě* 'itself'. Given the low number of categories in which we might expect to find the forms that interest us and the fact that most texts of the first two centuries were either direct copies of South Slavic originals or copies of copies, finding decisive evidence is not easy. It is made even more difficult by the fact that all of the instances where [jě] might occur are grammatical endings, which are subject to analogical change, and therefore less useful for resolving purely phonological questions.

A fourth complicating factor is that any attested forms must be considered within the context of the entire document, not just as isolated forms. It is well known that jat' fell together with /e/ in some dialects of Russian at a very early date. Sometimes the coalescence was only in unstressed position, in other cases in stressed position as well. In some cases *e* is used for jat' in words which were South Slavic rather than East Slavic.

The scholar who seems to have best taken into account the various aspects of the question is Durnovo (1924: 182-83), who gives a number of forms from documents which, he says, do not confuse *jat'* with /e/. Unlike other scholars, who merely repeat a list of occurrences of the pronominal forms mentioned above, Durnovo also lists some nouns. A major problem with his forms is that all of them are from Church documents, which makes them less reliable for our purposes than if they were from secular ones. Also, all but one of the four nouns are proper names. Only one of the forms cited by Durnovo has an unmistakably Russian form: the gen. sg. *odinoje* from the 11th-century *Chudov Psalter*. As Durnovo notes in the postscript to the book (366), he took many of his examples from Sobolevskij and Šaxmatov, which means that much of his evidence is not first-hand.

Since the spellings with *e* instead of *jat'* are not systematic, but rather sporadic, it would seem to be the case that what we have is not a change of /ě/ to /e/, as is stated everywhere, but rather a case of neutralization of the contrast between a high mid vowel and a low mid vowel in one specific environment. This is similar to the situation with /a/ and /ä/ (the result of the denasalization of /ǣ/), where neutralization took place after certain consonants: *ležati* (3rd. pl. pres.) ← **ležeti*, and *ležati* (inf., ← **legētey*) where there is no contrast between /a/ and /ä/. A similar neutralization of non-high front vowels (similar except that the following consonant is the determining factor) is the neutralization of three degrees of height in many dialects of English, where /æ/, /e/ and /ey/ all become a single vowel before /r/: *marry*, *merry*, *Mary* are all pronounced the same.

Durnovo makes another interesting point (183): *jat'* is replaced by *je* in initial position in some examples from the same period and the same manuscripts; this is presumably because there was an initial [j] before the *jat'* in this position, and *jot* + *jat'* gives [je]. His supposition fits in well with the generally accepted idea that non-back vowels had a prothetic [j] in early East Slavic. The variation between *ě* and *je* supports the contention that we are dealing with a case of neutralization after [j].

Durnovo's position, that *jat'* and /e/ coalesced after /j/, is reasonable enough, but one would feel much more comfortable in accepting it if more evidence were available. This evidence might be of two types: first, more examples of real Russian words such as *odinoje* (what Durnovo calls 'Russian' words seem to be, simply, words that occur in both Church Slavonic and Russian, as opposed to words that occur only in the former); and, second, hyperforms. As far as I have been able to ascertain, nobody cites any hyperforms. I believe however that at least one such hyperform does exist.

The earliest surviving original East Slavic document of significant length is the *Mstislavova gramota* of about 1130. It is a single-page deed of gift to St. George's Monastery in Novgorod. Several editions exist; a convenient one, with a reproduction of the original, is in Obnorskij & Barxudarov (1952:32-34).

With two exceptions, the letter *jat'* is used exactly where we would expect it etymologically: it occurs under stress in 10 instances (*povelěŭ*, *xotěti*, *těmī* [2x], *moě* [acc. pl.], *děti*, *životě*, *velělŭ*, *obědě*, *obědajeti*) and unstressed in 3 (*bouicě* [place-name, pl.], *donjelě*, *obědě*). There are two instances of the incorrect use of *jat'*.

The first is in a phrase written above the line: *i veno votskoe*. As the editors note, this is "*nadpisano v stroke počerkom pozdnejšego vremeni, čem osnovnoj tekst gramoty*." In other words, we have the oldest documented case of forgery in the East Slavic world: somebody decided to add a bit more to the gift (if the reading is accurate: Dean Worth makes a convincing case for rejecting the whole reading, cf. Worth 1981; in any case, since the interpolation is later, my arguments are not affected.)

The second form is not quite as clear: *a vy bratiě* (line 9). Obnorskij & Barxudarov, who normally provide notes on anything not completely obvious, do not comment on this. From the form, we would expect this to be a gen. sg., particularly since in this document the "third jat'" is used in the two instances where it would be etymologically expected (*bouicě* and *moě děti*), but syntactically the form is clearly a vocative (cf. similar vocative forms, but spelled *bratije* in both cases, in the colophon to the *Izbornik* of 1076, and on folium 176 of the September Meneion of 1095—see Obnorskij & Barxudarov 1952:29, 30 respectively.) Obnorskij and Barxudarov presumably take this as a simple case of substitution of jat' for *e*. Given the fact that jat' is otherwise used correctly in this document, however, one should look for an explanation other than just counting it as an example of the coalescence of jat' and /e/. A more likely explanation is that we have here the hyperform which helps to confirm Durnovo's evidence. Since the nominative is *bratija*, the vocative would indeed be *bratije*, and here we have /e/ after [j] being spelled with jat' in the sort of neutralization that I have suggested.

Finding other examples of the same hyperform would help to confirm my suggestion, but this is not easy. Nothing else is to be found in the published original East Slavic material from the 11th and 12th centuries, and it would be difficult to expect to find much, given the paucity of the material (a total of a few pages). Since the vocative form *bratije* probably was extremely familiar to scribes, one would not expect to find it misspelled often. Durnovo (1924:183) cites a gen. sg. *bratije* for **bratiě* from the *Mstislav Gospel*, but no hyperforms. I have also looked for a similar hyperform from the singular of nouns in *-nije*, but, again, the scribe was probably so familiar with the grammatical form that he found it relatively easy to spell correctly. Careful study of the texts which are East Slavic copies of South Slavic originals may yield some other examples, but this is not really necessary to confirm my basic point. We do have a hyperform which helps put more evidence behind Durnovo's theory and weakens the case of those, beginning with Sobolevskij (1907), who argue that the change of jat' to /e/ after [j] did not occur, and that forms such as *eě*, *toě* are to be taken as analogy or explained in some other way.

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EDITORS' NOTE: The citations of text given above in *bold italics* are in Cyrillic in the original ms.. The editors regret the inconvenience to the article's readers, and the imposition on its author, occasioned by a last-minute modification in the choice of fonts available for printing.

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POVZETEK

O SPREMEMBI JATA V E ZA JOTOM

*Glasovna sprememba, omenjena v naslovu članka, ostaja nerešeno (in redko obravnavano) vprašanje v vzhodnoslovanskem zgodovinskem glasoslovju. V stari ruščini je zveza ljě/ vključevala samo 'tretji jat' in je obstajala v zelo majhnem številu slovničnih oblik; redka so tudi besedila zadevnega obdobja s prvotnim vzhodnoslovanskim (namesto pobolgarjenim) pravopisom. Ta članek obravnava eno hiperobliko v Mstislavovi gramoti iz l. 1130. Tukaj se zvalnik od **bratija** piše **bratiě** namesto navadnega **bratie**; to je nadaljnji dokaz za zlitje, tj. nevtralizacijo ě-ja in e-ja za j-jem.*