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Proto-Indo-European **trei-(es)* in intensifying function in South Slavic and Celtic

1.0. Intensifying ‘three’ in (Old) Church Slavonic, Serbian and Greek.

In Modern Serbian there are two sets of compounds with the first component identified as ‘three’, bearing the intensifying function (see Vučković 2021).

1.1. The first set is characteristic of the high, predominantly religious style and can be traced back to the influence of (Old) Church Slavonic, where it was probably adapted from Greek:

Serbian *trivelik*, Serbian Church Slavonic *trьvelikъ*, cf. Greek τρισμέγιστος ‘three-great, i.e. the greatest’ (Nicet. Eug. 5.280; used as a late Antique (nick)name of Hermes).

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Serbian *trìsvetī* & *trosvet*, corresponding to Serbian Church Slavonic *trъsvetъ* & *trìsvetъ*, Greek τρισάγιος, i.e. ‘thrice holy, the most holy’ (Eccl.).

1.2. The second set can be identified in some rather expressive terms of the vernacular Serbian speech:

tròčel adj. m. ‘a man with a high forehead’;

tròguz adj. m. ‘a man with an ample bottom, with large buttocks’;

tròkur adj. m. ‘a man having a large sexual organ; being extremely capable of sexual love’;

trògubica noun f. ‘a male or female person with very thick or swollen lips’;

tròkučka noun f. ‘a wicked, mouthy woman’ derived from *kùčka* f. ‘a female dog, a bitch’, pejoratively ‘a wicked, evil woman; an immoral person, a person of no integrity in general’ (see Vučković 2021: 282–86).

The form *tro-* is in the modern language also generally used in derivatives from ‘three’ without any intensifying function, e.g. *Trojstvo* ‘Trinity’, *trošatni* ‘three-hourly’; *-o-* is the binding vowel in compounds (whereas derivatives have no binding vowel), showing that such forms are in the modern language treated as compounds. Intensifying uses of this type have to our knowledge not been attested in other Slavic languages. This poses the question of their origin. At the same time, the Old Church Slavonic examples suggest that the origin may be old.

2.0. Intensifying **trej-* in the Celtic languages.

Intensifying uses of **trej-* appear to be well-spread in Celtic, as attested by the following Insular Celtic examples:

Old Irish *trederc* ‘keen eyed’, *treclas* ‘very green’, *treliath* ‘very grey’, *treoll* ‘very great’ (*DIL* T-288, 290, 294, 298);

Old Welsh *trybann* ‘limit’, Middle Welsh *tryfan* ‘limit’ (i.e. intensive *try-* + *bann* ‘top, tip’);

Old Welsh *trylenn* ‘protection, refuge’, adj. ‘much loved’, Middle Welsh *trylenn*¹.

Old Cornish *trede* gl. ‘cauma’ = *tre-* + *tes* gl. ‘feruor’, together ‘forte calor’, cf. the second component corresponding to Welsh *tes*, Breton *tez* ‘heat, warmth’; Old Irish *tess*. (Campanille 1974: 100, 102).

2.1. The Celtic forms have been explained with the help of the Common Celtic preposition **trē* (IE **trei*), attested in Old Irish *tre*, *tri*, with variants *tré*, *trí* ‘through’ (*LEIA* T-125–26), Old Welsh *trui*, *troi* ‘through’ (Falileyev 2000: 151), Old Breton *tre* ‘trans, par’; Gaulish *tri* in the inscription on a lead from Lezoux (Fleuriot 1986: 67: TRI ARAM... TRI CATIC... ‘through calm...through

¹ Here the second component may either correspond to Old Welsh *lenn* ‘curtain, veil’ or to Irish *lennán* ‘love’ (Falileyev 2000: 102, 151–52).

violence'), *tre* in *trebio* by Marcellus of Bordeaux (Meid 1996, 58: **trē bivon* or *bivū* 'through (the) living'; cf. also Delamarre 2018: 300).

Matasović (2009: 388) tries to explain these forms as follows:

**trē* < **trā-ē* < **trās-ē* < dat. **trāns-ei*,

but such a development is difficult to imagine in the light of the development of the same cluster *-*ns-* in the intervocal position in Celtic:

Welsh, Cornish, Breton *mis* 'month' < Brittonic **mīssan* < Celtic **mīnsan* < Late IE acc.sg. **mēnsm̥*; cf. also Old Irish *mí*, gen.-dat.sg. *mís*, and Gaulish (calendar of Coligny) MIF 'month' < **mīn(t)s* (Delamarre 2018: 227).

Vendryes (*LEIA* T-126) wrote that it is difficult to differentiate between the forms with the intensifying function and the forms meaning 'triple'. If Common Celtic **trē* is easily derivable from IE **trei-(es)*, it may be possible to connect the intensifying function in Celtic with the sense of 'triple'.

Similar to the intensifying function of 'triple' is the intensifying function of 'double' attested in Czech *dvojctihodnost* 'veneranda dignitas' (title), *dvojctihodný* 'highly venerable, literally doubly venerable' (Jungmann 1835: 522).

3.0. Possible sources of these similarities.

The discussed similarities of two geographically independent linguistic pockets within the Indo-European language area may have arisen based on a common origin, some kind of influence, or independently.

Similar constructions, both literally and in the intensifying function, were frequently attested in Greek and partly also in Latin, cf. Greek τριβάρβαρος 'triple barbarian, i.e. totally barbarian', τριγύμφοτος 'triple nailed, i.e. fully nailed down', from γύμφοτος 'nail'; Latin *triparcus* 'very stingy'². These examples had not fully lost the original meaning of 'triple'. They show that a common Indo-European heritage may have developed independently in the different branches, including Proto-Celtic and Proto-Slavic.

Currently, as we have shown, only a small pocket of Slavic demonstrates this phenomenon. This might indicate that external influences may have played a role either by stimulating this development or stimulating preservation of this phenomenon. There might have been several venues for these influences.

3.1. Balkan Celtic influencing South Slavic.

The influence of Balkan Celtic is difficult to trace. It is known that the Celtic tribe *Scordisci* dominated the Sava valley from the 4th cent. BCE on and founded the fortress *Singidunum* on the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers, which

² We are grateful to an unknown reviewer for these examples.

later became the Serbian capital Belgrade. Around the turn of the millennium Strabo [7.5.] wrote that *Scordisci* lived by the mouth of the Noarus (= lower stream of the Sava – see Šašel Kos 2002: 152) river into the Danube. During the rule of Traian (98–117 CE) *Scordisci* became Roman citizens (cf. Wilkes 1995: 256) and their language was replaced by Vulgar Latin. Only c. 450 years later the first Slavs crossed the Danube. During the Migration Period (AD 375–568) the language map of the Balkan Peninsula underwent a significant change. It is improbable to speculate about any Celtic remnants here, which could have preserved their language and exerted influence on South Slavic.

3.2. Galatian influencing Greek in turn influencing Old Church Slavonic.

Galatians may have given this form to Greeks, because in the 2nd cent. AD we find Zeus depicted as three-eyed, and also Argus, who later becomes the Argos Panoptes, with 100 eyes. The same 100-eyed Argos was rendered in western South Slavic as three-eyed (*trooki div Jože*), and only in that way.

3.3. The influence of the Old Irish mission in Aquileia.

The influence of the religious center of Aquileia in northern Italy, in the Middle Ages also frequented by the Irish mission, might have been probable by way of the Benedictine mission in Croatia, attested since AD 857. The stone decorations produced by this tradition point to the symbolic value of trinity, expressed by means of a three-ribbon interlace (the so-called *troplet*), considered an adequate decoration for rulers and holy places. However, the Croatian tradition had no intensifying ‘three’ as a language model (although Old Church Slavonic used in Croatia until the end of the Middle Ages had it), so this possible influence must be rejected.

3.4. Indications for an independent development.

The discussed modern Serbian forms occur in the expressive lexicon, not the stylistically neutral one. So we may ask the question of how intensification of this type is expressed in other Indo-European languages. What we find are phraseological expressions including ‘triple’ such as German *sich dreimal überlegen* ‘to consider three times, i.e. to consider very thoroughly’, *doppelt und dreifach* ‘twice and thrice, i.e. very thoroughly’; English *think twice* ‘consider very thoroughly’, French *y regarder à deux fois* ‘consider very thoroughly’. Other Slavic languages also offer multiple examples of phraseological expressions in which *tri* ‘three’ occurs in an intensifying function, e.g. Slovak *nedat’ niečo (ani) za tri svety* ‘not give something for the greatest value in the world’, *niekoho je za tri svety* ‘there is a great majority of some people’; Slovene e.g. *delati, jesti za tri* ‘to work, eat for three, i.e. extremely much’, *tako te bom, da boš tri sonca videl* ‘I’ll give you (a blow) so that you will see three suns, i.e. I shall beat you extremely strongly on your head’. Such phraseological expressions point to a cognitive basis underlying the expressive function of ‘three’ (as ‘three’ is the first cut-off limit when growing a numeral system); this is widely spread in the Indo-European languages.

4. Conclusion.

As revealed by the presented data, the development of the intensifying function of ‘three’ in the sense of ‘triple’ appears to have been widely spread and have a longer, probably cognitively motivated history in Indo-European. Classical Greek and Latin had this model in their word-formation systems and passed it on to Old Church Slavonic and by way of it to Serbian. This illustrates cultural influence, probably upon a common origin. At the same time, Germanic, Romance and other Slavic languages developed intensifying phraseological expressions based on ‘triple’ or ‘double’ as an inherent development of their vernaculars.

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Summary

**Proto-Indo-European **trei-*(*es*) in intensifying function
in South Slavic and Celtic**

This contribution compares the Common Celtic intensifying **trē* and its Slavic counterparts in Serbian Church Slavonic (*trb-* & *tri-*), Serbian of the religious style (*tri-*), and vernacular Serbian (*tro-*). In addition, evidence from Ancient Greek and Latin is mentioned. This paper proposes several development scenarios and discusses them critically.

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