The development of complex prepositions in Slavic

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Most Proto-Slavic prepositions were inherited from Proto-Indo-European, where they can usually be shown to be petrified case-forms of original root nouns, e. g. PSl. *vъnъ 'outside of', *do 'to', *izъ 'from', *po 'by', *sъ 'with', etc. (Matasović 2008: 246ff.). The same, typologically well-attested process of creating new prepositions from inflected forms of nouns (Hagège 2010: 162ff.), is attested in Proto-Slavic as well, e. g. in case of prepositions such as *vьrxu 'above' (OCS vrьxu, L sg. of vrъxъ 'top'), *medju 'between' (OCS meždu, G-L dual of mežda 'boundary'). However, no complex prepositions, consisting of more than one nominal, prepositional or adverbial root, can be reconstructed in Proto-Slavic with any degree of certainty.

In the modern Slavic languages, complex prepositions are well attested; they are usually composed of a noun which coalesced with a preceding preposition, e.g. Croat. umjesto (+Gen) 'in the place of' (< u mjesto, cf. Russ. vmesto), Cz. napřič 'across' (< na přič). The same process of grammaticalization and lexicalization of prepositions is still present in Slavic, as phrases consisting of nouns governed by prepositions (sometimes followed by another preposition) become fixed and develop into new prepositional expressions, e. g., na osnovi (+Gen) 'on the basis of', Croat. s obzirom na 'with respect to', etc. This process has parallels in most other European languages, where it appears to be equally recent (Fagard et al. (eds.) 2020).

However, some complex prepositions in modern Slavic languages are formed from two different prepositions (sometimes also from a preposition followed by an adverb), and such forms are often attested already in the Middle Ages, e. g. Croat. između 'between' (< iz + među), iza 'behind' (< iz + za), etc. Interestingly, such complex prepositions are more widespread and appear to have a longer history in West South Slavic (comprising Slovene and various dialects from which Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian and Montenegrin standards developed) than in the other Slavic branches. It is certainly significant that such complex prepositions are very common and equally old in Romance, and many Western South Slavic complex adpositions either look like calques built on Romance models, or they are at least formed very similarly, cf. Crot. ponad 'above' (< po nadъ) vs. Rom. asupră (< VLat. *ad supra), Croat. nasuprot 'against' (< na sǫprotъ) vs. It. incontra (< *in contra), Croat. iza 'behind' (< *jьzъ za) vs. Fr. depuis 'since' (< *de postius), etc. Such complex prepositions are especially common in Romanian, e. g. despre 'about' (< Lat. de super), deasupra 'above' (< Lat. de ad supra), peste 'across', după 'after' (< Lat. de post), împotriva 'against'(< Lat. in + OCS protivъ), printre 'among' (< Lat. per inter), etc.), indicating that they were probably also common in the extinct varieties of Balkans Romance that were in contact with West South Slavic languages during the Early Middle Ages. Therefore, this paper will examine the possibility that the development of this type of complex adpositions is the result of Slavo-Romance language contact in SW Europe.

REFERENCES

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