

ON THE PHONETIC SYSTEM EVOLUTION
IN SOME ARCHAIC RUSSIAN DIALECTS

S.Knyazev and S.Pojaritskaya

Institute of Russian Language,
Moscow State University;
Moscow, USSR

ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the problem of the evolution of some archaic Russian dialects. The development of their phonetic system tends to the elimination of the sound oppositions which are phonologically unsupported and not connected closely with the properties of their basis of articulation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Russian dialects display significant differences in their "basis of articulation" (BA). They are manifested in articulatory and acoustical qualities of particular sounds (i.e. the type of vowels labialization, their localization in more front or more back part of the oral cavity, and the mouth opening; the location and the type of consonantal articulation, etc.) This properties determine the ability of segments to participate in certain phonological oppositions. Different directions of the evolution of phonological systems and their stability in face of the active integrative processes connected with the deep sociological transformations during the last decades are also determined by the differences in the BA's.

We have chosen for our investigation a group of Archaic dialects from the Verkhnyaya Tcma region since they were examined more than sixty years ago by P.S.Kuznetsov [4]. We worked there in 1937 and 1990. A brief survey of these dialects' phonetic system is presented below.

2. VOWELS

The vowel system of the dialect is based on three-level triangle of 5 phonemes <и, э, а, о, у> which is found in a stressed syllable before a "hard" consonant and a tendency may be observed for this triangle to be used in the same consonantal context of unstressed syllables

(*н'и* - *н'и́а*, *р'ек* - *р'екá*, *р'ат* - *р'а́а*, *н'ос* - *н'осý*,

л'ун - *л'у́о́ф*). However, the system is reduced in some other contexts. Thus, in the position between "soft" consonants the system of phonemes (R.L.Avanesov's "weak phonemes") if not distorted by any lexical or morphological parallels may be derived from two-level triangle of 3 phonemes /и, э, у/, in which /э/ is a result of all the non-high vowels neutralization (*н'ок-н'ев'*, *р'ек-*

р'эк'у, *нр'ал-нр'эл'у*). The same set is found in unstressed syllables (*н'ек'ú*, *р'ек'ú*, *нр'ед'ú*). The significance of stress factor in such a system (this kind of vocalic structure which is typical for the Northern Russian Dialects (NRD) is called "okanye") is weakened as compared with the Southern "akanye", while the factor of consonantal context (i.e. the influence of the "soft" consonant on the vowel of the preceding syllable) becomes the decisive one.

While the preservation of the uniform sound shape of a morpheme is the most striking manifestation of "okanye" (é'о.л. é'о.л-ú, é'ú-é'о.л) the influence of the follow-

ing consonant (which raises the tonal features of a vowel and provokes the o/e, a/e alternations within a morpheme: *н'ок/н'ев'*, *н'окý/н'ек'ú* and *н'амоф/н'ем'*,

н'апо́к/н'ем'ú) has the opposite direction. This contradiction being inherent to the NRD phonetic system caused the distortion of the earlier relations within the system; namely the appearance of o and a in the position between "soft" consonants as a result of lexicalization and morphologization:

с'ер'о́а-с'ер'о́а'е, *до́ам'у-до́ам'у*. A weak phonological contrast of some vowels on the basis of timbre parameters makes possible the o-e and a-e variability in a stressed position between "soft" consonants (*с'ед'о́м/с'ед'о́у'е* - *с'ед'о́у'е*, *сто́а / сто́а'у-сто́а'у*,

жэ́оф / с'ем'ј́е-с'ем'ј́оф). It is especially typical for unstressed syllables where only the high vowels are opposed as the labialized and the non-labialized ones. The range of timbral variability is however restricted by the sound types which are the result of the regular phonetic changes before a

"soft" consonant (*н'осý-н'есý*, *н'анý-н'енý*) and the system contains some intermediate slightly labialized sounds of the [e'] type as well as non-labialized ones of the [æ] type. In a position before the syllable containing [и] the vowel

harmony is possible (*н'ус'ú*, *р'ук'ú*, *з'а'у'ú*) and the realizations of <о> and <а> may vary within rather wide limits ([e-и] and [a-e-и] respectively).

The narrow mouth opening and passive labial articulation result in a weakening of vowel distinctions and in centralization of vowels and cause the vowel variability. P.S.Kuznetsov [5] had pointed out in his analysis as a matter of fact the same manifestations of the variability in the vowel system, so we cannot reveal any essen-

tial change in this point of the phonological system under consideration. All this show that the vowel variability should not be considered as a result of the primary system destruction under the influence of some other system (the Russian literary one, for example; this variability is determined, first and foremost, by the BA properties and by the particular type of word prosodical organization in the NRD, where the word integrity is based on a consistent coordination of the sound chain units (of a vowel and a following consonant or of vowels from adjacent syllables) rather than on word stress.

3. CONSONANTS

3.1. Place and manner of articulation

The realization of the labial phonemes varies within rather wide limits. Labiodental phonemes may be realized in [β], [β], [m] (before nasals), sometimes [w] (chiefly before labialized vowels) and [ϕ], [π]: *на лá-пк'е*, *фс"о*, *о́а*, *враи"*, *бóз-л'е*, *пpа́бá*, *ф ч'ер'коф'*, *го-дóф*, *сво́о* and *сто́о(=своф)*, *сот*, *сáлно*, *пpамнý"ка*, *м'норé*, *лóушк'у*.

The voiced velar phoneme is plosive <г>: *гот*, *ун'огó*, *огорот* (but: *дóгу*, *догáтк'я*). The adjective ending Masc.Sg.Gen. -oro may be realized as [oro] or [ool]: *оругóго*, *н"икакóго*, *вос'мóо*, *и́оо*, *у"оó*.

The palatal phoneme <й> may be not pronounced in the word initial position before <э>: *н'е́эм*, *э́о*, *э́а"д"ит*, *эс"т"*, *эс'а'у* and sometimes in the intervocalic position: *но́ааа*. Epenthetic [j] may be inserted before initial <и>: *йит*, *йи́оо*. Any consonant (but especially [r]) may assimilate the following [j]: *л"и"у* (=льо), *с"т"изотвор'эн"н"а*, *ружá*, *лáт"т"о.л*, *на тр'ém"т"о.л*. Sibilants <ш>, <ж> are not

palatalized before front vowels and in the word final position: *покажи́, уд'ош, фиэр'с"т"э* (=в шерсти). The only exception is the position after palatal consonants, where the palatal sibilant is found:

рэн"ш"е, м'эн"ш"е, бóл"ш"е. The long sibilants are almost always non-palatalized and may be realized as [шш], [штш], [жж], [ждж]: *эишó, шштш'у, пожеж'а'и,*

ујежд'а'ју. It is worth noticing that the consonantal clusters [шт], [жд] may be represented by [штш], [ждж] as well:

жд'а'и, пош'о-то, од'эждж. The only affricate phoneme in the dialect is realized by a number of sounds such as [tʃ], [tʃ'], [tʃ''], [c], [c'], [c''], [tʃ], [tʃ'], [tʃ'']. The lateral phoneme <л> is almost always pronounced as the "dark" [ɫ]. The exceptions are very few: *ушó, тошк'а'и, розм'аш, дóшго, к'у-шаш, сташ, кошóт'аш.*

The phonemes <т>, <д>, <н>, <р> may be presented by dorsal dentals or by alveolar apicals. In the latter case a vowel after such a consonant becomes a front one: *т'óл"ко, т'јт, т'ам, н'э'т'у, о'у'о'у, др'ј'ш'у, б'р'а'и, у'а'с.*

т'óл"ко, т'јт, т'ам, н'э'т'у, о'у'о'у, др'ј'ш'у, б'р'а'и, у'а'с.

3.2. Palatalisation

The so called "soft" and "hard" consonants may be opposed in two different ways. The first one is identical with the Russian Literary Language (RL): the consonants are contrasted on the basis of palatalisation. In this case almost every consonant may be non-palatalized or palatalized, i.e.: *м'ат' / м'ат, т'к'от' / кот, з'ат' / наз'ат,* etc. The other type of the opposition is the place correlation (which is the characteristic for the eldest and the non-educated speakers). In this case the labial consonants are phonologically always "hard" but they receive a slight palatalization before front vo-

wels: *к'ев'óста, ф'ц'эр'коф, м'эсто, с'эр'ек, зап'ашашт, бóсем, поп'э'ф.* In this case the "soft" linguals are palatal: *к'ел"э"а, м'эсто, од'эждж, р'эу"ка,* etc. while the velars may be included (*лук'а"ек"*) or not included into the place opposition. In the latter case they receive a slight palatalization before front vowels and after palatal consonants: *на п'ел"о'г'э, в р'уб'а'т'э, на б'ак'э, д'эф'к'а, в н'ан"к'ат, б'ан"к'а.* It is worth mentioning that such a system is usually found in the pronunciation of the speakers whose [т, д, н]'s are apical (since the apical articulation hinders the process of palatalisation [4]).

3.3. Voiced-Voiceless Distinction

There are some indications that the "voiceless" and "voiced" consonants were earlier opposed on the basis of the (+/- tense) feature [1],[2],[3].

The voiceless plosives are aspirated: *п'ш'т', к'ш'т', п'ар'ен'.* The sonorants are devoiced after voiceless plosives and fricatives: *п'ш'ш'т, к'ш'ш'т, п'ш'ш'т, п'р'áво, с'ф'о'ја, на п'ш'ш'т, на с'ш'т'ф'у, п'ш'ф'ар'.*

In a position after a vowel or a sonorant before a vowel the voiced consonants may be pronounced instead of the voiceless and vice versa: *п'ш'ш'т'ко, ш"т'ер'эсно, н'ш'жэ топ'эр'а* (=теперь), *рэн"ш"е.*

The plosives in the word final position may have no release: *оп'э'т', ур'о'к, п'ш'т'.*

The fricatives become long in the position before another consonant: *м'эсто, м'ош'ко.*

Voiced plosives may be realized as spirants: *у'ш'т* (=идёт) or may be eliminated: *нао.* Sometimes a progressive assimilation takes place:

рэн"ш"е, нац"н"у, пал"т"ó, у'ш'т (=ушёл), *э"ш"е* (=идёт). The experimental studies of the voiced/voiceless distinction [2],[3] in such dialects show that this type of correlation is entirely parallel with the tense/lax contrast in some German dialects and differs significantly from the corresponding opposition in the Finno-Ugric dialects that are neighbours of the Russian dialects in question (cf. [1]).

3.4. Kuznetsov's description

When our data presented above is compared with the description of the same dialect made in 1930 it is easy to see the points which changes most obviously: the voiceless labials <ф> and <ф'> are established; the alternation [л]/[л'] disappears; the sibilants [ш], [ж] lose the palatalization; a tendency may be observed to use more than one affricate phoneme; the palatalized labials substitute the non-palatalized ones in the word final position; the voiceless consonants substitute the voiced ones in the position before another voiceless consonant or before a pause. The (+/- tense) and the place correlations turn into the (+/- voice) and (+/- palatalization) oppositions. Nevertheless, some phonetic manifestations of the former correlations remain: palatal articulation of the "soft" consonants, the progressive direction of the assimilative processes, the aspirated plosives, etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The phonetic system of the dialect evolves in a way of convergence with the RL system, but the vowel structure remains more stable than the consonantal one because of its less importance in a system. The most stable points of the consonantal structure are those which are determined by the EA properties and may be included into the other phonological system. The NRD system loses the most evident sound contrasts with the RL but preserves such latent pecu-

liarities as the apical and palatal articulations, aspiration and progressive assimilation.

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