

TOBIAS MOSBÆK SØBORG

University of Copenhagen  
tms@hum.ku.dk

## An acute problem: The Balto-Slavic diphthongs

In Balto-Slavic, diphthongs – i.e. a vowel followed by a tautosyllabic resonant (*VR*) – distinguish acute vs. non-acute just as long vowels. So far, the treatment of acute diphthongs have mostly been undifferentiated from the treatment of acute long vowels, whether one believes them to have arisen simply from old vowels or only before a tautosyllabic laryngeal. The main assumption seems to be that the vowel in acute diphthongs was long, just as in the long acute monophthongs. But this is not what we find in normal acute diphthongs where at least the treatment of *\*o/\*ō* shows a stark difference between its development as *\*ō* in general (Li. *uo*, CS *\*a*) vs. its development in acute diphthongs where it apparently behaves instead like a short *\*o* (Li. *-āR-*, CS *\*-oR-*). As most would agree, short *\*o* had merged with *\*a* in Proto-Balto-Slavic, whereas long *\*ō* and *\*ā* were still kept distinct; since there is no such clear-cut distinction in the development of the short and long vowels of other timbres, the development of *\*o/\*ō* in acute diphthongs will play the major role in this paper in the search for evidence on the suprasegmental properties of the vowel in the acute diphthongs in Proto-Balto-Slavic.

One misfit is the fact that we actually do find instances of long (acute) *\*ō* in front of tautosyllabic resonant in a few instances, where it has a remarkably different outcome, e.g. Li. *pūlti* ‘fall’ (pres.1sg. *pūolu*) and the acc.pl.m. of *\*o*-stems *-ūs*, def.adj. *-ūosius*. If one believes that the vocalic part of the acute diphthongs would have been long in Proto-Balto-Slavic or its precursors, it is hard to explain why examples like these don’t conform to the general development of acute diphthongs.

Other obviously interesting cases that will be dealt with in this talk are:

- the lack of Hirt’s Law in acute diphthongs;
- the repercussions of the fact that Winter’s Law seems to have happened
- before the delabiazation of *\*o > \*a* (cf. Lv. *nuōgs* ‘naked’ < PIE *\*nog<sup>w</sup>ós*) vs.
- its working in diphthongs (cf. Lv. *smaŗds* ‘stench’ < PIE *\*smordós*);
- the outcomes of the PIE thematic optative (*\*-oġh<sub>1</sub>-*) and dual nom.-acc.nt.
- (*\*-oġh<sub>1</sub>*) vs. the thematic dat.sg. (*\*-ōġ*);
- the infinitive type Lv. *kaŗt*, CS *\*kōŗti* with unexpected Hirt’s Law in acute
- diphthongs and the different solutions to its origin;
- the problematic “metatonic” type Li. *vaŗnas* ‘raven’ : *vārna* ‘crow’.

In the end, the question of the suprasegmental properties of the acute diphthongs in Proto-Balto-Slavic will be discussed and evaluated, and it will be argued that Balto-Slavic seems to retain a distinction between PIE *\*VR*, *\*V:R*, *\*VRH*, and *\*VHR*, respectively.