

## About the *ja-* in *Makedonskiot Jazik*: The Fate of Initial \**ǰ-* and \**ǧ-* in Macedonian

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*Abstract.* The change of initial \**ǰ-* to *ja-* has been overlooked in historical phonologies of Macedonian, yet is well attested. The present analysis provides a route for initial \**ǧ-* which changed to *ǰ-* to develop further to *ja-*, avoiding the phonologically implausible nasal merger and positing no additional sound changes without independent motivation.

This paper presents evidence for a phonological change of *ǰ-* > *ja-* in initial position in approximately the 12th century, a change that is not mentioned in Koneski's books (1983 and 1986) on the history of Macedonian. This change by itself affects only five roots, but there is reason to believe that *ǰ-* > *ja-* followed the well-documented change of *ǧ-* > *ǰ-*, and this fact has important implications for the so-called "confusion of nasals". The authors agree with Koneski that there probably was no confusion of nasal vowels in Macedonian (as opposed to Bulgarian), and offer this article as a further argument for this position.

As shown in Table 1 below, there are five roots that can be identified as representing reflexes of initial \**ǰ-* which have the sequence *ja-* in modern literary Macedonian and the west central dialects on which it is based. There is no evidence of initial \**ǰ-* > *e-*, the expected reflex in all other environments for west Macedonian (and the only reflex for \**ǰ* given in historical phonologies). We would like to further suggest that \**ǰ-* > *ja-* was preceded by \**ǧ-* > *ǰ-*, based on the data in the table. There is no evidence of *ǧ-* > *e-*, except in the case of words containing the root \**ǧk-*: *ek* 'echo', *ekot* 'echo', *ekne* 'resound', *eči* 'resound'. These are undoubtedly eastern dialectisms used to avoid homonymy with the root \**jak-* 'strong' (parallel, for example, to the adoption of the northern dialectal word *sud* 'court' to avoid homonymy with *sad* 'dish', cf. Koneski 1983: 43). Note, however, that the expected *jači* and *jakne* (\**ǧ-* > *ǰ-* > *ja-*) 'resound; moan' also occur. It is not surprising that there should be some need to avoid homonymy when there are four original segments, all of which yield word-initial *ja-*: \**ǰ-*, \**ǧ-*, \*(*j*)*a-*, \**ǧ-*. Note also that initial \**a-* and \**ǧ-* almost never yield anything other than *ja-*, due to the tendency to develop prothetic *j-* before back vowels (cf. Koneski 1983: 24). The only examples lacking prothesis are \**a-* > *a-* in *azbuka* 'alphabet', *azbučen* 'alphabetical', *alčen* 'greedy', *alčnost* 'greed' (which are probably Church Slavonicisms or bookish forms); and \**ǧ-* > *a-* in three words, all with the same root: *aglest*

'angular', *aglomer* 'protractor', *agol* 'angle' (which could also be dialectal, to avoid confusion with the root *jagl-* 'coal').

The tables below give the main forms of modern literary Macedonian words beginning with *ja-* and inherited from Common Slavic, arranged according to the origins of the initial segment. Borrowings with original initial *ja-*, e.g., *javaš* 'slow' (Turkish), *jamb* 'iamb' (Greek), *Japonec* 'Japanese man', are excluded, as are obvious derivatives, e.g., *jazičen* 'linguistic' < *jazik* 'tongue, language'. In cases where the derivation might not be obvious or where there is significant lexical differentiation, all words derived from the same root are grouped together. The Late Common Slavic forms of the word or root appear to the left.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1: \**ǰ-* > *ja-*

|        |                           |   |
|--------|---------------------------|---|
| ěd-    | <i>jad</i>                | 'torment; anger; poison'  |
|        | <i>jade (se)</i>          | 'eat; itch; torment'  |
|        | <i>jadec</i>              | 'wishbone'  |
|        | <i>jasje</i>              | 'food'  |
|        | <i>jasli</i>              | 'manger; nursery'   |
|        | <i>jasteliv, jastelit</i> | 'gluttonous; edible'  |
|        | <i>jastreb</i>            | 'hawk' [if etymology as 'partridge-eater' is correct; otherwise ( <i>j</i> ) <i>a-</i> > <i>ja-</i> ] |
| ěšinŭ  | <i>jasen</i>              | 'clear'   |
| ěd/x-  | <i>java</i>               | 'ride [a horse]'  |
|        | <i>jazdi</i>              | 'ride'  |
| ězŭ    | <i>jaz</i>                | 'dam'   |
| ězvīčī | <i>jazi se</i>            | 'clamber' [or alternatively perhaps from <i>ǧziti</i> ]   |
|        | <i>jazovec</i>            | 'badger'  |

Table 2: \**ǧ-* > *ǰ-* > *ja-*

|       |                  |                            |
|-------|------------------|----------------------------|
| ǧk-   | <i>jači</i>      | 'resound; moan'            |
|       | <i>jakne</i>     | 'groan'                    |
| ǧčīmy | <i>jačmen</i>    | 'barley'                   |
|       | <i>jačmenčok</i> | 'sty [on the eye]'         |
| ǧdrŭ  | <i>jadar</i>     | 'coarse; big; strong'      |
| ǧd/t- | <i>jadro</i>     | 'nucleus; essence'         |
|       | <i>jatka</i>     | 'kernel; core; content'    |
| ǧg/za | <i>jandza</i>    | 'fever; creeps; terror'    |
| ǧtry  | <i>jatrova</i>   | 'husband's brother's wife' |
| ǧzykŭ | <i>jazik</i>     | 'tongue; language'         |

<sup>1</sup> The following sources were consulted in preparing the etymologies: Berneker 1913; Vasmer 1950-58; Shevelov 1964; Georgiev et al. 1971; Skok 1971; Stevanović et al. 1973; Trubačev et al. 1979 and 1981.

Table 3: \**q*- > *ja*-

|         |                 |   |
|---------|-----------------|---|
| o       | <i>ja</i>       | 3sg fem oblique pronoun                           |
| ođica   | <i>jadica</i>   | 'fishing hook'                                    |
| ogł-    | <i>jaglen</i>   | 'coal'  |
|         | <i>jaglerod</i> | 'carbon'  |
| og(orī) | <i>jagula</i>   | 'eel'   |
| otū kū  | <i>jatok</i>    | 'woof [in weaving]'                               |
| otū nī  | <i>jator</i>    | 'croze [groove on a barrel stave for the bottom]' |
| oz-     | <i>jazol</i>    | 'knot'  |
|         | <i>jaže</i>     | 'rope; noose'                                     |

Table 4: \*(*j*)*a*- > *ja*-

|             |                  |  |
|-------------|------------------|--|
| (j)ablūko   | <i>jabolko</i>   | 'apple'  |
| (j)agne     | <i>jagne</i>     | 'lamb'   |
| (j)agoda    | <i>jagoda</i>    | 'strawberry'                                       |
| (j)aglika   | <i>jaglika</i>   | 'primrose'   |
| (j)aje      | <i>jajce</i>     | 'egg'  |
| (j)akū      | <i>jak</i>       | 'strong'   |
| (j)alovū    | <i>jalov</i>     | 'infertile'  |
| (j)ama      | <i>jama</i>      | 'pit; cave; hole'                                  |
| (j)arę      | <i>jare</i>      | 'kid'  |
| (j)arīmo    | <i>jarem</i>     | 'yoke'   |
| (j)arostīnū | <i>jarosten</i>  | 'angry'  |
| (j)azū      | <i>jas</i>       | 1sg pronoun  |
| (j)asenī/ū  | <i>iasen</i>     | 'ash tree'   |
| (j)asika    | <i>jasika</i>    | 'aspen' [but <i>o</i> - in other Slavic languages] |
| (j)ato      | <i>jato</i>      | 'flock; swarm'                                     |
| (j)av-      | <i>javi (se)</i> | 'announce, appear, make public'                    |
|             | <i>javka</i>     | 'slogan'   |
|             | <i>javnost</i>   | 'the public'                                       |
| (j)avorū    | <i>javor</i>     | 'maple'  |

Table 5: Unidentified Forms

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <i>jamka</i>  | 'loop; snare' [perhaps a diminutive of <i>jama</i> ?; but cf. SC <i>omča</i> = <i>o</i> + <i>mk</i> + <i>ja</i> according to Skok along with <i>zamka</i> ] |
| <i>janta</i>  | 'shepherd's leather bag' [ <i>cf. Tk yan-</i> 'side' like <i>yandžik</i> ? or Balkan Romance?]  |
| <i>jarbol</i> | 'mast' [ <i>cf. Lat arbor</i> according to Stevanović et al.; but cf. Blg. <i>érbja/járbja</i> 'raise']   |

There was certainly a merger of the nasal vowels in the history of Bulgarian, but it appears that the same cannot be said of Macedonian historical phonology. Arguments for this merger are based on changes of

ε- > q- and vice versa, and Koneski (1983: 24, 41) lists *jazik* 'tongue; language' as an example of the former. Here is a summary of Koneski's discussion of the supposed nasal vowel merger in Macedonian:<sup>2</sup>

- ε > q
- after unpaired palatalized consonants as a result of dispalatalization, found in only a few root morphemes and only in some dialects outside the west-central area;
  - in desinences, where morphological analogy was more of a factor than phonology in producing change;
  - word initially, as in *jazik*.
- q > ε
- after paired palatalized consonants, a widespread change reflecting a continuation of Common Slavic syllabic harmony.

By presenting the data in this fashion, Koneski is able to argue against most instances of supposed nasal merger: changes are attributed either to a complementary set of environments or to analogy. The only change that seems problematic is word-initial ε- > q-, which is not well-motivated phonologically, and would appear to suggest a merger of nasal vowels in initial position.<sup>3</sup> Koneski (1983: 40–41) attempts to provide a phonological explanation by suggesting that "[t]he avoidance of the sequence *j* + front vowel led to the change *je-* > *jq-*", producing *jezyk* > *jqzik*. Yet prothetic *j-* was certainly not original and probably not phonemic at the time, so a more natural solution would have been to simply drop *j-*. Further, this explanation requires adding a change to the history of Macedonian (namely *je-* > *jq-*) that serves no purpose other than to account for about a half-dozen roots plus derivatives. It is, however, possible to argue that nasal vowels as such were never confused or merged in Macedonian, not even in initial position. Although both ε- and q- eventually yielded *ja-*, this is the result **not** of ε- > q- (a hypothetical nasal merger), but rather the result of ε- > ě- > *ja-* (where we have a merger of the reflexes of initial ě-, q- and (*j*)*a-*). The explanation presented in this paper posits no extra changes other than those already posited by Koneski (namely ε > ě, q- > *ja-*, and (*j*)*a-* > *ja-*), plus ě- > *ja-*, for which there is independent evidence, and further suggests that there was no merger of

<sup>2</sup> This summary is condensed from Koneski 1983: 40–42; Koneski 1986 does not make substantive additions to the discussion of nasal vowels.

<sup>3</sup> Koneski also mentions *je* > *jq* in syllable-initial position, but all such examples which are not word-initial are desinential and subject more to analogical than to phonological factors. We should note here that our solution applies to the west central dialects of Macedonian, which served as the base of the literary language. The process must have been different in the peripheral western dialects, where *q* gives reflexes other than *a* (cf. Belić 1935: 39).

nasal vowels even in initial position, thus strengthening Koneski's argument in favor of a Macedonian development with regard to these segments distinct from that observed in Bulgarian.

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