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# OLD INDO-ARYAN *BHĀṢĀ* AND COMMON SLAVIC \**BOLBOLITI*

## ABSTRACT

The paper analyses both OIA *bhāṣā* “language” and Common Slavic \**bolboliti* “to chatter, to blather”. The first is a *s*-suffixed deverbative abstract, heavily modified according to Pedersen’s Law, Fortunatov’s Law and the process of Prakritization, while the second is an ablaut *o*-grade reduplicated intensive, both from the IE root \* $\sqrt{b}^h$ el- “sound”.

## KEYWORDS

Fortunatov’s law; intensive; etymology; *bhāṣā*; \**bolboliti*.

## 1. An introductory remark

Old Indo-Aryan *bhāṣā* “language” and Common Slavic \**bolboliti* (attested, for example, in Czech *blaboliti*, *blábolit*) “to chatter, to blather” are both related to the act of speech, though the first concerns articulate speech and the second unarticulate. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that both words could be etymologically related and show some phenomena related with the diachronic development of both words.

## 2. On OIA *bhāṣā* “language”

### 2.1 Attested forms in OIA and MIA

Old Indo-Aryan *bhāṣā* f. “language” is not attested in the Vedic period, though it is widely used in the later language.

Beside the above-mentioned *bhāṣā* f. “language” (Nir, Pāṇ. etc.) the root  $\sqrt{b}^h$ āṣ- is attested in other regular nominal derivatives as well: *bhāṣitar-* m. “speaker” (ŚB.);

*bhāṣya*- n. “work in the vernacular language”. There is a set of verbal forms such as ind. pres. *bhāṣati*, -*te* (B., Mbh.); pf. *babhāṣe* (B.); ppp. *bhāṣita*-; inf. *bhāṣtum*, etc. (see WHITNEY 1885, 110; WHITNEY 1879, 474; KEWA 497–498; EWA 261).

As stated above, the root is not attested directly in the Vedic language, but it should be kept in mind that the layer of Indo-Aryan language history, in which *bhāṣā* is attested, is very old, merely post-Vedic (i.e. Brāhmaṇas, Epic Sanskrit), and its absence from Vedic language could be simply dialectal or accidental, like other words that are of definitely old origin with known IE cognates, but which are unattested in Vedic.

Beside the forms with the long vowel *ā*, collected above, there is also a root  $\sqrt{bhaṣ}$ - attested in forms like ind. pres. *bhaṣati*, -*te* “barks, growls” and inf. *bhaṣita* (Mbh.; cf. WHITNEY 1979, 109; OBERLIES 2003, 473; WERBA 1997, 360). We shall return to the relation between the long and short forms below.

Later Indo-Aryan languages use both long and short forms. Hence we find Pāli *bhāṣati*; Prākṛit *bhāṣai* (FAHS 1989, 317; TURNER 1966, 540) and short-vowel forms like Pā. *bhasati* “barks” and Pk. *bhasai* (FAHS 1989, 316; TURNER 1966, 536), both with the regular reflex of MIA *s* < OIA *ṣ*. Even the so-called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (which is in fact an “Sanskritized” MIA dialect) also attests the aforementioned roots, both long and short: ind. pres. *bhasati*, *bhāṣati*, ppp. *bhāṣta*- (EDGERTON 1953/1, 222–223; EDGERTON 1953/2, 407–408).

## 2.2 The structure of OIA forms: Pedersen’s Law, Fortunatov’s Law and beyond

Hence we have two roots of similar meaning, one  $\sqrt{bhaṣ}$ - and the other  $\sqrt{bhāṣ}$ -. That leads us to suppose that both forms are just ablaut variants of a single root morpheme, in which the form with the short vowel represents full grade and the form with the long vowel represents lengthened grade<sup>1</sup>, from analogy with the full grade *pat*- in ind. pres. *pātati* and to the lengthened grade *pāt*- in pf. *papāta*, both variants of the root  $\sqrt{pat}$ - “fly”.

The interesting question is why both root-variants contain *ṣ*, since as generally known, OIA *ṣ* is regularly a result of the so-called Pedersen’s Law, also known as the *ruki* rule (strictly speaking, Pedersen’s Law is a special Slavic variant of a more general *ruki* rule, but the general use varies between both terms).

The *ruki* rule states that the retraction of the dental sibilant (*s* → *ṣ*) is a result of this sibilant’s contact with a preceding trigger, namely *i*, *u*, *r*, *k* (vowels can be both short or long, *r* can be either consonantal or vocalic) (PEDERSEN 1895, 74–87; COLLINGE 1985, 41). The question then arises of whether this has happened with our root, since the trigger is lost: before *ṣ* we find only *ā*.

1 cf. ERHART 1980, 41–42

This leads us toward the so-called (First) Fortunatov's Law<sup>2</sup> or more widely to the process of "Prakritization" in general. Prakritization is the process by which OIA retroflex consonants are sometimes present instead of regular dentals, on which more below. We consider Fortunatov's Law merely the first step in the same process as Prakritization.

**Fortunatov's Law** states that original IE \*l, when followed by a dental, changes the dental to a retroflex and then disappears (cf. FORTUNATOV 1881, 215; BURROW 1965, 97; for wider discussion see COLLINGE 1985, 41–46), thus in some examples we find OIA *a* followed by a retroflex obstruent (e.g. *āṭ*, *āṣ*) as reflexes of IE \*Vlt.

**Tab. 1: Examples of Fortunatov's Law**

*√pel-t-:	OIA <i>paṭa</i> - "cloth"	OCS <i>platiŋo</i> "linen", NPers. <i>pardah</i> "veil" (?), Gr. <i>πέλιτη</i> "light shield"
*√g <sup>h</sup> el-t-:	OIA <i>hāṭaka</i> - "gold"	OCS <i>zlato</i> , Lith. <i>zelts</i> , Goth. <i>gulþ</i> "gold"
*√g <sup>h</sup> el-t-:	OIA <i>ghaṭa</i> - "jar":	Lith. <i>gėlda</i> , Germ. <i>Gelte</i> "nádoba"
*√gel-t-:	OIA <i>jaṭhāra</i> - "belly":	Goth. <i>kilþei</i> "womb"
*√pel-s-:	OIA <i>pāṣāṇā</i> - "stone"	Germ. <i>Fels</i> "rock"

Fortunatov's Law could be considered the first phase in the process of an Prakritization, since both root variants, i.e. √bhaṣ- and √bhāṣ-, are attested only from a younger language than Vedic, so from a language contemporary with later (Middle) Indo-Aryan dialects.

The process that we call Prakritization is an irregular change of the attested or reconstructed *r* (either from an original IE vibrant or lateral liquid) to a vowel, generally *ā*, with a following obstruent shifted to a retroflex. Forms with a vocalic liquid or Prakritized forms without one are often attested in parallel, first in Vedic, then in the later language (note retroflex obstruents in the position to the right of the lost vocalic liquid that served as a trigger).

**Tab. 2: Examples of Prakritization**

Non-Prakritized form	×	Prakritized form
OIA √nṛt- "to dance"	×	OIA <i>naṭa</i> - "actor"
OIA √bhṛ- "to carry"	×	OIA <i>bhaṭa</i> - "soldier"
OIA <i>ārtni</i> "tip of bow"	×	OIA <i>aṭani</i> - "ibid."

<sup>2</sup> Fortunatov's Law should not be confused with his Law on Balto-Slavic accentuation. Because it is clear in the present paper that we are only dealing with the First Fortunatov's Law, we will further omit the numeral designation.

As we can see, Prakritization as well as Fortunatov's Law are both related to the *ruki* rule, as a continuation of it. The process of Prakritization is a more widely applied than Fortunatov's Law, which forms just a core of the process of Prakritization (cf. BURROW 1965, 98).

The *ṣ* is thus an \**s* made retroflex after an original liquid trigger, now lost. It seems it is nothing more or less than an original suffix used to form abstract nouns in all IE languages, cf. IE \**ǵenH-os-*: OIA *janas-* "birth", L. *genus*, Gr. *genos* "gens"; IE \**ǵkleu-os-*: OIA *śravas*, Gr. *kle(w)os* "fame"; Sl. *slovo(s)* "word" (ERHART 1982, 110; SZEMERÉNYI 1990, 184).

From the context it is clear that before *ṣ* we can expect only a sonorant, because the shift of original \**s* to a retroflex is possible only after \**i*, *u*, *r*, *k*, according to the *ruki* rule. From the above we see that in Indo-Aryan this works for original IE \**l* as well.

Thus from the above-mentioned forms we can suppose that the root *√bhāṣ-* is probably a descendant of Proto-Indo-Aryan \**√b<sup>h</sup>ar-s-* and a reflection of IE \**√b<sup>h</sup>el-s* (here *e* should be assumed to represent either \**e* or \**o*). The root *√bhaṣ-* can then be interpreted as an successor of PIA \**√b<sup>h</sup>r-s-* and in turn of IE \**√b<sup>h</sup>l-s-*. Furthermore, both roots stand in an ablaut relationship of full-grade PIA \**√b<sup>h</sup>ar-s-* (and IE \**√b<sup>h</sup>el-s-*) and reduced-grade PIA \**√b<sup>h</sup>r-s* (and IE \**√b<sup>h</sup>l-s-*) (cf. KEWA 2, 497–498; EWA 2, 261–262; POKORNY 1959/1, 123–124; LIV, 55, 59)

### 2.3 Parallel formations in OIA

Old Indo-Aryan displays both semantic and formal parallels to our *s*-extended root \**b<sup>h</sup>el-*, namely:

1. *√bhan-* "speak" is attested with an alveolar nasal in Vedic (ind. pres. *bhānati* RV.), but with a retroflex in the later language (*√bhaṇ-*: ind. pres. *bhaṇati* JB. C., pf. *babhāṇa* C.). The root is also attested in Pāli *bhaṇati* and Pkt. *bhaṇai* (both ind. pres.). Here we can suppose that the retroflex is a result of a similar process as above, i.e. the result of Prakritization. As we will demonstrate below, it fits the pattern of IE root morphology, and we can reconstruct the root in the reduced grade with an *n*-suffix: \**√b<sup>h</sup>l-n*, for the variant with dental nasal we reconstruct the root as \**b<sup>h</sup>en-*. If a retroflexion of the root is a purely incidental, then \**b<sup>h</sup>en-* is valid for both variants (TURNER 1966, 534; EDGERTON 1953/2, 222; FAHS 1989, 315; WHITNEY 1879, 108–109; KEWA 2, 469; EWA 2, 244; LIV, 55),
2. *√bhā-* in the nominal stem *sabhā-* f. "assembly, hall". The root is not attested in any other form and is also found later in Pā. *sabhā-* and Pkt. *sabhā-/sahā-* "assembly". If it is not a result of some irregular shortening of a root, then the root here would be expected to represent IE \**√b<sup>h</sup>eH-*, which again fits perfectly the pattern of IE root morphology (cf. KEWA 2, 433–434; EWA 2, 701).

### 3. CSL. \*bolboliti “to blather”

#### 3.1 Attested Slavic words

Common Slavic \*bolboliti is reconstructed from R. *balabólit* “to chatter, to blather”, Slk. *blábolit* and Cz. *blaboliti*, *blábolit(i)* etc. with similar meaning, and Bu. *blaból’a* “to mutter” (cf. MACHEK 1968, 55; ESSJ 2, 171; VASMER 1976/1, 44; SŁAWSKI 1974/1, 301). The Common Slavic word is not attested directly in Old Church Slavonic, but both the geographical and the dialectal distribution suffice to tell us that we are dealing with an old Common Slavic root. Beside the finite verbal forms, verbal nouns are attested as well: R. *balabólka* “bell; garrulous woman”, Cz. *blábol*, *blábolení* “chattering, babbling”, etc.

#### 3.2 The structure of \*bolboliti

The stem of this verb itself is formed by the stem suffix *-i-* and by reduplication. This reduplication clearly has an intensifying meaning and beside \*bolboliti we find other similar formations: \*golgolati (cf. OCS *glagolati*, Cz. *hlaholit*, SCr. *glagòlati*) “to peal, to sound, to speak”, \*polpolati (cf. Cz. *plápolat*) “to bicker, flare”.

The intensifying function of this reduplication can be demonstrated through \*polpolati, since beside the reduplicated intensive form there is a simple present stem \*pol(n)ti (cf. P. *plonać*, Slc. *planút*, SCr. *planuti*, Bu. *plana*, Cz. *planout*) “to blaze”, a factitive \*paliti “to burn” (cf. OCS *paliti*, R. *palít*, P. *palić*, SCr., Sln. *páliti*, Bu. *pálja*, Cz. *pálit*) and a deverbal noun \*polmy, -ene (cf. OCS *plamy*, Ru. *plámja*, Slk. *plámen*, Cz. *plamen* etc.) “flame, fire” (MACHEK 1968, 429–430; DERKSEN 2008, 390, 411).

The root hidden in \*bolboliti is to be reconstructed as \* $\sqrt{b^{(h)}}ol-$ , which is an *o*-grade of the aforementioned \* $\sqrt{b^{(h)}}el-$ . As is well known, in Balto-Slavic a voiced labial stop may derive from both an original IE voiced labial stop or a voiced aspirate, that is, both IE \**b* and \**b<sup>h</sup>* are represented in Balto-Slavic by \**b* (cf. OIA *bhrātar-*, L. *frater* vs. OCS *bratъ*, Lith. *brolis*, all with the meaning “brother”).

The intensive stem formation, though of very limited use in Slavic, is attested in other IE languages, cf. OIA intensives *nénekti* (from  $\sqrt{nij-}$  “wash”), *vevijyáte* (from  $\sqrt{vij-}$  “tremble”), *cárkarmi*, *cárkiran* (from  $\sqrt{kr-}$  2. “commemorate”), *cárcarīti* (from  $\sqrt{car-}$  “move”) (MACDONELL 1910, 390–391; BRUGMANN 1922, 497; ERHART 1980, 149). The formation thus seems to be of very archaic origin, since in Slavic it is limited to a few roots.

#### 3.3 Parallel words in Slavic and Baltic

In Slavic languages, there are some variants of this root as well (ESSJ 2, 171–172; SŁAWSKI 1974/1, 301–302):

1. the root ends with *s*: SCr. *blàbositi*, Sln. *blabosit*, R. dial. *balabósit*, Ukr. *balabóšyty* “babble”;

2. the root ends with *t*: Cz. *blabotati*, Slk. *blábotaf*, R. dial. *bolbotáf*, Ukr. *bolbotáty*, UpSor *blobotać* “babble”.

Both variants have parallels in Baltic, namely the following Lithuanian forms (FRAENKEL 1962/1, 31; LKŽ 588–589):

1. *balbúoti* “speak”, *balbėti* “chat” without any root coda (and thus parallel to OIA *sa-bhā*),
2. *s*-variant: *s*-extended *balbasuoti*, *balbasyti* “babble”,
3. *t*-variants *balbātyti* “gossip, to blab”, *balbatúoti* “blab”, *balbāčyti* “babble”.

In Lith. is attested *bašas* “voice”, which is not reduplicated and which is extended by a thematized *s*-suffix, thus it formally corresponds to OIA *bhāṣā* (cf. BURROW 1965, 98)!

We can see another striking relationship in Slavic *\*golsъ* “voice” (cf. OCS *glasъ*, Cz. *hlas*, P. *głos*. SCr., Sln. *glás*, R. *głos*), which is a deverbal abstract noun in *-s* from the IE root  $\sqrt{gal}$ - “to sound” as OIA *bhāṣā* is from the root *\*b<sup>h</sup>el-*. Considering that there is an reduplicated intensive *\*golgolati* “to peal, to sound”, we can draw the following table:

**Tab. 3: Parallels of  $\sqrt{b^h el-}$  and  $\sqrt{gal-}$**

	$\sqrt{\text{ROOT} + s-}$	INTENSIVE
$\sqrt{b^h el-}$	<i>b<sup>h</sup>ol-s-</i> : OIA <i>bhāṣā</i> , Lith. <i>bašas</i>	<i>*b<sup>h</sup>ol-b<sup>h</sup>ol-</i> : Cz. <i>blaboliti</i>
$\sqrt{gal-}$	<i>gol-s-</i> : OCS <i>glasъ</i> , Cz. <i>hlas</i>	<i>*gol-gol-</i> : Cz. <i>hlaholiti</i>

## 4. Other OIA related words

If L. *balbus*, *balbutio* is related, as Vasmer and the authors of ESSJ suggest (VASMER 1, 111–112; ESSJ 2, 170–172), it represents the form *\*bol-bo(H)*, reflecting same stem as Lith. *balbuoti*.

To the IE root *\*b<sup>h</sup>el-* of an onomatopoeic meaning “sound” are related forms like Oicel. *belja* “bellow, roar”, Oicel. *bylja* “roar”, OE *bylgan* “scream, bellow”, OE *bellan* “roar”, OHG *bellan* “roar”, OHG *bullôn* “howl”, OPrus. *billit* “say”, Latv. *biļst* “speak”, Lith. *bilti* “speak, say” etc. (cf. POKORNY 1959 1, 105–106, 123–124; LIV 59; KEWA 2, 469–470, 497–499; EWA 2, 244, 261–262; MAŽIULIS 1988/1, 140–142; KARULIS 2001, 127; KLUGE – SEEBOLT 1999, 96; LLOYD – SPRINGER 1988, 533–535; LLOYD – LÜHR – SPRINGER 1998, 432). To the Germanic forms should be noted, that forms could be probably traced back to *\*b<sup>h</sup>el-s* formation, analogous to above mentioned OIA and Baltic forms. Forms like Oicel. *belja* vs. *bylja* are given by the IE ablaut *e ~ o*, same is valid for Lith. *bilóju* vs. *balsas*.

## 5. Conclusion

Considering the phonemic development of OIA *bhāṣā* and its relationship with words in other IE languages, it is surely derived from the root \* $\sqrt{b^h}el$ - and enlarged by the abstract-forming suffix -s.

Slavic (and Lithuanian, too) has the root \* $\sqrt{bol}$ - (Baltic \**bal*-) of similar meaning. This root is an ablaut variant of IE root \* $\sqrt{b^h}el$ -. The stem is a regular reduplicated intensive, in accord with known IE morphology. The history of both the Indic and Slavic words is thus clear and in an accord with what is known about IE morphology and phonology.

To reconstruct semantics is always a somewhat tricky business, but it seems that the general meaning of the root \* $\sqrt{b^h}el$ - was “to sound”. Intensives should then have the meaning “to intensively sound”, which fits the attested meanings of the given words, with a further transition to “blathering” quite probable.

**List of abbreviations of languages:** B. = Bulgarian; Cz. = Czech; Germ. = German; Goth. = Gothic; Gr. = Greek; IE = Indo-European; L. = Latin; Latv. = Latvian; Lith. = Lithuanian; MIA = Middle Indo-Aryan; NPer. = New Persian; OCS = Old Church Slavonic; OE = Old English (= Anglo-Saxon); OHG = Old High German; OIA = Old Indo-Aryan; OIcel. = Old Icelandic (Old Norse); OPrus. = Old Prussian; P. = Polish; Pā. = Pāli; PIA = Proto-Indo-Aryan; Pk. = Prakṛt; R. = Russian; SCr. = Serbo-Croatian; Slk. = Slovak; Sln. = Slovenian; Ukr. = Ukrainian; UpSor = Upper Sorbian

**List of abbreviations of Indian source texts:** B. = Brāhmaṇas; C. = Classic Sanskrit; Mbh. = Mahābhārata; Nir = Nirukta; Pāṇ. = Pāṇini; RV. = Rīgveda; ŚB = Śatapathabrāhmaṇa

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