On the origin of the Slavic *i*-verbs

It is generally assumed that the oldest layer of verbs inflecting according to Leskien's IV. class continues Proto-Indo-European formations in *-$ei̯e/o$- (cf. Brugmann 1892, Vondrak 1928, Stang 1942, Hock 1995 and others). This is suggested by both formal and semantic reasons. Slavic *i*-verbs typically show an *o* vowel in the root, which is a characteristic for verbs in *-$ei̯e$- also in other Indo-European languages. Moreover, IV. class verbs typically have iterative or causative meaning which is again what we find in continuants of the *ei̯e*-type in other Indo-European languages, cf. the causatives PIE *sod-$ei̯e/o$- 'cause to sit' (causative) > OCS *saditi* 'to set, plant', Go *satjan* 'id.'; PIE *$u̯os$-$ei̯e/o$- 'clothe, put on clothes' (causative) > Hi *waššezzi* 'he clothes', Ved *vāsáyati* 'id.'; and the iteratives Gk *phoréō* 'I carry around, habitually carry', and OCS *nositi* 'to carry habitually' which do not have direct cognates in other Indo-European languages (see Fortson 2010). The only problem with identifying Slavic IV. class verbs and the above-mentioned forms in the other IE languages is that tautosyllabic sequences *-$ei̯e/o$- do not usually contract to *$ī$ in Slavic, cf. PIE *$trei̯es$ '3' > OCS NOM.PL.M *trьje* 'id.'. This has led researchers to posit an intermediate stage *-$ьje/o$-, which is assumed to have either been contracted further to *-$ī$- in some forms or to have developed into *-je/o- in others (cf. Vondrak 1928, Stang 1942, Hock 1995, Andersen 2014; differently Brugmann 1894). However, in the light of examples such as the above-cited numeral '3' as well as certain other forms, these developments cannot have been regular either. I therefore believe that an explanation which accounts for the Slavic facts without positing unattested intermediate stages is preferrable. In the talk, I propose two sound changes which allow to account for both contraction and vowel syncope in the suffix *-$ei̯e/o$-. Contraction occurred whenever the two vowels of the sequence at hand where of the same height (cf. Hill 2016 with a similar contraction) and the second vowel was not a long vowel, e.g., PRS.3SG *$h_1nok̑$-$éi̯e$-ti > *$nok̑$-$ī$-ti > OCS *nositъ*. If, on the other hand, the second vowel in the sequence was either long or of a different height than the first vowel, syncope of the first vowel occurred, e.g., PRS.1SG *$h_1nok̑$-$éi̯o$-h_2-$m̥$ > *$nok̑éi̯ōm$ > *$nok̑i̯ōm$ > OCS *nošǫ*. After having introduced these two changes I show that their assumption allows to regularly account for a greater number of grammatical forms than competing hypotheses. Finally, I discuss how certain exceptions to the proposed sound laws can be explained.

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