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Nasal inchoatives in PIE: an overlooked formation

(abstract)

The nasal classes of Germanic, Baltic and Slavic have been routinely taken from the same PIE nasal-affixed categories as those of Sanskrit and the other IE languages. Indeed, the formations look very similar, and there is no lack of word equations (cf. OCS *ri-nq-* ‘throw’ and Skt. *ri-ṅv-* ‘make flow’).

Yet there is a snag in this picture which precludes us from quite resting the case. On the functional (semantic) side, the nasal classes in the daughter languages are, with rare exceptions, *transitive* and often *terminative (telic)* as well (Delbrück 1897). In terms of inflection, the known nasal classes began life as strictly *athematic* formations. And even though most historical IE languages other than Hittite show a clear tendency for the nasal classes to become thematized, this purely formal process does not affect their basic transitive semantics.

The scene changes when we turn to Baltic, Slavic, and Germanic. Their most salient nasal classes are *intransitive* and *inchoative*, i.e., they comprise change-of-state verbs devoid of agency and volition on the part of the subject (cf. the semantic contrast between Skt. *dṛ-ṅá-* ‘tear (tr.)’ and Go. pret. *ga-taur-nō-* ‘came to be disrupted’). Furthermore, the *thematic* present stem observed in the Baltic, Slavic and Germanic nasal inchoatives (cf. Lith. *limp-a-* ‘cling,’ Go. *-lif-ni/e-* ‘remain,’ OCS *-lī(p)-ne/o-* ‘get stuck’) cannot be easily explained as the product of a post-PIE process of thematization. It appears that the Baltic, Slavic and Germanic inchoative verbs have been thematic all along—a fact that also requires an explanation.

In my paper I address these problems and propose a new PIE inchoative formation.