

# DOWNLOAD PDF POSITION OF THE SLAVONIC LANGUAGES AT THE PRESENT DAY

## Chapter 1 : Slavic languages - Infogalactic: the planetary knowledge core

*THE POSITION OF THE SLAVONIC LANGUAGES AT THE PRESENT DAY. IT would be impossible for me to begin this Lecture without paying a tribute, no less earnest because it is necessarily short, to the memory of the man, who, I may say, inspired it.*

During the Proto-Balto-Slavic period a number of exclusive isoglosses in phonology, morphology, lexis, and syntax developed, which makes Slavic and Baltic the closest related of all the Indo-European branches. The secession of the Balto-Slavic dialect ancestral to Proto-Slavic is estimated on archaeological and glottochronological criteria to have occurred sometime in the period 4000–3500 BCE. Substantial advances in Balto-Slavic accentology that occurred in the last three decades, however, make this view very hard to maintain nowadays, especially when one considers that there was most likely no "Proto-Baltic" language and that West Baltic and East Baltic differ from each other as much as each of them does from Proto-Slavic.

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consonant are eventually eliminated, in the following stages: Progressive palatalization or "third palatalization": Development of phonemic tone and vowel length independent of vowel quality: Complex developments see History of accentual developments in Slavic languages. Common features The Slavic languages are a relatively homogeneous family, compared with other families of Indo-European languages e. Germanic , Romance , and Indo-Iranian. As late as the 10th century AD, the entire Slavic-speaking area still functioned as a single, dialectally differentiated language, termed Common Slavic. Compared with most other Indo-European languages, the Slavic languages are quite conservative, particularly in terms of morphology the means of inflecting nouns and verbs to indicate grammatical differences. Most Slavic languages have a rich, fusional morphology that conserves much of the inflectional morphology of Proto-Indo-European.

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Nothing I might here say could express the debt I owe to my predecessor, the late Professor Morfill; his genuine and generous enthusiasm for the subject in which we were both so deeply interested encouraged me to emulation, while his brilliant wit and amazing memory left me in no doubt of the desperate nature of the attempt. Those who remember his wonderful gifts, who delighted in them, and must delight in the remembrance of them, may draw on their memories to supplement those qualities which will be found lacking, while those who did not know him will have the misfortune to realize what it is they have lost. Professor Morfill was the first official representative of Slavonic philology in England; his attainments and publications in his special field of study attracted the admiration and gratitude of the whole Slavonic world, which often expressed its appreciation of his efforts in the concrete terms of the conferment of academic distinctions. But besides his interest in the Slavonic languages, of the five principal of which he wrote grammars, and in the history of the Slav nations, to which he devoted several volumes, Professor Morfill was master of the languages and the literatures of Greece and Rome. He was well acquainted with all the other European languages philologically, as well as with some of those of Asia and Africa. There was scarcely a language one could mention so remote but that he would shyly confess to having at some time or other inquired into its structure. Nevertheless, with all these languages and literatures at his command, he would always unhesitatingly asseverate his preference for those of the Slavonic peoples, which appealed to him by their vigour and wealth of sound, no less than by their freshness and originality of expression. Once fascinated by this field of study, his plight resembled that of a bee distracted by the rival claims on her attention of many beautiful flowers; and if asked which of the Slavonic languages he preferred, would always find it difficult to give a single and decisive answer. But the benefit of his bibliophile activity which resulted in the formation of a unique private library was shared by this Institution, of which he was long a prominent and energetic administrator. Thanks to the indignation which this tragi-comic discovery provoked in him, Professor Morfill soon improved matters, and to-day the Taylorian possesses a very fairly comprehensive library of Slavonic literature. In case any misapprehension still exists as to where and by whom the Slavonic languages are spoken, it seems not out of place to take this opportunity of indicating the extent of the area over which these tongues are current to-day. There are several reasons which might account for such misapprehension, but the most likely would seem to be the apparent remoteness of these countries and languages from our own, and the number of strange and complex names with which they are associated. It is as difficult for the English ear to assimilate these names as it is to differentiate between them. What makes it worse for foreigners is that each of the Slavonic languages has an orthography of its own, the peculiarities of which are reflected in its nomenclature of all the other Slavonic nationalities; and in this connexion it is at any rate comforting to know that Slavs themselves find it difficult to make clear the distinctions in the names by which, in their several languages, some of their nationalities are designated. There will be occasion later to give examples of this terminological confusion. But here geography comes to our help. In Eastern Europe the conditions are different. To begin with, there are many fewer impressive natural boundaries than in the western half of the continent, such as the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and even when they do occur, they seldom correspond to the political, still more rarely to the linguistic divisions. Only three out of the seven principal Slavonic languages happen at the present day to be the state language in the respective political divisions where they are current, and to remember where the other four are spoken requires a more intimate knowledge of the history and geography of Eastern Europe than can be gained from familiarity with a purely political map of that half of the continent. History and geography tell us that the Slavonic languages on the

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whole are spoken to-day over a far greater area than they were years ago, but also that the general position and shape of that area have considerably changed. Some of the Slavonic languages have waxed, others have waned; some are moribund, others are obsolete. A language is like any other organism, it cannot remain passive; stagnation means death, it must either grow or decay, expand or recede, and the history of the Slavonic languages furnishes instructive proof of this inevitable law. The principal difference between the position which the Slavonic languages held in the ninth century, and that which they occupy to-day, is the following: The limits reached by the Slav tribes in the ninth century at the close of the era of wholesale migrations show that the direction of their expansion up to that time had been centrifugal; they had radiated west, south, and east from a common centre, the Carpathians and the plains to the north and south of them. The positions held by them at the present day show that their expansion eastwards has continued uninterruptedly; but on the west and south they have either remained stationary, in some places protected from the retaliation of evicted tenants by mountains, in others obstructed from further progress by the sea, or they have receded before nations they had themselves displaced, now claiming to redeem what had once been their own. But before examining the vicissitudes of the Slavonic languages, it is necessary to make a digression in order to mention a subsidiary but important group of languages whose fate has always been intimately connected with that of its Slavonic neighbours. It is customary in comparative philology, when tabulating the Indo-European family of languages, to speak of them as the Baltic group. Now although it is not reasonable or satisfactory to call a group of languages merely by the name of the ocean in the vicinity of which the people speaking them happen to dwell, still, for want of a better, Baltic serves the purpose, and is at least elastic. Now this group is always coupled with that of the Slavonic languages as the Baltic-Slavonic division of the Indo-European family. The reason is that a closer affinity exists between these two groups than between either of them and any other of the main divisions of the Indo-European family, and so, although it is out of the question to postulate a single prehistoric Baltic-Slavonic language, still it is scientifically permissible to treat them as one main division of the Indo-European family, and therefore to include also the Baltic in any tabulation of the Slavonic languages. It is advisable to prepose the Baltic to the Slavonic languages for more reasons than one. In the first place, they are in many ways more antique than the Slavonic languages, already themselves remarkable for their wealth of morphological and accidental survivals from an earlier epoch, compared with other Indo-European languages. Again, they cover such a relatively small and remote area, and the claims on our interest of their literatures are so modest, that they are apt to be neglected by all but specialists in Indo-European comparative philology. Yet these languages are so interesting in themselves, and so important in the light they throw on the historical development of the cognate Slavonic group, that they deserve the former place in any catalogue of this linguistic division. The so-called Baltic group includes three languages: Prussian, Lithuanian, and Lettish. Prussian was the language spoken by the people who in the ninth century inhabited the lands between the Vistula and the Niemen rivers, bounded on the north by the sea and roughly corresponding to the limits of the present German province of East Prussia. The Prussian language in the seventeenth century became extinct, and only meagre fragments of it have been preserved in writing; Lithuanian and Lettish are still spoken. The natural phenomena peculiar to the country, which abounds in vast swamps and forests, as well as its remoteness from great trade-routes, have conduced to the preservation of the antique character of these languages, especially of Lithuanian, but at the same time it is largely due to this cause that the earliest records and monuments of these languages go no further back than the sixteenth century. There is greater affinity between Lithuanian and Lettish than between either of them and Prussian, and, generally speaking, Lettish shows a later stage of development than Lithuanian; that is to say, it is the more remote of the two from what can be postulated as the language of their common origin. To what extent Lithuanian was spoken during those early centuries when the country was independent of all foreign influence it is now impossible to determine, but at the present day it is current in the mouths of at least , people in East Prussia, and of considerably more than two millions in Russia. It is important to remember that the political boundaries of the mediaeval state of Lithuania, which covered an immense area and included at one time all of

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what is now Western Russia, always extended far beyond the limits of the area where the Lithuanian language was spoken. At the present day it is spoken over an irregularly shaped piece of territory which could be roughly delimited by a line drawn through the following towns: Petersburg, through the bilingual signs at which, and at the corresponding station on the other side of the frontier, the unsuspecting traveller is misled into believing that German and Russian are respectively the only languages current in that region. From Eydtkuhnen the line goes south, then east to Vilna, then curving north turns westwards and follows almost exactly the boundary between the Russian governments of Kovno and Kurland, debouching at Polangen again on to the shores of the Baltic. In other words, Lithuanian is spoken in the extreme north-eastern corner of East Prussia, in Russia throughout the government of Kovno, and in considerable portions of the governments of Suvalki and Vilna. The territory where Lettish is spoken lies immediately to the north of that occupied by the Lithuanians; it is bounded on the west by the Baltic and on the south by the political boundary dividing the government of Kurland, the whole of which is Lettish, from that of Kovno, which is purely Lithuanian. Lettish is also the language of the southern half of the government of Livonia and of the western half of that of Vitebsk. It must not be forgotten that the big towns in Kurland and Livonia, such as Mitau, Libau, and Riga, are largely German, and that the landholders in these two governments belong to the same nationality, while the rural population is entirely Lithuanian and Lettish. The Letts and the Lithuanians of East Prussia, on the other hand, are one and all Lutherans, having in their more exposed geographical position accepted the teachings recommended by their Teutonic masters. Accordingly the vocabulary of Lithuanian betrays Polish, that of Lettish, German influence. Lettish has also been influenced by the proximity of its neighbours of Finnish race, whom the Letts gradually propelled northwards into the extreme northern corner of the promontory of Kurland, where a portion of them still remains, and into Livonia proper. Lithuanian has also been much influenced by White Russian, the dialect current in those provinces which in the Middle Ages formed the lands of the Lithuanian crown, and later with Lithuania became part of Poland. White Russian was actually chosen as the official language of Lithuania in the Middle Ages, the mother-tongue being considered too rustic a medium, and of too restricted resources to afford a suitable vocabulary for the redaction of state documents. The best Lithuanian literature consists of traditional folk-songs and ballads, only a small proportion of which have been written down and edited. The brave efforts of native authors to develop a school of poetry inspired by the phenomena of the Lithuanian landscape and the characteristics of local meteorology have been only moderately successful, but the national songs contain many lines of profound sentiment, and are full of quaint and gentle expressions. Also they abound in allusions to a lost and only half-intelligible mythology. In recent years gratifying signs of increasing interest in their own language and literature have been noticeable amongst the Lithuanians. Against this must be set the uninterrupted stream of emigration towards America, which has already drained the home-country to the extent of half a million people, or one-sixth of the whole nation. The Lithuanian community in America publish newspapers, books, and dictionaries with an energy that betrays the influence of their new surroundings, yet the wholesale appropriation of necessary but inadequately assimilated Americanisms, together with prolonged absence from the secular traditions of the mother-country, must at an increasing rate lower the standard of linguistic purity. In Lithuania itself, on the other hand, the commercial supremacy of German in the west and Russian in the east cannot fail to militate in course of time against the integrity of this humble but ancient and gentle tongue, even if its continued existence be not imperilled. The name given by the Letts to the Russians is of great interest and historical importance. Passing from the Baltic to the cognate Slavonic group of languages, the question arises, in which order the latter are to be classified. It is now the established custom to arrange the Slavonic languages in three main divisions, the criteria for which are certain phonetic characteristics which need not here be closely considered. These three divisions are called, according to their respective geographical positions, the Western, Southern, and Eastern. It is impossible now to determine to what extent the differences of these languages one from another had already crystallized by the ninth century, that is to say, at the time when the migrations of the Slavonic tribes were complete, before the formation amongst them

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of separate political states, and before the time to which even the earliest extant fragments of these languages belong. It is, however, probable that many of the characteristics peculiar to each of the Slavonic languages as we know them to-day had already developed in the ninth century, because considerable expansion westwards, southwards, and eastwards of the Slavonic tribes had already taken place, and consequently distinctions of nationality had time to appear and had acquired space to develop. To the western group, the first to be considered, belong those of the Slavonic languages spoken by the tribes who in the middle of the ninth century were settled north of the Danube and west of the so-called Baltic nationalities; the boundary between the western and eastern group not accurately to be determined even to-day roughly corresponds to the watershed between the Vistula and the Dnieper. That between the western and southern group is approximately indicated by the Danube. From among the many names of these Western Slavonic tribes that have been preserved, those have acquired greater prominence which correspond to the three important Western Slavonic languages of to-day. The first of these three, taken geographically, is Lusatian-Lusatian-Wendish, a name whose unfamiliarity is easily explained by the fact that this interesting language is to-day spoken by only , people, living in Prussia and Saxony. Related to them were other tribes, but as their names have become extinct it would be unnecessarily confusing to mention them here. In their last stronghold, the Spreewald, to-day, the only means of communication between one village and another is often by boat over the thousand ramifications of that torpid river. The name Wendish, which occurs in the English designation Lusatian-Wendish, is merely the German Windisch or Wendisch, the term by which all Germans have from time immemorial designated all Slavs, now more especially applied to the Lusatian Wends. The word is ubiquitous as a place-name wherever the Germans and Slavs have been in contact, and is even at the present day used to designate more than one Slavonic nationality. It is simplest for us to follow the German lead and call these people the Lusatian Wends, though it must not be forgotten that they call themselves and all other Slavs call them Serbs, and even the Germans sometimes call them Sorben, and their language Sorbisch. This is, of course, only a variation of the name of the well-known Southern Slav race, the Servians or Serbs, and is one of the many facts reminiscent of the essential pre-historic affinity of the Slavonic tribes, and of the proximity to each other which they must at one time have experienced. The marked differences between the two dialects have prompted some savants to treat Upper and Lower Lusatian- Wendish as two separate and independent languages, but the numerous points of fundamental similarity between them hardly justify such a course. The Lusatian Wends have, with their northern fellow-Slavs, had to bear the brunt of the aggression of their western neighbours, whose advance eastwards since the time of Charlemagne has been uninterrupted. As was mentioned before, barely , of the Lusatian Wends have survived to tell the tale; and this only thanks to the inaccessible nature of their retreats, while it must unfortunately be admitted that the incessant erosion of the surrounding German tide causes an estimated annual decrease in their numbers of a thousand. However minute the territory of this smallest of the Slavonic nations at the present day, proof of its former extent, and of the completeness of the sometime Slavonic occupation, is to be seen in the quantity of Slavonic place-names which occur wholesale in Germany east of the Elbe and Saal. Such proofs, which can be enumerated to any number, are clearly incontestable; happily they are imperishable too, because they have become in their Germanized forms, the etymology of which is usually obvious, so familiar to the Germans themselves that the authorities would scarcely think of arbitrarily substituting for them artificial modern German names, invented ad hoc, as they have done lately in some of the more eastern provinces of the Empire. Passing from Lusatian Wendish, the next of the Western Slavonic languages to be considered is Polish. Enjoying great prominence today, with a contemporary literature of extraordinary fertility and of great brilliance, and spoken by a larger number of people than any Slavonic language except Russian, Polish is only one of a group of dialects known in comparative philology as the Lechish group. The designation Lechish is an adaptation of the name by which the Poles were from early times called by their neighbours, but never used of themselves. To the Lechish group belong, besides Polish, all the Slavonic languages, except Lusatian Wendish, which were at one time spoken throughout what is now Northern Germany from the Eider in

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Holstein to the Vistula. The unique survivor of these once extensively spoken dialects, besides Polish, is that called Kashubish, spoken by the Kashubs, or, as some of them call themselves, Slovintsi; these now number slightly over , people inhabiting the country between Danzig and the boundary of the provinces of Western Prussia and Pomerania. This dialect was only identified and classified during the last century, and philologists have concentrated their attention on it none too soon, for emigration to America and erosion at home are causing a rapid diminution in the numbers of this people. As usual disputes have arisen as to whether Kashubish is to be regarded as a separate language, or as a dialect of Polish, the Polish savants maintaining the latter view, while their Russian colleagues naturally seize the opportunity offered of subtracting the Kashubs from the sum total of the Polish nationality. As in the case of the place-names in the country inhabited by the Lusatian Wends, those of Northern Germany between the Eider and the Vistula furnish ample proof of the complete occupation of this country at one time by the Slavs. Turning from these moribund and fragmentary dialects, it is reassuring to find Polish, the most prominent of the Western Slav languages and numerically the second in importance of them all, leading a vigorous and militant existence. It is the language of nearly twenty million people, who form a solid ethnographical quadrangle with its southern base resting on the Carpathians. The numerous tribal names, many of which have survived and are well known to-day, such as the Mazurowie and Kujawianie, have all been superseded by that of the principal central nationality, the Polanie, literally, the dwellers in the open fields, a name used at one time by several Slavonic tribes. The fact that in English the name Poland has come to be used to designate only Russian Poland causes it to be overlooked that the Polish provinces of Russia include little more than half of the territory over which Polish is spoken. In Germany the southern halves of the provinces of East and West Prussia, and the eastern half of Silesia are purely Polish, while of the total population of the German province of Posen, the country formerly known in Polish history as Great Poland, about 75 per cent, are Poles. In Austria the whole of Galicia west of the river San is solidly Polish, as is also the eastern half of Austrian Silesia. The fortunes of the Polish language have been very different in each of the three empires under whose political control the Polish nation passed when it was arbitrarily trisected at the tragic culmination of its history as an independent state in the eighteenth century. They have been darkest in Prussia, where the policy of exterminating the Polish nationality has been consistently applied by an incorruptible bureaucracy. This is not the place to discuss political rights and wrongs, and the situation can be summed up by saying that the province of Posen is as far as ever from being Germanized, while the millions spent by the Prussian Colonization Commission have only served to strengthen the economic position of the people for whose eradication they were voted.

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## Chapter 3 : Slavic languages - Wikipedia

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