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“Development of the Church Slavonic Norm”

In this paper we will try to give a brief overview of the development and characteristics of the Church Slavonic norm, which for most of its history was polycentric and biscriptural. In its development, we can identify several recurrent stages of stabilization and destabilization of the norm, which can be caused by the influence of the vernacular, the imitation of an external norm (mostly Greek or another Church Slavonic variety) and the changing attitude towards tradition. Being a mostly polycentric language, the evolutionary dynamics of regional norms, partly due to extra-linguistic reasons (confessional, political, cultural), show some differences. Nevertheless, Church Slavonic has undergone two important processes of convergence. The first, which took place in the Late Middle Ages, involved only the varieties used by the Orthodox population, while the second, which ended in the later stages of the Early Modern period, had a supra-confessional character for various reasons. The consequences of these processes of convergence were to limit the link between the norm and its original vernacular background.

The peculiarities of the development of the Church Slavonic norm and the reasons for such dynamics are more obvious when compared with other languages that played a similar role in the European speech communities: Latin and Greek. The most important difference between Church Slavonic and Latin and Greek is the long absence of a grammatical approach in education, which hardened the acquisition of the cultural language for users with a non-Slavic vernacular and contributed to the polycentricity of the language. The development of Latin and Church Slavonic has in common the fact of being a supranational language and the repeated revisions of the norm, which gradually spread throughout the politically divided cultural area. Medieval Greek and Church Slavonic (at least the varieties and stages of development) share the aspect of a multi-level norm, which allows the user to consciously choose a marker that refers to a concrete discourse tradition.