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Stylistic and Sociolinguistic Levels of Common Slavic – Vocabulary and
Word Formation

The finding that the common heritage of Indo European languages is not limited to a number of words and a quantity of roots and formants, but also includes some syntactic structures, and even minimal fragments of the prototext, opened the way to a kind of research whose object is usually called “Indo-European poetic language”, in German: *Indogermanische Dichtersprache*. “Poetic” might be too narrow a definition; the research in question could be more precisely described as dealing mainly with formulaic metrical texts, which is aimed at reconstructing linguistic items belonging to a higher stylistic level, elevated above the everyday verbal communication into the language of the traditional -particularly epic- poetry and on the other hand into the magical-religious sphere of contact with suprahuman entities. The main characteristics of this “language of gods”, as it is called by Homer, are descriptivity and metaphoricality, as opposed to the conventionality of everyday human speech. Having linguistically as well as culturally sprung from the Proto-Indo-Europeans, the Proto-Slavs inherited this stylistic stratification of linguistic expression, the traces of the elevated style being found mainly in the oral epic poetry –especially in those formulas that are attested both in South Slavic heroic poems and in Russian bylinas and thus proved to be of Common Slavic origin– as well as in anthroponymy which among them, not unlike other Indo-European peoples, preserved, petrified into compound names, many figures of the “poetic language”. As for the word formation, the higher linguistic level was characterised by composition and the lower one by suffixal derivation. The interaction between two levels is reflected in several instances, variously motivated, of a stylistically marked word being eventually adopted into the basic vocabulary.