

**PIE feminine '3' and '4': A critique of Snyder (1970)\***

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In this brief note I take issue with Emmerick's (1992:293) statement that Snyder's (1970) explanation of the morphology of the PIE feminine forms for the numbers '3' and '4', is "The most attractive explanation so far advanced". After a brief synopsis of the morphological puzzle presented by these forms I provide a detailed presentation of Snyder's explanation, as well as a critique of its methodological shortcomings.

One of the more recalcitrant morphological problems in Indo-European linguistics has been the formation of the feminine forms of the numbers '3' and '4' in Sanskrit (**tisrās** and **cātasras**, respectively), Avestan (**tisr-** and **catagr-**) and Old Irish (disyllabic **teuir**, monosyllabic **téoir** and **cethéoir** with the second syllable monosyllabic and-much rarer-disyllabic). These forms are so similarly different from their masculine counterparts (**tráyas-catváras** for Sanskrit, **θrāyah- caθβār-** for Avestan, and **tri-cethair** for Old Irish) that their construction begs explaining. A satisfactory explanation has not been given yet, as can be witnessed by the continuous resurfacing of the subject in the literature. Since Meringer's (1904) complete account of these forms, the subject has also been discussed by Cowgill (1957), Szemerényi (1967, 1977), Hamp (1973, 1988), Snyder (1970), Oettinger (1986), and Emerick (1992).

If we were to concentrate on the Indic forms (represented here by the Sanskrit in Table 1), the most disputed question since Meringer's (1904) account has been the nature of the cluster 'sr' in the feminine forms for these two numbers.

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'3'	<u>Masc</u>	<u>Fem</u>	<u>Neuter</u>
Nom	tráyas	tisráś	trīṇi
Acc	trīn	tisráś	trīṇi
Instr	tribhīś	tisṛbhīś	tribhīś
Dat	tribhīś	tisṛbhīś	tribhīś
Gen	trīṇám	tisṛṇám	trīṇám
Loc	trīṣu	tisṛṣu	trīṣu
'4'	<u>Masc</u>	<u>Fem</u>	<u>Neuter</u>
Nom	catváras	cátasras	catvári
Acc	catúras	cátasras	catvári
Instr	catúrbhīś	catasṛbhīś	catúrbhīś
Dat	<u>1catúrbhīś</u>	catasṛbhīś	<u>catúrbhīś</u>
Gen	<u>caturnám</u>	catasṛṇám	<u>caturnám</u>
Loc	<u>catúrsu</u>	catasṛṣu	<u>catúrsu</u>

Table 1. The Sanskrit paradigm for numbers '3' and '4'

Most analyses (Meringer, Szemerényi, Hamp, Oettinger) have proposed that the cluster *sr* has its origin in *\*sor* (zero grade *sr̥*) the PIE word for "woman", which has also been posited in *\*swe-sōr* (explained as self+woman-"own's woman"-extended to mean "sister"), Greek *ἄσφα* "wife" which Meringer derives from *\*so-sr̥*. Meringer would also like to identify it with Latin *series*, Greek *εἶρω* "to connect" (both from *\*ser*), thus getting the full ablaut pattern *\*sor-ser-sr̥*. Later (cf. Benveniste (1969)) this element was also cited in:

Latin *uxor* "wife" < *\*euk-sor* (know+woman)

Avestan *hāirisī* "woman" < *\*sor-is-i* (woman-neuter abstract-feminine suffix)

Sanskrit *strī* "woman" < *\*sri*, the *t* being epenthetic<sup>2</sup>.

Cowgill (1957) in a similar vein proposed that the cluster *sr* was a feminine ending, but disputed its connections to PIE *\*sor*.

<sup>1</sup> Underlined forms are not attested in the Rigveda.

<sup>2</sup> However, some of these citations are controversial; cf. Benveniste (1969), Szemerényi (1977).

On the other hand, Snyder's (1970) account, breaks with tradition as it does not try to link *-sr-* to *\*sor*, or even assign it the status of a feminine ending. Snyder assumes that the stem of four is *\*k<sup>w</sup>étwer-* (whereas the other accounts assume *\*k<sup>w</sup>ét-* for mas. stem and *\*k<sup>w</sup>éte-* for fem. stem). If *\*sor* had to attach to this stem, it would yield the unwieldy *\*kwetwersores*, from which *cátasras* could never arise.

In order to explain the appearance of *-sr-* in the feminine forms Snyder draws our attention to the following Sanskrit nouns: masculine *dātṛ* "giver" (nom. pl. *dātāras* which is similar to *catvāras*), and the feminine *uṣṭ* "dawn" (nom. pl. *uṣāras* which is similar to *cátasras*). For Snyder, this reflects a PIE differentiation between the two genders, so he proposes an alternation between masculine *\*k<sup>w</sup>étwōres* and feminine *\*k<sup>w</sup>étweres*. Through regular sound change the latter would yield *cátvaras* (nom.) and *cáturas* (acc.). From here Snyder proposes the following labyrinth of analogical influence:

- 1) Based on acc. *caturas* the nom. loses the *v* giving *cataras*
- 2) Based on nom. *cataras* the acc. *caturas* changes *u* to *a* giving *cataras*
- 3) The *r* of *cataras* gets analyzed as a feminine suffix
- 4) The *r* is attached to *tris* (for "three times") yielding *tris-ras* for fem '3'
- 5) Under the influence of *trisras* the accusative of '4' *cataras* changes to *catasras*
- 6) The accusative of '4' spreads to the nominative giving *catasras* there also.

The appealing quality of this account is that it does not posit *\*sor* in the formation and thus does not need to explain how and why a phrase that originally had the meaning "four women" (or "three women") came to mean '4' (or '3') of the feminine gender.

Unfortunately, however, Snyder's account is problematic from a methodological point of view because in order for it to work, there have to be at least 6 different instances of analogical influence between the numbers '3' and '4', which constitutes an abuse of 'the change by analogy' mechanism. More importantly, this account begs a number of questions. For instance, why should *-r-* be interpreted as feminine (see step 3) if it also exists in the masculine? And why should the multiplicative *tris* be involved in the formation of the feminine gender? Both of these proposals are unmotivated and, thus, lacking in explanatory force. These problems make Snyder's account no more attractive than any of the ones that came before or after it. In fact its excessive use of analogy, and unmotivated reinterpretation of segments make it even less plausible than any other account so far proposed. Alas, it seems that the puzzle of the formation of PIE feminine '3' and '4' still remains unsolved.

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