
The conditions of uninflectedness in nouns in the Slavic languages

Ursula Doleschal

Universität Klagenfurt

ursula.doleschal@aau.at

In Slavic languages the major word classes (nouns, adjectives and verbs) inflect for several grammatical categories, such as case, number, gender, animacy, gradation; person, tense, mood; verbs also form participles and adverbial participles, leading to up to 170 forms, e.g., in Russian. However, there are whole classes of lexemes that belong to the word classes mentioned but do not show any markers of grammatical categories, i.e., are uninflected.

In my talk I will first consider how to define uninflectedness under such circumstances: While this is unproblematic for nouns, it is more complicated for adjectives and verbs. As a second step I will show which classes of lexemes are most often affected by uninflectedness in Czech, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Slovene and Slovak. These are mainly proper names, loans, abbreviations, i.e., mostly nouns. I will demonstrate that there is a continuum for each class between a pole with the highest degree of uninflectedness and the opposite pole, where uninflectedness is almost non-existent. These continua correlate reversely with other continua of uninflectedness (numeral, compound formation).

I will argue that the lack of integration of the mentioned nouns into the inflectional system is related to constitutive features of declension classes, such as stem-ending, base form, grammatical gender. These features can be more or less restrictive. Thus some languages (e.g., Russian) show a higher degree of uninflectedness in nouns, while others are more permissive (e.g., Slovene). However, this permissiveness does not apply to all features equally: noun classes with feminine gender as a constitutive feature are often more restrictive than those with masculine gender as to stem-structure or base-form.

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