
Diachronic paths to uninflectedness in South Slavonic

Matthew Baerman¹, Greville G. Corbett¹, Alexander Krasovitsky^{1,2} & Maria Kyuseva¹

¹*University of Surrey*, ²*University of Oxford*

m.baerman@surrey.ac.uk, g.corbett@surrey.ac.uk

alexander.krasovitsky@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk, m.kyuseva@surrey.ac.uk

We argue that ongoing loss of case in Serbian and Bulgarian dialects has caused the system to split into competing co-grammars, one where nouns inflect and one where they do not. This split between ‘forerunners’ (without inflection), and ‘underachievers’ (with inflection), results in partial rules of different nature. Three kinds of split are found, depending on the dialect (illustrated from Bulgarian). Firstly, there is a split between morphological classes: while some retain case distinctions (Class II), others are uninflected:

	Class II ‘mother’	Class I ‘doctor’	Class III ‘salt’	Class IV ‘village’
NOM	<i>majk-a</i>	<i>lekar</i>	<i>sol</i>	<i>selo</i>
ACC	<i>majk-u</i>	<i>lekar</i>	<i>sol</i>	<i>selo</i>

Secondly, classes that retain inflection are nevertheless affected by constructional uninflectedness, as Class II nouns which are uninflected in partitive constructions:

2 (a). Subject	2 (b). Prepositionally governed	2 (c). Partitive
<i>vod-a</i> water-NOM ‘Water flows.’	<i>teče</i> vs. <i>čaša</i> s flows cup with ‘A cup with water.’	<i>vod-u</i> <i>čaša</i> <i>vod-a</i> water-ACC cup water-NOM ‘A cup of water.’

Thirdly, an otherwise inflecting morphological class may split on a semantic basis such as human (3a) vs. non-human (3b):

3 a. Stojan Stojan.NOM ‘Stojan is old’	e star vs. <i>minavame</i> is old we.pass ‘We pass by Stojan.’	prez Stojan-a by Stojan-ACC
3 b. Berlin Berlin.NOM ‘Berlin is nice.’	e xubav vs. <i>minavame</i> is nice we.pass ‘We pass by Berlin.’	prez Berlin by Berlin.NOM

Asymmetry in morphological change leads to the rise of partial synchronic rules: morphological as in (1), syntactic as in (2), or semantic as in (3). These persist over time, and change when a historical process moves to a new phase (for example, if uninflectedness spreads to a group within an inflected morphological class, e. g. to inanimates, splitting this class on a semantic basis). By examining these rules in contemporary dialects, and by arranging them chronologically, we can uncover the fine-grained details of this historical process.