

## An overview of the tendencies for the development of dative-locative syncretism in Slavic languages

Przegląd tendencji rozwojowych synkretyzmu celownika i miejscownika w językach słowiańskich

**Abstract:** This paper is an overview of linguistic phenomena leading to the formation of dative-locative syncretism in various Slavic languages, mainly in Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, Slovene, Serbian, and Croatian. These innovations may be motivated either by semantics, where they are linked with the category of animacy, or by morphology, where they arise as an effect of the rearrangement of the inflection system. In both cases, the mechanisms forming the syncretism originate in Proto-Slavic, but the morphology-oriented changes are more likely to result in a full syncretism, whereas the semantic motivation keeps the innovation within the bounds of the paradigm of masculine animate nouns.

**Key words:** case syncretism, comparative linguistics, Slavic languages, noun declension, morphology

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł jest ogólnym zarysem zjawisk językowych prowadzących do powstania synkretyzmu celownika i miejscownika w różnych językach słowiańskich, a w szczególności w słowackim, czeskim, ukraińskim, słoweńskim, serbskim oraz chorwackim. Innowacje te mogą być umotywowane zarówno semantycznie, gdzie powiązane są z kategorią żywotności, jak i morfologicznie, kiedy nastają jako efekt przebudowy systemu odmiany. W obu wypadkach mechanizmy powstawania synkretyzmu mają źródło w języku prasłowiańskim, jednak zmiany uwarunkowane morfologicznie częściej prowadzą do pełnego synkretyzmu, podczas gdy motywacja semantyczna utrzymuje tę innowację w obrębie paradygmatu rzeczowników męskich żywotnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** synkretyzm przypadków, językoznawstwo porównawcze, języki słowiańskie, deklinacja rzeczowników, morfologia

### Dative and Locative in the Slavic Languages

The majority of the Slavic languages retains the Proto-Slavic seven case system, sometimes with the exclusion of the vocative. Bulgarian and Macedonian, having mostly lost the original case system, still make a distinction between dative and accusative forms of clitic personal pronouns (Pianka & Tokarz, 2000, p. 189; Sławski, 1954, pp. 113–114).

The dative case is primarily used to indicate the recipient of an action, or, in a broader sense, the indirect object of an action. Prepositions may be added to modify this meaning.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the locative is a somewhat special case in that it is exclusively used with a preposition in every Slavic language.<sup>2</sup> It is employed to denote location, time, and (in most Slavic languages) the topic (Moszyński, 2006, p. 257).

The dative-locative syncretism exists in various Slavic languages, namely in Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, Slovene, Serbian and Croatian. The mechanisms of this development are different, though originating in the same, Proto-Slavic, background, and determine the extents that it can reach in the inflection system.

The Proto-Slavic Basis for the Dative-Locative Syncretism

The loss of the locative case is not uncommon among Indo-European languages. Its functions can be taken over by the ablative (as in the Italic languages), or the dative (as in Greek and the Germanic languages) (Fortson, 2012, p. 261, 281, 343). The reconstructed Proto-Indo-European morphemes for the locative singular are *-i* and null (Fortson, 2012, p. 116, 126). The first one could have been easily mistaken with the dative ending *-ei* in the course of the phonological development of the descendent languages (perhaps even more so in thematic nouns, where the dative ending was *-ōi*, while the locative ending was *-oi*), and the latter was likely to become a fossilized morpheme. The similarity of certain noun endings is often one of the reasons for the merging of noun cases.

In order to understand the mechanisms behind the merging of the dative and the locative in Slavic languages, we must examine the noun declension paradigm in Old Church Slavonic, as it is the closest to Proto-Slavic. The morphemes for the dative and the locative are as follows:<sup>3</sup>

Table 1  
Dative and Locative Morphemes in Old Church Slavonic

	o-stems	jo-stems	u-stems	a-stems	ja-stems	i-stems	ū-stems	consonant stems
Dative singular	-u	-u	-ovi	-ě	-i	-i	-i	-i
Locative singular	-ě	-i	-u	-ě	-i	-i	-e	-e
Dative plural	-omъ	-emъ	-ьmъ	-amъ	-amъ	-ьmъ	-amъ	-ьmъ
Locative plural	-ěmъ	-imъ	-ьmъ	-amъ	-amъ	-ьmъ	-amъ	-ьmъ

Note. Source: own study.

<sup>1</sup> One of such prepositions is *po* meaning “along,” which in the West Slavic languages merged with *po* meaning “after” which governs the locative case.

<sup>2</sup> There is only a handful of attested uses of the locative without a preposition in Old Church Slavonic texts (Moszyński, 2006, p. 257).

<sup>3</sup> The dual forms are not included, since there is no syncretism of the dative and the locative; rather, the dual noun endings are syncretic in their own way, as inherited from Proto-Indo-European: there are common forms for the nominative and the accusative, the genitive and the locative, and the dative and the instrumental. Furthermore, most Slavic languages do not retain the dual (Aitzetmüller, 1978, p. 68).

As seen in Table 1, three paradigms have the same morpheme for the dative and locative singular: the a-stems (the morpheme *-ě*), the ja-stems, and the i-stems (the morpheme *-i*). Later development sees the interchangeability of o-stem and u-stem morphemes, as well as the replacing of consonant stem morphemes with o-stem morphemes. Alternatively, the morpheme *-e* in the locative singular of consonant stems is replaced with *-i* due to the influence of the i-stem paradigm (Bartula, 2008, pp. 37–38, 43–45).

Based on the above we can conclude that the dative-locative syncretism in the singular was already present in the Proto-Slavic language in the a-stem, ja-stem and i-stem nouns, which predominantly belong to the feminine gender. From there, this syncretism would spread to the masculine and neuter gender, and even to the plural, in various Slavic languages and dialects.

## The Interchangeability of the O-Stem and U-Stem Morphemes

The use of the o-stem and u-stem morphemes in the inflection of masculine nouns was often based on their functionality, be it in semantics or the rearranging of the inflection system. This phenomenon is in some form present in all Slavic languages.

The u-stem dative singular ending *-ovi* had quite early been linked to the semantic category of animacy, sometimes even developing the variant *-evi* for jo-stem nouns (Bartula, 2008, p. 43). It was less frequently used with neuter nouns, which were more likely to keep the original ending *-u*.

This usage of the morpheme *-ovi/-evi* based on semantics was often inconsistent – for example, in Polish *-owi* became the primary dative ending for masculine nouns, regardless of their animacy (*człowiek* “man” – dat. sg. *człowiekowi*; *stół* “table” – dat. sg. *stołowi*); at the same time, some animate nouns have the morpheme *-u*, generally used in the neuter gender (*ojciec* “father” – dat. sg. *ojcu*; *pies* “dog” – dat. sg. *psu*). However, the languages that consistently attributed the category of animacy to the dative ending *-ovi* developed a dative-locative syncretism for masculine animate nouns, as will be demonstrated below.

While the semantics is the reason for the interchangeability of the dative endings, the use of the u-stem locative singular morpheme *-u* in masculine and neuter nouns can be attributed to uniformizing tendencies in the noun declension system. The West Slavic languages, as well as Ukrainian and Belarusian, employ the ending *-u* after velar consonants in order to avoid their palatalization. In Polish, this morpheme also replaced the original ending *-i* of the jo-stem nouns. On the other hand, in Russian, the u-stem morpheme developed into the so-called “second locative,” where certain nouns take on the ending *-e* or *-y* depending on the preposition used (Brown, 2007, p. 62).

The spread of the morpheme *-u* in the locative singular was even more evident in the South Slavic languages, leading to the dative-locative syncretism which will be discussed in more detail below.

## Partial Syncretism Based on Semantics

The dative-locative syncretism based on the semantics (the category of animacy associated with the morpheme *-ovi*) originates in masculine nouns and can later spread to pronouns, adjectives, and even neuter nouns when morphological analogy prevails over the original meaning. Various realizations of this kind of syncretism can be observed in the Slovak, Czech, and Ukrainian language.

The semantic category of animacy is predominantly expressed in Slavic languages with the syncretism of the genitive and accusative case of masculine nouns. The adjective then agrees with the noun. For example, compare these two Slovak sentences: *Vidím veľkého psa* "I see a big dog" and *Vidím veľkú dom* "I see a big house." The accusative of the adjective *veľkého* takes on the form equal to the genitive, in accordance to the animate noun *psa* which it describes. In Slovak, a similar phenomenon occurs in the locative, where masculine animate nouns take on the dative ending *-ovi* (Krajčovič, 1988, pp. 97–101). This morpheme is quite consistently used to express animacy (Dalewska-Greń, 2007, pp. 297–298), while inanimate nouns have the dative ending *-u* and the locative ending *-e* (for stems ending with a hard consonant), *-i* (for stems ending with a soft consonant) or *-u* (for stems ending with a velar). Unlike the genitive-accusative syncretism, adjectives do not take on a syncretized form when accompanying animate nouns: *veľkému psovi* (dative, animate), *veľkom psovi* (locative, animate), *veľkému domu* (dative, inanimate), *veľkom dome* (locative, inanimate). Thus, the dative-locative syncretism is another way of marking animate nouns, similar to the genitive-accusative syncretism, only less developed (Dudášová-Kriššáková, 2008, p. 168).

A similar situation occurs in the Czech language, where the ending *-ovi* is used for nouns referring to human beings, and sometimes for other animate nouns as well, though alternative morphemes *-u* (for stems ending with a hard consonant) or *-i* (for stems ending with a soft consonant) are usually also allowed (Dalewska-Greń, 2007, p. 298). Whichever morpheme is used, the locative form of a masculine personal noun remains equal to the dative form. The ending *-i* (Gebauer, 1896, pp. 100–102), however, was introduced in the dative case in order to expand the opposition between hard and soft stems across all the cases, thus creating a different kind of dative-locative syncretism, this time based on morphology.

In Ukrainian, the ending *-ovi* (with a soft stem variant *-eovi*) is used interchangeably with *-y* in the dative singular of masculine nouns. The morpheme *-ovi*, however, must have been associated with animacy, as indicated by its occurrence in the locative, where it is employed predominantly with animate nouns.<sup>4</sup> This dative-locative syncretism spread further to neuter animate nouns (signifying children and young animals): *поросятко* "piglet" – *поросяткові* (dative/locative) (Ukrain's'kyi pravopys, §49, §52). Even though the association of the morpheme *-ovi* with animacy was not as strong in Ukrainian as in Slovak (Rusaniv's'kyj, 2001, pp. 19, 33, 73), its inclusion in the locative caused more advanced

<sup>4</sup> The morpheme *-ovi* is also used as an alternative to *-y* with stems ending with a velar (Ukrad'n's'kyi pravopys, §52).

changes in the morphology, as adjectives and pronouns became affected with the dative-locative syncretism (Ševčenko, 1996: 77–78).

Unlike in Slovak, Ukrainian adjectives take on the dative form (ending with *-omy*) in the locative in the masculine and neuter gender. The original locative form (ending with *-im*) still exists, though the newer form is preferred, regardless of whether the morpheme *-ovi* is used with the noun. The same is true for pronouns: the syncretic locative form is more popular than the original form (for example the demonstrative pronoun *цей* has the locative form *цьому* or *цим*; the personal pronoun for the third person masculine *він* has the locative form *ньому* or *ним*) (Ukrains'kyi pravopys, §68, §73–78).

Yet, the dative-locative syncretism of singular masculine and neuter forms in Ukrainian is not complete. The primary locative ending for nouns is still *-i*, which is absent from the dative.

The examples of Slovak, Czech, and Ukrainian show that the dative-locative syncretism originating in the semantics can evolve differently, depending on the level of dissociation of the morpheme *-ovi* with animacy. In Slovak, where the association is the strongest, the syncretism is the most consistent, though at the same time it never spread outside of the masculine nouns. In Czech, marking the masculine animate nouns in the dative and locative is optional, meanwhile, another form of syncretism arose based on morphology.<sup>5</sup> In Ukrainian, the link between animacy and the ending *-ovi* is the weakest: in the dative case it is no longer present today. Nevertheless, this connection still allowed for the formation of dative-locative syncretism in masculine animate nouns, which later spread to neuter animate nouns. Since the original motivation behind these forms had become less obvious, adjectives, and even pronouns underwent the same process, in order to achieve case agreement with the newer noun forms.

The semantics-based syncretism, however, can never spread beyond the singular, the reason being the original distinct dative and locative endings remaining in inanimate nouns. Since the syncretism is not complete in the masculine and neuter singular, even with the morphological syncretism in the feminine gender inherited from Proto-Slavic, the two cases can never fully merge, and so the plural remains unaffected.

## Partial Syncretism Based on Morphology

We have already discussed the Czech paradigm of masculine nouns which differentiates between hard stem and soft stem morphemes. To that end, the soft stem locative ending *-i* was introduced to the dative, as a doublet for the hard stem ending *-u*. In the South Slavic languages, the dative-locative syncretism is also based on morphology, though their declension makes little distinction between the original o-stem and jo-stem nouns.

<sup>5</sup> Note that the Czech ending *-ovi* does not have an alternative form for soft stem nouns. An innovative morpheme *-ievi* was dropped under the influence of hard stem nouns (Kosek, 2014, p. 38).

In Slovene, Serbian, and Croatian,<sup>6</sup> noun inflection paradigms are quite uniform, in the sense that most cases tend to have one morpheme and not differentiate between soft stem and hard stem forms.<sup>7</sup> For the masculine and neuter locative singular morpheme, most Western South Slavic dialects chose *-u* from the *u*-stem paradigm, which is coincidentally identical with the dative singular ending from the *o*-stem paradigm. This led to the formation of the dative-locative syncretism in masculine and neuter nouns in the singular. On the other hand, the Croatian Chakavian dialects opted for the ending *-ě* (which later developed into *-i* or *-e*) in the locative, preventing the syncretism from taking place, and only adopting the morpheme *-u* under the influence of neighboring dialects (Malić, 1997, p. 518).

This morphological syncretism is only considered with masculine and neuter nouns in the singular and it remained that way in Slovene (Toporišič, 1974, p. 31), as well as in the Kajkavian (Šojat, 2009, pp. 47–48) and Chakavian dialects of Croatian. In the Shtokavian dialects,<sup>8</sup> however, this has developed into a full dative-locative syncretism.

## Full Syncretism

Modern standard Croatian and Serbian, based on the Shtokavian dialects, have a full dative-locative syncretism, to the point where one could argue that the locative case could be excluded from Croatian and Serbian grammar (Gis, 2011, pp. 48–49).

In the singular, the syncretism in feminine nouns had been inherited from Proto-Slavic (with a uniform ending *-i* adopted from the *ja*-stem paradigm), while in masculine and neuter nouns, like in other Western South Slavic languages, the ending *-u* was chosen for the locative, making it identical to the dative. In pronominal adjective forms, the final *u* was dropped from the dative ending *-omu*, which then merged with the locative ending *-om*<sup>9</sup> (Daničić, 1874, p. 165).

The syncretism is even more advanced in the plural, including not two, but three cases: the dative, the locative and the instrumental. This phenomenon began with the merging of dative and instrumental endings of feminine nouns (originally *-am* in the dative and *-ami* in the instrumental) and pronominal adjectives (originally *-im* in the dative and *-imi* in the instrumental). The final *i* in the instrumental ending was dropped, and later *a* was added to the uniform dative-instrumental noun form which now had the morpheme *-ama*, while the adjective morpheme remained as *-im* with optional final *a* (Daničić, 1874, pp. 123–124, 205–206). This caused confusion, and instrumental forms were used instead of dative forms of masculine and neuter nouns, replacing the dative ending *-om* with *-i* (*o*-stem instrumental plural morpheme) or *-mi* (*u*-stem instrumental plural morpheme). Meanwhile, the two instrumental endings merged into *-imi*, which later predictably became *-im*

<sup>6</sup> The same is true for Bosnian and Montenegrin, which are commonly, together with Croatian and Serbian, referred to as Serbo-Croatian.

<sup>7</sup> The only distinction outside of the vocative being the alternation between *o* and *e*.

<sup>8</sup> Shtokavian dialects are the basis for the modern standard Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian and Montenegrin.

<sup>9</sup> Optional vowels *u* or *e* can be added to the dative-locative masculine and neuter singular ending *-om*.

and then *-ima* (Daničić, 1874, pp. 96–98, 115–121), thus completing the dative-instrumental syncretism in the plural.

On the other hand, the locative at first displayed a tendency to merge with the genitive, likely because of the shared ending of pronominal adjectives *-ih*. Since the sound [h] was not pronounced in many regions, the genitive-locative endings *-ih* (masculine and neuter) and *-ah* (feminine) became just *-i* and *-a*. Later the final *m* was added, and the final *a* after that. Adjectives were treated similarly. The locative merged with the dative-instrumental, while the genitive remained separate (Daničić, 1874, pp. 136–140).

The Shtokavian dialects demonstrate that morphological motivations are very effective in forming case syncretism. Formally similar morphemes tend to merge into one. At the same time, the Western South Slavic languages usually have only one ending for each case in each paradigm, preventing any semantic association with a given case morpheme. This allows the cases to merge fully, and not only within one semantic category.

## Conclusion

As evidenced by the discussed Slavic languages – Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, Slovene, Serbian and Croatian – there are two possible motivations behind the dative-locative syncretism, which yield different results. One of them is semantics, the other – morphology.

Whatever the reason behind this phenomenon, the foundations upon which it was built were laid in the Proto-Slavic period, namely the dative-locative syncretism of singular feminine forms, the distinction between animate and inanimate nouns in the accusative, and the interchangeability of o-stem and u-stem morphemes.

The first kind of dative-locative syncretism found in Slovak, Ukrainian, and, to some extent, in Czech, is based on the association of the dative singular morpheme *-ovi* with the semantic category of animacy. This morpheme was employed in the locative singular of masculine animate nouns. From there, the syncretism evolved differently, depending on the strength of the semantic association. Paradoxically, the more the language clung to the original motivation behind the phenomenon, the more likely it was to hinder its spread. Such was the case in Slovak and Czech, where this innovation stayed within the singular paradigm of masculine animate nouns. On the other hand, in Ukrainian, after the syncretism spread from the masculine animate to neuter animate nouns, its original motivation started to fade away, giving way to the merging of dative and locative forms of masculine and neuter adjectives based on case agreement with the nouns. Eventually, this phenomenon affected pronouns too, having started in the semantics, through syntax, and ending in morphology. This kind of syncretism, however, is limited by the original dative and locative morphemes in the inanimate nouns, which remain distinct, thus preventing the complete merging of the two cases and keeping the plural forms unaffected.

The morphological motivation behind the syncretism appears to be much more effective. We observe it in its first stage in Czech, where it coexists with the semantics-based syncretism, as a way of differentiating between hard and soft consonant stems, as well as in Slovene, where it arose as a result of coincidental similarity of the dative and locative endings adopted during the rearrangement of the declension system. In these two

languages, the syncretism never proceeded beyond masculine and neuter nouns, unlike in Serbian and Croatian.

Serbian and Croatian prove that formal similarity between the morphemes is the most effective mechanism of forming case syncretism. Through this mechanism the dative-locative syncretism of singular nouns spread to pronominal adjectives. The plural was affected in a similar way, starting with the merging of the dative and instrumental morphemes of feminine nouns and pronominal adjectives, which caused confusion in the use of non-syncretic masculine and neuter forms, leading to their uniformization. At the same time, the genitive-locative syncretism had started in the plural, but eventually the new locative endings were replaced with formally similar dative-instrumental endings, while the genitive remained separate. The Serbian and Croatian inflection system, quite consistent in attributing only one morpheme to each noun case, made no room for the association of a single morpheme with any semantic category, which would have probably stopped the spread of the syncretism throughout all of the paradigms.

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