

The Belarusian Genitive Plural: A Case for Reanalysis

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The paper presents new data from ongoing morphological change in Belarusian nominal declension which potentially bear on the nature of phonology-morphology interactions. It is generally accepted that the allomorphs in the genitive plural case are /-Ø/, /-ow/, and /-ej/, and that the /-ow/ allomorph is being extended from Declension Ia masculine nouns to all other declension classes. But this morphological change is unusual in two respects: 1) it is specifically the unstressed variant of the /-ow/ allomorph, [-aw], which is being productively extended; and 2) [-aw] is being extended under phonotactic conditions which are not active elsewhere in the nominal paradigm and that do not appear to be a generalization over the lexicon of Declension Ia nouns.

These developments indicate that noun morphology in Belarusian is operating on the surface, so to speak, both in terms of generalizing the end product of the phonological grammar (automatic vowel neutralization) and in terms of surface phonotactics (syllable structure conditions). I argue that the phonologically neutralized pronunciation of /-ow/ has been reanalyzed as an independent lexical allomorph /-aw/ and that this change is supported by paradigm uniformity. I also propose that there has been a concomitant reanalysis of the noun stem feature(s) which condition(s) genitive plural allomorphy. Unlike in Russian, Ukrainian, and older Belarusian, for which various analyses have argued that declension class or gender,¹ stem-final consonant type,² underlying theme-vowels,³ suffix stress,⁴ paradigmatic stress patterns,⁵ and/or the nominative singular vs. genitive plural markedness relation⁶ are among the critical factors determining genitive plural allomorphy, in Standard Belarusian today the feature relevant to allomorph selection in the genitive plural is primarily stress.

The extension of /-aw/ is to a large extent facilitated by the type of neutralizing vowel reduction specific to Standard Belarusian, whereby unstressed non-high vowels are pronounced as [a] after both palatalized and non-palatalized consonants. The generalization of /-aw/ in the genitive plural now completes the set of *default* inflectional suffixes in the plural of all Belarusian nouns, a development that is fully consistent with the unmarked status of the stem-stressed paradigm in general. The finding that stress governs allomorph selection in the Belarusian genitive plural raises the question of where stress-based allomorph selection is actually done in the grammar.

¹ Zalizniak, A. A. (1967). *Russkoe imennoe slovoizmenenie*. Moscow: Nauka.

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² All analyses and grammars recognize the contribution of this condition.

³ Halle, M. (1994). The Russian declension. In Cole, J. & Kisseberth, C., *Perspectives in phonology* (pp. 29-60). Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.

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⁴ Pertsova, K. (2004). Distribution of genitive plural allomorphs in the Russian lexicon and in the internal grammar of native speakers. PhD thesis, UCLA.

Pertsova, K. (2015). Interaction of morphology and phonology in Russian genitive plural allomorphy. *Morphology*, online 17 Feb 2015.

⁵ Brown, D. & Hippisley, A. (1994). Conflict in Russian genitive plural assignment: a solution presented in DATR. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics* 2 (1), 48-76.

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⁶ Jakobson, R. (1957). The relationship between genitive and plural in the declension of Russian nouns. *Scano-Slavica*, 3. 1. 181-186. Also Pertsova (2004, 2015).

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