

The dog didn't bark, the noun didn't inflect: a typology of significant absences

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Uninflectedness
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1 Introduction

Unexpected absence

Inspector Gregory to Holmes:

“Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?”

“To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.”

“The dog did nothing in the night-time.”

“That was the curious incident,” ...



Silver Blaze (from *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*), Arthur Conan Doyle, 1894

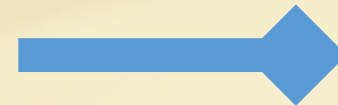
1.1 Expectations

- we name the unexpected (suppletion, defectiveness ...)
- the 'Inflectional Expectation' (Spencer 2020: 146) makes uninflectability nameworthy
- it's useful to examine our expectations

And see Andrew Spencer on this 

1.2 Intellectual housekeeping

- Expectations
good start, but ...
- Terminology
e.g. Spencer (2020):
Russian *pal'to* 'coat' is uninflectable (Fido doesn't bark)
ili 'or' is uninflecting (frogs don't bark)
- Related phenomena
We try to draw boundaries
and to recognize the interest of phenomena which resist classification



Jenny Audring's paper is especially relevant here ●

1.3 Key data: 1. Slavonic languages

promising:

- complex inflectional morphology
- substantial research tradition on uninflectability
(NB work of Ursula Doleschal, 2000-2001, 2002a, b, 2008) ●



	Russian	Ukrainian	Polish	Czech	Serbo-Croat
SINGULAR	kakadu	kakadu	kakadu	kakadu	kakadu
PLURAL	kakadu	kakadu	kakadu	kakadu-ové	kakadu-i

The Slavonic language family



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Slavic_languages.jpg

Worth (1968: 11) for the distribution of uninflectability

Slavonic languages (continued)

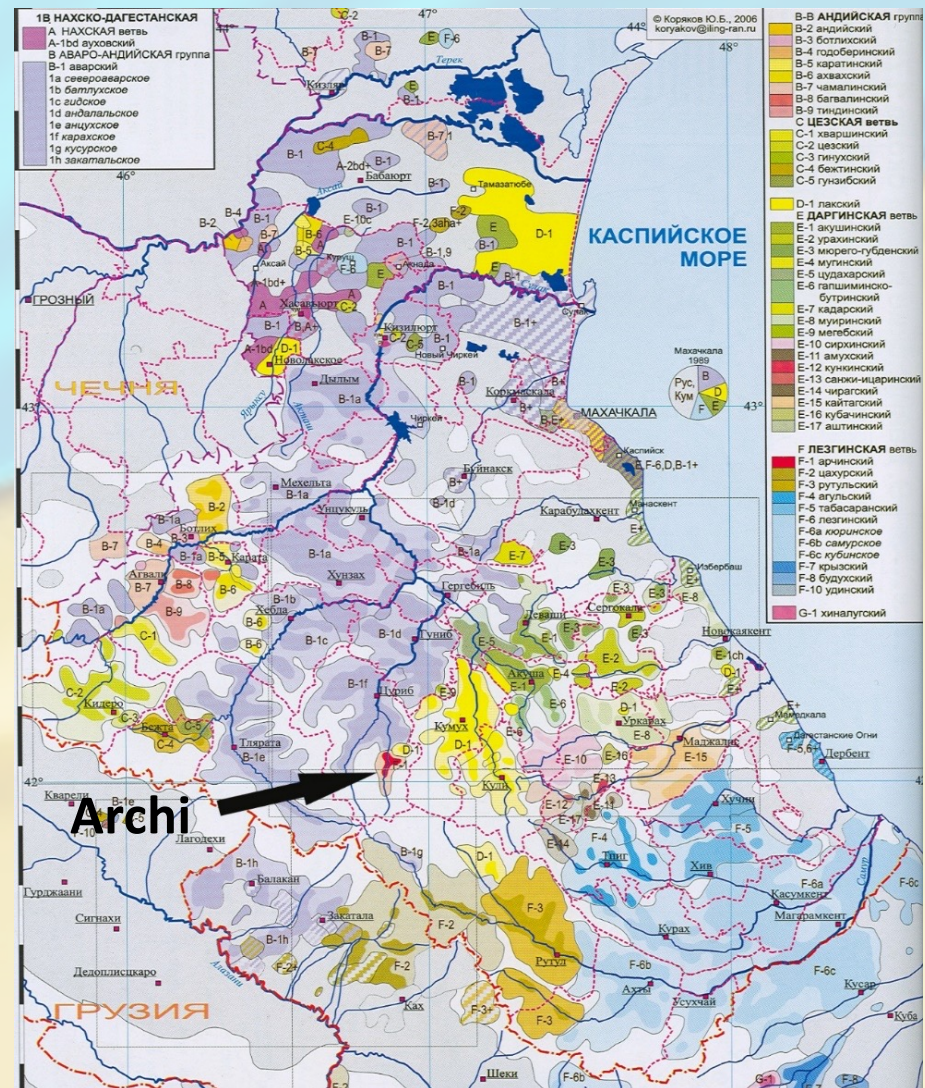
significant differences between related languages

- Russian has many uninflectable nouns, yet retains inflection for numerals
- Serbo-Croat is strict on inflecting nouns but has developed uninflectable numerals

Note: I treat Serbo-Croat (hbs) as a pluricentric language, like German or English, with four standards: Bosnian (bos), Croatian (hrv), Montenegrin (cnr), and Serbian (srp)

following the 2017 'Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku' (<http://jezicinacionalizmi.com/deklaracija/>)

1.3 Key data: 2. Nakh-Dagestanian languages



Ju. B. Korjakov. 2006. *Atlas kavkazskix jazykov*. Moscow: Pilgrim.

Archi (Nakh-Dagestanian)

- remarkable degree of inflection

(1)	d-ez	Ajša	d-ak:u
	II.SG-1SG.DAT	Aisha(II)[SG.ABS]	II.SG-see.PFV
		‘I saw Aisha (woman’s name).’	[with agreement]

- a lot of uninflectability too

(2)	d-ez	Ajša	kʈ’an
	II.SG-1SG.DAT	Aisha(II)[SG.ABS]	love
		‘I love Aisha.’	[no agreement]

(Chumakina & Bond 2016: 112)



1.4 Outline

Canonical (un)inflectable lexeme (§2)

Four scales of non-canonicity:

Uninflectability *across* items (§3)

Uninflectability *within* items (§4)

External conditions (§5)

External consequences (§6)

Conclusions (§7)

2 Canonical (un)inflectable lexeme

2.1 Canonical Typology

‘the canonical approach breaks down complex concepts in a way that clarifies where disagreements may lie between different linguists and theoretical frameworks’

(Nikolaeva 2013: 100)

Irina Nikolaeva. 2013. Unpacking finiteness. In Dunstan Brown, Marina Chumakina & Greville G. Corbett (eds) *Canonical morphology and syntax*, 99-122. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Canonical Typology: Measuring and baselines

- establish scales (criteria)
- push them to logical end point
- use the end points as baselines
- draw out the theoretical space to tease apart the clusters



Erich Round

‘our approach to measurement allows one to conduct comparisons equally well within languages and between them’ (Round & Corbett 2020)

Canonical Typology: expectation to measurement

‘... nothings are usually extremes. They tend to sit at one end of a spectrum. And when scientists want to explore a phenomenon they look for an extreme version of it, because the factors are often easier to spot.’

Webb (2013: 2)

Jeremy Webb (editor). 2013. *Nothing: From absolute zero to cosmic oblivion – amazing insights into nothingness*. London: Profile Cape.

and what it's not ...

Canonical is a logical construct. It does NOT imply:

usual

normal

frequent

expected

unmarked

prototypical

permanent short-URL to the Canonical Typology bibliography: tiny.cc/ctbib

What is the baseline (to calibrate from)?

Canonical inflection:

- feature values ‘multiply out’: all possible paradigm cells exist
- lexical material is constant within lexemes
and different across lexemes
- inflectional material is different within lexemes
and constant across lexemes
- thus every form of every lexeme will be distinct

And what can inflect will inflect

Corbett (2015: 150-151)

BOTH ends of scale in our case

- we measure from zero (canonical noun)
- calibrate the different non-canonical properties according to a set of orthogonal criteria
- could also measure from 'uninflectable'

2.2 Definitions (base)

Uninflectability is the phenomenon where:
a member of an inflecting part of speech fails to inflect

compare:

Baerman, Brown & Corbett (2005: 27-35)

Spencer (2020: 142-143)

on definitions see: Viktor Köhlich

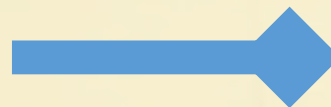


2.3 Closest related phenomena

- Baerman, Brown & Corbett (2005: 27-35) are concerned with neutralization – syncretism – uninflectedness
- they define uninflectedness as follows:
 - There is, in certain lexemes only, a loss of all values of a particular feature F found elsewhere in the language. This loss may depend on the presence of a particular combination of values of one or more other features (the context).
 - Other syntactic objects distinguish values of feature F, either generally or in the given context, and feature F is therefore syntactically relevant.

that definition allows for partial uninflectedness

for syncretism, see Yvonne Treis



neutralization
syncretism

Defectiveness

- In principle, the distinction is clear:
 - uninflectability causes no syntactic problem
 - defectiveness makes the syntax crash

 defectiveness

Uninflecting: Russian *pal'to* 'coat'

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
NOMINATIVE	pal'to	pal'to
ACCUSATIVE	pal'to	pal'to
GENITIVE	pal'to	pal'to
DATIVE	pal'to	pal'to
INSTRUMENTAL	pal'to	pal'to
LOCATIVE	pal'to	pal'to

The Russian National Corpus has several examples each of:

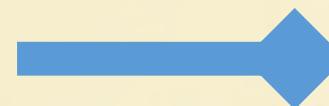
zimn-ee pal'to *and* zimn-ie pal'to
winter-SG coat winter-PL coats
'(a) winter coat' 'winter coats'

Defective (PT) Russian *galife* 'riding breeches'

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
NOMINATIVE	***	galife
ACCUSATIVE	***	galife
GENITIVE	***	galife
DATIVE	***	galife
INSTRUMENTAL	***	galife
LOCATIVE	***	galife

v ser-yx galife
in grey-PL.LOC riding.breeches
'in grey riding breeches'

Corbett (2019)




pluralia tantum

Defectiveness

- In principle, the distinction is clear:
 - uninflectability brings no syntactic problem
 - defectiveness causes the syntax to crash

BUT NOT SO FAST:

- items may vary (uninflecting / defective) according to case, as we shall see
- paper by Dunstan Brown, Harald Baayen, Neil Bermel, Yu-Ying Chuang, Roger Evans & Alex Nikolaev 
- and compare Nikolaev & Bermel (2022)

 defectiveness

The background of the slide is a photograph of a desert landscape. It features a large, smooth sand dune in the foreground, sloping upwards from the bottom left towards the right. The sky above is a clear, bright blue. The overall scene is bright and open.

3 Extent of uninflectability *across* items

3.1 Measuring *across* items (1)

How many items? Canonically NONE.

Comparisons:

1. Within the Part of Speech (the key comparison)

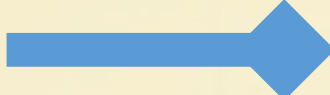
- e.g. Russian *pal'to* 'coat': many such, but minority relative to inflecting nouns
- expectation that behaviours line up:
 - specifically syntactic PoS = morphological behaviour (Spencer 2005: 101, Corbett 2013)
 - more generally in Canonical Typology: criteria converge (Brown & Chumakina 2013: 9, Corbett & Fedden 2016: 527)

3.1 Measuring *across* items (2)

Comparisons :

2. Within the language (secondary)

- Serbo-Croat numerals have largely lost inflection, other nominals retain it
- Archi: inflection in all parts of speech
- in Archi (and Mian, see later) uninflectability is not straightforwardly exceptional; also in Amuzgan: paper by Enrique L. Palancar ●
- compare **overdifferentiation?** (*extra values*)

 overdifferentiation

Archi : Inflection in different parts of speech

(3) buwa-mu **b**-ez dit:a<**b**>u
mother(II)-SG.ERG SG.III-1SG.DAT early<SG.III>

χ^w alli

bread(III)[SG.ABS]

a<**b**>u

made<SG.III>.PFV

‘Mother made bread for me early.’

(Kibrik 1994: 349)

controller / goal / trigger

gender III

Lexemes which inflect for agreement in the Archi dictionary

	total	agreeing	% agreeing
verbs	1248	399	32.0
adverbs	383	13	3.4
postpositions	34	1	2.9
discourse clitics/particles	4	1	(25.0)

Taken from Chumakina & Corbett (2015: 95)



3.1 Measuring *across* items (3)

3. Cross-linguistically / typologically

- e.g., we expect verbs to inflect, and not conjunctions ...

Walman (Torricelli, New Guinea, Lea Brown & Matthew Dryer, p.c's, 2008)

(4) w-ru chuto rounu alpa **w-aro-l** nyanam
 GEN-3SG.FEM female old one[FEM] 3SG.FEM-**and**-3SG.DIMIN child
nngkal ngo-l pa y-an nakol
small one-DIMIN DEM 3PL-be.at village

‘(Only) one old woman and a small child were left behind in the village.’

- the typological picture is not clear

3.2 Determining which items (fail to) inflect

Two distinctions (cf. Bye 2015: 107); not easy to pull apart here:

First: unpredictable vs predictable/rule governed

- phonotactic, phonological, morphological, semantic (Fedden 2019)
- a study of Archi (Chumakina & Corbett 2015), shows the need for:
 - phonology, derivation, part of speech, morphological type (e.g. dynamic vs stative verbs)

Determining which items (fail to) inflect

Second: arbitrary vs functionally motivated/natural

- motivation relevant to particular type: e.g. bare stem nominative vs. female name, hence *Dolores* is uninflectable in Serbo-Croat (Browne 1993a: 378)
- change of part of speech (e.g. adjective > participle) (Arkadiev 2013, 2020)
- borrowed status (metalinguistic awareness), linked to sociolinguistic factors: Russian *metro* 'underground' (see Doleschal 2000-2001: 14-16)

See more on determining factors: Javier Caro Reina



and Jerzy Gaszewski



Diachrony

To demonstrate what the determining factors are, diachronic evidence is key:

Maria Copot, Ninoh Agostinho Da Silva, Ahmed Beji, Arno Watiez & Olivier Bonami ●

Vincent Renner & Adam Renwick ●

Katja Friedewald ●

Louise Esher ●

Michele Loporcaro ●

Lameen Souag ●

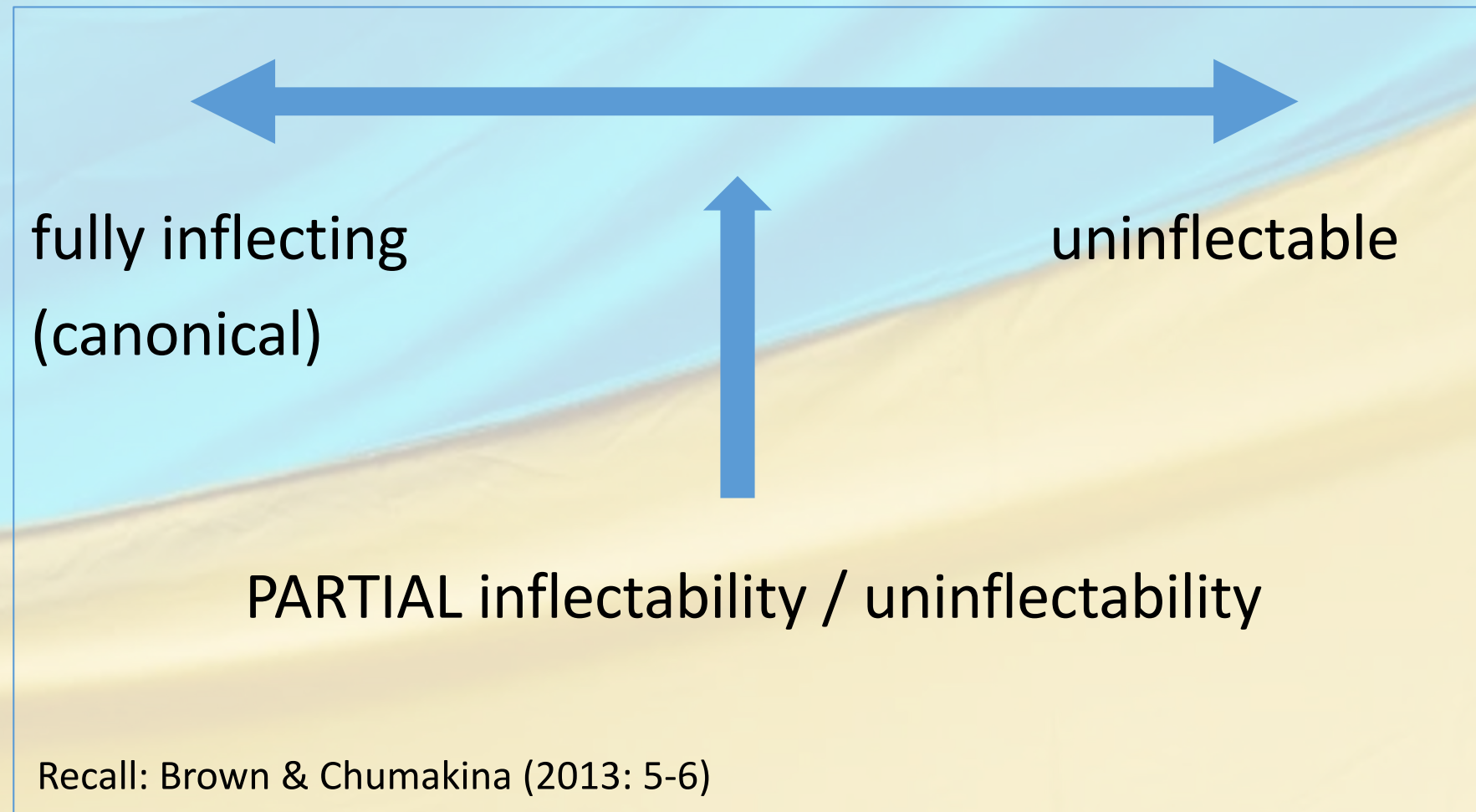
Anna Thornton & Paolo D'Achille ●

Matthew Baerman, Greville G. Corbett, Alexander Krasovitsky & Maria Kyuseva ●



4 Extent of uninflectability *within* items

Extent of uninflectability *within* items



Macedonian adjectives

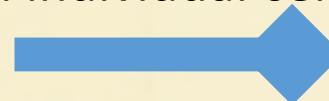
SINGULAR			PLURAL	gloss	type
MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER			
nov	nova	novο	novi	new	fully inflecting
kasmetlija			kasmetlii	lucky	partially inflecting / partially uninflectable
taze				fresh	uninflectable

(Victor Friedman 1993: 266-267 and personal communication)

Polish *muzeum* 'museum'

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
NOMINATIVE	muzeum	muzea
ACCUSATIVE	muzeum	muzea
GENITIVE	muzeum	muzeów
DATIVE	muzeum	muzeom
INSTRUMENTAL	muzeum	muzeami
LOCATIVE	muzeum	muzeach

1. Simple type: number&case inflection lacking or present
2. Featural range: slab of paradigm, rather than individual cell(s)



HETEROCLISIS

For the nouns which behave this way see Swan (2002: 118)

Partial (un)inflectability

- we can define the division (the segments of the paradigm) in terms of:
 - cells: an unmotivated segment (morphomic)
 - slab: a motivated segment (featural)
- and we can measure from either extreme:
 - INFLECTS (apart from segment ...)
 - does NOT inflect (apart from segment ...)

Partial inflectability: first dimension of comparison

definition of segments	
cell(s) (morphomic)	slab (featural)
	Polish <i>muzeum</i>

Simple inflection in cells: sporadic / reluctant inflection

Uninflectedness not all or nothing ?

Russian *èxo* 'echo':

- Unbegaun (1947: 133-134) suggests inflection in INS SG (*èxom*) more likely than elsewhere
- Thomas (1983: 182-182) says *only* in INS SG (references there)

If correct, this implies a dramatic expansion of the notion 'possible lexeme'

èxo 'echo' probably gained forms; sporadic inflection could arise too in a loss environment, see Louise Esher's paper for complex incremental changes ●

Testing sporadic / reluctant inflection

Russian <i>èxo</i> 'echo'	examples (RNC)	% inflected	rank by total	rank ("typical 1")	rank ("typical 2")
NOM SG	2996	+/-	1	1	2
ACC SG	444	+/-	3	2	3
GEN SG	274	86.9	4	3	1
DAT SG	98	80.6	5	6	6
INS SG	1138	98.5	2	5	5
LOC SG	63	66.7	6	4	4

RNC: Russian National Corpus

Typical 1: Brown, Tiberius & Corbett (2007: 522): rank of SG only

Typical 2: Araneum Russicum III Minus (~100 million words): rank of SG only

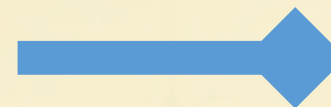
Many thanks to Dunstan Brown

Two dimensions of comparison: examples so far

		definition of segments	
		cell(s) (morphomic)	slab (featural)
system	simple (inflect or not)	Russian <i>èxo</i> 'echo'	Polish <i>muzeum</i> 'museum'
	compound (subsystem or not)		

Other instances of sporadic/reluctant inflection

Bulgarian and Serbian dialects (Baerman et al. ●)



OVERABUNDANCE

Compound inflection in slab: Object agreement in Mian

Mian verbs:

have obligatory subject agreement
may be uninflectable for object agreement
(and verbal classifier)

a lexical stipulation:

- no external conditions (§5)
- no effect on syntax (§6)

Mian: Ok family (within TNG)



Department of Geography, University of Cambridge



Object agreement and object classifier in Mian

- (5) máam=e bou-n-o=be
mosquito=SG.M swat-REAL-3SG.F.SBJ=DECL
'She swatted the mosquito.'
- (6) máam=e a-nâ'-n-o=be
mosquito=SG.M 3SG.M.OBJ-hit-REAL-3SG.F.SBJ=DECL
'She hit the mosquito.'
- (7) máam=e dob-ò-n-o=a
mosquito=SG.M 3SG.CL2.OBJ-take.PFV-SEQ-3SG.F.SBJ=MED
'She picked up the mosquito and then ...'

Fedden (2022)

OBJECT agreement in Mian: types

Transitive verb type (OBJECT agreement)	n	percent
never agree, e.g. <i>bou</i> 'swat'	248	84%
agree in person, number and gender, e.g. <i>nâ</i> ' 'hit, kill'	7	2%
take a verbal classifier, e.g. <i>ò</i> 'take'	40	14%

Note: there are also 7 verbs which arguably show verbal number, alternating according to the number of the object (Fedden 2019: 311-314)

Corbett, Fedden & Finkel (2017), Fedden (2022)

Compound inflection in slab: two further examples from Trans New Guinea languages

- Nankina object agreement
 - 9 verbs have a full paradigm of object agreement
 - some others distinguish number only
 - the rest are uninflectable for object agreement
 - Spaulding & Spaulding (1994: 40-42), Corbett (2012: 164n15), Fedden & Paciaroni (2022)
- Dano possessed nouns
 - some inflect for possessor person&number, and for case
 - others inflect for possessor person&number, but NOT case
Strange (1972), Baerman, Brown & Corbett (2017: 10-12, 28)

Further examples in Windschuttel (2019)

Two dimensions of comparison: examples so far

		definition of segments	
		cell(s) (morphomic)	slab (featural)
system	simple (inflect or not)	Russian <i>èxo</i> 'echo'	Polish <i>muzeum</i> 'museum'
	compound (subsystem or not)		Mian object agreement

Compound inflection in cells: Archi: inflection of pronoun

(8) buwa-mu **b**-ez dit:a<**b**>u
mother(II)-SG.ERG SG.III-1SG.DAT early<SG.III>

χ^w alli

bread(III)[SG.ABS]

a<**b**>u

made<SG.III>.PFV

‘Mother made bread for me early.’

(Kibrik 1994: 349)

controller

gender III

Compound inflection in cells: Agreeing personal pronouns of Archi

	SINGULAR		PLURAL			
	1 person	2 person	1 person		2 person	
			EXCLUSIVE	INCLUSIVE		
ABSOLUTIVE	zon				nen-t'-u	
ERGATIVE	zari	un	nen		nen-a-w nen-a-r-u nen-a-b-u nen-t'-u etc	ž ^w en
GENITIVE	w-is \ b-is d-is / b-is \ is is /	wit	ulu d-olo b-olo olo etc		la-w-u la-r-u la-b-u la-t'-u etc	wiš
DATIVE	w-ez \ b-ez d-ez / b-ez \ ez ez /	wa-s	w-el d-el b-el el etc		w-ela-w d-ela-r-u b-ela-b-u el-t'-u etc	wež
COMIT	za-ɬ:u	wa-ɬ:u			la-ɬ:u	ž ^w a-ɬ:u
SIMILAT	za-q ^ɸ di	wa-q ^ɸ di			la-q ^ɸ di	ž ^w a-q ^ɸ di
COMP	za-χur	wa-χur			la-χur	ž ^w a-χur
SUBST	za-k'ena	wa-k'ena			la-k'ena	ž ^w a-k'ena
SUPERESS	za-t	wa-t			la-t	ž ^w a-t
SUPERELAT	za-t:i-š	wa-t:i-š			la-t:i-š	ž ^w a-t:i-š
SUPERLAT	za-t:i-k	wa-t:i-k			la-t:i-k	ž ^w a-t:i-k
SUPERTERM	za-t:i-kəna	wa-t:i-kəna			la-t:i-kəna	ž ^w a-t:i-kəna
CONTELAT	za-ra-š	wa-ra-š			la-ra-š	ž ^w a-ra-š
CONTLAT	za-ra-k	wa-ra-k			la-ra-k	ž ^w a-ra-k
CONTALL	za-r-ši	wa-ra-ši			la-ra-ši	ž ^w a-ra-ši
CONTTTERM	za-ra-kəna	wa-ra-kəna			la-ra-kəna	ž ^w a-ra-kəna

based on:
Kibrik
(1977: 257-260)

Two dimensions of comparison: round up

		definition of segments	
		cell(s) (morphomic)	slab (featural)
system	simple (inflect or not)	Russian <i>èxo</i> 'echo'	Polish <i>muzeum</i> 'museum'
	compound (subsystem or not)	Archi pronouns	Mian object marking

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5 External conditions (“incoming”)

External conditions

- Spencer (2020: 144) constructional non-inflectedness (*e.g. cat food*), Doleschal (2000-2001: 14) syntagmatic/contextual uninflectedness
- Conditions are non-canonical (syntax simpler without them)
- Classic example German adjectives:
 - in attributive position, case / number / gender with two levels of reduced agreement
 - genuinely NO inflection in predicate: *Der Mann ist alt* 'the man is old'
- Russian dummy noun / classifier (plus nominative): *roman Vojna i mir*
- Kayardild: the set of words on which a morphosyntactic feature is realized is determined by concentric domains of features (Round 2013: 78-84)
- See also Bożena Cetnarowska ●
- An exotic example: Sanskrit (next)

The Sanskrit future (Stump 2013)

Periphrastic future-tense formation

1 and 2 persons	agent-noun derivative masculine : nominative : singular	PLUS present indicative active* forms of <i>as</i> 'be'
3 person	agent-noun derivative masculine : nominative : singular, dual, plural	

*very rarely, middle

Present indicative active of *as* 'be'

	SINGULAR	DUAL	PLURAL
1	ásmi	svás	smás
2	ási	sthás	sthá
3	ásti	stás	sánti

The Sanskrit future: example

Periphrastic future-tense forms of *dā* 'give' (without sandhi)

	SINGULAR	DUAL	PLURAL
1	dātá asmi	dātá svas	dātá smas
2	dātá asi	dātá sthas	dātá stha
3	dātá	dātárau	dātáras

Periphrastic future-tense forms of *dā* 'give' (with sandhi)

	SINGULAR	DUAL	PLURAL
1	dātásmi	dātásvas	dātásmas
2	dātási	dātásthas	dātástha
3	dātá	dātárau	dātáras

Sanskrit examples

- (9) tatas tvā pārayitā_ asmi
from.that 2SG.ACC rescue.NMLZ.SG.M-be.PRS.1SG
'I will rescue (lit: I am rescuer) you from that.'

[Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.8.1.2]

- (10) mahac _choka-bhayam prāptā_ smaḥ
great.SG.ACC pain-fear.SG.ACC meet.NMLZ.SG.M-be.PRS.1PL

'We are going to meet with great pain and dread.'

[Gopatha Brāhmaṇa 1.1.28]

(Stump 2013: 112, 113)

Note: *smaḥ* is the pre-pausal sandhi variant of the 1PL *smas*

(Greg Stump, personal communication, 5 August 2013)

Reduced inflection in the Sanskrit verb

- (11) ekā janāyitā putram.
one.F.SG.NOM produce.NMLZ.SG.M son.SG.ACC
'one (feminine) will bear a son'

[*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.38.8]

- (12) na jāne yātāras tava ripavaḥ kena ca pathā.
not know.1SG go.NMLZ.PL thy enemy.PL.NOM which.SG.INS and path.SG.INS
'I don't know by which path your enemies will go.'

[*Bhojaprabandha* 55]

Constructional non-inflectedness: what form?

- typically an *inflected* form, but which?
- zero inflection / default / base / unmarked?
- Sanskrit: NOM M SG and NOM M SG/DU/PL
- beware smaller systems (potentially misleading)
- and note accusative is an attractor for time / quantity in Serbo-Croat and Polish
(Browne 1993a: 329, 374)

Reduced agreement

- Fedden & Paciaroni (2022)
- a subpart of partial inflection
- helpful because we can manipulate the feature values

And see paper by Michele Loporcaro ●



6 External consequences (“outgoing”)

External consequences

1. Canonically NO external consequences

Ingush

Mian

Agreement in Ingush (Nakh-Dagestanian)

‘there is an arbitrary and strictly lexical bifurcation of verbs into those that do and those that do not have gender agreement’

(Nichols 2018: 845)

(similar to its distant relative Archi)



Johanna Nichols

Johanna Nichols. 2018. Agreement with overt and null arguments in Ingush. *Linguistics* 56.845-863.

Measuring Ingush: presence of overt argument (tokens)

		S	A	O/T	TOTAL
verb root agrees	n	100	41	37	178
	% overt argument	88	59	92	82
verb root does not agree	n	41	38	24	103
	% overt argument	85	76	83	82

(from Nichols 2018: 858)

Differences not statistically significant

Comparable results from Lak, in: Forker (2018)

OBJECT agreement in Mian: types (reminder)

transitive verb type (OBJ agreement)	n	percent
never agree, e.g. <i>bou</i> 'swat'	248	84%
agree in person, number and gender, e.g. <i>nâ'</i> 'hit, kill'	7	2%
take a verbal classifier, e.g. <i>ò</i> 'take'	40	14%

Mian object agreement: verb agrees or not

		gender	classifier	combined
verb agrees	n	68	219	287
	% overt argument	37	40	39
verb does not agree	n			384
	% overt argument			42

Difference not statistically significant

Fedden (2022)

6.2 External (syntactic) consequences

FOUR *suggested* examples (all from South Slavonic)

NB these are reports of others' suggestions

I have not obtained confirming data

External (syntactic) consequences

1. Serbo-Croat *doba* ‘time, season, age, period’

- practically the only native uninflectable noun
- issues pointed out as early as Kovačević (1951), including how (un)inflectable it is

Browne (2015: 12): web count 31.12.2014

(13)	od	tog	doba	285 instances: 43.5%
	from	that.SG.GEN	doba	
		‘from that time’		
(14)	od	toga	doba	242 instances: 36.9%
	from	that(long).SG.GEN	doba	
(15)	od	to	doba	128 instances: 19.5%
	from	that.SG.NOM/ACC	doba	

External (syntactic) consequences

2. Serbo-Croat numeral phrases

- Serbo-Croat numerals have largely lost inflection (large literature). Higher take GEN PL, lower (2-4) take adnumerative, realised as GEN SG or NOM PL, based on inflection class (Corbett 2009)
- numeral phrases increasingly function as non-inflecting “blocks”
- BUT: Popović (1981-82): the case frame matters

Ljubomir Popović



Serbo-Croat numeral phrases: the issue

Numeral phrases are fine as NOM, ACC, GEN, and with prepositions taking various cases:

(16) seć-am se [ova četiri glumca] [GEN]
remember-1SG REFL [DEM four actor]
'I remember these four actors.'

(17) razgovar-am sa [ova četiri glumca] [sa + INS]
talk-1SG with [DEM four actor]
'I am talking to these four actors'

BUT

(18) *dati knjige [ova četiri studenta] [*DAT]
give.INF books [DEM four student]
'to give books to these four students'

Examples: Wechsler & Zlatić (2003: 167-168); see also Popović (1981-82) 69

Serbo-Croat: similar issue with nouns

Wechsler & Zlatić (2003) suggest similar effect with nouns:

(19) Dolaz-im sa Miki. [sa + INS]
come-1SG with Miki (woman's name, uninflectable)
'I am coming with Miki.'

(20) *Div-im se Miki. [*DAT]
admire-1SG REFL Miki
'I admire Miki'

Wechsler & Zlatić (2003: 134, 133)

Serbo-Croat: similar issue with nouns

But now:

(21) Div-im se lep-oj Miki.
 admire-1SG REFL beautiful-SG.DAT Miki
 'I admire beautiful Miki'

(22) *Div-im se braon Miki.
 admire-1SG REFL brown Miki
 'I admire brunette Miki'

Dative/Instrumental Case Realization Condition

If a verb or noun assigns dative or instrumental case to an NP,
then that case must be morphologically realized by some element
within the NP. (Wechsler & Zlatić 2003: 135)

For more on all this, see Wechsler & Zlatić (2003: 115-169), Bošković
(2006) and Adamson (2019: 103-111)

There is speaker variation.

External (syntactic) consequences

3. Serbo-Croat adjectives

(23) smeđ-a je on kupi-o kol-a
brown-PL.N.ACC AUX.3SG 3SG.M.NOM buy-PST.3SG.M car(PL.N)-PL.ACC
'He bought a brown car.'

(24) *braon / *bež je on kupi-o kol-a
brown / beige AUX.3SG 3SG.M.NOM buy-PST.3SG.M car(PL.N)-PL.ACC
'He bought a brown / beige car.'

Željko Bošković's account (2013: 22), for Serbo-Croat:

- 'non-agreeing adjectives are incorporated (head-adjoined) into the noun'
- the incorporation blocks agreement
- incorporated adjectives cannot undergo left-branch extraction (which is a phrasal movement)

There is speaker variation.

Serbo-Croat adjectives

(25) smeđ-a plastičn-a kol-a
brown-PL.N.NOM plastic-PL.N.NOM car(PL.N)-NOM
'a brown plastic car'

(26) ?*braon / ?*bež plastičn-a kol-a
brown / beige plastic-PL.N.NOM car(PL.N)-NOM
'a brown / beige plastic car'

(27) plastičn-a braon / bež kol-a
plastic-PL.N.NOM brown / beige car(PL.N)-NOM
'a plastic brown / beige car'

Željko Bošković's account (2013: 22):

'a non-agreeing adjective must be adjacent to the noun it modifies'

this follows 'if non-agreeing adjectives are adjoined, i.e. incorporated, into the noun'

Discussion in Adamson (2019: 115-121). There is speaker variation.

External (syntactic) consequences

4. Bulgarian definiteness

- effect first pointed out by Halpern (1985: 150-153); see also Spencer & Luís 2012: 128-130) and Adamson (2019: 83-103)
- definiteness is inflectional
- the NP is marked definite on the first markable item:

(28) knig-a-ta
book(F)-SG-DEF.SG
'the book'

(29) xubav-a-ta knig-a
nice-SG.F-DEF.SG.F book(F)-SG
'the nice book'

Spencer & Luís (2012: 128-130)

Bulgarian definiteness: uninflectable adjective

(30) serbez žen-a
quarrelsome woman-SG
'a quarrelsome woman': *serbez* is uninflectable

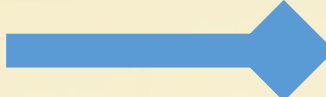
(31) *serbez-ăt/ta žen-a **Count the adjective >> ***
quarrelsome-DEF.SG woman-SG
'the quarrelsome woman'

(32) *serbez žen-a-ta **Don't count the adjective >> ***
quarrelsome woman-SG-F-DEF.SG
'the quarrelsome woman'

Halpern (1985: 150-153), Spencer & Luís (128-130)

6.2 External (syntactic) consequences

FOUR *suggested* examples (all from South Slavonic):

- one involves constructional non-inflectedness (the Serbo-Croat numeral phrases)
- each is challenging
- speaker variation
- the issue is not *whether* the item inflects, but how similar it is syntactically to regular inflecting items
- we appear to have defectiveness, not just lexical, but also constructional (a novelty)  defectiveness

7 Conclusions

The dog didn't bark: what follows? (1)

👤 Morphological typology



- 👤 within similar morphological *systems*, uninflectability can vary substantially (Russian vs Serbo-Croat)
- 👤 individual *items* can be very different

👤 Diachrony



- 👤 a window into how uninflectability is determined
- 👤 loss of inflection can reflect a change of part of speech

The dog didn't bark: what follows? (2)

Morphological theory

-  Spencer (2020: 143): uninflectability itself makes a nonsense of some variants of Distributed Morphology
-  how can inflectional morphology have external consequences? In particular, uninflecting items (and constructions) may be partially defective

The role of inflection

-  uninflectability may make no difference (Russian, Mian, Ingush)
-  what then is the function of inflection?



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