

# THE SLAVONIC LANGUAGES

EDITED BY  
Bernard Comrie  
and  
Greville G. Corbett



LONDON AND NEW YORK

---

# 1 Introduction

*Bernard Comrie and Greville G. Corbett*

The Slavonic languages (usually called the Slavic languages in the United States) are the major languages spoken over most of eastern and much of central Europe, as indicated in map 1.1 on page 2. The Slavonic language with the greatest number of speakers, Russian, has spread, as a result of gradual expansion, from its original heartland in eastern Europe across most of northern Asia to the Pacific coast. The parts of eastern and central Europe where Slavonic languages are spoken are areas of great current political interest, with the emergence of new experiments in democracy, economic organization and artistic expression in societies whose recent history has been primarily one of tight centralized control.

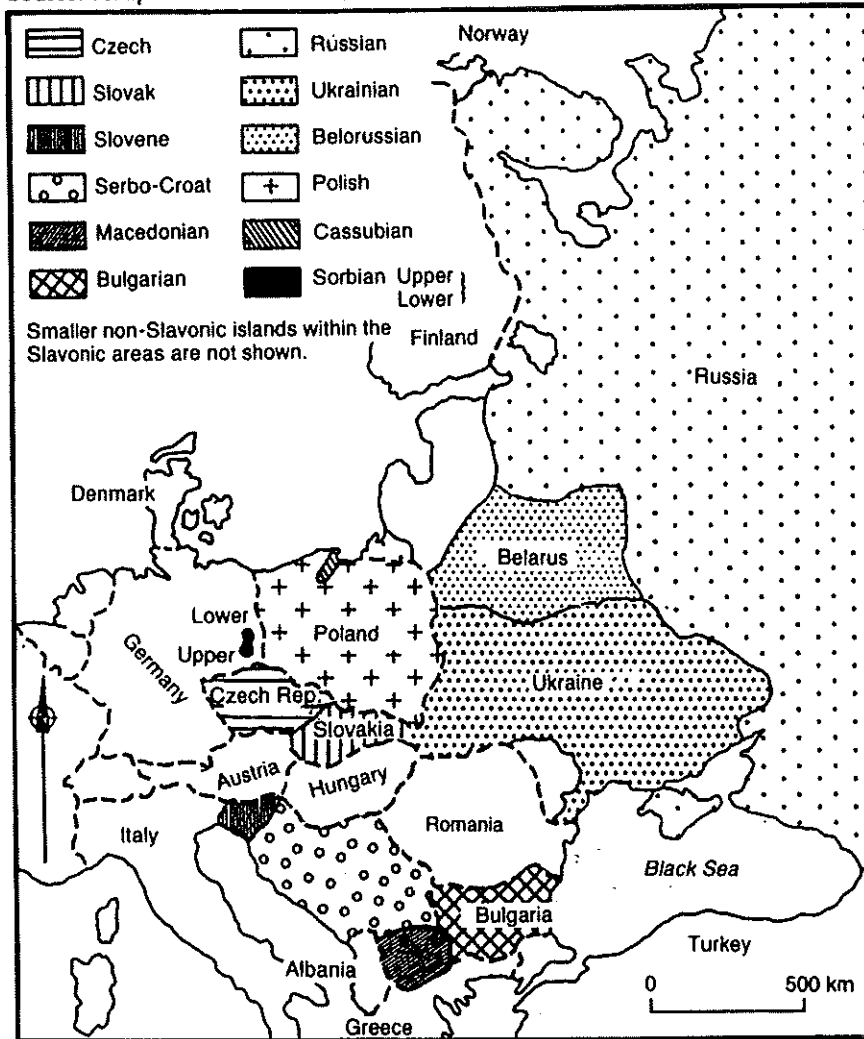
The Slavonic languages form a genetic unit, that is they are all descendants of a single ancestor language, conventionally called Proto-Slavonic, whose characteristics can be reconstructed by comparing the various attested Slavonic languages. Going further, the Slavonic languages in turn form a branch of the Indo-European family, the family of languages that covers most of Europe and large parts of south-western Asia and South Asia and which includes English: the ultimate genetic relatedness of English and Russian, while perhaps not apparent at first glance, can still be seen in such similar items as Russian три/tri, English *three*, Russian сын/syn, English *son*, Russian свинья/svin'já 'pig', English *swine*.

## 1 The structure and scope of the book

In this book, a separate chapter is devoted to each of the following languages: Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croat, Slovene, Czech, Slovak, Upper and Lower Sorbian (one chapter devoted to these two closely related languages), Polish, Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian. For the present geographical location of these languages, reference should be made to map 1.1. These are the generally recognized contemporary standard literary Slavonic languages, each of which is either the (at least *de facto*) official language of an independent country or countries (Belorussian, Bulgarian, Czech, Macedonian, Polish, Russian, Serbo-Croat, Slovak,

### Map 1.1 Approximate present-day distribution of Slavonic languages in Europe

Source: Adapted from Jakobson, 1955



More detail can be found on the maps in the individual chapters; this is particularly relevant for the area of the former Yugoslavia.

Slovene, Ukrainian) or is used locally for some official purposes (Upper Sorbian, Lower Sorbian) – this reflects the political situation in early 1993. Although the official status of Cassubian is as a dialect of Polish rather than as a separate language, the distinctiveness of this variety in comparison to the bulk of Polish dialects has led us, following the practice of many other

Slavists, to treat it as a separate language. In addition, two extinct languages have been included: Old Church Slavonic, as the language of the oldest attested writings in a Slavonic language, of great importance for our understanding of the early history of Slavonic languages, and Polabian, which is structurally clearly to be considered a distinct Slavonic language. A further chapter has been devoted to Proto-Slavonic, the reconstructed ancestor of the Slavonic languages, which provides the necessary bridge between the Indo-European family and its Slavonic branch. Finally, two chapters do not deal with individual languages: that on alphabets and transliteration (chapter 2) discusses material particularly important in the case of Slavonic because of the variety of alphabets, orthographic conventions and scientific and non-scientific transliterations of non-Roman alphabets that are current for Slavonic languages, while the chapter on the Slavonic languages in emigration (chapter 18) emphasizes that many Slavonic languages are spoken in lands far beyond the Slavonic heartland in eastern and central Europe and shows the importance of these far-flung communities for socio-linguistic research.

This volume differs from previous surveys of the Slavonic family in several significant respects. First, each chapter is written by an acknowledged specialist in the particular language. The expansion of work in the field means that it is now impossible for an individual to cover the whole family with the necessary level of expertise. Second, the chapters are highly structured, with each author providing detailed information on the same important topics. Thus the reader interested in a specific topic, whether it be verbal aspect, clitics or numerals, can easily find comparable information on each of the Slavonic languages. And the comparison is further facilitated by treating the languages as of equal linguistic interest; the relative standing of the different languages in terms of number of speakers and political importance does not influence the attention accorded to each. Third, within the descriptions syntax is given its due place. Modern linguistics has put syntax in the centre of the stage; this means that much more is known about the syntax of the Slavonic languages than was the case even a few years ago. Fourth, the book is accessible to a wide readership. To assist non-Slavists, all the examples from languages which use the Cyrillic alphabet are given in transliteration (as well as in the Cyrillic form; see *Transliteration from Cyrillic* and notes there; pages xii-xiii). Terms which are likely to be less widely known are explained. Thus, besides providing an up-to-date survey of current knowledge for Slavists, the volume is also a source of reference for all others with an interest in the Slavonic family; indications of further sources in English and other widely read languages are provided where possible in the bibliographies. Given the major input from Slavists into mainstream linguistics in the past (see section 2) and from linguistics into Slavonic studies, it is natural to seek to maintain this relationship.

As was mentioned above, each of the individual-language chapters is written according to a single general plan. The structure of each chapter is as follows. An introductory section 1 provides a brief account of the current status of the language and of its historical development in social terms (including the development of the literary standard). The section on phonology (section 2) deals with the sounds of the language in question and relations among them, in particular the inventory of phonemes (section 2.1), that is which sounds can be used in the language to distinguish words (in the way that the phonemic opposition between /p/ and /b/ in English enables one to distinguish between *pin* and *bin*); the subsections on morphophonemics (sections 2.2 and 2.3) deal with the ways in which the phonemic shape of an item can change in different morphological forms, as in the way that the English morpheme (minimal grammatical unit) *wife* appears in phonemically different shapes in the words *wife* /waif/ and *wives* /waivz/, that is, /waif/ versus /waiv/. The section on morphology (section 3) deals with the details of how morphemes are combined into words, such as how the English morphemes *pen* and *-s* (the plural suffix) combine to give *pens* or, to take a more complex example, how the morpheme *sing* combines with the morpheme for past tense to give the word *sang*. Morphology can be further divided into inflectional morphology (sections 3.1 and 3.2), which deals with relations among different forms of a single lexical item, such as the relations among *walk*, *walks* and *walked* as different forms of the lexical item WALK in English, and derivational morphology (section 3.3), which deals with the relations among distinct but formally related lexical items, such as among English *observe*, *observer*, *observation* and *observational*. Within inflectional morphology, Slavonic languages, like most Indo-European languages, make a clear distinction between nominal morphology (section 3.1) and verbal morphology (section 3.2); linguistic terminology is not entirely standardized in this area, so readers are asked to take particular care in noting the senses in which we use the following terms, especially *nominal* and *noun*: *nominal* is a cover term subsuming nouns (see below), adjectives, pronouns and numerals; *noun* refers to nouns in their narrow sense, the traditional 'name of a person, place or thing'; *adjective*, *pronoun* and *numeral* are used in their usual senses, as is *verb*. In general, the same paradigm items are given for each language to make comparison easier. Section 4 of each chapter deals with syntax, the various patterns of combining words into phrases and sentences. Section 5 of each chapter deals briefly with the lexis (vocabulary) of that language, including in particular the relative weight of lexical items inherited from Proto-Slavonic (or created using morphemes of Proto-Slavonic origin) and those borrowed from other languages; for comparative purposes, lexical items are given from three well-defined lexical fields that have been important in recent linguistic and anthropological studies of lexis, namely colour terms (follow-

ing Berlin and Kay 1969), body parts and kinship terms. Finally, section 6 discusses the most salient characteristics of the main dialects of the language.

Our emphasis on the innovative nature of the present volume should not be interpreted as a lack of gratitude towards the pioneering work of our predecessors, which has indeed made this book possible. The scientific study of the Slavonic language family has a history of well over a century, the initial work generally being considered Miklosich (1852-75), a detailed and compendious comparison of the individual Slavonic languages and of Slavonic with other Indo-European languages; the inclusion of a volume on syntax set an example that only too many successors have failed to heed. The next major landmark is Vondrák (1906-8); it is chastening to see how many of the problems that remain at the forefront of Slavonic linguistics are already treated in these early works, such as the positioning of clitic pronouns and the use of different cases after the copula. The intervening years have seen the appearance of the detailed comparative grammar of the Slavonic languages by Vaillant (1950-77), in addition to the first two volumes of the more concise work by Bräuer (1961- ). Scholarly (as opposed to pedagogical) introductions to the Slavonic language family are available in various Slavonic languages, such as Бернштейн/Bernštejn (1961) in Russian, Horálek (1962) in Czech, Lehr-Splawiński, Kuraszkiwicz and Sławski (1954) in Polish and Nahtigal (1952) in Slovene (also available in a Russian translation). In Continental Western European languages there is van Wijk (1956) in French, in addition to the German translation of Nahtigal (1952) and most recently Panzer (1991). In English such works range from the concise introduction of Jakobson (1955) via the medium-sized Entwistle and Morison (1949) to the detailed survey of the individual Slavonic languages of De Bray (1951). Finally, important recent contributions to the social and cultural development of the Slavonic languages have appeared in the publications of the Yale Concilium on International and Area Studies: Schenker and Stankiewicz (1980) and Picchio and Goldblatt (1984), and in Stone and Worth (1985).

In many ways the Slavonic languages form a homogeneous group within Indo-European. They are therefore an ideal area for comparative and typological work. A very positive aspect of this research has been the concern to consider data from each of the Slavonic languages, rather than just from the most easily accessible. This concern to give the comprehensive picture was initiated by Rudolf Růžička: see, for example, his account of reflexives (1973).

The perceived strategic importance of Russian from the 1950s on meant that American work on machine translation concentrated on translation from Russian to English, as in the Georgetown GAT system and the well-known SYSTRAN work (Hutchins 1986: 70-8, 209-18). There has also

been a good deal of research in the former Soviet Union. While machine translation has had a chequered history, the linking of interest in Slavonic languages with computer technology has had several spin-offs. The Slavonic family is probably uniquely well provided with research tools in the form of morphological dictionaries (whether giving roots and derived forms or concentrating on inflectional information), frequency dictionaries and reverse dictionaries. Russian is particularly well covered, but researchers working on certain other Slavonic languages also have useful grammatical and lexicological reference works at their disposal.

## 2 Some salient characteristics of Slavonic languages

In this section, we list some of the most important typological characteristics of the Slavonic languages, in particular those that have provided important material for the development of general linguistic theory (sections 2.1-2.4).

In phonology, one of the most distinctive features of Slavonic languages is the presence of a substantial number of palatal and palatalized consonants, in many Slavonic languages forming pairs of palatalized (soft) and non-palatalized (hard) consonants; perhaps the extreme case is Russian, where almost every consonant participates in this palatalization opposition. Another characteristic of Slavonic languages is the presence of an extensive set of morphophonemic alternations within inflectional and, especially, derivational morphology, as in the *k:č* alternation in Russian крик/крик 'shout' versus крича́ть/крича́т 'to shout'; see further section 2.1.

All Slavonic languages have a rich morphology, including a rich inflectional morphology, and in this respect can be characterized as conservative Indo-European languages. While some languages have lost some of the inflectional categories found in Proto-Slavonic (perhaps most strikingly the near-complete loss of case in Bulgarian and Macedonian), all Slavonic languages retain a rich set of morphological categories; often there are even a few innovations relative to Proto-Slavonic. Typologically, Slavonic morphology is primarily fusional, that is a given affix frequently combines the expression of a number of grammatical categories, for example in Russian столу́/stolú 'table' (DAT SG), the inflection *-u* encodes simultaneously dative case (compare NOM SG стол/stol) and singular number (compare DAT PL столáм/stolám). Morphologically, verbs and, especially, nouns fall into a number of distinct conjugational/declensional classes, so that while Russian стол/stol 'table' has its dative singular in *-u*, жена́/žená 'wife' has женё́/žené with the affix *-e*, and кость/kost' 'bone' has ко́ст-и/kóst-i with the affix *-i*. Most of the morphological categories found in Slavonic languages are those familiar from other Indo-European languages, but one verbal category that is particularly richly developed in Slavonic languages is aspect (section 2.2).

Perhaps the most salient syntactic characteristic of Slavonic languages is their so-called free word order, whereby the order of major constituents is determined not so much by syntactic factors (grammatical relations, such as subject, object) as by pragmatic factors (such as topic, focus; see further section 2.3); this makes it hard to characterize individual Slavonic languages in terms of such typologies as Subject-Verb-Object versus Subject-Object-Verb. This freedom of word order is particularly clear in the case of the major constituents of the clause (such as subject, verb/predicate, direct object, indirect object), while the order within individual constituents tends to be more fixed (though by no means always absolutely so): thus genitives usually follow their head noun, while demonstratives, numerals and adjectives usually precede; all Slavonic languages make extensive use of prepositions, with postpositions having at best marginal status.

Slavonic languages have extensive agreement systems, for instance between adjectives and their noun or between verbs and their subject, and the intersection of agreement with the rich morphology already alluded to gives rise to a number of complications with theoretically interesting resolutions (see further section 2.4). The fact that finite verbs usually encode the person-number of their subject leads to the possibility of omitting unstressed subject pronouns, although the extent to which such omission is favoured differs from language to language: in Serbo-Croat, for instance, it is normal to omit unstressed subject pronouns, while in Russian their inclusion is usual.

Subordination in Slavonic languages in general follows patterns familiar in other European languages, with a strong preference for finite subordinate clauses with clause-initial conjunctions and, in most languages (the exceptions are Bulgarian, Macedonian and the eastern variant of Serbo-Croat), an infinitive used in certain constructions where its understood subject can be retrieved from the syntactic context. The written Slavonic languages also make extensive use of other non-finite constructions, such as participles substituting for relative clauses and gerunds (verbal adverbs) substituting for adverbial clauses, although such non-finite constructions are not characteristic of the spoken languages.

### **2.1 Morphophonemics (Morphophonology)**

One characteristic of all Slavonic languages is a rich set of morphophonemic (morphophonological, morphonological) alternations. Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising that much of the fundamental work in morphophonemics, including generative phonology, has been done by linguists who worked largely with Slavonic material: Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, Nikolaj Trubeckoj (Trubetzkoy), Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle; see, for instance, Anderson (1985: 56-139, 318-22), Jakobson (1948) and Halle (1959).

By a morphophonemic alternation we understand a situation where a given morpheme (minimal grammatical unit) has more than one phonemic representation in different words into which that morpheme enters. In English, for instance, the alternation between /ei/ and /ou/ in *break* /breik/ versus *broken* /broukən/ is an instance of morphophonemic alternation involving the two allomorphs (/breik/, /brouk/) of the morpheme *break*.

A few of the morphophonemic alternations found in Slavonic languages continue alternations found in Proto-Indo-European: for instance, the vowel alternation found in Russian текý/tekú 'I flow' versus ток/tok 'current' is a direct reflex of the Indo-European ablaut alternations that also show up in, for example, English *break* versus *broken*. For the most part, however, the morphophonemic alternations of Slavonic languages represent either Proto-Slavonic innovations or the innovations of individual Slavonic languages, since a propensity for generating new morphophonemic alternations seems to be a characteristic of Slavonic languages.

In the Proto-Slavonic period, for instance, major new morphophonemic alternations arose as the result of the various palatalizations (see further sections 2.9–2.10 of chapter 3). Thus, the alternation that shows up in Russian пекý/pekú 'I bake' versus печёшь/pečěš' 'you bake' derives from the first palatalization of *k* to *č* before a front vowel (in this case, Proto-Slavonic *e*). Another set of morphophonemic alternations that arose in the Proto-Slavonic period was that between back and front vowels, depending on whether the preceding consonant was hard (non-palatalized) or soft (palatalized), as the result of a sound change whereby vowels were fronted after soft consonants. Thus the ending of the nominative–vocative–accusative singular of *o*-stem neuter nouns remained *-o* after hard consonants, but became *-e* after soft consonants, as can still be seen in Russian мѣсто/město 'place' versus поле/póle 'field'.

In the late Proto-Slavonic period, new morphophonemic alternations between a vowel and zero arose; the sign for zero is Ø. These alternations came about through the loss of the reduced vowels (symbolized *ъ* and *ь* deriving from Proto-Indo-European *u* and *i*, respectively), which are known as *jers*. *Jers* in strong positions developed into full vowels (the actual vowels are different in different Slavonic languages) while those in weak positions were lost, thus producing alternations like Russian рот/rot 'mouth', GEN SG рта/rtá (that is, *rot-* alternates with *rØt-*), for Old Russian рѣтъ/гѣтъ, GEN SG рѣта/гѣта. (See further section 2.25 of chapter 3.) Vowels that alternate with zero in this way are known as 'mobile', 'fugitive' or 'fleeting' vowels.

The phenomenon of *akan'e* in Russian (see chapter 15, sections 2.2 and 6), whereby unstressed *a* and *o* became *ɨ* or *ɔ* in unstressed syllables, provides an example of a language-specific sound change that has given rise to morphophonemic alternations, as can be seen from comparing the

vowels in the different inflectional forms of Russian голова́/golová 'head': NOM SG голова́/golová [gəlavá], NOM PL ГОЛОВЫ́/gólóvy [góləvi], GEN PL ГОЛОВ/golón [gəlól], where the shifting stress gives rise to alternations between 'o on the one hand (under stress) and ɪ or ə on the other (no stress). Note that we mark stress by ' on the stressed vowel; this symbol is chosen to avoid confusion with other diacritics.

The existence of morphophonemic alternations led linguists investigating Slavonic languages to posit a level of morphophonemic representation at which a given morpheme would be given a constant representation; one convention for indicating that a representation is morphophonemic is to enclose it in braces, that is { }. Thus, the stem of the Russian word for 'head' would be {golov-}, which would then be related, by the operation of rules, to more phonetic representations such as those given above for individual inflectional forms. Because of different morphophonemic behaviour, segments that are phonetically and phonemically identical may receive different morphophonemic representations. Thus the vowels of the first syllable of Russian сова́/sová [savá] 'owl' and страна́/straná [straná] 'country' are phonetically identical, but are differentiated in other inflectional forms of the words when the first syllable is stressed, as in nominative plural со́вы/sóvy [sóvi], стра́ны/strány [stráni], that is, the morphophonemic representations of these stems would be {sov-} and {stran-}, respectively. In describing the morphology of Old Church Slavonic, it is necessary to distinguish morphophonemically between two kinds of *y*, since {*y*<sub>1</sub>} shows up after soft consonants as *i*, while {*y*<sub>2</sub>} shows up as *ę* after soft consonants; compare the following forms of the masculine *o*-stem nouns *rabъ* 'slave' and *možь* 'man': INST PL *raby* (morphophonemically {*raby*<sub>1</sub>}), *moži*, ACC PL *raby* (morphophonemically {*raby*<sub>2</sub>}), *može*. In this, one can see the origin of abstract levels of phonological representation in generative phonology. The precise degree of abstractness that should be allowed in morphophonemic alternations has proved to be controversial; while probably most linguists would be happy with the morphophonemic representations proposed in the preceding paragraph, many would be less happy with Jakobson's attempt to account for the alternation found in Russian examples like жать/žat' 'to press', first person singular present tense жму/žmu, by positing a morphophonemic representation {žm-} and a rule that drops the nasal and inserts *a* in the infinitive stem; instead, this latter example would probably be treated most simply as a morphological irregularity.

Although morphophonemic alternations typically arise as the result of conditioned sound changes, there is a tendency, well reflected in Slavonic languages, for the original phonological conditioning to be lost, that is for morphophonemic alternations to become increasingly morphologized. In Proto-Slavonic, the difference in endings selected by hard- and soft-stem nouns was transparently phonological, so that in Old Russian, for instance,

we find the ending for hard stems *-ъ* in genitive plural *рабъ/rabъ* 'slave' and the corresponding ending for soft stems *-ь* in *дъждь/dъždь* 'rain'. In Modern Russian, however, the relevant forms are *рабо́в/rabóv* and *дожде́й/dožděj*, where the suffixes *-ov* and *-ej* are morphological, rather than morphophonemic, alternants; the expected correspondent of *-ov* for soft stems, namely *-ev*, occurs only with nouns ending in *j*, for example *геро́ев/geróev* from *геро́й/gerój* 'hero'. Finally, in every Slavonic language at least some instances of some inherited morphophonemic alternations have been lost by analogy. In Old Russian, for instance, the dative-locative singular of *рука/ruka* 'hand' was *руцѣ/rucě*, with *c* as a result of the second palatalization; in Modern Russian, however, we have simply NOM SG *рукá/ruká*, DAT-LOC SG *рукѣ/rukè*. In Proto-Slavonic, and still in Old Church Slavonic, the morphophonemic opposition of hard versus soft consonants corresponds exactly to the phonetic opposition of non-palatalized versus palatalized consonants. During the history of several individual Slavonic languages, however, some of these consonants have become phonetically non-palatalized but none the less retain their earlier morphophonemic behaviour. In such languages, the morphophonemic class of soft consonants thus no longer corresponds exactly to the phonetic class of palatalized consonants, as when Russian masculine nouns ending in (synchronically non-palatalized) *ž* require the genitive plural ending *-ej* characteristic of soft stems, rather than *-ov* as with hard stems, as in *еже́й/ežěj*, genitive plural of *еж/ěž* 'hedgehog'.

## 2.2 Aspect

One of the major contributions of Slavonic linguistics to general linguistic theory has been the notion of verbal aspect; indeed the very term 'aspect' in this sense is a direct translation of Russian *вид/vid* (compare *видеть/videt'* 'to see'). In every Slavonic language, with Russian used here as an illustration, most verbs occur as a pair, one member of the pair being of the imperfective aspect (such as *писа́ть/pisát'* 'to write'), the other being of the perfective aspect (such as *написа́ть/napisát'*). Like tense, aspect is concerned with the general notion of time, but whereas tense is concerned with locating the situation described by the clause in time, relative to other time points (most commonly the present moment), aspect is concerned with the internal temporal structure of situations. The essential content of the perfective/imperfective opposition is that between bounded and unbounded situations, or rather between the presentation of situations as bounded or unbounded, respectively. In a sentence like *Ко́ля написа́л (PRFV) письмо́/Kólja napisál (PRFV) pís'mó* 'Kolja wrote a letter', Kolja's writing of the letter is presented as a bounded event, that is as an event that is complete – from which we can deduce that Kolja did indeed finish writing the letter. By contrast, *Ко́ля писа́л (IMPFV) письмо́/Kólja pisál (IMPFV) pís'mó* 'Kolja was writing the letter', makes no explicit reference to

the boundedness or completion of the writing; indeed, it is quite possible that Kolja gave up writing the letter before completing it. As this example illustrates, the distinction sometimes corresponds to that between simple and progressive verb forms in English, namely with dynamic verbs referring to a single action, but this is not a general equation. Stative verbs are typically in the simple form in English, for example *the book lay on the table*, whereas in Russian they are typically in the imperfective, since a state is by definition unbounded (to begin or to end a state is an action, not part of the state), whence Russian книга лежала (IMPFV) на столé/kniga ležala (IMPFV) na stolé. In English, habitual situations are usually in the simple form, for example *Kolja wrote a letter every day*, whereas Russian uses the imperfective, since the habit (as opposed to any individual act of letter writing) is not bounded, that is Коля писал (IMPFV) письмó каждый день/Kolja pisál (IMPFV) pis'mó káždyj den'.

Aspect is particularly salient in the Slavonic languages because the perfective/imperfective opposition characterizes virtually all verb forms, usually covering all moods and tenses (though the present/future opposition is typically neutralized in the perfective) and both finite and non-finite forms. The pervasiveness of aspectual oppositions in Slavonic languages is, no doubt, one reason for the extent to which aspectology has leant on the Slavonic opposition; see, for instance, Comrie (1976).

Although the perfective/imperfective opposition is the basic opposition in all Slavonic languages, most Slavonic languages also have some other, typically more restricted, aspectual oppositions (called sub-aspects). Most Slavonic languages, for instance, have an opposition, restricted to verbs of motion, between a determinate sub-aspect (essentially, motion in a single direction) and an indeterminate sub-aspect (motion in various directions). Russian contrasts determinate идти́/iditi with indeterminate ходить́/xodit' 'to go', for example он идёт в школу́/on idët v škólu 'he is going to school' versus он ходит по полю́/on xodit po pólju 'he is walking about the field'; both are imperfective – the perfective is пойти́/pojti 'to go, set out', as in он пошёл в школу́/on pošël v škólu 'he has gone to (set out for) school'.

It is worth noting briefly the basic principles of the formation of imperfective–perfective verb pairs in Slavonic languages, using Russian examples. In general, simple unprefixed verbs are imperfective (such as писать́/pisát' 'to write'), with only a handful of exceptions being perfective (like дать́/dat' 'to give'). Perfective verbs are formed from simple unprefixed imperfective verbs primarily by prefixation. Prefixation also normally changes the lexical meaning, so that, for instance, the perfective verb описать́/opisát' means 'to describe', though for a given simple unprefixed imperfective verb there is typically one (lexically determined) prefix that is most neutral; in the case of писать́/pisát' this is на-/на-, so that написать́/napisát' can be glossed simply as 'to write' (PRFV) –

whether such prefixes are ever truly lexically neutral is one of the controversies in current Slavonic aspectology. Less commonly, perfectives are formed by suffixation, as in Russian исчезнуть/*isčeznut'* 'to disappear', the perfective of исчезать/*isčezat'*. Prefixed perfectives (in particular, those where the prefix carries a difference in lexical meaning), and also simple unprefixed perfectives, form corresponding imperfectives by suffixation: the imperfective of описать/*opisat'* 'to describe' is описывать/*opisyvat'*, that of дать/*dat'* 'to give' is давать/*davat'*. In addition, most languages have some idiosyncratic pairs, including suppletive pairs, for example, Russian брать/*brat'* (IMPFV) versus взять/*vzjat'* (PRFV) 'to take'.

### 2.3 Functional Sentence Perspective

In English, word order plays an important role in carrying the basic syntactic relations within a sentence. In *John saw Mary*, for instance, only this particular order of words is possible, and any change in the order of words either changes the meaning (as in *Mary saw John*) or leads to a non-sentence (for example, *John Mary saw, saw Mary John*). In Slavonic languages, however, the word order is not tied to the expression of syntactic relations in this way. In Russian, for instance, any of the six logically possible word-order permutations of the sentence Кóля (NOM) видел Тàню (ACC)/Kólja (NOM) videl Tànju (ACC) 'Kolja saw Tanja' is grammatical and has the same basic meaning, that is refers to a situation in which Kolja saw Tanja; thus Тàню (ACC) видел Кóля (NOM)/Tànju (ACC) videl Kólja (NOM) still means 'Kolja saw Tanja', and not, for instance, 'Tanja saw Kolja'. This freedom of word order goes hand in hand with the richer morphology of Slavonic languages. In the Russian example just cited, the prime indication of who did the seeing is the nominative case of the noun phrase Кóля/Kólja, while the prime indication of who was seen is the accusative case of the noun phrase Тàню/Tànju, thus freeing word order to express other distinctions.

Just what does order express in Slavonic languages? There is no uniformity of terminology, and even some disparity of conceptual basis, in answering this question, but the following represents something approaching a consensus. Word order in Slavonic languages is determined primarily by the arrangement of given and new information, more specifically placing towards the beginning of the sentence information that is given (that is, already shared by speaker and hearer) and placing towards the end of the sentence information that is new (that is, the new information that the speaker wants to convey to the hearer). If one interlocutor asks 'Who did Kolja see?', then the fact of Kolja's seeing is given information and will come first in the answer in a Slavonic language, while the fact that the one seen is Tanja is new information, so that this will come last, giving, for instance, the version Кóля (NOM) видел Тàню (ACC)/Kólja (NOM) videl

Tanju (ACC) in Russian. Conversely, if the question is 'Who saw Tanja?', then the fact of Tanja's being seen is given information, while the identification of the one who did the seeing as Kolja is new information, giving, for instance, the Russian version ТАНЮ (ACC) ви́дел КО́ля (NOM)/Таню (ACC) ви́дел Ко́ля (NOM) as an appropriate answer. The new information is also referred to as the focus of the sentence.

Sometimes, the structure of the discourse will force or suggest a particular constituent of the sentence as what that sentence is about. For instance, if someone asks 'What about Tanja?', then an appropriate reply must be about Tanja. The item that the sentence is about is called its topic (or theme), the rest of the sentence is the comment (or rheme). In Slavonic languages, the topic usually occurs at the beginning of the sentence. Imagine the following conversation between A and B:

- A: Vanja saw Vera.  
 B: What about Kolja? Who(m) did he see?  
 A: Kolja saw Tanja.

In the last turn of the conversation, Kolja has been established as topic, and the rest of the sentence is the comment. Furthermore, the fact that the person seen is Tanja is the new information or focus, so we have: topic *Kolja*, comment *saw Tanja*, focus *Tanja*, giving in Russian the word order КО́ля (NOM) ви́дел ТАНЮ (ACC)/Ко́ля (NOM) ви́дел ТАНю (ACC). Thus, in a sense the basic word order in most Slavonic languages can be said to be Topic-X-Focus, where X represents material other than the topic and focus (non-focus comment material); deviations from this order serve primarily to indicate emotional expressiveness in spoken registers.

These major differences between the function of word order in English and in Slavonic languages were first studied in detail by linguists of the Prague School, such as Vilém Mathesius (Mathesius 1939 and, more generally, 1947), who were interested in comparing and contrasting English and Czech syntax. The general area of study that covers such notions as topic, comment, focus, is referred to variously as functional sentence perspective, communicative dynamism, topic-comment (theme-rheme) structure; the Prague School used the Czech term *aktuální členění*. They noticed another distinction that ties in closely with those already mentioned (freedom of word order, richness of morphology). English has a number of productive syntactic processes that enable one to change grammatical relations (such as which noun phrase is subject of a sentence); the most evident is the passive, which enables one to rephrase *Kolja saw Tanja* as *Tanja was seen by Kolja*. One function of such syntactic processes in English is to bring a noun phrase to sentence-initial position, thus marking it overtly as topic of the sentence. While passives are possible in Slavonic languages, they tend not to be particularly idiomatic, especially in spoken

registers, and are usually much more heavily restricted than in English, with, for instance, no possibility of a literal translation of *Kolja was given a book by Tanja*. In functional terms, the equivalent of English *Tanja was seen by Kolja* in a Slavonic language is not a passive, but rather an active sentence with the object preposed, such as Russian ТАНЮ (ACC) ВИДЕЛ КОЛЯ (NOM)/Таню (ACC) videl Kólja (NOM). To a large extent, the functional equivalent of English rules that change grammatical relations is the possibility of word-order permutations in Slavonic languages.

While it is reasonably clear that for English the basic word order is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), the question of the basic word order in Slavonic languages is not so clear in syntactic terms (though one can say that the basic order is Topic-X-Focus). For some languages, such as Russian, there is consensus that the basic order is SVO, for instance on the basis of the greater textual frequency of SVO over other word orders and on the basis of the preferred interpretation of potentially ambiguous sentences like МАТЬ ЛЮБИТ ДОЧЬ/*mat' ljubit doč'* 'the mother loves the daughter' (rather than 'the daughter loves the mother'), where both nouns happen not to distinguish nominative from accusative. The grammatical traditions of some other Slavonic languages, however, either suggest other basic orders or no basic order in syntactic terms, and this is reflected in the chapters on individual Slavonic languages.

#### 2.4 Agreement and agreement categories

Slavonic languages preserve a rich inflectional morphology and have made innovations in the categories involved in agreement; these two facts result in complex agreement systems, which have attracted considerable interest. Typically, we find agreement within the noun phrase in case, number and gender. In Russian ИНТЕРЕСН-АЯ КНИГА/*interesn-aja kniga* 'interesting book', the adjective ИНТЕРЕСН-АЯ/*interesn-aja* stands in the nominative singular feminine form, these features matching those of the head noun. Finite verbs typically agree with their subject in person and number; Russian МЫ ПИШ-ЕМ/*my piš-em* 'we write' as opposed to, say, ОНИ ПИШ-УТ/*oni piš-ut* 'they write'. Past tenses are frequently formed with the so-called *l*-participle, which creates a more interesting situation, as in Serbo-Croat Снежана је дошла/*Snežana je došla* 'Snežana came (literally: Snežana is come)'. Here the auxiliary verb *je*/*je* 'is' shows agreement in person and number (third person singular), while the participle shows agreement in number and gender (singular and feminine). Some Slavonic languages, such as Russian, use a null form for the verb 'be' in the present tense, so that we find: ТАНЯ ПРИШЛА/*Tanja prišla* 'Tanja came'. The former participle is the sole form in the past tense, so it may be said that Russian verbs agree in person and number in the present, but in number and gender in the past. Various types of pronoun also show agreement with their antecedents, in number and gender. The description given so far

covers a large proportion of the instances of agreement in Slavonic. There are, however, many examples where additional factors are involved, which require elaboration of our account. We will consider these first in terms of the constructions where complications occur, and then by looking at the agreement categories affected.

There are several constructions where more than one agreement form may be found. Consider this example of agreement with conjoined noun phrases in Russian: преподава́лась матемáтика и физика/*prepodaválas' matemátika i fizika* 'was taught mathematics and physics', that is, 'mathematics and physics were taught'. We find agreement (feminine singular) with just the nearer conjunct матемáтика/*matemátika*. But the plural form преподава́лись/*prepodavális'* is also possible, showing agreement with both conjuncts. A similar option occurs in comitative constructions (such as Ива́н с бра́том/*Iván s brátom* 'Ivan with brother', that is 'Ivan and his brother'). Quantified expressions too are a complex area: given a phrase like пять де́вушек/*pjat' dévušek* 'five girls' we may find plural agreement, but alternatively also neuter singular agreement. Subject-verb agreement in Slavonic is normally controlled by a noun phrase in the nominative case. Here, however, the part of the phrase which is in the nominative case, пять/*pjat'* 'five', lacks gender and number features, while де́вушек/*dévušek* 'girls' is in the genitive plural; one possibility, therefore, is that agreement fails, and so the verb takes the default form, the neuter singular. Alternatively, the plural may be used, given that the quantified expression, though not formally nominative plural, nevertheless denotes a plurality. This gives rise to variants пришло́ (SG) пять де́вушек/*prišlo (SG) pjat' dévušek* and пришли́ (PL) пять де́вушек/*prišli (PL) pjat' dévušek* 'five girls came'. The constructions discussed have in common a choice between agreement determined by the form, 'syntactic agreement', or by the meaning, 'semantic agreement'. Several factors bear on the choice in individual instances. Let us look at the problem from the viewpoint of the item which determines the agreement, the 'agreement controller' (for instance, the conjoined noun phrases in our first example). We find that controllers which precede the agreeing element and controllers which denote animates are more likely to give rise to semantic agreement (plural in this case) than those which do not. If we start from the agreeing element or 'target' we find that predicates are more likely to show semantic agreement than are attributive modifiers, relative pronouns more so than predicates, and personal pronouns more so than relative pronouns. This is the Agreement Hierarchy (attributive < predicate < relative pronoun < personal pronoun). Further patterns have been established, in addition to the interaction of these two major types of factor, so that the picture is indeed complex; see, for instance, Corbett (1983) for further details.

Let us now move on to consider the agreement system in terms of the

categories involved. Person is perhaps the least controversial since Slavonic has the three persons found widely within and beyond Indo-European. It is worth noting, however, that Polish uses third-person forms for polite address. Number is more complex; Slavonic inherited a three-number system, singular/dual/plural, but the dual has been lost in almost all the modern Slavonic languages. However, this loss has caused considerable complications in agreement within numeral phrases involving the number 'two', and often 'three' and 'four' as well.

Slavonic languages are particularly helpful for coming to a clearer understanding of the category of gender (for a general survey see Corbett 1991). The standard languages preserve three genders, masculine, feminine and neuter, though the neuter is under pressure in several languages and is being lost in some dialects. In addition to the three main genders, a new subgender of animacy has arisen. In the accusative case, animates take different agreements from inanimates, for example Serbo-Croat *òvāj pròzor/òvāj pròzor* 'this window' (inanimate) as opposed to *òvog sīna/òvor sīna* 'this son' (animate). There are no separate accusative forms involved, but always syncretism with the genitive; thus *òvog sīna/òvor sīna* 'this son' is also a genitive case form. There is considerable variation of two sorts, first in the forms affected. In the south-west, as in the case of Serbo-Croat, only the masculine gender is subdivided into animate and inanimate, and that in the singular only. Russian, in the north-east, is at the other end of the spectrum since animacy affects the masculine singular and all genders in the plural. The other type of variation is in the categories of nouns treated as animate. First male humans of certain types were included, and then the boundary spread 'downwards'. The animate subgender is still much more firmly based on semantic classifications than are the three older genders, but in some languages various inanimates may be treated as animate and the semantic basis is becoming less clear.

In addition to this elaboration of the gender system, some West Slavonic languages have further introduced special agreements for nouns denoting male persons (thus a subset of the masculine animate subgender). In Polish, for example, we have in the plural an opposition between predicate agreement forms such as *byli* 'were', for subjects denoting male persons, and *były* 'were' for all other plural subjects. Here again, the assignment of nouns to the masculine personal category is much more clearly based on semantics than are the traditional genders.

Finally, we look at case (though recognizing that the matching of case forms need not necessarily be treated as agreement). Most of the Slavonic languages preserve a vital case system, with minor weakenings (several have lost the vocative, for example). However, Bulgarian and Macedonian have dramatically reduced the inherited case system. For the languages which retain a substantial case system, a particularly interesting problem of case agreement is the question of whether nominal complements of copular

verbs agree in case with their subject or not: in the equivalent of sentences like 'he was a fine poet', the complement may be nominative or instrumental, depending on the language, with both possibilities acceptable in some languages.

### 3 Suggestions for using this book

The book has been designed to meet the differing requirements of a variety of readers. Some need a straightforward reference work, and for them information on particular languages can be found through the contents page, while more specific data on particular topics is to be located through the index. Then there are linguists of various types, who may require a general introduction to the Slavonic family. Such readers might start by working on any one of the chapters devoted to a contemporary Slavonic language, and then by branching out from there. Typologists can begin from a particular problem, whether in phonology, morphology, syntax or lexis, and move from language to language concentrating on the relevant section. Historical linguists with a grounding in Indo-European philology will no doubt prefer to start with the chapters on Proto-Slavonic, Old Church Slavonic and the alphabets and transliteration, and then progress to the modern languages. Sociolinguists should begin at the end, with the chapter on the Slavonic languages in exile, and then refer particularly to the introductory and dialect sections of the chapters on the modern languages.

Slavists too can approach the book in various ways. The Slavist could look first at the Slavonic language he or she knows best, since this will make it clear how the familiar information is organized. Alternatively, it makes sense to explore the family either by looking at a new Slavonic language which is closely related to a familiar one, or to take the opposite view and to look at a language which is as different as possible from the language or languages already known. After looking at one or more of the contemporary languages, the Slavist might then take in the chapter on alphabets and transliteration, followed by the historical perspective in the chapters on Proto-Slavonic and Old Church Slavonic, and also the chapter on the Slavonic languages in exile.

### References

- Anderson, Stephen R. (1985) *Phonology in the Twentieth Century: Theories of Rules and Theories of Representations*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Berlin, Brent and Kay, Paul (1969) *Basic Color Terms: their Universality and Evolution*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bräuer, Herbert (1961- ) *Slavische Sprachwissenschaft*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Comrie, Bernard (1976) *Aspect*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Corbett, Greville G. (1983) *Hierarchies, Targets and Controllers: Agreement Patterns in Slavonic*, London: Croom Helm.
- (1991) *Gender*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Bray, R.G.A. (1951) *Guide to the Slavonic Languages*, London: Dent. (Third edition 1980 in three volumes: *Guide to the South Slavonic Languages*; *Guide to the West Slavonic Languages*; *Guide to the East Slavonic Languages*, Columbus, Oh.: Slavica.)
- Entwistle, W.J. and Morison, W.A. (1949) *Russian and the Slavonic Languages*, London: Faber & Faber.
- Halle, Morris (1959) *The Sound Pattern of Russian*, The Hague: Mouton.
- Horálek, Karel (1962) *Úvod do studia slovanských jazyků*, 2nd edn, Prague: Nakladatelství Československé akademie věd.
- Hutchins, W.J. (1986) *Machine Translation: Past, Present, Future*, Chichester: Ellis Horwood, and New York: John Wiley.
- Jakobson, Roman (1948) 'Russian conjugation', *Word* 4: 155-67. Reprinted 1984 in Roman Jakobson, *Russian and Slavic Grammar: Studies 1931-1981*, Berlin: Mouton, 15-26.
- (1955) *Slavic Languages: a Condensed Survey*, New York: King's Crown Press.
- Lehr-Spławiński, Tadeusz, Kuraszkiewicz, Władysław and Sławski, Franciszek (1954) *Przegląd i charakterystyka języków słowiańskich*, Warsaw: Państwowe wydawnictwo naukowe.
- Mathesius, Vilém (1939) 'O tak zvaném aktuálním členění věty', *Slovo a slovesnost* 5: 171-4.
- (1947) *Čeština a obecný jazykozpyt: soubor statí*, Prague: Melantrich.
- Miklosich, Franz (1862-75) *Vergleichende Grammatik der slavischen Sprachen*, vol. I *Lautlehre*, vol. II *Stambildungslehre*, vol. III *Formenlehre*, vol. IV *Syntax*, Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller.
- Nahtigal, Rajko (1952) *Slovanski jeziki*, Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Filozofska fakulteta. (German translation 1961: *Die slavischen Sprachen, Abriß der vergleichenden Grammatik*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz; Russian translation 1963: *Славянские языки*, Москва: Издательство иностранной литературы.)
- Panzer, Baldur (1991) *Die slavischen Sprachen in Gegenwart und Geschichte: Sprachstrukturen und Verwandtschaft* (Heidelberger Publikationen zur Slavistik. A: Linguistische Reihe, 3). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Picchio, Riccardo and Goldblatt, Harvey (eds) (1984) *Aspects of the Slavic Language Question*, vol. I *Church Slavonic - South Slavic - West Slavic*, vol. II *East Slavic*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale Concilium on International and Area Studies.
- Růžička, Rudolf (1973) 'Reflexive versus nonreflexive pronominalization in Modern Russian and other Slavic languages', in F. Kiefer and N. Ruwet (eds) *Generative Grammar in Europe* (Foundations of Language Supplementary Series 13), Dordrecht-Holland: Reidel, 445-81.
- Schenker, Alexander M. and Stankiewicz, Edward (eds) (1980) *The Slavic Literary Languages: Formation and Development*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale Concilium on International and Area Studies.
- Stone, Gerald and Worth, Dean (eds) (1985) *The Formation of the Slavonic Literary Languages* (UCLA Slavic Studies 11), Columbus, Oh.: Slavica.
- Vaillant, André (1950-77) *Grammaire comparée des langues slaves*, 5 vols, Paris: IAC (vols I-II), Klincksieck (vols III-V).
- van Wijk, Nicolaas (1956) *Les Langues slaves. De l'unité à la pluralité*, 2nd edn, The Hague: Mouton. (First edition 1937 in *Le Monde slave*.)

Vondrák, Václav (1906-8) *Vergleichende slavische Grammatik*, vol. I *Lautlehre und Stammbildungslehre*, vol. II *Formenlehre und Syntax*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (Second edition 1924-28.)

Бернштейн, С.Б. (1961) *Очерк сравнительной грамматики славянских языков*, Москва: АН СССР.