

**Title:** Vowel Reduction and Language Change in Russian and Belarusian Verbs  
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The paper focuses on the effects of vowel reduction on paradigm contrast and paradigm levelling in the verbal system of Russian and Belarusian. Morphological change generally takes one of two forms: 1) either the potential loss of a contrast within a paradigm is avoided by the introduction of a different suffix, or 2) contrast is lost and the paradigm is reclassified as another type. An example of the former is the Old Moscow norm use of 3 pl {-ut} in Conjugation II verbs, e.g., [ljúbjut] instead of the expected vowel reduction to [ljúbjit] for *ljubjat* 'they love' to avoid homophony with the 3 sg form [ljúbjit]. An example of the latter is the shift of a verb like *dremat* 'to doze' from Conjugation I to Conjugation II where it acquires the morphophonemic alternation characteristic of Conjugation II verbs, e.g., *dremljú*, 1 sg, *drémiš*, 2 sg.

While frequency may be a factor contributing to the pattern of change in some cases, many of the morphological changes discussed here are not what would be predicted on the basis of frequency, markedness or productivity criteria alone. The changes are clearly motivated by the reflexes of vowel reduction. Furthermore, the nature of some of these analogical changes raises provocative questions about how speakers identify members of a given morphological category and what actually constitutes a base for paradigmatic levelling. In any case, it is clear that morphology must have access to the outputs of vowel reduction in these systems.