

Title: Morphology on the Surface: The Belarusian Genitive Plural

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Abstract:

The genitive plural allomorphs of Standard Belarusian (SB) nouns are /-ow/, /-Ø/, and /-ej/. They were originally correlated with declension class: /-ow/ with Declension Ia masculines, /-Ø/ with Ib neuters and Declension II nouns, and /-ej/ in Declension III (Karskii 1911/1956, Iankoŭski 1989). But the /-ow/ allomorph is now being extended from Declension Ia to all other declension classes. What is remarkable about this change is that the allomorph being extended is specifically the unstressed pronunciation of /-ow/, [-aw]. For example, Declension III nouns which normally have suffix stress in the genitive plural with etymological /-ej/, actually shift stress to the stem in order to accommodate [-aw] and do not permit [-ow] (Biryła and Shuba 1985, Lukashanets 2007, Mayo 1976): *vóblasʲɕj: ablasʲɕj-ěj ~ vóblasʲɕj-aw* 'oblast'.

I cite other evidence in support of the argument that the automatic outcome of vowel neutralization has now acquired independent status in morphology as /-aw/. Thus, in a serial derivational grammar, morphology would be taking place on the surface, so to speak, in that vowel neutralization precedes allomorph selection. This development is strongly favored by full *akanne/jakanne* in SB because it gives [a], by the freedom of distribution of /-aw/ itself (it may occur after non-palatalized as well as palatalized consonants, unlike /-ej/), by the presence of /a/ in the oblique cases of the plural (dat /-am/, prep /-ax/, instr /-amji/), by token frequency, and also by Belarusian orthography which spells vowel neutralization.

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