

Title: The Historic Roots of Russian Defective Verbs  
Author: Matthew Baerman, University of Surrey

It is well known that Russian has a set of 2nd conjugation verbs which are defective for the 1sg (e.g. *\*pobežu*), but little is known about how this came about. In this paper we trace what can be recovered of their history, using data from the Russian National Corpus and from older grammatical treatises, dictionaries and style guides. In so doing we uncover evidence of an unrecognized class of non-alternating 2nd conjugation verbs which enjoyed acceptance in earlier stages of the literary language. We argue that contemporary defectives represent the last remnants of this defunct inflectional subclass.

Taking Zaliznjak's (1977) list of defectives as a point of reference, we observe a strong correlation between them and dental-stem verbs which earlier observers cited as lacking the expected stem-final consonant alternation, e.g. *očutit'sja* has 1SG *očutitjus'* in the 1st Academy Dictionary (1789-94) in place of *\*očučus'*. Later observers have denied the existence of this class (Obnorskij 1953, Černyšev 1915, Pavskij 1841), but references to it abound in 17th and 18th century sources (Polikarpov (1704) lists 50 verbs), going back to Smotryc'kyj's (1619), where, *pace* Horbatsch (1974), such verbs are clearly not due to the intrusion of dialect features, but represent a conscious innovation within the Church Slavic tradition (though a plausible Common Slavic origin can be proposed for at least two verbs).

The contemporary defectives are the reflex of two strata of originally non-alternating verbs, one consisting of Church Slavicisms such as *bdet'*, the other of substandard items such as *ljamzit'*. Both existed at the margins of the written language. With the codification of the literary norm, a new class of defectives was created from them.