The *Masculine Personal* in West Slavic: Unraveling the feature knot

Gilbert C. Rappaport
University of Texas at Austin
grapp@mail.utexas.edu

The generative approach to linguistic analysis has made it possible to formulate generalizations by decomposing apparent structural unities into distinct components which function in the grammar independently of each other. In the domain of phonology, phonemes were decomposed into phonological features which were subject to regularities regardless of the particular phoneme involved. Syntactic constructions can be derived by Argument or Non-argument movement, with the properties of these more elemental mechanisms studied independently of any particular construction. The present paper looks at the morphological category of *Masculine Personal* found in Standard Literary Polish (and, to a lesser degree, in Polish dialects and in some neighboring Slavic languages) from this 'deconstructional' perspective.

The default for Polish nominal morphology is for there to be no distinction between the Nominative and Accusative desinences in the plural. However, a noun (satisfying certain formal morphological conditions) which denotes a group including at least one male human typically replaces both of these endings: the Nominative takes the form *-i* (exceptionally *-owie*, instead of *–y*) and the Accusative is syncretic with the Genitive (instead of with the Nominative). This differentiation is found not only in the noun and pronoun, making it a properly morphological feature, but in the agreeing adjective and (with some complications) numeral, making it a morphosyntactic feature as well:

(1) a. kot 'cat':
i. Nom: te młode koty 'these young cats'
ii. Acc (=Nom): te młode koty 'ibid.'

b. pilot 'pilot':
i. Nom: ci młodzi piloci 'these young pilots'
ii. Acc (=Gen): tych młodych pilotów 'ibid.'

The morphosyntactic affect of this feature is seen in predicate agreement (with a Nominative subject) as well:

(1) c. i. koty spały 'The cats were sleeping'
ii. piloci spali 'the pilots were sleeping'

If this were the extent of the story, then the analysis would be simple: there is a feature [masculine personal] and the spell-out of the Nominative and Accusative plural is sensitive to this feature (just as the spell-out of the Accusative singular is sensitive to an [animate] feature: *widzę ten paszport-∅* 'I see this passport' versus *widzę tego kot-a* 'I see this cat'). However, it is possible to observe either desinence substitution without the other, requiring a distinction in their conditioning environments.

First, there is a substantial and productive category of *depreciative* nouns in Polish (Saloni 1988; Rappaport, forthcoming), which satisfy the formal and semantic conditions of the Masculine Personal and correspondingly display the Genitive-Accusative syncretism, but not the distinctive Nominative form:

(2) brudas 'slob':
i. Nom: te brudasy 'these slobs'
ii. Acc(=Gen): tych brudasów 'ibid.'

We take the Acc-Gen syncretism to be a direct consequence of the [masculine personal] feature, analogous to the relationship of the parallel syncretism in the singular with the feature [animate]. The Nominative form (but not the Accusative) requires reference to an additional feature, which we will call [depreciative: ±]. The various mechanisms by which this feature is valued will be explored. It is ultimately a sub-gender of a subgender (a subset of masculine personals, which in turn are a subset of masculines), just as animates constitute a subset of masculines in the singular.

Further discrepancies between the two case forms are found in Polish dialects. There are dialects in which the Gen-Acc extends in the plural to all animates (Dejna 1973), so that it is only the Nominative which is sensitive to the Masculine Personal feature.

An interesting contrast, the converse of the depreciative, is provided by the honorific construction used in some Polish dialects (Makarski 1973):

(3) a. Babka poszli.
woman went$_{\text{3rd.Masc Pers.Pl}}$
'The woman went.'

b. nasi dziadek mówili
our$_{\text{Masc Pers.Pl}}$ grandfather$_{\text{Sg}}$ said$_{\text{3rd.Masc Pers.Pl}}$
'our grandfather said'

In these dialects the distinctive Nominative Plural form of the Masculine Personal is found, but not the Genitive-Accusative. The category is used non-referentially: the referent need be neither plural nor masculine. Moreover, this *pluralis maiestatis* form is reflected in agreement, but not in the noun itself. That is, the Masculine Personal property is expressed morphosyntacticly, but not morphologically. Therefore we cannot merely assume that the honorific is expressed by associating the noun denoting a prestige referent with the feature [masculine personal]. We propose that morphological features (proper) are housed at the head level (N), while morphosyntactic features are housed at the D level, and that the honorific plural is a D-level phenomenon, not an N-level one. The distinction of D-level and N-level morphology is further supported by the behavior of depreciatives, which can trigger Masculine Personal or default plural (*brudasy byli* or *były* 'slobs were'). We see the essence of this distinction as follows: D is the source of referential features, while N is the source of lexical features. The parallel morphosyntactic:morphological distinction follows as derivative of grammatical structure (locality).

Finally, the notion of `Masculine Personal' should be unbundled into two features, as indicated by coordinated structures:

(4) Dziewczyna i pies spacerowali w parku.
girl$_{\text{Sg}}$ and dog$_{\text{Sg}}$ strolled$_{\text{Masc Pers.Pl}}$ in park
'A girl and a dog strolled in the park.'

One subject noun provides the [personal] feature and the other provides the [masculine] feature, and only their coordination provides the plural environment required to trigger the Masculine Personal form of the predicate.

The reason for the relative independence of the two case markers (Nom and Acc) of the Masculine Personal lies in the historical origin of the category, the result of two independent developments of paradigm leveling which followed (in opposite directions) the Animacy Hierarchy; it was essentially an accident (a contingent historical development) that in Polish (and neighboring Slavic) dialects these two changes met to partition nouns into Masculine Personal and others, prompting a semanticization of a change in nominal morphology which was purely formal (paradigmatic) in its essence (Rappaport 2009).

Bibliography

Dejna, Karol. 1973. *Dialekty polskie*. Ossolineum.

Makarski, Władysław. 1973. 'Konstrukcje *pluralis maiestatis* w gwarach Rzeszowszczyzny'. *Poradnik językowy* 1.30-34.

Rappaport, Gilbert C. 2009. 'The Grammaticalization of the Category *Masculine Personal* in West Slavic.' *Wiener slawistischerAlmanach*, vol. 74, 169-80. Special issue: *Diachronic Slavonic Syntax: Gradual Changes in Focus*, ed. by Björn Hansen and Jasmina Grković-Major.

Rappaport, Gilbert C., forthcoming. 'Toward a Multi-level Theory of Morphology: How Polish Gender works'. *Generative Investigations: Syntax, morphology, and phonology*, ed. by Piotr Bański, Beata Łukaszewicz, and Monika Opalińska. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Saloni, Zygmunt. 1988. 'O tzw. formach nieosobowych rzeczowników męskoosobowych we współczesnej polszczyźnie.' *Biuletyn polskiego towarzystwa językoznawczego* 41.155-66.