

Deriving Collectives in Old Slavic

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For the most part in languages, we see the morphology, syntax, and semantics working together to express the lexical and grammatical meanings of a given word. However, there are often cases where we see that the morphology, syntax or semantics are at odds with one other, such as the so-called “collectives” in Indo-European. Slavic is one branch of Indo-European that has them, but it has not been adequately explored. This paper is concerned with how these collectives are derived in Old Slavic and the diachrony of this derivational process, within a wider Indo-European and potentially cross-linguistic context. We reanalyze Slavic collectives as substantivizations of possessives and genitivals.

Following Nussbaum (2014), we define true collectives as those items that are syntactically or morphologically singulars while they make reference to a multiplicity. We are particularly interested in derived collectives. These have been reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European, e.g. Oettinger (1995, 1999), and we can observe them in the oldest stages of Slavic, as well. For example, Matasović (2005) derives the collectives in -īje, e.g. *drěvije* ‘tree grove’ from *drěvo* ‘tree’ (Vaillant, 1974), from the PIE collective formant *-ey-/-i-. Moreover, Slavic collectives show different agreement patterns based on their morphology (attributives) and plural semantic interpretation (predicates) (Huntley, 1989).

How did these forms come to have these disconnects among the syntax, semantics, and morphology? Throughout Indo-European newer and branch-specific (i.e. synchronic) collectives are derived from genitivals (e.g. Ved. *pārśu-* ‘rib’ → *pārśvám* ‘side,’ Lat. *porrum* ‘leek’ → *porrina* ‘leek field’) or possessives (e.g. Lat. *arbōs* ‘tree’ → *arbustum* ‘copse,’ Ved. *gó-* ‘cow’ → *gómat* ‘wealth in cattle’). We follow Nussbaum (2014) in describing the derivational process for creating collectives in PIE and many of the daughter languages (e.g. Latin, Greek, Vedic, etc.) as the following:

Non-Collective → Possessive (Internally or externally derived) → Collective (Externally derived by *-h₂)

Thus, in PIE, the basic collectives had a two-step derivational history: first the derivation of the possessive through the thematic vowel, then the addition of *-h₂- to the thematic stem to form a collective, which connects them to the other categories of feminine, neuter plural, and abstract nominals.

<u>Non-collective</u>	→	<u>Possessive</u> (*-o/e-, no <i>vrddhi</i>)	→	<u>Possessive plus *-h₂ = collective/deliberative</u>
*h ₂ user- (ἀήρ ‘air’)		*h ₂ usr-o/e-		*h ₂ usre-h ₂ (αῦρα ‘a breeze’)
*ph ₂ ur- (πῦρ ‘fire’)		*ph ₂ ur-o/e- (*πῦρόν ‘watch-fire’ §8.2.3.2)		*ph ₂ ure-h ₂ (πῦρή ‘burning mass’)

Figure 1: Possessive-plus-*h₂ collectives and their two-step derivation

Slavic is a daughter language that follows this same pattern: throughout Slavic, collectives are derived from substantivizations of possessives and genitivals. For example we can take the collective numerals. These are derived from de-numeral adjectives, which have a general meaning of ‘X-fold’ (Majer, 2017):

*pęterō ‘a 5-fold (entity) > ‘a group of 5’ from the inflected adjective *pęterŭ, -a, -o ‘5-fold’

We see the transition from substantivizations of adjectives and genitivals to collectives within the history of Slavic. The suffix *-istvo* derived substantives at the Old Slavic stage, e.g. *balistvo* ‘medicine.’ Over time, this suffix shifted to a collective meaning, as seen in many of the modern languages, e.g. Cz. *lidstvo* ‘human race,’ Slovene *ljudstvo* ‘men.’

We can map the derivational scheme for Old Slavic in the same way as PIE. The intermediate stage might not be attested morphologically, but the semantics still hold: going from ‘X’ to ‘group of X.’ Thus, the collective of ‘pine tree’ would literally be ‘grove of pine trees,’ indicating the possessive/substantivized nature of the shift.

Non-collective	→	<u>Poss./Substant.</u>	→	<u>Collective</u>
<i>pero</i> ‘feather’				<i>perije</i> ‘feathers’
<i>prǫtǫ</i> ‘stick’				<i>prǫtije</i> ‘bundle of sticks’
<i>borǫ</i> ‘pine tree’				<i>borije</i> ‘pine grove (i.e. grove of pine trees)’
<i>pěti</i> ‘5’		<i>pěterǫ</i> ‘5-fold’		<i>pě</i> ‘group of 5’

Figure 2: Derivation of collectives in Old Slavic

All of this shows that the same general method of deriving collectives in PIE were used in Old Slavic. We can see those processes both synchronically in Old Slavic and diachronically in the developments that lead to modern Slavic. The motivations for this systems likely go beyond Indo-European as a cross-linguistic phenomenon. But in order to test such a claim, we must investigate more of the Indo-European daughter languages as well as other language families with rich collective nominal systems. This paper is just a stepping stone on the path to understanding collectives not only in Indo-European but also cross-linguistically.

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