

On Markedness and Marked Features in Serbian

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The goal of this paper is to provide a unified account for a handful of phenomena in Serbian morphology related to plurality, gender and possessive adjectives. The seemingly unrelated phenomena display similarities that suggest a common source, and motivate a unified analysis.

The Facts. (I) Serbian adjectives agree with the noun they modify in case, number and gender (1)-(2). The agreement affixes on *lep* ‘beautiful’, which agrees with SG.M *dečak* ‘boy’ in (1), and SG.F *žena* ‘woman’ in (2), largely coincide with the affixes on pronouns. It appears that the same affixes are what clitic pronouns solely consist of. In PL, however, in all non-nominative cases ([-NOM]), disregarding vocative, which is treated independently, adjectives exhibit total syncretism, and do not show gender distinctions, e.g., *lep-ih_{GEN.PL}*, may equally refer to a feminine or masculine group (3), while this distinction is clear with singular forms. The same stands for PL pronouns (3). PL adjectives and pronouns show gender distinction only in [+NOM] (4). **(II)** In Serbian, gender strongly correlates with Declension Classes (DC) (e.g., Mrazović and Vukadinović, 1990); all DCI nouns (1), are either masculine or neuter, and most of the DCII nouns (2) are feminine (see also Wechsler and Zlatić 2003). Exceptions to the latter rule are nouns like *vojvoda* ‘duke’, or proper names like *Nikola*, which belong to the DCII, as *žena* in (2), but show masculine agreement on the adjective, as if they were DCI (5). However, in [+NOM] PL, the only PL case with gender distinctions, the agreement is reversed: adjectives show the feminine DCII agreement (6). **(III)** As in other Slavic languages Serbian possessive adjectives (PAs) are formed from nouns via suffixation (*-ov/-in*) and show the number/gender/case agreement (7). PAs are restricted in many ways (Corbett 1987), one of which is that they cannot be formed out of PL nouns. This, however, is not true of pronominal PAs, which have both SG and PL forms, with the gender distinction holding in SG (8). Also, there existed, and to some extent still exist, pronominal PL PAs which distinguish for gender; for speakers that use these productively, (9) refers to PL feminine, and (8c) to PL masculine.

The Analysis. I assume a theory of morphological markedness, which determines which features, or combinations of features are marked (Calabrese 2008). I take that PL is marked as opposed to SG, and that all [-NOM] cases are marked as opposed to [+NOM]. Semantic gender is also assumed to be marked. The constraint in (10), a statement on markedness accumulation, specifies that Serbian agreement affixes cannot express more than two marked features. Due to the hierarchy in (11), it is gender that is systematically excluded out of the possible marked features; this way affixes on adjectives, and pronouns show gender in SG, and PL [+NOM], but not in PL [-NOM]. As for the facts in **(II)** above, the filter in (12) is added. I take that every nominal stem has to be specified for DC, from which (semantic) gender, if present, is implied in most cases, i.e., nouns need not be specified for gender, but have to be for DC. However, the gender feature of a noun like *vojvoda* is not implied by its DC, but is distinct and additionally specified, which triggers the agreement mismatch in (5). (12) then ensures that the two marked features on the affix cannot be PL and gender. Thus, in accordance with (11), the PL adjective agreement in (6a) defaults to DC. To explain **(III)** I propose that pronominal stems, unlike nominal ones, are specified for no morphological features, but only provide suitable phonological hosts for agreement affixes. Since nominal PAs can be derived only from animate nouns, their stems also have to be specified for (semantic) gender, a marked feature. A simple assumption that the possessive affix cannot be added to the maximum of two marked features accounts for the difference between nominal and pronominal PAs; PL nominal stems, unlike pronominal ones, always include an extra gender feature, which makes them systematically surpass the relevant markedness threshold. A noun like *deca* ‘children’ additionally supports this. This noun is specified for PL, and triggers PL agreement on verbs (13), but belongs to the DCII, and shows SG adjectival agreement (14). Since it declines as singular, a PA could conceivably be formed out of it via *-in* suffixation, as in the case of *žena*, or *vojvoda* in (15), which contradicts the facts (16). Pronominal PAs, however, are not subject to this constraint, and even cases like (9) are allowed.

(1)

Sg.	Adj.	Noun _M	Pron _{3.SG.M.}	Clitic
Nom	lep	dečak	on	<i>pro</i>
Gen	lep- og(a)	dečak-a	njega	ga
Dat	lep- om(e)	dečak-u	njemu	mu
Acc	lep- og(a)	dečak-a	njega	ga
Voc	lep-i	dečač-e	-	-
Instr	lep- im	dečak-om	njim	-
Loc	lep- om(e)	dečak-u	njemu	-

(2)

Sg.	Adj.	Noun _F	Pron _{3.SG.F.}	Clitic
Nom	lep-a	žen-a	on-a	<i>pro</i>
Gen	lep- e	žen-e	nje	je
Dat	lep- oj	žen-i	njoj	joj
Acc	lep- u	žen-u	nju	je/ju
Voc	lep-a	žen-o	-	-
Instr	lep- om	žen-om	njom	-
Loc	lep- oj	žen-i	njoj	-

(3)

Pl.	Adj.	Noun _{MASC}	Noun _{FEM}	Pronoun	Clitic
Gen	lep- ih	dečak-a:	žen-a:	njih	ih
Dat	lep- im	dečac- ima	žen- ama	njima	im
Acc	lep- e	dečak- e	žen- e	njih	ih
Instr	lep- im	dečac- ima	žen- ama	njima	-
Loc	lep- im	dečac- ima	žen- ama	njima	-

- (4) a. Nom: Lep-**i** dečac-**i** *Beautiful boys*; On-**i** *They_{MASC}*.
 b. Nom: Lep-**e** žen-**e** *Beautiful women*; On-**e** *They_{FEM}*.

(5)

Sg	Adj. (DCI _M – masc.)	Noun (DCII – fem)
Nom	lep	Nikol-a/vojvod-a
Gen	lep- og	Nikol- e /vojvod- e
Dat	lep- om	Nikol- i /vojvod- i
Acc	lep- og	Nikol- u /vojvod- u
Instr	lep- im	Nikol- om /vojvod- om
Loc	lep- om	Nikol- i /vojvod- i

- (6) a. Lep-**e** vojvod-**e** ‘Beautiful dukes’.
 b.*Lep-**i** vojvod-**e** ‘Beautiful dukes’.
 (7) a. dečak-**ov**-a bicikla ‘the boy’s bicycle’.
 b. žen-**in**-a bicikla ‘the woman’s bicycle’.
 (8) a. njeg_{GEN.S.M} + **-ov** – njegov ‘his’.
 b. nje_{GEN.S.F} + **-in** – njen ‘her’.
 c. njih_{GEN.PL} + **-ov** – njihov ‘their’.
 (9) njih_{GEN.PL} + **-in** – njen ‘their_{PL.F}’.
 (11) Number/Case > Gender
 (13) Deca dolaze / *dolazi.
 Children come_{PRES.3.PL} / come_{PRES.3.SG}
 ‘The children are coming.’
 (15) a. ✓žen-in otac ‘the woman’s father’.
 b. ✓Nikol-in otac ‘Nikola’s father’.
 c. ✓vojvod-in otac ‘the duke’s father’.
 (16) a.*dec-in otac
 ‘the children’s father’.

(10) *[plural, gender, [-NOM]/+____]w

(12) *[plural, gender]/+____]w

(14)

	Adj	Noun
Nom	lep-a	dec-a
Gen	lep- e	dec-e
Dat	lep- oj	dec-i
Acc	lep- u	dec-u
Voc	lep-a	dec-o
Instr	lep- om	dec-om
Loc	lep- oj	dec-i

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