

## The Source for Singular Neuter Agreement on Predicates in Slavic

Dorota Jagódzka, PhD student  
Palacký University Olomouc

In many languages, there are morphological and syntactic differences within individual semantic classes of numerical expressions that define the boundary between lexemes denoting numerical values lower, so the lower numerals 2-4 and higher, from 5 onwards. This especially applies to the cardinal numerals. The Middle Ages is a period when languages like Old Polish and Old Czech still exhibited the internal diversity within the so-called lower numerals. Explanations of this state should be sought in the origins of numerals in Indo-European. Perhaps originally there existed only numerals *one*, *two* and *three*, and the latter could then mean 'many' as Ifrah (1990, 15) states that number *three* was already a threshold for a human numerical system which cannot be understood or defined, and "in the mind of a man the discovery of numbers stopped first on the two". The proof for the existence of such an initial limitation may be the early distinction between singular, dual and plural in Indo-European languages (Słoboda 2012).

Noun phrases containing higher numerals exhibit a characteristic pattern in Polish in which the predicate takes the third person singular inflection as exemplified in (b) whereas noun phrases containing lower numerals trigger number and gender agreement on the following verb which is shown in (a) below:

- a) *Dwie kobiety przyszły.*  
two-NOM-Fem women-NOM-Fem-pl come-pastPRT,Fem,pl
- b) *Pięć kobiet przyszło.*  
five-NOM-Fem women- GEN-Fem-pl come-pastPRT,3sg,Neu  
'Five women came.'

The previous solutions to the Polish numerals puzzle, for instance Klockmann (2012), Matushansky (2016), were based on gender and case issues as the main reasons for the agreement mismatch. In the present study, I argue that it is the number feature on the numeral itself which is responsible for the singular neuter agreement on the following verb. Diachronically, there were two patterns which competed in Old Polish (15<sup>th</sup> century in particular). One of them accounted for the formal agreement with the verb which took the third person singular feminine inflection, as the numerals were originally feminine nouns. The other one exhibited the need for a semantic agreement between the verb and a plural noun phrase which allowed the verb to take plural inflectional ending (Słoboda 2012). Synchronic data show that Present-day Polish numerals trigger the singular agreement on the following predicate and the choice of the neuter gender is a default one.

### References

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