

A micro-typology of augments

Greville Corbett, Sacha Beniamine

Surrey Morphology Group, University of Surrey
g.corbett@surrey.ac.uk

Segmenting inflected words into stems and affixes is a core task underlying much of morphological analysis, from descriptive grammars to individual glossed examples. The task can be difficult, with alternative segmentations often possible (see Lounsbury, 1953; Bank, 2016). Given this **segmentation problem**, one solution adopts motivated principles to fold ambiguous material either into the stems (Spencer, 2012) or into the affixes (Bonami and Beniamine, 2021; Carroll and Beniamine, 2025). We take a third way, respecting the intermediate status of ambiguous segments (see Round, 2017: 752–754, 2023). We present a micro-typology of such augments, defined as the material in inflected forms which is intermediate between stems and affixes.

	‘city’	‘window’
NOM/ACC.SG	grad	prozor
VOC.SG	grad-e	prozor-e
GEN.SG	grad-a	prozor-a
DAT/LOC.SG	grad-u	prozor-u
INSTR.SG	grad-om	prozor-om
NOM/VOC.PL	grad- ov-i	prozor-i
ACC.PL	grad- ov-e	prozor-e
GEN.PL	grad- ov-ā	prozor-ā
DAT/LOC/INS.PL	grad- ov-ima	prozor-ima

Table 1: The Serbo-Croat augment *-ov-*, present in *grad* ‘city’, but not in *prozor* ‘window’

	SG	PL
NOM/VOC/ACC	jehn-ě	jehn- at-a
GEN	jehn- ět-e	jehn- at
DAT	jehn- ět-i	jehn- at-ům
LOC	jehn- ět-i	jehn- at-ech
INS	jehn- ět-em	jehn- at-y

Table 2: The Czech augments *-et-* and *-at-* in *jehně* ‘lamb’ (Short, 1993a: 470)

Table 1 shows the *-ov-* augment in Serbo-Croat. One would be hard pressed to see it as part of an allomorphic stem, since it is regular in two ways: (i) its presence is largely predictable from the inflection class and syllabic structure (Baerman et al., 2017: 93–98) and (ii) its shape is (largely) the same across lexemes. It is similarly awkward to analyze it as an affixal exponent of the plural, because (i) it is redundant, since there are lexemes that have the same plural inflections, without the *-ov-* and (ii) even among lexemes which have it, it seemingly contributes no grammatical meaning, with some lexemes presenting two series of plurals, with and without augments.

In canonical typology (Corbett, 2015), stems and affixes are defined in terms of similarity vs difference across cells and across lexemes. As the locus of lexical meaning, canonical stems are consistent within the paradigm (across cells), but different across paradigms (across lexemes). As the locus of inflectional meaning, canonical affixes are consistent across paradigms, but distinct within paradigms. Augments, then, are sequences which may recur across *some* cells of a paradigm, and also across *some* paradigms. For this initial typology, we narrow the investigation of augments to affixal morphology. We note that the term ‘augment’ is not widely used. Our definition above is in line with Maiden (2004: 147–148) and Corbett (2000), while in classicist usage augment indicates an inflectional verbal prefix (Willi, 2018: 357–416; Rose, 2013; Joseph, 2023).

	SG	DU	PL
NOM/ACC	šel-e	šel- eš-i	šel- et-a
GEN	šel- eš-a	šel- eš-owu	šel- et-ow
DAT	šel- eš-eju	šel- eš-oma	šel- et-am
LOC	šel- eš-u	šel- eš-oma	šel- et-ach
INS	šel- eš-im	šel- eš-oma	šel- et-ami

Table 3: The Lower Sorbian augments *-eš-* and *-et-* in *šele* ‘calf’ (Menzel, 2023: 184)

	SG	PL
		-at- -en-
NOM	dievč-a	dievč- at-á dievč- enc-e
ACC	dievč-a	dievč- at-á dievč- enc-e
GEN	dievč- at'-a	dievč- at dievč- enic
DAT	dievč- at'-u	dievč- at-ám dievč- enc-om
LOC	dievč- at-i	dievč- at-ách dievč- enc-och
INS	dievč- at'-om	dievč- at-ami dievč- enc-ami

Table 4: The Slovak augments *-at-/at'-* and *-enc-* in *dievč-a* ‘girl’ (Short, 1993b:545, Martin Alldrick p.c.)

As augments split paradigms into augmented and non-augmented segments, we consider Corbett's (2015) dimensions of variation for lexical splits. Two of these apply to augments. Dimension 2 measures **motivation across cells**. On one side of the spectrum, Maiden (2004) describes the Italian *-isc-* suffix as morphomic: the set of cells where it occurs does not correspond to a featural generalisation. At the other end of the spectrum, the Serbo-Croat *-ov* augment (Table 1) is neatly distributed in the plural. Dimension 3 concerns **lexical regularity** across lexemes. In the above Serbo-Croat example, the augment is largely regular, as its presence is predictable to a high degree from a combination of syllabic structure and inflection class. At the other extreme, Russian *xozja-in* (SG), *xozja-ev-a* (PL) 'landlord' is unique in the language in having different augments for singular and plural.

Beyond presence vs. absence, complex splits are introduced when there are multiple augments, or when forms with augments are overabundant. In Czech we see **multiple augments** in Table 2: *-et-* is found in the singular (except the direct cases) and *-at-* in the plural. Lower Sorbian *šele* 'calf' splits singular+dual versus plural (Table 3). **Overabundance** may arise when a specific inflected form can occur both with and without the augment: Serbo-Croat *galeb* 'seagull', has the plural *galeb-i*, but more frequently *galeb-ov-i* (with the augment). Another possibility is for a lexical item to allow alternative augments: Slovak *dievča* 'girl' (Table 4) has alternative augments in the plural *-at-* or *-enc-*, thus showing overabundance.

Our micro-typology of augments comprises four dimensions. Motivation and regularity situate augments within the grey area between stems and affixes. The two others depend upon multiplicity in two dimensions (multiple augments, overabundance). Rather than hide this intermediate nature of augments, we have made it our focus. The resulting typology opens the prospect of sharper analyses of other challenging systems, such as the nominal paradigms in Dagestani languages (Kibrik, 2003).

Bibliography

- Baerman, Matthew, Dunstan Brown, and Greville G. Corbett (2017). *Morphological Complexity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781316343074.
- Bank, Sebastian (2016). "Segmentation: a remark on the Syncretism Principle". In: *Morphology* 27.1, 1–20. doi: 10.1007/s11525-016-9295-2.
- Bonami, Olivier and Sacha Beniamine (2021). "Leaving the stem by itself". In: *All Things Morphology*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 81–98. doi: 10.1075/cilt.353.05bon.
- Carroll, Mae and Sacha Beniamine (2025). "Exponence and the theory of discriminative information in paradigms". In: *Morphology* 35, 227–269. doi: 10.1007/s11525-025-09437-2.
- Corbett, Greville G. (2000). *Number*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (2015). "Morphosyntactic complexity: A typology of lexical splits". In: *Language* 91.1, 145–193. doi: 10.1353/lan.2015.0003.
- Joseph, Brian D. (2023). "The Greek Augment: What this Amazingly Enduring Element Says about Continuity in Greek". In: *Classical Philology and Linguistics: Old Themes and New Perspectives*. Ed. by Georgios K. Giannakis et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 165–174. doi: 10.1515/9783111272887-007.
- Kibrik, Aleksandr E. (2003). "Nominal inflection galore: Daghestanian, with side glances at Europe and the world". In: *Noun Phrase Structure in the Languages of Europe*. Ed. by Frans Plank. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 37–112. doi: 10.1515/9783110197075.2.37.
- Lounsbury, Floyd G. (1953). *Oneida verb morphology*. English. New Haven: Published for the Dept. of Anthropology, Yale University, by the Yale University Press.
- Maiden, Martin (2004). "Verb augments and meaninglessness in early Romance morphology". In: *Studi di grammatica italiana [2004]* 22, 1–61.
- Menzel, Thomas (2023). *Komplexität und soziolinguistische Typologie in den Flexionssystemen des Sorbischen*. Spisy Serbskeho Institutu 71. Bautzen: Domowina.
- Rose, Sarah (2013). *Augment*. Ed. by Georgios K. Giannakis. doi: 10.1163/2214-448x_eag11_com_00000042.
- Round, Erich R. (2017). "Matthew K. Gordon: Phonological typology 2016". In: *Folia Linguistica* 51.3, 745–755. doi: 10.1515/flin-2017-0027.
- (2023). "Canonical phonology and criterial conflicts: relating and resolving four dilemmas of phonological typology". In: *Linguistic Typology* 27.2, 267–287. doi: 10.1515/lingty-2022-0032.
- Short, David (1993a). "Czech". In: *The Slavonic Languages*. Ed. by Bernard Comrie and Greville G. Corbett. London: Routledge, 455–532.
- (1993b). "Slovak". In: *The Slavonic Languages*. Ed. by Bernard Comrie and Greville G. Corbett. London: Routledge, 533–592.
- Spencer, Andrew (2012). "Identifying stems". In: *Word Structure* 5.1, 88–108. doi: 10.3366/word.2012.0021.
- Willi, Andreas (2018). *Origins of the Greek Verb*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/9781108164207.