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Slavistična revija 72/3 (2024): 273–290
UDK 811.16'367.625
DOI 10.57589/srl.v72i3.4180
Tip 1.01

Common Slavic **-nǫ-*, **-ny-*, or **-nu-*? A New Look at the History of the Slavic Nasal Suffix. The Diachronic Background and the Rise of the Common Slavic Variation

In a previous study we showed that in some peripheral dialects of Common Slavic, the aorist/infinitive suffix of Class II verbs was **-nu-*. In the present study, we focus on the diachronic explanation of the variation **-nǫ-* ~ **-ny-* ~ **-nu-* in this suffix. We propose that its rise was facilitated by CSl phonological developments in final syllables, at the juncture of stem markers and the PIE endings: 2SG **-neh₂-s* (or possibly 2SG **-neh₂-s*(*-s*) and 3SG **-neh₂-s-t*) > CSl **-ny*; (possibly) 1SG **-new-m* > CSl **-nǫ*; 3SG and word-internally **-new-*(*t*) > CSl **-nu*(-). The resulting allomorphy could be leveled in different directions, whereby the causes traditionally invoked to explain **-nǫ-* and **-ny-* (perseverative nasalization, analogy to other verbal stems) played a role too.[1]

Keywords: Common Slavic, class II verbs, nasal suffix, Proto-Indo-European, *Auslautgesetze*

Splošnoslovansko **-nǫ-*, **-ny-* ali **-nu-*? Nov pogled na rekonstrukcijo pripone glagolov II. vrste. Diahrono ozadje in nastanek splošnoslovanskih različic

V prejšnji študiji sva pokazala, da je nedoločniška/aoristna pripona splošnoslovanskih glagolov II. vrste na nekaterih območjih imela obliko **-nu-*. V pričujočem prispevku se osredotočava na diahrono razlago različic **-nǫ-* ~ **-ny-* ~ **-nu-* v tej priponi. Predlagava, da je bil nastanek le-teh pogojen s spsl. fonološkimi procesi v končnih zlogih, kjer so osnovi prvotno sledile praindoevropske končnice: 2SG **-neh₂-s* (ali mogoče 2SG **-neh₂-s*(*-s*) in 3SG **-neh₂-s-t*) > spsl. **-ny*; (mogoče) 1SG **-new-m* > spsl. **-nǫ*; 3SG ter znotraj besede **-new-*(*t*) > spsl. **-nu*(-). Nastala alomorfija je privedla do posplošitev, pomembno vlogo so pa igrali tudi drugi dejavniki (progresivna nazalizacija, analogija po drugih glagolskih priponah), na katere se tradicionalno sklicujejo pri razlagi **-nǫ-* in **-ny-*.

Ključne besede: splošna slovanščina, glagoli II. vrste, nazalna pripona, praindoevropščina, fonološki razvoj v končnih zlogih

[1] The article has been written under the research project financed by the National Science Centre (Poland) decision number: 2019/33/B/HS2/02965. The research discussed here was presented at two conferences: *17th Annual Meeting of the Slavic Linguistics Society (SLS17)*, Sapporo, and *4. Slovenski dialektološki posvet* (*SDP4*), Ljubljana, both in September 2022. We are grateful to the audiences of these events for their helpful comments and suggestions. Besides, we would like to thank Miguel Villanueva Svensson and Florian Wandl for useful observations on an earlier version of the manuscript. All interpretations and opinions are our own.

1 Basic premises

This article constitutes the continuation of our discussion on the formal evolution of the Class II suffix in Slavic published in the preceding volume (Szeptyński, Majer 2024). Let us restate that we are dealing with the formal evolution of the infinitive/aorist suffix of (most) Class II verbs, as in OCS *drъz**nǫ**ti* ‘dare.INF’, *drъz**nǫ**šę* ‘dare.AOR.3PL’, *min**ǫ**ti* ‘pass.INF’, *min**ǫ*** ‘pass.AOR.3SG.’ This is the sole entity we have in mind when speaking of ‘the nasal suffix’ or ‘*-*nV*-’. We are not concerned with the formation of the present stem or the functional properties of Class II, the morphological distribution of its various subtypes, etc. – topics on which plentiful research is available (see the literature we list in Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 132).

As noted in our previous study (Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 132-3), research in recent years (Andersen 1999, Pronk 2022, and predecessors) has emphasized that the unitary reconstruction CSl *-*nǫ*- is inadequate here, because – although it agrees with the majority of the evidence (OCS -*nǫ*-, Pol -*ną*-, Plb -*nǫ*-, etc.) – it does not do justice to some varieties of Slavic which continue a preform *-*ny*- instead (standard Sln -*ni*-, B/C/M/S dial -*ni*-, possibly USorb -*ny*-, Pol dial -*ny*-, Plb -*ně*-, etc.). More information on the delimitation of these two variants in the modern material, in light of the present state of research, can be found in Szeptyński, Majer (2024: 132-3), where the relevant bibliography is also provided.

We claim – as presented in detail in Szeptyński, Majer (2024: 135-46) – that this updated picture, incorporating the variation *-*nǫ*- ~ *-*ny*-, is still incomplete, as it cannot explain the dialectal Slovene evidence. We believe to have shown that, for certain varieties of Slovene, the only input form that generates the attested shape of the nasal suffix is CSl *-*nu*-. This fact has been hidden from plain sight because of the particularly convoluted situation in this language. Most Slovene dialects continue CSl *-*ny*- (thus also standard Sln -*ni*-), while a substantial part of the north and the north-east has *-*nǫ*-; however, in two peripheral zones – which at least regarding the early isoglosses stand out as archaic not only within Slovene, but also more generally in Slavic – the form continued is *-*nu*- (Resia -*nü*-; northern Jaun Valley and eastern Rosen Valley -*nu*-). This *-*nu*- has all the markings of a vestige which has been receding under pressure from the more expansive variants. It appears that in the eastern and central part of Carinthia, the switch from *-*nu*- to *-*nǫ*- has progressed all through the central Jaun Valley (it is likely that the same process had occurred in Pannonia, proceeding here until completion). More to the west – in western Carinthia and Upper Carniola – *-*nu*- has instead given way to *-*ny*-, but here certain lexicalized exceptions have retained *-*nu*-, most prominently the (effectively synchronically irregular) verb *minuti* ‘pass’.

To our knowledge, the above material is the totality of the positive evidence for CSl *-*nu*-. OCS spellings with -*nu*- for usual -*nǫ*- do not resist closer scrutiny (cf. Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 134-5), while the vast areas in which *ǫ falls together with *u cannot be considered probative, as *-*nǫ*- has to be the default assumption here in

any case (ESl, Cz, Slk, B/C/M/S etc. *-nu-* < **-nǫ-* *a priori* more likely than < **-nu-*;[2] see Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 145-6). Nevertheless, the Slovene evidence for CSl **-nu-* needs to be taken completely seriously, given that it occurs dispersed across outlying, conservative areas. The identification of this CSl **-nu-* may be of paramount importance for the diachronic explanation of the suffix, because – as is well-known, and as will be reviewed in more detail in §2.1 below – it is in fact far easier to explain diachronically than either **-nǫ-* or **-ny-* (note that **-nu-* is expected both on the grounds of internal reconstruction, as a synchronically regular alternant of **-nov-*, and on the grounds of external comparanda, generally subsumed under the PIE archetype **-new-*). However, its identification in attested material does not by any means solve the puzzle: the task remains to determine why this expected CSl **-nu-* coexists side by side with the variants **-nǫ-* and **-ny-*, why they (especially the former) have almost completely replaced it, and how they arose in the first place.

In the following sections, we first review the approaches to this variation that predominate in the current literature (with a cursory glance at earlier, now generally superseded views); this is the subject of §2. Subsequently, in §3, we suggest a new way of accounting for the variation **-nǫ-* ~ **-ny-* ~ **-nu-*, based on the premise that both the starting point and the processes involved were less uniform than is standardly assumed.

2 Present state of research

2.1 Overall variation and general diachronic background

Traditionally, it was thought that the nasal suffix in Common Slavic only had the form **-nǫ-*; consequently, all divergent forms were explained exclusively as due to local, dialect-specific innovations, be it of a phonological nature (vowel reduction – especially for forms in *-ny-* in the West Slavic data, cf. Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 132) or of a morphological nature (analogical influence of other verbal paradigms, specifically that in **-iti*), or a combination of both. Surveys of traditional research taking **-nǫ-* as a unitary point of departure are provided by Andersen (1999: 50) and Pronk (2022: 108-9). Some modern accounts of this type – see most recently Šivic-Dular (2021: 17-9) – are more sophisticated and ingenious; but irrespective of how well they work for specific varieties, they hardly account for the recurrence of forms pointing to **-ny-* in so many systems at the western periphery of Slavic.

The idea that **-ny-* has to be assumed as an input form for Common Slavic was expressed, at least implicitly, already by Trubačev (Трубачев 1968: 374), Szymański (1970: 302-3), and Schuster-Šewc (1977: 437-8, 447-8), but it was only developed as a full-fledged theory by Andersen (1999). Much research has operated with this finding since then, including many of the recent studies on the modern extent of **-ny-* in South Slavic dialects (referenced in Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 132-3).

[2] On Polabian with its potential *-ně-* < **-nu-* see Szeptyński, Majer (2024: 145, fn. 35).

In spite of this progress, the diachronic aspect remains without a clear solution. Neither *-*nǫ*- nor *-*ny*- are easily accounted for based on extra-Sl comparanda, much less their apparent coexistence. We outline the present state of research below.

The origins of Slavic Class II verbs have been studied extensively and there is no dearth of controversy regarding the topic. Still, we may speak of a basic consensus (codified by Stang 1942: 56-60, but see also van Wijk 1931: 243-6; Tedesco 1948: 347; Puhvel 1960: 36; Arumaa 1985: 224; Gorbachov 2007: 30-62; Šekli 2011: 131-3; Ackermann 2014: 56) that these Slavic verbs ultimately – though via far-reaching morphological evolution – developed from PIE present stems in *-*new*- (PIE *meh_2-*new*- 'beckon' >> CSl *-*mane*-, PIE *$d^hr̥s$-*new*- 'dare' >> CSl *-*dьrzne*-, PIE *$h_3l̥$-*new*- 'push, set in motion' >> CSl *-*rine*-, PIE *$stig^h$-*new*- 'step' >> CSl *-*stigne*- 'reach') as well as from PIE present stems in *-*ne-h*-, i.e., in PIE terms, stems in which the infix *-*ne*- preceded a root-final *-*h*[3] (PIE *$sḱi$-*ne-h*- 'shine' >> CSl *-*sine*-, PIE *$ǵ^hi$-*ne-*h_1- 'yawn' >> CSl *-*zine*-, *-*lu-ne-h*- 'cut' >> CSl *-*lyne*-).[4] The development of the Slavic present paradigm (CSl *-*ne*- < post-PIE *-*nw-e*-, *-*nh-e*-? See Matasović 2008: 258-9; Gorbachov 2007; Shevelov 1964: 196-9; Villanueva Svensson 2025) is a separate matter we shall not delve into, as the focus here is on the Slavic suffix of the aorist/infinitive.

It is generally recognized that the use of *-*nV*- as a CSl aorist/infinitive suffix must be secondary, given that the PIE morphemes *-*new*- and (infixed) *-*ne*- specifically marked present stems. Thus, it has been plausibly assumed that the CSl aorist/infinitive *-*nV*- has its origins in the PIE imperfect. The latter was a preterital formation which was built from the present stem, but which, in the course of the restructuring of the verbal system, was absorbed into the Sl aorist (Stang 1942: 57; Sadnik 1959: 129-30; Vaillant 1966: 230; Gorbachov 2007: 52; Pronk 2013: 127; Andersen 2013; somewhat differently Villanueva Svensson 2025).[5] Thus, descriptively speaking, a PIE imperfect such as *(e)-$d^hr̥s$-*new*-*t* 'dared' became the CSl aorist 2/3SG *-*dьrznǫ* ~ *-*dьrzny* (Gorbachov 2007: 52); likewise, the PIE imperfect *(e)-$sḱi$-*ne-h*-*t* 'shone' surfaces as the CSl aorist *-*sinǫ* ~ *-*siny*. Alternatively, the formation in question may have acquired the suffix *-*s*- (> *-*x*-, *-*š*-) from the *s*-aorist at an early stage, which would account for the entire paradigm at once (cf. e.g. 1SG *-*nǫxъ* ~ *-*nyxъ*); see also below.

[3] In Indo-European terms, the sequence with *h_2 (i.e. *-*ne-*h_2-) is by far the most widespread.

[4] This presentation is simplified, tacitly integrating standardly assumed minor analogical changes. To name a few of them here: CSl *-*i*, taken from other verbal forms, replaces expected *-*ь* < PIE *-*i*; the stem *$stig^h$-*new*- (also in Vedic *prá stiṅnoti* 'rises') is a post-PIE innovation replacing original infixed *-*sti-ne-*g^h- (LIV$_2$: 594; Gorbachov 2007: 57); CSl *-*lyne*- has a more widespread variant *-*lune*-, with *-*lu*- < PIE *-*low*- imported from other related formations. As regards more general matters, some scholars deny, or at any rate diminish, the role of *-*ne-h*- in the rise of Slavic Class II; thus e.g. Aitzetmüller (1991: 208: "unnötig", though without specific arguments), and in a way also Gorbachov (2007) or Villanueva Svensson (2025), where quite different scenarios of the IE prehistory of the relevant classes (and their subtypes) are hypothesized. Under these interpretations, the *-*ne-h*- prehistory of many or all of the above-mentioned examples could be doubted. This important discussion cannot be further pursued here.

[5] More broadly on PIE imperfects yielding Sl aorists cf. Meillet (1934: 252). Dissenting views exist (e.g. Aitzetmüller 1991: 209).

It has generally been assumed that the shape of this suffix must rely on some kind of transformation of the reflex of PIE *-*new*-.[6] That the latter is somehow reflected here is indeed evident from the fact that, in prevocalic position, the CSl suffix occurs as *-*nov*- – as seen in the past passive participle *-*nov-en-ъ* (and the verbal noun derived from it, cf. OCS *drъznovenie* 'courage') – as well as in the (infrequent[7]) imperfective derivatives in *-*ati* built to Class II verbs, such as **minovati* 'pass.IPFV' from **minǫti*. These forms can be obtained regularly from the post-PIE inputs *-*new-en-o*- and *-*new-ā*-.[8] Therefore, the anteconsonantal and word-final reflex, in accordance with the well-known monophthongization rules, should be *-*nu*-.[9] This, as we now know (see §1 above and Szeptyński, Majer 2024), can be considered attested as a peripheral remnant.

But for the most part we find *-*nǫ*-, and in addition – as has been clear for some time – *-*ny*-. The question how to explain these variants has been the object of quite a number of works.

2.2 Origin of *-*nǫ*-

The dominant approach to *-*nǫ*- since Èndzelins (Эндзелинъ 1912: 370-2; on followers, notably including Stang 1942: 56-57; cf. Andersen 1999: 49) has been to assume that the expected CSl *-*nu*- underwent secondary perseverative nasalization of **u* following a nasal consonant. As already mentioned in Szeptyński, Majer (2024: 133-4), Slavic attests doublets of the type **gnusъ* ~ **gnǫsъ* 'filth', **vъnukъ* ~ **vъnǫkъ* 'grandson', or **nuditi* ~ **nǫditi* 'coerce', and in many of them, including the above pairs,[10] it can be demonstrated on etymological grounds that the form with **nu* is original and the one with **nǫ* secondary. It should also be noted, however, that this process is never observed as a neogrammarian sound law, but rather as a sporadic tendency yielding inconsistent results, sometimes even within a single written tradition (OCS *gnušati sę* ~ *gnǫšati sę* 'be disgusted', OPol *wnuk* ~ *wnęk* 'grandson').

[6] The role of PIE verbs in *-*ne-h*- has hardly been mentioned in this particular context – which, as we shall argue later below (§3), may have been an important oversight.

[7] The imperfectivization *-*nǫti* → *-*novati* is rare and often competes with other types, some of which may in fact be older (e.g. **mijati* 'pass', which omits the nasal suffix). The type in *-*novati* is nevertheless clearly residual and may hardly be a recent creation (Arumaa 1985: 227; Tedesco 1948: 348).

[8] Given that the conditions for the change CSl **e* > **o* (or rather PSl **e* > *a*) before **v* (PSl **w*) are not fully understood, the development to CSl *-*nov*- may be considered unproblematic. For what it is worth, most examples with CSl *-*evV*- sequences can in fact be accounted for by assuming late restructuring, cf. e.g. **kleveta* 'slander' (< **klebeta*?, see Варбот 2010), **nevěsta* 'bride' (due to the restitution of the negative prefix *ne*-, cf. ЭССЯ XXV: 71-3), and PRS.1DU *-*e-vě* (due to the secondary fronting in *-*je-vě* and/or the *-*e*- in most of the other forms in the paradigm, cf. 2SG *-*e-ši,* 3SG *-*e-tь*, etc.).

[9] Or possibly *-*nju*-, see preceding footnote. However, while *-*CewC*- > *-*CjawC*- may have been a Balto-Slavic innovation, its reflexes have probably been ousted in the case of alternating suffixes: cf. CSl *-*u* < *-*ew*-(*C*) in desinences following non-palatalized root-final consonants in the *u*-stems, e.g. CSl **syn-u* 'son', not †*synj-u*.

[10] Beside standard etymological references, see now also Olsen (2020) on **vъnukъ*. The process of this perseverative nasalization is well-known; cf. Shevelov (1964: 319-20) or Sławski (1947; some of the individual etymologies here have to be treated with caution). On variation in OCS texts see Haralampiev (Харалампиев 2001: 61).

In and of itself, the development of CSl *-*nu*- (< PIE *-*new*-) to *-*nǫ*- is entirely credible. What has traditionally been considered problematic in invoking this process for the history of the Class II suffix is the apparent lack of preserved reflexes of the original *-*nu*-, much unlike in root morphemes with sporadic perseverative nasalization. This paradox has been widely noted,[11] but no compelling explanation has ever been offered.[12] In the light of our findings presented in Szeptyński, Majer (2024) – with CSl *-*nu*- now directly documented – this has to some extent been alleviated, but the picture is nevertheless still quite different from what results from the perseverative *Nu > *Nǫ process operating on its own.

When the necessity of the reconstruction of the variant CSl *-*ny*- became evident, it was soon recognized (Andersen 1999: 53-4) that CSl *-*nǫ*- may also represent a secondarily nasalized version of this *-*ny*-. Andersen himself dates the nasalization to an earlier period, predating the development PSl *$\bar{u}$ > CSl **y*; thus, the bifurcation is schematized as PSl *-*nū*- (> CSl *-*ny*-) vs PSl *-*nūn*- (> CSl *-*nǫ*-). This would represent an earlier process than the **gnusъ* ~ **gnǫsъ* phenomenon and would therefore explain its completely different patterning. However, the reason for the nasalization is not obvious to Andersen; he considers a phonetic, perseverative explanation (therefore typologically similar to the **gnusъ* ~ **gnǫsъ* phenomenon, though perseverative nasalization of CSl **y* lacks direct parallels[13]) as well as a morphological one (stacking of the present stem marker PSl/CSl *-*n*- onto the aorist/infinitive stem PSl *-*nū*- > CSl *-*ny*-, yielding PSl *-*nū-n*- > CSl *-*nǫ*-). The latter explanation, in particular, is neatly specific and well-defined. Still, such contamination of the present and aorist/infinitive stem would be entirely unparalleled in early Slavic. Competing (older) theories on the origin of *-*nǫ*- are even more problematic.[14]

2.3 Origin of *-*ny*-

Far less has been written on the potential origins of the newly discovered *-*ny*-. There are only two explanations on record. Andersen (1999: 53) considers PSl *-*nū*- > CSl *-*ny*- as an analogically lengthened apophonic zero-grade of PIE *-*new*- (the expected zero-grade, PIE *-*nu*-, would have yielded PSl †-*nu*- > CSl †-*nъ*-). He points to the fact that an identical pre-form *-*nū*- is also known from Greek (1SG *deík-nū-mi*

[11] E.g. Arumaa (1985: 226). Shevelov, referenced in the previous footnote, singles this out too (1964: 320).

[12] Wandl (2020: 39) operates with a distant assimilation preceding the monophthongization (PIE *-*now*- > PSl *-*nan*- > CSl *-*nǫ*-). Admissible in and of itself, the approach makes it difficult to account for the material in its entirety, as we shall see below.

[13] There are also potential examples for the inverse process – e.g. CSl **lyko* 'bast' vs. Lith *lùnkas* – though essentially all of them can also be interpreted differently.

[14] Vaillant (1951: 161) speaks of a "fusion de deux types d'infinitif, en *-*neu-tei* et en *-*in-tei*", which is in effect similar to the contamination solution; Machek (1938) and Fraenkel (1950: 271-2) believe the suffix *-*nǫ*- was abstracted from a pariticipial form built to the present stem of verbs in *-*neh*- (CSl *-*nǫt*- << PIE *-*nh-ont*-); Arumaa (1985: 225) attempts a direct link to the Hittite infix *-*nin*-, but this is known to be a local restructuring of PIE *-*ne*-; Jacobsson (1951: 7-20) believes the infinitive *-*nǫti* derives from a gerundive in *-*nt*-. An overview of older, even less acceptable solutions is provided by Machek (1938: 85-6) and Jacobsson (1951: 3-7).

~ 1PL *deík-nŭ-men* ‘show’). In the history of Greek, however, the analogical rise of such an alternation is far easier to motivate, given productive ablaut schemes involving other vowels in parallel verbal classes, such as *-nā-* ~ *-nă-*.[15] An alternative scenario is proposed by Pronk, who reconstructs the pre-form of *-*nyti* as “**-nuHtei*, with analogical length and acute intonation from infinitives in *-ati* < **-aH-tei* and *-ěti* < **-eH-tei*” (2022: 111; similarly already 2013: 128).

The idea that *-*ny-* originated at least *inter alia* due to the influence of other productive verbal stems with acute *-*V̄́-* is certainly plausible.[16] However, Pronk also believes (2022: 112-3) that the original locus of *-*ny-* in the infinitive – as opposed to the aorist, *l*-participle, and the clearly secondary past passive participle – is still reflected in the modern distribution of *-ni-* in certain West South Slavic dialects. We fail to see evidence for this in the dialectal material reviewed by Pronk. The modern dialectal systems display a significant departure from the Common Slavic situation in all respects, with growing impact of Class IV (*-*i-*) and mutual influence among the stems of former Class II itself. The prerequisites for abandoning the infinitive in *-*nyti* specified by Pronk (2022: 113) would not explain the rampant spread of *-*nǫti* in almost all of West and East Slavic. Besides, given the complete parallelism of *-*a-ti*, *-*ě-ti*, *-*i-ti* with *l*-participles in *-*a-lъ*, *-*ě-lъ*, *-*i-lъ*, an analogically created class in *-*ny-ti* could have hardly inherited a different *l*-participle than *-*ny-lъ* in the first place.

2.4 Interim conclusion

We conclude that the question of the origin and distribution of *-*nǫ-* and *-*ny-* remains open. A fresh analysis of the issue appears welcome, especially in the light of the identification of the reflexes of the third variant *-*nu-* in Slovene. In what follows, we offer a novel approach to the issue in its entirety.

3 A new theory of the *-*nǫ-* ~ *-*ny-* ~ *-*nu-* split

3.1 Exposition

On the one hand, the updated dataset – now with no fewer than three variants (*-*nu-*, *-*ny-*, and *-*nǫ-*) – is even more messy. On the other hand, the multifacetedness may mean that we should aim for a different kind of explanation than endeavored so far.

[15] Such patterns of neo-apophonic length in this suffix are also attested in Indo-Iranian, where similar – though not as favorable – prerequisites for innovation existed as in Greek. Since PIE did not know the apophonic alternation *u : *$ū$, common inheritance is out of the question. A possible connection between Slavic and Indo-Iranian is, however, discussed by Dybo (Дыбо 1981: 241-2), although solely on accentological grounds, i.e. without invoking the CSl variant *-*ny-* itself.

[16] But note that *-*ḗ-* and *-*ǽ-* were accentually dominant (in the sense as used by Dybo; cf. Дыбо 1981: 10), unlike the nasal suffix; *-*ī́-* provides the closest parallel.

In our view, the seemingly erratic distribution makes the impression of phonologically conditioned allomorphy, recently levelled out in different directions. In particular, the fact that the variation is consistently found at the right edge of the morpheme, as well as that the suffix directly preceded inflectional endings, makes one think of the Slavic laws of final syllables.

Note that the clash of the suffixes *-*new*- and *-*neh*- with the original inflectional endings inherited from PIE created complexes such as *-*new-(s)(C)#* and *-*neh(s)(C)#*,[17] providing the conditions for diverse Slavic *Auslautgesetze*. The operation of the latter, if uninhibited by analogical developments, would have led to a paradigm in which the surface shape of the stem-forming morpheme would have differed in the individual slots – assuming, *inter alia*, the forms *-*nu*-, *-*ny*-, and *-*nǫ*- – while the primordial inflectional endings would have been absorbed into it.[18] The potential developments can be envisaged in many different ways depending on the assumed point of departure and the specifics concerning the individual laws of final syllables. We limit ourselves to laying out one representative possibility. The projected phonological developments from the post-PIE situation all the way up to Common Slavic are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Phonologically expected Common Slavic reflexes in the aorist of verbs in *-*new*- and *-*neh*$_{2/3}$-.

	verbs in *-*new*-			verbs in *-*neh*$_{2/3}$-		
	post-PIE	expected CSl		post-PIE	expected CSl	
1SG	*-*new-m*	>	*-*nǫ*	*-*neh*$_{2/3}$*-m*	>	*-*nǫ*
2SG	*-*new-s*	>	*-*nu*	*-*neh*$_{2/3}$*-s*	>	*-*ny*
3SG	*-*new-t* (*-*new-s-t*)?	>	*-*nu* (*-*nu*)	*-*neh*$_{2/3}$*-t* (*-*neh*$_{2/3}$*-s-t*)?	>	*-*na* (*-*ny*)
pre-CV	*-*new-*	>	*-*nu-*	*-*neh*$_{2/3}$*-	>	*-*na-*

We hypothesize that the above pattern – or at any rate something resembling it (as already mentioned, exact results will depend on the assumed input and phonological framework) – was the original spawning ground of the *-*nu*- ~ *-*ny*- ~ *-*nǫ*- variation. Analogical levelings of the individual allomorphs, no doubt aided by the traditionally assumed factors (perseverative nasalization supporting *-*nǫ*-, preference for *-*ny*- due to the structural similarity to other verbal suffixes in -*V̄*-), led to the blurry image reconstructible for Common Slavic.

[17] With *(*s*) due to secondary sigmatization, which is uncertain.

[18] For some Slavic parallels for the absorption of *Auslautgesetze*-driven allomorphs (containing 'submerged' inflectional endings) into the stem, cf. derivatives of the type **kam-y-kъ*, **kam-ę-kъ* 'stone' (Boryś 1981: 43-4; see also Polański 1976 and Majep 2021: 264-71), where *-*y*(-) and *-*ę*(-) are the results of developments specific to final syllables leading to the phonological coalescence of the etymological stem and ending (regardless of which precise scenarios are accepted for explaining them; see Olander 2015: 83-6).

3.2 Commentary

A few explanatory remarks are necessary. We limit the scope to verbal stems in *-*new*- and *-*neh*$_2$-/*-*neh*$_3$- (the latter two developing identically in Slavic); we leave out *-*neh*$_1$-, for which no role in this scenario is detectable, although some such verbs are probably inherited (CSl *-*zine*- << *-*ǵ^{h}i-ne-h*$_1$- 'yawn', see above). We assume that the PIE apophony between the 'strong stem' (*-*new*-, *-*neh*$_{2/3}$-) and the 'weak stem' (*-*nu*-, *-*nh*$_{2/3}$-) was levelled in favor of the former in the aorist paradigm; note that no trace of quantitative paradigmatic suffixal ablaut is found Proto-Slavic in the indicative of any other verbal class except for some portmanteau morphemes. We restrict our presentation to four environments: the 1SG, 2SG, the 3SG (where the PIE endings of the imperfect comprised a single consonant: *-*m*#, *-*s*#, and *-*t*# respectively, thus positioning the whole complex in the word-final syllable[19]) and a single preconsonantal slot covering the remaining endings (all of which were syllabic in PIE and thus would not provide a word-final context).[20]

As regards the phonological development involving word-final *-*s*# (PSl *-*ās* > CSl *-*y*), we consider it secured based on the independent evidence from different morphological subsystems, cf. the pronominal clitics 1PL.ACC *-*ny*, 2PL.ACC *-*vy* < PIE *-*nōs*, *-*wōs* as well as the GEN.SG *-*y* < *-*ās* < PIE *-*eh*$_2$-*es* (the matter is surrounded by some dose of controversy, but the evidence appears overwhelming – see most recent discussion in Kim 2019: 5-7, Majer 2020: 83-4, and Szeptyński, Majer 2021: 51; competing view and summary of earlier research in Olander 2015: 56-7, 129-33, 230-1). As regards the two alternative options in the 3SG, there is no *a priori* way to determine whether the *-*s*- of the *s*-aorist had been analogically introduced here; if so, the development would have been such as indicated in parentheses.

Of course, the outline in Table 1 compresses several chronological layers. For example, the loss of final *-*t* may have been a Proto-Balto-Slavic change already; the development of PIE *-*eh*$_2$- and *-*eh*$_3$- proceeded via PBSl *-*ā*-, *-*ō*- to PSl *-*ā*- to CSl *-*a*-, and so on. However, the crucial *Auslautgesetze* involving *-*s*# and the final nasal clearly operated between the PSl and the CSl era. We consider it superfluous to reconstruct the forms at the intermediate stages, as the details here are immaterial to our problem as long as the final outcome holds. The one issue that bears mentioning is the autonomous development of the 2SG and the 3SG forms. Given that these are always

[19] Unless sigmatization is assumed.

[20] The 3PL form (with PIE *-*nt*#) might have followed an interesting path of its own here too, but since projecting its evolution would require extreme speculation, we refrain from including it here systematically. Likewise difficult to trace is the development of the 1SG form *-*new-m*. We consider it likely that the non-syllabic nasal marker of the 1SG was analogically kept stable across all paradigms (i.e., not *-*newm̥* > CSl †-*novъ* or similar) and assume the rise of the CSl back nasal vowel following monophthongization (*-*newm* > *-*nūn* > *-*nǫ*), based on general tendencies, though no exact parallel can be provided. (We leave aside the potential development of PIE *-*ewm*# > *-*ēm*#, as it is not observed in the reflexes of this class in the ancient IE languages either. We also do not take into account the possibility that the 1SG form retained a specific ablaut grade, *-*nu-m*, roughly in parallel to the respective present form in *-*ǫ* < *-*ō-m*, whose quantity was, incidentally, as different as could be.)

identical in aorist paradigms in attested Sl (and thus also in reconstructible Common Slavic), there is a tendency in the literature to treat their development jointly even at earlier stages (e.g. Aitzetmüller 1991: 179-80). This may well be justified for most of the other stem classes, where inputs such as PIE *-*e-s* ~ *-*e-t* or *-*eye-s* ~ *-*eye-t* indeed ultimately yielded the same outcomes: here, even if the endings remained distinct for a long time (until the PSl period), the difference was eventually obliterated. But this need not have been the case at least with the type in *-*neh$_{2/3}$-*, where the identity of the 2SG and the 3SG can be analogical. The phonological development would have yielded 2SG *-*neh$_{2/3}$-s* > CSl *-*ny* and 3SG *-*neh$_{2/3}$-t* > CSl *-*na* (unless both 2SG *-*neh$_{2/3}$-s*(-*s*) and 3SG *-*neh$_{2/3}$-s-t* > CSl *-*ny*[21]), and there is no reason not to believe that such results indeed emerged before being levelled out (see further below on CSl *-*na*-). When one considers this in conjunction with the general blending of the classes in *-*neh$_{2/3}$-* and *-*new*- into a single conjugational type, it is only to be expected that the resulting Slavic nasal class displays a less uniform structure than the remaining ones.[22]

It is not known when the unification of the classes in *-*new*- and *-*neh*- into a single Slavic conjugation occurred. The key treatments of the issue (such as Stang 1942: 60) do not mention a fixed chronology. However, just like in the case of the 2SG and the 3SG endings discussed above, it is likely that the distinction persisted until not long before the CSl era, as is indeed generally surmised by those few scholars who have dealt with this question directly (Tedesco 1948: 348: "That *nā*-presents reached down into Slavic is very likely"). The stems in *-*neh*- were presumably thematized early on (see Gorbachov 2007 for context), while *-*new*- may have remained a distinct class until the phonological confluence of pivotal forms such as the reflexes of the 3PL. PRS *-*nu-nti* (*-*new-nti*?) and *-*nh$_2$-onti* (*-*nh$_2$-enti*, *-*neh$_2$-nti*?); cf. Tedesco (1948:

[21] As suggested above, it is not clear whether or not the sigmatization of the aorist had reached these forms; the choice would depend on one's particular views on the prehistory of the category. In Table 1 and the accompanying discussion, we treat the non-sigmatized *-*neh$_{2/3}$-t* and *-*new-t* as the default assumption, but we also refer to the possibility of reconstructing *-*neh$_{2/3}$-s-t* and *-*new-s-t* (which actually yields results that are easier to interpret, see below).

[22] It is also not difficult to see why the CSl verbal class in -*a*-, which ultimately goes back to a stem in *-*eh$_2$*-, had no chance to retain the *-*y* ~ *-*a* allomorphy based on 2SG *-*eh$_2$-s* vs 3SG *-*eh$_2$-t*. Here, the present stem *-*a-je*- transparently consisted of the aorist stem extended with *-*je*-, providing clear support for *-*a*- as the sole aorist stem. (Cf. also Zucha 1986: 135-6, one of the few scholars to discuss directly the potential influence of *Auslautgesetze* on verbal stem allomorphy in Slavic; he likewise observes that forms like 2SG **dy* 'gave' and **děly* 'worked', from original *-*ā-s*, must have been levelled to match the 3SG *-*a* < *-*ā-t*). In the nasal class, the situation was different: the present stem *-*ne*- was not connected in any particular way with *-*nu*-, *-*ny*-, or *-*nǫ*- in the aorist. As regards the development of the past passive participle, which likewise had a unitary CSl form *-*novenъ* (< *-*new-eno*-), the abandoning of the expected reflex *-*nanъ* < *-*neh$_{2/3}$-eno*- was probably motivated by its ambiguous segmentation and potential conflict with related CSl *a*-stems (on which see below), cf. *-*na-n*- vs. *-*n-a-n*- (on laryngeal contractions in this type of participles see Kortlandt 1975: 8). The same obtains, *a fortiori*, for the imperfectivizing type **minovati*. It must be borne in mind that neither formation is overly ancient. In PIE, past participles (or verbal adjectives that provided the basis for them) were not derived from present stems, so that the creation of *-*nov-enъ* has often been considered as late as Sl-internal (Arumaa 1985: 227; Tedesco 1948: 348; under a theory like the one put forth in Villanueva Svensson 2025, the formation could be projected back to Balto-Slavic times at most). The iterative morpheme *-*a*- < *-*eh$_2$*- (see Villanueva Svensson 2020 on its origins and context) could not have been stacked on top of a present stem either.

347-8). Since the issue rests on the development of the present stems, we shall not treat it here in detail. The key premise for us is that nothing speaks against the possibility of distinct paradigms of *new*-verbs and *neh*-verbs feeding the Slavic *Auslautgesetze*.

Effectively, our scenario shares with Pronk's (2022: 110) the view that "*-*ny*- originally coexisted with […] *-*nǫ*- within the same paradigm" (cf.1SG *-*nǫ* alongside 2SG *-*ny* – and possibly 3SG *-*ny* – in the *-*neh$_{2/3}$*- class). At the same time, the mechanism is markedly different. We believe that the rapid onset of the allomorphy as presented in Table 1, caused by the operation of the *Auslautgesetze*, was soon met by levelings and unificatory tendencies. In our view, late CSl varieties had most likely already lost the etymological association of the given variants with the original loci of their rise. We would attribute distributions such as that currently found in West South Slavic to contact between dialects that had previously leveled different variants (in this case *-*ny*- and *-*nǫ*-/*-*nu*-), negotiating the use of a given allomorph in particular grammatical forms – a process which can still be observed there at work today. For the same reason, the fact that some subtypes of Class II verbs lack the nasal suffix in the aorist – more widely than infinitives – does not, in our opinion, preclude the possibility that the aorist paradigm was the key locus in which the variation arose (all the more because the historical spread of the nasal suffix probably began from the aorist; cf. above on the origin in the PIE imperfect).

To our knowledge, such a line of reasoning, involving the laws of final syllables, has scarcely been explored before – certainly not for the variants *-*nu*- (hitherto considered non-existent) and *-*ny*- (discovered recently and only subject to very few diachronic interpretations so far, all of them covered in §2.3 above). As regards *-*nǫ*-, the notion that the unexpected nasalization may result from the absorption of the 1SG and the 3PL endings has already been proposed by Vaillant[23] (1966: 230): "La 1re personne du singulier *-*neun* […] a pu de son côté donner *-*nǫ*, puis *-*nǫ-xŭ*", similarly 3PL *-*nw-ont* >> *-*nu-nt* > CSl *-*nǫ*(*šę*). This approach was criticized e.g. by Aitzetmüller (1991: 208), but note that it was considered in isolation and not as part of a broader *Auslautgesetze*-based scenario such as presented here. While we would not concur with all of Vaillant's exact preforms, we believe that the process as outlined above indeed may have contributed to the establishment of *-*nǫ*-. Once in play, the variant could be interpreted as the perseverative nasalization of *-*nu*- (and perhaps *-*ny*-), as generally assumed.[24] This latter factor is no doubt responsible for the considerable expansion of this variant at the cost of all others; but the inception within the finite inflectional paradigm seems likely.

[23] Elsewhere, Vaillant also suggested other origins for *-*nǫ*- (fn. 14).

[24] If AOR.1SG *-*nǫ* >> *-*nǫ-xъ*, as possibly common to both paradigms, contributed to their contamination after the irregular change *-*nu*- > *-*nǫ*- (alongside with the more important generalization of the present type in *-*ne*-), the process should have been impeded in the western peripheral zones of South Slavic, which resisted the perseverative nasalization (cf. §2.2). It is, in fact, indeed thinkable that the distinction of the separate classes survived longer in this area – cf. the residual Sln dial. *minuti* against the generalized *-ni*-. The variation observed in West Slavic, however – if real (see fn. 26 and Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 132) – is not quite in line with such an interpretation, as no local 'immunity' to the nasalization of the suffix can be observed here.

Another advantage of the *Auslautgesetze*-based approach is that it provides a direct and clear basis for the variant *-*ny*-. At the surface level, the assumption that the entire paradigm of the new nasal aorist aquired the suffix *-*s*- early would make our explanation almost trivial (cf. the pivotal role of 3SG forms as discussed below); however, as we have mentioned throughout the paper, this solution is not necessarily justified. For that reason, in what follows we pursue the alternative scenario, in which only the 2SG form *-*neh$_{2/3}$-s* yields the sequence *-*ny* phonologically in final position. Importantly, this *-*ny* could be levelled into the 3SG based on the identity of 2/3SG aorist in all other verbal classes and, from here, potentially generalized as the aorist/infinitive stem marker of the unified nasal class. Again, it is likely that this process was aided by an additional dynamic. Even if the absolute, foundational dominance of 3rd-person forms in analogical changes in paradigms cannot be substantiated (cf. Hill 2016), the hierarchical superiority of the 3SG for the indicative can hardly be doubted, and the chances of the entire paradigm being remodeled after the PRS.IND.2SG form, in particular, are low (cf. Grossman 2016: 12-5). Therefore, we believe that the rise of *-*ny*- is best explained as due to the combined pressure of the 2SG form *-*neh$_{2/3}$-s*, of other aorist/infinitive stems in long, acute monophthongs[25] (*-*a*-, *-*ě*-, and most probably *-*i*- – a factor that we have already mentioned before), and of the inherited alternation CSl *-*u* ~ *-*y* elsewhere in the system (cf. derivationally related items such as **duxъ* 'spirit' ~ **dyxati* 'breathe' or **kujǫ* 'forge' ~ **kyjь* 'club, hammer' as well as doublets of the type **pluti* ~ **plyti* 'swim, sail').[26]

Finally, one more aspect of the situation as schematized in Table 1 must be discussed. As may be seen, two non-negligible slots in the original *neh$_{2/3}$*-verbs are expected to yield CSl *-*na*-; this may include the crucial 3SG form (unless *-*neh$_{2/3}$-s-t* > *-*ny*) and certainly includes the preconsonantal environment, which actually represents several forms. Although analogical processes are famously unpredictable – so that the complete obliteration of this variant is unquestionably thinkable – one might, in principle, expect the direct[27] survival of attested CSl *-*na*- at least in some remains. Now, interestingly, forms consistent with CSl *-*na*- are found in certain areas in which *a* is not the general

[25] Note that the *-*u* of *-*nu(-)* was, before the CSl era, a diphthong. See below on the possible reason for the dispreference for *-*na(-)*, whose *-*a* was undoubtedly a long, acute monophthong and competed with *-*y* of *-*ny* in the first place.

[26] If the West Slavic evidence for *-*ny*- were to be disregarded (see Szeptyński, Majer 2024: 132), *-*ny* could be treated as a strictly West South Slavic entity and brought into association with the NOM.SG.M of the present participle, which, as is well-known, displays SSl *-*y* (*vis-à-vis* NSl *-*a*). But this SSl *-*y* competes with an early analogical variant *-*ǫ*, taken from the oblique cases. The variation of *-*ny* and *-*nǫ* in the NOM.SG.M of these participles built to Class II verbs could have been analogically extended, ultimately leading to the expansion of *-*ny*-. The mechanism seems rather convolute, however; besides, Class II verbs were productive predominantly in semelfactive/punctual, perfective verbs, where the prominence of the present participle was low. As regards the possible parallel development of the nasalized variant of the *-*nV*- suffix with the NOM.SG.M of the present participle (cf. AOR.2/3SG *-*nVN-C#* > SSl *-*ny* ~ NSl *-*na*?), this is contradicted by the retention of non-nasalized *-*nu*- in Slovene dialects as well as by the traces of *-*ny*- rather than *-*na*- in North Slavic.

[27] As for indirect evidence, we believe that the phonologically expected acute on *-*neh$_{2/3}$-* > *-*nā*- (CSl *-*nā́*-, when stressed) is the straightforward source of the consistent acuteness of the nasal suffix, irrespective of its segmental structure: CSl (when stressed) *-*nǫ́*-, *-*nӯ*-, *-*nū́*-. Cf. Дыбо (1981: 240-1).

reflex of *ǫ[28] (or *y, *u). Such reflexes with surface -na- occur in certain Slovene and Croatian dialects (a general overview is provided by Celinić, Menac-Mihalić 2017; see also Pronk 2022: 105-8). Still, the hypothesis that these dialects indeed conserve a CSl variant *-na- is not easy to substantiate. In most instances, the -na- occurring here can be accounted for via vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, ultimately reflecting either -ni- < *-ny- (cf. Jakop 2003: 7-8) or *-nǫ- (Lundberg 2013: 47).[29] For at least some varieties, however, previous research admits that forms in -na- have to be analogical after verbs in *-ati (e.g. Pronk 2022: 107 on the type *krénati* 'move' in Ozalj). Given that non-trivial transformations of this kind are considered indispensable in any case, one might entertain the theoretical possibility of inherited *-na- instead. Still, given the extremely slim basis and the presence of easily explainable -na- in neighboring varieties, the idea is best abandoned. Besides, one has to reckon with the possibility that the CSl allomorph *-na- was ousted due to the risk of ambiguous segmentation, possibly disturbing the aspectual oppositions between perfective *-na- and imperfective *-a- (this may also be the reason why the similarity to the acute suffixes of other verbal classes promoted *-ny- rather than *-na-, cf. above).[30]

4. Conclusions

The analysis presented above was based on two premises: firstly, on the fact that the existing explanations of both *-nǫ- and *-ny- are in our view unconvincing or at least incomplete, and secondly on our identification of the CSl variant *-nu- in the Slovene evidence, as documented in detail in our earlier study (Szeptyński, Majer 2024). We proposed a speculative but principled and comprehensive account of the variation *-nǫ- ~ *-ny- ~ *-nu- in its entirety. We believe the seminal split may have begun as allomorphy conditioned by the Slavic phonological laws of final syllables, coupled with the fact that the different classes of nasal presents (PIE *-new-, *-neh$_{2/3}$-) were in the process of merging into a single conjugational type. The model entails interesting predictions; first and foremost, one would also expect the existence of a variant CSl *-na- (< *-neh$_{2/3}$-C-). The Croatian and Slovene material that could theoretically be interpreted as evidence for CSl *-na- can (in an overwhelming majority) be accounted for in more straightforward ways, so that CSl *-na- has to remain a heuristic construct; concrete reasons for its elimination can be cited, too. Our model does generate *-nǫ- and *-ny-, although their distribution remains rather remarkable. This is especially true of the stunning 'career' of *-nǫ-, suggesting that its areal (rather than intrasystemic) expansion was clearly driven by other factors, first and foremost the traditionally assumed sporadic nasalization.

[28] We disregard modern East South Slavic, where *ǫ is generally reflected as *a* in suffixal syllables.

[29] Note that some Croatian dialects regularly reflect *-nǫ- as -na- also when accented. The Istrian Čakavian material studied by Vranić (2017) contains interesting cases where the nasal suffix is not fully in keeping with the reflexes of *ǫ in lexical morphemes, but it does not reveal likely candidates for inherited *-na- (or *-nu-) either.

[30] Cf. East Slavic imperfectives of the secondary type IPFV *min-a-ti* 'pass' (ЭССЯ XIX: 51) ← PFV (?*min-u-ti* <<) *mi-nu-ti* with which potential perfectives of the type **mi-na-ti* would have conflicted.

This is also in line with the status of *-*nu*- as the most archaic and recessive variant (at least judging by the material where it can be distinguished from *-*nǫ*-). As the phonological reflex of PIE *-*new*- in several key positions, it must have originally been much more prominent, but later receded under pressure of phonological and morphological innovations favoring *-*ny*- and especially *-*nǫ*-. These did not fully reach some of the outlier varieties of Slovene, also known for several other conservative traits.

List of abbreviations and symbols

B/C/M/S – Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian; BSl – Balto-Slavic; CSl – Common Slavic; Cz – Czech; dial – dialectal; ESl – East Slavic; IE – Indo-European; Lith – Lithuanian; NSl – North Slavic; O – Old; OCS – Old Church Slavic; Plb – Polabian; Pol – Polish; P – Proto-; Sl – Slavic; Slk – Slovak; Sln – Slovene; SSl – South Slavic; USorb – Upper Sorbian. Grammatical glosses in SMALL CAPS follow the *Leipzig Glossing Rules* (online), extended by: AOR – aorist. The symbols < and > denote phonological change; the symbols << and >> denote additional morphological modification.

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Povzetek

V ločeno objavljenem prispevku sva pokazala, da je imela splošnoslovanska aoristna/infinitivna pripona glagolov II. vrste na nekaterih obrobnih območjih obliko *-*nu*-, kar dokazuje nekaj arhaičnih slovenskih narečij: prim. rezijansko *-nü*-, (severno)podjunsko *-nu*-, (vzhodno) rožansko *-nu*- ter leksikalizirane ostanke širše znotraj slovenščine.

V pričujoči študiji obravnavava posledice te ugotovitve za splošnoslovansko geolingvistiko kot tudi njene globlje diahrone (indoevropske) vidike. Vzpostavitev različice *-*nu*- pomeni, da je bila formalna variabilnost te spsl. pripone širša, kot se je doslej domnevalo: ne le *-*nǫ*- ~ *-*ny*-, temveč *-*nǫ*- ~ *-*ny*- ~ *-*nu*-. Poleg tega je prav zadnja od teh različic tista, ki jo diahrono najlažje razložimo: pravzaprav je bil njen obstoj že prej domnevan na podlagi notranje rekonstrukcije (trpni deležnik na *-*nov-en*-) ter primerjave z drugimi indoevropskimi jeziki (pie. *-*new*-).

Predlagava nov pristop k celoviti zadevi. Izhajava iz dejstva, da je spsl. II. vrsta etimološko gledano konglomerat nekaj indoevropskih glagolskih tipov (predvsem *-*new*- in *-*neh$_2$*-) in da je njihovo združevanje lahko vključevalo obdobji razpada in reintegracije. Natančneje, predlagava, da se upošteva spsl. fonološki razvoj v končnih zlogih, kjer so v prvotnih preteritalnih paradigmah osnovama *-*new*- in *-*neh$_2$*- neposredno sledile osebne končnice: 2sg *-*neh$_2$-s* (ali mogoče 2sg *-*neh$_2$-s(-s)* in 3sg *-*neh$_2$-s-t*) > spsl. *-*ny*; (mogoče) 1sg *-*new-m* > spsl. *-*nǫ*;

3SG ter znotraj besede *-*new-(t)* > spsl. *-*nu(-)*. Prvotni rezultat je bila alomorfija, ki je – z napredovanjem oblikovanja enotnega glagolskega razreda – v posameznih narečjih lahko bila predmet analoških posplošitev v različnih smereh. Vendar pa priznava, da so pri oblikovanju končne slike igrali vlogo tudi dejavniki, na katere se tradicionalno sklicujejo pri razlagi variant *-*nǫ*- in *-*ny*- (progresivna nazalizacija, analogija po drugih glagolskih priponah itn.); le-ti so lahko prispevali k bolj intenzivnemu širjenju nekaterih različic.