Canonical Typology and Slavonic lexical splits

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We investigate 'possible words' by exploring the characteristics of the most straightforward lexemes. We adopt the Canonical Typology approach, in which we push our definitions to the logical limit, in order to establish a point in the theoretical space from which we can calibrate the real examples we find. We characterize canonical inflection, and this makes it possible to schematize the interesting phenomena which deviate from this idealization. These include suppletion, syncretism, deponency and defectiveness. Given this basis, we can then look at the ways in which lexemes are 'split' by these phenomena. We identify four dimensions, within which the particularly interesting Slavonic examples can be situated. These dimensions are: (i) form versus composition/feature signature; (ii) motivated versus morphology-internal; (iii) regular versus irregular; and (iv) externally relevant versus irrelevant. The typology recognizes these four dimensions separately. They are orthogonal to each other (they cross-cut), so that the unexpected patterns of behaviour may overlap in particular lexemes, giving rise to some remarkable examples. Moreover, we find several of the possibilities within Slavonic and others we find in other families. Thus besides the interest of individual examples, their range is also surprising: most of the possibilities licensed by the typology have been found. In these ways I hope to demonstrate that the notion 'possible word' is more challenging than many linguists have realized.