

Nouns in pairs in Slovene dialects

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Abstract

Slovene is one of the few Indo-European languages to have preserved the dual alongside the singular and the plural. Although the dual is a norm in standard Slovene and is also used in the majority of Slovene dialects, dual forms of nouns that come in pairs (e.g. body parts) have been replaced completely by the plural, a process that started at least as far back as the 16th century. The reason for this might come from the non-linguistic fact that human beings have two legs, two eyes, etc. The dual is required only for random pairs; with fixed pairs, dual forms are used only with the quantifiers *dva/dve* ('two') or *oba/obe* ('both') – that is, when someone wishes to stress the fact that both parts of the pair are at issue. This paper discusses dual vs. plural forms of nouns that appear in pairs.

1 Category of number in Slovene

Slovene, along with Sorbian, is the only Indo-European language to have preserved the dual alongside the singular and the plural. In the three-number system, the dual is – compared to the plural and singular – considered to be marked.¹ The number hierarchy (from less to more marked) would therefore be as follows in Slovene: singular > plural > dual.² Although the dual is mandatory in modern standard Slovene (marked for all inflected categories: verbs, pronouns, nouns and adjectives), dual forms of nouns that come in pairs have been replaced completely by the plural.

The dual once existed in the majority of the language groups and was used when referring to human organs that come in pairs. But in such cases the use of the dual is redundant because the duality is obvious from a non-linguistic fact;³ therefore, in some languages and dialects (like Slovene and most of the Lower Sorbian dialects), nouns in pairs have acquired plural forms. The dual form (*dve*) *nogi* is, compared to the plural *noge*, marked; that is why fixed pairs tend to have unmarked (i.e. a plural) form.

1.1 Nouns in pairs in Slovene

In standard Slovene the plural form is used instead of the dual in typical pairs, e.g. for left and right body parts that perform the same function (*roke* [arms/hands], *noge* [legs/feet], *obrvi* [eyebrows], *oči* [eyes], *ušesa* [ears]), for parts and items of clothing (*rokavi* [sleeves], *hlačnice* [trouser legs], *nogavice* [socks], *rokavice* [gloves], *uhani* [earrings]), and for biological or functional pairs: [*parents*], [*twins*]; [*horses*], [*oxen*], etc. (see Toporišič, 2000: 271).

While the dual has generally been preserved (*dva brata govorita* ['two brothers are talking']), nouns in pairs have been pluralised, e.g. *noge me bolijo* 'my legs are hurting'. The dual is required only for random pairs. With fixed pairs, dual forms are used only with the quantifiers *dva/dve* ('two') or *oba/obe* ('both') – that is, when someone wishes to stress the fact that both parts of the pair are at issue, e.g. *slep na obe očesi* ('blind in both eyes'); *imam samo dve roki* ('I only have two hands'), etc. In a few rarer cases involving body parts, the singular can be used instead of the plural, e.g. *Peter ima mirno roko* ('Peter has a steady hand'); *njegovo oko vedno vse opazi* ('his eye never misses a thing').

Belić (1932: 20) described eyes as one organ made up of two parts. An interesting example appears in Hungarian: for the plural form *eyes*, the singular form of the noun is used (*szem*),⁴ and if a Hungarian speaker wishes to stress the fact that only one eye is involved, the noun *félszem* 'half an eye' is used. *Félszemű* means 'one-eyed', *fél szemére vak* means 'blind in one eye', etc. The same goes for the noun *ear*: *chak úgy félfül hallottam* means 'I listen with one ear

¹ Many linguists have noted to the markedness of the dual (e.g. Greenberg, 1966: 31–37; Stolz, 1988: 481; Unger, 1998: 29).

² This hierarchy is universal; see also Corbett (2000: 38>).

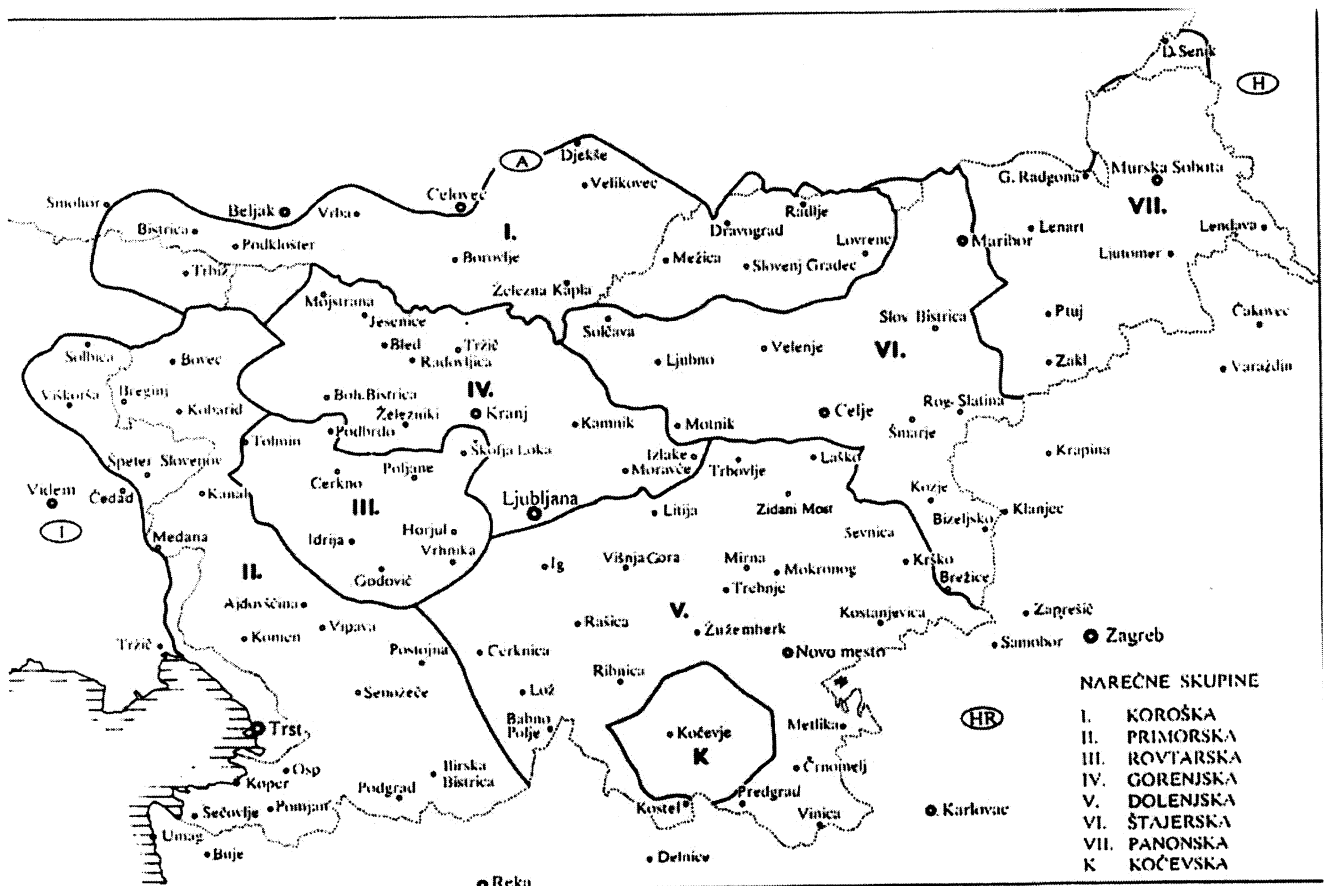
³ See also Belić (1932: 20).

⁴ In Hungarian the plural is formed by adding a morpheme *-k* to the singular form of nouns, verbs and pronouns.

only'; *fúlig adós* means 'in debt up to one's ears'.⁵ This data fits the theory that body parts in pairs represent one organ made up of two parts.

The modern plural form *oči* ('eyes') was originally a dual one (the plural form would be **oka*), while *ušesa* ('ears') (< *uši*) is a proper plural form. In the earliest extant samples of the Slovene language, *Brižinski spomeniki* (Freising Manuscripts; c. 1000), we have two examples of the dual form *oko*: *pred bosima ozima* (II. 27, 75, 86); *pred Tu(o)ima osima* (III. 55). The author of the first Slovene book Primož Trubar, in his other work *Cerkovna ordninga* from 1564, used dual alongside plural forms for the noun *oko*, e.g. *pred zloueskima ozhyma* (44 b) : *pred nashimi ozhy* (167 b).⁶ But in the first Slovene translation of the Bible (Jurij Dalmatin, 1584), nouns in pairs already have plural forms only, e.g. *Njegove ozhy so kakor Golobje ozhy; Njegove roke, so kakor slati parstani*.⁷

As with nouns in pairs (e.g. *roke, oči*), fixed pairs (e.g. *parents, twins*, etc.) used to have a dual form (e.g. *roditelja*). In the Dalmatin's *Bible* (1584), this noun can have a plural and a dual form, e.g. *Inu njegovi Starishi [pl.] so vsaku leitu hodili v'Jerusalem [...]. Tvistu leitu pak stabila dva Starisha [du.] etc.*⁸ After the 16th century, the noun *starši* (together with other nouns in pairs) became a plural noun.



Map no. 1: Map of Slovene dialect groups from Toporišič (2000: 24).

⁵ This data is taken from Hungarian-Polish Dictionary (Reychman, 1980: 361, 402, 1008).

⁶ Logar (1996: 356).

⁷ Derganc (1998: 46).

⁸ Derganc (1998: 49, 50).

2 Nouns in pairs in Slovene dialects

2.1 Masculine nouns in pairs: *starši* ['parents']

The analysis is based on material collected for the ongoing *Slovenski lingvistični atlas* – SLA ('Atlas of the Slovene Language') – specifically, answers to question no. 646 on *starši* (nominative plural). The noun *stárši* is a comparative adjective acting as a noun (< *starejši*), after the German *Eltern* 'parents' (< *alt*).⁹

2.1.1 Because the question tries to elicit the plural form, the SLA material shows the dual form *starša* only at two data points: 198 and 399 (Gorenjska and Prekmurje dialects respectively). But today, in standard and colloquial Slovene, both forms are in use: *starši* (plural) and *starša* (dual). In the *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika* (SSKJ, Dictionary of Standard Slovene) we find examples for both the plural and dual forms, while in the *Slovenski pravopis* (SP, Slovene Orthography) the dual form *stárša* is marked as non-standard colloquial. This demonstrates that the dual is still a productive and live category in Slovene.¹⁰

2.1.2 In addition to *starši*, the older form *stáriši* (< *starejši*), used by Trubar (e.g. *starišem/starišom*), appears in the extreme north-western and the extreme north-eastern part of Slovene territory (e.g. 5, 94; 375, 404). Some micro-dialects use a variant *stárjiji*: one data point in the extreme south-western part of the *Primorska* (122) and data points in the extreme south-east in the *Dolenjska* dialect group (e.g. 285). *Starejši* is found in the *Koroška* dialect group (e.g. 12, 38, 50).¹¹

2.1.3 One data point for the *Koroška Mežica* dialect (45) has the form *staréjši* as well as *ta stára dva*; one data point of the *Rovte Cerkno* dialect (168) *stárš* and *te stari*; one data point of the Gorenjska dialect (198) *stárša* and *ta stári*. At the data points of *Koroška Podjuna* (39) and the Gorenjska dialect (185, 199), we find the comment that the lexeme *stárši* is rare and that another lexeme is used instead. In the *Primorska Rezija* (56, 59) and part of the Ter dialect (62), the Romance lexeme (*d*)*ženitorji* (< Italian *genitori*), is used instead of *starši*.

2.1.4 Many dialects use *oče in mati* ['father and mother'] and variants instead of *starši*: e.g. in the local dialects of the *Koroška* and *Primorska* dialect groups in the west (e.g. 27; 80, 102, 156) and the *Dolenjska* and *Štajerska* dialect groups in the south-east (267, 295; 297, 313, 362).

2.2 Feminine nouns in pairs: *roka* ['arm/hand'] and *noga* ['leg/foot']

The analysis is based on SLA material – specifically, answers to questions no. 25 on *roka* (nominative dual) and no. 56 and/or 741 *noga* (nominative dual). Using linguistic geography methods, a morphological map has been compiled showing the noun *roka* and *noga* in the nominative dual (see appendix).

2.2.1 In general, more plural forms appear in nouns in pairs which in standard Slovene have plural forms only. In some dialects, where feminine nouns have otherwise preserved the dual forms, only plural forms are possible for nouns in pairs (*ženi* [du.] : *roke*, *noge* [du. = pl.]), e.g. in the *Primorska* (85, 121), *Rovte* (169, 170), *Dolenjska* (236, 239, 243, 246, 255, 293), *Štajerska* (358) and *Pannonian* dialect groups (367, 389, 391, 404).

2.2.2 In feminine nouns in pairs, the dual is preserved in peripheral dialects. Stress on the base (*róki*, *nógi*) is characteristic of the whole of the *Koroška* dialect group (extreme north-west, e.g. 1, 28, 51),¹² the larger part of the *Primorska* dialect group (73, 100, 115, 129, 142), some local dialects of the *Dolenjska* dialect group (231), the eastern part of the *Štajerska* dialects (356, 359) and the *Pannonian* dialect group (365, 372, 398). Stress on the ending (*rokí*, *nogí*) is only found in the western part of the *Primorska* dialects (57, 71) and in some dialects in the extreme east (380, 391, 393).

⁹ Snoj (2003: 695).

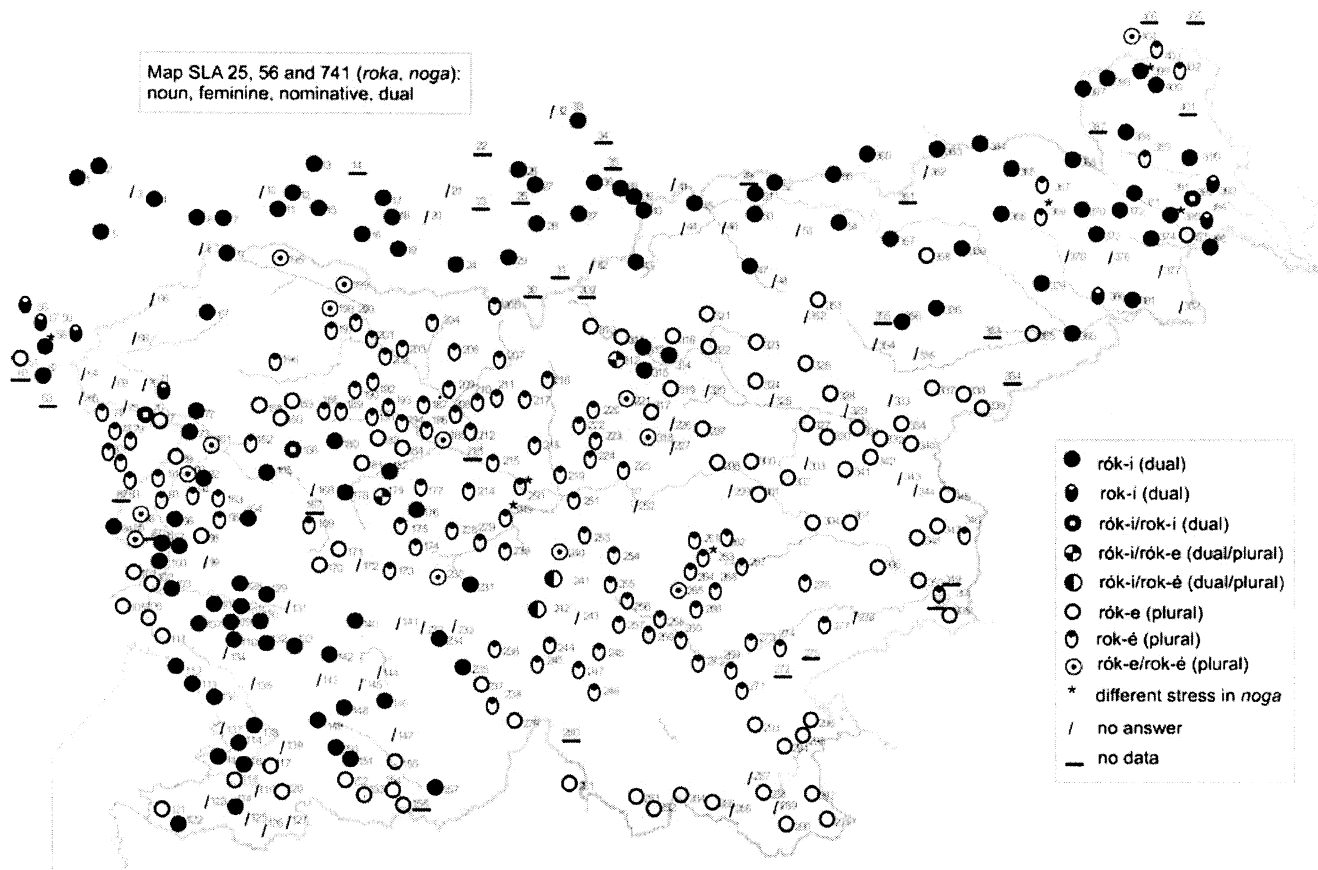
¹⁰ See also Derganc (2003: 174).

¹¹ The names of the dialects have been taken from the *Karta slovenskih narečij* 'Map of Slovene Dialects' (Logar – Rigler 1983). The dialect group to which the dialect or parts of the dialect (local micro-dialects) belong is always given in italics. See also map no. 1 of Slovene dialect groups (Toporišič, 2000: 24) at the end of the article.

¹² Dialectal palatalisation *k*, *g*, *h* > *č*, *j*, *š* (e.g. *ročje*, *noje*) is found in the Zilja, Rož, Podjuna, Istria, Notranjska, Cerkno and Gorenjska dialects.

2.2.3 Dialects with plural forms with a stress on the final *-e* (*roké, nógé*) have dual forms with a stress on the base (*róki, nógi*), like in the singular (*róka, nóga*), e.g. *Pannonian* dialects (371, 374, 388). If in those dialects the dual has been pluralised, the dual form takes the plural ending but the stress remains on the base (*róke, nóge*). The plural and (ex-) dual form still differ according to where the stress falls (*róke* [du.] : *roké* [pl.]), e.g. at one data point of the *Bača* micro-dialect (160).

2.2.4 Pluralisation of the dual appears in central dialects; stress on the base (*róke, nóge*) is found in the *Rovtve Bača* micro-dialect (158 160) in the west¹³ and in the *Štajerska* dialect group (297, 310, 324, 332, 348). Stress on the ending is found in the western part of the *Primorska* (74, 83, 91) and in the central territory: the *Gorenjska* (200, 210) and *Dolenjska* dialects (236, 247, 266).



Map no. 2: Map *Nouns in pairs* (SLA 25, 56 and 741) by Tjaša Jakop.

¹³ This is the dialect of Slovenicised Germans, who have, generally speaking, greatly simplified the morphology.

Summary

Although dual forms of nouns that come in pairs have been replaced in standard Slovene completely by the plural, material gathered for the SLA shows that, in feminine nouns in pairs with the quantifiers *dva/dve* ('two') or *obalobe* ('both'), the dual has been preserved in peripheral dialects: in the *Koroška* and a larger part of the Primorska dialect group, in the north-eastern part of the *Štajerska* dialect group, and in the *Pannonian* dialect group. For masculine nouns in pairs, the SLA questionnaire includes no dual forms; the dual form *starša* therefore only appears at two data points (one in the Gorenjska and other in the Prekmurje dialect), but many dialects use a dual phrase *oče in mati* ['father and mother'] instead.

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