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Authors:

Jasmin Hodžić

and

Marc L. Greenberg

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Jasmin Hodžić, Marc L. Greenberg

The entry treats the Neo-Štokavian accent system (NŠA), a word-prosody innovation characterizing the standard languages and many of the dialects underlying Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian. Diachronically, NŠA refers to a set of accent retractions that have been progressing through the Štokavian dialect territory since the 15th century and continue developing to the present. The innovation consists in moving the inherited Common Slavic place of stress one syllable to the left, resulting in a rising tone in the newly stressed syllable. The retractions take place in a hierarchy, first in word-final and open, short syllables. Synchronically, there are three basic characteristics of the NŠA: firstly, the differences between the four (Neo-)Štokavian accents, primarily the relationship between two short accents, secondly, the Neo-Štokavian accent shift onto the proclitic, and, thirdly, the preservation or elimination of post-accentual length as a specific feature of the classical accent norm. Special attention is given to the types of NŠA in dialects, as well as their prosodic dominant features. Both dialectological and standard systems are considered. Special attention is given to the Bosnian and Montenegrin insight into the topic, owing to the central position of the Neo-Štokavian innovations in the southern belt of Štokavian. In addition to the traditional division of the Štokavian territory into eastern and western Štokavian dialects, the southern Štokavian dialect (not including the Torlak dialect) is examined, in particular the connection between the southern Štokavian dialect and the NŠA phenomenon as a whole.

The basis of Neo-Štokavian accentuation

Diachrony

Western [South Slavic](#) dialects are generally conservative with respect to the inherited Slavic place of stress. By the 15th century, prior to the Neo-Štokavian accent (NŠA) system, [Štokavian](#) dialects had carried through the following changes from the inherited [Proto-Slavic](#) system: shortening of the old acute accent resulting in a short falling stress, e.g., *brātrъ, *brātra > brāt, brāta 'brother.NOM.SG, ACC.SG'; the inherited falling tone on a short vowel lengthened in monosyllables before an elided *jer* in the following syllable, e.g., *bǫgъ, *bǫga > bōg, bōga 'God.NOM.SG, God.ACC.SG'. In the majority of Štokavian dialects (except in Slavonia), the Proto-Slavic neo-acute has merged with the falling tone, as a result of which the prosodic system lost pitch contrasts, e.g., *kljǫčь > kljūč 'key', *kǫnъ > kǫnj 'horse' (cf. [Čakavian](#) k[l]jūč, kǫnj, the latter with [compensatory lengthening](#)). The resulting system with stress-placement and quantity contrasts is often referred to as Old Štokavian accent (BCMS *staroštokavski*) and is found, for example, in the southern

[Montenegrin](#) dialect area (see further Peco 1988: 40ff.; Čirgić 2020: 35ff.). Once these developments were in place, the NŠA innovations began to take shape. These innovations consisted in the shift of stress one syllable leftward, resulting in a rising tone and preserving the quantity value of the ceding syllable and the newly stressed syllable, e.g., *glāvǎ* > *gláva* ‘head.NOM.SG’ (long rising + short unstressed), *glāvê* > *glávê* ‘head.GEN.SG’ (long rising + long unstressed). Notably, the retractions occur in a hierarchical fashion, conditioned by the relative weight of the ceding and receiving syllable as well as the place of original stress. Final stresses are retracted before internal stresses; stressed open syllables are retracted before closed syllables. Ivić (1958: 105ff.) has modeled the retraction hierarchy in the shape of a cube with directional arrows on its edges indicating the progression of expected retractions. The retraction hierarchy can also be rendered in tabular form, as in table 1.

Table 1: Retraction hierarchy after Ivić 1958: 105

Order	Ceding syllable	Receiving syllable	Example	Gloss
1	short final open	short	<i>sestrǎ</i> > <i>sèstra</i>	‘sister’
2	short final closed	short	<i>jezìk</i> > <i>jèzik</i>	‘tongue’
3	short nonfinal	short	<i>lopǎta</i> > <i>lòpata</i>	‘shovel’
4	long final open	short	<i>sestrê</i> > <i>sèstrê</i>	‘sister.GEN.SG’
5	long closed final	short	<i>junâk</i> > <i>jùnâk</i>	‘here’
6	long nonfinal	short	<i>pozlâcén</i> > <i>pòzlâcén</i>	‘gilded’
1a	short final open	long	<i>glāvǎ</i> > <i>gláva</i>	‘head’
2a	short final closed	long	<i>nāròd</i> > <i>národ</i>	‘people (as a group)’

3a	short nonfinal	long	<i>pītāla</i> > <i>pítala</i>	'she asked'
4a	long final open	long	<i>glāvê</i> > <i>glávê</i>	'head.GEN.SG'
5a	long closed final	long	<i>glāvôm</i>	'head.INS.SG'
6a	long nonfinal	long	<i>třpîmo</i> > <i>třpîmo</i>	'we suffer'

A parallel set of retractions from final syllables has taken place in [Slovene](#) (Greenberg 2003: 241).

Additionally, the inherited Proto-Slavic falling tone, traditionally described as “recessive” stress, continues to behave as in Proto-Slavic by appearing on the leftmost clitic, e.g., *nǎ glāvu* ‘onto one’s head’, in which case the resulting shift does not result in a rising tone (further details below). Further details on the Proto-Slavic origins of the system may be found in [Accentology](#) and [Schools of Balto-Slavic Accentology](#).

Synchrony and territorial distribution

In addition to the territorial distribution, i.e., the specific area in which they occur, Neo-Štokavian dialects of [Štokavian](#), which form the basis of the closely related [South Slavic](#) standard languages, are recognized by two linguistic characteristics. Apart from syncretism in the [case](#) system (reducing some of the inherited distinctions in case marking) and the tendency to replace the infinitive with subordinate clauses (see [Differential Object Marking](#); [Infinitive Loss](#); [Balkan Convergence Area](#)), Neo-Štokavian dialects are primarily recognized by the NŠA, with its four accents – two new rising, short, and long – along with preservation of post-accentual length contrasts (cf. Belić 1971). Synoptically, these are ‘ (short rising),) (short falling), ^ (long falling), and ’ (long rising) accents; the mark for post-accentual (unstressed) length is ¯, which is, along with the four accents, an important feature of the Neo-Štokavian accentual system (see also [Quantity Systems](#)). Note that these diacritic marks are used descriptively, but are not included in the [BCMS](#) standard orthographies.

Vowels as syllable carriers may also carry stress as well as, less frequently, vocalic *r* (with additional unstressed length of all vowels and vocalic *r*). Consequently, the following vowel-stress-pitch-quantity permutations are possible: à-à-â-á-â, è-è-ê-é-ê, ì-ì-î-í-î, ò-ò-ó-ó, ù-ù-û-ú-û, ř-ř-ř-ř-ř. Examples include short falling (*mǎčka* ‘cat’, *vrěca* ‘bag’, *knjiga* ‘book’, *kònj* ‘horse’, *kūca* ‘house’); short rising (*kǎfa* ‘coffee’, *žěna* ‘woman’, *bilder* ‘bodybuilder’, *nòga* ‘leg’, *kùtija* ‘box’); long falling (*mǎjka* ‘mother’, *mêd* ‘honey’, *vîd* ‘vision’, *môre* ‘sea’, *ljūdi* ‘people’); long rising (*gláva* ‘head’, *séka* ‘dear sister’, *pîsmo* ‘letter’, *gósipa* ‘Holy Mother’, *kúla* ‘tower’).

Neo-Štokavian accentuation is particularly characterized by the phenomenon of **accent shift** to unstressed clitic morphemes, forming a single accentual unit together with the accent-bearing word. Falling accents are shifted, i.e., short falling and long falling ones. There are two types: (a) shift with change of pitch (when shifted, short and long falling accents become short rising: “ > ”) and (b) shift without pitch change (the long falling accents become short falling when shifted, i.e., short falling accent remains short falling: “ ; > ”). Additionally, when a long falling accent is shifted, a post-accentual length remains in its place, i.e., “ ^ > ”: examples of (a) are *ù Bosnu* (*Bòsnu*) ‘to Bosnia’ (Bosnia.ACC), *òd brata* (*bràta*) ‘from one’s brother’ (brother.ACC.SG), *iz sòbē* (*sòbē*) ‘out of the room’ (room.GEN.SG), *nè znām* (*znām*) ‘I don’t know’ (I know), *nè rādīm* (*rādīm*) ‘I am not working’ (I am working) (this is the NŠA shift); (b) *òd Boga* (< *od Bòga*) ‘from God’, *ù vodu* (*vòdu*) ‘into the water’ (water.ACC.SG), *nā oči* (*òči*) ‘on one’s eyes’ (eyes.ACC.PL), *ù grād* (*grād*) ‘into town’ (town.ACC.SG), *nā mōre* (*mōre*) ‘to the sea’ (sea.NOM/ACC.SG) (this is the diachronically older shift from the inherited, “recessive” Proto-Slavic circumflex).

Neo-Štokavian variant types, differences in accentuation

In the following discussion, the complex interactions of varieties of NŠA are discussed along with the development of standard versions of NŠA, which relate to the dialect bases associated with the standard BCMS languages. This tradition goes back to the 19th century, when the “classical” NŠA system was based on the dialect of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864), who, with the aid of fellow lexicographer and standardizer Đuro Daničić (1825–1882), codified the modern BCMS standard accent system based on the accent patterns of his native Eastern Herzegovinian dialect. Accordingly, the classical NŠA is based on the “four-accent” system, with conservatism in the retention of post-tonic quantity, which is a characteristic of Vuk’s (as he is traditionally referred to) native dialect.

There are three types of Neo-Štokavian dialects, based on the reflex of Proto-Slavic *ě (see further [Jat](#)), Ekavian (eastern), Ikavian (western), and Ijekavian (southern) dialects (see Belić 1971; Peco 1988), and the four-accent NŠA system is found in all three (Peco 1988: 16). The entire Štokavian dialect can be divided into eastern and western zones. However, the tripartite division is more precise and purposeful. The division into eastern and western Štokavian, and thus newer Štokavian dialects as well, is mainly discussed in the context of the historical development of Štokavian dialects (until the migrations in the 15th c., the borders between the eastern and western Štokavian zones were somewhat known; since then, we have observed mixed and transitional borders between the two Štokavian dialects), while the division into Ekavian, Ikavian, and Ijekavian (i.e., eastern, western, and southern/central dialects) remains valid today (see the premigration map in Lisac 2003: 164–165). Nevertheless, we can speak of the eastern belt of the Neo-Štokavian dialects in relation to the western Štokavian dialects. Moreover, in addition to east and west, there is a central territory, which is, in a narrower sense, more precisely defined as southern, since over time there has been an expansion of southern dialects to the north and northwest, thus the southern dialect being considered originally central (for details, see Ivić 1958: 71ff.; Alexander 1993: 182–183). For this reason, the following claims are accepted: “The shift of the accent of falling intonation towards the beginning of the word began **in central versions** of the Štokavian dialect - Herzegovina” (Peco 1988: 51); “The appearance of new rising accents affected only one part of the Štokavian dialect, that is, **the central territory**. These are

varieties of the **Herzegovinian type**" (Peco 1988: 47; emphasis ours) in the south, as is confirmed also by Belić (see Peco 1988). Additional confirmation of the focus on the southern region (in relation to the eastern and western Štokavian dialects) is also found in the following: "**Post-accentual lengths** are best preserved in the **southern Neo-Štokavian belt** (Kapović 2015: 57, emphasis ours). Broadly speaking, as indicated above, this is the southern region of the central Štokavian (and Neo-Štokavian) territory. Moreover, there is a "separation" of the south in relation to the center in the following: "**Neo-Štokavian innovations** are generally more pronounced in Herzegovinian dialects than in Bosnian ones" (Valjevac 2009a: 309, emphasis ours).

As already pointed out in the light of the characteristics of the central and southern Štokavian dialects, there are two main Neo-Štokavian features: a shift in accents of falling intonation toward the beginning of the word (from which the phenomenon of accent movement also stems, as well as the phenomenon of formation of four accents) and well-preserved unstressed lengths.

With regard to accent shift, it is omitted if the speaker needs to emphasize a word in which the accent should be shifted/moved (e.g., *u Bòsni* 'in Bosnia', instead of *ù Bosni*). Such reasons can be not only pragmatic, communicative, or psychological but also purely linguistic (cf. Riđanović 2009: 391; Kalajdžija 2009: 374; Hodžić 2014: 168). For example, if the accent-bearing word forms a firmer whole with the word that follows, it is more likely that the accent will not be shifted to the proclitic that precedes it, or both options are possible (e.g., *u Bòsni i Hèrcegovini* 'in Bosnia and Herzegovina'; see Riđanović 2009: 391). Shifting may naturally be omitted if the word has more than two syllables. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the shift is more consistent than in other Štokavian territories, and more so in Herzegovina than in Bosnia, as illustrated by examples that would be unusual in other areas: *dvā metra* 'two meters' (instead of *dvā mētra*), *trī dāna* 'three days' (instead of *trī dāna*), *pēt marākā* 'five (Bosnian) marks (currency)' (instead of *pēt mārākā*), *desēt godinā* 'ten years' (instead of *dēset gōdīnā*).

In addition to the discussion of accent shift and preservation of the post-accentual length, special attention should be given to the clear differentiation between the four Neo-Štokavian accents; the rule is that in certain territories, this difference is more pronounced, and in others less so. Again, the autonomy of the southern belt in relation to the central area is emphasized, that is, of the central in relation to other dialects.

Comparing the **Bosnian central and southern accentuation**, we may say that in **central Bosnia**: "in an acoustic and articulatory sense, the **differences between individual accents are smaller** than in Herzegovinian pronunciation, but all four accents still remain within the boundaries of normal pronunciation." (Brozović 2007: 177, emphasis ours)

This phenomenon mostly manifests itself in facultative differences in accentuation in the pitch of short accents in Bosnian, e.g., in nouns: *jāgoda/jāgoda* 'strawberry', *lādica/lādica* 'drawer', *mātica/mātica* 'matrix, queen bee', *āutor/āutor* 'author', *svād̄ba/svād̄ba* 'wedding', *sābah/sābah* 'morning', *āuto/āuto* 'car', *čōšak/čōšak* 'corner', *īgra/īgra* 'game, dance', *cēsta/cēsta* 'road', *smēce/smēce* 'trash', where, for example, words of foreign origin are often

accented differently in the south than in the central (northern) Bosnian dialects (the accent in borrowings naturally adapts to the local accent system), and differences are also evident in local words (the broader Štokavian dialect recognizes doublets such as *òvāj/òvaj* 'this', *kòjī/kōjī* 'which'). As an illustration, the characteristics of short accents in the [Montenegrin](#) accentuation are worth mentioning: short falling accents predominate in relation to rising accents in certain words such as *đēca* 'children (coll.)', rather than *dēca* (*djēca*); *slūžba* 'service' rather than *slùžba*; *pòšiljka* 'package' rather than *pòšiljka*; *pùblika* 'audience' rather than *pùblika*; *mùzika* 'music' rather than *mùzika*; *àpril* 'April' rather than *àpril*; *likòvnī* 'visual (art)' rather than *likòvnī*; *pòsmrtnī* 'posthumous' rather than *pòsmrtnī*; *skòro* 'nearly' rather than *skòro*; *ùkupno* 'altogether' rather than *ùkupno*; and *ùpravo* 'just (now)' rather than *ùpravo* (cf. Ćirgić and Šušanj 2016: 1790). In general, the differences in emphasis on short accents can be attributed to differences between eastern and western accentuation (*vòće/vòće* 'fruit'; *mène/mène* 'me.GEN.SG') or differences between older and newer accentuation (*čòvjek/čòvjek* 'person'). Differences in accentuation and differences in the quality of accents as well as doublets in the realization of short accents occur within the individual BCMS languages. Moreover, this is not just the case with regard to the differences between the BCMS languages, but such variation occurs even within each of them.

For example, Brozović (2007), comparing the narrower Bosnian dialects in relation to the Herzegovinian and describing the dialect variation in the valley of the Fojnica River, observed a contrast in the short tones, whereby a kind of reduction of difference between the accents applied to the central dialects in relation to the southern Bosnian dialects – that is, in the southern belt, the differences are clearer and more striking:

The slow [*spori*, or 'rising'] accent is quite different from "Herzegovinian." It is somewhat shorter and flatter in tone, especially in fast speech. At first, I sometimes doubted whether I heard fast [*brzi*, or 'falling'] or slow, especially if any of them were found where I would not expect it[...] In the Fojnica valley, the slow accents also have a somewhat lower syllable behind as compared to the "Herzegovinian" one. Hence, **the difference is reduced** with regard to the "fast" (*brzi*) accent. (Brozović 2007: 102; emphasis ours)

It is noteworthy that by "Herzegovinian," Brozović (2007) in fact meant dialects from southeastern Bosnia, though he states that it is a dialect "as it is in Foča" (2007: 101; cf. Foča was the sanjak of Herzegovina in the past). We can certainly speak of the mixing of southern and central Bosnian speech features, i.e., the competition of eastern Bosnian and eastern Herzegovinian dialects, and bordering southern and central Bosnian dialects. Similarly, Jahić (2000) has also pointed out the features of quality in short accents in the northern Herzegovinian dialects (around Konjic) in which there is a tendency to shift from short falling to short rising tones:

But that subdialect [North-Herzegovinian subdialect, which is strongly influenced by southeast Bosnian] in some cases develops its original characteristics...accents: *pùška* 'rifle', *pjèsmā* 'song'. (Jahić, 2000: 37; instead of short falling: *pùška*, *pjèsmā*).

Furthermore, Brozović (2007), among others, provides examples for Fojnica (central Bosnia): “So I was in doubt whether I really hear *bràta* ‘brother.ACC/GEN.SG’ ...*nìšta* ‘nothing’...in Fojnica” (Brozović 2007: 102; instead of short falling: *bràta, nìšta*). In general, the confirmation of this characteristic feature of the Bosnian dialects (in relation to Herzegovinian) is also present in Baotić (1983). Studying dialects in the vicinity of Derвента (northwestern Bosnian area), Baotić found that “there is a tendency **characteristic of Bosnian dialects to shift from short falling to short rising accent**” (emphasis ours; see Baotić 1983). From the above discussion, it can be concluded that, in relation to the central area, southerners speak more distinctly, that is, they show more pronounced differences between individual types of accents, with the central (Neo)-Štokavian territory having the same characteristic in relation to the eastern and western belt of the Neo-Štokavian dialect.

The conclusions for other Neo-Štokavian features also apply here, that is, the phenomenons of accent shift and post-accentual length preservation. We shall return briefly to the discussion of the tonal relationship between short accents (which is the most difficult to distinguish in practice). Within the Neo-Štokavian four-accent system, the characteristics of clear differences between the existing accents are also the basis of a codified norm. As the short accents undergo neutralization of pitch, the “number of accents,” to use the traditional nomenclature, decreases.

According to Nikolić (1970: 12), when it comes to the relationship between short accents in the context of their clear differentiation or their mutual approximation, there are two types of short falling accent, “considering the movement of the melody” (Nikolić 1970: 12). Pronunciation “in central dialects” (see Nikolić 1970) is taken as more typical, while the falling accent with a flatter melody is found in the eastern parts and a few others. Moreover, an intermediate type also occurs, with a somewhat typical or flat tone. Similarly, a short rising accent is divided into two types: one completely rising and one in which the tone is only partially rising and partially flat. “In such cases, therefore, the accent ` approximates the accent `” (Nikolić 1970: 12). Pairing this statement with the previous one, it is clear that short falling and short rising accents will converge in some territories. This has led some linguists to conclude that one can speak of neutralizing the tonal difference between the short accents (cf. Tošović 2008; Martinović 2010) or that it is a matter of “pseudo-neutralization” (cf. Kapović 2010), considering the differences among the short accents in all the dialects to which this statement refers. The main conclusion is that short accents (in the eastern and western Štokavian territory) are neutralized in favor of short falling accents (and in some northern and central Bosnian dialects in relation to southern ones, there is a rising-tone tendency). It is more correct to say, however, that it is not a matter of complete neutralization, i.e., one can also speak of pseudo-neutralization for which the standard, in its vocabulary, clearly distinguishes examples of short rising and short falling accents. This can easily be proved in the accent of individual lexemes (e.g., *sèstra* ‘sister’, *òtac* ‘father’ – both with short rising accent; cf. Kapović 2010). However, though these differences exist and are verifiable in concrete examples, this does not mean that conclusions about some tendencies of tonal merger are invalid. Specifically, this applies to the broader character of certain accentual features of the Serbian and Croatian languages, whereby the reduced tonal contrast between short accents has been observed. For example, regarding Serbian, Tošović (2008: 784) mentions “the elimination of tonal contrasts in short syllables (in examples like *vòda* ‘water’, *lepòta* ‘beauty’, *veličina* ‘size’,

pòtok ‘stream’, *kukùruz* ‘corn’)” as a widespread phenomenon. Furthermore, analyzing similarities and differences between Croatian and Serbian orthoepy, Martinović (2010) reports on the removal of tonal contrast in short accents, which is a phenomenon that is only emerging in the Bosnian language. By no means is tonal neutralization in Bosnian a widespread phenomenon. However, as we will see, this tendency is already noticeable in some Bosnian dialects, albeit in a slightly different way. Thus, in this context of common characteristics of Croatian in relation to the Serbian language, “two fundamental prosodic changes” are also emphasized, specifically “the removal of tonal contrast in short stressed syllables and the **loss of the post-accentual length**” (Martinović 2010: 293; emphasis ours).

Similarly, optional tendencies and phenomena in the prosodic system of the Bosnian language, which have not (yet) become the rule, remain a prosodic stylistic feature. Valjevac (2009) points to the tendency to neutralize the differences between short accents. With regard to Bosnian, this statement is valid for the territory of northern (and central) dialects relative to the south. Specifically, in this case it is actually a matter of dominance of one accent over another:

Some accents are more robust than others. They appear alongside them or even spread at their expense. The phenomenon is especially noticeable among the short accents, where the falling ones yield to rising (*kùća* ‘house’, *màma* ‘mom’, etc.: *kùća*, *màma*)” (Valjevac 2009: 358)

It is sufficient to refer to three contemporary dictionaries of the Bosnian language: Halilović et al. 2010 and Čedić 2010 (further on accentual doublets, see Hodžić 2021). With regard to the lexeme *mama*, one may observe the fluctuation between the pronunciation *màma* and *măma*, where the former (rising) is preferred. This is, however, not a feature of the Bosnian south, which organically corresponds to the Neo-Štokavian base accent system of the modern standard language (in all other South Slavic standard languages, it is *măma*, not *màma*, the latter being non-etymological, i.e., unexpected).

When discussing the preservation of post-accentual length, it is necessary to first determine whether there may also be doubts and differences with regard to determining what should be preserved. Practically, the following statement is valid: “Post-accentual lengths are eliminated in the Croatian and the Serbian languages, and preserved in the Bosnian language” (Horga et al. 2010: 263) – i.e., the fact that in Bosnia and Herzegovina post-tonic (unstressed) length is in principle always pronounced as long and distinct (Kapović 2015: 57). However, it is especially important to further determine the basic corpus made up of words in which the post-accentual length should be kept.

Examples of dilemmas with regard to characteristic length are provided, with special reference in pronominal, adjectival, and numerical word forms. In addition, it should be noted that there are patterns of innovative length in the Montenegrin standard language, e.g., in the infinitive of verbs, such as *mřznūti* ‘freeze’, *slūšāti* ‘listen’, *glėdāti* ‘watch’, *pjevāti* ‘sing’, *kūpīti* ‘buy’, *rūšīti* ‘topple’; nominal forms, such as *pjėsmāma* ‘songs.OBL.PL’, *grūpāma* ‘groups.OBL.PL’, *rībāma* ‘fish.OBL.PL’; and adverbs, such as *dānās* ‘today’, *nòcās* ‘tonight’, *večėrās* ‘this evening’ (cf. Čirgić and Šušanj 2013). Although some specialists in the standards

will explicitly advocate for one variant, what is at stake here is that there are competing (doublet) accentual variants.

Particular dilemmas are seen in the preservation or elimination (presence vs. absence) of post-accentual lengths in the accent of various examples of numbers, such as *pětsto/pětstō* ‘500’, *šěsto/šěstō* ‘600’, *sědamsto/sědamstō* ‘700’, *òsamsto/òsamstō* ‘800’, *jedànaest/jedànaēst* ‘11’, *dvànaest/dvànaēst* ‘12’, *trínaest/trínaēst* ‘13’, *devetnaest devètnaest/devètnaēst* ‘19’; pronouns, such as *njěga/njěgā* ‘of him’, *čěga/čěgā* ‘of it’, *tàkav/tàkāv* ‘such’, *kàkav/kàkāv* ‘what kind of’, *onàkav /onàkāv* ‘like that’, *njěgov/njěgōv* ‘his’, *njězin/njězīn* ‘her’, *òvog/òvōg* ‘of this’, *ònog/ònōg* ‘of that there’, *tòga /tògā* ‘of that’, *měne/mènē/mènē* ‘of me’, *těbe/těbē/těbe* ‘of you’, *sěbe/sěbē/sěbe* ‘of oneself’; adverbs, such as *mànje/mànje* ‘less’, *všě /všē* ‘higher’, *břže/břžē* ‘faster’, *bòlje/bòljē* ‘better’, *nàravno/nàravno* ‘naturally’ (of course), *náporno/náporno* ‘tiringly’; adjectives, such as *ljúbavni/ljubāvni (ljúbāvni)* ‘loving’, *òsnovni/òsnōvni* ‘basic’, *ìstinski/ìstīnski* ‘true’, *òpcínski/òpcīnski* ‘pertaining to the district’, *mòstarski/mòstārski* ‘pertaining to Mostar’, *nàstavnički/nàstāvnički* ‘pedagogical’ (this may extend to adverbs that are marked without the final length that are, nevertheless, pronounced as adjectives in actual speech, e.g., *bràtski/bràtski* ‘in a brotherly way’, *ljúdski/ljúdski* ‘in a human[e] way’); or nouns, especially as concerns innovation of post-tonic length, as in *prěporod/prěporōd* ‘rebirth’, *pròfesor/pròfesōr* ‘professor’, *nàstavnik/nàstāvnik* ‘teacher’, *násilnik/násīlnik* ‘bully’, *něvinōst/něvīnōst* ‘innocence’, as well as in borrowed nouns such as *dòcent/dòcēnt* ‘assistant professor’, *pàket/pàkēt* ‘packet’, *sěrvīs/sěrvīs* ‘service’, *kòncèrt/kòncert* ‘concert’, or in examples like *návōj/návoj* ‘thread’ (of a screw), *pòkōj/pòkoj* ‘rest’, *pónōc/pónoć* ‘midnight’, *làžōv/làžov* ‘liar’. In southern dialects, post-tonic length is recorded for all the above examples of numbers (*petsto, jedanaest*) and for pronouns (*čěga*) and adverbs (*bolje*), while eastern areas have neutralized length (i.e., post-tonic length has yielded to a short unstressed vowel), while the western preserve post-tonic length. In general, the verified doublets of the verb are known for elimination or preservation of the post-accentual length in the present and aorist, e.g., *ùdari/ùdari* ‘hit’, *ìskočī/ìskoči* ‘jumped out’, *prèlomī/prèlomi* ‘broke’, *ùgledā/ùgleda* ‘glimpsed’, *šjēm/šjēm* ‘I sew’, *kùjēm/kùjem* ‘I forge’, *plètēm/plètem* ‘I braid’.

Neo-Štokavian dialects as the basis for the standard language

The Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect as the eastern belt of the Neo-Štokavian dialect “served from the early 18th century onward as the basis for the new Serbian literary language” (Ivić 1985: 69), and “[i]t can be said that the vernaculars of this dialect in northwestern Serbia and parts of Srem form the basis of the Serbo-Croatian literary language of the eastern dialect, that is, the one used in Serbia and Vojvodina” (Ivić 1985: 70). From among the features of the Šumadija-Vojvodina dialect, “new (or mostly new) accentuation and predominantly Ekavian *jat* replacement” (Ivić 1985: 70) stand out as typical features.

In practice, “radical elimination of post-accentual length and the tendency to shorten syllables with long accents” are particularly important for the accentuation of Ekavian dialects (Telebak 2009: 75; emphasis ours). Moreover, various deviations from the classical (Vukovian) standard in the Serbian accent system, as has been asserted by some Serbian linguists, indicates that the Serbian standard accent system has a norm that mainly reflects the western Serbian dialects, but not the eastern ones. For this reason, a restandardization of the ekavian accent system would be warranted (cf. Petrović, cited in Telebak 2009: 76).

Neo-Štokavian Ikavian dialects are not directly reflected in any South Slavic standard, although Ikavian-Jekavian dialects were the most widespread (in the prestandard period before the 19th c.) South Slavic Štokavian dialect, a proto-standard, in which many fine examples of folk poetry were sung. Ikavian speakers accepted Ijekavian (southern dialects) for their standard. Ikavian Neo-Štokavian dialects extend to the area of western Bosnia and Herzegovina, and parts of southwestern Croatia (see Belić 1971). After the migrations in the 15th century, parts of the coastal Čakavian dialects became Štokavian.

East Herzegovinian or so-called southern dialects, having as their primary location not only the southeastern parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina but also western Montenegro (i.e., the so-called old Herzegovina), and parts of western Serbia, are directly defined as the basis of the standard [Bosnian](#) language and standard [Montenegrin](#) language. These dialects formed the basis for the [Serbian](#) Ijekavian standard and, partly, the [Croatian](#) standard.

It should be mentioned that the southeastern Montenegrin dialects are archaic, i.e., Old Štokavian, and all Bosnian dialects today have Neo-Štokavian (and by the accent innovative) features. Also, the Šumadija-Vojvodina (Neo-Štokavian Ekavian) accent is connected to the majority of northwestern Serbia, while a smaller part of western Serbia belongs to the East Herzegovinian Neo-Štokavian dialects (see Jahić 2000).

It can also be stated that the Bosnian territory in this context is dialectally the most compact and most uniform. For this reason, as a rule, the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina is recognized by its “classical” accent system: (a) *shift of accent to the proclitic* and (b) *preservation of post-accentual length* (see Riđanović 2009), although remnants of the old accentuation can be found in the dialects of the Bosnian language outside Herzegovina (see Čatović 2020; Hodžić et al. 2020). The “classical system” refers to the previously established Serbo-Croatian classical accent norm, according to Vuk Karadžić and Đura Daničić, i.e., as codified later by Tomo Maretić (see references in Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian). The territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the accent system of the contemporary Bosnian language are also, precisely through reliance on central Štokavian dialect features, judged as “suitable” to bear classical Neo-Štokavian accent features in the accentuation of standardized forms of the language:

In the light of accentual norm in standard Bosnian, I think that the situation is different than the standard, which, properly, relies on a “Central Štokavian” dialect more than is the case with Croatian. Therefore, it is justified that the standard follow the “Martić style.” (Pranjković 2010: 23)

For other territories of Neo-Štokavian dialects and the Štokavian territory as a whole, the tendency toward less frequent leftward shift in accent applies, which is both a dialectal and increasingly a *de facto* standard feature of the Serbian, Croatian, and Montenegrin languages.

In contrast, for Montenegrin dialects, and for the bordering dialects of southwestern Serbia, preservation of classical pronunciation of the Ijekavian reflex of Proto-Slavic *jat* is the most prevalent feature in practice. The East Herzegovinian dialects also include the dialects of

southwestern Serbia, which means that, in addition to their connection to other Serbian speakers outside Serbia, these dialects are also taken as the basis for Ijekavian Serbian language standard (Serbian recognizes two of its standards, Ekavian and Ijekavian). However, during the formation of the [Serbo-Croatian](#) (previously common) standard, Vuk Karadžić (1814a; 1814b; 1818; 1852) subsequently incorporated many speech features into that standard, which he could not have found in his native dialect (Tršić in Serbia near Zvornik in Bosnia, on the northwestern border of Serbia with Bosnia) but went farther southwest, outside of Serbia. He consequently adopted certain characteristic linguistic features and particularities (which refer to the preservation of the *h* sound, unrealized Jekavian *jot*-sound alternations such as *djevojka*/*đevojka*, etc.). Karadžić also adopted some orthographic solutions from the west (the Bosnian old letter *đerv* [



] for the sounds *đ* and *ć* [Vukovian Cyrillic *ђ* and *ћ*], the Latin *j*, etc.) in reforming the [Cyrillic](#) alphabet.

The Croatian standard is based on the Dubrovnik dialect, as a southern version of the Neo-Štokavian dialect, but also on the western Štokavian dialect in general, and on Štokavian Dalmatian-Bosnian dialects. Finally, in updating the standard, it also relies on non-Štokavian Croatian ([Čakavian](#) and [Kajkavian](#)) dialects. That is, in the accentual landscape of the standard language and in building the accent norm, the Croatian language relies on the central and western Štokavian territory (see Delaš 2013; Martinović 2010).

Furthermore, in current versions of standard languages on the basis of the Neo-Štokavian system, certain deviations from Vuk's accent system are noted. By "verified deviations" are meant examples that are still considered attested in standard use (not examples of deviations from the classical features of Neo-Štokavian, which would conflict with and differ from the standard language). Likewise, even the entire Neo-Štokavian territory inherits additional differences in accentuation. Both for deviations from Vuk's classical accent system and for additional examples of differences in accentuation, the determination of verified examples of accentual doublets is warranted, an area that requires further research.

Given that the main features of classical Neo-Štokavian dialect (a clear distinction of four accents, post-accentual length, and accent shift) connect to the southern belt of the Neo-Štokavian dialect, it is worth noting that this territory is also the one with the greatest contact among the Bosnian, Montenegrin, Croatian, and Serbian languages, i.e., the territory between two borders: from the border of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia to the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Croatia.

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