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The Slavic languages, along with the Baltic languages, are remarkable for their rich and varied word-prosody systems, which in terms of their suprasegmental realizations include dynamic-stress (e.g., [East Slavic](#), [Bulgarian](#)) and limited [pitch-accent](#) systems (e.g., [Slovene](#), [BCMS](#)). These systems, along with relic systems such as the ones found in West Slavic peripheral and extinct dialects (Northern [Kashubian](#), [Slovincian](#), [Polabian](#)), display lexical paradigmatic stress patterns, which, as well as their suprasegmental inventories, provide rich sources for the reconstruction of Proto-Indo-European word prosody (see [Accentology](#), [Schools of Balto-Slavic Accentology](#)). Fixed-stress systems are typically associated with the [West Slavic languages](#), the standard languages of which have either fixed word-initial stress ([Czech](#), [Slovak](#), Upper [Sorbian](#)) or penultimate stress ([Polish](#), Lower Sorbian). An outlier in the [South Slavic](#) branch is [Macedonian](#), whose standard variety is characterized by fixed antepenultimate stress (with exceptions). In dialects, fixed-stress systems are found in smaller subsets of the south and east.



Typology and distribution of fixed stress

In languages of the world, fixed-stress languages – as opposed to free-stress languages, in which stress placement contrasts and potentially produces minimal pairs, e.g., Ru *múka* ‘suffering’ vs. *muká* ‘flour’ – are common. According to Hyman’s typology (2006: 233–234, 237), fixed-accent systems can be subsumed under stress-accent systems, as opposed to pitch-accent systems, which are known to permit (underlyingly) accentless words (e.g., Tokyo Japanese and Somali), which is a property reconstructed for **Proto-Slavic** (accentual paradigm [a.p.] *c* forms such as **gǫlvǫ* ‘head.ACC.SG’ vs. **golvǫ́* ‘head.NOM.SG’) but not of modern Slavic languages (see further **Accentology**). (Notably, accentless words can occur in languages lacking phonemic pitch, though they are sometimes associated with those that have lost erstwhile pitch distinctions, e.g., non-tonemic Abkhaz and the tonemic Tapant dialect of Abaza, both northwest Caucasian languages; see Dybo et al. 1978 for details.) Stress-accent systems may be further divided into fixed-stress and free-stress types, whereby fixed stress can be estimated to comprise about 56% of world languages. Estimates of the share of word-prosody systems with free stress vs. fixed stress, including the breakdown of target syllable for the fixed types, are provided in table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of fixed- and free-stress languages, N = 502 (compiled from Goedemans and van der Hulst 2013)

free stress		44%
fixed stress	initial	18%
	second	3%
	third	0%
	antepenultimate	2%
	penultimate	22%
	ultimate	10%
total		100%

Although modern **Indo-European** languages predominantly have contrastive stress, fixed-stress systems occur in subsets of the families: ca 16% are final-stressed (e.g., Armenian, **Romani**, **Iranian**); initial-stress is found in ca 8% (e.g., Latvian, **Czech**, Irish) – though note that detailed grammars often point out exceptions in subsets of the lexicon. Penultimate stress is somewhat rarer (e.g., **Polish**; data from Salmons 1992: 51). Slavic languages, though together with Baltic languages noted for their intricate inherited system of lexically assigned paradigmatic stress patterns (see **Accentology**; **Pitch-Accent**), have developed fixed-stress systems in the three Slavic branches, most pervasively in **West Slavic**, where standard **Polish**, **Czech**, **Slovak**, **Upper and Lower Sorbian**, and northern **Kashubian** have fixed stress. Among these, stress is fixed on either the initial or the penultimate syllable, which are not uncommon configurations in world languages. **South Slavic** fixed stress is represented by standard **Macedonian**, which has antepenultimate word stress, a typologically rare configuration. In western Carpathian **Ukrainian** (Lemko) dialects, fixed penultimate stress is a contact feature introduced from **West Slavic** (Baerman 1999: 125).

The standard Slavic languages associated with fixed-stress systems normativize a model fixed system for each of these languages, whereas transitional dialect zones and exceptions to both fixedness of the primary stress as well as

the presence or absence of vowel quantity contrasts (see [Quantity Systems](#)) are found in authentic speech of otherwise standard speakers and dialects. An overview is given in table 2.

Table 2: Fixed-stress systems in Slavic standard languages

language	type	other prosodic features	notes
Kashubian	initial		northern dialects retain lexical/morphological stress
Polish	penultimate		some classes of words in standard Polish are asserted to resist generalization of penultimate stress
Lower Sorbian	initial		secondary stress in the penultima
Upper Sorbian	initial		loanwords can violate initial stress; words with four or more syllables can have penultimate stress, realized as greater length (Howson 2017)
Slovak	initial	quantity contrasts in vowels	central dialects have alternation between initial and penultimate stress; others, notably in the east, have penultimate or, in the Sotak dialects, preserve some inherited free stress (Schallert 2011)
Czech	initial	quantity contrasts in vowels	Silesian dialect has penultimate fixed stress akin to Polish
Macedonian	antepenultimate		antepenultimate stress limited to west and central dialects; penultimate stress prevails in dialects in Albania and Greece; nonfixed and partially nonfixed (transitional) stress patterns in eastern Macedonian dialects

The phonetic correlates of fixed stress are generally relatively higher amplitude and pitch as well as greater length of the prominent syllable. In Slavic fixed-stress systems, stressable phonological words are thus marked for culminative and delimitative functions, that is, marking off a word unit and its boundary. Clitics attached to a word count as part of a phonological word, but boundary effects can also modify the stress placement. Thus, for example, in Czech, both the word *obyčejný* [ˈɔbɪtʃejniː] ‘usual.NOM.SG.M’ and its negated form *neobyčejný* [ˈnɛɔbɪtʃejniː] ‘unusual’ have expected initial stress plus obligatory glottal stop before a vocalic onset; however, a phrasal unit with a preposed [negation particle](#) contrasts in that the ictus sometimes remains in the first syllable of the headword rather than moving to the proclitic *ne obyčejný* [nɛ_ɔbɪtʃejniː] ‘not usual’ (Bičan 2008: 32). Fixed-stress systems linking to the rightward boundary accordingly have stress on the default syllable regardless of the number of syllables suffixed. So for example, in standard [Macedonian](#), there are the following stress assignments in a simplex word and derivatives from it: *tatko* [ˈtat.kɔ] ‘father’, *tatkova* [ˈtat.kɔ.va] ‘father’s.FEM.SG’, *tatkovina* [tat.ˈkɔ.vi.na] ‘fatherland’, *tatkovinata* [tat.kɔ.ˈvi.na.ta] ‘the fatherland’. Macedonian also includes enclitics into the phonological word, e.g., *Done'si mi ja k*

nigata (lit. ‘bring.IMP.2SG I.DAT it.F.SG book.DEF’) ‘Bring me the book’ (Baerman and Billings 1997: 20; Greenberg 2023: 196–197). Polish, notably, has both a default penultimate stress and a smaller set of borrowed words with non-penultimate, usually antepenultimate stress. Moreover, the past-tense forms of verbs retain, at least in conservative varieties of the standard, stress on the past-tense stem regardless of the number of syllables that the **person-number** markers add to the stem. Borrowings with the suffix *-ika/-yka* are orthoepically stressed on the antepenult, e.g., *Po matematyka* [ma.te.'ma.ti.ka] ‘mathematics’, *akustyka* [a.'ku.sti.ka] ‘acoustics’. Past-tense singular conditional verb forms in the 1st- and 2nd-person plural are also prescriptively stressed on the antepenult, e.g., *Po chodźiliśmy* [xo.'dzi.li.ɡmi] ‘walk.1PL.M’, *pracowałyście* [pra.tso.'va.wi.ɕtɛ] ‘work.2PL.F’, *chodźitabym* [xo.'dzi.wa.bim] ‘walk.1SG.F.COND’, *chodźitabyś* [xo.'dzi.wa.biɕ] ‘walk.2SG.F.COND’, *chodźitaby* [xo.'dzi.wa.bi] ‘walk.3SG.F.COND’, whereas the longer plural conditional forms are to be stressed on the pre-antepenult, e.g., *napisatabyśmy* [na.pji.'sa.wa.biɕ.mi] ‘write.1PL.F.COND.PFV’, *zniosłybyście* [znj'o.swi.bi.ɕtɛ] (Ostaszewska and Tambor 2023: 94–95). Each of these “exceptional” patterns has a tendency in spontaneous speech to be stressed on the penult in accord with the default pattern (Rada Języka Polskiego 2002). Moreover, optional antepenult stress occurs in *w 'ogóle* ‘in general; at all’ (a likely spelling pronunciation for common *w ógle*), *Rzeczposp'olita* ‘endonym referring to the Polish state’ (probably analogical to *republika*); cf. *pospolity* ‘common’. The tendency toward or complete loss of sensitivity to lexical stress patterns is referred to as “stress deafness” in the phonological literature (Domahs et al. 2012; Hyman 2014: 78).

Some south Polish varieties (e.g., the Goral dialect, including Podhale, and related dialects in Slovakia, Spiš/Spisz and Orava/Orawa; the Jabłonków **Silesian** dialect) have initial stress, often with strong variation affected by the dominant penultimate Polish system (Karaś n.d.).

In subsets of Czech and Slovak dialects, there are systems that show distributions of stress elements at variance with the standardized initial-stress pattern. Holub (2011) documents for a spoken corpus recorded in southern and western Bohemia, in the environs of Pilsen, penultimate stress occurring about 75% of the time in stressable (i.e., non-clitic) words, while penultimate “stress” may be an interpretation of a rising-pitch contour, sometimes referred to in the dialectological literature as “plzeňské zpívání” ‘Pilsener singing’ (Holub and Greenberg 2013). Similar variability has been observed in central Slovak dialects (Petřík 1937–1938; see also Habijanec 2006: 52–59).

Some claims have been made about divergent systems in **South** and **East Slavic** that have tendencies toward stress fixing, though they cannot be synchronically considered fixed-stress systems. Examples include the **Kajkavian** dialects (which are otherwise typically pitch and quantity distinguishing) of Virje and Gola in northern Croatia, south and north of the Drava River, respectively, close to the Hungarian state border. In these dialects, the place of stress is limited to the two final syllables of an accentogenic word, where the final syllable can carry stress only if it is long (pitch contrasts have been eliminated; Fancev 1907: 338–362; Večenaj and Lončarić 1997; Marešić 2009). As Kapović (2015: 44–45) indicates, this dialect nevertheless preserves the fundamental inherited paradigmatic relationships, e.g., in the verb *čistiš* (a.p. *a*, with Slovene-Kajkavian neo-circumflex) < *čīstīš ‘you clean’; *nòsiš* (a.p. *b*, with neutralization of pitch from neo-acute on a short root vowel) < *nòsiš ‘you carry’; *sadīš* (a.p. *c* with neutralization of pitch with neo-acute stress on a long desinential vowel) < *sadiš ‘you plant’; however, barytone stress such as Kajkavian *jägode* ‘strawberry.GEN.SG’ (a.p. *a*) has been replaced by the a.p. *c* pattern *sramotê* ‘shame.GEN.SG’. Other moves toward partially fixed systems have been observed in the northern **Russian** dialect of Zaonež'e (northern peninsula on the Lake Onego), the Slavonian Štokavian dialect, and the Podravski Štokavian dialect of Valpovo, in each of which are documented cases of retraction from end-stressed forms to initial-stressed, including onto enclitics: e.g., *Zaonež'e* [zivj'æt] ‘lives.3SG’ (StRu *živět*), [ts'æplj'æt] ‘of chicks.GEN.PL’ (StRu *cyplját*), *u nas* ‘by us’ (StRu *u nás*), [rɔʎzəš'va] ‘of Christmas.GEN.SG’ (StRu *roždestvá*) (Ter-Avanesova 1989: 218). The parallel northern Slavonian retractions (final-stressed open syllable to initial stress) occur in the context of Old Štokavian accent systems with otherwise variable stress and pitch, e.g., *žèna* ‘of woman.GEN.SG’, *vòdē* ‘of water.GEN.SG’ (< *vodē), *ù ministarstvo* ‘to the ministry’ (< *u ministarstvò*), but *danàs* ‘today’ (< *dъnъsъ), *krādēju* ‘they steal’ (a.p. *c* *kradq[tr̥]) (Ivić 1958: 286–287; see further **Štokavian**, **Neo-Štokavian accent**). Pronk (2018), summarizing and elaborating earlier scholars’ views, demonstrates that these retractions arose as a result of contact with non-Slavic fixed initial-stress languages, Finnic in the case of Zaonež'e and Hungarian in the Štokavian cases (see Pronk 2018 for details and

additional data and critiques of earlier analyses). Kapović (2015: 714–715) points out that the Slavonian evidence may be unreliable and notes the “chaotic” nature of the evidence for retractions.

The emergence of fixed stress

The rise of fixed-stress systems occurred after the breakup of [Common Slavic](#) and before the rise of [West Slavic](#) texts, thus in a “dark” period such that it has hampered reconstruction of the developments leading to them (Habijanec 2006: 2). [Czech](#) initial fixed stress can be established as having arisen by the 13th century, as indicated in analysis of versification (Jakobson 1924–1925; Habijanec 2016: 97).

Jakobson’s early structural account of Slavic prosodic systems (Jakobson 2018 [1929]), noted here because of its influence on later researchers’ views, situates fixed-accent systems within a path of developments on which the inherited [pitch-accent](#) and vowel-quantity contrasts conflict with the emergence of phonemic [palatalization](#) with the fall of the *jers*, such that the elimination of palatalization correlations before the fall of the *jers* gave rise to the western [South Slavic pitch-accent system](#) and the attendant merger of the back and front *jers* into a single reflex). Those areas that retained palatalization contrasts and lost pitch contrasts split, according to Jakobson, into an “eastern solution,” exemplified by [Russian](#) and [Bulgarian](#), with the loss of quantity distinctions and retention of stress placement, and a “western solution,” exemplified by Czech, [Slovak](#), Old Polish, and [Sorbian](#), which retained quantity distinctions and assigned a stable ictus to one syllable in a stressed word. Fixed stress in [Carpathian Rusyn](#) (Jakobson’s “Rusnak”) and [Macedonian](#) (“Western Bulgarian”) are explained as a result of transitional zones between palatalizing and free-stressing dialects ([Ukrainian](#), “Eastern Bulgarian”) and less palatalizing ([Slovak](#)) and non-palatalizing (western South Slavic) areas (Jakobson 2018: 79–80, 84, 92, 95–96, based on a 1938 publication).

According to Habijanec (2016), following the general lines of Lehr-Splawiński’s (1923) often cited (and thus, arguably “classic”) theory of West Slavic accent stabilization, initial stress was generalized over most of the West Slavic territory except for northern [Kashubian](#) (Topolińska 1974: 86–87), and it is retained today in Czech, Slovak, and Sorbian; penultimate fixed stress developed subsequently in Polish, Lower Sorbian, and the eastern Slovak dialect. The kernel of Lehr-Splawiński’s theory lies in the analysis of the three outcomes of Kashubian dialects, in which he divides the territory into northern, central, and southern dialect belts. In the northern Kashubian dialect, stress can occur in any syllable of the word and can be mobile within a word; in central Kashubian, any word syllable can be stressed, while there is no paradigmatic stress mobility; in southern Kashubian, which is the only dialect to have had continuous contact with Polish, fixed initial stress prevails, with secondary penultimate stress in polysyllabic words. The secondary, penultimate stress in southern Kashubian reflects the stress that was secondarily generalized in Polish, while the central and northern dialects failed to carry through either the first (initial-stress) or second (penultimate-stressed) fixed-accent innovations. Czech is considered the epicenter of fixed initial stress, which spread eastward and northeastward, reaching Slovak by the 13th and Polish by the 14th century (Habijanec 2006: 97, 106). In Polish, some version of mobile stress was still in place at the time of the earliest written texts (*Bogurodzica*, *Kazanie świętokrzyskie*), which were originally composed by the 12th century, although surviving documents date to later centuries. The evidence is indirect and can be inferred from vowel elision vs. retention in positions where free-stressed Slavic varieties show unstressed vs. stressed final vowels; e.g., in the (Old Polish) *Kazanie świętokrzyskie*, one finds *wstań* ‘stand up!’ *dowiedzi* ‘lead up!’ vs. (modern) Čakavian *ustāni*, *dovedī* and a direct parallel, including final elision of unstressed *-i*, in Ru *vstān’*, *dovedī* (Klemensiewicz et al. 1955: 65; Habijanec 2006: 111) < PSL **-stāni*, **-vedī*.

Following Jakobson’s (2018 [1929]) observation about the similarity of initial fixed stress in “Czecho-Slovak” and Hungarian, Skalička (1935) proposes that fixed stress is a Central European convergence feature on the basis of both word-prosodic and segmental similarities between the two languages (see also [Habsburg Convergence Area](#)). The view that fixed stress is a result of contact between West Slavic languages and [German/Hungarian](#) is further advocated by Berger (2008: 18–19), who sees initial fixed accent in West Slavic as a consequence of primarily early contact with German, which had vowel-quantity oppositions and dynamic stress fixed in the first root syllable. When fixed initial stress with quantity spread over most of the areas in which there had been intensive German-Slavic [bilingualism](#) – including the Bohemian, Moravian, and western Slovak dialects – and reached as far to the northwest as the Sorbian languages and northward to Polish, it left traces of the older pitch-accent system in place in southern

Bohemia and the northernmost dialects in Czech Silesia in the southern tier of West Slavic (see above on the “*plzeňské zpívání*”) and the Pomeranian-Kashubian in the northern tier, where southern Kashubian continued to retain the earlier initial-stress generalization. Hungarian is thought to have played a weaker role in effecting initial stress stabilization in Slovak, as evidenced by the fact that eastern Slovak has non-initial stress and yet has had intensive contact with Hungarian.

The Macedonian development occurred separately and pertains only to a subset of dialects. Southern [Serbian](#) dialects in transition to [Macedonian](#) show limitations on (dynamic) stress placement, which also bridges the more complex pitch- and vowel-quantity-contrasting systems found in Štokavian dialects to the fixed-accent system in Macedonian (see [Štokavian](#); [Neo-Štokavian](#); [Torlak dialects](#)). According to Koneski (1983), the fixed (western) and nonfixed (eastern) stress types found in Macedonian were in place by the 13th century. In more recent times, a tendency toward retraction of stress from an open final syllable is noted for both the eastern Macedonian dialects and the western periphery in Albania (Boboščica), which further represents the southwesternmost periphery of Slavic. Fixed-penult-stress dialects are reflected in Common Romani loans (prior to the 15th c., presumed to be from the area of Kostur/Kastoria), e.g., *zélno* (← *zélien*) ‘green’, *perníca* (← *perníca*) ‘down-bed’; cf. Bg *zelén*, usually *pérnica* (see further [Romani and Slavic in contact](#)).

In Boboščica Macedonian, penultimate fixed stress has prevailed (Koneski 1983: 18–19), e.g., *raka*, *ra'kata* ‘hand, hand.f.sg.def’, *ljap*, *ljabo*, *le'bovi*, *lebo'vite* ‘bread, bread.m.sg.def, loaves of bread, loaves of bread.m.pl.def’ (Vidoeski 1981: 753, 758; Mazon 1936: 419). As has been pointed out by Baerman (1999), both phonological and morphological factors are likely to have contributed to fixed stress; moreover, the phonological “ban on final stress” affected not just Macedonian, but is found in all three branches of Slavic, including his three case studies, Macedonian, Kashubian, and Ukrainian, as well as [BCMS](#) (beginning in the 14th c.) and 15th-century central Bulgarian texts (Baerman 1999: 28–29, 34, 96–98, 126–128, 131; Ivić 1958: 67; Dybo et al. 1993: 30). Accented western Russian texts also reflect retraction from final to open syllables in the 14th century (Zaliznjak 1985: 182). A syntax-phonology-interface explanation for Macedonian fixed stress is built on the notion that Macedonian has reanalyzed phonological words to incorporate lengthy strings of clitics, on which see [Syntax-Phonology Interface](#).

The tendency toward limiting of place of stress can be observed in southern Serbian dialects (which have, like Macedonian and unlike most Štokavian languages, lost pitch and quantity), as has been demonstrated by Alexander (1975: 517), who identifies three isoglosses for [Torlak](#) dialects, which have the effect of narrowing: (1) retraction of stress from final to penultimate, analogously penultimate stress is retracted to antepenultimate (phonetically in the southwest; morphologically conditioned in central and eastern dialects); (2) shift of the stress to the final syllable or grammatical ending; (3) shift of stress from the initial syllable to the final syllable of the stem. The internal dialect differences within Torlak are mostly limited to a small number of morphologically defined exceptions, e.g., in southwest Torlak (contiguous to Macedonian) animate feminine nouns in dative singular (*sestr'e* ‘to sister’, *sna'e* ‘to daughter-in-law’) and aorist *id'o* ‘I went’, *no'si* ‘carried’ (end stress is analogically extended from 1st-person singular to the 2nd- and 3rd-person forms, the latter two of which are homonymous). Nevertheless, these retentions originate in phonologically conditioned environments in which stress retraction from a final syllable had been prevented: the dative singular feminine forms are taken from etymological a-stem genitive singular desinence (*-ĕ), which was long and thus retained stress; and the aorist 1st-person forms derive from syllables until recently ending in *-h* (Alexander 1975: 517–519). The result of these isoglosses is a narrowing of possibilities for stress placement to the final three syllables of polysyllabic words (see also Greenberg 2023).

(Further details about the typology of fixed stress, comparing Slavic to world languages, can be found in Kapović 2023: 419–430; and on the historical development of, as well as historiography of research on, Slavic fixed stress, see Habijanec 2006.)

Nonstandard abbreviations used in this article

St Standard

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