

**Laura Janda**

The Slavic language family is a group of closely related, yet in many ways surprisingly diverse linguistic communities. The past twelve hundred years or so of Slavic language history is reasonably well-documented, enabling us to trace the development from a mother language (closely approximated by Old Church Slavonic) to the present (Townsend & Janda 1996). I will present contrastive and diachronic Slavic data, derived from years of empirical research on vast databases of natural language data, primarily on the material of Czech, Polish, and Russian. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to three detailed analyses examining the semantics of Slavic case usage, the use of case in time expressions, and the development of new semantic distinctions within the masculine gender category. As we will see, a prolific source of contrasts in case usage is indicative of the role of metonymy in language, connecting endpoints, paths, trajectories, and locations. An unusually large number of systematic differences in case use is generated by the semantic field of time. This is perhaps no surprise, since time is understood entirely in metaphorical terms, providing many opportunities for languages to use different metaphoric means to highlight parallels between time and space, while suppressing others. The issue of salience and individuation has been returned to again and again in the development of distinctions within masculine gender in the history of Slavic languages, often recycling .old. morphology to create .new. distinctions. These three types of variation will be considered in this examination of the multitude of expressive textures available for cross-linguistic and diachronic comparison in the Slavic languages.