

# 14 Polabian

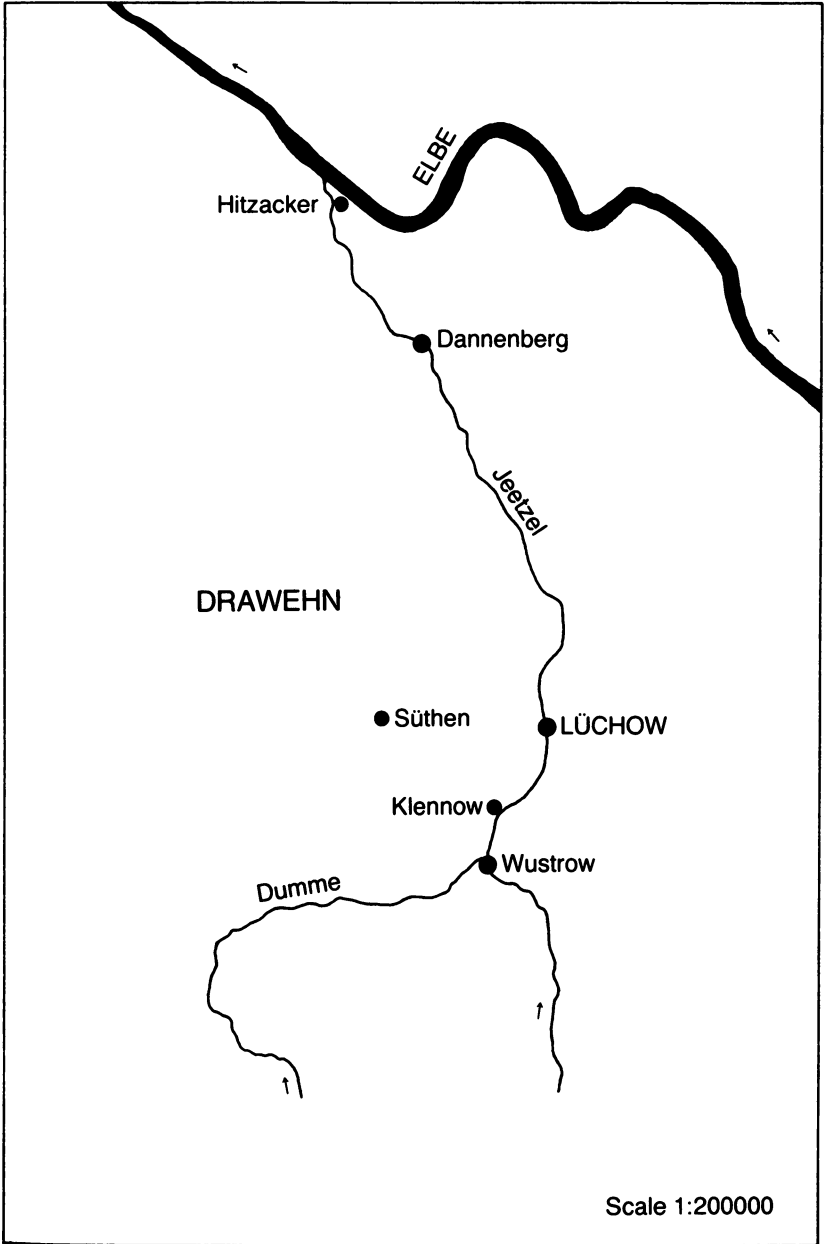
*Kazimierz Polański*

## 1 Introduction

Polabian belongs to the Lechitic subgroup of West Slavonic languages. Most of the dialects of West Lechitic were extinct by the late Middle Ages and are attested only by fragmentary, mainly toponomastic, evidence. Polabian was its westernmost variety, spoken by the Slavonic tribe living on the left bank of the Elbe river. It survived until the middle of the eighteenth century, when it was still spoken by a few people in the vicinity of the towns Lüchow, Wustrow and Dannenberg along the Jeezel and Dumme rivers. In actual fact the Slavonic language spoken there was not called Polabian either by the Germans or by the people who used it. The Germans referred to it as *wendisch* and the people that spoke it called it *slüvenst'ě* (◁ *\*slověnskъjь*) or *venst'ě* (◁ German *wend-* + *\*-ьскъjь*). (In order to help decode Polabian forms and compare them with their equivalents in the other Slavonic languages, each Polabian example will be provided with its Proto-Slavonic – or rather, pre-Polabian – reconstruction. Polabian forms will be cited in our transcription rather than in the way they were recorded by the compilers of the texts.)

The region is now called *Lüneburger Wendland* or *Hannover Wendland*. Formerly, it was called *Drawehn* or *Drawein*. The Slavonic tribe inhabiting this region was mentioned for the first time in 1004 in the form *Drewani* (◁ *\*dervjani*) 'inhabitants of forests'. There seems to be no doubt that the few people speaking Polabian at the beginning of the eighteenth century were descendants of the Drewani tribe. As far as the term *Polabian* is concerned it should rather refer to another Slavonic tribe whose name was also recorded as early as the eleventh century in the form *Polabi*. Yet the term has been used in this sense for a long time (for example, by Schleicher 1871; Lehr-Spławiński 1929; Trubetzkoy 1929) and there is no need to replace it by another one. Some authors make use of terms combining both constituents, such as *Draväno-Polaben* (Rost 1907), *Drzewianie Połabscy* (Lehr-Spławiński and Polański 1962), *lingua dravaenopolabica* (Olesch 1983–7).

At the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Polabian language was in the process of dying. Christian Hennig von Jessen, one of



Map 14.1 The region of Drawehn

the recorders of Polabian, in the introduction to his *Vocabularium Venedicum*, states that only a few of the old people still spoke Polabian and goes on to predict that within twenty, or at most thirty, years, when the old people had died, the Polabian language would cease to exist. This was written about 1710.

The recorded Polabian material is highly fragmentary. It includes roughly 2,800 lexical items, the majority of which are registered in one grammatical form, not necessarily the basic one. Quite a number of words are cited misleadingly as basic units, for they must have been taken by the compilers out of a broader context, for example, *letā* (LOC SG) 'summer', *stārne* (DAT SG) 'side' from *vā letā* (< \**вѣ лѣтѣ*) 'in summer', *kā stārne* (< \**къ сторнѣ*) 'to the side, aside', respectively.

The paucity of the Polabian written records and all kinds of inconsistencies encountered in them invited some scholars to take liberties with the texts and speculate freely on the sounds and forms of Polabian. This generated a number of conflicting hypotheses concerning the phonology and almost all parts of Polabian grammar. However, a more careful examination of the Polabian records, carried out since the 1920s, shows that their notation was far more regular than previously assumed.

The most important sources of Polabian are: (a) Johann Parum Schultze's *Chronicle* with a German-Polabian glossary. Parum Schultze was the only Polabian among the compilers of the Polabian texts. (b) Hennig von Jessen's *Vocabularium Venedicum*, the most comprehensive and systematic of the Polabian texts; (c) Pfeffinger's *Vocabulaire Vandale*. These and practically all the rest were published by Rost (1907). All available Polabian material has been very carefully republished by Olesch (1959, 1962, 1967).

Polabian was exposed to the influence of the German language, in the first place to the Low German variety, from the Middle Ages to the final period of its existence. Most German loan-words can be traced to Middle Low German. German loan-words constitute about 20 per cent of the recorded lexicon. These were not only phonologically assimilated, but most of them were also morphologically adapted to the grammatical system of Polabian, being inflected according to the native paradigms as well as often provided with native prefixes or suffixes, for example, *brind'ojě* (< \*(German *bring-*)-*ajerъ*) 'brings', *krauckotě* (< \*(Middle Low German *krüce-*)-*katъjъ*) 'crossed, cross'.

There were a number of German calques in Polabian, for example, *vā janü* (< \**вѣ jedъno*) 'together' (compare German *in eins* 'together'), *dirzolsā vit paivo* (< \**dřžalъ sę (v)otъ piva*) '(he) has abstained from beer' (compare German *sich enthalten vom Biere*), *jopt' ě-dpъ* (< \**jablъko-dpъbъ*) 'apple-tree' (compare German *Apfelbaum*), *jisin-mond* (< \**jesenъ (mond* from Middle Low German *mand*)) 'September' (compare the German *Herbstmonat*).

In addition to the lexicon, German influence also affected Polabian grammar. Low German has been claimed as the source of the Polabian mixing of the dative and the accusative, as in *momě jim* (< \**jmamy jemu*) 'we have him' (instead of *momě jeg* < \**jmamy jego*). One type of Polabian passive construction employed the Low German auxiliary verb *werden* (see 3.2.1). On the German model Polabian developed separable compound verbs using both German and Polabian prefixes-particles (see 3.3.3). The new perfect-tense forms with the auxiliary verbs *bâit* (< \**byti*) or *met* (< \**jměti*) are another example of German influence upon Polabian grammar, for instance, *ja vâpodeně* (< \**jestь vьpadenъjь*) '(he) has fallen in', *vân mo nodenâ* (< \*(*v*)onь jьmajetъ najьdenoje) 'he has won'. Here we should mention forms with *sâ* (< \**sъ*) plus the instrumental, which completely replaced the instrumental without preposition (see 3.1.2).

Polabian also borrowed from German such grammatical elements as the personal pronoun *jai* 'you (2 PL)' (from Middle Low German *jī*), the conjunction *un* 'and' (from Middle Low German *un*), the adverb *din* 'also' (from Middle Low German *den*).

Along with the Slavonic impersonal constructions of the type *gramě* (< \**grьmitь*) 'it thunders', *gramolü* (< \**grьmělo*) 'it thundered' we also encounter *tü gramě, tü gramolü* (< \**to grьmitь, \*to grьmělo*) on the German model *es donnert, es hat gedonnert*. Most probably, too, here belong the constructions of the typ *kâ* plus the dative of the verbal substantive, which seem to have been formed on the model of German expressions *zu* plus the infinitive; compare *vân mo kâ perdojě* (< (*v*)onь jьmajetъ къ perdaji) and German *er hat zu verkaufen* 'he has for sale', *netâm nic kâ vâidoňě* (< \**ne jьmatъ nečьso къ vьdanьju*) and German *ich habe nichts auszugeben* 'I have nothing to give away'.

## 2 Phonology

### 2.1 Segmental phoneme inventory

The segmental phonemes of Polabian are represented in table 14.1.

The letter *é* stands for the closed *e*. The vowels *ü, ö* and *â* were the rounded counterparts of *i, e* and *a*, respectively, that is, *ü* was front, high, rounded, *ö* was front, mid, rounded and *â* was back, low, rounded.

The nasal vowels when followed by occlusive consonants tended to develop a homorganic nasal consonant before a stop, as can be seen from recordings of the type *Dûmb* (= *dɔb* < \**dɔbъ*) 'oak, tree', *Stumpó* (= *stɔpɔ* < \**stɔpa*) 'mortar' versus *Pünt* (= *pɔt* < \**pɔtъ*) 'road, way' *Selünd* (= *zelɔd* < \**želɔdъ*) 'acorn'.

In contradistinction to Polish, Polabian preserved the voiced/voiceless opposition at the end of a word: *laug* (< \**lugъ*) 'meadow near a river' versus *lauk* (< \**lukъ*) 'garlic'.

Table 14.1 Segmental phonemes

Vowels										Nasal	
Oral											
Non-reduced						Reduced					
Monophthongs				Diphthongs							
i	ü	u	ai	ái	au	ë		ą	o		
è											
e	ö	o									
a	â					â					

Consonants														
	Bilabial		Labio-dental		Dental		Alveolar		Palatal		Post-palatal		Velar	
<b>Obstruents</b>	p	b			t	d			t'	d'			k	g
	p̥	b̥												
<b>Affricates</b>					c	ʒ			č	ǰ				
<b>Fricatives</b>			f	v	s	z	š		ś	ź	χ			x
			-	ʋ										
<b>Nasals</b>	m				n				ɲ					
	m̥													
<b>Laterals</b>							l							
							l̥							
<b>Trills</b>							r							
							r̥							
<b>Semi-vowel</b>									j					

The alveolar *š* listed in the consonantal part of table 14.1 represents the consonant occurring mainly in German loan-words, for example, *šopo* (Middle Low German *schape*) 'frying pan', *šopät* (Middle Low German *schapen*) 'to create'. Polabian is said to have changed the original consonants *č, ž, š* into *c, z, s*, compare *coso* (< \**čaša*) 'bowl', *zobo* (< \**žaba*) 'frog', *cisě* (< \**češerь*) 'combs'. The phenomenon is referred to as 'Polabian mazurzenie' (after a similar phenomenon in some Polish dialects). In actual fact, however, one of the Polabian dialects had preserved remnants of the original distinction between *č, ž, š* and *c, z, s*. In Pfeffinger's glossary quite a few forms are noted with the letter combinations *tsch, dsch* for *č*, and *sch* for *š* or *ž*, compare *Tócatsch* = *tākāč* (< \**тѣкачь*) 'weaver', *Dschela* = *čelā* (< \**бѣчела*) 'bee', *Deúscha* = *dāišā* (< \**duša*) 'soul', *schribang* = *žribą* (< \**žerbę*) 'colt, foal' (compare Małeckı 1937: 32ff.; Trubetzkoy 1929: 83–8).

The Polabian consonantal system made ample use of the opposition of hard and soft (palatal or palatalized) consonants. Except for *f* and *š*, whose role in this system was marginal as they appeared only in German loan-

words, all the other hard consonants had their soft counterparts. Several points, however, need explanation here. The soft consonants *t'* and *d'* served as the palatalized counterparts for both the dental *t*, *d* and velar *k*, *g*: compare, on the one hand, *taǵnɔt* (< \**tęgnɔti*) 'to pull' / *t'ɔg* (< \**tęgъ*) 'ascent', *detɔ* (< \**dětę*) 'child' / *d'otkă* (< \**děťka*) 'little child' and, on the other hand, *vilkă* (< \**velikaja*) 'big' / *vilt'ă* (< \**velikoje*) 'big', *daugă* (< \**dļgaja*) 'long' / *daudă* (< \**dļgoje*) 'long'. But the palatalized dental and velar fricatives differed in quality: compare, on the one hand, *disɔt* (< \**desętъ*) '10' / *dišptě* (< \**desęťjъ*) 'tenth' and, on the other hand, *blăxă* (< \**blъxa*) 'flea' / *sauxě* (< \**suxъjъ*) 'dry'.

The Polabian language of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries did not have quantity proper, that is, it did not distinguish between long and short vowels. On the other hand, apart from full vowels and diphthongs it possessed reduced vowels (marked *ǎ* and *ě*). The opposition between non-reduced and reduced vowels was conditioned by stress, which was on the final or on the penultimate syllable (see below). Vowels in stressed (= tonic) or immediately pre-tonic syllables did not undergo reduction, for example, *zobó* (< \**žaba*) 'frog', *nidělă* (< \**nedělja*) 'Sunday'. Such syllables are referred to as strong. Reduction regularly affected post-tonic syllables and, optionally, syllables occurring between the main and the secondary stress (the latter here marked `), compare *zině* (< \**ženetъ*) 'drives', *bledáică* (< \**blédica*) 'paleness', *pătărü* (< \**pętero*) '5'. The secondary stress most frequently fell on the antepenultimate syllable in polysyllabic words with final stress. Syllables in which reduction occurred are referred to as weak. Nasal vowels were usually non-reduced: *pöstüłq* (< \**posteljɔ* (ACC SG)) 'bed', *rǔkɔ* (< \**rǔkɔ* (ACC SG)) 'hand'. However, *ɔ* could optionally undergo denasalization and reduction, compare *jó cɔ* or *jó că* (< \**ja xъtjɔ*) 'I want', *să lüďă* (< \**sъ oldъjeɔ*) 'by boat'. The reflexive particle \**sę* always appears in the reduced form: *măit-să* (< \**myti sę*) 'to wash oneself', *büji-să* (< \**bojiti sę*) 'is afraid'.

It follows that the place of stress in Polabian can always be predicted from the distribution of non-reduced and reduced vowels in an accentual complex, that is, in a word with or without enclitics and proclitics: if the final syllable was non-reduced, it must have carried the stress, if it was reduced, the stress was on the penultimate syllable (see Trubetzkoy 1929: 77–84). Therefore, from now on the place of stress will not be marked.

The reduction of vowels resembles the Russian *akan'e* (see chapter 15, section 2.1) in that it neutralized most vowel oppositions (including the diphthongs) replacing them by the opposition between the high and low reduced vowels (*ě* and *ǎ*), compare *o/e* in *coso* (< \**časa*) 'bowl, cup' and *vă nüse* (< \**vъ nosě*) 'in the nose' versus *zenă* (< \**žena*) 'woman, wife' and *vă letă* (< \**vъ lětě*) 'in summer'; *ü/i* in *nebü* (< \**nebo*) 'sky, heaven' and *püli* (< \**polje*) 'field' versus *risetě* (< \**rešeto*) 'sieve, sifter' and *zilě* (< \**zelje*) 'grass'; *ai/âi/au* in *bait* (< \**biti*) 'to beat', *băit* (< \**byti*) 'to be', *mauxo* (<

\**muxa* 'fly' versus *âibět* (< \**ubiti*) 'to kill', *sâmět* (< \**съmyti*) 'to wash off', *klüběk* (< \**klobukъ*) 'hat'.

The Proto-Lechitic change of \**ě* > *a* and \**ę* > *o* before the hard dentals (*s, z, t, d, r, l*) is evident also in Polabian. The new vowels *a* and *o* developed in the same way as the original vowels \**a* and \**o* (see below).

Initial \**o-* and \**u-* (except for the preposition-prefix \**u*) developed a prothetic *u*, which later changed into *v*, for example *vâgord* (< \**ogordъ*) 'garden', *vâknü* (< \**okno*) 'window', *vaustă* (< \**usta*) 'mouth'.

In early Polabian the hard syllabic *ʀ* changed into *ar*, the soft syllabic *ʀ* into \**ar* (before hard dentals) or *ir* > *er* (elsewhere), the hard and soft syllabic *ʃ, ʃ* fell together and most probably yielded *ul*. The subsequent changes were *ar* > *or*, \**ar* > \**or* (softening the preceding consonant), *er* > *ar*, and *ul* > *au/u* (the latter variant in Parum Schultze's and Pfeffinger's dialects): \**bʀže* > *borz* 'sooner', \**gʀnъkъ* > *gornäk* 'milk pot', \**bʀdo* > *bordü* 'flax swingle', \**vʀba* > *varbă* 'willow', \**ʃstʀjъ* > *taustě/tustě* 'thick', \**vʃkъ* > *vauk/vuk* 'wolf'.

The Proto-Slavonic diphthongs *orC, olC* underwent metathesis and in early Polabian yielded *raC* (if long, or, in other terms, acute), *roC* (if short, or, in other terms, circumflex), *laC* (if long), *loC* (if short). Later, the vowels *a, o* evolved like *a, o* of non-diphthongal origin, for example, \**ormę* > *râmq* 'arm, shoulder', \**ordlo* > *râdlü* 'hookplough', \**orsti* > *rüst* 'to grow', \**orkyъno* > *rüt'aitně* 'osier', \**olbo* > *Lobü* 'Elbe', \**oldbjeʀo* > *lüdq* 'by boat'.

The sequence *CelC* coalesced with *ColC* yielding *ClâC*; the combination *CerC* changed into *CreC* (*e* later developed like the same vowel of non-diphthongal origin); the *CorC* group gave the same result as the original hard syllabic *ʀ*, that is, or: \**melti* > *mlât* 'to grind', \**golva* > *glävă* 'head', \**berza* > *breză* 'birch', \**na berzině* > *no brizaină* 'birchwood' (name of part of a village), \**korva* > *korvo* 'cow'.

The Proto-Slavonic *jers* were vocalized or lost, depending on whether they were in a strong or weak position. The treatment of the Polabian weak *jers* differed, however, from that of the weak *jers* in other Slavonic languages. The Proto-Slavonic weak *jers* in the initial syllable of a word were treated in Polabian as strong when originally stressed or immediately pre-tonic. This means that the *jers* in Polabian were vocalized in the initial syllable of all originally disyllabic words and of most polysyllabic ones.

The result of vocalization was not uniform and depended on the environment. The strong back *jer* (ъ), when after *k, g, x* and followed by an originally fronted consonant, developed into *ě*, elsewhere into *â*, for example, *nüd'êt* (< \**nogъtь*) 'fingernail, toenail', *lüt'êt* (< \**olkъtь*) 'elbow', *vâs* (< \**vъšь*) 'louse', *sâpât* (< \**съpati*) 'to sleep', *kâtü* (< \**kъto*) 'who'.

The strong front *jer* vocalized into *â* when followed by originally hard consonants and into *a* elsewhere: *mâglâ* (< \**mъgla*) 'fog', *pâs* (< \**pъsъ*) 'dog', *pasai* (< \**pъsi*) 'dogs', *pan* (< \**pъnъ*) 'stump'. However, the initial

\*jь-sequence yielded *jai-* when originally stressed: *jaima* (< \*jьmε) 'name', *jaid'ü* (< \*jь'go) 'yoke'. When unstressed and followed by hard consonants, it gave *jā-*, when unstressed elsewhere, *jě-*, for example, *jâkrâ* (< \*jьkrâ) 'roe', *jěver* (< \*jьvérъ) 'shaving, chip'. Examples of the loss of the weak *jers* in word-internal position are *janü* (< \*jedьno) 'one', *motkâ* (< \*matьka) 'bitch'. Examples of the loss of the weak *jers* in the originally unstressed initial syllable: *celâ* (< \*bьčelâ) 'bee', *düjocě* (< \*dьvojačьjь) 'twofold', *tövrě* (< \*vьtorьjь) 'other'.

The vowel \*a (both original and from \*ě) changed into *o* in strong positions and into *ā* in weak positions: \*mēra > *māra* > *moro* 'measure', \*na > *no* 'on', \*lēto > \*l'ato > *lotü* 'summer; year', \*žena > *ženā* 'woman; wife', \*pekaryъ > *pekār* 'baker'. But the initial \*ra- sequence yielded *rā-*: \*rana > *rāno* 'wound', \*radostь > *rādüst* 'wedding'.

The vowel \*ě, unless followed by originally hard dentals, evolved into *e* in strong positions and into *ā* in weak ones: \*měšati > *mesāt* 'to mix', \*na světě > *no svāte* 'in the world', \*vьně > *vānā* 'outside'.

The vowel \*o in strong positions evolved into *ö* when followed by originally hard dentals (*s, z, d, t, n, r, l*) or *í*, and into *ü* elsewhere: \*lono > *lönü* 'bosom', \*smola > *smölä* 'resin; Hell', \*vь smolě > *vā smüle* 'in Hell', \*(v)ogorь > *vöđ' ör* 'eel'. But in the sequence \*vo (whether with original or prothetic *v*) the vowel \*o in strong positions changed into *ā* before originally hard consonants and into *i* elsewhere: \*volь > *vāl* 'ox', \*voda > *vādā* 'water', \*onь > *vān* 'he', \*oko > *vāt'ü* 'eye', \*(v)ovьsь > *vivās* 'oats', \*(v)ovьca > *vičā* 'sheep, ewe'. In the respective weak positions the results were: *ā* and *ě*, for example, \*životь > *zaiivāt* 'life; stomach', \*vysokь > *vāisěk* 'high', \*rešeto > *rišetě* 'sieve'.

The vowel \*e in strong positions gave *e* when followed by hard consonants, and *i* elsewhere: \*nebo > *nebü* 'sky; Heaven', \*polje > *püli* 'field', \*grebenь > *gribin* 'comb; rooster's comb'. In weak positions it reduced to *ā* and *ě*, respectively: \*na nebo > *no nābü* 'to Heaven', \*sь nebeša (instead of \*nebesе) > *sā niběšo* 'from Heaven', \*tęgnertь > *tęgně* 'pulls, stretches'. Yet, in the word-initial combination \*je- before hard dentals \*e yielded *a*, for example, \*jedla > *jadlä* 'fir tree', \*jedьnь (instead of \*jedьnь) > *jadān* 'one'.

The development of the vowels \*e, \*o in prefixes or prepositions departed from the regular processes irrespective of the following sounds, for example, \*podь > *püd* 'under', \*(v)obь > *vib* 'around, about', \*perdь > *prid* 'in front of, before', \*perzь > *priz* 'through; without'.

The nasal vowel \*ę (unless followed by hard dentals, see above) evolved into *a*, for example, \*pętь > *pät* 'five', \*dětę > *detä* 'child'. When preceded by a soft consonant, the nasal vowel \*o changed into \*ę and then evolved in the same way as original \*ę, for example, \*zьrjо > *zarä* 'I look', \*plęšortь > *plšäq* '(they) dance'. Elsewhere, it remained a back nasal: \*mока > *mökā* 'flour, meal', \*карькo > *kopkө* 'drop (ACC SG)'.



The high vowels *\*i*, *\*y*, *\*u* were diphthongized in strong positions: *\*i* > *ai*, *\*y* > *âi*, *\*u* > *au* or *âi*. The latter result obtained in the preposition or prefix *\*u*, in the position before labials and in all forms in the dialect represented by Parum Schultze and Pfeffinger. Examples: *\*biti* > *bait* 'to beat', *\*dymъ* > *dâim* 'smoke', *\*korvy* > *korvâi* 'cows', *\*u sebe* > *âi sibě* 'on oneself', *\*ulomiti* > *âilümêt* 'to break off', *\*gumьно* > *d'âimně* 'farm, homestead', *\*muxa* > *mauxo/mâixo* 'fly'. However, the sequences *\*ky*, *\*gy*, *\*xy* evolved into *t'ai*, *d'ai*, *χai* (most probably through the intermediate stage *\*ki*, *\*gi*, *\*xi*) and the vowels *i*, *y* changed into *a* when followed by *r* and into *â* when followed by the hard *l*, compare *car't'ai* (< *\*cřky*) 'church', *t'ënad'ainâ* (< *\*kъnëgyña* instead of *\*kъnëgyni*) 'noblewoman', *vrexai* (< *\*(v)orëxy*) 'nuts', *sarüt'ë* (< *\*širokъjъ*) 'wide', *sarötâ* (< *\*syrota*) 'whey', *gnâlâ* (< *\*gnilaja*) 'rotten'. In weak positions all three high vowels reduced to *ë*, for example, *\*ubiti* > *âibët* 'to kill', *\*pokryti* > *pükrët* 'to cover', *\*klobukъ* > *klübëk* 'hat'.

There is no general agreement as to the factors that caused the fronting of the vowel *\*o* (into *ü*, *ö*) and the diphthongization of *\*i*, *\*y* and *\*u* in Polabian.

Like some other Slavonic languages, Polabian tended to contract vowels separated by *j*, for example, *\*bojëti* > *bet* 'to be afraid', *\*sējati* > *šot* 'to sow', *\*vojevoda* > *vâvâdâ* 'prince', *\*stojati* > *stot* 'to stand', *\*rodъ zemjeř* > *püd zimâ* 'under the earth'. But the contraction of vowels was not an absolute rule: compare *d'olâ/d'olöjě* (< *\*dëljajetъ*) 'works', *křsojě* (< *\*křsajetъ*) 'bites', *svaitojě* (< *\*svitajetъ*) 'it dawns, day is breaking'.

In early Polabian, as in the other Lechitic dialects, consonants followed by the front vowels (*e*, *ë*, *ę*, *i*, *ь*) were softened. This softness was a redundant feature until the change *\*ë* > *a*, *\*ę* > *o*, *\*ř* > *ar*, that is, when soft consonants could occur both before front and back vowels. Subsequently, the soft consonants followed by front vowels underwent depalatalization, for their palatalized character must have been perceived as positionally conditioned. Examples: *l'otü* (< *\*lëto*) 'summer, year' versus *vâ letâ* (< *\*vъ lëtě*) 'in summer', *řpřtë* (< *\*přetъjъ*) 'fifth' versus *přat* (< *\*přetъ*) 'five', *âimortë* (< *\*umřtъjъ*) 'dead' versus *sâmart* (< *\*sъmřtъ*) 'disease of chicks or goslings'.

The changes in the Polabian consonantal system were considerably less complex than the vocalic ones. The *šč*, *žž* sequences changed into *st*, *zd*, compare *stamil* (< *\*ščьmelъ*) 'bumblebee', *xřast* (< *\*xřeščъ*) 'beetle', *dâzd* (< *\*dъžžъ*) 'rain'. The stops of the clusters *st*, *zd* preserved their softness if followed by originally back vowels: *st'auko* (< *\*ščuka*) 'pike', *pl'aušt'â* (< *\*pljušča* (GEN PTT)) 'ivy'. The consonants *k*, *g* became fricative if followed by a stop, compare *sâ lüx'tâm* (< *\*sъ olkъьtmъ*) and *lüt'ët* (< *\*olkъьtъ*) 'elbow', *nüxte* (< *\*nogъtë*) 'finger- or toenails'. The clusters of the type consonant + *v* were simplified, losing their second element if: (a) followed by an original *\*o*, as in: *tüi* (< *\*tvojъ*) 'your', *χöst* (< *\*xvostъ*) 'oven broom', *d'üzd* (< *\*gvozdbъ*) 'nail', *dör* (< *\*dvorъ*) 'farm'; (b) preceded by a velar

consonant and followed by an original \*a, for example, *kos* (◁ \**kvasъ*) 'yeast, leaven, barm', *xolě* (◁ \**xvalitъ*) 'praises'. The clusters of this type changed into the sequence consonant + *j* if their second element was soft: *sjotü* (◁ \**svęto*) 'holiday', *tjordä* (◁ \**tvřdoje*) 'hard', *kjot* (◁ \**kvěřъ*) 'flower', *gjozdä* (◁ \**gvězda*) 'star'. In other cases post-consonantal *v* remained unchanged: *no sväte* (◁ \**na světě*), *dvarai* (◁ \**dъvri*) 'door', *svorět* (◁ \**svariti*) 'to quarrel'.

The consonants *k*, *g*, *x* were palatalized when followed by the original \*o, \*u, \*y as well as by the back *jer* (ъ) if that latter preceded an originally fronted consonant: *st'öt* (◁ \**skorъ*) 'cattle', *vät'ü* (◁ \**oko*) 'eye', *st'aibä* (◁ \**skyba*) 'bread', *t'aurq* (◁ \**kurę*) 'chick', *d'ölqb* (◁ \**golqбъ*) 'pigeon', *t'éd* (◁ \**kъde*) 'where', *xüdět* (◁ \**xoditi*) 'to go', *ładě* (◁ \**xudъjъ*) 'bad, evil; thin', *xémil* (◁ \**xъmelъ*) 'hop'. This change was a result of the fronting of the vowels in question, which must have occurred before the diphthongization and contraction of vowels.

In word-final position or before another consonant, clusters consisting of a stop or an affricate followed by *r*, *l*, *m*, *n* were broken up by the insertion of a secondary *jer*-type vowel: *vořer* (◁ \**votr* ◁ \**větrъ*) 'wind', *visēm* (◁ \**vism* ◁ \*(v)*osmъ*) 'eight', *vid'én* (◁ \*(v)*ognъ*) 'fire', *sribarně* (◁ \**sribrně* ◁ \**serbrъnъjъ*) 'silver'.

In several cases a *jer*-type vowel was inserted between a stop and *r* before a vowel: *kārāi* (◁ \**kry*) 'blood', *pāred* (◁ \**pred* ◁ \**perdъ*) 'formerly'. When used in the function of a preposition or prefix, the reflex of Proto-Slavonic \**perdъ* sounded *pid*, as in *pid* 'before, in front of'.

## 2.2 Morphophonemic alternations inherited from Proto-Slavonic

Among the oldest alternations are those of the velar consonants *k*, *g*, *x* with *ç*, *z*, *s* (◁ \**č*, \**ž*, \**š*) and *ç*, *ž* (◁ \**ç*, \**ž*). They originated from the Proto-Slavonic first and second palatalizations (see chapter 3, sections 2.9 and 2.19). The result of the second palatalization of \**x* must have been *s* (◁ \**š*, as in the other Slavonic languages) but no example of it is attested.

The alternations resulting from the first palatalization were greatly reduced in Polabian and were chiefly limited to derivation: *rpkā* (◁ \**rpkā*) 'hand' versus *rpcněk* (◁ \**rčъnikъ*) 'towel', *büg* (◁ \**bogъ*) 'God' versus *büzäc* (◁ \**božъcъ*) 'God (DIMIN)', *mex* (◁ \**měxъ*) 'sack' versus *mesäk* (◁ \**měšъkъ*) 'little sack'.

Residual instances of the first palatalization are encountered in inflection. In nominal declension we find it only in the nouns *vät'ü* (◁ \*(v)*oko*) 'eye' and *vauxü* (◁ \*(u)*xo*) 'ear', compare *vicai* (◁ \*(v)*oči* (NOM-ACC DU), *vausai* (◁ \*(v)*uši* (NOM-ACC DU)). In conjugation it could be used to oppose the present-tense forms to past tenses or the infinitive: *plocq* (◁ \**plačp*) 'I cry' versus *plokol* (◁ \**plakałъ*) '(he) cried', *plokāt* (◁ \**plakati*) 'to cry', *pākně* (◁ \**pъknetъ*) 'falls' versus *pāci* (◁ \**pъčetъ* (AOR)) 'fell', *müzēs* (◁ \**možešъ* 'you can' versus *müg* (◁ \**mogъ* (AOR)) 'I

could'. For the most part, however, verbal stems tended to be levelled in the entire conjugation: *joz ricâl-mě* (< \**jazъ rečlъ mu*) 'I told him', *ne-měžalo-jěg noit* (< \**ne možala jęgo najiti*) '(she) could not find him', *taucâl-să* (< \**člčlъ sę*) 'it was haunted' (instead of \**reklъ*, \**mogla*, \**člklъ sę* on the model of *ricě*, *müžě*, *tauci-să* (< \**rečerъ*, \**možerъ*, \**ččerъ sę*).

In general, however, both consonantal and vocalic alternations (with the exception of stress alternations and the related alternations between non-reduced and reduced vowels) were considerably limited within the Polabian conjugation. Present-tense forms abandoned consonantal alternations completely: *ricą* (instead of *reko* < \**rekō*) '(I) say', *picą* (instead of *peko* < \**pekōrъ*) '(they) roast'.

The alternations *k/c*, *g/ž* occurred in the declension of nouns, where they reinforced morphological oppositions: *grauk* (< \**grukъ*) 'pear tree' versus *graucai* (< \**gruci*) 'pear trees', *krig* (from German *Krieg*) 'war' versus *vă križe* (< \**vъ (krig-)-ě*), *nügă* (< \**noga*) 'foot, leg' versus *nüže* (< \**nožě* (NOM-ACC DU)) 'feet, legs'.

The opposition of hard and soft consonants, which originated from the depalatalization of consonants before front vowels, served as the most important consonantal alternation in Polabian morphology. It occurred in the declension of nouns where it replaced the opposition of originally front vowels to originally back ones: *büzăc* (< \**božьcъ*) 'God (DIMIN)' versus *büscă* (< \**božьca* (GEN-ACC SG)), *büscě* (< \**božьcu* (DAT SG)), *dan* (< \**dnъ*) 'day' versus *daño* (< \**dnia* instead of \**dnе* (GEN SG)), *păs* (< \**pъsъ*) 'dog' versus *pasai* (< \**pъsi*) 'dogs', *zimă* (< \**zemja*) 'earth' versus *no zimă* (< \**na zemjo*) 'to the earth', *stažă* (< \**stьža*) 'path' versus *stažă* (< \**stьžō* (ACC SG)).

The declension of nouns also made use of the alternations *k/t'*, *g/d'*, *x/č*, for example, *roka* (< \**rōka*) 'hand' versus *priz ročě* (< \**perzъ rōky*) 'without a hand', *nügă* (< \**noga*) 'foot, leg' versus *pričě nüd'ě* (< \**perky nogy*) 'over the foot', *grex* (< \**grěxъ*) 'sin' versus *grěxě* (< \**grěxy*) 'sins'. But the role of this alternation is most noticeable in the inflection of adjectives, where it contributed, among other things, to the distinction of genders: *vilkă* (< \**velikaja*) 'big' (F) but *vilt'ă* (< \**velikoje*) 'big' (N), *draugă* (< \**drugaja*) 'other' (F) but *draud'ă* (< \**drugoje*) 'other' (N), \**sauxă* (unattested, < \**suxaja*) 'dry' (F) but *sauxă* (< \**suxoje*) 'dry' (N).

The reduction of vowels brought about the most productive vocalic alternation in Polabian. This alternation was closely related to the alternation of stress and it affected both inflection and derivation as in the endings *-o/-ă* (*coso/zenă* < \**čaša* 'bowl', \**žena* 'woman') or in the derivative *ăibět* 'to kill' (< \**ubiti*) versus *bait* 'to beat' (< \**biti*).

It was, however, in conjugation that these alternations played the most essential role, thanks to the enclitic character of the reflexive particle *să* (< \**sę*) and of the monosyllabic pronominal forms. Since the present-tense

forms generalized the penultimate stress, the stress had to shift to the desinence when followed by an enclitic, given the Polabian limitation of stress to the penultimate syllable. In this way there arose the alternation of non-reduced and reduced vowels: *aidě* (← \**iderь*) 'goes', *bülě* (← \**bolitь*) 'it hurts' versus *kok aidī-sā* (← \**kako iderь sę*) 'how are you doing', *büli-mě* (← \**bolitь тьне*) 'it hurts me'.

Other vowel alternations were due to various metaphonies. Some of them occurred in Lechitic or early Polabian, others took place in later periods. To the former belong vowel-zero, *e-’o*, *a-’o* and *ar-’or* alternations (as well as their variants stemming from the reduction of vowels), to the latter *e-i*, *a-i*, *ā-i*, *ō-ü*, *ā-a*, *ai-ā*, *āi-ā* alternations.

Owing to the different treatment of the weak *jers* in Polabian from that of other Slavonic languages, the vowel-zero alternations were practically limited to final/penultimate syllables and occurred mainly in the declension of nouns: *d’ōlṛbāk* (← \**golṛbьkъ*) 'small pigeon' but *d’ōlṛpt’ě* (PL) (← \**golṛbьky*), *pican* (← \**pečьнь*) 'loaf of bread' but *picne* (PL) (← \**pečьně*).

The *e-’o* alternation is attested mainly in the inflection of nouns: *l’otü* (← \**lěto*) 'summer, year' versus *vā letā* (← \**вль lětě*) 'in summer'. We find some examples of the *ar-’or* alternation in derivation: *sāmart* (← \**сѣмѣтъ*) 'disease of chicks' but *āimortě* (← \**umѣтъь*) 'dead', *corně* (← \**čŕňьь*) 'black' but *carnaičā* (← \**čŕnica*) 'blackberry'. The *a-’o* alternation is found in some individual forms: *plāsq* (← \**plęšo*) '(they) dance' versus *pl’ōsāt* (← \**plęsati*) 'to dance', *disqt* (← \**desęť*) 'ten' versus *dišptě* (← \**desęťьь*) 'tenth'.

The vowel alternations due to later developments in Polabian were used in inflection: *cesāt* (← \**česati*) 'to comb' but *cisě* (← \**češetь*) 'combs', *vādā* (← \**voda*) 'water' but *vā vidā* (← \**вль vodě*) 'in water', *smōlā* (← \**smola*) 'Hell' but *vā smūlā* (← \**вль smolě*) 'in Hell', *pās* (← \**pьsь*) 'dog' but *pasai* (← \**pьsi*) 'dogs', *āipaustaix* (← \**upustixь*) 'I dropped (AOR)' but *āipaustāl* (← \**upustilь*) '(he) has dropped (PRF)'.

### 3 Morphology

Polabian morphology cannot be fully described for several reasons. First, there is only a relatively small amount of source material. Second, most of it was given in glossaries, in which words were noted mainly as vocabulary items; no word is recorded in its complete paradigm. Third, the recorders did not know Polabian and may have made mistakes. Fourth, some of the informants might have had an imperfect knowledge of the language (since it was already dying). However, thanks to the fact that almost all the texts cite quite a number of sentences or expressions and that Hennig occasionally supplements some grammatical forms, it is possible to reconstruct the fundamentals of Polabian morphology and some aspects of syntax.

### 3.1 Nominal morphology

#### 3.1.1 Nominal categories

From the viewpoint of morphology Polabian was very conservative, maintaining most of the categories of Proto-Slavonic. Like Sorbian and Slovene, it distinguished singular, plural and dual. The dual number was used in nouns which denoted paired objects, but was preserved only in the nominative-accusative and in the dative-instrumental: *rŕce* (< \**rŕcě*) 'hands', *nüze* (< \**nozě*) 'legs', *vausai* (< \*(*v*)*uši*) 'ears', *vicai* (< \*(*v*)*oči*) 'eyes', *perisai* (< \**peresi*) 'wings', *râmënai* (< \**ormeni*) 'arms', *sâ vicaimâ* (< \**sъ* (*v*)*oçima*) 'with the eyes', *rŕkomâ* (< \**rŕkama*) 'hands'. As in Sorbian, the genitive dual was replaced by the genitive plural: *âi dâvix grauk* (< \**dъ voxъ gрукъ*) 'at the two pear trees'.

Polabian had three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. Within the masculine gender, Polabian made a distinction between animate and non-animate nouns. In masculine nouns denoting human beings and most probably animals (although no such example is attested) the accusative coincided formally with the genitive, whereas the other genders distinguished the two forms: *bedë bügo* (*bedë* from Middle Low German *beden*) 'asks God (ACC = GEN)' and *vit bügo aipädenë* (< \*(*v*)*otъ boga upadenъъ*) 'fallen away from God (GEN)', *tâi ne-mâs met drauzëx büd'üv likâm mane* (< \**ty ne jъmašъ jъmëti družijixъ bogovъ* (*lik-* from Middle Low German *lik*)-*ътъ тънë*) 'you are not to have other gods (ACC = GEN) beside me' but *nügo* (ACC) *vibët* (< \**nogŕ* (*v*)*obiti*) 'to trip somebody', *pričë nüd'ë* (GEN) (< \**perky nogy*) 'over the foot'.

Polabian distinguished six case forms: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, instrumental and locative, but had lost the original vocative. The function of the latter was taken over by the nominative: *zenâ, pëlüz detŕ vâ zâipkŕ* (< \**žena, položi dëtę vъ zybъkŕ*) 'woman, put the child in the cradle', *defkâ, aid, zâib* (< \**dëvъka, idi, zybi*) 'girl, go rock'. The instrumental was used only with prepositions (an example of German influence mentioned in section 1 above): *pid gârdâm* (< \**perdъ gordътъ*) 'before the court', *virgnë vâisëk sâ maçŕ* (< \**vŕgnetъ vysoko sъ meçejŕ*) 'throws the ball up'.

Polabian preserved some relics of the original short forms of adjectives. They were used mainly in the possessive function: *l'olën brot* (< \**ljalinъ bratъ*) 'father's brother', *Morajën danâc* (< \**Marijinъ dъnъcъ*) 'St Mary's day'.

Several examples with short forms are attested in lexicalized expressions: *dausân dan* (< \**dušъnъ dъnъ*) 'All Souls' Day', *nüvo launâ* or simply *nüvo* (< \**nova luna, \*nova*) 'new moon', *storo launa* or simply *storo* (< \**stara luna, \*stara*) 'last-quarter moon'.

The short forms of the neuter acquired the function of adverbs and were always stressed word-finally: *püznü* (< \**pozdъno*) 'late', *sauçü* (< \**suxo*)

'dry', *daud'ü* (< \**dlgo*) 'long'. Under German influence they could also function as predicative forms of adjectives: *to kolai ja jist teplü* (< \**тънъ* (Middle Low German *kol-*)-*u jestъ ješče teplo*) 'this cabbage is still hot', compare German *es ist heiß* and *der Kohl ist heiß*.

The Polabian degrees of comparison were a clear continuation of the Proto-Slavonic forms: *zaimnesě* (< \**zimъnějъšъjъ*) 'colder', *lepsě* (< \**lěpъšъjъ*) 'better', *nastāresě* (< \**najstarějъšъjъ*) 'oldest'.

### 3.1.2 Noun morphology

The declension of nouns was closely related to the distinctions of gender. Two main declension types can be distinguished: (a) masculine and neuter nouns; (b) feminine nouns. Neither of them was uniform, but no further clear-cut classifications can be formulated. The attested endings are given in table 14.2.

The differences between individual paradigms reflected, to some extent, the Proto-Slavonic stem distinctions. The vast majority of masculine nouns ended in  $-\emptyset$  (= zero) in the nominative singular. Here belonged the reflexes of Proto-Slavonic \**-o-*/*\*-jo-* stems (for example, *büg* (< \**bogъ*) 'God', *dāzd* (< \**dъžъ*) 'rain'), \**-u-* stems (*med* (< \**medъ*) 'honey'), \**-i-* stems (*popt* (< \**poptъ*) 'road') and consonantal stems (*dan* (< \**dъnъ*) 'day', *jačmin* (< \**jačъmenъ*, instead of \**jačъmy*) 'barley'). The nominative ending of thirty or so attested masculine animate nouns was  $-\check{a}$  (< \**-a*), for example,

**Table 14.2 The declension of nouns**

#### Singular

	M		N	F
	AN	INAN		
NOM	$-\emptyset, -\check{a}$	$-\emptyset, -\check{a}i$	$-\check{u}, -i/-\check{e}, -a/-\check{a}$	$-o/-\check{a}, -\check{a}i, -\emptyset, -ai$
ACC	= GEN	$-\emptyset, -\check{a}i$	$-\check{u}, -i/-\check{e}, -a/-\check{a}$	$-\emptyset, -\check{a}/-\check{a}, -\emptyset$
GEN	$-o/-\check{a}, -au/-\check{a}i$			$-\check{a}i/-\check{e}, -\check{a}, -i, -v\check{e}$
DAT		$-au/-ai/-\check{e}$		$-e/-\check{a}, -ai$
INST		$-\check{a}m$		$-\emptyset, -\check{a}/-\check{a}$
LOC		$-e/-\check{a}, -ai$		$-e/-\check{a}, -\check{e}$

#### Plural

NOM	$-ai/-\check{e}, -e, -\check{u}v\check{e}, -i$	$-\check{a}$	$-\check{a}i/-\check{e}, -ai/-\check{e}, -e/-\check{a}, -v\check{a}i$
ACC	$-\check{a}i/-\check{e}, -e$	$-\emptyset$	$-\emptyset$
GEN	$\check{u}v/-ev, -\emptyset$	$-\emptyset$	$-\emptyset$
DAT	$\check{u}m$	$-$	$-\check{a}m$
INST	$\check{e}(?)$	$-$	$-\text{om}\check{e}$
LOC	$-$	$-\check{a}x$	$-$

#### Dual

NOM-ACC	$-\check{a}$	$-ai/-\check{e}$	$-e$
DAT-INST	$-$	$-aim\check{a}$	$-om\check{a}$

*vaujä* (< \*(v)uja) 'uncle', *skocaikā* (< \*skačika) 'stallion'. One attested noun retained the ending *-āi* (< \*-y) in this case: *komāi* (< \*kamy) 'stone'.

The neuter nouns in the nominative singular ended in *-ü* (< \*-o) / *-i* (< \*-e) / *-ě* (the reduced variant of the former two) or *-q/-ǎ* (< \*-ǣ): *l'otü* (< \*lěto) 'year, summer', *püli* (< \*polje) 'field', *gnozďě* (< \*gnězdo) 'nest', *zilě* (< \*zělje) 'pasture', *jaima/jaimā* (< \*jьmę) 'name', *t'aurq* (< \*kurę) 'chick'. Their accusative form in all numbers was identical with that of the nominative.

The endings reflecting the original \*-o-/\*-jo- declension prevailed in the remaining declensional forms of the masculine and neuter nouns, but in some cases the influence of the original \*-u- stems can be observed. The ending *-au/-āi* (< \*-u) alternated with *-o/-ǎ* (< \*-a) in the genitive singular masculine. The ending *-üv* (< \*-ovь) and its secondary variant *-ev* almost completely replaced the original ending *-θ* (< \*-ь) in the genitive plural of masculine nouns. Under the influence of the \*-u- stems the ending of the instrumental singular *-omь* changed into *-ьmь*.

As far as the masculine nouns ending in *-ǎ* in the nominative singular are concerned, nothing can be said about the other forms of their paradigm because none of them is attested in the texts.

The feminine nouns in the nominative singular ended in *-o/-ǎ* (< \*-a), *-θ* (< \*-ь), *-āi* (< \*-y) or *-ai* (< \*-y (preceded by *k, g, x*) and \*-i), for example, *poro* (< \*para) 'swamp', *sredā* (< \*serda) 'Wednesday', *mail'o* (from Middle Low German *mile*) 'mile', *svečā* (< \*světja) 'candle', *t'üst* (< \*kostь) 'bone, fishbone', *kārāi* (< \*kry) 'blood', *cart'ai* (< \*cřky) 'church', *motai* (< \*mati) 'mother'. They continued the Proto-Slavonic declensions of the \*-a-/\*-ja-, \*-i-, \*-ū-, and consonantal stems. The Proto-Slavonic \*-ū- declension was productive in Polabian. Some of its endings were used not only in original \*-ū- stems but also in others, especially German loan-words, compare not only *kārāi* 'blood', *cart'ai* 'church', but also *grausāi* (< \*gruš-y) 'pear tree', *sod'ai* (from Middle Low German *sage*) 'saw', *modāi* (from Middle Low German *made*) 'maggot'. As can be seen from the example *grausāi*, even originally soft stems could acquire the ending *-āi* (< \*-y). Particularly productive was the ending of the nominative-accusative plural *-vāi*, which came into being as a result of the contamination of the original *-ьvi* with the ending *-y* of the \*-a- stems. It could also occur in nouns ending in *-o/-ǎ* in the nominative singular, for example, *soko* (from Middle Low German *sake*) 'thing' and *sokvāi* (NOM-ACC PL).

In a number of nouns (originally belonging to consonantal stem paradigms) an alternation of stems occurs between the nominative singular and some other forms, for example, *komāi* (< \*kamy) 'stone', *kominė* (NOM-ACC PL) (< \*kamenьje); *slüvi* (< \*slovo) 'word', *slüvesā* (NOM-ACC PL) (< \*slovesa); *rāma* (< \*ormę) 'arm', *rāminai* (NOM-ACC DU) (< \*ormeni); *paiļq* (< \*pilę) 'duckling', *paiļotā* (NOM-ACC PL) (< \*pilęta);

compare also *soko* ‘thing’ versus *sokvâi* ‘things’ (see above). Examples:

### Singular

Accusative, feminine: *korvø* (◁ \**korvø*) ‘cow’, *no zimø* (◁ \**na zemjø*) ‘to the earth’, *zo nidelâ* (◁ \**za neděljø*) ‘in a week’. As far as the accusative of masculine nouns is concerned, its form coincided either with the nominative or with the genitive (see 3.1.1).

Genitive, masculine–neuter: *bügo* (◁ \**boga*) ‘God’, *daño* (◁ \**ďňa* instead of \**ďne*) ‘day’, *gorxâ/gorxâi* (◁ \**gorxa*, \**gorxu*) ‘pea’, *l’oto* (◁ \**lěta*) ‘summer’, *vainâ* (◁ \**vina*) ‘wine’; feminine: *slâmâi* (◁ \**solmy*) ‘straw’, *pøl t’üpě* (◁ \**poľ kopy*) ‘half a threescore’, *âi zimâ* (◁ \**u zemjě*) ‘at the earth’, *au jâdai* (◁ \**u jědi*) ‘at a meal’, *věz doli* (◁ \**jъz dale* instead of \**dali*) ‘from afar’, *âi kokvě* (◁ \**u* (Middle Low German *kâk-*)-ъve) ‘at the pillory’.

Dative, masculine–neuter: *kâ sjotau* (◁ \**къ světu*) ‘to the world’, *kâ dâně* (◁ \**къ дъни*) ‘to the bottom’, *kâ vâidoňě* (◁ \**къ vydanъju*) ‘to give away’; feminine: *kâ stârne* (◁ \**къ storně*) ‘to the side’, *kâ maisâ* (◁ \**къ* (Middle Low German *mis-*)-ě) ‘to mass’, *kâ zimai* (◁ \**къ zemji*) ‘to the earth’.

Instrumental, masculine–neuter: *prid gârdâm* (◁ \**perďь gordътъ*) ‘before the court’, *sâ lüxt’âm* (◁ \**съ olkътътъ*) ‘with the elbow’, *prid lotâm* (◁ \**perďь lěťтътъ*) ‘a year ago’; feminine: *püd zimø* (◁ \**rodъ zemjejø*) ‘under the earth’, *sâ lüdâ* (◁ \**съ oldъjejø*) ‘by boat’, *mauckø* (◁ \**mъčъkojø*) ‘in secret’.

Locative, masculine–neuter: *no svâte* (◁ \**na světě*) ‘in the world’, *vâ letâ* (◁ \**въ lětě*) ‘in summer’, *vâ pülai* (◁ \**въ polji*) ‘in the field’; feminine: *vâ emerice* (◁ \**въ* (Middle Low German *hemmelrik-*)-ě) ‘in heaven’, *vâ smülâ* (◁ \**въ smolě*) ‘in Hell’, *no zimě* (◁ \**na zemji*) ‘on the earth’.

### Plural

Nominative masculine: *büzai* (◁ \**bozi*) ‘gods’, *pasai* (◁ \**pъsi*) ‘dogs’, *godaicě* (◁ \**gadici*) ‘worms’, *nüze* (◁ \**nožě*) ‘knives’, *vâlüvě* (◁ \**volove*) ‘oxen’, *t’agli* (◁ (\*Middle Low German *kegel-*)-e) ‘skittles’.

Nominative–accusative, neuter: *vâknâ* (◁ \*(v)okna) ‘windows’, *jojâ* (◁ \**jaja*) ‘eggs’; feminine: *sestrâi* (◁ \**sestry*) ‘sisters’, *gjozdě* (◁ \**gvězdy*) ‘stars’, *vice* (◁ \*(v)ovъcě) ‘sheep’, *nidelâ* (◁ \**nedělě*) ‘weeks’, *t’üstai/t’üstě* (◁ \**kosti*) ‘bones, fishbones’, *grausvâi* (◁ \**grušъvy*) ‘pears’.

Accusative masculine: *grexai* (◁ \**grěxy*) ‘sins’, *pâsě* (◁ \**pъsy*) ‘dogs’, *daüste* (◁ \**gostě*) ‘guests’.

Genitive, masculine: *âi dâvix grauk* (◁ \**u dъvnoхъ grukъ*) ‘by two pear trees’, *büd’üv* (◁ \**bogovъ*) ‘gods’, *danüv/danev* (◁ \**дъновъ*, \**дъневъ*) ‘days’; neuter: *drâv* (◁ \**дръвъ*) ‘wood’; feminine: *priz mior* (◁ \**perzъ měrъ*) ‘without measure’.



Dative, masculine: *gresnārūm* (< \*grěšnaromъ) 'to sinners'; feminine: *kā vaikām* (< \*kъ (Middle Low German *wik-*)-amъ) 'to the town'.

Instrumental, masculine: perhaps *sā vilē vlāsē* (< \*sъ velъje volsy) (if not the nominative instead of the genitive) 'with lots of hair'; feminine: *sveckomě* (< \*svěčъkami) 'candles'.

### Dual

Nominative-accusative, masculine: *rřkovā* (< \*rřkava) 'sleeves'; neuter: *vicaī* (< \*(v)oči) 'eyes', *jojě* (< \*jaji) 'testicles'; feminine: *rřce* (< \*rřcě) 'hands'.

Dative-instrumental, neuter: *vicaīmā* (< \*(v)očima) 'eyes'; feminine: *rřkomā* (< \*rřkama) 'hands'.

### 3.1.3 Pronominal morphology

The Polabian personal pronouns continued, with the exception of the second personal plural *jai* 'you' (see p. 798), the Proto-Slavonic forms: *joz/jo* (< \*jazъ, \*ja) 'I', *tāi/tě* (< \*ty) 'you, thou', *vān, vānā* (< \*(v)onъ, (v)ona) 'he, she', *māi* (< \*my) 'we', *vinai* (< \*(v)oni) 'they'. The attested forms of the oblique cases can be reconstructed as in table 14.3.

The mixing of the dative and the accusative (see p. 798) could also

**Table 14.3**

	1 SG	2 SG		
ACC	<i>minē/mane/ma/mē</i>	<i>tibē/tēbe/ta/tē</i>		
GEN	<i>minē/mane/manē</i>	<i>tibē/tibe</i>		
DAT	<i>mine/mane/manē/mē</i>	<i>tibē/tibe/tē</i>		
INST	<i>(sā) maŋo</i> (< *sъ mъnojo)	<i>(sā) tābo</i> (< *sъ tebojo)		
	1 PL	2 PL		
ACC	<i>nos/nās</i> (< *nasъ)	–		
DAT	<i>nom/nām</i> (< *namъ)	<i>vom</i> (< *vamъ)		
INST	<i>(sā) nomē</i> (< *sъ nami)	<i>(sā) vomē</i> (< *sъ vami)		
	3 SG	3 PL	3 DU	
ACC	<i>jig/jëg/nëg</i> (< *jego, njego)	–	–	
GEN	<i>jig/jëg</i> (< *jego)	–	–	
DAT	<i>jim/mē</i> (< *jemu, *mu)	<i>jaim</i> (< *jimъ)	<i>(kā) naimo</i> (< *kъ njima)	
INST	<i>(sā) nëm</i> (< *sъ njimъ)	–	–	

affect the genitive: *mině* < \**mene*, *mane* < \**тънѣ*, *maně* < \**тъне*; *tibě* < \**tebe*, *tibe* < \**tebě*, *těbe* < \**tebě*. The forms *mā*, *tā* occurred only after prepositions: *bed zo mā* (< (*bed* from Middle Low German *beden*) \**za mę*) 'pray for me', *prid tā* (< \**perdъ tę*) 'in front of you'. The forms *mě* (< \**mi*), *tě* (< \**ti*), *mě* (< \**mu*) in the dative, *mě* (< \**тъне?*) and *tě* (< \**tebe?*) in the accusative are enclitic: *doj-mě* (< \**daji mi*) 'give me', *kok aidi-tě?* (< \**kako iderъ ti?*) 'how are you?' literally, 'how goes it to you (SG)?', *bŭli-mě* (< \**bolitъ тъне*) 'it hurts me'. The form *tě* (< \**ty*) in the nominative is attested only in the expression *cŭ tě t'autěs?* (< \**čъso ty kuitišъ?*) 'what are you doing?' The accusative form *něg* (< \**njego*) is attested in isolation but it must have occurred after prepositions as in the other Slavonic languages.

The reflexive pronoun is attested in the following forms: *sā* (after prepositions)/*sā* (as the reflexive particle after verbs) (< \**sę*) (ACC), *sibě* (< \**sebe*) (GEN), *sibe/(kā) sěbe* (< \*(*kъ*) *sebě*) (DAT), (*vā*) *sibe* (< \**vъ sebě*) (LOC).

There were two demonstrative pronouns: *tř*, *to*, *tŭ* (< \**тънъ*, \**ta*, \**to*) 'that (over there)', and *sř*, *so*, *sŭ* (< \**сънъ*, \**sa*, \**so*) 'this (over here)'.  
 The possessive pronouns are attested in very few forms apart from the nominative: nominative singular, masculine: *mŭj* 'my', *tŭj* 'your', *sŭj* 'one's own'; feminine: *mŭja*, *tŭja*, *sŭjā*; plural, masculine: *nos* 'our', feminine: *vosā* 'your' (< \**mojъ*, \**tvojъ*, \**svojъ*, \**moja*, \**tvoja*, \**svoja*, \**našъ*, \**vaša*); accusative singular feminine: *mŭja*, *sŭja* (< \**mojř*, \**svojř*), locative singular masculine–neuter: (*vā*) *mŭjěm*, *tŭjěm* (\**vъ mojimъ*, \**tvojimъ*); nominative plural masculine: *mŭjai*, *sŭjai* (< \**moji*, \**svoji*); dative plural masculine: *nosěm* (< \**našimъ*).

The universal pronouns are attested in the following forms: *věs* (M), *věsi* (N) (< \**vъšъ*, \**vъše*) 'all, every' and *věso't'ā* (< \**vъšakoje*) 'all, any'. Very few forms of the interrogative and negative pronouns are attested: *kātŭ*, *t'ŭmau* (< \**kъto*, \**komu*) 'who', *cŭ*, *cig* (< \**čъso*, \**čego*) 'what', *ko't'ě*, *kokā*, *ko't'ŭg* (< \**kakъjъ*, \**kakaja*, \**kakogo*) 'which, which one'.

The negative pronouns were formed with the morpheme *ne/mi* (< \**ne*, instead of \**ni*): *nekātŭ* (< \**nekъto*) 'no one', *nic* (< \**nečъso*) 'nothing', *ni't'ěd* (< \**nekъde*) 'nowhere'.

### 3.1.4 Adjectival morphology

Polabian preserved some relics of the original short forms of adjectives. All of them represent the nominative singular (see 3.1.1). The long forms of adjectives are also quite well attested in the nominative. The remaining cases are much worse represented. On the basis of the recorded material the following endings can be reconstructed (table 14.4). Examples:

#### *Singular*

Nominative: *vilt' ě* (< \**velikъjъ*) (M), *vilt' ā* (< \**velikoje*) (N), *vilkā*

**Table 14.4 The declension of adjectives**

	SG			PL			DU N
	M	N	F	M	N	F	
NOM	-ĕ	}	-ā	-ĕ	}	-ā	-ā
ACC = NOM OR GEN			-ā/-ĕ	-ŏ		-ā	
GEN	-āg/-ĕg		-	-ĕx	-	-	-
DAT	-ümĕ		-ĕ	-	-	-	-
LOC	-		-āj	-	-	-	-

(*\*velikaja*) (F) 'big, great', *büzĕ* (*\*božьjь*) (M), *büzĕ* (*\*božьjeje*) (N), *büzä* (*\*božьjaja*) (F) 'God's; pious';  
 Accusative feminine: *dübrŏ* (*\*dobrŏjŏ*) 'good';  
 Genitive masculine–neuter: *väsükäg* (*\*vysokajego*) 'high', *tritĕg* (*\*tretьjego*) 'third';  
 Dative: *varxnümĕ* (*\*vřxnomu*) 'supreme';  
 Locative feminine: *no provāj* (*\*na pravĕji*) 'to the right'.

### Plural

Nominative: *vilĕ* (*\*veliciji*) (M) 'big', *senenä* (*\*sĕnenaja*) (N) 'hay', *vil'ä* (*\*velikyjĕ*) (F) 'big';  
 Accusative masculine: *lesnä vrexäi* (*\*lĕšьnyjĕ (v)orĕxy*) 'hazelnuts' literally 'wood-nuts';  
 Genitive masculine: *družĕx büd' üv* (*\*družijixъ (instead of \*drugyjixъ) bogovъ*) 'other gods'.

### Dual

Nominative–accusative neuter: *paunä cilĕsai* (*\*pl'něji čĕlesi*) 'full cheeks'.

### 3.1.5 Numeral morphology

The numerals are quite well attested in the texts. For the most part, they do not depart from their counterparts in other Slavonic languages.

Cardinals: *jadän* (*\*jedьнъ* instead of *\*jedьнъ*), *janü* (*\*jedьno*) '1', *dävo* (*\*dьva*), *däve* (*\*dьvě*) '2', *täri* (*\*trьje*) '3', *citĕr* (*\*čĕtyre*) '4', *pät* (*\*pĕť*) '5', *sist* (*\*šestь*) '6', *sidĕm* (*\*sedьmь*) '7', *visĕm* (*\*(v)osmь*) '8', *divät* (*\*devĕť*) '9', *disät* (*\*desĕť*) '10'. The cardinals from '11' to '20' occur in two or more alternative forms: *janädĕst/jadänädĕst* (*\*jedьнъ na desĕte*), *janünäcti* (*\*jedьno na desĕte*) '11', *dvenädĕst/dvenäcti/dvenäcte/dvenocĕte* (*\*dьvě na desĕte*) '12', *trainädĕst/trainäcte/trainocĕte/tärojnäcti* (*\*tri na desĕte, \*trajь na desĕte*) '13',

*citěrnādist/citěrhoct/citěrhocti* (< \*četyre na desęte) '14', *paťnādist/paťnocti* (< \*pęť na desęte) '15', *sistnādist/sistnocti* (< \*šestę na desęte) '16', *siděmnādist/siděmnocti* (< \*sedmę na desęte) '17', *visěmnādist/visěmnocti* (< \*(v)osmę na desęte) '18', *divaťnādist/divaťnocti* (< \*devęť na desęte) '19', *disaťnocti* (< \*desęť na desęte) '20', *janü disaťnocti/disaťnocti janü* '21' and so on. Apart from *disaťnocti* the word *stig* (Middle Low German *stige* 'twenty sheaves') was used in this function. '30' was *pöl t'üpä* (< \*polę kopy), '40' – *citěrdišot* (< \*četyre desęť), '50' – *pa(t)dišot* (< \*pęť desęť), '60' – *sis(t)dišot* (< \*šestę desęť), '70' – *siděmdišot* (< \*sedmę desęť) '80' – *visěmdišot* (< \*(v)osmę desęť), '90' – *diva(t)dišot* (< \*devęť desęť). As can be seen from *pöl t'üpä* '30', alongside *sis(t)dišot* Polabian must have also used \**t'üpä* (< \*kopa, originally 'rick, stack, heap, pile', then in North Slavonic secondarily also 'sixty (sheaves), 60') in the sense of '60'. To express '100' the forms *disaťdišot* (< \*desęť desęť) or *pať stid'ě* were used. '1,000' was *disať paťstid'ě*.

Ordinals: *parā* (< \*přvaja or \*přvoje) 'first', *törě* (< \*vъtoręjъ) 'second', *tritě* (< \*tretęjъ) 'third', *ciťortě* (< \*četvęťjъ) 'fourth', *přptě* (< \*pęťjъ) 'fifth', *sestě* (< \*šestęjъ) 'sixth', *vāsmě* (< \*(v)osmęjъ) 'eighth', *divřptě* (< \*devęťjъ) 'ninth', *dišptě* (< \*desęťjъ) 'tenth'. 'First' was also *erstě* (from German *erste*) or *preňā* (< \*perdъnaja).

Collective numerals: *citvārü* (< \*četvero) '4', *paťārü* (< \*pętero) '5', *sistārü* (< \*šestero) '6', *sidmārü* (< \*sidmārü) '7', *vismārü* (< \*(v)osmero) '8', *divaťārü* (< \*devętero) '9', *disaťārü* (< \*desętero) '10'.

## 3.2 Verbal morphology

### 3.2.1 Verbal categories

Like other Slavonic languages, Polabian distinguished between the perfective and imperfective aspects. The distinction was implemented chiefly by prefixes, for example, the imperfectives *lümět* (< \*lomiti) 'to break', *mesāt* (< \*męšati) 'to mix', *aidě* (< \*iderę) 'goes' had the perfectives *vězlümět* (< \*jъzlomiti) 'to break', *vězmesāt* (< \*jъmęšati) 'to mix', *püdě* (< \*pojъdetę) 'will go'.

Some aspectual pairs were marked by other morphological means, such as alternation or change of conjugation, compare the imperfectives *jaimojě* (< \*jъmajetę) 'seizes', *dvaizě* (< \*dvižetę) 'raises' with the perfectives *jěmě* (< \*jъmetę) 'seizes', *dvaigně* (< \*dvignetę) 'raises'.

Polabian preserved all three past tenses of Proto-Slavonic, imperfect, aorist and perfect: compare the imperfects *tex* (< \*xъtęaxъ) 'I wanted', *bějās* (< \*bъjaaše) 'was beating', the aorists *vāik* (< \*vykъ) 'I learned', *rici* (< \*reče) 'said', *āipaustaix* (< \*upustixъ) 'I dropped', *āitācix* (< \*utęčexъ) 'I met', *vāzq* (< \*vъzę) 'took' and the perfects *rüddāl-sā* (< \*rodilę sę) '(he) was born', *āiseklai* (< \*usękli) '(they) cut off'.

The present tense expressed the present when used in the imperfective and the future if in the perfective form: *pajα* (⟨ \**pijα*) 'I am drinking', *lāzēs* (⟨ \**l̥žeš̥*) 'you are lying', but *praivαzα* (⟨ \**privež̥α*) 'I shall tie to', *püddārcē* (⟨ \**rod̥r̥tjet̥*) 'will trample'.

The analytical future tense comprised the finite forms of the verb *ca* (⟨ \**x̥tjα*) 'I want, I will' and the infinitive of the main verb: *jo ca pict st' aibα* (⟨ \**ja x̥tjα pekti skybα*) 'I shall bake (some) bread', *ci dāzd ait* (⟨ \**x̥tjet̥ d̥ž̥ž̥ iti*) 'it will rain'.

The imperative is well attested in the singular and only in two forms in the plural. It ended in *-θ/-ai* (⟨ \**-i*) in the singular and *-tē* (⟨ \**-te*) in the plural: *doj* (⟨ \**daji*) 'give', *ricai-mē* (⟨ \**reči mu*) 'tell him', *rūsplāstaitē* (⟨ \**orzplāšcite*) 'flatten out', *jectē* (⟨ \**jēdj̥te*) 'eat'. The verbs *dot* 'to give', *jest* 'to eat' and *vaižē* 'sees' preserved the original consonantal type of the imperative: *doz* (⟨ \**dadj̥*), *jez* (⟨ \**jēdj̥*), *jectē* (see above), *vaiž* (⟨ \**vidj̥*). As a form of injunction, Polabian used the modal particle *nex* (⟨ \**nexaji*, the original imperative from \**nexati* 'to let') with the third person present of the verb: *nex ja tok* (⟨ \**nexaji jest̥ tako*) 'may it be so', *nex tibē tū smakojē* (⟨ \**nexaji tebe to* (Middle Low German *smak-*)-*ajet̥*) 'may it taste (good) to you.'

The Polabian verb had the following non-finite forms: the infinitive, the present active participle and the past passive participle. With few exceptions, they continued the Proto-Slavonic forms: *sāpāt* (⟨ \**s̥p̥pati*) 'to sleep', *zarāt* (⟨ \**z̥r̥ēti*) 'to look', but *vāst* (⟨ \**v̥z̥ti* instead of \**v̥z̥eti*) 'to take', *sedq̥cē* (⟨ \**sēd̥et̥j̥j̥*) 'sitting', *baitē* (⟨ \**bit̥j̥j̥*) 'beaten', *āik̥psenē* (⟨ \**uk̥r̥šen̥j̥j̥*) 'bitten'.

The past passive participle served to form the passive voice in combination with the auxiliary verbs *bāit* (⟨ \**byti*) 'to be' or *vārdot* (⟨ (Middle Low German *werd-*)\*-*ati*) 'to become'. The texts seem to show that the two constructions differed in their function: the passive with *bāit* most probably referred to the present, that with *vārdot* to the future, compare the following examples together with their German translations: *ja zazonē* (⟨ \**jest̥ ž̥ž̥an̥j̥j̥*) 'er ist verbrandt' (= 'it is burned') versus *vārdā āirūdenē* (⟨ (Middle Low German *werd-*)\*-*ajet̥ uroden̥j̥j̥* instead of \**urod̥jen̥j̥j̥*) 'er wird geboren werden' (= 'he will be born'). The past tense of the passive always contained the appropriate form of *vārdot*: *vārdol baitē* (⟨ \*(*werd-*)*al̥ bit̥j̥j̥*) '(he) was beaten', *v̥z̥v̥z̥onē* (⟨ \**v̥z̥v̥zan̥j̥j̥*) *vārdol* '(he) was tied up'.

### 3.2.2 Conjugation

In the present-tense forms, Polabian established stress on the penultimate syllable. Owing to the reduction of vowels the original \**-e/o-* and \**-i-* conjugations fell together, compare *aidē* (⟨ \**idet̥*) 'goes', *nūsē* (⟨ \**nosit̥*) 'carries'. In disyllabic or polysyllabic forms, as well as before enclitics, the stress shifted one syllable towards the end of a form and the reduced ending

**Table 14.5 The present tense**

	SG		PL		DU	
	I	II	I	II	I	II
1	-ǫ	-m	-mĕ		-	
2		-s	-tĕ		-	
3		-θ	-ǫ		-tā/-to	

was replaced by the non-reduced one, compare *dojĕ* (< \**dajetŕ*) 'gives' with *vitĕdojimĕ* (< \**otŕdajemy*) 'we forgive' and *aidĕ* (< \**idetŕ*) 'goes' with *aidi-sā* (< \**idetŕ sŕ*) '(am, are, etc.) getting along', literally 'goes (to me, to you, and so on)'. As a result of these processes Polabian distinguished between only two conjugation types: verbs with the *-ĕ-/i-* stem and verbs with the *-ā/-o-* stem. Let us refer to them as the first (I) and second (II) conjugations. The endings of the present-tense forms are given in table 14.5.

Examples: *plocŕ* (< \**plačŕ*) 'I cry', *ričŕ* (< \**rečŕ*) 'I say', *zarŕ* (< \**zŕrjŕ*) 'I look', *nexām* (< \**nexamŕ*) 'I let', *opām* (< (Middle Low German *hop-*) \**-amŕ*) 'I hope'; *cajĕs* (< \**čuješŕ*) 'you feel', *znojis-mĕ?* (< \**znaješŕ tŕne*) 'do you know me?', *zarĕs* (< \**zŕrišŕ*) 'you look', *mos* (< \**jŕmašŕ*) 'you have, you are to', *ne-mās* 'you are not to', *ganās* (< (Middle Low German *gönn-*) \**-ašŕ*) 'you are favourable to', *ni ganos-mĕ* 'you envy'; *plocĕ* (< \**plačĕtŕ*) 'cries', *lümĕ* (< \**lomitŕ*) 'breaks', *pĕpādi-sā* (< \**popadetŕ sŕ*) 'falls down', *rüdi-sā* (< \**roditŕ sŕ*) 'is born', *zĕvā* (< \**zĕva* < \**zĕvajetŕ*) 'yawns', *strid' o-sā* (< (Middle Low German *strid-*) \**-a sŕ*) 'quarrels'; *cimĕ* (< \**xŕtjemy*) 'we want', *vitĕdojimĕ* (< \*(v)*otŕdajemy*) 'we forgive', *momĕ* (< \**jŕmamŕ*) 'we have, we are to'; *citĕ* (< \**xŕtjete*) 'you want', *motĕ* (< \**jŕmate*) 'you have'; *pŕjŕ* (< \**pojŕtŕ*) '(they) sing', *vorŕ* (< \**varĕtŕ*) '(they) cook', *jaigroja* (< \**jŕgrajŕtŕ*) '(they) play'; *bĕjāto-sā* (< \**bŕjeta sŕ*) '(they two) beat each other'.

The perfect tense was formed by means of the morpheme *-l/-lā* (< \**-lŕ*, \**-la*) in the singular and *-lai* (< \**-li*) in the plural, added to the original infinitive stem. The personal distinctions could be made either by the forms of the auxiliary verb *bāit* (< \**byiti*) 'to be' or by personal pronouns, compare *ja plokol* (< \**jestŕ plakaŕŕ*) '(he) cried', *joz pl' ŕsāl* (< \**jazŕ pŕŕsaŕŕ*) 'I danced' (M), *joz bālā* (< \**jazŕ byla*) 'I was' (F), *tāi vāipāl* (< \**ty*

**Table 14.6 The present tense of the verb *bāit* 'to be'**

	SG	PL	DU
1	jis (< *jesmŕ)	jismāi/jismĕ (< *jesmy)	-
2	jis (< *jesŕ)	-	-
3	jā/jā	-	jistā (< *jesta)

*vypilъ* 'you drank' (M), *vân âirüdüal-sä* (< \*(v)onъ urodilъ sę) 'he was born', *vinai bêlai-sä* (< \*(v)oni bili sę) 'they have beaten each other'.

Other tenses, the imperative and the non-finite forms of Polabian conjugation are much less well attested. They are presented in 3.2.1.

The only irregular verb in Polabian was *bâit* (< \*byti) 'to be'. Its forms in the present tense are given in table 14.6. The form *jâ* appears in reduced positions, for example, when preceded by the negative particle *ni* (< \*ne), compare *ni-jâ*. The origin of the nasality of *jâ* is not clear. Apart from the present tense, the following forms of the verb are attested: *ni-bäs* (< \*ne bêaše) (IMPF) 'was not', *bōdē* (< \*bōdētъ) (FUT) 'will be', *bâl* (< \*bylъ) (PRF M) and *bâlâ* (< \*byla) (PRF F) 'has been'.

### 3.3 Derivational morphology

In addition to Slavonic derivational patterns, Polabian also used some German elements in word formation (see 3.3.3).

#### 3.3.1 Major patterns of noun derivation

The most clear categories of noun derivation include the following:

- 1 Diminutives formed by means of the suffixes *-ĕk* (< \*-ikъ) (M), *-äk* (< \*-ькъ, \*-ъкъ) (M), *-äc* (< \*-ьць) (M), *-kă* (< \*-ъka) (F), for example, *t'ütlĕk* (< \*kotъlikъ) from *t'ü'âl* (< \*kotъlъ) 'kettle', *varsäk* (< \*vřšъkъ) from *varx* (< \*vřxъ) 'peak, top', *d'ölqĕk* from *d'ölqĕ* (< \*golqĕbъ) 'pigeon', *brotäk* from *brot* (< \*bratъ) 'brother', *t'öskă* from *t'öză* (< \*koza) 'goat', *t'üskă* (< \*kožъks) from *t'üză* (< \*koža) 'skin'. From some masculine nouns, diminutives were derived by means of the suffix *-kă*: *Ānskă* 'Johnny' from *Āns* 'John' (from Middle Low German *Hans*), *ramkă* (from Middle Low German *ram*) 'goat, ram', *Michelkă* 'Michael' (German *Michael*). The suffix seems to have been the contamination of the Low German suffix *-che/-ke* (compare German *-chen*) with the native *-kă*.
- 2 Nouns denoting females formed by means of the suffixes *-kă* (< \*-ъka), *-skă* (contamination of Middle Low German *-sche* with the native *-skă* < \*-ьska): *erskă* 'mistress, lady' from *er* (Middle Low German *er*) 'master, gentleman', *toblârskă* 'witch' from *toblâr* (Middle Low German *toverer*) 'sorcerer, wizard'.
- 3 Nomina agentis formed by means of the suffixes *-nĕk* (< \*nikъ), *-äc* (< \*-aць), *-aikă* (< \*-ika). The first one attached to nouns, the latter two to verbs: *crivnĕk* (< \*červъnikъ) 'shoemaker' from *criv* (< \*červъ) 'shoe', *tăkăc* (< \*tъkaць) 'weaver' from *tăkât* (< \*tъkati) 'to weave', *flăităc* 'lesser whitethroat (a song-bird)' from *flăitot* (Middle Low German *floiten*) 'to play the flute, the fife', *bezaikă* (< \*bĕžika) 'runner' from *bezât* (< \*bĕžati) 'to run', *perdojaikă* (< \*perdajika) 'merchant' from *perdojĕ* (< \*perdajetъ) 'sells'.

- 4 Nomina actionis formed by means of the suffixes *-ně* (⟨ \**-ьje*), *-t'ě* (⟨ \**-tьju* (DAT) from verbs: *vobeně* (⟨ \**vabenьje*) 'baiting, alluring', *catině* (⟨ \**čьtenьje*) 'counting' from *catě* (⟨ \**čьterь*) 'counts', *kā pait'ě* (⟨ \**кь pitьju*) 'to drink'.

Some of the suffixes mentioned above also fulfilled other functions, for example, *storěk* (⟨ \**starikь*) 'leaven' from *storě* (⟨ \**starьjь*) 'old', *bolāk* (⟨ \**bělkь*) 'the white of an egg'.

### 3.3.2 Major patterns of adjective derivation

The productive suffixes were *-n-* (⟨ \**-ьn-*), *-en-* (⟨ \**-en-*), *-ost-* (⟨ \**-ast-*), *-üv-/ev-* (⟨ \**-ov-/ev-*), *-ot-* (⟨ \**-at-*). With the exception of the suffixes *-n-* and *-en-*, which could form adjectives both from nouns and verbs, all the other suffixes mentioned attached to nouns: *xlādeně* (⟨ \**xoldenьjь*) 'cool' from *xlād* (⟨ \**xoldь*) 'shade, cool', *t'ülně* (⟨ \**kolьnьjь*) 'wagon' from *t'ölä* (⟨ \**kola*) 'wagon', *traivň* 'wedding' from *traivoje* (⟨ \*(Middle Low German *truw-*)-*ajetь*) 'marries', *rüseně* (⟨ \**rošenьjь*) 'bleached' from \**rüsě* (which is unattested, but compare *rüsi-sä* ⟨ \**rositь sę* 'is bleached'), *snörostě* 'fringed' from *snör* (Middle Low German *snör*) 'string', *kolüvě* 'cabbage' from *kol* (Middle Low German *kól*) 'cabbage', *šaprev* 'shepherd's' from *šapār* (Middle Low German *schaper*) 'shepherd', *krauckotě* 'crossed, cross' from *krauce* (Middle Low German *kruze*) 'Ascension'.

### 3.3.3 Major patterns of verb derivation

The main types of verb derivation are prefixation and separable compounding. The productive prefixes were: *āi-* (⟨ \**u-*), *prai-* (⟨ \**pri-*), *sā-* (⟨ \**сь-*), *vā-* (⟨ \**вь-*), *vāz-* (⟨ \**вьz-*), *věz-* (⟨ \**ьz-*), *vi-* (⟨ \*(*v*)*o-*), *vāi-* (⟨ \**vy-*), *zo-* (⟨ \**za-*): *āibrükot* 'to wear out' from *brükot* (Middle Low German *brüken*) 'to use', *praibüvāt* 'to build onto' from *büvot* (Middle Low German *buwen*) 'to build', *sābrükoně* 'worn out' from *brükot* (see above), *vāmarkojě* 'marks' from *markojě* (Middle Low German *marken*) 'draws, marks', *vāzlodot* 'to load on' from *lodot* (Middle Low German *laden*) 'to load', *vězlikāl* '(he) has compared' from *likot* (Middle Low German *liken*) 'to make equal', *visāct* (⟨ \*(*v*)*osěkti*) 'to cut apart' from *sect* (⟨ \**sěkti*) 'to cut', *vāirāvāt* (⟨ \**vyrьvati*) 'to tear out' from *rāvāt* (⟨ \**рьvati*) 'to pick, pull up', *zosüleně* 'dirtied, dirty' from the unattested verb borrowed from Middle Low German *solen*.

On the German model Polabian developed separable compound verbs using both German and Polabian prefixes-particles: compare, on the one hand, *to-vist* (⟨ \*(Low German *to*)-*vesti*) 'to ride to', *vizě-to* (⟨ \**vezetь* (Low German *to*)) 'rides to', *to-zině* (\*(Low German *to*)-*ženetь*) also *zině-to* 'drives to', *derě-dal* (⟨ \**deretь*-(Middle Low German *dal*)) 'pulls off, tears off', and on the other hand, *klaja vānau* (⟨ \**kljujotь vьnu*)



'(they) peck out, scratch out (of chickens)', *vānau dojě* (◁ \**vъnu dajetъ*) 'gives out', *aidě dānau* (◁ \**idetъ dъnu*) 'goes in', *dānau klodě* (◁ \**dъnu kladerъ*) 'puts in', *püslod t'autait* (◁ \**poslědъ kutiti*) 'to imitate' (compare *t'autait* 'to make, to do' and German *nachmachen* 'to imitate', *machen* 'to make'), *rōbēt vākorst* (◁ \**rōbiti (v)okrъstъ*) 'to hem around'. The native elements *vānau*, *dānau*, *püslod*, *vākorst* were used to fulfil the function corresponding to the German separable prefixes, such as *zu* (Low German *to*), *heraus*, *hinein*, *nach*, *um*, *herum*, for example, *zufahren* (= Polabian *to-vist*), *abziehen* (= Polabian *derě-dal*), *herausscharren* (= Polabian *kl'ajā vānau*), *herausgeben* (= Polabian *dojě vānau*).

## 4 Syntax

Given the relatively small amount of material available, it is not possible to reconstruct all aspects of Polabian syntax. To facilitate comparison with other chapters, the same subsection numbers are retained and there is no subsection 4.7.

### 4.1 Element order in declarative sentences

Polabian had free word order in the sense that the major constituents could in principle occur in any order. For example, the subject could precede or follow the verb, and the verb could precede or follow its objects or any adverbial modifiers: *dāzd aidě* (◁ \**dъžъ idetъ*) 'rain goes' or *aidě dāzd* 'goes rain' (= 'it is raining'), *šapār posě vice* (◁ \*(Middle Low German *schaper*) *pasetъ (v)ovъčě*) 'the shepherd grazes the sheep' and *t'üskō derě del* (◁ \**kožъkō deretъ* (Middle Low German *del*)) 'takes off the skin', *virgně dal no zimā* (◁ \**vĭgnetъ* (Middle Low German *dal*) *na zemjō*) 'throws down to the ground' and *vā lōnū vāmě* (◁ \**vъ lono vъjъmetъ*) 'takes in one's arms'.

### 4.2 Non-declarative sentence types

Yes-no interrogative sentences seem to have been formed without any particle: *cis-sā kōpāt ait?* (◁ \**chъtješъ sę kōpati iti*) 'do you want to go and take a bath?', *müzēs venst' ē gornēt?* (◁ \**možešъ* (German *wend-*)-*ъsky gorniti*) 'can you speak Wendish?', *znojis-jěg?* (◁ \**znaješъ jego?*) 'do you know him?'

Commands and negative commands are expressed by means of the imperatives: *aid sād kā mane* (◁ \**idi sędi kъ tъně*) 'come and sit beside me', *pūd sem er* (◁ \**rojъdi sěmo* (Low German *her*)) 'come here', *ni brind'oj-nās kā farsükoñě* (◁ \**ne* (German *bring-*)-*aji nasъ kъ* (Middle Low German *vorsak-*)-*anъju*) 'do not bring us into temptation'.

### 4.3 Copular sentences

The role of the copula was played by the verb *bāit*: *ninā joz mom tūjā brūt bāit* (◁ \**neně jazъ jъmatъ tvoja* (Low German *brūt*) *byti*) 'now I am to be

your bride', *tâi jis vainĕk* (< \**ty jesĕ vinĕnikъ*) 'you are the guilty one'. Adjectives are used in long form with the copula: *ja glădiŭvnĕ* (< \**jestĕ goldovĕnĕjĕ*) '(he) is poor', *joz jis storĕ* (< \**jazĕ jesĕmĕ starĕjĕ*) 'I am old' (M). Some examples are attested with the verb *vărdot* (< \*(Middle Low German *werd-*)-*ati*) in similar functions: *solix vărđās* (< \*(Middle Low German *sâlich*, *werd-*)-*ašĕ*) 'you become happy', *špĕtă mo vărđot tŭji jaimĕ* (< \**svętoje jĕmajetĕ ... tvoje jimĕ*) 'thy name become holy'.

#### 4.4–4.5 Complex sentences

Little can be said about the syntax of complex sentences as only twenty or so complex sentences are attested in the texts. The majority of them are asyndetic, coordinate structures, for example, *Morajă xŭdi văkorst carkvaicĕ să târaimă sveckomĕ, sâikăs büscă, ne-mĕžălo-jĕg niĕ ĕđĕ nojt* (< \**Marija xodi (v)okŕstĕ cŕkĕvici sĕ trima svĕčĕkami* (Middle Low German *suk-*)-*aašĕ božĕca, ne možăla jĕgo nekĕde najiti*) 'Mary walked around the church with three candles, she was looking for the Lord, she could not find him anywhere'. Several comparative and relative clauses are attested: *kătŭ ci sarăt, tŕ aid* (< \**kĕto xĕtjetĕ sĕrati, tĕnĕ idi*) 'whoever wants to shit, may he go', *vitĕdoj-năm nos grex kăk măi vitĕdojimĕ nosĕm gresnărŭm* (< \*(v)*otĕdaji namĕ našĕ grĕxĕ kako my (v)otĕdajemy našimĕ grĕšĕnaromĕ*) 'forgive us our sin as we forgive our sinners'.

#### 4.6 Negation

The particle *ni/ne* was used in the function of negation: *ni ja mĕt' ĕ* (< \**ne jestĕ mĕkĕkĕjĕ*) 'is not soft', *joz ne-mŭg zatĕk băt* (< \**jazĕ ne mogĕ zĕtikĕ byti*) 'I cannot be the groom'. As in other Slavonic languages, the negated transitive verb required its direct object to stand in the genitive: *ne-mă lŭko* (< \**ne jĕmajetĕ* (Middle Low German *lŭck-*)-*a*) 'has no luck' versus *văn mo vilt' ĕ moxt* (< \*(v)*onĕ jĕmajetĕ velikĕjĕ* (German *macht*)).

With negative pronouns double negation was used: *joz ni caja nic* (< \**jacĕ ne čujŕ nečĕso*) 'I do not feel anything', *ni vaid'ăl niĕ'ŭg?* (< \**ne vidĕlĕ nikogo?*) 'didn't you see anybody?'.

#### 4.8 Reflexives and reciprocals

The Polabian reflexive verbs were formally distinguished by the particle *să* (< \**sĕ*) and were used in several functions, among others: (a) to denote that the subject acts upon itself: *joz măl-să* (< \**jazĕ mylĕ sĕ*) 'I have washed myself', *văzdălai-să* (< \**vĕzdĕli sĕ*) 'they have got dressed'; (b) to signal impersonal constructions: *kok aidi-să vom?* (< \**kako idetĕ sĕ vamĕ?*) 'how are you doing?'; (c) to refer to uncontrolled actions: *pĕpădăl-să* (< \**popadlĕ sĕ*) '(he) has fallen', *ăitŭpăl-să* (< \**utopilĕ sĕ*) '(he) has drowned'; (d) to denote reciprocity: *krigălai-să* (< \*(German *krig-*)-*ali sĕ*) 'they have fought'. In some cases the use of reflexives was close to that of the passive: *beli-să* (< \**bĕlitĕ sĕ*) 'is bleached'. Reciprocity was also expressed by means of *jadăn ... draug* or *draug ... draug*: *jadăn sl'od*

*draugäg* (< \*jedъnъ slědъ drugajego) 'one after the other', *draug draugau drauzět* (< \*drugъ drugu družiti) 'to help one another'.

Some verbs could occur only as morphological reflexives: *büji-sä* (< \*bojitiъ sę) 'is afraid', *strid' o-sä* (< \*(Middle Low German *strid-*)-*ajetъ sę*) 'quarrels'.

#### 4.9 Possession

Possession was expressed by means of the verb *met* (< \*jъměti) 'to have', possessive pronouns, and perhaps also possessive adjectives: *mos pąžā?* (< \*jъmašъ pąža?) 'do you have money?', *ne-nām pąžā* 'I have no money', *müjā soko* (< \*moja (Middle Low German *sake*)) 'my thing', *süj düm* (< \*svoжъ domъ) 'one's own house', *šaprev stok* (< \*(Middle Low German *schaper-*)-*evъ* (Middle Low German *stok*)) 'shepherd's crook', *malnait'üv knext* (< \*malnik-ovъ; *mal-*, *knext* from Middle Low German) 'miller's hand'. Examples of the latter type are very few and are not certain, for they can also be interpreted as representing qualitative adjectives (that is, 'the type of crook a shepherd uses; mill hand'). No examples of the genitive case in this function are attested.

#### 4.10 The partitive genitive

The partitive genitive was employed in Polabian to a much greater extent than in other Slavonic languages. A noun in the partitive genitive could serve not only as the object of a verb but also as the subject of a sentence: *tü paivo ja dübrā* (< \*to piva jestъ dobroje) 'this beer is good', *to kolai ja jist teplü* (< \*tъnъ (Middle Low German *kol-*)-*u jestъ ješče teplo*) 'this cabbage is still hot', *to zenā mo dübrā mlākā* (< \*ta žena jъmatъ dobroje *melka*) 'the woman has good milk'. A noun used in the partitive genitive seems to have been qualified by adjectives in the nominative no matter what role the noun played in a sentence.

#### 4.11 Impersonal and passive constructions

In addition to the personal (active, passive and reflexive) constructions characterized by the presence of the subject, Polabian had impersonal constructions which were either intransitive or reflexive: *svaitojě* (< \*svitajetъ) 'day is breaking', *svetě* (< \*světirъ) 'lightning flashes', *kok aidi-sā vom* (see 4.8).

The use of the passive was quite frequent in Polabian. The texts seem to show that the passive started to supersede typically Slavonic reflexive constructions in some of their functions: *plātně ja rüsenā* (< \*poltъno jestъ *rošenoje*) alongside with *plātně rüsi-sā* (< \*poltъno rosirъ se) 'the linen is bleached', *vārdā airüdeně* (< \*(Middle Low German *werd-*)-*ajetъ urodenъjъ* instead of *urodenъjъ*) '(he) will be born' alongside *airüdāl-sā* (< \*urodilъ sę) '(he) was born'.

## 5 Lexis

### 5.1–5.2 General composition and borrowings

The recorded material includes roughly 2,800 words, predominantly (about 2,000 words) of Slavonic origin. But a considerable proportion of them (more than 600) are German loan-words. Most of the latter can be traced to Middle Low German. Some lexical items were mixed forms, which comprised both native and borrowed elements: *jisin-mond* ‘September’ (< native \**jesenъ* ‘autumn’ and Middle Low German *mand* ‘month’), *vosěpuc* ‘barber’ (from native *vos* ‘beard’ and Low German *putzen* ‘to shave’).

In view of the incompleteness of the recorded material it would be unjustified to draw any conclusions concerning the general composition of the Polabian word-stock.

### 5.3 Incorporation of borrowings

German loan-words were not only phonologically assimilated, most of them were also morphologically adapted to the grammatical system of Polabian; they were inflected according to the native paradigms as well as often gaining native prefixes or suffixes, for example, *lük/glük* (Middle Low German (*g*)*lück*) ‘luck’, genitive singular *lük/glük* (< \*(*g*)*lük*-*a*), *t’arl* ‘man, husband, fellow’ (Middle Low German *kerle*), dative singular *t’arlau* (< \*(*kerl*-)*u*), *praibüvāt* (< \**pri*-(Middle Low German *buw*-)*ati*) ‘to build onto’, *snörostě* (< \*(Middle Low German *snôr*-)*astъjъ*) ‘fringed’.

### 5.4 Lexical fields

#### 5.4.1 Colour terms

The only colour terms which are attested are *bolě* (< \**bělъjъ*) ‘white’, *corně* (< \**čŕnъjъ*) ‘black’, *carveně* (< \**čŕvenъjъ*) ‘red’, *saivě* (< \**sivъjъ*) ‘grey’.

#### 5.4.2 Body parts

*Glāvā* (< \**golva*) ‘head’, *vāt’ü* (< \*(*v*)*oko*) ‘eye’, *nös* (< \**nosъ*) ‘nose’, *vauxü/väixü* (< \*(*v*)*uxo*) ‘ear’, *vaustā/vāistā* (< (*v*)*usta*) ‘mouth’, *vlās*, plural *vlāsāi* (< \**volsъ*, \**volsy*) ‘hair’, *vājo/vājā* (< \**vyja*) ‘neck’, *rāmā* (< \**ormę*) ‘arm’, *rōkā* (< \**rōka*) ‘hand’, *polāc* (< \**palъcъ*) ‘finger, toe’, *nügā* (< \**noga*) ‘leg’, *stüpä* (< \**stopa*) ‘foot’, *borst’ā* (Middle Low German *borst*) ‘chest’. The word for ‘heart’ is not attested.

#### 5.4.3 Kinship terms

*Motai* (< \**mati*) ‘mother’, *lōlā* (< \**ljalja*), also *fader* (Middle Low German *vader*), *aitā* (Germanic, compare Old Frisian *heitha*) ‘father’, *sestrā* (< \**sestra*) ‘sister’, *brot* (< \**bratъ*) ‘brother’, *strājefkā* (< \**stryjevъka*) ‘aunt,

father's sister', *vaujefkă* (< \*(v)ujevъka) 'aunt, mother's sister', *străjă* (< \*stryja) 'uncle, father's brother', *vaujă* (< (v)uja) 'uncle, mother's brother', *tetană* (origin unclear, but compare LSo. *šéseňe* 'great nephew') 'cousin's child', *grotkă* (Middle Low German *groteke*) 'grandmother', *storë lölă* (< \*starъь ljalja) or *grotefor* (Low German *grōtevād'r*) 'grandfather', *zenă* (< \*žena) 'woman, wife', *t'arl* (Middle Low German *kerle*) 'man, fellow, husband', *defkă* (< \*dēvъka) 'girl, daughter', *vătrūk* (< \*(v)otrokъ), also *săinkă* (< \*synъka) 'son'.

## 6 Dialects

Owing to the paucity of the written records, little can be said about the dialects of Polabian. A close scrutiny of the notation used in the records shows that part of what has been considered to be spelling inconsistencies is due to the dialectal differentiation of the language. Three dialects have been distinguished in Polabian: the Süthen dialect (represented by Parum Schultze), the Lüchow dialect (represented by Pfeffinger) and the Klennow dialect (represented by Hennig; see section 1). The most evident differences among them related to the results of certain sound changes. The original syllabic / changed into *u* in Schultze's and Pfeffinger's dialects, but into *au* in Hennig's dialect; the original vowel \**u* in strong positions was diphthongized (depending on the environment, see 2.1.2) into *au* or *âi* in the dialect represented by Hennig, but only into *âi* in Schultze's and Pfeffinger's dialects; Pfeffinger's dialect had preserved some remnants of original *č*, *ž*, *š*, whereas the two other dialects had completely changed the original *č*, *ž*, *š* into *c*, *z*, *s* (see 2.1, 2.1.2).

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