

HETEROGENEOUS PREPOSITIONS IN LATVIAN

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Among the Indo-European languages, Latvian (Baltic) is unique in that its prepositions undergo a systematic change of government between singular and plural. Whereas in the singular prepositions can govern the accusative, the genitive or, more rarely, the dative, in the plural all prepositions are construed with the dative. There is complete case neutralization. This typological singularity, which has long attracted the attention of linguists (see recently Holvoet 2010, Kushnir 2019), is generally explained by the fact that the preposition *ar* ‘with’ originally governed the instrumental: when this case disappeared in Latvian, its singular forms were assimilated to accusative forms, its plural forms to dative forms, due to their surface similarity, giving rise to a heterogeneous construction, *ar* ‘with’ + ACCUSATIVE in the singular, + DATIVE in the plural. At a later stage, heterogeneity was reanalyzed as a global constraint imposing the dative on all prepositions in the plural, resulting in secondary usages such as *bez* ‘without’ + GENITIVE in the singular, + DATIVE in the plural. This peculiarity is attested as early as the first Latvian texts (16th century), but there are still vestiges, in Old Latvian and in some modern dialects, of an earlier state of the language, where prepositions governed the same case from singular to plural. The aim of this presentation is to shed light on the heterogeneous construction of prepositions in Latvian in connection with the special status of the preposition *ar* ‘with’.

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