

RUSSIAN FEMININE STRESS SHIFT AND COMPLEX SUFFIXES

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1. PUZZLE: FEMININE STRESS RETRACTION

Halle 1973: in gendered pairs formed with the suffixes *-nik-* and *-ŭk-* the feminine undergoes **stress shift** (for *-ŭk-* also independently noted by Beard 1987):

(1) masculine nouns with *-ŭk-* (unaccented stems only): Halle 1973

- a. *pastuškí* 'shepherds', *korobkí* 'small bast boxes' (from *korobók*), *poroškí* 'powders', *gorodkí* 'small towns', *voloskí* 'hairs', *čulkí* 'stockings'
- b. *pastúški* 'shepherdesses', *kazáčki* 'Cossack women', *koróbki* 'boxes', *golóvki* 'heads', *skovoródki* 'pans'

(2) masculine nouns with *-nik-* (unaccented stems only): Halle 1973

- a. *provodníkí* 'conductors', *balovnikí* 'spoiled children', *bludníkí* 'fornicators', *učeníkí* 'students', *vípuskníkí* 'graduates'
- b. *provodníci* 'conductors', *balovníci* 'spoiled girls', *bludníci* 'fornicators', *učeníci* 'students', *vípuskníci* 'graduates'

In the corresponding feminine nouns stress is retracted one syllable to the left

The fact that two different suffixes exhibit this change is grounds for investigation

The fact **that the feminine version of *-ŭk-* is pre-accenting can be ascribed to the yer**, which cannot be stressed and so triggers stress retraction (Halle 1975, Melvold 1990)

But a vocalized yer *can* be stressed, cf. *korobók* 'small bast box_{MSG.NOM}' vs. *koróbki* 'box_{FPL.GEN}', so more needs to be said

2. FURTHER GENDERED SUFFIXAL PAIRS

In the **suffixal pair *-ŭc-/-ic-*** as well the masculine variant is post-accenting and the feminine one, accented:

The yer of the masculine suffix is vocalized in (3a) to break the impossible consonant cluster

- (3) a. *černecí* 'monks' / *černíci* 'nuns'
b. *vdovcí* 'widowers' / *vdovíci* 'widows'

In this suffixal pair the consonant remains the same and the vowel changes

The **suffixal pair *-ščik-/-ščic-*** triggers the same stress alternation (in derivatives where stress is not on the lexical stem, the latter is by far the preferred variant):

This suffix also has an allomorph *-čik-*, which is used after dental-final stems and is never post-accenting, so the stress in its feminine variant *-čic-* cannot be checked

- (4) a. *kranovščíkí* / *kranovščíci* 'construction crane operators.M/F'
b. *časovščíkí* / *časovščíci* 'watchmakers.M/F'

Both *-ščik-* (Witkowski 1981) and *-nik-* historically arise from suffix stacking, with the same shared component: the diminutive/nominalizing suffix *-ik-*

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Possible explanation: coincidence. Very few items

3. HOW IS GENDER CHANGED IN RUSSIAN?

In Romance languages, feminization of a noun is done by changing its inflection class (i.e., by adding the final [a] in the nominative):

- (5) a. *muchacho* ‘boy’/*muchacha* ‘girl’
 b. *sirviente/sirvienta* ‘servant.M/F’ Spanish, Harris 1991

This reasonably corresponds to adding the feature [+ feminine] (see Percus 2011, Kramer 2009, 2015, 2016, Pesetsky 2013, etc.):

- (6)
$$\begin{array}{c} \text{nF} \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ \text{n} \quad \quad \text{nF} \\ | \quad \quad | \\ \text{muchach-} \quad -a \end{array} \rightarrow \text{muchacha}$$

In contemporary Russian feminization is done by adding a suffix or by substituting one:

- (7) a. *sekretán'sja* ‘secretary’, *generál'sja* ‘general’s wife’, *blógersja* ‘blogger’
 b. *laborántka* ‘lab assistant’, *zeml'áčka* ‘compatriot’
 c. *baronéssa* ‘baroness’, *kritikéssa* ‘critic’
 d. *masteríca* ‘master’, *tigríca* ‘tigress’
 e. *knágl'ina* ‘princess’, *filologína* ‘philologist’
 f. *trusíxa* ‘coward’, *borčíxa* ‘wrestler’, *zajčíxa* ‘hare’
 g. *direktrísa* ‘director’, *abbatísa* ‘abbess’
 h. *svát'ja* ‘mother of the child-in-law’, *boltún'ja* ‘chatterbox’
- (8) a. *piárščik/piárščica* ‘PR administrator.M/F’
 b. *animéšnik/animéšnica* ‘animé lover.M/F’

The “Romance option” used to be available in Russian (see Fufaeva 2020), but isn’t anymore

In contemporary Russian, null-derived deadjectival nouns can change their gender by changing their inflection:

- (9) a. *zavédujuščij/zavéduščaja* ‘manager’
 b. *rússkij/rússkaja* ‘a Russian’

Otherwise only the few nouns in (10) and some first names (*Evgénij/Evgénija*, *Valérij/Valérija*, *Aleksánder/Aleksándra*...) distinguish gender by declension class:

- (10) a. *vóron/voróna* ‘raven/crow’, *lis/lisá* ‘he-fox/fox’, *žiráf/žiráfa* ‘giraffe/giraffe’
 b. *kum/kumá* ‘fellow godparent’, *suprúg/suprúga* ‘spouse’, *rab/rabá* ‘slave’
 c. *órk/%órka* ‘an orc’, *él'f/%él'fa* ‘an elf’
 d. *rebiónok* ‘child’/*rebiónka* ‘female child’, *kotiónok* ‘kitten’/*kotiónka* ‘female kitten’

These words are often given as exemplar feminines, but they are highly non-representative

4. PROPOSAL

Suppose one feminizing suffix in Russian, n_F , which is **phonologically null** and semantically

- defines an identity function ($IDENT_F$)
- over nominalizing suffixes
- introducing the presupposition that the resulting nominal is feminine

If n_F can only combine with suffixes, it will not combine with stems (except for the happy few in (10))

(11) a.  \rightarrow *-níc-*_F b.  \rightarrow *'-ŭk-*_F

- on the suffix itself if it is syllabic: *-nik-* → *-nⁱc-*
- on the preceding syllable otherwise: since the yer of *-ŭk-* cannot bear stress, stress is shifted to the left (Melvold 1990) and the suffix becomes pre-accenting

5. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

- The stress retraction issue could be resolved in a different way (e.g., by making the null feminine suffix assign accent to the preceding morpheme)
- The morphosyntactic question of the lack of null-derived feminines in Russian... can it be an accident?
- But complex affixes are not excluded by any syntactic theory
- And the notion could be useful for the nominalizers we just saw

- it's an accident: there is no such suffix in Russian (even though there are null-derived feminine nouns, both animate and inanimate)
- it's semantics: the [female] feature is a modifier of n's in Russian (also an accident, but a semantic one)
- it's morphology: the [female] feature requires a nominalizer because it is not one itself and therefore cannot combine with roots (nor with some suffixes)

To be honest, I don't believe in acategorial roots in Russian. So maybe it is an argument for my position

When we look at the suffixes concerned, we see a lot of shared pieces:

- the suffixes *-ščik/-ščic-* and *-nik/-nic-* are linked to the diminutive/nominalizing suffix *-ik-* and the feminitive/nominalizing suffix *-ic-* (with many caveats)
- the masculine/nominalizing suffix *-ič-* is linked to the the feminitive/nominalizing suffix *-ic-* via one vowel feature change
- [c] is an underlying [k]
- [n] of the suffixes *-nik/-nic-* is the adjectivizing suffix *-ŋn-*

The fact that these masculine suffixes are post-accenting can be explained via the same shared underlying representation *-ĩk-*, which would also explain why nouns derived with the masculine suffix *-ĩc-* may have also a feminine in *-ũk-*:

Vinogradov 1986:117fn.: If the noun in *-ĭc-* is deverbal or deadjectival, its feminine counterpart will be built with the suffix *-ic-* (12a), if it is denominal, the suffix *-ĭk-* is used (12b). This is empirically incorrect

- (12) a. *pevĕc/pevĭca* ‘singer’, *krasávec/krasáviča* ‘a beauty’
 b. *torgóvec/torgóvka* ‘merchant’, *némec/némka* ‘a German’

The underlying representation *-ĭk-* easily links *-ĭk-*, *-ĭc-*, *-ic-*, and *-ik-*:

Table 1: Nominalizing/feminine connections

vowel consonant	[+back]	[–back]	
	[–ATR]		[+ATR]
velar	<i>-ĭk-</i> F/D	<i>-ĭk-</i>	<i>-ik-</i> M/D
coronal		<i>-ĭc-</i> M	<i>-ic-</i> F

Would Morris have liked this?

7. REFERENCES

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