

# Russian feminine stress shift and complex suffixes

Ora Matushansky

CNRS/Université Paris 8

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# Feminine stress shift

**Halle, Morris (1973): The accentuation of Russian words.**  
*Language.*

In gendered pairs formed with the suffix *-ǔk-* (surface forms [ok]/[k]) and the suffix *-nik-* the feminine undergoes **stress shift** (for *-ǔk-* this was also independently noted by Beard 1987):

- (1) *pastuškǐ* ‘shepherds.DIM’ (sg. *pastušók*)
- (2) *pastúški* ‘shepherdesses’ (sg. *pastúška*)
- (3) *provodnikǐ/provodníci* ‘conductors.M/F’,
- (4) *bludnikǐ/bludníci* ‘fornicators.M/F’

# Feminine stress shift

While the masculine *-nik-* and *-ŭk-* are post-accenting (final stress in the plural), *-nic-* is accented, their feminine counterparts are pre-accenting:

- (1) *pastuškí* ‘shepherds.DIM’ (sg. *pastušók*)
- (2) *pastúški* ‘shepherdesses’ (sg. *pastúška*)
- (3) *provodníkí/provodníci* ‘conductors.M/F’,
- (4) *bludníkí/bludníci* ‘fornicators.M/F’

Taking into account the yer in the feminine *-ŭk-*, **stress in feminines is retracted one syllable to the left**

The same is true for other feminines

# Feminine stress shift

In the gendered suffixal pairs *-ščík-/-ščic-* and *-íc-/-ic-* the feminine also undergoes stress shift:

- (5) gendered pairs with *-ščík-/-ščic-*:  
*kranovščikí/kranovščíci* ‘construction crane operators.M/F’  
*časovščikí/časovščíci* ‘watchmakers.M/F’
- (6) gendered pairs with *-íc- (surface [ec]/[c])/-ic-*:  
*černecí* ‘monks’/*černíci* ‘nuns’  
*vdovcí* ‘widowers’/*vdovíci* ‘widows’

**Halle’s stress shift occurs in all gendered pairs**

# Feminine stress shift could be a coincidence

The feminine counterparts in *-ščik-/-ščic-* and *-nik-/-nic-* both contain the same *-ic-*, which is also appears in *-ič-/-ic-*

These gendered pairs are all internally complex

But this will not help with the suffix *-ŭk-* (without some stipulations) or with other feminitive suffixes

Which brings us to the question of **feminitive formation in Russian**

# Feminitive formation in Russian

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

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

Russian doesn’t have this option

# Feminitive formation in Russian

Russian has similar examples, but they are actually atypical:

- (8) 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’, *élj/%éljfa* ‘an elf’
- d. *rebjónok* ‘child’/%*rebjónka* ‘female child’,  
*kotjónok* ‘kitten’/%*kotjónka* ‘female kitten’

# Feminitive formation in Russian

Russian has such examples too:

- (8) 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’, *élif/%élifa* ‘an elf’
- d. *rebjónok* ‘child’/*rebjónka* ‘female child’,  
*kotjónok* ‘kitten’/*kotjónka* ‘female kitten’

**This was the full list of such nouns** + some proper names



# Feminitive formation in Russian

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- (8) a. *vóron/voróna* ‘raven/crow’, *lis/lisá* ‘he-fox/fox’,  
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**All other feminitives of Russian involve a suffix**

# Feminitive formation in Russian

In Russian feminization of a noun is done by replacing a suffix or by adding one:

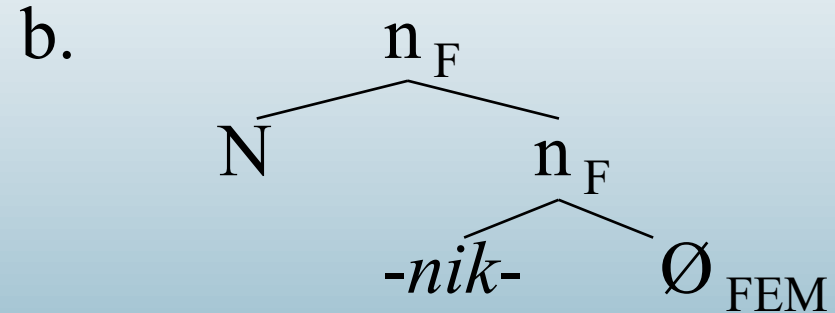
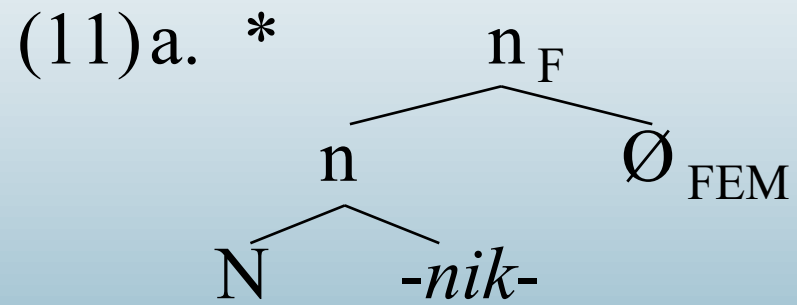
- (9) a. *piárščik/piárščica* ‘PR administrator.M/F’  
b. *animéšnik/animéšnica* ‘animé lover.M/F’  
c. *pevéc/pevíca* ‘singer’, *krasávec/krasávica* ‘a beauty’
- (10) a. *sekretárša* ‘secretary’, *blógerša* ‘blogger’  
b. *laborántka* ‘lab assistant’, *zemljáčka* ‘compatriot’

**There are no feminitives in Russian without a suffix**

Excepting the few nouns above and a few proper names

# Russian feminine as a suffixal modifier

Suppose the **Russian feminine suffix cannot combine with stems:**



Then **Russian nouns cannot feminize by a change in declension class**

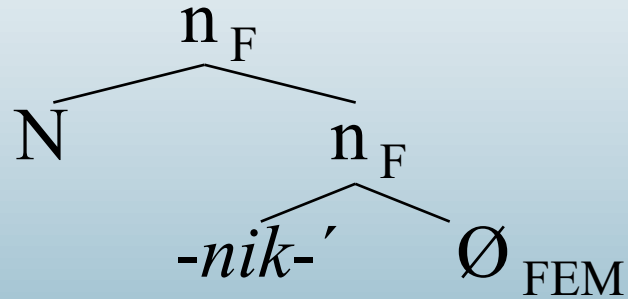
Why this restriction?

Possible hypotheses: semantics or morphology

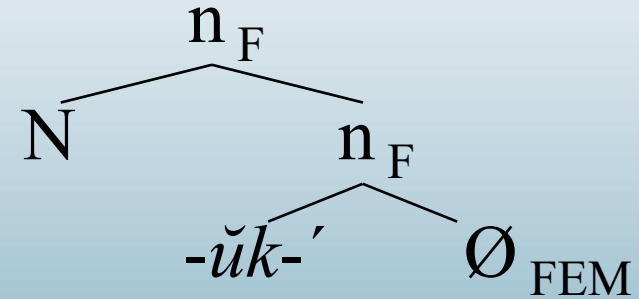
# Russian feminine as a suffixal modifier

But **the complex feminine suffix defines a phonological cycle:**

(12) a.



b.

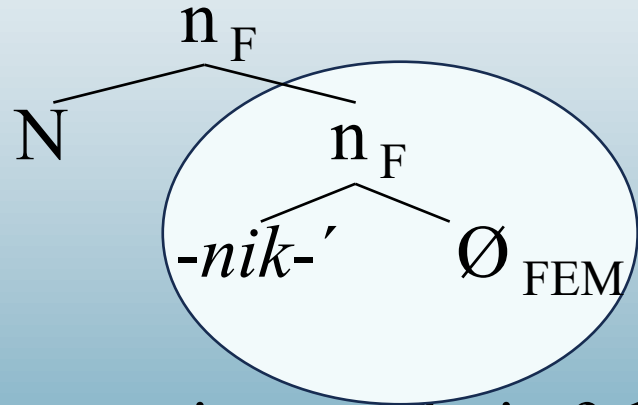


What happens to the accent of the post-accenting suffix when it is inside a complex suffix?

# The suffixal cycle

**If Melvold 1990 is right, stress must be assigned in this cycle too:**

(13) a.



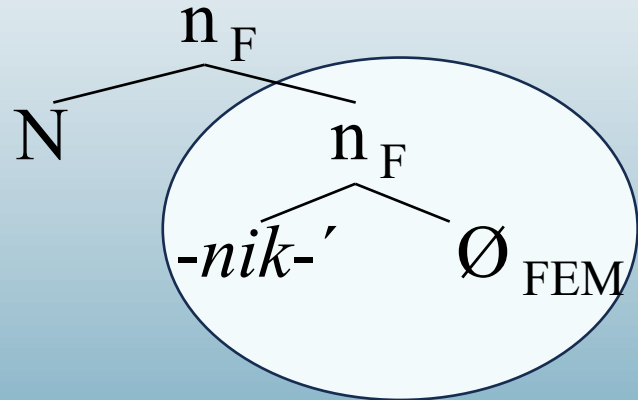
Our post-accenting suffix is followed by a phonologically null suffix that cannot bear stress

Let's not worry about the [k]-to-[c] palatalization, it is normal for Russian

# The suffixal cycle: syllabic suffix

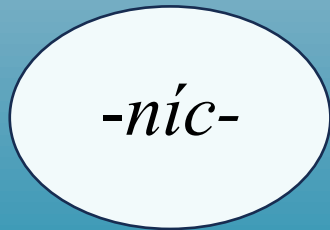
Here the complex feminitive suffix is syllabic:

(13) a.



And stress ends up on it:

(as usual for Russian final morphemes)

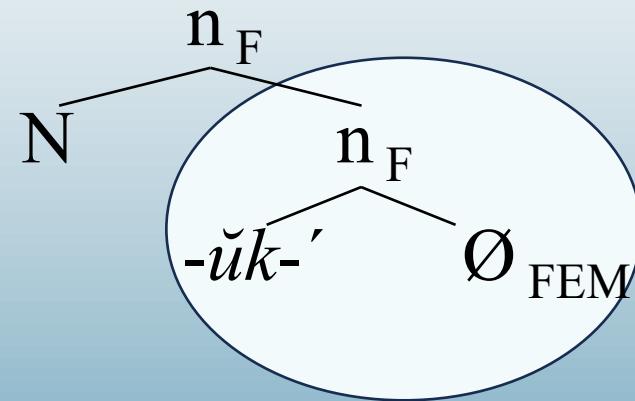


# The suffixal cycle: asyllabic suffix

The complex feminitive suffix can also be **asyllabic**:

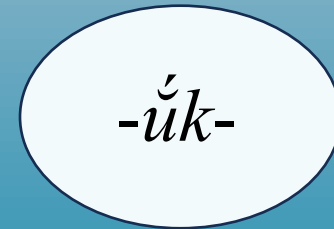
(13)

b.



The accent of the post-accenting suffix ends up inside the complex suffix here too

**But a yer cannot bear stress!**

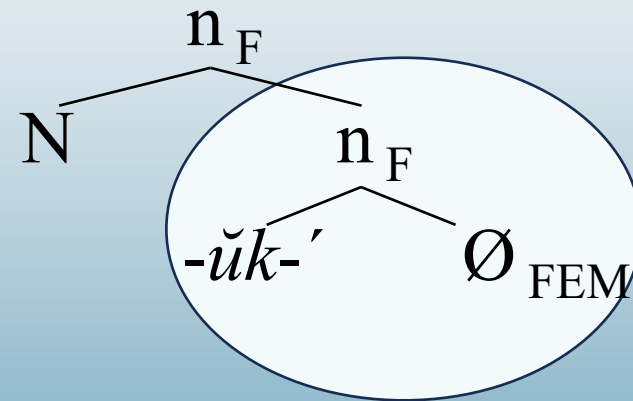


# The suffixal cycle: asyllabic node

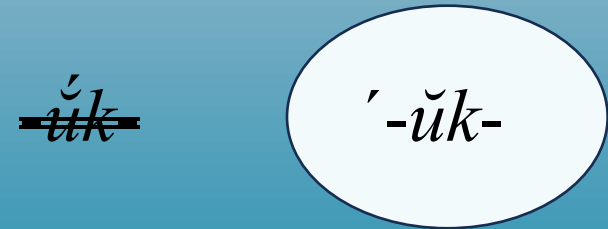
Halle 1973, Melvold 1990: yer-triggered stress shift:

(13)

b.



An accented yer makes stress appear to its left:

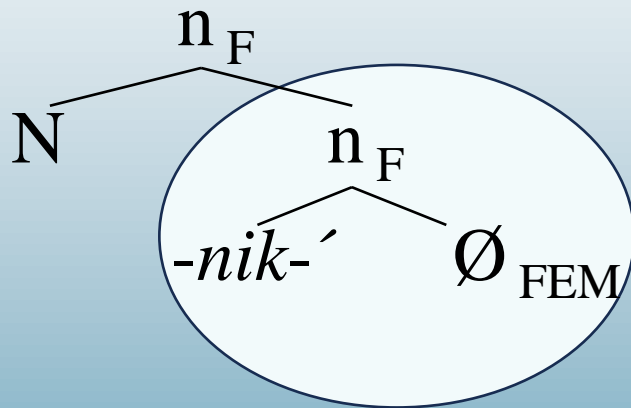




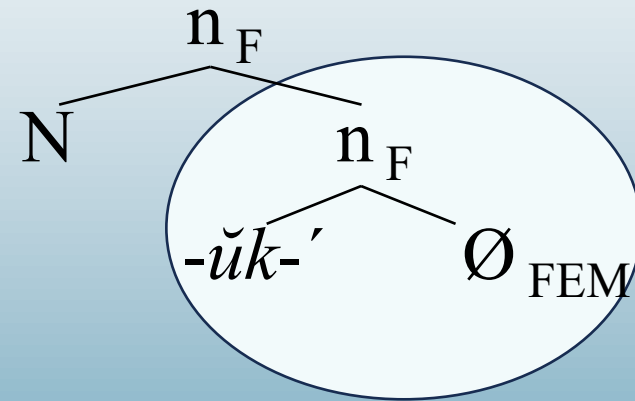
# Russian feminine stress retraction

Stress retraction is due to the cycle defined by the complex suffix...

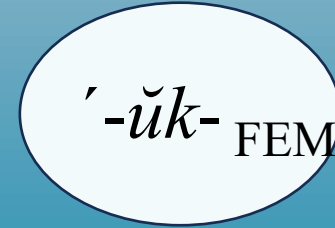
(13) a.



b.



...and the properties of the suffixal vowel:



# 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 syllable)
- The morphosyntactic question of the lack of null-derived feminitives in Russian... I have no idea
- But complex affixes are not excluded by any syntactic theory (and are in fact used, e.g., to account for thematic suffixes, Oltra-Massuet 2000, 2021, or for lexical suffixes, Gouskova and Bobabljik 2022)
- They could be useful for synchronic and diachronic issues
- Q: the consequences of  $*\emptyset_{nF}$  for the acategorical root hypothesis

# Дело Морриса живет и побеждает! :)

For a more detailed handout and the references go to my site or

