Russian *yers* and prosodic structure

Keywords: prosody; Russian; *yers*; prepositions; syntax

There is contradictory evidence for the prosodic structure of Russian prepositions and prefixes (Matushansky 2001, Steriopolo 2007, Gribanova 2009, 2010). First, some processes that apply across the boundary between a preposition or prefix and the following material diagnose it as a word boundary, while other processes diagnose no prosodic boundary at that location. This contradiction can be called the CLITICIZATION PARADOX.

Second, there is evidence both for and against the notion that prepositions and verbal prefixes — which are largely homophonous and have a common historical source — behave identically in the synchronic prosodic phonology as well. I will refer to this problem as the UNITY PARADOX. In particular, vowel reduction, devoicing, and palatalization apply in the same way across a preposition-noun boundary as they do across a prefix-verb boundary (Matushansky 2001). On the other hand, the vowel-zero alternation known as *yer* realization appears to distinguish the two categories (Gribanova 2009).

The key is that the empirical complexity of the *yer* facts has been underappreciated in the literature. In this talk I resolve the two paradoxes described above by taking a closer look at the complex and variable data on *yer* realization with prepositions, using both the Russian National Corpus (RNS) and Google. Once the facts are sorted out, and once the intricate phonotactic, syntactic, and lexical factors that affect *yer* realization are brought to light, it is possible to resolve the two paradoxes by inferring the correct prosodic representation of the structures involving prefixes and prepositions.

Among the syntactic restrictions on *yer* realization, I identify the following. First, it only applies when the triggering noun is a complement of the preposition. In (1a), the form with the *yer* (ko 'to') is obligatory, while it is impossible in (1b). Second, if the complement of the preposition is inalienably possessed, *yer* realization applies only when it is possessed by its syntactic binder. Observe the contrast between the (2a), where the preposition vo 'in' is realized with a *yer*, and (2b), where it is not. Third, *yer* realization fails to apply with prepositions whose meaning is not semantically transparent, i.e. with prepositions that are idiosyncratically selected by a verb.

(1)  
(a) k*(o) mne  'to me'  

(b) k*(o) mne neizvestnomu čeloveku  
\[ \text{to unknown.DAT person.DAT} \]  
'to a person unknown to me'

(2)  
(a) Petja letaet vo sne  
\[ \text{P flies in dream} \]  
'Peter flies in (his own) dream'  

(b) Petja letaet v sne  
\[ \text{P flies in dream} \]  
'Peter flies in (someone else's) dream'
As I show, all of these conditions point to the existence of two types of P-N groups whose prosodic structure is shown in (3a) and (3b). The choice between them depends on the syntactic and lexical grounds, and the phonological behavior of yer realization and other processes follows from prosodic structure.

(3)  a. \[ \begin{array}{c} \alpha \\ \sigma \\ P \end{array} \quad b. \begin{array}{c} \alpha \\ \sigma \\ P \end{array} \]

A supporting argument for this proposal is the behavior of the so-called rule of stress retraction, another process that variably applies to the preposition-noun complex. In some case forms of certain nouns, this process places stress on the preposition rather than on the noun itself. Surprisingly, stress retraction is subject to the same syntactic restrictions as yer realization: the noun must be the complement of the preposition; inalienably possessed nouns must be possessed by their binders; and stress retraction does not apply with semantically non-transparent prepositions. This suggests that a common prosodic distinction — such as the one illustrated in (3) — is at play.

The proposal provides a resolution to the Unity Paradox. Although superficially dissimilar from preposition-noun sequences, prefix-verb combinations show the same two types of prosodic structures. I show that Gribanova’s claim that verbs and nouns behave differently results from a comparison of nominal structures like (3a) with verbal structures like (3b).

Finally, the Cliticization Paradox also becomes a non-issue given the enriched representations in (3). The adjunction of a preposition (3a) is a representation that, so to speak, allows one to have the cake and eat it — it treats both the noun as well as the entire P-N complex as a prosodic word. More precisely, there are two kinds of prosodic words in such a representation, \( \omega_{\text{max}} \), which is not dominated by any other \( \omega \), and \( \omega_{\text{min}} \), which itself does not dominate any \( \omega \). The paradox can be resolved by stipulating that phonological processes can select either \( \omega_{\text{min}} \) or \( \omega_{\text{max}} \) as their domain.

References