

An Optimality Theoretic analysis of syllable structure in Ukrainian

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This paper deals with the syllable structure in Ukrainian. The analysis is presented in terms of Optimality Theory. First, I outline the basic syllable structure by looking at onsets, complex onsets, codas and complex codas. I focus on the faithfulness constraints which ensure that input consonants are preserved in the output rather than deleted to optimize syllable structure. Next, I consider word-medial sequences of consonants and show the interaction of Onset and NoCoda constraints. Prothesis in southwestern dialects of Ukrainian is analyzed in the following section and contrasted with an account of Standard Ukrainian, where prothesis is no longer productive. Prosthetic segments are shown to optimize the syllable structure by providing missing onsets (e.g. /armija/ → /harmija/ ‘army’). The final part of this paper is devoted to consonants violating the SSG. I discuss the special status of obstruents which are grouped as onsets despite a violation of the SSG. Conversely, word-medial SSG violations incurred by sonorants are avoided. An account of sonority plateaus at word margins follows. Finally, Jespersen’s Voice Constraint is employed to deal with word-medial sequences of consonants which disagree in voicing (e.g. /kladka/ ‘footbridge’). Constraints which facilitate onset maximization are overridden in the face of a violation of a higher-ranked constraint banning different voice specifications in adjacent obstruents. Consequently, the cluster of obstruents is broken-up by syllabifying each of them to a different syllable. The occurrence of such clusters of obstruents is widely reported in the literature on Ukrainian and is due to the absence of devoicing processes, common in most Slavic languages. I conclude that Optimality Theory provides the means to effectively account for the syllable structure in Ukrainian. Especially enlightening are the ways of dealing with onset maximization, special status of obstruents, prothesis or the absence of it, tolerance of SSG-violating sonorants at word-margins and the breaking-up of word-medial clusters of obstruents with opposite voice specifications. Optimality Theory’s superiority is evidenced in providing the *raisons d’être* for these processes, rather than merely stating the necessary rules in a rule-based theory. Universality of constraints, one of the fundamentals of Optimality Theory, is reflected in the treatment of prothesis. By merely changing the ranking of two universal constraints (Onset and Dep_{Seg}) with

respect to each other we are able to account for a variety of Ukrainian where prothesis ceased to operate and a dialect where prothetic segments are in current use. A traditional rule-based theory must refer to the presence or absence of a rule. Moreover, the formulation of this rule is un insightful, since a traditional rule-based theory, unlike Optimality Theory, is incapable of making direct reference to the mechanism of providing missing onsets thus adding to the optimality of syllable structure.

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