Intervocalic deletion and positional faithfulness in Russian

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This paper proposes an analysis of intervocalic glide deletion in Russian within the framework of Optimality Theory (OT, Prince and Smolensky 1993). The descriptive generalisation is that the glide is dropped before the vowel *i* in word-initial and intervocalic positions (1a), whereas the deletion is blocked when the *ji* sequence occurs after a consonant (1b).

(1) a. mój 'my' – *moj* + *í* [i] (pl.), cf. *moj* + *á* [ja] (fem.)

strój 'build' (imp.) – stro + ítel' [í] 'builder', cf. strój + u [ju] (1st pers. sg.)

jévro [jé] 'Euro' – jevrópa [i] 'Europe'

b. čjí [čjí] 'whose' (nom. pl.)

statjí [t'jí] 'article' (nom. pl.)

semjí [m'jí] 'family' (gen. sg.)

It has been demonstrated in the literature that the configuration *[ji] is disfavoured cross linguistically (Kawasaki 1982). In terms of OT, the absence of the *[ji] sequences is due to the constraint DISTINCT GLIDE that prohibits an onset that is identical to the nucleus (Rubach 2000). This paper argues that the data shown in (1) are problematic for OT. On the one hand, the glide is deleted word-initially and intervocalically at the expense of creating an onsetless syllable, as in *jévro* [jé] 'Euro' – *jevrópa* [i] 'Europe', *moj* + *á* [ja] 'my' – *moj* + *í* [i] (pl.). On the other hand, the glide is retained after a consonant in (1b) in spite of the fact that its deletion would eliminate a complex onset and, therefore, improve syllable structure. It is shown that one way to generate deletion in words in (1a) but block it in (1b) is to adopt a positional faithfulness approach, stating that faithfulness constraints are stronger in some positions (McCarthy and Prince 1995, Beckman 1997, and others). In the case at hand, a syllable is the privileged position where markedness considerations are overridden by the requirement to preserve underlying segments. More exactly, the analysis assumes that the postconsonantal deletion of the glide is prohibited by the syllabic faithfulness constraint σ-CONTIGUITY, requiring that contiguous input segments (represented on the melodic tier) must be contiguous in a syllable (McCarthy and Prince 1995).

References

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