

Different but same: An investigation into the relationship between the Polish and English stress systems

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The chaotic and unpredictable metrical system of English eludes strict theoretical formulation. Among the valuable approximations, one should especially note Burzio's refinement (1996) of Hayes' proposal (1985), resulting in a light-weight model of considerable explanatory power, which it owes largely to its inclusion of whole null syllables, as well as simple null vowels.

In the paper I first propose a model to describe, explain and, to the extent that is possible, predict word stress in both Polish and English. The model, grounded in a combination of Metrical Theory (i. e., the work of Hayes and Burzio) and Optimality Theory (Kager 1999; Gąsiorowski 1998), applies both parameters and ranked constraints to a non-hierarchical representation featuring feet but no trees or grid. The foot inventories of both languages are seen as composed of trochees and dactyls. Following Burzio, I propose two generalized stress patterns, trochaic and dactylic, to which most English words can be safely reduced. That simplification is achieved at the cost of requiring word-final vowels (overt or null) and extending the list of available syllable weights by one (from {heavy, light} to {heavy, light, ultralight}). I then present the less complex facts of Polish stress in analogous terms. Those theoretical assumptions are all argued for and discussed. Moving on to Polish-English, I put forward two tentative hypotheses: briefly, that orthography matters (Archibald's; 1993) and that certain trochaics undergo stress shift in PE as a result of assimilating to a subgroup of dactyls (my own). The remaining part of the paper introduces two experiments on the production of English word stress by Polish subjects (one of them a preliminary study, reported in Marczak 2008), analyzes their data, verifies the two hypotheses mentioned above, and seeks to explain the observable PE stress shifts (and lack thereof) in terms of the model outlined.

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