

Polish and Slavic place-names and word-final consonant groups – new affricates and diphthongs in Polish?

Krzysztof Jaskuła (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin)

The phonology of place-names seems to be an interesting part of the phonology of a given language. In Polish, consonant clusters occurring at the end of such nouns may provide a decent handful of examples of not-necessarily-well-accounted-for phonological structures. Although such consonant combinations are not always confined to place names, these seem to form a self-contained set of words which may shed light on the remaining part of the language.

In this paper, we will take a look at complicated consonant groups occurring at the end of place-names, e.g. *Otwock*, *Leżajsk*, *Gdańsk*, *Bielsk*, *Szumsk*, *Czersk*, *Stupsk*. Thus, the area of interest will cover the cluster *-sk* preceded by another consonant.

In Generative Phonology and its daughter continuations, as well as in many other theoretical approaches, what follows a vowel or nucleus word-finally does not really matter for syllable structure because any constituent, in this case the coda, may include as many segments as possible.

In Government Phonology – (GP) – (Kaye, Lowenstamm and Vergnaud 1990, Kaye 1990, Harris 1994), however, there are strict predictions as regards the nature of syllable structure because, if a constituent branches, it can contain no more than two positions. Consequently, then, what follows the rightmost nucleus may be at most two or three consonants: either a coda plus a single onset or a coda followed by a branching onset. Any other structure is deemed illicit.

Also in the non-branching versions of Government Phonology, originated by Lowenstamm (1996), developed e.g. by Scheer (1998, 2004), Cyran (2003) and Jaskuła (2006), the configuration of a vowel followed by more than two/three consonants is considered to be a structural difficulty to which phonologists try to find diverse solutions. All of these analyses to some extent break with the original GP assumption that every position in the word must be licensed and that the principles for this licensing are very strict. Kaye (1992) introduced *Magic*-licensing to account for the presence of a word-initial empty nucleus and some scholars, e.g. Gussmann (2007), still use this mechanism, even word-medially. Others, e.g. Cyran (2003), propose that some empty nuclei need not be licensed because it is enough to say that they can license the onsets they follow. Thus, the battle is about the nature of licensing. However, perhaps the solution might be sought somewhere else.

Here, it is observed that GP, although it officially broke with the idea of the phoneme over 20 years ago, is still enslaved to this concept. If this notion is truly rejected and the inventory of a language is not limited to a certain number of phonemes or officially recognized segments, a return to the basic idea of GP is possible. An analysis of Polish place-names conducted in this spirit suggests that, if we accept occasional new affricates and diphthongs because they sometimes behave like affricates and diphthongs, many problems with the nature of licensing can vanish. (477 words)