THE MORPHOPHONEMICS OF THE RUSSIAN IMPERATIVE

ABSTRACT. The most natural generative account of the Russian imperative requires its derivation from the nonpast stem, not from the 1948 Jakobsonian verb base, as heretofore in generative descriptions. The Jakobsonian base is most appropriately used as a verbal citation form, from which the required nonpast or past stem form can be predicted by stem-referencing rules. This study shows that it is possible to steer a middle course between the Scylla of Lightnerian phonology and the Charybdis of the Jakobsonian verb system and still produce a systematic description of a Russian verbal category.

1. In this study of the Russian imperative I will first present the analysis, then discuss the relevant literature in light of the analysis. Following a somewhat modified version of Lunt (1975), the analysis will make use of the inventory of Russian morphophonemes described below. This system will also be used as a generalized notation for discussing the work of various authors, each of whom uses a slightly different notational system. The advantage of Lunt's system is that, in containing two rows of vowels, it possesses sufficient latent "vowel power" in the sense of Hamilton (1976) to produce requisite consonant mutations and palatalizations, while avoiding the excessive abstractness characteristic of some other generative approaches to Russian morphophonemics such as Lightner (1972). Lightner's description of Russian phonology involves, among other things, the postulation of various vowel features such as vocalic length and diphthongs, which become absolutely neutralized during the course of word derivation. Although in the interest of simplicity of exposition in this basically grammatical description, rules in the present study are given in a traditional morphophonemic form, the assumption is that these rules reflect natural phonological processes in most cases. For this reason it will be considered appropriate to evaluate morphophonemic rules in light of their ultimate phonological plausibility.

1.1. Morphophonemes

Vowels

Back a e i o u
Front á ë í ò ú ū
Consonants
Plain  p  b  f  v  m  t  d  s  z  n  l  r
Velar  k  g  x
Hushing  č  ž  š
Palatal glide  j

Operators
Null  0
End of word  #
Morpheme Boundary  -

Stress Morphophonemes
Fixed
Simple Shifting

By the morphophoneme $i_2$ (for which Lunt has no special notation) is meant the $i$ morphophoneme that is realized as the phoneme $i$ preceded by a palatalized plain or velar consonant (in the case of the velar, palatalization is not distinctive), cf. $nǔs$-$i_2$: $νοσί’carry’$, $pōk$-$i_2$: $νοκί’bake’$.

The morphophoneme $i_2$ is distinguished on the one hand from $i$, which is realized as the phoneme $i$ preceded by a palatalized plain consonant or a mutated velar consonant (cf. $xōd$-$i$: $xόδι’t$ ‘he walks’, $ǔk$-$i$: $ǔχι’t$ ‘he teaches’), and on the other hand from the morphophoneme $i$, which is realized phonemically as $i$ preceded by a plain or (nonphonemically) palatalized velar constant (cf. $gǔb$-$i$: $gǔβ’lips$, $rǔk$-$i$: $rǔκi’hands’$).

Through the application of morphophonemic rules, the system outlined above is eventually realized as the phonemic (or lower-level morphophonemic) system sketched below:

1.2. Phonemes
Vowels a e i o u

Consonants
Paired  p  b  f  v  m  t  d  s  z  n  l  r
Jač  þ  ċ
Velar  k  g  x
Hushing  č  ž  š
Palatal Glide  j

1.3 Morphophonemic Rules
The morphophonemic rules pertinent to the present study are given below. Unless otherwise indicated, these are general Russian morphophonemic