

On Jakobson's 1948 System of Russian Verb Accentuation

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- This talk is about Roman Jakobson's famous article of 1948, called “Russian Conjugation,” that introduced the “one-stem system” and created a revolution in linguistics and the teaching of Russian.
- The main idea of the paper is that a single stem is sufficient to predict the complete paradigm of any regular Russian verb, as long as the general rules of the system are known. The older tradition had been to use two different stems but have fewer rules.
- My talk today will not deal with the entire verb article but only the two sections (2.61 and 2.62) that describe the **stress of Russian verbs**.
- We will examine several implicit ideas behind Jakobson's description that are not as clearly spelled out as they might be. Jakobson’s wording is very terse and is sometimes hard to understand.
- Some interesting structural patterns may be hard to see from the text of the article.

- The plan of the talk will be as follows:
- First, I will present the content of Jakobson's sections 2.61 (accented verb stems) and 2.62 (unaccented verb stems), together with my own explanations and charts, to make the ideas as clear as possible.
- Since Jakobson does not clearly spell out what ties together the verbs of each section, I will point out the common features of each type and what differentiates verbs within each type.
- Next, I will go through Jakobson's actual text, pointing out his use of terminology and how best to understand the meaning intended.
- Finally, I will indicate areas in which the 1948 stress system fails to capture relevant structural aspects of the system.

- Let's start with a few comments about Jakobson's basic verb stems. The **basic stem**, together with system-wide rules, is intended for the prediction of the verbal paradigm.
- The systems covered by Jakobson include those with vowel endings (present/imperative system) and those with consonantal endings (past/infinitive system). Since each system differs in its vowel or consonant endings, the endings actually are often an alternative way of specifying that something happens in the present or past tense, which is especially important when speaking about Russian stress.
- Jakobson ignores prefixes when dealing with basic stems. Therefore, there are **unsuffixed stems that consist only of a root** (e.g. *n'os—*, *d'en—*, which end either in an obstruent—e.g. *t, d, s, z—* or a sonorant—e.g. *j, r, l, n*) and **suffixed stems** (e.g. *var'-i—*, *rug-aj—*, *žd-a—*) that consist of a root plus suffix.

- Now let's take a look at Jakobson's two types of basic stem stress and what they mean.
- Every regular basic stem falls into one of two types: either there is a stress mark (´) on one of its vowels or an absence of any such mark. These types can be referred to as **stressed basic stems** (section 2.61) and **unstressed basic stems** (section 2.62).
- At first glance, this seems simple, but each of the two types has three basic subtypes and Jakobson offers no generalizing statement about what ties together each of the two types.
- I think the easiest way to approach this is with two diagrams—one for stressed basic stems as found in section 2.61 and the other for the unstressed basic stem type of section 2.62, as follows.

Verb Stems with Marked Stress (´)

Past System "Irremovable"

All marked stems have **stem stress** where marked.

E.g.

sáxar'-i— (сáхарила)
rug-áj— (ругáла)
d'én— (дéла)
v'el'-é— (велéла)
krád— (кра́ла)

Other stressed stems cited:

carápnu—
str'ig—

Present System

"Irremovable"

Stem stress where marked for:

1. **Vocalic stems with non-stem-final (non-suffixal) stress;**
2. **Sonorant stems.**

E.g.

sáxарят
ругáют
дéнут

"Removable"

Final stress for:

1. **Vocalic stems with stem-final (suffixal) stress;**
2. **Obstruent stems.**

E.g.

веля́т
краду́т

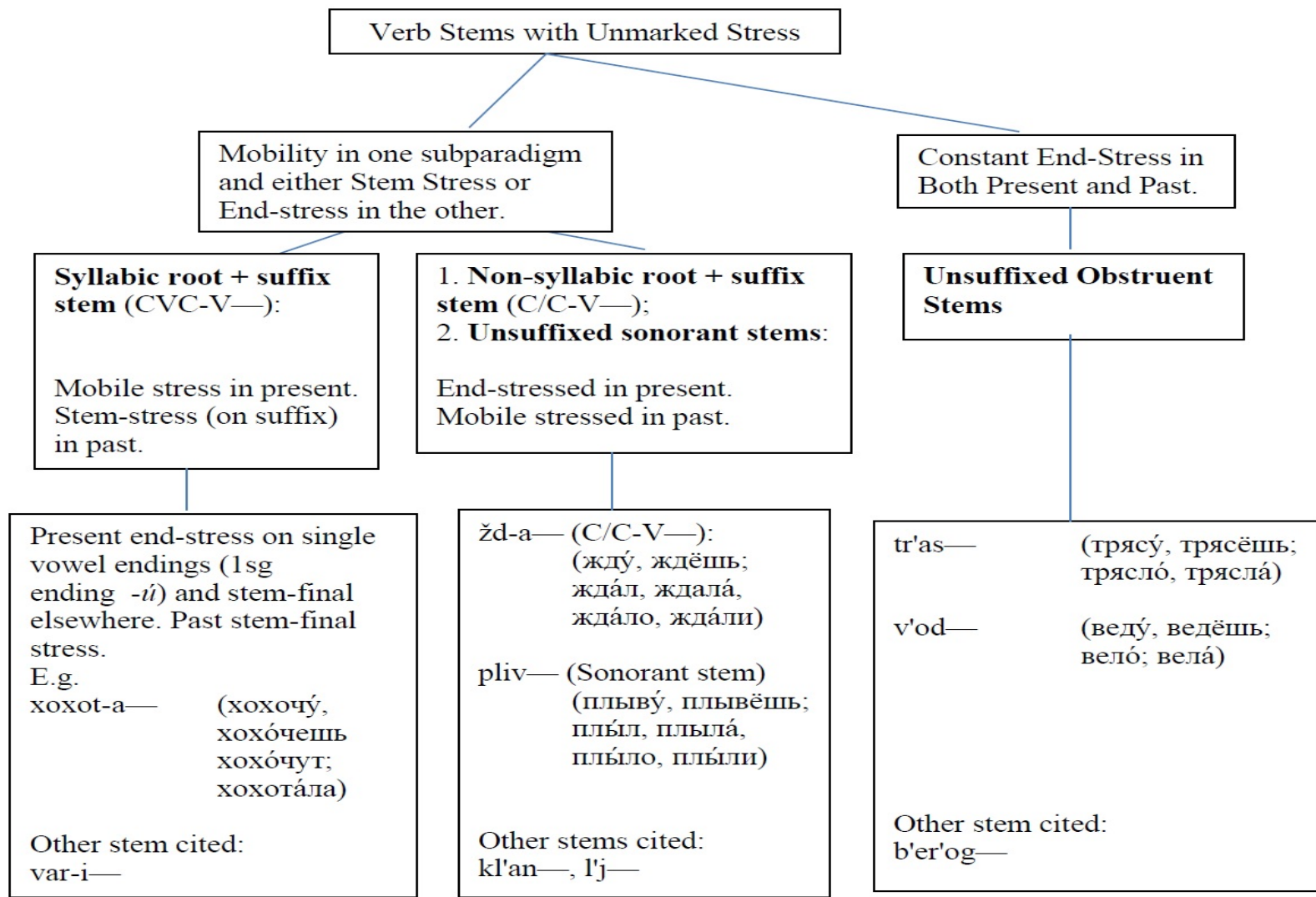
Jakobson's system of "accented" or "marked" stems.

Common features:

1. Past tense stress agrees with the mark for all verbs.
2. All verbs have either constant stem-stress or constant ending stress within past and present subparadigms; i.e. no mobility within subparadigms.

Differences:

Present tense stress either remains on stem ("irremovable") or moves to ending in all forms ("removable"), depending on verb type.



Jakobson's system of "unaccented" or "unmarked" stems.

Common features:

Stems have either mobility within present or past subparadigms or constant end-stress. By contrast, marked stems never have mobility inside present or past and never have past end-stress.

Differences:

Present mobility for syllabic suffixed; past mobility for non-syllabic suffixed and unaffixed sonorant stems; constant end-stress for unaffixed obstruent stems.

- We can sum up the stress patterns of marked and unmarked types in both present and past systems as follows:

Marked ()	Present	Past	Examples
'---V— --SON—	Stem		сáхар-и— дéн—
---V́— --OB—	Ending		вел-é— кра́д—
Unmarked ()			
CVC-V—	Mobile	Stem	хóхот-а—
C/C-V— --SON—	End		жд-а— плыв—
--OB—			вё́д—

- Now we'll have a look at the original text of Jakobson's sections 2.61 and 2.62. (The original text of 1948 is being used, in which there was a misprint in section 2.62, which I have edited to show the correction.)

2.61. Full-stems with removable and irremovable accent. In all Finite forms and in the Infinitive the stress falls on the same syllable of the accented full-stem, with the limitation that in **open and broadly closed full-stems** the stress moves from their final or only syllable to the first or only syllable of the vocalic desinence.

In our transcription of full-stems the acute accent marks the syllable which in Finite forms is the only accentable one.

Notes:

1. **"Full-stems"** refer to stems in which no sounds have been changed or deleted.
2. **Open stems** are those ending in a vowel; **narrowly closed** are those ending in a sonorant (including *v* as a sonorant); **broadly closed** are those that end in an obstruent.
3. Since the **past/infinitive system uses consonantal endings** and the **present/imperative system uses vowel endings**, the former can be referred to as occurring before consonantal desinences and the latter before vocalic desinences.
4. All stems in the "accented" category bear a stress mark; **irremovable stress means that the stress always stays where marked** and **removable means that stress is marked on the stem, but moves rightwards** onto the ending under certain conditions, such as final stress in vocalic and obstruent stems.

- Stem stress where marked is set up as the norm and anything else is called a "limitation." In the past tense (i.e. before consonantal endings), all stems have stem stress where marked, so there are no limitations there. As you can see, the limitations apply to stress on the final syllable of either **vocalic** or **obstruent** stems, in which case the stress is on the ending instead of the final stem syllable. As shown on the chart I presented, the cases of "limitation" are shown to the extreme right.
- Note that in the present tense of vocalic suffixed stems, such as *v'el'-é—*, the stem-final vowel gets deleted before the present tense endings (велю́, веля́т, etc.), so it is expected that the stress will have to move either leftwards or rightwards. But, in the case of unsuffixed obstruent stems such as *krád—*, the stress movement to the ending is not motivated in the same way.

- Jakobson's examples of the marked verbs of section 2.61 are as follows:

E.g. *sáxar'i*— 'sugar': 1 Sg. Pres. *sáxar'—u*, 3 Pl. *sáxar'—u-t*, M, Pret. *sáxar'i—l*, F. *sáxar'i—l-a*, Pl. *sáxar'i—l'-i*; *carápnu*— 'scratch': *carápn—u*, *carápn—u-t*, *carápn—l*, *carápn—l-a*, *carápn—l'-i*; *v'el'é*— 'order': *v'il'—ú*, *v'il'—á-t*, *v'il'é—l*, *v'il'é—l-a*, *v'il'é—l'-i*; *krád*— 'steal'— *krad—ú*, *krad—ú-t*, *krá—l*, *krá—l-a*, *krá—l'-i*; *str'íg*— 'shear': *str'ig—ú*, *str'íž—ó-š*, *str'ík*, *str'ig—l-a*, *str'ig—l'-i*; but on the final (or only) syllable of narrowly closed stems the stress remains irremovable: *rugáj*— 'scold': *rugáj—u*, *rugáj—u-t*, *rugá—l*, *rugá—l-a*, *rugá—l'-i*; *d'én*— 'put'— *d'en—u*, *d'en—u-t*, *d'é—l*, *d'é—l-a*, *d'é—l'-i*.

Note that Jakobson carefully distinguishes between morphophonemic and phonemic transcription. Basic stems are in morphophonemic transcription while actual grammatical forms are transcribed phonemically.

- Moving on to the unaccented stem type of section 2.62, we have the following description:

2.62. Unaccented full-stems. This type presents two varieties: A) verbs with open polysyllabic full-stems stress either the simple desinence or the preceding vowel if the desinence is complex (cf. 1.2); B) the other verbs stress their last (or only) accentable syllable, with the limitation that all but the ^{broadly}~~narrowly~~ closed full-stems draw the stress back from the Neut. and Plur. Preterit desinences (cf. 1.32).

In our morphophonemic transcription the absence of an acute accent denotes an unaccented full-stem.

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- Although it's not stated as such, "type A" has **present tense mobility** but constant stem suffix stress in the past tense, while "type B" has **past tense mobility or end-stress** but constant end-stress in the present.
 - The only type with present tense (and also imperative) mobility is the "open polysyllabic full-stem." This refers to stems with vowel suffixes ("open") but is called "polysyllabic" in order to exclude stems with non-syllabic roots, called "n/s-a" verbs in some textbooks.

- Type B includes verbs without present tense mobility, but with either past mobility or past end-stress, depending on whether the verb has a non-syllabic root (C/C-a—) or sonorant final vs. those with obstruent finals.

- Jakobson's examples of the unmarked verbs of section 2.62 are as follows:

E.g. 1) open polysyllabic full-stems: xoxota— 'guffaw': Imp. *xaxač—í*, 1 Sg. Pres. *xaxač—ú* ~ 2 Sg. *xaxóč—i-š*, 3 Pl. *xaxóč—u-t*, and M. Pret. *xaxatá—l*, F. *xaxatá—l-a*, Pl. *xaxatá—l'-i*; var'i— 'cook': *var'—í*, *var'—ú*, *vár'—i-š*, *vár'—u-t*, *var'í—l*, *var'í—l-a*, *var'í—l'-i*; 2) open monosyllabic full-stems: žda— 'wait': *žd'—í*, *žd—ú*, *žd'—ó-š*, *žd—ú-t*, *ždá—l*, F. *žda—l-á*, Neut. *ždá—l-a*, Pl. *ždá—l'-i*; narrowly closed stems: pliv— 'swim': *pliv'—í*, *pliv—ú*, *pliv'—ó-š*, *pliv—ú-t*, *plí—l*, F. *pli—l-á*, but N. *plí—l-a*, Pl. *plí—l'-i*; kl'an— 'curse': *kl'in'—í*, *kl'in—ú*, *kl'in'—ó-š*, *kl'in—ú-t*, *kl'á—l*, *kl'i—l-á*, but *kl'á—l-a*, *kl'á—l'-i*; l'j— 'pour': *l'éj* (cf. 2.122), *l'j—ú*, *l'j—ó-š*, *l'j—ú-t*, *l'i—l*, *l'i—l-á*, but *l'í—l-a*, *l'í—l'-i*; broadly closed stems: tr'as— 'shake': *tr'is'—í*, *tr'is—ú*, *tr'is'—ó-š*, *tr'is—ú-t*, *tr'ás*, *tr'is—l-á*, *tr'is—l-ó*, *tr'is—l'-í*, Inf. *tr'is—t'í*; v'od— 'conduct': *v'id'—í*, *v'id—ú*, *v'id'—ó-š*, *v'id—ú-t*, *v'ó—l*, *v'i—l-á*, *v'i—l-ó*, *v'i—l'-í*, *v'is—t'í*; b'er'og— 'spare': *b'ir'ig'—í*, *b'ir'ig—ú*, *b'ir'iž—ó-š*, *b'ir'ig—ú-t*, *b'ir'ók*, *b'ir'ig—l-á*, *b'ir'ig—l-ó*, *b'ir'ig—l'-í*, *b'ir'é—č* (cf. 2.111).

- Some inadequacies of the 1948 stress system.
- 1. **Prefixes.** Stem-final ~ Final vs. Initial ~ Final mobility.
- By not considering prefixes, the forms жи́л and жи́ла are both treated as having final stress, but жи́ло and жи́ли are treated as having stress “drawn back.” Using a prefix, we see that all forms except for жи́ла actually have stress drawn back to the initial syllable (за́жил, за́жили, etc.).
- Note that there is no way to characterize the difference between Russian за́пил vs. запíл in this system, since only unprefixated *pj'* — (пить) is treated and the masculine form пíл says nothing about its variable behavior with prefixes.

- 2. So-called “irremovable” stress on suffixed (*rug-aj—*) and unsuffixed (*d'en—*) sonorant stems **obscures accentual differences between derived and non-derived verbs.**
- Suffixed (derived) stems are subject to different rules than non-derived. For example, the derived type retracts past participial stress, but non-derived does not in this sonorant type, even though the present tense is similar. **E.g. обрúган, but задёт.**
- The present and past tenses also show the **derived/non-derived difference.** When the –i- suffix is absent, verbs act as non-derived and can oppose mobile vs. end-stress (e.g. прошú/прóсишь vs. говорú/говорíшь), but when the i-suffix surfaces in the past tense, there can be no opposition of mobile vs. end-stress and the two verbs have merged and equal stem-stress (просíла/говорíла).

- Segmentally, the longer stem normally is basic and gives more information than the shorter stem with deletion (e.g. pros'i—t' vs. pros'i—it). However, the shorter stems with deletion have more **accentual** oppositions.
- 3. The pattern of only one deviating mobile stress in a subparadigm (such as present or past tense) is not mentioned. This pattern also extends to nouns, in which the single deviating mobile form is also found in noun singular and plural subparadigms. E.g. прошý in the present or жилá in the past tense.
- 4. The basic inventory of accentual paradigms for both nouns and verbs is comparable but does not emerge from the article on verb stress alone.

- I have tried to deal with all of these issues in several papers. In the 1990's, a paper criticized my system for setting up a dual designation of two subparadigms for each noun and verb (e.g. singular/plural for nouns and present/past for verbs), in view of Jakobson's principle that there is only a single basic stem. However, there appear to be good reasons for doing so, since the two verbal paradigms of a single verb can have different derivational properties, depending on the presence or absence of a suffix.
- Since time does not permit a full comparison of my verb stress system and Jakobson's of 1948, I end with a diagram of the system I have proposed, which can be contrasted to others. Type A verbs, which have the same stem-stress in all forms, are not included in the diagrams, which only describe types B and C, which have stress other than constant stem-stress.

Non-Past (Present-Future)

Opposition: Forms lacking a suffix vowel.

Type B: Mobile. Pre-desinential~desinential stress: end-stress if ending is -V#; otherwise pre-desinential.

vs.



Type C: Immobile desinential stress

1. Neutralization of types B/C :

Forms with a suffix vowel:

-áй, -éй, -úй-.

2. Neutralization of all types: non-syllabic stems.

помогу́, помо́жешь
отниму́, отни́мешь
попрошу́, попрóсишь

понесу́, понесёшь
говорю́, говори́шь

1.	2.
игр-áй-(y)	тр-úт
стар-éй-(y)	бьй-úт
атак-úй-(y)	льй-úт

Past Tense

Opposition of Type B vs. C:
Stem lacks a syllabic suffix.

Neutralization of B-C opposition: Syl-
labic suffix exists; merged stress follows
type B (predesinential immobile or mo-
bile.)

Immobility: Un-
suffixed obstru-
ent stems.

Mobility: Un-
suffixed sonorant
stems.

Immobility: syl-
labic root and suf-
fix: CVC-V-
Predesinential
stress.

Mobility:
Non-syllabic root
and syllabic suf-
fix: C/C-V Pre-
desinential ~ des-
inential (-á) mo-
bility.

Type B:
Predesinen-
tial stress.

Type C:
Desinential
stress.

Type B:
Predesinential
~ desinential
mobility (-á)

Type C:
Initial ~
desinential
mobility (-á)

грызло
стриггло

←-→

несло
гребло

заплыло
~заплыла́
запи́ли
~запила́

←-→

зажило
~зажила́
запи́ли
~запила́

проси́ла, -ло
говори́ла, ло

жда́ло
~ждала́
собра́ло
~ собралá

Thanks for your attention!