

WORDS AND IMAGES

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR
(EMERITUS) DENNIS WARD

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THE STUDY OF RUSSIAN STRESS PATTERNS

WITH ADVANCED STUDENTS

GREVILLE G. CORBETT

Introduction

A significant proportion of Dennis Ward's earlier work was the development of useful teaching materials. And his more theoretical writings suggest that one of his motives in studying the linguistic structure of Russian was to enable him to present it to students in a more easily understandable form. This paper attempts to follow Dennis's lead; it is concerned with a way of helping students to come to grips with the stress patterns of Russian nouns, since 'substantives ...present at first sight a bewildering variety of stress location' (Ward 1965:62).

Background

It may be helpful to describe briefly the context in which this approach has been tried.* It has formed part of a course on the Structure of Modern Russian, which is taken by third and fourth year students at the University of Surrey. The degree course has a vocational slant, with strong emphasis on practical skills. Before starting the Structure course, students have had an outline

*I am grateful to Professors C.L.Drage and A.Mustajoki for reading an earlier version of this paper.

Introduction to linguistics, taking just one hour per week for two years. The Structure course is intended as a continuation of the study of linguistics, with the aim that students should view Russian from the perspective of linguistics, trying to see what is particularly unusual and particularly interesting about the language. Since there is no possibility of covering the structure of Modern Russian in such a short time, I offer a selection of challenging problems and allow the group to select from them. We then spend three or four weeks on each topic, so that students can come to terms with the data and the issues involved, rather than skating over a wider range of questions. Though this has been the usual setting, the material has been used elsewhere and can, of course, be adapted to fit different needs.

The classes

At the beginning of the study of stress patterns a short bibliography is handed out, and the purpose of the different references is explained. First, it is essential that students should be able to find out the position of the stress on any desired form. One obvious source is Wheeler (1972); to use such a source students must read the introduction in order to come to terms with the various abbreviations used. Zaliznyak (1977) gives more information, but is correspondingly more difficult to use. The literature on Russian stress is extensive and it is not the purpose of this article to review it. I suggest to students that they should consult Red'kin (1971), Coats (1976) or Mustajoki (1980). For the very keen I add Halle (1973) to the list, hoping that some may wish to tackle the relevant section, but only after one of the three books just listed. It is worth emphasising that several of the ideas which follow can be found in Halle (1970); our purpose is not to argue the merits of different analyses, but rather to suggest how the data can be presented in such a way as to help students to learn about Russian and to learn about language. Concern with teaching stress is not new; see, for example, the papers by Levin (1975), Steele (1975) and Drage

(1980), and the books by Vovk (1979), Mustajoki (1980) and references there, as well as Tornow's source book (1984); what is perhaps unusual in the approach described here, is the attempt to combine language teaching and linguistics.

After commenting on the bibliography, I hand out a sheet of examples, similar to Table 1 (see following page). This is a sample of Russian nouns which is representative in the sense that all the major stress patterns are included. On the other hand, it does not reflect the distribution of the patterns in Russian. The analogy of the zoo proves helpful here; a zoo may have, say, two lions and two zebra, thus representing both species, whereas in the wild, zebra are of course much more common than lions. (It should also be said that some types are missing from the sheet).

The instrumental and locative forms need not necessarily be included, since these, apart from special locatives, have the same stress as the dative. For ease of reference in this paper, the stresses are marked in Table 1. When the sheet is handed out, there are no stresses, and students take turns to read an example, with a clearly stressed syllable. This inevitably produces a certain amount of hilarity, particularly with nouns like *сховорода*. And it serves to emphasise the point that there is indeed a problem, both in terms of learning the correct forms and in terms of giving a satisfactory description. To make the exposition here more straightforward, the nouns in Table 1 are given in logical order, which matches our account. Since the purpose of the classes is to help students discover the pattern for themselves, their sheet has the nouns in a less obvious order.

At this point, I simply ask how we should start the analysis. There may be an initial silence; then suggestions are offered. These are sometimes too specific. But generally, a fairly early suggestion is that there is a pattern consisting of stress on the stem in all forms, as in nouns like *кнѣзь*. I label these Class I. From here, it is not far to finding the pattern with stress on the ending throughout, as in nouns like *овкѣ*, which we label Class II. Whether

TABLE 1: Examples of Russian Stress Patterns

книга	книги	очко́	очки́	черта́	черты́
кни́гу	кни́ги	очко́	очки́	черту́	черты́
кни́ги	кни́г	очка́	очко́в	черты́	черт
кни́ге	кни́гам	очку́	очка́м	черте́	черта́м
кни́гой	кни́гами	очко́м	очка́ми	черто́й	черта́ми
кни́ге	кни́гах	очке́	очка́х	черте́	черта́х

стол	сто́л	вече́р	вече́ра	мо́ре	мо́ря
стол	сто́л	вече́р	вече́ра	мо́ре	мо́ря
стола́	стола́в	вече́ра	вече́ров	мо́ря	мо́рей
столу́	стола́м	вече́ру	вече́рами	мо́рю	мо́рям
стола́м	стола́ми	вече́ром	вече́рами	мо́рем	мо́рями
столе́	стола́х	вече́ре	вече́рах	мо́ре	мо́рях

звезда́	звёзды	колесо́	колёса	во́лос	во́лосы
звездú	звёзды	колесо́	колёса	во́лоса	во́лосы
звездú	звёзд	колеса́	колёс	во́лоса	во́лос
звезде́	звёздам	колесу́	колёсам	во́лосу	во́лосам
звездой	звёздами	колесо́м	колёсами	во́лосом	во́лосам
звезде́	звёздах	колесе́	колёсах	во́лосе	во́лосах

ночь	но́чи	сковорода́	сковоро́ды	губа́	губы́
ночь	но́чи	сковоро́ду	сковоро́ды	губу́	губы́
но́чи	но́чей	сковоро́ды	сковоро́д	губы́	губ
но́чи	но́чам	сковоро́де	сковоро́дам	губе́	губа́м
но́чью	но́чами	сковоро́дой	сковоро́дами	губо́й	губа́ми
но́чи	но́чах	сковоро́де	сковоро́дах	губе́	губа́х

борода́	боро́ды	це́на	це́ны
боро́ду	боро́ды	це́ну	це́ны
боро́ды	боро́д	це́ны	цен
боро́де	боро́дам	це́не	це́ном
боро́дой	боро́дами	це́ной	це́нами
боро́де	боро́дах	це́не	це́нах

or not they realise the implications, someone usually suggests that *чёрта́* belongs in the same class as *очко́*. Here it is important to slow things down, and draw out (and if necessary spell out) the alternatives. What is obvious to the 'working linguist' is not obvious to students who spend most of their time on other subjects. The alternatives are:

- (1) to have two separate classes for *очко́* and *чёрта́*
- (2) to treat them as belonging to the same class, in which case an extra piece of machinery is required, namely the principle that if a noun should be stressed on the ending but lacks an ending in a particular morphosyntactic form, then the stress will fall on the last syllable of the stem.

This is an important moment; not all students take it for granted that theoretical parsimony is a good thing. Nevertheless, after some discussion the second alternative is usually overwhelmingly favoured. From there it may take a strong hint for nouns like *стол* to be considered in the same way. It can be argued (though Mustajoki [1981], for example, would dissent), that such nouns are fully analogous; they merely have no ending in the nominative (and sometimes accusative) singular, rather than in the genitive plural, and so are stressed on the last syllable of the stem in those forms. In any case, it is important to persuade students to consider the possibility; comparison with verbs which are regular in terms of conjugation in all forms apart from the infinitive can be helpful. An alternative suggestion which has been made on more than one occasion is that nouns like *стол* are simply stressed on the last syllable. This suggestion would do away with the need for a special principle to deal with instances where there is no ending. However, it is shown to be inadequate by the instrumental plural *стола́ми*, which is stressed on the ending but not on the last syllable.

Thus far then we have two classes: stem stressed (I) and ending stressed (II), and we have a principle to cover instances where an ending is missing. From this point on, the nouns selected for analysis next can vary considerably. One way forward is to consider nouns like *вече́р* (Class III). These appear to be a mixture of the previous two classes, since stress is on the stem in the

singular, but on the ending in the plural. The other example given (море) is consistent with the narrower claim that stress is in fact on the first syllable in the singular. If we had only examples like море, then we would not be able to determine whether the stress was on the first, last, or some other syllable of the stem. (A fuller account would include the point that the earlier restriction on stress placement in the singular is being broken down by the growing group of nouns like профессор, which are stem-stressed, but not initial-stressed, in the singular, and end-stressed in the plural). Next the investigation may move to variants of the classes already established, but a more logical alternative is to go first to nouns like звезда and колесо. In these nouns (Class IV), we find stress on the ending in the singular but on the stem in the plural. Again, it is not any syllable of the stem; as nouns like колесо suggest, the stress in the plural falls on the syllable immediately before the ending (that is, in pre-desinential position). At this point it is worth reviewing the ground covered, which can be done conveniently by using an overhead projector slide with the information given in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Basic types of nominal stress

I		II	
SINGULAR stem	PLURAL stem	SINGULAR ending	PLURAL ending
III		IV	
SINGULAR initial	PLURAL ending	SINGULAR ending	PLURAL pre-desinential

It is reasonable to set up these classes as major patterns since each differs from all the others in, at the least, all the forms of one number. Once the basic patterns are clear, the remaining nouns can be tackled, and the order in which this is done depends on which similarity is spotted first. A likely candidate is слово, which is identical to nouns of Class III like вечер, except

for the nominative plural (and accusative equal to the nominative plural). In these forms, where we would expect stress on the ending we find it on the initial syllable. This considerable similarity to the nouns of Class III suggests that nouns like слово should be treated as a subclass of Class III, which we can label Subclass IIIi. Once this subclass is identified, nouns like ночь can also be assigned to it. Since such nouns have a monosyllabic stem, the stress position in the nominative plural is ambiguous, but since nouns like слово are unambiguous, we may say that ночь too has initial stress in the nominative plural. From here some students may spot сковороды; this is a Class II noun, with stress on the ending throughout, except for the nominative/accusative plural. What makes it more difficult to recognise is the genitive plural, which would be stressed on the ending, if there were one. Сковороды can be assigned to Subclass IIIi; nouns of this subclass diverge from Class II in exactly the same way in which слово diverges from Class III. It can then be seen that рыба belongs to Subclass IIIi, like сковороды; again the pattern is easier to spot in the noun with the longer stem.

By this time the idea of looking for small deviations from the major classes is well established, and there will be various suggestions for the remaining nouns. In some cases other students in the group will point out why particular suggestions fail to account for the data. Suppose the next noun chosen is чеша; it and nouns like it form a subgroup of IV, which we can label subgroup IVi. Чеша behaves just like Class IV nouns - with stress on the ending in the singular but retracted on to the last syllable of the stem in the plural - except for one exceptional form, namely the accusative singular. Then there is the question as to which syllable the stress is on in the accusative singular. As this subgroup contains no nouns with bi-syllabic stems, there is no direct way of establishing the stress position; this question will become clearer when the remaining nouns are covered. These remaining nouns are the борода type. Such nouns are like Class II in that they have the stress on the ending, except

for the nominative (and accusative) plural, where it is on the initial syllable, and except for the accusative singular, where it is also on the initial syllable. Some students see this quickly, others need longer to think it through. And indeed there is a lot to grasp. *Борода* is being matched against a model which has stress on the ending throughout. In the genitive plural there is no ending and so the stress is on the last syllable of the stem, according to the general principle. In the nominative and accusative plural it is on the initial syllable (as with Subclass III). Furthermore it is on the initial syllable in the accusative singular. These nouns differ from those in the major class in two ways, and can be assigned to Subclass IIIi. Once all the nouns on the sheet have been assigned to a pattern students are given a sheet with the necessary forms of twenty more nouns and are asked to assign these to the appropriate pattern. This can be done out of class and checked at the beginning of the next session. This has the effect of widening the database and so increasing the practical value of what is being done; it also ensures that the basic points have been grasped.

For taking the theoretical side further, the exceptional accusative singular stress on nouns like *борода* can be used to solve a previous problem. In this type it is clear that the stress which 'ought' to be on the ending is in fact on the initial syllable. It is reasonable to suppose that in the case of nouns like *цена*, the accusative singular *цену* has initial stress. This would mean that all the exceptional forms have initial stress, where the main class has stress on the ending. There is a very simple logic behind the patterns proposed, set out in Table 3.

TABLE 3: *The logic behind the stress patterns*

MAJOR PATTERNS

- (a) stress on ending or not
- (b) plural with same stress as singular or not

MINOR PATTERNS

- (a) nominative plural has initial stress (instead of being stressed on the ending): Subclasses III and IIIi
- (b) accusative singular has initial stress (instead of being stressed on the ending): Subclass IVi
- (c) minor patterns (a) and (b) together: Subclass IIIi

We have established that the stress patterns on Russian nouns do not represent the chaotic situation which first seemed to be the case. But the overall pattern is even more elegant than is immediately obvious from Table 3. Given the possibilities presented in Table 3, we may ask what patterns could exist. If stress can be on the stem or on the ending, and the plural can be the same in this respect as the singular or different from it, then there are exactly four possibilities. All four are found in Russian, but with the restrictions already mentioned in Classes III and IV. But given also that there are three ways in which subclasses can occur, should we not expect there to be twelve subclasses, rather than the four actually found? It is worth going through the possibilities in turn. Class I has the stress on the stem throughout. Each of the possible subclasses depends on the stress occurring on the initial syllable instead of on the ending. Since Class I nouns do not by definition have the stress on the ending, there can be no subclasses. Class II is the most complex and so is best left to last. In Class III, the *сéвep* type, the stress is on the initial syllable through the singular: there can therefore be no subclasses based on points (b) and (c) in the minor patterns above. In the nominative plural, however, the stress is on the ending; if it is moved to initial position we have nouns of Subclass IIIi. In Class IV the position is reversed. Since the stress is on the stem throughout the plural there can be no subclasses based on points (a) and (c). But as it is on the ending in the singular, this opens the possibility of a subclass with initial stress in the accusative singular. This is precisely what we find in nouns of Subclass IVi like *цена*. Thus all the subclasses which could theoretically be derived from Classes I, III and IV do in fact exist. Class II, which has stress on the ending throughout, offers the greatest scope for sub-

classes. And indeed, we find a subclass with initial stress in the nominative plural (III, nouns like *сковороды*). We also find nouns (like *бороды*) which have initial stress in both the nominative plural and the accusative singular. The one other possibility would be for a subclass of Class II consisting of nouns with initial stress in the accusative singular but not in the nominative plural; such a subclass does not exist. Thus out of the theoretically possible five subclasses, four exist. There is a remarkably close fit between what might be predicted given the underlying logic of the system and the classes and subclasses actually found.

The distribution of nouns

Earlier the point was made that the examples in Table 1 were chosen so as to be representative of the different stress patterns. It is also of interest to students to see the way in which the nouns of Russian are distributed over these classes. Table 4 is a reworking of data given by Halle (1975:105), in turn derived from Zaliznyak (1967:172-3).

TABLE 4: *Distribution of nouns (about 33,000) over the stress patterns*

	мас. (журнал)	neut. (окно)	Decl. II (книга)	Decl. III (кость)
I stem	11,400	4,900	10,700	3,100
II ending	1,700	130	340	(6)
i except nom. pl.	5	3	40	0
ii except nom. pl. & acc. eg.	0	0	18	0
III stem/ending	250	33	0	0
i except nom. pl.	50	2	1	80
IV ending/predesidential	14	70	185	0
i except acc. eg.	0	0	13	0

This table requires a little explanation. The nouns in the first column are those which decline according to the first declension; they decline like *журнал*

'magazine', but do not necessarily, of course, share its stress pattern. Those in the second are the type like *окно* 'window', and also those like *время* 'time' (which form a significant proportion of the 33 nouns of pattern III in this class). The second declension includes mainly feminine nouns, but also a sizable minority of nouns which decline like feminines, but are masculine, like *дядя* 'uncle'. Nouns of the third declension are those which decline like *кость* 'bone' (it would be more accurate to include the *время* type here but this could cause confusion). The entry '(6)' in this column is for nouns like *любовь*, to which we return shortly. The figures for stress pattern III includes nouns like *учитель*, hence the class is labelled 'stem/ending'. The table provides another useful opportunity to extend the range of data; several examples are given for each of the classes and subclasses.

One of the most valuable aspects of this type of work is allowing students to develop the skills of analysing data. For this reason, it is important that they should have time to decide what can reasonably be concluded from the data in Table 4. After a little discussion, often with some prompting, the following points usually emerge:

1. Class I is by far the largest, and Class II is easily the second largest. This means that the overwhelming majority of Russian nouns have fixed stress.
2. Though Classes III and IV have fewer members than I and II, the major classes all have many more members than the minor classes.
3. Looking at the table 'vertically', we see that the declension type which has the greatest number of possibilities is the *книга* type, which is represented in almost every major and minor class, while the *кость* type is the most restricted. Since both comprise mainly feminine nouns, we may deduce that stress patterns in Russian correlate with declensional type and not with gender.

Let us now return to the question of nouns like *любовь*. The problem here is the instrumental singular *любовью* which, according to the machinery we have set up, would be exceptional. To incorporate such nouns into the account would require a discussion of the so-called 'fleeting vowels' or jers. Unless specifically asked, I make no reference to these, in order to achieve a reasonably satisfying analysis without taking up too much time. If the question

does arise, I first give an ultra-short account of where the fleeting vowels come from and then point out that these vowels may or may not be counted in for the purposes of stress assignment. Thus *otcu* 'father' belongs to a pattern in which the stress is on the ending (genitive *otcu*); since there is no ending in the nominative singular, the stress falls on the last syllable of the stem, even though this is a jer. On the other hand, *gora* 'corner' might be expected to behave in a similar way, since the genitive is *goru*; in this instance the jer in the nominative singular does not take the stress which then moves further forward. There is much more which could be said, but the basic point holds true. More generally, I make it quite clear that the analysis given above covers most of the nouns of Russian, but that there are exceptions (such as *гражданин* 'citizen', plural *граждане*), and I challenge students to find them. Another interesting avenue to explore would be the recent changes in the system; here a good starting point is Comrie and Stone (1978:56-62).

Conclusion

Russian stress patterns are indeed complex, but the underlying patterns are simple and elegant. Students can, with a little help, discover these patterns for themselves. It is sometimes the case that the students who grasp what is involved the most readily include some who do not shine at certain other aspects of the course. The aim of the type of presentation suggested here is that students should both learn something about the methods of analysing data, and should improve their Russian, since once stress is seen as being a manageable topic, they are more likely to pay attention to it in listening and then in speaking.

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