RUSSIAN E-VERBS AND TRANSITIVE SOFTENING

Russian is generally regarded as having two conjugation classes: in the first conjugation the vowel preceding agreement morphology in the present tense is [ʲo], and in the second, [i]. While for most second-conjugation verbs, the past-tense suffix (-*l*-) is also preceded by the vowel [i], in some 80 verbs it is preceded by [e] (turning into [a] after palatals), as in Table 1.

If the final consonant of the stem is a velar (e.g., in *krik* 'a scream'), the velar is changed into an alveopalatal by an independent process (Halle 1959, Plapp 1999, etc.), and then the vowel is backed, turning into [a] (1). (The first-conjugation deadjectival verbalizer -*e[j]*- and the elative suffix -*ejš*- are subject to same processes.)

Two strategies have been proposed for dealing with e-verbs. Micklesen 1973, Coats and Lightner 1975, Itkin 2007:129-130 propose that the second conjugation present-tense suffix is null, and the thematic vowel [e] is raised to [i] in the present tense, as in (2a). Melvold 1990 (following Jakobson 1948) suggests that the thematic vowel [e] is deleted before the present-tense suffix (-*i*-) by the general hiatus resolution rule, as in (2b).

While hiatus resolution by the deletion of the first vowel is independently motivated (Jakobson 1948), vowel change is not. The goal of this paper is to present two arguments for the latter: from the unique verb *ssátʲ* 'to piss' and from agentive nouns.

Evidence for thematic vowel raising: the verb *ssátʲ* 'to piss' is unique in the vowel appearing before its present-tense agreement endings: [ɨ] (Table 2).

The **raising ablaut** needed for (2a) will also change the [– back][– round][– high] vowel [a] to the [– back][– round][+ high] vowel [ɨ]. The fact that the underlying representation of the suffix is [e] is shown by agentive nominalization in -*telʲ*- (3). (3c) shows that the base for the suffix -*telʲ*- is the past-tense stem, which presumably coincides with the underlying representation. The fact that agentive nouns formed from **palatal a-verbs** surface with [a] (4) supports this view. In addition it also shows that this form is underlying: suppose the underlying representation was [i]. Then the ablaut to [e] with the suffix -*telʲ*- would have to happen only to velar-final verbs, which is counterintuitive.

Agentive nouns formed from e-verbs of the second conjugation, on the other hand, can surface with [e] (5) or [i] (6), showing that the raising ablaut is available in this environment only to a subset of e-verbs. Independent evidence for this comes from (7), demonstrating that some verbs whose thematic suffixes surface as [a] in the past and as [i] ([j]) in the present also form agentive nouns on the basis of their present-tense stem.

Summarizing, the hypothesis that second-conjugation e-verbs involve ablaut of the thematic vowel is supported by the exceptional verb *ssátʲ* 'to piss' and by agentive nominalization of e-verbs, a-verbs and a/i-verbs in (7).

An **extension** of the hypothesis that the raising ablaut operative in the present tense of e-verbs is available for some of them in other environments sheds new light on transitive softening in **secondary imperfectives** derived from second-conjugation verbs.

Transitive softening (aka iotation, Lightner 1965, Coats and Lightner 1975, cf. also Bethin 1992, Rubach and Booij 2001, etc.) is a type of consonant mutation indicative of an underlying [Cj] cluster. In (8) and (9) the thematic suffix [i] turns into [j] before the vocalic suffixes that derive secondary imperfective forms (respectively -*iw*- and -*a*-).

While transitive softening is the default outcome in the secondary imperfective of i-verbs (14 roots in a productive class), it is the marked one with e-verbs (10)-(12). This asymmetry can be derived if the prevocalic [e], unlike the prevocalic [i], does not turn into a glide.

To explain the transitive softening in (11), we suggest that the same raising ablaut can apply in the secondary imperfective. Independent evidence for it comes from two **first-conjugation e-verbs with transitive softening in the secondary imperfective** (13). The lack of transitive softening in (10c), as well as in the 14 i-verbs mentioned above, is explained by a backing ablaut that is independently needed to explain the two a/i-verbs of the second conjugation (*gnatʲ* 'to chase' in (7a) and *spatʲ* 'to sleep'). Finally, forms with [v] like in (7b) reveal what happens when the thematic suffix [e] is not changed into [i].

The same two ablauts can therefore derive multiple exceptions and some generalizations.

Table 1: Second conjugation: *carítʲ* **'to reign',** *gorétʲ* **'to burn',** *kričátʲ* **'to scream'**

		singular-M(F/N)			plural		
pres	1	*car-ʲ-ú*	*krič-[ʲ]-ú*	*gor-ʲ-ú*	*car-í-m*	*krič-í-m*	*gor-í-m*
	2	*car-í-š*	*krič-í-š*	*gor-í-š*	*car-í-te*	*krič-í-te*	*gor-í-te*
	3	*car-í-t*	*krič-í-t*	*gor-í-t*	*car-ʲ-át*	*krič-ʲ-át*	*gor-ʲ-át*
past		*car-í-l(a/o)*	*krič-á-l(a/o)*	*gor-é-l(a/o)*	*car-í-l-i*	*krič-á-l-i*	*gor-é-l-i*

(1)   second-conjugation verbalizer *-e-*
    a.   *-vis-* 'hang' + *-e-* → *visít/visél* 'hang PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'
    b.   *-vizg-* 'squeal' + *-e-* → *vizžít/vizžál* 'squeal PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'

(2)   a. $[[[gor\text{-}e]_2\text{-}Ø]_3\text{-}t]_4 \rightarrow [[[gor\text{-}i]_2\text{-}Ø]_3\text{-}t]_4 \rightarrow$ [gorit]   vowel change
    b. $[[[gor\text{-}e]_2\text{-}i]_3\text{-}t]_4 \rightarrow [[[gor\text{-}e]_2\text{-}i]_3\text{-}t]_4 \rightarrow$ [gorit]   vowel deletion

Table 2: Special verb *ssátʲ* **'to piss'**

		singular.M (F/N)	plural
present	1	ss-ú	ss-í-m
	2	ss-í-š	ss-í-te
	3	ss-í-t	ss-ú-t
past		ss-á-l (a/o)	ss-á-l-i

(3)   a.   *vladéet* PRES.3SG/*vladél* PAST.MSG 'own' → *vladételʲ* 'owner'   *-ej-/-e-*, I conj
    b.   *čitaét* PRES.3SG/*čitál* PAST.MSG 'read' → *čitátelʲ* 'reader'   *-aj-/-a-*, I conj
    c.   *píšet* PRES.3SG/*pisál* PAST.MSG 'write' → *pisátelʲ* 'writer'   *-j-/-a-*, I conj
    d.   *lʲúbit* PRES.3SG/*lʲubíl* PAST.MSG 'love' → *lʲubítelʲ* 'amateur'   *-i-/-i-*, II conj

(4)   a.   *déržit/deržál* 'hold PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG' → *deržátelʲ* 'holder'
    b.   *díšit/dišál* 'breathe PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG' → *dišátelʲnica vaginoj* 'vagina breather'
    c.   *zvučít/zvučál* 'sound PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG' → *obertonnyj zvučátelʲ* 'obertone sounder'

(5)   *svidételʲ* 'witness' (cf. *vídetʲ* 'to see', *svídetʲsʲa* 'to see each other again')

(6)   a.   *smotrítelʲ* 'custodian' ← *smótrit/smotrél* 'look (after) PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'
    b.   *povelítelʲ* 'sovereign ruler' ← *povelít/povelél* 'enjoin PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'
    c.   *zrítelʲ* 'spectator' ← *zrít/zrél* 'behold PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'

(7)   a.   *gonítelʲ* 'oppressor' : *gónit/gnal* 'chase PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'   *-a/i-*, II conj
    b.   *dvížitelʲ* 'mover': *dvížet/dvígal* 'move PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'   *-a/i-*, I conj
    c.   *skazítelʲ* 'storyteller': *skázetʲ/skazál* 'tell PRES.3SG/PAST.MSG'   *-a/i-*, I conj

(8)   a.   *kormitʲ* 'to feed'   (9)   a.   *gruzítʲ* 'to load'
    b.   *otkormítʲ* 'to fatten PRF'   b.   *razgruzítʲ* 'to offload PRF'
    c.   *otkármlivatʲ* 'to fatten IMPRF'   c.   *razgružátʲ* 'to offload PRF'

(10)   a.   *povelétʲ/povelevátʲ* 'to command/rule PFV/IMPFV'   e, [v] allomorph (3 roots)
    b.   *poglʲadétʲ/poglʲádivatʲ* 'to take a glance PFV/IMPFV'   no TS, [ɨv] allomorph (17 roots)
    c.   *dogorétʲ/dogorátʲ* 'to finish burning PFV/IMPFV'   no TS, Ø allomorph (3 roots)

(11)   a.   *posidétʲ/posíživatʲ* 'to sit for a bit PFV/IMPFV'   TS, [ɨv] allomorph (4 roots)
    b.   *obídetʲ/obižátʲ* 'to offend PFV/IMPFV'   TS, Ø allomorph (1 root)

(12)   *pobojátʲsʲa/pobáivatʲsʲa* 'to fear PFV/IMPFV'   unclear, [ɨv] allomorph (5 roots)

(13)   a.   *razgovéetsʲa/razgovélsʲa* 'break fast FUT.3SG/PAST.MSG' → *razgovlʲátʲsʲa*
    b.   *vízdoroveet/vízdorovel* 'recover/heal FUT.3SG/PAST.MSG' → *vízdorávlivatʲ*