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ON THE PEDAGOGICAL RUSSIAN VERBAL BASE

As we know, the Russian verb can appear in two stem
forms - the infinitive /past stem and the present/ impera-
tive stem. In the United States the description of Russian
conjugation has largely centered around the question of
the verbal BASE, that is, a form of citation from which all
conjugational forms of eitner stem can be derived[1].
Most proposals for a verbal base derive from Roman Jakob-
son's 1948 proposal according to which the infinitive stem
of some verbs and the present stem of other verbs
is used as a base[2]. Rules for dropping consonants and vo-
wels in given environments, together with rules for stem
mutations, allow the prediction of the opposite member of
the stem pair. For example, a rule dropping consonant befo-
re consonant allows the prediction of the infinitive čitat´
from the present stem čitaj - plus the infinitive ending
-t´. Another rule drops the stem vowel a or o before a
vowel ending and simultaneously mutates the stem consonant,
providing for the description of verbs like pisa-+-u ⟶
pišu. Jakobson's description has found numerous pedagogi-
cal applications, for example in Townsend, Lipson, Levin,
and Davidson[3].

The chief disadvantage of Jakobson's verbal base is
that it is not associated with a stable place in the mor-
phology of the verb. Consequently, it often strikes stu-
dents as excessively abstruse.

In the present paper a verbal base will be proposed
which is constructed on the infinitive. This base has the

the advantage that the infinitive is the form of verbal ci-
tation in all standard reference works.

We may begin our analysis by examining some representa-
tive stem pairs of the First Conjugation /the conjugation
whose endings are -u, -eš, -et, -em, -ete, -ut/:[4] čita-
čitaj-, ume- umej-, pisa- piš-, sovetova- sovetuj-, dava-
daj-, dvinu- dvin-, sty- styn-, nės- nės-.
These stems have been obtained by subtracting the ending
-t'/or -ti/ from the infinitive and -u from the 1st pers.
sg. present.

The comparison of one stem to the other reveals the
occasional presence in one stem of an element -- either
vowel or consonant -- that is not present in the other stem.
For example, the present stem čitaj- has a final j, absent
in the infinitive stem čitaj-. One may assume that such
elements are some kind of suffix -- in the case of čita-j-,
probably a present suffix. We will refer to such alterna-
ting stem suffixes as THEMES. In the above corpus we can
spot a number of themes, some associated with the present
stem, others with the infinitive stem /these themes are set
between hyphens in their citation below/: čita- čita-j-,
ume- ume-j, pis-a- piš- /the latter with a hidden theme j:
pis-j-/, sovetov-a- sovetu-j-, dvin-u- dvin-, sty- sty-n-.
Only the verb nės- nės- contains no overt or hidden theme
in either stem.

The present proposal for a Russian verbal base is foun-
ded on the observation that the present stem can be predic-
ted from the infinitive stem, provided the themes are indi-
cated, as above. If this system is compared to Jakobson's
system, the same two dozen or so verbs will be irregular
/will have unpredictable stem pairs or some other anomaly/[5].
In addition, the verbs sty-, de-, sta-, -strja-, with an
unpredictable present theme -n- , are irregular.

In the following space we will examine the rules for
predicting the present stem from the infinitive stem.

CONJUGATION I

Conjugation I verbs can be divided into vowel stem and consonant stems. For vowel stems, the rule for forming the present is as follows: add j first dropping any infinitive themes. Only verbs with theme in -u- and monosyllabic verbs in -a- do not add -j-. Illustrations:

Infinitive Stem	Minus Infinitive Theme	Plus Present Theme	=Present Stem
čita-		-j-	čitaj-
ume-		-j-	ume j-
pis-a-	-a-	-j-	pis-j- /→ piš-/
koy-a-	-a-	-j-	koy-j_ /→ kuj-/
day-a-	-a-	-j-	day-j- /→ daj-/
kol-o-	-o-	-j-	kol-j-
dvin-u-	-u-	-Ø-	dvin-
žd-a-	-a-	-Ø-	žd- .

Note that before -j-: consonants mutate; oy goes to u; ay goes to a.

Consonant stem verbs comprise a single class, the members of which are subject to various sound-change rules /which, it should be noted, must be learned in some form or another, whatever the general analysis/:

1. $v \rightarrow \emptyset$ / __ t   živ-t′→ zit′

2. t, d, b → s / __ t   věd-ti → vesti

3. kt′, gt′→ č   mog-t′ → moč

4. Cr → ere / __t′   tr-t′→ teret′

    → ёr / __l, t   tr-l → tёr-l → rule 9

5. Cn, Cm → Cja / __C   mn-t′→ mjat′

6. C′j → Ci / __C   p′j-t′→ pit′

7. Cj → Cy / __C   mj-t′→ myt′

    → Coj / __V   mj-u → moju

8. t, d → Ø / __l   věd-l → vёl

9. l $\rightarrow$ ∅ / C __ #   mog-l $\rightarrow$ mog.

CONJUGATION II

Conjugation II verbs take present ending -u, -š, -t, -m, -te, -nt, and have infinitive themes in -e-, -i-, and -a-preceded-by ś, č, ž, šč, or oj-. All have present theme in -i- , changing to -j- before vowel; Before a consonant, -i- combines with -n- to form -ja: ljub-i-nt $\rightarrow$ ljubjat. Illustrations:

Infinitive Stem	Minus Infinitive Theme	Plus Present Theme	=Present Stem	1st per. sg.
kup-i-	-i-	-i-	kup-i-	kup-i-u $\rightarrow$ kupju $\rightarrow$ kuplju
vid-e-	-e-	-i-	vid-i-	vid-i-u $\rightarrow$ vidju $\rightarrow$ vižu
krič-a-	-a-	-i-	krič-i-	krič-i-u /$\rightarrow$ kričju/ $\rightarrow$ kriču [6]

STRESS NOTATION

The following notation for verbal stress is adapted from Levin /op. cit./. According to present notation, ' signifies fixed stress; " signifies present-shifting stress with vowel stems and past-shifting stress with consonant stems; ~ signifies a stress opposition between present on the one hand and past on the other. Examples: pis-â-t', čitá-t', kol-ô-t', p'i-t', klâd-t', darov-â-t', věd-tî, živ-t".

COCNCLUSION

In the final analysis what one chiefly requires of a pedagogical analysis of the Russian verb is that it distinguish verbs of the čitat', pisat', kričat', umet', and videt' classes, since these are the main classes that can be

confused. Of the other verb types, some are morphophonemi-
cally simple, some are complex, but in practice their iden-
tification never poses a major problem. In other words, if
one applied the present proposal for a verbal base only to
these five classes -- _čitá-t´_, _pis-â-t´_, _krič-á-t´_, _umé-t´_,
and _vid-e-t´_-- one would have accomplished most of what
can be expected of a classificational system. In addition,
by our focussing on those verbs for which a pedagogical
verb analysis must be primarily designed, it becomes easier
to evaluate the present proposal against alternate proposals
such as that of Jakobson. Ultimately, the comparison of al-
ternate proposals must also take into account not only the
conjugational forms _sensu_ _stricto_ but also the formation
of the gerunds, participles, and the imperfective aspect of
prefixed perfective verbs. However, as has been indicated
in a previous article,[7] here too the most efficient de-
scription seems to favor an infinitive base.

Notes

[1] The attention accorded the question of the Russian verbal base in the U.S. seems to illustrate an instance where pedagogical concerns have influenced developments in linguistic description. Non-Slavic speakers have difficulty in mastering Russian verbal morphology, and this fact has led researchers, most of whom have at one time or another also been language teachers, to develop techniques for teaching the Russian verb to non-Russians as efficiently as possible. The pedagogical interest is manifest in Jakobson's treatment of this subject as well /see note 2/.

[2] Jakobson, Roman, "Russian conjugation", Word 4/3, 1948, 155-167

[3] Townsend, Charles, Russian Word Formation, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1968; Lipson, Alexander, Verb Workbook, second preliminary edition, Cambridge, Mass., Slavica Publishers, 1968; Levin, Maurice, Russian Declension and Conjugation, Columbus, Ohio, Slavica Publishers, 1978; Davidson, Dan et al., Russian: Stage One, Moscow, Russian Language Publishers, 1980

[4] Here and throughout, cyrillomorphophonemic transcription is employed. It should be stressed that we are not indicating all morpheme boundaries in the verb but only those of direct relevance to present and past-tense conjugation. Ultimately, a form like delaeš' can be divided into five morphemes: del-a-j-o-š.

[5] The most important Russian "irregular" verbs are the following: revet', brit', molot', stlat', gnat', leč', sest', pet', jexat', byt', kljast', idti, tkat', spat', slat', čtit', xotet', bežat', -šibit', dat', est', -njat', /the latter as in prinjat'/, and živopisat'.

[6] Under a more abstract analysis of thies verb, the root would be considered to be krik-, with mutation of stem-final k to č before all themes: krik-ja-t' → kričat';

krik-i-u → kriču; krik-i-nt → kričat.

Swan, Oscar E., "Predicting the Present Tense from the Infinitive", Russian Language Journal, XXXII/112, 1978, 71-77. The dot notation described in that article has been widely interpreted as a kind of graphic algorithm for predicting the present tense rather than a serious proposal concerning the morphological structure of the verb, in spite of the balanced discussion of this system by Gilbert Holiday in "Some Observations on the Teaching of One-Stem Verb Systems", Slavic and East European Journal, 25/1, 1981, 90-94. It has been my intention in the present paper to outline the morphological conception underlying a pedagogical adaptation such as the dot system, without prejudicing the direction that pedagogical adaptations of this conception might take. The dot system represents only one of several possible such adaptations.

O FORMIE BAZOWEJ CZASOWNIKA ROSYJSKIEGO DLA CELÓW DYDAKTYCZNYCH

Streszczenie

Opis koniugacji rosyjskiej opiera się zwykle w Stanach Zjednoczonych na tzw. bazie czasownikowej, czyli formie podstawowej, od której można utworzyć każdą inną formę koniugacyjną czy to z tematem czasu przeszłego /bezokolicznika/, czy też czasu teraźniejszego /rozkaźnika/. Większość autorów podąża tu śladem Romana Jakobsona, który w r. 1948 zaproponował, aby dla pewnych czasowników bazą był temat bezokolicznika, a dla pewnych innych temat czasu teraźniejszego. Największą wadą bazy czasownikowej w propozycji Jakobsona jest to, że owa baza nie ma stałego miejsca w morfologii czasownika, dlatego też w niniejszym artykule proponuje się, aby dla w s z y s t k i c h czasowników baza była konstruowana w oparciu o jedną formę, a mianowicie bezokolicznik. Zaletą /dydaktyczną/ takiej bazy jest niewątpliwie to, że tradycyjnie bezokolicznik stanowi formę reprezentującą cały czasownik we wszystkich standardowych słownikach i podręcznikach.