

Russian feminization is highly idiosyncratic, with the choice of the feminizing suffix influenced not only by the prosody/phonology and the semantics of the stem, but also by the lexical identity of the root/stem. I will focus on three morpho-phonological puzzles underlying feminization as a whole.

(i) Strikingly, the masculine/feminine opposition in Russian (unlike in Romance) is almost never achieved only by the change in the declension class (e.g., *Aleksánder/Aleksándera*). Why?

(ii) Feminization of agentive nouns is systematically achieved by replacing the agentive suffix by the appropriate feminine variant (e.g., *čern[ě]ci* ‘monks’/*čern[ic]i* ‘nuns’). How can this be achieved in a derivational model?

(iii) As observed by Halle 1973, in gendered pairs formed by the agentive suffix *-nik/-nic-* or by the diminutive/feminizing suffix *-ŭk-* the segmental masculine/feminine opposition is combined with stress retraction in the feminine (e.g., *učen[ik]i/učen[ic]i* ‘students.M/F’). As the phenomenon extends to other gendered suffixal pairs (*-ic-/ic-* and *-ščik-/ščic-* (and its allomorph *-čik-/čic-*)), is the relation within the pair achieved only by suprasegmental material and might the derivation proceed in the opposite direction?

I cannot promise a full answer to these questions, but hopefully a better grasp on the complexity of Russian “feminization”.

Halle, Morris. 1973. The accentuation of Russian words. *Language* 49, 312-348.