

Palatalization avoidance in Russian loanwords

This presentation focuses on palatalization avoidance in Russian loanwords. In native words, consonants are palatalized (or “softened”) when they precede [e], but can remain non-palatalized in the same context in loanwords (Аванесов 1984; Князев & Пожарицкая 2011 among others):

(1) (Князев & Пожарицкая 2011: 332)

ka[fe] (café); *super*[me]*n* (superman); *an*[te]*nna* (antenna);

[re]*gbi* (rugby); [ke]*mping* (camping).

It has also been documented that the acceptance of non-palatalized consonants in this position depends on type of consonant.

In this work, 4790 loanwords in which consonants precede /e/ were gathered from Krysin’s (2000) foreign word dictionary. Targeting these words, a quantitative survey of the palatalization avoidance was conducted by consulting Es’kova et al’s (2015) orthoepic dictionary. The results obtained indicated that palatalization is more likely to be avoided (i) in stressed syllables (for coronals, stressed: 41.7% vs. unstressed: 32.8%), (ii) when consonants are coronal (for stressed syllables, coronals: 62.7% vs. labials: 10.0%, velars: 2.5%), and (iii) when consonants are obstruent or non-continuant (for coronals in stressed syllables, stops: 67.1%, fricatives: 48.0%, nasals: 48.5% vs. liquids: 27.2%).

It will be argued that the observed differences in the likelihood of palatalization avoidance result from several phonological factors. In unstressed syllables, for consonants to remain non-palatalized, /e/ avoids reduction or non-palatalized consonants precede [i] due to the reduction, both of which are contrary to general tendencies in Russian native phonology. With regard to the place of articulation, non-coronal consonants do not share it with following [e] (or [i]). They thus tend to undergo palatalization in order to assimilate themselves to the following front vowel. Finally, since liquids are phonetically similar to vowels, they are likely to be affected by the following front vowel, i.e. palatalized.

Further in this presentation, taking into account similar phenomena in Polish and Old Slavic, it will be shown that the observed variation among consonants of different articulatory places contributes to typological research on Slavic languages. To put it shortly, the tendency that velars are likely to be palatalized before front vowels, whereas coronals not is common.

References

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