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HOW FREE IS ALTERNATING STRESS IN ERZYA?

Abstract. The present paper addresses the subject of the variability of stress assignment in Erzya. The aim of the analysis reported here was establishing speaker-, utterance- and word-related data that might account for the alternation of the initial and non-initial stress patterns. The material used for the analysis contained spontaneously produced utterances recorded by 33 speakers of Erzya originating from different areas of the Mordvin Republic and diaspora. The overall distribution of the stress patterns in the data of spontaneous speech proved to be more variable than it has been observed in script reading. The occurrences of initial stress exceeded those of non-initial stress; however, noninitial stress was used more often than in reading. The analysis revealed differentiation in the distribution of the patterns of stress in the idiolect-related data. The tendency towards the assignment of initial stress was more salient in the data of the idiolects characterized by the reduction of vowels in noninitial syllables. There was less difference between initial and non-initial stress occurrences in the data of the idiolects which use only full-formation vowels. In the dialects that use reduced vowels, reduction might have been the consequence of the diminishing mobility of stress. The assignment of stress, as the test material showed, could not be conditioned by the type of word structure. It is rather the functional role of the word in an utterance that might be associated with the mobility of stress. The recurrent responses of the speakers recorded in a dialogue were found to contribute to the increase of non-initial stress occurrences.

Key-words: Erzya, stress, idiolect, utterance.

1. Introduction

Erzya alternating stress does not lend itself to being clearly defined from the typological point of view. Two features have invariably been mentioned in literature as its specific manifestations. Firstly, discernible prominence, conventionally labelled as stress, can be shifted within a word, for example: ko-rtams/korta·ms 'speak', ku·doso/kudo·so 'at home'. Alternation in stress assignment causes no distinctive opposition between the resulting forms of a word. Secondly, relative prominence of a syllable in a word can sometimes be indistinct. It seems to float from a syllable to a syllable and, eventually, the syllables involved can be heard as equally prominent. The meaning of a word in such cases is not stress-dependent either, unlike that of double-stress words, for example, in English: re·tu·rn 'turn again' and retu·rn 'come back'. Thus, stress singles the prosodic system of Erzya out

from the systems of most other languages: it can not be reckoned from the beginning or end of a word in a regular way and its linguistic significance is not explicit. Questions concerning the predictability and the phonological role of this type of mobile stress, as well as its origin, have been posited in literature ever since the early grammars of the language were published. However, the ideas suggested over time were not supported with sufficient empirical evidence. A comprehensive review of previous findings concerning Erzya stress has lately been provided in the introduction to a systematic study of Erzya prosody which has produced data of acoustic analyses concerning quantity, tone, and stress (Lehiste, Aasmäe, Meister, Pajusalu, Teras, Viitso 2003). The publication constitutes a part of a research project (supervised by Ilse Lehiste) which deals with the study of prosody in several Finno-Ugric languages. Further research of Erzya stress has been carried out by the authors of this article, in conformity with the conclusions made in the aforementioned study. The article reports some evidence of interand intra-speaker variability in the assignment of stress, a facet which was not in the focus of study in the previous work. The relevance of this paper is endorsed by the fact that the data on Erzya stress published recently (Estill 2004) deviate from the results of analysis reported by I. Lehiste, N. Aasmäe, E. Meister, K. Pajusalu, P. Teras and T.-R. Viitso (2003).

The main claim made by Estill is that the tendency towards initial stress observed in contemporary Erzya has developed over the period of the last 200 years. The conclusion was drawn as the result of comparison of the stress patterns assigned in the 18th century documentation of Erzya (Φeoκтистов 1971; 1976) and those observed in the native speakers' readings of the documents and of contemporary texts. Estill found that the speakers predominantly used initial stress while the historical documents evidenced the salience of stress on the second syllable. D. Estill (2004: 165) concluded that, as far as placement of stress is concerned, most of the Erzyan dialects are remarkably uniform. Stress variations, according to D. Estill, are boundless; they depend on the intention of an individual (2004: 199-200). In the study by I. Lehiste, N. Aasmäe, E. Meister, K. Pajusalu, P. Teras and T.-R. Viitso (2003: 86), stress has been regarded as a higher-level prosodic unit that divides words and utterances into disyllabic sequences. Regularity in the occurrence of additional stress in polysyllabic words has been suggested by N. Nujanzina-Aasmäe (1980; 1982). Stress has been found to be assigned either on odd-numbered or even-numbered syllables of a word. Ordering of stresses on odd-nymbered syllables in polysyllabic words has been observed, for example, in Estonian (Ross, Lehiste 2001: 50—53).

Empirical data of Erzya stress have hitherto been obtained using script reading materials. In our work, two sources — spontaneous speech and scripted reading — have been used. In this paper, we will report the data of spontaneous speech. Recently, the general interest for the phonetic research of free conversational speech has significantly increased (Lennes, Anttila 2002: 149—158). In the case of Erzya, the use of spontaneously produced utterances for the study of stress is of paramount importance. Auditory analyses of field work and other materials convince us that the mobility of stress in reading is not as salient as it is in speech. In the previous studies that were based on script reading, regular stress on the initial syllable has been observed (Lehiste, Aasmäe, Meister, Pajusalu, Teras, Viitso 2003: 50, 86; Estill 2004: 165).

2. Experimental design

To obtain a comparable set of material spontaneously produced by different speakers, informal dialogues were used, during which the speakers answered a standard set of questions. It enabled to record same series of one-word utterances which, as anticipated, differed by the patterns of stress both in inter- and intra-speaker productions. The speakers were exposed to a dialogue during which they occasionally had to repeat their responses. The choice between the questions to be answered once or repeatedly was random, so that the dialogue would sound natural.

Example:

Question: *Ul'i-ara's mir'd'et'/nit'*? 'Do you have a husband/wife?'

Response 1: *Araś* 'No, I don't.' Repeated question: *Ul'i*? 'Do you?'

Response 2: Araś.

Repeated question: Araś? 'Don't you?'

Response 3: Araś.

The words in the responses contained from two to four syllables. The total material amounts to 895 tokens. It was recorded by 33 speakers, aged 19-21, who originate from different rural areas. The speakers' idiolects can be considered representative of all the main varieties of Erzya spoken in the Mordvin Republic; there were also several speakers from diaspora groups. The location of stress in the recorded material was established through repeated listening to the material by the first author, who is a native speaker of Erzya. The test words were assigned initial, non-initial or double stress. In words consisting of three and four syllables, additional stress was perceivable; in these cases either the odd-numbered or even-numbered syllables of a word tended to be stressed. Since additional stress occurring on the third or fourth syllable is aligned with stress on the first and second syllable, it is disregarded in the analysis here. Attention will be drawn to the use of the initial and non-initial stress. The recordings were performed by an experienced technician in the studio of the phonetics laboratory of the Mordvin Pedagogical Institute. Professional equipment used for recording consisted of a microphone MD-16, a recorder M93-28 (recording at 38.1 cm/sec.) and a panel RKS-02. The recordings were subsequently digitalized and transferred to 16 bit 48 kHz wav-files using a computer equipped with a Creative Labs SoundBlaster Extigy soundcard and Adobe Audition 1.0 software. For the playback of the tapes, a ReVex B77 MK II Stereo tape-recorder was used. The procedures were performed in the Phonetics room of the Department of Estonian and Finno-Ugric Linguistics of the University of Tartu.

3. Data analysis

3.1. Preliminaries

The concept of stress, taken as a theoretical premise for this study, has been defined in literature in terms of overall prominence, produced and perceived, of certain syllables relative to others, which has its function(s)

within a linguistic system (Lehiste 1970, 1976; Lehiste, Aasmäe, Meister, Pajusalu, Teras, Viitso 2003: 84; Nyqvist 1974: 9, 69; Clark, Yallop 1995: 340). We have tried to group the data according to the origin of speakers, the functional role of a word in an utterance, and the segmental and morphemic structure of the words.

Firstly, an attempt was made to analyze the manifestations of stress in individual and inter-speaker group productions to establish the extent of prosodic variability among the groups of idiolects involved. The experimental part of the study was preceded by analyses of field work materials collected in several parts of the Mordvin Republic. The segmental variability of Erzya has been described in detail in literature. A major parameter used for differentiation among dialect groups is the distribution of vowels in noninitial syllables. The dialects, in which the full-formation vowels i, e, u, o, a are used in both initial and non-initial syllables, have been distinguished from the dialects, in which the full-formation vowels in certain positions are represented by reduced ones. Within each type, subgroups of dialects have been identified (Itkonen 1971; Цыганкин 1977 : 19—30; Ермушкин 1984; Keresztes 1990: 16-17; Feoktistow 1990). The variability of prosodic features in Erzya dialects has not been considered for lack of sufficient evidence (Ермушкин 1984 : 28). Taking the two types of vowel representation as a point of departure for the identification of the target idiolect groups in our study, we further tallied the inter-speaker data with regard to the extent of reduction and the occurrences of stress patterns in the speakers' productions. The results of acoustic analysis obtained in our study served as an essential parameter for the verification of compatibility among the idiolects. The data on the background of the dialects was also taken into account. Geographical mobility is considered to be one of the sources of complexity in dialects (Hudson 1999: 41-42). Erzyan communities are known to have experienced extensive migration. The dialects were modified in the course of time but some of the original features were preserved. In the grouping of the idiolects, which was ultimately defined in our study, geographically distant idiolects appear to be merged in some cases. The four groups thus identified can be briefly described as follows.

- 1. Origin of the speakers: Cukaly of Ardatov, Lunga, Mordovskije Dubrovki, Andrejevka of Atjaševo, Nizovka, Paradejevo, Čornaja Rečka (Samara), Ivantsevo (Nižnij-Novgorod), Mordovskoje Afońkino (Tatarstan). The idiolects are characterized by the occurrence of the full-formation vowels e, i, o, u, a both in initial and non-initial syllables (with the exception of u), e. g.: kudoso 'at home'; vel'ese 'in the village', which is also common to the literary language.
- 2. Origin of the speakers: Kelvedne, Kučenjajevo, Mordovskije Siresi, Sabančejevo, Djurki, Tarasovo, Varmazejka. The idiolects are close to those of group 1; however, sporadic reduction was observed in the utterances of the speakers, e.g.: kudusə, kudəsə, but vel'ese.
- 3. Origin of the speakers: Berezniki, Guzintsi, Šugurovo, Staryj Najman, Papulevo, Standrovo. The common feature of the idiolects is moderate reduction; characteristic is the use of the vowel ä, e.g.: kudusă, kudəsă, väl'isä/ə.
- 4. Origin of the speakers: Sabajevo, Dubjonki, Drakino, Malyj Tolkaj (Samara). The idiolects are characterized by extensive reduction. The use of the vowel \ddot{a} is also a feature of the idiolects, cf.: $kud(\partial)s\breve{a}$, $v\ddot{a}l'(\partial)s\breve{a}/\partial$.

Secondly, the occurrences of stress were analysed regarding the type of the segments, syllables, and morphemes in the structure of the words juxtaposed in the material. In the past, there were attempts to relate some of the conventions in the assignment of stress to certain structural types. However, there have been no empirical data on the subject. Comparison drawn here was based on multiple productions of speaker groups.

Thirdly, we have considered the possibility that stress alternation could be dependent on the functional role of a word in an utterance. The series of the speakers' first and repeated responses were processed to see whether stress is sensitive to the recurrences of a response. In this respect, the question of inter-idiolect variability presented special interest.

3.2. Speaker-related data

The overall occurrences of initial, non-initial and quasi-equal or double stress in the material are shown in Figure 1. The patterns of stress were found to be distributed as follows: initial stress occurred in 510 responses (57%), non-initial stress in 264 responses (30%), and double or quasi-equal stress in 121 responses (13%). The data reveal that the tendency towards the use of initial stress in the overall material of spontaneously produced utterances persists; however, the share of non-initial and double stress occurrences is comparatively large. The inter-speaker distribution of the patterns of stress in the overall data was found to be heterogeneous. The data of the idiolect groups identified in the material throughout the analysis revealed inter-group differences. Figure 2 shows the occurrences of initial, non-initial, and double stress in the data of the idiolect groups. It is apparent that the percentage of initial stress occurrences in the data of groups 1 through 4 increases and that of non-initial stress occurrences decreases. The share of the cases of double stress is nearly the same in the four groups (13—14%). The least difference between the percentages of the occurrence of initial and non-initial stress was observed in the data of group 1 (50% and 37%, respectively); in the data of group 2 the difference was greater (55% and 31%, respectively). The speakers of groups 3 and 4 used the pattern of initial stress even more often (66% and 68%, respectively), while the cases of non-initial stress in their productions were as low as 18% in group 3 and 19% in group 4. The inter-idiolect data suggest that stress may depend on the extent of vowel reduction. Namely, the

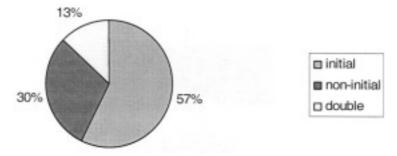


Figure 1. Overall distribution of initial, non-initial and double stress in disyllabic, trisyllabic and polysyllabic words.

tendency towards initial stress was the most salient in the idiolects of group 4 characterized by extensive reduction. In the idiolects using full-formation vowels, a comparatively small difference between the occurrences of initial and non-initial stress was found. The idiolects of groups 1 and 4 can be identified as distant types. The productions of the speakers in groups 2 and 3 yielded results that allow categorizing the idiolects as intermediary cases between those of groups 1 and 4. According to the data viewed here, the data of group 2 is close to that of group 1 while the data of group 3 is close to that of group 4. The attempt to merge the data of groups 1 and 2, on the one hand, and groups 3 and 4, on the other, led to a greater heterogeneity of the results in the new subdivisions. The same outcome was in the case of merging the data of groups 2, 3, and 4. This evidences the complexity of relationship among the idiolects in groups 2 and 3.

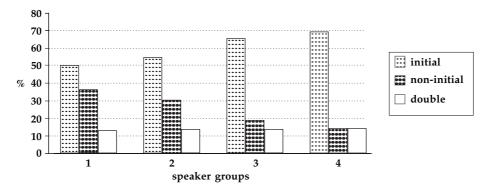


Figure 2. Idiolect-related occurrences of initial, non-initial and double stress (Group 1: speakers — 13, tokens — 367; Group 2: speakers — 9, tokens — 251; Group 3: speakers — 6, tokens — 149; Group 4: speakers — 5, tokens — 130).

3.3. Word-related data

As it has been mentioned above, in polysyllabic words additional stress normally appeared; hence, the number of syllables is a conditioning factor that influences stress occurrences. The primary task of this part of analysis, however, was the definition of the relationship between stress and the types of segments, syllables and morphemes constituting a word. The approach to the analysis enabled to obtain 895 tokens in which a set of structural types were represented. Table 1 shows the distribution of the stress patterns in the test words (in transcription, the literary norm is used). The structure of the words differed by the type of syllable nuclei: they either had a same phoneme in the first and second syllables (e, o, or a, in words 1—11) or different phonemes (u vs. i, e, o, in words 12—18). The composition of the syllables differed, too, e.g.: CVCV, VCVC, VCCVC, etc.; the words belong to different categories and represent various morphological forms. The frequency of the tokens in the overall material was not the same, due to several circumstances. For example, there were cases of alternative answers, like veľeseť/kudosot. Longer forms, like araśeľiń, uľňekšňiň,

in some cases tended to be replaced by shorter ones: $ara\acute{s}$, $ul'\acute{n}i\acute{n}$. It can be inferred from these data that any word potentially could be assigned stress either on the initial or non-initial syllable or its syllables could be pronounced with (quasi)-equal prominence. The position of stress alternated both in words with same vowel and syllable types: $ara\acute{s}$, $o\acute{s}o\acute{s}$; $vel'e\acute{s}e$, and different vowel and syllable types: kudoso, $ul'\acute{n}ek\acute{s}\acute{n}i\acute{n}$, ul'i, ul'ii', $ul'\acute{n}i\acute{n}$. Stress appeared to be less mobile, i.e. tended to be on the first syllable in words having the same vowel, e.g.: vel'e, different vowels, e.g.: kudo, or different syllable types, e.g.: $o\acute{s}o\acute{s}$, $o\acute{s}so$. On the other hand, the words $ara\acute{s}$ and apak, unlike $o\acute{s}o\acute{s}$, which has a similar segmental structure, revealed a highly varied distribution of stress patterns. Comparing the data of words having different morphemic structure, e.g.: kudo, ul'i, $o\acute{s}so$, apak, we can not fail to notice that the series of distribution of stress patterns diverge. However, there is no regularity in the series of distribution that could be ascribed to certain morpheme types.

Table 1
Occurrences of initial (s1), non-initial (s2) and double (s1/2) stress in the test words (speakers — 33).

| | - | | | |
|---|-----|-----|------|-------|
| Tokens | s1 | s2 | s1/2 | Total |
| 1. <i>veľe</i> 'a village' | 53 | 3 | 8 | 64 |
| 2. <i>veleś</i> 'the village' | 22 | 4 | 2 | 28 |
| 3. <i>veľe</i> ńt '(of) the village' | 33 | 5 | 5 | 43 |
| 4. <i>veľese</i> 'in a village' | 68 | 8 | 1 | 77 |
| 5. <i>veleset</i> 'they are in the village' | 18 | | | 18 |
| 6. <i>ošso</i> 'in a city' | 51 | 1 | 1 | 53 |
| 7. <i>ošoś</i> 'the city' | 15 | 3 | 2 | 20 |
| 8. araś 'no, not' | 30 | 45 | 16 | 91 |
| 9. apak 'not' | 24 | 28 | 11 | 63 |
| 10. araśeľ 'was not' | 30 | 27 | 1 | 58 |
| 11. araśeľiń 'I was not' | 18 | 17 | 6 | 41 |
| 12. <i>ul'i</i> 'is' | 17 | 31 | 20 | 68 |
| 13. <i>uľiť</i> 'are' | 8 | 18 | 13 | 39 |
| 14. <i>uľńiń</i> 'I was' | 14 | 19 | 22 | 55 |
| 15. <i>uľńekšńiń</i> 'I used to be' | 9 | 22 | 3 | 34 |
| 16. <i>kudo</i> 'a house' | 55 | 5 | 5 | 65 |
| 17. kudoso 'at home' | 30 | 19 | 3 | 52 |
| 18. <i>kudosot</i> 'they are at home' | 15 | 9 | 2 | 26 |
| Total | 510 | 264 | 121 | 895 |

Stress occurrences were found to be differently distributed in words of same morphemic structure: *vel'ese*, *kudoso*; *vel'eset'*, *kudosot*. Thus, the assignment of stress could not be associated with certain types of the segmental and morphemic composition of the words.

3.4. Utterance-related data

The occurrences of initial and non-initial stress in the series of the speakers' recurrent responses were compared to see whether the assignment of stress might be sensitive to the alternation of the functional role of the word in

an utterance. Repeating a response a speaker is likely to alter the emotional or attitudinal implication. It has been mentioned in section 2 that the speakers repeated their responses, occasionally changing the stress pattern used in the first response. Table 2 shows the percentages of the cases of initial and non-initial stress in first responses (1) and recurrent responses (2). The results of comparison in the overall and inter-group data were as follows. Initial stress occurrences were higher in all the parts of the data. However, there was a tendency towards an increase in the use of non-initial stress and, accordingly, decrease of the use of initial stress observed in the recurrent responses, which was manifest in all the idiolect groups. In the overall data, the changes amounted to 8%. In the case of group 1, the increase was by 6%, in the case of group 2 it was by 3%, while in groups 3 and 4 the increase was by 12% and 10%, respectively. The tendency towards increase in the use of non-initial stress in recurrent utterances gives reasons to suggest that stress is sensitive to changes occurring in the function of an utterance.

Table 2

Inter-response data of variance
between initial (s1) and non-initial (s2) stress occurrences

| Group | Response | Tokens | % of s1 | % of s2 |
|---------|----------|--------|---------|---------|
| All | 1 | 416 | 69 | 31 |
| | 2 | 345 | 61 | 39 |
| Group 1 | 1 | 164 | 61 | 39 |
| - | 2 | 149 | 55 | 45 |
| Group 2 | 1 | 115 | 64 | 36 |
| | 2 | 95 | 61 | 39 |
| Group 3 | 1 | 74 | 82 | 18 |
| | 2 | 54 | 70 | 30 |
| Group 4 | 1 | 63 | 86 | 14 |
| | 2 | 47 | 76 | 24 |

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the assignment of stress in one-word utterances revealed several features that have not been considered before.

- 1. It showed that in spontaneous speech stress has the tendency towards greater mobility, compared to reading. There was a considerable share of non-initial stress occurrences in spontaneous speech. The percentage of the occurrences of non-initial stress, compared to the evidence concerning script reading, was higher; however, overall occurrences of initial stress exceeded those of non-initial stress in this material as well.
- 2. Occurrence of initial and non-initial stress was found to be idiolect-dependent. The results revealed differences among groups of idiolects. The differences proved to be associated with the extent of the reduction of vowels in non-initial syllables. A growing tendency towards the use of initial stress was observable in the idiolects characterized by a greater extent of reduction. In the data of the idiolects that use full-formation vowels within a word, non-initial stress occurrences were approaching initial stress occurrences. Two groups of idiolects were found to be distant, as far as

the tendency of stress assignment and extent of vowel reduction in non-initial syllables are concerned. The other groups showed a complexity of the features that enables to identify them as intermediate groups. The question arises whether reduction can have developed as a consequence of the diminishing mobility of alternating stress. Thus, the data considered in this study have evidenced the prosodic variability of Erzya. Idiolect background is an important factor to be reckoned with in the phonetic and phonological studies of the language.

3. The data analyzed confirmed that the segmental and morphemic structure of the word do not condition the assignment of stress. The alternation of a functional role of a word in an utterance might be one of the conditioning factors of the mobility of Erzya stress. The analysis of stress distribution in recurrent utterances showed that repeated responses contributed to the increase of non-initial stress in the speakers' productions. It can be suggested that the recurrent responses were bearing complementary, emotional or attitudinal, implications.

In the analysis we followed the maxim: "there is no such thing as f r e e variation, [---] features which vary are conditioned, sometimes by a complex of linguistic and social factors" (Chambers, Trudgill 1998 : 128).

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НАСКОЛЬКО СВОБОДНО ПОДВИЖНОЕ УДАРЕНИЕ В ЭРЗЯНСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ?

В данной статье рассматривается вопрос о вариативности места ударения в эрзянском языке. Авторы провели исследование, в котором попытались установить влияние на подвижность ударения таких факторов, как диалектные особенности говорящего, функция высказывания и структура слова. В исследовании использована спонтанная речь, записанная при участии 33 информантов, носителей разных диалектов. Общая дистрибуция начального и неначального ударений записанной устной речи оказалась более разнообразной, чем при чтении, хотя начальное ударение использовалось чаще, чем неначальное. Анализ выявил различия в дистрибуции ударения у носителей разных типов идиолектов. Использование начального ударения более характерно для группы информаторов, в речи которых наблюдалась редукция гласных. Меньшая разница в частоте начального и неначального ударения отмечена у группы информаторов, в речи которых гласные полного образования не подвержены заметной редукции. В диалектах редуцирующего типа редукция могла возникнуть вследствие уменьшения подвижности ударения. Исследование показало, что подвижность ударения обусловлена не структурой слова, а скорее всего изменениями в функциональной роли высказывания. Повторные реплики информантов способствовали увеличению частоты неначального ударения.