On the shortening of the first components of compounds in Standard Serbian

Stanimir Rakić (Beograd)

Standard Serbian (SS) is a pitch-accent language characterized by four different accents: short-falling (riba ’fish’), long-falling (gré:k ’town’), short-rising (sélo ’village’) and long-rising (glá:va ’head’). Falling accents can occur only on the word initial syllables, while rising accents are traditionally assumed to occur on any syllable of the word except the last one. Rakić (1991) has however proposed a general rule according to which the rising accent may fall on the penult if the final syllable is heavy; if the final syllable and the penult are light, the antepenult is preferred in trisyllabic words, but in bisyllabic words the penult is accented. In some lexically marked case last syllables or segments can be extrametrical.

It is well-known that in a trochaic system trochaic shortening can shorten the foot (HL)\textsubscript{F} into the optimal foot (LL)\textsubscript{F} (Prince 1990). In English, the vowel length of the first components of English compounds cannot be shortened by trochaic shortening because the principle of strict cyclicity bans the alternation of lexical units if the condition of ’derived environment’ is not satisfied (Rakić 2015). In Serbian and Croatian grammars is usually distinguished between ‘proper’ compounds which bear just one accent and are classified as phonological words and the so-called ‘semi-compounds’, which do not fulfill this condition because each component in these word-constructions keeps its own accent as in the examples ščih-pró:ba ‘spot check’, gô:1-rǎ:zlika ‘goal difference’, prà:h-sče:cer ‘powdered sugar’. In these examples there is no linking vowel which would make the previous syllable open, and trochaic shortening is impossible. In SS, if the compounds make prosodic words and have a linking vowel, trochaic shortening often can apply as in (1):

(1) \(kr:ve ’blood’ + o ’linking vowel’ + \text{to}:k ‘flow’ \rightarrow kr\text{v}ot\text{o}k ‘bloodstream’\)
\(vi:do ’sight’ + o ’linking vowel’ + kr\text{ù}:g ’circle’ \rightarrow \text{v}ì\text{d}okr\text{ù}g ‘field of vision’\)

In (1), the linking vowel forms a foot with the first components to which trochaic shortening can apply as in (vi:do)\textsubscript{F}(kr\text{ù}:g) \rightarrow \text{v}ì\text{d}okr\text{ù}g. The linking vowel \(o\) crucially provides a required ‘derived environment’ for trochaic shortening.

The shortening of the first components which as independent words have a rising accent involves the change of tone which so far has not been satisfactorily explained. Comparing the accent of the first compound components with its independent forms, we notice that the long-rising accent of the independent forms is shortened into the short-falling one in compounds (2):

(2a) \(zi:m(a) ’winter’ + o + li:st ‘leaf’ \rightarrow \text{ž}ì\text{mol}ì\text{s}t ’a woody perennial plant’\)
\(rù:k(a) ‘hand’ + o + pì:s ‘the stem of the verb pì:sati ‘to write’ \rightarrow rùkopìs ‘handwriting’\)

(2b) \(vòd(a) ‘water’ + o + pà:d ‘fall’ \rightarrow vòdopàd ‘waterfall’\)

In (2) two-syllabic first components are replaced with one-syllabic stems \(žì:m, rù:k\) and \(vòd\) bearing a falling accent plus a linking vowel, and then only in (2a) trochaic shorting applies. Inkelas & Zec (1987) tried to account for the change of tone in (2b) by proposing that there is a special rule which cancels the tone of the first compound components. They did not specify to which type of compounds this rule applies, so any supporting evidence for this proceeding is missing. They simply assume that there is a special rule – ’Initial High’ which on the first syllable of the compounds without tone inserts a short-falling accent.

The rising accents in SS are generally considered to extend over the stressed syllable and the post-stressed one, while falling accents extend just over the stressed syllable. This means that the falling accent on the one-syllabic stems of the compound’s first components in (2)
The length of the last syllable of the stem is shortened before a) bisyllabic or polysyllabic suffixes or, b) closed monosyllabic suffixes which do not contain unstable a. These lexical rules can be generalized so to apply to any prosodic word as well as to the compounds like blágdan.

In this paper, I account for the change of tone in the compounds in (2) and I discover a particular set of compounds in which the general rule of shortening applies. The part a) of this rule has a similar form as the well-known rule of trisyllabic shortening in English phonology. The compounds (4) also effectively illustrate the application of the accent rule mentioned above.

References


Rakić, S. 1991. O receptivnim sufiksima i pravilu akcenta u srpskohrvatskom jeziku, Zbornik Matice srpske za filologiju i lingvistiku34/2, 121-134.
