

Accent assignment and the diacritic weight scale in Central Selkup

In this paper, I present an original analysis of data from Central dialects of Selkup (Samoyedic, Uralic) which sheds a new light on the problem of accentual dominance.

Central Selkup, spoken near the Ob' River in Siberia (Tomsk region, Russian Federation) is on the verge of extinction. While Taz Selkup (a Northern Selkup dialect) was previously described and analyzed in several important publications, including literature on metrical theory (McNaughton 1976; Idsardi 1992; Halle & Idsardi 1995; Zoll 1997), little attention has been paid to Central and Southern Selkup in the Western literature. All Selkup data in this paper come from Normanskaja (2011) which draws on extensive fieldwork materials, including recent ones (a 2009 fieldwork expedition). This data only appeared in Russian-language publications. Central Selkup has been characterized in the literature as a lexical accent system.

- (1) a. 'ydəʃpa fall-PRES-3Sg (of a night)
 b. y'dəʃpa get drunk-PAST-3Sg

The general accent rule of Central Selkup, formulated in terms of lexical accents, is given in (2) and exemplified in (3-4).

(2) *The accent rule (preliminary)*

Accent falls on the leftmost lexically accented morpheme in the word (if any); otherwise, accent is initial.

(3) Napas

a. *accented root-accented suffix*

'komd-e	money
'kver ⁱ -e	crow
'tʃ'ib-e	fly

b. *unaccented root-unaccented suffix*

'am-a	mother
'loy-a	fox
'lak-a	thing

(4) Parabel

accented root-accented suffix

'arm-a	coolness
'kag-a	corpse
'kad-e	spruce
'kyʒ-e	urine

However, in certain cases, as in (5), accent does not fall on the leftmost morpheme.

- (5) ta'p-ol-gu kick (*of an animal*)-SEMEL-INF
ko'b-al-gu scour-SEMEL-INF

The examples with –ol/-al in (5) are representative of accent being fixed on this suffix (which Normanskaya calls “accent-categorizing”). This pattern is not compatible with the general rule (x).

In order to account for this behavior without violating (2), lexical accent theories view such morphemes as “dominant” and implement dominance as Accent Deletion, whereby the dominant morpheme deletes all lexical accents in the domain, except its own (Poser 1984, Alderete 1999).

I present here a new theoretical approach to the problem of accentual dominance which accounts for the exceptional behavior of accent-categorizing morphemes in a simple and uniform way. This approach is based on the Primary Accent First (PAF) theory (van der Hulst 1996, 1997, 2010, 2012).

The PAF theory is a non-metrical parametric approach which separates the representation of word accent (primary stress) and rhythm, a move suggested by multiple authors (Goedemans and van der Hulst 2014; van der Hulst 1996, 2010; McGarrity 2003). While the PAF theory correctly accounts for accent location in a wide number of languages, the PAF theory by itself fails to capture (5). But, as I will show, it can do so when enriched with a special type of weight scale.

Recall that “syllable weight” is the capacity of *syllables* to attract accent, based on their phonological properties. It is reasonable to view the ability of *morphemes* to attract accent as a particular manifestation of weight, called “diacritic weight” in van der Hulst (1999:19), with this difference that it lacks phonological sources (e.g. Rhyme structure, sonority).

It is well-known that syllable weight distinctions may be scalar, which leads to phonological weight scales (see, e.g., Gordon 2006: 27-28). Since diacritic weight is a type of weight, we can extend the notion of weight scale by introducing “diacritic weight scales”, scales that order (classes of) morphemes according to the degree of diacritic (morphemic) weight. Therefore, it is predicted that there is a language which has a diacritic weight scale.

I will argue that this type of scale is found in Central Selkup. The scale has three weight degrees, with the superheavy (i.e. heaviest) morphemes being accented in any word in which they occur:

(6) superheavy > heavy > light

We can now formulate an *accent assignment mechanism* for Central Selkup. This consists of the weight scale (6) and of the set of PAF parameter settings (7):

(7) {Domain (Unbounded), Weight (Yes), Select (Left), Default (Left), Extrametricality (No)}.

Further, I introduce the Weight Grid, which, for every morpheme, represents its diacritic weight (given by the scale) as a column of gridmarks, with the number if gridmarks in a column equal to the degree of weight of the morpheme.

I assume that, in the course of derivation, only the heaviest morphemes in a word project their weight from the Weight Grid onto the accent grid.

Sample derivations are provided below (data are from Normanskaya 2011). Consider the form [a¹v^jej^ɟpu^ɟgu] (“burn.down-INF”) involving the diacritic weights in (8). The derivation for the UR /av^j-ej^ɟ-pu^ɟ-gu/ runs as in (6), resulting in initial accent:

(8) /av^j/: light; /-ej^ɟ/: heavy; /-pu^ɟ/: light; /-gu^ɟ/: heavy

(9) * Select (Left)
 * * Weight projection
/av^j-ej^ɟ-pu^ɟ-gu/
 * * * * Weight Grid
 * *

Accent on /-ol/ in [ta¹p^ɟ-ol^ɟ-gu] (“kick (*of an animal*)-SEMEL-INF”), which contains the superheavy semelfactive suffix /-ol^ɟ/, preceded by a heavy root and followed by a heavy suffix /-gu^ɟ/, is derived as in (10).

(7) * Select (L)
 * Weight projection
/tap^ɟ-ol^ɟ-gu/
 * * * Weight Grid
 * * *
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Summarizing, while the PAF theory alone cannot account for accent location in lexical accent systems, it can do so if it is enriched with the diacritic weight scale. A “diacritic weight” approach is superior to lexical accent theories because accent is categorical, while weight is scalar. Thus, it captures the true nature of what appears to be “lexical accent”, while, at the same time, accounting for accentual dominance so as to integrate the exceptions with the accent rule of the language.

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