Instructor: George Fowler  
Office: Ballantine 514  
Hours: MW 1:30–2:30 pm [tentative], or by appointment  
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Prerequisite

One previous course in the structure of Russian (either R403 or L501) and graduate status in Slavic linguistics, or consent of instructor.

Course Format

Seminar-style. Active participation and lively debate are required.

Course Goals

1. Investigate the details of a linguistic description of Russian derivational morphology, with particular emphasis on morphophonemics.
2. Consider the semantic potential of various word formation processes.
3. Examine the ramifications of Russian word formation for general linguistic (generative) theoretical approaches to derivational morphology.
4. Gain an idea of the potential and limitations of computers for linguistic research in areas related to derivational morphology.

5. Although it is not an explicit goal for this course, it is a hoped-for fringe benefit that increased sensitivity to word-formation processes might enhance your passive Russian vocabulary (if you are not a native speaker of Russian).

Requirements

1. Two brief papers, 5 pages maximum, one on form and one on content, each worth 25% of course grade.
2. In-class critical presentation of one article, worth 25% of course grade.
3. Attendance, participation, and involvement, nominally valued at 0% but could affect borderline cases.

Several general lines of exploration suitable for papers are outlined on p. 4 below, and we will talk about this more in class. All students are encouraged to talk with me while casting about for something to write about.

Course materials

Two books, various articles and book/dissertation excerpts, to be distributed in .pdf format via OnCourse. Students are expected already to own a copy of Charles Townsend’s Russian Word Formation; if not, then it is readily available from the instructor.


Topical Syllabus

A. Introduction. (5 classes, 1/7-9; 1/14-16; 1/25)

Derivation vs. inflection. Morphology vs. other modules of grammar. Practical survey of word-formation problems in Russian. Productivity. Alternative approaches to derivational
morphology. Computer applications in the analysis of derivational morphology.


**B. Formal Aspects of Russian Word Formation** (12 classes)

1. **The status of jers.** Nature of the cycle and principles of Lexical Phonology. (3 classes: 1/28–30; 2/4)
   

2. **Stress.** (2 classes: 2/6; 2/11)
   
   Reading: Janis Melvold, *Structure and Stress in the Phonology of Russian* [Extended excerpt]

3. **Truncation.** (1 class: 2/13)
   
   Reading: Bill J. Darden, “Truncation and/or Transderivational Constraints in Russian Word Formation”

4. **Derived imperfectives.** (1 class: 2/18)
   
   Reading: Michael Flier, “The Glide Shift in Russian”

5. **The status of morphological units** (one suffix or two?; prefix vs. combining form; superimposition; use of zero in analysis). (3 classes: 2/20; 2/25–27)
   

6. **Word-internal syntax.** (2 classes: 3/4–6)
   

**Assignment 1: Paper on formal word formation, due date TBA**

**C. Content: Semantics and Function** (10 classes)

   

2. **Noun Formation: Diminutive suffixation and discursive semantics.**
   
   (3 classes: 4/10; 4/15–17)

Assignment 2: Paper on semantics of word formation, due date TBA

D. Student presentations & Instructor's conclusion (2 classes: 4/22–24)

Possible Topics/Areas for Papers

Bear in mind that these are limited, 5-page papers. Of course, some topics can be handled in more or less detail, from this kind of brief paper up to a whole book. Nonetheless, you will be better served if you make sure you pick a very finite topic. There are many, many possibilities; this survey might help you get your mind in gear at the very beginning. I will insist that you come talk with me before settling on a topic for each paper. There might be ways to relate both papers if you are heavily interested in one particular word formation phenomenon; this would need to be discussed in detail.

**Formal morphology.** A number of topics should suggest themselves from our readings in this course, as well as in-class discussions. Stress is always a major topic; you could look for unusual stress patterns in word formation and attempt to explain them. You could look for undiscussed examples which either obey or violate Pesetsky’s level-ordering generalizations or his analysis of jers. You could argue a position on the issue of homophony in word formation; for example, the suffix -ка derives diminutives (тёпка), more or less unmarked female equivalents to masculine nouns (студентка), and deverb process/result nouns (проверка). One suffix, two, or three? You could investigate this on the formal level, attempting to find a principled basis for resolving that issue (similarities or differences in the formal properties of words formed with this or other suffixes). You could look at hardening in verbal suffixation (забросить → забросать), and classify the types of verbs in which it can/must occur, looking always for pertinent generalizations. You could compare parallel processes in Russian and another Slavic language, relating the differences to other distinctions in the respective grammatical structures.

**Computer Topic.** Within formal morphology, you could try to collect data from the computerized Zaliznjak corpus. What is a computer good for? It can find all examples of something specific, but it cannot contribute intellectually the resolution of any problem. The key to finding a computer topic is to identify a question whose resolution would be aided by identifying all examples of some finite phenomenon (a particular type of stress, sequence of sounds, etc.). Let me give you a couple of examples. 1) Suppose you notice that many nouns in -ник also correspond to adjectives in -ный (e.g., распутник ‘libertine’ ~ распутный ‘debauched, dissolute’); moreover, alongside -ник you find personal nouns in -ик (фронтовик ‘soldier at the front’, старик ‘old man’, etc.), as well as nouns in -ц и -ч. The question is, could you segment -ник into -н(ый) + -ик? You could use the computer to find and compare all the relevant examples. You then have to analyze them to see what, if anything, you can determine from the data. 2) The nominal suffix -ота occurs in words with three distinct types of stress: stress on the root (пахота ‘plowing’; this stress is unusual), stress on the first syllable of the suffix (племята ‘drowsiness’), and stress on the desinence (теплота ‘warmth’); the last two are both quite common (there are even a couple of minimal pairs). You could identify all examples of each stress type, along with related words, and attempt to figure out what, if any, morphological characteristics of the “motivating” words or roots might be correlated with the stress distinction.

**Semantic/content morphology.** You could attempt to extend Flier’s or Janda’s semantic methodology to some other verbal prefix(es) (this is not as easy as it might sound); or you could contrast it with another type of approach to the same prefixes. You could extend Wierzbicka’s methodology to some completely different kind of phenomenon, beyond the limited realm discussed in the excerpts from her book. (In this case, you should look at some of her other work on semantics apart from word formation.) You could examine the semantics of relational vs. qualitative adjectives, and attempt to explain borderline cases. You could pick one suffix and examine its semantic range, with a view toward deciding if there is a semantic invariant or not.