Tobias Scheer

Abstract
Vowel-zero alternations in Slavic: Havlik and Lower patterns

In this talk I propose a survey of vowel-zero alternations in Slavic that isolates what this process has in common in different Slavic languages, and sketches what its loci of variation are. The following issues will be addressed:

1. Synchronic identity of yers
   What do vowels that alternate with zero look like in underlying representations of synchronic systems?
2. Modern alternating vowels and CS yers
   It is not the case that all modern alternating vowels are reflexes of CS yers, and it is not true either that all CS yers are alternating vowels in modern languages.
3. Insertion or deletion?
   It is an established and consensual fact that the occurrence of yers cannot be predicted. Therefore the traditional Lower-based analysis deletes lexically present items. Despite of that, insertion-based analyses, or elements thereof, keep coming back. A different issue are cases where alternating vowels do not behave like yers and at the same time are predictable: here an insertion-based analysis may be warranted.
4. Lower vs. Havlík
   One locus of variation concerns the vocalization of alternating vowels before vowels that alternate with zero themselves: in Lower languages (e.g. Old Polish) the zero alternant surfaces, while in Havlík languages (e.g. modern Polish) vocalization occurs.
5. Uniformity
   Within a given language, are we facing one or several independent processes? While the former view is traditional, the latter is argued for by Gouskova (2012)
6. A Slavic matter only?
   Vowel-zero alternations exist in many languages, but for historical reasons the objects that alternate in Slavic have a particular name: yers. This is both the reason and the consequence of the widespread if tacit view that Slavic yers are incommensurable, i.e. are specific to Slavic and not found anywhere else. I show that the Lower pattern also controls other alternations in Slavic, and also occurs in other languages.

The talk also discusses the various analytical options that have been entertained, regarding the implementation of Lower, the underlying identity of alternating vowels and the fact that Lower seems to resist OT-based implementations: there is a blank spot in OT concerning Slavic vowel-zero alternations, and analyses that have been put forth (Yearley 1995, Gouskova 2012) rely on alternative mechanisms based on syllable structure (and hence insertion).

References
Gouskova, Maria 2012. Unexceptional Segments. To appear in Natural Language & Linguistic Theory 30: 79-133.
Yearley, Jennifer 1995. Jer vowels in Russian. Papers in Optimality Theory, edited by J. Beckman, S. Urbanczyk & L. Walsh, 533-571. Amherst, Mass.: GSLA.