

Palatalisation in Serbian and Croatian (a CV/VC approach to the *i* vs. *j* problem)

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The question of palatalisation of consonants is generally assumed to be reduced to the interaction of front vowels (i.e. vowels containing a palatal agent) and (some) consonants. The Slavonic languages offer a prime example for this process. The question of palatalisation, however, in Croatian and Serbian seems to be bound to some very special conditions and is less general than in the other dialects of Slavonic.

The two languages have a classical five-member vowel set (**i**, **e**, **a**, **o** and **u**; Croatian in addition has the diphthong **ie** which is totally missing in Serbian) of which the front ones do not cause palatalisation of any of the consonants (e.g. *piti* ‘to drink’, *biti* ‘to be’, *mio* ‘dear’, *silá* ‘power’, *tele* ‘lamb’, *selo* ‘village’, *nit* ‘thread’; k/g/h + front vowel clusters are missing for diachronic reasons). It is, however, true for both languages that there **are** regular non-palatal ~ palatal consonant alternations: e.g. *skup* ~ *skuplji* ‘expensive ~ more expensive’ (**lj** is a palatal lateral and is the result of the palatalisation of the labials), *drag* ~ *draži* ‘dear(er)’, *mład* ~ *mładī* ‘young(er)’ (**đ** = **đǣ**), *čvrst* ~ *čvršći* ‘strong(er)’, *suh* ~ *suši* ‘dry(er)’, etc. The problem is further complicated by the diphthong **ie** in Croatian which seems to produce only ‘partial’ palatalisation (the palatal agent is superimposed onto the consonant as secondary articulatory, but there is no palatalisation of the kind shown in *mład* ~ *mładī* above): e.g. *mjesno* ~ **mljesno* ‘local’, *pjena* ~ **pljena* ‘foam’, *tjesan* ~ **ćesan* ‘tight’, *djevojka* ~ **đevojka* ‘girl’. So, Croatian exemplifies palatalisation as follows: (i) no palatalisation (*derati* ‘to tear’), (ii) ‘partial’ (*djelo* ‘deed’) and (iii) ‘full’ palatalisation (*mładī* ‘younger’).

These and a number of other questions (e.g. why is it possible to have velar consonants before the palatal sonorants in spite of the fact that such clusters are thought to have all been palatalised in the diachrony: e.g. *kljun* ~ **čljun* ‘beak’) will be tackled in the framework of CV/VC Phonology (Lowenstamm 1996, Szigetvári 1999) and a traditional consensus on the number and type of melodic primes (Harris & Lindsey 1995). The questions addressed will also include a number of issues of theoretic importance: is there a difference in the palatalisation effects exerted by the ‘**I**’ prime depending on its syllabic affiliation to a C or a V slot in the skeleton? If so, then the C and the V are not merely hooks onto which melody can link but active agents in processes that are referred to as government vs. licensing in CV/VC Phonology. In addition to this, is there some proof after all that there could be a consonant-to-consonant government/licensing process?

References

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