

### Is the wolf lonely? Observations of Erzya harmony

Erzya exhibits vowel-consonant harmony. Both a final-syllable front vowel and a stem-final palatalized alveolar causes both the fronting of a mid vowel and the palatalization of an alveolar consonant (typically /t, d, n/) in the suffix. However, sibilants /s, z/ do not undergo harmony and also block the palatalization of other alveolars in a cluster with them. Nonetheless, they are transparent for the vowels.

Suffixes in which both the consonant and the vowel can alternate also have a “hybrid” allomorph, in which the suffix-initial consonant is not palatalized but the vowel is fronted. These allomorphs occur after stems with a final-syllable front vowel and a stem-final non-palatalized alveolar (the classic example is /veřgiz-de/ ‘wolf-ABL’). Based on the fact that, according to an earlier study, harmony is a strong tendency stem-internally as well, it is reasonable to think that in such native stems the stem-final consonant is always a sibilant. The aim of this study is to check this fact in the material of an extensive dictionary.

The results show that only three native words (compounds not counted) with a final-syllable front vowel end in /z/. The number of similar words ending in /s/ is much higher, but almost all of them end in the same derivational suffix, -/ks/. There are no native words with a final-syllable front vowel ending in a non-palatalized plosive, nasal, lateral or tremulant. However, there is a considerable number of such Russian loanwords. As corpus data show, such stems take the “hybrid” allomorph. Surprisingly, borrowed stems with a final-syllable front vowel ending in a cluster, consisting of a non-palatalized alveolar and an – otherwise transparent – labial or velar consonant, show vacillation: sometimes they are suffixed with the “hybrid” allomorph, sometimes with the allomorph with a palatalized consonant and a front vowel.

The conclusion is that although the ‘wolf’ is not lonely, but if we count how many native morphemes (and not words) behave in a way it does, we do not find many of them. However, Russian loanwords (mostly modern international Wanderwörter) considerably raise their number.

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