

The impact of experimental task on syllabification judgments: a case study of Russian
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Whereas sonority, stress assignment, morphological boundaries, word frequency and other similar factors known to influence syllabification have been extensively discussed in the literature, the role of the experimental task administered to collect the data has largely been overlooked. The majority of syllabification studies utilize a single procedure and pay little to no attention to the effect that the task itself can have on syllabification judgments. Among the few studies that do attempt to compare the results of two or more distinct experimental procedures, only some address the issue of different tasks leading to different results. For example, the results of the Icelandic syllabification experiment reported in Berg (2001) vary depending on whether the participants perform a reduplication or a permutation task. The present talk aims to demonstrate that differences in experimental procedures may result in both between and within-speaker variation in syllabification judgments even when identical stimuli are used. It is argued that different experimental tasks give more weight to different factors involved in syllabification.

For the purpose of the present study, four distinct tasks were used to determine the syllabification judgments of Russian speakers: (1) whole-word repetition with pause insertion, (2) last syllable repetition, (3) written slash-insertion task, and (4) written well-formedness evaluation questionnaire. These four tasks are commonly used in syllabification experiments (e.g., Fallows 1981, Treinman & Danis 1988, Treinman et al. 1992, Goslin 2002, Ishikawa 2002, Goslin and Floccia 2007, etc.) and their results are often taken to be directly comparable.

Bisyllabic non-words containing either a single consonant or a consonant cluster word-medially (e.g., /duzan/, /paksul/, etc.) were used in the experiment. To minimize the influence of morphology on syllabification, the stimuli resembled Russian monomorphemic masculine nouns (nominative singular) and none of the possible syllabification patterns could result in a form coinciding with an existing Russian morpheme. Using non-words also made it possible to avoid the impact of such factors as word frequency and/or existence of a permanent graphic representation in the long term memory. Stress placement, which is sometimes claimed to influence syllabification in Russian (e.g., Vinogradov et al. 1953), and vocalic environments were also controlled for.

The results of the experiment demonstrated significant positive correlation at the .05 level only between the results of Task 1 and Task 4 and no significant correlation between the results of other tasks. In addition, as demonstrated in the table below, different factors show statistically-significant effect (at or below the .05 level) on the results of different tasks, with none of the factors being significant for Task 2.

FACTORS	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task4
Word-init. possibility	✓			✓
Word-init. frequency			✓	
Word-fin. possibility	✓			
Word-fin. frequency	✓			✓
Word-med. frequency	✓		✓* (* - .1 level)	✓
C1 type			✓ (cont)	✓ (cont, place)
C2 type				✓ (cont)
Son. viol.	✓			✓

Thus, the experimental task itself seems to have substantially more impact on syllabification judgments than previously acknowledged in the literature. It appears that different experimental paradigms do not give the same weight to the many factors involved in syllabification, and data collected using non-identical procedures may not be directly comparable.

References

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