

Stress Patterns in Russian noun declension

It may seem to you that Russian stress can fall anywhere in a word and that stress moves about chaotically in Russian. While it is true that the stress may be on any syllable in a word (and we have to learn where it is when we see a new word), once you know where the stress is, there are only a few patterns by which it may move around in the word, if it moves at all. These stress patterns are easier to visualize as we do in the tables below.

We use two-letter abbreviations to tell you what is going on in the singular forms (the first letter) and in the plural (the second letter). Thus [SS] indicates fixed stem-stress in both the singular and the plural, [EE] indicates fixed end-stress in both the singular and the plural. The two types of stress that shift in the middle of the paradigm are 1) onto the stem in the feminine ACCsg only for a small group of nouns (we use [U] for this stress retraction away from the -y|-ю ending) or 2) from the stem (NA) to the endings (GLDI) in the plural forms (we use [M] for this mixed stress pattern).

We use these terms and abbreviations in vocabulary and grammatical commentary throughout the book. We generally will not make any comments about [SS] or [EE] types since nothing interesting is happening in these words, but will mark [SE], [ES], [SM], [EM], [US], [UM] in the vocabulary lists.

Fixed Stress always on Stem [ss]

N	—	—	N	—	—
A	—	—	A	—	—
G	—	—	G	—	—
L	—	—	L	—	—
D	—	—	D	—	—
I	—	—	I	—	—

автóбус, кнѝга, чѹвство, товáрищ,
недѐля; most numerous, 30,000+ nouns

Fixed Stress always on Ending [ee]

N	—	—	N	—	—
A	—	—	A	—	—
G	—	—	G	—	—
L	—	—	L	—	—
D	—	—	D	—	—
I	—	—	I	—	—

отец', госпóжá, этаж', стáтья;
approximately 2200 nouns

Shifting Stress — Stem to Ending [se]

N	—	—	N	—	—
A	—	—	A	—	—
G	—	—	G	—	—
L	—	—	L	—	—
D	—	—	D	—	—
I	—	—	I	—	—

дóлг, гóрод, дéло, мéсто; essentially non-
feminine with 150+ masculine nouns (Npl
in -á) and ~80 1-syllable masculine nouns,
~25 neuter nouns

Shifting Stress — Ending to Stem [es]

N	—	—	N	—	—
A	—	—	A	—	—
G	—	—	G	—	—
L	—	—	L	—	—
D	—	—	D	—	—
I	—	—	I	—	—

числó, винó, женá, звездá; essentially
non-masculine with ~50 neuter & ~100
feminine nouns

Fixed Stress on Stem in Singular with Mixed Stress in Plural [SM]

N		N	
A		A	
G		G	
L		L	
D		D	
I		I	

бог, волк, вещь, дверь; essentially non-neuter with ~50 masculine & ~75 feminine nouns

Fixed Stress on Ending in Singular with Mixed Stress in Plural [EM]

N		N	
A		A	
G		G	
L		L	
D		D	
I		I	

конь, губа, слеза, блоха; 5 masculine & ~40 feminine nouns

Accusative-Retraction (U-retraction) with Shifting Stress Ending to Stem [us]

N		N	
A		A	
G		G	
L		L	
D		D	
I		I	

вода, душа, земля, зима, коса, спина, цена; ~13 feminine nouns

Accusative-Retraction (U-retraction) with Mixed Stress in Plural [um]

N		N	
A		A	
G		G	
L		L	
D		D	
I		I	

борода, голова, гора, доска, нога, река, рука, среда, стена, сторона, строка, щекá; ~18 feminine nouns

Stress Patterns in Russian verb conjugation

In verbs, the stress patterns are far more limited than nouns. We find only fixed stress on verbal stems or verbal endings or, if we have shifting stress, it only occurs in two forms: 1) in the conjugated forms, stress may shift from the ending in the INF and я-form and onto the stem in the other forms or 2) the stress in the past tense will shift onto the ending in the feminine only, but remain on the stem in the other forms. The tables below illustrate these possible patterns.

Fixed Stem Stress

INF	—	—	—
1sg	—	—	—
2sg	—	—	—
3sg	—	—	—
1pl	—	—	—
2pl	—	—	—
3pl	—	—	—

Fixed End Stress

INF	—	—	—
1sg	—	—	—
2sg	—	—	—
3sg	—	—	—
1pl	—	—	—
2pl	—	—	—
3pl	—	—	—

Conjugation Stress Shift

INF	—	—	—
1sg	—	—	—
2sg	—	—	—
3sg	—	—	—
1pl	—	—	—
2pl	—	—	—
3pl	—	—	—

Past Tense Shift

INF	—	—	—
Msg	—	—	—
Fsg	—	—	—
Nsg	—	—	—
pl	—	—	—

NB: with the exception of a few verbs, e.g., снять (сниму́, снѐмешь, снѐмут; снѐл, снѐла, снѐли), we won't see shifting stress in both the non-past and in the past. So, if a verb has a stress shift in the non-past it will not have any shift in the past and, equally, if there is a shift in the past, there is no shift in the non-past.