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## Aspect in Russian as grammatical rather than lexical notion: Evidence from Heritage Russian

Глагольный вид в русском языке как грамматическое (а не лексическое) явление

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**Аннотация** В данной статье рассматриваются изменения, происходящие в системе глагольного вида в языке тех иммигрантов, для которых русский является родным, но не доминирующим языком. По результатам этого исследования делаются выводы как о видовой системе в языке иммигрантов, так и о видовой системе в русском языке в целом. В данной статье, во-первых, продемонстрировано, что, вопреки ожиданиям, основанным на изучении диахронических изменений в языке, а также изменений в лексиконе иммигрантов, такие факторы, как частота формы в исходном языке и внешние воздействия в результате языкового контакта, не играют заметной роли в перестройке видовой системы в языке иммигрантов. Во-вторых, утверждается, что, так как изменения в видовой системе и в лексиконе являются результатом воздействия различных факторов, то глагольный вид в русском языке в целом является грамматическим, а не лексическим понятием.

### 1 Introduction

This paper examines the aspectual system of Heritage Russian, which for the purposes of this paper is defined as the language of those Russian emigrants who have some native-like skills in Russian but whose dominant language is not Russian, but another language (I focus here on speakers whose dominant ambient language is American English, although some comparison to other geographical varieties of Diaspora Russian, *jazyk russkogo zarubež'ja*, are made throughout the paper). Although different classifications of Heritage Russian speakers have been made in the literature (cf. Fishman 1964; Kagan and Dillon 2001, *inter alia*), in this paper I do not distinguish between various subgroups of Heritage Russian speakers, focusing on the qualitative similarities in the types of departures from the base norm of Contemporary Standard Russian (CSR) in terms of the speakers' choices of

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aspectual forms rather than on the quantitative differences in the number of such departures from CSR.<sup>1</sup>

The goals of this study are two-fold: first, I aim to identify the factors that define the aspectual system of Heritage Russian, especially in relation to factors that have been previously identified as playing a role in lexical attrition; second, I seek to shed a new light on the long-standing issue in (non-Heritage) Russian aspectology, namely whether aspect in Russian is a wholly lexical distinction or at least a partially grammatical distinction (similar to tense and voice).

Heritage Russian is subject to pressures from two directions: pressures internal to the source language (that is, CSR) and pressures from the speakers' ambient language (for most speakers in this study, this is American English, although other languages play a role as well, as will be discussed below). Among pressures internal to the source language are competence-related factors, that is the knowledge of the grammatical system itself, as well as such performance-related factors as the frequency of a given word, form or construction in the source language. All of these factors—system-internal pressures, frequency of certain structures and external interferences from other languages—are known in historical linguistics as potential triggers for language change in diachronic terms (the passing of the language from generation to generation) and the same factors are expected to play a role in language change on a more short-term scale among Heritage speakers. In this paper, I show that these expectations are not met, specifically that neither frequency nor external interferences play a role in the restructuring of the aspectual system among Heritage Russian speakers. This leaves only the system-internal pressures as the possible factor that defines the aspectual system of Heritage Russian; in my earlier work (Pereltsvaig 2001, 2005) I have proposed that such system-internal pressure is the disconnect found in CSR between lexical and grammatical aspect. The same disconnect is said to affect the acquisition of the CSR aspectual system by monolingual Russian children; both children and Heritage speakers seem to use the same strategy: when in doubt, revert to lexical aspect.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of the findings from this study, namely that the aspectual system of Heritage Russian is unlike what is known about lexical attrition, in that the former is not affected by either frequency of the given forms in the source language or the interferences from the speakers' ambient language, is twofold: first, it creates a more complicated picture of language attrition than has been assumed so far, one whereby various parts of the language system are vulnerable to influences of different factors; second, the results of this study shed a new light on the old problem in Russian aspectology, namely the question whether aspect is a lexical or a grammatical notion. The former position is adopted in the works of Isačenko, Janda, Maslov, as well as in many Russian dictionaries, whereas the latter position is taken for instance by Comrie (1976). The Heritage Russian data in this paper strongly supports the latter position, namely that Russian aspect is a grammatical rather than lexical notion. The logic of this argument is as follows: since the choice between aspectual forms like *čítat'* – *pročítat'* ('to read IMPF – PERF') is not subject to the same factors as are lexical choices in general, the aspectual distinction is a grammatical one.

<sup>1</sup>In a recent study Bar-Shalom and Zaretsky (2006) report no departures from CSR in terms of the choice of aspectual forms in their pool of speakers. This is, however, unsurprising, as it is not the case that all Diaspora Russian speakers undergo the same changes in their linguistic system. The speakers considered in this study are fairly extreme in their loss of Russian.

<sup>2</sup>This is despite the apparent early knowledge of grammatical aspect by very small children even before they have clearly identifiable verbs (cf. Gagarina 2000a).

The paper is organized as follows: in Sect. 2, I provide some background information on Russian aspect and briefly review the previous findings regarding the loss/restructuring of aspect by Russian immigrants. Section 3 examines the role that the frequency in the source language and the influence of the speakers' ambient language play in lexical attrition. Sections 4 and 5 are concerned with the role that these factors play in defining the aspectual system of Heritage Russian. In Sect. 4, I consider the frequency of aspectual forms in CSR, in Sect. 5—the potential transfer from the speakers' ambient language. In each of these sections, I will first outline the predictions of the two alternative hypotheses with respect to aspect under attrition, then analyze the available data to show that the hypotheses fail to account for it. The last section provides a summary of findings, and posits questions for future research.

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Aspect in Contemporary Standard Russian

Before I embark on an exploration of aspect in Heritage Russian, I briefly review the basic facts about aspect in Contemporary Standard Russian (CSR) necessary to understand the Heritage language facts to follow; therefore, many notions and phenomena that are irrelevant for my study of Heritage Russian will be ignored here (a more detailed discussion of aspect in CSR can be found in Arefiev 1999; Babko-Malaya 1999; Forsyth 1970; Pereltsvaig 2005; Smith 1991; Spagis 1961; Timberlake 2004 and the references cited therein).

As is well-known, CSR distinguishes two morphological aspects: imperfective and perfective. This formal contrast appears in all finite and non-finite forms, including imperatives, infinitives, and participles. In addition to speakers' intuitions, one can rely on a battery of tests that distinguish the two aspects (cf. Arefiev 1999, 12–15; Smith 1991, 338–340). The morphological patterns relating perfective and imperfective verbs are quite complex and will not be discussed here. Semantically, many verbs in Russian are said to form the so-called aspectual pairs, which are verb pairs synonymous in all respects other than their morphological aspect. For instance, verbs like *čitat'* – *pročitat'* 'to read IMPF – PERF' form an aspectual pair, whereas *dočitat'* 'to complete reading.PERF' does not form an aspectual pair with either of these two verbs because it adds the meaning of completion, not present in *čitat'* – *pročitat'*. Although in practice, it is not always easy to determine which verbs are semantically identical except for their aspect, in this paper this is determined on the basis of speaker intuitions.

### 2.2 Previous research on aspect in Heritage Russian

To date, little research has been done on aspect in Heritage Russian. Many studies of Heritage Russian focus entirely on general psycho- and socio-linguistic aspects of language attrition (e.g., Donitsa-Schmidt 1999); others investigate specific linguistic phenomena, but do not discuss aspect among them (e.g., Leisiö 2001; Pereltsvaig 2004). A pioneering work on the subject has been Polinsky (1994), abundant with data from American Russian and interesting generalizations.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Polinsky's data indicate that Russian emigrants

<sup>3</sup>The term *American Russian* refers to Heritage Russian of speakers in the USA and is contrasted with *Israeli Russian*, *Finnish Russian*, *German Russian*, etc.

make occasional mistakes in the use of aspectual forms. Sometimes their choice of the aspectual form is consistent with that of monolingual speakers in Russia (even if other errors are made):<sup>4</sup>

- (1) a. Immigrant Russian  
oni **upali** v ljubov'  
they fell.PERF in love
- b. CSR  
oni **vljubilis'**  
they fell-in-love.PERF  
'they fell in love'

Yet, in other utterances the same speakers may choose aspectual forms that are either odd or totally ungrammatical from the point of view of CSR. The main claim of Polinsky's paper is that speakers undergoing severe attrition use verbal aspectual morphology on a verb-by-verb basis rather than depending on the context and encode lexical aspectual notions such as telicity. This idea finds further support in Pereltsvaig (2001, 2005), where it is argued that verbal aspectual morphology in Heritage Russian encodes neither the viewpoint aspect (in the sense of Smith 1991), nor telicity in the compositional sense. Instead, Pereltsvaig (2005) draws a distinction between verbs that denote events with a bounded Path, on the one hand, and verbs with no Path or with a non-bounded Path, on the other hand; an example of this contrast (formalized as the  $[\pm P]$  feature) is the pair *write*–*doodle*: the verb *write* implies an action toward an end-point on a Path (whether what is written is a single letter, a word, a paragraph or a book), while the verb *doodle* implies aimless writing. Pereltsvaig (2005) shows that this distinction is encoded linguistically through a number of language-specific contrasts (the reader is referred to Pereltsvaig 2001, 2005 for tests for the  $[\pm P]$  feature). In Heritage Russian verbs that denote events with bounded Paths are retained in the perfective form, whereas verbs that denote events without a Path or with a non-bounded Path are retained in the imperfective. Therefore, when lexical aspect (as defined here) and viewpoint aspect do not coincide, Heritage Russian speakers appear to make mistakes in their choice of the aspectual form. For instance, when an event denoted by a verb without a bounded Path is viewed from outside (in Smith's 1991 terminology), a CSR speaker would chose a perfective verb, whereas a Heritage Russian speaker uses the imperfective counterpart:

- (2) a. Heritage Russian (context: describing a short visit to Princeton)  
mne **nравилос'** v *Princeton*  
me.DAT liked.IMPF in Princeton
- b. CSR  
mne **ponравилос'** v *Prinstone*  
me.DAT liked.PERF in Princeton  
'I liked it in Princeton'

<sup>4</sup>Throughout this paper, *italics* indicate code-switching or code-mixing and verb forms of interest to the discussion are highlighted with **boldface**. Unless otherwise indicated, examples come from the author's corpus of Heritage Russian.

Conversely, when an event denoted by a verb with a bounded Path is viewed from inside (again, in Smith's 1991 terminology), a CSR speaker would choose an imperfective form, whereas an Heritage Russian speaker uses a perfective:

- (3) a. Heritage Russian  
 ja nikogda ne **pročital** ta kniga  
 I never not read.PERF that.NOM book.NOM
- b. CSR  
 ja nikogda ne **čital** tu knigu  
 I never not read.IMPF that.ACC book.ACC  
 'I have never read that book'

Note that in many instances the two distinctions—Path and perfectivity—coincide and both CSR and Heritage Russian use the same form. In fact, it has been suggested in the literature (cf. Andersen and Shirai 1996; Comrie 1976; Forsyth 1970 *inter alia*) that (Contemporary Standard) Russian and scores of other languages exhibit the so-called Distributional Bias, namely, telic verbs (or [+P] verbs, in Pereltsvaig's 2005 terminology) tend to appear more often in the perfective, whereas atelic verbs (or [−P] verbs, in Pereltsvaig's 2005 terminology) tend to appear in the imperfective. The difference between CSR and Heritage Russian can be seen as a matter of degree: while in CSR the correlation between lexical and grammatical/morphological aspect is a tendency, in Heritage Russian it is a rule. From this it follows that Heritage Russian should exhibit frequency effects: the association between lexical and viewpoint aspects would be most pronounced for those [+P] verbs that are found more frequently in the perfective in CSR and for those [−P] verbs that are found more frequently in the imperfective in CSR. This is the Frequency Hypothesis, which I will examine in detail in Sect. 4. Before I proceed to discuss aspect in Heritage Russian, let us consider the factors that affect lexical attrition.

### 3 Lexical attrition

Numerous studies of Heritage Russian as well as other Heritage languages show that, as far as lexical attrition is concerned, both frequency of a given lexical item in the speakers' source language and interference from their ambient language determine in large part which words (and collocations) are retained and which ones are lost. In this paper, I will provide some illustrative examples from Heritage Russian and other Heritage Slavic languages, but the same phenomena have been attested in other Heritage languages, such as Heritage Italian, Heritage Swedish and Heritage Norwegian, to name only a few (cf. Bettoni 1991; Hjelde 1996; Klintborg 1999; Milani 1996).

First, the frequency of a given item in the speakers' source language has been shown to affect the rate of retention/loss; for instance, Polinsky (2005) has studied lexical attrition of lexical categories (verbs, nouns, and adjectives) among Heritage Russian speakers and shows that for all three categories there is a correlation between frequency in CSR (according to Brown 1996) and the retention of items under attrition (measured in the percentage of translation accuracy and reaction times): the higher the frequency the more likely the speakers to retain the item, and vice versa.

The importance of the interference from the speakers' ambient language in lexical attrition has also been widely noted in the literature: bilingual speakers often transfer lexical information from one language to the other in the form of loanshifts, lexical or

grammatical calques and collocations (cf. e.g., Moskvich 1978; Moskvich and Moonblit 1993; Zemskaja and Glovinskaja 2001). An example of a loanshift is:

- (4) kak balončik iz katorogo vyšel vozdux  
 as balloon from which went-out air  
 ‘as a flat balloon’ (CSR: *balončik* ‘little bottle’, ‘balloon’)

Here, a Heritage Russian speaker uses the diminutive form of *balon*, which in CSR means ‘bottle, can’ to refer to a balloon (in CSR, *vozdušnyj šarik*). A possible reason behind this loanshift is the obvious phonetic similarity between the Russian form *balon* and the English word *balloon*.<sup>5</sup> For examples of loanshifts in Heritage Italian and Heritage Norwegian, see Hjelde (1996) and Milani (1996), respectively.

An illustrative example of a lexical calque/collocation in Heritage Russian is given in (1) above, repeated below (5); other typical examples include *imet’ golovnuju bol’* (lit. ‘have a headache’ instead of the CSR *bolit golova* lit. ‘aches the head’), *vzjat’ avtobus* (lit. ‘take a bus’ instead of the CSR *poexat’ na avtobuse* lit. ‘go on a bus’), and numerous others.

- (5) a. Immigrant Russian  
 oni **upali** v ljubov’  
 they fell.PERF in love  
 b. CSR  
 oni **vljubilis’**  
 they fell-in-love.PERF  
 ‘they fell in love’

Like loanshifts, lexical calques have been attested for various Heritage languages; see Henzl (1981) for examples from American Polish and American Czech, and Milani (1996) and Bettoni (1991) for examples from Heritage Italian.

Finally, not only the meaning, the collocational use and the phonological form are transferred from one language to another, but also the information about selectional restrictions a given lexical item imposes on its complement. Particularly vulnerable to such transfer is the selection of prepositions by governing verbs. In the illustrative example below (6), the Heritage Russian speaker uses the preposition *dlja* ‘for’ instead of *na* ‘on’, which is idiomatically used with this particular verb in CSR. Similar examples from American Swedish and American Polish are found in Henzl (1981) and Klintborg (1999), respectively.

- (6) rabotal dlja CIA  
 worked for CIA  
 ‘worked for CIA’

To recap, both the frequency of a given item in the speakers’ source language and the interference from their ambient language have been shown to play a defining role in lexical attrition. In the remainder of this paper, I will show that these factors do not determine the choice of verbal aspectual forms in Heritage Russian, thus suggesting that attrition of aspect does not fall under the more general heading of lexical attrition.

<sup>5</sup>Another potential (albeit, less likely) source of this loanshift is that particular speaker’s familiarity with the Hebrew word *balon* ‘balloon’.

#### 4 Frequency in the source language

As discussed in the previous section, the frequency of a given item in the speakers' source language plays a role in defining the course of lexical attrition. In this section, I discuss the role of frequency in determining the choice (and ultimately, the retention) of aspectual forms in Heritage Russian. A priori, it is not inconceivable to view the loss of certain aspectual verb forms in Heritage Russian as part of a larger process of lexical attrition. Just as Heritage Russian speakers lose certain nouns, adjectives, verbs, and prepositions (or just parts of lexical entries, such as encoding inherent case-assigning properties of verbs and prepositions; cf. Polinsky 1997), it is not implausible that they would also lose certain aspectual forms of verbs. In fact, this view would follow if one is to adopt the widely accepted (in Russian aspectological literature) view that the relation between aspectual forms of a verb is lexical in much the same way as the relation between synonymous verbs. For instance, Isačenko (1960), Maslov (1948, 1974), and others believe that the relation between the imperfective and perfective forms of 'read'—*čitat'* and *pročitat'*—is the same as between *xodit'* 'walk' and *marširovat'* 'march'. I can, thus, hypothesize that Heritage Russian speakers retain forms that are more frequent in their source language, that is in CSR.<sup>6</sup>

According to Comrie (1976, 117, citing Josselson 1953, 20–22), the perfective aspect is more frequent overall in CSR than the imperfective. However, it has also been noted that the ratio of perfective and imperfective verbs changes depending on the tense and mood of the verb; for example, imperative forms are more frequently imperfective than perfective (57% vs. 43%, according to Steinfeldt 1963, 26), whereas in the past tense and in the infinitive perfective verbs predominate (infinitive: 48% imperfective vs. 52% perfective; past tense: 34% imperfective vs. 66% perfective). Similarly, according to Comrie (1976, 117, citing Josselson 1953, 20–22), "in the Future the predominance of the Perfective is even greater" (synthetic perfective future is compared to analytic imperfective future). Moreover, different aspectual pairs exhibit different patterns of frequency. Therefore, the only meaningful prediction that the Frequency Hypothesis can make with respect to Heritage Russian is with reference to specific aspectual pairs: the member of a given aspectual pair which is more frequent in CSR is hypothesized to be retained in Heritage Russian, whereas the less frequent member of the aspectual opposition is expected to be lost. In what follows, I will argue that this hypothesis is not borne out by the data.

Throughout this paper, frequency is determined on the base of three frequency lists for CSR. The first and the oldest list is Steinfeldt (1963), whose figures represent the number of occurrences in the corpus; the obvious disadvantages of this list in general and for the purposes of this study are its age (it was composed in the Soviet times, which greatly affects the results), its limited size, and its being based on written sources (which typically are not a large part of the input for Heritage speakers). The second and the newest list is Sharoff (2002), whose figures represent the number of occurrences per million words in the corpus. The third list—Brown (1996)—is different in the presentation; its figures are the rankings from the most frequent word of Russian (i.e., 1) to the 10,000<sup>th</sup> most

<sup>6</sup>Since longitudinal input data for the specific Heritage speakers are not available, here I assume that relative frequencies of aspectual forms in CSR in general are applicable to Heritage speakers' input as well. This assumption is further supported by the fact that relative frequency of imperfective and perfective forms of the verbs studied here (namely, whether the perfective is more frequent than the imperfective or the other way around) is constant across three frequency lists for CSR that I have consulted (see below in the main text).

frequent word. Hence, for both Steinfeldt's and Sharoff's lists the higher the number, the more frequent the item, whereas for Brown (1996) exactly the opposite obtains—the higher the number, the lower the frequency (for clarity's sake, I will refer to Brown's figures as markedness rather than frequency; this implies statistical markedness only). The reader should not assume that three different lists were used because of systematic discrepancies among them; in fact, it is surprising to what extent the three lists coincide in determining the more frequent member of aspectual oppositions. For more detailed descriptions of these corpora the reader is referred to the original sources.

Let us first consider data that support the Frequency Hypothesis, that is aspectual pairs in which the more frequent member of the opposition is retained in Heritage Russian. For example, the perfective *vzjat'* 'take' is retained in (7) instead of the imperfective *brat'* 'take'.<sup>7</sup> The perfective is also more frequent than the imperfective in CSR:

- (7) a. Heritage Russian  
 ty ne **voz'mi** ètot *dish*  
 you not take.PERF this dish
- b. CSR  
 ne **beri** èto bljudo  
 not take.IMPF this dish  
 'don't take this dish'

**Table 1** Frequency of perfective vs. imperfective 'take'

	✓ <i>vzjat'</i> (PERF)	<i>brat'</i> (IMPF)
Frequency (Steinfeldt 1963)	311	106
Frequency (Sharoff 2002)	752.82	322.82
Markedness (Brown 1996)	132	419

Similarly, sometimes it is the imperfective member of the aspectual opposition that is more frequent in CSR and is also the one that is retained in American Russian. This is the case with the verb *nraivit'sja/ponraivit'sja* 'please':

- (8) a. Heritage Russian (context: describing a short visit to Princeton)  
 mne **nraivos'** v *Princeton*  
 me.DAT liked.IMPF in Princeton
- b. CSR  
 mne **ponraivos'** v *Prinstone*  
 me.DAT liked.PERF in Princeton  
 'I liked it in Princeton'

**Table 2** Frequency of perfective vs. imperfective 'please'

	<i>ponraivit'sja</i> (PERF)	✓ <i>nraivit'sja</i> (IMPF)
Frequency (Steinfeldt 1963)	52	86
Frequency (Sharoff 2002)	104.05	196.05
Markedness (Brown 1996)	1897	548

<sup>7</sup>Here and below, the frequency form marked with ✓ is the one retained in Heritage Russian.

Thus, both perfective and imperfective members of the aspectual oppositions may be retained when they are more frequent in CSR. However, it is not always the case that the more frequent member in CSR is retained in Heritage Russian. In particular, both perfective and imperfective forms may be retained when they are less frequent. For example, the perfective *pročitat* 'read' is less frequent than the imperfective *čitat* 'read', but it is the perfective that is retained:

- (9) a. Heritage Russian  
 ja nikogda ne **pročitat** ta kniga  
 I never not read.PERF that.NOM book.NOM
- b. CSR  
 ja nikogda ne **čitat** tu knigu  
 I never not read.IMPF that.ACC book.ACC  
 'I have never read that book'

**Table 3** Frequency of perfective vs. imperfective 'read'

	✓ <i>pročitat</i> (PERF)	<i>čitat</i> (IMPF)
Frequency (Steinfeldt 1963)	52	185
Frequency (Sharoff 2002)	86.22	361.44
Markedness (Brown 1996)	1584	230

Example (10) illustrates the situation where the imperfective member of the opposition is retained in Heritage Russian despite being less frequent in CSR:

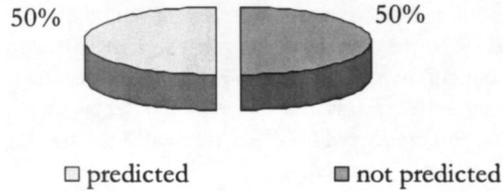
- (10) a. Heritage Russian  
 ja **pokazyvaju** tebjja moja sobaka  
 I show.IMPF you my.NOM dog.NOM
- b. CSR  
 ja **pokažu** tebe svoju sobaku  
 I will-show.PERF you self's.ACC dog.ACC  
 'I am going to show you my dog'

**Table 4** Frequency of perfective vs. imperfective 'show'

	<i>pokazat</i> (PERF)	✓ <i>pokazyvat</i> (IMPF)
Frequency (Steinfeldt 1963)	131	85
Frequency (Sharoff 2002)	261.16	162.41
Markedness (Brown 1996)	316	556

To sum up, the Frequency Hypothesis, namely the hypothesis that it is the more frequent member of the aspectual opposition that is retained in Heritage Russian, cannot account for all the data. But how much of the data can it account for? An analysis of errors in the production corpus gives the following figures: the more frequent member of the aspectual opposition is retained in only 50% of the pairs in my corpus. This is represented by the graph in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1** The predictive power of the Frequency Hypothesis



Thus, the Frequency Hypothesis can account for half of the errors. Given only two possible choices (perfective vs. imperfective), this hypothesis appears to have as good a predictive power as flipping a coin. Hence, I conclude that frequency does not play an important role in determining which aspectual forms are retained in Heritage Russian. In the next section, I will argue that interference from the speakers' L2 does not play a role in the restructuring of the aspectual system in Heritage Russian either.

### 5 Interference from the speakers' ambient language

A plausible explanation for the changes in the use of verbal aspectual forms in Heritage Russian would be the interference from the speakers' ambient language. According to this Interference Hypothesis, language attrition reduces to grammatical borrowing of constructions and phenomena found in the speakers' ambient language (which is for them also the dominant language). Again, this hypothesis is not a priori unreasonable since it has been shown in the attrition literature that interference from the dominant language shapes various attrition phenomena. In addition to the above-mentioned interference in the lexical domain (see Sect. 3), various grammatical phenomena have been shown to be subject to interference. For instance, Leisiö (2001) examined interference from two contact languages—Finnish and Swedish—with respect to past participle constructions, word order in noun phrases with a genitive phrase and case assignment to subjects and objects in Finland Russian. Zemskaja and Glovinskaja (2001) show that many speakers of Heritage Russian exhibit interference in the widened use of light verb constructions (especially with the verb *imet'* 'have, own'). Thus, it is not initially implausible to expect Heritage Russian speakers to exhibit interference also in the domain of aspect. However, in what follows I show that this hypothesis is not borne out by the facts either.

Specifically, four arguments are put forward below to rule out interference from the speakers' ambient language:

1. A detailed examination of the aspectual system of American Russian (that is, Heritage Russian in the USA) in comparison with the aspectual system of (American) English shows that the former is not closer to the latter than the aspectual system of CSR is.
2. More generally, speakers of Heritage Russian are shown to make the same types of errors with the same classes of verbs regardless of their level of proficiency in the ambient language, the length of exposure to or dominance of the ambient language, or the context of acquisition (ESL instruction vs. naturalistic exposure).
3. The same types of errors with the same classes of verbs are also found regardless of the nature of the aspectual system in the ambient language that the Heritage speakers are exposed to (e.g., English, Hebrew, German, Swedish, etc.).
4. The same association between morphological aspect and lexical semantic properties of the verb is found in the production of monolingual children at a certain age (approx.

between 2 and 3 years old) and in colloquial speech of monolingual adult Russian speakers (especially, in iterative contexts, discussed in Zemskaja and Glovinskaja 2001).

Consider first the argument involving American Russian: according to the Interference Hypothesis, we would expect the aspectual system of American Russian to be very similar to that of (American) English. In English, grammatical aspect is marked through the opposition of what is traditionally called tenses: perfect and progressive. Note that lexical aspect is not marked in English either on the verb itself or through case marking on the direct object, as it is in some other languages (cf. Babko-Malaya 1999 on Russian; Kiparsky 1998 on Finnish; Ramchand 1997 on Scottish Gaelic; Svenonius 2001, 2002 on Icelandic). Given the general similarities, the Interference Hypothesis predicts that American Russian speakers would assimilate the Russian perfective morphology to the English perfect tenses and the Russian imperfective morphology to the English progressive tenses. Since in English we find context-sensitive alternations (e.g., *has broken* vs. *is breaking*, or *has played* vs. *is playing*), the Interference Hypothesis predicts similar alternations in American Russian. However, this is not what is found. As has been mentioned in Sect. 2.2 above, a given verb is typically retained in Heritage Russian (including American Russian) only in one form, either perfective or imperfective. Thus, we do not find the expected context sensitive alternations.

A weaker version of the Interference Hypothesis predicts that American Russian speakers would transfer only one of the English aspects: either they would use the imperfective in the same way that progressive is used in English or they would use the perfective in the same way that perfect is used in English. However, as I proceed to show immediately below, neither of these predictions is borne out.

Consider first the correlation between the Russian imperfective and the English progressive. Both can be used for ongoing dynamic events; however, the English progressive *-ing* cannot be used with stative verbs (hence, the ungrammaticality of *\*John is liking the borsch*). If American Russian used imperfective morphology in the same way as English uses the progressive, we would expect to find no imperfective stative verbs in American Russian. However, the exact opposite is found in American Russian: stative verbs are retained exclusively in the imperfective, even where CSR requires the perfective:

- (11) a. Heritage Russian (from Polinsky 1996)  
 my i videli ètot dom i my i ne ljubim tam  
 we and saw this house and we and not like.IMPF there
- b. CSR  
 my i videli ètot dom i nam ne ponravilos' tam  
 we and saw this house and us.DAT not pleased.PERF there  
 'we saw this house and we didn't like it there'
- c. English  
 \*we are not liking it there

Hence, American Russian speakers DO NOT assimilate the use of the imperfective morphology to that of the English progressive.

Now consider the putative correlation between the Russian perfective and the English perfect. The latter can be used to refer to the result state, as in *Barbara has painted her nails black*, which can be used to state that Barbara's nails are black. Thus, the following prediction emerges: American Russian speakers will use perfective to refer to the result state. Yet, again quite the opposite is true: American Russian speakers use stative imperfective forms (denoting the result state of a dynamic event) instead of the perfective,

which would be appropriate in the given context in CSR. For instance, in the example below the speaker describes his actions when invited for a job interview; instead of using the perfective forms *podstrič'sja* 'get a haircut' and *nadet'* 'put on' denoting non-habitual completed events, the speaker uses stative verbs *nosit'* 'wear' and *byt'* 'be' to denote the result states of his actions.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the putative correlation between the use of the perfective morphology and that of the English perfect is not found in American Russian.

(12) a. Heritage Russian

i budu **nosit'** korotkie volosy i ja budu s galstuk  
and will wear.IMPf short hair and I will-be with tie

b. CSR

ja **podstrigus'** i **nadenu** galstuk  
I will-get-haircut-self.PERF and will-put-on.PERF tie  
'I will get a haircut and will put on a tie'

What is remarkable is that speakers of Heritage Russian are shown to make the same types of errors with the same classes of verbs regardless of their level of proficiency in the ambient language, the length of exposure to or dominance of the ambient language, or the context of acquisition (ESL instruction vs. naturalistic exposure): the same types of errors were found in the speech of Heritage Russian speakers who are more or less proficient in English, those who were exposed to formal English classes and those who were not.

Furthermore, the Interference Hypothesis is also contradicted by the data involving speakers exposed to different ambient languages. Under the Interference Hypothesis, we expect to see a different pattern in aspectual marking among Heritage Russian speakers with different ambient languages. However, this expectation is also not met. Unfortunately, little is known about the aspectual systems in Israeli or Finland Russian (and further studies are necessary in this respect). However, Zemskaja and Glovinskaja (2001, 248) discuss a Heritage Russian speaker whose ambient language is not English and she makes the same types of errors in her Heritage Russian as do American Russian speakers (as described above). In particular, for the speaker discussed by Zemskaja and Glovinskaja (2001), a woman they refer to as AO, Heritage Russian is her third language in the order of dominance and very limited in scope, with Swedish being her most dominant language (e.g., she is reported to count in Swedish) and German being her second strongest and also the ambient language of her current environment (she was born in Germany but spent most of her childhood and youth in Sweden; she is married to a non-Russian-speaking German, with her formal education being partially in Swedish and partially in German).<sup>9</sup> For this speaker, potential interferences would be from Swedish and/or German, both of which have aspectual systems different from that of English; yet, AO makes the same types of errors with the same types of verbs as American Russian speakers described above do:

(13) a. Speaker AO (context: telling about one completed action)

ja **uveličivala** odnu fotografiju  
I enlarged.IMPf one photo

<sup>8</sup>The copula *byt'* is morphologically perfective, but semantically stative (cf. Franks 1995).

<sup>9</sup>This speaker belongs to the third-generation of the 1<sup>st</sup> wave of immigrants. For more details on her history and speech, see Zemskaja and Glovinskaja (2001, 241–256).

- b. CSR  
 Ja **uveličila** odnu fotografiju  
 I enlarged.PERF one photo  
 'I enlarged one photo'
- (14) a. Speaker AO (context: telling about her aunt's ability to draw)  
 ona tože **narisovala** xorošo  
 she too drew.PERF well
- b. CSR  
 ona tože **risovala** xorošo  
 she too drew.IMPF well  
 'she too drew well'

These mistakes can be compared to the very similar data from the American Russian corpus given below. 'Enlarge' is similar in its lexical semantics (except, of course, transitivity) to 'grow' and 'draw'—to 'write':

- (15) a. Heritage Russian (American Russian corpus)  
 esli ty *use natural fertilizers*, i u tebja èti cvety **rastet**  
 if you use natural fertilizers and by you these flowers grow.IMPF
- b. CSR  
 èti cvety **vyrastut**  
 these flowers grow.PERF  
 'if you use natural fertilizers, these flowers will grow'
- (16) a. Heritage Russian (American Russian corpus)  
 ona naučila menja **napisat'**  
 she taught.PERF me to-write.PERF
- b. CSR  
 ona naučila menja **pisat'**  
 she taught.PERF me to-write.IMPF  
 'she taught me how to write'

Finally, even monolingual speakers of Russian, both children and adults, presumably under no interference of other languages, often revert to using verbal aspectual morphology to encode lexical rather than grammatical aspect. This is very typical of children acquiring Russian in a monolingual environment, in particular, children in the so-called Optional Infinitive stage, namely the stage when infinitives are used instead of finite forms (this stage typically lasts between ages of 1;6 and 2;2). Although this stage is found in the development of various child languages, two important characteristics distinguish the Optional Infinitive stage in child Russian from that in child English or child Greek: first, in child Russian infinitives do not have a modal meaning; second, even in the infinitives aspectual opposition is retained. So what does the perfective-imperfective opposition encode at this stage of child Russian development? According to Gagarina (2000b, 157) and Gagarina (2003, 139), aspectual morphology at this stage denotes lexical rather than grammatical aspect (as it does in CSR). In particular, she also brings forward data that contradict earlier proposals by Brun (1999) and Brun et al. (1999), who claim that with infinitival verbs the aspectual morphology correlates with the temporal interpretation: "the events in the past tense are overwhelmingly expressed through the verbs in perfective aspect, while the present tense

interpretation is almost always expressed through imperfective verbs” (Brun 1999, 9). The following examples from Brun et al. (1999) illustrate their claim: in (17a) the perfective infinitive signifies a past tense interpretation, whereas in (17b) the imperfective infinitive signifies a present tense interpretation:

- (17) a. PERF = past interpretation  
 Sasha P. (1;8) after he had put on his pants:  
**odet'**  
 to-put-on.PERF  
 '(he) has put (the pants) on'
- b. IMPF = present interpretation  
 Sasha J. (1;6 / 2;4) describes the actions of his sister who is playing with her toy stroller in the same room:<sup>10</sup>  
**kačat'** koljasočku  
 to-swing.IMPF stroller.DIM  
 '(she) is swinging the stroller'

However, Gagarina shows that the choice of aspectual morphology does not always correlate with the temporal interpretation but always correlates with the lexical aspect of the verb. For instance, in (17a) *odet'* 'put on' and in (18a) *slomat'* 'break' denote bound events and therefore perfective is used, whereas *kačat'* 'swing' in (17b), and *guljat'* 'walk' and *exat'* 'go/drive' in (18b) denote non-bound events and therefore imperfective is used:

- (18) a. PERF but non-past interpretation  
 Vanja (2;2) starts to break a toy car door, commenting on his action:  
**sjamat'** (= *slomat'*)  
 break.PERF  
 '(I) am breaking (car door)'
- b. IMPF but past interpretation  
 Roma (age not indicated) describes how he went for a walk with daddy:  
**guljat'** papa, mašina exat'.  
 walk.IMPF daddy car go.IMPF  
 '(I) was walking (with) daddy, went (by) car'

Hence, I conclude that even without any possible interference from another language, monolingual children acquiring Russian make the same types of errors with the same types of verbs as do Heritage Russian speakers: both groups of speakers use aspectual morphology to encode lexical aspect rather than grammatical aspect. To conclude, the Interference Hypothesis makes wrong predictions with respect to the aspectual marking in Heritage Russian.<sup>11</sup> As has been concluded at the end of the previous section, the Frequency Hypothesis does not much better than the Interference Hypothesis.

<sup>10</sup>The first age indicated is the child's mental age and the second age is his physical age. The reader is referred to Brun et al. (1999) for discussion.

<sup>11</sup>This result is particularly interesting in the context of Bardovi-Harlig's (1992, 262) findings that interference from the speakers' first language does not play a role in the choice of aspectual forms by second language learners of English. Thus, it appears that neither the first language plays a role in the acquisition of the second, nor does the second language play a role in the attrition of the first, as far as aspect is concerned.

## 6 Conclusions

In this paper, I show that neither the frequency of aspectual forms in CSR nor the interference from the speakers' ambient language play an important role in the attrition of aspect in Heritage Russian. In this respect, attrition of aspect differs from lexical attrition, thus suggesting that aspect in Russian is a grammatical rather than lexical distinction.

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