

Morphosyntactic Variation in the Expression of Aspect: Heritage Russian

Heritage Russian (HR), a reduced variety of Russian spoken in the US by people who were born into households where Russian was spoken natively, but who over the years switched to English as their primary language, has been shown to differ from the baseline variety of Russian (BR) in many respects, including the expression of verbal aspectual distinctions. In recent studies of the restructuring of the aspectual system in HR (Polinsky, 1997; Pereltsvaig, 2002), it has been argued that the aspectual morphology in HR encodes the lexical properties of the Russian verbs (telicity), rather than grammatical aspect (perfectivity), and that the verbs in HR are retained in one form, either perfective or imperfective, depending on the inherent telicity of the verb root. This idea, captured as the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis (LAH) by Pereltsvaig, relies crucially on the following assumptions: (i) lexical aspect is a property of verbal roots, and (ii) the dominant language has no influence on the HR aspectual morphology.

The paper explores the aspectual morphology in the original data from 9 HR speakers collected via free speech elicitation (sociolinguistic interviews), story-telling (*The Three Bears* story), and controlled elicitation (sentence completion and construction). Although the HR data reveal some interesting differences from BR in the expression of aspectual distinctions, such as lack of certain perfective forms (e.g., inceptives) and the more general tendency for expressing the aspectual meaning analytically or periphrastically rather than synthetically, the overall conclusion is that the aspectual markers in HR are (i) not always restricted by the verb root and are prone to contextual alternations (examples 1-2), and (ii) are sensitive to the L2 influence.

The latter point is supported empirically with the results of the sentence construction task, aimed specifically at verbs denoting activities and accomplishments, as these predicates generally exhibit varying telicity in different contexts (Verkuyl, 1993; Kratzer, 2004; Slabakova, 2005), e.g., *to eat a sandwich in an hour* (telic)/ *for an hour* (atelic). The aspectual interpretations of these predicates often depend on the nature of the direct object in English, e.g. *John drank wine* (atelic) vs. *John drank a glass of wine* (telic), but not in Russian (Filip 2005). As predicted, the surrounding context (particularly, the specificity/definiteness of the direct object) was found to be relevant for the occurrence of the perfective morphology with these lexically unspecified, or [α telic], verbs.

The paper contributes to the on-going debate on the issue of internal vs. contact-induced changes in the development of a heritage grammar and provides a fresh insight into the complex interactions between (a)telicity and (im)perfectivity in the context of language change.

- (1) a. Ona **pechet** torty
she.Nom bake.IMP.3.Pres cakes.Acc.Pl
'She bakes cakes'
- b. Na den' rozhdenija mne nado **spech** tort
on day.Acc birth.Gen me.Dat need bake.PERF.Inf cake.Acc.Sg
'For my birthday I need to bake a cake'
- (2) Kto-to **kushal** moju kashu i vsjo **skushal**
someone eat.IMP.3.Past my.Acc.Sg porridge.Acc.Sg and all eat.PERF.3.Past
'Someone's been eating my porridge and they ate it all up'

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