



**Fathers and sons:  
Do Russians in the US  
all speak the same language?**



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## BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

**Послушаем...**



- С... сцена начинается ссс... # как кошка вытаскивает зайца из шапки, и потом волк сидит, смотрит, # он зритель. И он берет эту шапку и уб... убегает, потому что он хочет зайца вытащить из шапки и скушать его. Но оказывается, что # ну, шапка как бы волшебная. И он, как, не может зайца вытащить из шапки только длинную-длинную веревку вытаскивает.

## RECURRENT FEATURES

- short segments
- many pauses, incl. unexpected breaks
- impoverished morphology
- repetitions
- no/few embedded clauses
- ‘and then’ (*i, i potom, i vot*)

☞ sounds like ...

## SOUNDS LIKE...

- ...child language?
- ... uneducated speaker?

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☹ The language of the “sons” ☹

## WHAT NATIVE SPEAKERS SAY ABOUT “THE SONS”

- what they speak is not a real language...
- they better stay speaking English, because they are murdering the language of
  - Lao Tzu
  - Pushkin
  - Cervantes
  - Aristophanes
- there is nothing we can learn from observing these people ...

### LET'S REVISIT THESE COMMENTS

- What they speak is not a real language...  
What they speak *is* a real language

### LET'S REVISIT THESE COMMENTS

- What they speak is not a real language...  
What they speak *is* a real language
- They better stay speaking English, because they are murdering the language of Pushkin  
What they speak is not the language of Pushkin—  
but they can learn that one too

### LET'S GIVE THESE PEOPLE A NAME

- Old names: incomplete learners, semi-speakers, attriters
- New name: Heritage speakers

### LET'S GIVE THESE PEOPLE A NAME: HERITAGE LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

- A person who grew up hearing (and possibly speaking) a language, who can understand and perhaps speak it to some degree, but who now feels more at home in another, more dominant language

12

## HERITAGE LANGUAGE

- A language that an individual is exposed to during childhood, usually in the home, that s/he does not learn to “full capacity”
- Learning is interrupted by the switch to a different dominant language
- Terminological point: the language of exposure is the **baseline**,
  - **baseline is not necessarily the same as the standard** language—because heritage speakers usually have no schooling (Polinsky 2000, Polinsky & Kagan 2007)

13

## RUSSIAN TERMINOLOGY?

- Семейный язык
  - Домашний язык
  - Наследный язык
- } Heritage language

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- Семейный язык
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  - Второй родной
- } Heritage language
- ЛУРЫ: люди с унаследованным русским
  - «Наследники»

## RUSSIAN TERMINOLOGY?

- Семейный язык
  - Домашний язык
  - Наследный язык
  - Второй родной
- } Heritage language
- «Херитажники»—неблагозвучно, но очень популярно!

## WHAT THEY SPEAK IS A REAL LANGUAGE

## BIG QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to speak Russian?
- When is a person speaking *real* Russian and when is it something else?
- When it is something else, what is it, and does this phenomenon have anything to say to the study of human linguistic capacity?

## WHAT IS 'SOMETHING ELSE' ?



*Ruins of Russian?*  
a random  
collection of  
language chunks  
and pieces, not a  
complete  
language  
system...

## SYSTEMATIC ERRORS

- locative plural in *-ax* as generalized prepositional case
- neuter > feminine reanalysis

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Similar errors in child Russian and Russian dialects

### OVERGENERALIZED LOCATIVE PLURAL

- Heritage Russian
  - к соседах, ... с друзьями* (American Russian)—  
expected: *к соседям, с друзьями*
  - пять мовшехах, с олиманх* (Israeli Russian)—  
expected: *мовшехов* 'computers, *с олимани*
  - за собачках, без подарках* (German Russian)  
expected: *за собачками, без подарков*

### OVERGENERALIZED LOCATIVE PLURAL

- Heritage Russian
- Dialects: *без сапогах* 'without boots',  
*за девках* 'for the girls' (Avanesov 1972)
- Child language: *с яблочках, без конфетках*  
(Gvozdev 1961)

### WHY THIS FORM?

- It is very salient (easy to hear)
- It is more frequent than other salient forms (e.g., instrumental –*ами*)
- It shows no variation—compare with the genitive:
  - город**ОВ**
  - двер**ЕЙ**
  - денег-**Ø**

## GENDER ERRORS: *neuter > fem*

- Heritage Russian:  
*моя полотенц[ə]* 'my towel'  
*какая яблок[ə]* 'which apple'  
*большая облак[ə]* 'large cloud'

## GENDER ERRORS: *neuter > fem*

- Heritage Russian:  
*моя полотенц[ə]* 'my towel'  
*etc.*
- Non-standard dialects:  
*снять гумну* (< гумно) 'cut the field'  
*строения* (< строение) *какая* 'what building'
- Child language:  
*дай яичку* 'give me an egg'  
*за моей одеялой* 'for my blanket'

## WHY THIS CHANGE?

- Neuter changes to feminine  
– But not the other way around
- Feminines in soft consonant (*тетрадь, соль*)  
change to masculine  
– But not the other way around
- Why?

## WHY THIS CHANGE?

- Neuter nouns are less common than feminine nouns, so heritage speakers assimilate them to feminine nouns

## WHY THIS CHANGE?

- What a native speaker does:
    - Native speaker has access to cases
    - If a noun ends in a vowel without stress, check its genitive case
  - What a heritage speaker does:
    - Heritage does not connect gender and declension
    - If a noun ends in a vowel without stress, it is feminine
- яблоко*~ *яблока*→ Neuter    *МОЯ МАМА*  
*груша*~ *груши*→ Feminine    *МОЯ ЯБЛОКА*

## SYSTEMATIC CHANGE

- Heritage speakers who are less fluent have only two genders:
  - Nouns ending in a vowel (*МОЯ.....*)
  - Nouns ending in a consonant (*МОЙ...*)
- More fluent heritage speakers have three genders but their neuter only includes end-stressed nouns (*ОКНО, МОЛОКО*)

## CORRELATION WITH PROFICIENCY

### *Basic generalizations:*

- significant variation across heritage speakers
- fuzzy boundaries between heritage speakers and 'true' bilinguals

## HOW HERITAGE SPEAKERS DIFFER

- Production range: from less fluent to more fluent
  - Segment length
  - Deviations from the baseline
  - Amount of repetitive material
  - Length of pauses
  - Knowledge of words

## IDENTIFYING HERITAGE SPEAKERS

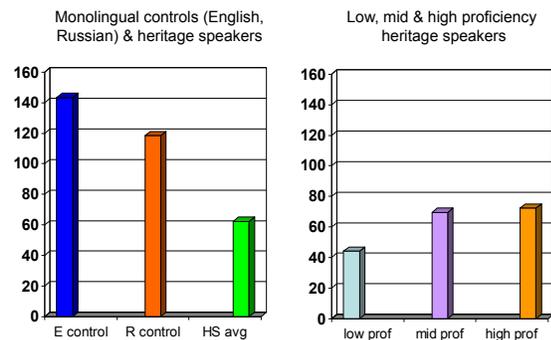
### *Biographical characteristics:*

- Age of interruption  
(Polinsky 2005)
- Duration of schooling  
(Kagan & Friedman 2005)
- Separation from the speech community

## IDENTIFYING HERITAGE SPEAKERS

- Linguistic characteristics: can we more effectively classify heritage speakers in terms of their linguistic knowledge?
- Speech rate (words per minute)

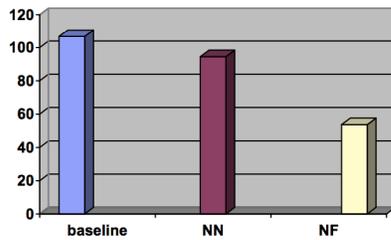
## SPEECH RATE (WORD/MIN)



## SPEECH RATE

- Low level proficiency speakers are at 30% of normal speech rate  
mainly due to difficulty in lexical access
- Speech rate significantly correlates with some measures of grammatical proficiency (e.g., two gender system—Polinsky 2008)
- Speech rate seems to be an accurate measure of relative proficiency among HSs

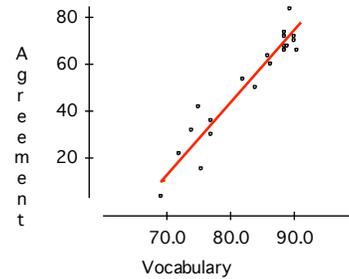
## BACK TO GNDERES: NEUTER-FEMININE ASSIMILATION



Rate of speech (wrds/min) in baseline controls, speakers who maintained end-stressed neuters (NN), and speakers who treated all neuters as feminines (NF)

## LEXICAL PROFICIENCY, RUSSIAN

Correlation between lexical knowledge and control of grammatical agreement (.882)



## LEXICAL PROFICIENCY

- Lexical proficiency strongly correlates with grammatical proficiency
- Lexical knowledge is a good preliminary measure of heritage speaker's proficiency
- HS range: 30-70% of basic word list

## INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

- Heritage speakers speak a real language
- But this language is different from the language of Pushkin or of their fathers
  - It is built according to a system of rules
  - Understanding these rules would help us understand the differences between the "fathers" and "sons"

**NO NEED TO STICK TO  
ENGLISH: THEY CAN LEARN  
TO SPEAK LIKE “FATHERS”**

### **SOME MYTHS ABOUT (RE-)LEARNING**

- Myth 1: They already understand everything
- Myth 2: If you correct them often enough they will learn

### **THE MYTH OF UNDERSTANDING**

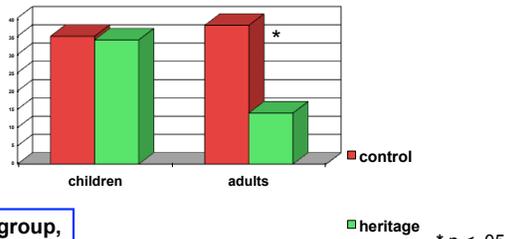
- Heritage speakers understand contextually established interactions
- When faced with ambiguity or cultural references heritage speakers experience serious difficulties

### **RELATIVE CLAUSES**

*Где собака, которую догоняет кошка?*



### OBJECT RELATIVE CLAUSE COMPREHENSION: TOKENS CORRECT, RUSSIAN (items)



N=18/group,  
children @ 6.5,  
adults @ 28

### THE CORRECTION MYTH

- P: А вот идет дядя без велосипедах
- M: Дядя без велосипеда
- P: Почему без велосипедах?
- M: Без велосипеда
- P: Почему он без велосипедах?
- M: скажи «без велосипеда»
- P: Почему он приходит пешком?

### THE CORRECTION MYTH

- Correction in early L1 acquisition is known to be useless
- Correction makes heritage speakers feel insecure in their less dominant language, hence more reluctant to speak
- Correction focuses on micro-learning, while heritage speakers respond well to macro-learning (Kagan 2009, Kagan and Dillon 2010)

### SOME TRUTHS ABOUT (RE-)LEARNING

- Truth #1: If they learn to read they will speak better
- Truth #2: The more they they realize how much they can do the better they get

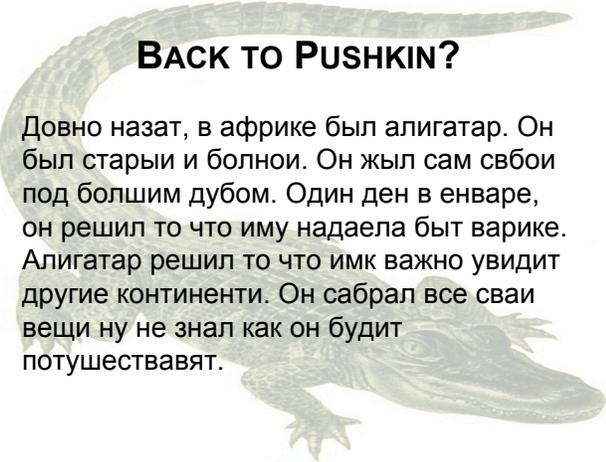
### THE TRUTH ABOUT READING

- Small but highly reliable increments in word knowledge due to reading at all grade and ability levels
- Likelihood of learning an unfamiliar word while reading: about 1 in 20.
- The likelihood increased to 1 in 10 when children were reading easy narratives (Anderson 1996)

### THE TRUTH ABOUT READING

- Reading increases word knowledge
- Word knowledge is highly correlated with grammatical ability
- The ease of reading is important, therefore, heritage speakers should be read to and should be exposed to simple short narratives at early stages

### BACK TO PUSHKIN?



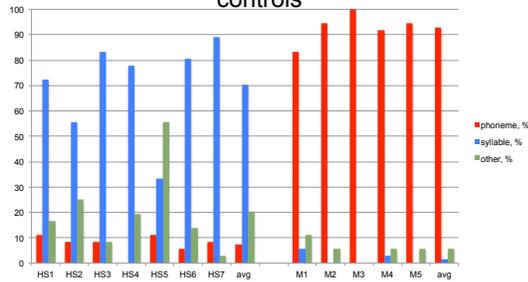
Довно назат, в африке был алигатар. Он был старый и болной. Он жыл сам свбои под болшим дубом. Один ден в енваре, он решил то что ему надаела быт варике. Алигатар решил то что имк важно увидит другие континенти. Он сабрал все сваи вещи ну не знал как он будит потушествовать.

### Literacy development

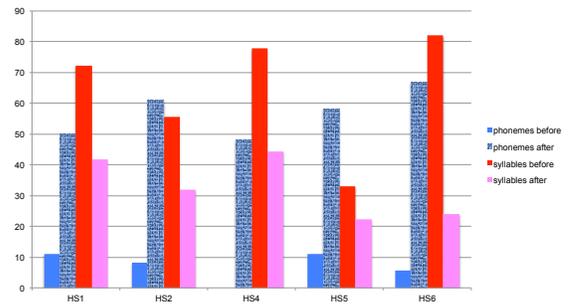
- Tapping: tap for each sound of the word
  - скрепа
  - грекса

## Tapping: Heritage vs. Controls

percentages; 7 HS, prior to instruction, 5 native controls



## Effect of instruction!



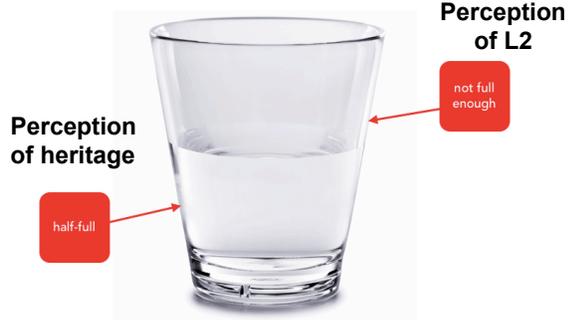
## YES, BACK TO PUSHKIN

Мои бабушки и дедушки тоже легко цитируют те стихи которые мы читаем, но не с особенной любовью к словам, а с простой гордостью что всё таки помнят как будто готовы что бы кто-то им пятёрку вручил. Я лично, в школе тоже некоторые стихи запоминал; конечно не в таком количестве как в Советском Союзе, но мы стихи тоже наизусть учили...

## THE TRUTH ABOUT POSITIVE FEEDBACK

- Many heritage speakers are reluctant to speak in the presence of native speakers
  - Anxiety over mistakes
  - Impatience on part of native speakers
  - Discomfort with pragmatic and cultural norms (Dubinina 2012)

## DAUNTING DICHOTOMY



## THE TRUTH ABOUT POSITIVE FEEDBACK

- A daunting dichotomy:
  - L2 learners are celebrated when they make baby steps
  - Heritage speakers are admonished when they make tiny mistakes
- Reasonable positive feedback (or smaller amounts of negative feedback) provides essential reinforcement in the value of the language and in one's skills

- Heritage speakers better stay speaking English, because they are murdering the language of Pushkin
- What they speak is not the language of Pushkin—but they can learn that one too
- We need to be their partners, not adversaries, in that learning or re-learning

## TAKING STOCK

- A heritage language is a coherent system operating on its own principles

## Heritage language as a system?



- *Null Hypothesis*: heritage speakers do not control a comprehensive language system; instead, they retain a random collection of “language chunks”

## What exactly do they know?



- An incomplete grammar differs from the grammar of the respective full language in a systematic, rather than random way
- Recurrent structural similarities across incompletely acquired languages  
(Polinsky 1997, 2000, 2006)

## TAKING STOCK

- Heritage speakers are bilinguals who have re-analyzed the home language into a new grammatical system
- Unlike their parents, they need to learn the parental language as a separate system
- Let’s give them a chance!

Thank you  
Спасибо  
*Сп ас нѵа*