

THE PROBLEM OF INCOMPLETE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND HERITAGE LANGUAGES

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The problem of incomplete language acquisition and heritage languages is approached from several perspectives: who are heritage speakers, how are they different from native speakers and L2 learners, is heritage language a particular system? This article aims at answering these and other questions focusing on constructional deviations in the output of heritage speakers and linguistic strategies that these speakers perform in their production. The research is corpus-based and offers a thorough comparative analysis of English and Russian constructions.

There are distinctive phonological aspects between the Russian and English languages. The Russian language consists of 33 consonants and 5 vowels. The following English phonemes are not present in Russian: /w θ ð ŋ h/ (Gildersleeve-Neumann & Wright, 2010). Most of the Russian consonants are differentiated by a palatalization feature, which is one of the most complex and important aspects of Russian phonology that distinguishes the Russian language from the English language (Zharkova, 2005). Another key difference is the lack of voicing of final obstruents (i.e., a fricative or plosive speech sound), whereas final obstruents may be voiced or unvoiced in English. There is a larger variety of dorsal and palatal sounds in Russian, and there are almost double the amount of Russian stops and nasals used phonemically as compared to English (Gildersleeve-Neumann & Wright, 2010). In regards to vowels, the 5 vowel phonemes in Russian form a vowel system that is simpler than the English vowel system, which consists of 15 vowel sounds. There is also a tense/lax vowel contrast in English that is not present in Russian (Gildersleeve-Neumann & Wright, 2010). Another area of difference between Russian and English is in syllable and word shape patterns. While English has a prevalence of one-syllable words, most Russian words are two to three syllables and often range to as many as eight syllables (Gildersleeve-Neumann &

Wright, 2010). Additionally, sequences of a few consonants together occur frequently in Russian summarize the comparison between Russian and English phonology:

Russian has a more complex consonant inventory and a much smaller and simpler phonemic vowel inventory than English. On average, words in Russian have more syllables, more varied stress patterns, and more articulatorily complex consonant segments than those in English. It is these areas of difference then that could be expected to influence English phonological acquisition in Russian-English children.

There are presently two main understandings of who heritage speakers are. The broad definition treats heritage speakers as individuals who are born in immigration, who do not speak or understand the language of their native country and who are motivated to study the language because of his or her family ties. This understanding, however, is not relevant linguistically because it does not draw any line between heritage and L2 learners. In this research we operate with another, narrower definition. According to [Kagan, Dillon 2006], [Polinsky, Kagan 2007] and others heritage speakers are unstable bilinguals whose parents emigrated to a country where the majority language is different from their native one, which leads to a partial loss of proficiency in the first language under the heavy influence of the dominant second language. Such impoverishment has been the subject of particular interest among linguists over the past decade, however, few studies have directed their attention to mechanisms leading to the reduction in lexical and grammatical systems of heritage languages and the strategies that heritage speakers resort to when they are urged to go beyond those limitations. The traditional approach taken in these works is experimental and tests for comprehension rather than production. There are quite clear reasons for this: production mistakes in free speech are extremely hard to provoke experimentally.

Bilingualism may affect both acquisition of the second language and maintenance of the first language. There is evidence that bilinguals whose second language has become their dominant language translate basic words from the dominant language

to the non-dominant language and vice versa with the same speed (Kalyuga, 1999). However, abstract words do not follow the same pattern. Words with abstract meanings are more difficult for bilingual children. Words with simple meanings, phonological shape, and morphemic structure are the most common in the vocabulary of bilingual children (Kalyuga, 1999). In a study about lexical errors made by Russian-English bilingual children, Kalyuga (1999) examined the types of lexical errors made by children who have switched their dominant language from Russian to English by distributing surveys. Results revealed that, overall, bilingual children's Russian vocabulary was smaller than that of monolingual peers, and errors in speech persevered longer. Also Lexical errors of Russian in bilingual children can be caused by underdeveloped skills in Russian and by the influence of English (Kalyuga, 1999). Those errors caused by underdeveloped skills in Russian are similar to the errors made by monolingual speakers, and errors in bilinguals' speech may be sustained longer because their use of Russian is restricted. For instance, bilingual children may not know some words or may make errors in words that are already familiar to their monolingual peers.

Heritage speakers present a peculiar phenomenon among non-standard speakers of a language. They are often compared with regular learners of a foreign language because they have at least two languages at their disposal and they are not proficient enough in one of them. However, they have a number of distinctive features. Heritage speakers are often called creative with language when they come to a classroom to improve their mother tongue. In this paper we show that there are certain general prerequisites for this from the point of view of theoretical linguistics. Among these are:

- a) readiness to invent new constructions, absent in both Heritage and dominant English —we call this strategy non-calquing;
- b) specificity of language interference: partial calquing (semi-calquing) and selective motivated calquing with direct borrowings from the dominant language;
- c) the basic principle of compositionality preference with every type of linguistic strategy.

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