

A Study of Language Attrition: American Russian in Minnesota

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American Russian (AR) is a variety of Russian spoken in the US by people who acquired Russian as their first language but subsequently replaced it with English as their primary or dominant language*. AR has been described as a “severely reduced” or “highly impoverished” language variety characterized by “profound structural changes” (Pereltsvaig, 2004a; Polinsky, 1996), as compared to Standard Russian (SR), spoken natively by people whose first and primary language continues to be Russian.

It is commonly acknowledged that AR is undergoing a gradual process of language change known as attrition – a phenomenon characterized by the loss of vocabulary and simplification of structure. The literature on first language attrition presents two hypotheses about the motivation for linguistic changes in a language undergoing attrition. On the one hand, L1 attrition can be viewed as a process of convergence towards an L2. It has been proposed that attrition in L1 is influenced by the dominant (or interfering) language L2 in that the rules of L2 gradually replace the rules of L1 via the process of *transfer*. This explanation has been referred to as the cross-linguistic influence (CLI) hypothesis (Sharwood Smith, 1983). Although the hypothesis has received considerable empirical support, it has not been shown to apply uniformly to all domains of language change under attrition; as Köpke & Schmid write, “it remains to be elucidated in which cases the CLI hypothesis applies to attrition, and in which cases it does not” and, further, “it is not clear whether specific linguistic domains of L1, like the lexico-semantic domain for instance, are more susceptible to influence by the L2 than others, such as morphology for example” (Köpke & Schmid, 2004, p. 12). On the other hand, it has been suggested that “language change – albeit observed in language contact settings – is *language internal*” (Köpke & Schmid, 2004, p. 11), and the linguistic modifications are “motivated by universal principles” or “related to some fact in the particular grammar of L1” (Seliger & Vago, 1991, p. 10). Under this hypothesis, attrition is ascribed primarily to non-use and insufficient contact with L1.

While it is generally acknowledged that AR is undergoing attrition, or “decay” (Nemtchinova, 2005, p. 3), and for some scholars, even language death (Polinsky, 1996), there seems to be little agreement as to the motivation for the attrition. Both

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external and internal motivation hypotheses have been explored to account for attrition in AR. Benson (1969, p. 163), for instance, discusses what he calls “differences in the extent of *English linguistic penetration* among various speakers” and further makes some statements to imply that the characteristic features of AR are largely a consequence of English influence: “...there are those whose Russian has been so *corrupted* that much of it would be incomprehensible to a monolingual speaker of Soviet Standard Russian (SR)”; “[t]he *degree of English influence* on the speech of an individual immigrant is obviously determined by several factors...” (*italics mine*). On the other side of the debate, “limited exposure” to and “insufficient schooling” in Russian (Nemtchinova, 2005, p. 2) are taken to be the primary reasons for attrition. Polinsky (1996), for instance, argues that the change in AR is “motivated by some universal principles” and “cannot be explained by the influence of English” (p. 86).

The goal of the present study is to investigate the attrition phenomena that are responsible for the fact that AR is defined as a reduced variety of SR. In accounting for these phenomena, the study will attempt to raise a larger question about the nature of language change in AR: are we really dealing with a case of language change where the shift is induced *internally* and motivated by some universal principles, or is the attrition caused to a larger extent *externally* by the direct influence from the interfering language (English)? The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 describes the methodology and provides some necessary background on the speakers consulted for the study. Section 2 discusses the lexical changes in AR; structural changes are addressed in Section 3. Section 4 presents a brief summary of findings.

1. Methodology

The material for the study has been collected from six speakers of AR residing in Minneapolis, MN – three males and three females. The informants came to the US as monolingual speakers of Russian at ages 5 through 10. They are now in their early and mid- twenties¹ and are fully fluent in English, which is now their dominant language. All of the informants had little or no formal schooling in Russian; currently, they use Russian primarily to communicate with their non-English-speaking relatives (mainly, grandparents). When communicating at home with their English-speaking relatives, most informants admit to responding in English even when addressed in Russian. The material has been collected through elicitation of words and stories, as well as from free conversations on various topics (e.g., current events, cultural differences, friends, education, family) in an informal setting. The methods used for collecting data focus on measuring attrition at the level of performance rather than the competence level of the speakers². The data have been collected and analyzed by the author, a native speaker of SR.

2. Changes in the Lexicon

Deficiency of the lexicon has been argued to be one of the major features of AR: the speakers usually lack portions of the SR vocabulary and frequently misuse words in the remaining portions (Polinsky, 1996). This observation has been confirmed both by the vocabulary experiment and the data derived from the informal conversations.

¹ Studies on L1 attrition generally report an 8-year stay in an L2-dominant environment as a condition for attrition (Jamshidiha, H. & Marefat, H., 2006, p. 26); the informants were initially selected with this criterion in mind.

² See Sharwood Smith (1983) on the competence/performance distinction and the three stages of language attrition. Because the earliest stage of L1 attrition is usually restricted to performance deviations, designing the study around performance makes it possible to detect the earliest signs of attrition in the speech of the informants.

2.1 Vocabulary Test

The test has been modeled after the experiment described in Polinsky (1996). The subjects were asked to translate the basic vocabulary list (the Swadesh list), consisting of 100 words, from English into Russian. The findings are shown in Tables (1-6) below: the leftmost column lists the items that the speakers were unable to recall, the central column lists incorrect translations (e.g., the word *cloud* ‘oblako’ translated as *nebo* ‘sky’), and the rightmost column lists incorrect word forms (e.g., plural forms given for singular nouns), including incorrect citation forms³ (e.g., Feminine and Neuter adjective forms, all non-Imperfective forms for verbs, non-Nominative case marking on the noun). Overall, the results of the vocabulary test described in the present study closely correlate with the findings reported in Polinsky’s (1996). The nature of errors appears to be largely the same in both experiments: the three most common cases among the incorrect citation forms in Polinsky’s study are “the wrong form of the adjective ..., the plural instead of the singular form of the noun ..., and the incorrect aspectual form of the verb” (p. 18) – cf. the third column in Tables (1-6) below⁴.

(1) Table 1: Speaker 1 (male)

Not recalled	Incorrect words			Incorrect forms		
	Eng	AR	SR	Eng	AR	SR
<i>feather</i>	<i>not</i>	net <i>no</i>	ne	<i>lie</i>	nepravdu <i>N Acc</i>	lozh <i>N Nom</i>
<i>ashes</i>	<i>die</i>	mertvyj	umirat’	<i>egg</i>	jaitsa <i>Pl</i>	jaitso <i>Sg</i>
<i>horn</i>		dead <i>Adj</i>		<i>eye</i>	glaza <i>Pl</i>	glaz <i>Sg</i>
<i>louse</i>	<i>come</i>	idi go <i>I</i>	prihodit’	<i>seed</i>	semena <i>Pl</i>	semja <i>Sg</i>
	<i>neck</i>	gorlo	sheja	<i>stand</i>	stoj <i>I</i>	stojat’ <i>Inf</i>
		throat		<i>say</i>	skazhi <i>I Perf</i>	govorit’ <i>Imp</i>
	<i>path</i>	put’ way	tropa	<i>see</i>	posmotri <i>I Perf</i>	videt’ <i>Imp</i>
	<i>claw</i>	nogti <i>nails</i>	kogot’	<i>bite</i>	ukusi <i>I Perf</i>	kusat’ <i>Imp</i>
	<i>flesh</i>	telo <i>body</i>	plot’	<i>sit</i>	sest’ <i>Perf</i>	sidet’ <i>Imp</i>
	<i>hear</i>	slushat’	slyshat’	<i>give</i>	daj <i>I Perf</i>	davat’ <i>Imp</i>
		listen		<i>kill</i>	ubju <i>Fut Perf</i>	ubivat’ <i>Imp</i>
	<i>grease</i>	maslenaja	zhir	<i>burn</i>	podzhech <i>Perf</i>	zhech <i>Imp</i>
		<i>oily Fem</i>		<i>green</i>	zelenaja <i>Fem</i>	zelenyi <i>Masc</i>
				<i>long</i>	dlinnaja <i>Fem</i>	dlinnyi <i>Masc</i>
				<i>new</i>	novaja <i>Fem</i>	novyj <i>Masc</i>
				<i>red</i>	krasnaja <i>Fem</i>	krasnyj <i>Masc</i>
				<i>small</i>	malen’kaja <i>Fem</i>	malen’kij <i>Masc</i>
				<i>white</i>	belaja <i>Fem</i>	belyj <i>Masc</i>
				<i>yellow</i>	zheltaja <i>Fem</i>	zheltyj <i>Masc</i>
				<i>full</i>	polnaja <i>Fem</i>	polnyi <i>Masc</i>
				<i>cold</i>	holodno <i>Adv</i>	holodnyi <i>Adj</i>
				<i>hot</i>	gorjacho <i>Adv</i>	gorjachij <i>Adj</i>
				<i>good</i>	xorosho <i>Adv</i>	horoshij <i>Adj</i>
				<i>eat</i>	kushaj <i>Col I</i>	est’ <i>Stan Imp</i>
				<i>leaf</i>	listik <i>Col</i>	list <i>Stan</i>
				<i>bone</i>	kostochka <i>Col</i>	kost’ <i>Stan</i>

³ SR has the following citation forms for the relevant word classes: Masculine gender for adjectives, Imperfective aspect for verbs, and Nominative case for nouns. The variation of citation forms has been argued to be an important indicator of attrition. See Polinsky (1996, pp. 15-18) for discussion.

⁴ The following abbreviations are used in the Tables and throughout the paper: *Fem* – Feminine, *Masc* – Masculine, *Neut* – Neuter, *Pl* – Plural, *Sg* – Singular, *Result* – Resultative, *Imp* – Imperfective, *Inf* – Infinitive, *Perf* – Perfective, *I* – Imperative, *Adv* – Adverb, *Adj* – Adjective, *Col* – Colloquial, *Stan* – Standard, *N* – Noun, *Acc* – Accusative, *Nom* – Nominative, *Fut* – Future.

(2) Table 2: Speaker 2 (male)

Not recalled	Incorrect words			Incorrect forms		
	Eng	AR	SR	Eng	AR	SR
<i>feather</i> <i>louse</i>	<i>ashes</i> <i>flesh</i> <i>cloud</i> <i>come</i> <i>grease</i> <i>seed</i>	<i>ugol' coal</i> <i>telo body</i> <i>nebo sky</i> <i>idti go</i> <i>maslo oil</i> <i>zerno crop</i>	<i>pepel</i> <i>plot'</i> <i>oblako</i> <i>prihodit'</i> <i>zhir</i> <i>semja</i>	<i>white</i> <i>yellow</i> <i>egg</i> <i>sit</i> <i>good</i> <i>hot</i> <i>liver</i>	<i>belaja Fem</i> <i>zheltaja Fem</i> <i>jaitsa Pl</i> <i>saditsja Result</i> <i>horosho Adv</i> <i>zharko Adv</i> <i>pechonka Col</i>	<i>belyj Masc</i> <i>zheltyj Masc</i> <i>jaitso Sg</i> <i>sidet' Imp</i> <i>horoshij Adj</i> <i>gorjachij Adj</i> <i>pechen' Stan</i>

(3) Table 3: Speaker 3 (female)

Not recalled	Incorrect words			Incorrect forms		
	Eng	AR	SR	Eng	AR	SR
<i>bone</i> <i>foot</i> <i>mountain</i> <i>tree</i> <i>cloud</i> <i>feather</i> <i>full</i> <i>path</i> <i>root</i> <i>sand</i> <i>star</i> <i>stone</i> <i>tooth</i> <i>ashes</i> <i>breast</i> <i>burn</i> <i>claw</i> <i>flesh</i> <i>horn</i> <i>liver</i> <i>louse</i> <i>seed</i>	<i>earth</i> <i>not</i> <i>that</i> <i>come</i>	<i>mir world</i> <i>net no</i> <i>eto this</i> <i>idi go</i>	<i>zemlja</i> <i>ne</i> <i>to</i> <i>prihodit'</i>	<i>egg</i> <i>give</i> <i>kill</i> <i>say</i> <i>see</i> <i>stand</i> <i>white</i> <i>yellow</i> <i>hot</i> <i>eat</i> <i>good</i>	<i>jaitsa Pl</i> <i>dat' Perf</i> <i>ubit' Perf</i> <i>skazat' Perf</i> <i>uvidet' Perf</i> <i>vstavat' Result</i> <i>belaja Fem</i> <i>zheltaja Fem</i> <i>gorjachaja Fem</i> <i>kushat' Col</i> <i>horosho Adv</i>	<i>jaitso Sg</i> <i>davat' Imp</i> <i>ubivat' Imp</i> <i>govorit' Imp</i> <i>videt' Imp</i> <i>stojat' Imp</i> <i>belyj Masc</i> <i>zheltyj Masc</i> <i>gorjachij Masc</i> <i>est' Stan</i> <i>horoshij Adj</i>

(4) Table 4: Speaker 4 (female)

Not recalled	Incorrect words			Incorrect forms		
	Eng	AR	SR	Eng	AR	SR
<i>grease</i> <i>claw</i> <i>louse</i>	<i>earth</i> <i>not</i> <i>come</i> <i>path</i> <i>flesh</i>	<i>mir world</i> <i>net no</i> <i>idti go</i> <i>put' way</i> <i>kozha skin</i>	<i>zemlja</i> <i>ne</i> <i>prihodit'</i> <i>tropa</i> <i>plot'</i>	<i>stand</i> <i>give</i> <i>kill</i> <i>die</i> <i>say</i> <i>see</i> <i>green</i> <i>white</i> <i>yellow</i> <i>red</i> <i>long</i> <i>new</i> <i>small</i> <i>full</i> <i>good</i> <i>cold</i> <i>hot</i> <i>eat</i>	<i>vstavat' Perf</i> <i>dat' Perf</i> <i>ubit' Perf</i> <i>umeret' Perf</i> <i>skazat' Perf</i> <i>uvidet' Perf</i> <i>zelenaja Fem</i> <i>belaja Fem</i> <i>zheltaja Fem</i> <i>krasnaja Fem</i> <i>dlinnaja Fem</i> <i>novaja Fem</i> <i>malen'kaja Fem</i> <i>polnaja Fem</i> <i>horoshaja Fem</i> <i>holodno Adv</i> <i>gorjacho Adv</i> <i>kushat' Col</i>	<i>stojat' Imp</i> <i>davat' Imp</i> <i>ubivat' Imp</i> <i>umirat' Imp</i> <i>govorit' Imp</i> <i>videt' Imp</i> <i>zelenyj Masc</i> <i>belyj Masc</i> <i>zheltyj Masc</i> <i>krasnyj Masc</i> <i>dlinnyj Masc</i> <i>novyj Masc</i> <i>malen'kij Masc</i> <i>polnyj Masc</i> <i>horoshij Masc</i> <i>holodnyj Adj</i> <i>gorjachij Adj</i> <i>est' Stan</i>

(5) Table 5: Speaker 5 (female)

Not recalled	Incorrect words			Incorrect forms		
	Eng	AR	SR	Eng	AR	SR
<i>claw</i> <i>louse</i>	<i>not</i> <i>that</i> <i>die</i> <i>path</i> <i>flesh</i>	net <i>no</i> eto <i>this</i> smert' <i>death</i> doroga <i>road</i> telo <i>body</i>	ne to umirat' tropa plot'	<i>come</i> <i>kill</i> <i>say</i> <i>big</i> <i>black</i> <i>green</i> <i>new</i> <i>white</i> <i>yellow</i> <i>cold</i> <i>full</i> <i>hot</i> <i>good</i> <i>eat</i>	prijiti <i>Perf</i> ubit' <i>Perf</i> skazat' <i>Perf</i> bol'shoe <i>Neut</i> chernaja <i>Fem</i> zelenaja <i>Fem</i> novaja <i>Fem</i> belaja <i>Fem</i> zheltaja <i>Fem</i> holodnaja <i>Fem</i> polnaja <i>Fem</i> gorjachaja <i>Fem</i> horoshaja <i>Fem</i> kushat' <i>Col</i>	prihodit' <i>Imp</i> ubivat' <i>Imp</i> govorit' <i>Imp</i> bol'shoj <i>Masc</i> chernyj <i>Masc</i> zelenyi <i>Masc</i> novyj <i>Masc</i> belyj <i>Masc</i> zheltyj <i>Masc</i> holodnyj <i>Masc</i> polnyj <i>Masc</i> gorjachij <i>Masc</i> horoshyj <i>Masc</i> est' <i>Stan</i>

(6) Table 6: Speaker 6 (male)

Not recalled	Incorrect words			Incorrect forms		
	Eng	AR	SR	Eng	AR	SR
<i>ashes</i>	<i>grease</i> <i>not</i> <i>flesh</i> <i>that</i>	grjaz' <i>dirt</i> net <i>no</i> mjaso <i>meat</i> ono <i>it</i>	zhir ne plot' to	<i>louse</i> <i>seed</i> <i>die</i> <i>give</i> <i>kill</i> <i>burn</i> <i>come</i> <i>bite</i> <i>green</i> <i>new</i> <i>cold</i> <i>hot</i>	vshi <i>Pl</i> semena <i>Pl</i> umeret' <i>Perf</i> dat' <i>Perf</i> ubit' <i>Perf</i> ozhech <i>Perf</i> pridi <i>I Perf</i> ukusit' <i>Perf</i> zelenaja <i>Fem</i> novaja <i>Fem</i> holodno <i>Adv</i> gorjacho <i>Adv</i>	vosh <i>Sg</i> semja <i>Sg</i> umirat' <i>Imp</i> davat' <i>Imp</i> ubivat' <i>Imp</i> zhech <i>Imp</i> prihodit' <i>Imp</i> kusat' <i>Imp</i> zelenyi <i>Masc</i> novyj <i>Masc</i> holodnyj <i>Adj</i> goryachij <i>Adj</i>

The results of the test are consistent with the general tendencies of language change in the context of attrition outlined in previous studies. For instance, Schmid (2002, p.16) points out that attrition most often leads to the following processes: reduction in registers (cf. the colloquial forms *listik*, *pechonka*, *kostochka*, *kushat'* offered by the informants in place of the standard SR forms – a finding not entirely surprising given that the speakers' contact with L1 is restricted to the home/family domain where colloquial forms are likely to be used most often), lexicon reduction, affecting first and foremost low-frequency items (cf. the forms in the first column above), and a reduction in morphological complexity (to be discussed in Section 3 below).

2.2 Conversations

A characteristic feature of the AR speech that reflects changes taking place in the lexicon is the frequent misuse of words – i.e., correct Russian words being used in an “incorrect” context. If these changes are caused by a direct interference from English, we can expect to find traces of such interference in the data. Consider the following examples, recorded during informal conversations and illustrating the phenomenon of misuse in the speech of the informants:

- (7) povar.. ona zastavljala shtoby ja vsjo... dolzhen **zakonchit'** (cf. SR *dojest'*)
 cook she made-Fem that I all must finish
 “The cook would make me finish all [my food]”

- (8) ja uzhe zakanchivau **shkolu** na god ran'she... (cf. SR *universitet*)
 I already finish-Imp school on year earlier
 "I am already finishing college a year earlier..."
- (9) printsessa **v lubvi** s... (cf. SR *lubila*...)
 princess in love with
 "Princess was in love with..."

The above examples illustrate a general pattern observed in the data: the misused SR words almost always receive the meanings of their English equivalents via the process of semantic extension. Only one example of misuse that cannot be explained by the CLI hypothesis has been found in the data: the word *skazka* 'fairy-tale' was used instead of *istorija* 'story' without any apparent influence from English:

- (10) ... hotel rasskazat' eshe odnu **skazku**
 wanted tell-Perf more one fairy-tale
 "[I] wanted to tell you one more story"

Under the hypothesis that attrition in AR is a result of some internal principles – e.g., forgetting the vocabulary due to disuse – we could expect to find more than one example of word misuse that cannot be attributed to L2 influence. It thus seems plausible to suggest that in the area of the lexicon, the change in AR is to a very large extent induced externally.

A special case of word misuse is misuse of prepositions, which occupy an intermediate position between the lexicon and the grammar. Several instances of such misuse were discovered in the data:

- (11) **na** pjatom klasse (cf. SR 'v pjatom klasse')
 on fifth grade
 "In fifth grade"
- (12) ja zapominal knigi slovo **na** slovo (cf. SR 'slovo v slovo')
 I memorized-Imp books word on word
 "I used to memorize books word for word"
- (13) mne inogda nraivitsja govorit' frazy **po** drugim jazykam
 me.Dat sometimes like-3Sg.Refl speak phrases in other languages.Dat
 "I sometimes like to say phrases in other languages"
 (cf. SR '**na** drugih jazykax' Loc)
- (14) pervyj **cherez** dvenadtsatyj klass (cf. SR 's pervogo **po** dvenadtsatyj')
 first through twelfth grade
 "first through twelfth grades"
- (15) kogda ja **vokrug** amerikantsy (cf. SR 'v prisutstvii amerikantsev')
 when I around Americans-Nom
 "When I am around Americans..."

Example (11) above is especially interesting because the "wrong" preposition *na* 'on' does not correspond to the "correct" preposition in either language, English or SR: the expected form in both languages is *in*. Under the external influence hypothesis, the shift from the SR *v* 'in' to *na* 'on' is completely unmotivated. Similarly, example (12) illustrates the use of *na* in place of the SR *v* (while the English form required in this context is yet another preposition, *for*). The questions that these examples raise for the

external motivation hypothesis are, first, where does *na* come from in (11) and, second, why wasn't the form *dlya* 'for' used instead of *na* in (12)? These examples are not, however, problematic for the internal motivation hypothesis, which maintains that some larger universal principles (and not the grammar of L2) are responsible for changes in languages undergoing attrition.

Unfortunately, the data are a little less consistent than one could hope: example (13) seems to point in exactly the opposite direction from (11) and (12). Here, the expected form *na* is replaced by *po* (which has no direct equivalent in English). This is surprising at least for two reasons: one, the SR form to be used in this context is *na* (i.e., since *na* sometimes appears to serve as a default form in AR, why not use it here?), and two, *na* (unlike *po*) at least has an equivalent in English. I suggest the following explanation: in Russian, the preposition *po* is used in similar constructions (e.g., *govorit' po-russki* 'to speak Russian', *govorit' po-anglijski* 'to speak English'). Because these constructions must be relatively frequent, *po* might have been memorized as part of the expression 'to speak *po* - *X*' and is now being extended to other constructions that fit the template.

Finally, *cherez* in example (14) and *vokrug* in (15) are direct translations of the English *through* and *around* – and are hence relatively straightforward instances of external influence on AR.

3. Structural Changes

3.1 Aspectual System

SR makes an overt morphological distinction between perfective and imperfective aspects, where, as suggested in Comrie (1976), the perfective views the situation "in its entirety," while the imperfective views a situation with regard to its "internal temporal consistency" (pp. 12-24). The perfective verbs tend to be used for "single, completed actions," and the imperfective verbs "are always used in cases of processuality and usually in cases of habituality" (Dickey, 2000, p. 12). The aspectual distinctions in SR are grammaticalized and marked by verbal inflectional morphology; verbs typically form aspectual pairs.

Verbal morphology has been argued to be "a prime candidate for simplification and erosion as a result of language loss" (Montrul, 2002, p. 40) – an observation borne out by the present data, which show significant deviations from SR in the aspectual system. The data yield a great number of instances where instead of the expected SR perfective form (e.g., *complete* in the examples (15) and (16) below), the imperfective form is used by an AR speaker in free speech:

- (15) Ja mog by na dva goda ran'she **zakanchivat'** shkolu...

I could Subjunc on two years earlier finish-*Imp* school
 "I could have graduated two years earlier" (cf. SR 'zakonchit')

- (16) [Steklo razbilos']. Okno tut ... malen'ka chastei ... vse **vypadyvali**

glass shattered-*Perf* window here small parts all fell out-*Imp*
 "[The glass shattered.] That window there... [its] small parts all fell out"
 (cf. SR 'vypali')

Similarly, the perfective aspectual marking is sometimes used in place of the imperfective. For instance, the following example shows an incorrect use of a perfective suffix *-nu* instead of the expected imperfective form (note that the form *sunuju* is not attested in SR):

- (17) Ya беру паlets, **sunuju** ego v shorty, vytaskivaju... oops!
 I take-Imp finger put-Semelf it in shorts pull-Imp
 “I put my finger in my shorts, pull it out ... oops!” (cf. SR ‘*suju*’-Imp)

The idea of lexicalization of aspect in AR was presented in Polinsky (1996, pp. 52-57), who noticed that perfective and imperfective verbs do not form aspectual pairs in AR, and later developed in numerous works by Pereltsvaig (2004b, 2005), who formulated a hypothesis to help account for this change in AR by suggesting that verbal aspectual morphology encodes grammatical aspect in SR, but lexical aspect⁵ in AR.

The vocabulary test described above has shown that for all speakers, the perfective form was conceived of as the citation form for the following verbs: *bite* (2 instances), *burn* (2), *come* (2), *die* (2), *give* (4), *kill* (5), *say* (4), *see* (3), *sit* (1), whereas all six speakers produced the imperfective forms for *eat*, *drink*, *hear*, *know*, *lie*. It appears that verbs with an inherent endpoint (or *telos*) tend to occur with the perfective aspectual morphology, in contrast to verbs referring to processes that do not have an inherent limit, which occur with the imperfective morphology. This is fully consistent with the earlier proposals regarding the lexicalization of aspect in AR, a process that appears to be language-internal and independent of any influence from L2, possibly with the exception of two verbs, *sit* and *stand*. The verb *sit* was produced by one speaker as *saditsja* (cf. SR *sidet*’), and *stand*, by two speakers, as *vstavat*’ (cf. SR *stojat*). Both of these AR forms are imperfective verbs, but with an additional resultative⁶ reading (somewhat along the lines of the English ‘to be sitting down/standing up’) – a clear departure from the less specific meaning of the generic imperfective of SR (‘to be sitting/standing’). It is not unreasonable to suggest that the resultative interpretation in the AR version of the verbs could be derived from the (relatively frequent) English forms *sit down* and *stand up*. If this explanation is on the right track, then it would seem to partially support the external motivation hypothesis. Apart from these two instances, however, the changes involving the lexicalization of the aspectual distinctions have been found to occur in accordance with language-internal principles, rather than due to L2 transfer.

3.2 Noun Gender

Unlike English, Russian has three grammatical genders, Masculine, Feminine, and Neuter. Feminine nouns usually end in *-a* or a palatalized consonant; Neuter nouns end in *-o*, *-e*; and Masculine nouns typically end in a non-palatalized consonant. The category of gender is expressed through syntactic agreement between nouns and singular adjectives, possessive pronouns, and modifying numerals, as well as past tense verbs. An observation that AR speakers make a lot of errors in gender agreement (Polinsky, 1996; Pereltsvaig, 2004a) has led to a proposal that AR is undergoing a loss of gender agreement altogether (Pereltsvaig, 2004a). Consider, for instance, the following sentences, illustrating incorrect gender agreement:

- (18) **moego** mamina dvojurodneyj brat...
 my.Masc mom.Fem second.Masc brother.Masc
 “My mother’s [male]cousin...”

⁵ Unlike grammatical aspect, expressed through inflectional morphology on the verb, lexical aspect depends on the verb’s meaning: “an event can have an inherent limit or endpoint and be telic” or “it can be atelic and have the potential of continuing indefinitely” (Montrul, 2002, p. 41).

⁶ The term is used here to mean “entailing a resultant state of affairs” (Dickey, 2000, p.9).

- (19) ja i moj brat i moj dvojurodnj sestra
 I and my.Masc brother and my.Masc second.Masc sister.Fem
 “Me, and my brother, and my [female] cousin”

Given the claim of the loss of gender agreement in AR, one may find it surprising that the correct agreement is nevertheless still preserved in some contexts (cf. Masculine in *dvojurodnj brat* in (18) and *moj brat* in (19) above). One may also find it surprising that any agreement morphology is present in the first place (i.e., if the syntactic gender is lost, why not just drop the gender endings altogether?). In responding to these questions, I will follow Pereltsvaig (2004a), who suggests that some sort of gender agreement morphology is necessary in AR because bound roots cannot appear alone in Russian. That is, the SR gender agreement endings are no longer agreement endings *per se* (since in AR they do not mark the allocation of the noun to a certain gender class); hence, they do not need to be consistent, and we can expect to find both correct and incorrect agreement forms in the data.

Having shown that the system of gender is undergoing changes in AR, I now turn to the question of whether these changes can provide any information on the motivation for attrition in AR. This issue will be addressed by discussing the adaptation of code-mixed L2 items in AR speech. An interesting observation regarding gender assignment to code-mixed items in AR (and something that appears to distinguish AR from SR) is a lack of what I would call ‘a-insertion’. It has often been observed that many English borrowings show some variation in SR: English words ending in consonants may enter Russian as Masculine nouns (e.g., *imejl* (Masc) – ‘email’) or as Feminine nouns with an added word-final *-a* (e.g., *imejla* (Fem))⁷. This variation is only possible when the borrowed items have feminine counterparts in Russian (e.g., *pochta* (Fem) ‘mail’). This strategy is not entirely unusual in SR and, in my own experience, is also common among Russian-dominant bilinguals. It is therefore rather surprising that no examples with a-insertion were found in the present data; furthermore, some speakers found words of the *imeila*-type rather amusing. As a possible explanation one could suggest that because the speakers of AR do not have a direct and immediate access to the corresponding Russian nouns in the lexicon, no direct association can be made between the code-mixed noun and its Russian equivalent. It follows that the gender of the equivalent Russian word cannot influence the speakers’ decision in assigning the code-mixed item to a particular gender class. As a result, gender assignment is done according to a (somewhat simplified) phonological rule: words ending in a consonant are Masculine. Because this rule itself is language-internal, it can be argued that the changes taking place in the gender system of AR are guided by independent principles rather than L2 transfer.

4. Conclusion

The paper has provided a preliminary study of some lexical and grammatical changes in AR based on the data collected from six AR speakers. As expected, the findings point to a reduction of vocabulary and changes in the aspectual system and gender agreement in AR. All these changes are highly consistent with the definition of AR as a reduced variety of SR. Additionally, the study has attempted to shed more light on the debate regarding the motivation for attrition in AR. In the area of the lexicon, attrition appears to be for the most part the result of the L2 influence (perhaps the strongest piece of evidence in favor of the external motivation hypothesis is the overwhelming number of direct calques from English in the speech of the informants),

⁷ Benson (1960: 168) discusses more examples of this kind: [kara]/[kar] – car, [farma] – farm, [korna] – corn (on a toe).

although the vocabulary test has also shown some reduction of the lexicon primarily affecting words that the speakers are probably not exposed to frequently (e.g., 'louse'). Evidence from the behavior of prepositions in AR is largely contradictory: some examples appear to support the internal motivation claim (e.g., *on* in AR in place of the expected SR and English *in*), whereas other instances point in the opposite direction (i.e., *cherez* 'through' instead of *po*). The underlying rules guiding the processes of structural attrition, however, appear to be mostly language-internal: the structural changes explored in this study have been found to occur in AR by and large without any detectible influence from English.

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