

## Acquisition of verbal morphology in Russian with attention to defective verbs

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Little work has been done on L1 acquisition of verbal morphology in Russian, and especially on acquisition of paradigms with gaps. We experimentally investigate how normally developing Russian children (age 3-5) acquire verbs with expected paradigm gaps and compare them to verbs with variation, with regular alternations, and with no alternations.

Defectivity or “paradigm gaps” are a known puzzle in morphology because, among other things, it poses serious questions for language acquisition: if children learn from positive evidence only, how would they learn that a particular inflectional form, especially of an infrequent lexeme, is absent or ill-formed (given that it is not produced)? If they learn from weak negative evidence (by noticing that some forms are not produced), when and how is such knowledge acquired? Do they generalize to the expected alternation or not before learning that a verb is defective? Or is defectivity a result of grammatical failure that manifests early on?

This investigation will also shed light on the theoretical accounts of gaps. There are different views on the origin of the notorious gaps in Russian 1sg. forms of second conjugation verbs with stems ending in dental consonants (*pobedit'* — ?*pobezhu*, ?*pobed'u*, ?*pobezhd-u*) (see Gorman & Yang, 2017; Pertsova, 2016; Baerman, 2008; Sims, 2006). We test a theory proposed by Pertsova 2016 according to which 1sg. gaps in Russian result from the competition between two conflicting forces: a relatively weak alternation rule and the Paradigm Uniformity Principle (Benua, 1997). The alternation rule wins out in cases in which the expected alternation is supported by other existing allomorphs of the stem with that alternation. Otherwise, when all competitors have low well-formedness, the result of the competition is a gap. Gaps are similar to variation, but different from it in that variation presupposes relatively high well-formedness of the variants (Sims, 2006). Pertsova and Kuznetsova (2017) show experimental evidence that otherwise similar verbs differing only based on whether or not they have 1sg. alternations elsewhere (*gundos-it'* vs. *kvas-it' - kavash-enn-yj*) are treated differently by adults: there's lower interspeaker agreement and lower confidence in judgements for 1sg. forms of verbs like *gundosit'* compared to verbs like *kvasit'*, as well as higher instance of circumlocutions.

The current study (in progress) is an extension of Pertsova and Kuznetsova's work to children. In this study children produce 1p.sg. and 3p.sg. forms of existing and nonsense verbs of four categories: a control group of verbs with no alternations (*darit'*), verbs with free variation throughout their paradigm (*maxaet-mashet*), verbs with a labial alternation in 1sg (*l'ub-it'*), verbs with dental alternations of two types: those with existing relatives exhibiting 1sg. alternation (*gruzit'*), and those without such relatives (*derzit'*). We have currently collected data from 24

children (10 of which have completed both sessions). Our preliminary results show that as expected children perform best with verbs that have no alternations in their paradigm. Also as expected, children do worse with pseudo-words compared to real words. Among verbs with alternations, children do better on verbs with labial alternations and verbs in *-at'* with variation (although they mainly produce non-alternating forms) compared to verbs with dental alternations. Among verbs with dental alternations, children do equally badly on verbs with known and suspected gaps and pseudo-verbs. This is true even for high-frequency defective verbs such as *ubedit'*, *pobedit'*, and *shelestet'*. More data and analysis is required, however, these preliminary results show that dental alternations in general are harder to acquire than labial alternations (perhaps because they are consonant-specific), that paradigm gaps likely emerge early on, and that there is a general preference for non-alternating forms.

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