

## Gender Agreement with Animate Nouns in Heritage Russian in Germany

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Russian has a three-gender system: masculine, feminine and neuter. Most Russian nouns show fixed gender specification, i.e. each noun belongs to one of these gender classes. However, there are also animate nouns that do not exhibit a fixed gender specification. These include so-called *hybrid nouns* as well as *common* (or *dual* (Rappaport 2014: 358)) *gender nouns*, that can take either masculine or feminine gender, depending on the sex of the referent. The first group includes nouns that are morphologically masculine and denote professions, e.g. *vrač* 'doctor', *direktor* 'director'. As Krüger (2021: 29) points out, syntactic, semantic as well as mixed agreement is an option for these nouns. The second group includes nouns ending in *-a*: They belong to the second declension, which contains mainly feminine nouns, and denote primarily personal qualities (Laleko 2018: 242), for example *zanuda* 'nerd', *umnica* 'smart one'. According to different studies, the number of these nouns varies between 100 and 400 (ibid.), with colloquial Russian presumably showing a much higher number. Rodina and Westergaard (2012) tested Russian-speaking children's knowledge of semantic agreement among others with hybrid nouns as well as with common gender nouns. The results of this study have shown that Russian-speaking monolingual children (age 2;6-4;0) distinguish between these rather problematic classes of nouns in Russian as they use different gender agreement patterns: they prefer formal agreement with hybrids (similar results were also found in the older children (5;1-6;5) (ibid.: 1095)) and semantic agreement with common gender nouns.

Our study focuses on gender agreement with animate nouns in heritage Russian in Germany. The main research questions are: Are there any differences between gender agreement patterns with hybrid nouns and common gender nouns used by heritage speakers? Are there any differences compared to other groups of Russian-German bilingual speakers? To what extent do the study participants accept syntactic resp. semantic agreement patterns?

We tested Russian-German bilingual speakers' preferred gender agreement patterns with hybrid nouns and common gender nouns: 22 heritage speakers born in Germany (aged 10-15); 12 1.5 generation immigrants who came to Germany during their adolescence (aged 30-45); 21 first-generation immigrants who immigrated as adults (aged 50-70). Data were collected using a forced-choice task, in which participants were asked to choose the sentence they liked best. Each sentence contained a hybrid or a common gender noun, while the sentence pairs differed in agreement patterns by showing either formal (syntactic) or semantic agreement. In addition, participants were asked to rate the strength of their preference for one or the other form (using a 1–6 scale).

Our results reveal that, overall, heritage speakers perform similarly to the speakers of the other two groups: They prefer to use semantic agreement depending on the sex of the referent. However, heritage speakers tend to use syntactic agreement patterns more often than the other participants of the study, i.e. morphological cues sometimes overrule semantic cues for determining the gender of "ambiguous" nouns.

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