Agreement in the Absence of Agreement:
Gender Agreement in American Russian

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Abstract: This paper investigates the loss of agreement under first language attrition, with special focus on gender agreement within a noun phrase in Immigrant Russian. It is argued that the seemingly haphazard patterns of occasional agreement and occasional disagreement reflect the loss of syntactic agreement (i.e., feature checking or feature matching). It is further argued that the attrition data cannot be explained by either performance problems or differences in gender allocation. Instead, it is proposed that Immigrant Russian speakers resort to certain "camouflage" strategies described and analyzed in this paper, which allow them to pick an "agreement" ending without syntactic agreement. In addition, it is also shown that the same strategies are employed in a similarly random fashion in Standard Russian where normal syntactic agreement mechanisms are suspended, such as in loanword borrowing, acronym formation and during first language acquisition.

1. Introduction

American Russian is the language of second-generation Russian-speaking immigrants in the USA. It is often considered a highly impoverished version of spoken Russian, even more so than their parents' speech, which Polinsky (1997, 1998) calls "Émigré Russian". However, Polinsky has argued that even though the language of the first-generation immigrants is in many ways a continuation of trends found in Russian spoken in Russia (henceforth, Contemporary Standard Russian or CSR), the language of the second-generation (i.e., "American Russian") is better viewed as a distinct language with a grammar of its own. Unfortunately, not much is known as yet about the grammar of American Russian; one such understudied topic is agreement. This paper is aimed at filling this gap; for reasons of space, I will focus on gender agreement within the noun
phrase. Observationally, American Russian speakers make numerous errors in gender agreement, examples of which are provided throughout the paper. Unless otherwise indicated, the data in this paper comes from the materials collected by the author during fieldwork conducted in California.

This paper focuses on the question of where these errors derive from. One possibility is that American Russian does not differ from CSR in any significant respect, and the differences in linguistic behavior (i.e., the “errors”) reflect performance problems involving lexical access, on-line processing, memory limitations and the like. I will call this THE PERFORMANCE HYPOTHESIS. Alternatively, if errors in agreement involve the speakers’ competence, one can hypothesize that American Russian differs from CSR minimally in the allocation of specific nouns to gender classes. I will call this THE GENDER ALLOCATION HYPOTHESIS. The third possibility, which I will call THE NO-AGREEMENT HYPOTHESIS, draws the widest gap between the two languages by maintaining that American Russian has no syntactic agreement at all, that is no checking (or matching) of syntactic features in an appropriate syntactic configuration.

In this paper, I will argue that THE PERFORMANCE HYPOTHESIS and THE GENDER ALLOCATION HYPOTHESIS are both incorrect. Instead, I will defend THE NO-AGREEMENT HYPOTHESIS and will show that it alone can account for the range of data found in the corpus of American Russian data. In other words, I will argue that American Russian lacks syntactic agreement altogether. I will tie this proposal to the claim that “American Russian lacks uninterpretable instantiations of features” (Pereltsvaig to appear). Thus, I will propose that gender agreement morphology found in American Russian is not a reflex of uninterpretable gender features but fulfills a purely morphological requirement of complementing a bound root, which cannot appear on its own. In other words, endings that in CSR encode gender (among other features) do not have that function in American Russian; yet, their choice is not completely arbitrary either.

1 By “errors” I mean forms that are not grammatical in CSR, i.e., I will focus on the differences between the two languages.

2 In CSR, all nouns belong to one of the three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter (marked in the glosses as М, Ж and Н, respectively). There are potential complications to do with the so-called “hybrid” nouns (e.g., вра ‘doctor’) and the so-called nouns of “common gender” (e.g., сирота ‘orphan’), which trigger complicated agreement patterns depending on whether the intended referent is male or female. Although
2. The Performance Hypothesis and the Gender Allocation Hypothesis

As mentioned in the introduction, the two hypotheses – the Performance Hypothesis and the Gender Allocation Hypothesis – both entertain the possibility that American Russian differs from CSR very minimally. In what follows, I will argue that this is not the case.

The best argument against the Performance Hypothesis comes from the data involving grammaticality judgments. Even though providing grammaticality judgments is in itself a linguistic behavior and performance factors cannot be disregarded, they are still our best tool for probing the linguistic competence of speakers. Polinsky's work and my own interviews with American Russian speakers show that they are unreliable in providing grammaticality judgments on any topic (they simply accept everything as grammatical), and gender agreement is no exception. Below is an excerpt from an interview conducted with one of the speakers by Maria Polinsky (reported in Polinsky 1996).³

(1) a. Interviewer:

\[ \text{what do you think of } \text{sin-ij } \text{pal'to?} \]
\[ \text{blue.M coat(N)} \]
\[ \text{‘blue coat’} \]

b. AR speaker:

\[ \text{that’s fine.} \]

As can be seen from this example, the American Russian speaker accepts the ungrammatical agreement pattern where a neuter noun \( \text{pal'to} \) ‘coat’ triggers a masculine agreement on the adjective \( \text{sinij} \) ‘blue’. This shows that the speakers’ competence is affected by attrition and not just their performance.

Furthermore, if the problem with agreement is that of performance, we would expect a wider range of possible mistakes than we actually find. Thus, one finds in

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³ In the glosses, the gender of a noun (the interpretable instantiation) is marked in parentheses, and the gender of an agreeing item (the uninterpretable instantiation) is marked after a period.
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the corpus a wider range of patterns that are grammatical in CSR; yet, not all possible patterns are instantiated. No patterns which are grammatical in CSR can be said to be excluded in American Russian; this may have to do with access to CSR through rote memorization. What one does find in American Russian includes examples of correct agreement endings, as in (2), and examples of some incorrect patterns, as in (3). Here and below, I will mark forms that are found in American Russian but not in CSR with a “Fb” and forms that are ungrammatical in both languages with the usual asterisk; unmarked forms are found in American Russian and are grammatical in CSR.

(2) a. moja mama  
    b. to platje

    my.F mom(F)  
    that.N dress(N)

    ‘my mom’  
    ‘that dress’

(3) a. Fb moj-∅  
    mat’

    my.M  
    mother(F)

    ‘my mother’

   (cf. CSR: moj-a mat’ ‘my.F mother’)

b. Fb moj-a deduška

    my.F  
    grandpa(M)

    ‘my grandpa’

   (cf. Standard Rus.: moj-∅ deduška ‘my.M grandpa’)

Yet, there are patterns expected under the Performance Hypothesis that one does not find in the corpus: first, if the problem facing American Russian speakers were processing overload, we would expect them to resolve this problem by dropping agreement endings altogether. However, such cases, as the ones given below, are never found in American Russian:4

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4 The agreeing forms of these A-items are given below:

masculine:  
    et-ot  
    každ-yj  
    bol’š-oj

neuter:  
    et-o  
    každ-oe  
    bol’š-oe

feminine:  
    et-a  
    každ-aja  
    bol’š-aja

translation:  
    ‘this’  
    ‘every’  
    ‘big’
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(4) * èt-Ø / každ-Ø / bol'š-Ø devuška
    this / every / big girl(F)
    'this / every / big girl'

Second, if American Russian speakers make errors in agreement because of performance problems, we would expect to find all kinds of erroneous patterns. Yet, this is not true either. One finds alongside the correct feminine agreement, as in (5a), the incorrect masculine agreement, as in (5b), but not the incorrect neuter agreement, as in (5c).

(5) a. odna devuška    b. ètot devuška
    one.F girl(F)    this.M girl(F)
    'some girl'      'this girl'

c. * bol'šoe devuška
    big.N girl(F)
    'big girl'

It is unclear how a pure performance analysis can account for the patterns that are missing in American Russian, such as (5c).

Note further that these data are also problematic for the Gender Allocation Hypothesis. If American Russian differed from CSR only in the way certain nouns are allocated to gender classes, one would expect certain nouns to be “mis-allocated” in a uniform fashion. In other words, what would be expected is a noun systematically triggering the “wrong” gender agreement. What is not expected under this hypothesis is the same noun triggering different agreement patterns, especially if the different patterns are uttered by the same speaker in the same sentence. This is in fact the case with the data in (5 a-b). It is hardly plausible that a speaker would allocate the same noun to two different genders within the same utterance.

Before we proceed to discuss the No-Agreement Hypothesis, it must be mentioned that it has been proposed (for CSR) that gender allocation is dependent
on declension class allocation (see Corbett 1982, 1991). In this paper, I will not discuss the correlation between declension class and gender simply because it is hard to draw any conclusions about declension classes in American Russian: because of a massive loss of productive case paradigms (the only position marked for case is that of the indirect object), all the information one can gather about a particular noun’s declension class comes from the gender agreement it triggers. Indirect support for the idea that American Russian speakers’ real trouble is with gender agreement rather than with declension classes comes from Finland Russian, which retains case morphology. According to Leisiö (2001), Finland Russian speakers make errors with gender agreement even when the noun itself is declined correctly (example from Leisiö 2001:215-216).

(6)  
storona mojej papy  
side  my.F  dad(M)  
‘relatives on my father’s side’
(cf. CSR storona moego papy)

Thus, I will not make reference to declension classes but will rather rely on the phonological shape of the noun (in nominative singular, which is presumably the form lexicalized by American Russian speakers in view of the massive case loss).

To conclude, I have argued that neither the Performance Hypothesis nor the Gender Allocation Hypothesis is correct. Below, I will argue that American Russian differs from CSR in more than a minimal way.

3. The No-Agreement Hypothesis

In the previous section, I have argued that the types of errors attested and those unattested in American Russian suggest that both the Performance Hypothesis and the Gender Allocation Hypothesis are incorrect. Here, I propose that gender agreement morphology in American Russian (unlike that in CSR) does not realize uninterpretable φ-features, but fulfills a purely morphological role: it attaches to a bound root which cannot appear alone. This is exactly why we do not find bare
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roots, as in (4) above. Furthermore, according to this hypothesis, the choice of gender agreement morphology is not based on feature checking. Since the agreement ending does not encode the allocation of the noun to a gender class, it need not be consistent across tokens (hence, we find alternations as in (5) above).

So if the choice of a particular agreeing form in American Russian is not determined by syntactic feature checking, what, if anything, is it determined by? I propose that it is determined by a number of extra-linguistic strategies. The crucial difference between these extra-linguistic strategies and grammatical rules in a language like CSR is in their interactions: while the choice among extra-linguistic strategies in American Russian is purely random, the order of application of grammatical rules is part of the grammar itself (cf. Corbett 1991:41 “these rules are ordered; semantic rules take precedence over morphological rules”). Therefore, the same American Russian speaker can produce two different gender agreement forms in the same sentence (as in (5) above), whereas for a CSR speaker this is unthinkable.

What are these extra-linguistic strategies that American Russian speakers resort to in order to choose an agreement form? I propose that there are two such strategies: phonological strategy based on the shape of the noun and semantic markedness strategy based on animacy. These two strategies are schematized below.

(7) a. PHONOLOGICAL STRATEGY:
if the noun ends in –a, use feminine agreement form; otherwise, use masculine agreement form.

b. SEMANTIC MARKEDNESS STRATEGY:
if the noun is animate, use masculine agreement form; otherwise, use neuter agreement form

The crucial claim is that the two strategies are completely disjoined: for example, an animate a-noun can lead to a feminine agreement form being used (if the phonological strategy is resorted to) or to a masculine agreement form being
used (if the markedness strategy is resorted to); this is exactly the case in (5) above. Note also that there is no way to allocate such a noun to the neuter gender; hence, the impossibility of (5c).

Note that these strategies are not completely foreign to CSR, where similar correlations are employed if syntactic agreement is suspended. In the following subsections, I discuss the phonological and the markedness strategies in more detail and will show how they differ from analogous rules in CSR. In section 4, I will address the question of why these two particular criteria for gender allocation are retained in American Russian.

3.1 Phonological factors in CSR and American Russian

I will consider the phonological factors first. The generalization about CSR is that (everything else being equal) nouns ending in a consonant, especially, a non-palatalized consonant (henceforth, C-nouns) are masculine, those ending in -o (henceforth, o-nouns) are neuter and those ending in -a (henceforth, a-nouns) are feminine. This generalization can be seen at work in gender allocation of loanword and acronym adaptations and code-mixing (in such varieties of Diaspora Russian that retain productive nominal declension and syntactic gender agreement). For examples of gender allocation of acronyms in CSR see Graudina et al. (1976:83-90). An example of a loanword gender allocation according to its phonological shape (cited in Mjakilja 2000:98) is given below:5

(8) My tancevali a- a- a kotoraja populjarna …
    we danced cha-cha-cha which.F popular.F
    ‘We danced cha-cha-cha that is popular ...’

The same generalization is observed in loanword adaptation in Israeli Russian; for examples see Moskovitch (1978:227).

5 In fact, this particular noun vacillates between feminine gender (in accordance with the phonological strategy, as in the example above) and masculine (in analogy to its hyponym tanec ‘dance’). In general, vacillation between two or even three genders is not uncommon for loanwords. Other names of dances in -a are typically feminine as well.

(i) a. kubinskaja rumba
    Cuban.F rumba
    ‘Cuban rumba’

b. populjarnaja nyne salsa
    popular.F now salsa
    ‘the now-popular salsa’
Finally, consider code-mixing by fluent emigrant speakers of Russian (Polinsky’s term for such speakers in the USA is “Émigré Russian”). In code-mixing situations of interest for us here, the noun is code-mixed but other DP-internal items are not. Therefore, agreement has to be constructed with a noun that has no gender assigned to it in Russian. As with acronym and loanword adaptation, the phonological shape of the noun plays a decisive role in determining the gender agreement this noun triggers. The following examples illustrate code-mixing in Finland Russian. For instance, the following were uttered by a 3rd generation speaker (examples are from Leisiö 2001).

(9) a. ėta seisova pöytä
   this.F standing table
   ‘this buffet’

b. ėta kaka 0 en’ byla...
   this.F filled-cake very was
   ‘This filled cake was very (tasty)’

Leisiö (2001:224-226) notes that these examples cannot be explained by the analogical pattern, which is also operative in Finland Russian because in both cases the Russian translations of the code-mixed items – stol ‘table’ and bufet ‘buffet’ for (9a) and tort ‘filled cake’ for (9b) – are masculine. The second example is particularly interesting in this respect because the Russian counterpart of kaka ‘filled cake’ is used by the speaker in the same conversation a few sentences prior to the code-mixed item kaka. Therefore, one cannot maintain that the Russian counterpart of this Finnish word is simply unknown to the speaker.

Let us now consider how the phonological strategy applies in American Russian. The first thing to note is that the only phonology-to-gender correlation found in American Russian involves a-nouns. Nouns ending in a consonant (whether palatalized or non-palatalized) are allocated to the masculine gender (more rarely to the neuter). It is interesting to note that palatalization, even though retained in pronunciation by most speakers (cf. Polinsky 1998), plays no role in determining the gender class allocation. As regards nouns that end in unstressed o,
they are assimilated to the *a*-class (not surprisingly, since the pronunciation of an unstressed *o* is the same as that of an unstressed *a*, a schwa in both cases). Let us now consider some illustrative examples repeated from (3) above.

(10) a. [п] moj-Ø mat’
    my.M mother(F)
    ‘my mother’
    (cf. CSR: moj-a mat’ ‘my.F mother’)
b. [п] moj-a deduška
    my.F grandpa(M)
    ‘my grandpa’
    (cf. Standard Rus.: moj-Ø deduška ‘my.M grandpa’)

The noun in (10a) ends in a consonant (more precisely, in a palatalized consonant, but as mentioned above, palatalization is ignored in gender agreement). Thus, in American Russian it triggers masculine agreement on the possessive pronoun ‘my’. Note also that since the masculine agreement morpheme for ‘my’ is phonologically null in CSR, it is not possible to determine whether any agreement morphology is present at all in the American Russian utterance. I will, however, maintain that there is a zero-morpheme present here, given the lack of bare stems of prenominal items that have a non-zero masculine ending, as discussed in connection with (4) above. The example in (10b) illustrates the overgeneralization of the feminine *a*-noun pattern. The noun here is masculine in CSR since it denotes a male human, but because it ends in *-a*, it triggers feminine agreement in American Russian.

Likewise, code-mixed nouns in American Russian are often treated according to their phonological shape. For instance, in the following example a code-mixed *dish* triggers masculine agreement on the demonstrative *етот* ‘that’ because it is analyzed as a C-noun.

(11) etot dish (cf. CSR eto bljudo ‘that.N dish(N)’)
    that.M dish
    ‘that dish’
The next obvious question is why American Russian speakers rely on those specific sound-gender correlations but not on the others. I will return to this question in section 4 below, where I also discuss some parallels between American Russian speakers, monolingual Russian children and L2 learners of Russian. In the next subsection, I will discuss the second strategy resorted to by American Russian speakers in order to chose a gender agreement morpheme when syntactic agreement is lacking – using the least marked gender forms.

3.2 Semantic markedness in CSR and American Russian

The semantic markedness strategy is based on selecting the least marked (i.e., the default) gender form. According to Jakobson (1959/85:141), Russian has “two genders – the more ... marked feminine vs. non-feminine. The feminine gender signals that the given noun cannot designate a male human being ... the unmarked non-feminine ... splits into two genders, distinguished, however, only in the unmarked, nominative case... Russian non-feminine nominative forms display a distinction between the marked neuter and the less specified, unmarked masculine. The neuter signals a lack of sex reference.” Thus, the following markedness system, in which “the masculine is twice unmarked gender”, emerges. In the diagram below markedness decreases from left to right:

\[ (12) \]

There is, however, an alternative way of looking at this markedness system: the masculine is the default gender if the noun is animate (i.e., has sex reference), and the neuter is the default gender if the noun is inanimate.

Let me first illustrate the application of the markedness rule to gender allocation of loanword adaptations in CSR. Consider gender allocation of
loanword animate nouns denoting animals. In this situation the markedness strategy is resorted to: since nouns denoting animals are animate, such nouns are typically assigned to the masculine gender:

\[(13) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a. no phonologically determined gender: } & \text{poni ‘pony’} \\
\text{b. potentially neuter o-noun: } & \text{flamingo ‘flamingo’} \\
\text{c. potentially feminine a-noun: } & \text{al’paga (type of lama)}
\end{align*}\]

In contrast, inanimate loanword nouns are typically allocated to the neuter gender (in accordance with the markedness strategy and not the phonological strategy). Note particularly the contrast in the minimal pair (13c) and (14b).

\[(14) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a. no phonologically determined gender: } & \text{alibi ‘alibi’} \\
\text{b. potentially feminine a-noun: } & \text{al’paka ‘plated copper alloy’}
\end{align*}\]

Let us now turn to American Russian. The question arises as to which of the three gender forms is the default form in American Russian. The most frequently used citation form of adjectives in American Russian is the neuter, whereas the masculine is given as the default much more rarely (Polinsky, p.c.). The graph below illustrates the use of masculine vs. neuter form in translation from English by four American Russian speakers in Polinsky’s study.  

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6 As with native nouns, sex-differentiating nouns are assigned to gender classes according to the biological sex of the intended referent; for instance, biznes-vumam ‘business-woman’ is feminine and biznesmen ‘businessman’ is masculine. Nouns denoting animals can usually be used to refer to both male and female individuals; thus, the biological sex cannot be a factor in determining the grammatical gender of such nouns.

7 Note that speaker SM, who uses the masculine form more often than the other speakers, moved to the USA at the age of 5 and became English-dominant only at the age of 8, whereas the other speakers were born in the USA and became English-dominant between ages 3 (speakers KM and AL) and 5 (speaker DB). Speaker DB is male and the other three speakers are female. The translation task consists of translating 30 frequent adjectives from the Swadesh list; the average accuracy of translation (regardless of gender form chosen) across all four speakers is 66.6% (ranging from 53.3% for speaker KM to 90% for speaker SM).
It is not the case that the citation form and the default form (which is used when syntactic agreement is lost) are the same thing. For example, American Russian speakers sometimes use the genitive case form as the citation form and the nominative as the default. I propose that the choice of the default gender form is based on Jakobson’s markedness system, illustrated in (12) above. Thus, for animates the least marked form is the masculine and for inanimates the least marked form is the neuter. This appears to be the case with respect to both the production data discussed throughout the paper and the translation data from Polinsky’s study.

Let me first illustrate the application of the markedness strategy with some examples from the production data. In (15) below, an a-noun девушка ‘girl’ triggers masculine agreement. Note also that American Russian speakers often use a doubling subject proclitic он ‘he’ which is likewise masculine (in CSR there are no such proclitics; for a more detailed discussion of the doubling proclitic in American Russian the reader is referred to Polinsky 1996, 1997). This agreement pattern goes against the semantic criterion of the biological sex of the referent; it also goes against the phonological strategy discussed above. I propose that the speaker uses the masculine as the default agreeing form because the noun is animate.
Another typical example of the use of the default masculine form (from Turian and Altenberg 1991:224-225) is given below. This example comes from production by a younger speaker of American Russian in the earlier stages of language attrition, only nine months after he stopped being regularly exposed to Russian. Once again the default masculine appears with an animate noun.

(16) Gde moj mama?
where my.M mommy(F)
‘Where is my mommy?’ (cf. CSR: Gde moja mama?)

The following example illustrates the use of the neuter as the default agreeing form when the noun is inanimate (i.e., lacks sex reference). The phonological strategy discussed above cannot account for this example because lawn is a C-noun and as such should trigger masculine agreement, were the phonological strategy resorted to. The analogical strategy cannot account for this example either since the Russian translation gazon ‘lawn’ is likewise masculine.

(17) pered naš dom est’ bol’šoe lawn
in-front-of our.NOM house. NOM is big.N lawn
‘There is big lawn in front of our house.’
(cf. CSR: pered našim domom bol’šoj gazon)

To sum up, American Russian speakers often rely on the markedness strategy in order to chose an agreement ending for an agreeing item.

4. Why these strategies?
Table 1 summarizes the analysis proposed so far for the differences in gender
Gender Agreement in American Russian

agreement between CSR and American Russian.

Table 1.
Differences in gender agreement between Standard and American Russian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CSR</th>
<th>American Russian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>syntactic agreement?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biological sex plays a role?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phonological distinctions among non-a-nouns?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rules/strategies ordered?</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following is a preliminary discussion of why certain strategies are chosen to be employed in American Russian but not others, specifically why the phonological strategy is restricted to a-nouns. I would like to suggest that the relevant factors are phonetic salience and determinacy. In this, my analysis is similar to that proposed by Poplack et al. (1982), who claimed that the degree to which phonology plays a role in determining gender of code-mixed nouns depends on whether phonological factors are salient and determinate in allocating nouns to gender classes in the parent language. Thus, according to them, speakers of Puerto-Rican Spanish in New York City pay more attention to the phonological shape of the code-mixed word in allocating them to gender classes than speakers of Montreal French do because in Spanish phonological shape of the noun plays a more significant role in determining the noun’s gender than it does in French.

Thus, one of the reasons that American Russian retains the phonological strategy only for a-nouns is because the distinction between [a] and other sounds (consonants and other vowels) is very salient phonetically. In fact, [a] is the most sonorant vowel of all. Also, it is a very common vowel cross-linguistically, present in all vowel systems; this is so because it is most clearly distinguished from the other two vowel that together with [a] constitute the simplest tri-vowel systems (namely, [i] and [u]). A complicating factor in Russian is the vowel reduction in unstressed positions. Thus, in the following nouns the unstressed
endings are pronounced exactly the same, despite the fact that (18a) belongs to the a-class and (18b, c) belong to the o-class.

(18)  

a. *kniga* [kníɡ] 'book'
b. *udo* [úd] 'miracle'
c. *solnce* [sónc] 'sun'

However, the class of a-nouns significantly outnumbers the class of o-nouns in CSR, so that it is more natural to assimilate the o-nouns to the a-nouns rather than the other way around. Thus, the retention of the feminine a-class and the non-retention of the neuter o-class is due to the phonetic salience of the former class and the non-salience of the latter class.

Note that further support for the claim that the class of a-nouns is salient phonetically comes from Finland Russian. According to Leisio (2001), the phonological strategy is particularly common with Finnish nouns that end in -a or -ä, which are almost always trigger feminine agreement.

Another argument in support of the saliency of the a-nouns comes from L1 acquisition of Russian. When a child does not know the target gender allocation of a given noun, phonological clues determine which gender class a noun will be allocated to. The following examples illustrate such mistaken gender assignment and the resulting mistaken agreement in L1 acquisition of Russian (similar facts from L2 acquisition of Russian by Finnish speakers are reported in Leisio 2001:215). Examples in (19) are from Popova (1973:273); unlike other examples in this paper they illustrate gender agreement with past tense verbs.

(19)  

a. Lošad’ poexal, lošad’ ubežal.
   horse(F) went.M horse(F) ran-away.M
   ‘The horse went, the horse ran away.’
b. Djadja sidela na lošadke.
   uncle(M) sat.F on horse
   ‘The uncle sat on the horse.’
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The example in (19a) shows that palatalization is ignored in child Russian as far as gender allocation/agreement is concerned: nouns in a palatalized consonant are treated as masculine, on a par with nouns ending in a non-palatalized consonant. The example in (19b) illustrates the salience of the a-nouns. Further examples from Voeykova (1997:149) are given below:

(20) a. A missis Keks bol’shoj?
and Mrs. Keks big,M
‘And Mrs. Keks is big?’
b. A myšata tut malen’kaja
and mice here small,F
‘and the mice here are small’

In (20a) Missis Keks ‘Mrs. Keks’ is assigned to the masculine gender and triggers masculine agreement on the adjective bol’šoj ‘big’ because it is analyzed as a C-noun (despite its denoting a female person). In (20b) the noun myšata ‘little mice’ is analyzed as an a-noun and hence is assigned to the feminine gender and triggers feminine agreement on the adjective malen’kaja ‘small’. The latter example is particularly interesting because it allows us to address the question of whether the relevant factor is really phonological or morphological; in other words, is the word kniga ‘book’ assigned to the a-class because it ends with the segment [a] or because it ends with the morpheme -a? The example in (20b) suggests that the phonological approach is on the right track since what the noun myšata has in common with kniga is the final segment, not the final morpheme. The final [a] in myšata is part of the rare plural morpheme -(j)ata (also found in rebjata ‘children’, kotjata ‘kittens’, strausjata ‘baby ostriches’). Additionally, children are noted to use feminine agreement (on the verb) if they “pronounce nouns

Finally, more support for the salience of the a-nouns comes from the following data concerning lexical borrowing. In a way, these data are the reverse of the loanword adaptation data considered above: in the examples above the gender assignment was done in accordance with the noun’s phonological shape, whereas in the data below the phonological shape of the noun is adjusted in accordance with the gender assignment. Specifically, loanword nouns are assigned to the feminine gender and as a result of this phonological adaptation they acquire a final [a].

(21) a. CSR: lampa ‘lamp’
   b. Australian Russian: vajfa ‘wife’, gērla ‘girl’
   c. Russian slang: gerlā ‘girlfriend’
   d. Australian Russian: braška ‘brush’
   e. American Russian: kara ‘car’, farma ‘farm’

In (21a) the noun was borrowed from French lampe ‘lamp’, and the original French gender assignment has been retained. The borrowings in (21b,c) are assigned to the feminine gender because of the biological sex of the intended referent. The borrowings in (21d,e) are assigned to the feminine gender because of analogy with Russian translations (š etka ‘brush’, mašina ‘car’, ferma ‘farm’). Examples (21b,e) are cited from Leisiö (2001:240); in (21e) from Leisiö (2001:212).

Phonetic salience may also play a role in ignoring palatalization as a factor in gender allocation. It has been noted that American Russian speakers move the place of articulation of coronals further back in the oral cavity compared to the typical CSR pronunciation (Polinsky 1998 and references cited therein). Thus, instead of using dental coronals, they use dental-alveolar coronals, much like in those found in English. As a result of this backing of coronals, their palatalized counterparts may be distinguished less easily from palato-alveolars, which makes palatalization a non-salient feature. This, in turn, leads to the non-distinction of
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nouns ending in palatalized consonants as a separate class as far as gender allocation is concerned.

However, another factor may also be at play here, namely, determinacy. As has been mentioned above, nouns that end in a palatalized consonant can be either masculine or feminine (and some such nouns have changed their gender allocation during the history of the language). In CSR the assignment of nouns that end in a palatalized consonant to either masculine or feminine gender depends on array of phonological, morphological and semantic factors (the reader is referred to Nesset 2002 for details). Since a noun of this type cannot be assigned gender just on the basis of its final segment, this generalization is not retained in American Russian.

5. Summary and conclusions

To sum up, I have proposed the following analysis of gender agreement in American Russian: this variety of Russian lacks syntactic agreement (in accordance with the general hypothesis that American Russian lacks uninterpretable features; cf. Pereltsvaig to appear). However, American Russian retains the morphological restriction on adjectival stems which are treated as bound morphemes and therefore cannot stand in isolation. Therefore, some morpheme expressing gender (among other features) needs to be attached to the stem. In this situation, extra-linguistic strategies must be resorted to.

In this paper, I have identified two such strategies: the phonological strategy (i.e., over-generalization of phonological patterns) and the semantic markedness strategy (i.e., using the least marked gender forms). These two strategies alternate freely, which creates the impression of haphazard choice in agreement forms. It appears from the data examined so far that some speakers tend to use one of the strategies more often than the other, and some speakers may use only one strategy all of the time. Overall, however, there is no clear pattern determining which of the two strategies is used in each given case. In particular, there is no correlation between the type of agreeing item (possessive pronoun vs. demonstrative vs. adjective) and the choice of the strategy. Furthermore, there are no cases where different items within the same DP appear with different gender endings (this may be due to the relative lack of syntactic complexity in American Russian).
This lack of clear pattern of choice between different strategies further supports my main claim that gender agreement in American Russian is determined by extra-linguistic strategies rather than grammatical rules that apply in an ordered fashion.

References
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