

Emergent communicative norm
in a contact language:
Indirect requests in Heritage Russian

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in memoriam

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Ellen F. Prince

*who taught us more than we can express
& to love and respect variability in language*

Requests: speech act universals

- Direct requests: imperatives, often softened via lexical marker

– *Peredaj sol', pozhalujsta!*

pass.IMPERA.SG salt please

– *Pass me the salt, please!*

- **Russian** & **English** both prefer indirect strategies (notably, interrogatives)

– *Ne podbrosiš do doma?*

NEG give.lift.PFV.2.SG to home

– *Can you give me a ride?*

Requests: speech act universals

- Conventionalized indirect R may involve sentences concerning (Searle 1965, 1975)
 - S's wish or want that H do A
 - H's ability to do A
 - H's desire or willingness to do A
 - H doing A
- Linguistic conventions for marking polite indirect requests offer a range of options (like most pragmatic functions)
 - This range, and preferences within it, are language-specific

Present study

- No significant studies of HL pragmatics to date
Exception: Pinto & Raschio 2007 – requests in HL Spanish
- Yet, HS can function in the language performing a variety of usual daily communicative tasks well enough despite grammatical and lexical deficiencies
- **Initial data collection and analysis** to explore communicative competence of HS in the framework already used for L1 and L2 pragmatics (Blum-Kulka “CCSARP”)

Research questions:

- Is the linguistic variable – the form of polite indirect requests – correlated with the population (Heritage Russian vs. Monolingual Russian)?
- How do the differences play out?
- Do HS have their own communicative norms, i.e. have they restructured pragmatic rules?
- If yes, did these new norms develop under the influence of English and/or as a result of grammatical restructuring?

Outline of the talk

- Methodology:
 - Corpus studies
 - Production study
- Requests in English vs. Russian
- Production study: Heritage vs. Native speakers
- Discussion: Heritage Russian as a contact language
- Conclusions and future research

Methodology: Corpus studies

- Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English
 - 1,848,364 words
 - College students, professors, and staff
 - Text-searchable only – a sub-corpus was analysed
- Russian National Corpus (spoken sub-corpus)
 - 8,870,387 words
 - Diverse age and background, so corpora not fully comparable, though academic speech is included
 - Text, lexical, morphological, and some grammatical information searchable

Methodology: participants

- 48 heritage speakers
- 33 monolingual Russian native speakers
 - never lived outside Russia

Age-matched

Education-matched

- Reported here: initial analysis only

Methodology: heritage speakers

- All college students enrolled in beginning Russian literacy for HS class
- Mean age of immigration to the U.S. – **3.52**
(62% left Russia before the age of 6; 21% were born in the U.S.)
- 89% never had any prior schooling in Russian (formal or informal)
- Self-reported language use:
 - Mean % using Russian with mother – 85% (SD = 27)
 - Mean % using Russian with father – 82.89% (SD= 33)
 - Mean % using Russian with grandparents – 95% (SD= 20)
 - Mean % using Russian with siblings – 19% (SD = 27)

Methodology: heritage speakers

- Native language (self-evaluation):
English – 25.5%,
Russian – 51%,
Russian and English – 12%,
could not say – 6%
- Average speech rate:
in Russian – 88 wpm (min – 36, max – 199), SD = 26
in English – 148 wpm (min - 76; max- 198), SD = 29
- Average speech rate of native Russian speaker – **105**
(Polinsky and Kagan, 2007)

Methodology: initial analysis

- 2 role-enactments
 - SIT 1: asking to borrow lecture notes from a classmate
 - SIT 2: asking to borrow a rare book from the instructor
- 10 HS; 10 NS
 - (raw statistics representative of other HS and NS speakers in the study)
- Head acts identified and analyzed, using a modified version of the CCSARP taxonomy (Blum-Kulka and Kasper 1989)

Requests in English vs. Russian

Languages have tendencies/preferences to exploit different felicity conditions in making indirect requests:

- **English** – H's ability to perform A
- **Russian** – either H's ability **OR** H doing A (perfective future).

– *Ty ne možeš/ne mog by podbrosit' menja do doma?*

You.SG NEG can.2.SG /NEG can.SBJV give.lift me.ACC to home

– *Can/could you give me a lift home?*

– *Ty ne podbrosiš menja do doma?*

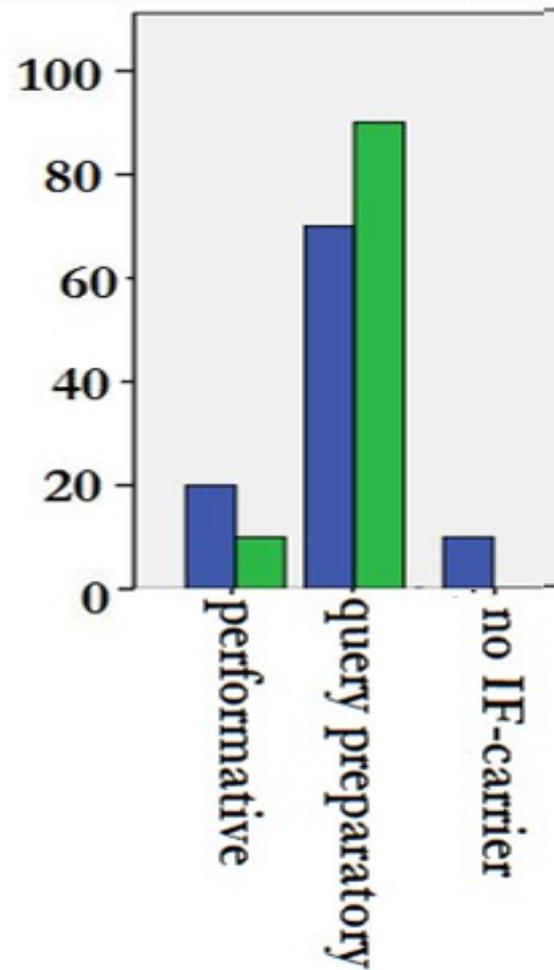
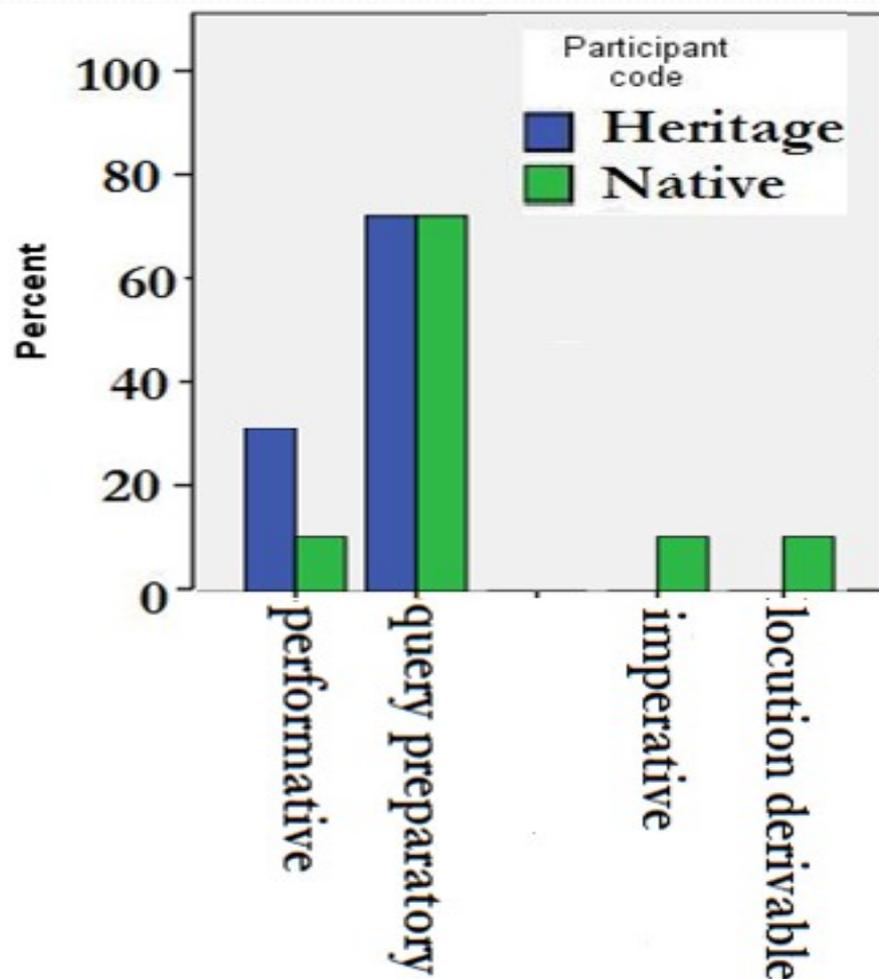
You.SG NEG give.lift.PFV.2.SG me.ACC to home

– *Will you give me a lift home?*

Direct vs. Indirect expression of request

Informal Situation 1 $p = .11$

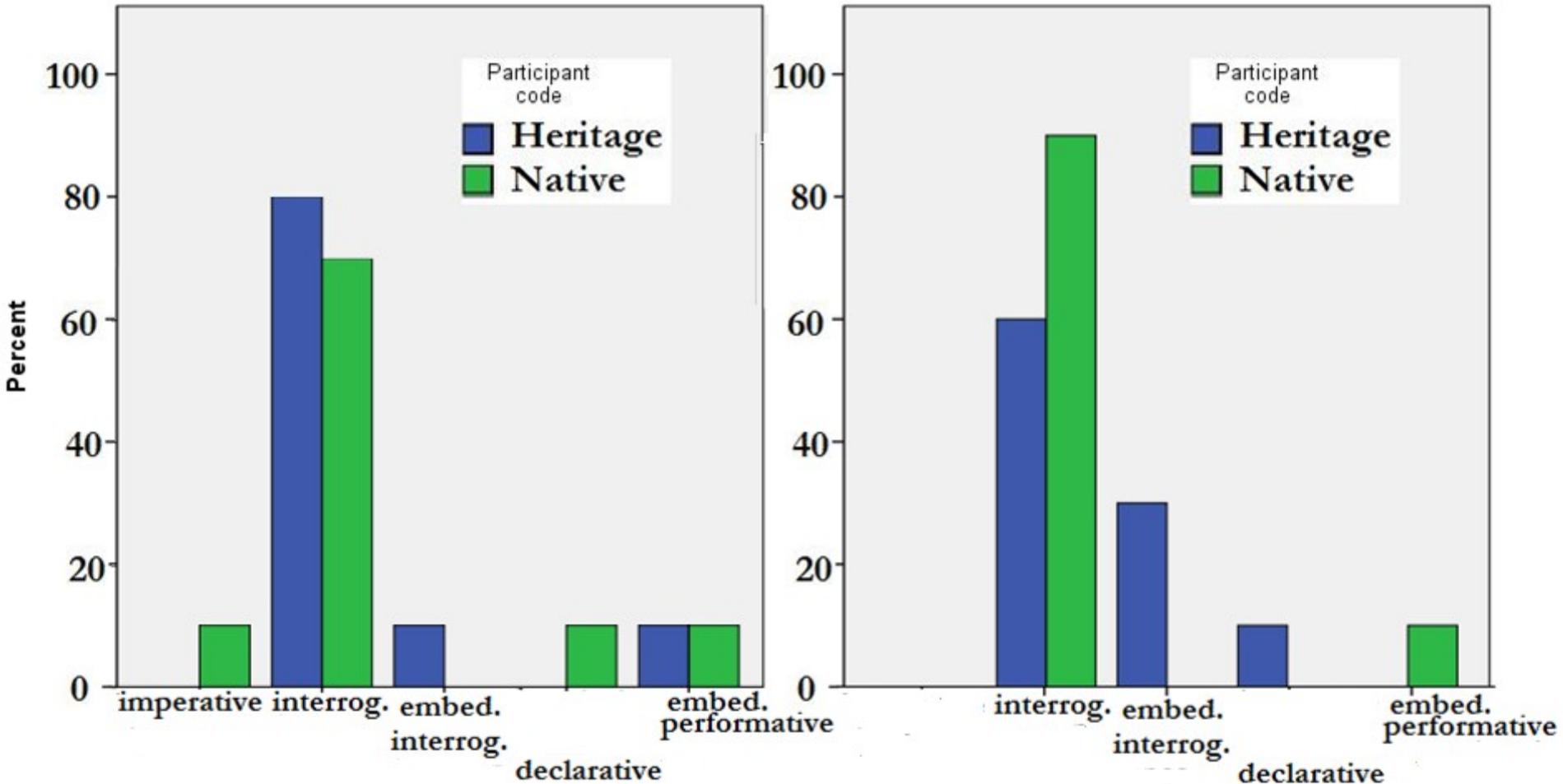
Formal Situation 2 $p = .96$



Marking indirect requests: syntax

Informal Situation 1 $p = .73$

Formal Situation 2 $p = .2$



Marking requests: syntax - results

- NS have a broader repertoire of syntactic forms used in indirect polite requests
- HS seem to have an impoverished repertoire
- HS use a form absent in NS data (esp. in formal sit. 2):
Interrogative embedded under performative

Ja hoču sprosit', jesli ja jejo mogu odolžit'.

I want to.ask if I it.F.ACC can borrow

'I want to ask you if I can borrow it'

- Transfer from English? – 1 instance in MiCASE
Further investigation needed

Morpho-syntactic politeness

- English conventionally uses mood (subjunctive)
 - *Can/Could you give me a lift home?*
 - *Can/Could I have this book?*
- MiCASE search
 - 347 indicative “can” requests, of them 17 also have “please”
 - 72 subjunctive “could” requests, of them 13 have “please”
 - Initial analysis (50 results from each set):
“could” set contains higher percentage of power discrepancy between S and H (e.g., S is student, H is professor)

Morpho-syntactic politeness

Morpho-syntactic means of expressing politeness

- **Russian** uses antithetical particle (NEG)
 - alone or together with subjunctive mood-marker particle.

Ty ne možeš /ne mog by podbrošit' menja do doma?

You.SG NEG can.2.SG /NEG can SBJV give.lift me.ACC to home

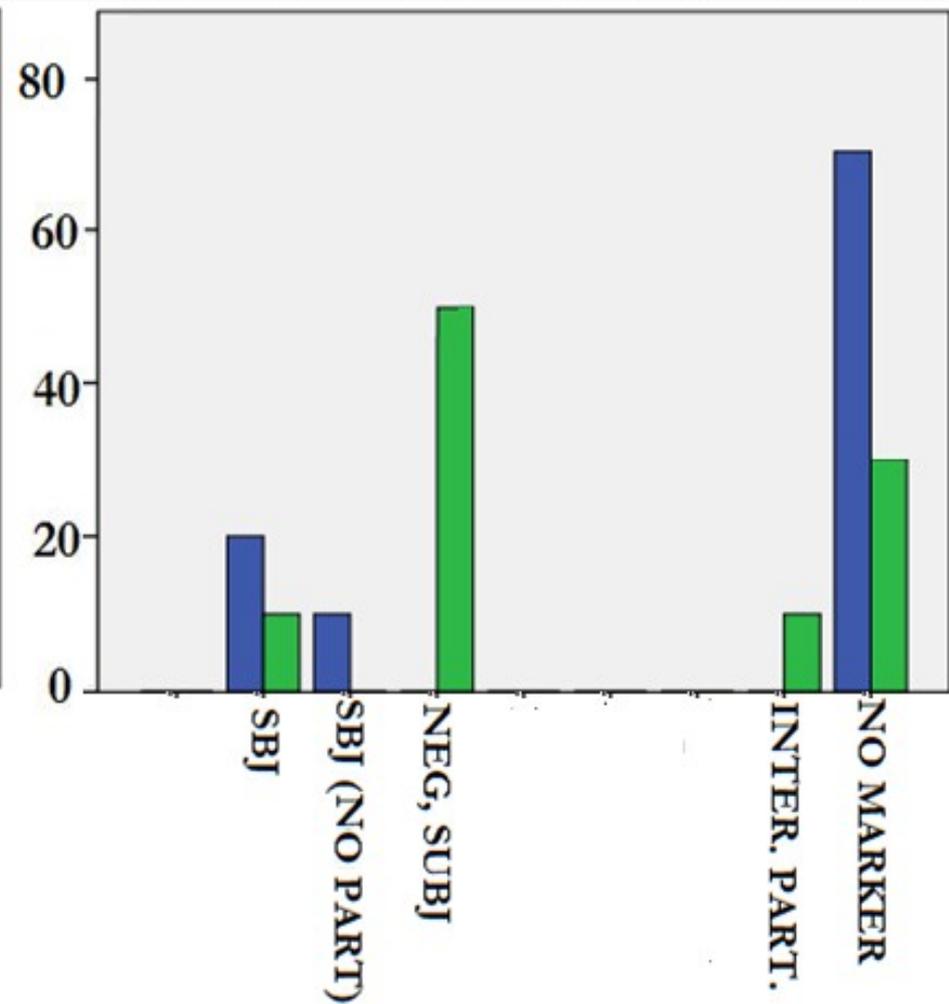
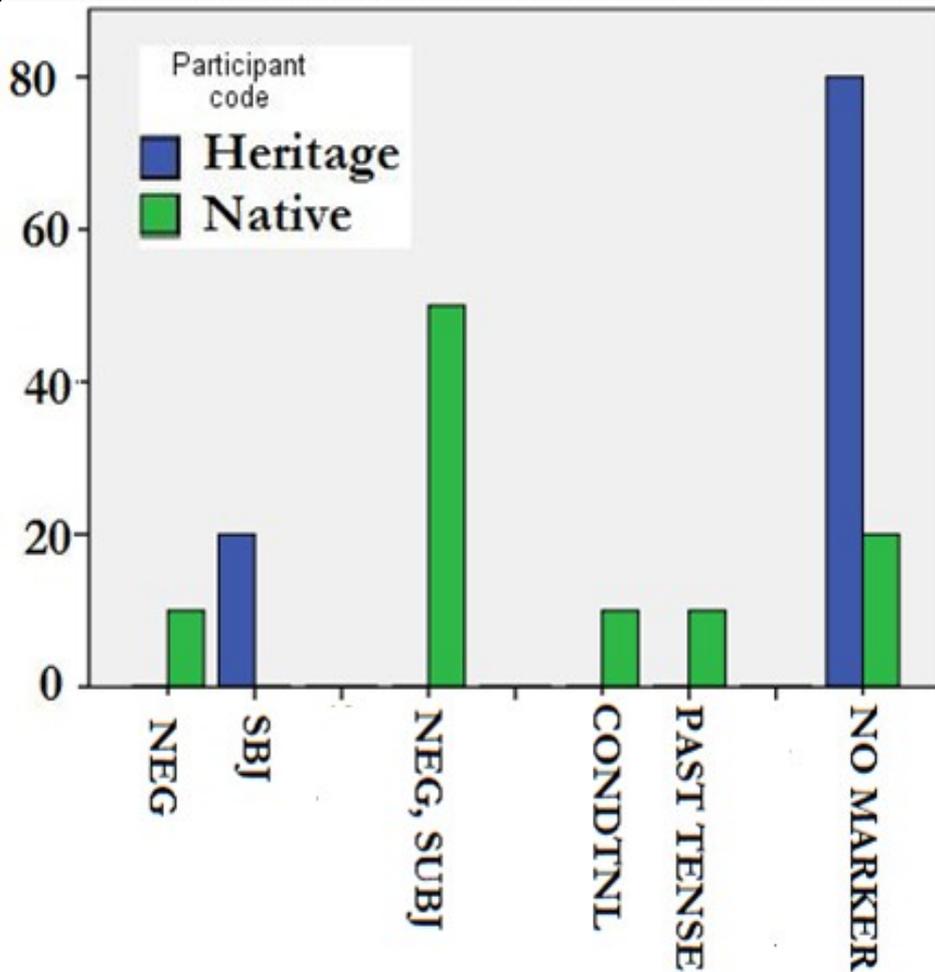
?#Ty možeš /mog by podbrošit' menja do doma?

You.SG can.2.SG /can SBJV give.lift me.ACC to home

Morpho-syntactic politeness

Informal Situation 1 $p = .05$

Formal Situation 2 $p = .35$



Morpho-syntactic politeness: results

HS seem to have an impoverished repertoire of strategies to make indirect polite requests in Russian both

- in types of utterances
- and morpho-syntactic means of politeness
- NEG in NS productions: 70% of indirect requests
 - Other requests use marking where NEG is ungrammatical.
- HS productions have NO instances of NEG

Morpho-syntactic politeness: Russian

S questioning H performing A

- Same propositional content as info-seeking question:

– *Ty ne zakroeš okno?*

You.SG NEG close.PFV.2.SG window.ACC

Literally: ‘Won’t you close the window?’

- In such context, use of NEG is near-obligatory to mark requestive intent
 - *100% in NS production data*
 - *No instances of NEG in HS, even in this context*

Lexical politeness markers

- **English** often inserts “please” even in interrogatives
 - *Could you give me a lift home, please?*
- MiCASE: 159 requests with “please”
 - 67% in the direct requests
 - 33% in the indirect requests (30% in interrogatives)

Lexical politeness markers

- **Russian** rarely uses “please” in interrogatives, especially in H doing A

– #Ty ne mog by menja podbrosit' do doma, požalujsta?

You.SG NEG can.SBJV me.ACC give.lift to home, please

– ## Ty ne podbrosiš menja do doma, požalujsta?

You.SG NEG give.lift.PFV.2.SG me.ACC to home, please

- RNC: 10124 occurrences of **požalujsta** (“please”)
 - 5647 are within 2, 6057 within 5 words of an imperative verb
 - 7 are in an interrogative indirect request
 - Almost all of the rest are non-requestive

Lexical politeness in Russian

- *Možno* – impersonal modal with dual meaning:
 - possibility (usually with imperfective infinitive)
 - permission (with perfective infinitive)
- Requests usually refer to a one-time completed action → PFV
SO: *možno* suggests a request for permission.
 - *Možno vzjat' vašu knigu?*
Psbl.imp to.take.PFV your.PL.ACC book.ACC
“May I take your book?”
- Lexical politeness marker is rarely used in these requests:
 - *##Možno požalujsta vzjat' vašu knigu?*
Psbl.imp please to.take.PFV your.PL.ACC book.ACC

Lexical politeness in Russian

- RNC:

2899 occurrences of *можно* up to 12 words before “?”

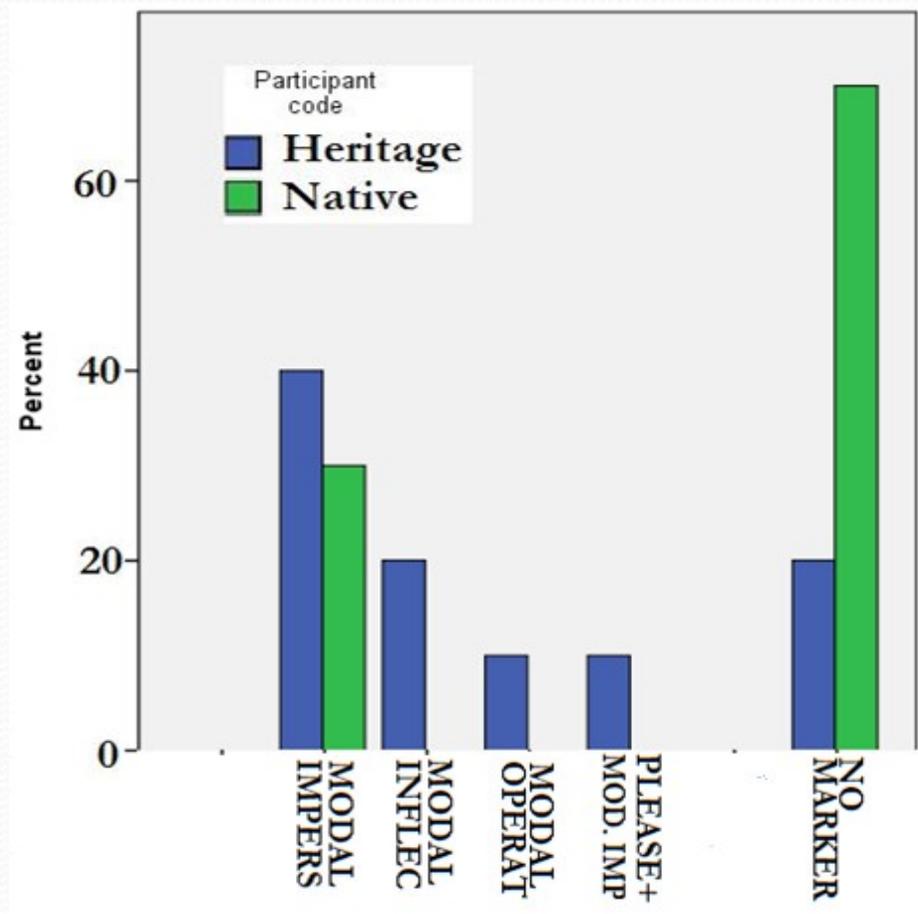
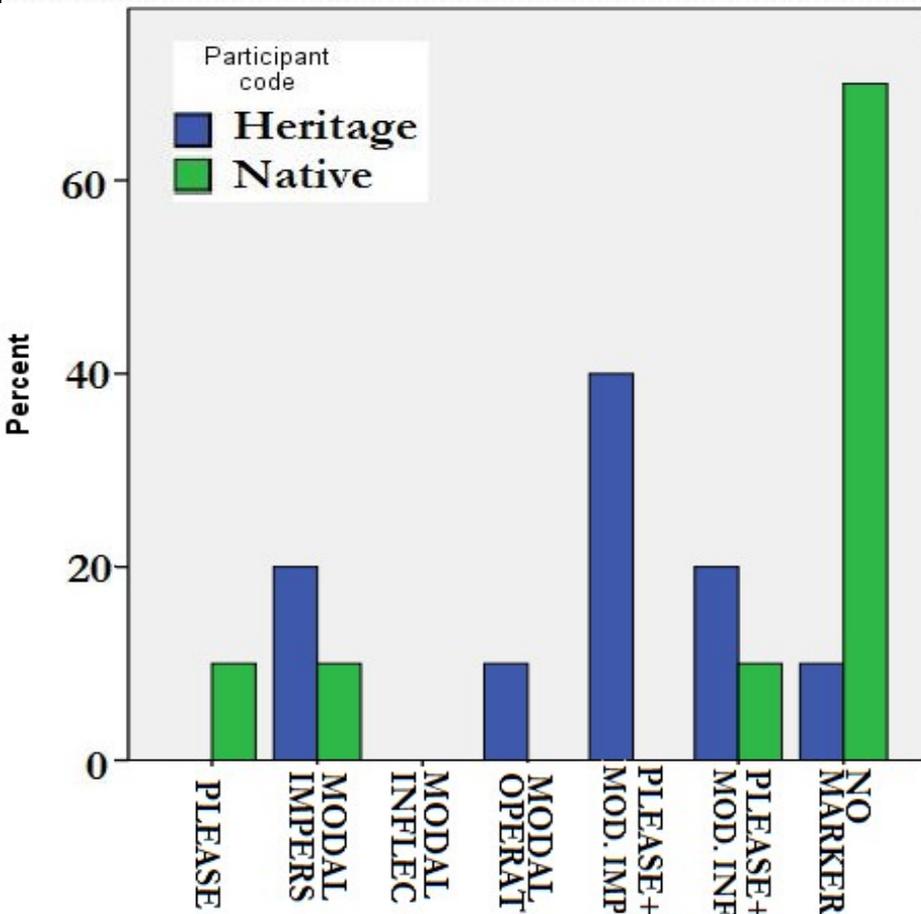
Analysis of a sample of 100 of these indicates that

- 50% are non-requestive (How possible.IMP to.term this?)
- 25% are requests for permission
- 2% embed performatives (Possible.IMP to.invite you?)
- 23% are indirect requests
 - 11% IRs are verb-less (Possible.IMP tea? = Can I get tea?)
- 3 of these 2899 sentences with *можно* also have *пожалуйста* (“please”)

Lexical politeness markers

Informal Situation 1 $p = .045$

Formal Situation 2 $p = .12$



Politeness marking: results

- HS compensate for their impoverished repertoire of morpho-syntactic markers in indirect requests by
 1. Relying almost exclusively on lexical politeness markers, producing combinations which sound “strange” to NS (*možno požalujsta*)
 2. Over-using modal *možno*.
 3. Relying on unusual morpho-syntactic politeness strategies, e.g. embedded interrogative under performative

Discussion: transfer from English

- Corpus studies show that
 - English uses “please” in both direct and indirect requests,
 - while Russian disprefers “please” in IRs.
- The overusage of **požalujsta** in HS seems to be a **transfer** from the dominant language
- The lack of NEG in HS indirect requests may also be due to transfer from English:
 - *Would you open the window?*
 - *Would you not open the window?*

Discussion: HS-internal development

- HS also overuse the impersonal modal **možno**
 - using it either by itself or in combination with “please” (65% total)
 - The latter doesn’t happen in NS speech in this data set
 - and is exceedingly rare in corpus data (3 total instances in spoken sub-corpus of RNC)
- HS may be re-analyzing the “rule” for using **možno** (expanding its domain)

HS request “formula”

- HS may have their own form of conventionalized indirect request– **možno (+ požalujsta)** regardless of the social context
- Since this form is allowable in the baseline (albeit very rarely or in the context of permission), HS communicative intent is generally understood quite clearly by NS.
 - NB: especially because all other components of a request are present.

Discussion:

emergent norm in a contact language

- **Možno** (especially when it's followed by a verb) is more often a marker of permission request, it may be more frequent in child-adult interactions
- HS don't get enough socialization in different contexts (asking for favor rather than permission)
 - where NS use inflected modals rather than impersonal **možno**
- HS speakers notoriously do not notice subtle morphology
- As a result, HS don't understand the difference between the inflected and impersonal modals.

Next steps

- Analysis of remaining speakers: confirm findings
- Expanded analysis of corpus data
- Comprehension study completed
- CHILDES study underway: requests in child speech and child-directed speech
- Comprehension of requestive utterance without NEG
- Correlation between proficiency and preferred requestive strategy

Heritage Russian as a contact language

- HS seem to have re-analyzed the impersonal modal *možno* under the influence
 - of impoverished input,
 - of the dominant language, and
 - of the need to express requestive intent
- *Možno* – a request marker (communicative norm)
- Similar to other language-internal contact-driven change (e.g. Prince 2001 for Yiddish)