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(In)consistencies in target gender marking in heritage Polish and Russian in Germany

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Introduction

Acquisition of **grammatical gender** in (heritage) bilinguals a frequently investigated area, also for **Russian and Polish HLs**

Different research perspectives:

- restructuring of gender system (cf. Polinsky 2008)
- speed and order of acquisition of (sub)genders (cf. Dieser 2009)
- accuracy of acquisition depending on transparency of gender cues of nouns (Rodina & Westergaard 2017, Brehmer & Rothweiler 2013)
- role of cross-linguistic influence and language-internal and language-external factors (Schwartz et al. 2015; Rodina & Westergaard 2017; Mitrofanova et al. 2018; Rodina et al. 2020)

Introduction

- grammatical gender as agreement between the noun (controller) and other targets (Corbett 1991; Hockett 1958; Zaliznjak 1967)
- almost all studies on bilinguals focus on noun-adjective gender agreement (i.e. within DP)
- However, both Russian and Polish mark gender agreement on different types of targets:

➢ attributive adjectives, demonstrative, possessive and indefinite pronouns, some cardinal numerals

➢ 3rd person personal pronouns (cf. English he – she – it)

➢ predicative adjectives and participles

➢ past tense and conditional verb forms

Introduction

(1) Naš**a**	nov**aja**	učitel'nic**a**	očen'	xoroš**a(ja)**.
Our-FEM	new-FEM	teacher-FEM	very	good-FEM
(2) Naš-**ø**	star**yj**	televizor-**ø**	byl-**ø**	prodan-**ø**.
Our-MASC	old-MASC	TV-MASC	was-MASC	sold-MASC
(3) Naš**e**	nov**oe**	pal'to	ponravil**o**s'	vsem.
Our-NEUT	new-NEUT	coat-NEUT	liked-NEUT	everyone.

Grammatical gender in Polish, Russian & German

Polish	Russian	German
Sg.: **masc.**animate – **masc.**inanimate – **feminine** – **neuter**	Sg.: **masc.**animate – **masc.**inanimate – **feminine** – **neuter**	Sg.: **masc** – **feminine** – **neuter**
Pl.: neutralization of gender distinction, replaced with marking of **virility** vs. non-virility (DP: nom & acc, VP)	Pl.: neutralization of gender distinction, replaced with marking of **animacy** in all genders (DP: acc)	Pl.: **neutralization of gender distinction**
agreement in DP and VP (sg/pl)	agreement in DP (sg/pl) and VP (sg)	agreement only in DP (sg)
gender assignment more or less **predictable**	gender assignment more or less **predictable**	rather **probabilistic** gender assignment

Research Questions

RQ 1: Do accuracy rates of gender agreement marking differ depending on the gender target (attributive elements – personal pronouns – verb forms)?

RQ 2: If yes, which factors possibly account for differences in the vulnerability of gender agreement marking with different gender targets in bilingual settings?

Hypothesis

- Accuracy rates of gender agreement marking will differ depending on gender target:

  personal pronoun > attributive elements > verb forms

  singular forms > plural forms [esp. in Polish]

[cf. missing agreement marking in VP in German, gender neutralisation in plural, late monolingual acquisition of gender/virility distinction in plural declension in Polish in contrast to nouns in singular (Smoczyńska 1985: 664)]

- proposed hierarchy might lead to inconsistencies of gender agreement marking when several gender targets co-occur

Part 1

Study 1: (In)consistencies of gender agreement in Polish heritage speakers in Germany

Gender Marking in Heritage Polish in Germany

- Three groups of participants (N = 30 each):

– **Young adult heritage speakers** of Polish in Germany

(= HSs, i.e. simultaneous and early-sequential bilinguals), average age at testing: 22,5, average AoO German: 2

– **First generation immigrants** with late age of onset of the acquisition of German, but prolonged exposure to German

(= LSBs, i.e. late sequential bilinguals, potential „attriters“ of L1 Polish), average age at testing: 37, average AoO German: 25,0

– age-matched control group of **young monolingual Polish adults**

(= MLs), average age at testing: 24

Gender Marking in Heritage Polish in Germany

Data:

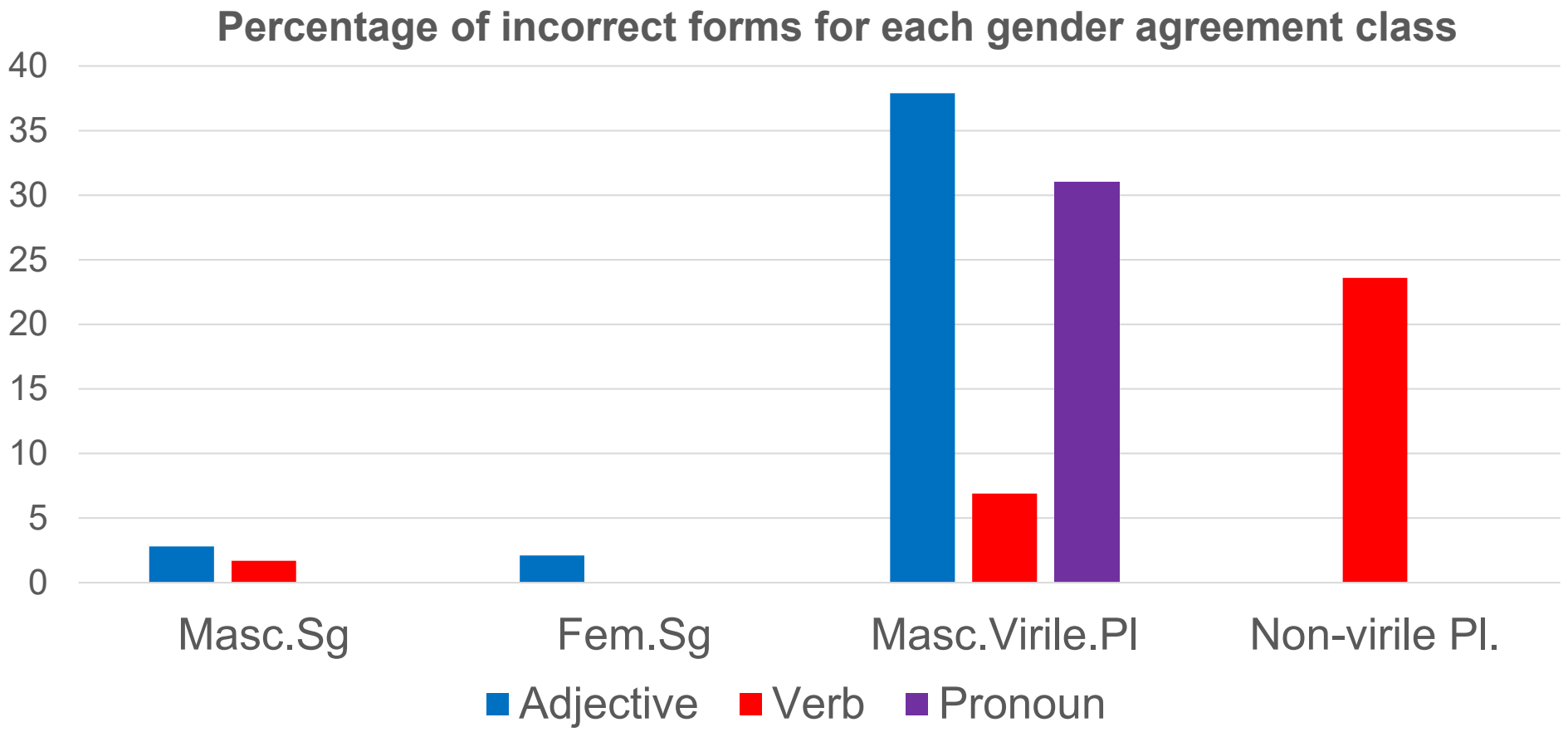
- **„C-Test“** (own creation)

– 36 gaps targeting gender-sensitive inflections of verb forms (n= 23 items), attributive adjectives (n = 12 items) and pronouns (n = 1)

– Gender agreement classes included: Masc.Sg. (n = 9 gaps), Fem. Sg. (n = 11 gaps), Masc.Virile.Pl. (n = 9 gaps), Non-virile.Pl. (n= 7 gaps) [no neuter forms included!]

- **Results:** LSBs and MLs performed at ceiling (100%), HSs slightly less successful (92%)

Gender Marking in Heritage Polish in Germany



Gender Marking in Heritage Polish in Germany

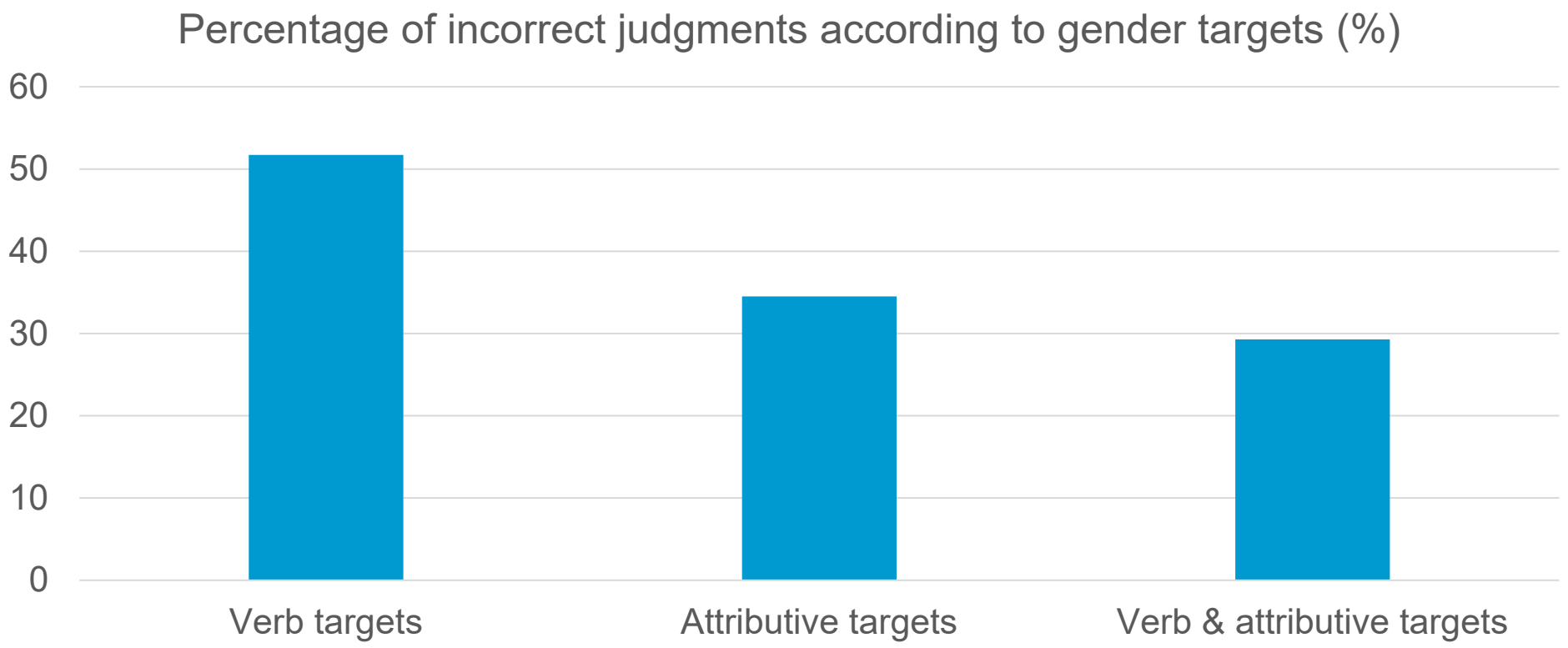
- **Acceptability Judgment Task**

– 9 test sentences targeting gender agreement in plural contexts (4x Masc.Virile, 5x Non-virile nouns) + 5 test sentences for gender agreement in singular (2x Fem., 2x Masc.Animate, 1x Masc.Inanimate)

– Gender targets: verb forms only (4x), attributive elements only (4x), verb forms + attributive forms (6x), the latter subdivided into cases of consistent (4x) and inconsistent marking (2x)

- **Results:** LSBs and MLs again performed at ceiling (96-100%), HSs only for singular contexts (98%), but not for plural (80%)

Gender Marking in Heritage Polish in Germany



Gender Marking in Heritage Polish in Germany

Summary for heritage Polish

- Gender agreement in plural contexts seems to be most problematic for HSs (→ Hypothesis 1 confirmed)
- With non-virile controllers, **verb targets** often receive **virile inflections** whereas with virile controllers and **other types of targets** it is the **non-virile inflection** that is overgeneralized

(4) Sylwia i moja mama *mi**eli** (= mi**ały**) urodziny.

Sylwia-FEM and my-FEM mum-FEM had-MASC.VIRILE birthday.

(5) ***Te** *syn**y** (= **ci** syn**owie**) od ni też tam by**li**.

These-NONVIRILE sons-NONVIRILE of her also there were-MASC.VIRILE

Part 2

Study 2: (In)consistencies of gender agreement in Russian heritage speakers in Germany

Gender Marking in Heritage Russian in Germany

Task 1:

Gender agreement in **personal pronouns**

Task 2:

Gender agreement in **attributive adjectives**

Participants of the study

Group	N (f/m)	Age (SD)	AoA (SD)
Heritage speakers	18 (14/4)	10–15 (1.72)	0–2 (0.51)
Early sequential bilinguals	14 (7/7)	29–42 (3.75)	7–16 (2.37)
Late sequential bilinguals	17 (14/3)	40–70 (7.74)	21–53 (10.22)

Task 1: Personal Pronouns

Study design

1

Это ...

This is….



2

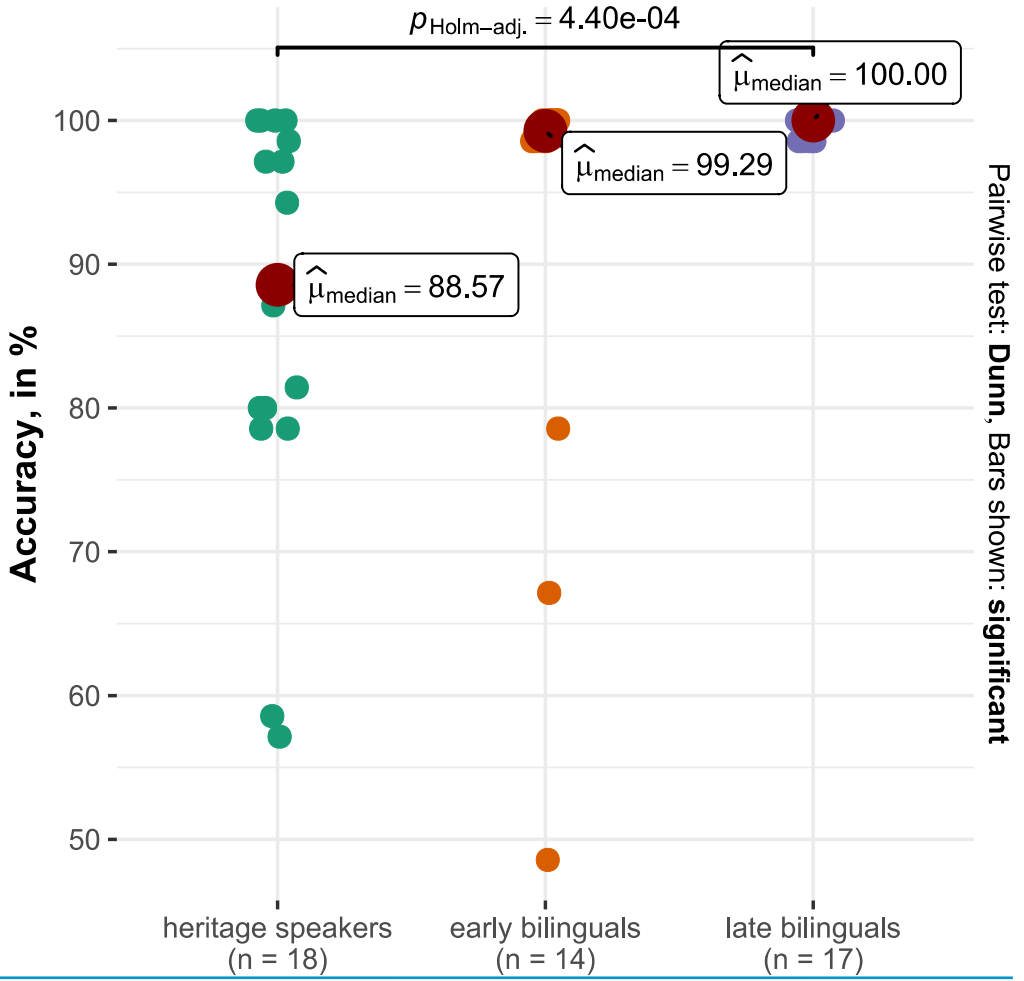
Он ...
Она ...
Оно ...

He …
She …
It ….



Task 1: Results

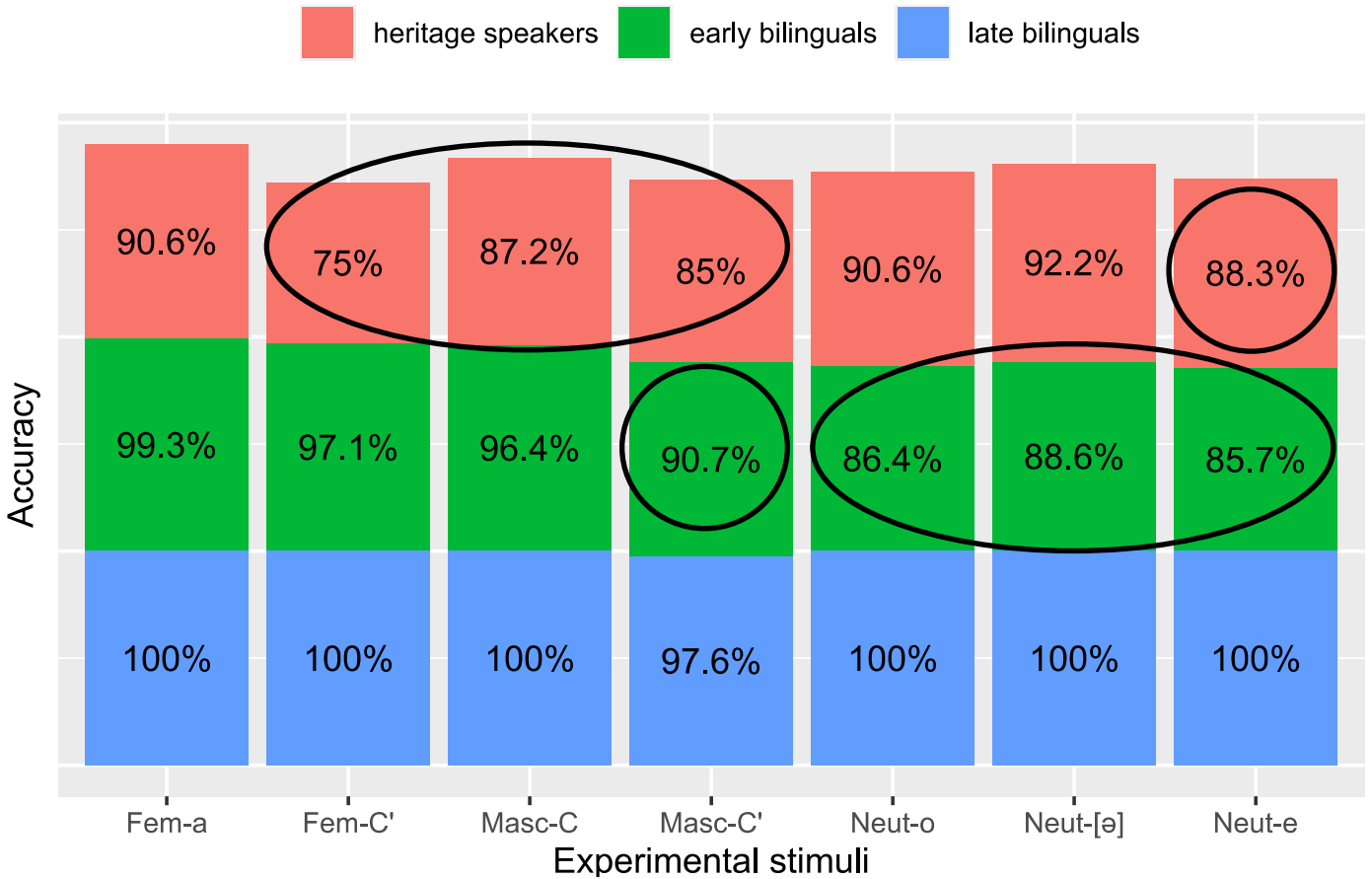
Pairwise comparisons using Dunn's test revealed that heritage speakers‘ scores were significantly different from those of the late sequential bilinguals (p = .00044).



Task 1: Results

Accuracy of gender assignment by types of gender cues

- **HSs**: mismatches in Fem-C', Masc-C', Masc-C, Neut-e
- **ESBs**: mismatches mainly in neuter nouns
- **LSBs** were more accurate than other groups (mismatch: *šampun'* ‚shampoo')



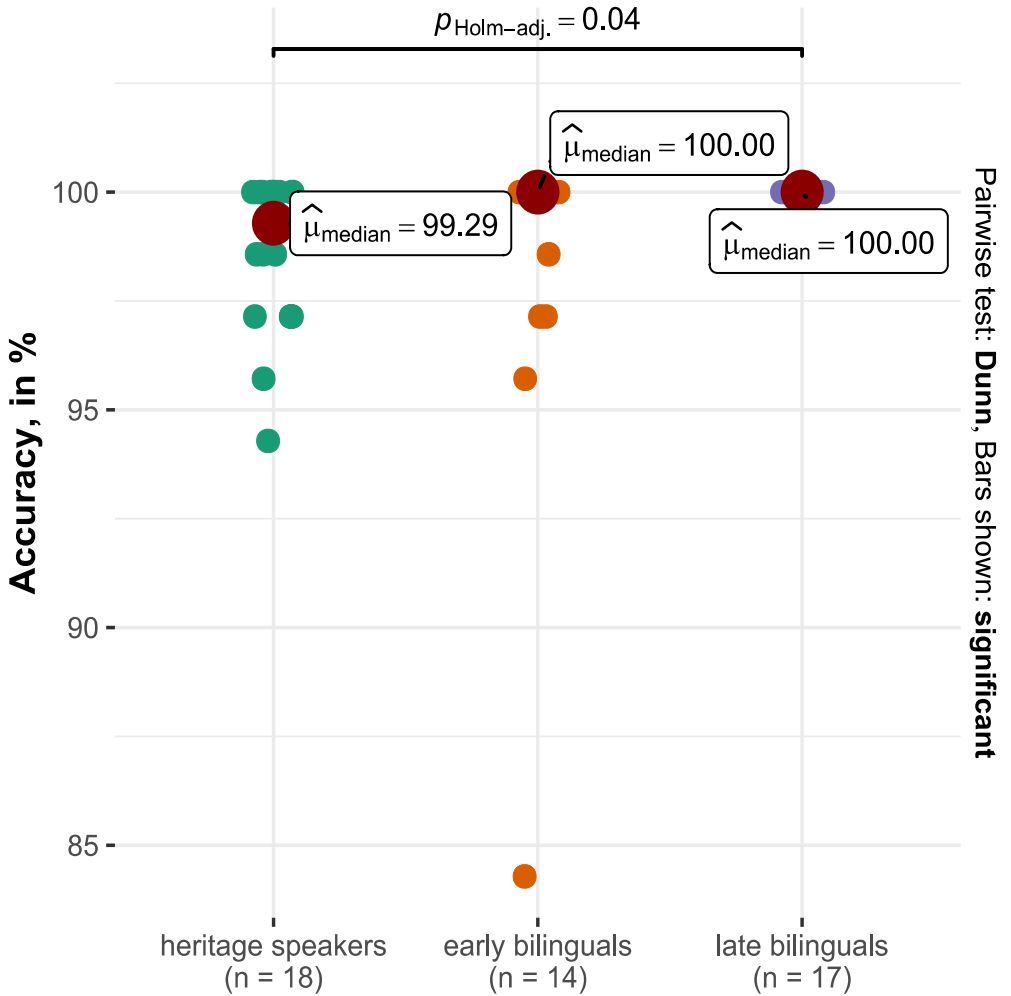
Task 2: Attributive adjectives

Study design



Task 2: Results

Pairwise comparisons using Dunn's test revealed that heritage speakers‘ scores were different from those of late sequential bilinguals (p = .04).

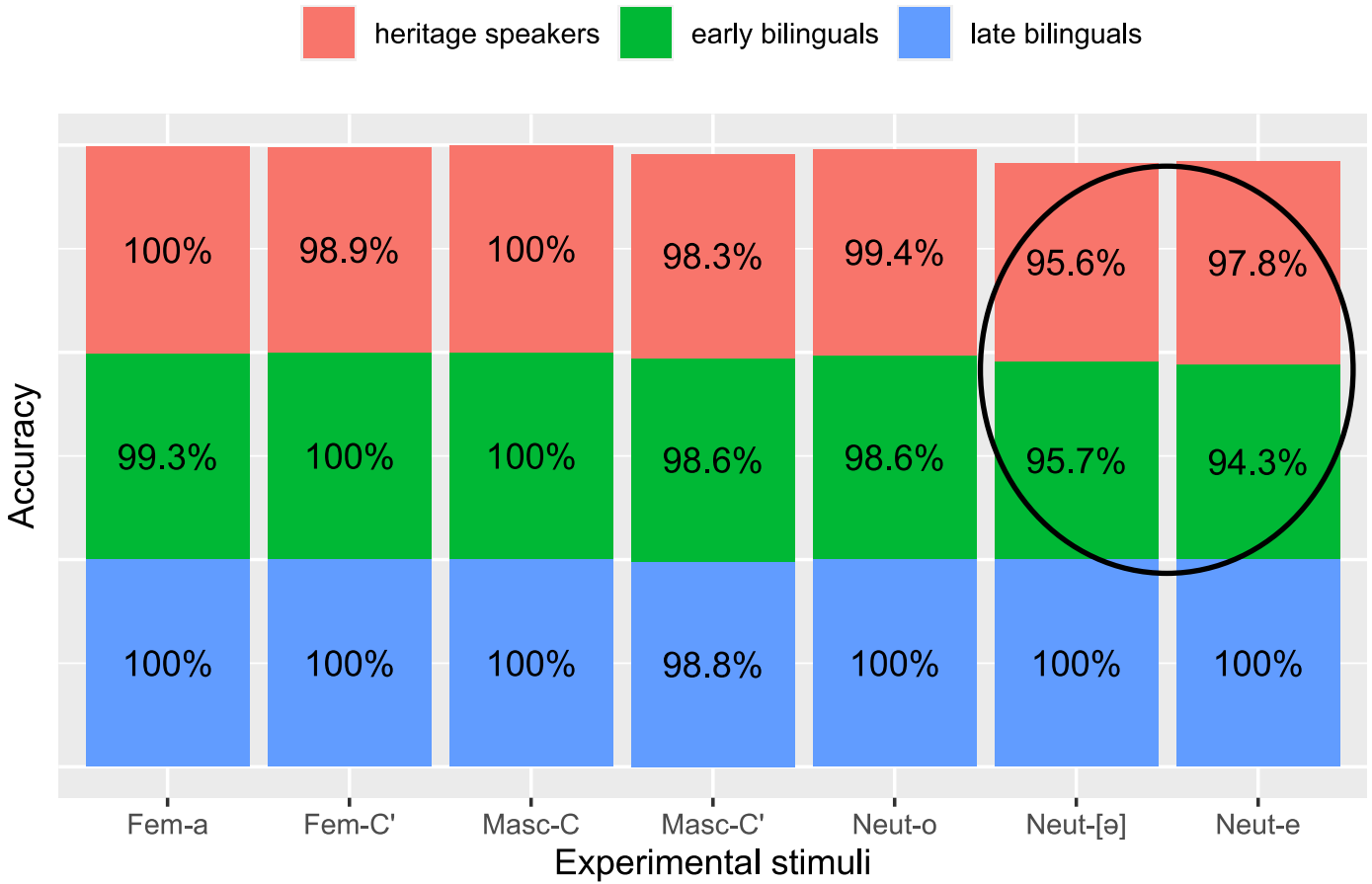


Task 2: Results

Accuracy of gender agreement by groups of nouns

Frequent mismatches:

- **HS's** mismatches: *koleno* ‚knee' (5), *pečen'e* ‚cookie(s)' (2)
- **EB's** mismatches in neuter nouns: *koleno* (2), *pečen'e* (2)
- **LB's** mismatch: *šampun'* ‚shampoo' (2)



Gender Marking in Heritage Russian in Germany

Summary for heritage Russian

- Gender agreement marking in **personal pronouns** is more challenging than in **attributive adjectives**

➢ Hypothesis 1 not confirmed

- No problem in gender assignment (same nouns in Task 1 and 2)

Discussion & Conclusions

RQ 1: Differences in accuracy rates depending on type of gender target?

- **Polish heritage speakers** show little variation in accuracy of gender agreement with different types of gender targets in **singular contexts**

➢ problems emerge only in **plural contexts**, especially with **verb targets** (virile forms are overgeneralized), less with **adjective targets** (here non-virile forms are overgeneralized)

➢ For plural contexts, hypothesis and hierarchy confirmed

Discussion & Conclusions

- **Russian heritage speakers** show almost no problems with **attributive adjectives**, but struggle with gender marking in **personal pronouns**

➢ hypothesis and hierarchy NOT confirmed

➢ controller noun absent from clause (≠ attributive adjectives), makes need to mark gender agreement less obvious

Discussion & Conclusions

RQ 2: Factors that provoke deviations in gender agreement marking

- **Phonological priming**

➢ Phonological form of inflection of gender controller impacts on inflection of gender target, leading to agreement errors, cf. Polish:

(6) Dzieci będą *musieli (= musiały) chodzić do szkoły.

Children-NONVIRILE will have to-MASC.VIRILE go to school.

(7) tylko będą *grube (= grubi) ludzie

only will be fat-NONVIRILE people-MASC.VIRILE

Discussion & Conclusions

- **Frequency effects**

➢ More frequent (unmarked) forms get overgeneralized, cf. over-generalization of virile form in verb targets in Polish plural contexts:

(8) Piotr i mój tata mie**li** urodziny.

Piotr-MASC. and my-MASC dad-MASC. had-MASC.VIRILE birthday.

(9) Sylwia i Piotr mie**li** urodziny.

Sylwia-FEM and Piotr-MASC had-MASC.VIRILE birthday.

(4) Sylwia i moja mama *mie**li** (= mia**ły**) urodziny.

Sylwia-FEM and my-FEM mum-FEM had-MASC.VIRILE birthday.

Discussion & Conclusions

Cf. also Bogusławski (2009: 54f.) on status of –li-forms in Polish:

«Not only is it used in most cases where *at least one* entity in the set described is male, while others are female, thus making the verbal form refer to both males and females (whereas *–ły* is strikingly «feministic» or «non-animistic» in the positive sense. (...) The unmarked status of the ending *–li* also shows in the fact that whenever the distinction in question is dropped altogether in favour of one of the endings, what gets lost is invariably the ending *–ły* (this is true not only about Polish dialects or [groups of] Polish idiolects, but also about the development of the l-participle and the perfect tense in other Slavonic languages, e.g. Russian ; note also the frequent phenomenon of people's shifting to the 1st and 2nd person forms in *–liśmy, -liście*, or even to *–li* where *in fact* only females *can* be or *are* referred to). Another index of the basic character of the –li-forms is their use as a special non-identifying personal referential device (cf. *Przywieźli towar* 'wares have been delivered' (…).»

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