Addressing the address function: A corpus study of the Russian new vocative

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The vocative is an enigmatic case since it is used for calling upon the addressee instead of marking the syntactic relations between participants in a sentence (Daniel and Spencer 2008). The present paper investigates the so-called new vocative in Russian, a category that provides a unique opportunity to study the evolution and function of the vocative. On the basis of extensive corpus data, it is argued that the Russian new vocative involves complex interactions of phonetics, phonology and morphology, and that these interactions are most adequately represented in a non-modular framework such as cognitive linguistics.

In an earlier historical stage of Russian, like other Slavic languages, the vocative case was used to mark vocative meaning (e.g. *bože*, for the vocative case of *bog* 'God', Nesset 2015). However, while the "old" vocative case is now limited to a handful of archaic words, a number of researchers have identified a new type of vocative morphology in present-day Russian, which involves shortened forms like *mam* from *mama* 'mom-NOM.SG' (Daniel and Spencer 2008, Parrott 2010, Andersen 2012 and references therein). The new vocative is quite frequent; the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru, accessed on September 6, 2018) has attestations in 8,236 documents, of which the vast majority is of the new type under scrutiny in the present paper.

Although most researchers have studied the Russian new vocative from a morphological perspective, a number of claims have been made about the phonetics of vocative forms. For instance, it is claimed that new vocatives display voiced obstruents in word-final position, despite the fact that Russian has final devoicing (Daniel and Spencer 2008). However, such phonetic exceptions have received limited attention among phoneticians, and a rigorous phonetic investigation is therefore necessary. Moreover, little investigated is the interaction of morphology and prosody in the context of the new vocative: in what way does morphological marking (e.g. morphological alternation) interact with prosodic marking (e.g. intonation)?

To tackle these issues, we analyze the Multimodal Russian Corpus (MURCO, Grishina 2010), which contains video data produced by multiple speakers in various contexts including public speech, private speech and movie speech. An acoustic analysis was conducted measuring inter alia (i) fundamental frequency (F0) contours (intonation), and (ii) voicing proportion during the final consonants (for words ending with stops or fricatives, such as *Ser'ož* 'Sergey! (a male name)'). In addition to the new vocative itself, the nominative case with a vocative function (e.g. *mama!* vis-à-vis *mam!*) was also considered, since the nominative case, which is a default case in Russian, can also occur in the same context. Preliminary results demonstrate: (i) The new vocative is marked not only by morphology, but also by prosody such as the use of distinctive intonation; (ii) no sustained vocal fold vibration was observed during the word-final obstruent at least for some fricatives.

While the Russian new vocative is an interesting category in its own right, it is of particular interest to cognitive linguistics, because it demonstrates the advantages of a non-modular model, where phonetics, phonology and morphology are tightly integrated instead of relegated to different modules. We show that a cognitive approach with radial category networks and schemas incorporating phonetic, phonological and morphological information (e.g. Nesset 2008) provides an insightful approach to the new vocative in Russian.

Selected References

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