

Statement of Research Interests

Alyona Belikova

My immediate area of expertise and training has as its focus theoretical (generative) approaches to adult second language (L2) acquisition of morpho-syntax. However, my professional interests go beyond this specific research domain, relating to adult L2 acquisition in domains other than morpho-syntax, to linguistic disciplines outside L2 acquisition, and to research done within paradigms other than the generative framework. All of these are united under the umbrella of a very fundamental question as to what constitutes our knowledge of language, and how this knowledge is represented.

Adult Second Language Acquisition

A central approach to L2 acquisition that I adopt is whether interlanguage (i.e. non-native) grammars are constrained by the same linguistic principles as native speaker grammars, whether acquisition of subtle properties of the target L2 is possible, and how the interlanguage grammar is represented.

The summary below demonstrates how I have tried to contribute to a better understanding of what underlies L2 acquisition.

My Ph.D. dissertation focuses on whether or not linguistically misleading classroom instruction can affect L2 acquisition. Of particular interest are linguistically inappropriate classroom rules which are superficially logical but linguistically false.

A case in point is provided by French reflexive and reciprocal verbs, which are formed with the clitic *se*, see (1). The reflexive/reciprocal clitic *se* does not behave on a par with object clitic pronouns (Kayne 1975, Reinhart & Siloni 2005) as many reliable syntactic diagnostics (e.g. passives, causatives, ellipsis constructions) suggest. Superficially, however, *se* generally resembles object clitic pronouns, due to similarities in distribution and form. It is, then, not surprising that classroom French L2 instruction consistently misrepresents *se* verbs as syntactic transitive constructions, and *se* itself as a reflexive/reciprocal object pronoun. My dissertation examines whether English- and Russian-speaking L2 learners of French adopt the linguistically inaccurate classroom generalization or converge on a native-like representation of *se*.

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| (1)a. Ils s'habillent.
<i>they dress(refl/rec)</i> | c. Ils se dessinent.
<i>they draw(refl/rec)</i> |
| b. Ils s'embrassent.
<i>they kiss(refl/rec)</i> | d. Ils se parlent.
<i>they talk(refl/rec)</i> |

Two tasks are designed for this purpose: contextualized grammaticality judgments and truth value judgments. Both tasks involve constructions where *se* and clitic pronouns behave differently. The rationale is that, if L2 participants observe the relevant contrast, this finding would suggest that the inaccurate classroom instruction is not internalized, thus supporting L2 acquisition models that argue for the availability of domain-specific language acquisition mechanisms (similar to L1 acquisition). Crucially, results suggest that advanced L2 learners do not generally treat *se* as a pronoun at the level of *linguistic competence* – as opposed to the level of *learned linguistic knowledge* (Schwartz 1993) – and that classroom generalizations that are formulated in linguistically misleading terms fail to be internalized by L2 learners, even if these rules seem to be superficially plausible and make sense as far as domain-general reasoning is concerned. Another important finding of my thesis research is that Russian speakers, as a group, observe a sharper distinction between *se* and true object clitic pronouns than English speakers do. This difference could be explained by L1 transfer, but only further research can confirm or disconfirm this interpretation, a line of research which I intend to pursue.

The effects of linguistically misleading instruction have not, up to now, been adequately addressed, with just a few studies concluding that it is not generally internalized by learners (Belikova 2008a, forthcoming, Bruhn-Garavito 1995). In another study (Belikova 2009a), I reinterpret Lakshmanan and Lindsey (1998) who report that adult classroom learners of Russian (L1 English) have extreme difficulty acquiring the so-called Genitive of Negation. While the original study ignores the nature of classroom instruction altogether, I argue that the Genitive of Negation rule presented to learners in the Russian L2 classroom is formulated in quite straightforward but linguistically inaccurate terms. Non-acquisition is then a remarkable piece of evidence suggesting that implicit language-specific knowledge can sometimes block explicit domain-general reasoning. Crucially, I have detected a number of contexts where abundance by the classroom rule would result in linguistically implausible overgeneralizations, and where L2 learners fail to make such overgeneralizations. As the next step, further investigation will look at highly advanced/near-native Russian L2ers who have been sufficiently exposed to naturalistic input in the L2, to see if they demonstrate native-like knowledge of Genitive of Negation.

More generally, acquisition scenarios involving linguistically misleading classroom instruction provide us with important test cases capable of shedding light on what mechanisms underlie L2 acquisition. In addition to the contribution for the theory of L2 acquisition, this line of research has important implications for applied linguistics. If linguistically misleading instruction indeed fails to be internalized by learners, it is important to revise teaching materials from the linguistic perspective to make sure that learners' time in the classroom is not spent in vain. To this end, my research provides a unique opportunity for enhancing interdisciplinary collaborations across various language programs and departments.

I have also examined the plausibility of resetting linguistic parameters in L2 acquisition. According to the Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis (FTFA) (Schwartz & Sprouse 1996), L2 learners start off by adopting the first language (L1) grammar; whenever the L1-based interlanguage grammar fails to deal with new L2 input, restructuring may take place, including parameter resetting. Adopting the analysis of reciprocal verbs in terms of the Lexicon-Syntax parameter (e.g. Reinhart & Siloni 2005), I tested the predictions of FTFA with respect to the acquisition of reciprocal verbs in L2 French by native speakers of Russian (Belikova 2007a, Belikova 2008b).

Briefly, the Lexicon-Syntax parameter splits the world's languages into those that derive reciprocal verbs in syntax (French, Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, etc.) and those that form them in the lexicon (Russian, Hebrew, Hungarian, etc.). The empirical evidence for the split comes from a cluster of properties associated with reciprocals in the two types of languages. The most prominent property is productivity; in languages like French, reciprocalization is highly productive (2a, b), while in languages like Russian, it is restricted to a particular set of verbs (3a, b). The subtlest property of the parameter is discontinuity; the so-called discontinuous construction is ungrammatical in French (2c), but grammatical in Russian (3c). Crucially, discontinuity is neither taught in the classroom, nor is it discussed in textbooks.

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| (2)a. Ils s'embrassent.
<i>they kiss(rec)</i> | (3)a. Oni celujut-sja.
<i>they kiss(rec)</i> |
| b. Ils se dessinent.
<i>they draw(rec)</i> | b. *Oni risujut-sja.
<i>they draw(rec)</i> |
| c. *Il s'embrasse avec elle.
<i>he kisses(rec) with her</i> | c. On celuet-sja s nej.
<i>he kisses(rec) with her</i> |

The prediction of FTFA, then, is that although French L2ers, whose L1 is Russian, will start out with the lexicon setting of the parameter, once they are sufficiently exposed to L2 input containing productive reciprocals that do not have a corresponding Russian counterpart, resetting of the Lexicon-Syntax parameter should be triggered. Consequently, L2ers should end up also knowing that French does not license the discontinuous construction, despite the learnability problem.

To test this prediction, I conducted an experiment where a group of French L2ers (L1 Russian) and a group of native controls (L1 French) completed a grammaticality judgment task, where the crucial stimuli involved French sentences with productive reciprocal verbs, as in (1b), and discontinuous reciprocals, as in (1c). Overall results reveal that French L2ers master the productivity property, but they experience difficulty acquiring the ungrammaticality of the discontinuous construction. Careful examination of individual results suggests that the productivity of reciprocalization can actually trigger more than one type of restructuring of the interlanguage grammar, and that a subset of L2ers did in fact perform accurately on discontinuity, suggesting that true parameter resetting is possible.

In a different project – in collaboration with Lydia White (McGill University), Paul Hagstrom (Boston University), Tanja Kupisch (University of Hamburg/Lund University) and Öner Özçelik (McGill University/Indiana University) – we have been investigating the L2 acquisition of restrictions on the existential *there* construction in English by native speakers of Russian and Turkish (Belikova et al. 2010, White et al. 2009, 2012). To provide some background, in English, definiteness is expressed by means of articles and other determiners, some of which are definite (strong) and others indefinite (weak). There is a well-known restriction on definiteness in the existential *there*-insertion construction (Milsark 1977), where indefinite DPs are permitted (4a) while definite expressions are excluded (4b). This restriction also applies to negative existentials, as in (4c).

- (4)a. There is a/one fly in my soup.
- b. There is *the/*every fly in my soup.
- c. There aren't any/many/*the/*most flies in my soup.

Although Russian lacks articles and Turkish has no definite articles, these two languages show a definiteness effect in existential constructions with other determiners. However, the restriction is not identical to English. Like English, Russian and Turkish permit weak determiners and prohibit strong determiners in positive existentials, but they differ from English in negative existentials, where they permit both weak and strong determiners to occur. To test whether L2 learners whose L1 is Russian and Turkish can acquire the subtle constraint on existentials in English, we designed a contextualized acceptability judgment test. Briefly, our results show that L2ers have response patterns similar to native speakers, accepting indefinite/weak DPs and rejecting definite/strong DPs not only in affirmative but also in negative existentials, suggesting that they can 'overcome' differences between the L1 and L2. Extending this research further, we also examined the knowledge of restrictions on the existential construction in the German (behaving on a par with English) and Turkish of early German-Turkish bilinguals to study possible effects of crosslinguistic influence. Our results show that early bilinguals' performance in German and Turkish patterns with monolingual speakers' performance in German and Turkish, respectively, suggesting no crosslinguistic influence. This is an ongoing project, and we are also planning to look into L2 and early bilingual acquisition scenarios involving other language combinations.

In different collaborative work with Lydia White (McGill University), I looked into whether a linguistic principle that does not operate in the L1 can still be operative in adult L2 acquisition (Belikova & White 2009). The linguistic principle in question is the Subjacency principle (Chomsky 1973) which regulates question formation and stipulates that certain constituents form islands from which *wh*-phrases cannot escape, (5b-e).

- (5)a. Who did you say that this girl danced with ____?
- b. *Who did you wonder whether this girl danced with ____?
- c. *Who did you spread a rumor that this girl danced with ____?
- d. *Who did you meet a girl that danced with ____?
- e. *Who did you meet this girl after she danced with ____?

A number of earlier studies showed that L2ers whose L1s lack *wh*-movement (e.g. Chinese) are quite inaccurate at rejecting Subjacency violations, in contrast to those with L1s that have *wh*-movement (e.g. Johnson & Newport 1991; Schachter 1989, 1990). In our paper, we review changes to theoretical accounts of islands effects over the years, and consequences for theories of L2 acquisition. As a result, we reanalyze earlier findings and show that when the Subjacency principle is reformulated in light of more recent advances in theoretical linguistics (e.g. Uriagereka 1999), L2ers' grammars appear to be constrained in the relevant respects.

Child Bilingual Acquisition

My particular interest in second language acquisition has led to a more general interest in language acquisition, both monolingual and bilingual. In collaboration with Tanja Kupisch (the University of Hamburg) and fellow graduate students at McGill University, we examined filler syllable production by a bilingual German-English child (Belikova et al. 2009).

Briefly, during L1 acquisition, some children go through a stage in which they produce monosyllabic segments, mainly [ə, e, a], typically referred to as 'fillers' (e.g. Peters 2001). A major debate in the study of fillers is whether they are used for primarily prosodic or primarily morpho-syntactic reasons. Our research addresses this debate by examining previously unanalyzed spontaneous data from a bilingual German-English child, Dora. Following previous research (e.g. Bottari et al. 1993/94, Pepinsky et al. 2001, Tremblay 2005), we argue that the fillers in this corpus represent functional categories (FC), such as auxiliaries, copulas, articles, subject pronouns, etc. We first rule out alternative explanations of Dora's fillers (e.g. as a purely phono-prosodic/rhythmic phenomenon) and then focus on fillers in obligatory positions for FCs. The analysis yields the following findings: (i) a rough negative correlation between the rates of fillers and the FCs they presumably replace, and (ii) more natural developmental curves if fillers in positions of missing FCs are viewed as FC realization rather than FC omission. We propose that fillers are a resource that L1 learners can use when the acquisition of language-specific functional material is particularly challenging. As bilingual L1 acquisition is arguably more challenging than monolingual L1 acquisition, it can result in quantitative differences in filler use between monolinguals and bilinguals. (A large number of fillers are found in both of Dora's languages, in contrast to monolingual acquisition of Germanic languages, where fillers are rarely observed.)

Morphosyntax

My contribution to the domain of morphosyntax is related to my research on L2 acquisition of French reflexive and reciprocal verbs which involve the clitic *se*.

Kayne (1975) observes a series of asymmetries in French in the behaviour of pronominal clitics, on the one hand, and *se*, on the other hand. While certain constructions where such asymmetries are found have been repeatedly referred to by different authors (e.g. Pesetsky 1995, Sportiche 1998, amongst many others), adjectives with dative arguments have been largely left out of discussion. Briefly, the relevant observation is that while clitic object pronouns, such as *me* 'me', are licensed with adjectives like *infidèle* 'unfaithful', the reflexive/reciprocal clitic *se* is reported to be ungrammatical in the same context (Jones 1996, Kayne 1975), see (6).

- (6) Ils *me*/**se* sont infidèles.
 they me/REFL(REC) are unfaithful
 'They are unfaithful to me/themselves (each other).'

To this end, I analyze experimental data from a contextualized grammaticality judgment task (GJT) completed by 19 French native speakers (Belikova 2009c). While pronominal clitics, such as *me*, are normally accepted with adjectives (93% of the time), adjectives with *se* in reflexive and reciprocal contexts are not totally rejected (38%). In my ongoing research, I work towards a solution of this *se* adjective puzzle which draws on (i) relevant differences between adjectives and verbs

(Baker 2003), as well as (ii) special properties of morphological reflexivization/reciprocalization in French as compared to many other languages (e.g. Russian, Hebrew) where such detransitivity morphology absolutely cannot mark adjectives (Siloni 2012).

Syntax

Before coming to McGill, I had been mostly trained as a theoretical linguist specializing in generative syntax at Tel-Aviv University. In particular, my M.A. thesis (Belikova 2005) taps into the syntax of Russian participial relative clauses (RCs), which I followed up on a few years later, focusing on the syntax of participial relatives cross-linguistically (Belikova 2009b).

The structure of participial RCs is traditionally defined as impoverished in comparison to that of regular RCs (e.g. Siloni 1995). Thus, participial RCs are described as lacking independent temporal reference; they are hence interpreted as simultaneous (7a) or perfective (7b) with respect to the matrix event tense, rather than simply as present or past. Second, participial RCs often ban overt subjects (8), which is sometimes taken as stemming from their lacking independent temporal reference (i.e. they apparently lack $T_{[+ \text{tense}]}$, the nominative Case checking head). Third, unlike regular RCs, participial RCs never license overt CP material (*wh*-phrases/complementizers) (9).

- (7)a. We kick/kicked/will kick out pupils [_{prtcl-RC} wearing jeans].
b. We see/saw/will see leaves [_{prtcl-RC} fallen from the tree].
(8) *The book [_{prtcl-RC} the boy reading] is interesting.
(9) The boy [_{prtcl-RC} (*that/*who) reading a book] is clever.

In my work, I bring certain pieces of evidence together to maintain the proposal that properties traditionally taken to establish the reduced nature of participial RCs are mere by-products of their nominal nature, rather than intrinsic to them. Thus, participial RCs do not universally lack independent temporal reference (e.g. Russian). Moreover, certain languages in fact allow participial RCs with overt subjects (e.g. Arabic, Turkish). Crucially, the two properties do not necessarily coincide (Russian participial RCs do not allow overt subjects, while Arabic participial RCs lack independent temporal reference), so that [-tense] and (non)availability of overt subjects are not straightforwardly related. Finally, the CP layer is not simply cut off of participial RCs, but is arguably replaced with DP (cf. Ouhalla 2004), which is consistent with the fact that participial RCs in languages like Arabic, Greek and Hebrew are headed by overt determiners. In other words, there exist languages clearly showing that none of the three traditional ‘defining’ properties properly define participial RCs. I then articulate my proposal as to exactly what defines these RCs (roughly, they are DPs cross-linguistically, cf. Siloni (1995)), and establish why they do end up looking reduced at times. Briefly, I show that participial RCs exhibit their full structure overtly only if special syntactic requirements imposed on them are met. For example, I demonstrate that if the DP analysis of participial RCs is adopted, the (in)ability to license overt subjects ultimately depends on whether or not the language licenses resumptive pronouns. Crucially, Russian does not license resumption, while Arabic and Turkish do.

Historical Linguistics

Finally, I have an interest in historical linguistics, and have conducted research relevant to the debate on genesis of Modern Hebrew (MH). The Traditional School (e.g. Rosen 1977) claims that MH is Biblical Hebrew revived, while the Revolutionary School (Horvath & Wexler 1997, Wexler 1990) argues that MH is Indo-European in nature. In particular, Wexler and Horvath (1997) assert that MH is Yiddish relexified to Old Hebrew; in other words, it is claimed that MH exhibits phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic structure of the substratum language (Yiddish), while the vocabulary is recognizable as being from a lexifier language (Old Hebrew). To this end, I have contributed to the debate by providing a new piece of evidence in favour of the relexification hypothesis of the genesis of MH (Belikova 2007b). The comparative analysis of relative clauses

(RCs) in MH, Biblical Hebrew and Yiddish shows that the structure of RCs in MH mirrors the peculiarities of Yiddish RCs rather than the ones of Biblical Hebrew RCs. Although Modern and Biblical Hebrew RCs are similar in that they both involve resumptive pronouns, only MH resumptives behave like *wh*-phrases in the absence of the overt complementizer (cf. Demirdache 1991). The fact is puzzling for the traditional approach to MH genesis, while the relexification hypothesis in fact predicts this pattern, given that Yiddish employs both resumptive pronouns and the *wh*-strategy, and in addition bans co-occurrence of a *wh*-phrase and the overt complementizer.

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