

Haifa, 12 January 2023

Report on
Sergei Gnitiev's PhD thesis

Title: First Language Attrition Among Russians Living in Hungary

The dissertation is devoted to the important and increasingly relevant issue of first language attrition. The study is carried out in the bilingual settings of Hungary compared to monolingual context in Russia. The choice of population and context is instrumental in closing an existing gap in research of attrition in Russian-speaking populations.

Form:

The dissertation is clearly and accessibly written in academic English, and therefore reads well. Some language problems occur, such as on page 63 "two group's performance", page 79 " both the control and the target group did not produced " and " coincidecoincides", page 80 "However, the variation of the target group was not been confirmed by Pearson correlation analysis". APA rules are applied across the paper. Legends for figures (e.g., Figure 6, p.54 and Figure 9 p.59) could be more explicit.

Content:

The **literature review** familiarizes the reader with the basic historical and political events leading to the emergence of the Russian-Hungarian bilingualism and describes the factors that might impact speakers' identity. It sufficiently describes the classical theories of language attrition and current studies in various countries, includes definitions of main terms for individual and social language attrition, defines heritage speakers, distinguishes between L1 and L2/FL attrition. After the discussion of cross-linguistic interaction and complexity /dynamic systems theory, it is a bit disappointing that the author limits his discussion to L1-L2 interactions, given that the scholars

mentioned in the review on pp.20-23 actively advanced multilingual research. Language attrition on the lexical, semantic, phonetic, and other levels, speech production and fluency as well as extralinguistic factors in language attrition are given due attention. The literature review logically leads readers to the research questions posed in this study.

The context of the study is well described. It would be interesting to see the diversity of the mono- and bilinguals that participated in the study, but I understand this is not possible in the framework of a thesis by a young researcher. **The structure** of the dissertation is transparent and logical; some paragraphs are devoted to intermediate summarization.

The section of **methodology** shows the several methods and instruments used by the candidate: interviews, questionnaire, story-telling task, verbal fluency task and Social Personal Background Questionnaire (SPBQ) adapted by the author. This is a big advantage of this dissertation.

The **results** chapter consists of reports on each aspect under research, each illustrated by graphs and figures. Here it becomes clear that, perhaps, there are too many aspects dealt with on such a small population sample. The author recognizes this in the limitations section. On the other hand, even the pilot small-scale study and its results provide a good basis for the follow-up studies and stimulate further research. **The discussion** addresses the results, comparing them to the previous studies. I feel that the results deserve a more extended discussion in terms of other important things they show. In fact, the results can give some taste of further research in the area of language attrition. **The conclusion** provides a short summary of the study and its limitations. In view of the results, the conclusion does not do justice to this study.

Questions:

1. You mainly speak about Russian-paired bilinguals and about L1 and L2. Are your participants truly bilingual or are they multilingual? Please explain and add to your own comment about English as an additional language (p.78).
2. During the study you revealed other important things that were not taken into consideration initially. This is commendable and a sign of a true researcher. Would

you, then, expand your research question "To what extent do the Russian and Hungarian languages and cultures contribute to the identity formation of Russians in Hungary" to include other possible facets of identity, or would you take into consideration only two languages and two cultures? Whether you answer 'yes' or 'no,' please explain your choice.

Final comment:

My conclusion is that the dissertation by Sergei Gnitiev is well-timed. It is written on a topic that has been brought to the fore by the current global developments. The dissertation presents an original piece of research on L1 Russian attrition, which has been scarcely researched in various contexts. I believe that this dissertation meets the requirements of a PhD degree. I am looking forward to discussing the study and its implications with the candidate at the public defense.

Larissa Aronin

Larissa Aronin
Associate Professor
Oranim Academic College of Education, Israel