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Simplifying grammatical gender in inflectional languages: Odessa Russian and beyond

Summary: This work aims to contribute to the analysis of the morphosyntactic processes of gender assignment and gender agreement in inflectional languages, through the study of gender variation in Russian. We will focus on the data of a special contact variety, Odessa Russian (OdR), and compare it to standard, dialectal, child Russian, as well as other contact varieties of Russian. OdR is a linguistic variety slightly decomplexified by non-native acquisition, which arises from a special language contact situation; it originated as a *lingua franca*, and was passed on later to successive generations of speakers as a native variety. Some of the most striking features of OdR are its divergences in gender assignment and agreement with respect to Standard Russian. The specific processes analysed in this paper are classified in three groups: (i) loss of a gender value (neuter gender), by virtue if a strategy of gender (re)assignment; (ii) transfer or 'migration' of gender according to the phonological shape of the words involved (masculine into feminine and feminine into masculine); interestingly, formal rules in this group of processes can sometimes prevail over semantic rules (i.e. over natural gender); and (iii) disruptions of gender agreement (associated with disruption of grammatical case), which can be interpreted as the simplification of the corresponding syntactic tree by eliminating uninterpretable gender features in the language. We will show that these processes go beyond mere substrata effects, and proceed according to more general processes that partially take place also in other (contact and non-contact) varieties of Russian. More specifically: (i) occasional changes in the assignment

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and agreement of gender are reminiscent of dialectal Russian, but are more widespread in OdR (closer to child language) than in those varieties; (ii) even if gender in OdR was not lost as a grammatical category, some productions point to a partial loss of gender features, reminding us of pidgins and heritage languages.

Keywords: Odessa, Russian, grammatical gender, semantic gender, gender assignment, gender agreement, noun classes

1 Introduction

This work is a contribution to the analysis of gender assignment and gender agreement in inflectional languages of fusional type from a morphosyntactic point of view.[1] The relevant phenomena will be addressed here by focusing on a special contact variety, the Russian language spoken in the city of Odessa (OdR), as compared to other Russian varieties (standard Russian, dialectal Russian, child Russian, heritage and pidginized Russian). Hopefully, the analysis of their similarities and divergences will give us a convenient study space to assess the properties of gender in inflectional languages, as well as possible pathways of variation in grammatical gender.

As an additional part of the study, in order to isolate 'universal' phenomena in a satisfactory way, we also need to assess the role of substrata and other possible sources triggering contact varieties (in the spirit of Mufwene 1986). Thus, we will show that, in OdR, two factors will be relevant for the development of grammatical gender: (i) Substrata are determinant for specific linguistic traits that will develop further in OdR. In this sense, we will analyse similarities and divergences in grammatical gender in OdR with respect to dialectal varieties of Russian and Ukrainian (the only observable substrata operating in gender assignment and agreement in OdR). (ii) More general or universal processes, relevant in a cross-linguistic perspective, shape the exact ways in which certain traits, motivated by a language contact situation, will develop and spread further. In this sense, we will show that OdR shares pathways of development of grammatical gender with child Russian, as well as unrelated pidginized and heritage Russian varieties.

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1 We use the term 'fusional language' in the typological sense, for languages in which several pieces of morphological information are "fused", i.e. included in a morpheme in an undistinguishable way.

2 Preliminary notions about the Russian language of Odessa (OdR)

Although this is not a work on contact linguistics, we will present some preliminary data about the formation of OdR, essential to understand the special linguistic situation that brings about the phenomena we will analyse in this paper.

Odessa is nowadays a Russian-speaking million-city, located by the Black Sea, in Southern Ukraine. It was officially founded by Catherine the Great, the Russian Empress, in 1794, based on the site of the Turkish fortress Khadzhibei, occupied some years before by the Russian Army. In 1819, the city was granted free-port status, and it soon became home to a diverse population of Albanians, Armenians, Bulgarians, Crimean Tatars, French, Germans, Greeks, Italians, Jews, Poles, Romanians, Russians, Turks, Ukrainians, and other nationalities. As a result of this massive and rapid migration flow, a special situation of language contact arose, in which roughly half the population of the city was made up of outsiders, who had to learn Russian, the language of the Empire. This initial sociolinguistic situation of OdR (the first 30–40 years after the foundation of the city), fits clearly Trudgill's (2011) contact situation involving L2 learning by adults. In this period, OdR suited the classic definition of *lingua franca* as a vehicular language, indispensable for communication between speakers with different native languages.[2]

In a few decades from this initial linguistic situation, Russian stopped being a mere *lingua franca* and was transmitted to successive generations of speakers as their own native language, not only as a vehicular means, but also in other spheres of their lives. In this period, OdR is defined as a socially upper-class variety or 'urbanolect' (in contrast to the Ukrainian-speaking rural area; cf. Stepanov 2004: 78), which nevertheless included the characteristic traits of the first stages of its formation as a linguistic variety. Our study here focuses on this second

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2 According to the census of 1896, roughly half the population of the city had Russian (or Ukrainian) as a native language (Stepanov 2004: 16). A little less than half the population was made up by speakers of languages other than East Slavic (most notably, speakers of Yiddish), fulfilling Trudgill's (2011) calculation of the percentage of non-native speakers necessary to perform contact-induced changes. Meanwhile, in the case of many Yiddish speakers, they were already citizens of the Russian Empire when they migrated to Odessa, so that they could contribute to OdR with their Jewish Russian variety, even if they were mostly native Yiddish speakers. Jewish Russian is defined as a cluster of varieties of post-Yiddish ethnolects. Odessa Russian, like other Jewish Russian, exhibits some degree of Yiddish substratum (Verschik 2016); however, as we will see, in the specific case of gender, the Yiddish substratum is not relevant.

chronological stage, as we find it in the texts and popular culture of the first half of the 20th century, *after* its initial status of *lingua franca*.

Unfortunately, after the repression of the Jews from the 1940's on and their massive emigration abroad, the OdR variety started to fade out. Nowadays, only a few lexical and morphological traits are preserved in the daily speech of Russian speakers in the city of Odessa.[3] In other words, most of the characteristic features of OdR we analyse in this paper are out of use nowadays. Nevertheless, OdR remains chronologically very close to the present day, so we have plenty of texts, notices, and records from this variety. In this paper, we will rely on all sorts of oral and written collections of linguistic productions characteristic of OdR, while it was still in use in the city. More specifically, we work with Stepanov's (2004) detailed monography on OdR, as well as Smirnov's (2003) dictionary of OdR expressions (four volumes).[4] The morphosyntax of gender we analyse in this paper is found in texts or corresponds to speakers' productions in the first half of the 20th century (Stepanov 2004: 411–443). The sample of phenomena relevant to this paper has been extracted "by hand", going through the works, and selecting those examples including the features analysed here.

As a caveat, we must say that, as happens in other non-standard varieties, most of the grammatical features observed in OdR are not subject to a norm, so the relevant data can vary and fluctuate. Together with Stepanov (2004: 81), we will take as relevant the most frequent phenomena observed in the areas studied. Through the paper, we will give examples that converge with standard instances of gender assignment and/or agreement, together with divergences from the standard (this duality will be addressed in Section 7.2). In general, the patterns presented in this paper can differ from speaker to speaker, or even from production to production, being somewhat of an occasional phenomenon rather than signal a well-established grammar.

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3 The characteristic features of OdR preserved to this day comprise mainly lexical items, expressive particles (*taki* 'still, even though'), interjections (*taki da*! 'of course (not)'), and idioms (*imeiu vam skazat'* 'I need [lit. have] to tell you', *ia vas umoliaiu* 'stop saying that! [lit. I beg you]'), but almost no morphosyntactic traits, except for those coinciding with the Ukrainian norm, which are still widespread (e.g. the preposition *za* instead of the preposition *o(b)* and *po*). The lexical and idiomatic specifics of OdR have been collected in several works by V. P. Smirnov, most notably in (2003).
4 These authors collected productions of OdR speakers in the following ways: (i) transliteration of the recorded speech of elderly OdR speakers, collected by Stepanov and Smirnov from speakers born in the early 20th century; (ii) written texts produced in the city, including literary works, publicity, journals, or about the city (memoires, essays) during the 19th and early 20th centuries; (iii) other oral sources, such as movies set in Odessa, songs, folklore, jokes, etc. These sources are specified after each example. When referring to Smirnov (2003), we just indicate the volume and page corresponding to the example.

Finally, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Odessa showed an additional situation of diglossia, as OdR coexisted with the standard Russian language, which was the imposed variety, used in written texts and taught in schools. A standard variety (in this case, literary standard Russian) imposes a pressure on non-standard varieties, "softening" the potential simplification processes in the language (cf. McWhorter 2005 for softening of creolization in similar situations). In the case of OdR, this factor could be crucial in order to explain its lesser degree of simplification, as compared to heritage languages or pidginized Russian (cf. Section 7.2).

3 Two assumptions on gender and inflection in Russian

3.1 Assumption 1: gender and noun classes

Since Corbett (1982), most authors define gender in terms of noun classes and agreement, at least in the case of languages with rich inflection, like Russian. Grammatical gender systems in fusional languages are systems of agreement classes, related to other morphological properties, i.e. exhibiting cumulative exponence with respect to other features, such as number, case, or person (Di Garbo & Miestamo 2019).

The notion of cumulative exponence is important here, because in Russian, noun classes, case and gender are intricately interrelated. Cumulative exponence has the immediate implication that weakening of gender morphology goes hand in hand with case attrition, as it happened in different Indo-European languages. In the case of OdR, disruption of gender agreement is typically associated with the disruption of case marking as well (cf. Section 7.1).

In Russian, nominal morphology is overtly expressed through inflectional morphemes on adjectives, pronouns and nouns. In the case of the nouns, several classes and subclasses are distinguished. The main criteria used to classify inflectional classes are stem, gender, number and, at a lesser extent, animacy. Stems are defined according to their phonological shape: if there is no final vowel, the stem can be 'hard' (non-palatalized) consonant or 'soft' (palatalized) consonant. Stems ended in vowel can have an −*a*, or an −*o* ending (plus the palatalized versions of the previous consonant).

There are three genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter), two numbers (singular and plural), and animate / inanimate nouns. There is a substantial number of syncretic forms for several values, and animacy is restricted to accusative plural and class I stems in the singular accusative case.

In regular conditions, adjectives, pronouns and some verbal forms "agree" in gender with an associated noun. Gender morphology surfacing on agreeing elements is determined by the gender of the noun:

(1) a. *Moia mladshaia sestra   stala   otlichnoj   pisatel'nitsei.*
         my.F younger.F   sister.F became.F excellent.F writer.F
         'My junior sister became an excellent writer'
     b. *Moi mladshii   brat   stal   otlichnym   pisatelem.*
         my.M younger.M   brother.M became.M excellent.M writer.M
         'My junior brother became an excellent writer'

With regard to noun inflectional classes, we will adopt Corbett's (1982) four-part system, illustrated in Table 1 for singular number:

Table 1: Inflectional classes in Russian, four-part system. Singular number.

Case (singular)	I class hard / soft (anim / inan) <u>masc.</u> *brat* 'brother' / *otel'* 'hotel'	II class *-a* <u>fem.</u> *stena* 'wall'	III class soft <u>fem.</u> *kost'* 'bone'	IV class *-o* <u>neuter</u> *telo* 'body'
Nominative	brat / otel'	stena	kost'	telo
Accusative	brata / otel'	stenu	kost'	telo
Genitive	brata / otelia	steny	kosti	tela
Dative	bratu / oteliu	stene	kosti	telu
Instrumental	bratom / otelem	stenoi	kost'iu	telom
Locative	brate / otele	stene	kosti	tele

As represented in Table 1, noun classes in Russian determine the gender of the noun in most cases. The exceptions to class-gender correspondences are certain sex-differentiable nouns:

(i) In class I, even if most nouns are masculine, there exist some hybrid nouns denoting professions, such as *pedagog* 'teacher', *vrach* 'doctor', *advokat* 'advocate' (2a);
(ii) In class II, besides a majority of feminine nouns, there are masculines, such as *papa* 'Dad' or *diadia* 'uncle' (2b), and common gender nouns, such as *sud'ia* 'judge', *zanuda* 'boring person', *griaznulia* 'dirty person', etc. (2b).

(2) a. *Moia mladshaia sestra   stala   otlichnym   pedagogom.*
         my.F younger.F   sister.F became.F excellent.M teacher.M.CLASS I
         'My junior sister became an excellent teacher.'

b. *Moi mladshii diadia stal otlichnym sud'ëi.*
my.ᴍ younger.ᴍ uncle.ᴍ.ᴄʟᴀss ɪɪ became.ᴍ excellent.ᴍ judge.ᴍ.

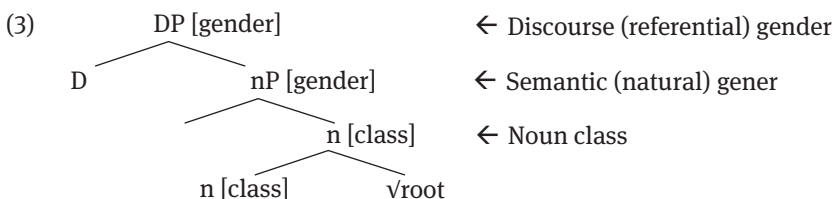ᴄʟᴀss ɪɪ

'My junior uncle became an excellent judge.'

In these examples, natural (semantic) gender of the noun (male, female) triggers the corresponding gender agreement on verbal forms, as well as on related adjectives in the case of the nouns in (2b), regardless the noun class-gender correspondence represented in Table 1. Corbett & Fraser (2000) and Nesset (2004) argue that the reason for these mismatches is that semantic gender assignment (rules referring to biological sex) usually takes precedence over other (formal) gender assignment rules.

3.2 Assumption 2: the Distributed Gender Hypothesis

As for the nature of gender and its realization in the structure, we will follow Steriopolo's (2018a) Distributed Gender Hypothesis (revised version). This hypothesis is in line with the Distributed Morphology framework, and considers that gender is not a uniform notion. Rather the contrary, gender can be decomposed into "smaller pieces" that are shared between different parts of the nominal structure:

(i) Morphological or grammatical gender features are determined in Russian by noun classes, and there is no need to posit additional "intrinsic" gender features ([masc] [fem]) in the lexical items.

(ii) Semantic or natural gender, and discourse or referential gender are viewed as "syntactic" gender, i.e. not intrinsically associated to each noun, but specified higher in the tree.

The distribution of gender features in Russian is illustrated in (3) below. Semantically or naturally determined gender (determined by biological sex) is associated with small nP, while discourse-dependent (referential) gender is assigned at D-level. Grammatically determined gender has no specific place in the syntactic tree, because it is directly determined by declension class (therefore, at the level of n).

(3)

DP [gender]   ← Discourse (referential) gender
D   nP [gender]   ← Semantic (natural) gener
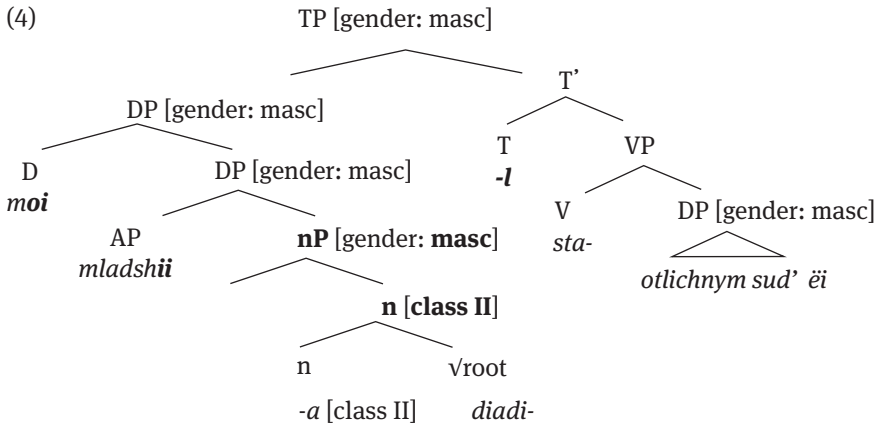n [class]   ← Noun class
n [class]   √root

This account nicely fits Corbett's (1982) four-part system of inflectional classes in Table 1, whereby grammatical gender and gender agreement of nouns in Russian are determined by their morphology. Thus, all else being equal, consonant class I triggers and percolates masculine gender all over the structure, −*a*-class II and −*i*-class III percolate feminine, and −*o*-class IV percolates neuter.

The exceptions in (2) do not invalid this neat correspondence of gender and morphological classes in Russian, because morphological and natural gender are distributed at different points of the structure. According to Steriopolo (2018a), all these exceptions correspond to instances of "syntactic" gender, valued at *n*P or DP-level, therefore, independent from (purely morphological) grammatical gender, determined by the noun class intrinsically in the noun head.

Thus, natural or referential gender agreement of hybrid and common nouns in Russian can override their inflectional class; i.e. class II male nouns percolate masculine (valued at *n*P), instead of feminine (2b), whereas class I common nouns percolate feminine (valued at DP), when the referent is female (2a).

For example, if natural gender at *n*P is specified as [male], this feature will percolate and trigger masculine agreement on every adjective and verb higher in the structure, even if the noun belongs to class II; thus overriding lower features, corresponding to noun class. This is the case of example (2b) above (*Moi mladshii diadia stal otlichnym sud'ëi*), whose distribution of gender features is illustrated in (4).

(4)

$$\text{TP [gender: masc]}$$

TP [gender: masc]

DP [gender: masc]   T'

D   DP [gender: masc]   T   VP
moi   *-l*

AP   **nP [gender: masc]**   V   DP [gender: masc]
mladshii   *sta-*

n [class II]   *otlichnym sud' ëi*

n   √root
-a [class II]   *diadi-*

Here [class II], which otherwise would result in feminine agreement, remains low in the structure and gets overridden by the natural gender feature [masculine] at *n*P, the feature that percolates further in the structure.

4 Simplification of gender assignment and agreement in Odessa Russian (OdR)

In 1895, the Russian journalist V. M. Doroshevich wrote in his short humoristic essay about the Russian language spoken in Odessa that "the language of Odessa does not respect declension, conjugation, agreement, nothing!"; and that "Northern (Russian) people, arriving in Odessa, say that Odessians speak in a sort of Chinese language."

In this paper, we will show that Doroshevich, of course, exaggerates. More specifically, in the case of gender assignment and agreement, we will certainly detect certain processes of decomplexification, comparable to heritage languages or pidgins, but not to the same extent. Nonetheless, we will assume that these similarities with pidgins and heritage languages, are due to Dahl's (2004: 110) 'suboptimal language transmission', simplification due to the acquisition of a language from "imperfect" or non-native L2 learning, at least, in the first stages of the development of this variety.[5]

As expected in a contact variety, there are elements in OdR which have a straightforward substratum explanation, most notably in the realm of phraseology and lexical elements. Most phenomena regarding gender, however, cannot be traced to a clear substratum effect; rather the contrary, they have parallels in other unrelated varieties of non-standard Russian. Some patterns will be better described as spontaneous contact-induced processes of simplification of the language that are widespread in heritage and/or child Russian as well.

In the following sections, we will go through the main characteristics of grammatical gender in OdR as compared to other varieties of Russian. For each group of phenomena, we will first present the data with its potential explanation(s), and then evaluate the role of substrata vs. more general processes of gender assignment and agreement.

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5 Suboptimality in language transmission has many nuances we will not discuss here. Dahl (2004) observes that there are different degrees of suboptimal transmission, depending on the L1 of the speaker, the element of the language that is being learnt, etc.

5 Reduction of the number of gender values: loss of neuter gender

5.1 Migration from neuter into feminine gender

One of the possible outcomes of change in grammatical gender, according to Di Garbo & Miestamo (2019) is the loss of gender through redistribution of agreement features. An example of this is the assimilation of neuter to feminine gender in OdR, whereby the standard tri-way partition (masculine, feminine and neuter) is reduced to masculine-feminine.

(5) a. *A ty ego za ushku potrogai.* (OdR)
and you him behind ear.ACC.F touch
'Touch him behind the ear.' (L'vov 1972, *Skazhi sebe, kto ty. Rasskazy*: 81)

b. *Razve mozhno zhivotnuiu nazyvat' chelovecheskim imenem?*
maybe is.possible animal.ACC.F call human name
'Is it possible to give an animal a human name?' (popular joke in Smirnov 2003, I: 179)

c. *Shtekaite povidlu poka papa dobryi.*
pinch jam.ACC.F while dad good
'Pinch some jam, while Dad is in good mood.' (Smirnov 2003, IV: 494)

(6) a. *Kakaia nakhal'stva!*
what.NOM.F effrontery
'What a cheek!' (Babel' 1921–1924, *Odesskie rasskazy – Liubka kazak*)

b. *Kakaia u vas umnaia zhivotnaia.*
what.NOM.F at you intelligent.NOM.F animal
'What an intelligent animal you have!' (Smirnov 2003, III: 226)

In these examples, the nouns *ushka*, *nakhal'stva* and *povidla* are declined according to feminine class II. Any agreeing adjective surfaces as feminine (6) and, if the noun is in direct object position, it takes the accusative singular form typical of class II (5).

The relevant forms in StR corresponding to (5–6) would be IV-class neuter nouns, invariant in accusative form (*ushko*; *nakhal'stvo*; *povidlo*) and they would percolate neuter gender, as well (*kakoe nakhal'stvo*; *kakoe umnoe zhivotnoe*).

As shown in Table 2, final non-stressed *–o* and *–a* are equally reduced to schwa in Russian *akan'e* varieties (to [a] in strong *akan'e* dialects) in nominative singular case of classes II and IV. In OdR, the homophony of these forms enables

neuter −*o*-class nominative case to go into feminine −*a*-class in a quite straight-forward way.

Table 2: Nominative and accusative singular forms of classes II and IV

	II (-a)	IV (-o)
Nominative sg	shkola [ʃkólə]	telo [tʲélə]
Accusative sg	shkolu [ʃkólu]	telo [tʲélə]

Other examples of this migration are: *Buratina* 'Pinocchio', *úcha* 'ear', *gorla* 'throat', *spasiba* 'thanks', used as a noun, e.g. in: *luchshe bol'shoi spasiby* 'better big.GEN.F thanks.GEN.F' ('better than giving many thanks'), *chuchela* 'stuffed animal, scarecrow', *tela* 'body', etc., all of which are −*o* neuters in StR (*Buratino, úkho, gorlo, bol'shoe spasibo, chuchelo, telo*).

Even the nominalized adjective of neuter gender *zhivotnoe* 'animal' becomes feminine: *zhivotnaia* 'animal' (5b, 6b). As in the case of nouns, despite their orthography, the nominative singular ending of neuter (-*oe* [əjə]) and feminine adjectives (-*aia* [əjə]) are phonetically identical in *akan'e* varieties (in strong *akan'e*, too: -*oe* [-aja], -*aia* [-aja]; cf. Pozharitskaia 2005: 107). Thus, the same phonological motivation (identification of unstressed endings between different inflectional classes) underlies this gender transfer as well.

In OdR, the transfer from neuter class IV into feminine class II affects not only nominative and accusative case, but also other grammatical cases:[6]

(7)   a.   *Slukhai siuda ukhoi.*   (OdR)
          hear   here ear.INST.F
          'Just hear me with your ears.' (Smirnov 2003, II: 141)
      b.   *Shë   ty   molchish', dlinnei toi   zhirafy s   eë*
          what you   are silent   longer that   giraffe with   her
          bezrazmernoi   gorloi?
          unmesureable.INST.F   throat.INST.F
          'Why do you keep silent so long, without understanding a word? (lit. it takes you "longer than a giraffe's neck" to understand what's being said)' (Smirnov 2003, I: 393)

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6 In StR, the corresponding forms for the feminine nouns in (7) are all neuter (*ukhom, bezrazmernym gorlom, na vsëm tele, k ètomu zhivotnomu, dereviannogo Buratino* – the last one is a neuter indeclinable proper name in StR).

   c. *Strugal baistriukov vmesto dereviannoi Buratiny.*
       chipped bastards   instead wooden.ɢᴇɴ.ꜰ Pinocchio.ɢᴇɴ.ꜰ
       'He carved illegitimate kids instead of a wooden Pinocchio.' (Smirnov
       2003, I: 203–204)

   d. *A   chto ia eshchë mogu, esli na vsei   tele   ostalos'*
       and what I   still   can   if   on all.ʟᴏᴄ.ꜰ body.ʟᴏᴄ remained
       odno zdorovoe mesto.
       one   healthy place
       'What can I do, if only an undamaged place all over my body is left?'
       (popular joke, in Smirnov 2003, III: 214)

   e. *Mosel ... nëssia k   ètoi   zhivotnoi.*
       Mosel   ran   towards this.ᴅᴀᴛ.ꜰ animal.ᴅᴀᴛ.ꜰ
       'Mosel ran towards that animal.' (Smirnov 2003, IV: 90)

Loss of the neuter value, then, was precluded by the disappearance of the corresponding declension class (class IV).

5.2 Substrata and general processes in the loss of neuter

If the identification of homophonous nominative singular forms of class IV and class II (as represented in Table 2) underlies the assimilation of neuter into feminine in OdR, it seems reasonable to assume a phonological strategy of gender assignment as the most salient explanation of this phenomenon. Gender assignment according to a phonological strategy pays attention to the correlations between phonological forms and grammatical gender existing in the morphological paradigms of a language.

This fact excludes straightforwardly a Ukrainian substratum for this specific phenomenon. Ukrainian did not historically undergo the phonological shift called *akan'e*, i.e. reduction of unstressed vowels, named precisely after the reduction of unstressed −*o* to something more similar to −*a*. Central and South dialects of Russian underwent *akan'e* by the 15th century, but Northern Russian and Ukrainian did not (with the exception of the North-East band of Ukraine along the border with Russia), and unstressed −*o* was preserved as such (what is usually called *okan'e*). It is therefore not surprising that, unlike in dialectal Russian, there is no loss, partial or total, of neuter gender in dialectal Ukrainian (Bevzenko 1980: 91).

Odessa, of course, did not exist as a Russian-speaking settlement when *akan'e* emerged, and missed this historical process. When Russian was introduced in the newly created city, during the 18–19th centuries, the *akan'e* variant was adopted, together with the homophony between neuter −*o* and feminine −*a*

forms, which was unavailable in the *okan'e* varieties of Ukrainian geographically surrounding Odessa.

Other substrata effects potentially due to an analogical strategy of gender assignment must be discarded, at least on an individual item-by-item basis.[7] For example, neuter *ukho* 'ear' and *telo* 'body' turning into feminine *ukha* and *tela* cannot be traced back to e.g. Yiddish underlying gender of the corresponding words, as the equivalent words are masculine in Yiddish.[8]

Moreover, partial processes of loss of neuter gender for the same phonological reason are attested in other unrelated Slavic *akan'e* variants (Wiemer 2004; Erker 2014: 368). Erker (2014) reports that, in Belarusian dialects, neuters migrate both to feminine (more often) and masculine (less often) gender. Fluctuation of a few words between –*o* and –*a* inflectional classes is attested across standard varieties of Slavic languages as well; for example, the Polish word for Russian *povidlo* 'jam' is feminine (*powidla*).

In Central Russian, a similar process took place in masculine proper names ending in unstressed –*ko*, –*lo*, which migrated into (masculine) –*a*-class II in Moscow Russian in the 16th century: *Danilo > Danila* (acc. *Danilu*, etc.); *Stepanko > Stepanka*, etc. (Vinogradov 2002: 12).

The same process of gender transfer is described by i.a. Kuznetsov (1960: 98–100), and Pozharitskaia (2005: 107–109) for several Southeast *akan'e* dialects, most notably, Ryazan dialects, which lost neuter gender in a partial way. Here, some –*o* class IV words go into –*a* class II, usually in two case forms: (i) nominative singular (evidenced by agreeing adjectives): *bolshaia stad[ə]* 'big.NOM.F group of cattle', and (ii) accusative singular: *stadu* 'cattle.ACC.F'; *v poliu* 'to field.ACC.F' (cf. *pol[jə]*), *razbil khoroshuiu bliudu* 'he broke a good.ACC.F plate.ACC.F' (cf. *bliud[ə]*).[9]

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7 Analogical strategies of gender assignment are those in which speakers determine the gender of a noun by copying the gender that the corresponding noun has in their own language (for example, Puerto Rico Spanglish *la carpeta*.F < *la alfombra*.F 'the carpet'; Nash 1970: 227).

8 A brief note on grammatical gender in Yiddish. There are three genders in Yiddish, masculine, feminine and neuter. The gender of a noun is largely unpredictable, except for a few rules, such as assignment of gender to living beings, and feminine to nouns ending in unstressed schwa. Related to this, note that unstressed –*o* and –*a* endings in OdR, whose collapse led to identification of inflectional classes II and IV, sounded precisely like a final schwa. Thus, we cannot totally discard a certain substratum analogical effect for choosing feminine and discarding neuter after the collapse of both inflectional classes, although this does not work on an item-by-item basis. In addition, as we will see now, this preference for feminine gender over neuter is a more general process in (dialectal) Russian, beyond the influence of Yiddish.

9 Kaporulina et al. (1972: 124) and Kuznetsov (1960: 99) report cases of hybrid agreement between neuter and feminine, especially when the neuter noun ends in stressed –*ó*, in which case the ending is not reduced into a schwa, but feminine agreement still takes place: *bol'shaia sel[ó]* 'big.F village.

In this respect, OdR goes further that other dialectal Russian, because this migration spreads all over the nominal paradigm, affecting grammatical cases other than the nominative and accusative (cf. examples in 7).

On the other hand, we cannot attribute the loss of neuter gender only to an "accidental" phonological homophony between two case forms. The marked character and unproductivity of the neuter gender in the Russian language in general terms were determinant in this process as well.[10] Let us see why.

An obvious observation is that gender migration was performed from neuter into feminine, and not the other way round. The gender assignment strategy operating here, could be a markedness strategy, i.e. less marked gender (feminine) prevails over marked neuter in case of identity of forms.[11]

Another sign of the marked character of neuter gender is reported by Kaporulina et al. (1972: 124) and Kuznetsov (1960: 99). They describe cases of masculine agreement with neuter nouns in dialectal Russian (*bol'shoi seló* 'big.M village.N', *krasnyi sol'nce* 'red.M sun.N', *molokó vytek* 'milk.N spilt.M'), which cannot be explained but as motivated by the general unproductivity of the neuter gender in the language, because there is no phonological homophony of nominative case forms between two noun classes.

In OdR, we find this kind of 'hybrid' expressions, too; gender agreement can be sometimes disrupted as in (8):

(8)   *Malen'kii rubl'   luchshe bol'shoi   /   bol'shogo   spasiby.*[12]
       small   rouble better big.GEN.F /   big.GEN.**M/N** thanks.GEN.F
       'A small rouble is better than many thanks.' (Smirnov 2003, II: 284)

N', *kupil kisluiu molok[ó]* 'he bought soured.ACC.F milk.N'. The same effects are found in Dukhoborian Russian (a variety spoken in Canada by Russian emigrants), studied by Makarova (2019).

10 For the lack of productivity and marked character of neuter gender nowadays, cf. Osetrova (2015) on variations in gender in the Russian language on the Internet.

11 A markedness strategy is at stake when speakers pick a less marked option over a more marked option to assign gender. In American Russian, for example, animate nouns are interpreted as masculine by default (for example, *ètot devushka on rodilsia v Iaponiia* 'this.M girl he was.born.M in Japan' – Pereltsvaig 2004: 100).

12 The case of feminine *spasiba* 'thanks' is especially interesting, as etymologically it comes from *spasi Bog* save.IMPER. God.NOM 'God save you'. The same etymology underlies the Ukrainian equivalent *spasybi*. These are adverbial expressions or, if modified by an adjective like 'big', indeclinable neuter nouns (*bol'shoe spasibo* – big.NEUT thanks 'thanks a lot'). In colloquial Russian, genitive case can be occasionally used (*i spasiba ne skazal* 'he did not even say thanks.GEN'). Thus, the reinterpretation of this word as feminine in OdR patterns with that of other neuter class IV nouns.

The unproductivity of the neuter gender in Russian is further confirmed by a few varieties of Russian displaying a total loss of neuter gender, documented by Avanesov & Orlova (1965: 99–100). In Smolensk dialects (Southwest *akan'e* dialects), neuter has migrated not to feminine II class, but to masculine I class, a process for which the initial phonological reason underlying the migration of −*o* neuter into −*a* feminine is absent. Neuter has been totally lost in South Ural dialects as well; this loss can be attributed to the fact that Russian in this area coexists with the Bashkir language, which lacks grammatical gender.

6 Simplification of gender assignment rules: other gender transfers

6.1 Feminine ⟷ masculine gender migrations in OdR

Besides the migration of neuter gender into feminine, there are two other types of transfers of grammatical gender in OdR: from masculine into feminine gender, and from feminine into masculine.[13] As in the previous case, identification of phonological endings underlies masculine / feminine transfers, too. Looking close at these transfers, we detect two consistent patterns of gender assignment:[14]

(i) Nouns ending in non-palatalized or 'hard' consonant (corresponding to masculine class I), migrate into feminine class II. Some examples: OdR *botinka* 'boot', *apelsina* 'orange', *mandarina* 'mandarin', *zala* 'room', *pomidora* 'tomato', *frukta* 'fruit', *shlema* 'helmet', *papa Karla* 'dad Karl (Marks)', *fil'ma* 'movie', *litra* 'litre', *tigra* 'tiger', *kachkavala* 'sort of fresh cheese', *synochka* 'little son', *shaga* 'step', *póezda* 'train', etc. Cf. StR *botinok, apelsin, mandarin, zal, pomidor, frukt, shlem*, etc.

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13 The gender transfers discussed in this section are pragmatically neutral instances of gender assignment, and are not to be confused with gender reversals as an expressive means in StR, i.e. to denote endearment, solidarity, negative or positive evaluation, etc. (cf. Steriopolo 2021).

14 A special type of transfer affects nouns with an −*i*-stem, which are not considered to form a separate inflectional class; −*i*-stem nouns can be feminine (*statuia* 'statue'), masculine (*sanatorii* 'sanatory') or neuter (*zdanie* 'building'), and their inflectional class is almost identical to 'soft' classes II, I and IV, respectively (only the locative singular case differs). Among these words, in OdR, we observe transfers from feminine into masculine (OdR *mumii* : StR *mumiia* 'mummy', OdR *u bronzovogo statuia* 'near bronze.GEN.M statue.GEN.M' : StR *u bronzovoi statui* 'near bronze.GEN.F statue.GEN.F'), and masculine into feminine (OdR *sanatoriia* : StR *sanatorii* 'sanatory'). We will disregard this inflectional stem here, as there are very few examples and all of them are loanwords, which are intrinsically prone to show gender variation by themselves (Vinogradov 1972).

(ii) Nouns ending in palatalized or 'soft' consonant and postalveolar fricative
(corresponding to feminine class III) migrate to masculine class I. Some ex-
amples: OdR *my[sh] probëg* 'mouse run.past.ᴍ', *chej-to krov'* 'someone's.ᴍ
blood', *ètot glupost'* 'this.ᴍ silliness', *ètot step'* 'this.ᴍ steppe', *ètot drob'*
'this.ᴍ (buck)shot', *ètot galo[sh]* 'this.ᴍ rubber overshoe', *takoj fufel'* 'such.
ᴍ rubbish', etc. Cf. StR *my[sh] probezhala* 'mouse ran.past.ꜰ', *ch'ia-to krov'*
'someone's.ꜰ blood', *èta glupost'* 'this.ꜰ silliness', *èta step'* 'this.ꜰ steppe',
etc.

The *first type of transfer* (masculine into feminine) consists of the addition of a
final *−a*, the defining ending of inflectional class II, to a hard consonant stem
(masculine class I). This mechanism is characteristic of OdR and typically affects
loanwords, but also native Slavic words (*poezd*, *synochek*, *shag*).

Let us see some examples of migrations from masculine into feminine. Femi-
nine gender agreement with respect to nominative case-marked nouns is overtly
realized on adjectives and/or verbal *l*-forms (9a-b). Accusative case is illustrated
in (10a-b) and genitive case in (10c-e):

(9) a. *Samaia   kinofil'ma shla   v kontse.*   (OdR)
       itself.ɴᴏᴍ.ꜰ movie   went ɴᴏᴍ.ꜰ in end
       'The movie itself was at the end.' (Shkval 1928, *Dvukhnedel'nyi zhurnal
       izvestii Odesskogo GubKoma KPbU*, 1–53: 6; *ap.* Stepanov 2004: 413)

    b. *Synochka nenagliadnaia, truzhenik dorogoi... chtob ty   propala!*
       son   beloved.ɴᴏᴍ.ꜰ worker.ᴍ dear.ᴍ   let   you be lost.ɴᴏᴍ.ꜰ
       'My beloved hard-working son... get lost!' (Smirnov 2003, I: 203)

(10) a. *Sizhu   v kafe i   em   s   komfortom apel'sinu.*
        am sitting in cafe and eat with   comfort   orange.ᴀᴄᴄ.ꜰ
        'I am sitting in a cafe, comfortably eating an orange. (Smirnov 2003, I: 37)

     b. *Snimet   botinku   i   tozhe   issleduet.*
        takes.off shoe.ᴀᴄᴄ.ꜰ and   also   examines
        'He took one shoe off and examined it.' (Babel' 1923, from the tale *V
        shchëlochku*)

     c. *Dve   shagi   nalevo, dve   shagi   napravo.*   (OdR)
        two.ꜰ step.ɢᴇɴ.ꜰ   to left two.ꜰ step.ɢᴇɴ.ꜰ   to right
        'Two steps to the left, two to the right.' (From the song 'Shkola Salo-
        mona Kliara' by V. Rudenkov)

     d. *Tak gromko, kak Mokushka, mozhno bylo rzhat' tol'ko*
        this loud   as   Mokushka possible was   neigh   only
        posle litry   kofe.
        after litre.ɢᴇɴ.ꜰ   coffee

'Laughing as loud as Mokushka was possible only after a litre of coffee.' (Smirnov 2003, II: 189)

e.   *V kachestve shlëmy   mototsiklista stali   ispol'zovat'*
in quality   helmet.GEN.F biker   started use
nemetskie kaski   s   rogami.
German   helmets with horns
'They started to use German helmets with horns in the place of bikers' helmets.' (Smirnov 2003, IV: 470)

As in other varieties of Russian and Ukrainian (see Section 6.3 below), the addition of a final −*a* to a hard consonant stem has an underlying phonological explanation, i.e. a phonological strategy of gender assignment: it makes the pronunciation of words with final consonant clusters easier, cf. *poezd* : *póezda*, *frukt* : *frukta*, *litr* : *litra*, *tigr* : *tigra*. The presence of this final −*a* made possible the interpretation of these words as belonging to feminine class II, and the further extension of this pattern, regardless of the absence of a final consonant cluster (*apelsina*, *shaga*…). In the case of loanwords (*apelsina, pomidora, zala*…), such an explanation is straightforward, because loanwords typically display more variation in gender assignment than native words (Vinogradov 1972).

     As for *the second type of transfer* (feminine into masculine) in OdR, it affects nouns with 'soft' consonant stem, which in StR are distributed between two inflectional classes, masculine class I and feminine class III (cf. Table 1). Again, the homophony of nominative singular case forms (the final soft consonant of the stem, with a zero ending) leads to the relevant transfer, according to a phonological strategy of gender assignment.

(11) a.   *Lunnyi   noch'*   (OdR)
           moonlit.M night (Smirnov 2003, III, 439)

     b.   *Lunnaia   noch'*   (StR)
           moonlit.F night

Here are more examples.

(12) a.   *Prekratite skazat' mne ètot   glupost'.*   (OdR)
           stop   say   me this.M silliness
           'Stop telling me such rubbish!' (Smirnov 2003, III: 210)

     b.   *U vas nevynosimyi graz', papasha.*
           at you unbearable.M dirt   father
           'It is unbearably dirty at your place, father.' (Babel' 1921–1924, *Odesskie rasskazy – Otets*)

c. *Ètot podkozhnyi   svoloch' vsë ravno okazalsia za kakikh-to*
   this.ᴍ subcutaneous.ᴍ jerk   all same was   at some
   polmetra   ot   nego.
   half meter from him
   'That treacherous jerk all the same was half a meter from him. (Smir-
   nov 2003, III: 330)

In a few cases, a final −*a* or −*o*, typical of the StR forms, is absent in OdR, and the noun has the aspect of a regular soft consonant stem: *fuflo* : *fufel'* 'rubbish', or *galosha* : *galosh* 'rubber overshoe' (13a). More often, the transfer from feminine class III to masculine class I conveys depalatalization of the final consonant, especially if the noun is inflected for case, as in (13c). The collapse of palatalized and non-palatalized consonants is typical in OdR in weak positions (13b), but not only (13c) (Stepanov 2004: 153–154):

(13) a. *Poslednii galosh   propivaet.*   (OdR)
        last.ᴍ   rubber overshoe drinks
        'He drinks like a fish.' (Smirnov 2003, I: 265)
     b. *Seichas   prol'ëtsia chei-to   krov.*
        now   will pour   somebody's.ᴍ blood
        'Now somebody's blood is going to be spilled.' (Smirnov 2003, II: 202)
     c. *Gde-to   tut po stepu   skryvaetsia.*
        somewhere here by steppe.ᴅᴀᴛ.ᴍ is hiding
        'He is hiding here somewhere in the steppe.' (Kataev 1936, *Beleet parus odinokii*)

6.2 The impact of gender transfers on nouns with biologically determined gender

The saliency of the phonological strategy of gender assignment adopted by OdR in the transfers reviewed so far gives rise to an interesting effect on gender assignment and agreement of sex-differentiable nouns.

In standard varieties of Russian, semantic gender assignment prevails over formal rules, i.e. rules referring to biological sex take precedence over other rules (Corbett & Fraser 2000; Nesset 2004).[15] By contrast, OdR can disregard semantic
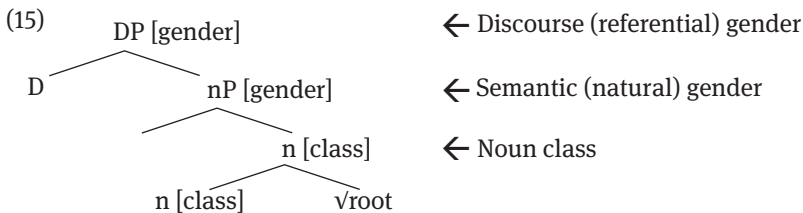
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15 This does not seem to be the case of gender assignment in child language, however, as we will explain in Section 6.3.

rules of gender assignment and agreement, and promote formal (phonologically motivated) rules (cf. 9b, repeated below as 14).

(14) *Synochka   nenagliadn**aia**,   truzhenik   dorogoi... chtob ty   propal**a**!*
      son   beloved.NOM.F   worker.M   dear.M   let   you   be lost.F
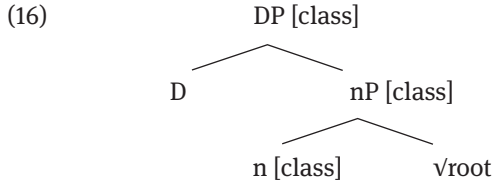   'My beloved dear hard-working son... get lost!'

In this example, transfer of gender from masculine into feminine on the noun results in percolation of feminine agreement to other elements in the sentence (the adjective and the verb), regardless of the [male] feature implied by the natural gender of the word *synochek* 'son'. Another example would be (7c) in Section 5.1, *dereviannoi Buratiny* 'wooden Pinocchio' (in genitive case), in which a noun with a male referent percolates feminine agreement.

   In order to explain this pattern, let us first recall the available positions for gender in the syntactic tree proposed by Steriopolo (2018a), represented in structure (15). Gender features corresponding to semantic and referential gender are valued at the level of *n*P and DP, respectively, while grammatical gender is determined by inflectional class (low in the tree).

(15) DP [gender]   ← Discourse (referential) gender

   D   nP [gender]   ← Semantic (natural) gender

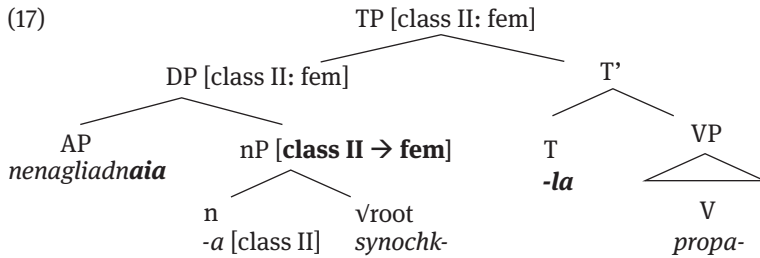   n [class]   ← Noun class

      n [class]   √root

According to Steriopolo (2018a), in the case of nouns with biologically determined gender, gender feature valuing is performed at different places in the syntactic structure. This proposal accounts for mismatches between gender and noun class in Russian hybrid and common gender nouns of the type introduced in Section 3.2. Therefore, in StR, if natural gender is specified as [male], even if the noun belongs to class II (*diadia* 'uncle', *sud'ia* 'judge'), masculine gender percolates higher in the structure to adjectives and verbs, overriding the lower class I feature. Cf. example (2b), *Mo**i** mlad**shii** diadia **stal** otlichn**ym** sud'**ëi***, represented in structure (4).

   In the case of (14), however, percolation of feminine gender features associated with a male referent reveals the irrelevance of [male / female] features in the OdR system of gender valuing. In other words, OdR simplifies the tree in (15) by dispensing with the feature corresponding to semantic gender in the case of biologically determined referents, as represented in (16).

(16)

```
                    DP [class]
                  /          \
                D              nP [class]
                             /         \
                        n [class]       √root
```

In this way, OdR displays a two-part grammatical gender system directly mapped from the inflectional class of the relevant noun. Thus, even in case of nouns with biologically determined gender, OdR can choose the option in which gender agreement is determined just by the inflectional class, which is the only feature that percolates higher. This is represented in (17), the structure of *synochka nenagliadnaia – propala* in (14).

(17)

```
                              TP [class II: fem]
                          /                       \
           DP [class II: fem]                       T'
          /                 \                      /    \
        AP                  nP [class II → fem]   T       VP
   nenagliadnaia           /        \            -la     /  \
                          n          √root               V
                      -a [class II]  synochk-           propa-
```

In this structure, a noun of class II with a male referent percolates just [class II = fem], while natural gender does not get valued syntactically. The inflectional class imposes its 'gender' and agreeing requirements, resulting in feminine agreement.

6.3 Substrata and general processes in gender transfers

We will first evaluate *feminine – masculine gender transfers* of the types reviewed in Section 6.1. As in the migration from neuter into feminine, we can safely exclude an analogical strategy on an item-by-item basis of a Yiddish substratum for these transfers. For example, in Yiddish, many loanwords taken as feminine in OdR are masculine (*film* 'movie', *pomidor* 'tomato', *tiger* 'tiger', *liter* 'liter', etc.).[16]

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16 Pereltsvaig (2004) notes that the analogical strategy on an item-by-item basis is not adopted either in other Russian varieties in contact with languages with rich gender morphology, specifically, in Israeli Russian. That is, Israeli Russian speakers never construct gender agreement on the basis of the given noun's grammatical gender in Hebrew.

A substratum explanation based on dialectal Russian is more plausible. In (geographically dispersed) dialects of Russian, variation between masculine and feminine gender assignment is widespread (Kaporulina et al. 1972: 125), although the phonological criteria for the transfers are fuzzier, as compared to the OdR distribution. Thus, the range of variation in gender in dialectal Russian is wider than in OdR, and largely unpredictable:

– Masculine 'soft' class I can migrate into feminine class III: *kartofel'* 'potato', *roditel'* 'parent', etc.
– Masculine 'hard' class I can migrate into feminine 'hard' class II with addition of a final −*a*, as in OdR, as in OdR: *tsarizma* 'tsarism', *realizma* 'realism', *litra* 'liter', *metra* 'meter', *tigra* 'tiger', *kedra* 'cedar', *uzhina* 'dinner', *priznaka* 'sign', *postupka* 'action', *khoda* 'path', etc.
– Feminine class III can migrate into masculine 'soft' class I, as in OdR: *mysh'* 'mouse', *pechen'* 'liver', *molodezh'* 'young people', etc.
– Feminine 'hard' class II can migrate into masculine 'hard' class I with elision of a final −*a*: *verlog* 'lair', *pasukh* 'armpit', etc.

According to Kaporulina et al. (1972), the reason for the differences in gender between standard and dialectal Russian vary according to each specific transfer:

(i) Dialects preserve the old gender of some words (*uzhina* 'dinner.ꜰ', nowadays *uzhin* 'dinner.ᴍ');
(ii) Dialects preserve the alternative gender variant in words, which belonged to Old Russian common gender inflectional classes, i.e. formerly including both masculine and feminine genders (*mysh'*, *zver'*);
(iii) As in OdR, loanwords are sometimes borrowed in dialectal Russian with a different gender than standard Russian (feminine suffix -*izma* vs. StR masculine suffix −*izm*);
(iv) As in OdR, a phonologically motivated transfer affects words ending in a consonant cluster, which receive a final −*a* for easier pronunciation (*tigra, kedra, litra* vs. StR masculines *tigr, kedr, litr*). Likewise, we can stipulate a similar input generalization to phonologically unmotivated instances, such as *choda*.

As for the Ukrainian substratum, Southern Ukrainian dialects display the first type of gender transfer observed in dialectal Russian and OdR; namely, some masculine words are taken as feminine, with the addition of a final −*a*: *litra* 'liter', *metra* 'meter', *hripa* 'flu', *tanka* 'tank', *proteza* 'prosthesis', etc. (Bevzenko 1980: 91–92). Here, gender assignment affects, again, final consonant clusters and loanwords.

As for the second type of transfer, from feminine into masculine, it is virtually unattested in Ukrainian dialects. According to Stepanov (2004: 412–413), only two

words in this group could be due to an influence of (standard) Ukrainian: *drob'* > *drob* 'shot', cf. Ukrainian *drib*, and *iarmarka > iarmarok* 'market', cf. Ukrainian *iarmarok*.

Likewise, the transfer from neuter into feminine of OdR does not exist in dialectal Ukrainian, which overwhelmingly displays *okan'e* while, conversely, the transfers from feminine into neuter, operating in Ukrainian dialects, are absent in OdR (Bevzenko 1980: 91–92).

Turning to non-substratum motivations for the gender transfers analysed here, let us consider L1 acquisition of Russian gender. According to Popova (1973), children promote feminine class II endings and percolate feminine features over other classes / genders rather than the other way round (e.g. *slona < slon* 'elephant', *tigra < tigr* 'tiger'). This is exactly the same tendency we observe in OdR.

Likewise, Rodina et al. (2020) note that children pay attention to the nominative or citation form of the word, ignoring the rest of the paradigm. Exactly as in OdR, Russian children display gender / class migrations from neuter class IV into feminine class II, and from feminine class III into masculine class I, on the basis of their homophonic endings (only) in nominative case.

Gvozdev (1961: 396) affirms that children assign masculine gender to hard consonant class I nouns and feminine to class II nouns by the age of 3. However, a certain degree of gender 'confusion' is maintained until later:

(i)   Unstressed neuter class IV nouns can be assigned feminine gender (class II), not only in nominative case, but all over the paradigm (18a);

(ii) Feminine class III nouns can be assigned masculine gender (class I), in every grammatical case as well (18b);

(iii) Sometimes feminine class III is assimilated to feminine class II by adding a final *−a* to the consonant stem (18c).

(Child Russian, Gvozdev 1961: 396)[17]

(18) a. *Takaia chuchela* (6;6;14); *zhylezy* (6;4;30); *zhylez'oi* (6;5;14)
          such.F scarecrow.F   iron.GEN.F   iron.INST.F

      b. *Ten'   upal* (4;7;16); *dva tena* (5;5;13); *v tenu* (4;7;16)
          shadow fell.M   two.M shadow.GEN.M in shadow.PREP.M

      c. *veshch'a* (6;6;11); *bol'shuiu veshch'u* (6;5;22)
          thing.F   big.ACC.F thing.ACC.F

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17 The corresponding forms in StR are the *−o* neuters *chuchelo, zheleza, zhelezom,* and the feminine 'soft' class III nouns: *ten'* (*upala* 'fell.F'), *dve teni, v teni; veshch', bol'shuiu veshch'.*

The first two transfers (18a-b) are exactly the same as in OdR, and they concern every grammatical case, not just nominative.

The addition of an −*a* to a final 'soft' consonant, collapsing both feminine classes III and II (18c), differs from OdR. Whereas children add a final −*a*, typical of feminine class II, to already feminine class III 'soft' nouns (*veshch'a*), as well as to masculine class I nouns ended in 'hard' consonant (*slona*, *tigra*), 'feminizing' them, OdR displays only the second type of transfer. Thus, OdR proceeds according to a neat phonological strategy (adding an −*a* to simplify pronunciation, which results in gender reassignment), while Russian children also favour morphological strategies (unifying both feminine noun classes in one).

With regard to the impact of *gender reassignments on nouns with biologically determined gender*, described in Section 6.2, we must say that the phenomenon of feminine gender assignment (class II) to nouns with a male referent is not unknown in general in Russian. On the one hand, several nouns in class II have male referents (*diadia* 'uncle', *papa* 'Dad'...), although, unlike OdR they do not trigger feminine agreement on related adjectives or verbs; cf. Section 2.1, example (2b).

On the other hand, sex-differentiable nouns can undergo gender reversals for expressive (derogatory, affective...) reasons (Steriopolo 2018b, 2021). Again, these nouns do not percolate feminine agreement in StR, when referred to a male (*liubimyi / nash synochka prishël* 'dear.ᴍ / our.ᴍ son came.ᴍ', contrasting with OdR *liubimaia / nasha synochka prishla* 'dear.ꜰ / our.ꜰ son came.ꜰ').

Doleschal & Schmid (2001) report cases of adjectival feminine agreement with common gender nouns as highly downgrading when referred to a male (19a). Steriopolo (2018b) describes a 'mixed' agreement pattern for class II nouns referred to males, in which class II emerges from the addition of an evaluative (vulgar or affectionate) suffix (19b). In this pattern, which not all speakers accept, an adjective related to the relevant suffixed noun displays feminine gender, while the verb is masculine. In any event, in neither of these two patterns (common gender and suffixed class II nouns with a male referent) percolation of feminine gender affects verbal forms, contrasting with OdR (cf. example 14).

(19) a. *Takaia p'ianitsa*   (Russian, Doleschal & Schmid 2001: 11)
          such.ꜰ drunkard
      b. *?Eta griaznulia   vsë tut zapachkal* (Steriopolo 2018b: 355)
          this.ꜰ dirty person.ᴀꜰꜰᴇᴄ all here made dirty.ᴍ
          'This little pig made everything dirty over here.'

Turning to child Russian, however, we find a similar picture as in OdR. Gvozdev (1961) and Popova (1973) show that young children can rely on formal rules rather than semantic rules when percolating gender. For example, in the case of mascu-

line class II nouns (20a), and feminine class III (20b), children often attend to the formal shape of the word, rather than the biological gender of the referent, representing the same pattern as OdR *synochka propala* (example 14).

(Child Russian, Popova 1973: 273, ap. Pereltsvaig 2004)

(20) a.   *Dedushka sidela   na loshadke.*
           grandpa   was sitting.ꜰ on horse
      b.   *Loshad'   ubezhal.*
           horse   ran away.ᴍ

This pattern is consistent with our proposal of a "simplified" tree of gender feature valuing in OdR, lacking the layer corresponding to semantic gender valuation (cf. structures 16–17). In the case of Russian child language, this "simpler" tree can be attributed to the fact that the layer corresponding to semantic gender needs more time to be maturated than the lower part of the tree, which percolates just formal (noun class) features.[18]

6.4 Interim summary

The prevalence of feminine gender assignment over neuter gender, and its consequent loss in OdR and other dialectal Russian stemmed from a mixed strategy of gender assignment, combining phonological (homophony of forms in nominative singular case) and markedness (unproductivity of neuter gender) factors. In the case of gender transfers between feminine and masculine, OdR also takes on a tendency found in dialectal Russian (and partially, also dialectal Ukrainian), initially motivated by phonology (homophony of forms and easiness of pronunciation). An analogical item-by-item strategy of gender assignment can be safely excluded for these phenomena.

However, OdR goes one step further, and regularizes the paradigm according to more transparent phonological criteria than other dialectal varieties, becoming closer to the patterns we find in Russian child language:

(i)   unlike dialectal Russian, in OdR and child language, gender transfers affect not only nominative case, but spread all over the paradigm;

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[18] Culbertson et al. (2016) offer a possible explanation for this fact. Their experiment suggests that children rely on phonological rules rather than semantic cues, because they start to build their noun classes (including gender classes) very early, when phonological information is already available, but word meanings are not. (Thanks to G. Corbett for bringing this work to our attention.)

(ii) OdR and child language render a simpler system of gender assignment as compared to StR, whereby nouns ending in consonant (palatalized or not) tend to be assigned masculine gender (I class), while nouns ending in −*a* [ə] are assigned feminine (II class). Classes III and IV, together with neuter gender, are dispensed with;

(iii) as for percolation of gender in the syntactic tree in those cases in which biologically determined gender and noun class differ (e.g. class II nouns with male referents), unlike other varieties of Russian, OdR and child language seem to lack the layer that percolates semantic gender overriding noun class. Thus, they are able to percolate all over the structure just the gender determined by the noun class.

Thus, for the phenomena of gender assignment and agreement reviewed in Sections 5 and 6, we need to acknowledge not only the possible specific influences of dialectal Russian and Ukrainian, but most of all, the relevance of general linguistic processes operating as well in L1 acquisition.

7 Bordering loss of gender values: disruption of gender agreement

7.1 Disruption of gender and case agreement in OdR

Besides the processes of gender reassignment and percolation reviewed in the previous sections, we occasionally find linguistic productions displaying complete disruption of gender agreement in OdR, albeit in a quite inconsistent way. We will argue that these patterns mask loss of grammatical gender as a value for agreement, at least, at a certain degree and/or in some speakers.

Whereas gender and/or case agreement between adjectives and related nouns is disrupted, the adjective takes the default (masculine nominative) form:

(OdR)

(21) *Èto ia chernokoshii? Da moi   zhopa po sravneniiu   s   tvoi –*
     this I black   and my.M ass.F by comparison with yours.NOM.M
     Snegurochka.
     Snow White
     'Is it me dark-skinned? My ass, compared to yours, is like Snow White.'
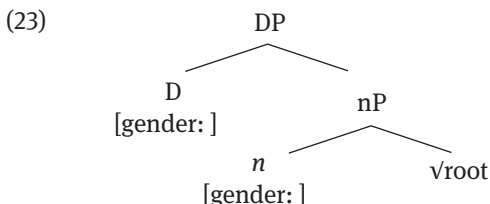   (Smirnov 2003, II: 223)

In (21), the first possessive adjective (*moi*) modifies a feminine noun, but surfaces as masculine, and the second possessive (*tvoi*) is realized as a default nominative masculine, instead of the expected feminine instrumental case, complement to the preposition *s* 'with'. Such productions are not mere instances of gender reassignment; here, 'failure' in gender agreement is associated to disruptions in case marking, as well as the realization of default forms.

In our sample, there are many other examples of occasional case disruptions, which render default nominative in the place of other grammatical cases. Below, we illustrate case disruption in the following configurations: animate (accusative-genitive) object position (22a), genitive and accusative prepositional complement position (22b), and locative prepositional complement position (22c).

(22) a. *Vus   mozhno kormit' ètot   bezdel'nik?*   (OdR)
          how much possible to feed this.NOM.M slack.NOM.M
          'How long can you provide for that lazy bones?' (Smirnov 2003, I: 240)
      b. *Peretianite mene divan,   a   to iz-za   ètot   pruzhiner imeiu*
          pull   me   sofa bed and this because of this spring   have
          chërnyi   koshmar   dazhe v lunnyi   noch'.
          black   nightmare even in moonlit night
          'Bring the sofa bed for me; it's just because of that spring bed, I see horrible nightmares even on a moonlit night.' (Smirnov 2003, III: 439)
      c. *Ia uzhe   budu imet' pokoi v ètot   dom?*
          I already will have peace in this.NOM.M house.NOM.M
          'Will I have some rest in this house some day?' (Smirnov 2003, I: 406)

Similar disruptions of case / gender in American Russian are attributed by Pereltsvaig (2004) to a total loss of case / gender features. Overt realization of masculine nominative forms on adjectives, seemingly conveying gender features, is due to the fact that Russian has a morphological requirement that makes it impossible to produce null endings on adjectives and pronouns (**et- krasiv- devushka* 'this-ø beautiful-ø girl'). If this is true also for OdR, then disruption of gender agreement conceals the loss of uninterpretable gender features, which is why masculine nominative case surfaces instead, without any real featural value, just by default.

This pattern can be formalized in the corresponding syntactic structure. Unlike those instances in which inflectional class (e.g. feminine class II) could percolate higher overriding (e.g. [male]) natural gender features (cf. Section 6.3), here, by contrast, gender features (even those derived from inflectional class) would be totally absent, as represented in (23).

(23)

```
                    DP
              ┌──────┴──────┐
              D            nP
         [gender: ]    ┌────┴────┐
                       n        √root
                  [gender: ]
```

In absence of gender percolation imposed by inflectional class, default forms (masculine) surface on adjectives. As a result, gender disruptions of this kind also affect inanimate referents, whose gender is otherwise always determined by their inflectional class (Corbett 1982; Steriopolo 2018).

On the other hand, gender/case disruptions in OdR are not systematic, as evidenced by the examples in (24). In (24a), the first two nouns after the preposition *vmesto* 'instead' (*stakan* and its complement *vino*) are realized as default nominative forms (instead of genitive), contrasting with the NP *domashnei kolbaski*, marked with the expected genitive case. In (24b), the possessive adjective within the NP (*moei*) surfaces as the expected genitive case, whereas the N head (*spina*) is default nominative.

(OdR)

(24) a. *Vmesto stakan   vino   i   domashnei   kolbaski.*
        instead glass.NOM.M wine.NOM.N and house-made.GEN.F sausage.
                                                               GEN.F
        'Instead of a glass of wine and house-made cold meat.' (Smirnov 2003, III: 229)

     b. *Sprygni   s   moei   spina.*
        jump down from   my.GEN.F back.NOM.F
        'Jump down from my back!' (Smirnov 2003, IV: 324)

This kind of inconsistency, i.e. the co-occurrence of agreeing forms and disrupted agreement, can be due to socio-linguistic reasons, mainly, normative pressures from StR. An alternative explanation is offered by Pereltsvaig (2004) for American Russian, which seems suitable for OdR as well; speakers of 'featural-deficient' varieties making use of apparently agreeing forms would be just producing previously learnt chunks of discourse.

Gender featural-deficient chunks are characteristic of OdR, as evidenced by the recurrent use of 'fixed' endings for specific grammatical cases, regardless the gender features of the corresponding noun. The most characteristic examples are the endings *–om* and *–ov*, used as instrumental singular and genitive plural forms, respectively, on both masculine and feminine nouns. These forms corre-

spond to the masculine 'hard' class I paradigm in StR, but are overgeneralized to other classes and genders in OdR.

Let us consider first the form –*om*. Besides masculine nouns, we find examples of feminine class II displaying this specific case form (25):

(OdR)

(25) a. - *Iz chem ty sobralsia zhrat' kartoshku? Iz lozhkom ili*
with what you are ready eat potatoes with spoon.ɪɴsᴛ.ᴍ or
iz vilkom? - Iz selëdkom.
with fork.ɪɴsᴛ.ᴍ with herring.ɪɴsᴛ.ᴍ
'- Do you want to eat the potatoes with a spoon or with a fork? – With herrings.' (Smirnov 2003, II: 40)

b. *Temnet' dal'she budesh' ne v sobstvennykh rasskazakh, a priamo*
tangle further will not in own stories but directly
uzhe sobstvennym mordom.
already own.ɪɴsᴛ.ᴍ snout.ɪɴsᴛ.ᴍ
'You will mess everything up further, but not in your stories, but with your own mug instead.' (Smirnov 2003, IV: 184)

c. *U nee pod iupkom drobom byl zariazhennyi nagan.*
at her under skirt ɪɴsᴛ.ᴍ buckshot.ɪɴsᴛ.ᴍ was loaded revolver
'She had a revolver, loaded with shot, under her skirt.' (From the song 'Murka', 1921–1922)

In a similar way, the genitive plural form –*ov* is used on feminine nouns, even on biologically determined nouns with a female referent, as shown in (26):[19]

(26) a. *U odnoi iz serdobol'nych madamov.*   (OdR)
at one among good-hearted mesdames.ɢᴇɴ.ᴘʟ.ᴍ
'... at one of the good-hearted ladies.' (Smirnov 2003, I: 55)

b. *Kavalery priglashaiut damov.*
gentlemen invite ladies.ɢᴇɴ.ᴘʟ.ᴍ
'The gentlemen invite the ladies.' (From the song 'Shkola Salomona Kliara' by V. Rudenkov)

c. *Uzhe uspeli razvesti zebrov tol'ko chërnogo tsveta?*
already had time breed zebra.ɢᴇɴ.ᴘʟ.ᴍ only black colour

---

19 In StR, the forms corresponding to (25) would be the feminine forms *lozhkoi*, *vilkoi*, *selëdkoi*, *sobstvennoi mordoi*, and *iupkoi*. Those corresponding to (26) would be the feminine forms *madam* (indeclinable), *dam*, *zebr*. The form *drobom* in (15c), instead of *drob'iu*, can be rather attributed to the transfer from class III into 'soft' class I we reviewed in Section 6.2.

'When did they start to breed black-coloured zebras?' (Smirnov 2003, IV: 402)

The overspread of the masculine ending *–ov* to feminine noun classes, not necessarily loanwords, and not always animate, is observed in dialectal Russian as well, as reported by e.g. Kaporulina et al. (1972: 146): *zhenshchinov* 'women', *starushkov* 'old women', *mashinov* 'cars', *tarelkov* 'plates' etc.

In all these instances, grammatical case is preserved, and only gender is disrupted. Still, the assignment of gender obeys the 'featureless' strategy of picking up default gender (masculine, in this case).

7.2 Substrata and general processes in disruption of gender agreement

In general terms, speakers of standard Russian identify linguistic productions of 'disrupted' agreement with so-called 'broken' Russian (*lomannyi russkii*), attributed to L2 learners of Russian with a low command of the language, as well as speakers of Russian-based pidgins. And, in fact, mismatches in both gender and case agreement are characteristic of pidginized or pidgin-like varieties of Russian, for example, Ninilchik Russian (Steriopolo 2019), Kiakhta Chinese-Russian pidgin, nowadays in disuse (Neumann 1966), or Ussurian Chinese-Russian pidgin (Nichols 1980). The last two are classic examples of pidginization, in which Russian acts as the main lexifier, and the language becomes radically simplified: in the morphological realm, the whole set of inflectional forms for case, number and gender, as well as verbal inflection, are absent, at least, in the core versions of these pidgins.

In the specific case of gender, default masculine forms surface regardless inflectional classes (27a), or the semantic gender of the referent (27b), as shown in these examples from Ussurian Chinese-Russian pidgin:

(27) a.   *Kogda tvoi   lavka otkroetsia, a?* (Ussurian, Nichols 1980: 398–401)
           when your.M stall.F will open   eh
           'When does you stall open, eh?'
      b.   *Baba ego sovsem   plokhoi.*
           wife.F his   completely   bad.M
           'His wife is in very bad shape.'

A similar picture arises in heritage Russian varieties. Many of them have reduced or lost grammatical gender in a generalized way. Let us consider some relevant

examples of American Russian from Pereltsvaig (2004: 96); as in child Russian and OdR, heritage speakers pay more attention to the phonological form of the word than to the semantic or natural gender of the referent (28).

(28)   a.   *Moi*   *mat'.*   (American Russian, Pereltsvaig 2004: 96)
            my.M   mother
     b.   *Moia*   *dedushka.*
            my.F   grandpa

On the one hand, example (28a) is similar to those OdR transfers, whereby a word of feminine 'soft' class III migrates into masculine class I, and percolates masculine instead of feminine (cf. Section 6.2). On the other hand, both (28a) and (28b) reproduce the same pattern of child language and OdR (cf. *synochka nenagliadnaia*, *dedushka sidela* in Sections 6.2 and 6.3), whereby speakers override semantic gender and favour gender agreement determined only by the inflectional class of the noun.

Here are more examples of disruption of gender agreement in American Russian. In (29a), a neuter noun is modified by an adjective that takes the default form (masculine), while in (29b), either feminine or masculine can surface:

(29)   a.   *Sinii*   *pal'to.*   (American Russian, Pereltsvaig 2004: 89–91)
         blue.ᴍ   coat.ɴ
     b.   *Ètot*   /   *èta*   /   **bol'shoe*   *devushka*
        this.ᴍ   /   this.ꜰ   /   big.ɴ   girl

Interestingly, (29b) shows that disruption of agreement in American Russian is not completely random, as speakers chose either the (expected) feminine form or the (default) masculine form, but never the neuter. The unproductivity of neuter gender, therefore, is characteristic of heritage varieties, too (cf. Section 5.2).

On the one hand, as in heritage languages and pidgins, OdR can resort to default masculine gender and display disruptions of gender agreement, suggesting a lack of the corresponding gender feature. On the other hand, unlike heritage Russian and pidgins, OdR most often preserves gender features associated with inflectional classes (very low in the tree), overriding semantic or natural gender, and displays quite systematic phonological strategies of gender (re)assignment, in a more similar way to child Russian (cf. Section 6.3). Softening of pidginizing/contact phenomena in OdR can be partly attributed to the fact that speakers were constantly exposed to literary and standard Russian.

In any event, the parallels of the OdR data with other (unrelated) contact varieties of Russian suggest that language contact was determinant for the presence

of disruptions in gender agreement. In American Russian and Chinese-Russian pidgins, the contact language is typologically an isolating one (English, Chinese), which we could consider a direct motivation for the loss of gender agreement.

Nonetheless, OdR shows similar effects of agreement disruptions, but the languages that configured its contact environment displayed rich inflectional systems including three genders (Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, even Polish or Greek). Therefore, we need to attribute OdR disruption of gender agreement to more general linguistic mechanisms of morphological simplification we observe in contact situations in general, regardless the characteristics of the specific substrata.[20]

8 Conclusion

The Russian language of Odessa represents an interesting lab to evaluate variation in gender assignment and agreement in a fusional language at a microparametric level. Because of its special socio-linguistic status, midway between a contact language and a dialectal variety, OdR displays mixed properties, some shared with other East Slavic dialects, others shared with unrelated heritage Russian, pidgins and child language. Thus, the OdR system of gender assignment and agreement underwent a certain degree of simplification with respect to the standard, but still not in such a high degree as heritage Russian or pidgins.

The phenomena of gender assignment and agreement analysed in this paper are good examples of the possible pathways of development of morphosyntactic features in fusional languages, characterized by cumulative exponence. The data in our sample evidence the following processes of gender assignment and gender agreement:

1) Neuter gender was reduced according to a phonological strategy of gender (re)assignment, whereby neuter class IV migrated into feminine class II, because of the homonymy of the corresponding endings in nominative singular. The generalized unproductivity of neuter gender in Russian enabled its identification with feminine class II, as well as the extension of this transfer to

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20 We can draw the same conclusion from Rodina et al.'s (2020) macro-study about the conditions facilitating (heritage) acquisition of Russian gender in contact with different languages. They show that the availability and type of grammatical gender in the majority language does not have an effect in gender acquisition in Russian heritage speakers, and that the determinant factors were family type, age, and exposure to Russian instruction. There are other examples of gender loss determined by the mere non-native or imperfect learning in contact situations in which the languages entering into contact have both gender, e.g. Afrikaans < Dutch with a Khoekhoe substratum (Igartua 2019).

other cases in the noun paradigm, and percolation of feminine gender all over the structure;

2) Instances of gender migration from masculine class I into feminine class II and from feminine class III into masculine class I were initially motivated by the phonological shape of the nominative form of the classes involved, resulting in a reduction of inflectional classes and a one-to-one mapping of classes and genders. Moreover, gender percolation according to the inflectional class can override semantic or natural gender percolation in OdR, implying a certain simplification of the structure (lack of the *n*-layer, corresponding to semantic gender valuing);

3) Occasional instances of disruption of gender agreement (associated or not with disruption of case) are motivated by the lack of uninterpretable gender features, as a consequence of which default agreement (masculine) surfaces.

In general terms, we can affirm that the simplification patterns analysed in this paper are attributable to the special contact situation of OdR. These patterns function according to general linguistic processes, observable also in dialectal Russian, child language and, partially, pidginized and heritage Russian.

Compared to pidgins and heritage languages, gender features in OdR were not completely lost, at least not in a generalized way, although certain linguistic productions probably conceal the lack of gender feature valuation in the structure. OdR and other dialectal Russian (dialectal Ukrainian at a lesser extent) share some common features regarding migration of gender according to noun classes. Other phenomena observed in OdR are common with child language, namely, percolation of gender stemming from noun classes (overriding semantic gender) in nouns with biologically determined gender, and the extension of gender migrations to every grammatical case in the paradigm.

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