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Mind the Gap: English L2 Learners of Russian and the Null Possessive Pronoun

William Comer

The personal possessive pronouns in Russian (мой, твой, наш, ваш, его, её, их) are taught very early in virtually all elementary textbooks of the language. At the point of their introduction, the problems that they most often pose for English-speaking L2 learners are their morphology and the rules for agreement with the nouns they modify. For L2 learners, the usage and frequency of these pronouns at this stage in language study seem virtually to mirror English patterns. When introduced to simple sentences with finite verbs and complements as well as the "у кого есть что" construction, learners may (or may not) notice the difference between the textbook input and sentences that they produce with «extraneous» possessive pronouns (e.g., *У меня есть моя квартира; Я читаю мою книгу; Я живу в моей квартире). Свой is introduced later, usually somewhere in the second half of the college elementary-level textbook.[1] It appears incidentally in the language input in *Nachalo* («вы разрешаете это только своим аспирантам» 50), *Golosa* ("Роб меня познакомил со своим другом Максом" 366), and *Troika* ("Лена подарила своему другу Ивану книгу" 343). In *Live from Russia,* its appearance is connected specifically with the issue of disambiguating third-person references (i.e., "Таня рассказывала Оле о своём экзамене" ~ "Таня рассказывала Оле о её экзамене" 241).

While all these textbooks present an accurate description of Russian grammar, they vary in which aspects of свой they highlight. *Live from Russia*, *Golosa* and *Troika* note the use of свой with all three persons, pointing out its obligatory use in the third person to differentiate what belongs to the subject from what belongs to someone other than the subject. *Nachalo* deals with свой only in third-person contexts, although it explicitly mentions that «Russian usually omits possessives when the context is clear» (55). Thus, while students

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[1] Свой is introduced in *Live from Russia* (2009) in Ch 10 of 14 (approximately 71 percent of the way through the course); *Golosa* (4th ed) in Ch 10 of 20 (50 percent of the way); *Troika* (1996) in Ch 13 of 18 (72 percent of the way) and *Nachalo* (2nd ed) in Ch. 8 of 14 (57 percent of the way).

are introduced to the three main ways of expressing possession with a noun (ø [i.e., the null possessive], свой, and the personal possessive pronouns) at the elementary level, their learning to deploy these three possessive structures in native-like ways is a much more complex affair.

This article will explore the use of these three possessive structures primarily in third-person contexts by comparing one Russian and one English text with their translations into the other language. This cross linguistic research will yield both quantitative and qualitative data about the usage of these possessive structures in narratives, which in turn will be applied to questions of L2 teaching and learning of these structures.

Literature Review

The reflexive possessive pronoun свой as well as the reflexive pronoun себя have attracted the attention of many scholars with varying theoretical perspectives and research agendas.

In his prescriptive grammar of Russian for English speakers, Wade (2000) concludes his discussion of the possessive pronouns with the generalization "When ownership is obvious from context, Russian usually dispenses with a possessive pronoun" (143). In two of his three examples about this point, Wade features the ø possessive before body parts, but he does not go on to note the likelihood of the ø possessive with specific lexical spheres. Wade's discussion and examples raise questions about ways that we can quantify the "usual" omission of a possessive, and how we can define unambiguous contexts that allow for the ø possessive.

The frequency dictionaries that draw on the Russian National Corpus provide an authoritative source about the relative frequency of expressed possessive pronouns in contemporary Russian. Based on these data, we know that the lemma свой (i.e., свой in all its grammatical forms) is the 27th most frequently used word in the Russian National Corpus, at 2,867 occurrences per million running words. The other possessive pronouns occupy the following frequency rankings: его – 37th; её – 44th; наш – 54th; мой – 57th; их – 80th; ваш – 147th; твой – 254th (Novyi). The higher frequency of all forms of свой is not surprising here since it can be used in reference to all three persons in both singular and plural.

Other researchers have focused on describing the semantics of possessive pronoun usage. Andreyewsky (1973) offers one of the first examinations of the semantic differences between the use of свой and the personal possessive pronouns in first- and second-person contexts. He notes three distinctions in

usage. First in the pair "Я своё/моё дело знаю" he finds that the свой version focuses on the speaker's competence in business, whereas the мой version focuses on the ownership of this business (5). Second, he notes that with deverbal nouns the choice of possessives can express a subjective/objective nuance. In the sentence "Я вам опишу своё/моё лечение" the свой version suggests that the "I" received treatment from someone else, while the мой version suggests that the "I" formulated a treatment for use on someone else (9). In his third significant point, using the example Мы с тобой вспоминали своё/наше детство, Andreyewsky notes that the свой version emphasizes that each person in the collective subject had his own individual childhood, while the наш version points to a shared, collective childhood (11). While the article offers a number of insights, Andreyewsky does not offer a unifying system for describing or linking the usage distinctions that he notices.

Yokoyama and Klenin (1976) note the need to formulate a broader, non-structural, rule governing the choice between the reflexive and non-reflexive possessive pronouns, although their many interesting examples and discussion do not lead to a formulation of such a rule. To deal with the variations in possessive pronoun usage, they apply various notions of empathy, speaker perspective (here-and-now speaker, as opposed to a speaker in another set of circumstances), and collective versus shared possession to explain the use of a personal possessive pronoun or свой in both «optional» first- and second-person contexts and also in third person contexts where the personal pronoun usage seems to violate standard grammatical rules.

Ioffe (1985) notes that the use of possessive pronouns (мой, твой, наш, ваш) stresses the uniqueness of the possessed item, whereas the use of свой in the same context suggests that the possessed item or the possessor is one of a set of similar items/possessors, which happens to be connected to the subject of the sentence. Ioffe's unique contribution to scholarly discussion is his consideration of the ø possessive pronoun. He generates his examples for this discussion primarily in two ways: by taking sentences that have an expressed possessive and deleting it, and by citing other examples where an explicit possessive is used in one part of the sentence, but is omitted before another noun. He finds that the null possessive «signifies the habitualness of the relations between subject and object, the usualness of the object for the subject» (6 - my translation), or the null possessive can indicate the «inalienable or single nature of the object in a given situation» (108 - my translation).

Summarizing his own previous work (Timberlake 1980) and giving a very comprehensive treatment of the use of possessive pronouns, Timberlake (2004) notes:

свой often suggests that the possessed entity fits exactly because it is associated with the subject, whereas other entities would not fit… this kind of reference is essential, in that the referent is defined by its relation of identity to the antecedent. In context, with свой, essential reference takes on several guises: a distributive relation of possessed entities with possessors, a contrast of exactly this possessor as opposed to other possible possessors, or the sense that this possessed item, defined by identity to the subject is characteristic of the entity (2004: 241-242).

He contrasts this essential reference with the notions of neutral reference and individuated reference, where the entity possessed is defined independently of its relation to the identity of its antecedent. In neutral reference and individuated reference, the choice of свой or его/её/их will depend on the degree of restrictions on the domain, with свой being used in neutral reference in unrestricted and moderately restricted domains and in individuated reference only in unrestricted domains (242).

Extending the parameter of reference, Timberlake notes that the choice of possessive can also involve «time-worlds» where the reflexive shows that the entity is «defined relative to one time-world,» while a non-reflexive possessor denotes an «entity independent of time-worlds,» and speaker perspective where the reflexive possessive pronouns show the «perspective of one subject as opposed to other possible subjects,» while the non-reflexive pronoun indicates a «perspective of the timeless and unique speaker» (256). Timberlake's identification of these parameters provides a very useful framework considering the potential meaning differences between the three means of expressing possession in Russian.

Another whole school of research has examined Russian's reflexive constructions from Universal Grammar perspectives, examining how and when native speakers and non-natives set the parameter for long-distance binding and other questions. Bailyn (1992) examined how Russian L1 children's comprehension of себя constructions changes from late childhood to adolescence. He found changes in his participants' willingness to allow long-distance binding from inside чтобы clauses to main clause subjects. Czeczulin (2007) also looked at the acquisition of adult native-like strategies for

understanding the long-distance binding of -ся /свой/себя references among second-language learners. Her experiments show that higher proficiency L2 learners of Russian have more native-like strategies in identifying the antecedent for the Russian reflexive form. In the course of her work, she found surprising variation among native speakers in identifying antecedents for reflexives in some contexts, which she interprets as a possible sign of changing language norms.

The given article will expand the research base by looking at the use of three possessive structures (ø, personal possessive pronoun, свой) specifically from a comparative Russian-English perspective.

Research Questions

Four research questions will be addressed in this study:

1) How frequent is the usage of the null possessive in comparison with expressed possessive pronouns?

2) What semantic difference(s) exist between contexts where nouns are and are not marked by possessive pronouns?

3) What kind of rule(s) can be formulated for English speakers about the ø possessive pronoun?

4) What might the relative frequency of these three means of expressing possession (ø, personal possessive pronoun, свой) tell us about the likely order of acquisition of these structures by L2 learners of Russian?

While the first two questions have been considered in the existing literature, this article centers its discussions on the ø possessive, since its frequency and use have been very poorly described. Drawing on the frequency and usage data elicited in answering the first two questions, we will tackle the third and fourth questions, which have practical applications to the teaching and learning of Russian. The decision to focus on the ø possessive is justified by the fact that for English speakers to achieve native-like Russian, the effective deployment of the ø possessive in speech is no less important than the accurate use of свой and the personal possessive pronouns.

Procedures

The task of quantifying the frequency of the ø possessive requires a comparative approach to Russian and English usage, and so the researcher selected two contemporary short stories of approximately similar length (8,373 and 10,765 words) with one originally written in Russian (Liudmila Ulitskaia's "Pikovaia

dama"[2] with English translation by Arch Tait) and one originally written in English (Saul Bellow's "The Silver Dish"[3] with a Russian translation by L. Bespalova). The translations were published by Schocken Books and AST respectively, which allows one to assume that their English and Russian usage is acceptable, even if the translations suffer from inaccuracies. The stories are well matched for themes (difficult relations among members of a multigenerational family) and in terms of narrative format (mostly 3rd person objective narrator with some dialog). The authors differ somewhat in style with Ulitskaia reflecting traditional Russian prose, while Bellow's English in the given story is markedly conversational.

The originals and translations were compared for the use of possessive pronouns, and the Russian texts were tagged according to 11 possible conditions, described in Table 1 below.

The tagging system requires a few additional explanations. Condition 8 is used to mark situations where a possessive pronoun modifies the subject of the sentence, or where the possessive pronouns (его/её/их) refer to someone other than the subject of the sentence. Conditions 1 and 10 are complementary. Condition 1 is applied to any situation where свой was grammatically possible (i.e., the possessor was coreferent with the subject of the clause), even if the resulting phrase is stylistically impossible or unattested in actual Russian corpora. This coding criterion is justified, since our task is to elucidate contexts where an English speaker feels the need to mark the noun with a possessive, and Russian's grammar would seem to compel him to use свой. Condition 10 applies to all cases where the missing possessive in the Russian text *cannot* be a third-person свой. In all but a handful of cases (especially for conditions 1 and 10

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[2] Ulitskaia's story traces four generations living in a single apartment: Mour (in her 80s), her daughter Anna Fedorovna (in her 60s), her granddaughter Katya (almost 40), and Katya's two children, Lena (late teens) and Grisha (early adolescence). Mour's foul-mouthed reminiscences about her many love affairs and her tantrums tyrannize the rest of the family. Anna Fedorovna's husband Marek, who left the Soviet Union in the 70s, returns for a first visit in the 1990s, and his presence markedly changes the family dynamics.

[3] At the death of his father, Woody (the middle-aged main character of Bellow's story) recalls his complicated feelings for his roguish father, whose schemes often got Woody into trouble. At one point during the Great Depression, the college-aged Woody brings his father to his benefactor, a rich Christian widow. While the woman prays about whether to give Woody's father the fifty dollars he requests, Woody's father steals a silver dish from a curio cabinet. Woody's father gets the fifty dollars and pawns the stolen dish, while Woody pays the consequences — he is expelled from the seminary, estranged from his family, and forced from then on to make his living.

because of the ambiguity of свой/его-ее-их usage in participial and infinitival constructions), the tagging was straight-forward.

Table 1: Tag numbers, condition descriptions, and short-hand summary

Tag #	Condition	Short-hand
1	Russian text has no expressed possessive, but could have a 3rd person свой, and the English has an expressed possessive before the equivalent noun.	R: ø -3rd свой; E: +
2	Russian text has an expressed 3rd person свой, and the English has an expressed possessive before the equivalent noun.	R: 3rd свой; E: +
3	Russian text has an expressed 3rd person свой, while the English text has no expressed possessive.	R: 3rd свой; E: −
4	Russian text has an expressed 1st or 2nd person свой, and the English has an expressed possessive.	R: 1st/2nd свой; E: +
5	Russian text has an expressed 1st or 2nd person свой, while the English text has no expressed possessive.	R: 1st/2nd свой E: −
6	Russian text has an expressed 1st or 2nd person possessive pronoun where свой would be possible, and the English text has an expressed possessive.	R: 1st/2nd possessive – свой; E: +
7	Russian text has an expressed 1st or 2nd person possessive pronoun where свой would be possible, while the English has no expressed possessive.	R: 1st/2nd possessive – свой; E: −
8	Russian text has an expressed personal possessive pronoun where свой is not permitted, and English has an expressed possessive.	R: possessive, свой impossible; E: +
9	Russian text has an expressed personal possessive pronoun where свой is not permitted, while English has no expressed possessive.	R: possessive, свой impossible; E: −
10	Russian text has no explicit personal possessive and свой is not permitted, while English has expressed possessive.	R: ø - possessive, свой impossible; E: +
11	The syntax of the original and translation differ and comparison of possessive pronoun use is not obvious or cannot be made.	Different syntax

Results

Table 2 below lists for each text the number of cases of each condition, along with a calculation of its frequency per thousand words of text, and its percentage of usage based on the total number of tagged nouns.

Table 3 presents the averages from the two texts, sorted by the frequency. From the data in this table, we can see that the most frequent phenomenon (46 percent of all cases) is the Russian null possessive (conditions 1 and 10 combined) in those contexts where English *does* use a possessive. Differences in

syntax account for another 26 percent of all cases when there is divergence in possessive pronoun usage. Three Russian patterns (y + кого constructions, ethical datives, and -ин- suffixed possessives) account for most of the syntax variations from English's expressed possessive pronouns.

Table 2: Occurrences of possessive forms (by tag)

	Ulitskaia R->E Words: 8373	Bellow E->R Words: 10658	R->E per 1000 words	E-> R per 1000 words	E-> R as % of tags	R-> E as % of tags
1 R: ø –3rd свой; E: +	102	78	12.182	7.318	26.98%	21.08%
2 R: 3rd свой; E: +	28	20	3.344	1.877	7.41%	5.41%
3 R: 3rd свой; E: -	6	11	0.717	1.032	1.59%	2.97%
4 R: 1st/2nd свой; E: +	1	2	0.119	0.188	0.26%	0.54%
5 R: 1st/2nd свой; E: -	0	3	0.000	0.281	0.00%	0.81%
6 R: 1st/2nd possessive – свой; E: +	1	3	0.119	0.281	0.26%	0.81%
7 R: 1st/2nd possessive – свой; E: -	0	1	0.000	0.094	0.00%	0.27%
8 R: possessive, свой impossible; E: +	59	53	7.046	4.973	15.61%	14.32%
9 R: possessive, свой impossible; E: -	3	17	0.358	1.595	0.79%	4.59%
10 R: ø – possessive, свой impossible; E: +	110	56	13.137	5.254	29.10%	15.14%
11 Different syntax	68	126	8.121	11.822	17.99%	34.05%
Total tags	378	370	45.145	34.716		

Non-reflexive third-person possessive pronouns account for approximately 15 percent of the total number of cases and are over twice as frequent as incidents of third-person свой. Only in about 22 percent of all cases (conditions 2, 4, 6 and 8) are the possessive pronouns used in ways that reflect the grammar rules explicitly taught in elementary textbooks of Russian, *and* mark the same nouns in English and Russian equivalent sentences. This modest percentage of usage highlights the fact that English-speaking learners cannot rely on either

internalized L1 rules or textbook rules when expressing possession in Russian if they hope to make their output native-like.

Table 3: Occurrences of possessives (sorted by frequency)

Condition	Ulitskaia R->E	Bellow E->R	Average per 1000 words	Average as % of tags
11. Different syntax	68	126	10.194	25.94%
1. R: ø –3rd свой; E: +	102	78	9.458	24.06%
10. R: ø – possessive, свой impossible; E: +	110	56	8.723	22.19%
8. R: possessive, свой impossible; E: +	59	53	5.885	14.97%
2. R: 3rd свой; E: +	28	20	2.522	6.42%
9. R: possessive, свой impossible; E: -	3	17	1.051	2.67%
3. R: 3rd свой; E: -	6	11	0.893	2.27%
6. R: 1st/2nd possessive – свой; E: +	1	3	0.210	0.53%
4. R: 1st/2nd свой; E: +	1	2	0.158	0.40%
5. R: 1st/2nd свой; E: -	0	3	0.158	0.40%
7. R: 1st/2nd possessive – свой; E: -	0	1	0.053	0.13%
Totals	378	370	39.304	99.98%*

*does not equal 100% because of rounding

Due to the nature of the narratives examined in this study, there were extremely few examples of first- and second-person possessive pronouns; thus, the discussion will be restricted to third-person situations.

Analysis of Examples
A. Syntax Differences
In Bellow's story and its translation, syntactic differences account for most of the variation in the two languages' expression of possession. In 21 of the 126 cases, an English set phrase with a possessive pronoun is translated with a Russian

verb-noun phrase that does not require one to express the same meaning (e.g., "holding his father in his arms" = "обнял … старика"; "she became his widow" = "овдовев"). In 14 cases, English-reduced relative clauses were rendered with a Russian possessive pronoun plus a deverbal noun (e.g., "the caddy money you saved" = "твои сбережения"; «everything he had» = "все его силы"). In 11 cases, the possessive idea was rendered by a personal or reflexive pronoun («he brought home his reflections» = "мысли … он увез с собой в Южный Чикаго"; «she worked in his shop» = "она работала у него в лавке"). In ten cases, variations in possessives occurred in conjunction with descriptions of body parts and/or clothing items («over his ruddy face» = "краснолицый"; "fill you up with their ideas"= "задурить тебе голову"). The remaining cases can be grouped in smaller clusters where the two languages take very different approaches to expressing possession: Bellow's vague "his way" (e.g., "to steer clients their way," "to shovel his way," "out of his way") and "his move" (e.g., "to make his move") rarely find a direct equivalent in the Russian translation, and even in some places where possessive pronouns would work in Russian, the translation reuses a name or more specific noun. Such stylistic and phrasing distinctions between English and Russian are quite beyond the scope of normal beginning and intermediate language instruction, and so will not be considered further in this paper.[4]

Between Ulitskaia's Russian original and its English translation, syntactic differences are less frequent (68 cases total), although they are similar in category: in 18 cases Russian uses another personal or reflexive pronoun to denote possession (e.g., "Плита у нее всегда была занята" = "her stove"; "принеси ко мне в комнату" = "to my room"; "приносит ей прямо в постель щенка" = "into her bed"); in 11 cases possessive – *ин-* and other similar adjectives in Russian are made more explicit in English (e.g., "с мужниным секретарем" = "with her husband's secretary"; "по аспирантским обязанностям" = "as part of her duties as a postgraduate"). It is worth noting that the possessives in -ин cannot combine with possessive pronouns. In eight of the 64 cases, a verbal collocation is rendered with an English possessive adjective and noun (e.g., "она не правильно живет" = "she was living her life wrong"). Several examples in the text that all translate into "her own" in English show a

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[4] The one exception here are the location/destination constructions of the type "in his shop" = «у него в лавке» which are frequent and predictable enough in Russian to draw to students' attention beginning with the intermediate level.

wider range of vocabulary in the original Russian, including emphatic words such as *собственный* and *родной*.

B. Russian's ø possessive

As noted earlier, nearly half of the uses of possessive pronouns in English are reflected in Russian with the ø possessive. This usage difference most likely arises from the fact that possessive pronouns convey information about ownership at the same time they make an English noun phrase definite (Celce-Murcia, 312-313). In many of the places where Russian has a null possessive, the possessive pronoun in the equivalent English sentence does not emphasize ownership as much as it specifies definiteness. Inasmuch as Russian can specify definiteness without a definite article, it can do so as well without a possessive determiner. The null possessive is most likely to suggest that the entity belongs to the subject although this relationship does not need to be specifically marked, and so we will begin by looking at cases where the null possessive is contrasted with the explicit use of свой.

In the Ulitskaia text, there are 102 examples where in English, a noun is marked with a third-person possessive, and in Russian the possessor of the noun is coreferent with the subject of the clause and thus could be marked with свой. In terms of lexical groups, there are clear trends for omitting свой with a body part (31 cases), with a kinship term (18 cases), with an item of clothing (nine cases). In contrast, свой is explicitly used a total of 28 times: four times with a body part; six times with a kinship term; and once with a clothing item. The trend is similar in Bellow's text where the null possessive is used in place of 3rd person свой with body parts (24 cases of total 78), with kinship terms (17 cases), and with clothing items (15 cases). Свой is explicitly used in the Russian translation 20 times: with a body part (two cases) and with a kinship term (four cases), but never with a clothing item.

Looking more deeply at these situations, we can start to define exactly a "clear context" for the omission of a possessive свой. In the following examples the bracketed phrases (< >) start with the condition tag and include the equivalent phrase from the text's translation.

1. *Леночка полным ходом шла к провалу* <1 her exams> *сессии, но* <1 her classes> *занятия в эти решающие дни она забросила, тенью ходила за* <1 her brand-new granddad> *новеньким дедом.* (Ulitskaia)

2. Woody was fourteen years of age when Pop took off with Halina, who worked in his shop, leaving his <1 бросил нравную христианку жену> difficult Christian wife and his <1 выкреста сына> converted son, and his <1 крошек дочерей> small daughters. (Bellow)

From these two examples, we can see that one "clear context" for the omission of свой is when there is a single explicit subject, and the nouns modified with possessives in English either unambiguously belong to the subject and so have definiteness (such as the listing of family members that the father abandons in Example 2) or belong to a class of objects that really cannot be possessed in the sense of property (i.e., сессия/занятия in Example 1). When we consider what nouns by themselves can show unambiguous belonging, it becomes clear why kinship terms and body parts are most often not modified by possessive pronouns in Russian.

Nevertheless it would be wrong to create the impression that kinship terms and body parts *cannot* be modified by possessive pronouns in Russian. The following example adds nuance to the question of usage here:

3. Мать <8 his mother> его, коммунистка, бежала из Польши с ним и <8 his> его старшим братом в Россию, <10 his father> отец остался в Польше и погиб. (Ulitskaia)

In Example 3, the main character of the story, Anna Fedorovna, retells a detail from her estranged husband's biography that is unknown to her adult daughter. This sentence introduces the reader to these characters, and thus the pronoun его immediately clarifies the relations of мать and брат to an already mentioned character. The noun отец, in clear opposition to мать and in a parallel construction does not require the clarification of его since the context has established whose family is under discussion. Thus, we can note that parallel or almost parallel constructions (as in 2 and 3), since they reduce ambiguity, seem to favor the omission of possessive pronouns.

Explicit use of possessive pronouns before kinship terms in Russian can reflect changes of emphasis or perspective:

4. You think my son would bring me if I was a bad father to your house? He loves his <1 любит папу> dad, he trusts his <1 верит папе> dad, he knows his <8 его папа - хороший папа > dad is a good dad. (Bellow)

In Example 4, the narrator's father in «The Silver Dish» is trying to con an old woman into lending him money, playing on his relationship with his son. The first two cases with the null possessive rather than an explicit свой suggest the very close connection between son and father, while the change of construction and the use of его before the third папа allow the father to present the old woman an objectified evaluation of his qualities as a father.

Possessive pronouns can even be repeatedly used before kinship terms as in Example 5 if they serve to emphasize the connection of the possessed entity with the subject's sentence:

5. У нее была на редкость удачная несчастная *любовь*, ради которой она и оставила <2 her> *своего* первого невнятного мужа, и с предметом <2 her> *своей* великой любви она изрядно мытарилась, родила от него Гришку и уже тринадцатый год бегала к <3 to this high-minded lover> *своему* совестливому любовнику на редкие свидания и откладывала с года на год момент настоящего, неодностороннего знакомства <1 of her son> сына с <10 with his secret father> тайным отцом. (Ulitskaia)

In Example 5, we find that the three repetitions of свой serve to emphasize the connection between Katya (Anna Fedorovna's adult daughter) and her two partners. The свой highlights that these entities (the problematic first husband and current lover) are characteristic of Katya, as the narrator ironically remarks in the sentence's opening clause. In the final portion of this sentence neither father nor son requires a possessive modifier in Russian, because their relationship to Katya and to each other is clear.

There are cases where Russian's omitted possessives pose problems for the translator, as in Example 6:

6. Катя переглянулась с <1 her> *матерью*: и здесь Мур завладела вниманием прежде <10 his> *дочери*, прежде <10 his> *внуков*. (Ulitskaia)

After years of living abroad, the estranged father has returned to see his daughter Katya and her mother, his first wife. At this meeting, the father's mother-in-law, a woman of strong character who dominates the household, enters the room. With the null possessive pronoun in Example 6, we should understand the possessor of дочери and внуков to be Mour, the mother-in-law, but the translator interprets the sentence as «Even here Mour had imposed herself ahead of his daughter, ahead of his grandchildren» (Ulitskaia, 2005, 90),

drawing attention to the relationship of the daughter and grandchildren to the newly-found grandfather.

C. Expressed Possessive Pronouns

Other factors also lead to the explicit use of possessive pronouns with nouns including kinship terms and body parts. In the discussion of the absence of fathers across several generations in the family, Ulitskaia's narrator notes:

7. <2 her>Своего отца она [Anna Fedorovna] так никогда больше и не видела и только смутно догадывалась о <3 a vague intuition> своем глубиннейшем с ним сходстве. Дочь Анны Федоровны Катя сохранила о <2 her own father> своем отце еще более смутные воспоминания. (Ulitskaia)

8. Катина ранняя дочка Леночка и вовсе не помнила <2 her own father> своего отца. (Ulitskaia)

In Examples 7 and 8, the use of свой before each instance of the word отец (which refers to three different males) has a distributive meaning — each woman has her own father, which is reflected in the translator's use of "own" in the second and third generation. This distributive use of свой (i.e., the relationship of each person with his own thing) has been well described in the scholarly literature, and it represents a place where the null possessive cannot be used. Furthermore, this is the first mention of the fathers in each generation and so the explicit possessive here defines them, while the ø possessive would have suggested that they were already defined in the text.[5]

Nevertheless, the distributive notion is not the only meaning that motivates the use of свой before kinship terms, body parts, and clothing items. The difference between literal and figurative meanings of these words can play a part in the use of possessive pronouns, such as in Examples 9 and 10.

9. Он [Marek] почему-то весело засмеялся, кинулся целовать ей [Mour] руку, а она, подав великосветским движением <1 her desiccated hand> сушеную кисть, стояла перед ним, хрупкая и величественная, как будто именно к ней

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[5] What contribution word order (e.g., the inversion of possessive-noun pairings [as in the opening words of Example 3 "Мать его»] and theme-rheme reversals [as in Example 7 "Своего отца она так никогда больше и не видела"]) may make to the author's choice to use explicit possessive pronouns is an interesting question that awaits investigation.

и приехал этот нарядный господин, заграничная штучка. <2 with her newly manicured hand> Своей наманикюренной ручкой отвела великосветская старушка всеобщую неловкость, и всем членам семьи стало совершенно ясно, как надо себя вести в этой нештатной ситуации. (Ulitskaia)

In Example 9, at the first meeting of the family with the estranged father/husband Marek, Mour the mother-in-law tries to claim for herself a central place, seeing any male in the house as a potential new playmate for herself. Thus in describing the physical gesture of putting forth her hand (кисть) to be kissed, no свой is required; however, when she must dispel the awkwardness, it can only be Mour's hand to make the gesture that will change the atmosphere. Thus, свой appears before наманикюренной ручкой to emphasize the connection between this old woman and this specific gesture. The hand here matters less as her body part than as a signal of her power. A similar use of свой before кулак in Example 10 points again to свой before a figurative, rather than a literal, body part, despite the modifier волосатый.

10. … бурный роман с тайным генералом, держащим весь литературный процесс в <2 in his hairy fist> своем волосатом кулаке … (Ulitskaia)

Examples 9 and 10 do not seem to conform to the usage of свой to distinguish one item from a set of similar items, as in Examples 7 and 8. That usage of свой with a distributive meaning requires a more established context of multiple persons and multiple objects as can be seen further in Examples 11 and 12:

11. … она, Катя, в пятнистой кошачьей шубе и меховой шапке идет по узкой тропинке к остановке автобуса, держась одной рукой за тетю Беату, другой - за отца. Автобус уже стоит на остановке, и она страшно боится, что он опоздает, не успеет в него влезть, и, вырвав <2 her> свою руку, она кричит ему:
    - Беги, беги скорей!
    В том же году он и выполнил Катину рекомендацию. (Ulitskaia)

12. Он [Marek] приблизил к ней [Anna Fedorovna] свое <2 his> лицо, и видно стало, что он вовсе не так молод… (Ulitskaia)

In both Examples 11 and 12, there are multiple actors and multiple hands and faces. The свой identifies the owner of the hand and face right before there is a

change in perspective.   In Example 11, the child can have no idea that withdrawing her hand could have the outcome of letting her father go permanently (i.e., he emigrates the following year); in Example 12, the context of the story lets the reader know that the impersonal impression implied by видно стало is actually what Anna Fedorovna perceives herself.   The distributive contexts as well as the heightened contrasts of perspective here seem to favor the use of an explicit possessive form.

<u>D. Russian Expressed Possessives, English ø</u>
Finally it is very instructive to look at places where English does not use a possessive, but the equivalent Russian text does:

13. But behind his <1 завел грядку марихуаны позади склада> warehouse, where the <3 где держал свой роскошный "линкольн-континентал"> Lincoln Continental was parked, he kept a patch of marijuana. (Bellow)

14. Once a year, and sometimes oftener, he left his <1 он пускал дела на самотек> business to run itself, arranged with the trust department at the <3 поручал отделу доверительных операций своего банка> bank to take care of his <8 присматривать за его присными> gang, and went off. (Bellow)
Examples 13 and 14 both reveal an interesting contrast — the translator into Russian omits the possessive before склад and дела, but when faced with the definite article before "Lincoln Continental" and "bank" (which suggests an already known entity) the translator marks the nouns in Russian with a possessive pronoun so that they cannot be misinterpreted as generic items (**a** car/**a** bank).   In absence of the definite article, the expressed possessive adjective in Russian sometimes is used to mark definiteness.

In the singular, English proper nouns are normally marked as "definite" so that a definite article or other definite determiner is not required before them (Celce-Murcia 275-276). In Russian свой can often be used before proper nouns for ironic or other stylistic effect, as in Examples 15 and 16. Here as in Example 5, the свой characterizes the place as an attribute of the subject.

15. It was mother, from <3 мама, которая вывезла из своего *Ливерпуля* английские манеры> Liverpool, who had the refinement, the English manners. (Bellow)

16. Звонил Марек из <3 from Johannesburg> своего Йоханнесбурга так часто, как не звонили <10> приятельницы из Свиблова. (Ulitskaia)

Formulating a usage rule?
While the usage of possessive structures in all the examples found in the texts can be explained in ways similar to above, it is still quite difficult to formulate anything other than some general guidelines for English speakers about the uses of possessives. There are four points that may help in determining usage. First, if the point of an utterance is to introduce an entity and state its relationship to the subject/actor, then in Russian one will use an expressed possessive pronoun. Second, when there is only one expressed subject/actor in the context (sentence or paragraph), one can probably safely omit possessive pronouns before an entity, especially if the entity is expressed lexically by a kinship term, a body part, or a personal item (such as a clothing item). Third, in third-person contexts where there is more than one subject/actor and/or more than one entity to be possessed, then an explicit свой/его-ее-их is very likely. Fourth, in first- and second-person contexts, the use of свой as opposed to the ø possessive will give greater emphasis on the connection between subject and possessed entity, while the use of the personal possessive pronouns will stress the uniqueness and independence of the possessed entity. As Timberlake (2004, 253) notes, свой is more frequent than the other possessive pronouns in first- and second-person contexts.

Implications and Conclusions
<u>Acquisition</u>
Knowing the relative frequency and usage of these features in Russian narratives can give us a rubric for judging the native-likeness of a non-native's narratives. The current study is limited by its use of literary narratives, and one must recognize that narratives embedded in spontaneous oral speech may deploy these three possessive structures with different frequency. While frequency alone is not an indicator of the likely order of the acquisition of language features (e.g., English definite articles have very high frequency but are very hard to acquire completely), it does allow us to formulate a hypothesis about the possible acquisition order for possessives for English speakers. Thus one can posit four stages to native-like deployment of possessive structures:

Stage 1. Overuse of the non-reflexive possessive pronouns in acceptable and unacceptable contexts

Stage 2. Omission of many extraneous reflexive and non-reflexive possessive pronouns
Stage 3. Use of свой in required third-person contexts, such as finite clauses
Stage 4. Use of свой in first- and second-person contexts

This progression is only a hypothesis, and to be tested, a researcher will probably need to devise a video or picture narration task that would serve as a stimulus for speech samples to be gathered from native speakers and from L2 learners at various stages of language development. The creation of this narration task will not be simple, although without such a task it is unlikely that a natural or naturalistic (i.e., an Oral Proficiency Interview) speech sample would generate enough contexts for varied use of possessive structures.[6]

Pedagogical Suggestions
From the analysis of usage described in the scholarly literature and in this paper, there are a number of practical suggestions that we can make about increasing the salience of these features in language teaching at various levels. Given the frequency data, a first step for language teachers, particularly at the elementary and intermediate levels, is to make students aware that Russian very often omits possessive pronouns.[7] It might make sense to connect the omission of these pronouns with Russian's lack of articles, drawing to the students' attention that English possessives show definiteness as well as possession.

Furthermore, students from the beginning level should be made aware of how possession is often expressed in Russian through means other than possessive pronouns. Teachers can have students notice this when dealing with lexico-grammatical patterns such as у меня болит голова and coordinated prepositional phrases (u + genitive with v/na+prepositional) that are

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[6] As a first trial of visual prompts for a narration task, the researcher recorded an adult educated native speaker narrating the stories represented in two sets of pictures (Davis, 70-71, 230-233). The native speaker was not told what forms the researcher was interested in, and she produced two lengthy recorded narrations neither of which included a single свой. When debriefed after the session, she noted about the pictures "Но тут не было ничего своего." Clearly, not all stories will prompt the use of possessive pronouns.

[7] An activity for noticing the ø possessive could easily be incorporated into the exercise presented in *Golosa* (2007, 348) for teaching the похож на кого construction. The textbook authors explain the construction and give three sample sentences with English equivalents that all have expressed possessives. A simple question to learners to compare the Russian and English versions and note the differences in usage would be enough to make explicit Russian's ø possessive.

synonymous with preposition+possessive+noun (e.g., у него в лавке as an equivalent for в его лавке).

The introduction of свой should probably be coordinated with highly salient examples of свой in the students' language input and targeted activities to have students make necessary form-meaning connections both concerning lexical meaning (свой can after all mean "my, your, his, her, etc.") as well as tracing antecedents. The exercise in Dabars et al. (1995, 258) with its illustrated sample sentences "Художник пишет свой портрет/Художник пишет его портрет" does an excellent job of making learners establish the form-meaning connections for свой. After this kind of introduction, it may be advisable to work with свой mostly in its distributive meaning, since equivalent sentences in English will usually have an emphatic «own» after the possessive form (e.g., У каждого есть своя комната = Each person has his own room. Все родители гордятся своими детьми = All parents are proud of their own children). The explicit marking of «own» in this usage should give свой increased salience for English learners.

At this initial stage, teachers should prefer output activities where they can verify the referential meaning of the student's work. For example, one can imagine a line drawing that features four named people each with a backpack full of the same items that differ in size and quality. The students' task would be to write sentences in Russian stating who is pleased with his/her own item, as well as what item belonging to someone else he/she would like. On the picture, they would need to draw numbered arrows from subjects to objects to reflect each sentence. When the teacher grades such an exercise, he/she can verify that a student's written forms match his/her annotated drawing.

Over time, teachers may want to include other highly salient usages of свой, such as «я добился своего», where мой and other possessive pronouns cannot be used. In English, such sentences require some additional noun to complete the thought (i.e., I got my way), which should make the use of свой stand out. Other high-salience phrases might include по-своему, and proverbial usages of свой (e.g., Всякому овощу своё время/Своя рубашка ближе к телу).

Some may argue that the possessive structures discussed here are too insignificant a feature of Russian to make them the focus of instruction at the intermediate level, where a major focus is placed on having students attempt tasks typical of the ACTFL Advanced level (i.e., coherent paragraph length narration in major time frames). Certainly control of tense, verbal case governance, and verbs of motion are grammatical areas that cause learners the most obvious difficulties in reaching the Advanced level. Nevertheless, the

possessive structures discussed in this paper, and particularly the ø possessive, are an essential part of how Russian creates textual cohesion in paragraph length discourse. At the intermediate level, asking students to attend to them in a more conscious fashion (especially the ø in relationship to kinship terms, body parts, items with unambiguous belonging) may allow teachers to refocus their efforts from correcting the learners' faulty morphology of extraneous possessives to having them notice the number of places where Russian does not need a possessive pronoun at all. Increasing learner attention to the use of the null possessive pronoun may steer learners toward producing sentences like "он потерял паспорт" rather than puzzling over the choice between "он потерял его/свой паспорт" as the equivalent of English's "He lost his passport."

In this paper, I have documented the relative frequency of three kinds of possessive constructions in Russian using written literary narratives. Further research is needed to learn if the patterns of usage found in these narratives is similar to that of narratives embedded in spontaneous oral speech. Further research will also be needed to refine the suggested usage guidelines, and to test whether the hypothesized acquisition order is correct.

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