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THE *LA*-FORM: RUSSIAN VERBS IN NANAI SPEECH

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Abstract. Nanai speakers who are fluent both in Nanai and Russian use verb forms with a Russian root and the suffix *-la* (called further "*la*-forms") in their speech. The status of *-la* is under question: on the one hand, it resembles the Russian past tense form (*-l*), on the other hand, it can be interpreted as the Nanai derivational suffix *-la/-lə*, which is used in Standard Nanai for the verbalization of nouns. We argue that in modern Nanai this case turns out to be a complicated one, and that *la*-forms are maintained due to their links with both of these sources.

Keywords: language contact, code-switching, endangered languages, borrowings, verbal morphology, Russian, Nanai, Tungusic languages.

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1. Introduction

The Nanai language (Tungusic, Altaic) is spoken in the Far East of Russia and in China. Nowadays Nanai speakers are also fluent in Russian (in Russia) or Chinese (in China) and prefer to use Russian or Chinese rather than Nanai in everyday life (cf. Stoljarov 1994). There are no fluent speakers under 50 years old. Less than one hundred people of the older generation sometimes use Nanai in informal communication between each other. Thus, Nanai is an endangered language with plenty of borrowings, often involved in code-switching due to intensive contacts with Russian or Chinese.

This paper deals with the strategy of verbal borrowing from Russian into Nanai which is very frequent among the Nanai people residing in the area of the Lower Amur, as our field data show (see also Avrorin 1961: 17). This strategy shows up in combining Russian verbal roots with the suffix *-la* (*-lə*/*-l*) and with Nanai grammatical markers:

(1) avarij popa-**la**-rə[1]
accident$_{RUS}$ get$_{RUS}$-**LA**-CVB.NSIM
‘(he/she) had an accident’

The status of the suffix *-la* is the subject under question. As it will be shown below, the nature of this suffix can be interpreted in two ways according to its hypothetic Nanai or Russian origin. To get a better idea of this matter, see the reference to this case as a complicated one in the overview of contact phenomena in Tungusic languages by Malchukov (2004). In this paper we will discuss a number of different properties of the *la*-form in Nanai. We will show that this form shows both Nanai and Russian features, and depends also on the type of the usage (section 2). We will look at the use of this form in the speech of speakers who show different degrees of language competence (section 3). We will also look at similar forms in some closely related languages (section 4). Our conclusion is presented in section 5.

The research is based on the data collected during 4 fieldtrips to the area of the Lower Amur, Khabarovskij Krai (September 2007, September 2009, August 2011, August 2012).

2. The source of *la*-forms

2.1. “Russian” hypothesis vs. “Nanai” hypothesis

There are formally identical forms in Nanai and in Russian both of which can be considered as the source for verbal forms like (1). However, the meanings of these forms in Nanai and in Russian have nothing in common. In Nanai, *-la/-lə*[2] is a denominal derivational suffix:

(2) *meoča-**la**-*
gun-**LA**-
‘(to) shoot’ (Nanai)

In Russian, the *-l* forms (which superficially look similar) are used in the past tense paradigm: masc. *-l*, fem. *-la*, neutr. *-lo*, pl. *-li*.

1 The elements borrowed from Russian are marked with X$_{RUS}$, the suffix in question is glossed LA, as its nature is not clear.

2 The choice of vowel *a* or *ə* in the suffix depends on the vowel harmony rule (see 2.2). The Nanai verbalizer *-la* has also a variant *-da*/*-də*. Historically, the choice of the variant was motivated by phonetic rules. Today *-da*/*-də* is just a variant that is used with a closed list of Nanai roots.

(3) *xodi-**l-a***
walk-**PST-F.SG**
'she was walking' (Russian)

Two alternative explanations of the status of the Nanai *-la/-lə* can be suggested which correspond to the existence of two identical forms in Nanai and in Russian. The "Russian" hypothesis presupposes that *-la* in verbal borrowings goes back to the Russian past tense suffix *-l*, while the "Nanai" hypothesis states that *-la* in verb borrowings goes back to the Nanai denominal derivational suffix *-la* (this interpretation of such borrowings is mentioned in Nanai grammatical description: Avrorin 1961: 17).

There is a number of tests that can provide some evidence *pro et contra* the "Nanai" hypothesis and the "Russian" one. These tests operate on different language levels: phonology (vowel harmony, section 2.2), grammar (tense and gender, section 2.3), derivation (*la*-forms derived from nouns, *la*-forms derived from irregular stems, section 2.4), and syntax (the level of integration into the Nanai verb complex and syntactic structure, section 2.5).

2.2. Phonetic properties of *la*-forms: vowel harmony

There are two series of vowels in Nanai:

(4) *e a o*
i ə u

The vowels of suffixes are chosen according to the vowel series that is used in the root. The only exception described by V. A. Avrorin (1959: 41) is that in Standard Nanai, the 1st series vowels (*e*, *a, o*) can be automatically replaced with 2nd series vowels (*i*, *ə, u*) in the final position:

(5) *ogd**a**-p**u***
boat-P.1PL
'our boat'

According to the "Nanai" hypothesis, one could expect that the Nanai verbalizer *-la* should follow the vowel harmony rule: the variant *-lə* is chosen after the roots with 2nd series vowels. The following examples confirm this expectation:

(6) *korčeva-**la**-ra=tani*
stub$_{RUS}$-**LA**-CVB.NSIM=PART
‘(he/she) stubbed’

(7) *uči-**lə**-ndə-xə*
learn$_{RUS}$-**LA**-PURP-PST
‘to learn’

All the examples of borrowed Russian verbs with *-la* found in Onenko (1980) also follow the vowel harmony rule. However, in our data there are also examples that do not match the vowel harmony rules described in Avrorin (1959: 41):

(8) *vozmest**i-la**-go-j*
compensate$_{RUS}$-**LA**-REP-NPST
‘(he/she) compensates’

Such examples may support the “Russian” hypothesis. If *-la* is considered to be a copy of the Russian ending of the past tense verbal form, feminine singular (like in example (3)), then the vowel harmony is predicted to be violated. This interpretation can be supported by examples like (8).

Another problem arises due to the violation of the vowel harmony rule in word final position in the oral speech of today’s Nanai people. This rule can be violated in both ways – the 1st series vowels can be replaced with 2nd series vowels and vice versa. However, the factors that cause the replacing of a vowel series have not received a clear explanation yet.

Taking into account all the properties of vowel harmony in Nanai, one can assume that the choice of the vowel in *-la* in the examples above cannot serve as proof for any of the hypotheses.

2.3. Grammatical properties of *la*-forms

2.3.1. Tense

As *-l(a)* is identical with the Russian past tense verbal marker, one can expect that Nanai *la*-forms are also used only (or mostly) with reference to the past. The absence of such a correlation would be an argument for the “Nanai” hypothesis, because the Nanai verbalizer *-la* is not sensitive to the time reference.

In Table 1 below all the verb forms with *-la* that were attested in our texts are presented. The forms that are supposed to refer to non-

past or simultaneous events are marked in bold. In the second column, examples for each form are given.

Table 1. Nanai verb forms attested with the suffix *-la*

Form	**example**
V-PST-(P.1SG)[3]	*učastvova**la**-xam-bi* 'I participated'
V be-PST-(P.3SG)	*prinima**la** bi-či-n'* 'was taking'
V-PST-OBL-P.3SG	*raskulači**la**-xam-ba-ni* 'cannibalize'
V-PURP-PST-(P.3PL)	*uči**lə**-ndə-xə-č* 'to study'
V-CVB.SIM	*uči**lə**-m* 'studied'
V-CVB.NSIM	*popa**lə**-rə* 'got'
V-NPST	*gotovi**la**-j* 'cook'
V-REP-NPST	*vozmesti**la**-go-j* 'compensate (again)'
V-REP-IMPS-NPST	*žari**la**-go-o-ri* 'fried again'

Table 1 demonstrates that *la*-forms can be not only used with reference to the past (cf. non-past forms (NPST) and so called simultaneous converbs (CVB.SIM)).

(9) pečem-ba-ni žari-**la**-go-o-**ri** xaj-wa-nia...
liver-OBL-P.3SG grill$_{RUS}$-**LA**-REP-IMPS-**NPST** thing-OBL-P.3SG
*serdečka n'oan-že-ni sobira-**lə-j**...*
little.heart$_{RUS}$ 3SG-INS-OBL gather$_{RUS}$-**LA-NPST**
'…liver should be fried… heart is gathered with this…'

Example (9) is part of a text about cooking the viscera of a chum salmon. The interpretation of the reference to the past, in this context, would be incorrect.

Examples like (9) support the "Nanai" hypothesis. However, *la*-forms with reference to the past are more numerous. This fact can be interpreted as the influence of "past semantics" of the Russian *-l(a)*, which bilingual speakers supposedly bear in mind. At the same time, in our text database, which is 3 h 12 m 17 s long, past forms are far more frequent: the majority of texts are of an autobiographical character, memories about the past, descriptions of ancient customs, rituals, and the like. Thus a large number of past tense forms are predetermined by the specific nature of the texts.

3 Any personal possessive marker can be in the place of possessive markers in the Table.

2.3.2. Gender

In Nanai, neither verbs nor nouns are marked for gender, while the Russian past tense singular forms have gender markers. The Russian past tense verbal inflection is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Russian past tense paradigm

	masc	**fem**	**neutr**
SG	*-l-Ø*	*-l-a*	*-l-o*
PL		*-l-i*	

According to the "Russian" hypothesis, one could expect to find both *la*-forms and *-l, -lo, -li* forms in Nanai speech. These forms are expected to match at least the sex and the number of a subject referent, especially if the referent is a person. According to the "Nanai" hypothesis, *-l, -lo, -li* forms should not occur in Nanai speech.

Neither *li*-forms, nor *lo*-forms were found in our data. However, *l*-Ø-forms occur in Nanai texts, but they occur only occasionally.

(10) *mənə towar-wa Mančžuri ded vozi-**l**-xa-ni,*
self's goods-OBL Manchuria grandfather$_{RUS}$ carry$_{RUS}$-**LA**-PST-P.3SG
<???> Mančžuri pulsi bi-či-ni
<???> Manchuria go be-PST-P.3SG
'Grandfather carried his goods to Manchuria, … used to go to Manchuria'.

The use of *l*-Ø-forms is of special interest from various perspectives. First of all, the phoneme *l* forms a complete syllable in such forms. So it can be considered to be just a reduction of the vowel *a* or *ə* that is rather common in Nanai oral speech: vowels can be reduced (cf. *xəǯə-lə* > *xəǯə-l*) and some consonants can form a syllable in Nanai oral speech as well (cf. *gu-ru-n*)[4]:

(11) *a təj xəǯə-**l** bi guru**n**=təni təj gostinec xaj*
and that lower.river-**LOC** be people=PART that gift$_{RUS}$ what
uŋ-ku-rə um-bu-ri nani təj
say-REP-CVB.NSIM say-IMPS-NPST Nanai that
uŋ-ku-rə nixəli-p ogosan koax=koax
say-REP-CVB.NSIM open-CVB.COND.SG dried.fish extremely.dry

4 Normally such words as *gurun-* with suffixes or clitics are pronounced as a two-syllable word – [gu-run-tə-ni] (see (Avrorin 1957: 37–38)). However, sometimes [n] can form a syllable in oral speech – [gu-ru-n-tə-ni], cf. example (11).

bii-n'=go
be-P.3SG=PART
'And that people living down the river say (something) in Nanai, say in response, having found out, that dried fish is extremely dry'.

Thus, examples, like (10), can be analyzed in a different way – as a case of reduction, not of Russian influence.

However, in all sentences with *l*-forms based on Russian verbal roots (5 examples), the subject has a reference to a male as is predicted by the Russian gender paradigm (see Table 2). In some cases, the referent is expressed by the Russian noun, like in (10), where 'grandfather' is expressed by the Russian noun *ded*. In such case the suffix *-l* can be really interpreted as a part of a Russian expression (see section 2.5 for details on adaptation of Russian verbs in Nanai speech). But it should be noted that the opposite case also occurs. In example (12), a subject male referent is also expressed by a Russian noun, but the *la*-form contains the vowel *a*:

(12) *baza* *təj* *sogdata* *təj* *Sidorov,* *ded* *Nikolaj*
warehouse$_{RUS}$ that fish that Sidorov$_{RUS}$ old.man$_{RUS}$ Nikolaj$_{RUS}$
*prinima-**la*** *bi-či-n'=go* *təj* *Sidorov*
take$_{RUS}$-**la** be-PST-P.3SG=PART that Sidorov$_{RUS}$
n'oani *təj* *čadu* *ǯobo-xa-ni*
3SG that there work-PST-P.3SG
'…warehouse… that fish that Sidorov, old man Nikolaj Sidorov took, that Sidorov, he worked there…'

So the data do not give us clear proof for the "Russian" hypothesis. If we found the forms *-li*, *-lo* and *-l*, we could claim that these are no doubt Russian gender forms transferred into Nanai "as is" in their initial gender meaning. The form *-l* is in fact attested, but it is not evident if it can be interpreted as the Russian masculine form. The absence of all possible Russian past forms in Nanai borrowings do not entirely contradict the "Russian" hypothesis, but makes it at least somewhat weaker: *-la* can be considered as a Russian form (phonologically the most appropriate for the Nanai system), but one that has no more connection to its gender meaning.

2.4. Derivational properties of *la*-forms

2.4.1. Denominal derivation vs. deverbal derivation

Nanai *-la/-lə* is a derivational verbal suffix. It is used to verbalize nouns and some adjectives, but not to derive verbs from verbs (Avrorin 1961: 16). The *la*-forms under discussion can be derived from Russian nouns too:

(13) *oxota-**la**-xa-ni*
hunting$_{RUS}$-**LA**-PST-P.3SG
'he hunted'

(14) *zavuče-**la**-xa-ni*
director.of.studies$_{RUS}$-**LA**-PST-P.3SG
'(s)he worked as a director of studies'

Examples (13) and (14) obviously support the "Nanai" hypothesis, because there are no such verbs as *oxotala* or *zavučela* in Russian. But the *la*-forms under discussion are derived mostly from Russian verbs, not from nouns. This does not contradict the "Nanai" hypothesis either. Russian verbal stems are interpreted as non-verbs (or more precisely – not Nanai verbs). Therefore nearly all verbal stems borrowed from Russian end with *-la/-lə* (Avrorin 1961: 17). Thus the use of a verbalizer to mark loan verbs cope with its general function, which is making verbs from non-verbs. This strategy is widely attested cross-linguistically, cf. (Matras 2009: 179).

2.4.2. Russian verb stem

The Russian verbs normally have two stems that are used to derive different verbal forms: past forms, infinitive and some others are derived from the past tense stem, while present forms, imperative forms and some others are derived from the present tense stem. The past tense stem is usually vowel final, while the present tense stem is consonant final. The system of Russian verbal stems is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Russian verbal stem system

	formal structure	forms	Russian examples
past tense stem	-V	past forms, infinitive …	*risova-l* 'draw-PST', *risova-tj* 'draw-INF'
present tense stem	-C	present forms, imperative …	*risuj-u* 'draw-PRES.1SG', *risuj-te* 'draw-IMP.PL'

Our data show that the Nanai *la*-forms in question are derived from the Russian past tense stem: e.g., *korčeva-la-* 'stub' (the corresponding present tense stem in Russian is *korčuj-*).

There are also some irregular verbs with other types of stems in Russian. Irregular verbs that have different stems for the past and the infinitive attach *-la* to the past tense stem, not to the infinitive one: *popa-la* 'get' < $popa_{PST}$- / $popastj_{INF}$ (only one example is attested).

With respect to the "Nanai" hypothesis, *la*-derivates from other Russian forms may be expected too (cf. forms like *xoč-u-la* 'want-PRES.1SG-LA' in Russian Siberian Pidgin, see section 4 for details). However, such derivates are not attested in our data.

2.4.3. The suffix -či: a parallel form to -la

There is another verbalizing suffix in Nanai – the suffix *-či*[5]. It often has an iterative aspectual meaning while the verbalizer *-la* sometimes has a perfective meaning (Avrorin 1961: 16–17):

(15a) *meoča-**la**-*
gun-**LA**
'(to) shoot (once)'

(15b) *meoča-**či**-*
gun-**IPFV**
'to shoot (repeatedly)'

According to the "Nanai" hypothesis, one can expect to find *či*-derivates from Russian verbs (parallel to *la*-forms). These *či*-forms, unlike *la*-forms, would have an iterative semantic nuance. However, *či*-forms are not attested in our text database. Neither can they be found in the Nanai-Russian dictionary (Onenko 1980). According to

5 It has a great amount of variants that are not relevant for the present study.

the data given by Onenko (1980), all the loanwords derived from Russian verbal stems do not have *či*-derivates, while some loanwords derived from Russian nominal stems do have an iterative form:

(16a) *bomba-**la**-*
bomb$_{RUS}$-**LA**
'to drop a bomb (once)'

(16b) *bomba-**či**-*
bomb$_{RUS}$-**IPFV**
'to bomb (repeatedly)'

Verbs in (16a) and (16b) are derived from the Russian noun *bomba* 'a bomb', and not from the Russian verb *bombi-t'* 'to bomb'. The absence of iterative forms with *-či* for borrowed verbs supports the "Russian" hypothesis.

2.5. The level of integration into Nanai verb complex and syntactic structure

2.5.1. Morphological integration

Russian verb can be more or less integrated into the Nanai morphological structure. We distinguish three levels of integration:

1. a verb form with derivational and inflectional affixes (aspectual affixes, valency-changing suffixes):

(17) *vozmesti-**la**-go-j*
compensate$_{RUS}$-**LA**-REP-NPST
'(he/she) compensated'

2. a verb form only with inflectional markers (tense, person: examples (9), (10) and others);

3. an auxiliary verb construction (bare *la*-form and the verb *bi* 'to be' with grammatical markers):

(18) *prinima-**la*** *bi-či-n'=go*
receive$_{RUS}$-**LA** be-PST-P.3SG=PART
'(she) received (from time to time)'

The lower the level of integration is, the higher the "perceptual similarity" is to the Russian past tense form. For example, the form

prinimala in (18) is more likely to be recognized by a bilingual speaker as a Russian past form than the fragment *vozmestila-* in (17).

2.5.2. Syntactic integration

The *la*-forms can be used in different syntactic contexts with different degree of formal integration:

1) The *la*-form can be used in a grammatically well-formed Nanai speech fragment where all arguments acquire Nanai grammatical markers:

(19) *xor-d* *učastvova-**la**-xam-bi*
choir$_{RUS}$-DAT participate$_{RUS}$-**LA**-PST-P.1SG
'I was a member of the choir'.

2) The *la*-form can be used after a grammatically correct Russian speech fragment:

(20a) *<v* *školu* *pošli>*$_{RUS}$ *uči-**lə-ndə-xə***
<to school went>$_{RUS}$ study$_{RUS}$-**LA-PURP-PST**
'(We) went to school to study'.

Still, the suffixes of the last word in example (20a) are Nanai (which are in bold). Suffix *-lə* here can't be interpreted as a Russian verbal past marker, as another verbal form, the infinitive, should be used in such a context in Russian, cf. an entirely Russian example (20b):

(20b) *v* *školu* *pošli* *učitsja*
to school went to.study
'(We) went to school to study'.

In the case of (20a), the *la*-form is a border between Russian and Nanai speech. In examples like (19), *la*-forms can undoubtedly be considered borrowings. At the same time, examples like (20a), can be rather considered to be code-switching, or alternation in terms of Muysken (2000), which means that an inserted element – neither Russian *v školu pošli uči-(lə)-* nor Nanai *-(lə)-ndə-xə* – doesn't form a syntactic constituent.

3) The *la*-form can occur in a grammatically ill-formed mixed speech fragment:

(21) *avarij* *popa-**la**-rə*
accident$_{RUS?}$ get$_{RUS}$-**LA**-CVB.NSIM
'when he had an accident…'

The word *avarij* 'accident' is undoubtedly borrowed from Russian (cf. Russian word *avarija* 'crash, accident'). However, its form corresponds neither to the Russian grammatically correct noun form, nor to the Nanai one. In Russian the noun is expected to have a locative form with the preposition – v *avariju*. In Nanai the only way to interprete this form is to consider it as an unmarked Nanai form, which is often used in the direct object position. However it is not clear, why the direct object is used with this Russian verb (not as in standard Russian). So, examples like (21) can be regarded as an intermediate case between the case of pure borrowing like (19) and pure code-switching like (20a). The examples (19)–(21) support the idea of the continuum "borrowing–code-switching" discussed in (Myers-Scotton 2002).

4) The *la*-form can be used as an insertion into Nanai speech:

(22) *a* *tuj* *pudə-məri* *pudə-məri=təni*
and so conjure-CVB.SIM.PL conjure-CVB.SIM.PL=PART
əm *əktə=təni* *jaja-lo-xa-ni*
one woman=PART communicate.with.spirits-INCH1-PST-P.3SG
kamlanit' ***stala***
communicate.with.spirits.INF$_{RUS}$ begin.PST.FEM$_{RUS}$
jaja-lo-xa-n'=go
communicate.with.spirits-INCH1-PST-P.3SG=PART
'And they were conjuring this way, and a woman (shaman) began to communicate with spirits'.

In such cases, *la*-forms are certainly Russian verb forms that are inserted into Nanai speech for the clarification. Code-switching of this kind is very widespread in modern Nanai. It's used to a variable extent by all bilingual Nanai speakers, including those who don't use *la*-forms.

2.6. Summary

Some of the parameters discussed above prove the "Russian" hypothesis, while some of them prove the "Nanai" one, and some others turn out to be in fact irrelevant (Ø); finally, some parameters gives both *pros* and *contras* of the same hypothesis (+/– or –/+); and for some parameters we do not have enough data.

Table 4. "Russian" hypothesis vs. "Nanai" hypothesis: *pro et contra*

	Russian hypothesis	Nanai hypothesis
vowel harmony	Ø	Ø
Tense	–/+	+
Gender	+/–	+/–
Nanai nouns + *la*	+	–/+
Russian nouns + *la*	–	+
irregular verb stems + *la*	?	?
other Nanai suffixes with the same function	–	+

The data presented lead to a conclusion that, firstly, *la*-forms are maintained both by the existence of Russian past tense forms like *popala* and at the same time by the existence of the Nanai derivational suffix *-la/-lə*, and, secondly, that in different types of occurrences *-la* in the forms under discussion demonstrates more or less features of the Russian past tense marker or of the Nanai derivational suffix: e.g., in the context where the *la*-form acts as a border between Russian and Nanai speech *-la* is likely to exhibit more features of the Russian past tense marker.

The problem discussed in the paper can be formulated by the terms of Direct Insertion and Indirect Insertion (cf. Wohlgemuth 2009). Direct Insertion is a strategy of verbal borrowing which implies that "the borrowed verb is immediately available for the grammar of the recipient language without any morphological or syntactic adaptation" (Wohlgemuth 2009: 87). Indirect Insertion is a strategy which implies that the borrowed verb is adapted with the help of a special affix. So, when the *la*-form manifests more features of the "Russian" hypothesis then this can be interpreted as a case of Direct Insertion. When this form exhibits more features of the "Nanai" hypothesis, then it can be interpreted as a case of Indirect Insertion where *-la* is a verbalization suffix.

3. The use of *la*-forms

It would be reasonable to suggest that the presence or frequency of *la*-forms in the speech of a particular speaker would correlate with his/her language competence. However, this is not proved by our data:

on the one hand, there are both fluent Nanai speakers and semi-speakers who use *la*-forms frequently; on the other hand, there are both fluent Nanai speakers and semi-speakers who don't use *la*-forms at all.

For instance, one fluent speaker (R.Ch.K. from the village Džuen) used 25 *la*-forms in 6 oral texts, while another fluent speaker (I.V.G. from the village Džuen) used no *la*-forms in 6 oral texts of about the same length.

Table 5. Use of *la*-forms by different speakers

	fluent speakers	semi-speakers
la-forms are attested	5	2
la-forms are not attested	9	11

Table 5 shows the number of fluent speakers and semi-speakers who use/do not use the forms in question. The numbers are quite small and the data are only approximate because it is impossible to divide the speakers into two groups with regard to their language competence. However, the numbers given in the Table 5 are relevant and show that there is no correlation between the use of *la*-forms and language competence (2-Tail Fisher's Exact Test, P=0,38), i.e. that both fluent speakers and semi-speakers use *la*-forms in their Nanai speech.

4. Background from other Tungusic languages

A similar verbal borrowing strategy occurs in some other Tungusic languages and in Russian Siberian Pidgin which is spoken on the Russian-Chinese border in the area of the rivers Amur and Ussuri. According to Perexval'skaja (2008: 104), verbs in Russian Siberian Pidgin also acquire the suffix *-la*. Moreover, not only are the examples like *xodi-la* (which are identical with Russian past tense verbal forms) attested, but also examples like *xoču-la* (which is the combination of Russian present tense form *xoču* 'want.1SG' and the suffix *-la*). A. Šprincyn analyzes this form in Russian Siberian Pidgin as the contamination of the Russian suffix *-l* ([la] in Chinese pronunciation) and the Chinese aspectual suffix *-la* (Šprincyn 1968: 94). Nevertheless, this case is quite different from the Nanai one, because *la*-forms in Russian Siberian Pidgin do not take any grammatical markers following *-la* unlike the Nanai *la*-forms (cf. example (1)).

In Southern dialects of Udihe (Tungusic < Altaic), the verbal *la*-form is also attested (Perexval'skaja 2008: 105). E. V. Perexval'skaja (2008: 105) points out that it can be used instead of Udihe past forms. Like in Russian Siberian Pidgin and unlike in Nanai, *la*-forms do not take any Udihe grammatical markers. She notes that *-la*/*-lə* is perceived by Udihe speakers themselves as a borrowing from Chinese rather than from Russian (although contacts between Russians and the Udihe are as close as between Russians and the Nanai).

In Even (Tungusic < Altaic) (N. Aralova, p.c.), a common way to accommodate Russian verbs is to use Russian imperative forms with the Even verbalizing suffix *-da* and Even grammatical markers:

(23) *ukrašaj-da-mi*
decorate.IMP$_{RUS}$-VR-COND.CVB
'if (he/she) decorates'

The common strategy for borrowing Russian verbs into Even is different from the Nanai one, and the "Russian" hypothesis is not applicable for Even, as the verbalizer *-da* is not formally identical with the Russian past tense marker *-l*. However, in the Kamchatka dialect of Even, there are also *l*-forms (like Nanai *la*-forms), but they are quite marginal:

(24) *podaril-li-n*
*present.*PST$_{RUS}$-PST-POSS.3SG
'(he/she) presented'

The data from other closely related languages demonstrate that phenomena that are similar in some respects are also attested in these languages, though they are rather different from the phenomenon observed in Nanai. Thus, for the corresponding strategy of verbal borrowing in other Tungusic languages, there are some additional *pros* and *contras* of the hypotheses postulated for Nanai. Moreover, an alternative plausible explanation can be proposed for some of these languages. All this gives grounds to treat this issue as even more complex.

5. Conclusion

In modern Nanai, the most common means to derive verbs from Russian stems (both verbal and nominal) is the suffix *-la*. This suffix can be followed by Nanai grammatical markers, so that the Nanai

strategy of borrowing and deriving verbs differs in this respect from those found in genetically related or areal close languages (Even, Udihe, Russian Siberian Pidgin). The Nanai *la*-forms are maintained both by the existence of Russian past verb forms like *popala* and at the same time by the existence of the Nanai derivational suffix *-la/-lə*. The interpretation we propose seems to be possible, because nowadays, all the Nanai speakers are equally fluent in Russian and Nanai, or more fluent in Russian. Moreover, in some types of occurrences, *-la* in the forms under discussion generally demonstrates features of the Russian past tense marker, while in other types of occurrences, *-la* generally demonstrates features of the Nanai derivational suffix.

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Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3 person; COND – conditional; CVB – converb; DAT – dative; F – feminine; IMP – imperative; IMPS – impersonal; INCH – inchoative; INS – instrumental; IPFV – imperfective; LA – *la*; LOC – locative; NPST – non-past; NSIM – non-simultaneous; OBL – oblique; P – possessive; PART – particle; PL – plural; POSS – possessive; PRES – present; PST – past; PURP – purpose; REP – repetitive; SG – singular; SIM – simultaneous; VR – verbalizer.

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Kokkuvõte. Sofia Oskolskaya ja Natasha Stoynova: *la*-vorm: vene verbid nanai kõnes. Nanai keele kõnelejad, kes oskavad nii nanai kui ka vene keelt, kasutavad vene verbitüvesid koos sufiksiga *-la*. Selle elemendi algupära on küsitav: ühelt poolt on see sarnane vene keele minevikutunnusega *-l*, teisalt tõlgendatav kui nanai tuletussufiks *-la/lə*, mida kasutatakse nimisõnade verbaliseerimiseks. Selle artikli autorid leiavad, et tegemist on keerulise juhtumiga: *la*-vormi kasutamine on seotud mõlema nimetatud allikaga.

Märksõnad: keelekontakt, koodivahetus, ohustatud keeled, laenamine, verbimorfoloogia, vene keel, nanai keel, tunguusi keeled