

Variation in first person singular non-past forms of new English borrowings into Russian second conjugation verbs

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Abstract

The article examines a sample of nineteen new Russian second conjugation loan verbs with English stems ending in labial and dental consonants and the cluster /st/ (such as *strimit* ‘to stream’, *kommentit* ‘to comment’, *frilansit* ‘to freelance’, and *postit* ‘to post’), and to what extent their first person singular non-past (1 SG) forms undergo normative Russian consonant alternations in the writings of internet users. According to earlier studies (2010–2016), labial stems did not pose problems (alternations, or transitive softening, occurred most of the time), whereas in verbs with dental stems and stems ending in consonant clusters, the 1SG forms largely instantiated plain softening.

To find out if there have been any changes in the tendencies of using transitive softening vs. plain softening, I conducted a series of Google searches 2020–2025 to obtain data on the same verbs from different times. My findings corroborate the results of earlier studies when it comes to stems in different types of consonants and ease of adjusting to the standard consonant alternations. Thus, dental stems and the cluster -st are less easily adjusted than labial stems. However, the results show a clear trend in most of the verbs in my sample: they have gradually moved towards more transitive softening in their 1SG non-past forms and now follow the pattern of normative Russian to a very high degree, although a few verbs still show considerable variation between transitive and plain softening (e.g., *kopipastit* ‘to copy and paste’). Also, a few t- and s-verbs (*čatit’sja* ‘to chat’; *frilansit* ‘to freelance’) seem to have basically settled with plain softening.

1. Introduction

Since the 20th century, new loan verbs with English stems are frequently formed using the verbal suffix -i- (Sokolova, Birzer, Ignateva & Kibisova 2025). This means that they will belong to the second conjugation, whose stems ending in the labial and dental consonants /m, p, b, f, v, t, d, s, z/ or the cluster /st/ normally undergo consonant alternations to /ml', pl', bl', fl', vl', č/šč, ž/žd, š, ž, šč/ in the first person singular non-past (1SG) before the ending -u, whereas those ending in the non-labial sonorants /n, r, l/ do not change but are softened. This article examines the utilization on the internet of 1SG forms of a sample of new second conjugation loan verbs with English stems and to what extent the above-mentioned consonant alternations appear. As I will demonstrate, while there is variation, many verbs are gradually adopting the traditional alternations.

The well known history behind the consonant alternations in second conjugation verbs is pedagogically described by Tore Nessel (2015:139, 231–234) in terms of j-palatalization, a sound change caused by a following /j/. In the Common Slavic class of verbs from which today's second conjugation derives, the thematic vowel turned into /j/ before the vowel of the 1SG ending. The resulting cluster of a consonant + /j/ underwent j-palatalization and thus resulted in the consonant alternations of today's second conjugation verbs.

In Nessel's (2008) cognitive linguistic study of the morphology-phonology interface in normative Russian verb inflection, the second conjugation consonant alternations (termed transitive softening) are analyzed as a vehicle for conveying non-past tense as well as first person singular. Three schemas for present tense (and imperative) forms with V(owel)-initial endings yield three competing candidates for the 1SG form of, for example, *videt'* ('to see'): [v'iz̩+u] (transitive softening), [v'id̩+u] (plain softening), and [v'id+u] (no alternation). The interaction between the schemas resolves the competition in favour of [v'iz̩+u]. That is, a second-order schema specifies that the past form stems of verbs that include the suffix [i] or [e] (absent in the 1SG form) undergo transitive softening before the non-past ending [u]. The candidate [v'id̩+u] (manifesting plain softening alternation, the default pattern for V-initial non-past tense endings) is blocked by the [u]-ending through interaction with the schema with no alternation ([v'id+u]).

Most second conjugation verbs are well adjusted to the pattern described above. There are, however, so called defective verbs that are said to lack the 1SG form in normative standard Russian. These verbs have attracted the interest of numerous linguists (for some more recent studies, see, e.g., Baerman 2008; Moskvina 2015; Pertsova & Kuznetsova 2015; Pertsova 2016; Sims 2017). A verb frequently discussed is *pobedit'* ('to win'), for which the new *Bol'shoj akademičeskij slovar'* (2011, vol. 17, s.v. *pobeždat'*) still notes a paradigmatic gap for 1SG. However, the forms *pobedju* (with

plain softening), *pobeždu* (Church Slavonic transitive softening) and *pobežu* (transitive softening) are attested in the Russian National Corpus (www.ruscorpora.ru) at least in the Main, National media, and Social networks subcorpora, mostly when text producers comment on the difficulty of choosing a form. Gridina, Konovalova and Burceva (2013:369) note that the forms *pobedju* and *pobežu* may be used jokingly in spoken and literary language. Another verb that usually appears in the literature on defective verbs and paradigmatic gaps is *pylesosit'* ('to Hoover'), which for a long time also was said to lack 1SG, whereas speakers would use *pylesosju* or *pylesošu*. Today all dictionaries on the site Gramota.ru listing this verb give the 1SG form *pylesošu*, but the new *Bol'soj akademičeskij slovar'* (2012, vol. 21, s.v. *pylesosit'*) gives both alternatives and further notes that *pylesosit'* was first codified in a dictionary of new words in 1971. Thus, new words may take time to adjust to the normative pattern of transitive softening, and alternative forms with plain softening may occur in parallel or compete with the forms that comply with the normative pattern. Historically some 1SG forms with plain softening were acknowledged (Baerman 2008), and even today plain softening, unifying the stems of the whole paradigm into a single form, occurs in some dialects and is not uncommon in non-standard Russian (Bernštejn [1986] 2000:305–306; Moskvín 2015:223).

When it comes to the type of loan verbs under scrutiny in this article, several different 1SG forms are attested. Just to mention one example: for the verb *frendit'* ('to friend') Plungjan (2010) lists four different forms: *frenžu* (transitive softening), *frendju* (plain softening), *frendžu* and *frendlju* (mixed). As mixed types of softening (non-standard innovations or "incorrect" alternations) are of very low frequency compared to both standard alternations and lack of alternation (Slioussar & Kholodilova 2013:257), I will concentrate on transitive and plain softening. Earlier research has been preoccupied with aspects of the new borrowings in a single period, i.e. the time when the data were collected. By contrast, I have studied the use of 1SG forms of certain new borrowings from the first analyses I could find up to the present (2025). My research questions are: Which of the examined verbs favour transitive softening? Are there verbs that favour plain softening? Are there verbs with varying or competing forms? Have the preferences changed over time?

The rest of the article is structured as follows. In section 2, earlier studies on recent loan verbs are discussed. Section 3 describes my material, analysis, and results. In section 4, I discuss the results of the present study, comparing them with earlier results. Section 5 offers some broader conclusions from the study.

2. Earlier research

Earlier research has examined 1SG non-past forms of new borrowings in the context of the characteristics of Russian internet language and of problems in verb inflection that cause processes of leveling or paradigmatic gaps.

The earliest account of variegated 1SG forms in new second conjugation verbs with English stems that I have been able to find is Plungjan's handout (?) on internet language at the University of Bergen (2010). Plungjan notes a great variety of forms, fluctuation between transitive and plain softening, and in addition contamination of models of alternation. He presents numbers of occurrences of the 1 SG forms he found for the verbs *postit'* ('to post'), *frendit'* ('to friend'), *kommentit'* ('to comment'), *fludit'* ('to flood'), *flejmit'* ('to flame'), and *banit'* ('to ban') both in the simplex verbs and with different prefixes (when, where and how the searches were done is not described). The raw numbers for simplex *postit'*, *frendit'*, *kommentit'* (verbs that also appear in my material) are as follows: *pošču/posču* (4,200), *postju* (3,400); *frenžu* (190), *frendju* (830), *frendžu* (16), *frendlju* (14); *kommenču* (1,430), *commentju* (1,030). As the title of the relevant subsection of the handout states, Plungjan sees this variation in forms as a breakdown of the system of transitive softening in internet language.

Slioussar and Kholodilova (2013) examine novel Russian second conjugation verbs in a larger study of paradigm leveling processes in four different verb classes, processes that often involve the omission or distortion of standard consonant alternations in non-standard innovative forms. As Russian corpora contain very few non-standard forms, the authors used Yandex to search for 82 novel second conjugation verbs (of English origin) with stems that should undergo alternation. These searches can have been conducted no later than 2011 (the article is based on a paper given in 2011). Slioussar and Kholodilova found that many verbs might lack alternations in the first person singular; less frequent verbs lacked alternations more often; stems ending in obstruent clusters caused more problems; and verbs with stems ending in labials rarely lacked alternations. They searched for 1SG forms both with the "correct" alternations (i.e., transitive softening) and "without them" (presumably with plain softening) and counted the frequencies, limiting themselves to the 100 first occurrences for frequent verbs (Slioussar and Kholodilova 2013:247–248). Below I cite Slioussar's and Kholodilova's numbers for the verbs that are also included in my study (the first figure is the number of forms with transitive softening)

- (1) *nubit'* ('to noob') – 100 | 0
- folovit'* ('to follow') – 99 | 1
- instagramit'* ('to use Instagram') – 98 | 2
- strimit'* ('to stream') – 98 | 2
- bekapit'* ('to back up') – 95 | 5
- serfit'* ('to surf') – 35 | 65
- jutubit'* ('to use YouTube') – 36 | 13
- postit'* ('to post') – 77 | 33

kopipejstít ('to copy and paste') – 14 | 86
frendít ('to include in the friends list') – 86 | 14
kommentít ('to comment') – 75 | 25
apgrejdit ('to upgrade') – 52 | 48
brauzít ('to browse') – 18 | 82
frilansít ('to freelance') 9 | 91
čatít'sja ('to chat') – 2 | 98

Slioussar and Kholodilova (2013:249) also present percentages for three different groups of verbs as wholes. Table 1 displays the ratios of 1SG alternations vs. lack of alternation in frequent and infrequent verbs with stems in labials, obstruent clusters and other stems (dentals). Statistical analyses reached significance in all comparisons except the difference between frequent and infrequent verbs with stems in obstruent clusters.

Alternations	Labials		Obstruent clusters		Other stems (dentals)	
	frequent	infrequent	frequent	infrequent	frequent	infrequent
Yes	90.8%	82.5%	37.7%	32%	58.2%	32.8%
No	9.2%	17.5%	62.3%	68%	41.8%	67.2%

Table 1. Ratios of 1SG forms with and without alternations in verbs with different types of stems (Slioussar & Kholodilova 2013:249)

Magomedova and Slioussar (2017) provide an account of several types of non-standard stem-final consonant mutations (or lack of mutation) that occur on the internet, viz. in 1SG verb inflection, comparative forms of adjectives, and diminutive nouns. They adopt a special sublexical grammar approach to account for the fact that novel words may not follow the same pattern as other words, thus “assuming that speakers may have specific grammars for subgroups of words that have a common property” (Magomedova & Slioussar 2017:238). They argue that in non-standard Russian, faithfulness to the stem gets promoted so that speakers may, for instance, avoid consonant alternations or add suffixes while retaining the final consonant of the stem (Magomedova & Slioussar 2017:255). Their discussion of 1SG forms exemplifies the new approach using data from Slioussar and Kholodilova 2013.

Pertsova (2016) used recently borrowed second conjugation verbs to test the hypothesis that defectiveness (paradigm gaps) is synchronically tied to dental but not to labial alternations. She used 56 new borrowings (many from Slioussar’s and Kholodilova’s list) in a Google search (July 2014, limited to Russian language and region Russia). Though aware of the fact that web data are noisy and search engine counts imprecise, she still thinks that emerging clear patterns are unlikely to be accidental. Pertsova’s results confirm the difference between labial and dental stems: labial stems mostly had the expected alternations, whereas dental stems were highly diverse. However, stems in -f behaved differently from other labial stems: there was a negative correlation between frequency and proportion of alternations – more frequent

verbs were less likely to alternate, e.g. the most frequent f-verb *serfit* ' (more than 3,000 hits) had only 35% 1SG with alternation. According to Pertsova and Kuznetsova (2017), the fact that the labial alternation involves epenthesis but does not alter the consonant of the stem is a likely explanation for the higher productivity of labial alternation compared to the phonological opacity of the stem-altering dental alternations.

In a large psycholinguistic study on palatalization (transitive softening) in the Russian verb system by Kulinich, Royle and Valois (2016), one of the experiments was a written production task involving new second conjugation loan verbs. Twenty-three adult Russian speakers (average age 21 years, $SD = 3.6$) were asked to produce 1SG non-past forms of 9 verbs with stems ending in the dentals -t, -d, and -s. Alternation was used in only 51.66% of responses, but there was considerable variability between items and between subjects. The variability between individual verbs is not discussed, but the percentage of palatalization by each participant is displayed in a figure (Kulinich et al. 2016:349). Palatalization ranged from participants who produced nearly 90% palatalization to those who were just above 20% ($SD = 30.3$). According to the authors, only 51.66% of palatalized forms on average suggests that either the loanwords are not fully integrated or that pressure comes from the rest of the non-past paradigm where no forms are palatalized.

Earlier studies thus demonstrate that 1SG forms of newly borrowed second conjugation verbs are characterized by variability, tendencies of leveling, and similarities to standard Russian verbs with 1SG non-past gaps.

3. Google searches and results

To find 1SG non-past forms of new second conjugation verbs for the present study, for the same reasons as Slioussar and Kholodilova (2013) and Pertsova (2016), I turned to the internet, while keeping in mind the reliability problems of this method. The Russian National Corpus nowadays includes a social networks subcorpus, but this does not help much. Although all except one of the verbs I examined are attested, more than half of them have no occurrences of 1SG forms or only one.

I thus conducted a series of Google searches over a five year period to obtain data on the same verbs from different contexts and times. The first search had no limitations of time, language, or region. It was undertaken in June 2020 with a few additional searches about one year later. Starting with a longer list of new second conjugation verbs, a search for infinitives was conducted to get an idea of the general frequency of the verbs. Fifteen verbs with 5,000 or more hits of the infinitive (2020) and another four verbs (2021) were further examined through searches for exact phrases of the type “ja 1SG form with transitive softening” and “ja 1SG form with plain softening”. Verbs with at least one attestation of “ja 1SG form” were included in the material. Raw numbers for the two types of 1SG forms and percentages were counted.

The verbs in (2) ended up in the material (for two verbs alternative spellings were checked):

- (2) **Labial stems:** *strimit* ‘(to stream)’, *instagramit* ‘(to use Instagram)’, *bėkapit* & *bekapit* ‘(to backup)’, *jutubit*¹ ‘(to use YouTube)’, *nubit* ‘(to noob)’, *follovit* & *folovit* ‘(to follow)’, *sėrfit* ‘(to surf)’, *selfit’sja* ‘(to take a selfie)’
- Dental stems:** *čatit’sja* ‘(to chat)’, *kommentit* ‘(to comment)’, *apgrejdit* ‘(to upgrade)’, *frendit* ‘(to friend)’, *frilansit* ‘(to freelance)’, *autsorsit* ‘(to outsource)’, *brauzit* ‘(to browse)’, *relizit* ‘(to release)’
- Consonant cluster -st:** *postit* ‘(to post)’, *repostit* ‘(to repost)’, *kopipastit* ‘(to copy and paste)’.

I will not present these results in detail but only comment on the general tendencies in the three groups of verbs. In labial stems, the transitive softening type totally dominated (nearly 100%), except for *jutubit* (57% – four tokens out of only seven attestations) and *sėrfit* (67% of 2,118 attestations). Pertsova’s (2016) observation about stems in -f was supported: the more frequent verb *sėrfit* alternated less (67%) than the less frequent *selfit’sja* (91%). The results for the dental stems were varied: all 1SG forms of *čatit’sja* were tokens of plain softening, whereas the other verbs with stems in dental plosives had considerably more tokens of transitive softening (80–85%); the verbs with stems in dental fricatives showed the opposite pattern of considerably more tokens of plain softening (from 71% (*relizit*) to 97% (*autsorsit*). As for the verbs with stems in the consonant cluster -st, *postit* and *repostit* instantiated transitive softening on average 85% of the time, while *kopipastit* attested only 39% tokens of transitive softening. Thus, there was variation within and between groups of stems as well as in individual verbs.

To find out whether there has been any change or development during the last few years, I undertook new searches for 1SG forms of the same verbs in the Fall of 2025. As Google had changed so that the results given to search strings like “ja 1SG form” now included *ja* followed by any form of the verb, I tried searches using the 1SG forms only with double quotation marks. Checking the first few pages for each form (if there were many pages), I saw that for the most part the results were clean and could be used (exceptions were the forms *jutubju* and *instagramju* that gave almost only noise, so I checked all instances). Thus, I conducted searches for 1SG forms with transitive and plain softening of all verbs in (2), with the difference that I performed separate searches for *sėrfit* and *serfit*. Two different searches were conducted for the period 1/1/2021–9/30/2025, one (2025a in tables 2–5) with no limits on language or region (for better comparison with my 2020/2021 results, and possibly with Slioussar & Kholodilova

¹ An anonymous reviewer asked about the alternative spellings *jutjubit* and *jut’jubit*. These were not considered by Slioussar and Kholodilova (2013), nor by me in 2020/2021. Searches for 1SG forms with the same limitations as in my two 2025 searches gave altogether 3 hits, and only in the search with no other limitations than time: *jutjublju* (2 hits) and *jut’jublju* (1 hit).

2013), and one (2025b in tables 2–5) limited to Russian language and region Russia (for better comparison with Pertsova 2016).

Table 2 presents the results for verbs with labial stems. The results of both searches are very similar to those of the 2020/2021 search with nearly 100%² occurrence tokens of transitive softening for most verbs, which in the 2025a search also pertains to *jutubit'*. However, in the 2025b search *jutubit'* has only 2 attestations and *nubit'* 7, so that one token each of plain softening lowers the percentages of transitive softening to 50% and 86%, respectively.

Verbs with labial stems	1SG Transitive softening				1SG Plain softening			
	Raw number		Percent		Raw number		Percent	
	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b
<i>strimit'</i>	393,000	29,000	99.94%	99.98%	164	7	0.06%	0.02%
<i>instagramit'</i>	98	6	100%	100%	0	0	0%	0%
<i>bėkapit</i>	230	153	98%	99%	5	2	2%	1%
<i>bėkapit'</i>	79	37	100%	100%	0	0	0%	0%
<i>jutubit'</i>	68	1	98.5%	50%	1	1	1.5%	50%
<i>nubit'</i>	1070	6	95.5%	86%	51	1	4.5%	14%
<i>follovit'</i>	304	54	100%	100%	0	0	0%	0%
<i>folovit'</i>	211	52	99.5%	98%	1	1	0.5%	2%
<i>sėrfit'</i>	300	76	79%	54%	79	65	21%	46%
<i>serfit'</i>	904	60	32%	62%	1960	37	68%	38%
<i>selfit'sja</i>	79	3	65%	60%	43	2	35%	40%

Table 2. Transitive vs. plain softening in second conjugation 1SG forms of labial verbs (2025a Google 2021-01-01–2025-09-30, no other limitations; and 2025b Google 2021-01-01–2025-09-30, language Russian, region Russia)

As in earlier studies, the verbs with stems in -f diverge from the dominant labial pattern. The possibility to have separate results for *sėrfit'* and *serfit'* yielded the rather unexpected outcome that in the 2025a search, transitive softening was preferred for *sėrfit'* (79%), but plain softening for *serfit'* (68%), and thus the ratio of transitive softening (32%) was close to that of Pertsova's (2016) study (35%). However, in the 2025b search, both for *sėrfit'* and *serfit'* the majority of 1SG forms are tokens of transitive softening (54% and 62%, respectively), which is, however, less than in the 2020/2021 search (67%). The less frequent f-verb *selfit'sja* demonstrates lower ratios of transitive softening in the 2025 searches (65% and 60%) than in the 2020/2021 search (91%). The raw numbers are, however, extremely low (3 and 2) in the 2025b search.

Table 3 displays the results for verbs with dental stems. Among the verbs with dental plosives, *ėatit'sja* still stands out as the verb for which plain softening is by far the most frequent choice (98%) in both searches, despite a few (4 and 2) tokens of transitive

² As it was not possible to undertake statistical analyses of the results for all verbs due to too low numbers of attestations of some forms, only percentages were calculated.

softening. However, for the other t- and d-verbs, transitive softening is clearly preferred in both searches (77%–99% and 83%–100%).

Verbs with dental stems	1SG Transitive softening				1 SG Plain softening			
	Raw number		Percent		Raw number		Percent	
	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b
<i>čatit'sja</i>	4	2	2%	2%	228	114	98%	98%
<i>kommentit'</i>	617	230	87%	96%	95	10	13%	4%
<i>apgrejdit'</i>	415	39	77%	83%	121	8	23%	17%
<i>frendit'</i>	619	30	99%	100%	5	0	1%	0%
<i>frilansit'</i>	62	6	10%	7%	573	76	90%	93%
<i>autsorsit'</i>	1	0	10%	0%	9	2	90%	100%
<i>brauzit'</i>	3	0	60%		2	0	40%	
<i>relizit'</i>	33	10	79%	77%	9	3	21%	23%

Table 3. Transitive vs. plain softening in second conjugation 1SG forms of dental verbs (2025a and 2025b)

When it comes to the dental fricatives, as in earlier studies, the s-verbs favoured plain softening in the 2025 searches (90% and 93%–100%), while the z-verbs instantiated transitive softening in the majority of 1SG tokens (60% and 77%–79%). It should, however, be noted that the raw numbers for *autsorsit'* and *brauzit'* are very low, even to the point of zero attestations for *brauzit'* in the 2025b search.

Verbs with stems in -st	1SG Transitive softening				1SG Plain softening			
	Raw number		Percent		Raw number		Percent	
	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b	2025a	2025b
<i>postit'</i>	26,700	1070	92%	90%	2,430	116	8%	10%
<i>repostit'</i>	18,500	192	95%	95%	998	10	5%	5%
<i>kopipastit'</i>	230	69	55%	48%	192	76	45%	52%

Table 4. Transitive vs. plain softening in second conjugation 1SG forms of verbs with stems in -st (2025a and 2025b)

Table 4 presents the results for the verbs with stems in -st. As in the 2020/2021 search, there is a difference between *postit'* and *repostit'* vs. *kopipastit'*. However, the tendency to use transitive softening has increased for all of them in the 2025 searches: *postit'* and *repostit'* from 85% to 93% on average; *kopipastit'* from 39% to 55% and 48%.

4. Discussion

Reviewing the results from earlier studies up to my 2025 searches, a clear trend can be seen in most of the verbs in my sample: they have gradually moved towards more transitive softening in their 1SG non-past forms. Thus, for the verbs that we can compare from Plungjan 2010 through Slioussar and Kholodilova 2013 and my 2020/2021 search

up the two searches I conducted in 2025, the use of transitive softening has increased as displayed in table 5.

Transitive softening	2010	2013	2020/21	2025a	2025b
<i>postit'</i>	55% (<i>pošču/posču</i>)	77%	86%	92%	90%
<i>frendit'</i> ³	19% (of <i>frenžu+frendju</i>)	86%	95%	99%	100%
<i>kommentit'</i>	58%	75%	80%	87%	96%

Table 5. Increase in transitive softening in 1SG non-past of *postit'*, *frendit'*, *kommentit'* 2010–2025

Thus, there are now stems in -st, -d, and -t that reach levels of transitive softening close to those of labial verbs (except those with f-stems), seen in all studies that discuss 1SG non-past of novel second conjugation verbs. Verbs with f-stems invariably report less transitive softening. Slioussar and Kholodilova (2013) and Pertsova (2016) report only 35% transitive softening for *serfit'*. Pertsova also found that the frequent verb *serfit'* showed less transitive softening than less frequent verbs with f-stems. In my searches, *sërfit'* consistently manifested higher but fluctuating levels of transitive softening (67%, 79%, and 54%). The results for *serfit'* in the 2025 searches also show variation: only 32% transitive softening in the search without limitations of language and region vs. 64% when limited to Russian pages. Thus, at least in Russian pages, both variants of this f-stem attest increased use of transitive softening compared to earlier studies. However, the results for *selfit'sja* go in the opposite direction: transitive softening has decreased from 91% in the 2020/2021 search to 65% and 60% in 2025. That the results for novel verbs with f-stems differ so much from other labial verbs is probably to do with the fact that there are very few verbs with f-stems in Russian, and most of them are infrequent (Pertsova & Kuznetsova 2017). In an experiment Pertsova and Kuznetsova found that standard Russian verbs with f-stems “elicited lower confidence and lower alternation rates compared to other low-frequency labial verbs” (Pertsova & Kuznetsova 2017:428).

When it comes to verbs with dental stems, almost all t- and d-verbs have seen an increase in the use of transitive softening (cf. Table 5). The exception is *čatit'sja* instantiating plain softening in 98% of the occurrences (Slioussar and Kholodilova 2013; both 2025 searches) and 100% (2020/2021). A plausible explanation suggested by Moskvina (2015) and Pertsova (2016) is avoidance of repeating consonants (because it sounds awkward). Another reason for avoidance of a form with transitive softening suggested by Moskvina (2015) is that an unwanted association with another word could

³ An anonymous reviewer wondered, if the form *frendžu* would undergo a process analogous to that of *frenžu*. Judging from searches with the same limitations as 2025a and 2025b, the utilization of *frendžu*, like *frendju*, is decreasing: Plungjan (2010) found 16 attestations of *frendžu*, the 2025 searches gave only 6 and 4 hits.

appear. As it happens, the form *čačus*’ could bring the Georgian liquor *chacha* to mind. That the association between *chat* and *chacha* has been made can be seen in (3).

- (3) *P.S. tak že v processe obsuždenija pojavilsja glagol “čačit’sja”, t.e. sidet’ v čate popivaja čaču.*⁴

‘P.S. also in the process of discussion the verb “čačit’sja” turned up, i.e., sit in a chat drinking chacha.’

The 1SG form of the newly coined verb *čačit’sja* would, of course, be *čačus*’.

When it comes to stems in the dental fricatives, already in Slioussar’s and Kholodilova’s (2023) study z-verbs had more tokens of transitive softening (*brauzit*’ 18%) than the s-verbs (*frilansit*’ 9%). In my sample, the z-verbs are gradually moving towards transitive softening. In 2020/2021, *brauzit*’ showed 25% transitive softening and in 2025a 60% (no attestations in 2025b). *Relizit*’ moved from 29% transitive softening (2020/2021) to 79% and 77% (2025). The s-verbs have not seen any increase in transitive softening since Slioussar’s and Kholodilova’s (2013) rates for *frilansit*’ (9% transitive softening vs. 91% plain softening), rather an increase in plain softening appeared in my 2025b search: *frilansit*’ had 93% plain softening and *autsorsit*’ 100% (however, only two tokens). This difference between s-verbs and z-verbs needs further investigation.

I examined only one consonant cluster, namely, -st that alternates with -šč in standard Russian. As already demonstrated, *postit*’ has moved towards increased use of transitive softening, and *repostit*’ follows the same trend. Slioussar and Kholodilova (2013) mention that stems in consonant clusters are characterized by a variety of “incorrect” alternations, one of which is *pošču* (which was counted together with the correct form *pošču* by Plungjan 2010). I searched for this form in the same Russian pages as the other 1SG forms. The result was 126 occurrences, i.e., only 10 occurrences more than for *postju*, which means that *pošču* is by far the most frequent form (1,070 tokens). *Postit*’ and *repostit*’ are the second and third most frequent verbs in my sample (after *strimit*’). The less frequent *kopipastit*’ has only slightly increased its proportion of transitive softening from 39% (2020/2021) to 55% and 48% (2025). (Slioussar & Kholodilova 2013 reported 14% transitive softening for *kopipejsttit*’, not attested in my 2020/2021 search.)

To conclude, only four verbs (out of nineteen) have not developed towards an increase in the use of transitive softening in 1SG non-past forms: *čatit’sja*, *frilansit*’ and *autsorsit*’ have had about the same very high levels of plain softening in all studies, while *selfit’sja* has moved towards decreased use of transitive softening between 2020/2021 and 2025. For the “problems” with *čatit’sja* and *selfit’sja* possible explanations have been proposed in the literature, but why s-stems seem to avoid alternation remains unclear.

⁴ <https://pyrcus.livejournal.com/470039.html>

All verbs in my sample except *jutubit'*, *nubit'*, *autsorsit'*, and *brauzit'* are codified in *Vikislovar'* (ru.wiktionary.org). In the main, the 1SG non-past forms feature transitive softening alternation. The exceptions are *čatit'sja*, *frilansit'*, and *kommentit'* with plain softening, and *repostit'* that has a gap for the 1SG form. Thus, only *kommentit'* and *repostit'* differ from the results of my Google searches.

My findings corroborate the results of earlier studies when it comes to stems in different consonants and ease of adjusting to the standard consonant alternations. Thus, dental stems and the cluster -st are less easily adjusted than labial stems. However, my findings show that with time and high frequency such verbs also tend to gradually adjust. Some exceptions can be explained by the overall low frequency of the type of stem in the language and unfortunate repetition of consonants.

5. Conclusion

As demonstrated in this article, second conjugation 1SG non-past forms of new borrowings vary in which of Tore Nessel's (2008) schemas for present tense forms with V-initial endings they follow. Most of my sample of verbs at present follow the pattern of normative Russian to a very high degree. However, a few t- and s-verbs seem to have basically settled with plain softening, and in some verbs there is considerable variation in choice of schema. Applying different types of interaction or instantiation of the schemas for present tense forms, the model described by Nessel could easily be used to account for non-normative as well as normative forms (cf. the sublexical grammar approach by Magomedova and Slioussar 2017).

Some researchers have written about the breakdown or decay of alternations. My small-scale investigation suggests instead that the system of alternation is not collapsing, but that certain variation is tolerated in new verbs, either while they are not fully integrated or out of pressure from rest of the paradigm. Larger scale investigations of more and newer verbs, different written communication types and communities, as well as oral production tasks would be needed for further elucidation of the variation in 1SG non-past forms.

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