

## Conference Paper

# On the Problems of Teaching Russian As a Foreign Language to the Speakers of a Cognate Language (Polish)

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## Abstract

This paper is devoted to the problem of learning Russian by native speakers of the Polish language. The presented research is made in the context of the language-oriented approach and includes linguistic experiment, comparative analysis of Russian and Polish languages and identification of problem areas causing interference errors. A system of rules and exercises for Polish learners of Russian is being proposed as recommended practice for excluding interference errors. The language-oriented approach used in this report is based, first, on provisions that take into account the already existing initial language system of learners, second, on a comparative analysis of languages, and third, on an analysis of learners' mistakes. Mastering a foreign language takes place in close interaction of language systems in the minds of students. In the situation of interaction between two contacting languages, interference is likely to occur. Identification of interference errors in the analysis of speech of foreign languages allows us to identify problem areas in the studied language and correct the language skill in the course of learning. Typical mistakes are a material for creating the necessary strategy of teaching Russian language for native speakers of a certain language.

**Keywords:** interference, Polish language, Russian language, learning Russian as a foreign language, language-oriented approach

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is devoted to the description of specific difficulties of native speakers of a cognate language (Polish) in learning Russian. When studying the second and subsequent languages, the influence of the system of one's first language is inevitable, the second language is studied by an inophone through the prism of his / her native language. Particular difficulties may arise if the native language and the target language are typologically different (for example, one of them has some exotic grammatical categories that lack in the other) or on the contrary are closely related as Polish and

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Russian because at all levels of the language systems there are similarities, partial coincidences which can lead to mixing up some elements.

In order to effectively master a foreign language, it is important to establish a connection between the mother tongue and the language being studied, to take into account the peculiarities of both languages, and to identify areas of the language being studied that are problematic for acquisition by a foreigner.

As **methodological basis** for the presented research the language-oriented approach has been chosen. Throughout the history of the development of the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language, there have been different approaches to teaching, based on a comparison of mother tongue and the languages studied. Russian and foreign researchers pointed to the need to develop educational material on the basis of the description of the studied language in comparison with the parallel description of the native language of students (V. Gak [1], L. Shcherba [2], etc.). There is a number of studies developing concrete methods of teaching foreign students that recommend studying phonetic, grammatical and lexical features of the Russian language through the prism of the native language and based on the analysis of the phenomena of interference as a consequence of bilingualism and multilingualism (M. Vsevolodova [3], E. Bryzgunova [4], etc.). Teaching methods that take into account the peculiarities of the studied language and culture of its native speakers and compare similar and different phenomena of native and studied languages in the selection and presentation of the material are called national-oriented (or language oriented) methods. On the basis of this method, later attempts to develop an ethno-oriented approach were made taking into consideration the ethnocultural, ethnopsychological and ethnolinguistic specifics of the students. The key concepts of this approach are ethnicity, culture, mentality, national character, and ethnic stereotype (N. Pomortseva [5], T. Balykhina [6], etc.).

The paper is based on the data of our own research that use a combination of case study and comparative method. The paper describes the interference zones of the Russian and Polish languages, reveals and summarizes the interference mistakes in the oral speech of native speakers of the Polish language in Russian at different language levels and proposes recommended practice for self-learners and teachers of Russian as a foreign language.

**The material of the study** includes 11 oral texts, ranging in size from 344 to 4111 words. (753, 475, 440, 486, 344, 567, 590, 677, 2200, 4111 words). In the process of collecting the material eight students of the second year of bachelor's program, two students of the first year of full-time master's program and one student of the third year of part-time

bachelor's program in Russian philology of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań were interviewed.

## 2. Problem Areas and Linguistic Training

### 2.1. Phonetic language level

Among the phonetic phenomena of the Russian language causing the most difficulties for native speakers of the Polish language the following were identified: reduction that is absent in Polish, mobile Russian accent, pronunciation of sounds [л] and [л'], phonetic differences in the sounding words of common Slavonic vocabulary, borrowings, toponyms and their derivatives.

Significant difficulties in the study of the Russian language by Poles causes the Russian mobile accent. In the Polish language the accent is fixed, it falls on the penultimate syllable of the word. Therefore, there are mistakes in the Russian speech of Poles that can be divided into two types. The cause for the mistakes of the first type is the interlingual interference in which the speaker applies the rules of the Polish language when generating speech in Russian: so Polish speakers stress in Russian the second syllable from the end of the word. In the speech of the interviewees the following examples of the wrong emphasis were found: была, ждала, начала, взяла, области, она, слюдми, физиотерапия, родный, учатся, видела, в кино, места (plural), поехала, Петербург. The cause for the second type of mistakes is the intra-linguistic interference: a Polish speaker knows that in Russian the accent is not fixed but does not know the norm for a certain case, so he chooses arbitrarily using the principle "not like in my native language". Examples of this kind of mistakes in our interviews: в городах, любят, бывала, такой, в воду. Russian accent is one of the most difficult phenomena for mastering the foreign language. It is difficult to learn the accent for all words, but it seems expedient for language training to present to students the most frequent words of the Russian language with the indicated accent. We recommend using the "New Frequency Dictionary of Russian Lexicon" by О. Lyashevskaya and S. Sharova [7]. Students can be given the most frequent verbs, adjectives and adverbs of the Russian language. Furthermore, it is advisable to give students sentences with marked accent with Russian and Polish toponyms, for example, Я бы хотела поехать в Санкт-Петербург. Он часто бывал в Москве, as the interview materials contain many mistakes in accent in these words: в Моск[ф]е, Санкт-Петербур[ф]г... Петербург. The

next task is to form adjectives from the toponyms given in the sentences, for example: Санкт-Петербург -- санкт-петербургский, Москва -- московский.

The Russian and the Polish languages have a common lexicon fund, the phonetic closeness of which is explained historically. Due to the positional correspondence of Polish sounds [ś], [ć], [ź], [dź] to Russian [c'], [t'], [z'], [d'], it is possible that the Russian speech may contain the replacement of soft [c'], [t'], [z'], [d'] by [ś], [ć], [ź], [dź] in words of similar sounding in both languages. In the interview materials, the following errors were found: не встре[ч']ила; лю[dź]и; с лю[dź]ми.

As a material to work on this problem area, it is possible to offer the trainees tables with words that present the positional correspondence of Russian sounds [c'], [t'], [z'], [d'] and Polish [ś], [ć], [ź], [dź]: тень --- cień, зелёный --- zielony, люди --- ludzie.

The next aspect is the correspondence in some words Polish [ć] to Russian [ч'], for example, czysty -- чистый, czyj -- чей, człowiek -- человек. An example of the following pronunciation was found in the text of the interview (Polish czeski): [č]ескую. As a reminder, students can be given a table with words with similar correspondence in Russian and Polish.

According to our observations, special attention should also be paid to words that are borrowed from other European languages both in Russian and Polish. The phonetic appearance of such words in Russian and Polish is mostly quite similar, which causes errors in the pronunciation. The interview materials revealed the following variants of borrowing: лингвист[ты]ка, комп[пу]тер, мо[ты]вации, [сы]туация. The students are offered a list of Polish words and their Russian analogues, with fragments that differ from each other. For example, ситуация -- sytuacja, дискуссия -- dyskusja, математика -- matematyka, физика -- fizyka.

Also it is necessary to take into account that in addition to regressive assimilation in Polish language (ścieżka-ście[sz]ka) that is also given in Russian ([з]бежать), there is also progressive assimilation (O. Lazareva: consonants [v], [v'], [ż] are deafened after a voiceless consonant: *kwiat* -- [k'f'jat], *Moskwa* [moskfa], *trzy* [tšy]) [8, 81]. The language skill of progressive assimilation among native speakers of the Polish language is automated and is being transferred to their Russian speech: в Моск[ф]е, церк[ф]и, с[ф]ой. However, assimilation mistakes were found only in Russian words whose appearance is close to that of Polish: Moskwa-- Москва, cerkiew-- церковь, swój -- свой. Therefore, in this case, we can probably speak of a complete or partial replacement of the phonetic appearance of the word due to the fact that the equivalents in Polish and Russian have a similar sounding.

As palatal consonants do not appear in borrowings before *e* in Polish, Poles tend to make such errors in pronunciation of Russian words with combinations of *consonant + e*. The following examples of mistakes were found in the speech of informants: о[кэ]й, ма[тэ]риала, ту[рэ]цкую, на факульт[э]те, в Си[бэр'ь]ю, ин[тэ,рэ]сно, физио[тэ]рапия. These examples show that errors occur in words whose appearance is similar in Russian and Polish. As a rule, these are borrowed words. To work on this problem zone, we can offer a list of words of foreign origin with this combination for independent reading: демократия [д'ь] -- demokracja [de], университет [в'ь], [т'э] -- uniwersytet [we], [te].

Difficulties may arise in the pronunciation of sounds [л] and [л']. «Согласный «л» -- произносится как русский мягкий [л'] только перед «и». Ср.: лира -- липа. В остальных случаях «л» не имеет соответствия в русском языке, (это так называемый «европейский звук л»)» / "The consonant "l" is pronounced as Russian soft [л'] only before "i". In other cases, "l" has no correspondence in the Russian language (it is the so-called "European sound l)". [9, 41]. The hard [л] is absent in the Polish language at all, so in Russian speech there can be difficulties with pronouncing this sound. Here is an observation of Kinga, one of the interviewees: «Для меня самое трудное -- это твердая [л], <...> иногда говорю «лучше»-- это не звучит по-русски. <...> Я пробую, пытаюсь практиковать, но бывает по-разному, самое хорошее упражнение -- это общаться с русскими, просто слушать или слушать музыку» / "For me, the most difficult thing is the hard [л], <...> sometimes I say "лучше" -- It does not sound Russian. <...> I try to practice, but sometimes the best exercise is to communicate with Russians, just listen to them or to music". Because of the positional correspondence of [л] and [л'] mistakes can appear in the Russian speech of Polish speakers. For example: на Со[л]овках -- an [л] is used instead of [л']. The following example of hard [л] appeared in our material: на Байка[л]ской. In Polish, the word-formative model looks like this: Bajkał -- bajkalski, where [л] alternates with [l]; in Russian: Байкал -- байкальский, where [л] alternates with [л']. Probably, the speaker does not know the pronunciation norm of this word and tries to pronounce the word not as it sounds in his native language.

## 2.2. Morphological language level

At the morphological level, the following phenomena are our research focus: differences in the expression of the category of animacy in Russian and in Polish; the difference in the declension of words of Latin origin; nouns that are inflected in the Polish language, but uninflected in the Russian language; interference errors in subjunctive mood forms.

Latin nouns of the neuter grammatical gender with the *--um* flexion are inflected only in plural in the Polish language whereas in the singular they have one form for all cases: *muzeum, liceum, gimnazjum*. The Russian analogues sometimes lack the element *-um*: музей, лицей, гимназия, and sometimes preserve it: аквариум, коллоквиум. In Russian, these nouns are masculine or feminine and are inflected in compliance with their grammatical gender having both singular and plural forms. We recommend to provide the students with a list of such words in Russian with notes on their declension paradigm, and to offer substitution exercises for training Russian nouns of Latin origin in different cases. For example, Лида была в \_\_\_\_\_ (музей) в Кракове. -- Лида была в музее в Кракове. Рита почистила стенки \_\_\_\_\_ (аквариум). -- Рита почистила стенки аквариума.

The other significant difference in grammar features of borrowed nouns in Russian and Polish is that borrowed nouns ending in *-o* are uninflected in Russian, but inflected in Polish (кино / kino, метро / metro, радио / radio etc.) so that the Polish students have to be aware of such borrowings and their grammatical properties in Russian: бюро, видео, гетто, депо, домино, дзюдо, казино, капучино, кино, либретто, лассо, лото, манго, метро, пальто, патио, пианино, радио, ранчо, рококо, рондо, самбо, соло, стерео. For training such nouns in sentences we recommend to use language illustrations and substitution exercises: На чемпионате по танго все они получили высшие баллы (dativus). Виктор оставил свои ключи в \_\_\_\_\_ (пальто). Вчера она была в \_\_\_\_\_ (кино) со своими подружками. Particular difficulty for Russian learners may arise in using collocations of borrowed uninflected nouns with inflected adjectives: Мы танцевали медленное танго (accusativus). Пары закружились в последнем танго (locativus). Examples of exercises: Маргарита заиграла на \_\_\_\_\_ (старенькое пианино). Управляющий уже три года работает в \_\_\_\_\_ (это казино).

In Russian, nouns are consistently distributed according to the category of animate/inanimate. The formal indicator of animate is the identical form in the accusative and in genitive plural, and in the case of masculine nouns, also in the singular. Inanimate manifests in identical forms of the nominative and accusative cases. In the Polish language, however, only personal-masculine nouns and non-personal-masculine nouns in singular are animated. Native speakers of Polish tend to transfer Polish declension paradigm of animate / inanimate nouns into Russian.

During the interview, respondents were asked to choose the appropriate form of plural accusative of animated nouns. Respondents, along with the correct forms, chose the forms of accusative case coinciding with the nominative case: разводят зубры,

задавит (\*котенки)/котята, пригласить ребенка/дети, видела женщины, накормил собаки, любит лошади, заметил спортсменки, стоящие..., which indicates the strong influence of the Polish declension paradigm. It is proposed to present the students with the rule, to use the language illustration, and to train feminine and neuter animated nouns in the exercises: Я заметила женщин, стоящих под зонтиком. Я просто обожаю домашних животных! Он ненавидел насекомых, поэтому он не очень любил лето. Then it is suggested to open the brackets, choosing the correct form of accusative case. Пацаны во дворе помогли мне поймать \_\_\_\_\_ (коты). Люблю свою профессию, люблю школу, люблю \_\_\_\_\_ (дети)! На гранитных ступеньках, ведущих к воде, время от времени мы замечали \_\_\_\_\_ (студентки), (готовящиеся) к сессии.

An interesting interference error appeared in subjunctive mood form used by one of our respondents: Они познакомили бы ся с другими людьми из России The subjunctive mood in Polish, as in Russian, is formed with help of the particle *by* (бы). The difference is that the Polish *by* particle is conjugated like a verb: *bym* (1 person sg.), *byś* (2 person sg.), *by* (3 person sg.), *byśmy* (1 person pl.), *byście* (2 person pl.), *by* (3 person pl.). «Частица *by* с личными окончаниями может отделяться от глагола и присоединяться к подчинительным союзам или писаться перед глаголом после первого слова в предложении». / "Particle *-by* with personal endings may be separated from the verb and join subordinate conjunctions or be written before the verb after the first word in the sentence" [10, 132-133]. We propose to train different positions of *бы* in Russian sentences, especially with reflexive verbs: Он с удовольствием познакомился бы с директором. -- Он хотел бы познакомиться с директором.

### 2.3. Syntactic language level

At the syntactic level, we identified some structures that differ in Russian and Polish. These are extended nominal predicate and negative sentences. Furthermore difference in verb patterns and coordination of nouns and numerals are an often cause for interference mistakes. In this paper we focus on the last two syntactic features.

In the nominative case, the numerals of two, three, four, and twenty-two, thirty-two, forty-two, and so on, require in Russian a noun in genitive singular: пятьдесят два стола, три кота, четыре варианта, and in the Polish language, a noun in nominative plural: pięćdziesiąt dwa stoły, trzy koty, cztery warianty.

The following examples were found in the texts of the interviews: я хотела учиться два языка, уезжаем еще в Москву на два дни. It is advisable not only to present

the students with Russian coordination rules of nouns and numerals, but to give a wide range of examples with names of objects, animals and persons that clearly demonstrate the difference between languages and help to remember it. Exercises should use the contexts with nominative and accusative cases of male and female animated and inanimate nouns, as they show the difference between Polish and Russian. For example, Он прибыл в Москву на \_\_\_\_\_ (2, день). -- Он прибыл в Москву на два дня. \_\_\_\_\_ (3, мужчина) стояли возле ресторана. -- Три мужчины стояли возле ресторана. Automation of the coordination of nouns and numerals skill takes much time, and our observations revealed that even advanced learners of Russian make such errors; therefore repeated training appears in this case feasible.

The verb patterns are one of significant difficulties for learning and teaching Russian as a foreign language as they have to be memorized together with each particular verb. When asked what caused the most difficulties in learning Russian, Mirela (one of the respondents) named the word stress and verb patterns: «Rekcja czasownika [управление глагола]. Например, болеть за кого, интересоваться чем. Мы не знаем всех конструкций, потому что у нас в университете не говорили нам так много об этом». / "Rekcja czasownika [verb rection]. For example, to cheer for whom, to be interested in what. We don't know all the structures because we didn't get so much of it at the university". In the most cases, verbs with the same meaning govern the same cases in both languages, but there is a number of verbs that have different verb patterns in Russian and in Polish. Due to the fact that the most verb patterns in Russian and Polish are similar, it is important to pay attention to the differences in order to avoid the influence of native language structures in Russian speech. In the interview materials the next example was found: до всего можно привыкнуть. For teaching purposes the students should be offered a list of Russian verbs, whose patterns differ from that in Polish. For example, zadzwonić (do kogo? czego?) do babci -- позвонить (кому? чему?) бабушке; zadzwonić (na kogo? co?) na policję -- позвонить (куда?) в полицию; chodzi (o kogo? co?) o używanie -- речь идет (о ком? о чем?) об использовании. To train this grammar skill, translation exercises of sentences using the particular verb patterns into the target language are advisable.

### 3. Conclusion

In this paper we applied the language-oriented approach which uses the comparative analysis of two language systems. In accordance with I. Pugachev's [11] ideas we propose to use the following algorithm when teaching Russian to the speakers of Polish: 1.



contrastive representation of the problem zone (*show and explain the fact causing difficulties, comparing the similar and different phenomena of the two languages*). 2. formulation of the rule or memorizing the set of language units showing the particular phenomenon. 3. training the different language features using the conventional teaching principle of consequent transition from language to speech exercises.

As part of the study, we analyzed theoretical literature on Russian and Polish language systems in order to predict the problem areas in the acquisition of the Russian language by native speakers of Polish through comparing the phonetic, morphological and syntactic levels of the Russian and Polish languages; in the practice-oriented part of the study we conducted interviews with native speakers of Polish in Russian; analyzed and described their errors, identified the influence of the native language system and developed exercises to prevent interference mistakes.

Thus, among the phonetic phenomena of the Russian language causing the greatest difficulties for native speakers of the Polish language the following were revealed: reduction, mobile Russian accent, pronunciation of sounds [л] and [л'], phonetic differences in the sounding of common Slavonic vocabulary, borrowings, toponyms and their derivatives. Among morphological phenomena there were revealed differences in the expression of the category of animate/inanimate; in the declension of words of Latin origin and borrowed nouns ending in -o. On the syntactic level, we have described differences in coordination of nouns and numerals and verb patterns. A set of exercises for training language features of interference zones is being proposed.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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