

Research Article**Russian language in the global educational context**

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Abstract

The question of the status of language in the period of serious globalization shocks is one of the most significant in the system of scientific knowledge. Attitude to language in terms of international contacts demonstrates a change in views on the economic, political, social spheres of a state's life. The role of the Russian language as a translator of the worldview of Russian citizens and the policy of the Russian state is undergoing significant transformations today. The most obvious changes occur in the educational sphere. This article examines the leading trends in the field of both language education policy in general and particular aspects of changes in the teaching of the Russian language abroad—teaching the Russian language as a foreign language, a heritage language, a second language, non-native language, as a lingua franca, as a diaspora language, as a language of Internet communication. The author specifies the contemporary status of the Russian language as a language of international communication. Recommendations are formulated to improve the quality of teaching Russian to foreigners.

Keywords

Russian as a foreign language, Russian as a heritage language, Russian as a second language, Russian as a non-native language, Russian as a lingua franca, Russian as a diaspora language, Russian as a language of the Internet communication

Introduction

Contemporary language education policy is being developed in a sophisticated environment and difficult conditions, which are connected with the challenges caused by the collapse of globalization, total uncertainty, complications in international relations, rethinking the factors of the formation and consolidation of national identity. In these conditions, the renewal and broad discussion of priorities in the field of teaching foreign languages is becoming one of the urgent tasks for researchers, educators, academicians, and practical teachers.

What are the causes of the transformations, which at the moment change noticeably the format of teaching foreign languages? There are a number of factors here, the sequential enumeration of which allows us to determine the scale of the changes and the timing of their introduction into the educational space.

The first factor is *the collapse of the globalization vector of civilization*. In the management aspect, the global regulators have already been exhausted, the models based on

“bipolarity”, “unipolarity” of the world, “global hierarchy” cease to work, new strategic schemes of polyarchical global governance and interaction have not yet been worked out, or have just entered the phase of primary approbation (Starostin, 2017). No less significant are the changes in the global vision of social, national, state and personal identity (Banks, 2017; Kiseleva, 2015). Socialization by the type of traditional society has become obsolete, it does not cope with the new challenges of socialization in modern society. We see the domination of the regulators of multi-unit and multi-level identity, which, rather, disorients social groups and individuals, does not create long-term prospects for personal and social development. Thus, images of a new value-oriented strategy are being outlined, which should be an alternative to the globalization model, and this alternative strategy will entail a sharp change in the prevailing priorities in various areas, including education in general, and foreign language education in particular.

The second factor which poses new challenges for foreign language education is connected with the *virtualization of space* – a symbol of the information society. An individual strives for virtual communication, for access to information resources. Computerization, and as a consequence, informatization, influencing human thought, culture, life, become new objects of study, application and use, they embrace all spheres and processes of communicative interactions, which makes it possible to reach an entirely different system – a system of socio-cultural augmented reality (Akçayır and Akçayır, 2017). The format of interaction between subjects, their integration into a cultural space is changing. What is required is to modernize the process of teaching how to apply the instruments of “digital” interaction and “virtual” integration, namely, a foreign language as one of such effective tools. This has a direct effect on the changes in linguistic education practices (Tareva, 2015).

The third factor which determines the inevitability of changes in the sphere of teaching foreign languages is determined by *the networking of the modern world and the relations regulating it*. The theory of the network society (Castells, 2003), has emerged and developed dynamically, integrating with various scientific environments, ideally to unite the processes of globalization, integration and unification, on the one hand, and the processes of fragmentation, disintegration and isolation on the other. In reality, network time leads to the weakening of national states, to the strengthening of the role of supranational governing bodies (superglobalization), to the strengthening of the role of media that are capable of positively and negatively affecting the individual in the network space and network interaction (Hassan, 2017). These trends indicate the ambiguity of modern processes of interpersonal integration, the complication of communication processes, the increased possibility of conflicts at interpersonal and intercultural levels. These consequences affect the educational situation in general, predetermining the changes at the level of teaching foreign languages and the teacher of foreign languages

“A good foreign language teacher is expected to possess knowledge in the target language and culture as well as knowledge in educational science (pedagogy, psychology), which enables him/her to organize the class well, to motivate, present, explain and clarify the material in a comprehensible way” (Drakulić, 2020).

The fourth factor is connected with the strengthening of *the policy of “soft power”*, which in the educational sphere implies the demonstration by the state of its cultural, didactic, and moral values, which are attractive from the point of view of representatives of other countries (Kiseleva, 2015; Sergunin and Karabeshkin, 2015). Here we speak about the “export” of education. As an example of such educational ideological expansion we can see the spread of the dominant foreign language (today, as generally recognized, the English language), which translates (sometimes implants) cultural values and itself, in fact, is the value (Tareva, 2016). In the process of competition, those languages that have

long been in demand in the educational space of various geographical areas lose their positions.

The emergence and strengthening of these factors leads to significant changes in the global language education policy. Conditions are created for academic mobility, which demonstrates the triumph of internationalization and integration in the educational environment, the establishment of global educational standards. There is a convergence of national educational systems, leading to transnational education, satisfying the needs of individuals in overcoming tourist, cultural, academic, scientific and other borders. In this sense, the European Union is a good example of the search for new formats of international cooperation that can make European universities more competitive in the twenty-first century. The European Universities Initiative promoted by the EU is a good example of a commitment to internationalisation that seeks to create “networks of universities across the EU which will enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities” (data of 2017: https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en).

Simultaneously with positive trends in modern educational policy, a whole range of risks is outlined, among which one of the most notable is the change in the disposition of foreign languages as objects of mastery. In general, foreign language education has entered a period of severe competition for leadership in the global system of teaching foreign languages (Pietikainen et al., 2016). And this struggle is fiercer with the more obvious the desire to use education as an effective instrument of influence, as a means of increasing the economic and political prestige of the state. An example of victories and defeats in this “battlefield” is the statistics of how many foreign students are studying outside their homeland. The EU countries account for 40% of the total number of foreign students, 28% study in the USA, 7% in Australia and China, 5% in Russia (data of 2015 – https://www.unipage.net/en/student_statistics).

Data and methods

In connection with what has been said, it becomes necessary to identify the status of the Russian language, which is in a state of the re-confirmation of its status in the language “palette”. New trends have actively influenced the change in its role and functions in the world community. The variety of the conditions for its functioning and the contexts of its existence must be identified, taking into account the prevailing geopolitical, social, economic and educational dominants.

The aim of this study is to examine the latest functions of the Russian language as a language of international communication, to clarify its current status and the role it plays in the context of interaction between different cultures.

The research questions are: What are the changes in the functioning of the Russian language as a language of international communication in the modern multicultural and multilingual world? What functions does the Russian language perform in the context of international interaction? What conclusions and regulations should be taken into account to improve the quality of teaching Russian to foreign students?

The Russian language is one of the languages whose status has been seriously transformed. In recent years, it has occupied a comparatively more modest place in the contemporary global language space than during the Soviet period, when the Russian language united numerous ethnic groups, serving as the main means of interethnic communication and familiarizing many nations with the latest achievements of science, culture, and technology. The status of the Russian language has changed due to the geopolitical upheavals of the last thirty years. It continues to change in the present day, responding to contemporary needs.

Indicative changes in the status of the Russian language can be traced in the statistical calculations of *the Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance* (DEPP) of the Ministry of Education and Science of France (Repères et références statistiques, 2017). According to the data from September 2016, the English language is the leader in the category “*the first foreign language*”: 95.4% of all students study it, 96.1% of whom attend private educational institutions and 95.3% study in state schools. The German language has been chosen by 3.4% of schoolchildren; other languages are studied by one student out of 100. The situation is different in the category “*the second foreign language*”, the compulsory study of which was introduced in 2016. Among the second foreign languages, Spanish is the leader (72.2% of students). The second place is given to the German language, the position of which is getting stronger (15.9% in 2016 against 14.6% in 2015). In this category, Russian is practically not represented, it can be referred to the group “other languages” (ibid.), which only accounts for 1.4% of the total number of students learning foreign languages. The category “*the third foreign language*” refers only to 6.8% of schoolchildren; among them the most popular are Italian and Spanish. Then in descending order are Chinese (16.3%), Russian (5.7%), Portuguese (3.8%), German (2%). In general, in high school education the Russian language occupies an unstable eighth place with a modest 0.2% of students. The highest percentage of students studying the Russian language is in Corsica (14.3%), in other regions the percentage is incomparably lower: in the French overseas department of Reunion it is 4.9%, in the central region of Ile-de-France it is 4.4%, and in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region it is 2.3%.

In an interview given in 2010 to the electronic educational magazine VOUS-NOUSILS, the President of the French Association of Russophones Philippe Comte noted that in the previous twenty years the study of the Russian language in France has decreased by 50%. Nevertheless, in P. Comte’s opinion, France is one of the few Western European countries where the Russian language is still taught in high school and where the high quality of the Russian language teachers is preserved (*un des rares pays d’Europe occidentale à avoir gardé le russe dans le secondaire et il y a une très grande qualité du corps professoral*) (Enseignement du russe, 2010).

It is noteworthy that the interest in the Russian language is preserved in universities: from universities in France, 22 offer a program of training specialists in the Russian language and literature. In 2010, there were only 260 Russian teachers in France with the degree of agrégation or who passed the CAPES certification tests, which gives them the right to teach in a secondary school (ibid.). At the moment, there is a tendency to reduce vacancies for teachers of the Russian language. In 2017, only 4 vacant seats were offered for the CAPES certification test in the Russian language (Concours de recrutement, 2018).

The analysis of the changes that are taking place in the field of teaching Russian as a foreign language in European countries shows that today there have been significant changes in this area. In addition to objective political and economic reasons (in this article the author does not analyze these reasons), new trends emerged that can be considered as encouraging. These trends indicate that the Russian language abroad “reformats” the educational space of its existence in accordance with the new needs of potential customers. The vector of changes in this area can be briefly described as follows: from the predominance of *abstract humanitarian motives* for studying Russian as a language of high literature and culture, to the triumph of the utilitarian and professional interests of students; the latter relate the knowledge of the Russian language not so much to spiritual enrichment and the possibility of emotional development, but to existential well-being, since this language can act as an effective tool in business, production, technology, tourism and science. Hence the interest in commodification – the transformation of language into a commodity (Medway and Warnaby, 2014). This is an explanation for the paradox

formulated by Yu. E. Prokhorov: The Russian language in terms of its number of students has “declined”. But according to the number of those using it in communication it “has grown up” and continues to “grow” (Prokhorov, 2009). Nowadays, when in many countries there are significant diasporas of Russian language native speakers, its role as a language of co-existence in another culture is becoming more and more real and significant. One of the most striking examples is the recent discussion of the inclusion of the Russian language as a working language in the activities of the European community, in which Russia is not a member country. The presence of significant diasporas in many countries requires the availability of certain structures that can interact with native speakers of this language. Naturally, these structures use the language of the host country, but taking into account the national and cultural specifics of the diaspora requires proficiency and knowledge of this language and this culture. Co-existence in the global economic space requires the presence of specialists in the field of business communication with good knowledge of the Russian language. And the pragmatic needs of employers stimulate the teaching of Russian as a foreign language (Prokhorov, 2017).

In connection with the existing objective circumstances, it is quite obvious that the Russian language as an object of study by foreigners has changed the educational environment of its application: it was significantly reduced at the school level (we mentioned that above), but proportionally strengthened its positions in higher educational institutions, especially on non-linguistic, non-philological courses. According to a number of statistical studies, nowadays in European countries there is a specific wave of interest in the study of the Russian language, more and more students choose it as a second foreign language. 28,5 thousand students study Russian in the universities of Western Europe. In this status, the Russian language is more confident in positioning itself in the group of “market languages”, “marketing languages”. Employees of European firms engaged in trade must master these languages in order to understand the psychological strategy of the business partner and to achieve success in interaction. Judging by the latest data, Western firms (especially German firms), when dealing with Russian companies, more often use Russian than English, and attribute this to one of the ways for successful negotiations with Russian partners (Bilyalova and Nikiforova, 2017).

Study and Results

Changes in the status of the Russian language in the educational space of Europe and the whole world makes us think about the variety of options for teaching it: *Russian as a foreign language* is a term that weakly reflects the contemporary reality, it requires its specification, adaptation to the conditions of today’s educational language policy. The feasibility analysis of implementing strategies for teaching the Russian language in the higher educational system and beyond has shown that at the moment the following variants of the Russian language as an object of teaching / acquisition can be identified and described:

Russian as a foreign language

This option involves the implementation of a traditional strategy for teaching the Russian language, according to which:

- a) language training is usually conducted in Russia, the country of the language being studied; the training may be effective in this case due to the natural language environment (real and / or virtual) which surrounds the individual (Bourina and Dunaeva, 2018);
- b) the leading motive is the practical goal of learning, which involves not teaching language as a system, but teaching with the help of language how to solve practical problems; in this sense, when teaching Russian as a foreign language, we feel a withdrawal (abandonment) from the perception of ideals in favour of goals-achievements;
- c) learning is reduced to acquiring new ways of expressing thoughts;

d) language training is conducted on the basis of the principle of consciousness, activation of the corresponding cognitive processes of students, stimulating the strength and longevity of the development of speech habits and skills;

e) in education, the principle of minimizing the content of learning plays a dominant role, while maintaining the sufficiency requirements for communication.

Russian as a non-native language

In this case, the Russian language acts as a means of interethnic communication between the peoples of Russia, as well as migrants. This option is distinguished by the following features:

a) the study of the Russian language as a non-native begins in the secondary school in conditions of educational bilingualism;

b) native and Russian languages are studied in parallel (as a rule) in conditions of their coexistence in the surrounding language environment of the learner;

c) there are conditions for such language environment (see above);

d) there is a positive influence of the native language on the acquisition of the Russian language, and the negative influence of the first on the second (interference);

e) the teaching of the Russian language is conducted in a multicultural educational environment, with multicultural specificity.

Russian as a second language

In this situation the following variant of teaching the Russian language is applied:

a) it is studied after the native language;

b) it can be learned after the first foreign language; in this case, Russian becomes the second foreign language (the prevalence and popularity of this variant of teaching we described above);

c) it relies on the experience of acquiring the native and/or the first foreign language;

d) it can be taught both in the natural language environment (in Russia) and abroad.

Russian language in the situation of bilingualism

This is studying two languages at the same time (Poarch and Bialystok, 2015). This situation is characterized by the following features:

a) a bilingual is able to alternately use both languages depending on communicative intent and on the conditions of the situation;

b) conditions are created for the dominance of one of the languages - one that ensures the greatest social success;

c) bilingualism positively affects the development of mental mechanisms and cognitive processes of a child due to the actualization of compensatory ability, the ability to switch from one language to another, the availability of general educational skills (Edele et al., 2018);

d) in the process of targeted learning, a transition from unconscious to realized bilingualism can be realized;

e) both languages are fully-fledged instruments of a dialogue of cultures, when both cultures are equal for a person who speaks two languages and embodies both cultures.

The Russian language as a heritage language ("home language", "family language")

This variant is associated with the use of the Russian language in the families of the second generation of emigrants (Eriksson, 2015). According to statistics in the US alone, there are about 800,000 Russian immigrants. In this case, we cannot speak about the bilingual basis of acquiring the Russian language (in this case, a balance of languages would be assumed) and about acquiring the Russian language as a native language when this lan-

guage is the only one. We are talking about “unstable bilinguals” (Dubinina and Polinsky, 2013; Isurin and Ivanova-Sullivan, 2008; Polinsky and Scontras, 2020); that is, people who inherited the Russian language – those who, in the presence of initially a (in childhood) bilingual environment, later, under the influence of factors of domination of another language and culture, lose the features of bilinguals (Bermel and Kagan, 2000; Makarova et al., 2017).

It is noteworthy that the language is not forgotten at all. It is noted that more and more students of universities that have grown up in Russian families express a desire to learn Russian and improve their skills (*ibid.*). A direct consequence of the interest of immigrants in their family language is that an increasing number of such emigrants are enrolled in Russian language courses at universities, and as a result, an increasing number of universities create courses “Russian for Russians”. A textbook for such students has already been issued (Kagan et al., 2002), and their presence in the classroom forces the teachers to radically change the traditional methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language. This is because these false bilinguals need to be taught according to their needs, and since they have deficiencies in the use of the language whose correction requires a detailed analysis.

The situation when Russian is a heritage language has a number of features:

- a) the level of language proficiency of a bilingual heritage speaker is very low – mainly the language covers the areas of routine, everyday communicative functions;
- b) those who speak the Russian family language experience difficulties both in generating speech and in understanding; This difficulty is even greater when it comes to the written language (Bermel and Kagan, 2000);
- c) the availability of the initial base (perhaps even unconscious) ensures overcoming certain difficulties, and removes the abundance of obstacles that are common for those who did not speak Russian (Nagy, 2018);
- d) the availability of the background simultaneously imposes additional obligations on the students because bilingual heritage speakers are expected (and they themselves expect) to achieve better results, they are supposed to understand more and to be able to say more; the probability of the effect of unfulfilled expectations and hopes is likely to be high, which can reduce motivation;
- e) there is a need to search for ways of revival and development of the extinct linguistic ability of the emigrant.

The Russian language as the language of the diaspora

This variant of studying the Russian language and/or its improvement has obvious distinctive features. In particular, they include the following:

- a) the Russian language in such a way of life is not a “sterile” tourist language, it becomes an instrument for the existence and development of culture; hence the attention to the cultural and/or socio-cultural aspect of teaching the Russian language;
- b) the learner has special conditions for self-identification in a small community (for example through the Russian-language Cyberspace, for example (Yin, 2013));
- c) in a diaspora, if there are similarities in the picture of the world, there may be (and very often are) significant differences in cultural attitudes, which should be taken into account when organizing teaching.

The Russian language as a lingua franca

The Russian language plays the role of a lingua franca in the post-Soviet space. In addition, according to some data, in this status, Russian is used (along with English) in 20 countries (for example, in Finland, Turkey, Montenegro, Cyprus), being the most popular among Russians in the tourist sense. Such a functional orientation of teaching the Russian language requires a special educational context aimed at:

- a) a significant change in traditional methods, textbooks, teaching materials in

terms of abandoning the rigid normalization of the linguistic phenomena used, maximizing the principle of approximation (approximation to the norm) in pronunciation, tolerance of mistakes that do not complicate understanding, etc. (Ivanova-Sullivan, 2014);

b) creation of on-line courses, platforms, electronic manuals, mobile applications for teaching the Russian language as a lingua franca;

c) teaching practical skills in combination with understanding of the enchanting, captivating and multifaceted world of the Russian language, modern Russian culture and Russian humour (Pavlenko, 2016).

The Russian language as the language of the Internet

As of May 1, 2015, Russian-language content ranked second after the English language (w3techs.com). At the first stage of development of the Web network (Web 1.0), the use of Russian in Internet communication makes it possible to recognize that the materials placed on official Internet resources are targeted, in particular, for Russian-speaking readers. The second stage of the development of the Web environment indicates that Russian-speaking users are regarded as active communication partners (feedback forms, forums, blogs, Web 2.0). Finally, the introduction of rating services in Russian indicates a further increase in the communicative status of Russian-speaking participants in content ranking (polls, voting, Web 3.0) (Butorina, 2016). Nowadays we witness close cooperation between Russia and China in the sphere of the protection of sovereignty in opposition to perceived technological and governance hegemony of the United States (Budnitsky and Jia, 2018). Russian as the language of the Internet is used in all post-Soviet countries; basically these are sites related to business, finance and mass communication.

In this version, the method of teaching the Russian language as an object of study and acquisition is in need of:

a) interdisciplinary description of the features of the Russian-language Internet discourse, including difficulties in gaining competence in these features;

b) determining the degree of normality of the Russian language as the language of Internet communication, analyzing Internet jargon;

c) identification of specific parameters of speech skills that ensure the effectiveness of Internet communication in Russian;

d) didactic structuring of the virtual Russian-speaking environment.

Conclusion

The variants presented above prove the diversity of the utilitarian and functional status of the Russian language as an object of study and language acquisition by foreign students. These variants exist due to changes at the level of language education policy and, in general, the major globalization transformations that humanity has encountered. Given such diversity, new challenges arise for linguodidactics, and these challenges are difficult to handle. Teaching the Russian language to foreigners cannot be realized by obsolete "patterns", using traditional components of the classical system of teaching Russian as a foreign language. Each of the described options requires special attention and a new kind of didactical strategy. Apparently, it is time to talk about the official diversification of the types of the Russian language for teaching foreign citizens and, accordingly, about the development of a special technology for each case.

From these positions, there are many issues that need to be resolved in the short term. For example: *What are the linguistic and didactical parameters of each of the variants of the Russian language? How to optimize the content of teaching in view of the utilitarian and professional needs of students? What should a Russian textbook for special purposes be like? How to test the communicative competence of students in the presence of a wide variety of their interests and motives? What is the format of the Russian language for academic purposes, is there a need for it*

and how to respond to it? What is the potential of new educational technologies in relation to each of the variants of the Russian language as an object of study? There are no simple answers to these questions. We believe that it is necessary to organize discussion at the level of a highly professional academic community with the aim of improving the quality of teaching Russian for foreigners, expanding its popularity in different regions and social contexts, and at the same time increasing the attractiveness of the Russian Word and Russian Culture.

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