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Using traditional and innovative methods in teaching Russian grammar to Spanish-speaking students

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to consider the development of methods of teaching foreign languages (in particular, Russian as a foreign language) in scientific and educational literature, and to analyze common textbooks and manuals for teaching Russian grammar to Spanish-speaking students. The following research methods are used: theoretical analysis, synthesis, comparison, analysis of scientific and methodological literature for teaching Russian language to Spanish-speaking students. Since the middle of the XX century both general and specific methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language have been published in Russia, gradually replacing one another. Textbooks based on comparative analysis between Russian and foreign languages began to appear, including those aimed at Spanish-speaking students. The article describes the progressive development of such techniques, in particular, the consciously-comparative and the consciously-practical methods. It is stated that innovative teaching methods focused on students' cognitive activity are very popular in recent years. Some methods of teaching foreign languages, both traditional and innovative ones, imply the possibility of taking into account the students' native language. The article also analyzes particular features of teaching Russian grammar to foreigners. The author mentions the most difficult Russian grammatical categories to study and the reasons for grammatical mistakes made by students. The article analyzes Russian and foreign reference books and textbooks for Spanish-speaking students and for teachers working with this category of students. In conclusion it is noted that most of the textbooks for Spanish-speaking students do not differentiate between Spanish and Latin American students and rely almost entirely on traditional teaching methods.

Keywords: traditional teaching methods; innovative teaching methods; teaching languages; Russian as foreign language; Spanish-speaking students; students' native language; nationally oriented teaching.

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**Использование традиционных и инновационных методов
в обучении русской грамматике испаноязычной аудитории**

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Аннотация. Обучение русскому языку как иностранному в вузе различных категорий студентов – представителями разных стран и континентов продолжает оставаться актуальной областью для исследования. Целью статьи является рассмотрение развития методики преподавания иностранных языков, в частности русского как иностранного, в научной и учебной литературе, а также анализ распространенных учебников и пособий по обучению испаноязычных студентов русской грамматике. Использовались следующие методы исследования: теоретический анализ, синтез, сравнение, анализ научно-методической литературы по обучению испаноязычных студентов русскому языку. В результате установлено, что с середины XX в. в нашей стране были изданы как общие, так и частные методики обучения русскому языку как иностранному, при этом на смену одним методам приходили другие. Появлялись пособия, основанные на сопоставлении русского и иностранного языков, включая учебники, ориентированные на испаноязычных студентов. В статье описывается последовательное появление таких методик, в частности, сознательно-сопоставительного и сознательно-практического метода. Констатируется, что в последние годы весьма востребованными считаются инновационные методы обучения, ориентированные на познавательную деятельность студентов. Некоторые методы обучения иностранному языку, как традиционные, так и инновационные, предполагают возможность учета родного языка учащихся. В статье анализируются особенности преподавания иностранцам русской грамматики; упоминаются проблемные для изучения грамматические категории русского языка и причины грамматических ошибок, совершаемых студентами; анализируются отечественные и зарубежные издания, предназначенные для испаноязычных студентов, а также для преподавателей, работающих в испаноязычной аудитории. В итоге подводится вывод, что большинство пособий для испаноязычных студентов не дифференцирует учащихся из Испании и Латинской Америки и опирается практически всецело на традиционные методы обучения.

Ключевые слова: традиционные методы обучения; инновационные методы обучения, обучение языку; русский как иностранный; испаноязычные студенты; учет родного языка; национально-ориентированное обучение.

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Introduction. Methodology, as defined by A.N. Shchukin, is “an academic discipline that provides theoretical and practical training for future language teachers” (Shchukin, 2003: 6). Methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language is closely related to other sciences. “Methodology as a practical discipline should be based on theoretical sciences. Such sciences for methodology of language teaching are general linguistics and psychology. In order to develop methods of teaching the Russian language to adult foreigners it is very important to take into account achievements of theoretical linguistics, comparative and typological research of languages and descriptive grammar, lexicology and semasiology of the Russian language” (Barkhudarov, 1967: 4).

The term “method” (Ancient Greek: μέθοδος, *methodos* is the way of research or cognition) in modern science is used in three meanings: *general methodological* (method as a means of cognition, a way of studying reality), *general didactic* (a system of interrelated actions of teacher and students that ensures the acquisition of the educational content) and *special didactic* or actually methodical (method as a direction in teaching that determines the strategy of students’ educational activity) (Shchukin, 2003: 177). Several dozens of methods are known in the history of teaching Russian as a foreign language, but it is almost impossible to single out a method as a universal one.

The aim of this article is to consider the gradual development of methods of teaching foreign languages (in particular, Russian as a foreign language) in scientific and educational literature, and to analyze commonly used textbooks and manuals on teaching Russian grammar to Spanish-speaking students. In order to achieve our aim, we used the following **research methods** in the article: theoretical analysis, synthesis, comparison, analysis of scientific and methodological literature for teaching Russian language to Spanish-speaking students.

Research Results and Discussion. All methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language are based on specific features that are typical for learning a non-native language. Adults who study a foreign language common-

ly use the “top-down” way, i.e. conscious way to master the language, when “students are provided with information as rules and instructions necessary for practical language proficiency, and special exercises are given to secure the acquisition of knowledge, speech skills and abilities formed on their basis” (Shchukin, 2003: 7). In this way, one of the key principles of teaching is observed: the principle of consciousness. A.N. Shchukin points out some peculiar features of the discipline “foreign language”, in particular, “Russian as a foreign language”: the goal of teaching a foreign language is the formation of skills and abilities in speech activity; a foreign language occupies an intermediate position between theoretical and practical disciplines, however, the practical orientation of teaching remains; what counts most is not learning the language means, but their use in professional activity; language “unlimitedness” obliges to limit the amount of material, to create language minima (Shchukin, 2003: 8-9).

Since the middle of the XX century a range of language teaching methods has been described in Russian scientific literature. These methods include both general methods of teaching the Russian language (they do not take into account the specific conditions of teaching), and private ones (they are based on specific conditions of teaching and on the students’ native language). “We can point four stages in the history of teaching Russian as a foreign language at the preparatory faculty: the first (the 50s of the XX century), the second (the 60-70s), the third (the 80s), the fourth (from the beginning of the 90s up to the present moment)” (Kapitonova, Moskovkin, 2006: 23). In the 40-50s, the translation-grammatical method, which was dominant at that time, was modified in works by such scientists as V.D. Arakin, I.V. Rakhmanov, I.D. Salistra, Z.M. Tsvetkova, V.S. Tsetlin et al., and was named “the consciously-comparative method”. One of its principles was the principle of taking into account the students’ native language (Kapitonova, Moskovkin, 2006: 24-25). However, the teaching aids of that time based on this principle contributed to learning the grammatical material, but not to practical language skills. The

further practical orientation of teaching led to a renewal of the consciously-comparative method, “which was based on the principles of linguistic consistency, consciousness, reliance on the native language and practical (speech) orientation, but the latter principle was not just declared, it was embodied in the system of tasks aimed at teaching the language activities (listening, speaking, reading and writing)” (Kapitonova, Moskovkin, 2006: 28). A number of textbooks based on comparison of Russian and foreign languages began to appear. They included those for Spanish-speaking students (Barmello Lastra, 1986; Vinogradov, Miloslavsky, 1986; Lepeskaya, 1985, etc.).

In the 60s and 70s, the consciously-practical method somewhat supplanted the consciously-comparative one, but the students’ native language was not completely excluded. According to T.I. Kapitonova and L.V. Moskovkin, “if it was possible and expedient to use translation in semantization of words when explaining phonetic or grammatical material, teachers always used it” (Kapitonova, Moskovkin, 2006: 31). Later, audiovisual and audiolingual methods, as well as the method of programmed teaching, became widespread, but they did not replace the conscious principles in practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language.

Since the 70s, the communicative method has been gaining popularity. It is still considered one of the leading principles of teaching Russian as a foreign language. O.D. Mitrofanova and V.G. Kostomarov emphasized the importance of stimulating the communicative competence based on the following data: “In modern society people listen 45%, speak 30%, read 16% and write 9% of their time” (Mitrofanova, Kostomarov, 1990: 200). The authors note that “communication as a fundamental category of the methodology science tends to including students into the direct act of communication with each other (or the teacher) for solving life problems” (Mitrofanova, Kostomarov, 1990: 80). One of the principles on which this method is based is the principle of reliance on the native language. However, neither the communicative method, nor the

suggestopedic method that gained popularity in Russia in the 80s, did not provide building of strong speech skills, especially grammatical ones. Therefore, the consciously-comparative method that focused on the students’ native language, continued to develop along with them.

In recent years, the innovative methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language are commonly used. These methods shift the teacher’s attention to the student himself. “The focus of the methodologists’ attention is shifting from the field of educating (teaching) towards knowledge (learning). Much attention is paid to the educational technologies focused on the student’s cognitive activity. An attribute of innovative technologies is organization of pedagogical work in the system of subject-object relations” (Chernogorskaya, 2018: 324).

This group of methods is constantly being developed and updated with the latest investigations. Some of them are: the IT method that involves the use of multimedia at classes; the project method that allows students to do creative work; the method of silent teaching, which implies manifestation of students’ initiative during the lesson; training based on physical actions, etc. Some innovative methods involve the collaborative work of a group of students: the method of problem learning (it allows searching for common solutions), the moderation method (the teacher acts as a moderator, while the students independently implement a number of tasks), various games.

It should be noted that although not all methods of teaching a foreign language (both traditional and innovative) assume the possibility of taking into account the students’ native language, only a few of them definitely deny it (for example, the direct and audiovisual methods).

Currently, various methods, often mixed ones, are used in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Thus, at the preparatory department of V.G. Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University we use a complex of methods for teaching Russian language to foreign students. These methods are aimed at the improvement of all types of speech activity and in one way or

other touch upon all aspects of the language. Below we will analyze special aspects of teaching Russian grammar to foreigners.

Obviously, when we teach Russian as a foreign language, we should pay close attention to grammar, because not understanding its structure it is impossible to formulate or understand the Russian speech. At the same time, learning grammar should not be reduced to memorizing grammar rules. "In connection with the purely practical goals of teaching the Russian language to foreigners, a specific requirement is put forward in the methodology: to build a teaching system based on practical grammar".

The practical teaching system is characterized by "the absence of "pure" grammar lessons with explanation of the theoretical material" (Barkhudarov, 1967: 49). Z.N. Ievleva emphasizes that practical grammar "is aimed only at the use of language in speech, that is, communication-oriented" (Ievleva, 1981: 69). The author identifies the following characteristics of the methodological grammar system:

1. Specific orientation, focus on achieving the educational goal;
2. Defining the material and its step-by-step presentation considering the methodological requirements and difficulties;
3. Working with grammatical material simultaneously with the learning process (Ievleva, 1981: 71).

At each level of studying grammar, students face the task of learning the grammatical minimum necessary for the present level. However, already at the elementary level foreigners have a lot of difficult aspects to learn. The most problematic grammar aspects to understand are various inflectional forms of the prepositional-nominal system and basics of the verbal aspect and tense system of the Russian language. The category of Russian verbal aspect is the major problem, because it has no direct analogs in many languages, in particular, in Spanish. At the same time, "the grammar of verbs can be considered a fundamental component of the language competence of a foreign student learning Russian in order to acquire a future profession" (Volkova, Kiseleva, 2011: 214).

The grammatical mistakes made by students in the process of learning the Russian language are first of all connected with the absence of identical grammatical phenomena in the students' native language and the interference of the native language norms into the target language. The concept "interference" has become widely used in linguistics due to the work by W. Weinreich titled (Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems, 1953).

The grammatical interference, which occurs in the process of studying grammar, is "the effect of the grammatical structure of the native language on the structure of the foreign language being studied" (Barakhta, 2015: 84). The difficulties faced by foreign students who study Russian bring about the necessity to work out special teaching manuals taking into consideration the students' native language.

Hereafter, some textbooks for Spanish-speaking students from the standpoint of Russian grammar presentation are reviewed.

In the second half of the XX century several textbooks for Spanish-speaking students were published in our country.

The Textbook of the Russian Language for Persons Speaking Spanish by G.I. Kopylova and T.A. Ramsina was published in 1966, a revised and enlarged edition followed it in 1974. The textbook was intended for students who speak Spanish and who start studying the Russian language for the first time at the USSR universities. It was based on traditional methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language and provided students with elementary knowledge of Russian grammar.

Hable Ruso (Speak Russian) by S.A. Khavronina was first published in 1966. It focuses on lexical material. However, the parallel translations of the sentences after the texts and comments in Spanish provide an opportunity for students who speak Russian at a basic level to understand better both lexical, and grammatical material.

Conjugación del verbo ruso (Manual para los extranjeros) – Russian Verb Conjugation (A Handbook for Foreigners) by L.I. Pirogova and S.I. Makarova was published in 1968. According to the authors, this publication was es-

sential due to the lack of such manuals, with the exception of the *Russian Verb Manual* by S.S. Maksimenko (1963). The purpose of this reference book is to provide examples that serve as a model for using all forms of commonly used Russian verbs. The manual contains 100 tables with verbs in different forms and a list of verbs in alphabetical order, about 10,000 in total (Maksimenko, 1963: 5). Of course, this manual can still be used by students as additional material, provided that they have knowledge of the Russian grammar at least at a basic level.

The manual *El Ruso. Gramática práctica* (The Russian Language. Practical Grammar) by I.M. Pulkina and E.B. Zahavoy-Nekrasova was published in 1985, and it had several editions afterwards. The manual is for students who already speak Russian at some level. The authors focus on explaining difficult grammar topics, in particular, the verbal aspect and tense system of the Russian language, using the consciously-comparative method. The manual is supplied with a large number of exercises for practicing grammatical material. In our opinion, its latest edition may be useful for Spanish-speaking students at present time.

The book by V.S. Vinogradov and I.G. Miloslavsky titled *Comparative Morphology of the Russian and Spanish Languages*, 1986, is based on the comparative method. With the help of this method, “the authors try to discover the correlation degree of the linguistic systems under study, and to identify the similarities and differences of grammatical categories and functions within these systems” (Vinogradov, Miloslavsky, 1986: 3). This work cannot be used by students of preparatory faculties, because it is addressed to teachers and philology students from Hispanic countries who speak Russian at the advanced level. However, it can be extremely useful for teachers working with Spanish-speaking students and striving to understand the congruences and the differences in Russian and Spanish grammatical phenomena. With this purpose, one can also use *A Course of Lectures on the Comparative Typology of the Russian and Spanish Languages* by Lastra Gladis Bermello, published in 1986 under the

editorship of V.S. Vinogradov, as well as the guidance manual by G.F. Lepeskaya *The Comparative Typology of the Spanish and Russian Languages*, 1985, intended for the 5th year students of the Spanish Language Faculty. *The Methodological Recommendations for Studying Russian Grammar in Comparison with the Spanish Language Grammar at Elementary Level*, 1990, by M.B. Budiltseva and N.I. Kiseleva was also written to help teachers, and it is intended for teachers working with students from Latin America. All these manuals are based on comparison of grammar of the two languages and have not yet lost their relevance.

A widely used textbook at preparatory faculties of Russian universities is *Russian Language in Exercises* by S.A. Khavronina and A.I. Shirochenskaya. It was adapted to the Spanish-speaking students and came out in 1981 under the title *El Ruso en ejercicios*; several later editions have also come out. It should be noted that this book does not differ significantly from the textbook in Russian, but the abstract and the tasks are translated into Spanish, which makes it easier for students, but does not take into account their native language as to choose and organization of exercises. In this regard, it is similar to the textbook for Spanish-speaking students *Los verbos de movimiento en Ruso* (The Verbs of Movement in Russian) by L.S. Muravyova, published back in 1976, but aimed at mastering another specific grammatical aspect.

Russian Grammar for Spanish Speakers (elementary level), 2014, by V.I. Kapitonova and L.V. Moskovkina is a modern textbook addressed to beginner students who learn Russian, and to teachers of the Russian language from Spain and Latin America. The grammatical material is limited to the elementary level minimum. The texts are presented in Spanish and Russian versions.

The Russian language textbooks for Spanish-speaking students published abroad in recent years are mainly based on the communicative method and take into account the principles of visibility and communication. Most of them are complete educational complexes intended for students of different levels.

Textbooks by María Sánchez Puig are of great interest. Thus, *Lecciones de Ruso*, 1997, makes up 49 lessons, including such sections as “Grammar” and “Grammar exercises”, as well as an extensive table of Russian perfective and imperfective verbs in various forms with translation into Spanish. The grammar of verb is presented briefly, but with Spanish equivalents, and is supplemented with texts and exercises. *Sinopsis de la lengua rusa*, 2000, is addressed to advanced learners. It contains tables and diagrams on various topics of the Russian language; the morphology section is the most extensive. All materials in the manual are provided with a detailed commentary in Spanish.

The textbook *Curso Completo de Lengua Rusa. Niveles Básico, Intermedio y Avanzado*, 2005, contains a complete course of the Russian language. It is also written by Maria Sánchez Puig and co-authored by T. Drozdov Dias, P. Perez Molero, et al. The explanations of grammar are precise and concise. The course is based on the principles of communication and concentric distribution of material.

Another complete course is presented in the manual *Ruso para hispanohablantes*, published in two parts in 2003 and 2004. The manual is written by M. Gorbatkina, C. Mercader, V. Nogueira, M. Oganissian. The textbook is intended for elementary and basic level students, each part contains A1 and A2 levels material respectively. The course is based entirely on the communicative method and aims not only at developing speaking and writing skills, but also at increasing interest in the Russian language. The grammar is not explained in detail: students are expected to learn the basics while studying the texts, the dialogues, and other materials. The course was later supplemented by the textbook by V. Nogueira, A. Merechénkova and M. Gorbatkina *Gramática práctica de la lengua rusa*, 2011, where the emphasis is placed on grammar of the Russian language, in particular, the Russian verbal forms. Just like the manual, it is intended for A1 and A2 level students. A logical sequence of the course *Ruso para hispanohablantes* is the textbook by O. Leontyeva and M. Ogan-

esyan *Ruso para hispanohablantes 3*, intended for B1 level students.

We should note that popular foreign editions have been published over the past two to three decades, because they started teaching Russian in Spanish-speaking countries only in the second half of the 20th century. Besides, most of the manuals were published in Spain, because they began to teach Russian in this country in the late 50s – the early 60s, and now “it is taught at the faculties of translation at universities of Granada, Valencia, Alicante, Las Palmas, Salamanca, Santiago de Compostela, Vigo, Coruña, Leon, Seville, Malaga, at the University of Cadiz, etc., as well as in many public language schools, the Alexander Pushkin Foundation (Madrid), etc” (Tirado, 2017: 5). The growth in demand for learning Russian in Spain has been gradual.

The relations between the Russian Federation and the states of Latin America has developed in different ways. In the 60s, due to the favorable political situation, Russian was the most widespread foreign language in Cuba, but with the collapse of the USSR it turned out to be less in demand. However, in recent years, Russian has become required in a number of other Latin American countries (Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, Peru).

The main reasons for the growing interest in the Russian language are: 1. the demand for education at Russian universities; 2. the social and cultural reason, namely, interest in the Russian culture, literature, theater, philosophy; 3. a large number of immigrants from the USSR and Russia (primarily in Argentina and Mexico) who want to study Russian as their native or second native language (Guzhelya, 2018: 8). Despite the demand for the Russian language in Latin American countries, its teaching in these countries is not at a high level. “The main problems of teaching Russian in Latin American countries are the lack and low level of professional qualification of the teaching staff, as well as the poor supply with the teaching aids” (Guzhelya, 2018: 11). Probably, these problems are also due to the lack of modern manuals, textbooks, training courses of the Russian lan-

guage, published in Latin America and adapted for the local dialect of the Spanish language.

Conclusions. It should be noted that most manuals for Spanish-speaking students do not differentiate between Spanish and Latin American students. Almost all textbooks are based on the classical Castilian Spanish.

We can also conclude that almost all classical Russian textbooks for Spanish-speaking students are founded on traditional teaching methods, while popular foreign courses often involve comprehensive students' activities and include various technical training aids in the educational materials. However, the use of innovative technologies in teaching Spanish-speaking students the Russian language is practically not described in the textbooks issued, but such technologies can be found in a few Internet resources.

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