

**METHODOLOGY OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A
FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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Abstract. *This article examines the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language (RFL) and outlines the principles, approaches and techniques that make instruction effective for learners whose first language is not Slavic. The study reviews the theoretical background of the field, compares the leading methodological approaches, and describes practical ways of developing pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and communicative skills. Particular attention is given to typical learner difficulties and to the role of digital tools and assessment. The paper concludes that a balanced, communicatively oriented and learner-centred model gives the best results in RFL classrooms.*

Keywords: *Russian as a foreign language, teaching methodology, communicative approach, learner autonomy, language assessment, CEFR.*

1. Introduction

Russian remains one of the most widely used languages of Eurasia and an important medium of science, trade and cultural exchange. Interest in studying it as a foreign language has therefore remained stable, and universities, colleges and language centres in many countries continue to open new courses. At the same time, Russian is regarded as a demanding language for foreign learners because of its rich inflection, mobile stress and complex system of verbal aspect. These features require a carefully planned methodology that does not simply transfer techniques used for English or other widely taught languages.

The methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language is a branch of applied linguistics and pedagogy. It studies the goals, content, methods and tools of instruction, as well as the ways in which learners acquire a new linguistic and cultural system. The aim of this article is to summarise the main methodological ideas that shape modern RFL teaching and to suggest how they can be combined in classroom practice.

Contemporary language pedagogy rests on several complementary theories. Cognitive approaches describe learning as the gradual construction of mental representations through noticing, practice and feedback (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Sociocultural views stress that language develops through interaction, so that a learner progresses when supported by a more experienced speaker or by a well-designed task. Psychological research adds that motivation, attitudes and self-confidence strongly influence how long and how effectively people study (Dörnyei, 2005).

For RFL, these ideas have three practical consequences. First, instruction must combine conscious study of rules with abundant meaningful use of the language. Second, the teacher must take into account the learner's first language, because transfer can help or hinder the acquisition of Russian forms. Third, the cultural context should be presented together with the linguistic material, since communication in Russian depends on social norms, politeness formulas and shared background knowledge (Kramsch, 2014).

Historically, the grammar-translation method dominated foreign language classes. It trained learners to analyse texts and translate sentences, and it gave a clear picture of Russian morphology, but it produced little oral fluency. The direct and audio-lingual methods that followed placed speech at the centre and relied on imitation and drills; they improved pronunciation but often resulted in mechanical, context-free responses (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

The communicative approach, which became the prevailing paradigm in the last decades of the twentieth century, redefined the goal of teaching as the

ability to use the language for real purposes. Lessons are organised around situations such as shopping, travelling, studying or working, and accuracy is developed through meaningful interaction rather than through isolated exercises (Harmer, 2007). Task-based teaching extends this idea: learners complete a purposeful task, for example planning a trip or solving a problem in pairs, and attention to form arises while the task is being prepared and reviewed (Ellis, 2003).

Modern practice is rarely based on a single method. Many teachers follow a principled eclectic course in which communicative tasks are supported by short explanations of grammar, controlled practice and regular feedback (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In an RFL class this means that a lesson on the genitive case, for instance, may begin with a realistic dialogue about quantities and possession, continue with a brief explanation of endings, and finish with a speaking task in which students describe what they have and what they lack.

Pronunciation and intonation. Learners often find the palatalised consonants, the hard and soft contrast and the reduction of unstressed vowels difficult. Work on sounds should begin early, use listening and imitation, and be connected to short phrases rather than isolated words. Contrastive observation of the learner's native sounds helps to predict errors, while recording and comparing one's own speech increases learner awareness.

Grammar. Russian grammar is traditionally presented through the six cases, the gender and number system, verb conjugation and aspect. A useful principle is to introduce grammar in functional blocks: the accusative with the idea of a direct object, the prepositional case with the idea of location, the instrumental with the idea of means or accompaniment. Visual tables, colour coding and short inductive discovery tasks help students see patterns, and repeated communicative recycling consolidates them.

Vocabulary. Systematic vocabulary growth requires deliberate attention to high-frequency words, word families and collocations (Nation, 2001). In Russian, the study of common prefixes, suffixes and roots is especially productive, because it allows learners to guess the meaning of new derived words and to understand the verbs of motion with their prefixes. Spaced repetition and the use of new words in speaking and writing tasks are more effective than memorising lists.

Receptive and productive skills. Listening and reading should be taught with authentic or lightly adapted materials and with a pre-, while- and post-activity structure. Speaking develops through role-plays, discussions and information-gap tasks, and writing progresses from guided forms, such as messages and short descriptions, to extended texts. The integration of skills in one project, such as an interview followed by a written report, mirrors real communication and makes the learning outcomes visible.

Experience shows that several areas regularly cause problems. The case system is the first of them: students may know the endings but fail to select the correct case in spontaneous speech. The second is verbal aspect, since the choice between perfective and imperfective forms depends on meaning and context rather than on a simple rule. The third is the group of verbs of motion, where direction, repetition and means of transport all affect the form. Finally, stress is mobile and is not normally shown in written texts, so learners must memorise it together with the word.

These difficulties are best addressed by careful sequencing, frequent return to key patterns, and tolerant but systematic error correction. Delayed correction is suitable for fluency activities, whereas immediate correction is more appropriate in controlled practice. Learners with a Turkic or other non-Slavic background may also need additional support with grammatical gender and agreement, which have no direct equivalent in their first language.

Digital resources have changed the possibilities of RFL teaching. Online dictionaries, corpora, video platforms, language-exchange applications and learning management systems give learners access to authentic Russian and allow flexible, personalised practice. Teachers can use them to prepare interactive tasks, to organise virtual exchanges with native speakers, and to monitor progress. However, technology serves the pedagogical aim and does not replace it: its value depends on well-planned activities and clear feedback.

Assessment should be consistent with the goals of instruction. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages describes proficiency in levels from A1 to C2 and offers can-do descriptors that can be used for planning, self-assessment and testing (Council of Europe, 2001; Council of Europe, 2020). Combining formative assessment, such as portfolios and observation, with periodic summative tests gives a fuller picture of learner development and encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.

7. Conclusion

The methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language has moved from rule-centred translation to a flexible, communicative and learner-centred model. Effective teaching combines clear explanation of Russian grammar with meaningful interaction, systematic work on pronunciation and vocabulary, cultural education and thoughtful use of technology. Teachers who understand their learners' first language, anticipate typical difficulties and apply transparent assessment criteria are able to create a motivating environment in which students develop real communicative competence. Further empirical research on different learner groups will help to refine these recommendations.

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