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## DIFFICULTIES IN STUDYING THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE ORDER OF WORDS AMONG MALAGASY STUDENTS

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### *Abstract*

There are two official languages in Madagascar: Malagasy and French. More than 83% of the country's population only knows Malagasy and about 16 % knows both French and Malagasy. Since both languages play an important role in education, we decided to consider the word order of the three languages, as well as to analyze the teaching methods. The choice of methods and techniques to overcome difficulties in teaching Russian in the absence of a language environment in order to achieve the most effective result is only possible on the basis of psychological and pedagogical theory. The effective methodology shall be built on the intersection of related sciences: pedagogy, linguistics, theory of speech communication. Our purpose is to find suitable methods of teaching Russian to Malagasy students taking into account the peculiarities of French and Malagasy in comparison with Russian. The materials of the study included works of such researchers of Russian grammar as O.A. Krylova, et al; and in the field of teaching Russian as a foreign language such researchers as Yu.K. Babanskiy, M.P. Chesnokova, B.V. Belyaev, I.Y. Shechter. To achieve the set objective, we used methods of analysis and synthesis, observation and comparison. As a result, it was concluded that the difficulties caused by the fact that the norms of the word order in three languages are different can be overcome by audiolingual method of learning, the method of repeating the same techniques, conscious-comparative, emotional and semantic methods and the method of rhythmopedia.

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## **1. Introduction**

Russian is a difficult language to learn not only because of its phonetics, but also because of the unfixed order of words both in a sentence and in a phrase. For example, in literary and spoken styles there is often an inversion, using which the author changes the meaning due to the mobility of the components of the Russian sentence.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The order of words in Russian is difficult to study for students, where in their native language the order of words is based on a certain scheme. In comparison between Russian and French and Malagasy, we will find more differences than similarities, which makes it difficult to explain this topic to Malagasy students.

## **3. Research Questions**

The study sets the following objectives:

- to consider the norms of the word order in Russian, thus comparing them with the norms of the word order in French and Malagasy;
- to identify difficulties in studying the word order in Russian among Malagasy students;
- to find methods that help students to tackle the problems of studying the topic Word Order in Russian Language.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The word order in Russian is most complicated than in French, because the position of words in a sentence does not depend on syntactic role, the syntactic function is determined by the case. In this regard, as Krylova and Khavronina (1976) noted, it can be concluded that in Russian the word order is unfixed or incoherent.

## **5. Research Methods**

The materials of the study included works of such researchers of Russian grammar as Krylova and Khavronina (1976), Kovtunova (1969), Matezius (2010), Adamets (1966) and in the field of teaching Russian as a foreign language such researchers as Babanskiy (2007), Chesnokova (2015).

We also relied on pedagogical observations while teaching Russian at the University of Antananarivo to Malagasy students.

The methods of analysis and synthesis, observation and comparison were used in the study.

## **6. Findings**

The study covers the methods of teaching Malagasy students to achieve an understanding of the peculiarities of the Russian language as a language with unfixed word order.

## 7. Conclusion

### At the level of a sentence

There are two factors affecting the word order in a sentence in Russian:

- Text stylistics. If a text style shall be emotionally neutral or objective, direct word order is most often used. Such a phenomenon can be observed in scientific and official-business texts. In spoken, literary and publicistic speech for the purpose of greater expression, the objective word order is often violated. The objective word order in a narrative sentence was well-defined by I.I. Kovtunov and Y.P. Knyazev in relation to the preposition of a theme and the post-position of a rheme.

For example: “It is cold outside / in winter” (as cited in Kovtunova, 1969; Sattarova, 2002).

T                      R

- Communicative setup. The communicative-stylistic setup determines the current division of a sentence, i.e. the correlation of a theme and a rheme. Current division of a sentence is a “binary organization (i.e. a sentence consists of two components: theme and rheme) reflecting the communicative setup of a speaker/writer” (Adamets, 1966, p. 52).

For example: “Children / walk on the street” or “On the street / the children walk”.

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We see that the location of words in Russian changes its communicative meaning, based on this, it can be concluded that the word order in Russian is not free.

As Muller (2008) notes, unlike the Russian language, in French the word order is coherent or fixed and defined by the SVO scheme: Subject + Predicate+ Object.

Examples:

- Mon petit frère fêtera son anniversaire. – My younger brother will celebrate his birthday.
- Presque tous les anciens étudiants ont remis leurs dossiers. – Almost all graduates presented their projects.

We see that for each member of the sentence, the place is defined, and the actual division occurs using definite (le, la, l, "les) and indefinite (un, une, des) articles.

Although the word order in French is fixed, there are components, secondary members of a sentence that are mobile, such as all adverbial modifiers of place, time, mode of action, purpose, causes, consequences, conditions that add the whole sentence, not a verb. In Russian grammar they have a definition of determinants, as Sattarova (2002) writes.

French also has the term “determinant”, but the meaning of this definition is completely different. “Déterminant” in French – prepositions, articles, particles, etc. – service words. However, there are also circumstances in this language that apply not to a verb, but to a whole sentence, they are called modifiers-determinants. Their absence in a sentence has little effect on the meaning in the same way as displacement, these components are independent of the subject or predicate, have no effect on the word in a sentence. Their location depends only on the communicative setup.

For example:

1. La neige est tombée la semaine dernière. – It was snowing last week.
2. La semaine dernière, la neige est tombée. – It was snowing last week.

The location of determinant circumstances depends on whether they are a theme, as in Example 2, or a rheme, as in Example 1.

Elena Dragan writes that all statements in French consist of two parts: subject and predicate. The difference between what has been confirmed and what is confirmed is created in speech logic, and the difference between the theme and the rheme is psychological (Dragan, 2012)

In French, the theme most often ranks first in a sentence, usually a subject is in a theme, while the rheme follows after since it carries information on the theme. The latter includes a predicate, an object, and sometimes an adverbial modifier.

For example: “L’information s’est rapidement éparpillée / dans tout le pays”.

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The above makes it possible to conclude that in French the role of a subject is a theme and the role of an object is a rheme, hence the French word order is fixed, coherent, with determinants. The functions of word order in French: structural-syntactic, communicative-syntactic and stylistic.

In comparison of the word order in a sentence in Russian and French it can be made clear that both languages are not free, since in neutral speech there is a norm of preposition of a theme and post-position of a rheme. But, it is worth noting that in French the word order is determined by the scheme “subject + predicate + object”, except for adverbs-determinants, and in Russian everything is determined by the communicative setup of a speaker.

In Malagasy, the word order in sentences is fixed, but somewhat unusual for Europeans. It is the VOS-type language, i.e. sentence elements follow a predicate-object-subject model.

Only 3 % of the world’s languages have this word order. In relation to the above-mentioned VOS model, neutral sentences begin with a predicate (which may be a verb but also, for example, an adjective), follow an object (which is a predicate), and only at the end there is a subject.

A simple sentence in Malagasy is as follows: “Mamaky boky ny mpianatra”. / “Reading a book a student”. – “l’ élève lit un livre”. / “A student is reading a book”.

If you compare three languages, each of them differs in its features with regard to the word order in a sentence. It is worth noting that in French and Malagasy the word order is fixed, but at the same time Malagasy is characterized by a scheme that does not relate to models of neutral sentences of most European languages.

### **At the level of a phrase**

#### *Concord*

The Russian language is characterized by the preposition of a dependent word in relation to the main word, and in French and Malagasy on the contrary. For example, “right hand” – “une main droite” – “Tanana havanana”; “strong woman” – “une femme forte” – “vehivavy matanjaka”.

In French, however, there are exceptions when the dependent word precedes the main word. The exception is made when the adverb is presented by pronouns, numerals, adjectives defining proper names, adverbs defining adjectives. For example, “ma première année” – “my first year”; “le petit lapin” – “little rabbit”.

There is also a limited range of adjectives which position affects the meaning of a phrase. For example, “de nouveaux livres” – books that I don’t have yet; “des livres nouveaux” – fresh books that have recently been printed.

### *Management*

In Russian, in phrases with a type of connection, the management of a dependent component follows the main, and the relations of verbs and nouns is expressed by cases, for example, “approach a window”, help a friend”. In French and in Malagasy the word order in management is maintained, but in both languages prepositions and articles play the role of cases. For example, “manjaitra eo ambonin 'ny seza” – “coudre sur une chaise” – “sew on a chair”.

### *Adjunction*

In Russian, the adjunction has the following norms:

- Adverb (-o, -e, -sky) is adjacent to the main component, for example, “very interesting”, “categorically protest”.

Most often the dependent component in French and Malagasy phrases is placed after the main word, usually a verb. For example, “parler aisément” – to speak easily, “mahaliana be” – very interesting.

- In Russian and Malagasy, the infinitive is in post-position with respect to the main component and does not require a preposition. For example, “need to do”, “wants to help”, “teha ahay” – “wants to learn”.

In French, the adjunction is formed the same way: the infinitive is behind the main component, but still the infinitive can be used with a preposition. For example, “vouloir réussir”, “apprendre à parler correctement”.

- Both in Russian, French and Malagasy, the main component follows a quantitative adverb and stands before a qualitative one. For example, “almost complete”, “French-style meat”, “beaucoup de monde” – “many people”, “la mode à la malgache” – “Malagasy fashion”, “be olona” – “many people”, “miteny frantsay” – “speak French”.

Considering that the main purpose of learning Russian as a foreign language is to develop communication skills of Malagasy students at the University of Antananarivo, it is necessary to consider the most effective pedagogical methods and techniques of learning Russian as a foreign language in order to overcome difficulties regarding the topic *Word Order in Russian Language*.

There are three groups of methods in foreign language teaching, which were identified by Babanskiy (2007):

- organization and implementation of educational and cognitive activities
- stimulation and motivation of educational and cognitive activity
- efficiency control and self-control method

According to Babanskiy, a teacher is responsible for choosing the method of teaching, so he described the criteria for the optimal choice of a method. According to him, successful choice of approaches is determined by six factors:

- patterns and resulting learning principles
- learning objectives

- content of a subject of study
- learning abilities of a student and the students' group
- features of external conditions
- level of professional qualification of a teacher

The methods of training activity also define the forms of work.

A student is both a subject of the educational activity and a subject of communication, both indirect when reading a book or performing an educational task, and direct, in communication with a teacher, a student or students. Thus, there are the following forms of learning:

- frontal
- individual
- pair
- group
- collective

To learn the word order in Russian it is necessary to use all the above-mentioned forms of training, as each of them has its own advantages. The frontal method will help to become an authority for students, individual training of a student himself, although limited to his possibility of self-study, is also important in the process of educational and cognitive activity, pair and group forms are used at all stages of teaching and in learning of any material. The collective form implies the existence of relations in a scientific group, which is not always possible, as language groups consist of different specialties that meet each other only once a week, for example, the system of teaching a foreign language to Russian-speaking students at RUDN.

At the initial stage of training, it is important to avoid a gap between knowledge, skills and abilities in the use of the word order in Russian. In this context, the most effective method of training can be the audio-language method – training using the auditory channel of perception, which involves repeated listening and repetition of sample sentences after a speaker (i.e. lingaphone equipment is actively used in classes).

This training method involves:

- oral forestalling;
- focus on the development of verbal skills;
- drill exercises (multiple repetition);
- little explanation;
- extensive use of country specific information.

Considering that fact indicated by Chesnokova (2015) that speaking, writing, reading and listening in a studied language refers to verbal skills, there is a need to consider the method as a system of repetition of the same techniques to solve cyclically repeated problems. For example, after a teacher explains the peculiarities of a sentence structure in Russian, he/she shall organize training and application of this material in speech practice using the techniques of repetition, reasoning, training and use of the

acquired knowledge by students. The means of communication may include educational programs, manuals, tables, diagrams, etc. (Matezius, 2010).

However, the use of the above techniques blurs the attention of students. Thus, it is necessary to use the creative activity of students, which makes it possible to apply conscious methods of teaching: a conscious-comparative method – learning based on comparison of the studied language with the native language and a conscious-practical method – learning that combines conscious and practical learning. The key methodological principle of these methods is the principle of consciousness.

The above methods help students to understand the order of words in Russian and to find differences from Malagasy language, which makes it possible to study with reference to a native language, but helps to overcome interference, i.e. negative impact of a native language).

The development of creative text production is based on syntax (i.e. minimum learning unit – sentence), and concentricism in presenting a sentence (i.e. in cycles depending on the stage of training) and allows preserving the sequence of training – from knowledge to skills and abilities.

Special attention shall be paid to the selection of material, which shall take into account the use of words in phrases and sentences. The knowledge of isolated words is necessary, but it is more important to use them in sentences effectively. At the initial stage of the educational process in the absence of a linguistic environment it is necessary to select materials in the sphere of life, socio-political or special topics. Thematic selection contributes to better learning, especially at the initial stage of study. For example, the topic *Shop or Study at University*.

The use of emotional and semantic learning methods was proposed and developed by I.Yu. Schechter. They imply role-plays and a system of communicative tasks aimed at mastering the language as a means of communication. These methods contribute to the use of the Russian language in certain typical situations, which makes it possible for students to learn the skills of using the word order of the Russian language on the basis of simple typical situations of communication and on simple texts related to the professional activity of students.

Taking into account the genetic features of speakers of Malagasy language, the method of rhythmopedics developed at the Chisinau University, which provides for the creation of optimal conditions for memory mechanisms, will be effective in this country. This method involves introduction, consolidation and activation of educational material using rhythmostimulation, i.e. exposure of a student to rhythmic sound, light and color signals).

Rhythmostimulation contributes to favorable conditions for solid memorization of a large volume of educational material, activation of consciousness and subconscious in combination with logical perception of information. Given the differences in word order in Malagasy and Russian, there is a need to learn a great deal of material.

In summary, Malagasy students may have difficulty learning the following:

- word order in a sentence due to fixed word order in French and Malagasy
- word order in a phrase similar to matching, since in French and Malagasy the definitive word precedes the dependent
- word order in a phrase similar to adjunction, because in French and Malagasy the definitive word is always in post-position with respect to the main, and in Russian its position is flexible.

It is also worth noting that this topic intersects with the case endings of the names of nouns and adjectives, as the connection in French and Malagasy phrases and sentences takes place only due to prepositions, articles and word order, and in Russian also with the help of case endings.

Thus, in order to overcome the above-mentioned difficulties, it is necessary to resort to the audiolingual method of teaching, the method of repeating the same techniques, the conscious-comparative, emotional and semantic method and the method of rhythmopedia.

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