

**ICHEU 2021**  
**International Conference «Humanity in the Era of Uncertainty»****HYPERCORRECTION IN RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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**Abstract**

The study aims to analyze the phenomenon of language hypercorrection in Russian as a foreign language, as well as errors that are caused by hypercorrection and that foreigners make when studying Russian. The research shows how hypercorrection is produced at different levels and in different aspects of the language (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar). The study reveals the key role of language analogy that leads to hypercorrection, and in this case, the analogy is mistaken. It also describes the mechanism of hypercorrection, which is based on the expansion of certain language rules, the use of these rules, “just in case”, where they cannot be used, which psychologically is due to speaker or writer’s fear of making a mistake. Along the way, the research analyzes another phenomenon related to language analogy - linguistic interference, which is also shown at different levels of language; the difference between these two concepts is established. In addition, the study proposes ways to overcome hypercorrection in terms of Russian as a foreign language.

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## **1. Introduction**

Uncertainty, as a phenomenon generally inherent of modern reality, covers different aspects of life and is reflected, particularly, in the language. The phenomenon of hypercorrection can be deemed a symptom of world uncertainty for a language. Hypercorrection (or hypercorrectness) is a fairly common linguistic phenomenon that includes a number of paradoxical errors, which occur where they apparently could not occur.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The innovation of the research is defined by studying hypercorrection in terms of Russian as a foreign language and by the lack of works that develop the issue in this aspect properly, although there is a certain number of studies of hypercorrection for other languages (Baker, 1996; Pinker, 1999; Pollan, 2001; Wright, 1986). But present research is based, overall, on author's experience of teaching Russian as a foreign language and provides examples from the real learning process.

## **3. Research Questions**

The main research questions are:

- What are the reasons that cause hypercorrection in Russian as a foreign language?
- How is hypercorrection produced at different levels of the language?
- What are the ways to overcome hypercorrection in foreign students' speech?

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

The purpose of the study is to analyze hypercorrection that occurs in the speech of foreign students studying Russian.

## **5. Research Methods**

The research is based on the following methods: observation, analysis, comparison, description.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1. Language Analogy: positive and negative**

It is necessary to begin by saying that hypercorrection is based on language rules that are overly used and extended, which, on the one hand, is out of a desire to be correct (Nordquist, 2020), and, on the other hand, is due to poor knowledge or understanding of a particular language rule. Native speakers, as it were, insure themselves against making a mistake, using rules, "just in case", where they really cannot be used. Hypercorrection can be produced in different aspects and at different levels of the language, but it is most clearly manifested, apparently, in spelling - as part of ridiculous spelling errors found, in particular, in school essays and the Russian Uniform State Examination (USE). We are talking about such mistakes

as the wrong spelling of the adverb *потихоньку* using a hyphen (*по-тихоньку*), the use of a soft sign for the 3rd person forms for the present tense of verbs with the postfix *-СЯ* (*Он учится*), the use of doublets - doubling vowels and consonants (*вообщем, кожаный*), the separate spelling of particles НЕ and НИ (*ни кто*), as well as wordforms such as *будующий*, etc.

Analyzing these errors carefully helps to see that they are often produced by mistaken analogy with correct forms. For example, *будующий* is clearly formed by analogy with the spelling of the word *следующий*; *по-тихоньку* - by analogy with adverbs like *по-английски, по-французски*. As for the incorrect spelling of adjectives with a doubled consonant H or the separate spelling of the particles НЕ and НИ, most likely, they can be explained by a conviction that one can avoid a mistake in such words as long as he uses a doubled H or puts a hyphen.

Analogy as one of the fundamental laws of language has a negative effect in this case as it leads to errors due to language hypercorrection. The analogy can be seen, in particular, with hypercorrection in pronunciation. One example is the Russian word *огуречный* where the combination of the letters ч and н might be pronounced as [шн], by analogy with words like *конечно, нарочно*, which is wrong.

The analogy also works within hypercorrection in grammar. Suffice it to mention the common grammar mistakes where speakers put words in a phrase making wrong grammatical bonds between words, as it is seen with the phrases *с днем рождением, с Восьмым мартом*, where the preposition С, which requires the instrumental case, extends not only to the main word, but also to the dependent word in the phrase. Besides the above-mentioned types of hypercorrections (pronunciation, spelling, grammar), there is also lexical-semantic hypercorrection, which, in turn, is also due to language analogy. Lexical-semantic hypercorrection can be observed with semantic redundancy, for example, in the phrase *Честно признаюсь*, used by analogy with such phrases as *Честно говоря*. The use of the word *честно* is semantically redundant in this phrase, as the very meaning of the verb *признаваться* (to confess) suggests that the person is talking about something honestly and frankly.

Hypercorrection of Native Russian speakers differs from the same phenomenon among foreigners studying Russian. The crucial difference lies in the nature of mistakes made by those for whom Russian is their mother tongue and those for whom Russian is a foreign language. For native Russian speakers, hypercorrection basically touches the sphere of speech, while mistakes made by foreigners studying Russian break the boundaries of the language system, i.e., go beyond the Russian language system.

In terms of mistakes of foreigners learning Russian as a foreign language, they can be divided into two groups, based on the reasons that cause these mistakes. The first group includes errors due to language interference. The very term "interference" comes from physics and means the amplification or attenuation of the amplitude of two waves when they are superimposed on each other. By analogy with this concept, language interference means that the features of one language system are imposed on another language and have impacts on it (Petrov, 2020, p. 123). Moreover, this influence can be both positive and negative. So, for example, matching nouns and adjectives in gender and number for Romance languages provides a clearer understanding and correct use of the similar grammar issue in Russian, by native French, Spanish, Italian speakers. In this case, it turns out to be the positive influence of the native language. The negative influence of the native language while learning a foreign language, causes mistakes. For example, most nouns in Spanish, as well as in Russian, ending in -a, are feminine. The exception is nouns that came from

the Greek (tema, problema, eblema, etc.), which are masculine, therefore, by analogy with the grammatical gender of these words in their language, Spanish speakers learning Russian, sometimes match these nouns incorrectly (серьезный проблема, важный тема). In this case, interference is negative.

## 6.2. Linguistic Interference

According to the level system of the language, it seems possible to distinguish phonetic, grammatical (syntactic) and lexical-semantic interference types. The phonetic interference is, probably, most evident, since this kind of interference is directly related to the plan of expression of language signs. The phonetic interference is understood by Liubimova (1991) as "an internal mechanism, the result of which is influenced not only by the specificity of the primary sound system, but also by the secondary one, as well as by universal linguistic tendencies" (p. 4). In other words, the phonetic interference is not just a transfer, but the mutual influence of two language systems. For example, when articulating the Russian sound [ы], which is not present in other languages, foreigners try to find a similar sound available in their language. The result is a combination of partial articulatory features of the Russian sound [ы] and a similar sound found by foreign students in their native language phonetic repertory, thereby creating a hybrid sound that resembles the sound [ы], but in fact is not. In terms of its quality, this is a kind of third sound that is absent both in Russian and foreign students' native language.

An example of the grammar interference is the lack of the negative particle НЕ with verbs when using negative pronouns like никто, ничего, нигде: Никто знает. Я был нигде. This is due to the fact that in many languages the negative particle is redundant in the given grammatical position, therefore is not used, cf. English sentence: Nobody knows. A kind of the grammar interference is syntactic interference, when syntactic structures of one language are transferred to another language, where these structures are not possible, like the construction with a perception verb + direct object + infinitive, which is used, particularly, in English and Romance languages: I heard him say; Lo vi salir de la tienda. By analogy with this construction, native speakers of these languages might say in Russian: Я слышал его сказать. However, explanatory clauses are available only, in Russian in this case: Я слышал, что он сказал; Я видел, как он вышел из магазина.

A very curious linguistic phenomenon is lexical-semantic interference. The essence of semantic interference lies in transferring, distributing certain meanings of a lexical unit of a native language to a similar lexical unit of a second language, in which these meanings are not present. In many Western European languages, the Russian verb мечтать (English to dream, French rêver, Spanish soñar) has a meaning "to experience events and images in your mind while you are sleeping" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021), which is not present in Russian. Nevertheless, some students use the Russian verb мечтать with this sense: Вчера ночью я мечтал о собаке. From the context, it becomes clear that the student was asleep at the same time, so it is not correct to say in Russian: Мне снилась собака. Thereby such use of the verb мечтать is a part of the lexical-semantic interference (Petrov, 2020, p. 124). Taking into account language interference, being aware of phonetic, grammatical, lexical and semantic features of students' native language, helps to prevent many of their mistakes when learning Russian.

### 6.3. Hypercorrection mistakes in Russian as a foreign language

As you can see above, language interference is a fairly common phenomenon while learning foreign languages, including Russian. However, interference is not the only one reason for mistakes made by foreigners mastering Russian. A certain part of such errors is not related to the native language influence and is not explained by this influence. The nature of these errors is different which is due, as indicated, to another linguistic phenomenon, which is language hypercorrection.

It has been pointed out that, in the psycholinguistic aspect, hypercorrection is based on student's fear of making a mistake, which pushes him to use this or that rule "just in case." Quite often the choice of one form or another, the spelling of this or that word, seems to a student too simple and obvious to be correct, from his point of view, so he complicates the issue deliberately, being sure that this way he can avoid mistakes. This kind of hypercorrection is provoked as well by the objective difficulty of Russian, primarily grammar and sound systems, and not only for foreigners, but also for native Russian speakers themselves. But obviously, the Russian language causes most problems to foreigners. As for Russian as a foreign language, hypercorrection has a certain uniqueness: if for native Russian speakers, hypercorrection mostly covers the area of spelling and punctuation marks, then for foreigners this phenomenon primarily goes for pronunciation and grammar. For example, at the phonetic level, hypercorrection concerns positional vowel changes, first of all, a-o, when a foreign student pronounces the sound [a] instead of [o] under the stress in words such as опыт, но, приносит. Hypercorrection lies in the wrong use of the vowel reduction rule for [o]; as a result, [o] becomes [a] not only in an unstressed, but also in a stressed position: [‘апыт] [на], [при’насит]. In such words, even though the students use the correct stress, they change the quality of the phoneme [o], by analogy with the words where the phonetic reduction takes place: молоко, города, проводит. It is important to note that in this case, hypercorrection, as a rule, occurs in words where there is no letter “a” at all and there is only one letter “o”.

A very frequent thing is hypercorrection in grammar. One of its sides is the redundant making of grammar forms for declension and conjugation when nominative forms and accusative ones which coincide with the nominative, are replaced by indirect cases for nouns and adjectives, as well as verb infinitives are replaced by personal forms. An example of the grammar hypercorrection is a sentence like: Вчера у нас были уроков по математике, where the word уроки is used in the genitive case instead of the nominative, or Вчера я ходил в театре (instead of театр). This grammar mistake where the accusative substitutes the locative, is quite common for foreign students learning Russian. It is noteworthy that in the same sentence, foreigners can use the correct form if the noun is feminine and ends in -а /я: Вчера я ходил на почту. Why is this happening? This is due to foreigners' erroneous idea that in Russian all words must certainly change, therefore, when making a phrase or sentence, one cannot leave a word unchanged, it is necessary to put endings all the time. This is how hypercorrection works in grammar. It is no wonder that in the sentence Вчера я ходил на почту, mistakes can be avoided as foreigners trying to change the word, can find the necessary oppositions а - у, я - ю, but masculine words like театр are different as they have a zero ending, so the endings are taken from other grammar cases, e.g., from the locative case which is the closest to the accusative in semantics.

A similar situation is seen with verbs. In such wrong sentences as Я люблю читаю or Я ходил на стадион играю в футбол, the infinitive forms (читать, играть) are replaced by personal ones (читаю,

играю). This happens even though the infinitive is used in students' native language in such sentences, at least, this is true for Western European languages (English, French, Spanish): I like to read (English), J'aime lire (French), Me gusta leer (Spanish). Thus, the mistaken grammar analogy (hypercorrection) prevails over the correct one (positive interference) in this case.

If we talk about ways to overcome language hypercorrection in foreign students' speech, then, as in the case of interference, these ways embrace students' native language features and require, where possible, the making of correct links in pronunciation and grammar in the native and foreign languages. And of course, students need to learn to see a language as a system whose elements have certain rules of functioning (Petrov, 2009, p. 11). It is also important to help students to defeat their fear of making mistakes when using a foreign language as this is natural and normal; it is a part of the learning process.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that hypercorrection takes place not only in Russian, but also in other languages, particularly, in English. The most characteristic example of hypercorrection in English is the use of the pronoun *I* instead of *me* in the phrase "Between you and I" (Sihler, 2000), which is due to the grammar usus that lies in the fact that the pronouns You and I are often grammatically juxtaposed and used together, cf. the correct English sentence: Samuel and I are proud to announce a World Premier.

## 7. Conclusion

Mistakes that foreigners learning Russian make can be roughly divided into two groups. The first group includes errors caused by the negative influence of students' native language (in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, semantics), i.e., language interference. The second group is made up of errors, which are based on the redundancy in rules produced by student's phobia of making a mistake. These are cases of the so-called language hypercorrection. For both interference and hypercorrection, language analogy plays a key role. However, with interference, language analogy is caused by the influence of the native language, while hypercorrection analogy happens within the language the student is mastering. At the same time, for native speakers, hypercorrection is involved in the sphere of speech, and hypercorrection has to do with the language system when it comes to foreigners. In other words, foreigners' hypercorrection errors are of a systemic nature. Both interference and hypercorrection appear at different levels and in different aspects of the language: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, semantics, spelling.

However, it is noteworthy that native speakers' hypercorrection is primarily seen with spelling and punctuation marks, while foreigners' hypercorrection is basically about pronunciation and grammar. In order to overcome hypercorrection in Russian as a foreign language, it is pivotal to take into account students' native language features, help students to think of the language as a system and work on the rules according to which the elements of this system are acting in terms of communication.

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