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## METHODS OF STUDYING RUSSIAN NOUNS FOR VIETNAMESE LEARNERS

### MÉTODOS DE ESTUDIO DE SUSTANTIVOS RUSOS PARA ESTUDIANTES VIETNAMÉS

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper deals with methodological aspects of studying a noun in a Vietnamese audience. The choice of research topic and its relevance are due to the fact that the methodological aspects of studying Russian as a foreign language by a Vietnamese audience are not sufficiently developed. Every year, along with the increasing demand for knowledge of Russian, the number of students studying Russian is also increasing significantly, but teaching methods and materials of the Russian language are always limited. Despite the efforts of students, the results leave a great deal to be desired. In order to improve the quality of material learning, suitable methods are needed to teach Russian as a foreign language. The paper presents a comparison of the characteristics of nouns in Russian and Vietnamese; the difficulties Vietnamese students encounter in learning Russian, including nouns; and an exercise system designed for Vietnamese students.

#### Keywords:

Method of teaching, russian language, vietnamese language, vietnamese learners, russian as a foreign language, nouns.

#### RESUMEN

El documento trata los aspectos metodológicos del estudio de un sustantivo en una audiencia vietnamita. La elección del tema de investigación y su relevancia se deben al hecho de que los aspectos metodológicos del estudio del ruso como lengua extranjera por parte de una audiencia vietnamita no están suficientemente desarrollados. Cada año, junto con la creciente demanda de conocimientos de ruso, el número de estudiantes que estudian ruso también aumenta significativamente, pero los métodos y materiales de enseñanza del idioma ruso son siempre limitados. A pesar del esfuerzo de los estudiantes, los resultados dejan mucho que desear. Para mejorar la calidad del aprendizaje material, se necesitan métodos adecuados para enseñar ruso como lengua extranjera. El artículo presenta una comparación de las características de los sustantivos en ruso y vietnamita; las dificultades que encuentran los estudiantes vietnamitas para aprender ruso, incluidos los sustantivos; y un sistema de ejercicios diseñado para estudiantes vietnamitas.

#### Palabras clave:

método de enseñanza, idioma ruso, idioma vietnamita, estudiantes vietnamitas, ruso como lengua extranjera, sustantivos.

## INTRODUCTION

The reason for choosing this topic is that the Methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language in Vietnam is limited. Each year the number of people learning Russian increases significantly, but we still do not have enough modern methods of teaching Russian and materials to study. Despite the learners' efforts, their knowledge of Russian is still poor. In order to understand well the knowledge from materials, it is necessary to have appropriate methods of teaching Russian.

The novelty of this scientific research is to compile a system of exercises about Russian nouns for Vietnamese learners, which is based on the results of a questionnaire. In addition, based on the results of the questionnaire, conclusions about the characteristics of Vietnamese people learning Russian are made.

The purpose of this research is to compare the grammatical characteristics of Russian nouns to Vietnamese nouns and to build a system of exercises, which is more suitable for Vietnamese learners.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the purpose of the research, the following research tasks are required to be completed:

- To study materials about nouns as part of speech;
- To compare grammatical characteristics of nouns in two languages (Russian-Vietnamese language);
- To analyze the mistakes and difficulties that Vietnamese students often encounter when they study Russian nouns;
- To build a suitable system of exercises on the topic "Noun" for Vietnamese learners.

The following methods are used in this paper: collective, statistical, comparative analysis, descriptive method and questionnaire.

## DEVELOPMENT

Nowadays, it is necessary to learn foreign languages for everyone, especially for young people. Knowledge of foreign languages helps us to more easily make successes in our job. Scientist Kostomarov (1991), said: *"each nation, where their mother language is not popular in the world, must join the modern world, and master a common foreign language"*. (p. 5)

In fact, Vietnamese language belongs to a group of languages, which is not popular in the world. Therefore, nowadays, Vietnamese young people always try to learn foreign languages well. Each language has its own beauty

and charm. Some people choose English to learn, because it is an international language, others choose Korean to watch Korean movies without subtitles. Of course, there is also a group of people who love Russian more than any other foreign language. Russian is the language of famous love poems, long novels and language of the great Soviet Union.

Russian today is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world (more precisely, it ranks the fifth place in the world by popularity). Currently, in addition to the Russian Federation, in many countries in the world, such as: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and others, local residents also speak Russian as a second language. In addition, there are a considerable number of students who learn Russian as a foreign language. Why do so many people want to learn Russian? Maybe it is due to soft beauty of Russian. Russian is considered as the language of love and romanticism. Pushkin's famous poem "I Loved You" is an example of this.

*"So tenderly I love you, so sincerely, I pray God grant another love you so"*, such romantic words of the poem can always be in our hearts. However, it is no secret that Russian is one of the most difficult foreign languages to learn due to its inexplicable rules, original grammar and multilayering. Not only does grammar make Russian language difficult but also its pronunciation. Russian language has a lot of characteristics that are not found in Vietnamese. Therefore, learners meet with many difficulties when learning Russian. In this research, we only compare the characteristics of Russian and Vietnamese nouns.

Shansky (1987), wrote: *"nouns denote things and express this meaning in the forms of gender, number and case. In a sentence, nouns often play the role of subject or complement. They also can play the role of definition, adverb and can be used as part of the predicate"*. (p. 93).

The nouns in Russian language belong to the group of independent parts of speech.

There are three lexical-grammatical categories of nouns: the category of common and proper nouns, the category of animate and inanimate nouns, and the category of concrete nouns, which opposes to abstract, collective and material nouns.

Grammatical categories of nouns include the gender, the number, and the case category.

All Russian nouns belong to one of three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. The gender category is expressed at different levels of the language: syntax, morphology and word-formation.

Nouns in Russian language change by numbers, it means they have correlative singular and plural forms. For example: **номер** (number) – **номера** (numbers), **книга** (book) – **книги** (books), etc. However, there is a considerable number of nouns that have only the singular or plural form.

In modern Russian language, there are six cases (nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, instrumental, prepositional cases). The nominative case is different from all the others. The nominative case is different from all the others. It expresses grammatically independent position of the noun in speech, and is called direct, and the other cases – indirect. The nominative case is most often used to express the subject. The forms of indirect cases express adverbial, object, and definition meanings.

For example:

**Это моя сестра** – nominative (This is my sister)

**Он боится моей сестры** – genitive (He is afraid of my sister)

**Я подарю моей сестре эти цветы на ее день рождения** (I will give my sister these flowers for her birthday) – dative

**Мою сестру зовут Хоа** (My sister's name is Hoa) – accusative

**По вечерам я часто гуляю с моей сестрой** (I often walk with my sister in the evenings) – instrumental

**Расскажи о твоей сестре** (Tell me about your sister) – prepositional

Continuing the research, we analyze nouns in Vietnamese language. First of all we would like to introduce something about Vietnamese (Hoa, 1995).

Vietnamese is the official language of about 97 million people living in a country that resembles the Latin letter “S” on the map. Although this language is still not popular in the world, Vietnamese people are so happy, because every year more and more foreigners choose Vietnamese to study and come to Vietnam for vacation or work.

Vietnamese is an isolating language like Chinese or Thai, it means that words in this language consist of only one morpheme – the root. Besides, words in Vietnamese language do not combine with suffixes, prefixes, etc. In addition, Vietnamese language is characterized by the absence of inflection, it means word forms never change. Therefore, grammatical relations in sentences are expressed mainly by order of words and functional words (Vuong, 1994).

Vietnamese is an **Austroasiatic language**. Vietnamese people use the Latin alphabet. There are 29 letters in the modern Vietnamese alphabet. The main difference in

comparison with Latin letters is the addition of diacritics to vowels at the top and bottom of the letter (for example: a, á, à, ạ...).

Vietnamese is compared to the melodies in music. It has 6 tones, and 5 of them have their own symbols.

In the characteristics of morphology and syntax, nouns in Vietnamese language greatly differ from nouns in Russia. Big difference in grammatical characteristics between Russian and Vietnamese nouns makes learners feel difficult for learners when studying Russian in general, Russian nouns in particular.

Nouns in Vietnamese do not have the category of gender and do not change by numbers and cases. Nouns are divided into different groups that comply with different criteria. There are the following groups: proper (nhà lãnh tụ **HỒ Chí Minh** – leader Ho Chi Minh, thành phố **Hà Nội** – Hanoi city) and common nouns (bàn – table, cửa sổ – window), collective (tiền bạc – money, quần áo – clothes) and non-collective nouns (gương – mirror, xe đạp – bike), concrete (giáo viên – teacher, nhà – house) and non-concrete nouns [abstract (ma – ghost, hạnh phúc – happiness) and material nouns (đường – sugar, nước – water)], nouns denoting units of measurement (mét – meter, hecta – hectare), countable (năm – year, điện thoại – mobile phone) and uncountable nouns (vàng – gold, niềm tin – faith) (see the diagram below to more clearly understand).

Nouns in Vietnamese are often combined with the functional words “cái” and “con”. These words always stand before nouns in sentences. The word “con” is used for animals, people, and generally for living things. For example: con người “person”, con hổ “tiger”, con ong “bee”; and the word “cái” is used for objects, for example, cái gương “mirror”, cái vali “suitcase”, cái gối “pillow”.

Nouns in the Vietnamese language do not have the gender category. Nouns are not divided into three groups: masculine, feminine, and neuter gender as in Russian. However, when Vietnamese people talk to each other, they must pay attention to the gender of the person who is talking with them in order to properly address. In these situations, there are various ways to express gender, such as:

- use of different words for men and women, for example: ông “grandfather”, bà “grandmother”, cậu bé “boy”, cô bé “girl”, chú “uncle”, dì “aunt”, etc.;
- use the words that express gender before or after nouns.

After nouns these words, such as đàn ông “man”, đàn bà “woman”, trai “boy”, gái “girl”, nam “male”, anh “brother”, nữ “female”, chị “sister” are usually used, for example: thợ đàn ông “man-worker”, thợ đàn bà “woman-worker”,

bạn trai “boyfriend”, bạn gái “girlfriend”, nam ca sĩ “man-singer”, nữ ca sĩ “woman-singer”, anh bồi bàn “waiter”, chị bồi bàn “waitress”, etc (Figure 1).

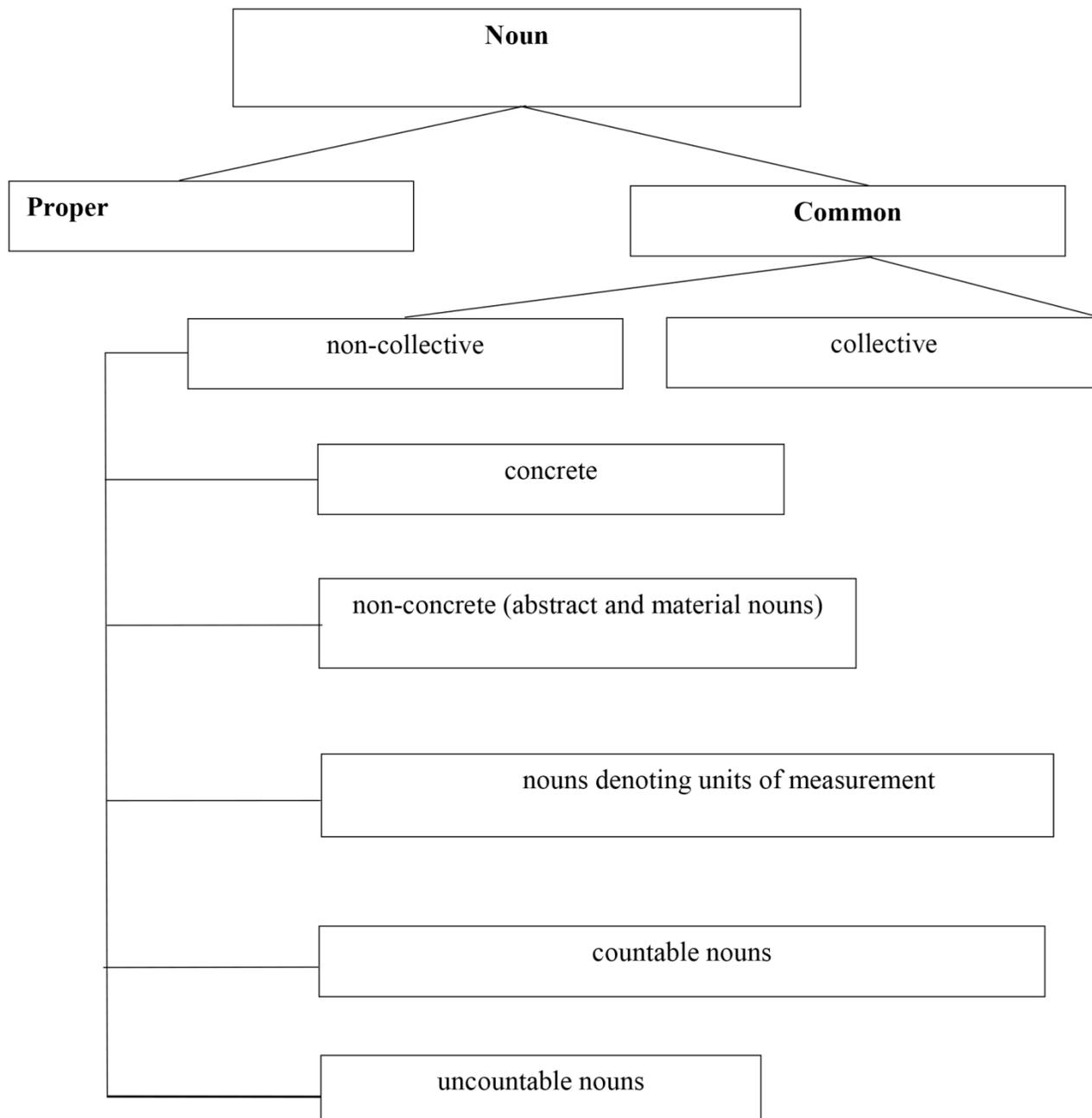


Figure 1. Noun and its subclasses in Vietnamese language.

Teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language in Vietnam today – this is a difficult and demanding job. The big difference in grammatical structure between two languages creates many difficulties for Vietnamese learners in learning Russian grammar. Teachers often face various problems while teaching Russian. They involuntarily compare the language they are studying to their mother language and try to find analogies between them.

As we said above, Vietnamese is an isolating language, while Russian is a inflected language. Vietnamese nouns do not have the category of gender and do not change by numbers and cases.

As you know, there are 6 cases in Russian, and each case expresses a lot of meanings. In addition, each case has singular and plural forms. For example: these forms of the word “*книга*-book” as: “*книги, книг, книге, книгам, книгу, книгой, книгами, книгах*” are translated into Vietnamese as “*sách*”, and this word in Vietnamese is never changed its form in sentences.

Difficulties for foreigners when they study Russian are the correct use of each case in the particular contexts. Learners who do not speak Russian as their native language, as well as Vietnamese learners in particular face many difficulties when choosing cases. They always have many questions, like: why do we use this case here? What meaning does it express?, etc. In addition, the declension rules are not easy to remember, it requires a lot of time for students to practice and memorize.

In Vietnamese language there are some functional words like “*các*”, “*những*”, “*nhều*”, “*vô số*”... which are used to express the plural of nouns, and the noun itself is never changed. For example, *bông hoa* (flower) – *những bông hoa* (flowers), *nhà văn* (writer) – *các nhà văn* (writers), *bài tập* (exercise) – *nhều bài tập* (many exercises), etc.

The functional words “*nhều*”, “*vô số*” are translated into Russian as “a lot”, and “*các*”, “*những*” – “these, such”. Although “*các*”, “*những*”-these, such” are synonyms, they cannot always replace each other. “*Các*” is usually used when we talk about a set of homogeneous objects. For example:

“*Anh ta biết các nhà giáo đó*” (he knows these teachers).

In this situation, “he” knows all the teachers in this context.

*Những* is most often used when we talk about a part of homogeneous objects. For example: in class, the teacher said, “*Hôm nay thầy sẽ điếm danh để biết những em nào nghỉ học*” I’m going to check your names to find out who in the group is absent today).

In this example, the word “*những*” stands before the noun “*em*” “person”, and it denotes only a small part of this class. If we use the word “*các*” (*các em*) instead of “*những*”, the meaning is changed. It means that the entire group is not attending the lesson. In fact, the difference between “*các*” and “*những*” is not very clear.

On the contrary, words in Russian language are always changed (*цветок* “flower”-*цветы* “flowers”, *лист* “leaf”-*листья* “leaves”). This difference is considered one of the difficulties in learning the Russian language in general, and the nouns in particular. Foreigners must keep in mind the rules of changing a noun from singular to plural form and remember a lot of exceptions. For example: *стол* “table” – *столы* “tables”, *телевизор* “television” – *телевизоры* “televisions”, *сумка* “bag” – *сумки* “bags”, however, *брат* “brother” – *братья* “brothers”, *сын* “son” – *сыновья* “sons”, *паспорт* “passport” – *паспорта* “passports”, etc.

In order to find out what difficulties Vietnamese students face when learning Russian nouns, we created surveys among Vietnamese students. 25 Vietnamese students who study at universities in Hanoi participated in these surveys. (The question we asked students: What types of nouns in Russian are most difficult for you?).

The survey shows that among lexical and grammatical categories, abstract nouns (40%) and collective nouns (20%) are the most difficult types of nouns in Russian language for Vietnamese learners. The identification of animate and inanimate nouns is also not easy for learners to achieve Russian. On the contrary, it is not too difficult for learners to classify proper and common nouns, as well as material nouns. This can be explained because there are similar grammatical classes of words in Vietnamese language.

Among grammatical categories, cases are the most difficult category for learners when they study Russia (almost all interviewees agree with this - 96%). Many learners admitted that although they have been studying Russian for a long time, they still do not know the meaning of each case very well, and they even often confuse how words are changed by case. Undoubtedly, this is due to the difference in grammatical structure between two languages. The second place of difficulty after category of cases is the gender category (20%), because Vietnamese nouns do not have this category. Category numbers causes the least difficulty among grammatical categories for students.

Besides, such teaching conditions, as: lack of teachers – native Russian speakers, lack of good materials, lack of language environment, old textbooks, unsuitable studying system at universities, schools or english centers are also major obstacles to teach and learn Russian in general,

and nouns in particular in Vietnam. Therefore, students who only have the opportunity to learn Russian in Vietnam must make more effort to achieve this language.

1. Nouns in Russian language denote things and express this meaning in the forms of gender, number and case. In a sentence, nouns often play the role of subject or complement. They also can play the role of definition, adverb and can be used as part of the predicate. The most important syntactic specificity of a noun is its ability to combine with adjectives and verbs. Nouns in Vietnamese semantically are similar to nouns in other languages. They can consist of one or more words (mostly two-syllable nouns). When dividing nouns in Vietnamese into different groups, we found some new noun groups that do not exist in Russian language, such as: non-collective, countable, non-countable nouns and nouns denoting units of measurement.
2. Russian grammar is very difficult for Vietnamese learners to study because of the inflection of the Russian language and the presence of various forms of a word in this language. With the help of these features, grammatical meanings of words and syntactic relations in sentences are clearly expressed. On the contrary, Vietnamese language is an isolating language, and it is very different from the inflectional Russian language. The difference can be clearly seen in phonetics, morphology, syntax, and grammar in general.
3. Through the results of the survey, the most difficult problems in the studying of Russian nouns were found. Among lexical and grammatical categories, abstract nouns are considered as the most difficult type, and among grammatical categories - the case category (almost all interviewees agree with this).
4. Methods of teaching Russian nouns play an important role in studying the Russian grammar. They contribute to the process of teaching and learning Russian language. In the last part of the research, we created some types of exercises for foreigners in general, especially for Vietnamese learners to study Russian nouns. Useful exercises, in our opinion, are the exercises to determine nouns belong to which group among groups of lexical and grammatical category; to devise nouns by animate-inanimate, by gender; to determine gender of borrowed nouns and proper nouns, as well as derivative nouns; to form plural nouns from the singular nouns and vice versa; to determine cases in sentences and to use the noun in the needful case. Of course, exercises for composing phrases and sentences with given nouns are indispensable.

## CONCLUSIONS

The combination of different types of exercises, the observance of basic methodological principles will help foreign

students learn how to use nouns to write and speak correctly and to avoid mistakes. By this way learners will be able to speak and write correctly and beautifully by Russian. We hope that our work will be useful to all who study Russian.

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