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CONSIDERATION OF DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE IN STUDYING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. A CASE STUDY OF STUDENTS FROM ARAB COUNTRIES

CONSIDERACIÓN DE LOS CARACTERÍSTICOS DISTINTIVOS DE LA LENGUA NATURAL EN EL ESTUDIO DEL RUSEO COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA. UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE ESTUDIANTES DE PAÍSES ÁRABES

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the influence of the distinctive features of the native language in the course of the study of Russian as a foreign language by students from Arab countries. The interference, that is, the transfer of language units of all language levels (phonetics, vocabulary, morphology, syntax) of the native language to the target language, can be called a specific feature. Particular attention is paid to the difficulties the students face due to the lack of linguistic phenomena or mismatch between them (for example, the lack of certain sounds, mismatch of the lexical meaning of homonymic words and different sentence construction). In order to achieve the effectiveness of the educational process, it is necessary to study some methods and means that facilitate the mastering of non-native linguistic phenomena. The authors of the article come to the following conclusions: teachers should

have certain linguistic knowledge of the native language of students; in the lessons, it is preferable to pay particular attention to the phenomena that are absent in the native language; in the course of education, it is necessary to carry out systematic work to eliminate difficulties at all language levels.

Keywords:

Interference, native language, russian as a foreign language, partial match of distinctive linguistic features.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la influencia de las características distintivas de la lengua materna en el estudio del ruso como lengua extranjera por parte de estudiantes de países árabes. La interferencia, es decir, la transferencia de unidades lingüísticas de todos los niveles (fonética,

vocabulario, morfología, sintaxis) de la lengua materna a la lengua de destino, puede denominarse característica específica. Se presta especial atención a las dificultades que enfrentan los estudiantes debido a la falta de fenómenos lingüísticos o la falta de coincidencia entre ellos (por ejemplo, la falta de ciertos sonidos, la falta de coincidencia del significado léxico de palabras homónimas y la diferente construcción de oraciones). Para lograr la efectividad del proceso educativo, es necesario estudiar algunos métodos y medios que faciliten el dominio de los fenómenos lingüísticos no nativos. Los autores del artículo llegan a las siguientes conclusiones: los profesores deben tener cierto conocimiento lingüístico de la lengua materna de los estudiantes; en las lecciones es preferible prestar especial atención a los fenómenos que están ausentes en la lengua materna; En el curso de la educación, es necesario realizar un trabajo sistemático para eliminar las dificultades en todos los niveles del lenguaje.

Palabras clave:

Interferencia, lengua materna, ruso como lengua extranjera, coincidencia parcial de rasgos lingüísticos distintivos.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher is an essential part in the context of teaching Russian as a foreign language because, in the process of studying the social and cultural areas, it is the teacher who is able to help in many situations, to explain words and expressions and to interpret speech events (Raikov, 1947; Solovkov, 2000; Ponomareva, 2006; Goncharenko, 2011; Otkrov et al., 2023; Popov & Semenchukova, 2023; Semenkova, 2023).

During the determination of the communicative needs of the students, it is possible to point out the difficulties caused by the interference, mixing or non-distinction of linguistic phenomena. Studying Russian as a foreign language, the students have phonetic, lexical, morphological and syntactic problems which are often related to the distinctive features of the structure of their native language.

The issue of this paper is the identification of the causes of the impact of the native language and the interference of knowledge. The authors of the article tried to identify the main problems the students have in the course of the study of Russian as a foreign language as well as to distinguish the methods that help to eliminate the difficulties (Zuev, 1807; Ushinsky, 1948; Verzhilin & Korsunskaya, 1976; Traiak, 2002; Zvonareva & Mazurak, 2009; Wiebe, 2020).

What difficulties do the students face studying Russian as a foreign language? What differences and commonalities are there between the languages? How the consideration of the native language helps in studying a foreign

language? What methods and means to be used for effective learning?

The purpose of the study is to determine the mechanisms affecting the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the educational process of a foreign audience, in addition, to identify certain difficulties to be overcome and to describe the methods and means that can simplify the learning process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The following techniques were used during the research: general scientific methods of analysis, comparison and observation as well as some laws of related sciences (laws of psychology and logic) and achievements of related sciences (culturology); moreover, a systematic approach was applied. These methods helped to analyze the materials more deeply.

Studies of the Russian scientists that consider the influence of one language on the other one serves as an important reference point in this article. For example, some researchers think that the native language cannot always act as the source. Now, there is a very strong influence of English in the study of Russian as a foreign language, that is, the language through which the transfer of phenomena is easier to implement becomes the priority.

To assess the necessity of the consideration of linguistic knowledge, an experiment was conducted among people who study or have studied Russian as a foreign language and are from such Arab countries as Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Chad. Students aged from 17 to 26 as well as Arabs who have already graduated from university participated in the experiment.

Also, we conducted a study due to which it is possible to have an idea of how the native Arabic language influences the process of studying Russian.

42 persons were interviewed during the survey. The study involved both Arabic-speaking students that attended the preparatory course of Moscow Polytechnic University from 2019 to 2022 and continue education in Russia (12) and former students of the Military University of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation who studied from 2008 to 2014 and left Russia (17), as well as Arabs who came to Russia for work (11) and for other purposes (2).

The questionnaire included both questions of an organizational nature and questions of a linguistic nature aimed at identifying a positive or negative influence of the native language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education is the main reason for which Arab students study Russian as a foreign language. This is quite obvious since many Arab students from countries of Africa and Asia come to get higher education in Russia so everyone attends the preparatory course.

The research showed some cases where students (Figure 1), having graduated from university several years ago, returned to Russia and began to work. There are also some examples of people who studied in other countries and came to Russia only for work (a large number of doctors are observed).

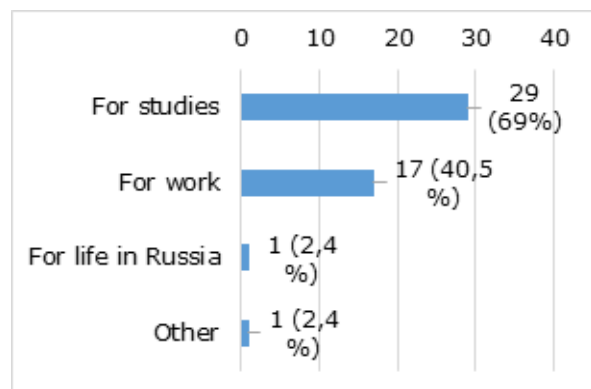


Figure 1. Reasons why to study the Russian language.

Source: self made

The respondents included students who completed their preparatory course in 2022 as well as those who did not continue their studies after completing their preparatory course in terms of the pandemic, that is why the answer (1 year) is so common. It is interesting to note that it was very rare for students not to continue their education before the pandemic. Expectedly, the answers (2-5, 6-10 years) are the most popular since bachelor's studies are 4 years and master's studies are 2 years (Figure 2).

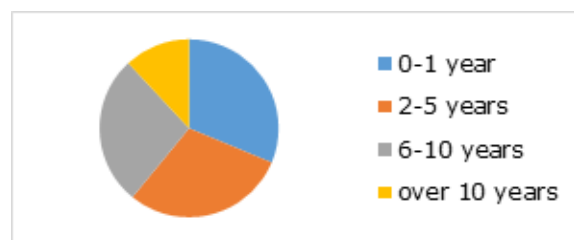


Figure 2. Number of years of studying the Russian language.

Source: self made

As the results showed, the number of Arabs living in Russia and having left for their home country is almost the same (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Current residence in Russia

Source: self made

During the pandemic, due to certain circumstances, many students had to shift to distance learning, which, as time has shown, has not replaced live communication with teachers, that is why the survey showed that most respondents choose traditional forms of education, considering distance lessons only an additional but not the main form (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Best way to study Russian.

Source: self made

The question of the time necessary for fluency in the language has always been controversial in the methods of teaching foreign languages. As the survey showed, students need enough time to master Russian. One year is not enough for students to communicate freely, that is why higher education institutions must organize thoroughly the system of education of foreigners in the main courses (Figure 5).

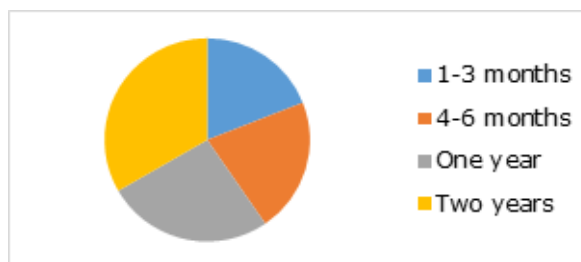


Figure 5. Time to speak the language fluently.

Source: self made

Students, coming to Russia for studies, must adapt in the new country, so the role of Russian as a foreign language becomes particularly important. In this situation, the language is studied not for fun but for the possibility of easily adapting to the new conditions. However, students

who obtain a diploma and leave Russia often cease to use Russian and forget it over time (Figure 6).

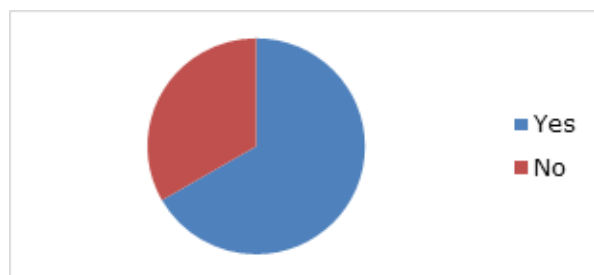


Figure 6. Use of the Russian language after its study.

Source: self made

At the end of the survey, the respondents were asked to assess their level of Russian language proficiency. As the statistics showed, the majority assess their level as average.

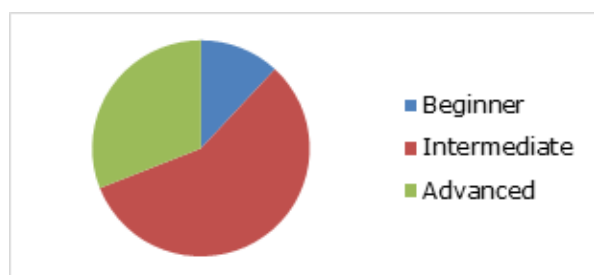


Figure 7. Self-assessment of the level of Russian language proficiency.

Source: self made

Modern methodologists try to place emphasis on speaking. As the survey showed, the students also want to learn to communicate first, although they understand the importance of learning grammar (Figure 8).

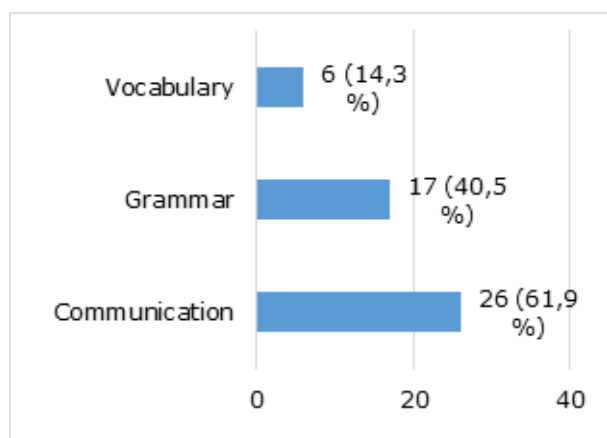


Figure 8. Elements to take into account when learning the Russian language.

Source: self made

According to the statistics, morphology is the most difficult section of Russian. Indeed, as practice shows, Arab students have difficulty in learning the prepositional case system of Russian as well as the distinctive features of the verbal aspects (Figure 9).

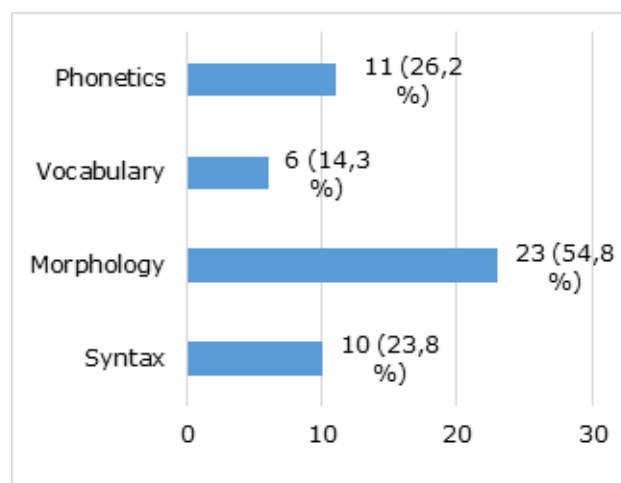


Figure 9. Content of the most difficult language to learn.

Source: self made

Arabic phonetics has many commonalities with Russian phonetics, however, some sounds are absent, that is why sounds that are absent in the native language cause the most difficulty in the study of the sound system. Traditionally, [ɬ] is one of the most difficult sounds for Arab students (Figure 10).

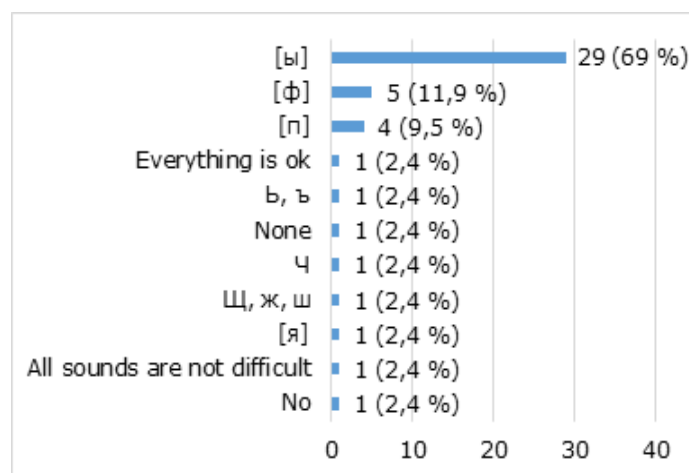


Figure 10. Sounds in the most difficult Russian language to learn. Choose the correct answer.

Source: self made

Synonymous words cause the most difficulty in the study of the vocabulary. As the survey showed, most respondents were able to choose the correct answer due to the knowledge interference. In Arabic, like in Russian, the

verb “**смотреть**” can be used both with and without prepositions (Figure 11).

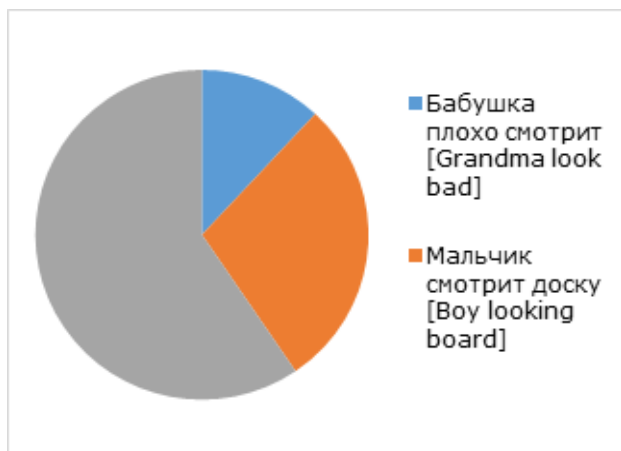


Figure 11. Choice of correct answers.

Source: self made

This diagram proves the negative influence of the native language. Many respondents were not able to choose the correct gender since in Arabic, this word is feminine and the neuter gender does not exist (Figure 12).

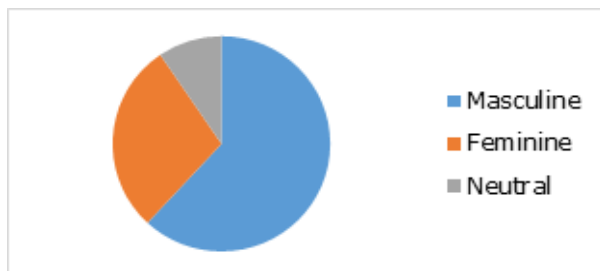


Figure 12. Determine the gender of the noun **корабль** [ship].

Source: self made

Nouns used only in the plural form presented some difficulty to Arab students. Despite the formal indicator of the plural – the ending **-и**, the students attributed the word “**очки**” to the singular by analogy with their native language (Figure 13).

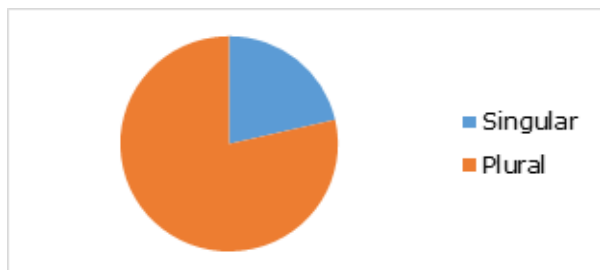


Figure 13. Determine the gender of the word **очки** [glasses].

Source: self made

This example proves that interference negatively affects the study of the prepositional case system. It is easier for the students to learn case endings that are absent in the language (almost no one chose the accusative case form) than to overcome a partial match (a preposition is used in this structure in Arabic) (Figure 14).

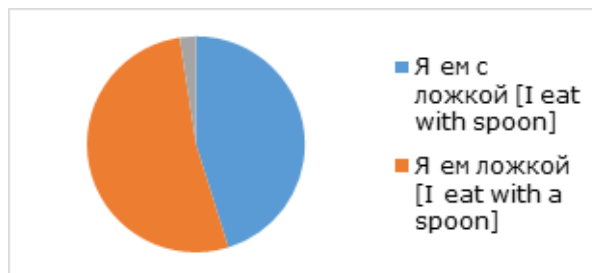


Figure 14. Choice of correct answers.

Source: self made

The survey showed that the difficulties occur during the determination of the aspect since this category is absent in Arabic (Figure 15).

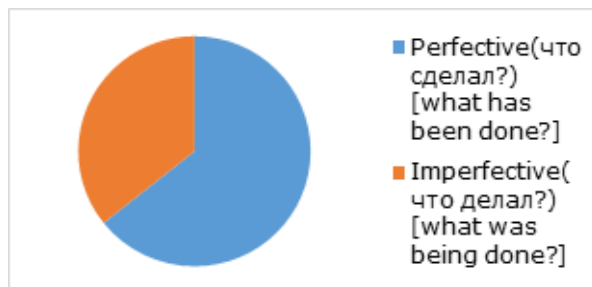


Figure 15. Determine the verb aspect “**Я купил газету**” [I bought a newspaper].

Source: self made

The consideration of the linguistic knowledge of the native language of the students helps to optimize the process. In addition, it is also preferable to have some ideological and cultural country-specific information to understand the significant aspects of the life of the students (Ter-Minasova, 2000). In the lessons of Russian as a foreign language, particular attention should be paid to those distinctive features of the language that are absent in the native language or partly match the foreign language. Consequently, the educational process requires systematic work with language difficulties to eliminate mistakes (Gadzaova et al., 2023).

In the modern world, the development of international relations serves as a criterion for the effectiveness of higher education institutions, that is why attracting international students to higher education institutions is an important task characterizing the quality of the higher education institutions and promoting the further development (Loseva et al., 2023). Students from countries of Africa and Asia

have recently prevailed in Russian higher education institutions. The object of our study is the consideration of the distinctive features of the native language in the context of Arabic-speaking students from such countries as Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Chad.

Arabic-speaking students often come to Russia with no knowledge of the Russian language, culture of Russia and, unfortunately, sometimes not even possess the language of their specialty, that is why the foreign language serves as a kind of tool to perform the educational, pedagogical and cultural function. In the span of one year, future experts have not only to master Russian but also to gain the necessary knowledge for their further education in the chosen profession (Shafazhinskaya et al., 2023). It is the teachers who are the central point in the course of education. They are to organize the education, introduce the language of science, spark the interest in culture and achieve progress together with the students. Of course, there are various ways to teach Russian as a foreign language. These days, traditional teaching sometimes gives way to interactive teaching, which makes it possible to organize lessons in the form of games, discussions and quests. Distance learning became common along with intramural studies as a result of the pandemic (Babintseva et al., 2023). Today, sometimes it is difficult to choose one universal method among many but it is necessary to remember that the right organization of the learning process is key to success. We understand that the university must not only give certain knowledge in the specialty area but also ensure the all-round development of the individual, it is especially relevant for international students.

An important aspect of teaching Russian as a foreign language is the teacher's consideration of linguistic knowledge in the course of the study of the foreign language. Within the framework of the research, it is fair to point out the difficulties that are due to the interference of linguistic phenomena or their non-distinction. Every teacher has noted that when learning a foreign language, students have problems at the phonetic, morphemic, lexical, morphological and syntactic levels. These difficulties are associated with an overlap between the foreign and native languages, that is why within the methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language this feature is called "principle of considering the native language", that is, the consideration of students' knowledge of the native language. Modern linguists confirm this fact because the better individuals speak the native language, the easier it is for them to learn a foreign language.

The native language can have both a positive and a negative influence. On the one hand, sometimes it is enough to transfer a linguistic phenomenon of the native language

to the target language, but on the other hand, interference can cause mistakes. Consequently, the consideration of the distinctive features of the native language must be in the selection of the educational materials because linguistic phenomena in the native and foreign languages can match fully or partly or can differ from each other. Accordingly, teachers must organize the lessons in the way which ensures that the most difficult phenomena of Russian are practiced more thoroughly than the matching phenomena. Oddly enough, partly matching phenomena can cause the most difficulty because phenomena of the foreign language would be built according to the model of the native language or an intermediate language.

It can be noted that the issue of the consideration of philological knowledge of the language is contradictory. It is not always possible for teachers to have an idea of all the languages spoken by the students in the study groups, which are often formed in terms of a heterogeneous contingent. Certainly, educators do not have to and are not able to speak all native languages of the students, however, to achieve the desired results, they need not only to be aware of the phonetic, lexical and grammatical structure of the students' language but also to consider them in the course of teaching. Consequently, philological knowledge of the language positively affects the quality of the educational process: the effectiveness of learning, the amount of time spent, the degree of progress in language phenomena and the sustainability of the acquired knowledge can depend on the correctness of the use of the distinctive features of the language.

The implementation of this principle requires paying attention to a partial or full match or the lack of linguistic phenomena at the phonetic, lexical, morphological and syntactic levels. Of course, if there are common forms or universals in the native language and the foreign language, students do not need to make efforts to master them because they have already learned it through the native language. Therefore, it is necessary only to carry out the process of transferring skills from the native language to the foreign language. In the absence of a linguistic phenomenon, teachers need to be able to properly form knowledge about the new phenomenon, to pay particular attention to it, for which a certain system of tasks and exercises should be developed to overcome the difficulties. As a result, there must be an understanding of the distinctive structural features of language due to the identification of significant grammatical attributes or lexical meaning. A special problem is partly matching linguistic phenomena, so we can observe a negative influence of the native language in this case.

The purpose of our study is to determine the influence of the distinctive features of the native language (Arabic in this case) on the foreign language (Russian in our case).

Philological knowledge of the native (Arabic) language in studying Russian as a foreign language must be considered at all levels of the language along with the use of theoretical and practical means.

Undoubtedly, the phonetics of Russian must be studied with consideration of the native Arabic language. During the lessons, it is necessary to compare the sounds of the Russian and Arabic alphabets and to identify the sounds that are absent in Arabic or partly match as well as to pay attention to the problems resulting from the transfer from the native language to Russian (Kovalev & Sharbatov, 2008; Kuzmin, 2020). For example, there is no sound [ы] in Arabic, that is why this sound must be thoroughly practiced with the students. For this purpose, it is necessary to clearly pronounce the sound as well as to describe the features of the speech apparatus making the sound because the students must have a clear idea of the position of the speech organs in the process of speaking. Moreover, attention should be paid to the features of linking the sound [ы] with consonants into the syllables [ты], [мы], that is, first the students should learn to pronounce the sound alone and then in syllables and words. If necessary, the teacher can also fall back on the students: identify a student who pronounces the sound well and ask him or her to explain in Arabic the peculiarities of the pronunciation of the sound. Sometimes the teacher can propose the words in which a similar sound can be heard. Theoretically, there is no sound [ы] but in some words a similar sound is pronounced (for example, friend – قِيْدَص [сады:к]).

Moreover, Arabic vowels are long and short, in addition, short sounds do not have a separate phoneme, they are denoted with the use of special diacritics over the consonants which are called vowel marks.

Non-distinction of sounds is another difficulty. For example, Arabic-speaking students cannot distinguish between the sounds [б] and [п] because there is only one sound [ب] (close to the Russian sound [б]) in their native language. In the lessons, it is necessary to determine the difference in the pronunciation of the sounds as well as to pay attention to the words in which these sounds can perform a distinctive function: for example, борт – порт [bort – port], пыл – был [pyl – byl], былль – пыль [byl' – pyl']).

The accentology of Russian requires particular attention. It is difficult to explain to many students the features of Russian stress since in Arabic it is fixed: if a syllable is long, the stress falls on the penultimate syllable, if it is short, on the third syllable from the end of the word.

The students cannot determine the position of stress in Russian words by themselves because it is free and varies, that is, it can fall on any syllable: on the first – Яблоко [apple], on the second – морковь [carrot], on the third – документ [document], and so forth. Moreover, Russian stress is mobile since it can change its position within one word but in different word forms (хочу – хочешь) [I want – you want]. The position of stress in Russian can change the meaning of homographs (замок – замоК) [castle – lock]. Consequently, the teachers must consider the difficulty of Russian stress for Arab students and pay attention to accentology at the initial stage. It is no coincidence that the authors put stresses in elementary level textbooks for foreigners, for example, The Way to Russia.

Let us examine the consideration of philological knowledge at the morphemic level. The extensive system of word formation is a distinctive feature of Russian. Many people know that suffixes in Russian have a wide range of shades of meaning: magnification, diminishment, singularity, attribute, property, profession, female persons. Comparing the languages, one can also find partial matches. For example, female nouns denoting professions in Arabic are formed in the same way as in Russian. However, in contrast to Russian, there are more feminitives in Arabic (there is a feminine derivative of the noun “engineer” – سِنْفَم).

In the vocabulary, we can distinguish such a feature as interlingual homonymy. For example, in Arabic, as well as in Russian, there are words which are pronounced in the same way but have different meanings: بنت “bint” (girl instead of bandage), فاتة “fata” (girl instead of veil), أم “um” (mother instead of mind). Moreover, polysemantic words cause certain difficulties. In the age of computer technology, many students no longer use printed dictionaries, which describe in detail all meanings of polysemantic words. It is easier for students to find word translation through Yandex Translate or Google Translate. Unfortunately, these services often give only one meaning, that is why students do not obtain all shades of word meanings. For example, they do not take into account multiple meanings of the word “старый” [old], as a result of which the selection of synonyms and antonyms (новый – старый; молодой – старый) [new – old; young – old] becomes problematic. It should also be noted that the word used in a phrase or a sentence becomes more precise and clearer.

Particular attention should be paid to the difficulties arising in learning morphology. The prepositional case system is the main problem in the course of studying Russian as a foreign language. In Arabic, there is a system of changing nouns according to three cases (nominative, genitive, and accusative). So we can observe a partial match of the phenomena. Consequently, the task of the teacher

is to explain identical and different phenomena to the students: for example, the possessive genitive case is the same in Russian and Arabic (**комната студента** [student's room] – **بِإِطْلَا قَفْرُغ**) but the instrumental case without a preposition in Russian corresponds with the instrumental genitive case to a preposition in Arabic (**ем ложкой** [eat with a spoon] – **فَقَّ غَلْمِ ابْ لُكَا**, literally “**ем с ложки**” [eat from a spoon]).

Moreover, the gender category does not match. The gender category is binary in Arabic: masculine and feminine. Consequently, knowing the gender system of Arabic, the teacher will be able to avoid further mistakes. In attributing nouns to the neuter gender, formal signs, especially clear knowledge of endings, will be of a great importance. Accordingly, in an Arab audience, particular attention must be paid to the study of the neuter gender and its practice. Moreover, it is necessary to work thoroughly on the determination of the gender of the nouns ending in a soft sign: **корабль, день, осень**. The nouns that do not have the same gender in Russian and Arabic are problematic as well: for example, the noun “**книга**” (**كِتَابُكَ**) is masculine in Arabic and feminine in Russian.

We can point out the difference in the category of number. Arabic has three types of numbers: singular, plural and dual. In modern Russian, there is no longer the dual number denoting paired items. Determining number, students must mainly be guided by the one-many paradigm as well as have an idea of nouns that are used only in singular (**молоко**) or plural (**сутки**) forms. Words not matching in number must be thoroughly practiced: for example, the words “**очки**” [glasses] (**أَقْرَاطُنْ**), “**ножницы**” [scissors] (**صَقْم**) are singular in Arabic and plural in Russian.

The consideration of philological knowledge helps in studying such parts of speech as verbs. Verbs change tenses both in Arabic and in Russian. However, in contrast to Russian, Arabic verbs do not have a clear system of aspects. Consequently, the main problem of an Arab audience in studying verbs is the explanation and understanding of the Russian aspect system as well as further progress in its use. The students need, on the one hand, to learn the features of the formation of aspect pairs in different ways: prefixal (**читать – прочитать**) [read – read], suffixal (**решать – решить**) [decide – decided], prefixal-suffixal (**покупать – купить**) [buy – bought] or stem suppletion (**брать – взять**) [take – took], on the other hand, to understand the meaning of imperfective and perfective aspects (**Каждый день покупаю газету, но вчера купил журнал**) [I buy a newspaper every day, but yesterday I bought a magazine].

One of the most difficult topics is undoubtedly verbs of motion: unidirectional and multidirectional (**идти – ходить**) [go – walk], as well as verbs of motion with prefixes (**пойти, обойти, прийти**, etc.) [to go, to go around, to come]. Visual materials are just necessary in the study of this topic. Moreover, it is usually interesting for the students to schematically explain the features of using these verbs.

It is worth pointing out the difference between the languages in the root form of verbs. Arabic has no infinitives like Russian, and the root form is the masculine singular form in the third person and the past tense, which is specified in the dictionary.

Let us consider also the distinctive features of the syntax of Russian and Arabic. The system of concord in Russian is difficult for Arab students. The order of concord of nouns with adjectives is different: in Russian, first adjectives and then nouns, in Arabic – quite the opposite: **أَرْقَا قَفْدِيْدَجْ قَفْدِيْدَجْ** (literally “**Читаю журнал новый**” [I'm reading a new magazine]). Moreover, structures with a disagreeing attribute prevail in Arabic: for example, **بِإِطْلَا قَفْيَلْكَ** is literally “**факультет медицины**” (**медицинский факультет**) [Faculty of Medicine].

There are distinctive features also in the construction of sentences. For example, personal pronouns are barely used as subjects in Arabic (for example, **بِإِطْلَا “Пишу”** [writing] instead of “**Я пишу**” [I'm writing]).

There are also some difficulties in the translation of particular structures from the native language to Russian. Let us give an example: **أَنَا يَمْسَا** is literally “**Мое имя – Анна**” (**Меня зовут Анна**) [My name is Anna]. Consequently, studying mismatching structures, one should pay attention to the distinctive features of constructing these phrases.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we can note that the consideration of philological knowledge has an important role in the process of teaching Russian as a foreign language to students from Arab countries, that is why the emphasis on the distinctive phonetic, lexical and grammatical features of the native language of the students helps the teachers to effectively organize the time to explain the material, that is, more time should be spent for the study of phenomena absent in the language than for the topics matching the native language. This method is the key to the successful study of Russian as a foreign language.

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