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**International Scientific Conference****SYNTAGMATIC DIMENSION OF THE RUSSIAN VERB IN THE  
CONTEXT OF TEACHING**

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**Abstract**

This paper analyzes the Russian verb in syntagmatic structures for language teaching. The idea is to center teaching around the verb system; what makes such efforts relevant is the current lack of a single concept and clearly defined criteria for isolating and describing uniform information blocks when teaching Russian, whether as first or second language. The goal hereof is to combine teaching experience and psycholinguistics for connecting the conceptual framework with the formal and grammatical aspects of the language and to find ways to describe and structure vocabulary and grammar with the verb-based phrases as a foundation. For the first time, the verb rather than the conversation topic serves as their foundation to build an utterance. The verb serves not only as the grammatical anchor but also as the starting point for phrase understanding and memorizing. Research herein is mainly analytical but uses distribution and contextual analysis. Testing the developed strategy, the authors hand-picked and structured study materials, defined minimum context, made verbs lists. Two textbooks by the authors hereof are built on the approach key principles to teaching vocabulary and grammar. The innovation is the auditory perception of phrases. Logical generalizations are intertwined with the introduction techniques that utilize mnemonics. This strategy can be used to write textbooks and study aids that focus on communication first. The paper describes an algorithm for material presenting; it shows a roadmap to a broader linguistic competence for speaking freely. The article introduces the method to tailor such teaching to individual students' needs.

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*Keywords:* Russian verb, grammatical systemization, mnemonic techniques, phrase generation, language teaching



## 1. Introduction

The authors' idea of teaching a language is based on the known psycholinguistic principle that a thinking person is prone to stereotyping and understanding the systemic nature of language, even if these processes are subconscious at first. However, even the most advanced science of today has no clear enough idea of how linguistic awareness functions in human, how speech is produced, and how to teach that. Speech is an activity that is backed by the same mental and neurophysiological mechanisms regardless of the person's first language (Baayen, 2014). However, the understanding of the cognitive foundations of language has advanced substantially in recent years (Trevisan, 2019). Since cognitive processes are inseparable from emotions, the learning process needs to be comfortable and efficient. It is also imperative to bear in mind the connection between a person's "perception, cognition, and emotional judgment" (Zalevskaya, 2018).

What makes this particular research relevant is the need for a comprehensive, integrated approach to language that would utilize the interconnectedness of different language aspects and make reasonable use of cognitive processes. The idea to center teaching Russian around its verbs is not new; however, our review of research papers, textbooks, and study aids shows there is so far no uniform concept of how to teach the Russian verb. Linguists' publications only cover some small groups of verbs (Ikramovna et al., 2020; Luraghi, 2020; Ovsjannikova, 2020). The popularity of Russian as a foreign language (Dengub et al., 2020; Markina, 2019) gives rise to numerous methodologies to be analyzed.

The authors hereof have reviewed the available teaching materials and made several general findings: (1) Learner's dictionaries that focus on verbs constitute complementary rather than independent material for learners, as the alphabetical arrangement of verbs does not help learn them. (2) Practicing topic-based conversations does not enable the student to speak freely, as the phrases they learn will inevitably contain verbs that differ syntactically. (3) Beginner textbooks and study aids of Russian as a foreign language have a lot of "fill-in" exercises; however, alphabetically arranged glossaries are not productive unless verbs are given in a separate list. (4) Some study aids that focus specifically on verbs are designed to improve the learner's language skills; the Cases chapter accentuates case morphology rather than verbs. (5) Advanced textbooks do touch upon communication skills, but this aspect is still underwhelming, as the material on verbal syntax is fragmentary (Anikina, 2018; Baranova et al., 2019; Bulgakova et al., 2019; Chernyshov & Chernyshova, 2020; Esmantova, 2019; Khavronina & Shirochenskaya, 2019; Kuzmina, 2018; Malyshev, 2015; Silvina, 2019).

The vocabulary and grammar learning system we presented earlier in more practice-oriented works centers around the verb and calls for a theoretical analysis as it provides a broad spectrum of opportunities to be used in various types of speech.

## 2. Problem Statement

Linguistic research into verb collocations has been long and fruitful. Language teaching accentuates verb-related syntax, as syntax is bound to communication norms, cognitive structure, and the denoted reality. A speech act must be based on understanding the speech situations that the learner finds themselves

in. But how can we create such situations? What kind of basis can we offer students to help them effectively engage in communication? These questions are yet to be answered.

### **2.1. Feeding Information When Teaching the Verb**

Grammar is not a goal but an instrument of learning, an instrument that helps conveniently structure the material. We believe that right from the start, every verb must be learned in a phrasal context i.e., along with its syntagmatic features; verbs should therefore be split into information blocks. This helps build communication around phrases, whether as a perceived or generated unit of speech. Information blocks can greatly facilitate the mnemonics. Ideally, a long list of verbs must be made and structured in such a way as to enable students to expand their vocabulary without the teacher's assistance.

### **2.2. Rote Learning vs Creativity**

In the 21st century, students dismiss rote learning as primitive; they want creativity. What complicates the situation with verbs is that the core question remains unanswered: what to learn? by which technique? how to add creativity to the process? Mnemonic techniques could be of help that are effective for learning any aspect of language, be it a school class or a university course (Fasih, 2018; Ożańska-Ponikwia, 2015). When teaching the verb, it is imperative to find the anchoring points that would help students converse naturally on day one. Natural communication can be done in a nearly subconscious manner, and the key here is the auditory perception of properly picked and classified material with the information blocks accentuated according to the developed system. One relevant method is to utilize phrases as heard and record (memorize) verbs in their syntactic environment. This is a significant advantage for teaching, as in many cases, the teacher will not need to comment on verb semantics as rendered in dictionary definitions. Especially relevant is the potential opportunity to prove erroneous the idea that learning verbs is an uncontrolled and endless process.

## **3. Research Questions**

3.1. What is the most optimal way to structure vocabulary and grammar when the Russian verb is the centerpiece of language learning?

3.2. Which vocabulary/grammar teaching methods and which mnemonic techniques should be singled out?

3.3. How to bring together different aspects of language and different types of speech?

3.4. What are the roles of textbooks, teachers, and self-studies?

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

This paper analyzes the Russian verb from the grammatical perspective as the centerpiece of a non-verbless sentence, the unit that the phrase builds upon. The goal was to pick and systematize the vocabulary and grammar material focused on the verb and to present an algorithm for learning such material with the phrase serving as the foundational unit.

## 5. Research Methods

The research herein is mainly analytical but also uses distribution and contextual analysis.

## 6. Findings

The paper analyzes Russian verbs from the grammatical perspective in the context of teaching. The authors hereof propose a systematic approach that has proven effective over the recent years of teaching, an approach that we believe to be a promising foundation for further developments related to language teaching. The paper therefore refers to exercises in beginner and advanced textbooks (Laskareva, 2018, 2019). For teaching purposes, we describe and organize grammar and vocabulary in such a way as to facilitate the understanding, processing, memorization, and reproduction of information.

### 6.1. List of Verbs

The authors hereof compiled a list of verbs to support the learning process. For beginner courses of Russian as a foreign language, we made a minimum list of 64 units (Laskareva, 2019). The list already splits verbs into logical blocks: *читать, писать, говорить, смотреть; смотреть, слушать; есть, пить, спать; давать, брать, открывать, закрывать* (read, write, speak, watch; watch, listen; eat, drink, sleep; give, take, open, close), etc. The textbook presents all verbs in phrases rather than standalone units, and each time it presents a verb, such presentation is bound to its syntagmatic features: first the student listens to a phrase, then performs imitation exercises where they utter the phrase, then they reproduce it and make their own phrases using this verb. For advanced students, the vocabulary is structured and described grammatically; it consists of a minimum of 500 units and expands up to 2 to 3 thousand units or even more (Laskareva, 2018). It is important to teach students to retrieve specific verbs from memory and to associate each verb with a specific fragment of systematized vocabulary that they learned earlier. The innovation here is that each section ends up with a structured list of verbs that helps students independently decide which verbs they want to learn—and monitor their progress in the process. The teacher's role is to help students make sure that their grammar and stylistics are correct.

### 6.2. Grammatical Systemization

We believe that learning something new to reproduce it later is an individual yet predictable process. Presenting each verb in its syntagmatic context helps introduce a large body of vocabulary. Cases could be the starting point for syntactic systemization and expansion of the verb list (Laskareva, 2018). The method itself is not new; novelty here lies in the primary focus on how the verb functions in a phrase. We have proven that Cases are indeed a promising topic, since conscious perception and modeling of phrases with the help of grammar pertaining to the most frequent verbs is what enables the student to think in the target language; in fact, this approach provides ready-to-go microtopics for conversations. The phrase below highlights the difference between semantically similar Russian verbs that utilize the same syntax: *Ты управляешь страной. - Ты командуешь армией. - Ты руководишь проектом.* (You run a country; You command an army; You manage a project). The potential advantage of the proposed system is that students

can independently decide how far to expand their active vocabulary depending on their goals and desired learning outcomes. One month is enough to learn a minimum list of grammatically systematized verbs (Laskareva, 2019) and start speaking. Automation of skills unavoidably involves timekeeping; another innovation of this approach is that it also records the number of phrases and the time it takes to make an utterance.

### 6.3. Mnemonic Techniques

Verbs can be memorized effectively if they are arranged on a logical basis: *давать* — *брать*, *вспомнить* — *забыть*; *отправлять* — *посылать*, *рекомендовать* — *советовать* (give and take, remember and forget, send and dispatch, recommend and advise), etc. Another promising solution is to use melodic consonance, e.g., in the conjugation paradigm [*daju* – *dajosh*; *beru* – *ber'osh*], in aspectual pairs [*davat'* - *dat'*; *vstavat'* - *vstat'*], [*pokazyvat'* - *pokazat'*; *rasskazyvat'* - *rasskazat'*], etc. When the student listens to a phrase and then repeats it, their articulation machinery activates, and so does the short-term memory. Minimal phrases should first be modeled by the teacher or read out aloud from the textbook; alternatively, students can listen to a partial recording. Regardless of the method, only minimum context should be provided. The novelty hereof lies in the fact that minimal verb-based phrases are presented as the material to be learned rather than merely as examples; this makes the auditory perception more illustrative. The context shown is enough to apprehend many systemic phenomena; importantly, such perception is unique in each student's case. Thus, students begin to perceive and memorize the language as its syntactic system: *соответствовать* and its antonym *противоречить* (to be consistent with/contrary to smth.; both Russian verbs take the dative case); *влияет* and its synonym *действует* (affects/influences smth., both take the preposition *на* followed by the accusative case), etc. The key point here is that starting from Lesson 1, students begin to model their phrases on a given example, whilst the teacher checks if the use is appropriate. This effectively stimulates students to speak and helps get used to controlling the process of speaking.

## 7. Conclusion

It is important to teach students to understand phrases and produce their own; with this in mind, the structure and approach of this research were dictated by the idea of centering teaching Russian around its verbs. The review of papers and textbooks has shown there is still no uniform concept of what should be the unifying, the most significant aspect of language from the teaching standpoint. We believe that the verb should be such linchpin, as it enables students to start speaking sooner and better than communication-focused textbooks. In essence, what we believe to be the key is to minimize the explanation of grammar machinery in teaching. It is the understanding of phrases that provides a psycholinguistic foundation for implicit understanding of Russian grammar, which intensifies unconscious cognition. The authors hereof have described and structured lexical and grammatical material with a focus on verb phrases. The core ideas and examples presented herein are original and published for the first time.

The novelty hereof lies in the fact that minimal verb-based phrases are presented as the material to be learned rather than merely as examples. If recordings are not available, students can read phrases from

the textbook aloud to provide listening experience; this makes the auditory perception more illustrative. Texts made under this approach show how the verb functions within a sentence; the authors also compiled lists of verbs and their arguments. Listening and pronunciation lay the foundations, upon which the student will master how to produce correct phrases quickly and painlessly. By modeling phrases with the help of grammar pertaining to the most frequent verbs, students can quickly learn to think on various topics in their target language, which in turn helps them start speaking freely sooner.

The authors' experience shows that the mechanism behind phrase production is controllable: phrase modeling coupled with timekeeping is an effective approach. This paper is the first to show that vocabulary and grammar can indeed be delivered with an option for later expansion, i.e., in such a way that allows students to independently decide what level they already have and when to level up. Information presented in logical blocks is easy to memorize, which motivates students to continue learning. This strategy has been proven effective by the authors' teaching practices; it is used in two of their textbooks and can be used in further language teaching research with a focus on individual, tailor-made teaching.

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