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The Russian Language in Modern Scientific and Educational Environment
MEDIA RESOURCES IN STUDYING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE BY CHINESE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The article deals with systemizing open resources that can be used by Chinese students when studying Russian as a foreign language. Scientific papers usually dwell on unique sources that are available to students of Russian universities only in terms of a particular faculty. However, nowadays a sufficient number of Internet platforms have already emerged, which can be used by both students and teachers when learning Russian as a foreign language. Their structuring and description within the framework of the scientific research is very important at the moment, as it will provide a unique empirical basis for studying Russian as a foreign language by Chinese students. The author has explored the resources created and functioning in Russia and China and included various types of platforms in the research: multifunctional educational platforms, open websites of online foreign language schools, virtual dictionaries, online translators, online libraries, information and reference systems (synthesis of a library, a dictionary, and a news resource). The article deals with the selection criteria of these resources, including the authorship of the site, the frequency of updates, the speed of loading information, ease of navigation, the possibility of interactive communication, the quantity and quality of information and the uniqueness of information. The author postulates the unsystematic nature of the existing structure and the need to devise a methodological guide for students and teachers who deal with Russian as a foreign language.

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Keywords: Educational information and communication technologies, foreign language, information technologies, online resources, Russian as a foreign language



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1. Introduction

According to official sources the number of Chinese students in Russian universities is increasing. The portal of «The Russian Newspaper» published, which reports: «Chinese students are accepted to 305 universities in 85 cities, primarily in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as in the Far East and Siberia. Most of the students from China nowadays study at Lomonosov Moscow State University, SPbPU, SPbSU, Herzen State Pedagogical University and RUDN» (Kuznetsova, 2019). At the same time, there is an increase in the number of students. They enter different universities choosing various majors, but each of them first undergoes language training, which means, they learn Russian as a foreign language.

Nowadays, modern computer technologies are used more frequently in the educational process to facilitate it, to add gamification and interactive elements. Melnikova (2004) notes that due to cultural differences, it is much easier for a student from China to employ resources as an asset to independent work: «working with a computer, students pause grammar explanation and revise some rules more often than in the classroom with a teacher. This is caused by the insufficient level of students` communicative competence at this stage of training. Students find it difficult to formulate their question in Russian without knowing grammatical terms» (Melnikova, 2004, p. 82). Russian teachers for their part strive to use various interactive online resources in the learning process.

Certain universities and departments devise own resources, for example, Baranova (2012) describes a multimedia complex «The Russian Verb», Vyazovskaya et al. (2017) explore a smart textbook «Education in Russian». The presented resources are not for general use, as they are introduced by specific universities and departments.

Meanwhile, the increasing number of foreign students indicates the growing need for a selection of high-quality open Internet resources for learning the Russian language. It should be noted that they should be legitimate from the standpoint of the academic community. That is, both students and teachers should not doubt the possibility of using them both for classroom and individual work.

After a thorough study of the resources in various search engines based on queries related to learning Russian as a foreign language, a large number of different platforms was discovered. At the same time, they exist both in the Russian section of the Internet and in the Chinese one. Systemizing and disseminating the obtained data will undoubtedly simplify the educational process for students and teachers.

2. Problem Statement

The researcher sets a number of objectives, including:

- Searching for existing educational Internet resources and information about them in the academic literature.
- Identifying the features and properties of educational Internet resources.
- Organizing educational Internet resources according to general features.
- Devising a minimum of educational Internet resources recommended for wide distribution among teachers of Russian as a foreign language and students.

3. Research Questions

The research presupposes answers to the following questions: What open educational resources exist on the Internet today? What criteria should be put forward to evaluate educational portals in order to select only high-quality resources? What languages are employed in these sources of information? How can they be systematized? At what stages of training is it possible to make use of educational Internet platforms when learning Russian as a foreign language? What information is contained in the explored sources (Is it reliable/ convenient/ up-to-date)? Is it possible to make a list of these resources to be recommended for teachers and students?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to systematize the existing online resources for teaching Russian as a foreign language, which can be used in the learning process with reference to certain selection criteria.

5. Research Methods

A significant place among the methods of scientific work is occupied by information monitoring and its systematization. The description method made it possible to form a general idea of each identified resource, to understand their similarities and differences, and functional features. The criterion approach enabled the author of the article to identify individual characteristics of the phenomenon under study, both qualitative (qualitative analysis) and quantitative (system analysis). A multi-faceted approach to the subject is based on structuring and describing a disparate flow of information as vitally important in the contemporary society, especially when it comes to teaching Chinese students, since it is especially necessary for them to independently revise the material, use additional sources of information.

6. Findings

It should be noted that that information and educational resources themselves do not accomplish the learning process, no matter how clearly they are structured and no matter how vast the information base is. According to the felicitous remark of Zhdanova et al. (2012): «in the race for improving IT in the educational process, we should not forget about the human factor and the dominant role of the communicative method in teaching and use, primarily, visual contact and the gesture-mimic complex in a real communicative act» (Zhdanova et al., 2012, p. 8). The importance of teacher training in the new educational environment was discussed by Antokhina et al. (2020). At the same time, it is important to take into account the psychological characteristics of students mastering a foreign language. According to Sorokoumova et al. (2021), only a living person is capable of a complete analysis of the educational situation. Thus, researchers assume an exclusively auxiliary role of technology, the incompleteness of functioning in the system of teaching Russian as a foreign language.

6.1. Criteria for Evaluating Information and Educational Resources

Inspired by the opinions of other researchers, Zhdanova et al. (2012) proposed their own methodology for determining the criteria for evaluating Internet resources in the field of foreign language teaching. They fully meet the needs of the presented study and do not require the development of their own criteria. So, applying the results of the researchers to the subject under study, it is possible to obtain the following set of parameters:

1. Authorship of the site. In each case, the page address and the information provided can be used to determine whether it belongs to an individual or a legal entity, a professional or an amateur in this field. The article will only present those sites whose authorship can be established, and an important parameter will be employment and growth in the professional field of teaching Russian as a foreign language. In other words, all the sites presented belong to an organization or an individual engaged in educational linguistic activities. In this case, it is possible to state meeting the criterion.

2. Update frequency that is the frequency of introducing new information and removing unreliable and inappropriate information. Within the framework the research, the number of updates in a certain time span is not relevant, but the fact of the source being transformed, if need be, will be regarded as meeting the criterion.

3. The speed of loading information is an important parameter that guarantees convenience to a user. Insufficient speed of switching between sections results in frustration during the learning process. However, the current level of telecommunications development has reached the point when an overwhelming majority of sites transmit the information flow quickly enough and the slowdown can only be caused by the technical properties of the receiving party. Moving between pages within a 10-second time range and loading exercises and interactive features over the same period will be thought as satisfactory within the criterion.

4. Ease of site navigation, including sections structuring by topic, alphabetically and through multi-level segmentation (when the user finds the necessary section of knowledge, moving from large services to more detailed ones, for example, grammar – beginner level – present tense verbs spelling and so on) is a subjective parameter, so in this case, we will explore the sites that were recognized as satisfactory and partially satisfactory.

5. The possibility of interactive communication with the author, due to which the user can ask clarifying questions, make adjustments or suggest additions to existing information, is an important parameter, as it demonstrates attention to the audience and the site's updatability. In this case, the presence of any type of communication (chatbot, email address, technical support address) will be considered as a fact of meeting the criterion.

6. The design of the site specified by the developers of the system does not meet the objectives of the presented article, since this is too subjective a parameter, and it cannot serve as a reason for refusing to receive information from this source. Similarly, the frequency of use will not be taken into account, since the number of users visiting the site directly cannot indicate the quality and quantity of the educational resource.

Thus, the sites indicated in this study have been carefully selected and meet the presented criteria.

However, satisfaction with the general criteria for evaluating educational sites is not enough to select high-quality resources. We suggest using the rating scale developed by Kudinova et al. (2018) for sampling linguistic sites. The researchers have divided about the following rating scale:

1. Criteria related to the general contact and reference information of the resource, which include the source of information (the author of the resource is a private or legal person, an expert or an amateur), as well as the target audience (who the resource is aimed at, who will benefit from using it, for example, teachers or students who are studying or already speak the language, bilinguals or polylinguals, schoolchildren or students, humanities majors or non-humanities majors). In this case, the selection was made based on the total of these parameters. For the first criterion, the official status of the resource and the focus on foreign language learners and teachers of Russian as a foreign language were important.

2. Criteria for experts in the field of linguistics, including the reliability and verifiability of information (scientific or non-scientific, reasoned or unsubstantiated, whether or not there are any references to reliable sources of information), the relevance and novelty of information (whether or not it corresponds to modern scientific ideas and theories and whether it contains new or outdated information), the objectivity of information (one point of view or a polyphony of opinions), the inclusion of information in the socio-cultural context (whether or not it contains reference to cultural and historical events, phenomena, traditions), the language aspect of information (complete or brief information, complexity or accessibility, logical construction or randomness, presence or absence of various mistakes in the texts), the method of introducing information (systematic or unsystematic, diverse or monotonous, illustrative or lack of illustrations, presence or absence of advertising on the site), a variety of information as seen through the type of materials (whether or not different types of information are used: curricula, training programs, theoretical courses, workshops, methodological recommendations, tests, cases, text information, audio- video files, interactive technologies). It is possible to acknowledge meeting this criterion if more than 50% of the specified parameters with a positive connotation (evidence, reasonableness, completeness, heterogeneity, diversity, presence of something) are identified in the course of the research.

3. Criteria for experts in the field of information technology, among which are technological (the ability to work on all platforms and browsers, the availability a mobile device version), usability, external reference mass (links that lead to this resource). In this case, it will be important to take this criterion into account as optional.

4. Criteria for experts in the field of special (defectological) education (accessibility of information for persons with disabilities and health limitations). Having a version for the visually impaired will be an advantage, but this criterion will not be fully taken into account.

5. Criteria for all experts with the focus on the availability of information (free or paid resource, whether or not registration is required, whether or not all the information is immediately opened), the attractiveness of design. It is possible to meet this criterion if at least part of the information is available on the resource for free and without registration, even if the full version must be purchased.

Thus, the linguistic criteria will allow to make a secondary selection and indicate only those Internet resources that meet them in the study.

6.2. Educational Internet Resources Existing as Part of Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language in Chinese Universities

China has an abundance of sites devoted to learning the Russian language. Most of them are open so anyone who wishes can visit them. These resources provide information for both those who are just starting to learn a new language, and for advanced learners as well. The author of the article will describe the ones that were selected according to the above mentioned criteria.

First, there is a multilingual portal «Olacio», where users can learn Spanish, French, English. A Russian language section is also presented here. Interestingly, the portal has specific information about employment and admission options when it comes to Russian universities. However, most of the training materials are to be paid for. Users have access to many sections with information of various sorts, including interactive lessons «In the Fitting Room», «The Lunch», «Social Network», «Reflexive Pronouns». All materials are supplemented with a visual series. Access mode: <https://ru.olacio.com/>.

2. The Hujiang educational portal is one of the largest electronic resources for learning Russian in China. Here is an array of information that is sufficient to prepare for passing exams. This resource was detailed by Yuehan Wang Wang (2019). It is divided into levels, that is, the materials are graded from A1 to C1. The student has access to such sections of linguistics as listening, speaking, vocabulary and its application, reading. Among the formats, it is worth mentioning text, audio and video files. An important section is country studies, where students learn about some aspects of life in Russia: culture, social phenomena, national traditions. The site also has a link to a subsidiary site, which is an online school for learning Russian. This is an existing school, where you need to attend virtual lessons and there is an opportunity to communicate with the teacher and at the end of the course a student receives a certificate. The online school operates exclusively on a commercial basis and it would be wrong to recommend it as a source of information. Access mode: <https://ru.hujiang.com/>

3. Educational portal «Tingroom» is available to everyone. It contains lot of information in a text format, often supplemented with images, audio and video materials. In fact, the site has a built-in word translation system. If the user has a problem with the translation of a particular word, just hover the cursor over it and a hint will pop up with the translation of the word and its grammatical properties. Here it is possible to find the materials corresponding to all levels of Russian language learning – from basic to advanced. It is important that many training materials contain information of national cultural peculiarities. Access mode: <http://ru.tingroom.com/>

4. Another important resource is an educational portal "Myruru". It is especially popular among those who want to get a higher education in Russia or apply for a job there. Here the user can find a variety of information, from national jokes to scientific articles in Russian, and many texts about different aspect of life in the country. In addition, the portal publishes adverts in Russian about finding a job and studying in Russia. To use this site, you need at least a beginner level of language proficiency with the desire to improve it. Philologists from Russia participate in creating training materials; they also record video tutorials, which makes them especially valuable in terms of information reliability. Access mode: <https://www.myruru.com/>

5. There is also an information and reference site «Etogether» with a translator function. The most universal function of this site is online translation of texts into Spanish, German, English, Japanese and

other languages, including Russian. It is supplied with an extensive vocabulary, but the translation is not always accurate, however, this is a problem with most interactive multilingual dictionaries. Individual words and concepts can be translated quite accurately though. Access mode: <http://www.etogether.net/russianTranslate.jhtml>

6. Online dictionary «Yicool» is a resource where you can learn the meaning of a Russian word. The advantage of the site is the translation indicating not only the meaning of the concept, but also its grammatical and stylistic properties, the possibility of using it in various contexts, including proverbs and sayings, slang and dialect meanings, declension, grammatical constructions, and example sentences. In addition, users can ask a question or add information. Access mode: <http://www.yicool.cn/>.

7. «Zhanjiang» is an online library with the advantage of free access to files. Users can select a language from more than 20 available languages and a bibliography section, such as Russian-Economics, and have access to a selection of files available for reading or downloading. In fact, it contains not only books and articles, i.e. text documents, but also audio and video files, for example, recordings of radio and TV programs in Russian. Access mode: <http://www.pdfbook.cn/>.

To resume, the study presents a selection of seven Chinese sites that can be used as multimedia platforms for learning the Russian language and reinforcing the knowledge already gained. These resources are selected by the author based on the criteria described above, that is, they are qualitative from the standpoint of the presented research. Clearly, the list is not limited only to the sites described, but they are enough for a basic list of quality resources for teachers and students. It can be shortened and expanded to meet the realities and needs of individuals.

6.3. Educational Internet Resources for the Study of Russian as a Foreign Language within the Runet

Kudinova et al. (2018) presented a serious study dealing with Russian-language educational Internet resources related to studying and teaching Russian as a foreign language. Using the database of these authors we have verified the portals described in the work, supplemented the list of the portals and performed the structuring according to the type and amount of information.

1. «Contemporary Russian Language» is an international information and educational project. This is a multifunctional portal with a modern design, where you can learn Russian as a foreign language. However, the service can be used most effectively by those with basic knowledge, since the site does not have foreign-language versions, and automatic translators built into browsers do not provide the proper level of translation and can confuse the user. We should mention the option to check the word (spelling and meaning), the news feed, blocks of individual sections of linguistics («Declination of Surnames», «Declination of Numerals», «Selection of Synonyms» and others), lengthy publications on various topics (how the military speak, borrowed words, the prose by Leskov and others), the podcast «Funny Russian» (Neskuchny Russkiy) with audio recordings on specific aspects of the Russian language, an information and reference section (authors of publications and lessons, the project geography, participants and sponsors), as well as a Question-and-Answer chat, where the user can ask a question about grammar or punctuation and get a quick detailed answer.

In general, this service is designed for students and teachers of Russian as a foreign language: in addition to educational services, there are methodological recommendations, for example, how to get a student to talk at the lessons of the Russian Language Teaching Institute, as well as invitations to webinars and meetings of the professional community. Access mode: <http://www.oshibok-net.ru/>.

2. Another important resource is an information and reference portal «Gramota.Ru». The site map includes the user's guide, dictionaries (including word check, audio dictionaries, spelling dictionaries, explanatory dictionaries, Russian Argo dictionary, and others), library (including magazines, research and monographs, contest publications), reference office, education (spelling rules, online tutor, textbooks, Olympiads, video resources), news feed, games, and humor. To use all the resources registering is obligatory. Visiting the front page, you can find special forms for checking the words and asking questions. The presented resource is suitable for teachers and those who learn a language, including students from different countries, for example, China. Access mode: <http://gramota.ru/>.

3. «Education in Russian» is a portal with the support of the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. It is worth mentioning the site has a very convenient navigation. The only thing the user needs is to specify the level of Russian language proficiency, the topic of interest and the type of resource (training courses, lectures and lessons, tests, webinars, video library) by filling in special forms. This procedure will help the user to have access to a selection that corresponds to these parameters. Thus, the site user does not waste time searching for suitable materials. The portal is very interactive, as it regularly hosts Olympiads related to various sections of linguistics, as well as online meetings dedicated to memorable dates of Russian culture and literature. For teachers of Russian as a foreign language, there is a special section on the portal, where a large number of resources are placed, and there is also an opportunity to take paid advanced training courses. Access mode: <https://pushkininstitute.ru/>.

4. Interactive educational resources on Russian as a foreign language were launched as the Russian language for foreigners supported by Pushkin State Russian Language Institute. It is essentially a library of projects, each of which has its own Internet address, for example, «Russian Language Dictionary», «Russian for Children», «Interactive Author's Lessons», «First Time in Russia: Student's Navigator», «Preparing for the Olympiad», «Education Course in Russian», «Online Training Resources for Certification Testing». In addition, there are sections for teachers where you can find sample general education programs, courses on teaching a foreign language in a three-dimensional virtual educational environment, and a book of the Olympiad participants. In general, this resource is useful because it places links to proven quality resources dedicated to narrow sections of learning Russian as a foreign language. Access mode: <http://eor.pushkininstitute.ru/>.

5. «Cyberleninka» is a scientific electronic library, where you can find scientific publications on various topics in reputable journals. The user can set up a search by topic, by journal, by keywords, by author, or by article title. The service automatically creates a list of similar works when viewing an article, and also offers a paid option of selecting literature. However, this service can be used as a recommended tool for studying Russian as a foreign language for senior students and graduates whose level of language proficiency is B1 or higher. Access mode: <https://cyberleninka.ru/>.

6. Another online service for learning Russian is «YouLang». Here you can find ready-made lessons of Russian as a foreign language, which can be used by both students and teachers. The user can

choose the level for which the lesson is intended, and the topic. The content is regularly updated. Some lessons are free of charge, but the main part must be paid for. Access mode: <https://youlang.ru/>.

7. There are also original multimedia projects where a foreign citizen is told about various regions of Russia. The major ones are represented by «Sketches of Siberia. The City of Tomsk», published on the largest resource of open educational courses Coursera (access mode: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/zarisovki-o-sibiri#>) and an independent project «Closer to Russia. Omsk» (access mode: <http://bezoshibok.ucoz.ru/>). These resources are devised for those who already have the basic knowledge of Russian.

To resume: the selection was made taking into account the compliance with the criteria, which indicates a sufficient number of high-quality educational resources for students from abroad in Runet. It should be noted that there are both large multifunctional complexes of mixed content, and local projects. They are divided according to the level of Russian language proficiency and can be used by students and teachers of Russian as a foreign language

7. Conclusion

The selection includes 14 different educational resources, and Chinese and Russian Internet sectors are represented by seven educational resources each. There are also versions of studying Russian as a foreign language in other sectors, but they are not included in the scope of this study, as they are not primarily intended for Chinese students. Also, local projects dedicated to a separate section of linguistics, such as «Russian Verbs», were not taken, since they contain a small amount of information (compared to multifunctional portals).

For convenience all the services can be divided by language proficiency levels. In this case Chinese portals should be recommended to students from China at the beginner stage of training upon arrival or before arriving in Russia. It should be noted that a cursory study of the content revealed that the exercises and texts of Chinese-language services are somewhat simpler than those of Russian-language services. Also, the former are easier to navigate, since the information presented there is in Chinese. Russian resources should be recommended to students with basic knowledge of the Russian language.

In general, the presented database appears to be complete and reliable if all the options of each Internet source described are made use of. The author of the article does not claim that this list should be considered exhaustive, since due to modern technologies, other resources may emerge, and existing ones may stop functioning. However, it should be noted that this database, possibly supplemented on the basis of a specific educational situation by a teacher, should be recommended in all universities that are engaged in pre-professional and professional training of Chinese students in Russian universities.

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