

**FORMAL AND SEMANTIC MODIFICATIONS  
OF RUSSIAN BORROWINGS AS MATERIAL  
FOR FORMING COMPLEX LINGUISTIC  
COMPETENCE**

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**Abstract.** The purpose of the study is the use of Russian borrowings in French as a material for intercultural communication skills formation. Research objectives: to find Russian borrowings in mass-media and informal Internet communication of 2016-2019; to analyze formal features and identify semantic changes in Russian borrowings in French; to develop assignments for seminars in theoretical disciplines at a language university and for classes in theory and practice of translation for non-linguistic universities, as well as for extracurricular work. Material: the Russian borrowings that function independently of the context of Russian culture. Results: The obtained data allow us to consider about 150 Russian words in French expressing the communicants' own thoughts when communicating on topics not related to Russian culture over the past four years. French words formed with Russian elements, but nonexistent in Russian have also been discovered: bérézina, cacatov, russkoff, pavlova, salade russe, le syndrome tolstoïevsky, tchernobyliser. Several dozen of them were included in the assignments: terms of science and art: constructivisme, cosmonaute, dubnium, jarovisation, liman, méné-

lévium, pavlovien, permien, podzol, polynie, printanisation, solonetz, solonchak, spoutnik, steppe, Art steppique, tchernozem, tokamak, taïga, toundra, vernalisation; names of animals: barzoï, beluga, kolinski, mammoth, morse, samoyède, zibeline; names of dishes and drinks: blinis, bortsch, kacha, koulibiac, koumys, malossol, pirojki, sterlet, vodka, zakouski; common words: niet, kalachnikov, kopeck, bistro, cocktail Molotov, astrakan, apatchik, moujik, salade russe, troïka. For example: Explain the etymological doublet concept (take zibeline and sable as an example); Consider modifications to the toy designation: “Matriochka babouchka, poupées gigognes en bois. Ensemble de Noël de 3 poupées de nidage - Matryoshka Dolls”. For the translation course, types of creative assignments on reverse translation have been developed as well as extracurricular search for interpretation of Russian borrowings: round tables, events (Translator's Day), video projects (for example, a video with a survey of young French people about the meaning of the word *bérézina*). Findings: The use of Russian borrowings as a material for mastering the linguistics theoretical concepts causes emotional acceptance and genuine interest of students due to the impression of familiarity which contributes to the formation of intercultural competence and comprehensive linguistic competence.

**Keywords:** French as foreign language, intercultural communication; semantic changes; Russian borrowings

## **Introduction**

Borrowing is the most important way of enriching modern languages. In the era of creating a single world informational space, the process of entering a word in the language system is very fast. However, the case of borrowings from the native (in our case, Russian) language which have taken root on foreign soil offers to students a keen feeling that the semantic structure is especially different from the structure of the native word. Students are sensitized to problems of the linguistic plan, including purely scientific, theoretical ones.

**The purpose of the study** is the use of borrowings from Russian in French (and for a language university – in comparison with the corresponding English words and expressions) as a material for developing intercultural communication skills as part of complex linguistic competence.

**The first research objective** was to find Russian borrowings in French mass-media and informal Internet communication of 2016-2019. We started with a list made in 2011 and we added recent units. If Russian borrowings (Russianisms) in English are more than a thousand in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED3, 2019; Egorova K., 2018) or even 2,500 (Kabakchi V.V., 2012) Studies of French operate in the same vein (Leshev O.P., 2008; Buchi E., 2010). Almost all of them carry information about the specifics of the Russian worldview and culture. But dictionaries (we rely on Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales and Larousse data) follow the new tendencies changing the content of the entries; semantic analyses reveal similarities and differences in lexicographic (Podhajecka M., 2007; Avdonina M., 2018). The idea of the present research is to find fully assimilated lexical units borrowed from Russian but used actually by native speakers without a Russian context: they are few in number, but very effectively serve to introduce the basic concepts of general linguistics and translation theory.

**The second objective** was to analyze new formal features and identify semantic changes in Russian borrowings in modern French, we mean properties not yet reflected in dictionaries.

*The final task* was to apply the obtained data to develop assignments for different area of learning French as foreign language.

### **Methods**

The basis of our study is multiparadigmatic and interdisciplinary systematic approach, contextual and situational semantic analysis, functional and componential analysis; communicative method of teaching. As usual, our team used Project methodology to develop creative assignments.

*Materials*: the Russian borrowings that function independently of the context of Russian culture.

## **Results**

The obtained data allow us to consider about 150 Russian words in French expressing the communicants' own thoughts when speaking on topics not related to Russian culture over the past four years.

Several dozen of them were included in the assignments in theoretical disciplines seminars at Moscow State Linguistic University (MSLU) and used for classes in theory and practice of translation for both MSLU and RUDN university (at the segment level), as well as for extracurricular creative work. The criterion was the significance of formal and semantic changes of borrowings for learning French as foreign language. Here are the chosen units:

terms of science and art: *constructivisme, cosmonaute, dubnium, jarovisation, liman, principe de matriochka, mendélévium, pavlovien, permien, podzol, polynie, printanisation, solonetz, solonchak, spoutnik, steppe, Art steppique, tchernozem, tokamak, taïga, toundra, vernalisation;*

names of animals: *barzoï, beluga, kolinski, mammouth, morse, samoyède, zibeline;*

names of dishes and drinks: *blinis, bortsch, kacha, koulibiac, koumys, malossol, pirojki, sterlet, vodka, zakouski;*

common words: *astrakan, appatchik, bérézina, bistro, boyard, cocktail Molotov, goulag, kalachnikov, kopeck, cosaque, moujik, niet, politburo, pogrom, pouchka, salade russe, sibérien, stakhanoviste, troïka.*

French words formed with Russian elements, but nonexistent in Russian have also been discovered and partly included in the exercises and creative assignments: *cacatov, russkoff, pavlova, salade russe, le syndrome tolstoïevsky, tchernobyliser.*

Phonetics and graphic options.

Exercise 1. Historical record of the surnames suffix –off.

Assignment: Find several Russian surnames with transcription / transliteration vibrations.

Exercise 2. Recording and transformation methods for pronunciation:

Assignment: Explain the French forms: *boyard*; *refuznik*, *sterlet* (*lat. acipenser ruthenus*). Answer: These are cases of incomplete comparison.

Exercise 3. Find cases of simplification of the graphical form, not only on forums and chats, but also in journalism:

a) *kopeak* → *kopek*, b) *politbureau* → *politburo*

Exercise 4. Set the frequency of recording options for the variants of the following words: *bortsch*; *tsar*; *tchernozem*; *hopak*; *hourra*. Compare with the options in English.

Exercise 5. Find the modern pronunciation of the word *agit-prop*.

Theoretical grammar.

Exercises are proposed for a comparative analysis of morphological categories of nouns:

Exercise 6. Prove the instability of the genus: *un / une Kalachnikov*;

Exercise 7. Observe the acquisition of the feminine by a word, the semantics of which in the Russian language does not allow this: *un moujik – une moujik*;

Exercise 8. Reveal plural forms assimilated as singular. Answer: *un pirojki, un blini*.

Lexicology.

First, students learn various methods of identifying, and then transmitting a meaning found in dictionaries.

Exercise 9. Find the meaning of the word *béluga* (*bélouga*) and compare with the form and semantics of a similar English word, set the borrowing history. Prepare illustrative photos and videos.

Answer: Transliteration led to homonymy due to the lack of sound [h] in French: 1. beluga whale (polar dolphin, ← *belukha*); 2. a fish and its caviar; 3) (in Breton) a dolphin or a large fish (shark, tuna). Association made that the large Airbus and the type of light yacht are also called *Beluga*. (Bélouga, 2019).

After this first step, students are proposed to explore the semantic transformations of Russian words in the process of borrowing by themselves:

Exercise 10. Work with historicisms.

Compare the printed and online versions of the Larousse 2019 dictionary. Find why the historicisms *zemstvo*, *starets*, *raskol* not enter in the online dictionaries (CNRTL, 2019; Larousse, 2019).

The answers showed that the exercise encourages students to think about the difficulties of lexicographer's activities.

Exercise 11. Can the term cocktail Molotov be considered Russian?

Compare the stories about the history of this expression on different Internet sites. Find common ground in at least three objects the names of which contain the word *Molotov*. Find the images.

Answer: The phrase *cocktail Molotov*, although it includes the pseudonym of V. M. Scriabin, the USSR Foreign Minister of that time, and is directly connected with him personally, was created in Finnish as a mockery after his deceitful speech on the radio as (Trotter W.R., 2002). Drinks and cake (considered a Portuguese dessert) have a common visual image of streaming down blood (after an explosion of a Molotov cocktail).

Exercise 12. Explain the etymological doublet concept (take *zibeline* and *sable* as an example).

Exercise 13. Find French words and stable expressions with Russian names and surnames: *Pavlov*, *Pavlova*, *Orlov*, *Stanislavsky*, *Kondratiev*, *Korsakov*, *Stakhanov*, *Mendeleev*, *Stroganov*, *Matryona*.

Write in English and French proper names *Пушкин*, *Хрущев*.

Exercise 14. Imagine the reasons why the following French words with Greek and Latin roots are considered Russian: *agit-prop*, *cosmonaute*, *icône*, *intelligentsia*, *nomenklatura*.

Exercise 15. Find the word *pouchka* in the on-line dictionaries (for example: ABC de la langue française, 2019). Can this word constitute a printed dictionary entry? Justify your point of view.

Answer. This word is included in the argo of rappers and is often used by them to designate firearms instead of the word *revolver*, for example: *En forme de pouchka est mon continent...* (Kery James, 2016).

Exercise 16. Check the meaning of the word *matrioshka*.

16a. Read the promotional offer and consider modifications to the toy designation as a stereotype of Russian folk style: “*Matriochka babouchka, poupées gigognes en bois. Ensemble de Noël de 3 poupées de nidage: Matryoshka Dolls*” (<https://www.etsy.com> › ... › Poupées et miniatures).

16b. Find the contexts where *matriochka* expresses a constructive principle, try to find the extension of this meaning used as a metaphor in the texts of political, philosophical, economic topics.

16c. Interpret the following sentences keeping in mind that *Matriochka* is a Russian diminutive of the female name Matrena:

- A book for children by Sophie Pavlovsky “Olga la Petite Matrioshka”;
- Toy Matriochka Natasha;
- Case Babushka Matryoshka poupée russe iPod / iPhone;
- Gift set vodka / black caviar Matriochka Anastasia;
- Black caviar Matriochka Tatiana

Exercise 17. Analyze occasional derivarion processes with humorous sense:

a) ukasiste: “*Au prochain congrès, pensez à voter pour le changement de nom du parti "socialiste" en parti "ukasiste"*” (<https://twitter.com/laudecclaude>);

b) tchernobyliser: *19 mars 2018: Voilà un diariste qui nous parle des milliers de pages du Journal ésotérique et posthume déposées, «en mains propres», à Antoine Gallimard comme s’il s’agissait d’une source de radiation qu’il fallait coffrer, mettre au secret, tchernobyliser* (Lévy B-H., 2018).

Translation Studies

Exercise 18. Try to find a good equivalent for the adjective *pavlovien*:

*La réponse est pavlovienne.*

To learn how to translate our team proposes a method of discussing in the native language. Learning begins by reading the text, then, students set forth the idea of the text and, at the same time, analyze it in their native language. The search for the translation of components has to be prepared in advance by the teacher who strives to give students the opportunity to get away from literal reproduction of an understandable image (in this case, Pavlov's dog).

A series of exercises consists of fragments of French literary works containing borrowings from Russian. We offer, for comparison and for the subsequent discussion of the quality of translation, passages showing that the word *moujik* acquired meanings that are not similar to Russian, this is, first of all, the expression "treat like a moujik", meaning "human being having no rights". It is a complete surprise for students that in French it is used both in masculine and feminine. Its second sense to be revealed is rudeness:

*Sont-ce vraiment des manières ? On dirait un moujik !* (Delanglade S., 2018), However, *moujik* may be highly aesthetic, for example: *Pulls extralarges à épaules tombantes, <...> ces pantalons de moujik <...>: son défilé qui comptait autant de silhouettes masculines que féminines faisait l'effet d'une main de fer dans un gant de velours.* (Champenois S. et al., 2019). We also tell the famous story of six Yves Saint Laurent's dogs: *Le légende raconte que, depuis le début des années 70, si le chien d'Yves Saint Laurent semble ne pas changer, c'est parce qu'à chaque fois qu'il décédait, il était remplacé dans la nuit mais gardait toujours le même nom, Moujik...* (Catz L., 2018).

For the translation course, types of creative assignments on reverse translation have been developed as well as extracurricular search for interpretation of Russian borrowings: round tables, events (Translator's Day), video projects. For example, a video with a survey of young French people about the meaning of the word *bérézina* on skype and facebook (Fig. 1).



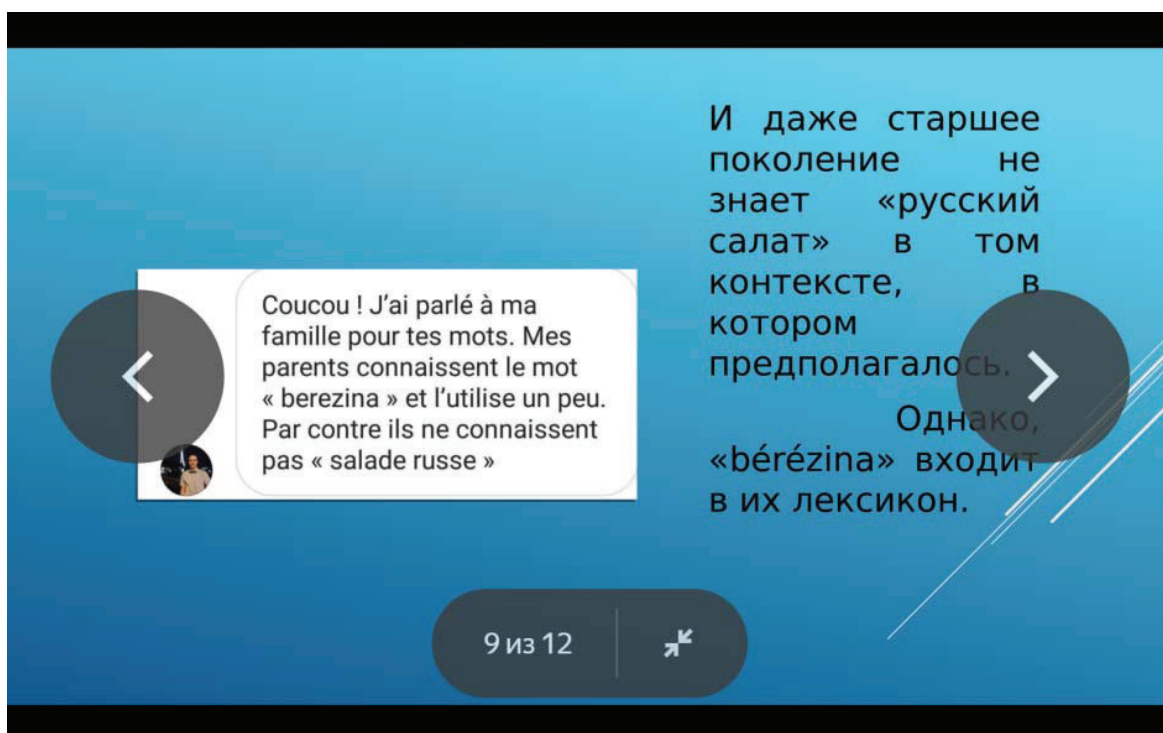


Figure 1. A slide from the Power Point presentation by second-year students on Translator's Day “A survey of young French people about the meaning and use of Russian borrowings”, RUDN University, November 2018, Project director N. I. Zhabo (Beresina MGP, 2018).

## Conclusion

The new data of 2016-2018 are first to be used for the multimedia assignments in the courses of lexicology, theoretical phonetics and theoretical grammar, theory of translation, creative tasks using ICT: students' video, Power Point presentations. Forms of extracurricular activities for students of non-language colleges are the following: round tables, festive events, reports at student conferences, video projects. Teaching comparative analysis of morphological and semantic modifications of Russian borrowings demands series of exercises designed for practical seminars in language colleges; borrowings back translation from French into Russian uses the method of preliminary discussion in the mother tongue.

It is on the example of borrowings from Russian that students effectively learn the idea of the adequacy of the choice of lan-

guage tools, the focus on achieving comprehensive equivalence of the translated text.

The use of Russian borrowings as a material for mastering the theoretical concepts of linguistics causes emotional acceptance and genuine interest of students due to the impression of familiarity, which contributes to the formation of intercultural competence and comprehensive linguistic competence.

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