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ANALYSING ERRORS IN RUSSIAN VERB ACQUISITION BY ITALIAN L1 LEARNERS: THE COMPLEXITY OF VERBS OF MOTION

This paper delves into the acquisition of Russian verbs by Italian L1 learners, highlighting the most common errors and challenges encountered in the process. Through a comparative analysis, it seeks to uncover the underlying patterns that Italian speakers commonly face while learning and using Russian verb forms. The study’s primary goal is to shed light on the unique difficulties Italian learners experience due to the disparities between Russian and Italian. By doing so, it aims to suggest effective language learning strategies tailored for Italian L1 learners, potentially enhancing instructional approaches and improving learner outcomes in second language acquisition. This research not only contributes to our understanding of language learning barriers but also proposes didactic solutions to overcome these challenges, thereby facilitating a more efficient and successful learning experience for Italian speakers studying Russian.

Keywords: Russian verbs, comparative analysis, language acquisition

1. INTRODUCTION

The journey of acquiring a second language represents a complex challenge, especially when it involves languages so dissimilar as Russian and Italian. This paper aims to examine the challenges Italian L1 learners face at the university level in mastering Russian verbs, which represent a crucial step towards achieving proficiency in this culturally rich and historically significant language. Despite its growing popularity among Italian speakers, the stark differences in grammatical structures and verb inflections between Russian and Italian pose notable difficulties. Addressing these challenges is essential for the enhancement of the learning experience and a successful language acquisition.

1.1. Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The foundational basis of this article draws upon the seminal works of L. Talmy, particularly “Semantics and Syntax of Motion” (1975) and “Lexical Typologies” (2007). The latter focuses primarily on a cognitive approach to the event of motion itself, delineating four principal conceptual components: the motion event; the figure, denoting the moving object; the ground, or the space within which the action occurs; and the path traversed by the figure during movement. These components can be associated with further additional elements such as the manner of motion and its cause. Motion trajectory further incorporates elements like vectors, indicating the direction; conformation, detailing the figure’s position in relation to the ground; and deixis, a concept to which closer attention will be paid later in this essay.

An experimental study, carried out at the University of Palermo (Italy) with Italian-speaking master’s students of foreign languages and literature, led to the observation that many common errors made by students were predictable. This necessitates an understanding of how Italian (L1) and Russian differ in encoding spatial, temporal, and personal deixis. However, before delving into the experimental part, it is crucial to provide a definition of deixis, essential in order to comprehend the similarities and differences between Russian and Italian from a semantic-spatial perspective.

Deixis concerns how sentences are anchored to their utterance contexts, encompassing information about the participants like their roles in the speech event, and their spatial, temporal, and social locations (Grenoble, 1995) and, talking about verbs of motion, it is closely linked with prefixal verb formation in Russian, posing challenges for Italian-speaking students. The peculiarities of Russian verbal prefixes include the so-called 'aspectual prefixes', typically associated with the works of several Russian linguists and philologists, including Roman Jakobson. Jakobson has significantly contributed to the study of aspect in Russian verbs, using the term to denote prefixes that change the verb's aspect without altering its semantics. His work has laid the groundwork for understanding the intricate ways in which these prefixes modify the temporal structure of verbs, thus influencing the interpretation of actions in terms of their completion, duration, or repetition.

Jakobson's analysis of aspectual prefixes has been instrumental in the development of modern linguistic theory, particularly in the realm of Slavic languages. His insights helped clarify how these prefixes function to convey subtle nuances in meaning, which are crucial to achieve precise communication in Russian. For instance, prefixes like "по-" and "за-" can transform an imperfective verb into its perfective counterpart, indicating a completed action without changing the core meaning of the verb itself. This distinction is essential in Russian, a language in which aspect plays a crucial role in conveying when an action occurs and its nature.

The ongoing theoretical debates among contemporary linguists continue to develop starting from Jakobson's foundational work, exploring further complexities and variations in the use of aspectual prefixes across different contexts and dialects of Russian. Modern research delves into how these prefixes interact with other grammatical categories such as tense, mood, and voice, providing us with a more detailed understanding of their role in the language.

Moreover, the study of aspectual prefixes extends beyond theoretical linguistics, impacting practical fields such as language teaching, translation, and natural language processing. For instance, teaching Russian as a second language often involves emphasizing the correct use of aspectual prefixes to help learners grasp the subtleties of verb aspect. In translation, understanding these prefixes is crucial for accurately conveying the meaning and nuances of Russian texts into other languages. In natural language processing, algorithms that correctly interpret aspectual prefixes enhance the accuracy of machine translation and other language technologies.

Jakobson's pioneering work (1963) is still an inexhaustible source of inspiration and research in these areas, demonstrating the enduring significance of his contributions to the field of linguistics.

In traditional linguistic scholarship, aspectual prefixes in Russian are primarily understood as grammatical tools used to form the perfective aspect of verbs. This view posits that the primary function of these prefixes is to point out the completion or boundedness of an action without contributing additional semantic content. For instance, the verb *pisat'*[to write] transforms into *napisat'* [to write up] with the addition of the prefix на- (na-). In this framework, на- is seen as a semantically "empty" prefix, fulfilling the sole function of aspect modifiers of the verb from imperfective to perfective. This perspective has been widely accepted among linguists and educators due to its simplicity and clarity, facilitating the teaching and understanding of aspect in Russian verbs by focusing on aspectual change. Contrary to the traditional view, Janda et al. (2013) present a compelling argument against the notion of semantically empty aspectual prefixes. They assert that these prefixes, while fulfilling their grammatical role in marking aspect, also carry significant semantic content. Janda and her colleagues demonstrate that aspectual prefixes in Russian are imbued with nuanced meanings that extend beyond simple aspectual marking. These prefixes contribute to the verb's overall semantics by conveying subtle shades of meaning related to spatial orientation, directionality, intensity, and other conceptual domains. An example is that of the prefix на- (na-) *napisat'*, which not only marks the verb as perfective but also suggests a sense of completion or thoroughness, indicating that the action has been performed to its intended end. Janda et al.'s research highlights the complexity and richness of Russian aspectual prefixes, challenging the simplistic view of them as merely grammatical markers and underscoring their role in enriching the meaning of verbs.

To illustrate their argument, Janda et al. provide several examples showing how aspectual prefixes enrich the meaning of Russian verbs. Due to space constraints, only a few of these instances will be hightlighted:

1) The prefix по- (po-) in the verb *пойти* (pojti, "to start walking") does more than simply create a perfective aspect. In fact, it also implies the beginning phase of the action, suggesting an inception, a slight movement, or a direction. According to Janda et al., по- contributes to convey the sense of embarking on an action, indicating a spatial and temporal initiation. This prefix subtly informs the listener that the action is in its early stages or that the subject is starting to move in a particular direction.
2) The prefix вы- (vy-) in *выйти* (vyjti, "to exit") conveys an outward movement from an enclosed space. This directional meaning remains even as the prefix marks the verb as perfective. Janda et al. note that вы- retains its spatial semantics, implying emergence or departure, which provides contextual information about the ongoing action. The prefix вы- therefore enriches the verb with a sense of moving outwards or away from a contained area.
3) The prefix до- (do-) in *дочитать* (dočitat', "to finish reading") carries the notion of reaching an endpoint or completing an action. Janda et al. explain that до- not only marks the perfective aspect but also conveys the idea of finality and completion, adding semantic depth to the verb. The prefix до- enriches the verb by indicating that the reading has been carried out to its conclusion, emphasizing the completion and thoroughness of the action.

Within the scope of Russian linguistics, a prevalent assumption posits that adding prefixes (excluding по- and с-) to multidirectional motion verbs does not alter their aspectual characteristics. However, recent research challenges this notion, revealing numerous instances where prefixed multidirectional verbs do, in fact, shift to the perfective aspect. This shift complicates the traditional view and underscores the semantic versatility of Russian aspectual prefixes.

Several prefixed verbs exemplify the transition to perfective aspect:

1. ***про-ходить* (pro-chodit')**: this verb, derived from the multidirectional base *ходить* (chodit', "to walk"), signifies "to walk for a certain period of time". The prefix про- (pro-) imbues the verb with a sense of enduring or completing the action, thereby transforming it into a perfective aspect verb. This example shows how prefixes contribute not only to grammatical aspectual marking, but also to semantic depth related to the duration or completeness of an action.
2. ***от-ходить* (ot-chodit')**: derived from *ходить* (chodit'), *от-ходить* (ot-chodit') denotes "to run their (walking) course". The prefix от- (ot-) adds a notion of the action reaching its natural conclusion or fulfilling its course, thus indicating a perfective aspect. This usage highlights the way prefixes enrich the verb's meaning by specifying the completion or fulfillment of an action.
3. ***на-ходить (na-chodit')***: from *ходить* (chodit'), *на-ходить* (na-chodit') signifies "to cover a distance (by walking)". The prefix на- (na-) suggests the completion of an action involving movement over a specified distance, transforming the verb into a perfective aspect form. This example demonstrates how prefixes not only modify aspect but also convey specific spatial or directional meanings within the verb's semantics.
4. ***за-ходить (za-chodit')***: derived from *ходить* (choditt'), *за-ходить* (za-chodit') means "to start walking". The prefix за- (za-) indicates the beginning or initiation of an action, thereby imparting a perfective aspect to the verb. This instance illustrates how prefixes can denote the commencement or onset of an action, influencing the aspectual interpretation of the verb.

In the domain of Russian linguistics, scholars like V. Soboleva (2018) classify verbs formed by adding prefixes to unprefixed multidirectional motion verbs as instances of secondary imperfectivization. This classification suggests that adding prefixes converts these verbs into imperfective forms indicating ongoing or habitual actions, while perfective verbs denote completed or bounded actions.

Supporting this viewpoint, V.V. Vinogradov (1947) argues that these prefixes should be considered as inflectional components within Russian verb morphology. Vinogradov posits aspect as an inflectional category in which verbs in imperfective and perfective aspects represent different forms of the same underlying verb, distinguished primarily by their aspectual prefixes.

In contrast, A.N. Tikhonov (1997) draws a detailed distinction between inflectional elements, such as aspectual prefixes, and semantic prefixes that exert a more significant influence on verb formation and meaning alteration.

This theoretical framework leads to the broader assertion that elements belonging to the same morphological category in Russian verbs can simultaneously serve as both inflectional and derivational components. This assertion prompts a critical examination of whether such dual functionality aligns with empirical evidence and theoretical paradigms in Russian linguistics.

Luisa Ruvoletto (2020) reviews studies on aspectual prefixes, citing Mark Vey and Cornelis van Schooneveld, who distinguish between *full-prefix*, which forms perfective aspect verbs while adding semantic components, and *empty-prefix*, serving only for aspect formation. The emphasis is put on prefixes that do not add new semantic components to the base verb.

1.2. Lexical-semantic contrasts between the verb *andare* and *venire* in Italian and*идти, ходить, пойти* in Russian

The difference between the verbs *andare* and *venire* in Italian and *идти, ходить, пойти* in Russian reflects the diversity that may originate confusion in Italian-speaking students learning Russian motion verbs. The Russian translations of *andare* vary by the type of movement (on foot, by transport, etc.) and the space in which it occurs (land, air, etc.), underpinning the differences between definite/indefinite motion verbs and influencing related spatial-temporal deixis phenomena. Spatial-temporal deixis, a concept based on the properties of language elements defining the perception of spatial and temporal relationships, shapes the differences in expressing the moment and direction of movement. Moreover, it affects the perception of events related to these verbs, generating specific language expression features related to space and time.

When analysing the concepts of repetitive and unidirectional motion in language, we can observe distinct differences in verb usage that convey these actions. For example, in Russian, the verbs *ходить* (chodit') and идти (*idti*) can be both translated as "to go" in English, but their use implies different types of motion:

- *Игорь ходит на работу* (Igor' chodit na rabotu - Igor goes to work) suggests a repetitive action, indicating that Igor going to work is something that happens regularly.
- *Игорь идет на работу* (Igor' idet na rabotu - Igor is going to work) indicates a single, direct action, emphasizing that Igor is currently on his way to work.

This distinction between repetitive and unidirectional motion can also be found in Italian with the use of the verbs "andare" and "venire." Both these verbs describe movement towards a destination or goal, but there is a clear difference based on the perspective of the speaker and the listener, as well as the context of the movement. "Andare" typically means "to go" and implies movement away from the speaker towards a different location, while "venire" means "to come" and refers to movement towards the speaker.

However, these distinctions are not always straightforward. For instance, consider a routine situation in which the manner of movement varies depending on the direction. In Russian, one might say:

Каждый день Иван идет на работу (Každy den' Ivan idet na rabotu - Every day Ivan walks to work) and *Иван едет с работы на автобусе* (Ivan edet s raboty na avtobuse - Ivan takes the bus back home).

In this example, *Иван идет на работу* uses the verb *идти*, indicating a single, direct action of walking to work. Conversely, *Иван едет с работы на автобусе* uses the verb *ехать* which signifies

traveling by vehicle, thus showing a different mode of transportation to come back home. The example provided shows how the choice of verb is not only related to the repetitiveness or directionality of the motion but also to the specific manner of movement involved.

Such nuances in verb usage highlight the importance of context in understanding and accurately conveying motion in different languages. They demonstrate that while certain verbs may have general meanings, their specific implications can vary widely based on how they are used in routine versus singular actions and in different directions or manners of travel. This complexity must be carefully taken in account while approaching linguistic studies and translations so that the intended meaning and context of the original statements could be preserved.

1.2.1 Talmy's Theory of Motion Encoding

Another important distinction between Italian and Russian was highlighted by Talmy's (2007) theory.

According to Leonard Talmy's theory, languages can be divided into 'satellite-framed' and 'verb-framed' based on how they encode the core schema of motion events (Talmy, 2000). In satellite-framed languages like Russian, the path of motion is typically encoded in a satellite (such as a prefix or particle), while verb encodes the manner of motion. For example:

- ***Она выскочила из комнаты*** (Ona vyskočila iz komnaty - She jumped out of the room).
    - Here, the prefix **вы-** (vy- out) encodes the path, while **скочила** (skočila - jumped) encodes the manner of motion.

In contrast, verb-framed languages like Italian encode the path of motion directly in the verb, with optional satellites providing additional manner information. For example:

- **Uscì dalla stanza saltando** (She exited the room jumping).
    - In this sentence, **uscì** (exited) encodes the path, while **saltando** (jumping) provides manner information.

The fundamental difference between satellite-framed and verb-framed languages influences how speakers conceptualize and express motion. For Italian-speaking students learning Russian, this leads not only to the understanding of new verbs, but also to a new way of structuring sentences to convey movement. To address the underspecification of speaker- vs. hearer-oriented motion in Russian, one could compare sentences like ***Иди туда*****!** (Idi tuda! - Go there!) and ***Иди сюда*****!** (Idi sjuda! - Come here!) with **"Va' là!"** (Go there!) and **"Vieni qua!"** (Come here!). Additionally, to discuss the underspecification of the manner of motion in Italian, one should compare different cases where **andare** is translated with various Russian verbs of the same group.

Referring to this specific topic, Luisa Ruvoletto (2017) has presented arguments that challenge this binary classification, particularly in the context of Russian and Italian, that is presented in the next paragraph.

1.2.2 Ruvoletto's Theory

According to us, it would be advisable to divide Luisa Ruvoletto's theory into four macro areas, and for each of them example will be provided:

1. **Continuum of Motion Encoding**: Ruvoletto argues that the distinction between satellite-framed and verb-framed languages is not as strict as Talmy suggests. She posits that languages display a continuum of strategies for encoding motion, rather than fitting neatly into one of two categories. For example, while Russian language typically uses satellites to encode the path of motion, it also has instances where the verb itself can convey the path. This flexibility indicates that Russian does not necessarily adhere to the satellite-framed category.

Below, some examples are presented:

Russian Example:

a. ***Она вышла из дома*** (Ona vyšla izdoma - She exited the house).

Here, ***вышла*** (vyšla - exited) contains the prefix **вы-** (vy- out), which indicates the path.

Italian Example:

b. **È uscita di casa** (She exited the house).
The verb **uscita** (exited) encodes the path.

2. **Context-Dependent Usage**: Ruvoletto puts emphasis on the fact that the use of satellites or verbs to encode motion can be highly context-dependent. In Italian, while path is generally encoded in the verb, there are situations where additional elements (e.g., prepositions or adverbs) are used to specify the path or manner of motion. This context-dependent variability challenges the clear-cut division proposed by Talmy.

English Example:

c. ***He walked into the room*.**
The verb ***walked*** describes the manner, while ***into***s pecifies the path.
Italian Example:

d. **È andato a scuola correndo** (He went to school running).
The verb è ***andato*** (went) indicates the path, and ***correndo*** (running) specifies the manner.

3. **Integration of Path and Manner**: Another critical point raised by Ruvoletto is the integration of path and manner in both Russian and Italian. She argues that both languages can use a combination of verbs, satellites, and other grammatical structures to convey complex motion scenarios. For instance, Italian can employ periphrastic constructions that combine a path verb with manner adjuncts, while Russian can incorporate manner into the verb itself, especially in colloquial usage.

Russian Example:

e. ***Он быстро въехал в гараж*** (On bystro v'yechal v garaž - He quickly drove into the garage).
The verb ***въехал*** (*v'yecha*l- drove in) integrates both manner (driving) and path (into the garage).
Italian Example:

f. **È entrato in casa correndo** (He entered the house running).
The verb **è entrato** (entered) indicates the path, with **correndo** (running) specifying the manner.

4. **Cross-Linguistic Flexibility**: Ruvoletto also points out the cross-linguistic flexibility and diversity in motion expression strategies. Many languages, including Russian and Italian, exhibit hybrid characteristics that do not fit neatly into the satellite-framed or verb-framed categories. For example, Russian makes use of prefixes to denote the path while also incorporating verbs that inherently suggest a path (e.g., "войти" - to enter, which includes the path 'in').

Russian Example:

g. **Он залез на дерево** (On zalez na derevo - He climbed up the tree).
The prefix **за-** (za- up) and the verb **лез** (lez- climbed) combine to show both path and manner.
Italian Example:

h. **На camminato lungo il fiume** (He walked along the river).
The verb **camminato** (walked) specifies the manner, while **lungo** (along) describes the path.

The contrasting theories of Leonard Talmy and Luisa Ruvoletto offer significant insights into understanding the encoding of motion events and deixis in different languages. Talmy's distinction between satellite-framed and verb-framed languages provides a foundational and extremely impactful frameworkfor categorizing how languages encode the path and manner of motion. This binary classification helps linguists identify and analyse patterns within and across languages, revealing crucial differences in linguistic structure and cognitive processing.

However, Ruvoletto's critique and subsequent theoretical contributions underscore the complexity and fluidity inherent in natural languages. By highlighting the continuum of motion encoding strategies and the context-dependent nature of verb usage, Ruvoletto emphasizes that languages cannot always be methodically categorized. Her observations about the integration of path and manner and the cross-linguistic flexibility seen in languages like Russian and Italian demonstrate that real-world language use often struggles to stick to rigid classification.

These theories are crucial for understanding deixis, as they reveal how different languages manage spatial and temporal relationships. Talmy's framework helps identify systematic differences in how languages handle deixis through motion verbs, while Ruvoletto's approach provides a more multifaceted view that accommodates the variability and adaptability found in natural language use

Within the doctoral project at the University of Palermo (Italy), a study was conducted with the aim of pinpointing the challenges faced by Italian-speaking students when approaching to the translation of Russian motion verbs. The study's main objective was to identify and analyse the most common errors and difficulties encountered by these students in order to develop more effective linguodidactic strategies and practices. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing both paper and online surveys to reach a broad participant base. The survey included 50 bachelor's degree students specializing in foreign languages and literature.

1.3.1 Translation exercises

The paper-based test begins with the question, "In your opinion, what is your language proficiency level?" in which the candidate was asked to indicate, according to their own opinion, the language proficiency level they had achieved during their undergraduate studies in Russian. This serves to help the examiner understand the starting level of the student. Not all levels of the 50 students are reported, but the general average level ranges from A2 to B1.

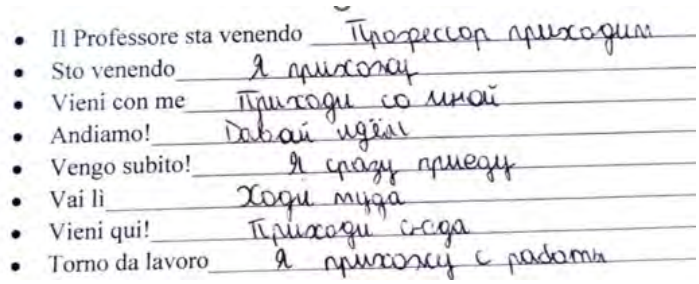
At the beginning of the study, students were asked to complete a written task to provide a basis for evaluating their actual performance, rather than just their self-assessed competence. A practical task was proposed, requiring students to translate several sentences from Italian into Russian. At the end of this exercise, students were also asked about the meanings of the Italian verbs "andare" and "venire". The data from the tests administered to the students at the University of Palermo are completely anonymous because they are based solely on the errors/mistakes made when encoding verbs of motion, and the linguistic reflection generated by them.

The linguistic reflection test is divided into three parts:

- The first part is dedicated to the translation of minimal sentences, containing decontextualized Italian verbs of motion, with the aim of identifying the reasoning process that students apply when translating these verbs into Russian for deixis encoding. (See illustration 1)
- The second part focuses on the translation of contextualized sentences taken from the National Corpus of the Russian Language and from various grammar textbooks.
- The third part uses Frog Stories, which allow students to reflect on the encoding of verbs of motion, the use of prefixes, and the differences in rendering Russian verbs of motion in Italian through visual story descriptions.

Participants were asked to rate the frequency of their errors in using motion verbs on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being "very rare" and 10 being "very frequent." The analysis of the results provided insightful information on the frequency of motion verb usage errors among the students. The data revealed that 25.5% of the students rated their error tendency as 5 out of 10, indicating a moderate frequency. Meanwhile, 23.5% of the students gave a rating of 7 out of 10, suggesting a higher propensity for errors in selecting motion verbs.

In Illustration 1 (see below), students were asked to translate several sentences from Italian into Russian. At the end of the exercise, they were also asked to explain the meanings of the Italian verbs “andare” and “venire.”



In this first part, we presented students with minimal and decontextualized sentences pursuing the aim of confusing them, as without the influence of context, they had to reason and explain why they used one prefix instead of another. This approach fostered a debate in which each student could express their own reflection.

The first sentence analysed was *Il Professore sta venendo*. Forty-five out of fifty students used the prefix “pri-”. This result was predictable due to the interlinguistic interference between L1 and L2. Students choosing the prefix “pri-” extend its meaning of “approach” to the verb “*venire*” in Italian because, unlike Russian, it indicates that the subject of the sentence is closer to the deictic center (DC) compared to the subject in a sentence with the verb *andare* (to go). According to what emerges from the received data, only one student used the correct verb *idėt sjuda* (including the adverb of place, which is important for defining movement from location X to Y), two students used the verb “*idti*” without specifying the adverb, and the remaining two used the prefix “v-”.

Subsequently, after our discussion, we posed the following question to the class: “Why did most of you use the prefix pri-?” According to one student, the prefix pri- should not have been used because the given sentence indicates that the subject, the professor, still had to move from point X to point Y, so no movement trajectory had yet occurred. Another student admitted to have used this prefix because if “the professor is coming,” it is certain that he will make an approach, indicated by the prefix pri-.

1.3.2 Frog Stories

In this part of the experiment, students were asked to unleash their imagination by describing several depicted scenes using motion verbs they had studied over the years. This analysis aims to ensure that students can use and improve their knowledge and use of motion verbs.

From the students’ answers, it is evident that 50 percent of the participants in the experiment use verbs without prefixes. In addition, it is observable how most used prefixed verb is the one with “po-.” In our analysis, this trend is attributed to two primary factors. The first one is the fact that unprefixed motion verbs generally have a lower margin of error compared to their prefixed counterparts, making them a safer choice for students. The second factor is constituted by the prefix “po-” and its tendency to be particularly clear and unambiguous in its meaning, avoiding potential confusion with other possible interpretations.

Furthermore, students were asked to provide explanations for their verb choices, as showed in Illustration B. This task required them to articulate the reasoning that had led them to prefer one motion verb over another, fostering a deeper understanding of the nuances and appropriate contexts for each verb. This part of the experiment not only assessed their grasp of motion verbs but also encouraged critical thinking and precision in their language use.

In summary, the findings suggest that while students prefer the simplicity of unprefixed verbs, the clarity and distinctiveness of the prefix “po-” make it a favoured choice among prefixed verbs. The additional exercise of explaining their verb selections helped to reinforce their learning and provided valuable insights into their decision-making processes.

1.3.3 Translations and Comparisons with the National Corpus of the Russian Language

The final part of the test administered to the students involved translating sentences taken from the National Corpus of the Russian Language. The students translated these sentences independently, and their translations were subsequently compared with those made by the authors in the Corpus.

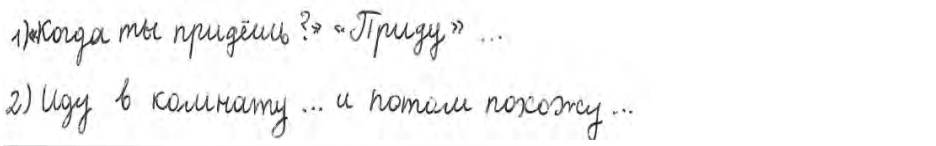
Due to space constraints, we will present only a selection of translations for some of the sentences given to the students, along with a comparison and commentary on the translations provided by the authors.

The task presented (below) to the students is in Italian and includes the following instructions: Translate the following sentences and provide your reflections.

Traduci le seguenti FRASI ed esponi le tue RIFLESSIONI:

1. Quando vieni?» «Vengo», promise Viktor. «Solo un po'più tardi..e probabilmente quando non ci sono zia Nina e zio Kolja…
2. «Vado sotto nella stanza a posare questi, poi **vengo** a trovarti, così vedo la tua trasmissione »

Here are presented some of the translations made by the students, conveniently highlighted with sequential numbers to guide the reader in understanding the test:



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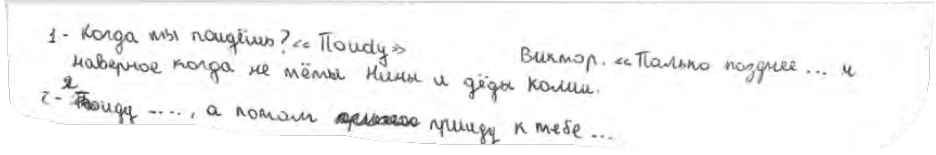

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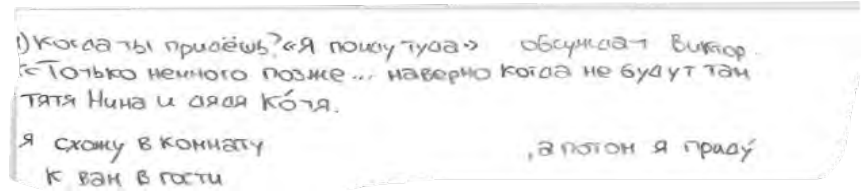


N.3

In order to identify translation errors, we presented students with the same sentences they had translated, along with the translations by authors featured in the Russian National Corpus. The sentence (A) is from "*Закон улитки*" (2005) translated by Bruno Osimo, and the second one (B) is from the novel "*Io Uccido*" by Giorgio Faletti, translated by Irina Konstantinova in 2005.

A. *A ty pridëš'? – Pridu, – poobeščal Viktor. Tol'kočut' pozže... I, naverno, togda, kogda teti Niny i ėtogo djadi ne budet...*
Andrej Kurkov. Zakonulitki (2005).I Pinguini non vanno in vacanza| (Bruno Osimo).

B. *Tol'ko spuščus' vniz, v komnatu, otnesu diski i pridu k tebe. I uvižu tvoju peredaču.*
Giorgio Faletti. Io uccido (2002) | (Irina Konstantinova, 2005)

A common feature across the three examples (see examples 1, 2, and 3) is that the Italian temporal clause introduced by *quando* (when) is literally translated by the students as *когда*(kogda). In contrast, Bruno Osimo translates it as *a* (a).

The conjunction "a" in Russian is a versatile particle that can serve multiple functions, one of which is to introduce a contrast or comparison between two situations or actions. In the context of

temporal clauses, "a" is often used to indicate an action occurring simultaneously with another action without creating a strong subordination as *когда* (kogda) would.

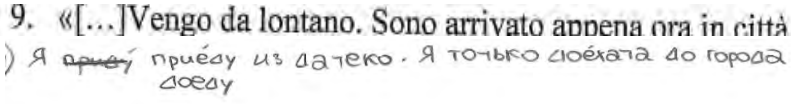
In this example, "a" does not introduce a temporal subordinate clause like *kogda* does. On the contrary, it places the two actions on an equal footing, suggesting a simultaneous or sequential action without subordination.

The choice of *a* over *kogda* can depend on various factors, including the translator's personal style and the need to maintain text fluidity without creating overly complex structures.

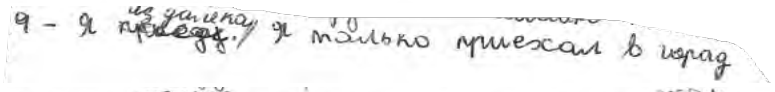
In examples 1 and 3, the correct prefixed verb is used, while in example 2, the prefix *no-* (po) is used. In exercise 3, the response to the question includes *я пойду* (ja pojdu).The prefix *no-* is used to indicate an inchoative action, introducing the beginning of an action or an action that occurs for a short period. We hypothesize that the students interpret the phrases *vengo* (I come) or *vengo a trovarti* (I come to visit you) as the "beginning of the action." Using verb prefixes in the appropriate way can be challenging for Russian learners, as it requires a deep understanding of grammar and semantic nuances.

Now let's analyse another sentence from the administered test and its corresponding translation done by a limited sample of students (C- F) and by Dino Buzzati. *L'assalto al Grande Convoglio* (1942).

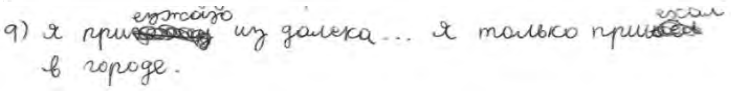
C



D



E



Below is the author's translation:

Ja izdaleka. *Tol'ko sejčas pribyl v gorod, obros*

Dino Buzzati. L'assalto al Grande Convoglio (1942) | (R. Chlodovskij)

1. **Translation C**: The student uses the prefix при (pri-) because the phrase *veng oda lontano* (I come from afar) implies that the subject is in a distant position X compared to the interlocutor. This prefix suggests a movement towards the interlocutor from a distant location, emphasizing the spatial relationship in the context.
2. **Example E**: In this instance, the student uses *приезжаю* (priezžaju-I come/I am coming"), which is the imperfective form of the verb. This form does not imply completion, but rather indicates that the action is ongoing, habitual, or repeated over time.
3. **Translation D**: This translation is closest to that of Dino Buzzati because in Russian, the verb of motion can sometimes be omitted in present and future tenses when the context makes the meaning sufficiently clear. This omission is more common in informal conversations but is not applicable in the past tense, where clarity and grammatical correctness require the inclusion of the verb of motion.

These explanations highlight how different linguistic nuances and contextual interpretations can influence the choice of words and grammatical structures in translations from Italian to Russian, especially when the aim is that of truthfully portraying the style and essence of a specific author like Dino Buzzati.

2. RESULTS

The findings underscore the need for the creation of specialized educational materials and teaching methodologies aimed at overcoming the specific challenges and errors experienced by Italian-speaking students in learning Russian motion verbs. Focusing on the cognitive aspects of motion verb usage and the principles of encoding deictic information allows for a more effective identification of interference manifestations and causes generally associated with errors.

This phenomenon highlights the particular challenges Italian-speaking students face in learning motion verbs and prefixes in Russian as a second language. Despite their high level of proficiency in the Russian language, translating the Italian verbs *andare* and *venire* with their respective Russian prefixes can be daunting due to differences in deixis encoding between the two languages. In Russian, the prefixes по- and при- on unidirectional motion verbs denote purely aspectual counterparts to their bare imperfective forms. Originally expressing ingressive procedural aspects indicating the onset of goal-directed movement, these prefixes now signify dispersed or unspecified direction (по-) and movement towards the meeting point (при-), respectively.

Errors in the translation of motion verbs can arise from several factors, primarily rooted in the overlapping of linguistic and conceptual frameworks between the native language (Italian) and the second language (Russian). This overlap often leads students to unconsciously transfer Italian grammatical rules and conceptual patterns into their Russian translations, resulting in inaccuracies in verb usage and prefix application. However, which specific grammatical rules are being transferred?

When considering the differences between **andare** and **venire**, Italian exhibits a more marked pattern. Therefore, difficulties would be expected in the opposite direction, such as Russian students learning Italian, who might overextend one form. If the focus is on the use of prefixed verbs of motion, it is crucial to explain which elements are problematic in the encoding of motion in Russian. Are the challenges related to manner, path, or both?

As highlighted in earlier sections of the linguistic test administered to University of Palermo students, these errors can be easily exemplified through specific instances. However, a more detailed explanation is necessary to understand how these prefixed verbs of motion were elicited, and which specific elements caused difficulties in the accurate encoding of motion in Russian.

Additionally, the absence of consciousness regarding linguistic distinctions between Italian and Russian further compounds the challenge. This lack of awareness can significantly impact the fidelity and precision of translating motion verbs, underscoring the intricate interplay between linguistic structure, conceptual frameworks, and translation accuracy in second language acquisition contexts.

3. CONCLUSION

The acquisition of Russian verbs by Italian L1 learners presents substantial challenges that necessitate a nuanced and informed approach in language instruction. This essay has delved into the intricate difficulties encountered by Italian learners when grappling with Russian verb acquisition, predominantly arising from disparities in grammatical structure and verb inflections. Notably, studies by Chahine and Uetova(2021)have underscored these differences as pivotal factors influencing the learning trajectory.

The complexity lies in the fundamental distinctions between Italian and Russian grammar systems, particularly in verb morphology and syntactic patterns. Italian, with its Romance language roots, features a relatively straightforward verb conjugation system compared to the highly inflected and aspectual nature of Russian verbs. This stark contrast poses considerable challenges for Italian learners who must navigate unfamiliar verb forms, tense-aspect distinctions, and syntactic constructions unique to Russian.

Moreover, the pedagogical implications of these linguistic disparities underscore the imperative for targeted instructional strategies. Educators must employ methodologies that cater specifically to the linguistic needs and cognitive processes of Italian L1 learners acquiring Russian verbs. This necessitates

a deeper understanding of the cognitive mechanisms involved in verb acquisition across different language pairs, informed by empirical research and theoretical frameworks.

Consequently, ongoing research is crucial in elucidating effective teaching methodologies tailored to the complexities of Italian-Russian verb acquisition. By refining our understanding of these challenges and developing pedagogical strategies that integrate insights from linguistic theory and empirical research, educators can optimize language instruction outcomes at the university level. This concerted effort not only enhances instructional efficacy but also cultivates a supportive learning environment where diverse linguistic backgrounds are acknowledged and accommodated. Ultimately, by addressing these challenges systematically, educators can foster greater proficiency and confidence in Italian L1 learners acquiring Russian verbs, contributing to their broader linguistic competence and academic success.

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ANALISI DEGLI ERRORI NELL'ACQUISIZIONE DEL VERBO RUSSO DA PARTE DEGLI APPRENDENTI DI ITALIANO L1: LA COMPLESSITA' DEI VERBI DI MOTO

Sintesi

Il movimento è il dominio concettuale più importante sia per lo sviluppo che per la cognizione umana, quindi non è solo fondamentale in tutte le lingue, ma anche, secondo Slobin, la lingua che parliamo può influenzare il modo in cui formiamo un'esperienza. Questa formazione inconscia avviene fin dalla prima infanzia e crea schemi resistenti ai cambiamenti necessari per padroneggiare una seconda o una lingua straniera. L'analisi degli errori ha dimostrato che gli studenti di lingua italiana che imparano il russo come seconda lingua hanno enormi difficoltà con i verbi di movimento, commettendo errori costanti. Questo significa che gli studenti continuano a fare gli stessi errori anche mentre progrediscono a livelli superiori di russo, poiché questi ultimi sono il risultato dell'asimmetria nel modo in cui l'italiano e il russo codificano le informazioni deittiche su persona, luogo e tempo. Gli obiettivi di questo articolo, basati sui risultati della mia ricerca dottorale, sono i seguenti: 1) mostrare come i verbi di movimento possano essere insegnati in РКИ dalla prospettiva di uno studente di lingua italiana; 2) implementare un processo di "ristrutturazione del materiale" attraverso una proposta didattica basata su un esperimento linguistico che ho condotto all'Università di Palermo.

Parole chiave: verbi di moto, linguistica, didattica della lingua russa

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