

Phonological Interpretation of French Vowels in the Russian Literary Language

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Abstract

The present article deals with studies and analyzes the lexical innovations of French origin in the Russian literary language on materials of fiction, opinion journalism, as well as etymological, defining, and foreign dictionaries under well-defined criteria of foreign word extraction. Various investigations dedicated to the study of language contacts offer variety of criteria describing the functioning of foreign vocabulary in the Russian lexical system as the result of interaction of various manifestation of language contacts. On the basis of analysis of two languages phonological systems and different approaches to the assimilation typologies, considering also numerous general and specific characteristics of lexical neologisms assimilation in Russian (graphic and phonetic), authors offer a clear and complete image of current trends the reception and phonological adaptation of foreign language vocabulary of French origin in the Russian literary language, describing its basic laws and models as well as the types of possible deviations.

Keywords: Language; Linguistic; Borrowing; French; Russian; Assimilation.



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1. Introduction

One of the key problems of modern lexicology, the problem of language contacts and borrowings, remains at the same time one of the most controversial phenomena in the life of modern society. Considered by linguists as a dynamic source of the development of the lexical composition of the language, borrowing causes such a violent reaction of the society that attempts to regulate it are being undertaken often at the level of the highest structures of state power. However, the expansion of foreign vocabulary and its adaptation as a complex diachronic process takes more than one day. Moreover, the period required to master the borrowed lexical unit is always different in duration. It is a gradual, sequential inclusion of all components of the word – orthographic, phonetic, morphological and semantic – in the system of the receiving language. According to Verbitskaya, the corpus of new foreign words, regardless of the source language, should be considered a developing system that cannot be changed without passing the variation (Verbitskaya, 1998).

By variants we mean various modifications of form under the identity of semantics (Galdi, 1958). Summarizing all the above mentioned types, we consider it possible to group the entire palette of formal variations by the nature of the discrepancy: phonetic, where it is easy to identify two categories (accent and phonemic), graphic and morphological, which in turn can be broken up into inflectional ones (a special case of which is a generic synonymy), word-formative and syntactic. In general, formal variation is one of the universal tendencies of the borrowing process, especially if it is in the context of its early stages, characterized by the no formalization of assimilation models (Verbitskaya, 1998). However, despite the abundance of scientific papers devoted to this problem (Craig, 2017); (Daniels, 2017); (Pennycook, 2016); (Adamou *et al.*, 2016); (Ageeva *et al.*, 2015); (Cubberley, 1993), the state of modern linguistic science, that comprehends the process of borrowing, is characterized by the irregularity of the conceptual construct, not by a strict approach to the problem of the typology of foreign vocabulary, as well as too high degree of emotion that complicates the scientific analysis of adaptation characteristics of foreignisms on the background of phonetics, morphology and prototype semantics.

The present work is therefore devoted to the identification and description of certain regularities in the interpretation of French vowels by means of the phonological system of the Russian language, taking into account the allo- and isomorphic characteristics of the contacting languages.

2. Material and Methods

The methods used in the present paper include linguistic description methods (examination, description, classification, comparison), as well as lexical-semantic and comparative methods and the method of diachronic description of language which are considered to be traditional for lexical-historical research. Statistical method of quantitative description was used when studying some aspects of the problem.

3. Results

In general, the phonological adaptation of foreign vocabulary is rather fairly regarded by scientists as the first stage of the complex process of assimilation. Native speakers of the receptor language that bring the foreign elements in their attempts to imitate foreign pronunciation, find in their native system suitable phonemes or adapt already available phonemes in the donor language to its requirements, give an incorrect phonological interpretation to the sounds of foreign speech and pass the borrowed vocabulary through the phonological sieve of the host language. From our point of view, for studies of reactions specific to the Russian literary language for the insertion into its system of elements of French origin, it is viable to conduct at least a synchronic analysis of the phonemic structures of both languages. Due to their belonging to different genealogical groups: the Romance and Slavic – this comparison allows to identify the most striking specific features of each of the contacting languages.

Phonologically, the Russian language is a language of strongly pronounced consonant type. The most important typological feature of the Russian language in the field of consonantism is the unification of the majority of consonant phonemes into a correlative series of paired, not-palatalized – palatalized consonant phonemes, which forms the core of the phonological system of the Russian language and determines its main characteristics, in particular combinatorial modifications of sounds in the flow of speech: assimilation and accommodation. In French, on the contrary, vocal tendencies are clearly traced and do not allow vowel phonemes to take a subordinate position in relation to consonants. Here the clarity and tension of their articulation, the lack of reduction in unstressed position and timbre invariance throughout the entire period of sound should be taken into consideration. The vocal system of the French language is considerably richer than the Russian one from the qualitative point of view, and, correspondingly, from the quantitative one. In the classification of the vowels of the French language four criteria are distinguished (raising, series, labialization, nasalization), while in Russian there are only three (raising, series, labialization). In general, we can reflect all the classification characteristics in the summary table of the vowel phonemes of the French and Russian languages (Table 1):

Table-1. Comparative classification of vowel phonemes in French and Russian

	Voyelles antérieures		Voyelles postérieures	
	Non-labialisées	Labialisées	Labialisées	Non-labialisées
Voyelles orales (fermées)	i / и e	y ø	o / o u / y	ы
Voyelles orales (ouvertes)	ɛ / э a	œ ə	ɔ	ɑ / a
Voyelles nasales (ouvertes)	ẽ	œ̃	õ	ã

The clarity and brightness of the French vowels is due to the intensity of their articulation. Even unstressed French vowels are distinguished by greater clarity and vitality than Russian stressed ones, which is explained by a much stronger intensity of the speech apparatus during articulation. The same characteristic explains the absence of the reduction of vowels in French which is specific to the Russian language. In view of the above, even taking into account the almost threefold quantitative superiority of the French vowels over the Russian ones, we object to the Polish researcher Kalinevich, who posed the question of “How could the nasty system of Russian vowels convey the nuances of the multi-phonemic French vocal system?” (Kalinevich, 1978). First of all, it should not be forgotten that due to the peculiarities of the phonological organization of the Russian language, not only positional but also combinatorial changes in the vowel system are manifested much more strongly in the Russian language than in the French language. Among these latter there are the accommodation processes, which significantly affect the quality of the vowel. For example, after the palatalized consonant phonemes [a], [o], [y] become front, the phoneme [e] after a palatalized consonant is more closed than in the initial position and etc. Allow us to illustrate this thesis on the basis of interpretation of the French phoneme [y] in the Russian language (Khudaibergenov *et al.*, 2018).

4. Discussion

4.1. Models of Phonological Interpretation of the Phonemes [y] and [u]

French front closed vowel [y] has no analogues in Russian, in fact it is labialized [i]. Shcherba notes that students studying the French language tend to interpret it as a sound [u] in combination with a palatalized consonant (Abisheva *et al.*, 2018) Thus, the phonological sieve of the Russian language allows two interpretations of this phoneme in the adaptation of the Gallicisms: the transmission of the back vowel [y] to the Russian vowels, and the consonant remains not-palatalized (graphically, this combination is formed with the help of the letter y), and the use of its allophone [ÿ] in combination with a palatalized consonant (it is reflected by the letter ю in the graph). Let us consider both tendencies.

a. [y] – [y]: caricature – карикатура karikatura (caricature), duel – дуэль duehl (duel), recrue – рекрут rekrut (recruit), figure – фигура figura (figure), sculpture – скульптура skul'ptura (sculpture);

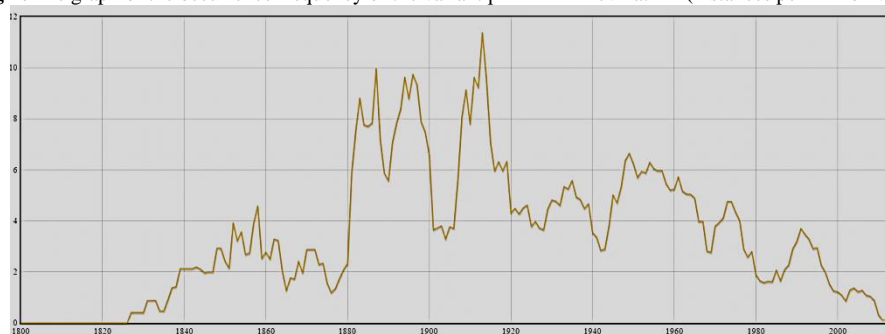
b. [y] – [ÿ]: brochure – брошюра broshyura (pamphlet), buste – бюст byust (portrait sculpture), ridicule – ридикюль ridikyul' (reticule), purée – пюре pyure (mashed potatoes), bureau – бюро byuro (bureau).

Here we intentionally reflect only two of the existing variants of the phoneme [y] in Russian, preferring a global tendency of fixation those minor differences that the allophones of the phoneme [y] represent in a weak position. From the above it becomes clear that the cases of palatalization of the previous consonant are less frequent in comparison with the functioning of its not-palatalized variety. The search for possible ways of equalizing the sound

forms is rather mentioned: French-speaking representatives of Russian society tried to accurately reflect the French front [y] with the help of available phonetic means of the Russian language. For instance, the lexeme сюртук *syurtuk* ‘from Fr. *surtout*’, has a long variant range: суртук *surtuk*, суртут *surtut*, сертук *sertuk* and, finally, сюртук *syurtuk*, – noted by various sources. The earliest variants of a foreign word are transmitted by the French front vowel [y] by means of the Russian back vowel: суртук *surtuk*, суртут *surtut*. In our opinion, the comprehensive explanation for the existence of such a long variant series is Galdi’s resistance to the receptor language (Galdi, 1958) to the norms – in our case, the pronunciation norms – of the source language. The letter ю, which, due to the softness of the previous consonant, forms a slightly advanced allophone of sound [y] – [j̥] and most accurately transmits the French vowel [y], is not the most frequent in the Russian language.

Let us illustrate this trend on examples of lexemes, which in the end were lucky to a far lesser degree: Variant number of the lexeme ревматизм *rhumatisme* has about a dozen forms: роматизм *romatizm*, руматизм *rumatizm*, рюматизм *ryumatizm*, ремотизм *remotizm*, рематизма *rematizma*, рюматисм *ryumatism*, рюматисим *ryumatism* (ратисимы) *ratisimy*, ремотисм *remotism*, рематиз *rematiz*, ревматизм *revmatizm* (ревматизмы) *revmatizmy*. The functioning of most variants refers to the XVIII century, however, the XIX century, especially its beginning, is presented quite widely as well: Есть ли у меня не рюматизм в спине EST’ li u menya ne ryumatizm v spine <...> 1764. Catherine II. <...> признавал в вышнем градусе ремотисм от простуды priznaval v vyshnem graduse remotism of prostudy. Nashchokin’s notes <...> Коллежский асессор доктор Вицман. Болен был 4 недели от руматизма Kollezhsij aessor doktor Vicman. Bolen byl 4 nedeli ot rumatizma. 1857. M. Vorontsov (Epishkin, 2010). Despite the abundance of variants, the new interpreter of words of Yanovsky fixes only the form of ревматизм *revmatizm* at the beginning of the XIX century (Yanovsky, 1803). The same position is maintained by the authors of later vocabularies. The results of the analysis of the literary corpus provide us with the same data:

Fig-1. The graph of the occurrence frequency of the variant ревматизм *revmatizm* (instances per million words)



In our opinion, the form ревматизм *revmatizm* substituted all other variants due to the tradition registered in the Russian language before Peter the Great, specifically the transfer of the Greek letter combination eu- by the Russian ев- *ev-* (Евдокия *Evdokia*, Европа *Evropa*, Евлампия *Evlampiya*, евхаристия *evharistiya*). An important point is that at the time of using the version рюматизм *ryumatizm* in the play *Woe from Wit*, the word had already been obsolete and, by pronouncing the actual archaism, the author emphasizes the decrepitude of Moscow life, which makes even relatively young people grow old. It seems appropriate to conduct an analysis of the interpretation of the French phoneme [u] to a fairly close Russian [y], although it is difficult to consider them completely identical. The French sound is tenser. It is characterized by a higher degree of labialization, which distinguishes it from the Russian sound. Here we also confined ourselves to only one, basic, allophone of the Russian phoneme [y], since its unstressed version differs only in quantitative but not qualitative characteristics:

[u] – [y]: amour – амур *amur* (Cupid), accoucheur – акушер *akusher* (obstetrician), de jour – дежурный *dezhurnyj* (on duty), courier – курьер *kur'er* (messenger), journal – журнал *zhurnal* (journal), groupe – группа *grupa* (group). As we see, the substitution of one phoneme by the other in the pair prototype-correlate is completely consistent. In addition to articulatory proximity, it is due to the fact that the phonemes of the source language and the receptor language can function in similar positions, not limited by any phonetic conditions (Abisheva *et al.*, 2018).

5. Summary

The influence of the phonemes of the receptor language and the phonetic processes inherent in it, which affect the adaptation of a foreign language, is spontaneous in nature. Cases of non-distinction and non-pronunciation of different phonemes of the foreign language due to lack of them in the native language (Epishkin, 2010) cause phoneme blending at the level of phonological variation. The presence of phonetic and morphological doublets, although not so numerous and diverse, represented rather by isolated cases and amenable to classification, remains one of the most important characteristics of the process of borrowing of French vocabulary even at later stages. Often this kind of discrepancies act as real forms characterized by a sufficient frequency of use (Galdi, 1958), which raises the question of revising the role of source language in conditions of direct language contacts. The parallel occurrence of several variants of one lexeme, caused by different phonological norms of the two languages, is quite common in the XVIII-XIX centuries. Their use in the works of bilingual authors can be either an unconscious desire to approximate Gallicism to its French prototype – or is dictated by various stylistic considerations (Verbitskaya, 1998).

6. Conclusions

Through the analysis of phonetic structure of French prototypes and foreign words in the recipient language, the authors of this study came to conclusion that foreign vocabulary of French origin is being comprehensively and actively assimilated by the Russian language and incorporated into the Russian language system. During this process foreign words lose their original characteristics and get new ones common for a recipient language.

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