

Analysis of the Russian Language

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- **Indo-European** Language
 - One of four living East Slavic languages
 - Cyrillic Script
- 160 million native speakers
- USSR influence in popularity

Introduction and Language Family

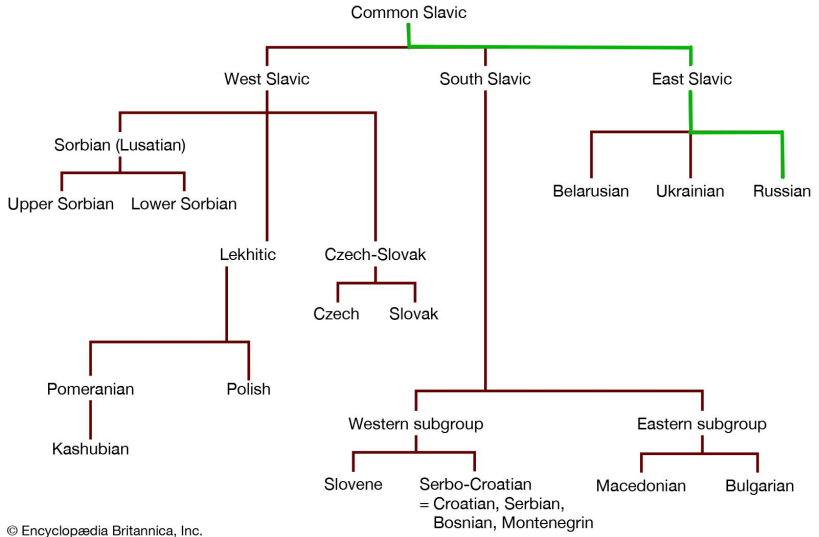


Figure 1: Family tree of the Slavic Languages

Introduction and Language Family

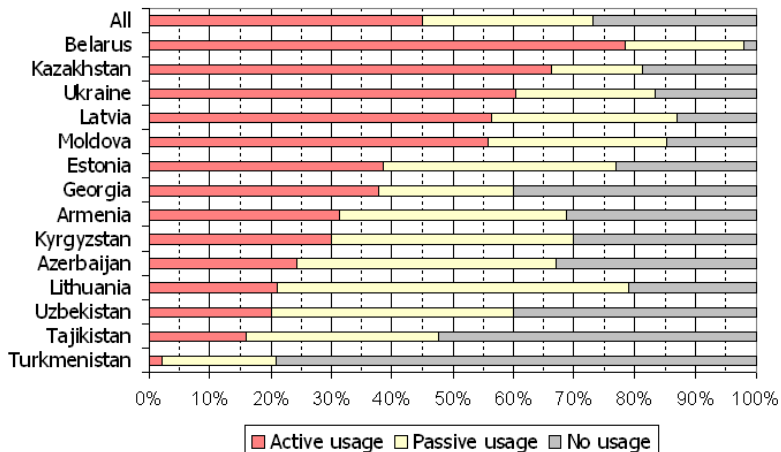


Figure 2: Competence of Russian in countries of the former Soviet Union

Important Features of the Language

- Widespread palatalization of consonants (Also present in other Slavic Languages)
- Extensive nominal morphology
- Simple verb system

- Russian uses the **Cyrillic alphabet** (русский - ['ruskʲɪj])
- There are 32 letters and an *additional sign for palatalization*¹
 - Ъ indicates palatalization of the previous consonant.
 - Ь is silent; it prevents palatalization of the preceding consonant.
- Stress is not normally indicated orthographically. An optional acute accent is used to mark it when distinguishing between homographic words.

¹This is sometimes reported as 33 letters. I have kept the 'additional sign for palatalization'

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|-----|--------|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|
| А а | Б б | В в | Г г | Д д | Е е | Ё ё | Ж ж | З з | И и | Й й | К к |
| a | b | v | g | d | e | ë | ž | z | i | j | k |
| [a] | [b] | [v] | [g] | [d] | [je] | [jo] | [ʒ] | [z] | [i] | [j] | [k] |
| Л л | М м | Н н | О о | П п | Р р | С с | Т т | У у | Ф ф | Х х | Ц ц |
| l | m | n | o | p | r | s | t | u | f | x | c |
| [l] | [m] | [n] | [o] | [p] | [r] | [s] | [t] | [u] | [f] | [x] | [ts] |
| Ч ч | Ш ш | Щ щ | Ъ ъ | Ы ы | Ь ь | Э э | Ю ю | Я я | | | |
| č | š | šč | " | y | ' | è | ju | ja | | | |
| [tɕ] | [ʃ] | [ɕ/ʃɕ] | [-] | [ɨ] | [-] | [ɛ] | [ju] | [ja] | | | |

Figure 3: The Cyrillic Script, transliteration, and IPA transcription

- 5 vowels or 6?
- Phonemic status of the i/i alternation:
 - i occurs only after non-palatalized consonants
 - i only after palatalized ones and word-initially
 - They could be considered complementary sounds and not separate phonemes.
- The reduced i and u vowels of the ancestral Slavic language were lost in Russian.

Table 1: Vowel Chart in Russian

| | Front | Central | Back |
|-----|-------|---------|------|
| Mid | i | (ɨ) | u |
| Mid | e | | o |
| Low | | a | |

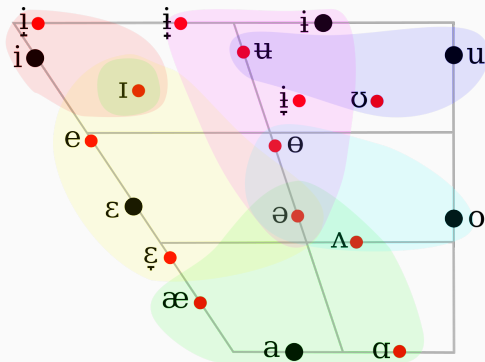


Figure 4: Russian Vowel Chart by Jones and Trofimov

- There are 36 consonants.
- Consonant palatalization is widespread
 - [tʰ], [ʃ], [ʒ] lack palatalized counterparts.
 - [tɕ], [ɕ], [j], are always palatalized, lacking counterparts.
- Palatalization is represented by an accent mark over the letter.

Phonology and Phonetics - Consonants

Table 2: Consonant chart

| | | Labial | Dental | Alveopalatal | Palatal | Velar |
|-------------|------------------|--------|--------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Stop | Voiceless | p p' | t t' | | | k k' |
| | Voiced | b b' | d d' | | | g g' |
| Affricate | <i>Voiceless</i> | | ts | | tʃ | |
| Fricative | <i>Voiceless</i> | f f' | s s' | ʃ | ç | x x' |
| | <i>Voiced</i> | v v' | z z' | ʒ | | |
| Nasal | | m m' | n n' | | | |
| Trill | | | l l' | | | |
| Approximant | | | r r' | | j | |

Stress can fall on any syllable and it may serve to differentiate lexical or morphological forms. For instance, muká ('flour') versus múka ('torment'), rukí (genitive singular) versus rúki (nominative plural).

Stress is not normally indicated orthographically. An optional acute accent is used to mark it when distinguishing between homographic words.

Syllable structure can be complicated, with initial and final consonant clusters of up to 4 consecutive sounds: CCCCVC CCC

These clusters are not very common. Examples: - взгляд ([vzglʲat], 'glance') - государств ([gəsʊ'darstf], 'of the states')

Syllables cannot span multiple morphemes.

Russian Morphology is **highly fusional**

Russian nominal morphology has retained part of the complexity of Old Church Slavonic:

- It has lost the vocative case
- The number of declension types has been reduced
- The dual number has disappeared

Definite and Indefinite Articles do not exist

Table 3: General characteristics covered under Nominal Morphology

| Property | Values |
|------------|---|
| Gender | masculine, neuter, feminine |
| Number | singular, plural |
| Case | nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, instrumental, locative/prepositional |
| Adjectives | masculine singular, neuter singular, feminine singular, plural |
| Pronouns | personal, possessive, demonstrative, interrogative, relative |

Russian noun cases may supplant the use of prepositions entirely. Furthermore, every preposition is exclusively used with a particular case (or cases).

Russian has four major types of noun declension: a-stem, masculine o-stem, neuter o-stem and i-stem.

- Most a-stem nouns are feminine (but those that refer to a male are masculine).
- Almost all i-stems are feminine.
- O-stem nouns are masculine or neuter.

Morphology - Nouns and Adjectives

- Plural forms do not distinguish gender
- Neuter and Masculine adjectives differ in nominative and accusative
- Feminine sing. adjectives: one form for genitive, dative, instrumental, locative

| | <i>masc. sg</i> | <i>neuter sg.</i> | <i>femin. sg</i> | <i>plural</i> |
|-------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|
| nom | staryj | staroe | staraja | starye |
| acc | staryj | staroe | staruju | starye |
| gen | starogo | starogo | staroj | staryx |
| dat | staromu | staromu | staroj | starym |
| instr | starym | starym | staroj | starymi |
| loc | starom | starom | staroj | staryx |

Figure 5: Declension of *staryj* (old)

Morphology - Nouns and Pronouns

Personal Pronouns

- Declined in all 6 cases
- Distinguish Gender in 3rd Person Singular
- 2nd plural form may be used as a polite singular

| | <i>nom.in.</i> | <i>accusat.</i> | <i>genit.</i> | <i>dative</i> | <i>instr.</i> | <i>locat.</i> |
|-------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1s | ja | menja | menja | mne | mnoj | mne |
| 2s | ty | tebja | tebja | tebe | toboj | tebe |
| 3s m. | on | (n)ego | (n)ego | (n)emu | (n)im | nëm |
| 3s f. | ona | (n)eë | (n)eë | (n)ej | (n)ej | nej |
| 3s n. | ono | (n)ego | (n)ego | (n)emu | (n)im | nëm |
| 1p | my | nas | nas | nam | nami | nas |
| 2p | vy | vas | vas | vam | vami | vas |
| 3p | oni | (n)ix | (n)ix | (n)im | (n)imi | (n)ix |

Figure 6: Personal pronouns in Russian

Morphology - Nouns and Pronouns

Possessive Pronouns/Adjectives

- Declined in all cases
- Distinguish gender in the singular, **Exception** of 3rd person forms

| | <i>masc. sg</i> | <i>neut. sg.</i> | <i>femin. sg</i> | <i>plural</i> |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|
| mine/my | moj | moë | moja | moi |
| ours/our | naš | naše | naša | naši |
| yours/your | tvoj | tvoë | tvoja | tvoi |
| yours/your | vaš | vaše | vaša | vaši |
| his/its | ego | ego | ego | ego |
| her, hers, its | eë | eë | eë | eë |
| their, theirs | ix | ix | ix | ix |

Figure 7: Possessive Pronouns

Demonstrative Adjectives

Neuter single forms are *used as demonstrative pronouns*

| | <i>masc. sg</i> | <i>neuter sg.</i> | <i>femin. sg</i> | <i>plural</i> |
|------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|
| this (pl. these) | etot | eto | eta | eti |
| that (pl. those) | tot | to | ta | te |

Figure 8: Demonstrative Adjectives as Pronouns

Interrogative Pronouns

Mainly: kto ('who?') and čto ('what?')

Others: kotoryj ('what?/which?') and kakoj ('what kind of?').

All of the above can also function as relative pronouns.

Indefinite pronouns

Formed by adding **-to/-nibud** to interrogative pronouns.

(The only) Reflexive Pronoun

sebja ('himself, herself')

Animacy is relevant in nominal and adjectival declensions.

The Accusative has two possible forms depending on animacy of the referent

- For Animate referents (persons, animals), accusative is generally identical to genitive
- For Inanimate referents, accusative is identical to nominative

Far simpler than Nominal Morphology

The infinitive is the only non-finite form widely used.

Table 4: General characteristics covered under Verbal Morphology

| Property | Values |
|-------------------|--|
| Person and Number | 1s, 2s, 3s; 1p, 2p, 3p |
| Modality | indicative, imperative |
| Tense | past, non-past, imperfective future, conditional |
| Aspect | imperfective, perfective |
| Voice | active, passive (infrequent) |

past, non-past, imperfective future, conditional

- *past, non-past*: only tenses formed without auxiliary
- *non-past*: verbs agree with subject in **person, number**
- *past*: verbs agree with subject in **gender, number**
- *imperfective future*: auxiliary=**budu**('will be') + future form of verb + infinitive
- *conditional*: past tense + 'by'

Morphology - Verbal, Tense

| | | I Conjugation <i>čitat'</i> (to read) | II Conjugation <i>govorit'</i> (to say) |
|-----------------|----------|--|--|
| 1) Non-Past | 1sg | čitaju | govorju |
| | 2sg | čitaš' | govoriš' |
| | 3sg | čitaet | govorit |
| | 1pl | čitaem | govorim |
| | 2pl | čitaete | govorite |
| | 3pl | čitajut | govorjat |
| 2) Past | masc.sg | čital | govoril |
| | fem. sg | čitala | govorila |
| | neut. sg | čitalo | govorilo |
| | plural | čitali | govorili |
| 3) Imperfective | | | |
| Future | 1sg | budu čitat' | budu govorit' |
| | 2sg | budeš' čitat' | budeš' govorit' |
| | 3sg | budet čitat' | budet govorit' |
| | 1pl | budem čitat' | budem govorit' |
| | 2pl | budete čitat' | budete govorit' |
| | 3pl | budut čitat' | budut govorit' |
| 4) Imperative | | | |
| | 2 sg | čitaj | govori |
| | 2pl | čitajte | govorite |

Figure 9: Tenses

imperfective, perfective

- **imperfective**: incomplete/ongoing action
- **perfective**: completed action

perfective = prefix + imperfective

The prefix is unpredictable: May change meaning of verb, or not.

1. to read: čitat (imperfective), to read: pročitat (perfective)
2. to write: pisat (imperfective), to write: napisat (perfective)
3. to write: pisat (imperfective), to describe: opisat (perfective)

Voice

There is Active and Passive voice, but usage of Passive is infrequent.

Non-Finite forms

The only common one is the *infinitive*

Participles and Gerunds are only used in literary language.

Very flexible SVO

Case system is enough to indicate function of words in sentences

What's missing

No articles

Copula ('to be' verb) is omitted in the present tense # Syntax

Positions of structures

Prepositions, rather than postpositions

Subordinate clauses follow main clauses

Adjectives precede nouns, agree in gender, number, case.

Agreement of finite verbs

Finite verbs agree with their subjects in:

- Person and number in non past tense
- Gender and number in past tense

Numbers

Table 5: Numbers in Russian

| 10,1-9 | 11-19 | 20,21,(30,90,10) | 100,147, (200,900,100) | 1000,2000 |
|----------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 'desyat' | | | sto | tysyacha |
| a'deen | o'dinnatdsat' | d'vadtsat' | sto sorok sem' | |
| dva | dve'nadtsat | dvadsat' odeen | dvesti | dve tysyachi |
| tri | tri'nadsat' | t'ridtsat' | treesta | |
| chetyre | che'tyrnadsat' | sorok | chetyresta | |
| pyat' | pyat'nadtsat' | pyatdesyat | pyat'sot | |
| shest | shet'nadtsat' | shestdesyat | shestsot | |
| sem' | sem'nadtsat' | 'semdesyat | sem'sot | |
| vosem' | vosem'nadtsat' | vosemdesyat | vosemsot | |
| devyat' | devyat'nadtsat' | devyanosto | devyatsot | |

Colours

Russian appears to be an exception to Berlin and Kay's suggestion that languages should have a maximum of 11 basic colour terms.

Russian has 12. There's distinction between light and dark blue.

belyj → *cernyj* → *krasnyj* → *zelenyj* → *zeltyj* → **sinij** → **goluboj** → *koricevyj*
→ *fioletovyj* → *rozovyj* → *oranzevyj* → *seryj*

white → black → red → green → yellow → *dark blue* → *light blue* → brown
→ purple → pink → orange → grey

Kinship terms

Relationship terms exist for:

- Immediate blood relations
- Great uncles/aunts
- In-laws
- Paternal/maternal distinction of grandparents/cousins
- No Paternal/maternal distinction of uncles/aunts
- Male/female distinction of cousins
- Male/female distinction of second cousins
- Step-family
- Great grandparents/grandchildren

Literature

- Pushkin, poetry
- Nikolai Gogol, novelist
- Leo Tolstoy
- Anton Chekhov