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## Use of a comparative analysis for prediction and negotiation of linguistic difficulties in teaching reading in English in Agricultural academy

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### Abstract

This article is devoted to the problems of teaching reading in English in Agricultural academy. Here is given the research of: 1) comparing languages from a cognitive perspective which recognizes the interaction of two or more linguistic systems in the minds of students; 2) typologizing the main linguistic features of Yakut, Russian and English language. To solve the tasks set, the following research methods were used: the study and analysis of Russian literature on the research problem; monitoring the learning process of reading among the students of the first and the second courses; conversations with students and lecturers. The carried out research has allowed to come to the following conclusions: a comparative analysis of different linguistic systems that interact in learning process of a foreign language is essential for effective modification of educational content in order to improve the quality of teaching a foreign language including reading. Such analysis may enable the teacher to: 1) more accurately anticipate and overcome linguistic difficulties, and 2) identify areas of possible positive (or negative) transfer of linguistic knowledge. The application of the principles and findings of comparative linguistics facilitates students' acquisition of linguistic knowledge by improving their metalinguistic skills, i.e. skills necessary for reflecting upon the language-learning process.

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### Keywords

Comparative linguistics, language difficulties, positive (or negative) transfer of linguistic knowledge, metalinguistic skills, morphological level of comparison, syntax, grammatical category, similarity, difference, interlinguistic and intralinguistic interference.

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## Introduction

A comparative analysis of different linguistic systems, one of which is the target language of a teaching-learning process, is "essential for effective modification of educational content in order to improve the quality of teaching a foreign language" [Osman, 1960, p. 126]. Such analysis may enable the teacher to: 1) more accurately anticipate and overcome linguistic difficulties, and 2) "identify areas of possible positive (or negative) transfer of linguistic knowledge" [Fomin, 1991, p.220]. This applies to all aspects of foreign language teaching, including reading.

What is meant by the term applied comparative linguistics? Applied comparative linguistics is a "branch of applied linguistics concerned with the comparative study of two or more languages in order to identify similarities and differences at all levels of linguistic structure" [Lingvisticheskii ensiklopedicheskii slovar, 1990, p. 23] for the purposes of teaching more effectively one of the compared languages. There are at least four levels of linguistic structure: phonetic (phonological), grammatical (morphological), syntactic and lexical (lexical-semantic); sometimes a fifth, derivational, level is also considered. It is important to note that no degree of genetic or typological similarity (or remoteness for that matter) between languages in question plays a role in an applied linguist's choice of conditions for linguistic comparison. There are different approaches to how applied comparative linguistics should be done and each depends on its purpose. Nevertheless, linguists distinguish at least three main approaches: 1) comparison of equivalent lexical-grammatical categories between native and nonnative languages; 2) comparison of non-equivalent lexical-grammatical categories between native and non-native languages, where at least one category exists in the non-native language, but not in the native language; and 3) comparison of non-equivalent lexical-grammatical categories between native and non-native languages, where at least one category is present to the native language, but not in the non-native language [Desheriev, 1976, p.16].

It is believed that the application of the principles and findings of applied comparative linguistics in the classroom, facilitates students' acquisition of linguistic knowledge by improving their metalinguistic skills, i.e. skills necessary for reflecting upon the language-learning process. There are two ways in which applied comparative linguistics can be applied in the classroom – implicitly or explicitly. The former, relies on a covert comparison of languages carried out by the teacher (or an author of a textbook in case of independent learning) in advance. Its purpose is to present to the student typical linguistic difficulties in the target language against the backdrop of his/her native language and require the student to perform a series of exercises aimed at overcoming them. Explicitly applying comparative analysis in teaching involves the teacher (or a textbook author) openly and actively engaging the student in the comparison of the target language and his/her native language. The goal of this approach is to make "students aware of the specific differences and similarities between the foreign and the native languages" [Schepilova, 2005, p.140].

## The statement of the problem

The aim of this article is twofold: first to consider the issue of comparing languages from a cognitive perspective which recognizes the interaction of two or more linguistic systems in the minds of students; and second, to typologize the main linguistic features of Russian and Yakut language (U.Desheriev, U.Yusupov and others) and English and Yakut language (R.Barsuk, J. Buranov). To this end, in accordance with the 12 principles proposed by U.Yusupov, we will adhere to the following three principles: 1) the principle of simplicity; 2) the principle of synchronicity; and 3) the principle of

reduction [Yusupov, 1980, p.120].

We are especially concerned with the study of the phenomena of knowledge interference. Interlingual interference, in contrast to intralinguistic interference, most clearly reveals any contrasting features of languages under comparison. We are especially concerned with establishing 1) the source(s) of interlingual interference on morphological and syntactic levels; and 2) the source(s) of intralingual interference.

At the morphological level of comparison, we will focus on grammatical categories, especially morphemes and parts of speech; at the syntactic level, we will concentrate on sentential structure. In teaching English as a foreign language, interference is particularly notable at the syntactic level, especially at the word-order level. Therefore, we will pay close attention to differences and similarities in word order. In our comparative analysis we use the terminology suggested by A.Schepilova [Schepilova, 2003, p. 251] and R.Barsuk [Barsuk, 1970, p.117]. Also note, that linguistic similarity is suggestive of a possible positive transfer of knowledge which can facilitate language learning, while a linguistic difference is indicative of a possible negative interference which can hinder language learning.

**Table 1 - A comparative analysis of 12 grammatical categories in Yakut (L1), Russian (L2) and English (L3)**

Grammatical category	The similarity between L1 and L3	The similarity between L2 and L3	The difference in L1 and L3	The difference in L2 and L3	Difficulties in reading in English
Number of nouns		In L2 and L3 cardinal numbers require after themselves a noun in plural: one cup -> two cups. In L2 and L3 homonymy of endings is observed: For example, ending -(e)s is used to express: 1) the third person of the verb in Present Simple; 2) plural of nouns; and 3) the possessive case of nouns	In L1, unlike L2, L3, the noun does not accept plural endings after the cardinal numbers: биир (=one) дьиэ (house) -> икки (two) дьиэ (houses). In L1 the same affixes can express different grammatical categories.		Sometimes students feel difficulties in distinguishing homonymous form -(e)s, because it can be: 1) the third person of the verb in Present Simple; 2) plural of nouns; 3) Possessive case; and 4) a contracted form of <i>to be, to have</i> . Tutor should: 1) explain students homonymy of endings -(e)s; 2) give them exercises to distinguish these phenomena; and 3) remind students of a similar phenomenon in L2 (R.Barsuk).
Gender of	There is no category of			Gender of nouns is	This phenomenon is not difficult for students; also,

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Grammatical category	The similarity between L1 and L3	The similarity between L2 and L3	The difference in L1 and L3	The difference in L2 and L3	Difficulties in reading in English
nouns	gender in L1 and L3. There are: 1) words denoting the sex of people and animals: boy-юл, girl-кыыс; and 2) pronouns he, she, it. Morphological signs of gender are observed in L1 under the influence of L2. For instance, Chychahov (m) vs. Chychanova, (f).			basic and characteristic feature of L2, which "is defined according to the ending" (Vinogradov (m) vs. Vinogradova (f) (female).	there is no category of gender of nouns in L1 and L3.
Article		The absence of article in L2 and L3; definiteness / indefiniteness is expressed lexically.	The absence of article in L1, in which definiteness / indefiniteness is expressed lexically.		The presence of articles in the text means nothing to some students. Due to absence of articles in L1 and L2, it is difficult for students to create conception of definiteness and indefiniteness (R.Barsuk).
Adjective	Adjectives do not agree with nouns in number, gender and case in L1 and L3. Adjectives do not take inflectional endings.	There are degrees of comparison of adjectives in L2 and L3. There are certain similarities in the way of its formation.		In L2 adjectives agree with nouns in number, gender and case.	Students do find it difficult to perceive adjectives while reading (complete support of L1).
Verb	There are analogous concepts in L1 and L3: a) Continuous Tense; b) Past Efficient in L1 and Present Perfect in L3; c) Past Perfect Tense in L1 and Past Perfect in L3; and c) Past	There is an analytical form Future Tense formation in L2 (imperfective verb) and L3: буду писать = I shall/will be writing.	There are analogous concepts in L3: 1) "regular and irregular verbs"; 2) 2 groups of Tenses: absolute and relative; and 3) auxiliary verbs which are used to form interrogative,	In L2 there are: 1) two bases of verb: Infinitive and Present Tense to which personal endings are attached; and 2) three Tenses.	Students do not always recognize in English texts irregular verbs and their forms in which change of vowel/word occurred. Perhaps it is due to the fact that the root of a word does not change in L1 and L2 and affixes are added to it.

Grammatical category	The similarity between L1 and L3	The similarity between L2 and L3	The difference in L1 and L3	The difference in L2 and L3	Difficulties in reading in English
	Perfect Progressive in L1 and L3.		negative forms. In L1: 1) there is an indefinite basis from which verbal forms are formed and affixes are attached; and 2) there is no internal flexion.	In L3 there are: 1) four groups of verbs; 2) three inflectional suffixes: - (e)s (the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person of verb in Present Simple); - (e)d (regular verbs in Past Simple); -ing (Participle I)	
Preposition		In L2 prepositions: 1) are not part of sentence, 2) clarify syntactic functions of other parts of the sentence. Auxilliary words and prepositions play great role in L3.	In L1 there are no prepositions, "they are replaced by affixes of cases, postpositions and function words" (R.Barsuk).		Students have difficulties perceiving sentences with prepositions because of a diverse range of linguistic functions of prepositions.
Gerund				The presence of Gerund in L3, which denotes an action, a process or a state. A similar form is absent in L1 and L2.	Gerund is difficult for students because of: 1) its absence in L1 and L2; 2) homonymy: a word with -ing can be: a) Participle I, b) verbal noun; and 3) complex functions in sentence.
Voice	In L1 and L3 there is a system of voice and verb Tenses.	In L2 and L3 there is system of voice and verb Tenses; concept of "Passive Voice".			Students find it difficult to perceive sentences with Passive Voice. Tutor should explicitly teach Passive Voice, comparing L2 with L3.

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Grammatical category	The similarity between L1 and L3	The similarity between L2 and L3	The difference in L1 and L3	The difference in L2 and L3	Difficulties in reading in English
Mood		There are 3 kinds of mood in L2 and L3.	In L1 there are 10 kinds of mood because of large number of modal meanings: e.g. imperative, indicative, owing, optative, concern, conditional, temporary conditional, affirmative, suppositional.	Use of Future Tense in conditionals in L2 is the source of interference in L3.	Students have difficulties perceiving sentences with Subjunctive II and III in English.
Verbal		There are similarities in the use of verbals (Infinitive, Participle, Gerund) in L2 and L3	In L1: 1) there is no form appropriate to Infinitive in L2; 2) Infinitive is given in different ways.		Students have trouble perceiving sentences with Participles and Infinitives.
Types of sentences	There are personal, impersonal, indefinite-personal sentences in L1 and L3.	There are personal, impersonal, indefinite-personal sentences in L2 and L3. There is the notion of Indirect Speech in L2 and L3.			Students sometimes have difficulties perceiving various sentences with Participle Clauses and Infinitive Groups.
Word order	Words are usually in permanent, strict order in a sentence in L1 and L3.	There is a concept of "a general and a special question" in L2 and L3.	In L1 the predicate is usually at the end of a sentence. In L3 the verb takes the 2nd position in the sentence.	There is a relatively free word order in L2.	Students are sometimes unable to identify Subject and Object correctly due to differences in word order between L1, L2 and L3.

### A comparative analysis of Yakut (L1), Russian (L2) and English (L3) syntax

L1, L2 and L3 employ different means to build sentences. Furthermore, word order may serve different functions in different languages. For example, in L1, because of its unique morphology, word order performs mostly stylistic functions [Musaev, 1960, p. 6]; in L2 word order serves mainly semantic

and syntactic functions which is also related to its peculiar morphological structure; and in L3, which has lost its rich morphology, word order in most cases is used to express complicated objective-subjective semantic relations [Musaev, 1960, p. 6].

L1, L2 and L3 belong to different language families and therefore differ in their syntax. Nevertheless, we consider it is necessary to identify their similar linguistic features to be used as reference points for teaching reading in English. According to J. Buranov, at first glance, it might seem that the structures of the Indo-European (English and Russian in this case) and the Turkic (here Yakut) languages have nothing in common. However, in reality, structural and positional differences between L1, L2 and L3 are not as significant as it appears; their structural variations are explained in terms of the differences observed at the surface structure, but at a deeper level of structure each of their sentential elements are functionally comparable. For instance, "three-term structures in English and Turkic languages are similar at their deep level of structure, but at the service level significant differences can be observed because the order of their sentential components vary" [Buranov, 1983, p. 27].

**Table 2 - Consider the location of parts of the sentence in L1, L2 and L3.**

L1 (Yakut)	L2 (Russian)	L3 (English)	Difficulties
Predicate is at the end of the sentence.	Predicate usually stands in the 2nd place, but "a certain word order is not always kept" [R. Barsuk].	Predicate is in the 2nd place in a simple affirmative sentence.	Students can mistakenly perceive a word placed at the end of a sentence as a predicate because of the transfer of norms of L1 into L3 (negative transfer). Tutor should teach students to recognize Predicates in L3.
Subject is in the beginning of a sentence, if there is no attribute.	Subject is in the beginning of a sentence, if there is no attribute.	Subject is in the beginning of a sentence.	Recognition of Subject in a sentence does not cause difficulties because of similarities in three languages.
Direct Object precedes Predicate: e.g. Мин <b>книгу</b> аа5абын. (я книгу читаю).	Object is after Predicate: e.g. я читаю <b>книгу</b>	Object is after Predicate: e.g. I am reading <b>a book</b>	Students can mistakenly confuse the Indirect Object with the Predicate in L3 under the influence of L1
1) Indirect Object placed before Predicate; 2) If there is a Direct and an Indirect Object, Indirect Object is situated as in L3 (i.e. after the Predicate)		Indirect Object is between Predicate and Direct Object.	
Attribute in L1 and L3 is expressed by Adjectives, Participles, Ordinal numbers, which is adjacent to defined words and stand before them.	Unlike L1 and L3, Attribute in L2 is consistent with defined words and stand in before them. For instance, singing girl is beautiful.	In L3 Attribute is expressed by Adjectives, Participles, Ordinal numbers, which are positioned before modified words.	Students do experience difficulties while reading (complete support of L1).

In addition to the grammatical elements of L1, L2 and L3 listed in the table above, there are other aspects of L3 syntax that may be problematic for students to learn. These aspects include participle clauses, infinitive groups, gerunds, complex objects, complex subjects and the infinitival complexes. Although foreign-language teaching should be based on students' linguistic experience, the

aforementioned grammatical phenomena do not have equivalents in either L1 or L2. [Ivanova, 2009, p. 76].

In addition to numerous interlinguistic challenges, students also face a number of intralinguistic difficulties related to reading English texts. These difficulties, in turn, may be associated with the problem of recognizing certain grammatical phenomena both in terms of their complexity and their role in interlinguistic and intralinguistic interference. Intralinguistic interference occurs within one language and can cause violations of its internal organization. "The greatest difficulties are caused by homonymous, polysemantic and multifunctional forms and structures" [Razumeeva, 1970, p.25].

### The results of the study

In summary, the results of our comparative analysis can be summarized as follows: 1) similarities and differences have been identified on the base of which pretext exercises aimed at overcoming morpho-syntactic interference in reading English texts can be made; 2) a typology of possible students' reading difficulties caused by the interlinguistic interference on the morphological and syntactic levels was developed; 3) a tentative typology of possible students' reading difficulties caused by intralinguistic interference was suggested.

On the morphological level, L3 phenomena, which are different or absent from L1 and L2 are particularly difficult for students. These include: 1) articles which present difficulties for approximately 47% of the Yakut-speaking students from the Agricultural Academy; 2) differences in word-formation (L1, L2, L3) cause 62% of students to fail to identify parts of speech according to their derivational affixes while reading English texts; 3) differences in noun pluralization causes problems for 55% of students. In L3 in addition to regular nouns, that are also those which are either always singular, though appearing plural in form (e.g. news, politics...etc) or always plural, though seeming singular (e.g. police...etc); 4) differences in expressing the category of case results in difficulties reading English texts. For instance, in L3 case can be expressed by prepositions (e.g. to talk **about** the weather, a course **of** events...etc). But prepositions are absent in the Yakut language and this is probably why 52% of students from the Agricultural Academy have difficulties with prepositions; 6) recognition of irregular verbs and its forms in English texts is difficult for 62% of students. This is probably due to the fact that English irregular verbs are conjugated by changing a vowel within a word or altering its form altogether. This is alien to speakers of the Yakut language. In L1 the verb may have several affixes that are attached in a specific order; 7) Recognition of modal verbs such as *to be to*, *to have to*, *to be able to* in English texts is difficult for 73% of students because in English modality is expressed via conjugation, while in L1 it is expressed by means of affixation; 8) 73% of students from the Agricultural Academy have difficulties with verbals such as gerunds, participles I and II. The gerund is especially difficult because it is completely absent from the Yakut language and performs complex functions in the sentence.

In addition to the aforementioned differences in L1, L2 and L3, we also noted some morphological similarities which can be used as supports for more efficient and effective language learning. These similarities are: 1) there is no category of gender for nouns in L1 and L3; and 2) in L1 and L3 adjectives do not agree with the noun in gender, case and number and do not take inflectional endings.

Students' possible reading difficulties on the syntactic level include: 1) participle clauses, infinitival groups and gerunds present difficulties for about 70% of Agricultural Academy students; 2) for 70% of students reading difficulties may be related to complex objects, complex subjects, as these grammatical phenomena are expressed differently in L1 and L2; 3) for 72% of students reading English texts is accompanied with difficulties processing sequence of tenses and reported speech because in L1 and L2 the subordinate clause does not depend or agree in tense with the main clause; 4) subjunctives



II and III are difficult for 67% of students from the Agricultural Academy, as the subjunctive mood in L1 and L2 correspond to various forms of mood in L3; 5) 72% of students have difficulties with the passive voice.

### Summary

In terms of intralinguistic interference the following difficulties have been observed: 1) homonymy of forms and structures, resulting in: a) 50% of students having difficulties distinguishing the variants of -ing, which may mark the gerund or the participle I; b) 40% of students having trouble in distinguishing various forms of the suffix -(e)d which can mark either the past tense of the verb or the 2<sup>nd</sup> participle; c) 55% of students finding it challenging to differentiate the homonymous -(e)s, which can indicate a contracted form of *to be* or *to have*, the ending of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the verb in the present simple, the noun plural marker and the noun genitive case marker;

2) multifunctional forms and structures, such as: a) 52% of students of the Agricultural Academy have difficulty in understanding the multifunctional auxiliary verbs *to be* and *to have*; b) 52% of students have trouble understanding sentences with prepositions because prepositions in L3 are highly multifunctional.

Based on foregoing, it can be concluded that comparison of contact languages in learning process contributes to understanding of specificity of structure of foreign language compared to L1 and L2, and also allows to find an effective method of teaching students.

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## **Использование лингвокомпаративного анализа при обучении чтению на английском языке в агровузе**

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### **Аннотация**

Данная статья посвящена вопросам обучения чтению на английском языке в агровузе. В статье рассмотрены: во-первых, вопросы о сравнении языков с когнитивной точки зрения, которая признает взаимодействие двух или более языковых систем в умах учеников; во-вторых, создана типология основных языковых особенностей якутского, русского и английского языков. Для решения поставленных задач использовались следующие методы исследования: изучение и анализ отечественной литературы по проблеме исследования; наблюдение за процессом обучения чтению студентов 1-2 курсов агровуза; беседы со студентами и преподавателями. Проведенное исследование позволило нам сделать следующие выводы: сравнительный анализ различных языковых систем, взаимодействующих в процессе обучения иностранному языку, необходим для эффективной модификации образовательного контента с целью повышения качества преподавания иностранного языка, включая чтение. Такой анализ может позволить учителю: 1) более точно предвидеть и преодолевать языковые трудности, и 2) определять области возможной положительной (или отрицательной) передачи лингвистических знаний. Применение принципов и результатов сравнительной лингвистики облегчает приобретение студентами лингвистических знаний, улучшая их металингвистические навыки, то есть навыки, необходимые для размышлений над процессом изучения языка.

### **Для цитирования в научных исследованиях**

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### **Ключевые слова**

Сравнительная лингвистика, языковые трудности, положительный (или отрицательный) перенос языкового знания, металингвистические навыки, морфологический уровень сравнения, синтаксис, грамматическая категория, сходство, различие, межъязыковая и внутриязыковая интерференция.

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