



## **CHALLENGES OF TEACHING RUSSIAN TO UZBEK-SPEAKING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

Teaching Russian to Uzbek-speaking university students involves a number of linguistic and pedagogical challenges influenced by differences between the two languages and the multilingual background of learners. This article examines common difficulties in Russian language instruction at the university level, including pronunciation problems, grammatical interference, lexical confusion, and limited speaking confidence. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and classroom-based examples, the study identifies recurring patterns in student performance and discusses practical teaching strategies to address them.

The findings suggest that effective instruction requires contrastive explanation, communicative practice and supportive formative feedback. Adapting teaching methods to learners' linguistic background can significantly improve both language accuracy and communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Russian as a foreign language, Uzbek-speaking students, higher education, multilingualism, language interference, communicative competence.

### **Introduction**

The teaching of Russian in higher education continues to play an important role in multilingual societies where students use several languages for academic, professional, and social purposes. In the Uzbek context, many university students study Russian not as a native language, but as a second or foreign language needed for communication, access to academic sources, employment, and mobility. At the same time, teaching Russian to Uzbek-speaking students is not a simple matter of presenting grammar and vocabulary. It involves addressing differences between two language systems and helping learners overcome the effects of first-language transfer. Multilingual education research consistently



shows that the learner's home language shapes how additional languages are processed, learned, and assessed.

One of the central issues in second language teaching is interference, or transfer, from the learner's first language into the target language. Research on language transfer shows that phonology, morphosyntax, and semantics are especially vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence. When students learn a language with a grammatical system different from their own, they often apply familiar patterns from the first language, producing structurally predictable errors. In the case of Uzbek-speaking learners of Russian, such problems may appear in verb agreement, gender usage, case endings, word order, and pronunciation.

Another challenge lies in the gap between formal knowledge and communicative use. A student may know rules, memorize vocabulary, and perform well in written exercises, yet still struggle to speak fluently in real classroom interaction.

Communicative language teaching literature has long argued that language instruction should not stop at rule explanation; it must also develop communicative competence through realistic and meaningful use. This is especially relevant in

university classrooms, where students are expected to use Russian for discussion, presentations, and academic tasks.

The purpose of this article is to identify the main challenges of teaching Russian to Uzbek-speaking university students and to describe practical teaching responses based on classroom experience. The article focuses on real teaching situations that reflect common patterns in higher education rather than on a large-scale experimental dataset.

## **Methods**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach based on classroom observation, reflective teaching practice, and analysis of recurring student errors in Russian language classes at university level. The article is practice-based and draws on naturally occurring examples from the instructional process. Rather than measuring outcomes statistically, it aims to describe typical learning problems and interpret them pedagogically.

The material for analysis comes from regular classroom interaction in Uzbek speaking student groups studying Russian in higher education. The observations

include oral responses, short dialogues, written exercises, vocabulary tasks, pronunciation practice, and teacher feedback sessions. Repeated error patterns were grouped into four broad categories: phonetic difficulties, grammatical interference, lexical and semantic problems, and communicative barriers.

Several classroom-based examples are included in this article. These examples are not presented as isolated mistakes, but as indicators of broader tendencies among learners whose first language differs structurally from Russian. This kind of classroom-based inquiry is consistent with pedagogical action-oriented reflection, where teaching practice itself becomes a source of analysis and improvement.

Research on multilingual learners and negative transfer supports the value of examining actual learner production in order to design more responsive teaching methods.

## **Results**

The classroom observations revealed three major groups of challenges in teaching Russian to Uzbek-speaking university students.

1. Phonetic and pronunciation difficulties. The first group of challenges concerns pronunciation. Russian contains phonetic contrasts that are difficult for learners whose dominant linguistic background differs from Slavic phonological patterns. Students often pronounce unstressed vowels more distinctly than native Russian norms require, confuse soft and hard consonants, or avoid difficult consonant clusters in rapid speech. Studies on pronunciation learning in second language contexts show that phonological differences between languages frequently lead to persistent articulation problems if they are not explicitly taught.

A classroom example illustrates this issue. During oral reading, one student repeatedly pronounced words such as семья and день without sufficient softness, which made the speech understandable but noticeably non-target-like. Another student inserted an extra vowel when reading a consonant cluster in a word such as встреча, producing a slower and segmented version. These examples show that pronunciation is not merely a mechanical problem; it affects confidence, fluency, and willingness to speak.

2. Grammatical interference from Uzbek. The second major challenge is grammar. Uzbek and Russian differ substantially in grammatical structure. Russian

relies heavily on gender, case endings, agreement, and verbal aspect, whereas Uzbek follows different morphological and syntactic principles. In practice, students often omit endings, misuse case forms, or produce sentences with reduced agreement.

For example, when describing a female student, a learner said: Он хороший студент, transferring a familiar generalized pattern instead of selecting the appropriate gender form in Russian. In another case, a student wrote: Я иду университет instead of Я иду в университет, omitting the required preposition and case marking. Such errors are common in classrooms where students understand the general meaning they want to express but have not fully internalized the grammatical architecture of Russian. Research on negative transfer confirms that morphosyntactic errors often emerge when learners map first language structures onto a second language with a different system.

3. Lexical and semantic problems. The third challenge involves vocabulary. Students may know individual Russian words but still struggle with collocations, contextual meaning, or false equivalents. Lexical transfer from the first language may lead learners to produce expressions that are understandable but unnatural. Studies on lexical transfer show that learners often choose words based on direct equivalence rather than usage patterns in the target language.

A real classroom example occurred during a speaking task on daily routine. A student wanted to say that a lesson “takes place” at a certain time, but instead used a verb equivalent to “goes” in a way influenced by another language pattern. Another learner translated an Uzbek-style expression word-for-word into Russian, producing a sentence that was grammatically possible but semantically odd in academic Russian. These examples indicate that vocabulary teaching must include phrase-level instruction, model sentences, and contextual use, not just isolated word lists.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this article show that teaching Russian to Uzbek-speaking university students requires a pedagogical model that is both linguistically informed and instructionally flexible. The problems described above are not random student weaknesses. They are predictable outcomes of multilingual learning in which one linguistic system interacts with another. UNESCO’s work on multilingual education and assessment emphasizes that multilingual learners



should not be treated as deficient monolinguals; instead, teaching and assessment should recognize the role of prior language knowledge in shaping new learning. First, the results suggest that contrastive teaching is especially important. When teachers explicitly compare Uzbek and Russian structures, students understand not only what is correct, but why the error occurs. For instance, case usage becomes clearer when students see those Russian marks relations differently and more visibly than Uzbek does in similar communicative situations. Instead of simply correcting Я иду университет, the teacher can demonstrate how movement toward a place in Russian usually requires both a preposition and the correct noun form.

Second, the data support the use of communicative scaffolding. Students should not be expected to move immediately from grammar explanation to free discussion. A more effective sequence is controlled practice, guided speaking, pair work, and then freer communication. In practice, this means giving phrase banks, model dialogues, functional expressions, and topic-based prompts before asking for spontaneous production. Communicative language teaching literature supports this gradual movement from form to meaningful use.

Third, pronunciation should receive systematic attention, especially at early stages. In many university settings, pronunciation is corrected only incidentally. However, the classroom evidence in this article shows that pronunciation directly influences intelligibility and confidence. Short focused drills, echo reading, minimal-pair practice, and repeated oral modelling can help reduce persistent errors.

Research on phonological constraints in second-language learning also suggests that pronunciation difficulties are easier to manage when they are addressed early and explicitly.

Finally, the findings highlight the value of formative feedback in multilingual classrooms. Students improve more when feedback is immediate, specific, and supportive rather than punitive. Instead of simply marking an answer as wrong, the teacher can identify the type of error: pronunciation, agreement, preposition, aspect, or word choice. Such feedback gradually builds learner awareness and autonomy.

UNESCO's recent guidance on classroom-based assessment for multilingual learners aligns with this approach by emphasizing diagnostic and supportive assessment practices.

## Conclusion

Teaching Russian to Uzbek-speaking university students is a complex but manageable task when teachers understand the linguistic and pedagogical sources of learner difficulty. The major challenges include pronunciation problems, grammatical interference, lexical imprecision, and limited communicative spontaneity. These challenges are not signs of low ability; rather, they reflect the realities of multilingual language learning.

The article has shown, through classroom-based examples, that effective Russian language teaching in higher education should combine contrastive explanation, scaffolded communication, pronunciation support, contextual vocabulary work, and formative feedback. A successful teacher of Russian in this context must therefore act not only as a transmitter of rules, but also as a mediator between languages and a designer of supportive communicative environments.

Future research may build on this practice-based article by conducting a larger empirical study with student interviews, error frequency analysis, or experimental comparison of teaching methods. Nevertheless, even at the level of classroom observation, it is clear that instruction becomes more effective when it is adapted to the actual linguistic background of Uzbek-speaking learners.

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