

Обучение за рубежом и овладение русскими личными именами

Study abroad and the acquisition of Russian nominal address terms

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена овладению русскими личными именами у студентов русского языка во время восьминедельной программы в Москве. Она заключает, что социальное взаимодействие, обеспечиваемое во время короткого пребывания, способствует вниманию и осознанию социальных переменных уважения, социальной дистанции и, в меньшей степени, навязывания. В результате это влияет на овладение личными именами, которое остается ограниченным из-за недостаточной вовлеченности в социально близкое и эмоциональное взаимодействие.

Ключевые слова: русский как второй язык, обучение за рубежом, эмоциональный язык, социальное взаимодействие.

Abstract

This paper explores the acquisition of nominal address terms (NATs) in L2 learners of Russian on an eight-week Study Abroad programme in Moscow. It concludes that the social interaction afforded during a short stay facilitates attendance to and awareness of the social variables of respect, social distance and to a lesser extent imposition. As a result, this has an impact on the acquisition of NATs which remains limited due to lack of engagement in socially close and emotional interaction.

Keywords: Russian as a second language, Study Abroad, Emotional language, social interaction.

When assessing the linguistic range of learners of a second/foreign language, traditionally scholars of second language acquisition (SLA) and teachers have been concerned with aspects such as accuracy of grammatical forms and lexical items or 'native-like' pronunciation, but little attention is paid to the socially-appropriate use of language. In Russian, for example, beyond the ты /вы distinction learners are rarely given the opportunity to engage with the richness of the socioemotionally-sensitive variability embedded in the morphosyntax of the language. Such variability permeates the Russian language and is manifest, for example, through 'expressive suffixation' [10: 32] (хлебушкаvs хлеб), verbal aspect (садись всядь), verbal tense (сидитесьvs сели) and, of course, via nominal address terms (Марияvs Маша). While the aforementioned examples are semantically or functionally equivalent, they are not interchangeable. Selecting an inappropriate variant can have a negative impact on the hearer and can therefore impede social interaction. This is an often overlooked element of second/foreign language acquisition and teaching which is frequently considered an optional extra, or the 'icing on the cake' [18: 245]. However, if an aim of acquiring an additional language is to avoid 'misunderstandings and communication breakdowns' [7: 260], the competence to choose an appropriate variant is essential when it comes to intent of interaction. The inappropriate use of language can lead to 'the formation of cultural

stereotypes” [2: 174] or even to individual learners “having their social (or even political, religious or moral) judgement called into question.” [17: 104].

Now that the importance of socioemotional aspects to the linguistic repertoire of learners has been foregrounded, we turn to its acquisition. Developing competence in such aspects requires access to and interaction with a dynamic learning environment rich in diverse linguistic opportunities. It has been posited that, unlike the classroom which is described as being a limited context, relying on canonical forms which have become ‘neutralized’ [5: 725], the Study Abroad (SA) context may submerge the learner in a potentially “rich linguistic and cultural haven” [12: 198]. As Devlin [6] argues, the SA context provides access to interaction with an evolving range of socially-constructed spaces which can foster the acquisition of situationally-congruent language use.

The Study

In light of the above, the current paper will focus on the acquisition of nominal address terms (NATs) in an SA context. The system of NATs in Russian is highly socioemotionally sensitive and complex and often constitutes a battleground for learners. According to Кропайз [20] there are eight variations of the tripartite system of first name, patronymic and family name. The most common usages are first name only (Maria) and first name and patronymic (Maria Borisovna). While both can be used with acquaintances, they are socially differentiated. The former is neutral; whereas the latter implies greater degrees of respect and tends to be employed towards older addressees, those with a higher social position and / or in formal situations. In the context of friends, or in situations with heightened emotions, the default variant is a diminutive first name – e.g. Masha instead of Maria [20]. However, diminutive first names are also subject to so socioemotional variation and “great care must be taken both to use them only in the right circumstances and to distinguish the nuances of the various forms” [13: 230].

Methodology

The paper explores the impact of a short-term SA programme on the development of the use of NATs and learners’ attendance to the social variables respect, emotionality, social distance and imposition.

Participants

The participants consist of 18 US college students on an eight-week SA programme in Moscow.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected at the beginning of the SA sojourn and at the end. Learners were asked to complete the same discourse completion task (DCT) in both occasions. A DCT is a controlled data elicitation tool which allows for the careful reconfiguration of social variables in such a way as to effectively draw the participants’ attention to them, alerting them to the possibility of varying their linguistic responses. Despite some criticism, they have been shown to produce high rate of validity [8] and remain “a very powerful and influential data collection tool” [19: 171]. For the purpose of the current paper, we consider four paired scenarios where the participants are asked to realise the same speech act in socially-differentiated contexts. The first situation in each scenario is designated a casual situation (sC) and the second is a respectful situation (sR). The scenarios are presented in table 1.

Table 1 DCT Scenarios

Scenario 1: Institutional Request: You are in class. Ask your classmate Irena Nikolayevna Kolyaskina to open the window. You are in class. Ask your teacher Marina Petrovna Belkina to open the window	Scenario 2: Conversational Request Ask your friend’s four-year-old son, Andrei Ivanovich Belyi, to pass you the bread Ask your friend, Ivan Mikhailovich Goncharov, to give you some beer
Scenario 3: Apology: Your friend Roman Antonovich Markalov has invited you to dinner with his father Anton Ilych Markalov and you are late. Apologise to your friend.	Scenario 4: Offer: A close friend, Alexander Borisovich Dudin, has called round. Invite him to sit down and offer him tea Your friend’s mother, Svetlana Ivanovna

Your friend Roman Antonovich Markalov has invited you to dinner with his father Anton Ilych Markalov and you are late. Apologise to his father.	Dudina, has called round. Invite her to sit down and offer her tea.
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The scenarios were presented in English in order to ensure that the task was fully understood and also to avoid influencing language choices. Differentiation of the situations was influenced by the principles laid out by Brown & Levinson [3] – i.e. social distance, power and imposition. However, research has noted that Russian culture values social solidarity over social hierarchy and, as a result, the power variable is not readily attended to [15]. It has been suggested that the variable of respect is the most significant social variable when deciding how to address a person in Russian [14]. In addition, as already highlighted, emotionality plays a significant role variant choice. Therefore, the social principles explored are social distance, respect, emotionality and imposition.

Results

The intensity of use and dispersion of NATs across time, speech act and situation is shown in table 2. Overall, there were 144 opportunities to use a NAT. The data show that the intensity of use of NATs increased over the time period from being used in 46.5% (n=67) of cases to 76% (n=109). Following a Chi Square test, the increase was seen to be statistically significant (χ^2 (21.782), $p = .002$). While the use of NATs is slightly greater in the sC than in the sR – n=93 v n=81 (64.5% v 56%), this does not prove to be statistically significant. Digging deeper into the data, we can see that while the intracontextual patterns stay the same across time, statistically significant increases can be found in the conversational request sC and in apologies and offers where the number doubled across time in both situations ($p \geq 0.05$). Therefore, it can be stated that during their sojourn, learners shift from a strong tendency of avoiding the use of NATs in all circumstances to a position whereby their use becomes the preferred option. They remain more comfortable employing NATs in casual situations as a whole, but significantly increased their use with interlocutors while realising the speech acts of apology and offer. With regards requests, conversational requests in the casual situation saw an increase in the use of NATs.

Table 2 Intensity of Use and Dispersion of NAT per Category

	T1								Total 1	T2								Total 1
	Inst R		Conv R		Apol		Offer			Inst R		Conv R		Apol		Offer		
	sC	sR	sC	sR	sC	sR	sC	sR		sC	sR	sC	sR	sC	sR	sC	sR	
FFN	13	1	7	3	5	1	1	0	31	14	1	10	7	10	0	4	1	47
FFNP	0	7	0	0	1	5	0	5	18	0	8	0	0	0	11	1	9	29
FFNPFa	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	7
FFNFa	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	4
DFN	1	0	2	4	0	0	5	0	12	1	0	4	4	1	0	7	1	18
P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
EndFFN	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Title Fa	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	14	9	10	7	6	8	6	7	67	17	10	15	13	12	15	13	14	109

Key: FFN = full first name; FFNP = full first name and patronymic; FFNPFa = full first name, patronymic and familiya; DFN = diminutive first name; EndFFN = term of endearment and full first name

Turning our attention to dispersion of NATs, it can be seen that although there is variation, patterns emerge and become corroborated over time. The three most used categories are: FFN, FFNP and DFN at both T1 and T2. In general, the preferred option for a casual situation is FFN and the FFNP for the respectful situation. The pattern of use is congruent with the expected norms of native

speaker use vis-à-vis the respectful situation. This is not the case in terms of the casual situation whereby DFN is normative for native speakers [20]. However, an increase in the use of DFN is apparent across time and tentatively across speech acts. With the exception of one instance in T2, it is used solely in casual situations and most often in the conversational request and offer. In the conversational request, it was used most often with the child in T1 but by T2 it was used equally with the peer and with the child. As a final note, it must be stated that T2 witnessed greater experimentation with NATs as demonstrated by the inclusion of non-standard or idiosyncratic forms (P only / title + Fa) and intensified forms (term of endearment + FFN).

Discussion

As previously noted, in Russian, the use of NATs is highly variable and carries significant socioemotional weight. The use of an inappropriate variant may provoke a negative reaction from the addressee, cause the learner to lose considerable face or impede the formation of friendships. As the choice is often predicated on attendance to, and awareness of, contextually-bound degrees of respect, social distance, emotionality and imposition, learners require intense and diverse interaction with naturally-occurring language spaces in order to acquire the competence to vary their use of NATs accordingly. It has been argued that a SA context may facilitate this.

With reference to the results, it is clear that even a short-term study abroad has an impact on the use of NATs. The shift can be explicated by invoking attendance by the learners to the social variables of respect, emotionality, social distance and imposition. The solidification of the use of FFNP in the discourse of the learners when engaging with an older interlocutor and the FFN when interacting with a peer could be seen as growing awareness of the need to differentiate along the variables of respect and social distance. Inversely, it could also be hypothesized that the short-term nature of the sojourn did not facilitate adequate diversity of interaction for the learners to attend to the variables of social closeness and emotionality. In particular, it did not allow for the development of friendships with native speakers or engagement in emotionally-invested interactions with native-speaking peers. Prior research into duration of SA has shown these to be time sensitive [6] and this is foregrounded in the results which highlight that even when speaking to friends/peers, the preferred option is the full first name and not the diminutive version. While the full first name can be neutral, it is often devoid of the social closeness and emotionality that interactions with friends incur [20]. Despite not being a preferred option, DFNs were present in the data and their use grew over time. In particular, they are present in child-directed speech and when realising the speech act of offering to a friend. While speaking to a child obviously evokes emotionality and social closeness, what both situations have in common is a low imposition context. It could therefore be hypothesised that the use of DFNs is influenced not primarily by emotionality, but by degrees of imposition.

In short, this type of short-term SA can be considered conducive to the development of the variable use of NATs. However, the variation is limited and can be explicated by greater awareness of, and attendance to, the social variables of respect, social distance and to a lesser degree imposition which was facilitated by social interaction during SA. However, the duration of the SA did not allow learners to become aware of, and attend to, the variables of emotionality and social closeness.

Implications

While the current paper is not concerned with convergence with NS norms, it is clear that the production of NATs does not approximate NS norms in many instances. This raises the question of the need for “direct instruction and guided exposure [...] to interact with native speakers using socially appropriate language.” [11: 406]. Shardakova notes that it is not enough to leave “learners to figure out on their own Russian socio-cultural conventions and their effects on communication” [16: 446]. This may be particularly important within short-term SAs as “participants may experience superficial cultural contact” [1: 454] due to very limited contact with social networks [9]. This is foregrounded in the current study particularly vis-à-vis a deficit in awareness of nominal address terms which “is crucial for intercultural dialogue.” [4: 407]. In light of that, all learners would benefit from direct instruction in the use of NATs.

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