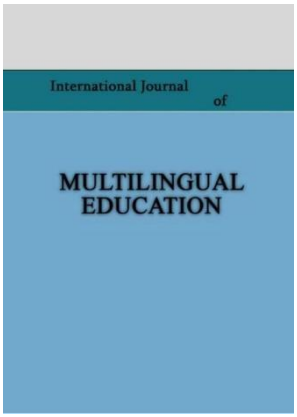

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Regarding the issue of teaching grammar for its own sake in Georgian schools

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses an important issue in Georgian public schools, the problem of teaching grammar "for its own sake" when teaching Russian as a second foreign language. The state standard of Georgia requires that Russian be taught using communicative methodology. However, recent Georgian textbooks propose a series of purely grammatical tasks that violate this requirement. This article analyses the tasks proposed in the textbooks and identifies which principles of communicative methodology they disregard. Additionally, this article discusses why teachers and authors of educational resources are slow to transition toward communicative methods for teaching grammar and speaking skills development.

Keywords: *Russian as a second foreign language, teaching grammar, communication method, formation of speaking skills.*

Introduction

This article reviews the reasons for teaching "grammar for its own sake" while teaching Russian as a second foreign language in Georgian schools. In public schools in Georgia Russian is taught for two lessons per week, with each lesson lasting for 40 or 45 minutes. It is challenging to develop the necessary communication skills for students when devoting more than necessary time to learning grammar for its sake in the classroom. According to a survey of Georgian school teachers, teaching Russian as a second language produces unfavourable results, especially regarding the development of speaking skills. The teachers rated the results of speaking skills with the lowest score of 2 out of 4 points (Lortkipanidze, 2021, p. 1 - 2).

Given the limited hours and the possibility of having 30 students in the class, it is essential to actively use and organise tasks to reduce oral speech to automaticity. This means minimizing purely grammatical tasks and conducting them mainly in pairs.

General description of teaching Russian as a second foreign language in Georgian schools

The Georgian state standard for teaching a second foreign language emphasises the use of communicative approach. To develop educational resources, the State Standard of Georgia recommends using the "backward design" method. This method involves teaching grammar that arises from communicative needs, rather than teaching it in isolation. The teaching of grammar should be integrated with communicative goals, and lexical material should be taught alongside grammatical issues. This approach is outlined in the National Curriculum 2016 - 2024 for the Basic Level (p. 9).

Despite the Georgian State Standard requirements for a foreign language, analysis of Russian language textbooks accredited in Georgia, school lessons and various demonstration lesson plans reveal that Georgian public school teachers and authors of Georgian textbooks still mainly focus on purely grammatical tasks in the classroom. These tasks involve putting words in the correct form, writing noun endings, and other similar exercises. Typically, the students complete these exercises individually in writing, and the teacher then questions them one by one. For example, the 6th grade textbook (the second year of teaching the Russian language) includes many teaching grammar “for its own sake” tasks, but their instructions make it clear that these tasks are far from the communicative methodology requirements. None of the tasks are aimed at speech speaking skills development, nor are they close to genuine speaking situations. As a result, these tasks do not contribute much in developing students' speaking skills. In all these tasks, students have to put one or two words into the correct grammatical form, for example, Задание 1. Прочитай предложения. Найди ошибку. Запиши правильно. / Задание 2. Вставь глагол идти в нужной форме. /Задание 3. Вставь правильно глаголы идти, ехать в нужной форме. /Задание 4. Вставь правильно глаголы идти, ехать. / Задание 5. Заполни таблицу по аналогии. / Задание 6. Раскрой скобки. Вставь существительные в нужной форме. (Lortkipanidze *et al.*, VI, Workbook, 2018. P. 19 - 21).

In Georgian schools, the importance of organising tasks in pairs is not properly understood by the teachers. They use pair work sporadically, for example, in the lesson plan of teacher Ia Chkhonia dated 17.05.2018, which aims to "acquire new vocabulary and use it in practice", students perform only one task in pairs throughout the lesson, which is not sufficient to ensure their use of vocabulary in practice (Chkhonia, Model lesson plans, 2018). The same can be said about the training plans of other teachers, as they allocate only 0-5 minutes to work in pairs from the lesson time. These plans include those of Bokuchava's lesson plan from 2016 and Ruseishvili's lesson plan from 2019 (Bokuchava, lesson plan, 2016, Ruseishvili, Lesson plan, 2019).

The abundance of grammar taught “for its own sake” tasks in Georgian schools, the lack of speaking

practice and pair work are the main reasons for the deplourable situation in Georgian schools in terms of developing speaking skills in Russian as a foreign language.

Reasons for teaching grammar for its own sake in Georgian schools

This article explores the reasons why Georgian schools struggle to develop the necessary skills for foreign language speaking, particularly in oral conversation. It also looks at why teachers and modern Georgian textbooks still focus on learning grammar "for its own sake". To do this, the study analyzed Russian language school textbooks accredited in Georgia, Russian textbooks which are frequently used as additional educational resources by Georgian teachers and Russian-language (Russian and Belarusian) methodological literature.

1. One of the reasons for the teaching of grammar for its own sake in Georgia should be looked for, first of all in **the experience** of Russian language teachers and textbook authors in Georgia. In Georgia, until 2011, the Russian language was compulsory and enjoyed the status of the first foreign language. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian was taught similar to the native language, i.e. 5 - 6 lessons were allocated at school, language (grammar) and literature were taught separately and the student had a Russian-speaking environment. Therefore, the language teaching method at that time was completely different from the method that is needed today for teaching Russian as a second foreign language. The experience of teaching focused on grammar follows the teachers from the Soviet period and even today it determines the way of organizing the class by the teacher and the attitude of the authors towards the compilation of educational resources.
2. Another reason that creates a certain stereotype concerning the compilation or organization of educational resources in Georgia must be sought for in Russian textbooks, which are used more or less frequently by some school teachers as additional resources, for example: "Дорога в Россию" (Antonova *et al.,* 2009); "5 элементов" (Esmantova, 2014) and others. These textbooks advance the linguistic aspect alongside communication-oriented tasks. For example, learning grammar for its own sake involves the following types of tasks: students have to think of a question to answer, and while answering, they have to open the brackets: *«Вопрос и ответ». 1. _? (Она думает _ (муж). 2. _? Они говорят _ (работа). 3. _? Инженер спрашивает _ (проект). 4. _? Семья мечтает _ (квартира). 5. _? Эти люди говорят _ (погода), 6. _? Спортсмен рассказывает _ (чемпионат)"*, *etc.* (Esmantova, 2014, p. 209). The following task is based on transformation*: Как можно передать эту информацию по-другому? (используйте активные конструкции) 1. Все учебные вопросы*

решаются деканом. 2. Контрольная работа будет выполняться студентами на компьютере. 3. Эта картина создавалась художником 5 лет, etc. (Antonova, 2009, p. 8).

Similarly, purely grammar-oriented tasks can be found in all Georgian textbooks of the Russian language, for example, students are expected to open brackets and correctly use the adverbial case form of nouns: *Раскрой скобки. Поставь слова в творительный падеж. 1. Моя квартира находится прямо над ... (магазин). /2. На карнавал я иду с ... (брат и сестра). /3. Музей находится перед ... (сквер). / 4. Боты стояли за ... (дверь). / 5. Моя младшая сестра очень любит хлеб с ... (масло). / 6. Мы с ... (друзья) завтра идём в кино, etc. (*Lortkipanidze et al., 2018, VI, Student's book, p. 52).

In the given tasks, learning the grammatical form is an end in itself, not a means. Such assignments do not comply with the requirement of the Georgian standard - the manual should be thematically constructed - using the sentences of the mentioned tasks it is impossible to compose any naturally flowing, coherent text necessary for communication on one topic, for example, it is difficult to connect such sentences in a speech situation: : *Боты стояли за ... (дверь). / Моя младшая сестра очень любит хлеб с ... (масло) / Музей находится перед ... (сквер).* Such tasks will not lead the student to the final result - to facilitate speaking about a specific topic using the combined sentences. It should be noted that the requirement of functional teaching of grammar is also violated in this assignment taken from the Georgian textbook as it offers examples of different functions of the same case, specifically, the function of the joint action and that of place performed by the adverbial case-form, На карнавал я иду с ... (брат и сестра) / Музей находится перед ... (сквер).

- *На карнавал я иду с ... (брат и сестра) / Музей находится перед ... (сквер) .*

In relation to Russian textbooks, it should be noted that the main target group of teaching Russian as a foreign language in Russia are students of preparatory groups of higher education institutions, therefore, it is not appropriate to use the textbooks intended for this target group in a Georgian-language school. The target group of teaching Russian as a foreign language may also be represented by Russian national school students or immigrant children, that is, those students for whom, unlike Georgian students, the Russian language environment is not alien. Therefore, textbooks tailored to their needs are inappropriate for Georgian schools.

3. **Russian methodological literature** discusses various problems of teaching Russian as a foreign language in depth. The authors of Georgian school textbooks also refer to this literature, but it is not advisable to rely on these studies and methodological tips entirely while building educational

resources for Georgian schools. This is because the vast majority of Russian scientific papers or methodical textbooks are designed for senior students of higher education institutions who are learning Russian in a Russian-speaking environment.

This focus audience determines the main difference between the Russian and Georgian methodological approaches to teaching a foreign language. The difference primarily lies in the priority of teaching grammar. The Georgian standard requires the authors to build a textbook based on a communicative approach where teaching grammar is an auxiliary mandatory component.

In contrast, grammar-oriented teaching is considered important in Russian methodical literature. It is either a precursor to teaching speaking or is considered an important skill alongside speaking skills. In Russia, " the conscious-practical method is the leading method of teaching foreign languages" (Schukin, 2017, p. 87). According to this method, "students first acquire language structures, and then speaking is taught" (Schukin, 2017, p. 86). B.V. Belyaev, who introduced the conscious-practical method into Russian methodological literature, emphasises the need to teach the theoretical plane of the language first. "After providing some information about a certain theoretical issue, it is necessary to move on to speaking skills training (Belyaev, 1967, p.10). The communicative approach provided for by the state standard of Georgia requires language teaching primarily under the thematic heading, where there is no "theoretical knowledge information delivered beforehand." However, the hourly grid of the high school does not allow for this.

In recent years, there has been a growing trend towards using a communicative approach to teach Russian as a foreign language in Russia. This approach is reflected in many methodical books and textbooks, such as those written by Lebedinsky & Gerbik (2011), Chesnokova (2015) and Fedotova (2016) among others. However, due to the inflectional nature of the Russian language, some leading methodologists still prioritize the development of linguistic competence. Unfortunately, the communicative method may not always produce the desired results, especially when dealing with the intricate system of prepositions, verb tense and aspect in Russian. Therefore, the methodological research suggests the introduction of a new component - the linguistic component - to the term "communicative competencies" to improve the teaching of the language. (Kryuchkova, & Moshchinskaya, 2009, p. 21).

Regarding the stages in learning

As mentioned above, to develop the student's speaking skills, especially in the conditions of 2 lessons a week, it is important to pay great attention to the tasks necessary to automate the skills of using

grammar, which is built according to the step-by-step principle. These stages are actively discussed in modern Russian methodological literature. So, for example, N.L. Fedotova distinguishes 6 stages of formation of grammatical skill: "Stages of formation of grammar-skills: perception of typical structures (observation, analysis); imitation; substitution; transformation; reproduction and combining" (Fedotova, 2016, p.192), S.I. Lebedinsky & L.F. Gerbik also discuss these stages in the chapter "Formation of grammar skills" (Lebedinsky, & Gerbik, 2011, p. 296 - 297). i.e. Passov discusses the stages of grammar skills formation in terms of conditional-speech exercises: "Five stages - five steps. Push the student through every step toward the pinnacle called 'Grammar Skill'." […] perception, imitation, substitution, transformation, reproduction! The student will go through these five steps, perform a complex of conditional-speech exercises" (Passov, & Kuzovliova, 2010, p. 409 - 410) and others.

Grammatical tasks to be practised according to these stages also develop the speaking skills; that is why it is correct to consider them as stages of developing speaking skills, for example, N.L. Shibko rightly considers them as a preparatory stage of teaching speaking: "Exercises for teaching speaking: preparatory and speaking. […] types of preparatory exercises: imitative, substitutional, transformational, combinational" (Shibko, 2011, p.130).

Examples of grammar-oriented teaching tasks in 2023 Georgian textbooks.

In order for Georgian public schools plan to switch to using the communicative method to teach Russian as a second foreign language, the school textbooks need to comply with the requirements of this method. One of the challenges for the authors of these educational resources is to teach grammar functionally and develop it in different speech topics, while gradually delivering the material from simple to complex. The authors of the educational resources face such a difficult task. Two 10th-grade textbooks passed state accreditation in Georgia in 2023. However, their in-depth analysis should be discussed separately in another article. I will expand on the tasks oriented on the speaking exercises offered in parallel with grammar exercises taught for its sake. .

The latest Georgian textbooks contain graded grammar teaching tasks which are often designed to be conducted in pairs, and the instructions require students to practice them orally. This is improvement although in some of these tasks completely unrelated substitute vocabulary and instructions can be found, characteristic of grammar taught for its own sake, which can hinder effective communication and discourage students from participating. For instance, ***Устно составьте диалоги. Запишите два из них. Образец**: Печенье| песочное| бабушка. - Что ты делаешь? / - Я ем печенье. / - Какое печенье? /-*

Песочное печенье, которое испекла бабушка. 1. ***Пицца*** *| итальянский ресторан. / 2.* ***Кафе*** *| новое| рядом| наш парк. / 3.* ***Кофе*** *| подарок | подруга. / 4.* ***Торт*** *| день рождения | сестра. / 5.* ***Фильм*** *| премия Оскар| этот год. / 6.* ***Музыка*** *| я | записать вчера. / 7.* ***Платье*** *| красное| тебе понравилось. / 8.* ***Книга*** *| я | посоветовать | друг.* (Barsegova, Workbook, 2023, p. 112).

In Koberidze's textbook, there are many attempts to offer speaking tasks, namely, substitution, transformation, and reproduction tasks are, in some cases, correctly constructed, although the textbook regularly returns to the self-directed teaching of grammar. For example, when teaching the use of the subordinating conjunction который in the adverbial case, the author offers nine purely grammatical exercises one following the other, for example: *„Составьте предложения по образцу. Используйте предлоги: за, перед, между, над, под. Задание выполните устно. Образец. Перед вами письменный стол/работать писатель - Перед вами стол, за которым работал писатель". / „Восстановите предложения. Задание выполните по образцу. 1. На столе лежат старые рукописи писателя. 2.Над этими рукописями писатель работал долгими зимними вечерами. над этими старыми рукописями = над которыми 3. На столе лежат старые рукописи, над которыми писатель работал долгими зимними вечерами* (Koberidze, 2023, Student's book, p. 42 - 43, & Workbook, p. 34 - 36).

Most of the instructions for these tasks are not in any way compatible with teaching using the communicative method - they do not encourage the student to communicate, to speak. In these tasks, the content partially corresponds to the educational speaking topic (excursion to A.P. Chekhov's House-Museum), that is, the examples are completely unsuitable for the topic - (1) Нашему другу Матео подарили гитару. Об ... он мечтал с детства. (2) Нашему друга Матео gave a guitar, о ... он мечтал с детства. One of the reasons for using non-theme sentences is that the textbook while teaching the subordinating conjunction который for some reason doesn't aim to focus on the topic verbs that govern the adverbial case. This is a big disadvantage of this textbook. Here it is important to note that the given samples are artificial, completely uncharacteristic of speaking.

In addition, in 9 exercises with one type of task in which a student practices inserting one word "который" into a correct form of the adverbial case while these words are given only at the sentence level, which cannot form the student's ability to play the role of a guide in a simulated role-playing task for him/her to speak coherently in 8 - 10 sentences. Moreover, these grammatical tasks violate important principles necessary for the formation of speech, especially speaking skills:

1. Assignment instructions should be communication-oriented, encouraging speaking and for this it should not contain purely grammatical instructions.

2. The pattern according to which students should (conditionally) speak, should be natural, characteristic of the speaking situation;
3. The replacement vocabulary should not exceed the teaching speaking topic.

Teaching Russian as a foreign language in Georgian schools,using the communicative method is not easy, especially in terms of teaching grammar. Teaching grammar for its own sake in Georgian schools still remains an important problem, the main causes of which are as follows: 1) teaching, by inertia, according to the Soviet method when the Russian language was taught like the native language; 2) relying on those Russian textbooks or methodical literature that teach Russian as a foreign language using a non-communicative method; 3) relying on those Russian textbooks and methodical literature, the focus audience of which are not school students; 4) failure to take into account the fact that in Georgian schools, a total of 2 lessons a week are devoted to the second foreign language, and we do not have the time and "luxury" to teach the grammar of the Russian language on our own.

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