

Teaching Russian Interrogative Intonation to Foreign Students

Обучение Иностранных Студентов Русской Интонации Вопросы

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Written by:

Marina Nikolaevna Shutova²⁴

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5530-9449

https://www.elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=485080**Sergey Sergeevich Khromov**²⁵

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4977-2960

https://www.elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=468188**Tatyana Vyacheslavovna Nesterova**²⁶

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1799-1897

https://www.elibrary.ru/author_items.asp?authorid=394730

Abstract

The article deals with teaching Russian intonation of interrogative sentences to foreign students. Mastering this complex aspect of the Russian language causes great difficulties, and Russian intonation is not studied at the origin countries of foreign students. That is why we propose to study interrogative intonation based on variable rows developed by E.A. Bryzgunova. The rows enable students to improve the intonation structure of interrogative sentences, as well as their communication skills.

Keywords: interrogative intonation; teaching phonetics to foreign students; intonation patterns.

Аннотация

Статья посвящена обучению иностранных учащихся русской интонации вопросительного предложения. Так как обучение этому сложному аспекту русского языка вызывает большие трудности, и русская интонация не изучается на родине иностранных учащихся, то мы предлагаем интонацию вопроса изучать на основе вариативных рядов, разработанных Е.А. Брызгуновой и дающих возможность учащимся совершенствовать не только интонационное оформление вопросительного предложения, но и свои коммуникативные возможности.

Ключевые слова: интонация вопроса; обучение иностранных студентов фонетике; интонационные конструкции.

Introduction

Teaching intonation is one of the most difficult aspects of teaching Russian to non-Russians. Intonation is the emotional and logical basis of spoken language. There is no sentence and no speech without intonation. According to T.V. Shustikova, “the first thing that forms the basis of the course is understanding the semantically distinguishing capabilities of the key intonational means: a) using types of intonation patterns according to the speaker’s communicative

intention and considering the various conditions of verbal communication; b) semantically distinguishing capabilities of the centre of the intonation pattern and its relocation; c) sense-forming capabilities of syntagmatic segmentation of a phrase, its variability” (Shustikova, 2010).

There are multiple functions of intonation in speech, and the communicative function is one of

²⁴ Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, Moscow, Russia.

²⁵ Moscow Polytechnic University, Moscow, Russia.

²⁶ Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, Moscow, Russia.

the most important (Khromov, 2011). Intonation serves to show the subject's attitude to the utterance (emotion, evaluation, etc.). This is primarily due to the indissoluble link between intonation of the utterance with the person's thoughts, intentions and feelings. Moreover, intonation is a quite complex object of study as it is a combination of such elements as the change in pitch (melodics), rhythmicity, the relative duration of single sounds, timbre and the sound of syntagmas depending on their lexical volume (Shcherba, 1974).

Methods

Practical experience convincingly demonstrates that teaching Russian intonation to foreign students is especially efficient if the teaching is conducted on the basis of E.A. Bryzgunova's intonation theory (Bryzgunova, 1977). According to I.M. Loginova, the scholar's studies transformed "into a coherent theory of spoken language based on the consistent functioning of all linguistic means within the framework of variable rows of utterances and functional and emotional-expressive stylistics of Russian speech" (Loginova & Kontseptsiya, 2004). Therefore, intonation training materials should include such notions as intonation pattern (IP), the centre of IP, precentral and postcentral parts of IP, mid-level tone, tonal change, as well as the notion of a syntagma, syntagmatic segmentation of a sentence, i.e. students should work on analyzing texts from the point of intonation (Loginova & Kontseptsiya, 2004; Bryzgunova, 1986).

Teaching Russian intonation to foreign students is the most difficult aspect of teaching Russian as a foreign language. However, methodic devices of IP usage significantly facilitate the teacher's work with foreigners. The topic of our study deals with the intonation of the Russian interrogative sentence that can express different intentions. The variability of IP usage in Russian interrogative sentences should be studied at the advanced stage of teaching foreign students (level B1-B2). The ability to use different intonation in questions enables foreign students to improve their communicative skills and enhance the mutual understanding of interlocutors.

Results and Discussion

Unfortunately, the aspect of the intonation structure of an utterance remains in the background during phonetics classes in the origin countries of foreign students. Even if students

obtain the basic knowledge of the types of IP (IP-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7), the intonation centre and its connection to the meaning of the utterance, they possess hardly any skills or abilities to use this knowledge in practice or speech. We believe that in a speech environment that provides real examples of monologic and dialogic speech, during the communication with native speakers, while listening to the radio and television one must begin improving one's listening and speaking skills with intonation structure. Students should be shown the options of the interaction of vocabulary, syntax, intonation and the semantic connections of utterances in context. They should be taught to understand and express the entire content of an utterance – the subjective-meaning, as well as the subjective-modal.

Such unity of syntax, vocabulary, intonation and the semantic aspect of an utterance are particularly evident in variable rows developed by Bryzgunova (Bryzgunova, 1986; Bryzgunova, 1989). We believe that the framework of Russian dialogic speech is contained in the variable rows of utterances expressing questions (five rows), affirmations, negations, declarations of intent (demand, request, advice, permission, etc.), addresses and some others. Variable rows of intonation are the subject content of the orienting basis of an action (OBA) that allows one to summarize the knowledge and basic skills of the intonation structure that students obtained in their home countries. The OBA is a system of conditions, directions and reference points necessary for performing actions. As a result of a gradual acquisition, the scheme of the OBA becomes the psychological basis for the subject's action (Galperin, 1966).

Thus, let us examine variable rows of interrogative utterances.

- I. The variable row of interrogative sentences where possible features (actions) are equally known:
 - 1) sentences with question words:
 - Kogda ty nachal izuchat russkii yazyk? [- When did you start learning Russian?] (IP-2);
 - I kogda (zhe) vy budete oformlyat dokumenty? [- (So) when are you going to do the paperwork?] (IP-4 – formal speech, edification, reprimand);

- Kakuyu vam gazetu? "MK"? "Kommersant"? [- Which newspaper would you like? "MK"? "Kommersant"?] (IP-2 and IP-3 – expressing the option to list a number of features (actions);
 - I zachem oni tolko prishli? [- And why in the world have they come?] (IP-5 – expressing a shade of displeasure);
 - Kogda ona prikhodila? [- When did she stop by?] (IP-6 – expressing recollection, the centre of intonation is on the question word);
 - Pochemu oni ne pozvonili? [- Why didn't they call?] (IP-6 – expressing confusion, regret).
- 2) sentences where question words are omitted:
- Imya? Familiya? God rozhdeniya? [- Name? Surname? Year of birth?] (IP-4 – questions in a survey, interview);
 - Vashi dokumenty? [- Your papers?] (IP-4 – question-demands).
- II. The variable row of interrogative sentences where one of the possible features (actions) is the most likely:
- 1) sentences with no pronominal words where the opposition between the most likely feature and other possible features is expressed through the means of intonation and vocabulary:
 - Segodnya u nas lektsiya po istorii? (ili po literature) [- Do we have a lecture on history today? (or on literature)] (IP-3);
 - Zavtra u nas zacet? Po fonetike? [- Do we have an exam tomorrow? On phonetics?] (IP-3, 3 – with the help of intonation, it is possible to single out two rhemes, and one of them will clarify the other).
 - 2) sentences with pronominal words where there is a number of unknown features (actions), and then one of them is identified:
 - Pochemu ona ne otvetila? Ne poluchila moego pisma? [- Why hasn't she replied? Has she not received my letter?] (IP-2, 3);
 - 3) sentences with no pronominal words and with the particle "razve" [really]:
 - Razve ona ne vernulas? [- Has she really not returned?] (IP-3 – the meaning of the question is combined with the meaning of surprise, incredulity, doubt).
- III. The variable row of interrogative sentences where the presence or absence of a feature (action) is established:
- 1) sentences with no pronominal words where the antonymic opposition of the feature (action) is expressed through the means of syntax and intonation:
 - A babushka prikhala? (prikhala ili net) [- Has grandmother arrived? (arrived or not)] (IP-3);
 - A babushka / prikhala? [- Has grandmother arrived?] (IP-2, 3 – there is a possible additional meaning of "this exact");
 - 2) sentences with the conjunction "ili" [or] where the antonymic opposition is expressed through lexical-semantic means:
 - Babushka prikhala / ili net? [- Has grandmother arrived / or not?] (IP-3, 2);
 - Babushka prikhala/ ili tetya? [- Has grandmother arrived / or has aunt arrived?] (IP-3, 2 – could make the question more categorical).
- IV. The variable row of interrogative sentences where the unknown feature (action) is established through the previous, already known one:
- 1) elliptical interrogative sentences with the contrastive conjunction "a" [and]:
 - Otkuda vy idete? – Iz biblioteki. – A vasha sestra? (A vasha sestra otkuda idet?) [- Where are you going from? – From the library. – And your sister? (And where is your sister going from?) (IP-4);
 - 2) sentences with pronominal words, the contrastive conjunction "a" [and] and the particle "zhe" [then] expressing the negation of something in the previous remark:
 - Eto studenty ne iz Gany. – A otkuda zhe? = A otkuda zhe togda? = A otkuda zhe eshche, esli ne iz Gany? [- These

students are not from Ghana. – Then where from? = Then where are they from? = Then where else are they from, if not from Ghana?] (IP-4) – the usage of IP-2 and the adverb “eshche” [else] emphasizes the shade of disagreement).

V. The variable row of interrogative sentences where the unknown feature (action) is supposed to be the same as the previous one:

1) sentences with the conjunction “i” [and] expressing equivalence:

– Studenty iz Bolgarii byli v teatre? – Da, byli. – I studenty iz Chekhii? = I studenty iz Chekhii tozhe byli? [– Have the students from Bulgaria been to the theatre? – Yes, they have. – And the students from Czechia? = And have the students from Czechia been there too?] (IP-3);

2) sentences with the conjunction “i” [and] expressing supposition:

– Oni vchera uekhali. – I uzhe doma? – Net, im eshche sutki ekhat [– They left yesterday. – And are they home already? – No, they have another day to go] (IP-3);

3) sentences with the conjunction “i” [and] where the presence or absence of a feature (action) can be unknown:

– My priglasili kolleg na konferentsiyu. – I oni priedut? = Nu i kak, interesno? Oni priedut? [– We have invited our colleagues to the conference. – And are they coming? = So, I wonder? Are they coming?] (IP-3);

4) sentences with the conjunction “i” [and] expressing a guess or surprise:

– I oni reshili k vam priekhat? [– And they have decided to come to you?].

VI. The variable row of echo questions:

1) the previous statement or question is repeated:

– Zavtra my edem v Peterburg. – Kogda my edem v Peterburg? = Kogda, ty govorish, my edem v Peterburg? (Chto-chto?) [– We are going to Petersburg tomorrow. – When are we going to

Petersburg? = When, are you saying, we are going to Petersburg? (Sorry, what?)] (IP-6);

2) the rheme of the first question is repeated:

– Otkuda eti studenty? – Iz Rumynii. – Otkuda? [– Where are these students from? – From Romania. – Where?] (IP-3 – IP-4 is possible to express a shade of surprise) (Shutova, 2004).

We believe that the use of variable rows of intonation in utterances while teaching foreign students makes it possible to expand and enhance the speech training material which is necessary at the advance stage of learning Russian. With this approach, the intonation is perceived and processed in speech in the complex of all interacting means: different syntactic constructions, the vocabulary and the semantic interactions of utterances.

The main method of working on intonation at the advanced level of studying (level B1-B2) is the method of communicative analysis of the spoken sentence, the text, as “the meaning of the spoken sentence (utterance) is the result of the interaction of meanings expressed by the syntactic construction, the vocabulary, the intonation, as well as the semantic interaction of the sentence with one of the previous or the following sentences” (Bryzgunova, 1979). The communicative analysis of text is based on the following principles: 1) the basic unit of learning is a sentence (an utterance); 2) the analyzed utterance is discussed from the point of its parts: the syntactic construction, the intonation, the semantic connections to the context; 3) the utterance is viewed in the dynamic context considering all situational transformations, including lexical-grammatical and intonational, and all semantic and emotional-stylistic shades are taken into account; 4) the goal of working on an utterance is its active acquisition in the unity of its lexical-grammatical and intonational structure. Such analysis of an utterance turns the work on intonation into work on speech development which is the goal of teaching Russian to foreign students (Mukhanov, 1989; Shutova, 2015; Shutova, 2017).

Conclusions

Foreign students have the most difficulties with mastering the intonation of real-life communication as the semantic and expressive aspects of intonation are interconnected. A native

speaker has an intuitive command of intonation, without thinking about how to express joy or anger, displeasure, insistence or request. For a foreigner, it is very difficult to distinguish jokes, irony, disappointment, distrust, doubt, etc. in the Russian language. At the advanced stage, foreign students should be taught to express such declarations of intent through intonation, by using IP-4, 5, 6, 7 in different speech situations. We offer textbooks that will help foreign students to understand the meaning behind the texts of monologues and dialogues, as well as teach them to read and speak correctly and expressively in various real-life situations. When teaching Russian intonation to foreigners, besides the traditional characteristics described in traditional intonology, one must also consider the features of verbal discourse that become important and necessary in cross-cultural communication not only between members of different cultures but also between members of different social, age-related, cultural or ethnic strata inside a polycultural society, as the success of communication depends on these features. Among them are the following: 1) speech volume; 2) speech tempo (the speed of pronouncing speech elements of different length); 3) the emotional-expressive intonational mode of verbal discourse; 4) paralinguistic means. Although at first, these aspects seem needless and unnecessary, in fact, they prove important and useful for cross-cultural communication in the Russian language in modern society. They are evolving characteristics of modern speech continuum that often cause misunderstanding between different strata of speech continuum.

Modern linguodidactics analyses the synthesis of difficulties that members of different nationalities and cultures face while learning, mastering and adjusting Russian intonation. These difficulties make it possible to propose, justify and use in teaching theory and practice the new paradigm of studying the intonational phenomenon in spoken discourse (Khromov & Boguslavskaya, 2013; Khromov & Skorikova, 2016; Nesterova, 2015; Nesterova, 2016; Nesterova, 2017).

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