

## Teaching Russian language: the Role of Word Formation

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### Abstract

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The article is devoted to the problem of increasing the level of the subject of competency in philology majors. By identifying the main areas where the word-formation principle is actualized, we have established that derivation has a special methodological significance for implementing inter-level linguistic relations in Russian language teaching. From the point of view of methodology, those effective word-building units which provide the objectification of word-formation principle are derivatives, derivational types (models), and word formation families. Our research has shown that exercises on derivation are also very effective in forming language skills based on the ability to effectuate the structural and semantic features of the word. The research revealed that it is necessary to make maximum use of word formation potential in assimilating lexical data, in teaching morphology, spelling and stylistics of the Russian language. Moreover, we should take into account the fact that studying word formation helps to develop logical thinking, as well as the ability to analyze and synthesize.

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**Keywords:** Russian language teaching, integrative teaching model, lexicon, inter-level language relations, derivation, semantization, word-formation process.

### 1. Introduction

Current federal educational standards and guidelines state that communicative competency is one of the goals of teaching language. Students of philological faculties and departments can develop it by using the *integrative study model*. Among the features of this model are schematic forms of presentation, a focus shift from general proficiency in language to specialized language skills, new information and communication technologies, and cooperation between lecturers. To improve students'



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command of language, instructors should implement *the principle of inter-level linguistic relations*. In our practice of teaching Russian language, we apply this principle to the sphere of word formation.

The problem of Russian word formation has never been sufficiently researched in the methodical aspect. Notable contributions include those made by linguists (Adams, 2001; Bauer, 1983; Coralia, 2005; Fatkhutdinova, 2015; Miloslavskii, 1980; Mitev, & Miteva, 2000; Plag, 2002; Shkvartsova, 1993; Štekauer, 2005), specialists in language teaching (Amiantova, 1999; Hashemi, & Azizinezhad, 2011; Kieliszek, 2015; Krasilnikova, 2011; Motina, 1988; Plotnikova, 2012; Shekikhacheva, 1987; Tahaine, 2012; Vsevolodova, 2001), as well as in applied studies (Baayen, & Lieber, 1991; Barykina, & Dobrovolskaya, 2015; Nishimoto, 2004; Slesareva, 2010; Surzhikova, 1988). The *relevance* of our study is determined by the fact that, on the one hand, the role of word formation in the educational process is undervalued, and on the other, it is necessary to develop the word-formation skills in students.

The *purpose* of our research is to reveal the methodological potential of derivatives and the significance of Russian word formation in the learning process by identifying the main areas of actualization of the word-formation principle in Russian language teaching.

The *objects* of the study are the methodological aspects of word-formation competency in philology majors.

## 2. Research methods

The study is based on *integrative, comprehensive approaches* to the study of language material which take into account the principle of integral description of language units on different levels, in particular, the interaction between derivatives and units of other levels in the language system and verbal communication.

Theoretical and methodological basis of this work draws on the works of V.V. Vinogradov, E.A. Zemskaya, E.S. Kubryakova, V.V. Lopatin, G.A. Nikolaev, L.V. Sakharnyi, A.N. Tikhonov, I.A. Ulukhanov, N.M. Shanskii, M.N. Yantsenevskaya and others which are dedicated to the study of Russian word-formation system from the point of structural-semantic and functional-communicative approach. We are also indebted to theoretical contributions of E.I. Amiantova, T.M. Balykhina, G.I. Volodina, M.V. Vsevolodova, L.P. Klobukova, V.V. Morkovkin and others on the creation of functional communicative didactic model of language and its functional educational model. Developments in the theory and methods of teaching Russian language have been covered by G.N. Averyanova, E.G. Azimov, T.V. Vasilyeva, E.I. Voinova, V.G. Kostomarov, N.A. Lobanova, V.M. Matveeva, O.D. Mitrofanova, V.V. Moskovkin, I.P. Slesareva, S.A. Khavronina, S.F. Shatilov, and others.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Word formation and lexicon

The implementation of the word-formation principle is of significant importance for the study of lexicon.

1.1. Derivational units play a fundamental role in the systemic learning of the lexicon and present the most effective way to enrich the students' vocabulary.

The word-building units providing the objectification of word-formation principle in studying lexicon are derivatives, derivational types (models), and word formation families (in Russian grammar they are called "nests"). The derivatives more clearly show the systemic nature of language. Derivatives of the same type are characterized by a certain semantic affinity expressed by the common affix, and certain semantic difference expressed individually by the stems. The range of word-formation types, their productivity and derivational activity are determined by the specifics of the lexical database. Semantically organized lexemes tend to have a partly or fully coinciding set of derivatives and word-formation types, i.e. have a relatively equal word-formation potential. This makes it possible to produce a word according to the pattern (word-formation model) that facilitates the assimilation of vocabulary: word-formation models are limited and reproducible, and the human memory can record the large vocabulary which is required for communication. In addition, new derivatives enter the systemic (synonymous, antonymous, or homonymous) relations with other words already existing in language. The system-forming role of derivational types in the formation of grammatical classes of words is also important. The alignment of a new derivative with the words of the same affix design places it within a specific grammatical category, which also contributes to a more efficient teaching of Russian language. Derivational families possess the most notable systemic abilities. The significance of their use in the course of Russian language teaching has been noted by A.N. Vasileva, V.A.Kondrat'eva, A.I.Kuznetsova, I.G.Miloslavskii, N.V.Nasakin, R.M.Nefedova, L.G.Sayakhova, I.P.Slesareva, A.S.Pardaev, A.N.Tikhonov, L.B.Trushina and others. Their data show that mastering the vocabulary of the Russian language with the help of derivational family method is the shortest and the most rational path. The derivational family has many distinctive features of units involved into the systemic organization of vocabulary: the units included into the family have constant characteristics; the meanings of words can be derived from those of other related words; the derivational families help to identify synonymous, antonymous, and homonymous phenomena in the vocabulary and thus, to take the most effective and economical way of mastering the vocabulary. The derivational family of different parts of speech has a typical set of derivatives, so the learner can predict their formation.

The derivational family has both internal links between its constituent members and external connections between families, as well as external semantic connections which manifest themselves in various relationships with the words belonging to other structural and semantic associations. Often not only single words, but word groups or even families are found to have systemic relations. Thus, the family acts as a form of organization of so-called "reflected" lexical and semantic phenomena, which have been studied by A.N. Tikhonov, A.S. Pardaev under the names of "reflected" synonymy, "reflected" antonym, and "reflected" homonym (Tikhonov, & Pardaev, 1989).

Derivatives reflecting antonym, synonymy or homonym of producing words are double systems: they act as the elements of lexical and word-formation language systems. Derivational families shorten the distance between the semantization of a word and including it into active speech because the words entered in this way are not assimilated mechanically, not in isolation but in conjunction with other words, which helps to open up the meaning of a new word. Such assimilation is more effective, as it involves logical reasoning and linguistic guesswork. The associative connections play an important role in this process. Forming associative connections of words in students is a necessary precondition for the enrichment of their active vocabulary. The grouping of words according to the word-formation principle implements the structural and semantic way of memorization that matches the nature of associative links.

Systematic work with derivational families of words helps build the skill of recognizing related words by both formal criterion (common root morpheme) and common semantics. The process of studying the derivational families is the process of building up in one's memory a certain set of affixes, capable of modifying the primary (original) stem, i.e. it is a process of speech mechanisms acquisition. Derivational affixes add a certain meaning to words. The function of word-building means is generalized on the basis of identifying a common meaning in words with the same affixes. Knowing the meaning of the stem and derivational affix, a student can guess the meaning of the whole word and, thus, the word is derived from its structure. Mastering derivatives by entire word families does not run counter to the basics of human memory and memorization process. Hence, methodologists and psychologists recommend splitting the material into large informational units. In learning vocabulary, derivational nests can act as such units.

1.2. Derivational characteristics are a significant factor for minimizing the lexical system for training purposes (this idea is generally accepted in the methodology of Russian language). It involves the creation of *separated derivational lists* (from the methodological point of view) in which the main derivational morphemes must provide the corresponding types and categories of Russian word formation.

1.3. The structure of the Russian word is *synthetic*, which is important for the semantization of new words. To "decode" the semantics of a new word, a student should know the basic laws and rules of Russian word formation, the meaning of the most important derivational morphemes, etc., and also possess the skill of derivational and morpheme analysis.

#### **4. Word formation and stylistics**

The *stylistic potential* of word formation occupies a special place in the educational process. The expressiveness of students' speech is achieved by the use of functional stylistic and expressive resources of word-formation.

The study of word formation in the stylistic aspect of the system contributes to the enrichment of students' speech and helps guarantee its meaningful (i.e. adequate to the speech situation, to the objective of verbal expression, etc.) and proper construction. Derivational language resources in this

approach, on the one hand, are seen by trainees as a means of aesthetic impact on the listener. On the other hand, derivational language resources help develop the aesthetic attitude to language.

## **5. Word formation and spelling**

Derivational features are important in the practice of *teaching spelling*. The morphological principle is well-known to be the basic one in Russian orthography. Consequently, mastering the skills of literate writing is impossible without knowledge of word structure. To spell Russian root morphemes, prefixes and suffixes correctly, students need to mark them out consciously, not mechanically. Derivational analysis helps to do morphemic analysis, ensures accurate and fast selection of meaningful parts in the word, helps to determine how a word was formed, and also to understand the rules of attaching affixes. Mechanical division of words into certain morphemes does not give a true representation of the connections and relationships between morphological parts that make up the word. The inability to distinguish between morphemes, to understand the derivational relations between words, often leads to the situation when spelling rules are rote-learned and, moreover, used inappropriately.

## **6. The role of word-formation dictionary**

The integrated use of specific *word-formation dictionary* (Efremova, 2002; Tikhonov, 1990; Tikhonov, 1978) can help to implement the inter-level linguistic relations in the educational process. It gives the opportunity to see the systemic connection between the lexicon and word-formation. The dictionary shows the significant systemic function of word-formation family, as it is used as the enlarged unit of teaching word-formation and enrichment of the students' vocabulary. It supports the idea that systemic approach to mastering vocabulary with the help of word-formation families is a very high priority. The dictionary gives the students a visual representation of the derivative structure of the word, its relations with other words, information about the alternation of sounds, the stress shift in word-formation, which is very useful for those who study Russian as a foreign language (this helps to avoid pronunciation and grammatical errors). The location of derivatives in the dictionary shows the degree of semantic proximity and facilitates the absorption of word-building patterns that are reflected in the word-forming chains and paradigms. Derivational dictionary presents an active-type tutorial. It can be used for semantization of words through derivational connections (the meaning of word-formation stems and derivational affixes); to distinguish between homonym and paronymy; to discern systemic links between words belonging to the same part of speech or thematic group, antonyms, synonyms; to enrich the students' vocabulary, to develop the ability to determine the meaning of the words "on a hunch"; and finally, to develop linguistic intuition and speech skills. The dictionary also plays a significant role in building spelling skills: it is possible to create a set of exercises on spelling the root morphemes, prefixes, and suffixes.

## 7. Conclusions

Having covered only a subset of areas where the word-formation principle can be applied, we showed the obvious need for its actualization in the practice of teaching Russian language. Word formation exercises are the basis for organizing other language skills in accordance with the ability to effectuate the structural and semantic features of the word. It is necessary to make maximum use of word formation potential in assimilation of lexical data (as it helps quantitative and qualitative enrichment of the students' vocabulary), in teaching morphology (by laying the groundwork for a more conscious assimilation of grammar elements), spelling (by setting conditions for conscious formation of spelling skills), and the stylistics of the Russian language (as it increases the expressiveness of the students' speech). Moreover, we should take into account the fact that studying word formation helps develop logical thinking, as well as the ability to analyze and synthesize.

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