

The French Conquest of Russian Lexical Territories: A Study of French Loanwords in Russian

1. Onset of the French influence

In Russian, there are over 1350 words that were borrowed from French. It was under the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725) that significant changes in the everyday lexicon started taking place, and the borrowing of lexical items from French was made possible due to his reforms concerning trade and education (*Большая Советская Энциклопедия* [Big Encyclopaedia of Soviet Union]). As a famous saying goes: "Peter the Great opened a window to Europe."

Still, the popularity of the French language only reached its peak during the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796), who was a great admirer of French culture and literature. The prestige of the French language in Europe during this period, combined with Catherine the Great's passion for the culture and literature, have greatly influenced Russian society, resulting in French being used more frequently than even Russian itself among the beau monde (Kalinevich, 1977).

2. Comparison between Russian and French grammars

In Russian, there are five categories that can characterize a noun: gender (masculine, feminine and neutral), number (plural and singular forms), animacy, partitive and cases. In contrast, in French, only two categories are obligatorily marked on the noun: gender and number (Gak, 2006, p. 10). Because of these differences French nouns have not blended completely into the Russian system, or have kept entirely their original forms. Gender, in particular, played a big role, as there are three genders in Russian (masculine, feminine and neutral) and only two in French (masculine and feminine). Another obstacle for integration were cases. While French nouns are not inflected for case, Russian nouns must be marked with one of the following six cases: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental and prepositional. Due to these grammatical differences between Russian and French, the introduction of French loanwords resulted in a completely new category of Russian nouns: invariable or uninflected nouns (see section 4).

3. Phonetic adaptation of French nouns in Russian

According to Bracquenier (2011), the phonetic adaptations made to French loanwords are strongly connected with orthography. When words were first borrowed, there was no consensus concerning their spelling. Hence, to avoid inconsistencies in writing, Russian authors would often keep the original French version, without any changes whatsoever (1).

(1) а. **Hôtel** есть наёмный дом, где вы, кроме комнаты и услуги, ничего не имеете.

[ɔtɛl jɛs'tʲɪ n'aʲomnɨj 'dom, gdʲe vɨ, 'kromɨ 'komnɛtɪ i uslʲʉɡɨ, nʲɪ'ʦɨ'vo nʲɪ i 'mʲɛjɛtʲɛ]

'Hotel is a rented house, for which, except for the room and services, you have nothing more.'

(Karamzin, *Письма русского путешественника*)

However, in some cases, borrowed words will be transcribed in Russian using sounds that are similar to those in French (2).

(2) На первый взгляд всё это выглядело как самый обычный светский **суаре** [...]

[N'a pʲɛrvɨj vʲzɡlʲad fsʲə 'ɛtə vɨɡlʲadʲelo kak 'samɨj e' bʲɪʦnɨj svʲɛtskɨj suare]

'At first sight, it all looked like an ordinary society evening.'

(Akunin, *Коронация или Последний из Романов*, p.397)



The examples in (3) present regular patterns of adaptation of sounds.

(3) а. **u** [y] or **ou** [u] becomes **у** [u] or **ю** [ɥ]

patrouille 'patrol' = патруль [pɛtrulʲ]

б. **ieu** [jø] becomes **ье** [jɛ] or **ье** [je]

monsieur 'sir' = месье [mɛsʲjɛ]

с. **on** [ɔ̃] becomes **он** [on]

bouillon 'stock' = бульон [bulʲjon]

д. **in** and **im** [ɛ̃] becomes **ен** [jɛn] or **эн** [ɛn], **ем** [jɛm] or **эм** [ɛm]

Tintin 'Tintin' = Тэнтэн [tɛntɛn]

е. **an** and **am** [ɑ̃] becomes **ан** [an] or [ɑn]

roman 'novel' = роман [rɛ'man]

4. Morphological adaptation of French nouns in Russian

While being transferred from French into Russian, loanwords went through orthographical, phonetic and morphological changes. Some commonalities in both languages, such as the existence of masculine and feminine genders, and singular and plural forms, made the transition from French to Russian smooth. However, there are no articles in Russian and nouns bear a case suffix (4). Also, for certain loanwords, adaptation to the Russian system meant the acquisition of a new gender (neutral). Kaneeva (2015) states that the common pattern of acquisition of neutral gender takes place for French nouns ending in [o], [e], [ɛ] (5), and that the loanwords that have received neutral gender in Russian are indeclinable (invariable or unchangeable nouns), and differ from the neutral gender nouns of Russian origin.

(4) а. J'ai posé une question **au** professeur.

[ʒa zədɛl vɛ. 'pros pɛfʲɛsɔru]

Я задал вопрос профессору. (Nominative case: профессор [professor]. Here, dative case is applied.)

'I asked a question to the professor.'

б. Je suis fier **de** mon travail.

Я горжусь своей работой. (Nominative case: работа [rabota]. Here, instrumental case is applied.)

[ʒa gorʒʉs' svɔjɛj rɛ' bɔtɔj]

'I am proud of my work.'

(5) а. *métro* (m) 'metro'

метро (n) [mʲɪ'trɔ]

б. *cache-pot* (m) 'planter'

кашно (n) [kɛ.'ʃpɔ]

с. *variété* (f) 'pop music'

варьете (n) [vɛ.'rʲɛtɛ]

According to Kaneeva's research (2015), if the French word ends with a pronounced consonant, it will be masculine in Russian (6a). If the French word ends with a pronounced vowel, but is followed by a silent consonant, in Russian, the word will also be masculine, as the consonant will be pronounced (6b).

(6) а. *abordage* (m) [abɔRdɛʒ] 'boarding'

абордаж (m) [ɛber'daʒ]

б. *sujet* (m) [syʒɛ] 'topic'

сюжет (m) [sʲɥ'ʒɛt]

Therefore, if a French feminine noun follows one of these two patterns, in Russian, its gender will change (7a). Exceptions are loanwords that end with a soft *l*, that is [lʲ], as this ending is characteristic of a number of Russian feminine nouns (7b). Yet, the masculine nouns that end in *l* remain masculine (7c). For other French feminine nouns, in order to keep the feminine gender, the Russian ending [a] was added (7d-e).

(7) а. *bordure* (f) [bɔRdyR] 'border'

бордюр (m) [berdʲɥ'r]

б. *console* (f) [kɔ̃sɔl] 'console'

консоль (f) [kɛnsɔlʲ]

с. *vaudeville* (m) [vod(ə)vil] 'vaudeville'

водевиль (m) [vodɛvil]

д. *intrigue* (f) [ɛ̃tRig] 'intrigue'

интрига (f) [ɪnt'riɡə]

е. *mansarde* (f) [mɑ̃zard] 'attic room'

мансарда (f) [mɛn'sardə]

The biggest morphological change concerns the French suffixes—*ie* and *-tion* that form feminine nouns(8).

(8) а. *-ie*

-ия [ija], *-ая* [ɛja], *-ея* [jɛja]

orangerie (f) [oRɑ̃ʒRi] 'orangery'

оранжерея (f) [ɔrɑ̃ʒɛrʲija]

б. *-tion*

-ция [tsija], *-чая* [tseja], *-цея* [tseja]

composition (f) [kɔ̃pozisjɔ] 'composition'

композиция (f) [kɛmpɔzitsija]

Out of all the analyzed words, only one had a gender switch from masculine to feminine (9) (Kaneeva, 2015).

(9) *brigantin* (m) 'brigantine'

бригантина (f) [brʲigɛn'tʲinə]

5. Conclusion

Through the study of French borrowings in Russian (i.e., the patterns of morphological and phonetic adaptation), I was able to reflect on the Russian language itself and certain grammar rules that are not indigenous to Russian and that were created because of French loanwords. This area of study presents endless opportunities for further research from a linguistic viewpoint as well as from a cultural perspective, since language can shape the lifestyle and habits of a given society.

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