

CHAPTER IV

A BRIEF REVIEW OF STUDIES ON THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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IV.1 INTRODUCTION

There has been practically no substantive work or study on the problems of teaching the Russian segmentals, in particular to the Bengali speaking learners. The small volume of works that the researcher has come across merely furnishes a very sketchy and superfluous survey and description of the problem. However, in some articles and other dissertations on similar subjects and topics, with other languages as L1 background of the learners, some relevant information has been given. Following is a brief account of the works that the researcher has come across, benefited by, and considers worth mentioning in the given context.

IV.2 Collection of articles in Vopr.osy pr. jepodavaniia r.usskogo jazyka v niejazykovoi sr.jedie, v castnosti v indii, CRS, JNU, New Delhi, 1977 pp. 124. Ed. by Bakaya, R.M., Pande, H.C., and others.

The collection comprises of sixteen articles, of which three are devoted to phonetics and/or teaching of Russian as a foreign language.

IV.2a Banerjee, S.N. in his article "Nielotor.yie osobiennosti intier.fier.jentsii pr.i izucienii r.usskogo jazyla", (pp. 3-7), poses the problem as it prevails in most of the Indian classrooms where the medium of instruction is English, and the situational and audio-lingual methods are inadequate for the grown-ups. In view of the fact that in the Indian class room

students come from various L1 backgrounds, Banerjee notes, that in the process of training in the Russian language, problems arise not because of the language, which is used as the medium of instruction, but because of the MT (L1).

The author deals in brief about the interference of the L1 both in the areas of phonetics and lexicon, word and sentence formation, and suggests a study of the two or three languages in contact, and also a trilingual approach in the Indian context for better results.

1V.2b Pande, H.C. in his article "O r, o] . i r, o d n o g o j a z y l a p r . i i z u c , j e n i i v t o r . o g o j a z y l a", (Na mat' er. i a l. i e j a z y l a H i n d i i r . u s s l o g o j a z y l a), (pp.8-17), at the very outset sets up the conceptual framework of "Mother Tongue" as the language, learnt from childhood in natural surroundings and conditions, and which happens to be the first linguistic code, different from other languages, etc. The "Second Language" to be the one that is learnt artificially, which may not always be the second language, and in the given context is the Russian language, etc.

The author describes the role of MT in learning the TL to be a question limited by convergence, divergence, overlappings and similes, and explains his views with random examples from Russian and Hindi vocabularies.

The article, in brief, indicates the role of the MT and has the nature more in the form of a comparison of the two systems, and possible difficulties in terms of convergence, divergence, overlappings and similes.

Though very brief, the article has a clear vision of the problem, and deserves more in-depth treatment.

IV.2c Balupuri, C. in her article "R.ol." sl.ukovogo vospr.jiatija v ovl.adjenij inostr.annyjazykom", (pp. 77-83) very correctly recognises the fact that all the forms (speaking, reading and writing) of language activities are interrelated. However, the main task of foreign language learning is "SPEECH", and in the process of learning a foreign language it is important not only to get used to the new codes, but also to **decodings**. The author here briefly discusses Pr.okhorova, I.O. and R.jefor.matsij, A.A., and their views on foreign language learning. She points out the traditional concepts on the related subjects, and briefly discusses views of the above, and Nida, E.A., Ber.l.o, D.l., Br.yzgunova, Y.A., L.ja\$jenio, M.N. and others, and summarizes her views on various phases and parts of the process of learning as:

- a. HEARING
- b. IMITATION
- c. TRAINING IN MEMORY
- d. SYNTHESISATION
- e. ANTICIPATION
- f. REPRODUCTION

The above, according to her, must begin at the very initial stages of foreign language teaching, and also that all the learners should be acquainted with the prosodic characteristics of the TL.

The author concludes her brief article with comments on sentence formation and comprehension.

IV.3 Br.atus' B.V., in his article "tr.udnosti r.ussskogo pr.oizno\$jenija dl.ja inostr.antsev", pp. 1 — 9, in the collection: sojuz sovjetskix ob\$jestv dr.uZbi i kul.'tur.noj svjazi s zar.ubjeZnymi str.anami, SSOD, Moskva, outlines the main difficulties faced by the foreign learners of the Russian language

to be a. articulation of certain Russian sounds like /l./—/l.'/, /r./—/r.'/, /ʃ./, /y/ etc., b. consonantal combinations, c. syllabic divisions and d. stress and intonation.

The author identifies the main difficulty to be that of the differences in the articulatory bases of the L1 and the TL. He gives examples from the Indian language (context) those of /t/—/d/ and /t./—/d./. He also mentions the oppositions of aspirated and nonaspirated sounds in the Indian languages. The author mentions in detail the following characteristic features of the Russian system:

1. Palatalisation.
2. Dorsal articulation of the forelinguals.
3. Division of consonants into voiced and voiceless.
4. Isolated cases of typical Russian consonants.
5. Russian vowels and their reduction, etc.

The author also mentions in brief the unequal articulation of some Russian vowels in isolated words, he calls 'diphthongized' articulation, and concludes with a list of difficult words with three, four and five consonantal combinations. He notes that for the correct articulation of Russian consonants it is important to work on the reflex movement of the middle part of the tongue.

14.4 L.oginova, I.M. in her article "Ekspj.er.imental.'no — fonjeticjeskoje izucjenije javl.jenij zvukovoj intjer.fjer.jentsii pr.i obucjenii r.ussskomu pr.oiznoSjeniju", pp. 48-58 in the collection fonjeticjeskije issl.jedovanija v tsjel.jax obucjenija inostr.annyx stud.jentov r.ussskomu pr.oiznoSjeniju, Moskva, 1977 deals in the so called foreign accent or interference in the process of learning a foreign language. The author tends to opine quite correctly, that this interference or the so called foreign accent of the learners should not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon, but should be

seen in terms of a common feature of the learners with the same L1 background, and suggests a detailed study of the languages in contact, i.e. the MT (L1) and the TL, and the acoustic-articulatory bases of the languages in contact.

The author briefly analyses Russian and English languages, and opines that the errors could be of three types: a.PHONETIC, b.PHONOLOGICAL, and c.MIXED, which are characterised by the differential and distinctive features of the two systems of speech sounds, and suggests that at the initial stage of training in a foreign language a detailed study of the phonetic errors, their classification should be undertaken, and only after that any experimental phonetic study can be carried out.

IV.5 Sukr.anova, I.M., in her article "O sootnošjenii fonologičeskogo i fonetičeskogo aspektov pri sopostavitel'nom analizje zvukovyx sistem rodного i inostrannogo jazykov v tseljax obučenija", in the collection Tjeoričeskije problemi fonetiki i obučenije prirodoščeniju, MGU, 1971, ed. by Ljeont'ijev, A.A. and Samujlova, N.I., notes that while preparing instructional material on the basis of a contrastive analysis of the MT (L1) and the TL, enough care should be taken to consciously avoid the MT habits of the learner, where one of the most difficult tasks is to distinguish between phonetic and phonological aspects, and establishing between them the correct correlations.

The author later analyses specific characteristic features of the Russian language that need special attention, and also mentions some of the practical difficulties that a teacher of the foreign language faces; the prime of them being that in one

sitting all the aspects of the system of a foreign language cannot be explained to the learners due to paucity of time and the learners' inability to remember the entire material. While suggesting a comparative study of the two languages the author very correctly points out that often in practice a comparative study of the two languages in contact does not include the positional variations of speech sounds, and suggests that not only care should be taken in doing so, but wherever possible made best use of in the process of training in foreign language.

IV.6 L.jebjedjeva, Y.G., in her dissertation "Lingvodidaktičeskie osnovy obučeniya russkomu proiznoženiju studentov v gumanitarnom vuze", Moskva, 1981, MIMO-MID, SSSR, recognises that along with interference, the low level of recognition of the pronunciation and articulatory rules of the TL are reasons for foreign accent, and suggests that training in a foreign tongue must start with the correct understanding of the TL articulations and the learner must overcome the MT (L1) inertia.

The author further clarifies the term 'foreign accent' and analyses various aspects of the same, and then goes into the problem of interference. She discusses at length the concepts of Šerba on 'speech activity' and those of other authors and linguists and then studies other linguistic and philosophical factors, responsible in the process of learning a foreign language.

IV.7 Kr.yl.ova, Nina, G., in her dissertation "Metodika upravljeniya proisshozhdeniem formirovaniem i nožnykh artikulyatsij", Moskva, 1982, deals with the communicative-speech approach of foreign articulations and stresses the hypothesis that the possibility of a correct foreign

articulation mainly rests upon a correct understanding of the TL articulation, which demands special attention at the very initial stages of learning a foreign language.

The methodology of the study emphasises on the preparation of a row of effective modules of the Russian language speech units and their correlative measures, and discusses in depth works of Gal. jejeva, M.M., L. jubimova, N.A., L. jašenko, M.N., Sovsun, G.V., Sololova, I.S. and others including those of Br. yzgunova, E.A. and Vovl, P.S. and adopts the following pattern:

- i. Generalisation of theoretical data.
- ii. Observation upon pedagogical process from the point of view of the organization of the study on the speech sounds at the initial stages.
- iii. Interview with students.
- iv. Statistical - mathematical analysis of data.

The dissertation concludes: The present task of training in the foreign articulation has its place in a. at the initial stage, i.e. when the speech sounds are introduced to the students, and b. at subsequent stages, when they are to be strengthened by the supportive material, and that 'articulation' is understood to be a complex process of speech movements which holds the most important basis of language training of the foreigners.

IV.8 Ar. akin, V.D. in his book "Tipologija jazykov i pr.obl.jema metodiceskogo pr.ognozirovanija", Moskva, "VysSaja Skola", 1989, pp.158, has given a new orientation to the methodological analysis of the languages. Out of the five

chapters that the book consists of, the first two chapters deal in: a. general questions on typology (Ch.I), b. typology of phonological systems (Ch.II). The other chapters are devoted to various other aspects of the language, viz. morphology, syntax and word formations.

The author at the very outset establishes his reasons for the need of a typological analysis, in order to understand the system of a given language better, especially in view of the study of the MT and TL. He further goes on to the description of "language type and type of language", and opines that one of the most important aspects is the understanding of the "type of the language", and states that while analyzing the common features of the languages of different types, one has to look deep into their structures. The author gives random examples from the Russian and other Indo-European languages. He discusses the theory of the Czech scientist V.Štilichka on language types and describes the classification of V.Štilichka to be of the following types: a. inflected type, b. agglutinative type, c. quarantine type, d. polysynthetic type, and e. introflective type, and adds to it the wider definitions that he deems fit.

The other points discussed in the first chapter include:

- a. The language universals and their meanings for typology.
- b. Levels of typological analysis.
- c. The history of typological studies.

He concludes the first chapter with a note on the recent trends of comparative-typological analysis of languages, in which he attaches great importance to such studies with a view to teaching foreign languages.

The second chapter on the 'typology of phonological systems' makes a detailed analysis of the role of the 'phoneme' in the description of a language. In this chapter he talks on:

- a. List of distinctive features for the typology of the systems of language under comparison.
- b. Typological features of the subsystems of the vowels in MT and TL.
- c. Typological features of the subsystems of the consonants of the MT and the TL.
- d. Number of articulatory zones.
- e. Phonemic inventory.
- f. Correlation of voicing - devoicing.
- g. Correlation of hardness - softness.
- h. Neutralisation.
- i. Phonemic distribution.
- j. Synharmonizm and harmony of vowels.
- l. Typological characteristics of suprasegmentals.
- l. Typological indicators of stress.
- m. Typological indicators of intonation.
- n. Typological indicators of syllabic structures.

In his comparative typological analysis a study of Russian, English, Swedish, Danish, German, Icelandic, Samoanic, and some other languages has been made.

The book of Professor V.D.Arslan is a unique study of the structural characteristics of a complete row of languages through a simultaneous comparison of the languages with other languages of the same family (of various degrees of genetic closeness) and also of the different families.

IV.9 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RELATED LITERATURE FOR THE PRESENT

STUDY

Most of the above articles, no matter how brief they are in volume, very correctly identify the decisive role of the MT in second language acquisition and the characteristic features of the Indian classrooms. It is important to note that the distinctive feature of the Indian classrooms is their composition of students with multilingual background. It is more so when it is the question of the Russian language in the Indian context, especially for the post-school learners. They not only hail from a multi-lingual background, but also belong to different age, professional and interest groups, which directly or indirectly have a concrete bearing on the ability as well as efficiency of the learners in mastering the TL.

As discussed in the articles above (Pande, H.C.), the concept of the mother tongue and its overlappings with other tongues of the learner in the light of the fact that an average Bengali student is expected to be more or less proficient in English and Hindi (apart from some other Indian languages and/or dialects thereof), will have to be carefully borne in mind while carrying out the sampling and interpretation of data. This is very important, because while discussing the interfering effects of the MT while learning the Russian language, the role of the OTs is a very important one. The researcher has found the above article to be of extreme importance, which has provided a clear insight into the problem under study.

The article by Balupuri, Chinta, is also very important in terms of defining the area of difficulties in the initial stages

of FLT. The fact that FLT basically is a habit formation of coding-decoding, hence while interpreting the phonetic data, the current study will require to establish the deviations by the learners in the process of coding-decoding.

A special mention is deserved by the article of L.loginova, I.M. for the same has helped the researcher immensely in classifying the errors. More important here is the fact that the above article along with that of Br.atus' R.V. are in fact the forerunners of this study, because they have actually analysed the Russian system of sounds with that of English and in the case of Br.atus' some sounds from Indian languages. The article of L.loginova has helped the researcher in formulating the guidelines for the interpretation of data (discussed in greater detail in the following chapter).

The other articles/dissertations are mainly devoted to methods of teaching the Russian language and the interference of the MT in the process of learning the TL, which are directly linked with the subject of this study.

Lastly the work of Professor Ar.alin, V.D., mentioned at the end, devoted to the typological analysis in the process of a methodological study of languages has been of great value to the researcher in formulating the main outlines of the two languages (of this study) in terms of numerical inventory, as proposed by the author. However, the same may not exactly help the researcher, at this moment, to come to any conclusion, but the researcher has been guided by the above work in classifying the differences in the systems of articulation of the Russian and Bengali speech sounds.

The following chapter includes the procedural framework of the present study.