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ERROR PATTERNS IN NEGATION IN RUSSIAN LEARNERS: A COMPARISON OF NON-NATIVE AND HERITAGE SPEAKERS**

This article addresses the acquisition of the category of negation in Russian by two distinct groups of learners – non-native speakers and heritage speakers. Drawing on corpus-based data from the Russian Learner Corpus (RLC), the study explores structural and developmental patterns in the use of negation across different stages of language proficiency. While previous research has examined specific subdomains of Russian negation, such as double negation or the use of negative pronouns, the present work aims to provide a comprehensive account of learner difficulties by comparing the two groups in parallel. The analysis is grounded in a typological classification of negation-related errors observed in learner production and considers both the linguistic and didactic perspectives. Particular attention is paid to the developmental dynamics of these errors and the potential for their fossilization. By situating the phenomenon of negation within the broader context of second language acquisition and bilingualism, the study contributes to our understanding of the challenges involved in mastering this core grammatical category in Russian. The findings are intended to inform language instruction by identifying critical stages in the acquisition process that may require targeted pedagogical intervention.

Keywords: negation acquisition, heritage speakers, Russian as a foreign language, error typology, fossilization.

У чланку се анализира усвајање категорије негације у руском језику код две различите групе ученика – страних и говорника руског као наследног језика. Полазећи од корпусних података из Руског ученичког корпуса (RLC), у раду се анализирају структурни и развојни обрасци коришћења негације на различитим језичким нивоима. Док су раније студије посвећене одређеним областима руске негације као што су двојна негација или коришћење одричних заменица, наш рад тежи да представи детаљан опис тешкоћа ученика путем поређења двеју група. Анализа се заснива на типолошкој класификацији грешака везаних за негацију уочених у говору ученика и разматра како лингвистичке, тако и методичке перспективе. Пошто феномен негације сагледава у ширем контексту усвајања другог језика и билингвизма, рад доприноси разумевању изазова укључених у савладавање ове кључне граматичке категорије у руском. Резултати теже да допринесу подучавању језика помоћу одређивања критичних тачака у процесу усвајања које могу захтевати циљану интервенцију наставника.

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Кључне речи: усвајање негације, говорници руског као изворног језика, руски као страни језик, типологија грешака, фосилизација.

1. Introduction

Negation occupies a key position in linguistic systems and is one of the fundamental grammatical categories found across all languages. Contemporary studies, e.g., Horn (Horn 2010), Zeijlstra (Zeijlstra 2004), Penka (Penka 2011), de Swart (de Swart 2010), Plungian (Плунгян 2011) demonstrate that negation is not a homogeneous phenomenon. Rather, it represents a complex category whose variability is shaped not only by the typological features of a given language but also by its cognitive and functional characteristics.

Research in the field of negation thus encompasses a broad spectrum within linguistics. It ranges from general inquiries — such as Horn's (Horn 1989) overview of the origins, typology, and semantics of negative constructions, or the comprehensive theoretical account of negation across languages presented by Déprez and Espinal in *The Oxford Handbook of Negation* (Déprez et al. 2020) — to numerous specific aspects of the topic. These include, for instance, cyclic, typologically motivated changes in negative constructions (Jespersen 1917); double negation (Zeijlstra 2004); the principles governing the functioning of negative pronouns (Penka 2011); the relation between the means of expressing and interpreting negation (de Swart 2010); the interaction between modality and negation (van der Auwera 1998); the influence of negation on the grammatical structure of languages in general and on other elements of the sentence in particular (Zwarts 1998); cross-linguistic comparative investigations into the nature of negation (Haegeman 1995); and the acquisition of negation in the first language (Bloom 1970; Bellugi 1967; Gennari et al. 2005; Thornton et al. 2013; Цейтлин 2017; Мурашова et al. 2007). Naturally, it is also possible to refer to scholarly works that specifically examine the category of negation within the Russian language itself (Бондаренко 1983; Ольхова 2004).

When it comes to second language acquisition, negation has been examined both from holistic perspectives — i.e., as a component of the general process of second language learning (Krashen 1982; Lardiere 2008) — and as the central object of investigation (Dimroth 2008; Gil et al. 2019; Grüter et al. 2010; Meisel 1997; Pourhashemi 1989). The volume of scholarship in this area is immense, as the study of negation lies at the intersection of morphosyntax, semantics, pragmatics, and logic, and is inextricably linked to cognitive development, language acquisition, and typological markers specific to individual languages — all of which naturally attract considerable scholarly attention.

This article, however, focuses on only one particular aspect of negation as a linguistic phenomenon — namely, the acquisition of the category of negation

by non-native and heritage speakers of Russian. As in other domains, we can rely here on a wide range of studies devoted both to the acquisition of negation by bilingual speakers (Avramenko et al. 2024; Рингблом 2011), and to the difficulties and challenges associated with negation in the context of learning Russian as a foreign language (Belikova 2009; Cho 2018; Madariaga et al. 2024; Юэ et al. 2020; Штернина 2016).

Most of the aforementioned studies focus on specific aspects of the acquisition of the category of negation — such as the issue of double negation (Юэ et al. 2020), the use of negative pronouns and adverbs (Панков 2016), or the acquisition of negation by speakers of a given language in a didactic context (Штернина 2016).

In contrast, the present study seeks to draw upon the possibilities offered by existing corpus-based materials — in particular, the data provided by the Russian Learner Corpus (hereafter RLC) — to offer a general overview of the challenges encountered in the acquisition of the category of negation by non-native and heritage speakers of Russian (regardless of the dominant language environment). We aim to highlight both the similarities and the differences between these two processes, which show both parallels and fundamental divergences. To this end, we will attempt to address the following research questions.

- How does error frequency in the domain of negation develop quantitatively with the increase in overall language proficiency in groups of non-native and heritage speakers of Russian?
- What is the typology of errors within the category of negation at different stages of Russian language acquisition in these two groups?
- What are the observable trends in the evolution of different error types as general language proficiency increases? Of particular interest is the question of potential fossilization of certain error types related to negation — that is, do any error types persist regardless of increasing language proficiency, and do these coincide across the groups of non-native and heritage speakers of Russian? We consider this last question to be central, as its answer may define critical differences in the didactic approach to teaching non-native and heritage learners in this specific domain, and thereby influence instructional effectiveness.

2. Materials and Methods of Research

The Russian Learner Corpus (<http://www.web-corpora.net/RLC/>) is a structured collection of texts produced by two distinct groups of non-standard Russian speakers: individuals acquiring Russian as a foreign language and heritage speakers whose primary, dominant language differs from Russian. This cor-

pus encompasses both spoken and written language samples, offering a valuable resource for linguistic analysis. It provides the capability to search for wide a spectrum of deviations from Standard Russian. These deviations include errors in spelling and grammar, as well as unconventional lexical choices and syntactic structures that diverge from normative usage. The Russian Learner Corpus (RLC) enables searches based on the level of overall language proficiency, by the predominant language (more than 40 languages) and, in total, contains 196,681 sentences and 2,370,243 words.

In this study, in accordance with the research objectives, the primary methods applied will include corpus analysis, frequency analysis, linguistic observation and description, distributional analysis along with the related syntactic analysis, and the comparative approach.

3. Quantitative Development of Negation Errors in Non-Native and Heritage Speakers of Russian Across Levels of Overall Language Proficiency

To address the first of our research questions — namely, how the rate of negation-related errors changes quantitatively with increasing overall language proficiency among groups of non-native and heritage speakers of Russian — we constructed six subcorpora based on the Russian Learner Corpus (RLC) using a method of random sampling. Specifically, we compiled three subcorpora for each group (non-native and heritage speakers), each containing 200 sentences, corresponding to three proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. In total, 600 contexts were analyzed (each sentence was examined within its immediate context). Within each subcorpus, we analyzed all instances of both correct and incorrect usage of negative constructions. The frequency of such instances was then converted into percentages. As a result, we are able to state that, overall, the overwhelming majority of uses of negation in both groups can be considered

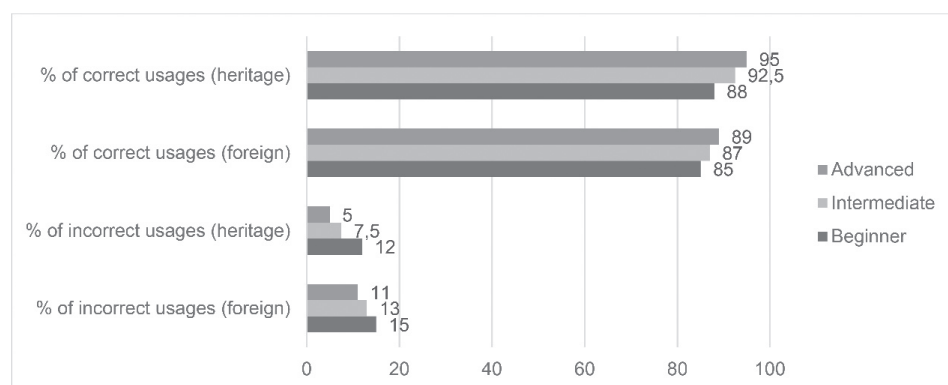


Figure 1. The relationship between the overall language proficiency level of non-native and heritage speakers and errors in the negation category

successful. We also gained insight into the relationship between speakers' general language proficiency and the frequency of errors in the domain of negation.

Based on the analysis conducted, we can state that the percentage of erroneous uses of negation tends to decrease steadily with increasing levels of overall language proficiency. Moreover, the correlation between the error rate progression in the non-native and heritage speaker groups is very high (the correlation coefficient for both groups is 0.9). This indicates that, from a quantitative perspective, the progression in the acquisition of the category of negation does not show significant differences between learners of Russian as a foreign language and heritage speakers.

4. Typology of Negation Errors in Non-Native and Heritage Speakers of Russian

To gain a clear understanding of the typology of errors in the category of negation among learners of Russian as a foreign language and heritage speakers, we undertook the following:

- We conducted a qualitative analysis of all contexts involving incorrect use of negative constructions in the RLC corpus, with the aim of classifying the errors marked in the corpus as belonging to the category of negation;
- We conducted a quantitative analysis of all such contexts in order to describe the typology of negation errors among non-native and heritage speakers at different stages of Russian language acquisition.

As a result of a detailed qualitative analysis of the spoken and written data contained in the RLC (we included only those cases that were explicitly marked in the corpus as errors in the category of negation¹), we identified the following types of violations in the domain of negation.

Error Type			Example of usage from the RLC
Complex Complex Errors	Double negation		Дети знают ничего о мире. Но не в коем случае Рязанов не давал его молодости остонавливать его не в чём.
	Partial negatives / general negatives constructions	General negation instead of partial negation	Скоро я заметила, что все женщины в России не полнеют /.../. (<i>не все</i>) ²

1 In this particular research we are dealing with a limited volume of material, which is also reflected in the derived classification. Expansion of the corpus volume in the future, especially of the heritage beginner segment, will certainly help to expand the classification in the future.

2 Here and hereafter, when examples are given, the correct options are italicized in parentheses.

	Partial negation instead of general negation	В лечебнице он жил всего два года, пока не он умер .
	Word order mistake in partial negation	Иначе как часто думают, дело саамов не только касается Севера /.../.
Negative design element omission	Omission of "не" (omission of negation)	Всем дали общежитие, а мне дали .
Using an extra element in a negative construction	Unnecessary "не"	Когда некоторые семьи связались с службой защиты детей они (и дети как и родители) не даже не ощущали что они участвуют в с защиты детей, чувствовали что они под контроля.
	Unnecessary "ни"	По-моему это как бы ни ничего страшного, потому что я вижу одних и тех же людей каждый день и могу общаться с ними.
	Unnecessary "нет"	У меня никогда не было никакого идола нет .
Replacement of one of the elements of the negative design	Substitution ("не" instead of "ни")	Пошёл в тренировку местного клуба моего родного города “ Лахден Рейпас” и не разу не сожалел.
	Substitution ("ни" instead of "не")	Ученый ‘ Эд Динер’ думал, что он проверить правильность теории Маслоу, но он ни согласен с мнением Маслоу, что остальные останавливаются на более потребностях.
	Substitution of "не" with another element	И если что-то но понимает, она может посмотреть слова в словаре.
	Substitution of "ни" with another element	Наше общее летнее хобби - это неудивительно футбол, и мы два два в неделю играем в него с мая до сентября. (как ни удивительно)
	Substitution of "нет" with another element	Со стороны выглядит как всё хорошо и без проблем . (<i>нет проблем</i>)

	Substitution ("не" instead of "нет")	Её родители и сестра живут в Астрахане и у Зои не возможности встречать их так часто, как она хотела бы.
	Substitution ("нет" instead of "не")	В течение временных лет, люди переехали больше из деревни в города, а нет наоборот.
	Incorrect usage of "нельзя"	В банках не можно использовать молбильники и т.д. В молоке нельзя быть медикаментов так как они могут стать причиной аллергии.
	Using "есть нет" instead of "нет"	Но к сожалению есть нет женской команды баскетбола в высшей школе экономики.
	Using "не есть" instead of "нет"	И иногда, касса закрыт и не есть причени.
	Genitive case in negation	Я хотела сделать всё по-своему, не хотела помощь ни от кого.
Spelling	"не" is written separately / in one word	Анжела К. говорит, что мне нeнравится учиться онлайн

Table 1. Typology of negation errors (general overview with examples)

It can be seen that here, first of all, there are deviations related to complex problems, such as double negation and partial/general negation. In most cases, these errors disrupt the structure of the whole utterance. But there are also problems related to the absence / excessive use / substitution of elements of negative constructions, which can, but should not be complex, as well as errors related to spelling.

In order to get a more accurate picture of the distribution of each type of error at different levels of Russian language acquisition by non-native and heritage speakers, we also conducted a quantitative analysis of the material. Since the size of the six subcorpora considered (non-native and heritage speakers by levels: beginner, intermediate, advanced) is different, we dealt with different amounts of data.

	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
foreign	37	238	52
heritage	5	112	34

Table 2. Absolute frequency of incorrect usages

Upon closer examination, it became clear that the number of relevant errors in the heritage speakers at the beginner level subcorpus — amounting to only five instances — renders a qualitative analysis of error typology infeasible, as the resulting data would compromise the validity of the study. Therefore, in the subsequent quantitative analysis, in which the number of errors of each type was converted into a percentage of the total number of errors within each group, we were obliged to limit the scope to the remaining five groups.

Overall, the results of the analysis indicate that the speech of learners of Russian as a foreign language exhibits all types of errors also found in the speech of heritage speakers. However, in the speech of heritage speakers — across all proficiency levels — certain error types that appear among non-native speakers were completely absent.

The following issues appear to be generally uncharacteristic of heritage speakers:

- Unnecessary ‘ни’
- Unnecessary ‘нет’
- Substitution of ‘не’ with another element
- Substitution of ‘ни’ with another element
- Substitution of ‘нет’ with another element
- Using ‘есть нет’ instead of ‘нет’
- Using ‘не есть’ instead of ‘нет’

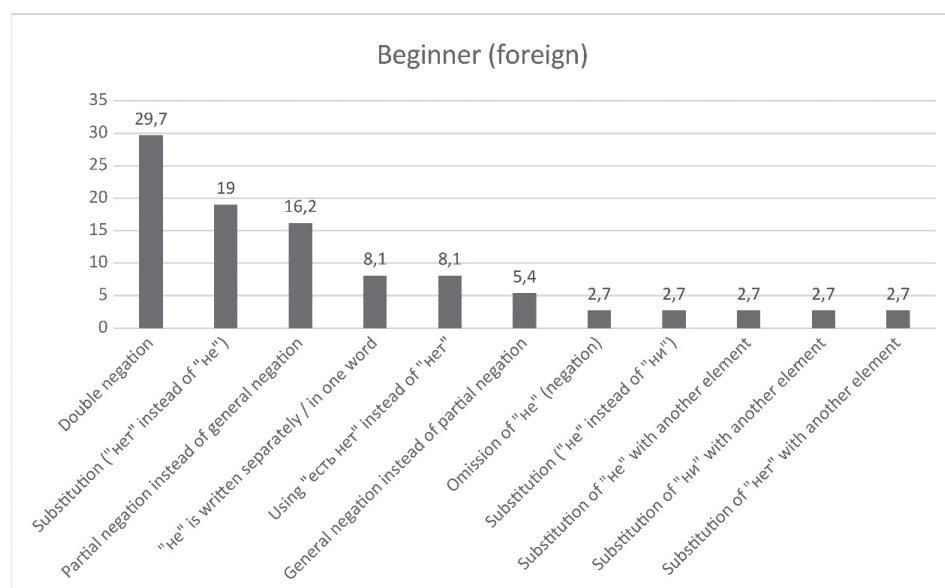


Figure 2. Typology of negation errors (foreign Beginner)

At the level of beginners with Russian as a foreign language, we see the least variety of error types, which, in our opinion, is explained by the speakers' intensive use of the compensatory avoidance strategy, which allows them to avoid obviously problematic or simply difficult constructions. Qualitative analysis of the material has shown that the repertoire of negative constructions at this level is characterized by narrowness, which leads to increased errors in several of the most problematic areas, such as: double negation, interchange of general and partial negation, substitution 'нет' instead of 'не' and 'есть нет' instead of 'нет', in addition, errors in spelling ('не' is written separately / in one word) are highlighted.

The use of 'нет' instead of 'не' and 'есть нет' instead of 'нет' represents typical errors observed at the beginner level. These errors are primarily caused by a lack of understanding or insufficient internalization of the basic means of expressing of concepts of existence and possession in Russian — particularly the correct usage of the verb 'БЫТЬ' in its zero form.

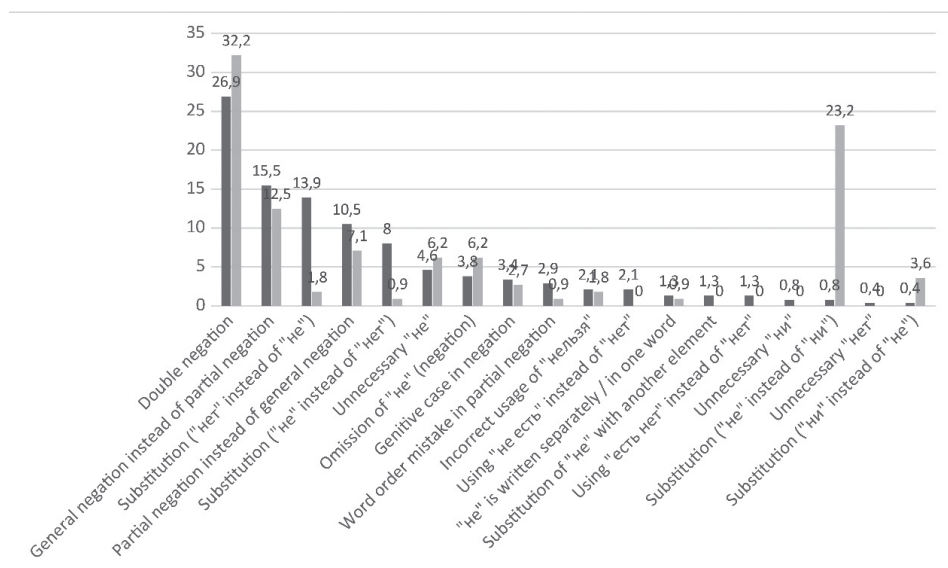


Figure 3. Typology of negation errors (foreign + heritage Intermediate)

As shown clearly in Figure 3, the key distinction in the typology of errors at the intermediate level lies in the significantly greater diversity of error types. This fragmentation – which, among other factors, results from the increased variety of syntactic constructions used by speakers — sets intermediate learners apart from those at the beginner and advanced levels. Moreover, when comparing the foreign and heritage groups, it becomes evident that this fragmentation is considerably more pronounced in the group of learners of Russian as a foreign

language. Several types of errors — such as unnecessary ‘ни’ / ‘нет’, substitution of ‘не’ / ‘ни’ / ‘нет’ with another element, using ‘есть нет’ instead of ‘нет’, and using ‘не есть’ instead of ‘нет’ — do not occur at all in the speech of heritage speakers at this level.

We can also observe areas of error concentration that are typical for both groups — such as double negation, the substitution of general negation for partial negation and vice versa, and, to a lesser extent but still present in both groups, unnecessary ‘не’, omission of ‘не’, and issues with genitive case in negation. At the same time, certain problems appear to be significantly more typical of only one of the groups.

For non-native speakers, the correct distribution of ‘не’ and ‘нет’ presents considerable difficulty. In contrast, heritage speakers struggle more frequently with the substitution between ‘не’ and ‘ни’, especially with the use of ‘не’ instead of ‘ни’, which emerges as a particularly serious issue. In the former case, the underlying causes are syntactic: the observed errors are often the result of contamination between competing syntactic structures and the incomplete acquisition of existential and possessive constructions. In the latter case, the primary challenge lies in phonological features, particularly the distinction between ‘не’ and ‘ни’ in stressed and unstressed positions, as heritage speakers tend to acquire the language primarily through auditory exposure.

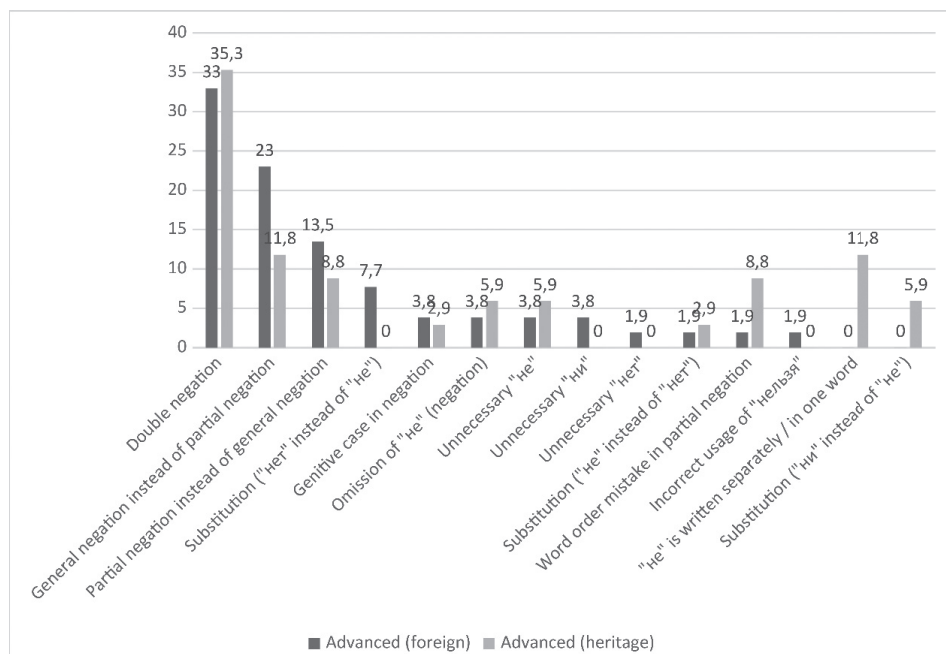


Figure 4. Typology of negation errors (foreign + heritage Advanced)



At the advanced level, we observe a narrowing of the range of errors in the domain of negation, even as the diversity of syntactic constructions used by speakers is maintained – and, as revealed by the qualitative analysis, even increases.

Interestingly, the set of problems common to both groups remains largely unchanged. These include:

- double negation,
- substitution between general and partial negation (with heritage speakers also displaying word order mistakes in partial negation),
- and, to a lesser extent, omission of ‘не’, unnecessary ‘не’, and issues with the genitive case in negation.

At the same time, the distribution of other error types outside these core categories diverges significantly between the two groups.

Among non-native speakers, difficulties at this level include:

- overuse of ‘ни’ and ‘нет’,
- and incorrect usage of ‘нельзя’.

Among heritage speakers, common issues include:

- confusion between separate and joined spelling of ‘не’,
- and the use of ‘ни’ instead of ‘не’.

Each of the difficulties mentioned above undoubtedly warrants independent and detailed analysis. However, given the limited scope of this article and its survey-oriented nature, we will, for the time being and by way of example, examine in greater detail only one issue – the one that consistently ranks first in frequency across all error distributions, both among non-native and heritage speakers, at all proficiency levels. This, of course, concerns the issue of double negation, which plays a crucial role in mastering the category of negation in Russian. The remaining error types will be the subject of future, more in-depth investigations.

Double negation, or what Vsevolodova (Всеволодова 2000) terms negative modification in the context of Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL), does not represent a single issue but rather a complex cluster of interrelated difficulties, which constitutes a major obstacle for the majority of learners precisely due to its multifaceted nature. What does this cluster include?

At its core lies the fundamental issue of the very concept of double negation, which is unacceptable or ungrammatical in many languages. This manifests in two principal forms: problems involving the negative particle preceding the verb (Example 1, Table 3), and errors involving negative

pronouns or adverbs (Example 2, Table 3). Even among speakers whose native languages allow double negation, difficulties often arise concerning the number of negative components involved in a “double” negative construction — which, in Russian, is not necessarily limited to just two (Example 3, Table 3). Another core difficulty concerns the distinction between utterances with no grammatical negation, with single negation, and with double negation. Here, learners may produce slight shifts in intended meaning or stylistic deviations (Examples 4 and 5, Table 3), or, in more serious cases, significant misunderstandings (Example 6, Table 3).

	Example of usage
1	Дети [не] ³ знают ничего о мире.
2	И я не хочу ругаться с кем то .
3	Конечно, я выучилась никогда [не] пожимать руки никому , и была довольна собой.
4	Я студентка и у меня [нет] ни денег, ни времени делать покупки.
5	Именно из-за учёбы я стаю рано утром, хотя я действительно никакая [не] ранняя пташка.
6	Всем дали общежитие, а мне [не] дали.

Table 3. Examples of errors from The Russian Learner Corpus 1

In addition to the core issues, there are several associated problems. First, there is the issue of distinguishing between invariable negative adverbs such as ‘нигде’ and ‘никак’, on the one hand, and negative pronouns such as ‘никто’ and ‘ничей’, which possess full paradigms, on the other. This often results in failure to decline pronouns appropriately (Example 1, Table 4). Related to this is interference based on formal similarity with the indeclinable indefinite pronouns ‘некто’ and ‘нечто’ (Example 2, Table 4). Second, learners face difficulties in choosing the appropriate pronoun, applying the correct inflectional paradigm, and then selecting the appropriate case (Examples 3 and 4, Table 4). Third, we observe contamination between two-part sentences featuring double negation (e.g., ‘Я никому не звонил’) and single-subject constructions with different semantics and without double negation (e.g., ‘Мне некому было позвонить’) (Examples 5 and 6, Table 4). Fourth, there is the issue of non-standard prepositional placement in prepositional-case constructions – specifically, when the preposition appears between a prefix and the root, as in ‘Мы ни о чём не говорили’. Fifth, closely related to the previous issue, is the problem of separating the pronoun from the preposition in writing (Examples 7 and 8, Table 4).

3 Here and further in the tables with examples, the elements of the utterance missing in the speakers' speech are given in square brackets.

	Example of usage	Correct option
1	Я не могла разговаривать об этом с никто , но моя подруга была со мной и не договорила ответы.	/.../ ни с кем, /.../.
2	Когда мальчик родилась 5 августа 1905 в Мюнхене, некто думал , что он станет звездой экономической сферы.	/.../, никто не думал, /.../.
3	Вопреки ожиданиям всего Владивостокского народа, городское правительство не сообщило никого официального мнения о строе АЭС в Хабаровске.	/.../ не сообщило никакого /.../.
4	Меня раздражает то, что я не успею прочитать весь материал достаточно хорошо для никакого экзамена.	/.../ ни на какой экзамен.
5	Особена если они некогда этого не видели .	/.../ никогда этого не видели.
6	В первой спальне две мыши, одна слева от второй мыши, которая нечего делает у окна.	/.../ ничего не делает /.../.
7	Знаю многих людей, даже молодых, которые не зачто ни хотели бы жить, например, в Хельсинки.	/.../ ни за что не хотели бы /.../.
8	Но, я не хочу обращаться никакому специалисту.	/.../ не хочу обращаться ни к какому /.../.

Table 4. Examples of errors from The Russian Learner Corpus 2

These difficulties are further compounded by the issue of genitive case in negation, along with the corresponding adjective agreement. Here, we observe both substitution of the genitive case with an incorrect case (Example 1, Table 5), and, conversely, the replacement of a nominative subject with the genitive case, which reflects a case of overgeneralization (Example 2, Table 5). Additional confusion is introduced by the failure to distinguish between and the interchangeability of the particles ‘не’ and ‘ни’ (Examples 3, 4, 5, Table 5). This is particularly problematic in light of a tendency toward error accumulation (Example 3, Table 5 – incorrect joined/separate spelling combined with ‘не’ instead of ‘ни’; Example 5, Table 5 – spelling error in a negative pronoun combined with ‘ни’ instead of ‘не’).

	Example of usage	Correct option
1	Казалось, что никто не был дома и было сильная мгла.	/.../ никого не было /.../.
2	Я ждала полчаса, и один таксист сказал мне, что никого не придет из-за того, что рейс опоздал.	/.../ никто не придет /.../.
3	Из финнов не кто за границей знаком , но на некоторых конкурсах участвовали Юкка и Кирси Аромаа в 80-х годах.	/.../никто не известен /.../.
4	Это не с чем не сравнить .	/.../ ни с чем не сравнить.

5	Также, не могу Вам сказать, сколько раз прошлой зимой после моего пребывания в Казахстане я ругал своих друзей, опять заболевших, за то, что они никогда ни одевают шапку зимой.	/.../ никогда не одевают /.../.
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Table 5. Examples of errors from The Russian Learner Corpus 3

Speakers, in their majority, are aware of the existence of big problems with double negation, which, of course, mainly positively affects the process of mastering the category of negation, but, unfortunately, also often leads to over-compensation, when double negation / third, fourth negative element appears in constructions where they are superfluous. The examples given in Table 6 reflect the variety of problems that arise as a result of overcompensation. These include redundant isolated ‘нет’ (Example 1, Table 6), and redundant ‘не’ before a full-nominal verb (Example 2, Table 6), redundant ‘не’ before a negative pronoun (Example 3, Table 6), and even substitution of a sentence without grammatical negation by a negative sentence (Example 4, Table 6).

	Example of usage	Correct option
1	У меня никогда не было никакого идола нет .	/.../ не было никакого идола.
2	Они не могли ничего не делать , и Колберь за течение 25 минут Колберь иронически ругал Буша и шутил так, чтобы все поняли, что он не шутит.	Они не могли ничего делать, /.../.
3	Акмарал тате еле встала с постели и открыв мне дверь упала на пол и сказала «Уходи!» я не ничего не поняла , спрашивала «Что случилось?».	/.../ я ничего не поняла, /.../.
4	Иногда я заядло что то отучиваю начинаю зубрить 2-3 недели, и устаю, начинаю ничего не учить месяц желания пропадает и теряю время.	/.../ прекращаю что-либо учить /.../.

Table 6. Examples of errors from The Russian Learner Corpus 4

To date, in the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language, it is considered appropriate to apply two different approaches in explaining the problem of double negation, depending on the native language of the speaker. For speakers of Romano-Germanic languages, the focus is on the need to use the particle ‘не’ before the predicate if there are negative pronouns/adverbs in the sentence, while for speakers of some other languages (e.g., Chinese, Turkish, Korean), the importance of replacing pronouns and adverbs like ‘все’, ‘всегда’ with negative pronouns and adverbs with ‘ни’ when using negative verbs is emphasized (Юэ et al. 2020; Панков 2016). There is also a clear and well-thought-out system of exercise types that progressively passes through all levels of language proficiency and ensures gradual acquisition of double negation and the category of negation in general (Величко 2009).

From our point of view, the success of the application of already available, and sufficiently qualitatively and in detail developed, methods depends to a great extent, first of all, on how successfully it is possible to avoid the cumulation of the above-mentioned problems in the process of language acquisition. In our opinion, the most important factor here is the gradual, step-by-step introduction and elaboration of all the above-mentioned aspects of the problems, systematic avoidance of the accumulation of undeveloped/partially mastered and unreinforced elements in the process of interiorization internalization of negative constructions. Success also depends on how early and effectively communicative types of exercises are introduced, which are known to contribute to the automatic usage of correct skills in speaking and writing.

5. Development of Negation Errors in Non-Native and Heritage Speakers of Russian

To obtain a clearer picture of how the frequency of individual error types evolves with increasing overall language proficiency, we recalculated the number of each error type per subcorpus volume in instances per million (ipm). As expected, most error types exhibit positive dynamics: their frequency decreases predictably as general language proficiency improves. However, some nuances emerge here as well – and the developmental trajectory of each error type, as shown in Figures 5, 6, and 7, proves to be highly individualized. Among heritage speakers, we generally observe only one type of positive dynamic: a sharp decline in error frequency between the intermediate and advanced levels, or complete disappearance of the error from production at the advanced stage.

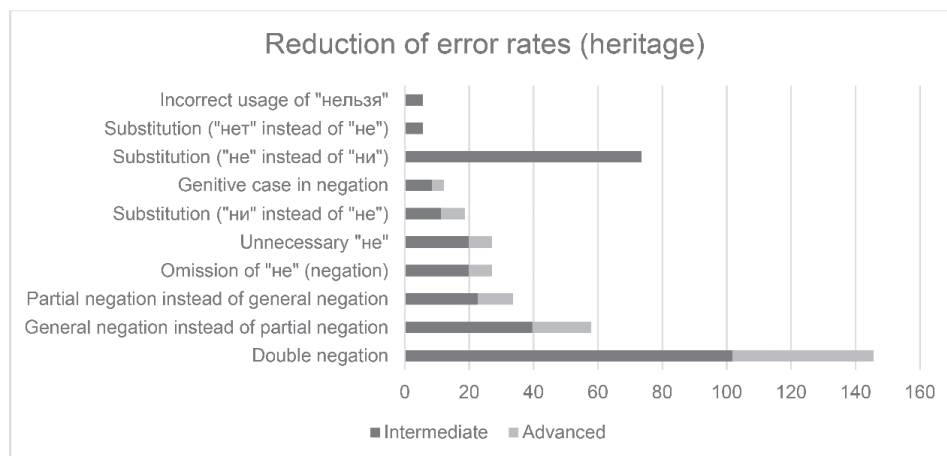


Figure 5. Reduction of error rates (heritage speakers)

Among non-native speakers, however, we observe three distinct patterns of positive development. First, we find the same pattern already observed in heritage speakers: a clear correlation between the level of overall language proficiency and the number of errors across groups. As shown in the graph, the majority of error types disappear at the advanced level (and some even at the intermediate level), or their frequency drops significantly.

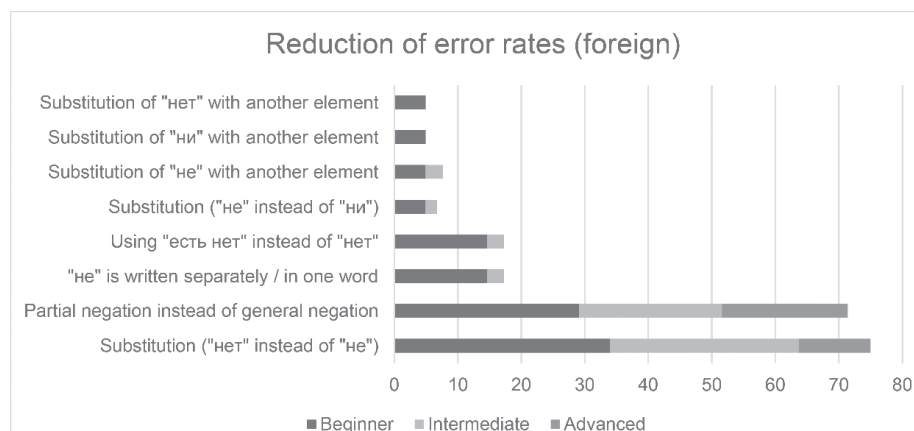


Figure 6. Reduction of error rates (foreign speakers) I

Second, there are cases where a decline in error frequency is observed only at the intermediate level. This pattern is likely attributable to the narrow syntactic repertoire and the active use of compensatory avoidance strategies by beginner-level learners. Thus, the emergence of these errors at the intermediate level reflects an active phase of language development — including the implementation of various learning strategies, and, not least, the expansion of the learner's syntactic repertoire.

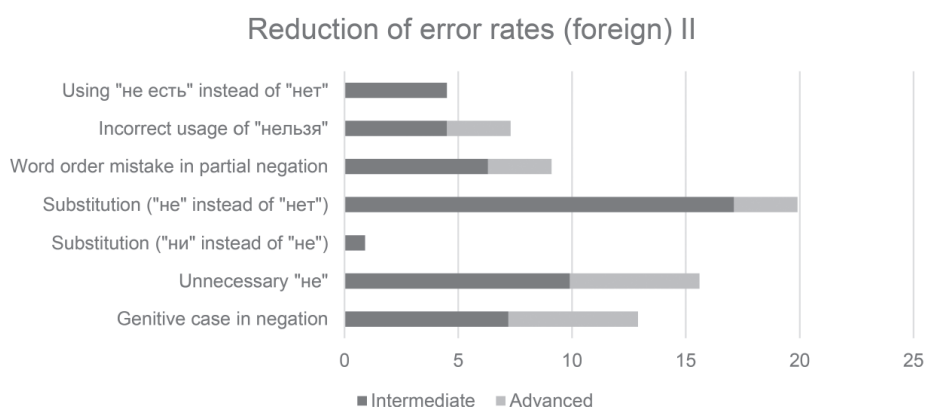


Figure 7. Reduction of error rates (foreign speakers) II

Third, we also observe a type of positive development characterized by a U-shaped trajectory, which reflects the complexity of the internalization process for certain aspects of knowledge, the gradual development of skills, and the eventual stabilization of correct usage. The apparent regression associated with the internalization of previously acquired knowledge – typical of U-shaped development – has been thoroughly documented in the SLA literature across all levels of language (Ellis 2002; Williams et al. 2022; Carlucci et al. 2013).

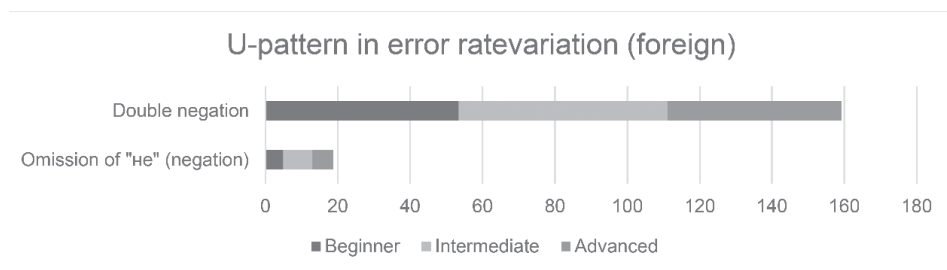


Figure 8. U-pattern in error rate variation (foreign speakers)

On the other hand, the positive trend described above is only very weakly evident in the case of double negation at the advanced level. The persistently high error frequency among non-native speakers reveals a much weaker U-shaped development ($53.4 \rightarrow 57.6 \rightarrow 48.2$ ipm) than might be expected, which points to substantial difficulties in overcoming challenges in this domain.

In our view, the key factor here is the need for consistent, systematic work on double negation beginning at the earliest stages of language instruction. Equally important is the principle of avoiding cumulative cognitive overload in individual tasks or at particular stages of instruction. Indeed, the accumulation of multiple high-demand elements (e.g., managing word order, selecting the appropriate particle, determining its position in the utterance, choosing the correct form of a negative adverb or pronoun, placing the preposition, etc.) may lead to speaker resignation, and consequently, to fossilization of the error.

In the case of omission of ‘he’ ($4.9 \rightarrow 8.1 \rightarrow 5.7$ ipm), we observe an instance of incomplete U-shaped development. At the advanced level, such errors tend to occur in syntactically complex utterances containing multiple negative elements, and may, in our view, be attributed to overcompensation and learners’ efforts to maintain the “correct” number of negative components in the sentence.

All of the patterns described above are consistent with expectations based on existing research in the field of second language acquisition. Nevertheless, despite the overall positive developmental trajectory in the domain of negation – observed in both heritage and non-native speakers – there are certain error types whose frequency, paradoxically, increases with rising levels of overall language proficiency. These types of errors are of particular interest, as they highlight per-

sistent learning challenges and help identify which aspects of negation require focused instructional attention. Recognizing these trends is crucial for teachers working with both non-native and heritage learners of Russian, as it may help prevent fossilization of such error types.

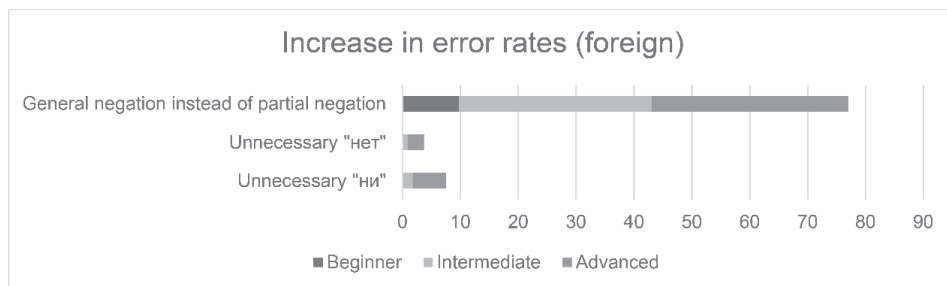


Figure 9. Increase in error rates (foreign speakers)

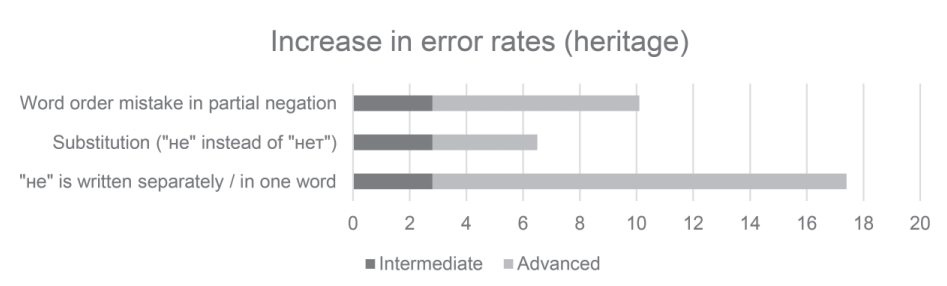


Figure 10. Increase in error rates (heritage speakers)

The graphs presented above clearly illustrate the differences between the two groups under investigation. Among heritage speakers, error patterns often stem from the uneven development of language modalities, in particular, from significantly stronger skills in speaking than in writing. This discrepancy gives rise to errors such as substitution of ‘he’ instead of ‘нет’ and ‘he’ is written separately/in one word. A considerable improvement could result from placing greater instructional focus on writing skills.

As for word order mistakes in partial negation, this error type tends to emerge as a consequence of a decrease in substitutions of partial negation with general negation. That is, learners have already internalized the inadmissibility of using general negation in certain types of sentences, but still struggle to determine the correct position of the negative particle in

preverbal negation structures.⁴ In this sense, such errors may be seen more as a byproduct of a generally positive developmental trend. Nonetheless, overcoming these challenges requires systematic work with intonational patterns (particularly phrasal stress) and their syntactic functions, as well as instruction focused on information structure and theme–rheme articulation.

Overall, heritage speakers tend to exhibit relatively low frequencies of fossilized errors in the domain of negation – a pattern that stands in stark contrast to that observed among non-native speakers, whose situation differs fundamentally. On the one hand, we observe a slight increase in the already marginal frequency of overuse of ‘нет’ and ‘ни’, which, as in previous cases, may be viewed as a byproduct of a generally positive trend. These errors appear to stem from overcompensation as learners attempt to master one of the most complex areas of Russian negation – double negation.

On the other hand, as previously noted, the frequency of errors in double negation remains persistently high among non-native speakers, even at the advanced level – a clear indicator of undesirable fossilization in this critical domain. Even more pronounced signs of fossilization are found in what appears to be the second most problematic area of negation for non-native speakers at the advanced stage – namely, the erroneous substitution of general negation for partial negation. The development of error frequency in this category (9.7 → 33.3 → 34 ipm) illustrates a typical fossilization pattern resulting from overcompensation.

Earlier, we observed that at initial stages of language acquisition, non-native speakers more frequently exhibited the opposite problem – using partial negation instead of general negation. However, already at the

4 Naturally, we are fully aware that in Russian there exist both semantically general negation constructions — realized through predicate negation as well as preverbal (constituent) negation — and semantically partial negation constructions, which likewise may involve either predicate or preverbal negation (for a detailed typology, see, e.g., Падучева 2011).

However, from the perspective of practical acquisition — that is, on the basis of our empirical material — the overwhelming majority of errors pertained to three specific types of violations:

1. The erroneous use of a semantically general negative sentence with predicate negation instead of a semantically partial negative sentence with preverbal negation;
2. The erroneous use of a semantically partial negative sentence with preverbal negation instead of a semantically general negative sentence with predicate negation;
3. The incorrect placement of the negative particle within a semantically partial negative sentence involving preverbal negation.

intermediate level, the inverse pattern becomes dominant and remains virtually unchanged at the advanced stage. Meanwhile, the use of partial negation where general negation is required continues to decline, indicating improvement.

This suggests that the issue does not stem from a conceptual misunderstanding of the general vs. partial negation distinction. Rather, it reflects the fixation and procedural automatization of incorrect speech patterns established at the intermediate level. And since negative constructions are highly frequent in Russian, it is precisely at the intermediate stage that special efforts must be made to prevent fossilization in this area – primarily through systematic reinforcement of correct forms and targeted instructional feedback.

6. Conclusions

1. As language proficiency increases, the percentage of errors in negation tends to decrease gradually, with a high correlation between error rates in non-native and heritage speakers, suggesting that quantitatively, progress in mastering the negation category shows no significant differences between learners of Russian as a foreign language and heritage speakers.

2. The typology of errors in the domain of negation by levels, which simultaneously represents critical points requiring teacher support during the acquisition process, can be presented as follows.

Beginner level (foreign learners):

Limited variety of error types due to reliance on compensatory strategies to avoid complex constructions. Narrow range of negation constructions leads to increased errors in key areas:

- Double negation.
- Substitution between full and partial negation.
- Confusion between ‘нет’ and ‘не’, and ‘есть нет’ instead of ‘нет’.
- Spelling errors related to ‘не’ (written as one word or separately).

Intermediate Level:

Greater variety of error types as speakers utilize more diverse syntactic constructions. Foreign learners exhibit more pronounced fragmentation in errors compared to heritage speakers.

Typical errors for both groups include double negation and substitution issues (full and partial negation), excessive ‘не’ or its omission, issues with genitive negation, but unique challenges arise:



- Non-native speakers struggle with the distribution of ‘не’ and ‘нет’.
- Heritage speakers face issues with substituting ‘не’ and ‘ни’, often using ‘не’ instead of ‘ни’.

Advanced Level:

Narrowing of error types in negation, while maintaining or increasing the variety of syntactic constructions used. Consistent problems across both groups include double negation and issues with substitution of full and partial negation. Distinct differences in error patterns emerge:

- Non-native speakers often overuse ‘ни’ and ‘нет’ and misuse ‘нельзя’.
- Heritage speakers struggle with the spelling (written as one word or separately) of ‘не’ and the use of ‘ни’ instead of ‘не’.

The following types of errors occur in the speech of non-native speakers but are entirely absent in the speech of heritage speakers: unnecessary ‘ни’, unnecessary ‘нет’, substitution of ‘не’ with another element, substitution of ‘ни’ with another element, substitution of ‘нет’ with another element, using ‘есть нет’ instead of ‘нет’, using ‘не есть’ instead of ‘нет’.

3. Patterns of Error Development

While most errors decrease in frequency as learners progress, individual error types follow distinct developmental trajectories.

Heritage Speakers: Errors sharply decline from intermediate to advanced, often disappearing. The main challenge stems from asymmetrical skill development – oral proficiency outpaces writing, leading to errors such as substitution ‘не’ instead of ‘нет’ and ‘не’ is written separately/in one word. Increased focus on writing and prosodic structure is key to overcoming these issues.

Non-Native Speakers: Three distinct patterns of error reduction emerge:

- Gradual decline, aligning with the heritage speaker trend.
- Errors appearing at intermediate due to limited syntax and avoidance strategies on the beginner level, reflecting active learning rather than fossilization.
- U-Shaped Development, where errors temporarily rise before stabilizing, indicating the complexity of internalizing negation rules.

Despite overall improvement, negation errors in non-native speakers present a risk of fossilization, particularly in the areas of double negation and general vs. partial negation. While early stages show a tendency to overuse partial negation, learners at the intermediate level often shift towards the opposite issue – overuse of total negation – which persists into advanced proficiency. This suggests not a lack of conceptual understanding but the automatization of incorrect patterns during active language acquisition.

To mitigate these risks, systematic reinforcement of double negation rules from the early stages is essential. Particular attention should be given to gradual skill integration, ensuring that learners do not experience cognitive overload when simultaneously managing multiple linguistic factors, such as word order, choice and placement of negation particles, and syntactic constraints specific to double negation. This chapter highlights the need for targeted intervention at the intermediate level to prevent fossilization and promote the stable acquisition of correct double negation structures.

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Source

The Russian Learner Corpus. <http://www.web-corpora.net/RLC/>

Вероника Штранц-Никитина

ТИПИЧНЫЕ ОШИБКИ В УПОТРЕБЛЕНИИ ОТРИЦАНИЯ У ИЗУЧАЮЩИХ РУССКИЙ ЯЗЫК: СРАВНЕНИЕ НЕНОСИТЕЛЕЙ ЯЗЫКА И НОСИТЕЛЕЙ РУССКОГО КАК НАСЛЕДНОГО ЯЗЫКА

Резюме

Отрицание, являющееся одной из центральных категорий морфосинтаксиса и одним из ключевых элементов организации языковой системы, безусловно, играет важную роль в процессе освоения языка. Эффективное усвоение отрицательных конструкций существенно влияет на формирование общей языковой компетенции и, как показывает практика преподавания русского языка как иностранного в смешанных группах, требует дифферен-

цированного подхода при обучении неносителей и эритажных носителей русского языка.

Настоящее исследование выполнено на материале Русского учебного корпуса (Russian Learner Corpus), который содержит образцы устной и письменной русской речи как носителей русского языка как наследного, так и неносителей русского языка. Причем в корпусе представлены образцы речи изучающих русский язык с большим разбросом преобладающих языков (более 40 разных преобладающих/родных языков).

В работе предпринята попытка представить общий обзор проблем, возникающих в процессе усвоения категории отрицания неносителями и эритажными носителями русского языка вне зависимости от характера преобладающего языка. С этой целью проводится сопоставительный анализ формирования навыков употребления отрицательных конструкций у упомянутых групп обучающихся, принимая во внимание изменения, происходящие с ростом уровня общей языковой компетенции говорящих. Корпусный подход позволяет выявить как количественные параметры (частотность различных типов отрицательных структур, распределение ошибок по уровням владения языком), так и качественные (контекстуально обусловленные) особенности их функционирования в речи представителей каждой группы.

Анализ показывает, что траектории усвоения отрицания у изучающих русский язык как иностранный и у эритажных носителей действительно несколько различаются. В исследовании рассматриваются особенности сопоставительной динамики прогресса обеих групп в области усвоения отрицания и, далее, представлена типология ошибок по уровням владения языком, отражающая ключевые «горячие» точки, требующие усиленной педагогической поддержки. Отдельное внимание уделяется проблеме фоссилизации некоторых типов ошибок в области отрицания и необходимости их целенаправленной коррекции на разных этапах обучения.

Ключевые слова: освоение отрицательных конструкций, эритажные говорящие, русский язык как иностранный, типология ошибок, фоссилизация.