

Foreword

I have a dream...

Martin Luther King, 1963

4 And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we are scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

6 And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them."

7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

Genesis 11.1-9

I have a dream – and my dream is world peace.

I belong to the generation of Russian speakers born toward the end of the Cold War who, throughout their adult lives, have been exposed to the unrest and contradictions of the post-Soviet societies. While at school, the Cold War did not feel like an interesting topic, even though a nuclear attack was then already a real threat. Maybe, picturing its horrors was unmanageable for the imagination of a happy child, who was brought up in a quiet town hidden in the forest of northern Russia. Ten years after leaving this peaceful haven, I learnt that, during all those years, the workplace of my father was the part of nuclear weapon industry. The weapons located there were equivalent to ten tonnes of explosives for each resident. This was in the 1970 and 80s. The threat of nuclear war is still present to greater extent than most people realise, even though it gets little attention in the media.

My grandparents witnessed and tasted the sorrows of World War Two in full. Based on their experience, I believe that no matter how controversial philosophies, social orders and national interests are, they are not worth human suffering and death. Besides, nuclear war would be different from other wars: if it happens, there will be no interests or views to defend since too few will survive to hold those. This is the only thing to truly consider.

I begin a book about vocabulary shared by English and Russian with such a seemingly unrelated theme because words have power. They are used to express interests, find compromises, and persuade. Views are also formed based on information that we gain through the mediation of oral and written speech. Anton Chekhov was right, when he said "As many languages you know – as many times you are a person," because knowledge of a foreign language increases the variety and quality of information to which you have access. It gives individuals more freedom to make their own judgements about the history, culture, and politics of other countries. It stops "overseas" from being impersonal.

Psychologists say that understanding of others' motives can reduce aggression. Therefore, knowledge of foreign languages may potentially serve as a vaccine against wars. Restoration of the Tower of Babel requires understanding and collaboration, not prejudice and conflict.

Teaching Russian as a foreign language may seem a small contribution to world peace but, thinking of all teachers of all languages, I feel a part of an enormous force. All people want happiness. Supposedly, those in positions of power and influence have easier access to it than less advantaged members of society – yet happiness built on the blood and tears of others is too fragile. At the end of the day, those assigned to click the button and destroy life in another part of the world may hesitate, having tasted the potential victims' mind through their language. Then, the day will not end.

Introduction

The story behind *7000 English words...*

Metalinguistic awareness – the ability to see the systematic nature and similarity of languages – helped my life progress and career many times, although I was never particularly inclined to be a polyglot. There were two milestones that made me think about the crucial role of a shared vocabulary in the acceleration of foreign language acquisition.

In summer 1992, a month before the university entry examinations, I relocated to Ukraine, where the official educational doctrine changed rapidly, as did many other things during that year. It became compulsory to sit an exam on the history of the new independent state. Having completed secondary school not far from the Golden Ring of Russia, I had never studied either Ukrainian history or the language.

Although I could use Russian in the exam, all history textbooks were only available in Ukrainian. I, therefore, had no choice but to read these. Ukrainian academic vocabulary differs significantly from its Russian counterpart, but I still received a placement at the university, after only two weeks' preparation. I was able to understand Ukrainian without a dictionary by identifying root words related to Russian and by considering those in the context of the sentence. This method aided my further studies, and I used it to speed-learn English fourteen years later.

When I arrived in London in 2006, with all my professional qualifications, I could have been very employable – if only my English were fluent! Unfortunately, it was rather limited, and I had little experience of conversing in English. Doing a job that did not utilise my education was very frustrating until I realised that knowledge of Russian could aid my English. To my absolute joy, I managed to make myself understood in 80% of cases from then, and others were wondering how I had learnt an advanced vocabulary in such a short time. Despite the odds and without taking any language courses, I was offered a trainee teaching position at a secondary school in London two years later, while mastering academic vocabulary of a new language takes five years on average.

In truth, my English was not as good as it may have appeared to my colleagues, pupils, and family. Whenever I felt stuck on account of my lack of vocabulary, I remembered a Russian word of foreign origin. The trick, therefore, was in my native language proficiency combined with metalinguistic awareness.

Target reader and teaching practice

I soon realised that this method could also work the other way around, especially for adult learners, to whom the Russian language would be an advantage in their professional lives. Having developed the metalinguistic approach during my British battle for employability, I now use it to teach adult beginners. My pupils can read mid-sized Russian sentences by the fourth hour of being involved in learning the language, from an absolute “zero”. They see for themselves that the English and Russians, who are aware of international vocabulary, can communicate after learning a few strategic sentence structures.

It then came to my attention that many adult learners are short of time and struggle to attend lessons regularly; this often results in their foreign language course becoming a never-ending sequence of recapping and repetition. However, educated career individuals tend to be highly capable of independent learning and successful use of logic and prior knowledge as a foundation for new concepts. So, I decided to write a book for English speakers to help them accelerate their studies by revealing the similarities between the two languages.

Beginner and advanced learners or teachers of Russian, who are looking for helpful logical links and structure to support both mastering and delivering the subject, will benefit from familiarising themselves with the content of this book.

Language as a living entity: the scientific approach

Contemporary research shows that human brain needs to organise information into patterns to make sense of the world and deal with it. Incidentally, any language is a multi-levelled system of patterns. Studying science is popular in the modern world even more so than the study of foreign languages; yet scientists experience first-hand how much the knowledge of linguistic patterns – suffixes and prefixes – helps at mastering terminology.

The diversity of biological species has never stopped scientists from assigning organisms into categories. Similarly, the multiplicity of language patterns and exceptions should not prevent students from seeing organisation behind the variety. Language is a product of the human nervous system; therefore, it obeys biological laws and should be treated as such. To a biologist, variation is a sign of adaptation that may lead to evolution, and not a sign of instability – and so are exceptions to a linguist. The evolution of species is prompted by changes in physical habitats – and evolution of language is the natural outcome of the transformation of social life and communication. Therefore, lexical borrowing is the most natural consequence of economic and political interaction. Understanding the cause of an exception always deepens the knowledge of a language since no exception stands alone.

Only the scientific – morphological – perception of a language has the power to open the learners' eyes to its inheritability, regularity, and dynamic nature. In other words, it develops metalinguistic awareness. This book will help the reader to grasp the systematic side of the Russian language, which will open the path to its acquisition in a most time-efficient and cost-effective way.

First language as prior knowledge

A good teacher can be identified by their skill in revealing familiar patterns within a language unfamiliar to learners, which leads to both rapid progress and increased motivation. Using the similarities and making connections between the new and the familiar is not a pedagogical innovation. This strategy has been widely applied in many subjects for at least a hundred years. Modern pedagogics refers to it as “prior knowledge,” which is, incidentally, a compulsory teaching standard of the UK educational inspectorate OFSTED. It only takes a small amount of outside the box thinking to consider one's native language as prior knowledge for learning another language.

About state of the art

I discovered the teaching potential of shared vocabulary empirically and independently during my teaching practice and learnt about Intercomprehension Didactics – a relatively new direction in linguistic pedagogy – only when I was finalising this book.

Closely related languages have similar patterns, so they are quick and easy to acquire. Participants of the project European Comprehension have been researching this approach since the 1990s, although it is based on the comparative-morphological method of Lev Scherba (1880 – 1944). Intercomprehension

Didactics is a method used for teaching multilingualism to translation students within one linguistic group.

Possibilities for intercomprehensive translation outside the same group of languages are considered limited. However, the first step of the EuroComprehension Programme is making a learner aware of vocabulary shared by the *target* and the *bridging* (familiar) languages. When it comes to training of oral and written skills, even a limited amount of shared material becomes invaluable since, in the situation of active communication, the choice of vocabulary belongs to the speaker. Therefore, the ability to immediately use between four and seven thousand words of a new language may be considered a good starting point for mastering productive – oral and written – skills, even when the target and bridging languages belong to different groups, such as English (Germanic) and Russian (Slavic).

Using this book

I do not treat this work as a purely academic text – above all, it is meant to be helpful to beginner and intermediate learners of Russian regardless the field of their occupation. This fusion of a textbook, a dictionary, and a collection of etymological anecdotes can be used for each of the three purposes individually. Reading it from cover to cover is not necessary. The content sheet and introductions to Parts 2 – 4 will help to understand the structure and aid the search for specific enquiries.

Part 1 lays the theoretical foundation for the rest of the text, which I felt was crucial to help English speakers navigate the Russian grammar involved in borrowing foreign vocabulary. Furthermore, the material from Part 1 will support any Russian course that the reader may choose to undertake. Using linguistic terminology was essential for clarity; all terms can be found in the *Glossary of accessible definitions* at the end of the book.

The lists of words in the book are presented in the manner of a translation dictionary, which typically does not explain the meaning of lexemes. However, when the semantics of a word differ in English and Russian, this is indicated in the commentary in the middle column or in the text. Since this book is about the patterns of adaptation of borrowed vocabulary by the Russian language, the word lists are representative of these patterns. For example, to find the Russian version of the word **station**, go to the list of words that end in **-tion** in Chapter 16, which can be found through the content sheet.

The idea of bringing stories of words' etymology and spheres of use into a book about shared vocabulary was inspired by *The Etymologicon*, in which Mark Forsyth recounted many anecdotes about the relation of selected English lexemes to other languages. Most words shared by English and Russian have an even more peculiar history, the researching of which was great fun. My most surprising find was seeing how little the English language has influenced Russian borrowed vocabulary, despite the widespread complaint about the overwhelming Anglicisms in it. In fact, most words shared by English and Russian were borrowed by the two languages at different periods and often under unrelated circumstances. So, in the manner of *The Etymologicon*, I decided to share some selected stories behind the foreign words in the Russian language that I found interesting and, hopefully, so will the reader.