

SIMILARITY ASPECTS OF ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES

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INTRODUCTION

English and Russian are parts of the huge Indo-European language family. However, the two languages have distinct differences because they belong to different branches. English is from the Germanic branch while Russian is from the Slavonic branch. Therefore, Russian is more related to Serbo-Croatian, Czech and Polish languages, which belong to the Slav languages. Languages naturally evolve and the theory goes that at some point in time, as groups of people went their separate ways, their languages evolved and changed over time in different ways. Eventually, the languages of the various communities of people evolved differently enough that they became different languages. Most languages share common factors and can be divided into language families. For example, modern languages like English, Dutch and German are part of the Germanic language family, and share a common ancestor called Proto-Germanic. Russian is part of the Slavonic branch of the Indo-European language family. It is closely related to other Slav languages such as Polish, Czech and Serbo-Croatian. English and Russian are very different in many important aspects. The chief difference is that Russian is a synthetic language, whereas English is an analytical language. In particular the grammar systems show significant variations. English has a fairly fixed word order. Meaning is expressed through the addition of words (for example auxiliaries) and movement of words within limited boundaries. Russian, on the other hand, conveys meaning largely through changes in the composition of words (e.g., by inflections or the addition of prefixes and suffixes). Its word order is very fluid. Because of these differences Russians often find learning English a serious challenge. Alphabet. Russian language uses Cyrillic alphabet, some of whose letters are similar to letters in the Latin alphabet used by English. There are some unique letters that are not present in any other language. Decades back, when the region was still called the USSR, Russian was the first language spoken by more than 150 million people in Russia alone. Today, Russian is the eighth most spoken language in the world, still spoken as a first language in 19 countries by about 154 million, according to Ethnologue. Worldwide, Russian is spoken by 258.2 million people. The Russian language is one of the official languages of the United Nations. It is the official language in the Russian Federation as well as in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Belarus and used in official and public capacity in Mongolia and Israel. Aside from the aforementioned countries, Russian is also spoken widely in the following locations: Azerbaijan, China, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Russian is unique as it has so many features that are inherent to the language. Among the European languages, Russian is one of the most difficult to learn if you are an English speaker. But its distinct features are what make the language truly fascinating

-For one thing, did you know that astronauts today have to learn Russian before they can go into space?

-Did you also know that Russians could differentiate more shades of blue than people who speak English?

-The verb "to be" has many forms in Spanish. However, it is not present in Arabic. Surprisingly, the verb exists in Russian, but it is only used in the past tense and future tense, but never in the present tense constructions of sentences.

-While all Russian adjectives consist of two or more syllables, the term злой (angry) is the only exception.

-Russian is an inflected language. This means that the meaning of the word changes depending on the stress placed on a particular syllable.

-This one is definitely unique. Since the earliest times, native words in Russia do

-Not start with the letter **A**. Two of the very few exceptions are the Russian

-Equivalent of *perhaps* and If there are Russian words that start with **A**, it is very

-Likely that these are borrowed words.

-Russian surnames have a gender. All Russian names have a **patronymic name**.

-Thus, all male children will have their father's last name followed by – **ovich**. If

-The child is female, she will have her father's surname followed by – **ovna**.

-Now, don't you find Russian intriguing?

Many aspects of the two languages are dissimilar. However, the main differences are found in their alphabets and grammar systems.

Grammar

The word order in English is fixed, whereby the meaning is established via the addition of auxiliaries and other words. The words move within a specified boundary. In Russian, the meaning is conveyed by the changes made on the constitution of the words such as by adding suffixes or prefixes or through inflection. For an English speaker, you have to forget verb conjugation if you're studying Russian. There are fewer tenses in Russian compared to English but Russian has many more cases.

A noun's case determines the role that it will play within the sentence

This involves the changes made on the words' endings based on their functions in the context of the sentences. In Modern English, you'll find three cases – subjective (she/he), possessive (hers/his) and objective (her/him). The Russian grammar has six cases:

-Nominative case – also called the dictionary form or the initial form. It respond to the questions what or

-Genitive case – somebody or something refers or belongs to something or somebody.

-Dative case – shows that something is addressed or given to an object or a person.

-Accusative case – describes the action's object.

-Instrumental case – defines an instrument used to make something

-Prepositional case – used to indicate an object, person or place is an object of thought and speech.

This particular case uses a preposition all the time.

The Russian grammar system is based on the concept that an action is either completed or not completed. It is shown by the addition of affixes to the verb stem since they do not have too many auxiliary verbs. Thus, English has no need to inflect or affix because of the existence of various auxiliary verbs as well as perfect tense and progressive forms. The Russian language has articles but often omit them. Instead, Russian nouns have gender. Three genders are used – masculine, feminine and neutral (neuter). It is easy if the words refer to physical gender, such as mother or father. Objects are trickier since the user has to know the object's gender to form the word correctly. It's a good thing that the noun's spelling denotes its gender. If the noun is the subject of the sentence, it will be in the nominative case (or dictionary form), which means it is easier to know its gender. If the noun is found in a different part of the sentence, the ending is changed to fit the case, using the following guidelines:

Check the Word's Last Letter:

1. Masculine – ends with *ъ* or a consonant
2. Feminine – ends with *я* or *а*
3. Neuter – if the word ends in *е* or *о*
4. Either feminine or masculine – if the word ends in the soft sign, *ь*

For Russian language learners, it is vital to memorize the words and the genders, since the assignation of the gender is often arbitrary. There will be times when the noun's gender is related directly to the gender of the object or thing it refers to.

Alphabet

English uses the Latin alphabet. On the other hand, Russian uses the Cyrillic script to form the Russian alphabet, which consists of 33 letters. Some of them have the same sounds as the letters in the English alphabet but the way they are written can be confusing because it is an entirely new alphabet.

Phonology

The Russian language has five vowel sounds. It does not differentiate between long and short vowel sounds. English has 12 vowel sounds, distinguishing the 7 short sounds, 5 long sounds and the 8 diphthongs. Russians find it difficult to pronounce the *cur* and *her* sounds, especially with words that start with the letter *W* such as *worth*, *work* and *were*. Russians are also not able to differentiate between the sounds created by words like *sit* and *seat* or *set* and *sat*. In terms of consonants, English and Russian have the same number but they are not similar in sounds. The Russian language does not have the /ð/ and /θ/ sounds, so they find it difficult to pronounce words like *clothes*, *then* and *thin*. And like the Germans, they have difficulty when pronouncing English words with /v/ and /w/. Russians also find it hard to produce the *ng* sound at the end of some words such as *thing*, *bang*, *belong*, *oblong* and so on. Russian is phonetic therefore the pronunciation is determined by the spelling. How the word is spelled defines how it is pronounced.

Sentence Structure

Several rules apply when English sentences are structured. Moreover, English allows word order to be shifted. Russian sentences are more free flowing. Similar to English, words can be placed at different locations within a sentence to emphasize specific elements. However, this is different from English in that the point of the sentence is not lost even if the words are moved within the sentence. English speakers find it difficult to understand this rule when they first encounter it.

Specific Words to Stress a Point

English and Russian are similar in that they both have words with several meanings and several words whose meanings are the same. However, the Russian language has specific words that are only used in a sentence to make a point. They do not have equivalents in English. These tricky words make translation difficult, since what they have to *translate are not the words* but the intent.

Fewer Prepositions

It is a good thing that there are only a few prepositions in Russian since they have various meanings. Otherwise it would be very difficult to translate them effectively. English speakers find this very difficult to understand because they are more used to specific orientation in space and time. It's

customary for English speakers to be more precise when describing locations, thus prepositions are typically used.

Russian Spelling is Easier

Irregular spellings and homonyms are part of English grammar, which cause confusion among English language learners. Russian spelling on the other hand is simpler and easier as it's phonetic and intuitive. What you have to learn is the Russian alphabet and the distinct sound each letter makes. Once you have mastered this, it is very easy to spell words in Russian. These are the major differences between these two distant cousins – English and Russian. The differences are so great that learners of either language will find initial difficulty when they first encounter the language. As usual, everything will depend on the determination of the student to learn Russian or vice-versa. Russian is not an easy language to learn if you are an English speaker. If you need help with proper communication for whatever purpose, get in touch with us at Day Translations, Inc. We are a professional language services company that offers a full suite of services, including Russian interpreting and Russian translation services. Our native-speaking translators live in-country, assuring you that they understand the right nuances of the language.

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