

The Methodology of Teaching Verb Conjugation in Non-Russian-Speaking Classrooms: Challenges and Effective Strategies

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Abstract. This article is devoted to the current challenges of teaching the system of verb conjugation in non-Russian-speaking classrooms, particularly in multinational schools where Russian is studied as a second language. The focus is on the difficulties learners face when mastering the tense-aspect forms of Russian verbs, as well as the underlying causes of these difficulties. Among the most common issues are cross-linguistic interference, insufficient understanding of aspectual distinctions, incorrect use of verb tenses, and an underdeveloped grammatical intuition.

The author analyzes how representatives of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds perceive the Russian verb system, emphasizing the importance of taking students' native languages into account in the learning process. The article highlights effective methodological strategies aimed at developing strong grammatical skills. These include visualization techniques, reliance on grammatical models, game-based learning, and communicative exercises that help learners not only understand theoretical aspects but also apply them practically in speech.

The communicative orientation of teaching is presented as a key element in the successful acquisition of Russian verb conjugation. The article also underscores the importance of a systematic and step-by-step approach, in which students move from understanding the structure of verb forms to actively using them in various communicative situations. Finally, practical recommendations are provided for teachers of Russian as a foreign language to help overcome common mistakes and enhance the effectiveness of the educational process.

Keywords: *Russian as a foreign language, verb conjugation, teaching methodology, grammar, non-Russian-speaking students, language interference, error correction*

1. Introduction

In today's rapidly globalizing educational landscape, the **Russian language** continues to hold a prominent role as both a medium of intercultural communication and a subject of academic inquiry. Across the post-Soviet region and in many other parts of the world, Russian is studied as a second or foreign language, remaining an important bridge for cultural exchange, professional mobility, and scholarly engagement.

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Among the many challenges faced by learners of Russian, **verb conjugation** stands out as one of the most complex and cognitively demanding aspects of grammar. Conjugation in Russian is closely linked with multiple grammatical categories, including **tense, person, number, and aspect**. These categories are morphologically encoded and frequently expressed through irregular or opaque patterns. As a result, learners—especially those whose native languages lack comparable systems or who have limited prior grammatical training—often encounter difficulties that manifest as persistent errors, slowed progress, and increased cognitive load.

Importantly, acquiring mastery of Russian verb conjugation cannot be reduced to rote memorization. Effective learning requires **dynamic, contextualized, and meaningful practice** that allows learners to internalize patterns, apply them communicatively, and adapt them across diverse linguistic contexts.

This article examines **modern methodological approaches** to teaching Russian verb conjugation in classrooms of non-native speakers. It focuses on common learner difficulties and presents strategies for addressing them, with particular attention to:

- **Contrastive analysis** for highlighting cross-linguistic similarities and differences;
- **Visual modeling** to support cognitive clarity;
- **Gamification** as a tool for motivation and engagement;
- **Communicative orientation** to ensure grammatical competence is linked with real language use;
- **Psycholinguistic considerations**, including memory, perception, and cognitive load.

Additionally, the article explores the specific challenge of **mixed-level groups**, proposing differentiated instruction as an effective pathway to inclusivity and learner success.

The ultimate goal is to provide a **comprehensive, research-informed, and practice-oriented framework** for teaching Russian verb conjugation. By integrating cognitive, communicative, and cultural dimensions of language learning, the proposed methodology seeks to help instructors create classrooms that are effective, inclusive, and motivating—aligned with the diverse needs of contemporary students.

1.1. Difficulties in Mastering Verb Conjugation

For learners whose native languages are **analytical** (such as English, Chinese, or Turkish), mastering Russian verb conjugation presents a serious and persistent challenge. Unlike Russian, which is characterized by **rich inflectional morphology**, analytical languages rely heavily on word order, auxiliary verbs, or separate particles to express grammatical meaning. This structural divergence creates difficulties that go far beyond vocabulary acquisition, often resulting in error-prone performance and learner frustration.

Major difficulties include:

- **The complex conjugation paradigm.** Russian verbs change according to **person, number, tense, and aspect**, requiring learners to memorize and actively apply a large number of forms. For beginners, this abundance of paradigms can feel overwhelming.
- **Orthographic and phonological challenges.** Verb roots may change depending on person or number, as in *нести* → *несу, несёшь, несут*. Such alternations are often unpredictable for learners and add an additional cognitive burden to memorization.

- **Interference from native language structures.** Students frequently apply the grammatical habits of their first language. For example, the English “I go” is mechanically translated as *Я иду* or *Я хожу* without attention to Russian aspectual distinctions.
- **Incorrect use of tense and aspect.** A common error is *Я вчера читаю книгу* instead of *Я вчера читал книгу*. This demonstrates not only misunderstanding of past tense marking, but also the failure to grasp the functional load of aspect.

As E.V. Radionova observes, “*The difficulty in mastering the Russian verb system lies not only in the number of forms, but also in their functional load. Each form in Russian carries significant information about the type and completeness of the action*” (Radionova, 2015, p. 89).

Thus, teaching verb conjugation requires more than grammatical explanation; it must address **psycholinguistic processing, cross-linguistic interference, and the need for meaningful contextualization.**

2. Methodological Approaches

2.1. Communicative Approach

At the core of modern foreign language instruction lies the **communicative approach**, which emphasizes the functional use of language in real-life contexts. Rather than drilling verb paradigms in isolation, learners are encouraged to practice conjugated forms in **dialogues, narratives, role-plays, and authentic interactions.**

For instance:

- *Что ты сейчас делаешь? — Я читаю статью.*
- *Куда ты идёшь? — Я иду в университет.*

By embedding verb forms in situational exchanges, students grasp not only grammatical accuracy but also the **intentional and pragmatic dimensions** of communication. Communicative tasks—such as planning a weekend, narrating a past event, or discussing personal routines—foster natural repetition and functional mastery of conjugation.

Peer interaction plays a central role. **Mini-dialogues, group storytelling, and interviews** place verbs at the center of expression, transforming grammar from abstract rules into tools for meaning-making. Importantly, the communicative approach also promotes **implicit grammar acquisition**, as repeated contextual exposure enables learners to internalize patterns without conscious rule memorization. Over time, this yields a **more fluent, confident, and accurate** command of Russian verbs.

2.2. Contrastive Method

The **contrastive method** relies on systematic comparison of Russian grammar with learners’ native languages. It is particularly effective in **multilingual classrooms**, where linguistic backgrounds strongly shape learning strategies. By explicitly mapping similarities and differences, teachers can anticipate difficulties and design targeted interventions.

For example:

- English lacks a grammaticalized aspect system but distinguishes between *I wrote* and *I was writing*. These can be used to introduce Russian perfective (*написал*) versus imperfective (*писал*) verbs.
- The English continuous tense offers an accessible analogy for the Russian imperfective, though teachers must stress that Russian aspect conveys additional nuances, such as **completeness, repetition, or duration**.

Contrastive teaching helps preempt predictable errors. English-speaking learners often overuse the perfective aspect due to native intuitions, producing sentences such as *Я написал книги* where *Я писал книги* would be more natural. Through **contrastive exercises**—for example, parallel sentences showing aspectual differences—students develop **metalinguistic awareness** that deepens comprehension and prevents fossilization of errors.

Ultimately, this method fosters **reflective thinking** and **critical comparison**, empowering learners to see grammatical structures as interconnected systems rather than isolated rules.

2.3. Visualization and Modeling

Russian verb conjugation and aspect are abstract concepts, and learners benefit from **visual scaffolding** to clarify complex paradigms.

- **Color-coded charts** can distinguish first and second conjugation verbs or contrast perfective and imperfective forms, enhancing memorization through visual association. For example, first-conjugation verbs may be marked in blue, second-conjugation verbs in green.
- **Schematic diagrams and timelines** illustrate temporal dynamics, such as initiation, continuation, repetition, and completion. These are especially valuable for teaching aspect, allowing students to conceptualize actions as **processes unfolding in time**.
- **Digital animations and interactive presentations** in blended classrooms can further increase engagement. Moving timelines, clickable verb forms, and animated characters performing actions allow learners to “see” grammar in action. Such tools reduce abstraction, reinforce memory, and stimulate motivation.

By transforming invisible grammar into visible models, visualization fosters **cognitive clarity and deeper retention**.

2.4. Gamification and Interactivity

Gamification integrates elements of play into grammar learning, reducing anxiety and increasing motivation. Grammar becomes less intimidating when reframed as a challenge or competition.

Examples include:

- **“Catch the Form!”** – Students receive a prompt and must quickly identify the correct verb form from a set of options.
- **“Conjugate the Verb”** – A timed competition where students conjugate verbs under pressure, reinforcing accuracy and automaticity.

- **“Fix the Error”** – Learners analyze sentences with deliberate mistakes, encouraging critical thinking and metalinguistic reflection.

Such activities cultivate not only accuracy but also **speed, flexibility, and confidence**. They create a classroom climate where making mistakes is part of the learning game, thereby encouraging risk-taking and resilience.

Gamification also nurtures **positive emotions**, which are crucial for long-term retention and successful second language acquisition.

Conclusion: Practical Recommendations

The effective teaching of Russian verb conjugation requires a methodology that is **comprehensive, adaptive, and communicative**. Rule memorization alone is insufficient; learners must experience verbs as living components of speech.

Practical recommendations include:

- **Integrating grammar into communicative tasks**, not teaching it in isolation.
- **Providing meaningful repetition** across all four skills—reading, writing, listening, speaking.
- **Offering differentiated support** for mixed-level groups to ensure equitable progress.
- **Employing modeling, gestures, and visual aids** to reinforce comprehension and memory.
- **Creating opportunities for authentic language use**, where students can take risks, make errors, and learn from them in supportive settings.

Teachers should also consider the **emotional dimension of learning**: reducing anxiety, celebrating small achievements, and fostering learners’ sense of agency.

Ultimately, verb conjugation is more than a technical grammar exercise. It is about giving learners the **linguistic tools to express actions, thoughts, and identities** in Russian. A flexible, student-centered, and culturally sensitive pedagogy can transform one of the most challenging areas of Russian grammar into a space of **deep linguistic development and personal growth**.

3. Typical Errors and Correction Strategies

The effective teaching of Russian verb conjugation requires not only the clear presentation of forms and rules, but also the **anticipation, diagnosis, and systematic correction** of errors that learners are likely to make. These mistakes typically arise from two major sources:

1. **Interference from the learners’ native language**, particularly in the case of analytical languages where verbal morphology is limited or absent.
2. **Cognitive overload**, as students attempt to process the complexity of Russian verb systems while simultaneously engaging in communication.

Recognizing recurring patterns of error allows instructors to adopt **proactive and targeted correction strategies** that both address the immediate mistake and build long-term grammatical competence.

3.1. Mixing Aspects and Tenses

Perhaps the most frequent and persistent error among learners of Russian is the **confusion between perfective and imperfective aspects**. For example:

✗ *Я писала письмо и отправляла его.*
("I was writing the letter and was sending it.")

✓ *Я написала письмо и отправила его.*
("I wrote the letter and sent it.")

Such mistakes typically stem from the fact that many native languages (e.g., English, Chinese, Turkish) lack a **formalized aspectual system**. Where aspect does exist, it often functions according to different principles, making direct transfer ineffective.

Correction Strategy: Action Modeling & Contextual Questioning

Teachers can scaffold learning by linking grammatical aspect to **real-world actions and their outcomes**, guiding learners through a sequence of questions that clarify meaning:

- *Что ты делала? → Писала.*
- *Ты закончила писать? → Да.*
- *Значит: написала.*

This guided questioning reinforces the **semantic core** of aspect (process vs. completion) and helps learners anchor grammatical distinctions in familiar contexts. Role-plays and situational tasks (e.g., telling a story about yesterday, describing a completed project vs. an ongoing one) further deepen aspectual awareness.

3.2. Errors in Verb Endings

Another widespread error concerns the **misuse of verb endings**, for instance:

✗ *Он говоришь* instead of ✓ *Он говорит*.

These mistakes reveal incomplete **automatization of morphological patterns**. Learners may know the correct paradigm but fail to apply it consistently in real-time communication, particularly under time pressure.

Correction Strategy: Repetition in Meaningful Contexts

- **Oral and written drills** designed around high-frequency verbs strengthen automatic recall.
- **Pair work and dialogue rotation activities** ensure multiple repetitions in varying communicative contexts.
- **Model dialogues** (e.g., "Кто говорит по телефону? — Он говорит по телефону.") provide a scaffold for self-correction.
- **Peer feedback** encourages collaborative monitoring, reinforcing awareness of correct endings.

Through consistent, contextualized repetition, learners gradually achieve **form internalization**, moving from conscious effort to automatic fluency.

3.3. Syntactic Violations

Errors in verb usage often extend beyond morphology into **syntax**, disrupting the grammatical structure of the sentence. A typical example is:

✗ *Я есть хочу* (a calque from native languages that rely on different word order).

✓ *Я хочу есть.*

✓ *Он любит читать.*

✓ *Ты умеешь писать?*

Such errors illustrate how **native syntactic patterns** interfere with Russian sentence construction, producing structures that are grammatically impossible in Russian but logical from the learner's perspective.

Correction Strategy: Patterned Sentences & Mental Templates

- Teachers should introduce **stable syntactic frames** containing high-frequency verbs, which learners can memorize and reproduce with substitutions.
- Frequent repetition of correct structures (*Я хочу + инфинитив*; *Он любит + инфинитив*) builds **mental templates** that replace erroneous calques.
- Incorporating these templates into communicative activities—such as surveys, interviews, or mini-dialogues—ensures that learners practice syntax as part of **natural speech flow**, not as isolated rules.

Over time, these patterned sentences establish **automatic syntactic accuracy**, reducing the intrusion of native language structures.

Together, these targeted correction strategies demonstrate that error correction in Russian verb conjugation must go beyond simply “pointing out mistakes.” Instead, it should:

- Diagnose the **source of the error** (aspectual confusion, morphological inconsistency, syntactic transfer).
- Provide **scaffolded corrective feedback** that is both immediate and meaningful.
- Reinforce correct forms through **contextualized, repeated, and communicative practice**.

This integrated approach transforms errors from obstacles into **learning opportunities**, supporting both accuracy and fluency.

4. Psycholinguistic Aspects of Learning Verb Conjugation

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the acquisition of Russian verb conjugation involves the activation and integration of multiple cognitive processes, including **perception, working memory, categorization, and linguistic production**. The morphological richness and irregularity of Russian verbs often result in cognitive overload for learners, especially in the early stages of acquisition.

The presence of numerous inflected forms, irregular patterns, and aspectual distinctions challenges learners' ability to categorize and retain information. For example, encountering sets like:

писать → *пишу, пишешь, пишут*

написать → *напишу, напишешь, напишут*

can cause confusion due to phonetic shifts and unpredictable changes in the root or ending. Verbs like *идти* → *иду, идёшь, идут* deviate from regular paradigms and demand **rote memorization and high-frequency exposure**.

To mitigate these challenges and enhance cognitive processing, instructors are encouraged to use the following strategies:

Chunking: Teach commonly used phrases as ready-made units (*я читаю книгу, он говорит по-русски*) to reduce the cognitive load and foster fluency.

Verbal automation: Incorporate regular speaking drills that prioritize speed and rhythm, helping learners move from conscious recall to automatic production.

Mnemonic devices: Use rhythmic patterns and rhymes to reinforce conjugation endings (e.g., *ю — ешь — ем — ете — ют*), which help learners internalize forms in a memorable and structured way.

By understanding and addressing the psychological mechanisms underlying language acquisition, teachers can design more effective instructional approaches that align with the learner's cognitive abilities and needs.

In multilingual and mixed-level classrooms, one of the greatest challenges for instructors is addressing the diverse linguistic backgrounds, learning speeds, and cognitive abilities of students. A one-size-fits-all approach is rarely effective. Therefore, the methodology must be **tiered, flexible, and learner-centered**, offering differentiated instruction tailored to the individual needs and proficiency levels of each student.

For **beginners**, instruction should focus on building confidence and familiarity with high-frequency verbs in the **first person singular**, embedded in simple, communicative phrases:

Я работаю, Я учусь, Я живу в Баку, Я люблю русский язык.

These forms are personally relevant and easily memorized, helping students begin to internalize conjugation patterns through repetition and everyday usage.

For **intermediate learners**, the focus can shift to the **systematization of conjugation groups**, recognition of patterns, and the introduction of **aspectual pairs**. Visual aids such as color-coded tables, verb maps, and **mini-stories** are especially helpful at this stage:

- *Он рассказывает* → *Он рассказал*
- *Они читают книгу* → *Они прочитали книгу*

Through storytelling, students can observe verb forms in meaningful contexts, aiding both comprehension and retention.

For **advanced students**, the emphasis should be placed on **nuanced aspectual usage**, especially in complex syntactic constructions involving conditional, subjunctive, or narrative discourse:

- *Если бы я знал, я бы написал письмо.*
- *Когда он пришёл, я уже читал статью.*

Differentiated tasks can be implemented within the same lesson to ensure that all learners are appropriately challenged:

- One group might **complete conjugation charts**,
- Another **compose dialogues** using specified verbs,
- A third might **edit short texts**, identifying and correcting aspectual or agreement errors.

This approach not only maintains engagement for all levels, but also encourages peer learning and collaboration within a supportive environment.

Conclusion

Teaching verb conjugation in Russian as a foreign language is a complex, multidimensional process that goes far beyond the memorization of endings or paradigms. To foster both accuracy and fluency, instruction must be integrated, context-rich, and interaction-oriented, ensuring that grammar is taught not as an abstract system, but as a tool for communication.

Several guiding principles are essential for effective instruction. First, verb conjugation is not an isolated skill. It must be developed holistically through listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with grammar always serving communication rather than overshadowing it.

Second, contextual repetition is indispensable. Learners should encounter the same verbs in multiple persons, aspects, and tenses to reinforce both meaning and form. For instance, the verb *читать* can appear in varied contexts: *Я читаю, Она читала, Мы прочитаем, Ты читал когда-нибудь эту книгу?*

Third, feedback must be immediate, specific, and supportive. Correction should be embedded naturally within communication, with teachers modeling correct usage and

encouraging self-correction. In this way, errors become opportunities for growth rather than sources of anxiety.

Fourth, authenticity is crucial. Learners must practice verb forms in realistic communicative tasks—interviews, role-plays, storytelling, or reflective writing—which bridge the gap between grammatical knowledge and active performance.

Ultimately, teaching Russian verb conjugation is not merely a matter of grammatical precision. It is about equipping students with the linguistic tools to express motion, time, intention, perspective, and lived experience in Russian. A flexible, learner-centered, and communicative methodology enables students to move beyond mechanical memorization toward meaningful, confident, and creative use of the language.

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