Research Article

Grammatical Constructions of Time and Date Nominations in the Russian and Chinese Languages

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Abstract. The work is the comparative study of lexical and grammatical means of expressing the idea of time in the Russian and Chinese languages. The main research method is the reverse reconstruction method, in which the studied grammatical model of the Russian language is first translated into Chinese, then the Chinese language model is sequentially reconstructed word for word in Russian while preserving the grammatical features of the Chinese language. The result of the work is an opportunity for the researcher (including the teacher of the Russian language who works in the Chinese audience and does not speak the students’ native language) to understand how the Russian lexical and grammatical model is seen by the native speakers of the Chinese language. With the help of this method the prepositional-case constructions with the meaning of time (89 units) were investigated, the similarities and differences in the grammatical structure of these models were established. The textbooks and the teaching aids on Russian as a foreign language became the source of definition of these models. All studied lexical and grammatical models are combined into a parallel catalog created by reverse reconstruction and showing the zones of grammatical discrepancies when expressing the idea of time in two languages.

Key words: expression of time, Russian and Chinese, parallel catalog of constructions

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Грамматические конструкции номинации времени и даты в русском и китайском языках

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Аннотация. Проведено сопоставительное изучение лексико-gramматических средств выражения идеи времени в русском и китайском языках. Основной метод исследования — метод обратной реконструкции, при котором исследуемая грамматическая модель русского языка сначала переводится на китайский язык, затем китайская языковая модель последовательно, «слово в слово» реконструируется на русском языке с сохранением грамматических особенностей китайского языка. Применяемый авторами лингвоконтрастивный метод позволяет продемонстрировать, как русскую лексико-gramматическую модель воспринимают носители китайского языка. С помощью названных методов были исследованы предложно-падежные конструкции со значением времени (89 единиц), установлены сходства и различия в грамматическом строе этих моделей. Источником определения грамматических моделей стали учебники и учебные пособия по русскому языку как иностранному. Все изученные лексико-gramматические модели объединены в параллельный каталог, созданный путем обратной реконструкции и показывающий зоны грамматических несовпадений при выражении идеи времени в двух языках.

Ключевые слова: выражение времени, русский и китайский, параллельный каталог конструкций

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Introduction

The comparative studies of languages allow us to identify the extreme similarities and differences in two language systems. Studies based on the comparison of two languages, but carried out for linguodidactic purposes focus on the difficulties that international students face when switching from one way of objectifying the world expressed by means of their native language to another. The grammatical aspect of the Russian language as shown by numerous studies [1—4] requires a special methodological interpretation in the Chinese audience based on a comparative analysis of the structure of the two languages. The main advantage of developing a nationally oriented teaching methodology for mono-
ethnic educational groups is that it “makes it possible to increase the effectiveness of teaching, i.e. reduce the learning time and increase the volume of the studied material by using interlanguage similarity and reducing the influence of interference” [5. P. 158].

The aim of this article is to show how native Chinese speakers see the grammatical system of the Russian language and how they comprehend it in the process of learning it. The paper results are addressed primarily to the Russian language researches deals with the comparative grammar and the teachers who do not speak Chinese but work with a Chinese audience. In the theory of teaching foreign languages it is generally accepted that the reason for difficulties in mastering a new language code is failures in the formation of grammatical skills. And it takes place at the stage of explaining and understanding the structure and meaning of a grammatical phenomenon [6. P. 157]. This work could help researchers and teachers look at the grammar of the Russian language through the optics of the Chinese language.

The subject field of research was the comparison of constructions of expressing time in a simple sentence in Russian and Chinese. It should be emphasized that constructions which name the fact of time, for example, the name of the month, date, moment of event, etc., and the constructions of the expression of time which in the structure of a sentence perform not a nominative, but an adverbial function were also subjected to research. The study compares the nominative and adverbial constructions of time in the Russian and Chinese languages, as in the Russian language these constructions are noticeably different.

**Methodology**

The reverse reconstruction method was developed to solve this problem. At the first stage the catalog of Russian structures with the time value is compiled. Then each structure is translated into Chinese. Further the Chinese model is reconstructed by means of the Russian language, so that the native speaker of the Russian language can understand its grammatical structure. In the process of reconstruction it is important to reflect the morphological and sometimes lexical means involved in the formation of each analyzed language model. In this case undoubtedly there are some errors caused by the mismatch of the grammatical structure of languages: in particular, the absence of inflection in the Chinese language puts the researcher before the choice whether to preserve the morphological structure of the Chinese language when transmitting the Chinese construction by means of the Russian language or to use case and other grammatical forms of the Russian language. In this study the first option was chosen, so the reconstructed models look unnatural in Russian. For example, the Russian model “meet after two o’clock” («встретимся после двух часов») as a result of reverse reconstruction may look like this: Chinese “we two o’clock after meet” («мы два часа после встретиться»). In the reconstructed model we can see that the idea of designating the time of a postponed event is conveyed as follows: firstly the tense construction is placed before the verb and secondly in the construction itself the words which name the time are in the first place, then words with the semantics “after the specified moment time”. Thus, when seeing the reconstructed model a person who does not speak Chinese can understand how it works grammatically.
When we speak about the perception of time in Russian and Chinese linguocultures, we should understand that the category of tense is not exclusively grammatical, it has a global, philosophical character. The expression of the idea of time by linguistic means is due to the influence of the national picture of the world, formed by each subject of the communicative process under the influence of the native linguistic culture.

«Время течет, как вода, не останавливается ни днем, ни ночью» — these words belong to the ancient great Chinese philosopher Confucius. In Russian culture there are also some expressions which shows the transience of time, the impossibility of its returning which makes it one of the most valuable possessions in our life: for example, “Time is more precious than gold” («Пора да время дороже золота») [7. P. 613]. But despite the fact that there is a semantic consonance in Russian and Chinese idiomatic expressions, the perception of time by Russian and Chinese cultures is not the same, not equivalent.

As an example, there is some material which allows us to compare how, in what direction the development of a person’s life path takes place in time in Russian and Chinese linguocultures. The researchers found that for the carriers of European, in particular, Russian culture the path of a person’s life is presented in such a way that the past is behind him, and the future is ahead. For the carriers of Chinese culture the perception of the past and the future is completely opposite: the future is behind a person, and the past is in front of him [8. P. 97].

The vision of the world by a participant in communication affects the language designation of his statements, and as a result, for example, a literal translation of the Russian phrase «все впереди» (“everything is ahead”) into Chinese becomes impossible, so the Chinese will translate it as «你的幸福还在后边» (Chinese: “All your happiness is still behind”). Thus, the category of time is complex not only from the point of view of the grammatical code of the language, but also from the point of view of its perception by different linguistic cultures.

We will describe how the same grammatical models of time are arranged in Russian and Chinese. And the method of reverse reconstruction is the base of this description.

Results

The Designation of Date and Time

The Designation of Date

The expression of the date designation in two languages will be shown. Table 1 gives examples of the language format for expressing the date idea in Russian and Chinese.

This material allows highlighting the following differences:
1) there are two constructions for expressing the date idea in Russian: nominative (question: what’s the date?) and adverbial (question: when?):
   — the nominative construction contains an ordinal in the form of the nominative case and a noun in the form of the genitive case,
   — the adverbial construction contains a numeral and a noun in the form of the genitive case;
2) in Chinese the date nomination and the answer to the question “When?” have the same grammatical pattern;
3) there is some different numeral design of the date in Russian and Chinese linguocultures: in Chinese culture the sequence is year, month, day; in Russian culture the sequence is day, month, year.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Designation of Date</th>
<th>(the nomination and the adverbial function)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Russian language model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chinese language model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the date today?</td>
<td>When? What date?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Десятое апреля (the tenth of April)</td>
<td>Десятого апреля (on the tenth of April)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Десятое апреля две тысячи двадцатого года (the tenth of April two thousand and twenty)</td>
<td>Встретимся десятого апреля две тысячи двадцатого года (See you on the tenth of April two thousand and twenty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.04.2020</td>
<td>2020.04.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Designation of the Names of the Week Days</th>
<th>(the nomination and adverbial function)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Russian language model</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chinese language model</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What day of the week is it today?</td>
<td>When? What day?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Вятница (Friday)</td>
<td>В пятницу (on Friday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Выходной день (day off)</td>
<td>В выходной день (on a day off)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presented language models with the names of the week days allow highlighting the following differences:

1) there are two constructions in Russian (as in the case of expressing the date idea): the nominative construction (question: what day of the week is it?) and the adverbial one (question: when?):
   — the nominative construction contains a noun in the form of the nominative case,
   — the adverbial construction contains a noun in the form of the accusative case with the preposition В (in);

2) in Chinese the nomination of the week day and the answer to the question “When?” have the same grammatical pattern. The distinction of meanings occurs logically and it is not explicated linguistically.

The designation of such Russian time intervals as week, month, year occurs in a similar way: the nominative and adverbial constructions with a certain grammatical content are used. In Chinese both nominative and adverbial meanings are conveyed using the same grammatical form.
The presented description of the existing differences in the expression of the time idea in the Russian and Chinese languages explains the reason for the occurrence of interference errors in the Russian speech of Chinese students. Therefore, the explanation of the present grammatical material in the Chinese audience requires obligatory accompaniment in the form of an explanatory linguistic and linguocultural commentary which should contribute to a better, more effective conscious understanding by Chinese students of the differences in the expression of this grammatical category.

The Expression of the Exact Time of the Day

The official and non-official linguistic designation of the idea of expressing the exact time is possible in both languages. The official version is the use of only the 24-hour system of calculating the time of day. For example, the time 15.00 in both Russian and Chinese is formalized in the same way: «пятнадцать часов» (“fifteen o’clock”) and «15:00» (Chinese: “fifteen o’clock”).

Other examples of Chinese language models for formatting the time in the official format will be given.

- 07.00 — «07:00» (Chinese: “seven o’clock”);
- 07.05 — «07:05» (Chinese: “seven o’clock five minutes”);
- 07.15 — «07:15» (Chinese: “seven o’clock fifteen minutes”);
- 07.30 — «07:30» (Chinese: “seven o’clock thirty minutes”);
- 07.45 — «07:45» (Chinese: “seven o’clock forty five minutes”).

The examples given from the Chinese language show that in the Russian and Chinese languages the designation of the official time is the same. But it should be noted that there is one more variant in the Russian language which is not in the Chinese one: when denoting the time in the Russian language, the cases of non-use of the words “hour” and “minute” are possible. For example, the time 07.15 in Russian has both the full version: «семь часов пятнадцать минут» (“seven o’clock fifteen minutes”) and the short one: «семь пятнадцать» (“seven fifteen”).

The non-official variant of expressing the exact time in both Russian and Chinese uses a 12-hour system for calculating the time of day. In this case time constructions can have accompanying words (= marker words), if it is not clear from the context of the speech situation what time of day is in question. For example, «утро» (“morning”) — «07:00» (Chinese: “morning”), «день» (“day”) — «07:00 / 07:30» (Chinese: “morning / afternoon”), «вечер» (“evening”) — «19:00» (Chinese: “evening”), «ночь» (“night”) — «00:00» (Chinese: “night”):

- 8 часов утра (“8 o’clock in the morning”) — «08:00» (Chinese: “morning 8 o’clock”);
- 3 часа дня (“3 o’clock in the afternoon”) — «15:00» (Chinese: “afternoon 3 o’clock”);
- 9 часов вечера (“9 o’clock in the evening”) — «19:00» (Chinese: “evening 9 o’clock”);
- 3 часа ночи (“3 o’clock at night”) — «03:00» (Chinese: “night 3 o’clock”).

Thus, there is a logical similarity in how time is represented in the non-official variant of expressing the exact time in Russian and Chinese. However, there is some grammatical
difference in the construction of the language model. So the numeral group is first used in the Russian language, then the marker word indicates the time of day. And in Chinese the marker word is in the first place and then the numeral group is used.

It should be said separately about the expression of time 01.00 (“one o’clock”). In case of Russian non-official use the non-use of the word «один» (“one”) in the indicated construction is possible: for example, «час» (“o’clock”) or «час дні» (“o’clock in the afternoon”), «час ночі» (“o’clock at night”). This cannot be in the Chinese language, in which the word “o’clock” is an obligatory element of the language model for expressing the exact time, i.e. both the word “o’clock” and “one” should be in the same situation of use in the Chinese language: [ (Chinese: “one o’clock”) [9. P. 77].

It is known that in a non-official Russian situation some special linguistic models are used to express the minute time of the first half of an hour: «сколько минут какого часа» (“how many minutes of which hour”). At the same time students’ attention should be drawn to the fact that the next hour in a sequence should be used in the model. For example, 06.10 — «девять минут седьмого» (“ten minutes past six”, Russian: “ten minutes of seven”). Chinese students find it difficult to study such linguistic models, because in their native language only the official model is used in such a situation: in this case 06.10 «ੂ߳ੂunft (Chinese: “six o’clock ten minutes”).

The expression of half an hour in a non-official Chinese situation is different from the Russian one. The model of minute time of the first half of an hour is in the Russian language: «сколько минут какого (следующего) часа» (“how many minutes of which (next) hour”). For example, 06.30 — «половина седьмого», «половсядьмого» (“half past six”, Russian: “half of seven”). In Chinese although we speak about the first half of the hour which should be expressed by the model of the official style, the half-hour time is formalized differently: for example, 06.30 «ੂ߳ੂunft (Chinese: “six o’clock half”).

The expression of the minute time of the second half of an hour also has its own peculiarities. There is a certain linguistic model both in Russian and in Chinese to show the time: «без скольких (минут) сколько часов» (Russian: “without how many minutes of how many hours”). For example, in Russian 07.55 is expressed as «без пяти восемь» (“five minutes to eight”), in Chinese this time is expressed as «ੂ߳ੂunft (Chinese: “eight o’clock without five”), i.e. in both linguocultures the designation of the minute time of the second half of an hour is a certain number of minutes to the next hour. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the different order of the elements in these linguistic models: in Chinese the hours are indicated first and the use of the word “o’clock” is mandatory, then the minutes are indicated.

There is a difference in the ways of expression and the quarter time in Russian and Chinese. So in Russian this time is indicated by models which are used to express the minute time of the first and second half of an hour. In Chinese these models are the following:

06.15 — «ੂ߳ੂunft (Chinese: “six o’clock a quarter”);
06.45 — «ੂ߳ੂunft (Chinese: “six o’clock three quarters”).

The word “a quarter” in Chinese is more frequent than in Russian. Both models are productive.

In natural speech activity the models of expressing the exact time are used when marking the exact hour time and when fixing the moment of the event.
In the first case the speech situation can be accompanied by such a context — сейчас четыре часа дня (“Now it is four o’clock in the afternoon”), in the second case — магазин откроется в четыре часа дня (“The shop will open at four o’clock in the afternoon”). Let us consider what the features of the syntactic formation of these constructions are in Russian and Chinese.

There is a syntactic model which includes a special auxiliary word «п» to designate the nomination of the exact hour time in the Chinese language [10. P. 67]. And this word is not translated into Russian. For example,

Сейчас 01.00: Сейчас час (“Now it is one o’clock”) — ২ (Chinese: “Now one o’clock”);
Сейчас 02.04: Сейчас два часа четыре минуты (“Now it is two o’clock and four minutes”) — ২ (Chinese: “Now two o’clock four minutes”);
Сейчас 14.00: Сейчас два часа дня (“Now it is two o’clock in the afternoon”) — ২ (Chinese: “Now afternoon two o’clock”);
Сейчас 18.30: Сейчас полседьмого вечера (“Now it is 18:30, it is half past six in the evening”) — ২ (Chinese: “Now evening six o’clock half”).

The above examples illustrate the difference in the structure of language models for the nomination of hour time: the Chinese syntax in this construction “what time is it now” requires the using of a mandatory link (a special auxiliary word) and there are no such elements in the Russian model.

In the case of the designation of the moment in time the opposite regularity is observed: there is an auxiliary word in the form of the preposition “in” in the Russian model, and the special Chinese elements, on the contrary, disappear. For example,

Встретимся в 14.00: Встретимся В duas часа дня (“See you at 2 o’clock in the afternoon”) — ২ (Chinese: “We second part of the day 2 o’clock meet”);
У нас урок начинается в 09.00: У нас урок начинается В девять часов утра (“Our lesson begins at 9 o’clock in the morning”) — ২ (Chinese: “We morning nine o’clock begin lesson”).

The study of the structure of syntactic constructions used in Russian and Chinese when expressing the idea of exact time and designating the moment in time at which an event occurs, revealed their differences. The auxiliary words are used in the syntactic organization of these models, but in Russian they are used in a model which performs an adverbial function, and in Chinese they are used in a model which performs a naming function.

Conclusions

The above-mentioned grammatical constructions united by the general idea of expressing time, translated into Chinese with subsequent return translation into Russian, allow a Russian researcher (a Russian teacher) who does not speak Chinese to show how Chinese-speaking people perceives these constructions, thus giving the Russian researcher the Chinese optics. And it is obvious for teachers working with Chinese students that this grammatical topic is difficult. The parallel catalog of time constructions in Russian and Chinese will allow the teacher to develop effective linguodidactic materials which take
into account the interference intersections in Chinese and Russian language models of time expression.

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ЯЗЫКОВАЯ СИСТЕМА