

The Grammatical Category of Number in Russian in the Aspect of Russian-Uzbek Interference

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ABSTRACT

The paper offers a contrastive-typological description of the grammatical category of number in Russian and Uzbek and analyses the systemic cross-linguistic interference generated by the typological asymmetry between the two languages. Russian, an inflectional (fusional) language, expresses the opposition of singular and plural through a system of endings supported by agreement in gender, number and case and interacting with the lexical semantics of countability, collectivity and materiality; Uzbek, an agglutinative language, conveys plurality mainly through the single affix -lar and lacks the concomitant grammatical agreement. Drawing on the functional-semantic conception of grammatical categories and on the theory of interference and interlanguage, the study describes the means of expressing number in the two systems at the morphological, syntactic and semantic levels, locates the zones of maximal typological distance, and classifies the recurrent types of interference – morphological, syntactic-agreement, numeral-noun, pluralia/singulariatantum, and semantic-collective. It is shown that interference in the category of number is not a set of random deviations but a regular, systemic consequence of the structural mismatch between an inflectional and an agglutinative type, and that number is most adequately described as a dynamic functional-semantic field whose peripheral, agreement-based means are precisely those unsupported by the native system of the bilingual.

Keywords: Category of number; Uzbek–Russian bilingualism; cross-linguistic interference; contrastive analysis; functional-semantic grammar; language typology.

INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of Russian as a language of interethnic communication, science and academic mobility keeps the description of its grammatical system, in comparison with typologically distant languages, among the enduring tasks of contrastive linguistics. In Uzbekistan, where the languages in contact belong to different structural types, such comparison acquires additional relevance: command of Russian presupposes the assimilation of grammatical categories that have no direct counterpart in the native Turkic system, and the reliable description of these categories is a precondition for understanding the speech of the bilingual [20].

Among the grammatical phenomena that regularly reveal the distance between the two systems, the category of number occupies a special place. In Russian the opposition of singular and plural is expressed through an interconnected system of inflectional endings, is supported by agreement in gender, number and case, and interacts with the lexical semantics of countability, collectivity and materiality [21]. In Uzbek plurality is conveyed lexically and by the agglutinative affix *-lar*, without the concomitant grammatical agreement characteristic of an inflectional language [11]. This typological asymmetry means that the category of number in Russian has no isomorphic counterpart in the mother tongue, which objectively generates interference in bilingual speech.

Illustrative contrasts make the source of divergence concrete. A Russian noun phrase such as *новые книги* marks plurality simultaneously on the noun and on the agreeing adjective, whereas its Uzbek counterpart *yangikitoblar* marks plurality only once, by the affix *-lar*, leaving the modifier unchanged. Constructions with numerals diverge as well: Russian requires case-governed forms (*два стола, пять столов*), while in Uzbek the noun after a numeral remains in the singular (*ikkikitob, beshkitob*). Mass and abstract

nouns behave differently too: Russian мебель and информация are singular and resist pluralisation, yet the bilingual, transferring native patterns, tends to pluralise them. Such mismatches are not isolated lapses but regular consequences of the typological distance between the two systems.

The theoretical apparatus of the study combines the description of number as a functional-semantic field with the theory of interference and interlanguage. Within the Russian tradition, number is understood not as a purely formal feature but as a category interwoven with the lexical semantics of the noun [21], organised around a semantic core of quantity and a periphery of formal means [2]. The classical account of language contact defined interference as a deviation from the norms of a language occurring in the speech of bilinguals [22], while contrastive analysis linked the difficulty of a second language to the structural differences between the native and the target systems [13]. Revising this tradition, Selinker regarded the learner's language as an autonomous, dynamic system shaped by both transfer and internal development, so that interference is a systematic feature of acquisition rather than a mere deviation [17]; Corder likewise treated errors as evidence of the speaker's underlying strategies [3]. Odlin's account of cross-linguistic influence, in which transfer operates across the phonological, grammatical, lexical and semantic levels and may either hinder or facilitate acquisition, is particularly relevant for the category of number, where the structural distance between Uzbek and Russian is considerable [15]. For Turkic-Russian bilingualism, Djusupov showed that interference arises from the structural differences between language systems and is especially evident in their systemic realisations [5], and Semchinsky described semantic interference as a mismatch between the conceptual systems of the languages in contact [18].

The aim of the present study is to carry out a contrastive-typological analysis of the grammatical category of number in Russian and Uzbek and to describe and classify the systemic interference that their typological asymmetry generates in bilingual speech. Its novelty lies in the integrated treatment of number as a dynamic functional-semantic field and in a

consistent, level-by-level account of the mechanism of interference – from the morphological exponents of plurality, through syntactic agreement and numeral government, to the semantics of countability and collectivity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material of the study comprises the paradigms and constructions of number in standard Russian and Uzbek – the inflectional and affixal exponents of plurality, adjectival and verbal agreement, numeral-noun combinations, and the lexico-grammatical classes of mass, collective and pluraliatantum nouns – together with the recurrent interference phenomena observed in Uzbek–Russian bilingual speech.

The investigation rests on a complex of linguistic methods. The principal one is contrastive (comparative-typological) analysis, which juxtaposes the two systems in order to locate the points of structural divergence at which interference is predictable [8; 10]. It is complemented by the descriptive method, by componential and functional-semantic analysis of the category, and by the analysis of interference phenomena within the interlanguage framework. Number is examined at three interconnected levels – morphological, syntactic and semantic – so that the comparison captures not only the formal means of expressing plurality but also their agreement-based syntactic support and their semantic motivation. The comparison relies on the established descriptions of the two grammatical systems: the academic grammars of Russian [21; 2] and of Uzbek [11], and the contrastive grammars of the two languages [1; 10].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A contrastive description of the two systems specifies the points at which interference is most likely to occur. Table 1 juxtaposes the principal means of expressing number in Russian and Uzbek and shows that the Russian category is realised simultaneously at the morphological, syntactic and semantic levels, whereas in Uzbek it is confined largely to a single lexical-affixal exponent. It is

precisely where Russian requires additional, redundant marking that the native system of the bilingual provides no support.

Table 1. *Means of expressing the category of number in Russian and Uzbek*

Parameter	Russian	Uzbek
Typological type	Inflectional (fusional)	Agglutinative
Plural exponent	System of endings: столы, книги, окна	Affix <i>-lar</i> : stollar, kitoblar
Agreement	Adjective and verb agree: новые книги стоят	No agreement of modifiers: <i>yangi kitoblarturibdi</i>
After numerals	Case-governed: два стола, пять столов	Noun stays singular: <i>ikkikitob, beshkitob</i>
Mass/abstract nouns	Singular: мебель, информация	Expressed lexically, no opposition
Pluraliatantum	Present: ножницы, каникулы	No comparable class

At the morphological level the two languages realise plurality by opposite mechanisms. Russian employs a fusional exponent: a single ending simultaneously conveys number, gender and case (стол-ы, книг-и, окн-а), and its choice depends on the declension type, the stem and the grammatical gender of the noun. Uzbek employs an agglutinative exponent: the invariable affix *-lar* attaches to an unchanged stem (*stol-lar, kitob-lar*) and expresses plurality alone, without cumulating other grammatical meanings. The consequence for the bilingual is a marked asymmetry of form: where Russian distributes the meaning of plurality across a paradigm of endings sensitive to gender, case and declension, Uzbek concentrates it in one transparent morpheme. The morphological interference that follows takes the shape of an overgeneralised, *-lar*-like plural – the transfer of a single uniform marker to a system that requires a differentiated one – and, conversely, the pluralisation of nouns that in Russian resist it.

On this basis the interference associated with the category of number can be classified into several recurrent types (Table 2). The classification is not merely descriptive: each type

corresponds to a specific gap between the two systems. The most persistent difficulties concern agreement and numeral constructions – exactly the areas in which Russian marks number redundantly and Uzbek does not.

Table 2. *Types of cross-linguistic interference in the category of number*

Type	Description	Typical error → norm
Morphological	Pluralisation of mass and abstract nouns by analogy with -lar	*мебели → мебель
Syntactic (agreement)	Omission of plural marking on the adjective or verb	*новые книга → новые книги
Nominal-noun	Retention of the singular after numerals, as in <i>beshkitob</i>	*пять стол → пять столов
Pluralia / singulariatantum	Absence of the corresponding class in Uzbek	*ножница → ножницы
Semantic (collective)	Reinterpretation of collective and mass nouns as countable	*листвы → листва

At the syntactic level the decisive divergence is agreement. In Russian, number is not a property of the noun alone but a feature of the whole noun phrase and of the predicative link: the adjective and the verb reproduce the plural of the noun (*новыекнигистоят*). Uzbek does not mark the plural on modifiers – *yangikitoblarturibdi* leaves both the adjective and the verb morphologically unchanged – so the very mechanism of concord has no analogue in the native system. This absence is the source of the most stable interference: the plural is registered on the noun but not extended to the words that agree with it (*новыекнига, книгистоит*). A related divergence appears in numeral constructions. Russian governs the case and number of the counted noun (*двастола*, with the paucal genitive singular; *пятьстолов*, with the genitive plural), whereas in Uzbek the noun after a numeral remains in the singular, since the numeral itself already expresses quantity (*ikkikitob, beshkitob*). Transfer of the Uzbek pattern yields forms of the type *пятьстол, двакнига*, in which the counted noun fails to receive the case-number form that Russian requires.

At the semantic level interference stems from a different partition of the lexicon into countable, mass and collective nouns. Russian singulariatantum such as мебель, информация, листва denote an undivided quantity and do not enter the singular-plural opposition, while pluraliatantum such as ножницы, каникулы, сани lack a singular altogether; both classes are grammatically fixed and only partly motivated by meaning. Uzbek draws these boundaries differently and expresses the corresponding notions lexically, without a comparable grammatical opposition. As a result the bilingual reinterprets Russian mass and collective nouns as ordinary countables and pluralises them (мебели, листвы), or supplies pluraliatantum with an unwarranted singular (ножница). Here interference is not formal but conceptual: it reflects a mismatch between the two ways of categorising quantity [18].

Taken together, these observations show that transfer between the two systems is dual in nature. Shared features – for instance the basic subject-object-predicate ordering – may facilitate the construction of simple utterances, but as the communicative load increases this initial facilitation gives way to interference precisely in agreement and in the mass-count distinction [15]. The category of number thus behaves as a functional-semantic field: its core – the bare opposition of one and many, realised on the noun – is comparatively accessible to the bilingual, whereas its periphery – the agreement-based and case-governed means that redundantly reproduce number across the phrase – is the zone of maximal typological distance and, consequently, of the most persistent interference [2]. The phenomena observed in Uzbek-Russian bilingual speech are therefore not random deviations but systematic evidence of an evolving internal system that reorganises the resources of the native language in the categories of the target one [7; 9].

CONCLUSIONS

The contrastive-typological analysis of the grammatical category of number in Russian and Uzbek has shown that the divergences between the two systems stem from their belonging to different morphological types – the inflectional (fusional) and the

agglutinative – and that these divergences generate regular, systemic interference in bilingual speech rather than isolated errors. The interference is concentrated at the morphological and, above all, the syntactic level, and is most persistent in adjectival and verbal agreement and in numeral constructions, that is, in exactly those means by which Russian marks number redundantly and for which the native system provides no support.

The description of number as a dynamic functional-semantic field accounts for this distribution: the semantic core of the category – the opposition of singular and plural on the noun – is comparatively accessible, whereas its formal periphery of agreement and government constitutes the zone of maximal typological distance and of the densest interference. The classification of interference into morphological, syntactic-agreement, numeral-noun, pluralia / singulariatantum and semantic-collective types offers a systematic picture of the points of divergence and of their linguistic causes. Further research may extend the analysis to other grammatical categories that lack direct counterparts in Uzbek – gender, aspect, case – and to the comparison of Russian across different Turkic-language backgrounds, so as to distinguish the interference features common to Turkic-Russian bilingualism from those specific to the Uzbek-Russian contact.

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