

## ***Structuralism Approach to English Teaching as a Means of Solving Cross-Cultural Problems of Russian Students***

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### **Abstract**

The article deals with language as cultural heritage of nation. Russian students of English when facing lingual phenomena that do not occur in their mother tongue avoid certain typically English lexical units and structures, which impoverish their speech and violate inter-cultural communication. To help students get insights into the inner structure of the units and expose the mechanism of their functioning, we turn to the ideas of Structuralism – Theory of Oppositions – and present the meaning of a unit by means of paradigmatic correlation of lingual forms by which certain functions are expressed. When word-forms are represented in the binary privative opposition framework, it reveals a bundle of differential features (strong features) exposing its categorical properties. By means of gradual opposition framework exposed are the remnants of the extinct dual rank of the category of number in modern English, whose function has since Indo-European period of its development been replaced by simple plural. It is evident that the seme of duality is present in the lexico-semantic structure of certain English lexemes, which expresses the concept of two as contrasted to many. Component analysis helps reveal lexical units containing the seme of duality in their lexico-semantic structure and to study their functioning in speech in the system of modern English. Traces of numerical duality are also found in numerous binary oppositions of grammatical categories and in some fossilized forms. The worked-out series of training exercises might give proper results for students to better understand the mechanisms of the English language operating.

Keywords: Structuralism, Binary Privative Opposition, Gradual Opposition, The Seme Of Duality, Modern English, Grammatical Category

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## Introduction

Modern scientists see language as a complicated structure of elements, which forms specific relations. To study and analyze the specific relations and patterns is the main task of structuralism. The essence of structuralism linguistics lies in the supposition that each lingual unit occupies certain place in the integrity of language structure and the task of linguists is to establish its place, function and relation to other elements. Structural linguistics originates from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure "Course in General Linguistics" [12], where he states that language is a system of interconnected units. According to him, a language is made up of arbitrary elements. These elements do not have any individual meaning. It is through the system that these elements derive meaning, being identified within the premises of the structure.

One of the theories of Structuralism is binary opposition. It originated in Saussurean structuralism theory and it consists in the contrasting language units of one level for the purpose of identification of differences between them. It is not a contradictory relation but a structural, complementary one [19]. Paired opposites in language rely upon a relation with adjoining words inside a paradigmatic chain. This highlighted that certain units are in opposition to one another.

## Literature Review

In accord with contemporary theories [1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8], opposition is understood as correlation of forms based on common and differential features. The opposition in linguistic sense is defined as a generalized correlation of lingual forms by means of which a certain function is expressed. Common features serve as the basis of contrast, while differential features immediately express the function in question.

Binarity, which is represented by two opposite elements or processes, which are in constant antagonism, is the initial principle of creation of all systems. It stimulates the development of the system. The binary opposition is a universal means of cognition of the world, which was realized as such in the XX century. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, the binary opposition is the means by which the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined in reciprocal determination with another term, as in binary code. Saussure demonstrated that a sign's meaning is derived from its context (syntagmatic dimension) and the group (paradigm) to which it belongs. [10, p. 64]. One of the key methods of Ferdinand de Saussure was syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis, which defines units syntactically and lexically in accord with their contrast in relation to the other units of the system. A classic example of a binary opposition is the presence-absence dichotomy. It is the contrast between two mutually exclusive terms, such as *on* and *off*... *left* and *right* [16]. "An example of this is that one cannot conceive of 'good' if we do not understand 'evil' " [10, p. 65].

The system of binary differential signs is used practically in all spheres of structuralism humanitarian research. It was stated that in the description of the picture of the world lies binary opposition, and it has a universal character: life – death, happiness – misfortune, good – bad, the past – the future, here – there. The left part of the opposition is considered to be marked positively, the right one – negatively. Duality of perception of the world around is caused by purely physiological reasons, first of all, that the brain of a man is divided into two hemispheres, that we have two

eyes, two ears, two hands and feet. A.N. Leontiev states in his work “Image of the World,” that “the problem of perception should be raised and developed as a problem of the psychology of the image of the world” [11, p. 252].

## **Methodology**

The key methods of the research are syntagmatic and paradigmatic analyses, which defines units syntactically and lexically in accord with their contrast in relation to the other units of the system.

## **Body. Analytical part**

Grammatical oppositions expose the paradigmatic correlations of grammatical forms in a category. Grammatical morphological opposition reflects the plane of expression (form) and the plane of content (meaning) and may be expressed by, at least, one opposition of forms. A contrastive pair of members forms the binary privative morphological opposition which is based on a morphological differential feature present in its strong member and absent in its weak member. The member in which the feature is present is called the marked or positive member (the left part of the opposition). The member in which the feature is absent is called the unmarked, or negative member (the right part of the opposition). The featuring in question serves as an immediate means of expressing a grammatical meaning [7]. Consider an example of grammatical morphological opposition: *Students* (marked member): *student* (unmarked member).

The grammatical suffix S signifies a morphological differential feature of the category of Number. The meanings differentiated by the opposition of signemic units are referred to as semantic features, or semes. The differences in meanings arise from the interaction between the underlying oppositional sememic marks of the category and the more concrete lexical differences in the semantics of individual words. Differences and oppositions are also marked as the bases of Saussure’s theory of language as a synchronous system of networks held together by distinctive value [7].

Numerous oppositions **of privative binary character** are observed in a regular choice of the forms of most parts of speech and grammar categories. The opposition of correlated forms in a paradigm manifests itself in meaning. Specific types of meaning are found in regular grammatical oppositions of certain grammatical categories, which causes difficulties and incomprehension in communication for Russian students. It is through binary privative opposition that the student learns the intricacy of certain meaning. Consider the ambiguity of the following kindred phrases, which is removed by means of opposition:

**The Superlative Degree** of the Comparison of Adjectives **vs the Elative**: *the most (interesting book)* versus *a most (interesting book)*

**Elative** [adj., Latin *elatus* + English *-ive*; = raised, lifted up] – a term applied to what is also called *Absolute Superlative*, denoting a high or intense degree of a quality, but not excluding that an equal degree may exist in other cases [20]; in the absence of comparison, the Elative conveys the notion of “supreme” – a superlative or intensifier. Compare:

*“The Lord of the King” was the most attractive book for teen-agers at the end of the last millennium (the Superlative: “more than any other (s)” [17].*

*It’s a most exclusive store (very exclusive, not the Superlative, but the Elative).*

*Thank you, you have been most kind to me (= very kind, not kindest).*

To train the opposition pattern “the Superlative vs. the Elative” we have developed an exercise.

**Activity 1.** Choose the correct variant. Translate the following sentences from English into Russian:

*She was the most \ most nice to me all the time.*

*It was a most \ the most unhappy incident.*

*The world known artist died in bitterest \ the bitterest poverty.*

*She is a very best \ the very best in the group.*

*Sue was a best \ best \ the best when she was not trying to show off.*

*These tendencies are clearest \the clearest in the Russian Language.*

*She says it’s best \ the best to take no notice but I can’t.*

*I think it is safest\ the safest to cross the river here.*

As we pointed it out, numerous oppositions of privative binary character are observed in a regular choice of the forms of most parts of speech and grammar categories. We subjected to analysis frequently misused morphological forms and revealed a set of grammar forms that causes misunderstanding of Russian students:

**Numerals:** *the second (piece of cake) versus a second (piece of cake)*

Nouns pre-modified by ordinals are used with the definite article: *the first month of the year*. When used with the indefinite article, they lose their numerical meaning and acquire that of a pronoun (another, one more) as in: *a second man entered, then a third*.

**Activity 2.** Translate the following sentences from Russian into English:

*Привычка – вторая натура.*

*Наши студенты начинают учить второй язык на втором курсе.*

*Учи, третьей возможности у тебя не будет.*

*Мои друзья и коллеги стали для меня второй семьёй.*

*Боюсь, что вам придётся сдавать экзамен второй раз.*

*Он женился в четвёртый раз и очень успешно.*

*Не хватает девятой страницы.*

*Учёный провёл первый, второй, третий и четвёртый эксперименты, но получил те же результаты.*

**Quantifiers:** *few versus a few; little versus a little*

*A few* is positive and means a small number.

*Few* is negative and means not many.

*A little* is positive and means some, not a lot.

*Little* is negative and means not much, “not enough”.

**Activity 3.** Choose the correct variant. Translate the following sentences from English into Russian:

*Could you put it in just few \ a few words?*

*There are still few \ a few things left undone.*

*I don't deny that perhaps Amy took her husband little \ a little too much for granted.*

*He feels rather lonely, he has few \ a few friends in the class.*

*Little \ a little did he know what was in store for him.*

*Addy feels much better now that he already has got few \ a few friends.*

*We need one more player; we are one too few \ a few for this game.*

*The forces were obviously unequal: we were many, they were few \ a few.*

**Collective Nouns:** *the family is* versus *the family are*

The meaning of plurality in certain nouns is not marked in any form. They are collective nouns denoting living beings and are singular in form but plural in meaning: *police, gentry, clergy, fowl, cattle, and poultry*. Collective nouns have two categorical meanings: plurality as indivisible whole and plurality of separate beings. That is why the words of this type – *people, family, crew, crowd, parliament, team, jury, government* - can be both singular and plural. In the latter case, they are called *Nouns of Multitude*. The number of the verb-predicate (singular in the first case and plural in the second) indicates the difference in two categorical meanings as well as by personal pronouns.

*The family quarrel* (among themselves).

*The family quarrels* (with somebody else).

*The crowd have accepted the decision.*

*The crowd has parted down the middle like a black curtain.*

*The crew of the ship was excellent.*

*The crew have taken their posts.*

**Activity 4.** State whether the nouns in bold type are collective nouns or nouns of multitude. Translate the following sentences from English into Russian:

*My family is now in the country.*

*It was eleven o'clock before the family were all in bed.*

*No one had seen him since and the police were searching for him.*

*The band were changed, and in the gallery already.*

*Then one by one, the worn out crew were helped on board.*

*The crew of the ship consists of twenty seamen including the captain and his mate.*

*Who is your team playing with next week?*

*The ship's crew were lined up on the upper deck for checkup.*

**Notional Concord:** *five million dollars are* versus *five million dollars is*

Subjects expressed by nouns denoting measure, weight, time, etc., have a singular verb-predicate when the statement is made about the whole amount, not about the units.

*Ten years is a long term.  
Another five minutes goes by.  
Five million dollars is a lot of money.*

**Activity 5.** *Choose the appropriate present-tense verb form:*

*Tea and bread (to be) the best supper.  
Five minutes (to be) not enough for such a job.  
Over ten million dollars (to be) planned to be spent on the project.  
Ten million dollars (to be) a great sum of money.  
Forty years (to have brought) sweeping changes to our life.  
Fifty guineas for a room each week (to be) not an uncommon figure at that time.  
Three metres (to be) not enough for this dress.  
The wedding party (to be forced) to abandon their cars and literally to fight their way into the Old Town Hall on foot.*

**Universal Pronouns:** *Every versus each.*

*Each denotes choice from a specific, definite group:  
Each child was given an apple (=all those children).  
Every denotes choice from an endless class of things:  
Every child likes chocolates (= all the children).  
Every as a rule is not followed by 'of'. It may be followed by 'of' when used emphatically, with exaggeration:  
Do not believe this letter: every word of it is false.  
But: There were 30 words in the dictation and he made a mistake in each of them.*

**Activity 6.** *Translate the following sentences from Russian into English:*

*У каждого города свой характер.  
Мы побывали в пяти городах, и в каждом городе нашли что-то интересное.  
Я спрашивал об этом почти каждый день, и каждый раз он отвечал «Не знаю».  
Каждый водитель должен строго соблюдать правила дорожного движения.  
Каждый водитель, нарушивший правила дорожного движения, наверняка попадет в беду.  
Сестры возвращались из виноградника, каждая из них несла корзину с виноградом.  
Меняйте масло в машине каждые 10000 километров.  
Я помню каждое его слово.*

It is seen from the empiric material that the meaning of the weak member of the privative opposition is more general and abstract as compared with the meaning of the strong member, which is, respectively, more particular and concrete. Due to this difference in meaning, the weak member is used in a wider range of contexts than the strong member is. Thus, the forms *the most (interesting book), the second (piece of cake), few, little, the family is, five million dollars are*, are most common constructions of words. Nevertheless, their opposites will particularize the situation and add accuracy to the statement.

## Findings & Discussion

Another type of opposition is gradual. The gradual opposition is formed by a contrastive group of members, which are distinguished not by the presence or absence of a feature, but by the degree of it. Gradual opposition in morphology is identified as a minor type at the semantic level only. An example of the gradual morphological opposition can be seen in modern English in the category of comparison of adjectives and adverbs: *strong – stronger – strongest; early – earlier – the earliest*.

At the semantic level, gradual opposition might be observed in the specific quantitative meaning of certain English lexemes of notional nominal and functional status, which finds its realization through the component analysis. It shows that in lexico-semantic structure of certain words observed is the seme of quantity, it is inbuilt and revealed in valence, i.e. potential ability of words to be selectively combined in a speech chain [3, p. 110].

In accordance with the key method of Ferdinand de Saussure, syntagmatic and paradigmatic analyses define units syntactically and lexically in contrast to the other units of the system, we will try to reveal lexical units containing the seme of quantity in their lexico-semantic structure and to study their functioning in speech in the system of modern English. Consider, for example, English pronouns of different classes:

Within the group of **Universal pronouns**, several units keep traces of duality:

*Both* vs. *all*: [2 vs. 2+1...]

*Both* = the one and the other; *all* = the complete amount or quantity of [19].

*The police set up barriers at both ends of the street.*

*Will all the girls please stand over there?*

*Both prisoners escaped* vs *All the prisoners escaped*.

***Either* vs. *any*** [2 vs. 2+1...]

*Either*=the one or the other (either of the two mentioned, only if there is indication that there are two objects):

*If you are 'ambidextrous, you can write with either hand.*

*Any* = each one or all members of a group: *Before touching the computer or any of its parts, one needs to read the instructions.*

***Neither* vs. *none*** [2 vs. 2+1...]

*Neither* = not the one or the other:

*Neither of the prisoners escaped.*

*None* = not any of something: *She had inherited none of her mother's beauty.*

Thus, *either* \ *neither* are used when there is a choice of two objects; if there are three or more objects, *any* is used: *either / neither book will do* vs. *any book will do* → *either* vs. *any*; *neither* vs. *none*.

**The subclass of reciprocal pronouns** comprises only two items: *each other* and *one another*. [2 vs. 2+1...]

*They loved each other.*

The pronoun *each other* generally implies that only two persons / non-persons are involved; *one another* is usually preferred where more than two persons are involved.

*They stood silent, in each other's arms.*

*They often quarrelled with one another.*

**The subclass of detaching pronouns: *the other* vs. *another*.** [2 vs. 2+1]

*Other* denotes some object different from the one mentioned before. When *other* is used with the definite article or another determiner, it denotes a contrast between:

- two objects: *On weekends I do all my housework on one day, so the other day I am free.*

- two parts of the object: *There is a bookstore on the other side of the road.* The pronoun *another* correlates only with count nouns in the singular: *another cup.* *Another* has two meanings: a) 'a different one':

*Can you pass me another pencil?*

b) 'an additional one'

*Another of the speakers suggested abandoning the project altogether.*

*Is this another of your schemes to make money?*

**Activity 7. Translate the following sentences from Russian into English:**

Какой из этих / двух словарей лучше? Каждый по-своему хорош, один не хуже другого.

Можете взять какую-нибудь из этих книг, они обе интересные. – Да нет, ни одна из них меня не привлекает.

Мы побывали в пяти городах, и в каждом городе нашли что-то интересное. На пляже было много народу: одни капались, другие загорали, другие играли в волейбол.

Несколько человек вернулись в город, другие остались на даче на ночь.

У каждого города свой характер.

Я до сих пор помню его каждое слово, каждый жест.

Я спрашивал об этом почти каждый день, и каждый раз он отвечал «Не знаю».

The grammatical category of number in modern English, which is presented nowadays by singularity and plurality, does keep the prints of the third component of this category – duality [9], the understanding of which is very obscured, and it causes mistakes in the utterance production of Russian students – secondary language personalities of English. In the light of the reasons stated, it is obviously necessary to allocate those forms in the semantic organization of English behind which stands the duality rank of the category of number.

Duality has appeared to be a lexemic number in addition to singular and plural. The pronouns under study have displayed their specific numerical semantics, it is interpreted as referring to precisely two of the entities (objects or persons) acting as a single unit or in unison. It brings us to the idea that the vocabulary of the English language can be represented by the following numeric opposition series: ***Singular: Dual: Plural.***

English word-stock contains a lexico-semantic field united by the seme of duality in the lexico-semantic structure of its words [13]. Illustrative material is taken from the Internet [14, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 21]. Traces of lexemic duality are revealed through Gradual Opposition [2 vs.2+1...] in certain word classes and subclasses of the English vocabulary:



**A couple** (two things or people of the same kind): *We'll have to wait a couple of minutes.*

*If you've gone onto Twitter in the last couple of weeks, you've probably seen this. But in the last couple of years we've become infamous for a couple of things.*

**Twain**

(two; nearly obsolete in common discourse, but used in poetry and burlesque):  
*Never the twain shall meet. TWAIN and TWAIN Direct are application programming interfaces (APIs) and communication protocols that regulate communication between software and digital imaging devices, such as image scanners and digital cameras.*

**Pair** (a single thing made of two similar parts that are joined together):  
*She bought a pair of shoes.  
The company is run by a pair of brothers.*

**Twosome** (two people who work together or spend a lot of time together)  
*It ended up being just a twosome with the third one watching from a chair.  
Those sisters are a constant twosome, going everywhere together...*

**Activity 8.** Translate the following statements from English into Russian.

*In the next couple of years, the hypertext community didn't recognize him either.  
I figured I'd come back in a couple of weeks and talk to the grandmother.  
The rock was split in twain.  
Just clear out, the pair of you!  
They will make a lovely pair dancing together.  
Drug dealers often work in pairs.  
Twosome Necklace: Necklace in 18k gold with two rings linked together. One rounded ring and one squared with the words Amor Vinci Omnia.  
The twosome kept the secret for a month.*

**Invariable plural nouns** that nominate the names of tools or articles of dress consisting of two equal parts, which are joined: *scales, binoculars, pincers, pliers, scales, scissors; pajamas, jeans, shorts, tights, trousers.*

**Adjectives:** *double, dual, twin, binary, twofold, twain* (consisting of two parts):  
*This free binary calculator can add, subtract, multiply, and divide binary values, as well as convert between binary and decimal values.  
The aims of the study are twofold.  
Love is beautiful when you are sharing it with the one who is your twin flame (Valentine Day's greetings).*

**Activity 9.** Translate the following statements from English into Russian.

*Student numbers have expanded twofold in ten years.*

*The price increased twofold last year.*

*In mathematics and digital electronics, a binary number is a number expressed in the base-2 numeral system or binary numeral system, which uses only two symbols: typically "0" (zero) and "1" (one).*

*The office of a clergyman is twofold: public preaching and private influence.*

*His knees doubled up under him.*

*The ewes of this country rarely twin.*

*We were the first twosome out on the golf course this morning.*

*She is the double of her mother.*

*Sales doubled last year.*

**Substantivized adjective: *the latter*** (formal, opposite *former*): the second of the two people or things just mentioned:

*The system brings both financial and environmental benefits, the latter being especially welcome.*

The sense of dual number is found out in the adjective proper *latter* [only before the noun] (formal): being the second of two people or things mentioned or the last in the list just mentioned:

*The latter half of the year was quite calm and measured.*

**Preposition: *between* vs. *among*.** Both prepositions being used alone differ in relation to the number of items: *between* is used with a small number of items – separate and individual:

*The ball went between the player's legs.*

*Between 1914 and 1945, 70 million people died in Europe alone as a result of armed conflict.*

With certain nouns *between* actualizes the sense of duality: *The contrast between two areas.*

*What he said, that all too often, is that we accept the distance between those two ideas. The difference between American football and soccer.*

***Among*** suggests a larger number:

*I was hoping to spot Marcia among the crowd.*

**Activity 10.** Translate the following statements from English into Russian.

*Peter and Steve are students, but the former is doing this last year at college, while the latter is only in his first.*

*What is the difference between an UNCITRAL legislative text and an UNCITRAL non-legislative text?*

*In the Kennedy family two brothers are most famous: John and Robert. The former was US President, while the latter was Attorney General.*

*And, among other things, they're looking for dark matter.*

*It's a story of nations, of ideologies, of territories, and of conflicts among them.*

*Of the two people mentioned, the former is dead, but the latter is still alive.*

*We make a distinction between talking from a diplomatic level and talking at the political level.*

*You can purchase additional storage at any time, and this additional storage is*

*shared among Google Docs, Picasa, Gmail, Blogger and Buzz [22].*

To train the opposition pattern “*between/in-between /among*” we have developed another exercise.

**Activity 11.** *Choose a suitable word: between / in-between / among.*

*And they go back and forth ----- this hive and the arena, via this tube.*

*And my weekly audience at that time was ----- 200 to 300 million people.*

*I tend to find myself in the spaces ----- .*

*To do so, click the Rate and select your rating (----- one and five stars).*

*And what they found was a series of mutations in a gene called SPR, which is responsible for producing serotonin, ----- other things.*

*In these times, there is no ----- .*

*And so this informs, ----- other things, of course, a treatment for bone marrow transplant, which he undertakes.*

*That's where you can find Sam, the DP, - -----?*

## **Conclusions**

English at Russian Universities is studied by linguistic disciplines, which have either a practical or a theoretical purpose. A practical discipline is aimed at practical mastery of the language, while a theoretical discipline pursues analytical aims: to gain insights into the inner structures of language and expose the mechanism of their functioning. To process a theoretical description of language systems, i.e. to scientifically analyze and define grammatical, lexical and phonological categories, requires cognitive analysis on the part of the student. The theoretical basis of language supports the student's language acquisition and helps develop his \ her linguistic and cognitive skills. The involvement of Opposition Theory to identify differential components in the lexical and semantic structure of some lexemes of the English language contributes to the students' awareness of typically English constructions that they do not have in their native language. The system of exercises developed on the basis of modern empirical material will provide reliable consolidation of both theoretical and practical aspects of the English language by Russian students – secondary linguistic personalities of English national culture.

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