

# *Research on Russian Loanwords from the Perspective of Sociolinguistics*

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**Abstract:** In the long process of social development, countries, regions, and ethnic groups may spontaneously or involuntarily borrow foreign words in the process of communication and collision due to practical needs such as political and economic system reform, scientific and technological development, trade exchanges, or external environmental changes. Sociolinguistics is an important means of studying the characteristics and development process of foreign vocabulary. This article employs theoretical analysis approaches to further investigate Russian loanwords within the context of established sociolinguistic theories and loanword expression theories. Through a comprehensive analysis of synchronicity and diachronicity, we can better understand the borrowing, use, and development process of loanwords in Russian. The research findings demonstrate that the incorporation of loanwords occurs unevenly across all stages of social development and sectors of society within the same timeframe, highlighting their significant influence on language and culture.

**Keywords:** Sociolinguistics, Russian Loanwords, Diachronic, Synchronic.

## 1. Introduction

Currently, due to the increasingly evident trend of globalization, there is a growing amount of communication and friction between countries, regions, and ethnic groups, which greatly increases the possibility and necessity of learning from each other[1]. Foreign words refer to vocabulary borrowed from other languages, usually entering the target language through transliteration, sound meaning combination, and other means. Simultaneously, based on the notion of borrowing foreign word forms, the acquisition of foreign words can be categorized into two types: complete borrowing and partial borrowing. Among them, complete borrowing refers to the direct borrowing of foreign language vocabulary into the national language or the pronunciation of foreign words. In Russian, it is often manifested as the respelling of the pronunciation of foreign words by using Russian letters to form new Russian words; partial borrowing refers to the borrowing of only a portion of loanwords, including phonetic loanwords, semantic loanwords, semi-imitative loanwords, and imitative loanwords[2]. As a manifestation of interpersonal communication, loanwords directly reflect the changes in social life and the process of cultural exchange[3]. Consequently, in the present environment, comprehensive research on foreign vocabulary is crucial for linguists to examine social and historical evolution, along with the attributes and prospective patterns of modern societal development via linguistic analysis. It can open up new ideas for people to understand social development from a linguistic perspective. The fundamental ideas of sociolinguistics possess a

distinct framework and substance in ongoing development. This article aims to analyze foreign vocabulary in Russian using its synchronic theory.

## 2. The Diachronic Nature of Foreign Vocabulary in Russian

According to Chomsky's theory of generative grammar, the internal structure of language is universal, and any language is subject to traditional constraints, thus posing a certain degree of stability. According to the diachronic theory of sociolinguistics, language evolves in tandem with social history, and the extent of these changes is intricately linked to political shifts, economic advancement, cultural interactions, technical innovations, and other influences.

Usually in times of rapid political, economic, cultural and technological development, language changes are more drastic, and the number of introduced foreign words is usually higher. For example, with China's opening up to the outside world and the spread of Western learning, a large number of European and American loanwords have been directly introduced or transferred into Chinese through Japan. These terms encompass various domains, including physics, technology, culture, and politics, illustrating the intensification of cultural exchanges between China and the West[4]. This article will explore the use and changes of loanwords in Russian from a diachronic perspective. Numerous significant phases in Russian history have witnessed the extensive utilization of loanwords.

### 2.1. 10th Century AD

The early use of loanwords mainly existed in religious activities. In 988 AD, Grand Duke Vladimir promoted Christianity as the state religion of Kievan Rus, a historical event known as the "Rus Baptism" that led to the first single religious belief among all Rus and laid the ideological foundation of the Russian nation for thousands of years. Following the baptism of Rus, a significant number of Greek priests migrated to Kievan Rus, facilitating the influx of Byzantine culture and expediting the process of Ruskization, culminating in the emergence of numerous churches that amalgamated Slavic and Russian languages. To this day, modern Russian still retains some old Slavic vocabulary, such as добродетель (virtue), бедствие (disaster, misfortune), жизнь (life), битва (battle)...[5]. The introduction of a large number of loanwords during this period promoted the reform of the political system in Russia, and propelled the development of the Russian economy and national culture. It was not only the result of the spread of Christianity in Russia but also a reflection of the improvement of the spiritual civilization level in Russia.

### 2.2. 13th to 15th Centuries

In 1243, the Mongol Tatars officially established the Golden Horde based on their victories in capturing various principalities of Rus, and Rus entered the period of "Mongol Tatar captivity" from then on. During this period, the Mongolian Tatars had control over the entire Rus, and in order to achieve their rule within Rus territory, they continuously infused their own culture into the Rus, which was first reflected in their writing. During the period of shackles, due to the Mongolian Tatars implementing a system of feudalism and border control, the entire territory of Russia was in the abyss of feudal separatism, and the development of ethnic language and culture stagnated, providing important conditions for the influence of Tatar culture on it. Kievan Rus was under the rule of the Mongol Tatars for 200 years, and the Russian vocabulary during this period was also deeply influenced by the Tatar language. According to historical records, such words include деньги (money), жемчуг (pearl), арбуз (watermelon)... Although in 1480, under the leadership of Ivan III, Moscow achieved complete political independence by defeating the Tatars in the Battle of Ugra, Russia still retained a large number of vocabulary from the Tatar language, and the phenomenon of mutual use between Russian and Tatar languages has never stopped and continues to this day.

### 2.3. 17th and 18th Centuries

In 1547, Ivan IV was officially crowned as the first Tsar of Russia, embarking on a journey of national development. During the reign of Ivan IV, a series of measures were taken internally to weaken the power of hereditary nobility and strengthen centralization, such as the establishment of the gentry council and the Hundred Chapters council. At the same time, to develop the country's education and culture, Ivan IV focused on learning advanced ideas from the West and introducing healthy lifestyles. Therefore, a large number of vocabulary related to social life, technology, and culture emerged during this period. According to historical records, in terms of social life, for example, костюм(costume), суп(soup); in terms of cultural and educational aspects, such as автор(writer), студент(student); in terms of art, for example, опера(opera), балет(ballet); in terms of science and technology, for example, яхта(speedboat)... Russia has consistently engaged in territorial conflicts with Sweden and Türkiye regarding foreign relations. To protect national sovereignty and territorial integrity, Ivan IV prioritized military reform. His two main measures: constantly support the reform of the army and build a new navy; ensure the salaries of existing military personnel. Therefore, during this period, a large number of foreign military-related vocabulary from Dutch and German were also introduced into Russian, such as military aspects — штаб(headquarters), офицер(officer) and regarding navigation гавань(port), каюта(cabin)... Ivan IV's reforms followed the will of the people and the trend of history, promoting the recovery and development of Russia.

### 2.4. 18th and 19th Centuries

From the 1840s to the 1880s, during the reign of Catherine the Great, Russia had very close relations with France, leading to a "French fever" that sought to imitate French fashion. The upper class in Russia admires French culture and considers speaking fluent French as a sign of their status as a prominent figure. French culture has profoundly impacted Russian culture across various dimensions, leading to a significant incorporation of French lexicon into Russian, thus enhancing its vocabulary and linguistic framework. The legal loanwords of this period were mainly related to the lives of the upper class (vested interests who held political power, social resources, and natural resource allocation rights in society), such as клуб (club), комбайн(harvester), митинг(rally)...

### 2.5. 20th Century

In the 1980s and 1990s, with the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia began to re-examine the situation, adjust its values, and strengthen exchanges with Western countries in politics, economy, culture, and other aspects. Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin, the three leaders, recognized that the theme of international development was increasingly moving towards "peace and development" and realized that to revive Russia's great power status, they should vigorously promote reforms. Simultaneously, the United States emerged as the world's singular superpower following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, possessing unmatched strength. Russia recognizes the power of the West and follows suit politically by implementing "parliamentary democracy" and economically by adopting capitalism and a market economy. As a result, the cultural trend has shifted from the original "French fever" to the "English loanword fever". Due to the deepening trend of globalization, the introduction of foreign words in Russia during this period paid more attention to international integration, and some words were directly transliterated, such as сэкэнд хэнд(second hand), фейс(face), саммит(summit)... But this has, to some extent, led to the mixing of English and Russian vocabulary, which to some extent interferes with the purity of Russian and hinders the development of national culture[6]. The introduction of a large number of English words during this period indicates that language use was influenced by social development.

### 3. The Synchronicity of Foreign Vocabulary in Russian

The synchronic theory of sociolinguistics analyzes language on a social cross-section, where the introduction of foreign words in different fields may vary due to differences in the speed and degree of development in different areas of society during the same period. The disparate advancement of different domains is a significant factor contributing to the irregular incorporation of loanwords. Examining Russia post-1990s, one may discern the significant impact of social context on the volume and pace of foreign word integration across various domains, including politics, economy, and culture. After the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became the only hegemon in the world, with strong comprehensive national strength and great international influence. This made Russia re-examine its own system and values. After recognizing the strength of Western countries, many Russian youth developed a great admiration and fascination for the advanced material and spiritual civilization of the United States, and speaking English became a fashion as a result. Many English vocabulary words have been absorbed and transformed, even transliterated verbatim, and integrated into modern Russian as an important part[7]. This article focuses on analyzing the use of Russian English loanwords in fields such as politics, market economy, culture, science and technology, and daily life.

#### 3.1. In the Political Field

During this period, Russia followed the advanced capitalist political system of Western countries, and as a result, a group of political loanwords representing western reality were introduced into contemporary Russian. Nowadays, people often use "парламент(parliament)" to call the Federal Conference "спикер(speaker)" to address the Chairman of the Duma. At the same time, similar to Western countries, Russia has also seen protests that pressure government officials for its own group interests, giving rise to loanwords related to this, such as "лобби(lobby)" and "лоббизм(lobbism)". The verb form has also been created based on the characteristics of the Russian language itself(in Russian, nouns can form verbs by adding different affixes) — "лоббировать(Conduct off-site activities)". Furthermore, due to the social unrest and rampant criminal activities in Russia, vocabulary borrowed from English has also become active in the language — "рэкет(racket)", "рэкетир(racketeer)" and "киллер(killer)".

#### 3.2. In the Socio-economic Field

Starting from the mid to late 1980s, under the continuous reforms of its leaders, the Soviet Union moved from a closed state to an open one, increasingly aligning with the international community. Its economic system also shifted from a planned economy to a market economy. Consequently, numerous terms pertaining to economic transformation and market economy were included into the Russian language during this period., such as "кредитная карточка(credit card)", "трейд марк(trade mark)", "менеджмент(management)", "дилер(dealer)" and "риэлтер(realtor)"...

#### 3.3. Social Technology Field

With the progress of the fourth technological revolution, the world's scientific and technological development is advancing rapidly, and a large number of vocabulary related to technology have entered Russian. The introduction of foreign technological words is an irresistible trend during this period. This article only discusses vocabulary in the field of computer science, such as "компьютер(computer)", "ноутбук(notebook)", "интернет(Internet)", "принтер(printer)", "сканер(scanner)", "файл(file)" and so on. For example, before the introduction of English loanwords, the local Russian interpretation of a computer was "электронно-вычислительная-машина"[8]. In

terms of word length and structure, Russian English loanwords are more accessible, as they directly adopt English spelling and pronunciation, thereby diminishing the challenges of acquiring a new language; explanatory words (Russian terms that elucidate foreign vocabulary using the native language) necessitate more intricate grammatical structures and vocabulary combinations, rendering them comparatively complex to recall and utilize. Therefore, the introduction of Russian English loanwords has reduced the difficulty of understanding and using these vocabulary words for the public.

### 3.4. Social and Cultural Fields

With the deepening trend of globalization, Russia's interactions with other countries and regions have become increasingly frequent. Therefore, in the social and cultural field, Russian has also absorbed a large number of loanwords. The term 'дайджест' was introduced from the American magazine Reader's Digest, and its popularity is closely related to the popularity of this type of digest among a wide range of readers. In terms of social life, the introduced English loanwords include "масс-медиа(mass media)", "фаст-фуд(fast food)", "сауна(sauna)", "хот-дог(hot dog)" and so on. It reflects that Russia's spiritual civilization closely follows the development of material civilization. In the field of music, English loanwords include "рэппер(rapper)" and "хип-хоп(hip-hop)", European and American pop music has had a certain impact on the cultural and artistic life of the Russian people and is loved by the masses.

Overall, scientific and technological terms are the most concentrated area of new word growth in modern language (with the rapid advancement of science and technology, new scientific terms will be created once new technological achievements emerge), so during this period, Russian loanwords grew the fastest and were most concentrated in the field of technology. Next is the social and cultural field. Due to the natural lively and inclusive characteristics of the younger generation in Russia (related to their geographical, historical, and cultural backgrounds), they are very eager for new and exciting things internationally and even regard the use of loanwords as a fashion (even though there are corresponding words in Russian, they are still ecstatic and use loanwords first), so many loanwords related to social culture have been introduced into Russian. Finally, in the fields of social economy and politics. The introduction of loanwords in the economic field is related to the practical needs of Russia's trade with foreign countries, while in the political field, due to the lack of significant political changes in Russia and the relatively stable political system, the number of loanwords introduced is not high[9].

## 4. Conclusion

According to the historical analysis of social language, it is not difficult to see that loanwords are unevenly introduced at different stages of social development. The diachronic analysis mainly reflects the origin, development process, and changes of loanwords in different historical periods. Similarly, according to the synchronic analysis of social language, the introduction of foreign words in different fields of society during the same period is unbalanced. The synchronic analysis mainly reflects the usage and semantic changes of foreign words at the time of introduction. In general, language changes according to the needs of social development, and its own changes can also reflect the development of society. This article examines the characteristics of foreign word integration into Russian through a sociolinguistic lens, emphasizing the intricate connection between foreign lexicon and social evolution. It does not analyze from the perspective of language construction; that is, it does not discuss the specific forms of foreign word changes in Russian. Future research will focus on the specific forms and structural rules of Russian loanwords, exploring the characteristics and development of Russian loanwords from a new perspective of structural linguistics.

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