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Usefulness of Loanwords of Latin Origin for Learning Russian

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Abstract

Latin is the primary donor language to Russian. In this study, a vocabulary survey was conducted to propose the usefulness of frequently used Russian vocabulary of Latin origin and their English equivalents for learners of Russian. The Oxford 3000 was used as the primary reference for the 3,000 most frequently used English words, and the author investigated the frequency of their Russian equivalents. As a result, 411 loanwords of Latin origin were found to be included in the 3,000 most common Russian words. Therefore, the present study concluded that learning basic Russian vocabulary of Latin origin helps English speakers improve their Russian proficiency.

Keywords: English; German; Greek, Latin; Russian.
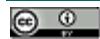
1. Introduction
1.1. Distribution of the Russian Language

Russian belongs to the East Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family (Crystal, 2010). It is an official language in the Russian Federation, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. The Russian Federation is the largest country in the world (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Russian is also widely spoken in several other member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States, partially controlled by the Russian government (Boyle and Gerhart, 2002). The Cyrillic alphabet is used for Russian, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian, as well as for several Turkic languages such as Kazakh and Kyrgyz as present-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were part of the Soviet Union until its dissolution in 1991 (Kenez, 2016).

1.2. Cultural Relationships Between Ancient Greek and Russian

The Cyrillic alphabet is derived from from the Greek alphabet (Morwood and Taylor, 2002). Several Cyrillic letters, such as *ф* (f in the Latin alphabet), *п* (p), and *р* (r), are, therefore, similar to their Greek counterparts *φ* (phi), *π* (pi), and *ρ* (rho), respectively (Crystal, 2010; Woodard, 1997). In this article, Russian words are transliterated in the Latin script, as a majority of readers of this manuscript may not read the Cyrillic alphabet. *J* is used to indicate the symbol [j] of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), and *y* corresponds to the close central unrounded vowel [ɨ] of the IPA.

In addition, Orthodox Christian institutions in Russian-speaking countries were, for centuries, under the influence of the Byzantine Empire, where Greek served as the primary language, and the Eastern Orthodox Church was the main Christian denomination (Riasanovsky and Steinberg, 2010). These cultural links encouraged Russian and several other Slavic languages to borrow Ancient Greek vocabulary. For instance, the Russian words *filosofija* (philosophy) and *akademija* (academy) originate from the Greek words *philosophia* (philosophy) and *akademia* (academy), respectively (Morwood and Taylor, 2002). Additionally, Latin is the primary source of academic vocabulary in the majority of European languages (Leonhardt, 2016) for example, the Russian words *religija* (religion) and *traditsija* (tradition) originate from the Latin words *religio* (religion) and *traditio* (tradition), respectively (Morwood, 2005).

1.3. Loanwords in Polish, Czech, and Estonian

Polish is a Slavic language that is written using the Latin alphabet, and many Polish words of Latin or Greek origin, such as *historia* (history), remain identical to their Latin forms (Sadowska, 2012). This word's Russian equivalent, *istorija* (history), lost the original [h] sound in Ancient Greek, but a similar phonetic simplification can be observed in modern languages originating from Latin, such as Spanish and Italian (Penny, 2002; Solodow, 2010).

Czech is another Slavic language that is written using the Latin script, but an original Czech word *dějiny* (history) is more frequently used than the loanword *historie* (history). However, many Czech words of Greek origin, such as *filozofie* (philosophy), *energie* (energy), and *melodie* (melody) are frequently used (Čermák and Křen, 2011). The pronunciation and meaning of most Czech words of Greek or Latin origin are similar to their German equivalents, such as *Philosophie* (philosophy), *Energie* (energy), and *Melodie* (melody), as the Austrian Empire, where German was predominantly spoken, ruled the present-day Czech Republic for centuries (Curtis, 2013; Judson, 2016). German-speaking aristocracy in Austria significantly influenced Czech culture, tradition, and national identity until the 1940s (Glassheim, 2005). Between 1948 and 1989, Czechoslovakia was under the communist rule of the Soviet Union, and Russian predominantly influenced the Czech and Slovakian languages (Teich, 1998).

Estonian belongs to the Finnic branch of the Uralic language family; however, the language was affected and modified by Germans and Russians who ruled present-day Estonia between the 13th and 20th centuries (Raun,

2001). For this reason, Estonian loanwords of Greek origin, such as *bioloogia* (biology), *geograafia* (geography), *meloodia* (melody), and *teooria* (theory), are similar to the German *Biologie* (biology), *Geographie* (geography), *Melodie* (melody), and *Theorie* (theory) and the Russian *biologija* (biology), *geografija* (geography), *melodija* (melody), and *teorija* (theory) (Taranov, 2016; Thompson, 2013).

1.4. Characteristics of the Russian Language

The pronunciation of the majority of Russian words of Slavic origin differs significantly from that of Latin and Greek terms common to most European languages. For instance, speakers of English, French, German, and Spanish with no prior knowledge of Russian might not be able to guess the meaning of *golova* (head), *gora* (mountain), *kniga* (book), and *litso* (face). Moreover, the endings of Russian nouns and adjectives often change according to grammatical case, i.e., whether they are in the nominative, accusative, genitive, instrumental, or prepositional case (Dunn and Khairov, 2009). These linguistic features often demotivate learners of Russian and decrease the popularity of the language outside Russian-speaking countries. However, Russian has borrowed thousands of words from Greek, Latin, and several modern European languages (Wade, 1998). These loanwords may offer an advantage to speakers of English and other major European languages, such as French, Spanish, Italian, and German.

1.5. Objective

Learning the basics of Russian is crucial, especially for students, educators, and researchers from other countries, in order to understand the economy, science, technology, and culture of Russia and other Russian-speaking countries. Additionally, an effective approach to learn basic Russian vocabularies will benefit foreigners who are working or wish to work in those countries.

The research questions in this study are as follows:
1. Can loanwords of Latin or Greek origin shared among Russian, English, French, Italian, and Spanish assist speakers of English or other major European languages?
2. Does this category of loanwords exhibit semantic and phonetic similarities across the aforementioned languages?

This study proposes an efficient method for learning basic Russian words of Latin or Greek origin. Most Greek words were borrowed through Latin. This method is primarily oriented toward native English speakers who are interested in learning basic Russian. The primary references for Latin and Russian in this research are the *Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Morwood, 2005) and the *Compact Oxford Russian Dictionary* (Thompson, 2013), respectively.

2. Literature Review
2.1. Usefulness of Phonetically and Semantically Similar Words

Ringbom (2007) defines cognates as "historically related, phonetically similar words, whose meanings may be identical, similar, or partly different." Petrescu *et al.* (2017) advocate the advantages of using English words with shared etymologies to teach vocabulary to Romanian-speaking learners of English. Romanian belongs to the Romance languages, which originate from Latin (Botoman, 1995). Therefore, an explicit presentation of English vocabulary of Latin origin helps Romanian-speaking learners improve their knowledge of English vocabulary.

Dijkstra *et al.* (1999) examined the ability of Dutch-speaking learners of English to recognize cognates and homographs between Dutch and English. Their study suggests primarily that English words of Latin origin with a pronunciation almost identical or very similar to that of their Dutch counterparts are especially helpful to Dutch speakers because they allow them to make use of their first-language vocabulary knowledge.

Poort and Rodd (2017) also explored the usefulness of phonetically and semantically similar words for Dutch speakers learning English vocabulary. Poort and Rodd discussed the benefits of creating lists of phonetically and semantically similar vocabulary shared between learners' first and target languages. This enables learners to deepen their vocabulary knowledge and raises their awareness of the importance of phonetic and semantic similarities in language learning.

Everson (2011) reviewed recent studies on the teaching of Arabic, Hebrew, Japanese, and Mandarin, all of which use non-Latin writing systems. His study highlights the importance of developing the ability to exploit the semantically similar elements of foreign words from an early stage of learning as this skill helps learners to rapidly recognize and identify the meanings of unknown words. Everson's suggestion would benefit English, French, Spanish, Italian, and German speakers learning the Cyrillic alphabet, which is used for Russian, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian.

2.2. Hebrew Vocabulary of Latin and Greek Origin

Additionally, Uni (2018) examined those words of Latin and Greek origin included among the approximately 3,000 most frequently used Hebrew words. A total of 186 words originating from Latin or Greek were examined. For instance, the Hebrew *energya* (energy), *filosofya* (philosophy), *geografya* (geography), *kategorya* (category), and *teorya* (theory) are similar to their English equivalents. Their Italian equivalents are *energia* (energy), *filosofia* (philosophy), *geografia* (geography), *categoria* (category), and *teoria* (theory). His study also suggests that possessing a knowledge of English and Hebrew vocabulary of Latin origin helps English speakers learn Hebrew, as an example of languages based on non-Latin alphabets.

2.3. German Vocabulary of Latin and Greek Origin

German belongs to the West Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family (Crystal, 2010). Uni (2019a) analyzed German words of Latin and Greek origin, which are among the approximately 3,000 most frequently used German words. German has been influenced by Latin and Greek through the Austrian Empire, Germany, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein (Salmons, 2018). A total of 432 German words of Latin and Greek origin were identified. For example, German words such as *Energie* (energy), *Geographie* (geography), *Kategorie* (category), *Philosophie* (philosophy), *Technologie* (technology), and *Theorie* (theory) may successfully be recognized by a majority of speakers of English, French, Italian, or Spanish without previous knowledge of German.

2.4. Swedish Vocabulary of Latin and Greek Origin

Swedish belongs to the North Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family (Crystal, 2010). Uni (2019b) examined the percentages of Swedish words of Latin and Greek origin, selecting approximately 3,000 of the most frequently used Swedish words. The study observed 556 loanwords. For instance, the Swedish *ekonomi* (economy), *energi* (energy), *filosofi* (philosophy), *geografi* (geography), *kategori* (category), *teknologi* (technology), and *teori* (theory) are loanwords from Latin and Greek (Morwood, 2005).

3. Materials and Methods

In this study, the primary reference for high-frequency English words was the Oxford 3000 word list. The author of the study counted Russian words of Latin or Greek origin within the scope of the Russian equivalents of the English list.

4. Results

In total, 411 words of Latin or Greek origin were included in the study's list of Russian equivalents to the 3,000 most frequently used English words. The number of loanwords was equal to 13.7% of the total number of basic Russian words. Each part of the following section presents examples of Russian words of Latin or Greek origin to assist English speakers in learning basic words in Russian.

5. Discussion

5.1. Russian Words Ending in *-iskij*

Table 1 presents Russian words ending in *-iskij*. The English equivalents listed end with the suffix *-ic* or *-ical*. A high degree of regularity is observed between the Russian words listed and their English equivalents. This correspondence between the two should allow English-speaking learners to produce Russian words more accurately. However, the Russian word *istoricheskij* is derived from *istorija* (history), which by the time of its adoption had lost the original [h] sound included in the Ancient Greek noun *historia* (history).

Table-1. Examples of Similar Words in Russian and English (1)

Russian suffix *-skij* (IPA [skij])		English suffix *-ic(al)*	
avtomaticheskij (automatic)	*dramaticheskij* (dramatic)	*elektronicheskij* (electronic)	*fizicheskij* (physical)
istoricheskij (historical)	*logicheskij* (logical)	*organicheskij* (organic)	*prakticheskij* (practical)

5.2. Russian Words Ending in *-ivnyj*

Table 2 presents Russian words ending in *-ivnyj*. The English words listed end with *-ive*. Despite minor phonetic differences, the listed words remain similar to their English equivalents. This Russian suffix comprises *-nyj* as an additional element. For example, their French equivalents are *actif* (active), *positif* (positive), and *négatif* (negative); their Italian equivalents are *attivo* (active), *positivo* (positive), and *negativo* (negative); their Spanish equivalents are *activo* (active), *positivo* (positive), and *negativo* (negative). Thus, speakers of English, French, Italian, and Spanish should be able to identify the meaning of the Russian words with little difficulty.

Table-2. Examples of Similar Words in Russian and English (2)

Russian suffix *-nyj* (IPA [nij])		English suffix *-ive*	
aktivnyj (active)	*al'ternativnyj* (alternative)	*effektivnyj* (effective)	*negativnyj* (negative)
objektivnyj (objective)	*passivnyj* (passive)	*pozitivnyj* (positive)	*subjektivnyj* (subjective)

5.3. Russian Words Ending in *-ija*

Table 3 presents Russian words ending in *-ija*, the original Latin words, and their English equivalents. In Russian, the [k] sound in loanwords of Latin origin is spelled with the Cyrillic letter *к*. The Greek consonants spelled with *θ* (theta) and *φ* (phi) have been changed to the Russian sounds [t] and [f], respectively.

Table-3. Examples of Similar Words in Russian and English (3)

Russian suffix *-ija* (IPA [ijə]) English suffix *-y* R.: Russian L.: Latin			
R. *biologija* L. *biologia* (biology)	R. *geografija* L. *geographia* (geography)	R. *istorija* L. *historia* (history)	R. *komedija* L. *comoedia* (comedy)
R. *filosofija* L. *philosophia* (philosophy)	R. *simpatija* L. *sympathia* (sympathy)	R. *strategija* L. *strategia* (strategy)	R. *teorija* L. *theoria* (theory)

For instance, their French equivalents are *biologie* (biology), *géographie* (geography), *sympathie* (sympathy), and *théorie* (theory); their Italian equivalents are *biologia* (biology), *geografia* (geography), *simpatia* (sympathy), and *teoria* (theory); their Spanish equivalents are *biología* (biology), *geografía* (geography), *simpatía* (sympathy), and *teoría* (theory).

5.4. Russian Words Ending in *-tsija* or *-sija*

Table 4 presents Russian words that end in *-tsija*, the original Latin words, and their English equivalents. This suffix also maintains a high degree of phonetic similarity with the English and French suffix *-tion*. The English spellings *ci* and *ce* are often replaced with the [tsi] and [tsje] sounds in Russian, respectively. For instance, *association* in English corresponds with *assotsiatsija* in Russian, while *center* in English has the Russian cognate *tsentr* (center).

Table-4. Examples of Similar Words in Russian and English (4)

Russian suffix *-tsija* (IPA [tsijə]) English suffix *-tion* R.: Russian L.: Latin			
R. *ambitsija* L. *ambitio* (ambition)	R. *assotsiatsija* L. *associatio* (association)	R. *funktsija* L. *functio* (function)	R. *informatsija* L. *informatio* (information)
R. *kollektsija* L. *collectio* (collection)	R. *reaktsija* L. *reactio* (reaction)	R. *reputatsija* L. *reputatio* (reputation)	R. *traditsija* L. *traditio* (tradition)

For example, their French equivalents are *ambition* (ambition), *fonction* (function), *information* (information), and *tradition* (tradition); their Italian equivalents are *ambizione* (ambition), *funzione* (function), *informazione* (information), and *tradizione* (tradition); their Spanish equivalents are *ambición* (ambition), *función* (function), *información* (information), and *tradición* (tradition).

Table 5 presents Russian words that end in *-sija*, the original Latin words, and their English equivalents with the suffix *-sion*. This correspondence would suggest that English-speaking learners of Russian and Russian-speaking learners of English can utilize this morphological similarity when learning their target language.

Table-5. Examples of Similar Words in Russian and English (5)

Russian suffix *-sija* (IPA [sijə]) English suffix *-sion* R.: Russian L.: Latin			
R. *diskussija* L. *discussio* (discussion)	R. *missija* L. *missio* (mission)	R. *professija* L. *professio* (profession)	R. *sessija* L. *sessio* (session)

Their French equivalents are *discussion* (discussion), *mission* (mission), *profession* (profession), and *session* (session); their Italian equivalents are *discussione* (discussion), *missione* (mission), *professione* (profession), and *sessione* (session); their Spanish equivalents are *discusión* (discussion), *misión* (mission), *profesión* (profession), and *sesión* (session).

5.5. Russian Words Ending in *-ika*

Table 6 presents Russian words ending in *-ika*, the original Latin words, and English words ending in *-ic(s)*. Although two forms are observed in the English suffix, the Russian suffix *-ika* covers both. English-speaking learners of Russian should, therefore, be able to guess the form of the Russian counterparts with more accuracy than Russian-speaking learners of English, who may be confused by the two similar forms of the English suffix.

Table-6. Examples of Similar Words in Russian and English (6)

Russian suffix *-ika* English suffix *-ic(s)* R.: Russian L.: Latin			
R. *kharakteristika* L. *characteristica* (characteristic)	R. *etika* L. *ethica* (ethics)	R. *fizika* L. *physica* (physics)	R. *gimnastika* L. *gymnastica* (gymnastics)
R. *kosmetika* L. *cosmetica* (cosmetic)	R. *logika* L. *logica* (logic)	R. *matematika* L. *mathematica* (mathematics)	R. *politika* L. *politica* (politics, policy)

For example, their French equivalents are *caractéristique* (characteristic), *éthique* (ethics), *physique* (physics), *logique* (logic), and *politique* (politics); their Italian equivalents are *caratteristica* (characteristic), *etica* (ethics), *fisica* (physics), *logica* (logic), and *politica* (politics).

5.6. Russian Words Ending in *-ent*

Table 7 presents Russian and English words ending in *-ent*. The English suffix is identical to its French equivalent and corresponds with the Italian suffix *-ente*. Speakers of any of these major European languages learning Russian should be able to produce the Russian words listed from an early stage of learning. However, learners should be aware of the distinction between the Russian words *student* (male student) and *studentka* (female student).

Table-7. Examples of Similar Words in Russian and English (7)

Russian suffix *-ent*		English suffix *-ent*		
klient (client)	*opponent* (opponent)	*patsient* (patient)	*prezident* (president)	*student* (student)

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the usefulness of basic Russian words of Latin and Greek origin for English-speaking learners of Russian. Of the approximately 3,000 most frequently used Russian words, 411 words originating from Latin or Greek were examined. The majority of these words remain semantically and phonetically similar to their English equivalents. The present study concluded that learning basic Russian vocabulary of Latin and Greek origin helps English speakers improve their Russian proficiency.

Many English words of Latin origin that end with *-tion* and *-sion* retain phonetic and semantic similarities with their equivalents in Russian, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. (e.g., English *philosophy*; Russian *filosofija*; French *philosophie*; German *Philosophie*; Italian *filosofia*; Spanish *filosofía*). English nouns with the suffixes *-ic* and *-ics* and many of their equivalents in the aforementioned languages have a high degree of correspondence. Moreover, English adjectives with the suffixes *-ic*, *-ical*, and *-ive* often share similarities with their cognates in most of the languages examined in this study. Therefore, learners who wish to enrich their foreign language vocabulary must focus on the endings and analyze the degree of regularity of similarities. This strategy will allow learners to save on time and cost of learning vocabulary and concentrate on improving the accuracy and fluency of their production in a foreign language. Thus, learners can make the best of their vocabulary knowledge when communicating in a target language.

The main limitation of this study is the limited number of basic loanwords of Latin or Greek origin that are shared across the general high-frequency vocabularies of the aforementioned languages. Analyses of frequently used academic vocabularies shared across multiple languages will be required to support learners who are studying Russian for academic purposes.

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