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## The Role of Comparative Analysis in Foreign Language Learning (German and Russian languages)

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### Abstract

In this article we will examine the importance of cultural studies when learning foreign languages. For this purpose we have chosen the comparative analysis between Russia and Germany. We will study the influence of the language's grammar and of different geographical and other factors on people's mentality. We will compare the forms of politeness in both countries and see how languages interact and develop, and how new borrowings enter other languages.

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*Keywords:* FL learning; comparative analysis; politeness; language development; German influence

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### 1. Introduction

The learning of one or two foreign languages has become a norm in modern education. It belongs to the educational minimum and stands alongside mathematics, history, geography and other subjects.

When we learn a foreign language, we immerse ourselves in a completely different world, filled with its own traditions, customs and another way of thinking.

It's not correct to consider a language as a number of words and sentences, or as a row of grammar rules, that one has to know for a successful communication. "Foreign language learning... is accompanied by a peculiar splitting of one's personality, which means that one acquires qualities of the second language personality" (Gural, 2012). So besides learning a foreign language, we should also study and analyze various subtle cultural differences. The latter can help us to understand in a better way other people, who live according to their own, unusual for us, rules.

Especially in the beginning it is not easy to immerse in the culture of the target language, because it possesses different customs, and people of other countries react in a different way to the same situations. S. Gural wrote that "this necessity to modify one's way of thinking and rebuild one's worldview according to a strange and

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unusual pattern, presents one of the main difficulties (also psychological) in the foreign language acquisition” (Gural, 2012).

The importance of the language comparison has been underlined by S.G. Ter-Minasova: “We can clearly see a barrier between languages, but a barrier between cultures can be only seen when a native culture collides... with another, different, culture”(Ter-Minasova, 2000).

In the thirties and forties of the last century there emerged an idea to look at the comparative method from a linguistic point of view. The following scientists contributed to its development: E.D. Polivanov, L.V. Sherba, S.I. Bernstein. In 1951 the academician V.V. Vinogradov wrote: “Alongside with a comparative and historic learning of similar languages, it is possible and even necessary to compare the languages belonging to different systems” (Khairulina, 2011).

In the sixties, the comparative language investigation was intensified. Numerous languages of ex-Soviet Union as well as the languages that were taught at universities, namely the West European languages were compared. This fact contributed to the « enhancement of the language culture as a part of people’s culture (Yartseva, Klimova & Zhuravliov, 1990).

Nowadays in linguistics there exists a big interest in the comparative approach in foreign language learning, that’s why investigations in this area are very significant. All these pieces of information demonstrate us the importance of our article theme.

The purpose of this article is to analyze some cultural differences between the German and Russian cultures that should be known in order to avoid unpleasant situations.

## 2. What does it mean “to be polite” in Germany and Russia?

Germans use in their speech the word “bitte” (please) much more often than Russians. Even when talking to a child they tend to say: “Hör bitte auf!” (“Stop it, please!”) or “Steh bitte auf!” (“Get up, please!”).

When Russians address their friends or children, they often use the imperative form of the verb without the interjection “please”: “Get up!”, “Sit down!”, “Move!” - and these forms are not considered impolite. On the other hand, when addressing an unknown adult person, they express their politeness by saying: “Excuse me, please”, “Tell me, please”, - which corresponds to the norms of the German language as well.

When Russians want to utter their benevolent attitude towards relatives or friends, they often use the diminutive form of a word, showing their positive emotional disposition: “Танечка” (diminutive form of the name “Tania”), “мамочка” (diminutive of “мама” – “mom”) “сыночек” (from “сын” - son), “доченька” (from “дочь” - daughter), “лапочка” (translated into English like “sweetheart”).

S.G. Ter-Minasova noticed that “The worse a people’s prosperity in different areas, the more noticeable their striving towards beautiful... or just nice, be it clothes, fragrance or furniture – it does not matter. Severity of life has been reflected not only in the big amount of cuss words in the language (Russian), but surprisingly there developed a big love for diminutive words and for active usage of special politeness forms. People were buying and reading not just *книги* (books) but rather *книжечки* (diminutive of “books”), they were eating *огурчики*, *помидорчики* (diminutive of “cucumbers” and “tomatoes”)” (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

The German language has as well its own diminutive suffixes: *chen* and *lein* (“Häuschen” — diminutive of “house”, “Schäflein” — diminutive of “sheep”) But they are more often used when addressing children or in fairy-tales.

Unlike in Russia, in Germany it is common practice to greet and say goodbye to each other in public places, for example, at the cash register or in a café. Especially elderly people are accustomed to greeting all their acquaintances, including people that they just meet regularly near their house. Germans say “Lieber einmal zu viel gegrüßt als einmal zu wenig” (It’s better to greet one time too much, than vice versa). But as well there are situations when Russian people would always say “Hello!” whereas Germans could leave it out. When German students meet their teacher in a school corridor, sometimes they are too “shy” to say hello or they think it is

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