

If John were Ivan: Would he fail in reading? Dyslexia & dysgraphia in Russian

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Outline (as prescribed)

- The Russian language
- Literacy in Russia (Russian Federation)
- Dyslexia in Russia
 - Definition
 - Identification
 - Policy
- Examples of good practice
 - Teaching reading/language arts
 - In regular schools
 - In specialized settings
 - Encouraging children to learn

Russian Federation



The Russian Language



- 160 ethnic groups, 100 languages
- Russian

• Within the Russian Federation

- Dominant (98.2% of the population), Tatar (3.6%), Ukrainian (1.2%)
- Homogeneous throughout Russia

• Across the world

- The most geographically widespread language of Eurasia
- The most widely spoken Slavic language (from Old East Slavic, 10th century; Cyrillic)

The Russian Language

(6 Characteristics to note)

1. Russian orthography is relatively regular
 - It contains a number of deviations from the 1:1 grapheme–phoneme correspondence
 - Phonologically mostly transparent
 - Palatalization
 - кров “krof” (shelter), but кровь “krof” (blood)
 - вес “v’es” (weight), but весь “v’es” (all)
 - Morphologically motivated deviations
 - Morpheme & syllable based
 - Exceptions
2. Russian is characterized by high morphemic distinctiveness/discreetness
 - Any morphemic variations are represented by distinct graphemes
 - друг “drug” (friend), but друзья “družja” (friends)
 - Russian is
 - Highly phonemic
 - Highly morphologically complex
 - Complicated word formation and conjugation and declension patterns that involve morphemic fusion, morphological syncretism and shifting stress patterns, as well as phonological alternations and deletions

The Russian Language

(6 Characteristics to note)

3. Russian has complex syllable structure
 - frequent multiple consonant clusters and syllables as complex as CCCCCVC
 - вскрыть “Vskryt” (open up)
4. In Russian, any order of the subject, verb and object is possible
 - the reader has to rely on inflectional distinctions between words to extract the grammatical roles
 - reading comprehension is not aided by the word order and relies entirely on being able to successfully decode the words, which adds an additional Challenge for a beginning reader

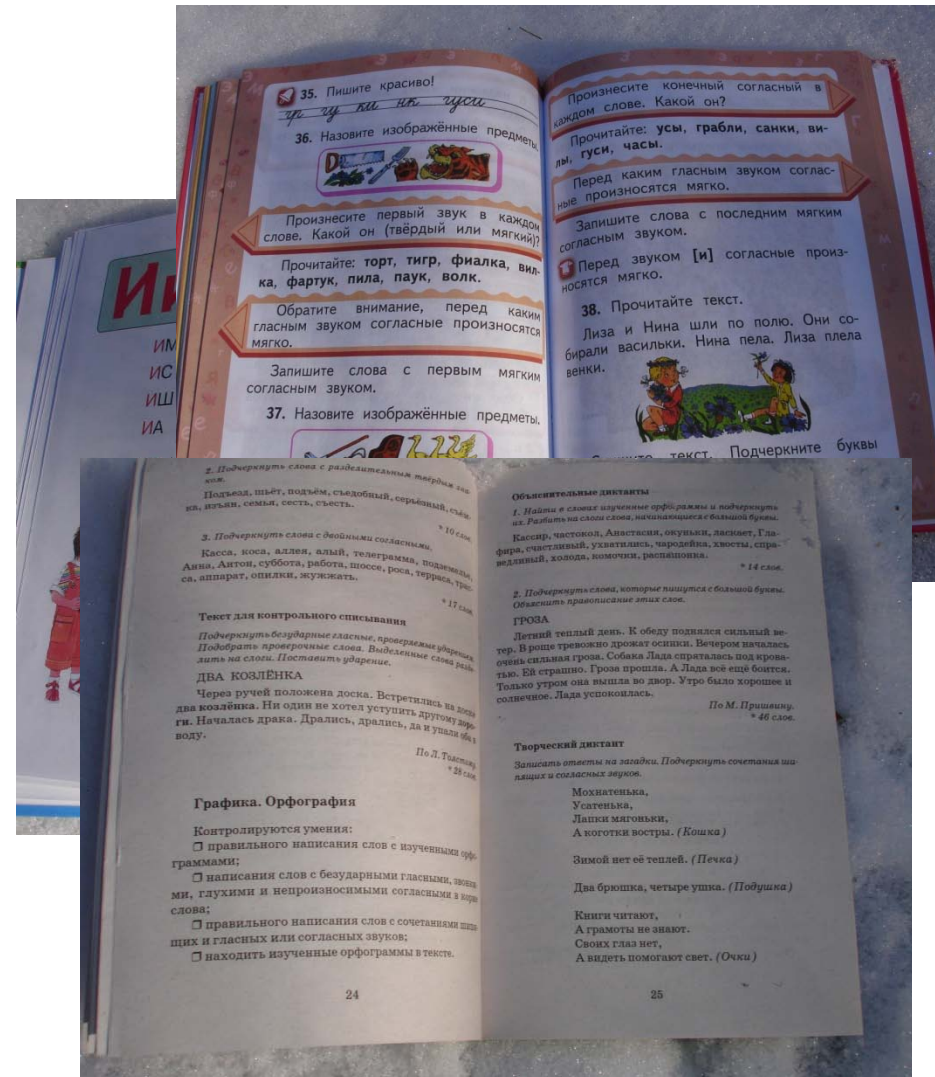
The Russian Language

(6 Characteristics to note)

5. In Russian, there is a distinction between accuracy and fluency
 - Developing fluency is not impeded by a high degree of irregularity, and measuring fluency and speed is not complicated by a high rate of reading inaccuracy in novice readers
 - Fluency is a good indicator of individual differences in reading acquisition
6. In Russian, accuracy and fluency of reading do not seem to be related to IQ, whereas indicators of comprehension—do. Any order of the subject, verb and object is possible
 - The IQ-reading (but comprehension) discrepancy is not valid for Russian

Stages/Characteristics of Typical Reading and Spelling Acquisition in Russian

- Analytical-synthetic teaching of reading and spelling
 - Phonological representations of words (sounding out words)
 - Alphabet/Syllable-based
 - Fluency-driven
 - Orthography-oriented



Signs of Atypical Reading and Spelling Acquisition in Russian

- Immature reading
- Low speed of reading
- Lack of accuracy
- Double reading and guessing
- Lack of comprehension

Developmental Dyslexia in Russia

- As a “medical” (pediatric, neurological, psychiatric) diagnosis
 - Focus on labeling
 - The tradition goes back to the 1930s
 - Alexia & agraphia
 - Re-surfaced in 1970s
 - Mental retardation
 - Developmental delays
 - » Задержка психического развития (ZPR)
 - Syndrome within a disorder
- As a “pedagogical” problem
 - Focus of remediation
 - The tradition goes back to the 1940s
 - Is continued in today’s research & practice
 - Defectology
 - Logopedia
 - Special educational/psychological condition
 - » Inherent developmental links between difficulties in the acquisition of spoken and written language
 - » Dyslexia vs. (and) dysgraphia

The Many Face of Dyslexia in Russia



A Russian Reading/Spelling Quilt

- Нарушение чтения и письма (Violation)
- Трудности при обучению чтению и письму (difficulties)
- Проблемы в обучении (problems)
- Неспособность (специфическая неспособность) к обучению чтению и письму (disability/inability)
- Дислексия и дисграфия (dyslexia & dysgraphia)



Dyslexia

- A partial specific impairment (a **violation**) of the process of reading, which is caused by the immaturity of higher mental functions and is manifested in repeated consistent errors

(Logopedia, 2007)

- A condition, manifested in the consistent, specific **inability** to master the skill of reading, in spite of adequate intellectual and speech and language functioning and optimal schooling, in the absence of auditory and visual deficit. The core deficit in dyslexia is the inability to master syllable construction/deconstruction and the automatized recognition of whole words. Dyslexia is often manifested in deficient comprehension of written materials. The source of this condition is the challenged brain-based processes that form the functional basis of reading

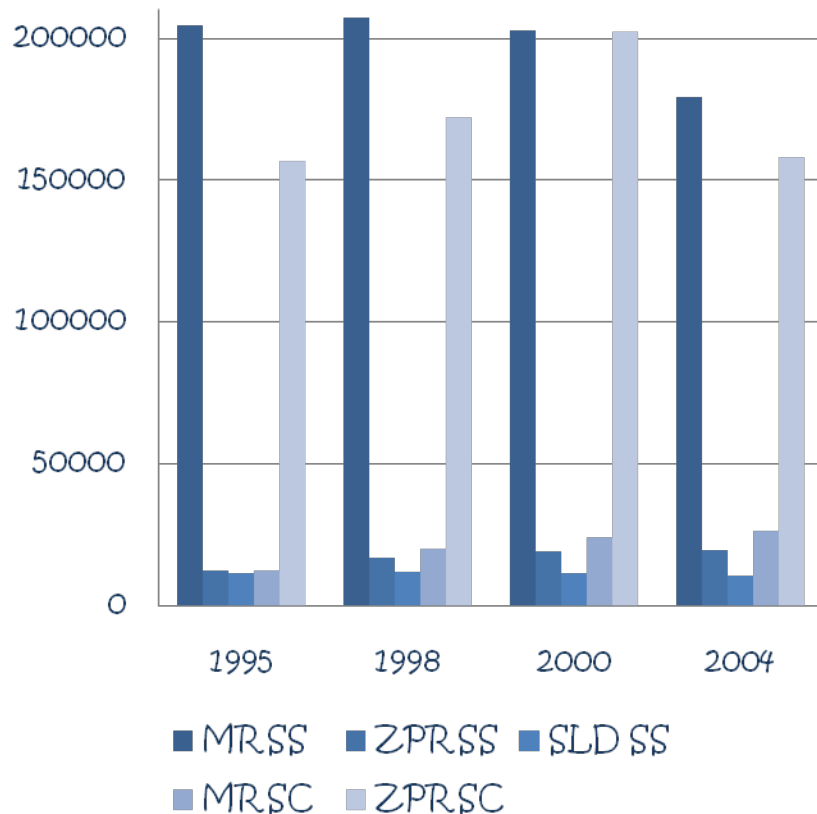
(Kornev, 1995, pp. 31-32)

Special Education in Russia

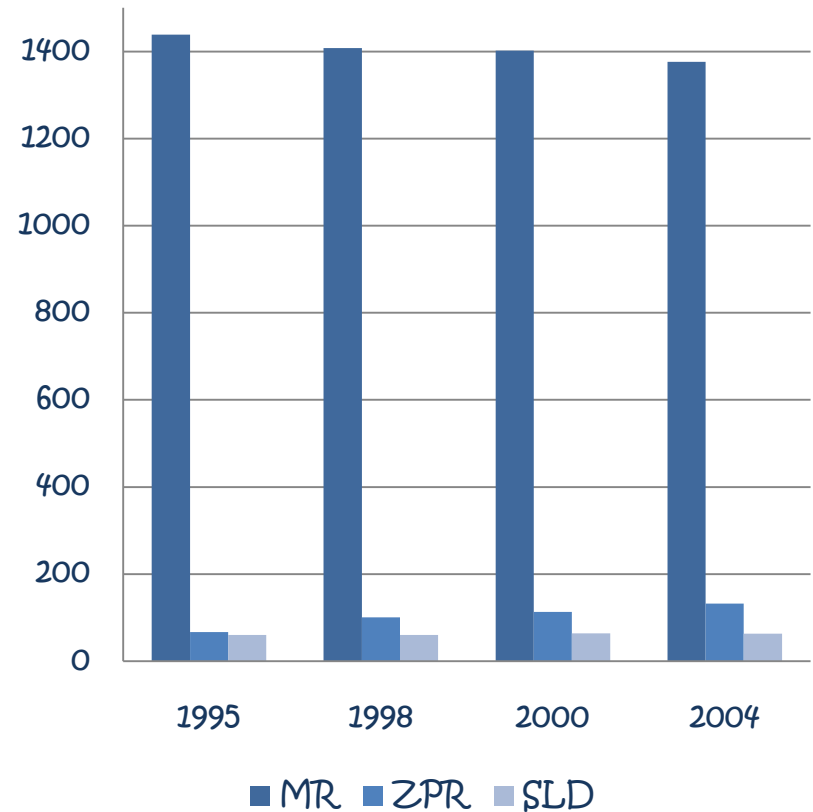
- From to Закон СССР о Всеобуче (1930, *Education for All Act*) to Закон Российской Федерации Об образовании (2001-2003, *The Education Law of the Russian Federation*)
 - deafness
 - hearing impairments
 - blindness
 - Visual problems
 - **severe speech and language disabilities**
 - severe motor development problems (e.g., Cerebral palsy and scoliosis)
 - **ZPR**
 - mental retardation

Special Education in Russia

Number of Students in Specialized Schools/Classrooms



Number of Specialized Schools



Professional Support

- Individual support in a specialized/ regular school
 - Defectologist, logoped (SSP), psychologist
 - Group support in a specialized/regular school
 - Defectologist, logoped (SSP), psychologist
 - School district centers
 - Various professionals
 - Psychiatric clinics
 - Neurologist, psychiatrist, psychologist
 - Research centers
 - Defectologist, logoped (SSP), psychologist
 - Private practice
-
- High demand (at least 5-7%)

Examples of Good Practice



Accommodations for Individuals with Dyslexia in Russia

- not having to read aloud in front of the class;
- not being penalized for poor handwriting or spelling;
- using a dictionary in a classroom;
- having more time to complete written assignments;
- substituting written assignments with oral assignments

granted at teachers' discretion

guaranteed by law
obtaining professional help (grades 1-4)

- using a keyboard/computer for written assignments;
- using a recorder to capture the content of oral presentations in place of taking notes;
- being allowed to start a foreign language later or not at all;
- hearing questions read aloud by the examiner before preparing a written response;
- answering certain questions, for example in foreign languages, orally

not granted
(or even considered)

Much to do....

- No Law about special education
- Dyslexia (dysgraphia), as a Category, is not mentioned in a single legal document pertaining to the rights to free appropriate public education...
- Multiple relevant laws (handicap, disability, education), but not clear specific regulations (and, thus, multiple violations)
- 2001: President—Attorney General—Vice Premier Minister on social issues (Valentina Matvienko): “the chilling data” on the violation of the laws

Yet...Unique Features of Russian Literacy Tradition

- *Умники и Умницы* (Clever boys and girls)
- Since 1992
- Based on the knowledge of literature
- Prize—admission to one of the most prestigious colleges of Russia (МГИМО), n=250
- 10,000 participants every year
- Saturday at 8:50am
- The best TV program for children



And many-many-many
other programs