

Teaching Grammatical Gender in Russian as Foreign Language to Spanish Learners: a Review and Didactic Recommendations

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Abstract

Previous studies report that grammatical gender causes difficulties for learners of second (L2) and foreign languages (FL), especially for those students whose first language does not possess this grammatical characteristic. Although Spanish and Russian share gender feature, Russian has a more complex gender system which may be difficult to acquire for Spanish-speaking students. Given that it is not clear what explicit instructions Spanish students of FL Russian receive during the acquisition process and not numerous research that study this issue, in this paper we aim to analyse three elementary level textbooks usually used to teach Russian as FL in Spain as for their presentation of grammatical gender. The textbook analysis revealed differences between the presentation of noun endings of each gender and the activities employed in practicing gender agreement. Notable similarities between three textbooks were found in their lack of: i) natural and grammatical gender distinction, ii) noun endings frequency statistics, iii) explicit reference to the Spanish gender system. The didactic recommendations that emerge from the present study are the following: the explicit instructions should focus on the distinction between natural and grammatical gender, the reference to Spanish gender and the most relevant endings for non-canonical nouns, and noun endings frequency statistics should be provided.

Keywords

Grammatical gender; teaching grammatical gender; Russian as foreign language (FL); textbooks.

Enseñar el género gramatical en ruso como lengua extranjera a los hispanohablantes: una revisión y recomendaciones didácticas

Resumen

Las investigaciones previas indican que el género gramatical provoca dificultades a los aprendices de segundas lenguas (L2) y de lenguas extranjeras (LE), especialmente a aquellos estudiantes cuya primera lengua no presenta esta característica gramatical. A pesar de que el español y el ruso comparten la característica de género, el ruso tiene un sistema más complejo que pueda resultar difícil para su adquisición por parte de los estudiantes hispanohablantes. Dado que desconocemos qué instrucciones explícitas reciben los aprendices hispanohablantes de ruso como LE durante el proceso de aprendizaje y un número relativamente pequeño de los estudios que investigan esta cuestión, en este artículo pretendemos analizar tres libros de texto de nivel principiante que se utilizan habitualmente para enseñar ruso como LE en España en cuanto a su presentación del género gramatical. El análisis de los libros de texto ha revelado algunas diferencias en la presentación de las terminaciones de sustantivos y en las actividades empleadas para practicar la concordancia de género gramatical. Se encontraron similitudes entre los tres libros de texto en cuanto a la falta de: i) distinción entre el género natural y el género gramatical, ii) estadísticas de frecuencia de terminaciones de sustantivos, iii) referencia explícita al sistema de género en español. Las recomendaciones didácticas que surgen a partir del presente estudio son las siguientes: la instrucción explícita debe centrarse en la distinción entre el género natural y el gramatical, se debería proporcionar la referencia al género en español, a las terminaciones más relevantes de sustantivos no canónicos y estadísticas de frecuencias de terminaciones de sustantivos.

Palabras clave

Género gramatical; enseñar el género gramatical; ruso como lengua extranjera (LE); libros de texto.

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1. Introduction

Gender is a morphosyntactic feature that is represented differently across languages. Russian distinguishes between three genders – masculine, feminine and neuter, whereas Spanish has a two-way gender system (Corbett 1991; Harris 1991; Hockett 1958). Previous studies on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) report that gender agreement is a persistent problem for many second language (L2) learners, even when their first language (L1) has grammatical gender (Ellis, Conradie & Huddleston 2012; Grüter, Lew-Williams & Fernald 2012; Martoccio 2019; Meisel 2009; Montrul et al. 2008; Ogneva, 2022; Quinn 2018).

There are several hypotheses which aim to explain the difficulty that L2 learners face when acquiring this grammatical feature. One of them is the Failed Functional Features Hypotheses (FFFH) (Hawkins & Chan 1997). This hypothesis suggests that L2 learners cannot fully acquire gender if their L1 does not present this feature, since they already passed the critical period and, therefore, are not able to access Universal Grammar (UG). On the other hand, according to the Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse 1996), L2 learners never lose complete access to UG. Thus, L2 learners are able to fully acquire grammatical gender (Alarcón 2010; Bruhn de Garavito & White 2002).

As argued by Ruiz Martín (2004), many English-speaking students of Spanish as L2 continue experiencing problems with gender agreement even when they have already acquired more complex features of Spanish, such as the subjunctive mood and the past tenses. Furthermore, the author mentions that many students claim that they do not remember receiving explicit instructions on grammatical gender assignment and agreement. It may seem that teaching Russian grammatical gender to Spanish-speaking students would not suppose difficulty, since learners already possess the underlying knowledge of gender. That is, students know that each noun (even inanimate) is classified as masculine, feminine or neuter, as they have this distinction in their L1. However, previous research shows that Spanish-speaking learners of Russian as FL present problems with gender. For instance, Golikov (2008) mentions that learners frequently ignore the existence of neuter gender and, therefore, commit mistakes when establishing gender assignment and agreement. Another problematic area pointed out by Golikov (2008) are nouns which have the same ending in both languages (e.g., -o) but are assigned different genders in Spanish and in Russian (e.g., *vino* ‘wine’ is neuter in Russian and masculine in Spanish). Moreover, Ogneva (2019) analysed errors in written works of Spanish-speaking students of Russian of A2 level. It was found that gender agreement errors constitute almost 21% of all.

Therefore, it appears that the textbooks and other teaching materials disregard this grammatical feature to some extent. The main aim of this study is, thus, to review current methodologies of teaching Russian grammatical gender to Spanish-speaking students and to propose some didactic recommendations that may be useful for teachers of Russian as FL. To achieve that, we first provide an overview of the system of grammatical gender in Russian and in Spanish, highlighting the main similarities and

differences between them. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we then proceed to describe the context of teaching and analyse the textbooks used to teach Russian to Spanish-speaking students, specifically with regard to their explicit instruction of grammatical gender. Didactic recommendations are presented in Section 3 before concluding the article in Section 4.

2. Grammatical gender in Russian and in Spanish

Gender is a grammatical feature that can substantially modify a sentence. That is, based on the gender of a noun, any dependent item will adapt one morphological form or another, as observed in the examples (1). In (1a), feminine noun *devuška* 'girl' triggers feminine agreement with the preceding adjective *vysokaja* 'tall' and with the verb *zašla* 'came in'. Similarly, in (1b) and (1c) both adjective and verbs are modified to masculine and neuter according to noun's gender. This phenomenon is known as agreement (Corbett 1991, 2006).

- (1) a. *vysok-aja devuška zašla v komnatu*
 tall-F girl-F entered-F in room
 'a tall girl entered the room'
- b. *vysok-ij paren' zašel v komnatu*
 tall-M boy-M entered-M in room
 'a tall boy entered the room'
- c. *bol's-oje zhivotnoje zašlo v komnatu*
 big-N animal-N entered-N in room
 'a big animal entered the room'

Gender in Russian is correlated with the case system (Corbett 1991). Nouns form four inflectional paradigms which are marked phonologically. Nouns of declensional type I are masculine, nouns of declensional types II and III are feminine, and nouns of declensional type IV are neuter. There are certain differences in declension of animate and inanimate nouns (of the I and the III declensional type) in accusative case. This is summarized in Table 1. As it can be observed in this table, masculine nouns usually end in a consonant, feminine nouns end in -a or a palatalized consonant, and neuter nouns usually have -o ending. Therefore, gender in Russian is largely predictable from the morphological form of the noun in nominative case.

Moreover, genders are not distributed equally in Russian. According to Corbett (1991), approximately 46% of all nouns in Russian are masculine, 41% are feminine and only 13% are neuter. However, in a corpus-based study Slioussar and Samojlova (2015) found a less equal distribution where masculine is clearly a default form. It was found that 47.6% of nouns are masculine, 31.1% are feminine and 18.4% are neuter.

Table 1. Russian case system *NOM: nominative, ACC: accusative, GEN: genitive, DAT: dative, INS: instrumental, LOC: locative

	I (inanimate) <i>stul</i> 'chair'	I (animado) <i>čelovek</i> 'persona- M'	II <i>noga</i> 'leg-F'	III (inanimate) <i>sol'</i> 'salt-F'	III (animate) <i>rys'</i> 'lince-F'	IV <i>oknó</i> 'window- N'
NOM*	<i>stul-∅</i>	<i>čelovek-∅</i>	<i>nog-a</i>	<i>sol'-∅</i>	<i>rys'-∅</i>	<i>vedr-o</i>
ACC	<i>stul-∅</i>	<i>čelovek-a</i>	<i>nog-u</i>	<i>sol'-∅</i>	<i>rys'-i</i>	<i>vedr-o</i>
GEN	<i>stul-a</i>	<i>čelovek-a</i>	<i>nog-i</i>	<i>sol'-i</i>	<i>rys'-i</i>	<i>vedr-a</i>
DAT	<i>stul-u</i>	<i>čelovek-u</i>	<i>nog-e</i>	<i>sol'-i</i>	<i>rys'-i</i>	<i>vedr-u</i>
INS	<i>stul-om</i>	<i>čelovek-om</i>	<i>nog-oj</i>	<i>sol'-u</i>	<i>rys'-u</i>	<i>vedr-om</i>
LOC	<i>stul-e</i>	<i>čelovek-e</i>	<i>nog-e</i>	<i>sol'-i</i>	<i>rys'-i</i>	<i>vedr-e</i>

In Spanish, all nouns are either masculine or feminine (Harris 1991). Gender distribution is quite equal: approximately 52% of nouns in Spanish are masculine and 45% are feminine (Bull 1965). Generally, Spanish presents a strong correlation between noun's ending and its gender. Previous research claim that about 99.89% of nouns ending in -o are masculine, whereas the ending -a corresponds to feminine gender in 96.3% (Teschner & Russel 1984). Regarding agreement items, generally they are similar in Russian and in Spanish, e.g., adjectives, participles, pronouns and numbers (see Table 2). The main differences between two languages consist in the presence of gendered verbal forms in the past tense (*prišel / prišla / prišlo* 'he/she/it came') and the absence of definite and indefinite articles in Russian.

Table 2. Some differences between gender agreement items in Russian and Spanish

	Russian	Español
Definite and indefinite articles	-	el / la 'the-M/F', un / una 'a-M/F'
Adjectives	<i>krasivyy</i> / <i>krasivaja</i> 'beautiful-M/F'	<i>feo</i> / <i>fea</i> 'ugly-M/F'
Participles	<i>otpravlennyj</i> / <i>otpravlennaja</i> 'enviado/a'	<i>enviado</i> / <i>enviada</i>
Ordinal numbers	<i>pervyj</i> / <i>pervaja</i> 'primero/a'	<i>primero</i> / <i>primera</i>
Cardinal numbers	<i>dva</i> / <i>dve</i> 'dos-M/F'	<i>uno</i> / <i>una</i>
Pronouns	<i>čej</i> / <i>č'ja</i> 'cuyo/a'	<i>algún</i> / <i>alguna</i>
Verbal forms in the past tense	<i>sdelal</i> / <i>sdelala</i> / <i>sdelalo</i> 'hizo-M/F/N'.	-

In summary, compared to Spanish, gender system in Russian is more complex, as it presents three genders and a correlation with the case system. Nevertheless, there are certain similarities between two systems which may cause positive transfer and subsequently help students to acquire grammatical gender (e.g., -a ending in feminine nouns).

3. Context of teaching and textbook analysis

In Spain, Russian is taught and learnt at both university and non-university (i.e., language courses at the Official School of Languages) levels. Regarding university level, Russian language courses are available as a part of different bachelor's degrees, such as Translation and Interpretation degree, Modern Languages degree or Slavic Philology degree. Students enrolled in the degree in General Linguistics and Slavic Philology at the Complutense University of Madrid also are able to have classes of Russian as FL.

Non-university level also offers courses of Russian. One of those institutions are *Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas* (EOI; Official Schools of Languages). These are a national network of publicly funded language schools that can be found in most of the cities and towns. Thus, clearly, in these contexts we deal with learners who are well beyond the critical period, as defined by Lenneberg (1967), that is, Spanish-speaking learners of Russian as FL are usually adult learners who probably had no previous exposure (or very little) to Russian as foreign language.

The importance of teaching grammatical gender is highlighted in several official documents. On the one hand, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) states the importance of gender agreement knowledge as a part of the grammar competence (CEFR 2002, 112-113). *Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas* (Official Schools of Languages) also provide an official document with a planning of teaching Russian at different levels. For instance, Official School of Languages in A Coruña includes grammatical gender in specific grammatical contents of the *nivel básico* 'beginner level'¹. More specifically, students of Russian as FL are supposed to know three Russian genders (masculine, feminine and neuter), the general rule and some main exceptions (*EOI de A Coruña*, 37). Similarly, official planning of EOI of Zaragoza refers to gender in linguistic grammatical contents (*EOI de Zaragoza*, 14). Specifically, the students expected to know three genders of nouns, adjectives and pronouns.

The present section will analyse three textbooks, which are currently used to teach Russian as FL, specifically with regard to their explicit instruction of grammatical gender. We will only focus on teaching gender in nominative form. As it has been mentioned earlier, in the context of teaching Russian as FL in Spain, we are normally speaking about adult learners who had no previous (or very little) knowledge of this foreign language. This is an important point, since the textbooks are probably elaborated considering that issue. As we will see, in two out of three books, instructions

¹ *Nivel básico* refers to A2 of the CEFR.

are initially provided in Spanish, and many connections to similarities in Spanish vocabulary and grammar are made.

For the selection of the textbooks, we first analysed the offer of Russian language courses, focusing on the non-university level. Ten centres from different Spanish regions were identified and included in the list (see Table 3). We then proceeded to select the textbooks of the A1 level² taking into consideration the frequency of the use by different centres that teach Russian and the year of publication. Based on these criteria, we have chosen three textbooks: 1) "Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1" by Nogueira et al. (2003), 2) "Manual Curso completo de la lengua rusa" by Sánchez-Puig et al. (2005), both of these textbooks are used by three different centres; and 3) "Poehhali! A course for beginners. Part 1" by Černyšov and Černyšova (2019), which was identified as the most recent textbook.

Table 3. The list of centres that offer Russian language courses and the textbooks used in teaching

Centre	Textbook
Centro ruso en Granada	Černyšov, S., and Černyšova, A. (2019). <i>Poehhali! Načal'nyj kurs</i> . Zlatoust: Sankt-Peterburg.
EOI Alicante	Nogueira, V., Gorbatkina, M. Mercander, C. and Oganissian, M. (2003). <i>Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1</i> . Barcelona: Herder.
EOI A Coruña	Nogueira, V., Gorbatkina, M. Mercander, C. and Oganissian, M. (2003). <i>Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1</i> . Barcelona: Herder.
EOI Barcelona	Nogueira, V., Gorbatkina, M. Mercander, C. and Oganissian, M. (2003). <i>Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1</i> . Barcelona: Herder.
EOI Bilbao	Antonova, V., Nachabina, M., and Tolstych, A. (2017). <i>Doroga v Rossiyu. Nivel elemental</i> . San Petersburgo: Zlatoust.
EOI Madrid Jesús Maestro	Miller, L., Politova, L. V., and Rybakova, I. Y. (2017). <i>Zhili-byli</i> . San Petersburgo: Zlatoust.
EOI Málaga	Sánchez Puig, M., Drosdov Díez, T., Pérez Molero, P., Rojlenco, A., Statsyuk, B. and Usiatínskaya, I. (2005). <i>Curso complete de la lengua rusa</i> . Madrid: Ediciones Hispano Eslavas.
EOI Zaragoza	Leontieva, O., and Merechénkova, A. (2015). <i>Kak dela? Ruso para principiantes A1.1</i> . Barcelona: Herder Editorial.
Instituto de Idiomas Sevilla	Sánchez Puig, M., Drosdov Díez, T., Pérez Molero, P., Rojlenco, A., Statsyuk, B. and Usiatínskaya, I. (2005). <i>Curso complete de la lengua rusa</i> . Madrid: Ediciones Hispano Eslavas.
UNED Cursos de Idiomas	Sánchez Puig, M., Drosdov Díez, T., Pérez Molero, P., Rojlenco, A., Statsyuk, B. and Usiatínskaya, I. (2005). <i>Curso complete de la lengua rusa</i> . Madrid: Ediciones Hispano Eslavas.

3.1 Analysis of "Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1"

The first textbook we will focus on is "Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1" by Nogueira et al. (2003). The authors, in the book's introduction, state an emphasis on

² We have selected the A1 level textbooks, as it is when grammatical gender is first introduced.

developing communication skills (oral and written) so students are able to understand, speak and write about everyday life topics in Russian. The book contains twelve units which focus on different aspects of Russian language and culture, and grammatical gender assignment and agreement is covered in lesson one, two, three and six³.

Lesson one presents grammatical gender on the 13th page with a distinction made between *on* 'he', *ona* 'she' and *oni* 'they' (see Figure 2). This explanation accompanies an exercise where students have to decide which pronoun they should use in a sentence, as illustrated in (2). As observed, gender choice is based on the differentiation between animate nouns in singular form (i.e. female names in 2a) and plural form (i.e. two female and male names in 2b)⁴. The distinction between masculine, feminine and neuter nouns is not yet explained in this textbook.

(2) a. -*Eto Tamara?*

This Tamara?

-*Da, eto ona.*

Yes, this she.

b. -*Eto Anton i Alla?*

This Anton and Alla?

-*Da, eto oni.*

'Yes, this they.

The figure illustrates the explanation of grammatical gender in Russian. It includes a cartoon illustration of a woman and a man, a dialogue exercise, and a table of nouns categorized by gender.

Dialogue exercise:

- Где Андрей?
- Вот он.

- Где ручка?
- Вот она́.

- Где карандаш?
- Вот он.

- Где Вера?
- Вот она́.

- Где радио?
- Вот оно́.

ОН мужской род	ОНА женский род	ОНО средний род
стол	ручка	слово
карандаш	семья	море
портфель	фамилия	упражнение
музей	тетрадь	
дедушка		

Figure 2. Explanation of grammatical gender in the textbook "Manual ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1" (extracted from Nogueira et al. 2003)

³ These are introductory lessons where initial concepts are introduced. As gender systems is interrelated with the case system, in further lessons changes in gender endings are presented when a noun is used in any case but nominative.

⁴ It is important to highlight that nouns in plural do not present gender feature.

Lesson two presents grammatical gender in a task focused on asking and answering where an object or a person is, as shown in the example (3). Three genders are introduced via corresponding pronouns.

- (3) a. -*Gde karandaš?*
 'Where pencil-M?'
 -*Vot on.*
 Here he.
- b. -*Gde ručka?*
 'Where pen-F?'
 -*Vot ona.*
 Here she.
- c. -*Gde radio?*
 'Where radio-N?'
 -*Vot ono.*
 Here it.

Following that, a table is presented in which each column shows a gender with some examples, as in Table 4. Examples provided in this table present specific endings, typical for each gender. For instance, the majority of the masculine nouns end in consonants, feminine nouns tend to end in -a, whereas neuter nouns usually have -o ending. Nonetheless, it can be rather confusing that some of the gendered endings coincide in masculine and in feminine (e.g. *portfel'* 'backpack' and *tetrad'* 'notebook'). Thus, the teacher would need to explain these exceptions of the rule.

Table 4. Grammatical gender system in Russian
 (adapted from Nogueira et al. 2003)

<i>On</i> 'he' masculine gender	<i>Ona</i> 'she' feminine gender	<i>Ono</i> 'it' neuter gender
<i>stol</i> 'table'	<i>ručka</i> 'pen'	<i>slovo</i> 'word'
<i>portfel'</i> 'backpack'	<i>sem'ja</i> 'family'	<i>more</i> 'sea'
<i>muzej</i> 'museum'	<i>tetrad'</i> 'notebook'	
<i>deduška</i> 'grand father'		

Grammatical gender assignment exercises are then provided for students to work on (p.32 and p.236). The first task is quite similar to the explanation above. It provides a table (with three columns, each gender represents a column) and a list of words which students have to put in a column where it belongs, according to its gender. Some of the words in this list are repeated from the explanation table (e.g. *deduška* 'grandfather', *tetrad'* 'notebook'). An additional activity is available in the end of the textbook and forms a part of *Cuaderno de ejercicios 1* 'Notebook of exercises 1'. Students are provided with a picture of a room with a lot of different objects and have to describe it using

pronouns *on/ona/ono*. Students are not given an instruction to follow but probably they have to create a simulation of a dialogue illustrated in (3).

Lesson two also provides gender related information. Specifically, it focuses on personal pronouns. Three columns, similar to those in Table 3, present personal pronouns in masculine, feminine and neuter forms. For example, *moj, moja, mojo* 'my-M/F/N'. To practice gendered pronouns, the authors propose two exercises where students are supposed to ask who an object belongs to and then answer this question. This is illustrated in example (4).

- (4) *čej eto karandaš? eto tvoj karandaš?*
 whose-M this pencil? this your-M pencil?
 'whose is this pencil? is it your pencil?'

Lesson three presents gendered adjectives (p. 45). These are illustrated with some pictures. For instance, a picture of a city with a descriptive phrase below *kakoj krasivyj gorod* 'what-M a beautiful-M city-M'. Following that, a table is shown which contains examples of gendered adjectives. Two exercises are given to practice it. In the first one, students have to make questions from a model, as in the example (5).

- (5) *eto očen' interesnyj žurnal*
 'this very interesting-M journal-M'
kakoj eto žurnal? očen' interesnyj.
 'what this journal? very interesting-M'.

Gendered adjectives are also briefly mentioned in lesson ten. In this case, adjectives refer to languages, for example, *anglijskij* 'English' or *rususkij* 'Russian'. The authors present this topic in several advertisements of language schools where different languages are listed. Following that, in a table, the authors state two verbs that can be used with these adjectives.

The presentation of gender in "Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1" by Nogueira et al. (2003) contains both positive and negative components. One of the issues of this textbook is the fact that the authors do not include explicit differences and similarities between Spanish and Russian. This may be beneficial in order to force positive transfer between two languages (e.g., -a ending is associated with the feminine gender) and avoid negative transfer (e.g., -o ending is associated with masculine gender). The authors only present one masculine animate noun (i.e. *deduška*) which is a non-canonical noun. As for the feminine gender, no animate noun is mentioned. The textbook does succeed, however, by providing a relatively thorough list of noun endings. It is essential to reinforce learning non-canonical endings, especially those of feminine and neuter nouns, as previous research suggests that L2 learners tend to assign masculine gender to nouns with non-canonical gender (Bruhn de Garavito & White 2002; Franceschina 2001). This way, it may be useful for students to establish an idea that nouns with endings other than -a or -o can also be feminine and neuter. In fact, it would be beneficial for the authors to provide specific and factual information on the

usage frequency of the masculine, feminine and neuter endings. Providing statistics may help to build more logical and more structural knowledge on gender in Russian.

A final issue with “Ruso para hispanohablantes. Nivel 1” is the lack of activities related to gender agreement with non-canonical animate nouns, such as *deduška* ‘granddad’. This can be considered as a significant flaw, as it may lead students to wrong association of masculine nouns ending in -a with feminine gender.

3.2. Analysis of “Poekhali!”

The second textbook we will focus on is “Poekhali! A course for beginners. Part 1” by Černyšov and Černyšova (2019). This textbook, as stated by the authors in the introduction, is intended for native speakers of different European languages.

The book contains thirty units which focus on different aspects of the Russian language and culture. Grammatical gender assignment and agreement is covered, mainly, in lesson two, three, ten, eighteen and nineteen. Lesson two presents grammatical gender on the 10th page with a distinction made between *он* ‘he’, *оно* ‘it’ and *она* ‘she’. The explanation is provided via several pictures which present objects of masculine, neuter and feminine gender, as well as two pictures of a boy and a girl (see Figure 3).

m.	n.	f.
он	оно	она
—	-О / -Е	-А / -Я
студѐнт	метрО	студѐнткА
-ь	—	семьЯ
день		-ь
		ночь

Figure 3. Explanation of grammatical gender in the textbook “Poekhali! A course for beginners. Part 1” (extracted from Černyšov & Černyšova 2019)

Following that, a table is given in which endings corresponding to each gender are shown (see Figure 3). Similar to what was observed in Nogueira et al. (2003), no specific explanation is provided as for the overlap of some endings. Thus, it can be not clear enough for students. Lesson three mentions the use of gender with different professions. First of all, the authors present a table with two columns in which masculine and feminine forms of nouns are shown (e.g., *aktijor* ‘actor-M’ and *aktrisa*

‘actor-F’). These nouns are formed via suffixation. Secondly, another table is given in which common gender nouns are provided (e.g., *povar* ‘chef’, *soldat* ‘soldier’).

Next lessons cover the use of gendered pronouns (lesson ten) and adjectives (lesson eighteen and nineteen). Gendered pronouns are presented in a table (p. 51) and accompanied with a series of pictures where different dialogues are shown (see example 4). Following that, students are to complete an activity where they are supposed to choose a gendered pronoun in a phrase, similar to that in (6).

- (6) -*Č’ja eto mašina? Vaša?*
 ‘whose-F car is it? yours-F?’
 -*Net, ne moja.*
 ‘no, not mine-F’.

Gendered adjectives are first given in lesson eighteen. Similar to the previous units, gender information is given in a table where examples of different forms of the adjective *kakoj* ‘which’ are listed (see Table 5). Following that, the authors provide an example of a masculine, feminine, neuter and plural adjective with a corresponding noun (e.g. *krasivyj dom* ‘nice-M house-M’ and *krasivaja mašina* ‘nice-F car-F’). The authors also provide a list of antonyms, for instance, *horošij – plohoj* ‘good-bad’.

Table 5. Gendered adjectives (adapted from Černyšov & Černyšova 2019)

<i>on</i> ‘he’ masculine gender	<i>ono</i> ‘it’ neuter gender	<i>ona</i> ‘she’ feminine gender	<i>oni</i> ‘they’ plural form
<i>kakoj?</i>	<i>kakoje?</i>	<i>kakaja?</i>	<i>kakije?</i>
-yj / ij	-oje/jeje	-aja/jaja	-yje/ije
-oj			

There are four proposed activities for this part. Firstly, students are supposed to fill in a blank space a correct form of the adjective *kakoj* ‘which’, as illustrated in the example (7).

- (7) a. _____ *restoran?*
 _____ restaurant-M?
 b. _____ *strana?*
 _____ country-F?

Secondly, students are asked to describe several pictures using opposite adjectives, e.g., *novyj – staryj* ‘new – old’. Thirdly, learners are required to answer some questions using gendered adjective, for example, *Rossija – malen’kaja strana?* ‘Is Russia a small country?’. Finally, students are supposed to link a list of adjectives related to some countries (e.g., *soedinjonnyj* ‘united’ or *rossijskij* ‘Russian’) with a list of countries (e.g., *štaty* ‘states’ or *federatsija* ‘federation’).

Lesson nineteen reinforces the knowledge of gendered adjectives with the superlative form of these. Superlative forms are given in four examples in each gender and in plural form, e.g., *samyj bolšoj gorod Rossii – Moskva* ‘the biggest city of Russia is Moscow’. This is subsequently practiced in two speaking tasks. More adjectives related exercises are provided in this unit. For example, students have to make pair of nouns and adjectives: *sport – sportivnyj* ‘sport – sporty’.

The presentation of gender in “Poekhali!” by Černyšov and Černyšova (2019) contains both positive and negative components. Given that “Poekhali!” is intended for native speakers of different European languages, it is not surprising to find no contrastive information between the Russian gender system and any other. Similar to the previous textbook, although “Poekhali!” successfully provides a comprehensive list of noun endings, there is no specific mention of gender distribution across nouns. One of the most positive aspects of this textbook is the fact that the authors propose a rather extensive list of activities focused on gender and gender agreement. Thus, students receive more materials that can help them to work on gender. A notable component of the explanation of gender in “Poekhali!” is the decision to include common gender nouns.

3.3. Analysis of “Curso completo de la lengua rusa”

Another textbook of our interest is “Manual Curso completo de la lengua rusa” by Sánchez-Puig et al. (2005). All explanations in this textbook are provided in Spanish. Grammatical gender assignment and agreement is covered, mainly, in units two, three, four, five and seven. Gender information is presented as a part of general characteristic of nouns, along with number and case in unit two (p. 20).

Following that, the authors provide noun endings in each gender (see Figure 4). All examples of nouns are given with a translation to Spanish which can be useful in order to establish differences between two languages. The list of noun endings is larger in comparison with the other analysed textbooks, i.e. the authors comment on non-canonical endings such as *-iy* for masculine gender (*sanatorij* ‘sanatorium’), *-ija* for feminine (*armija* ‘army’) or *-ije* for neuter (*znenije* ‘knowledge’). Moreover, ten specific neuter nouns ending in *-mja* are also listed (e.g., *vremja* ‘time’). The authors also mention epicene nouns that have the same gender for male and female referents.

Unit two also makes reference to the possessive pronouns. These are presented in a table for three genders, e.g. *moj dom* ‘my-M house-M’, *moja mat* ‘my-F mother-F’ and *moje okno* ‘my-N window-N’.

1. El sustantivo: características generales. El género de los sustantivos

1.1. Las características principales del sustantivo son:
 •Género: masculino, femenino y neutro; se determinan por la desinencia.
 •Número: singular y plural; se determina por la desinencia.
 •Caso: el sustantivo ruso se declina, tiene 6 casos.

1.2. Son masculinos los sustantivos terminados en:
 consonante – студент estudiante

-й – музей museo
 -ий – санаторий sanatorio
 -ь – день día
 -а, -я – мужчина hombre, дядя tío

1.3. Son femeninos los sustantivos terminados en:
 -а – роза rosa
 -я – земля tierra
 -ия – армия ejército
 -ь – дверь puerta
 -жь, -чь, -шь, -щь – ночь noche, вещь cosa

1.4. Son neutros los sustantivos acabados en:
 -о – окно ventana, кино cine

-е – море mar, поле campo
 -ие – знание conocimiento

10 sustantivos en -мя (имя nombre, умя ubre, время tiempo, бремя peso, пламя llama, племя tribu, темя ocupación, семя semilla, знамя bandera, стремя estribo).

1.5. Son del género epiceno, o común para femenino y masculino, algunas palabras que designan cualidades o características humanas:
 неряха desastrado/a, sucio/a плакса llorica

Género de los sustantivos

Masculino		Femenino		Neutro	
стол, студент	сопс.	комната	-а	окно	-о
словарь	-ь	тетрадь	-ь	поле	-е
трамвай	-ий	деревня	-я	ружье	-ё
санаторий	-ий	армия	-ия	знание	-ие
дядя,	-я	рожь	-жь	семья, племя,	-мя
мужчина, юноша,	-а	мышь	-шь	вымя, темя,	
дедушка		вещь	-щь	пламя, знамя,	
		ночь	-чь	время, бремя,	
				стремля, имя	

Figure 4. Explanation of grammatical gender in the textbook “Curso completo de la lengua rusa” (extracted from Sánchez-Puig et al. 2005)

Lesson three focuses on the demonstrative pronouns. Specifically, the authors present them in a list of sentences with their Spanish translation, as illustrated in example (8). A brief explanation of the differences between (8a) and (8b) is also given. Specifically, the authors state that in (8a) *eto* ‘this’ is the subject of the sentence, whereas in (8b) the subject is *kabinet* ‘office’.

(8) a. *eto moj kabinet* => este es mi despacho ‘this is my office’.

b. *etot kabinet moj* => este despacho es mío ‘this office is mine’.

The presentation of gendered adjectives provided in lesson four is similar to that given in Table 4. The authors mention all possible endings of the adjectives and also comment on the fact that Russian adjective have two forms: a long and a short form (compare two form of the adjective ‘great’: *velikij* and *velik*). Furthermore, it is also outlined that adjectives can be substantivized, and a comparative information between Russian and Spanish is provided. In lesson five the authors present the ordinal numbers (from 1 to 20) that change according to noun’s gender that they accompany. Each ordinal number is listed with its corresponding form in masculine, feminine, neuter or plural. Finally, lesson seven covers the topic on possessive pronouns. These are presented in a table with their Spanish equivalents.

Generally, this textbook provides a lot of theoretical information on the gender system in Russian. The authors also cover some aspects that other textbooks do not

mention, such as substantivized adjective, long and short form of adjective. Not so frequent noun endings in masculine, feminine or neuter gender are also given, e.g., *-ij*, *-ija*, *-ije*. The inclusion of this information may aid students in learning nouns with these less common endings. Moreover, the authors mention epicene nouns. They do, however, generalize common gender nouns and epicene nouns in one category. This is an arguable point, since these two types of nouns require different agreement (Corbett, 1991). Another positive aspect is the fact that the authors provide Spanish translations of some linguistic terms that might seem difficult for FL students.

One of the issues of “Manual Curso completo de la lengua rusa” by Sánchez-Puig et al. (2005) is the lack of activities on some explained grammatical aspects. For instance, no exercises are proposed to practice long and short forms of adjectives or substantivized adjectives. As a possible consequence of that, students may not fully learn this information. Similar to other analysed textbooks, no statistical information on gender distribution is provided, neither is found reference to grammatical gender in Spanish.

3.4 Summary

In conclusion, all three revised textbooks are quite similar regarding their explanation of grammatical gender. None of the textbooks explain what grammatical gender actually is, as grammatical feature. This may be explained by the fact that Spanish already present gender feature. However, the textbook “Poekhali! A course for beginners. Part 1” is intended for native speakers of different European languages, as mentioned by the authors. Generally, all three textbooks provide a similar description of grammatical gender system in Russian. “Curso Completo de la lengua rusa” (Sánchez-Puig et al. 2005) is the one that gives the fullest list of noun endings corresponding to each gender. Activities focused on gender assignment and agreement are quite similar in three textbooks.

All three textbooks we have revised in this paper show approximately the same number of lessons in which grammatical gender system in Russian is explained or mentioned. Specifically, “Ruso para hispanohablantes” explains gender in 4 units, corresponding to 33% of all lessons. In “Poekhali! A course for beginners. Part 1” 5 lessons are concerned with gender assignment and agreement, corresponding to 16.7% of all lessons. Finally, “Curso Completo de la Lengua Rusa” presents 5 lessons on this topic, corresponding to 20.8% of all didactic units. Furthermore, the textbooks differ referring to the number of proposed activities on gender agreement. “Ruso para hispanohablantes” provides 13 exercises, “Curso Completo de la Lengua Rusa” offers 13 activities and “Poekhali! A course for beginners. Part 1” proposed 24 exercises⁵. This is summarized in Figure 5.

⁵ Only gender activities in Nominative case were taken into account.

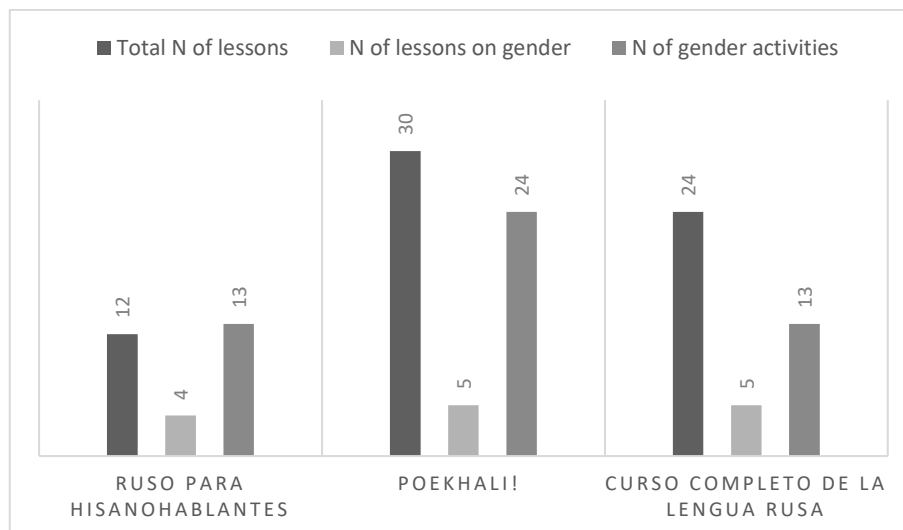


Figure 5. Total number of lessons in the textbook, number of lessons focused on grammatical gender and number of activities on gender agreement

The textbooks also differ in their reference, or lack thereof, to the system of gender in Spanish. “Poekhali! A course for beginners. Part 1” makes no mention of Spanish. It is, however, not quite surprising, as the textbook is intended for native speakers of different European languages. Similarly, none of the textbooks mentioned the frequency of the gender ending that they provide, so there is no statistical information in terms of how many Russian nouns have those endings. The textbooks do not make a special focus on non-canonical nouns that usually provoke difficulties to L2 learners (Alarcón 2011; Ogneva, 2022).

4. Didactic recommendations

Based upon the previous research examined in this paper, as well as the textbook analysis presented in the previous section, some recommendations can be made for Russian L2 teachers instructing learners whose L1 is Spanish. As this is a topic that has been identified as causing difficulties for L2 learners, it is important that teachers have a well-informed understanding of how to best present it. Efficient instructions will minimize the difficulty that students face when acquiring this grammatical feature in FL Russian. The didactic recommendations will be based on three main points: i) natural and grammatical gender, ii) noun frequency, iii) grammatical gender activities in comprehension and production.

First of all, given that gender system is strictly related to the case system, and the case system makes a distinction between animate and inanimate nouns (e.g., *vižu človeka* ‘I see a man-ACC and *vižu dom* ‘I see a house-ACC), it is important that students start distinguishing between these types of nouns from the very beginning. Secondly, as we have previously mentioned, it can be useful to provide students of Russian as FL with statistical information on distribution of grammatical gender across nouns. Learners of L2 and FL are reported to develop metalinguistic awareness, i.e., they are able to think

about the language they are learning (Montrul et al. 2008). Thus, teachers can inform students that 47.6% of nouns are masculine, 31.1% are feminine and 18.4% are neuter (Sliossar & Samojlova 2015). This way, the instruction is less vague and abstract. Moreover, there should be a stronger focus on non-canonical noun endings. If students are introduced to the information about non-canonical endings, in the future they are likely to commit less errors with these nouns and their gender.

Finally, regarding gender activities in comprehension and production, Montrul et al. (2008) found that L2 student learning grammatical gender make more errors in oral production. That is why one recommendation with regard to grammatical gender activities is that the teacher begins with comprehension related activities instead of production. Similarly, Alarcón (2011) found that a significant factor of L2 learners' difficulty with gender is the communication pressure that they experience in specific situations. Therefore, it is important to allow students to refer back to the explanation of grammatical gender in the textbook and minimize the pressure put on the students. Limiting pressure is possible by not grading homework assignments for accuracy rates until they have had enough exposure and time to practice gender and gender agreement.

5. Conclusion

The acquisition of grammatical gender in Russian can cause considerable difficulty for L1 Spanish speakers, given the complexity of gender system in Russian (Corbett, 1991), and the existing differences between Spanish and Russian. In fact, compared to Russian, Spanish's grammatical gender system is less extensive, as it only consists of two genders (Harris 1991; Hockett 1958). Russian, on the other hand, contains three genders and a complex correlation with the case system (Corbett 1991). Although only a few studies have explored grammatical gender acquisition in L2 Russian, previous research focused on this topic show that learners demonstrate incomplete acquisition even after years of exposure to the L2 (Franceschina 2001).

In this paper we have analysed the presentation of grammatical gender in three elementary textbooks that are usually used in teaching Russian as FL to Spanish-speaking learners in Spain. The analysis found that, although grammatical gender is presented in a similar manner in three textbooks, there are differences referring to the presentation of noun endings. There is certainly room for improvement in the way in which grammatical gender in FL Russian is taught to Spanish-speaking students. Given the difficulty that it has been reported to cause for L2 learners, it may be beneficial to modify these presentations.

As only a few studies are available with Spanish-speaking students of Russian as FL, it is important that future research focus on this grammatical feature, since much remains unknown about the manner in which L2 learners acquire grammatical gender, the difficulties they have in this process and the best manner to teach this feature.

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