Colloquial Russian between theory and practice: what is claimed and what is real?

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Abstract

This paper presents an extensive review of the research literature on Colloquial Russian (CR) in the past 50 years with an extra focus on the teaching of Russian as a foreign language (RFL). First, using Zemskaja's understanding of *russkaja razgovornaja reč'* (1973, 1979, 1987, 2011, 2016), the article offers an overview of CR's linguistic features and, second, it looks at the recommendations issued in the literature as to whether and when colloquial peculiarities should be taught—be it for receptive or productive communicative competence. Third, the paper presents the results of an empirical study, which was conducted to show how linguists, Russian instructors and teachers in German-speaking countries treat CR in their lectures and seminars on Russian linguistics as well as in secondary RFL classes and where their preferences lie. Based on the findings from this survey, the article then addresses what researchers preach and what practitioners teach and makes suggestions on how to narrow the gap between theory and practice, claim and reality.

Аннотация

Данная статья представляет собой подробный обзор научной литературы по русской разговорной речи (РРР) за последние 50 лет, уделяя особое внимание преподаванию русского языка как иностранного (РКИ). Во-первых, опираясь на понимание русской разговорной речи Е. Земской (1973, 1979, 1987, 2011, 2016), статья определяет лингвистические особенности РРР. Во-вторых, рассматриваются рекомендации, опубликованные в литературных источниках, относительно того, следует ли обучать особенностям разговорной речи, когда это необходимо и для какой цели – развития рецептивного или продуктивного видов речевой деятельности. В-третьих, в статье представлены результаты эмпирического исследования, которое было проведено в виде анкетирования. С помощью этого онлайн-опроса среди лингвистов, преподавателей и учителей русского языка из немецкоязычных стран хотелось выяснить, как они относятся к РРР, какие лингвистические особенности РРР они знают и считают необходимыми для обучения. На основе результатов этого исследования рассматривается вопрос о том, что исповедуют исследователи и чему учат практики. В заключении выделены предложе-

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ния о том, как сократить разрыв между теорией и практикой, утверждениями и реальностью.

> *«Если студент не понимает различий между литературным и разговорным языками, тогда это только во вред.»*
> (Survey participant's comment, 2022)

1 Introduction

If Russian foreign language (RFL) teachers wanted to get a quick and concise overview of Russian colloquial language in academia, they might, for example, turn to Hinrichs' chapter in the *Handbook of Russian linguistic studies and its border disciplines* (*Handbuch der sprachwissenschaftlichen Russistik und ihrer Grenzdisziplinen*) (1999). Hinrichs places the term colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*) within four different variant readings: language use, language variety, linguistic subsystem and functional style. He asserts that within Slavia the term depends on the language situation typical of the individual country and the relationship between the colloquial language and the standard language (Hinrichs, 1999, p. 590).[1]

According to the school of thought that subscribes to Zemskaja's work, which has prevailed in the research on Colloquial Russian (CR) (*russkaja razgovornaja reč'*),[2] CR is seen primarily as a special subsystem[3] of the Russian language system itself and together with the Codified Standard Language (CSL) (*kodificirovannyj literaturnyj jazyk*) it forms the Russian literary language (Mattig, 1994, p. 210; Kromer, 2009, p. 74; Zemskaja, 2011, p. 3; Abduraxmanova, 2019, p. 137). Therefore, Hinrichs (1999, p. 593) brought up the term "diglossia", which embraces both varieties of the Russian language, each with its own (linguistic) characteristics. For example, CR is often associated with spontaneous daily interaction and casual oral communication and, consequently, in Russian terminology it is referred to as "speech" (*reč'*).[4] However, due to the increasing communication via the Internet and social networks, CR is frequently encountered in written (online) discourse, which is why some scholars already speak of it as a "special semiotic system" (Litnevskaja, 2011, p. 79) or "special functional subsystem" (Golev, 2013, p. 12). Furthermore, non-verbal communication (Gladrow, 2004, p. 229), as well as cultural aspects (Vepreva et al., 2019, pp. 926–931) have to be considered when describing and analyzing CR. It is particularly worth mentioning that the democratization process triggered by the perestroika period underscored the role of CR when its increasing official use heralded the "collapse" of Soviet censorship and meant "greater freedom" in both spoken and written language (Ryazanova-Clarke & Wade, 1999, p. 307). Since then, the process of so-called "colloquialization" (*kollokvializacija*/*ustnizacija*) (Sładkiewicz, 2013, p. 18) or "oralization" (*oralizacija*) (Sternin, 2015, p. 15), i.e., the adoption of colloquial language in the functional areas of the codified standard language, has steadily been increasing, especially in social media and in the official public discourse.

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[1]It must be noted here that colloquialization is not a phenomenon unique to Russian only as colloquial peculiarities and their use are also comparable to other languages, for example to German, English or French.

[2]We are aware that CR – apart from Zemskaja and her school – was also studied by Lapteva (1976) or Sirotinina (1974, 1983, 1993) – to name just two prominent authors.

[3]Jachnow (1980, p. 61) calls CR the most important "language variant" (*Sprachvariante*) besides the standard language.

[4]As CSL and CR form the two subsystems of the Russian literary language, it would be more appropriate to speak of "colloquial language" (*razgovornyj jazyk*) instead of "colloquial speech" (Zemskaja, 2011, p. 3).

In this regard, CR is closely linked to socio-political developments and can undeniably be called a complex phenomenon. Scholars often point to its various features, for instance, its "variability" (*variativnost'*), which Golev (2013, p. 28) traces specifically in written CR, its "vulgarity" (*vul'garnost'*) (Ximik, 2014; Vepreva et al., 2019), and its "diffuseness" (*diffuznost'*) (Bogdanova-Beglarjan et al., 2017, p. 13). Ximik (2014, p. 62) locates the latter predominantly in CR's lexis, the semantic structure of colloquial words and expressions, and in the ambiguity of defining the term "colloquial speech" (*razgovornaja reč'*) itself (see also Jachnow, 1980). This definition problem is also brought up by Bezmen (2006, p. 123), who argues that CR's norms are neither thoroughly identified nor well described. Bogdanova-Beglarjan (2020, p. 588) criticizes the frequent absence of CR features in grammar books and dictionaries, which is even more true for grammars and textbooks in school settings. This absence was a major impetus for our study, as already Jachnow (1980, p. 61) had indicated the need for greater consideration of CR both in research and in language teaching.

In view of the difficulties and inconsistencies regarding a holistic description of CR, we will first give a synopsis of CR's different linguistic characteristics by concentrating on the qualitative features most frequently referred to in the literature.[5] Thereby, we will focus not only on phonetics, morphology, word formation, lexis and syntax, but also on sociopragmatics, which is usually excluded[6] in studies on CR even though it is essential for achieving communicative competence. We clearly argue for the integration of CR in the Russian language classroom as the understanding of register shifts and the interactive use of colloquial expressions are crucial in spontaneous, direct and (in)formal speech. Second, we will summarize the recommendations found in the literature as to whether and mainly when colloquial features should be integrated into the RFL classroom. Looking at these recommendations from scholars is particularly interesting as textbooks often prioritize a neutral register. Third, we will present the results of our survey on the treatment of CR phenomena in academia and at secondary schools, which enables us to answer the question of whether the theoretical suggestions put forward in the literature are implemented in educational and pedagogical practice. Finally, based on the questionnaire's results, we will outline the main gaps between theory and practice of CR and make suggestions on how to bridge them in a dynamic and authentic language classroom aiming at communicative competence in the target language and favoring an action-oriented approach in teaching.

2 Linguistic characteristics of CR

2.1 Phonetics

One of CR's most important peculiarities[7] is "phonetic elision" (Cradler & Launer, 1988, p. 25), or what Agatstein (1988, p. 43) calls "qualitative changes and quantitative sound reductions", which may even lead to the elimination of certain phonemes. For example, high-frequency words are considerably reduced phonetically, such as *značit* 'so and/or then' [*znač*

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[5]It would go beyond the scope of the current article to discuss and list all CR particularities in an exhaustive way. For an in-depth description of CR's linguistic characteristics see, for example, Mills (1990), Zemskaja (2011) and Xarčenko (2013).

[6]An exception to this are the two anthologies edited by Thielemann and Kosta (2013) and Thielemann and Richter (2019).

[7]For a thorough description of CR's phonetic characteristics, see, for example, Hinrichs (1999) and Zemskaja (2011).

= *náčit* = *načt*], *govorju* 'I speak' [*gr'u*], *čto-to* 'something' [*čot''*], *sejčas* 'now' [*ščas*], *voobšče* 'so and/or basically' [*vašče*], and *inogda* 'sometimes' [*inadá*] (Agatstein, 1988, p. 43; Kromer, 2009, p. 75). As these examples show, the reduction particularly concerns adverbs, but it can also affect conjunctions, numerals, pronouns, and certain verbs (Zemskaja, 2011, pp. 208–209). In our opinion, the correct understanding of sound reduction is crucial to the understanding of speech, and we therefore advocate its implementation in audio and video files accompanying Russian textbook dialogues.

Apart from reductions, vowels in CR can be stretched to express various emotions (Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013, p. 127), for example, *Maša! Ty-y? Otkuda?* 'Masha! You? Where [do you come] from?' or *Èto tvo-oj syn? Kak vy-yros!* 'Is this your son? How he has grown!' (Zemskaja, 2011, p. 214).

As regards the comprehension of these phenomena, Kromer (2009, p. 75) refers to the importance of regularity and routine of the situation itself:

> Так, если, входя, кто-то говорит [рáс'т'], а уходя — [с'идáн'ь], все поймут, что он поздоровался, попрощался, так как сама ситуация заставляет именно так понять слова пришедшего.
>
> Thus, if on entering someone says [*rás't'*] [reduced form of *zdravstvujte*] and on leaving someone says [*s'idán''*] [reduced form of *do svidanija*], everyone will understand that s/he said hello and goodbye because the situation itself makes it clear to understand these words. (Translation M.K. & W.St.)

Kromer's (2009) statement is also important when it comes to including these phonetic features in the Russian language classroom because the more familiar students are with these features, the better they will understand them in direct speech. In this respect, Rathmayr (1984) and Agatstein (1988) emphasize that it is not recommended that learners reduce or slur words the way target language speakers do. Learners should acquire these skills only receptively and gain an understanding of spoken Russian when listening to spontaneous everyday conversations or when watching films (Rathmayr, 1984) or videoclips. Cradler and Launer (1988, p. 32) suggest providing students with "a list of the most frequently encountered categories of radical phonetic deformation, such as numbers, name-and-patronymic pronouns, and greetings"—another suggestion that might also have been considered long ago for speakers of Russian dialogic texts in audio recordings.

2.2 Morphology

One of the most striking differences between CR and CSL is the high frequency of adverbs in CR (Hinrichs, 1999; Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013). Additionally, particles e.g., *nu*, *da*, *že*, *to* and interjections e.g., *oj!*, *ox!* are frequently used to organize speech or express emotions (Rathmayr, 1984; Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013). Sergeeva (2010, p. 151) also stresses the importance of *tipa* 'like' as an "evidential marker" in (1).

(1)   Ja že ne mogu povernut'sja i skazat' "È/mužiki/zatknites'/tipa/nadoeli/da"
       'I can't turn around, can I, and say/"Eh/men/shut up/like/have had enough/yes."'

Zemskaja (2011, p. 72) adds that in CR deictic adverbs and pronouns are more frequently used than in CSL e.g., *tam* 'there', *zdes'* 'here', *ètot* 'this', *takoj* 'such'.

While the frequency of these "mini-lexemes" (Rathmayr, 1984, p. 6) is very high in CR, the use of longer lexemes, such as nominalizations, participles, or prepositions is strongly reduced (Hinrichs, 1999, p. 599; Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013, p. 127). Kromer (2009) offers another example of this—the tendency in CR to use the nominative both as the main constituent and the dependent constituent of an utterance, for example in phrases as in (2).

(2)   Kakoj fakul'tet vy učites'?
       'What faculty do you study [at]?'

In this regard, Zemskaja (2011, p. 74) draws our attention to the fact that the nominative is the most frequently used case in CR because it is the main word form, usually provided in dictionaries, and free from syntactic dependencies (see also Sect. 2.5).

As for the use of verbs, CR has its unique features, too. For example, it is possible to use prepositions followed by an infinitive as in (3), where the infinitive takes over the function of a noun (Kromer, 2009, p. 79).

(3)   Ja special'no dlja popit' kupila.
       'I bought [it] especially for drinking'

Additionally, CR differs from CSL when considering the use of specific vocative forms in which the noun endings are omitted (*mam!*, *pap!*). These vocative forms can be doubled and combined with the particle *a* (*pap! a pap!*, *mam! a mam!*) (Zemskaja, 2011, p. 76) and they are normally used to attract attention. Such reduplication of words also occurs with verbs, for instance, *zovu-zovu* 'I am calling-calling' (Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013, p. 127), and either has an expressive function or serves to actualize the utterance (Zemskaja, 2016, p. 177).

It is also worth mentioning that CR even has its own word class, the so-called "reljativy" (Hinrichs, 1999; Zemskaja, 2011), which unites all words expressing a reaction to the interlocutor or the situation, for example, agreement or disagreement *da* 'yes', *net* 'no', *konečno* 'of course', *ladno* 'alright', *xorošo* 'ok', *ničego podobnogo* 'nothing of the kind', or greetings *zdravstvuj* 'hello', *poka* 'bye', *privet* 'hi', *saljut* 'salute' (Zemskaja, 2011, pp. 100–101). Zemskaja (2011, p. 101) stresses that without knowledge of these "reljativy" it is not possible to actively use or understand CR.

Considering this expandable list of frequent morphologic CR particularities, one wonders why these features, or at least some of them, are so seldomly included in Russian coursebooks. Especially when single words are concerned, one could easily add particles, interjections, modal auxiliary verbs, or etiquette words to dialogues already at the basic level A1[8] of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (*CEFR*) without significantly increasing the lexical difficulty.[9]

2.3 Word formation

Rathmayr (1984) and Novikova and Budil'ceva (2013) argue that it is vital for students to know the various ways of expressing different meanings by adding suffixes. The Russian literary language, in general, is rich in suffixation, and this word-formation process is very productive, particularly in CR. Most researchers (Rathmayr, 1984; Hinrichs, 1999; Kromer, 2009; Krysin, 2011; Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013) stress the expressive function of suffixation and list some of the most important suffixes frequently encountered in CR. According to Rathmayr (1984, p. 5), suffixes designating persons, such as *-nik*, *-čik*, *-ščik* and *-ec*, are of particular importance in teaching Russian. By means of these suffixes, a person can be described according to their preferences or passions, e.g., *gribnik* 'mushroom enthusiast',

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[8]A1 is the first level of the *CEFR*'s six-level scale, ranging from basic (A1–A2) to independent (B1–B2) to proficient (C1–C2) (see Council of Europe, 2020).

[9]A good example of non-bookish telephone conversations is to be found in Dolmatova and Novacac (2019, p. 46–47), which features CR elements such as vocative forms, ellipses, interjections, and high-frequency adverbs at A1–A2. This also strengthens our claim that CR can be integrated into the language classroom at an early stage.

arbuznik 'watermelon lover', *sobačnik* 'dog fancier'; profession, e.g., *serdečnik* 'heart specialist', *musorščik* 'garbage man'; or by a health issue they have, e.g., *serdečnik* 'cardiac'. As the example of *serdečnik* shows, these nouns are normally polysemous and, thus, their actual meaning always depends on the context (Hinrichs, 1999, p. 607).

A further and vivid characteristic of CR and, according to Rathmayr (1984, p. 6), an interesting one for students is the use of feminine nouns with the suffixes *-ka*, *-ixa*, *-ša* instead of the generic masculine form characteristic of CSL. For example, in CR, especially in Russian media and online communication (Kobjakov, 2020, p. 1), it has become common to use feminine forms such as *avtorka* 'female author' or *blogerka* 'female blogger'.[10] Feminine nouns are prolific in CR (Guzaerova, 2019; Mineeva, 2020), and frequently several feminine forms coexist. For instance, *vračinja* and *vračka* are classified as "softer" forms of *vračixa* 'female doctor' (Alksnit, 2020, p. 53), which has a derogatory connotation in CSL (Ćuto, 2005).[11] Moreover, new feminine nouns often exist as doublets—e.g., *blogerka*/*blogerša* 'female blogger' or *rèperka*/*rèperša* 'female rapper'—because historically the suffix *-ša* was used to express "the belonging of a wife to her husband" and thus has a pejorative connotation (Guzaerova, 2019, p. 108; Kobjakov, 2020, p. 3).[12]

Another peculiarity of CR is omissions, which occur both at the syntactic (see Sect. 2.5) and lexical levels. For example, CSL compounds frequently form one single word in CR by omitting the noun and adding the suffix *-k-* to the adjective, e.g., *maršrutnoe taksi* = *maršrutka* 'routed taxicab' and *polival'naja mašina* = *polivalka* 'watering cart'. Also, the noun can be omitted in combinations of "noun + adjective," for example, in the answer to the following question (4):

(4)   Čto sdaëm? — Zarubežnuju! (= zarubežnuju literaturu)
        'Which [exam] do we take? – Foreign [literature]!' (Kromer, 2009, p. 77).

Another peculiarity is truncation, where parts of the original word are removed, as in *univer* = *universitet* 'university' or in *prepod* = *prepodavatel'* 'teacher' (Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013, p. 127).

Finally, it should be noted that word formation is also very productive with adjectives. As Hinrichs (1999, p. 609) found, prefixes expressing the absolute superlative, such as *pre-*, *arxi-*, and *sverx-*, occur frequently in CR. In addition, Novikova and Budil'ceva (2013, p. 127) drew attention to suffixation within adjectives, which RFL learners could analyze according to their gradation of expressiveness, e.g., *krasnen'kij* 'rosy red', *krasnovatyj* 'reddish', *krasnjuščij* 'bright red'.

Furthermore, current keywords, often of English origin and therefore easily understandable to plurilingual and pluricultural learners, are being used as a basis for new Russian compound words: *(vne)internetovskij*, *onlajnovyj*, *setiket*, *WEB-dizajn* (Timofeeva, 2001, p. 205–206).[13] Such words are no longer a new trend, as they have been incorporated in ev-

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[10] Although feminine nouns are part of everyday colloquial speech and widespread in media and online communication, the results of an opinion poll among Russians show that 68% of the respondents have never heard of femininitives, such as *avtorka* 'female author', *diplomatka* 'female diplomat' or *organizatorka* 'female organizer' (FOM, 2020).

[11] Because of the derogatory connotation of *vračixa*, it is also common to accord the generic masculine forms with feminine forms. For example, *ètu vrača* is frequently used in online communication (Sičinava, 2011).

[12] Despite its pejorative "past", the suffix *-ša* is, according to Guzaerova (2019, p. 111), of particular interest and use in CR. According to a corpus study by Nesset et al. (2022, p. 18), "the choice of the suffix to some extent depends on the morphophonological properties of the stem".

[13] This also holds true when regarding the "Russian words of the year", most of which are usually of English origin, for example 'QR-code' (*QR-kod*, *kuar-kod*, *k'juar-kod*, *kuar*) and its derivatives (*kuarit'[sja]*,

eryday Russian language, and hence are relevant for learners of Russian who regularly use the Internet, new media, and social networks.

2.4 Lexis

The lexis of CR is "enriched and renewed [and] constantly updated" (Sheshukova et al., 2019, pp. 2, 4) but also "short-lived" (Rathmayr, 1984), which is why Rathmayr (1984, p. 5) recommends not to teach such words, especially to students. However, single words deriving from youth slang can, according to Rathmayr (1984, p. 5), be integrated into the RFL classroom for the benefit of amusement and a change of routine. Despite the undeniable ephemerality of CR's vocabulary, there are some words already well established in online communication, such as *čë? = čto* 'what',[14] *ščas = sejčas* 'now', *norm = normal'no* 'fine', *pasibki/sps/spasib = spasibo* 'thank you', and *dz/domaška*[15] *= domašnee zadanie* 'homework' (Golovanova, 2019, pp. 2–3). Such lexical items can easily be integrated into Russian lessons from the very beginning, i.e., at the *CEFR*'s basic user (A) levels, especially if they are not only common in the learners' L1 such as the clippings, e.g., *univer*, *prepod* (see Sect. 2.3), but also highly frequent and part of their learning environment e.g. *domaška*, *fizička*.[16]

As a guideline for teachers, Sheshukova et al. (2019, p. 5) recommend focusing on certain groups of slang words that the authors define as "the most numerous" in the Russian language: these words are used in or to describe everyday domestic situations (e.g., name of persons by gender), personality traits (to create an "effect of ease" or to express a disdainful attitude toward others), and—once again—on computers and the Internet. Thus, it becomes obvious that CR's lexis mostly focuses on human life and activities—peoples' daily routines, nutrition, health, physical and mental conditions, and relationships with others. For this reason, Krysin (2011, p. 341) calls CR "anthropocentric" (*antropocentrična*).

Sładkiewicz (2013, p. 21) suggests adapting these everyday situations to the needs of foreign students and to include them into the lexical corpus of both written and audio texts from various sources.[17] The new dynamics, which she traces in the Russian language because of the increasing global economic relations, also call for a collection of authentic conversational dialogues read and pronounced by Russian target language speakers (Sładkiewicz, 2013). As an example, Sładkiewicz (2013, pp. 19–20) presents a fragment of a dialogue taken from an Internet forum and adapted to the Polish group's proficiency level. Although the sample provided is obviously not the best as colloquial slang is over-used, there are numerous sites on the Internet that present Russian slang words in abundance and tempt RFL learners with extravagant headings such as *Top ten Russian phrases and sentences you need to know*,[18]

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kuarizacija, beskuarnik) (Ubaxova, 2021). Since Russia's war against Ukraine beginning in February 2022, however, there is a new language purification trend in Russia, which aims at "liberating" the language from foreign words, in particular anglicisms.

[14] This was also one of the examples frequently mentioned in Q7A, where the questionnaire's participants had to come up with their own examples from CR (see Sect. 4).

[15] This word is primarily used in elementary school.

[16] This word is primarily used in elementary school (cf. footnote 15). It is worth noting here that the feminitive *fizička* denotes only a female teacher at school, while the masculine form *fizik* refers to a physicist working at the university.

[17] Including the National Corpus of the Russian Language, Russian interviews, TV shows, chat rooms, and Internet forums.

[18] https://www.mondly.com/russian-phrases-expressions (retrieved January 17, 2023).

Russian Colloquial words and phrases which you should know,[19] *15 trendy Russian slang words*,[20] and last but not least, *51 hilarious Russian idioms that will make you giggle*.[21] There are also YouTube videos like *10 conversational Russian phrases*[22] or *10 Russian slang expressions*.[23] These sites present a valuable resource of up-to-date CR learning material that can be adapted to the learners' needs and proficiency levels.

Unlike these random and catchy sites, Novikova and Budil'ceva (2013, p. 127) list concrete words RFL learners should indeed know, for example, expressive and emotional lexis such as *balbes* 'bonehead' and *orat'* 'to shout'; colloquial phraseology such as *valjat' duraka* 'to fool around/to mess about' and *brosat'sja v glaza* 'to catch someone's eye'; animal names designating people, e.g., *gus'* 'an unreliable and cunning person' and *svin'ja* 'a dirty and unpleasant person'; and words in figurative meaning, such as *kaša* 'mess, disorder' and *zagorat'* 'to do nothing'. However, when reviewing the literature, it becomes evident that many authors simply list colloquial lexis and focus entirely on the form and meaning of (slang) words but ignore their use.

An article by Gorbunova (2019) on parasite words (*slova parazity*)[24] underlines this tendency. Most of these words, such as *nu* 'well', *vot* 'here you are (go)', *blin* 'damn', *koroče* 'in short', *tipa* 'like', *tak skazat'* 'so to say', *kak by* 'sort of', *v obščem-to* 'basically', *vot tak vot* 'so there you go', and *tak tak-tak-tak* 'let me think' are part of one- to four-word utterances (Sherstinova, 2013). We are convinced that these words can be useful at the beginner level if presented in adequate situational contexts. Gorbunova (2019, p. 14) explains that "parasite words are used due to poverty of vocabulary and the associated regular hiccups in the speech flow". But these parasite words, pronouns, particles, or filling words, can be extremely helpful for foreign language learners who are at a loss for words (see Dreher et al., 2020), and quite often certain gestures are used instead of these words or phrases as in the following example (5) taken from Kromer (2009, p. 79):

(5) Kakuju tebe jubku / vybiraj // Mne vot takuju (žest izobražaet dlinnuju rasklešennuju jubku), mne èti (žest izobražaet mini-jubku) nadoeli.
'Which [kind of] skirt [do you want] / choose [one] // I [want] this kind (with a gesture she depicts a long flared skirt). I am tired of these (points to a mini-skirt)'

Even if popular vocabulary is short-lived and buzzwords disappear quickly, we suggest considering the recent lexical changes brought about by digital communication and encourage their greater inclusion in Russian beginner courses. These communicative situations are well known by young adult learners, and they are used to switching between oral and written forms of language. Material developers should be encouraged to refrain from mere word lists[25] no matter which topic they belong to, and instead provide (particular social) contexts of how and when to use these words or phrases.

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[19] https://www.learnrussianineu.com/russian-colloquial-words-and-phrases-which-you-should-know (retrieved January 17, 2023).

[20] https://www.fluentu.com/blog/russian/russian-slang/ (retrieved January 17, 2023).

[21] https://www.theintrepidguide.com/russian-idioms/ (retrieved January 17, 2023).

[22] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPWd7fidDyk (retrieved January 17, 2023).

[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4sWzo0H_HU (retrieved January 17, 2023).

[24] Parasite words are short words or phrases without any semantic meaning (Gorbunova, 2019, p. 13).

[25] Sobolev et al. (2019) use such Russian-English word lists called "Colloquialisms and transition words" in their book *Colloquial Russian 2* without marking which words belong to the first and which to the second group. Only one word is explicitly marked as colloquial: the imperative form *xoti* 'wish, want' in a table on irregular verbs (Sobolev et al., 2019, p. 351).

2.5 Syntax

As stated in Sect. 2.3, one of the most frequent peculiarities of CR is omissions and apart from lexis this concerns primarily syntactic constructions. Weiss (2013, 2019), distinguishing CR's syntax from that of CSL, says that the "diversity of empty slots" is "a quirk" of Colloquial Russian.

One of the CR features often cited in the literature is its abundance of ellipses. Their purpose is twofold: they make communication more efficient and they replace irrelevant details (Rathmayr, 1984; Agatstein, 1988; Cradler & Launer, 1988; Mattig, 1994; Kromer, 2009). Ellipses are used in place of familiar information and objects that are perceptible in a sensory manner (Mattig, 1994, p. 211). As regards the teaching of these peculiarities, Agatstein (1988, p. 43) suggests explaining them to students "relatively early". Moreover, Rathmayr (1984, p. 8) advises against always demanding learners to answer in complete sentences. Instead, students should be motivated to give incomplete or short yes/no-answers (Rathmayr, 1984; Mattig, 1994). These pieces of advice still hold true today when, with regard to online communication, abbreviations and short answers are even more common than they were 40 years ago.

Ellipses are also used in lieu of verbs of action. This is a unique feature not only of CR in general, but of the Russian language in particular, differentiating it from other Slavic languages and "all other European language families including the Baltic and Finno-Ugric neighbors" (Weiss, 2013, pp. 105–106). This particularity can be illustrated by the following examples (6–10) (see also Hinrichs, 1999):

(6)   Ty èto sama?
      'Do/Did you [do it] yourself?'

(7)   On domoj.
      'He['s going] home.'

(8)   Ty skoro?
      '[Are] you [coming] soon?'

(9)   Ja na tramvaj.
      'I['m taking] the streetcar.'

(10) Ty otkuda?
      'Where [do] you [come] from?'

While in CR certain words tend to be omitted, one can also find the opposite, for example, pronoun-doubling at the beginning of sentences, as in (11) and (12) (for reduplication see also Sect. 2.2):

(11) Moroženoe ego Marina včera ela.
      'Ice-cream-it Marina ate yesterday.'

(12) Alla ona čto ljubit?
      'Alla-she likes what?' (McCoy, 2003)

Syntactic peculiarities of CR also include word order (Agatstein, 1988; Mattig, 1994; Abduraxmanova, 2019). For example, Agatstein (1988, p. 46) writes that "[t]he most important constituent in a colloquial utterance may be emphasized by stronger word stress and through the process of fronting (placing it at or near the beginning of the utterance)". He also points to CR's tendency to put nouns in the nominative case, such as in (13): "The speaker places

so much emphasis on the important information, [sic!] that the grammatical markers become almost an afterthought" (Agatstein, 1988, p. 47; see also Hinrichs, 1999, p. 600).

(13)   Buduščaja nedelja – on idět v otpusk.
       'Next week—he goes on vacation.'

In a study about the rules of word order, Abduraxmanova (2019) points out that such an undertaking needs an advanced level of language proficiency. Although her contribution focuses on migrant children who speak Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh as L1 and on bilinguals of Russian and Avar, the tasks she gave to her research participants could also be used to raise awareness in pre-service teachers of Russian about the intricacies (*tonkosti*) of direct and reverse word order, inversion, and the arrangement of words in stylistically neutral and stylistically colored speech (Abduraxmanova, 2019, p. 140).

Pereltsvaig (2008) examines split phrases as a further feature of CR requiring special intonation, for example in (14).

(14)   Ja xoču čtoby novuju on kupil mašinu.
       'I want him to buy a new car.'

Additionally, according to Novikova and Budil'ceva (2013, p. 127), high-frequent peculiarities of CR include "*u kogo*"-constructions such as in (15) and repetitions such as *Da-da, konečno!* 'Yes-yes, sure' and *Emu vsë xuže i xuže* 'He is getting worse and worse'.

(15)   U menja u sestry takoj že plašč = U moej sestry takoj že plašč.
       'My sister has the same raincoat.'

2.6 Sociopragmatics

One of the few contributors to CR's sociopragmatic characteristics is Mills (1991). She investigated the three functions of the interrogative in CR, i.e., getting information, affirmation, and seeking a directive for action (Mills, 1991, p. 555). She convincingly illustrates how different interrogative phrases can vary depending on the speaker's situation. For instance, Mills (1991, p. 556) provides nine different examples of how to ask someone for the time in Russian, including a typical standard Russian question (16) and some CR questions (17–19), the latter of which are characterized by the negative particle and the finite verb as well as ellipses, which both indicate the "sense of urgency" and the "degree of familiarity connected with the speech exchange" (Mills, 1991, p. 557).

(16)   Skažite, požalujsta, kotoryj čas?
       'Can you please tell me what time it is?'

(17)   Vremeni vy ne skažete skol'ko?

(18)   A vremja-to vy ne podskažete?

(19)   Ne podskažete?

Mills (1991, p. 565) stresses CR's richness of expression and implied meaning, pointing out that various colloquial constructions "span the progression" between the two prototypical direct speech acts, the imperative and the interrogative. For example, the prototypical imperative (20) can be varied by means of CR to express surprise (21), politeness (22), sarcasm (23) or to simply remind the person of putting on a shirt (24) (Mills, 1991, pp. 565–566).

(20)   Naden', požalujsta, majku!
       'Please put on your shirt!'

(21)   Ty ne nadeneš' majku?

(22)   A majku ty ne budeš' nadevat'?

(23)   A majka-to u tebja est'?

(24)   Ty ne budeš' nadevat' majku?

The edited volumes by Thielemann and Kosta (2013) and Thielemann and Richter (2019), respectively, also contain chapters dealing with Russian talk-in-interaction (e.g., the use of everyday utterances), facework-in-interaction (e.g., impoliteness and mock-impoliteness), sociolinguistics (e.g., linguistic variation and communicative diversity), and pragmatics (e.g., the effect of questions on replies; [self-]repairs). However, neither volume pursues the claim that the examples of sociopragmatic studies of Slavic interaction and urban voices are, among others, to be used for classroom discourse or interaction. Yet the chapters can serve as a relevant overview to broaden the horizons of pre-service RFL teachers and CR researchers/linguists.[26] More easily accessible, from a language-pedagogical perspective, is an article by Stauffer (2017) about how to use Russian forms of address to develop sociopragmatic competence at the introductory level, for example *Ty/Vy* forms, first names and diminutives, or informal variants of greetings (Stauffer, 2017, p. 879). Stauffer (2017, p. 892) also concludes that there is a gap, or "disconnect", as she says, "between Russian forms of address in real speech situations and the status quo in description and instruction".

Bolden (2008) deals with telephone conversations between friends and family members, discussing possible reopenings and introducing new topics in Russian conversation closings by using the multifunctional discourse particle *-to*, marking either delay *A kak že dožd'-to tak* (Bolden, 2008, p. 104) or reaffirming interpersonal relationships before taking leave, using (*nu*) *ladno* or (*nu*) *xorošo* 'okay, all right' as in (25).

(25)   Panjatn./Xaraš[o/ – ^Okey./Xaraš[o Miša – N' ladn'/– A-ga/A-g[a – [Nu paka/
       'Understood good – Okay./Alright/okay/ah-hah bye/bye' (Bolden, 2008, p. 105).

2.7 Interim conclusion

Recapitulating, this brief description of some of CR's most frequently encountered features in the literature shows that Russian colloquial speech differs considerably from CSL in terms of phonetics, morphology, word formation, lexis, syntax, and sociopragmatics. Following Kromer (2009, p. 81), it would be pointless to judge CR utterances as right or wrong, as CR constitutes one of the two varieties of Russian literary language and therefore its peculiarities need to be analyzed independently and need not be compared with CSL:

> Оценивать подобные высказывания с позиции правильно/неправильно нельзя. Взгляд на явления РР [разговорной речи] и ее нормы через призму КЛЯ [кодифицированного литературного языка] не дает возможности увидеть специфику РР. Более продуктивным является анализ фактов РР исходя из самой РР. (Kromer, 2009, p. 81)

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[26]Van Compernolle et al. (2016) explored the teaching of second-language Spanish sociopragmatics through concept-based instruction, focusing on self-presentation, social distance, and power in order to broaden learners' sociopragmatic knowledge and their potential to use this knowledge when making pragmalinguistic choices. Such a study still seems to be a research desideratum in Russian linguistics and Russian language pedagogy. As Van Compernolle et al. (2016) have shown, this approach can be adapted for different languages and used by different teachers.

It is impossible to evaluate such utterances from the position of right/wrong. Looking at the phenomena of CR and its norms through the CSL prism does not allow one to see CR's specifics. It is more effective to analyze CR's realities by starting from CR itself. (Translation M.K. & W.St.)

Based on the characteristics of CR as outlined in this Section, it is clear that CR markedly differs from the codified Russian literary language (Mattig, 1994, p. 208) and, for this reason alone, poses "significant difficulties" for foreign language learners (Cradler & Launer, 1988, p. 25). Despite these difficulties, we are convinced that CR needs to be an integral part of the Russian language classroom from the very beginning.[27] However, teaching students to speak "informal, spontaneous and direct" Russian is a challenge for all the teachers inclined to use colloquial speech in the classroom and spark an interest for it. This becomes even more challenging when we consider the fact that the *CEFR* does not provide any guidance for teaching CR at the lower levels in beginner classes, which might also be one of the reasons why modern textbooks mainly stick to codified standard language and neutral style instead of including colloquial speech in dialogues (Stadler & Kaltseis, 2022).

Therefore, we will first look into the recommendations provided in the literature on when and for which purposes CR should be taught. Second, we will present the results of a survey of linguists, Russian language instructors, and schoolteachers and answer the question of whether the suggestions given in the theory are considered in the teaching practice.

3 CR's integration into the RFL classroom—recommendations from the literature

The role we envision for CR in language teaching corresponds to that described in the research literature, i.e., a functional variety or style that complements the literary language (Petrov, 2020, p. 219). Hence, CR can only enhance but in no way replace the teaching of CSL.

Although quite a few researchers agree with our demand that CR should be part of teaching Russian, especially at the university level (Rathmayr, 1984; Agatstein, 1988; Cradler & Launer, 1988; Mattig, 1994; Bezmen, 2006; Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013; Sładkiewicz, 2013; Bogdanova-Beglarjan, 2015; Nikitina, 2016; Nečaeva & Kargy, 2017; Ruth, 2017; Sheshukova et al., 2019; Popova & Pepeliaeva, n.d.), opinions differ about **when** to teach CR. The literature offers two suggestions. One group of researchers recommends introducing CR to learners at the beginner or basic user level by systematically integrating colloquial elements into the language classroom (Agatstein, 1988; Bezmen, 2006; Abduraxmanova, 2019). Another group of researchers, citing the complexity and difficulty of CR, advocates for teaching CR at the pre-intermediate level (Sheshukova et al., 2019) or exclusively in university courses for philologists (Mattig, 1994).

The literature also offers two approaches for the teaching aims and learners' knowledge of CR. The first group of researchers opts for receptive rather than productive skills/knowledge of CR, which learners should internalize (Rathmayr, 1984; Agatstein, 1988; Cradler & Launer, 1988; Bogdanova-Beglarjan, 2015; Nikitina, 2016; Sheshukova et al., 2019). These researchers feel it is important for learners to be aware of the characteristics of spoken language but see no need for students to actively use them. Additionally, Rathmayr (1984) and Sheshukova et al. (2019) stress the importance of contrasting CR features with the learners'

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[27]It should be noted here that we would include *slang* expressions if they are part of the learners' domain but would exclude *prostorečie* or *mat* from teaching RFL at secondary schools.

L1. The second group of researchers adopts a more progressive view of teaching CR, as they want students to also obtain productive knowledge (Sładkiewicz, 2013; Nečaeva & Kargy, 2017; Dziedzic, 2020). For instance, Nečaeva and Kargy (2017) call for the automatization of so-called linguistic "stamps" (*štampy ustnoj razgovornoj reči*), including interjections (*meždometija*), *reljativy*, or function words (*služebnye slova*), which could help learners to better understand dialogic speech. Dziedzic (2020, p. 45) writes that students should acquire a "colloquial lexicon" to be able to take "an active part in real communication in Russian."

This contact with target language speakers and the ability to manage real-life situations is also one of the reasons often mentioned in the literature for why CR should be integrated into the Russian language classroom (Mattig, 1994; Sheshukova et al., 2019). In this respect, Novikova and Budil'ceva (2013, p. 126) argue that not knowing CR will put up a "communicative barrier" (*kommunikativnyj bar'er*) between learners and target language speakers. They also stress that CR is part of the Russian Speech Culture (*russkaja rečevaja kul'tura*) and therefore should not be neglected in Russian language classes.

Yet another important reason for including CR in language teaching is to make it easier for learners to understand Russian-language media, songs, and public communication (Agatstein, 1988; Sładkiewicz, 2013). Colloquial language, particularly the use of anglicisms, has become more widespread with the ongoing digitalization and mediatization of Russian in the 21st century (Kostomarov, 1999; Mustajoki, 2013; Dunaeva et al., 2020; Bacher et al., 2022). Therefore, CR must not be ignored in the modern language classroom.

In summary, there is a widespread consensus in the literature that CR should be an integral part of teaching Russian, be it to communicate with target language speakers, understand media and public discourse, or to better grasp the cultural dimension of the Russian language. However, opinions on when to start integrating CR into the classroom differ. Also, there is no simple answer to the question of which skills learners should acquire. Given the dissent in the literature, we were wondering how much people who work with the Russian language in a subject-specific context know about CR and how they think about its integration into the classroom, be it at school or university/college. For this reason, we conducted a survey among Russian language teachers and academics, the results of which are presented in the next section.

4 Survey of linguists, language instructors and schoolteachers

The aim of the survey was to determine whether there is indeed a "disconnect" between the theoretical assumptions about CR (see Sects. 2 and 3) and the actual teaching practice in schools and universities/colleges. For this reason, we posed the following research questions:

(1) Which CR characteristics are teachers, instructors, and linguists familiar with?
(2) What is the opinion of these specialists on integrating CR into the (language) classroom?
(3) Where and starting at which levels should CR be taught?
(4) Which exercises/tasks are considered appropriate for teaching CR?

To answer these questions, we generated a questionnaire, which is described in detail in the next section.

4.1 Questionnaire

Based on the literature review and our research questions, we developed a questionnaire, which was pre-tested twice among three colleagues (one former schoolteacher of Russian,

one linguist, one Russian language instructor) and three pre-service teachers. They provided valuable feedback, and we adopted the questionnaire according to their suggestions.

The final version of the questionnaire was composed of four parts: (1) demographic data, (2) knowledge of CR, (3) CR in the teaching practice, and (4) appropriate exercises/tasks for teaching CR. The first part (Questions [Q]1–6) asked for the participants' demographic data, including their age, place of birth and permanent residence, and the institution or place where they learned and/or have been teaching Russian most of their working lives. The second part (Q7–7C) requested the participants to assess their knowledge of CR, and list certain CR characteristics. Two closed questions asked the participants to assign examples from CR to the corresponding linguistic subfield (for instance, to match *vaščé*, *inadá*, *zdrás't'i* with "phonetics") and relate *CEFR* descriptors to the appropriate competence levels (A1–C2). The third part (Q8–12) was concerned with the participants' use of CR in their teaching of Russian at school or university/college. Accordingly, these questions were, on the one hand, open ones, asking the participants why and for which purposes they do or do not integrate CR in their teaching. This part also contained closed questions about the participants' opinions on where (at school or university/college) and when (i.e., at which level—A1–C2), one should begin teaching CR. In particular, participants were asked to indicate if learners should develop only receptive or also productive skills. The questionnaire's fourth and final part (Q13–15) was dedicated to identifying which activity formats participants considered appropriate for teaching CR. At the end of the questionnaire (Q16), the participants could take a stand and express further opinions on teaching CR or add comments about the study itself.

4.2 Data collection and participants' demographic information

The data collection for the study took place in June and July 2022 via the open-source application LimeSurvey. The questionnaire was sent to Russian teachers and linguists in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland via several Russian teachers' associations, general associations or organizations (e.g., *Verband Russisch und Mehrsprachigkeit*, *Osteuropazentrum der Universität Innsbruck*) and (interuniversity) mailing lists. Furthermore, we contacted colleagues personally asking them to participate in the study and forward the questionnaire to peers who might be interested.

The study participants were 268 Russian language teachers, university instructors, and linguists who specialize in Slavic or Russian linguistics. Yet only 95 of the participants, i.e., 35%, filled in the entire questionnaire. Only their answers were considered for our analysis.[28] Of the 95 participants, 44 were teaching Russian at secondary schools, nine were working as Russian tutors outside school, 12 were instructors of Russian at a university or college, 21 were specialists in Slavic linguistics, and nine were specialists in Russian linguistics. The participants' average age was 44.8 years. Twenty-three identified as male and 70 as female. Two did not answer this question. Most of the participants were born in Austria ($n = 42$), Germany ($n = 14$) or the Russian Federation ($n = 14$); the other participants were born in Switzerland ($n = 6$), Italy ($n = 5$), Kazakhstan ($n = 3$), or Belarus ($n = 2$). The remaining participants originate from Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, France, Japan, Lithuania, Serbia, and Ukraine ($n = 1$ for each country). Most of the participants said that

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[28] Generally, written questionnaires have a very low response rate (Diekmann, 2014, p. 516). There are several possible reasons for the response rate of the current survey, including the length and difficulty of the questionnaire or the fact that the request for participation was sent via mail. A stumbling block for the subjects of our questionnaire might have been Q7A, where specifics of the Russian colloquial language had to be listed in the answer, provided the participants had indicated to be (very) familiar with the Russian colloquial language.

they had been living in Austria ($n = 47$), Germany ($n = 21$), the Russian Federation ($n = 9$), Switzerland ($n = 7$), Italy ($n = 4$) or Belarus ($n = 2$) for most of their lives. In response to a question about their knowledge of the Russian language, only 20 reported that Russian was their first language. Approximately one-quarter of the participants learned Russian in a Russian-speaking country either at school ($n = 21$) and/or at university/college ($n = 39$). The majority of the participants learned Russian in a non-Russian speaking country at school ($n = 40$) and/or at university/college ($n = 69$).

After this brief description of the participants' demographic data, Sect. 4.3 presents the survey's results in more detail and offers interpretations.

4.3 Results and interpretations

In this Section, the results are outlined according to the survey's structure, i.e., the participants' knowledge of CR (Sect. 4.3.1) and the role of CR in their teaching practice (Sect. 4.3.2). The final paragraph presents the exercise/task formats the participants considered most appropriate for teaching CR (Sect. 4.3.3).

4.3.1 Participants' knowledge of Colloquial Russian

In reference to the participants' knowledge of CR ($n = 95$), they were asked to point out to what extent they agreed with the statement "I am very familiar with the peculiarities of Russian colloquial language." On a scale ranging from "strongly agree" ($= 4$) to "strongly disagree" ($= 1$), 68 participants reported being (very) familiar with CR's peculiarities, while only 27 stated they were not ($M = 3$). In fact, they demonstrated their knowledge of CR when they answered open question Q7A, which required that they list the CR characteristics with which they were well acquainted. The participants provided a wide range of examples similar to the ones cited in the literature (see Sect. 2), including phonetics (e.g., sound reductions, stretching of vowels), lexis (e.g., anglicisms, emotive words and expressions, abusive language, *mat*), morphology (e.g., interjections, reduplication, diminutives), and syntax (e.g., ellipsis, fronting of the nominative case). However, there were only a few examples of word formation (e.g., abbreviations, univerbation) and sociopragmatics (e.g., forms of address). Interestingly, one participant also considered gestures (e.g., stroking the neck[29]) to be a form of CR (behavior) (see also Zemskaja, 2016, pp. 12–13).

Question 7B asked the participants to assign examples from CR to the corresponding linguistic subfield. Here, the results were somewhat striking. While the experts in Slavic/Russian linguistics and the Russian language instructors at university/college matched (almost) all the examples in a plausible manner, the teachers of Russian at school assigned the two syntactic examples *Kakoj fakul'tet vy učites'?* and *Buduščaja nedelja – ona idët v otpusk* to morphology. This could be because syntactic peculiarities of Russian in general—and of CR in particular—are frequently not explicitly taught in Russian language classes or lectures and thus teachers lack the necessary awareness. Furthermore, both groups (linguists and lecturers, schoolteachers) allocated the occupational titles *musorščik*, *vračixa*, *učitel'ša* to lexis. Although this is not intrinsically wrong, in our opinion, this example contains clear characteristics of CR's morphology (i.e., suffixes) and should therefore be assigned to the latter.

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[29]This is the English translation for the participant's answer in German: "(sich) über den Hals streichen". It is possible that s/he meant "tapping (a finger on) the neck", which is one of the most popular Russian gestures signifying an invitation to a drink or indicating that somebody is already drunk.

When asked to relate *CEFR* descriptors to the appropriate levels (Q7C), the participants showed a very good understanding of the descriptors and the corresponding levels (A1–C2, C2 = 6; A1 = 1), rating them mostly only half a level below the *CEFR*'s proposed levels. For instance, having "a good command of common idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms," which is, according to the *CEFR*, at C1 level (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 132), was rated B2.1/B2.2 by the survey participants ($M = 4,44$). The lowest level (B1.2, $M = 3,59$) was assigned to "can understand what is said in a personal e-mail or posting even where some colloquial language is used", which the *CEFR*, however, assigns to B2 (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 54). In other words, the participants assigned one descriptor to B1, which is interesting, given that the *CEFR* relates colloquial features of any language exclusively to the higher proficiency levels (starting with B2). However, one may doubt whether pupils or students achieve "a good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms" (Council of Europe, 2020, p. 171) if they are not prepared and trained at the lower proficiency levels. This was also highlighted in the participants' comments (Q16), in which three persons stated that the understanding of CR is "essential at all competence levels" and that CR "has no beginning and no end": i.e., in their opinion, it is possible to integrate colloquial chunks and expressions into teaching at the lower proficiency level A1.

4.3.2 CR in the teaching practice

Given the participants' good knowledge of CR in general and their comments (Q16) listed in the previous Section, it is surprising that most ($n = 60$) stated that they do not teach CR (Q8) ($M = 2,19$; very true of me = 4; very untrue of me = 1). In fact, when asked how often they integrate CR into their language classroom or lectures (Q8A), only a third of the participants ($n = 35$) answered this question and indicated that they "sometimes" did ($M = 4,47$; very often = 6; never = 1). Concerning the purpose (Q8B) for integrating CR, both groups, Slavic and Russian linguists/language instructors at university/college and schoolteachers/tutors, mentioned the following: they use CR to liven up their lessons, raise awareness for different language registers, or improve learners' language skills. In addition, Slavic/Russian linguists and language instructors claimed to teach CR to convey a complete picture of the Russian language and its speakers, and to illustrate prospective research fields for seminar papers or BA and MA theses. Schoolteachers, in contrast, highlighted CR's cultural aspects, its authenticity and the comprehension of "native speakers"[30] as the main reasons for integrating it into the language classroom. These reasons are in unison with the purpose of teaching CR mentioned in the literature (e.g., Novikova & Budil'ceva, 2013). Specifically, the teachers frequently mentioned authenticity as opposed to the bookishness of textbook language. They said that using CR makes Russian "more authentic", "livelier", and "more realistic". This suggests they believe that the language promoted in textbooks does not reflect actual language use and usage. So, if the adjective "colloquial" appears on textbook covers this needs to be seen as a marketing strategy and not so much as evidence of authenticity (Stadler & Kaltseis, 2022).

As regards the reasons for not teaching CR ($n = 51$), Slavic/Russian linguists often pointed to the fact that they do not teach (practical) language courses. This was interesting insofar as they thereby conveyed that CR should not or could not be part of lectures on Russian linguistics, delegating the responsibility for its teaching to language instructors. Accordingly, it was not surprising that another reason for disregarding CR was that linguists

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[30]For a critical discussion of the term 'native speaker' (*nositel' jazyka*) in Russian, see Stadler and Dreher (2023).

named other foci in their research. Schoolteachers and tutors of Russian frequently put forward the learners' lack of appropriate linguistic knowledge or missing language competence. However, one of the most striking explanations is that the latter claimed not to know enough about CR, and, therefore, did not consider themselves expert enough to incorporate colloquial language into their lessons. This result was surprising because in the first question the majority of the participants claimed to be acquainted with CR (see Sect. 4.3.1).
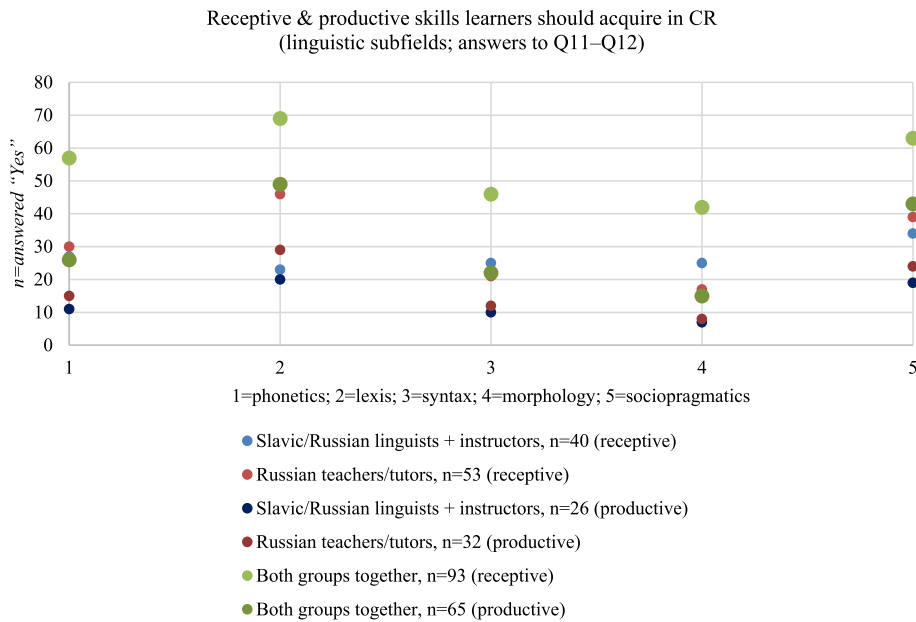
Lack of knowledge, personal insecurity, and the characterization of CR as a "source of misunderstandings" (Q8Bneg) clearly point to the dire need for Slavic and/or Russian languages curricula to introduce teaching units (modules) that promote students' familiarity with CR characteristics. However, if these units (modules) only relate to practical RFL acquisition and are not part of linguistic seminars or workshops, future teachers will neither develop the necessary awareness nor the confidence for teaching the language. Apart from issues of confidence, other explanations for not teaching CR in school included the repeatedly quoted lack of time, the purported focus on CSL, and the fact that CR is excluded from textbooks and, thus, not covered in tests or exams ("nicht prüfungsrelevant").

Although schoolteachers admitted not having enough knowledge to teach colloquial language, most of the participants ($n = 62$) agreed to some extent that CR should be taught at school (Q9) ($M = 2{,}78$; strongly agree $= 4$; strongly disagree $= 1$), starting at the A2.2 level ($M = 2{,}53$; C2 $= 6$; A1 $= 1$). Both groups listed lexis ($n = 54$), sociopragmatics ($n = 45$), and phonetics ($n = 35$) among the top linguistic subfields they believe should be taught at school. Most agreed that it was acceptable to neglect syntax and morphology.

Only a third of the participants ($n = 33$) believed that CR should only be taught at the university or college level ($M = 2{,}76$; strongly agree $= 4$; strongly disagree $= 1$), starting at the B1.2 level ($M = 3{,}54$; C2 $= 6$; A1 $= 1$). Strikingly, the participants voting for the university/college option seemed to be more "conservative" about the competence level at which CR should be taught. They opted for the B1.2 level, i.e., one level higher than the participants who thought that CR should already be taught at school. As regards the linguistic subfields to be taught at universities/colleges, the participants also voted for lexis ($n = 22$) and sociopragmatics ($n = 19$), followed by syntax ($n = 13$). Interestingly, phonetics received equal amounts of approval and disapproval ($n = 12$), whereas morphology got more negative than positive answers, implying that it should not be taught at universities/colleges. This result is, again, remarkable because, as we have shown in Sect. 2.2, CR's morphological peculiarities may already be built into dialogues at the A1 level. Moreover, as stated in the literature, morphology is vital for learners to express different meanings by adding suffixes or to know that some nouns can have pejorative connotations (as is true of certain feminitives). If learners are not cognizant of these peculiarities, they might say something embarrassing, or upset or annoy their interlocutors. In this respect, one may ask where and when learners should be familiarized with CR's morphological particularities if not at university or college.

Concerning the questions (Q11–Q12) about whether learners should acquire only receptive or both receptive and productive skills in CR, the questionnaire's results mirror the disagreement in the literature, with 35 participants voting for the first option. According to them, learners should gain receptive competence, first of all, in lexis ($n = 29$), then sociopragmatics ($n = 24$), and last but not least in phonetics ($n = 20$).

Most participants ($n = 60$), however, indicated that learners should develop both receptive and productive skills in CR. In their opinion, learners should attain receptive knowledge in lexis ($n = 40$), sociopragmatics ($n = 39$), phonetics ($n = 37$), and syntax ($n = 30$). Only morphology received a small and equal amount of both negative and positive answers. So, whether the bias is for only receptive or both receptive and productive skills does not have any effect on the CR content, i.e., the linguistic subfields, to be taught.

Receptive & productive skills learners should acquire in CR
(linguistic subfields; answers to Q11–Q12)

1=phonetics; 2=lexis; 3=syntax; 4=morphology; 5=sociopragmatics

- Slavic/Russian linguists + instructors, n=40 (receptive)
- Russian teachers/tutors, n=53 (receptive)
- Slavic/Russian linguists + instructors, n=26 (productive)
- Russian teachers/tutors, n=32 (productive)
- Both groups together, n=93 (receptive)
- Both groups together, n=65 (productive)

Fig. 1 Receptive and productive skills learners should acquire in CR (linguistic subfields); Q11–Q12 (Color figure online)

The participants' answers to Q11 and Q12[31] are also shown in the following graphic (Fig. 1), which illustrates the difference between the two groups in terms of which skills learners should acquire in CR. Slavic/Russian linguistics and instructors are represented in blue. Russian teachers/tutors are represented in red.

The Slavic/Russian linguists, instructors, and schoolteachers/tutors agreed that teaching productive skills should mainly comprise two subfields: lexis ($n = 49$) as number one, and sociopragmatics ($n = 43$) as number two. All other linguistic subfields got more negative than positive answers.[32] This view also corresponds with the literature that advises students to productively learn, first and foremost, colloquial lexis (see Sect. 3).

Interestingly, syntax was ranked third by both groups. The schoolteachers ranked morphology at least fourth. In all the previous questions, both groups had considered morphology negligible when teaching. This might be mere speculation, but it seems as if teachers were finally reminded of the importance of grammatical forms in the teaching process.

4.3.3 Appropriate activity formats for teaching CR

The last part of the questionnaire was dedicated to various activities that linguists, language instructors and schoolteachers consider appropriate for teaching CR. In the first question (Q13), the participants were given the choice between several activities (e.g., role plays, audio[visual] comprehension tasks, etc.). They could add comments and present their own

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[31] Note that for receptive competence, the answers to Q11 and Q12 were added because the participants who were in favor of the statement that learners should only acquire receptive competence did not get to answer questions Q12–Q12C.

[32] Figure 1 visualizes only the participants' positive answers.

Table 1 Linguistic subfields and proposed CEFR levels for teaching (Q14)

Linguistic examples	Linguistic subfield (according to the authors of the article)	Proposed *CEFR* level for teaching (C2 = 6; A1 = 1)
А. *Privetik!* – Б. *Zdravstvuj!* – А. *Nu kak ty?* – Б. *Oj/voobšče ne mogu*//	sociopragmatics	A2.1 (*M* = 2,47)
tipa, blin, vot tak vot	lexis	A2.2 (*M* = 2,76)
musorščik, vračixa, učitel'ša	morphology/word formation	B1.1 (*M* = 3,01)
vaščé, inadá, zdrás't'i	phonetics	B1.1 (*M* = 3,24)
Ja tebe uže sto raz govorila, čto ni čerta ne ponimaju v fizike!	sociopragmatics	B1.1 (*M* = 3,26)
Buduščaja nedelja – ona idët v otpusk.	syntax	B1.2 (*M* = 3,59)
Kakoj fakul'tet vy učites'?	syntax	B1.2 (*M* = 3,66)

views. As is most appropriate, listening and/or viewing comprehension tasks were ranked first (e.g., from audiovisual and social media) (*n* = 83), followed by role plays (*n* = 59) and the translation/mediation of a colloquial dialogue into the learner's L1 (*n* = 54). The other two proposed activities received more negative than positive answers, i.e., the translation/mediation of a dialogue from CSL into CR and the translation/mediation of a colloquial dialogue into another (foreign) language learned by the pupils/students. This is interesting as translating/mediating a dialogue from CSL into CR or vice versa is one of the activities frequently suggested in both older and more recent literature (Agatstein, 1988; Sheshukova et al., 2019). However, when asked to name appropriate activities themselves, two participants proposed translating a dialogue from CR into CSL; others suggested working with online corpora (e.g., ruTenTen), video clips, or internet memes, comparing and contrasting CSL and CR texts, or encouraging dialogues with "native speakers".

When asked (Q14) at which *CEFR* levels the participants would teach the following linguistic examples of CR (see Table 1), the participants opted, for the most part, for the A2–B1 levels, which underpins the idea that CR can and should be taught at beginner (basic user) and lower intermediate (independent user) levels and, consequently, at school.

What stands out in Table 1 is that although the participants in the previous questions consistently ranked lexis before sociopragmatics in terms of the importance of teaching, it is the sociopragmatic example they think can be taught at a lower level, namely A2.1. However, as shown in Sect. 4.3.1, with very few exceptions, sociopragmatic examples were not provided by the participants themselves. Moreover, it is interesting to note that both groups excluded morphology from teaching CR, but according to the results of the question here (Q14), it should or could be taught at the B1.1 level.[33] Remarkably, both examples from syntax are considered the most difficult ones and accordingly, the participants would teach them only at an upper intermediate level, i.e., B1.2. A possible explanation for this might be, as mentioned earlier, that syntactic characteristics are often not explicitly dealt with or camouflaged under "grammar" in Russian language classes or lectures and thus are perceived as challenging. These syntactic examples were also the ones not identified as syntax by schoolteachers, and in the comments (Q16) one participant even wondered if the example *Kakoj fakul'tet vy učites'?* was not actually linguistically wrong ("Das Beispiel *Kakoj fakul'tet vy učites'?* ist

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[33] Note, however, that the examples *musorščik, vračixa, učitel'ša* were classified by most of the participants as CR "lexis" (see Sect. 4.3.1).

doch sprachlich falsch?"). This comment is evocative of Kromer's advice (2009), cited in Sect. 2, that CR utterances should not be judged right or wrong because CR is a variety on its own and cannot be measured with regard to the standard variety CSL.

In the last question (Q15), the participants were asked to rate which of the following skills or competencies they considered decisive for the appropriate use of colloquial language. Interestingly, the use of syntactic structures (e.g., ellipses) was rated most important ($M = 3,47$; very important $= 4$; not important $= 1$), followed by the comprehension of audiovisual and social media ($M = 3,25$), the use of set phrases to gain time ($M = 3,16$), the mastery of memorizing chunks ($M = 2,99$), topicalization ($M = 2,89$), and knowledge of expressive word formation phenomena (e.g., feminitives) ($M = 2,7$). This result is remarkable considering that CR lexis and sociopragmatics are frequently listed as the two top linguistic subfields that should be taught—but when it comes to the appropriate use of CR, handling ellipses is considered to be the most important skill. This belief also corresponds with the recommendations in the literature suggesting that ellipses (abbreviations, short answers etc.) should be explained and trained at an early stage (see Sect. 2.5).

5 Between theory and practice: how to narrow the gap?

When comparing the questionnaire's results with the suggestions and recommendations provided in the literature, it becomes evident that the survey reflects the ambiguity among scholars about **when** to teach CR. What is interesting, however, is that the responses show a tendency toward teaching CR at school, as two-thirds of the participants chose this option. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that, generally, the participants opt for an earlier integration of CR particularities into the language classroom or university lectures (i.e., at A2 level) than the *CEFR*, which starts introducing colloquialisms at the B2 level. In other words, most participants take a more progressive stance than what is put forth in the *CEFR* concerning the question of when to introduce CR.

To a certain extent, the questionnaire's results are contradictory, especially regarding the section about rating and ranking the importance of certain linguistic subfields. This might be because CR is intrinsically a very complex phenomenon. Even though most participants have a broad knowledge of CR characteristics, they do not actively include them in their lectures or language classes. Strikingly, some Russian/Slavic linguists think that CR should only be dealt with in language courses, which might be one reason that schoolteachers often regret their lack of knowledge of CR. As one teacher stated in this context, colloquial language was unfortunately not covered during his/her studies; two other participants said in the comment section that they hope a teacher seminar on CR will soon be organized and enhance their awareness of CR and close the gap.

There is, in fact, a considerable disconnect between theory and practice. While CR should, at least in theory, be part of university courses on Slavic/Russian linguistics, the survey shows that this is not the case. However, as the current study illustrates, CR's particularities need not be part of linguistic lectures only but should also be dealt with in lectures and seminars on Russian cultural and literature studies, as they are a substantial part of both the linguistic and cultural repertoire. In this respect, our survey reveals an urgent demand for more lectures and/or seminars on CR characteristics at universities/colleges because if they are not addressed there, they will not find their way into the language classroom. However, as CR reflects authentic language usage, specifically as regards online communication, audiovisual media, and the comprehension of target language speakers and culture, our opinion is that neglecting it would be detrimental to the progress and success of learning Russian. This

is exactly as one participant put it in a comment used as a header for our introduction—not understanding the differences between CR and CSL is "harmful" (*vo vred*). Furthermore, as stated at the beginning (Sect. 1), the Russian literary language consists of both CR and CSL: presenting only one part of it would deprive the language of its second half.

Finally, we are aware of the difficulty and the challenge CR may pose to both linguists/instructors/teachers and learners. For this reason, we have devised a few ideas about CR characteristics that can readily be integrated at beginner levels (e.g., chunks, one- to four-word utterances, short answers, particles, etc.). In the literature, more examples of how to integrate and teach CR can be found (see e.g., Rathmayr, 1984; Agatstein, 1988; Mattig, 1994; Zemskaja, 2016; Sheshukova et al., 2019; Dziedzic, 2020; Stadler & Kaltseis, 2022). Furthermore, in the questionnaire's comments, the need for seminars on CR for schoolteachers and the demand for coursebooks providing more "authentic" and "real" language were expressed. Given today's heterogenous language classes that bring together beginning learners, heritage speakers, and other expert speakers, we agree that it is important to meet the needs of the commenters.

In conclusion, although CR is often still considered off-limits by many "native" Russian speakers, we plead for more openness and flexibility regarding this special subsystem of the Russian language because, following Bezmen (2006), colloquial speech also enhances (linguistic) freedom and creativity.

6 Limitations

The findings of our study may have some limitations. First, in the current study, only participants working and teaching in German-speaking countries, i.e., Austria, Germany and Switzerland, were involved. Second, although 268 Russian language teachers, university instructors and linguists answered the first question, only about a third of them ($n = 95$) filled in the whole questionnaire. We have already reflected on this small number of participants in Sect. 4.2, and we can only speculate why most decided to drop out. One reason might have been that they had to answer open questions, which are more time-consuming than closed ones. Another reason might have been the difficulty of certain questions. Therefore, subsequent interviews would have been helpful to find out about possible problems and obstacles within the questionnaire and get additional information on the teaching and understanding of CR. Third, a brief definition of CR at the beginning of the survey might have been conducive, as was also claimed by one participant in his/her comments (Q16). Another respondent criticized that the survey's target group was Russian teachers, who despite their education might have had difficulties with the linguistic terminology used in the questions. Irrespective of these limitations, we are convinced that the responses given shed new light on CR in the teaching process and provide a solid basis for further qualitative research in this area.

7 Conclusion

In this article, we have placed CR in the focus of Russian language pedagogy and given it the place we believe it deserves. We have identified some of the most striking particularities of CR mentioned in the literature, including (among others) phonetic elision and reduction, highly frequent chunks or mini-lexemes, specific word forms and word classes, suffixations, lexical and syntactic omissions, and a wide range of emotional and ever-changing

lexis. Since sociopragmatics has been mentioned more than once in connection with CR, it seems appropriate at this stage to recall Kasper's (1997) method of how to make pragmatics teachable. To her mind, this can only be done by "arranging learning opportunities in such a way that they benefit the development of pragmatic competence in L2" (Van Compernolle et al., 2016, p. 343). Forms and expressions—be they grammatical or pragmatic—are always easier to pick up, as they might be familiar from the learner's L1, but it is more difficult to deduce (socio)pragmatic meaning, especially if the forms and expressions are embedded in CR structures.

Considering all these aspects, integrating CR into the language classroom—be it as functional style or language variety—is quite challenging, which is why most researchers advocate for teaching students only neutral style or receptive skills of CR. However, an in-depth analysis of the literature has also revealed that some scholars plead for more active-oriented approaches when teaching CR, such as the automatization of "stamps" to help students master authentic dialogic speech. This dissent in the literature concerning the integration of CR is also reflected in the questionnaire among Slavic/Russian linguists, Russian language instructors, and schoolteachers/tutors, who have a much more progressive view than the one presented in the literature or the *CEFR* as they vote for teaching CR at A2 level at school. Although there is consensus that CR should be taught in language courses and lectures on Russian linguistics at university, the empirical study exposed an obvious gap between theory and practice. In fact, teaching CR in university lectures or seminars is far from a given, as some linguists pass the teaching on to instructors of "mere" language courses. But as stated in the article, if future teachers do not become accustomed to the characteristics of CR from a thorough (applied) linguistic perspective, they will not be able to teach CR at school. So, we plead for greater openness to CR, especially at university and college levels, and we strongly support its implementation in the curricula. This is the only way to ensure that students will fully grasp the Russian language system and its cultural entanglements and will not encounter communicative barriers.

Declarations

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