ISSN:2828-6235
Impact factor:13.77

International Journal of Literature and Language Studies(IJLLS)

Teaching Contemporary Russian Poetry in Upper Grades of Schools with Non-Russian Languages of Instruction

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doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23614092

Abstract. Teaching contemporary Russian poetry in upper grades of schools with non-Russian languages of instruction presents a complex pedagogical challenge that extends beyond the acquisition of vocabulary and the comprehension of literary content. Students encounter poetic texts through the interaction of linguistic structures, cultural associations, emotional responses, and individual interpretive experience. This article proposes an author-oriented methodological approach that transforms poetry lessons into a space of linguistic discovery, intercultural dialogue, critical thinking, and creative self-expression. The central idea is expressed through the original methodological sequence "word → image → association → interpretation → personal meaning → creative response."

Keywords: Contemporary Russian poetry, multilingual education, Russian language teaching, literary interpretation, poetic imagery, intercultural communication, upper secondary school, creative expression, linguistic personality, reader response.

In contemporary education, the teaching of literature is increasingly associated with the development of independent thought, communicative competence, cultural awareness, and the ability to interpret complex meanings. These objectives acquire particular significance in upper grades of schools where the language of instruction is not Russian. In such educational environments, students encounter Russian literary texts through a linguistic system that may differ substantially from the language they use in everyday communication. The challenge becomes especially apparent when they begin to study poetry, a literary form in which meaning is frequently conveyed through metaphor, rhythm, sound, ambiguity, symbolic imagery, and emotionally charged lexical choices. A student may understand the dictionary meanings of individual words and still fail to perceive the artistic relationship between them[1]. Conversely, a student may intuitively sense the emotional atmosphere of a poem without possessing sufficient Russian vocabulary to articulate that response. This discrepancy reveals an important methodological problem: the teaching of poetry must connect linguistic understanding with aesthetic perception and independent interpretation. Contemporary Russian poetry offers considerable opportunities for addressing this problem because it can connect literary education with questions that are meaningful to adolescents. The search for identity, the experience of belonging, the relationship between the individual and society, the value of memory, the meaning

of freedom, the fragility of human relationships, and the perception of an increasingly complex world can become starting points for thoughtful engagement with poetic language. Such themes allow students to encounter literature not as a collection of distant cultural facts but as an artistic form through which human experience becomes comprehensible and discussable. Nevertheless, the educational value of a poem does not depend exclusively on its theme.

Its significance also emerges from the way language transforms experience into an artistic image[2]. Therefore, the principal task of the teacher is to help students discover how poetic meaning is constructed rather than merely inform them about what a poem is supposed to mean.

The methodological position developed in this article rests on the assumption that a multilingual learner possesses interpretive resources that extend beyond the boundaries of the language being studied. Students bring to the classroom knowledge of their native language, personal memories, cultural associations, reading experiences, and individual ways of perceiving the world. These resources should be incorporated into literary instruction without replacing the original Russian text or reducing its complexity. The native language can function as a point of comparison, a means of identifying semantic nuances, and a resource for recognising similarities and differences between cultural images. Russian, in turn, becomes the language through which students gradually learn to express increasingly precise interpretations. The objective is not to eliminate the influence of the first language but to transform multilingual experience into an instrument of literary and linguistic development.

The central methodological contribution of this article is an author-oriented interpretive framework expressed through the sequence "word → image → association → interpretation → personal meaning → creative response." The sequence represents a movement from linguistic observation towards independent meaning-making. At the same time, it is not intended as a rigid algorithm that must be followed identically in every lesson. Poetic reading is recursive: a newly discovered image may change the interpretation of an earlier word, while personal reflection may lead the reader back to a previously overlooked detail[3]. The model therefore provides a flexible structure for organising classroom interaction while preserving the openness characteristic of genuine literary interpretation.

The initial stage, represented by the word, directs students' attention to the linguistic material of the poem. Instead of beginning with a complete explanation of the text, the teacher invites learners to identify words, expressions, repetitions, unusual grammatical constructions, and lexical combinations that attract their attention. Students attempt to infer meaning from context before consulting a dictionary or receiving an explanation. This procedure encourages linguistic observation and reduces dependence on immediate translation. It also teaches learners to distinguish between words that are essential for understanding the poem and those whose meaning can be inferred from the surrounding context. The teacher's task is to provide sufficient support without removing the intellectual challenge of discovery.

The next stage focuses on the image. A word acquires artistic significance through its relationship with other elements of the text. An ordinary object may become a symbol, a physical movement may suggest an emotional transition, and a description of nature may communicate an internal psychological state. Students should therefore investigate not only what an expression

denotes but also what it evokes and how it influences the atmosphere of the poem. Questions such as “Why might the poet have chosen this particular image?”, “What changes when this word is replaced by another?”, and “How does the image contribute to the emotional effect of the text?” encourage learners to connect linguistic form with artistic function. Through this process, literary terminology becomes meaningful because students encounter the expressive potential of language before being required to define it theoretically. The stage of association introduces the relationship between poetic imagery and cultural experience. Students may compare the meanings associated with such images as a road, a window, a tree, a river, a home, or a distant horizon in Russian and their native language[4].

However, this comparison should not be based on the assumption that every cultural symbol possesses one fixed meaning. The same image may evoke security for one reader, uncertainty for another, and freedom for a third. Its interpretation depends on the context of the poem as well as the reader’s experience. Consequently, the teacher should encourage students to distinguish between culturally familiar associations, personal responses, and meanings supported directly by the text. Such differentiation develops intercultural sensitivity and prevents literary discussion from becoming a collection of unsupported generalisations about national cultures. Interpretation constitutes the next essential stage. At this point, students formulate an explanation of the poem’s central idea, emotional movement, or underlying conflict. Their responses should be personal but textually grounded. A meaningful interpretation requires more than stating that a poem concerns love, nature, loneliness, or freedom. Students must explain how particular words, images, contrasts, repetitions, and compositional choices contribute to the proposed meaning. This requirement develops analytical discipline while allowing multiple interpretations to coexist. When two students offer different explanations of the same image, the teacher should not automatically eliminate one response in favour of the other. Instead, both interpretations can be examined in relation to the available textual evidence. Such discussion helps students understand that interpretive freedom does not mean the absence of reasoning.

Personal meaning emerges when students connect their interpretation with their own experience, observations, or understanding of contemporary life. This connection should not turn a literary lesson into an exclusively autobiographical discussion. Rather, it should help learners recognise how literary texts can illuminate experiences that are not identical to their own[5]. A poem about distance, for example, may encourage reflection on physical separation, emotional isolation, the passage of time, or the difference between memory and reality. Students can explain which aspect of the poem appears most significant to them and why. They may also acknowledge that their interpretation has changed during the discussion. Such reflection supports intellectual independence because learners begin to recognise reading as a process of reconsideration rather than the passive reception of an established conclusion.

The final stage, creative response, enables students to apply their understanding in a new communicative situation. They may compose a short poetic fragment, rewrite a selected image from another perspective, propose an alternative title, prepare an expressive oral interpretation, or create a concise commentary explaining the artistic function of a particular word. The purpose is not to require every learner to become a poet. Instead, creative production allows students to demonstrate whether they can transfer their understanding of language and imagery into

independent expression. When a learner deliberately selects a word, constructs a comparison, or changes the perspective of a lyrical speaker, literary knowledge becomes an active linguistic resource. The implementation of this framework requires teaching techniques that combine intellectual challenge with accessible forms of participation. One particularly productive technique may be described as "The Poetic Detective." Students work individually or in small groups to identify clues within a poem, including repeated expressions, unexpected images, shifts in tone, contrasts, and details that initially appear insignificant. Each group develops a hypothesis about the text and supports it with specific examples. The hypotheses are then compared during a classroom discussion. This approach encourages students to treat the poem as a meaningful structure whose elements interact, rather than as a sequence of lines requiring separate translation.

Another technique, "The Image Laboratory," focuses on the transformation of linguistic material into artistic meaning. Students select an image and describe its literal meaning, possible figurative significance, emotional associations, and function within the poem. They may represent their observations through a cluster of keywords or a short written explanation. The essential requirement is that each interpretation must be connected to identifiable features of the text. This technique is particularly helpful for learners who understand the general atmosphere of a poem but struggle to formulate an analytical response in Russian[6]. The technique "Two Languages, One Image" makes purposeful use of multilingual experience. Students select a poetic expression and examine how it might be conveyed in their native language. They compare possible translations and discuss what is preserved, altered, or lost in the process. The comparison may reveal differences in connotation, imagery, emotional tone, or grammatical structure. Students are encouraged to recognise that a translation can be linguistically correct while failing to reproduce an important artistic effect. Through this activity, translation becomes a means of developing linguistic awareness rather than a mechanical exercise in replacing words.

A further technique, "The Dialogue of Interpretations," organises discussion around reasoned disagreement. One student presents an interpretation, while another asks questions that test its coherence and textual basis. The speaker must then clarify, defend, or revise the initial explanation. Questions such as "Which word supports your conclusion?", "Could this image suggest something different?", and "How does the final line change the meaning of the opening?" help students develop academic communication. This activity is particularly important for learners who are accustomed to searching for one correct answer and may initially hesitate to express an independent opinion. The successful implementation of these techniques depends on the teacher's ability to balance linguistic support with intellectual independence. Excessive explanation can deprive students of opportunities to discover meaning, whereas insufficient guidance may leave them unable to participate confidently. A differentiated approach is therefore essential. Learners with limited vocabulary may benefit from contextual glossaries, sentence frames, guiding questions, or short preparatory discussions. Students with stronger proficiency can be asked to compare competing interpretations, analyse ambiguity, evaluate translation choices, or explain the relationship between a poem's structure and its emotional effect. Differentiation should modify the degree of support and complexity without excluding students from the shared literary experience. Digital resources can extend these opportunities when they serve a clear educational purpose. Audio recordings allow students to examine the relationship between rhythm, intonation, pauses,

and interpretation. Digital annotation tools can help learners identify recurring images and compare their observations with those of classmates. Collaborative platforms may support the creation of thematic word maps, short interpretive commentaries, or recordings of expressive reading. However, technology should not become the centre of the lesson. Its value depends on whether it improves close reading, encourages meaningful collaboration, or enables students to communicate their interpretations more effectively.

Assessment should reflect the multidimensional nature of poetry learning. Linguistic accuracy remains important, but it should not be treated as the only indicator of achievement. A student may produce a grammatically imperfect response while demonstrating sophisticated interpretive insight; another may speak accurately while offering only a superficial description of the text. An effective assessment system should therefore consider comprehension, linguistic awareness, the use of textual evidence, interpretive reasoning, intercultural understanding, and the ability to communicate an independent response. Formative assessment is particularly valuable because it provides information about the learner's progress during the interpretive process rather than only at its conclusion.

A practical assessment procedure can involve three questions. First, what has the student discovered about the language and imagery of the poem? Second, how effectively can the student explain an interpretation using textual evidence? Third, how successfully can the student express that interpretation through oral or written Russian? These questions allow the teacher to identify different areas of development and plan subsequent instruction accordingly. Reflective self-assessment can complement this procedure by inviting students to identify one meaningful discovery, one difficulty they overcame, and one question they would like to investigate further.

The proposed framework also has implications for the development of students' linguistic personalities. Literary language offers opportunities to move beyond formulaic communication towards more precise, nuanced, and expressive use of Russian. Students gradually learn that the choice of a word influences tone, that a metaphor can communicate an idea indirectly, and that the same sentence may acquire different meanings depending on context. These discoveries can enrich not only literary interpretation but also oral communication, academic writing, and the ability to express complex personal positions. Poetry consequently becomes a medium through which linguistic competence and intellectual development support one another. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the proposed approach should be established through systematic pedagogical investigation rather than assumed on the basis of its theoretical rationale alone. Further classroom research could examine whether regular use of the framework contributes to improvements in students' interpretive independence, expressive vocabulary, quality of textual argumentation, willingness to participate in discussion, and ability to compare cultural meanings. Such research should document the educational context, learners' initial proficiency, the selected poetic texts, the duration of instruction, and the assessment procedures. It should also distinguish observed changes from assumptions about causality. This would make it possible to evaluate the model's practical value and identify the conditions under which its components are most effective.

The broader significance of teaching contemporary Russian poetry in schools with non-Russian languages of instruction lies in the possibility of bringing language, culture, thought, and personal experience into a meaningful relationship. When students examine the structure of a

poetic image, compare its possible cultural associations, defend an interpretation, and create their own response, they participate in a form of learning that integrates linguistic practice with critical reflection. They discover that understanding a literary text involves both attention to the author's artistic choices and awareness of their own interpretive position.

In conclusion, contemporary Russian poetry should be approached as a dynamic educational resource capable of developing linguistic competence, literary awareness, intercultural dialogue, and creative independence. The author-oriented framework "word → image → association → interpretation → personal meaning → creative response" offers a structured yet flexible way to organise this process. Its principal methodological value lies in connecting close reading with active communication and allowing multilingual students to approach complex literary meanings without sacrificing either artistic depth or linguistic development. The ultimate aim is not merely to teach students to explain poems correctly, but to enable them to read attentively, think independently, communicate precisely, and recognise how language can transform experience into meaning.

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