



Features of the Use of the Verb «open» in Chinese and Russian

Xinchao Li¹ & Daria Iliushina²

¹Teaching Affairs Office, Jiangsu University, Jingkou District, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, China

²School of Liberal Arts, Faculty of Education, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu, China

Correspondence: Iliushina Daria, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, China

Email: kotilushin@gmail.com

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Abstract

Studies of the mistakes that Russian-speaking students make when learning Chinese show that one of the most common mistakes is the use of the verb «开 (to open)» with inappropriate objects. Students do not always take into account the features of the use of the same verb in different languages, which can lead to mistakes. This article analyzes the features of the word use of the verb «to open» with objects in Chinese and Russian in order to determine possible cases of positive and negative influence of language transfer. The research revealed 4 groups of features of the use of the verb «to open» with objects in Russian and Chinese languages: phrases with the possibility of direct translation, phrases typical only for Russian or Chinese, as well as phrases that require explanation. There are much more cases of possible negative transfer when using the verb «开 (to open)» than cases where positive transfer is possible.

Keywords: Verb «To Open», Chinese language, Russian Language, Language Transfer, Translate

Introduction

Literature Review

There is a lot of research on the mistakes foreign students make when learning Chinese. According to Dobrynina (2018), there are a number of the most common mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, word usage, pronunciation, and etc, which are typical only for a certain category of students — for example, there are mistakes that are typical only for students from Arabic countries, or mistakes inherent only in students from Europe, etc.

A huge number of Russian-speaking students study Chinese. Consequently, there are a number of mistakes that are inherent in Russian-speaking students. Among the studies on the mistakes that Russian-speaking students make in the course of learning Chinese language, Ji Jinjin (2019), who investigates the mistakes of Russian-speaking students in HSK5 (one of the six levels of Chinese language proficiency), and Wu Aijun (2010), who also studies the peculiarities of learning Chinese in the classroom by Russian-speaking

students, and a number of other teachers (Zhao, 2013), revealed that one of the most common mistakes of Russian-speaking students is the incorrect use of the verb «*开* (to open)» with objects. For example, according to the researchers, Russian-speaking students often use the verb «*开* (to open)» in combination with inappropriate objects:

请你*开书* (Translation from Chinese: *Please open the book*. This example shows the misuse of the verb «*开* (to open)». Correct: *打开*);

医生叫我*开我的嘴* (Translation from Chinese: *The doctor asked me to open my mouth*. In this case, the verb «*开* (to open)» is also used incorrectly. The correct version is «*张开*»).

The researchers point out that the reason for such a mistake is negative transfer, which occurs due to the differences in the use and lexical meaning of the verb «*open*» in Russian and Chinese languages.

There are two types of transfer in linguistics: positive and negative. Positive transfer occurs when two languages have similar grammatical, lexical and other features, so the student has a transfer of similar vocabulary, grammar, etc. into a foreign language, and it does not require much effort. Negative transfer occurs when languages differ, so a student may, for example, habitually use grammar from the native language in a foreign language, even if it does not comply with the rules of the foreign language (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Milrud & Kondakova, 2015).

Protasova (2011, p. 30) points out that in Russian the same verb with the meaning «*open*» is combined with objects such as *doors, mouth, book, eyes*, and etc. This leads to an attempt by Russian-speaking students to use these phrases in the same way in Chinese, which is unacceptable in Chinese.

Since existing studies consider this phenomenon only as one of the types of mistakes, and do not provide a detailed description of the differences in Chinese and Russian languages of the verb «*open*», and taking into account the very little research on the features of the use of the verb «*open*»; we will analyze the features of the use of this verb in Chinese and Russian based on the Russian and Chinese language corpora to identify possible cases of positive and negative transfer.

Features of the Verb «open» in Chinese and Russian

Before moving on to the features of the use of the verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian languages, we first consider the meanings of these verbs. According to the Online Chinese dictionary, in Chinese, the verb «*开* (to open)» means *to turn on, to develop, or to open something that is closed*. Ding Zhicong (2006) points out that in Chinese, the verb «*开* (to open)» is used in various contexts and forms, and as a rule in the meaning of *to*

start, to open, to turn on and etc: 开门 (to open the doors), 开眼 (to open one's eyes), 开灯 (to turn on the light), 开电视 (to turn on the TV), 开市 (to start trading), 开课 (to start classes), 开车 (to drive) and etc. At the same time, in Russian, the equivalent of the verb «开 (to open)» usually has the following translation variant: *открывать (to open)*:

*Открывать дверь (to open the door);
Открывать заведение (to open a factory).*

According to the “Large Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language” (2008), the Russian verb «*открывать (to open)*» has the following meanings in Russian: *to make something open for the passage of a person, air, light, by changing the position of the obstacle; to move the barrier; to make something accessible, explicit, visible; to start work; to discover previously unknown to anyone, to make a scientific discovery; to make information available, to declassify.* The same Russian verb «*открывать (to open)*» is also combined with objects such as *books, mouth, and eyes*. Such word usage is considered incorrect in Chinese.

Currently, in Russia, textbooks and dictionaries (such as “New Practical Chinese Reader” (2015) textbooks and “*Nachal'nyi kurs kitaiskogo iazyka*” (“Basic Chinese course”) (2021)) used by Russian students often point out two translation options. According to the examples in Chinese textbooks, the Chinese verb «*开 (to open)*» has the following two variants of translation into Russian:

1. *открывать (to open)*. This verb is used in the meaning «*to open something, to make something accessible to the passage*»: *открывать окно (to open the window), открывать двери (to open the doors)*;

2. *включать (to turn on)*. This verb means to turn on devices related to technology and electronics : *включать свет (to turn on the light), включать телевизор (to turn on the TV)*.

In addition, textbooks contain additional translations such as «*to drive a car (开)*» and «*to joke (开玩笑)*». Direct translation of these expressions into Russian is unacceptable.

As we can see, the verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian languages has both similarities and differences in meaning and usage. According to Protasova (2011), the mistake with the verb «*open*» occurs due to the fact that Russian students associate the Chinese verb «*开 (to open)*» primarily with the Russian verb «*открывать (to open)*». Although from the above examples we can see that there are much more translation options, and this can lead to negative transfer. That is, despite the similarity of the verbs «*开 (to open)*» and «*открывать (to open)*», these verbs can correspond to different objects. And due to the lack of or ignorance of additional translations of the verb «*открывать (to*

open)» in Russian and the variety of situations of its use, Russian-speaking students use objects corresponding to the Russian verb «открывать (*to open*)» in situations where they are inappropriate with the Chinese verb «开 (*to open*)».

Research Methods

In order to study and compare the features of the use of the verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian, we chose the following three language corpora: to analyze sentences in Russian, we used Natsional'nyi korpus russkogo iazyka (Russian National Corpus); to analyze sentences in Chinese, we used Chinese Corpus and Corpus Online. The advantage of our chosen language corpora lies in their open access and huge database. We also used dictionaries for the correct translation of phrases and sentences (Tsili, 2016).

Although the verbs «开 (*to open*)» and «открывать (*to open*)» have similar meanings in Chinese and Russian, as stated above, these verbs are slightly different. In addition, the Russian translation of the Chinese verb «开 (*to open*)» is restricted. Therefore, we assume that the contexts in which these verbs are used may also be different. The language corpora help us analyze the various contexts in which the verb «*open*» is used in modern Chinese and Russian.

The research consists of two stages:

The first stage is the stage of collecting of phrases and sentences obtained from language corpora. In order to compare the verb «*open*» in two languages, we focused on grammatical structures such as «开 + *object*» and «открывать + *object*» and analyzed the 60 of the most common phrases and sentences in both languages. We searched for and investigated the verb «открывать (*to open*)» in the Russian language corpus, taking into account different tenses, forms, grammatical moods and genders: открывать, открыла, открыл, открой, открывали and etc.

The second stage is the stage of comparing the features of the use of the verb «*open*» with additions. As a result, we compared the features of the use of the verb «*open*», namely with what objects the verb «*open*» is combined in Chinese and Russian. For convenience, we divided the data obtained during the analysis into 4 groups.

Results

During the analysis of phrases and sentences with the verb «*open*», we noticed that in each of the languages there are phrases that coincide in meaning, as well as phrases inherent in only one of the languages. That is, we found a number of objects that are combined with both the Chinese verb «开 (*to open*)» and the Russian verb «открывать (*to open*)». But there are also objects that are combined with the verb «*open*» in only one of the languages, and not combined in the other. In addition, some phrases with the verb «*open*» can be put into a separate category due to their ambiguity, since they require further

clarification.

Thus, we identified 4 groups of features of the use of the verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian languages: 1) similar features of the use of the verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian; 2) the features of the use, typical for the Russian verb «*открывать (to open)*»; 3) the features of the use, typical for the Chinese verb «*开 (to open)*»; 4) ambiguous phrases with the verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian.

Similar Features of the Use of the Verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian

First of all, we considered the word usage of the verb «*open*» inherent in both languages. These include the following phrases, which coincide in meaning in both languages and are translated by the same «*开/ открывать (to open)*» in both Chinese and Russian. For convenience, we combined phrases with similar usage into the following categories in Table 1:

Table 1: Similar meanings of the verb "to open" in Russian and Chinese

Meaning	Examples in Russian	Examples in Chinese
1. To establish / to open;	1. Открывать филиал (to open a branch); 2. Открывать фирму (to open a company); 3. Открывать производство (to open a factory); 4. Открывать булочную (to open a bakery);	1. 开工厂 (to open a factory); 2. 开一家水果店 (to open a fruit shop);
2. To make something open/ to open a room;	1. Открывать дверь (to open the door); 2. Открывать погреб (to open the cellar); 3. Открывать окно (to open the window); 4. Открывать замок (to open the lock);	1. 终于开了大门 (finally opened the door); 2. 又开了城门 (opened the gate again); 3. 开一扇扇房门 (to open the doors); 4. 把窗子开 (to open the window); 5. 开箱子 (to open the box); 6. 开了锁 (opened lock);
3. To open/ to unscrew;	1. Открывать крышку (to open the lid); 2. Открывать напиток (to open a bottle of drink);	1. 开了一瓶蒙达维白葡萄酒 (opened a bottle of Mondavi white wine); 2. 开罐头 (to open a tin); 3. 开瓶子 (to open the bottle);
4. To hold a meeting	1. Открывать заседание (to open the meeting);	1. 开会 (to hold (to open) the meeting);
5. To open/ to unseal;	1. Открывать пакет (to open the package);	1. 开了封 (opened the letters);
6. To create/ to initiate;		1. 为中国前途开一个新纪元 (to usher in a new era for China's future);
7. To start military operations;	1. Открывать военные действия/ огонь (to open hostilities / to open fire); 2. Открывать пальбу (to open fire);	1. 开火 (to open fire); 2. 开了一枪 (fired a shot);
8. To open one's mouth to start talking;		1. 开口说谎 (to open one's mouth and [start to] lie);

For the categories from table 1, we found similar usage. In other words, these sentences can be translated into Chinese using the verb «开 (to open)», or they can be translated into Russian using the verb «открывать (to open)». This means that for Russian

students, there could be a positive transfer in these categories of the use of the verb «open».

The Features of the Use, Typical for the Russian Verb «открывать (to open)»

Next, based on the Russian corpus, we studied the contexts of the verb «открывать (to open)» that only apply to Russian. It is impossible to directly translate these phrases into Chinese (Table 2):

Table 2: The features of the use, typical for the Russian verb «to open»

Meaning	Examples in Russian
1. To discover/ to find;	1. Открывать что-то новое (to discover something new); 2. Открывать богов (to discover gods); 3. Открывать противоядие (to discover the antidote); 4. Открывать закон (to discover the law);
2. To start to do something;	1. Открывать бизнес (to start a business); 2. Открывать учебные курсы (to start training courses); 3. Открывать уголовное дело (to open a criminal case);
3. To click on;	1. Открывать сайт (to open the site); 2. Открывать ссылку (to open link); 3. Открывать папку (to open folder); 4. Открывать программу (to open the program);
4. To open a book;	1. Открывать учебник (to open the textbook); 2. Открывать самоучитель (to open the tutorial); 3. Открывать страницу (to open a page);
5. To speak out;	1. Открывать секрет (to reveal a secret); 2. Открывать истину (to reveal the truth); 3. Открывать сердце (to open one's heart);
6. To open;	1. Открывать люк (to open the hatch); 2. Открывать капот (to open the bonnet);
7. To set up/ to open;	1. Открывать интернет-центр (to open an internet center);
8. To start an event;	1. Открывать вечер (to start the party); 2. Открывать мероприятие (to start an event);
9. To open the container/ package;	1. Открывать портфель (to open a backpack); 2. Открывать коробку (to open the box); 3. Открывать кастрюлю (to take the lid off the pan);
10. To show/ to uncover;	1. Открывать щеку (to uncover one's cheek); 2. Открывать лицо (to uncover one's face); 3. Открывать ноги (to uncover one's legs);
11. To open/ to put up;	1. Открывать зонтик (to put up an umbrella);
12. To allow passage;	1. Открывать границу (to open the border); 2. Открывать проход (to open the passage);

As mentioned above, the researchers noted that among the mistakes of Russian-speaking students, they found incorrect translation of some of the phrases from Table 2 from Russian into Chinese, such as «открывать книгу (to open a book)» and others. Therefore, we can assume that when Russian students try to translate the above phrases from Russian into Chinese, a negative transfer may occur. If we try to translate sentences like «открывать уголовное дело (to open a criminal case), открывать зонтик (to put up umbrella), открывать страницу (to open a page)» into Chinese with the verb «开 (to open)», it will lead to mistakes and misunderstandings, or the phrase will have a completely different meaning. This means that such phrases need to further clarify to Russian students which objects the verb «开 (to open)» is used in conjunction with.

The Features Of The Use, Typical For The Chinese Verb «开 (to open)»

Regarding the third group of phrases with verb «开 (to open)», we obtained the following phrases from the Chinese corpus. The following phrases are only suitable for Chinese, and their literal translation into Russian is not allowed:

1. 开他的玩笑 (kidding him);
2. 开垦 (to develop new lands);
3. 开了言 (started the speech);
4. 开车 (to drive), 开拖拉机 (to drive a tractor);
5. 开了一个洞 (made a hole), 开了条窄窄的口子 (made a narrow hole);
6. 开电视 (to turn on the TV), 开电灯了 (to turn on the lights);
7. 开钻 (to drill);
8. 开唱 (to start singing);
9. 开了一份汤的票 (to write a check for the soup);
10. 开奠 (to start the ceremony);
11. 开铁矿 (to exploit iron ore deposits);
12. 开大课 (to begin the class);
13. 开个名单 (to make a list);
14. 开了工资 (paid wages);
15. 把水开过儿 ([a request to a person] boil the water);
16. 开了工 (to get to work);
17. 开铺盖 (to make the bed);
18. 开一个药方 (to write a prescription);
19. 开风气 (to give rise to other customs and traditions);
20. 开绿灯 (to give the green light).

In the examples above, we can see the use of the verb «开 (to open)» with different meanings. If we translate all these phrases into Russian, then instead of the verb «открывать (to open)» we will need to use other verbs. For example, when translating «开电视 (to turn on the TV), 开电灯 (to turn on the light)», instead of the verb «открывать (to open)», we will use the verb «включать (to turn on)»; «开工 (to get to work) / 开言 (to start a speech)» — «начинать (to start)»; «开车 (to drive) / 开拖拉机 (to drive a tractor)» — «водить (to drive)» and etc. We presume that since the most common translation of the Chinese verb «开 (to open)» in Russian is «открывать (to open)», Russian students may have difficulty understanding the meaning of these phrases, so they also need further explanation.

Ambiguous Phrases with the Verb «open» in Chinese and Russian

In addition, during the analysis of the Russian and Chinese language corpora, we also found some cases of the use of the verb «open», which require additional clarification due to their ambiguity:

1. *Открывать крепость* (Literal translation from Russian: *to open the fortress*. Meaning: *to open the front door of the fortress*). In some cases, we cannot literally translate such phrases into Chinese. Russians often say sentences like «открывать дом (Literally: *to open the house*)», «открывать комнату (Literally: *to open the room*)». It means «to open the door of the house», «to open the door of the room». The word «door» in Russian is omitted. We believe that such omission is impossible in some Chinese sentences. For example, in Chinese, phrases «开房间 (Literally: *to open + the room*)» and «开房间的门 (Literally: *to open + the door of the room*)» have different meanings. The first phrase (开房间) translates as «rent a hotel room» and the second phrase (开房间的门) translates as «to open the door of the room».

2. *Открывать воду* (Literal translation from Russian: *to open + the water*). This sentence is translated from Russian as «to turn on the water» or «to turn on the faucet», but if we literally translate this phrase from Russian into Chinese, the result is the phrase «开 (open) + 水 (water)», which means «boiling water (开水)» in Chinese.

3. *开商业谈判 (to start negotiations), 议论开了 (discussion began)*. In Russian, the objects such as «negotiation/ discussion» can also be used with the verb «открывать (to open)». However, Russians more often use other verbs for phrases with «negotiation/ discussion»: «проводить (to hold)».

4. *开眼* (Literally: *to open one's eyes*). In Chinese, the phrase «开眼 (to open one's eyes)» means «broaden one's horizons». If we translate it literally into Russian, the result is the phrase «открывать глаза (to open one's eyes)», which leads to a distortion of the meaning. In addition, there are two interpretations of the phrase «открывать глаза (to

open one's eyes)» in Russian: «*to open one's eyes*» and «*to undeceive*». Therefore, when translating this phrase into any of these languages, we should take into account the main meaning that we are trying to convey.

In the examples above, we can see that due to the fact that the Chinese verb «开 (*to open*)» is often translated into Russian as «открывать (*to open*)», the meanings of phrases containing the verb «开/ открывать (*to open*)» can be misunderstood or incorrectly translated.

The phrases like «*to open the company/ to open the door/ to open the bottle*» etc. are the same in two languages. A positive transfer may occur here. However, based on the examples obtained from the language corpora, we can notice that there are far fewer cases where a positive transfer may occur compared to the cases where a negative transfer may occur. For example, in some sentences, because certain objects cannot be used with the Russian verb «открывать (*to open*)», we translate the verb «开 (*to open*)» into Russian as «включать (*to turn on*)», «водить (*to drive*)», «начинать (*to start*)» and etc. The same happens when translating phrases from Russian to Chinese. In addition, in some cases, in order to correctly translate the verbs «开 (*to open*)» and «открывать (*to open*)», we need to understand the context. In examples such as «开房间 (*rent a hotel room. Literal translation: to open a room*)» and «открывать глаза («*to open one's eyes*» or «*to undeceive*»)», the meaning of the words may be highly contextual. Misunderstanding of the verb «open» and its subsequent objects in Russian and Chinese can lead to distortion of meaning and translation mistakes.

Research Recommendations

The single verb «开/ открывать (*to open*)» in Chinese and Russian has a wide range of contexts and differences, which may lead to negative or positive transfer. For teachers, this means that in each individual case, they need a certain strategy for explaining this verb.

Based on the aforementioned use of the verb «open» in Chinese and Russian, we can single out the following problems that teachers and Russian-speaking students may encounter:

1. Russian students associate the Chinese verb «开 (*to open*)» with the Russian verb «открывать (*to open*)», but these verbs have some differences;
2. the verbs «开 (*to open*)» and «открывать (*to open*)» can be used with different objects;
3. there are special cases of the use of the verb «open», which can be confused;
4. there are problems associated with the literal translation of the verb «open» in both languages.

Based on the above content, we can emphasize the following suggestions for

teachers and students:

Suggestions for Teachers

As a teaching strategy, we can provide the following suggestions:

1. We recommend that teachers explain to students that the verb «*open*» can have different meanings depending on the context, for this reason the verb «*open*» in Chinese and Russian may differ and be used with different objects. The literal translation from Russian to Chinese can lead to misunderstandings. Similarly, the literal translation from Chinese to Russian can lead to misunderstandings and distortion of meaning.

2. We also suggest that teachers explain to students the special cases of using the verb «*open*», that is, in some cases, it is impossible to omit the word «*door*», or the literal translation of the phrase «*открывать воду (开 + 水)*» (meaning in Russian: *to turn on a faucet*) into Chinese is «*boiling water*», that is, such a translation distorted the original meaning of the phrase.

Considering these characteristics of using similar words in Chinese and Russian, teachers will be able to understand the nature of certain mistakes, so teachers will be able to better explain to students how to avoid mistakes and correctly use the verb «*open*» and verbs with similar translation features.

Suggestions for Students

To achieve more correct speech in Chinese, we also recommend that students:

1. avoid literal translation, otherwise it is possible to say a phrase like «*开书*», which is a mistake in Chinese;

2. when using dictionaries and electronic translators, look not for a single word, but for a collocation or phrase, because dictionaries and translators, as a rule, contain frequently used phrases and fixed expressions that cannot be literally translated;

3. consider the context, based on which students can choose a more appropriate word or phrase;

4. use frequency dictionaries and language corpora to familiarize themselves with common expressions and the most frequently used phrases in the speech of native Chinese speakers.

Conclusion

Among the mistakes inherent in Russian students, we can single out the mistakes associated with the use of the verb «*open*» with inappropriate objects. Researchers attribute this fact to the result of negative transfer. Despite the similar meanings of the Russian verb «*открывать (to open)*» and Chinese verb «*开 (to open)*», their use has its own

characteristics. In the course of analysing the Chinese and Russian language corpora and comparing the use of the verb «open» with objects in both languages, we found that we can use some of the objects both with the Chinese verb «开 (to open)» and with the Russian verb «открывать (to open)», that is, literal translation is possible. But we also found cases where certain objects are used with the verb «open» in only one of the languages. Cases of the use of the verb «open» that differ in Russian and Chinese can lead to negative transfer, translation mistakes and misunderstandings due to literal translation. Therefore, we recommend that teachers, in the event of such mistakes, take into account the cases of different word use of this verb in different languages, and draw the attention of Russian-speaking students to these features in order to avoid mistakes.

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