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Abstract

This paper introduces the survey carried out on 58 participants of Russian as a Foreign Language (TORFL) examination sessions in Brazil. The first large TORFL session was conducted in this country in 2018 by the Language Testing Centre of Saint Petersburg State University and three Brazilian language schools. The survey results could be used to process how TORFL becomes a part of the Russian language teaching in a new area and to promote TORFL abroad.

Key words: *Russian as a foreign language, Test of Russian as a Foreign Language, RFL, TORFL, TRKI, Russian language in Brazil*

Аннотация

В статье представлены результаты опроса, проведенного среди 58 участников сессий Тестирования по русскому языку как иностранному (ТРКИ) в Бразилии. Первая масштабная тестовая сессия была организована в Бразилии в 2018 году Центром языкового тестирования Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета и тремя языковыми школами Бразилии. Полученную информацию планируется использовать для исследования влияния ТРКИ на организацию преподавания русского языка в Бразилии и других странах, где он еще не получил широкого распространения, а также для дальнейшего продвижения ТРКИ.

Ключевые слова: *русский язык как иностранный, тест по русскому языку как иностранному, РКИ, ТРКИ, русский язык в Бразилии*

An opportunity to obtain an official international certificate in Russian improves the status of the language abroad and motivates people to study Russian. However, the Test of Russian as a Foreign Language (TORFL) is little known in the countries of Latin America.

In Brazil the first large examination session was held in 2018 by the Language Testing Centre of Saint Petersburg State University and three Brazilian language schools in two biggest Brazilian cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Nowadays the SPBU Language Testing Centre has a partnership with six Brazilian language schools: “Clube Russo Priviet”, “Clube Eslavo” and “Clube da Cultura Russa” (they all have their head offices in São Paulo), “Skavushka” (Rio de Janeiro), “Yu Cursos de Idiomas” and “Ontoletras” (both in Brasília). Until now, three TORFL exam sessions were conducted in three cities of Brazil. The aim of the current work is to study the TORFL audience in Brazil and to get feedback from the candidates. The survey of the language test participants is not a common practice for TORFL, but it is being applied for other languages (Hawkey 2006).

The total number of exam participations in TORFL sessions in Brazil in 2018 and 2019 was 112. The participants mostly took testing for the levels Elementary/A1, Basic/A2 and TORFL-I/B1 (see Table 1); 89% of the exam participations were successful. This relatively high percentage is at least partially explained by the previous application of a placement test

developed by us in 2018 (Dubinina et al. 2019). It became a part of the registration procedure and helps participants to define which testing level to choose. These 112 exam participations correspond to 103 TORFL participants, nine out of them took the exam two times: seven participants felt especially motivated after obtaining their certificates and took testing for the next levels; two out of 12 participants who failed to pass at the first attempt took the TORFL again successfully.

Table 1. Number of the TORFL exam participations in Brazil in according to the levels, summarizing the data from 2018 and 2019

Level	Elementary/A1	Basic/A2	TORFL-I	TORFL-II	TORFL-III	Total
Number of candidates	37	33	33	7	2	112
Passed	36	29	28	5	2	100
Failed	1	4	5	2	0	12

The TORFL consists of five subtests: Speaking, Writing, Grammar and Vocabulary, Reading and Listening. In all the subtests, average scores obtained by students were similar, from 76% (Grammar and Vocabulary) to 86% (Reading).

Having finished the third exam session, we developed a survey questionnaire containing closed and open-ended questions covering many aspects of the Russian language learning and TORFL experience. The questionnaire was answered by 58 Brazilian TORFL participants: 59% passed the exam in São Paulo, 22% in Brasília and 19% in Rio de Janeiro.

We present below some data from our survey. Only the most frequent answers are shown.

1. Russian language experience

1.1 Motivation to study Russian:

- interest in Russian culture and literature (38%);
- interest in studying foreign languages (36%);
- being a Russian heritage speaker (16%).

1.2 Way to study Russian:

- a presential course at a language school (22%);
- self-study (22%);
- private online classes (19%).

1.3 Time invested in studying Russian:

- 2 – 4 years (43%);
- more than 6 years (33%);
- 4 – 6 years (17%).

1.4 Visiting Russia:

- visited one time (43%);
- have never been there (28%);

- have been there many times (17%);
- have lived in Russia (10%).

2. TORFL experience.

2.2 Motivation to pass TORFL:

- to verify one's level of Russian (59%);
- teacher recommendation (14%);
- to advance career (14%);
- to study in Russia (5%).

2.2 Experience in international language exams:

- have never taken any language exams (45%);
- have taken English exam (26%);
- have taken French exam (10%).

2.3 Information source about TORFL:

- Russian language teacher (56%);
- social media (29%).

2.4 Before the testing the most difficult subtests seemed to be:

- Speaking (40%);
- Writing (30%);
- Grammar and Vocabulary (16%);
- Listening (14%);
- Reading (one respondent).

2.5 The major difficulty in the exam preparation process:

- low essay writing skills (26%);
- lack of conversational practice (22%);
- all the subtests together (21%);
- limited knowledge of grammar (12%)
- no special difficulty (19%)

2.6 The most difficult subtest as considered after the exam:

- Writing (29%);
- Grammar (21%);
- Speaking (19%).

2.7 The easiest subtest as considered after the exam:

- Reading (33%);
- Listening (29%);
- Grammar (19%).

2.8 The level of stress during the subtest Writing:

- comfortable (47%);
- slightly nervous (41%);

- stressed (12%).

2.9 The level of stress during the subtest Speaking:

- comfortable (52%);
- slightly nervous (41%);
- stressed (7%).

The survey also included some open-ended questions. Describing what they especially liked at the exam, 33% of the respondents emphasized the general organization, 31% friendly and calm atmosphere and 17% the examination materials. When asked about any possible disappointment, 53% told to be completely satisfied and 19% mentioned the low time limit for performing the tasks; some others mentioned organization details and the absence of the possibility to review the tasks after evaluation.

All these data together allow us to imagine a typical Brazilian student that intends to pass the TORFL: one studies alone or online for two or more years, has been in Russia just one time or never, one wants to take the TORFL just to check his level, has never passed exams in other foreign languages and is afraid of the Speaking subtest. This reflects the Brazilian special features in studying Russian: a big interest of those who persist even considering a low access to materials and a few opportunities of taking presential courses or going to Russia; no reference of their real level; few opportunities to speak with Russian native speakers outside the classroom (Polivanova 2017). Russian learners in Brazil have a personal interest in the language, generally not related to their profession or intention to study abroad. The family history is important in 16% of cases, being a reflection of a long history of the Russian immigration in Brazil (Ruseishvili 2016).

Interestingly, the half of students that considered Speaking the most difficult subtest before the exam changed their opinion after the exam (from 40% to 19%). Many mentioned the friendly atmosphere that helped them. According to the perception of students after the exam, the most difficult subtest was Writing. In fact, it seems that most Brazilian language schools and private teachers follow the communicative approach, lessons are focused on conversational skills and students do not have many opportunities for writing. Students can improve and assess reading and listening skills themselves, and perceive them as the easiest.

In conclusion, the survey data allow us to know better the TORFL audience in Brazil and their results could be used to promote TORFL and to improve the preparation for the exam and the organization of the test sessions in this country. It would be useful both for the TORFL item writers and for TORFL presenters and researchers. The regular surveys could be introduced to process how TORFL becomes a part of the Russian language teaching in a new area. The questionnaire also could be used to survey the TORFL audience in other countries introducing comparative studies of the Russian learner's profiles.

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СВЕДЕНИЯ ОБ АВТОРАХ

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Nadezhda Dubinina is a Russian language testing specialist at the Language Testing Centre of Saint Petersburg State University. She is a Test of Russian as a Foreign Language (TORFL) examiner and TORFL tasks designer. One of her projects is Russian language testing for school students.

Надежда Александровна Дубинина, тестор ТРКИ (Тестирование по русскому языку как иностранному), сотрудник Центра языкового тестирования Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета. Занимается разработкой контрольно-измерительных материалов ТРКИ, также является разработчиком системы тестирования по русскому языку как иностранному для школьников.

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Anna Smirnova Henriques is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Applied Linguistics and Language Studies at Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, Brazil (http://corpuslg.org/lael_english/home/). Her principal research interests are in the field of bilingualism studies using methods of the experimental phonetics and sociolinguistics. Her current project, supported by the Brazilian funding agency CAPES, is focused at late Russian-Brazilian Portuguese bilinguals. She is also a teacher of Russian as a Foreign Language and organizes TORFL sessions in Brazil collaborating with Saint Petersburg State University.

Анна Смирнова Энрикес - постдокторант на факультете прикладной лингвистики и языкознания Папского католического университета в Сан-Паулу, Бразилия (http://corpuslg.org/lael_russian/home/). Ее научные интересы лежат в области исследований билингвизма с помощью методов экспериментальной фонетики и социолингвистики. На настоящий момент она работает с поздним билингвизмом у русскоязычных, живущих в Сан-Паулу и овладевших бразильским португальским во взрослом возрасте. Ее проект поддерживается грантом бразильского фонда CAPES. Она также преподает русский как иностранный и организует в Бразилии сессии ТРКИ, сотрудничая с СПбГУ.

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Snizhana Maznova is the owner and director of the language school Clube Eslavo ("Slavic Club"), which by the number of students can be considered the biggest Russian language school in Brazil. Snizhana Maznova began to develop her own methodology for teaching Brazilians in 2009, starting as a teacher of Russian as a Foreign Language at FIP (Faculdades Integradas Paulista). The school Clube Eslavo is located in São Paulo, but offers online courses involving the whole Brazil and other countries where Brazilians live. Snizhana`s team is working together on didactic materials for adults and children, improving the methodology and continuing to develop a platform for distance learning. The Slavic Club organizes TORFL sessions in Brazil collaborating with Saint Petersburg State University.

Снежана Мазнова является владельцем и директором языковой школы Clube Eslavo («Славянский клуб»), которая по количеству учеников может считаться крупнейшей школой русского языка в Бразилии. Снежана Мазнова начала разрабатывать собственную методику обучения бразильцев в 2009 году, начав как преподаватель РКИ в FIP (Faculdades Integradas Paulista). Школа Clube Eslavo находится в Сан-Паулу, но, предлагая онлайн-курсы, охватывает всю Бразилию и другие страны, где проживают бразильцы. Команда Снежаны совместно работает над дидактическими материалами для взрослых и детей, совершенствуя методику и продолжая разрабатывать платформу для дистанционного обучения. Clube Eslavo организует сессии TORFL в Бразилии в сотрудничестве с СПбГУ.

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Valeria Fomina has a Bachelor degree in Philology and Teaching Russian as a foreign language. Since 2010 she has worked as a teacher in Russia and China and in 2017, she has founded a Russian language school “Skavushka” in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Her methodology is focused on learning through practice and is showing good results among Brazilian students. Valeria organizes lectures and events promoting Russian culture and language in Rio de Janeiro. She is one of the organizers of TORFL sessions in Brazil in collaboration with Saint Petersburg State University.

Валерия Фомина имеет степень бакалавра по специальностям «Филология» и «Преподавание русского языка как иностранного». В 2010 году она начала работать учителем в России, а потом в Китае и в 2017 году открыла школу русского языка «Skavushka» в Рио-де-Жанейро, Бразилия. Её методология основана на изучении языка через практику и показывает хорошие результаты у бразильских студентов. Валерия организует лекции и мероприятия, связанные с продвижением русского языка и культуры в Рио-де-Жанейро. Она является одним из организаторов ТРКИ в Бразилии в сотрудничестве с СПбГУ.

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Юлия Михеева имеет степень бакалавра по специальностям «Филология» и «Преподавание английского и немецкого языков как иностранных». Она также закончила курс по специальности "Преподавание русского языка как иностранного" в СПбГУ. С 2005 года она работает преподавателем английского языка и с 2009 работает преподавателем русского языка. Она основала школу русского языка "Yu Cursos de Idiomas " в городе Бразилиа в Бразилии в 2012 году. Она использует коммуникативный метод в преподавании языков и верит, что это лучший способ развить все необходимые навыки и умения для достижения успешной коммуникации. Юлия организует тематические занятия и мероприятия, связанные с продвижением русского языка, традиций и культуры в городе Бразилиа. Она является одним из организаторов ТРКИ в Бразилии в сотрудничестве с СПбГУ.

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Adriana dos Reis has Bachelor Degree in Law, Philology, Philosophy, Sociology, Pedagogy, History and International Relations. She has lived in Italy and Russia, and has attended academic congresses in several countries. Master in Philology from Russian State University for the Humanities (RGGU, Moscow). PhD in Law from University of São Paulo (USP). She is currently a professor at the university Unieuro in Brasília. Founder and teacher at Ontoletras language and culture center.

Адриана дос Рейс бакалавр юриспруденции, филологии, философии, социологии, педагогики, истории и международных отношений. Жила в Италии и России, является участником научных конференций в различных странах мира. Имеет степень магистра филологии (Российский гуманитарный университет, Москва) и PhD в области права (Университет Сан-Паулу, Бразилия). Основатель и преподаватель центра языка и культуры «Онтолетрас» (Бразилиа, Бразилия).

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Volha Yermalayeva Franco is a Russian and Belarusian teacher at Clube Eslavo (Slavic Club) language school. Her main focus at work is preparing students for TORFL and elaborating teaching materials for Portuguese speakers. She has got a Certificate of Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language at Moscow State University and a Certificate of TORFL Supervisor from Saint Petersburg State University. She has a Bachelor Degree in Cultural Heritage and Tourism at the European Humanities University (Lithuania), currently doing her Masters in Architectural Heritage Preservation and Restoration at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil.

Воля Ермалаева Франко преподает русский и белорусский языки в школе Clube Eslavo (Славянский клуб). Основной фокус работы - подготовка студентов к экзамену ТРКИ и разработка дидактических материалов для португалоязычных учащихся. Имеет сертификат преподавателя русского языка как иностранного, выданный Московским государственным университетом и сертификат тестора ТРКИ Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета. Закончила бакалавриат по программе "Культурное наследие и туризм" в Европейском гуманитарном университете (Литва), в настоящее время продолжает обучение в магистратуре по специальности "Архитектурное наследие: консервация и реставрация" в Федеральном университете штата Баия (Бразилия).

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