

**DIALECTISMS IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE: FEATURES, CLASSIFICATION,
AND ROLE IN CULTURE**

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Abstract: The article is devoted to dialectisms in the Russian language, their features, classification, and role in culture. The main dialects of the Russian language—northern, southern, and central Russian—are considered, along with their phonetic, grammatical, and lexical differences. The article describes types of dialectisms: lexical, phonetic, grammatical, word-formation, and semantic, with examples of their usage. Special attention is paid to the role of dialectisms in literature and folklore, where they create local color and emphasize authenticity.

Introduction

Dialectisms are words, expressions, or grammatical constructions characteristic of territorial dialects and vernaculars that do not conform to the norms of the literary language. They reflect the regional features of the Russian language, shaped by historical, geographical, and social factors. In the Russian language, dialectisms play an important role in preserving cultural diversity, and they are also used in literature to create local color and authenticity. By definition, dialectisms are dialectal inclusions in the literary language that help convey the speech specificity of speakers from particular regions.

The Russian language, as one of the most widely spoken Slavic languages, possesses a rich dialectal system. Dialects have been forming for centuries, beginning with the Old Russian period, and continue to evolve under the influence of urbanization and globalization. This article considers the classification of Russian dialects, types of dialectisms, examples of their use, and their significance in literature and modern society.

Classification of Russian Dialects Russian dialects are traditionally divided into two major dialect groups: northern and southern, with a transitional zone of central Russian dialects. This division is based on phonetic, grammatical, and lexical features.

- **Northern dialects:** Spread across territories north of the central Russian zone, including the Arkhangelsk, Vologda, and Kostroma regions, and parts of Siberia. They are characterized by okanye—the clear distinction of vowels in unstressed syllables (e.g., the word moloko is pronounced with a distinct “o” in each syllable). Other traits include explosive pronunciation of g (similar to English “go”), tsokanye (merging of “ts” and “ch”), and specific grammatical

constructions such as poyti v lesu (“to go in the forest”) instead of the literary poyti v les.

- **Southern dialects:** Spread across southern regions, including the Kursk, Orel, and Voronezh regions, and parts of Ukraine. These dialects are marked by akanye—the merging of “a” and “o” in unstressed syllables (e.g., moloko sounds like malako). Other features include fricative g (like Ukrainian “h”), yakanye (replacement of “e” with “ya” in certain positions), and constructions such as skhodit’ do rechki (“to go till the river”) instead of the literary skhodit’ k reke.
- **Central Russian dialects:** A transitional zone including the Moscow, Vladimir, and Nizhny Novgorod regions. They combine features of both northern and southern dialects and formed the basis of the modern literary Russian language. For instance, moderate akanye and mixed grammatical forms are characteristic.

The formation of these dialects is linked to historical processes such as settlement in the 12th–13th centuries, inter-dialect contacts, and the influence of neighboring languages (Finno-Ugric in the north, Turkic in the south). By the 15th century, the dialect groups had taken shape, and in later-settled regions (Volga region, Urals, Siberia) dialects were more mixed due to migration.

Types of Dialectisms Dialectisms are classified by levels of language: lexical, phonetic, grammatical, word-formation, and semantic.

- **Lexical dialectisms:** Words denoting objects or phenomena absent from the literary language or having synonyms. Examples: kuren’ (a house in southern Russia), laika (dog in northern dialects), porebrik (curb in the St. Petersburg dialect). They often reflect local life: izba instead of dom (“house”) in northern regions.
- **Phonetic dialectisms:** Pronunciation differences. For example, in southern dialects, fricative g (khata instead of khata with a standard g), or tsokanye in northern dialects: tsai instead of chai.
- **Grammatical dialectisms:** Changes in morphology and syntax. Examples: kosit’ trava (“to mow grass” with nominative instead of accusative), o maslyanitse bliny pekli (“on Maslenitsa they baked pancakes” using o to indicate time).
- **Word-formation dialectisms:** Differ in affixes. Example: non-standard suffix usage in gribnaya pora otoyti ne uspela (“the mushroom season has not passed yet”).
- **Semantic dialectisms:** Words with meanings different from the literary language. Example: smak meaning “taste” in some dialects, or govet’ meaning “to fast.”

These types often intersect, creating unique regional features.

Examples of Dialectisms in Use Dialectisms are actively used in the speech of native speakers and in literature, highlighting regional flavor. In northern dialects, baskoy means “beautiful,” e.g., U vas baskoy dom stoit u reki (“You have a beautiful house by the river”). In the south, luk (“onion”) may be replaced with tsibulya: Dobav’ tsibuli v sup (“Add onion to the soup”). In central Russian dialects, especially in the Petersburg dialect, bordyur (“curb”) is replaced by porebrik: Ne nastupai na porebrik! (“Don’t step on the curb!”). Grammatical dialectisms appear

in constructions like the northern poshli v lesu za gribami (“went in the forest for mushrooms”) instead of the literary v les, or the southern skhodi do rechki instead of k reke.

In literature, dialectisms help create lively character speech. For instance, in Mikhail Sholokhov’s novel *And Quiet Flows the Don*, Cossack characters use southern dialectisms such as kuren’ (house) and stanitsa (settlement). In Vasily Belov’s works about the northern village, words like izba and okanye constructions emphasize local color.

The Role of Dialectisms in Literature and Culture Dialectisms are used in literature to stylize speech, create atmosphere, and characterize heroes. Classics such as Nikolai Leskov (*The Left-Hander*) or modern authors like Viktor Astafyev introduce dialectisms for authenticity. In folklore (proverbs, tales), they preserve cultural heritage: Ne suysya v vodu, ne sprosya brodu (“Don’t go into the water without asking where the ford is”), with dialectal variations.

In culture, dialectisms influence music and art. The group Ivan-Kupala uses folklore elements with dialectisms. However, in the 20th–21st centuries, dialects have been declining due to education, mass media, and migration. Speakers remain primarily among the older rural population.

Modern State and Prospects Today, dialectisms penetrate colloquial speech and internet culture, but traditional dialects are fading. Dialectology research records them in atlases and dictionaries. In education, dialectisms are studied to understand linguistic diversity. Despite unification, they remain a source of inspiration for linguists and writers.

Conclusion

Dialectisms are living evidence of the evolution of the Russian language, reflecting its diversity. They preserve historical memory and enrich modern speech. Studying dialectisms helps to understand the cultural roots of the people and contributes to preserving linguistic heritage in the era of globalization. For deeper study, one can turn to Russian dialect dictionaries or works by regional authors.

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