

# THEORETICAL AND APPLIED ASPECTS OF LINGUISTICS

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## **SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS IN THE CREATION OF RUSSIAN PHONETICS CORRECTION COURSES FOR INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED STUDENTS**

*SUMMARY. The paper deals with different aspects of the problem of elaboration of Russian phonetics courses for intermediate and advanced foreign students. The contents and characteristics of such courses may depend upon the native language of the students and their future profession. If the future profession of the students is taken into consideration, courses of Russian phonetics should be based both on usual and terminological vocabulary. Courses of practical phonetics for the students of a certain nationality are composed on the basis of results of the comparative investigation of the native language system in contrast with the Russian system. The results of contrastive analysis of positional phonetic rules of the first and second language sound systems are an issue of special importance and should be taken into account in the process of composition of courses in practical phonetics. The mistakes, which appear due to positional phonetic rules of the first language system, are characterized by serious steadiness; they may remain in the foreign accent till the last stage of Russian language studies. The knowledge about the interference of positional rules of the native language system in foreign students' Russian pronunciation gives the possibility of a considerable improvement of methods for teaching Russian phonetics.*

*KEY WORDS. phonetics, training/correction courses, pronunciation, positional characteristics, accent.*

Russian phonetics correction courses are created for intermediate and advanced students learning the Russian language. Despite the wide variety of such correction courses, the issue of their development remains ongoing. Correction courses may be based on a practical course in Russian language (supporting courses) or be independent and self-sufficient. The latter is much more common in teaching speaking skills in Russian, as to coordinate a course in phonetics with a major course in a situation

where students have a good command of Russian is a rather difficult task. For this reason, in manuals on teaching methodology, phonetics courses are sometimes referred only to the initial stage of training.

The fact is that correction courses are rarely “purely” corrective. Actually, the essence of all Russian phonetics correction courses, even courses addressed to foreign teachers of the Russian language, is production and correction [Odintsov 2004]: the task of correct sound production is the main one at all training levels. Moreover, as pointed out by N.A. Lyubimova, when mastering Russian phonetics foreign students begin to pronounce hybrid sounds — neither from their native language, nor from Russian [Lyubimova 2006]. These sounds include, for instance, a voiceless dental aspirated [t] in the English accent. This sound is similar to the English sound [t] as it is aspirated, but it is dental and not alveolar.

For these reasons, any stage of phonetics learning initially deals with relatively light simple tasks: in particular, an important part of any phonetics course, including correction courses, are minimal pairs of words: *точка* — *дочка*, *шар* — *жар*, *сутки* — *шутки*, *палить* — *парить* (a point — a daughter, a ball — fever, night — jokes, to shoot — to soar) and the like.

If compared, lexical and grammatical material for intermediate and advanced training does not always make it possible to solve a purely phonetic task. According to the degree of “connectedness” with a basic practical course of Russian, the beginning of a supporting correction course should differ from its end: here we are dealing with a sort of inverted pyramid – the material of the main course is included in the phonetics course to a larger extent when students become more familiar with the new aspects of phonetics.

Correction courses may be either general or specifically oriented. In the first case, the course has the widest targeted audience: it is appropriate for all foreigners regardless of their professional orientation or native language. Professionally and nationally oriented courses have a narrower target audience. Vocationally oriented phonetics courses are developed for students mastering a certain profession, and should be based not only on the common vocabulary, but also on professional terms.

For instance, if students of philology study the opposition [ш] — [ш':] / [sh] — [sh ':] along with minimal pairs of common language words ((*прошу* – *прошу*, *чаша* — *чаща*, *прошение* — *прощенье*) / (ask — forgive, a bowl — a thicket, a petition — forgiveness), it is appropriate to introduce linguistic and literary terms — words and phrases containing similar audio units: *произношение*, *прошедший*, *существительное*, *сообщение*, *общеупотребительный*, *изящный*, *действующий*; *хорошее произношение*, *прошедшее время*, *имя существительное*, *сообщение к семинару*, *общеупотребительная лексика*, *изящная словесность*, *действующее лицо* / pronunciation, last, a noun, a report, common, graceful, acting, good pronunciation, the past tense, a noun, a report for a seminar, common language vocabulary, *belles lettres* style, a character.

Sentences and texts should include special terminology corresponding to the phonetic aspect under study. Depending on the needs of particular students, professional

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texts can be both academic and mainstream. To diversify the process of teaching, some entertaining texts on linguistic or literary studies topics can be employed in class. For example, to master the pronunciation of the sound [sh':] the following text can be offered: *Один мужчина — лирика. Двое мужчин — анекдот. Мужчина и женщина — новелла. Две женщины и мужчина — повесть. Двое мужчин и женщина — драма. Две женщины и двое мужчин — юмореска. Две женщины — пасквиль. Одна женщина — баллада.* / One man is lyric poetry. Two men is an anecdote. A man and a woman is a novel. Two women and a man is a story. Two men and a woman is a drama. Two women and two men is a humoresque. Two women is libel. One woman is a ballad.

Nationally oriented correction courses of Russian phonetics are designed for homogeneous linguistically identical students — native speakers of specific languages. These courses are compiled based on survey data of the phonological system of the Russian language in comparison with the phonological system of the native language of students.

An important task is taking into consideration a native language in the search for favorable phonetic position and pronunciation of correlating sounds to correct pronunciation skills. It is known, for example, that teaching pronunciation of noisy voiced consonants should usually begin in the neighborhood of sonorous consonants (*длина, легенда, бомба* / length, a legend, a bomb), but for the Chinese the most favorable position is between vowels (*мода, оба* / fashion, both), as this position ensures the maximum duration of the vocal cords' vibration in the pronunciation of consonants in the Chinese language.

Teaching the pronunciation of [ы] is usually easier in a combination with velar consonants. Such combinations are possible in the Russian language at the junction of words: [кы] — *к Ире, язык и литература*; [хы] — *двух или трех* / [кы] — to Ira, language and literature, [хы] — two or three. For some students it can be recommended to study the sound [ы] further in conjunction with labial consonants (*мы, вы, быт, опыт* / we, you, life, experience). At the same time, in the accent of the Koreans one can often identify the replacement of the sound [ы] with the Korean vowel sound [ү], similar to the Russian sound [y], as the combination of [ы] with labial consonants is the most difficult combination, as labial consonants evoke inappropriate labialization of vowels. Similar examples can be provided for any category of students.

The survey of the interfering impact of the positional patterns of a native language raises the important and poorly developed problem of creating nationally-oriented correction courses. The errors associated with the transfer of the positional patterns of a native language, usually characterized by high stability, accompany the speech of students up to the final phase of training.

The fact is that positional patterns of a native language is a sphere dominated by unconscious mechanisms and stereotypical phonetic patterns. Usually they are intuitively absorbed by native speakers and mechanically reproduced at the beginning of the language study process, i.e. in childhood. No child who is a native-speaker of

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the Russian language makes mistakes in phonetic alternations ([з]/[с] в морозы — мороз; [о]/[а] в дом — дома / [з] // [с] in frosts — frost or [о] // [а] in a house — houses). In contrast, morphonological sequences are usually violated by children and sometimes adults: respectively pronounced wrong options \*бе[ж]у и \*защи[т']ю.

Since all native language phonetic phenomena, determined by positional regularities, are easily acquired in childhood, positional accent is especially difficult to get rid of in foreign language pronunciation acquisition by adults. The positional patterns of a native language are transferred by students into the target language, and if they do not coincide with the positional patterns of their native language, they will inevitably lead to deviations.

For instance, the correlation of voiceless / voiced consonants is different in different language systems. As it is well known, in the Russian language the exchange of voiceless and voiced consonants occurs in three positions: 1) the absolute end of a word (*плот и плод* — [плот] / a raft and fruit [plot]), 2) before noisy voiceless consonants (*с каской и сказкой* — [скáскъї] / with a helmet and with a fairy tale — [skáskı̯]), 3) before noisy voiced consonants excluding voiced labio-dental fricatives (*сбор и без боли* — [збор] и [би<sup>е</sup>збóл'ь] / a collection and without pain — [zbor] and [biezból'ı̯]). In the first two positions, voiced consonants are substituted by voiceless consonants, in the third, on the contrary, voiceless consonants are substituted by voiced consonants. The latter occurs before voiced labio-dental fricatives, if followed by noisy consonants: compare — *от вдов* [адвдóф] / from widows [advdóf].

Foreign language systems are characterized by different patterns of voiceless / voiced consonant variation. In particular, in a number of Romance languages (Spanish, Italian) the position before sonorous and voiced labial fricative consonants can only be taken by voiced or semi-voiced consonants. The transfer of native language positional patterns into Russian makes speakers of other languages identically pronounce words like: *слóй / злóй, слóва / злóго, твоих / двóих, Тверь / дверь* / layer / evil, a word / evil, Tver' / a door.

In some Germanic languages, such as German, there is a limited distribution of the [s] phoneme, thus the initial position of a word can only be taken by a voiced forelingual fricative consonant. Accordingly, some accents make no distinction in the pronunciation of voiceless and voiced consonants: *совершáть / завершáть, салó / залá, сов / зов, суп / зуб, со мной / за мной* / to make and to complete, fat / a hall, an owl / a call, a soup / a tooth, with me / follow me; possible errors such as \* [z] *идеть* (to sit), \* [z] *оздавать* (to create), \* [z] *уровый* (severe) can occur. Like all other mistakes, the transfer of native language positional patterns onto the studied ones is characterized by stability and accompany the students' pronunciation up to the final stage of training, when they are almost fluent in Russian.

One more difficulty is the positional substitution of voiced consonants with voiceless consonants in the word final position. Native speakers of the majority of languages pronounce in these positions voiced consonants in the place of voiced phonemes. This is what happens, for example, in the English-speaking accent, of

French people or Croatians: homophones *плот / плод, лук / луг, порок / порог, столн / столб, рос / роз / raft / fruit, onion / meadow, heart / threshold, a pillar / a column, grew / roses* are pronounced differently — according to the voiceless or voiced consonant at the end. It is also possible to pronounce voiced consonant sounds (often voiced fricatives or the ones with a “weakened” bond (Spanish accent), implosive consonants (Korean accent), intrusive vowels after voiceless or voiced consonants (Chinese accent)) instead of voiceless in the final position.

At the same time it should be noted that there is a positional exchange of voiced and voiceless consonants in the word final position in the phonetic systems of the Polish and German languages. In the process of acquiring Russian pronunciation, the speakers of these languages can expect a positive transfer of the native language phonetic features onto the language under study.

The voiceless / voiced consonants variation before the following noisy consonants *ло[д]очка / ло[т]ка, [с]обирать / [з]бор // lo [d] ochka / lo [t] ka [s] obirat' / [z] bor* represents a positional pattern characterizing a number of languages, but in the majority of foreign language systems, it is unstable. This fact characterizes such typologically different systems as English, French and Arabic: in these systems, there is a variation in pronunciation of voiceless / voiced consonants in the position before noisy consonants, which creates some minor problems in teaching Russian pronunciation to the speakers of these languages.

The instance of considering the tendency of positional changes of voiceless / voiced consonants in Russian in comparison with foreign language systems makes obvious the need to fully determine similarities and differences in positional patterns of the native and studied sound systems when teaching pronunciation. Comparative study of positional patterns within phonetic systems of a native and a studied language can help foresee many phonetic deviations in the speech of students due to language interference.

In particular, being aware that in a number of languages (Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Serbian, Chinese, and others), positional interchange of nasal sonorous consonants occurs before the following noisy consonant, one can assume that some speakers might make a mistake like: *\*и[m]формация (информация / information), \*ду[n]ский (думский / дута), \*ло[n]тик (ломтик / лупр), \*зво[?]ко (звонко / ), \*зво[m] бы (звон бы)*. The law of synharmonism in Turkic languages causes difficulties for speakers of these languages in switching articulations of hardness / softness in Russian phonetic words: *выписывать, передавать, польский, закономерность* / to prescribe, to pass, polish, a tendency. Typical Tatar pronunciation of the last syllable is likely to lead to violations in the reduction of Russian vowels and Russian rhythm.

The analysis of positional patterns in the native language in comparison with the target language is necessary in order to develop methodology for eliminating phonetic variations interfering with students' speech. The outwardly similar errors often have different mechanisms, due to the influence of a native language. The transfer of the patterns of positional change from a native language onto a studied one often underlies

the emergence of “exotic” sounds far from the target language’s phonetics [Barkhudarova 2011: 44-45].

Knowledge of the Russian language at intermediate and advanced stages of learning makes it possible to include some topics about Russian national culture in the program of the phonetics course. These themes include orthoepic variability within the Russian cultural tradition, Russian stage pronunciation, the phonetics of a poetic text. The issue of sound symbolism is of special interest to foreign-language audiences.

It is known that sound can cause a variety of associations. “In the Russian language the percussive sound “o”, said the writer O. Suleimenov, often occurs in words denoting extreme states, events, feelings (night, sun, heat, cold, frost, fire, lightning, thunder, hunger, salt, sex, sea, plague, mountain), and has acquired a minor character over centuries similar to the sound “o”, opposite to a hot, bright, happy “a” [Suleimenov 2005: 11].

It should be added that this emotional perception probably is not unique just for the Russian poetic tradition. If you offer a group of foreign students a question, whether [o] denotes fun or trouble, the answer is the latter. As for the association with [a], in a similar situation fun is chosen.

The example given above is not unique. The universal nature of emotional associations with sounds makes a foreign language poetic text easier to comprehend. The task here is to help students analyze sound design and show that the prevalence of some sounds creates a happy mood, and the prevalence of other sounds is associated with negative emotions — sadness and sorrow.

These are some aspects associated with Russian phonetics correction courses. Everything stated above obviously shows that the areas of linguodidactics remains poorly studied and important.

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