

DEVELOPING PRONUNCIATION SKILLS IN TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A PHONETIC AND PROSODIC APPROACH

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Abstract

The article examines the features of developing pronunciation skills in teaching Russian as a foreign language. It analyzes the main phonetic and prosodic difficulties encountered by foreign learners and their impact on oral speech quality and comprehension. Special attention is paid to the role of intonation, rhythm, and stress in the formation of phonetic competence. The study substantiates the necessity of systematic phonetic instruction at the elementary and intermediate stages of teaching Russian as a foreign language. Methodological techniques and exercises aimed at developing listening–pronunciation skills and improving the communicative effectiveness of speech are proposed.

Keywords: Russian as a foreign language, phonetics, pronunciation, intonation, prosody, phonetic competence, teaching methodology.

Introduction

Pronunciation is one of the most important yet challenging aspects of teaching Russian as a foreign language (RFL). Clear and accurate pronunciation plays a crucial role in oral communication, as phonetic errors may significantly hinder understanding even when lexical and grammatical structures are correct.

Russian phonetics is characterized by a complex system of vowel reduction, consonant palatalization, variable stress, and rich intonation patterns. For foreign learners, especially those whose native languages differ significantly in phonological structure, mastering Russian pronunciation requires focused and systematic instruction. However, in teaching practice pronunciation is often marginalized in favor of grammar and vocabulary.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the main phonetic and prosodic difficulties encountered by learners of Russian as a foreign language and to identify effective pedagogical strategies for developing pronunciation skills.

Phonetic Competence in RFL Teaching

Phonetic competence is an essential component of overall communicative competence. It includes the ability to perceive, reproduce, and differentiate sounds, stress patterns, and intonation contours in accordance with the norms of the target language.



In RFL instruction, phonetic competence encompasses:

- correct articulation of Russian vowel and consonant sounds;
- mastery of word stress;
- control of rhythm and tempo;
- appropriate use of intonation patterns in different communicative situations.

Insufficient attention to phonetic training often results in fossilized pronunciation errors that are difficult to correct at advanced stages of learning.

Major Pronunciation Difficulties of Foreign Learners

Vowel Reduction

One of the most challenging features of Russian pronunciation is vowel reduction in unstressed positions. Learners tend to pronounce vowels as they are written, which leads to unnatural and non-native-like speech. This difficulty is particularly noticeable in spontaneous oral production.

Consonant Palatalization

The opposition between hard and soft consonants is a distinctive feature of Russian phonology. Many foreign languages lack this contrast, which results in incorrect articulation and confusion between minimal pairs.

Word Stress

Russian word stress is free and mobile, meaning it can fall on any syllable and may shift in different grammatical forms. Learners often rely on fixed stress patterns from their native language, which leads to frequent errors and affects intelligibility.

The Role of Prosody in Russian Speech

Prosody — including intonation, rhythm, and sentence stress — plays a crucial role in conveying meaning, emotions, and communicative intent in Russian. Incorrect intonation may change the pragmatic meaning of an utterance or make speech sound unnatural.

Russian intonation patterns differ significantly from those of many other languages. Learners often use intonation models from their native language, which results in pragmatic interference. Therefore, prosodic training should be an integral part of RFL instruction.

Methodological Principles of Teaching Pronunciation

Effective pronunciation teaching should be based on the following principles:

1. systematic and continuous phonetic training;
2. integration of pronunciation practice into all stages of learning;
3. gradual progression from perception to production;
4. use of contrastive analysis where appropriate;
5. emphasis on communicative relevance rather than absolute phonetic perfection.

Pronunciation training should not be isolated but closely connected with listening, speaking, and communicative tasks.



Phonetic Exercises and Teaching Techniques

A variety of exercises can be used to develop pronunciation skills in RFL learners:

- phonetic drills focusing on articulation;
- minimal pair discrimination tasks;
- imitation and shadowing exercises;
- intonation modeling using dialogues;
- rhythm and stress practice through poetry and songs.

Modern digital tools, such as audio recordings and speech visualization software, can significantly enhance phonetic instruction and learner autonomy.

The Teacher's Role in Pronunciation Training

The teacher plays a central role in developing learners' pronunciation skills. Accurate phonetic modeling, timely feedback, and individual correction strategies are essential for successful pronunciation instruction.

Teachers must also create a supportive learning environment where learners are not afraid to make mistakes. Pronunciation errors should be treated as a natural part of the learning process rather than as failures.

Conclusion

Pronunciation training is a fundamental component of teaching Russian as a foreign language and should be given systematic attention throughout the learning process. A phonetic and prosodic approach allows learners to develop clear, intelligible, and communicatively effective speech. By integrating pronunciation practice into communicative activities and using a variety of methodological techniques, teachers can significantly improve learners' oral proficiency and overall language competence.

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