

ЛИНГВОДИДАКТИКА И НОВАЦИИ. ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОСНОВЫ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКОВ И
КУЛЬТУР | LINGUODIDACTICS AND INNOVATIONS. PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF LEARNING
LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Рекомендации для русскоязычных учащихся по совершенствованию английского произношения

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В данной статье даются практические рекомендации как для преподавателей, так и для студентов, направленные на эффективное развитие произносительных навыков русскоязычных учащихся. Рассматриваются распространенные заблуждения («произносительный навык не подлежит деавтоматизации»; «правильное произношение — излишний перфекционизм»; «практическая необходимость в фонетических символах отсутствует» и т.п.), которые часто мешают правильному преподаванию и изучению английских звуков. Практические рекомендации, приводимые в данной статье, включают в себя использование игровых видов деятельности, невербальных средств обучения, таких как изображения и жесты, корректирующих вопросов учителя, а также открытых дискуссий или «мозговых штурмов». Традиционные ресурсы, такие как фонетические таблицы и словари с аудио произношением, также рекомендуются как эффективные средства изучения фонетики английского языка.

Ключевые слова: английский язык, русскоязычные учащиеся, фонетика, фонология, произношение, звук, акцент, качественный и количественный признаки гласных звуков, практические рекомендации, интуитивно понятные объяснения учителя, игровые формы обучения.

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Mastering English Pronunciation: Insights for Russian-Speaking Learners

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This article provides valuable insights and guidance for both teachers and students, with the aim of effectively enhancing Russian students' pronunciation skills. It challenges common misconceptions that often hinder the correct teaching and learning of English sounds, such as the belief that pronunciation mastery means indefinite retention, that correct pronunciation is excessive perfectionism, that phonetic symbols are unnecessary, etc. By addressing these misconceptions, the article seeks to foster a better understanding of the approach required to master the intricacies of English phonetics. This approach involves incorporating playful activities, utilizing non-verbal aids like images and gestures, implementing corrective questioning, and employing open discussions or brainstorming sessions. The goal is to encourage active participation and critical thinking among students, leading to improved phonetic skills in English language learning. Traditional resources such as phonetic charts and dictionaries with audio pronunciation are also recommended as part of this approach.

Keywords: the English language, Russian-speaking learners, phonetics, phonology, pronunciation, sound, accent, quantity and quality of the vowel sounds, practical recommendations, intuitive instructions, game-based learning.

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The importance of studying the phonetics of a foreign language cannot be disputed, as it plays a crucial role in effective communication, especially in oral interactions. Both speaking and understanding speech require the ability to produce and perceive oral expressions that can be understood by the listener. To achieve this, a shared code, which is phonetics, is essential.

However, despite the availability of extensive reference material on the phonetics of foreign languages, it has been observed that the practice of pronunciation often receives insufficient attention, even within modern communicative approaches to language learning [11]. This lack of emphasis on pronunciation can lead to difficulties in listening comprehension for students [12].

One of the obstacles in successfully teaching phonetics is an excessive focus on theoretical aspects of the subject. Instead of overwhelming students with linguistic terms like fricative and alveolar, teachers should provide intuitive explanations that are simple and effective [4], [6].

To optimize the teaching of phonetics, it is important to identify the factors that hinder the quick and effective acquisition of phonetic knowledge. One significant barrier is the lack of seriousness among adult learners when it comes to studying phonetics. This lack of seriousness is particularly evident when students already possess basic language skills and view the study of phonetics at

advanced stages as a regression to elementary levels [4].

However, the problem runs deeper than just a lack of seriousness. In many cases, this lack of motivation to study phonetics stems from acquired insecurity («learned helplessness») [16]. Students may have had past unsuccessful experiences with phonetics, leading to a fear of criticism, a desire to avoid engaging with the subject, and various misconceptions about learning English phonetics due to students' psychological defense mechanisms.

The fear of playfully experimenting with sounds, present in adults but nearly absent in children, can hinder successful acquisition of the phonetic structures of the language [15]. As practicing English teachers, our task is to dispel these mythical notions about phonetics and create a positive emotional atmosphere through games and accentuating the importance of English pronunciation.

Myth 1: «After mastering your English pronunciation, you will retain this skill indefinitely».

The necessity of a specialized introductory phonetics course is undoubtedly justified. However, in this case, we cannot ignore the following factors:

- 1) The skill of pronunciation, unlike any other, is prone to de-automation [9]. With the complexity of vocabulary, grammar, and syntactical structures, students' attention shifts from how they speak to what they say. This means that while students may initially focus on pronunciation, as they progress in their language learning journey, their pronunciation skills may deteriorate or become less automatic. This is due to the increasing cognitive load on their language processing system, leading them to shift their attention to other aspects of language acquisition [15].
- 2) The nature of working on phonetics changes at different stages of language acquisition. Mastering phonetics is not just about pronouncing individual sounds and words correctly [10]. We are talking about phonetic difficulties that arise not on the level of an individual word but within phrases (such as the differentiating role of intonation, elision, additional sounds, assimilation, etc.) [8]. Therefore, it is crucial for students to understand the nuances and intricacies of how sounds and words interact or may interact within the context of a sentence or phrase. These aspects of phonetics are not always explicitly covered in introductory courses, making it necessary for students to continue refining both their pronunciation skills and listening skills even after completing such courses.

In order to illustrate the point above, the following examples will be provided [11]:

Table 1

What we write	What we say (when a word ends with -t or -d and the next word begins with a consonant, the sounds /t/ or /d/ are not pronounced; sometimes this occurs with the sounds /t/ and /d/ within a single word)
I don't know	I dunno
I want to	I wanna (<i>colloquial</i>)
Internet	Inernet
Lift going up	Lif going up
Second floor	Secon floor
It isn't coming	It isn coming
Politely	Polily (<i>ad hoc</i>)
Friends	Friens

Table 2

What we write	What we say (vowel sounds are occasionally omitted in unstressed syllables, particularly when speaking quickly)
For example	Frexample
Probably	Prob-ly
Accidentally	Accident-ly

Table 3

What we write	What we say (when a word ends with a vowel sound and the next word begins with a vowel sound, an epenthesis phenomenon is sometimes observed, resulting in the insertion of an additional sound)
I go out	I go /w/ out
Do it	Do /w/ it
Do a challenge	Do /w/ a challenge
The elevator	The /j/ elevator
The element	The /j/ element
I agree	I /j/ agree
Me and you	Me /j/ and you

From the teacher's perspective, there is a need to maintain the standards of pronunciation throughout different stages of learning. As students progress in their language acquisition, it becomes even more important for teachers to provide ongoing guidance and correction to ensure that students maintain and improve their pronunciation skills [3]. This involves identifying and addressing the specific areas of difficulty that students face as they move from pronunciation at the word level to the more complex challenges posed by phrases and sentences. By consistently focusing on pronunciation, teachers can help students develop a solid foundation in pronunciation that will serve them well in their language learning journey.

Myth 2: «Striving to pronounce words correctly is excessive perfectionism. Why waste time on it?»

This myth fails to recognize that correct pronunciation is not merely a superficial aspect of language, but rather a crucial element for effective communication. Pronouncing words correctly is not just about aesthetics; it is a mechanism that distinguishes meanings and ensures successful interaction [5].

To dispel this myth among students, an effective approach would be to engage them in the following exercise. They can be asked to think of a single-syllable English word and then provide other words that have similar phonetic compositions but are not identical. For example, they could consider words like «head», «had», «hard», «heart», «hut», «hot» and «hat». This exercise highlights how slight variations in pronunciation can lead to completely different words. The students might initially assume that even a mispronounced word can potentially be understood through context. However, it is important to note that relying solely on context may not always salvage understanding, especially in situations where multiple words sound unclear or are mispronounced [4].

Myth 3: «Why not use Russian sounds when speaking English? After all, some English words are included in the Russian language and are written in Russian [1]».

While it is true that there are certain sounds in English that are similar to Russian sounds in terms of articulation (such as [r], [b], [g], [s], [z], [m], etc.), it is crucial to discourage students from relying solely on familiar Russian phonemes or phonetic symbols. Although knowledge of certain Russian phonemes may help in reproducing English counterparts, the majority of English sounds do not have direct equivalents in the Russian language [9].

To debunk this third myth, it is important to highlight the quantitative disparity in vowel sounds between Russian and English. Russian has only six vowel sounds, while English has a staggering 20 vowel sounds. This significant difference illustrates the need to approach English pronunciation independently and not rely on Russian phonetics [4].

For instance, the English word «lady» has been assimilated into Russian as «леди» (ledi). However, a native English speaker may interpret «леди» as «lady» (паренек), which completely alters the intended meaning. Thus, it is crucial to emphasize that the focus should not be on imitating a specific variant of English speech (such as RP — Received Pronunciation), but rather on understanding the fundamental universal differences between phonemes.

Additionally, it is important to address the idea that there is no speech without an accent, as there are numerous accents in English [11]. This notion helps students overcome the fear of speaking and understand that there is no singular correct variant of English speech.

Myth 4: «There is no point in studying special phonetic symbols. Using the alphabet letters is enough».

Contrary to the belief that using the regular alphabet letters is sufficient for pronunciation, it is essential to study special phonetic symbols. Despite the fact that there are indeed some consistent patterns between sounds and their written representation, it is important to understand that English writing is not phonetic as opposed to Russian writing [4].

Understanding these special phonetic symbols allows us to accurately represent the various nuances and subtleties in pronunciation that cannot be adequately conveyed through regular alphabet letters alone [13]. These symbols provide a systematic way to represent sounds, making it easier for learners to grasp the intricacies of English pronunciation.

Myth 5: «The only difference between individual vowel sounds (а: - А, э: - э, u: - u, i: - I) is their length».

It seems that this misconception is widespread among students, teachers, and even authors of reputable English textbooks. However, it is important to realize that the length of a vowel sound is not the sole determining factor.

In English, there is a qualitative difference between vowel sounds, known as *tense* and *lax* [11]. While the quantitative aspect, which refers to the length of the sound, is relevant, it is not the primary distinguishing factor. This is evident from the fact that we use different symbols to denote long and short vowel sounds, rather than a simple colon sign.

Understanding the qualitative difference between tense and lax vowel sounds is crucial because it affects the way words are pronounced. Focusing solely on the duration of a sound can mislead students, even if the teacher or textbook provides flawless pronunciation examples.

With the advancement of technology, we now have access to modern electronic players that allow us to adjust the speech tempo [14]. This, in turn, enables us to vividly confirm that the same sound marked as long can have different durations in different words while maintaining the quality

of tenseness. For instance, when we listen to words like «food» and «juice» at various speeds, we can observe that the length of the vowel sound changes, but the quality of tenseness remains consistent.

To challenge the myth further, singing English songs can be an excellent exercise. By elongating both «long» and «short» sounds equally while maintaining their respective qualities, we can debunk the misconception that the length of a vowel sound is the only factor determining its pronunciation. For example, when we elongate the word «live», it does not transform into a different word like «leave», highlighting the importance of understanding the qualitative difference in vowel sounds [4].

Myth 6: «It is impossible to practice pronunciation without a coach».

Undoubtedly, having a teacher is a desirable factor in improving pronunciation, especially when it comes to adult learners. However, self-practice with sounds is also important for acquiring the necessary pronunciation skills, especially when modern teaching methods and internet technologies are utilized.

Some original game-based forms of phonetics learning can be suggested to supplement the role of a coach. One effective method is sound recording, where students record their own speech at different stages of language learning. For example, they can record themselves retelling a text and compare their pronunciation to that of native speakers. This allows them to identify areas for improvement and work on specific sounds [4].

Another fun approach is the *fictional biography* technique, where students pretend to be English-speaking characters and practice speaking in an English or American accent. This helps them understand the individual articulation mechanisms and develop a more natural pronunciation [17].

Tongue twisters are also beneficial in practicing specific sounds. Students can focus on tongue twisters that target the sounds they struggle with, helping them improve their pronunciation in a playful way [12].

Eliminating unnecessary words (or choosing correct ones) based on sound is another technique that can now be used with the help of mobile or online pronunciation applications. By focusing on the sound rather than the meaning, students can develop a better understanding of individual sounds and how they are produced [7].

When working independently, students can utilize phonetic charts (available in a smartphone app) as a reference to understand the different sounds in English [7]. Today, there are also dictionaries with audio pronunciation that allow students to listen to the correct pronunciation of particular words.

In addition to the above techniques, learners should be encouraged to use tablet and smartphone applications which offer interactive games and tutorials that make learning phonetics enjoyable. For example, there are some applications that provide video lessons from high-quality accent coaches, including the chance to practice speaking and receive immediate, accurate feedback on your pronunciation using advanced speech recognition technology [14].

A more natural way to master English pronunciation would be watching English-language films both with and without English subtitles, which can significantly help learners to improve their pronunciation by observing how native speakers articulate words [14]. This is well supplemented and reinforced by the speech shadowing technique which involves listening to a native speaker or audio recording and repeating the words or phrases immediately after them. The purpose is to closely mimic the rhythm, intonation, and overall pronunciation of the native speaker [7].

Watching videos at home and reproducing not only the speech intonation pattern but also the

gestures and facial expressions of characters can also enhance pronunciation skills [6]. This helps students connect the auditory and visual aspects of language learning, leading to better pronunciation. It is worth noting that nonverbal (visual) support is also desirable when working on certain sounds with the teacher's assistance. For example, teachers can use images or gestures to reinforce the practice of specific sounds. Hand gestures can be used to illustrate the difference between narrow and wide sounds, helping students visualize the correct articulation [4].

In conclusion, optimizing the process of teaching English phonetics can be achieved through dispelling mythical beliefs and incorporating game-based activities. It may be advisable for teachers to indirectly address students' misconceptions by guiding them through corrective questions and vivid illustrations during open discussions or «brainstorming sessions». By utilizing these methods and resources, students can practice pronunciation effectively, even without constant guidance from a coach.

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