

**Title:** Птица [ш]астья завтрашнего дня: The Status of “ш” in the Speech of Heritage and L2 Students of Russian

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The phoneme /ʃ ':/ (a long soft alveopalatal sibilant) has a marginal status in the phonemic system of Russian.

- It does not form a hard/soft pair; the closest partner - /ʃ/ - differs in both palatalization and length; very few minimal pairs exist.
- There is dialectal variation.
- It occurs infrequently in speech.
- The spelling is not consistent: *ещё, счастье, мужчина*.
- In writing, the symbols for the letters *ш* and *щ* are very similar, and they have adjacent positions on the standard Russian keyboard.

The combination of these factors results in certain problems even in L1 acquisition.

Russian L2 acquisition by L1 English speakers has to overcome another ‘obstacle’ as well: the L1 interference from the English /ʃ/, which has both palatalized and non-palatalized variants, the difference between which is non-phonemic.

Heritage Language Acquisition occupies an intermediate position between L1 and L2 learners, with a much greater degree of individual differences, which are largely determined by the degree of exposure to Russian in the family and schooling.

This paper presents observations on a series of mini-longitudinal studies, spanning from one semester to 2–3 academic years over a period of 5 years. Most of the subjects were enrolled in second- and/or third-year courses. The linguistic skills observed were listening comprehension, pronunciation, and writing/spelling.

The data collected in the classroom suggest that both Heritage and L2 learners go through the initial stage of analyzing *щ* as an allophone of *ш*:

$$\begin{array}{c} /ʃ/ \\ / \ \backslash \\ [ʃ] \ [ʃ':] \end{array}$$

However, while for L2 students the allophonic status of [ʃ ':] is conditioned by the phonetic environment (before front vowels), Heritage students tend to treat [ʃ] and [ʃ ':] as occurring in free variation.

The paper discusses the pedagogical implications and suggestions for facilitating the acquisition of this ‘tough’ consonant.