

Title: Teaching Ukrainian Pronunciation to Students of Russian Language Background
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A sizeable percentage of Ukrainian language students in US universities have some prior competency in Russian. At Harvard Summer School and Columbia University, this percentage has varied from 30% to 80% creating the problem of adapting the teaching methodology to the fact that Ukrainian and Russian phonologies have both much in common and are very different in their important aspects.

This paper examines the typical patterns of negative and positive language interferences of Russian with Ukrainian at the level of pronunciation and ways of handling them in order to maximize the Ukrainian pronunciation acquisition by learners whose mother tongue is English and who come to the classroom with a command of Russian serious enough to influence their Ukrainian pronunciation.

Successful handling of Russian phonetic interferences requires that the instructor be fully aware of and prepared to deal with “facts on the ground” which have to do with: 1) phonological differences between Ukrainian and Russian; 2) phonological similarities between Ukrainian and Russian; 3) phonological differences between Ukrainian and English; 4) phonological similarities between Ukrainian and English. The differences and similarities can be: 1) systemic, e.g., full Ukrainian vocalism vs. vocal reduction in Russian and English; no devoicing of syllable-final/word-final consonants in Ukrainian and English vs. their devoicing in Russian; 2) particularistic, e.g., differences in the articulation of specific related pairs of phonemes in the two interacting languages (Ukrainian soft /ɲ'/ vs. Russian never soft /ɲ/).

The methodological challenge a Ukrainian language instructor is faced with here is how effectively to neutralize detrimental influences of Russian phonology upon the learner while at the same time maximizing the use of inherited English and acquired Russian phonological characteristics which by virtue of their similarity with the Ukrainian sound system can facilitate the mastering of modern Ukrainian literary pronunciation by the American student.