



COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN PHONOLOGY.

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Abstract: *This article emphasizes the difference and similarities of English and Russian phonology. Compared to English, Russian vowels are clear and for long period, however there is not any diphthong in Russian language. Some of the Russian consonants are absent in English, which makes the pronunciation diverse. In Russian, consonants are harsher and does not consist aspiration, while in English, consonants are softer with air-breathing in pronunciation. Stress patterns are also another differentiation in two languages along with intonation. In Russian intonation plays a significant role, due to the fact that it delivers emotion, purpose and meaning. English speakers can better prepare for learning Russian by understanding the differences in pronunciation between the two languages. To fill the void left by prior research in this sector, we intend to investigate the most significant challenges commonly encountered by foreign students of Russian and English.*

Key words: *phonology, comparison, English phonology, Russian phonology, consonants, vowels, phonetic differences.*

INTRODUCTION




To begin with, English and Russian languages belong to different branches of Indo-European family of languages, so there are plenty of discrepancies between two languages. This study aims to examine and contrast the phonetic features of English and Russian. It emphasizes segmental features (vowels and consonants), suprasegmentally features (stress, rhythm, and intonation), and shared phonological processes. This comparison is especially important for learners and teachers of both languages, as phonological interference frequently impacts pronunciation and intelligibility. The value of understanding English and Russian phonology is both theoretical and practical. In theory, such comparisons help linguists understand how phonological traits evolve across branches of the Indo-European family and how different phonemic systems deal with contrasts and allophonic variation (Hayes, 2009). Practically, it offers useful insights into language teaching and learning, particularly pronunciation instruction and error analysis. Learners of English whose original language is Russian may struggle with phoneme perception and articulation, such as recognizing vowel length differences or producing English dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, which are lacking in Russian (Bryzgunova, 1980; Jones, 2011). In contrast, English



speakers learning Russian may struggle with palatalization contrasts and variable stress placement, both of which have no obvious English equivalents. English and Russian phonological systems have changed dramatically throughout time. Old English had a more symmetrical vowel system than Modern English, with fewer core vowels and diphthongs (Wells, 1982). Similarly, Church Slavonic influenced Old Russian phonology, which later changed in vowel quality and palatalization patterns, resulting in the current five-vowel system with substantial allophony (Avanesov, 1972). These diachronic changes have produced discrete phonotactic and suprasegmental traits, making comparative study both difficult and informative. Furthermore, phonological comparisons between English and Russian help to the study of second language acquisition (SLA). According to Flege's Speech Learning Model (1995), students assimilate new sounds based on their closeness to existing phonemes in their original language, which frequently results in pronunciation transfer. Russian speakers, for example, tend to substitute English diphthongs with monophthongs or diminish final voiced consonants as a result of Russian final devoicing regulations. Understanding these cross-linguistic connections allows educators to create focused teaching strategies that improve students' pronunciation and listening comprehension (Derwing & Munro, 2015). English and Russian phonology vary according to vowel and consonant systems and they follow some of the rules.


VOWEL SYSTEMS:



The English vowel system is rather complicated, with approximately 20 vowel phonemes (including diphthongs) depending on variety. Received Pronunciation (RP) comprises vowels like /i:/, /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɑ:/, /ɒ/, /ɔ:/, /ʊ/, /u:/, and the core vowel /ə/. English has several diphthongs, including /aɪ/ (as in time), /eɪ/ (made), and /aʊ/ (house). Vowel length and quality are phonemic. In comparison, Standard Russian has a vowel inventory of only five phonemes: /i, e, a, o, u/. However, vowel reduction has a considerable impact on Russian phonology. Vowels in unstressed syllables centralize and merge, such as unstressed /o/ and /a/, which are frequently realized as [ɐ]. Russian lacks diphthongs, and vowel quality is greatly influenced by stress position. As a result, English has a quality- and quantity-based vowel contrast system, whereas Russian depends solely on stress-based reduction.

English also makes considerable use of diphthongs, which are complex vowels formed by gliding from one vowel quality to another inside a single syllable. RP diphthongs are /eɪ/ (**face**), /aɪ/ (**price**), /ɔɪ/ (**choice**), /aʊ/ (**mouth**), /əʊ/ (**goat**), /ɪə/ (**close**), /eə/ (**square**), and /ʊə/ (**purity**). Many current accents have virtually eliminated the diphthongs /ɪə/, /eə/, and /ʊə/ (Cruttenden, 2014).

Vowel reduction, where unstressed vowels are centered toward /ə/ or /ɪ/, is a noteworthy feature of English vowel phonology. For example, **photograph** ['fəʊtəgrɑ:f] vs **photography** [fə'tɒgrəfi]. Stress thus plays an important role in vowel realization and rhythm, contributing to English's stress-timed nature (Ladefoged & Disner, 2012). Vowel



reduction in unstressed syllables is a distinctive feature of Russian phonology. According to Bryzgunova (1980), stressed vowels keep their entire quality, whereas unstressed vowels become centralized and reduced. For example, the stressed vowel /o/ is pronounced [o], but in unstressed syllables it changes toward [a] or [ɐ]:

молоко́ [mələ'ko] 'milk'

го́род ['gorət] 'city'

This mechanism reduces vowel differences in unstressed syllables, making stress an important determinant for intelligibility. Russian vowel reduction is more systematic and impacts almost all unstressed syllables, whereas English reduction only affects function words and unstressed syllables in related speech (Crosswhite, 2000).

Phonologically, English compares vowels based on both length and quality, whereas Russian focuses mostly on quality distinctions influenced by stress and consonantal context. Russian speakers learning English frequently struggle to retain vowel distinctions based on quantity and diphthongization, whereas English speakers learning Russian must master the complicated system of stress-dependent vowel reduction and palatalization effects (Derwing & Munro, 2015).

Mastering vowel length, diphthongs, and center vowels like /ʌ/ and /ɜ:/ is especially tough for Russian learners of English, as these sounds do not exist in Russian. In contrast, English speakers learning Russian must pay attention to the precise location of stress as well as the influence of adjacent consonants on vowel quality. To develop appropriate phonological representations, instruction should focus on auditory discrimination and production practice in context (Flege, 1995).

CONSONANT SYSTEMS

One of the most striking differences between the two systems is palatalization—a secondary articulation in which the middle of the tongue approaches the hard palate. In English, palatalization occurs only as a contextual allophone before front vowels, e.g., [kʲ] **in keen versus [k] in car**, but it is not phonemic (Jones, 2011). In Russian, however, palatalization is contrastive and plays a central phonological role. The difference between **mat [mat] 'mother' (vulgar form) and matʲ [matʲ] 'checkmate'** illustrates a clear semantic contrast based solely on palatalization. This feature is pervasive across the Russian consonant system, influencing both consonant-vowel coarticulation and word morphology (Bryzgunova, 1980; Timberlake, 2004).

English distinguishes between voiced and voiceless consonants, such as /b/ vs. /p/, /d/ vs. /t/, /g/ vs. /k/, and /v/ vs. /f/. These contrasts are usually preserved in all word locations, while assimilation can occur in related speech (Roach, 2009). Russian likewise has a voiced/voiceless distinction, but it has a significant process of final devoicing, in which voiced obstruents are devoiced at the end of words: **sad [sat] 'garden' (spelled сад).** Russian also features regressive assimilation of voicing, which spreads backward inside clusters (e.g., **vdrug ['fdruk]'suddenly'**). English does not exhibit systematic regressive assimilation, though partial voicing effects do occur (Ladefoged and Johnson, 2014).



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