

# The Course of Phonetics of Russian Language in Sanya University

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**Abstract**—The formation and development of linguistic competence in the process of the aspect-based studying of Russian language is inextricably connected with studying of Russian phonetics and intonation. Phonetic skills are the basis for the formation, development and improvement of skills and knowledge in all kinds of the speech activity. The distortion of sounding speech in a foreign language can render difficult the communication process or even make it a failure.

The article describes the peculiarities of teaching the corrective course of Russian-language phonetics at the Chinese university. The issues of organization, teaching methods and learning difficulties are being dealt with.

**Keywords**—Russian phonetics; phonetic skills; language interference; organization of a phonetics course; comprehensive approach

## I. INTRODUCTION

China's developing economy with a background of creating the New Silk Road and prospective cooperation with Russia requires increased number of the Russian-speaking professionals. This gives a considerable boost in the country to the growing interest in studying Russian language. In China "in 2017, the number of the language students increased by 7% and the number of Russian-language teachers increased by 10.5%." [1] "Currently, about 30 thousand students at more than 300 universities are studying Russian language in China." [2] The greatest number of specialists with knowledge of Russian language is in demand by production enterprises as well as by foreign trade and tourist companies.

Southern China is one of the priority destinations for Russian tourists. Hainan Island, known as "tropical paradise," awaits guests throughout the year. The students learning Russian at the local universities are trained, among other things, to be hotel administrators, interpreters, tourist guides, etc. When speaking about methods for training highly qualified staff, Liu Mao Yuan, the PhD at the Institute of Foreign Languages of the Northeastern Pedagogical University, emphasizes the need for high-level command of Russian to be shown by hotel staff: "Hainan requires the systematized study of Russian language by permanent staff at five-star hotels, improvement of (personnel's) skills of listening comprehension and speaking, as well as regular language practice." [3]

Sanya University (Sanya city, Hainan Province), which makes a substantial contribution to teaching the young people of China to speak Russian, was founded (and approved by the Ministry of Education of The People's Republic of China) in 2004, and, in 2018, was ranked second among China's private universities.

The University comprises 14 faculties in total. Here you can find the Institute of Foreign Languages, one of the departments of which is Russian Department. The advancement of the teachers' methodical activity is taken seriously at Sanya University. The teaching staff under the supervision of the University administration pays great attention to elaboration of curricula for the subjects, course planning, composition of compendia of lessons, as well as annual revision and update of learning and reviewing materials.

## II. RUSSIAN PHONETICS AS A TEACHING COURSE

### A. Formation of Phonetic-phonological Competence

As is known, the basic framework for mastering foreign-language speech activity is the formation and improvement of students' phonetic-phonological competence. The phonetic-phonological competence (along with lexical and grammatical competences) constitutes the structure of the linguistic competence. "The component composition of the phonetic-phonological competence includes the knowledge and skills of recognizing and reproducing phonemes, allophones, articulatory-acoustic characteristics of phonemes, phonetic arrangement of words, prosody and phonetic reduction." (L.L. Prisnaya) [4]

The disruption in the phonetic aspect of foreign-language sounding speech renders very difficult a communication process and, when serious mispronunciations occur, makes it practically failed. M.N. Shutova stresses the importance of mastering pronunciation skills when studying a foreign language: "The phonetically-correct oral speech preconditions the quality of all other parameters of speech, given the peculiarity of the phonetic material to allow the complete vocabulary and grammar of the studied language to get "realized" through it. [5]

In her work, devoted to the role and the place of phonetics in the process of teaching Russian to the foreigners at the primary stage, T.V. Buzanova speaks of the goals and

objectives of teaching phonetics: “The main goal in teaching phonetics is to create associations between grammatical and phonetic categories of the studied language in the minds of the learners. The main objective of phonetics is working out the articulatory automaticity that is sufficient for ensuring one kind of speech activity or another.” [6] N.A. Lyubimova also accentuates the importance of working out the automatized auditory and oral motor operations, which provide for “both perception, and realization of various-level units of a phonological component of a given language in accordance with its system and its norm, as well as audiolingual phonetic abilities.” [7] The different types of audiolingual abilities are:

- articulatory skills,
- accentuation and rhythmization skills and
- intonation skills.

Thus, at primary and basic stages of learning, it is necessary that the skills of pronouncing sounds, detecting these sounds in the flow of sounding speech, positioning of the correct word-stress and the skills of intonational presentation of syntactic constructions of a foreign language are practiced until it becomes automatic.

While forming pronunciation skills, both imitative, and analytical-imitative (conscious) teaching methods should be used.

In organizing a phonetics course, a comprehensive approach should be applied with account taken of the interrelated teaching articulation, rhythemics, word-stress and spoken Russian intonation in accordance with the communication goals and the language setting.

#### *B. Phonetics Course at Sanya University*

Teaching Russian at Sanya University is based on the communicativeness principle and the aspect-based comprehensive approach allowing for the formation and development of four types of speech activity: listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing.

An introductory-phonetics course makes a component part of the basic primary course in Russian language that is taught by Chinese teachers. More thorough pronunciation training is carried out at a corrective course in phonetics in the first semester in the first year of study by a Russian-speaking teacher. A phonetics course held by a Russian teacher lasts for a period of 15 weeks and in the 16th week it is completed with a credit, during which a student shall demonstrate his/her achievements in pronunciation and intonation. A course (all students in the same year) is divided into two groups of 26-35 students, which creates certain difficulties for individual work with each of them.

The course is conducted based on the course-book of O.N. Korotkova “In Russian without accent,” elaborated through the comparative analysis of phonetic systems of Russian and Chinese languages. All comments and wordings of the tasks given in the course-book are translated into Chinese. [8] It is necessary to adapt the course-book’s materials because teaching at Sanya University during one

semester is supposed to last for the period of 15 weeks, which corresponds to 30 hours of classroom sessions, and the course-book consists of 17 lessons (laboratory sessions) and is supposed to take 34 hours of classroom sessions.

E.V. Sirko’s textbook “The phonetics of Russian” can be called a supplementary teaching aid containing the comments in Chinese and its value is in the fact that the Russian sayings and tongue twisters are sufficiently presented (and translated) therein. [9]

When composing a curriculum, a teacher shall point out the goals and objectives of a course, its relevance, importance and contents, work methods, the requirements for a teacher and students, who are in the process of passing the course, as well as the requirements for successful performance at getting a credit. There are recommendations given to the students for delivery of homework (and time needed for this purpose), words of advice for their self-guided work and follow-up work. Subjects and purposes of each learning session, contents of lessons are described by the lesson, materials and tasks in the course-book that are going to be worked at during the given lesson are specified and there are also additional materials on this subject, work types and home tasks for each lesson.

A compulsory textbook, a supplementary compulsory textbook and materials for optional self-study: a book for selective reading and manuals providing for a more in-depth study should be specified in a course curriculum. As for the learning guides for further study, it is recommendable to use “Russian as a foreign language: phonetics” by N.B. Bitekhtina and V.N. Klimova [10], “An introductory-phonetics course of Russian for international students” by I.Yu. Varlamova [11], “Phonetics games and excersies” by I.S. Milovanova [12], “Russian phonetics manual” by Yu.G. Lebedeva [13] and “Practical exercises in phonetics of Russian” by I. Hobzová (Brno) [14].

One must also recall “the digital pedagogics” as being “the beginning of a new era” in the educational activity (V.G. Kostomarov) [15] and include the Internet resources that can help students master the subject. For practical self-guided work at the primary level, it can be recommended to use such Internet resources as: “Alphabet: sounds and letters” [16], “Online audio teach-yourself guide [17], “The phonetics of Russian for foreigners” [18], “Video-records. Russian multimedia library. Lomonosov Moscow State University” [19].

It is also advisable for the students to refer to the interactive author’s course developed by N.B. Bitekhtina and V.N. Klimova – “Listening to and understanding spoken Russian” [20]; in the first section thereof, “there is a main focus on developing phonematic and intonational perception, activating the skills of word chain segmentation, identifying the intonationally-expressed logical and semantic ties in sounding speech, as well as on forming auditive abilities at the level of an utterance.” [21]

#### *C. Difficulties in Teaching Phonetics for Chinese Students*

While forming audiolingual (auditory and articulatory) skills, it is necessary to remember overcoming a negative

phonetic interference – one of the major problems encountered by foreign learners when mastering a foreign language pronunciation. In his article devoted to foreign accent, E.A. Budnik gives a definition to phonetic interference: “The phonetic interference is understood to be a disruption (a distortion) of the secondary language system and its norm as a result of interaction of phonetics systems and pronunciation norms of two, and sometimes more, languages in the mind of a speaker, which is manifested through the interference of pronunciation skills, which have been formed on the basis of these interacting systems.” [22] N.A. Lyubimova gets into specifics of the notion of the phonetic interference in respect of the psycholinguistic aspect of its interpretation: “the interference is considered as a hidden, internal mechanism, the result of acting of which is impacted not only by the specifics of the primary, but also that of the secondary sound system, as well as by the universal linguistic trends; the result itself can be both negative, and positive, and cannot not be confined to the mere transfer.” [23]

Methodological experts also call for taking into account the interference of pronunciation skills and reminds us of the need to differentiate between purely scientific description of phonetics courses and a practical course: “The phonetics of Russian as a foreign language is a method-oriented description of the sound aspect of a language, which is carried out considering the comparison of Russian and other languages (in some cases – the learners’ native language).” [10] Hence, for successful work on the sound aspect of speech, it is necessary to take into account:

- the difference of the phonological system of Russian from the phonological system of the learners’ native language;
- the system of positional changes of phonemes in Russian and their differences from changes of such kind in the learner’s native language;
- the nature of articulation basis of Russian and its differences from the articulation basis of the learners’ native language;
- the nature of possible language interference and national types of accent;
- the difference of the intonation system of Russian from the intonation system appearing in the learners’ native language.

The main difficulties in mastering the phonetics of Russian by Chinese students consist in the difference of phonetic systems of the native language and the language to be learned.

In the article devoted to teaching Russian pronunciation to Chinese students, the researcher, Zhu Yu Jia, brings attention to the reasons for arising difficulties and defines the main direction of a course as follows: “Russian is considered to be a consonant-type language, whereas in Chinese there prevails a vocalism system and a consonantism system is much weaker than in Russian. For this reason, studying the Russian consonantism and mastering pronunciation of the

Russian consonants is one of the key objectives of Russian phonetics course taught to Chinese students.” [24]

Drawing on juxtaposition of consonants in Chinese and Russian, a number of Chinese researchers (Zhu Yu Jia, Dan Jie, Chen Zhao Lin) point out that in Chinese:

- there are no such distinctive features as “voicelessness” – “voicedness,”
- “hardness – softness,” which are characteristic of Russian language;
- there are no equivalents for the Russian coronal trilled sounds /p/ - /p’/ i.e. (/r/ - /r’/),
- hard /л/ (/l/),
- labio-fricative /в/ (/v/) and
- biphonemic combination /ш:’/ (f:’).
- Besides, when acquiring the knowledge of the system of Russian vowel phonemes, the greatest difficulty for Chinese learners is presented by realizing /ь/ (ə) phoneme.

Moreover, free, mobile, differently-placed word-stress appearing in the words in Russian can also cause difficulties [24], [25], [26].

Inasmuch as the coupled hard and soft, voiceless and voiced consonants, as well as /в/ (/v/), /п/ (/t/) and /л/ (/l/) are not present in Chinese, it is necessary to pay attention to training pronunciation and correcting of these sounds throughout the duration of the complete phonetics course.

### III. CONCLUSION

In the process of taking a phonetics course, various phonetic units are dealt with separately: sounds, syllables, phonetic words, syntagmas and spoken phrases; the rhythmic and intonation notions are highlighted. This is due to the professional linguistic approach to describing the language phenomena. So, when listening to our native speech or a speech in a foreign language, we come across such phenomenon as a speech flow, in which everything turns into an uninterrupted linear sequence of sound, and which bears the whole semantic charge.

That is why, “a comprehensive approach to the phonetic aspect of a language is certainly more justified in the process of teaching, because audial means, alongside the lexical-syntactical ones, serve one purpose: to express a speaker’s intent in his/her speech, to manifest his/her intention to perform a certain action with the help of a language, to ask, to inform, to put a question, etc.” (N.B. Bitekhtina, V.N. Klimova). [10]

The formation of phonetic skills helps comprehend, “decipher” a speech flow coming in a foreign language. The development of phonematic perception and formation of verbal skills of comprehending language units through listening imply creation of an auditory image of a language unit with subsequent articulatory setting for pronouncing it, as well as acquiring the knowledge of the graphic-phonemic

matchings of pronunciation. The analysis of a speech flow is impossible without the development of intonational perception on the basis of working with rhythmic models of words.

If systematic work is carried out, foreign students can cope with the difficulties, which hamper correct pronunciation. The differences of the phonological systems of Russian and Chinese, the dissimilarity of articulation basis, the nature of language interference and the national type of accent that the Chinese learners have should not appear as insurmountable. Problematic usages need to be regularly worked over; the emphasis should be on the systemic difference between the Russian voiceless and voiced consonants and the Chinese half-voiced ones; the strong links shall be formed between phonetic and lexical-and-grammatical materials; one must work towards proper articulating and correcting its imprecise realization.

The innovative forms of learning, for example, phonetics games, can diversify this quite difficult way. Playful forms of work included in the process of forming phonetic skills are intended to improve the system of controlling learners' speaking actions. A. Yu. Kasatkina, who devoted her thesis to developing such games, believes that they can reduce learners' dependency on the imitative method of mastering a foreign pronunciation and lift the psychological tension: "Using playful forms of work contributes to the optimization of the process of forming phonetic skills in non-native language" and creates "a positive emotional atmosphere." [27]

The work on pronunciation should not be limited by the first semester of the introductory-phonetics and corrective course, the improvement of audiolingual (auditory and articulatory) skills should continue throughout the whole period of learning Russian.

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