

Title: A New Approach to the Teaching of Russian Word Stress and Other Phonological Aspects to Complete Beginners

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Abstract:

Although in recent years Russian language pedagogy has received increased scholarly attention, very little work has been devoted to methodological approaches to teaching complete beginners. This is somewhat surprising, given that ab-initio learners make up the majority of the Russian language learning market.

Moreover, Russian beginner textbooks appear to contain no or exceptionally limited systematic material targeting particular phonological aspects. For example, there seems to be no method for teaching Russian word stress, which is notoriously difficult for foreign learners to acquire (e.g.: Hayes-Harb & Hacking, 2015).

The new methodology facilitates the effective acquisition of Russian word stress and vowel reduction, along with consonant clusters and palatalization, while establishing letter-sound correspondences at the very start of learning. Based on activating learners' cognitive processing during reading out sets of unfamiliar word strings, specially selected to target particular stress patterns or other aspects of Russian phonology, as well as for gradual acquisition of the Cyrillic alphabet, this methodology can be easily integrated into any Russian beginners' course. Its high effectiveness was demonstrated by my teaching intervention (funded by the British Philological Society) involving three groups which were taught using two different methodologies. The word-string-group participants were able to pronounce any unfamiliar Russian words with the correct stress, unassisted, within 8 one-hour sessions, outperforming Russian Studies ab initio students. The teaching materials developed for the experiment have the potential of becoming a valuable teaching aid for Russian tutors worldwide. Furthermore, this research has important implications for the teaching of other Slavic languages and for training in pronunciation at the beginner level more generally.

Hayes-Harb, R., & Hacking, J. F. (2015). The influence of written stress marks on native English speakers' acquisition of Russian lexical stress contrasts. *Slavic and East European Journal*, 59, 91-109.