



The Phonetic Aspect of Russian as a Foreign Language for Effective Teaching in Pakistan

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Abstract: This research was meant to analyze and categorize the problems being faced by Pakistani students while learning the phonetic aspect of the Russian language in the absence of the Russian language environment. The main attention is paid to a comparative analysis of phonemes of the Russian and Urdu languages for developing effective studying Russian language by Pakistani students. Considered techniques for teaching the phonetic aspect of the Russian language are developed not only at the level of a phoneme but also at the level of a word and the group of words as a part of a sentence. The conclusion and recommendations mentioned in the article may be used for effective teaching to Pakistani students in the absence of a Russian language environment.

Key Words: Learning Russian language, Language Environment, Phonetic Skill, Urdu, Pronunciation, Phoneme

Introduction

The Russian language belongs to the family of Indo-European languages, which is one of the four East Slavic languages. Written material and literature is witnessed from the 10th Century onward. Today the Russian language is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. Russian is an official language in the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Kazakhstan but it is also spoken and understood throughout Eastern European countries, the Baltic States, the Caucasus and Central Asia due to the influence of Russians in on the region in Soviet Union era.

Around 250 million people speak the Russian language with 160 million speakers in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Russian is the eighth most spoken language in the world by the number of native speakers and the seventh by the total number of speakers. Language is one of the six official languages of the United Nations.

For many decades Russia remained closed to many other countries. Travelling to and from Russia was very limited and restricted. But in the modern regime and after the 1991 revolution, Russia has made new economic and cultural ties with many countries especially in neighbouring ones and in Europe. Russia is extending its technological and cultural cooperation and the people of Pakistan are interested in knowing Russian culture, literature, history and the Russian language. For many years Pakistan had no cultural centres where residents could study and know the Russian language and literature. Besides, there were no relevant faculties in the universities. But the main problem was and remains that language centres do not consider Russian as a subject for study and only a few universities open their respective departments. Interest in the Russian language is only beginning to develop, and the shortage of Russian language teachers,

the lack of bilingual textbooks in Russian and Urdu aggravates the situation.

At present, the geopolitics of Pakistan is aimed at searching for the import of energy sources from South Asia and Russia. Pakistan is looking for a market for industrial goods produced in the country and the Russian market in this respect seems ideal. To solve these problems knowledge of the Russian language is required.

Literature Review

In modern methodology, there is a tendency to intensify learning of Russian as a foreign language (RFL), which is reflected in the educational course profile. A tight and rigid time frame for learning languages requires the exclusion of all unnecessary material and ineffective methods from the language learning process for the efficiency of studying. Besides all the above-mentioned constraints more focus is paid to vocabulary and grammar and resultantly, insufficient attention is paid especially to the phonetic aspect of the language, which is equally important for good Russian language learning outcomes including speaking with proper pronunciation and understanding.

Incorrect pronunciation of any word creates a psychological barrier and stress to the speaker that prevents him from expressing his thoughts in a non-native language fluently. When we hear any mistakes in the interlocutor's speech, we inevitably start correcting them (in our mind), which makes the communication process more difficult and slow, because we have to switch from the meaning of the message to its sound form (pronunciation). Bernstein (1975) rightly noted that "a disapproving attitude to a foreign accent is partly explained as an unconscious form of protesting against being forced to unproductively expend mental energy of listener" (Bernstein, 1975)

Moreover, incorrect pronunciation negatively affects not only students' speech production but also the listening process since, even auditory perception is impossible without the participation of the speech motor analyzer

(Zhinkin, 1958). Thus, the success of listening in a non-native language mainly depends on "the level of speech hearing formation, which is aimed at the correctness of the perception of a speech acoustic signal" (Stevens & Halle, 1969). It turns out that a student will be able to speak and understand speech correctly only when his phonetic skills are formed at the appropriate level.

To a certain extent, the problem of teaching phonetics in a language environment is less acute, since students are in contact with native speakers, perceiving language acoustics automatically and unconsciously. It is quite another thing when learning takes place in the absence of a language environment when students do not have the opportunity to constantly listen to the speech and speak the language being studied, and therefore to train their phonemic hearing and articulation. In this regard, the solution to the problem of studying the phonetic aspect of coursework in Pakistan is highly relevant.

As noted by Buzanova, the role and place of phonetics in the learning process depends on the course goals. Most people that are enrolled in foreign language courses have the communicative purpose of learning. Therefore, mastering an adequate level of pronunciation with native speakers is a matter of paramount importance (Buzanova, 2004). Inevitably, effective communication is a strategic goal for learning the Russian language in courses in Pakistan.

Approach and Methodology

For the first time in history, under this research, the phonetic aspect of the Russian language in comparison with the Urdu Language was studied and investigated. The purpose of this research is to find effective ways of teaching the Russian language to Pakistani students even in the absence of a language environment. For this purpose, a broad-based methodology was developed considering all dimensions of research. The authors utilized a mixed methods approach, convergent parallel mixed methods in particular, which involved both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Many

designs exist in the mixed methods field, but Creswell (2014) focuses on three basic mixed methods designs namely: convergent parallel mixed methods, explanatory sequential mixed methods and exploratory sequential mixed methods followed by the development of a questionnaire, sound recording of authentic material, interview and feedback from students, analysis and finding (Creswell, 2014). For analysis and finding authors had to learn both Russian and Urdu languages along with the sounds (consonants/vowels) of each language. The study targeted students learning the Russian language at the Institute of Languages and Linguistics (ILL), University of Punjab. For this purpose, data were collected from seven batches of students enrolled in a Russian language course at ILL from 2009 to 2016, which were 49 in number.

Analysis and Findings

One of the principles for efficiently working and organization of educational material is making a comparison of different parameters of the phonetics systems of Russian and the native language of students (in our case, it is Urdu) at the level of distinctive features. In this research, the use of comparative phonetic analysis helps to predict typical mistakes of course participants and enables the teacher to understand the causes of pronunciation difficulties and to find ways for their

elimination. Therefore, the basis of this paper is the comparison of phonetic systems of Russian and Urdu based on the data collection and analysis. Considering the features of phoneme systems in two languages as discussed above, we can divide them into 3 groups as given below:

- a) present and coinciding in both languages;
- b) absent and thus different;
- c) partially overlapping.

The above classification may be described in more detail as follows in three groups:

Group I

The phonemes of this group for Pakistani students are the least difficult since the skill formed in their native language is transferred to the studied one, i.e. Russian. This group includes the following phonemes: <a>, <п>, <б>, <м>, <ф>, <в>, <т>, <д>, <г>, <с>, <з>, <ц>, <к>. To assimilate them, it is enough to perform imitative exercises. It is also useful to demonstrate to listeners a series of words from their native language, where these sounds are pronounced almost in the same way. Examples of such words are [ам] ام, [панка] پنکھا, [бал] بال, [ма] ماں, [фарк] فرق, [варк] ورق, [тала] تالا, [дукан] دکان, [гай] گئے, [сат] سات, [зубан] زبان, [цади] شادی, [кам] کام as mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1. Russian words of Group 1 with corresponding Urdu words having similar phonemes (Saleem & Sohail, 2013)

Sr. No	Russian Phonemes of Group-I	Russian words representing phonemes of Group-I	International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) of Russian words	Urdu words representing similar to Russian Phonemes of Group-I	International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) of Urdu words
1.	<a>	мама	m 'a $\text{m}\text{\textcircled{a}}$	ام	α :m
2.	<п>	папа	p 'ap $\text{\textcircled{a}}$	پنکھا	p $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ ŋk ^h α:
3.	<б>	бык	b 'ɪk	بال	bα:l
4.	<м>	мак	m 'ak	ماں	m $\text{\textcircled{a}}$:
5.	<ф>	фон	f 'on	فرق	f $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ rq
6.	<в>	вода	v $\text{\textcircled{e}}$ d 'a	ورق	v $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ r $\text{\textcircled{a}}$ q
7.	<т>	ток	t 'ok	تالا	t $\text{\textcircled{a}}$:lα:

Sr. No	Russian Phonemes of Group-I	Russian words representing phonemes of Group-I	International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) of Russian words	Urdu words representing similar to Russian Phonemes of Group-I	International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) of Urdu words
8.	<ɔ>	дом	d 'om	دکان	d ʊkɑ:n
9.	<ɔ>	год	g 'ot	گائے	g ɑ:e:
10.	<ɔ>	сок	s 'ok	سات	s ɑ:t
11.	<ɔ>	зонт	z 'ont	زبان	z ɔbɑ:n
12.	<ɔ>	щука	ʃ : 'ʊkə	شادی	ʃ ɑ:d ʌi:
13.	<ɔ>	кот	k 'ot	کام	k ɑ:m

Group II

This group includes phonemes of <ы>, <ш>, <ц>. These phonemes cause difficulty for Pakistani students while learning the Russian language since they are not available in the Urdu language. As a result, the replacement of a foreign language sound with a native language sound can be observed. This leads to both i.e. a thick accent and a distortion of the sentence. For example, instead of the word «мыл» “washed” students say «мил» “pretty”,

instead of «был» “was” - «бил» “beat”, instead of «мышка» “mouse” - «мишка» “bear”, i.e. replacing [ы] with [и]), instead of «цвет» “colour” - «свет» “light”, instead of «кольцо» “ring” - «колесо» “wheel”, instead of «перец» “pepper” - «перс» “Persian” (replacing [ц] with [с]). All this hindered not only the process of speaking but also affect listening skills when students are not able to distinguish the words that are similar in sounds as mentioned in Table 2.

Table 2. Russian Phonemes of Group-II with corresponding Russian words mistakenly pronounced by Pakistani students (Saleem & Sohail, 2013)

Sr. No	Phonemes of Group II	Russian words (with meaning), containing phonemes of Group-II		Russian words (with meaning), wrongly understood and pronounced by Pakistani students	
		Word	Meaning	Words	Meaning
1.	<ы>	мыл	washed	мил	pretty
		был	was	бил	beat
		мышка	mouse	мишка	bear
		цвет	colour	свет	light
2.	<ц>	кольцо	ring	колесо	wheel
		перец	pepper	перс	Persian
		пишу	I write / I am writing	пищу	I squeak / I am squeaking
3.	<ш>	прошу	I ask	прощу	I will forgive

As it was mentioned above, Pakistani students feel difficulty mastering the sounds of Group 2, which are absent in their native language. Nevertheless, this problem arises only at the start of Russian language learning, which over

time almost disappears if there were abundant phonetic practices. While practising these sounds, it is useful to work with tongue twisters. For example, *Кошка на окошке шьет*

рубашку для Ермошки (with sound ш), Молодец надел кольцо девице на палец (with sound ц), Если руки мыли вы, если руки мыли мы, если руки вымыл ты, значит, руки вы-мы-ты (with sound ы).

In addition, before starting the practice, the teacher must necessarily inform students about the specific moments of articulation (that is, about the position of speech organs that can be observed, felt and controlled) and about so-called sound "helpers" (Miller & Politova, 2015). In particular, when teaching [ц] (ṭs) in Urdu speaking audience, we draw attention to the presence of the stop element [т] (t), since it causes difficulties for students. At the time of articulation of sound [ш] (ʃ), it is important to control students of the courses not to soften this sound and not to replace it with [щ] (ʂ). When learning [ы] (ɨ), it is helpful to pronounce a long sound [y] (ʊ) and simultaneously stretch the corners of the lips as if a person is smiling.

Group III

With respect to learning and mastering, the phonemes of Group 3 seem to be the most difficult for Pakistani students, since the features of pronouncing the sounds of the Urdu language are transferred to a foreign one. Students do not notice the difference between the two sounds and tend to do with the sounds of their native language, which leads to a thick accent and sometimes impedes understanding. If the difficulties in studying the phonemes of the second group mostly appear at the beginning of the course, then mistakes in the formation of sounds of the third group somehow accompany the entire duration of learning. These include the following phonemes: <э>, <u>, <o>, <y>, <п'>, <б'>, <м'>, <ф'>, <в'>, <т'>, <д'>, <н'>, <к'>, <с'>, <з'>, <р'>, <л'>, <л'>, <ж'>, <ч'>, <й'>, <к'>, <г'>, <г'>, <х'>.

It is noticed that most of these phonemes are soft consonants. Hard variants of these consonants are usually pronounced by the students correctly, therefore, it is necessary to train learners to transform the sounds familiar to their articulation basis into their soft

variants. It is an established fact that the opposition of hardness vs. softness of consonants in the Russian language plays an important role in understanding the meaning of words. For instance, был (was) – *быль* (true story), стан (stature) – *стань* (become), etc. As per Davidova, in the Urdu language, there is no phonemic contrast in hardness - softness (Davidova, 2003), although with regard to pronunciation they can be slightly softened depending on the phonetic position, still, they are not equivalent to the sounds of the Russian language.

For the convenience of analysis, we will separate soft consonants that make pair with hard consonants into a separate group since the technique of working on them will be the same i.e. <п'>, <б'>, <м'>, <ф'>, <в'>, <т'>, <д'>, <н'>, <с'>, <з'>, <р'>, <л'>, <к'>, <г'>, <х'>. It is important for us to teach students the basic principles of transforming hard sounds into soft one. Since the typical mistake that Pakistani students make in pronouncing any soft consonant is that they replace it with the corresponding hard consonant in combination with [j], therefore, it resulted in the mixing of similar words like *льет* [lʲj'et] (pouring) instead of *лед* [lʲ'et] (ice). Therefore, it is advisable for the Pakistani audience to perform exercises based on the contrast of 1. hard consonant + vowel and 2. soft consonant + vowel and 3. soft consonant + j + vowel.

Considering the vowels of Group 3 i.e. – <э>, <u>, <o>, <y>, it is observed that a typical articulatory mistake of Pakistani students while using the vowel phonemes of the third group is the absence of clear differentiation between <э> and <u>, <o> and <y>, and these vowels interchange, since in Urdu these pairs of sounds are transmitted only by one letter: <э>, <u> – *ۛ* and <o>, <y> – *۞*. Due to this feature of the Urdu language, it can be observed that wrong pronunciation takes place while the learners are studying the Russian language. For instance, instead of «мир» “peace” they say «мэр» “mayor”, instead of «Света» “Sveta” (Russian female name) – «свита» “entourage”, instead of «стул» “chair” – «стол» “table” and

vice versa as demonstrated in Table 3. Moreover, students do not distinguish these sounds not only while training their productive

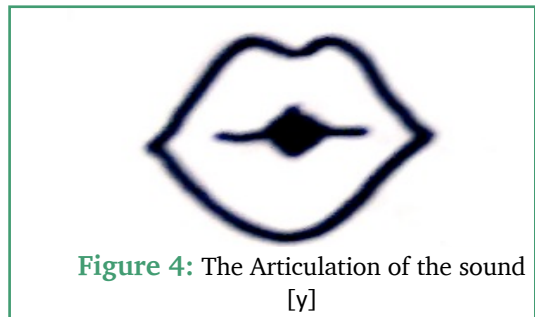
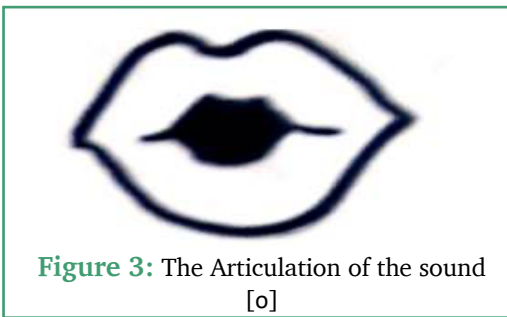
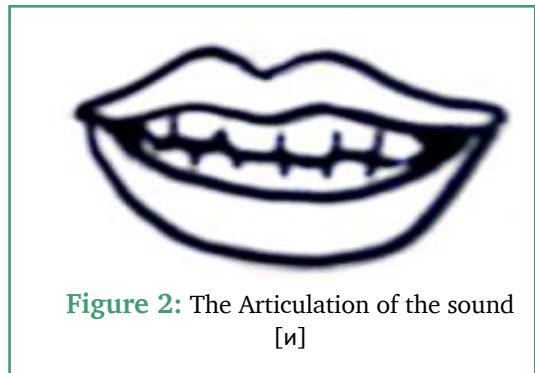
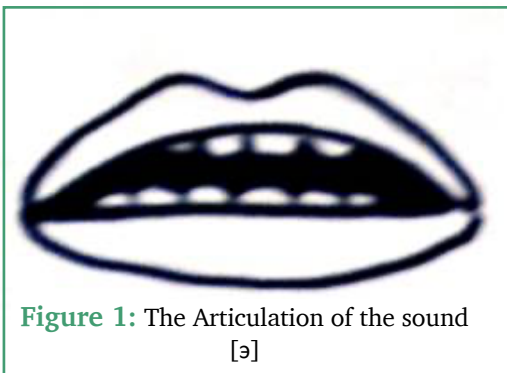
skills but also during the process of reception while listening, which ultimately affects the ability to communicate in Russian.

Table 3. Russian words versus pronounced words by Pakistani students along with the meaning

Sr. No	Russian word		Pronounced word by Pakistani students	
	Word	Meaning	Word	Meaning
1.	мир	peace	мэр	mayor
2.	Света	Sveta (Russian female name)	свита	entourage
3.	стул	chair	стол	table

An effective method of training these phonemes i.e. <э>, <у>, <о>, <у> is the use of articulation figures shown in figures 1 to 4 for each sound depicting the different levels of the opening of the oral cavity and different lip

shapes. As soon as the student makes a mistake, the teacher shows the corresponding card, and the student has to correct pronunciation on his / her own.



We should also dwell on some features of sonorants production in the speech of Russian language course participants from Pakistan.

When working with <H>, the teachers must emphasize that the tip of the tongue

should touch the lower teeth, and the front part of the back of the tongue closes with the inner side of the upper teeth. The frequent mistake in pronunciation of this sound is that the students produce a sound that is a mixture of hard and

soft [н], since in Urdu when articulating a sound transmitted by the letter “ن” (nun), the tongue is located on the alveolar ridge.

Pakistani students found much difficulty in mastering the Russian phoneme <р>. Despite the fact that a similar sound exists in their native language transmitted by the letter “ر” (re), however, it is pronounced with less vibration of the tip of the tongue and with less strength. It is important for students while producing <р> to increase the vibration of the tongue during articulation of the said sound.

Pakistani learners also face problems while pronouncing the Russian phoneme <л>. They find it easy to master the soft version of this sound since Urdu has a similar sound, denoted by the letter “ل” (lam). With regard to <л>, instead of a hard consonant, often a soft sound is produced. For example, such lexemes as «был» [b'ɪl] (was), «стал» [st'al] (became), «мел» [m'el] (chalk) are pronounced as [b'ɪlʲ], [st'alʲ], [m'elʲ] respectively, i.e. replace with words that have a different lexical meaning – *быль* (true story), *сталь* (steel), *мель* (shallow). To avoid such mistakes, it is necessary to draw the attention of students to the fact that in Russian, when pronouncing [л], the tongue touches the teeth, not the alveolar ridge (in contrast to the Urdu language). It is also useful to perform exercises where a long [л] would be pronounced by the students starting from elementary words like *ллл-лампа*, *ллл-лошадь* to the phrases such as *звал Ладу* [zv'al_l'adu], *ел лук* [j'el_l'uk].

It is better to train phonemes <ў> and <ж> in parallel during teaching Urdu speaking audience since it is difficult for students to recognize the difference between them. Usually the second of said phonemes is replaced by the first one. As a result, the words «подойди» “come here” and «подожди» “wait” are pronounced in the same way [pədejdʲ'i]. The main mistake in the articulation is that the tongue moves forward instead of backward, and also descends the tip of the tongue instead of lifting it. Therefore, the students should pay attention to this particular information.

Pakistani students also face difficulty while working with <ч>. In Russian, this phoneme is soft, but in Urdu, the sound transmitted by the letter “چ” (Che) is even softer. In some phonetical positions, Pakistani learners can make a sound close to the transmitted letter combination *ть* [tʲ], which can lead to the communication failure. For instance, instead of *плачем* [pl'atʲɛɪm] (we are crying), students may say *платим* [pl'atʲɪm] (we are paying). Therefore, exercises in contrasting these sounds are useful both – within a word and across word boundaries. For example, *приведший, дед шел, вот шелест*, on one hand, and *ночь, дочь честно (ответила)* on the other.

Among velar consonants, the most difficult is <х> (no problem arises while pronouncing <к> and <з>). It is better to demonstrate the phonemic contrast of this sound in comparison with the corresponding sounds in the students' native language. In Urdu, there are five phonemes similar in pronunciation to [x], ranging from a pharyngeal spirant, sometimes almost inaudible – [h], to uvular deep sound, which is pronounced with a slight wheeze (خ) [x]. A typical mistake when pronouncing Russian [x] is when the learner moves a tongue backwards more than it is required, which creates an acoustic effect of a very deep sound. This phenomenon doesn't cause a communication failure, but it leads to a thick accent in speech.

We have already mentioned above the key points of teaching pronunciation of Russian language sounds and it was found out that in the Urdu language there is no opposition and specific difference of hardness vs. softness of consonant phonemes. However, it is not enough just to indicate the above-stated fact, without mentioning another very important feature of the Russian consonant system i.e. the presence of voiced and voiceless consonants in their correlation, stress and reduction of unstressed vowels.

It is to be noted that only those students should be accepted for enrolment in Russian language courses who have the basic ability of speaking and understanding English. In the

English language, there are stress and reduction of vowels almost in every word unlike the Urdu language, where the reduction is not met so often. In this regard, it is methodologically expedient to explain both stress and reduction with the help of the English language.

In the Russian language at the end of the word, consonants are not opposed to the basis of criteria of voiceless and voiced. For example, pairs of words *роз – рос* and *мок – моx* have the same pronunciation – [r'os] and [m'ok] respectively. Urdu has its specific features of final voiced consonants – there is no devocalization of final voiced sound since voiced and voiceless consonants may affect the meaning of the words, for instance, ز ا ی پ [pɪjɑ:z] (onion), س ا ی پ [pjɑ:s] (thirst).

Therefore, this habitual skill from the Urdu language is automatically transferred to Russian. A common mistake of Urdu-speaking students is the absence of devocalization of consonants both at the ends of words – мѐд [m'et], рѐд [r'at] and within one word when assimilation takes place, e.g. devocalization – аѐтробус [eft'obʊs], выставка [v'ɪstɐfkə] or voicing – фѐтбол [fɐdb'ol]. Pakistani students learn to devocalize consonants at the ends of words more quickly than within a word.

Another acute problem of teaching is the fluent continuous pronunciation of sounds of two words in Russian without making a pause between them, particularly, a preposition followed by a lexeme: *от дома* [ɐd'd'omə]

(voicing), or devocalization of prepositions *из, без, под, перед, над*, if the subsequent word begins with a voiceless sound: *без тебѧ* [b'ɪs_t'ɪb'æ], *перед папой* [p'ɪr'ɪt_p'apəj]. Pakistani students take more time to master the skill of pronouncing related prepositions and meaningful words together as one word, especially at the beginning of the course, when their speech is slow. To develop this skill, abundant practice in oral communication is required, which will increase the speed of speech. As a result, the fluent pronunciation of any phonetic word will become habitual for students.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We examined the basic features of Russian vocalism and consonantism through the prism of the Urdu language in order to reveal specific features of the methodological work in the development of the phonetic skill of the Russian language course participants in Pakistan. In conclusion, we note that for effective learning the teacher should take into account all the above-described methods of working with Russian articulation, taking into account the features of the students' native language.

It is necessary to strive to ensure course participants understand well that wrong pronunciation of the sounds will lead not only to poor accent but also to the replacement of one word with another one, which will result in misunderstanding and communication failure between the interlocutors.

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