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University of San Francisco

**English Pronunciation Skills and
Intelligibility of Native Russian Speakers**

A Field Project Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Teaching English To Speakers of Other Languages

By
Zoia Palgova
December 2022

English Pronunciation Skills and Intelligibility of Native Russian Speakers

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

by

Zoia Palgova

December 2022

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the native Russian-speaking population in the United States created an urgent need to improve their pronunciation skills and increase their second language speech intelligibility. The purpose of this field project was to present a research-based curriculum, with the use of embedded technology, that can be utilized to improve the American English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers.

The body of analyzed scholarship demonstrated that speech intelligibility is the primary goal of second language pronunciation teaching, justified the importance of research-based pronunciation teaching, emphasized the significant role of technology in pronunciation research and teaching, and revealed the lack and need for resources teaching American English pronunciation to native Russian speakers. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, one of five hypotheses that form Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition, is used as the theoretical framework for this field project.

The designed field project *English Pronunciation with ZOYA* is an eLearning Platform grounded on a research-based curriculum tailored according to the related in-depth literature review and personal teaching experience to improve American English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of adult native Russian-speaking learners. The eLearning Platform is available at englishpronunciationwithzoya.tilda.ws. The Platform is designed as a user-friendly website with an easy-to-navigate module structure course curriculum creating a safe self-paced learning environment for pronunciation teaching and learning. The developed curriculum is recommended for adult intermediate to advanced proficiency level (B1 - C2, CEFR) native Russian-speaking learners, their instructors, and curriculum developers interested in improving pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian-speaking learners.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role of pronunciation and intelligibility among English language learners is increasingly important as the majority of people who speak English totals approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide, with only 360 million people speaking English as their first language (Levis & Silpachai, 2022, p.160). This means that about 75 percent of English language users are nonnative speakers who use English to communicate with other nonnative speakers, underscoring the importance of intelligibility. Among these nonnative English speakers in the United States, many are native Russian speakers. According to the Census Bureau, Russian is the 12th most common language in the United States overall and one of the most common of the Slavic languages spoken in the United States (<https://www.census.gov/>). The census reports large numbers of Russian speakers living in New York, California, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Washington, and in the hundred years from 1910 to 2010, the number of Russian speakers in the United States rose from 57,926 to 854,955. As is true for English language learners in general, the role of pronunciation and intelligibility is also relevant among native Russian speakers living in the United States, and a topic of special interest to their English language teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Pronunciation teaching and learning is a complex and multifaceted process that attracts the attention of both educators striving to polish their students' pronunciation skills and learners interested in increasing their second language speech intelligibility. In particular, the late language learners' ability to attain native-like outcomes in phonology is an enigmatic and fascinating research domain for second language acquisition (SLA) scholars. The number of

learners older than ten years old who manage to defy the Critical Period Hypothesis and develop native-like fluency is infinitesimal (Moyer, 2014, p. 418). First proposed by Penfield and Roberts (1959) and later popularized by Lenneberg (1967), the Critical Period Hypothesis claims that the ability to acquire language is biologically sensitive to age. The hypothesis suggests that the ideal time for acquiring a new language lies in childhood, right before puberty, with language acquisition in later life considered to be a more difficult and effortful process. Seemingly confirming this, less than 5% of adult language learners can reach outstanding results by attaining both native-like pronunciation and phonological fluency (Moyer, 2014, p. 418).

However, in the last 25 years, the field of pronunciation teaching and learning has undergone a major shift in recent years away from accent modification/eradication and towards accent reduction and speech intelligibility. The groundbreaking scholarship of Munro and Derwing (1995) was the first to make the claim that accent itself is not a communicative barrier and that intelligibility, rather than native-like pronunciation, could be a primary goal of pronunciation teaching, learning, and research. In the years that followed, other researchers such as Gordon et al. (2012), Sung (2016), Brinton (2017), and Chan (2018) echoed this claim. According to these scholars, even heavily accented speech can be highly intelligible, and thus, the degree of accentedness should be taken into account only in case it impedes understanding. Best practices for pronunciation teaching include: (a) multimodal approaches like visual and kinesthetic strategies (Brinton, 2017); (b) the haptic approach, based on physical engagement and movement (Burri et al., 2019); (c) embodied pronunciation practices that integrated pronunciation with greater bodily awareness, movement, and sensation (Chan, 2018); (d) the use of emerging digital tools for both teaching and data collection (Brinton, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2018; Yoshida, 2018).

This is an important shift for English language teachers and students because it changes the focus of pronunciation teaching and learning such that it now prioritizes comprehensibility and intelligibility before goals related to accent (Levis & Silpachai, 2022). For those pronunciation teachers who do focus on accent, recent research has suggested that accent is taught through the lens of sociocultural identity-building. The addition of this new lens can help language learners understand and navigate the shades of meaning activated by accent, and to explain the relationship between accent and identity (Brinton, 2017; Moyer, 2014). It may also support the development of native-like pronunciation, acquired after puberty, among students who develop specific cognitive, psychological, and sociolinguistic factors that demonstrate a willingness to develop a new second language (L₂) identity and a strong sense of positive self in the L₂. Research on the topic emphasizes the importance of making the students aware of the interrelation between accent and identity in second language acquisition (SLA) through critical discussions and reflections aimed at developing a relationship between the social domain and second language pronunciation.

As it is for all teachers and students engaged in English language learning, the shift in pronunciation teaching and research is also relevant to English language teachers of native Russian speakers. Unfortunately, there are very few resources that target this demographic. In addition, there are no specific resources designed for teachers of native Russian speakers who wish to embed technological innovations in their pronunciation teaching curricula. The literature from the field on teaching pronunciation includes a gap in scholarship related to native Russian speakers. For this reason, this field project focuses on English pronunciation teaching for native Russian speakers and aims to develop a curriculum that can be used by their English language

teachers. This may help to bridge the gap in current research and best practices that focus on English language learners in general, to native Russian English language learners in particular.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this field project is to present a research-based curriculum, with the use of embedded technology, that can be utilized to improve the American English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers. The curriculum is aimed at intermediate to advanced proficiency level native Russian speakers mastering American English pronunciation at a university, community college, or adult school level. This project will also interest English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) pronunciation teachers with native Russian-speaking students who need to improve their pronunciation skills and intelligibility. The created curriculum will also be beneficial both for intermediate through advanced level students as well as ESOL teachers for self-study. This curriculum will be based on and informed by a document analysis of existing curricular models that aim to teach English pronunciation to native Russian and other English language learners and employ technology in teaching pronunciation.

Theoretical Framework

The Affective Filter Hypothesis, one of five hypotheses that form Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition (1982), is used as the theoretical framework for this field project. The Affective Filter Hypothesis claims that affective factors, such as stress, motivation, or self-confidence, and language acquisition are interrelated, with a high affective filter capable of impeding second language acquisition. For example, if a language learner experiences negative emotions or anxiety in the classroom, it may undermine their motivation and self-confidence, and thus decrease retention affecting their acquisition of the target language. This is particularly important for the current project as it describes how affective variables are related to success in

second language acquisition, and pronunciation teaching and learning in particular. The Affective Filter Hypothesis will be used in this field project because it reveals how and why a safe environment in the classroom can be created in order to improve pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers through a research-based curriculum that includes the use of technology.

Some of the foundational authors who have contributed to the filter hypothesis include Dulay and Burt (1977), Krashen (1982; 2013), Brinton (2017), and Chan (2017). Originated in the Dulay and Burt's (1977) scholarship proposing the relationship between affective variables and second language acquisition, the Affective Filter Hypothesis flourished in the seminal works of Krashen (1982; 2013) that further develops the ideas conceptualized by Dulay and Burt (1977). The theoretical framework discussion ends with a review of the ideas developed by Brinton (2017) and Chan (2018), who illustrate the importance of the affective filter hypothesis in relation to the teaching of pronunciation in particular. Taken together, these authors provide a theoretical rationale for this field project as a whole, and as a frame for understanding how and why the English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers can be improved through a research-based curriculum that includes the use of technology. This progression of thought is important because it demonstrates the development and importance of the Affective Filter Hypothesis, as well as the role of the affective filter in teaching and learning pronunciation. It's important for my paper because developing this type of safe learning environment with lowered affective filters can lower anxiety, build confidence and a willingness to speak among language learners, and as a result, have a profound influence on language acquisition improving learners' outcomes.

Significance of the Project

This field project may be of interest to ESOL pronunciation teachers and practitioners who wish to support native Russian-speaking students to improve their English language pronunciation skills and intelligibility. Because the project provides a research-based approach to developing a curriculum, with the integration of technology, this field project may help teachers and practitioners find more efficient ways to teach pronunciation and motivate students. This field project may also interest curriculum designers aiming to specifically address the pronunciation needs of native Russian speakers. In addition, this field project may also interest researchers in the fields of pronunciation, teaching pronunciation, and second language acquisition who are interested in teaching practices that lower the affective filter of students by creating a safe learning environment and building student engagement and confidence. Native Russian speakers who continue their English language studies through self-study may also benefit from this field project as it may provide an opportunity to work toward mastery of English pronunciation.

Definition of Terms

- **Consonant chart** - a chart listing all consonant sounds for a particular language organized by place of articulation, manner of articulation, and voiced or voiceless distinction. A sample chart can be found in Grant (2017).
- **Modular training** is a type of program or course composed of several individual modules that either can stand alone or be arranged into a variety of learning courses. Each module usually has its own learning objective. Modular training courses can address the specific needs of individual students, especially flexible training modules that can be successfully implemented through technologies (O'Brien et al., 2018).

- **Sagittal diagram** - a sketch diagram used in phonetics and pronunciation teaching and learning that shows the position of the organs of speech, including tongue, teeth, lips, nasal cavity, and sometimes the whole pharynx and larynx depending upon what sounds need to be shown. For teaching and learning purposes, it is used to demonstrate the particular position of the organs of speech to explain the differences between sounds, for instance, in which part of the mouth the tongue lies or how the stream of air should go when various sounds are produced. A model of the sagittal diagram can be found on the webpage *The Organs of Speech* (2022).
- **Spoken learner corpus** - a large collection of data introduced by speech samples that can be used in a variety of contexts, including pronunciation research and teaching, second language acquisition, materials development, second language pedagogy, language testing, etc. (O'Brien et al., 2018).
- **Vowel quadrant** - also known as a vowel diagram or vowel chart that takes the form of a triangle or a quadrilateral demonstrating a schematic arrangement of the vowels specifying tongue positions within the oral cavity, with vertical positions denoting close (high) or open (low) positions, and horizontal positions denoting front or back vowels (Vowel diagram 2021). A picture demonstrating a vowel chart for southern California English showing how its vowels are distributed within the IPA vowel trapezium can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vowel_diagram.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The claim of worth for this literature review is that English language teachers can improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers through a research-based curriculum that includes the use of technology. The body of scholarship that justifies this claim includes four sets of research that: (a) demonstrates that speech intelligibility is the primary goal of second language pronunciation teaching; (b) discusses the importance of research-based pronunciation teaching; (c) discusses the role of technology in pronunciation research and teaching; (d) demonstrates the need for research and curricula specific to the task of teaching English language pronunciation to native Russian speakers. The Affective Filter Hypothesis theory can be used to frame this body of scholarship. Side by Side reasoning is used to connect these pieces of evidence/ reasons because the literature includes different authors, theorists, experts, studies, and/or statistics. A visual representation of the logic equation is as follows: $R_1, R_2, R_3, R_4 \therefore C$ (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 97).

Foundations for Affective Filter Hypothesis

The theoretical framework for this field project is the *Affective Filter Hypothesis*. Coined by Krashen (1982), the Affective Filter Hypothesis claims that affective factors, such as stress, and language acquisition, are interrelated, with a high affective filter having a negative impact on language acquisition. This section covers a brief history of the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which first includes a discussion of Dulay and Burt's (1977) original scholarship proposing the relationship between affective variables and second language acquisition. This section also includes a summary of the seminal works of Krashen (1982; 2013) that further develops the ideas conceptualized by Dulay and Burt (1977). The section ends with a discussion of the ideas

developed by Brinton (2017) and Chan (2018), who illustrate the importance of the Affective Filter Hypothesis as it relates to the teaching of pronunciation in particular. This progression of thought reviewed in this section is important because it demonstrates the development and importance of the Affective Filter Hypothesis, as well as the role of the affective filter in teaching and learning pronunciation.

According to Dulay and Burt (1977), some affective factors have a profound influence on language acquisition. Affective factors can include emotions, feelings, mood, attitude, motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, and the idea of a *socio-affective filter* can be used to understand why it is important for language learners to maintain positive emotions and attitudes toward language learning. In early research on the topic, Dulay and Burt (1977) claim that a high socio-affective filter can cause language learners to “delimit their linguistic input” (p. 103), which in turn limits language acquisition overall. For example, if a language learner experiences negative emotions or anxiety in the classroom, it may undermine their motivation and self-confidence, impeding their acquisition of the target language. The concept of the socio-affective filter, described by Dulay and Burt, forms the foundation of the Affective Filter Hypothesis later theorized by Krashen (1982).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis is one of five hypotheses that form Krashen’s Theory of Second Language Acquisition (1982). This theory includes the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Monitor hypothesis, the Natural Order hypothesis, the Input hypothesis, and the Affective Filter hypothesis. According to this theory, language acquisition depends on the presence of comprehensible input as well as a low affective filter. Krashen organizes affective variables into three categories: (a) motivation; (b) self-confidence; (c) anxiety. Motivation, especially integrative motivation, drives interest and participation in language learning.

Self-confidence and a positive self-image also support language learning. Finally, low anxiety levels improve both output and retention for language learners. When motivation and self-confidence drop, and anxiety increases, affective variables prevent input from reaching what Chomsky calls the language acquisition device (*LAD*)” (p. 4), the part of the brain responsible for second language acquisition. In this way, the Affective Filter Hypothesis describes how affective variables are related to success in second language acquisition.

This is particularly important as it relates to the role of pronunciation in language learning. According to Krashen (1982), “the effective language teacher is someone who can provide input and help make it comprehensible in a low anxiety situation” (p. 32). This observation is echoed in the work of Brinton (2017), who claims that language teachers can help their students acquire a positive attitude toward pronunciation by creating a safe and encouraging learning environment. Developing this type of learning environment can lower anxiety and build confidence and a willingness to speak among language learners. In order to increase learner motivation and autonomy, and decrease their affective filter, Brinton recommends multimodal approaches to pronunciation teaching. Similarly, Chan (2018) promotes the idea of embodied pronunciation practices in language classrooms. According to Chan,

Acquiring an intelligible pronunciation of a language is not only a matter of what one does with the mouth, nor is it reliant solely on listening with the ears. Although these two parts of the body are extremely important, pronunciation can be learned well only when it is integrated with greater bodily awareness, movement, and sensation. Through explicit learning and self-monitoring, language teachers can become more conscious of the appropriate use of gestures and other nonverbal languages in general. And in particular, they can learn to employ well-developed, systematic, consistent, and meaningful body

movements in their classrooms so as to guide their learners to clearer and more intelligible pronunciation (p. 63).

The multimodal, nonverbal, and kinesthetic activities described by Brinton and Chan can be used in language classrooms to improve pronunciation through increased awareness and engagement. The authors also make an important connection between the Affective Filter Hypothesis theory and language teaching practice by describing ways to lower the affective filter while teaching pronunciation. Along with Dulay and Burt (1977) and Krashen (1982), the work of Brinton and Chan will be used as a theoretical rationale for this field project as a whole, and as a frame for understanding how and why the English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers can be improved through a research-based curriculum that includes the use of technology.

Intelligibility: The Primary Goal of Second Language Pronunciation Teaching

For English language teachers, the first step in improving the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers is to understand that speech intelligibility is the primary goal of L₂ pronunciation teaching. This section includes research that illustrates how research in the field of language acquisition has come to prioritize intelligibility over nativelikeness in L₂ teaching. It also includes a discussion of the relationship between accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility. Finally, this section reviews the research that highlights the importance of understanding how sociocultural meaning is activated by accent, which justifies the need for pronunciation training. This body of scholarship is essential because it helps to justify the larger claim for this literature review that the English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers can be improved through the lens of research and through the use of technology.

Research in the field of language acquisition has come to prioritize intelligibility over nativelikeness in L₂ teaching. Evidence of this can be found in Levis and Silpachai (2022), who identify intelligibility as a primary goal of second language teaching, learning, and research. According to the authors, intelligibility was not always the goal of pronunciation teaching. On the contrary, for many years, nativelikeness was the main focus of second language pronunciation teaching. In 1995, groundbreaking research by Munro and Derwing shed light on the role of intelligibility, causing a major shift in the focus of teaching and research related to pronunciation in second language learning. Munro and Derwing (1995; 2020) demonstrated that the main goal of L₂ learners is to be understood by a variety of interlocutors in various contexts, and the authors emphasize intelligibility over native-like pronunciation. This position has been echoed by others in the field including Gordon et al. (2012), Sung (2016), and Chan (2018).

Brinton (2017) argues the importance of intelligibility as a pronunciation goal for those in the fast-growing field of English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication, a type of interaction among non-native speakers with different L1 backgrounds who use English as a common means of communication. The primary role of pronunciation teaching is described by Brinton as: “to prepare ELF users of the language to communicate effectively and intelligibly with other ELF speakers” (Brinton, 2017, p.454). In sum, the research articulates the prioritization of intelligibility over native-like pronunciation in second language teaching.

Related to this is a body of scholarship that explores the relationships between accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility. For example, in a reprint of their foundational study mentioned above, Munro and Derwing (1995) claim that accent, intelligibility, and comprehensibility are related but partially independent. According to the authors, accent itself is not a communicative barrier as it was once thought to be; even heavily

accented speech can be highly intelligible, and the presence of an accent does not necessarily impede intelligibility or comprehensibility. In a later study, Levis and Silpachai (2022) confirm these findings and make a similar claim that accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility are related yet distinct. Thus, if comprehensibility and intelligibility are chosen as primary goals, the degree of accentedness should be taken into consideration only if accent interferes with listeners' understanding. This research demonstrates that in second language teaching and learning, accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility cannot be used interchangeably as synonyms; they are related but distinct goals and teachers and students should prioritize comprehensibility and intelligibility before pursuing goals related to accent.

When second language teachers do focus on accent, it is important for them to teach the sociocultural meaning that accent carries, and to allocate sufficient time to understanding and practicing the sociocultural nuances of accent. For example, according to Moyer (2014), adult language learners with exceptional outcomes in second language phonology, or the ability to proceed and produce sounds like a native, demonstrating a willingness to develop a new L₂ identity and a strong sense of positive self in the L₂. According to Moyer, there are specific cognitive, psychological, and sociolinguistic factors that explain outstanding outcomes in second language pronunciation acquired after puberty. These include: (a) pride in second language attainment developed under the influence of intrinsic motivation; (b) strong identification, or integrativeness, with the second language; (c) a desire to sound like a native speaker; (d) being socially extroverted. A literature review by Brinton (2017) confirms these findings and claims that second language teachers need to help their students become aware of the relationship between the social domain and second language pronunciation in general, and of the relationship

between accent and identity in particular. Brinton identifies “a significant correlation between learners’ beliefs and attitudes towards L₂ pronunciation and their ultimate attainment” (p. 451).

Related to this, Sung (2016) addresses the sociocultural meanings that an accent can activate among ELF speakers. According to Sung, those who learn English as a lingua franca can be sorted into two categories: (a) those who prefer to speak English with native-speaker accent, and demonstrate a positive self-image and a high level of English proficiency; (b) those who prefer to speak English with their local accent, projecting their linguacultural identities through their native language influenced accent in order to distance themselves from native speakers of English and avoid native speaker association. These categories have implications for teaching pronunciation for ELF communication. For example, according to Sung, second language teachers should be aware of the role of identity in second language acquisition, and in second language pronunciation in order to give learners more freedom of accent choice. In addition, the author recommends that second language teachers incorporate *critical pedagogy* into their teaching by engaging their students in “critical and reflective discussions” (p. 63) on language pronunciation, accent preferences, and the sociocultural meanings that accents activate.

In summary, the conducted literature review allows understanding of the primary step of pronunciation teaching and learning process highlighting that intelligibility is the primary goal of second language pronunciation teaching, which is relevant for English language teachers aiming to improve their pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers. This section illustrates how research in the field of language acquisition has come to prioritize intelligibility over nativelikeness in L₂ teaching. It also sheds light on the relationship between accentedness, comprehensibility, and intelligibility. Lastly, this section reviews the research that emphasizes the importance of understanding how sociocultural meaning is activated by accent, which justifies

the need for pronunciation training. This body of scholarship is important because it clarifies the underlying assumption that pronunciation teaching should first focus on intelligibility and comprehensibility. Following this, teachers and students in language classrooms may attend to accent through the lens of sociocultural identity building. This discussion of goal setting leads to a second discussion, focused on the actual teaching and learning of pronunciation, addressed in the next section.

This body of scholarship is important because it helps to justify the larger claim for this literature review that the English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers can be improved through the lens of research and through the use of technology.

Research-Based Pronunciation Teaching

After setting a goal for developing intelligibility, second language teachers must develop an understanding of how to teach pronunciation. This section reviews a body of scholarship that argues for teaching pronunciation within a *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) framework. This section also discusses the importance of integrating multimodal approaches to pronunciation teaching. Finally, this section reviews research demonstrating the primary role of suprasegmental over segmental features in pronunciation teaching. The literature reviewed in this section is important because it helps to justify the claim for this literature review that English language teachers can improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of their native Russian speakers through a research-based curriculum.

To begin, research illustrates the importance of teaching pronunciation within the framework of CLT. Evidence of this can be found in the literature review by Brinton (2017), who traces the transition in pronunciation teaching from rote drill and repetition to pronunciation teaching that is communicative in nature. Brinton highlights fundamental changes in the field of

pronunciation teaching caused by the shift to the CLT framework. These include: (a) creating a balance between accuracy and fluency; (b) increasing the use of authentic teaching materials; (c) a focus on communication-oriented tasks that engage learners in interactive and meaningful exchanges of information; (d) designing student-centered pronunciation curricula. Related to the communicative approach to teaching pronunciation, Brinton also discusses the importance of integrating multimodal approaches, including auditory, visual, and kinesthetic approaches, into pronunciation teaching. According to Brinton, visuals, gestures, sound, and movement are beneficial tools that second language teachers can use when teaching pronunciation.

Brinton (2017) identifies many different examples of multimodal teaching tools, activities, and techniques. For example, the author recommends traditional visuals such as the vowel quadrant, the consonant chart, and the sagittal diagram. Brinton also recommends visual pronunciation exercises that allow learners to build an awareness of how the speech organs work, how to make articulatory muscles more flexible, and how to enhance the automaticity of second language sounds. Influenced by the relationship between embodied cognition and learning, Brinton also highlights the benefits of a *haptic* approach, a pronunciation teaching system based on the implementation of physical engagement and movement such as touch, gestures, and movements such as clapping syllables. Haptic pronunciation teaching, an extension of kinaesthetically-based instruction involving gestures, movement, and touch, teaches both pragmatic and phonological competencies (Burri et al., 2019). Brinton argues that the haptic approach, along with the use of sounds, words, and phrases anchored in movement and/ or visuals, is the best way to facilitate the recall of target pronunciation features in spontaneous speech.

Similarly, a literature review by Chan (2018) demonstrates the benefits and importance of using embodied pronunciation practices with careful attention to breathing, articulatory positions, vocalization, pulmonic and tactile pressures, scope, pitch and duration, and synchrony of body movement, in addition to the systematic use of gestures. Chan (2018) highlights the important role of body language in second language learning and emphasizes the relationship between the cognitive and physical domains of pronunciation. Like Brinton (2017), Chan recommends using a multisensory and multicognitive approach to pronunciation learning, and describes a variety of classroom techniques based on embodied pronunciation practices. These include pronunciation workouts such as articulator exercises and breath training, and the use of simple devices (drums, kazoo, a rubber band, etc.), hands, and fingers to demonstrate aspects of articulation and prosody. Chan also recommends activities like the *Haptic Syllable Butterfly*, the *Stress Stretch*, and the *Rhythm Fight Club* that involve larger body movements aimed to improve stress and rhythm. The author notes that embodied pronunciation teaching practices such as these can help teachers of English make the features of pronunciation more perceptible, and that pronunciation can be successfully acquired only on the condition that it is integrated with greater bodily awareness, movement, and sensation. When taken together, the work of Brinton and Chan suggests that multimodal approaches to pronunciation teaching can improve pronunciation, and enhance retention.

Research from the field of second language acquisition identifies a final strategy that can be used to improve the teaching of pronunciation: a shift in focus from *segmentals*, individual units of speech such as phonemes, to a focus on *suprasegmentals* such as including intonation, stress, and rhythm (Brinton, 2017). For example, in a study from 2012, Gordon et al. (2012) found that explicit suprasegmental instruction improved comprehensibility scores among second

language learners. Several years later, Cox et al. (2019) also found that suprasegmental features play an important role in improving ESL learners' intelligibility, and comprehensibility, as they can cause errors in message-level intelligibility. While suprasegmental errors may not be recognized as pronunciation errors, they can impede communication or be perceived as cross-cultural pronunciation differences in intonation, or even as a social failing. When taken together, this research suggests the primary role of suprasegmental over segmental features, and also the importance of explicit instruction in pronunciation teaching.

In summary, research demonstrates that it is essential to understand what research says about pronunciation teaching. This section reviews a body of scholarship that argues for teaching pronunciation within a CLT framework. This section also discusses the importance of the integration of multimodal approaches to pronunciation teaching. Finally, this section prioritizes the role of suprasegmental over segmental features in pronunciation teaching. Taken together, this body of research helps to justify the claim that English language teachers can improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers through a research-based curriculum. The final section of this literature review reviews the role of technology in teaching pronunciation.

The Use of Technology in Pronunciation Research and Teaching

Similar to the role of research-based teaching strategies, technology can play a role in the research and teaching of pronunciation. For example, this section includes a discussion of the use of various innovative technologies in language classrooms, including a summary of precautions. It also includes a discussion of the importance of collaboration between scholars and teachers who specialize in pronunciation, and experts in a wide range of related fields.

To begin, the research illustrates the positive impact of technology on research in the field of pronunciation. Evidence of this can be found in a literature review by O'Brien et al. (2018), who catalog the use of various technological tools in research. Digital tools that can be used to research pronunciation include freeware, automatic speech recognition (ASR), text-to-speech (TTS) systems, and cloud-based applications. Freeware, such as Praat and Anvil, uses a variety of platforms to conduct experiments and to collect data from participants in the form of waveforms, pitch tracks, spectrograms, and videos, which is important to pronunciation researchers because they can conduct phonetic analysis or/ and video annotation research and thus provide an analysis of a speech event. ASR is a type of innovative technology that was originally developed to use in second language pronunciation research. More recent speech technology research is aimed at investigating ASR-based measures for pronunciation error detection capable of providing focused corrective feedback immediately after an utterance. To do that, researchers need to collect sufficient amounts of reliable data to train ASR algorithms that could reflect human judgments of the quality of pronunciation and assess L₂ learners' intelligibility and comprehensibility. ASR is important to pronunciation researchers because new advanced technological approaches would be employed to address specific issues in second language pronunciation, which could support language learners and help them master their pronunciation skills. Text to Speech function is an innovative technology capable of artificially converting written texts into spoken language. It's specifically developed for individuals with severe speech or visual impairment, or people with reading disabilities. For second language teaching and learning purposes, TTS systems may be utilized for modeling the pronunciation of words, phrases, sentences, and texts for second language learners. Currently, TTS systems are still under development, however, they are significant to pronunciation researchers as they

predict rapid advancement of the technology and its incorporation into education programs, which could individualize instruction for second language learners. Finally, cloud-based applications existing not on local computers but stored on Internet servers called *clouds*, such as Thomson's (2018) English Accent Coach, are important to pronunciation researchers because they have several formidable advantages: such technologies are more accessible for the users, allow to implement immediate updates for all end-users, and allow for extensive resources for data collection. O'Brien et al. also highlight the important role of data collection in pronunciation research, including the benefit of developing spoken learner corpora research and the creation of research-based computer-assisted pronunciation teaching (CAPT). A spoken learner corpus refers to a large collection of data introduced by speech samples and is important because it can be used in a variety of contexts, including pronunciation research and teaching, second language acquisition, materials development, second language pedagogy, language testing, and other fields. CAPT refers to computer-assisted pronunciation teaching involving a variety of specially-designed technologies to train pronunciation features and is important because they have numerous advantages beneficial for teaching pronunciation in class, including the ability to facilitate learners' autonomy, individualize instruction, and expose learners to various speech models. In addition to the benefits for language and pronunciation researchers, the use of technology is also recommended for language teachers.

Recently, several scholars have advocated for the use of technology in language classrooms. For example, O'Brien et al. (2018) identify three ways in which the technologies explained above can be used by language teachers: (a) software advances can be used to address different learning styles such as visual, auditory, written, kinesthetic and multimodal; (b) individualization of instruction through modular training can be used to personalize instruction

and to provide feedback to students; (c) Automatic Speech Recognition systems can be used to provide error analysis, feedback, and advanced opportunities for spontaneous speech recognition. Brinton (2017) also advocates for the use of ASR, as it can help students improve their perception of unfamiliar English sounds and, to a lesser degree, the intelligibility of their phoneme production. In addition to this, Brinton recommends the use of synchronous video conversations, which allow language teachers to provide students with audio and video feedback during online sessions. Brinton (2017) also highlights the positive role of mobile technologies due to their widespread availability and their ability to empower language learners, encourage language learner autonomy, and extend learning beyond the classroom.

Despite the many benefits, several authors caution against the indiscriminate use of technology in the classroom. For example, Yoshida (2018) reminds language teachers that technology “is not a panacea” (Yoshida, 2018, p. 209), and that each technological tool has its limitations. According to Yoshida, language teachers should implement technologies in the classroom by first focusing on the pedagogical tasks, and then choosing the best technology to suit the task. Considerations for choosing technology to support pedagogical goals related to pronunciation include good quality, accurate, practical, and inexpensive technological tools that support synchronous and/or in-person learning. Related to this, several authors in the field have begun to investigate the role of cross-discipline collaboration as it relates to the development and use of technology in teaching pronunciation.

Research suggests that scholars and teachers who specialize in pronunciation may benefit from collaboration among a wide range of fields, such as applied linguistics, computer science, engineering, pedagogy, and phonetics. If researchers and teachers in these related but disparate fields collaborate, they may be able to successfully develop and integrate technologies that

support the teaching and learning of English language pronunciation (Brinton, 2017; Cox et al., 2019). O'Brien et al. claim that long-term collaborations of this kind are possible with two prerequisites: (a) the opportunity for researchers to collaborate to work out a common understanding of the issues; (b) stable funding. Building on this, Cox et al. (2019) claim that it is necessary to establish an interdisciplinary entity in order to ensure that appropriate technologies are utilized for the right purposes, and these technologies are adapted to meet specific goals, use appropriate insights and data, and the approaches based on technologies are pedagogically sound. This type of collaboration may be a defining feature of future research in second language acquisition in general, and in the evolution of teaching pronunciation in particular. When taken together with the discussion on the current role and benefits of technology in language classrooms, this small body of research helps to justify the larger claim for this literature review that English language teachers can improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of English language learners through a research-based curriculum that includes the use of technology. The final section of this literature review demonstrates why this is particularly important for the English language teachers of native Russian speakers.

Lack of Resources for Teaching Native Russian Speakers

According to Cox et al. (2019), pronunciation pedagogy should be an inseparable part of ESOL teacher-preparation curricula, but many L₂ instructors do not often feel qualified to teach pronunciation due to the lack of sufficient training. This is particularly relevant for the English language teachers of native Russian speakers because there is a marked lack of resources devoted to pronunciation teaching for this target group. A search of the existing literature on pronunciation teaching for native Russian speakers resulted in a limited number of studies on the following topics: (a) teaching pronunciation to native Russian learners in the English as a

foreign language (EFL) environment (Bergman, 2021; Quian et al., 2018; Sokolova et al., 2008); (b) teaching English pronunciation to native Russian students in the ESOL environment (Banzina et al., 2015; Swan and Smith, 2002). This section explains the exhaustive process used to identify the literature. It also provides a brief summary of the limited scholarship available on the topic of teaching English language pronunciation to native Russian speakers.

Searching the Literature

The search for scholarship related to teaching English pronunciation to native Russian speakers was conducted in the following databases: Fusion, Google Scholar, ERIC, and Education Source. The following criteria were applied to limit the search of the material: (a) only recent publications, not older than 2011, were used, and (b) only peer-reviewed resources were taken into account. The initial list of the keywords used for the search included but was not limited to: “teaching pronunciation to russian*,” “teaching pronunciation, russian*,” “handbook on american pronunciation,” and “handbook on american pronunciation for russian learners.” A broader search was done in the databases ERIC and Education Source. The following keyword searching parameters were applied to get data in ERIC: “*English (Second Language) OR english language learners/ AND pronunciation OR speech AND russia**” and “*English (Second Language) OR english language learners OR second language/ AND pronunciation OR speech/ AND russia**.” The following keyword searching parameters were applied to get data in Education Source: “*English as a foreign language OR english language learners OR second language/ AND pronunciation OR speech/ AND russia**” and “*English as a foreign language OR english language learners OR second language/ AND pronunciation OR speech (with Russian selected as language).*” These searches resulted in a limited number of studies, with even fewer published in recent years. In the analysis, I have also used two books: *Practical*

Course in English Phonetics and Phonemic written by Sokolova et al. (2008) called, and also *Learner English* by Swan and Smith (2002) relevant for the current research. In spite of their early dates of publication, these books are still widely used in the field of education as valuable sources containing relevant information for the current study information on teaching pronunciation to native Russian students.

Summary of Studies on the Teaching of English Pronunciation to Native Russian Speakers

Research demonstrates there is a distinct lack of papers approaching the topic of teaching English pronunciation to native Russian speakers. A handful of existing papers on the research topic includes findings on teaching pronunciation to native Russian learners in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment (Bergman, 2021; Quian et al., 2018; Sokolova et al., 2008;), and research focusing on teaching English pronunciation to native Russian students in the ESOL setting (Banzina et al., 2015; Swan and Smith, 2002). The literature reviewed in this section is important because it reveals the layer of the existing findings related to the research topic, and helps to justify the claim for this literature review that English language teachers can improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of their native Russian speakers through the research-based curriculum.

To begin, research illustrates findings on teaching pronunciation to native Russian learners in the English as a foreign language (EFL) environment (Bergman, 2021; Quian et al., 2018; Sokolova et al., 2008). Evidence of this can be found in the research involving native Russian learners of English as a foreign language conducted by Quian et al. (2018). The research paper presents a system for segmental perceptual training that utilizes a computational approach to perception based on the following components: corpus-based word frequency lists, high variability phonetic input, and also text-to-speech technology. The system is aimed to

automatically create discrimination and identification perception exercises, which are individually customized for different learners. The system was evaluated in pre-and post-tests that involved 32 adult Russian-speaking learners of English as a foreign language. In terms of teaching implications, the model utilized in the research training can be useful in the classroom and research settings. The results of the training model provide an example for replication in language teaching and research settings.

Another research that analyzes teaching pronunciation to native Russian learners in the EFL environment can be found in Bergman (2021). This is exploratory research providing a data-driven approach to the identification and systematization of L₂ Russian speakers' of English most frequent segmental pronunciation errors. Although teaching pronunciation is not a primary goal of the research paper, the results of this study can be utilized to identify the recurring problems valuable for pronunciation instruction for Russian learners of English. An error analysis was conducted with the usage of a self-collected corpus of pronounced sentences. The speech samples were recorded in a well-equipped lab at Novosibirsk State University (NSU) using a set of designed Python and Praat scripts. The study demonstrates that a comprehensive phonetically-annotated corpus is capable of revealing pronunciation errors that the experts in pronunciation have not previously described or overstated. The systematized list of persistent errors created by the author can be useful for teaching pronunciation and helping teachers focus accordingly on specific students' needs.

Another resource that focuses on teaching pronunciation to native Russian learners in the EFL environment is the book by Sokolova et al. (2008) called *Practical Course in English Phonetics and Phonemic*, which is widely used in Russia to prepare future teachers of English at the university level. The book is designed for students with an advanced level of proficiency in

English. It is aimed at helping students master their own pronunciation, and get a practical foundation in the subject matter to be prepared to teach English pronunciation to others.

Although not supplemented by any multimedia material, the book provides extensive explanation and practice on both segmental and suprasegmental levels.

In sum, this body of scholarship focuses on teaching pronunciation to Russian-speaking learners in the EFL setting, which can be valuable to justify the larger claim for this literature review that the English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers can be improved through the integration of research and technology.

Related to this, research investigating teaching English pronunciation to native Russian students in the English as a Second language (ESL) environment (Banzina et al., 2015; Swan and Smith, 2002). Evidence of this can be found in Banzina et al. (2015), who conducted the first acoustic study investigating Russian learners of English production of secondary-stressed (SS) and unstressed–unreduced (UU) syllables. The participants of the experiment were a group of students, including native female and male Russian speakers and native speakers of American English studying at a university in Ohio. The research showed the most striking differences between native speakers and Russian-accented English in the temporal and vowel quality dimensions. The researchers believe that the significant vowel quality and duration reductions in Russian-spoken secondary-stressed and unstressed–unreduced vowels occur due to a transfer of native phonological features. To be specific, Banzina et al. (2015) claim that Russian-spoken unstressed–unreduced and secondary-stressed syllables are much shorter, being approximately only half the duration of English-spoken ones. Unlike native speakers, Russian speakers produce vowels with the jaw significantly less open, and the tongue placed higher in the oral cavity. For instance, for the low front vowel sound /æ/, the tongue was significantly closer to the central

position, thus having very little in common with the native-spoken low front vowel. Next, inaccurate production of unstressed–unreduced vowels resulted in significant inhibition of lexical access. Unlike UU sounds, reduced secondary-stressed vowels revealed less interference. Some results also have interesting teaching implications relevant to the current study. In particular, improper UU syllable realization has detrimental effects on native listener comprehension. Thus, Banzina et al. (2015) strongly recommend including unstressed–unreduced syllables in the pronunciation syllabus for Russian learners of English so that Russian learners of English could pay special attention to the accurate pronunciation of this type of syllable in their speech. Meanwhile, the mixed results received for secondary-stressed syllables indicate that their accuracy might be relatively less critical for intelligibility.

The teacher’s guide to interference and some other problems entitled *Learner English* written by Swan and Smith (2002), is also valuable for the current research as it contributes to teaching English pronunciation to native Russian students in the ESOL environment. This research provides a brief overview of significant features distinguishing the Russian sound system from English and points out several differences in stress patterns, intonation, etc. The researchers provide a list of specific pronunciation features that can be useful for tailoring a research-based curriculum aimed at improving the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers.

The search for the literature in this section demonstrates a lack of resources devoted to teaching English pronunciation to native Russian speakers. Across the four databases searched, using various keywords and terms, only a few sources were located. The topic of these sources includes teaching pronunciation to native Russian learners in both EFL and ESOL environments.

Along with the research presented in the preceding sections of this literature review, the limited results of this final section help to justify the need for curricula addressed by this field project.

Summary

In summary, the body of research that justifies the claim that English language teachers can improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers through a research-based curriculum that includes the use of technology includes four sets of research that: (a) demonstrates that speech intelligibility is the primary goal of second language pronunciation teaching; (b) discusses the importance of research-based pronunciation teaching; (c) discusses the role of technology in pronunciation research and teaching; (d) demonstrates the need for research and curricula specific to the task of teaching English language pronunciation to native Russian speakers. With my field project, I have addressed the need identified in the final section by creating a research-based curriculum, including the use of technology that would improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers.

CHAPTER III

THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Brief Description of the Project

English Pronunciation with ZOYA is an eLearning Platform grounded on a research-based curriculum that includes the use of technology designed to improve American English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian-speaking learners. The Platform creates a safe self-paced learning environment for pronunciation teaching and learning. The Platform is available via the following link: english.pronunciation.with.zoya.tilda.ws. The Platform can be utilized for online, in-person, and autonomous learning.

The eLearning Platform utilizes innovative technologies in teaching and learning. It is tailored as a user-friendly website with an easy-to-navigate modular structure course curriculum capable of creating a clear learning pathway for the students. According to O'Brien et al. (2018), the modular structure is also capable of personalizing instruction for second language learners and meeting their specific needs. The course curriculum is based on the research findings provided in the literature review. One of the formidable advantages of the created eLearning Platform is that it can be used as a cell phone application, which, according to Brinton (2017), is capable of encouraging language learner autonomy and extending learning beyond the classroom. For my eLearning Platform, I chose the website builder called Tilda as it provided a solid foundation for my project and gave me all the necessary mechanisms to launch the Platform the way it was initially designed.

The Platform comprises the following components and digital tools: logo, brief introduction, “Meet Your Instructor” section, slogan, target audience description, the section with course curriculum, and also “Enroll in Course” and “Connect with Your Instructor” options.

Let us look closely at each component and give a brief description of their role on the Platform.

Logo. The logo (Figure 1) serves as a unique emblem representing the eLearning Platform English Pronunciation with ZOYA, which is used to promote public identification and recognition of the Platform. The book inside the green circle has a symbolic meaning representing the educational mission of the Platform.

Figure 1

Logo of the eLearning Platform English Pronunciation with ZOYA



Brief Introduction. A brief introduction, as well as the logo, serves as an eye-catcher. It briefly introduces the Platform providing a general idea of the leading educational topic presented in the videos and the target audiences who benefit the most from the Platform. The introductory part also puts an emphasis on the teaching and learning environment created through the lenses of the Affective Filter Hypothesis, the theoretical framework that makes the glue of this field project:

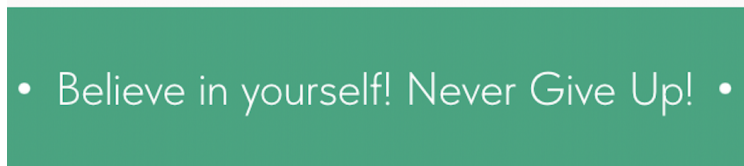
The Art of American English Pronunciation for native Russian-speaking learners, their instructors, and curriculum developers craving to implement a safe self-paced approach to teaching pronunciation.

Meet Your Instructor. This section introduces the instructor of the eLearning Platform, providing information about the teaching experience, educational background, including certification and degrees, and the instructor’s goals.

Slogan. The slogan “Believe in Yourself! Never Give Up!” (Figure 2) reflects the instructor’s teaching and learning philosophy. It is aimed at creating an engaging atmosphere and motivating learners to believe in themselves on the way to achieving their goals.

Figure 2

Slogan of the eLearning Platform English Pronunciation with ZOYA



Target Audiences. This section introduces the target groups who will benefit the most from utilizing the Platform and provides information on the language proficiency level and age of the target learners.

The eLearning Platform is primarily designed for the following target audiences:

- native Russian-speaking learners who want to improve their American English pronunciation skills
- ESL instructors who want to create a safe educational environment for their Russian-speaking students and help them master American English pronunciation
- curriculum developers interested in providing a self-paced individual approach for their students, and native Russian-speaking learners in particular.

The course curriculum is recommended for the intermediate through advanced (B1 - C2) proficiency level, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

(CEFRL), adult native Russian-speaking learners mastering American English pronunciation at a university, community college, or adult school level.

Course Curriculum. The research-based Course Curriculum (Figure 3) is grounded on the findings presented in the literature review. It has a modular structure that comprises an introduction and three sections:

1. For ESL Teachers and Curious Learners
2. Consonants
3. Vowels

Each component of the curriculum is presented through short lessons given by the instructor of the Platform in the form of educational videos. The curriculum includes 8 videos in total, three of which are coming soon due to the time limitations of the project. The short-form videos, which do not exceed 13 minutes, are aimed at keeping learners' attention and fitting the overloaded schedules of the students seeking affordable and easy-to-digest educational opportunities in the modern fast-paced world.

Introduction provides a brief introductory video describing the Platform, its goals, and approaches to teaching and learning, and it also introduces the instructor.

Section 1. *For ESL Teachers and Curious Learners* is designed to give research-based explanations to all the approaches and pronunciation phenomena utilized and taught in the course for ESL teachers and learners who go above and beyond in their studies. Thus, the video lesson *Accent and Intelligibility* tells about the major shift in the field, which was marked by focusing on intelligibility as the main goal in pronunciation teaching and learning.

Section 2. *Consonants* and Section 3. *Vowels* make the core components of the curriculum. The selection of topics for the videos is based on the literature review and

conditioned by the major features distinguishing Russian from the American English sound system. Each video includes the following components:

- introduction of the sound/sounds and explanations and clarifications of how to produce it/them clearly and distinctly
- pronunciation practices presented in minimal pairs, groups with similar sounds, etc.
- common mistakes typical for Russian-speaking learners and the ways how to get rid of them.

To introduce and explain how the sounds are produced, the instructor uses a variety of techniques that address different learning styles, including sagittal diagrams demonstrating how the organs of speech work or how the stream of air goes to produce the sound clearly and distinctly, imitation techniques, warming-up massage and stretching exercises, a piece of paper, a candle and other techniques to support language learners and help them master their pronunciation skills.

Pronunciation exercises presented in minimal pairs, groups with similar sounds, and other ways are aimed at providing ample practice for the students to sound intelligible. The instructor pronounces the sounds, words, and word combinations, and invites the students to imitate the sounds focusing on clear pronunciation. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), an alphabetic system of phonetic notation, is utilized to indicate how sounds and words are pronounced. This system is involved because English is not a phonemic language, meaning that different combinations of letters can be pronounced in the same way, which makes transcription based on the IPA very helpful in demonstrating how the words are pronounced.

The essential component of each educational video in Sections 2 and 3 is the explanation of common mistakes that Russian-speaking learners frequently make when they speak

Figure 3

Course Curriculum of the eLearning Platform English Pronunciation with ZOYA

Course Curriculum

Introduction Coming soon

Section 1. For ESL Teachers and Curious Learners

Accent and Intelligibility Coming soon

Section 2. Consonants

Lesson 1. TH Consonants /θ/ and /ð/ Start

Lesson 2. Consonants /w/ and /v/ Start

Lesson 3. Consonant H /h/ Start

Section 3. Vowels

Lesson 4. Vowel /æ/ Start

Lesson 5. Diphthongs Start

Lesson 6. Vowel length Coming soon

[Enroll in Course](#)

American English. The instructor focuses on the types of mistakes that occur, explains why they usually happen and provides ways how to get rid of those mistakes to sound intelligible.

It is important to emphasize that one of the important features of all the videos on the Platform is Speech to Text recognition. The videos created for the Platform are stored on the instructor's YouTube Channel, which allows the implementation of a Speech to Text technique for teaching and learning purposes. The embedded Speech to Text function is capable of artificially converting the instructor's spoken language into written texts which appear on the screen in the form of subtitles providing extra language help to understand the educational videos for the learners who need support in listening comprehension.

Enroll in the Course. This option allows joining the American English Pronunciation course on the eLearning Platform.

Connect with Your Instructor. This "Need Help?" button assists future and current learners with questions to immediately connect with the instructor and ask for help in a personal message.

Development of the Project

The idea of this field project originated many years ago when I realized that teaching English, and teaching English pronunciation, in particular, is my passion. I can roughly divide the whole process of my field project development into three stages, from the very first moments when teaching pronunciation grasped my attention to the present moment when I created an eLearning Platform devoted to teaching American English pronunciation to native Russian-speaking learners.

Stage 1. Pre-Project Phase. The first seeds sprouted long before I started writing my

project, it was the period when I got fascinated by pronunciation teaching. It comprises my teaching, learning, and volunteering experiences before I pursued the Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL) degree at the University of San Francisco. Regarding my teaching experience, I have taught EFL/ESOL at the university, college, and adult school levels in Russia and the United States. It has always been something magical and enigmatic about teaching pronunciation that attracted my attention most of all. I noticed long ago that pronunciation stands out among the other language skills because it is usually much easier to acquire vocabulary, grammar, or other aspects rather than master pronunciation skills. Moreover, my teaching practice demonstrates mastery of pronunciation skills has always been one of the most desired yet the most difficult ultimate goals my students wanted to achieve. Some of my students confessed to having experienced a language barrier because they “didn’t sound like a native.” Being a lifelong learner, I have always tried to find clear, better, and engaging ways to improve my students’ pronunciation and help them grow in the shortest possible time.

My pre-project phase also includes my findings during my studies at the University of California, Berkeley, Extension, and my concurrent participation in conferences and volunteering for the California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL) as a coordinator of the Non-Native Language Educators’ Interest group, which gave me a lot in terms of understanding the interrelation between accent, identity, and intelligibility. During my studies and active participation in conferences, I came to different revelations I had not thought about before. One of the most insightful moments was when I realized that accent is a part of our identity. Meanwhile, my studies at UC Berkeley Extension and volunteering for CATESOL not only gave me a different perspective on accent, identity,

intelligibility, and teaching pronunciation in general, but they also posed more questions I wanted to research in order to grow as an ESOL instructor and serve my students better. With all those myriads of questions and intentions to find the research proofs and explanations, I stepped into the MA TESOL program at the University of San Francisco. This is where Stage 2 of my field project starts.

Stage 2. Literature Review. The actual field project creation started with the literature review, an engrossing period when all my research findings and thoughts were put into words on paper. I did not hesitate for a second when I had to choose the topic for my final project. As far as I am bilingual and can speak English and Russian fluently, my goal was to help a growing native Russian-speaking population acquire American English pronunciation. The literature review period has immensely contributed to my project development. It helped me take three crucial steps before I started creating my eLearning Platform. First, while reading multiple research papers, I had a chance to look for and find theoretical explanations of all the pronunciation phenomena relevant to my field project. Next, the literature review helped me define research gaps related to my topic in the existing literature. It would be essential to mention that I was greatly surprised to know that the number of studies devoted to my research topic was infinitesimal. On the one hand, it opened a vast field of study to research, on the other, it made me very responsible for what I was doing because of the lack of papers related to my topic in question. Finally, the literature review stage also allowed me to figure out techniques and approaches to be utilized on my eLearning Platform.

In essence, the literature review stage became a solid theoretical foundation to realize my initial purpose to create a research-based curriculum, with the use of embedded technology, to improve the American English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian

speakers.

Stage 3. eLearning Platform. The main goal of Stage 3 was to create my eLearning Platform and find ways to implement my theoretical findings to make my research-based curriculum grounded on online technologies beneficial for native Russian-speaking learners. The Platform was created in several steps utilizing backward design to build it. First, I tailored a mindmap of my future eLearning Platform, a schematic representation of an approximate final product that I wanted to see, which became my ideal goal to create. Next, I planned and shot the educational videos trying to utilize new approaches I learned from the literature review, and to incorporate my personal and professional experience. Lastly, I researched website builders and found the best one for my needs. The website builder allowed me to collect all my “puzzle pieces” and make a big picture of them. Keeping the notions of content and face validity in mind, I created my logo, slogan, online research-based curriculum, and all the other elements that made my site an eLearning Platform designed to improve the American English pronunciation skills of Russian-speaking students.

I am thrilled and excited to open access to my eLearning Platform. I firmly believe that my Platform will be helpful for native Russian-speaking learners mastering American English pronunciation through engaging practices in a self-paced online learning environment, it will also be helpful for their instructors and curriculum developers.

The Project

The project can be found in its entirety here: <http://englishpronunciationwithzoya.tilda.ws/>.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In this section of my field project, I would like to focus on my contribution to the field, the limitations of this field project, and some self-reflections revealing what I have learned as an expert during my research.

This project contributes to the field of teaching pronunciation through theoretical findings provided in the literature review and a developed eLearning Platform created for the pronunciation teaching and learning needs of native Russian-speaking learners. The key point of the created field project is that I met my original goals. My primary focus was to present a research-based curriculum using embedded technology that can be utilized to improve the English pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian speakers. The field project presents a research-based curriculum tailored according to the related in-depth literature review and personal teaching experience. Next, as it was initially planned, the curriculum is built on the eLearning Platform, providing several teaching and learning advantages: (a) it is designed to create a safe learning environment with low affective filters for the native Russian-speaking learners seeking to master their American English pronunciation skills; (b) the Platform is self-paced that allows learners follow their own learning pace comfortable for them to understand, remember, and internalize the new material through practice to be ready to use it in their fluent everyday communication easily; (c) the module-structured research-based curriculum providing information in small digestible pieces contributes to activation of an individualized approach to learning, thus, allowing students to choose his/ her/ their path focusing on the modules that are more problematic and important for their personal growth, and

ordering the modules according to the personal needs. Lastly, the created eLearning Platform is aimed at improving the American English pronunciation skills of native Russian-speaking learners through original educational videos designed to explain how the problematic sounds for native Russian-speaking learners are pronounced, how to get rid of pronunciation mistakes that occur while producing these sounds, and the Platform also provides practices how to improve pronunciation skills and sound intelligible.

This field project has time limitations. If time had allowed, I would have developed more educational videos, which at the present moment go under the label “Coming soon” on my eLearning Platform. They include an introductory video devoted to accent and intelligibility in the section created for ESOL instructors and curious learners and a video about vowel length. If I had more time, I would also have expanded my eLearning Platform with a Companion Guide book containing ancillary materials with additional pronunciation practices for learners and a Handbook with guidelines for their instructors.

What is important for my professional development, my final project helped me grow as an expert. First and foremost, I found research-based explanations for pronunciation phenomena and concepts such as intelligibility, accentedness, native likeness, identity, and other concepts relevant to my research and creation of my eLearning Platform. Second, the literature review allowed me to learn more about the practical approaches I implemented in my pronunciation video lessons to make them more engaging and my explanations clear and concise. Moreover, while creating my eLearning Platform, I improved my technological skills, which can be helpful in my future teaching practice and career development.

Recommendations

This section of the project describes the recommended target groups who would benefit the most from utilizing this project, the types of teaching and learning environment where the project can be used, and this section also provides recommendations for the future development of the project.

The developed eLearning Platform is primarily recommended for the three groups of users: native Russian-speaking learners who want to improve their American English pronunciation skills and intelligibility, their ESOL instructors who are interested in creating a safe educational environment for their Russian-speaking students and helping them master American English pronunciation, and also curriculum developers craving to provide a self-paced individual learning approach for their students.

The developed research-based curriculum provided on the eLearning Platform is recommended for adult intermediate to advanced proficiency level native Russian-speaking learners mastering American English pronunciation at a university, community college, or adult school level. It can also be utilized for self-study and private teaching practices to improve the pronunciation skills and intelligibility of native Russian-speaking learners.

The Platform can be used in a variety of teaching and learning contexts. I recommend this eLearning Platform be considered for online, hybrid, and in-person pronunciation teaching and learning classes. In online and hybrid teaching, the Platform can be utilized both synchronously and asynchronously. In a synchronous mode, the videos can be watched during the class, the common mistakes analyzed in pair or group work activities, and practice with their ESOL instructor, who can monitor and give immediate feedback to his/ her/ their learners. If taught asynchronously, the students can follow the videos at their own pace, stop if necessary and repeat

practices multiple times to sound intelligible. The videos can also help teach pronunciation in the in-person environment for a variety of small-group, whole-class, or individual practices.

This field project has several recommendations for future development. First, the existing Platform can be expanded, or a different platform could be created focusing on suprasegmental features, as the existing Platform primarily focuses on teaching segmental features. Another pathway for future development is the creation of similar platforms for native speakers of other languages to master the art of American English Pronunciation. Such pronunciation eLearning platforms designed for native speakers of different languages, for instance, Spanish, Chinese, and others could be beneficial in multicultural classes to pinpoint and address the specific needs of each learner and individualize instruction focusing on the areas of growth according to pronunciation features that are relevant for the speakers of different languages.

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APPENDIX

eLearning Platform English Pronunciation with ZOYA
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