YOUR GUIDE TO BETTER PRONUNCIATION IN RUSSIAN

After learning the Cyrillic alphabet, students of the Russian language are usually pleased to discover that, unlike English, Russian is a phonetic language—that is, words are almost always pronounced as they are spelled. Nonetheless, knowing the alphabet does not guarantee an acceptable Russian accent. The subtle differences, for example, between Russian vowels and their English counterparts can only be discerned by listening to Russian speakers.

The How to Pronounce Russian Correctly audiocassette affords students—from beginning to advanced—the opportunity to concentrate on the sounds of Russian with a fluent Russian speaker. How to Pronounce Russian Correctly explains, illustrates, and drills the basic sounds of the Russian language, concentrating on those that cause special problems for English speakers. The tape begins with the sounds that are closest to English and concludes with the three sounds that have no equivalent in our language. Pronunciation material is divided up into 11 parts, so that you are introduced to Russian sounds in short, accessible lessons. And the cassette format allows you to repeat and practice as often as you like, until you get it right!

This User’s Manual features both a transcript of the cassette, as well as charts and footnotes that expand on the recorded explanations. The Manual’s Introduction discusses the differences between the English and Russian sound systems, explains stress and describes how best to use the cassette.

All in all, How to Pronounce Russian Correctly is an indispensable key to an improved Russian accent.
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The Russian Alphabet in Sequence 60
Introduction

*How to Pronounce Russian Correctly* is a comprehensive program designed to introduce and reinforce the basic sounds of the Russian language. Consisting of a Study Guide and an audiocassette, the program is designed to help language students develop the most authentic Russian accent possible.

Russian has certain intrinsic features that make it relatively easy for an English-speaker to pronounce. To begin with, each letter in the Russian alphabet represents a definite sound. When a Russian letter deviates from this "true" sound in the alphabet, it does so according to definite rules that have few exceptions. In addition, Russian spelling is essentially phonetic—that is, a Russian word is pronounced exactly as it is spelled. Thus, once you learn the true sound of every letter in the Russian alphabet and know the circumstances that modify that sound, you will be able to pronounce at sight every Russian word you encounter. By contrast, many letters in the English alphabet represent not one, but several sounds, and it is often very difficult for English-language students to know which of these sounds a particular letter is intended to represent.

Besides the natural characteristics that make Russian an easy language to pronounce, certain special features of the cassette and Study Guide should make your progress still easier. First of all, you do not have to know the Russian alphabet before you begin. In Units 1–5, you will learn to recognize each letter as you learn to pronounce it. In addition, the letters will be presented, not in alphabetical order, but in a sequence that begins with the sounds closest to those in English (and therefore the easiest to pronounce), moving gradually towards the three sounds that have no counterpart in English. Transcriptions have been provided for all Russian sounds, but, to simplify matters, they are given as simple English transliterations, rather than in phonetic symbols. In addition, technical terminology has been avoided whenever possible. When it is used, it has been fully explained.

The example words provided for illustration and practice have been carefully selected so that your attention is focused on a single aspect of pronunciation at a time. In Unit 1, you will study only four Russian letters—the sounds *ah*, *aw*, *eh*, and *oo*. You will practice pronouncing them in actual Russian words that contain only three additional letters (the Russian *K*, *M*, and *T*), selected because they look and sound like their counterparts in English.

In Units 2–5, you will learn one additional letter at a time. The example words in these units do not contain any Russian letters that have not been formally introduced. In this way, you will be able to concentrate on the sound of each new letter, as you reinforce your familiarity with letter sounds previ-
ously discussed. With only one exception, sound variations will not be dis-
cussed in Units 1-5. Instead, these will be covered systematically in Units
6-11, so that, in the first five units, you can concentrate on the "true" sounds
of the letters.

The one variation that could not be deferred involves the sounds of
stressed and unstressed Russian vowels. Although discussed in detail in Unit
10, this variation occurs so frequently in Russian that some mention of it has
to be made in Unit 1. Because of their importance, you should be familiar at
the very outset with the following characteristics of stressed and unstressed
Russian vowels.

1. In Russian, words have as many syllables as they have vowels.

2. However, only one syllable (and thus only one vowel) in a Russian
word is stressed.

3. The sound of a stressed vowel is its true sound in the alphabet. Any
other vowels in the same word are slurred, that is, they are shorter
and less distinct.

4. In words of one syllable, the vowel is automatically stressed.

5. In words of more than one syllable, you can identify the stressed syl-
lable by the accent mark [~] that appears over the vowel in that syl-
lable. Accent marks are not a usual part of the Russian writing
system, but they appear in most textbooks as an aid for beginners.

Stressing, as it does, the component sounds of Russian words, How to Pronounce Russian Correctly reflects an approach that is thoroughly consistent
with current methodology in language teaching. The emphasis on sound pat-
terns that can be recognized in any number of unfamiliar words contrasts
with an older methodology that treated each word as a unique sound unit
having little relationship to other sound units in the language.

As you move through this program, you will study all the basic aspects of
Russian pronunciation, as well as the most common exceptions to the pho-
netic rules. After mastering the material in the Study Guide and on tape, you
will be able to approach Russian pronunciation with confidence.

From beginning to end, the material on tape takes about 50 minutes to lis-
ten to. However, do not do too much at one time: you will only become confu-
sed. You may also acquire incorrect speech habits that will be hard to lose
later on. So, plan to study just one unit at a time, and master it before you
move on to the next one.
Part One
The Russian Alphabet
UNIT 1

THE VOWELS A, O, Э, AND Ъ

The first sounds you will learn to pronounce will be the vowels а [ah], о [aw], э [eh], and ъ [oo]. These are some of the Russian sounds that are closest to those in English.

The Letter A а [transcribed ah when stressed]

The stressed Russian а sounds almost like the a in father, but it is brighter and shorter. Say: Ah . . .

Now say:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>TRANSCRIPTION</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>мак . . .</td>
<td>mahk</td>
<td>poppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>как . . .</td>
<td>kahk</td>
<td>how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>так . . .</td>
<td>tahk</td>
<td>thus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>акт . . .</td>
<td>ahkt</td>
<td>act</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now say the four words together:

мак, как, так, акт . . .

The Letter O о [transcribed aw when stressed]

The stressed Russian о sounds like the aw [au] in fault or law, but it is crisper. Say: Walk . . .

Now pucker your lips the same way and say the Russian о . . . .

Say:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
<th>TRANSCRIPTION</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>том . . .</td>
<td>tawm</td>
<td>volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тот . . .</td>
<td>tawt</td>
<td>that (one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>кто . . .</td>
<td>ktaw</td>
<td>who</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>кот . . .</td>
<td>kawt</td>
<td>cat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The four words together:

**том, тот, кто, кот** . . .

**The Unstressed A and O [transcribed uh]**

Now you know how to pronounce the stressed a and o in Russian. Whenever they appear in an *unstressed* position in a word of more than one syllable, both the a and the o sound like the *uh*-sound in *lemon*.

Say:  

**там** . . .  

*tahm*  

there  

Now say:  

**мама** . . .  

*mah-muh*  

mother  

Did you hear the difference between the stressed a in the first syllable and the unstressed a in the second syllable?

Repeat:  

**там, мама** . . .

Again:  

**там, мама** . . .

Say:  

**кот** . . .  

*kawt*  

cat  

Now say:  

**кота** . . .  

*kuh-tah*  

of the cat  

This is the difference between the stressed a and the unstressed o.

Repeat:  

**кот, кота** . . .

Again:  

**кот, кота** . . .

**The Letter ë ë [transcribed eh]**

The Russian letter ë sounds almost like the *eh* in *men* or *let*, but keep your mouth a little more closed.

* In the phonetic transcription of the examples, the stressed syllable is given in italics. Words of one syllable will always be transcribed in italics since the vowel in such words is always stressed.

Say:  

**это** . . .  

*eh-tuh*  

this is  

**эта** . . .  

*eh-tuh*  

this (f.)  

**эта** . . .  

*eh-tuhk*  

thus (coll.)  

**это** . . .  

*eh-tuht*  

this (m.)  

Did you notice the sound of the unstressed a and the unstressed o in these words? Let us try them again:

**это, эта, эта, это** . . .

**The Letter Y y [transcribed oo]**

The Russian letter y sounds much shorter than the oo in *noodles* or *room*. Puckering your lips will help you to pronounce the Russian y.

Say:  

**ым** . . .  

*oom*  

mind, intelligence  

**кум** . . .  

*koom*  

godfather  

**тут** . . .  

*toot*  

here  

**томым** . . .  

*tuh-moo*  

to that (one)

Repeat all four together:

**ым, кум, тут, томым** . . .

**The Unstressed ë and Y**

The ë and the y sound almost the same, whether stressed or unstressed. [That is, the unstressed ë and y sound almost like their stressed counterparts. Hence, there will be no variation in the respective transcriptions of these letters.]

* Note the unstressed o in the first syllable.
UNIT 2

CONSONANTS

Now let us pronounce some Russian consonants that also sound much as they do in English. They are the letters: м [emm] . . . , б [beh] . . . , в [veh] . . . , ф [eff] . . . , and г [geh] . . .

The Letter М м [transcribed m]
Say: мак . . . mak poppy
там . . . tam there
том . . . tawm volume
ум . . . oom mind

мак, там, том, ум . . .

The Letter Б б [transcribed b]
Say: бак . . . bahk tank (receptacle)
бум . . . boom boom
бок . . . bawk side
баба . . . bah-buh peasant woman

бак, бум, бок, баба . . .

The Letter В в [transcribed v]
Say: вам . . . vahm to you
вот . . . wawt here

бата . . . vah-tuh cotton, wadding
буква . . . book-vuh letter (of the alphabet)
вам, вот, бата, буква . . .

The Letter Ф ф [transcribed f]
Say: фат . . . faht fop
факт . . . fahkt fact
фото . . . faw-tuh photo
фатá . . . fuh-tah bridal veil

фат, факт, фото, фатá . . .

The Letter Г г [transcribed g]
The Russian letter г [geh] is pronounced like the g in go, never as in gentle or gem.
Say: гамма . . . gahm-muh scale (in music)
губа . . . goo-bah lip
гамак . . . guh-mahk hammock
бумага . . . boo-mah-guh paper

гамма, губа, гамак, бумага . . .

Now let us consider the Russian letters д [deh] and н [emm] which sound harder than the corresponding letters in English because the tip of the tongue goes down rather than up.

4
The Letter Д д [transcribed d]
Say: да .... dah yes
dва .... dvah two
dом .... dawm house
dáма .... dah-muh lady
da, два, дом, дама ....

The Letter Н н [transcribed n]
Say: на .... nah on, upon
ну .... noo well!
нам .... nahm to us
Канада .... kuh-nah-duh Canada
на, ну, нам, Канада ....

The Letter Й й [transcribed l]
The Russian letter й [ell] is also a hard sound, harder than the l in table or Mabel. Say: table .... Now say: tablah ....
Make the й as hard as you possibly can. Make sure that the tip of your tongue touches your upper teeth and then bends downwards.
Say: й [ell] .... Now practice the following words:
лак .... lahk lacquer
лом .... laxwм crowbar
лук .... look onion

лак, лом, лук ....
кукла .... kook-luh doll
малá .... muh-lah small (f.)
лунá .... loo-nah moon
кукла, малá, лунá ....
The Russian consonants з [zeh] and с [ess] sound sharper than the corresponding letters in English. Whistle more.

The Letter З з [transcribed z]
Say: за .... zah behind
знак .... znahk sign, signal
звук .... zvook sound
вáза .... vah-zuh vase
за, знак, звук, вáза ....

The Letter С с [transcribed s]
Say: сам .... sahm oneself
сон .... sown dream, sleep
нос .... naws nose
стул .... stool chair
сам, сон, нос, стул ....
UNIT 3

CONSONANTS (Continued)

Now let us take up some sounds that will require a little practice—first, the letters п [peh], т [teh], and к [kah].

A Note on Aspiration

Aspiration occurs when a short puff of breath is released after another sound, giving the effect of a slight hesitation or h-sound. It can be heard after the п in pie, after the т in tie, and after the к in kind. By contrast, the h-sound should not be heard after the п in please, after the т in try, or after the hard с in clean.

Before you proceed to work intensively on the letters п, т, and к, practice on the English words please, try, and clean so that you may be sure to avoid any aspiration when you pronounce the Russian п, т, and к.

The Letter п п [transcribed п]

The Russian п [peh] sounds like the п in please. The slight aspiration heard after the п in English words like pen and pie never occurs in Russian.

Say: пакт . . . . пахт пакт
but: пакт . . . . пахт пакт
пост . . . . паст паст
суп . . . . суп пуп nah мух
Панама . . . . пух nah muh Panama

пакт, пост, суп, Панама . . . .

The Letter т т [transcribed т]

The Russian т [teh] sounds like the т in try. Again, the aspiration heard after the т in such English words as tie and table never occurs in Russian.

Say: там . . . . тахм there
not тHHахм
but: там . . . . тахм there
tон . . . . тан тон
tут . . . . тут тут
мост . . . . матвст bridge

там, тон, тут, мост . . . .

The Letter к к [transcribed к]

The Russian к [kah] sounds like the k-sound in clean. Once more, the aspiration heard after the к in English words like key and kind never occurs in Russian.

Say: как . . . . кахк how
not кHHахк
but: как . . . . кахк how
кот . . . . кот кот
класс . . . . клас х class
лук . . . . лук look onion

как, кот, класс, лук . . . .
The following Russian letters are quite easy to pronounce because we have similar sounds in English. However, in English, it is necessary to use several letters to represent these sounds; in Russian, each of these sounds has its own special letter. These letters are: ж [zheh] . . . , ш [shah] . . . , ч [cheh] . . . , and шч [shchah] . . . .* The letters ж, ш, and ч sound harsher than in English.

The Letter Ж ж [transcribed zh]

The Russian letter ж [zheh] sounds even harsher than in pleasure or vision.

Say: жук . . . zhook beetle
жажда . . . zhahzh-duh thirst
жук, жажда . . .
кожа . . . kaw-zuh skin
ужас . . . oo-zuhhs terror
кожа, ужас . . .

The Letter Ш ш [transcribed sh]

The Russian letter ш [shah] sounds harsher than in nation or Russian.

Say: штат . . . shtaht state
ваш . . . vahsh yours
штат, ваш . . .
шанс . . . shahns chance
шум . . . shoom noise
шанс, шум . . .

The Letter Ч ч [transcribed ts]

The Russian letter ч [tseh] sounds harsher than in quartz or cats.

Say: баш . . . bahts bang
чукат . . . too-kaht candied fruit
баш, чукат . . .
плаз . . . plahts parade ground
чанца . . . tsah-tzuh swelled head (coll.)
плаз, чанца . . .

* For example, in English words the sound of ж is represented by a variety of combinations: e.g., pleasure, vision, seizure. For the sound of ш, consider: nation, Russian, short, sure. For the sound of ч, consider: quartz, cats.

The next two sounds are softer than in English. It helps to smile when you pronounce them.
UNIT 4

LETTERS WITH UNUSUAL SOUNDS

Now let us consider the sounds that have no counterpart in English. Two of them occur in several other European languages; the last one is particularly Russian. These sounds are the p [err], the x [khah], and the щ [ih].

The Letter P p [transcribed r]

To pronounce the Russian p [err], purr like a cat: rrrr . . . . Exaggerate the sound at first. It will help you get used to it. Try again: rrrr . . . .

Now say: поп ... rawm rum
рыб ... rahk crayfish, crab
брать ... braht brother
поп, рыба, брат . . . .

спорт ... spawrt sport
курс ... koors course
март ... mahrṭ March
спорт, курс, март . . . .

The Letter X x [transcribed kh]

The Russian letter x [khah] is something like the English h in hut, hid, or harp, but pronounced much more harshly. It is really a guttural sound, closer to the kh-sound in the German nacht or the Scottish loch. Say: Xa [khah] . . . .
Now say: **ox** . . . .  *awkh*  oh!

*хам* . . . .  *khahm*  cad

*хор* . . . .  *khawr*  choir

**ox, xam, xor** . . . .

**слюх** . . . .  *slookh*  hearing

**ухо** . . . .  *oo-khuh*  ear

**муха** . . . .  *moo-khuh*  fly

**слюх, ухо, муха** . . . .

**The Letter ы [transcribed ih when stressed]**

The letter ы is typically Russian. Nothing like it exists in English. To pronounce it, put a pencil between your teeth and push your tongue backwards. Now try to say:

**its** . . . .

**its** . . . .

Hear the sound rumbling in your throat? That is where it should be—down deep in your throat.

Exaggerate and try it again: **its** . . . .

Say:  **sin** . . . .

Now say:  **сын** . . . .  *sihn*  son

Say:  **dim** . . . .

Now say:  **дым** . . . .  *dihn*  smoke

Say:  **bit** . . . .

Now say:  **быт** . . . .  *biht*  mode of life

Do you hear the difference? Now let us try some Russian words with the only really difficult sound in the Russian language—мы.

Say:  **мы** . . . .  *mih*  we

**сыр** . . . .  *sihr*  cheese

**бык** . . . .  *bihk*  bull

**мы, сыр, бык** . . . .

**рыба** . . . .  *rih-buh*  fish

**тыква** . . . .  *tikh-vuh*  pumpkin

**мышька** . . . .  *mihsh-kuh*  mouse

**рыба, тыква, мышка** . . . .

* The letter ы never begins a word.
THE SOFT VOWELS AND І

You have now learned and practiced the five hard vowels: a, o, э, y, and ы. Next, let us take up the five soft vowels.*

The Letter И [transcribed ee when stressed]

The first soft vowel we will study is the letter И. The Russian И sounds shorter than the ee in feet or people.

Say:  

Ива .... ee-vuh willow tree  
иск .... eesk legal action  
йдол .... ee-duhl idol

Ива, иск, йдол ....

The Letter І І [transcribed y; pronounced as in yank]

Before studying the other soft vowels, you will find it very useful to learn to pronounce a special Russian letter which is part of the sound of these soft vowels. This letter closely resembles the И [ee] in appearance, but it is neither a consonant nor a vowel. It never stands alone. It always stands next to a vowel. This is the letter І.

After a Vowel. When І comes after a vowel, it sounds like the y in boy.

Say:  

Май .... mahy May  
бой .... bawy battle

Before a Vowel. When І comes before a vowel, it is pronounced like the y in yet.

Say:  

Йорк .... yawrk York  
йота .... yaw-tuh iota

Йорк, йота ....

Between Two Vowels. When І falls between two vowels, it sounds like the y in coyote.

Say:  

Майор .... muh-yawr major  
район .... ruh-yawn region, district

Майор, район ....

The Letters Я я, Е е, Е е, and Ю ю

Now you are ready to study the other four soft vowels. They actually sound like a combination of І plus one of the hard vowels—а, o, э, or у.*

* The words hard and soft, as used in connection with vowels, are widely accepted, conventional terms that have nothing to do with the actual sounds of the vowels themselves. What the terms do indicate is that certain vowels (the soft vowels) affect the sound of a consonant that precedes them, whereas the hard vowels do not. This phenomenon will be discussed in Bands 6 and 7.

* When я, э, е, and ю are stressed, and appear (1) at the beginning of a word or (2) following another vowel, they will be transcribed, respectively, as yah, yaw, yeh, and yoo.
The Phonetic Relationship between Hard and Soft Vowels

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hard} & \quad \text{Soft} \\
\text{ rá} + \text{ a} & \quad \text{я} \quad (y + \text{ah} = \text{yah}) \\
\text{ rá} + \text{ o} & \quad \text{ё} \quad (y + \text{aw} = \text{yaw}) \\
\text{ rá} + \text{ e} & \quad \text{е} \quad (y + \text{eh} = \text{yeh}) \\
\text{ rá} + \text{ y} & \quad \text{ю} \quad (y + \text{oo} = \text{yoo}) \\
\end{align*}
\]

Say:  
yard........  The sound of \text{ rá} [y] plus \text{ a} [ah] is the sound of the Russian letter \text{ я} [yah].

Say:  
York........  The sound of \text{ rá} [y] plus \text{ o} [aw] is the sound of the Russian letter \text{ё} [yaw].

Say:  
yet........  The sound of \text{ rá} [y] plus \text{ e} [eh] is the sound of the Russian letter \text{е} [yeh].

Say:  
you........  The sound of \text{ rá} [y] plus \text{ y} [oo] is the sound of the Russian letter \text{ю} [yoo].

At the Beginning of a Word. Let us practice the sounds \text{ я} [yah] ...., \text{ё} [yaw] ...., \text{е} [yeh] ...., and \text{ю} [yoo] .... at the beginning of a word.

For the letter \text{ я} at the beginning of a word, say:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ яма} & \quad \text{yah-muh} & \text{hole, pit} \\
\text{ Янки} & \quad \text{yahn-kee*} & \text{Yankee} \\
\text{ язва} & \quad \text{yahz-vuh} & \text{ulcer} \\
\end{align*}
\]

* When \text{ я} appears in an unstressed position, its sound is shorter and less distinct. This variation is discussed in Band 10 (page 28).

For the letter \text{ё} at the beginning of a word, say:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ ёлка} & \quad \text{yawl-kuh} & \text{spruce tree} \\
\text{ ёрзал} & \quad \text{yawr-zuhl} & (\text{he}) \text{ fidgeted} \\
\text{ ёлка, ёрзал} & \quad \\
\end{align*}
\]

For the letter \text{е} at the beginning of a word, say:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ ем} & \quad \text{yehm} & (\text{I}) \text{ am eating} \\
\text{ Ева} & \quad \text{yeh-vuh} & \text{Eve} \\
\text{ ест} & \quad \text{yehst} & (\text{he}) \text{ is eating} \\
\text{ ем, Ева, ест} & \quad \\
\end{align*}
\]

For the letter \text{ю} at the beginning of a word, say:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ юмор} & \quad \text{yoo-muhr} & \text{humor} \\
\text{ юнга} & \quad \text{yoon-guh} & \text{cabin boy} \\
\text{ Юкóн} & \quad \text{yoo-kawn} & \text{Yukon} \\
\text{ юлá} & \quad \text{yoo-lah} & \text{top (a toy)} \\
\text{ юмор, юнга, Юкóн, юлá} & \quad \\
\end{align*}
\]

* The vowel \text{ё} is always stressed. Hence, the diaeresis [ •• ] not only serves to distinguish \text{ё} from \text{е}, but also serves as a stress mark.
After Another Vowel. Now let us try я, е, е, and 5 when these letters follow a vowel.

For the letter я after another vowel, say:

ма́йк . . . . muh-yahk lighthouse
бу́йн . . . . boo-yahn ruffian

ма́йк, бу́йн . . . .

For the letter е after another vowel, say:

заём . . . . zuh-yawm loan
поёт . . . . puh-yawt (he) sings

заём, поёт . . . .

For the letter е after another vowel, say:

я ем . . . . yah yehm I am eating
у́ехал . . . . oo-yeh-khuhl (he) drove away

я ем, у́ехал . . . .

For the letter 5 after another vowel, say:

ка́йта . . . . kuh-yoo-tuh cabin
убт . . . . oo-yoot coziness
жую́ . . . . zhoo-yoo (I) am chewing

ка́йта, у́йт, жую́ . . . .
UNIT 6

ACTION OF THE SOFT SIGN

You have now learned to pronounce all the Russian letters when they are true to their sound in the alphabet. However, as in English, the sound of a Russian letter is affected by: the sounds of the letters that surround it, by its position in the word, and by its position in the sentence. First, let us study how a consonant is affected by the sounds that surround it.

The Hard Sound of Consonants

The sounds which you have already learned and practiced for the Russian consonants are known as hard sounds.

A Note on the Meaning of Hard Sounds

To speak of the “hard sounds of consonants” is to say that the Russian consonants are pronounced like their English counterparts, except for the slight differences that have been specifically pointed out thus far. In the actual production of hard sounds, the tongue is nearer to the lower teeth, the mouth is in a relaxed position, and the pitch of the voice is relatively low.

The consonants have a hard sound: at the end of a word, as in сон; when followed by a hard vowel, as in 6ымара; or when followed by another consonant, as in срьл.

The Soft Sound of Consonants

However, there are occasions when the hard sound of the consonant becomes softened [see note at the right]. It happens when the consonant is followed by the soft sign or by a soft vowel. Let us take up the soft sign first.
A Note on the Softening of Consonants

The softening of the sound of a consonant is accomplished by raising the tongue nearer to the roof of the mouth and smiling at the same time. This gives to the sound of a soft consonant a higher pitch than it has when pronounced hard.

Study the differences in pitch and in the position of the tongue in the following sets of English words, particularly with respect to the formation of the initial letter in each word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HARD INITIAL CONSONANT</th>
<th>SOFT INITIAL CONSONANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taught</td>
<td>reach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dill</td>
<td>deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sill</td>
<td>seal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noodle</td>
<td>needle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poodle</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foot</td>
<td>few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>moose</td>
<td>muse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be clearly understood that soft consonants in Russian are not new letters. Most Russian consonants—with only a few exceptions—may be pronounced either hard or soft, depending upon the letter which follows. The exceptions are: ж, ш, and ч, which are always pronounced hard; and щ and щ, which are always pronounced soft.

The Letter ь (Soft Sign)

The soft sign [ь] is a special Russian letter that has no sound. However, it affects the sound of the consonant before it.* It softens it. When you see the soft sign [ь], smile—and slightly raise your voice. Smiling will help you pronounce a word with a soft sign [ь] in it.†

At the End of a Word. Let us see what the soft sign [ь] does at the end of a word.

Say: дан .... dahn given

Now smile and say:

dань .... dahñ tribute

Say: мол .... mawl pier

Now smile and say:

моль .... mawł moth

Do you hear the difference? Say these words again.

dан dahn

dань .... dahñ

* The soft sign [ь] never begins a word.
† For the purposes of phonetic transcription, the softening of a Russian consonant will be indicated by the sign ~ above the softened consonant. This sign—known as the tilde—has been selected because of its softening effect on the sound of the letter н in Spanish words such as mañana (tomorrow) and niño (boy).

It should be noted that the tilde will not appear over the transcription for the letters ж, ш, щ, и, and щ since their sound is not affected by either a soft sign or a soft vowel.

‡ When examples are arranged in this fashion, be prepared to repeat them as a group.
between two consonants. When the soft sign [ъ] comes between two consonants, it not only softens the consonant that comes before it, but also makes the entire word brighter and softer.

Say: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>dauhn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>danь . . .</td>
<td>dahn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>molь . . .</td>
<td>mawlı</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>molь . . .</td>
<td>mawlı</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>molь . . .</td>
<td>mawlı</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now let us practice some sets of words: *without* the soft sign [ъ], and *with* it.

Say: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>dauhn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stalled</td>
<td>stahl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>стал . . .</td>
<td>stahlı</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>брат</td>
<td>braht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>брать . . .</td>
<td>brahtı</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>удар</td>
<td>oo-dahr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ударь . . .</td>
<td>oo-dahrı</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mat</td>
<td>maht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>мать . . .</td>
<td>mahili</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>dauhn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>petto</td>
<td>bawlı-nuh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>свадьба</td>
<td>svahlı-buh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тома</td>
<td>ımah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hear the difference the soft sign [ъ] makes in the following sets of words.

Say: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sand</th>
<th>dauhn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>полка</td>
<td>pawlı-kuh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now say: полка</td>
<td>pawlı-kuh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>банныка</td>
<td>bahn-kuh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ванныка</td>
<td>vahnlı-kuh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>банныка, Ванныка</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>горка</td>
<td>gawlı-kuh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>горько</td>
<td>gawlı-kuh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26
ACTION OF THE SOFT VOWELS

Now that you know how consonants are softened by the soft sign [ъ], let us see how the soft vowels ы, ы, ы, ы, and ю do the same. We shall start with the ы.

The Vowel ы after a Consonant

Say:  

мал . . . .  
mahl  
small (m.)

Now smile and say:

мил . . . .  
мeeel  
nice (m.)

мал, мил . . . .

Say:  

пол . . . .  
pawl  
floor

Now smile and say:

пил . . . .  
пeeel  
(he) drank

пол, пил . . . .

Did you hear the difference an ы made in the sound of the м and of the н? Try it again.

мал  
mahl

мил . . . .  
meeel

пол  
pawl

пил . . . .  
пeeel

Let us practice some more words without and with an н.

Say:  

пар  
pahr  
steam

пир . . . .  
пeer  
feast

кот  
kawt  
cat

кит . . . .  
кeeet  
whale

вáза  
vah-zuh  
vase

вýза . . . .  
vee-zuh  
visa

лáпа  
lah-puh  
paw

ли́па . . . .  
lee-puh  
linden tree

был  
bihl  
(he) was

бил . . . .  
бeeel  
(he) hit

The Vowels ы, ы, ы, and ю after a Consonant

The vowels ы, ы, ы, and ю also soften a consonant before them, but in doing so, they lose their initial н [y] sound.

The ы sound which otherwise begins the letters ы, ы, ы, and ю is absorbed by the softened consonant. In effect, when you see a consonant followed by ы, ы, ы, or ю:

1. Pronounce the consonant soft (except in the case of ж, ш, and ы)—lifting your tongue nearer to the roof of your mouth and smiling at the same time.
2. With the mouth in this position and the pitch of the voice raised, pronounce what remains of the soft vowel—i.e., ah, aw, eh, or oo.
Say:  
Ама . . . .  
yah-muh  
pit, hole

Now say:  
мял . . . .  
м̣ahl* (he) crumpled

not  
мял  
myahl

but  
мял . . . .  
м̣ahl

Say:  
еп . . . .  
yehl (he) ate

Now say:  
пел . . . .  
п̣ehl (he) sang

not  
п̣ел  
pyehl

but  
пел . . . .  
п̣ehl

Did you hear the difference?  Say these words again:

Ама  
yah-muh

мял . . . .  
ṃahl

eп  
yehl

пел . . . .  
p̣ehl

Let us practice some additional examples of the same type.  First,  
а after a consonant.

Say:  
мал  
mahl  
small (m.)

мял . . . .  
ṃahl (he) crumpled

вал  
vahl  
rampart

вял . . . .  
ṿahl (he) faded

пола  
puh-lah  
flap, lap

пола . . . .  
puḥ-lah  
fields

Now е after a consonant.

Say:  
м̣ол  
mawl  
pier

м̣ел . . . .  
mawl (he) swept

нос  
naws  
nose

н̣ес . . . .  
ṇaws (he) carried

лот  
lawt  
half an ounce

сл̣ет . . . .  
ṣlawt  
gathering

Now е after a consonant.

Say:  
п̣ол  
pawl  
floor

п̣ел . . . .  
p̣ehl (he) sang

м̣ол  
mawl  
pier

м̣ел . . . .  
ṃehl  
chalk

св̣ат  
svaht  
matchmaker

св̣ет . . . .  
ṣveht  
light

* For purposes of phonetic transcription, when a stressed а, е, о, or ө is preceded by a consonant, it will be transcribed as ah, aw, eh, or oo, respectively. At the same time, a tilde [~] will appear over the preceding consonant to indicate the softening action of the vowel and the absorption of the ы sound by the consonant.
The Softening of Consonants: Summary

1. The soft sign [b] and the soft vowels [и, я, е, и, ио] soften a consonant that precedes them.

2. The vowels я, е, и, and ио lose their initial [и] sound when they follow a consonant.

3. The consonants ж, ш, and щ are invariably pronounced hard, and ч and Ц are invariably pronounced soft. Hence their sound is not affected by a soft sign or a soft vowel that follows. Note, however, that when a soft vowel follows these consonants, it loses its initial [и] sound nonetheless.

* Note that the letter к is also pronounced soft because it is followed by к. The fact that the к (or any soft vowel) is in an unstressed position does not hinder its softening effect on the sound of the consonant which precedes it; however, the unstressed к should be pronounced shorter and less distinct.

UNIT 8

ACTION OF THE SEPARATION SIGNS

In the previous examples illustrating the softening of consonants, the initial [и] sound of the soft vowels—я, е, и, ио—was lost. There is, however, a way of keeping the [и] sound of the soft vowels. It is done by means of two signs, one of which is already familiar to you—the soft sign [b].

The letter б acts not only as a soft sign, softening the sound of a consonant that precedes it, but also as a separation sign. In the latter capacity, it serves to separate the sound of a soft consonant from the sound of the vowel that follows it. As a result of the separation, the initial [и] sound of the vowel is preserved. However, there should be no pause whatsoever between the sound of the consonant and the sound of the vowel.

The Letter б as a Separation Sign

When the soft sign [b] comes between a consonant and a vowel, you soften the consonant but keep the [и] sound of the vowel.

Say: пью .... p’yoo* (I am drinking)

Hear the [и] sound between the п and the ио? Say it again:

пью .... p’yoo

So remember, whenever you see a soft sign between a consonant and a vowel, soften the consonant and say [и] before the vowel.†

* In the phonetic transcription, to indicate the separation, an apostrophe will be inserted between the softened consonant and the following vowel.
† The insertion of a soft sign [b] between a consonant and a vowel not only preserves the [и] sound of the vowels я, е, и, and ио, but also adds a [и] sound to vowels that otherwise do not have it. For example:

воробьи

бульбя

vuh-ruh-b’yee

boo-b’yawm

sparrows

broth
Ready for practice?

ну́ю ....  ð'you (I) am drinking
ба́рьер .... buh-ð'yehr barrier
ну́ю, ба́рьер ....

су́дья́ .... soó-d'yah judge
dру́зья́ .... droó-z'yah friends
ко́нья́к .... kuh-ñ'yahk cognac
су́дья́, дру́зья́, ко́нья́к ....

To make sure you can recognize the difference the soft sign [ь] makes between a consonant and a vowel, repeat the following sets of words. Notice how the ñ sound is retained.

хота́ кхуа-ð'ah though
стата́й . . . стуа-ð'yah article
рэ́пa  ðeh-puh turnip
ба́рьер . . . buh-ð'yehr barrier
полёт  puh-lawt flight
льё́т . . . ð'yawt (he) pours

The Letter ъ (Hard Sign)

To keep the ñ sound without softening the preceding consonant, however, another sign is used—the hard sign [ъ].

The hard sign is another special Russian letter which, like the soft sign, has no sound. The hard sign never begins a word but always falls between a consonant and a vowel. Its function is as follows:

When the hard sign [ъ] comes between a consonant and a vowel, you keep the consonant hard, and also keep the true sound of the vowel.

Say:

изъя́н . . . . eez'-yahn defect
объ́ект . . . . uhb'-yehkt object
подъём . . . . puhd'-yawt ascent

изъя́н, объ́ект, подъём . . . .

To make sure you can recognize the difference a hard sign [ъ] makes when it comes before a vowel, repeat the following sets of words. Listen for the ñ after the hard sign [ъ].

сплю́ ..... sploo (I) am sleeping
ну́ю ....  ð'you (I) am drinking
плу́нь ..... ploon spitle (imper.)
вы́юн . . . . ð'yoon quicksilver (fig.)
UNIT 9

VOICING AND DEVOICING OF CONSONANTS

You have learned how the soft vowels and the soft and hard signs affect the sounds around them. Now you will see how the position of the consonant in the word affects its sound.

Voiced and Voiceless Consonants

Russian consonants are divided not only into hard and soft sounds (see page 14), but also into voiced and voiceless consonants. Voiced consonants are produced with the aid of the vocal chords, which give to the consonants a buzzing sound; in the production of voiceless consonants, however, the vocal chords remain inactive.

The same distinction exists in English: the English b, v, d, and z are voiced or buzzing sounds; the p, f, t, and s are voiceless sounds. Study the differences in the production of these letters in the following sets of words:

\[
\begin{array}{llll}
\text{bat} & \text{van} & \text{die} & \text{seal} \\
\text{pat} & \text{fan} & \text{tie} & \text{seal}
\end{array}
\]

You will notice that when you form each pair of words, your mouth is in the same position, yet the sound is different. The difference can be clearly put: in each word on top, the vocal chords are used in the production of the initial letter; in the corresponding word on the bottom, they are not.

Most voiced consonants in Russian have their voiceless counterparts, just as in English the b is related to the p, the v to the f, the d to the t, and the z to the s. However, in Russian pronunciation, unlike English, this relationship is functional; for under certain circumstances, voiced consonants become devoiced (i.e., pronounced like their voiceless counterparts), and vice versa.
Study the following table, to be sure you understand the pattern of these changes.

### Classification of Russian Consonants as Voiced and Voiceless

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALWAYS VOICED</th>
<th>and</th>
<th>ALWAYS VOICELESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CURRENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>COUNTERPARTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \pi )</td>
<td>( \beta [b] )</td>
<td>( \nu [p] )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \mu )</td>
<td>( \nu [v] )</td>
<td>( \phi [f] )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \eta )</td>
<td>( \gamma [g] )</td>
<td>( \kappa, \chi [k, kh] )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \rho )</td>
<td>( \delta [d] )</td>
<td>( \tau [t] )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \phi [zh] )</td>
<td>( \iota [i] )</td>
<td>( \eta [sh] )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \varsigma )</td>
<td>( \varphi [s] )</td>
<td>( \varsigma [z] )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Devoicing at the End of a Word**

Now let us take up the sounds that change when they are at the end of a word. The voiced consonants \( \beta, \nu, \gamma, \delta, \phi, \) and \( \varsigma \)—when they come at the end of a word—lose their sharpness; that is, they become voiceless.

- The \( \beta \) sounds almost like \( \pi \).
- The \( \nu \) sounds almost like \( \phi \).
- The \( \gamma \) sounds almost like \( \kappa \) or \( \chi \).
- The \( \delta \) sounds almost like \( \tau \).
- The \( \phi \) sounds almost like \( \iota \).
- The \( \varsigma \) sounds almost like \( \varsigma \).

For instance: The word \( \text{лоо} \) (forehead) is pronounced as if it were spelled “\( \text{лоп} \)” (lawp).
- The word \( \text{друг} \) (friend) is pronounced as if it were spelled “\( \text{друк} \)” (droomk).
- The word \( \text{раз} \) (once) is pronounced as if it were spelled “\( \text{рач} \)” (rahs).
- The Russian spelling, of course, does not actually change; only the pronunciation.

Listen carefully and repeat the following examples which illustrate the devoicing of the sound of these consonants at the end of a word, as compared with their regular voiced sound.

For the letter \( \beta \), say:
- \( \text{зуб} \) \( \rightarrow \) \( \text{зубы} \)... \( \text{zoo} \) \( \rightarrow \) \( \text{zoo-bih}^* \) tooth

For the letter \( \nu \), say:
- \( \text{нов} \) \( \rightarrow \) \( \text{nawf} \) new (m.)
- \( \text{нооо} \)... \( \text{naw-vuh} \) new (n.)

For the letter \( \gamma \), say:
- \( \text{lug} \) \( \rightarrow \) \( \text{look} \) meadow
- \( \text{lugа} \)... \( \text{loo-gah} \) meadows

For the letter \( \delta \), say:
- \( \text{сд} \) \( \rightarrow \) \( \text{saht} \) garden
- \( \text{сдъв} \)... \( \text{suh-dih} \) gardens

For the letter \( \phi \), say:
- \( \text{муж} \) \( \rightarrow \) \( \text{moosh} \) husband
- \( \text{мужъв} \)... \( \text{moo-zh-yah}^+ \) husbands

* When \( \pi \) appears in an unstressed position, its sound is much shorter and less distinct. This variation is discussed in Band 10 (page 27).

† The letter \( \phi \) (like \( \pi \) and \( \varsigma \)) is always pronounced hard. Thus, the soft sign which follows \( \phi \) does not affect its sound but simply indicates that the \( \pi \) sound of the vowel \( \pi \) is to be preserved.
For the letter ə, say:

gлаз  

glæhs  
eye

gлаза́  
gluh-zah  
eyes

If a soft sign comes at the end of a word, the consonant which precedes it is considered to be "at the end of the word" for the purposes of this rule. Thus, for example, голубь (pigeon) is pronounced: gaw-loop. The soft sign simply softens the devoiced ɓ.

Devoicing before a Voiceless Consonant

The same consonants [ɓ, в, г, д, ж, and з] also become devoiced when they precede a voiceless consonant [see table]. For example:

лёвко  
lawf-kuh  
adroitly

крúжка  
kroosh-kuh  
mug

лёдка  
lawt-ka  
boat

Did you hear how the в became an φ, how the ж became a ш, and the 亮相 became a τ? [As in the case of the devoicing of consonants at the end of a word, here also the change occurs only in pronunciation. The actual spelling of the Russian word does not change.]

Keep referring to the table of voiced and voiceless consonants in the manual (page 21). Now let us practice.

For the letter ɓ, say:

прóба  
praw-buh  
test

прóбка  
prawp-kuh  
cork

tрубá  
troo-bah  
trumpet

tрубка  
troop-kuh  
pipe

For the letter в, say:

вё́чер  
vēh-cheer*  
evening

вчера́ . . .  
fchee-rah*  
yesterday

весь  
vēhš  
all (m. sing.)

все . . . .  
fēh  
all (pl.)

For the letter г, say:

но́готь  
naw-guht  
nail

но́гти . . .  
nawk-tee*  
nails

магнит  
muhg-nee  
magnet

мя́гко . . .  
mahkh-kuh  
softly

For the letter д, say:

водá  
vuh-dah  
water

вóдка . . . .  
vawt-kuh  
vodka

буди́ть  
boo-dee  
to awaken

бúдка . . . .  
boot-kuh  
cabin, booth

For the letter ж, say:

крúжóк  
kroo-zhawk  
circle

крúжка . . . .  
kroosh-kuh  
mug

* The unstressed е and the unstressed ɯ sound alike—shorter and less distinct than the stressed ɨ. This variation will be discussed in Band 10 (page 28).
Devoicing before a voiceless consonant may occur when a word ends in two consecutive voiced consonants: the final consonant automatically becomes devoiced because it is at the end of a word; as a result, the next-to-last letter will also become devoiced because it precedes a consonant that has become voiceless. For example, consider the word съезд, spelled s’yehsd but pronounced s’yehst. The final consonant д became devoiced because of its position at the end of the word. Consequently, the preceding consonant з must also become devoiced because it comes before a voiceless sound (the devoiced д).

Devoicing before a voiceless consonant may also occur, even though a soft sign intervenes. Consider the word редька [transcribed reč-kuh and meaning “horse-radish”]. Here, the д becomes devoiced because the consonant which follows it [є] is already voiceless. The intervening soft sign simply softens the voiceless д.

Voicing before a Voiced Consonant

The opposite holds true. If a voiced consonant [other than л, м, н, or п] follows a voiceless consonant, the voiceless consonant becomes voiced.

For example:

сделать ... sĕh-luhī to have done
Hear how the с almost becomes a з? As another example, say:

просить ... pruh-seei to ask
Now say: просьба ... prawz-buh* request
Hear the difference?
Repeat: просить pruh-seei
просьба ... prawz-buh

As in other instances of voicing and devoicing, when a voiceless consonant becomes voiced, the change occurs only in the pronunciation. The spelling of the Russian word remains the same.

Now repeat the following words where the voiceless consonants become voiced when followed by another voiced consonant.

сажать suh-zhahī to seat
сжать ... zzhaht to squeeze
собрать suh-brahī to gather
сбор ... zbaawr collection
кулак koo-lahk fist
вокзал ... vuhg-zahl railway station

* A soft sign intervening between a voiceless and voiced consonant does not prevent the voicing rule from operating. In the word просьба, the с becomes voiced because the consonant that follows it [є] is already voiced. The intervening soft sign simply softens the voiced с.
Voicing and Devoicing of Prepositions

The preceding rules for the voicing and devoicing of consonants hold true for prepositions consisting of one letter. For purposes of pronunciation, a preposition consisting of one letter is considered part of the following word.

Practice the following examples.

Say: v okne . . . . vuhk-nēh in the window

The v was not devoiced because it was followed by the vowel o. [However, it was pronounced as if it were part of the first syllable of the following word. There was, and should not have been, any hesitation between the two words.]

However, say:

v komnate . . . . fkwam-nuh-tee in the room

Here, the v was followed by the voiceless consonant k and became devoiced. [Again, it should have been pronounced as part of the following syllable without any hesitation whatsoever.]

Now an example showing when a voiceless consonant becomes voiced.

Say: s dorogi . . . . zduh-rav-gee after the journey

Say: s obeda . . . . suh-beh-duh from dinner

The first c became voiced [being followed by the voiced consonant d]; the second c remained unvoiced [being followed by an unstressed o. Once again, both prepositions should have been pronounced as part of the following syllable.]

[The rules for the voicing and devoicing of consonants also apply to longer prepositions, as well as to any words ending and beginning with consonants that fall under these rules.]

Rules for Voicing and Devoicing: Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALWAYS VOICED</th>
<th>VOICED and VOICELESS COUNTERPARTS</th>
<th>ALWAYS VOICELESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>л л [b]</td>
<td>→п [p]</td>
<td>ι</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>м в [v]</td>
<td>→ф [f]</td>
<td>ч</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>н г [g]</td>
<td>→к, х [k, kh]</td>
<td>щ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>р д [d]</td>
<td>→т [t]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ж [zh]</td>
<td>→щ [sh]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>з [z]</td>
<td>→с [s]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The voiced consonants in the center column above become devoiced (i.e., pronounced like their voiceless counterparts):
   a. When they come at the end of a word.
   b. When followed by any voiceless consonant.

2. The voiceless consonants in the center column above become voiced (i.e., pronounced like their voiced counterparts):
   a. When followed by any voiced consonant except л, м, н, or p (see the first column above).

Note: A soft sign coming at the end of a word or between two consonants will not prevent voicing or devoicing from taking place. The soft sign will simply soften the resulting sound of the affected consonant.
UNIT 10
THE UNSTRESSED VOWELS

In the Introduction you learned that Russian words have only one stressed syllable and that the vowel in that stressed syllable always remains true to its sound in the alphabet. You therefore know how to pronounce every stressed vowel in the Russian language.

In this connection, it is also important to know that:

1. As in English, the stress in Russian has no fixed place in a word. In a word of two or more syllables, it may fall on any syllable. (In some languages there is a definite location of the stress: e.g., in French, on the last syllable; in Czech, on the first syllable; in Polish, on the next-to-last syllable.)

2. In Russian, the stressed syllable—and particularly the vowel in that syllable—is pronounced more emphatically than in English.

3. In the pronunciation of a stressed syllable in Russian, the pitch of the voice is raised.

The unstressed vowels? [i.e., all the other vowels in a given word.] They are much less distinct.* It is practically impossible to give an exact value to their sounds, so listen to this part very carefully.

The vowels that change their sound when unstressed are а, о, ы, е, и, and я.

The Unstressed A and O

We said [in Band 1] that the unstressed а and о sound like the uh-sound in lemon. Actually, there are slight differences in the sound of the unstressed а and о, depending on their exact position in a word.

* One could approximate the values of unstressed vowels in Russian to those of the unstressed English sounds in such words as potato, calendar, lantern, pencil, cabbage, city, and the like.

In the Pretonic Position. When the unstressed а and о come [in the syllable] immediately before a stressed vowel [i.e., in the pretonic position], both а and о sound like the uh-sound in come.

The unstressed vowel in the pretonic position is somewhat stronger and has a more distinct sound than all other unstressed vowels in the same word. This should be particularly noted because it is just the opposite in English, where the pretonic unstressed vowel is the weakest and least distinct.

Say: трава . . . трух-вах* grass

Hear the difference between the first unstressed а and the second stressed а? Again, say:

трава . . . трух-ва . . . трава, арбуз, магазин . . .

арбуз . . . uhr-booz† watermelon
магазин . . . muh-guh-zeen shop

Listen carefully to the speaker’s pronunciation of магазин. The word has two unstressed а’s, the second of which is in the pretonic position. Try to distinguish the difference in sound between the first а and the second (pretonic) а. The second а will sound stronger and more distinct than the first.

Say: онэ . . . uh-naw it

* The unstressed а and о will continue to be transcribed as uh, despite the slight differences in sound arising from their position in a word. To indicate these slight differences would require the use of more complicated phonetic symbols.
† Note the devoicing of the а at the end of a word. (See Summary, page 25.)
Hear the difference between the first unstressed o and the second stressed o? Again, say:

онó . . . . . uh-naw  it
полнó . . . . puhl-naw  full (n.)
хорошó . . . . kuhu-ruh-shaw  well

онó, полнó, хорошо . . . .

Listen carefully to the speaker's pronunciation of хорошо. The word has two unstressed o's, the second of which is in the pretonic position. Try to distinguish the difference between the two unstressed o's. The second (pretonic) o will sound stronger and more distinct than the first.

In Other Positions. When the unstressed a and o come [in a syllable] after a stressed vowel or not immediately before a stressed vowel [such as the first a in магазин and the first o in хорошо], they are less distinct. Then they sound like the uh-sound in lemon.

Say: óta . . . . . eh-tuh  this (f.)
Now say: ете . . . . . eh-tuh  this is

Look at the spelling of these words. The first ends with a, the second with o; yet the sound is exactly the same. Now repeat:

óta  eh-ruh  this (f.)
óto . . . . . eh-tuh  this is
слáва  slah-vuh  glory
слóво . . . . slaw-vuh  word

Special Situations. The same rule often applies to one-syllable prepositions, conjunctions, and particles, which for purposes of pronunciation are considered part of the following word.

* Note the devoicing of r at the end of a word.
† Note the devoicing of з.
na stol . . . . nuh-stawl onto the table
po gorodu . . . . puh-gaw-ruh-doo about town
ot brata . . . . uhd-brah-tuh from brother

Sometimes, but not as often, the opposite can happen—that is, the preposition, conjunction, or particle is stressed while the word following it is completely unstressed. Listen and repeat carefully.

na pol . . . . nah-puhl onto the floor
za ruku . . . . zah-roo-koo by the hand
po dva . . . . paw-dvuh by twos

The Unstressed Ь

The unstressed Ь, usually occurring at the end of a word, sounds something like a cross between the uh-sound in lemon and the true sound of the м.

vazy . . . . vah-z* vases
kukly . . . . kook-1 dolls

vazy, kukly . . .

krasnii . . . . krahs-n*i red (m.)
yumnii . . . . oom-n*i intelligent (m.)
krasnii, yumnii . . .

* The unstressed Ь will be transcribed as [i].
† Note that c remains voiceless. The letter Ь is one of those voiced consonants which do not affect a voiceless consonant that precedes them. See Rule 2a in the Summary of Band 9 (page 25).

The Unstressed Е, И, and Я

Before a Stressed Syllable. The unstressed е, и, and я also become less distinct. They sound something like the short i in city. It is a tricky sound. Again, listen carefully to the unstressed е, и, and я before a stressed syllable.

Say: леса . . . . ̃ee-sah* woods
Now say: лиса . . . . ̃ee-sah fox

Now look at the spelling of these words. The first is spelled with a е, the second with an и; yet they sound alike.

Repeat: леса ̃ee-sah woods
лиса . . . . ̃ee-sah fox
мела́ ̃ee-lah (she) swept
мила́ . . . . ̃ee-lah nice (f.)
йацо́ ̃ee-tsaw† egg
пятно . . . . пъet-naw spot
telefon . . . . ̃ee-ťee-fawn telephone
telefon . . . .

литерату́ра . . . . ̃ee-ťee-ruh-too-ruh literature
литерату́ра . . . .

* The unstressed е, и, and я will be transcribed as [ee]. Note also in the following examples that a consonant still becomes softened when followed by a soft vowel, even when the soft vowel is unstressed.
† The unstressed я and е retain the initial Ь sound when they come at the beginning of a word or after another vowel.
After a Stressed Syllable. Listen now to the unstressed е, и, and я after a stressed syllable.

When the unstressed е, и, and я come after a stressed syllable, they sound shorter and weaker and much less distinct (without completely becoming a short i) than they did in the preceding examples where they came before the stressed syllable. However, since the difference in sound is relatively slight, the same phonetic transcription [ee] will be used.

Мóре, кни́ги, д́ядя . . .

мáльчик . . . махá-chék boy
нóле . . . пав-те book
пáмять . . . пах-ме́t memory
мáльчик, нóле, пáмять . . .

To appreciate the difference between the stressed and unstressed е, и, and я, repeat the following sets of words:

лес лéhs wood
лесá . . . лéh-sah woods
лис лées fox (m.)
лнсá . . . лéh-sah fox (f.)

Special Situations. The same pronunciation rule applies to one-syllable prepositions, conjunctions, and particles. Practice the unstressed е and и in the following examples.

я не знаю . . . yah нéé-snah-yoo I do not know
я не знаю . . .
это не хорошо . . . eh-tuh нéé-khuh-ruh-shaw this is not good
это не хорошо . . .

The Unstressed Э, У, and Ю

The other vowels э, у, and ю remain practically the same, whether stressed or unstressed. Let us practice the following sentences.

это экрán . . . eh-tuh ehk-rahn this is a screen
The Letter Е

Е is always stressed.

объём ёлки два фу́та . . . . uhh'-yawm yawl-kee The spruce tree measures two feet

объём ёлки два фу́та . . . .

Significance of the Stress

You are probably wondering why all this emphasis on stressed and unstressed vowels. In Russian, many words which are spelled exactly alike have different meanings, depending entirely on the position of the stress. Say the following words and pay close attention to the difference in the position of the stress. Afterwards, look at the difference in meaning.

1. зáмок zah-muhk castle
   замóк . . . zuh-mawk lock
2. мyка moo-kuh torment
   мукá . . . moo-kah flour
3. áтлас aht-luhs atlas
   атлáс . . . uht-lahs satin
4. пóлы pawl-ih flaps
   полý . . . puh-lih floors
5. пóлки pawl-ke shelves
   полкй . . . puhl-kee regiments
6. ру́ки roo-kee of the arm (gen. sing.)
   рукй . . . roo-kee of the arm (nom. pl.)
7. дбма daw-muh of the house (gen. sing.)
   домá . . . duh-mah houses (nom. pl.)
8. нóсите nau-see-tee (you) are carrying
   носи́те . . . nhu-see-tee carry! (imper.)
9. ку́рите koo-tee-tee (you) are smoking
   курйте . . . koo-tee-tee smoke! (imper.)

The position of the stress plays a very important role in the Russian language. It may:

a. Indicate different meaning, as in the first three pairs of examples on the preceding page.

b. Distinguish between words spelled alike in the plural though different in the singular, as in the fourth and fifth pairs of examples above.

c. Determine the case of certain words, as in the sixth and seventh pairs of examples.

d. Indicate the tense and mood of verbs, as in the eighth and ninth pairs of examples.
SPECIAL PRONUNCIATION RULES

Even people who have studied Russian for many years frequently do not pay enough attention to some of the finer points of Russian pronunciation. Therefore, even if you are a more advanced student, study the following rules carefully.

The First Rule

After the letters ж, ш, and ц, the letters и, е, and ё will sound like ъ [ih], э [eh], and о [aw] or their unstressed counterparts.

Say:

ежить . . . zhihit to live
ежест . . . zhehst gesture
ежёлтый . . . zhawlt-thy yellow (m.)
ежить, ежест, ежёлтый . . .

щить . . . shihi to sew
щесть . . . shehsi six
щёлк . . . shawlk silk
щить, щесть, щёлк . . .

цент . . . tsehnt cent
цирк . . . tsihrk circus
цифра . . . tsihfruh number
цент, цирк, цифра . . .

The Second Rule

After the letters ч and ш [which are always pronounced soft], а, о, and я will sound like я, е, and о or their unstressed counterparts [minus the initial ъ sound]. The position of the mouth and the pitch of the voice are the same as in the pronunciation of consonants followed by soft vowels. (See page 17.)

Say:

чай . . . chahy tea
час . . . chahs hour
чулóк . . . choo-latek stocking
чай, час, чулóк . . .

щұка . . . shchoo-kuh pike
чаща . . . chah-shchuh thicket
ощущáть . . . uh-shchoo-shchahí to feel, to sense
щұка, часа, ощущáть . . .

The Third Rule

The letter р sometimes sounds like a в.

ерó . . . yee-vaw* his
сегодня . . . šee-vaw-don today
ерó, сегодня . . .

* Note that the unstressed е retains the initial ъ sound when it comes at the beginning of a word. See footnote on page 28.
The Fourth Rule

The letter ч sometimes sounds like a ш.

что . . . shtaw what
конечно . . . kuh-nesh-nuh of course
что, конечно . . .

The Fifth Rule

Sometimes, in a group of three or more consonants, one of them is not pronounced.

A Russian will say:
[For the word солнце, sun] sawn-tseh . . .
not sawLn-tseh but sawn-tseh . . .
[For the word честный, honest] chehs-nihy . . .
not chehsT-nihy but chehs-nihy . . .
[For the word сердце, heart] sehr-tseh . . .
not sehrD-tseh but sehr-tseh . . .
[For the word известный, known] ezh-vehs-nihy . . .
not ezhvehsT-nihy but ezh-vehs-nihy . . .
[For the word чувство, feeling] choos-tvuh . . .
not chooVs-tvuh but choos-tvuh . . .
[For the word здравствуй, how do you do] zdrah-stvooy
not zdraht-stvooy but zdrah-stvooy

There are even finer points that could be considered but you have now learned the fundamental principles of Russian pronunciation. If you continue to practice and apply these rules consistently, you will pronounce Russian correctly.
The Russian Alphabet in Sequence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LETTER</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>А а</td>
<td>ah</td>
<td>Hard stressed, 1-2, 16; unstressed, 2, 46-50; after ў and ўу, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Б б</td>
<td>beh</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 4, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; hard devoiced, 38-45; soft devoiced, 40-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>В в</td>
<td>veh</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 4-5, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; hard devoiced, 38-45; soft devoiced, 40-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Г г</td>
<td>geh</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 5, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; hard devoiced, 38-45; soft devoiced, 40-42; irregular, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Д д</td>
<td>deh</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 6, 24, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; hard devoiced, 38-45; soft devoiced, 40-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Е е</td>
<td>yeh</td>
<td>Soft, 17-18; stressed after a consonant, 29-32; stressed, other positions, 17-20, 33-36; unstressed after a consonant, 51-53; unstressed, other positions, 51n., 53; after ж, жу, and жи, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ё ё</td>
<td>yaw</td>
<td>Soft, 17-18; stressed after a consonant, 29-32; stressed, other positions, 17-20, 33-36; never unstressed, 19n., 54; after ж, жу, and жи, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ж ж</td>
<td>zheh</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 10, 24, 38; hard devoiced, 37-45; never soft, 24; followed by a soft sign, 39n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>З з</td>
<td>zeh</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 7, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; hard devoiced, 38-45; soft devoiced, 40-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>И и</td>
<td>ee</td>
<td>Soft stressed, 16, 28-29; unstressed, 51-53; after a soft sign, 33n.; after ж, жу, and жи, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Й й</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>Semivowel, after a vowel, 16-17; before a vowel, 17; between two vowels, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>К к</td>
<td>kah</td>
<td>Hard voiceless, 9, 23, 38; soft voiceless, 23-35; hard voiced, 38, 42-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Л л</td>
<td>ell</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 6-7, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; never devoiced, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>М м</td>
<td>emm</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 4, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; never devoiced, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Н н</td>
<td>enn</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 6, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; never devoiced, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>О о</td>
<td>aw</td>
<td>Hard stressed, 1-2, 16; unstressed, 2, 46-50; after a soft sign, 33n.; after ў and ўу, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>П п</td>
<td>peh</td>
<td>Hard voiceless, 8, 23, 38; soft voiceless, 23-35; hard voiced, 38, 42-45; soft voiced, 43n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Р р</td>
<td>err</td>
<td>Hard voiced, 13, 23, 38; soft voiced, 23-35; never devoiced, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>С с</td>
<td>ess</td>
<td>Hard voiceless, 7, 23, 38; soft voiceless, 23-35; hard voiced, 38, 42-45; soft voiced, 43n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Т т</td>
<td>teh</td>
<td>Hard voiceless, 9, 23, 38; soft voiceless, 23-35; hard voiced, 38, 42-45; soft voiced, 43n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>У у</td>
<td>oo</td>
<td>Hard stressed, 3, 16; unstressed, 3, 53-54; after ў и ўу, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ф ф</td>
<td>eff</td>
<td>Hard voiceless, 5, 23, 38; soft voiceless, 23-35; hard voiced, 38, 42-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Х х</td>
<td>khah</td>
<td>Hard voiceless, 13-14, 23, 38; soft voiceless, 23-35; hard voiced, 38, 42-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ц ц</td>
<td>tseh</td>
<td>Always hard voiceless, 11, 24, 38; followed by a soft sign, 39n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ч ч</td>
<td>cheh</td>
<td>Always soft voiceless, 12, 24, 38; irregular, 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ш ш</td>
<td>shah</td>
<td>Hard voiceless, 10-11, 24, 38; hard voiced, 38, 42-45; never soft, 24; followed by a soft sign, 39n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Щ щ</td>
<td>shchah</td>
<td>Always soft voiceless, 12, 24, 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ъ ъ</td>
<td>hard sign</td>
<td>No sound, 35-36; always between a consonant and a vowel, 35-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ы ы</td>
<td>ih</td>
<td>Hard stressed, 14-15; unstressed, 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ь ь</td>
<td>soft sign</td>
<td>No sound, 25; at the end of a word, 25-26; between two consonants, 26-27; between a consonant and a vowel, 33-35; effect on voicing and devoicing, 42, 43n.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Э э</td>
<td>eh</td>
<td>Hard stressed, 2-3, 16; unstressed, 3, 53-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ю ю</td>
<td>yoo</td>
<td>Soft, 17-18; stressed after a consonant, 29-32; stressed, other positions, 17-20, 33-36; unstressed, 53-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Я я</td>
<td>yah</td>
<td>Soft, 17-18; stressed after a consonant, 29-32; stressed, other positions, 17-20, 33-36; unstressed after a consonant, 51-53; unstressed, other positions, 51n.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The phrases in italics indicate the characteristics of each letter when it is true to its sound in the alphabet.
Manual and Audiocassette
How to Pronounce Russian Correctly

Graded Readers
Basic Russian, Book 1
Basic Russian, Book 2
Beginner's Russian Reader
Russian Intermediate Reader
Modern Russian Reader for Intermediate Classes

Civilization & Culture
Russian Composition and Conversation
Business Russian
Russian Area Reader
Songs for the Russian Class

Literary Adaptations
Trio: Intermediate-Level Adaptations of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Gogol
Quartet: Intermediate-Level Adaptations of Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Chekhov

Annotated Russian Literature
Six Soviet One-Act Plays
The Inspector General
The Queen of Spades
Asya

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