

## Pedagogical practice and the acquisition of Russian stress: Does writing stress marks help?

A crucial aspect of L2 Russian phonological development is the acquisition of stress. Since Russian belongs typologically to what are termed lexical stress languages (Kijak 2009), in which stress is a property of a word's lexical representation rather than being phonologically specified, the learner of Russian must learn the position of stress for each new lexical item separately. Russian L2 materials and pedagogical practice reflect appreciation for the importance and difficulty stress acquisition presents for learners. While stress is generally not indicated in texts for native speakers, it is routinely indicated in pedagogical materials especially for beginning level students. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for instructors to require students to indicate the position of stress using stress marks in their own writing. A questionnaire administered to instructors (N=86) of Russian to English-speaking learners found that 26% of respondents require beginning students to write stress marks. In this paper we present data drawn from the oral exams of college level first year Russian students in a program that traditionally required stress marking but then discontinued the practice. Otherwise, the program remained constant: same instructor, same textbook, same syllabus, assignments, assessments and so on. We compare the oral productions from one stress marking class (N=8) and one non-stress marking class (N=8). We provide details of what student stress production looks like at this early stage of Russian language development, and ask whether there are any differences between those who marked stress in writing and those who did not. Preliminary analysis shows that both groups of students exhibit comparable patterns of stress production, and more specifically, that they evidence similar problems. For example, the data show that these students often produced words with no discernable primary stress. This pilot study, while limited in scope, suggests that writing stress marks may not produce the intended benefit, and provides a picture of early learner production of Russian stress.

Kijak, Anna. "How Stressful Is L2 Stress? A cross-linguistic study of L2 perception and production of metrical systems." PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2009.