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**Chepelyuk N. I.**

*Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences,  
Associate Professor at the Department of English Philology and Translation Studies  
Odesa Polytechnic National University  
Odesa, Ukraine  
E-mail: natalach@gmail.com  
ORCID: 0000-0002-6822-9691*

**Liashenko I. V.**

*Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences,  
Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguodidactics  
Sumy State University  
Sumy, Ukraine  
E-mail: i.liashenko@uabs.sumdu.edu.ua  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4211-5116*

## **DISTANCE LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES: FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING PHONETICS FOR THE STUDENTS MAJORING IN PHILOLOGY AND TRANSLATION STUDIES**

### **Abstract**

*The article explores the methodological challenges and pedagogical strategies of distance learning and teaching phonetics to students majoring in Philology and Translation Studies, with a particular focus on two influential pronunciation standards of the English language: Standard American English (SAE) and Received Pronunciation (RP). The study emphasizes that phonetic competence is a key component of professional training for future philologists and translators, as it directly affects their ability to communicate effectively, to provide accurate interpretation, and to ensure high-quality translation in academic and professional contexts. The article examines a range of online teaching techniques such as transcription platforms for practicing the International Phonetic Alphabet, acoustic visualization software that makes speech patterns visible, interactive methods like shadowing and peer correction, as well as the integration of authentic audiovisual materials. Statistical data and pilot study results are presented to demonstrate the efficiency of multimodal approaches, which enabled students to improve their perception and production of SAE–RP phonetic contrasts by more than a quarter compared to traditional methods. The research concludes that despite limitations related to reduced teacher control in distance learning, carefully selected technological tools and task designs can compensate for these drawbacks. The article also outlines prospects for future research, including the development of AI-based pronunciation feedback, the exploration of cross-linguistic interference with students' native languages and another foreign language. In this way, the study contributes to the ongoing modernization of distance learning methodologies in foreign language education and underlines their significance in the global academic context.*

**Key words:** *distance learning, phonetics, Standard American English, Received Pronunciation, philology, translation studies, online teaching.*

**Introduction.** Those involved in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) are faced with the problem as to which particular variant of English to use for instruction – Received Pronunciation (RP) of Great Britain or Standard American English (SAE) or General American (GA). Interestingly, both dialects are thought of as “newscaster English”. That is, they are the English used in broadcast media of the respective countries – RP for the BBC, SAE for all US media.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the ways in which foreign languages are taught and learned, particularly in higher education institutions. Distance education, once regarded as a supplementary form of instruction, has now become a central teaching mode, especially following the global challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia's full-scaled attack on Ukraine since February 2022. According to UNESCO (2021), more than 1.6 billion learners worldwide were affected by educational disruptions, which accelerated the integration of online teaching platforms [10].

For university students majoring in Philology and Translation Studies, the acquisition of phonetic competence is especially crucial, as pronunciation underpins both oral communication and translation accuracy. However, teaching phonetics online presents particular methodological challenges: limited control of articulation, reduced opportunities for corrective feedback, and the necessity of relying on digital tools to visualize and practice sounds [3].

Against this background, the comparison between two standard varieties of English pronunciation – Standard American English (SAE) and Received Pronunciation (RP) – gains renewed relevance. Both serve as global models for learners, yet differ in articulation patterns, vowel systems, and prosody. The ability to perceive, analyze, and reproduce these varieties is fundamental for philologists and translators who work in multilingual and multicultural environments.

**The Aim of the Scientific Research.** The aim of this article is to explore the methodological specifics and practical outcomes of distance teaching phonetics to students of Philology and Translation Studies, with a focus on SAE vs. RP pronunciation models. The research seeks to justify the pedagogical relevance of contrasting these two varieties, to analyze the difficulties students encounter in online phonetic practice, and to propose strategies that enhance the effectiveness of distance phonetics instruction.

### Main Part of the Article. 1. Relevance of Phonetics in Distance Language Learning

Phonetics forms the foundation of linguistic competence [1]. For translation and philology students, mastering phonetic accuracy is not limited to communication: it influences the quality of interpretation, subtitling, dubbing, and even literary translation. Online learning, however, limits direct teacher / student interaction, making phonetic acquisition less intuitive, so at the first stage of our pilot experiment the research into development of English Pronunciation Standards, as well as into some conventional approaches, has been done.

#### 1.1 American Standard English (ASE Standards)

SAE was first mentioned by George Philip Krapp, an American linguistic scholar, in his 1925 book, *"The English Language in America"*. In it, he roughly described the concept as the variant of English spoken by the majority of the country. This was followed up by John Kenyon who stated in his 1930 book *American Pronunciation* that ninety million Americans spoke ASE (out of a population of 121 million, or nearly 74%). In addition, he laid out guidelines for the pronunciation. The pronunciation became popular among voice coaches from the burgeoning film industry who were looking for an accent that would be understandable to the majority of Americans [4; 5].

The exact height and/or backness of the starting points is somewhat variable.

The American English vowel sounds are described in terms of height (high, middle, low); backness (front, central, back); lip position (rounded, spread or unrounded); length (short, long, complex); and tenseness (lax, tense) [2].

#### 1 – HEIGHT: Tongue Position in the mouth:

High (/i:/, /ɪ/, /ə/, /u:/, /ʊ/) Middle (/eɪ/, /ɛ/, /ʌ/, /ə/, /oʊ/) Low (/æ/, /ɑ:/, /ɔ/)

#### 2 – BACKNESS: Far front or back the tongue is in the mouth: Front (/i:/, /ɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɛ/, /æ/)

Central (/ə/, /ʌ/, /ə/, /ɑ:/) Back (/u:/, /ʊ/, /oʊ/, /ɔ/)

#### 3 – LIP POSITION: Whether the lips are rounded (O-shape) or spread (no rounding) when the sound is being made:

Unrounded (/i:/, /ɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ə/, /ɑ:/) Rounded (/u:/, /ʊ/, /oʊ/, /ɔ/)

#### 4 – LENGTH: Represents vowel sound has one or two parts: Short (/ɪ/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɑ:/)

Long (/i:/, /eɪ/, /ju/, /oʊ/, and the diphthong /aɪ/) Complex (/u:/, /ʊ/, /ɔ/, and the diphthongs /aʊ/, /oɪ/)

#### 5 – TENSENESS: Refers to the amount of muscular tension around the mouth when creating vowel sounds:

Lax (/ɪ/ and /u/ \*, /ɪ/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɑ:/, /ʊ/)

Tense (/i:/, /eɪ/, /ə/, /u:/, /ɔ/, /oʊ/, and the diphthongs /aɪ/, /aʊ/, /oɪ/).

#### 1.2 Development of Received Pronunciation (RP Standards)

RP, or "King's English", is defined in the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* as "the standard accent of English as spoken in the south of England" [7; 8].

Peter Trudgill, a British sociolinguist who is Professor Emeritus at Fribourg University in Switzerland, estimated in 1974 that 3% of people in Britain were RP speakers. Although this percentage has been questioned, in contrast to ASE, RP is spoken by very few native English speakers in Great Britain.

ASE, as a standard, is a language of the people, while RP is an artifice, pronunciation that is used naturally only by a small percentage of the British people.

### 2. The Impact on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL).

#### 2.1 Relevance of Phonetics in Distance Language Learning

Phonetics forms the foundation of linguistic competence. For translation and philology students, mastering phonetic accuracy is not limited to communication: it influences the quality of interpretation, subtitling, dubbing, and even literary translation. Online learning, however, limits direct teacher – student interaction, making phonetic acquisition less intuitive.

Much can be written about the differences in the orthography between American and British English, e.g. – our (Br.) vs. – or (Am.): honour vs. honor, and vocabulary, e.g. rubber (Br.) and eraser (Am.), this paper is focused on the differences in pronunciation of the two English dialects in certain cases and how they can affect effective TEFL.

A comparison of the consonantal sounds shows little variance in vocalization and the construction of the sounds. It is with the vowels and the use of consonants in pronouncing words, especially the voicing of the intervocalic **t**, the strong /æ/, and the 'schwa+r' /ə/ in ASE, that the greatest differences and confusions occur with the TEFL learner. In addition, the problems that occur when the TEFL attempts a certification process through the Certification procedure to define the Level according to the CEFR, some of them use RP, while the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) uses ASE. We will examine a few of these and their impact on TEFL.

#### 2.2 The Intervocalic /t/

In RP, a **t** is a /t/ – a voiceless, unflapped alveolar stop. In ASE, it can be at the beginning of a word, e.g. time /taɪm/, or at the end of a word, e.g. want /wɒnt/ or /wʌnt/. It is when it is located intervocalic, either single or double, that American English tends to voice the letter, making it sound like a **d**. In ASE, you have the following phenomena:

– homonyms:

latter	ladder
letter	led her
matter	madder

putting	pudding
letting	leading (using the metal)
betting	bedding

– rhyming words:

little *and* middle fatter *and* sadder cattle *and* saddle batter *and* bladder fatter *and* madder otter *and* odder utter *and* udder;

– single words:

later /leɪdə/

Saturday /'sædədeɪ/.

There are, however, patterns to the vocalization of the **t** in ASE. The following combinations are almost always vocalized:

1. vowel + tter (latter)
2. vowel + ttle (little)
3. vowel + ter (later)
4. vowel + tting (letting)

The /ə/ /ɪ/ /ɪŋ/ cause the **t** to be vocalized. In fact, in ASE, to pronounce these words with a /t/ is thought of as pretentious and “putting on airs”. How does the native ASE speaker differentiate between the words that are spelled differently and have different meanings but sound identical? Through context. Take, for example, the words **putting** and **pudding**. “I am **putting** the car in the garage”. “I had **pudding** for dessert”.

Although to the native ASE speaker, the context of the words in each sentence provides the meaning and spelling. Context is very important in ASE and should be stressed to the TEFL learner of ASE.

### 2.3 The Strong / æ /

In RP, the word “cat” would be pronounced /kæt/, which to an ASE speaker sounds like the word “cot”. There would be a confusion for the ASE speaker with all the – at words with RP pronunciation: hat *sounds like* hot bat *sounds like* bot.

To pronounce this sound, the front of the tongue is pushed further forward and is held lower in the mouth than with any other vowel sound. To form it:

1. the tip of the tongue will touch the inside of the bottom front teeth,
2. the body of the tongue is rounded slightly upward, and
3. the jaw is lowered and the lips are held apart – this allows the entire oral cavity to remain open.

ASE is not the only English dialect that contains this sound – Australian, Norwich, and Canadian do also.

### 2.4 The Rhotic or 'SCHWA+R' /ə/

In RP, the – er, e.g. teacher, sounds like /ə/, as in /titʃə/. In ASE, the – er is pronounced as /ə/, as in /titʃə/. This is the same sound in words such as *purse, worse, early, further*.

To form this sound:

1. the tongue is raised in the middle of the mouth with the tip touching the bottom of the lower teeth (apico-dental),
2. the mouth is closed but the lips are semi-open and tense, and
3. the sound comes from the back of the mouth.

This sound has been likened to a growl or the sound a child makes when racing a model car along the floor. As with the **t**, to pronounce the sound as /a/ or /ə/ will open up the TEFL learner to stares and accusations of “putting on airs”.

### 3. SAE vs. RP in the Online Classroom

Recent studies [2, 8] indicate that 72% of language students consider phonetics the most challenging aspect of online learning, while only 41% of teachers report feeling confident in providing adequate online corrective feedback. These statistics highlight the need for further development of methodologies tailored for phonetic distance education.

SAE and RP represent prestigious models of English pronunciation. Both function as 'standard' varieties, yet their teaching in an online format requires careful differentiation. The vowel system differences, rhoticity, and prosody distinctions between SAE and RP can be effectively demonstrated with digital tools such as spectrograms and minimal pair practice.

Examples of key contrasts:

- SAE rhotic vs. RP non-rhotic: \*car, far, better.\*
- Vowel shifts: RP /ɒ/ vs. SAE /ɑ:/ in \*cot\* vs. \*cart.\*
- Intonation: RP greater pitch range vs. SAE flatter contours.

Students often demonstrate greater familiarity with SAE due to exposure to American media, while RP is perceived as “academic” or “elite”. The contrast itself becomes a valuable pedagogical resource.

### 3. Methodological Approaches in Distance Teaching

The following approaches have proven effective in teaching phonetics online:

- Digital transcription platforms (IPA keyboards);
- Acoustic analysis software (Praat, Speech Analyzer);
- Shadowing exercises with audiovisual materials;
- Peer correction sessions in breakout rooms.

The first stage of the pilot study in phonetics classes, in the frame of an integrative experiment in order to create an interactive application, was conducted with 56 students (1st–4th year Philology majors) at the Odesa Polytechnic National

Table 1

Results of Pilot Study on SAE–RP Perception Improvement

Group	Pre-test Accuracy (%)	Post-test Accuracy (%)
Control Group (audio only)	62	68
Experimental Group (multimodal Tools)	61	88

University (2023–2025). The main purpose of the research is to design an effective learning environment that combines linguistic innovation with personalization and gamification. This approach not only increases user engagement, but also stimulates the development of comprehensive language skills, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension [9]. The results of the first stage of the study demonstrated that students using multimodal phonetic visualization tools improved their perception of SAE–RP contrasts by 27% compared to a control group.

The data suggest that visualization and interactive methods substantially increase phonetic accuracy.

**Conclusions and perspectives of the research.** With the ubiquitous presence of Hollywood movies, IT, and American cultural influences, it is important that the TEFL student learns ASE pronunciation. This will help them to better understand what they are experiencing and to allow them to make better choices in an increasingly English-dominant world.

The teaching of phonetics in a distance-learning environment requires the integration of innovative digital tools, explicit contrastive analysis, and increased learner autonomy. SAE and RP provide valuable frameworks for expanding students' phonological competence and intercultural awareness.

Future research perspectives include:

- Developing AI-driven pronunciation assessment tools.
- Expanding cross-linguistic comparison (e.g., English/German – Ukrainian interference).
- Investigating long-term effects of distance phonetic training on translation performance.
- Designing gamified learning environments to increase student motivation.
- Conducting longitudinal studies with larger sample sizes to track phonetic development.
- Inviting and collaboration with American and/or British English teachers (native speakers).

That said, unfortunately the availability of ASE texts and teaching materials is extremely limited. Materials stressing RP are easily obtained [6; 7]. The TOEFL, which is required for entrance into American universities for non-native speakers of English, is offered seldom and many times in places that are difficult to reach for many TEFL students. Because of these, TEFL teachers will need to continue to teach RP. However, being teaching these three important differences between RP and ASE will increase the student's mastery of English by understanding ASE.

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**Чепелюк Н. І.**

кандидат педагогічних наук,

доцент кафедри англійської філології та перекладу

Національний університет «Одеська політехніка»

Одеса, Україна

**E-mail:** natalach@gmail.com

**ORCID:** 0000-0002-6822-9691



Ляшенко І. В.

кандидат педагогічних наук,  
доцент кафедри іноземних мов та лінгводидактики  
Сумський державний університет  
Суми, Україна  
E-mail: i.liashenko@uabs.sumdu.edu.ua  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4211-5116

## ДИСТАНЦІЙНЕ НАВЧАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ: З ДОСВІДУ ВИКЛАДАННЯ ФОНЕТИКИ СТУДЕНТАМ, ЯКІ СПЕЦІАЛІЗУЮТЬСЯ НА ФІЛОЛОГІЇ ТА ПЕРЕКЛАДІ

### Анотація

У статті досліджуються методологічні виклики й педагогічні стратегії дистанційного навчання та викладання фонетики студентам, які спеціалізуються на філології та перекладознавстві, з особливим акцентом на двох стандартах вимови англійської мови: стандартній американській англійській (SAE) і загальноприйнятій вимові (RP). У дослідженні підкреслюється, що фонетична компетентність є ключовим компонентом професійної підготовки майбутніх філологів і перекладачів, оскільки вона безпосередньо впливає на їхню здатність ефективно спілкуватися, забезпечувати точний переклад і гарантувати високу якість перекладу в академічному та професійному контексті. У статті розглядається низка онлайн-методів навчання, таких як платформи транскрипції для відпрацювання Міжнародного фонетичного алфавіту, програмне забезпечення для акустичної візуалізації, що відтворює мовні шаблони, інтерактивні методи, такі як «повторення-імітації» та взаємне виправлення, а також інтеграція автентичних аудіовізуальних матеріалів. Статистичні дані й результати пілотного дослідження демонструють ефективність мультимодальних підходів, які дали студентам змогу поліпшити сприйняття й відтворення фонетичних контрастів SAE-RP більш ніж на чверть порівняно з традиційними методами. Дослідження доходить висновку, що, незважаючи на обмеження, пов'язані зі зменшеним контролем викладача в дистанційному навчанні, ретельно підібрані технологічні інструменти й завдання можуть компенсувати ці недоліки. У статті також окреслюються перспективи майбутніх досліджень, включаючи розроблення зворотного зв'язку щодо вимови на основі штучного інтелекту, дослідження міжмовної інтерференції з рідною мовою студентів та іншою іноземною мовою. Таким чином, дослідження сприяє постійній модернізації методик дистанційного навчання в галузі іноземної мови й підкреслює їх значення в глобальному академічному контексті.

**Ключові слова:** дистанційне навчання, фонетика, стандартна американська англійська, загальноприйнята вимова, філологія, перекладознавство, онлайн-викладання.

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