

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.28925/2412-0774.2026.1.7>

UDC 811.111'34:378.147:81'246

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DEVELOPING ENGLISH PHONOLOGICAL COMPETENCE IN MULTILINGUAL UNIVERSITY BEGINNERS: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

The article examines the problem of English phonological competence for university multilingual beginners, for whom English is not their first foreign language. The difference in using terms “phonetic competence” and “phonological competence” by Ukrainian and foreign scholars correspondingly has been generalized as well as using the term “phonological competence” in this study has been substantiated. The problem addressed has been analysed from both domestic and foreign perspectives. It is concluded that developing phonological competence in university multilingual beginners is held in formal and non-formal formats. The taxonomy of the development of the targeted phonological competence is developed and three stages identified, namely a) sound articulation and primary consolidation of sound pronunciation, b) pronunciation skills development, and c) intonation (prosodic) skills development. The three-elements model of English phonological competence has been designed according to its peculiarities and the specific organization of the educational process. It is realized during in-class activity, out-of-class activity and homework. Recent findings have been



considered and a non-formal format for the development of the targeted competence suggested. Based on the modern developed CEFR/CV, 2020 the following framework of phonological control has been accepted: articulation including pronunciation of sound/phoneme, rhythm and stress – both word stress and sentence stress and intelligibility. Sound articulation needs a focus on familiarity and confidence with the target language sounds. Prosodic features presume that focus is on the ability to effectively use prosodic features to convey meaning in an increasingly precise manner. The necessity of the control of stress, intonation and rhythm has been proved as well as the ability to exploit and/vary stress and intonation to highlight the student's particular message.

Keywords: *areas of control, formal format, multilinguals, model, non-formal format, phonological competence, taxonomy.*

INTRODUCTION

Phonological facets in foreign language education still remains challenging in Ukraine. It can be explained by the fact that, when applicants become first-year students of the linguistic universities, they have some serious gaps in English Phonology. Despite having entered at B1+ level through the State Independent Evaluation, their phonology level corresponds to A2. This, means that the learner's pronunciation is generally enough to be understood, sometimes obvious and occasional mispronunciation occurs, there is a strong influence from the other languages, he/she speaks with stress, rhythm and intonation that may affect intelligibility, there is systematic mispronunciation of phonemes, and Prosodic features (e.g. word stress) are adequate for familiar, everyday words and simple utterances (CEFR/CV, 2020, 134–135).

And explanation is that, in Ukrainian schools, Phonology is not taught at all. We are strongly convinced about the necessity of introducing a Phonological course, even as a part of Practical English Course during the first year of study at the linguistics university for students, studying English as a second foreign language. We suggest a Three Modules' Model, which could be presented as the System of Vowels, the System of Consonants and Intonation. Such a model will provide the outcomes of achieving of B2 Level in Phonology, suggesting that learner has a clear, natural pronunciation and intonation.

Literature Review. Developing Phonological Competence within L2 Language Acquisition has gained traction as an effective way to enhance language proficiency inside and outside formal (non-formal) educational contexts in modern language learning – which mostly lacks a Phonological Course (Werquin, 2010). Non-formal learning is defined as “education which takes place outside the sphere of compulsory schooling, but where there is educational intent and planning of teaching/learning activities” (Lafraya, 2011, p. 8).

Several studies have recently investigated the impact of phonological competence on English as a second foreign language (ESFL) characterized by its structured flexible approach. Scholars investigate the ways to improve speaking skills using Artificial Intelligence-Mediated Interactions (Fathi et al., 2024; Hwang et al., 2024) focus on both formal and in-formal to identify learning. (Lai et al., 2015; Larchen Costuchen & Dev, 2022; Werquin, 2010); exploring the impact of different conversational Generative AI Chatbots on ESFL Learners (Cucchiarini et al., 2012; Wang, 2024). However, still remaining to be explored in depth are emerging new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI). Integrated into the process of effectively learning ESFL, they create new opportunities for phonological competence development, into non-formal digital learning practices (e.g., Bashori et al., 2024; Fernández et al., 2023; Seemab et al., 2024; Tai, Chen, 2024).

A lot of researches in Ukraine has also been dedicated to the problem. It has been tried in outlining the content for developing phonological competence for future English teachers (Parashchuk, 2020) and; enhancing phonological competence during self-study (Dolyna, 2012). But the problem of developing English phonological competence in multilingual students (hereafter “multilingual students” always implies without English as their first foreign language), still remains to be researched.

The aim of the article is to **outline** a methodology for developing phonological competence in multilingual students. This involves the following **tasks**:

- to develop a phonological taxonomy;
- to design a model for the process of realizing this methodology;
- to provide criteria for assessment of the level attained.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ukrainian and foreign scholars use the term differently. The Ukrainian scholars use the term “phonetic competence” (S. Nikolayeva, V. Chenysh, A. Kyrii, Yu. Golovach, A. Dolina et al.). They state that phonetic competence is the ability to speak correctly in terms of articulation and intonation as well as to understand the other participants of the communication (Nikolaieva, 2013, p. 192–193). The foreign scientists use the term “phonological competence” (Scarborough & Brady, 2002; Piccardo, 2016 et al.) They focus on acquisition of phonological knowledge, the development of the relevant skills (at segment and suprasegment levels) as well as on phonological awareness (CEFR, 2001, p. 173; Scarborough & Brady, 2002, p. 313–317, Piccardo, 2016, p. 8). A multilingual language learner, mother tongue and dialect would result in difficulties and frequent errors in second foreign language acquisition (Chen, Wang, 2023, p. 72–74). The latest research proves articulation and prosodic skills to be more challenging in terms of the necessary definitions and the new term “intelligibility” has been introduced in CEFR/CV, 2020 (CEFR/CV, 2020, p. 133), drawing increasing interest from scholars around the world.

We use the term “phonological competence” as we use CEFR/CV, 2020, on the one hand to develop assessment criteria for the development of English phonological competence and, on the other, because we believe it will be more useful to the university students to be aware of the Phonology as the unit of language structure.

Taxonomy of the English phonological competence for multilingual students. In our research we differentiate the following three stages in the development of English phonological competence: a) sound articulation and primary consolidation of sound pronunciation, b) pronunciation skills development, and c) intonation skills development. Sound articulation and primary consolidation of sound pronunciation includes demonstration for a target sound because articulation is fully realized only during speech activity. That is why we believe that the stages of articulation and primary consolidation make up an organic unity. We suggest that each stage should contain special exercises for training and consolidation of the specific skills.

Consider the content at every stage. During the stage of sound articulation we demonstrate articulation of the sound and demonstrate the position of speech organs while simultaneously giving instructions (*open/close your mouth; open your mouth a little/a little more; put your tongue forward/back/up/down; put your tongue forward and up and practise...; put your tongue down and back and practise...*), thus developing articulation skills. Also within this first stage we have to provide the primary consolidation of the target sound. To attain this, we train students by means of the following exercises: *open your mouth very little to make the target sound ...; listen and repeat, it's a short sound; read the words with this sound; listen to the words and check if you have pronounced correctly.*

Thus, within the stage of sound articulation we develop articulation skills and primary consolidation of the target sound. It is very critical at that time to make sure the students understand the instruction and have a special command of the vocabulary.

During the second stage, pronunciation skills development the phonological operations are being processed. They form the basis of pronunciation skills based on the developed articulation skills and primary consolidation of the target sound. In addition, it's important to remember that to facilitate phonological competence development you need the following knowledge: phonetic knowledge providing the development of the target pronunciation skills; phonetic processes (influence of the sound position within the word and the neighborhood of the other sounds on its

sounding); knowledge relevant to the regularities of the sound combination (compatibility); syllable structure and syllabic division; stress; intonation.

From a psychological point of view to develop the pronunciation skills we need to practice the operations considered to be complex, that is: acceptance, identification, articulation, sound modelling matching, reproduction, differentiation, sounding, combining.

At the same time, we believe, that during pronunciation skills development the volume of listening operational memory has to be considered: the students have to memorize many dialogues exercising the target sound. It's obvious that the outcome of the process of developing pronunciation skill will be enhanced when *deep processing* of it is taken place. *Deep processing* can be defined as the amount of intellectual and emotional efforts involved into the learning process. Here, we provide an example of deep processing method suggested at the stage of pronunciation skills development: *listen and repeat* (perception); *listen and repeat both sounds, mind the articulation of both sounds* (identification and articulation); *you will hear ten words. Listen and match the word with the target sound* (sound modelling matching); *tick the words you hear in the sentences* (differentiation, e.g. ban-Ben); *listen and practice the target sound in these words* (reproduction); *practice the words from the dialogue* (sounding); *record your voice to compare your pronunciation of the target sound with the recording* (sound modelling matching); *listen to the mini dialogue with the target sound, practice it reading aloud. Mind the correct articulation and pronunciation* (combining).

Thus, the second stage of the development of English phonological competence will provide the development of pronunciation awareness as well as phonological skills at the level of words and mini dialogues/texts based on the operations of acceptance, identification, articulation, sound modelling matching, reproduction, differentiation, sounding, combining and using the method of deep processing the target sound.

The third stage of the development of English phonological competence for multilingual students is the stage of intonation (prosodic) skills development: word stress, sentence stress and intonation. As mentioned before, the volume of operational memory is very important here to facilitate the phonologically correct reproduction of the texts and macro dialogues. It should be noticed at this stage that stress and intonation (the voice going up or down) in English express feelings (surprise, exclamation, suggestions, commands etc) so it is very important for students to be aware of the phonological peculiarities in English. Here are the examples of exercises to develop prosodic skills. Word Stress: *practice the word stress in the following place names, where the strong stress on the first/last/ syllable/ in the middle of the word* (Ann Baker, 2006: 14). Sentence Stress. Here the students must be aware of what words in the sentence are stressed and which are not. A very useful exercise for training sentence stress will be using the oooOOOooo model, where big circles denote stressed syllables and the small circles are the weakly stressed syllables, e.g. *listen to the sentences and provide the intonation scheme of each sentence using oooOOOooo model, where OOO are strong/stressed syllables and ooo are weak/unstressed syllables*.

The third stage includes teaching and acquisition of intonation. It suggests the student's awareness of Terminal Tones and Scales. They must be practiced based on macro dialogues and texts using deep processing and promoting consistently. The following exercises can be suggested to develop prosodic (intonation) skills: match the correct intonation patterns with the conversation items (terminal tones); *listen to the recording of the Symphony in Yellow poem by Oscar Wild and pay attention to its intonation. Now practice reading and record your voice. Compare your production of the intonation with the recording. Practice again. Focusing on the intonation, learn the poem by heart. Again, record your voice and compare with the target recording* (intonation).

Having suggested the taxonomy of the phonological competence for multilingual students, now we present how it could be realized.

The Model of educational process. The model of realizing the development of phonological competence in multilingual students could be viewed from two points, namely formal and non-formal studying. Under "formal" we mean teaching/studying in terms of the syllabus approved for the educational process.

Here we suggest a three-element model realized from in-class activity, out-of-class activity and homework. During in-class activity students become aware of phonological knowledge, exercising and consolidating the primary articulation and pronunciation skills. During out-of-class activity, which is associated with successful language development (language learning laboratories, phonological libraries etc.) and home work they continue to develop their skills, receiving instructions from the teachers (Dolyna, 2012; Fernández et al., 2023).

Non-formal studying is very helpful and popular among university multilingual students. It can be confirmed by the advantages bilinguals may have. More exposed to different sound structures and phonological patterns, they acquire better cognitive ability to process phonological knowledge and to progress with self-study; in case two languages share some sounds or structures, proficiency in one language can improve the skills in the other.

Besides, non-formal learning will provide multilingual learners with convenience in the ability to access different language resources at their own convenience from anywhere in the world. Finding a place and time in a non-stressed environment is very important as very often learners, due to peer pressure issues, have insufficient opportunities for interactive pronunciation practice and are unwilling to partake in interactive classroom activities (Seemab et al., 2024).

Students can try on-line platforms, specially designed Apps programs and projects (Cucchiarini et al., 2012; Seemab et al., 2024) to facilitate phonological skills. Visiting different websites is itself a useful language tool. Websites equipped with Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology, provide different types of immediate feedback. Recent studies on technological developments have shown that encouraging implementation of technology-enhanced language learning has proven effectiveness in helping improve learners' pronunciation skills, especially prosody (Bashori et al., 2024).

Our suggested Model can be realized during the first year of study at a university including three Modules (The System of Vowels, The System of Consonants and the Intonation) in terms of 3 ECTS.

Assessment. Assessment of phonological control has been tackled by many Ukrainian and foreign scholars. They focus on control of the level of phonetic competence developed by junior students aiming to become future teachers (Holovach, 1997); develop technological Automatic speech recognition-based (ASR-based) programs, applied to pronunciation assessment, using technological algorithms to detect pronunciation errors, giving feedback through an interface and providing remedial exercises accordingly (Cucchiarini et al., 2012; Tejedor-García et al., 2021).

Based on CEFR/CV, 2020, we choose the following three areas for assessment of students' phonological competence to increase their confidence in speaking.

Sound articulation. A student can articulate a high proportion of the sounds in the target language clearly in extended stretches of production, and is intelligible throughout, despite a few systematic mispronunciations.

Overall phonological control. A student generally uses appropriate intonation, places stress correctly and articulates individual sounds clearly; accent tends to be influenced by other language(s) he/she speaks, but has little or no effect on intelligibility. A student can generalize from his/her repertoire to predict the phonological features of most unfamiliar words (e.g. word stress) with reasonable accuracy (e.g. whilst reading). Overall phonological control intelligibility has been a key factor for discriminating between levels. The focus is on how much effort is required from the interlocutor to decode the speaker's message.

Prosodic features. A student can employ prosodic features (e.g. stress, intonation, rhythm) to support the message he/she intends to convey, though with some influence from other languages he/she speaks (CEFR/CV, 2020, p. 135).

In language teaching, the phonological control of a native speaker has traditionally been seen as the target, with accent being regarded as a marker of poor phonological control. The focus on accent and on accuracy instead of on intelligibility has been detrimental to the development of pronunciation teaching.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that developing English phonological competence of multilingual students is effective in enhancing students speaking skills, and their overall language proficiency. These findings contribute to the existing methodology of teaching English to multilingual students, namely, the phonological facet. The study has important implications for multilingual students, educators and methodology developers.

Firstly, multilingual students may use the methodology of phonological competence development suggested for structured efficient and unrestricted language learning not only in formal but non- formal settings as well.

Secondly, study provides the valuable practical examples and insights into how English phonological competence of multilingual students can effectively be integrated into the language learning.

Moreover, language teachers can integrate the Introductory Course of Phonological Competence Development in their Practical Course of English Course, in case they need it. Moreover, further researches may usefully focus on designing phonological courses for multilingual students as such studies are scarce.

Finally, the various limitations of tools observed in this present study expose areas that still need to be researched to provide multilingual students with sophisticated systems and more advanced possibilities for incorporation in language learning education.

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Received 6.02.2026

Accepted 26.03.2026

Published 30.03.2026

ФОРМУВАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ ФОНОЛОГІЧНОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ У МУЛЬТИЛІНГВІВ ПЕРШОГО РОКУ НАВЧАННЯ: ВИКЛИКИ І ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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У статті досліджено проблему англійської фонологічної компетентності у мультилінгвів першого року навчання у закладах вищої освіти, для яких англійська мова є другою іноземною мовою. Узагальнено розбіжності щодо термінів «фонетична компетентність» / «фонологічна компетентність» в українському та зарубіжному наукових просторах та обґрунтовано послугування у цій роботі терміном «фонологічна компетентність». Проаналізовано стан вивчення проблеми у вітчизняній та зарубіжній науці. Виявлено, що формування фонологічної компетентності для мультилінгвів (англійська – друга іноземна мова) відбувається у формальному і неформальному форматі. Розроблено таксономію формування згаданої компетентності, що представлена трьома етапами, а саме: етап артикуляції і первинного закріплення вимови звуку, етап розвитку навичок вимови та етап формування інтонаційних (просодичних) навичок. Для реалізації запропонованої методики розроблено модель формування фонологічної компетентності з урахуванням її особливостей та специфіки організації освітнього процесу з англійської мови для мультилінгвів. Її основу складає

трьохелементна модель, що реалізується в процесі аудиторної, позааудиторної та домашньої робіт під час формального навчання. Ураховано результати досліджень останніх років з питання формування фонологічної компетентності і попередній досвід студентів та запропоновано неформальний формат удосконалення фонологічної компетентності. На основі CEFR/CV (2020) виокремлено та відібрано аспекти фонологічного контролю, зокрема: артикуляція, включаючи вимову звуків/фонем; просодика, включаючи інтонацію; ритм і наголос (у слові і реченні), розбірливість (*intelligibility*). Доведено, що артикуляція потребує акценту на схожості та впевненості в коректній вимові звуків, що засвоюються. Доведено, що розвиток просодичних навичок передбачає здатність студента ефективно, максимально наближено використовувати засоби просодики, що означає необхідність контролю наголосу, інтонації/ритму, здатності гнучко використовувати наголос та інтонацію для висловлення своїх комунікативних намірів.

Ключові слова: мультилінгви, модель, неформальний формат, об'єкти контролю, таксономія, фонологічна компетентність, формальний формат.