

**Методические особенности дистанционного обучения иностранным
языкам**

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Аннотация. Данная статья обсуждает потенциальные преимущества и недостатки использования компьютерных программ для обучения произношению (САРТ) при изучении иностранных языков. В статье подчеркивается важность использования систем САРТ в качестве дополнения к привычным ресурсам для изучения иностранных языков. Автор исследует некоторые из возможных способов внедрения таких систем в процесс обучения произношению английского языка. В статье также подчеркивается важность дистанционного обучения для педагогов в их стремлении оставаться конкурентноспособными, а также опасения относительно такого подхода. В целом, в статье приводятся важные аргументы для педагогов и учащихся, заинтересованных в интеграции систем САРТ в свою методику изучения иностранных языков.

Ключевые слова: дистанционное обучение, английский, САРТ, тренировка произношения.

Methodological Features of Distance Learning of Foreign Languages

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Abstract. This article discusses the potential benefits and limitations of computer-assisted pronunciation training (CAPT) systems in language learning. It emphasizes the importance of using various systems as a supplement to other language learning resources and explores some of the online English pronunciation training materials available. The article also highlights the importance of distance learning for educators in order for the institutions to remain competent and outlines participants' fears towards this idea. Overall, the article provides valuable insights for educators and learners interested in incorporating CAPT systems into their language learning approach.

Keywords: Distance Learning, English, CAPT, Pronunciation Training.

In the past few years, distance learning has evolved immensely, becoming more advanced and more accessible year by year. Just 10-15 years ago few universities offered online courses with no or very limited teacher-student interaction, and such courses were not seen as equivalent to traditional, in-person programs. Today, several universities offer degrees that may be acquired fully online, and blended learning is becoming the new norm. The potential of distance learning is vast as it offers flexibility, accessibility, inclusion and often cost-effectiveness. At times of crisis, e.g. during COVID-19, distance learning becomes essential to avoid the disruption of education.

In light of the rapid advancement of technology, digital transformation of Russia has been declared a priority in 2022²⁹. Yet, according to Grunt E.V., only 1,1% of higher education in Russia is delivered via distance mode [1, p. 47]. COVID-19 highlighted the challenges of distance higher education in Russia. In a sociological study conducted in Ekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk and Moscow in 2020, Grunt E. V. and his colleagues identified such challenges as decline in education quality, non-compliance to educational standards, insufficient digital literacy of teachers, difficulties with choosing adequate online educational resources and platforms, psychological discomfort of both teachers and students, and other [2, pp. 50-54].

In such circumstances, it is absolutely crucial for teachers to improve their digital competencies continuously to provide high-quality, engaging and effective learning. According to UNESCO, the use of new technologies entails new teacher roles, new pedagogies and new approaches to teacher education – structuring learning in a new way, encouraging cooperative interaction online, restructuring group learning, etc. [2, p. 21]. The following research focuses on methodological features of distance learning for foreign language teaching, specifically on synchronous and asynchronous pronunciation training.

Synchronous learning is defined as “any type of learning that takes place in real time, where a group of people are engaging in learning simultaneously” [3] (e.g. face-to-face or online webinars, lectures, video conferencing), whereas asynchronous learning implies working separately at different times, using pre-recorded lectures, etc. [4]. Both forms of learning allow effective use of computer-mediated communication (CMC), defined as any communication in which users interact via the direct use of a computer [4]. CMC has been widely applied in language education, and several studies confirmed its effectiveness in acquiring reading, speaking and writing skills in a foreign language [5, p. 80].

²⁹ Presidential Decree of 21.07.2020 No. 474 On the national development goals of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030 // ConsultantPlus legal reference system. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_357927/

Examining the effectiveness of applying synchronous and asynchronous CMC in teaching pronunciation, a group of Iranian researchers confirmed the positive effect of CMC-oriented instruction on learner's pronunciation development, stating however that a significant enough difference hasn't been found among synchronous and asynchronous modes [6, p.10]. Talking about synchronous pronunciation training, e.g. via video conferencing, possible advantages may lie in interaction intensity, the opportunity of immediate feedback, or group interaction that can help students notice and correct certain phonetic features. Asynchronous pronunciation training in its turn offers self-paced learning, endless opportunities of repetition, and exposure to a wide range of dialects and accents.

Other important factors affecting the effectiveness of both modes of learning are learners' participation style and social anxiety. Omer Demir and colleagues examined the impact of social anxiety and various participation styles on active participation, as well as the impact of active participation on academic achievements – the results showed that all three are closely interlinked, and participation styles and social anxiety in fact do affect the performance [7].

Taking all written above into account, the logical solution is to avoid the “one size fits all approach”. Active participation has been a stumbling block in discussions on effectiveness of distance learning. However, there are plenty of ways to keep the students engaged and active both via synchronous and asynchronous CMC, even though tailoring lessons to the needs of the students requires a certain level of creativity. A variety of services may be used to facilitate the classes. The following computer aided pronunciation training (CAPT) resources may be used for improving the English pronunciation of the students.

In both synchronous and asynchronous learning, teachers may incorporate visual animations and other types of multimedia like videos and interactive platforms. Some undeniable advantages of this method are giving the students an opportunity to listen to authentic material, attracting their attention, and incorporating both auditory and visual learning styles. However, it's not always easy to find appropriate materials suitable for the class to comprehend the speech and not be overwhelmed with various

accents, colloquial phrases and slang, and therefore becoming discouraged. Muayyed J. Juma's research clearly shows the efficiency of using animations and videos in class, with the experimental group (the one that studied with a help of animations and videos) performing 15,22% better compared to the control group that studied using traditional methods only [8, p.408]. An example of interactive pronunciation animation for young learners could be found online, or made-up by the teacher specifically for the age group and the level of English they are working with. Other resources that can be used both synchronously and asynchronously are podcasts, songs, tongue twisters and pronunciation simulators.

Speaking about asynchronous learning only, the number of apps and platforms for learning foreign languages have become somewhat ubiquitous. Famous apps such as Duolingo, ELSA Speak and Busuu offer many exercises that can be used to practice pronunciation. All three apps use speech recognition and AI, so according to reviews, the feedback is quite accurate. ELSA Speak has a variety of videos showing mouth and tongue positions. Some other speaking apps are Pronuncian, Accent Training, BoldVoice, and Say It: English pronunciation. Some of these apps have initial diagnostic tests, which direct students to relevant pronunciation units. Most of the apps also give simple, but instant feedback to the learners.

Other popular methods involve podcasting services, where students can record themselves. Pronunciation tests, pronunciation games, educational websites, weekly recording tasks.

Rapid advancement of technology allows using virtual reality for language learning. Although VR is inaccessible for many students at the moment, it may allow real-time immersion into the language in the nearest future. Pamela Rogerson-Revell mentions VR environments such as Second Life (<https://secondlife.com/>) and Active Worlds (<https://www.activeworlds.com/>) as suitable for practicing pronunciation [9, pp. 189-205]. Although it is a long shot, considering that not everyone is able to afford even the basic interactive boards in the classes, but for some time the concept of personal computers seemed strange and unique to people too, so it is entirely possible to implement VR in learning ESL.

Certainly, there are several concerns about the usage of CAPT in general – Daniel Korzekwa mentions in his research that a big problem with CAPT methods lies in limitations in detecting pronunciation errors with high accuracy, stating that the general precision is currently at 60% [10, pp. 22-33]. However, the rapid advancement of AI, improvement of machine learning models may soon solve the mentioned problem. Pamela Rogerson-Revell expressed further concerns about limitations in pedagogic accuracy of content on CAPT resources. For instance, she described an example of two similar CAPT apps describing phonological features differently – one stating that the voice has to go up in pitch when asking questions, and the other – that the pitch has to be lowered, with no clarifications or further rules to support the statements [9, pp. 189-205]. In such cases, teacher is obligated to monitor the content thoroughly, which with the lack of consistency and clarity in pedagogic accuracy may lead to confusion and ultimately hinder language learning progress. Another obvious limitation is difficulties in having natural conversations with computers – voice-controlled digital assistants like Alisa, Siri, etc. may be of some help, however, they are still far from being able to replace human interaction and the nuances of human communication. For language learners, it is crucial to be able to practice and improve their speaking and listening skills in real-life situations with native speakers. Therefore, while CAPT systems can be a useful supplement to language learning, they should not be seen as a complete solution.

In conclusion, distance learning of foreign languages is an ever-evolving field with constantly improving technological advancements. With the rise of digital literacy and the need for flexible learning options, distance learning has become an attractive option for language learners. However, it is important to consider the methodological features that are essential to a successful distance learning program. The use of technology in distance learning has made it possible to provide learners with a more personalized and engaging learning experience. Online language courses and apps, virtual classrooms, and CAPT systems all have the potential to enhance language learning. It is virtually important to remember that these tools should be used in conjunction with other resources and real-life practice with native speakers. Overall,

distance learning of foreign languages has the potential to add value to traditional lessons, motivate and engage learners, particularly the young and/or digitally literate. As distance learning continues to evolve, it is important for educators to stay informed about the latest trends, technologies, and best practices in order to provide the best possible learning experience for language learners.

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