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**LIMITATIONS OF JOLLY PHONICS  
IN DEVELOPING THE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION  
AND READING MICRO-SKILLS  
AMONG RUSSIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

**Abstract:** the present article discusses the application of Jolly Phonics methodology in forming and developing the English pronunciation and reading micro-skills of Russian primary schoolers. The application of Jolly Phonics in a foreign language classroom has received criticisms since it is not adapted to the needs of non-native English learners. The present article aims to evaluate the Jolly Phonics methodology for teaching Russian young learners of English both pronunciation and literacy.

**Keywords:** Jolly Phonics, Russian learners of English, literacy, pronunciation skills, primary school students.

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**ОГРАНИЧЕНИЯ В ПРИМЕНЕНИИ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ JOLLY PHONICS  
В ОБУЧЕНИИ МЛАДШИХ РУССКОЯЗЫЧНЫХ ШКОЛЬНИКОВ  
ТЕХНИКЕ ЧТЕНИЯ И ПРОИЗНОШЕНИЮ  
АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА**

**Аннотация:** в данной статье рассматриваются вопросы применения методики Jolly Phonics для формирования и развития навыков произношения и техники чтения у русскоязычных младших школьников на материале

английского языка. Использование Jolly Phonics на уроках иностранного языка для неанглоговорящей аудитории неоднократно подвергалось критике в литературе, поскольку методика не адаптирована к потребностям обучаемых, для которых английский язык не является родным. Данная статья направлена на оценку методики Jolly Phonics для формирования у русскоязычных детей на младшей ступени школьного образования произносительных навыков и навыков техники чтения английского языка.

**Ключевые** слова: Джолли Фоникс, русскоязычные обучаемые, техника чтения, произношение, учащиеся начальной школы.

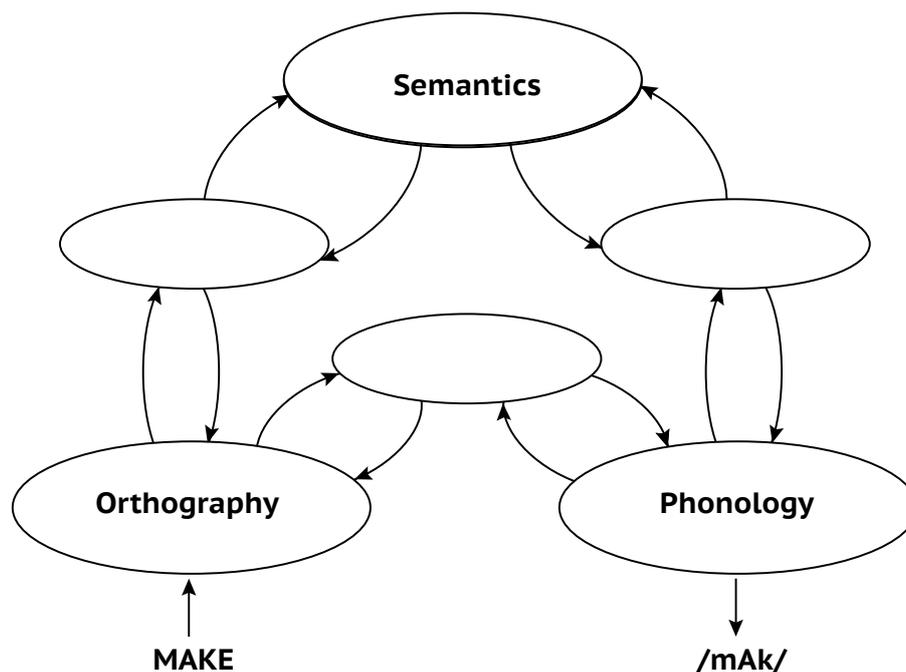
### ***Introduction***

Teaching reading in a second language is an important aspect of language learning. It has become one of the most paramount objectives of foreign language education at the primary school stage when children start learning the L2 sound system and developing L2 phonemic awareness and decoding skills. Literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning forming the foundation of all mental processes and operations which are to take place at the subsequent stages. There are various methods and approaches to teaching reading in English as L2. Jolly Phonics has proven itself as an effective method to teach literacy to young native learners of English, nevertheless, it has received criticism since it is not adapted to the needs of non-native English learners.

### ***Theoretical framework***

Learning to read is a complex process of mapping between visual forms and phonology, and involves multiple skills such as phonological and morphological awareness that play an important role in the development of children's word reading [4].

As proposed by the triangle model of reading (Fig. 1), phonology, semantics and orthography are the central components of word reading across languages, and any difficulty with these components can lead to reading difficulties [1]. Large ovals represent groups of units that encode different types of information: orthography (spelling), phonology (derived from pronunciation and sound), and semantics (meaning). To develop reading comprehension, L2 learners have to master both macro and micro reading skills.



*Fig. 1.* The triangle model of reading [5]

The present paper focuses on the enhancement of micro-skills (i.e., phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, and decoding) of reading comprehension and pronunciation performance of young L2 learners of English. In order to achieve a good grasp of English reading skills, learners have to develop awareness that words are broken down into phoneme units, i.e., they have to learn the mapping between orthography and phonology. Awareness of sound-letter knowledge is one of the best predictors of children's ability to read fluently. Therefore, combining pronunciation and reading instruction enables young L2 learners to practice pronunciation and enhance their reading skills at the same time. We lay out how the method of Jolly Phonics can be implemented in the Russian Primary classroom.

### ***Jolly Phonics system overview and its limitations***

Jolly Phonics is believed to be one of the most popular methods of teaching literacy to young learners. Created in England in 1989 by a teacher, Sue Lloyd, and Christopher Jolly, the method was meant to help young learners master literacy. Even though the method has proved to be successful in the native environment, it has received criticisms in EFL teaching.

Jolly Phonics distinguishes five basic skills for reading and writing [2]:

1. Learning the letter sounds (to establish the grapheme-phoneme correspondences).
2. Learning letter formation (to learn handwriting).
3. Blending (to be able to read a word as a whole).
4. Identifying sounds in words (to raise phonemic awareness).
5. Spelling the tricky words (to recognize words with irregular spelling).

The 42 main sounds are introduced through gestures and words and taught in a specific order, not alphabetically, thus letters are not referred to by their conventional names (Fig. 2). The sounds are organized in 7 groups, and the learning starts with the sounds which allow to form a higher number of words from the very first lessons (to start blending as early as possible). Learning letter-sounds correspondences enables children to start to decode by blending them together to form words. Some sounds are represented by two letters (digraphs). Such digraphs as “oo” and “th” are represented in two forms (to distinguish between different sounds – [u] and [ʊ], [θ] and [ð]).

1. s, a, t, i, p, n
2. c k, e, h, r, m, d
3. g, o, u, l, f, b
4. ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or
5. z, w, ng, v, oo, oo
6. y, x, ch, sh, th, th
7. qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar

*Fig. 2.* The 42 main sounds of English [3]

Each sound is associated with an action and a story to help children remember it. When learners become confident with the sounds, gestures are no longer needed. The Jolly Phonics Handbook pinpoints that only one grapheme-sound correspondence type is taught at a time even if it stands for different phonemes. We believe that the vowel digraph “ea”

representing the /i/ sound should be added to group 4 (along with “ee” and “ie”). It is one of the most common graphemes in written English found in such early-learned words as *please, sea, tea, seat*, etc. We fully support the idea that sound-letter correspondences should be taught one at a time. As soon as the learner acquires the correspondence “ea”=/i/, other ways of pronouncing this letter combination could be introduced: [ɛ] as in *breath*, [e] as in *bear*, [iə] as in *idea*.

Originally proposed as a method for native English speakers, it needs adjustments for foreign language learners. The goals with native speakers boil down to learning grapheme-phoneme correspondences since there is no need to explicitly teach the meaning and pronunciation of words – native speakers learn the written form of words they already know. However, the process is more complicated in L2 acquisition. Using Jolly Phonics in a non-native environment, the number of goals increases: learning grapheme-phoneme correspondences, training pronunciation of sounds (some of them are non-existent in Russian, therefore, more time should specifically be devoted to pronunciation), assigning meaning to the words, using the words in a communicative situation.

The method in its original form has a serious drawback for Russian L2 learners – the lack of communicative element. Non-natives understand neither the words in the Wordbook nor the jingles which are associated with each sound, since the vocabulary items provided in the Wordbook sometimes correspond to B1-B2 levels, which limits understanding and creates difficulty. Vocabulary should correspond to the level of L2 learners, therefore, lexical material selection is vital. Semantization of vocabulary should be incorporated into the method so that teachers should maintain a focus on both form and meaning. We believe that when learners practice decoding, their attention should also be given to the meaning of what they read; otherwise, the sense that words, sentences or texts actually communicate a meaning is lost. For that reason, the number of practiced words should be limited to the amount that the learners are able to acquire during the lesson to prevent mere repetition of words without understanding their meaning. Knowing words is not only memorizing them since language is a means of communication. Therefore, in the foreign language classroom, Jolly Phonics should be adjusted to help learners develop their communicative competence.

### **Conclusion**

The main limitations of the Jolly Phonics method apply not only to Russian learners of English, but also to other EFL students. Even though this methodology works effectively in the native environment, it ignores the needs of a bilingual classroom. There is a lack of communicative exercises in the system, thus interaction is hardly fostered. Moreover, despite a wide variety of materials provided by Jolly Phonics, it is hardly possible to use them in the foreign language classroom since non-native speakers can not understand the meaning of given words and are not familiar with the grammar structures used. Finally, additional pronunciation practice is needed to make sure L2 learners acquire pronunciation skills.

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