

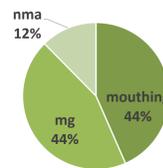
Re-thinking the origin of mouthing: it is a written language contact phenomenon



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What is a mouthing and where does it come from?

- Mouth movements that resemble the articulation of words
- Usually correspond with the manual sign both in terms of temporal alignment and semantic congruency (Bauer 2019)
- Occur in the RSL corpus just as frequent as mouth gestures (Bauer & Kyuseva forthc.)
- Usually occurs temporally reduced
- Mouthing is reduced when its parts are invisible, as in the RSL example *Novosib(irsk)*



- All previous studies define mouthing as a spoken language contact phenomenon (Boyes Braem 2001, Crasborn et al. 2008, Johnston et al. 2006). Thus, Bank et al (2011: 250) believe that casual spoken Dutch is an important source for NGT mouthings. Nadolske & Rosenstock (2001) describe ASL mouthings as “derived from” or “influenced by spoken English” and Mesch & Schönström (2020) consider STS mouthings to be “borrowed from the spoken Swedish language”.

Because RSL mouthings differ from the actual Russian pronunciation, this study suggests that mouthing is not a spoken, but a written language contact phenomenon.

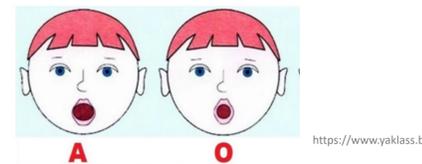
What is vowel reduction?

- Spoken standard Russian is characterized by a prominent phonological feature of vowel reduction which affects vowels in unstressed syllables. Unstressed vowels are pronounced differently from the stressed vowels.
 - Due to the process of vowel reduction, the unstressed vowel /o/ → [a]
- stól [stól] ‘table’ (nom. sg.) – stolá [stala] (gen. sg.)
dom [dóm] ‘house’ (nom. sg.) - domá [dama] (nom.pl)

Orthography ≠ pronunciation

Lip rounding in Russian vowels

- The difference between [a] and [o] can be easily perceived visually in Russian: [a] is a central open unrounded vowel and [o] is a half-closed rounded vowel.



- Research shows that lip rounding is the most easily visible feature. Both hearing and deaf appear to be very good at visually perceiving the presence of lip rounding in vowels (Öhrström & Traunmüller 2007).
- If signers are influenced by the visual information from lip movement in their production of mouthings, we expect the Russian vowel reduction patterns to be present in mouthings.
- The RSL sign VODA ‘water’ should be accompanied by the mouthings with the unrounded vowel [va] in the first syllable as it is pronounced by a standard Russian speaker and not as [voda] as it is coded by the orthography.
- RSL corpus analysis, however, shows a different pattern.

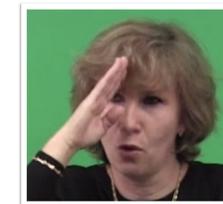
Russian Sign Language Corpus

The online corpus of RSL (<http://rsl.nstu.ru>, Burkova 2012-2015) was made during the project “Corpus-Based Research on Morphosyntax and Vocabulary of the Russian Sign Language” funded by Russian Foundation for Basic Research.

- over 180 texts filmed from 59 RSL signers – men and women (18 to 63 years) with varying degrees of deafness: deaf, hard-of-hearing and CODA.
- Novosibirsk & Moscow.
- spontaneous speech (narratives and dialogues), texts on the basis of stimulus materials (cartoons retelling, picture based storytelling) & some elicitation data.

How do RSL mouthings differ from the actual pronunciation?

- All mouthings in the RSL corpus lack vowel reduction patterns, which are obligatory in standard spoken Russian words. Thus, the sign VODA ‘water’ is accompanied by a mouthing vo and not by va, as it pronounced in standard Russian.



mouthing
RSL sign
Spoken Russian
Written Russian

vo
WATER
[vada]
voda



okn
WINDOW
[akno]
okno

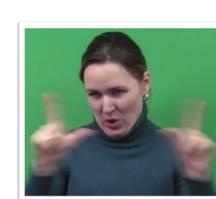


kom
MOSQUITO
[kamar]
komar



mouthing
RSL sign
Spoken Russian
Written Russian

ob
MONKEY
[abez'jana]
obez'jana



bol
HOSPITAL
[bal'nica]
bol'nica



lop
SHOVEL
[lapata]
lopata

The origin of mouthings

- RSL mouthings are not likely to be influenced by the visual information from lip movements /shape of the mouth only.
- Deaf signers are more heavily influenced in their mouthing production by the orthography rather than by the visual information from lip movement.

References

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