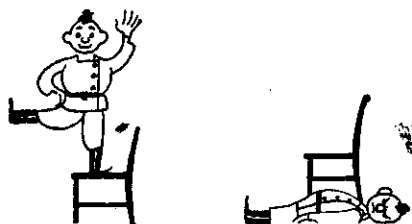


# RUSSIAN IS EASY TO LEARN

## Contrary To Popular Belief, You Can Master The Alphabet In One Simple Lesson

*RUSSIAN, it was decided at the annual meeting of the University Senate, will in future be an optional subject for the New Zealand B.A. Degree. How difficult it will be to qualify has yet to be discovered, but if we may accept the testimony of Captain Chaitkin, who teaches Russian to the armed forces of America, learning the language can be really good fun. This is what he had to say about it in a recent issue of "Esquire," by whose courtesy we quote him:*

**O**F all the bugaboos current about Russia and things Russian, none is more prevalent than the one about the difficulty of learning the Russian language. How often one hears people say, with a great show of authority, that it takes years to learn the language, that it's one of the most difficult tongues in the world, or even that it's impossible for Anglo-Saxons to learn it!



Have you ever heard of some of the features of Russian that make it one of the easiest in the world to learn? For example, that Russian knows no articles? No *the* or a of the English, *le, la, des* of the French, none of the confounding *der, die, das* of the German? Have you heard that the order of words in a Russian sentence can be manipulated to your heart's desire; that you need not place the subject first, the predicate next, etc? In Russian you can say: "Boy stands on chair," "stands boy on chair," or "stands on chair boy," without doing violence to the language.

Most important of all, Russian is a purely phonetic language, which means that each letter of the alphabet stands for one specific sound and that sound only, so that if you master the Russian alphabet, you are at once able to read any Russian text whatever. Just like that. To-day you learn the Russian alphabet, and to-day you emerge, like Venus from the foam, a full-blown reader of Russian.

You might not be able to understand most of what you read, but even without a dictionary you could make out Russian maps, scientific and technical terms, and bibliographies: and with a little help from a Russian-English dictionary you would gain access to tables of contents, map legends and the like. And of course you would then be able to pursue the study of Russian grammar and syntax with the same ease or difficulty as in the case of Spanish, French, etc.

The tremendous advantage afforded in the study of Russian by the phonetic nature of the alphabet becomes clear

★ Says ★  
**Capt. Jacob Chaitkin**



**CAPTAIN JACOB CHAITKIN**, the author of this article, was born on the shore of the Baltic Sea, went to America at the age of nine, and a year later returned to the Baltic province of Kurland, to attend a scientific school. After six years, he returned to America, attended a Pittsburgh high school and then the Pittsburgh University, where he graduated in law, practising this profession for some years in New York City. He speaks Russian, German and English with equal ease. In the last war he was a private in the American army, and is a captain in this one.

when we realise what a mnemonic burden the most simple English words impose on a foreign student. The letters of the English alphabet, with the exception of a few consonants, are secret ciphers representing an infinite variety of sound values. Take A, for example. Why is it called "ay," anyway? It might just as well be called "ah," and be denoted by an E. In such words as *care, fare, etc.*, it is certainly pronounced like the E in there and where. Or why not call it "O"? How much difference is there between the sound of the a in *Fall* and that of the o in *Lord*? It is the same way with all the other English vowels. There is no need of multiplying examples, but just think of the exasperating variety of disguises that the e takes on in *best, few, certain, there, great, real, reign, etc.*, etc. Not to speak of that nightmare of the teachers of English for foreigners, *bough, cough, dough, rough* and through. . . .

With what a feeling of relief the student turns to the simple, unequivocal Russian vowels! Each vowel equals but one sound, and no other. Let us see how this works out.

The study of Russian should be begun by noting that the Russian A looks exactly like the English A, and is pronounced like the A in every western language—as in *car* or *father*. The Russian E is like our E in *chest*, usually pronounced *ye* as in *yet*. The O is like ours in *Lord*.

With these reservations as to pronunciation of the A, E, and O, it is possible to isolate six letters of the Russian

alphabet which look the same and sound the same as in English. It is easy to remember these six letters as O K TEAM. When you see one of these letters in a Russian text, pronounce it unhesitatingly as what it appears to be. *Tom* will appear as *Tom* in Russian, *Mama* as *Mama*, etc.

### The Bad Boys



**BPYH**

Four other letters should be tackled without delay. These are the bad boys of the Russian alphabet, the letters which look like what they aint. They are the misleading characters B, P, Y, and H. B is the Russian V; P (like the Greek Rho) is the Russian R; Y stands for OO (as in poor); and H represents the Russian N. They will be easily remembered if one learns the Russian word for liar, which is *vroon*, and looks like this: **BPYH**. It is composed entirely of these mendacious letters.

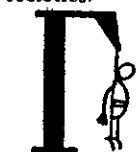
The troublesome Russian N, represented by H, is also easily fixed in our minds if we learn, as we must, that there is no H sound in the Russian language. Russian has no H. *No H*. When you see the H in a Russian text, think of this, and substitute the N from the *No*.

O.K., Team, let's learn that **BPYH** is *vroon*, and that *vroon* is something you can't call a Russian without precipitating an international incident.

The rest of the Russian alphabet is easy. You simply have to learn that certain symbols stand for certain specific sounds. There is a plethora of memory aids to help you. I present a few obvious ones. You can probably think of some that will be more helpful in your individual case, because of your linguistic background.

### Association with Greek

Some of the Russian letters are directly derived from, or are at least associated with, the ancient Greek alphabet, and should be a cinch for those of you familiar with the Greek-letter societies.



**GAY AS GALLOWS**

**Γ** is the Greek Gamma. It is always pronounced as the G in *gay*, never as *gee*. Since it looks like a gallows, it should be easy to remember, if you will pardon this ghoulis, gruesome reference to gibbets.

The troublesome P stands for R, and is, of course, the Greek Rho. This letter is known to you as a member of the *vroon* family.

**Π** stands for our P, and is, of course, the Greek Pi. If you never saw or heard of a Pi before, this is the time to consult any English dictionary; it is an important symbol of our mathematics.

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