

Learner profile: Ukrainian

This guide presents common challenges faced by Ukrainian learners of English and typical features of language production. Please note, these guidelines are intended to advise teachers on areas where students may experience problems. However, native speakers may not all find the following points challenging.



Facts

- **Language family:** Eastern Slavic.
- **Native speakers:** 40 million.
- **Location:** Ukrainian is the official language of Ukraine. Ukrainian is also an official language in Crimea, which is internationally recognised as being part of Ukraine, and Transnistria, an unrecognised breakaway state of Moldova.
- **Writing system:** Cyrillic script.

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Pronunciation

- The sounds /θ/ and /ð/ (the initial sounds in 'think' and 'this' respectively) are not in the Ukrainian phonemic inventory and therefore speakers may replace these sounds with a 's' or 'z' sound.
- The sounds /ɹ/ and /ŋ/ (the first and last sounds in the word 'ring') are not found in Ukrainian and speakers may need specific practice of these sounds.
- Ukrainian speakers might also find /w/ (the initial consonant of 'when') and produce this as [v].
- Ukrainian learners of English may find diphthongs difficult to pronounce.

Grammar

- Ukrainian has three grammatical genders – masculine, feminine and neuter.
- There are no definite or indefinite articles in Ukrainian so learners may forget to insert 'the', 'a' or 'an' in English.
- Ukrainian is an inflected language where adjectives are inflected to agree with the noun. This could be replicated in English (for example, 'three greens cars' where green has been inflected to agree with the plural noun).
- Pronouns can be dropped in Ukraine as the language is highly inflected and the verb carries information about the grammatical subject.
- Ukrainian learners may translate prepositions from Ukrainian which may cause errors such as 'I called to Sofiy' instead of 'I called Sofiy'.

Writing

- Ukrainian is written using the Cyrillic script so learners will have to learn the Latin alphabet when learning English.
- Commas are used in a list to replace 'and'.
- Quoted speech and dialogues in books are introduced with a dash. Quotation marks may take the form «...».

Vocabulary

- Ukrainian learners may confuse 'how' and 'what' as they direct translate the question form from Ukrainian.
- Some lexical verbs, such as 'say' and 'tell', 'borrow' and 'lend', 'learn' and 'teach' and 'make' and 'do', may be confused by Ukrainian speakers.
- Some expressions are directly translated from Ukrainian and this can lead to mistakes such as 'I am agree' and 'I feel myself'.

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Cultural Differences

- Children in Ukraine start school at age 6.
- Many Ukrainians also speak Russian and might watch films and TV shows at home in Russian.
- The curriculum in Ukraine includes Ukrainian literature, world literature, Ukrainian history, world history and a foreign language (which may be English, German, French or Spanish).
- Older generations are less likely to understand English.
- Pupils might do chess and karate as part of the school day.

Recommended FlashAcademy® lessons

Some lessons which might help based on the above differences:

Beginner > A Few Basics > Personal Pronouns

Beginner > Handwriting: Letters & Numbers

Beginner > Handwriting: Words

Beginner > Phonics 1 > Set 4, Set 6, Additional Sounds

Beginner > Food & Drink > Articles

Beginner > Food & Drink > Countable and uncountable nouns

Beginner > School Essentials > Question words

Beginner > Work & School > Lend vs. Borrow

Beginner > Punctuation > Inverted commas

Intermediate > Family & Relationships > Say vs. Tell

Intermediate > Everyday Life > Make vs. Do

Intermediate > Environment & Society > Articles