

## LESSON 5.1 :

Lesson 5 – Russian letters (part 5) : Same sound, different writing / Specific Russian letters / Hard and soft consonants

- I. **The Russian alphabet (part 5) : letters that sound like English letters but are written differently / Specific Russian letters**
- II. **Hard and soft consonants**

The Russian alphabet (part 5) : letters that sound like English letters but are written differently / Specific Russian letters

**Ч / ч** – This letter is pronounced « ch », like in the word « cheese ».

Example :

**Чек** (chek) – check

**Я / я** – This is the vowel « ya » in Russian.

Example :

**Аллея** (alyeya) – alley

**Ы / ы** – This letter represents a specific Russian sound that does not exist in English.

To pronounce this sound properly : first, imagine you want to say « и » and then, move your tongue lower and backward.

Example :

**Мы** (mee) – we

**Щ / щ** – This consonant is pronounced « sh' » (cf. the word « sheep »).

Example :

**Борщ** (borsh') – borscht

**Ц / ц** – This letter is pronounced « ts ».

Example :

**Царь** (tsar') – czar

**The last letter of this word is a soft sign : Ъ / ъ.**

A soft sign does not have a sound of its own. Instead, it is used to modify the pronunciation of the preceding consonant by making it soft.

## Hard and soft consonants

A Russian consonant can be either hard or soft. A soft sound is produced when the middle of the tongue moves closer to the hard palate.

The soft sign is represented by an apostrophe in our phonetic transcription.

Sometimes, but it's not very common, the adding of a soft sign can change the meaning of a word.

The soft sign is not always the last letter of a word. It can also be situated inside the word, like in the name **Ольга (Ol'ga)**– Olga.

**Ъ / ъ :**

This letter is a hard sign. The hard sign has no pronunciation on its own, just like the soft sign.

Before 1918, soft consonants were followed by a soft sign and hard consonants by a hard sign.

But after the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks introduced a reform to simplify Russian orthography : they decided to eliminate the hard sign which would normally appear at the end of all words after a hard consonant.

Today, in modern Russian, the hard sign is used to separate the syllables of a word.