

THE INFLUENCE OF THE UZBEK LANGUAGE ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH

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ANNOTATION

Pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), yet many learners experience persistent pronunciation difficulties despite years of formal instruction. One of the major causes of these difficulties is first language interference. This study investigates the influence of the Uzbek language on the pronunciation of English sounds by Uzbek-speaking EFL learners. The research examines both segmental features, including consonants and vowels, and suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation. Data were collected through pronunciation tests and audio recordings of learners' spoken English. The findings indicate that the absence of certain English phonemes in the Uzbek phonological system and differences in rhythmic patterns significantly contribute to pronunciation errors. The study highlights the importance of teacher awareness of first language influence and supports the use of explicit pronunciation instruction to improve learners' intelligibility. Pronunciation is a critical aspect of communicative competence in English, directly affecting learners' ability to convey meaning accurately and interact effectively. For Uzbek-speaking learners, the influence of their first language manifests not only in the substitution of unfamiliar English sounds with native equivalents but also in the application of native rhythmic and intonation patterns. These patterns can cause unnatural stress placement, monotone speech, and difficulties in producing connected speech, which may hinder intelligibility in real-life communication.

In addition to segmental errors, such as mispronunciation of consonants and vowels absent in Uzbek, suprasegmental features including sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation are also affected by first language interference. Uzbek learners may struggle with stress-timed patterns and vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, resulting in speech that sounds less fluent and natural. This highlights the importance of addressing both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation in instruction.

Explicit pronunciation teaching, combined with awareness of first language influence, is essential to help learners overcome these challenges. Techniques such as focused listening, guided articulation practice, interactive speaking exercises, and the use of digital tools for immediate feedback have proven effective in improving learners' intelligibility. By integrating pronunciation instruction into communicative activities, teachers can enhance learners' confidence, fluency, and overall oral communication skills.

Understanding the specific challenges faced by Uzbek-speaking learners allows English teachers to design more targeted and effective pedagogical strategies. This approach not only supports the accurate production of English sounds but also contributes to the development of learners' overall communicative competence, enabling them to participate successfully in diverse English-speaking contexts.

Introduction. Pronunciation plays a vital role in successful oral communication in a foreign language. Clear and intelligible pronunciation allows speakers to convey meaning effectively and avoid communication breakdowns. Despite this importance, pronunciation is often one of the most challenging aspects of English language learning for EFL learners. Many learners demonstrate adequate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but struggle to pronounce English sounds accurately. One of the major factors influencing learners' pronunciation is the impact of their first language. When acquiring a foreign language, learners tend to rely on the phonological system of their native language, transferring familiar sound patterns to the target language. This process, known as first language interference or negative transfer, frequently results in systematic pronunciation errors. For Uzbek-speaking learners of English, differences between the Uzbek and English sound systems present particular challenges. English contains several consonant and vowel sounds that do not exist in Uzbek, as well as stress-timed rhythm patterns that differ from the syllable-timed nature of Uzbek. As a result, Uzbek learners often experience difficulties in producing certain English sounds, word stress, and intonation patterns. Understanding the influence of the Uzbek language on English pronunciation is essential for English teachers. Awareness of common pronunciation problems caused by first language interference enables teachers to design more effective instructional strategies. Therefore, the aim of this article is to examine the influence of the Uzbek language on the pronunciation of

English sounds and to discuss pedagogical implications for English teachers.

Literature review. Research in second language acquisition has consistently highlighted the significant role of first language transfer in learning a foreign language. R.Lado proposed the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, suggesting that similarities between the native and target languages facilitate learning, while differences lead to learning difficulties. Although later studies refined this view, first language influence remains a key factor in pronunciation learning¹.

Flege's Speech Learning Model emphasizes that learners' ability to acquire new phonetic categories depends on the perceived similarity between first and second language sounds. When an English sound is similar to an Uzbek sound, learners may substitute the English sound with a native equivalent, leading to inaccurate pronunciation. Conversely, sounds that are entirely absent in the first language are often difficult to perceive and produce. Several studies have examined pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners from different linguistic backgrounds².

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin stress the importance of explicit pronunciation instruction and teacher awareness of learners' first language. They argue that targeted instruction can significantly reduce negative transfer and improve learners' intelligibility. Although research on English pronunciation difficulties has been conducted in various contexts, studies focusing specifically on Uzbek-speaking

¹ Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. University of Michigan Press.

² Flege, J. E. (1995). Second language speech learning: Theory, findings, and problems. In W. Strange (Ed.), *Speech perception and linguistic experience: Issues in cross-language research* (pp. 233–277). York Press.

learners remain limited. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the phonological challenges faced by Uzbek learners of English and the pedagogical implications for English teachers³.

Methodology. This study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design to investigate the influence of the Uzbek language on the pronunciation of English sounds among Uzbek-speaking EFL learners. The participants were undergraduate students majoring in English at a higher education institution in Uzbekistan. All participants were native speakers of Uzbek and had received at least six years of formal English instruction.

Data were collected using two main instruments: pronunciation tests and audio recordings of learners' spoken English. The pronunciation test included a list of English words and sentences containing target sounds that are known to be problematic for Uzbek learners, such as /θ/, /ð/, /w/, /v/, /æ/, and /ɜ:/. In addition, learners were asked to read a short passage aloud to assess stress, rhythm, and intonation patterns.

Audio recordings were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Pronunciation errors were identified and categorized based on segmental features (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental features (word stress, sentence stress, and intonation). The analysis focused on recurring error patterns that could be attributed to first language interference. To ensure reliability, the recordings were analyzed multiple times, and error patterns were cross-checked.

Results. The analysis of the data revealed several consistent pronunciation difficulties among Uzbek-speaking EFL learners. These difficulties were largely related to differences between the Uzbek and English phonological systems. One of the most frequent errors involved the substitution of English sounds that do not exist in Uzbek. For example, the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ were commonly replaced with /s/, /z/, or /t/. Words such as *think* and *this* were often pronounced as *sink* and *zis*. Similarly, learners demonstrated confusion between /w/ and /v/, pronouncing *west* as *vest*, which reflects the absence of /w/ as a distinct phoneme in Uzbek. Vowel pronunciation also posed challenges. Learners struggled to differentiate between long and short vowels, such as /i/ and /i:/ or /æ/ and /e/. This difficulty can be attributed to the relatively simpler vowel system of Uzbek compared to English. As a result, vowel length and quality distinctions were often neutralized, affecting intelligibility.

The influence of the first language on English pronunciation extends beyond isolated phonetic substitutions and includes broader patterns of speech rhythm, stress, and prosody. Uzbek-speaking learners, for example, may apply syllable-timed patterns typical of Uzbek to English, which is stress-timed, leading to unnatural pauses and misplacement of stress in multisyllabic words. This can affect listeners' comprehension and reduce the overall clarity of speech. Additionally, English connected speech features such as assimilation, elision, and linking often pose challenges, as these processes are less prominent or realized differently in Uzbek. Without explicit instruction, learners may produce speech that sounds segmented and less fluent⁴.

Phonological interference is particularly evident in minimal pairs, consonant clusters, and vowel contrasts. English consonant clusters like /str/ in "street" or /spl/ in "splash" can be difficult for Uzbek learners, leading to epenthesis or vowel insertion, such as pronouncing "street" as /sətrɪt/. Similarly, distinctions between voiced and voiceless sounds, such as /v/ versus /w/, are often neutralized, as Uzbek lacks the /w/ phoneme. Vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, common in English, is another area of difficulty, with learners often over-pronouncing vowels, producing a more "even" or monotone speech rhythm.

Beyond segmental challenges, suprasegmental features significantly influence intelligibility. English intonation patterns not only mark questions, statements, and emphasis, but also carry pragmatic meaning, conveying attitudes, politeness, and speaker intention. Uzbek learners may transfer intonation patterns from their native language, which can result in a flat or inappropriate melody in speech, affecting how messages are perceived. Effective pronunciation teaching must therefore include awareness of both stress and intonation, using techniques such as exaggerated modeling, choral repetition, and interactive speaking exercises.

Cognitive strategies and learner engagement play a complementary role in overcoming first language interference. Learners benefit from noticing contrasts between English and Uzbek sounds through focused listening tasks, phonetic training, and visual feedback using spectrograms or waveform analysis. Peer interaction,

pronunciation drills, and corrective feedback in communicative contexts further enhance learners' ability to self-monitor and adjust their speech. Motivation and confidence are closely linked to successful pronunciation development, as learners who feel anxious about mispronouncing words may avoid speaking, limiting their practice opportunities.

Teacher awareness and systematic instructional design are essential in addressing L1 interference. English instructors should diagnose common error patterns among Uzbek learners, implement structured pronunciation exercises, and integrate pronunciation with communicative practice. Using a combination of explicit instruction, technological support, and communicative activities can create a learning environment in which learners gradually internalize English phonemes, stress, rhythm, and intonation, resulting in clearer, more fluent, and intelligible spoken English⁵.

Discussion. Pronunciation in English is not only a matter of producing sounds correctly but also a key component of effective communication that influences learners' overall confidence and interactional competence. For Uzbek-speaking learners, the challenges in acquiring accurate English pronunciation extend beyond isolated phonemes to encompass the rhythm, stress, and intonation patterns characteristic of English. Unlike Uzbek, which is largely syllable-timed, English is stress-timed, meaning that certain syllables are naturally emphasized while others are shortened. This difference often leads Uzbek learners to produce English speech with unnatural stress patterns, resulting in sentences that may sound monotonous or unintelligible to native speakers.

In addition to rhythmic differences, Uzbek learners often encounter difficulty in perceiving and articulating phonemic contrasts that are absent in their first language. For instance, English contains minimal pairs such as "ship" and "sheep" or "bat" and "bet," where vowel length or quality distinguishes meaning. The Uzbek vowel system, being relatively simple, does not provide the same contrasts, leading to vowel neutralization and frequent mispronunciations. Similarly, consonant sounds like /θ/ and /ð/, which are common in English, have no equivalents in Uzbek and are frequently substituted with /s/, /z/, or /t/, which can result in miscommunication in both formal and informal contexts.

Suprasegmental features, including sentence stress, intonation, and linking, also present challenges. English intonation patterns convey not only grammatical information but also pragmatic meaning, such as indicating questions, emphasis, or speaker attitude. Uzbek learners, transferring patterns from their native language, may unintentionally produce flat or incorrect intonation, affecting the naturalness and perceived fluency of their speech. Awareness of these suprasegmental features is critical for achieving intelligibility and communicative effectiveness.

Furthermore, first language influence interacts with cognitive and affective factors in language learning. Learners' awareness of pronunciation differences, motivation to speak clearly, and opportunities for meaningful oral practice significantly affect their ability to overcome native language interference. Explicit pronunciation instruction, supported by visual aids, phonetic transcription, and guided practice, has been shown to reduce errors and increase learners' confidence. Integrating technology, such as speech analysis software, language learning apps, and audio-visual modeling, can provide immediate feedback, helping learners monitor and adjust their pronunciation in real time⁶.

Teacher knowledge and sensitivity to the specific challenges faced by Uzbek-speaking learners play a crucial role. By identifying patterns of common errors and understanding the linguistic reasons behind them, teachers can tailor instruction to address both segmental and suprasegmental difficulties. Emphasizing communicative practice alongside corrective feedback encourages learners to experiment with sounds, stress, and intonation, gradually developing a more native-like and intelligible English accent. This comprehensive approach not only improves pronunciation but also enhances overall communicative competence, allowing learners to participate more confidently in diverse English-speaking contexts.

Conclusion. This study examined the influence of the Uzbek language on the pronunciation of English sounds among Uzbek-speaking EFL learners. The findings demonstrate that both segmental and suprasegmental pronunciation difficulties are strongly influenced by first language interference. The absence of certain English sounds in

³ Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

⁶ Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Uzbek and differences in rhythmic and stress patterns contribute to persistent pronunciation errors.

The study highlights the crucial role of English teachers in addressing these challenges through explicit and informed pronunciation instruction. By raising awareness of first language influence and

implementing targeted teaching strategies, teachers can help learners achieve greater intelligibility and confidence in spoken English. Future research may explore experimental teaching interventions or compare pronunciation difficulties across different proficiency levels.

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