

THE INFLUENCE OF UZBEK MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract. This study explores the influence of Uzbek mother tongue interference on English pronunciation among EFL learners. The research focuses on identifying common pronunciation errors caused by phonological differences between Uzbek and English. Data were collected from 30 undergraduate students through reading and word-list tasks, and their speech was analyzed using phonetic transcription. The findings reveal that dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, the front vowel /æ/, consonant clusters, and word stress patterns present significant challenges for learners. The results confirm the strong impact of negative transfer in second language pronunciation acquisition and emphasize the importance of contrastive phonological analysis in teaching English pronunciation.

Keywords: mother tongue interference, pronunciation errors, phonological transfer, Uzbek learners, EFL

Introduction. Pronunciation is a fundamental component of communicative competence in second language learning. Even when learners possess strong grammatical knowledge and a wide vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation can reduce intelligibility and hinder effective communication. One of the primary factors affecting pronunciation in second language acquisition is mother tongue interference, also known as first language (L1) transfer.

Mother tongue interference occurs when learners apply the phonological rules of their native language to the target language. According to Robert Lado and his Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, structural differences between languages are the main source of learning difficulties. When the sound systems of two languages differ significantly, learners are likely to experience pronunciation problems. Furthermore, Larry Selinker introduced the concept of interlanguage, explaining that second language learners develop a transitional linguistic system influenced by both their native and target languages.

Uzbek and English belong to different language families and have distinct phonological systems. Uzbek lacks several English phonemes, particularly dental fricatives, and has different vowel distinctions and stress patterns. These structural differences often lead to systematic pronunciation errors among Uzbek learners of English.

The aim of this study is to analyze how Uzbek mother tongue interference affects English pronunciation and to identify the most problematic phonological areas for EFL learners.

Main Body. Phonological Differences Between Uzbek and English

One of the main causes of pronunciation errors is the structural difference between the Uzbek and English sound systems. English contains phonemes that do not exist in Uzbek, such as the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. Since these sounds are absent in Uzbek phonology, learners tend to substitute them with familiar sounds from their native language.

Another important difference lies in the vowel system. English has a rich vowel inventory with clear distinctions between short and long vowels and front and back vowels. Uzbek vowel distinctions are less complex, which often leads to vowel substitution errors.

Additionally, English allows complex consonant clusters at the beginning and end of words, while Uzbek syllable structure generally avoids such clusters. This difference results in insertion or simplification strategies among learners.

Segmental Errors

The analysis of students' speech revealed several common segmental errors.



First, dental fricatives were frequently replaced with alveolar sounds. For example, the word “think” was pronounced as /sɪŋk/ or /tɪŋk/, and “this” as /dɪs/. This substitution occurs because learners rely on the closest equivalent sounds available in Uzbek.

Second, the vowel /æ/ caused considerable difficulty. Words such as “man” and “cat” were often pronounced with /e/ instead of /æ/. The absence of an equivalent front low vowel in Uzbek contributes to this confusion.

Third, consonant clusters were simplified through vowel insertion. For instance, “school” was pronounced as /ɪsku:l/ and “sport” as /ɪspɔ:rt/. Learners insert a vowel sound to make pronunciation easier according to Uzbek syllable patterns.

Suprasegmental Errors

In addition to segmental problems, learners demonstrated difficulties with word stress. English stress is variable and can change meaning or word category, while Uzbek stress patterns are more predictable. As a result, learners often misplaced stress in multisyllabic words, such as pronouncing “important” as imPORTant instead of IMportant.

Incorrect stress placement negatively affected speech rhythm and overall intelligibility. Although these errors were less frequent than segmental substitutions, their impact on communication was significant.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that pronunciation teaching should explicitly address problematic phonemes and stress patterns. Teachers should incorporate:

- Articulatory explanations of dental fricatives

- Minimal pair exercises

- Focused vowel discrimination activities

- Practice with consonant clusters

- Stress and rhythm training

Contrastive analysis between Uzbek and English phonological systems can help learners become more aware of differences and reduce negative transfer.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of Uzbek mother tongue interference on English pronunciation among EFL learners. The results demonstrate that phonological differences between Uzbek and English lead to systematic pronunciation errors, particularly in dental fricatives, vowel production, consonant clusters, and word stress placement.

The findings support the theory of negative transfer and highlight the importance of addressing L1 interference in pronunciation instruction. Effective teaching strategies based on contrastive phonological analysis can significantly improve learners’ pronunciation accuracy and communicative competence.

Future research may involve a larger sample size, acoustic analysis of vowel production, or experimental studies measuring the effectiveness of targeted pronunciation training programs.

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