

PHONETIC INTERFERENCE IN COMPARATIVE AND  
CONTRASTIVE PHONETICS: AN ANALYSIS OF PRONUNCIATION  
DIFFICULTIES IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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**DOI:**

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14270771>

**Abstract:** *Phonetic interference arises when learners transfer pronunciation patterns from their native language to a new language, causing difficulties in pronunciation. This phenomenon is examined through comparative and contrastive phonetics, focusing on Uzbek and English. In comparative phonetics, interference is less frequent among related languages, as seen in the French and German examples, where native language phonetic patterns influence English pronunciation. In contrast, non-related languages, such as Uzbek and English, exhibit more pronounced interference due to significant phonetic differences. This study highlights specific challenges Uzbek learners face, such as mispronunciations of English sounds that do not exist in Uzbek, difficulties with vowel differentiation, and issues with consonant clusters and silent letters. Understanding these interferences provides insights into addressing pronunciation difficulties and improving language instruction.*

**Keywords:** *Phonetic Interference, Comparative Phonetics, Contrastive Phonetics, Pronunciation Difficulties, Uzbek Learners, English Learners, Negative Transfer, Vowel Pronunciation, Phonological Errors, Language Learning*

Interference in comparative and contrastive phonetics occurs when language learners are influenced by the phonetic patterns and sounds of their native language, leading to pronunciation difficulties or inconsistencies when learning a new language.

When related languages are compared to each other, the phenomenon of interference is less common than in non-related languages. Though the letter “h” exists in the French alphabet and is written in many words—*homme, honneur, heure*—it is always silent. French ESL students are simply ignoring the “h” sound in English words out of habit. Moreover, French learners unconsciously pronounce the English [r] sound like a French [ʁ], which is a voiced, velar (or uvulaire), fricative<sup>1</sup>. The sound [w] is often pronounced as [v] by German speakers of English. Since the phoneme [w] does not exist in German, this is a common problem for most German speakers<sup>2</sup>. The same problem occurs between Uzbek and Kazakh languages. In comparative phonetics, there is little phonetic interference and they rarely cause phonological errors. But when comparing unrelated languages, the number of

<sup>1</sup> Flege, J. E., Munro, M. J., & MacKay, I. R. (1995). Factors affecting strength of perceived foreign accent in a second language. *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 97(5), 3125-3134.

<sup>2</sup> Major, R. C. (1992). Losing English as a first language. *Language in Society*, 21(2), 203-223.

phonetic interferences is endless, and they cause phonological errors in language learning, causing many misunderstandings in the process of communication<sup>3</sup>. As an example of the phonetic interference that occurs when learning unrelated languages, it is considered appropriate to cite the differences in the phonetic characteristics of Uzbek and English languages. The interference caused by these differences also occurs between languages belonging to other families and English, and they are:

**Different pronunciation of Uzbek and English sounds:**

For example, the Uzbek consonants [t, d] are articulated in a more frontal position, being dental and dorsal, than the English consonants [t, d], which have an alveolar and apical articulation. Among the fricatives the Uzbek [s, z, sh, j] may be produced in a more frontal position of the mouth cavity than the English counterparts [s, z, ʃ, ʒ]. The Uzbek [s, z] are dorsal, [sh, j] are palato-alveolar consonants. The English [s, z] have apical, alveolar articulation with round narrowing and [j, ʒ] being also palato-alveolar, have two foci in articulation. The class of nasals coincides in number [m, n, ŋ] – [m, n, ng] but their articulatory, acoustic and phonological features are different in both languages. The English [n] is alveolar and apical, while the Uzbek [n] is a dorsal, dental consonant. The English [ŋ] is a separate phoneme and it can never be divided into two syllables as [n – g] in all positions. The Uzbek [ng] can function as a separate phoneme in word final position (*uying* - «your house», *qo'ling* - «your hand») and in word medial position, owing to the syllable division it can be divided into two elements, as [n – g] *qo'lingga* - «to your hand» (*qo'l-in-ga*), *singling* (*sin-glin-ga*) - «to your sister». As to the English [l] phoneme it has two allophones: «clear» and «dark» the distinction of which is based on the pronunciation with a frontal secondary focus («clear» [l]) and with a back secondary focus («dark» [ɫ]). Such kinds of articulation are not found in Uzbek. The English [r] has a cacuminal, post alveolar articulation while the Uzbek [r] is regarded as a rolled (or trilled) consonant<sup>4</sup>.

Uzbek learners have some difficulties while pronouncing the particular vowels. According to the horizontal movement of the tongue, English vowels may be front, front-retracted, mixed, and back-advanced and back, whereas Uzbek vowels are fully front and back. That means that they have difficulties in distinguishing and pronouncing the vowels like: [i], [ə], [ɜ:], [u], [ʌ]. They have difficulties with differentiating pronunciation the words like [*live-leave*] [*sit-seat*] [*fit-feet*] [*hit-heat*]<sup>5</sup>.

**The absence of some English sounds in Uzbek:**

There is no consonant phoneme such as the English sonant [w] in Uzbek. Uzbek learners pronounce [æ] as [e]. For example: had is pronounced as [hed]; [θ] is pronounced as [s] instead. For example, think is pronounced as [sink]<sup>6</sup>;

<sup>3</sup> Author's opinion

<sup>4</sup> Abduazizov, A.A. English phonetics. Theoretical course. –T., 2006.

<sup>5</sup> O'.Hoshimov, I. Yoqubov. Ingliz tili o'qitish metodikasi. Toshkent. "Sharq" nashriyoti, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> The same source

Instead of [ð], they pronounce [z]. For example: this is pronounced as [zɪs]; They pronounce [w] as [v] instead. For example: well is pronounced as [vel]; Besides, the Uzbek vowels have relatively stable articulation. There are no diphthongs and diphthongoids in Uzbek which means they require huge effort to master for Uzbek people. In diphthongs, the first vowel sound is pronounced louder than the second. However, it should be noted that both sounds are pronounced in the same syllable. For Uzbek students studying English, diphthongs are completely unfamiliar sounds. Therefore, they often do not pronounce the second sound of the diphthong; they only pronounce the first sound<sup>7</sup>. For example,

wrote [rot],  
day [dej],  
play [plej],  
came [kejm],  
take [tejk],  
straight [strejt],  
complain [kəm'plejn],  
translation [træns'leɪʃən],  
imagination [i,mædʒi'neɪʃən<sup>8</sup>].

#### **Different patterns of word stress**

In Uzbek word stress is free as it may fall on any syllable. Word stress in Uzbek has become free as a result of language contact which is observed in the cited examples. In the Turkic languages, particularly in Uzbek, word stress usually falls on the final syllable. Turkic languages are regarded as agglutinative, i.e. word forms may take from one to six suffixes and word stress tends to be at the end of the word form and very often the last syllable receives stress.

The placement and degrees of word stress in Uzbek depend on the syllabic structure of words. Different degrees of word stress may fall on any syllable of a polysyllabic word. But primary stress cannot be shifted from one syllable to another in most English words though some suffixes may be added. Uzbek learners tend to shift word stress to the end of the English words<sup>9</sup>:

for example: magnificent- [mæɡ'nɪfɪs(ə)nt] is pronounced as [mæɡnɪfɪ's(ə)nt]; develop- [dɪ'veləp] is pronounced as [dɪve'lop]; development-[dɪ'veləpm(ə)nt] is pronounced as [dɪveləp'm(ə)nt]

#### **Incorrect pronunciation of vowel sounds in sequence:**

	correct pronunciation	incorrect pronunciation
audience	[ˈɔ:diəns]	[ˈaʊdiəns]
audio	[ˈɔ:diəʊ]	[ˈaʊdiəʊ]
author	[ˈɔ:θə(r)]	[ˈaʊθə(r)]

<sup>7</sup> The same source

<sup>8</sup> The same source

<sup>9</sup> Abduazizov. A.A. English phonetics. Theoretical course. –T., 2006.

*autumn*      ['ɔ:təm]      ['aʊ:təm]<sup>10</sup>

**The existence of silent letters:**

	correct pronunciation	incorrect pronunciation
<i>answer</i>	['a:nsə(r)]	['a:nswə(r)]
<i>awkward</i>	['ɔ:kwə(r)d]	['ɔ:wkwə(r)d]
<i>building</i>	['bɪldɪŋ]	['bɔɪldɪŋ]
<i>calm</i>	[ka:m]	[ka:lm] <sup>11</sup>

**The existence of consonant clusters:**

Consonant clusters also cause problems for Uzbek speakers, with the result that they will insert a vowel sound both before and in the cluster. For example, *stress* would be [esteress]<sup>12</sup>. As you can imagine, this can cause huge pronunciation and comprehensibility issues. Many of Advanced English Education students are still not able to pronounce English final consonant clusters correctly. Especially to those words that containing [rst], [kst], [nd], and [mp] final consonant clusters. They tend to get rid one sound at the end of the word or to add one vowel in the middle of these consonant clusters.

O'.Hoshimov states that the features are more pronounced when comparing the English phonetic system with the Uzbek phonetic system. They differ in quantity, quality and sharpness.

The difference in quantity: English vowels are pronounced short and long. In Uzbek such sounds are rare. The long vowel changes the meaning in English. For example: *it-eat, ship-sheep, live-leave*.

In terms of quality, English vowels are divided into monophthongs, diphthongs and triphthongs. But this is not typical of Uzbek sounds<sup>13</sup>.

In English sounds are pronounced differently from Uzbek. English consonant sounds differ from Uzbek consonant sounds in sharpness, soft pronunciation, and lack of exchange<sup>14</sup>.

The above differences cause phonetic interference between languages and prevent faster and perfect acquisition of the pronunciation of the language being studied.

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<sup>12</sup> Al-Homoud, E., & Schmitt, N. (2009). Extensive reading in a challenging environment: A comparison of extensive reading programs in Saudi Arabian and Kuwaiti tertiary institutions. *Language Teaching Research*, 13(4), 383-401.

<sup>13</sup> O'.Hoshimov, I. Yoqubov. *Ingliz tili o'qitish metodikasi*. Toshkent. "Sharq" nashriyoti, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> The same source

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