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A PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION ERRORS MADE BY UZBEK-SPEAKING C1 LEARNERS

Ermanov Davron Raxmatali o‘g‘li
Senior Teacher, National university of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek
Department of foreign language and literature
davron.ermanov@gmail.com
+998949189070
Zayniyeva Gulchaman Ilhomjon qizi
Teacher, National university of Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek
Department of foreign language and literature
gulchamanzayniyeva@gmail.com
+99897 002 53 71

Abstract
This study examines English pronunciation errors produced by Uzbek-speaking learners at the C1 proficiency level from a phonological perspective. A total of 22 pronunciation errors were identified and classified into several categories, including word stress errors, vowel length errors, vowel substitution, diphthong-related errors, weak syllable deletion, and mispronunciation of interdental consonants. The findings reveal that most errors stem from typological differences between the phonological systems of English and Uzbek, particularly in terms of stress patterns, vowel reduction, and rhythmic structure. Furthermore, some errors appear to be associated with the complexity of English lexical stress rules and insufficient targeted phonetic instruction. The study highlights the importance of explicit pronunciation training even at advanced levels of language proficiency.
Keywords
pronunciation errors, phonological transfer, English language, Uzbek language, word stress, vowel reduction, vowel length, diphthong, pronunciation, C1 learners

Introduction

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the development of communicative competence in foreign language education. Despite achieving high levels of grammatical and lexical proficiency, advanced language learners often continue to experience difficulties in pronunciation. In particular, learners at the C1 level may demonstrate strong command of vocabulary and grammar while still facing challenges in acquiring the phonological system of the target language.

Previous research suggests that pronunciation errors are frequently associated with first language (L1) transfer, the complexity of English stress patterns, and the inaccurate application of vowel reduction. Since English and Uzbek differ substantially in terms of stress placement,

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rhythm, and vowel systems, pronunciation remains a challenging aspect of language acquisition for Uzbek-speaking learners.

Literature Review

Several studies have linked the pronunciation difficulties of Uzbek-speaking learners to differences in stress patterns and vowel reduction. Umarova (2026), Aliyevna (2026), Baratova (2021), and Almbark (2014) argue that unstressed vowels in Uzbek generally retain their quality (Ermanov, 2020), whereas English frequently employs schwa and other reduced vowels in unstressed syllables. This difference often leads learners to pronounce English words with inappropriate stress patterns and insufficient vowel reduction.

Research conducted by Karjo (2016), AlMuselhy (2024), and Mohammad (2023) demonstrates that the complexity of English lexical stress rules can result in stress-shift errors even among advanced learners. According to these studies, learners frequently transfer stress patterns from their native language to English, particularly when producing multisyllabic words (Ermanov, 2020).

Difficulties related to vowel length and diphthongs have also been identified as significant challenges in second-language phonological acquisition. Ghosh (2021), Richards (2016), Nuraini (2024), and Karjo (2016) emphasize that learners often struggle to distinguish between short and long vowels and to accurately produce English diphthongs.

Furthermore, Niu (2023) and Baratova (2021) note that interdental consonants /θ/ and /ð/ are absent in Uzbek. Consequently, learners tend to substitute these sounds with more familiar alveolar consonants such as /t/, /s/, or /z/, resulting in persistent pronunciation errors.

Methodology

The study investigated the English pronunciation of first-year C1-level students enrolled in the Foreign Language and Literature program at the National University of Uzbekistan. Data were collected through pronunciation tasks and samples of spontaneous oral speech.

The identified pronunciation errors were analyzed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and categorized according to their phonological characteristics. The classification framework included:

- word stress errors;
- vowel length errors;
- vowel substitution;
- diphthong errors;
- weak syllable deletion;
- consonant substitution;
- mixed phonological errors.

A total of 22 pronunciation errors were identified and analyzed.

Results

The analysis revealed seven major categories of pronunciation errors.

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1. Word Stress Errors

Word stress errors constituted the largest category.

Examples include:

- access → /əkˈses/
- beneficial → /ˌbeˈnəfɪʃəl/
- decision → /dɪsɪˈʒən/
- achievement → /ˈætʃiːvmənt/
- engagement → /ˈɛnjeɪdʒmənt/
- consideration → /ˈkɒnsaɪdeˌreɪʃən/
- considered → /ˈkɒnsaɪdrəd/
- complex → /kəmˈplɛks/
- influence → /ɪnˈfluːens/
- interested → /ɪn.tə.resˈtɪd/

These errors accounted for more than half of all identified pronunciation problems. They can be attributed to both the complexity of English lexical stress and the influence of Uzbek stress patterns.

2. Weak Syllable Deletion

Only one example of weak syllable deletion was identified:

- international → /ˈɪn.tə.næʃ.nəl/

This error appears to result from the incorrect application of vowel reduction and schwa production in English unstressed syllables.

3. Vowel Length Errors

Several learners demonstrated difficulties in producing appropriate vowel length:

- together → /tuːˈgeðər/
- resources → /ˈriːzɔːrsɪz/
- crisis → /ˈkrɪːsɪs/
- and so → /end soː/

These examples indicate a tendency to overlengthen certain vowels.

4. Epenthesis (vowel insertion) is a phonological process in which a vowel sound is added to a word to make the pronunciation of consonant clusters easier.

In Uzbek, complex word-final consonant clusters occur less frequently than in English. As a result, Uzbek-speaking learners of English often insert an additional vowel sound when pronouncing unfamiliar or difficult consonant sequences. This strategy simplifies the cluster and makes the word conform more closely to the phonotactic patterns of their first language (L1). Consequently, pronunciations such as *members* /ˈmembərɪz/ instead of the target form /ˈmembəz/ may occur due to L1 phonological transfer.

5. Diphthong-Related Errors

Errors involving diphthongs included:

- worldwide → /ˈwɜːld.wɪd/
- horizon → /həˈraɪzən/

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These errors suggest difficulties in the perception and production of English diphthongs.

6. Interdental Consonant Errors

The following examples illustrate substitution of interdental consonants:

- authorize → /ˈɔːsəraɪz/
- they → /θeɪ/

These errors are consistent with the absence of /θ/ and /ð/ in the Uzbek phonological inventory.

7. Mixed Phonological Errors

Some words exhibited multiple simultaneous phonological deviations:

- resilience → /rɪˈzɪljəns/
- resources → /ˈriːzɔːrsɪz/
- interested → /ɪn.tə.resˈtɪd/
- horizon → /həˈraɪzən/

These examples involve combinations of stress, vowel, and syllable-related errors.

Discussion

The findings indicate that lexical stress represents the most significant challenge for Uzbek-speaking C1 learners. More than half of the identified errors were directly or indirectly related to stress placement. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Karjo (2016), AlMuselhy (2024), and Mohammad (2023), which highlight the difficulty of mastering English stress patterns.

The second major area of difficulty involves the vowel system. Errors related to vowel length, vowel substitution, and diphthong production accounted for a substantial proportion of the data. Since vowel length does not function as a phonemic contrast in contemporary Uzbek to the same extent as in English, learners may struggle to acquire English long-short vowel distinctions.

Errors involving interdental consonants provide a clear example of phonological transfer. When confronted with unfamiliar sounds, learners tend to replace them with the closest equivalents available in their native language.

Furthermore, weak syllable deletion and vowel reduction errors may be explained by differences between the stress-timed rhythm of English and the relatively syllable-timed nature of Uzbek. Because unstressed vowels in Uzbek generally maintain their quality, learners often fail to reduce vowels appropriately in English.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that pronunciation errors among Uzbek-speaking C1 learners are primarily associated with first-language transfer, the complexity of English lexical stress patterns, vowel reduction, and vowel length distinctions. All twenty-two identified errors can be explained by one or more of these phonological factors.

The results suggest that advanced learners would benefit from explicit instruction focusing on lexical stress, schwa production, vowel reduction, interdental consonants, and minimal-pair practice. Incorporating contrastive phonological training into pronunciation

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instruction may help learners overcome persistent pronunciation difficulties and achieve greater intelligibility in spoken English.

The study also suggests that pronunciation instruction should remain an integral component of language education even at advanced proficiency levels, as grammatical and lexical competence does not necessarily guarantee phonological accuracy.

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