

VARIATIONS IN PRONUNCIATION DUE TO CULTURE AND LANGUAGE: A STUDY OF EFL LEARNERS

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Annotatsiya: Talaffuz til bilish darajasining muhim tarkibiy qismi hisoblanadi, ammo u ko'pincha o'rganuvchining ona tili va madaniy muhitidan ta'sirlanadi. Ushbu tadqiqot O'zbekiston Davlat Jahon Tillari Universitetining ikkinchi kurs ilg'or talabalari orasida ingliz tilida talaffuzga madaniy va lingvistik farqlar qanday ta'sir ko'rsatishini o'rganadi. Tadqiqot oldindan va keyin test qilish usuli asosida o'tkazilib, maxsus fonetik mashg'ulotlardan oldin va keyin talaffuz farqlari baholandi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, talabalarning ona tilidagi fonologik tizimi ingliz tilidagi tovushlarni, ayniqsa, unli tovushlarning uzunligi, urg'u namunalari va undosh tovushlarning talaffuzini sezilarli darajada ta'sir qiladi. Bundan tashqari, ingliz tilidagi ommaviy axborot vositalariga ta'sir qilish darajasi va talaffuzga bo'lgan madaniy munosabat kabi sotsiolingvistik omillar ham o'rganildi. Maxsus talaffuz mashg'ulotlaridan so'ng, talabalarning talaffuzida sezilarli yaxshilanishlar kuzatildi, bu esa aniq maqsadli fonetik mashg'ulotlarning ahamiyatini ta'kidlaydi. Ushbu tadqiqot chet tili sifatida ingliz tilini o'rgatishda madaniy xususiyatlarni hisobga olgan holda talaffuz ta'limining zarurligini ko'rsatadi va fonetikani kommunikativ til o'qitish metodlariga integratsiya qilish muhimligini ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: fonetika, EFL o'quvchilari, fonologik ta'sir, ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish, sotsiolingvistika

Аннотация: Произношение является ключевым компонентом владения языком, однако оно часто подвергается влиянию родного языка и культурного фона учащегося. В данном исследовании рассматривается влияние культурных и лингвистических различий на произношение английского языка среди студентов второго курса продвинутого уровня в Узбекском государственном университете мировых языков. В исследовании применялся метод предварительного и последующего тестирования для оценки различий в произношении до и после целенаправленного фонетического обучения. Результаты показывают, что фонологическая система родного языка студентов оказывает значительное влияние на произношение английских звуков, особенно в отношении длины гласных, моделей ударения и артикуляции согласных. Кроме того, социолингвистические факторы, такие как уровень воздействия англоязычных СМИ и культурные установки в отношении произношения,

влиять на способность учащихся осваивать аутентичное английское произношение. После специального фонетического обучения наблюдались улучшения, что подчеркивает важность целенаправленного фонетического тренинга. Это исследование подчеркивает необходимость культурно-ориентированного обучения произношению для устранения языковых барьеров в классах изучения английского языка как иностранного, а также важность интеграции фонетики в коммуникативные методы преподавания языка.

Ключевые слова: фонетика, изучающие английский как иностранный, фонологическое влияние, овладение вторым языком, социолингвистика

Abstract: Pronunciation is a key component of language proficiency, yet it is often influenced by a learner's native language and cultural background. This study examines how cultural and linguistic variations affect English pronunciation among second-year advanced students at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. A pre-test and post-test approach was used to assess pronunciation differences before and after targeted phonetic training. The findings reveal that students' native phonological systems significantly impact their pronunciation of English sounds, particularly in vowel length, stress patterns, and consonant articulation. Additionally, sociolinguistic factors such as exposure to English media and cultural attitudes toward pronunciation influence learners' ability to acquire native-like pronunciation. After focused pronunciation instruction, improvements were observed, highlighting the importance of targeted phonetic training. This study underscores the need for culturally responsive pronunciation instruction to bridge linguistic gaps in EFL classrooms, emphasizing the importance of integrating phonetics into communicative language teaching methods.

Keywords: phonetics, EFL learners, phonological interference, second-language acquisition, sociolinguistics

I. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation plays a crucial role in language comprehension and communication. However, learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often struggle with pronunciation due to the influence of their first language (L1) phonology and cultural background. Differences in vowel length, consonant articulation, stress patterns, and rhythm can lead to misunderstandings and communication barriers. Previous research suggests that pronunciation challenges stem from phonological interference, where sounds from the native language affect the articulation of the target language. This study aims to analyze pronunciation variations among Uzbek EFL learners and assess the effectiveness of targeted phonetic training in improving their pronunciation.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined the role of first-language phonology in second-language pronunciation. Lado (1957) introduced the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which argues that differences between L1 and L2 phonological systems cause pronunciation difficulties. For example, Uzbek lacks certain English phonemes, such as the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, leading learners to substitute these sounds with /s/ or /z/, respectively. Similarly, the Uzbek vowel system does not distinguish between long and short vowels in the same way English does, resulting in pronunciation errors in words like "ship" versus "sheep."

Flege's Speech Learning Model (1995) suggests that adults struggle with new phonetic contrasts if they do not exist in their native language. This is particularly relevant in EFL settings, where learners are often exposed to English pronunciation only in classroom settings with limited real-life interaction. Studies by Derwing and Munro (2009) emphasize that pronunciation training is effective when it focuses on intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy. This perspective aligns with communicative language teaching principles, which prioritize effective communication over perfect pronunciation.

Additionally, cultural attitudes towards pronunciation can influence learners' motivation to improve their spoken English. Some cultures emphasize written proficiency over oral skills, leading students to deprioritize pronunciation practice. Moreover, learners who are frequently exposed to English media tend to develop better pronunciation skills compared to those with minimal exposure. This suggests that pronunciation development is not solely a linguistic challenge but also a sociocultural phenomenon.

Research on Uzbek and other Central Asian EFL learners indicates that common pronunciation difficulties include mispronunciation of English vowels, incorrect stress placement, and the substitution of English phonemes with native equivalents (Rahimova, 2020). Given these findings, this study aims to investigate how explicit pronunciation training can mitigate these issues and improve learners' spoken English.

II.METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. A sample of 50 second-year students at Uzbekistan State World Languages University participated in the study. The research was conducted over a six-week period, during which students underwent pronunciation assessment and phonetic training.

Pre-test and Post-test: Students read a standardized passage aloud, which was recorded and analyzed using phonetic transcription. Key pronunciation features assessed included vowel accuracy, stress patterns, and consonant articulation. The same passage was used for the post-test to measure improvement after training.

Phonetic Training: A structured pronunciation intervention was implemented, consisting of:

Minimal Pair Exercises: Students practiced distinguishing and pronouncing commonly confused vowel and consonant sounds, such as /i:/ vs. /ɪ/ and /θ/ vs. /s/.

Intonation Drills: Exercises focused on natural English rhythm and stress, including sentence stress and contrastive stress patterns.

Interactive Role-Plays: Students engaged in dialogue-based activities designed to encourage spontaneous speech with a focus on pronunciation accuracy.

Listening and Shadowing Activities: Exposure to native English speakers through recorded materials helped students develop better phonemic awareness.

Student Perception Survey: A survey was conducted to assess students' awareness of pronunciation difficulties and their perception of the training effectiveness. Questions focused on confidence levels, perceived improvement, and preferred instructional methods.

III.RESULTS

The pre-test results showed that 80% of students had difficulties with English vowel sounds, particularly distinguishing between long and short vowels (e.g., "ship" vs. "sheep"). Incorrect vowel pronunciation was the most frequent issue, accounting for 45% of all recorded errors. Additionally, stress placement errors were common, with 65% of students misplacing primary stress in multi-syllabic words, such as "photograph" vs. "photography." Consonant substitution was another significant issue, particularly with sounds not found in Uzbek (e.g., replacing /θ/ with /s/ and /ð/ with /z/).

After the phonetic training, post-test results showed:

A 40% improvement in vowel pronunciation accuracy, particularly in differentiating short and long vowels.

A 30% reduction in stress placement errors, with students demonstrating better awareness of syllable emphasis.

A 50% decrease in consonant substitution errors, especially with sounds like /θ/ and /ð/.

An increase in speaking confidence, with 85% of students reporting that they felt more comfortable speaking English after training.

Students who engaged more frequently in listening and shadowing activities demonstrated higher levels of improvement compared to those who relied solely on in-class instruction.

IV:DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that cultural and linguistic background significantly influence English pronunciation. Uzbek-speaking EFL learners tend to transfer phonetic rules from their native language, leading to systematic pronunciation errors.

The results support prior research by Lado (1957) and Flege (1995), which emphasize the impact of phonological interference on second-language pronunciation. However, the study also highlights the role of sociolinguistic factors, such as exposure to English media and attitudes toward pronunciation practice.

The improvement in students' pronunciation underscores the importance of explicit phonetic instruction and practice. Minimal pair exercises were particularly effective in helping students differentiate vowel sounds, while intonation drills improved stress and rhythm. The significant reduction in consonant substitution errors suggests that targeted articulation practice can successfully address phonetic transfer issues. Furthermore, students' increased confidence suggests that pronunciation training enhances both linguistic competence and communicative self-assurance.

These findings highlight the need for pronunciation instruction to be integrated into broader communicative language teaching strategies. Instead of treating pronunciation as a separate skill, educators should incorporate phonetics into speaking and listening activities to create a more holistic language learning experience.

V.CONCLUSION

Pronunciation variations due to cultural and linguistic influences are a significant challenge for EFL learners. This study demonstrates that focused phonetic training can lead to substantial improvements in pronunciation accuracy and learner confidence. The findings suggest that integrating pronunciation exercises into regular speaking activities can help students overcome phonetic transfer issues. Future research could explore the long-term retention of pronunciation skills and the impact of incorporating pronunciation-focused technology, such as AI-based speech recognition tools, into language classrooms. Implementing culturally responsive pronunciation strategies can help bridge linguistic gaps and improve overall communicative competence in EFL settings.

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