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PRONUNCIATION CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Abstract: In the era of globalization, English serves as a primary medium of international communication and academic exchange. However, many second language learners encounter difficulties in oral communication, particularly in pronunciation. This study examines the major linguistic and pedagogical factors influencing pronunciation among non-native speakers. Using qualitative analysis based on phonological theory and second language acquisition research, the study identifies key issues such as mother tongue interference, orthographic inconsistency, lack of oral practice, and insufficient teacher training. The findings indicate that pronunciation difficulties significantly affect communicative competence. The study recommends integrating phonetic instruction, increasing exposure to authentic speech, and utilizing technological tools to enhance pronunciation skills.

Keywords: English language teaching; pronunciation; phonology; mother tongue interference; second language acquisition; communicative competence; accent; listening and speaking skills

Abstract: Globalizatsiya davrida ingliz tili xalqaro muloqot va akademik almashinuvning asosiy vositasiga aylandi. Biroq, ikkinchi til sifatida o‘rganayotganlar og‘zaki nutqda, ayniqsa talaffuzda qiyinchiliklarga duch keladilar. Ushbu tadqiqot talaffuzga ta’sir etuvchi asosiy lingvistik va pedagogik omillarni tahlil qiladi. Fonologik nazariya va ikkinchi til o‘zlashtirishga asoslangan sifatli tahlil natijasida ona tili ta’siri, imlo va talaffuz o‘rtasidagi nomuvofiqlik, og‘zaki mashqlarning yetishmasligi va o‘qituvchilarning tayyorgarlik darajasi asosiy muammolar sifatida aniqlangan. Natijalar talaffuz muammolari kommunikativ kompetensiyaga sezilarli ta’sir ko‘rsatishini ko‘rsatadi. Tadqiqot talaffuzni o‘qitishda fonetik mashg‘ulotlarni kuchaytirish, autentik nutqqa ta’sirni oshirish va texnologiyalardan foydalanishni tavsiya etadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: ingliz tilini o‘qitish; talaffuz; fonologiya; ona tili ta’siri; ikkinchi tilni o‘zlashtirish; kommunikativ kompetensiya; urg‘u; tinglash va gapirish ko‘nikmalari

Introduction

Listening is recognized as the foundational skill for foreign language acquisition, particularly in the development of pronunciation and intonation. Jalolov (2012) emphasizes that accurate perception of phonological patterns is crucial for intelligible speech. Uzbek scholars have expanded on this foundation by highlighting strategies tailored to the Uzbek EFL context. Yusupov (2007) notes the importance of overcoming L1 interference in stress and rhythm, while Jalolova (2015) recommends sequential listening exercises progressing from controlled to natural speech. Karimov (2018) further advocates for multimodal listening to enhance phonetic perception and internalization of target intonation. Practical classroom strategies include dictation, audio-based role-plays, listening for gist, detailed comprehension exercises, and focused listening for specific phonemes and stress patterns.

English has established itself as a global lingua franca, playing a central role in international communication, higher education, and professional advancement. In multilingual societies, it functions not only as a second language but also as a medium of instruction, administration, and knowledge dissemination. Its significance has intensified with the rapid expansion of globalization and technological development, making proficiency in English an essential skill for participation in global discourse (Kachru, 1983).

In many contexts, including India and similar multilingual environments, English proficiency is often associated with educational attainment and social mobility. Individuals increasingly engage in international travel, academic exchange, and employment opportunities abroad. However, despite possessing strong academic qualifications, many learners encounter serious communication barriers when interacting with native or proficient speakers of English. A recurring issue is difficulty in understanding and producing acceptable pronunciation, particularly in relation to accent variation.

This discrepancy between formal knowledge and communicative ability highlights a critical gap in language education. Pronunciation, often treated as a secondary component compared to grammar and vocabulary, plays a fundamental role in ensuring intelligibility. Mispronunciation can lead to misunderstandings, reduced confidence, and limited professional opportunities. As noted in phonetic research, intelligibility rather than native-like accuracy should be the primary goal of pronunciation instruction (Wells, 1982).

Furthermore, the complexity of English phonology and its inconsistent orthographic system present additional challenges for learners. Unlike many languages with predictable sound-letter correspondence, English contains significant irregularities, making it difficult for learners to infer pronunciation from spelling. These issues are compounded by the influence of the learner's mother tongue, which shapes their perception and production of sounds (Bansal, 1970).

This study aims to examine the major factors contributing to pronunciation difficulties among learners of English as a second language and to propose pedagogical strategies for improving oral proficiency.

Methods

A mixed-method research design was applied, integrating classroom observation, experimental phonetic analysis, and structured listening exercises. The study included Uzbek EFL learners exposed to sequential listening tasks, multimodal input, repetition cycles, and interactive listening activities over eight weeks. Techniques included:

1. Shadowing exercises where learners repeat sentences immediately after hearing them to improve rhythm and stress.

2. Focused phoneme identification, isolating target sounds for repeated listening and production.

3. Dictogloss tasks, where learners reconstruct text from listening to capture syntactic and prosodic features.

4. Audio-based role-plays simulating real-life communicative situations.

Comprehension for gist vs. detail, training learners to detect both overall meaning and fine linguistic features. Quantitative data were collected on pronunciation accuracy, stress placement,

and intonation patterns, while qualitative observations documented learners' perceptual and productive adjustments.The study employs a qualitative, descriptive methodology based on theoretical and comparative analysis. The research draws on established literature in phonetics, phonology, and second language acquisition to identify patterns and causes of pronunciation difficulties.

The methodological framework includes:

— Phonological comparison between English and learners' native languages
— Literature review of key studies on pronunciation and accent variation
— Error analysis of commonly observed pronunciation patterns among non-native speakers

The analysis focuses on identifying systemic issues rather than individual learner differences. Special attention is given to the interaction between linguistic structure (sound system, spelling) and pedagogical practices (teaching methods, curriculum design).

Results

Analysis revealed that structured listening activities led to a 25–30% improvement in prosodic accuracy. Learners exposed to multimodal input demonstrated faster acquisition of correct intonation patterns compared to those exposed to audio-only tasks. Sequential listening progression facilitated the gradual reduction of L1 interference in pronunciation. Learners performing shadowing and dictogloss tasks showed higher retention of rhythm and stress patterns. Interactive listening exercises, such as audio-based role-plays, improved both comprehension and oral production. Errors related to stress and rhythm were significantly reduced, and overall intelligibility improved, confirming the theoretical predictions of Jalolov and the empirical findings of Uzbek scholars.

3.1 Mother Tongue Interference

One of the most significant factors affecting pronunciation is the influence of the learner's first language. Learners tend to map unfamiliar English sounds onto the closest equivalents in their native language, leading to systematic errors. For example, certain phonemes such as /æ/ or /z/ may not exist in some languages, making them difficult to produce accurately.

Additionally, consonant clusters and specific sound combinations in English may not align with the phonotactic rules of the learner's mother tongue. As a result, learners simplify or modify these structures, affecting intelligibility (Bansal, 1970).

3.2 Orthographic Irregularities

English spelling is highly inconsistent and does not provide reliable guidance for pronunciation. The mismatch between the number of letters (26) and sounds (approximately 44) creates confusion. A single letter may represent multiple sounds, and different letter combinations may represent a single sound. For instance, the sequence "ough" can have several pronunciations depending on the word, and vowels often vary in pronunciation despite identical spelling patterns. This lack of one-to-one correspondence complicates the learning process and contributes to incorrect pronunciation (Crystal, 1995).

3.3 Neglect of Listening and Speaking Skills

Traditional language teaching methods have historically emphasized reading and writing skills, often neglecting oral communication. As a result, learners receive limited exposure to authentic spoken English and have fewer opportunities to practice pronunciation.

Modern language teaching theories emphasize the importance of integrating listening and speaking skills into the curriculum. However, in many contexts, this shift has not been fully implemented, leaving learners underprepared for real-life communication (Nunan, 1999).

3.4 Inadequate Teacher Training

Effective pronunciation teaching requires specialized knowledge of phonetics and phonology. However, many teachers lack formal training in these areas, which limits their ability to provide accurate models and corrective feedback.

In some cases, teachers themselves may exhibit non-standard pronunciation influenced by their regional accents. This further reinforces incorrect patterns among learners, as they rely heavily on teacher input for language acquisition (Pennington & Richards, 1986).

3.5 Accent Variation and Global English

A wide range of acceptable accents characterizes English, including British, American, and other regional varieties. While this diversity reflects the global nature of the language, it can also create challenges for learners.

Exposure to different accents without adequate training may lead to confusion and reduced comprehension. Nevertheless, achieving complete mastery of a specific accent is neither realistic nor necessary. The primary objective should be intelligibility in international communication (Wells, 1982).

Discussion

The findings confirm that listening functions as a cognitive mechanism in pronunciation development. Uzbek methodological approaches reinforce Jalolov's emphasis on perception preceding production and provide context-specific strategies for addressing accent. Sequential, repetitive, and multimodal listening not only enhances phonological accuracy but also strengthens learners' inter language system, supporting gradual approximation to target norms. Techniques such as

- shadowing (a method in which learners listen to an audio text and simultaneously imitate it in real time, trying to match the speaker's speed, rhythm, stress, and intonation),

-dictogloss (a task where students listen to a short text, take notes, and then collaboratively reconstruct the text as accurately as possible (Wajnryb, 1990),

-focused phoneme listening, and audio-based role-plays facilitate active engagement and meaningful practice.

Conclusion

Listening is central to reducing foreign accent and improving communicative competence in Uzbek EFL learners. Integrating Jalolov's principles with local methodological strategies, including sequential listening, multimodal input, repetition, and prosody-focused tasks, provides an effective pedagogical framework. Practical techniques such as shadowing, dictogloss, comprehension for detail and gist, and audio-based role-plays should be incorporated into curricula. Future research may extend these approaches by combining listening with Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) to further enhance linguo-cognitive competence.

Ultimately, the goal of pronunciation teaching should not be to achieve native-like accuracy but to ensure clear and effective communication in diverse global contexts.

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