

DIFFICULTIES UZBEK LEARNERS FACE IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract. Pronunciation is one of the most essential yet challenging skills for language learners to master—especially for those learning English, a language known for its irregular spelling and wide variety of sounds. For Uzbek learners, English pronunciation presents a unique set of difficulties rooted in the structural differences between the Uzbek and English sound systems. While Uzbek is a relatively phonetic language with consistent spelling rules and fewer vowel and consonant sounds, English is far more complex in both pronunciation and rhythm. These differences create barriers for Uzbek speakers when trying to produce and distinguish English sounds, particularly those that do not exist in their native language. Problems often arise with specific consonants like the "th" sounds (/θ/ and /ð/), vowel distinctions such as /ɪ/ vs. /i:/, and features like word stress, intonation, and consonant clusters. In addition, the influence of Uzbek speech rhythm and spelling habits can result in unnatural or unclear English pronunciation.

Key words: Vowel sounds, diphthongs, consonant sounds, intonation, unstressed syllables, regular intervals, stress-timed, learners, Uzbek, English sounds, mispronunciations, struggle, influence, equivalents, weak stress, statements.

Phonetic differences between Uzbek and English: One of the main reasons Uzbek learners struggle with English pronunciation lies in the significant phonetic differences between the two languages. Uzbek has fewer vowel and consonant sounds compared to English, which causes learners to substitute unfamiliar English sounds with the closest Uzbek equivalents. Understanding these challenges is the first step toward overcoming them. By identifying the specific areas where Uzbek learners commonly struggle, teachers and students alike can take targeted steps to improve pronunciation and develop clearer, more natural spoken English.

Vowel sounds: English has around 12 vowel sounds, including short, long, diphthongs, and triphthongs, whereas Uzbek has only 6 pure vowel sounds. This often leads Uzbek learners to confuse vowel pairs such as /ɪ/ (as in sit) and /i:/ (as in seat), or /æ/ (as in cat) and /e/ (as in bed).

Consonant sounds: Certain English consonants do not exist in Uzbek. For example, the English "th" sounds /θ/ (as in think) and /ð/ (as in this) are particularly difficult. Uzbek speakers often replace these with /s/, /z/, /t/, or /d/, leading to mispronunciations like "think" becoming "sink" or "this" sounding like "dis."

Use **clapping or tapping** to help learners recognize strong vs. weak **stress and intonation patterns:** English is a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables occur at regular intervals, and unstressed syllables are shortened. Uzbek, on the other hand, is more syllable-timed, with each syllable pronounced roughly equally. This difference causes Uzbek learners to struggle with: **Word stress:** Misplacing stress within English words can lead to confusion or even misunderstandings. For example, the noun 'record' stresses the first syllable (RE-cord), but the verb stresses the second (re-CORD). Uzbek learners often apply uniform stress patterns, which can sound unnatural to native English speakers. **Sentence intonation:**

English uses intonation patterns to express questions, statements, emotions, and emphasis. Uzbek learners may speak with a flatter intonation, making their English sound less expressive or sometimes confusing. **Final consonant sounds and clusters:** In Uzbek, words often end with vowels or simpler consonants, whereas English frequently has words ending in consonant clusters, such as *texts*, *walked*, or *friends*. Uzbek speakers may omit or simplify these clusters, which affects clarity and comprehension. For example, the word *friends* might be pronounced as *frend* or *frens* by Uzbek learners, losing the final consonant sound /s/. This can hinder intelligibility in communication.

Influence of Cyrillic and Latin scripts: Although Uzbek uses the Latin alphabet today, many learners are influenced by Cyrillic, which can impact their pronunciation of English letters. For instance, the English letter “v” is pronounced /v/, but the Cyrillic script uses a different symbol for this sound. This can lead to confusion in recognizing and pronouncing English words correctly.

Lack of exposure to natural spoken English. Many Uzbek learners do not have enough opportunities to hear and practice natural English pronunciation in everyday life. Limited access to native speakers or multimedia materials affects their ability to internalize correct pronunciation patterns, making it harder to self-correct **diphthongs** (gliding vowels), many of which do not exist in Uzbek.

Common Confusions:

English Sound	Common Error	Example	Mistaken Pronunciation
/ɪ/ vs /i:/	Confused or merged	<i>ship</i> vs <i>sheep</i>	Both may sound like <i>ship</i>
/æ/ vs /e/	Not distinguished	<i>man</i> vs <i>men</i>	Both may sound like <i>men</i>
/ʌ/ vs /ɑ:/	Substituted with /a/	<i>cup</i> vs <i>car</i>	Both may sound like <i>cap</i>

English uses **stress-timed rhythm**, which means that some syllables are pronounced longer and louder than others. Uzbek, by contrast, uses more **syllable-timed** rhythm, where each syllable has roughly equal stress. Common Issues: Equal stress on all syllables: *imporTANT* → *IM-por-tant*. Ignoring reduced syllables: Unstressed vowels in English often reduce to /ə/ (schwa), which doesn't occur in Uzbek. Example: *banana* → [bə'na:nə], not *ba-NA-na*.

Problematic Sounds: /θ/ and /ð/ – These “th” sounds do not exist in Uzbek. Learners often replace: /θ/ (as in *think*) → /s/ or /t/ /ð/ (as in *this*) → /z/ or /d/ **/v/ and /w/** – These are often confused. Uzbek speakers may say *wine* instead of *vine*, or vice versa. **/ŋ/** – The final “ng” sound in *sing* is often pronounced as /n/ (*sing* → *sin*).

Uzbek has no equivalent sounds for the English “th” sounds, like in “**think**” (/θɪŋk/) or “**this**” (/ðɪs/). So Uzbek learners often replace these sounds with /s/, /z/, /t/, or /d/. Example: *think* → “**sink**” or “**tink**”, *that* → “**dat**” or “**zat**”. This can confuse listeners because you're accidentally saying different words (e.g., *thin* vs *sin*). Practice placing your **tongue gently between your teeth** and blowing air for /θ/ (unvoiced), and **vibrating your vocal cords** for /ð/ (voiced). Use a mirror to check your tongue.

In Uzbek, words usually end with a vowel or a single consonant. English, however, has many words ending in multiple consonants or linking sounds: *helped* → Uzbek learners may omit the final /t/ or /d/. *I want to eat* → Often spoken with breaks between each word, rather than linking *want to* as /wɒnə/.

English spelling often doesn't match pronunciation, while Uzbek is more phonetic. This causes Uzbek learners to **pronounce silent letters** or misread words. Examples: *knight* → pronounced /nart/, not /k-nɪ-g-h-t/, *psychology* → /saɪ'kɒlədʒi/, not /p-syk-ho-lo-gy/, *island* → /'aɪ.lənd/, not /ɪs.lənd/. Uzbek intonation is flatter compared to English, which uses a **rise and fall in pitch** to show emotion, emphasis, or sentence type (question vs statement). Example: *Are you coming?* should rise at the end. Uzbek learners might say it flatly like a statement.

Uzbek has the sound /v/ but not /w/, and learners often mix these two sounds. Examples: *very* → sounds like *wery*, *west* → sounds like *vest*, *wine* vs *vine* → both may sound the same

Uzbek words usually avoid complex clusters of consonants (like three or more in a row), but English has many—especially at the ends of words. Uzbek learners may **drop one or two consonants**. Examples: *texts* → may be pronounced as *text* or *teks*, *asked* → may become *ask*, *friends* → may become *frens* or *fren*

Uzbek has a small number of vowel sounds (about 6), while English has many (over 15), including long vowels and diphthongs. Uzbek learners often **don't distinguish** between sounds like: /ɪ/ (as in *bit*) and /i:/ (as in *beat*), /ʌ/ (as in *cut*) and /ɑ:/ (as in *cart*).

Examples:

- *ship* vs *sheep* → both may sound like *ship*
- *full* vs *fool* → both may sound like *fool*
- *bad* vs *bed* → both may sound like *bed*

Pronunciation challenges faced by Uzbek learners in English stem largely from the linguistic differences between the two languages and limited exposure to native speech. To overcome these difficulties, learners should focus on targeted phonetic practice, including distinguishing difficult vowel and consonant sounds, mastering English stress and intonation, and practicing consonant clusters. Teachers can assist by using phonetic drills, audio-visual materials, and encouraging active listening and speaking in real-life contexts. With patience and focused effort, Uzbek learners can improve their English pronunciation significantly, enhancing both their confidence and communication skills in the global English-speaking world.

Conclusion: Pronunciation is not just about sounding good—it's about being understood. For Uzbek learners of English, pronunciation difficulties stem from deep-rooted linguistic differences between Uzbek and English. These challenges include unfamiliar vowel and consonant sounds, incorrect stress and intonation patterns, problems with consonant clusters, and confusion caused by irregular English spelling.

While these issues can make speaking English clearly a struggle, they are not impossible to overcome. With focused practice, active listening, and guided support, Uzbek learners can gradually build stronger pronunciation skills. Tools like minimal pair exercises, shadowing techniques, and pronunciation apps can make a significant difference. Teachers also play a vital role by introducing learners to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), providing models of natural speech, and correcting errors in a supportive way. Ultimately, pronunciation improvement is a gradual process that requires patience and regular exposure to authentic English. By understanding the specific challenges they face and applying practical strategies, Uzbek learners can gain both clarity and confidence in their spoken English, allowing them to communicate more effectively in academic, professional, and everyday settings.

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