

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING: WHAT MAKES ENGLISH HARD FOR UZBEK SPEAKERS?

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**Abstract.** *Learning a new language involves a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors. For Uzbek speakers, acquiring English presents unique psychological and linguistic challenges shaped by differences in grammar, pronunciation, writing systems, and cultural contexts. Understanding these difficulties from a psychological perspective can help learners, teachers, and curriculum developers create more effective strategies for mastering English.*

**Key words:** *Linguistic, challenging, articles, fundamental, cognitive load, subject-verb-object, native language, grammatical feature, phonological challenges, word order.*

**Grammatical and syntactic differences:** Grammatically, English and Uzbek are quite different:

- **Word Order:** Uzbek typically uses Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order, while English uses Subject-Verb-Object (SVO). This reversal can cause confusion in sentence construction.

- **Articles:** English articles (*a, an, the*) are notoriously difficult for Uzbek speakers because Uzbek doesn't use articles. Learners must grasp abstract distinctions like definiteness and specificity, which are not marked in their native grammar.

- **Tense and aspect:** English verb tenses are more complex and nuanced than those in Uzbek. Uzbek conveys time mostly through aspect and context, while English requires precise tense forms (e.g., *I have eaten* vs. *I ate*), which can feel redundant and confusing.

These differences create a psychological challenge in “rewiring” the learner’s linguistic habits, leading to errors that are difficult to self-correct without sustained practice.

**Linguistic differences and cognitive load:** One of the primary reasons English is challenging for Uzbek speakers is the structural differences between the two languages. Uzbek, a Turkic language, is agglutinative and follows a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, whereas English is an Indo-European language with a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure. This fundamental difference requires learners to reorganize how they think about sentence formation, which increases cognitive load and slows down fluency development. English also uses articles (*a, an, the*), which do not exist in Uzbek. The absence of this grammatical feature in the native language makes it difficult for learners to grasp the correct usage and often leads to errors or omission, affecting sentence accuracy and meaning.

**Phonological challenges and pronunciation anxiety:** English phonology contains sounds unfamiliar to Uzbek speakers. For example, English distinguishes between the sounds /θ/ and /ð/ (as in *think* and *this*), which do not occur in Uzbek. Uzbek speakers often substitute these with /t/ or /d/, leading to misunderstandings. The intonation patterns and stress placement in English also differ significantly, contributing to pronunciation difficulties. These challenges can cause what psychologists call **pronunciation anxiety**, where learners become self-conscious or fearful about speaking, further hindering oral practice and confidence.

**Alphabet and writing system barriers:** Uzbek is written in a Latin-based alphabet similar

to English, but with additional letters representing specific sounds. However, English spelling is notorious for its irregularities and exceptions. The inconsistency between English spelling and pronunciation demands more effort from Uzbek learners to decode words, which can slow down reading fluency and increase frustration.

**Cultural and psychological factors:** Language learning is deeply tied to cultural identity and motivation. Uzbek learners might experience a psychological barrier called **language anxiety**, which involves fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, or negative self-assessment. This anxiety can reduce motivation and impair memory retention. Moreover, the communicative styles differ: Uzbek culture values politeness and indirectness, whereas English communication can be more direct. This difference may cause misunderstandings or a sense of discomfort when learners attempt to participate in English conversations.

Uzbek's grammatical structure is based on subject-object-verb (SOV) order, while English predominantly uses subject-verb-object (SVO) order. This difference requires Uzbek learners to mentally rearrange sentence components, which involves significant cognitive effort and often results in errors during spontaneous speech or writing. For example:

- Uzbek: *Men kitob o'qiyman* (I book read)
- English: *I read a book*

Switching between these structures can lead to confusion and longer processing times, especially in real-time communication.

**Transfer and interference:** From a psychological standpoint, learners often rely on their native language as a reference point—a phenomenon called **language transfer**. While transfer can be helpful, negative transfer or interference occurs when Uzbek grammar or vocabulary mistakenly influences English usage. For example, Uzbek does not use the verb *to be* in the present tense as English does, leading to errors like "He teacher" instead of "He is a teacher."

**Cognitive strategies and metalinguistic awareness:** Despite challenges, Uzbek speakers can leverage their cognitive strengths in language learning. Awareness of linguistic differences encourages the use of **metalinguistic skills**, allowing learners to consciously analyze language rules and exceptions. Educators can support this by explicitly teaching contrasts between Uzbek and English, helping students develop strategies to manage difficult areas.

**The role of motivation and exposure:** Psychological research highlights that motivation—both intrinsic (personal interest) and extrinsic (career goals)—plays a crucial role in overcoming language difficulties. Regular exposure to English through media, conversation, and reading helps reinforce learning and reduces anxiety by increasing familiarity.

**Tense and aspect systems:** English has a more complex system of tenses and aspects (simple, continuous, perfect, perfect continuous), which often do not have direct equivalents in Uzbek. Uzbek expresses time differently, often using contextual clues rather than verb conjugations. This leads to difficulty understanding and using correct English verb forms, causing frequent mistakes like: *I am go to school* instead of *I am going to school*.

**Articles and determiners:** The use of definite (*the*) and indefinite (*a, an*) articles in English is particularly challenging because Uzbek lacks this grammatical category. Learners struggle to determine when and how to use articles correctly, often omitting them or using them inaccurately, which can affect the clarity of their messages.

**Phonetics and pronunciation challenges:** English contains phonemes absent in Uzbek, such as the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ (e.g., *think, this*). Uzbek speakers often replace these sounds with /t/ or /d/, which may lead to misunderstandings. Additionally, English stress-timed

rhythm and intonation patterns differ from the syllable-timed rhythm of Uzbek, making natural-sounding pronunciation difficult to achieve.

**Writing system and orthographic depth:** While Uzbek and English both use Latin alphabets, English spelling is highly irregular and inconsistent. The opaque relationship between English spelling and pronunciation increases cognitive load, making vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency slower and more frustrating for Uzbek learners. Many Uzbek learners experience language anxiety, which encompasses fear of making mistakes, being judged, or speaking in public. This anxiety can hinder speaking practice and reduce overall participation in language learning activities, limiting improvement. Motivation plays a pivotal role in language acquisition. Uzbek learners motivated by academic or professional goals (extrinsic motivation) often have more sustained learning efforts. However, intrinsic motivation, such as genuine interest in English culture or literature, can significantly enhance engagement and retention.

Uzbek culture tends to value politeness, formality, and indirect communication, which can conflict with English's more direct and explicit style. This difference can cause learners to feel uncertain about when and how to participate in discussions or debates, potentially limiting their communicative competence. Language transfer occurs when learners apply rules from their native language (L1) to the target language (L2). Positive transfer helps learning when structures are similar. Negative transfer or interference, however, causes errors when Uzbek patterns are incorrectly applied to English, such as omission of the verb *to be* in sentences. Language learning requires substantial working memory resources to process unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation patterns simultaneously. The unfamiliarity of English grammar increases cognitive load for Uzbek speakers, often resulting in slower speech production and comprehension.

**Brain processing differences:** L1 Uzbek speakers process language using neural networks optimized for Turkic languages, which differ in phonology and syntax from English. Learning English involves creating new neural pathways, which requires intensive practice and time, especially for complex features like English's irregular verbs and stress patterns.

**Limited exposure to English:** In many parts of Uzbekistan, English exposure outside the classroom is limited. Unlike learners in countries where English is commonly used in media, business, or daily life, Uzbek learners may have fewer opportunities to practice listening and speaking in natural contexts. This limited immersion slows down language acquisition and can reduce motivation. **Individual differences in learning styles:** Some Uzbek learners might prefer visual learning, others auditory or kinesthetic. Understanding their preferred style can help teachers tailor instruction, for example, using videos for visual learners or interactive dialogues for kinesthetic learners to make English more accessible. **Metacognitive awareness and self-regulation:** Successful language learners often develop metacognitive skills — the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning. Uzbek learners who cultivate self-regulation techniques (setting goals, seeking feedback, practicing regularly) tend to overcome obstacles more effectively.

**Academic vocabulary and register:** Academic English requires understanding complex vocabulary and formal expressions, which differ greatly from everyday spoken English and from Uzbek academic conventions. This gap can be intimidating and requires explicit vocabulary instruction and practice. **Writing skills and cohesion:** Writing in English involves specific discourse markers, cohesive devices, and argument structures that may not align with Uzbek writing traditions. Learners struggle with essay organization, paragraph linking, and referencing,

which can affect their academic success.

Use of language learning apps and online resources: Modern technologies provide Uzbek learners access to interactive platforms (Duolingo, BBC Learning English, etc.) that offer customized learning experiences, immediate feedback, and opportunities for speaking and listening practice outside the classroom. Overcoming negative beliefs. Some Uzbek learners hold fixed beliefs about their ability to learn English (“I’m not good at languages”). Encouraging a growth mindset — the belief that abilities improve with effort — fosters persistence and resilience, which are crucial for mastering a difficult language like English. Managing language learning stress: Techniques such as mindfulness, positive self-talk, and relaxation exercises can help learners manage stress related to language tests, speaking anxiety, or academic pressures.

**Conclusion:** The psychology of language learning reveals that English poses specific challenges for Uzbek speakers due to linguistic differences, pronunciation difficulties, writing system irregularities, and cultural factors. By understanding these obstacles, educators and learners can develop targeted strategies that reduce anxiety, promote confidence, and enhance effective acquisition of English. Combining cognitive awareness with motivation and exposure can transform difficulties into opportunities for success.

Mastering English as an Uzbek speaker is a multifaceted challenge involving linguistic hurdles, cognitive demands, cultural adjustments, and emotional regulation. Addressing these from multiple angles — sociolinguistic, neurocognitive, psychological, and pedagogical — offers a comprehensive roadmap for learners and educators. Embracing technology, fostering positive attitudes, and applying effective teaching strategies can transform difficulties into growth and success.

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