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## **The importance of word stress in English and Uzbek languages: a comparative analysis**

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### **Annotation**

*This article delves deeply into the phonological challenges that Uzbek learners encounter when acquiring English phonetics, offering a comprehensive comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between the sound systems of English and Uzbek. The focus is placed on vowel and consonant inventories, stress patterns, intonation contours, and their acoustic realizations. By examining these elements, the study identifies key difficulties, such as the production of English-specific phonemes like the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, which have no direct equivalents in Uzbek, and the diphthongs that contrast with Uzbek's monophthongal vowel system. Additionally, it explores how native Uzbek prosodic patterns – characterized by syllable-timed rhythm and predictable final-syllable stress – interfere with the stress-timed rhythm and variable stress placement in English, often leading to mispronunciations that affect intelligibility in communication. Drawing on a wide array of linguistic theories, including Metrical Phonology (Liberman & Prince, 1977) and Rhythm Typology (Dauer, 1983), as well as empirical studies from sources like Athanasopoulou et al. (2020) and Ismailova (2022), the article synthesizes findings from acoustic analyses, perceptual experiments, and classroom observations. It further discusses pedagogical strategies to mitigate these challenges, such as contrastive analysis exercises that highlight cross-linguistic differences, targeted phonetic training programs involving minimal pairs and shadowing techniques, and the integration of modern technological tools like speech recognition software (e.g., ELSA Speak or Praat for acoustic visualization) and online platforms for interactive pronunciation practice.*

### **Keywords**

*Phonology, English pronunciation, Uzbek learners, phonetic challenges, vowels, consonants, stress, intonation*

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## **Важность ударения слов в английском и узбекском языках: сравнительный анализ**

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### **Аннотация**

*Данная статья глубоко исследует фонологические трудности, с которыми сталкиваются узбекоязычные учащиеся при освоении английской фонетики, предлагая всесторонний сравнительный анализ сходств и различий между звуковыми системами английского и узбекского языков. В фокусе внимания находятся системы гласных и согласных звуков, паттерны ударения, контуры интонации и их акустические реализации. Путем анализа этих элементов исследование выявляет ключевые проблемы, такие как произношение специфических для английского фонем, например, межзубных фрикативных /θ/ и /ð/, которые не имеют прямых эквивалентов в*

узбекском, а также дифтонгов, контрастирующих с монофтонгальной системой гласных узбекского. Кроме того, оно рассматривает, как родные просодические паттерны узбекского – характеризующиеся слоговым ритмом и предсказуемым ударением на последнем слоге – вмешиваются в ударный ритм и переменное размещение ударения в английском, часто приводя к ошибкам в произношении, влияющим на понятность в общении. Опираясь на широкий спектр лингвистических теорий, включая Метрическую Фонологию (Lieberman & Prince, 1977) и Типологию Ритма (Dauer, 1983), а также эмпирические исследования из источников вроде Athanasopoulou et al. (2020) и Ismailova (2022), статья синтезирует результаты акустических анализов, перцептивных экспериментов и наблюдений в классе.

**Ключевые слова** Фонология, произношение английского языка, узбекоязычные учащиеся, фонетические трудности, гласные, согласные, ударение, интонация

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## Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida so'z urg'usining ahamiyati: qiyosiy tahlil

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**Annotatsiya** Ushbu maqola o'zbek tilida so'zlashadigan o'quvchilarning ingliz tili fonetikasini o'zlashtirish jarayonidagi fonologik qiyinchiliklarni chuqur o'rganib chiqadi va ingliz va o'zbek tovush tizimlarining o'xshashliklari hamda farqlarini keng qamrovli qiyosiy tahlil qiladi. Unda unli va undosh tovushlar tizimi, urg'u naqshlari, intonatsiya konturlari va ularning akustik ko'rinishlari diqqat markazida. Ushbu elementlarni ko'rib chiqish orqali, ingliz tiliga xos bo'lgan fonemalar, masalan, interdental frikativlar /θ/ va /ð/ kabi tovushlarni talaffuz qilishdagi qiyinchiliklar aniqlanadi, chunki ular o'zbek tilida to'g'ridan-to'g'ri ekvivalenti yo'q, shuningdek, o'zbekning monoftongal unli tizimi bilan qarama-qarshi bo'lgan diftonglar. Bundan tashqari, o'zbek tilidagi ona prosodik naqshlar – bo'g'in vaqti ritmi va bashoratli oxirgi bo'g'in urg'usi – ingliz tilidagi urg'u vaqti ritmi va o'zgaruvchan urg'u joylashuvi bilan aralashib, ko'pincha talaffuz xatolariga olib keladi, bu aloqa tushunarlilikiga ta'sir qiladi. Maqola Lieberman va Prince (1977) ning Metrikal Fonologiyasi va Dauer (1983) ning Ritm Tipologiyasi kabi lingvistik nazariyalarga asoslanib, Athanasopoulou va boshq. (2020) va Ismailova (2022) kabi manbalardan olingan empirik tadqiqotlar natijalarini jamlaydi, jumladan akustik tahlillar, idrok tajribalari va sinf kuzatuvlari. Shuningdek, ushbu qiyinchiliklarni yumshatish uchun pedagogik strategiyalar muhokama qilinadi, masalan, tillar o'rtasidagi farqlarni ta'kidlaydigan kontrastiv tahlil mashqlari, minimal juftliklar va soya texnikasi orqali maxsus fonetik mashqlar dasturlari, hamda nutqni tan olish dasturlari (masalan, ELSA Speak yoki Praat akustik vizualizatsiyasi) va interaktiv talaffuz amaliyoti uchun onlayn platformalar kabi zamonaviy texnologik vositalarni integratsiyalash.

**Kalit so'zlar** Fonologiya, ingliz tili talaffuzi, o'zbek tilida so'zlashadigan o'quvchilar, fonetik qiyinchiliklar, unli tovushlar, undosh tovushlar, urg'u, intonatsiya

## Introduction

Word stress, as one of the most important suprasegmental features in phonology, determines not only the rhythm and melody of speech but also influences meaning, intelligibility, and communicative efficiency. In the realm of language learning and linguistic theory, understanding word stress is pivotal, especially when comparing languages from different families. English, an Indo-European language with Germanic roots, and Uzbek, a Turkic language with agglutinative morphology, exhibit significantly different stress systems, reflecting their distinct phonological typologies. English word stress is complex and contrastive, varying according to morphological, lexical, and etymological rules, whereas Uzbek stress tends to be predictable and regular, usually falling on the final syllable but with exceptions shaped by morphology, prosody, and pragmatic contexts. This comparative paper examines the importance of word stress in both languages through established phonological theories such as Metrical Phonology (Liberman & Prince, 1977) and the Rhythm Typology Hypothesis (Dauer, 1983). Using a qualitative comparative approach, it investigates acoustic correlates, morphological interactions, pedagogical implications, and theoretical interpretations. The findings suggest that while stress in English functions as a lexically distinctive feature capable of altering meaning, Uzbek stress serves a primarily prosodic and rhythmic purpose, vital for maintaining speech fluency, phrase-level prominence, and overall coherence in discourse.

To fully appreciate the role of word stress, it is essential to define it clearly. Stress refers to the degree of prominence a syllable receives in a word, marked acoustically by greater loudness, duration, pitch, and vowel quality (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020). The role of word stress extends beyond mere phonetic prominence – it affects word recognition,

lexical contrast, and even grammatical categorization. For instance, in English, stress position can change meaning entirely: REcord (noun) vs. reCORD (verb). Such alternations highlight stress as a contrastive feature that learners must master for accurate communication. In contrast, in Uzbek – a Turkic, agglutinative language – stress is relatively predictable, usually placed on the final syllable (Umarova, 2023). Nevertheless, recent studies reveal that Uzbek stress patterns are not entirely mechanical but are influenced by morphological and pragmatic factors, such as the addition of suffixes or the need for emphatic highlighting in conversation (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020). This flexibility adds layers of complexity that parallel, yet differ from, English patterns.

Research into stress systems across languages has attracted considerable attention in phonological theory. According to the Metrical Phonology model, stress is not merely an auditory phenomenon but also a structural one, governed by hierarchical rhythmic patterns (Liberman & Prince, 1977). This theory posits that syllables are organized into feet, with stressed syllables heading these units, creating a metrical grid that influences intonation and rhythm. Understanding word stress is therefore vital in both theoretical linguistics and language pedagogy. Learners of English from Uzbek backgrounds face unique challenges in mastering English stress placement because of the contrast between predictable and variable stress systems. For example, Uzbek speakers might inadvertently apply final-syllable stress to English words, leading to pronunciations like “comPUter” instead of “COMputer,” which can confuse native English listeners. Moreover, the absence of vowel reduction in Uzbek unstressed syllables means learners often fail to reduce vowels in English, resulting in overly articulated unstressed syllables that disrupt the natural stress-timed rhythm.

Beyond these challenges, word stress intersects with broader linguistic phenomena. In English, stress can signal word class shifts, as seen in pairs like 'object' (noun) vs. ob'ject (verb), or influence compounding, where primary stress falls on the first element (e.g., 'blackboard'). In Uzbek, stress supports the language's agglutinative nature, where long words formed by suffixation maintain final stress to preserve rhythmic flow. Comparative studies, such as those by Setter and Jenkins (2005), emphasize that prosodic transfer from L1 to L2 is a common source of errors, underscoring the need for targeted instruction. This paper builds on such insights to provide a nuanced analysis, incorporating examples from everyday vocabulary, literary texts, and spoken corpora to illustrate real-world applications. Furthermore, recent acoustic investigations, such as those by Plag et al. (2020) for English and Peck (2025) for Uzbek, offer quantitative data that enrich our understanding of how stress is realized phonetically, highlighting cues like pitch excursions and durational contrasts.

### Methods

This research employs a comparative-descriptive method, relying on secondary linguistic sources, phonological analyses, and illustrative lexical examples from both English and Uzbek. The study systematically compares the structural, functional, and acoustic properties of word stress in the two languages. The analysis draws upon theoretical frameworks in phonology (Liberman & Prince, 1977; Hayes, 1981), rhythm typology (Roach, 1982; Dauer, 1983), and recent descriptive studies of Uzbek stress (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020; Ismailova, 2022; Umarova, 2023; Peck, 2025). Examples were taken from dictionaries (e.g., Oxford English Dictionary for English and Uzbek National Encyclopedia for Uzbek), corpus data such as the British National Corpus for English and spoken Uzbek recordings from linguistic archives, and existing research to identify commonalities and divergences.

In English, stress was examined through minimal pairs (e.g., 'insight' vs. 'incite') and

morphologically related forms (e.g., 'nation' → 'national' → 'nationality'), highlighting how affixes alter stress placement. For Uzbek, data were analyzed through morphological paradigms, such as verb conjugations (e.g., 'o'qimoq' – to read, with stress on the final syllable in various forms), native speaker descriptions from fieldwork studies, and acoustic research on stress realization using tools like Praat software. The methodology emphasizes cross-linguistic comparability rather than quantitative measurement, though it incorporates qualitative acoustic data from studies measuring parameters like fundamental frequency (F0), duration, and intensity. To ensure comprehensiveness, the analysis includes historical perspectives, such as the evolution of English stress from Old English fixed patterns to Modern English variability influenced by Norman French borrowings. This multifaceted approach allows for a robust comparison, avoiding biases by consulting diverse sources from Western and Central Asian linguistics.

Additionally, the methods involve synthesizing pedagogical insights from applied linguistics, reviewing classroom interventions documented in journals like *Language Teaching* (Setter & Jenkins, 2005). No primary data collection was conducted; instead, the focus is on meta-analysis of existing literature to draw generalizable conclusions. Acoustic data integration draws from empirical studies, such as Plag et al. (2020) for North American English and Athanasopoulou et al. (2020) for Uzbek, where measurements were normalized (e.g., z-scores) and statistically tested via MANOVA and ANOVA to validate correlates.

### Results

English word stress is lexically contrastive, distinguishing one word from another. It operates within a hierarchical metrical tree structure (Liberman & Prince, 1977). Stress is influenced by a combination of phonological, morphological, and etymological factors. For instance, in 'record' (noun) versus 'record' (verb), the stress shift signals a grammatical

category change, a phenomenon known as stress alternation. English stress patterns often depend on word origin: Germanic words tend to have initial stress (e.g., 'mother,' 'father,' 'water'), while Latinate borrowings tend to have stress near the end (e.g., 'information,' 'nation,' 'democracy'). Stress also interacts with affixation: adding a suffix can shift stress (e.g., 'photograph' → 'photography' → 'photographic'), following rules like the Latin Stress Rule, which places stress on the antepenultimate syllable in certain cases (Hayes, 1981). Acoustically, stressed syllables are longer, louder, and have higher pitch, with measurements showing stressed vowels up to 50% longer than unstressed ones in controlled speech (Roach, 2009). Vowel reduction in unstressed syllables (e.g., /ə/ in 'about,' 'sofa,' or /ɪ/ in 'rapid') is another hallmark of English stress, contributing to its stress-timed rhythm where intervals between stressed syllables are roughly equal, regardless of intervening unstressed syllables (Dauer, 1983; Roach, 1982).

Further examples illustrate this variability: In compounds like 'greenhouse' (a glass building) vs. 'green house' (a house that is green), stress placement disambiguates meaning. Polysyllabic words follow patterns like iambic (weak-strong) or trochaic (strong-weak) feet, as in 'banana' (trochaic) or 'potato' (iambic with secondary stress). Empirical data from corpus analyses show that about 70% of English disyllabic nouns have initial stress, while verbs often have final stress (Hammond, 1995). Expanding on acoustic details, in North American English, primary stress in accented words exhibits significant differences in F0 (approximately 2.5 semitones higher in left-prominent positions) and intensity (4.1 dB higher in primary vs. secondary positions), with spectral tilt showing more negative values (e.g., -20 dB) in secondary stressed syllables, indicating steeper energy drop-offs in higher frequencies (Plag et al., 2020). In unaccented contexts, these effects weaken, with F0 drops of only 0.46 semitones and intensity differences of 0.6 dB, suggesting accentuation amplifies

stress cues ( $p < 0.01$  for interactions). Vowel quality, measured via spectral balance, is higher (less negative, e.g., -15.5 dB) in primary stressed positions, reflecting less centralization compared to unstressed syllables.

In contrast, Uzbek stress is predictable and non-contrastive, meaning it does not change word meaning. It typically falls on the final syllable of the word, regardless of word length or syllable structure (Umarova, 2023). For example, 'kitoblar' (books) and 'o'qituvchi' (teacher) both receive final-syllable stress, as do longer words like 'universitet' (university). However, exceptions occur when enclitics or particles are added; the stress then shifts to the particle (e.g., 'kitobmi?' – "book?" with stress on 'mi'). Uzbek stress may also move for emphasis or contrastive focus in discourse, showing interaction with intonation rather than lexical contrast (Ismailova, 2022). Unlike English, vowel reduction does not occur in Uzbek unstressed syllables; vowels remain fully articulated, maintaining clarity across the word (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020). Acoustic studies confirm that Uzbek speakers rely more on pitch (higher F0) than on loudness or duration to mark stress, with pitch rises of up to 20-30 Hz on stressed syllables in declarative sentences (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020).

Additional acoustic data from Tashkent Uzbek speakers reveal nuanced patterns.

In non-focus conditions for three-syllable words, duration increases progressively (Syllable 1 < Syllable 2 < Syllable 3, all  $p < 0.005$ ), with final syllables up to 50% longer; mean F0 is lowest on the final syllable ( $p < 0.005$  vs. initial), and F0 contours show sharp falls on the final syllable ( $p < 0.005$ ). Under contrastive focus, duration and F0 increase on penultimate and final syllables ( $p < 0.005$ ), with greater F0 elevation on finals (up to 2-3 semitones); new information focus sharpens final F0 falls (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020). However, some studies suggest these may reflect phrasal prosody rather than lexical stress, with no localized intensity differences and increasing durations domain-wide



(Athanasopoulou et al., 2020, LabPhon paper). In citation forms, final vowels are longer, but F0 and intensity peak on penultimates, potentially due to phrase-final lengthening (Peck, 2025). Additional results from comparative acoustics reveal that English stressed syllables average 250-300 ms in duration, compared to 150-200 ms for unstressed, while in Uzbek, syllable durations are more uniform at around 200 ms each, aligning with syllable-timing (Dauer, 1983). These patterns extend to phrases: English phrases exhibit alternating stress (e.g., 'The quick brown fox'), whereas Uzbek maintains end-weighting for prosodic balance.

### Discussion

The differences observed confirm Metrical Phonology's premise that languages differ not only in stress placement but also in how stress interacts with morphology and phonetics (Hayes, 1981; Selkirk, 1980). English uses stress as a lexical marker, where misplaced stress can lead to miscommunication or non-native accents, while Uzbek employs it as a prosodic marker to facilitate fluent speech production. English stress demonstrates the interaction of metrical hierarchy and morphological structure – a stressed syllable may project a higher metrical node, affecting rhythm and intonation across phrases. Uzbek stress, by contrast, is rule-governed and post-lexical, serving to maintain sentence-level prosody rather than lexical distinction (Ismailova, 2022; Umarova, 2023). This aligns with the concept of prosodic domains, where Uzbek words form right-headed feet, promoting a flat structure suited to its morphology.

According to Dauer's rhythm typology (Dauer, 1983), English is stress-timed, characterized by alternating strong and weak beats that compress unstressed syllables, while Uzbek tends to be syllable-timed, giving equal duration to each syllable and resulting in a more metronomic speech tempo. This rhythmic difference affects speech perception: Cross-linguistic studies show that English listeners rely on duration and intensity cues to perceive

stress, whereas Uzbek listeners prioritize pitch variations (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020). Consequently, perceptual differences lead to pronunciation challenges for Uzbek learners of English, who often produce evenly timed syllables, neglecting vowel reduction and stress alternation, which can reduce intelligibility in global English contexts (Setter & Jenkins, 2005). For instance, words like 'development' might be pronounced with equal stress on all syllables, sounding robotic to native ears. The expanded acoustic data reinforces this: English primary stress shows robust F0 (2.5 ST) and intensity (4.1 dB) boosts in accented positions (Plag et al., 2020), while Uzbek's final prominence relies on durational gradients ( $p < 0.005$ ) and F0 falls, potentially phrasal rather than lexical (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020; Peck, 2025). This nuance suggests Uzbek may exhibit weaker or optional lexical stress, complicating L2 acquisition.

Pedagogically, awareness of these differences is essential for English language teaching in Uzbekistan. Teachers should explicitly train learners in recognizing and producing stressed syllables, vowel reduction, and rhythmic timing through activities like jazz chants or poetry recitation. Materials emphasizing stress patterns (e.g., through stress drills, rhythmic reading, and minimal pair exercises such as 'desert' (noun) vs. 'desert' (verb)) can significantly improve pronunciation and listening comprehension. Technology plays a key role: Apps like Forvo or YouGlish provide authentic stress models, while software like Audacity allows learners to visualize their own stress patterns against native samples.

The findings also have computational implications. Accurate stress modeling is necessary in speech synthesis and recognition systems for both languages. English models, such as those in Google Translate, require variable stress prediction based on lexical databases, whereas Uzbek systems can rely on rule-based stress assignment, simplifying algorithms but requiring adjustments for pragmatic shifts (Roach, 2009). Furthermore, in

bilingual contexts, stress transfer can lead to hybrid patterns, as seen in code-switching among Uzbek-English speakers, where English words adopt Uzbek final stress.

Finally, the study aligns with Hammond's (1995) claim that metrical structure underlies both phonological and prosodic variation. The interaction of stress and morphology in English supports hierarchical representations, while Uzbek exemplifies a flat, right-headed prosodic domain, offering insights into universal vs. language-specific prosody (Selkirk, 1980). Expanding on this, future research could explore diachronic changes, such as how loanwords from Russian or Persian influence Uzbek stress, or how globalization affects English stress perception among young Uzbek learners. The additional acoustic evidence, such as Uzbek's F0 contours and English's spectral tilt variations, highlights the need for perceptual studies to refine these models.

### **Conclusion**

Word stress plays a crucial role in both English and Uzbek phonological systems, shaping how speakers convey meaning and rhythm in communication. English stress is lexically distinctive and morphologically sensitive, allowing for nuanced distinctions that enhance expressive power but pose challenges for learners. In contrast, Uzbek stress is predictable and primarily prosodic, supporting the language's agglutinative structure and ensuring smooth discourse flow. Acoustically, English relies on duration, intensity, and vowel quality for stress marking, leading to reduced vowels and compressed rhythms, whereas Uzbek stress is realized mainly through pitch variations, preserving vowel integrity and syllable equality. Expanded data show English primary stress with 4.1 dB intensity boosts and 2.5 ST F0 differences (Plag et al., 2020), while Uzbek finals exhibit progressive duration increases ( $p < 0.005$ ) and

falling F0 contours (Athanasopoulou et al., 2020; Peck, 2025).

These findings demonstrate that the two languages embody distinct rhythmic and prosodic principles, with English aligning to stress-timing and Uzbek to syllable-timing (Dauer, 1983; Roach, 1982). Metrical Phonology successfully explains English's variable stress through hierarchical prominence and foot structures (Liberman & Prince, 1977; Hayes, 1981), whereas Uzbek follows a rule-based pattern consistent with its morphological typology, where stress anchors the word's end to facilitate suffixation and intonation (Ismailova, 2022).

Understanding such contrasts benefits pronunciation instruction, phonetic training, linguistic theory, and technology applications. For Uzbek learners of English, mastering stress patterns enhances intelligibility, naturalness, and fluency, reducing fossilized errors and boosting confidence in international settings. Educators can leverage contrastive analysis to design curricula that address specific interferences, such as incorporating rhythm exercises or using multimedia resources to model native prosody.

Moreover, this analysis contributes to broader discussions in applied linguistics, highlighting how L1 prosody influences L2 acquisition and advocating for inclusive teaching that values linguistic diversity (Setter & Jenkins, 2005). Future studies should combine acoustic and perceptual data to model stress transfer patterns among bilingual speakers, potentially using neuroimaging to examine cognitive processing of stress cues. Longitudinal research on Uzbek-English bilinguals could reveal adaptation strategies, informing AI-driven language tools. Ultimately, by enriching our knowledge of word stress, this work promotes effective cross-cultural communication and advances phonological scholarship.

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