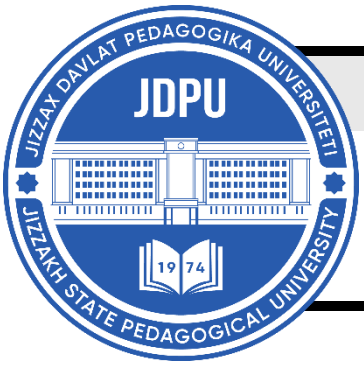
DOI: https://doi.org/10.37547/mesmj-V6-I3-28 Pages: 249-252

MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL



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http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index

PHONETIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND UZBEK VOWEL SOUNDS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: phonetics, vowel system, English, Uzbek, second language acquisition, contrastive linguistics

Received: 16.05.25
Accepted: 18.05.25
Published: 20.05.25

Abstract: This study examines the phonetic and phonological differences between the vowel systems of English and Uzbek. Although both languages utilize vocalic distinctions to convey meaning, they differ in terms of vowel inventory, vowel length, diphthongization, and the presence or absence of vowel harmony. These differences pose specific challenges for second language learners and carry implications for pedagogy in phonetics and language acquisition.

Introduction

English and Uzbek represent two distinct language families—Germanic and Turkic respectively—each characterized by unique phonetic structures. A core area of contrast lies in their vowel systems. Comparative phonetic studies are instrumental in understanding the difficulties faced by learners in cross-linguistic settings (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2014).

Vowel inventory. English, particularly in Received Pronunciation (RP), has a large vowel inventory with approximately 12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs. It includes tense-lax pairs such as /iː/ vs. /ɪ/, /uː/ vs. /ʊ/, and various mid-vowel contrasts such as /ɜː/ vs. /ə/. In contrast, Uzbek has a simpler and more symmetrical system with only six phonemic vowels: /i/, /e/, /a/, /o/, /u/, and /ʊ/. These vowels are relatively stable and do not form diphthongs, making the system more predictable.

Vowel length is phonemic in English. For example, the vowel in 'sheep' /iː/ is longer than in 'ship' /ɪ/, and this difference distinguishes meaning. In Uzbek, vowel length is not phonemic; any variations in duration typically arise from intonation or prosodic factors rather than lexical contrast (Johanson & Csató, 1998). Thus, Uzbek speakers may initially overlook length distinctions in English, leading to comprehension or production errors. Schwa and Vowel Reduction The schwa /ə/ is one of the most common vowels in English and typically occurs in unstressed syllables, e.g., 'banana' or 'about'. It contributes to English's stress-timed rhythm and phonetic reduction. Uzbek, a syllable-timed language, lacks a true schwa and instead tends to articulate vowels clearly regardless of stress. As a result, Uzbek speakers may hyperarticulate English unstressed vowels or fail to reduce them, affecting naturalness in speech. Diphthongs and Nasalization English contain multiple diphthongs like /aɪ/, /eɪ/, and /əʊ/, which involve a glide from one vowel quality to another. Uzbek vowels, however, are purely monophthongal and static. This can lead to simplification or substitution errors by Uzbek learners. Nasalization, which occurs phonetically in English (though not phonemically), is absent in Uzbek, further adding to the contrast between the two languages (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Diphthongs are complex vowel sounds that begin with one vowel sound and glide into another within the same syllable. This smooth transition creates a dynamic sound quality that distinguishes diphthongs from monophthongs, which maintain a single, stable vowel sound.

Diphthongs consist of two distinct vowel sounds that are pronounced in a single syllable. transition between the two vowel sounds is smooth and continuous, without a pause. This glide is what gives diphthongs their unique auditory quality. The first vowel sound is typically more prominent, while the second sound is less emphasized but still integral to the diphthong's overall quality. In the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), diphthongs have

specific symbols that represent these gliding vowel qualities. Here are some common diphthongs with examples:

- /aɪ/ in "my," "fly," "high" It starts with an open front vowel and glides to a near-close front vowel.
- /eɪ/ in "day," "say," "play". It begins with a mid-front vowel and glides to a close front vowel.
- /ɔɪ/ in "boy," "toy," "coin". It starts with a mid-back rounded vowel and glides to a near-close front vowel.
- /aʊ/ in "how," "cow," "now". It begins with an open front vowel and glides to a near-close back rounded vowel.
- /oʊ/ in "go," "no," "show". It starts with a mid-back rounded vowel and glides to a close back rounded vowel.

Diphthongs can vary significantly between different dialects and accents of English. For instance, the pronunciation of "go" might differ in American and British English. Understanding diphthongs is crucial for language learners, as they can affect pronunciation and comprehension. Mastering diphthongs helps with clearer speech and better listening skills. Diphthongs can contribute to the rhythm and flow of poetry and song lyrics, making them essential for creative expression. Diphthongs are an essential aspect of phonetics and linguistics, adding richness to spoken language. Their unique characteristics and variations highlight the complexity of vowel sounds in English and other languages. Understanding diphthongs enhances both communication skills and appreciation for the nuances of language.

Vowel harmony in Uzbek. One of the defining characteristics of Uzbek phonology is vowel harmony, particularly in affixation, where vowels within a word harmonize in frontness and rounding. This feature is completely absent in English. English's apparent inconsistency in vowel distribution and lack of harmony can pose a learning barrier for Uzbek speakers who are used to more systematic vowel patterns.

Pedagogical implications. Uzbek learners of English may face difficulty with vowel contrasts not present in their L1, such as /æ/ vs. /ʌ/, or fail to reduce vowels appropriately in unstressed syllables. Instructors should incorporate auditory discrimination and phonetic

training exercises. English learners of Uzbek must learn to apply vowel harmony rules and avoid inserting diphthongs where they do not exist.

Conclusion. Analyzing the phonetic differences between English and Uzbek vowel systems illustrates significant typological divergence. These insights not only enhance second language teaching and learning but also contribute to theoretical understanding in phonology and contrastive linguistics.

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