

WORD STRESS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Annotation: This article examines the concept of word stress in the English language and its importance in correct pronunciation and effective communication. Word stress plays a crucial role in distinguishing meaning, improving intelligibility, and developing listening and speaking skills. The article discusses the definition of word stress, its main types, and common stress patterns in English words. Special attention is given to the difficulties faced by Uzbek learners of English and the typical mistakes they make in stress placement. The study highlights the significance of teaching word stress systematically and suggests practical approaches for improving learners' pronunciation competence.

Keywords: Word stress, English phonology, Uzbek phonology, stress-timed language, syllable-timed language, vowel reduction, pronunciation teaching.

Word stress is a fundamental component of phonology that contributes to intelligibility, rhythm, and meaning in spoken language. Although both English and Uzbek employ word stress, the two languages differ considerably in how stress is placed, how it functions, and how important it is for communication. These differences are especially significant in the context of teaching English pronunciation to Uzbek learners.

English is a stress-timed language, which means that stressed syllables occur at roughly equal intervals, while unstressed syllables are shortened or reduced. As a result, English word stress is closely connected to vowel reduction, particularly the use of the schwa /ə/ in unstressed syllables. For example, in the word photograph (PHOtograph), the unstressed vowels are pronounced weakly, whereas in phoTOGraphy, stress shifts and vowel quality changes. English word stress is lexical, meaning it is an inherent property of each word and must often be memorized. Stress placement can occur on different syllables depending on word origin, morphology, and grammatical category. Words of Latin and Greek origin often follow recognizable stress patterns, especially in relation to suffixes such as -tion, -sion, -ic, and -ity.

However, many exceptions exist, which makes English stress unpredictable for learners.

A distinctive feature of English stress is its contrastive function. Stress can differentiate meaning and grammatical category, as seen in pairs like REcord (noun) versus reCORD (verb), and INcrease (noun) versus inCREASE (verb). Thus, incorrect stress placement can lead not only to foreign accent but also to misunderstanding.

Uzbek, by contrast, is a syllable-timed language, where syllables tend to be pronounced with relatively equal duration. Stress in Uzbek is fixed and predictable, usually falling on the final syllable of a word. Because of this regularity, Uzbek stress is not lexical but grammatical in nature. Uzbek is an agglutinative language, which means that grammatical relationships are expressed through the addition of suffixes. As suffixes are added, stress typically shifts to the last syllable. For example, yoz (write) becomes yozUVchi (writer) and yozuvchilarIMIZ (our writers), with stress consistently falling on the final syllable. This shifting does not change meaning but simply reflects word formation. Another important characteristic of Uzbek stress is that vowel reduction is minimal. Unlike English, unstressed vowels in Uzbek are generally pronounced clearly. This results in more stable vowel quality and a more even rhythm across syllables.

Phonetic and Phonological Differences

From a phonetic perspective, English stress involves several acoustic features: increased loudness, longer duration, higher pitch, and clearer vowel quality. In Uzbek, stress is primarily realized through slight lengthening and pitch change, but the contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables is much weaker than in English. Phonologically, English relies heavily on stress to structure words and sentences, while Uzbek relies more on morphology and word order. As a result, stress errors in Uzbek rarely affect comprehension, whereas in English they can significantly reduce intelligibility.

Due to the fixed stress pattern of Uzbek, Uzbek learners of English often transfer their native stress habits into English. Common problems include placing stress on the final syllable of English words, failing to reduce unstressed vowels, and ignoring stress-based meaning distinctions. These difficulties may persist even at advanced levels unless stress is explicitly taught.

Effective pronunciation teaching should therefore focus on:

- raising learners' awareness of stress variability in English,
- practicing stress patterns through listening and repetition,
- teaching vowel reduction and weak forms,
- contrasting English stress with Uzbek stress patterns.

Similarities in Word Stress in English and Uzbek

Both English and Uzbek use word stress as an important phonological feature that contributes to correct pronunciation and intelligibility. In both languages, stress helps listeners identify words more easily and plays a role in distinguishing meaning and grammatical forms. One similarity is that content words (such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are generally stressed more strongly than function words in connected speech in both English and Uzbek. This makes key information more prominent in communication.

Another similarity is that stress affects vowel quality. In both languages, unstressed syllables tend to be pronounced more weakly, while stressed syllables are clearer and more prominent. This difference helps maintain the rhythm of speech. Additionally, both languages show predictable stress patterns in many words. While English stress can vary depending on word formation, Uzbek stress is often more regular, typically falling on the final syllable. Despite this difference, learners of both languages must be aware of stress placement to avoid misunderstandings.

Overall, understanding the similarities in word stress between English and Uzbek can help Uzbek learners of English improve their pronunciation and develop more natural speech patterns.

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