

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE 5 ENGLISH VOWELS AND THE 6 STABLE UZBEK VOWELS

Denov Institute of Entrepreneurship and Pedagogy,
Faculty of English Philology and Language Teaching,
1st-year students

Qodirova Shohista Faxriddin qizi

Xudoyqulova Nasiba Alisherovna

Teacher: **Murodova Sevara**

E-mail: godirovashoxista53@gmail.com

E-mail: xudoyqulovanasiba00@gmail.com

Phone number: +998770359507

Phone number: +998993785874

Annotation: This article presents a comparative analysis of the vowel systems of the English and Uzbek languages, focusing on the 5 basic English vowel phonemes and the 6 stable Uzbek vowels. It examines the phonetic and phonological differences between the two systems, including vowel quality, quantity, and position. The study highlights how the mismatches between these systems can lead to phonetic interference in the pronunciation of Uzbek learners of English.

Keywords: Vowel system, English vowels, Uzbek vowels, comparative phonetics, phonology, vowel quality, vowel quantity, pronunciation, phonetic interference, second language acquisition.

Аннотация: В данной статье проводится сравнительный анализ систем гласных английского и узбекского языков, с акцентом на 5 основных гласных

фонемах английского языка и 6 стабильных гласных узбекского языка. Рассматриваются фонетические и фонологические различия между двумя системами, включая качество, количество и позицию гласных. В работе показано, как несоответствие этих систем приводит к фонетической интерференции в произношении узбекоязычных учащихся, изучающих английский язык.

Ключевые слова: Система гласных, английские гласные, узбекские гласные, сравнительная фонетика, фонология, качество гласных, количество гласных, произношение, фонетическая интерференция, усвоение второго языка.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada ingliz va o'zbek tillarining unli tovush tizimlari qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda ingliz tilining 5 ta asosiy unli fonemasi va o'zbek tilining 6 ta barqaror unlisi o'rganiladi. Ikkala tizim o'rtasidagi fonetik va fonologik farqlar — unlilarning sifati, miqdori va pozitsiyasi — ko'rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, ushbu farqlarning ingliz tilini o'rganayotgan o'zbek tilida so'zlashuvchilarning talaffuziga ta'sirini o'rganadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Unlilar tizimi, ingliz unlilari, o'zbek unlilari, qiyosiy fonetika, fonologiya, unli sifati, unli miqdori, talaffuz, fonetik interferensiya, ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish.

Introduction: In modern linguistics, phonetics and phonology are fundamental to understanding how speech sounds function across languages. Among the most essential elements of any phonological system are vowels, which form the nucleus of syllables and carry a great deal of the acoustic and semantic load in spoken language. Different languages vary significantly in the number and quality of their vowel phonemes, and these differences can have a major impact on second language acquisition.

English is traditionally described as having 5 vowel letters (a, e, i, o, u) in its orthography, yet phonetically it possesses a much richer system of vowel sounds — approximately 12 to 20 depending on the dialect. This discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation is one of the most challenging aspects of English phonology.

Uzbek, by contrast, operates with a more consistent system. Standard Uzbek has 6 stable vowel phonemes — /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/, /ɔ/ — each of which corresponds more reliably to a single phonetic realization. The vowel system of Uzbek is considered more transparent than that of English, making cross-linguistic comparison particularly instructive.

This paper aims to compare the vowel systems of English and Uzbek, identify their phonetic similarities and differences, and analyze how the divergence between the two systems affects the English pronunciation of Uzbek speakers.

Main body:

1. The English Vowel System

Although English orthography uses 5 vowel letters, the phonetic reality is far more complex. Standard Southern British English (Received Pronunciation) distinguishes approximately 12 pure vowels (monophthongs) and 8 diphthongs. However, from a basic pedagogical standpoint, the 5 “short” and “long” vowel contrasts tied to the 5 vowel letters are often the starting point for learners.

The 5 English vowel letters and their primary phonetic realizations:

Letter	Short sound	Example	Long sound	Example
A	/æ/	cat	/eɪ/	cake
E	/e/	bed	/i:/	see
I	/ɪ/	sit	/aɪ/	kite
O	/ɒ/	hot	/oo/	note
U	/ʌ/	cup	/ju:/	cube

As demonstrated in the table, a single English vowel letter can correspond to multiple distinct phonemes, often determined by syllable structure, word stress, and spelling conventions. This richness makes English vowels particularly difficult for learners whose native language has a smaller, more stable vowel inventory.

In addition to the above, English also contains the central vowel schwa /ə/, which appears in unstressed syllables (e.g., “about” /ə'baʊt/) and is considered the most common vowel sound in spoken English. The presence of vowel reduction — where unstressed vowels are reduced to schwa — is another feature that sets English apart from Uzbek.

2. The Uzbek Vowel System

Standard Uzbek (the Latin-script based form adopted since 1993) has 6 stable vowel phonemes. Unlike English, Uzbek vowels are relatively consistent in their phonetic realization, meaning each phoneme corresponds to a predictable sound regardless of position in the word.

The 6 Uzbek vowels and their descriptions:

Vowel	IPA	Example	Articulatory description	Nearest English equivalent
A / a	/a/	aql	Low, central, unrounded	/ɑ:/ as in "father"
E / e	/e/	er	Mid, front, unrounded	/e/ as in "bed"
I / i	/i/	istak	High, front, unrounded	/i:/ as in "see"
O / o	/o/	ota	Mid, back, rounded	Between /ɒ/ and /oʊ/

U / u	/u/	uy	High, back, rounded	/u:/ as in "food"
O' / o	/o/	o't	Mid-low, back, rounded	/o:/ as in "thought"

A key feature of the Uzbek vowel system is its phonemic stability: every vowel phoneme has a single, consistent phonetic realization. There is no vowel reduction, no diphthongization, and no lengthening in unstressed positions. This stability reflects the agglutinative morphological structure of Uzbek, where suffixes are added transparently without altering the base vowel quality.

The 6th Uzbek vowel, /o/ (written as O'), is unique to Uzbek and has no direct equivalent in English. It is a rounded mid-back vowel, similar to the /o:/ in English "thought", but shorter and used in many common words. This phoneme is often a source of difficulty for English speakers learning Uzbek.

3. Cross-linguistic Comparison: English vs. Uzbek Vowels

The comparison between the two vowel systems reveals the following major differences:

Inventory size and complexity:

- English has 12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs, making it far more complex than Uzbek's 6 monophthong system. Uzbek has no diphthongs; each vowel is realized as a pure, unchanging sound.

Vowel length (quantity):

- English distinguishes between short and long vowels phonemically (e.g., /ɪ/ vs /i:/ in "sit" vs "seat"). Uzbek does not have phonemic vowel length; all vowels have approximately the same duration.

Vowel reduction:

- English has extensive vowel reduction in unstressed syllables (schwa /ə/ is the most frequent vowel in spoken English). Uzbek does not reduce unstressed vowels, maintaining their full quality in all positions.

Phoneme-grapheme correspondence:

- English has a notoriously opaque orthography — the same letter can represent multiple sounds (e.g., "a" in "cat", "cake", "all", "about"). Uzbek's Latin-based orthography is highly transparent: each letter maps reliably to one sound.

Unique phonemes:

- Uzbek has the phoneme /ɔ/ (O‘) which has no direct equivalent in English. English has the central vowel schwa /ə/ which does not exist in Uzbek. These unique phonemes are the most common sources of substitution errors.

4. Phonetic Interference in Second Language Acquisition

When Uzbek speakers learn English, the structural differences between their native vowel system and English vowels frequently lead to phonetic interference. The most common patterns of interference include:

Substitution of English short vowels:

Uzbek speakers often replace the English /ɪ/ (as in "sit") with the Uzbek /i/, producing a longer, tenser vowel that can sound like "seat". Similarly, /e/ in English "bed" may be pronounced as Uzbek /e/, which is a closer approximation but still slightly different in quality.

Failure to reduce unstressed vowels:

Since Uzbek has no vowel reduction, Uzbek learners of English tend to pronounce all vowels with their full quality, even in unstressed syllables. This results in non-native

prosodic patterns and may impede communication. For example, the word "about" /ə'baʊt/ may be pronounced as /a'bout/.

Difficulty with English diphthongs:

Because Uzbek has no diphthongs, learners may produce monophthongs in place of English diphthongs. For instance, "go" /gəʊ/ may be pronounced as /go/, and "face" /feɪs/ may become /fes/.

The Uzbek /ɔ/ vs English vowels:

Uzbek speakers sometimes transfer the /ɔ/ sound into English words containing "o", leading to pronunciations that do not match any native English vowel. For example, "hot" may be produced with a rounded, mid-back vowel rather than the English /ɒ/ (or /ɑ:/ in American English).

Conclusion: This comparative study of the 5 English vowels and the 6 stable Uzbek vowels reveals fundamental differences in phonemic inventory, vowel quality, vowel quantity, and the role of vowel reduction. English is characterized by a large and complex vowel system with extensive diphthongization and vowel reduction, while Uzbek maintains a smaller, more stable system with no reduction and no diphthongs. These structural differences have direct pedagogical implications: Uzbek speakers learning English must consciously learn to produce sounds that do not exist in their native language, and to reduce vowels in unstressed positions — a feature entirely absent from Uzbek phonology. Developing phonetic awareness of these differences is essential for achieving accurate English pronunciation. Future research and classroom practice should focus on targeted pronunciation training that addresses these specific areas of interference.

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