

## Mother Tongue: The Impact on English Pronunciation

**Umida Abdominal qizi Abdullayeva**

EFL Teacher, Department of English Language, Kimyo International University in Tashkent

### Article Information

**Received:** February 23, 2023

**Accepted:** March 24, 2023

**Published:** April 25, 2023

**Keywords:** pronunciation, mispronounce, sound, mother tongue, affect, methods, effective, podcast, syllable, stress, dialect.

### ABSTRACT

*The proper pronunciation of a foreign language depends on many factors. Many linguists believe that mother tongue is the most powerful tool that effects on the delivery of speech, especially the grammar and pronunciation. This is due to the fact that learners usually compare the foreign language with their mother tongue. Current article is dedicated to the study of those factors, more precisely, the influence of mother tongue onto the pronunciation of the English language.*

*Moreover, the article is aimed at identifying the significant connection between the mother tongue and English language pronunciation with reference to two languages Uzbek and Russian. The article contains interesting data on the influence of Uzbek language as a mother tongue on the English language learner in terms of its pronunciation. Furthermore, according to the dominant position of Russian language and majority of Russian ethnicity, it was found necessary to include some elements of Russian as a mother tongue. It can be pointed out that comparison of Uzbek-English pronunciation and Russian-English pronunciation is presented in the article with specific examples.*

*Finally, the article identifies the problems regarding the topic as well as it suggests some possible solutions to deal with the issues both in an academic environment and individually.*

### Introduction

There are several elements of a foreign language that need to be learned such as grammar, vocabulary, speaking, listening, reading and writing. And last but not least, pronunciation must also be taken into consideration while learning a new language. It is not a secret that when speaking a foreign language, we express ourselves with the help of pronouncing the foreign words. Whether what we said is understood by others or not highly depends on our pronunciation.

Mother tongue is the first language that is learned from early stages of a lifetime. It is the language that is used at home, with friends and in the initial society. However, nowadays it is habitual and necessary to be able to speak at least two languages. Uzbek language is the mother tongue of Uzbek people. But it is not the only language that is used in Uzbekistan. Due to the majority of Russian people among the population, most Uzbek people know Russian language as their mother tongue. With the rising demand, younger generation is learning English language as well.

English language is taught very early in Uzbekistan. Even in the nursery schools children start

learning English, more precisely, the vocabulary and pronunciation. English language that is spoken by Uzbek and Russian people is usually clear, however, there are some noticeable effects of the two mother tongues on English pronunciation.

There are several reasons of the difficulty of the English language pronunciation. Brown mentions that first and foremost reason is the phonological differences between the native language and English.

This article suggests the specific effects of mother tongue on English language pronunciation and possible ways to tackle the issue of mispronouncing the English words in an academic atmosphere.

### **Materials and method**

To conduct the investigation two groups were selected. The groups contain university students whose English language level is different ranging from elementary to intermediate. One of the groups are students whose native language is Uzbek and the other group contains Russian students. Both of the groups were observed, they were given different texts to read and they were asked to make up oral presentations on topic "My hobby".

It should be pointed out that they were not told that they are the part of a research. This is because of the fact that I believe that they perform more naturally when they think that the tasks, they are doing are just a part of regular lessons.

The text was in the intermediate level. Before the research I was almost sure that the students with high level of English language proficiency will read the text with good pronunciation and those whose level is lower will find it difficult to pronounce the English words. However, when the research was over, I was quite surprised that mispronounced words were the same words in both levels. Here is a piece of text that was given to students.

*Don't drink coffee in the morning. Have one at 3.00 p.m.*

*Most coffee drinkers sometimes make a cup as soon as they wake up.*

*However, researchers have suggested that morning is the worst time to drink coffee, because it stops the body from producing the stress hormone cortisol, which we need at this time to help us to wake up.*

*The best time to drink coffee- or caffeine in general - is between 2.00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m., when it can make us more mentally alert, according to an interesting study carried out by the University of Sheffield a few years ago.*

(English File 4<sup>th</sup> edition Student's book. Adapted from The Times)

Furthermore, students were asked to make a PPT presentation at home and prepare to present it orally in front of the class. This task was chosen in order to identify if there is any difference between the pronunciation when it is read and spoken. Actually, the students mispronounced more words when they spoke than reading. I took notes while they were reading the above given text and when they were speaking. In order to make the research more accurate their speech was recorded.

After listening to the recordings for several times, I found the mispronounced words and then identified the mistakes (sounds that are usually mispronounced).

### **Results**

The participants of the research were of the same age; however, their level of English language proficiency was very different. There were students whose level was elementary and students who were very fluent in the English language. At first, I was sure that the level of English would

definitely influence the pronunciation. But it is interesting to note that although intermediate level students pronounced most of the words correctly, the words which were mispronounced were almost the same. And the reason why they mispronounced those words is not actually the variety in levels. It was found out that the thing that really influenced their pronunciation was their mother tongue.

The mispronounced words are given in the following table.

№	English pronunciation	Uzbek pronunciation	Russian pronunciation
1	<b>Morning</b> (BrE)[ 'mɔ:nɪŋ] (AmE)[ 'mɔrnɪŋ]	[mornɪŋ]	[mɔ:ning]
2	<b>Make</b> [ 'meɪk]	[meɪk]	[meɪk]
3	<b>They</b> [ 'ðeɪ]	[zeɪ], [deɪ]	[zeɪ], [deɪ]
4	<b>Wake</b> [weɪk]	[veɪk]	[veɪk]s
5	<b>Researcher</b> [rɪ'sɜ:tʃə]	[risotʃe]	[risyotʃe]
6	<b>Early</b> [ 'ɜ:li]	[o:li]	[o:li]
7	<b>Mentally</b> [ 'mentəli]	[men'tali]	[men'tali]
8	<b>Sometimes</b> [ 'sʌmtaɪmz]	[sʌmtai'miz]	[sʌm'taɪms]
9	<b>To</b> [tə]	[tu]	[tu]
10	<b>Interesting</b> [ 'ɪntrəstɪŋ]	[ɪnte'rəstɪŋ]	[ɪnte'rəstɪŋ]

What is more, the next task that was given to check their pronunciation was presenting the topic “My hobby”. They were asked to speak about their favourite free time activity. This time the mispronounced or oddly pronounced words and phrases were different (due to the different speech), therefore I tried to collect most common of them and arranged them as a table:

№	English pronunciation	Uzbek pronunciation	Russian pronunciation
1	Favourite [ 'fɛvərɪt]	<i>sometimes</i> [fa'varit]	<i>sometimes</i> [fa'varit]
2	Student [ 'stju:dnt]	[stu'dent]	[stu'dent]
3	Singing [ 'sɪŋɪŋ]	[sin'gɪŋ]	[sin'gɪŋ]
4	Mountain [ 'maʊntən]	[maun'teɪn]	[maun'teɪn]
5	Listening [ 'lɪsənɪŋ]	[lis'teniŋ]	[li'seniŋ]

## Discussion

After analysing the results, I came to conclusion that there are several factors that have a huge impact on pronunciation. As for the Uzbek students, they tend to pronounce the words under the influence of: a) dialect, b) Uzbek word stress, c) Uzbek syllable making process, d) sound difference between the Uzbek and English languages. Moreover, the Russian language speakers' pronunciation was affected by: a) Russian word stress, b) the difference between the sound systems of Russian and English.

Let's analyse each word and identify the major factor that contributes to mispronunciation. To begin with the students with Uzbek as a mother tongue, it should be noted that most of their pronunciation is affected by their dialect (variety of the Uzbek language in other regions of the country). To be more precise, in some regions (I did not want to mention particular region in order not to insult the people of specific regions) the sound system of variation of Uzbek differs dramatically from the literary Uzbek language. For example, the Uzbek word “ilon” (snake) should be pronounced with soft [i] sound, however, in some regions it is articulated as ilon, with hard [ɪ] sound. This reflects in the pronunciation of the English language as well: instead of saying [ti:m] that is the word team they say [tɪm] with hard [ɪ] sound.

Another factor that has a huge impact on the mispronunciation is the differences in the word stress of the analyzed languages. It is not a secret that in the Uzbek language words are usually stressed in the last syllable: [tala'ba], [minnat'dor], hamsuh'bat]. Most of the above-mentioned words are mispronounced due to this reason: instead of saying [ 'mentəli] both Uzbek and Russian students said

[men'tali] with the wrong word stress. We can observe this mistake in many other words such as [sʌm'taɪms] instead of ['sʌmtaɪmz], [ɪnte'rɛstɪŋ] instead of ['ɪntrɛstɪŋ], [stu'dent] instead of ['stju:dnt], [sɪn'gɪŋ] instead of ['sɪŋɪŋ], [maun'teɪn] instead of ['maʊntən] and [lɪs'teniŋ] instead of ['lɪsənɪŋ]. The list of words mispronounced due to the stress difference can be continued. It can be concluded that the position of word stress plays a major role in the proper English pronunciation.

Furthermore, words are split into syllables differently in the Uzbek and English languages. In the Uzbek language the number of syllables in a word depends on the number of vowel sounds in the word that is if a word contains 3 vowel sounds it means the word is split into 3 syllables: talaba-talaba 3 vowels, 3 syllables. Most students automatically split English words into syllables according to the Uzbek rules: [sʌm-taɪ-'mɪz] 3 syllables instead of 2 ['sʌmtaɪmz].

What is more, an interesting occasion must be mentioned that nowadays most languages including Uzbek and Russian are borrowing new words from the English language. The borrowed words are adapted into the language with different pronunciation: favourite- [favarit], reason- [rizon].

Finally, the most observed mistake in pronunciation was because of sound difference between the languages. Some sounds in the English language are unique, they are not found in other languages especially in Uzbek and Russian. Sound [ŋ] is not difficult for Uzbek learners as the Uzbek language contains the same sound in Uzbek phonology. However, in Russian language there is no such kind of sound therefore, Russian learners find it hard to pronounce this sound in words. They pronounce the ng separately as [ŋg]: [mɔ:'nɪŋ] instead of ['mɔ:nɪŋ], [ɪnte'rɛstɪŋg] instead of ['ɪntrɛstɪŋ], [sɪn'gɪŋ] instead of ['sɪŋɪŋ] and [lɪ'senɪŋg] instead of ['lɪsənɪŋ]. In addition to this, both Uzbek and Russian learners suffer from the [ð] sound. It is much easier for them to say [zeɪ], [deɪ] instead of ['ðeɪ]. Another unique English sound is [ʒ] which is mostly pronounced [o] or [yo]: [rɪsɔtʃe] or [rɪsɔtʃe] instead of [rɪ'sɔ:tʃə], [o:li] instead of ['ɜ:li]. In Russian language [m] sound is usually pronounced toughly, with active participation of both lips, therefore, there is a slight difference in articulation of the word *make* in English and Russian. Moreover, the sound [w] is not observed in Uzbek and Russian. Therefore, all words with this sound are pronounced with [v] sound: [veɪk] instead of [weɪk].

## Recommendations

During my professional activity I encounter students with different background of English. Although their English language proficiency is different, they tend to have one problem in common: appropriate pronunciation. Here are my suggestions to tackle this issue:

- Make your students listen to more recordings of native speakers. Nowadays the BBC 6-minute English podcasts are becoming very popular and I believe that they are very effective in not only improving the listening and pronunciation but also it develops students' speaking skills and vocabulary range. In my experience I conducted small research and asked my students to listen to a particular podcast several times for a week (they are in pre-intermediate level). They mentioned that at first, they did not catch most of the words and it was difficult for them to work out the meaning even if they listened to the podcast 5-6 times. I asked them not to give up and listen to the podcast more times. However, the next day they were so content that they asked for another new podcast. After listening to more than 10 times they were able to understand and repeat the recording. I noticed considerable improvement in their pronunciation.
- Another simple but effective way of boosting pronunciation is reading out. During the classes I usually ask my students to read out the texts. It may seem quite time-consuming; however, it is very effective. Your students can do this activity at home as well.
- Last but not least, learners should work on their pronunciation individually, that is to say, ask them to record their voice while reading out and then they listen to their pronunciation, find their mistakes and work on the words that are being mispronounced.

All of the above-mentioned methods of improving pronunciation can be efficacious when they are

performed permanently.

### **Conclusion**

There are still more factors in mother tongue that affect English language pronunciation. Mispronunciation is an ongoing concern that many teachers and learners have to deal with. However, there are several effective ways of correcting the pronunciation. Teachers and students must collaborate and work with great patience. It can be a long and effort-demanding process but in the end it will be very rewarding.

### **List of used literature**

1. Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, USA: Pearson Longman.
2. Carter, R., & Nunan, D. (2021). *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
3. Latham-Koenig, C., Oxenden, C., Lambert, J. *English File. Intermediate, Student's e-book* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford University Press.