



PAPER

ASSIMILATION IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK PHONETICS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This study investigates assimilation in English and Uzbek phonetics from a comparative perspective. Focusing on consonantal assimilation, it examines articulatory and phonological patterns observed in both languages. English assimilation is closely linked to connected speech and stylistic variation, whereas Uzbek assimilation predominantly occurs within word boundaries and morphological structures. The analysis highlights shared phonetic principles alongside language-specific realisations and demonstrates the relevance of assimilation for pronunciation teaching and applied phonetics.

Key words: assimilation, phonetics, English, Uzbek, comparative analysis

INTRODUCTION

Assimilation is one of the most widespread phonetic processes in natural speech and reflects the tendency of adjacent sounds to influence one another. This influence often results in partial or complete modification of phonetic features such as voicing, place of articulation, or manner of articulation. From an articulatory perspective, assimilation contributes to economy of effort and fluency in speech production. For example, in English connected speech, the sequence *handbag* is commonly realised as /hæmbæg/, where the alveolar nasal /n/ assimilates to the bilabial /b/. A similar tendency can be observed in *ten bikes*

pronounced as /tem baks/ and *good girl* realised as /l/, all of which demonstrate articulatory simplification.

In Uzbek phonetics, articulatory economy likewise motivates assimilation, though it is typically manifested within word boundaries. For instance, in *ketdi* the sequence /td/ is realised as a geminated consonant /ket/, while *yoza* is pronounced as /josa/ and *ot+da* as /odda/. These examples illustrate that assimilation in Uzbek functions as a regular phonetic mechanism ensuring smooth articulation rather than stylistic variation. Assimilation has long been regarded as an interface phenomenon between phonetics and phonology. It is shaped both by physiological constraints of speech production and by language-specific

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phonological rules. As a result, its realisation varies across languages and speech contexts. This variation makes assimilation a productive domain for comparative phonetic analysis. Despite numerous studies on assimilation in English and Uzbek individually, integrated comparative analyses remain limited. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining consonantal assimilation in both languages, identifying shared tendencies and language-specific patterns, and discussing their implications for pronunciation teaching.

2. Types and Directionality of Assimilation

One of the most important parameters in the analysis of assimilation is directionality. Regressive assimilation, where a following sound influences a preceding one, is widely recognised as the most frequent type in both English and Uzbek. In English, this can be observed in *bad boy* pronounced as /bb b/, where the voiced bilabial /b/ affects the preceding alveolar /d/. Similarly, *have to* is commonly realised as /hf tu/, showing devoicing under the influence of the voiceless /t/. Another example is *newspaper*, which in rapid speech may exhibit partial assimilation in consonant clusters. Uzbek phonetics also shows a strong tendency towards regressive assimilation, particularly in morphologically complex forms.

In *kitob+da*, the voiced /b/ may be realised as voiceless /p/ in certain phonetic environments, yielding /kitopta/. Comparable cases include *yurib+di* pronounced as /juripti/ and *oq+ko'l* realised as /oqkol/. These examples demonstrate that regressive influence is a dominant organising principle in both languages, although its phonological conditioning differs.

Progressive assimilation, in which a preceding sound affects a following one, is less frequent but still systematic. In English, plural and past tense endings provide clear illustrations, where the realisation of suffixes depends on the voicing of the preceding consonant. In Uzbek, progressive effects are comparatively rare and are usually overshadowed by regressive patterns.

3. Domain of Assimilation:

Connected Speech vs Word-Internal Processes

A major contrast between English and Uzbek lies

in the domain in which assimilation operates. English assimilation is strongly associated with connected speech and often crosses word boundaries. For example, *next please* is typically pronounced as /neks pliz/, *don't you* as /dntu/, and *would you* as /wdu/. These examples illustrate that assimilation in English is sensitive to speech tempo, rhythm, and discourse context.

In Uzbek, by contrast, assimilation is predominantly word-internal and closely linked to morphological structure. Forms such as *ish+siz* realised as /isz/, *qiz+cha* pronounced as /qta/, and *bor+gan* realised as /borgan/ demonstrate that assimilation occurs within clearly defined lexical boundaries. Unlike English, Uzbek assimilation is less influenced by speech style and is generally treated as a stable norm of pronunciation. This typological difference reflects broader structural distinctions between the two languages. English relies heavily on prosodic and contextual factors, whereas Uzbek phonetics is more strongly conditioned by morphology.

4. Coalescent Assimilation and Language-Specific Patterns

Coalescent assimilation, involving mutual influence between adjacent sounds, is particularly productive in English. Common examples include *did you* pronounced as /ddu/, *this year* realised as /j/, and *won't you* pronounced as /wntu/. In such cases, the interaction between alveolar consonants and palatal approximants results in affricates or fricatives.

In Uzbek, coalescent assimilation is more limited but still observable in specific constructions. Expressions such as *yoz+chi* realised as /joti/, *ol+chi* pronounced as /olti/, and *kel+chi* realised as /kelti/ show that similar phonetic mechanisms operate, although their distribution is narrower. These contrasts further underline the language-specific implementation of a universal phonetic principle.

5. Pedagogical Implications

Differences in assimilation patterns have important implications for pronunciation teaching, particularly in English as a foreign language contexts. Uzbek learners of English often produce forms such as *good boy* as /d b/ instead of the more natural /b b/, or *don't you* as /dnt ju/ rather than

/dntu/. Similar difficulties arise in sequences like *next day*, where learners may retain /nekst de/ instead of /neks de/.

These errors stem from the fact that Uzbek assimilation is largely word-internal and predictable, whereas English assimilation frequently operates across word boundaries and depends on speech rhythm. Explicit instruction that highlights these contrasts can help learners develop more natural pronunciation and reduce phonetic interference.

6. Conclusion

Assimilation is a fundamental phonetic process that reflects both universal articulatory tendencies and language-specific phonological organisation. The comparative analysis of English and Uzbek demonstrates that, while both languages rely heavily on regressive assimilation and articulatory economy, they differ significantly in the domains and variability of assimilation. English assimilation is closely tied to connected speech and stylistic factors, whereas Uzbek assimilation is primarily word-internal and morphologically conditioned. Recognising these differences is essential for theoretical phonetics and has clear pedagogical value for pronunciation teaching and applied linguistics.

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