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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORD STRESS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This article compares word stress in English and Uzbek, focusing on stress placement, phonetic realization, and functional role. It shows that English has a free and contrastive stress system, while Uzbek has a predominantly fixed final-syllable stress pattern. The findings highlight key differences important for phonetics and language teaching.

Key words: word stress, English phonetics, Uzbek phonetics, contrastive analysis, suprasegmental features

Introduction

Word stress is a fundamental suprasegmental feature that plays a central role in structuring spoken language and ensuring effective communication. It refers to the relative prominence of one syllable within a word, which is perceived through a combination of acoustic cues such as intensity (loudness), pitch (fundamental frequency), and duration. In addition to its phonetic realization, stress has important phonological and functional implications, as it can contribute to meaning differentiation, grammatical distinctions, and rhythmic organization of speech. Although stress is present in all languages, its behavior and significance vary considerably, which makes comparative analysis particularly valuable. The contrast between English and Uzbek provides a clear example of how stress systems can differ both structurally and functionally.

In English, word stress is characterized by its free and variable nature, meaning that it is not confined to a specific syllable position and must often be learned individually for each word. This variability allows stress to perform a crucial role in distinguishing grammatical categories and lexical meanings. For instance, the pair ˈpermit /pˊɜːmɪt/ (noun) and perˈmit /pəˈmɪt/ (verb) demonstrates how stress placement alone can signal a shift in function. Similarly, ˈincrease /ínkriːs/ (noun) contrasts with inˈcrease /ɪnˈkriːs/ (verb), and ˈabstract

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/aébstraekt/ (noun/adjective) differs from ab'stract /əb'straekt/ (verb). Another set of examples includes 'transfer /ɾraensfɜ:/ and trans'fer /traens'fɜ:/, as well as 'overflow /əʊvəfləʊ/ and over'flow /ˌəʊvə'fləʊ/. These examples clearly illustrate that stress in English has a phonemic function and plays a key role in the organization of the lexicon.

In addition to grammatical contrasts, English stress often shifts within derivational families, reflecting morphological processes. For example, 'origin /ʕrɪdʒɪn/ changes to o'riginal /ə'rɪdʒɪnəl/ and further to ori'ginality /əˌrɪdʒɪ'naeləti/. Another example can be seen in 'finance /ɟaɪnaens/ and fi'nancial /faɪ'naenʃəl/, where the addition of suffixes leads to stress movement. Likewise, 'energy /énədʒi/ contrasts with ener'getic /ˌenə'dʒetɪk/. These patterns indicate that stress assignment in English is sensitive to morphological structure and cannot be fully predicted without lexical knowledge.

From a phonetic standpoint, stressed syllables in English are marked by a complex interplay of acoustic features. In words such as en'joy /ɪn'dʒɔɪ/, at'tract /ə'traekt/, and com'plete /kəm'pli:t/, the stressed syllable stands out due to higher intensity, increased pitch, and greater duration. Moreover, English exhibits extensive vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, often resulting in the schwa /ə/, as seen in po'lice /pə'li:s/ and to'day /tə'deɪ/. This reduction contributes to the characteristic rhythm of English and enhances the contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables.

In contrast, Uzbek displays a predominantly fixed stress system, where stress typically falls on the final syllable of a word. This pattern is consistent across a wide range of lexical and grammatical forms. For example, bozor becomes bozór, qishloq becomes qishlóq, and do‘stlik becomes do‘stlík. When suffixes are added, stress shifts to the final syllable of the new form, as in do‘stlar → do‘stlár and do‘stlarimiz → do‘stlarimiź. Similarly, yaxshi becomes yaxshilár, and yaxshilarimiz becomes yaxshilarimiź. This regularity demonstrates that stress in Uzbek is predictable and governed by morphological structure, particularly suffixation.

Phonetically, stress in Uzbek is less prominent compared to English. While the final syllable receives emphasis, the differences in pitch and intensity between stressed and unstressed syllables are relatively small. For instance, in teatr pronounced as teatŕ and madaniyat as madaniyát, the stress is realized primarily through slight lengthening rather than significant pitch elevation. As a result, Uzbek stress contributes more to rhythmic organization than to strong perceptual prominence.

The functional role of stress also differs significantly between the two languages. In English, stress is contrastive and can change meaning, as illustrated by 'conduct /ḱʕndʊkt/ (noun) versus con'duct /kən'dʊkt/ (verb), and 'contest /ḱʕntest/ versus con'test /kən'test/. Similarly, 'detail /di:teɪl/ (noun) differs from de'tail /dɪ'teɪl/ (verb). In Uzbek, however, stress does not typically serve a meaning-distinguishing function. Variations such as bozor versus bozór do not lead to semantic differences, indicating that stress is non-phonemic.

Another important distinction lies in the rhythmic organization of speech. English is considered a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables occur at relatively regular intervals, and unstressed syllables are compressed or reduced. For example, in the sentence He was ex'plaining the im'portance of the pro'cedure, the stressed syllables create a rhythmic pattern that structures the utterance. Uzbek, on the other hand, is closer to a syllable-timed language, where each syllable is pronounced with relatively equal duration. In the sentence U jarayonning muhimligini tushuntiryapti, syllables are articulated more evenly, and vowel reduction is minimal.

These differences have significant implications for language learning, particularly for Uzbek learners of English. Due to the influence of their native language, learners often apply a fixed stress pattern to English words, leading to errors such as fi'nance instead of 'finance or ori'gin instead of 'origin. Such misplacement of stress can result in reduced intelligibility and may hinder effective communication. Furthermore, learners may fail to perceive stress-based contrasts, which are essential for understanding spoken English.

To address these challenges, pronunciation teaching should incorporate explicit instruction on stress patterns, including common stress rules and exceptions. The use of IPA transcription can help learners visualize stress placement, while listening and repetition exercises can improve perception and production. Additionally, acoustic analysis tools

such as Praat can provide visual representations of pitch, intensity, and duration, allowing learners to observe the physical correlates of stress.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative analysis demonstrates that English and Uzbek differ significantly in their stress systems in terms of placement, phonetic realization, and functional role. English stress is variable, contrastive, and semantically significant, while Uzbek stress is largely fixed, predictable, and rhythm-oriented. These findings underscore the importance of contrastive phonetic studies in understanding cross-linguistic variation and improving language teaching methodologies. Future research may focus on experimental acoustic analysis and corpus-based studies to further investigate stress patterns and their role in speech perception and production.

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