

The Language Situation in Uzbekistan And Its Influence on The Process of Acquiring Russian Pronunciation

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Received: 16 March 2025; **Accepted:** 12 April 2025; **Published:** 14 May 2025

Abstract: The article explores the impact of the linguistic situation in Uzbekistan on the acquisition of Russian pronunciation among native Uzbek speakers. It analyzes phonetic challenges caused by articulatory differences and language interference. The role of the linguistic environment and learner motivation is also examined. The paper proposes methods for overcoming pronunciation difficulties.

Keywords: Linguistic situation, phonetics, interference, Russian pronunciation, bilingualism, Uzbekistan.

Introduction: Modern Uzbek society is developing in the context of multilingualism and intensive interlingual interaction, driven by both historical and socio-cultural factors. As a result of the current language situation in the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Russian language, despite losing its official status after the country gained independence in 1991, continues to play an important role in various spheres of public life — from science and education to interethnic communication and mass media.

Russian remains not only a tool of interethnic communication but also a significant component of cultural capital, especially in urban environments. At the same time, there is a clear stratification along regional and social lines: while in the capital and large cities, knowledge of Russian is considered a sign of high social status and intellectual level, its role is significantly weakened in rural and monolingual Uzbek-speaking regions.

One of the most vulnerable aspects through which the influence of this linguistic situation manifests itself is the phonetic side of Russian speech. For native Uzbek speakers learning Russian as a foreign or second language, mastering pronunciation norms presents a particular challenge. These difficulties are generally

associated not only with articulatory-phonetic differences between Uzbek and Russian but also with phonetic-level interference caused by the presence of stable native speech patterns.

Studying the pronunciation difficulties of Russian speech among Uzbek-speaking learners requires a comprehensive approach that combines methods of linguistic analysis, psycholinguistics, phonetics, and sociolinguistics. It is important to consider both objective phonetic barriers and subjective factors: the level of motivation, the perceived status of the language, and the characteristics of the linguistic environment in which learning takes place. This topic is particularly relevant in the context of the growing need to improve the quality of Russian language teaching in Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan.

This study aims to identify and analyze the main factors influencing the formation of pronunciation competence in Russian among Uzbek-speaking individuals, as well as to determine strategies for overcoming phonetic difficulties within the specific linguistic situation. The results may be useful both in theoretical and applied aspects — in the development of teaching materials, the formation of educational programs, and the training of teachers of Russian as a

foreign language.

1. The Language Situation in Uzbekistan (Extended Academic Version)

The language situation in the Republic of Uzbekistan is a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon shaped by the intersection of historical, cultural, and political factors. The country is characterized by a high level of linguistic diversity, where, alongside the state Uzbek language, other ethno-linguistic systems function, including Russian, Karakalpak, Tajik, Kazakh, Turkmen, and several other minority languages.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Uzbek language is recognized as the state language and is officially used in all areas of state administration, education, and documentation. Nevertheless, the Russian language, despite lacking official status, retains its prestige as a high-status means of interethnic communication and continues to be widely used in science, higher education, business, legal practice, and media discourse. Russian holds particular significance in cities where bilingual or multilingual populations have historically developed.

The emerging type of linguistic consciousness in Uzbekistan can be characterized as functional bilingualism, where the native (Uzbek) and second (Russian) languages are used in different social and professional contexts. As a result of a long period of bilingualism, especially during the Soviet era, language behavior models rooted in the society are characterized by free code-switching, code-mixing, and the adaptation of Russian language elements into Uzbek speech and vice versa.

However, there is a clear difference in the level of Russian language proficiency between urban and rural populations. In large cities such as Tashkent, Nukus, Samarkand, and Bukhara, the Russian language maintains a significant presence and is often used in everyday communication, while in rural areas, especially in regions with dominant Uzbek monolingualism, the knowledge and use of Russian are significantly reduced. This is due to several factors, including limited access to quality Russian language education, lack of language practice, and the strengthening of nationally-oriented language policies.

It should be noted that the language situation in Uzbekistan is dynamic and subject to change under the influence of both internal and external factors. On the one hand, there is an institutionalization of the Uzbek language linked to the strengthening of national identity; on the other hand, the Russian language retains high pragmatic value as a tool for academic, professional, and migratory mobility. In this context, bilingualism is viewed not as a threat but as a resource

that contributes to expanding the cognitive and communicative abilities of an individual.

Thus, multilingualism in Uzbekistan creates a unique sociolinguistic environment where languages interact not only at the level of structural interference but also at the level of social functions, ideological attitudes, and individual speech behavior strategies. This, in turn, directly affects the process of acquiring the Russian language, including its phonetic aspect, especially for Uzbek-speaking learners who do not have regular contact with live Russian speech.

2. Features of Russian Phonetics and Learning Difficulties

The phonetic system of the Russian language is one of the most challenging subsystems for non-native speakers to master, especially if their native language belongs to a different language family, as is the case with Uzbek. Uzbek and Russian differ in terms of phonological organization, articulatory base, prosodic features, and the interaction of segmental and suprasegmental units. These differences account for the high level of interference when Uzbek-speaking learners acquire Russian phonetics.

One fundamental difference is the articulatory base. The Russian language is generally characterized by an anterior (front-of-the-mouth) articulatory setting, whereas Uzbek tends toward posterior (back-of-the-mouth) articulation. This leads to shifts in articulation points, especially in the pronunciation of sibilants, affricates, and sonorants. For example, sounds like [ш], [ж], [ч], [щ] are often replaced by simpler or articulatorily similar elements of the Uzbek system, which compromises the phonemic clarity of speech.

A particular difficulty arises with the presence of reduced unstressed vowels in Russian. The Uzbek language, which has a quantitative-qualitative vocalism system, does not utilize vowel reduction in the same way as Russian. As a result, learners often pronounce unstressed vowels with the same level of clarity as stressed ones, which is perceived as a foreign accent and affects the rhythmic and intonational organization of speech. Moreover, hypercorrection occurs — attempts to "artificially" reduce vowels in inappropriate positions.

The existence of voiced-voiceless consonant pairs and their positional alternations in Russian (final devoicing, voicing in intervocalic positions) also poses significant difficulties. The Uzbek language lacks such positional variability, leading Uzbek-speaking students to preserve phonetic invariance, which, in turn, violates orthoepic norms and makes their speech sound "foreign."

Particular attention should be given to the phenomenon of consonant palatalization (softness vs. hardness). In Russian, this opposition is phonemic and includes a wide range of phonemes, even sonorants. In Uzbek, there is no such opposition, so distinctions between, for example, [b] and [b'], [l] and [l'], are often neutralized in perception and simplified in pronunciation, which leads to semantic distortions of words.

Typical manifestations of phonetic interference from the Uzbek language include:

- Absence of vowel reduction and excessive articulation of unstressed vowels;
- Substitution of difficult sounds: [ɣ] → [ɨ], [ɯ] → [ɯɰ] or [c], [ɮ] → [c] or [ɰ];
- Insufficient distinction between soft and hard consonants;
- Difficulties in pronouncing voiced consonants at the end of words;
- Stress placement errors, especially in polysyllabic words.

In addition to objective linguistic factors, subjective ones also play a role: insufficient auditory and articulatory sensitivity, low motivation to correct the accent, and lack of systematic phonetic training in the early stages of learning. All this leads to the formation of a persistent foreign accent and complicates the development of full-fledged speech competence.

Thus, successful mastery of Russian phonetics requires not only theoretical knowledge of the sound system but also active practice aimed at developing phonemic hearing, correcting articulation, and establishing pronunciation automatism within a speech environment. In this regard, it is crucial to consider the specifics of the learner's native language when developing phonetic teaching methods, especially in multicultural contexts such as Uzbekistan.

3. The Influence of the Language Environment on the Formation of Pronunciation Skills

The language environment is one of the key extralinguistic factors influencing the effectiveness of mastering the phonetic norms of a foreign language. From sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives, the degree and quality of a learner's immersion in the target language environment directly correlate with the level of pronunciation competence. In this context, pronunciation is not viewed as an isolated skill but rather as the result of a complex interaction of perception, articulation, social imitation, and language experience.

In the multilingual environments typical of major Uzbek

cities like Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand, learners generally demonstrate a higher level of adaptation to Russian pronunciation norms. This is due to the fact that Russian functions there as a real means of social communication — in education, media, trade, and everyday life. Constant contact with live speech, including samples of normative pronunciation, fosters the development of phonemic hearing, the automatization of pronunciation skills, and the reduction of phonetic interference.

Conversely, in monolingual Uzbek-speaking regions and rural areas, the formation of Russian pronunciation skills is significantly hindered. Limited opportunities for speech practice, a weak motivational environment, and minimal exposure to Russian in daily life create an "artificial" learning situation, where phonetic skills develop mainly within formal classroom activities. In such conditions, the role of the teacher as the primary speech model increases. However, if the teacher themselves speaks Russian with a noticeable accent, there is a risk of learners internalizing distorted pronunciation patterns.

It should be emphasized that the language environment not only provides acoustic and articulatory material but also shapes the learner's attitude towards imitation and identification with native speakers. Studies in sociophonetics show that the presence of a communicative need to use the language (in this case, Russian) significantly enhances awareness during pronunciation learning. An important factor here is the perception of the language's prestige: when Russian is viewed as socially significant, learners are more motivated to achieve accurate phonetic realization.

Therefore, in environments with limited exposure to Russian, compensatory measures are necessary: organizing intensive phonetic workshops, utilizing audiovisual materials with normative speech samples, engaging native speakers or highly qualified teachers proficient in standard pronunciation. Immersive learning technologies, which create artificial speech situations with active use of live Russian, can also prove effective.

Thus, the language environment performs both a stimulating and corrective function in the development of pronunciation skills. In the absence of a favorable external environment, the role of internal learning strategies and pedagogical approaches aimed at developing phonetic competence becomes increasingly important.

4. Sociolinguistic Aspects of Acquiring Russian Pronunciation

Learners' phonetic competence in acquiring a foreign

language is shaped not only by structural differences between languages but also by a complex set of sociolinguistic factors, including language attitudes, motivation, the degree of identification with the language community, and the dominant language ideology in society.

One of the central concepts is motivation to learn the language, particularly intrinsic motivation, which is linked to the understanding of the pragmatic and social value of Russian language proficiency. Learners who view Russian as a tool for academic advancement, professional success, or social mobility generally exhibit a higher level of engagement in the learning process and a conscious attitude toward correcting pronunciation errors. Such learners tend to display active self-reflection, a desire to reduce their accent, and efforts to develop normative speech skills.

At the same time, language attitudes can have both a stimulating and inhibiting effect. If Russian is perceived as culturally and linguistically "alien," imposed, or associated with former imperial or ideological dominance, a negative affective attitude may develop, reducing learning effectiveness. This perception is often reinforced in monoethnic environments where priority is given exclusively to the national language, and the use of Russian might be seen as an undesirable deviation from the norm.

In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, a dual language policy is observed, combining efforts to strengthen the status of the Uzbek language with the preservation of the pragmatic value of Russian. This ambivalence gives rise to heterogeneous sociolinguistic scenarios: in some regions, Russian language proficiency is associated with prestige and high social capital, while in others, it symbolizes cultural distance or even resistance.

A particularly significant role is played by the prestige of the language, which shapes learners' models of speech behavior. Depending on the context, the Russian language may be perceived as the language of science, technology, and international communication, or, conversely, as a language declining in importance, secondary to English or other global languages. When the target language holds high prestige, learners not only strive to master it but also tend to achieve greater success in acquiring its phonetic system.

Equally important is the factor of social identification: learners seeking integration into the Russian-speaking academic or professional environment often unconsciously imitate pronunciation models, intonation patterns, and speech habits. This imitation promotes more accurate reproduction of phonetic norms, particularly when learning takes place in an authentic language environment or through immersive

methods.

In light of the above, it becomes evident that the sociolinguistic context exerts a direct influence on the process of mastering the phonetic aspect of the Russian language. Successful phonetic adaptation is possible when there is a positive motivational orientation, a high status of the target language in the learner's perception, and a supportive sociocultural environment. Therefore, the development of effective teaching methods should take into account not only phonetic features and language proficiency levels but also the sociolinguistic characteristics of the target audience.

5. Overcoming Phonetic Difficulties among Uzbek-Speaking Learners

Overcoming phonetic difficulties for Uzbek-speaking learners of Russian requires a systematic, multifaceted approach that integrates linguistic, pedagogical, and psychophysiological components. Given the profound differences in articulation bases, phonemic systems, and prosody between Uzbek and Russian, phonetic instruction must be both early and methodologically sound.

Firstly, early phonetic orientation of learners plays a key role. From the very initial stages of language acquisition, it is essential to develop an understanding of the Russian sound system, with particular emphasis on the reduction of unstressed vowels, the hardness/softness contrast of consonants, and differences in prosodic features such as intonation, rhythm, and stress. At this stage, phonetic warm-ups, articulation exercises, and introductory training for the auditory recognition of minimal pairs prove particularly effective.

Secondly, the development of phonemic hearing is an indispensable component, as the lack of auditory differentiation of phonemes (for example, distinguishing between [ы] and [и], [щ] and [ш], reduced and full vowels) leads to persistent pronunciation errors. Effective methods include dictations focused on listening, exercises for sound recognition and reproduction, audiovisual dictations, and imitation tasks using native speech samples.

The next step involves the introduction of audio materials featuring standard pronunciation, which serve as models of speech. These materials should be authentic, diverse in timbre and intonational color, and preferably include examples of academic, neutral, and colloquial speech. Particularly useful are educational platforms offering slow playback functions, spectrogram visualizations, and self-assessment tools.

Furthermore, the comparative-contrastive method

plays a crucial role, enabling learners to consciously perceive the differences between their native and target phonetic systems. Comparing, for instance, vowel systems, stress patterns, and articulation bases of consonants helps learners overcome interference effects through logical strategies rather than imitation alone.

The implementation of communicative-phonetic exercises is also highly effective. These exercises incorporate elements of spontaneous speech, interactive dialogues, and situational communication. When learners are compelled to reproduce speech units in real-time, phonetic skills become automated, fostering an intuitive sense of the language. Dramatizations, role-plays, and participation in Russian-language discussions serve not only as speech practice but also as phonetic training.

A pivotal transition point involves shifting from an imitation-based to a conscious approach to pronunciation learning. While traditional methods focus on repeating after a model, modern approaches encourage learners to understand the nature of phonetic differences, engage in self-analysis, and acquire self-monitoring and correction techniques. In this context, reflective learning becomes particularly important, including keeping speech journals, recording and analyzing one's own pronunciation, and participating in phonetic laboratories.

Finally, psychological readiness to correct one's accent becomes a significant success factor. Learners need to develop a positive attitude toward error correction, overcoming the fear of public speaking and the embarrassment associated with having an accent. Working in small groups, adopting individualized approaches, and providing supportive feedback from instructors prove effective in this regard.

Thus, overcoming phonetic difficulties among Uzbek-speaking learners is possible only through a comprehensive approach that combines early diagnosis, scientifically grounded instruction, phonemic hearing development, and the cultivation of reflective skills. Only under these conditions can learners achieve a normative level of pronunciation competence.

CONCLUSION

The conducted analysis has shown that the linguistic situation in Uzbekistan, characterized by institutionalized bilingualism and functional asymmetry between Uzbek and Russian, directly affects the formation of pronunciation skills among native Uzbek speakers. Given the typological differences between the phonetic systems of the two languages, as well as the social and psychological

parameters of the language environment, mastering Russian pronunciation requires a targeted, methodologically substantiated, and contextually adapted approach.

The process of forming pronunciation competence should not be considered in isolation but within the framework of the complex interaction of linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic factors. Effective interference reduction is achievable only through early phonetic intervention, the development of phonemic hearing, the use of the comparative-contrastive method, and systematic work with authentic speech samples. The quality of teaching, including the phonetic competence of the instructor, as well as the learner's positive language attitude, becomes particularly significant.

Consequently, the improvement of Russian phonetics teaching methods in Uzbekistan should be based on an interdisciplinary synthesis of scientific data and take into account the sociocultural specifics of learners. Only through such integration is it possible to achieve a high level of pronunciation literacy, which, in turn, contributes not only to communicative effectiveness but also to professional, academic, and cultural mobility of individuals in an increasingly globalized world.

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