



Challenges in Teaching English to Turkic Language Speakers

Niyadullayeva Sabrina¹

¹Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Uzbekistan

Abstract

The article analyzes typical difficulties encountered by native speakers of Turkic languages (Turkish, Azerbaijani, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, etc.) when learning English. The aim is to systematize the main areas of cross-linguistic interference at phonetic, grammatical, lexical, and syntactic levels. In phonetics, problems include English front vowels, interdental consonants [θ, ð], absence of vowel harmony, and fixed stress. Grammatical difficulties involve the lack of article category in Turkic languages, differences in aspectual-temporal systems (especially perfect forms), word order (SOV vs. SVO), and complex sentence construction. Lexical interference manifests through false friends, calquing, and different collocational patterns. Sociocultural and psychological factors are also considered: differences in speech etiquette, politeness strategies, and educational traditions. Based on the analysis, methodological recommendations are proposed: using a contrastive approach, systematic training of problematic phonemes, practicing articles and tenses, developing metalinguistic awareness. The article is intended for English teachers working in Turkic-speaking environments and for researchers in contact linguistics. The results can be applied to create specialized teaching materials and correct typical errors.

Key words: cross-linguistic interference; Turkic language speakers; English language learning.

In the context of globalization and the expansion of international contacts, English has become an essential component of education in many Turkic-speaking countries – Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. However, speakers of Turkic languages, which are of the agglutinative type with vowel harmony and an SOV (subject–object–verb) word order, face systematic difficulties in learning English, which is a fusional-analytical language with an SVO word order. These difficulties are not random but occur regularly, allowing them to be regarded as typical cases of cross-linguistic interference. The phonological system of Turkic languages differs significantly from that of English.

The most common errors include: *Front vowels*. In English, distinctions are made between /i:/ (sheep) and /ɪ/ (ship), as well as /u:/ (fool) and /ʊ/ (full). In Turkic languages, these contrasts are either absent or realized differently. For example, speakers of Turkish often replace /ɪ/ with /i/ or /u/, which can lead to semantic distortions. Interdental fricatives /θ/ (think) and /ð/ (this) are absent in all Turkic languages. They are usually substituted with /t/, /d/, /s/, or /z/, leading to an accent and potential misunderstanding (*three* → *tree*, *then* → *den*).

Lack of vowel harmony in English. Turkic languages require vowel harmony by front/back and rounding. Accustomed to this system, learners unconsciously try to “equalize” vowels in English words (for example, pronouncing computer with vowels of the same type). *Stress*. In Turkic languages, stress usually falls on the final syllable (as in Turkish) or has fixed positions (in Uzbek – on the final syllable, in Kazakh – often on the final). In English, stress

is mobile and can distinguish meaning (‘record – re‘cord), which causes difficulties both in pronunciation and in distinguishing parts of speech. *Grammatical structure.* The grammatical system of Turkic languages differs radically from English, leading to many persistent errors. In Turkic languages, the article category is absent. Definiteness or indefiniteness is expressed through word order, cases, or particles (for example, the Turkish suffix -i for a definite direct object). Therefore, Turkic-speaking learners often omit articles or use them inconsistently: *I saw cat* instead of *I saw a cat*; *Sun is shining* instead of *The sun is shining*. The English system of 12–16 verb tenses contrasts sharply with the simpler Turkic systems (in Turkish – 5 main tenses, in Uzbek – 3–4).

Particular difficulties include: Perfect tenses (I have done): Turkic languages have no direct equivalent; the perfect meaning is often conveyed by the past tense with a special suffix (for example, Turkish -miş), which usually expresses evidentiality (reporting, uncertainty) rather than result. This leads to errors such as *I have seen him yesterday* (confusion with the simple past). Continuous forms (I am doing): Duration in Turkic languages can be expressed by special constructions, but their use is less regular than in English. Learners often use the Simple instead of Continuous: *Look! It rains*. Sequence of tenses in complex sentences: Turkic languages do not have a strict sequence of tenses, which causes mistakes in reported speech: He said he will come instead of would come.

Word order. Turkic languages are SOV, whereas English is SVO. This leads to calques: *I him saw* (*Ya ego videl*). Additionally, Turkic languages have a developed case system (6–7 cases), while English expresses case relations through prepositions and word order. Learners may omit or misuse prepositions: *listen music* instead of *listen to music*, *go school*. Question formation: In Turkic languages, a question is often formed with a question particle (tulpars) without changing word order. English requires inversion (*Do you like...?*). A typical error is *You like coffee?*, directly translating from Turkic.

Lexical difficulties

False friends. For example, Turkish *aktual* means “current, active,” not “factual”; English *brilliant* may be wrongly associated with Turkish *briyant* (cut diamond). In Uzbek and Kazakh, Russian and Arabic borrowings create additional false parallels, complicating word choice and comprehension.

Calquing of fixed expressions. Literal translation of Turkic idioms often produces unnatural English constructions: *It’s my head’s door* (Turkish *başımın kapısı* – referring to something very precious).

Differences in lexical collocation. Turkic languages often use a single verb where English requires several distinct verbs. For example, the Uzbek verb *qilmoq* (“to do/make”) can combine with thousands of nouns, whereas English strictly distributes *do*, *make*, *take*, *give*, and others.

Syntax. Turkic languages are left-branching (modifiers always precede the head; dependent words come before the main word). English allows both left- and right-branching, especially in complex sentences with subordinate clauses. Learners often construct cumbersome sentences by placing all subordinate clauses before the main clause: *The book that I yesterday from the library took was interesting* instead of *The book that I took from the library yesterday was interesting*.

Gerunds and infinitival constructions. Turkic languages lack equivalents of English gerund and infinitive constructions (Complex Object, Complex Subject), causing difficulties in translation and production. For example, *I want you to come* is often replaced with *I want that you come*.

Non-linguistic factors affecting learning

Politeness strategies. In Turkic cultures (especially in Asian regions), indirect speech acts, avoidance of direct “no,” and euphemisms are common. In English, directness is not perceived as rude, which can lead to communicative misunderstandings.

Teaching traditions. In many Turkic-speaking countries, the grammar-translation method dominates, focusing on written language. Students accustomed to memorizing rules and translating texts experience stress when exposed to communicative approaches. Russian language interference (for CIS countries – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan): Russian, as a non-native but widely studied second language, can either reinforce or mitigate Turkic interference. For example, Russian does not improve article usage but provides experience in learning a fusional language.

Based on the difficulties described, the following strategies can be proposed to overcome them. *Contrastive analysis.* Regular comparison of grammatical and phonetic phenomena in English and the native Turkic language. Tables, diagrams, and translation exercises with commentary are useful. *Phonetic drills with minimal pairs.* Exercises such as ship – sheep, think – sink, then – den. Use of mirrors and visualizations to show tongue and lip positions. *Article drilling.* Specialized exercises for choosing definite, indefinite, or zero articles based on context, as well as translation from Turkic to English, where an article must be added. *Systematic teaching of tenses.* Introduce the 12 English tenses gradually, emphasizing contrasts (Simple vs Continuous, Present Perfect vs Past Simple). Use timelines and real-life scenarios. *Word order practice.* Exercises converting SOV structures into SVO, transforming questions and negatives. *Development of metalinguistic awareness.* Explaining the reasons for typical errors using linguistic concepts (vowel harmony, agglutination, analytic structure) to help learners consciously control their speech. *Consideration of*

sociocultural components. Discuss differences in politeness strategies, use authentic materials (dialogues, videos) to master English communicative conventions.

Speakers of Turkic languages face a complex set of difficulties in learning English, caused by deep structural differences at the phonetic, grammatical, lexical, and syntactic levels. The most serious problems are related to the absence of articles, a different tense-aspect system, variations in word order, and specific phonetic structures. Effective learning requires a contrastive approach, specialized corrective exercises, and attention to psycholinguistic characteristics of learners. Further research can focus on creating multilingual error corpora and developing digital training tools for Turkic-speaking audiences.

Bibliography

- Demirel, Ö. (2018). *Yabancı dil öğretimi*. Pegem Akademi.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Gökçe, S. (2015). Phonological problems of Turkish learners of English. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 11(2), 45–58.
- Karimov, I. (2020). Article acquisition by Uzbek learners of English. *International Journal of Central Asian Studies*, 24(2), 205–221.
- Komshilova, O. N. (2017). Komshilova, O. N. (2017). Sravnitel'naya tipologiya tyurkskikh i germanskikh yazykov. *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriya 9. Filologiya*, 3, 72–84.
- Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures*. University of Michigan Press.
- Odlin, T. (1989). *Language transfer*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rakhimova, D. (2019). Lexical interference in English of Kazakh speakers. *Almaty Review of Linguistics*, 1, 33–47.
- Swan, M., & Smith, B. (2001). *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tursunov, U. (2021). Syntactic errors in English writing of Kyrgyz students. *Central Asian Journal of Education*, 6(1), 15–29.