

WORD-FINAL DEVOICING

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Annotation: This article analyzes the phenomenon of word-final devoicing, which refers to the devoicing of voiced consonants at the end of words, from both phonetic and phonological perspectives. The study comparatively examines the features of this phenomenon in English and Uzbek, highlighting that in English the preservation of voiced consonants is phonemically significant, whereas in Uzbek their devoicing is considered a natural phonetic process. The article also discusses the impact of this phenomenon on the English pronunciation of Uzbek speakers and identifies possible cases of phonetic interference.

Keywords: Word-final devoicing, voiced consonants, devoicing, phonetics, phonology, pronunciation, English language, Uzbek language, comparative analysis, interference, minimal pairs, speech errors.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается явление оглушения звонких согласных в конце слова (word-final devoicing) с фонетической и фонологической точек зрения. В работе проводится сравнительный анализ проявления данного явления в английском и узбекском языках, где в английском языке сохранение звонкости согласных имеет фонематическое значение, тогда как в узбекском языке их оглушение является естественным фонетическим процессом. Также анализируется влияние данного явления на произношение английского языка носителями узбекского языка и рассматриваются случаи фонетической интерференции.

Ключевые слова: Оглушение в конце слова, звонкие согласные, оглушение, фонетика, фонология, произношение, английский язык, узбекский язык, сравнительный анализ, интерференция, минимальные пары, речевые ошибки.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada word-final devoicing, ya'ni so'z oxirida jarangli undosh tovushlarning jarangsizlashuvi hodisasi fonetik va fonologik jihatdan tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda mazkur hodisaning ingliz va o'zbek tillarida namoyon bo'lish xususiyatlari qiyosiy asosda o'rganilib, ingliz tilida jarangli undoshlarning saqlanishi fonematik ahamiyatga ega ekani, o'zbek tilida esa ularning ko'pincha jarangsizlashuvi tabiiy fonetik jarayon sifatida izohlanadi. Shuningdek, ushbu hodisaning o'zbek tilida so'zlashuvchilarning inglizcha talaffuziga ta'siri hamda yuzaga keladigan interferensiya holatlari yoritiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Word-final devoicing, jarangli undoshlar, jarangsizlashuv, fonetika, fonologiya, talaffuz, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili, qiyosiy tahlil, interferensiya, minimal juftliklar, nutq xatolari.

Introduction: In modern linguistics, phonetics and phonology play a crucial role in understanding the articulatory, acoustic, and functional properties of speech sounds. Speech sounds are not only physical units produced by the speech organs but also serve as meaningful elements that distinguish one word from another. Among these features, the distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants is of particular importance in many languages.

One of the phonetic processes that involves this distinction is word-final devoicing, which refers to the devoicing of voiced consonants in word-final positions. This phenomenon is widely observed in several languages, where it functions either as a phonological rule or as a phonetic tendency conditioned by articulatory ease. In some languages, word-final devoicing is systematic and does not affect meaning, while in others, it may influence phonemic contrasts.

A comparative analysis of English and Uzbek reveals significant differences in how this phenomenon operates in each language. In English, voiced consonants in word-final position generally retain their voicing and contribute to phonemic distinctions. For example, minimal pairs such as *bad* /bæd/ and *bat* /bæt/, or *bag* /bæg/ and *back* /bæk/, demonstrate that voicing plays a crucial role in distinguishing meaning.

In contrast, in Uzbek, word-final voiced consonants often undergo devoicing as a natural phonetic process. For instance, the word “*kitob*” may be pronounced as [kitop], and “*javob*” as [javop]. This devoicing does not typically lead to a change in meaning and is considered a regular phonetic adaptation rather than a phonological contrast.

This difference becomes particularly significant in second language acquisition. Uzbek speakers learning English may transfer phonetic features of their native language into English pronunciation, leading to instances of interference. As a result, English words may be pronounced with devoiced final consonants, potentially causing misunderstandings or reducing phonemic accuracy.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the theoretical aspects of word-final devoicing, examine its manifestation in English and Uzbek languages, and investigate its impact on the English pronunciation of Uzbek speakers through a comparative linguistic approach.

Main body: Word-final devoicing is a phonetic process in which voiced obstruents (such as /b, d, g, v, z/) lose their voicing and are realized as their voiceless counterparts when appearing in word-final position. From an articulatory perspective, this phenomenon is closely related to the physiology of speech production. Voicing requires continuous vibration of the vocal folds, which becomes less stable toward the end of an utterance due to reduced subglottal pressure and decreased airflow.

From a phonological standpoint, word-final devoicing may function either as a rule or as a phonetic tendency depending on the language system. In some languages, such as German, Russian, and Polish, it is a categorical phonological rule that neutralizes voicing contrasts in word-final position. In such systems, underlying voiced consonants are systematically realized as voiceless, and this does not lead to ambiguity because morphological or contextual cues compensate for the loss of contrast.

¹ Roach, P. *English Phonetics and Phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. – pp. 40–45.
<https://assets.cambridge.org/97805217/17398/sample/9780521717398ws.pdf>

In contrast, languages like English do not apply this rule phonologically. Instead, voicing contrasts are preserved, and final consonants remain phonemically distinct. This distinction plays a crucial role in maintaining lexical differences between words.

2. Word-final Consonants and Phonemic Contrast in English

In English, the voicing feature of consonants in word-final position is phonemically contrastive. This means that the presence or absence of voicing can change the meaning of a word. Minimal pairs clearly demonstrate this functional load.

Examples of minimal pairs:

- cap /kæp/ vs cab /kæb/
- leaf /li:f/ vs leave /li:v/
- back /bæk/ vs bag /bæg/
- ice /aɪs/ vs eyes /aɪz/ (in connected speech)

These examples illustrate that voicing is not merely a phonetic detail but a meaningful phonological feature. Therefore, devoicing in these positions would potentially obscure lexical distinctions.

However, in natural spoken English, partial devoicing may occur due to coarticulatory effects, speech rate, or prosodic weakening. For instance, voiced consonants at the end of an utterance may have reduced voicing duration, but they rarely lose voicing completely in careful speech.

3. Word-final Devoicing in Uzbek: Phonetic Nature and Morphological Influence (Revised)

In Uzbek, word-final devoicing is a regular phonetic phenomenon in which voiced consonants are realized as voiceless in word-final position. This process is primarily motivated by articulatory simplification and does not affect lexical meaning, as voicing is not phonemically contrastive in this position.

This phenomenon can be illustrated with the following examples:

- kitob (“book”) → [kitop]
- javob (“answer”) → [javop]

In these cases, the underlying voiced consonant /b/ is devoiced to [p] at the end of the word. However, when a vowel-initial suffix is attached, the original voicing is restored:

- kitob + -lar (plural suffix) → kitoblar (“books”) → [kitoblar]
- kitob + -im (possessive suffix “my”) → kitobim (“my book”) → [kitobim]

These examples demonstrate that devoicing in Uzbek is position-dependent and occurs only in word-final environments. The reappearance of voicing in morphologically complex forms indicates that devoicing operates at the phonetic level rather than as a phonological rule affecting the underlying representation.

Thus, word-final devoicing in Uzbek reflects a surface-level phonetic adjustment rather than a phonemic contrast, distinguishing it from languages like English, where voicing plays a crucial role in meaning differentiation.

4. Cross-linguistic Comparison: English vs. Uzbek

The comparison between English and Uzbek reveals fundamental differences in phonological organization:

Phonemic status:

In English, voicing is phonemic in final position; in Uzbek, it is not contrastive word-finally.

Rule application:

Uzbek applies a systematic phonetic devoicing process; English does not.

Minimal pairs:

English relies heavily on minimal pairs to distinguish meaning, whereas Uzbek relies more on morphological and syntactic context.

Phonetic realization:

English preserves voicing in careful speech, while Uzbek tends to neutralize it in word-final obstruents.

Morphological interaction:

Uzbek shows voicing alternation depending on suffixation, while English maintains stable consonantal voicing regardless of morphological changes.

Conclusion: In conclusion, word-final devoicing is one of the important phonetic differences between English and Uzbek. In English, the preservation of voiced consonants at the end of words plays a crucial role in distinguishing meaning, whereas in Uzbek their devoicing is observed as a natural phonetic phenomenon. This difference causes interference in the English pronunciation of Uzbek speakers, leading to mispronunciations.

Moreover, this phenomenon directly affects the clarity and intelligibility of speech. Especially in minimal pairs (such as bad–bat, dog–dock), errors may result in a change of meaning. Therefore, studying word-final devoicing comparatively, developing phonetic awareness, and forming correct pronunciation skills through practical exercises are of great importance.

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