

## The Impact of Syntactic Word Order Differences on the Development of English Speaking Skills among Uzbek Learners

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**Abstract:** This study examines the difficulties Uzbek learners face in developing English speaking skills due to differences in syntactic word order. Uzbek follows a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) structure, while English uses a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) pattern. These structural differences often cause word order errors, hesitation, and reduced fluency in spoken English. Findings indicate that learners frequently transfer Uzbek syntax into English and experience cognitive load when reorganizing sentences during speech. Two teaching methods—contrastive syntax awareness activities and structured speaking tasks—were identified as effective strategies to help learners internalize English word order and improve fluency.

**Keywords:** Uzbek learners, English speaking skills, syntactic differences, word order, language transfer, EFL teaching, fluency

### Introduction

English speaking skills are considered one of the most important parts of learning a foreign language. In Uzbekistan, English is widely taught at schools and universities, and students are expected to communicate clearly and confidently. However, many Uzbek learners face difficulties when speaking English, even if they have a good knowledge of vocabulary and grammar rules. One of the main reasons for this problem is the difference in syntactic structure between the Uzbek and English languages. Uzbek and English follow different word order patterns. English normally uses a Subject–Verb–Object structure, while Uzbek follows a Subject–Object–Verb order. Because of this difference, Uzbek learners often transfer the word order of their first language into English when speaking. This negative transfer can lead to unnatural sentences, hesitation, and reduced fluency. As a result, learners may feel less confident and avoid speaking in English.

Previous studies in second language acquisition show that first language interference plays an important role in the development of speaking skills. When learners plan their speech, they often think in their native language first and then translate their ideas into English. This process becomes more difficult when the syntactic rules of the two languages are very different.

The purpose of this study is to examine how differences in syntactic word order affect the development of English speaking skills among Uzbek learners. The study also aims to identify common speaking difficulties related to syntax and to discuss effective teaching methods that can help learners overcome these problems in the classroom.

### **Research Methods**

This study uses a qualitative research approach to explore speaking difficulties related to syntactic word order among Uzbek learners of English. The participants were Uzbek EFL students studying at an intermediate level. Data were collected through classroom speaking tasks, short oral presentations, and semi-structured interviews. During these activities, students' speech was recorded and later analyzed. The analysis focused on word order errors, pauses, and sentence reformulation during speaking. In addition, classroom observations were conducted to understand how students respond to speaking tasks in real learning situations. Previous studies were used to support the choice of methods and to help interpret the findings. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of learners' speaking challenges and their causes.

### **Discussion**

Syntactic differences between Uzbek and English are one of the factors that strongly influence the speaking performance of Uzbek learners of English. Because Uzbek and English follow different word order systems, learners often transfer the structure of their first language into English during oral production. This section discusses two major speaking difficulties that arise from this contrast: incorrect word order and reduced fluency caused by syntactic planning problems.

The first major difficulty is the use of Uzbek-style word order in English sentences. Uzbek typically follows a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) structure, where the verb is placed at the end of the sentence. For example, in Uzbek, the sentence “Men kitobni o‘qidim” literally translates as “I the book read.” This structure is grammatically correct in Uzbek but incorrect in English, which requires a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) order: “I read the book.” During speaking tasks, many learners produced English sentences that mirrored Uzbek syntax, such as “I my homework finished” instead of “I finished my homework.” This shows direct syntactic transfer from Uzbek to English.

Previous studies on language transfer explain that learners rely more on their first language during speaking than writing because speaking happens in real time and allows less opportunity for conscious correction. In the case of Uzbek learners, the habit of placing the verb at the end is deeply rooted, and this habit appears automatically during speech. Even learners who know English grammar rules often fail to apply them correctly when speaking under time pressure. As a result, their speech

may be understandable, but it does not sound natural or fluent to native or proficient speakers.

The second major difficulty is reduced fluency caused by hesitation, pauses, and sentence reformulation. This problem is closely connected to word order differences. In Uzbek, important information often comes before the verb, while the verb closes the sentence. In English, however, the verb appears early, and the sentence continues after it. For example, the Uzbek sentence “U kecha do‘stlari bilan kinoga bordi” follows the order: He yesterday with friends to the cinema went. When Uzbek learners try to express this idea in English, they often hesitate before the verb because they are mentally reorganizing the sentence. This results in speech such as: “He... yesterday... with his friends... went... to the cinema.”

Such hesitation shows that learners are planning their sentences using Uzbek syntax and then attempting to convert them into English structure while speaking. According to cognitive models of speech production, this process increases mental effort and slows down speech. Learners may pause, repeat words, or change the sentence halfway. This was frequently observed in the collected speaking data, especially during longer responses.

These syntactic difficulties also influence learners’ confidence and speaking strategies. Many students avoided complex sentences that included time expressions, objects, or adverbial phrases. Instead, they preferred short sentences like “He went.” or “I like English.” While these sentences are grammatically correct, they limit learners’ ability to communicate detailed meaning. This avoidance behavior has been discussed in previous research, which suggests that learners simplify their speech to reduce the risk of syntactic errors and negative evaluation.

The comparison between Uzbek and English syntax clearly explains why Uzbek learners face specific speaking difficulties. The SOV structure of Uzbek conflicts with the SVO structure of English, leading to word order errors and reduced fluency. These problems are not caused by lack of knowledge alone but by deep structural differences between the two languages. Understanding this contrast is essential for developing effective teaching strategies that help learners reorganize their syntactic thinking when speaking English.

### **Teaching methods to overcome syntactic speaking difficulties**

Based on the identified speaking difficulties, it is clear that Uzbek learners need teaching methods that directly address syntactic differences between Uzbek and English. General speaking practice alone is not enough, because learners may continue to apply Uzbek word order unconsciously. This section discusses two concrete teaching methods that can help students overcome syntactic transfer problems and develop more fluent English speaking skills.

**1. Contrastive Syntax Awareness Activities.** The first effective method is the use of contrastive syntax awareness activities. This method focuses on helping learners clearly see and understand the structural differences between Uzbek and English sentence order. Instead of teaching English syntax in isolation, teachers directly compare the two languages and show how meaning is organized differently. For example, a teacher can present the Uzbek sentence “Men har kuni ingliz tilini o‘rganaman” and write its literal word-by-word translation on the board: “I every day English study.” Then, the correct English sentence “I study English every day” is shown next to it. By visually comparing the two structures, students become aware that English places the verb earlier in the sentence, while Uzbek places it at the end. This comparison helps learners understand not only what is correct, but why their usual word order does not work in English. In speaking lessons, teachers can use sentence transformation tasks, where students first say a sentence in Uzbek and then immediately produce the correct English version. Over time, this practice helps learners reduce reliance on Uzbek syntax and build a new mental pattern for English sentence formation. Research in applied linguistics supports this approach, showing that contrastive analysis can reduce negative transfer when learners are made consciously aware of cross-linguistic differences. This method is especially useful at the pre-speaking stage. When students understand the structural contrast clearly, they feel more confident during speaking tasks and are less likely to hesitate before the verb. However, teachers should avoid overloading students with grammatical terminology and instead focus on clear examples and guided practice.

**2. Structured Speaking Tasks with Controlled Output.** The second effective method is the use of structured speaking tasks that control sentence structure while still allowing meaningful communication. Many Uzbek learners struggle during free speaking because they must plan content and syntax at the same time. Structured tasks reduce this cognitive load and allow learners to focus on correct word order.

One useful activity is sentence-building speaking tasks. For example, students are given key sentence elements such as subject, verb, object, and time expression on separate cards. A student may receive the words: I / watch / a movie / yesterday. The student must arrange them orally in the correct English order and then say the full sentence aloud: “I watched a movie yesterday.” This task directly contrasts with Uzbek order, where the time expression often appears earlier and the verb appears last.

Another effective task is guided storytelling. Students are given a simple story outline with prompts that follow English SVO order. For example: Who? → What did they do? → Where? → When? This format encourages learners to organize their speech according to English syntax rather than Uzbek patterns. Over time, repeated exposure

to this structure helps learners internalize English sentence order and speak more fluently.

Studies on task-based language teaching suggest that controlled speaking tasks help learners develop accuracy before moving to full fluency. For Uzbek learners, this step is crucial because incorrect syntax often becomes automatic if it is not addressed early. In essence, both contrastive syntax awareness activities and structured speaking tasks directly target the root cause of Uzbek learners' speaking difficulties. By helping learners notice syntactic differences and practice correct sentence order in supported speaking situations, these methods can significantly improve fluency, accuracy, and confidence in English oral communication.

### Conclusion

This study examined the difficulties Uzbek learners face in developing English speaking skills due to differences in syntactic word order between Uzbek and English. The findings showed that the Subject–Object–Verb structure of Uzbek strongly influences learners' spoken English, leading to incorrect word order, hesitation, and reduced fluency. These problems are not only grammatical but also cognitive, as learners need to reorganize sentence structure while speaking.

The discussion highlighted two major teaching methods that can help address these difficulties. Contrastive syntax awareness activities allow learners to clearly understand the differences between Uzbek and English sentence structure, while structured speaking tasks provide guided practice that supports accurate and fluent speech. Together, these methods help learners reduce negative language transfer and build more automatic English sentence patterns.

Although this study focused on a limited group of learners, the findings have important implications for English language teaching in Uzbekistan. Future research could explore these methods in larger classrooms or examine their long-term effects on speaking fluency. Overall, addressing syntactic differences directly can significantly improve Uzbek learners' confidence and effectiveness in spoken English.

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