THE INFLUENCE OF STUDENTS' FIRST LANGUAGE ON ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING: THE CASE OF UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract. This thesis examines how features of Uzbek as students' first language influence their academic writing in English, drawing on contrastive rhetoric and language transfer theory. Based on empirical findings from typologically related languages, typical transfer-related errors of Uzbek learners, such as article omission, word-order deviations and preposition misuse, are analysed. Practical recommendations for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instruction in Uzbekistan are proposed.

Keywords: first language transfer, contrastive rhetoric, academic writing, EFL, error analysis, Uzbek learners.

Introduction

English has become the dominant language of international scholarship, and the ability to write accurate, well-organised academic texts in English is now a core requirement for students and researchers in Uzbekistan. However, academic writing is not a language-neutral skill: it is shaped by the grammatical and rhetorical conventions of the writer's first language (L1). Many texts by Uzbek students require heavy revision not only because of surface mistakes, but because of deeper patterns rooted in Uzbek. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the influence of Uzbek on students' academic English writing and to suggest ways of addressing it.

Theoretical Background

The study is based on three complementary theories:

– contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966) – speakers of different languages organise written argumentation differently;

– cross-linguistic influence (Odlin, 1989) – L1 structures are transferred positively or negatively into L2;

– interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) – learner language is a systematic, developing system rather than a set of random errors.

Structural Differences Between Uzbek and English

Uzbek and English differ considerably in their typology:

– Uzbek is an agglutinative language, English is analytic;
– Uzbek has SOV word order, English has SVO;
– Uzbek has no article system, while English articles are grammaticalised;
– Uzbek uses postpositions and case suffixes instead of prepositions.

These differences create predictable difficulties for Uzbek learners writing in English.

Typical L1-Related Errors in Academic Writing

Corpus-based error analyses of Uzbek EFL learners' essays report consistent L1 interference caused by structural mismatches between the two languages (Uzbek students learning EFL, 2024). Similar results are found for Turkish and Azerbaijani learners, whose languages are also agglutinative and

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article-less. The most frequent error types are: omission or misuse of articles; word-order errors at the clause level; incorrect use of prepositions; underuse or misuse of English cohesive devices.

Lower-proficiency writers mostly make morphological errors, while more advanced writers tend to show syntactic and discourse-level interference.

Practical Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Introducing explicit contrastive instruction on article use;
2. Providing structured practice in English clause-level word order;
3. Teaching academic cohesive devices (however, therefore, moreover);
4. Using error analysis of students’ own texts in EAP classes;
5. Developing EAP materials that take Uzbek-specific difficulties into account.

Conclusion

The first language continues to shape academic English writing well beyond the beginner level, producing predictable, structurally motivated errors rather than random ones. Taking the differences between Uzbek and English into account provides a solid basis for designing EAP curricula that directly address Uzbek learners’ difficulties.

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