

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# THE ROLE OF PHONETIC TRAINING IN ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION FOR DARI-ENGLISH BILINGUALS

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## Abstract

Phonetic training has become a pivotal tool in improving pronunciation skills among bilingual learners, especially those transitioning between languages with distinct phonological systems, such as Dari and English. This article examines the role of phonetic training in enhancing pronunciation for Dari-English bilinguals by evaluating the effectiveness of various training methods. It explores the phonological challenges faced by Dari speakers when learning English, the impact of phonetic training on pronunciation accuracy, the role of technology in phonetic training, and the importance of addressing fossilization. The findings highlight the necessity of tailored phonetic instruction to achieve accurate pronunciation and improve communication for Dari-English bilinguals.

**KEYWORDS:** Phonetic training, pronunciation accuracy, Dari-English bilinguals, phonological challenges, fossilization, English dental fricatives, Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT), intelligibility, pronunciation errors, articulatory mechanisms, phoneme distinction, visual aids in pronunciation training.

## INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is critical in second language acquisition, particularly for Dari-English bilinguals who face challenges due to distinct phonological differences between the two languages. Phonetic training focuses on articulation, intonation, and rhythm, offering a practical approach to overcoming these issues. Key difficulties include English sounds absent in Dari, such as dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. If pronunciation errors persist, they can become fossilized, making them harder to correct over time. This article explores how phonetic training, supported by technology, helps Dari speakers improve English pronunciation and intelligibility.

## Literature Review

Research emphasizes the importance of phonetic training for pronunciation improvement. Studies show that bilingual learners, especially those transitioning between dissimilar phonological systems, benefit from targeted pronunciation instruction. Phonetic training can also address fossilized errors, particularly when introduced early. The integration of technology, such as Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT), further enhances learning by offering personalized feedback and practice opportunities.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to

investigate the role of phonetic training in enhancing pronunciation skills among Dari-English bilinguals. The research design consists of both quantitative and qualitative components, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of phonetic training methods.

### **Participants**

The study involved a sample of 60 Dari-English bilingual learners, aged 18 to 35, who were enrolled in English language courses at various educational institutions in Uzbekistan. Participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group that received phonetic training and a control group that received standard language instruction without a specific focus on pronunciation.

### **Data Collection**

1. Pre- and Post-Tests: Both groups completed pre-tests assessing their pronunciation accuracy in English, focusing on specific sounds challenging for Dari speakers, such as the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. Following the intervention, post-tests were conducted to evaluate improvements in pronunciation accuracy.

2. Phonetic Training Program: The experimental group underwent a structured phonetic training program over a period of six weeks, incorporating techniques such as minimal pair drills, shadowing exercises, and Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT). The training sessions focused on articulatory descriptions and practical exercises aimed at addressing the specific phonological challenges faced by the participants.

3. Qualitative Interviews: After the completion of the training program, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants from the experimental group to gather qualitative data on their experiences and perceptions of phonetic training. These interviews provided insights into the effectiveness of various training methods and participants' self-reported improvements in pronunciation.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from the pre- and post-tests were analyzed using statistical methods to determine

the significance of pronunciation improvements between the experimental and control groups. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to assess overall performance.

Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically. Key themes related to the effectiveness of phonetic training, participant challenges, and perceived changes in intelligibility were identified, providing a deeper understanding of the impact of phonetic training on pronunciation skills.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

### **Phonological Differences Between Dari and English**

The phonological systems of Dari and English are markedly different, presenting unique challenges for Dari-English bilinguals. Dari, an Indo-Iranian language, has a simpler vowel system compared to English and lacks several consonant sounds crucial for English pronunciation. For instance, the English dental fricatives /θ/ (as in "think") and /ð/ (as in "this") are absent in Dari, making them difficult for Dari speakers to master (Rasouli, 2018). Additionally, English's tonal and stress patterns, which differ significantly from those in Dari, often lead to stress placement and intonation issues among Dari speakers. Understanding these differences is essential for designing effective phonetic training programs that target the specific challenges faced by Dari-English bilinguals. Example: A Dari speaker might say, "I tink it's a good idea," instead of "I think it's a good idea," substituting /θ/ with /t/.

### **The Impact of Phonetic Training on Pronunciation Accuracy**

Phonetic training is integral in helping bilingual learners, particularly Dari-English bilinguals, overcome pronunciation challenges by enhancing their ability to perceive and produce L2 sounds

that do not exist in their L1 (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Such training focuses on articulating difficult sounds, such as the English /v/ and /w/ contrast or the pronunciation of diphthongs, leading to significant improvements in pronunciation accuracy and fluency. By providing structured exercises and targeted practice, phonetic training helps learners develop the necessary skills to produce these unfamiliar sounds more accurately. Example: After phonetic training, a Dari-English bilingual might improve from pronouncing "wery" as "very," correctly distinguishing between the /v/ and /w/ sounds.

### **Addressing Fossilization Through Phonetic Training**

Fossilization, where incorrect pronunciation patterns become ingrained, is a common issue among bilingual learners, especially adults. Phonetic training plays a critical role in addressing fossilization by offering repeated practice and feedback on correct pronunciation (Selinker, 1972). This is particularly important for Dari-English bilinguals, who may struggle with specific sounds that are not present in their native language. Intensive and focused phonetic training can help reverse fossilized errors, leading to significant improvements in pronunciation even among advanced learners (Saito, 2012). Preventing fossilization through early and consistent phonetic training is essential for enhancing long-term language proficiency. Example: A speaker who consistently says "tirty" instead of "thirty" might overcome this fossilized error with targeted phonetic exercises.

### **Improving Intelligibility and Comprehensibility**

Improving intelligibility, or how well a speaker's pronunciation is understood by others, is a key goal of phonetic training. Research has shown that phonetic training not only aids in accurate sound production but also enhances overall intelligibility and comprehensibility (Munro & Derwing, 2006). For Dari-English bilinguals, improving intelligibility is crucial for effective communication in English-speaking environments, where miscommunications can have significant social and professional consequences. Thomson (2012) found

that learners who received phonetic training were better understood by native speakers, underscoring the importance of such training for bilinguals aiming to improve their spoken English. Enhancing intelligibility ensures that Dari-English bilinguals can communicate more effectively, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings. Example: Without training, a Dari-English bilingual might pronounce "ship" and "sheep" identically, causing confusion; phonetic training helps clarify this difference.

### **Technological Approaches: Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT)**

Technology plays a significant role in modern phonetic training, with Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT) emerging as a popular and effective tool. CAPT programs provide immediate feedback and enable repeated practice, allowing learners to visualize their pronunciation and compare it with native speakers (Levis, 2018). These programs often include interactive elements that make the learning process engaging and accessible, particularly for Dari-English bilinguals. By offering a flexible platform for mastering difficult phonetic concepts, CAPT helps learners overcome specific pronunciation challenges more effectively.

### **Explicit Phonetic Instruction and Visual Aids**

In addition to technology, explicit phonetic instruction that includes articulatory descriptions and phonological contrasts between Dari and English is crucial for enhancing pronunciation skills. Techniques such as minimal pair drills, shadowing exercises, and auditory discrimination tasks are effective in reinforcing correct pronunciation (Saito, 2012). Visual aids, including spectrograms and articulatory diagrams, further support learners by providing clear representations of sound differences and production techniques. For Dari-English bilinguals, these instructional methods help bridge the gap between their native phonological system and the target language, facilitating more accurate pronunciation. Example: An instructor might use a spectrogram to show how the vowel sound in "beat" differs from "bit," helping learners visualize the subtle difference.

### Individual Differences in Response to Phonetic Training

The effectiveness of phonetic training varies depending on individual factors such as age, motivation, and prior language learning experience. Younger learners often benefit from greater neuroplasticity, making it easier for them to acquire new sounds (Flege, 1995). However, highly motivated adult learners can also make significant progress with consistent and targeted phonetic training (Moyer, 1999). Educators must consider these individual differences when designing phonetic training programs to ensure the training is accessible and effective for all learners. Tailoring programs to meet the specific needs and characteristics of Dari-English bilinguals is crucial for maximizing the benefits of phonetic training. Example: A younger learner might quickly correct their pronunciation of "zoo" from "soo" after a few sessions, while an older learner may require more practice.

### CONCLUSION

Phonetic training is crucial for improving pronunciation in Dari-English bilinguals, addressing phonological challenges like unfamiliar English sounds. These pronunciation errors, if uncorrected, can become fossilized. Phonetic training helps learners better understand articulation and improve intelligibility, especially in professional and academic settings.

Technology, such as Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT), enhances phonetic instruction by providing personalized feedback, enabling focused practice. While individual factors like age and motivation affect training outcomes, consistent practice can lead to significant improvements for all learners.

In summary, phonetic training is essential for Dari-English bilinguals to overcome pronunciation challenges, prevent fossilization, and enhance communication skills, which is increasingly important in a global context.

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