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Reduction and Sound Changes in the Uzbek Language: Theoretical Foundations of the Orthoepic Norm

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Abstract: *The article examines the theoretical foundations of phonetic sound changes in Uzbek, with particular attention to reduction and its relation to procope, syncope, apocope, elision, syneresis, and consonant deletion. The analysis focuses on unstressed position, articulatory convenience, speech economy, and simplification as factors underlying sound changes. Uzbek sound changes are considered from combinatory and positional perspectives, with attention to their orthoepic and, in limited cases, orthoepic-orthographic characteristics. The study argues that reduction may function as an initial stage of weakening in spoken language, while complete deletion may represent a subsequent stage. The article also emphasizes the need to distinguish phonetic, orthoepic, and morphophonological dimensions of sound alternations.*

Keywords: Uzbek, phonetics, phonology, reduction, sound change, orthoepy, procope, syncope, apocope, elision, syneresis, metathesis, consonant deletion.

1. Introduction

Sound changes constitute one of the important issues in the study of the phonetic and phonological systems of a language. From the earliest stages of comparative linguistics, sound alternation and the relationships among speech sounds have attracted the attention of researchers [1]. In the history of Turkic phonetics and phonology, the observations of such scholars as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, Abu Ali ibn Sina, and Mahmud al-Kashgari represent important theoretical sources. In his work *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk*, Mahmud al-Kashgari recorded not only phonetic differences among Turkic languages but also such phenomena as assimilation, dissimilation, metathesis, sound deletion, and sound insertion [2].

In later linguistic studies, I. A. Baudouin de Courtenay and N. V. Kruszewski made significant contributions to the theoretical classification of sound alternations. Baudouin de Courtenay distinguished between combinatorially conditioned and tradition-based alternations, relating the former to phonetics and the latter to morphology. This approach makes it possible to consider not only the articulatory characteristics of sound changes but also their morphological and functional properties [3].

In Uzbek, a significant part of sound changes is associated with oral speech and orthoepic norms. In particular, the phenomenon of reduction is associated with the weakening of a sound in an unstressed syllable and manifests itself in relation to processes such as procope, syncope, apocope, elision, and syneresis. The dissertation material also

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identifies reduction and unstressed position as important factors contributing to the emergence of these changes [4].

The aim of the study is to identify the theoretical foundations of phonetic reduction and related sound changes in the Uzbek language, systematize the factors underlying their occurrence, and elucidate their relationship with orthoepic norms [5].

The objectives of the study are: (1) to generalize theoretical interpretations of sound changes; (2) to determine the role of reduction in the Uzbek language; (3) to classify the principal sound changes associated with reduction; (4) to characterize their orthoepic and morphophonological features; and (5) to substantiate the need to take reduction into account in improving the pronunciation norms of the Uzbek literary language [6].

2. Methodology

The primary material of the study consisted of the theoretical views presented in Section 1.1 of the dissertation, examples of phonetic phenomena in the Uzbek language, and the scholarly interpretations provided for them. The analysis employed descriptive, comparative-analytical, classificatory, and phonetic-phonological interpretation methods. Sound changes were grouped according to their position within a word, their relationship with stress, the influence of adjacent sounds, articulatory ease, and factors related to the economy of speech.

In the analysis of the materials, sound changes were examined on the basis of two major factors: combinatory and positional factors. Combinatory changes included phenomena associated with the interaction of sounds, such as assimilation, accommodation, dissimilation, and nasalization, whereas positional changes included reduction and certain related processes. At the same time, the study distinguishes between the form of a sound change as a phonetic phenomenon and its status within the norms of standard pronunciation.

The study does not claim to have developed a new experimental corpus or statistical sample. The findings are based on the reorganization and theoretical generalization of the existing dissertation material.

3. Results

1. Reduction and Its Central Role

The analysis of sound changes in the Uzbek language demonstrates the particular significance of the phenomenon of reduction. Vowel sounds in unstressed syllables may be pronounced with less strength and clarity than those in stressed syllables. As a result, a sound may undergo quantitative or qualitative reduction and, in certain cases, may be completely deleted. In this sense, reduction can be interpreted as a phonetic initial stage of many sound changes [7].

The emergence of sound changes is influenced by such factors as linguistic economy, articulatory ease, and the interaction of sounds. The tendency to facilitate the movements of the speech organs may result in processes of shortening, deletion, or restructuring within the sequence of sounds [8].

2. Procope

Procope is characterized by the deletion of a sound at the beginning of a word, particularly the loss of a vowel in an unstressed position. The research material provides examples such as *uchun–chun* and *agar–gar* [9]. Procope is associated both with historical development and with processes of reduction in spoken language. However, a historical form and the normative form of the contemporary literary language should not be treated as the same phenomenon; their functional status should be determined separately.

3. Syncope

Syncope is associated with the weakening and deletion of an unstressed sound, most often a vowel, occurring in the middle of a word or root. The material provides examples such as *olucha–olcha*, *ko'buruk/ko'puruk–ko'prik*, *ikki+ov–ikkov*, *shahari–shahri*, and *ulug'+ay–*

ulg'ay. Experimental observations have also recorded cases in which certain unstressed vowels become acoustically imperceptible in the flow of speech. This evidence makes it possible to regard syncope not merely as a theoretical category but as a phenomenon directly associated with actual speech processes [10].

4. Apocope

Apocope is characterized by the deletion of a sound, and in some cases a syllable, at the end of a root or word. In the material, this phenomenon is associated with the facilitation and economy of pronunciation. It is important to distinguish between historical manifestations of apocope and those occurring in spontaneous speech, since certain shortened forms may, over time, become standardized as independent lexical or grammatical units [11].

5. Elision and Syneresis

Elision refers to the deletion of one of two adjacent vowels, whereas syneresis involves the merging of adjacent vowels and their realization as a single vowel. In Uzbek spoken language, forms such as *yoza olmoq–yozolmoq*, *bora olmoq–borolmoq*, and *Salima opa–Salimapa* are cited as examples of elision. Syneresis, in turn, is associated with the deletion of an intervocalic consonant or with the articulatory simplification of adjacent vowels in borrowed words [12].

6. Deletion and Insertion of Consonants

Reduction is not limited exclusively to vowels. The deletion of consonants is described as *ecthipsis* and may occur in *anlaut*, *inlaut*, and *auslaut* positions. The material provides examples such as *Arslon–Aslon*, *oltmish–olmish*, *past–pas*, and *farzand–farzan*. Conversely, the insertion of the consonants *h*, *y*, and *v* to reduce the articulatory difficulty associated with the pronunciation of adjacent vowels has also been recorded, as illustrated by *soat–sohat*, *doira–doyira*, and *muomala–muvomala* [13].

7. Metathesis and Morphophonological Changes

Metathesis involves the mutual transposition of sounds within a word. In Uzbek spoken language, forms such as *qo'shni–qo'nshi*, *daryo–dayro*, *ahvol–avhol*, *aylanmoq–aynalmoq*, and *tuproq–turpoq* have been documented. Some outcomes of metathesis have subsequently become standardized forms in the course of historical development [14].

In Turkic languages, which have an agglutinative structure, changes in the phonetic composition of a root may also occur during the combination of morphemes. The material demonstrates the morphophonological nature of such changes through examples such as *ong–angla*, *singil–singli*, and *qizil–qizar*. Thus, it is insufficient to explain all sound alternations solely as purely phonetic processes; some are closely associated with the interaction and combination of morphemes [15].

4. Discussion

The results of the analysis demonstrate that sound changes in the Uzbek language cannot be explained by a single causal factor. Although positional and combinatory conditions are important, unstressed position, reduction, articulatory ease, speech economy, and the tendency toward simplification should be considered together in explaining the different stages of the process [16].

From the perspective of Baudouin de Courtenay's distinction between combinatory and traditional alternations, some sound changes in Uzbek are directly conditioned by phonetic environments, whereas others have become established through morphological structure and historical tradition. Therefore, equating a variant occurring in spontaneous speech with the normative form of the literary language requires methodological caution [17].

The view that a substantial proportion of sound changes in the Uzbek language are orthoepic in nature is also important in this regard. Pronunciation forms such as *oyila–oila* and *turtti–turtdi* may not be fully reflected in writing. In some cases, however, the relationship between pronunciation and orthography is directly observable. Therefore, the phenomena of reduction, elision, syneresis, and other features of spontaneous speech

should be taken into account in the compilation of orthoepic dictionaries [18]

An important methodological issue in this context is the need to distinguish between a phonetic phenomenon, a normative pronunciation variant, and a historical sound change. For example, a sound deletion that occurred historically may no longer exist as an ordinary phonetic variant in the contemporary language system. Conversely, a reduction regularly observed in spoken language may be important for describing the norms of literary pronunciation [19].

Furthermore, the study of the phonetic system of Uzbek requires the anatomical-physiological, acoustic, and functional aspects of speech to be considered in an integrated manner. Such an approach makes it possible to explain sound changes not only through their written forms but also through their articulation and acoustic realization in actual speech [20].

5. Conclusion

Sound changes in the Uzbek language arise from the interaction of phonetic, orthoepic, and, in certain cases, morphophonological factors. Reduction is one of the central phenomena in explaining many changes occurring in spoken language. The weakening of a sound in an unstressed syllable may be associated with subsequent processes of deletion or restructuring. Although procope, syncope, apocope, elision, and syneresis are related to the positional characteristics of sounds and articulatory ease in speech, each of these phenomena has its own specific mechanism. The deletion and insertion of consonants are also important phonetic features of Uzbek spoken language. They should be analyzed not only from a phonetic perspective but, in certain cases, from a morphophonological perspective as well. In describing sound changes in Uzbek, historical forms, variants occurring in spontaneous speech, and contemporary literary norms should not be conflated. Taking reduction and related sound changes into account is of both theoretical and practical importance for improving the orthoepic dictionary of the Uzbek literary language.

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