THE ROLE OF UZBEK IN LEARNING TURKISH BY UZBEK STUDENTS: A SURVEY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: This study is based on the results of a survey conducted among students of Samarkand Medical University. A total of 40 students participated in the survey, which examined the role of their native language, Uzbek, in the process of learning Turkish. The findings indicate that, owing to the genetic and typological proximity between the two languages, knowledge of Uzbek exerts a significant positive effect on Turkish language acquisition: shared vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural factors considerably accelerate the learning process. At the same time, "false friends" (false cognates), orthographic differences, and certain grammatical interference phenomena were identified as the primary sources of difficulty.

Keywords: Turkish language teaching, Uzbek language, related languages, bilingualism, cognates, interference.

1. INTRODUCTION

Turkish and Uzbek belong to the Turkic language family, which, according to Altaic linguistic theory, shares common roots. The two languages exhibit notable lexical, morphological, and syntactic similarities. In theory, this proximity should enable Uzbek-speaking students to acquire Turkish rapidly and efficiently. In practice, however, the extent to which this potential is realized—and what obstacles may impede it—requires systematic empirical investigation.

This article presents an empirical analysis based on a survey conducted among medical students in Samarkand. The aim of the study is to identify both the positive and negative effects of Uzbek language knowledge on Turkish language learning, as well as to develop pedagogical recommendations grounded in learners' own experiences.

The theoretical framework of the study draws on Corder's (1967) error analysis, Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory, and Odlin's (1989) concept of language transfer. From the perspective of these theories, the phenomenon of "positive transfer" in the learning of closely related languages significantly accelerates the acquisition process.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

2.1. Survey Design

The survey consisted of 28 questions divided into two sections: (1) demographic information and language proficiency level, and (2) statements rated on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree"). Open-ended questions were also included to capture participants' personal learning experiences.

2.2. Participants

A total of 40 students from Samarkand Medical University participated in the study. The key demographic characteristics of the participants are presented below.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	22	55%
	Female	18	45%
Age	17–20	31	77.5%
	21–25	8	20.0%
	25+	1	2.5%
Duration of Study	0–6 months	29	72.5%
	6–12 months	7	17.5%
	1 year or more	4	10.0%
Proficiency Level	A1–A2	30	75.0%
	B1–B2	10	25.0%

The data indicate that the majority of participants (72.5%) had been studying Turkish for 0–6 months and were at the A1–A2 proficiency level (75%), making the findings particularly representative of the initial stages of language learning.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Lexical Similarity and Vocabulary Acquisition

Survey item 6 ("It is easy to memorize new words because of their similarity") and item 10 ("When reading texts, I understand them quickly thanks to similar words") reveal that more than 80% of participants consider lexical similarity to be a facilitating factor in Turkish language learning.

Table 2. Distribution of Responses Regarding Lexical Transfer

Survey Item	Agree / Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Memorizing new words is easy (Q.6)	82.5%	10.0%	7.5%
Understanding texts quickly (Q.10)	77.5%	10.0%	12.5%
Uzbek knowledge is helpful (Q.18)	80.0%	12.5%	7.5%

These findings confirm the conclusion that the shared lexical layer between Turkish and Uzbek functions as a form of "free vocabulary" for learners. In open-ended responses, participants expressed views such as: "There are similar words and the sentence structure is the same" and "Most words in Uzbek are identical to their Turkish counterparts."

3.2. Grammatical Transfer and Sentence Structure

With respect to item 7 (understanding sentence structure) and item 8 (learning more quickly due to similarities), 72.5% and 75% of participants respectively provided supportive responses. Both Turkish and Uzbek are agglutinative languages that follow Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) word order. This shared structural feature substantially facilitates the acquisition of grammatical forms.

Among the grammatical topics identified as comparatively accessible, participants most frequently cited personal suffixes, the imperative mood, the optative mood, and vowel harmony rules. Grammatical categories such as "personal endings" (şahıs ekleri) and the "imperative mood" (emir kipi) were confirmed in the survey as being relatively manageable for learners.

3.3. Challenges: False Cognates and Interference

Item 11 of the survey—"I find it difficult when certain words resemble Uzbek but carry different meanings"—received agreement from approximately 40% of participants, indicating that the problem of "false friends" (faux amis) constitutes a genuine obstacle to learning. The existence of formally similar but semantically divergent words in Uzbek and Turkish gives rise to translation errors.

Table 3. Responses Regarding Primary Areas of Difficulty

Area of Difficulty	Agree / Strongly Agree	Disagree
False cognates (Q.11)	42.5%	35.0%
Pronunciation difficulty (Q.12)	35.0%	45.0%
Tense suffixes (Q.13)	37.5%	42.5%
Orthographic confusion (Q.16)	37.5%	40.0%
Using incorrect words due to Uzbek influence (Q.14)	47.5%	32.5%

With regard to pronunciation, approximately 35% of respondents agreed with item 15 ("I have difficulty pronouncing certain Turkish letters due to the influence of Uzbek phonology"), particularly in relation to characters such as ö, ü, and ğ, which have no direct equivalents in Uzbek. Conversely, 45% disagreed with item 12 ("Turkish pronunciation is difficult for me"), suggesting that the majority of students do not perceive pronunciation as a significant obstacle.

3.4. Motivation and Self-Confidence

Item 20 ("The cultural similarities between Turkish and Uzbek increase my desire to learn the language") received a positive response from 85% of participants, confirming that cross-cultural affinity plays a significant role as a motivational factor.

Item 21 (self-confidence) was answered positively by 82.5% of respondents, indicating that psychological barriers to learning are comparatively low. Item 22 (progressing more quickly due to similarities) was similarly confirmed by 82.5% of participants.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the language transfer theory developed by Odlin (1989). For Uzbek learners of Turkish, positive transfer clearly predominates

over negative transfer, a pattern attributable to the genetic relatedness of the two languages—that is, their shared Turkic origins.

Nevertheless, the study also documents the presence of negative interference. Specifically, three principal areas emerge: (1) false cognates—words that share a similar form but carry different meanings, such as the Uzbek yaxshi and the Turkish iyi, or orthographically similar pairs with semantic divergence; (2) orthographic confusion—arising from the use of the Latin alphabet in Uzbek alongside differing spelling conventions in Turkish; and (3) certain grammatical categories—particularly the variable expression of past tense forms across the two languages.

The cultural proximity factor warrants particular attention. Participants' responses indicate that the similarities between Turkish and Uzbek cultures—encompassing lifestyle, traditions, cuisine, and music—exert a strong motivational influence on language learning, a finding consistent with Dörnyei's (2001) motivational theory.

5. STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Item 26 of the survey ("What are your recommendations for Uzbek students learning Turkish?") was an open-ended question. The most frequently recurring recommendations are presented below.

Table 4. Most Frequently Cited Student Recommendations

Category	Sample Response	Frequency
Regular practice	"Speak frequently, practice every day"	High
Media-based learning	"Watch series, films, and videos"	High
Reading	"Read extensively"	Medium
Vocabulary building	"Use a dictionary, memorize words"	Medium
Self-confidence	"Believe in yourself and get started"	Medium

Participants themselves rated Turkish as a relatively easy language to learn: in response to item 27 ("In your opinion, is Turkish easy for Uzbek speakers?"), more than 70% of respondents answered "Very easy" or "Easy."

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that the Uzbek language constitutes a significant source of advantage in Turkish language learning, providing substantial positive transfer across lexical, grammatical, and cultural domains. More than 80% of participants indicated that their knowledge of Uzbek had been beneficial to their acquisition of Turkish.

The primary challenges identified include false cognates, orthographic differences, and certain grammatical interference phenomena. These difficulties can be mitigated through targeted pedagogical approaches.

The pedagogical recommendations that emerge from this research are as follows: (1) course materials and syllabi should devote special attention to the divergences between the two languages; (2) instructors should compile lists of false cognates and develop dedicated exercises; (3) Turkish television series and film materials should be actively incorporated into classroom instruction; and

(4) contrastive grammar textbooks should be developed that leverage learners' native language knowledge as a form of scaffolding.

Future research should undertake broader comparative analyses across diverse educational institutions and age groups, and should consider the adoption of longitudinal methodologies to track learner development over time.

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