

On The Semantic Transformations in Arabic Loanwords

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Abstract: This article examines the semantic transformations observed in Arabic loanwords integrated into the modern Uzbek literary language. While a significant portion of the Uzbek lexicon originates from Arabic, the borrowed terms often diverge from their original meanings, either expanding, narrowing, or in some cases, acquiring entirely different connotations. By exploring examples such as *lahm*, *basir*, *kun fayakun*, *kasofat*, *qavm*, *jāhil*, *zamid*, and others, this study highlights the dynamic processes of linguistic adaptation and semantic change in Uzbek.

Keywords: Arabic loanwords, semantic shift, linguistic borrowing, uzbek language, lexical transformation, historical linguistics.

Introduction: Over the course of history, thousands of words have entered modern Uzbek literary language from Arabic, Persian, Russian, Mongolian, Latin, and other languages. This influx of borrowed vocabulary has enriched the Uzbek lexicon, contributing to both its historical evolution and stylistic diversity. Among the most significant sources of external enrichment are Arabic and Persian-Tajik, constituting approximately 20% and 10–12% of the Uzbek lexicon, respectively. These borrowings have not simply been assimilated at the level of vocabulary; many have undergone shifts in meaning—some words retain their original Arabic senses, whereas others have expanded, narrowed, or diverged to convey distinct meanings within Uzbek usage.

The fifteenth-century written literary language already showcased extensive borrowing, with Arabic and Persian-Tajik loanwords accounting for nearly 60% of the lexical layer. Linguists generally agree that words are borrowed to designate concepts or objects lacking a native equivalent. However, as languages change over time, borrowed words frequently undergo semantic shifts. This article focuses on examples of Arabic-origin words in Uzbek, illustrating how their meanings have transformed, occasionally to the point of contradicting the original Arabic sense.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous scholarship on the integration of Arabic loanwords into Central Asian languages has noted the

pervasive influence of Arabic on legal, religious, and scholarly terminology. Studies have also highlighted how semantic change is neither monolithic nor uniform across different contexts and historical periods. Classical dictionaries, such as Arabic lexicons and historical Uzbek dictionaries, offer insight into how loanwords were once employed. More recent works, including the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, reveal how current usage often departs from older forms.

Researchers of Turkic languages have long documented the influence of Persian, Russian, and Arabic. While some scholars have concentrated on phonological and morphological adaptation, others have underscored the role of cultural and religious factors in shaping semantic shifts. This article contributes to the ongoing discussion by focusing specifically on semantic alterations that have occurred in Arabic loanwords as they entered and became established in Uzbek.

Methods and Methodology

1. **Data Collection:** The study primarily relied on lexicographical sources, notably the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language and standard Arabic dictionaries. Representative words of Arabic origin were identified based on their frequency of occurrence and relevance to semantic transformations.

2. **Comparative Analysis:** Each selected Arabic loanword was analyzed in both its original Arabic context—using Arabic dictionaries and classical texts—

and in its current Uzbek usage, as documented in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language and contemporary Uzbek literature.

3. Historical Contextualization: In order to track the evolution of meaning over time, instances of these loanwords were traced through historical texts, including poetry and prose from the fifteenth century onward. Where possible, changes in meaning or connotation were linked to sociocultural developments influencing the Uzbek language.

4. Semantic Categorization: Based on their observed transformations, words were classified according to different types of semantic shift, such as expansion, narrowing, divergence, or contradiction of the original Arabic sense.

The main part

Over the course of history, thousands of words have entered modern Uzbek literary language from Arabic, Persian, Russian, Mongolian, Latin, and other languages, thereby enriching our language through external sources.

Approximately 20% of the current Uzbek literary lexicon consists of words of Arabic origin, and about 10–12% are Persian-Tajik loanwords. Naturally, depending on the genre and style, the frequency of Arabic and Persian-Tajik borrowings may be higher in one context and lower in another. In the written literary language of the fifteenth century, the lexical layer borrowed from Arabic and Persian-Tajik sources constituted around 60%. A certain proportion of the Uzbek vocabulary is comprised of words borrowed from Arabic. According to linguists, words are primarily borrowed from one language into another to denote a concept or object. Not all Arabic loanwords in Uzbek retain their original meanings: some have undergone semantic expansion in comparison to their meanings in Arabic, while others have undergone semantic narrowing. In some instances, the borrowed words have acquired a meaning contrary to the original; in other cases, their meaning has simply diverged from the source language.

In Arabic, *lahm* (لحم) means “meat,” whereas in Uzbek it specifically denotes “boneless meat,” most commonly used in the phrase *lahm go’sht* (“boneless meat”) as a modifier. The word *basir* in Arabic signifies “seeing” or “keen-eyed” and is regarded as one of the attributes of God (e.g., *بصير تعملون إن الله بما* ... *Innallaha bima ta’maluna basirun* — “Indeed, Allah sees what you do,” *Qur’an* 2:110). In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, however, this borrowed term is indicated to mean “blind.”

Similarly, the phrase *kun fayakun* (فيكن كن) in the

Qur’an appears with the sense of “God said ‘Be!’ and it came into existence,” whereas in Uzbek it conveys the opposite meanings of “ceased to exist” or “was annihilated.” The Arabic word *kasofat* signifies “dense,” “thick,” or “coarse,” yet in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language it is noted to mean “unfortunate consequence,” “misfortune,” or “disaster.”

In Arabic, the word *qavm* denotes “nation” or “people,” whereas in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language it is defined as referring to a group descending from the same lineage, an extended family, or a tribe. Hence, we can conclude that when this word was adopted into Uzbek, its meaning narrowed in comparison to the original sense in Arabic. For instance, in the Arab Republic of Egypt, the term “National Research Center” is rendered as *Al-markaz al-qawmī lil-buhūth* (المركز القومي للبحوث).

In Arabic, *jāhil* (جاهل) carries the meanings “uneducated,” “ignorant,” “foolish,” or “insane.” However, in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, along with “backward,” “uncultured,” and “ignorant,” it also includes the meanings “stubborn,” “obstinate,” or “quarrelsome.” Another word derived from the same root, *jahl*, signifies “foolishness,” “ignorance,” or “darkness” in Arabic, yet in modern Uzbek it has come to denote “anger” or “rage.” Historically speaking, however, this word was also used in Uzbek to signify “ignorance” and “foolishness.” For example, in *Furqat’s* poem “*Ilm xosiyati*” (“The Benefit of Knowledge”), we find the following line:

Darig’o Furqati beilm qoldim

O’zimni jahl zindonig’a soldim.

In Arabic, the word *zamir* (ضمير) denotes “conscience,” “intellect,” “intention,” “thought,” “imagination,” or “idea.” Moreover, in Arabic grammar, it also signifies a pronoun. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, however, this borrowed word is listed with the meanings “essential nature,” “inner significance,” or “core,” and is noted as an archaic term for a pronoun.

The term *zamzama* in Arabic connotes “humming,” “murmuring,” “grumbling,” “rumbling,” or “gurgling,” whereas in Uzbek it has acquired the meanings “introduction to a musical piece,” “a softly begun song,” “humming,” “gesture,” “signal,” or “hint.”:

Zebo pari yengil xalq qo’shiqlarini zamzama qilar edi...

In Arabic, the word *bisot* originally meant “carpet,” whereas in Uzbek it has come to signify an individual’s personal belongings (often a woman’s), including any item in one’s possession. The Arabic word *haykal* denoted something “very large, enormous; a place of worship, a grand structure,” but in Uzbek it refers to a

depiction of a person or animal sculpted from plaster, stone, metal, wood, or similarly durable materials.

In Arabic, the term *fitna* conveys the meanings “to fascinate and lead astray,” “rebellion,” or “turmoil,” but in Uzbek it denotes a covert act intended to discredit someone in pursuit of malicious objectives. The Arabic word *almisoq* means “pledge, oath; contract, agreement,” while in Uzbek its meaning has shifted to indicate “very old” or “dating back to ancient times” (for example, an *almisoqdan qolgan* item refers to a relic from a distant past).

The Arabic word *hasham* once signified “respect, reverence; servants, attendants,” yet in Uzbek it has come to mean “objects or items used for decorative purposes.” The Uzbek term *farrosh* derives from the Arabic *farasha*—“to spread out.” Historically, *farrosh* described individuals in royal courts whose task was to spread carpets. Over time, the meaning evolved, and today a *farrosh* is someone who sweeps streets, yards, or gardens, or who cleans offices and institutions.

Here, we have outlined only a few Arabic loanwords that have undergone semantic transformation; the Uzbek language includes numerous other examples of such semantic shifts.

CONCLUSION

The Uzbek language’s extensive borrowing from Arabic underscores its historical connections and cultural exchanges, resulting in a rich and multifaceted lexicon. Although many Arabic-origin words have retained their fundamental meanings, numerous examples illustrate marked semantic shifts, underscoring the dynamic nature of linguistic adaptation. Words such as *lahm*, *basir*, and *zamir* reveal how the same borrowed term may acquire narrower, broader, or even contradictory meanings in the recipient language. The analysis of these shifts not only deepens our understanding of the complex processes underlying linguistic change but also highlights the profound cultural and historical interactions between Arabic and Uzbek. As this study demonstrates, continued examination of loanwords across various domains and periods remains crucial for appreciating the evolution and richness of the Uzbek language.

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