

A Study of Realia Used in Uzbek Lullaby Texts

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Abstract: This article examines the role of realia - culturally specific linguistic units - in Uzbek lullaby texts (alla), focusing on how they reflect national traditions, beliefs, and worldview. Lullabies, as a form of oral folklore, serve not only as expressions of maternal affection but also as a rich source of ethnolinguistic data. The analysis identifies various categories of realia, including those related to food (plov), clothing (atlas ton, doppi), household items (beshik), cultural rituals (tonbichar), and place names (Oqrabot). These elements represent linguistic markers of identity and embody deeply rooted cultural meanings. Particular attention is paid to how realia function within the communicative structure of lullabies and how they contribute to the symbolic transmission of national values across generations. The study concludes that lullaby realia serve not only as carriers of lexical and cultural information but also as key instruments in shaping the collective memory and worldview of the Uzbek people.

Keywords: Uzbek lullaby; realia; cultural linguistics; folk tradition; ethnolinguistics; national identity; oral discourse; atlas fabric; symbolic meaning; language and culture.

Introduction: Mastering the language and culture of one's own people plays a crucial role in the formation of an individual as a personality. A person's worldview is often shaped by the linguistic picture of the world. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis includes the following fundamental principles:

1. language determines the way its speakers think;
2. the way people perceive and understand the real world depends on the language in which they conceptualize it [2].

Lullaby texts are considered one of the most valuable sources for understanding a nation's culture and mentality. Each ethnic group possesses a unique linguistic worldview that reflects the national and cultural characteristics of how the world is linguistically conceptualized. This worldview becomes deeply embedded in the consciousness of native speakers. The national linguistic worldview is vividly manifested in samples of folk oral tradition and literary works.

Every nation has a set of culturally specific words – realia – that reflect its culture, daily life, lifestyle, and history. Such realia can be found in proverbs, idiomatic expressions, folktales, and, notably, in lullaby texts, all of which are products of national thought.

Linguists S. Vlahov and S. Florin define realia as follows: "Realia are words and expressions that denote objects, concepts, and phenomena characteristic of the life, traditions, culture, and social development of a specific people; they possess national and historical specificity." [12]

Linguist Y.A. Maklakova also categorizes realia as linguistic units that express linguocultural features. According to her, realia include:

- Names of historical events preserved in the collective memory of the people;
- Names of cultural realia;
- Onomastic realia;
- Names associated with nationally precedent

texts;

- Culturally and historically bound realia with no equivalents;
 - Names of national material (everyday) realia;
 - Names expressing national-cultural symbols.
- [3]

The analysis of the following lullaby texts will focus on identifying and interpreting realia that reflect the distinctive features of Uzbek national culture.

O'smalar siqay qoshingga, alla,

Do'ppilar tikay boshingga, alla.

Allalar aytib uxlatay oyimchani, alla,

Beshikka solib tebratay begimchani, alla.

In the presented lullaby text, several culturally significant realia appear, including usma (a traditional eyebrow dye), doppi (a national skullcap), alla (lullaby), and beshik (cradle).

In Uzbek culture, the tradition of applying usma to the eyebrows dates back to ancient times. Usma has been cultivated and cared for in almost every Uzbek household, alongside other herbs such as basil (rayhon) and mint (yalpiz). Uzbek women have traditionally valued natural methods of beauty and skincare. Applying usma helps to darken, lengthen, and beautify the eyebrows, and such eyebrows are considered a standard of beauty in Uzbek aesthetics. The process of applying usma was usually carried out collectively, often among a group of young women or female relatives, reflecting the communal aspects of traditional beauty rituals.

The doppi, a traditional Uzbek skullcap, serves as a cultural symbol that conveys rich historical and ethnographic information about the Uzbek people. Across Uzbekistan, various regional styles of doppi are well known, including those from Chust, Andijan, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Boysun, and Shakhrisabz. Among them, the most iconic is the square-shaped Chust doppi, recognized as Uzbekistan's national headwear. Each side of the Chust doppi is believed to protect its wearer from evil forces originating from the four cardinal directions. The black color symbolizes the cosmos and darkness, while the decorative embroidery typically uses white thread. The pepper-like motifs (qalampir) embroidered on all four corners represent vitality and familial prosperity, and are thought to ward off the evil eye. The lower part of the doppi often features 16 arches, symbolizing the continuity of life and death. These arches are designed to attract abundance and vital energy. The stylized ram's horns (qo'zichoq shoxlari) embedded within the arches symbolize strength and courage [13].

The beshik (traditional cradle) is a culturally and historically significant artifact inherited from ancestors, playing an essential role in the upbringing and development of every child. In Uzbek households, the beshik is welcomed with joy and celebration and holds a special place both in the national consciousness and in the daily life of every family.

The ton (a traditional robe), considered one of the garments symbolizing Uzbek national identity, is frequently mentioned in lullaby texts. In the given lullaby, reference is made to an atlas ton—a robe made of atlas, a silk fabric of great cultural and national significance for the Uzbek people. Atlas is distinguished by its bright colors and refined weaving patterns. It reflects the seven colors of nature and the vibrant hues of the rainbow, symbolizing the Uzbek people's ancient reverence for and love of nature. The phrase atlas ton is a realia expressed as a compound nominal phrase.

Alla desam yarashsin, alla,

Bo'yingga gul o'rashsin, alla.

Atlasdan to'nlar tiksam, alla.

Chin bo'yiga yarashsin, alla.

Atlas fabric has an ancient history and enjoys global recognition. One of the most noteworthy aspects of a word becoming a realia lies in its origin—realia are closely linked to the region, country, nation, or ethnic group in which they first appeared. While a realia may carry deep cultural significance within a specific community, it may also spread widely across borders and even attain international prominence. As noted by the renowned translation theorist V.M. Rossels, realia are words that enter the target language during translation and denote culturally or locally specific objects, items, or concepts from the source language [9]. Realia are usually named in accordance with the language and culture in which they emerged, thereby carrying the identity of the nation or community of origin. A vivid example of such realia is Uzbek plov (pilaf), one of the most widely consumed and culturally significant national dishes in global gastronomy. On December 1, 2016, Uzbek plov was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As such, it is considered a realia that not only spreads globally but also preserves the cultural identity of its origins. According to linguist Z. Sadiqov, even when words related to currency, cuisine, or political systems become borrowed lexemes, they often retain their national and cultural specificity. As an example, he points to the Euro of the European Union, the US dollar, and the Swiss franc, which, despite their international usage, preserve the color and characteristics of their countries of origin [11]. S. Vlahov and S. Florin, who systematically classified

realia, identified a category known as international realia. These are items that appear in the lexicons of many languages and are included in standard dictionaries, yet still retain their distinct national flavor [12].

Yemishlaring bo'lsin deyman palovlar-ey, alla,

Hech so'nmasin o'chog'ingda olovlar-ey, alla.

Bog'-rog'lar yaratginoy alla-yo, alla,

Mergan bo'lg'in bo'lsin ot-u ulovlarey, alla.

A lullaby also serves as an expression of a mother's wishes and prayers for her child. Among the Uzbek people, plov (pilaf) holds a special place in daily and ceremonial life. It is served at both celebratory and mourning gatherings, and it plays a central role in hospitality and communal events. The proverb, "Kuningdan bir kun qolsa ham osh ye, pulingdan bir so'm qolsa ham osh ye" (Even if you have only one day left, eat plov; even if you have only one coin left, eat plov), reflects the Uzbek people's deep cultural attachment to this dish.

Colors are interpreted differently across cultures, and lullaby texts reflect national perceptions associated with color symbolism. According to historical sources, people in ancient times were unable to fully distinguish the complete spectrum of colors. In their worldview, three primary hues—white, red, and black—played significant symbolic roles. This developmental view of color perception and meaning is observed in various studies exploring the evolution of color semantics [7]. Ethnographer L. Mironova remarks on the primordial meanings of white, red, and black in early mythological thought, stating: "In the color red, early humans saw blood, fire, heat, and the sun." [6]

In Uzbek culture, red (qizil) and crimson (qirmizi) shades carry a wide range of meanings:

1. Vitality – Red symbolizes life, associated with the color of blood.
2. Love and passion – It is linked with emotions such as affection and desire.
3. Beauty and energy – It signifies charm, courage, and youthfulness.
4. Warning – Red also functions as a cautionary signal.
5. Intensification – It strengthens the meaning of words (e.g., qip-qizil jinni – "utter lunatic").
6. Health – A ruddy or red complexion is associated with physical well-being.
7. Youth – Red is also connected with the vitality and brightness of youth.

As noted by folklorist A. Musaqllov, in traditional

Uzbek wedding songs, the color red is often used as a symbolic reference to the bride, while white symbolizes the groom [8].

Moreover, several diseases are named using the color red due to visual symptoms, including: measles (qizamiq), rubella (qizilcha), scarlet fever (qizil isitma), red lichen (qizil lishay), rosacea (qizil tugurik), and conjunctivitis (qizilko'z syndrome).

In the lullaby discussed below, a reference is made to a crimson robe (qirmizi to'n), further demonstrating the cultural and emotional resonance of color symbolism in Uzbek folk texts.

The following lullaby text contains a reference to a crimson robe (qirmizi to'n):

Qora qoshim qunduzim,

Ko'zi tongday yulduzim.

To'y-hayitlar bo'lganda,

Kiygan to'ni qirmizim.

Alla bolam alla-yo.

Jonim bolam alla-yo.

In Uzbek culture, there is a strong connection between the color of clothing and ceremonial practices. In traditional households, when a family member passes away, white or blue clothing is typically worn, and in some regions, black is also used to signify mourning. After a certain period following the death, these garments are replaced with brightly colored attire, such as red or green, symbolizing the end of the mourning period and the hopeful return of joyful days.

According to folklorist M. Ruzieva, a bride would traditionally wear red or crimson dresses after the wedding and continue to do so until the birth of her first child. This attire signified her status as a newlywed woman [10].

The crimson robe (qirmizi to'n) mentioned in the above lullaby reflects folk beliefs associated with red garments. The mother expresses her wish that her child, dressed in red clothing during festivals and celebrations, will live a joyful life.

The description of the ton (traditional robe) in lullaby texts encapsulates national and cultural concepts. This is clearly illustrated in the following lullaby, which begins with the line: "Oqrobotning yetmish ikki yo'li bor..." ("Oqrobot has seventy-two roads...").

Oqrobotning yetmish ikki yo'li bor-o, alla,

Qo'zichog'imning banorasdan to'ni bor-a, alla.

Yoqasida o'zim tikkan guli bor-a, alla,

To'nni kimlar bichgan, muncha yengi tor-a, alla.

Alla, qo'zim-o, alla.

In the lullaby, Oqrabot appears as a toponym. It is the name of a village located in the Jondor district of Bukhara region, and the term itself signifies “large rabat” or “large settlement” [3]. Within the lullaby, Oqrabot is used metaphorically to represent one of the largest places in the world, and the mention of “seventy-two roads” leading to it reinforces this idea through hyperbole and poetic imagery. Another culturally significant element found in the lullaby is the affectionate use of the word qo‘zichog‘im (“my little lamb”), a term of endearment unique to Uzbek culture. It reflects the traditional Uzbek way of expressing love and tenderness toward children. Historically, the Uzbek people have been deeply engaged in pastoral life, and the lamb is culturally associated with innocence, purity, gentleness, small physical stature, and vulnerability. These associations are deeply rooted in the nation’s collective consciousness. The ton (traditional robe) mentioned in the lullaby is said to be made of a fabric called banoras, which is noted for its high value and aesthetic quality. In Uzbek tradition, when a woman embroiders or decorates fabric with flowers or patterns specifically for someone, it is seen as a symbol of deep affection, love, and care. The lullaby also refers to the process of tailoring the ton, which is culturally significant. In fact, the act of cutting and sewing a ton can be part of a specific ceremonial practice. This underscores the ritualistic and symbolic value of robe-making in Uzbek culture. Typically, tons are cut by master seamstresses in consultation with others, which is why the text poses the rhetorical question, “Who tailored it?”—emphasizing the importance and expertise involved in this tradition. In Uzbek society, a man’s robe may even reflect the skill and attentiveness of his wife as a seamstress, symbolizing her dedication to both her spouse and household. The ton holds deep meaning in Uzbek culture: it is also a symbol of friendship. Presenting a robe to someone is a traditional way of reinforcing bonds of closeness and respect.

The Explanatory Dictionary of Uzbek Ethnographic Terms includes descriptions of rituals associated with the ton, further attesting to its cultural significance:

Tonbichar – A ceremonial practice in which a robe (sarpo) is tailored and sewn for the groom at the bride’s household.

Tonbovi – A gift (such as money or fabric) given to the person who dresses the groom on the wedding night.

Tonkiydi (1) – The act of presenting a robe to matchmakers and others from the groom’s side who bring wedding expenses to the bride’s household.

Tonkiydi (2) – The act of gifting a robe (sarpo) to individuals who have rendered services during the

wedding ceremony.

Toniluv – A ritual in which a robe is ceremonially hung at the entrance of a newly constructed building as a symbolic gift to the master builder. [4]

Realia are culturally specific words that reflect national identity and often lack direct equivalents in other languages. In Uzbek lullaby texts, realia related to food, clothing, cultural traditions, place names, material objects, and traditional fabrics are frequently encountered. Realia associated with national dishes and textile names have attracted interest from people of other cultures and have consequently spread beyond their country of origin. Studying the realia present in lullabies is essential for understanding the cultural and linguistic worldview embedded in these traditional texts.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that Uzbek lullaby texts are a valuable linguistic and cultural resource for analyzing realia – lexical units that lack full equivalents in other languages and express the specificity of national traditions. These realia encapsulate essential aspects of Uzbek life, including cuisine, clothing, rituals, material culture, and world perception. Lullabies often preserve archaic linguistic forms and reflect the collective mentality, emotional values, and aesthetic preferences of the Uzbek people.

Particularly notable is the symbolic depth attached to certain realia such as qirmizi ton, beshik, usma, and plov, which carry not only material but also spiritual and cultural significance. The use of realia in lullabies demonstrates their functional load in expressing emotion, cultural continuity, and national identity. Moreover, realia such as traditional dishes and textiles have transcended local boundaries and sparked international interest, thus reinforcing their status as symbols of cultural heritage.

This research underscores the importance of studying lullabies not only as poetic and musical expressions but also as linguocultural artifacts. Continued investigation into lullaby realia can enrich cross-cultural studies, translation theory, and educational materials aimed at preserving intangible cultural heritage.

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