

SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGES IN TRANSLATING LITERARY DIALECT: A CASE STUDY OF UZBEK PROSE INTO ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the sociolinguistic challenges that arise in the translation of literary dialect from Uzbek into English, with particular reference to Abdulla Qodiriy's seminal novel *O'tkan Kunlar* (*Days Gone By*, 1925). Literary dialect, as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, encodes social stratification, regional identity, historical register, and interpersonal power dynamics — dimensions that resist straightforward lexical transfer. Drawing on Labov's variationist sociolinguistics and Venuti's translation theory, this study analyses how dialect markers, honorific systems, and socially indexed speech patterns in the source text are handled in available English renderings. The analysis reveals that translators systematically face four interrelated challenges: the loss of social indexicality, the neutralisation of dialectal variation, the erosion of historical register, and the domestication of culturally specific forms of address. The paper argues that a sociolinguistically informed translation strategy — one that prioritises functional equivalence of social meaning over formal equivalence of lexical items — is essential for preserving the literary and cultural integrity of Uzbek prose in English translation. The findings have broader implications for translation pedagogy and the translation of Central Asian literary heritage.

Keywords: *literary dialect, sociolinguistics, translation, Uzbek prose, O'tkan Kunlar, social indexicality, register, functional equivalence*

**BADIIY MATNDAGI DIALEKTNI TARJIMA QILISHNING
SOTSIOLINGVISTIK MUAMMOLARI: O'ZBEK NASRINI INGLIZ TILIGA
O'GIRISH TAJRIBASIDAN**

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ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqolada Abdulla Qodiriyning "O'tkan kunlar" romani misolida o'zbek badiiy nasridagi dialekt xususiyatlarini ingliz tiliga tarjima qilishda yuzaga keladigan sotsiolingvistik muammolar tadqiq etiladi. Badiiy dialekt ijtimoiy tabaqalanish, mintaqaviy o'ziga xoslik, tarixiy uslub va shaxslararo munosabatlarni aks ettiruvchi murakkab lingvistik hodisa sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi. Tahlil shuni ko'rsatadiki, tarjimonlar to'rtta asosiy muammo bilan duch keladi: ijtimoiy indeksianing yo'qolishi, dialekt farqlanishining neytrallanishi, tarixiy registrning o'zgarishi va madaniy jihatdan o'ziga xos murojaat shakllarining domestikatsiyasi. Maqolada sotsiolingvistik jihatdan asoslangan tarjima strategiyasi muhimligi ta'kidlanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: *badiiy dialekt, sotsiolingvistika, tarjima, o'zbek nasri, O'tkan kunlar, ijtimoiy indeksiya, funksional ekvivalentlik*

1. INTRODUCTION

The translation of literary texts is never a purely linguistic act. It is, at its core, a sociolinguistic undertaking — a process of mediating between two distinct social worlds, each with its own hierarchy of registers, dialectal varieties, and culturally embedded speech patterns. When the source text is a work of nineteenth-century Uzbek prose, the sociolinguistic complexity is particularly acute. Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan Kunlar* (1925), widely regarded as the first modern Uzbek novel, presents translators

with a rich tapestry of dialectal forms, archaic registers, and socially stratified speech that encodes the intricate social fabric of Tsarist-era Uzbekistan.

The concept of literary dialect — the deliberate use of non-standard linguistic features to characterise social identity, regional origin, and interpersonal relations — has been studied extensively in Western literary traditions (Trudgill, 1999; Page, 1988). However, its manifestation in Central Asian literary prose, and the specific challenges it poses for translation into English, remains a significantly underexplored area. This study addresses that gap by offering a systematic sociolinguistic analysis of dialect translation in O'tkan Kunlar.

The primary objectives of this paper are: (1) to identify the key sociolinguistic features of literary dialect in the source text; (2) to examine how these features are rendered in English translation; and (3) to evaluate the sociolinguistic adequacy of translation strategies employed, with reference to established theoretical frameworks in translation studies and variationist sociolinguistics.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study operates at the intersection of two fields: sociolinguistics and translation studies. From sociolinguistics, it draws primarily on Labov's (1972) variationist framework, which treats linguistic variation as systematically correlated with social variables such as class, age, gender, and regional origin. Crucially, Labov's concept of social indexicality — the idea that linguistic forms carry social meanings beyond their referential content — is central to understanding what is at stake when dialect is translated.

Within translation studies, the paper engages with two competing paradigms: Venuti's (1995) domestication/foreignisation dichotomy and Nida's (1964) distinction between formal and dynamic (functional) equivalence. Venuti argues that domesticating translation — which renders the foreign text fluent and natural-sounding in the target

language — erases the cultural and linguistic otherness of the source. Foreignisation, by contrast, preserves traces of the source's alterity, making visible the fact of translation. For dialect translation, this tension is particularly sharp: a domesticated rendering may make a character's speech socially intelligible to the target audience, but at the cost of misrepresenting their social position in the source culture. Trudgill's (1999) typology of dialect representation in literature provides a further analytical tool. Trudgill distinguishes between full dialect representation (phonological, morphological, and lexical non-standard features), eye dialect (graphemic deviation suggesting non-standard speech without true dialectal accuracy), and conventional dialect (use of a few salient markers to suggest dialect without full representation). This typology proves useful in categorising the strategies available to translators of O'tkan Kunlar.

3. SOCIOLINGUISTIC FEATURES OF O'TKAN KUNLAR

Abdulla Qodiriy's prose is remarkable for its sophisticated deployment of linguistic variation as a literary and social tool. The novel's characters speak in ways that immediately signal their social class, regional origin, educational level, and gender — a dimension of the text that is inseparable from its novelistic meaning. Four categories of sociolinguistic feature are particularly significant for translation.

3.1 Honorific and Address Systems

Uzbek possesses a complex system of address forms that encodes social hierarchy with considerable precision. The contrast between *siz* (formal/respectful second-person pronoun) and *sen* (informal/intimate) is not merely a grammatical distinction; it is a social act that marks relative status, intimacy, and power. In O'tkan Kunlar, characters' use of these forms reveals the social dynamics of nineteenth-century Fergana Valley society with nuance that is difficult to replicate in English, which lacks a grammaticalised T-V distinction. Consider the asymmetric use of address forms between Otabek and his father: the son invariably uses *siz* to his father, while the father

may shift between forms to mark emotional register shifts — a sociolinguistic choreography invisible to English readers of a translation that renders both simply as "you".

3.2 Register Variation and Historical Distance

The novel is set in the 1840s–1860s, and Qodiriy deliberately employs an archaic register — incorporating Persian and Arabic borrowings, Chagatai lexical items, and literary formulae — to signal historical distance and cultural authenticity. This register functions sociolinguistically to mark characters as educated members of the Uzbek literary elite, situating them within an Islamic scholarly tradition. The following example illustrates the challenge:

Original: *"Hazrat, bu faqirga marhamat qilib..."*

Translation: *"Your Excellency, if you would be so kind as to grant this humble servant..."* (Adapted from Qodiriy, 1925/2019)

The original employs *hazrat* (an honorific derived from Arabic, conveying profound reverence) and *faqir* (literally 'poor one', a self-deprecating form of address in formal Islamic discourse). The English rendering, while capturing the surface meaning, neutralises the specific socioreligious register of the original, rendering a culturally marked Islamic deferential formula as a generic European-style formal address.

3.3 Gender-Indexed Speech

Qodiriy's female characters, particularly Kumush, employ speech patterns that are sociolinguistically marked as feminine within the novel's cultural context. The use of diminutives, softened imperatives, and particular discourse particles indexes gender identity in ways that reflect the social norms of nineteenth-century Uzbek society. English, with its comparatively impoverished system of gender-indexed grammatical features, requires the translator to make interpretive choices about how — and whether — to signal these distinctions.

3.4 Regional and Class Dialect Markers

The novel's secondary characters, particularly servants, traders, and rural figures, speak in forms that are dialectally differentiated from the educated urban speech of the protagonists. These markers include morphological simplifications, regionally specific lexical items, and phonological features rendered orthographically. In the original Uzbek, a reader immediately recognises the social positioning of a character from their speech; in English translation, this immediate social legibility is typically lost unless the translator adopts a radical foreignisation strategy or employs a target-culture dialect as a sociolinguistic substitute — a strategy fraught with its own ideological risks.

4. ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

The analysis of available English renderings of O'tkan Kunlar reveals a consistent pattern of domestication, in which sociolinguistically marked features of the source text are regularised, neutralised, or replaced with target-culture equivalents. This section examines the four translation challenges identified in Section 3 and evaluates the strategies employed.

4.1 The Loss of Social Indexicality

The most pervasive challenge is the systematic loss of social indexicality. When Uzbek *siz/sen* oppositions, honorific titles, and deferential formulae are rendered with a uniform "you" and normalised address forms, the English reader is deprived of the sociolinguistic information that the original reader absorbs automatically. This is not merely a stylistic loss; it is a semantic one. The social relationships between characters — who defers to whom, who claims intimacy, who performs status — are partially obscured. Translators face a genuine dilemma here. Attempts to compensate through lexical means (e.g., using "sir", "madam", or archaic "thee/thou" forms) risk introducing target-culture social connotations that are incongruent with the source text's social world. The use of "thou" for *sen*, while preserving the T-V distinction, carries

connotations of biblical or Shakespearean English that may distort the cultural register of Qodiriy's prose.

4.2 Neutralisation of Dialectal Variation

The speech of lower-class characters is typically rendered in standard English in available translations, eliminating the sociolinguistic differentiation that Qodiriy uses to mark social hierarchy. An analysis of speech attributed to bazaar traders, servants, and rural characters reveals that dialectally marked features in the Uzbek — including morphological simplifications and regionally specific vocabulary — are consistently normalised in English renderings. The effect is a levelling of the social landscape of the novel, in which all characters speak with equal linguistic prestige.

4.3 Historical Register and Cultural Specificity

The archaic and Persianate register of the source text presents particular challenges. Arabic and Persian loanwords that carry socioreligious meaning — hazrat, janob, faqir, jannat, bisotun — are variously rendered as generic honorifics, omitted, or replaced with European equivalents that fail to evoke the Islamic scholarly culture in which the novel is embedded. A foreignisation strategy that preserves these terms (possibly with paratextual glossing) would better serve the sociolinguistic integrity of the text, though it may increase the cognitive demand on target readers.

4.4 Functional Equivalence vs. Formal Equivalence

The analysis suggests that the most successful moments in English translations of O'tkan Kunlar are those in which translators achieve functional equivalence of social meaning, rather than formal equivalence of lexical form. Where translators prioritise the social function of a dialectal feature — its role in marking status, intimacy, or cultural identity — over its precise linguistic form, the sociolinguistic coherence of the translation is better preserved. This finding aligns with Nida's (1964) advocacy of

dynamic equivalence and supports the argument that translation of literary dialect requires sociolinguistic competence alongside linguistic and literary expertise.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight a fundamental tension in the translation of sociolinguistically rich literary texts: the tension between accessibility and fidelity. Domesticating translations that smooth out dialectal and register variation make Uzbek prose more immediately accessible to Anglophone readers, but they do so at the cost of misrepresenting the social world the text inhabits. Foreignising translations that preserve dialectal markers may be more sociolinguistically faithful, but risk alienating readers or introducing incongruous cultural associations. The paper argues that this dilemma is not resolved by simply choosing between domestication and foreignisation, but by adopting what might be called a sociolinguistically informed translation strategy: one that identifies the specific social functions of each dialectal feature in the source text and seeks to replicate those functions — not necessarily those forms — in the target text. This may involve creative solutions such as calibrated register variation, strategic use of archaic or formal target-language forms, paratextual annotation, or the employment of social markers that, while culturally distinct, perform analogous sociolinguistic functions. The broader implications of this analysis extend beyond Uzbek literature. As Central Asian literary heritage becomes increasingly available in English translation, the sociolinguistic dimension of translation practice deserves greater scholarly and pedagogical attention. Translation training programmes should incorporate sociolinguistic competence as a core component — training translators not only to recognise dialectal and register variation in source texts, but to develop repertoires of target-language strategies for rendering social meaning.

6. CONCLUSION. This paper has examined the sociolinguistic challenges of translating literary dialect in Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan Kunlar* into English. Through

analysis of honorific systems, register variation, gender-indexed speech, and class-marked dialect, it has demonstrated that the social meaning encoded in the source text's linguistic variation is systematically under-translated in English renderings. The paper has argued for a sociolinguistically informed translation strategy, grounded in Labov's variationist framework and Venuti's translation theory, that prioritises functional equivalence of social meaning. The case of O'tkan Kunlar illustrates a challenge that is paradigmatic for the translation of literary heritage from minority and non-Western languages: that linguistic difference and social difference are inseparable, and that a translation which resolves the former without attending to the latter is, in an important sense, incomplete. Future research should extend this analysis to other works of Uzbek literary prose and examine the reception of sociolinguistically divergent translation strategies among Anglophone readers.

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