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HISTORISMS AS STYLISTIC AND PRAGMATIC DEVICES IN KHAYRIDDDIN SULTONOV'S PROSE

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the stylistic and pragmatic functions of historisms (istorizmlar) in the novellas of contemporary Uzbek writer Khayriddin Sultonov: *Ko'ngil ozodadur* (The Heart is Free), *Yozning yolg'iz yodgori* (The Lonely Memory of Summer), and *Saodat sohili* (The Shore of Happiness). Historisms — words denoting objects, phenomena, or social realities that have ceased to exist in contemporary life — are distinguished from archaisms on the basis that they retain their referential uniqueness: no modern synonym exists to replace them. Drawing on stylistic theory (Galperin 1971; Leech and Short 1981; Vinogradov 1963), Uzbek lexicology (Mirzayev 2010; Mahmudov 2002), and pragmatic frameworks (Safarov 2008; Hakimov 2001), the study demonstrates that Sultonov employs historisms not merely for historical colouring but as instruments of characterisation, temporal contrast, irony, and ideological commentary. The findings reveal that historisms in Sultonov's prose function as pragmatic presupposition triggers, evoking shared cultural memory and constructing an implicit dialogue between past and present. The study contributes to Uzbek literary linguistics and offers a model for the pragmatic analysis of archaic lexical strata in contemporary prose.

Keywords: Historisms; istorizmlar; archaic lexis; Khayriddin Sultonov; Uzbek prose; stylistics; pragmatics; presupposition; temporal contrast; linguistic personality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literary language and historical time has long been a central concern of stylistics. When a writer reaches into the lexical past — deploying words that name vanished institutions, obsolete social roles, or objects no longer in use — the choice is never neutral. Such words carry within them the traces of historical consciousness, functioning simultaneously as referential signs and as pragmatic signals that activate cultural memory, establish temporal distance, and position both author and reader in relation to historical experience. Within Uzbek linguistics, historisms (istorizmlar) are distinguished from archaisms (arxaizmlar) on a principled lexicological basis. An archaism is a word that has been replaced by a modern synonym — the archaic form has fallen out of use but the concept it named persists; a historism, by contrast, names a reality that has itself disappeared: feudal titles, pre-Soviet administrative units, traditional crafts, ceremonial objects, and social customs that no longer exist in contemporary Uzbek life (Mirzayev 2010; Mahmudov 2002). This distinction has important consequences for stylistic analysis: where an archaism signals register and temporal distance through its formal properties, a historism also carries referential weight — it points to a vanished world.

Khayriddin Sulstonov's novellas are set at the intersection of traditional Uzbek society and modernity, and their narrative fabric is richly threaded with historisms. Yet these lexical items have not been analysed in terms of their pragmatic functions. The present study addresses this gap, asking: what stylistic and pragmatic roles do historisms play in Sulstonov's prose, and how do they contribute to the author's broader artistic purposes?

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Historisms in Uzbek Lexicology

Uzbek linguistic tradition defines historisms as passive vocabulary items whose disappearance from active use reflects the disappearance of the referents they name (Mirzayev 2010). They include: (a) titles and social designations from feudal and pre-revolutionary Uzbek society (bek, xon, mirzo, qozi); (b) administrative and territorial units (viloyat in its pre-Soviet sense, tumanboshi); (c) traditional occupational terms (duradgor, temirchi, naqqosh as applied to guild craftsmen); (d) ceremonial and ritual objects and practices; (e) monetary and measurement units no longer in use. Their presence in a literary text requires the reader to activate historical schema — prior cultural knowledge about the vanished world to which these words refer.

2.2. Stylistic Functions of Historisms

Galperin (1971) identifies historical colouring as the primary stylistic function of archaic lexis in literary prose: the deployment of period-specific vocabulary to create a sense of historical authenticity. Vinogradov (1963) further distinguishes between passive historisms, which serve merely as temporal markers, and active historisms, which carry evaluative, ironic, or ideological charge. Leech and Short (1981) subsume such choices under the category of lexical foregrounding — the deviation from expected register norms that draws the reader's attention to the word itself as a meaningful choice.

2.3. Pragmatic Dimensions: Presupposition and Implicature

From a pragmatic perspective, historisms function as presupposition triggers (Safarov 2008; Hakimov 2001). When Sul'tonov deploys a historism, he presupposes that his reader possesses the cultural knowledge necessary to recover its referent — an assumption that simultaneously constructs an implied reader and creates a community of shared historical consciousness. Where this

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presupposition is exploited — where the historicism is placed in an incongruous modern context — it generates Gricean implicatures of irony, nostalgia, or ideological critique.

3. METHODOLOGY

The corpus for this study comprises the three novellas of Sulstonov listed above. Historicisms were identified through close reading and lexicological verification against contemporary Uzbek dictionaries and Mirzayev's (2010) reference work on archaic Uzbek lexis. Items were classified by semantic field and by their syntactic and narrative positioning within the text. Pragmatic functions were analysed at utterance, dialogue, and narrative-passage level, applying presupposition theory and Gricean analysis. The distinction between historicisms and archaisms was maintained rigorously throughout: only items naming genuinely vanished referents were retained in the historicism corpus.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Semantic Fields of Historicisms in Sulstonov's Prose

Analysis of the corpus yielded historicisms distributed across six primary semantic fields:

Social hierarchy and titles. Words designating feudal and pre-Soviet social ranks (mirzo, qozi, dodxoh) appear in Sulstonov's novellas in contexts that invoke the memory of a stratified social order. Their pragmatic function is primarily one of temporal anchoring — marking the historical moment being recalled — but also of implicit social commentary: the precision with which Sulstonov names historical rank structures underscores the distance between the values of that world and those of the present.

Traditional crafts and occupations. Terms for artisanal occupations (kashtado'z, naqqosh, zardo'z in their guild-specific senses) appear in characterisation contexts, typically associated with older characters or recalled in the speech of

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characters evoking their family histories. Here the historicism carries an elegiac pragmatic charge: the naming of the vanished craft implies mourning for a lost cultural world.

Ceremonial and ritual vocabulary. Items relating to traditional Uzbek ceremonies — wedding rituals, funeral practices, seasonal celebrations — constitute a particularly rich historicism stratum in the novellas. Their pragmatic function is complex: they anchor the narrative in a specific cultural-historical world while simultaneously generating presuppositions about the reader's own cultural memory. When a character in *Yozning yolg'iz yodgori* invokes a ceremonial term, the utterance presupposes shared knowledge of the ritual — and the absence of that ritual in the present implicitly structures the narrative's temporal contrast.

Monetary and measurement units. Pre-metric and pre-Soviet units of measurement and monetary denomination appear sporadically but significantly. Their effect is one of calibrated historical distance: their presence signals that the world being described is not merely past but specifically and irreversibly past.

Administrative and territorial designations. Pre-Soviet administrative vocabulary, used in recalled speech or historical narrative passages, functions as ideological presupposition trigger — encoding assumptions about the social order of the pre-Soviet period that are implicitly contrasted with Soviet and post-Soviet realities.

Clothing and material culture. Terms for traditional garments (*do'ppi*, *chopon*, *jiyak* in specific historical senses), household objects, and architectural features ground the narrative in a material historical world. Their pragmatic function is primarily referential-atmospheric, but they also contribute to the construction of character: those characters who use or are described through such vocabulary are implicitly positioned as bearers of traditional culture.

4.2. Pragmatic Functions: Presupposition and Cultural Memory

Across all three novellas, the most consistent pragmatic function of historicisms is the activation of cultural presupposition. Sultonov assumes a reader equipped

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with the historical and cultural knowledge necessary to recover the full referential weight of these terms. This assumption constructs what Bakhtin (1981) would term an implied dialogic other — a reader who is a participant in the same historical-cultural community as the author.

This presuppositional function becomes especially significant in passages of intergenerational dialogue. When an older character uses a historicism in conversation with a younger character who does not recognise the term, Sulstonov exploits the resulting communicative asymmetry for narrative purposes: the young character's incomprehension is itself a pragmatic signal of cultural rupture, of the gap between generations that is a recurrent thematic concern of the novellas.

4.3. Historisms and Irony

Several historicisms in the corpus function as vehicles of irony when placed in incongruous modern contexts. The deployment of a feudal title or a ceremonial designation in a contemporary or Soviet-era setting generates a violation of register expectations that carries evaluative implicature. Following Sperber and Wilson's (1986) account of irony as echoic mention, such uses can be understood as echoes of a historical discourse that the author simultaneously invokes and distances himself from. The pragmatic effect is one of subtle social critique — a commentary on the persistence of hierarchical values beneath changed social surfaces.

4.4. Historisms and the Author's Linguistic Personality

Sulstonov's historicism repertoire is not random but constitutes a recognisable authorial signature. His preference for items drawn from artisanal, ceremonial, and hierarchical semantic fields reflects a consistent artistic concern: the relationship between cultural tradition and historical change, and the human cost of the ruptures between them. The historicisms are, in this sense, thematic as well

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as stylistic choices — they enact at the lexical level the same concerns that structure the narratives at the plot level. This integration of lexical choice and thematic concern is a hallmark of what Safarov (2008) and Yuldosheva (2022) describe as a developed authorial linguistic personality.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that historisms in Sulstonov's novellas serve functions that extend well beyond historical colouring. As presupposition triggers, they activate cultural memory and construct an implied reader community. As irony vehicles, they generate evaluative implicatures about the relationship between historical and contemporary social values. As characterisation devices, they position characters within a cultural-historical world and mark intergenerational distances. And as components of the author's linguistic personality, they reflect consistent thematic and artistic commitments. The rigorous distinction between historisms and archaisms — maintained throughout this analysis — proves essential to the precision of these observations. Future research might apply corpus-linguistic methods to quantify the distribution of historisms across Sulstonov's broader oeuvre, and extend the comparative analysis to other contemporary Uzbek prose writers to assess the distinctiveness of Sulstonov's historical lexical repertoire.

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