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ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UZBEK AND TAJIK LANGUAGES IN THE NATIONAL-CULTURAL SPACE OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

The article analyzes interlingual contacts in the national and cultural space of Uzbekistan, with particular attention to the organic relations between the Uzbek and Tajik languages. The linguistic dimensions of the country's multiethnic environment are examined, and the centuries-long interaction between Uzbek and Persian-Tajik is elucidated on a scientific basis at the phonetic, morphological, lexical, and syntactic levels. The study specifically highlights the weakening of vowel harmony (synharmonism) in Uzbek, the penetration of numerous Arabic and Persian-Tajik borrowings into the lexical stock and grammatical system, and the influence of Persian traditions on syntactic structures. In addition, the phenomena of bilingualism and code-switching are discussed, particularly through examples from the linguistic environments of Samarkand, Bukhara, Fergana, and Surkhandarya. The author reveals the linguistic and cultural significance of the interaction between Uzbek and Tajik and provides a scholarly analysis of its impact on language development and the cultural heritage of the peoples concerned.

Keywords: Uzbek language, Tajik language, interlingual contact, bilingualism, code-switching, borrowing, vowel harmony, lexical influence, morphological influence, syntactic influence, national and cultural space.

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Introduction

The multilingual and multicultural character of the Republic of Uzbekistan provides a unique sociolinguistic environment in which sustained language contact has played a decisive role in shaping linguistic development. Among the various contact situations, the interaction between Uzbek (a Turkic language) and Tajik (an Iranian language) represents one of the most historically profound and structurally significant cases of long-term bilingual coexistence in Central Asia. For centuries, Turkic and Iranian-speaking populations have shared the same geographic, economic, and cultural space, resulting in extensive linguistic convergence.

While the influence of Arabic and Persian on Turkic languages has been acknowledged in general Turkological scholarship, the specific dynamics of Uzbek–Tajik interaction within the national-cultural space of Uzbekistan require systematic and integrative analysis. This study aims to examine the phonetic, lexical, morphological, syntactic, and sociolinguistic dimensions of this interaction, with particular attention to regional variation, bilingual practices, and structural change. By situating the Uzbek-Tajik relationship within broader frameworks of contact linguistics and areal linguistics, the article seeks to clarify the mechanisms and outcomes of prolonged interlingual influence.

Literature Review

Research on Uzbek-Tajik linguistic relations has developed along several major lines: historical-comparative studies, contact linguistics, areal linguistics, and sociolinguistic investigations of bilingualism. Early Turkological scholarship documented the large-scale lexical borrowing from Arabic and Persian into Chagatai and later Uzbek literary language. Historical-phonological research demonstrated the weakening of vowel harmony in Uzbek in comparison with other Turkic languages, often attributing this development to intensive Persian-Tajik contact.

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Within Uzbek linguistics, scholars such as **Shavkat Rahmatullaev** have emphasized that borrowings from Arabic and Persian-Tajik affected not only the lexical layer but also the morphemic and word-formation systems of Uzbek. Studies by M. Ibragimov and others have examined the assimilation of Persian-derived affixes (e.g., *-dor*, *-goh*) into Uzbek morphology, arguing that such elements became productive components of the language's derivational system. From an areal-linguistic perspective, the Uzbek-Tajik contact zone has been analyzed as part of a broader Central Asian linguistic area, characterized by structural convergence between Turkic and Iranian languages. Sociolinguistic research has further documented patterns of bilingualism and code-switching in regions such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Fergana Valley, highlighting the functional distribution of languages across domains of communication. However, despite these contributions, there remains a need for a comprehensive approach that integrates structural (phonetic, morphological, syntactic) and sociolinguistic dimensions into a unified analytical framework. The present study seeks to address this gap.

Methods and Methodology

This research adopts a multidisciplinary methodological framework combining historical-comparative analysis, structural linguistic analysis, and sociolinguistic observation.

Historical-Comparative Method. Diachronic data from Old Uzbek (Chagatai) and historical Tajik sources were examined to trace the development of phonetic and lexical changes, particularly the weakening of synharmonism and the integration of Arabic-Persian lexical elements.

Structural-Linguistic Analysis. Phonological, morphological, and syntactic features were analyzed to identify patterns of convergence. Special attention was given to: the reduction of vowel harmony; the adaptation of borrowed lexemes;

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the integration of Persian-Tajik derivational affixes; syntactic constructions influenced by Persian models (e.g., subordinate clauses with *-ki*).

Lexical-Semantic Analysis. Borrowed vocabulary was categorized according to semantic fields (everyday life, science, literature, administration, etc.) to determine the scope and functional significance of lexical influence.

Sociolinguistic Observation. Patterns of bilingualism and code-switching were examined through descriptive analysis of speech practices in multilingual regions of Uzbekistan. The study considered domain distribution, intergenerational transmission, and mixed-language utterances as indicators of active contact processes.

Areal-Typological Framework. The findings were interpreted within theories of language contact, convergence, and typological change, particularly with regard to shifts in agglutinative structure and the emergence of analytic tendencies.

This integrated methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of both structural transformation and communicative practice.

The Main Part

The national and cultural space of the Republic of Uzbekistan is distinguished by its multilingual and multicultural environment. Although the majority of the population considers the Uzbek language their mother tongue (approximately 80%), more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups reside in the country due to historical and social factors. Consequently, the Uzbek language has developed in direct contact with a number of other languages, and their mutual influence manifests itself in various forms. In particular, linguistic interactions exist with Russian, Tajik, Karakalpak, Kazakh, English, and Korean, as well as with the

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languages of other peoples such as Arabic, Uyghur, Armenian, and Jewish communities; these contacts are reflected at the lexical, morphological, and syntactic levels.

The relations between the Uzbek and Tajik languages have been formed over millennia and have reached a distinctive degree of convergence. These two languages have developed side by side territorially: since ancient times in Central Asia, Turkic tribes (the ancestors of the Uzbeks) and Iranian tribes (the Tajiks and their ancestors) have lived in close proximity and maintained economic and cultural ties. As the language of a neighboring people, Tajik has long interacted with Uzbek—this is one of the fundamental observations noted in the scholarly literature. In particular, the influence of Persian-Tajik on the historical development of Uzbek has been very strong, and as a result certain changes have occurred in the phonetic system and grammatical structure of Uzbek.

First, let us consider the influence at the phonetic level. The rule of vowel harmony (synharmonism), characteristic of nearly all representatives of the Turkic language family, has significantly weakened in Uzbek, and scholars associate this precisely with the centuries-long influence of Persian-Tajik. For example, in closely related languages such as Kazakh, Karakalpak, and Kyrgyz, the vowels within a word typically conform to uniform rounding or front–back harmony, whereas Uzbek does not maintain such a strict rule: different types of vowels freely co-occur within a single word. According to historical-phonological studies, in the later stages of Old Uzbek (Chagatai), synharmonism disappeared in certain dialects under strong Persian influence; as a result, the modern literary Uzbek vowel system contains only six vowels (whereas many Turkic languages have eight or nine). In particular, the Uzbek dialects of southern and central Uzbekistan (Samarkand, Bukhara, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya) are considered Iranianized dialects, whose pronunciation and lexical stock are rich in Persian elements. By contrast, the Uzbek dialects spoken in the northern regions (Khorezm, the Tashkent area, and the southern part of Kazakhstan) are

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relatively less affected by Persian-Tajik and have preserved Turkic features more clearly. For instance, elements of vowel harmony can still be observed in the Khorezm dialect and in some villages of the Tashkent oasis, where certain words are pronounced similarly to Kazakh and Karakalpak. This situation demonstrates that the influence of Persian-Tajik has been uneven across regions.

The influence at the lexical level is an even more wide-ranging phenomenon. A substantial portion of the Uzbek literary language vocabulary consists precisely of words borrowed from Arabic and Persian-Tajik. According to sources, as early as the 14th-15th centuries, nearly half of the lexical composition of Old Uzbek literary language was made up of Arabic and Persian words. In contemporary Uzbek as well, numerous concepts – from everyday life to scientific discourse – are expressed through these long-established borrowings. From Arabic, countless words have entered the language, such as *daftar* (notebook), *kitob* (book), *maktab* (school), *ilm* (science), *adabiyot* (literature), *mantiq* (logic), *maqola* (article), *odam* (person), *zamona* (era), *qalam* (pen), and *ghazal*. From Persian-Tajik, one may cite many examples, including *dasturxon* (tablecloth), *mehmon* (guest), *osh* (pilaf), *sabzi* (carrot/greens), *ko'cha* (street), *devor* (wall), *bog'* (garden), *shahzoda* (prince), and others.

It should be noted that many of these words have undergone phonetic and grammatical adaptation over the centuries. For example, the Arabic plural *kutub* (“books”) was adopted into Uzbek in the singular form *kitob*; similarly, the Persian *mehmon* entered Uzbek with virtually identical form, whereas *devor* shows slight phonetic modification (Persian *divār*). Borrowed lexemes function freely within Uzbek morphology, allowing the formation of new meanings and word forms through the addition of native suffixes: from *adabiyot* come *adabiyotchi*, *adabiy*, *adabiyotshunos*; from *bog'* come *bog'bon*, *bog'cha*; from *ilm* derive *olim*, *ilmiy*, and *bilim* (the latter formed in combination with a Turkic synonym).

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Moreover, certain affixes entered Uzbek together with Persian-Tajik vocabulary and became fully integrated into the language. For example, the suffix *-dor* (denoting possession, as in *bo'ydor*, *ilmdor* in older usage) and *-goh* (denoting place, as in *istirohatgoh*, *saylgoh*) have been productively used. Some of these affixes combine with Turkic lexical bases as well. This phenomenon—the assimilation of borrowed affixes into the recipient language—is regarded as a result of interlingual morphological contact. The researcher M. Ibragimov, in a special analysis of suffixes borrowed from Persian-Tajik, demonstrates that the Uzbek word-formation system has expanded through these elements.

The interaction between Uzbek and Tajik is also evident in syntax and stylistics. First, because Persian-Tajik historically functioned as a prestigious literary language in the region, many sentence patterns and expressions in Uzbek developed under Tajik (or Persian) models. For instance, subordinate clauses introduced by the particle *-ki* (e.g., *Bilaman-ki, sen haqsan* “I know that you are right”) reflect the influence of the Persian conjunction *ki*. Likewise, the usage of *ham* in sentences such as *U keldi, men ham keldim* (“He came, I also came”) derives from Persian *ham* (“also”) and appears in a syntactic position not originally characteristic of Turkic structure.

Second, many Uzbek idioms and proverbs are translations from or influenced by Persian sources. For example, the proverb *Ko'p oshga solma tuz, ko'p so'zga solma uz* structurally reflects Persian proverbial style, and the well-known saying *Olma pish, og'zimga tush* has parallels in Persian tradition. In the language of **Alisher Navoiy**, the influence of Persian appears as a distinctive stylistic phenomenon: in his poetry, Navoiy extensively employed Arabic-Persian expressions, compound verbs, and wordplay. This demonstrates that the contact between the two languages operates not only at the lexical level but also at the level of stylistic and expressive units.

Bilingualism and mixed usage. The spread of the Tajik language within the territory of Uzbekistan is particularly high in the regions of Bukhara, Samarkand,

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Surkhandarya, Fergana, Namangan, and Kashkadarya, where Uzbek-Tajik bilingualism is widespread. In these areas, the mixed use of the two languages within a single household or neighborhood is common: for example, parents may speak Tajik while children speak Uzbek, or vice versa, and many individuals are able to express themselves fluently in both languages. Code-switching is also widely observed in this environment, with instances where one part of a sentence is uttered in Uzbek and the remainder in Tajik. For example, constructions such as *Men ertaga bora olmayman, chunki ishlarim bor* (beginning in Uzbek and continuing with Tajik or Russian elements) frequently occur. This phenomenon naturally attracts particular linguistic interest, since elements of two structurally different languages are harmonized within a single speech context.

From a theoretical perspective, the interaction between Uzbek and Tajik has been extensively studied within the frameworks of areal linguistics and contact linguistics. Scholars emphasize that investigating the mutual influence resulting from the long-term contact of Turkic and Iranian languages coexisting in the same region greatly facilitates understanding both their historical development and their present structure. The impact of Arabic and Persian-Tajik on Uzbek has led to certain typological changes in the language (for example, a partial reduction in the degree of agglutinativity, the emergence of some inflectional features, and the increased use of analytic constructions), all of which have been noted in the scholarly literature. In particular, linguists such as **Shavkat Rahmatullaev** have argued that Arabic and Persian-Tajik borrowings have influenced not only the Uzbek lexicon but also its morphemic structure. For instance, some Arabic plural morphemes are still present in Uzbek usage: forms with the suffix *-ot*, such as *mahsulot* and *axborot*, denote singular collective concepts rather than true plurals. Likewise, broken plural forms borrowed from Arabic—*aholi*, *avlod*, *ulamo*, *arvoh*, *fuzalo*, and others—have been assimilated. Certain Arabic adjectives ending in *-ayn/-ein* (e.g., *azimayn* “great”) are also attested in historical Uzbek texts.

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Although such elements have largely become passive in the modern literary language, they remain important evidence of historical contact.

In conclusion, the interaction between Uzbek and Tajik has enormously enriched the lexical resources of Uzbek, has modified its phonetic-phonological system to a certain degree, and has also influenced its grammatical structure. These contacts are reflected as well in the centuries-old cultural heritage of the Uzbek people: bilingual literary works, joint dictionaries, and enduring traditions of bilingualism serve as clear testimony to this long-standing linguistic relationship.

Conclusion

The long-term interaction between Uzbek and Tajik represents a paradigmatic example of sustained contact between Turkic and Iranian languages within a shared cultural and geographic space. The evidence demonstrates that this interaction has operated at multiple linguistic levels.

Phonetically, the weakening of vowel harmony and the restructuring of the Uzbek vowel system reflect deep historical convergence. Lexically, Arabic and Persian-Tajik borrowings have profoundly expanded the semantic and stylistic resources of Uzbek, shaping both everyday and scholarly discourse. Morphologically, the assimilation of foreign affixes and plural forms illustrates structural integration beyond simple lexical borrowing. Syntactically and stylistically, Persian models have influenced subordinate constructions, discourse markers, and literary expression, including the works of **Alisher Navoiy**, where bilingual literary competence is evident as a deliberate aesthetic strategy.

At the sociolinguistic level, widespread bilingualism and code-switching in regions such as Samarkand and Bukhara demonstrate that Uzbek–Tajik contact is not merely a historical phenomenon but an ongoing dynamic process.

In sum, the Uzbek–Tajik linguistic relationship has significantly contributed to the structural development, lexical richness, and cultural depth of Uzbek. The study of this interaction not only enhances our understanding of Central Asian

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linguistic history but also provides broader insights into mechanisms of language contact, convergence, and typological change in multilingual societies.

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