

Obsolete words in Uzbek Folk Tales

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the linguostylistic and linguopoetic features of obsolete historisms and archaisms in Uzbek folk tales. Folk tales preserve traces of ancient periods; obsolete words constitute a fundamental lexical fund that secures the genre-specific features and national spirit of the text. The analysis shows that although these units mainly perform a nominative function, they carry strong emotional-expressive coloring in context. From this perspective, historisms are divided into nine groups related to socio-political and everyday life, while archaisms are demonstrated – through examples – to create an aura of antiquity in the text.

Keywords: Obsolete vocabulary, historism, archaism, Uzbek folk tales, nominative function, emotional-expressive, diachronic analysis, stylistic dominant.

INTRODUCTION

The history of any national language is closely bound up with the uninterrupted evolution of society over time. Conceptual shifts in social life are directly reflected at the lexical-semantic level of the language. Y. Pinkhasov [10: 40] characterizes this as follows: “As time passes and conditions change, certain things disappear; along with them, the words that designate those things fall out of use”. In this process, the need to express certain concepts gives rise to new lexemes that enrich the active vocabulary of the language. At the same time, lexical units that have lost their activity in the language’s synchronic state – but once denoted

exactly those concepts – cede their place to the new units. From a linguistic standpoint, the obsolescence of such words that have lost their communicative function is a natural law: they firmly occupy a place in the passive vocabulary.

Diachronic analysis shows that obsolete words do not merely “grow old”; over time, they may acquire new scholarly significance across various linguistic sources. This emerges through scientific study of obsolete vocabulary – its etymology, semantic evolution, and place and functional features in specific written or oral sources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In world linguistics, the nature and dynamics of obsolete vocabulary have been investigated theoretically by many scholars. The language's historical development is the primary criterion for analyzing this lexical-semantic phenomenon. In the early twentieth century, V. A. Bogoroditsky's [3: 7] research provided a fundamental theoretical basis for studying the diachronic development of vocabulary. Recognizing the language's mutability as an absolute regularity, he advances the axiomatic claim: “Our speech, generally speaking, changes continuously over time along with all of its parts.” This underscores that language is a socio-historical phenomenon whose synchronic and diachronic states cannot be strictly separated.

K. G. Menges's [8: 248] work is significant for its focus on the etymology of the Turkic languages, the study of their historical vocabulary, and the analysis of lexis in ancient Turkic sources. B. A. Larin's [7: 116] contributions to historical lexicography and the study of archaic lexis lay the scholarly groundwork for the comprehensive investigation of the stylistic functions of obsolete words. According to Larin, a historical dictionary not only records the language's changing lexical composition but also serves as an important source reflecting the society's cultural-historical evolution. As he emphasizes, “... a historical dictionary illuminates not only the history of things and concepts, but also the history of word-signs.”

S. Ullmann [15: 346] theoretically grounds the processes of semantic change in obsolete words within the field of semantics. In Uzbek linguistics, the stylistic function of obsolete vocabulary in literary texts has been a continuous object of study. In this direction, the views of scholars such as E. Qilichev [11: 29; 12: 160], L. Abdullayeva [1: 150], Kh. Abdurahmonov & N. Mahmudov [2: 59], M. Qurbonova [13: 49], S. Karimov [6: 140] and M. Yo‘ldoshev [16: 151] are of particular importance. Relying on these scholars’ insights, investigating the aesthetic value and linguopoetic features of obsolete words in Uzbek folk tales has become significant for present-day linguistics.

Folk tales are among the most ancient and stable genres of folklore and preserve traces of earlier linguistic stages. In this respect, the use of obsolete words in tales, much like in epics, exhibits distinctive dialectical features.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When literary works depict events from a particular era, recourse to obsolete concepts and lexical units characteristic of that period becomes a necessary stylistic device to ensure contextual authenticity. However, this lexical function takes on somewhat different linguistic characteristics in folk tales. From a historical standpoint, the obsolete words encountered in tales often are not “purely historical words” or archaic lexis for the tale as a text. The reason is that these tales were created and transmitted orally across generations over centuries, during which those words enjoyed active frequency of use in their time. Accordingly, they became firmly embedded in the artistic structure and plot fabric of the tales and came to be regarded as the stable lexical core of the text.

As S. Karimov [6: 118] rightly notes, “If the degree of use of a word among units expressing certain concepts has declined, that fact remains a fact,” that is, if its frequency decreases – or it ceases to be used – it enters the ranks of obsolete words. In line with this, while such words may be obsolete in a synchronic analysis of the tale’s language, from a diachronic perspective they constitute a fundamental lexical fund preserving the genre

features and ensuring the traditional aesthetic impact of the tale. This lends the language of tales lexical stability and a relative immunity to changes in the modern language.

This can be observed in the following excerpts:

1. Then the chief of the soldiers seized the young man, beat him repeatedly, put him in the *kunda*, and threw him into the dungeon. (Oltinbeshik, "AhmadjonbilanLuqmonjon", p. 23);
2. The cruel king, having consulted those in the palace, had a *mapa* made; it was poisoned, and whoever went out in it was to die immediately. (Oltinbeshik, "MomirbilanSomir," p. 84);
3. The *otinoyi* had nearly ten girls studying under her. The woman's name was Chinnoy; Bibixalfa was her epithet. (Oltinbeshik, "Husniyabonu", p. 187);
4. The princess cast a *kamand* three times in succession but could not snare the deer. Embarrassed before the girls, she ran after it. (Oltinbeshik, "Zoyodbotir", p. 60);
5. They pitched the princess's *bargāh* there. (Oltinbeshik, "Zoyodbotir", p. 61).

In these examples, obsolete words such as *kunda* (a special wooden device, plank shackle/pillory used to secure prisoners' legs), *mapa* (a palanquin/sedan chair used to carry a ruler), *otinoyi* (female teacher in old *maktabs*; a woman learned in religion and sharia), *kamand* (lasso; a noosed rope used to catch animals, bind captives, or climb by hooking onto something), and *bargāh* (royal court, audience pavilion; tent; a place entered by special permission) serve a distinctive stylistic function by highlighting the period color of the tale and are therefore not to be treated as merely obsolete within the tale. This lexical fund belonged to the active vocabulary of the time and the oral tradition in which the tales arose. Such layers are interwoven with the tale's artistic structure and contribute to the continuity of the language, reinforcing the contextual authenticity of characters, settings, and events. They function as constructive elements that preserve the genre's aesthetics and traditional style. This methodological approach should be applied to obsolete words in Uzbek folk tales.

Since tales have been transmitted orally across centuries, the obsolete words within them are not mere lexical remnants; they are stylistic dominants that stabilize the genre, sustain the plot, and reflect the national spirit. For example: “Once upon a time, in ancient days, there lived a *qong‘izbikach* (Lady Beetle). (Bo‘ribilanmergan, “Qo‘ng‘iz Bikach,” p. 28). Here *bikach* (standard *bekach*) is still used today in some Uzbek dialects and is historically a term for the wife or daughter of a bek or other rulers and nobles. The word also has an archaic function: in archaic usage it served as a respectful form of address for women (*Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language*, Vol. 1, p. 215). Its emotional-expressive effect in the tale comes from context: applying *Bikach* to an ordinary beetle adds sarcasm, mock elevation, or paradoxical respect, underscoring the tale’s marvelous tone.

Consider further examples where units with essentially nominative function take on emotional-expressive and poetic roles in the tale:

1. The old woman’s craft and skill were always *baxshilik* and *qoqinchilik*. (Bo‘ribilanmergan, “Rustamzodva Sherzod”, p. 37);
2. Thieves, as a rule, would go about even in daytime as *sallakalon*, as if they were shaykhs, appearing to the people as honorable and reputable. (Bo‘ribilanmergan, “Rustamzodva Sherzod”, p. 40);
3. Once there lived two men named *Soqimumsik* and *Boqimumsik*. They were exceedingly miserly; they begrudged each other even a sip of water. (Oyjamol, “Soqimumsikbilan Boqimumsik”, p. 104);
4. Ah, may your house burn, old man! A jewel had been *yitib* (lost) from the kingdom. (Bo‘ribilanmergan, “Rustamzodva Sherzod”, p. 40);
5. Hey nuridiydam, if anyone but you had spoken about this courtyard, I would have torn his tongue from his *kom* (mouth cavity). (Oltinbeshik, “Husniyabonu”, p. 187);
6. A few days later they went to the riverbank where the camel had been taken and *qo‘shlashlabdilar* (took a day’s rest). (Oltinbeshik, “Ahmadjonbilan Luqmonjon”, p. 24).

In (1), *qoqinchilik* is a historical profession now shifted to *kinnachi*, *tabib* (“healer”). The lexeme entered the tale through

phonetic variation from a form present in the literary language: *qoqinch* (ethnographism – healing by incantation and massage of limbs) + the agentive suffix *-chi*, yielding *qoqinchi* (*qoqinchilik*) “one who heals by qoqim,” i.e., a healer. In the tale this lends the character an aura of enchantment and extraordinary power – stronger than an ordinary healer, perhaps bordering on sorcery.

In (2), *sallakalon* combines Arabic *salla* (“turban”) and Persian *kalon* (“great”), denoting a dignitary or religious notable. In the tale, applied to thieves, it signifies a mask of prestige and false respectability, heightening the irony.

In (3), *mumsik* means “miserly, stingy.” Its negative connotation is intensified by embedding it in proper names and by repetition (“exceedingly miserly”), shaping a strongly negative evaluation.

In (4), *yitmoq* (“to be lost, to vanish”) conveys not only physical loss but also the pain of losing something precious, thereby amplifying affect.

In (5), *kom* (“oral cavity”) becomes expressive in the phrase “to tear his tongue from his kom,” inviting the reader to infer the intended threat.

In (6), *qo'shtashlamoq* means “to rest for a day,” adding a particular rhythm to the tale’s contextual frame.

These examples show that although some lexical items retain their primary nominative function, in the tale’s context they also perform additional emotional-expressive and poetic roles. Thus, even when essentially nominative, the inclusion of obsolete words can sometimes ensure stylistic variegation. A neutral word, when used within a tale’s context, can gain heightened impact and expressivity.

Historisms in tales may consist of set phrases and collocations:

1. **king of the world, sovereign of glory**, let me also present my plea; hear me,” he begged. (Oyjamol, “Tuhmat”, p. 65);
2. The king’s servants put the woman into a sack and, from the top of a one-hundred-eighty-gaz tower, threw her down saying, “The king’s decree is binding (Oyjamol, “Tuhmat”, p. 66);

3. When they reached the place where the bird fell, there stood by a great river an **imoratioliy** like the palaces of khans. (Oyjamol, "Bo'z bola", p. 27);
4. Wait, sir! This desert lad has never seen the **arkonidavlat (great officers of state)**; his tongue was tied with astonishment. (Oyjamol, "Tiltig'dano'tkir", p. 108);
5. I do so much thieving, and yet I am always in need of a spoonful of **yovg'on (melted fat)**. (Oyjamol, "Navro'zqaroqchi", p. 70);
6. There is no benefit in my wandering. Without wife and children, what use is the world to me?" he said, and **gave his hand to the pır**. (Oyjamol, "Navoiybilanmardikor", p. 111)

As M. Yo'ldoshev [16: 73] correctly notes, "ahistorism is the unique name of the phenomenon it denotes." Grouping the words in the language of tales shows that most historical words belong to the noun class and designate unique names for concepts specific to social-domestic life, material culture, and systems of governance in the past. A significant portion of these historical words is scarcely used in today's literary language because their referents have vanished from modern life. It should be noted that although some historical words have disappeared from the literary language, they remain in use within certain Uzbek dialects. This underscores the need to study historical lexis as a lexical-semantic archive.

A substantial share of obsolete words consists of archaisms. Our research indicates that archaisms in the language of folk tales are not as active as historical words, but they are not entirely absent. As has been noted, "archaisms are used in literary texts to depict the reality of the period and to ensure the work's historical spirit" [16: 72]. This criterion is also important for archaic units in tales and determines their role in creating textual integrity and historical context. A. Hojiyev identifies active groups of archaisms as: "1) lexical archaisms; 2) grammatical archaisms; 3) phraseological archaisms" [5: 149].

In the language of folk tales, lexical archaisms form the core. In particular, lexical-phonetic archaisms appear in examples such as:

1. *Podshoh bir suruk tuyalarga javohirotlarni yuklab, oldiga qari kishilardan bittasini mindirdi.* (Bo'ri bilan mergan, "Rustamzod va Sherzod", p. 45);
2. *Devonaxon, bizning oldimizga har kuni ertalab salom vaqtida bir kelasiz-u shul gapni gapirib berasiz va xazinachidan bitta oltin olib ketasiz, – debdi.* (Oltin beshik, "Ko'kka tupursa, betga tushadi", p. 126);
3. *Ahmadjon o'ziga ishonqiramay "Tushimmi bu, yo o'ngimmi? – deb, ul qizdan: – Rost ayt, sen kim bo'lding? – deb so'rabdi.* (Oltinbeshik, "Ahmadlar," p. 138);
4. *Qarasa, yonibturgan tosh danqilingan uyning yonida birkampiro'ltirganemish.* (Oltinbeshik, "Oypari", p. 172)

In these, the addition or preservation of certain sounds reflects features that are obsolete per the norms of modern Uzbek linguistics. From the analyzed examples, most archaisms belong to the noun class. Still, to illuminate the tale's scenery, some historical words from the classes of adjectives, pronouns, adverbs, and verbs are also used. For instance:

1. *Ko'nglimo'rtansin agar g'ayriga* (o'zga, begona) *parvo aylasa, Harko'ngil ham kimseningshavqingnipaydoaylasa.* (Oyjamol, "Shoirsevgisi", p. 106);
2. *Bu bobo og'rilardanolibkelgan murg'imusammo* (*murg'*forstilida "qush", *musammo*arabcha "osmoniy", "samoviy", ya'niosmondankelgan, ilohiyqushma'nosiniifodalaydi) *edi.* (Bo'ribilanmergan, "Rustamzodva Sherzod", p. 45)

CONCLUSIONS

Historicism here denotes a historical lexical item naming an object/institution no longer present in modern life. Archaism denotes an older lexical/grammatical/phraseological form supplanted by newer forms but retained for stylistic effect. Titles such as *Oltinbeshik*, *Bo'ribilanmergan*, *Oyjamol* are preserved in transliteration; page references follow the original.

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