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**SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATION OF ARABIC AND PERSIAN LOANWORDS: A CASE  
STUDY IN THE UZBEK LANGUAGE**

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the semantic transformation of lexical units borrowed from Arabic and Persian into the Uzbek language. Focusing on the divergence between the original etymological meanings and their contemporary usage, the study identifies key mechanisms of semantic change, including narrowing, broadening, metaphorical shifts, and connotative evolution. Drawing on examples from religious, literary, and socio-cultural discourse, the research demonstrates how borrowed lexical units undergo functional and stylistic recontextualization. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how loanwords are semantically integrated and reshaped within the Uzbek linguistic system, revealing broader patterns of language contact and cultural adaptation.

**Keywords:** semantic transformation; lexical borrowing; semantic shift; Arabic loanwords; Persian loanwords; etymological analysis; connotative meaning; stylistic change.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The lexical wealth of the Uzbek language has been significantly shaped by borrowings from Arabic and Persian. Over the centuries, these lexical units have been actively employed in religious, scholarly, literary, and socio-cultural domains. Through phonological, morphological, and syntactic adaptation, they have become fully integrated into the Uzbek linguistic system. However, these borrowings have undergone not only formal but also semantic changes, undergoing a process known as semantic transformation.

Semantic transformation refers to the divergence between the original etymological meaning of a lexical unit in the source language and its contextualized usage in the target language. This process can take multiple forms, including semantic narrowing, broadening, metaphorical shift, connotative change, and stylistic-emotional reinterpretation. For instance, the Arabic word *fitna*, which initially meant “trial” or “test,” has acquired negative connotations in modern Uzbek such as “rebellion” or “turmoil.”

These semantic shifts have evolved in response to historical, cultural, stylistic, and communicative needs. As a result, Arabic and Persian loanwords in present-day Uzbek are not merely passive elements of the lexicon but active semantic components that carry newly formed semantic layers. This indicates their transformation from simple borrowings into dynamic elements of meaning-making.

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that while the phonological and morphological adaptation of Arabic and Persian loanwords has been extensively explored in Uzbek linguistics, the semantic transformation processes – particularly their connotative and stylistic dimensions – have not been systematically studied. In particular, their cognitive-semantic and socio-pragmatic aspects remain underexplored.

The novelty of this study is that it analyzes the semantic transformation of Arabic and Persian loanwords in modern Uzbek discourse for the first time by applying the theoretical models of Chomsky, Traugott, Gärdenfors and Qo‘ziyev. It specifically draws on concepts such as semantic saturation, subjectification and cognitive motion to examine how these borrowed units have been enriched with stylistic, emotional and sociolinguistic meanings.

The main objective of this article is to identify the types of semantic transformation present in Arabic and Persian loanwords within Uzbek, evaluate their functional roles in contemporary discourse and analyze the historical and sociolinguistic foundations of these processes. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the lexical development of the Uzbek language, offers a nuanced analysis of the functional potential of borrowed words and highlights the central role of semantic processes in language evolution.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of transformation in linguistics is rooted in the generative-transformational grammar introduced by Noam Chomsky in *Syntactic Structures*. Transformation refers to the process by which one syntactic structure is derived from another, often through changes in surface realization while preserving or modifying deep semantic content (Chomsky, 1957, p. 111). Although Chomsky did not directly study the transformation of loanwords, his distinction between deep structure (the core semantic level) and surface structure (the syntactically expressed form) has served as a foundational model for explaining semantic shift in borrowed vocabulary.

In the context of Uzbek, Arabic and Persian loanwords often experience transformation not only at the morphological or syntactic level but also semantically. For example, the word *fitna*, originally denoting “trial” or “test” in Arabic, has evolved to mean “rebellion” or “chaos” in Uzbek a shift from a neutral or even religious concept to a socially negative one (Qo‘ziyev, 2025, p. 143).

Building on Chomsky’s formalist model, semantic change has become a central topic in cognitive and historical linguistics. Elizabeth Traugott has developed one of the most widely cited frameworks for semantic transformation, classifying shifts into six main types: narrowing, broadening, pejoration, amelioration, metaphoric shift and metonymic shift. These transformations are often motivated by changes in discourse context, cultural dynamics, or the need for pragmatic relevance (Traugott, 2003, pp. 103–139).

Traugott later introduced the concepts of subjectification and intersubjectification, which explain how the meaning of words shifts depending on speaker perspective and shared communicative intent (Traugott, 2010). These ideas are crucial when analyzing connotative shifts in borrowed words how neutral or technical terms become stylistically loaded or emotionally charged.

Another influential approach is offered by Peter Gärdenfors, who conceptualizes semantic transformation as movement within a conceptual space. According to Gärdenfors, lexical items shift position within mental maps, undergoing changes such as focus adjustment, scope change, or cross-domain transfer. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding how Arabic and Persian borrowings in Uzbek evolve into culturally and contextually nuanced expressions (Gärdenfors, 2010, p. 15).

For example, Gärdenfors identifies five types of semantic motion:

1. Change in focus – a shift in semantic emphasis within a word’s components.
2. Increase in precision – general meanings become narrower and context-specific.
3. Change in scope – meaning may broaden or narrow depending on usage patterns.
4. Inter-domain transfer – semantic elements move across conceptual fields (e.g., religious → poetic).

Intra-domain semantic shift – a subtle shift within the same field, often driven by metonymy or stylistic use.

In Uzbek linguistics, Otabek Shukurov (2021) provides a structural categorization of semantic transformation levels, identifying three degrees of deviation from the etymological base. His model

allows systematic evaluation of how borrowed words adapt semantically in modern discourse, often serving new pragmatic, stylistic, or even ironic functions.

An essential contribution from Umidjon Qo‘ziyev (2025) builds upon these frameworks with his concept of semantic saturation, which explains how borrowed units accumulate multiple layers of meaning in the recipient language. Qo‘ziyev distinguishes two key mechanisms:

Full semantic transfer, where the original semantic spectrum is retained, often resulting in broad synonymic capacity (e.g., *qiyomat*, *laylatul-qadr*);

Context-driven enrichment, where socio-stylistic or emotional overlays develop within the recipient language (e.g., *assalomu alaykum* evolving into dramatic or ironic usage in media) (Qo‘ziyev, 2025, pp. 143–144).

Recent empirical research further supports these theoretical models. In a Scopus-indexed article, M. Amonov (2025) examines Arabic-origin lexical items such as *lahm*, *basir*, *kasofat*, *kun fayakun*, *jāhil* and *zamid* in contemporary Uzbek discourse. His analysis reveals distinct patterns of semantic narrowing, pejoration and metaphorical recontextualization. For instance, *jāhil*, originally meaning “ignorant,” is now often used in moral and political discourse to denote ideological opposition or extremism (Amonov, 2025).

Amonov’s study affirms the theoretical insights of both Traugott and Gärdenfors, showing that borrowed lexical units are not statically preserved but dynamically reinterpreted within the sociocultural matrix of Uzbek usage. His contribution bridges the gap between abstract theory and real-world data, demonstrating that semantic transformation is not only conceptual but also observable and measurable in linguistic practice.

Collectively, the works of Chomsky, Traugott, Gärdenfors, Shukurov, Qo‘ziyev and Amonov provide a rich theoretical and empirical foundation for analyzing semantic transformation in Arabic and Persian loanwords in the Uzbek language. Their combined perspectives spanning formal grammar, cognitive semantics, sociolinguistics and empirical corpus analysis validate the multidimensional nature of semantic change. These insights will inform the present study’s exploration of how borrowed words adapt functionally, culturally and stylistically in contemporary Uzbek.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the deep historical and cultural influence of Arabic and Persian on the Uzbek language, scholarly attention has predominantly focused on the phonological and morphological assimilation of borrowed lexical units. Much less attention has been given to the semantic transformation these borrowings undergo, particularly in contemporary Uzbek usage. As a result, the functional, connotative and stylistic evolution of Arabic and Persian loanwords remains largely underexplored.

Existing studies tend to categorize such borrowings from a static, etymological perspective, failing to account for the dynamic processes by which meanings shift due to socio-cultural, pragmatic and cognitive factors. This oversight limits our understanding of how borrowed terms acquire new semantic roles, reflect modern communicative needs, or even reshape discourse practices in media, religion, education and everyday speech.

Moreover, while international semantic change theories such as those by Chomsky (1957), Traugott (2003, 2010) and Gärdenfors (2010) provide rich explanatory models, there is a lack of empirical integration between these frameworks and the Uzbek linguistic context. Important local contributions, such as Qo‘ziyev’s (2025) notion of semantic saturation, have yet to be incorporated into a broader, comparative analysis of how Arabic and Persian lexical elements are semantically restructured in Uzbek.

Therefore, this study addresses the urgent need to systematically investigate the semantic transformation of Arabic and Persian loanwords in the Uzbek language. It aims to fill the gap by combining theoretical models from historical and cognitive linguistics with empirical evidence from modern Uzbek discourse, highlighting the multi-layered, evolving nature of loanword semantics in a post-Soviet, multilingual environment.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design is based on a qualitative and descriptive-classificatory methodology, aimed at identifying the semantic transformation of Arabic and Persian loanwords in the Uzbek language. To achieve this, several concrete methods were employed. Specifically, a semantic classification model was used to distinguish the types of transformation—namely semantic narrowing, broadening, metaphorical shift and connotative extension.

Additionally, corpus analysis was applied to trace the frequency and contextual variation of these lexical units in contemporary usage. Etymological investigation helped reconstruct the historical semantic foundations of each word. Finally, through contextual-semantic analysis, the study examined how these loanwords have acquired emotional, stylistic and functional shifts within various socio-discursive settings.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Throughout the evolution of any language, contact with other languages and sociopolitical influences often leads to the adoption of both lexical and grammatical units. The Uzbek language, in particular, has had sustained contact with Arabic and Persian during the Islamic Golden Age and through centuries of cultural and scholarly exchange. Borrowings from these languages entered Uzbek at different historical stages and adapted to the language not only phonetically and morphologically, but also semantically.

These borrowed units have undergone notable semantic transformations, diverging from their original meanings due to shifts in communicative, cultural and stylistic contexts. This section presents four principal types of semantic transformation observed in Arabic and Persian loanwords in Uzbek, supported by concrete examples and comparative linguistic analysis.

**1. Semantic Narrowing.** Semantic narrowing involves a lexical unit that originally had a broad or neutral meaning being reduced to a more specific or socially restricted usage. For example, “*Taqsir*” (تقصیر): Originally meaning “shortcoming” or “neglect” in Arabic, this word narrowed in Uzbek to become a respectful form of address toward figures of authority, such as religious scholars or elite individuals. In the sentence “*Taqsirim, bizning toji davlatimiz janobingizda,*” the term no longer reflects guilt or failure but serves as a formal expression of humility and deference.

**Table 1:** Semantic Narrowing Of The Word “Andisha”

Indicator	Description
Etymology	<i>Andisha</i> (اندیشه) – Persian origin; originally meaning “thought,” “reflection,” “deliberation,” or “anxious consideration.”
Early usage in Uzbek	Applied broadly to signify “thought,” “contemplation,” “concern,” or “inner reflection” in various intellectual and emotional contexts.
Contemporary usage	Meaning narrowed to convey <b>moral hesitation, fear of public opinion, social embarrassment, or internalized shame.</b>
Transformation type	<b>Semantic narrowing:</b> a general intellectual-emotional term became socially and psychologically restricted in meaning.

<b>Illustrative expression</b>	“ <i>Andisha qil, el nima deydi!</i> ” – no longer suggests rational thinking, but rather <b>a warning to conform</b> , rooted in social anxiety.
<b>Stylistic-connotative shift</b>	From reflective, philosophical semantics → to <b>emotionally loaded, normative restraint</b> used for <b>indirect social regulation</b> .
<b>Fixed expressions</b>	“ <i>Andisha qilmoq</i> ” (to act with caution), “ <i>andishasiz ish</i> ” (reckless act), “ <i>andisha bilan gapirmoq</i> ” (to speak carefully) – imply moral self-control.
<b>Socio-cultural implication</b>	The word now functions as a tool of <b>social behavior conditioning</b> , reflecting Uzbek norms of decency, shame and public scrutiny.

This narrowing reflects the process by which a semantically rich word becomes restricted to a specific cultural function—namely, a social mechanism of control and restraint.

**2. Semantic Broadening.** In semantic broadening, a word initially used in a specific or technical sense evolves to cover a wider set of meanings, often acquiring emotional or cultural significance. Example, “*Musofir*” (مُسَافِر): derived from the Arabic root *sāfara* meaning “to travel,” this word originally referred to someone who was physically on a journey. In modern Uzbek, however, “*musofir*” now encompasses meanings such as “exile,” “immigrant,” “diaspora,” and evokes a sense of emotional distance, suffering and spiritual endurance. Phrases like “*Musofir yurtda aziz bo‘lmas*” and “*Musofir bo‘lmaguncha musulmon bo‘lmas*” reflect these emotional and metaphoric layers.

The transformation from a geographical to a spiritual and emotional concept exemplifies the dynamic nature of semantic broadening under sociocultural pressures, especially migration, displacement and transnational experiences.

**3. Metaphorical Transformation.** Metaphorical transformation occurs when a word transitions from a literal meaning to a figurative or symbolic usage. Example, “*Hazm*” (هضم): originally referring to the physiological process of digestion, in Uzbek, “*hazm*” has acquired metaphorical meanings related to emotional endurance or acceptance. Expressions such as “*Bu gapni hazm qila olmadim*” or “*Hazm qilish qiyin bo‘ldi*” refer not to food digestion but to the psychological difficulty of accepting unpleasant truths or emotional shocks.

This semantic shift demonstrates how biological terms can be recontextualized through metaphor to describe mental and emotional processes, enhancing the expressive and symbolic potential of the language.

**4. Connotative Shift.** Connotative shifts involve the addition of emotional, stylistic, or evaluative layers to a word’s original neutral meaning, often without changing the core denotation. Example, “*Mutasaddi*” (مُتَصَدِّي): in Arabic, this term denoted a responsible or executive official in a neutral tone. In modern Uzbek, however, “*mutasaddi*” frequently carries a sarcastic or negative connotation, often implying incompetence, delay, or irresponsibility. For instance, “*Mutasaddilar yana hech narsa qilmadi,*” suggests public frustration rather than administrative authority.

This change reflects how societal attitudes toward institutions and bureaucracy can shift the emotional tone of language, adding implicit criticism to otherwise neutral terms.

These findings reveal that Arabic and Persian loanwords in Uzbek do not remain semantically static. Rather, they undergo profound transformation aligned with Uzbek linguistic, cultural and cognitive systems. Semantic narrowing, broadening, metaphorical expansion and connotative shift are not isolated phenomena but part of a complex adaptive process that reflects historical experience, worldview and communicative strategies of Uzbek speakers.

This semantic transformation thus functions not only as a linguistic change but as a socio-cultural recontextualization demonstrating the Uzbek language’s ability to absorb, reshape and repurpose borrowed elements in line with its own expressive needs.

## CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the semantic transformation of Arabic and Persian loanwords in the Uzbek language, demonstrating that lexical borrowing is not a one-dimensional process of formal adaptation, but rather a dynamic and context-dependent mechanism of linguistic integration. Drawing on a combination of historical, cognitive and stylistic frameworks, the research identifies four major transformation patterns: semantic narrowing, broadening, metaphorical shift and connotative change.

Through detailed analysis of lexical units such as *andisha*, *musofir*, *hazm* and *mutasaddi*, the study reveals how originally neutral or technical terms evolve into contextually enriched expressions that reflect socio-cultural values, emotional attitudes and communicative practices specific to Uzbek discourse. These shifts illustrate the role of semantic transformation as both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon, wherein borrowed words undergo resemanticization in response to changing pragmatic needs, ideological shifts and interaction with local conceptual structures.

The findings suggest that Arabic and Persian loanwords in Uzbek are not merely remnants of past contact, but active participants in the ongoing evolution of the language. Their semantic trajectories reflect broader processes of meaning negotiation within a multilingual and postcolonial context, where language continues to adapt to new forms of expression, identity and worldview.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how lexical semantics operates within contact-induced change, offering new insights into the interplay between borrowing, meaning and cultural integration. It also lays a foundation for further comparative, corpus-based and interdisciplinary studies on semantic change in Turkic languages and beyond.

## FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The current study reveals the complex nature of semantic transformation among Arabic and Persian loanwords in the Uzbek language, emphasizing that borrowed lexicon is far from static—it evolves in tandem with cultural, cognitive and communicative shifts. However, the semantic processes examined here only begin to uncover the broader implications of lexical adaptation in multilingual contexts.

In the future, several research avenues merit attention:

**Corpus-based semantic mapping.** The use of large-scale Uzbek language corpora—both written and spoken—can provide more systematic data on frequency, usage variation and diachronic semantic change. Applying computational tools such as semantic tagging, concordance analysis and collocation networks would allow for more granular tracking of meaning evolution in context.

**Sociolinguistic variation and identity.** Future studies could explore how semantic transformation varies across dialects, age groups, social classes, or geographic regions. This would help identify whether certain semantic shifts are more pronounced among youth, media discourse, or rural vs. urban speech. Loanwords often carry ideological, religious, or cultural significance, which may reflect speakers' identity construction.

**Cross-linguistic comparison in Turkic languages.** Comparing the semantic transformation of Arabic and Persian loanwords in Uzbek with their counterparts in other Turkic languages (e.g., Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Uyghur) may yield insights into shared or divergent semantic paths, highlighting the role of typological and cultural contact in shaping semantic change.

**Educational and lexicographic implications.** The findings of this study could inform modern dictionary-making and Uzbek language teaching materials. Lexicographers may consider recording both etymological roots and current semantic layers of loanwords. In pedagogical contexts, awareness of semantic drift can prevent misinterpretation, especially for students of classical literature or religious texts.

**Semantic change and language policy.** As Uzbekistan redefines its linguistic identity in a post-Soviet and globalized world, there is room for further research on how semantic shifts in loanwords interact with processes of decolonization, language planning and standardization. Semantic transformation can serve as a marker of social change and ideological repositioning.

**Cognitive linguistic modeling.** Using frameworks from conceptual metaphor theory and cognitive semantics (e.g., Gärdenfors’ conceptual spaces), future studies could model how abstract meanings emerge from concrete origins. This would bridge descriptive linguistics with psycholinguistics, enhancing our understanding of how semantic transformations are mentally processed.

The exploration of semantic transformation in Arabic and Persian loanwords opens the door to interdisciplinary, computational and socially engaged research. Future studies will benefit from integrating linguistic, technological and cultural perspectives to better understand how borrowed words adapt, persist and evolve within the Uzbek linguistic landscape.

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