HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

REGISTER STRATIFICATION IN ALISHER NAVOI'S MUNSHAOT: AUTHORIAL VOICE, EPISTOLARY GENRE, AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

Karimova Yulduz Bakhtiyorovna (PhD)
Teacher, Academic Lyceum of Fergana State University
E-mail: Yulduzk228@gmail.com | Tel: +998 50 711 88 48

Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21331140

Abstract: This article investigates register stratification – that is, the systematic differentiation of communicative registers – in Alisher Navoi's epistolary collection Munshaot. The primary objective of the study is to identify and classify the speech registers that Navoi constructs across the letters of the collection in accordance with three governing variables: the social standing of the addressee, the nature of the author-addressee relationship, and the generic conventions of the epistolary subtype concerned. The corpus for comparative analysis comprises letters belonging to the xabariya (informative), javobiya (responsive), and xitobiya (appellative) generic subtypes. The research traces the textual instantiation of the authorial voice through the recurring 'faqir' (the humble self) persona, and examines the divergence between formal-official and intimate-personal registers. Particular attention is devoted to the functional role of religious-mystical (Sufi) lexicon in the articulation of register distinctions. The findings demonstrate that register stratification in Munshaot is systematically governed by the addressee's social position, the communicative purpose of the letter, and genre-specific conventions – thereby reaffirming Navoi's exceptional command of Persianate-Turkic prose rhetoric. The study employs philological analysis, comparative-typological, and stylistic methods.

Keywords: Alisher Navoi; Munshaot; register stratification; register variation; epistolary genre; xabariya; javobiya; xitobiya; authorial voice; 'faqir' persona; stylistic register; prose stylistics; Chagatai literature; classical Uzbek prose.

Introduction

In his treatise Muḥākamat al-Lughatain (A Comparison of the Two Languages), Alisher Navoi advanced a systematic theoretical argument for the expressive parity of Turkic with Persian. In Munshaot (lit. 'compositions' or 'writings'), he furnished the empirical demonstration of that claim: the work shows that the Turkic language possesses the stylistic resources required to address a sultan, a disciple, and a friend – each in a register perfectly calibrated to the social relationship in question [1]. Within the epistolary tradition of Central Asia, the art of letter-writing (inshā) held a distinguished position. In Persian literature, poets such as Jāmī, Khāqānī, and Niẓāmī ʿArūżī elevated the epistle to a canonical literary form. Navoi's singular contribution lies in his being the first to demonstrate this tradition fully and to raise it to a new level of artistic achievement in the Turkic language [2].

The term munshaot (Arabic: inshā – that which is written, composed) denotes a genre in Eastern literature consisting of a collection of letters in verse or prose by one or several authors. Such collections were not mere utilitarian correspondence; they constituted a distinct branch of literary art – the art of inshā – characterised by profound content and refined aesthetic expression. Some letters attained the highest degree of ornamental virtuosity. The genre was cultivated primarily in Arabic and Persian; it was, however, Alisher Navoi who inaugurated it for the first time in Uzbek literary history [3].

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

In the preface to the collection, Navoi himself explains the circumstances that gave rise to the work. He observes that letters written in Turkic on behalf of the state, or exchanged between individuals, were "devoid of the refinement of diction and free from the eloquence of phrasing" (alfozi latofatdin muarro va tarokibi balog'atdin mubarro) [4]. Accordingly, he conceived of composing letters that would demonstrate the capacity of Turkic prose to equal Persian in beauty, ornament, and depth: "it occurred to me that notes in the Turkic language might be written in exactly the same manner [as Persian], and that letters in this tongue might be set down in precisely the same way" [5]. The poet enriched his composition with verses, rubāʿīs, and masnavīs; he also embedded fine examples of rhymed prose (sajʿ). Persian verses constitute a small minority; the remaining poetic insertions are composed entirely in Turkic. It is clear that Navoi aspired not to convey merely a message but to create a work of art in which aesthetic achievement supersedes informational function – thus founding a new literary genre in classical Uzbek literature.

Generic Structure and Compositional Conventions

The structural organisation of the letters follows the canonical conventions of classical inshā. The opening section comprises a ḥamd (praise of God) and a naʿt (eulogy of the Prophet), followed by an encomium of the ruling sovereign, the substantive communication (muddaʿā), and a concluding prayer (duʿā) and colophon (khātima). Navoi adheres to this template while simultaneously imparting to the central communicative nucleus of each letter a distinctive artistic form [6].

The authorial 'I' in Munshaot manifests in markedly differentiated configurations depending on the addressee. Although each configuration is distinct, all are articulated through a single authorial voice – that of Navoi. This constitutes evidence of his rhetorical adaptability and literary mastery.

Table 1. Manifestations of the Authorial 'I' in Munshaot

Manifestation of the Authorial 'I'	Addressee	Rhetorical features	Defining characteristic
Statesman-counsellor 'I'	Sultan Husayn Bayqara	Formal, argumentative, political	Aligning royal interests with popular welfare
Mentor-pedagogue 'I'	Princes (Badiuzzaman, Muzaffar)	Measured yet firm; pedagogical	Instruction through analogy and simile
Friend and intellectual companion 'I'	Scholars and artists	Informal, literary, dialogic	Harmonious integration of verse and prose
Affectionate elder brother 'I'	Darwish ʿAli	Sincere, melancholic, sage	Fusion of lyrical register and moral counsel

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

Spiritual father-master 'I'	Adopted disciple	Lyrical, philosophical, hopeful	Solitude and spiritual testament

3. Analytical Close Reading: Letters 25, 26, and 27

Letter 25 opens with the formula: "Following humble devotions and supplications, let it be known that the auspicious letter, which was graciously dispatched from [such a place], has arrived and its contents have become known" (Qulluq duodin so'ngra arzadosht ulkim, humoyun bitikkim, inoyat qilib, falondin yuborib erdingiz, yetishti va mazmuni ma'lum bo'ldi). This constitutes the canonical opening formula of the javobiya. Nevertheless, the body of the letter proceeds to issue directives and instructions – a defining feature of the xitobiya subtype. The distinctiveness of the authorial voice in this letter resides in the simultaneous operation of three discursive strata:

(1) The first stratum: Navoi acknowledges receipt of the Khan's letter – "its contents have become known" (mazmuni maʿlum boʻldi). This acknowledgement is terse and economical; no superfluous language is employed. The javobiya formula is discharged and the letter proceeds.

(2) The second stratum: Navoi speaks as a messenger transmitting a royal decree – "In the matter of inquiry, such a command was issued..." (Soʻruq bobida andoq hukm qildilarkim...). At this juncture, the authorial voice recedes entirely; Navoi becomes a conduit. This constitutes a singular configuration within the authorial voice: the poet effaes himself completely.

(3) The third stratum: the letter closes with the formula "humble supplications have been rendered; peace be upon you" (qulluq duo arz qilindi, vassalom). While formulaic, the word vassalom functions as a sharp and decisive closure – a marker of deliberate economy of expression.

The most rhetorically significant formulation in Letter 25 is the phrase "set down in the letter as a document addressed to the Khan" (bitikda xon tobug'ida deb bitib). Navoi here insists on the juridical force of the document: the letter is not merely discourse but a legally binding instrument. This rhetorical emphasis endows the letter with the weight of official obligation.

Letter 26 exhibits especially refined emotional stratification. The instruction "let [the painting] be executed" (tasvir qilinsin) constitutes an administrative directive; the immediately following clause – "the person capable of executing it is Master Behzad" (ani tasvir qilaolur kishi ustod Behzoddur) – is not technical information. It is, rather, an aesthetic judgement. Navoi speaks not as an official but as an artist. The formulation "however the command in this matter may come, it shall be acted upon accordingly" (Har nechuk ul bobda hukm kelsa, anga koʻra qilingʻusidur) constitutes the most subtle rhetorical gesture in the authorial voice: Navoi returns the decision to the Mirza. This is the art of diplomatic prose – advice is proffered while the last word is reserved for the sovereign. The rhetorical structure of the letter is as follows: opening formula, then information and instruction, with the informational portion considerably longer than is typical – a defining mark of the xabariya, in which the communication itself constitutes the primary telos.

Register stratification is further evidenced in the locution "as it is the case that nothing other than the scattering of particles from the sun proceeds from it" (Har oyinakim, andoq boʻlgʻusidur, quyoshdin zarraparvarliqdin oʻzga ish kelmagusidur). This phrase articulates Navoi's positional stance

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

towards the Mirza: the sovereign is likened to the sun – a classical formula of panegyric – yet its placement in the middle of a letter, rather than in a designated encomium section, renders it entirely natural and integrated.

Letter 27 opens thus: "This servant, having girded himself with the sash of attendance and set out towards [the meeting], was prevented from that journey by the weakness of his fortune" (bu qul mulozamat ehromin bog‘lab, mutavajjih bo‘lurda tole’ za’fidin oriza dast berdiki, ul tavajjuh monii bo‘ldi). This is xabariya in its purest form: Navoi communicates his condition and his inability to attend.

Among the letters analysed, Letter 27 is that in which the authorial 'I' is most transparently present. Three rhetorical strategies are operative:

(a) Humility and apology: the phrase "by reason of the weakness of fortune" (tole’ za’fidin) displaces personal agency; it is fate, not the author, that is responsible. This is a classical device of Eastern literary rhetoric – an appeal to providential will as a means of attenuating personal accountability.

(b) Mediation: in the section beginning "as for Shaykh [...]", Navoi again effects his own erasure and transmits the concerns of a third party. This is a recurrence of the mediation register observed in Letter 25 – Navoi frequently speaks on behalf of others.

(c) Closing formula: "the words borne in mind have been communicated to those companions who have departed" (arz qilsalar, umid xotirig‘a kelgan so‘zni ham borg‘on yoronlarg‘a aytilibtur) constitutes an intricate rhetorical construction. Two propositions are expressed simultaneously: 'I could not come in person' and 'I have nonetheless conveyed my message.' Physical absence is reconciled with rhetorical presence.

The most powerful rhetorical characteristic of Letter 27 is the coalescence of apology and petition within a single discursive gesture. Navoi apologises and simultaneously requests – yet neither act is articulated explicitly; both are fused into a single utterance.

The Stability of Opening Formulae and the Diversity of Content

A remarkable feature of all three letters is the invariance of their opening formulae alongside the radical divergence of their content. All three commence with "Following humble devotions and supplications, let it be known" (Qulluq duodin so‘ngra arzadosht ulkim or Qulluq arzadosht ulkim) – a mark of formulaic stability. Yet from the third clause onwards, each letter proceeds in an entirely different direction. This constitutes a defining property of Navoi's prose style: external form is stable; internal content is inexhaustibly various.

In Letter 25, the locution "the auspicious letter" (humoyun bitikkim) represents the highest grade of honorific address. In Letter 27, by contrast, Navoi narrates his own condition – personal content is foregrounded. This confirms the principle that the closer the social distance between author and addressee, the more prominent the personal voice. This phenomenon constitutes the evidentiary basis for the analysis of register stratification presented in this article.

It is further noteworthy that, within the xitobiya subtype, Navoi's personal perspective is most consistently visible – a function primarily of the generic requirements of the subtype and of the subject matter addressed. The formulae "arzadosht bitildi", "arzg‘a yetkurildi", and "arz qilildi" are not merely

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

grammatical constructions: they simultaneously govern the generic classification of the letters into xabariya, javobiya, and xitobiya subtypes. Equally significant is the fact that the clause concerning Behzad in Letter 26 – while ostensibly a technical specification – simultaneously functions as the poet's aesthetic voice.

A Systematic Classification of the Letters

The eighty-eight letters constituting Munshaot admit of clear taxonomic groupings according to addressee, communicative purpose, and rhetorical features. While Kh. Abdurakhimov [8] identified certain general characteristics of these letters, no systematic classification was provided. The present study offers the first comprehensive classification of the letters according to both the addressee and the rhetorical properties of the authorial voice.

Table 2. Classification of the Letters in Munshaot by Addressee and Rhetorical Register

Group	Addressee	No. of letters (approx.)	Primary rhetorical function	Register
I	**Sultan Husayn Bayqara**	18-20	Political counsel; call for justice	**Formal-elevated**
II	**Princes (Badiuzzaman, Muzaffar)**	15-17	Paternal admonition; political education	**Formal-hortatory**
III	**Amirs and begs**	12-14	Reconciliation, solicitation, recommendation	**Formal-diplomatic**
IV	**Scholars and artists (Jami, Pahlavan Muhammad)**	10-12	Intellectual dialogue, creative exchange, spiritual discourse	**Informal-literary**
V	**Intimate associates (younger brother, disciple)**	2 (riqa)	Personal affection, counsel, interiority	**Sincere-lyrical**
VI	**Mixed (congratulatory, condolence letters)**	15-20	Festive and mourning formulae; pious wishes	**Formulaic-ceremonial**

HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

This classification demonstrates that register stratification in Munshaot is pervasive and systematic. In passing from one letter to the next, not merely the subject matter but the mode of address, the lexical range, the rhythmic organisation, and the emotional tonality all undergo transformation. This bears witness to Navoi's rhetorical adaptability and mastery of prose style.

Authorial Polyphony: Theoretical Implications

The five configurations of the authorial 'I' identified above demonstrate that this persona constitutes the internal axis of Munshaot. As a single author addresses different correspondents, each address generates a new poetic world. This phenomenon is designated in contemporary narratology as 'polyphonic authorial voice' – the phenomenon identified by M. M. Bakhtin in Dostoevsky's prose [7] – here observed in its classical manifestation within a pre-modern literary tradition.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that register stratification in Alisher Navoi's Munshaot is not incidental but systematic, operating at multiple levels: lexical selection, rhythmic organisation, mode of address, and emotional tonality. The authorial voice manifests in five clearly differentiated configurations – statesman-counsellor, mentor-pedagogue, intellectual companion, affectionate elder brother, and spiritual father-master – each calibrated to the social position of the addressee. The three generic subtypes (xabariya, javobiya, xitobiya) are not merely formal categories; they constitute rhetorical instruments through which Navoi modulates his prose register with precision. The 'faqir' persona, the mediation rhetoric, and the integration of panegyric within discursive prose collectively testify to a sophisticated metalinguistic awareness rarely paralleled in the Persianate-Turkic epistolary tradition.

These findings confirm that Munshaot occupies a distinctive and underexplored position within the history of classical Uzbek literary prose. As the founding text of the munshaot genre in Uzbek letters, it merits sustained scholarly attention not only within Uzbek philology but within the broader field of Persianate literary studies.

References

1. Hayitmetov, A. (1965). Navoiy nasri [Navoi's Prose]. Tashkent: Fan, pp. 45–52.
2. Jomiy, A. (1964). Kulliyot. Maktublar [Collected Works. Letters]. Tashkent: Fan, pp. 14–18.
3. Uzbek Soviet Encyclopaedia (O‘zME), Vol. 1. Tashkent, 2000.
4. Navoi, A. (2012). Munshaot. Tashkent: [Publisher], p. 549.
5. Navoi, A. (2012). Munshaot. Tashkent: [Publisher], p. 549.
6. Orinboyev, A. (1966). Navoiy va Husayn Boyqaro [Navoi and Husayn Bayqara]. Tashkent: Fan, pp. 85–95.
7. Bakhtin, M. M. (1979). Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva [The Aesthetics of Verbal Art]. Moscow: Iskusstvo, pp. 285–290.
8. Abdurakhimov, Kh. Munshaot – Navoiy epistolar merosining [Munshaot – Navoi's Epistolary Heritage]. [Publication details not specified in source].