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ALISHER NAVOI'S "MUHOKAMAT UL-LUG'ATAYN" AS AN INVALUABLE MASTERPIECE OF LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: This article examines the linguistic, historical, and cultural significance of Alisher Navoi's Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn (The Comparison of Two Languages) as an outstanding monument of linguistic thought. Particular attention is paid to Navoi's comparative analysis of Turkic and Persian, his arguments concerning the expressive capabilities of the Turkic language, and his contribution to the development of linguistic consciousness and literary identity. The study employs historical-comparative, descriptive, and textual-analytical approaches to explore the principal linguistic ideas presented in the treatise. The analysis demonstrates that Navoi's work addresses issues of lexical richness, semantic differentiation, linguistic expression, and the relationship between language and literary creativity. The article also considers the relevance of Navoi's linguistic heritage to contemporary discussions of multilingualism, language preservation, and cultural identity. It concludes that Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn remains an important source for understanding the history of Turkic linguistic thought and the intellectual traditions of Central Asia.

Keywords: Alisher Navoi, Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn, comparative linguistics, Turkic language, Persian language, historical linguistics, lexical semantics, linguistic heritage, literary language, cultural identity.

Introduction

Language is one of the fundamental instruments through which societies preserve their historical memory, cultural values, intellectual traditions, and collective identity. Throughout history, the development of literary languages has been closely associated with cultural advancement, education, scholarship, and artistic expression. The linguistic heritage of Alisher Navoi occupies a distinguished position within this historical process because his literary and scholarly activities contributed significantly to the recognition and development of Chagatai Turkic as a language of sophisticated literary expression.

Alisher Navoi (1441–1501) was an outstanding poet, thinker, statesman, and representative of the intellectual culture of the Timurid period. His writings played a decisive role in demonstrating the artistic and expressive potential of the Turkic literary language. Among his scholarly works, Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn, completed in 1499, is particularly significant because it presents a systematic literary-linguistic comparison of Turkic and Persian.

During Navoi's lifetime, Persian enjoyed considerable prestige in the literary and scholarly circles of Central Asia. Many educated writers preferred Persian for literary composition, while Turkic

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was sometimes regarded as less suitable for sophisticated poetic expression. Navoi challenged this assumption by demonstrating that Turkic possessed extensive lexical resources, distinctive semantic possibilities, and considerable stylistic flexibility.

The importance of Muhokamat ul-Lug‘atayn extends beyond the historical circumstances of its creation. The treatise raises questions that remain relevant to contemporary linguistics, including the expressive capabilities of languages, lexical differentiation, literary language development, and the relationship between linguistic identity and cultural heritage.

The aim of this study is to analyze the linguistic significance of Muhokamat ul-Lug‘atayn, identify its principal comparative arguments, and explain its contribution to the historical development of Turkic linguistic thought.

Literature Review

The linguistic and literary heritage of Alisher Navoi has attracted the attention of scholars working in Turkic studies, historical linguistics, literary history, and Central Asian cultural studies.

One of the major scholarly contributions to the understanding of Chagatai literary culture is János Eckmann’s Chagatay Manual (1966). This work provides a systematic description of Chagatai grammar and contributes to understanding the linguistic environment in which Navoi developed his literary and scholarly ideas. Its treatment of grammatical structures and historical linguistic characteristics offers an important foundation for examining Navoi’s language.

Robert Devereux’s English translation, Judgment of Two Languages (1966), is particularly valuable for international scholarship because it makes Navoi’s comparative arguments accessible to readers who do not possess sufficient knowledge of Chagatai Turkic. The translation provides an important basis for studying the structure, content, and linguistic claims of the treatise.

Maria Eva Subtelny’s Timurids in Transition: Turko-Persian Politics and Acculturation in Medieval Iran (2007) contributes to understanding the broader historical and cultural environment of the Timurid period. Her research provides relevant context for interpreting the interaction between Turkic and Persian literary traditions.

Research on the historical development of Turkic languages also provides a wider comparative framework. Lars Johanson’s Turkic (2021) discusses the linguistic characteristics and historical development of the Turkic language family. Although its scope extends beyond Navoi’s work, it helps situate Chagatai within the broader history of Turkic languages.

The existing scholarship indicates that Muhokamat ul-Lug‘atayn should be approached not only as a literary defense of Turkic but also as an important historical source reflecting early comparative linguistic reasoning. Nevertheless, its arguments must be interpreted within the intellectual traditions and sociolinguistic conditions of the fifteenth century rather than equated directly with modern comparative-historical linguistics.

Materials and Methods

The primary object of the study is Alisher Navoi’s Muhokamat ul-Lug‘atayn. The research focuses on its linguistic arguments, comparative examples, and historical significance.

The study employs a qualitative research design based on the following approaches.

First, the historical-comparative approach is used to examine the linguistic and cultural circumstances in which Navoi compared Turkic and Persian. Particular attention is given to the prestige of Persian and the position of Turkic within the literary environment of the Timurid period.

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Second, the descriptive method is applied to identify the principal linguistic categories addressed in the treatise, including vocabulary, semantic differentiation, stylistic expression, and literary potential.

Third, textual analysis is used to interpret Navoi's arguments concerning the expressive resources of Turkic and their relationship to literary creativity.

Finally, an interpretive approach is employed to assess the relevance of Navoi's linguistic ideas to contemporary discussions of language development and cultural identity.

The study is based on textual and historical analysis. It does not involve surveys, experiments, or quantitative measurements.

Results and Analysis

1. The historical and linguistic significance of the treatise

Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn represents one of the most influential works in the history of Turkic linguistic thought. Its importance lies in Navoi's deliberate attempt to compare the expressive capabilities of two prestigious languages within the cultural environment of his time.

The work was written at a period when Persian occupied a highly influential position in poetry, administration, and intellectual communication. Navoi did not deny the literary achievements of Persian. Instead, he sought to demonstrate that Turkic also possessed the lexical richness and expressive flexibility necessary for sophisticated artistic creation.

This distinction is important because the treatise should not be interpreted simply as a rejection of Persian. Rather, it is a reasoned defense of the literary capabilities of Turkic, supported by examples drawn from vocabulary and poetic expression.

Navoi's comparative approach was significant because it encouraged readers to evaluate linguistic resources through concrete examples rather than relying exclusively on established literary prestige.

2. Lexical richness and semantic differentiation

One of the central arguments of Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn concerns the lexical resources of Turkic. Navoi emphasizes that Turkic contains numerous words capable of expressing particular actions, emotional states, and shades of meaning.

His discussion of verbs associated with crying is especially illustrative. By drawing attention to distinctions among expressions describing emotional behavior, Navoi demonstrates how vocabulary can encode differences in intensity, manner, and psychological condition.

From the perspective of contemporary linguistics, such observations relate to lexical semantics and semantic differentiation. Words that appear to share a general meaning may nevertheless convey distinct emotional, stylistic, or contextual information.

Navoi's argument therefore highlights an important linguistic principle: the expressive possibilities of a language cannot be adequately evaluated merely by counting words or identifying direct translation equivalents.

The absence of an exact one-word equivalent in another language does not necessarily indicate the absence of the corresponding concept. Languages may express similar meanings through different lexical, grammatical, or syntactic mechanisms.

Consequently, Navoi's observations are most appropriately understood as evidence of his sensitivity to lexical nuance and the expressive resources of Turkic.

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3. Comparative characteristics of Turkic and Persian

Navoi's analysis draws attention to differences between Turkic and Persian in their lexical and expressive systems.

The treatise illustrates that languages may organize semantic distinctions differently. A meaning expressed through a single lexical item in one language may require a phrase or a different grammatical construction in another.

This observation remains relevant to modern linguistic comparison because languages differ in their lexical inventories, morphological structures, and conventional patterns of expression.

However, the linguistic arguments of Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn should not be interpreted as proving the universal superiority of one language over another. Contemporary linguistics recognizes that natural languages possess systematic means of expressing complex meanings, although they may differ considerably in their structural and stylistic resources.

Navoi's historical contribution lies primarily in demonstrating the capabilities of Turkic within a literary environment where Persian had greater established prestige.

4. The relationship between language and literary creativity

An important aspect of Navoi's linguistic thinking is his understanding of the relationship between language and artistic expression.

He regarded the development of a literary language as closely connected with the creative activity of poets and writers. A language becomes more visible as a medium of intellectual and artistic expression when authors actively employ its lexical, grammatical, and stylistic possibilities.

Navoi's own literary achievements provide an important context for this argument. Through his poetry and prose, he demonstrated that Chagatai Turkic could be used to produce complex literary compositions.

Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn therefore combines theoretical argument with the broader cultural project of strengthening Turkic literary expression.

Its significance is not restricted to individual linguistic examples. The work contributed to the formation of literary confidence and encouraged the development of written Turkic traditions.

5. Linguistic heritage and cultural identity

The treatise also possesses substantial cultural significance because language functions as a carrier of historical experience, intellectual traditions, and collective identity.

Navoi's defense of Turkic reflects the importance he attached to the preservation and development of linguistic heritage. By emphasizing the expressive possibilities of Turkic, he encouraged greater recognition of its literary and cultural value.

This aspect of the work is relevant to contemporary discussions of language preservation and multilingual education.

At the same time, the historical circumstances of Navoi's work differ significantly from present-day language policy and linguistic planning. Its modern relevance should therefore be understood primarily through the general principles of respect for linguistic diversity, recognition of literary heritage, and informed comparative language study.

6. Principal findings of the textual analysis

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The qualitative analysis of Muhokamat ul-Lug‘atayn supports several major findings.

Analytical dimension	Main observation	Linguistic significance
Historical context	Navoi defended the literary capabilities of Turkic within a Persian-influenced cultural environment.	Provides evidence of historical language attitudes and literary prestige.
Lexical semantics	The treatise highlights words expressing subtle distinctions in meaning.	Illustrates semantic differentiation and lexical richness.
Language comparison	Turkic and Persian are examined through selected expressive resources.	Represents an important example of early comparative linguistic reasoning.
Literary development	Navoi connects linguistic resources with poetic and artistic expression.	Demonstrates the relationship between literary creativity and language development.
Cultural identity	The work emphasizes the intellectual and cultural value of Turkic.	Contributes to understanding linguistic heritage and literary identity.

The findings indicate that the treatise has linguistic, literary, historical, and cultural value. Its distinctive contribution is the combination of comparative observations with a sustained argument for the expressive capabilities of Turkic.

Discussion

The results of the analysis demonstrate that Muhokamat ul-Lug‘atayn occupies a distinctive position in the intellectual history of Central Asia.

Navoi’s arguments reveal an awareness of linguistic differences and the relationship between vocabulary, meaning, and literary expression. These observations are particularly significant when considered within the historical circumstances of the Timurid period.

The treatise can be regarded as an early contribution to comparative linguistic thought because it systematically discusses selected differences between two languages. However, it does not employ the reconstruction procedures, sound correspondence methods, or genealogical classifications associated with modern comparative-historical linguistics.

This distinction is necessary to avoid anachronistic interpretations of Navoi’s scholarly achievements.

The comparison with contemporary lexical semantics also reveals both similarities and differences. Navoi’s attention to semantic nuance anticipates questions that remain central to linguistic analysis, but his primary purpose was literary and cultural advocacy rather than the construction of a general scientific theory of meaning.

Another important issue concerns the relationship between language prestige and linguistic capability. The historical dominance of a language in literary production does not establish its inherent structural superiority. Prestige is influenced by political, cultural, educational, and institutional conditions.

Navoi’s work is therefore important because it challenges assumptions based exclusively on literary prestige and directs attention toward the actual expressive resources of a language.

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The treatise also provides valuable material for university-level education. Its study may help students develop an understanding of historical linguistics, comparative analysis, lexical semantics, and the cultural dimensions of language.

In interdisciplinary educational settings, including engineering and technical universities, the work can contribute to the development of academic communication, cultural literacy, and awareness of the historical foundations of the Uzbek literary tradition.

Nevertheless, the present study is limited to qualitative textual interpretation. It does not establish quantitative comparisons of the lexical resources of Turkic and Persian, nor does it attempt to evaluate the relative expressive capacity of these languages through modern experimental methods.

Further research could examine the lexical examples presented in the treatise using historical dictionaries, annotated corpora, and contemporary semantic analysis.

Conclusion

Alisher Navoi's Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn is an invaluable monument of linguistic and literary thought that occupies an important place in the history of Turkic intellectual culture.

The study demonstrates that the significance of the treatise is closely associated with its comparative treatment of Turkic and Persian, its attention to lexical richness and semantic differentiation, and its defense of the literary capabilities of Turkic.

Navoi's observations provide important historical evidence of linguistic awareness and demonstrate how language comparison can contribute to discussions of literary development and cultural identity.

The work also illustrates the close relationship between linguistic resources and artistic creativity. By emphasizing the expressive potential of Turkic, Navoi contributed to strengthening the position of Chagatai as a literary language.

From a contemporary perspective, Muhokamat ul-Lug'atayn should be recognized as a major historical contribution to comparative linguistic reasoning rather than as a direct equivalent of modern comparative-historical linguistics.

The enduring value of the treatise lies in its scholarly observations, literary significance, and contribution to the recognition of linguistic diversity. Its study remains relevant to the history of Turkic languages, lexical semantics, literary studies, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

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