



Linguistic Ambiguities of Uzbek and Classification of Uzbek Dialects

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Abstract. – In this analytical article, I present the dialectic diversity of the Uzbek language in terms and problems with the linguistic classification of those dialects. I intend to demonstrate that the diversity stems from the historical development of the language in the territory occupied by a variety of peoples at different times. I also attend to the issue of the spatial distribution of various Turkic and non-Turkic families of languages of Central Asia and beyond, and discuss their proximity and distance. I also discuss the existing linguistic ambiguities within the Uzbek language. [Central Asia, Uzbek language, Uzbek dialects, Chagatay, classification of dialects]

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Introduction

In spite of numerous studies on the Uzbek language, it is not an easy task to present a clear picture of its dialectical complexity. Grenoble (2003) characterized the dialect situation of Uzbek as a “linguistic chaos,” and judging by the available literature and my own experience, this is hardly an exaggeration.¹ The complexity of the present situation can be explained, at least partly, by the fact that Uzbek did not stem from any “protolanguage” but rather re-

sulted from a conglomeration of three genetically different groups of languages (Polivanov 1933: 4).

While studying the history of Turkic peoples, their migration history and the languages spoken in the territories of Central Asia, one cannot but ask oneself why there are so many varying opinions on what was the actual basis of modern literary Uzbek and why the classification of this language, as well as other Turkic languages, is full of ambiguities.² In the relevant literature, there exists an agreement that present Central Asia was occupied by a large number of nomadic and sedentary groups that spoke heterogeneous vernaculars; they were governed by dynasties of both Turkic and Mongol origin. Cer-

1 Uzbek language together with other Central Asian languages has been mainly studied within the framework of historical analysis of Turkic family of languages (Wurm 1954; Johanson 1998, 2002, 2005, 2008; Baldauf 1993). There was a considerable attention to studies on Khorezmian (khwarizmian, choresmian, coresmian) language and its ancient culture (Menges 1933; Eckmann 1959; Eckmann and Sertkaya 1996; Boeschoten 1994; Henning 1955, 1964). These works used various sources besides local and Russian ones including Chinese, Persian and Greek. Literary Uzbek and its dialects have been mainly studied by Russian and other local scientists from comparative perspective (Samoylovich 1928; Abdullaev 1960; Polivanov 1933; Olim 1936; Kanonov 1960; Radjabov 1996; Shoabdurahmanov 1962, 1971; Yudahin 1939). There are few western linguistic analyzes of Uzbek language in English (Bidwell 1955; Bodrogligli 2003, Sjoberg 1963).

2 Central Asia in geographical understanding of the region is a bigger territory than the region meant in this article. ‘Central Asia’ will be used to include only the territory which was part of the Soviet Union before namely five states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

tainly, there existed similarities between spoken and written languages but today, given the scarcity of sources, it is difficult to define them precisely. It is therefore difficult to establish which language was spoken by which group and what role a given language played in the formation of literary Uzbek. Indeed, a similar situation exists in today's Uzbekistan: there is a clear division between spoken and written language forms, and a considerable difference between the literary Uzbek and its dialects.

How could these dialects be classified? Numerous attempts in this regard were made by Russian and local scientists.³ They differ substantially in depth of the analysis and in the linguistic variables on which the classification is based. But they all, at least, agree that there are three families of dialects, namely Oguz, Kypchak and Chagatay, which contributed to the formation of the Uzbek language. The main question concerns differences between these three groups and their participation in the genesis of Uzbek dialects.

The available linguistic literature, though surely important, is of somewhat limited value, because most of these studies reflect the older state of research. I will primarily take into consideration the differences that were pointed to by my informants and, of course, my own linguistic competency in Uzbek (I am a native speaker of both Kypchak and Oguz groups of Khorezmian dialects, Tashkent city dialect, and literary Uzbek). I will focus on the Khorezmian group of dialects (Oguz group) since this group is characteristic of the speakers that I studied in comparison with other Uzbek groups in the city of Tashkent.

I will further discuss the origin of Uzbek and its formation. This discussion is mainly based on the work of Russian, local and western turkologists. I will present a broad classification of Uzbek dialects that is more or less agreed upon by the authors mentioned above. This includes an overview of lexical, phonetic and morphological differences between Uzbek dialects, following the same principle of analysis mentioned above. The article ends with some remarks on the implications of linguistic barriers that exist between Uzbek speakers in Tashkent city and which are crucial for the discussion on identity politics and rhetoric strategies.

³ Samoylovich (1922); Abdullaev (1960); Polivanov (1933); Olim (1936); Reshetov (1978); Shoabdurahmanov (1962).

1 The Origin of Uzbek

Languages, as they exist at a particular point in time, are products of complex historical changes. In the course of this process, they typically become more and more divergent, thus leading to dialectal and other variants, and often these variants become "languages" on their own right, and specifically when speakers spread out over various territories and the frequent communication between them ceases to continue. So, a language may have an identifiable ancestor, a "protolanguage" – for example (West)-Germanic in the case of German, English and Dutch, or Latin for French, Italian, Spanish. In certain cases, however, it is not so easy to identify such a single protolanguage. In fact, one might argue that modern English is actually based on a merger between (West)-Germanic and (Old)-French. There is no such protolanguage in the case of Uzbek as well (Polivanov 1933: 4). This has to do with the "melting-pot" status of Central Asia. According to Schlyter (2004: 812), before the Arab conquest and the following Turkic migration, large areas of Central Asia were populated by people speaking Eastern Iranian languages (Soghdian, Khorezmian, Khotan-Saka, and Bactrian).⁴ The "westward Turkic migration and the subsequent Arabic invasion ended the use of these languages at the end of the seventh century" (Schlyter 2004: 813). After that time, Arabic as well as the Western Iranian (New Persian) language gained a high status as the language of administration and culture, and thus spread over the entire territory once dominated Turkic languages.

According to certain sources⁵ the "predecessor" of Uzbek was the Chagatay literary language that gained a considerable prestige as a literary language alongside Arabic and New Persian.⁶ Johanson (2008) assigns Early Chagatay to the Middle Turkic period of development of Turkic literary languages.⁷

⁴ See René Grousset (reprinted 2000, translated in 1970 and originally published in French in 1939) for a more detailed historical description of peoples of Central Asia in a wider geographic sense.

⁵ Eckmann (1966); Eckmann and Sertkaya (1996); Baskakov (1962, 1981); Samoylovich (1928); Wurm (1954); Baldauf (1993).

⁶ Borovkov (1952: 183f.); Eckmann (1959: 152); Johanson (2005).

⁷ Chagatay comes from the name of the second son of Chingiz Khan. Reshetov (1964) argues that the use of the term 'Chagatay' is misleading because it was not the only group that have influenced the foundation of the Uzbek language but rather three related sub-groups of this language group namely Qarluq-Čigil-Uyghur in addition to other groups mentioned by Polivanov (1933) have also played role to some extent. According to Reshetov (*ibid.*) the literature of ninth and tenth centuries of Karakhanids era influenced the formation and

According to his classification, the Old Turkic period knew such literary languages as Old Turkic Proper, Old Uyghur, and Qarakhanid. The middle Turkic period that began in the thirteenth century was characterized by the domination of Khwarezmian Turkic, Old Kypchak, Early Chagatay and others. Early Chagatay, used in the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries in the Temurid realm, was based on Qarakhanid-Khwarezmian traditions and on local vernaculars.⁸

Stefan Wurm (1954) also assumes that Chagatay was based on the Qarakhanid literary language and was in use from the fifteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, Eckmann and Sertkaya (1996: 2) argued that “das Chwarezmtürkische” was a “transitional language” from Qarakhanid to Chagatay. Qarakhanid that had also Kypchak and Oguz elements was based on the Uyghur literary language of the pre-Islamic period. The Uyghur script derived from one of the northern Semitic alphabets in the eighth-ninth centuries through the Soghdian script which later was replaced by the runic script. After the conversion to Islam, the Arabic script was also used for the Uyghur language (Wurm 1954: 10). After the Russian revolution and during the national delimitation program, the Uzbek language was developed on the basis of literary Chagatay. It was a big challenge to create a standardized written language that could incorporate all spoken varieties in the delineated region named Uzbekistan. The complexity of this task stemmed from the fact that there were both written and spoken vernaculars in the territory of present Central Asia with very little interaction among them (Johanson 1998: 87).⁹

Moreover, a number of local intellectuals had a considerable impact on the formation of Old Uzbek language. The foremost of them was Alisher Navoi, the author of “Mukhakamat-ul-Lugatain” (“Lawsuit of Two Languages”), who is considered to be “the founder of the Uzbek language” (the language he used was literary Chagatay).¹⁰ Later, poets such as Furqat, Muqimiyy, Zavqiy and Khamza Niazi frequently drew on spoken vernaculars of or-

development of the old Uzbek written language. According to him Karakhanids included conglomeration of Turkic tribes consisting of Qarluq, Čigil, Uyghur and others. That is why he calls the group of Turkic languages of the South-east as not Chagatay but Qarluq-Čigil-Uyghur.

8 Johanson (2008); Eckmann (1959); Samoylovich (1928).

9 Abdulgozi (1992 [1658–1661]) wrote that the written language was not accessible for the broad masses (see his *Sharai Turk*).

10 See Usmanov (1948); Borovkov (1946) (Alisher Navoi as the founder of the Uzbek literary language), and also other authors cited above.

inary people (Reshetov 1964: 7). Otherwise, there was only limited interaction between both forms of the emerging Uzbek language. Besides, before the Bolsheviks initiated their *Likbez* campaign after their invasion of the region, the literacy rate among ordinary people was estimated to be only 3%.¹¹ Turkic languages were used as written literary language and language of administration, and Arabic was a language of instruction in *madrasas* and taught by *mullas* (Khalid 1994).¹² In 1923 a new modified Arabic script was adopted for the Uzbek literary language. It was based on the phonetics of Iranised urban dialects without vowel harmony. In 1929, however, the script was Latinized in the name of internalization, although in 1940–41, the Latin script was replaced by the Cyrillic script.

In his account of origin and formation of Uzbek, Polivanov (1933) used the term “Uzbek *Nakkollektiv*,” instead of “Uzbek nation,” when referring to Uzbeks and subsequently to their “common” language.¹³ He argued that this language had been formed through the “unification of linguistically different Turkic collectivities.” He also identified the process of formation of the Uzbek language as *gibridizaciya* (hybridisation) of different languages belonging to three genetically different families into one, and the further development of this language into a common national language – as *uzbekizaciya* (uzbekisation) (193: 4f.). There were two major reasons for the heterogeneity and variety of dialects that contributed to the formation of the Uzbek language. In the first place, the Central Asian oasis had been attracting Turkic tribes with different language background for centuries. Secondly, the Turkic tribes that came to settle in the region “entered to some kind of ethnic amalgam” with the indigenous Indo-Iranian groups.

Today most scholars agree that Uzbek was formed mainly from three different groups of Turkic languages as a result of mixing of sedentary and nomadic populations on the territory of Central Asia: Chagatay/Qarluq, Oguz, and Kypchak dialects.¹⁴

11 *Likbez* abbreviation from Russian *likvidacija bezgramotnosti* (liquidation of illiteracy). The campaign was led by Bolsheviks in order to fight illiteracy in the expanded territories of the former Soviet Union.

12 *Madrasa* is a religious school which was the only educational institution before Russians came to the region.

13 *Nakkollektiv* is an abbreviated form from *nacionalnyi kollektiv* in Russian can be translated as ‘national collectivity’.

14 I will use Chagatay and Qarluq interchangeably as there are ambiguities on the degree of influence of both languages into Turkic (Qarluq) and Mongol (Chagatay) tribes in the formation of the Uzbek language and its nation. It is difficult to define who had more influence and who had less, as hundreds of various tribes were mixed and interdependent on each other.

Proto-Turkic	The Southwestern Common Turkic (Oguz)	West Oguz		Azeri
		East Oguz		Turkmen Khorasani Turkic
		South Oguz		Dialects of Iran
	The Northwestern Common Turkic (Kypchak)			Kypchak (extinct)
		West Kypchak		Crimean Tatar
		North Kypchak (Volga-Ural)		Kazan Tatar
		South Kypchak (Aralo-Caspian)		Kazak Karakalpak Kyrgyz Kypchak Uzbek
The Southeastern Common Turkic (Uyghur)	West			Uzbek Uyghur Taranchi
	East			Chagatay/Qarlıq Old Turkic etc.
The Northeastern Common Turkic (Siberian)	South Siberian	Sayan Turkic		
		Yenisey Turkic		
		Chulym Turkic		
		Altai Turkic		
		Altai Turkic		

Table 1: Classification of Turkic language family and their origin.

Johanson (1998) has given the following classification of Turkic languages (Table 1).

Kypchak and other related languages like Kazak and Kyrgyz belong to the North-western Turkic family of languages, Chagatay belongs to the South-eastern Turkic family, and Oguz, along with other related languages – like Turkmen and Azeri – to the South-western Turkic family. Madrahimov (1999: 3f.), a local Khorezmian scientist, argues that ancient Khorezmians have assimilated into the Oguz populations, but the influence of various other non-Turkic languages, including Persian, Arabic, and others should not be underestimated. Both Turkic and non-Turkic populations that had influenced Khorezmian language had close relations with Khiva khanate as it was a separate polity and a trade centre. The Chagatay and the Kypchak language families are therefore closely related to each other

whereas the Oguz family is closer to Turkmen, Azeri, Osman and other groups of the Southwestern group of Turkic languages (Polivanov 1933: 28).

2 Classification of Uzbek Dialects

Students, who conducted research on the internal differentiation of the Uzbek language in the course of the last seventy years, both Russian and local ones, have used various types of classification.¹⁵ None of them can be called right or wrong because they are based on different linguistic and historical principles. The criteria for grouping one or another family of dialects together differ considerably. For my own working classification of the Uzbek dialects, I will simply draw on the above mentioned classifications in order to outline the main differ-

er thanks to great population mobility of mainly nomadic tribes and various invasion of the region by different dynasties. Languages discussed here are in bold.

15 Cf. Abdullaev (1960); Kanonov (1960); Polivanov (1933); Radjabov (1996); Reshetov (1978); Olim (1936); Yudahin (1939); Zarubin (1925).

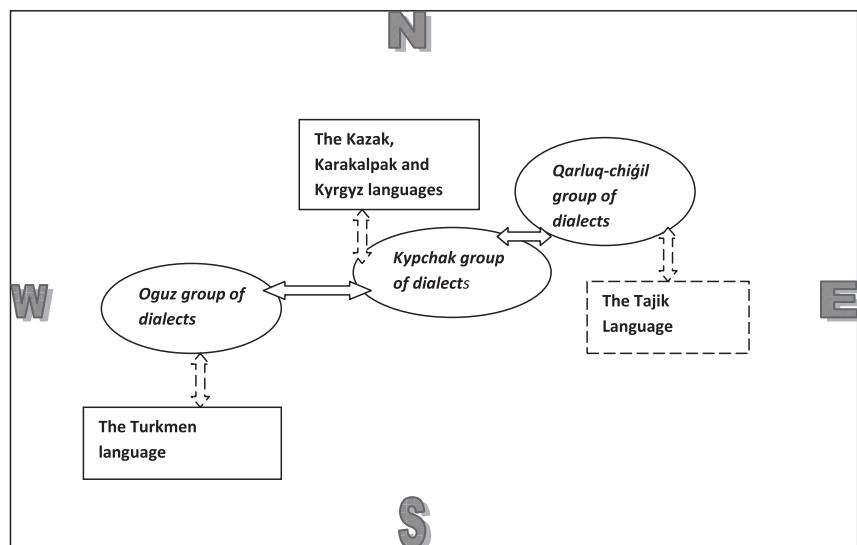


Fig. 1: Spatial location of Uzbek dialect groups and other Turkic languages and their mutual influence.

ences and major groups of dialects without discussing them in depth. My main criterion is the level of intelligibility between among various dialects. I will focus therefore on substantial lexical and semantic differences in the vocabulary, on the one hand, and on recurrent phonetic and morphological differences in the grammar, on the other.

The three historical strata on which Uzbek rests are the main source of its inherent dialect variation in modern times. The first is the Southeastern or “Chagatay” group of Turkic languages (Reshetov’s Qarluq-Čigil-Uyghur group) which includes the sub-dialects spoken in Namangan, Tashkent, Andijan, Margelan and Kokand, as well as a group of Iranised dialects spoken in Samarkand and Bukhara (see the map). Polivanov (1933) divides this group into three subgroups: the Samarqand-Bukhara type of *govor* (spoken form), the Tashkent type and the Fergana type.¹⁶ The second, the Southwestern, or Oguz, group includes dialects spoken in Khiva, Khonqa, Shovot, Khazarasp, Gazzavot and Urgench districts of Khorezm region. Speakers of this group are also found in Tashauz (in Turkmenistan) and Turtkul (in Karakalpakstan) (Reshetov 1978: 30, Radjabov 1996: 77).

The third one is the North-western or the Kypchak group of dialects which includes the dialects of Ohangaron, Mirzachul, Samarqand, and Zarafshon, as well as dialects spoken in the surroundings of Bukhara, Qashqadarya, and Surhondarya. Speakers

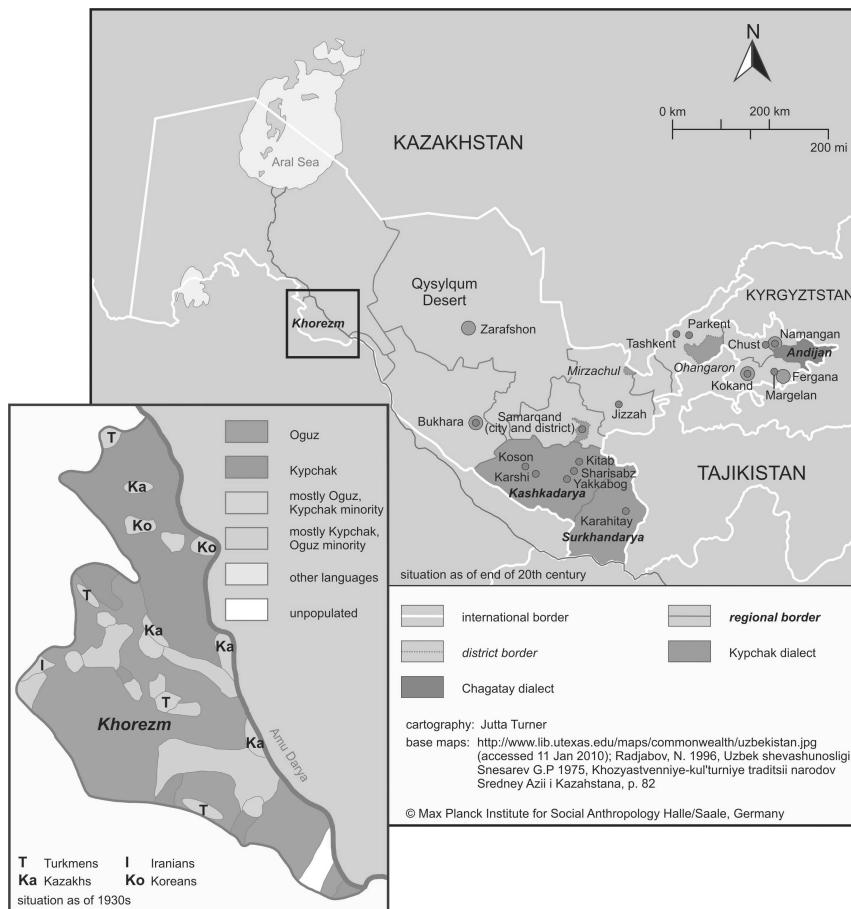
of this group can be also found in Khorezm region, Andijan, Fergana, Namangan and Qoqon (Reshetov 1978: 31). The present-day written Uzbek is mostly based on the dialects of Tashkent and Namangan regions (Qoqon) that belong to Chagatay/Qarluq family of Turkic languages.

As I have already pointed out, spoken and written Uzbek had been two clearly separated linguistic universes before Uzbek was made the official literary language of Uzbekistan. It is still the case that spoken dialects are more or less far from standard Uzbek, although certain dialects are closer to the literary language than others, particularly those that contributed to the formation of literary Uzbek. In order to see, Fig. 1 demonstrates the structural and spatial distance of particular groups of dialects to the literary Uzbek.

The diagram shows Uzbek dialect groups in oval forms, other related Turkic languages in squares, and a non-Turkic (Iranian) language within a block marked with broken lines. The spatial proximity indicates the linguistic distance among the shown dialect groups and languages. N, S, W, E stands for the cardinal points. The full arrows indicate the mutual influence between the dialect groups and the relevant language. As we can see, the geographical location of a given language is important to consider when looking at mutual influence and linguistic distance.

The three groups of dialects of Uzbeks correspond to the three and even more ethnic groups that inhabit(ed) today’s Uzbekistan. The first group, the Qarluq-Chiğil, is an Iranised group that has lost its vowel harmony as a result of the influence of the Tadjik language. The second Oguz group of territorially defined dialects is located in Khorezm region

¹⁶ *Govor* is a Russian linguistic term for a spoken form of a language. In Uzbek linguistic work of Uzbek dialects they do not particularly emphasize the written or spoken form. They differentiate between group of dialects (*lahcha* from Arab. ‘lahcha’/dialect), dialects (*dialekt*) and sub-dialects (*sheva*). (Reshetov 1957).



Map: Linguistic map showing the territorial distribution of groups of dialects in Uzbekistan.

bordering Turkmenistan and isolated from the rest of Uzbekistan by two deserts Kara Kum and Kyzyl-Kum (see the map).

The phonetic system as well as the lexical content of these dialects are close to the Turkmen language and to other Turkic languages, such as Azeri and Turkish. This is due to the specific ethnohistory of the region, namely the fact that it was a large, independent khanate. The last one, the Kypchak group, derives its name from the ethnonym “Kypchak” that refers to a nomadic ethnos that contributed to the ethnic formation of Kazaks, Karakalpaks and Kyrgyzs.

The diagram also shows that the Oguz dialects (mainly spoken in Khorezm region) are the most distant from all other Uzbek dialects and from the literary Uzbek language. On the other hand, the Kypchak and Qarluq-Chigil (Chagatay) groups are closer to each other than is the Oguz group. Representatives of the Kypchak group (Fergana dialect) and Chagatay (the Tashkent group of dialects) are considered to be the basis of literary Uzbek. Consequently, there are more phonetic, morphologic, and lexical differences in the Khorezmian Oguz group

of dialects than in other dialects of Uzbek. Apart from the historical evolution, the geographical location of that group of Turkic peoples also contributed considerably to the isolation of its spoken language.

In the following comparative outline of linguistic differences, three types of dialects will be taken as the basis, namely the Khorezmian dialect (the Oguz group of dialects because of its most distinct character), the Tashkent dialect (as the “majority/dominant” population of Tashkent), and the literary Uzbek (as all of the Uzbek groups including Khorezmians use it as a *lingua franca*). I do not intend to undermine other linguistic differences existing in other Uzbek dialects in comparison to the literary Uzbek pronounced in the studies of Uzbek dialects by both Russian and local scientists, but rather use my working classification that will help to analyze my ethnographical material and draw some general conclusions focusing on Khorezmian speakers. The main differences that contribute to the difficulties of understanding Khorezmian dialect are phonetic and lexical.

3 Lexical Differences

The main lexical differences emerge from the following factors:

- the systematic differences in the phonetic form,
- the different type of word-formation rules,
- the different choice of synonyms existing in more than one speech variety,
- the absence of certain words in compared dialects.

There are also substantial differences in compound expressions, for example proverbs and sayings. In what follows, I will first address differences in individual words and then give a number of examples for these compound expressions, which are frequently used in everyday conversation.

3.1 Words

In the following comparative analysis I will focus on the Oguz group of Khorezmian dialects as compared with the Tashkent dialect and literary Uzbek. The Oguz family has words and lexical units which either does not exist in any of the Uzbek dialects and literary Uzbek language or they diverge in their semantic use from those in other Uzbek dialects or literary Uzbek. There are several dictionaries of Khorezmian dialect published by local scholars (Abdullaev 1960, Madrahimov 1999). Abdullaev's

dictionary includes the words that are chosen according to the following criteria:

- They do not exist in literary Uzbek;
- They have minor or major systematic phonetic differences;
- They differ in the semantic use of words that exist also in literary Uzbek.

Abdullaev lists approximately 3170 words (not including specific terms such as household terms, animals, and food names, professional terms and agricultural terms) which meet these criteria.¹⁷ The degree of lexical differences between Khorezmian and other dialects is indeed very high (Begmatov 1985), and one can easily imagine the amount of potential miscomprehension between Khorezmians and members of other Uzbek groups. I will bring some examples from Khorezmian that vary not only in form but in meaning when compared to other Uzbek dialects and literary Uzbek. The following Tables 2 and 3 include words from the Khorezmian Oguz dialects, literary Uzbek, and Tashkent dialect of Uzbek:

¹⁷ The estimation is calculated by me as there was no number of word entries indicated in the dictionary. Estimation was calculated in the following way: I have counted the number of pages and number of words.

¹⁸ I included local written forms of the words in one-by-one Latin transliteration from the Cyrillic orthography because the new Latin script (officially announced to be completed by 2005) was not yet fully used by media, administration and

Table 2: Selected lexical differences

Khorezmian (Oguz group)	Literary Uzbek ¹⁸	Tashkent dia- lect (Chagatay group)	English translation
[Hauwa]	[hæ]	[hə]	yes
[σ:d]	[no:m][ism] ¹⁹	[no:m][ism]	name
[søllæ'mæk]	[gæpirmoq]	[gapirmoq]	to speak
[Lappa]	–	–	negative emotional ex- pression of close to 'do it yourself'
[gøzzin] 'aydin]	[muboræk bolsən] ²⁰	[kozingiz oj:din]	congratulation (with a new member of family)
[bæwæk]	[tfaqaloq]	[tfaqaloq]	baby
[a:ğ]	[tər]	[tər]	net for fishing
[bətfqe]	[ærræ]	[ærræ]	saw
[vağørðə]	[Showqin]	[showqin]	noise
[ulli] ²¹	[kættæ]	[kættæ]	big

Khorezmian dialects	Literary Uzbek	Tashkent dialect	English translation
[apa]	[onæ]	[oji:]/[æjæ]	Mother
[ækæ]/[ates ^{Ru}] ²²	[otæ]	[daedæ] [otæ]	Dad/father
[ækpæ]	[opæ]	[opæ]	Elder sister
[ukæ]	[singil]	[singil]	Younger sister
[uk'æ]	[ukæ]	[ukæ]	Younger brother
[aǵa] ²³	[akæ]	[aka]	Elder brother
[ænə]	[buvə]	[buvi]	Grandmother
[ata]	[buvæ]	[buva]	Grandfather
[dajı:]	[tögæ]	[tögæ]	Uncle(MB)
[hala] ²⁴	[holæ]	[holæ]	Aunt (MZ)
[æmmæ] ²⁵	[amma]	[amma]	Aunt (FZ)
[aǵa]	[amaki] ²⁶	[amaki]	Uncle (FB)
[patcha]	[kujov]	[kujov]	Son-in-law, in-law male relative
[bijı:]	[kelən]	[kelən]/[kenoji:]	Daughter-in-law
[apojæ]	[opa singəl]	[opa singəl]	Sisters

The examples given in Tables 2 and 3 derive partly from my own knowledge of the language and dialects, and partly from the comparative dictionary of Oguz dialects of Uzbek by Madrahimov (1999). The tables illustrate that literary Uzbek and the Tashkent dialect have very similar lexemes besides few phonetic differences, whereas Khorezmian lexemes often have a word stem with different morphology. The words used by Khorezmians which were most frequently misunderstood by any other Uzbek group included even those used in basic introductory conversations.

other scholarly texts. For the dialects, I give only the transcription throughout the articles because Uzbek dialects are not used in written form (there are no local media published in dialect forms and instead standard official literary Uzbek is used). The only place where Uzbek dialects are documented is the linguistic work on Uzbek and its dialects. There they use Cyrillic alphabet as well.

19 From Arabic *ism* or *ism*/name.

20 From Arabic *mubarak*/gratulation.

21 *Ulli* is from Arabic *u'lū* which means ‘the highest latitude’ and this word is Khorezmian and does not exist in Uzbek language whereas Uzbek equivalent is *katta*.

22 *Ates* is borrowed from Russian *otecs* means ‘father’ not for calling but as a name used while talking about the father to others.

23 From Arabic *akh*/brother.

24 From Arabic *halal*/ an aunt(MZ).

25 from Arab. *amma*/aunt FZ.

26 From Arabic *am*/an uncle (FB).

Specifically, Khorezmians use an abbreviated version of the greeting *Assallomu alleykum*²⁷ as *s:əm*, whereas members of other Uzbek groups pronounce differently both words of the greeting with varying speed which often sounds like *asá:lalekəm*. “Goodbye” in Khorezmian *hosh*²⁸ is used in literary Uzbek and other Uzbek dialects as an exclamatory word which can be translated as “and so,” meaning a request to a speaker to continue to talk. By contrast, in literary Uzbek and in other Uzbek dialects the word “goodbye” is *hayir*²⁹ in combination with other words depending on the dialect spoken. From the etymological point of view, Khorezmians prefer using the Persian *hosh* than Arabic *hayir* – the word used by other Uzbeks.

After the greeting, one usually asks further questions about how one is. The Interrogative word meaning “what” in Khorezmian is *nawə* or *næ* (usually in combination with a demonstrative in post-position). In literary Uzbek and other Uzbek dialects this word (of Turkic origin) sounds *nima*. Another interrogative word, “how,” sounds in Khorezmian *nichik*, while in literary Uzbek and certain Uzbek dialects it is *qanday*; it might have originated in the Arabic language (*qayeffa* = “how”), or in Uzbek di-

27 From Arab. *assalamu alleykum*/greeting.

28 From Pers. *hosh*/good.

29 From Arab. noun *hayir*/something good.

Table 3: Differences in kinship terms

ialects (*qanaqa* – with minor phonetic differences depending on the dialect). “Where” in Khorezmian is *nerdal/neda*, whereas in literary Uzbek and in other Uzbek dialects it is *qaerda*, and in the Tashkent dialect – *qatta*. “How” or “in which way” sounds in Khorezmian *nishatib*, while in literary Uzbek and in Uzbek dialects it is *qanday qilib*. “Yes” in Khorezmian is pronounced *awa/hawa* (it sounds like the word *hawo* = “air” in literary Uzbek and other Uzbek dialects). “Yes” in literary Uzbek and in the dialects have the forms *hae/ha*.

3.2 Proverbs and Sayings

The use of phraseology has an ethnically/regionally specific character (Sabban and Worrer 1991; Schlee 2002; Shongolo and Schlee 2007). Local variants of the Uzbek language also have distinctive sayings and proverbs as well as metaphors used in everyday speech. In cases of Khorezmians, even if there will be words comprehensible for other Uzbek groups, the meaning will not be understood because of particular semantics these phrases and sayings carry. Consider the following sayings and phrases that were pronounced during informal talks and interviews by my informants. The meaning of each saying and phrase was explained after I asked for cross-checking:

Qushni Hakkasi Odamni Chakkasi Yomon (“From birds *Hakka* and from human beings *Chakka* are bad”).

Hakka is a certain type of bird which is considered to be bad among other birds, since, as it is believed, the bird brings bad spirits and bad luck. *Chakka* is a name for a certain group of people or a tribe that is considered to be lower in the tribal hierarchy of Urgench, the central town of Khorezm region. As the name of that tribe is specific to this town, the expression cannot be correctly interpreted by members of Uzbek groups from other regions.

Qizim saya aytaman galinim san eshit (“I will speak to you my daughter and you my daughter-in-law, listen”).

A word by word translation by non-Khorezmian speakers may lead to a certain comprehension of this phrase. But it misses its crucial meaning, namely “sending an indirect message to somebody you would rather avoid” in a cultural context of avoidance and respect.

Another example is the verb “to move” (in literary Uzbek *yurmoq*, in Khorezmian *yurish*). It has a very negative connotation in Khorezmian, meaning

“to be of light conduct.” It is used for both women and men in forms like “he/she walks”/*yuradi*, and even worse in forms “has moved/walked”/*yurib getgan*, which suggests promiscuity or prostitution. The verb can be used the following statement: *X bilan Y yuradila* (“X walks with Y”), meaning “X and Y have an affair.” In literary Uzbek, however, and other Uzbek dialects, it is a normal verb without such connotations, and speakers of these dialects would entirely miss the point when Khorezmians describe somebody’s conduct with this phrase. Another phrase, *dilini tapish*, means in Khorezmian “to find somebody’s tongue” – that is, to find a common language. In literary Uzbek and other Uzbek dialects this meaning is rendered with the verb *kelishish* (“to agree”). These are only few examples that came up during the interviews. There are plenty of similar phrases and proverbs which do not have any equivalent in other forms of Uzbek or they vary considerably from one another (cf. Radjabov 1996: 291).

3.3 Russian Borrowings

Another salient difference is the prevalence of Russian borrowings in the Khorezmian dialect in comparison with other Uzbek dialects and the spoken literary Uzbek language. These borrowings are phonetically integrated in the dialect, so that Khorezmian speakers are hardly aware of the fact that these words are borrowed from Russian, unless they know Russian – which is in fact often the case. Sometimes they consider these words to be Khorezmian and not Uzbek when one asks them about their origin. The word “kitchen,” for example, sounds *kuhnya* in Khorezmian, while in literary Uzbek and other Uzbek dialects the Uzbek word *oşhona* is used; it is formed out of two words: *osh* (a dish popular among all Uzbeks) and *hona* (“room”). For the word “bus (tram) stop” Khorezmians use *astanopka* (*ostanovka*), while in literary Uzbek and in Uzbek dialects the word *beket* is used to express that meaning. For the word “exactly” or “fully” Khorezmians use the word *chistin* (Rus. *chistiy* = “clean”), while the words *girt*, *tola* and *rosa* (depending on the dialect) is used in literary Uzbek and local vernaculars. Another example is the frequent expression “at all,” for which urban Khorezmians use *vaşe* (Rus. *voobshie* = “at all”), whereas the literary Uzbek uses the word *umuman*. The word “drug store” (Rus. *apteka*) is used as *apteka/aptik* by Khorezmians, while the standard Uzbek word is *dorihona* is formed out of two nouns: *dori* (“medicine”) and *hona* (“room”).

These are the most characteristic lexical differ-

ences found in an elementary everyday communication between Khorezmian speakers and those of other Uzbek dialects; they can be observed in all types of interaction settings – be it an official event or an informal conversation.

4 Phonetic Differences

My comparative analysis presented here concerns Khorezmian dialects, on the one hand, and literary Uzbek, on the other. I will also cite a number of examples of the Tashkent dialect. The differences within other dialects are limited only to the pronunciation of certain sounds which however goes beyond the purpose of this article. A number of my Khorezmian informants stated that non-Khorezmians frequently take them as not Uzbek, usually as Turkish. So I take this level of distinction between Khorezmian and other Uzbek dialects as the main gauge to measure the phonetic differences within the Uzbek language. My immediate concern is not much the precise measurement of linguistic distance, which is a rather complex issue, but rather the role phonetic differences play in comprehension and miscomprehension. The following examples of phonetic differences between Khorezmian and other Uzbek dialects are based on my own data as well as on the literature on Uzbek dialects, in particular those containing analyzes of certain groups of Uzbek dialects.³⁰ In essence, the following types of differences have been found:

1. There are certain vowel qualities such as length of vowels that can change the meaning of words. For instance, the word [bu:z] means “ice” in Khorezmian. When spoken with short vowel, that is [buz], it is interpreted in literary Uzbek and other Uzbek dialects as a verb “to destroy,” whereas “ice” sounds *muz* in literary Uzbek and in a number of Uzbek dialects. Another example is [qiz] the stem of the verb *qizmoq* “to heat” in literary Uzbek and certain Uzbek dialects. In Khorezmian this stem is used for word combinations in the meaning of “anger” *djahil* in literary Uzbek and some other Uzbek dialects. The same short word *qiz* in literary Uzbek and some other Uzbek dialects is used for “a girl,” while the Khorezmian word for “a girl” is the same word but with a long stem vowel [qi:z].

2. Voiceless consonants in Uzbek are voiced at the beginning of words in Khorezmian dialect such as *k>g*, *t>d* for example *kel>gal* (“come”), *taroq>daraq* (“comb”); vowel change [æ]>[e] for exam-

ple, in the personal pronouns *mæn* in Khorezmian Oguz dialects and in literary Uzbek it is *men*; consonant shift [dj]>[tʃ] in the middle of a word as well as a reduction of consonant endings for example, “sour” is [‘a:dʒi] in Khorezmian and in literary Uzbek [‘atʃ:iq]. The middle voiced consonant in literary Uzbek becomes voiced labial-velar approximant [w] in Khorezmian expression *hæbær*³¹ in literary Uzbek and in Khorezmian is [hɬwɬr].

3. There is much assimilation between two subsequent consonants in Khorezmian. For example, the Uzbek -l and -d are assimilated to a preceding nasal –n, resulting in –nn in Khorezmian. An example is *mannan saja podarkə* (Rus. “present to you from me”); in literary Uzbek it is *mendan senga sovgæ*. This process is also observed in almost all Uzbek dialects; for example –td->-tt-, -ld>ll-, e.g. *keldi>kelli* (has come), *ketdi>ketti* (“has gone”). This phonetic change falls under common rules of a spoken variety as a reduction of certain phonemes observed in other languages as well.

4. Middle voiced consonant shift into voiceless consonant such as *r>l*, *b>p*, *ç>dç* (as *j* in Eng. “judge”), *zarari*³² *yok>zalali yok* (“it is ok, not at all”), *acciq-adji* (“sour”).

5. Another systematic phonetic change is the shifting of vowel *o>a*, *e>æ* in any position. Examples are *oy>ay* (“moon”), *qol>qal* (“stay”), *be'lə>bæla* (from Arab. *bə'la* = “trouble”), *kəz>gæl* (“come”).

6. Word final consonants such as *q*, *g*, *k*, *g* are often omitted in Khorezmian. For example, *boğlıq>bağlı* (“bound”), *toliq>doli* (“full”), *kiçik>kiççi* (“small”), *sarıq>sarə* (“yellow”).

These systematic changes, shifts or other differences in Khorezmian in comparison with literary Uzbek contribute to the existing linguistic barrier between Khorezmian and other Uzbek groups in Tashkent. They are also a major obstacle in learning literary Uzbek or Tashkent dialect for Khorezmian speakers. A number of my informants stated that it is easier to talk literary Uzbek than learning Tashkent dialect because Tashkent dialect also has some more or less systematic phonetic and morphological differences in comparison to literary Uzbek. On the other hand, the differences between the Oguz group do not hinder the communication in any significant way. The Tashkent dialect is known to have a frequent use of reduction of phonemes and omission of end consonants. There are also morphologi-

31 From Arab. *habar* (“news”).

32 From Arabic *dharar/damage*, seems there was a consonant shift when borrowing from Arabic into Turkic languages *dh>z*, e.g. *dharar>zarar*, *hidmet>hizmat*.

30 E.g. Polivanov (1925–1927, 1933); Reshetov (1957, 1966); Shoabdurahmanov 1971)

Table 4: Differences in verbs

Khorezmian Oguz	Kypchak dialect	Tashkent dialect	Literary Uzbek	English translation
<i>galyatir</i>	<i>keledjatir</i>	<i>keyotti</i>	<i>kelyapti</i>	is coming
<i>getayatir</i>	<i>ketedjatir</i>	<i>ketvotti</i>	<i>ketyapti</i>	is going
<i>galwadik</i>	<i>kelgan edik</i>	<i>kegandik</i>	<i>kelgan edik</i>	have come
<i>galdjak</i>	<i>kelmakchi/ keldjak</i>	<i>kemohchi</i>	<i>kelmokchi</i>	will come

cal changes that contribute to the specific character of that dialect, although it is considered to be one of the “founding dialects” of literary Uzbek, along with the Fergana dialect.³³

5 Morphological Differences

The most noticeable morphological difference between Uzbek dialects concerns verb endings in all tenses. I will bring up the examples of these endings in all of the mentioned major groups of dialects.

The present continuous tense of the verbs in literary Uzbek has the form of *-yap* plus personal ending. In Tashkent dialect the ending has forms *-vat*/*vot*, *-ut* in Namangan dialect, *-op* in Samarqand dialect and Bukhara dialect, and in other dialects this ending is close to the one found in literary Uzbek. The Fergana group of dialects has also the same form of this ending as has literary Uzbek. In this regard Oguz type of dialects are the most distinct, as they have ending *-yatir* which is considered by most of the above mentioned local and Russian scholars as a specificity of the Khorezmian (Oguz) group of dialects. This includes also the Kypchak group of this region which has the form *-djatir*, the one to be found also in the Kazak, the Kyrgyz and the Karakalpak languages.

Past tense endings vary little between all Uzbek dialects with the exception of the Oguz group in which the corresponding forms are almost unrecognizable in speech due to the systematic phonetic difference described in the phonetic section. Consequently the verb sounds as a completely different word. For example the verb “came” (“have come”) is *kelgan edik* in literary Uzbek, *kelgandik/keluvdik* in Tashkent dialect, and *galwadik* in Khorezmian.

The ending *-moqchi*, which expresses an intention in all forms of the Uzbek language, is almost the same with only minor phonetic differences. The Kypchak group of dialects, for example, used the

form *-maqchi*, the Tashkent dialect and other Chagatay group of dialects *-moqchi/mohchi*, whereas the Oguz group of Khorezmian dialects has a specific and distinct form of this ending, namely *djak*, which is similar to Turkmen, Azeri, Turkish and other languages of the Turkic family. Examples are *bardjakman* (*bormoqchiman* in literary Uzbek) = “want to go,” *galdjakman* (*kelmoqchiman*) “want to come.” The examples discussed above have been put together in Table 4.

5.1 Word Formation

Another group of major and systematic differences between various forms of the Uzbek language concerns word-formation. Khorezmian dialects have specific suffixes in word-formation that are absent or different in literary Uzbek and in Uzbek dialects.

1. The suffix *-doy* has no equivalent in literary Uzbek and in other dialects. It is used to express a certain degree of the adverb “until” in Khorezmian, which has also another meaning closer to the ending *-acha* in literary Uzbek (*gacha*). *-Doy* is used to emphasize the degree of the adverb “until” as for example in the phrase *gechadoy* which can be translated as “until the very evening.”

2. The Khorezmian suffix *-lyq* is pronounced *-zor* in literary Uzbek and in certain dialects, as in *kamyshlyq*>*kamyshzor*, *otlyq*>*otzor* (“grass field”). The same suffix *-lik* in literary Uzbek has a different meaning, similar to *-ness* in English e.g. *özbek*>*özbeklik* “Uzbek-Uzbekness.”

3. The suffix *-chylap/chalap* in Khorezmian and *cha/chasiga* in literary Uzbek is an adjective and a noun-forming suffix meaning “like,” for e.g. *erkak-chalap*>*erkakcha/siga* (“man-like”).

4. The suffix *-din/nin* in Khorezmian and *-dek/dæy* in literary Uzbek is an adjective meaning “as if,” e.g. *bilgannin*>*bilgandek/dæy* (“as if one knew”), *akamnin*>*otamdek/day* (“similar to my father”).

33 Shoabdurahmanov (1962); Reshetov (1978); Radjabov (1996).

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I outlined major differences between Uzbek dialects that hinder mutual intelligibility. Uzbek as the national language has been formed through the conglomeration of different languages out of which three were genetically different. After the Soviets decided to make the present territory one nation and a semi-independent republic, they had to have one common language as well; the purpose was to bring together all vernacular spoken in the territory of the republic. The result is a “linguistic chaos,” as Grenoble (2003) put it because there exist significant differences even between literary Uzbek and Uzbek national language. By outlining main differences between spoken forms of the Uzbek language, I intended to demonstrate that the existing linguistic differences may hinder communication between Uzbeks coming from different regions, in particular between Khorezmians and those speaking other Uzbek dialects, e.g. one used in the capital city (Tashkent). Not surprisingly, therefore, the literary Uzbek serves as a *lingua franca* in cases where it is difficult to understand each other. My analysis demonstrates that the Oguz group of Khorezmian dialects is the most distinct among other forms of Uzbek, not only because speakers of these dialects are geographically isolated from others by the desert, but also because they originate from a genetically different language family and have their specific path of historical development.

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