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BORROWING AND TRANSFORMATION OF ARABIC PROVERBS IN THE UZBEK LANGUAGE: A SEMANTIC, LINGUOCULTURAL AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This article offers a systematic examination of the place occupied by Arabic proverbs within the Uzbek language, addressing the mechanisms of their borrowing and translation, the semantic transformations they undergo, and their linguocultural adaptation. The principal aim of the study is to establish the formal, semantic and functional relations obtaining between Arabic and Uzbek paremiological units, and to classify, on explicitly formulated scholarly criteria, those proverbial expressions that have entered Uzbek usage through direct borrowing, translation, literary mediation or cultural contact. The analysis proceeds from a terminological distinction that is frequently blurred in the existing literature — namely, the distinction between borrowing, translation and equivalence — and demonstrates that the presence of a semantically corresponding proverb in Uzbek does not, in itself, constitute evidence of historical derivation from Arabic. On this basis the article proposes a five-fold typology of Arabic–Uzbek paremiological correspondences: direct borrowing, calque translation, functional equivalence, partial equivalence and typological parallelism. Fifteen representative pairs are analysed in terms of their formal structure, imagery, semantic scope and pragmatic function. The study concludes that the presence of Arabic paremiological material in Uzbek constitutes a complex linguocultural process situated at the intersection of language, religion, literature, translation and popular thought, and that its investigation requires philological verification of each individual unit rather than inference from semantic similarity alone.

Keywords: Arabic language, Uzbek language, proverb, paremiology, paremiography, borrowing, translation, calque, equivalence, semantic transformation, linguoculture, intercultural communication.

1. Introduction

Proverbs are paremiological units that encapsulate, in condensed and figurative form, the historical experience, worldview, ethical convictions and everyday generalisations of a speech community. They function simultaneously as linguistic and as cultural phenomena: as linguistic units they possess a stable formal structure, a reproducible lexical composition and a determinate semantic content, while as cultural units they encode value systems, behavioural norms and collective patterns of interpretation. For this reason the comparative study of proverbs across languages permits the identification not only of structural and semantic correspondences, but also of the historical and cultural contacts that have obtained between the peoples concerned.

Although Arabic and Uzbek belong to genetically unrelated language families — Semitic and Turkic respectively — their paremiological systems contain units that are semantically proximate and, in a number of cases, structurally analogous. Recent comparative scholarship has examined the formal architecture, lexical composition, semantics and cultural context of Arabic and Uzbek

proverbs and has established the existence of full or partial equivalence in a considerable number of instances, emphasising throughout that the preservation of functional and contextual meaning is of greater consequence than word-for-word correspondence [5, 9].

The present article pursues two objectives. The first is terminological and methodological: to delimit the concepts of borrowing, translation and equivalence, which are frequently conflated in the specialist literature, and to formulate criteria by which historically motivated borrowing may be distinguished from independent, typologically conditioned convergence. The second is descriptive and analytical: to classify the Arabic paremiological material attested in Uzbek according to a consistent typology, and to illustrate that typology through the analysis of representative material.

2. The state of research

The problem of rendering Arabic proverbs into Uzbek has received sustained attention in recent years. Studies published in 2025 have subjected equivalent, alternative and transformational strategies of translation to separate analysis, examining the conditions under which each strategy preserves the pragmatic charge of the source unit [6, 9]. A comparative investigation published in 2026 approached equivalent proverbs in Arabic and Uzbek from formal, semantic, lexical and cultural perspectives, and provided a substantial body of paired material [5]. Corpus-based and lexicographical work on Arabic phraseology more generally [1, 7] has furnished the descriptive apparatus on which such comparisons rest.

A significant methodological difficulty nevertheless persists in this domain. The existence of a semantically corresponding proverb in Uzbek does not automatically entail that the Uzbek unit has been borrowed from Arabic. Universal concepts of human experience — patience, labour, knowledge, time, friendship, enmity, retribution — may be, and demonstrably are, expressed through similar imagery in the paremiological systems of peoples between whom no direct contact can be established. The image of the pit dug for another, or of the correspondence between sowing and reaping, is attested across the entire Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultural sphere and cannot be assigned to a single point of origin on semantic grounds alone. The conflation of equivalence with borrowing therefore constitutes a methodological error, and one that the present study seeks to avoid.

3. Materials and methods

The material of the study comprises fifteen Arabic proverbs drawn from the classical paremiographic tradition, together with their Uzbek counterparts as attested in contemporary usage. Each Arabic unit is presented in vocalised form, in scholarly transliteration, and in a literal English rendering; the Uzbek counterpart is given with an English gloss so that the degree of formal and imagistic divergence may be assessed by a reader without command of either language.

The investigation employs the comparative-typological method, supplemented by componential analysis of proverbial semantics, structural analysis of paremiological syntax, and linguocultural interpretation of the imagery employed. In distinguishing borrowing from convergence, the study proceeds from four evidentiary criteria, which are proposed here as a working procedure for subsequent philological verification of individual units:

(i) philological attestation — the demonstrable occurrence of the unit in Turkic or Uzbek written sources that stand in a relation of dependence upon an identifiable Arabic original;

(ii) formal markedness — the retention of Arabic lexical or syntactic exponents in structurally significant positions, or the presence of a calqued construction untypical of the receiving language;

(iii) register distribution — the confinement of the unit to bookish, religious or scholastic registers, as opposed to its diffusion throughout rural oral tradition, the former being characteristic of literary transmission;

(iv) negative control — the absence of the image from the pre-Islamic Turkic paremiological corpus, the earliest strata of which are accessible through such monuments as Maḥmūd al-Kāshgharī's Dīwān Lughāt at-Turk and Yūsuf Khāṣṣ Ḥājib's Qutadghu Bilig.

Where these criteria are not satisfied, a correspondence is to be classified as typological rather than genetic, irrespective of the closeness of the semantic match.

4. The Arabic paremiological tradition as a source domain

Arabic paremiology rests upon an ancient and exceptionally rich tradition. In the Arabic scholarly and literary tradition proverbs are designated by the term *al-amthāl* (الأمثال), a category that classical philologists subjected to systematic collection, classification and commentary from an early period.

Among the most celebrated classical compendia is the *Majmaʿ al-Amthāl* (مجمع الأمثال) of Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maydānī (d. 518 AH / 1124 CE), which assembles more than six thousand Arabic proverbs together with the narratives and contexts that motivate them [3]. The manuscript tradition of the work and its subsequent printed editions — notably the two-volume edition prepared by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd — constitute a primary source for the study of Arabic paremiology; a digitised copy is held within the Arabic Collections Online programme of Columbia University Libraries [4], and the compendium has itself become the object of dedicated linguistic and semantic investigation [8].

The content of Arabic proverbs reflects the social relations of early Arabian society: tribal life, custom and kinship obligation, war and peace, generosity and courage, patience, the pursuit of knowledge, labour, and the norms governing interpersonal conduct. The study of this corpus therefore constitutes a valuable source not for linguistics alone, but equally for history, ethnography and cultural studies.

5. Channels of transmission into Uzbek

Linguistic and cultural contact between the Arab and Uzbek peoples spans an extended historical period. The advance of Islamic civilisation into Transoxiana substantially strengthened the position of Arabic as the language of learning, religion, philosophy and letters. As a consequence of this religious and scholarly prestige, and in parallel with the extensive lexical borrowing that brought a large stratum of Arabic vocabulary into Uzbek, Arabic literature and its repertoire of gnomic expression exerted a formative influence upon the written and oral culture of the Turkic languages. Four principal channels of transmission may be distinguished.

The first channel is religious education. The study of the Qurʾān, ḥadīth, exegesis and jurisprudence created the conditions for the wide dissemination of Arabic aphoristic and proverbial material, much of which circulated in its original form among the educated.

The second channel is the madrasa and the scholarly milieu. Since Arabic served for centuries as the medium of scholarly communication in the region, numerous expressions from the Arabic literary heritage acquired currency within academic and pedagogical settings and passed thence into wider usage.

The third channel is written literature. Translations from Arabic into the Turkic languages, together with the direct engagement of Turkic authors with Arabic sources, facilitated the diffusion of proverbial imagery through the literary canon.

The fourth channel is translation proper. The direct rendering of Arabic proverbs into Uzbek brought certain images and concepts into circulation in forms that were subsequently naturalised and, in some cases, ceased to be perceived as foreign.

It follows that the traces of Arabic proverbs in Uzbek are to be sought not solely in oral folklore, but equally — and perhaps primarily — in the written literary and scholarly tradition.

6. Borrowing, translation and equivalence: a conceptual delimitation

Three concepts must be held distinct in the comparison of Arabic and Uzbek proverbs.

Borrowing denotes the entry of a source-language unit, in some determinate form, into the system of the receiving language. Borrowing may be understood in a narrow and in a broad sense. In the narrow sense it designates the transfer into Uzbek of a ready-made Arabic proverb, or of its structural-semantic model, as the result of historical and cultural contact. In the broad sense it encompasses the use in Uzbek of an Arabic proverb by way of translation, calque or literary mediation.

Translation denotes the re-expression in another language of a content formulated in the source language, and is a procedure rather than a state of the receiving system.

Equivalence denotes the performance by units of two languages of an identical or closely comparable communicative function, irrespective of their respective histories.

The distinction may be illustrated by the pair العلم نور (*al-ʿilmu nūr*, literally "knowledge is light") and Uzbek *Ilm — nur*. Here the correspondence of form and content is nearly complete: the two units share a lexical inventory, a predicative structure and an identical metaphorical vehicle. Such correspondence does not, however, of itself demonstrate that the Uzbek unit was historically borrowed from Arabic, since the comparison of knowledge to light is attested across a wide range of religious and philosophical traditions and may have entered Uzbek through several mediating channels. The use of equivalence and borrowing as interchangeable terms is therefore methodologically untenable.

7. A typology of Arabic–Uzbek paremiological correspondences

On the foregoing basis, the correspondences between Arabic and Uzbek proverbs may be assigned to five classes.

7.1. Direct borrowing. The Arabic unit is reproduced in Uzbek discourse in its original phonetic shape, generally within religious or scholastic registers and frequently accompanied by a gloss. Items 1 and 3 of the material below belong to this class, since both circulate in Uzbek in their Arabic form alongside their vernacular renderings.

7.2. Calque translation. The Uzbek unit reproduces the lexical composition and syntactic structure of the Arabic original, retaining its imagery unchanged. Items 3, 9 and 14 exhibit calquing to varying degrees; the criterion of formal markedness (§3, ii) is decisive in identifying this class.

7.3. Functional equivalence. The two units perform an identical communicative function while employing divergent imagery. Item 1 is representative: the Arabic formulation is built upon the verbs of striving and finding, whereas its Uzbek counterpart substitutes the culturally salient concept of baraka, thereby relocating the same admonition within a different value framework. Items 2, 5, 13 and 15 belong to the same class.

7.4. Partial equivalence. The semantic scope of the two units overlaps without coinciding. Item 12 illustrates this configuration: the Arabic proverb asserts that fraternity may exist independently of consanguinity, whereas the Uzbek counterpart states a more general identification of friend with brother and lacks the concessive nuance carried by the particle rubba. Item 8 is comparable, the Arabic maritime imagery having no counterpart in the Uzbek formulation, which expresses the same resignation in abstract terms.

7.5. Typological parallelism. The units correspond semantically but exhibit no demonstrable relation of derivation, their similarity being attributable to the universality of the underlying conceptual schema. Items 9, 10 and 11 fall under this heading: the retributive image of the self-inflicted pit, the agricultural metaphor of sowing and reaping, and the association of like with like are all attested independently in Semitic, Turkic and Indo-European traditions.

A caveat attaches to item 6. The opposition of silver speech to golden silence is widely attested in European tradition and its direction of transmission is contested in the scholarly literature; the unit may therefore represent a case of tertiary mediation rather than direct Arabic–Uzbek transfer. It is precisely such cases that demonstrate the insufficiency of semantic correspondence as an evidentiary basis.

8. Comparative material

The following table presents fifteen Arabic proverbs together with their Uzbek counterparts. The literal renderings are supplied in order to make visible the degree of divergence between the Arabic image and its Uzbek functional analogue, a divergence that is systematically obscured when only idiomatic translations are compared.

№	Arabic proverb	Transliteration	Literal English rendering	Uzbek counterpart
1	مَنْ جَدَّ وَجَدَ	*man jadda wajada*	Whoever exerts effort, finds.	Harakatda barakat *Blessing lies in effort.*
2	الصَّبْرُ مِفْتَاحُ الفَرَجِ	*aṣ-ṣabru miftāḥu al-faraj*	Patience is the key to relief.	Sabrning tagi sariq oltin *Beneath patience lies yellow gold.*
3	العِلْمُ نُورٌ	*al-ʿilmu nūr*	Knowledge is light.	Ilm — nur *Knowledge is light.*

№	Arabic proverb	Transliteration	Literal English rendering	Uzbek counterpart
4	الوَقْتُ كَالسَّيْفِ	*al-waqtu ka-s-sayf*	Time is like a sword.	Vaqt oltindan qimmat *Time is dearer than gold.*
5	خَيْرُ الكَلَامِ مَا قَلَّ وَدَلَّ	*khayru al-kalāmi mā qalla wa-dalla*	The best speech is that which is brief yet meaningful.	Oz so‘z — soz so‘z *Few words are good words.*
6	إِذَا كَانَ الكَلَامُ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ فَالسُّكُوتُ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ	*idhā kāna al-kalāmu min fiḍḍatin fa-s-sukūtu min dhahab*	If speech is silver, silence is gold.	So‘z kumush, sukut oltin *Speech is silver, silence is gold.*
7	لِكُلِّ مَقَامٍ مَقَالٌ	*li-kulli maqāmin maqāl*	Every situation has its own appropriate discourse.	Har joyning o‘z gapi bor *Every place has its own way of speaking.*
8	تَجْرِي الرِّيَاحُ بِمَا لَا تَشْتَهِي السُّفُنُ	*tajrī ar-riyāḥu bimā lā tashtahī as-sufun*	The winds blow contrary to what the ships desire.	Taqdir inson istagidek bo‘lavermaydi *Fate does not always follow human desire.*
9	مَنْ حَفَرَ حُفْرَةً لِأَخِيهِ وَقَعَ فِيهَا	*man ḥafara ḥufratan li-akhīhi waqaʿa fīhā*	Whoever digs a pit for his brother falls into it himself.	Birovga choh qazisang, o‘zing tushasan *If you dig a pit for another, you will fall into it yourself.*
10	كَمَا تَدِينُ تُدَانُ	*kamā tadīnu tudān*	As you deal with others, so you will be dealt with.	Nima eksang, shuni o‘rasan *You reap what you sow.*
11	الطُّيُورُ عَلَى أَشْكَالِهَا تَقَعُ	*aṭ-ṭuyūru ʿalā ashkālihā taqaʿ*	Birds alight in the company of their own kind.	O‘xshat o‘xshatni topar *Like finds like.*
12	رُبَّ أَخٍ لَكَ لَمْ تَلِدْهُ أُمُّكَ	*rubba akhin laka lam talid-hu ummuka*	Many a brother of yours was never borne by your mother.	Do‘st — birodar *A friend is a brother.*
13	عُصْفُورٌ فِي اليَدِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ عَشَرَةٍ عَلَى الشَّجَرَةِ	*ʿuṣfūrun fī al-yadi khayrun min ʿasharatin ʿalā ash-shajara*	A sparrow in the hand is better than ten on the tree.	Qo‘ldagi — qush, og‘izdagi — osh *What is in the hand is a bird; what is in the*

№	Arabic proverb	Transliteration	Literal English rendering	Uzbek counterpart
				mouth is a meal.
14	لَا تُؤَجِّلْ عَمَلَ اليَوْمِ إِلَى الغَدِ	*lā tuʾajjil ʿamala al-yawmi ilā al-ghad*	Do not postpone today's work until tomorrow.	Bugungi ishni ertaga qo‘yma *Do not leave today's work for tomorrow.*
15	مَنْ طَلَبَ العُلَا سَهِرَ اللَّيَالِي	*man ṭalaba al-ʿulā sahira al-layālī*	Whoever seeks eminence spends his nights awake.	Mehnatsiz rohat yo‘q *There is no ease without labour.*

Several observations follow from the material. In items 3, 9 and 14 the Uzbek unit preserves both the imagery and the propositional structure of the Arabic original, which is consistent with calquing though not, in itself, decisive for it. In items 1, 2, 13 and 15 the imagery diverges substantially while the pragmatic function remains constant, so that these pairs are to be treated as functional rather than formal equivalents. Item 4 merits separate comment: the Arabic proverb occurs in the fuller form al-waqtu ka-s-sayf, in lam taqṭaʿhu qaṭaʿaka ("time is like a sword: if you do not cut it, it cuts you"), in which the image is developed into an admonition concerning the reciprocal agency of time; the Uzbek counterpart replaces the martial image entirely with an evaluative comparison to gold, retaining only the injunction to husband time. Such asymmetries indicate that the transfer of paremiological material between the two languages has proceeded predominantly at the level of function rather than of form.

It must be reiterated that although a number of the units assembled here express closely comparable content in the two languages, the historical origin of each requires independent verification against the criteria set out in §3. The table documents correspondence; it does not, and cannot, document derivation.

9. Conclusion

The place of Arabic proverbs within the Uzbek language constitutes a phenomenon considerably broader than simple lexical influence between two contact languages. It is to be assessed as a complex linguocultural process formed at the point of intersection of language, history, religion, literature, translation and popular thought.

Three conclusions follow from the present analysis. First, the terminological distinction between borrowing, translation and equivalence is not a matter of scholarly refinement but a precondition of valid inference: semantic correspondence is a fact about two synchronic systems and carries no diachronic implication in the absence of independent philological evidence. Second, the five-fold typology proposed here — direct borrowing, calque translation, functional equivalence, partial equivalence and typological parallelism — furnishes a descriptive framework capable of accommodating the attested material without prejudging questions of origin. Third, the predominance of functional over formal correspondence in the material examined suggests that the principal mechanism of transfer has been adaptive rather than reproductive, the receiving tradition

assimilating the pragmatic charge of the Arabic unit while reconstituting its imagery from indigenous cultural resources.

Further research would profitably be directed towards the systematic verification of individual units against the earliest strata of the Turkic written tradition, and towards the corpus-based investigation of register distribution, which offers the most tractable empirical means of separating literary from oral channels of transmission.

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