

LEXICAL-SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF ARABIC BORROWINGS IN EXPLANATORY DICTIONARIES OF ALISHER NAVOI'S WORKS

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Abstract

This article provides a detailed analysis of the sign-semasis of Arabic borrowings found in explanatory dictionaries compiled for the works of Alisher Navoi. These borrowings—lexemes that express personal and object-related attributes (such as moral and psychological traits, appearance, color, and taste)—are examined from lexical-semantic, lexical-syntactic, and stylistic perspectives. In addition, the paper explores the contextual dependence of positive and negative character traits and their adaptation to the Uzbek language system.

Keywords: Dictionary, borrowing, Arabisms, sign-semasis, personal-character traits, appearance, mentality, color, taste, positive feature, negative feature, adaptation.

Introduction

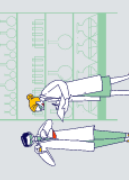
Alisher Navoi, who lived during the 15th century, occupies a central place in the formation of the Turkic-Uzbek literary language. The vocabulary used in his works—particularly the numerous Arabic and Persian borrowings—represents one of the key sources reflecting the lexical and stylistic richness of the Uzbek language. Explanatory dictionaries of Navoi's works serve as an indispensable basis for identifying these borrowings, analyzing their meanings, contextual usage, and stylistic functions. The term *sign-semasis* (or *sign semantics*), as used in this article, refers to the lexical potential of words to create symbolic images in literary expression. It encompasses lexemes that describe both the external and internal characteristics of a person or an object.

In particular, the study focuses on two main types of features:

1. Personal traits (person-sign semantics) — Arabic-derived lexemes expressing moral, intellectual, and psychological qualities such as character, disposition, and mentality;

2. Object-related traits (object-sign semantics) — Arabic-derived lexemes denoting external qualities such as color, shade, and taste.

By examining these categories, the paper aims to reveal how Arabic borrowings in Navoi's language contribute to artistic depiction, ethical evaluation, and cultural imagery, as well as how these elements have been adapted and integrated into the Uzbek lexical system.



Literature Review

The fact that dictionaries were compiled for Alisher Navoi's works as early as the final years of his lifetime indicates that what we now call *Navoiyshunoslik* (Navoi Studies) has a long-standing scholarly tradition. Indeed, the study of Navoi's linguistic and literary heritage began in his own time, with the writings of his contemporaries. It should be emphasized that, alongside words easily understood by the general public, Navoi's works also contain many lexical items whose meanings were complex or difficult to interpret. For this reason, soon after his death, the compilation of explanatory dictionaries for his works became an important scholarly endeavor.

The earliest known work in this field is “**Badoye‘ ul-lug‘at**” (1505), compiled by *Toli‘ Imoni Hiraviy* at the initiative of Sultan *Husayn Bayqaro*. The principles of this dictionary's compilation, the words it explains, and the factual materials it uses have been examined in Turkological research by scholars such as A. K. Borovkov, B. Hasanov, and E. Umarov. Subsequent research continued this tradition, and numerous linguists compiled dictionaries devoted to Navoi's works. Even today, explanatory dictionaries of Old Uzbek and Navoi's language remain the focus of extensive scholarly studies. Among the most significant of these are “*Dictionary of Alisher Navoi's Works*” (1972) and “*Explanatory Dictionary of the Language of Alisher Navoi's Works*” (4 volumes, 1983–1984). The deeper we study this vast scholarly heritage, the more we uncover new dimensions of the Turkic language and recognize its richness and expressive potential. Building upon this tradition, the present article focuses specifically on **Arabic-origin words with sign-semasis** found in explanatory dictionaries compiled for Navoi's works.

Research Methodology

The methodological basis of this article involves a lexical-semantic and lexical-syntactic analysis of Arabic borrowings found in the explanatory dictionaries of Alisher Navoi's works. The study aims to determine how these borrowings function semantically, how they adapt to the Uzbek linguistic system, and how their meanings depend on contextual and stylistic factors. In the process of analysis, the following research tasks were prioritized:

- identifying lexemes of Arabic origin that express *sign-semasis* (personal and object-related characteristics);
- classifying them according to their semantic roles and stylistic functions;
- examining the interaction between their **denotative** (core lexical) and **connotative** (emotional, aesthetic, and cultural) meanings;
- analyzing their syntactic behavior in Navoi's poetic and prose contexts;
- determining the level of adaptation of these lexemes in the Uzbek language—whether they have become part of the general vocabulary or remain stylistically marked elements of literary usage.

Through this methodology, the research seeks to reveal the relationship between language, meaning, and cultural context in the artistic lexicon of Navoi, emphasizing how Arabic borrowings contribute to the richness of imagery and moral discourse in his works.

Analysis and Results

The issue of *sign-semasis* lies at the intersection of linguistics and semiotics. It is significant in understanding how lexical signs contribute to the creation of imagery, character, and artistic expression in literary texts. Explanatory dictionaries provide two semantic layers of analysis: the **denotative layer** (the primary lexical meaning) and the **connotative layer** (aesthetic, emotional, and cultural associations).

Arabic borrowings often convey both layers simultaneously. For instance, the word *aswad* denotes “black” in its primary meaning, yet connotatively it may evoke associations with darkness, sorrow, or evil. To determine the semantic features of lexemes in explanatory dictionaries, the following criteria were applied:

1. **Denotative meaning** – the primary, dictionary-defined sense.
2. **Connotative meaning** – the emotional or stylistic value in artistic context (positive or negative).
3. **Syntactic role** – the grammatical position the lexeme occupies (adjective, noun, collocation, or phraseological unit).
4. **Degree of adaptation** – whether the word has been fully assimilated into the Uzbek lexicon or remains limited to poetic/literary usage.

These criteria form the basis for analyzing Arabic borrowings in Navoi’s explanatory dictionaries.

Arabic Borrowings Expressing Personal Traits

Lexemes denoting personal or character-related features in the explanatory dictionaries are mostly adjectives and nominal forms. They perform two main functions: (1) **ethical-didactic** — reflecting moral evaluation of a person; and (2) **artistic-descriptive** — creating imagery through depiction of psychological and physical attributes.

Among the most common lexemes are *sahiy* (generous), *oqil* (wise), *halim* (gentle), *zalim* (cruel), *faqir* (poor), and *johil* (ignorant). These are typically divided into **positive** and **negative** categories. The following examples illustrate this distinction.

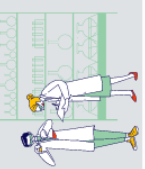
Oqil — “Wise, Intelligent, Prudent”

Etymology: The word *oqil* derives from the Arabic root ‘-q-l (ع ق ل), meaning “to reason, to understand, to be intelligent.” From this root also come *aql* (intellect), *aqliy* (rational), and related forms.

Dictionary definition: *Oqil* — intelligent, sensible, wise.

“Yuz ganj kishiga aqldin hosildur,
Yuqtur anga faqru foqakim oqildur.”
(*Nazm ul-javohir*, XV–49)

In this verse, the word *oqil* (Arabic ‘*āqil*) signifies a person endowed with intellect, wisdom, and discernment. The term entered the Uzbek language as early as Navoi’s era and came to symbolize moral and intellectual perfection.



The semantic field of *oqil* is associated with spiritual wealth and genuine human virtue. Navoi emphasizes that *aql* (intellect) is a person's greatest treasure:

- **Tazod (antithesis):** between *ganj* (wealth) and *faqru foqa* (poverty).
- **Tashbih (simile):** intellect is likened to a treasure — a metaphor for the most valuable possession.

This couplet expresses Navoi's philosophical view that *aql* is divine grace and that the truly wise person transcends material wealth.

Another example:

"*Va Rashitan otlig' vaziri bor erdi, kofiy va oqil kishin erdi.*"
(*Tarixi muluki Ajam*, XIV–200)

Here, *oqil* is used in a political context, describing a historical figure as prudent and capable in governance. Thus, the term not only denotes personal wisdom but also implies political acumen and statesmanship.

Overall, in Navoi's poetic system, *oqil* symbolizes intellect, wisdom, contemplation, and spiritual maturity — embodying the idea that "wealth is temporary, intellect is eternal."

Johil — "Ignorant, Unwise, Foolish"

Etymology: The term *johil* originates from the Arabic root *jahila* (جَهَلَ), meaning "to be ignorant, to act without knowledge." From the same root derives *jahl* (ignorance, folly).

In Islamic intellectual tradition, *jahl* is regarded as the opposite of *'ilm* (knowledge). In Navoi's works, *johil* denotes not only lack of learning but also spiritual blindness and moral weakness.

"*Chu oshiq johil erdi, ishq qattol,*
Sanam olig'a holin qildi irsol."
(*Farhod va Shirin*, p. 203)

Interpretation: In this verse, Navoi uses the phrase *oshiq johil* ("ignorant lover") ironically — one who acts irrationally in love becomes the victim of *cruel love* (*ishq qattol*). The word *johil* reveals the tension between intellect and passion: true love must coexist with wisdom.

- **Tazod (contrast):** "oshiq johil" combines the lofty emotion of love with the baseness of ignorance.
- **Isti'ora (metaphor):** "ishq qattol" personifies love as a punishing force.

Through these devices, Navoi portrays ignorance (*jahl*) as the root of human downfall. The *johil lover* is enslaved by passion, mistaking it for love, whereas true love is enlightened by intellect. Another example:

"*Zolim va johil va fosiq podshohlar zikrida.*"
(*Mahbub ul-qulub*, p. 12)

Here, *johil* is used in a socio-political sense. Navoi describes the "ignorant ruler" as the greatest calamity for society, suggesting that the root of tyranny lies in ignorance. The opposition between *oqil* and *johil* thus becomes a central ethical axis in Navoi's worldview:

- *Oqil* — intellect, divine light, enlightenment.
- *Johil* — nafs (ego), darkness, oppression.

For Navoi, ignorance is not merely intellectual deficiency but a moral and spiritual disease. Hence, in his ethical framework, the *oqil* symbolizes salvation, while the *johil* represents

destruction. Arabic borrowings that denote the characteristics of objects and phenomena (color, taste, and flavor) include *asvad*, *abyaz*, *asfar*, *azraq*, *ahmar*, *hulv*, *mur*, and others. Lexical units denoting colors are among the most frequently used elements in artistic imagery.

The word **asvad** (أسود) derives from the Arabic root s-w-d (س و د), meaning “to be black,” and denotes “black,” “dark,” “gloom,” or “dimness.” In its denotative meaning, *asvad* signifies the color black; however, in Navoi’s works, this word not only represents color but also encompasses psychological, moral, and aesthetic meanings. From Layli and Majnun:

Asvad yuzin ko’rdi, Majnun bo’ldi g’am,
Har ko’z yoshu qon, bo’ldi daryoyu shabnam.

In this couplet, the phrase *asvad yuz* means “black face,” but beyond its denotative meaning, it carries a symbolic connotation. *Asvad yuz* does not merely denote external darkness but signifies sorrow, suffering, excessive weeping, and emotional torment. Navoi uses *asvad* here as a psychological color: the darkened face becomes a symbol of a person fading in the pain of love.

Moreover, the metaphorical function of *asvad* in this context is to represent darkness, grief, and loss. Through this, Navoi employs a synesthetic style, depicting an emotional state through the perception of color — expressing feelings through sensory imagery. From Saddi Iskandariy:

Har ko’ngil asvad bo’lur zulm ila g’am,
Nur topgay kim, bo’lg’ay pok va kam.

In this verse, *asvad* is used metaphorically and morally. *Asvad ko’ngil* refers to a heart darkened by oppression and grief — that is, a soul clouded by evil. The connotation here is negative. Navoi employs *asvad* as a symbol of spiritual and moral darkness. To establish a positive contrast, he adds the phrase *nur topgay* (“will find light”), creating a moral antonymy (*asvad* ↔ *abyaz*).

These analyses demonstrate that *asvad* in Navoi’s language possesses a multilayered semantic structure:

- Denotative layer — black color, darkness;
- Connotative layer — sorrow, moral corruption, evil, anguish.

The word *asvad* generally functions as an adjective in Navoi’s texts, often appearing in genitive constructions (*asvad yuz*, *asvad ko’ngil*, *asvad libos*). In some cases, it undergoes metonymic transition and becomes a noun (for example, *asvad* as the embodiment of darkness itself). In modern Uzbek, the word *asvad* is no longer in active use, but in Navoi’s era, it held a firm place in poetic language as an emotionally charged Arabic borrowing. Today, the words *qora* and *qoramtir* have taken its place. Nevertheless, the cultural and aesthetic significance of *asvad* remains preserved within the symbolic color system of classical Uzbek poetry.

The word **abyaz** (أبيض) derives from the Arabic root b-y-d (ب ي د), meaning “to be white, to have a white color.” From this same root come the words *bayz* (“egg”), *bayzā* (“whiteness, light”), and *bayaz* (“white object, purity”). In explanatory dictionaries, *abyaz* is defined as “white, pure, a symbol of light.”

Ko’nglum ichra abyaz nur tushub, zulmat ketdi,
Ishq nuri bilan to’ldi bu jismim har sori.

(Khazoyin ul-maoniy — G‘aroyib us-sig‘ar divan)

In this couplet, the phrase *abyaz nur* (“white light”) symbolizes purity and spiritual awakening. The descent of “white light” into the heart represents the entrance of enlightenment and divine love. In Navoi’s works, *abyaz* is always semantically linked with “light,” “purity,” and “divine radiance.”

Jahonning g‘uborini *abyaz ko‘ngul yuvdi*,

Kim, pokiza bo‘ldi dard ila har sori.

(Mahbub ul-qulub)

Here, *abyaz ko‘ngul* means “pure, immaculate heart.” In Navoi’s usage, white color symbolizes inner purity rather than external appearance. The word *g‘ubor* (“dust”) refers to sin and worldly sorrow, creating the opposition “pure heart — dark world.” In Navoi’s poetics, the word *abyaz* functions as:

In its literal sense — denoting the color white;

In its figurative sense — signifying “purity,” “light,” and “divine cleanness.”

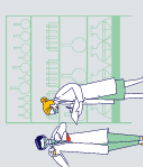
Used in contrast with *asvad*, *abyaz* expresses moral dualism — “white soul vs. black heart,” “light vs. darkness.” Through *abyaz*, Navoi celebrates the luminous side of the human soul — divinity and spiritual purity. The term also functions as a Sufi symbol: “white” stands for divine light (*nur-i ilohiy*), and “pure heart” represents the soul freed from the dust of the material world.

Color-related lexemes create psychological and aesthetic effects depending on the context. The dictionary definition also indicates the artistic connotations of such lexemes. In explanatory dictionaries, positive and negative lexemes are presented through numerous antonymic pairs. These antonymic structures introduce moral and didactic dimensions into the text. The analysis shows that most Arabic borrowings in Uzbek adapt through an antonymic spectrum, forming strong semantic contrasts (for example: *sahiy* ↔ *bakhil*, *oqil* ↔ *johil*, *halim* ↔ *ghazabnok*). The context plays a key role in determining whether a lexeme carries positive or negative connotations. For instance, the word *faqir* may convey a positive connotation — praising modesty and humility — or, in another context, denote social inferiority or weakness. Dictionaries provide such contextual examples, helping researchers identify the adaptive (flexible) nature of a lexeme.

Positive and negative evaluative lexemes in Navoi’s texts perform two main stylistic functions: Didactic-moral — shaping moral values in the reader and fostering social critique;

Aesthetic-imagery — enhancing the vividness and emotional depth of characters and scenes.

Explanatory dictionaries distinguish the didactic and aesthetic functions of these lexemes and illustrate their usage through examples. Many Arabic borrowings have been phonetically adapted to Uzbek pronunciation (for instance, replacing Arabic guttural and emphatic consonants with phonetically closer Uzbek sounds) and morphologically integrated with Uzbek derivational suffixes. Some have fully assimilated into Uzbek morphology and combine with native suffixes such as *-lik*, *-chi* (e.g., *oqillik*, *sahiylik*). Arabic borrowings are widely used in Uzbek as adjectives, nouns, or parts of idiomatic expressions. According to dictionary



examples, some lexical units appear only in literary contexts, while others have entered everyday language. For instance, the expression *sahiy kishi* (“generous person”) is widely used, whereas *hulv ta’m* (“sweet taste”) is found mostly in poetic or literary contexts.

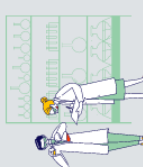
Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, it can be stated that the semantics of qualities and attributes in Navoi’s works are vividly and expressively conveyed through Arabic borrowings. These lexemes clearly and colorfully describe a person’s character, emotional state, and the external and internal qualities of objects and phenomena. Positive and negative evaluative lexemes add both didactic-moral perspective and aesthetic richness to the text; their antonymic pairs help shape the moral discourse within Navoi’s poetic world.

Lexical units denoting color and taste contribute to the diversity of Navoi’s imagery — evoking not only visual but also sensory and emotional experiences in the reader’s imagination. The process of adaptation of these borrowings demonstrates how Arabic lexical units have been integrated into the Uzbek language and adjusted to its stylistic functions; some have entered the general vocabulary, while others remain preserved within the artistic and aesthetic layer of the language. Ultimately, the analysis of Arabic borrowings in explanatory dictionaries on lexical-syntactic and semantic levels provides a deep understanding of their adaptation to Uzbek, their contextual dependence, their positive and negative semantic values, and their role in expressing emotional and spiritual experiences. This reveals how Arabic lexemes participated in the linguistic expression of the time, showing their vivid, emotional, spiritual, and descriptive characteristics on a broad scale. Thus, explanatory dictionaries serve as a rich source for illuminating the semantic layers of Arabic vocabulary in Navoi’s language and for further literary-linguistic research.

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