

**BORROWING WORDS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH:  
A CONTRASTIVE STUDY**

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**Abstract.** *This article explores the process by which foreign words penetrate and become established within the lexical systems of Uzbek and English, tracing the degree to which such words are structurally assimilated and identifying the conditions that determine whether a borrowed item achieves full integration or remains marked as external. Rather than cataloguing loanwords by origin, the study focuses on the dynamic relationship between external linguistic pressure and the internal structural resistance of each receiving language. The article argues that the degree and character of lexical assimilation is shaped not only by phonological and morphological compatibility but equally by the social prestige attached to the donor language, the institutional context of contact, and the communicative domains in which borrowed words first circulate. Findings from both languages reveal that the boundary between native and borrowed vocabulary is far less stable than traditional lexicological classifications suggest.*

**Key words:** *foreign words, lexical stratification, donor language, phonetic change, language prestige, terminology, lexical enrichment, language history.*

**Introduction.** When linguists speak of a language's vocabulary, they typically imply a degree of homogeneity that the actual lexical record rarely supports. In reality, the vocabulary of most languages is not a unified system but a stratified one - a layered accumulation of words from different historical periods, different geographic origins, and different social registers, held together by the grammar and the communicative

habits of the speaker community. Understanding this stratification requires attention not only to the internal development of a language but to its external history: the peoples its speakers traded with, the religions they adopted, the empires they lived under, and the technologies they encountered.

The present article approaches the vocabularies of Uzbek and English from precisely this angle. Rather than treating borrowing as a marginal or secondary phenomenon, the study takes lexical stratification as its central object of inquiry. The two languages are examined not merely as recipients of foreign vocabulary but as active systems that filter, reshape, and redistribute incoming material according to their own structural logic and their speakers' social priorities.

What makes this comparison especially productive is the asymmetry between the two languages. English currently occupies the position of the world's dominant donor language, exporting vocabulary to hundreds of other languages while itself borrowing relatively little. Uzbek, by contrast, occupies the position of a receiving language navigating the pressures of multiple donor traditions simultaneously - the classical heritage of Persian and Arabic, the Soviet legacy of Russian, and the contemporary pull of English. Examining how these two languages handle foreign vocabulary from their respective positions reveals a great deal about how prestige, power, and structure interact in the shaping of a lexicon.

**Literature Review and Methodology.** The theoretical foundation of this study draws on three distinct but complementary bodies of scholarship. The first is the tradition of historical lexicology, which traces the etymological origins of words and reconstructs the pathways through which vocabulary moves between languages over time. Within this tradition, the work of Otto Jespersen on the growth and structure of the English language remains foundational, as does the etymological scholarship embedded in the Oxford English Dictionary, which documents the first recorded use and historical development of English words with unparalleled detail.

The second body of scholarship concerns the structural analysis of language contact. Researchers in this field - among them Pieter Muysken, Yaron Matras, and Carol Myers-Scotton - have moved beyond the simple description of which words are borrowed to ask more precise questions about the mechanisms of transfer: under what structural conditions can a morpheme, word, or phrase cross from one language into another, and what happens to it when it does? Their work has produced a more sophisticated understanding of the interaction between the grammatical systems of languages in contact, revealing that borrowing is not a simple copying operation but a complex process of structural negotiation.

The third body of relevant scholarship concerns language attitudes and ideologies - the beliefs, values, and assumptions that speaker communities hold about their own and other languages, and that shape their responses to incoming vocabulary.

Research in this area, associated with scholars such as Kathryn Woolard and Jan Blommaert, shows that the acceptance or rejection of borrowed words is never purely a linguistic matter: it is always also a social and political one, bound up with questions of identity, belonging, and cultural authority.

Data for the present study were gathered from Uzbek and English dictionaries of etymology and contemporary usage, from linguistic descriptions of both languages, and from a selection of written texts in scientific, journalistic, and informal registers. Methodologically, the study combines close etymological reading of individual words with broader comparative structural analysis, situating both within the sociolinguistic framework outlined above.

**Discussion.** One of the most persistently misunderstood aspects of lexical borrowing is the assumption that it operates as a one-way, passive process in which a receiving language simply absorbs whatever vocabulary its speakers happen to encounter. In practice, the process is considerably more selective and more dynamic. Not every foreign word that enters circulation in a speech community becomes established in the lexicon; many are used briefly and disappear, while others survive in restricted specialist domains without ever reaching general currency. Understanding which words persist and which fade requires attention to factors that lie well beyond the words themselves.

Prestige is among the most powerful of these factors. When the speakers of a receiving language associate the donor language with social advancement, intellectual authority, religious legitimacy, or economic opportunity, they are far more likely to adopt and retain its vocabulary. This principle explains the deep and lasting impact of French on English following the Norman Conquest: for several centuries, French was the language of the English court, the legal system, and aristocratic social life, and the prestige it carried ensured that its vocabulary penetrated the most stable and central domains of English use. The same principle explains the penetration of Arabic into medieval Uzbek: Arabic was the language of the Quran, of Islamic jurisprudence, and of the scientific tradition of the Islamic Golden Age, and its authority in these domains gave its vocabulary an almost unassailable claim to adoption.

A second important factor is semantic necessity. Languages borrow most readily when they encounter concepts, objects, or practices for which they possess no existing name. The English word algebra, borrowed from Arabic al-jabr, entered the language together with the mathematical discipline it names; there was no competing native term because the discipline itself was new to European intellectual life. Similarly, when Uzbek speakers encountered Soviet industrial infrastructure - factories, railways, electrical systems - they adopted the Russian names for these installations because the installations themselves were introduced by Russian-speaking administrators and

engineers. In both cases, the borrowed word filled a genuine gap rather than displacing an existing native equivalent.

A third factor, less frequently discussed but equally significant, is phonological and morphological compatibility. Languages differ in the ease with which they can accommodate the sound sequences and structural features of foreign vocabulary. English, having already expanded its phonological inventory through sustained contact with French and Latin, can approximate the sounds of a wide range of donor languages without major restructuring. Uzbek, with its traditionally more constrained phonotactics, must work harder to integrate words containing sounds or sequences that fall outside its native patterns - particularly consonant clusters and vowel combinations introduced through Russian and, more recently, through English. This structural work is not always completed immediately; some borrowed words spend decades in an intermediate state before their phonological form stabilizes.

**Results.** The analysis of foreign vocabulary in Uzbek and English yields a set of findings that challenge some common assumptions about lexical borrowing while confirming others.

The first finding concerns the depth and invisibility of historical borrowings. In both languages, the oldest and most thoroughly assimilated borrowed words are effectively invisible to ordinary speakers - they have been so completely integrated into the phonological, morphological, and semantic fabric of the receiving language that their foreign origin is recoverable only through etymological research. In English, words such as street (from Latin *strata via*), wall (from Latin *vallum*), wine (from Latin *vinum*), and church (from Greek *kyriakon*) were borrowed during the early contact between Germanic-speaking populations and Roman civilization, and they now form part of what most speakers would instinctively identify as the core of the language. In Uzbek, Persian words such as *oshxona* (dining room, from *osh* - food and *khona* - room), *daryo* (river), and *sabzavot* (vegetables) are experienced by contemporary speakers as simply Uzbek, with no sense of their Persian provenance.

The second finding concerns the relationship between register and etymological origin. In both languages, a consistent pattern emerges whereby words from certain donor languages cluster in particular registers or domains. In English, the well-documented distinction between the Germanic everyday vocabulary and the Latinate-French formal vocabulary — *begin* versus *commence*, *end* versus *terminate*, *ask* versus *inquire* — reflects the historical association of French and Latin with education, law, and formal writing. In Uzbek, a parallel pattern associates Arabic borrowings with religious, scholarly, and formal discourse, Persian borrowings with literary and cultural expression, and Russian borrowings - increasingly - with technical and administrative language, though post-independence language policy has complicated this last association considerably.

The third finding concerns the behavior of international scientific terminology specifically. Words in this category - atom, electron, vitamin, protein, democracy, parliament, economy - exhibit a distinctive profile in both languages: they are widely recognized across language boundaries, they resist full phonological assimilation (retaining features that mark them as international rather than fully native), and they circulate primarily in written and formal spoken registers rather than in casual everyday speech. In Uzbek, these terms arrived through two distinct routes: the classical Greek-Arabic-Persian channel, which accounts for the oldest layer of scientific vocabulary, and the modern Russian-mediated channel, which transmitted twentieth-century scientific and technical terminology. In English, the same terms arrived more directly from Latin and Greek, but their function in marking scientific discourse as distinct from ordinary language is the same in both cases.

The fourth finding, perhaps the most significant for understanding the contemporary situation, concerns the accelerating pace of English-origin borrowing in Uzbek. Since independence in 1991, and particularly since the widespread adoption of digital technology in the 2000s and 2010s, English vocabulary has entered Uzbek at a rate that substantially exceeds the pace of earlier borrowing episodes. Words associated with digital communication, social media, commerce, and youth culture have become firmly established in urban Uzbek speech within a single generation. Unlike earlier waves of borrowing, which were mediated by sustained institutional contact over decades, this current wave is driven primarily by individual exposure through screens and networks, which means that the social supervision of borrowing - the institutional filtering that once determined which foreign words were acceptable - has been substantially reduced.

**Conclusion.** The contrastive examination of foreign word integration in Uzbek and English reveals that lexical borrowing is simultaneously a linguistic and a social phenomenon, shaped at every stage by the interaction between structural constraints and human choices. The structural constraints - the phonological patterns of the receiving language, its morphological typology, the semantic fields already covered by its native vocabulary - determine what happens to a borrowed word once it enters the system. The social factors - prestige, institutional authority, communicative necessity, and speaker identity - determine which words enter in the first place and whether they survive long enough for structural integration to occur.

What emerges from the comparison is a picture of two languages that have responded to lexical pressure from outside in ways that are deeply conditioned by their different histories and structures, yet that converge on a common outcome: a stratified vocabulary in which layers of different origin coexist, serve different communicative functions, and carry different social meanings. Neither language treats this

stratification as a problem to be solved; both have developed conventions for exploiting the expressive possibilities it creates.

The most pressing contemporary issue for Uzbek is managing the current acceleration of English-origin borrowing in a way that preserves the language's structural integrity and its connection to its own classical heritage, while remaining open to the global communicative community. For English, the equivalent challenge is perhaps more subtle: as the primary donor language of the contemporary world, it faces the question of how its exported vocabulary transforms in other languages, and what this transformation implies for the idea of global communication as a shared rather than a unidirectional enterprise. Both questions point toward a future in which the study of language contact will remain as relevant as ever.

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