THE COMPARISON OF UZBEK AND ENGLISH POETRY

Aliyev Akmal Ikromjonovich
O'zbekiston Davlat Jahon Tillar Universiteti Magistranti

Abstract. This paper compares Uzbek and English poetic traditions across history, form, prosody, thematic concerns, and translation practice. It traces continuities from classical Uzbek divan poetry (with Alisher Navoi as a focal figure) to twentieth-century and contemporary Uzbek verse, and contrasts these with the development of English poetry from medieval lyric and Chaucerian meters through the sonnet tradition to modern free verse. The comparative section highlights how linguistic typology (syllable-timed Uzbek vs. stress-timed English), formal conventions (ghazal/qasida/muhammas vs. sonnet/iambic meter/blank verse), and differing cultural functions (courtly/Sufi devotion and national identity in Uzbek poetry; individual lyric subjectivity, narrative and dramatic uses in English) shape poetic technique and translation choices. Practical recommendations for translators and editors preparing Uzbek ↔ English poetry for international journals are offered.

1. Introduction

Comparative study of poetry across typologically and culturally distinct languages illuminates how linguistic structure and literary history shape aesthetic choices. Uzbek poetry, with deep roots in Central Asian Turkic and Persianate traditions, and English poetry, arising from Germanic and Romance influences and transformed through Renaissance and modern innovations, present a rich field for contrastive analysis. This paper synthesizes historical scholarship and recent studies on prosody and translation to show where parallels occur and where fundamental contrasts persist.

2. Method and sourcese

This study is a literature-based comparative synthesis. Primary poetic exemplars (translated selections of Alisher Navoi and representative English sonnets) are used illustratively; the analysis mainly draws on secondary scholarship in literary history, prosodic typology, and translation studies. Key sources include research on Navoi and Central Asian divan forms, studies of English metrical history (notably on iambic pentameter and the sonnet), and contemporary scholarship on prosodic typology and poetic translation strategies between Uzbek and English.

3. Historical backgrounds and dominant forms

3.1 Uzbek poetry: classical to modern

Uzbek poetic tradition is anchored in the Timurid and later Central Asian divan literature, where forms such as the **ghazal**, **qasida**, **rubai**, and longer stanzaic types (muhammas, musaddas) dominated the learned and musical repertoires. Alisher

Navoi (15th century) is widely regarded as the founding genius of Chagatai/early Uzbek literary language; his ghazals and didactic works established a model that fused Turkic diction with Persianate meters and Sufi themes. In the twentieth century and beyond, Uzbek poetry absorbed Soviet influences and later national revival currents; poets such as Abdulla Oripov became prominent voices of modern Uzbek lyricism and translation. Uzbek poetry often functions both as personal lyric and as a carrier of national and spiritual identity.

3.2 English poetry: forms and evolutions

English poetic history features several decisive formal innovations: medieval alliterative verse and Chaucerian forms; the Renaissance flowering of the **sonnet** and the codification of **iambic pentameter** as a dominant meter; the rise of Romantic and Victorian lyric traditions; and the twentieth-century turn to free verse and experimental prosody. The sonnet—tight in rhyme and often organized around a volta (turn)—and iambic pentameter (five iambic feet per line) became central devices for English lyric and narrative poetry.

4. Linguistic typology and prosody: how language shapes meter

A crucial axis of difference is prosodic typology. English is commonly analyzed as a **stress-timed** language in which rhythm is organized around intervals between stressed syllables; this makes stress and meter (e.g., iambic pentameter) a salient vehicle for English poetic form. By contrast, Uzbek (like many Turkic languages) is frequently described as **syllable-timed**, with more regular timing across syllables and a tendency toward predictable word-final stress patterns; Uzbek also features vowel harmony and agglutinative morphology. These typological contrasts have practical consequences: English meters exploit variable stress patterns and polysyllabic reshaping, while many classical Turkic forms were adapted from quantitative Persian/Arabic metrics or recast to fit syllable and melodic recitation in Central Asia.

5. Formal comparison: shape, sound, and performance

5.1 Rhyme and stanzaic patterns

Uzbek classical poetry often uses monorhyme schemes (as in many ghazals and qasidas), internal rhyme, and refrains suitable for musical performance. English sonnets use structured rhyme schemes (e.g., Shakespearean abab cdcd efef gg or Petrarchan abba abba cde cde) and metrical regularity to create closure and argumental progression. The sonic expectations thus differ: Uzbek audiences historically valued musicality aligned with maqam/maqom traditions and oral performance; English traditions increasingly valorized printed lyric and lineated meter.

5.2 Meter and lineation

While iambic pentameter creates a regular stress pattern that can accommodate syntactic variation in English, Uzbek verse's lineation often follows syllabic or quantitative patterns inherited from Persian models or follows melodic phrasing for

oral performance. Modern Uzbek poets also write free verse influenced by world literatures, but the underlying phonology (vowel harmony, limited consonant clusters) subtly affects enjambment and line break aesthetics.

6. Themes, voice, and social function

Classical Uzbek poetry frequently centers on Sufi mysticism, courtly love, moral didacticism, and communal memory; the poet often functions as sage or spiritual interlocutor. English poetry shows a strong trajectory toward individual subjectivity (especially post-Renaissance and Romantic lyric), though narrative and epic functions remain important (e.g., Milton, epic tradition). In the twentieth century, both traditions engage national identity—Uzbek poetry explicitly in the post-Soviet nation-building context, and English poetry in various responses to empire, industrialization, and modernity. Scholarship emphasizes Uzbek poetry's role in preserving cultural memory and articulating postcolonial or post-Soviet identity.

7. Translation challenges and strategies

Translating poetry between Uzbek and English faces layered challenges:

1.   **Prosodic mismatch.** Stress-based meters in English do not map cleanly onto Uzbek syllable patterns; translators must choose whether to preserve meter (adapted iambics), approximate musicality (via alliteration, assonance), or prioritise semantic fidelity.

2.   **Lexical density and morphology.** Uzbek's agglutinative morphology allows compact expression using suffixation; English often requires additional function words, which affects rhythm and line length.

3.   **Cultural and intertextual references.** Persianate imagery, religious idioms, and historical frames in Uzbek poems may be opaque to English readers; translators must employ footnotes, paratext, or domestication strategies.

Successful strategies reported in translation studies include **creative transposition** (preserving the effect rather than literal form), **bilingual presentation** (parallel text), and collaborative translation that consults poets and musicologists to retain performative qualities.

8. Case studies (illustrative)

8.1 Alisher Navoi's ghazals

Navoi's ghazals blend Turkic idiom with Persianate metaphors and an ornamented rhetorical style; English renderings must decide how to render conceits, end-rhymes, and repetitions that are central to ghazal aesthetics. Some contemporary translators opt for **looser free-verse English** that preserves metaphorical density, while others attempt **rhymed quatrains** to echo the original music.

8.2 Modern Uzbek lyric (e.g., Abdulla Oripov)

Oripov's work shows modern idioms, political engagement, and adaptability to translation—he himself translated major European poets into Uzbek. When translating modern Uzbek poets, translators often find more direct equivalence in

imagery and syntax than with classical poems, but they still face prosodic and cultural signification issues.

9. Conclusion

Uzbek and English poetic traditions offer complementary avenues of aesthetic pleasure and scholarly investigation. Their contrasting prosodic architectures (syllable-timed Uzbek vs. stress-timed English), divergent historical lineages, and distinct cultural functions produce different formal repertoires and translation challenges. Yet both traditions continue to adapt—modern Uzbek poets to global forms, English poets to world influences—creating productive ground for comparative poetics and for careful, creative translation that makes each tradition accessible without erasing its particularity. For journal publication, writers should combine rigorous contextualization, transparent translation methods, and attention to performative qualities to present Uzbek poetry effectively to English-language readers.

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