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ARTICLES

A Study of Discourse Markers in English and Uzbek (Transformation in Translation)

Safoyeva Sadokat Nasilloevna

1-3



The Variability of Event Interpretation in Social Media: A Literary Reflection Through Ray Bradbury's the Martian Chronicles

Usmonova Zarina Habibovna, Shodiyeva Dilshoda Sultonovna

4-9



The Comparative Analysis of Clothes in “Kite Runner” by Khaled Hosseini

Zarina Usmonova Habibovna, Azizabonu Khayrulloeva Tijiddinovna

10-14



Psycholinguistic Interpretation of Judith Mcnaught’s “Almost Heaven”

Usmonova Zarina Habibovna, Abduxolikova Afifa

15-18



ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Focus and Scope

Section Policies

Publication Frequency

Peer Review Process

Open Access Policy

Publication Ethics

Copyright & License

Plagiarism Policy

Article Retraction & Withdrawal

Articles Processing Charge

Indexing & Abstraction

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The Comparative Analysis of Clothes in “Kite Runner” by Khaled Hosseini

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Abstract: This article presents a comparative linguistic and cultural analysis of clothing symbolism in The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini, focusing on its role within Afghan, English, and Uzbek traditions. The study reveals how clothing in the novel transcends its practical function, serving as a powerful symbol of social class, ethnic identity, cultural assimilation, political control, and emotional states. Through the contrast between Amir's and Hassan's attire, the novel illustrates the deep-rooted social hierarchies in Afghan society. Amir's shift from traditional to Western clothing highlights his journey of cultural transformation, while the Taliban's imposition of dress codes reflects the use of clothing as a tool of political oppression. Furthermore, the metaphorical use of garments, such as blood-stained clothing symbolizing guilt and redemption, resonates with linguistic expressions found in both English and Uzbek cultures. By comparing these representations, the article demonstrates that clothing operates as a universal lingua-cultural marker, shaping identity, behavior, and emotional perception across different societies.

Keywords: Clothing Symbolism, Social Identity, Cultural Transformation, Power Dynamics, Linguo-Cultural Analysis, The Kite Runner, Afghan Dress, Uzbek Clothing Traditions, Westernization, Metaphorical Meaning of Clothes

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1. Introduction

Clothing is more than just a necessity; it is a cultural and linguistic marker that reflects identity, social status, transformation, and power dynamics. In literature, clothing often serves as a symbolic device, revealing deeper meanings about characters and their societal roles. The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini provides a rich context for analyzing clothing from a comparative, lingua-cultural perspective, as it portrays Afghan traditions alongside Western influences[1].

The novel presents clothing as a reflection of class and ethnicity, particularly through the contrast between Amir, a privileged Pashtun, and Hassan, a marginalized Hazara. Additionally, Amir's shift from traditional Afghan attire to Western clothing symbolizes his journey of cultural assimilation and personal transformation. The novel also explores clothing as a tool of power, particularly under the Taliban, whose strict dress codes reinforce political and social control. Furthermore, emotionally charged imagery, such as Hassan's blood-stained clothes, serves as a metaphor for guilt, honor, and redemption — themes that resonate in both English and Uzbek linguistic traditions.

By conducting a comparative analysis of clothing in *The Kite Runner*, this study examines how linguistic and cultural perspectives shape the meaning of attire in Afghan, English, and Uzbek traditions. Through this exploration, the article highlights how clothing functions as a universal yet culturally specific symbol that defines clothing in *The Kite Runner* serves as a powerful lingua-cultural element, carrying meanings beyond its basic function[2]. It reflects social class, personal transformation, power dynamics, and cultural identity, making it a valuable subject for linguistic and cultural analysis. This section explores clothing-related themes in the novel by comparing them with English and Uzbek linguistic expressions and cultural traditions.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a comparative linguistic and cultural analysis to examine the symbolic role of clothing in *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini[3]. The research focuses on identifying and interpreting clothing references within the novel and comparing them to similar linguistic expressions and cultural traditions in Uzbek and English contexts. The method includes qualitative textual analysis, with particular attention to metaphorical language, cultural symbolism, and social constructs reflected through attire. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study reveals how clothing functions as a lingua-cultural marker of identity, power, transformation, and emotional experience across different societies.

3. Results and Discussion

Entity, social hierarchy, and emotional expression

In many cultures, clothing signifies status, ethnicity, and profession, and this is evident in *The Kite Runner*.

Clothing as a Class Marker

In the novel, Amir and Hassan's clothing contrast their social standing. Amir, a privileged Pashtun, wears well-kept clothes, while Hassan, a Hazara servant, wears simpler and worn-out clothes[4].

In English culture, terms like "dressed to impress" or "rags to riches" show how clothing represents wealth and status.

In Uzbek linguistics and culture, expressions like *kiyim odamning nufuzini belgilaydi* (clothing defines a person's prestige) reinforce the importance of attire in social perception.

Clothing and Ethnicity in Afghan Culture

Afghan traditional clothing, such as *shalwar kameez*, often indicates regional and ethnic identity. Pashtuns and Hazaras traditionally wear distinct styles, which reflect their cultural backgrounds[5].

In Uzbek culture, *chopon*, *atlas ko'ylak*, and *do'ppi* serve a similar function, marking both social and regional identity.

In English-speaking cultures, regional and professional identities are often linked to clothing, such as Scottish kilts or business suits. Thus, clothing in *The Kite Runner* functions as a lingua-cultural marker that distinguishes characters' social and ethnic positions[6].

Clothing as a Symbol of Personal Transformation

Clothing in the novel represents character development and cultural adaptation, particularly in Amir's journey[7].

Westernization and Cultural Shifts

When Amir migrates to the U.S., he begins wearing Western attire, symbolizing his assimilation into American culture. When he returns to Afghanistan, he deliberately wears traditional Afghan clothing, marking his return to his cultural roots. This reflects Uzbek expressions like *milliy kiyimni unutmaslik* (not forgetting national dress) and *kiyim o'zgarar, ammo asl mohiyat o'zgarmas* (clothes change, but true essence remains).

In English, phrases like "a new suit, a new man" reflect how attire can symbolize transformation. This shift in attire highlights a lingua-cultural pattern where clothing signifies both physical and psychological changes.

Clothing and Power: Oppression and Control

In *The Kite Runner*, clothing is used as an instrument of power and control, particularly under the Taliban[8].

Taliban's Dress Codes and Political Control

The Taliban enforces strict clothing regulations, such as burqas for women and turbans for men, reinforcing their authority. Clothing in this context becomes a symbol of forced compliance and lost individual freedom.

Clothing Control in Uzbek and English Cultures

In Uzbek history, Soviet authorities imposed dress codes that discouraged traditional Uzbek attire like the paranja (a traditional veil). In English-speaking cultures, terms like "dress code enforcement" show how clothing regulations exist in various contexts, from schools to workplaces[9]. The Uzbek phrase "majburiy kiyinish" (forced dressing) is similar to the concept of "imposed attire" in English, showing how clothing rules shape identity and behavior. This theme in *The Kite Runner* demonstrates how dress can be a political tool, influencing personal freedoms in different cultures[10].

Clothing as a Symbol of Guilt, Shame, and Redemption

Clothing in *The Kite Runner* is not just about status or control; it also carries deep emotional and moral meanings.

Hassan's Blood-Stained Clothes: Guilt and Betrayal. One of the most striking images in the novel is Hassan's blood-stained clothes after his assault, representing his suffering and Amir's guilt[11].

In English, phrases like "stained reputation" or "blood on one's hands" metaphorically express guilt and wrongdoing. In Uzbek, the phrase *kiyimi dog' bo'ldi* (his clothes were stained) has a similar dual meaning, referring both to literal stains and moral disgrace[12].

Amir's Clothing During Redemption

Later in the novel, Amir wears traditional Afghan clothes when he returns to Kabul, symbolizing his attempt to cleanse himself of past mistakes. This reflects the Uzbek saying *toza kiyim, toza niyat* (clean clothes, pure intentions), emphasizing how clothing can symbolize a renewed conscience. By examining clothing-related metaphors and imagery, we see how dress functions as a linguistic and cultural expression of guilt and redemption.

The Universal Language of Clothing in Literature

The themes of clothing in *The Kite Runner* are not unique to Afghan culture but are linguistically and culturally universal. In Uzbek culture, traditional dress (*chopon, atlas, do'ppi*) is often linked to identity, similar to the Afghan *shalwar kameez*. In English literature and culture, clothing is frequently used to express class, transformation, and oppression, just as in *The Kite Runner*. The lingua-cultural parallels between Uzbek, English, and Afghan clothing metaphors show how clothing serves as a symbolic language across cultures[13].

4. Conclusion

Clothing in *The Kite Runner* is more than just fabric; it is a lingua-cultural signifier that carries social, personal, and political meanings. By analyzing clothing-related themes in the novel and comparing them with Uzbek and English linguistic and cultural traditions, we see how dress functions as a symbol of identity, transformation, power, and emotion. The way people perceive, describe, and regulate clothing is deeply rooted in their language and cultural experiences, making *The Kite Runner* a compelling text for lingua-cultural analysis.

Amir's shift from traditional Afghan clothing to Western attire symbolizes his cultural assimilation and inner conflict, while his return to Afghan dress upon revisiting his homeland represents his moral and emotional transformation. This reflects a universal

lingua-cultural pattern, where attire is not only linked to external appearance but also serves as a metaphor for personal growth and redemption. Similarly, expressions in English and Uzbek, such as “a new suit, a new man” and “kiyim o’zgarar, ammo asl mohiyat o’zgarmas” (clothes change, but true essence remains), highlight the symbolic function of clothing in shaping identity[14-15].

Moreover, clothing in the novel is used as a tool of power and oppression, particularly under the Taliban, who enforce strict dress codes to control social behavior. This reflects historical dress regulations in Uzbek culture, such as the Soviet-era suppression of traditional garments, and dress codes in English-speaking societies that reinforce social and institutional norms. The symbolism of Hassan’s blood-stained clothes further reinforces how attire can embody guilt, suffering, and redemption, illustrating a linguistic and cultural connection between physical appearance and inner emotions.

Through a comparative analysis of clothing in *The Kite Runner*, this study demonstrates that attire serves as both a universal and culturally specific symbol. While clothing functions as an indicator of social status, cultural identity, and personal change across different traditions, its meanings are shaped by historical, political, and linguistic contexts. This analysis highlights how literature can provide a deeper understanding of lingua-cultural interactions, revealing the ways in which language, culture, and symbolism intersect through everyday elements like clothing.

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