

**CRIMINAL LEXICON: EXPLORING SOCIALLY LIMITED VOCABULARY IN
THE WORKS OF TAKHIR MALIK**

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the employment of criminal vocabulary within the literary framework of Takhir Malik, a distinguished Uzbek writer known for his intricate portrayal of society and its fringes. Through a detailed linguistic analysis of Malik's texts, this study identifies and explores the socially limited vocabulary that distinguishes and characterizes the criminal elements within his narratives. The research focuses on how these specialized terms not only shape the reader's perception of the characters but also reflect broader socio-cultural realities and tensions. By dissecting the usage, context, and function of criminal jargon in Malik's works, the paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of linguistic strategies in literature as tools for social commentary and cultural reflection. The findings highlight the potential of literary text as a medium for examining the intersection of language, identity, and social structure.

Keywords: Takhir Malik, criminal vocabulary, socially limited vocabulary, linguistic analysis, Uzbek literature, socio-cultural commentary, literary linguistics, narrative identity, language and society, textual analysis.

In the realm of scientific and educational discourse, the concept of social dialects frequently emerges. These dialects often diverge from the norms of standard literary language, presenting themselves as distinct linguistic forms. It is posited in numerous scholarly sources that social dialects serve as a medium to uncover various facets of literary language and represent a specific stratum within the national language.

The field of sociolinguistics employs the term "sociolect" to describe a lexicon that is socially restricted. A sociolect is a linguistic variant that evolves within verbal interactions among individuals who share common social attributes, thereby aligning speech patterns with specific social contexts. This form of language does not encompass a complete communication system; rather, it is primarily defined by its vocabulary and grammar, which closely resemble those of the national language.

Sociolects are categorized into types such as argot, jargon, and slang, each associated with particular social classes. Jargon, for instance, comprises specialized terms and phrases that enable members of a group to set themselves apart linguistically. An example of this can be seen in the vocabulary of alcohol consumers, where terms like “white” for vodka and “red” for wine are used.

The distinction between slang and argot is often blurred in linguistic studies. However, unlike slang, which is an overtly secretive and constructed language used by specific groups to obscure communication from outsiders, argot exemplifies a secretive nature, making it prevalent among hidden societal elements such as spies, criminals, and drug users. This secretive aspect is illustrated by the use of terms like “shman” (to steal) in thief slang.

Overall, these linguistic phenomena highlight the intricate relationship between language, identity, and social structure, serving as tools for both inclusion within, and exclusion from, certain societal circles.

In Tohir Malik’s novel “Shaytanat (Devildom)”, the depiction of characters within the criminal underworld is enriched by the use of distinctive nicknames that reflect the characters’ varied destinies, appearances, temperaments, and worldviews. These nicknames, often employed as proper nouns within the narrative, serve as a significant device for characterization and social commentary.

The term “laqab” originates from Arabic, denoting a name given in jest or derision based on an individual’s characteristic traits, which can include physical attributes, behaviors, or occupational roles¹. In Malik’s work, such nicknames transcend mere identifiers, becoming emblematic of the characters’ identities and social functions. For example, names such as Kesakpolvon, Chuvrindi, O’qilon, Suvilon, Bo’tqa, Xumkalla, G’ilay, Bo’ri, Qassob, and Hovuz polvon are not merely labels but encapsulate the essence of the individuals they represent.

These nicknames are assigned based on a variety of factors, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human identity. They can denote tribal or clan affiliations, physical deficiencies, personality traits, speech patterns, peculiarities in dress, professions, nationalities, and other distinguishing features. By doing so, they provide insights into the socio-cultural context of the characters, revealing both commendable and objectionable traits.

Nicknames, or “laqab”, are an integral part of Uzbek culture, often reflecting an individual’s physical appearance, character traits, or significant actions. The attribution of a nickname is a nuanced process that combines observation with cultural context, resulting in a moniker that is both descriptive and, at times, evaluative.

¹ Explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language. -Moscow: Russian language. 1981

Nicknames can be derived from an individual's physical features, such as "Xumkalla" (pot head) or "G'ilay" (cross-eyed), which highlight notable external characteristics. Alternatively, they can reflect personality traits or behaviors, as seen with "O'qilon" (smart snake) or "Suvilon" (water snake), where the names are metaphorical representations of character. Furthermore, nicknames often originate from significant actions or professions, such as "Kesakpolvon" (clod strongman) or "Qassob" (butcher), providing insight into an individual's occupation or notable deeds.

The dual nature of nicknames, capable of being either positive or negative, depends heavily on the context and intention behind their use. For instance, in the novel "Shaytanat" by Tohir Malik, the protagonist Haydar Asrorov is given the nickname "Kesakpolvon". This moniker is not a straightforward reflection of his physicality but is deeply embedded in a narrative of social interactions and personal history. In the novel, it is explained that the nickname "Kesakpolvon" emerged not because of Haydar's physical build—contrary to what one might assume given the robust connotations of "polvon" (strongman)—but from an incident involving a failed theft. Haydar, known for his deftness in cutting belts (a metaphor for stealing money), mistakenly steals a belt containing clods of dirt instead of money. This event, marked by both irony and misfortune, leads to his naming as "Kesakpolvon", a term that humorously undercuts his perceived strength with the image of worthless clods².

The fictional portrayal of organized crime often includes the use of specialized criminal jargon that may be opaque to the uninitiated. This analysis focuses on the criminal lexicon within the narrative of a criminal group led by Asadbek, as depicted in the text. Specifically, we examine terms that convey nuanced meanings within the criminal underworld, emphasizing their contextual significance and the implications for understanding criminal behavior and communication.

In the novel, the term "Akademik" is used not as a mere nickname but as a designation for a highly experienced and authoritative criminal. The passage highlights that "Akademik" refers to an individual with unmatched proficiency in theft: "Akademik — o'g'ri. O'g'rilikda unga teng keladigani yo'q"³. The criminal lexicon categorizes "Akademik" as a seasoned and respected figure within the criminal hierarchy, a definition corroborated by criminological dictionaries which describe "Akademik" as a veteran criminal or an authority figure.

The phrase "katta ov bo'ladi", spoken by the character Fedya, translates to "a big hunt will take place"⁴. This phrase is emblematic of the clandestine language used by criminals to discuss significant criminal activities without drawing undue attention. In this context, "ov" or

² T.Malik. Shaytanat.5-jildlik, 1-jild. -Toshkent: O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2018. P 71

³ T.Malik. Shaytanat.5-jildlik, 1-jild. -Toshkent: O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2018. P 225

⁴ T.Malik. Shaytanat.5-jildlik, 1-jild. -Toshkent: O'zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2018. P 328

“hunt” metaphorically represents a major criminal operation or heist. The use of such terminology is instrumental in planning and executing crimes while maintaining a veil of secrecy.

In the narrative, the term “o‘lja” is employed to refer to a target of retribution. This term, which typically means “prey”, is repurposed within the criminal lexicon to signify a person or entity marked for vengeance or exploitation. The metaphorical use of hunting terminology, such as “o‘lja”, underscores the predatory nature of the criminal world, wherein individuals are often reduced to targets or commodities.

The language used by criminal groups and adolescents in literary works often features a distinct set of terms and expressions that reflect their subcultural identity. In the novel we observe a rich tapestry of such language that offers insight into the vernacular of these groups. For instance, the term “bekor aytibsan, itvachcha”⁵ is a harsh rebuke, indicating the use of aggressive and confrontational language. The character Elchin expresses surprise and anger when his expected victim defiles the name of Noila, showing how personal and familial honor can be invoked in these interactions. Similarly, the phrase “hammasi pishdi”⁶ used by Jamshid signifies the completion of a task, akin to saying “everything is settled” or “everything is ready”. The term “shumon qilib ketishibdi” means “they have stolen it”, demonstrating the euphemistic and coded language employed to discuss criminal activities. Moreover, in the criminal underworld, the term “gumdon qilmoq” or “yo‘qotmoq”⁷ is used to describe the act of killing, showcasing the use of various euphemisms to mask the brutality of their actions.

Another notable term is “paxani”, used to describe the most powerful and influential member of a group, akin to a gang leader or chief thief. Interestingly, the author uses this term in place of “father”, indicating a hierarchical and possibly paternalistic structure within the group. The word “mentlar” refers to police officers, and “xitlashibdi” denotes the detection of a crime by the authorities. The use of these terms highlights the distrust and adversarial relationship between the criminals and law enforcement.

The language further illustrates the strategic and calculated nature of criminal activities. For example, “Ular tayyor, prokuror ozgina kavlashtirsin, birdan ro‘para qilsak, xitlashadi”⁸ reveals a tactical approach to dealing with law enforcement and legal proceedings. The mention of the “sho‘pir” being followed and the anticipation of him “gullaydi” (talking) indicates the planned manipulation and exploitation of informants or witnesses.

The renowned writer Tohir Malik’s detective novel “Shaytanat” offers an insightful exploration into the secretive and coded language of the criminal world. The character

⁵ T.Malik. Shaytanat.5-jildlik, 1-jild. -Toshkent: O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2018. P 204

⁶ T.Malik. Shaytanat.5-jildlik, 2-jild. -Toshkent: O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2018. P 17

⁷ T.Malik. Shaytanat.5-jildlik, 2-jild. -Toshkent: O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2018. P 17

⁸ T.Malik. Shaytanat.5-jildlik, 2-jild. -Toshkent: O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2018. P 122

Kesakpolvon, who uses phrases such as “they’ll hit, stamp, speak fluently, I’ve set them up”, exemplifies this unique vernacular. Such expressions are part of a lexicon that is comprehensible primarily to members of the criminal fraternity.

In one particular scene, the phrase “Sharif is drawing from the dry” is used, which metaphorically denotes “smoking marijuana”. This term also extends to meanings like “becoming addicted to needles” or “getting hooked on drugs”. Malik’s novel not only delves into the clandestine activities and intrigues of the criminal underworld but also emphasizes the psychological landscape of its characters. The narrative thus provides a dual focus: the unfolding of criminal events and the intricate inner worlds of the protagonists.

Our analysis concentrates on the specific jargon employed by the criminals in the novel. To enhance this study, we utilized minor dictionaries of thieves’, swindlers’, and prison slang compiled through the research of linguists such as Boduen de Courtenay, V.M.Popov, and other foreign linguists. These lexicons illuminate the specialized language that facilitates covert communication among criminals, allowing them to operate with a degree of opacity and exclusivity.

Malik’s adept use of this jargon not only authenticates the portrayal of his characters but also enriches the narrative by providing readers with a glimpse into a world where language itself becomes a tool of secrecy and power. By focusing on the criminals’ use of language, the novel underscores the broader theme of how communication shapes and reflects the identities and operations within clandestine communities.

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