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Religious Lexicon in the Uzbek Language: Approaches, Characteristics, and Lexicographic Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Islamic religious lexicon (religionyms) in contemporary Uzbek from a linguistic, sociocultural, and lexicographic perspective. Drawing on scientists' analysis of religious vocabulary in Uzbek dictionaries, as well as recent scholarship on the origin, structure, and use of religious terms in Uzbek, we analyze the etymological sources, semantic dynamics, productivity, synonymy, homonymy, stylistic constraints, and the need for specialized lexicographic resources. The findings suggest that (1) religious lexicon in Uzbek is deeply rooted in cultural and national identity; (2) it is predominantly borrowed from Arabic, with significant contributions from Persian-Tajik; (3) it has limited internal morphological productivity; (4) semantic narrowing and broadening processes shape its evolution; (5) synonymy is rare and primarily a result of cross-language borrowing; (6) homonymy is largely external; and (7) the current lexicographic coverage is insufficient, underscoring the need for a comprehensive explanatory dictionary. Our study contributes to teolinguistics, sociolinguistics, and lexicography, and suggests practical implications for dictionary compilers, translators, and educators.

Keywords: religious lexicon, religionyms, Uzbek language, semantic change, borrowings.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Religion and language are deeply interwoven in many cultures. In Uzbekistan, the Uzbek language reflects centuries of Islamic influence through a rich layer of religious vocabulary that expresses theological, ritual, and ethical concepts. The study of *religionyms* — lexical items denoting religious ideas, practices, or objects — is essential for understanding how linguistic forms mediate religious experience, cultural identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Although some research addresses Islamic terminology in Uzbek, there remains a gap in systematic linguistic and lexicographic analysis that integrates structural, semantic, sociolinguistic, and practical aspects. In particular, this paper provides a foundation for understanding the complex interplay between vocabulary, culture, and dictionary practices. By building on the insights, the article aims to articulate a coherent linguistic account of Uzbek religious lexicon, examine its morphosemantic and pragmatic features, and propose directions for lexicographic development.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teolinguistics, as the study of religious language, provides crucial theoretical grounding. Galieva (2018) describes how religious vocabulary forms a special subsystem marked by limited productivity and high semantic stability. This aligns with classical perspectives: Samarin (1976) argued that religious lexicon is often conservative, resistant to innovation, and transmitted with minimal change across generations. Van Noppen (1981) emphasized that religious discourse is not only about meaning but also about ritual, authority, and communal identity. In Islamic contexts, this is particularly salient, since Arabic as the liturgical and sacred language contributes to the prestige and continuity of religious terms.

Recent studies highlight that Arabic borrowings dominate Uzbek Islamic terminology. Khakimov (2024) in his article “*The Role of Religious Words in the Uzbek Language*” shows how Arabic and Persian-Tajik terms were integrated following the spread of Islam. Mavlonov (2024) contrasts religious terms in English and Uzbek, noting that Uzbek’s religious vocabulary reflects deep Arabic influence alongside Persian legacy. Sulaymanova (2023) further explores difficulties in translating Arabic-Islamic

borrowings from Uzbek into English, underscoring the semantic depth and contextual specificity of these terms. The need for specialized dictionaries of religious terminology in Uzbek has been recognized. Choriyeva (2022) studies religious lexical units — especially personal nouns — in Uzbek explanatory, thematic, and terminological dictionaries.

To'ychiyeva's article "*Religionimlarni tadqiq etishda turli yondashuvlar*" (2024) analyzes how restricted-layer vocabulary (religion) is treated in current Uzbek dictionaries and argues for a more systematic treatment. The analysis, published in the *Bulletin of Gulistan State University*, has become foundational for understanding the lexicographic gaps.

The pragmatics of religious lexicon in Uzbek has been investigated by Sadriddinzoda (2024), who studies how religious terms function in everyday speech, public discourse, and moral guidance.

Translation studies provide insight as well: Karimjonova (2025) examines the equivalence and translation strategies of terms in Uzbek and English versions of Nawawi's *Forty Hadith*, highlighting semantic, cultural, and terminological challenges.

Lexicographers also examine the origins and semantics of Uzbek words. Ahmedova (2023) examines the *Etymological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* as a resource for semantic expansion and homonymy.

These streams of research provide a theoretical and empirical basis for the present study, which aims to synthesize linguistic, semantic, and lexicographic dimensions of the Uzbek religious lexicon.

III. METHODS

To address our research questions, we employ a multi-method approach combining linguistic analysis, corpus-based investigation, and lexicographic evaluation. The core of our analysis relies on different published scientific research articles on the topic, including

data, arguments, and examples, given in these papers. The paper also examines etymological origins by comparing Uzbek religionyms with Arabic and Persian forms as discussed in the literature. The study surveys current Uzbek explanatory, thematic, and terminological dictionaries (drawing from Choriyeva's research) to assess coverage and identify gaps; and interpret the linguistic data in light of sociocultural dynamics in Uzbekistan, referencing recent sociolinguistic and translational studies. By combining these methods, we aim to produce a comprehensive profile of the Uzbek religious lexicon's structure, use, and lexicographic needs.

IV. RESULTS

This section presents the main findings derived from the analysis:

1. Cultural Centrality and Lexical Identity. We argue that religious vocabulary in Uzbek is a "*limited layer of actively used lexicon*" in modern dictionaries. According to our notes, religionyms are not peripheral but constitute a culturally marked subsystem: they are intimately tied to worldview, ethical norms, and social consciousness – the language of social consciousness in Uzbekistan includes worldviews, moral norms, and behavior determined by faith in supernatural reality. Thus, religionyms are not marginal borrowings but form part of the *core symbolic fabric* of Uzbek linguistic culture.

2. Etymological Sources: Arabic Dominance and Persian-Tajik Contributions. The article traces a significant proportion of Uzbek religionyms to Arabic, reflecting common Islamic terminological inheritance. For example, she discusses the word *islom* (Islam), noting that it comes directly from Arabic *islām* and retains its canonical meaning of "submission" or "obedience" to God. We also highlight Persian-Tajik borrowings: certain theological and religious institutions or terms came into Uzbek not only from Arabic but via Persian cultural channels. For instance, she mentions that vocabulary of religious learning (madrasah, mulla, etc.) often passed through Persian linguistic mediation. This etymological layering demonstrates historical contact: Arabic as liturgical, Persian as cultural, and Uzbek as inheritor and adapter.

3. Productivity and Morphological Constraints. One of the paper's key findings is the *limited internal productivity* of the religious lexicon. She argues that unlike

scientific or technical terminology, religionyms in Uzbek rarely generate novel derivatives. There are very few newly coined Uzbek religious words formed by native affixation; instead, existing Arabic or Persian forms are maintained. This morphological conservatism ensures terminological stability but limits creative lexical growth.

4. Synonymy: Cross-linguistic, Not Internal. Synonymy within religionyms is *rare* in Uzbek itself. Most apparent synonyms are the result of *multilingual borrowing*, e.g., an Arabic term and a Persian or Turkic equivalent coexisting. For instance, we can mention the terms such as *ma'rifat* (Arabic) vs. its Persian-derived counterparts, which may overlap in meaning but retain distinct usage contexts. This points to *functional specialization rather than free synonymy*.

5. Homonymy: External Rather Than Internal. Internal homonymy (i.e., religious terms having multiple unrelated meanings within the religious subsystem) is practically absent. When homonymy occurs, it is *external*: a religionym overlaps with a general-language word. For example, a word borrowed from Arabic may have developed a non-religious meaning in Uzbek, but this is a cross-system phenomenon rather than an ambiguity internal to religious lexicon.

6. Semantic Dynamics: Narrowing, Broadening, and Metaphor. The paper identifies key semantic processes in the evolution of Uzbek religionyms:

- Semantic narrowing: Some religionyms have become more specialized. She gives examples such as *minbar* (originally a general physical platform) becoming strictly associated with the pulpit in a mosque.

- Semantic broadening: In other cases, religious terms expand beyond their strictly ritual or doctrinal domain. To'ychiyeva points to words like *ziyosat* (pilgrimage) being used metaphorically or in broader cultural contexts.

- Metaphorization: Some religious words become metaphoric in poetic or artistic texts, but their core is preserved in religious discourse.

7. Stylistic and Pragmatic Constraints. Religious texts (e.g., sermons, theological writings) impose *normative constraints* on terminological usage: religionyms must be

semantically precise, and authors avoid creative shifts that might compromise doctrinal clarity. Conversely, in artistic or literary contexts, religionyms may appear metaphorically or symbolically, yet authors still respect their core meanings. For example, in poetry or prose, *ruh* (soul) may be used metaphorically, but its religious conceptual identity remains intact.

8. Lexicographic Gaps and the Need for a Specialized Dictionary. We strongly emphasize the *deficiencies in existing Uzbek dictionaries*. General explanatory, thematic, or terminological dictionaries do not adequately capture the semantic richness, historical depth, and functional nuance of religionyms. According to the analysis results, a specialized *Explanatory Dictionary of Islamic Religionyms in Uzbek* is needed to document:

- etymological paths (Arabic, Persian, etc.),
- semantic developments (narrowing/broadening),
- stylistic constraints (sacred vs. literary usage),
- pragmatic functions (ritual, ethical, communal),
- cross-linguistic synonyms,
- sociocultural contexts.

Such a dictionary would serve linguists, translators, educators, theologians, and the general public.

9. Sociolinguistic and Cultural Significance. Finally, the results underscore that religionyms are not merely linguistic artifacts but *markers of cultural and religious identity* in Uzbekistan. Their preservation and precise transmission contribute to intergenerational continuity of religious knowledge and national spiritual identity.

V. DISCUSSION

Based on the results outlined above — especially those drawn from recently published papers — several broader observations emerge, contextualizing the Uzbek religious lexicon in theoretical, sociolinguistic, and lexicographic frames.

1. The Conservatism of Religious Vocabulary. The finding that Uzbek religionyms show very limited internal productivity aligns with teolinguistic theory.

Religious vocabulary, especially in Islam, is often considered *sacred*, authoritative, and historically stable (Galieva, 2018; Samarin, 1976). The reliance on inherited forms rather than native derivation helps preserve doctrinal fidelity and minimize semantic drift.

2. Borrowing as a Cultural Bridge. The dominant Arabic source of many religionyms underscores the unity of the Islamic intellectual tradition: Arabic remains the language of revelation (Qur'ān), theological commentary, and ritual. The additional layer of Persian-Tajik borrowings reflects historical cultural exchange: Persian was historically a scholarly lingua franca in Central Asia, and many religious institutions used Persian alongside Arabic. In Uzbek, this leads to a rich, stratified lexicon that embodies both canonical and cultural inheritances.

3. Semantic Change and Adaptation. Semantic narrowing and broadening processes in religionyms reflect the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. Narrowing (e.g., *minbar*) ensures technical precision in religious discourse, whereas broadening (e.g., *ziyarat*) enables metaphorical and cultural expansion. Rather than being static, religionyms adapt to changing linguistic and social contexts, though always within constrained boundaries.

4. Stylistic and Pragmatic Regulation. The dual register usage — precise in religious texts, metaphorical in literature — demonstrates how religionyms function across genres. In theological discourse, misuse or overextension could lead to doctrinal confusion, so usage remains controlled. In literary contexts, writers exploit the symbolic resonance of religionyms but do so responsibly, maintaining respect for their sacred meaning.

5. Lexicographic Imperative. The lexicographic gaps are compelling. Existing dictionaries (explanatory, thematic, terminological) do not adequately serve the needs of various stakeholders: religious scholars, translators, educators, and laypeople. A specialized dictionary, as she proposes, would document not just definitions but also diachronic, semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic information.

6. Sociocultural and Educational Implications. In a post-Soviet Uzbekistan, where religious identity has experienced revival, precise knowledge of religious vocabulary is important for education, interfaith dialogue, and cultural preservation. A well-developed dictionary would not only preserve linguistic heritage but also support the accurate transmission of religious knowledge across generations and contexts.

7. Complementarity with Translation Studies. The importance of translation issues (as discussed by Karimjonova, Sulaymanova, and others) reinforces the lexicographic argument. Translating religious texts (e.g., Hadith) requires deep understanding of term equivalence, cultural connotation, and semantic nuance. A descriptive and normative resource focused on religionyms would greatly assist translators, particularly in working between Uzbek and English or other languages.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study integrates linguistic, semantic, sociocultural, and lexicographic dimensions to provide a comprehensive portrait of Islamic religious vocabulary in Uzbek. The major contributions and conclusions are as follows:

1. **Cultural Centrality:** Religionyms in Uzbek form a culturally marked and nationally significant subsystem, closely tied to religious consciousness and moral values.
2. **Etymological Stratification:** The lexicon draws predominantly from Arabic, complemented by Persian-Tajik borrowings, reflecting historical scholarly and cultural contacts.
3. **Morphological Conservatism:** The subsystem shows minimal internal productivity, maintaining stability across generations by conserving canonical forms.
4. **Semantic Dynamics:** Processes of narrowing, broadening, and metaphorization shape the evolution of religionyms, though within restricted registers.

5. **Synonymy and Homonymy:** Synonymy is rare and mainly cross-linguistic; homonymy occurs primarily between religious and general vocabulary rather than within religionyms.
6. **Stylistic Regulation:** Use is regulated by genre: religious discourse demands precision, while literary contexts allow symbolic uses.
7. **Lexicographic Necessity:** There is a clear need for a dedicated *Explanatory Dictionary of Islamic Religionyms in Uzbek* that captures etymology, semantics, usage, and pragmatics.
8. **Sociolinguistic Relevance:** In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, religionyms contribute to cultural identity, educational practices, and the intergenerational transmission of religious knowledge.
9. **Translation Support:** A specialized lexicon would support translators and religious educators in navigating equivalence and nuance between Uzbek, Arabic, English, and other languages.

Future Directions

Based on this study, future research and practical steps should include:

- Compiling a **comprehensive corpus** of religionyms from religious texts, literary texts, spoken discourse, and media, to analyze frequency, usage, and variation.
- Developing the **proposed explanatory dictionary**, ideally in a digital format, with cross-referencing, etymology, usage examples, and semantic notes.
- Conducting **psycholinguistic and educational studies** to assess how Uzbek speakers (especially youth) understand, use, and internalize religionyms.

- Collaborating with **translators and theologians** to standardize rendering of religionyms in translations of religious texts, ensuring semantic fidelity and cultural resonance.

In sum, the religious lexicon of Uzbek constitutes a vital and distinctive aspect of the language — a subsystem that merits systematic linguistic and lexicographic documentation. Addressing this need would enrich scholarship and serve broader social, cultural, and educational goals.

The analysis confirms that differing worldviews lead to the formation of a **linguacultural barrier**, complicating direct interlingual equivalence. Phraseological units with animal components that lack full lexical or semantic equivalents – especially within the German-Uzbek pair – are frequently rendered through descriptive or approximate translation. This tendency indicates the presence of culturally significant information embedded in such expressions, revealing their function as carriers of national-specific connotations and symbolic meanings.

Furthermore, the same zoonym may exhibit a **semantic ambivalence** that depends on the sociocultural context. For instance, the German *Hund* ('dog') often conveys universally negative associations – such as baseness, contempt, or moral degradation – yet in certain contexts may also embody positive traits like loyalty and devotion. This duality underscores the complex interaction between universal cognitive models and culture-specific value systems in phraseological semantics.

Future research in this area should be directed toward a more detailed and systematic analysis of phraseological units incorporating the names of less frequent biological classes – such as insects, reptiles, and amphibians – in order to achieve a more comprehensive reconstruction of the national linguistic picture of the world. Expanding the corpus of analyzed data will not only deepen the understanding of metaphorical and symbolic processes in German and Uzbek but also contribute to the broader field of contrastive phraseology and cognitive linguistics by elucidating the universal and particular mechanisms of conceptualization in different linguistic cultures.

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