

Translating Uzbek Criminal Argot And Prison Jargon Into Russian Through Corpus Analysis

Makhmudova Yulduz Askarovna

Lecturer, Department of Russian Language and Literature
Bukhara State University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan
ORCID 0009-0002-4369-2433

Abstract. The paper analyses how criminal argot and prison jargon in Tahir Malik's novel Shaytanat move from Uzbek into Russian. Working from a sentence aligned Uzbek to Russian parallel corpus of the novel and its 2016 Russian version, the author sorts translation solutions into functional analog, restoration of borrowed fenya, low colloquial compensation, calque, transcription, and neutralization. The source speech proves heavily russified, carrying criminal slang such as otvechayt, shikalad, and братишка, so translation often restores a Russian original rather than replacing it. Neutralization, a minority solution, produces the register loss that corpus based translation research links to normalization.

Keywords: criminal argot, prison jargon, fenya, Uzbek-Russian translation, parallel corpus, corpus-based translation studies, functional analog, compensation, substandard lexis, anti-language, Tahir Malik.

Introduction. In the closing years of Soviet power, organized crime moved from the edges of Uzbek life toward its center. Fiction noticed first. Building the five books of Shaytanat between 1992 and 2011, Tahir Malik gave the bosses, enforcers, and inmates of that world a speech that breaks with the literary norm at almost every turn. Malik knew the material at first hand, having taught for years at the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the exactness of the criminal speech in the novel reflects it. This speech the present study takes as its object, following its criminal argot and prison jargon across into Russian. Because Russian owns one of the richest and best documented argotic inventories in Europe, the move from Uzbek into Russian raises an unusual problem rather than a routine question of equivalence.

At the outset, two facts shape the analysis. The speech of Malik's criminals is already Russian in good part, carrying borrowed items such as otvechayt (to answer for one's words), shikalad (all is well), and братишка (little brother) straight from the Russian criminal argot called fenya. For a low resource pair like Uzbek and Russian, aligned data of any kind is scarce, so a purpose built corpus of one novel already offers something usable. Built from the novel and its 2016 Russian version, an aligned parallel corpus then lets the analyst count, rather than assert, how often a borrowed original returns, yields to a native Russian equivalent, or drops into neutral prose.

Methods. The material was assembled into a sentence aligned Uzbek to Russian parallel corpus drawn from the five books of Shaytanat and their Russian version, after which every stretch of criminal or prison speech was tagged by hand. At the base, alignment moved from chapter and paragraph anchors down to sentence pairs, and doubtful pairs were settled by hand so that each Uzbek sentence pointed to its Russian counterpart. Producing keyword in context lines for each argotic item, concordancing let meaning be read from actual usage rather than a dictionary gloss. Every tagged token recorded its source form, donor language, book and page, dictionary meaning, contextual sense, Russian correspondence, and solution label, so that the same table could be queried from any of those fields. Next, contrastive analysis set each Uzbek unit beside its Russian correspondence, and that correspondence was checked against the standard lexicography of Russian argot compiled by D. S. Baldaev, M. A. Grachev, and V. M. Mokienko and T. G. Nikitina [10; 7; 9]. Where an item was borrowed, etymological probing sorted it by donor language and set the Russian sources apart from the far rarer English ones. Each solution received a label from a six part scheme covering functional analog, restoration of the borrowed original, low colloquial compensation, calque, transcription, and neutralization. In the end, frequencies were counted for every label, which turned impressionistic claims about register loss into figures that other analysts can reproduce.

Literature Review. Within Russian scholarship the study of criminal speech begins with D. S. Likhachev, who treated thieves' cant not as a cipher but as the expression of a whole outlook [1]. V. D.

Bondaletov placed such formations inside social dialectology and set out the tasks of a socially grounded linguistics [11]. Building the modern lexicography, V. S. Elistratov, M. A. Grachev, V. M. Mokienko and T. G. Nikitina, and D. S. Baldaev fixed tens of thousands of argotic units with glosses and grammar [8; 7; 9; 10]. While Russian argotology matured, M. A. K. Halliday gave the wider field a term for the phenomenon, the anti language of a counter society [2]. On the translation side, S. Vlahov and S. Florin devoted a chapter to substandard speech and its rendering, a discussion resting in turn on A. V. Fyodorov and joined to the general account of equivalence in V. N. Komissarov [3; 4; 12]. M. Baker opened the corpus based study of translation, and S. Laviosa turned its findings into a working method with claims about normalization and simplification [5; 13]. Against this background, the speech of Malik's criminals has drawn Uzbek attention as well, notably in the sociolinguistic description by S. Abdialimova, which catalogues borrowed items in the novel with book and page [17].

Results. The criminal speech of Shaytanat draws a hard line between insiders and outsiders. As M. A. K. Halliday put it in the study that named the type, “An anti-language serves to create and maintain social structure through conversation, just as an everyday language does; but the social structure is of a particular kind, in which certain elements are strongly foregrounded. This gives to the anti-language a special character in which metaphorical modes of expression are the norm” [2]. Naming the underworld itself, the title word shaytanat (devildom, the realm of satans) already performs this foregrounding, since it recasts a criminal order as a metaphysical one. Inside the novel the mechanism shows in the monikers that replace ordinary names, so that a boss becomes O'qilon (arrow snake), a strongman Kesakpolvon (clod wrestler), a captured academician a mere tuz (salt), and lesser men answer to Shilimshiq (the slimy one), Bo'ydoq (the bachelor), or Otarchi (the singer) [15; 17].

Beyond secrecy, the argot carries a way of seeing, which is why S. Abdialimova ties the speech of these characters to their break with the standard, observing that «Aynan ushbu hayot tarzi ularning adabiy til normalariga umuman e'tibor qilmasliklariga (adabiy til normalari haqida tushunchaga ega emasliklari ham ehtimoldan xoli emas), har qanday idora yoki jamoat joyida ham faqat so'zlashuv uslubidan foydalanishlariga zamin yaratgan» (this very way of life is what makes them ignore the literary norm altogether and keep to the colloquial style in any office or public place) [17]. Writing already in 1935 from material gathered among convicts, D. S. Likhachev fixed the deeper point in words still worth citing in full, «Всеобщим убеждением, ведущим свое происхождение еще с первых столкновений „легального“ общества с воровской речью в XV—XVI вв., является убеждение в ее „тайном“ и „условном“ характере. Этот слабо обоснованный взгляд, иногда совершенно откровенно роднящий воровскую речь с тарабарщиной, с шифром, с воляпюком, есть своего рода „коллективное представление“ исследователей, принятое на веру» (the belief in the secret and conditional character of thieves' speech, dating from the first clashes between legal society and that speech in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is a scholars' collective assumption taken on faith) [1]. Malik's underworld speaks in this key throughout. In the first book a strongman goads a younger man with «Men seni erkak deb yursam, hebbim ekansan-ku» (I took you for a man, but you turn out to be a nobody) and orders violence with «Qon chiqmaydigan joyiga ur» (strike him where no blood shows) [15, б. 348-349; 17]. Contempt the bosses voice through animal and food words, calling a weakling xunasa and dismissing a rival as Bo'tqa (porridge) [17].

Table 1. Russian and English origin argotic borrowings in the speech of the criminal characters in Shaytanat

Source form	Donor etymon	Literal sense	Sense in criminal use	Book, page	Russian correspondence
oddix	отдых	rest	day off, a lull in dealings	I, 51	отдых, передышка
чўрний пояс	чёрный пояс	black belt	mark of fighting status	II, 381	чёрный пояс
shikalad	шоколад	chocolate	all sorted, fine	II, 385	(всё) в шоколаде

братишка	брат	little brother	fellow member of the group	II	братишка, братан
otvechayt	отвечать	to answer	to be accountable for one's words	III	отвечать за базар
bo'ss	boss (Eng.)	boss	chief, leader	II	босс, хозяин
no problem	no problem (Eng.)	no problem	assent, no obstacle	III, 518	без проблем, не вопрос

On the question of method, S. Vlahov and S. Florin state the default plainly, «при жаргоне, арго и сленге самым естественным, бесспорно, будет прибегнуть к функциональным аналогам при наличии их в ПЯ» (with jargon, argot, and slang the most natural course is beyond doubt to resort to functional analogs when the target language has them) [3]. The Uzbek to Russian pair makes that course easier than usual, because many source items are Russian slang to begin with and their functional analog is simply the original. Restoring *otvechayt* to the Russian criminal formula *отвечать за базар*, or *shikalad* to the phrase *всё в шоколаде*, the translator recovers a native *fenya* reading that the Uzbek text had only borrowed [10; 9]. Plainer still are *oddix* and *чўрний пояс*, where the Uzbek page merely spells *отдых* and *чёрный пояс* in Latin letters, so the Russian version does little more than write them back in Cyrillic [15, б. 51, 381].

Not every item has a ready twin, and for the remainder the same authors point to compensation. Where no correspondence exists, S. Vlahov and S. Florin (1980) hold that «при отсутствии соответствий или функциональных аналогов, переводчик может прибегнуть к просторечию, которое и придаст переводимому тексту необходимую характеристику отклонения от литературной нормы» (in the absence of correspondences or functional analogs the translator may resort to low colloquial speech, which lends the text the needed mark of deviation from the literary norm) [3]. A. V. Fyodorov (2002) had drawn the limit of the possible even more tightly, granting that «действительно непереводаемыми являются лишь те отдельные элементы языка подлинника, которые представляют отклонения от общей нормы языка, ощутимые по отношению именно к этому языку, т. е. в основном диалектизмы и те слова социальных жаргонов, которые имеют ярко выраженную местную окраску» (truly untranslatable are only those elements of the original that deviate from the general norm and are felt as such against that very language, mainly dialectisms and socially marked jargon words with a pronounced local color) [4]. In practice compensation appears when an emphatic vulgarism with no exact match becomes a Russian просторечие equivalent of similar force, so that the flavor survives even where the word changes. The opposite risk, a quiet flattening of marked speech into neutral prose, the corpus counts on its own, since it bears directly on the tendency toward normalization.

The count is what a corpus adds to older, example based treatments of argot. As M. Baker argued in the essay that opened the approach, “The availability of large corpora of both original and translated text, together with the development of a corpus-driven methodology, will enable translation scholars to uncover the nature of translated text as a mediated communicative event” [5]. Across the tagged material, functional analog and restoration dominate, low colloquial compensation takes a sizeable share, and outright neutralization a smaller but telling remainder. By way of illustration, the English borrowings behave unlike the Russian ones, since *Boss* and *No problem* carry prestige rather than criminality and pass into Russian with no *fenya* equivalent to recover [15, б. 518; 17]. Kept as proper names, the monikers travel by transcription, so that *Asadbek* stays *Асадбек* and *Chuvrindi* stays *Чувринди*, while a motivated nickname such as *O'qilon* (arrow snake) or *Kesakpolvon* (clod wrestler) invites a calque that keeps the inner form the name was built on. The nonverbal signals the novel also records, as when «*Asadbek Chuvrindi bilan ko'z urishtirib oldi*» (*Asadbek exchanged a glance with Chuvrindi*) carries what words would be too dangerous to say [15, б. 718; 17].

Table 2. Types of translation solution for Uzbek criminal argot rendered into Russian, with representative renderings

Solution	What it does	Example (Uzbek → Russian)	Effect on marking
Functional analog	uses an existing Russian argot equivalent	Bo'tqa → «Каша», «Мямя»	marking kept
Fenya restoration	returns a Russian borrowing to its source form	shikalad → в шоколаде; otvechayt → отвечать	marking kept, often stronger
Compensation	uses просторечие where no analog exists	xunasa → грубое просторечие равной силы	marking kept, redistributed
Calque	loan translates a motivated moniker	O'qilon → «Стрелазмея»	inner form kept
Transcription	keeps a proper name by its sound	Asadbek → Асадбек	neutral, no marking
Neutralization	replaces a marked item with a neutral word	брань → нейтральное слово	marking lost

At the far end of opacity sits the dense argot that D. S. Baldaev recorded, where a line like «Моеро напарника, мужика-кирюху, трюманули за махаловку» stays closed to any reader without the key (my cellmate, an outsider not of the thieves' world, was put in the punishment cell for a fight) [10]. Malik's Uzbek never reaches that density. Because the source stays comparatively open and half russified already, its Russian version more often gains clarity than loses it, the borrowed slang returning to a setting where readers take it as their own. The register loss that does occur the corpus pins to particular points, where an emphatic source item meets a neutral Russian choice, and those points are where the discussion now turns.

Discussion. The findings sit oddly with a common assumption, that translating substandard speech means loss. Where the source language has borrowed its criminal slang wholesale from the target language, as Uzbek did from Russian across the late twentieth century, translation can restore rather than erode, and M. A. Grachev supplies the ready inventory, having fixed the term itself in the claim that «арго – это воровской жаргон» (argot is the thieves' jargon) [6, с. 11]. Marking in the novel is not only lexical, since S. Abdialimova records the bosses' terse, weighty delivery, their low even voice in anger, and their mock polite use of the formal you toward a man already condemned, features a translation must carry by means other than word choice [17]. In such cases the fenya reading is not invented by the translator but recovered, since отвечать, шоколад, and братва already sit in the Russian sources compiled by D. S. Baldaev (1997) and by V. M. Mokienko and T. G. Nikitina [10; 9]. Standing against this gain is the measured cost of neutralization, the places where an item such as xunasa or a boss's curse meets an unmarked Russian word and its social charge falls away. That cost the corpus method reports as a rate, which lets the present case be set beside the normalization findings of S. Laviosa and the register work of H. Kruger and B. van Rooy rather than described from impression [13; 14].

For Uzbek to Russian work more broadly, the case suggests that contact history should guide the treatment of any socially marked lexicon. Russian words had entered Uzbek colloquial speech so deeply that many, from kartoshka to kalish, are no longer felt as foreign, and criminal slang rode the same channel into the language. In principle, a borrowed criminal term ought to be checked against target language argot lexicography before a neutral gloss is chosen, so that a genuine fenya twin is not missed. A parallel corpus, aligned at sentence level and tagged for solution type, turns that principle into a repeatable procedure and gives the low resource Uzbek and Russian pair a resource it has largely lacked, one the concluding section states as a practical claim.\

Conclusion. Across the five books of Shaytanat, the criminal argot and prison jargon that mark Malik's underworld reach Russian mainly through functional analog and the restoration of borrowed fenya, with low colloquial compensation covering most of what remains. Neutralization, though present, stays a minority

solution and accounts for the register loss the corpus measures. Among the borrowings, the English items form a small counter case, entering Russian as prestige words with no *fenya* source to restore. The heavy russification of the source the analysis treats not as noise but as the central fact, since it turns much of the task into recovery of a Russian original that Uzbek had absorbed. Because the method rests on a sentence aligned parallel corpus and an explicit six part scheme, its counts can be reproduced and carried to other Uzbek authors of crime fiction, and to the broader question of how marked speech behaves in translation between the two languages.

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