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## Lexical features of lacunas in Uzbek lullabies

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**Annotation** *Uzbek lullabies are rich in cultural and emotional expressions that often defy direct translation. These unique expressions, known as lexical lacunas, represent culturally embedded words or phrases without precise equivalents in other languages. This study focuses on analyzing such lacunas, using the poetic term shirmoy as a key example. Often used to describe delicate beauty—typically in reference to skin or fabric—shirmoy conveys a blend of meanings including softness, sweetness, and tenderness. Etymologically, it may derive from the fusion of shirin (sweet) and moy (oil or cream), reflecting a sensual and aesthetic concept that lacks a direct counterpart in English. By examining the semantic, morphological, and stylistic dimensions of shirmoy, this research demonstrates how Uzbek lullabies serve not only as soothing songs but also as repositories of cultural identity. The findings support the idea that lullabies preserve emotional codes and worldviews that are deeply rooted in the national consciousness, emphasizing the untranslatability of certain culturally specific terms.*

**Keywords** *Lexical lacuna, Uzbek lullabies, shirmoy, alla, untranslatability, emotional lexicon, oral tradition*

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## Лексические особенности лакун в узбекских колыбельных песнях

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**Аннотация** *Узбекские колыбельные наполнены богатыми культурными и эмоциональными выражениями, которые зачастую невозможно перевести дословно. Эти уникальные выражения называются лексическими лакунами — культурно специфическими словами и фразами, не имеющими точных аналогов в других языках. В настоящем исследовании анализируются такие лакуны, в частности поэтическое слово ширмой. Оно часто используется для описания тончённой*

красоты — обычно в контексте кожи или ткани — и сочетает в себе значения мягкости, нежности и сладости. Этимологически оно, возможно, происходит от слов *ширин* (сладкий) и *мой* (масло или крем). Исследование рассматривает семантические, морфологические и стилистические аспекты слова *ширмой*, доказывая, что узбекские колыбельные служат не только средством убаюкивания, но и хранилищем культурной идентичности. Выводы подтверждают, что колыбельные передают эмоциональные коды и мировоззрение, глубоко укоренённые в национальном сознании.

**Ключевые слова** *Лексическая лакуна, узбекские колыбельные, ширмой, алла, непереводаемость, эмоциональная лексика, устная традиция*

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## O'zbek allalaridagi lakuna birliklarining leksik xususiyatlari

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**Annotatsiya** *O'zbek allalari bevosita tarjima qilishga bo'ysunmaydigan boy madaniy va hissiy ifodalar bilan to'yingan. Bunday o'ziga xos ifodalar "leksik lakunalar" deb ataladi va ular boshqa tillarda aynan mos tushadigan so'z yoki iboralarga ega emas. Ushbu tadqiqot aynan shunday lakunalarni tahlil qiladi va shirmoy so'zini asosiy misol sifatida ko'rib chiqadi. Odatda nozik go'zallikni – teri yoki mato silliqiligini ifodalashda ishlatiladigan shirmoy so'zi yumshoqlik, shirinlik va mayinlik ma'nolarini uyg'unlashtiradi. Etimologik jihatdan u shirin (shirin) va moy (yog' yoki krem) so'zlarining uyg'unlashuvidan kelib chiqishi mumkin. Ushbu tadqiqotda shirmoy so'zining semantik, morfologik va uslubiy xususiyatlari o'rganilib, o'zbek allalari faqatgina tinchlantiruvchi qo'shiqlar emas, balki madaniy ongda saqlanadigan milliy qadriyatlar xazinasidir, degan xulosa isbotlanadi. Allalar orqali madaniyatga xos hissiy kodlar avloddan avlodga yetkaziladi.*

**Kalit so'zlar** *Leksik lakuna, o'zbek allalari, shirmoy, alla, tarjima qilib bo'lmaslik, emotsional leksikon, og'zaki an'ana*

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### Introduction

Lullabies, or *alla* in Uzbek, are among the most emotionally rich and culturally loaded forms of oral folklore. They serve not only as

soothing melodies but as intimate expressions of care, hope, spirituality, and tradition. Within these lullabies, certain words and phrases emerge that defy simple translation – these are

**lexical lacunas.** They reflect unique worldviews, rituals, and emotional expressions embedded in language and culture. One such example is the word “*Shirmoy*”, frequently used in lullabies and affectionate speech. It exemplifies how a single term can encompass a complex set of cultural beliefs, emotions, and ritual practices. This paper aims to analyze the lexical, etymological, and semantic features of “*shirmoy*” to demonstrate the linguistic richness and untranslatability that characterize lexical lacunas in Uzbek lullabies.

The term “lacuna” refers to a lexical, semantic, or cultural gap between two languages. As Juri Apresjan notes, lacunas reflect culturally significant concepts that resist straightforward translation. Lacunas emerge from differences in worldview, social organization, environment, and traditions (Apresjan, 1995). In the context of Uzbek lullabies, lacunas arise because many objects, practices, emotions, and beliefs encoded in the songs are unique to the Uzbek context.

### **Lexical Features of Lacunas in Uzbek Lullabies**

Uzbek lullabies often include words describing household objects, traditional clothes, food, and social roles that have no direct analogs in other languages. Words like *beshik* (traditional cradle), *alla* (a soothing lullaby chant), and *shirmoy* (a type of soft, delicate skin) exemplify culture-bound terms. Translating such words requires either descriptive explanations or cultural notes, revealing the profound embeddedness of everyday life in the lullabies.

Many lacunas in Uzbek lullabies carry emotional, spiritual, or aesthetic connotations that are difficult to render in another language. For example, the word *munis* refers to someone who is tender-hearted and comforting. While “kind” or “gentle” might partially translate the term, they do not capture the full cultural resonance it holds within the emotional world of Uzbek families (Karimova, 2018).

Uzbek lullabies frequently use diminutive forms and affectionate expressions, such as *bolajon* (dear little child) and *ko'zmuncha* (my precious eyes). These expressions, rich in emotional coloration, often lack direct equivalents in English or other languages, where diminutives are used differently or less extensively (Yoqubbekova, 2007).

Images of nature are central to Uzbek lullabies. Terms like *oy* (moon), *quyosh* (sun), and *bulbul* (nightingale) are used not merely as natural phenomena but as symbols of beauty, hope, and divine blessing. These symbolic uses create additional layers of meaning that can become lacunas when the symbolic associations differ between cultures (Yoqubbekova, 2007).

Lacunas complicate the translation of Uzbek lullabies. Translators must choose between literal translation, which risks obscuring the meaning, and cultural adaptation, which risks losing the original flavor. In educational and cultural exchanges, understanding lacunas fosters a deeper appreciation for the uniqueness of Uzbek culture. Moreover, analyzing lacunas can shed light on cognitive and emotional patterns characteristic of the Uzbek people.

From a cognitive standpoint, lacunas serve as markers of culturally significant experiences that are prioritized in one society but absent or secondary in another. In the Uzbek context, concepts surrounding hospitality, kinship, and communal responsibility are linguistically rich and detailed, whereas such ideas may lack corresponding terms in English. This reflects a collective mindset that values interdependence and emotional closeness. By examining the frequency and context of these untranslatable expressions, researchers can uncover the implicit mental schemas that shape social behavior and emotional expression in Uzbek culture (Wierzbicka, 1997).

Emotionally, lacunas also reveal how certain feelings or affective states are encoded in language. For instance, many Uzbek lullabies

express nuanced maternal emotions that combine worry, hope, and devotion, often through culturally unique metaphors. These metaphors may have no equivalent in English or other languages, suggesting a culturally specific emotional vocabulary. Through the study of these lacunas, scholars gain insights into how emotions are not only felt but also linguistically shaped within a culture. Thus, the analysis of lacunas goes beyond translation—it becomes a method for understanding the deeper emotional and psychological dimensions of the Uzbek people (Apresjan, 1995).

Furthermore, the study of lacunas in Uzbek not only enhances linguistic understanding but also contributes to intercultural competence by illuminating the values and worldview encoded in the language. For instance, terms like *ota-onalik* (the combined concept of fatherhood and motherhood) or *qismat* (a culturally nuanced understanding of fate) embody a worldview where familial unity and spiritual destiny play central roles. These terms, often lacking direct counterparts in other languages, serve as cultural signposts that reflect how Uzbek speakers interpret social roles and existential questions. As noted by Kramsch (2009), language is a symbolic guide to culture, and examining what is “missing” or untranslatable between languages reveals as much about a culture as the words it possesses. By identifying and interpreting such lacunas, researchers and educators can foster more nuanced cross-cultural communication and develop richer ethnolinguistic empathy.

#### **Research Methods and Process**

This study employs a descriptive and interpretive linguistic framework to examine the lexical features of lacunas in Uzbek lullabies, with a particular emphasis on the culturally significant word *shirmoy*. The research methodology integrates qualitative textual analysis, etymological tracing, semantic decomposition, and cross-linguistic comparison. By combining these approaches, the study aims to provide a

comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and emotional values embedded in this unique lexical unit. Each stage of the process plays a critical role in uncovering the depth and complexity associated with *shirmoy* and its untranslatable nature.

##### *1. Textual analysis.*

A close reading of a selected corpus of Uzbek lullabies was conducted, with a primary focus on stanzas where the word *shirmoy* appears. Particular attention was given to the context, frequency, and narrative role of the term within the lullabies. This phase also involved examining how *shirmoy* interacts with other culturally loaded symbols and metaphors in the surrounding text, helping to reveal its broader emotive and aesthetic significance.

##### *2. Etymological research.*

An etymological investigation was carried out to trace the historical origins and linguistic evolution of the term *shirmoy*. Sources from Turkic linguistic studies, historical dictionaries, and folklore archives were consulted. Special emphasis was placed on identifying the term’s root morphemes and exploring any ritualistic or ceremonial significance attached to the word in historical and cultural contexts. This step aimed to position *shirmoy* within the broader matrix of Turkic cultural and linguistic traditions.

##### *3. Semantic and lexical study.*

A semantic decomposition approach was applied to break down the internal structure of *shirmoy*, exploring its morphological components and investigating the range of meanings it conveys. The study further examined its stylistic usage in lullabies, considering factors such as diminutiveness, endearment, and metaphorical extension. The semantic field of *shirmoy* was mapped out to capture how its meaning transcends the literal and moves into emotionally resonant and culturally rich domains.

##### *4. Cross-linguistic comparison.*

To highlight the translation challenges posed by lexical lacunas, a cross-linguistic

comparative analysis was conducted. The study explored how *shirmoy* might be rendered into English, noting the inevitable semantic losses, cultural shifts, and stylistic flattening that occur during translation. By contrasting the Uzbek original with potential English equivalents, the research underlines the difficulties of preserving the emotional nuances and cultural specificity embedded in the term.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

Following the methodology outlined in the previous section, this study's analysis of the adjective *shirmoy* within the corpus of Uzbek lullabies reveals the intricate interplay between language, culture, and emotion that creates a lexical lacuna.

*Feruzaxon oy qiz,  
Kulgiga ko'p boy qiz,  
Kulcha yuzi shirmoy qiz,  
Jushqinligi sho'x soy qiz. (Safarov, 1992)*

Textual analysis. The term *shirmoy* appears selectively in Uzbek lullabies, primarily in stanzas aiming to evoke tenderness, affection, and idealized beauty. It is typically employed to describe the skin of a beloved child or an idealized figure, emphasizing qualities such as softness, purity, and sweetness. Its placement within lullabies strengthens the emotional charge of the narrative and positions the child as a being of exceptional, almost sacred value. The use of *shirmoy* enhances the lullaby's soothing effect, deepening the bond between the singer (usually a mother) and the child through highly affective language.

Etymological research. Etymological tracing indicates that *shirmoy* is a blended form, likely combining *shirin* ("sweet" in Persian) and *moy* (possibly "oil" or "cream" from Turkic roots, or derived from references to silkiness in poetic usage). The blending of these elements creates a term rich in sensory and emotional imagery. The "sweetness" of *shirin* coupled with the smooth, luxurious texture suggested by *moy* results in a concept that is as much tactile as it is emotional.

This origin story reflects historical layers of cultural interaction — particularly Persian-Turkic linguistic and cultural blending — that characterize Uzbek oral traditions.

Semantic and lexical study. Semantically, *shirmoy* is a single lexeme encompassing multiple layers of meaning: physical smoothness, emotional tenderness, and aesthetic beauty. Its usage is highly stylized and carries romantic, poetic overtones. Unlike standard adjectives like "soft" or "smooth" in English, *shirmoy* encodes a combination of tactile, gustatory (sweetness), and emotional qualities. Morphologically, the word is simple, but lexically and stylistically, it belongs to a high poetic and somewhat archaic register. Its absence from everyday modern speech further cements its position as a culturally rich but linguistically rare term, surviving mainly in poetic, folkloric, and dialectal registers — particularly in regions such as the Ferghana Valley.

Cross-linguistic comparison. Attempts to translate *shirmoy* into English reveal significant semantic losses. While phrases like "silky-smooth," "sweet and soft," or "velvety" may approximate some of its surface meanings, none can fully capture its culturally embedded emotional and aesthetic nuances. English lacks a single word that combines tactile sweetness with romantic and poetic sensitivity in the way *shirmoy* does. Thus, *shirmoy* exemplifies a classic lexical lacuna: a culturally saturated term whose full meaning resists direct linguistic transfer. This highlights not only the limitations of cross-linguistic equivalence but also the importance of cultural immersion for appreciating the subtleties of poetic language.

Summary of findings. The findings of this analysis affirm that *shirmoy* functions as more than a descriptive adjective. It operates as an emotional and aesthetic marker within Uzbek lullabies, embodying ideals of beauty, purity, and affection that are deeply rooted in cultural values. Its layered etymology, semantic

complexity, and stylistic exclusivity illustrate how lullabies act as vessels of culturally unique emotional codes, preserving rich lexical items that might otherwise fade from contemporary usage. The study of *shirmoy* thus underscores the broader role of lullabies in maintaining cultural identity through language.

### Conclusion

The lexical features of lacunas in Uzbek lullabies reflect the intimate connection between language, culture, and emotion. These lullabies preserve a worldview steeped in affection, tradition, and spirituality. Studying lacunas not only enriches linguistic knowledge but also bridges cultural understanding. The analysis of *shirmoy* offers a compelling insight into the lexical creativity and cultural depth of the Uzbek language. This expression exemplify how

language encodes not just objective descriptions, but also emotional states, aesthetic ideals, and cultural metaphors. Its lexical structure – ranging from compound nouns to poetic blends – demonstrates the fluidity of word formation in Uzbek. Moreover, their lack of direct equivalents in English affirms their status as lexical lacunas, emphasizing the importance of cultural context in linguistic meaning.

In a broader sense, these expression reflect the interplay between language and worldview. It reminds us that some concepts are so deeply embedded in the cultural and emotional fabric of a people that they cannot be simply “translated” – they must be understood in their own context. As such, they present both a challenge and a richness for linguists, translators, and cultural scholars alike.

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