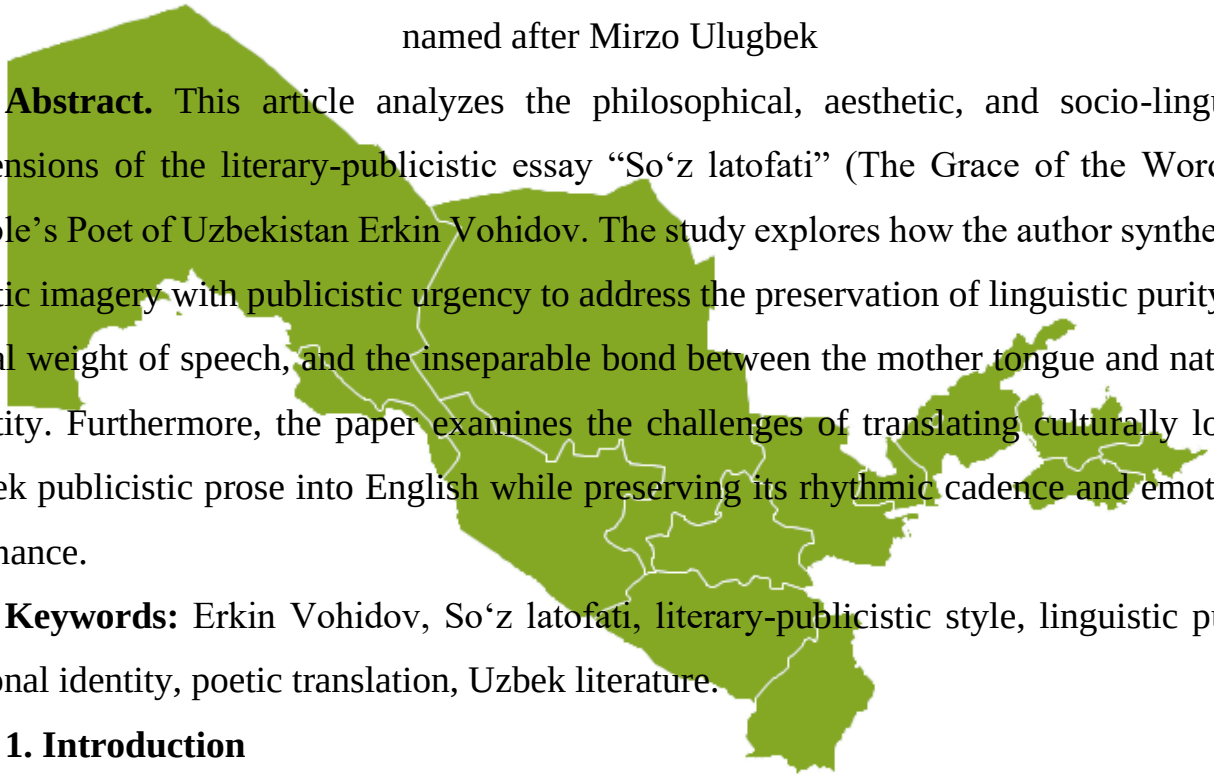
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THE POETICS OF THE WORD AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN ERKIN VOHIDOV’S LITERARY-PUBLICISTIC ESSAY “SO‘Z LATOFATI”

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Abstract. This article analyzes the philosophical, aesthetic, and socio-linguistic dimensions of the literary-publicistic essay “So‘z latofati” (The Grace of the Word) by People’s Poet of Uzbekistan Erkin Vohidov. The study explores how the author synthesizes artistic imagery with publicistic urgency to address the preservation of linguistic purity, the moral weight of speech, and the inseparable bond between the mother tongue and national identity. Furthermore, the paper examines the challenges of translating culturally loaded Uzbek publicistic prose into English while preserving its rhythmic cadence and emotional resonance.

Keywords: Erkin Vohidov, So‘z latofati, literary-publicistic style, linguistic purity, national identity, poetic translation, Uzbek literature.

1. Introduction

In modern Uzbek literature and publicistics, few writers have elevated the discourse on language from a purely linguistic concern to a profound spiritual and national imperative as effectively as Erkin Vohidov (1936–2016). Renowned primarily as a master of lyric poetry and ghazals, Vohidov also made enduring contributions to literary-publicistic prose. His landmark work, “So‘z latofati” (The Grace of the Word), stands as both an artistic meditation on the beauty of the Uzbek lexicon and an urgent civic appeal against linguistic carelessness.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the artistic and publicistic mechanisms through which Erkin Vohidov conveys the sanctity of the native tongue, as well as to present a literary English rendering of key passages from his essay.

2. Literary Rendering of the Essay Excerpt: “The Grace of the Word”

Below is a literary-publicistic English adaptation of the core passages from Erkin Vohidov’s reflections on the grace and responsibility of the word:

As long as a human being lives, the yearning for meaningful, eloquent, and graceful speech never fades within the soul. A word is far more than a mere instrument of communication—it is the living mirror of a nation’s memory, culture, spirit, and moral universe. Yet in the rush of daily life, we too often overlook the true worth of the word, treating it with casual indifference.

In our fast-paced modern era, whenever a new concept or term enters circulation, many adopt it verbatim without pausing to consult dictionaries or search for the rich equivalents already resting within our own language. Yet the Uzbek language stands historically among the deepest, most refined tongues, endowed with vast expressive power. Indifference toward one’s native tongue is, in truth, indifference toward one’s own roots and identity.

Throughout his writings, Erkin Vohidov binds the destiny of a people inseparably to the destiny of its language. Across the centuries, our nation has weathered grave trials—moments of bending and hardship—yet its spirit has never yielded. In four poignant lines, the poet distills both that historical ache and an enduring devotion to the mother tongue:

Out of meekness, we let others
Climb onto our shoulders.
Unable to pronounce foreign words,
We broke our own tongue.

If we aspire to raise generations worthy of the great forebears who once illuminated world science and civilization—scholars and thinkers such as Beruni, Ulugbek, Navoi, Babur, and Amir Temur—we must first revere our mother tongue and guard its purity like the apple of our eye. For the mother tongue is a fragment of our soul, the pulse of our heart, and the enduring guarantee of a nation’s immortality.

3. Literary-Publicistic and Stylistic Analysis

3.1. Fusion of Lyricism and Civic Publicistics

A defining hallmark of “So‘z latofati” is the seamless synthesis of poetic lyricism and

sharp social commentary. Vohidov avoids dry academic prescription; instead, he approaches the word as a living organism endowed with soul and dignity. Metaphors such as “the living mirror of a nation’s memory” and “a fragment of our soul” elevate linguistic stewardship into an ethical duty.

3.2. Critique of Uncritical Lexical Borrowing

In the context of globalization, Vohidov highlights a pressing socio-linguistic issue: the mechanical adoption of foreign terminology at the expense of native lexical resources. By contrasting historical linguistic self-doubt with the classical heritage of Alisher Navoi, the author demonstrates that Uzbek possesses deep semantic layers capable of expressing complex modern realities without losing its authentic character.

3.3. Structural and Thematic Dimensions

Thematic Dimension	Artistic / Stylistic Device	Core Message in So‘z latofati
Essence of the Word	Extended metaphor (mirror of memory, pulse of the heart)	Speech reflects a nation's spiritual and moral maturity.
Linguistic Purity	Contrast and rhetorical critique	Unnecessary foreign borrowings weaken native expressive power.
Historical Memory	Embedded poetic quatrain ("Tilimizni sindirdik")	Centuries of external pressure tested, but never broke, national spirit.
Generational Duty	Historical allusion (Beruni, Navoi, Ulugbek, Babur)	Preserving the mother tongue is essential […] great and […]

3.4. Imagery and the Poetics of the Embedded Quatrain

The four-line poem placed at the center of the essay performs a function that prose alone could not achieve. Its imagery is concrete and bodily: others climb onto our shoulders, and a people breaks its own tongue while straining to pronounce foreign words. Abstract notions such as cultural dependence and linguistic self-denial are thus converted into physical scenes that the reader can almost see. The quatrain also relies on a bitter irony: the effort to imitate the foreign leads not to mastery but to damage inflicted on one’s own speech. In this way the poet shifts the blame from external pressure to internal meekness, and the reader is invited to recognize a personal share in the responsibility.

Structurally, the quatrain acts as a hinge. Before it, the essay reflects on the value of the word in general terms; after it, the argument turns toward the duty of present and future generations. The lyrical interruption slows the tempo of the publicistic argument, giving the

reader a moment of emotional recognition before the moral conclusion is drawn. This alternation between reflection, image, and appeal is characteristic of Vohidov’s method and explains why the essay reads simultaneously as a poem in prose and as a civic manifesto.

3.5. Rhetorical and Syntactic Features

The rhetoric of the essay is built on parallelism, antithesis, and gradual intensification. Sentences about the word begin with its everyday and instrumental role and rise toward its spiritual meaning; the statement that a word is far more than a mere instrument of communication is typical of this movement from the ordinary to the sublime. Antithesis is equally prominent: casual indifference is set against sacred responsibility, borrowed vocabulary against the native lexicon already available, historical hardship against unbroken spirit. These oppositions give the text clarity and persuasive force without reducing it to slogans.

Another important feature is the use of the inclusive pronoun we and the collective expressions our nation and our language. The author does not address the reader from a position of superiority; he speaks as a member of the same community that he criticizes. This inclusive voice softens the severity of the critique and turns the essay into a shared act of self-examination, which is a distinctive quality of the publicistic tradition in modern Uzbek letters.

3.6. Historical Figures as Symbols of Linguistic and Intellectual Continuity

The names of Beruni, Ulugbek, Navoi, Babur, and Amir Temur function in the essay not as historical references alone but as symbols of a civilization that expressed its highest achievements through language, science, and statecraft. By linking the care for the mother tongue with the memory of these figures, Vohidov argues that linguistic neglect would sever the present generation from its intellectual ancestry. The image of guarding the purity of the language like the apple of our eye belongs to the same semantic field of protection and inheritance: the language is a legacy that is held in trust and must be handed on undamaged.

The reference to Alisher Navoi deserves particular attention. Navoi’s literary work is widely regarded as proof that the Turkic language is capable of the most refined poetic and philosophical expression. By invoking this heritage, Vohidov answers the sense of linguistic

inferiority that, as the quatrain suggests, had accompanied the nation’s historical trials. The classical past thus becomes an argument in a contemporary debate.

3.7. Problems of Translating Publicistic Prose with Poetic Texture

Translating an essay of this kind into English involves several difficulties. First, the key metaphors, such as the mirror of memory and the pulse of the heart, are culturally marked and must be rendered in a way that preserves both their emotional force and their symbolic logic. Second, the title concept latofat carries connotations of subtlety, delicacy, and grace that no single English word fully covers; the rendering grace keeps the aesthetic and moral dimensions but loses some of the sense of fine inner refinement. Third, the rhythm of the Uzbek sentences, with their balanced clauses and rising intonation, has to be recreated through English syntax and punctuation rather than imitated literally.

Following the distinction between semantic and communicative translation proposed by Newmark, the adaptation presented above favors communicative equivalence in the prose passages, aiming at the same effect on the English reader as the original has on the Uzbek reader, while the quatrain is rendered more closely in order to preserve its images and its terse, aphoristic structure. This combined strategy allows the translator to respect the author’s voice and still produce a text that functions naturally in the target language.

4. Conclusion

Erkin Vohidov’s “So‘z latofati” remains a vital text in contemporary Uzbek philology and cultural studies. Through expressive publicistic prose enriched by poetic intuition, the author reminds readers that safeguarding the purity and beauty of the mother tongue is inseparable from preserving national dignity and historical continuity. Translating such works into English not only introduces international audiences to the depth of Uzbek literary thought, but also underscores universal truths regarding the moral power of human language.

The analysis has shown that the essay owes its force to the fusion of several levels: the lyrical image, the rhetorical structure, the historical allusion, and the civic appeal. The metaphor of the word as a living mirror and as a fragment of the soul transforms a linguistic question into an ethical one; the critique of uncritical borrowing places responsibility on

every speaker; and the embedded quatrain gives the historical experience of the nation a concentrated poetic form. Together these elements demonstrate that, for Vohidov, the care for language is not a matter of purism for its own sake but a condition of cultural self-respect.

The study also suggests that the essay retains its relevance in the era of globalization, when the circulation of foreign terms accelerates and the temptation to adopt them without reflection grows. Vohidov does not reject contact with other languages; rather, he calls for attentiveness, knowledge of one’s own lexical resources, and a sense of responsibility toward the word. This balanced position can serve as a starting point for further research on language policy, lexicography, and the role of literary publicistics in shaping linguistic culture.

Finally, from the standpoint of translation studies, the English rendering of “So‘z latofati” shows how much can be preserved, and how much inevitably shifts, when a culturally saturated text crosses a linguistic border. Further work on the translation of Uzbek publicistic prose, including comparative analysis of several translators’ solutions, would help to develop more precise strategies for conveying rhythm, imagery, and moral tone. Such work would also make the intellectual heritage of Uzbek literature more accessible to the international scholarly community.

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