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Morphonological Transformations and The Phenomenon of Variation in Uzbek Linguistics

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Abstract: This article investigates the systemic issues of morphonology and morphophonology within the paradigm of modern Uzbek linguistics. It provides a comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis of the morphonological transformations that occur at the boundaries of affixal morphemes during word-formation and inflectional processes. Specifically, the study examines the phenomena of ellipsis sound omission/elision, monoconsonantism, and phonetic neutralization within the consonantal system. The paper highlights how these structural adaptations are driven by the pragmalinguistic principle of least effort, balancing articulatory economy with semantic clarity across both literary and colloquial discourse environments.

Keywords: Morphonology, Morphoneme, Ellipsis, Monoconsonantism, Stabilization, Neutralization, Articulation, Colloquial Style, Variation

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1. Introduction

Within the modern linguistic paradigm, exploring the structural integration of language levels and the transformations of invariant units during their discursive realization stands as one of the most fundamental scientific challenges. While traditional linguistics often investigated the fields of phonetics and morphology as isolated, autonomous systems, the rise of systemic-structural linguistics demonstrated the existence of highly unique, interdependent laws operating at the intersection of these two domains. To address this analytical need, morphonology emerged as an integrative discipline serving as the interface between phonology and morphology. The analysis of morphonological processes—particularly the transformations occurring at the boundaries of derivational and inflectional morphemes within the scope of boundary signals and positional variations—serves as a primary factor in revealing the internal dynamics and evolutionary trajectory of the language system.[1]

Although the formal and semantic properties of affixes represent invariant concepts within the language system, their physical behavior in actual speech manifests in highly diverse ways depending on the phonetic and articulatory environment. In this context, it is a matter of profound scientific necessity not only to elucidate the phonetic-morphological shifts within the contemporary Uzbek literary language but also to investigate the historical and comparative laws governing the broader pan-Turkic language family. Drawing upon the structural tenets of systemic linguistics, it can be confidently asserted that: "One of the critical tasks of linguistics is to investigate the morphological application of phonological oppositions—that is, the core problems of morphonology (morphophonology). It is demonstrated that defining morphonemes,

which constitute the primary units of morphonology, falls directly within the scope of this scientific problem." [2]

Literature Review

Within global linguistics, the theoretical foundation of morphonology as an independent subfield was laid by the representatives of the Prague Linguistic Circle, most notably N.S. Trubetzkoy, and subsequently advanced in the research of scholars such as V.V. Vinogradov and A.A. Reformatsky. Within national Uzbek linguistics, this direction constitutes a relatively young but rapidly developing branch of the science. The invaluable contributions of scholars like Sh. Rahmatullayev, A. Hojiyev, A. Abduazizov, and A. Nurmonov have been instrumental in examining the morphonological system of the Uzbek language on a systemic-structural plane, identifying the morphoneme as its core invariant unit, and analyzing the complex combinatorial-positional variations occurring at the interface of roots and affixes.[3] These foundational studies empirically demonstrate that each tier of the language system exists in a state of reciprocal, chain-like interconnectedness. Indeed, as observed in systemic frameworks:

"Each specified system possesses its own unique structural composition and architecture, and the relations ensuring the systemicity of these components operate in the same manner as those within the broader language system." When approached from the perspective of synchronous linguistics, the phenomena of ellipsis (sound omission/elision), the problem of monoconsonantism, and the manifestations of variation observed within affixal morphemes exhibit highly complex structural configurations and distinct functional characteristics.[4] To comprehend the underlying essence of these processes, one must first turn to the physiological laws of articulation, which govern the physical and biological capacities of the human speech apparatus. Driven by the pragmalinguistic need for articulatory economy and structural simplification within the speech stream, speakers conserve the kinetic energy of the articulatory organs, resulting in the reduction or elision of a specific phonetic segment. As emphasized in academic publications, "Articulation from Latin *articulatio*, *articulo* – to divide into distinct parts, to pronounce clearly is defined in phonetics as the movement of the organs of speech during production, and it is characterized by high dynamic velocity. Individual sounds and their sequential combinations (syllables, consonant clusters) undergo diverse articulatory modifications based on the operational phases of the speech organs.[5] It is precisely this dynamic velocity that drives phonetic segments to undergo elision or structural neutralization at morphemic boundaries. Another critical aspect of this problem is the structural alignment of morphonological phenomena between the prescriptive norms of the literary language and actual oral discourse. Prescriptive orthographic and orthoepic (pronunciation) rules frequently fail to fully encapsulate the inherent systemic variations of the language. In the live colloquial style and under dialectal influence, speakers exercise considerable structural freedom when pronouncing otherwise neutral literary words. As documented in scholarly literature, units characteristic of the colloquial style often display phonetic and morphonological features that diverge from or directly oppose active literary standards; they generate sound deletions (*qulfla-moq* → *qufla-moq* [to lock], *tashla-moq* → *tasha-moq* [to throw]) or trigger severe root-stem contractions under affixal pressure (*olib-di* → *opti* [he/she took], *kelib-di* → *kepti* [he/she came]).[6] This structural variance necessitates the study of morphonological variation not as a static paradigm, but within its functional-stylistic dynamics. Concurrently, the processes of neutralization occurring within the paradigmatic system of consonant phonemes constitute an integral component of the morphonological infrastructure. Due to combinatorial-positional factors within the speech flow, the distinctive features that separate phonemic oppositions can be neutralized; their free alternation within a significantly weak position—where they no longer perform a meaning-differentiating function—gives rise to new morphonological variants of a given linguistic unit. When this process does not encompass all members of a correlative opposition, it manifests as

incomplete neutralization, for instance, the transformation of the [m] - [n] pair when positioned immediately before plosives/bilabials: *manba* \rightarrow *mamba* [source], *shanba* \rightarrow *shamba* [Saturday].[7] In summary, the objective of this study is to provide a systemic analysis of the morphonological transformations occurring at the boundary of roots and affixes in the Uzbek language—specifically focusing on the phenomena of ellipsis, monoconsonantism, and neutralization—within the critical context of literary norms versus oral discourse, thereby elucidating their linguistic nature and variant-generating mechanisms.

2. Materials and Methods

In the study of the dynamic nature of the language system and the evolutionary processes unfolding during discursive realization, the structural transformations occurring at the boundary of roots and affixal morphemes occupy a central position. Among these universal phenomena, the process of ellipsis vocalic/consonantal reduction or elision) and its immediate structural component—monoconsonantism (the preservation or simplification of a single consonant in place of a consonant cluster)—represent critical focus areas. When approaching the essence of this problem from a purely phonetic perspective, ellipsis appears to be merely a mechanical process triggered within the speech flow by the conservation of kinetic energy within the human articulatory organs, the law of linguistic economy, and the physical need to facilitate easier pronunciation. However, if evaluated through a morphonological lens, ellipsis is revealed to be not a random speech occurrence, but a systemic mechanism within the language framework that alters the structural profile of a specific morpheme and drives the formation of linguistic variation.[8] To comprehend the biological and physical foundations of these processes, one must first address the phenomenon of articulation, which reflects the functional parameters of the human speech apparatus. In the *Great Russian Encyclopedia*, this concept is afforded the following academic definition:

"Articulation from the Latin *articulatio*, *articulo* – to divide into distinct parts, to pronounce clearly is defined in phonetics as the movement of the organs of speech during production." [9]

As documented in encyclopedic linguistic research, articulatory processes possess a highly complex architecture and operate with extremely rapid velocity:

"One distinguishes between the articulation of individual sounds (vowels and consonants), the articulation of sound sequences (syllables, consonant combinations, etc.), or—if the operation of the speech organs is viewed separately—between labial and lingual articulation, among others... When recording articulatory movements, specialized instruments frequently detect the complete absence of a distinct 'hold' phase, because the positional modification of the articulatory organs is characterized by exceptionally high velocity." [10]

It is precisely this high-velocity shifting of the articulatory organs and the reduction of specific positional phase elements (namely, the compression of the onset/attack, hold, and release/decay stages) that cause certain phonetic segments to undergo total elision at morphemic junctions. When two or more consonants appear in immediate succession, a state of monoconsonantism is induced, wherein one of the segments is dropped to minimize the articulatory barrier. This process stands as one of the most vital morphonological regulators, optimizing the speech flow and ensuring the functional-operational adaptability of the language system. The linguistic nature of these morphonological shifts is not always fully reflected within the confines of rigid synchronous literary codes and prescriptive orthographic regulations. In the absolute majority of cases, such transformations are forged under the pressure of live colloquial speech and the continuous influence of regional dialects. This empirically demonstrates that alongside prescriptive orthographic and orthoepic (standardized pronunciation)

norms, there operates a parallel, highly functional "oral discourse norm" characterized by structural freedom. The scientific observations articulated in the textbook literature by Professor Kh. Muhiddinova and her co-authors fully substantiate this position: "The second norm of linguistic pronunciation manifests primarily within conversational, oral discourse.[11] Within the colloquial style, a noticeable degree of structural freedom is observed during the pronunciation of otherwise universally used, literary-neutral words. Units characteristic of the colloquial style frequently possess phonetic attributes that diverge from or run directly counter to active literary language standards... [This includes] the elision of sounds within the word structure: *qulfla-moq* \rightarrow *qufla-moq* [to lock], *tashla-moq* \rightarrow *tasha-moq* [to throw]; the prothesis or epenthesis of a sound: *yech-moq* \rightarrow *chech-moq* [to untie/undress], *yangi-dan* \rightarrow *yangi-tan* [anew/freshly]; as well as severe stem-base contractions resulting from affixation: *olib-di* \rightarrow *opti* [he/she took], *kelib-di* \rightarrow *kepti* [he/she came]." [12]. These linguistic data structures provide an empirical baseline and serve as an objective framework for deep morphonological analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

Sound Omission and Monoconsonantism (Elision): In structural models such as *qulfla-moq* \rightarrow *qufla-moq* [to lock] or *tashla-moq* \rightarrow *tasha-moq* [to throw], the elision of a specific consonant phoneme is observed at the junction of plosive and fricative consonant clusters to simplify physical articulation. Beyond acting as a purely phonetic adaptation, this reduction systematically shapes a distinct allomorphic speech variant of the morpheme.

Morphological Contraction and Transformation: Conversely, in structural shifts such as *olib-di* \rightarrow *opti* [he/she took] and *kelib-di* \rightarrow *kepti* [he/she came], the language system does not undergo a basic phonetic substitution. Instead, a complex morphonological collapse (drastic structural contraction) occurs at the boundary of the root and the affix. During this process, the vocalic segment is entirely dropped, and the contiguous consonants ([b] and [d]) merge and undergo devoicing and desonorization according to regular phonotactic laws, assuming a highly compact bound morphemic form (-pti). This structural behavior demonstrates how oral discourse continuously enriches the literary language system by mediating between underlying morphonological invariants and their overt allomorphic speech realizations. One of the most intricate and theoretically profound problems in structural linguistics is the process of neutralization occurring across language levels—particularly within the paradigmatic system of consonant phonemes. In the doctoral dissertation of D. Nurmanova, this issue is analyzed rigorously through a systemic-structural approach, wherein the combinatorial-positional variations of consonants and their variant-generating properties are evaluated as follows:

"The fact that such paradigmatic relations of consonants undergo diverse modifications within the speech stream, leading to the loss of distinctive features between oppositions, allows them to alternate freely within a significantly weak position. Because they cease to perform a meaning-differentiating function here, they can actively generate speech variants of a given linguistic unit." [13]. As a direct result of neutralization, when two or more inherently oppositional phonemes occupy a weak position, they partially or completely lose their independent meaning-differentiating (distinctive) function and coalesce into a unified morphonological variant. In Nurmanova's research, this process is differentiated based on the scope of its systemic coverage. Specifically, if the neutralization process fails to encompass all correlative oppositional members within the paradigm, it is classified as incomplete neutralization:

"If neutralization based on a specific feature does not encompass all correlatively opposed phonemes within the system, it is considered incomplete neutralization. For instance, within the opposition of sonants, only the [m] - [n] pair undergoes neutralization when positioned immediately before the plosive [b]. This neutralization functions in favor

of the preceding phoneme: *manba* \rightarrow *mamba* [source], *shanba* \rightarrow *shamba* [Saturday]." [14]. This structural law demonstrates the mathematical and systemic precision upon which the morphonological framework of the Uzbek language is constructed. In the models *manba* \rightarrow *mamba* and *shanba* \rightarrow *shamba*, under the articulatory-acoustic influence of the subsequent bilabial plosive [b], the preceding antero-lingual (alveolar) nasal [n] undergoes regressive assimilation and transforms into the bilabial nasal [m]. At this exact interface, the distinctive feature separating the sonants [m] and [n] is neutralized, suspending their phonemic contrast. [15]

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the structural phenomena of ellipsis, monoconsonantism, and neutralization occurring within morphemic layers are not isolated or random speech deviations; rather, they operate as interdependent, self-regulating morphonological mechanisms within the holistic language framework. These mechanisms strictly serve the fundamental law of linguistic economy, which aims to maximize information transmission while minimizing articulatory energy expenditure. Based on the theoretical and empirical investigation into the unique morphonological laws of the Uzbek language—particularly the transformations arising at the boundary of roots and affixal morphemes—the following foundational scientific conclusions have been reached:

The Systemic Framework of Morphonological Transformations: The processes of ellipsis, monoconsonantism, and neutralization occurring within the word structure and at morphemic junctions are not mere mechanical or accidental acoustic fluctuations within the speech flow. Instead, these processes serve as homeostatic structural balance mechanisms governed by the core principles of functional-linguistic economy and articulatory adaptability, ensuring optimal data transmission with minimal phonetic weight.

Articulatory Dynamics and the Laws of Elision: As documented in the structural data of the *Great Russian Encyclopedia*, the exceptionally high velocity of the articulatory organs and the subsequent compression or total reduction of specific positional "hold" phases lay the groundwork for morphonological collapse. The manifestations of ellipsis and monoconsonantism (the structural simplification of consonant clusters) induced when multiple consonants appear in immediate succession serve to streamline the linear configuration of morphemes, thereby facilitating easier perceptual accessibility and phonotactic decoding for the listener.

Morphological Variation and Stylistic Differentiation: Live oral discourse and regional dialects exist in a continuous, highly dynamic dialogue with prescriptive literary standards. As demonstrated in the research of Professor Kh. Muhiddinova, the colloquial style introduces a structural margin of freedom, diverging from rigid prescriptive orthoepic norms. Severe discursive contractions (exemplified by models like *opti* and *kepti*) are proven to be the primary drivers shaping a new system of functional morphonological variants and allomorphs by exploiting the internal latent capacities of the language system.

Neutralization and Invariant-Variant Interrelations: The processes of neutralization occurring within the paradigmatic framework of consonant phonemes bear witness to the incredibly advanced structural architecture of Uzbek morphonology. According to the theory of incomplete neutralization substantiated by D. Nurmanova, the distinctive (meaning-differentiating) oppositions of phonemes are temporarily suspended when subjected to significantly weak positions. The regressive transformation of the antero-lingual/bilabial nasal pair ([m] - [n]) immediately preceding the bilabial plosive [b] (realized as *mamba* and *shamba*) fully confirms the highly positional and correlative character of this neutralization mechanism. The findings of this investigation provide an objective, systemic-structural foundation for exploring the underlying laws of Uzbek morphonology. The scientific formulations advanced in this paper can serve as a vital theoretical resource for improving the teaching of phonetics and morphophonology

modules within higher education curricula, refining academic textbook models, and establishing empirical frameworks for speech synthesis, natural language processing, and computational linguistics.

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