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ARGOTISMS AS SOCIAL INDEXES AND LITERARY DEVICES IN TOHIR MALIK'S SHAYTANAT: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC AND LINGUOPOETIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines argotisms in Tohir Malik's Shaytanat as socially indexical and literary-stylistic resources. Building on sociolinguistic approaches to language variation, identity, register, and in-group vocabulary, the paper distinguishes argot from the neighboring categories of jargon, slang, colloquialism, and professional vocabulary. The analysis is qualitative and contextual: it focuses on ten lexical items explicitly foregrounded in the source manuscript and groups them into criminal-organizational, gambling, and drug-related domains. Particular attention is given to the way specialized vocabulary marks group membership, encodes hierarchy and solidarity, contributes to character differentiation, and strengthens the realism of the criminal milieu. The study also considers the role of Russian-mediated lexical influence, while avoiding unsupported etymological claims for items whose origins are not established in the available material. The findings suggest that argotisms in Shaytanat function not merely as nonstandard vocabulary but as indexical signs that connect linguistic choice with social identity and narrative positioning. Their literary value lies in their contextual placement: they help construct social worlds, characterize speakers, represent group boundaries, and communicate the author's critical stance toward crime, addiction, and moral degradation. The paper concludes by proposing corpus-based and diachronic directions for future research.

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Introduction

Language varies systematically across social groups, situations, activities, and relationships. Sociolinguistics has long shown that variation is not random noise around a neutral standard; rather, linguistic choices can index social position, group membership, stance, and identity (Labov, 1972; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). In literary discourse, these social meanings acquire an additional aesthetic dimension because authors select linguistic varieties in order to construct characters and social worlds. Tohir Malik's Shaytanat is especially suitable for such analysis because the work represents a criminal milieu whose members are differentiated not only by action and status but also by their speech.

The present paper focuses on argotisms: socially restricted lexical items associated with relatively closed groups and often used to signal solidarity, specialized knowledge, or distance from outsiders. The category is difficult to delimit. In both general sociolinguistics and studies of slang, boundaries among argot, jargon, slang, cant, and other nonstandard varieties are treated as porous and historically variable

(Coleman, 2012; Mattiello, 2008). Uzbek linguistic tradition likewise recognizes socially restricted vocabulary as a distinct lexical layer, although terminological practice is not always uniform (Hojiyev, 2002; Madvaliyev, 2006–2008). This makes a contextual approach essential: a word should not be labeled an argotism merely because it is informal, expressive, or culturally marked.

The problem is particularly important in literary analysis. A specialized lexical item may have one function in everyday group communication and another within a novel. In real interaction, it may identify insiders, compress shared knowledge, or obscure meaning from outsiders. In fiction, the same item can also mark a speaker's social location, individualize dialogue, intensify conflict, and make a represented environment more credible. Such functions are consistent with approaches that treat identity as interactionally produced and linguistically indexed rather than simply reflected by language (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Eckert, 2000). From this perspective, argot is not only a vocabulary list; it is a resource through which characters are positioned in relation to one another and to the social order represented by the narrative.

This revised study therefore asks three questions: (1) How can argotisms in Shaytanat be distinguished from neighboring categories such as slang, jargon, colloquialism, and professional vocabulary? (2) What semantic and social domains are represented by the focal lexical items discussed in the manuscript? (3) What sociolinguistic and literary functions do these items perform in characterization, social-world construction, and the representation of group boundaries? The aim is not to produce an exhaustive dictionary of criminal vocabulary in Shaytanat, but to provide a theoretically clearer and methodologically transparent analysis of the examples already identified in the study.

Theoretical Framework: Argot, Slang, Jargon, and Social Indexicality

A useful starting point is the relationship between linguistic variation and social meaning. Labov's (1972) foundational work established that linguistic forms pattern with social structures, while later research emphasized the active role of speakers in using variation to construct styles and identities (Coupland, 2007; Eckert, 2000). Bucholtz and Hall (2005) further argue that identity emerges through interaction and can be indexed by linguistic choices, stances, labels, and styles. This framework is relevant to literary dialogue because a character's lexical selection can signal affiliation, authority, distance, or familiarity even when the narrative does not state those relations explicitly.

Argot belongs to a broader field of socially marked vocabulary. Slang is commonly associated with informality, innovation, expressiveness, and group affiliation, but it can circulate beyond the group in which it originated (Coleman, 2012; Eble, 1996). Jargon is often understood more broadly as specialized vocabulary connected with an occupation, activity, or community of practice. Argot or cant, by contrast, is frequently associated with socially closed or stigmatized groups and may carry a stronger function of concealment or exclusion. Mattiello (2008) emphasizes that slang overlaps with cant and jargon and that secrecy can be one of its social uses; Allan and Burridge (2006) likewise situate slang and jargon within broader processes of social regulation, taboo, and group-sensitive language choice.

For this study, an argotism is operationally defined as a lexical unit whose interpretation depends substantially on its association with a socially restricted milieu and whose use contributes to in-group meaning, social identification, or the representation of a closed communicative sphere. This definition deliberately excludes ordinary cultural vocabulary. Terms such as to'y (wedding), sovchi (matchmaker), quda (relation by marriage), mahalla (neighborhood community), osh (pilaf), and choyxona (teahouse) may be culturally specific, but they are not argotisms simply because they are locally meaningful. The central criterion is social restriction, not cultural distinctiveness.

A second theoretical issue is the dynamic status of nonstandard vocabulary. A term may originate in a narrow group and later diffuse into everyday speech. Consequently, contemporary familiarity cannot by itself establish that an item was non-argotic in the period represented by the novel. Agha's (2007) account of social meaning and enregisterment is useful here: linguistic forms can become socially

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recognizable through repeated association with particular speakers, activities, and values. In literary texts, authors can exploit such recognizability to evoke a social type or environment with minimal explanation.

Methodology

The primary text is Tohir Malik's Shaytanat series (Malik, 2009). The original manuscript identifies a set of socially restricted lexical items and discusses them through sociolinguistic, semantic, contextual, and linguopoetic approaches. The present revision preserves that qualitative orientation but makes the sampling procedure explicit. Rather than implying a complete corpus survey, it treats the ten lexical items explicitly foregrounded in the manuscript as a purposive focal sample: krysha, obshchak, ment, obez, stavka, dilyor, vabank, doza, ukol, and lomka.

Each item was examined in relation to three analytic dimensions. First, semantic domain was used to group items according to the social activity or milieu with which the manuscript associates them. Second, social-indexical function was considered, including group membership, status, solidarity, and insider/outsider boundaries. Third, literary function was evaluated in relation to characterization, realism, psychological portrayal, and authorial positioning. This procedure follows sociolinguistic approaches that interpret linguistic forms in relation to speakers, situations, and identities rather than treating vocabulary as socially meaningful in isolation (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021).

The analysis is intentionally conservative with respect to etymology. The source manuscript explicitly states that ment, obshchak, krysha, and obez entered Uzbek criminal speech through Russian. Those four items are therefore treated as Russian-mediated in the descriptive visualization below. The other six items are not assigned a language-of-origin category in this paper, because doing so would require independent etymological verification. Uzbek lexicographic sources, including Hojiyev (2002), Madvaliyev (2006–2008), and Rahmatullayev (2000), provide the broader lexical context for distinguishing standard, borrowed, and socially marked vocabulary.

Because the study does not use a fully digitized corpus of the four-volume work, no claim is made about the total number or statistical frequency of argotisms in Shaytanat. The figures therefore visualize the composition of the focal examples discussed in this article, not the distribution of all argotic vocabulary in the novel cycle. This distinction is important for methodological validity and for avoiding numerical claims unsupported by the available data.

Results

Semantic Domains of the Focal Argotisms

The ten focal items fall into three semantic domains. Four are associated with criminal organization and internal group relations: krysha, obshchak, ment, and obez. Three are associated with gambling: stavka, dilyor, and vabank. Three are associated with drug use: doza, ukol, and lomka. Figure 1 summarizes this descriptive distribution. The largest category in the focal sample is criminal-organizational vocabulary, but the difference is small and should not be interpreted as a frequency pattern for the complete text.

The criminal-organizational items are especially important because they represent the internal structure of the criminal milieu. The manuscript explains krysha in contexts where it refers to a protective or patronizing force and obshchak as a shared fund accumulated for group interests. Such items condense social relations into specialized lexical forms. Their use can indicate who possesses protection, who contributes to collective resources, and who belongs to the communicative network in which these meanings are understood. In this sense, argot operates as a compact social code.

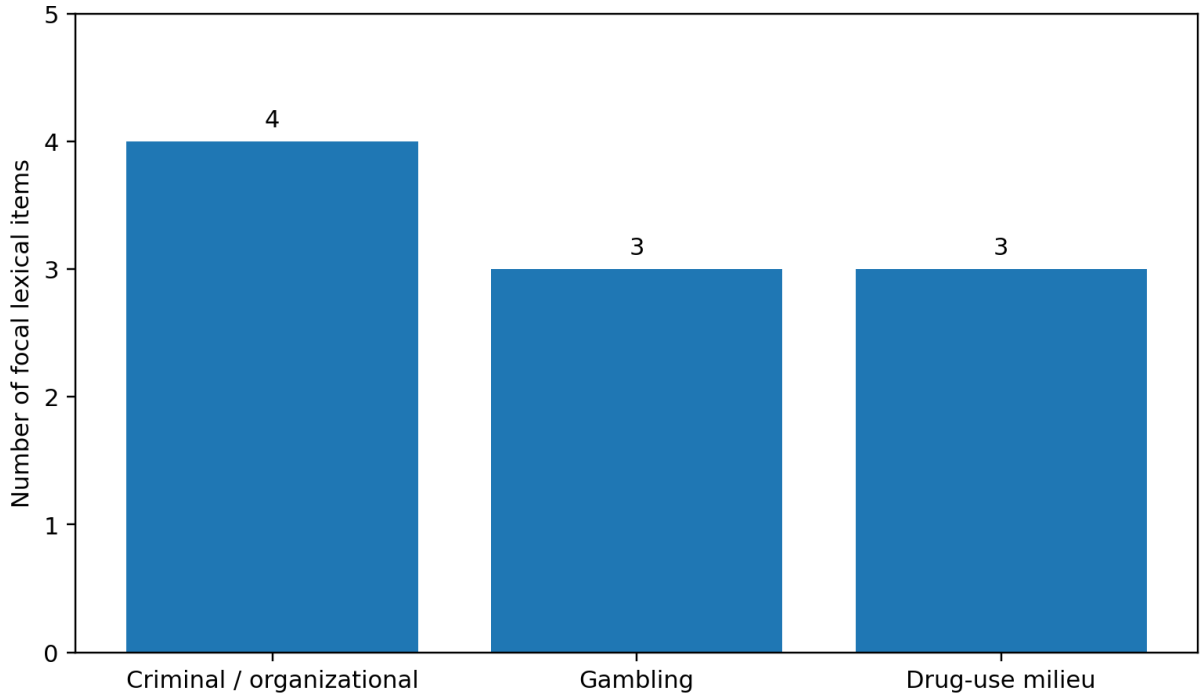
The gambling-related items construct a different but related social environment. Stavka, dilyor, and vabank evoke risk, money, competition, and the behavioral logic of gambling. Importantly, the argotic status of such terms is contextual rather than absolute. Some may circulate in wider contemporary speech. Their relevance in Shaytanat lies in the way they become associated with particular speakers, activities, and moments of risk. The terms thereby contribute to the portrayal of characters whose decisions and identities are shaped by money, chance, and high-stakes behavior.

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Drug-related items perform a similarly contextual function. Doza, ukol, and lomka belong to a lexical field connected with drug use and dependence. Within the novel's negative social environment, such vocabulary helps portray deterioration without requiring extended psychological exposition. The specialized lexicon can function metonymically: a single word evokes a wider social practice, bodily condition, and moral atmosphere. The result is a form of compressed characterization in which vocabulary contributes directly to the reader's understanding of a character's condition.

Figure 1

Focal Lexical Examples by Semantic Domain



Note. Counts represent only the ten lexical examples explicitly analyzed in this article (4 criminal-organizational, 3 gambling, 3 drug-related). They are descriptive sample counts, not corpus frequencies for the complete Shaytanat series.

Borrowing and Russian-Mediated Lexical Influence

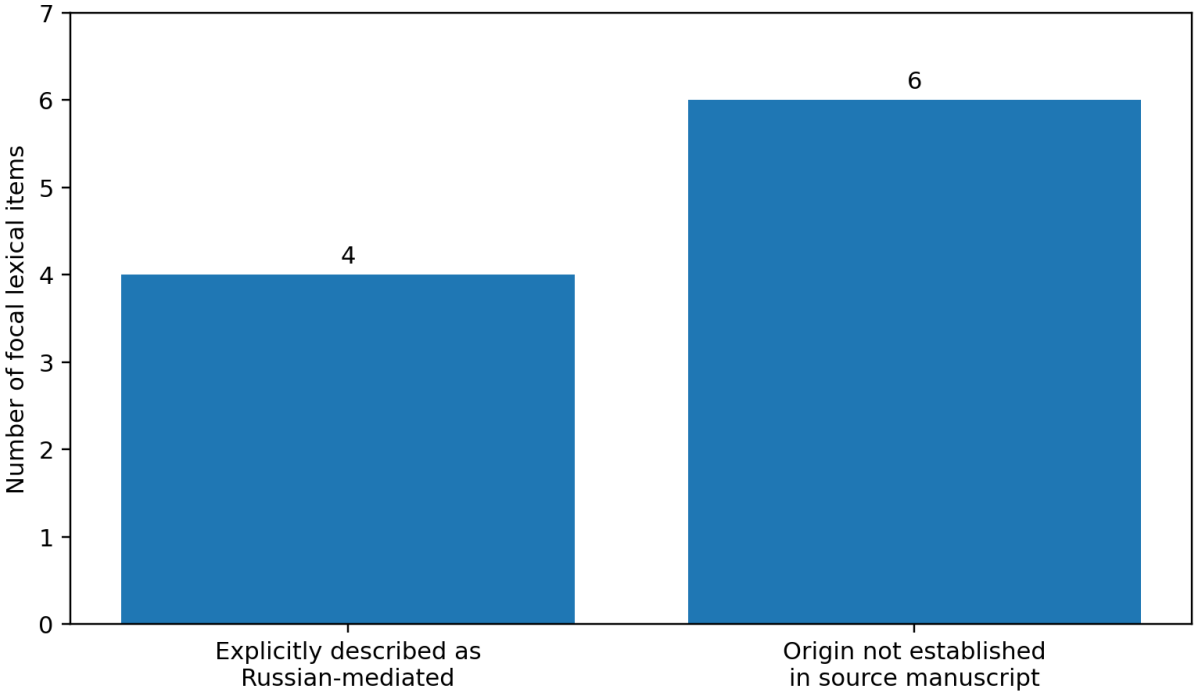
The source manuscript also highlights Russian-mediated influence in the criminal lexical layer. Four of the ten focal items—ment, obshchak, krysha, and obez—are explicitly described as having entered Uzbek speech through Russian. Figure 2 visualizes only this source-supported distinction. The remaining six items are left unclassified with respect to origin. This conservative treatment is preferable to assuming that every phonologically Russian-looking form has the same borrowing history or social trajectory.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, borrowing is significant not only as a historical process but also as a marker of social contact. A borrowed item may acquire meanings and social associations that differ from those of its source language. In a literary text, the presence of Russian-mediated criminal vocabulary can index the historical multilingual environment in which particular urban and criminal subcultures developed. At the same time, the novel integrates such items into Uzbek discourse, where their narrative effect depends on the surrounding Uzbek syntax, dialogue structure, and character relationships rather than on etymology alone.

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Figure 2

Origin Status of the Ten Focal Examples



Note. The source manuscript explicitly identifies ment, obshchak, krysha, and obez as having entered Uzbek speech through Russian. The other six items are intentionally left unclassified here because their origins are not established by the available source material.

Sociolinguistic and Literary Functions

Across the three semantic domains, four recurrent functions emerge. First, argotisms individualize character speech. A character who selects a specialized in-group term instead of a neutral literary equivalent is linguistically positioned within a particular social world. Second, argotisms contribute to hierarchy and group structure. Forms of address, evaluative vocabulary, and specialized naming can indicate authority, dependence, or distance. Third, they create group boundaries by distinguishing insiders from outsiders. Eble (1996) shows that in-group vocabulary can strengthen sociability and group cohesion; in Shaytanat, the same mechanism helps represent a criminal sphere that is partially closed to ordinary society. Fourth, argotisms intensify realism by introducing socially differentiated speech into a narrative where uniformly neutral language would be less credible.

These functions are not mutually exclusive. A single term may simultaneously identify a speaker, evoke a social practice, and position the speaker within a hierarchy. This multifunctionality explains why a purely dictionary-based approach is insufficient. The literary effect of an argotism emerges from who uses it, to whom, in what situation, and with what consequences.

Discussion

The findings support a view of argot as an indexical resource rather than a static lexical category. Socially restricted vocabulary works because speakers and readers connect forms with recognizable social meanings. This aligns with sociolinguistic theories in which variation is part of social practice (Eckert, 2000) and style involves meaningful linguistic choices that position speakers in relation to identities and situations (Coupland, 2007). In Shaytanat, argotisms help the narrative accomplish this positioning economically: they signal criminal affiliation, gambling practices, drug dependence, and internal group relations without requiring explicit sociological commentary in every scene.

The analysis also clarifies the distinction between argot and broader nonstandard vocabulary. Not every colloquial or expressive item should be treated as argotic. A useful classification must ask whether a lexical item is socially restricted, whether it has a specialized meaning within a group, and whether its

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interpretation is tied to a particular communicative network. This point is especially important in Uzbek literary studies, where national-cultural words, conversational forms, borrowed vocabulary, and criminal argot may coexist in the same passage. Treating all of them as a single category would weaken both sociolinguistic precision and literary interpretation.

The literary function of argotisms is also inseparable from characterization. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) emphasize that identity is produced in interaction rather than merely expressed from a pre-existing social essence. A similar principle operates in fictional dialogue: characters become socially recognizable through repeated patterns of lexical choice, address, evaluation, and stance. Malik's use of specialized vocabulary therefore contributes to what may be called a speech portrait. Readers infer social affiliation not only from what a character does but also from how that character names institutions, money, risk, protection, or bodily dependence.

Another important function is ideological. The novel's representation of criminal and drug-related vocabulary does not automatically amount to endorsement of the practices named by those terms. On the contrary, the manuscript consistently interprets the lexical layer as part of Malik's critical representation of crime, addiction, and moral degradation. This distinction matters because socially marked language can fascinate readers through novelty or expressive force. In the novel, however, argot is embedded in consequences: conflict, dependency, violence, unstable loyalty, and social isolation. The aesthetic realism created by specialized vocabulary therefore supports rather than cancels the text's critical social perspective.

The role of borrowing further complicates the picture. Russian-mediated forms show that the criminal milieu represented in the work is not linguistically sealed. Its vocabulary reflects histories of contact and circulation. Yet borrowing should not be equated automatically with argot. A borrowed word becomes relevant to this study only when it functions as socially restricted or contextually marked vocabulary in the represented milieu. This distinction prevents etymology from replacing sociolinguistic analysis.

Finally, the analysis demonstrates why literary texts are valuable sources for the historical study of social vocabulary. Slang and argot are highly mobile: forms can emerge in restricted communities, spread into popular speech, change meaning, or disappear (Coleman, 2012; Mattiello, 2008). Fiction preserves socially situated uses that may later become difficult to reconstruct. Shaytanat can therefore be studied not only as a literary work but also as evidence of the social meanings attached to particular lexical forms in a specific historical and cultural setting.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The principal limitation of the present study is the absence of a complete searchable corpus of Shaytanat. The ten focal items are a purposive sample drawn from the examples explicitly discussed in the source manuscript; they cannot support claims about overall frequency, dispersion across volumes, or statistically dominant semantic domains. The two figures are therefore descriptive visualizations of the sample, not corpus statistics.

A second limitation concerns etymology and diachrony. Only four items are classified here as Russian-mediated because that claim is explicit in the source manuscript. Establishing the histories of the remaining forms would require systematic consultation of historical dictionaries, dated textual evidence, and possibly Russian and Uzbek criminal-lexicon sources. Future research should also distinguish authorial narration from character dialogue, identify speakers and scenes, and record each occurrence in a reproducible coding scheme.

Conclusion

Argotisms in Tohir Malik's Shaytanat are best understood as multifunctional linguistic resources situated at the intersection of sociolinguistics and literary stylistics. Their importance lies not simply in their nonstandard form but in the social meanings they activate. The focal examples examined here

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represent criminal organization, gambling, and drug-use milieus; within those domains, they contribute to social identification, hierarchy, solidarity, insider/outsider boundaries, psychological characterization, and narrative realism.

The study also shows that rigorous analysis requires terminological restraint. Argot should be distinguished from general colloquial vocabulary, culturally specific words, professional terminology, and slang of broad circulation. Context is decisive. A lexical item becomes analytically significant when its meaning and effect are tied to a socially restricted environment and to the interactional position of its speaker.

For future research, the most productive next step is a corpus-based study of all four volumes of Shaytanat. Such a corpus could record lexical form, speaker, interlocutor, narrative context, semantic domain, presumed origin, and pragmatic function. Frequency and co-occurrence analysis could then be combined with close reading to test whether the patterns identified qualitatively in this article recur systematically across the work. Such research would contribute to the description of Uzbek social vocabulary while also demonstrating how literary language preserves and reshapes the linguistic codes of particular social worlds.

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