LINGUISTIC NATURE OF HASHTAGS IN THE UZBEK SOCIAL MEDIA SEGMENT: GRAPHIC AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *This article explores the linguistic status of hashtags within the digital landscape of the modern Uzbek language. As social media platforms (Telegram, Instagram, Facebook) become primary communication channels, the hashtag (#) has evolved from a mere technical search tool into a significant linguistic unit. The study analyzes the graphic transformation of Uzbek words through hashtags, focusing on the "economy of language" principle and the emergence of "CamelCase" formatting in Uzbek script. Furthermore, the research categorizes hashtags based on their semantic and pragmatic functions—nominative, expressive, and ironic. The findings suggest that hashtags are functioning as a new type of "digital punctuation" that influences the syntactic structure of modern Uzbek virtual discourse.*

The digital transformation of the Uzbek language has birthed a unique linguistic hybrid: the hashtag. While traditional linguistics views the hashtag merely as a navigational metadata tool, our research argues for its recognition as a structural morpheme within the Uzbek digital syntax. The core problem lies in the tension between the strict rules of Uzbek suffixation and the rigid, space-less requirements of social media platforms. This study departs from conventional perspectives by analyzing how Uzbek speakers utilize hashtags to bypass traditional punctuation, effectively creating a 'visual grammar' that functions independently of classical orthographic norms.

In our corpus analysis of over 5,000 Telegram posts, a phenomenon we term 'Suffix Elasticity' was observed. Uzbek users do not merely 'tag' their content; they inflect the hashtag itself. For instance, the use of #Vatanimizda (In our homeland) showcases how a digital symbol is treated as a substantive noun root. This integration suggests that the hashtag is being 'Uzbekized' (o'zbeklashgan), adapting to the language's agglutinative logic rather than forcing the language to simplify itself. This finding directly contradicts the popular belief that internet slang is eroding the complexity of the national tongue. Unlike English, where hashtags are often clustered at the end, Uzbek hashtags are increasingly being used as functional subjects in a sentence:

Example: #QishloqXo'jaligi rivojlanmoqda. (Agriculture is developing). Here, the hashtag replaces a traditional noun.

We identified a phenomenon called "Contextual Overriding". A hashtag can completely flip the meaning of an Uzbek sentence (Irony).

Sentence: "Yana yomg'ir yog'di." (It rained again).

With Hashtag: "Yana yomg'ir yog'di #mazza" (Positive/Neutral).

With Hashtag: "Yana yomg'ir yog'di #rasvo" (Negative/Ironic).

The research highlights the use of Emojis combined with Hashtags. In the Uzbek segment, an emoji often acts as a suffix to a hashtag (e.g., #g'alabauz). This creates a multi-modal linguistic sign that communicates more than a plain word could.

The findings of this research suggest that hashtags in the Uzbek digital space are not merely supplementary icons; they are functional linguistic units that challenge traditional orthographic and syntactic boundaries. Several key phenomena emerge from the data that deserve deeper sociolinguistic consideration.

Uzbek is a highly agglutinative language where meaning is built through a sequence of suffixes. However, our analysis shows a clear trend toward morphological reduction within hashtags. While standard grammar demands precise suffixation (e.g., #yurtimizdagi), digital users frequently opt for root-only hashtags (e.g., #yurt). This tension suggests that the "economy of effort" principle in digital communication is beginning to prioritize visual speed over grammatical completeness. This could, in the long term, influence how the younger generation perceives word formation and morpheme boundaries.

One of the most striking observations is the hashtag's role as a terminative marker. In classical Uzbek prose, the period (full stop) is the definitive end of a thought. In the examined Telegram corpus, however, the hashtag often acts as the "final word," carrying the primary emotional weight of the post. It functions as a post-scriptum punctuation mark that clarifies the speaker's intent—whether ironic, supportive, or urgent. This shift suggests that the hashtag is filling a pragmatic gap that traditional punctuation cannot address.

The widespread use of CamelCase (e.g., #OnaTili_MillatRuhi) represents a radical departure from the Cyrillic or Latin-based Uzbek orthography, which forbids internal capitalization. Our discussion posits that this is not "incorrect" writing, but rather a new visual grammar. Users are subconsciously creating a way to preserve the semantic integrity of a phrase while adhering to the technical constraint of "no spaces." This reflects the adaptability of the Uzbek speaker's cognitive linguistic faculty in a digital environment.

The hybrid nature of hashtags (e.g., #uzb_style, #osh_time) indicates a high degree of digital code-switching. Uzbek roots are increasingly being paired with English functional words. This suggests that the hashtag is a primary site for linguistic globalization within the Uzbek language. It is where the local (national identity) meets the global (internet slang), creating a unique dialect that is neither purely formal nor purely colloquial.

The linguistic analysis of hashtags in the Uzbek digital discourse reveals that the Uzbek language is undergoing a significant "digital transformation." This study has demonstrated that hashtags are not merely technical metadata but have evolved into complex linguistic signs with distinct graphic, morphological, and pragmatic properties.

The Uzbek language's agglutinative nature is flexible enough to integrate the hashtag symbol, treating it as a nominal root that can accept standard suffixes.

Ultimately, these findings emphasize the need for modern Uzbek linguistics to move beyond traditional texts and include digital discourse in its formal research agenda. The hashtag is a testament to the living, breathing, and evolving nature of the Uzbek language in the 21st century.

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