

Lexical Syncretism in Classical Chagatai Poetry: The Use of Common Turkic Words in the Ghazals of Atoiy

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Abstract. The classical ghazal, originally a Persian literary form, was deeply integrated into the Chagatai-Turkic literary tradition, bringing with it a heavy Perso-Arabic lexical and stylistic influence. However, the enduring vitality of Turkic poetry lies in its ability to synthesize these “high” literary loanwords with native, Common Turkic vocabulary. This paper examines the use of Common Turkic words in three specific ghazals by the classical poet Atoiy. Through lexicological and stylistic analysis, this study demonstrates how Atoiy strategically employs native Turkic somatic (anatomical), verbal, and natural vocabulary to ground abstract Perso-Arabic metaphors in physical, emotional, and cultural reality. The findings reveal that the Common Turkic lexical layer is not merely a linguistic baseline, but a deliberate aesthetic tool used to create intimacy, sincerity, and a distinct Turkic poetic identity within the classical ghazal framework.

Keywords: Atoiy, Chagatai literature, Common Turkic vocabulary, Ghazal, Lexical syncretism, Somatic vocabulary, Classical Uzbek poetry.

Introduction. The Chagatai literary language, which served as the lingua franca of the Turkic world from the 15th to the early 20th century, is characterized by a rich lexical stratification. While the “high” literary style was heavily indebted to Persian and Arabic—particularly in the genres of the ghazal and the mathnawi—the underlying grammatical structure and a significant portion of the core vocabulary remained firmly rooted in Common Turkic. The poet Atoiy, a prominent figure in this tradition, masterfully navigated this linguistic duality.

The ghazal, as a genre, relies heavily on a standardized set of metaphors: the beloved’s face is the moon, their hair is a snare, their eyes are narcotic. In the Chagatai tradition, these metaphors are often expressed using Persian loanwords (e.g., *rukh* for face, *zulf* for hair, *chashm* for eye). However, a close reading of Atoiy’s ghazals reveals a profound and deliberate reliance on native Common Turkic words. This paper analyzes three ghazals by Atoiy to explore how Common Turkic vocabulary functions semantically, morphologically, and stylistically. By contrasting the native Turkic lexicon with the Perso-Arabic literary layer, this study highlights Atoiy’s contribution to the development of a distinct, emotionally resonant Turkic poetic voice.

This study employs a descriptive and analytical lexicological method. The corpus consists of three ghazals by Atoiy, of the provided text. Ghazal Focuses on the beauty of the beloved and the lover’s devotion, utilizing imagery of the flower garden and the threshold of the beloved’s door. Describes the morning breeze, the fragrance of the beloved, and the physical manifestations of the lover’s sorrow and devotion. Explores the agony of separation, the bleeding of the heart, and the lethal beauty of the beloved’s eyes and eyebrows.

The analysis categorizes the Common Turkic words into three primary semantic fields: (1) Somatic and Anatomical vocabulary, (2) Verbs of Emotion, State, and Motion, and (3) Nature and Material Culture. Furthermore, the syntactic integration of these words is examined to understand their morphological behavior within the Chagatai poetic matrix.

One of the most striking features of Atoiy’s language in these three ghazals is his preference for Common Turkic somatic (body-related) words over their Perso-Arabic equivalents. In classical ghazals, the beloved’s physical features are usually described using Persian terms: *rukh* (face), *abru* (eyebrow), *chashm* or *ayn* (eye), *sar* (head), *dast* (hand), and *po* (foot). Atoiy, however, frequently replaces these with native Turkic roots, thereby bringing the ethereal, idealized beloved into a tangible, physical reality.

Atoiy writes: “Yuzuma surtum ayog’in, xoki rohin ko’zuma” (I rub your foot to my face, the dust of your path to my eye). Here, the Turkic words *yuz* (face) and *ko’z* (eye) are used. By using *yuz* instead of *rukh*, and *ko’z* instead of *chashm*, the poet grounds the act of devotion in the physical, flesh-and-blood reality of the lover. The word *ko’z* is also central in Ghazal: “Zulfung cheriki jamol mulkin, Oldi ko’zung ittifoqi birla” (The army of your hair took the kingdom of beauty, in alliance with your eye). The use of *ko’z* alongside the Persian *jamol* (beauty) and *cherik* (army - originally Turkic/Mongolic but fully integrated) creates a powerful syncretic image. Furthermore, in the same ghazal, the eyebrows are described using the Turkic *qosh*: “Ikki qoshi juftu toqi birla” (With her two eyebrows, paired and single).

The use of *qosh* instead of *abru* gives the verse a distinctly Turkic rhythmic and cultural resonance. The concept of the “heart” is the epicenter of the ghazal. While Persian uses *dil*, Atoiy exclusively uses the Common Turkic *ko’ngul*. In Ghazal the opening bayt is: “Qon bo’ldi ko’ngul firoqi birla, Kuydi jonim ishtiyogi birla” (The heart became blood from separation, my soul burned from longing). The word *ko’ngul* carries a deeper, more expansive semantic field in Turkic than the Persian *dil*; it encompasses the mind, soul, and emotional center. Similarly, the head is referred to as *bosh*. In Ghazal we find: “Ayog’ing qanda bo’lsa, boshim anda” (Wherever my moon-like beloved is, my head is there). In Ghazal the physical toll of love is described: “Ishqinda qaro boshim oqardi” (In love, my blind head turned pale). The use of *bosh* instead of *sar* emphasizes the physical vulnerability of the lover. The limbs are also expressed through native vocabulary. In Ghazal 2, the lover says: “G’uncha bo’ldum g’amdin ilkim domingg’a yetmayin” (I became a bud from grief, my hand not reaching the hem). *Ilk* (hand) and *ayog’* (foot, used in the same ghazal) are pure Turkic roots. By using *ilk* and *ayog’*, Atoiy maintains the agglutinative morphological purity of the verse, allowing for seamless suffixation (*ilki-m*, *ayog’-in*) that aligns perfectly with the Turkic poetic meter.

The verbal system in Atoiy’s ghazals is overwhelmingly Turkic. While the nouns and adjectives might borrow from Persian to fulfill the stylistic requirements of the ghazal, the verbs that drive the narrative and express the internal state of the lover are predominantly Common Turkic. This creates a dynamic where the “objects” of love are often described in high literary terms, but the “actions” of love are expressed in the native tongue. In Ghazal the reaction of nature to the beloved’s beauty is described: “Qizordi gul uyottin anjumanda” (The flower blushed from modesty in the flowerbed). The verb *qizarmoq* (to turn red/blush) is a native Turkic derivative of *qizil* (red). It provides a vivid, culturally resonant image of blushing that a Persian loanword like *surkh shudan* could not achieve with the same phonetic sharpness in this context. In Ghazal the physical manifestation of grief is expressed through *oqarmoq* (to turn white/pale): “Ishqinda karo boshim oqardi”. This verb perfectly captures the draining of blood and color from the lover’s face due to the agony of unrequited love or separation. The physical acts of devotion and the mechanics of the lover’s suffering are described using highly active Turkic verbs. In Ghazal the lover rubs the dust of the beloved’s path to his face: “Yuzuma surtum ayog’in”. The verb *surtmoq* (to rub/smear) is a deeply tactile, native Turkic word. It conveys a physical roughness and desperation that contrasts beautifully with the delicate imagery of the “dust of the path” (*xoki rohin*). The verb *topmoq* (to find) is used in the same ghazal: “ko’nglum topti yuz turluk safo” (my heart found a hundred types of purity/joy). The simplicity of *topmoq* contrasts with the complex spiritual state of *safo*, grounding the mystical experience in a tangible achievement. Furthermore, the verb *yetmoq* (to reach) is used to express the limitation of the lover: “ilkim domingg’a yetmayin” (my hand not reaching the hem). The concept of “reaching” (*yetmoq*) is a fundamental Turkic spatial metaphor that is here applied to the emotional distance between the lover and the beloved. Atoiy uses native verbs to articulate the cognitive processes of the lover. In Ghazal he states: “Kishi bilmas anikim, qoldi qanda” (No one knows how I remained). The verb *bilmoq* (to know) is the standard Turkic root for cognition. In Ghazal the poet compares the beloved’s face to a tulip: “Lola o’xshatsa o’zin ruxsoringa ma’zur tut” (If the tulip resembles itself to your face, excuse it). The verb *uxshatmoq* (to resemble/compare) is a native Turkic causative verb. By using *uxshatmoq* instead of a Persian equivalent, Atoiy frames the act of poetic comparison itself within the Turkic linguistic tradition. Finally, the playful, lethal nature of the beloved’s glance is captured in Ghazal: “Ko’z o’ynatib uttilar ko’ngulni” (They played with their eyes and stole the heart). The verb *o’ynamoq* (to play) and its causative *o’ynatmoq* perfectly encapsulate the flirtatious, destructive coquetry of the beloved in Turkic folk and literary traditions.

The third major category of Common Turkic vocabulary in these ghazals relates to the natural world and material objects. In classical Persian poetry, nature is often highly stylized (e.g., *gol* for flower, *khok* for dust, *dar* for door). Atoiy integrates native Turkic words for nature and objects, which evokes the physical landscape of the Turkic world—the steppes, the rural environment, and the traditional dwelling. In Ghazal the lover makes a profound declaration of devotion: “Mango ul dunyoda jannat ne hojat, Eshiking tuprog’i basdur kafanda” (What need do I have for paradise in that world? The soil of your threshold is enough for my shroud). Here, the word *tuproq* (soil/earth) is used instead of the Persian *khok*. *Tuproq* is a deeply rooted Turkic word that signifies not just dirt, but the native earth, the homeland, and the physical grave. By stating that the *tuproq* of the beloved’s threshold is enough for his shroud (*kafan*), Atoiy merges the Islamic concept of burial with the Turkic reverence for the native soil. Similarly, the word *eshik* (door/threshold) is used instead of *dar* or *bob*. The *eshik* is the traditional Turkic entrance to the yurt or the house, carrying connotations of hospitality, family, and the intimate

boundary between the public and private spheres. The beloved's hair is referred to as *soch* in Ghazal: "Uzun sochingdin uzmasmen ko'ngulni" (I will not cut my heart from your long hair). While *zulf* or *mu* are common in Persian, *soch* is the native Turkic term. The adjective *uzun* (long) is also purely Turkic. The combination *uzun soch* creates a phonetically soft, flowing image that mimics the physical trait it describes. In Ghazal the life force of the lover is described: "Qon bo'ldi ko'ngul firoqi birla" (The heart became blood from separation). The word *qon* (blood) is a fundamental Common Turkic root. It signifies life, vitality, and the physical essence of the lover, which is literally drained by the sorrow of separation (*firoq*). The material culture of the Turkic nomadic and settled life is also present. In Ghazal the beloved's eyebrows are compared to a bow, and the eyes to arrows: "G'uncha sevunub to'nig'a sig'mas, o'xshatsam o'qung bashoqi birla" (If I rejoice like a bud, it does not fit in its tunic; if I compare it to the arrowhead of your arrow). The word *o'q* (arrow) is a classic Common Turkic word, deeply associated with Turkic martial culture, hunting, and the metaphor of love as a wound. The word *bashoq* (ear of grain / arrowhead) is also of Turkic origin, linking the lethal weapon to the agricultural cycle of the settled Turkic peoples. In Ghazal the lover's garment is mentioned: "Gul bikin jon ko'nglaki hasrat bila bo'ldi qabo" (Like a flower, the soul's tunic became tight with sorrow). The word *ko'nglak* (tunic/shirt) is the native Turkic term for clothing, replacing the Persian *pirahan*. The physical tightness of the *ko'nglak* due to the swelling of the heart (from grief) is a highly relatable, physical image grounded in Turkic daily life.

The use of Common Turkic words is not merely a lexical choice; it fundamentally dictates the morphological and syntactic structure of Atoiy's verses. The Chagatai language is agglutinative, and the native Turkic roots allow for the seamless addition of suffixes that create complex poetic meanings within a single word. Because the core roots (*ko'ngul*, *yuz*, *ko'z*, *bosh*, *qon*, *tuproq*) are Turkic, they readily accept Turkic possessive, accusative, and dative suffixes. For example, in "Yuzuma surtum", the root *yuz* takes the first-person possessive *-um* and the dative *-a*, becoming *yuzuma* (to my face). In "Ko'nglum topti", *ko'ngul* takes the first-person possessive *-um*, becoming *ko'nglum* (my heart). This agglutinative flexibility allows Atoiy to maintain the strict syllabic and rhythmic requirements of the ghazal meter (*aruz*) while using native vocabulary. If Persian roots were used, the suffixation would often require different phonetic adaptations or the use of Persian *ezafe* constructions, which would alter the rhythmic flow.

The syntactic glue in these ghazals is provided by Common Turkic postpositions and converbs. The most prominent is *birla* (with/and), used extensively in Ghazal 3: "Qon bo'ldi ko'ngul firoqi birla" (with separation), "Kuydi jonim ishtiyoqi birla" (with longing), "Oldi ko'zung ittifoqi birla" (with alliance). The use of *birla* instead of the Persian *ba* or Arabic *ma'a* gives the verses a distinctly Turkic rhythmic cadence. Furthermore, the ablative and dative cases are marked by native Turkic suffixes: *-din/-din* (from) as in "subxidam zulfung nasimindin sabo" (the morning breeze from the scent of your hair), and *-g'a/-ga* (to) as in "ilkim domingg'a yetmayin" (my hand not reaching to the hem). These grammatical particles ensure that despite the heavy Persian vocabulary in the metaphors (like *nasim*, *sabo*, *doman*), the grammatical skeleton of the poetry remains unequivocally Turkic. The strategic deployment of Common Turkic vocabulary in Atoiy's ghazals serves several vital stylistic and aesthetic functions. The Perso-Arabic vocabulary in the classical ghazal often creates a sense of distance, elevating the beloved to an abstract, divine, or highly stylized plane. Words like *rukh*, *chashm*, and *kahrabo* (amber) belong to the realm of high courtly literature. By interspersing these with native words like *yuz*, *ko'z*, *tuproq*, and *eshik*, Atoiy breaks down this artificial distance. The native vocabulary introduces an element of raw, unfiltered intimacy. When the poet says he will rub the *tuproq* (soil) of the *eshik* (door) to his *yuz* (face), the use of native words makes the act of devotion feel immediate, personal, and deeply sincere, rather than a mere literary convention. Atoiy's use of Common Turkic words bridges the gap between the elite, written Chagatai literary tradition and the oral, folkloric Turkic tradition. Words like *qizarmoq* (to blush), *o'ynamoq* (to play), and *qon* (blood) are deeply embedded in Turkic folk songs (*yalla*, *lapar*) and epics (*dastan*). By bringing these words into the highly formalized structure of the ghazal, Atoiy enriches the classical genre with the emotional vitality of the folk tradition. The beloved is not just a distant Persian queen; she is a tangible presence whose *qosh* (eyebrows) play and whose *soch* (hair) traps the heart, imagery that resonates deeply with the

Ultimately, Atoiy does not reject the Perso-Arabic vocabulary; rather, he uses it in a state of lexical syncretism. The native Turkic words often serve as the "anchor" or the "base" of the metaphor, while the loanwords provide the "ornamentation." For instance, in "Lola o'xshatsa o'zin ruksoringa ma'zur tut", the native verb *uxshatmoq* (to resemble) and the native noun *lola* (tulip - though shared, it is deeply

naturalized in Turkic) interact with the Persian ruxsor (face). This syncretism allows the poetry to be both cosmopolitan (fitting into the broader Islamic/Persianate literary world) and distinctly local (rooted in the Turkic linguistic and cultural reality).

Conclusion. The analysis of the three ghazals by Atoiy reveals a profound and deliberate use of Common Turkic vocabulary within the classical Chagatai poetic framework. While the ghazal genre inherently relies on a Perso-Arabic lexical and stylistic foundation, Atoiy masterfully integrates native Turkic words to express somatic reality, emotional depth, and physical action. Through the use of native anatomical terms (ko'ngul, yuz, ko'z, qosh, bosh, ilk, ayog'), Atoiy grounds the abstract, idealized beauty of the beloved in a tangible, physical form. The deployment of native verbs of state and emotion (qizarmoq, surtmoq, oqarmoq, o'ynamoq, uxshatmoq) provides a dynamic, visceral expression of the lover's suffering and devotion. Furthermore, the use of native words for nature and material culture (tuproq, eshik, soch, qon, o'q) connects the poetry to the physical landscape and cultural heritage of the Turkic world. Morphologically and syntactically, these Common Turkic roots allow for the seamless agglutinative structures that define the Turkic poetic rhythm. Stylistically, this lexical syncretism serves to create intimacy, bridge the gap between elite literature and folk tradition, and assert a distinct Turkic poetic identity. Atoiy's ghazals, therefore, stand as a testament to the resilience and expressive power of the Common Turkic vocabulary, proving that the soul of the Turkic ghazal beats not just through the borrowed metaphors of Persia, but through the native, enduring words of the Turkic people.

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