

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROTAGONIST'S LANGUAGE IN THE AFGHAN-AMERICAN DIASPORA LITERATURE: THE CASE OF KHALID HOSSEINI'S "THE KITE RUNNER"

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18239888>

Djalilova Zarnigor Bakhodirovna

*Associate Professor of the Department of English Linguistics,
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences*

z.b.djalilova@buxdu.uz

Razaqova Yodgora Ismat qizi

First-year Master's student specializing in Linguistics (English Language)

yodgorarazzoqova1@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines the linguistic characteristics of the protagonist in Afghan-American diaspora literature, using Khalid Hosseini's novel "The Kite Runner" as an example. In the novel, language functions not only as a communicative tool, but also as a vehicle for cultural identity, social hierarchy, ethnic division, and emotional expression. By incorporating Dari, Pashto, Islamic idioms, and Afghan cultural sources into an English narrative, Hosseini creates an authentic portrayal of Afghan society. The study analyzes how code-switching, culturally determined vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and speech patterns reflect the characters' social status, ethnicity, and psychological state. The study demonstrates that lingua-cultural elements contribute significantly to character development, thematic depth, and the depiction of Afghan cultural heritage.

Keywords

diaspora literature, artistic strategy, code-switching, linguistic identification.

Introduction. Khalid Hosseini's "The Kite Runner" vividly portrays Afghan society before and after displacement, blending an English-language narrative with Afghan lexical and religious expressions. As an Afghan-American writer, Hosseini strategically combines elements of Dari and Islamic discourse into an English text, creating a hybrid linguistic space that reflects the diasporic condition.

Afghan-American diaspora literature often explores themes such as identity, memory, loss, and belonging. One of the more important tools writers use to express these themes is language, especially the language of the protagonist. Khaled Hosseini's novel "The Kite Runner" is a well-known example of how language reflects the emotional and cultural experiences of a displaced individual.

This article discusses the main characteristics of the protagonist's language in "The Kite Runner", focusing on narrative voice, emotional expression, cultural references, and the influence of diaspora life.

Main part.

The story of "The Kite Runner" is told in the first person by the protagonist, Amir. This narrative choice allows readers to see the world through Amir's thoughts, memories, and emotions. His language is personal and reflective, often sounding like a confession. Amir frequently talks about his past mistakes, especially his guilt toward Hassan, which shows how deeply the past affects him.

Because Amir tells the story as an adult remembering his childhood, his language is thoughtful and mature, even when describing events from a young age. This shows how memory shapes language and how storytelling becomes a way for the protagonist to understand his own life.

One of the strongest features of Amir's language is its emotional depth. He uses expressive words and vivid descriptions to communicate feelings such as shame, fear, regret, and longing for forgiveness. The language is not neutral; instead, it reflects his inner struggles and emotional pain. This is an example of confessional language that appears when Amir admits his guilt:

*"I ran. A grown man running with a swarm of screaming children. But I didn't care."*⁴⁵

This emotional style helps readers connect with Amir as a human character rather than just a fictional figure. According to diaspora scholars, such emotional storytelling is common in immigrant literature because it helps writers process trauma and displacement.⁴⁶

Although the novel is written in English, Hosseini includes Afghan words from Dari and Pashto, such as *Baba*, *naan*, and *inshallah*. These words are important because they keep Afghan culture alive within an English-language text. Often, the words are not directly translated, but their meanings become clear through context.

This type of lexical code-switching reinforces cultural identity and reflects everyday Afghan speech patterns. According to Baker, "Retaining culturally specific terms helps to preserve semantic and emotional meaning that would otherwise be lost in translation."⁴⁷

Hosseini inserts Afghan words and religious phrases into the English text:

*"There's going to be peace, Inshallah, and happiness and calm."*⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hosseini, K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. – P. 182.

⁴⁶ Brah, A. (1996). *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge.

⁴⁷ Baker, M. (2011). In other words: A coursebook on translation (2nd ed.). Routledge.

⁴⁸ Hosseini, K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. – P. 182.

Through this sentence, the writer connects hope and the future to God, increasing spiritual strength.

*"I found Rakhim Khan praying namaz in a corner of the room."*⁴⁹ Through this sentence, the writer reflects religion and culture, authenticity.

The writer describes the unforgettable nature of his native language through dialogues. For example, during the greeting: *"Salaam alaykum,"* he said. *"Salaam."*⁵⁰

The novel retains Afghan words even in American settings, reflecting diaspora identification. *"At the flea market, Afghans gathered every weekend, greeting one another with 'Salaam,' bargaining in Dari, and sharing stories of the homeland."*⁵¹ When Afghan immigrants in the United States greet each other with "Salaam" at the flea market, preserving their linguistic and cultural identity abroad.

This mixture of languages shows Amir's bicultural identity. He belongs to both Afghan and American cultures, and his language reflects this "in-between" position. Scholars describe this as linguistic hybridity, which is a key feature of diaspora writing.⁵²

Amir's language also reflects social and ethnic divisions in Afghan society. His descriptions of Hassan, who is a Hazara, sometimes reveal unconscious superiority, even though Amir cares deeply about him. The way Amir talks about Hassan shows how social hierarchy and ethnic discrimination are learned and expressed through language. Amir's language reflects the social system he grew up in. As an example, Amir says: *"He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?"*⁵³

The phrase *"just a Hazara"* shows how discrimination is embedded in everyday language, even in moments of guilt and self-reflection. By allowing readers to notice these linguistic differences, Hosseini encourages critical thinking about injustice and privilege. Language here has become a mirror of social values and moral conflict.⁵⁴

When Amir moves to the United States, his language begins to change. Afghanistan is remembered through nostalgic and poetic descriptions, while America is described in a more practical way. This shows how distance can idealize the homeland and turn it into a place of memory rather than reality.

*"For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his"*⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Hosseini, K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. – P. 193.

⁵⁰ Hosseini, K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. – P. 236.

⁵¹ Hosseini, K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. – P. 155.

⁵² Hall, S. (1990). Cultural identity and diaspora. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Lawrence & Wishart.

⁵³ Hosseini, K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. – P. 65.

⁵⁴ Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2002). *The Empire Writes Back*. Routledge.

⁵⁵ Hosseini, K. *The Kite Runner*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. – P. 108.

This shift in language reflects the experience of many immigrants who feel emotionally connected to their homeland but must adapt to a new cultural environment. Amir's language becomes a space where past and present meet, showing the emotional complexity of diaspora life.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The language of the protagonist in "The Kite Runner" is simple yet powerful, emotional yet reflective. Through first-person narration, emotional expression, cultural words, and shifting perspectives, Khaled Hosseini shows how language carries the weight of memory, guilt, and identity. Amir's voice represents not only his personal story but also the broader experience of the Afghan-American diaspora. Khalid Hosseini's "The Kite Runner" is a literary strategy of code-switching in the literature of the Afghan-American diaspora. The work uses cultural memory as a natural linguistic phenomenon, internalized through language, but also as an important aesthetic tool that expresses the complexities of personal identity and social experience. Although English is the medium of historical narrative, the retention of words and phrases related to Persian and Afghan culture reflects the characters' desire not to lose their origins and cultural identity. The novel demonstrates that language is more than communication – it is a way of remembering, healing, and understanding who we are.

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