

**ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN JADID TRANSLATIONS:
A STUDY OF LINGUISTIC REFORM AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION IN
EARLY 20TH-CENTURY CENTRAL ASIA**

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Abstract: This article explores the attitudes of Jadid intellectuals toward foreign languages as reflected in their translation practices during the late Tsarist and early Soviet periods in Central Asia. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources, the study examines how Jadid translators navigated the tension between preserving national linguistic identity and embracing foreign linguistic influences, particularly from Russian, Arabic, Persian, and Western European languages. The findings reveal a complex and context-dependent posture: while Jadids rejected cultural subjugation, they pragmatically adopted foreign linguistic elements to modernize education, disseminate reformist ideas, and create a unified national literary language. This study contributes to the understanding of Jadidism as a multifaceted reform movement and highlights the role of translation as a site of ideological negotiation and cultural mediation.

Keywords: Jadidism, translation studies, foreign language attitudes, Central Asia, Uzbek literature, linguistic reform, cultural transformation

Introduction

The Jadid movement (from Arabic *jadīd*, “new”) emerged in the late 19th century among Turkic-speaking Muslim intellectuals of the Russian Empire. While widely studied for its educational, political, and religious dimensions, the movement’s contribution to translation and its nuanced stance toward foreign languages remains underexplored. In the early 20th century, Jadid intellectuals, including Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Abdulla Qadiri, Cho‘lpon, and Abdurauf Fitrat, engaged in extensive translation from multiple languages, producing textbooks, journalistic pieces, and literary works. However, their relationship with foreign languages was far from uniform, reflecting both an embrace of modern knowledge and a deep concern for national cultural integrity.

Answering these questions is essential not only for understanding the history of translation in Central Asia but also for illuminating broader dynamics of linguistic nationalism, modernization, and cultural negotiation in colonial contexts.

Literature Review

Scholarship on Jadidism has grown substantially since the 1990s, yet the specific domain of translation and foreign language attitudes remains relatively less charted. Existing studies can be grouped into three main strands.

Jadidism as a Cultural Reform Movement

Adeeb Khalid's foundational work positions Jadidism as a cultural reform project aimed at adapting Islamic heritage to modern statehood. Khalid emphasizes the Jadids' conflict with both traditional 'ulama and Russian colonial authorities over the direction of educational and linguistic reform. Similarly, Ronnie Rordam's thesis highlights Jadid efforts to westernize education in Russian Central Asia, focusing on Ismail Gasprinskii's leadership.

Attitudes Toward Foreign Languages

A recent article by Kasimova (2022) directly examines Jadid writers' views on foreign language study in their journalistic and artistic works. The study identifies commonalities and differences in how these intellectuals navigated the relationship between national and foreign languages. Another study (Artikov, 2025) analyzes the role of Jadid representatives in the formation of the Uzbek school of translation, emphasizing their contribution to developing a national literary language.

Terminology and Borrowed Words

Research by Uzbek scholars has explored the Jadids' debates over terminology and borrowed words. While some Jadids advocated for the nationalization of foreign terms, others preferred to adopt words in their original form. A linguistic analysis of the newspaper "Jadid" reveals numerous Russian borrowings, indicating a pragmatic acceptance of foreign lexical influence.

Translation Case Studies

Fitrat, a prominent Jadid writer, translated Uzbek works into English, German, French, and other languages. Studies of Abdulla Qadiri's novel "Bygone Days" have assessed the accuracy, acceptability, and readability of its translations. These case studies provide concrete evidence of Jadid translation methods and the linguistic choices they made.

The literature establishes that Jadids engaged deeply with foreign languages, but a systematic framework for understanding their attitudes—ranging from instrumental adoption to selective resistance—is still lacking. This article aims to fill that gap.

Methods and Discussion

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach. Data were collected from scholarly articles, historical sources, and linguistic analyses of Jadid-era publications. The materials were analyzed to identify recurrent themes in Jadid attitudes toward foreign languages.

The analysis draws on 15 academic articles, theses, and historical documents published between 1979 and 2025, focusing on Jadid translation activities. Sources were identified through academic databases and search engines using keywords such as “Jadid translation,” “foreign language attitude,” and “Uzbek linguistic reform.”

A thematic coding scheme was developed to categorize attitudes expressed by Jadids. Four main categories emerged:

- **Instrumental adoption:** Pragmatic use of foreign languages to access modern knowledge (e.g., Russian technical terms, European educational materials).
- **Selective borrowing:** Adoption of foreign elements only when no adequate native equivalent existed.
- **Linguistic purism:** Rejection of foreign borrowings in favor of native or arabized forms.
- **Ambivalence:** Simultaneous recognition of foreign languages’ utility and concern over their potential to erode national identity.

Language Group	Attitude	Primary Function	Key Evidence/Context
Russian	<i>Instrumental Adoption / Political Resistance</i>	Technical & Administrative	Behbudi's use of technical terms vs. anti-Russification.
Arabic	Religious & Classical Respect	Theological & Scriptural	Alphabet reform (Jadidism) without total removal.
Persian	Cultural Appreciation	Literary & Historical Heritage	Gradual de-emphasis in favor of Turkic for mass literacy.
Western European	Strongly Positive / Modernizing	Scientific & Global Integration	Fitrat's translations; focus on German, French, and English for science
The attitudes toward foreign languages among Central Asian intellectuals (specifically the Jadids) during the late 19th and early 20th centuries reflect a pragmatic approach to modernization, balancing cultural preservation with the necessity of technical and scientific advancement. The linguistic landscape was characterized by a transition from traditional Perso-Arabic dominance toward a synthesis of local Turkic identity and Western scientific literacy.			

Table 1: Jadid Attitudes Toward Foreign Languages by Language Type

The table demonstrates that Jadid attitudes were not monolithic but varied significantly across languages. Russian, as the colonial language, was treated with a combination of pragmatic acceptance and political caution, while Western European languages were embraced more openly as vehicles of modern science and culture.

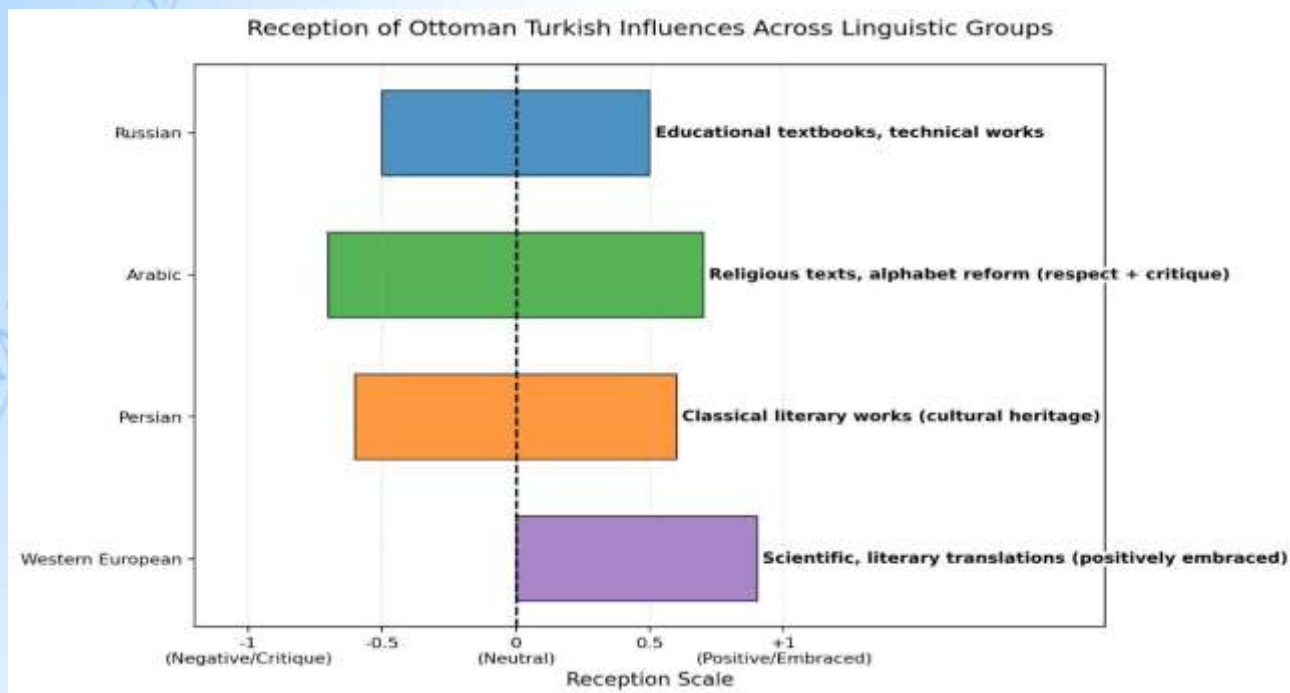


Diagram: Foreign Language Attitudes and Translation Practices

Discussion

The findings reveal a nuanced picture. Jadids generally adopted a pragmatic pluralism towards foreign languages: they recognized multiple languages as legitimate sources of knowledge while striving to build a unified national literary language. This attitude is visible in the five-to-six languages from which Samarkand-based Jadids translated school textbooks.

Tensions emerged most clearly in debates over terminology: while some Jadids advocated for nationalizing foreign terms, others insisted on preserving original forms. This controversy reflected deeper ideological divisions between those prioritizing ease of learning (nationalization) and those valuing international scholarly precision (original forms).

Russian occupied a particularly ambiguous position. The Jadids adopted Russian technical vocabulary in their new-method schools and publications, yet they resisted the Tsarist regime's Russification efforts and, later, Soviet linguistic policies that sought to marginalize Turkic languages. This "instrumental adoption with political resistance" characterizes the Jadid stance toward Russian.

Western European languages, in contrast, were embraced with relatively little ambivalence. Fitrat's translations of Uzbek works into English, German, and French exemplify a desire to project Uzbek culture onto the global stage.

The outcomes of these attitudes can be seen in the formation of a modern Uzbek literary language. Through translation, the Jadids enriched the Uzbek vocabulary with terms from multiple sources, standardized grammar, and developed new genres of prose and journalism. However, the heavy reliance on foreign sources also sparked concern—voiced by more purist Jadids—about diluting the national linguistic heritage.

Conclusion

The attitude of Jadid intellectuals toward foreign languages in their translation practices is best characterized as pragmatic pluralism with selective resistance. Jadids viewed foreign languages as indispensable tools for accessing modern science, reforming education, and connecting with global intellectual currents, yet they remained vigilant against cultural subjugation, particularly through the Russian language. Their translation strategies—ranging from direct borrowing to adaptation and nationalization—were shaped by a complex calculus that weighed utility, national identity, and ideological commitment against each other.

Future research should expand the empirical base by conducting archival studies of unpublished Jadid translations, examining the reception of translated works among different social strata, and comparing Jadid linguistic attitudes with those of contemporaneous reform movements in other Muslim societies (e.g., the Young Ottomans, Egyptian nahda).

Additionally, applying computational methods to analyze lexical borrowing patterns across Jadid-era publications could yield quantitative insights into the dynamics of linguistic exchange.

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