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Turkmen Substratum Features and Generational Variation in The Speech of Uzbek–Turkmen Bilinguals in Olot District, Bukhara Region

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Abstract: Border districts of Uzbekistan preserve long-standing, everyday contact between Uzbek and Turkmen speech communities, yet this contact has been studied mainly through lexical and phonetic description of the neighbouring Khorazm dialectal zone, while Olot District of Bukhara Region — an area with a documented Turkmen-descended population and toponymy — has received little dedicated attention. Based on field data collected in Olot District between 2023 and 2026 (over 300 lexical items and morphological forms recorded from dated, localized speakers), this article examines phonetic, morphological and lexical traces of Turkmen substratum influence in the speech of Uzbek–Turkmen bilinguals and analyses how these traces are distributed across generations. The findings show a consistent three-layer pattern: forms of clear Turkmen-Oghuz origin that remain stable in the speech of speakers aged 60 and above, forms that are currently in competition among middle-generation speakers, and an expanding set of standard-Uzbek forms among younger speakers (20–40). The article argues that the Olot bilingual system is best described as a case of morphological convergence in which the clause-level grammatical frame is Uzbek while a specific set of morphological exponents — case endings, negation, participle formation, diminutive suffixes — is supplied by a Turkmen-Oghuz source, and that this configuration is currently undergoing intergenerational levelling toward standard Uzbek.

Keywords: Uzbek–Turkmen Bilingualism, Language Contact, Turkmen Substratum, Oghuz Dialects, Olot District, Morphological Convergence, Generational Variation, Contact Linguistics

1. Introduction

Language contact between Uzbek and Turkmen speech communities is a long-standing feature of several border districts of Bukhara and Khorazm regions. Olot District of Bukhara Region, which borders Turkmenistan, is one such area: according to district administration data for 2026, more than 2,400 residents are registered as ethnically Turkmen, and everyday speech in the district shows sustained mixing of Uzbek and Turkmen linguistic material [1]. Village names within the district — Chovdur, Chandir, Qorluq, Bayot, Opshoq — are themselves Turkmen tribal and clan names, and I. Shamsiddinov's dialectological research on the neighbouring Qorako'l district traces the ancestry of several of these villages (Qorovul, Chandir, Xidireyli, Emrali) to Turkmen-descended clans [2]. Olot bilingualism is therefore not a recent or incidental contact situation but the linguistic residue of a centuries-long process of ethnic and linguistic integration attested in toponymy and local historical sources.

Existing scholarship on Uzbek–Turkmen linguistic relations has concentrated on the neighbouring Khorazm dialectal zone. Alimardonov documents the influence of Uzbek dialectal lexis on Turkmen dialects of that zone, particularly in vocabulary connected with agriculture, horticulture, construction and crafts [3]; Mamatkulova and Alimardonov describe the position of Turkmen dialects within the Khorazm zone relative to surrounding Uzbek varieties [4]; and Alimardonov's further work on the same zone compares vowel inventories across the two varieties [5]. A. Allaberdiyev's 2025 doctoral research extends this line of enquiry to the Bukhara Oghuz dialects, documenting Turkmen-descended phonetic and morphological features, though without a dedicated, generationally stratified account of Olot District specifically [6]. This article addresses that gap by asking, on the basis of dedicated field data from Olot District, which linguistic levels most clearly retain Turkmen-Oghuz substratum features, and how the retention of those features is distributed across speaker generations.

Theoretical Framework

The article treats the Turkmen-derived material identified in Olot speech as a case of substratum influence in the sense established by Weinreich, for whom contact-induced change results from the interaction of two grammatical systems in the mind of the bilingual speaker rather than from simple lexical borrowing [7]. Haugen's account of long-term stable bilingual communities, developed on the basis of Norwegian-American speech, provides a further point of reference for interpreting generational asymmetry: Haugen observed that contact features are typically best preserved in the generation that acquired the minority or substrate language first, and recede in the direction of the dominant contact language among descendants raised primarily in that dominant language [8]. Fishman's distinction between societal and individual bilingualism is also relevant here, since Olot bilingualism operates at the level of the speech community rather than as an individual or elite phenomenon, which is consistent with the depth and systematicity of the Turkmen-derived material documented below rather than with isolated code-switching [9]. Read together, these three frameworks predict exactly the kind of layered, generationally graded system that the Olot field material in fact shows.

2. Materials and Method

The empirical basis of this article is field research conducted in Olot District, Bukhara Region, between 2023 and 2026, in the course of which more than 300 lexical units and a corresponding set of morphological forms were recorded from dated, localized informants across several Olot villages (including Chandir, Chovdur, Qirlishon, Xidireyli, G'anchi-Chandir, Xosabo'yi, Opshoq, Go'kgo'z and others). Each form cited below is attributed to a named informant with birth year, village and year of recording, following standard dialectological practice. The study combines comparative-typological analysis of the recorded material against the reference grammars and dialect descriptions of Turkmen [10] and against descriptions of the Bukhara Oghuz dialects [11] with a generational stratification of informants into an older cohort (60 years and above), a middle cohort, and a younger cohort (20–40), in order to track the direction of change in the forms recorded.

3. Results and Discussion

1. Phonetic level

Standard Turkmen preserves a system of eight long and eight short vowel phonemes, in which vowel length is phonologically distinctive (at vs āt) [12]; standard Uzbek, by contrast, has six vowel phonemes with no comparable length distinction. In the Olot field material, long vowels of the Turkmen type are clearly audible in forms such as açgözlük (stinginess) and aç (hungry), where the initial vowel is pronounced closed and lengthened rather than in the open, short manner of standard Uzbek [13]. A. Allaberdiyev's dissertation on the Bukhara Oghuz dialects likewise identifies primary vowel length as a

feature preserved specifically in areas under Turkmen influence and the Olot material is consistent with that generalization.

Palatal vowel harmony, characteristic of Turkmen and of the wider Oghuz group, is likewise attested in Olot speech: the postposition *yali* ("like") harmonizes with the preceding word, as in *gul yali bavak* ("a child like a flower"), where standard Uzbek would use the invariant *kabi*. This harmonized form is well preserved in the speech of the older generation (60+), while younger speakers replace *yali* with the Uzbek *kabi*. M.Mirzayev's earlier study of the Bukhara group of Uzbek dialects documents a comparable weakening of vowel harmony in the affixation of comparative adjective forms and verb paradigms of the Oghuz-influenced villages of the Qorako'l district (e.g., *yaxshireq* alongside the vowel-harmony-violating *-req* suffix) [14], and the Olot data show the same erosion pattern, again concentrated in younger speech.

Word-initial voicing of stops ($k > g$, $t > d$), a diagnostic Oghuz feature also documented for the neighbouring Qorako'l dialect by I.Shamsiddinov [15], remains active in Olot speech among older speakers — *gitmek* ("to go"), *gelmek* ("to come"), *görkezmek* ("to show"), *gidjek dal* ("[he/she] does not intend to go") — while younger speakers increasingly use the de-voiced standard-Uzbek forms *ketmoq*, *kelmoq*, *ko'rsatmoq*, *ketmoqchi emas*. A separate but historically related shift, $f > p$, appears to have stabilized across the whole speech community regardless of generation: the Turkmen-descended *peydo* and *pali* are produced with *p* throughout Olot, and the substitution extends even to recent loanwords, where standard *multfilm* and *mikrofon* are locally pronounced *multpilm* and *mikrapon*.

The lexical-phonetic layer also preserves items that have undergone local sound substitutions while keeping their original meaning intact. Turkmen *gowy* ("good") surfaces in Olot as *qo'vi/g'ovi*, used in everyday greeting formulas by older speakers: *G'oviming?* ("Are you well?"), *Unyali g'ovi dalim* ("I am not so well"). Turkmen *abraý* ("reputation, standing earned through honest work") is preserved as *ovro'/avro'*, embedded in a set of local phraseological units — *ovro'ya qatilmaq* ("to share in [someone's] standing"), *ovro'yi to'kmak* ("to squander one's standing"), *avro'yi beyik* ("of great standing") — recorded alongside the semantically equivalent standard Uzbek *obro'*. The Persian-derived Turkmen *abtap* ("sunlit spot", from *oftob* "sun") appears in two phonetically distinct local variants — *optop* in *Opshoq* and *eptop* in *Dilkor-Qo'ng'rot* — illustrating that even within Olot District the same Turkmen-derived item can stabilize differently from village to village.

2. Morphological level

Turkmen distinguishes two allomorphs of the accusative case depending on the final segment of the stem: consonant-final stems take *-y/-i*, vowel-final stems take *-ny/-ni* (e.g. *gyz* — *gyzy* "the girl", *oba* — *obany* "the village") [16]. The Olot field material preserves the consonant-final variant in a reduced, nasalized form: *elin achip* ("opening [one's] hand", from *el* "hand") and *agzin achmak* ("to open [one's] mouth", from *agz* "mouth") use *-in* rather than the standard Uzbek *-ni*. The comparison is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Turkmen distinguishes two allomorphs.

Example	Turkmen form	Olot bilingual form	Standard Uzbek form
<i>el</i> ("hand", consonant stem)	<i>eli (-i)</i>	<i>elin (-n)</i>	<i>qo'lni (-ni)</i>
<i>agz</i> ("mouth", consonant stem)	<i>agzy (-y)</i>	<i>agzin (-n)</i>	<i>og'zini (-ni)</i>
<i>inak</i> ("cow", consonant stem)	<i>inaky (-y)</i>	<i>inagy</i>	<i>sigirni (-ni)</i>

eje ("mother", vowel stem)	ejeni (-ni)	ejeni (-ni)	onani (-ni)
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The dative case shows a related, if less dramatic, pattern. Turkmen marks the dative with -a/-e after both consonant- and vowel-final stems (mekdebe "to school", bazara "to the market"), whereas standard Uzbek uses the single allomorph -ga throughout. M.Mirzayev's study of the Bukhara group of Uzbek dialects records a further, closely related Oghuz feature in which the dative and locative cases merge functionally, illustrated by the Oghuz-dialect sentence Bozarga berdim, ul jerde mal kep ("I went to the market, there was a lot of livestock there") alongside its Bukhara-dialect counterpart Bozarga berdim, o'rga mal ko'p [17]. In the Olot material this dative-locative proximity is reflected in forms such as elina ver ("give [it] into [his/her] hand") and bozora gitmak ("to go to the market"), where the dative is consistently realized as -a/-e rather than as literary -ga.

Negation shows a parallel pattern. Standard Turkmen expresses negation with the independent particle *dal*, positioned after the verb-tense form and before person-number marking, giving a paradigm such as *gider dal* ("does not go"), *gitjek dal* ("does not intend to go"), *gitdi dal* ("did not go"), *gitmeli dal* ("should not go") [18]. This contrasts with standard Uzbek, where negation is expressed through the bound morphemes -mas or -emas. The Olot material preserves the Turkmen paradigm productively among older speakers: *gidjek dal* ("does not intend to go"), *dalmi* ("is that not so?"), *gidjek dalmiz* ("we do not intend to go"), alongside the perfective-evidential form *bavak chekraptir* ("the baby has [apparently] cried out"), in which -tir continues the Turkmen evidential past-tense function documented by A.Borcakov et al. [19]. Table 2 summarizes the four-way comparison across the generational split observed in the material.

Table 2. Negation shows a parallel pattern

Turkmen	Olot: older generation (60+)	Olot: younger generation	Standard Uzbek
<i>gider dal</i>	<i>gidjek dal</i>	<i>ketmoqchi emas</i>	-mas / emas
<i>gitdi dal</i>	<i>dalmi</i>	<i>emasmi</i>	emas edi
<i>gidipdir dal</i>	<i>bavak chekraptir</i>	<i>chinqiribdi</i>	ekan / -ibdi
<i>gitmeli dal</i>	<i>gidjek dalmiz</i>	<i>ketmoqchi emasmiz</i>	-masligimiz kerak

A further diagnostic is the past participle. Standard Turkmen — like Turkish and Azerbaijani, as part of a shared Oghuz pattern — forms the past participle with -an/-en (*dog'an* "born", *goren* "having seen", *baran* "having gone"), while standard Uzbek uses -gan/-kan/-qan (*tug'ilgan*, *ko'rgan*, *borgan*) [20]. In the Olot material, older speakers in Chandir and Chovdur produce *doran og'lan* ("a boy that was born"), *chag'alan kadin* ("a woman who has had children"), and *bavak chekryan bavak* ("a crying baby"), whereas younger speakers use the standard Uzbek -gan form (*tug'ilgan bola*, *ko'rgan narsa*).

Two further morphological features recur across the material without showing the same generational retreat: the diminutive suffix -jiq/-jagaz, cognate with Turkmen -jyk/-jik and documented by A. Allaberdiev as characteristic of the Bukhara Oghuz dialects generally (*chagajiq* "little child", *oglanjagaz* "poor little boy", *Guloyimjagaz*), which in Olot speech carries an additional connotation of endearment or sympathy when attached to personal names; and the collective-associative suffix -dag'i, corresponding to Turkmen *toparlaýyn -dagy* ("and those with him/her"), as in *ijem dag'i* ("my sister/aunt and her household") and *dayim dag'i* ("my uncle and his household"), attested in Bayot and Opshoq. Word order and postpositional placement in Olot bilingual speech likewise follow the Turkmen/Oghuz pattern of subject-object-predicate with postpositions following their governed noun, consistent with descriptions of Turkmen syntax.

Postpositional and word-order patterns provide a further, syntax-level confirmation of the same substratum. Turkmen is agglutinative with a subject–object–predicate clause order and postpositions that follow their governed noun; E. Gökcür's account of the Turkmen converb suffix *-(i)p* shows that a converb-marked verb form regularly precedes the main verb, encoding sequential action (Ol *gelip gitdi*, "He came and left"; Men *yazip bilmedim*, "I was not able to write"), and S. Dinch's description of Turkmen syntax confirms that postpositions such as *üçin* ("for") and *bile* ("with") likewise follow the noun they govern. The Olot material reproduces this pattern closely: *bile* ("with") in *enesi bile gitmek* ("to go with [one's] mother"), and the harmonizing postposition *yali* discussed above in *gul yali bavak* and *ot yali yogach* ("wood like a horse", i.e. "as sturdy as a horse"). The modal suffix *-jaq*, corresponding to the Uzbek desiderative *-moqchi*, likewise appears in a Turkmen-type position immediately before the predicate: *urushjak bo'lib* ("intending to fight"), *gidjek dalim* ("I do not intend to go").

Table 3 summarizes the generational distribution across five diagnostic morphological and phonological indicators drawn from the material discussed above, confirming that the shift from Turkmen-Oghuz forms toward standard Uzbek equivalents is not confined to any single subsystem but is a general property of the contact grammar.

Table 3. The generational distribution across five diagnostic morphological and phonological indicators

Indicator	Turkmen form	Older generation (60+)	Younger generation (20–40)	Standard Uzbek
Accusative case	-(n)y / -(n)i	Active	Inactive	-ni
Negative particle	<i>dal</i>	Active	Inactive	<i>emas</i> / <i>-mas</i>
Past participle	-an / -en	Active	Inactive	-gan / -kan
Diminutive suffix	-jyk / -jik	Active	Inactive	-gina
Vowel harmony	Full	Partial	Weak	Absent

3. Lexical layer

Beyond phonetics and morphology, the Olot material contains a substantial lexical layer of Turkmen origin absent from standard literary Uzbek. Words such as *arkadag*, *hemişeki*, *aşak*, *aňsat* and *gönenmek*, documented by O. Madrahimov as characteristic of the Oghuz dialect of Uzbek more broadly, remain in active use in Olot. Field recordings also document words retained specifically in older speech and receding among younger speakers: *begenç* ("joy"), recorded from a 65-year-old informant in the Dilkor/Bangi area (Nurgeldiyeva D., b. 1960, recorded 2025); *abaý etmek* ("to frighten"), recorded from a 69-year-old informant in Go'kgo'z (Galdiyev M., b. 1955, recorded 2024); *berre* ("young lamb"; figuratively, "young, beautiful"), recorded from a 53-year-old informant in Kesakli (Oltiboyeva F., b. 1973, recorded 2026); and *abadan* ("prosperous", also used as a female given name), recorded in Chandir and G'anchi-Chandir (Yusupova A., b. 1964, recorded 2024). A four-line children's song recorded from a 78-year-old informant in Opshoq (Ortiqova E., b. 1947, recorded 2025) — *Bala-bala bog'dan geling*, / *Oyog'ochiq dog'dan geling*, / *Og'aming pali yomon*, / *Bazara gidanda geling* — mixes Turkmen-origin lexis (*pali*, *geling*, *gidanda*) with Uzbek elements (*bog'*, *bazara*) within a single oral-tradition text, offering a compact illustration of the coexistence of the two languages in a single utterance.

4. A three-layer generational model

Taken together, the phonetic, morphological and lexical evidence converges on a consistent pattern that can be described as a three-layer system: a first layer of Turkmen-Oghuz-derived forms that remain stable and productive in the speech of the older

generation (60+); a second layer in which older and standard-Uzbek forms are currently in competition among middle-generation speakers; and a third, expanding layer of standard-Uzbek forms among younger speakers (20–40), who increasingly replace *yali* with *kabi*, *-jiq/-jagaz* with *-gina*, and the Turkmen *dal*-based negation paradigm with the standard Uzbek *-mas/emas*. This is consistent with what contact linguistics describes as morphological convergence: the Olot bilingual system retains an Uzbek grammatical frame—clause structure and general syntax—while specific morphological exponents such as case allomorphy, negation, participle formation, and diminutives continue to be supplied by a Turkmen-Oghuz source, a configuration typically associated with long-term, stable bilingual contact rather than recent or superficial borrowing.

Limitations

Two limitations of the present material should be noted. First, the field data reported here were collected through informant interviews and recorded speech rather than through a purpose-built, age-balanced sociolinguistic corpus with proportional sampling across all Olot villages; the generational contrast described above is therefore a qualitative pattern consistent across dozens of individually attributed forms rather than a statistically weighted result. Second, the data collection period from 2023 to 2026 coincided with increased labour migration from Olot District, a factor that the dissertation research identifies as a further, still under-documented source of language contact whose interaction with the Turkmen substratum reported here remains a task for future research.

4. Conclusion

Field data collected in Olot District, Bukhara Region, between 2023 and 2026 show that Turkmen substratum influence in local Uzbek–Turkmen bilingual speech operates simultaneously at the phonetic (vowel length, palatal harmony, initial consonant voicing), morphological (accusative and dative case allomorphy, *dal*-based negation, *-an/-en* participles, *-jiq/-jagaz* diminutives, *-dagʻi* collective suffix) and lexical levels, and that this influence is not uniformly distributed across the speech community but follows a clear generational gradient. Older speakers (60+) retain the Turkmen-Oghuz forms most fully; younger speakers (20–40) show a marked shift toward standard literary Uzbek equivalents. This generational asymmetry suggests that the historically stable Olot bilingual system is currently undergoing intergenerational levelling toward standard Uzbek, and that systematic documentation of the kind reported here is time-sensitive: several of the forms recorded from informants in their sixties and seventies were reported as absent or markedly reduced in the speech of their grandchildren. Future research extending the fieldwork reported here to larger, age-balanced samples across all Olot villages, and to migrant communities affected by labour migration, would allow this generational trend to be measured quantitatively rather than described qualitatively.

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