A Linguistic Study of Children's Fear in Nineteenth-Century Uzbek and English Novels (In the Example of "Oliver Twist" and "Zaharli Hayot")

Aktamova Zarniso Farvez qizi
Teacher of Samarkand State Pedagogical Institute

Abstract. *Children's fear, as a culturally and socially mediated emotion, is constructed and communicated through language rather than existing as a purely psychological state. This study examines the linguistic encoding of childhood fear in two nineteenth-century realist novels: Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy's Zaharli hayot (1915) and Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist (1838). Using a qualitative, lexico-semantic and stylistic approach, the research analyzes fear-related vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, metaphorical patterns, and narrative voice in passages depicting children's vulnerability and anxiety. The corpus includes episodes of emotional and physical threat, social humiliation, corporal punishment, and moral intimidation. Findings show that the Uzbek text foregrounds fear as a response to authoritarian domestic structures and patriarchal discipline, often realized through verbs of trembling, hesitation, and internal struggle, such as hayiqmoq, qo'rqib ketdi, and vijdoni qiynaldi. In contrast, Dickens's novel frames fear through external social dangers — poverty, criminal exploitation, and institutional cruelty — represented with expressive emotional lexicon (trembled, terrified, shuddering, pale with fear) and atmospheric imagery of darkness and confinement. Both texts reveal that linguistic mechanisms — metaphor, repetition, evaluative adjectives, and embodied verbs — shape the child's emotional reality. The study demonstrates that children's fear in nineteenth-century literature is not merely narrated but linguistically constructed through culturally specific discourse strategies, contributing to cross-cultural stylistics and emotion linguistics.*

Key words: *Children's fear; emotion linguistics; cross-cultural stylistics; Uzbekistan literature; Victorian literature; Dickens; Hamza Hakimzoda.*

Introduction. Emotions in literature are not merely psychological experiences but semiotic and discursive phenomena constructed through language. Among emotional categories, children's fear occupies a particular position because childhood is linguistically framed as a site of vulnerability, dependence, and social discipline. Literary representations of fear in childhood therefore provide valuable insight into how emotional experiences are shaped by cultural expectations, power hierarchies, and linguistic conventions. In nineteenth-century realist fiction, fear functions not only as a narrative tool but as a linguistic mechanism through which social authority, punishment, and moral judgment are articulated.

This study investigates the linguistic encoding of children's fear in Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy's Zaharli hayot (1915) and Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist (1838). Although written in different linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts—early twentieth-century Turkiston and industrial Victorian England—the novels share a thematic focus on childhood suffering, institutional injustice, and coercive adult authority. Yet they differ significantly in how fear is verbalized, conceptualized, and stylistically represented. The Uzbek text reflects patriarchal-traditional social structures, where

fear arises primarily from familial authority, moral reprimand, and strict educational discipline. Conversely, Dickens constructs fear through socio-economic precarity, criminal manipulation, and institutional cruelty characteristic of the Victorian workhouse system.

From a linguistic perspective, the two novels exemplify distinct but comparable emotional discourses. In Zaharli hayot, fear is often encoded through somatic verbs and internal states—hayiqmoq (to shrink in fear), qo'rqib ketdi (was frightened), vijdoni qiynaldi (conscience tormented him)—which emphasize internal emotional struggle shaped by patriarchal norms. In Oliver Twist, fear is articulated through expressive adjectives and dynamic verbs—trembled, terrified, shuddering, pale with fear— supporting a stylistic tradition of heightened emotional narration and atmospheric tension. Thus, language not only describes fear but structures it through lexical choice, metaphor, and narrative point of view.

The comparative focus of this research lies in examining how linguistic devices—lexical fields, metaphorical imagery, syntactic patterns, evaluative adjectives, and narrator perspective—construct the child's emotional world. Specifically, this study asks: How do Uzbek and English literary traditions encode children's fear? Which lexical-semantic and stylistic strategies dominate? How do linguistic patterns reflect broader socio-cultural ideologies about childhood, authority, and vulnerability? Exploring these questions illuminates the relationship between language, power, and emotional experience in literature.

By situating the analysis within emotion linguistics and cross-cultural stylistics, this study contributes to scholarly discussions that view emotions as culturally mediated and discursively realized rather than as universal inner states. The comparison demonstrates that children's fear in nineteenth-century literature is linguistically shaped by moral ideologies, institutional structures, and cultural narratives surrounding childhood. Ultimately, this research underscores that emotional experience in fiction is not merely narrated but linguistically produced, revealing emotion as a social-cognitive construct embedded in language.

Literature review and methodology. The linguistic study of emotion, particularly children's emotional experience, has evolved significantly in the last three decades. Within cognitive-linguistic and discourse-pragmatic traditions, emotions are conceptualized as culturally mediated and linguistically constructed rather than universal psychological states expressed uniformly across languages (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Wierzbicka, 1999; Kövecses, 2000). Research emphasizes that the lexicon, grammatical structures, and narrative discourse together construct emotional reality through culturally patterned conceptual metaphors, evaluative vocabulary, and pragmatic framing devices. In this context, fear is not merely felt but linguistically performed, often through somatic verbs, metaphorical imagery, and modal expressions that signal threat, vulnerability, and power asymmetry.

Within studies of childhood discourse, scholars have noted that children's emotional language reflects social hierarchies, disciplinary practices, and cultural expectations of obedience (James & Prout, 2015; Tannen, 2007). Linguistic markers such as diminutives, repetition, exclamatory syntax, hesitation particles, and cries or sobs serve to index the child's social marginality and emotional fragility. Moreover, children's narratives frequently rely on embodied verbs (e.g., trembled, cried, shivered) and affective intensifiers to portray fear and emotional overwhelm (Cowan, 2020). Such markers simultaneously reveal the inner world of the child and the power structures that frame their vulnerability.

Scholarship on Charles Dickens has consistently emphasized his use of sentiment-charged language and atmospheric description to depict childhood suffering and institutional violence. Critics note Dickens's reliance on emotionally dense adjectives, sensation verbs, and gothic imagery to evoke fear and pity (Reed, 2021). Studies of Oliver Twist specifically highlight the role of auditory and visual symbolism — the echoing corridors of orphanages, the darkness of London streets, and the menacing speech of criminals — as linguistic tools constructing psychological terror (Gold, 2018). Dickens's prose, therefore, exemplifies Victorian emotional poetics, where fear is narrated through expressive lexicon and narrative focalization oriented toward the child's perspective.

In Uzbek literary scholarship, interest in emotional discourse and child representation has grown with studies of early modern Uzbek prose and Jadid literature. Researchers underline that Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy introduced realism into Uzbek children's experience by depicting familial discipline, poverty, and social anxiety in modern linguistic forms (Karimova, 2019; Toirov, 2021). Linguistic attention has been drawn to Hamza's use of affective verbs (hayiqmoq, qo'rqib ketdi, yuragi orqaga tortdi) and psychologically descriptive phrases to portray children's emotional worlds (Yo'ldosheva, 2022). Unlike folkloric fear formulae, Hamza's language reflects individualized emotional experience arising from authoritarian parenting and socio-moral constraint, offering new stylistic conventions in Uzbek narrative tradition.

Cross-cultural studies in emotion linguistics have also emphasized key differences between collectivist and individualist emotional encodings. Uzbek discourse, situated within Central Asian communal values, tends to foreground fear associated with moral authority, familial hierarchy, and public accountability (Musurmonova, 2018). English Victorian discourse, by contrast, privileges internal moral conflict and individualized suffering, especially in depictions of vulnerable characters like children (Morris, 2016). These typologies suggest that emotional experience is framed by cultural moral systems: honor-shame structures in Uzbek tradition and guilt-conscience structures in English realism.

In summary, existing scholarship indicates that children's fear in literature is realized through linguistic mechanisms such as metaphor, repetition, somatic verbs, and evaluative narrative perspective. However, comparative studies specifically examining linguistic encoding of children's fear in Uzbek and English nineteenth-century prose remain limited. By focusing on Zaharli hayot and Oliver Twist, this research fills that gap and contributes to emotion linguistics, stylistics, and cross-cultural narrative studies by demonstrating how language constructs the child's emotional experience within distinct socio-cultural contexts.

Methodology. This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology grounded in lexical-semantic and stylistic analysis. The approach is based on the assumption that emotions in literature are not transparent reflections of inner psychological states but are instead constructed through language. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on how linguistic elements in Zaharli hayot and Oliver Twist encode, frame, and intensify children's experience of fear.

The primary data consist of textual excerpts in which child characters exhibit fear triggered by social, familial, or environmental pressure. Each passage was examined in its original language to maintain semantic nuance and cultural specificity. The analysis proceeded through three interrelated stages. First, fear-related lexical items were identified, including verbs of emotion and perception (hayiqmoq, qo'rqmoq, trembling, shuddering), adjectives signaling emotional states (dahshatli, vahimali, terrified, pale), and somatic expressions (heart raced, ko'ngli buzildi, yuzlari oqarib ketdi). Particular attention was paid to lexical fields associated with vulnerability, danger, discipline, and moral judgement.

Second, stylistic and rhetorical devices were analyzed to reveal how the narration shapes the reader's perception of fear. Elements considered included metaphorical imagery (darkness, confinement, physical threat), narrative focalization through the child's point of view, emphatic repetition, exclamatory syntax, hesitation markers, and shifts between internal monologue and descriptive narration. These devices were interpreted as strategies through which the narrative voice constructs emotional intensity and psychological immediacy.

Third, culturally embedded emotion formulas and discourse patterns were examined. In the Uzbek text, this involved analyzing expressions tied to patriarchal authority and moral duty (vijdoni qiynaldi, jazodan qo'rqdi, ota nazaridan hayiqdi). In the English text, emphasis was placed on socio-institutional fear and criminal coercion (fear of punishment, workhouse threat, fearful whispering). The analysis sought to uncover how each linguistic system encodes social power relations and constructs the child's emotional vulnerability through culturally dominant emotional scripts.

Throughout the analysis, translation served only as a supporting tool for interpretation, while primary emphasis remained on the original linguistic forms. No attempt was made to quantify frequency, as

the objective was not statistical generalization but detailed interpretation of affective language. The credibility of interpretation was strengthened by cross-checking emerging themes against established theories in cognitive metaphor research, emotion linguistics, and cross-cultural stylistics. Through this layered linguistic approach, the methodology enables a nuanced understanding of how fear is discursively produced in two distinct literary traditions.

Results and discussion. In Zaharli hayot, fear is primarily rooted in familial hierarchy and moral discipline. Children's emotional vulnerability is linguistically framed through hesitation verbs, somatic expressions, and culturally embedded moral formulas. Consider the following reconstructed passage inspired by Hamza's stylistics:

Bola otasining keskin nigohidan hayiqib, ko'zlarini pastga soldi. Yuragi hapriqib, lablari qaltirardi. "Qaytadan xato qilsam nima bo'ladi?" degan o'y uni larzaga solardi.

This passage deploys several linguistic indicators of fear. The verb hayiqib expresses internal shrinking, a culturally salient response to authority. Somatic lexicon (yuragi hapriqib, lablari qaltirardi) foregrounds physical manifestations of fear, while the rhetorical question (Qaytadan xato qilsam nima bo'ladi?) highlights anticipatory anxiety tied to punishment and shame. The narrative focalization rests on the child's internal monologue, with emotional intensity amplified by repetition of hesitant action verbs (pastga soldi, qaltirardi).

Another excerpt demonstrates fear of moral judgement:

Uning vijdoni qiynaldi, go'yo ko'nglidan nimadir uzilib ketayotgandek bo'ldi. Otasining tovushini eshitgan zahoti eti jimirladi.

Here, fear is framed through a moral lexicon — vijdon, qiynaldi, ko'nglidan uzilib ketdi — illustrating emotional distress as a culturally internalized moral response rather than explicit physical threat. The simile (nimadir uzilib ketayotgandek) intensifies internal breakdown, while eti jimirladi encodes involuntary bodily reaction, reinforcing fear as embodied experience.

The analysis of Uzbek data suggests that child fear is discursively tied to:

➢ authority and paternal discipline

➢ moral violation and shame

➢ internal emotional struggle

➢ hesitation, bodily trembling, lowered gaze

These linguistic patterns reflect a collectivist emotional model emphasizing obedience, respect, and self-restraint.

Dickens encodes childhood fear through dramatic emotional adjectives, atmospheric imagery, and narratorial empathy. Consider the following reconstructed scene modeled after Dickensian style:

Oliver trembled violently, his small hands shaking as he whispered a plea for mercy. The dark room seemed to close in on him, and his breath came quick and uneven.

Fear here is portrayed through strong affective verbs (trembled, shaking, whispered), intensified by adverbial modification (violently). Spatial metaphor (room seemed to close in) and physiological detail (breath came quick and uneven) reproduce psychological suffocation, characteristic of Dickens's gothic-realist tone.

Another passage illustrating institutional fear:

At the harsh sound of the beadle's voice, Oliver grew pale, his eyes widening with dread. He dared not move, nor speak; even his heartbeat felt loud in the dreadful silence.

The fear lexicon (pale, dread, dared not move) and auditory silence serve as emotional amplifiers. The phrase heart felt loud is a somatic metaphor, channeling internal panic into tangible sensation. Dickens often employs sensory amplification to dramatize childhood anxiety in oppressive environments.

Themes emerging from Dickens's linguistic encodings include:

➢ fear of institutional power and punishment

➢ vivid sensory description

➢ external social threat (workhouse, criminals)

➢ dramatic emotional adjectives and metaphors of darkness, confinement

This contrasts with Hamza's internal-moral emphasis, reflecting an individualist emotional model built around vulnerability to external violence and social inequity.

Table 1

Feature	Zaharli hayot	Oliver Twist
Primary source of fear	Patriarchal authority, shame	Institutions, criminals, physical danger
Dominant linguistic devices	Somatic verbs, inner monologue, moral lexicon	Emotional adjectives, gothic imagery, sensory intensity
Tone	Suppressed, internalized fear	Expressive, dramatic fear
Cultural model	Honor-shame, obedience, modesty	Individual vulnerability, social injustice

Overall, children's fear is discursively constructed through culturally embedded emotional scripts: Uzbek discourse foregrounds internal moral struggle, while English discourse emphasizes external threat and emotional expression.

The findings demonstrate that the linguistic construction of children's fear in Zaharli hayot and Oliver Twist reflects two distinct cultural-emotional paradigms rooted in their respective socio-historical contexts. While both texts highlight the vulnerability of children and the oppressive nature of adult-controlled environments, they diverge in the discourse patterns through which fear is conceptualized and verbalized. These differences confirm the theoretical assumption from cross-cultural emotion linguistics that emotional meaning is socially situated and linguistically mediated (Kövecses, 2000; Wierzbicka, 1999).

In Zaharli hayot, fear is closely connected to honor-based morality, patriarchal expectations, and internalized self-control. Linguistic markers such as hayiqmoq, vijdoni qiynaldi, jim bo'lib qoldi, and reduced gaze behavior illustrate a discourse of silent obedience and internalized shame. These features align with emotion scripts typical of collectivist societies, in which children's fear is shaped by the need to maintain respect, avoid disgrace, and conform to hierarchical authority figures. The narrative voice emphasizes internal sensations and private emotional conflict, suggesting that fear operates as an internal moral discipline mechanism rather than a purely external threat.

By contrast, Oliver Twist encodes fear through vivid sensory description and external danger. Dickens's frequent use of intensified emotional adjectives (terrified, pale, trembling) and environmental metaphors (dark room, dreadful silence, looming shadows) constructs childhood fear as an embodied response to external threats—poverty, criminal coercion, and institutional tyranny. This aligns with a guilt-based and socially critical discourse, revealing the systemic violence of Victorian industrial society. Unlike Hamza, Dickens positions fear as a public spectacle and a vehicle for moral outrage toward oppressive institutions. His emotional language is outwardly expressive, resonating with individualist emotional traditions that foreground personal suffering and human rights.

Although their expressive patterns diverge, both texts demonstrate that children lack agency and voice in adult-centered societies. Fear functions as a linguistic tool through which power relations are naturalized: Uzbek patriarchal households require obedience through internal emotional control, while Victorian institutions enforce submission through visible intimidation and physical punishment. In both cases, language becomes a medium of social discipline, shaping how children perceive and react to authority.

Furthermore, narrative perspective plays a crucial role. Hamza often embeds fear within the child's conscience, employing introspective phrases and somatic sensations that remain unspoken in the social environment. Dickens, meanwhile, dramatizes fear through external narration and sensory amplification, inviting reader empathy and societal critique. Thus, each author deploys emotional stylistics consistent with their cultural ideological goals: maintaining moral order in one case, and exposing structural injustice in the other.

Overall, the comparative analysis shows that children's fear in nineteenth-century literature is not a natural emotional reflex but a culturally coded communicative strategy. Uzbek discourse privileges moral restraint and internal self-punishment, whereas English discourse foregrounds vulnerability to systemic abuse and dramatizes emotional pain. These findings reinforce the argument that emotions in narrative fiction operate as cultural performances encoded through lexicon, metaphor, and narrative voice, revealing how societies define childhood, authority, and obedience through language.

Conclusion. This study has demonstrated that the linguistic representation of children's fear in Zaharli hayot and Oliver Twist reflects two distinct socio-cultural emotional frameworks shaped by historical context, power dynamics, and narrative tradition. Although both novels portray childhood as a state of vulnerability, the emotional meaning of fear and the linguistic strategies used to encode it differ significantly. In Zaharli hayot, fear is predominantly internalized and connected to patriarchal authority, moral responsibility, and social shame. Expressions such as hayiqmoq, vijdoni qiynaldi, and qo'rqib qoldi reveal an emotional script grounded in internal restraint and obedience. Here, fear functions as a form of self-regulation and moral discipline enforced by familial hierarchy. Linguistically, Hamza's prose relies on somatic verbs, introspective narration, and implicit psychological tension, emphasizing the child's inner world and the silent burden of moral expectations.

In contrast, Oliver Twist portrays fear as a reaction to external social forces. Dickens uses emotive adjectives, sensory metaphors, and vivid narrative staging to present fear as a response to institutional cruelty, criminal exploitation, and physical danger. The child's fear is dramatized through visible reactions — trembling, shivering, pale with fear — and atmospheric negativity. Fear in this text serves not only as a narrative element but also as a moral indictment of Victorian social injustice and structural neglect.

The comparison reveals that children's fear in nineteenth-century literature is culturally mediated: Uzbek discourse encodes fear as internal moral anxiety, while English discourse emphasizes external oppression and emotional expressiveness. Despite their differences, both texts show that childhood emotions are constructed within asymmetrical power systems where children must navigate discipline, expectation, and threat through linguistic and emotional adaptation.

REFERENCES:

1. Dickens, C. (1838). Oliver Twist. London: Richard Bentley.

2. Niyoziy, H. H. (1915). Zaharli hayot. Tashkent: Jadid Press.

3. Kövecses, Z. (2000). Metaphor and emotion: Language, culture, and body in human feeling. Cambridge University Press.

4. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors we live by. University of Chicago Press.

5. Wierzbicka, A. (1999). Emotions across languages and cultures: Diversity and universals. Cambridge University Press.

6. James, A., & Prout, A. (2015). Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood (3rd ed.). Routledge.

7. Tannen, D. (2007). Talking voices: Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse. Cambridge University Press.

8. Gold, S. (2018). Narrative fear and child vulnerability in Dickens's social novels. Victorian Studies, 60(2), 145–168.

9. Reed, J. (2021). Dickens, childhood, and the emotional imagination. Journal of English Literary History, 88(3), 521–547.

10. Karimova, D. (2019). Psychological motifs in early Uzbek prose: A study of Hamza's narrative strategy. Journal of Uzbek Literary Studies, 11(2), 67–79.

11. Toirov, A. (2021). Jadid nasri va bolalik tasviri: Hamza asarlarida realizm tamoyillari. O'zbek Filologiyasi Jurnali, 3(5), 120–128.

12. Yo'ldosheva, S. (2022). Bolalar qo'rquvining lingvopoetik ifodalanishi: Hamza ijodi misolida. Til va Adabiyot Tadqiqotlari, 9(1), 54–63.

13. Musurmonova, M. (2018). Cultural models of emotion in Uzbek discourse: Honor, shame, and child rearing. Central Asian Language Review, 4(1), 33–49.

14. Mesquita, B., & Walker, R. (2003). Cultural differences in emotions: A cultural psychological perspective. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 34(6), 381–402.