DIFFERENTIATING THE CONCEPTS OF DIALECT, SHEVA, SOCIOLECT AND REGIONALISM

OZODBAYEVA RUKHSORA MANSUR KIZI

ozodbayevaruxsora@gmail.com

orcid.0009-0003-8034-4697

Abstract. The paper argues that dialect, *sheva*, sociolect and regionalism are not synonyms but name four distinct objects of description, separated by two basic parameters: the axis of variation (territorial or social) and the level of the unit (a whole linguistic system or a single lexical item). Dialect and *sheva* are territorial systems that differ in scope and rank; sociolect is a socially conditioned variety; regionalism is a lexical, phraseological or grammatical unit marked by regional distribution, usually functioning inside the standard language. The study draws on Uzbek dialectological tradition and on Western dialectology and sociolinguistics, and proposes a set of comparative criteria useful for linguistic description, lexicography and translation studies.

Keywords: dialect, *sheva* (local subdialect), *lahja*, sociolect, regionalism, regional variety, standard language, language variation, dialectology, translation of non-standard speech.

Terminological precision is a precondition of any comparative or translational analysis of non-standard speech. In linguistic literature, however, the terms *dialect*, *sheva*, *sociolect* and *regionalism* are frequently used interchangeably, especially in applied studies, school textbooks and translators' commentaries. A word recorded in a single Khorezm village may be called a “dialectism”, a “regionalism” and a “local word” within one paper, while the speech of a professional group may be loosely described as a “dialect” of that profession. This confusion has three sources. First, the English term *dialect* has both a narrow, territorial sense and a broad sense covering

any variety of a language, including social ones (Chambers & Trudgill 1998: 3–5). Second, Uzbek linguistics operates with a two-level territorial hierarchy (*lahja* and *sheva*) that has no exact equivalent in English, where the lower level is rendered variously as *subdialect*, *local dialect*, *vernacular* or *patois*. Third, the sociolinguistic turn of the 1960s, associated with W. Labov, shifted attention from geography to social stratification, introducing *sociolect* as a parallel but distinct notion (Labov 1966).

The aim of this paper is to delimit the four concepts on explicit criteria and to show their hierarchical and functional relations.

The objectives are:

(1) to review definitions in Uzbek, Russian and Western scholarship;

(2) to identify differentiating parameters;

(3) to summarise them in a comparative model;

(4) to outline consequences for translation studies. The methods are descriptive, comparative-typological and definitional (componential) analysis of terms, supported by illustrative material from Uzbek and English.

In the narrow, classical sense, a dialect is a territorially bounded variety of a language that possesses its own system of phonetic, grammatical and lexical features and is mutually intelligible with other varieties of the same language. It is a complete communicative system, not a set of isolated deviations: a dialect speaker can express any content within it. Classical dialectology, from the German and French linguistic atlases of the late nineteenth century to the Survey of English Dialects, studied dialects precisely as such systems mapped onto geographical space.

The boundary between *language* and *dialect* is not purely linguistic. E. Haugen showed that the distinction depends on political and social status as much as on structural distance: a “language” is usually a variety that has acquired a written

standard and official functions. Accordingly, a dialect is defined relationally - it is a dialect *of* a language that serves as its standard roof

In Uzbek linguistic terminology the territorial variety of the highest rank is usually termed lahja (Russian *наречие*), while *dialekt* is used either as its synonym or as a general cover term. Uzbek dialectology traditionally distinguishes three large groups of dialects that reflect the ethnolinguistic history of the language: the Karluk (Karluk–Chigil–Uyghur), the Kipchak and the Oghuz groups (Reshetov & Shoabdurahmonov 1978). These groups are differentiated by systemic features, for example by the presence or absence of vowel harmony, by the initial *j-* / *y-* alternation (Kipchak *jo ʻl* vs. Karluk *yo ʻl* "road"), and by distinctive case and verb forms. Thus, the Oghuz dialects of Khorezm, studied in detail by F. Abdullayev constitute a dialect in the strict sense: a separate subsystem of Uzbek with its own phonology and morphology.

The Uzbek term sheva (Russian *говор*) denotes the speech of a single settlement or a small, compact group of settlements - a village, a *mahalla* or a district. It is the minimal unit of territorial variation and the primary object of fieldwork: dialectologists record *shevas*, and dialects are then reconstructed as groupings of *shevas* that share a bundle of isoglosses. The relation is therefore hierarchical: language (til) → dialect (lahja / dialekt) → local subdialect (sheva)

English lacks a single established equivalent. Depending on the author, *sheva* may be rendered as *local dialect*, *subdialect*, *vernacular* or *patois*; in Slavic-oriented literature the loan *govor* is also used. For academic English texts on Uzbek material, we recommend *local subdialect* with the original term in brackets at first mention, e.g. “the Urgench local subdialect (*Urganch shevasi*)”, since this rendering preserves the hierarchical meaning that *dialect* alone would lose.

Three features distinguish *sheva* from *dialect*. First, scope: a *sheva* covers a micro-territory, a dialect a macro-region. Second, systemic completeness: a *sheva*

shares the core system of its dialect and is distinguished only by a limited set of local features, for instance a particular pronunciation of a vowel, a local word for a household object, or a specific suffix variant. Third, social profile: a *sheva* is primarily an oral, everyday, home-and-neighbourhood code, whereas a dialect as an abstraction may embrace urban and rural speech alike. Consequently, every *sheva* belongs to some dialect, but no single *sheva* represents a whole dialect.

A sociolect (social dialect) is a variety of a language associated not with a territory but with a social group defined by class, occupation, age, education, gender or shared lifestyle. The term reflects the insight, systematised by W. Labov, that linguistic variation correlates with social stratification as regularly as with geography: in his New York study, the pronunciation of post-vocalic /r/ varied predictably with the speaker's socio-economic class and the formality of the situation. In Russian linguistics the same phenomenon had earlier been described by V. M. Zhirmunsky as *social dialects*.

Sociolects differ from territorial dialects in several respects. Their features are concentrated mainly in vocabulary and phraseology, and to a lesser extent in pronunciation; their grammar normally coincides with the standard or with the local dialect of the speakers. A sociolect is therefore usually not an autonomous system but a layer superimposed on another variety. Moreover, a speaker typically commands several sociolects and switches between them according to the situation, whereas a territorial dialect is acquired as a first, home code.

The category covers several subtypes that should themselves be distinguished:

professional varieties and jargons - the speech of physicians, farmers, programmers, drivers (cf. Uzbek agricultural terms used among cotton growers);

age-based varieties - youth slang, school and student speech;

argot - the deliberately concealed code of closed groups;

class-based varieties - such as the contrast between RP and broad working-class accents in Britain.

It follows that one person may simultaneously be a speaker of a *sheva* (by birth), of a regional variety of the standard (by education) and of a professional sociolect (by occupation). The concepts describe different dimensions of the same speaker's repertoire, not competing labels for one phenomenon.

Whereas dialect, *sheva* and sociolect are varieties, a regionalism is primarily a linguistic unit - a word, a meaning, an idiom, a pronunciation or a grammatical construction - whose use is restricted to a particular region of the language area. The crucial point is that a regionalism usually occurs within the standard language or in the speech of educated speakers, not only in the folk dialect. Examples include British *lift* vs. American *elevator*, Scottish *wee* "small", or the regional meanings of Uzbek kinship and household terms used in the literary speech of a given province. In this respect a regionalism must be distinguished from a dialectism. A dialectism is an element of a territorial dialect or *sheva* that appears in a text written in the standard language - typically in fiction, to characterise a character's origin (Crystal 2008). It is perceived as a departure from the norm. A regionalism, by contrast, is felt by local speakers as part of normal, correct usage; it marks a regional variant of the standard rather than folk speech. The distinction is thus one of status: the dialectism belongs to a non-standard system and is transferred into the standard, while the regionalism already belongs to a regional form of the standard. A second, broader use of the term refers to entire regional varieties of the standard language (sometimes called *regiolects* or *regional standards*), such as Scottish Standard English or Austrian German. Regional standards arise when dialect features are partly levelled under the influence of the literary norm, producing an intermediate layer between the local *sheva* and the national standard. In Uzbek, the literary speech of educated speakers in Khorezm, Fergana or Kashkadarya shows such regional colouring. Unlike sociolects, these

varieties remain territorially defined; unlike traditional dialects, they are oriented towards the standard. The four concepts can be separated on six criteria. Table 1 summarises the analysis; the first two criteria (basis of variation and level of the unit) are decisive, the remaining four are supporting.

Differentiating features of dialect, sheva, sociolect and regionalism

Criterion	Dialect (lahja)	Sheva (local subdialect)	Sociolect	Regionalism
Basis of variation	Territorial	Territorial	Social (class, profession, age)	Territorial
Level	Linguistic system	Linguistic system (sub-system)	Layer / sub-system	Single unit, or regional variety of the standard
Scope	Macro-region	One or several settlements	Social group, not tied to place	Region within the standard language area
Levels affected	Phonetics, grammar, lexis	Mainly phonetics and lexis	Mainly lexis and phraseology	Mainly lexis and semantics
Relation to standard	Non-standard, autonomous	Non-standard, part of a dialect	Coexists with standard or dialect	Inside the standard (regional norm)
Acquisition	First language at home	First language at home	Acquired later, situational	Acquired with standard in the region

The table shows that only dialect and *sheva* stand in a direct relation of inclusion (*sheva* - dialect). Sociolect is orthogonal to both: it cuts across territorial divisions. Regionalism differs from all three in being, in its primary sense, a unit rather than a variety; a dialectism and a regionalism may be formally identical words but differ in status and in the speakers' perception of normativity.

The distinctions drawn above have direct practical consequences, because each

type of variation performs a different function in a literary text and therefore calls for a different translation strategy.

Dialect and sheva in fiction usually index a character's geographical and social origin, rural background or distance from the narrator. A classic example is the broad Yorkshire speech of the servant Joseph in E. Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Replacing it with a specific target-language dialect (e.g. a Khorezm *sheva*) risks a false cultural relocation; full neutralisation into the standard erases characterisation. A common compromise is a generalised colloquial register with selected non-standard markers that signal "rural / regional" without pointing to a concrete Uzbek region.

Sociolects index group membership, occupation or age. Here a functional equivalent is often available in the target language - professional jargon or youth slang can be rendered by corresponding Uzbek sociolectal means, since social stratification is less culture-specific than territory.

Regionalisms belonging to a regional standard (e.g. Americanisms vs. Briticisms) frequently carry little stylistic load for the source reader and are normally translated by standard equivalents; translating them by target-language dialect words would create an unintended effect of non-standardness.

Dialectisms used deliberately for local colour may require **compensation** at other points of the text, a translator's note, or retention of a culturally marked word with explanation.

Thus, before choosing a strategy, the translator must first identify which of the four phenomena is present. Misclassification - treating a regionalism as a dialectism, or a sociolect as a territorial dialect - leads to distortions of character, register and narrative perspective.

The analysis supports four conclusions.

Dialect (*lahja*) is a territorially defined, relatively autonomous system of a

language, contrasted with other dialects through bundles of phonetic, grammatical and lexical isoglosses.

Sheva is the minimal territorial variety - the speech of a settlement or micro-area - and stands in a relation of inclusion to the dialect. In English academic writing it is best rendered as *local subdialect*, with the Uzbek term given at first mention.

Sociolect is defined by social, not territorial, parameters; it is usually a lexical-phraseological layer superimposed on the standard or a dialect, and a single speaker may command several sociolects.

Regionalism is, in its primary sense, a linguistic unit of regional distribution functioning within the standard language; in a broader sense, a regional variety of the standard. It must be distinguished from the dialectism, which is a non-standard element transferred into a standard text.

The proposed criteria - basis of variation, level of the unit, scope, linguistic levels affected, relation to the standard and mode of acquisition - make it possible to classify non-standard material consistently. This is important for Uzbek dialectology, for the compilation of dialect and regional dictionaries, and especially for translation studies, where the correct identification of the type of variation is the first step in choosing an adequate translation strategy.

References

1. Abdullayev F. Xorazm shevalari. — Toshkent: Fan, 1961.
2. Chambers J. K., Trudgill P. Dialectology. — 2nd ed. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
3. Crystal D. A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. — 6th ed. — Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.
4. Haugen E. Dialect, Language, Nation // American Anthropologist. — 1966. — Vol. 68, No. 4. — P. 922–935.

5. Hudson R. A. Sociolinguistics. — 2nd ed. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
6. Labov W. The Social Stratification of English in New York City. — Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966.
7. Reshetov V. V., Shoabdurahmonov Sh. O‘zbek dialektologiyasi. — Toshkent: O‘qituvchi, 1978.
8. Trudgill P. Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society. — 4th ed. — London: Penguin, 2000.
9. Wardhaugh R., Fuller J. M. An Introduction to Sociolinguistics. — 7th ed. — Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.
10. Жирмунский В. М. Национальный язык и социальные диалекты. — Л.: Гослитиздат, 1936.