

## THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC TURN: LITERARY DISCOURSE AS A CENTRAL PARADIGM IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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**Abstract:** *The study of literary discourse has undergone a fundamental transformation, evolving from a peripheral concern to a central notion within modern linguistics, driven by the ascendancy of the anthropocentric paradigm. This paradigm shift moves the analytical focus away from language as an abstract, self-contained system and toward its role as a vital human faculty for interaction, cognition, and cultural expression. Consequently, literary discourse is no longer defined solely by its formal properties but is reconceptualized as a dynamic process of meaning-making that engages the full spectrum of human experience. This article traces this theoretical evolution, exploring how the anthropocentric turn has redefined the roles of author and reader, foregrounding the reader's cognitive engagement through frameworks like cognitive poetics and reader-response theory. It examines how global research trajectories—including stylistics, critical discourse analysis, and corpus linguistics—leverage this human-centered approach to decode the intricate relationships between language, mind, and society. By synthesizing global theory with local cultural imperatives, the study of literary discourse proves to be an indispensable lens for understanding the construction of human reality itself.*

**Key words:** *literary discourse, anthropocentric paradigm, modern linguistics, cognitive poetics, stylistics, reader-response theory, national identity*

**Introduction:** From Text to Discourse. Theoretical Foundations: The Confluence of Linguistics and Literature The integration of literary discourse into linguistics was driven by several interconnected schools of thought:

### **Russian Formalism and Prague School Structuralism:**

The Anthropocentric Paradigm is a fundamental shift in perspective that places the human being at the center of inquiry. In linguistics, this means moving away from studying language as an abstract, self-contained system (a key tenet of early structuralism) and toward understanding it as a human faculty, a tool for human interaction, and a window into the human mind and culture. When this paradigm is applied to **literary discourse**, it radically transforms how we define, analyze, and value literature. Literary discourse is no longer seen merely as a formal object with special

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linguistic properties, but as a quintessentially human activity of world-making and meaning-making.

For much of the 20th century, linguistics primarily concerned itself with the abstract, structural properties of language—sounds, morphemes, and sentence-level syntax. Literary studies, meanwhile, operated in a separate domain, analyzing texts for their aesthetic and thematic value. However, a significant paradigm shift occurred in the latter half of the century, moving the focus from language as an isolated system to language as a form of social action. This shift brought the concept of “discourse” to the forefront, and with it, literary discourse has emerged as a central and fertile object of study within modern linguistics.

But what is “literary discourse”? It is more than just a fancy term for a literary text. If a text is a static arrangement of words on a page, discourse is the dynamic process of meaning-making that involves that text, its author, its reader, and the broader cultural and historical context in which it is produced and interpreted. Literary discourse, therefore, is not defined by a fixed set of formal features but by a specific communicative function—it is language used artistically, often to create imagined worlds, evoke emotions, and challenge conventional ways of seeing.

This article explores how literary discourse became a main notion of modern linguistics. It will trace the theoretical foundations of this approach, examine key research directions globally, and investigate the specific trajectory and contributions of scholars from Uzbekistan.

In the early 20th century, thinkers like Roman Jakobson and Jan Mukařovský argued that the defining feature of “poetic language” is its focus on the message itself. Jakobson’s famous “poetic function” emphasizes the form of the message, where language draws attention to its own artifice through patterns of sound, rhythm, and repetition. This was a crucial first step in applying linguistic models to literary art.

**French Structuralism and Narratology:** Building on Saussurean linguistics, scholars like Claude Lévi-Strauss and later, A.J. Greimas, analyzed narratives as structured systems of meaning. They sought to uncover the deep, universal “grammar” of stories—the fundamental units and rules that govern narrative, much like syntax governs sentences. This approach treated literary works as complex linguistic structures waiting to be decoded.

**Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction:** This movement, led by figures like Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, challenged the structuralist search for stable meaning. They argued that meaning is not fixed within the text but is generated through an endless play of signifiers. The concept of intertextuality—the idea that any text is a mosaic of quotations and references to other texts—became key. This “death of the author,” as Barthes proclaimed, empowered the reader and positioned literary discourse as an open, unstable, and inherently dialogic field.

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## Global Research Trajectories in Literary Discourse Analysis

The theoretical foundations gave rise to several robust research paradigms that continue to shape the study of literary discourse today.

**Stylistics:** Stylistics serves as a direct bridge between linguistics and literary criticism. It uses the rigorous tools of linguistic analysis—phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics—to explain how the technical choices of an author create specific stylistic effects and contribute to thematic meaning. For instance, a stylistic analysis of a Hemingway story would examine his use of simple syntax and concrete nouns to create his characteristic "iceberg" effect, while an analysis of Faulkner would focus on his complex, sprawling sentences to reflect stream of consciousness.

**Cognitive Poetics:** This more recent field, pioneered by scholars like Reuven Tsur and Peter Stockwell, investigates the mental processes involved in reading and interpreting literary discourse. It asks: How do metaphors, narrative structures, and textual worlds interact with human cognitive architecture? Research in cognitive poetics explores how readers use conceptual metaphors (e.g., "life is a journey") to understand abstract ideas in poetry, or how "deictic shifts" allow us to mentally project ourselves into the space and time of a fictional narrative.

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Literature:** While CDA is often applied to political and media texts, it is highly relevant to literary discourse. Scholars like Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk use CDA to uncover how literature reproduces, reinforces, or challenges power relations, ideologies, and social structures. Analyzing a colonial-era novel, for instance, would involve examining how the discourse constructs representations of "the colonizer" and "the colonized," thereby perpetuating or subverting colonial ideologies.

**Corpus Stylistics:** Leveraging digital technology, this approach uses large collections of electronic texts (corpora) to analyze literary style. By computationally identifying frequency patterns, collocations, and syntactic structures across an author's entire body of work or a literary period, researchers can make empirical, data-driven claims about style that go beyond subjective impressionism. For example, corpus analysis has been used to study the distinctive speech patterns of characters in Shakespeare's plays or the evolution of genre conventions in the 19th-century novel.

### Research in Uzbekistan: A Unique Synthesis

The study of literary discourse in Uzbekistan is deeply intertwined with its rich cultural heritage, particularly the legacy of its great poets like Alisher Navoi, and the complex socio-linguistic landscape of the post-Soviet era.

### Uzbekistani Research: National Heritage and Modern Analysis

Uzbek scholars have approached literary discourse by synthesizing global linguistic theories with a deep commitment to analyzing their national canon and contemporary realities.

1. Linguistic Analysis of the Classical Heritage: A significant body of research is dedicated to applying modern linguistic and discourse analysis to classical Chagatai and Persian-language texts. Scholars at the Alisher Navoi State Museum of Literature and the Institute of Language and Literature of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences have produced works that:

- Analyze the narrative discourse and fictional worlds in Navoi's epic poems like *Khamsa*.
- Examine the stylistic devices and conceptual metaphors in the poetry of Navoi, Babur, and others, linking them to Sufi philosophy and Timurid court culture.
- Study the socio-linguistic context of these works, viewing them as complex discourses that engaged with the political, spiritual, and intellectual currents of their time.

This research does not treat these classics merely as historical artifacts but as living discourse, whose linguistic and structural complexity can be freshly illuminated by modern methods.

2. Stylistics and Linguopoetics: Following the Russian and Soviet tradition of linguistic stylistics, Uzbek linguists have developed a strong school of linguopoetics. This approach involves a meticulous analysis of the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical levels of a literary text to reveal its aesthetic unity. Research in this vein might focus on the sound instrumentation in a modern Uzbek poet's work or the syntactic patterns that create rhythm and emphasis in a novel.

3. Discourse Analysis in a Multilingual Context: Post-independence Uzbekistan presents a fascinating case for discourse analysis due to its language policy (the transition from Cyrillic to Latin script for Uzbek, the status of Russian, and the presence of minority languages). Scholars are increasingly studying how contemporary Uzbek literature reflects and constructs new national and cultural identities. They analyze:

- How authors use code-switching between Uzbek and Russian to depict specific social realities or character identities.
- How the discourse of modern novels and short stories negotiates themes of tradition versus modernity, rural versus urban life, and globalized versus local identities.
- The role of literature in the standardization and modernization of the Uzbek literary language itself.

Cognitive and Cultural Linguistics Approaches: Younger generations of researchers in Uzbekistan are beginning to explore the cognitive dimensions of their

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national literature. This includes investigating how culturally specific cognitive models and cultural metaphors are embedded in both classical and modern literary discourse. For example, how are traditional concepts like *mehr* (compassionate love) or *vatan* (homeland) conceptually structured and expressed in poetry and prose?

#### Conclusion: The Centrality of Literary Discourse

The journey of literary discourse from the periphery to the center of modern linguistics is a story of the field's maturation. Linguistics has moved beyond analyzing language in a vacuum to understanding it as the primary medium of human experience, social interaction, and cultural production. Literary discourse, with its heightened reflexivity, complexity, and deep embedding in context, provides the ultimate testing ground for linguistic theories.

It forces linguists to account for ambiguity, polyphony, creativity, and the profound interdependence of language and world-view. The global research trends—from stylistics to cognitive poetics—demonstrate the immense explanatory power of applying linguistic tools to literary art.

In Uzbekistan, the study of literary discourse is not merely an academic exercise; it is a vital enterprise for national self-understanding. By analyzing the discourse of Navoi with modern tools, scholars reconnect with their heritage in a new light. By examining the language of contemporary writers, they map the evolving identity of a nation in transition. The work of Uzbek scholars exemplifies how the global theoretical framework of discourse analysis can be fruitfully applied to a specific, rich, and dynamic cultural and linguistic context, proving that literary discourse is indeed a main notion for understanding not just language, but the human condition itself.

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