



ABDULHAMID NURMONOV'S PHONETIC AND PHONOLOGICAL
VIEWS

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Husnida Zamirdinovna Iminjonova
PhD Researcher,
Kokand State University

Annotation. The article examines the phonetic and phonological theories developed by the distinguished Uzbek linguist Abdulhamid Nurmonov, who played a leading role in shaping the systematic study of sound phenomena in the Uzbek language. His scientific contribution is analyzed in the context of 20th-century Uzbek linguistics, a period marked by the formation of new paradigms and the establishment of functional-structural approaches.

Keywords: Abdulhamid Nurmonov, Uzbek linguistics, phonetics, phonology, phoneme, linguistic system, functionalism, economy principle, structural approach.

In the 20th century, Uzbek linguistics entered a stage of methodological renewal. During this period, linguists began to apply systemic, functional, and structural approaches to the study of the Uzbek language. One of the most significant outcomes of this development was the transformation of phonetics from a descriptive field into a theoretical discipline with strong ties to phonology.

At the beginning of this period, the study of Uzbek sounds was still largely descriptive. Scholars such as A.K. Borovkov and A. G'ulomov provided important data on articulation and pronunciation, yet their studies remained focused on the physiological nature of sounds [1, p. 42]. There was little attention paid to the *systemic relations* among sounds, to their functional value within communication, or to their connection with meaning.

It was in this intellectual environment that Abdulhamid Nurmonov emerged as a leading scholar who redefined the study of sound phenomena. His works provided the foundation for systemic phonology in Uzbekistan. He integrated articulatory and acoustic description with functional and structural analysis, making phonology not just a branch of phonetics, but a full-fledged theoretical science.

Before Nurmonov's contributions, Uzbek phonetic studies were primarily descriptive. For example, Z. Ma'rufov's *O'zbek tili fonetikasi masalalari* (1971) discussed issues of articulation, but did not establish a coherent theory of the phoneme [2, pp. 61-62]. Similarly, A. G'ulomov's *O'zbek tili fonetikasi* (1962) presented detailed articulation



charts without analyzing the functional load of individual sounds [3, p. 57].

These works were invaluable as preparatory stages. They provided empirical foundations for later theoretical synthesis. However, as Uzbek linguistics moved toward a systemic paradigm, it became clear that the study of sounds had to go beyond their physical manifestation. It required an analysis of how sounds interact to form meaning, how they operate in opposition, and how they change within speech flow.

The emergence of such a perspective coincided with the general rise of structural linguistics in the world – influenced by F. de Saussure, N.S. Trubetskoy, and R. Jakobson. Uzbek scholars, too, began to view language as a structured system of interrelated elements. Abdulhamid Nurmonov was among the first to successfully adapt these theoretical ideas to Uzbek linguistic reality.

Nurmonov's central works – *O'zbek tili fonologiyasi* (1973), *Til – struktur tizim* (1982), and *Hozirgi o'zbek tili: fonetika* (1989) – laid the groundwork for modern Uzbek phonological theory [4, pp. 3- 41]. In these works, he argued that phonemes should be studied as functional units that serve to distinguish meaning rather than as mere physical sounds.

According to Nurmonov, the phoneme is a dual entity: it has both a material (articulatory-acoustic) side and an ideal (functional) side. He emphasized that the ideal aspect of a phoneme represents the listener's internalized "mental image" of a sound, which allows them to perceive meaning even when the sound changes in speech. As he noted:

"Every speech unit, regardless of its physical pronunciation, possesses an ideal form. Even if articulation changes, the listener perceives the ideal image, and communication remains unaffected." [4, p. 37].

This statement reflects a key principle of functional linguistics: meaning stability in spite of phonetic variability.

Nurmonov's analysis of phonological oppositions also marked a turning point in Uzbek phonological thought. He showed that contrasts such as /p/–/b/, /k/–/q/, and /o/–/u/ are not merely sound differences, but functionally distinctive relations that form the backbone of the phonological system [5, pp. 44-46].

A particularly original aspect of Nurmonov's theory is his formulation of the principle of linguistic economy (*tejamlilik tamoyili*). This principle explains how natural speech tends to simplify articulation while maintaining communicative efficiency. Nurmonov observed that in Uzbek colloquial speech, phonetic reduction and assimilation frequently occur for the sake of efficiency. For instance:

olib chiq → *opchiq*/ *olib ket* → *opket*/ *o'lib turadi* → *bupturadi*/ *yig'lab yubordi* →



yig‘lavordi

He regarded such transformations as evidence of the natural tendency of the sound system toward optimization – achieving maximum communicative result with minimal articulatory effort [4, p. 45].

This view corresponds to global linguistic theory. The English linguist Pop Pessas similarly argued that “*language constantly strives to facilitate articulation and eliminate redundant movements*” [6, p. 114]. Nurmonov’s application of this universal principle to Uzbek data represents a significant methodological innovation.

Moreover, he extended the idea of economy beyond sound change to orthography and morphology, showing that reduced forms may eventually become standardized words (e.g. *bugun* < *bu kun*, *ertaga* < *ertan+ga*). This demonstrates the interplay between phonetic reduction, morphological fusion, and semantic preservation – processes at the heart of linguistic evolution.

One of Nurmonov’s most influential claims is that phonetics and phonology are not two separate sciences, but two perspectives on the same object – the speech sound. Phonetics studies the sound’s physical properties; phonology investigates its systemic and functional behavior. He wrote: “Although the term *phonology* has been widely accepted, scholars have not always agreed on the exact nature of its object. In reality, both phonetics and phonology deal with one and the same phenomenon – the speech sound – but from different points of view.” [4, p. 41].

This statement anticipates later developments in linguistic theory, where the boundary between phonetics and phonology is viewed as a continuum rather than a division. By integrating these two fields, Nurmonov laid the foundation for functional phonology, a discipline that studies how physical sound phenomena perform communicative and structural roles in the language system.

Professor N. Mahmudov describes Nurmonov as “one of the first linguists who approached the internal structure of the Uzbek language systematically and made its study the mission of his life” [7, p. 30]. His influence extended beyond phonetics – he helped to shape the methodology of Uzbek structural linguistics as a whole. Nurmonov’s approach combined the rational aspects of several Western schools – the functional, glossematic, and descriptive traditions – into a single coherent framework suitable for Turkic languages. This synthesis allowed him to interpret language not as a static set of rules, but as a dynamic system in constant equilibrium.

His theoretical models have since been applied in sociophonetics, dialectology, morphophonemics, and experimental phonetics. Later scholars such as A. Abduazizov and M. Mirtojiyev developed his ideas further, expanding them with acoustic and instrumental



research methods [8, p. 24].

Abdulhamid Nurmonov's phonetic and phonological views represent a milestone in the history of Uzbek linguistics. By uniting structural, functional, and systemic principles, he transformed phonetic studies into a theoretical science. His notion of the phoneme as a functional unit, his interpretation of form-meaning unity, and his principle of linguistic economy continue to guide modern linguistic research. Nurmonov's legacy lies not only in his theoretical achievements but also in his methodological contribution – he taught linguists to view language as a self-regulating system, where even the smallest sound reflects an internal logic of structure and function. His works remain a cornerstone for anyone seeking to understand the systemic nature of the Uzbek language and its sound organization.

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