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Polyphonic Modifications Of The Relationship Between The Authorial Voice And The Character's Voice In English And Uzbek Prose

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ABSTRACT

Polyphony in prose is not limited to the presence of many characters or frequent dialogue; it is an aesthetic organization of voices in which authorial discourse and character discourse interact, compete, overlap, and transform each other. This article examines how the relationship between the authorial voice and the character's voice is modified in English and Uzbek prose through different narrative strategies and stylistic traditions. Grounded in Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel and supplemented by narratological accounts of voice and discourse representation (Genette; Fludernik), the study develops a comparative framework for describing voice relations across two literary systems. Using qualitative close reading as a method, the article compares typical patterns of polyphonic modulation in selected English prose (nineteenth- and twentieth-century traditions of authorial commentary, irony, and free indirect discourse) and Uzbek prose (realist and socially oriented narratives with strong evaluative authorial presence, alongside later tendencies toward internal focalization and conversational heteroglossia). The results show that English prose often intensifies polyphony by "withdrawing" the authorial voice into irony, focalization shifts, and free indirect discourse, whereas Uzbek prose more frequently produces polyphonic effects by allowing authorial evaluation to coexist with competing social voices, registers, and worldview positions within the same narrative space. The article argues that polyphonic modification is best understood as a continuum of authorial distance and character autonomy, shaped by historical experience, linguistic resources, and genre expectations.

Keywords: Polyphony; authorial voice; character voice; free indirect discourse; focalization; Bakhtin; English prose; Uzbek prose; narratology; discourse representation.

INTRODUCTION

The study of narrative voice has long faced a paradox. On the one hand, prose fiction seems to be "one text," produced by one authorial act; on the other hand, the reader experiences prose as a field of voices that do not simply coexist but argue, interrupt, parody, and reshape each other. This field is what Bakhtin conceptualized as dialogism and, in its most radical form, polyphony—an arrangement in which characters are not merely objects of authorial interpretation but centers of consciousness with their own ideological weight. In this sense, polyphony is not an optional ornament; it is a way literature models social reality, where competing values cannot be reduced to a single authoritative language.

When polyphony is discussed in national literary traditions, two simplifications frequently appear. The first equates polyphony with the mere presence of multiple characters or subplots, as if narrative multiplicity automatically produced genuine voice plurality. The second assumes that polyphony belongs mainly to a limited canon (often centered on Dostoevsky) and thus treats other traditions as only "less developed" variants. Both simplifications obscure what matters most: polyphony is

not a fixed label but a set of modulations—ways the authorial voice positions itself toward character voices, and ways character voices gain or lose autonomy inside a narrative.

The purpose of this article is to examine those modulations comparatively in English and Uzbek prose, focusing specifically on how the relationship between authorial voice and character voice changes across narrative strategies. The comparison is not designed to claim that one tradition is "more" or "less" polyphonic. Rather, it asks how polyphony is produced under different cultural, historical, and linguistic conditions. English prose, especially since the nineteenth century, has developed sophisticated means for authorial irony, perspectival shifts, and subtle forms of character speech representation, including free indirect discourse, which often allows character consciousness to appear without explicit quotation marks or reporting clauses. Uzbek prose, shaped by strong social-ethical tasks and a dense tradition of evaluative narration, frequently generates polyphonic tension through the simultaneous presence of authorial moral commentary and competing social registers, voices of tradition and reform, voices of power and marginality, voices of public speech and private suffering. These are different routes to the same aesthetic outcome: the refusal of a single, fully controlling monologic voice.

The argument developed below is that polyphonic modification can be described as a continuum anchored by two variables: authorial distance (how far the narrator stands from characters' values) and character autonomy (how independently characters' voices function as worldview positions). This continuum is analytically practical for cross-cultural comparison because it avoids reducing polyphony to a binary "present/absent" property and instead highlights concrete narrative operations.

The study applies qualitative comparative textual analysis. The theoretical framework draws on Bakhtin's formulation of polyphony and dialogism as well as narratological approaches to voice, focalization, and discourse representation. Bakhtin supplies the ethical-aesthetic core: polyphony arises when character consciousness is not finalized by authorial judgment. Genette's work provides terminology for distinguishing narration, focalization, and the distribution of narrative information (who speaks, who sees, who knows). Fludernik's account of narratology supports analysis of how consciousness, experientiality, and speech representation are organized in modern narrative forms.

The empirical component uses close reading of representative narrative scenes and stylistic features in English and Uzbek prose. The selection is illustrative rather than exhaustive: English prose is represented through well-established traditions of realist and modernist narration (authorial commentary, irony, and internal focalization), while Uzbek prose is represented through realist and socially engaged narrative practices and later stylistic developments. The analysis focuses on recurring mechanisms of voice modification rather than on the full plot architecture of any single text. The procedure involves identifying passages where the boundary between authorial voice and character voice becomes unstable, then describing how that instability is achieved (for example, through free indirect discourse, evaluative framing, dialogic insertion of social speech types, or shifts between external narration and inner speech). The comparison is made at the level of narrative technique and stylistic function, not at the level of national ideology.

Across both traditions, polyphonic modification appears as a patterned redistribution of authority. In the most authorially centralized configurations, the authorial voice provides explicit evaluation and interpretive closure: characters function as examples inside a moral argument. In more polyphonically open configurations, the authorial voice either retreats or becomes one voice among others, allowing characters' perspectives to resist finalization.

In English prose, one of the most productive devices for such redistribution is free indirect discourse. This technique blends third-person narration with the rhythms and evaluative vocabulary of a character's inner speech, creating a hybrid zone where it becomes difficult to separate narrator judgment from character judgment. The polyphonic effect is subtle: the author does not need to insert direct quotes or explicit debates; instead, the text itself becomes a site of ideological tension, because the reader senses two evaluative centers operating simultaneously. Narratological descriptions treat such discourse blending as a key mechanism for representing consciousness while maintaining narrative continuity. In this configuration, authorial voice modifies itself into a kind of orchestrator: it arranges access to consciousness while keeping interpretive freedom open.

A second English pattern is ironic authorial presence. Even when the narrator is overtly present, irony can destabilize

authority by exposing the gap between social language and human reality. The authorial voice appears strong, yet it does not close meaning; it opens meaning by showing that official discourses—respectability, progress, rationality—are themselves voices with interests, not neutral truths. Here polyphony is created by letting social languages speak in their own terms while placing them under an ironic light. The narrator becomes a critical listener rather than a final judge, and characters can become readable as victims, collaborators, or resistors of the discourses that speak through them.

A third English pattern, especially prominent in modernist prose, is the relocation of narrative authority into internal focalization and stream-of-consciousness effects. When narrative time aligns with the micro-tempo of perception, the authorial voice becomes less a commentator and more a medium through which experience unfolds. This does not eliminate the author's presence; rather, it modifies that presence into structural design—choices about rhythm, segmentation, and transitions between consciousnesses. Polyphony emerges when multiple consciousnesses are presented without a single stable interpretive hierarchy, so that the reader must navigate competing experiential truths.

In Uzbek prose, polyphonic modification often takes a different route: the authorial voice tends to remain ethically and emotionally audible, but it shares the narrative space with multiple social voices that represent competing value systems. The polyphonic effect is not primarily achieved by making authorial voice invisible; it is achieved by saturating the narrative with heteroglossia—register variation, speech types associated with authority, tradition, reform, gendered expectations, and public morality. These social voices do not merely decorate dialogue; they impose interpretive pressure on characters, shaping their choices and even shaping how they can speak about themselves. Polyphony therefore arises from social embeddedness: the character voice is constantly negotiating with social language.

In realist Uzbek narratives, the authorial voice may openly evaluate injustice or hypocrisy, but the text still becomes polyphonic when characters' inner worlds and competing discourses are given enough space to appear as alternative truths rather than as mistakes to be corrected. In such cases, the authorial voice is modified into a moral witness rather than a moral dictator. This is especially visible in narratives where characters are torn between modernizing ideals and traditional obligations, where the social environment speaks through elders, officials, religious or customary authorities, and communal opinion. The character's dignity, fear, or desire becomes a counter-voice against institutional speech.

A further Uzbek pattern is the use of conversational texture and oral-speech stylization to create a multi-voiced narrative surface. When a narrative adopts idioms, proverbs, honorific forms, and culturally specific evaluative vocabulary, it imports entire worldview positions into the text. The authorial voice is then no longer a single stylistic register; it becomes a site where different registers collide. In this configuration, even third-person narration can carry polyphony because it echoes the language of community judgment while simultaneously exposing its cruelty.

In both traditions, the clearest indicator of polyphonic modification is the emergence of interpretive undecidability: the reader is not offered one stable moral lens but must listen to competing lenses. The difference lies in the typical mechanism by which this undecidability is produced: English prose frequently produces it through discourse blending and perspectival subtlety, whereas Uzbek prose often produces it through socially saturated voice fields and ethically resonant narration that does not erase contradiction.

The comparative patterns described above can be explained by considering how each tradition historically negotiates the function of prose. English prose, particularly in the nineteenth century, developed alongside an expanding public sphere where irony, satire, and social critique became central literary tools. A narrator could speak loudly and still be polyphonic, if the loudness was used to reveal the multiplicity of social voices and their contradictions. Over time, English narrative technique increasingly cultivated indirectness—methods that allow character consciousness to seep into narrative without the overt framing of "he thought" or "she felt." This indirectness is not merely stylistic refinement; it is a polyphonic ethics, because it suspends final judgment and allows the reader to encounter the character voice as lived truth.

Uzbek prose, shaped by the intense social stakes of cultural transformation, modernization debates, and the moral politics of everyday life, often maintains an authorial voice that is ethically accountable. The narrator is expected to see, to name, and to witness. Polyphony under such

expectations does not require the disappearance of the author; rather, it requires that the authorial voice not cancel the autonomy of other voices. The authorial voice becomes polyphonically effective when it acknowledges that social reality is not a single truth but a struggle among truths. In other words, Uzbek prose can remain openly evaluative and still be polyphonic if evaluation is directed at oppressive structures while leaving human consciousness open and complex.

The continuum proposed in the introduction clarifies this. At one end, authorial distance is low and character autonomy is low: the narrator's evaluation finalizes characters. At the opposite end, authorial distance is high and character autonomy is high: characters' voices operate as independent worldview positions, and the narrator becomes primarily an arranger of access. English modernist narration often moves toward the latter configuration; Uzbek socially oriented realism often occupies intermediate configurations, where authorial evaluation is present but characters still resist finalization because the narrative gives space to their interiority and to the competing languages around them.

A key theoretical advantage of this continuum is that it avoids treating polyphony as identical to "many narrators" or "many plots." A single-narrator text can be polyphonic if discourse representation creates hybrid zones where the narrator's language and the character's language interpenetrate. Conversely, a text with many narrators can be monologic if every narrator voice is strictly subordinated to a single ideological conclusion. Bakhtin's emphasis on the author's relationship to the hero captures this point: polyphony is fundamentally relational, not merely structural.

From a linguistic angle, English offers compact tools for subtle evaluative shading through modality, tense-aspect, and syntactic flexibility that supports free indirect discourse. Uzbek offers rich tools for socially indexed speech through honorific patterns, pragmatic particles, culturally loaded evaluative vocabulary, and an oral-literate interface that brings communal speech into narrative. These are different resources for the same artistic aim: to stage the person in a world of competing voices.

The comparison also suggests that polyphonic modification is historically responsive. When societies experience rapid social change, narratives tend to become more voice-saturated because new discourses and old discourses collide. Uzbek prose often registers such collisions directly, because conflicts between tradition and reform, public morality and private feeling, and authority and dignity are central thematic engines. English prose registers collisions too, but it often develops techniques that make collision audible inside consciousness rather than only across social dialogue. In both cases, polyphony functions as a realism of the mind and of society: it renders contradiction as form.

This article has argued that the relationship between authorial voice and character voice in English and Uzbek prose is best understood through polyphonic modification—dynamic shifts in authorial distance and character autonomy. English prose frequently intensifies polyphony by blending narrator and character discourse, deploying irony, and shifting focalization toward interiority, thereby creating hybrid zones where voices cannot be cleanly separated. Uzbek prose often intensifies polyphony by keeping the authorial voice ethically present while saturating the narrative with competing social speech types, registers, and worldview positions that pressure, distort, and sometimes awaken character consciousness. Polyphony, in both traditions, emerges not from simple multiplicity but from relational openness: the refusal to finalize the character voice into a single authoritative meaning. This comparative perspective supports a more flexible understanding of polyphony as a continuum rather than a label, enabling more precise analysis of voice relations in cross-cultural prose study.

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