

**THE HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF ARCHAISMS AND HISTORICISMS IN WORLD  
LINGUISTICS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the historical development of research on archaisms and historicisms in world linguistics. The study explores theoretical approaches to lexical obsolescence, focusing on the dynamic interaction between active and passive vocabulary layers. Drawing on Russian, Uzbek, and Western linguistic scholarship, the paper analyzes the processes of lexical archaization, semantic shift, and lexical disappearance. Particular attention is devoted to the classification of obsolete vocabulary, the distinction between obsolete and dead words, and the stylistic and cultural functions of archaic lexemes in literary and communicative contexts. The study demonstrates that lexical obsolescence is not merely a process of linguistic loss but a complex phenomenon reflecting social, historical, and cultural transformation.

**Keywords:** *archaisms; historicisms; lexical obsolescence; passive vocabulary; active vocabulary; archaization; lexical mortality; semantic change; linguistic evolution; dead words.*

The study of archaisms and historicisms has long occupied a central place in the research of linguists, literary scholars, translation theorists, and specialists in related disciplines. Even today, the investigation of archaic and historical vocabulary remains a significant issue in modern linguistics. As the lexical system of a language constantly undergoes processes of growth and development, it is essential to examine the stages of vocabulary evolution as well as the reasons why certain words fall out of active usage. The Russian linguist I.I. Sreznevsky emphasized the historical value of lexical units, stating that every word represents a concept that once existed in the life of a people: whatever existed in reality had its verbal expression. For historians, each word serves as a witness, a monument, and a fact of national life, and the importance of a word increases with the significance of the concept it expresses. Taken together, words constitute a system of concepts that reflects the everyday life and worldview of a people (author's translation).

The lexical stock of a language is continuously enriched by new words that emerge as a result of social transformation, technological advancement, and the development of science and culture. The accumulation of lexical items, the expansion of stylistic resources, and the refinement of grammatical structures contribute to the overall progressive development of language. At the same time, as N.M. Shansky notes, an opposite process also occurs: certain obsolete words gradually disappear from the lexical system. Although this process is not decisive in lexical development, it significantly influences the structure of vocabulary and testifies to its continuous refinement. Thus, linguistic change is manifested not only in the appearance of new lexical units but also in the gradual withdrawal of words from active usage.

The Uzbek linguist M.T. Irisqulov observes that the disappearance of words from everyday speech is a natural phenomenon for living languages. Alongside lexical enrichment, the elimination of unnecessary lexical doublets and outdated forms is both natural and necessary, as it enables language to fulfill its primary function—serving as an effective means of human communication. The emergence of new words and meanings, as well as the obsolescence of others, is a gradual and long-term process. Shansky emphasizes that at any given stage, the vocabulary of a language consists of two layers: the active and the passive lexical strata.



Sh. Rahmatullaev proposes a different classification, distinguishing between the “modern layer” and the “contemporary layer” instead of using the traditional active/passive dichotomy. According to him, defining lexical modernity solely in quantitative terms (active vs. passive usage) is methodologically insufficient. Words belonging to the modern layer are not determined by their frequency in individual speech but by their relevance within the language system as a whole. Even specialized terms, though familiar only to experts, may belong to the modern layer. Words carrying either novelty or archaic coloring are classified within the contemporary layer, which includes lexemes marked by innovation or obsolescence.

Other Uzbek scholars, including A. Hojiev and A. Ahmedov, identify widely used and frequently occurring words as common vocabulary, actual lexicon, or normative words—terms that collectively correspond to active vocabulary. Words that gradually lose functional productivity shift from the active to the passive lexical layer. Russian linguists such as D.E. Rosenthal, I.B. Golub, and M.A. Telenkova regard passive vocabulary as a component of the lexical system whose usage is restricted and often stylistically marked, primarily functioning in literary texts. In contrast, scholars such as N.M. Shansky and N.I. Fomina argue that passive vocabulary remains part of the contemporary lexicon, understandable to speakers but rarely used in everyday communication. From this perspective, passive vocabulary represents a cultural repository preserving historical and cultural heritage.

Based on these theoretical positions, the present study adopts the distinction between active vocabulary (words widely used in modern communication and lacking archaic or innovative connotations) and passive vocabulary (words no longer in active use). The active layer includes both general national vocabulary and restricted-use words such as terms and professionalisms. The passive layer comprises:

1. obsolete words (archaisms and historicisms);
2. neologisms not yet fully integrated into active literary usage.

The obsolete lexicon of modern literary language constitutes a complex and multilayered system. Each word possesses its own historical trajectory. While some words disappear completely, others survive in limited usage. The loss of a word or one of its meanings is a gradual process of linguistic archaization: first, the word moves from the active to the passive layer, and only later may it disappear entirely. However, archaic words may sometimes return to active usage, often with significant semantic shifts.

Shansky identifies several criteria for classifying obsolete words:

1. degree of obsolescence;
2. causes of archaization;
3. possibilities and character of usage.

Uzbek linguists distinguish between “old words,” “obsolete words,” and “dead words.” A word may be historically old yet functionally modern (e.g., basic lexemes such as *hand*, *stone*, *give*, *one*, *five*, *I*). Obsolete words differ from dead words: although functionally inactive, obsolete words may still be used for stylistic or historical purposes, whereas dead words are entirely absent from contemporary usage and incomprehensible without specialized dictionaries.

English-language scholarship refers to lexical obsolescence through terms such as *lexical mortality*, *lexical death*, *lexical loss*, *lexical disappearance*, *lexical decline*, *lexical obsolescence*, and *lexical replacement* (Harrison, Rudnicka, Tichy).

Foreign linguists define obsolete words in several ways:

- as a resource in language planning and vocabulary development;
- as a stylistic device for reconstructing historical atmosphere in literary works;



- as a pedagogical tool for expanding readers' vocabulary.

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