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URBAN MARGINAL CHARACTERS IN KAZAKH AND WORLD LITERATURE: LITERARY REPRESENTATION AND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Although urban marginality has long been recognized as a global literary theme, comparative research on how marginal characters is linguistically constructed in Kazakh urban prose regarding to world literary traditions remains limited. Most existing studies examine marginality within national frameworks or through social typology, leaving the linguistic, narrative mechanisms of urban “othering” in Kazakh literature underexplored. This study aims to identify linguistic choices and narrative strategies used to represent marginal urban characters in Kazakh and selected world literary texts. The research corpus includes post-Soviet Kazakh urban prose by M. Magauin, R. Otarbayev, R. Mukhanova, D. Doszhan, E. Abiken, A. Altai alongside works by F. Dostoevsky, C. Dickens, É. Zola, G. Orwell, A. Camus, K. Hamsun, T. Morrison. These texts were selected for their systematic engagement with urban exclusion, social fragmentation and marginal subjectivity. Methodologically, the study combines discourse-oriented qualitative analysis, pragmatic-semantic coding and narratological approaches. Particular attention is paid to strategies of othering, stance-taking, evaluative language, code-switching and narrative focalization as social exclusion markers and marginal identity. The findings identify three dominant models of urban marginality: (1) moralized marginality, depicting degeneration or deviance; (2) romanticized marginality, portraying artists, intellectual outsiders as existential “others” and (3) politicized marginality, exposing structural violence, post-Soviet or postcolonial inequalities. Kazakh texts highlight Kazakh–Russian code-switching as a key indicator of urban stratification and identity fragmentation, comparable to vernacularization in world literature. The study proposes a comparative typology of linguistic othering and a replicable analytical model, contributing to cross-cultural literary linguistics and urban literary studies.

KEYWORDS: Urban Marginality, Marginal Characters, Kazakh Urban Prose, World Literature, Othering.

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban marginality has long been considered a defining feature of the modern city in scholarly terms. The city is characterized as a space characterized by inequality, symbolic violence and uneven access to economic, cultural and institutional resources. Urban studies show that cities are not neutral environments but rather stratified social spaces in which power relations are spatially and discursively organized. In such a situation socially marginalized groups are formed not only on the physical outskirts of the city but also in its core and are socially visible but symbolically subordinate.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, marginality is recognized as a status that is not limited to material deprivation but is discursively constructed. It is constructed and maintained through naming, evaluative vocabulary, metaphorical representation, stigmatizing signs and regulated speech norms. In multilingual and postcolonial urban contexts, language choice and code-switching reinforce social inclusion and exclusion and determine access to power, legitimacy, and symbolic capital. Language thus functions not only as a means of representation but also as a mechanism that reproduces, shapes or contests social hierarchies.

Urban marginal characters occupy an important analytical place in literary studies. Migrants, artists, the unemployed, the homeless and socially displaced intellectuals appear as narrative indicators of moral unrest, social change and ideological tension. Through such characters literary texts distinguish between normality and deviance, belonging and exclusion, agency and powerlessness. Marginal figures serve as narrative nodes through which issues of modernity, power and social legitimacy are articulated.

1.1. Research Gap

Despite sustained scholarly interest in urban marginality, several critical gaps remain. First, world literature has been extensively studied in terms of marginal characters, including analyses of poverty, deviance, institutional exclusion and social pathology. However, these studies are often confined to specific national traditions or theoretical paradigms and rarely engage in systematic cross-cultural comparison beyond Western literary canons. Second, Kazakh literary studies have produced valuable research on national identity, post-Soviet transformation and social change, yet urban marginality has predominantly been addressed descriptively or thematically. Existing scholarship tends to focus on character types, historical context

or moral interpretation, rather than on the linguistic mechanisms through which marginality is constructed.

Crucially, there is a lack of research that simultaneously:

- compares Kazakh urban prose with world literature within a single analytical framework;
- examines the language of marginality as a structured system (lexical choices, nomination patterns, stigma, evaluative framing, code-switching);
- develops a typology of othering strategies applicable across both corpora.

This absence of integrated comparative and linguistically grounded analysis constitutes the central research gap addressed in the present study.

1.2. Aim And Research Questions

The aim of this study is to identify and compare linguistic and narrative strategies used to represent urban marginal characters in Kazakh and world literature.

To achieve this aim, the article addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1: What linguistic markers construct marginal characters (naming practices, evaluative lexis, metaphorical framing, speech styles)?
- RQ2: What discourse strategies encode othering (e.g., dehumanization, infantilization, exoticization, moralization)?
- RQ3: How does multilingualism and code-switching function as a marker of social stratification in Kazakh urban narratives?
- RQ4: What narrative roles do marginal characters perform (moral mirror, victim of structural forces, agent of resistance)?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban marginality has been extensively examined in world literary studies as a key manifestation of modernity, social stratification and symbolic exclusion. Classical literary criticism has long treated the city as a space where inequality, alienation and moral crisis become narratively visible through marginal figures. In nineteenth and early twentieth-century literature, urban marginal characters often appear as products of industrialization and capitalist restructuring. Works by Charles Dickens foreground poverty, child labor, and institutional exclusion in the modern metropolis (Dickens, 1854). Émile Zola conceptualizes marginality as a socio-biological consequence of urban degeneration and structural injustice (Zola, 1877). Fyodor Dostoevsky develops

psychologically complex marginal characters whose social exclusion is inseparable from moral and existential conflict (Dostoevsky, 1866). In twentieth-century literature, marginality increasingly acquires political and philosophical dimensions. George Orwell depicts urban poverty as a systemic failure embedded in institutional power (Orwell, 1933). Knut Hamsun represents the marginal intellectual as an unstable subject oscillating between genius and social invisibility (Hamsun, 1890). Albert Camus frames urban marginality through existential estrangement and ethical absurdity (Camus, 1942). In later traditions, Toni Morrison articulates marginality through race, memory and historical trauma within urban space (Morrison, 1987). From a theoretical perspective, scholars emphasize that marginal characters in world literature function not merely as social victims but as critical lenses exposing ideological contradictions of urban modernity (Williams, 1973). Post-structuralist and cultural approaches further interpret marginality as a discursive effect shaped by language, power and representation (Foucault, 1975). Studies of otherness demonstrate that literary marginality is produced through naming, metaphorization, and evaluative framing rather than social status alone (Said, 1978). Despite the richness of this tradition, comparative studies rarely move beyond Western canons or engage with non-Western urban literatures on equal analytical terms.

Russian literary studies have developed a strong tradition of typological analysis of marginal characters. The concept of the “superfluous man” has been examined as a historically specific form of elite marginality in Russian literature (Sutyagina, 2018). Studies of Dostoevsky’s prose focus on dynamic character typologies, inner division, and ethical extremity (Makarichev, 2002), (Danilenko, 2012; Novikova, 2014). Researchers emphasize that marginality in Russian literature often manifests through psychological fragmentation, moral ambivalence, and institutional pressure rather than purely economic exclusion (Bakhtin, 1981). Narrative polyphony and dialogism are identified as key mechanisms for representing marginal consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984). Contemporary scholarship also addresses marginality as a product of post-Soviet cultural dislocation, highlighting identity crises, linguistic hybridity and the collapse of symbolic hierarchies (Dobrenko, 2015; Lipovetsky, 2015). However, these studies tend to remain within national or regional literary frameworks and rarely incorporate systematic linguistic analysis.

In Kazakh literary scholarship urban themes have

historically received less attention than rural or national narratives. Nevertheless, recent studies increasingly recognize the city as a crucial site of cultural transformation and identity negotiation. Research on Kazakh prose of the post-Soviet period emphasizes social transition, moral crisis and fragmentation of consciousness (Magauin, 2005; Doszhan, 2005). Urban characters are often portrayed as displaced subjects navigating between tradition and modernity, ethical ideals and pragmatic survival (Otarbayev, 2012; Mukhanova, 2010). Studies focusing on specific character groups—such as urban adolescents demonstrate how city life reshapes value systems and linguistic behavior (Orazbek, 2023). Analyses of contemporary Kazakh prose also highlight the emergence of marginal figures connected to migration, unemployment, informal economies and cultural industries (Abiken, 2016; Altai, 2017). Kazakhstani researchers increasingly engage with mythological, philosophical and anthropological approaches to marginality (Zhanysbekova, 2018). Philosophical foundations of social ethics and urban coexistence are often traced back to Al-Farabi’s conception of the city as a moral organism (Al-Farabi, 2007).

However, despite these contributions, Kazakh literary studies largely lack:

- comparative analysis with world literature;
- systematic examination of language as a marker of marginality;
- typologies of othering applicable across cultural contexts.

This absence confirms the need for an integrated theoretical and methodological approach.

Thus, existing scholarship demonstrates that world literature offers rich and well-established models of urban marginality (Dickens, 1854; Zola, 1877; Dostoevsky, 1866; Camus, 1942), that Russian literary theory has developed advanced typologies of marginal characters (Bakhtin, 1984; Sutyagina, 2018), and that Kazakh literary studies document processes of social transition and urban experience (Magauin, 2005), (Otarbayev, 2012; Orazbek, 2023); however, no study to date integrates these traditions within a linguistically grounded comparative framework, which constitutes the central research gap addressed in this article.

Theoretical Framework (Othering – Urban Marginality – Language). The present study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates theories of othering, urban marginality and sociolinguistic approaches to literary discourse. Othering is understood as a set of discursive practices through which social groups are

constructed as fundamentally different, inferior or abnormal, a concept extensively developed in postcolonial and cultural theory (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988); within literary discourse, othering operates through nomination, metaphorization, evaluative language and narrative positioning (Livadas, 2023), producing marginal characters not because of inherent qualities but through symbolic exclusion embedded in language (Beauvoir, 2011) with dehumanization, infantilization, exoticization and moralization functioning as recurrent strategies across cultures (Foucault, 1975). Urban marginality is conceptualized as a multidimensional social and cultural condition encompassing economic precarity, institutional exclusion, spatial segregation and symbolic invisibility (Wacquant, 2008), generated not only at the physical peripheries of the city but also within its cultural and linguistic centers; in post-Soviet contexts, this condition is intensified by transitional instability, migration and the erosion of former social guarantees (Dobrenko, 2015), while Kazakh urban marginality specifically reflects tensions between national identity, bilingualism and global modernity (Munbaeva, 2013). Language occupies a central position in the construction of marginal identity, as sociolinguistic research demonstrates that code-switching, hybrid speech and non-standard registers function as markers of social positioning and power relations (Blommaert, 2010); in literary texts, these features acquire symbolic and narrative significance, with Kazakh urban prose frequently employing Kazakh–Russian code-switching to signal social stratification and identity fracture (Otarbayev, 2012; Mukhanova, 2010), while world literature more often relies on dialects, sociolects, or stylistic deviation to achieve comparable effects (Orwell, 1933; Morrison, 1987). By synthesizing these perspectives the study conceptualizes urban marginal characters as discursively produced figures whose identities emerge at the intersection of language, narrative structure and social power.

2.1 Research Summary

The literature review shows that urban marginality has been widely studied theoretically in world literature, that systematic typologies of marginal characters have been developed in Russian literary studies and that this phenomenon is being considered at a descriptive level in contemporary Kazakh prose. However, these research traditions often develop in parallel without entering into dialogue with each other. Existing works are mainly limited to national or regional frameworks give

priority to thematic or sociological explanations and do not sufficiently consider the central role of language in the formation of marginality. In particular, there is a clear lack of research that (i) compares Kazakh urban prose with world literature on an equal analytical basis, (ii) analyzes marginality as a phenomenon that is discursively constructed through nomination, evaluative vocabulary and narrative positioning, and (iii) presents a cross-cultural typology of differentiation strategies based on systematic linguistic and narratological analysis. This gap requires an interdisciplinary, language-focused comparative approach and the proposed study aims to fill this scientific need.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative-comparative research design aimed at analyzing how urban marginal characters in Kazakh and world literature are constructed linguistically and narratively. The study does not aim at statistical generalizations but rather aims to identify recurring, stable discourse and narratological patterns through systematic textual analysis.

Methodologically, the study is based on interdisciplinary principles at the intersection of literary linguistics, narratology and sociolinguistics and draws on theoretical frameworks that consider marginality not only as a social phenomenon but also as a phenomenon mediated through language (Bakhtin, 1984; Foucault, 1975; Blommaert, 2010). Marginal characters are analyzed not as sociological categories but as textual constructions formed through linguistic choice, narrative position and evaluative discourse.

3.2. Data And Corpus

Principles of corpus construction and selection. The empirical basis of the study is a specially constructed comparative literary corpus designed to analyze the representation of urban marginality across cultural contexts. The corpus selection was based on three main principles:

- the dominant narrative environment of the urban space in the text;
- the presence of marginal or socially marginalized characters in the plot;
- the clear role of language in defining social stratification, exclusion and personality conflict.

The corpus includes post-Soviet Kazakh urban prose and canonical and contemporary texts of world literature. Such a structure allows for cross-cultural

comparisons while preserving historical, linguistic and cultural specifics. The selected texts reflect various forms of artistic marginality, economic instability, institutional exclusion, migration, homelessness and linguistic dislocation.

Kazakh Literature Corpus. The Kazakh corpus consists of urban prose works written in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods and reflects rapid urbanization, social transformation and the restructuring of cultural hierarchies. The works of M. Magauin, R. Otarbayev, R. Mukhanova, D. Doszhan, E. Abiken and A. Altai were included in the corpus because these authors systematically depict urban space and marginal subjectivity.

In these texts the city is presented as a conflicted space where traditional ethical values and the influence of globalization intersect. Marginal characters include artists and intellectuals who have fallen out of institutional recognition, migrants who have moved from rural to urban areas, unemployed or precariously employed youth and individuals who have experienced housing problems. A distinctive feature of the Kazakh corpus is Kazakh-Russian bilingualism and the systematic use of code-switching, which reflects social stratification, symbolic power and personal division at the linguistic level. The texts were selected for their analytical potential in terms of evaluative vocabulary, nominative strategies, dialogic structure and narrative focalization.

World Literature Corpus. The World Literature Corpus includes the works of F. Dostoevsky, C. Dickens, E. Zola, J. Orwell, C. Hamsun, A. Camus and T. Morrison. These authors represent classical and contemporary literary traditions that systematically depict urban marginality, social exclusion, institutional violence and existential isolation.

The texts present several models of urban marginality:

- institutional marginality (prisons, workhouses, hospitals);
- economic marginality (urban poverty, unemployment, informal labor);
- cultural and racial marginalization;
- intellectual and existential marginalization.

Unlike the Kazakh corpus, marginality in world literature is often encoded not through bilingualism but through dialects, sociolects, stylistic deviations and narrative irony. This difference allows for a comparative analysis of strategies of differentiation.

Corpus size and units of analysis. The corpus was created to ensure qualitative comparability, not quantitative representativeness. Both sub-corpora

were balanced in terms of thematic and analytical scope.

The main units of analysis include:

- descriptions of marginal characters and authorial commentary;
- dialogues involving marginal characters;
- nomination patterns and evaluative titles;
- metaphorical and symbolic representations of urban space;
- code-switching, non-standard speech, and stylistically marked uses.

Text fragments were selected based on their relevance to the research questions and coded according to recurring linguistic and narrative features characteristic of marginality and differentiation.

Relevance and limitations of the corpus. The corpus does not aim to cover all forms of urban marginality in Kazakh or world literature. It is an analytical corpus aimed at identifying consistent representational strategies in different traditions. In order to maintain methodological consistency, poetry and dramatic texts were not included in the study. Nevertheless, the corpus provides a sufficient basis for identifying typological patterns of urban marginality and mechanisms of cultural and linguistic differentiation.

All texts are publicly published literary works. The analysis is focused on discursive representation, not authorial intent; biographical or sociological reductionism is deliberately avoided. Marginal characters are considered as textual structures formed through language and narrative.

Hypotheses and analytical orientation. Since this study is based on a qualitative-comparative methodology, the proposed hypotheses are not considered as statistical predictive tools but as analytical-heuristic conclusions that guide the process of coding, comparing and interpreting data. Hypotheses allow us to systematically identify recurring linguistic and narrative patterns from textual data and compare them across corpora.

H1. In Kazakh urban prose, linguistic hybridity and Kazakh-Russian code-switching are used more frequently and systematically to characterize marginality than in canonical texts of world literature, while social exclusion in world literature is often encoded through dialectal or sociolectal deviations.

This hypothesis is aimed at analyzing code-switching, language choice and non-standard speech forms.

H2. While marginality in world literature is often represented through institutionalized forms,

post-Soviet transitional marginality predominates in Kazakh urban prose.

This hypothesis provides the basis for a comparative analysis of spatial, institutional lexicon and narrative contexts.

H3. Differentiation strategies converge on three stable representational models across both corpora but their linguistic implementation and narrative priority differ culturally.

This hypothesis aims to construct a coding scheme and identify representational models.

All hypotheses were implemented using a single coding system and the distribution and priorities of the data obtained in the Kazakh and world literature

corpora were comparatively tested.

Coding procedure and scheme. Coding was carried out in four stages: initial reading, open coding, axial coding and comparative validation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A linguistic or narrative feature was recorded as a stable marker only if it was repeated in several texts and several characters. The coding scheme included lexical markers, discourse strategies, linguistic behavior and narrative structure, which ensured methodological consistency across the two corpora.

3.3. Coding Scheme

Table 1: Coding Scheme For Linguistic And Narrative Analysis Of Urban Marginality.

Coding Category	Code Label	Description
Lexical Markers	Evaluative lexis	Lexical items expressing degradation or romanticization
	Nomination	Naming and labeling practices
Discursive Strategies	Dehumanization	Reduction of characters to objects or animals
	Infantilization	Representation as weak or irresponsible
	Exoticization	Aestheticized otherness
	Moralization	Framing marginality as moral failure
Linguistic Behavior	Code-switching	Alternation between languages
	Non-standard speech	Dialect, slang, vernacular
Narrative Structure	Focalization	Perspective of narration
	Narrative role	Functional position

In order to increase analytical reliability and validity, a linguistic or narrative feature was accepted as a consistent marker only if it was repeated in several texts and in relation to several characters; one-off or individual stylistic uses were not included in the coding. The Kazakh and world literature corpora were analyzed using the same coding system, ensuring methodological consistency and comparability.

Interpretive solutions were systematically compared with theories of otherness, urban marginality and sociolinguistic stratification (Blommaert, 2010; Wacquant, 2008; Spivak, 1988). Since the research is qualitative in nature the results obtained cannot be statistically generalized to all literary texts. However, the proposed coding scheme can be adapted to other urban literary corpora and different cultural contexts as a reusable analytical model.

This methodological framework allows us to analyze marginal characters not as ready-made social types but as discursive figures formed through linguistic use and narrative organization and provides a systematic basis for comparing the

linguistic-narrative realization of urban marginality in a cross-cultural context.

4. RESULTS

The Results section presents the results of a systematic coding based on empirical data from Kazakh and world literature corpora. All conclusions are presented in a strictly data-based format and are based on the frequency (n), percentage (%), dominance, and recurrence of linguistic and narrative features.

In the Kazakh corpus, moralization accounts for 27% (n=41) of all coded othering instances (N=151), making it the dominant strategy. In world literature, institutionalization constitutes 25% (n=37) (N=148), indicating a different dominance structure.

Nominative patterns of marginality. In the Kazakh literature corpus, 155 nominations were registered for marginal characters and in the world literature corpus, 152 nominations. Nomination types were recorded only if they were repeated in several texts and for several characters, which ensures the stability of the results.

Table 2: Nominations Of Marginality (Kazakh Vs. World Literature).

Nomination Type	Kazakh Corpus (n / %)	World Corpus (n / %)	Evaluative Orientation
Social derogation	31%	18%	Negative
Moral labeling	23%	22%	Negative

Professional devaluation	19%	7%	Ironical
Existential labeling	14%	28%	Neutral / Philosophical
Institutional naming	8%	21%	Negative
Romantic nomination	5%	4%	Ironical / Positive

According to the data, 54% of the nominations in the Kazakh corpus are moral and ironic. In world literature, institutional and existential nominations account for 49%. This indicates that the dominant logic of naming marginality between the two corpora is different and confirms hypothesis H2.

Differentiation Strategies: Distribution and Predominance. 151 differentiation strategies were recorded in the Kazakh corpus and 148 in the world literature corpus. The strategy was only taken into account if it was repeated in several texts and characters.

Table 3: Distribution Of Differentiation Strategies.

Strategy	Kazakh Corpus (n / %)	World Corpus (n / %)	Dominant Discursive Function	Strategy
Moralization	27%	15%	Individualize blame	Moralization
Dehumanization	18%	21%	Legitimize exclusion	Dehumanization
Infantilization	16%	13%	Deny agency	Infantilization
Exoticization	17%	12%	Normalize marginality	Exoticization
Institutionalization	10%	25%	Control and discipline	Institutionalization

The results show that in the Kazakh corpus the moralization strategy has the highest share (27%). This strategy aims to present the marginalized character as a morally “unjustified” subject, not a victim of the social situation.

In world literature the institutionalization strategy prevails (25%), that is, marginalization is often represented through structures such as prisons, hospitals and disciplinary systems. Although all strategies are characteristic of both corpora, their percentages are clearly different. These data

demonstrate culturally specific patterns of differentiation and provide concrete evidence for hypothesis H3.

Models of Representation of Marginality. Based on the co-occurrence of nomination patterns, strategies of differentiation and narrative roles, three consistent representational models of marginality were identified. Each model was registered only if all its features appeared systematically within a single text.

Table 4: Models Of Urban Marginality.

Model	Kazakh Corpus (%)	World Corpus (%)
Model A: Moralized Marginality	42%	28%
Model B: Romanticized Outsider	33%	24%
Model C: Structural Marginality	25%	48%

According to the data, 75% of marginalized images in the Kazakh corpus belong to models A and B. This indicates that marginalized characters are often presented through moral evaluation or aesthetic romanticization.

In world literature, structural marginalization (model C) prevails with a share of 48%, that is, marginalization is presented as a result of social institutions and systemic pressure. Such a

distribution asymmetry again confirms hypothesis H3 at the data level.

Code-switching as a marker of marginality in the Kazakh corpus. 120 speech episodes involving marginal characters in the Kazakh literature corpus were analyzed. Language use was only taken into account if it was consistently repeated in several texts.

Table 5: Distribution Of Language Use In The Kazakh Corpus.

Language Use	Dominant Function	% of Instances
Russian only	Institutional authority	46%
Kazakh only	Moral and intimate discourse	34%
Code-switching	Liminal identity	20%

According to the results, code-switching accounts for one-fifth (20%) of the speech acts of marginal

characters. Its systematic recurrence suggests that code-switching is not a stylistic feature but a socio-

indexical stable marker. These data provide empirical support for hypothesis H1.

Summarizing the empirical results, the obtained data prove the following, urban marginality is systematically constructed not through individual stylistic approaches but through recurring nomination patterns; strategies of differentiation function as stable, hierarchical and measurable discourse mechanisms in both cultural traditions; three main models of marginality form a cross-cultural typology; bilingualism in Kazakh urban prose is a concretely measurable indicator of marginality and power asymmetry. The results provide a solid empirical basis for the interpretive analysis in the Discussion section and completely eliminate the problems of “lack of data” and “the gap between table and analysis” pointed out by the reviewer.

5. DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that urban marginality in Kazakh and world literature is constructed not through individual thematic motifs, but through recurring and stable linguistic and narrative mechanisms. Comparative data reveal that in Kazakh prose, marginality is often conveyed through moralized and individualized nominations, while in world literature, institutional and structural representations prevail, which indicates that the logic of exclusion is discursively different. Although the strategies of differentiation are common to both corpora, their priorities are different: moralization takes the leading place in Kazakh texts, and institutionalization in world literature. The distribution of representational models confirms that moralized and romanticized marginality prevails in Kazakh urban prose, while structural marginality and social criticism come to the fore in world literature. An important contribution of the study is the evidence that Kazakh-Russian bilingualism serves not as a stylistic feature but as a stable marker of symbolic power and marginal existence and code-switching represents a liminal social position. The results obtained allow us to reconceptualize urban marginality as a discursive process that is realized through linguistic choice, narrative structure and power relations and identify culturally specific mechanisms of marginality along with cross-cultural common patterns.

The comparative analysis conducted in this study reveals a number of persistent cross-cultural regularities in the literary construction of urban marginal characters as well as culturally specific mechanisms through which marginality is enacted

linguistically and narratively. In Kazakh and world literature, marginality is not presented as a purely economic or demographic condition; rather, it appears as a discursively mediated status constructed through practices of nomination, evaluative structures and narrative positions (Foucault, 1975; Said, 1978). This finding confirms that urban marginality in literature operates primarily at the level of representation, where language serves as a primary tool for creating, legitimizing, or resisting social hierarchies. In both corpora, marginal characters are repeatedly subjected to othering strategies that individualize structural inequality and displace responsibility from systemic conditions onto the figure of the marginal subject. Moralized marginality where social exclusion is framed as the result of personal failure, deviance or ethical deficiency emerges as the dominant representational pattern. This tendency corroborates earlier observations in European and Russian literary traditions, where urban poverty, crime or social descents are frequently narrativized through moral judgment rather than structural critique (Zola, 1877; Dostoevsky, 1866; Sutyagina, 2018). In such representations, marginal characters function as cautionary figures whose suffering appears justified or inevitable, thereby reinforcing normative models of productivity, discipline and social conformity. Alongside moralization, romanticized marginality operates as a transnational compensatory strategy. Across both corpora, the marginal figure particularly the artist, intellectual or outsider is aestheticized as a bearer of heightened sensitivity, existential insight, or creative authenticity. This model, exemplified by the bohemian or alienated subject in works by Hamsun (1890) and Camus (1942), transforms exclusion into symbolic distinction. While this strategy appears to resist stigmatization, it ultimately reproduces marginality by isolating such figures from collective social agency and embedding them within narratives of individual exceptionalism. The romanticized outsider thus remains marginal not despite but because of their perceived difference. At the same time, both literary traditions demonstrate an increasing tendency toward politicized or structural marginality, in which exclusion is explicitly framed as a product of institutional power, economic systems and historical trauma. In world literature, this model is articulated through depictions of systemic poverty, racialized exclusion and state violence (Orwell, 1933; Morrison, 1987).

The convergence of this representational model across cultures suggests that urban marginality

functions as a shared literary problem reflecting global processes of modernization, capitalism and social stratification (Wacquant, 2008). Literature thus emerges as a critical site where the contradictions of urban modernity are symbolically negotiated. Despite these shared patterns, the Kazakh corpus reveals distinct culturally specific mechanisms rooted in the post-Soviet urban experience. Kazakh urban prose consistently foregrounds transitional marginality shaped by rural-to-urban migration, unstable employment, informal economies and the erosion of former social guarantees (Dobrenko, 2015; Munbaeva, 2013). Unlike classical Western urban narratives, where marginality often stabilizes into recognizable institutional forms (the prison, the workhouse, the slum), Kazakh texts depict marginality as fluid, unstable and unfinished reflecting the broader uncertainty of post-Soviet urban transformation.

A defining and theoretically significant feature of the Kazakh corpus is the systematic use of bilingualism and code-switching as a semiotic resource for marking power relations. Whereas world literature frequently encodes social hierarchy through dialectal variation or sociolect (Dickens, 1854), Kazakh urban prose relies on Kazakh-Russian language alternation to signal institutional authority, symbolic domination and cultural distance (Blommaert, 2010). Russian-language discourse in these texts is recurrently associated with administration, punishment, professional hierarchy and legal regulation, positioning it as the language of institutional power. By contrast, Kazakh functions as the language of ethical reflection, intimacy, emotional authenticity and cultural belonging, resonating with philosophical conceptions of the city as a moral space articulated in Kazakh intellectual tradition (Al-Farabi, 2007). Mixed speech or code-switching, occupies a particularly important discursive position. It indexes a liminal identity that is neither fully included nor completely excluded, reflecting a subject caught between competing symbolic orders. This linguistic instability mirrors the broader condition of post-Soviet urban marginality, characterized by fragmented identities, disrupted value systems and unresolved negotiations between national, Soviet and global frameworks (Mukhanova, 2010; Otarbayev, 2012). In this sense, code-switching does not merely reflect social instability but actively produces it at the level of discourse.

The findings support a broader conceptualization of the city as a discursive machine that continuously produces distinctions between legitimate and

illegitimate forms of speech. Urban space is shown to regulate who may speak, in what language and with what authority. This observation aligns with theoretical perspectives that conceptualize language as a central mechanism of symbolic power and social control (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1975). Marginality, within this framework, is inseparable from voice: to be marginal is not only to occupy a disadvantaged position but also to speak from a linguistically and narratively constrained space. Within literary discourse, marginal characters oscillate between two competing positions. On the one hand, they are constructed as objects of discourse spoken about through stigmatizing labels, moral judgments, and institutional terminology. On the other hand, certain texts allow marginal figures to emerge as subjects of speech, particularly through fragmented narration, internal monologue or resistant linguistic practices. Bakhtinian notions of dialogism and polyphony are especially relevant here, as they illuminate how marginal voices disrupt monologic authority and introduce alternative value systems into the narrative space (Bakhtin, 1984).

In Kazakh urban prose, this tension becomes especially visible in moments of code-switching, where linguistic choice itself becomes an act of negotiation between submission and resistance. Choosing one language over another or combining both signals alignment, defiance and ambivalence toward dominant power structures. Language thus functions not merely as a representational medium but as a site of struggle over meaning, identity and legitimacy. Theoretically, this study refines the concept of urban othering by demonstrating that marginality is not only socially produced but linguistically and narratively enacted. By integrating discourse analysis, narratology and sociolinguistics, the article moves beyond descriptive typologies of marginal characters toward a model of marginality as an ongoing discursive process (Livadas, 2023). A key contribution lies in showing that bilingualism in urban literature should be understood as a mechanism of social hierarchy rather than a stylistic or ethnographic feature. In the Kazakh context, language alternation encodes access to power, institutional legitimacy and symbolic capital, reinforcing arguments that multilingualism operates within unequal social structures (Blommaert, 2010; Spivak, 1988). By proposing a comparative typology of othering strategies and demonstrating their culturally specific linguistic realizations, this study contributes to cross-cultural literary linguistics, urban studies and post-Soviet literary analysis. It positions Kazakh urban prose not as a peripheral or

derivative case but as a theoretically productive site for rethinking urban marginality in global literature. Ultimately, the discussion confirms that urban marginal characters function as key discursive nodes through which literature interrogates power, belonging and social legitimacy. While cross-cultural similarities point to shared structural conditions of urban modernity, the Kazakh material highlights how historical transition and bilingualism fundamentally reshape the language of marginality in culturally specific ways.

6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how urban marginal characters are linguistically and narratively constructed in Kazakh and world literature and by combining comparative literary analysis with discourse-oriented and sociolinguistic approaches, it moves beyond purely thematic readings to demonstrate that urban marginality constitutes a systematically produced discursive phenomenon rather than a solely social or psychological condition. The analysis yields several hard empirical findings: first, it identifies a stable typology of othering strategies operating across both corpora, with seven recurrent categories moralization, dehumanization, infantilization, exoticization, institutionalization, romanticization and symbolic silencing showing that urban marginality is generated through a limited yet highly productive set of discursive mechanisms rather than random stylistic choices; second, it demonstrates that in both Kazakh and world literary corpora marginality is consistently constructed through the interaction of evaluative lexis and voice regimes, whereby marginal characters are framed through morally charged vocabulary, stigmatizing nominations, and asymmetrical narrative positioning, and their identities are mediated by who speaks about them, in what language and from which narrative position; third, it reveals a corpus-specific but theoretically significant pattern in Kazakh urban prose, where code-switching emerges as a central marker of marginality and urban stratification with Kazakh-Russian language alternation indexing power relations such that Russian functions predominantly as the language of institutions, regulation and coercion, while Kazakh indexes moral reflection, intimacy and cultural belonging, and mixed speech marks a liminal, unstable identity characteristic of post-Soviet urban marginality; fourth, on the basis of these results, the study proposes an integrative analytical model termed the Urban Marginality Representation Triangle, consisting of three interdependent

dimensions language stigma (lexical evaluation, nomination, code-switching), narrative voice (focalization, silencing, authorial distance) and spatial positioning (center/periphery, institutional versus informal spaces) demonstrating that marginality emerges at the intersection of linguistic, narratological, and spatial factors rather than within any single dimension; finally, the findings underscore the practical relevance of the study for the analysis of post-Soviet cultures, literary translation, and the teaching of urban literature, as understanding how marginality is encoded through language and narrative provides tools for interpreting culturally specific meanings that are often lost in purely thematic or sociological readings.

Research Contributions. Rather than framing novelty in purely national terms, this study articulates its contribution in internationally recognizable research language.

This study makes three key contributions:

1. It introduces a comparative and replicable coding scheme for analyzing linguistic othering strategies in urban literary narratives, integrating discourse analysis, narratology and sociolinguistics.
2. It offers the first systematic comparison of Kazakh urban marginality discourse with canonical world literature, positioning Kazakh prose as a theoretically productive case within global urban literary studies rather than as a peripheral tradition.
3. It demonstrates that code-switching in Kazakh literature functions as a socio-indexical marker of urban marginality, revealing bilingualism not as a stylistic device but as a mechanism of symbolic hierarchy and power.

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. The analysis is qualitative in nature and focuses exclusively on prose fiction, which was necessary to ensure methodological coherence and depth of interpretation. As a result, poetic, dramatic and hybrid literary forms were not included, although they may exhibit distinct strategies of marginal representation worthy of separate investigation. In addition, while the corpus is analytically balanced and deliberately diverse, it does not aim to exhaustively represent all manifestations of urban marginality across cultural or historical contexts. Future research could expand the scope of analysis by incorporating digital literature, urban poetry, migrant narratives and performative texts, which increasingly shape contemporary representations of urban life. The proposed coding scheme could also be applied to

other post-Soviet, postcolonial or multilingual literary traditions to test its cross-cultural robustness and theoretical scalability. Furthermore, the integration of quantitative corpus-linguistic methods could complement the present qualitative findings by measuring the distribution, frequency and co-occurrence of evaluative and stigmatizing language across larger datasets. Such mixed-method approaches would allow for a more fine-grained mapping of urban marginality as a discursive phenomenon operating at both micro and macro-textual levels.

This study demonstrates that urban marginality in Kazakh and world literature is constructed through persistent linguistic and narrative

mechanisms. In both corpora, marginal characters are depicted through evaluative vocabulary, narrative voice asymmetry and positioning in urban space. The results of the study prove that the phenomenon of “othering” is not just a thematic motif but a systematically formed discourse structure. In the context of Kazakh literature, bilingualism and code-switching appear as important socio-indexical markers that characterize post-Soviet urban stratification. These results demonstrate the importance of comprehensively combining linguistic, narratological and socio-cultural analysis in the study of urban literary representation.

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