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From oral epic to digital story: a scene-based analysis of agency and cultural knowledge in Alpomish

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Abstract: This article develops a text-grounded model for adapting Uzbek oral epic to digital storytelling. It examines eight purposively selected scenes in the English translation of the Alpomish version associated with Fozil Yo'ldosh o'g'li: the hero's naming, Barchin's challenge, captivity, the horse's return, Ulton's takeover, Alpomish's Qultoy disguise, public wedding contests, and recognition at home. A transparent four-feature code records cultural knowledge, distributed agency, public or performative affordance, and identity transition. Seven scenes contained explicit cultural knowledge and distributed agency; five contained a public or performative affordance, and six staged an identity transition. These are scene-level descriptive counts, not population estimates or learning-effect measurements. Close reading shows that the epic's plot repeatedly makes action depend on Barchin, Qaldirghoch, Tovka, Boychibor, and public witnesses as well as on Alpomish. The article translates these findings into a five-stage digital-storytelling sequence that preserves source attribution, performance context, variant awareness, and learner interpretation. Its contribution is an auditable scene matrix and an instructional design derived from a defined primary text rather than a claim about classroom outcomes. The analysis is limited to one English translation and should be checked against Uzbek-language performance materials with community participation.
Keywords: Alpomish; Uzbek epic; digital storytelling; oral tradition; cultural literacy; narrative analysis.

Introduction

Uzbek oral epic is transmitted through more than a written sequence of events. The doston tradition joins narrative, poetic language, voice, memory, audience, and the knowledge of performers. In the English edition used here, the introductory material describes epics as recited and sung by bakhshi with instruments and as narratives shaped by communal life (Fozil Yo'ldosh o'g'li, 2018). This framing matters for digital adaptation: a screen version can preserve plot while losing the social relationships and performance cues that make a story intelligible. The present article asks a focused question: which features of selected Alpomish scenes can be carried into a digital story in a way that keeps cultural knowledge, distributed agency, performance, and identity visible?

Alpomish is a useful case because its narrative movement is driven by more than a solitary hero. Barchin sets conditions for her suitors and acts with resolve; Qaldirghoch connects otherwise separated episodes; Tovka provides information about Boychibor; the horse's actions enable escape; and witnesses interpret the returning hero's public performance. Scholarship on the epic likewise emphasizes the strong narrative role of Barchin and Qaldirghoch and the diversity of its variants (Eshonqulov, 2015). These relationships offer a practical basis for teaching students to see plot as a network of choices, testimony, and recognition rather than as a list of heroic feats.

Digital storytelling can give learners a medium for combining voice, images, movement, and written explanation. Robin (2008) discusses digital storytelling as an educational tool, while UNESCO's safeguarding framework defines heritage work to include documentation, research, transmission, and revitalization, with communities involved in safeguarding (UNESCO, 2003). Neither source implies that putting heritage on a screen automatically protects it. The pedagogical

problem is how to make adaptation accountable: learners need to identify their source, distinguish the translation from the oral tradition as a whole, and explain what they changed.

This article makes two bounded contributions. First, it presents a small, replicable scene analysis of one identifiable English text. Second, it derives a digital-storytelling sequence from patterns visible in that analysis. It does not report a classroom intervention, test student outcomes, estimate the prevalence of motifs across Uzbek epic variants, or claim that the translation fully represents the living tradition. The findings are therefore interpretive and descriptive. Their value is that the coding decisions and textual anchors are made inspectable so that future work can compare editions, translations, or performed versions.

Materials and Methods

Primary text and sampling

The primary material is the 2018 English-language edition Alpomish: Uzbek heroic epos, based on the version recited by Fozil Yo'ldosh o'g'li, translated by Kosimboy Mamurov, and edited for publication by Dilnoza Odilova. The text is publicly available through the University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoiy's digital library record and a full-text PDF. The unit of analysis is a narrative scene, not an individual line. Eight scenes were selected purposively to cover the arc from childhood naming through threatened marriage, captivity, return, disguise, public recognition, and restored kinship. Scene boundaries follow shifts in action and location in the translated narrative.

The selection uses the edition's printed page numbers to make checking possible: the naming scene appears around pp. 21–23; Barchin's request and suitor context around pp. 33–34; the captivity and Boychibor material around pp. 208–212; Ulton's threatened marriage and Qultoy disguise around pp. 265–270 and 281; and the wedding and return sequence around pp. 294–308 (Fozil Yo'ldosh o'g'li, 2018). The spelling of names follows the English edition. The transliteration and poetic phrasing of that translation are editorial choices, not a substitute for the Uzbek-language text or a live performance.

Analytical procedure

A directed qualitative content analysis was conducted in two passes. In the first pass, each selected scene was summarized in one sentence and anchored to the episode's action. In the second, each scene was coded as present (1) or absent (0) for four features. Cultural knowledge was coded when a scene explicitly represented a social practice, relationship, material term, or customary event that could be contextualized for learners. Distributed agency was coded when a non-Alpomish actor or collective materially influenced the next action, such as by setting conditions, providing information, enabling escape, refusing coercion, recognizing identity, or publicly responding. Public or performative affordance was coded only when a scene included a public contest, audience-facing performance, or repeated public announcement; ordinary verse dialogue alone did not qualify. Identity transition was coded when the scene tested, concealed, or publicly changed a character's status or recognized identity.

The binary scheme is intentionally modest. It records whether a defined feature is salient in a selected scene; it does not measure its importance, cultural representativeness, or emotional intensity. The author applied the codebook to all eight scenes as a single analyst. No intercoder agreement statistic is reported. Counts were calculated by summing the 0/1 scene entries in Table 2. The bar chart reports those same sums, with denominator eight. Close-reading notes were then used to explain how a feature could inform a digital-story module without making causal claims about student learning.

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The definitions below specify the positive threshold and one boundary for each feature. A code was assigned only when the scene met the stated threshold; ambiguous or merely implied evidence was coded absent. This rule makes the negative cells as important as the positive ones and allows another reader to challenge or repeat the coding.

Table 1. Operational codebook used to classify the eight selected scenes.

Feature	Positive coding rule	Boundary / exclusion
Cultural knowledge	A named practice, social relation, customary event, or material term is explicit and can be contextualized.	A general setting detail without an identifiable practice or relation.
Distributed agency	A non-Alpomish actor or group changes the next action through choice, information, assistance, refusal, recognition, or response.	A character is present but does not affect the bounded scene's next action.
Public / performative	The scene includes a public contest, audience-facing performance, or repeated public announcement.	Verse or dialogue alone, without a public event or audience-facing action.
Identity transition	The scene tests, conceals, or publicly changes a character's status or recognized identity.	A change in location or mood without a tatus or recognition shift.

Scope and research ethics

The study analyses a published literary translation and involves no human participants, interviews, recordings, or animal subjects. It therefore did not require participant consent or animal-welfare review. Since digital adaptation can circulate cultural material beyond its original context, the resulting design treats attribution, source limitations, translation status, and community consultation as explicit production steps. The analysis does not reproduce a long passage or a previously published figure; both figures in the manuscript are original visualizations of the present analysis.

Results

Scene-level coding

The coding indicates that cultural knowledge and distributed agency recur in seven of the eight scenes. Public or performative affordance appears in five, while identity transition appears in six. These totals describe the selected sample only. The full scene-by-scene decisions, including negative cases, are shown in Table 2; Figure 1 visualizes the column totals.

Table 2. Scene-level coding of the selected Alpomish episodes

(1 = feature present under the stated codebook; 0 = absent).

Scene	Cultural knowledge	Distributed agency	Public / performative	Identity transition
Naming and early teaching	1	0	1	1
Barchin's challenge	1	1	1	0
Captivity and report of Boychibor	0	1	0	1
Escape and reunion with Boychibor	1	1	0	1
Ulton's rule and coercion	1	1	0	0
Qultoy disguise	1	1	1	1
Wedding contests	1	1	1	1

Scene	Cultural knowledge	Distributed agency	Public / performative	Identity transition
Recognition and return	1	1	1	1

Note. Scene spans are based on the edition's printed page numbers: naming/teaching pp. 21–23; Barchin pp. 33–34 and 39–42; captivity and escape pp. 208–212; Ulton pp. 281–282; disguise pp. 265–270; wedding and recognition pp. 294–308. Coding is interpretive, completed by one analyst, and not an estimate of motif prevalence across variants.

The first scene links ability, family instruction, and public naming. At age seven, Hakimbek demonstrates exceptional strength and is named Alpomish by those who gather around him. The translated introduction also places learning, riding, and martial training within parental expectations. This scene can therefore support a discussion of how a community names a hero and which kinds of competence it values. Its code for public affordance reflects a gathered audience and public naming, while its identity-transition code records the shift from child Hakimbek to publicly recognized Alp. The negative agency code reflects the narrow definition: no non-heroic actor materially changes the next action within the bounded scene.

Barchin's challenge makes agency less centralized. The narrative gives her a time-bound choice among suitors and has her send for help; the broader scene frames a set of contests through which a marriage claim is publicly tested. The analysis codes cultural knowledge because the episode depends on courtship and contest conventions, and public affordance because challenges and competition can be staged for an audience. Barchin's decision-making is not simply a reward at the end of the hero's journey: her actions initiate the rescue plot and define the conditions under which the suitors are judged.

The captivity sequence supplies a negative case for public affordance. It is narratively and emotionally prominent, but its core action is not a public contest or audience-facing announcement under the codebook. Tovka's report about the tortured horse nevertheless changes what Alpomish attends to and seeks. In the following escape scene, Boychibor is not a decorative symbol; the horse's physical action helps Alpomish leave the dungeon. The code therefore registers distributed agency in both scenes and identity transition as the captivity and escape alter the hero's status from imprisoned captive to returning actor. This distinction prevents the chart from treating every vivid episode as performative in the same way.

Ulton's takeover is coded for cultural knowledge because it represents the social consequences of rule, kinship obligation, and a threatened forced marriage. It receives distributed agency because Barchin's refusal and the reactions of those around her resist a simple account of the usurper's power. Qultoy's disguise then turns identity into a public performance: Alpomish uses the old man's appearance to enter a dangerous social space, while humor, food, gifts, and wedding customs shape how others interpret him. The wedding contests amplify that ambiguity. Spectators see improbable skill, infer that the disguised participant may be Alpomish, and respond before his identity is openly declared.

The return sequence makes recognition collective. Repeated public announcements organize the scene, but the social meaning comes from family and community response: the news reorders relationships that had been suspended by captivity, absence, and coercive rule. The identity code captures the explicit disclosure of Alpomish, while the distributed-agency code records that recognition depends on others hearing, interpreting, and responding. Together, these readings yield the central pattern: the epic repeatedly stages heroism as socially recognized and relationally enabled.

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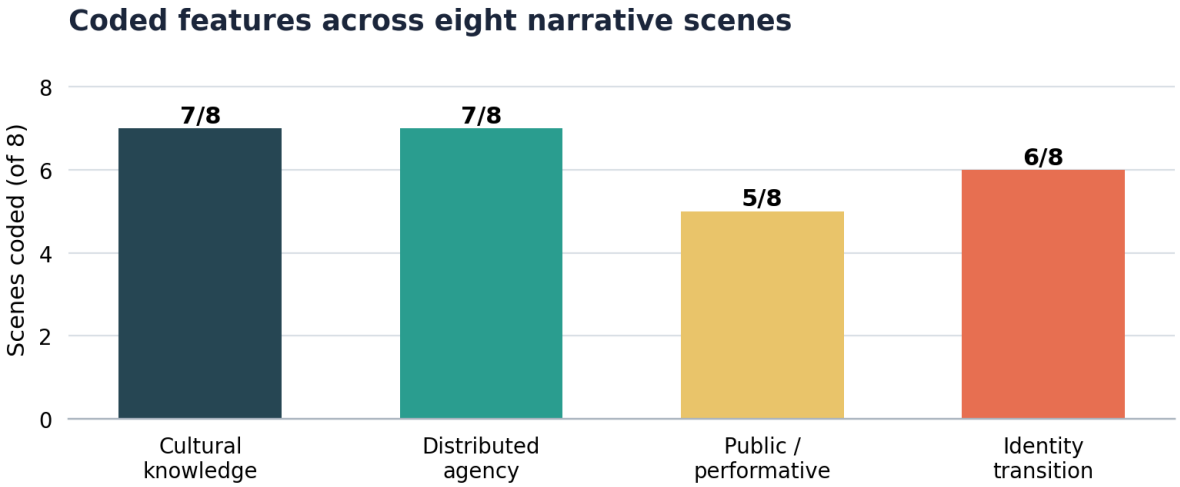


Figure 1. Number of selected scenes containing each coded feature (n = 8 scenes). Bars are direct sums of Table 2; they do not represent percentages of the whole epic or learner outcomes.

A digital-storytelling sequence derived from the analysis

The scene analysis supports a five-stage production sequence (Figure 2). It begins with source location because learners need to know whose version, translation, and editorial framing they are using. It then moves to scene reading and coding; comparison of voices and perspectives; construction of a short digital story; and reflection with attribution. Each stage addresses a specific result: source identification responds to the single-translation limitation, scene coding makes hidden narrative patterns discussable, voice comparison foregrounds distributed agency, production makes performance choices visible, and reflection guards against presenting a student adaptation as the tradition itself.



Figure 2. Five-stage learning sequence for adapting a selected epic scene into a digital story. The sequence is a design proposal derived from the analysis, not an experimentally validated intervention.

A practical assignment could ask pairs to produce a two- to four-minute audio-visual retelling of one selected scene. The learners would cite the edition and page range, identify whether dialogue is translated or newly written, and include a short creator's note naming any omitted or invented material. A storyboard should preserve at least one decision or action by a non-heroic character. For Barchin's challenge, for example, learners can represent her choice and the public conditions alongside the hero's response. For the horse's escape, a sound or animation choice can show that Boychibor acts within the plot rather than serving as scenery. For Qultoy's disguise, learners can distinguish what the audience knows from what the wedding crowd knows.

Discussion

What the scene pattern adds

The scene-level results sharpen the earlier conceptual argument of the first draft by grounding it in identifiable narrative material. They show how digital storytelling can begin with a close-reading question: whose action changes what happens next, and who recognizes the significance of that

action? This question prevents the adaptation from reducing Alpomish to an uninterrupted sequence of feats by one central hero. In the selected scenes, Barchin's conditions, Tovka's report, Boychibor's escape action, and the community's public recognition each contribute to plot movement. The finding is consistent with scholarship that treats the epic's women characters as narratively consequential, while the present analysis makes that claim auditable through scene-level coding (Eshonqulov, 2015).

The high frequency of cultural-knowledge codes also requires careful interpretation. Seven scenes contained at least one cue under a deliberately broad operational definition. This does not mean that each scene is culturally representative, that one translation captures all Uzbek practice, or that learners will acquire cultural literacy by seeing those cues on screen. It means that the selected text offers multiple points where an educator can ask what a social practice means in this narrative, what the translation makes visible, and what additional source or community knowledge is needed. This aligns with UNESCO's emphasis on safeguarding as transmission and revitalization involving communities, rather than mere storage of cultural objects (UNESCO, 2003).

The public or performative feature is lower than the cultural and agency features because it uses a narrower criterion. Five scenes include a contest, audience-facing performance, or repeated public announcement. The negative cases matter pedagogically: captivity and the private horse reunion may be emotionally central without becoming spectacle. A good digital adaptation should not turn every scene into a game or staged competition. Instead, learners can vary media according to function: quiet voice-over for captivity, contrasting sound perspectives for the reunion, and public framing for the wedding contests. This is a design implication from textual interpretation, not evidence that one medium is more effective.

Implications for teaching and adaptation

Three design choices follow. First, preserve provenance at the level of each product. The source note should identify the edition, translator, version attribution, and any secondary material consulted. A digital story assembled from the 2018 translation should be labelled an adaptation of that translation, not a definitive recording of the oral epic. Second, make perspective visible. Learners can storyboard a scene twice, once from Alpomish's point of view and once from Barchin's, Tovka's, or a spectator's. The difference reveals how information is distributed and how agency is interpreted. Third, annotate adaptation choices. A short note can explain why a scene was shortened, which cultural term was retained or glossed, and whether a sound or image was created by learners or sourced elsewhere.

This approach is compatible with the broader educational literature on digital storytelling, which emphasizes the integration of narrative and media production in learning (Robin, 2008). The present results add a specific heritage-oriented requirement: production should be paired with source criticism. A student-created animation may be engaging but can also flatten regional variation, normalize one character's perspective, or detach a custom from its narrative setting. Requiring a source note and a brief reflective explanation gives students a concrete way to account for those choices without burdening the story itself with scholarly exposition.

A further implication concerns language. The primary text is an English translation, while the epic's language, poetic form, and performance tradition cannot be exhausted by translated prose or verse. Where feasible, teachers should pair translated passages with Uzbek-language recordings or editions and invite knowledgeable community members to comment on interpretation. Such consultation should be voluntary, appropriately credited, and governed by agreed permission for recording or reuse. Where no such resources are available, teachers should state that limitation rather than create an impression that translation alone gives access to the whole performance tradition.

Conclusion

A scene-based reading of the 2018 English Alpomish translation identifies recurring cultural cues and a distributed pattern of agency across the selected narrative arc. Seven of eight scenes met

the stated criteria for cultural knowledge and distributed agency; five met the criterion for public or performative affordance, and six met the criterion for identity transition. These counts reveal how the text can support digital storytelling focused on voice, decision, recognition, and context. They do not establish the prevalence of these features across variants or prove educational effects.

The resulting five-stage sequence asks learners to locate a source, read and code scenes, compare voices, build a short story, and reflect with attribution. Its central principle is to adapt the epic as a situated narrative: retain the source trail, preserve meaningful roles beyond the central hero, and distinguish the learner's interpretation from the living tradition. Comparative work with Uzbek-language texts, performances, and community knowledge is needed before extending these findings beyond this translation.

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