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PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH AND UZBEK TONGUE TWISTERS

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Annotation: Pragmatic analysis examines tongue twisters not through the question "What do they mean?" but rather through the question "What do they cause to happen?" In this approach, the discursive context is not merely cataloged; instead, the primary focus is on the speech act that occurs between the speaker, the listener, and the group when a tongue twister is uttered. While the locutionary form of a tongue twister is typically a short text, its illocutionary force engages the listener in a performance, and its perlocutionary effect manifests as laughter, astonishment, competition, self-testing, or the need for self-correction. This criterion helps minimize redundancy: the analysis centers not on the setting in which a tongue twister is used, but on the specific speech force through which it functions.

Keywords and phrases: tongue twisters, perlocutionary effect, locutionary form, phonetic analysis, discursive analysis.

INTRODUCTION

From a metapragmatic perspective, tongue twisters make speech itself the subject matter. In ordinary sentences, language functions merely as a tool; in a tongue twister, however, language itself becomes the focus. The speaker pays more attention to "how I am saying it" rather than "what I am saying." The phrase "say a tongue twister quickly" clearly illustrates this; it encapsulates both the name of the genre and the requirement for its performance in a single statement. Similarly, in English, the term "tongue twister" alludes to the tangling of the tongue. Consequently, tongue twisters possess a metalinguistic character: they test speech through speech itself.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In his analysis of the various functions of language, R. Jakobson formulates the central question of poetics as: “What makes a verbal message a work of art?” [1] Tongue twisters provide a concise answer to this question: they are not merely ordinary messages, but forms of verbal art rooted in sound, rhythm, repetition, and performance. While the referential function may be weaker in them, the poetic, expressive, phatic, and metalinguistic functions are highly active. In the phrase “Shu mushuk, shum mushuk, shumshuk mushuk” [This cat, that sly cat, that sneaky cat], the play on sound, the establishment of contact, and the evocation of laughter are more significant than any actual information about a cat. The English example, “Six slippery snails slid slowly seaward,” functions similarly: although it depicts snails sliding slowly toward the sea, its primary purpose is to allow the listener to experience the flow of sounds.

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C. Kramsch views language and culture as an inseparable process [2]. Tongue twisters, too, do not exist outside of culture; each text evokes a specific object, setting, or life situation. Just as “She sells seashells on the seashore” relies on a seaside environment, the Uzbek phrase “Oq choynakka ko‘k qopqoq” [A blue lid on a white teapot] is rooted in the context of an Uzbek household and the culture of tea-drinking. From a functional-pragmatic perspective, these images are not merely decorative; rather, they serve to aid memorization, spark interest, and bring the performer closer to the text. If a tongue twister consists entirely of unfamiliar words, it may serve as a phonetic exercise, but its capacity to be collectively remembered diminishes.

A. Wierzbicka highlights the distinction between speech habits and cultural scripts within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics [3]. Tongue twisters manifest this distinction in a gentle, playful manner. In an English context, one frequently encounters formulations centered on self-assessment—such as "try this tongue twister" or "test your pronunciation"—whereas in an Uzbek context, direct, collective challenges—such as "try saying it," "who can say it the fastest?", or "say it again"—are more prominent. This should not be interpreted as a stereotype, but rather as a nuanced variation in speech habits. In both cases, the function of a tongue twister is to engage the speaker, yet the manner of this engagement carries a distinct tone.

In his theory of "cultural conceptualizations," F. Sharifian demonstrates that cultural experience is embedded within linguistic units [4]. In Uzbek tongue twisters, images such as “qo‘zichoq” (lamb), “choynak” (teapot), “qopqoq” (lid), “qish” (winter), “kishmish” (raisin), “tut” (mulberry), “turp” (radish), and “cho‘pon” (shepherd) are not merely semantic groupings; they are units that point toward collective experience. Conversely, in English tongue twisters, images such as "sea," "seashell," "woodchuck," "butter," "pepper," and "lorry" evoke their own specific cultural environment. In a functional-pragmatic analysis, these images are considered mnemonic anchors: a child or a language learner holds onto a chain of sounds by associating them with a meaningful scene. Consequently, in tongue twisters, the cultural code and the task of pronunciation are inseparable. The former makes the text engaging, while the latter turns the performance into a challenge.

METHODOLOGIES

From a functional-pragmatic perspective, relying solely on speed when evaluating tongue twisters is inappropriate. Factors such as clear pronunciation, rhythm, breath control, error monitoring, self-correction, and engagement with the listener must also be taken into account. If a learner speaks very quickly but lacks clarity, the primary objective of the exercise is lost. Conversely, a slower—yet precise and deliberate—performance establishes a solid foundation for increasing speed later on.

As a practical methodological approach, one can create a "methodological passport" for each tongue twister, comprising the text, source, language, phonetic focus, level of difficulty, context of use, recommended age group, potential types of errors, and cultural notes. Such a passport facilitates the integration of research findings into textbooks, instructional manuals, or digital platforms.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Tongue twisters also contain indirect speech acts. Even when the text takes the form of a question, it is not seeking actual information; rather, it demands performance. Questions such as "Did

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you say the sea is bottomless? Did you say the sea has no bottom?"—or, in English, "Did Peter Piper pick...?"—invite repetition rather than an answer. Therefore, it is more accurate to interpret them not as simple interrogative sentences, but as indirect directive speech acts. Such an analysis reveals the pragmatic complexity of tongue twisters: their form is that of a question, while their function is that of a test.

Extended practical analysis: speech acts and pragmatic outcomes

A comparative example: The phrase "Four furious friends fought for the phone" contains an implicit competitive act—the speaker attempts to articulate the sequence of /f/ sounds quickly and fluently. In the Uzbek example "Gulsara gul saralab, gul sanadi" ("Gulsara, sorting flowers, counted the flowers"), a subtler corrective act is present; the speaker must ensure they do not confuse the /g/ and /s/ sounds. The pragmatic tone of the first example leans toward competition, while the second leans toward fluent repetition and precision.

A comparative example: In the English phrase "Too big a toboggan is too big a toboggan to buy to begin to toboggan," the high frequency of repetition imposes a task on the speaker: they must manage their own memory. Similarly, the Uzbek phrase "Bu pista usta Musa ko‘sa pistafurushning pistasidir..." ("These pistachios belong to the beardless pistachio-seller, Master Musa...") creates an analogous speech act through the use of parallelism. Pragmatic outcome: the speaker is compelled to articulate the segments without conflating them.

Comparative example: In the phrase "Fresh fried fish fresh fried," the point of error is brief and distinct, allowing for an immediate corrective response—the listener can pinpoint exactly where a slip-up occurs (e.g., on "fresh" or "fried"). Similarly, in the Uzbek sequence "Osh pashshasi — pes pashsha, pes pashsha — maxov pashsha," any error involving the interchange of the sounds “p”, “sh”, or “s” is immediately audible. Because both texts are short, the corrective process is swift.

Comparative example: The phrase "A big black bear sat on a big black rug while a big black bug bit the big black bear" incorporates expressive and narrative elements; the bear, the rug, and the insect combine to form a brief, humorous scenario. Likewise, the Uzbek line "Eshik oldida buloq, buloqdan suv ichar uloq..." (A spring by the door, a kid drinking water from the spring...) employs a setting and an animal to create a narrative quality. Such linguistic units encourage the listener not merely to repeat the words, but to visualize a small, unfolding story.

Comparative example: The sequence "Can you can a canned can into an uncanned can..." offers language learners a way to test their own proficiency—it functions as an act of self-assessment. Similarly, the Uzbek question "Salima Salimdan savol so‘radimi, Salim Salimadan savol so‘radimi?" (Did Salima ask Salim a question, or did Salim ask Salima a question?) requires the speaker to keep track of the shifting names and roles. In both instances, errors can occur at any point throughout the performance, rather than being confined to the end of the text.

A practical comparative example: In the phrase “Imagine an imaginary menagerie manager...”, the speaker must manage both their imagination and the sequence of sounds. Similarly, the Uzbek phrase “E jo‘ra, bizning quyoshlamada quyoshlamalashib ket...” challenges the speaker through verbal

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play and unconventional word formation. In both cases, the pragmatic interest lies not in the literal meaning, but in the very process of articulation.

A practical comparative example: A student who recites “Peter Piper” without errors might receive praise in class; likewise, an Uzbek student who correctly recites “Qobil qozonda qovurdoq qovurdi...” earns the approval of the group. Here, the perlocutionary effect is positive recognition. Such recognition transforms the tongue-twister from a mere tool for identifying errors into a speech exercise that boosts self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

A discursive-communicative analysis of tongue twisters reveals that they exist primarily in oral performance rather than in written form. Factors such as the situation, participants, channel, tone, social norms, and the presence of an audience imbue the text with additional meaning. While English-language examples often feature classroom settings, challenges, and a focus on pronunciation, Uzbek-language examples are more strongly associated with family life, school environments, children’s games, and collective performance. Consequently, a tongue twister should be evaluated as a communicative event; each instance of performance is shaped by its specific context—including turn-taking, evaluation, laughter, corrections, and subsequent attempts—which allows for a more precise analysis.

Pragmatic analysis demonstrates that the primary function of tongue twisters is not to convey information, but rather to engage the listener in a speech act. They function as directive, expressive, corrective, competitive, and metapragmatic acts. For instance, the English phrase "Can you can a can..." prompts performance through a question, whereas the Uzbek phrase "Tez aytishni tez-tez ayt" ("Say the tongue twister quickly") serves as a direct command and a formula for a speech exercise. Elements such as errors, laughter, corrections, evaluations, encouragement, and repeated attempts are interpreted as the genre's inherent pragmatic mechanisms—a phenomenon that is clearly observable, scientifically classifiable, and empirically verifiable, particularly within the context of playful speech.

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