
Pragmatic characteristics of rhetorical questions arising under the influence of spoken discourse in English and Uzbek

Usmonova Zarina Habibovna

z.h.usmonova@buxdu.uz

Senior teacher,

Bukhara state university

Nurillayeva Mavluda Muzaffar qizi

isayevamavluda14@gmail.com

Mater's student,

Bukhara State University

Raximova Nargiza Maksudovna

Master's student,

Bukhara State University

Annotation

This article explores the pragmatic characteristics of rhetorical questions in English and Uzbek spoken discourse, with particular attention to their functions in conversational language use. Adopting a qualitative comparative approach grounded in pragmatics and discourse analysis, the study examines how rhetorical questions operate beyond their literal interrogative form. The findings demonstrate that such questions are not primarily used to seek information but to perform various pragmatic functions, including emphasis, evaluation, persuasion, and the expression of emotions. Their interpretation is shown to depend heavily on context, intonation, and shared background knowledge between speakers. Although English and Uzbek rhetorical questions exhibit similar communicative purposes, notable differences exist in their structural realization. English tends to employ modal verbs and auxiliary constructions, whereas Uzbek relies more on intonation patterns and contextual cues. The study concludes that rhetorical questions play a significant role in shaping meaning in spoken discourse and reflect the dynamic relationship between language, context, and speaker intention.

Keywords

Rhetorical questions, pragmatics, spoken discourse, implicature, speech acts, English, Uzbek

Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida so'zlashuv nutqi ta'sirida yuzaga keladigan ritorik so'roq gaplarning pragmatik xususiyatlari

Usmonova Zarina Habibovna

z.h.usmonova@buxdu.uz

Katta o'qituvchi,

Buxoro davlat universiteti

Nurillayeva Mavluda Muzaffar qizi

isayevamavluda14@gmail.com

Magistrant,

Buxoro davlat universiteti

Raximova Nargiza Maksudovna

Magistrant,

Buxoro davlat universiteti

Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqola ingliz va o'zbek og'zaki nutqida ritorik savollarning pragmatik xususiyatlarini, ayniqsa ularning muloqot jarayonidagi funksiyalarini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqot pragmatika va diskurs tahliliga asoslangan sifatli qiyosiy yondashuv orqali olib borilgan. Unda ritorik savollar o'zining oddiy so'roq shaklidan tashqariga chiqib, qanday ma'no va vazifalarni bajarishi o'rganiladi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, bunday savollar asosan axborot olish uchun emas, balki ta'kidlash, baholash, ishontirish hamda turli hissiyotlarni ifodalash uchun qo'llanadi. Ularning to'g'ri talqini esa kontekst, intonatsiya va suhbatdoshlar o'rtasidagi umumiy bilimga bevosita bog'liq. Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida ritorik savollar o'xshash kommunikativ maqsadlarga ega bo'lsa-da, ularning tuzilishida sezilarli farqlar mavjud. Ingliz tilida modal fe'llar va yordamchi konstruktsiyalar keng qo'llansa, o'zbek tilida ko'proq intonatsiya va kontekst muhim rol o'ynaydi. Xulosa qilib aytganda, ritorik savollar og'zaki nutqda ma'no shakllanishida muhim o'rin tutadi.*

Kalit so'zlar *Ritorik so'roq gaplar, pragmatika, so'zlashuv nutqi, implikatura, nutq aktlari nazariyasi, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili*

**Прагматические характеристики
риторических вопросов,
возникающих под влиянием
разговорной речи в английском
и узбекском языках**

Усмонова Зарина Хабибовна

z.h.usmonova@buxdu.uz

Старший преподаватель,
Бухарский государственный университет

Нуриллаева Мавлуда Музаффар кизи

isayevamavluda14@gmail.com

Магистрант,
Бухарский государственный университет

Рахимова Наргиза Максудовна

Магистрант,
Бухарский государственный университет

Аннотация *Данная статья посвящена изучению прагматических характеристик риторических вопросов в английской и узбекской устной речи с особым вниманием к их функциям в процессе коммуникации. Исследование основано на качественном сравнительном подходе с опорой на прагматику и дискурс-анализ. В работе рассматривается, как риторические вопросы выходят за рамки своей прямой вопросительной формы и выполняют различные коммуникативные задачи. Результаты показывают, что такие вопросы используются не столько для получения информации, сколько для выражения акцента, оценки, убеждения и эмоций. Их интерпретация во многом зависит от контекста, интонации и общего фона знаний участников общения. Несмотря на сходство коммуникативных целей в английском и узбекском языках, наблюдаются существенные различия в их структурной реализации. В английском языке чаще используются модальные глаголы и вспомогательные конструкции, тогда как в узбекском языке важную роль играют интонация и контекст. В заключение подчеркивается значимость риторических вопросов в формировании смысла устной речи.*

Ключевые слова *Риторические вопросы, прагматика, разговорная речь, имплицатура, теория речевых актов, английский язык, узбекский язык*

Introduction

Language is a dynamic system that constantly evolves under the influence of social interaction, communicative needs, and contextual factors. One of the most significant domains where such changes are observed is spoken discourse, which often reflects natural, spontaneous, and context-dependent language use. In this regard, rhetorical questions represent a particularly interesting linguistic phenomenon, as they function not merely as interrogative structures but as pragmatic tools for expressing attitudes, emotions, and implied meanings.

Rhetorical questions, unlike genuine information-seeking questions, do not require explicit answers. Instead, they serve various communicative purposes such as persuasion, emphasis, irony, and evaluation. Their interpretation largely depends on pragmatic factors, including speaker intention, shared knowledge, and discourse context. As a result, rhetorical questions are widely used in everyday conversation, where speakers rely on them to achieve specific communicative effects (Sadock, 1974).

In both English and Uzbek, rhetorical questions are frequently employed in spoken discourse, yet their pragmatic characteristics may differ due to linguistic, cultural, and contextual variations. Moreover, the influence of spoken language on grammatical structures and usage patterns contributes to ongoing processes of language change. This makes rhetorical questions an important area of study for understanding the interaction between pragmatics and language evolution.

Despite growing interest in pragmatics and discourse analysis, comparative studies focusing on rhetorical questions in English and Uzbek – especially in relation to spoken

discourse – remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the pragmatic characteristics of rhetorical questions arising under the influence of spoken discourse in these two languages.

The objectives of this research are:

- to identify the main pragmatic functions of rhetorical questions in English and Uzbek;
- to analyze how spoken discourse influences their usage;
- to compare similarities and differences between the two languages.

This study is expected to contribute to the fields of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and comparative linguistics by providing a deeper understanding of how rhetorical questions function in real communicative contexts.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to analyze the pragmatic characteristics of rhetorical questions in English and Uzbek within the context of spoken discourse. A qualitative method is particularly suitable for this research, as it allows for an in-depth examination of meaning, speaker intention, and contextual interpretation, which are central to pragmatic analysis.

The data for this study consist of examples of rhetorical questions collected from both English and Uzbek spoken discourse. These include naturally occurring dialogues, excerpts from literary texts that reflect conversational language, and constructed examples that are consistent with native speaker intuition. The inclusion of both authentic and representative examples ensures a balanced and context-sensitive analysis.

The analytical framework of this research is primarily based on principles of pragmatics

and discourse analysis. The study draws on the theoretical insights of scholars such as H.P. Grice, particularly his theory of implicature, which explains how speakers convey meanings beyond the literal interpretation of utterances (Grice, 1975). In addition, the concept of speech acts proposed by J.L. Austin and further developed by John Searle is used to understand how rhetorical questions function as indirect communicative acts rather than genuine requests for information (Austin, 1962).

Furthermore, the study considers the interactional role of discourse as discussed by Deborah Tannen, particularly in relation to spoken language and conversational strategies. This helps to explain how rhetorical questions contribute to maintaining interaction, expressing stance, and achieving communicative goals in real-life conversations.

For the comparative analysis, rhetorical questions in both languages are examined according to the following criteria:

- their pragmatic functions (e.g., emphasis, irony, persuasion);
- their contextual usage in spoken discourse;
- their structural and functional similarities and differences.

By applying these analytical tools, the study aims to provide a systematic and contextually grounded comparison of rhetorical questions in English and Uzbek, highlighting how spoken discourse influences their form and function (Mahmudov, 2012).

Results

The collected data demonstrate that rhetorical questions are widely used in both English and Uzbek spoken discourse and serve multiple pragmatic functions. The results are organized according to functional categories observed in the analysis.

1. *Distribution and Frequency in Spoken Discourse*

The data show that rhetorical questions occur frequently in conversational contexts in both languages. They are especially common in informal speech, where speakers rely on

context and shared knowledge. In such environments, rhetorical questions function as efficient communicative tools that reduce the need for explicit statements. In both English and Uzbek, rhetorical questions are more prevalent in dialogue than in formal written discourse, confirming their strong connection to spontaneous interaction (Qurbonova, 2015).

2. *Functional Types of Rhetorical Questions*

The analysis identifies several recurring pragmatic functions of rhetorical questions in both languages:

Emphasis

English: "Isn't that clear?"

Uzbek: "Bu tushunarli emasmi?"

Evaluation / Criticism

English: "Do you call that work?"

Uzbek: "Buni ish deb ataysanmi?"

Emotional Expression (e.g., frustration, surprise)

English: "What am I supposed to do?"

Uzbek: "Endi nima qilay?"

Persuasion / Influence

English: "Wouldn't it be better to wait?"

Uzbek: "Kutganimiz yaxshiroq emasmi?"

These examples show that rhetorical questions in both languages perform similar communicative roles, regardless of structural differences.

3. *Structural Characteristics*

The findings also reveal certain structural tendencies:

In English, rhetorical questions frequently include auxiliary and modal verbs such as "do," "can," "would," and "should."

In Uzbek, rhetorical questions are often formed through interrogative particles (e.g., -mi) and rely heavily on intonation for pragmatic interpretation.

Despite these differences, both languages use interrogative forms to express non-interrogative meanings.

4. *Contextual Dependence*

Another important result is that the interpretation of rhetorical questions in both languages depends strongly on context. Without contextual cues, it may be difficult to

distinguish rhetorical questions from genuine information-seeking questions.

This supports the idea proposed by H. P. Grice that meaning in communication is often implied rather than directly stated, and that listeners rely on shared knowledge to interpret utterances correctly (Grice, 1975).

5. *Similarities and Differences*

The comparison between English and Uzbek reveals:

Similarities:

- Both languages use rhetorical questions to express implicit meanings.
- Similar pragmatic functions are observed across both languages.
- Their use is strongly associated with spoken discourse.

Differences:

- English tends to use more syntactic variation (e.g., modal constructions).
- Uzbek relies more on intonation and contextual cues.
- Some Uzbek rhetorical questions appear more direct in form.

• Summary of Results

In summary, the results indicate that rhetorical questions in English and Uzbek:

- are common in spoken discourse,
- perform multiple pragmatic functions,
- depend on context for interpretation,
- and show both cross-linguistic similarities and structural differences.

Analysis

The findings of this study highlight the inherently pragmatic nature of rhetorical questions, as their primary function lies not in requesting information but in conveying implied meanings. This supports the view that language use in spoken discourse is largely shaped by communicative intention rather than purely grammatical structure.

From a pragmatic perspective, rhetorical questions can be understood as instances of conversational implicature, as proposed by H.P. Grice. Speakers intentionally violate the maxim of quantity or relevance by asking a question whose answer is already known,

thereby prompting the listener to infer the intended meaning. For example, questions such as "Isn't it obvious?" do not seek confirmation but instead reinforce shared knowledge and emphasize a particular stance (Grice, 1975).

Furthermore, the results confirm that rhetorical questions function as indirect speech acts. According to J.L. Austin and John Searle, the illocutionary force of an utterance may differ from its grammatical form. In this case, interrogative structures perform functions such as criticism, suggestion, or emotional expression. This indirectness allows speakers to mitigate the force of their statements, making communication more socially appropriate in many contexts.

The influence of spoken discourse is also significant. As noted by Deborah Tannen, conversational language prioritizes interaction and involvement. Rhetorical questions contribute to this by engaging the listener, maintaining attention, and creating a sense of shared understanding. This explains their high frequency in informal speech compared to formal written language (Tannen, 2007).

The cross-linguistic comparison further suggests that while the pragmatic functions of rhetorical questions are largely universal, their realization is shaped by language-specific features. English relies more on syntactic variation and modal verbs to encode subtle meanings, whereas Uzbek depends more on intonation and contextual inference (G'afforova, 2019). This difference reflects broader typological distinctions between the two languages, as well as cultural preferences in communication styles.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that rhetorical questions are not merely stylistic devices but essential components of pragmatic competence in both English and Uzbek. Their role in expressing attitude, managing interaction, and conveying implicit meaning makes them a key element in understanding how language functions in real communicative settings.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm that rhetorical questions function as important pragmatic devices in both English and Uzbek spoken discourse. Rather than serving as genuine requests for information, they operate primarily through implied meaning, allowing speakers to express attitudes, evaluations, and emotions in an indirect yet effective way. This reinforces the idea that language use in real communication is shaped more by pragmatic intention than by formal grammatical structure (Yule, 1996).

One of the key insights emerging from the findings is the strong relationship between rhetorical questions and implicature. As suggested by H.P. Grice, speakers often rely on shared knowledge and contextual assumptions to convey meanings that are not explicitly stated. In this sense, rhetorical questions deliberately guide the listener toward a specific interpretation (Grice, 1975). For example, when a speaker asks "Isn't it obvious?", the intended meaning is not a request for confirmation but an assertion of certainty. This demonstrates how rhetorical questions function as efficient tools for encoding implicit meaning in discourse.

In addition, the study highlights the role of rhetorical questions as indirect speech acts. According to J.L. Austin and John Searle, the surface structure of an utterance does not always correspond to its communicative function. The findings support this claim, as rhetorical questions frequently perform functions such as criticism, suggestion, or persuasion while maintaining an interrogative form. This indirectness can be seen as a strategy for managing interpersonal relations, as it allows speakers to soften potentially face-threatening acts (Searle, 1969).

Another important point concerns the influence of spoken discourse on the use of rhetorical questions. As observed in the results, these structures are particularly frequent in conversational contexts. This supports the view of Deborah Tannen, who emphasizes that

spoken interaction is characterized by involvement and engagement. Rhetorical questions contribute to this interactional dynamic by inviting the listener to participate cognitively, even when no verbal response is expected. In this way, they help maintain the flow of conversation and strengthen speaker-listener connection (Tannen, 2007).

The cross-linguistic dimension of the study provides further insight into the relationship between universal pragmatic principles and language-specific features. While both English and Uzbek employ rhetorical questions for similar communicative purposes, the differences observed in their structural realization suggest that pragmatic functions are shaped by linguistic and cultural factors. English tends to utilize modal verbs and syntactic variation to express subtle nuances, whereas Uzbek relies more heavily on intonation and contextual cues. This indicates that although the underlying pragmatic mechanisms may be universal, their expression is influenced by the typological characteristics of each language (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Furthermore, the findings suggest that rhetorical questions play a role in ongoing processes of language change, particularly within spoken discourse. As informal communication increasingly influences language use, structures like rhetorical questions may become more flexible and multifunctional. This supports the broader view that spoken language is a driving force in linguistic innovation and evolution.

Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of how rhetorical questions operate at the intersection of pragmatics, discourse, and language change. By examining both English and Uzbek, it demonstrates that rhetorical questions are not only stylistic features but also essential tools for effective communication in real-life contexts.

Conclusion

This study has examined the pragmatic characteristics of rhetorical questions in English and Uzbek spoken discourse, focusing on how

they function under the influence of conversational language use. The findings demonstrate that rhetorical questions are not used to obtain information but rather to convey implied meanings such as emphasis, evaluation, persuasion, and emotional attitude. In both languages, they serve as effective pragmatic tools that depend heavily on context and shared knowledge between speakers and listeners.

The comparative analysis shows that, despite structural differences, English and Uzbek share many similarities in the pragmatic use of rhetorical questions. Both languages employ them as indirect communicative strategies that allow speakers to express criticism, suggestion, or emotional reactions in a more subtle and socially acceptable way. This supports the theoretical perspectives of H. P. Grice on implicature and J.L. Austin and John Searle on indirect speech acts, which emphasize the gap between literal form and intended meaning.

At the same time, the study reveals language-specific differences. English rhetorical questions tend to rely more on

modal verbs and syntactic variation, while Uzbek rhetorical questions depend more on intonation and contextual interpretation. These differences reflect typological characteristics of the languages as well as cultural preferences in spoken interaction.

The research also confirms that spoken discourse plays a significant role in shaping the use and frequency of rhetorical questions. As highlighted by Deborah Tannen, conversational language is highly interactive, and rhetorical questions contribute to this interaction by engaging listeners and maintaining communicative flow.

Overall, the study concludes that rhetorical questions are essential pragmatic devices in both English and Uzbek spoken discourse. They reflect the dynamic relationship between language, context, and speaker intention, and they also illustrate how spoken communication contributes to language variation and change. Further research could expand this comparison by including larger corpora or exploring other discourse types such as media and institutional communication.

References:

1. Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
2. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
3. Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Vol. 3. Speech acts*. 41–58. Academic Press.
4. Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Tannen, D. (2007). *Talking voices: Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse*. Cambridge University Press.
7. Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
8. Sadock, J. M. (1974). *Toward a linguistic theory of speech acts*. Academic Press.
9. Mahmudov, N. (2012). *Til va nutq madaniyati*. Toshkent: O'zbekiston Milliy Ensiklopediyasi.
10. Qurbonova, M. (2015). *Nutqiy faoliyat va pragmatika masalalari*. Toshkent: Universitet nashriyoti.
11. G'afforova, D. (2019). *Ingliz va o'zbek tillarida diskurs tahlili muammolari*. Samarqand: SamDU nashriyoti.