

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE TEXTUAL STRUCTURE OF FOLKTALES

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The textual structure of Uzbek folktales comprises three components: traditional epic clichés, transitional links that provide supplementary information, and motifs that form the thematic foundation of the plot. There are also critical factors influencing these components, which are directly related to the degree of perfection or, conversely, the insufficiency of the folktale text. The most fundamental of these factors are as follows:

The storyteller factor (the storyteller's gender, age, occupation, education level, professional or amateur status, degree of adherence to folklore traditions, and other aspects);

The listener factor (the audience's gender, age, preferences, real-time psychological state, and others);

The factor of space and time (aspects such as the specific time and historical period of storytelling, as well as the location and geographic region).

The primary and most essential characteristic of folklore is its orality. The text of an orally performed folkloric specimen is renewed during each performance, leading to the emergence of different variants and even versions of a single work. The aforementioned factors play a crucial role in the emergence of these variants and versions. Consequently, examining each of these factors through specific examples provides important theoretical conclusions for the field.

First and foremost, it is highly beneficial to review the perspectives formulated prior to our study. The prominent folklorist, Academician T.Mirzaev, stated the following regarding folklore performers: "Performers meticulously observed the life, livelihood, customs, demands, and needs of the nation to which they belonged. The audience of most performers was confined solely to their own village and its immediate surroundings" [1; 52].

Another folklorist, scholar A.Musakulov, in his article dedicated to the study of the chain tale titled "Uch Echki" (The Three Goats), notes: "…When I asked Sister Zulfiya, 'You seem to know many tales, could you tell me one too?', she replied, 'I have one tale that is both long and short.' I asked how long and how short it was. She said, 'For the long version, the sun sets and the dawn breaks; the short one lasts only as long as it takes for tea to boil.' I said, 'Then please tell me the medium one.' Thereupon, she narrated the abridged variant of the tale presented for your attention. The point is that she had heard this tale from her grandmother and would recite it in the evenings to her grandchildren who did not yet attend school and to the neighboring children. From this, a logical conclusion emerges that this tale is known to representatives of five generations: grandmother, mother, storyteller, the storyteller's daughter or daughter-in-law, and the children listening to the tale. The structure of the tale – namely, its composition of prose and poetic sections – and the process of its narration are also distinctive. If the children did not fall asleep quickly, the number of goats in the tale would reach up to ten, thereby significantly prolonging the narrative; however, if the children grew drowsy, three goats were sufficient. The number of goats was

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never reduced below this threshold. When I inquired about the reason for this, she replied, 'My grandmothers used to tell it this way too,' which represents a specific manifestation of tradition. She narrated the tale with great skill, masterfully imitating animal voices. When she demonstrated the old man squeezing into a narrow leather vessel (kubi), the children laughed heartily. The tale is significant in several aspects. Firstly, it exerts a positive influence on children's upbringing. Secondly, according to the storytelling tradition, it was performed in the evenings. Our ancestors believed that a song, folktale, or epic poem performed in the evening protected the household from evil spirits. According to folk belief, evil spirits intensify at night. The performance of a folktale or epic prevents them from approaching people. For this reason, in the tale, an evil wolf comes to the household on the very night the old man and old woman forget their songs…

Special attention is also paid to traditional magical numbers in the text of the folktale. The crux of the matter is that the three goats, the foal, the cow, the dog, and the cat constitute a heptad (a group of seven). Our ancestors believed in the magical power of the numbers three and seven. This is precisely why the performers of this tale did not reduce the number of goats below three. The tale begins with a traditional zachin (initial formula/opening cliché). According to the storyteller, if she omitted any part of the opening formula – for instance, the line 'the crow was a cawer' – or interchanged the positions of the parts, the children would immediately correct her mistake. Crucially, the storyteller always took the audience – the children – into account. Depending on their mood, she either shortened or extended the tale. Naturally, due to this dynamic, a new variant of the tale emerged within each act of performance. The text we have cited is one such variant. In general, this method is a regular process in folklore. The performer of folklore works always takes the audience into account…" [2; 21-22].

J.Askarova, who has specifically researched storytelling and the repertoire of Uzbek folktale tellers, observes the following regarding the relationship between the storyteller and the audience: "It is well known that a folktale manifests as a living process in conjunction with its performer. Performers are referred to as storytellers (ertakchi). The storyteller directly requires an audience – listeners. As a result, a system of social phenomena – storytelling – comes into existence" [3; 5].

We shall now proceed to examine each of the three factors identified above that influence the folktale text.

The Storyteller Factor. This factor is exceptionally important in the formation of the folktale text. There are numerous scholars in world folkloristics who have conducted research on the folktale and its performer. One of the significant ideas regarding the storyteller and their emergence belongs to the renowned folklorist, scholar K.Imomov: "The initial emergence of the storyteller's persona as a creator began with the conditions associated with the past and their attitude toward real reality, and came into existence as a manifestation thereof... The storyteller is an inventor of tales, an artist. At the same time, they are an experienced creator, well-versed in folktale traditions, eloquent, good-natured, witty, and a comedian. They are a talented individual inclined to composing verse, adhering to the meanings of words and images, and possessing a style of storytelling characterized by lively speech and fluent language" [4; 190].

The scholar's aforementioned views primarily pertain to professional storytellers. One aspect that distinguishes the folktale, which belongs to the epic genre, from folk epics (dastons) is that the daston has been and continues to be performed exclusively by bakhshi-shoirlar (bard-poets). The folktale, however, can be narrated by anyone. Nevertheless, several aspects of the narrator cannot fail to influence the folktale text. The most crucial among these are as follows:

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The gender of the storyteller. Research indicates that the magical types of folktales were predominantly performed by men, and the term “professional storyteller” was also primarily applied to male storytellers. While acknowledging the significant role of female storytellers in nurturing and training professional folk storytellers, it can be stated that female storytellers mostly performed metaphorical folktales (animal tales).

The storyteller's epic knowledge. Although any representative of the people can readily perform a folktale, talented, epically knowledgeable, and tradition-adhering famous storytellers have existed among the people since ancient times. They performed the folktale in a manner that was artistically sounder, richer in descriptions, and more perfected than others. For instance, the opening (boshlanma) of the Uzbek folk fairy tale titled “Qahramon” demonstrates a perfect utilization of epic clichés. The description of locations and characters within the folktale's plot is drawn just like a picture:

“Once upon a time, when there was or was not, when people were hungry or full, the wolf was the steward, the fox was the herald, the crow was the cawer, the sparrow was the informer, the goose was the trumpeter, the duck was the piper, the tortoise was the weighmaster, and the frog was indebted to him.
In ancient times, there was a magnificent city. Since no enemy could harm it, people called this city the Peaceful City. To protect the city from the enemy, the king maintained countless troops and heroes. Among the heroes, the fame of a hero named Qahramon spread throughout the world. Qahramon was both the youngest and the bravest and strongest among the heroes” [5; 413].

Alternatively, the following instance in the text of the well-known folktale “Ur, To‘qmoq” (Beat, Cudgel!) draws attention:

“Once there lived an old man and an old woman. They spent their days hunting. One day, while the old man was waiting by the trap, a large stork caught in it. He ran and released the stork from the trap, whereupon the stork began to speak like a human:

– Old man, I am the chief of the storks, let me go, and I will give you whatever you wish for. My abode is behind the mountain across from here. If you ask, ‘Where is Laylakvoy’s (Stork’s) house?’, everyone will tell you, – he said. The old man let the stork go.

The next morning, he woke up and set out to bring back Laylakvoy’s gift. He walked and walked until he arrived at a certain place...” [6; 189].

In the folktale text above, the old man who released the stork did not initially demand anything. That is, he actually provided disinterested assistance to the stork. Then, unexpectedly, he sets out on a journey. In this instance, it can be discerned that the old man actually returned home and related the event to his wife from A to Z. Upon learning about this, the old woman urged the old man to get something from the stork. However, for some reason, the storyteller forgot or intentionally omitted this scene in the folktale. Hence, it can be argued that the storyteller’s level of competence and artistic skill inevitably influence the epic clichés, transitional links, motifs, and even the scenes that constitute the structure of the folktale.

The Listener Factor. This factor also plays an important role in the formation of the folktale text. Regarding this, J.Askarova states: “Studies have revealed that the folktale audience consists primarily of two categories: adults (men, women) and children. Tales belonging to the magical type, which are epically extensive and reflect social relations within the ‘adult world,’ were narrated to adult listeners. Children, on the other hand, were entertained with animal tales” [3; 5].

The state of the audience constantly influences the storyteller, as they select the folktale accordingly. The significant aspects of the listeners related to the folktale text are as follows:

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The age and gender of the listeners. While preparing to narrate a certain folktale, the storyteller primarily pays attention to the gender and age limits of the listeners. The type of folktale is selected accordingly. Tales carrying deep symbolic meanings or those associated with various adult relationships are told to older listeners. The descriptions within the folktale text also develop correspondingly. In particular, since the prior events are already familiar to the listeners, the storyteller omits certain elements within the folktale plot – such as transitional links and motifs – during the course of narration.

The desires and preferences of the listeners. The desires, preferences, and psychological states of the listeners are also vital for the storyteller, as the tale is performed accordingly. As the folklorist scholar Asqar Musakulov emphasizes, the storyteller always took the audience – the children – into account. Depending on their mood, she either shortened or extended the tale [2; 21-22]. To prolong the folktale, storytellers expanded various descriptive parts and added different scenes that did not affect the core meaning of the folktale plot. Conversely, when it was necessary to narrate a shorter version, the opposite approach was adopted.

The Factor of Space and Time. This factor inevitably influences the folktale text as well. It is well known that in ancient times, folktales were narrated after nightfall. That is, the darkness of the surroundings and the setting of the sun were essential for the performance of the folktale. Our ancestors believed that a folktale told in the evening protected the household from evil spirits. According to folk belief, evil spirits intensify at night, and the performance of a folktale was considered to prevent them from approaching people. Furthermore, the influence of time in a broader sense can also be reflected in folktale texts. The following folktale can be cited as an example of this:

"…When he said, 'Boil, little pot,' gold boiled out of the pot. When he said, 'Open, tablecloth,' all kinds of dishes appeared. Eating dishes they had never seen in their lives, the old man and old woman became overjoyed.

With the gold, the old man built a fine house and invited the khan to his home for hospitality. The khan said, 'Being the khan, shall I go to that poor, destitute old man's house for hospitality?' and refused to go.

The old man grew angry and challenged the khan to war. The next day, the khan prepared seven thousand soldiers, lined them up in front of the old man's house, and said:

– Well, old man, if you value your life, come out to war! – The old man came out of the door, looked at the cudgel, and shouted:

– Beat, cudgel! – Whereupon the cudgel struck all the soldiers one by one and laid them low; finally, the cudgel began to beat the khan. The khan said:

– Old man, stop your cudgel, you have won; save me from death, and you shall become the ruler of the land.

The old man stopped the cudgel. He became the ruler of the land himself. He reached his goal and desire." [7]

In reality, the aforementioned folktale should have concluded once the old man acquired all the magical objects. However, based on the demands of the era, the storyteller artificially continued the tale and added the conflict scene between the khan and the old man. Interestingly, such forced scenes that do not integrate into the primary plot drop out over time. Artistically sound works, however, remain eternal.

In conclusion, it can be stated that aspects such as how perfectly the components constituting the structure of the folktale text – epic clichés, transitional links, and motifs – are expressed, expanded, or

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shortened, as well as their omission or forced accretion, are directly linked to factors such as the storyteller, the listener, and the chronotope.

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