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ETHICAL AND AESTHETIC FEATURES OF IRONY IN THE ANECDOTE "THE FAULT IS MINE"

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Abstract. This article offers a linguo-pragmatic analysis of the ethical and aesthetic properties of irony as manifested in the Nasriddin Afandi anecdote "The Fault Is Mine." The study synthesizes established views within Uzbek linguistics on the nature of irony (J. Lapasov, E. Ibragimova, L. Jalolova, among others) with Grice's conversational maxims and Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory. It is argued that the irony in the anecdote operates on two levels: ethically, it models self-directed accountability through admitting one's own mistake; aesthetically, it produces a comic effect through the listener's inferential engagement.

Keywords: irony, ethical-aesthetic feature, Nasriddin Afandi, linguopragmatics, relevance theory, self-irony, folk anecdote, implicature, ironic meaning.

Nasriddin Afandi anecdotes occupy a special place in Uzbek oral folklore: in a concise form, they express profound social and philosophical meaning while simultaneously producing a strong comic effect. These two features of the anecdote—depth of content and elegance of form—correspond precisely to the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of irony. Therefore, irony should be studied not merely as a literary device, but also as a speech phenomenon expressing the complex relationship between language and thought.

A number of important studies on irony have been carried out in Uzbek linguistics. In particular, the handbook Uzbek Stylistics (1983) defines irony as the use of words and expressions, through sarcasm and mockery, in a figurative meaning opposite to their literal meaning. In Literary Text and Linguistic Analysis (1995), J. Lapasov pays particular attention to the distinction between irony and satire: whereas satire openly demonstrates a subjective attitude, irony expresses that attitude covertly and implicitly. This distinction serves as an important methodological basis for the present article because the humor in "The Fault Is Mine" is likewise constructed implicitly and requires the listener to draw an inference.

In her 2007 study of the language of the novel O'tkan kunlar, L. Jalolova characterizes irony as concealed ridicule, sarcasm, and one of the methods of negation in literary texts: words uttered seriously are used in a meaning opposite to their literal sense. In her study Methods and Means of Expressing Irony and Ironic Meaning in Uzbek (2001), E. Ibragimova classifies the linguistic means of expressing ironic meaning into intonational-phonetic, lexical-phraseological, paremiological, morphological, and syntactic levels. S. Ziyotova's 2020 article on irony in the novel Mehrobdan chayon also analyzes ironic devices in literary texts on the basis of the same classification. Although these approaches use different terms—such as irony, mockery, sarcasm, and taunt—they interpret them as various manifestations of a single phenomenon whose essence lies in the discrepancy between the words uttered and the speaker's actual intention.

A distinctive feature of the anecdote genre is that it is one of the most concise forms of oral folklore: plot, dialogue, and resolution may be compressed into three or four sentences. At the

same time, unlike many other short genres, an anecdote almost always ends with an unexpected resolution or final "punch." This makes it particularly suitable for studying irony, because one of the main conditions of irony—the discrepancy between expressed and intended meaning—appears in its most direct and compact form.

In Uzbek studies of anecdotes, irony is often treated only as a stylistic device, while its pragmatic function—that is, its role in the process of meaning-making between participants in communication—and its moral-evaluative function have received insufficient attention. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate, through an analysis of "The Fault Is Mine" and on the basis of the theoretical views of the Uzbek linguists mentioned above, how the ethical properties of irony (moral evaluation and self-blame) and its aesthetic properties (unexpectedness, concision, and symmetry) manifest themselves in an interconnected manner.

In describing the ethical dimension of irony, we first consider it as a category of evaluation: through an ironic utterance, the speaker or character reveals a contradiction between reality and expectation or outcome and thereby indirectly produces a moral conclusion. The principle of a "covert, implicit attitude," emphasized by J. Lapasov, is especially important here: unlike satire, irony encourages the listener to reach the conclusion independently rather than stating the evaluation openly. In Nasriddin Afandi anecdotes, this conclusion is often directed at the character himself—by blaming himself rather than others, he evokes in the listener a sense of humility and responsibility.

As for the aesthetic dimension, the comic effect of irony emerges through the deliberate flouting of the conversational maxims described by H. P. Grice, particularly the maxims of quantity and quality. A gap arises between what the speaker says and what is intended, and the listener "fills" this gap with the help of context. From the perspective of D. Sperber and D. Wilson's Relevance Theory, irony is a phenomenon of "echoic use," in which the speaker echoes a previous thought, expectation, or plan while expressing a critical and distanced attitude toward it. This theoretical model is compatible with E. Ibragimova's method of analyzing linguistic devices by levels: each level—phonetic, lexical, paremiological, and syntactic—creates different inferential cues for the listener. This theory is especially useful for the anecdote genre because its brevity requires a high degree of inferential activity from the listener, producing an aesthetic effect through concision.

Grice's cooperative principle consists of four maxims: quantity (providing the required amount of information), quality (speaking truthfully), relation (being relevant), and manner (speaking clearly and orderly). In "The Fault Is Mine," each of these maxims is "broken" in a distinctive way. The daughters' promises appear to observe the maxim of quality—they are not lying, and the stated conditions genuinely exist. However, the maxim of quantity is subtly flouted: each daughter speaks only about her own husband and remains silent about how the second condition negates the first. This is necessary but unstated information.

It is precisely this "lack" of information that creates the need for an additional inference in the listener—and in Afandi as a character within the text. In Grice's theory, this is known as conversational implicature: noticing the apparent violation of a maxim, the listener reconstructs what the speaker actually intends. The comic force of the anecdote depends on the speed and unexpectedness of this reconstruction.

In recent years, irony has been studied not only from the perspective of pragmatics but also within cognitive linguistics. From this viewpoint, irony is regarded less as an isolated stylistic figure and more as a manifestation of the human ability to activate two or more mental models

simultaneously and process the contradiction between them. “The Fault Is Mine” provides suitable material for this approach: two scenarios—a rainy year and a dry year—are activated simultaneously in the listener’s mind, and Afandi’s final conclusion replaces them with a third, generalized model: camel driving as a stable solution under all conditions. The cognitive force of irony lies precisely in the speed and unexpectedness of this “model shift.” This perspective may be developed further within cognitive linguistics in future research.

From a pragmatic perspective, the speech of each daughter appears independently to observe Grice’s maxim of quantity, since each provides complete information about her husband. Taken together, however, the two utterances require the listener—and Afandi himself—to draw an implicit conclusion: regardless of the weather, Afandi will benefit from only one son-in-law and not from the other. This conclusion is not stated explicitly in the text; rather, in the terminology of Relevance Theory, it is inferred by the listener according to the principle of achieving the greatest cognitive effect with the least processing effort.

Drawing on E. Ibragimova’s level-based classification, the linguistic devices that generate ironic meaning in the anecdote can be examined separately. At the syntactic level, the repeated conditional clauses introduced by “if” and expressing directly opposing meanings—“if the weather is favorable this year...” and “if the weather is dry this year...” —contrast two future possibilities through parallel syntactic constructions. This grammatical parallelism is not comic in itself, but it prepares the listener’s mind for the competition between two conditions concerning the same subject, Afandi, thereby creating the syntactic basis for the ironic conclusion.

At the lexical-phraseological level, the expression “I felt as if I were riding a horse and licking cream” deserves special attention. It is a figurative comparison from popular speech that semantically conveys a high degree of harmony and prosperity; in the context of the anecdote, however, it is used to express the opposite situation—receiving no real benefit. Here, J. Lapasov’s principle of using a seriously uttered expression in a meaning contrary to its literal sense is clearly manifested: the phrase is positive in form but carries a negative evaluation in context. The participation of such lexical-phraseological devices is one of the main factors strengthening the ironic effect of the anecdote.

The interjection “Oh-ho!” is an example of an ironic cue at the intonational-phonetic level. It expresses Afandi’s mixed state of surprise and regret and signals in advance to the listener that the following statement should be interpreted with an ironic tone. Thus, the text of the anecdote creates a system of mutually reinforcing ironic cues at several levels—syntactic, lexical, and intonational.

The ethical function of irony is most clearly manifested in the phrase “The fault is mine,” which serves both as the title and the final conclusion of the anecdote. Afandi blames neither his daughters, nor his sons-in-law, nor fate; instead, he assumes responsibility for the logical flaw himself. Within the Uzbek system of moral and cultural values, this represents a model of a responsible individual: acknowledging a defect in one’s own plan and refraining from blaming others are positively valued.

Unlike the principle of concealed ridicule emphasized by L. Jalolova and E. Ibragimova, the laughter here is directed not at an external object but at the speaker himself. This constitutes a distinct form of irony characteristic of Uzbek anecdotal tradition. It should be noted that if the passage were satire in J. Lapasov’s sense—open and sharp criticism—Afandi would state his mistake directly and confrontationally. Instead, the anecdote expresses it in the implicit, playful form typical of irony, evoking sympathy and encouraging the listener to imagine being in the same

position rather than provoking a sense of criticism. In this sense, irony becomes not so much an instrument of social criticism as a means of self-evaluation and learning from one's mistake.

The anecdote "The Fault Is Mine" reveals a distinctive aspect of Nasriddin Afandi's character: alongside wisdom, he demonstrates a readiness to acknowledge his own mistake. In the broader corpus of Nasriddin Afandi anecdotes, Afandi generally appears in two functions: in one, he is a critic who exposes the ignorance or greed of others—social-critical irony; in the other, as in this anecdote, he is a character who laughs at and admits his own mistake—self-irony. From a linguistic perspective, the second type has a more complex pragmatic structure because the speaker simultaneously becomes both the subject and the object of irony. This requires a kind of double encoding of the text, in which the speaker evaluates himself from an external perspective.

The results of this analysis are relevant not only to theoretical linguistics but also to educational practice. In upper grades of general education (Grades 5–8), Nasriddin Afandi anecdotes are often presented in native language and literature classes merely as sources of humor, while their internal linguistic and logical structure receives less attention. Presenting anecdotes such as "The Fault Is Mine" as exercises in syntactic parallelism, the logical function of conditional subordinate clauses, and the search for implicit meaning can simultaneously develop students' linguistic and logical thinking skills.

In addition, discussing the conclusion "The fault is mine" with students can help develop moral and educational concepts such as responsibility and the willingness to acknowledge one's mistakes through a literary text, without resorting to artificial moralizing. In this way, linguistic analysis and educational objectives perform two mutually complementary functions.

The analysis of "The Fault Is Mine" demonstrates that the ethical and aesthetic properties of irony function inseparably within a single pragmatic mechanism. The principle of expressing a "covert, implicit" attitude, emphasized by Uzbek linguists such as J. Lapasov, E. Ibragimova, and L. Jalolova, consistently manifests itself at all levels of the anecdote, from syntactic parallelism to intonational interjection. At the aesthetic level, irony produces a comic effect through the symmetrical construction of the plot, hyperbolic imagery, and echoic use; at the ethical level, it promotes a model of a responsible subject in the form of self-irony.

The interaction of these two layers ensures the concision characteristic of the anecdote genre—the capacity to express maximum meaning and evaluation through minimal text. On the one hand, the conclusions confirm traditional approaches to irony developed in Uzbek linguistics; on the other, they enrich these approaches with modern pragmatic theories (Grice, Sperber, and Wilson) and test, through this specific text, the general ethical-aesthetic model of irony developed in the article. In future research, this model may be investigated more broadly across a larger corpus of Nasriddin Afandi anecdotes.

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