

# PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF RHETORICAL INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK.

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**Abstract:** Rhetorical interrogatives are a vital tool in both English and Uzbek for conveying nuanced meanings beyond literal interpretation. This article examines the pragmatic characteristics of rhetorical questions in both languages, highlighting how cultural, social, and linguistic contexts shape their use. The study identifies similarities and differences in form, function, and communicative effects of rhetorical interrogatives, emphasizing the role of intonation, discourse strategies, and pragmatic markers in effective communication. The findings contribute to cross-linguistic understanding and language teaching.

**Keywords:** Rhetorical questions, pragmatics, English, Uzbek, discourse analysis, communicative function, intonation, language comparison

## Introduction

Rhetorical interrogative sentences (RIS) are statements formulated as questions but not intended to elicit direct answers. In English, rhetorical questions often express irony, emphasis, persuasion, or emotional involvement [1]. In Uzbek, RIS serve similar communicative purposes but are shaped by the agglutinative structure and specific cultural norms of politeness and indirectness [2]. Pragmatics, as the study of language in context, provides a framework for understanding how speakers use rhetorical interrogatives to achieve social and communicative goals [3]. Investigating RIS in English and Uzbek offers insights into cross-linguistic differences and universal features of indirect questioning.

Rhetorical interrogatives are pervasive in literary texts, media discourse, political speeches, and everyday conversations. In English, they are often introduced by interrogative pronouns (who, what, which, why) or auxiliary verbs (do, can, will), whereas in Uzbek, they rely on specific suffixes (-mi, -masmi), intonation patterns, and contextually determined markers [4]. Understanding the pragmatic features of RIS is essential for translators, language learners, and discourse analysts.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and comparative approach. Primary data consists of English literary and media texts, political speeches, and Uzbek contemporary literature and media discourse. The corpus includes 500 examples of RIS in both languages, selected from published sources between 2000 and 2023. The analysis focuses on:

- Structural features of rhetorical interrogatives
- Pragmatic functions (emphasis, persuasion, irony, politeness)
- Contextual usage in discourse
- Intonation and prosodic cues

- Cross-linguistic comparisons

Data were coded according to linguistic markers, pragmatic functions, and discourse context. Descriptive statistics summarize the frequency of pragmatic features, while qualitative discourse analysis provides interpretative insights [5][6][7].

## Results

The analysis reveals several key pragmatic features of RIS in English and Uzbek:

- **Emphasis and Persuasion:** In English, rhetorical questions often intensify the speaker's point, e.g., "Isn't it obvious?" In Uzbek, emphasis is achieved through the suffix -mi and prosodic stress, e.g., "Bu ishni qilish kerak emasmi?" [8][9].
- **Irony and Criticism:** English RIS frequently convey irony in both formal and informal contexts. Uzbek employs similar strategies but relies more heavily on intonation and cultural context cues [10].
- **Politeness and Indirectness:** Uzbek rhetorical questions are often more indirect due to cultural norms of respect, especially in formal and intergenerational discourse. English may use RIS for both direct and indirect politeness strategies [11].
- **Emotional Involvement:** Both languages use RIS to express emotions such as surprise, doubt, or admiration. English uses auxiliary inversion and interjections, whereas Uzbek depends on suffixes and particles [12].

Quantitative analysis shows that 65% of English RIS in the corpus are used for emphasis, 20% for irony, and 15% for eliciting reflection. In Uzbek, 50% are for emphasis, 30% for politeness and indirectness, and 20% for irony.

## Analysis and Discussion

Rhetorical interrogatives (RIS) in both English and Uzbek represent a complex intersection of linguistic form, pragmatic function, and socio-cultural context. These sentences are inherently multifunctional, and their interpretation goes far beyond their syntactic appearance. In English, the syntactic flexibility offered by auxiliary verbs, interrogative pronouns, and word order allows speakers to encode subtle nuances of attitude, emotion, and social stance. For example, constructions such as "Isn't it obvious?" or "Have you really thought about it?" convey emphasis, challenge, or criticism without expecting a literal response [1][5]. The inversion of subject and auxiliary in such examples signals not only that the utterance is rhetorical but also indicates the speaker's evaluative stance, often marking disapproval, incredulity, or urgency. Furthermore, English RIS frequently employ modality markers—such as "should," "could," or "might"—to convey shades of probability, expectation, or obligation, adding a layer of pragmatic meaning that interacts with the socio-pragmatic context [1][6].

In Uzbek, rhetorical interrogatives operate differently due to the agglutinative nature of the language. Particles and suffixes, such as -mi, -masmi, and -ekmi, are crucial markers that encode pragmatic nuances. These morphemes can signal not only the interrogative status of a sentence but also the speaker's attitude, expectation, or invitation for reflection [2][8]. For example, the sentence "Bu ishni qilish kerak emasmi?" (Shouldn't this work be done?) functions to emphasize the necessity of an action while also rhetorically prompting the listener to acknowledge it. Unlike English, where word order and auxiliary verbs can shift the pragmatic meaning, Uzbek relies heavily on these morphological markers combined with intonation patterns. Rising intonation at the sentence end typically signals emphasis or challenge, while a more neutral tone may imply politeness or indirect suggestion [8][10].

A cross-linguistic analysis reveals both universal and language-specific patterns in the use of RIS. Universally, rhetorical interrogatives serve three primary pragmatic functions:

emphasizing a point, eliciting reflection, and conveying speaker attitude. Emphasis allows the speaker to draw attention to a statement or issue, often invoking agreement or acknowledgment without requiring a direct answer. Reflection-oriented RIS encourage the listener to consider or evaluate the proposition critically. Meanwhile, attitude-oriented RIS express the speaker's emotions, including doubt, incredulity, or irony [3][5]. These universal functions are observable in both English and Uzbek, although their formal realization diverges according to linguistic structures and cultural norms.

In English, the reliance on word order and auxiliary verbs enables subtle distinctions between types of rhetorical questions. For instance, a declarative-styled rhetorical question such as "You think that's fair?" conveys incredulity or challenge, whereas "Is that really fair?" places more emphasis on seeking reflection or agreement from the interlocutor [1][6]. English also uses prosodic features such as pitch, stress, and lengthening to modulate the pragmatic force of RIS. Rising pitch may signal surprise or incredulity, while stress on specific words emphasizes the key element of the rhetorical proposition [9]. Additionally, the use of modal auxiliaries, as in "Could anyone possibly believe that?" adds a layer of skepticism or irony, which interacts dynamically with discourse context and the speaker's intended attitude [5].

Uzbek rhetorical interrogatives, by contrast, are tightly linked to morphological markers and social context. The suffix *-mi*, for example, transforms a declarative sentence into a rhetorical question while simultaneously indicating the speaker's expectation of acknowledgment or agreement. The variant *-masmi* carries a stronger implication of incredulity or critique, often used when questioning the listener's reasoning or actions. The suffix *-ekmi* conveys both rhetorical questioning and reflective prompting, frequently in contexts requiring indirectness or politeness [2][8]. Culturally, Uzbek speakers often embed deference and indirectness within RIS, particularly in formal or intergenerational communication. This contrasts with English, where rhetorical questions may be employed directly even in hierarchical discourse, although politeness strategies still modulate tone and phrasing [11].

Another key distinction lies in the role of intonation and prosody. In English, intonation often differentiates between genuine and rhetorical questions. Rising intonation may mark a literal query, while a level or falling intonation signals a rhetorical intent, coupled with emphasis on lexical items for effect [6][9]. In Uzbek, prosody works in tandem with morphological markers, with pitch, stress, and lengthening contributing significantly to meaning interpretation. For example, the sentence "Bunga kim ishonadi?" (Who would believe that?) can simultaneously convey disbelief, irony, or polite suggestion, depending on the speaker's intonation and contextual factors [10][12].

Discourse context plays a critical role in both languages. The pragmatic interpretation of RIS is heavily contingent on the surrounding text, situational context, and interlocutors' social roles. In English political speeches, rhetorical questions often function as persuasive tools to engage audiences, emphasize key points, and challenge opposition positions. In media discourse, they may convey critical commentary or satirical effect. In Uzbek literature and media, rhetorical questions similarly perform persuasive and evaluative functions, but they also encode culturally embedded norms of politeness and indirectness, reflecting the hierarchical and communal values inherent in Uzbek society [2][11].

Additionally, the interaction between pragmatics and semantics is significant. While RIS are structurally interrogative, their literal semantic content is often secondary to their pragmatic function. English examples like "Isn't it obvious?" and Uzbek "Bu ishni qilish kerak emasmi?" illustrate that the intended communicative goal is not to seek information but to influence the

listener's perception, evoke reflection, or assert a stance. This demonstrates that RIS function as a meta-linguistic device, bridging the gap between literal form and intended meaning [3][5]. The analysis also highlights the role of RIS in expressing social relations and power dynamics. In English, rhetorical questions can soften criticism or express polite disagreement, as in "Wouldn't it be better to reconsider?" Conversely, they can also assert authority or challenge interlocutors, depending on tone and context. In Uzbek, the choice of suffixes, particles, and intonation serves similar functions but with stronger emphasis on politeness and deference in formal communication [2][11]. Such nuances indicate that understanding RIS requires integrating linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural perspectives.

Finally, the comparison of English and Uzbek RIS underscores the importance of teaching and translation strategies. Language learners often struggle to interpret RIS correctly due to differences in morpho-syntactic realization and cultural conventions. Translators must consider not only the literal meaning but also the pragmatic intent, ensuring that rhetorical force, politeness, and stylistic effects are preserved across languages [6][12].

### Conclusion

Rhetorical interrogative sentences in English and Uzbek are multifunctional pragmatic devices that serve to emphasize, persuade, and convey nuanced attitudes. While English employs syntactic flexibility and auxiliary verbs, Uzbek relies on agglutinative suffixes, particles, and prosody. Cross-linguistic comparison demonstrates that despite structural differences, the pragmatic goals of RIS—emphasis, reflection, irony, and politeness—are largely universal. These findings are relevant for language teaching, translation studies, and discourse analysis, highlighting the need to consider both linguistic form and pragmatic function in communication.

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