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SOCIAL-PRAGMATIC AND ETHICAL-AESTHETIC FEATURES OF IRONY IN THE ANECDOTE "THE KING AND AFANDI'S DREAM"

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Abstract: This article analyzes the social-pragmatic and ethical-aesthetic features of irony in the Nasriddin Afandi anecdote "The King and Afandi's Dream." In this anecdote, irony functions as a means of self-defense and indirect resistance used by a socially weaker person against a powerful interlocutor. The analysis is based on Grice's theory of conversational cooperation, Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, and Uzbek linguistic studies of irony. The article demonstrates that the ironic meaning is created not by an individual word or expression, but by a dialogic question-and-answer strategy.

Keywords: irony, social-pragmatic irony, Nasriddin Afandi, linguopragmatics, relevance theory, implicature, speech strategy, folk anecdote.

Nasriddin Afandi has become a symbol of wisdom, quick-wittedness, ingenuity, and verbal resistance to social injustice in Uzbek oral folklore. The anecdote "The King and Afandi's Dream" is a vivid example of these qualities. In the anecdote, the king recounts his dream and says that in it he saw himself together with Afandi in the form of kittens. The events of the dream associate the king with a positive condition and Afandi with a negative one. The courtiers use this situation as a means of humiliating and mocking Afandi. However, Afandi does not respond with open protest. He simply asks a question, and through that question he changes the entire meaning and direction of the conversation.

In analyzing irony, H. P. Grice's cooperative principle provides an important theoretical foundation. According to Grice, participants in communication generally observe the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. In literary discourse, particularly in anecdotes, however, these rules may be deliberately flouted or used in an unconventional way to create implicit meaning. Ironic meaning often arises from the discrepancy between what is said and what is actually intended.

According to D. Sperber and D. Wilson's relevance theory, a listener seeks the most relevant and meaningful inference available in communication. In the anecdote, the listener's initial assumption is transformed by the final twist. Therefore, the humor emerges not only from the content itself, but also from the mismatch between the expected outcome and the actual conclusion. Irony often performs a special pragmatic function in situations of social, status-based, or psychological inequality. When a lower-status person cannot openly express dissatisfaction toward a higher-status individual, they may resort to implicit or indirect forms of expression. In such a situation, irony becomes a form of "safe resistance."

In "The King and Afandi's Dream," the initial social relationship is structured in favor of the king. The king represents authority, whereas Afandi is portrayed as a representative of ordinary people. The courtiers also support the king's position. Thus, if Afandi were to argue directly, he would have to confront not only the king but the entire court environment, which could create a practically dangerous situation. Afandi correctly assesses these social circumstances. He neither

rejects the king's words nor becomes angry or attempts to justify himself. His chosen method is to ask a question. Although the question appears to express simple curiosity, it actually becomes a means of controlling the conversation.

This form of irony also preserves the speaker's possibility of denying an implied intention. If his question is interpreted negatively, Afandi can explain that he was "simply interested in the continuation of the dream." In this respect, irony functions as a safe communicative strategy when speaking with a powerful person.

The most important pragmatic device in the anecdote is the question Afandi asks the king. The king recounts his dream, portraying himself in a favorable condition and Afandi in an unfavorable one. The courtiers enjoy the story and laugh at Afandi. At that moment, Afandi joins the conversation with a question equivalent in meaning to: "Please tell us the rest of our dream as well."

This question has two layers of meaning. First, it shows that Afandi does not appear offended by the situation and even seems interested in the details of the dream. Second, the question compels the king to continue the story. Because of his status and his desire to narrate the dream, the king answers Afandi's question.

The pragmatic power of the question lies in the fact that Afandi does not state his conclusion in advance. Instead, he causes the king himself to provide the information required for the conclusion. Consequently, the king confirms, in his own words, the principal evidence on which the later conclusion will be based. This can be described as a "question-trap" strategy.

This strategy unfolds through the following stages:

1. The king narrates a dream containing humiliating implications.
2. Afandi does not deny the content of the dream; instead, he expresses interest in its continuation.
3. The king continues the story in greater detail.
4. Afandi uses questions to make the king reconfirm the details he has stated.
5. Through his own confirmation, the king creates the conditions for Afandi's final conclusion.
6. Afandi delivers an unexpected and ironic conclusion.

Thus, Afandi leaves the king in the role of the active speaker while covertly determining the direction of the conversation himself.

The aesthetic impact of the anecdote is revealed in its final twist. At first, after hearing the king's dream, the listener assumes that Afandi will remain in an awkward and humiliating position. The contrast between the "sweet pit" and the "filthy pit" in the dream expresses the social difference between the king and Afandi.

However, Afandi turns the details of the event to his own advantage. He asks the king to continue the dream and draws his conclusion from the information supplied by the king himself. As a result, the initial distinction between the king and Afandi disappears. The events of the dream

show that they were in direct interaction with one another. In this way, the king's superiority is revealed to be relative and conditional.

The humor in the anecdote develops in three stages:

- first, the courtiers laugh at Afandi;
- then, after Afandi's question, the listener waits to see how the situation will end;
- finally, Afandi changes the direction of the laughter with an unexpected conclusion.

Here, the humor does not take the form of directly ridiculing the king; rather, it emerges as the logical consequence of a situation constructed from the king's own words. Therefore, Afandi's response does not exceed the boundaries of propriety. He does not directly insult the king; he merely uses the logical continuation of the dream's plot.

The strength of the ironic twist lies precisely in this: Afandi introduces no new fact, but interprets the events narrated by the king from a different perspective. This demonstrates one of the essential features of irony—the redirection of meaning.

Oppositional units such as the "sweet pit" and the "filthy pit" play an important role in shaping the meaning of the anecdote. The component "sweet" signifies a positive, pleasant, and high-status condition, whereas "filthy" signifies a negative, unpleasant, and low-status condition. Initially, this opposition presents the king positively and Afandi negatively.

By the end of the anecdote, however, this opposition loses its force because the dream reveals the interconnectedness of the king and Afandi. Thus, lexical units that initially serve to differentiate the two ultimately become a means of equalizing them.

This semantic transformation reveals the internal mechanism of irony. The same word or image may carry different evaluative meanings in different speech situations. Initially, the "filthy pit" functions as a means of humiliating Afandi; later, it becomes a detail expressing a shared situation involving both Afandi and the king.

The act of "licking" in the anecdote can also be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it appears as an ordinary action associated with the animal imagery in the dream. On the other hand, it becomes an ironic device indicating that the king and Afandi have ended up in the same condition. Thus, this verb provides the anecdote's final semantic impact.

The ethical meaning of the anecdote is manifested in the weaker person's ability to defend his dignity. Afandi does not use rudeness or violence to defend himself. He relies on intelligence, logic, patience, and verbal ingenuity. For this reason, his victory is positively evaluated in popular consciousness from a moral perspective.

The image of Afandi embodies popular conceptions of justice. An ordinary person may be physically weaker before a ruler, yet through intelligence and language he can restore his position. In this sense, the anecdote expresses the people's belief in the "power of words."

From an aesthetic perspective, the effectiveness of the anecdote is determined by the following factors:

- a short and dynamic plot;

• contrasting images;

• an unexpected question;

• the gradual disclosure of information;

• a final ironic twist;

• a shift in the object of laughter.

At the beginning of the anecdote, the listener may accept the king's position as justified. By the end, however, Afandi's logic of reasoning prevails. This evokes surprise, laughter, and satisfaction in the listener. "The King and Afandi's Dream" can be used in teaching the native language, literature, speech culture, and logic.

The anecdote can help students develop the following skills:

• understanding implicit meaning;

• evaluating the communicative situation in a conversation;

• understanding the communicative potential of questions;

• drawing logical conclusions;

• maintaining politeness in debate;

• defending one's viewpoint without direct aggression.

In particular, the question-trap strategy in the anecdote shows students that asking questions can serve not only to obtain information but also to guide the direction of communication. However, caution and speech etiquette are necessary when applying such a strategy in everyday life, because any ironic expression may be interpreted differently by different interlocutors.

The analysis of "The King and Afandi's Dream" demonstrates that irony can be formed not only at the level of an individual word or phrase, but also as an entire dialogic strategy. Although Afandi's question appears to express simple curiosity, it is in fact a pragmatic device that leads the king, through his own words, toward an ironic conclusion. Irony performs several functions in the anecdote. First, it serves Afandi's self-defense. Second, it reverses the king's humiliating intention. Third, it symbolically and temporarily neutralizes social inequality. Fourth, through an unexpected twist, it produces a strong aesthetic and humorous effect.

On the basis of this anecdote, two principal forms of irony can be distinguished: self-directed auto-irony and strategic irony that performs a defensive function in a social situation. Future research on a broader corpus of Nasriddin Afandi anecdotes may identify further manifestations of these types.

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