

PAPER

THE COMMUNICATIVE (ACTUAL) STRUCTURE OF THE UZBEK SENTENCE: THEME–RHEME ORGANIZATION AND ITS LEXICO–GRAMMATICAL CONDITIONING

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Abstract

This paper treats the communicative (actual) structure of the Uzbek sentence — the theme–rheme organization through which an invariant sentence pattern is realized as a contextually situated utterance — as an independent object of linguistic description. Working with a corpus of literary and colloquial Uzbek and applying the diagnostic question test together with transformation, opposition and componential analysis, the study establishes the units of communicative structure (theme, rheme and the communicative paradigm), distinguishes syntagmatically independent from syntagmatically dependent utterances, and demonstrates how word classes and their case and derivational forms condition the assignment of theme and rheme. It further describes theme–rheme progression, multi-stage (complex) communicative structures, and the specific behaviour of compound sentences. The results show that the actual structure of the Uzbek sentence, while sharing universal properties with other languages, exhibits a distinctive profile in which the pre–predicate position functions as the rheme zone and the syntactic organization is subordinate to the communicative aim. The findings are relevant to communicative syntax, text linguistics and the teaching of the culture of speech.

Key words: Uzbek language; functional sentence perspective; actual division; theme and rheme; communicative paradigm; information structure; Turkic syntax; text linguistics.

Introduction

As the highest–rank unit of language, the sentence possesses a complex hierarchical make-up. It is

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an integrity formed by the organic connection of several aspects — intonational, semantic (nominative), modal, formal-grammatical and communicative-dynamic. These aspects have received uneven attention in the history of linguistics. Following the general movement of the discipline from practice to theory and from the concrete to the abstract, scholarship first privileged the phonic and formal-grammatical sides of the sentence; the semantics and the communicative organization of the sentence began to receive serious study only comparatively recently.

A key distinction underlies the present study: that between the sentence as a unit of language — an abstract syntactic pattern (Uzb. gap) — and the utterance as a unit of speech (Uzb. jumla), the pattern as it is realized for a communicative purpose. The content side of the sentence is a system formed by the interaction of propositional, modal and communicative components. The propositional (denotative) frame, which reflects a situation in the world, is the most basic; yet a proposition alone does not make a syntactic construction a sentence, since it may also be expressed by units smaller than the sentence. For a real sentence two further frames must be added to the propositional one — the modal frame and the communicative frame. Whereas the semantics of the sentence as a language unit contains only the proposition and objective modality, the semantics of the utterance additionally, and necessarily, involves communicative structure and at times subjective modality. It is the realization of the sentence pattern in speech that brings the communicative structure into being and determines its significance.

The theory of the communicative, or “actual”, structure of the sentence has a long trajectory. Its roots reach back to antiquity, but its modern development begins with Henri Weil’s 1844 study of word order, whose account of how the sentence is shaped in connection with its communicative function laid an important foundation. Before Weil’s ideas were understood linguistically, they were interpreted psychologically: G. von der Gabelentz and H. Paul spoke of a “psychological subject” and “psychological predicate”, and in the Russian tradition F. Fortunatov and A. M. Peshkovsky drew on the notion of a “psychological

judgement”, distinguishing it sharply from grammatical analysis. It was V. Mathesius who, drawing critically on this heritage, proved that the phenomenon is linguistic — specifically syntactic — in nature; his 1939 paper on the “actual division of the sentence” became a landmark and directed attention to the relation between the formal and the actual division as one of the most characteristic questions of any individual language. Mathesius’s theory was deepened by the Prague scholars (Daneš, Firbas, Adamec) and taken up in Russian linguistics (Kovtunova, Raspopov, Krushelnitskaya, Panfilov, Pumpiansky), where it received the name it now most commonly bears.

The phenomenon was not unknown to the philological tradition of Central Asia. According to A. Rustamov, it was recognized as early as al-Zamakhshari, and the parts of the actual division were rendered by the special terms *mavzu* (‘theme’) and *mahmul* (‘rheme’). In the twentieth century, Fitrat, in his study of Uzbek syntax, discussed the relation between semantic and syntactic constituents and used precisely these traditional terms — a fact of considerable importance for the history of linguistic thought, since Fitrat wrote before the theses of the Prague Circle had been published. In modern Uzbek linguistics the topic re-emerged from the 1970s onward in the work of M. Turopova, K. Hayitmetov, M. To‘xsanov, B. O‘rinboev, A. Safaev and others; and in 1984 K. Hayitmetov published the first Uzbek monograph on the subject, devoted to word order and positional matters. Nevertheless, no comprehensive monographic study of the communicative structure of the Uzbek sentence as an independent object had been carried out, even though valuable observations were scattered throughout the syntactic and semantic-syntactic literature (Fitrat, A. G‘ulomov, G‘. Abdurahmonov, M. Asqarova, N. Mahmudov, H. Ne‘matov, R. Sayfullaeva, A. Nurmonov).

The aim of the present study is to identify the actual structure of the Uzbek sentence — the form by which the sentence conveys information in varying orientations and communicative values — and to establish its units and its conditioning factors. Its specific objectives are: to clarify the units of communicative structure

and their relation to the formal-grammatical structure; to identify the lexico-grammatical factors that serve communicative structure in Uzbek; to describe theme–rheme progression; to distinguish simple from complex (multi-stage) communicative structures; and to reveal the communicative properties of compound sentences. The complementary question of the formal means that express communicative structure — prosody, word order, particles, syntactic repetition and detachment — is addressed in a companion study; the present paper is confined to the units and factors.

Materials and Methods

The material of the study consists of a corpus of simple and compound sentences drawn from the various styles of the Uzbek literary language. The principal sources are works of prose fiction — by A. Qodiriy, Cho'lpon, A. Qahhor, Mirmuhsin, O. Yoqubov, P. Qodirov, Sh. Rashidov, S. Ahmad, G'. G'ulom, Oybek, A. Muxtor, O'. Hoshimov, J. Abdullaxonov, R. Bobojon, X. To'xtaboyev and A. Muqimov — together with poetry (E. Vohidov, A. Oripov) and sentences characteristic of the colloquial style. Literary and colloquial material are used jointly so that both the codified and the spontaneous realization of communicative structure are represented.

The theoretical-methodological basis of the study is the investigation of the language–speech continuum through the dialectical categories of the general and the particular, the possible and the actual, and the part and the whole. The object is treated as a system. The following procedures are employed. (i) The question test (Uzb. *so'roq*) is the principal diagnostic for identifying theme and rheme and for distinguishing syntagmatically independent from syntagmatically dependent utterances: the part of the utterance that supplies the answer to a given question is the rheme, the remainder the theme. Following Bally, four question types are distinguished — the full dictal question, directed at the whole content of the utterance (*Nima bo'ldi? — Boshim og'riyapti*); the partial dictal question, directed at a particular constituent (*Kim keldi?*); the full modal question, directed at the correspondence of the content to

reality (*Bolalar keldimi? — Ha*); and the partial modal question, directed at the truth of a doubtful constituent (*Bolalar bugun kelishadimi? — Ha, bugun*). (ii) Transformation is used to generate the communicative variants of a single lexical filling by reordering. (iii) Opposition (Uzb. *zidlash*) contrasts these variants so that the distinctive communicative value of each is revealed. (iv) Componential analysis and decomposition into constituents establish the internal structure of the theme and rheme groups. (v) The presupposition test (deletion, paraphrase) and the descriptive method complete the procedure. Throughout, the intonational and positional properties of each variant are correlated with its theme–rheme organization.

Results

The units of communicative structure

The utterance, or communicative variant of the sentence, consists of two parts differing in degree of communicative importance. The first part is the support point ('trampoline') of the utterance; it is usually known to the hearer or recoverable from the situation, and serves to launch the important information. The second part is the nucleus of the utterance: it carries the information that is new to the hearer, yet important and central, and it functions as the communicative centre. These two parts are widely termed the *theme* and the *rheme*. In V. A. Beloshapkova's summary, the theme is the support point and point of departure of the message, communicatively less important than the rheme, and often the part of the sentence recoverable from the preceding context; the rheme, standing in opposition to the theme, conveys the message about the theme, is communicatively more important, embodies the principal content of the message, and usually coincides with the new information.

A single sentence pattern is normally realized in speech by several utterances. According as different communicative aims are pursued, the appearance of more than one utterance yields the communicative paradigm of the sentence, whose members are also called the communicative variants of the sentence. Consider the paradigm in (1)–(3):

(1) *Xorijliklar bugun Buxoroga jo'nab ketishdi. —*

The foreigners left for Bukhara today.

(2) *Xorijliklar Buxoroga bugun jo'nab ketishdi.* — It was today that the foreigners left for Bukhara.

(3) *Buxoroga bugun xorijliklar jo'nab ketishdi.* — It was the foreigners who left for Bukhara today.

Although the three variants share the same lexical filling, they differ in communicative aim: (1) reports *where* the foreigners went, (2) *when* they left for Bukhara, and (3) *who* left for Bukhara today. The difference is made explicit by the questions each variant answers. The speaker, on entering into communication, selects the paradigm member that matches the communicative aim. The division of the utterance into theme and rheme is called the actual division precisely because it is the division that is actual — relevant — for the speaker in the given context or situation.

A terminological caution is in order. In Uzbek, replacing *tema* and *rema* with *ma'lum* ('given') and *yangi* ('new') is not always felicitous. The two pairs sometimes coincide, but they may also stand in opposition; and in some cases 'given' and 'new' correspond to units smaller than the theme or the rheme — to their components. Theme and rheme are therefore not to be equated with given and new.

Syntagmatically independent and dependent utterances

The utterances that make up a communicative paradigm divide into syntagmatically independent and syntagmatically dependent ones. A syntagmatically independent utterance is the invariant of its paradigm; its actual division is, as a rule, independent of the surrounding text, since its parts are arranged in an order that is context-free and coincides with the syntactic division: the theme, expressed by the subject or subject group, precedes the rheme, expressed by the predicate or predicate group, as in (4)–(5):

(4) *Xurshida bonu / boshini ko'tarib qaradi.* — Xurshida Bonu raised her head and looked. (O. Yoqubov)

(5) *Mahdumning hovlisi / uch qavat edi.* — The Mahdum's house was three storeys high. (A. Qodiriy)

Such utterances express a general judgement and occupy an independent position in the text. A disturbance of this order turns the paradigm invariant into a syntagmatically dependent

utterance: the utterance leans on the text, and its theme conveys information already known from the preceding utterances, as in (6)–(7):

(6) *Aksiga olib, darvozani / Ali Qushchi ochdi.* — As luck would have it, it was Ali Qushchi who opened the gate. (O. Yoqubov)

(7) *O'sha kuni kasalxonaga olib kelishganda / Sherzod deyarli behush edi.* — When they brought him to the hospital that day, Sherzod was almost unconscious. (O'. Hoshimov)

The syntagmatically dependent utterance is tightly bound to the context of situation and occupies a syntagmatically dependent position in the text. The question — the principal criterion of communicative structure — serves equally as the principal means of distinguishing dependent from independent utterances.

Lexico-grammatical conditioning of theme and rheme

Word classes and their morphological forms are the material of the syntactic constituents of the sentence, and there are definite affinities between word classes and syntactic functions — the noun to the subject, the verb to the predicate, the adjective to the modifier. Since theme and rheme are formed on the basis of the syntactic constituents, the word classes that constitute the semantics of those constituents are not indifferent to theme and rheme: the potential of a word class to form theme or rheme varies with its morphological form and syntactic function.

Nouns. In the nominative, nouns are suited to the theme, because in a two-part sentence with a verbal predicate a message is given about some entity; the noun-subject at the head of the sentence, and the movement of the content from the less important to the more important, show that the semantics of the noun is primarily specialized for the theme. Proper personal names are, as a rule, thematic: one neither asks nor reports about a wholly unknown person, and the referent of an acquaintance's or a famous person's name is known in advance to speaker and hearer as a presupposition. Abstract nouns such as *iymon* ('faith'), *muhabbat* ('love') and *tavba* ('repentance') can likewise be thematic when, on account of the many interpretations they admit, they become the object of discussion. In a two-part sentence with a nominal predicate, however, the

noun becomes the rheme, occupying the predicate position and taking special intonation and copular markers, as in (8):

(8) *Akam / — muhandis; Oltin / metaldir; Ukasi / ovchi ekan.* — My brother is an engineer; Gold is a metal; His younger brother is a hunter, it turns out.

The case forms of the noun differ systematically in their rheme-forming potential. The genitive (*qaratqich*) cannot by itself be the rheme in a context governed by *kimning?* ‘whose?’ unless it is replaced by the form in *-niki*: *Bu kimning kitobi?* — *Akamniki*. In other positions the marked genitive tends toward the theme and the unmarked toward the rheme. The accusative (*tushum*) is the rheme in a *nimani?* ‘what (obj.)?’ context, its favoured position being immediately before the predicate: *Nimani olding?* — *Qalamni*. Definiteness again matters: the unmarked accusative tends to the rheme (*Kitob o’qidim*, ‘I read a book’), the marked to the theme (*Sen kitobni / o’qidingmi?*). The dative (*jo’nalish*) is the rheme in *qayerga?* / *nimaga?* / *kimga?* contexts, typically within an elliptical answer — *Qayerga keldik?* — *Yangiqo’rg’onga* — and can be an independent rheme in predicate position: *Bu o’yinchoqlar / o’g’limga*. When the dative is used in a non-directional sense its rheme potential rises: *Men / gazetaga keldim* (‘I came for the newspaper’). The locative (*o’rin-payt*) is the rheme in *qayerda?* / *qachon?* contexts and reaches the highest degree of communicative importance in predicate position: *Uyimiz / — Qo’qonda; Akam / — institutda*. The ablative (*chiqish*) is the rheme in predicate and pre-predicate position: *Darvozamiz / — temirdan; Bu xat / opamdan; Biz / tog’dan kelyapmiz*. Finally, derivational (form-building) affixes may shift a noun to the rheme when their semantics is communicatively actual, as the limitative *-gacha* shows in (9)–(10); reduplicated noun forms, carrying an intensified feature meaning, likewise join the rheme group, as in (11):

(9) *Men / Yangiqo’rg’ongacha boraman.* — I will go as far as Yangiqo’rg’on. (Q.: how far?)

(10) *Yangiqo’rg’ongacha / men boraman.* — It is I who will go as far as Yangiqo’rg’on. (Q.: who?)

(11) *Paxtakorlar / tog’-tog’ xirmon bunyod etdilar.* — The cotton-growers built mountains of harvest heaps.

Adjectives. Attributive adjectives are most

often the rheme or a rheme component, since the speaker frequently seeks to foreground the features of entities: *Atrofimiz / baland tog’lar bilan o’ralgan* (‘We are surrounded by high mountains’). Moved from their typical attributive position to the predicate, adjectives are independently rhematic: *Qorao’zanning sholisi / a’lo navli* (‘Qorao’zan’s rice is of the finest kind’). In comparative constructions the most important constituent — the rheme — is the adjective: *Nok / olmagan shirinroq* (‘The pear is sweeter than the apple’). Characteristically, an adjective cannot by itself function as the theme.

Numerals. Because they express a quantitative feature, numerals often behave like adjectives, occupying an attributive position within the rheme: *To’y bo’lganiga / uch oydan oshgan* (‘It is more than three months since the wedding’). As a predicate the numeral is independently rhematic: *Ikki karra ikki / — to’rt; Qalamim / ikkita*. Placed within a preposed subject group, the numeral is a theme component.

Pronouns. Most pronoun types are specialized for the given: their essentially secondary, anaphoric use signals that they are not communicatively new for the hearer, and they are therefore frequently thematic. This does not, however, make them invariably thematic. In pre-predicate or predicate position a personal pronoun may be the rheme, as in (12), where the ‘given’ sense of *sen* (acquaintance) is retained but a predicative feature specifying the doer of the action is added as new information:

(12) *Bu ishni qilgan / — sen.* — The one who did this is you.

The communicative insignificance of subject personal pronouns is confirmed by their omissibility: *Keldim* (‘[I] came’), *Bordik* (‘[We] went’). The reflexive pronoun (*o’zlik*) serves to emphasize the personal pronoun, marking as rhematic the personal pronoun in the genitive: *Bu ishni / mening o’zim qildim*. The grammaticalization of *o’zi* into an emphatic particle — through the loss of the genitive and the fixing of the possessive affix on the base *o’z* — illustrates the close tie between the lexico-grammatical resources of the language and the expression of communicative structure.

Theme–rheme progression

The three models of communicative progression that are held to be universal are also proper to Uzbek. In real micro-texts these models seldom occur in an ideal state; they usually enter into combinations with one another, and it is this combination that secures the integrity of the micro-text. The progression from theme to rheme takes a variety of directions — *ma'lum–yangi* (given–new), *yangi–yangi* (new–new), *ma'lum–ma'lum* (given–given) and *yangi+ma'lum–yangi* — alongside utterances that are wholly new or wholly given. The chain of actual division is built by the rheme's becoming the theme of the following utterance, by the unchanged repetition of the theme, and by the continuation of a hypertheme (denoting a whole or a general — a partonym or hyperonym) as themes denoting its parts or its subordinate specifics (paronyms or hyponyms).

Complex (multi-stage) communicative structure

Alongside utterances with a simple communicative structure, Uzbek exhibits many utterances whose communicative structure is complex, and the analysis of these proceeds stage by stage. In certain complicated simple sentences, and in the majority of compound sentences, the communicative structure becomes complex and acquires a multi-stage character. This is favoured by such factors as the need to convey additional information, the gradation of predicative content, the multiplicity of descriptions attaching to a common constituent, and the large number of predicative parts in a compound sentence. On the basis of complex communicative structure there arise theme–rheme hierarchy, polyrhematicity and polythematicity.

Compound sentences

The communicative structure of Uzbek compound sentences has its own specific properties, and it is therefore expedient to study compound sentences in special groups. Their communicative paradigm shares a general similarity with that of simple sentences — the members of the paradigm are oriented to different situations and contexts — but also differs from it in the means and factors

that form the paradigm members. Semantic relations such as the general orientation of the text, preposed content, support–point value, cause–effect, condition–conditioned and explained–explanation, together with syntactic properties such as the head–dependent relation and syntactic linkage, serve as factors of the actual division of the compound sentence. Because the parts (the constituent clauses) have a fixed placement, and their transposition damages the overall meaning, inversion is not so effective here as in the simple sentence; the melody has the property of singling out either the theme or the rheme.

Discussion

The realization of a sentence pattern — a unit of language — as an utterance by means of actualizing devices is the essence of communicative structure; the actual structure of the sentence is the speech construct that carries out its communicative function. The adaptation of the sentence invariant to different situations gives rise to its communicative variants, and the four degrees of actual relevance embodied in fully informative, partially informative, fully relational and partially relational utterances reflect the range of these variants. In the actual division of the sentence, the dynamics of the text and the relation of utterance to text — of part to whole — are decisive.

The actual structure stands in a distinctive relation to the syntactic and semantic structures. The syntactic structure is formed on the basis of grammatical linkage within the sentence, the actual structure on the basis of communicative–value formation within the text; the syntactic structure serves as the material base — the material units and elements — for the actual structure. Full or only partial correspondence between the units of these structures produces, respectively, concord or discord between them. Because the actual structure possesses its own specific linguistic means, it may be regarded as an object of linguistics — more precisely, of text linguistics, in which the syntagmatic and semantic linkage of sentences into a single whole is studied; the actual division is a phenomenon bound up with the content side of the text.

Against the background of Turkic and general

linguistics, the Uzbek profile is distinctive. Whereas K. M. Abdullaev distinguishes for Azerbaijani a “strong” degree of actualization, in which the actualized constituent stands at the end of the sentence, in Uzbek the constituent actualized by word order stands only immediately before the predicate. A sentence-final constituent — other than the predicate — is at most a component of the rheme group, not an independent rheme; the case for treating it as the most important part of the sentence, as “strong” actualization would require, is therefore to be resisted. The persistent disagreement over terminology — “actual division” (Mathesius), “functional sentence perspective” (Firbas), “semantic division” (Krushelnitskaya), “logico-grammatical division” (Pumpanyansky), “predicative division” (Veykhman) — reflects the composite nature of the phenomenon, in which linguistic, logical and psychological facts are intertwined; no single term captures its essence in full, and the units themselves have borne many names (‘psychological subject/predicate’, ‘basis/nucleus’, ‘given/new’, ‘topic/comment’), the terms *tema* and *rema*, popularized by K. Boost, being the most widely used.

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Conclusion

The communicative (actual) structure of the Uzbek sentence can be described as an independent object with its own units, factors and regularities. The utterance divides into a theme and a rheme; a single sentence pattern yields a communicative paradigm whose members are selected according to communicative aim; and the utterances of a paradigm are either syntagmatically independent, coinciding with the syntactic division, or syntagmatically dependent, leaning on the text. Word classes and their case

and derivational forms condition the assignment of theme and rheme: nominative and pronominal forms gravitate to the theme, while nominal predicates, the oblique cases in pre-predicate position, adjectives, numerals and certain derived forms gravitate to the rheme. Theme–rheme progression, built from a small set of combinable models, secures textual cohesion; and complex, multi-stage communicative structures — with their theme–rheme hierarchy, polyrhematicity and polythematicity — are especially characteristic of complicated simple sentences and of compound sentences, whose communicative organization has its own specific properties. The syntactic structure furnishes the material base for the actual structure, which, possessing its own linguistic means, belongs to the content side of the text and thus to the domain of communicative and text linguistics.

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