



SYMBOLIC CHARACTERS EXPRESSED THROUGH LANGUAGE IN UZBEK FOLK TALES

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Abstract. *This study examines the linguistic construction of symbolic characters in Uzbek folk tales. Through a semiotic and narrative analysis of selected tales, it identifies how language is employed to convey culturally encoded character types such as the wise elder, the trickster, and the suffering hero. The study demonstrates that speech patterns, lexical choices, and narrative structures are used to symbolize social values, moral roles, and archetypes. These linguistic signs serve not only to develop character but also to transmit shared cultural codes across generations.*

Keywords: *Uzbek folk tales, semiotics, symbolic characters, cultural narrative, oral tradition, discourse analysis, archetypes*

Introduction. Folk tales are more than entertaining stories; they are cultural tools through which values, beliefs, and identities are transmitted. In Uzbek folk literature, characters are not merely agents of plot development, but symbolic embodiments of social roles and moral functions. These character types are constructed not only through action but also through the language they use. Language in this context becomes a system of signs that signals wisdom, authority, deception, innocence, or supernatural power.

This paper explores how Uzbek folk tales linguistically construct symbolic characters and what these signs reveal about Uzbek cultural worldviews. Drawing on semiotic theory and folkloristics, it examines the verbal characteristics that encode archetypal meaning in oral narratives.

Literature Review and Methodology.

Theoretical Background

The study is grounded in the following theoretical frameworks:

- **Juri Lotman's semiosphere:** Every culture creates its own system of signs through which meaning is circulated (Lotman, 1990).
- **Vladimir Propp's morphology of the folktale:** Character roles (e.g., helper, villain, donor) follow narrative functions (Propp, 1968).
- **Roland Barthes' semiotics:** Cultural myths and signs in language reflect ideological codes (Barthes, 1972).
- **Greimas' actantial model:** Narrative roles (subject, object, sender, etc.) are semiotic positions (Greimas, 1983).

Uzbek folklorists such as Yoqubov (2009) and Sodiqova (2015) have provided structural and cultural readings of folk narratives, though few have focused specifically on linguistic semiotics.

Methodology

- **Corpus:** 15 folk tales from *O'zbek xalq ertaklari* (National folklore collection), including *Tulki va Bo'ri*, *Zumrad va Qimmat*, *Boy va Gado*, etc.
- **Approach:**
 - *Narrative semiotic analysis:* Identifying character types and their associated language.
 - *Lexical-pragmatic analysis:* Examining repeated patterns of speech, metaphor, and symbolism.
 - *Cultural interpretation:* Relating verbal traits to societal values and archetypes.

Only original Uzbek versions were used, and linguistic features were analyzed in context.

Results and Discussion

1. The Wise Elder

The elder (*dono chol, bobo*) is often depicted as the voice of knowledge and moral guidance.

- **Language markers:** use of proverbs, parables, and metaphoric language; slow, deliberate speech.
- **Common phrases:** “Bolam, har bir so‘zimda ma’no bor” (“My child, every word I speak carries meaning”).

These characters function as **semiotic figures of tradition and reason**, symbolizing the continuity of communal knowledge through orality.

2. The Trickster

Usually embodied by animals (the fox, *tulki*) or clever peasants, the trickster’s power lies in verbal manipulation.

- **Linguistic features:** irony, double meaning, over-praise, flattery, verbal deception.
- **Example:** The fox says to the lion, “Sen dunyodagi eng dono hayvonsan” (“You are the wisest creature on earth”) while plotting betrayal.

The trickster represents **cunning and resistance** against brute force or rigid authority — a semiotic inversion of power.

3. The Innocent Hero

Characters like *yetim bola* (orphan boy) or *qizaloq* (little girl) often endure hardship before achieving reward.

- **Language use:** humble tone, respectful address, expressions of longing and faith.
- **Lexicon:** “sabr” (patience), “orzu” (dream), “yordam” (help), “yolg‘izlik” (loneliness).

These figures serve as **symbols of moral perseverance**, with their verbal humility reinforcing the theme of inner strength.

4. The Powerful Ruler

Kings, beks, and judges are marked by hierarchical and performative language.

- **Linguistic traits:** formal address, third-person references, imperative tone.
- **Example:** “Buyuring, ayting unga boshini olib kelsin” (“Order him to bring the man’s head”).

Rulers symbolize **structural power**, and their speech is stylized to project control and authority.

5. The Magical Helper

Supernatural figures like *pari* (fairy), *darvesh* (sage), or *qush* (talking bird) use archaic and rhythmic speech.

- **Speech forms:** repetition, rhyme, sacred numbers (three, seven), metaphoric prophecy.
- **Example:** “Uch tun yur, tog‘ ortida omad kutadi” (“Walk for three nights; fortune awaits beyond the mountain”).

These characters embody **transcendence and destiny**, using stylized language to signal connection to the mythic world.

Conclusion. Uzbek folk tales present a diverse range of symbolic characters constructed through distinct linguistic patterns. Language acts as a sign system that reflects and reinforces cultural archetypes — wisdom, deception, suffering, power, and magic. The verbal behavior of each character type is not incidental; it encodes moral frameworks and societal values that have persisted across generations. Through these oral texts, language serves as both a narrative tool and a cultural symbol, making folk tales a vital domain of semiotic meaning.

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