STRUCTURAL MODELS OF DIALOGUE IN MAGIC FOLKTALES: MORPHOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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ANNOTATION

This article examines the structural and functional models of dialogue in the magic folktale, drawing on Propp's morphology and Bakhtin's theory of speech genres. It proposes a methodological framework for teaching these models to university students aged 18-22 through functional mapping, role-play simulation, and comparative areological analysis of Uzbek and world folklore traditions.

Keywords: folktale, dialogue, morphology, function, Propp, Bakhtin, structure.

This paper looks at the structural and functional models of dialogue in the magic folktale and outlines a methodological framework for teaching these models at university level. Rather than chasing individual motifs, it treats dialogue as a functional unit of plot construction [4] — the point being that dialogue is not decoration but the skeleton the narrative hangs on: each exchange pushes the hero one step closer to the goal. Two tasks follow from this: first, matching dialogic exchanges to Propp's morphological functions, and second, working out how this pairing can be used in class with students aged 18–22. If the approach works, students should come away better able to break down the compositional structure of epic narratives through recognized scholarly models [2: 101] — a skill future teachers need, since they will have to pass on not just the stories themselves but the logic that holds cultural heritage together.

The relevance of the topic stems from a gap that is felt in practice: students at philology and pedagogy faculties are generally taught to summarise folktale plots, but rarely taught to read the dialogue itself as a structural unit with its own internal grammar. As a result, the analytical skill that future teachers most need — the ability to show why a tale is built the way it is, not just what happens in it — is left underdeveloped. Bridging Propp's formal morphology with Bakhtin's dialogic theory, and turning that bridge into a workable classroom method, is the specific task this article sets itself.

Structural analysis of the folktale still goes back to V. Y. Propp and his 1928 monograph Morphology of the Folktale, where he showed that magic tales are built from a limited set of recurring elements — functions [4]. Once this is accepted, dialogue stops looking like filler and starts looking like a ritualized carrier of those

functions: in Propp's system it is rarely a passive exchange, but almost always does something. Take the pair «Inquiry» and «Delivery» — it is dialogic by definition [4: 28]. The antagonist asks for information, the hero (or victim) answers, and that exchange is usually what tips the plot from equilibrium into conflict: the villain finds out where the victim is, or learns a secret, and the tale moves into “Trickery” or “Villainy”.

It is worth stressing that the Inquiry/Delivery pair is not an isolated case: several of Propp's thirty-one functions are, on inspection, realised almost exclusively through speech. The hero's “Testimony” before a Donor, the Donor's “Interrogation, attack” of the hero, the false hero's “Unfounded claims” before the court — all of these are dialogic functions in the strict sense: they cannot be performed by action alone, only by an exchange of turns between two speaking parties. This observation matters methodologically, because it means a fairly large share of a tale's morphology can be recovered by tracking dialogue alone, without first reconstructing the whole plot.

Bakhtin approaches dialogue differently: for him it is defined by the “change of speaking subjects,” which is what gives an utterance its “absolute boundaries” [1]. Folktale dialogue sits inside a rigid generic tradition, so those boundaries leave little room for spontaneity — the “dialogic discourse” here is ritualized rather than free-flowing, unlike ordinary speech. Bakhtin also insists that every utterance is “directed to someone” (addressivity); in the folktale, it is the addressee — a magic helper, an antagonist — who effectively dictates which generic forms the speaker can use [1]. Put differently, the hero's words are not really self-expression, but a response shaped by the demands of the genre. And since, in Bakhtin's phrase, “the word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder” [7: 274], character speech in these tales has to be read as part of a “dialogic interaction,” where the hero's line always carries the trace of the “alien word” spoken by whoever is on the other side.

Reading Propp and Bakhtin side by side produces a useful methodological complementarity. Propp supplies the horizontal axis of analysis — where a given exchange sits in the sequence of functions, and what it moves the plot toward. Bakhtin supplies the vertical axis — what kind of speech act the exchange is, and how far it is shaped by genre convention versus the individual voice of the speaker. Combining the two allows a single line of dialogue to be described both as a structural hinge in the plot and as a socio-linguistic event bound by tradition, which is precisely the double perspective students need before they can teach the text critically rather than merely retell it.

In Uzbek folklore — the Oyjamol collection in particular — the same structural models show up in tales like Ur, to'qmoq! (Strike, Cudgel!) and in the riddling exchanges between a “Wise Daughter” and a King [8]. Read through a morphological

lens, magic formulas such as «Ochil, dasturxon!» (“Open, Tablecloth!”) or «Ur, to'qmoq!» turn out to be more than colorful motifs — they are structural elements that resolve the “lack” and bring the story back to equilibrium [2: 102]. Sh. Yu. Musoeva calls this a way to “reveal the character in action” [3], and it fits: dialogue in Uzbek tales works as a “verbal test,” a “morphological axis” the whole plot turns on, not just background description. This lines up with the idea of “tradition ecology” that researchers like Honko and Thompson have written about — the structure of dialogue is universal, but how it adapts to a local setting is its own “morphological adaptation,” an organic process rather than a fixed template. Looking at these local variations is, in practice, how students see universal narrative laws meeting specific cultural values.

A further point deserves attention here: in the Uzbek material, the magic formula almost always doubles as a test of the speaker's moral standing, not only of their knowledge of the correct words. Whoever addresses the cudgel or the tablecloth with impatience, greed, or disrespect typically triggers the object's punitive rather than helpful function, which means the dialogic formula in this tradition carries an ethical charge that has no direct equivalent in, say, the alliterative, rhythm-driven formulas of English tale-telling. For teaching purposes, this contrast is itself a useful entry point: it lets students see that a shared morphological slot — “address to a magic object” — can be filled with different cultural content without the underlying function changing.

Teaching these structural models of dialogue calls for a deliberate approach, and this paper proposes three strategies suited to the developmental level of university students.

1. Functional Mapping of Discourse: Students identify Propp's 31 functions in a chosen text — the Oyjamol collection works well — and mark which of them are carried out purely through dialogue [2]. The point of the exercise is to shift attention from “what is said” to “what gets done through speech,” which is really the idea of the performative utterance in practice. In seminar practice, this is best run as a two-column table exercise: the left column lists Propp's functions in sequence, the right column records, function by function, whether it is realised through narration, through action, or through dialogue — which quickly makes visible how dialogue-heavy the middle section of most magic tales actually is.

2. Simulation of Conflictual Dialogue: Building on the idea of “conflictual dialogue” as a form of social struggle, students act out scenes between a hero and a “Donor” or “Villain” [3: 5]. Running the “Inquiry/Delivery” cycle as a role-play gives learners a hands-on feel for how power gets negotiated in speech within the limits folk tradition sets. It also fits with the “performance critical” approaches now

common in the field, which treat the text as the record of a live, interactive event rather than a fixed script. A useful variation is to have one group perform the exchange "in character", strictly inside the formulaic boundaries, and a second group deliberately break the formula, so the class can discuss, from direct experience, what the ritualized boundary was actually doing.

3. Comparative Areological Analysis: Students set the "initial formulas" and opening dialogues of Uzbek tales next to Slavonic or other world traditions and look for "milieu-morphological adaptations" [6]. The comparison drives home that while the "storyline" itself is a universal backbone, the "multiforms" of dialogue that dress it up reflect the particular "tradition ecology" of a given people — which, done well, pushes students toward a more emic understanding of world literature. Working with parallel handouts of, for instance, an English and an Uzbek variant of the same functional slot lets students draft their own short comparative commentary, which also serves as a low-stakes assessment task.

Taken together, these three strategies move students from recognition (mapping functions), to production (performing dialogue within and against the formula), to comparison (setting one tradition's formulas against another's). This progression mirrors the standard move in language and literature pedagogy from analysis to synthesis, and it gives instructors a natural basis for sequencing a semester's worth of seminars around a single theoretical spine rather than a list of disconnected texts.

The material reviewed here suggests that dialogue in the magic folktale cannot be treated as an optional ornament that a teacher may skip in favour of plot summary. Because a considerable share of Propp's functions are dialogic by definition, omitting close reading of dialogue leaves the morphological structure of the tale effectively invisible to the student. At the same time, Bakhtin's framework warns against treating that dialogue as free expression: its "absolute boundaries" are set by genre, not by the individual speaker, which is precisely what allows the same exchange — the demand and its answer, the riddle and its solution — to recur, with only minor variation, across hundreds of tales and several linguistic traditions. The pedagogical value of the three strategies proposed above lies exactly in making both of these facts visible and workable for learners who are not yet professional folklorists.

Dialogue in folktales, then, is not just a stylistic flourish — it is a rigid structural model that keeps the genre stable and carries cultural values forward. Putting Propp's morphological theory next to Bakhtin's communicative framework gives students a solid toolkit for literary analysis. Once dialogue is understood as the functional engine driving the plot, folktales stop looking like simple stories and start looking like highly organized systems of human communication. That structural reading does

two things at once: it protects the integrity of folk tradition, and it gives future teachers the analytical skills modern pedagogy actually requires.

Further work along these lines could extend the comparative dimension beyond the Uzbek-English pairing used here, testing whether the same three-stage methodology (mapping, simulation, comparison) transfers to other Turkic or Slavonic tale corpora, and whether it measurably improves students' ability to produce independent structural commentary on texts they have not previously analysed in class.

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