

**THE LANGUAGE OF “MOLLA NASREDDIN” JOURNAL AS A
FORMATIVE STAGE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
AZERBAIJANI NATIONAL LITERARY LANGUAGE**Fidan Surat Bakhshiyeva¹

Abstract: This research aims to determine specific models of wordplay at the level of syntagma in the language of the satirical journal “Molla Nasreddin”; the research applies a structural-semantic analysis of occasional syntagma constructed on paradox; the research reveals that the main model of wordplay is the contamination of famous, common syntagma with a paradoxical continuation; The game encompasses almost all levels of the language system from the scale to the syntactic models. In fact, modern mass media embody the element of speech, since all its features are clearly represented here. Outplaying the usual pemeias, creating new syntagms based on the paradox of deception or unjustified expectations, occupies a special place in the modern Azerbaijani speech

element. The paradox here is that the recipient is offered the familiar pemeia which does not correspond to the existing standard in the rheumatic part of the statement. Such outplaying has a serious communicative function, since the shock experienced by the addressee when breaking the stereotype helps focus attention on the essence of the information. This model appeared consistently in the language of the journal and determined the special characteristics of the national literary language for many decades to come. Today the models of “Molla Nasreddin” are typical of the journalistic style of the Azerbaijani literary language

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Introduction

The systemic-structural paradigm which paid attention to the need to distinguish between language and speech for the first time in the history of linguistics, did not deny that all our knowledge of language is based on speech. It is in the element of speech that models and specific statements are created for these models which are amenable to selection simultaneously in the production process, in accordance with available stereotypes. Thus, in the sphere of the language game, the interests of structural linguistics overlap with the interests of the modern cognitive paradigm.

The satirical journal “Molla Nasreddin” was especially significant in shaping the Azerbaijani national literary language. It’s reasonable to ask, “What exactly was its role?” and “What links the journal’s language with the national language?” Language is an inalienable attribute of culture.

For the past thousand years Azerbaijani Turks emerged within the context of a single Arab-Muslim civilization, which entailed innumerable cultural and linguistic consequences. One in particular is the influence of the Arabic language on Azerbaijani, which can be felt today in both vocabulary and grammar, but to a lesser extent, of course, in grammar. Two trends were typical in Azerbaijani speech at the start of the last century. On the one hand, there was a preponderance of Arabisms and, on the other, a clear tendency for Azerbaijani Turkish to become as close as possible to Ottoman Turkish, as it was known then. Both trends could be seen in the language of Mammad Amin Rasulzada, for example (Rasulzada, 1991).

In parallel with these trends in the early 20th century the national historico-cultural current, if we can call it that, was gaining momentum. Typical of this current was the use of national sources and, at the same time, an ironic attitude towards speech overburdened with Arabisms or Turkisms. An example is Uzeyir

Hajibayov who in his comedies always mocked supporters of both styles. Moreover, the speech of members of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia, overflowing with Russianisms, was also sharply ridiculed.

Against this background, the language of “Molla Nasreddin” journal is distinctive for its obvious use of sources of national literary language, first of all, folklore, and also the language of great Azerbaijani writers such as Fuzuli, Nasimi and Molla Panah Vaqif. Academician Tofiq Hajiyev observes that “Molla Nasreddin” and Sabir’s “Hophopnama” are very rich monuments of Azerbaijani national literary language (Hajiyev, 1987).

In this regard, it is worth pointing out that playing with Azerbaijani proverbs is an important part of the journal’s language.

Description of Research.

Wordplay, which helps to form paradoxical syntagma, constitutes

an area of real creativity. In fact, any speech or speech in itself is a space for linguistic creativity. Some combinations are easy to remember, but those that go unnoticed by the language collective reveal a unique mechanism to express an idea. Deliberate wordplay is rare in verbal and syntagmatic creativity. The usual flow of speech, everyday speech, in any language contains a huge number of spontaneously occurring constructions that are rapidly forgotten. These creations of the spoken language are stimulated by the subconscious reaction to stimuli of innumerable con-situations, which are formed, destroyed and merged with one another equally spontaneously.

The element of living language puts forward specific standard models of wordplay, which are created quite unconsciously. This allows the assumption that the element of language play repeats the phylogenetic element of the standardization of the language code as a whole. If this assumption is correct, the process that we describe as

language play constitutes the permanent evolution of an essentially semiotic system in spatiotemporal realization. The difference between language and speech in this case appears to be the difference between what is fixed and what is remembered, on the one hand, and the element of speech production, as such, on the other. What was settled became fixed not only at the level of the idea, but also at the level of models that became patterns, i.e. served as patterns for the formation of new units. In this case usualness means reproducibility and nothing more. At the same time it is clear that reproducibility in itself is conditioned by memorability and retention in the structure of collective memory. The concept of “usualness” means “prevalence” in this context in accordance with its etymological meaning. In origin all syntagmata built on wordplay have a verbal character. Most of them remain ephemeral. Only one part that is more effectively communicated settles in the popular memory as a result of which it begins to be perceived as part of the language. It should also be said that they also

shape the worldview to a certain extent. Analysis of the journal’s language provides evidence that language play had a special place in it. Needless to say, this language play is socially acute.

Atı atın yanında bağlasalar, xan görüb deyər: birini bağışla mənə. (Molla Nasreddin”, No. 1, 7 April 1906). The usual proverb is *Atı atın yanında bağlasan, həm rəng olmasa, həm xasiyyət olar* (Hamidov, 2004); i.e. “If you tie up a horse next to another horse, it won’t acquire the same colour, but it will acquire the same character.” Molla Nasreddin uses the first part of the expression without making any changes, but he changes the second part completely, thereby changing the meaning of the expression: “If you tie up a horse next to another horse, the Khan will see them and say, ‘Give one to me.’” The occasionalism reveals an acute social observation, which is true of everything in the journal as a whole.

Anlayana da qul ol, anlamayana da (*Ibid.*). The etymon reflects ancient norms of etiquette: *Sayanın quluyam, saymayanın ağası,*

which means, “I am the servant of whoever respects me, but the master of whoever does not respect me.” The molla is saying that you should be the servant and slave of whoever understands you and whoever doesn’t understand you too. There is another usual saying with a deep meaning, *Anlayana da qurban olum, anlamayana, vay yarımçıq əlindən* (I will sacrifice myself for those who understand and those who do not understand, but woe to those who cannot make up their minds). The speaker may be using motifs from this saying too. An interpretation of the occasionalism that takes into account the period and the journal’s aims of enlightenment can be suggested. Of course, Molla Nasreddin experienced great moral satisfaction when people understood him and laughed with him at failings. Any failure to understand is annoying. The journal is calling on readers to be patient towards those who don’t understand too.

Sözünü o kəslərə de ki, sənə qulaq vermirlər (Ibid.); (Speak to those who don’t listen to you). The usual

proverb is the opposite: *Sözünü o kəslərə de ki, sənə qulaq verirlər* (Speak to those who do listen to you). The wordplay creates a peculiar antonym of the usual paroemia and this too pursues the journal’s aims. Molla Nasreddin is urging readers to address those who do not listen to them.

Ac toyuq yuxusunda plov görər (Ibid.); (A hungry chicken dreams of pilaff). The usual proverb is *Ac toyuq yuxusunda darı görər* (A hungry chicken dreams of millet). In this case there is a correspondence between what is dreamt of and who does the dreaming. There is no correspondence in the wordplay version; if the dream is of pilaff, then the dreamer is a person, so in this case *Ac toyuq* – “a hungry chicken” – is a metaphor for man. Maybe the metaphor refers to the cowardice of a hungry person, who does not act to feed himself and is, therefore, a chicken. Otherwise, why should a hungry chicken dream of pilaff?

Adam yata-yata alim olur (Ibid.); (A man becomes a scholar through sleeping). The popular proverb

is *Adam oxuya-oxuya alim olur* (A man becomes a scholar through studying). The people say that a person becomes a scholar in accordance with how much he studies. Molla Nasreddin says that a person becomes a scholar in accordance with how much he sleeps. A distinctive topos comes into play here, typical of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The journal has a great many drawings of collective sleep, through which it creates the image of a sleeping people. The stereotype of the sleepy East and energetic West was a favourite of the Nasreddin writers. Occasionalism is part of this model.

The same irony is found in the call to put off the evening's business until the morning (until tomorrow) and the morning's business until the evening: *Axşamın işini sabaha qoy, sabahın işini axşama* (*Ibid.*). The paroemia that reflects common human experience and exists in all languages urges people not to put off until the morrow what can be done today. All languages like to play with this logical model. The following Russian saying is

one of the more popular versions: Don't put off until tomorrow what can be eaten today. Molla Nasreddin compounds the expression by playing on the enlightenment stereotype, according to which Muslims don't do any of their business at all – neither tomorrow, nor the day after tomorrow, neither morning nor evening.

İşləmək adamı puça çıxardar (*Ibid.*); (work crushes man). The usual proverb is *İşləmək adamın üzünü ağardar* (work ennobles man). It's an obvious joke about eastern laziness.

Historically, the Azerbaijani people have given their own interpretation to many Islamic norms. So, polygamy was always an object of criticism, hence the proverb *İkiarvadlı evdə bərəkət olmaz*, i.e. "There is never plenty in a house with two wives." The journal creates the antonym, *İkiarvadlı ev bərəkətli olar* (*Ibid.*). (There is plenty in a house with two wives.) The effect of this type of occasionalism is based on the relevance of background information. Maybe the joke here is that every wife brings something with her. Or the meaning might be simpler:

two is more than one, therefore it's better. Wealth at home lies in the number of wives, so the more the better.

Başladığın işi yarıda qoy (*Ibid.*). Molla Nasreddin recommends giving up a job half-way through. Azerbaijani has the expression *Başladığın işi yarıda qoyma*, i.e. “don't leave a job half-finished.” Every language has standard ironic recommendations to do something completely unacceptable. Compare the Russian *продолжай в том же духе* (carry on in the same vein). Azerbaijani has stereotypical expressions. For example, if someone breaks something, people say *sındır, sındır* (break it, break it). If children don't do their schoolwork, they say *oxuma, neynirsən oxumaq, ağıllı adamsan, oxuma* (don't study, why should you bother studying, you're clever, don't study). The model appears to be universal. However, despite the universalism of the standard models cited, I think the journal's originality is that the given model is used, first, not all the time, and second, not by chance. The model of such

antonymous, usual paroemia of modality is used to refer to typical failings. It can be concluded from this that if the journal recommends doing the direct opposite to popular experience, the people must be ignoring this popular experience. In this case, popular experience recommends not giving something up half-way through, without finishing it, but the standard for the people is a lack of energy and staying power to complete what they have started, so all around everything is half-finished. Therefore, Molla Nasreddin says, “It's right not to finish what you've started.” This negative model promotes a positive result, or in any case is programmed for a positive result. This and the journal's aforementioned occasionalisms show the productiveness of this pattern.

Bala baldan şirindir, qoyma oxuyub gözlərinin işığı getsin (¹ Molla Nasreddin, No. 2, 14 April 1906); (A child is sweeter than honey, so don't let them spoil their eyesight reading). Azerbaijani has the proverb *Bala baldan şirindir*, i.e. “A child is sweeter

than honey.” The molla is spreading a proverb by using the same model of negative recommendation, advising parents not to let their child spoil their eyesight by reading. *Borclu borclunun sağlığın istər: dəxi borc aldın – vermə* (Molla Nasreddin, No. 2, 14 April 1906). The first part is what’s usual here meaning “a lender genuinely desires a borrower’s good health”. The molla gives the proverb the comic continuation, “so if you have borrowed something, don’t give it back.” *Çox bilirsən, az danış, az bilirsən – çox danış* (Molla Nasreddin, No. 2, 14 April 1906). The usual proverb is *Çox bilirsən, az danış*, i.e. “know a lot but say little”. The molla’s proverb is the opposite, “Know little, say a lot.”

Azerbaijani has the proverb *Kök arıqlayınca arığın canı çıxar*, i.e. “While the fat man is slimming, the slim man dies.” The journal swaps the main concepts in direct accord with the realities of the time. The fat man becomes the khan, the thin – society: *Xan arıqlayınca cəmiyyətin canı çıxar* (while the khan is slimming, the people are dying).

Tısbağa qınından çıxsə, “abrozovonni” olar (Molla Nasreddin, No. 2, 14 April 1906). The usual proverb is *Tısbağa qınından çıxdı qınıni bəyənmədi* (When the tortoise came out of its shell, it didn’t like its shell). The journal creates an occasionalism relevant to its day: if the tortoise comes out of its shell, it will become educated. The joke is not only in the meaning but also in the distorted form of the Russian word *образованный* (obrazovanny – educated), widespread in common urban Azerbaijani at that time in the form *образовонны* (obrazovonny) with the stress on the penultimate syllable instead of on the third syllable. The vertical context foregrounds the image of the Russian-speaking Turk who has come out and learnt to speak Russian after a fashion and despises his fellow countrymen. The situation is familiar to Azerbaijanis today from the film “If Not This One, Then That One”.

Çox yaşayan çox bilməz, çox yatan çox bilər (Ibid.); (who lives a long time doesn’t know much, who sleeps a long time knows a lot). The

image of the sleeping Muslim became a stereotype of the “Molla Nasreddin” journalists and editors. Similar occasionalisms have already been considered. This case is a play on the usual proverb *Çox oxuyan çox bilməz, çox gəzən çox bilər* (He who travels knows a lot, not he who reads a lot). The molla says that “It’s not he who has lived a long time that knows a lot but he who sleeps a long time.” The motif of Muslim sleep is a leading one for Molla Nasreddin.

There are a great many such occasional expressions formed by wordplay in “Molla Nasreddin” journal. They are shaped by the journal’s satirical style. Laughter is not only the genre in which the journal specializes, it is the element in which the journal lives. The analysis has shown that the main device in wordplay in the journal is the use of usual syntagma through paradoxical assertions. The paradox of the created occasionalism lies, as a rule, in the unacceptability of the assertion. As has already been mentioned, the system of unacceptable concepts, on which the

journal’s language play is based, directly presents the system of social deficiencies against which Nasreddin’s people fought.

If we attempt to compare modern playful occasionalisms that have captured the media-discourse with what was in the language of “Molla Nasreddin” journal, we will have to acknowledge that, first, modern wordplay is usually aimed at making people laugh. It is quite rare for wordplay syntagmata to have a sharp social character. As a rule, they have a low aesthetic status, which is especially noticeable in advertising copy for which only the peg is important. A new precedent or a very common rhyme could be the peg. The orientation towards enlightenment and the public health function, which the journal had undertaken, determined Molla Nasreddin’s wordplay models, which in turn became classical. However, modern authors too sometimes create quite successful wordplay syntagmata in which the profound meaning is in keeping with the form. For example, *Ulduz ağacı, qoz ağacı, hər keçən bir*

daş atar (“Çal-çağır, ATV, 10 April 2002). The usual proverb is *Qız ağacı – qoz ağacı, hər keçən bir çimdik alar*. The popular proverb has a profound, down-to-earth meaning. It is that everyone enjoys looking at a girl; there’s nothing unusual about it; it is to be expected. No less wise is the occasionalism, “A tree of stars is like a nut tree – everyone who passes throws a stone.” In other words, stars should expect their lives to be discussed in the newspapers and on TV, they are laughed at and sometimes openly mocked. Whoever isn’t lazy throws a stone.

In this way, the language of “Molla Nasreddin” journal can be considered a formative stage not only in the development of Azerbaijani national literary language, but of national cultural tradition too, since it shaped the tastes of the reading public and people as a whole. What was important was that the journal’s language consciously distanced itself from traditions that were traditional but alien to the national spirit.

The systemic-structural paradigm which paid attention to the need to distinguish between language and speech for the first time in the history of linguistics, did not deny that all our knowledge of language is based on speech. It is in the element of speech that models and specific statements are created for these models which are amenable to selection simultaneously with the production process, in accordance with available stereotypes. Thus, in the sphere of the language game, the interests of structural linguistics overlap with the interests of the modern cognitive paradigm.

Thus, the language of Molla Nasreddin magazine can be considered phenomenon in the formation of not only the norms of the Azerbaijani national literary language but also the national cultural tradition, since it formed the tastes of the reading public and the people as a whole. The important thing was that the language of the magazine consciously dissociated itself from traditional but alien to the national spirit traditions.

The purpose of the study is the identification of specific models of language games at the level of syntagmas in the language of the "Molla Nasreddin" satirical magazine:

Methods

Such methods as descriptive and component analysis are used in the present article. The first is used to describe the syntagma, to identify semantic relationships with the image that served as the basis for recomprehension.

The second one is used when detecting semantic components of the value of the newly formed unit.

Discussion.

At the present stage, in fact, the same language processes take place throughout the post-Soviet space, the essence of which is due to the lifting many prohibitions, eliminating the totalitarianism obstacles and democratising literary language. V. G.

Kostomarov was one of the first who pointed this out in his book "Language Taste of the Era" (Kostomarov, 1999), published in 1999. Comprehensive processes of the language game at various levels of the language were studied by V. Z. Sannikov in the book "Russian Language in the mirror of the language game" (Sannikov, 2002). Various aspects of the language game are studied in modern Russian linguistics. By way of example, Y. V. Bulina's dissertation on "Language game in the speech of students and teachers as a way to create a laughable space in communication" (Bulina, 2011) can be pointed out. S. N. Bredikhin studies the language game in the works by Martin Heidegger, i.e. based on the material of philosophical language (Bredikhin, 2003). But A.D. Butakova studies the semantic shifts in the periodicals language due to the language game (Butakova, 2015).

The concept of "language game" is considered by us in the broad aspect of any semiotic transformations. We consider facts of a language game not only puns, a virtual pun, but also all

possible changes of structural and semantic nature covered by the phenomenon of symbolic combinatorics. For example, L. S. Panina considers such phenomena of transformation as truncation, contraction, decay in a dissertation entitled “The formation of phraseological units on the basis of Russian proverbs in the Russian language” (Panina, 1986). To our opinion, all three ways of forming phraseological units based on proverbs refer to the language game, the semiotic meaning of which is the formation of new units of the language by transforming existing ones. This also includes the phenomena standing in the spotlight of V.T. Bondarenko (Bondarenko, 2005), A.A. Burykina (Burykin, 2007), Y. V. Butko (Butko, 2008), Y. Velmezova (Velmezova, 2006), T. A. Gridina (Gridina, 1996), Y. I. Dibrova (Dibrova, 1979), V. M. Mokiyeenko (Mokiyeenko, 2010), A.V.Nasybulina (Nasybulina, 2008), Y. I. Seliverstova (Seliverstova, 2010), O.S. Sergienko (Sergienko, 2007) and many other scientists. Similar phenomena can be designated as facts

of the sign evolution, the regularity of which is motivated by the cultural and historical features of the current discourse.

Conclusions

The analysis experience of speech elements in many languages indicates that speech is focused on a game by which it is most expedient to comprehend symbolic combinatorics. Even if the addressee of the discourse is not aware of this, the game is aimed at achieving the maximum communicative effect. The language game in the modern Azerbaijani media, and in general in the speech element, is based on a rich tradition. This tradition has its deep roots in folklore. If we keep in mind the latest tradition, then we should name the language of the satirical magazine "Molla Nasreddin". The most crucial language game technique specific to the magazine language, is the change in the usual Azerbaijani proverbs, when the first part of the syntagma serving as the beginning, remains unchanged, the

second one, the climax acquires the character of a paradox against this background. Today, the socio-cultural aspect in the space of the language game in Azerbaijan comes to the front. Outplaying stable and well-known usual constructions becomes a very important way of expressing social protest. On the other hand, the language game in Azerbaijan reflects the democratization of the literary language, which is somehow related to the shattering of the historical and cultural tradition in the language. The language game is perhaps the most actual phenomenon in the modern Azerbaijani language of the post-Soviet period.

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