

Pragmatic Transposition Occurring in the Meaning of Interrogative Sentences

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INTRODUCTION

The study of speech acts has long emphasized the intricate relationship between linguistic form and communicative function. Since J. L. Austin's seminal work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), the performative nature of utterances has been analyzed not merely as statements of fact but as actions accomplished through language. Later developments by J. Searle, P. Harder (1978), and J. Sadock (1974) further refined this approach, demonstrating that speech acts can deviate from their literal form, resulting in complex pragmatic effects.

One such phenomenon is pragmatic transposition—the shift in illocutionary force whereby a linguistic structure performs a communicative function not typical for its grammatical form. In particular, interrogative sentences may serve as requests, offers, or expressions of emotion rather than as genuine questions. Scholars such as Cohen (1991), Benveniste (2002), and Teliya (1980) have described similar asymmetries between linguistic form and pragmatic content, viewing them as central to discourse dynamics.

In Uzbek and English discourse alike, transposition reveals the cognitive and communicative flexibility of language. Works by Eltzarov (2006), Mirzaev (2005), and Shomakhmudova (2021) suggest that such shifts emerge from both linguistic and extralinguistic factors—intonation, context, and speaker intention. Building on these perspectives, the present study investigates pragmatic transposition within interrogative structures, focusing on how declarative and interrogative forms alternate between constative and quesitive speech acts in English and Uzbek literary discourse.

Methods

The study employs a qualitative comparative analysis of pragmatic functions in interrogative and declarative sentences, based on examples extracted from English and Uzbek literary texts. Primary English data were drawn from *W. Somerset Maugham's Collected Short Stories* (1982), *J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye* (1991), *A. Michaelides' The Silent Patient* (2019), and *C. McCullers' The Square Root of Wonderful* (1981). The Uzbek corpus included *Said Ahmad's Kiprikda qolgan tong* (2003) and *Shuhrat's Oltin zanglamas* (2024).

Each selected utterance was analyzed within its speech-act framework, identifying (1) surface grammatical type (declarative/interrogative), (2) illocutionary intent (constative, directive, expressive, etc.), and (3) contextual cues such as intonation, discourse situation, and pragmatic inference. The theoretical foundation relied on Austin

(1962), Harder (1978), Sadock (1974), Pospelova (1988), and Paduchova (1982), whose criteria for illocutionary potential and force guided the classification.

Additionally, the study incorporated cross-linguistic comparison following the typological approach of Eltzarov (2006) and Mirzaev (2005), emphasizing syntactic and pragmatic parallels between the two languages. The analysis sought to determine how pragmatic transposition manifests as a systematic shift from constative → quesitive structures and vice versa.

Results

The analysis revealed that pragmatic transposition in interrogative constructions functions as a mechanism of illocutionary reinterpretation. Declarative sentences, when violating one or more conditions of constative performance (Paduchova, 1982), may acquire the illocutionary features of a question. For instance, Maugham's "I hear you're going away, Warburton" demonstrates an implicit request for confirmation rather than a factual assertion. Similarly, in Uzbek contexts such as "Бу ўтқир Ҳошимов деган ёзувчимиз-ку, танимадингизми?", the declarative form acquires a questioning force through pragmatic cues.

Conversely, interrogative sentences often display secondary constative or expressive meanings. Examples like "God, could that girl dance!" (Salinger, 1991) and "Am I tired!" (Leech & Svartvik, 1983) illustrate how interrogatives lose their literal question function and become emotional statements. Such constructions embody the functional-semantic asymmetry described by Bally (1955) and Shendels (1990), where grammatical form diverges from pragmatic function.

In both languages, transposition was most frequent in contexts of emotional emphasis, irony, and politeness. Uzbek data confirmed that declarative sentences referring to the listener's known actions—e.g., "Биласизми, бу ким?"—tend to adopt a quesitive illocution when contextualized in dialogic interaction. English data, by contrast, displayed a higher frequency of rhetorical and expressive interrogatives conveying admiration, disbelief, or sarcasm.

Overall, the results demonstrate that pragmatic transposition serves as a universal cognitive-communicative strategy: it allows speakers to achieve indirectness, maintain politeness, and convey evaluative or emotive meanings beyond literal syntax. This supports the claim by Gak (1979) and Harder (1978) that linguistic form and pragmatic intent exist in a dynamic, context-dependent relation rather than a fixed hierarchy.

Analysis

The term transposition originates from the Latin "*transpositio*" meaning "transfer" or "change of position," and has long been used in linguistics. However, this concept has been interpreted in various ways. Traditionally, transposition in a broad sense refers to a change in grammatical meaning while maintaining the general content of a linguistic unit. In a narrower sense, it refers to linguistic asymmetry, where words belonging to one lexical class undergo partial or complete morpho-syntactic shifts into another (Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1990).

When transposition is viewed as the movement of a linguistic unit from one category to another, it implies a change of meaning. Therefore, C. Bally proposed distinguishing between semantic and functional types of transposition. According to him, this phenomenon operates through a three-part model: the transpositor (the shifting agent), the transpondent (the basis of transposition), and the transposit (the result). Functional transposition thus manifests when a linguistic unit retains its original meaning but acquires a new grammatical function, fulfilling the syntactic role of another lexical category. In contrast, in semantic transposition, both grammatical function and meaning change simultaneously (Bally, 1955:131).

Another French linguist, É. Benveniste, called the process by which structures acquire secondary meaning due to context-dependent functional shifts "*metamorphism*." He emphasized that internal and external change under certain influences is inevitable (Benveniste, 2002).

Transposition always rests upon a syntagmatic foundation, though, unfortunately, its syntactic aspects have not been fully explored. Russian linguists such as V. N. Teliya and G. G. Sokolova noted that syntactic transposition not only changes the function of lexical units but can also lead to the formation of phraseological expressions carrying figurative meanings (Teliya, 1980; Sokolova, 1987). Other scholars distinguish between morphological transposition (a categorical shift of a word), conversion (transfer between parts of speech without affixation), and syntactic transposition (functional reorganization within a sentence).

It seems more appropriate to interpret transposition broadly—as a universal mechanism underlying various linguistic shifts. As J. Eltazarov emphasized, linguistic transposition manifests across multiple levels:

1. phonologically, in processes like assimilation, dissimilation, and metathesis;
2. morphologically, in simplification or differentiation of roots and affixes;
3. lexically, in semantic narrowing, broadening, metaphor, and metonymy;
4. syntactically, in ellipsis, inversion, and clause reduction (Eltazarov, 2006).

According to A. Mirzaev (2005), the key distinguishing feature of transpositional phenomena lies in their asymmetric dualism, where the same element simultaneously belongs to two systems. This view sees transposition as a cognitive-discursive process aimed at a specific pragmatic purpose, and therefore best studied through an integrative approach combining multiple linguistic dimensions.

Transposition is also relevant at the syntactic level. Within the framework of pragmatic syntax, it is viewed as the

activation of a syntactic structure in a context that gives it a new meaning. Such semantic shifts are linked to changes in communicative function. In this sense, pragmatic transposition of speech structures refers to cases where a construction performs a pragmatic function atypical for its illocutionary type.

Predicate structures with a fixed grammatical form may undergo communicative modification depending on the speech situation. This creates a mismatch between the formal sentence structure and its pragmatic content. Such cases are generally treated as indirect speech acts.

In her study of Spanish, A. F. Shomakhmudova distinguishes between *indirectness* and *implicitness*: the former occurs when a structure expresses its illocutionary goal indirectly, while the latter implies the absence of explicit linguistic markers of that illocution (Shomakhmudova, 2021:54). Hence, pragmatic transposition in syntax occurs when a structure performs a function alien to its conventional purpose.

The semantic structure of a sentence, the primary syntactic unit, is hierarchical: it includes primary (basic) and secondary (derived) meanings. The first corresponds to monointentionality (a single pragmatic aim), while the second enables polyintentionality (multiple communicative goals) (Pospelova, 1988:150). Thus, declarative sentences may acquire interrogative or directive meaning, while interrogative forms may express requests, suggestions, or denials. For example, K. B. Samigova included many such interrogative forms expressing requests or offers in her *English and Uzbek Dictionary of Speech Formulas* (Samigova, 2016:96–105):

- *Could you give me a hand with these parcels?* → "Would you help me carry these bags?"
- *Would you mind waiting outside?* → "Please, if it's not difficult, wait outside."
- *May I ask you for a little quiet?* → "Please, speak a bit more quietly."
- *Maybe we can have lunch together?* → "Perhaps we could have lunch together?"
- *Would you accompany me...?* → "Would you mind joining me?"

According to V. G. Gak (1979), any grammatical or pragmatic function emerges as a linguistic representation of meaning formed in human cognition. The secondary function or meaning of an interrogative structure, therefore, results from pragmatic transposition in a given communicative context. The primary purpose of interrogatives is to request information, as in *Haven't you done your homework?*, representing a typical *quesitive speech act*.

When interrogative structures express constative, directive, or expressive meanings, this indicates the realization of a secondary function through pragmatic transformation. The communicative value of the structure changes, showing that its meaning is not the sum of its linguistic elements but their functional interplay.

The interaction of primary and secondary pragmatic meanings in interrogatives is complex. As Gordon and Lakoff (1975) noted, forms such as *Why don't you do it?* or *Why don't you join in?* may convey either advice or inquiry, depending on the context. When functioning as advice, both meanings coexist; when functioning as a genuine question, the secondary meaning disappears:

- *Why did you do that?*
- *Did you object?*
- *Hell, no. I just want to know why you did it* (Irwin Shaw).

During such functional-semantic shifts, the primary meaning may fade while the secondary one becomes dominant, allowing different sentence forms to convey the same speech act.

Disagreements often appear in grammatical literature regarding the communicative value of interrogative sentences. For example, *Am I tired?*, *Is he a liar?*, *Am I hungry?* are treated by Leech and Svartvik (1982) as *interrogative-exclamatory* sentences, while others classify them as *emotive-exclamatory* (Jacobs, 1993). I. V. Arnold (1981) describes such constructions as examples of *transposition from interrogatives into exclamatives*.

These differ from genuine interrogatives: first, they express assertion or emotional certainty, not information-seeking; second, they have falling intonation rather than the rising pitch typical of questions; and third, the auxiliary and subject receive emphatic stress: *Am I tired! Has she grown! Did he look annoyed!* Thus, inversion prompts a question-like form, assertion aligns them with declaratives, and emphasis makes them exclamatory.

Researchers (Shendels, 1990) identify intonation and context as the main linguistic factors driving functional-semantic transposition, though lexical, grammatical, and structural cues may also participate, shifting the dominance of one semantic component over others.

In contexts where interrogative forms express constative meaning, they often include interjections (*oh, well*) or expletives (*God, Jesus, Christ, hell*). Compare: *Tot was already at the bus station, revolving like a lighthouse beacon. "By hell, am Ah glad to see you?" he greeted* (S. Chaplin).

Here, *By hell, am Ah glad to see you?* does not express inquiry but rather affirmation. Converting it into a declarative—*"I'm very glad to see you"*—confirms this.

Similarly, in *God, could that dopey girl dance?* (J. Salinger) or *Boy, can you make delicious coffee?* (McCullers), the modal verbs *can/could* express emotional astonishment, not genuine questioning.

Through pragmatic transposition, interrogative forms may neutralize their illocutionary function, becoming rhetorical questions that seek no answer but instead evoke emotion or influence the listener, e.g.:

– *I forgive you!*

I was stunned. Forgive me? How? Wasn't theft the greatest sin for my father—the root of all evil? (Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, p.66).

Here, the interrogative loses its questioning force and gains expressive assertive meaning. Sometimes, this shift is marked graphically by replacing "?" with "!", while keeping the interrogative form for emphasis.

In general, interrogative sentences display rich pragmatic potential. Their primary goal is to affect the listener and prompt action, which is why some linguists label question-like imperatives as "sentences of appeal" (Chomsky, 2006).

For example:

"Won't you sit down?" (A. Michaelides, *The Silent Patient*) or

Rost, otam bu kunni ko'rganida bor-mi? ("If only my father could have seen this day!" – K. Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, p.105).

Such rhetorical or negative interrogatives perform suggestive or persuasive illocutionary acts. However, their realization depends on specific conditions—e.g., the predicate verb must be in the present or future tense and often in the subjunctive mood (*Won't you come with me? Could we have dinner together?*).

According to Ivanova, Burlakova, and Pocheptsov (1981:278), pragmatic transposition occurs in two forms:

1. When an interrogative appears in a context typical of a different speech act;
2. When various speech acts share multiple linguistic realizations.

The systematic study of pragmatic transposition is essential for developing pragmatic syntax theory. The logical and linguistic mechanisms enabling interchangeability of speech units have long intrigued scholars (Pocheptsov, 1986; 1987; Romanov, 1982).

For instance, in *"You're planning something in that convoluted pixie mind of yours."* – *"I admit nothing"* (A. Hailey), or in Uzbek *"Hoynahoy, Mirsalim aka ham bo'lar... Ko'p ichmang!"* (Shuhrat, *Oltin zanglamas*, 2024:40), the utterances highlighted in bold express question-like force despite declarative form. The addressee's response confirms this pragmatic shift.

Such changes in pragmatic-communicative intent can be triggered by linguistic or extralinguistic means. A mismatch between sentence form and communicative goal underlies the unique pragmatic role of such constructions.

In our view, the emergence of constative → interrogative transposition depends on the following (Paduchova, 1982:43):

1. The speaker has grounds to regard the proposition as true;
2. The speaker is unsure of the listener's awareness of it;
3. The speech act is intended as a statement about reality.

Conversely, the success of a quesitive speech act depends on:

1. The speaker not knowing the answer;
2. The addressee being capable of providing the information unprompted;
3. The speaker presuming that the addressee knows the answer;
4. The speaker seeking to obtain that information (Paduchova, 1982:44).

Discussions

Observations concerning the shift of discourse indicate the occurrence of functional and semantic incompatibilities between the speech act being performed and the linguistic form that realizes it. The founder of the theory of speech acts, J. L. Austin, noted that in many cases the performative does not have an explicit linguistic realization (Austin, 1962).

When speaking about semantic inconsistency of speech structures, what is usually meant is a mismatch between the illocution and the meaning of a verb in the first-person present tense used (or potentially used) in that structure. For example, P. Harder, while discussing speech acts activated in the situation of making a promise, did not single out any of them as a "pure" promise. On the contrary,

depending on the speech situation, such structures could express meanings of offering help, support, or even refusal (Harder, 1978). Therefore, linguists such as J. Austin and J. Searle tend to interpret the theory of speech acts as a “theory of words.”

Indeed, identifying or describing the content of a speech act solely based on the performative scheme is a difficult task. Speech acts generally have a complex structure and content, and their classification requires caution. Researchers have pointed out that the performative scheme does not always suffice to determine the content of a speech act.

The relationship between the content of the speech act and the syntactic structure that performs the expressive function is distinctive and manifests itself in various forms. The functional discrepancies that arise, in Austin’s terminology, indicate a divergence between “word” and “action.” In this sense, “word” represents the structural form of speech, whereas “action” resembles the external performative form of a speech act that lacks illocutionary force.

For instance, when a speaker uses verbs like “insult” or “threaten” in the first-person present form, they do not actually aim to insult or threaten the listener. However, as T. Cohen noted, the speech structure in such a case does not entirely lose its illocutionary potential (Cohen, 1991). The focus should be not on the complete scope of speech reality but on a specific fragment of it. Thus, the fact that the content of a speech act does not fully correspond to its structural form can be regarded as a general characteristic.

Some verbs cannot be used performatively (to directly indicate a speech act meaning). The existence of such restrictions in a language system can be explained by the speaker-observer perspective encoded in the semantics of certain verbs. American linguist J. Sadock, who studied the linguistic theory of speech acts, once argued that English lacks a performative verb *threaten* because there is no corresponding implicit linguistic unit (Sadock, 1974:145). However, it is difficult to agree with his claim that the difference between *threatening* and *warning* lies in the fact that the speaker cannot deny the act of threatening. Therefore, the limited possibility of using certain verbs performatively is related to the nature of language itself, since such verbs simultaneously reflect both the speaker’s and observer’s perspectives.

Under such conditions, the function of the performative formula becomes specific: it not only reveals the illocutionary function of the speech structure but also concretizes the character of the speech action. This, in turn, requires distinguishing between illocutionary potential and illocutionary force.

The illocutionary potential consists of a set of communicative features typical of certain pragmatic types of speech structures. On this basis, specific illocutionary types such as requestive, instructive, or suggestive speech acts are classified according to their general potential.

The illocutionary force, on the other hand, directly expresses the pragmatic orientation of the speech structure. For instance, acts of commanding, requesting, offering, or asking indicate the communicative content of the structure and the immediate action being performed. However, identifying clear indicators of illocutionary force is difficult because various linguistic factors (e.g., particles, modal words, word order) may influence the formation of communicative

meaning. Nevertheless, illocutionary force, given a specific illocutionary potential, interacts with other linguistic means to realize pragmatic meaning.

Thus, the functional and semantic properties of a speech structure are relatively autonomous, and the loss of performative potential does not always directly correspond to the content of the speech act. For example, when one says “*I criticize you for not writing a good article*,” the speaker is not performing a direct act of criticism. Yet, an illocutionary shift occurs, where the illocutionary purpose is expressed indirectly or implicitly.

Illocutionary or pragmatic transposition serves as an example of the functional and content-based interrelation of speech structures, demonstrating how illocutionary force manifests in altered forms and stimulates the emergence of new speech acts. This, in turn, motivates a systematic study of pragmatic transposition within the system of interrogative sentences.

Conclusion

When we compare the examples above, we can see that the conditions for performing a constative speech act are not fully met. More precisely, the proposition expressed does not add anything to the addressee’s knowledge or store of information. On the contrary, the utterance corresponds to the conditions for performing a quesitive speech act: the speaker assumes that the addressee is already aware of the relevant information (the proposition). It should be noted that in such cases other conditions of the constative may still be satisfied, so the illocutionary composition of the utterance ends up consisting of several components. Compare:

1. “I hear you’re going away, Warburton,” the old Duke of Hereford said to him. “Yes, I’m going to Borneo” (W. Maugham);
2. Mrs. Sergio attacked me the next time I went into the club. “I hear Tim Hardy’s married,” she said. “Oh?” I answered, unwilling to commit myself (W. Maugham).
3. “Are all Tashkent women like that, or is it just yours who turned out that way?”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying, miss. Speak so I can understand.”

“If he came to Yakkachinar and fell madly in love with a girl named Oypopuk, then wrote a book about how he vowed to stay in Yakkachinar for the rest of his life because of her, and then read it to his wife, and our aunt congratulated him with a kiss, well, how does that make sense? Do Tashkent women not feel jealousy? I don’t get it, I don’t get it at all” (Said Ahmad, Kiprikda qolgan tong, 2003: 27).

4. “Do you know who this is? This is our great writer O’tkir Hoshimov, don’t you recognize him?” My host, half believing me and half not, was flustered (Said Ahmad, Kiprikda qolgan tong, 2003: 47).

In examples 1 and 3, the speech act answers an implied question from the addressee. In the latter cases, the addressee avoids answering and treats the speaker’s utterance as a constative.

Declarative sentences that realize a quesitive (interrogative) speech act have a distinctive semantic structure. As is well known, the semantics of a true interrogative consists of two parts: the addressee’s possession of information about the

situation, and the subject of the question. In the examples we analyze, only the desire to obtain information is represented.

Analysis of the collected material shows that only certain types of declaratives are capable of realizing a quesitive speech act. These include constructions that convey information about the addressee's actions or state, as well as those that make known the addressee's attitude toward the situation. In addition, the utterance may contain explicit information about the addressee. For example: "I noticed you didn't laugh with the others," he said abruptly. "I didn't think it funny" (W. Maugham).

"Ah, if only I had Hoshimjon's cap, oh, I'd do so many strange things" (Said Ahmad, Kiprikda qolgan tong, 2003: 50).

In sentences of this type the addressee's actions or state are necessarily referenced, since they are familiar to the speaker. Other components of the situation may be unfamiliar to the speaker yet familiar to the listener. Such configurations can be overtly signaled in the lexico-grammatical structure of the sentence. Compare: "I understand you've been having some trouble with your boys." Copper gave a harsh laugh. "They tried to blackmail me" (W. Maugham); "You know, I can't help thinking that I've seen you before somewhere or other," he said. "I couldn't say as I remember you," returned the skipper (W. Maugham).

Thus, transposition along the "constative → quesitive" axis occurs when the conditions for a declarative sentence to function as a constative speech act are violated and when a "question subject" component emerges within the sentence's semantic structure.

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