

1.4 Semantic and pragmatic aspects of rhetorical questions in Spanish

The development of communicative linguistics as a separate branch of linguistics leads to a growing interest of researchers in issues related to the peculiarities of the implementation and functioning of language units in speech. Describing the speech features of language units is one of the most important aspects of modern linguistics. The problem of communicative and functional characteristics of speech, of separate language units, including rhetorical questions, is increasingly considered in terms of the relationship between language and speech, language and thinking, language and objective reality. Particular attention is paid to the study of pragmatic orientation of expression, its semantic and syntactic features, the functioning of the basic elements of communication, as well as the communicative characteristics of the language situation. Rhetorical questions contain semantic, pragmatic and communicative potential, which is realized directly in speech.

The relevance of the research is determined by the need for a comprehensive study and in-depth analysis of semantic, pragmatic and communicative features of statements that include rhetorical questions. The fact that it belongs to anthropologically-oriented linguistic research also makes the problem relevant, which makes it possible to study the most effective language behaviour in a particular situation of interpersonal communication.

Despite the fact that the rhetorical question as a logical phenomenon in philosophy and rhetoric was studied by ancient Greek and Roman thinkers (Aristotle, Socrates, Demosthenes, Marcus Tullius Cicero), in linguistics the study of this unit of speech began in the second half of the twentieth century (I.R. Galperin, P.S. Popov, and other researchers). In domestic linguistics, the peculiarities of the functioning of rhetorical questions were described by V.I. Gorelov, A.A. Kalinin, Yu.M. Skrebnev, S.T. Shabbat. Studies of rhetorical figures as a means of enhancing the expressiveness of the text were carried out by I.V. Arnold, N.D. Arutyunova, I.R. Galperin, M.I. Zhinkin, Yu.M. Skrebnev, J. Greenstead, Ch. Han, N. Quirk and D. Greenbaum.

Pragmatic features of rhetorical questions in Spanish have been studied by linguists J. Gutiérrez-Rexach, F. Martínez-Hill, A. Cortés, K. Elijah, J. Villalba, and others.

The paper is devoted to the study of semantic and pragmatic aspects of the rhetorical question, which are realized in Spanish texts of different genres. An overview of different interpretations of the concept of “rhetorical question” is analysed, the content of rhetorical questions in connection with the communicative purpose of the speaker is investigated. A new pragmatic resource related to the use of rhetorical question has been identified in connection with the modifications in the communicative strategy of the author of the statement. The aim of the research is to study the peculiarities of the functioning of rhetorical questions in communication and identify their pragmatic characteristics depending on the communicative strategy of the speaker.

There are many approaches to defining the concept of “rhetorical question”, but all researchers agree on the fact that this type of question does not provide a simple unambiguous answer. Thus, I.V. Arnold notes that the rhetorical question is used not to encourage the listener to report new information for the speaker, but to attract attention, enhance impressions, raise emotional tone, and add sublimity to the message. “The answer is already suggested in it, and the rhetorical question only engages the reader / listener in thoughts or experiences, making him more active, as if forcing himself to draw a conclusion” [63, p. 167].

The main signs of rhetorical questions are the emotional saturation of the statement and the lack of convincing informational response. Therefore, a rhetorical question is considered as “a figure of heightened emotionality, which expresses the statement in the form of a question, as well as a question aimed at an unspiritual object, an animal, an absent person; a question that does not provide an answer” [64, p.174]. At the same time, the *Academic Explanatory Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language* defines a rhetorical question as “one of the stylistic figures of poetic language, which consists in using a question that contains an affirmative answer such as *isn't it?*” [65]. According to O.S. Akhmanova, a rhetorical question is used to give an exclamatory form to an affirmative or negative statement to the purpose of attracting the attention

of the listener, and raising the emotional tone [66]. This interpretation originates from Charles Bally's view that a rhetorical question is "not a question at all, and it has nothing to do with rhetoric, but it is an indirect means of expression that symbolizes a more or less definite group of feelings and uses expressiveness" [67, p. 308].

Being a figure of speech that consists of asking a question that does not expect an answer, a rhetorical question could be:

- a) a very broad question that cannot be answered;
- b) a question that we ask ourselves;
- c) a question aimed at guiding the answer by accepting as obvious the statement formulated in the interrogative form.

Thus, the communicative direction of rhetorical questions is totally the opposite of the actual interrogative sentence, because they are not aimed at the implementation of information retrieval. These sentences are interrogative in structure, although they convey announcements, messages, like narrative sentences. Rhetorical questions are key figures of language that take an active part in the construction of discourse, forming its logical and semantic structure and determining the degree of intensity of expression.

Classic rhetorical questions have been known to mankind since antiquity. Rhetoric is best reflected in Cicero's speeches: *¿Hasta cuándo, Catilina, abusarás de nuestra paciencia? ¿Cuánto tiempo hemos de ser todavía juguete de tu furor? ¿Dónde se detendrán los arrebatos de tu desenfrenado atrevimiento?* [68].

Ch. Han argues that the rhetorical question "expresses the illocutionary force of a categorical statement about the opposite polarity of what is obviously being asked" [69]. That is, a rhetorical question in its affirmative form possesses the illocutionary force of a negative statement, and a rhetorical negative question has the illocutionary force of an affirmative statement. For example:

- (1) *¿Te he dicho que montar el negocio será fácil?*
- (2) *¿No te he dicho que montar el negocio será fácil?*

The rhetorical understanding of these questions is as follows: "I did not tell you that it would be easy to start a business" (1), and "I told you that it would be easy to start a business" (2).

Rhetorical questions are similar in form to the questions asked for confirmation; however, they differ significantly: the confirmation questions present an opinion or proposal that is relevant to the speaker. The latter wants to confirm or verify whether his assumptions are true. The communicative purpose of rhetorical questions is the opposite: they present suggestions that are desirable to the listener. The presented opinion or proposal is a prerequisite in the information perception of the speaker [69]. For example, in the following controversial question, the speaker knows that Antonio is coming to dinner, but expects confirmation of this fact from the addressee (the interlocutor being on the receiving side), who apparently has more information about it:

¿No viene Antonio a cenar con nosotros?

The above question will be successfully used as rhetorical in a situation where the speaker is sure that Antonio will come to dinner, but wants to make this fact relevant to the listener. Therefore, according to J. Gutiérrez-Rexach (1997), if the question is rhetorical, it makes no sense answering it [70]. However, the speaker's reaction is not always unambiguous. It is the unpredictability of the expression of the participants of the communicative act in real speech situations that suggests the possibility of answering rhetorical questions.

The purpose of rhetorical questions, in our opinion, is to create an effect of tension, because these language figures retain the external features of the real question, and therefore evoke the same emotions and communicative expectations. We believe that these emotions are able to change the reality of the listener, which functionally brings rhetorical questions to the means of language play that is able to "create and change reality" [71, p. 29].

The rhetorical question would be of no interest as an interrogative structure. It is an indirect means of expression which makes it possible to symbolize a more or less determined group of feelings by an inflection of the voice. Thus, the sentence "*¿Te vas a callar por fin?*" – "*Will you shut up at last?*" shows impatience.

From a linguistic and oratorical point of view, the rhetorical question would serve to punctuate and give rhythm to a speech in which the speaker gives the answer

directly after having formulated his question. In this case, the role of the rhetorical question is to articulate the discourse, to attract the attention of the interlocutor and to convince him or her. To the above mentioned purposes, rhetorical questions are abundantly used in everyday speech: *¿Será posible? Pero, ¿cómo es esto posible? No, pero ¿cómo estás? ¿No ves que estoy ocupado? ¿Vale la pena hablar? ¿Que sé yo? ¿Quién lo conoce mejor que yo? ¿Cómo te atreves? ¿Cómo puedes pensar tal cosa? ¿Habrás visto? ¿Cómo que no me coges el móvil? ¿Estás loco? ¿Por qué todas las desgracias me ocurren a mí? ¿Tengo monos en la cara? ¿Cuántos años pasarán hasta que por fin pueda olvidarla? ¿Cuántas veces tengo que decirte que no quiero vivir aquí? ¿Puedes hacer un poco de silencio? ¿Quién habría de leer semejante mediocridad? ¿Cuándo terminará este calvario? Entonces me pregunto, ¿por qué a mí? ¿Cuándo lo vas a entender? ¿Quién me creará? ¿Tiene sentido todo esto? ¿Cómo pudiste hacerme algo así?*

As it is possible to observe in the examples given above, the scope of rhetorical questions is wide. Such techniques are used by authors to give more emotional colour to a particular expression, and therefore they occur in different functional styles of speech: in fiction (epic, poetry and drama), journalism, oratory, religious sermons, advertising texts, in everyday conversations, etc.

In the national epic of the Spanish people, *The Poem of the Cid*, the question to the rogue infants remains unanswered and it is a rhetorical one because it reflects an emotional appeal, a reproach, an insult, and it is lyrical in its essence: “*Cuando las non queriedes, ya canes traidores, / ¿por qué las sacávades de Valencia, sus honores? / ¿A qué las firiestes a cinchas e a espolones?*” [72]. In Spanish romances (narrative ballads written in vernacular Spanish dialects as opposed to poems in Classical Latin) of the late fifteenth century, there are many reproachful questions similar to those found in *The Poem of the Cid*:

–*¡Hija infame! – ruge el conde.*

¿Qué haces con este señor?

¿Dónde has dejado mi honor?

¿Dónde?, ¿dónde?, ¿dónde?, ¿dónde? (El romance del Conde de Sisebuto) [73].

However, it is quite common to come across the situations where a question may be or may be not considered rhetorical, depending on whether the addressee answers it:

*¿Mataré yo a Gerineldo,
al que cual hijo he querido?
Si yo mataré la infanta,
¡mi reino tengo perdido!* (Romance de Gerineldo) [73].

Undoubtedly, the unanswered question is rhetorical if the author of the question did not give the addressee an opportunity to respond:

*Ellos en aquesto estando su marido hélo aquí:
– ¿Qué hacéis mala traidora?
¡Hoy habedes de morir!* (La bella mal maridada) [73].

For the rhetorical question to be implemented in its fullness, the situation, the circumstances are of vital importance: as soon as the interlocutor answers the question, the rhetorical essence of the question fades away despite it seemed obvious until recently:

*– ¿De quién es ese caballo
que en mi cuadra siento yo?
– Ese es tuyo, dueño mío,
mi padre te lo mandó,
pa' que vayas a cazar
a los montes de León.* (La esposa infiel) [73].

The answer to a difficult question in the above quoted poem means not only overcoming verbal aggression, but also the opportunity to save lives. It makes the reader think that through such “victories” the romance teaches us to resist the enemy verbally.

In a modern novel, in one of the dialogues, which reflects everyday communication, we come across a rhetorical question, the purpose of which is to convey the interlocutor's indignation or to offend the addressee:

Ocurrió que el camarero [...] al pasar junto a Manolo tropezó y volcó la taza de café sobre su traje nuevo. [...]

– *¡Animal! ¿Es que no guipas?* [74, p. 32].

Victims of verbal aggression expressed in the above way, as a rule, find it extremely difficult to answer insulting questions and find excuses:

¡Imbécil!, ¿dónde tienes la cabeza? [74, p. 10]

The emotionality of the speaker paralyzes the recipient, as well as the logic of the question:

¡Eh, usted, ¿no mira por dónde anda?! [74, c. 61]

Answering such a question directly is considered humiliating by the addressee, and formulating an original answer requires effort and time, which he does not have.

However, as we have already noted, in real speech situations it happens in certain cases that rhetorical questions are answered. The possibility of such answers creates a latent pragmatic resource that works only under certain circumstances. The phenomenon consists in the following: an unexpected, as a rule, answer to a rhetorical question can completely change the direction of communication.

It should be noted that the probability that one of the communicators will answer a rhetorical question is quite high and it is due to two natural features of the rhetorical question. Firstly, it is due to the fact that the “rhetorical nature” or “authenticity” of the question being asked in the dialogue is almost always situational. For example, here is a question that ceases to be rhetorical as soon as it is answered: “*¡Qué porquería has hecho! ¿Quién lo va a limpiar?*” – [“*¿Yo mismo lo voy a limpiar?*”]. Secondly, the answer to the obviously rhetorical question is typical of bold and ready-to-fight, communicators, since the answer itself allows for revenge: “*¿Qué has dicho? – Pichulita he dicho*” [75, p.15].

Thus, although the rhetorical question traditionally symbolizes conviction, irrevocability, fatality, doom or victory, verbal aggression, etc., and is the “edge question” that drives the adversary to a dead end, it is also used as a shield, as an island of solid ground underfoot, as a hook, holding on to which, the communicator can restart the whole dialogue.

Interestingly, in dialogic speech there are often situations when listeners sometimes answer a rhetorical question, but the question itself retains attributes of rhetorical nature. Thus, there is a need to find criteria for distinguishing between the actual questions *per se* and rhetorical questions to which the interlocutor answers. For example, in the Gospel of Luke, the owner of the vineyard asks the winemaker about the fig tree: “*¿Para qué inutiliza la tierra?*”, and receives the answer: “*Señor, déjala todavía este año, hasta que yo cave alrededor de ella, y la abone. Y si diere fruto, bien; y si no, la cortarás después*” (Lucas 13: 8-9) [76]. In essence, this remark is not an answer to the owner’s question. But if it is considered rhetorical, as if equivalent in content to the order: “Cut it down so that the tree should not occupy much land”, then the request of the vinedresser is a clear response to such an order. In this case, the answer of the interlocutor helps to determine whether the question is rhetorical, because the addressee does not answer the question itself, but he answers what was intended in it [77].

Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between different types of answers given by interlocutors to the author of the question. The answer to one’s question usually contains the information for which the question was asked, while the answer to the rhetorical question is only the audience’s response to what the speaker actually meant, i.e. his statement, his order, etc., which are expressed in the form of a rhetorical question.

Unlike “real” questions, the main purpose of rhetorical questions is to communicate information or to draw attention to it. Rhetorical questions are formulated without waiting for an answer, in order to reinforce or reaffirm one’s own point of view, while encouraging the listener to reflect on an issue or to adopt a change in their behaviour. The essence of rhetorical questions is that with their help the author or speaker notes, remarks, emphasizes, stresses, underscores or highlights something.

An answer to the rhetorical question is also possible. We consider it an additional pragmatic resource that can change the communication strategy of one or more interlocutors. This resource works only in dialogue texts, which make it possible to be discovered. Monologue texts, such as official speeches, do not allow answers to

rhetorical questions. The traditional perception of rhetorical questions explains the previous lack of scientific interest in possible answers to it. Globalization processes involving the contamination of language cultures, democratization of speech, expansion of speech norms, acceleration of communication and increasing the frequency of communicative deviations can modify language communication processes. Further research should address these dynamics and characterize the functioning of certain elements of the communication code.