FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGE UNITS FROM A COMMUNICATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Abdullayeva Gulxayo Ulugbekovna

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

gulhayo.abdullayeva.28@gmail.com

Abstract

Language is a complex system of interconnected units that serve different purposes in human communication. Traditionally, linguistic units have been classified according to their structural characteristics and hierarchical organization. However, the study of language cannot be limited to its formal structure, since linguistic elements also perform various functions in the process of communication. This paper examines the theoretical foundations of the functional classification of language units from a communicative perspective. Particular attention is paid to the contributions of Karl Bühler, Roman Jakobson and M. A. K. Halliday, whose approaches demonstrate the relationship between linguistic forms and their communicative functions. The paper also considers the significance of semantic and pragmatic factors in interpreting linguistic expressions, drawing on illustrative examples from English and Uzbek. It argues that a functional perspective provides a broader understanding of linguistic units by examining not only their structural properties but also their roles in conveying information, expressing attitudes and establishing relationships between communication participants.

Keywords: linguistic units, functional linguistics, communication, linguistic classification, communicative functions, semantics, pragmatics.

1. Introduction

Language represents one of the fundamental means through which human beings exchange information, express their thoughts and establish social

relationships. As a complex and systematically organized phenomenon, it consists of various linguistic units that interact with one another at different levels. These units, including phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases and sentences, constitute the structural foundation of language and enable speakers to produce meaningful utterances.

In traditional linguistic studies, language units have predominantly been examined in terms of their formal characteristics, structural organization and relationships within the linguistic system. Such approaches have contributed significantly to identifying the hierarchical organization of language and establishing the principles according to which its constituent element's function. Nevertheless, the structural description of linguistic units does not always provide a comprehensive explanation of their role in actual communication. The same linguistic expression may convey different meanings or intentions depending on the communicative situation, the relationship between speakers and listeners, and the context in which it is used.

Consequently, the functional approach to language has become an important direction in modern linguistic research. Unlike approaches that primarily concentrate on the formal organization of linguistic structures, functional linguistics investigates how linguistic resources are employed to fulfil particular communicative purposes. From this perspective, linguistic units are not merely components of an abstract system but also instruments through which individuals represent reality, express personal attitudes, influence others and organize interpersonal interaction.

The theoretical foundations of this approach can be traced to the works of several prominent linguists. Karl Bühler's Organon Model, Roman Jakobson's theory of language functions and M. A. K. Halliday's functional theory of language offer different but complementary perspectives on the relationship between linguistic structure and communication.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the theoretical foundations of the functional classification of language units from a communicative perspective and to identify the significance of functional, semantic and pragmatic criteria in linguistic analysis. To achieve this purpose, the paper considers major theoretical approaches to language functions and illustrates their relevance through selected examples from English and Uzbek.

2. Theoretical Approaches to the Classification of Language Units

The classification of linguistic units has traditionally been associated with the structural organization of language. Within structural linguistics, language is regarded as a system consisting of interconnected elements whose characteristics are determined partly by their relationships with other elements.

Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding language as a structured system. In his work *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), Saussure distinguishes between language as a socially established system of signs and its individual realization in speech. This distinction subsequently influenced structural approaches to linguistic analysis and the investigation of language units as elements of an organized system.

From a structural perspective, linguistic units can be classified according to their hierarchical organization. Phonemes constitute the sound system of a language, morphemes function as its smallest meaningful morphological elements, words represent lexical units, while phrases and sentences participate in the organization of larger grammatical structures. Each level has its own characteristics and principles of organization.

However, the classification of linguistic units according to their structural properties represents only one dimension of linguistic analysis. In actual communication, the significance of a linguistic unit is also determined by the function it performs in a particular situation. This consideration encouraged the

development of functional approaches, which shifted attention from the formal organization of language towards its communicative potential.

An important contribution to this theoretical development was made by Karl Bühler. In his work *Theory of Language: The Representational Function of Language* (1934), Bühler introduced the Organon Model, according to which language is viewed as an instrument of communication involving three fundamental components: the speaker, the listener and the objects or states of affairs being discussed. Correspondingly, he identified three major functions of the linguistic sign: representation, expression and appeal.

The representational function concerns the relationship between linguistic signs and the objects or situations they refer to. The expressive function reflects the speaker's internal state, attitudes and emotions, whereas the appellative function is oriented towards the listener and aims to influence their response or behavior. These functions demonstrate that linguistic expressions can be analyzed not only in terms of their semantic content but also according to their communicative orientation.

Roman Jakobson further developed the functional interpretation of language in his influential article *Linguistics and Poetics* (1960). He proposed a model of verbal communication consisting of six constitutive factors: addresser, addressee, context, message, contact and code. Each factor corresponds to a particular function of language: emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic and metalingual, respectively.

Jakobson's model provides a broader understanding of how linguistic expressions participate in communication. For instance, the utterance "Could you open the window, please?" primarily demonstrates the conative function because it is directed towards the addressee and seeks to elicit a particular response. In contrast, "It is getting colder outside" primarily performs a referential function by conveying information about a particular situation.

Nevertheless, the dominant function of an utterance does not exclude the simultaneous presence of other functions.

Another significant contribution to functional linguistics is associated with M. A. K. Halliday. In his chapter "Language Structure and Language Function" (1970), Halliday examines the relationship between the organization of language and the functions it performs in human interaction. His approach emphasizes that linguistic structures should be interpreted in relation to the purposes they serve within particular social contexts.

Halliday's systemic functional theory identifies three meta functions of language: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational meta function enables speakers to represent their experiences and the world around them; the interpersonal meta function establishes and maintains social relationships between communication participants; and the textual meta function organizes linguistic resources into coherent and meaningful messages.

These theoretical perspectives indicate that the classification of linguistic phenomena can be approached from different but interconnected dimensions. Structural classification explains how linguistic units are organized within a language system, whereas functional classification focuses on the purposes they fulfil in communication. Consequently, the functional perspective complements structural analysis by taking into account the communicative circumstances in which linguistic forms are employed.

3. Functional and Communicative Characteristics of Language Units: Evidence from English and Uzbek

The communicative functions of linguistic units become particularly evident when their use is examined in different contexts. A linguistic form does not necessarily perform an identical function in every situation; its interpretation may depend on the speaker's intention, the addressee's expectations, the relationship between communication participants and the broader communicative environment. Therefore, the functional analysis of linguistic

units requires consideration of both their linguistic properties and the pragmatic circumstances in which they are employed.

One of the most illustrative manifestations of this phenomenon is the relationship between the grammatical form of an utterance and its communicative intention. For instance, the Uzbek expression *Eshikni yop* (Close the door) represents a direct directive construction in which the linguistic form corresponds relatively closely to the speaker's intention. However, the same intention can be communicated through less direct expressions, such as *Eshik ochiq qolibdimi?* (Has the door been left open?) or *Yelvizak juda yomon-da* (The draught is really unpleasant). Although these expressions have the grammatical form of a question and a statement, respectively, they may function as indirect requests depending on the communicative situation.

Turniyazov (2020, p. 153) examines this relationship through several Uzbek constructions, including *Sizga eshikdan shamol kelayotgandek tuyulmayaptimi?* (Don't you feel a draught coming through the door?) and *Nega eshikni ochib qo'ydingiz?* (Why did you leave the door open?). In these examples, the literal semantic content differs from the intended communicative purpose. The speaker does not necessarily seek information about the open door; rather, the utterance may indirectly encourage the addressee to close it. Such cases demonstrate that the communicative function of an expression cannot always be established solely through its grammatical structure or literal meaning.

This phenomenon can also be interpreted through the theoretical framework of speech act theory. Austin (1962) distinguishes between the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions of speech acts. From this perspective, the locutionary meaning of an utterance concerns what is literally expressed, whereas its illocutionary force relates to the communicative act performed by the speaker. The perlocutionary dimension, in turn, concerns the effect produced on the addressee. Consequently, an utterance such as *Eshik ochiq*

qolibdimi? may function as a question at the locutionary level while performing an indirect request at the illocutionary level and producing the action of closing the door at the perlocutionary level.

Another important dimension of functional classification concerns the expression of emotions, attitudes and interpersonal relationships. Linguistic units are frequently employed not only to communicate factual information but also to express the speaker's emotional state and regulate social interaction. This can be illustrated by Uzbek expressions of apology and politeness.

In a study of pragmatic interpretation in English and Uzbek, Izbosarova (2024, p. 225) reports expressions such as *uzr* (sorry), *mendan o'tgan bo'lsa* (if I have done something wrong), *boshqa qaytarilmaydi* (it will not happen again) and *xafa bo'lmang* (please do not be upset). These expressions demonstrate different ways of performing apologetic and interpersonal functions. While *uzr* directly signals an apology, *mendan o'tgan bo'lsa* adopts a more mitigated formulation, and *boshqa qaytarilmaydi* emphasizes the speaker's commitment not to repeat the action.

The functional significance of these expressions becomes clearer when they are examined in relation to the participants and circumstances of communication. For example, the selection of a particular apologetic construction may depend on the seriousness of the situation, the degree of familiarity between interlocutors and the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee. Thus, linguistic units contribute not only to the transmission of semantic content but also to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relations.

Emotional and expressive functions can also be realized through interjections and phonological modifications. Izbosarova (2024, p. 225) refers to Uzbek interjections such as *voy* and *oy*, as well as their elongated written forms, including *voooy* and *vuuuy*. In informal digital communication, such modifications may intensify emotional expression and communicate attitudes that are not fully conveyed through lexical meaning alone. This illustrates how

even relatively small linguistic elements can acquire considerable communicative significance depending on their context of use.

The relationship between linguistic form and communicative function can further be observed in English interrogative constructions. For instance, the expression "Can you pass me the book?" is grammatically structured as an interrogative sentence. Nevertheless, in ordinary conversation, it generally functions as a polite request rather than a question concerning the addressee's physical ability. A comparable distinction can be observed in Uzbek constructions such as *Kitobni uzatib yubora olasizmi?* (Could you pass me the book?). In both cases, interrogative forms serve an interpersonal and directive purpose.

The examples discussed above indicate that the functional classification of linguistic units should take into consideration several interconnected dimensions, including structural form, semantic content, communicative intention and contextual interpretation. Although English and Uzbek employ different linguistic resources, both languages demonstrate the ability of linguistic expressions to perform multiple communicative functions. Therefore, analyzing linguistic units from a functional perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of their role in human interaction.

4. The Significance of Functional Criteria in Linguistic Analysis

The functional approach has important implications for the classification and analysis of linguistic phenomena. First, it allows researchers to examine language units in relation to their actual use rather than treating them exclusively as abstract structural elements. This makes it possible to identify similarities and differences between linguistic forms that may perform comparable or contrasting communicative functions.

Second, functional analysis provides an opportunity to investigate the relationship between linguistic meaning and communicative intention. A particular expression may convey information, establish interpersonal contact,

express an emotional attitude or influence the behavior of an addressee. Consequently, its classification may require consideration of several interacting criteria rather than a single formal characteristic.

Third, the communicative perspective is particularly relevant to comparative linguistic research. Although English and Uzbek differ in their grammatical structures and linguistic resources, speakers of both languages employ various means to communicate information, express attitudes and establish interpersonal relationships. Comparing such means can reveal both universal communicative tendencies and language-specific patterns.

It should also be emphasized that functional classification does not replace structural or semantic classification. Rather, it complements these approaches by introducing an additional dimension of linguistic analysis. A comprehensive examination of language units therefore requires attention to their formal organization, semantic characteristics and communicative functions.

5. Conclusion

The examination of language units from a communicative perspective demonstrates that linguistic classification should not be restricted to structural and formal criteria. Although the hierarchical organization of language provides the foundation for understanding its constituent elements, the communicative functions of these elements represent an equally important dimension of linguistic analysis.

The theoretical contributions of Karl Bühler, Roman Jakobson and M. A. K. Halliday demonstrate that language performs multiple functions associated with the transmission of information, the expression of attitudes, the establishment of interpersonal relationships and the organization of meaningful messages. Their approaches provide a theoretical basis for examining linguistic phenomena in relation to the purposes they serve in communication.

Furthermore, the examples from English and Uzbek illustrate that the communicative interpretation of linguistic expressions is influenced not only by

their conventional meanings and grammatical structures but also by contextual and pragmatic factors.

Thus, the functional classification of language units offers a broader analytical perspective by integrating structural, semantic and communicative dimensions of language. Such an approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how linguistic resources operate in human interaction and provides a theoretical basis for further comparative and functional linguistic research.

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