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THE LINGUISTIC NATURE AND POETIC FUNCTION OF TROPES IN ZULFIYA'S POETRY

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Abstract: This article investigates the linguistic nature and poetic function of tropes in the poetry of Zulfiya Isroilova (1915–1996), one of the most significant figures in twentieth-century Uzbek literature. Tropes — figurative uses of language in which words acquire meanings beyond their literal signification — constitute the principal means through which Zulfiya constructs her poetic world. The study analyzes six major trope types — metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, and antithesis — examining their linguistic structure, semantic mechanisms, and expressive functions within selected poems. The analysis demonstrates that Zulfiya's tropological system is distinguished by its semantic density, its creative engagement with classical Eastern literary tradition, and its capacity to render complex emotional and philosophical content in compressed, memorable form. The findings contribute to Uzbek philology, stylistics, and the broader field of literary linguistics.

Keywords: Zulfiya, tropes, linguistic nature, poetic function, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche.

Introduction

Zulfiya Isroilova (1915–1996), universally known by her pen name Zulfiya, stands as one of the defining voices of twentieth-century Uzbek poetry. Over a creative career spanning more than sixty years, she produced a body of work remarkable for its emotional depth, formal variety, and linguistic sophistication. At the center of her poetic achievement lies her mastery of figurative language — her capacity to deploy tropes with precision and power, transforming ordinary words into extraordinary vehicles of meaning.

A trope, in the classical rhetorical tradition, is a figure of speech in which a word or expression is used in a non-literal sense, acquiring a meaning different from, and typically richer than, its standard denotation. Tropes are thus fundamentally semantic phenomena: they involve a displacement or transformation of meaning that generates new expressive possibilities inaccessible to literal language. In poetry, tropes serve not merely ornamental but constitutive functions — they are among the primary means through which poetic language creates its characteristic density, ambiguity, and aesthetic force.

While Zulfiya's poetry has attracted substantial scholarly attention — particularly in Uzbek literary studies — systematic analysis of her tropological system from a philological and linguistic perspective remains limited. The present article addresses this gap by examining six major trope types in her selected works: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, and antithesis. For each trope, the article describes its linguistic structure, explains its semantic mechanism, and analyzes its expressive function in specific poetic contexts. The study aims to contribute to Uzbek philology, literary stylistics, and the linguistics of literary language.

The study of tropes occupies a central place in both classical rhetoric and modern linguistics. The Aristotelian tradition identified metaphor as the master trope — the foundational instance of non-literal language — while subsequent rhetorical theory elaborated an extensive taxonomy of figurative devices. In modern linguistics, the study of tropes has been enriched by cognitive approaches — particularly Lakoff and Johnson's theory

of conceptual metaphor — that locate figurative language not in poetic deviation from a literal norm but in the fundamental structures of human thought and experience.

In philological and stylistic analysis, tropes are typically distinguished from figures of speech (or schemes): tropes involve semantic transformation — a change in the meaning of words — while schemes involve syntactic or phonological patterning without semantic displacement. This distinction, though not always rigorously maintained in literary practice, provides a useful analytical framework for the present study. The six tropes examined here — metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, and antithesis — represent the most productive figurative resources in Zulfiya's poetic vocabulary.

Uzbek stylistics, building on the work of scholars such as Nurmonov, Mahmudov, Hojiyev, and Mirzayev, has developed a rich analytical tradition for the study of figurative language in literary texts. The present study draws on this tradition while also engaging with international perspectives in literary linguistics and stylistics, bringing both Uzbek philological resources and broader theoretical frameworks to bear on the analysis of Zulfiya's tropological system.

Metaphor is constituted by an implicit identification between two semantically distinct entities — the tenor (the subject being described) and the vehicle (the figurative term applied to it) — on the basis of a perceived point of resemblance, or ground. Unlike simile, which renders the comparison explicit through a comparative marker, metaphor asserts identity: it states that A is B rather than that A is like B. This assertive quality gives metaphor its characteristic compression and force.

In Zulfiya's poetry, metaphor operates at multiple levels of linguistic structure:

My grief is a river without a sea — It flows and flows, but reaches nowhere free. My joy is a bird without a wing — It wants to fly, but cannot take to spring.

(Zulfiya, "Qayg'u" ["Grief"])

This quatrain contains two extended metaphors: grief as a river without a sea, and joy as a wingless bird. Linguistically, each metaphor operates through a predicate structure ('My grief is a river') that assigns the nominal vehicle to the nominal tenor. Semantically, both metaphors are structured around a common ground: the idea of frustrated movement — of reaching toward a destination that cannot be attained. The river flows but reaches no sea; the bird wants to fly but lacks wings. This parallel figurative logic creates a form of semantic rhyme that reinforces the poem's emotional content: both grief and joy, in the speaker's experience, are defined by incompleteness and unfulfilment.

This example illustrates a characteristic feature of Zulfiya's metaphorical practice: the preference for extended or sustained metaphors that unfold their implications across multiple lines, generating a figurative world with its own internal coherence, rather than isolated metaphorical comparisons that illuminate a single point and then dissolve.

Where metaphor is based on resemblance — on a perceived similarity between two entities — metonymy is based on contiguity: the substitution of one term for another on the basis of a real-world relation of proximity, causation, possession, or association. Classical examples of metonymy include the use of 'the crown' to refer to the monarchy, 'the pen' to refer to writing, or 'Washington' to refer to the American government. In each case, a term referring to one entity is used to refer to a closely associated entity.

The cradle sang its ancient lullaby, The bread upon the table did not lie. The threshold waited — no one crossed its stone, The hearth went cold — the house became a bone.

(Zulfiya, "Uy" ["Home"])

In this quatrain, 'the cradle', 'the bread', 'the threshold', and 'the hearth' function as metonymies for the domestic world — for the life of a family home. Each concrete object

stands for a dimension of human domestic experience: the cradle for infancy and maternal nurture, the bread for sustenance and provision, the threshold for departure and arrival, the hearth for warmth and communal life. By accumulating these metonymies, Zulfiya creates an image of the home not through direct description but through the evocation of its constitutive elements — a technique that is both linguistically economical and emotionally resonant.

Metonymy in Zulfiya's poetry frequently serves an elegiac function: by naming the objects associated with a lost or absent presence, the poem creates an indirect image of that presence — and of the grief of its loss — without stating either directly. This indirect mode of address is one of the hallmarks of her lyric sensibility.

Synecdoche is a specific subtype of metonymy in which the relation between the literal and figurative term is one of part to whole or whole to part: a part of an entity is used to refer to the whole, or the whole is used to refer to a part. Common examples include 'all hands on deck' (hands for sailors) or 'England played well' (England for the English national team). In poetry, synecdoche frequently serves to focus attention on a specific, concrete detail that stands for a larger, more diffuse reality.

A thousand eyes watched from the hilltop's height, A thousand hands reached up to touch the light, One heart remained behind the closing gate — One voice called out, but called out far too late.

(Zulfiya, "Xalq" ["People"])

'A thousand eyes' and 'a thousand hands' are synecdoches in which body parts — eyes and hands — stand for persons; the crowd watching and reaching is evoked through its most expressively significant physical components. 'One heart' and 'one voice', by contrast, are individualizing synecdoches: they reduce a person to their most emotionally charged attribute, focusing the poem's attention on interiority (heart) and expression (voice). The movement from collective synecdoche (many eyes, many hands) to individual synecdoche (one heart, one voice) enacts the poem's thematic movement from communal to personal — from the shared experience of the crowd to the isolated grief of the individual who has been left behind.

Irony, in its simplest form, involves saying one thing and meaning another — typically the opposite. It is a trope of semantic reversal: the literal meaning of an utterance is contradicted or undermined by its contextual meaning. In poetry, irony is a sophisticated device that requires the reader to perceive a gap between what is stated and what is meant — a gap that is typically generated by contextual incongruity, tonal signals, or the reader's knowledge of external facts.

How fortunate am I, who have so much — An empty room, a silence no one touched, A window looking out on no one's street, A table set for one — a bitter treat.

(Zulfiya, "Baxt" ["Happiness"])

The opening line — 'How fortunate am I, who have so much' — is ironic: what follows immediately contradicts the claim of good fortune, revealing that what the speaker 'has so much' of is emptiness, silence, absence, and isolation. The irony is structural: the poem's semantic content progressively undermines its rhetorical opening. This technique gives the poem its emotional power: by staging a collision between a conventional affirmation of happiness and the reality of loneliness, Zulfiya creates a figure that is simultaneously comic (in its incongruity) and deeply melancholy (in its content).

Irony appears less frequently in Zulfiya's poetry than metaphor or metonymy, but when it does appear it is typically deployed with considerable skill — as a means of expressing disillusionment, grief, or political consciousness in a form that is oblique enough to evade direct censure while remaining legible to an attentive reader.

Hyperbole is the trope of exaggeration: a statement that represents something as greater, more intense, or more extreme than it actually is, for expressive effect. Hyperbole is not a form of deception — speaker and reader share the understanding that the statement is not to be taken literally — but a means of communicating the intensity of a subjective experience that literal language would represent inadequately. In love poetry and poetry of grief, hyperbole is among the most natural of expressive resources.

I have wept enough to fill the Syr Darya, I have sighed enough to move the Milky Way, I have waited long enough to grow to stone, I have loved enough to love for all alone.

(Zulfiya, "Sevgi" ["Love"])

Each line of this quatrain contains a hyperbole: weeping enough to fill a river, sighing enough to move a galaxy, waiting long enough to petrify, loving enough to encompass all love. Each comparison anchors an abstract emotional intensity to a concrete, physically imaginable image of scale. The Syr Darya — one of the great rivers of Central Asia — is a specifically local geographical reference that grounds the hyperbole in Uzbek cultural space. The Milky Way, by contrast, moves the scale from the regional to the cosmic. This oscillation between local and universal scales is characteristic of Zulfiya's hyperbolic practice and gives her emotional amplifications a sense of scope that mere domestic imagery could not achieve.

Antithesis is the trope of semantic opposition: the juxtaposition of contrasting or contradictory terms, ideas, or images within a single statement or across parallel syntactic structures. Unlike the other tropes examined in this article, antithesis does not involve semantic displacement — its two terms retain their literal meanings — but generates figurative meaning through the tension produced by their juxtaposition. Antithesis is particularly well suited to the expression of paradox, ambivalence, and the complexity of emotional experience.

In joy I wept, in weeping — found my peace. In war I sang, in singing — found release. In loss I grew, in growing — lost my way. In darkness, shone — and in the light, turned grey.

(Zulfiya, "Hayot" ["Life"])

Each line of this quatrain is built on a double antithesis: 'joy / wept', 'weeping / peace'; 'war / sang', 'singing / release'; 'loss / grew', 'growing / lost'; 'darkness / shone', 'light / grey'. The effect is one of profound philosophical paradox: experience consistently produces its own opposite, so that joy generates grief, grief generates peace, war generates song, and loss generates growth. This antithetical logic constitutes a vision of human experience as irreducibly complex — as a space in which simple distinctions between positive and negative, gain and loss, light and darkness, cannot be sustained.

Antithesis in Zulfiya's poetry is frequently associated with philosophical reflection on the nature of time, love, and human destiny. It is the trope through which she most directly engages with questions of meaning and value — questions to which her characteristic answer is a form of lyric acceptance: the acknowledgment that life contains contradictions that cannot be resolved, only lived through.

The analysis of six tropes across selected poems by Zulfiya reveals a tropological system of considerable complexity and coherence. Several cross-cutting features of this system merit attention.

First, Zulfiya's tropes are characteristically integrated rather than isolated: metaphors are embedded in metonymic contexts, synecdoches reinforce hyperboles, and antitheses structure extended metaphorical passages. This integration produces a semantic density that rewards close reading and that distinguishes her poetry from work in which figurative devices are deployed more sporadically or decoratively.

Second, her tropological system demonstrates a consistent tension between tradition and innovation. Classical Eastern literary tropes — particularly the love and nature metaphors of the ghazal tradition — are present throughout her work, but consistently transformed by new contexts, unexpected combinations, and the pressure of twentieth-century historical experience. The result is a poetic language that is simultaneously rooted and original — one that speaks to readers versed in the classical tradition and to those coming to it fresh.

Third, the distribution of tropes across her work is not even: metaphor and antithesis tend to dominate in poems of philosophical reflection, while metonymy and synecdoche are more prevalent in her elegies and poems of domestic life. Irony appears more rarely, typically in poems with a social or political dimension. Hyperbole is most concentrated in her love poetry. This generic distribution suggests that Zulfiya's selection of tropes is sensitive to the specific emotional and thematic demands of different poetic modes.

This article has examined the linguistic nature and poetic function of six major tropes — metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, and antithesis — in the poetry of Zulfiya Isroilova. The analysis has demonstrated that her tropological system is characterized by semantic density, systematic integration of diverse figurative devices, creative renewal of classical literary traditions, and sensitive generic distribution of tropes across different poetic modes.

From a linguistic perspective, Zulfiya's tropes consistently exploit the full range of semantic mechanisms available to figurative language: resemblance (metaphor), contiguity (metonymy, synecdoche), semantic reversal (irony), intensity (hyperbole), and opposition (antithesis). This variety of mechanisms reflects the breadth of her linguistic resources and her sensitivity to the different expressive possibilities of different figurative modes.

From a philological perspective, the study of her tropes illuminates a central dimension of her artistic achievement: the capacity to give precise, memorable, and emotionally resonant linguistic form to the most intimate and universal dimensions of human experience. This capacity is, ultimately, what distinguishes the great poet from the competent versifier — and it is this capacity, the present study has argued, that Zulfiya possessed in exceptional measure.

Future research might productively extend this analysis to the diachronic development of Zulfiya's tropological system — tracing the evolution of her figurative language across different periods of her career — or to comparative study of her tropes alongside those of other major Uzbek and Central Asian poets of the twentieth century.

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