

Linguopoetic Features of Verse Structure and Rhyme in the Nurota Variant of the Epic *Alpomish*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the linguopoetic features of verse structure, rhyme, rhythm, sound repetition, and syntactic parallelism in the Nurota variant of the Uzbek heroic epic Alpomish. Particular attention is paid to the aesthetic, communicative, and performative functions of poetic devices in oral epic performance. The analysis shows that rhyme and rhythm contribute to narrative continuity, the representation of characters' emotional states, and the maintenance of audience attention, while recurrent units, formulaic expressions, alliteration, assonance, and syntactic parallelism organize the text at phonetic, grammatical, and semantic levels. The study further demonstrates that the Nurota tradition combines conventional epic formulas with the individual performance style and local linguistic features of the baxshi. These findings support an understanding of the Nurota variant not merely as a folklore text but as a distinctive linguopoetic system shaped by the interaction of language, poetic structure, and oral performance.

Keywords: *Alpomish*, Nurota variant, baxshi, language of the epic, linguopoetics, verse structure, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, repetition, syntactic parallelism

INTRODUCTION

As one of the major genres of Uzbek oral folklore, the doston is a complex artistic phenomenon that embodies the historical

memory, worldview, aesthetic thought, and expressive resources of the national language. Unlike written literature, the text of a doston takes shape in the process of oral performance and is transmitted from generation to generation by baxshis. For this reason, its poetic organization is closely connected not only with content and plot, but also with the phonetic, lexical, morphological, and syntactic resources of language.

Alpomish is one of the most important examples of Uzbek folk epic tradition, and its variants formed in different regions possess distinctive linguistic and poetic features. In particular, variants performed by representatives of the Nurota School of epic performance display local features of baxshi speech, traditional epic formulas, a distinctive rhyme system, repetitions, and rhythmic constructions. Rhyme and rhythm are of particular importance in the linguistic study of epic language because, in oral performance, poetic form is an essential means of conveying content to the listener. Rhyme not only connects lines with one another but also ensures their rhythmic integrity, while sound repetition strengthens the musicality of the epic.

From this perspective, a linguopoetic study of the verse structure of the Nurota variant of *Alpomish* is of considerable scholarly importance for identifying the artistic potential of the language of the epic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employs linguopoetic, comparative-analytical, descriptive, contextual, and structural methods of analysis. Poetic units in the epic text are examined at the phonetic, lexical, morphological, and syntactic levels. Principles of folklore studies and linguopoetics provide the basis for identifying the functional features of rhyme and rhythm in baxshi performance.

The analysis considers not only the formal characteristics of poetic units but also their functions in creating images, advancing the narrative, intensifying emotional expressiveness, and facilitating oral performance.

In the Nurota variant of *Alpomish*, poetic speech is organized according to a particular rhythmic and syntactic order. The

harmony among lines, the recurrence of syllabic patterns, and the sequence of rhyming units contribute to the musicality of the epic.

For the *baxshi*, verse structure functions as a ready-made poetic framework during oral performance. Such frameworks help the performer remember events and narrate them coherently. In this sense, rhythm in epic poetry may be regarded not only as an aesthetic phenomenon but also as one of the mechanisms through which the epic text is created and preserved.

The repetition of identical syntactic constructions in epics is also an important linguopoetic device (Yo'ldoshev 1982). For example, the use of verbs in the same grammatical form in consecutive lines intensifies the dynamics of events. The successive expression of actions enables the hero's activity to be portrayed rapidly and vividly.

Rhyme provides a phonetic connection between lines and reinforces the rhythmic integrity of poetic speech (Shomaqsudov et al. 1983). It is one of the major structural units in the poetic system of the epic. By linking lines phonetically, it creates in the listener a sense of rhythmic unity.

In the language of the *Nurota* variant, rhyme is often formed through words that are grammatically identical or similar in form. The rhyming use of verb forms is especially common in epic poetics. In such cases, rhyme is based not only on sound correspondence but also on grammatical parallelism.

For example, when several lines end with the same verb form, the sequence of events is emphasized. As a result, grammatical form also performs a poetic function.

Another important feature of rhyme is its semantic function. Words placed in rhyming positions often complement one another semantically or are set in opposition. Rhyme therefore also functions as one of the devices that organize meaning in the epic text.

The rhythmic structure of the epic is directly connected with *baxshi* performance. Certain repetitions that may appear ordinary in written form acquire a special musical quality in oral performance. The *baxshi* uses the rhythmic organization of the lines to present events dramatically.

Rhythm is especially prominent in depictions of dynamic events such as battle, journeys, pursuit, and mounting for departure. In such passages, short syntactic units and successive verb forms convey the speed of action.

By contrast, in passages depicting the characters' psychological states, separation, longing, or suffering, repetitions and extended syntactic constructions may heighten emotional impact. Thus, rhythm is not a purely formal phenomenon detached from the content of the epic; rather, it is a linguistic means of expressing that content.

The repeated use of sounds in the Nurota variant of "Alpomish" likewise strengthens poetic expressiveness. The recurrence of identical consonants produces alliteration, while the harmonious repetition of vowel sounds produces assonance (Qo'ng'urov 1977: 45).

Alliteration can create particularly strong expressiveness in passages describing battle or tense situations, whereas vowel repetition contributes to the musicality of the lines. Such phonetic devices become even more evident in baxshi performance. In a written text, the aesthetic quality of sound repetition is perceived visually, whereas in oral performance it is heard directly by the listener. Therefore, the relationship between text and performance must be considered together when studying the phonostylistic features of epic language.

Repetition is among the most active artistic devices in oral epic performance. Lexical, syntactic, and semantic repetitions contribute to the compositional integrity of the epic.

Repetition performs several functions in baxshi performance:

- it strengthens the connection between events;
- it directs the listener's attention to an important semantic point;
- it ensures rhythmic continuity;
- it helps the baxshi formulate the next line or episode during performance.

Epic formulas are also an integral part of this system. They shape the traditional poetic language of the epic and provide a link

between the baxshi's individual performance and the broader folk epic tradition.

Syntactic parallelism is another important linguopoetic device in epic language. The consecutive repetition of the same syntactic model strengthens the continuity of events. For example, the repetition across several lines of structures such as subject + object + predicate or adverbial modifier + predicate creates rhythmic expectation in the listener. This, in turn, enhances the naturalness and expressiveness of oral performance.

Syntactic parallelism is particularly effective in expressing a hero's actions in succession. At the same time, it can also be used to compare contrasting images or states.

One of the important features of the Nurota school of epic performance is the combination of traditional epic poetics with the individual creative skill of the baxshi. While using established epic formulas, the baxshi reinterprets them in accordance with an individual performance style, local linguistic features, and poetic possibilities.

From this perspective, the study of linguistic units in the Nurota variant makes it possible to identify two important layers: first, poetic units characteristic of the common folk epic tradition; and second, individual linguistic features associated with a particular baxshi and region.

This also helps explain why variants of the same epic differ from one another. The plot and characters may be shared, but their forms of expression, rhyming, repetitions, lexical choices, and syntactic organization vary from one baxshi to another.

Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, systematic scholarly recording, collection, publication, and study of the epic *Alpomish* was undertaken. Selecting a comprehensive and accomplished example from among the many variants and presenting it again to the public requires considerable knowledge and expertise on the part of an editor. Although theoretical work in this area was limited, extensive practical work was carried out. Epics and other folklore materials recorded from Fozil Yo'ldosh o'g'li, Ergash Jumanbulbul o'g'li, Po'lkan Shoir, Islom Shoir, Rahmatulla Yusuf o'g'li, and many other baxshis were published in book form and made available to a broad readership.

VERSE STRUCTURE AND POETIC SYSTEMS

Verse structure is a method of organizing the duration, rhythm, and musicality of poetic speech; it is a literary and artistic device. Speech expressed in verse – that is, poetic speech – differs from prose because it is governed by the principles of verse organization and adheres consistently to those principles. Verse structure constitutes a distinctive and complex system because numerous ideological and artistic elements participate in the creation of a poem. These include theme, idea, stanza, refrain, rhythm, meter, rhyme, intonation, pause, stress, poetic imagery, phonetic devices, figures of speech, plot, image, composition, conflict, and other elements, whose integration into a coherent system produces the poem. These aspects of verse structure may conventionally be divided into two groups: elements of content and elements of form. Within the fabric of a poem, however, these elements are closely interconnected and cannot be completely separated. One element may pass into another and vice versa; in some cases, a single element may serve both content and form, as in the case of the image. In poetry, content and form therefore exist as an integrated whole. Five formal elements are particularly important in verse structure: meter, rhyme, stanza, repetition (*takrir*), and paronomastic wordplay (*tajnis*). These features may also occur in prose, but they are not regularly present there.

Meter denotes the measure or norm of a poem and is one of the principal features distinguishing poetic speech from prose. Meter may also occur in rhymed prose (*saj'*) and in extended forms of *aruz*. Rhyme is the systematic occurrence of words with corresponding sounds in poetic lines, couplets, or stanzas. It is also used in works composed in *saj'* and related forms.

A stanza is a rhythmic unit of a poem with its own pattern of rhyme. It consists of lines linked by rhyme and intonation and repeated according to a particular order. Meter and stanza can be represented independently of linguistic material through various tables and symbols. Rhyme, repetition (*takrir*), and *tajnis*, however, can be manifested only through linguistic material. Verse structure develops in close relationship with historical

development, the style of an era, and cultural and literary traditions. A single system of verse may contain the possibilities of different poetic systems, which can be realized successively through historical development. The syllable lies at the foundation of meter in every verse system, although the character of each system depends on which property of the syllable it employs.

The syllabic system, including the Uzbek barmoq system, is based on the number of syllables; the tonic system is based on stress; the syllabo-tonic system is based on the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables; and aruz is based on syllabic quantity, that is, the distinction between long and short syllables. Scholars of versification identify the following stages and systems in the history of Uzbek verse structure:

1. The folklore-type period of Turkic, particularly Uzbek, verse structure. This system relied on syntactic parallelism. Initially, lines were not equal in syllable count; they were organized by poetic alliteration, sound devices, and word repetition, while rhymes and repeated words occurred together within the line. The movement of rhyme to line-final position is characteristic of later periods. This may also be regarded as a distinctive stage of the barmoq verse system.
2. The period of verse structure based on aruz meter. Aruz developed in the eighth century on the basis of Arabic oral tradition and, with the spread of Islam, entered first Persian culture and subsequently the cultures of Central Asian peoples, including Uzbek literature, where it began to be used from the eleventh century onward. Many outstanding works were created within this system of versification.
3. Free verse entered Uzbek literature in the 1920s under the influence of the Russian tonic verse system. Although it is free in terms of meter, rhyme, and stanzaic organization, it is not treated here as an entirely separate system, but rather as one of the simple, compound, mixed, or complex forms of barmoq meter.
4. Syllable-stress, quantitative-stress, and mixed verse systems emerged relatively later. Of the systems listed above,

however, *barmoq* and *aruz* constitute the principal foundations of Uzbek versification because Uzbek poetry has been created predominantly in these two systems. Free verse, syllable-stress, quantitative-stress, and mixed systems have not been as widely used.

FOLKLORE, PERFORMANCE, AND THE EPIC TRADITION

Folklore is syncretic in nature and incorporates elements characteristic of different forms of art. Many folklore works are performed through a combination of word and melody. Traditionally, *dostons* and *termas* are sung to the accompaniment of the *do'mbira*, while songs may be performed with the *dutor* and *childirma*. Some songs are accompanied by dance. In most folklore works, however, the word remains dominant, fully confirming the verbal essence of folklore.

Improvisation, as is well known, arises from the circumstances of the moment and manifests itself in different ways in the creative practice of the *baxshi*. Today, however, the development of internet networks and the recording and dissemination of *baxshi* performances can lead to a weakening of improvisation. It may also significantly diminish spontaneous creativity in the performance of the epic.

The external compositional form of folk epics follows a common traditional pattern in which passages of verse and prose alternate. Within this general framework, the artistic functions of verse and prose in the epic are almost equal. Prose, like poetry, may be rhymed and may possess metrical and rhythmic features. Each has its own place and function in the epic. In terms of descriptive power and volume, however, verse generally predominates over prose. In the variant performed by Bekmurod Jo'raboy o'g'li, by contrast, prose and verse are nearly equal in proportion. Indeed, the events from the beginning of the epic up to the point when Alpomish learns of Barchin's departure for Kashal are narrated entirely in prose. The prose section of this variant is also distinguished by its high degree of descriptiveness and elaborate *saj'*, or rhymed prose.

Barchin is described in the epic as follows:

Barchinoy is both son and daughter to Boysari, the only child among all his possessions, unique in her time, beneath the sky and upon the earth; a sight worth seeing, a beauty for whom one would sacrifice oneself, one whom one would embrace, one whom anyone would wish to approach; her brows suited her eyes, her beauty pierced the heart of whoever saw her, ornaments hung from her neck, her whole body fragrant with musk and amber, and whoever saw her lost his senses and remained distracted for three days; at exactly fourteen years of age, foremost among the sacred beauties, when she appeared even fairies were nothing beside her; holding her slender waist, biting her sugar-sweet lips, displaying thirty graces and three smiles; if one speaks of the moon, she has a mouth; if one speaks of the sun, she has eyes; she has words sweet as sugar, and in her age she is unique upon the face of the earth.

As can be seen, the *saj'* in this passage – mutually rhyming words and rhythmic segments – can be divided into six groups. Each group, or rhythmic segment, also contains internal rhyming, as in “in her time, beneath the sky, upon the earth.” Such complex forms of *saj'* occupy an important place in both variants. On the one hand, this highly vivid description brings Barchin’s inner and outer appearance clearly before the reader; on the other, it demonstrates the baxshi’s high level of mastery in epic performance.

During the years of independence, the epic *Alpomish* gained renewed recognition and genuine esteem; its cultural value increased and it entered a second flourishing. Continuing the enduring traditions of the ancient Sherobod School of epic performance, People’s Baxshis of Uzbekistan Xushboq Mardonakulov, Shoberdi Boltayev, Boborahim Mamatmurodov, and Abdunazar Poyonov gave new life to *Alpomish*. The epic lives in the hearts of baxshis and resounds fluently on their tongues, serving as a worthy link between the past and the present. The performance of *Alpomish* by the baxshis of the Surxon oasis has its own special appeal, because the epic and baxshi traditions of this region have a distinctive history and destiny (Norqulova 2016: 4-5).

In terms of plot construction and the combination of motifs, the version of *Alpomish* performed by Bekmurod Jo‘raboy o‘g‘li is very close to the variant of Fozil Yo‘ldosh o‘g‘li. In these variants, too, the epic begins by emphasizing the genealogy of Boybo‘ri and Boysari and the motif of their childlessness:

The two of them went with devotion to their grandfather’s grave, recited prayers, asked for a child, bowed their heads, completed their pilgrimage, and returned. That night they lay down. With their hearts and thoughts fixed upon their saintly grandfather, they fell into a sweet sleep. At dawn, in Boybo‘ri’s dream, his grandfather Shohimardon appeared... (Norqulova 2016: 22)

The emphasis on precisely these motifs at the beginning of epics is not accidental. Only when every word, every line, every image, and every motif in an epic is analyzed in depth and studied comparatively does its status as an example of high artistic achievement become fully apparent. *Alpomish* is a heroic epic, and many motifs demonstrating its heroic character can be observed throughout the work.

The birth of *Alpomish* also acquires a divine character in the epic, a feature to which folklore studies attach particular importance. First, the birth of the alp – the hero – signifies the coming into the world of a ruler who will unite a fragmented people. Second, the miraculous nature of his birth is characterized by the predetermination of the tasks and trials that will be placed upon him. As V. Zhirmunsky notes, the mysterious conception of women likewise demonstrates a close connection with ancient beliefs (Zhirmunsky 1974: 224–233).

In Bekmurod Jo‘raboy o‘g‘li’s variant of *Alpomish*, the motif of birth through a patron spirit appearing in a dream resembles that found in other versions, including the Fozil Yo‘ldosh variant. At the same time, as in the variant of Umir Baxshi, it is also expressed through the hunting motif and, consequently, through a totemistic worldview. In folklore studies, the motifs of dream, hunting, and birth often occur side by side.

The epic relates:

...the brothers Boybo'ri and Boysari remained behind to hunt. ...At dawn Boysari went out, watched the path of the deer, fitted an arrow to his feathered bow, held it firmly, and lay in wait. He saw seven deer passing conveniently before him. The first was a mother deer, lame in one leg and limping; the six behind her looked like her children of different ages. The two bucks at the rear were about three years old. He aimed his bow, intending to shoot one of the bucks behind. At that moment the mother deer sensed this, looked at her young with tearful eyes, and tears streamed down her face. Boysari understood what was happening, felt pity for the deer, abandoned his intention to shoot, rose from his place, and turned back. Seeing that the human being had abandoned his evil intention, the mother deer appealed to God: 'This man has come into the mountains; perhaps he has some wish or desire. He showed mercy to my child. O my Creator, grant him his wish, show him mercy. Reveal Your kindness and make complete whatever he lacks.' After this, his saintly grandfather entered his dream and granted him a child. That night his saintly grandfather appeared in his dream and said: 'O Boybo'ri, God has granted you children. May your hearts be at peace, may your paths be bright, may your hearts be pure, may your bodies be healthy, may your children multiply and grow. Amen.' Having blessed him, he disappeared. (Poyonov 2018: 24)

CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that the poetic organization of the Nurota variant of *Alpomish* is based on the interaction of rhyme, rhythm, sound patterning, repetition, and syntactic parallelism. These devices do more than create aesthetic effect: they structure oral narration, support memorization and improvisation, intensify emotional expression, and guide the listener through the development of the epic. The Nurota tradition also reveals a productive interaction between inherited epic formulas and the individual linguistic and performative choices of the baxshi. Accordingly, the language of the variant should be approached as an integrated linguopoetic system in which phonetic, grammatical, semantic, and performative features operate together.

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