

ANALYZING THE PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF RHETORICAL QUESTIONS IN PUBLIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract: This article examines the macro-textual and pragmatic functions of rhetorical questions within public and political discourse from the perspective of text linguistics. Moving beyond traditional, sentence-level grammatical views, this study treats rhetorical questions as vital structural devices that govern textual coherence, segment boundaries, and the overall argumentative flow. Based on a structural corpus analysis, a new typology of rhetorical questions (introductory, refutational, and concluding) is proposed. Through a step-by-step contextual analysis, the paper illustrates how these structures actively transform passive text consumption into active reader participation, bridging logical premises with emotional conclusions. The study highlights new avenues for analyzing persuasive strategies in public media.

Keywords: Text linguistics, pragmatolinguistics, rhetorical questions, textual coherence, public discourse, persuasive strategy.

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada matn tilshunosligi nuqtai nazaridan ommaviy va siyosiy nutqda ritorik so‘roq gaplarning makromatniy hamda pragmatik funksiyalari tadqiq qilingan. An‘anaviy, gap darajasidagi cheklangan grammatik yondashuvlardan farqli o‘laroq, mazkur tadqiqotda ritorik so‘roq gaplar matniy yaxlitlik (kogerentlik), segmentlar chegarasi va umumiy argumentatsiya oqimini boshqaruvchi muhim tarkibiy vosita sifatida o‘rganiladi. Tarkibiy korpus tahliliga tayanib, ritorik so‘roq gaplarning yangi tipologiyasi (kirish, raddiya va xulosa beruvchi turlari) taklif etilgan. Bosqichma-bosqich kontekstual tahlil orqali, ushbu tuzilmalarning mantiqiy asoslarni hissiy xulosalar bilan bog‘lash hamda matnni passiv qabul qilishdan kitobxonning faol lisoniy ishtirokiga o‘tkazish mexanizmlari yoritilgan. Tadqiqot ommaviy axborot vositalarida ta‘sir ko‘rsatish strategiyalarini tahlil qilishning yangi imkoniyatlarini ochib beradi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Matn tilshunosligi, pragmatlingvistika, ritorik so‘roq gaplar, matniy yaxlitlik, ommaviy nutq, ta‘sir ko‘rsatish strategiyasi.

In traditional grammar, a rhetorical question is simply defined as a question asked for effect, requiring no answer. However, from the perspective of text linguistics—the study of how sentences connect to form meaningful, unified texts—rhetorical questions are much more than decorative ornaments. They serve as vital structural and pragmatic tools that authors use to organize text, shift topics, and manipulate reader attention.

This paper investigates the *pragmatolinguistic* functions (how language choices achieve specific communication goals) of rhetorical questions within public discourse. While past research often analyzed these structures in isolation as single sentences, this study treats them as macro-textual devices. We argue that rhetorical questions act as the structural "glue" that binds paragraphs together, driving the argumentative flow and shaping the overall text coherence.

When placed within a larger discourse, a rhetorical question ceases to be a simple interrogative sentence. Instead, it performs three primary text-building operations:

- **Structural segmentation (Boundary marking):** Rhetorical questions frequently appear at the boundaries of text segments (the beginning or end of a paragraph). At the start of a section, they serve as topical openers, signaling to the reader that a new sub-topic is about to

be discussed. At the end of a section, they serve as a summary or a logical bridge to the next point.

- **Creating dialogic coherence:** Written texts are inherently one-sided, but a rhetorical question introduces a simulated dialogue. By adopting an interrogative form, the author forces the reader's brain to mentally participate in a question-and-answer exchange. This engagement establishes a closer psychological bond between the speaker and the audience.
- **Argumentative focalization:** A standard statement presents information passively. A rhetorical question, conversely, sharpens the focus of the text. It highlights the most critical point of the argument, leaving no linguistic room for alternative interpretations.

Based on our corpus analysis of public speeches and editorial texts from 2024 to 2026, rhetorical questions can be classified into three distinct categories based on where they sit in the text and what they achieve:

Category of question	Typical textual position	Structural function	Pragmatic & cognitive effect
Introductory (Proleptic)	Paragraph Openers / Section Headers	Introduces a new thematic block or switches topics	Activates the reader's curiosity; focuses attention on the upcoming argument
Refutational (Polemical)	Middle of an Argumentative Chain	Challenges an opposing viewpoint directly	Undermines alternative claims; highlights logical contradictions
Concluding (Epilogic)	Paragraph Closers / Text Finales	Summarizes the core message of the entire text	Creates a sense of absolute certainty; leaves a lasting emotional impact

To demonstrate how rhetorical questions manage the structural and emotional flow of a text, let us analyze a sample excerpt from a public address. This case study illustrates how an argument is structurally built around a single rhetorical pivot point:

"We stand at a critical crossroads in our economic development. For three years, inflation has steadily decreased, and local production has grown by 12%. Can we really afford to reverse these hard-earned gains by changing our primary strategy now? To do so would mean dismantling the very foundations of our current stability. It would jeopardize thousands of newly created jobs and stall infrastructure projects across the country."

The text flows systematically through the following structural phases, driven entirely by the central question:

1.The context (The Premise): Phase 1.

The text begins with objective, positive factual statements (*"inflation has decreased... production grew by 12%"*). This establishes a baseline of agreement with the reader.

2.The rhetorical pivot: Phase 2.

The author introduces the bolded rhetorical question. Syntactically, it is a question; pragmatically, it functions as a strong negative assertion (*"We absolutely cannot afford to reverse these gains"*). It forces the reader to mentally answer, "No, we cannot."

3.The logical bridge: Phase 3.

The question acts as a bridge. The pronoun phrase *"To do so"* at the start of the next sentence refers directly back to the action questioned in the rhetorical inquiry (*"reverse these gains"*), ensuring absolute textual cohesion.

4. The negative outcome: Phase 4.

The text closes by detailing the catastrophic consequences of the opposed action (*"jeopardize jobs... stall projects"*), reinforcing the self-evident nature of the question's implied answer.

If we remove the rhetorical question and replace it with a flat statement (*"We cannot afford to reverse these gains"*), the text remains grammatically correct, but it loses its structural dynamism. The question format is what transforms the passive reader into an active participant in the argumentation.

This thesis demonstrates that within text linguistics, rhetorical questions must not be studied as isolated syntactic units. They are powerful structural components that govern text organization and persuasive impact. By analyzing their placement, their role in creating dialogic coherence, and their ability to bridge premises with conclusions, we gain a deeper understanding of how public discourse is engineered.

For republican and national linguistic research, shifting the focus from simple sentence-level grammar to macro-textual pragmatics allows us to demystify the mechanisms of public persuasion and media text design.

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