

## STRUCTURAL-COMMUNICATIVE TYPES OF THE PERPLEXED ECHO QUESTION

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**Abstract.** Modern linguistics has shown us that the language is not limited to questions with the standard semantics of interrogation. Among the interrogative sentences used in the secondary functions one can find inquiries with additional emotional colourings. Perplexity is the closest emotional evaluative meaning, accompanying the interrogative semantics of a question. In the paper, one of the structural-communicative types of the perplexed question (an echo question) is considered. Two structural types of the perplexed echo question are distinguished. Detailed classification of an elliptical echo question type is given. An elliptical query can repeat the following structures: a subject, a predicate, part of a predicate and an object. The most meaningful center of the stimulus utterance (its rheme) is emphasized. In most cases, the expressive meaning of the emotional evaluative attitude to the interlocutor's statement is moved to the forefront. It is evidenced by additional emotive markers (parcellation, graphical expressive means, and repetition). The most typical structural-communicative form of an echo question that repeats the whole utterance is a construction with the direct word order, having the greater potential for expressing various emotional reactions. The structural variety of the perplexed echo questions and their elliptical form make it difficult to categorize them according to the existent classification (pronominal - non-pronominal types). The theory of actual division allows us to consider the functioning of the echo question in every single case.

**Keywords:** interrogative sentence / utterance; dicteme; additional emotive meaning; perplexity; elliptical and complete echo questions; actual division.

### Introduction

In the process of linguistic knowledge development, the communicative potential of interrogative sentences was reconsidered. Thus, it was traditionally stated that the main feature of a question lies in its orientation towards obtaining some unknown information. This communicative function was at the heart of distinguishing the interrogative sentence and opposing it to declarative and imperative ones [1: 258-259; 2: 353-367; 3: 144-151; 4: 67-71, and others].

However, many researchers have considerably changed this narrow understanding of the functional meaning of the interrogative sentence, having also considered its non-interrogative aspects (A.M. Peshkovskiy, N.I. Zhinkin, P. Restan, F. Kiefer, R. Conrad, Y.V. Paducheva, M.M. Pozdeev, O.G. Pocheptsov, N.N. Kolesova, I.M. Kobozeva, L.A. Ostroukhova,

Y.P. Khindely, and others). These non-interrogative meanings may also include various additional emotional evaluative shades. According to P. Restan, from the point of view of semantics we can distinguish the following types of questions: informative, which can be asked with the purpose of receiving some information, and non-informative or emotional expressive questions [5].

Using the material of the Russian language, N.I. Zhinkin claimed that “the question is meant to be one of the types of the communicative objective, that is, the interlocutor’s inducement to respond to the speech directed to him or to her. If we accept these definitions, it will turn out that a significant number of interrogative questions do not possess the meaning of interrogation” [6: 23]. An interrogative sentence may express the information retrieval as well as such speech acts as supposition, perplexity and request. Using the material of the German language, L.A. Ostroukhova also distinguishes the interrogative sentences conveying an emotional reaction to the preceding utterance or the interlocutor’s action (such as surprise, gladness, fear, indignation, disappointment, etc.). [7: 6]. Y.V. Paducheva calls the interrogative utterances, expressing the question proper, “the sentences with regular semantics” (as opposed to various idiomatic interrogative constructions). She relates rhetorical questions, questions-requests, questions-offers, questions-discussions, echo questions, reflective and emotional questions (questions-surprise) to the sentences with irregular semantics [8: 81].

Perplexity is the closest emotional evaluative meaning of a question, as it expresses distrust, doubt, lack of knowledge, which are inherent in a question. In the process of real communication, perplexity is often combined with related emotions of surprise and astonishment.

A perplexed echo question (15% of all examples) is one of the structural-pragmatic types of a perplexed question together with special and alternative questions (in the dichotomous classification of the interrogative sentences based on their actual division, proposed by Professor M.Y. Blokh). Thus, in the pronominal (special) question, the nucleus (the rheme) of the inquiry is expressed by an interrogative pronoun. The rheme of the special question is open. The rheme of non-pronominal (alternative) questions is quite different from the previous one. It is also open, but its openness consists of at least two semantic suggestions presented for choice to the listener. According to this theory, the general (yes-no) question is thereby implicitly alternative, as the inquiry inherent in it concerns not the choice between some suggested facts, but the choice between the existence and non-existence of an indicated fact [9: 18].

In the words of L.P. Chakhoyan, an echo question “corresponds to a speech act connected with the mental reaction of an interlocutor towards the previous statement” [10: 83]. This mental reaction can convey perplexity, surprise, distrust.

M.V. Rybakova calls the echo question “an emotional grammatical descriptor”, which can also convey perplexity among other meanings [11: 76]. The Russian grammarians (Russian Grammar 1980) rightly noted the fact that the repetition may also present emotional evaluative meanings of surprise, perplexity and so on. In particular, they consider the so-called “elucidation-question, which repeats the vocabulary of the previous utterance and is usually complicated by the emotional colouring of surprise, perplexity, anxiety, disapproval” [12: 395]. Other scholars (Y.M. Kutyanina, G.A. Veyhman, and R.P. Avedova) also record the use of the echo question for conveying such emotional evaluative meanings as perplexity, disagreement, distrust, surprise.

The complexity of interpreting the term “echo question” is mainly due to different approaches towards its description and heterogeneity of its structure. The common tendency of the echo question analysis is defining its structural variants together with the attempt of exploring their communicative functions.

In the opinion of L.P. Chakhoyan, the echo question as a special type of the interrogative utterance can be of two communicative varieties: *a specifying question*, concerning the semantic structure of the previous statement, and *a full (entire) echo question*, which completely repeats the semantic structure of a prior utterance [10: 84].

Y.M. Kutyanina, using the material of the German language, defines *an elliptical echo question*, *an inverted echo question*, *a periphrasis* and *an echo-question-modal-evaluative-index*. The author points out that an elliptical echo question loses its interrogative meaning for expressing different emotional reactions. An inverted echo question is used as an expressive means. The third syntactical form - a periphrasis - has a metaphorical character. The fourth type has modal verbs, and it gives the modal evaluation of the denotative meaning of the stimulus utterance [13: 7].

R.P. Avedova also places such one-word sentences as *Really?* and its equivalents *Indeed?*, *Yes?*, *So?*, *Is that so?*, *Seriously?*; the echo questions like *Well?*, *Uh-huh?*, *Yes?*, *Yeah?*; and utterances like *Beg your pardon?*, *Sorry?*, *Excuse me?* among other repetitive questions. These structures correspond to the utterance as a whole [14: 11].

### **Types of perplexed echo questions. Elliptical echo questions**

Thus, we focus our attention on the echo questions conveying perplexity and aimed at expressing an emotional reaction to the interlocutor's utterance. We distinguish the following structural types of the perplexed echo question - incomplete (elliptical) and complete. According to R. Artstein, “the difficulty in making an analysis of echo questions is explained by the fact that echo questions can appear to arbitrary sentence parts” [15: 98].

In this paper, we consider the most typical variants of echo queries with the additional emotional evaluative colouring.

Let us consider the examples where single parts and constructions of the stimulus utterance are repeated.

1). An echoed subject:

(1) He looked at his watch. "Why the devil are women always late?" he said peevishly. "She ought to have been here long ago. I've told her over and over again that if there's one thing that makes Uncle Joe furious, it's being kept waiting for his soup".

This introduction of the sex motif puzzled me.

**"She?"**

"Florence. She's meeting me here. We're dining with my uncle" [16].

(2) John: The boy's room is something super. There's a special closet for fishing rods and authentic equipment and even a bar.

Paris. **A bar?**

John. Where you can chin yourself [17].

In the example (1) the puzzled reaction is provoked by mentioning a female who is referred to as a longtime girlfriend. But Jeeves's interlocutor didn't tell him about their general plans for the evening. In this echoic question, the semantics of specification, which is proved by the responsive clarifying utterance, is combined with the emotional reaction to the interlocutor's statement (the lexical specifying descriptor *puzzled*). In the second example, the puzzled reaction of the boy can be explained by his father's mentioning a bar in a nursery where he intended to take his son to. That seemed very strange and inappropriate to the boy. We can suppose that in this case perplexity goes with surprise.

a). An echoed predicate or part of a predicate.

(3) Clive (looking off L.). Yes. He's sitting down under the apple tree.

Louise. **Sitting?** In this weather! Without an overcoat? He'll catch his death. Tell him to come in at once.

Clive. Perhaps he prefers it outside [18].

(4) BASHO. You Westerns are inscrutable. Let me tell you another Japanese proverb: people who raise ghosts become haunted.

GEORGINA. **Haunted?** I don't understand that. **Haunted?**

(BASHO goes out) [19].

(5) "Yes. She's in the film classes".

Barney looked puzzled. **"Film classes?"** We don't have any film classes. You sure you got the right place? Stage Two is strictly an acting workshop, with the emphasis on stage work. Ted thinks TV and movies are mostly commercial crap. Of course we'd all starve to death without it, but he's right. The stage is the only medium for an actor to really find himself, stretch himself to the limit. You must have the wrong workshop" [20].

(6) Dorothy. I'm going to knock out all four walls.

Mrs. Dull. **Knock out - what - ?** Incredible!

Dorothy. Yes, to accommodate some brand-new merchandise. Things I never kept in store before [21].

In this paper, we refer to the term "dicteme" to give a comprehensive analysis of the echo question functioning among other sentences within an utterance. An utterance (in the broad sense of the word) or a phrase as a completed act of expressing the speaker's communicative purposes is indeed a dicteme. A dicteme is an elementary topical unit of connected discourse. In the dicteme the four meaningful aspects of speech find an integral expression: nomination, topicalization, predication, and stylization. In the dialogical discourse, the dicteme is represented by one utterance. A dicteme can be expressed either by one sentence or by the unity of sentences. Within the framework of stylization, the connotational representation of the content is carried out, and it realizes situational impact upon the listener. This impact corresponds to the speaker's communicative purpose [22: 63].

In the third interrogative utterance, perplexity is coloured by anxiety about the health of a close person, who can catch a cold. In this example, Participle I of the notional verb is echo-questioned. The notional verb denotes the action which stimulated the heroine's worry. The perplexed echo question is marked with the italicized script, which shows the intonational emphasis of the sentence in speech. This echo question together with the second echoic question *Without an overcoat?* and the idiom *catch one's death* serve as a means of formation of the general emotionality of the utterance. The fourth example demonstrates the proper reaction of perplexity. Incomprehension of the interlocutor's words is emphasized by the context of the dicteme (*I don't understand that*). The repetition of the question at the beginning and at the end of the utterance can't be considered informationally redundant as these echo questions enhance the emotionality of the speaker's words. In (4) the question echoes the predicative, which is expressed by Participle II. In (5) the repeated predicative part is a prepositional phrase. In the sixth dialogue unity the infinitive as a component within the compound verbal modal predicate is echoed. However, this element of the construction can't be called rhematic. Here the most significant part of the sentence is replaced by the interrogative pronoun *what*. It was the word-combination *all four walls* that provoked a puzzled reaction. This example is remarkable for its high nerve-strain. It is evidenced by the graphically stressed pronoun *what* and by the second exclamatory sentence of the dicteme, which contains the evaluative adjective *incredible*. Thus, we can conclude that the perplexed echo questions form the general emotionality of the dicteme. In all interrogative structures, the part that evoked perplexity and distrust was echoed.

b). The repeated predicate and object:

(7) Pip. Because you like me, that's why.

Chas. *Like* you? Like *you*? You're the lousiest rotten snob I know.

Pip: And you like snobs [23].

The above given query is coloured by strong indignation and perplexity. The emotionality of the echo question is enhanced by the repetition of the predicate and the object with a different intonational pattern (the alternating emphasis on the predicate and then the object in two successive questions). It should be emphasized that in echo questions we often observe the substitution of one of the structural parts of the preceding utterance. The personal and possessive pronouns are commonly replaced. In this text the personal pronoun in the objective case *me* is replaced by the pronoun *you*. Chas is astonished and annoyed at his colleague's supposition that he likes him. The emotional evaluative character of the declarative statement emphasizes the general emotional tone of the dicteme. The construction of the emotional assessment is very expressive due to the superlative degree of the evaluative adjective and the curse-word *rotten*.

The lexical descriptor in the author's words *puzzled* allows us to understand the emotional semantics of the following question. The emotions of the heroine are caused by the fact that she doesn't understand the meaning of the question. In reality, the husband has never beaten her:

(8) She was pulling the curtain to cut off the lights that smashed right into her visitor's eyes when she said, "Your husband. Does he hurt you?"

"**Hurt me?**" Violet looked puzzled.

"I mean he seemed so nice, so quiet. Did he beat on you?" [24].

In the next example, the predicate and the object are graphically separated. The object is emphasized by the logical stress (the italicized script in writing). It testifies to considerable excitement of the heroine. The echo question expresses Janey's perplexity at the news that her husband married her not because she was a good match but for compassion and sympathy. Here perplexity goes with strong unpleasant surprise.

(9) "...I'm sure he loves the fact that you have personality and your own opinions, but he also married you because he thought you were a beautiful, sweet girl who was completely sympathetic... to *him*. He feels like he rescued you..."

"**Rescued? Me?** Did he actually say that?"

"Not in so many words, but... let's face it, Janey, you didn't always have the best reputation" [25].

3). An echoed object:

(10) "I think I figured out how we can get Boozy off our backs and still win you your Nobel Prize," he said. "**Boozy?**" She looked puzzled. "What's Boozy got to do with anything?" This was one of those moments when the only way out was straight through. "He saw us back by the pond," Ken said [26].

The first question of the dicteme is a puzzled echo question (the specifying descriptor *puzzled*). The repetition of the object conveys the heroine's

incomprehension at their mutual friend Boozy's participation in this risky business.

### Complete echo questions

Now let us analyze complete echo questions expressing perplexity. From the point of view of semantics, perplexed echo utterances which repeat the entire structure of the stimulus sentence, denote perplexity combined with surprise caused by something strange and unexpected. It is quite evident that the echoer is puzzled not at some separate part of the prior statement but at the interlocutor's proposition as a whole.

Let us look at the example where the entire declarative sentence is echoed:

(11) Eddie: Catherine, I don't want to be a pest, but I'm tellin' you're walking wavy.

Catherine: **I'm walking wavy?**

Eddie: Now don't aggravate me, Katie, you are walkin' wavy! I don't like the looks they're givin' you in the candy store. And with them new high heels on the sidewalk - clack, clack, clack. The heads are turnin' like windmills [27].

In the example given above the echo question comprises the semantics of perplexity, incomprehension and Catherine's objections, insulted by false accusations of her brother-in-law, who is in love with his wife's younger sister. Those accusations are not true; they're evoked by the man's secret passion.

By the following question the dialogue participant shows his perplexity. The emotionality of the interrogative dicteme is intensified by the pause, which is expressed by marks of omission in writing:

(12) "I followed you here, Lance".

**"You... followed me?"**

"That's right" [28].

The echo question in the following extract expresses a very strong feeling of perplexity, misunderstanding of the speaker as a result of something utterly unexpected and inexplicable. The omission of the auxiliary verb *was* testifies to the speaker's excited emotional state. From his wife, the narrator learns about the arrest of their mutual friend. However, she does not resemble a criminal at all.

(13) "She was arrested," she said.

**"Donna... arrested?"** I was astounded. Donna was mouselike. Organized. Gentle. Apologetic. Anything but likely to be in trouble with the police.

"She is home now," Sarah said... [29].

In the following situation, Arthur's perplexity is caused by his friend's belief that he is in love with his wife. Moreover, the latter seems to be very pleased with it.

(14) Tony. Now Arthur. Don't make a fool of yourself over this.

Arthur. **I... make a fool?**

Tony. It's quite reasonable [30].

In the above given texts, the questions have non-inverted word order which is not typical of the interrogative utterances. Nevertheless, the structural variant of the question with the direct word order possesses greater potential for expressing various emotional reactions. M.S. Saidova claims that "conveying non-interrogative communicative meanings is more common for interrogative sentences with the direct word order" [31: 1].

### Actual division and the structural-semantic status of an echo question

However, while considering the echo question within the framework of the present analysis, the issue about its structural-semantic status may arise. Thereupon it would be logical to analyze this interrogative type from the point of view of the actual division theory. It is evident that the echo question can be referred to either pronominal or alternative types of the interrogative sentences. However, for all that we must consider the preceding and the following utterances. For example:

(15) Kay [confusedly]... Anyhow, you came into it, I think, Alan.

Alan [amused and puzzled]: **Came into what?**

Kay: I can't remember. And I know I was listening to mother singing all the time [32: 151].

In the above given example the question is formed on the basis of the element of the semantic structure of the previous utterance that needs specification. Here, together with the semantics of specification the question has also an emotional colouring of perplexity. We can refer this question to the pronominal type because the interrogative word programs the filler of the rhematic position in the response sentence in accord with the nature of the inquiry. The heroine doesn't give a definite answer only because she doesn't possess this information. The singularity of the interrogative form for this sort of the echo question, when the interrogative pronoun is placed in the logically emphasized position, makes it unnecessary to do the superpositional rhematic test.

However, even if the interrogative word is missing the echo question may imply a pronominal (special) question:

(16) Boyle. An' now, Mr. Bentham, you'll have to have a wet.

Bentham. **A wet?**

Boyle. A wet - a jar - a bowl! [32].

In case of the elliptical structures, which can be viewed as a logical component of the actual division system [9: 16-17], it is expedient to use the method of "syntagmatic filling" [34: 180-188]. The perplexed echo question presented above expresses the character's misunderstanding caused by the



use of the nonce phrase *to wet one's whistle* in the meaning of *to drink*. In this very case, judging by the given answer, we can conclude that the question *A wet?* is equivalent to the special question *What is it (a wet)?*, as it marks the rhematic prospective of the response utterance. The same is true for the similar examples (1) and (2).

Let us give another example. The non-pronominal question requires either confirmation or negation. The complete echo question in example (11) is equivalent to the non-pronominal (alternative) question, as it expresses the semantics of specification together with conveying the speaker's emotional attitude. Sometimes it is necessary to do the rhematic testing. The superposition of the utterance *You... followed me?* may be presented as follows:

The question: *You... followed me?* = *You... followed me - not followed me?*

The answer: *That's right.* = *Yes, I followed you.*

With the help of this transformation we can see, that the answer closes the suggested alternative according to the interrogative-rhematic program inherent in it. However, the attribution of every structural type of the echo question towards one or the other kind of the interrogative question is not univocal. Therefore, the analysis of every concrete example ought to be carried out in the situational context.

## Conclusion

The examples show that the echo questions can be uttered as a response to a declarative sentence, which is more typical, as well as to interrogative and negative ones (examples 8 and 14). The utterances, in which only separate structures of the preceding statement are repeatedly nominated, tend to be more numerous. The following parts of the sentence: the subject, predicate, part of the predicate and the object can be echoed. The part that evoked the strongest doubt, incomprehension and disagreement is uttered. In other words, the most significant, rhematic component of the stimulus utterance is repeated. In these interrogative sentences, the purely specifying semantics is combined with the expression of the speaker's emotional attitude towards the information received. In most cases, it can be stated that the emphatic expression of the emotional evaluative attitude is brought to the forefront. It is more evident in the examples 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12-14. These questions have additional markers of emotionality: parcellation (the separation of the predicate and the object into different interrogative sentences), phonetic-graphical emphasis, repetitive questions. In echo questions, we often observe the substitution of one of the parts of the preceding utterance. The personal and possessive pronouns are commonly replaced. In the examples of complete echo questioning, the direct, non-inverted word order with a question

mark is retained. The graphical expressive means (marks of omission) are commonly used to reveal the characters' great emotional agitation.

The echo question with an additional emotive meaning of perplexity is a highly emphatic expressive means of conveying one's emotional attitude towards the interlocutor's utterance. The puzzled echo question together with other sentences of the dicteme can form the general emotional tone of the utterance.

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