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Digital Ethnopoetics in Comparative Perspective: Teaching Uzbek and English Heroic Epics through Technology-Enhanced Classrooms

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A B S T R A C T
This article explores the pedagogical and cultural significance of ethnopoetic analysis in teaching heroic epics from Uzbek and English traditions—"Alpomish," "Kuntugmish," and "Beowulf." By integrating ethnopoetic frameworks with digital storytelling and multimedia tools, the study demonstrates how folklore education can enhance students' cultural literacy, identity awareness, and interpretive competence. The paper highlights how computer graphics, interactive platforms, and AI-based visualization tools can help students grasp the rhythm, imagery, and performative essence of oral narratives. A comparative ethnopoetic analysis reveals shared heroic motifs—courage, moral strength, loyalty, and divine destiny—while underscoring cultural distinctions in their poetic form and performance. The findings advocate for technology-enhanced ethnopoetic teaching as an innovative approach to preserving folklore and fostering intercultural understanding.

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1. Introduction

In modern education, teaching folklore is not merely about recounting ancient tales but about reconstructing cultural memory through contemporary pedagogical tools. Ethnopoetics, introduced by Jerome Rothenberg, Dell Hymes, and Dennis Tedlock, offers a method to preserve the aesthetic rhythm and cultural depth of oral literature. This framework emphasizes the *performative*, *linguistic*, and *emotional* dimensions of storytelling.

However, in today's digital classrooms, these oral qualities risk being lost. Therefore, integrating technology—such as multimedia presentations, AI-generated visuals, and digital storytelling platforms—can bridge the gap between traditional narratives and modern learners. This article examines how *"Alpomish"* and *"Kuntugmish"* from Uzbek folklore, alongside the English epic *"Beowulf,"* can be taught through ethnopoetic and digital approaches to promote intercultural literacy and aesthetic appreciation.

2. Literature Review

Ethnopoetics emerged in the 1960s as a response to the inadequacy of conventional poetic analysis for oral texts (Rothenberg, 1972; Hymes, 1982). Dell Hymes proposed transcribing oral texts according to their natural rhythmic and syntactic breaks, preserving performance elements such as repetition, parallelism, and emotional tone. Tedlock (1983) expanded this to include *voice*, *gesture*, and *listener interaction* as part of meaning construction.

Scholars such as McCarty (2002) and Jaffe & Walton (2020) have recently explored the use of technology to enhance folklore pedagogy, arguing that digital media can recreate the performative essence of oral storytelling through visuals, sound, and motion. This approach aligns with culturally responsive pedagogy, where students engage emotionally and cognitively with their heritage through

modern tools.

Despite this, few studies have compared ethnopoetic teaching of *Eastern and Western heroic epics* in digital environments. This paper fills that gap by offering a comparative ethnopoetic reading of *"Alpomish," "Kuntugmish,"* and *"Beowulf"* as classroom resources enhanced through technology.

3. Methodology

This qualitative, comparative study employs **rhetorical-ethnopoetic analysis** of three epics, focusing on structure, symbolism, and performance.

Data sources include transcribed excerpts from each tale and multimedia teaching materials designed by educators.

- **Sample Texts:**
- ✓ *"Alpomish"* – Uzbek national epic depicting loyalty, heroism, and moral endurance.
- ✓ *"Kuntugmish"* – a didactic Uzbek tale emphasizing intelligence and justice.
- ✓ *"Beowulf"* – Anglo-Saxon epic celebrating valor and sacrifice.
- **Digital Tools:** Interactive storytelling software, AI-generated imagery, animated maps, and soundscapes.
- **Analytical Focus:** Poetic parallelism, formulaic diction, rhythmic pacing, and multimedia integration for pedagogical impact.

4. Comparative Ethnopoetic Analysis

4.1. Structural and Poetic Features

All three narratives share a tripartite structure: **departure, trial, and return.**

- In *"Alpomish,"* rhythmic repetition of oaths and moral declarations forms the backbone of the narrative, reflecting collective values of honor and unity.
- *"Beowulf"* employs alliterative verse and kennings ("whale-road" for sea, "ring-giver" for king) that reinforce its oral musicality.
- *"Kuntugmish"* uses short rhythmic stanzas and proverbial expressions, linking wisdom to spiritual integrity.

Ethnopoetic transcription of these texts reveals how each culture encodes moral vision in rhythm. For instance, *Alpomish*'s recurring phrase *"xalq uchun jon fido"* mirrors Beowulf's refrain *"for his people's peace."*

4.2. Heroic Motifs and Cultural Symbolism

While heroism is universal, its moral grounding varies:

- *Alpomish* symbolizes the unity of clan and homeland;
- *Kuntugmish* represents justice through intellect and humility;
- *Beowulf* glorifies individual valor and fate-driven heroism.

Digital visualizations amplify these contrasts—animated scenes can highlight *Alpomish's* pastoral landscapes, *Beowulf's* northern seas, and *Kuntugmish's* moral parables through color, music, and motion.

4.3. Technology and Performance

Integrating computer graphics, 3D animations, and audio narration transforms ethnopoetic performance into a multisensory learning experience.

In digital classrooms, teachers can synchronize rhythm-based recitations with visual cues (e.g., waves rising during Beowulf's battles, desert winds during Alpomish's exile).

This method re-creates oral tension and emotional resonance, making ancient narratives accessible to

Gen-Z learners accustomed to visual learning.

5. Discussion

5.1. Pedagogical Value

Teaching *Alpomish* and *Beowulf* side by side through digital ethnopoetics fosters **intercultural empathy**. Students recognize shared human ideals—bravery, sacrifice, justice—while appreciating local values shaped by geography and belief.

Multimedia tools not only visualize action but also emphasize rhythm, repetition, and rhetorical form—key ethnopoetic components often lost in print.

5.2. Cultural Preservation through Innovation

Technology serves as a **bridge between tradition and modernity.**

Digitized folklore archives, virtual storytelling exhibitions, and AI-based narration can preserve endangered oral expressions while allowing interactive exploration.

In Uzbekistan, such initiatives could support the national curriculum's emphasis on *ma'naviyat* (spirituality) and *milliy qadriyatlar* (national values).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Ethnopoetic pedagogy enriched with digital tools revitalizes folklore education, connecting students emotionally and intellectually to their heritage.

The comparative study of *"Alpomish," "Kuntugmish,"* and *"Beowulf"* reveals both universal and culture-specific poetic forms that can be effectively taught through multimedia.

Recommendations:

1. **Curriculum Development:**

   Incorporate comparative folklore studies into language arts curricula using digital storytelling techniques.

2. **Teacher Training:**

   Equip educators with skills in ethnopoetic transcription, multimedia design, and narrative performance.

3. **Technological Infrastructure:**

   Create digital archives for Uzbek and world folklore; promote interactive storytelling platforms.

4. **Student Engagement:**

   Encourage students to produce their own digital epics blending oral performance, visuals, and music.

5. **Further Research:**

   Expand ethnopoetic comparison to other oral genres such as lullabies, riddles, and proverbs.

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