

Date: 1st July-2026

STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SATIRICAL
DISCOURSE IN KIM YUJEON'S PROSE

СТРУКТУРНО-СЕМАНТИЧЕСКИЕ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ
САТИРИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА В ПРОЗЕ КИМ Ю ЧЖОНА

Kwon Nam Jung

knjrus@hanmail.net

Abstract: This article explores the structural and semantic characteristics of satirical discourse in the prose of the Korean writer Kim Yujeon. The study analyses the linguistic and narrative means through which satirical meaning is constructed and identifies the role of dialogue, narrative composition, and implicit evaluation in the organization of literary discourse. The findings indicate that satire in Kim Yujeon's prose functions not only as a means of creating comic effect but also as an important mechanism for representing social reality and revealing the moral contradictions of colonial Korean society. The findings contribute to further research on Korean literary discourse, narrative poetics, and discourse analysis.

Keywords: Kim Yujeon, Korean literature, satirical discourse, humour, irony, narrative structure, semantics, literary discourse.

Аннотация: Данная статья посвящена исследованию структурных и семантических особенностей сатирического дискурса в прозе корейского писателя Ким Ючжона. Анализируются языковые и композиционные средства формирования сатирического смысла, а также роль диалога, повествовательной организации и имплицитной оценки в построении художественного дискурса. Установлено, что сатира в произведениях Ким Ючжона выступает не только средством создания комического эффекта, но и важным механизмом отражения социальной действительности и раскрытия нравственных противоречий колониального корейского общества. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в дальнейших исследованиях корейского литературного дискурса, нарративной поэтики и дискурс-анализа.

Ключевые слова: Ким Ючжон, корейская литература, сатирический дискурс, художественный дискурс, юмор, ирония, композиция, семантика.

Kim Yujeon is widely regarded as one of the most prominent representatives of modern Korean short fiction. Although his literary career was brief, his works made a significant contribution to twentieth-century Korean literature through their combination of rural realism, vernacular language, humour, and subtle social criticism. One of the defining features of his prose is its realistic depiction of village life, in which seemingly ordinary domestic episodes expose the underlying social contradictions of colonial rural society¹. Unlike many Korean writers of the 1930s, who portrayed colonial reality through tragic conflicts or ideological confrontation, Kim Yujeon exposed the contradictions of rural

¹ Kim H. *Understanding Korean Literature*. – Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997. – P. 118.



Date: 1st July-2026

society indirectly, allowing readers to recognize them through the speech, behaviour, and everyday interactions of ordinary villagers.

Kim Yujeon wrote during the Japanese colonial period, when Korean rural communities experienced economic decline, social inequality, and the gradual transformation of traditional social values. These historical conditions shaped both the thematic concerns and the artistic development of modern Korean prose². Instead of depicting political events directly, the writer transferred social conflicts into everyday situations, demonstrating that even simple domestic conversations could reflect the complexity of colonial society. This indirect mode of representation forms the foundation of Kim Yujeon's satirical discourse, where everyday communication serves as the primary vehicle for social criticism.

The relationship between historical reality and literary representation is particularly visible in Kim Yujeon's best-known short stories. Each narrative demonstrates a different mechanism through which satire exposes social contradictions. This artistic principle is especially evident in *Spring, Spring* (봄봄), *Camellia* (동백꽃), *Scoundrels* (만무방), and *The Golden Bean Patch* (금 따는 콩밭). Although these stories are based on ordinary episodes of rural life, they consistently reveal deeper problems connected with poverty, social inequality, family relations, and traditional morality. Humour therefore not only performs an entertaining function but also serves as an important literary instrument for revealing the hidden contradictions of everyday life.

Within discourse studies, satire may be understood as a communicative phenomenon formed through the interaction of narrative composition, dialogue, linguistic expression, and implicit evaluation³. In Kim Yujeon's prose, comic effect emerges not merely through irony or exaggeration but through the organization of discourse itself, where the discrepancy between spoken words, hidden intentions, and readers' interpretation generates implicit social criticism. The reader is therefore required to reconstruct the satirical meaning independently, since explicit authorial judgement is deliberately minimized.

The structural organization of satirical discourse in Kim Yujeon's prose is most clearly reflected in the dialogues that shape the narratives of his short stories. Rather than relying on direct authorial judgement, the writer allows communicative interaction itself to construct implicit evaluation. Dialogue functions as the principal mechanism through which satire develops, while colloquial vocabulary, repetitions, unfinished utterances, emotional exclamations, and dialectal expressions reveal the psychological condition and social status of the characters, transforming everyday speech into an essential component of satirical discourse⁴. Rather than simply reflecting everyday speech, these linguistic

² Seth M. J. *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*. – Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011. – P. 294-306.

³ Fairclough N. *Discourse and Social Change*. – Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. – P. 36-52.

⁴ Lee P. H. (Ed.) *A History of Korean Literature*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. – P. 390-405.

Date: 1st July-2026

features organise the narrative perspective and shape the reader's interpretation of social relations.

This interaction can be clearly observed in *Camellia* (동백꽃). The relationship between the narrator and Jeomsuni is constructed almost entirely through dialogue and everyday interaction. Neither character openly expresses genuine emotions; instead, affection is concealed behind teasing, irony, and deliberate misunderstanding. This communicative mismatch constitutes one of the principal sources of satire, as readers perceive meanings that remain inaccessible to the characters themselves. *The episode involving the chickens illustrates how an apparently insignificant quarrel gradually acquires symbolic meaning. Although the conflict appears trivial, its narrative function extends beyond comic entertainment by exposing patterns of rivalry, pride, and emotional restraint characteristic of rural society. Jeomsuni deliberately provokes the narrator, yet her behaviour simultaneously conceals affection that neither character is able to express directly.* Literary scholars point out that the comic effect arises from the contradiction between verbal hostility and emotional attachment, while dialogue exposes traditional social conventions governing relations between young men and women.

A different mechanism of satire appears in *Spring, Spring* (봄봄). The story develops through a series of repeated conversations between the narrator and his future father-in-law, whose constant promises postpone the expected marriage. This recurring communicative pattern highlights the unequal relationship between the characters and creates comic tension while simultaneously exposing the social realities of rural life. The repetition does not merely create humour; it also reveals how language itself becomes an instrument of manipulation within unequal social relationships. As scholars have noted, Kim Yujeon frequently employs repetition, colloquial dialogue, and everyday situations to combine humour with implicit social criticism. Thus, repetition functions not only as a compositional device but also as an important semantic element that reinforces the satirical effect⁵.

The social dimension of satire is especially prominent in *Scoundrels* (판두방). The protagonists repeatedly attempt to overcome poverty through impulsive decisions and unrealistic expectations, yet every new effort only deepens their difficulties. Comic situations arise naturally from these unsuccessful attempts; however, the narrative never presents the characters as objects of ridicule. Instead, their constant attempts to justify their own actions and shift responsibility onto others reveal how poverty gradually distorts moral judgement and interpersonal relationships. Rather than condemning individual behaviour, the narrative demonstrates how poverty gradually reshapes moral judgement and everyday decision-making⁶.

⁵ Lee P. H. (Ed.). *A History of Korean Literature*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. – P. 390-397.

⁶ Cumings B. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. – New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005. – P. 135-167.



Date: 1st July-2026



A similar principle underlies *The Golden Bean Patch* (금 따는 콩밭), where the dream of sudden prosperity becomes the central symbolic motif. The symbolic opposition between hope and reality transforms individual aspirations into a broader reflection on the economic instability of colonial rural society. The protagonists' search for wealth repeatedly collides with reality, giving rise to comic situations that gradually acquire tragic overtones. Their illusion is presented not simply as a personal weakness but as a consequence of economic insecurity and the absence of genuine opportunities for improving their lives. Thus, satire is directed less against individual aspirations than against the social circumstances that encourage unrealistic hopes and moral compromise.

Viewed collectively, these narratives demonstrate that satire in Kim Yujeon's prose emerges through the interaction of dialogue, narrative composition, symbolism, and implicit evaluation. Humour never functions independently from the social context; instead, it reveals the contradictions of colonial rural society while preserving the psychological authenticity of the characters. Through this artistic synthesis, Kim Yu-jeong created a distinctive model of satirical discourse that continues to occupy an important place in the study of modern Korean literature⁷.

The structural and semantic features discussed above demonstrate that satire in Kim Yujeon's prose is not confined to the creation of comic situations. Its artistic function is most clearly revealed when the relationship between language and social reality is examined. Everyday conversations, seemingly insignificant conflicts, and spontaneous emotional reactions gradually reveal the value system of rural society, where economic hardship and traditional customs often determine both human behaviour and interpersonal relationships. As a result, satire develops through the gradual accumulation of communicative details rather than through direct authorial criticism⁸.

An equally important characteristic of Kim Yujeon's prose is the close connection between humour and psychological characterization. The writer avoids dividing his characters into entirely positive or negative figures. Even those whose actions appear selfish or deceptive remain psychologically convincing because their behaviour is conditioned by social circumstances. Literary historians note that Kim Yujeon avoids rigid moral categorization of his characters, presenting them as psychologically convincing figures shaped by their social environment⁹.

The semantic richness of Kim Yujeon's satire also derives from the symbolic function of everyday objects and actions. Household work, agricultural labour, domestic animals, and ordinary conversations repeatedly acquire meanings that extend beyond their immediate narrative function. Such details create a realistic picture of village life while simultaneously revealing hidden social conflicts. As a result, symbolic meaning emerges

⁷ van Dijk T. A. *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. – P. 17-35.

⁸ Bakhtin M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. – Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. – P. 184-203.

⁹ Lee P. H. (Ed.). *A History of Korean Literature*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. – P. 390-405.

Date: 1st July-2026

naturally from the development of the narrative and does not interrupt the realistic mode of storytelling¹⁰.

Another distinctive feature of Kim Yujeon's artistic style is the balance between irony and compassion. Although readers frequently observe the protagonists making irrational decisions or misunderstanding one another, the author never transforms them into objects of ridicule. Instead, humour is combined with sympathy, emphasizing that human weaknesses originate not only from individual character but also from historical circumstances, poverty, and social inequality. Such a combination considerably broadens the semantic potential of satirical discourse and distinguishes Kim Yujeon's prose from works based solely on comic exaggeration¹¹.

The evidence examined throughout the article indicates that Kim Yujeon's satirical discourse is based on the close interaction of structural and semantic elements. Narrative composition, dialogue, colloquial speech, and symbolic details function together to create an implicit form of social criticism that avoids direct authorial judgement. Through this artistic strategy, the writer reveals the contradictions of colonial rural society while preserving the realism and psychological credibility of his characters.

Taken together, the examined texts demonstrate that satire in Kim Yujeon's prose operates as a discourse-forming principle rather than merely a stylistic device. Through the interaction of dialogue, narrative organisation, and implicit evaluation, the writer transforms everyday rural experience into a subtle form of social criticism. This perspective broadens our understanding of Kim Yujeon's literary method and offers new directions for future research into Korean narrative discourse and the linguistic mechanisms of satire.

LIST OF REFERENCES:

1. Bakhtin M. M. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. – Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. – 333 p.
2. Bergson H. Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic. – London: Macmillan, 1911. – 201 p.
3. Cumings B. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. – New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005. – 544 p.
4. Fairclough N. Discourse and Social Change. – Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992. – 259 p.
5. Kim H. Understanding Korean Literature. – Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997. – 230 p.
6. Lee P. H. (Ed.). A History of Korean Literature. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. – 580 p.
7. Robinson M. *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History*. – Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. – 264 p.

¹⁰ Bergson H. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. – London: Macmillan, 1911. – P. 63-85.

¹¹ Robinson M. *Korea's Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History*. – Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007. – P. 41-56.



Date: 1st July-2026

8. Seth M. J. *A History of Korea: From Antiquity to the Present*. – Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011. – **594 p.**
9. van Dijk T. A. *Discourse and Context: A Sociocognitive Approach*. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. – 267 p.

