THE ESTHETIC POSSIBILITIES OF ONOMATOPOEIAS IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN POETRY

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Abstract. The artistic imagery of a poetic work synthesizes the visual and audible component in its intonation dimension. This will significantly enlarge the volume of esthetic information, together with the speaker’s emotional attitude which is able to suggest an image expressed in a poem to a reader. To reach the proper acoustic effect, poets use the ideophones (or onomatopoeias) and puns connected with them to create either overt or latent metaphors, constructing the image of a sounding thing or entity. This way the poet can concentrate any audible element to ‘a point within an idiom,’ activating the imagination and artistic thinking of a poem’s addressee.

Keywords: onomatopoeias, Ukrainian poetry, poetry, literature, intonation dimensions, artistic imagery.

Introduction

Ideophones (onomatopoeias) used in a poetic work help an author or a recipient to set up the image of any sounding thing or entity (Kachurovsky, 1994). According to Ivan Franko, the sense of hearing allows cognizing the wide arrays of some transient, imperceptible, volatile phenomena, and the wide arrays of defiant and strong shifts that strike human souls (Franko, 1981). Although the onomatopoeias (and interjections as a whole) are not the valuable parts of a sentence, they sometimes get substantiated in poetry, taking even the role of subjects or predicates. This can not only create the audible artistic conceit, but also give it a sense-making function.

The purpose of this work is to confirm the onomatopoeias the factors of renewal of the elements of ancient Slavic pantheistic worldview in contemporary Ukrainian poetry, including free verse as the sample of spontaneous poetic speech.

Method

We used the traditional methods of linguistic analysis to examine the transformation of onomatopoeias into self-dependent words and their functions as specific poetic images. The method of close reading was used to study the esthetical functions of sonic conceits in creating the special picture of the world in poems by Ukrainian writers, particularly the first half of the 20th century.

Results and Discussions

From the very beginning of the 20th century, Ukrainian poets, particularly the free verse writers, were taking the onomatopoeias and subsequentlyposing them as the following images:

- **Phonic mimesis**, the simple reproduction of the sounds of nature (twit-twit, jug-jug, bow-wow, meow, cuckoo, chirr, bang, slap, ding, dong, hiss, hush, tick-tock etc.);
- **Onomatophony**, the more complex stage of combination and using the words which are onomatopoetic in shape but independent in sense – nouns, adjectives, verbs and so on (to meow, to cuckoo, to chirr, to tick, a chirrup, a slap, a bang etc.);
- **Phonopoeia** (Greek phonos – the sound and poeia – the made, something made of the sound), the achievement of the proper acoustic effect in varying and combining the words which are not onomatopoetic but suggest the illusion of sounding by special phonemic background (alliteration, assonance etc. Tkachenko, 2003; See also Kachurovsky, 1994; Perrine, 1992).

The early 20th century poets – futurists and impressionists, were the first who widened the functions of onomatopoeias to the level of a self-dependent word. Consequently, the phonic mimesis as the initial dimension of phonic imagery became the main artistic factor to show the sounds and movements of an environment and to project them on the author’s internal reflections and impressions. This way the writers
created the images of both the urban and the rural space, which were crucially important for the literary process in Ukraine.

The urban landscape can be represented in the works by Mykhail’ Semenko:

\[ \text{pff} \]
\[ \text{puffin’ and sniffin’} \]
\[ \text{ssssh} \]
\[ \text{noisily hissing behind the machine...} \]
\[ \text{cough cough cough} \]
\[ \text{! and You} \]

(“The Poem.” Semenko, 1985; the quotations from the poems are hereinafter translated by the author of this paper).

The rural images are prevalent in free verses by Valerian Polishchuk:

\[ \text{Out of the frames} \]
\[ \text{The bees are hurrying one by one:} \]
\[ \text{Zoom, zoom –} \]
\[ \text{Flying out of a hive, a bee is hitting} \]
\[ \text{A certain invisible string} \]
\[ \text{That’s pulled from earth to heaven, like a dulcimer –} \]
\[ \text{There is no way to pass it without hitting} \]


Starting from phonic mimesis as the initial image-making force, the poets had reached the most complicated syntactic level of interaction between onomatopoeias and non-onomatopoeias, which can be called ‘phonopoeia’:

\[ \text{autumn and autumn} \]
\[ \text{and autumn once more} \]
\[ \text{and a watchman is sweeping the fallen leaves out...} \]
\[ \text{and fogy’s the morning} \]
\[ \text{as if the gray geese have covered the city} \]
\[ \text{crow crow crow} \]
\[ \text{autumn’s a real old crone} \]


Imitation of crows’ voices (crow crow crow) helps the poet create the semantic field that includes the sonic conceits ‘morning,’ ‘covered,’ ‘real crone’ and gets closed in an ironically intoned last line, ‘dayte pozhalusta prykuryt’ (‘Light me a cigarette please.’)

The onomatopoeias from the animal world occupy the very significant place in Ukrainian poetry up to nowadays. Showing the natural environment in mobile sensory images, the characters of any literary work try not only to reproduce the sound of a favorite entity, but also join themselves symbolically to the life of nature.

Valerian Polishchuk had taken the onomatopoeias from nature the key compositional means of image-making in his late free-verse works. Besides The Apiary cited before, there is one more brilliant poem, The Crickets:

\[ \text{Full is the plain – the melody’s resounding:} \]
\[ \text{These are the crickets trying to play} \]
\[ \text{A jolly rhapsody on flute:} \]
\[ \text{Chirr... chirr...} \]

(Polishchuk, 1987).

The sound image is here functioning in creation of a semantic field ‘human – nature’:

\[ \text{Chirring all night away,} \]
\[ \text{As if the stream of milk is running to a pail...} \]
\[ \text{I’m dreaming} \]
\[ \text{There was a before-autumn humming} \]
\[ \text{(August is walking thro the fields).} \]

The sonic image involves the other sensory conceits into the symbolic trinity ‘human – nature – civilization’:

\[ \text{A cricket... sings and sings,} \]
Signaling just like sparks of radio
Pouring its buzz into the air...
And lo, a cricket is telegraphing:
Chirr... chirr... chir-chir... chirr...
Et cetera (Polishchuk, 1987).

Another example (a quotation from The Early Spring) gives the synthesis of phonic mimesis and phonopoeia, which could be reproduced like this in translation:

The roosters in the drunken air
Are spreading their clear voices
Above the crystal plains...
Neither the rustle nor the knock is lost somehow...
A woodpecker’s tock-tocking at a bough (Polishchuk, 1987).

This synthesis of pure onomatopoeias and sonic game with self-dependent words is reflected in the entire poetic cycle, The Nature, which is a part of Polishchuk’s poetic collection with a profoundly symbolic title, Radio v zhytakh (Radio in Rye Fields). For comparison: the representatives of Russian ‘Silver Age’ had written the highly-artistic works based on the sequences of onomatopoeias. One of them is the below cited excerpt from Zia-zing, a poem from Vasyliy Kamenski’s book Zvuchal’ vesneyanki, which is quite interesting field for experiments in poetic translations:

Zia-zing-zwillo-zie
Zwillo-zie-zie-turr-liu –
Day by day in the green ringing birches
Like near God’s Gates to Paradise
Or next to the source of joys
Hear the re-sounding voices of birdies (Kamenski, 1918).

(This name is supposed to be composed of two contaminated words: first, zvuchat, to sound, plus pechal’, sadness; and second, vesna, the spring, plus -yanka, a Slavic female suffix for the names of nationalities, professions, and statuses. So that we can interpret this title as Soundess of a Springwoman).

Birds were considered by the writers the live symbols to express the flight of time, the connections between human and nature (See Naumenko, 2013). An image of a bird is closely tied to the element of Air, and therefore the birdsong, transcribed in the poetic narration by sounds of human speech, gets identified to the natural meta-language.

The represented way of image-making has been actualized in poetry by Ivan Andrusyak, our contemporary. However, the Ukrainian poet managed to create a strong counter-point (Wendepunkt), which allowed us to define the following verse work, Impossibilities of Language, the verse novella and therefore to recite it wholly:

jug jug jug jug
twit twit
twittio

and again:
tit tit tit tit tit
chirrup

and buzzzzzzzzzz – a bug

and so on:
twit twit twit
twittio

eh I wish I saw just one of them
but no – I see only a bug
yet the bug’s the one I do not want to talk to
cause my oh my
what would I say to the bug?

Just think a little… (Andrusiak 2011, 7)

The analysis of verse works with onomatopoeias for the main factors of image-making allowed us to
conclude that the greatest attention was paid to them, first of all, by the early 20th century poets – futurists,
impressionists and constructivists. It is quite evident that impressionists, trying to catch the moment, were
centrated at visual and sonic images in motion; moreover, futurists and constructivists as almost similar
poets in style gave the onomatopoeias the prominent role in their works (sometimes composing the whole
syntactic periods or stanzas of them). The onomatopoeia reveals the experimental nature of a separate poem,
so that it confirms the continuity of language development, particularly in the field of expressing the nature in
sensory images.

The further studies of semantics of onomatopoeias in Ukrainian poetry (the shistdesyatnyks, or the poets
of the 1960s, and post-modern writers) will allow observing that the deeper an author gets into the internal
form of a word (first of all, dissociating it, or creating the acoustic effect by sequences of the similar sounds,
or combining an onomatopoeia with a self-dependent word), the wider becomes the range of the meanings of
a certain cultural conceit.

Therefore, the phonic themes completing each other throughout a poem are finally integrating into a full-
sounding symbolic picture that is reflecting the large array of human spiritual activity and the versatility of the
entire human life.

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