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## PHONO-SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF SURREALIST POETRY

**Summary.** The paper focuses on the problem of the sound and meaning correlation in a poetic text. In modern linguistics, sound semantic is the object of phono-semantic studies (A.P. Zhuravlev, V.V. Levitsky, S.V. Voronin, L.P. Prokofieva), these issues also received much attention in the works of W. von Humboldt, A.A. Potebnya, E. Sepir, R. Jakobson. Statistical studies conducted by modern scholars have revealed the potential of the sound-meaning correlations in rendering strength, mobility, size, color, emotional perception.

Sound symbolism plays a specific role in a poetic text in which the expressiveness of sound reaches its extremes. This paper deals with the poetry of Hugh Sykes Davies, the British poet, whose work manifests the features of surrealism.

Surrealistic poetry, often seen as an absurd automatic flow of associations, provides particularly interesting material for the study of the “sound tissue” due to its orientation towards the rendering of the unconscious, the dream. Phono-semantics, which also has a subliminal aura (A.P. Zhuravlev), can help in the perception of this rather complex poetry.

Analysis of the poetic text shows that the ratio of sound and meaning can be viewed as an organizing principle for the study of poetry. The main elements for analysis include alliteration, rhyming words, sound symbolism, the metric system, which in general serve as a kind of supporting elements in the perception of poetry. Falling into the strong position of the text, they help the reader to intuitively catch the “underwater” meanings of the poem. Of particular interest are the acoustic characteristics of sound in their relationship to the semantic meanings of words, as well as the sound contrasts that poets create to enhance the reader’s aesthetic experience.

**Key words:** surrealism, phono-semantics, rhyme, sound symbolism.

**Introduction.** The question how the sound of a word is related to its meaning has a centuries-old history of research and started in the classical era. But only with the appearance of modern experimental methods that it became possible for the scholars to take a new view of this problem.

Questions of sound organization of the text belong to the priority areas of linguistics. Issues of sound and meaning correlation are discussed in the works of W. von Humboldt and A.A. Potebnya, E. Sepir, R. Jakobson, A.P. Zhuravlev. But it is in the poetic texts where “the expressiveness of sound reaches its limit” [5, p. 153] that sound symbolism acquires a specific role.

**The aim of this paper** is the study of sound symbolism and its semantics in the poetic texts. Taking as the point of departure the fact that linguistic perception cannot be limited only to the level of vocabulary, we will try to define the role the sound patterns play in a poetic work, to reveal their semantic possibilities and to trace what meanings can the “sound fabric” (R. Jakobson) of the verse produce.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** In modern linguistics, the semantic potential of a sound is studied by

phono-semantics (A.P. Zhuravlev, V.V. Levitsky, S.V. Voronin, L.P. Prokofieva). Statistical studies conducted by modern scientists reveal the main informative characteristics of sounds on a variety of grounds – strength, mobility, size, emotional perception. One of the most interesting aspects of sound symbolism is the study of the color-sound correlations (works by L.P. Prokof’eva, A.P. Zhuravlev) which examines cross-semiotic connections between sound, color and the world of complex feelings and impressions.

These studies are particularly important for understanding the language of poetry. V.V. Kandinsky in his book “On the spirituality in art” proved that colors, lines, forms as the primary elements of the language of painting should be perceived in their pure form, apart from the image in the painting [4]. In the same way, a poet appeals to the sound in its pure form, choosing every word or creating unusual words in a poem, taking greater interest in the music of a sound rather than in the semantics of a word, creating meaning through the sound. “The poem connects sound and sense and this is the real key to poetry,” – states Professor M. Drout [11, p. 8].

In linguistics, numerous studies of the relationship between the content and structural elements of the language also revealed “the presence of a more fundamental, psychologically primary symbolism” [6, p. 324] than simple referential meanings of words, which E. Sepir, “due to the absence of a better term,” called “phonetic symbolism” [6, p. 330]. The American linguist noticed that phonetic variations often result in the difference of meaning. Having conducted a number of experiments he concluded that phonetic symbolism is an independent psychological phenomenon which might be caused by acoustic and kinetic factors.

As in any developing science, many questions still bring about numerous discussions – from the nature of this phenomenon to phono-semantic universals. In our opinion, there is also a lack of practical research which can support the existing theories.

This paper offers the study of the semantic possibilities of sounds on **the material** of surrealist poetry. Originating in France at the beginning of the twentieth century as a continuation of the Dadaist protest against everything that was traditional, surrealism, led by the poet Andre Breton, opposed to Western rationalism and accused it of hypocrisy: “forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices” [9, p. 10]. The new movement strove for a world in which “life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future <...> cease to be perceived as contradictions” [9, p. 125], promising “to uproot thought from an increasingly cruel state of thralldom, to steer it back onto the path of total comprehension, return it to its original purity” [9, p. 124]. Relying on Freud’s discoveries in the field of dreams and the unconscious, the poets defined surrealism as “psychic automatism in its pure state <...> dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason,” [9, p. 26] and declared that their work was not just a search for “new means of expression”, but “a means of total liberation of the spirit” [1, p. 137].

Such poetry offers particularly interesting material for the study of the “sound fabric”. Indeed, as was indicated by A.P. Zhuravlev, “phono-semantics has a subliminal halo, almost unconscious by people. They use it intuitively, unconsciously” [3, p. 148]. Surrealist automatic images can lift the veil over some “aspects of the linguistic subconscious, over the language of intuition” [Ibid.].

Surrealist verse and surrealist poetic image in particular serve as a vehicle for bringing the irrationalism of imagination into the world of rationality. This poetry often looks like an incoherent associative flow of words. Andre Breton himself described it as “the hordes of words which, whatever one may say, Dada and Surrealism set about to let loose as though opening a Pandora’s box” [9, p. 152], as a stream of phrases that leave a strong impression of arbitrariness, but also of extraordinary inspiration, deep emotionality and particular picturesque quality, as well as “extreme degree of immediate absurdity” [9, p. 24–25].

Commenting on the surrealist writing, Roland Barthes points out its “total subjectivism” and calls it a “crisis of denotation” [2, p. 293], and the Greek researcher A.Je. Ster’jopulu – “a chain of the signifiers freed from their signified” [7, p. 60]. Still, such infinite trust in the automatism of the language, when it is left to itself, and the poet only captures the automatic images coming from the unconscious, makes the study of the phonetic symbolism in surrealist poetry particularly interesting.

**Results and Discussion.** In spite of some quite fair remarks of the researchers who oppose to studying surrealism outside Andre Breton’s group so as not to “expand the boundaries of surrealism as an organized movement” [7, p. 30], we rather agree with the researchers who, like Shelley Quinn, say: “The comparison of images from “surreal” writers from different countries further facilitates the identification of surreal elements in imagery, and help to isolate these from other modernist characteristics” [13, p. 11].

Further we look into the British surrealism and discuss the poetic works of Hugh Sykes Davies – poet, one of the organizers of the first London International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936 whose works can serve as a good example of surrealist poetry written in English. We will offer our observations over his poetry and its phonetic peculiarities. It is worth remembering that surrealists considered themselves just the conductors of the unconscious mind giving thus the reader the primacy in poetry interpretation.

The first reading of the poem *Decline of Phaenon* by Hugh Sykes Davies really reminds Pandora’s Box mentioned by Andre Breton.

<i>i 40- Phaenon leash more suns for caravan with your body’s-span more zodiac’s bears that eye unbars show-crabs and goats that telescopes yet must decline in rounded time of 40 suns I, – Phaenon’s!</i>	<p style="text-align: center;">*</p> <i>and suffer this preferment because you pierce dreams because you overhang night’s snarl with body’s-fang see where my blood streams in the firmament [10]</i>
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(We preserve Davies’s punctuation, spelling and division into two stanzas – LP.)

The title, which is always a strong element of the text, refers to the Greek myth about Phaenon – the son of the solar deity Helios who asked his father to drive the sun chariot for a day but was not strong enough to steer fiery horses and coming closer to the Earth almost destroyed it. To prevent the disaster, Zeus had to kill Phaenon by striking him down with a thunderbolt.

This is a rather short poem which demonstrates surrealist dislike of traditional meter. In its form it is somewhat arbitrarily divided into two stanzas of different lengths – 12 and 6 lines. In its syllabo-tonic system, the poem is not metric. The number of feet in the entire poem varies from 3 to 7, with 1 to 3 stressed syllables in a line and unregulated number of unstressed ones.

The number of feet in almost every line is different with shorter lines (1–4 feet) in the first stanza and longer (up to 7 feet) in the second. Therefore, the first part reads in a much tenser and emotionally strenuous way. The shorter lines render speed to the narration which, presumably, describes the fall of Phaenon (among *suns, zodiac’s bears, show-crabs, goats*) and actually feels like the fall of a bright meteor.

The second stanza, due to its longer lines, greater number of unstressed syllables (e.g. *and suffer this preferment* – 7 feet, 2 stresses) which slow down the reading, enjambment (*you overhang / night’s snarl, see where my blood streams / in the firmament*) gives a more meditative feeling, supported lexically by “explanatory” anaphora (*because you*).

The poem also presents a rare for the English surrealist verse case of rhyming. It is not a perfect, close rhyme, but slant rhymes, but they are organized in a very peculiar way. Thus, the first stanza is written in couplets, with pairs of lines that rhyme (*Phaenon-suns, caravan-span, bears-unbars, goats-telescopes, decline-time, suns-Phaenon’s*). The words that rhyme acquire greater significance and because of their position as the last word in the closed line become the “strong elements” of the poem. American professor Michael Drout says: “highline all the rhyming words and see if they tell a story” [11, p. 37]. Davies chooses the names of the heavenly phenomena, starts with the son-and-father reference and beautifully finishes with the reverse father-son relation. It’s interesting to note how two abstract words of *decline* and *time* “stand” against the words of concrete semantics and create aesthetic effect. Rhyming couplets, due to the fact that ideas come and close within two line, give the reader the feeling of an explosion and additionally support the idea of life lived fast and bright.

The second stanza also offers rhymes but very different ones. The first line rhymes with the last, the sixth line (slant *preferment-firmament*), the second line bears a perfect rhyme with the fifth one (*dreams-streams*), and the third line rhymes with the fourth one (*overhang-body’s-fang*). It gives the effect of continuous non-discrete speaking, of the voice of the hero appealing to the reader.

The “sound fabric” of the poem is additionally enhanced due to the phonetic peculiarities. Though we can’t observe particular alliterations or assonances here, let’s note that the first stanza abounds on the lexemes with mid-to-low pitch stressed vowels (*suns, caravan, body’s-span, show-crabs, goats, time, decline*).

E. Sepir describing his sound-symbolism experiments described the influence that vocal and consonant contrasts have on the recipient’s perception and noted their spontaneous nature [6, p. 326]. R. Jakobson also examined semantics of phonemes and stated that low-pitched vowels create a more negative effect on the reader because low sound is associated with something dark whereas high-pitched vowels render brighter and more positive feeling [8].

Thus, low and middle pitched vowel sounds in the first part might add to the feeling of the fall to the darkness. The abundance of fricative consonant only supplement the effect with the whistling sound of the fall (*leash, zodiac’s, bears, unbars, suns, Phaenon’s, span, show*).

The tone of the second part changes dramatically. Most of the stressed vowels are of the high or middle pitch (*dreams,*

*streams, pierce, firmament, preferment*) with a great contrast made by the “dark” word *snarl* (low-pitch and back [a:]) in a word combination *night’s snarl* in which the phonetic sound adds to the lexical and metaphoric meaning of the word. Altogether the stanza reads like of spiritual rising to the heaven after the fight with the dark forces of the night.

In many works of literature, Phaethon is depicted as a hero, as a symbol of man’s revolt against the world order and human destiny. Examination of sound symbolism of the poem by Hugh Sykes Davies suggests just the same idea.

**Conclusions.** Analysis of the poetic text shows that the match of sound and meaning can be regarded as an organizing principle for the study of poetry. And it is especially true when dealing with surrealist’s “plunges” into unconscious which result in the automatic flow of associations presenting much difficulty for the reader. The essential elements for analysis include alliterations, rhyming words, sound symbolism, metric system, which, altogether, serve as strong and significant elements of the text. It is their close observation that allows the reader to find those undercurrents that E.A. Poe insisted on when writing about the complexity and “some amount of suggestiveness of meaning <...> which imparts to a work of art so much of richness” [12, p. 1202].

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#### Прадівлання Л. М. Фоносемантичні аспекти сюрреалістичної поезії

**Анотація.** Статтю присвячено проблемі співвідношення звучання слова та його значення в поетичному тексті. У сучасній лінгвістичній науці питання семантичних можливостей звуку вивчає фоносемантика (А.П. Журавльов, В.В. Левицький, С.В. Воронін, Л.П. Прокоф’єва), проте феномену звукообразності мовних одиниць присвятили свої роботи В. фон Гумбольдт, О.О. Потебня, Е. Сепір, Р. Якобсон. Статистичні дослідження, проведені сучасними вченими, дали змогу виявити основні змістовні характеристики звуків за найрізноманітнішими ознаками – сили, рухливості, розміру, кольору, емоційного сприйняття.

Особливу роль звуковий символізм грає в поетичному тексті, в якому виразність звуку досягає межі. У статті розглядається поезія Г’ю Сайкса Девіса – британського поета, у творчості якого проявилися ознаки сюрреалізму.

Сюрреалістична поезія, яка часто являє собою абсурдний автоматичний потік асоціацій, дає особливо цікавий матеріал для вивчення «звукової тканини» поезії завдяки своїй орієнтації на передачу несвідомого. Фоносемантика, яка також має ореол підсвідомого (А.П. Журавльов), може допомогти в сприйнятті цієї досить складної поезії.

Аналіз поетичного тексту показує, що співвідношення звуку і сенсу можна розглядати як організуючий принцип вивчення поезії. Основні елементи для аналізу – це алітерації, рими, звуковий символізм, метрична система, які загалом служать своєрідними опорними елементами в сприйнятті поезії. Потрапляючи в сильні позиції тексту, вони допомагають читачеві інтуїтивно вловити «підводні» смисли вірша. Особливий інтерес становлять акустичні характеристики звуку в їх співвідношенні із семантичними значеннями слів, а також звукові контрасти, які створюють поети для посилення естетичного переживання читача.

**Ключові слова:** сюрреалізм, фоносемантика, рима, звуковий символізм.

#### Прадівлання Л. Н. Фоносемантические аспекты сюрреалистической поэзии

**Аннотация.** Статья посвящена проблеме соотношения звучания слова и его значения в поэтическом тексте. В современной лингвистической науке вопросы семантических возможностей звука изучает фоносемантика (А.П. Журавлев, В.В. Левицкий, С.В. Воронин, Л.П. Прокофьева), однако феномену звукообразности языка посвятили свои работы В. Гумбольдт, А.А. Потебня, Э. Сепир, Р. Якобсон. Статистические исследования, проведенные современными учеными, позволили выявить основные содержательные характеристики звуков по самым разнообразным признакам – силе, подвижности, размеру, цвету, эмоциональному восприятию.

Особую роль звуковой символизм играет в поэтическом тексте, в котором выразительность звука достигает предела. В статье рассматривается поэзия Хью Сайкса Девіса – британского поэта, в творчестве которого проявился интерес к сюрреализму.

Сюрреалистическая поэзия, часто являющая собой абсурдный автоматический поток ассоциаций, предоставляет особенно интересный материал для изучения «звуковой ткани» произведения благодаря своей ориентации на передачу бессознательного, сновиденческого. Фоносемантика, также имеющая ореол подсознательного (А.П. Журавлев), может помочь в восприятии этой достаточно сложной поэзии.

Анализ поэтического текста показывает, что соотношение звука и смысла можно рассматривать как организующий принцип изучения поэзии. Основные элементы для анализа – это аллитерации, рифмы, звуковая символика, метрика, которые служат своеобразными опорными элементами в восприятии поэзии. Попадая в сильные позиции, они помогают читателю интуитивно уловить «подводные» смыслы стихотворения. Особый интерес представляют акустические характеристики звука в их соотношении с семантическими значениями слов, а также звуковые контрасты, которые создают поэты для усиления эстетического переживания читателя.

**Ключевые слова:** сюрреализм, фоносемантика, рифма, звуковой символизм.