

**Магдалена Абаджиева**

(България, Институт за български език „Проф. Любомир Андрейчин“, Българска академия на науките)

## Езикът на поезията

*Резюме:* Разглеждат се примери от поетични произведения, в които художественото външне с постига чрез нарушаване на граматичната норма. Наблюденията доказват твърдението, че стандартните конструкции, стандартният език, се оказват недостатъчен художествен и комуникативен инструмент, за да могат да осигурят търсеното въздействие от страна на стихотворната реч. Нарушенията на езиковата норма и излизането извън установените книжовни правила са допустими, когато се твори поезия.

**Magdalena Abadzhieva**

(Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, “Prof. Lyubomir Andreychin” Institute for Bulgarian Language)

## The Language of Poetry

The research of the language of contemporary Bulgarian poets seems to remain outside of the interests of scholars. Usually, the studies examining the linguistic features reflected in the works of individual Bulgarian writers are focused on the period of formation of the Modern Bulgarian standard language. For example, such are the dissertations of R. Tzoinska about the language of Yoakim Karchovski, of Diana Petrova about the language of Grigor Parlachev, the book of Stoyan Zherev about Rayko Zhinzifov (Жерев/Zherev 1979), etc. A possible reason for the absence of such type of studies on contemporary Bulgarian literature, and on poetry in particular, may be the supposed absence of interesting linguistic features to provoke the scholars' interest.

An important clarification must be made here. Under “language of poetry” I don't mean stylistic devices observed in poetry, which characterize it and set it apart as a genre from other literary genres, but the acceptance of the poetic language as a separate kind of language according to certain of its features which give grounds for such definition (Веселовски/Veselovski 1993). In his article dedicated to the language of poetry Haj Ross from the University of North Texas writes that his main purpose is the confirmation of the usage of this term, specifically *“to regard poetry as a separate kind of language”* (Ross: 1). The American poet Kenneth Koch also dedicates a book to the art of reading and writing poetry explaining his intention like this: “Poetic purposes of a sort – a magical, religious sort – may be at the very origins of language or may have appeared very early on. To name things or beings was a first step to speaking to them and to trying to control them. Since its unknowable beginnings, however, language has become mainly a vast, reasonable, practical enterprise, with vocabulary and syntax and grammar to enable you to say almost anything you wish. The part the “almost” applies to is what can be said only by poetry.” (Koch 1998: 20). The quotations show that both Ross and Koch speak of poetry as a separate kind of language, which broadens the range of designation possibilities as compared to the ordinary standard language. Under “standard language” I mean the codified Bulgarian language with the official rules of its use. Lyn McCredden from Deakin University, Australia, maintains the same thesis in her essay:

“This essay argues that poetic language offers the possibility of meaning and value, and simultaneously points beyond itself, to the limits of language, to a space differently configured as erasure, silence, the c. What does it suggest, epistemologically and ontologically, if we acknowledge this double action of poetic language? What might this space beyond language be, and what difference does it make if we acknowledge this space?”(McCredden 2015: 95).

Surely, this is a really small part of the studies defending the thesis that poetry is a separate language and the purpose here is not to present the whole bibliography on the subject. In this article I will view several poems from Nikolay Milchev’s book “You and the cats in the afternoon. 26 poems of love” (Милчев/Milchev 2017) which in my opinion are an example precisely of such a crossing of the borders of standard language through the language of poetry which uses different grammatical devices. Before viewing specific examples from that book it must be said that the book itself contains the code for its deciphering.

Говори се,  
че имаш единадесет от всичките ми десет книги.  
И още се говори,  
че когато нищо не съм писал,  
ти си говорила с една забравена върху дървото  
мида  
и си я молила за нищо на света да не полита.  
...  
Ако не е така, тогава кой е чел  
буквара с изпокъсани растения?

(poem No. 17)

A rumour goes  
that you got eleven of my ten books.  
Another rumour goes  
that when I did not write a single word,  
you spoke with a clam forgotten on the tree  
and prayed for the sake of Lord not to fly.  
.....

If it's not so, then who has read  
the grammar book with torn plants?

It becomes evident the one who will read the book has to “skim” through it at the very beginning, to see more of it, to go outside the framework of the specific language and reach the poetic language which is somewhere beyond – in the eleventh of the ten books. Even more – to know that language and to be able to speak it even before humans created it when the letters were written by plants. Here’s another example confirming that:

Аз мога да живея само  
като непрекъснато объркани понятия.  
И мисълта ми да е гущерче,  
което криволичи  
просто хей така.  
Но ако ти сега четеш  
за лачените отражения  
на охлюви в тревата,  
значи си ти.

I only can exist as  
continuously misbehaving concepts.  
And turn my thought into a lizard  
Which twists and turns around  
Just like that.  
But if you're reading now  
About snail reflections  
Shining in the grass,  
Then it is you.

(poem No. 10)

The “patent reflections of snails in the grass” are the meanings which must be reached through poetry. The book “You and the cats in the afternoon” is dedicated namely to the person who succeeds in finding them. They are outside of the specific, crossing the borders of actual images and going beyond them, in the reflected world. The constantly confused concepts illustrate the way the language of poetry functions. It must be poly semantic – to generate meaning in such a way so as not to specify it as single and achieved, but to name its search. The shift from one suggestion to another, from one meaning to a second and third meaning, etc. – exactly that multilayerdness must be realized by poetry.

Ambiguity is a fundamental device in the poems of Nikolay Milchev. At times the words are selected and arranged in such a way so as not to allow just a single interpretation of the verse:

Прекрасно е,  
че ми запалваш вените,  
като събличаш пръстена от спомени.

It's wonderful  
That you light up my veins  
When taking memories down off the ring.

In the cited example it's not very clear whether the ring is made of memories or if the memories are taken off the ring. In the first case *of memories* functions as a modifier to the noun *ring*, and in the second case – as an indirect object (strip of what – of memories), which combines the two functions of that preposition in the sentence (Стоянов/Stoyanov 1980: 450).

The ambiguity here is achieved through the verb *strip* which is used figuratively, as well as by the preposition *of* which expresses material origin, substantial composition (GCBSL: 434) and ablative relations (GCBSL: 435). It is known that the exact meaning of the prepositions is extracted from the context, but in the example given the context itself presupposes ambiguous interpretation. Precisely that peculiarity characterizes the language of poetry and in this case gives a special colour and richness of suggestion. The following example from the first poem is identical:

Две черни мрени – лачени,  
ласкави, непохитени.  
И един щъркел със свлечени  
чорапи – от мокри растения.

Two barbels - black and glossy,  
Tender and unravished.  
And a stork in dragged down  
Stockings – of wet doug weeds.

(Милчев/Milchev 2017: 1)

The same usage of the preposition *of* is observed. Socks made of wet plants or socks which are pulled off by wet plants – both interpretations are possible.

A non-typical usage of the preposition *without* is observed in the following example:

А аз обичам теб  
и жадния ти жест  
да сипваш в чашите ни  
много мокри думи.  
Дъждът вали.  
И толкова е без,  
че става слаб.  
И може би е хубав.

And I love you  
I love your thirsty gesture  
When you pour soaked words  
In our glasses.  
The rain is falling down.  
It's so without  
It's getting slim.  
And maybe even handsome.

(Милчев/Milchev 2017: 18)

“The rain is falling. And it's so without, that it becomes weak”–here the preposition *without* is used as an adjective (a part of a predicate noun), in order to reinforce the lack of strong enough attributes describing the rain. Words prove to be insufficient for the language of poetry. It needs other forms, other meanings.

The poetry of Nikolay Milchev provides possibilities for a different perception of the meaning, and most interestingly this is achieved through the avoidance of syntactic constructions typical of the language and their substitution with such that can be interpreted in several ways. The following example is extremely interesting:

След време ще те върна невредима,  
но за това ми липсват основания,  
освен едно –  
че се завърта глобусът –  
отново –  
и на запад, и навсякъде.  
И ми е хубаво така,  
че ми е лошо.

I'll get you back some day undamaged  
Although I lack all grounds for this  
Apart from one –  
The globe is turning round-  
Again-  
West and everywhere.  
And I feel so good like that  
That I feel sick.

(Милчев/Milchev 2017: 5)

The sentence “And it feels so good, that it feels bad” can be understood in two ways. From a syntactic point of view, it’s undisputable that the main clause is impersonal, and the adverb *so* in it serves as an adverbial. On the one hand, the subordinate clause answers the question “what feels good?”. The interpretation in this case can be the following: “the fact that I feel bad makes me feel good” – the statement is paradoxical but this is a characteristic poetic device. In such an interpretation the subordinate clause is a subject clause. On the other hand, the subordinate clause can also be understood as an adverbial of consequence. Then the meaning would rather be: “I feel good so, in such a way, that I even feel bad.” In my opinion both hypotheses are admissible and the syntactic analysis can be made both ways depending on the interpretation, the different understanding of the meaning of the sentence. Here the way poetry functions comes to the fore again, namely by evading the monosemantic interpretation and allowing for polysemy, expressed through the specific selection of grammatical devices which are not typical of the standard language. The non-standard grammatical form is “intercepted” by the perceiver and on a subconscious level urges him/her to go back to the verse again and again and repeat it in his/her consciousness, carry it in his/her consciousness. Because poetry involves constantly returning to the text and searching for meaning. In my opinion this is the main difference between an ordinary declarative sentence and a sentence written in the language of poetry and incorporated in a poem. The declarative sentence presupposes the exact conveyance of some content, its interpretation by the perceiver and finally “exiting” the sentence since the objective is achieved – the information is conveyed and perceived exactly, no incomprehension is allowed. This is achieved by following the grammatical rules which is a precondition for the functioning of the standard language. Poetry, however, needs ambiguity, precisely so that this “exiting” from the sentence is not allowed but a constant return to it is achieved. This is why the language of poetry can function outside of grammar by breaking the established norms in order to keep the attention on the verse and to provoke the search for meaning, which cannot be single, as was already stated. In support of this, I quote the following example from N. Milchev’s book:

Аз ще съм само част от приземената тъга на лятото,  
защото знам,  
че лятото е нищо повече от теб.

I will be just a part of the ground sadness of the summer  
Because I know  
That summer is nothing more than you.

(poem No. 11)

In the cited example the Bulgarian rule of double negation is not observed. It states that the use of a negative pronoun requires the use of the negative form of the verb, too; for example: “I don’t have anything” (the correct form in Bulgarian would be “I don’t have nothing”), “there is nobody in the room” (“there isn’t nobody in the room”), “I don’t want anything” (“I don’t want nothing”), etc. The language of poetry, however, exceeds the boundaries of the established language. The unusual usage provokes different perception and it can’t be claimed that this is a mistake at all. On the contrary. Let’s view the example in both cases – with the rule observed and with the rule broken. In the first case the sentence must be: *the summer isn’t nothing more than you*. The double negation rule in the standard language functions like this. We have the negative pronoun for inanimate objects *nothing*, preceded by the negative form of the verb *to be* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, present tense. The interpretation is the following: when I compare you to summer, it is not more than you, it’s not more significant than you. The poem, however, says: *the summer is nothing more than you*. It can’t be claimed that the meaning is the same as

the previous. The broken norm can be felt and that precisely points and keeps the attention to that part of the text. The meaning of that phrase is rather: *you are the summer, the summer without you would be nothing*. It seems that here the comparison between “you” and “the summer” is lost, and the absence of a negative form of the verb *to be* turns the statement into poetry. This suggestion cannot be achieved, if the norm is observed. This is why poetry needs its own grammar.

The grammatical rule is broken also in the usage of the form *mucher* in the following example:

Не ти искам устата – само я помня.  
Един кос в маранята като ангел бърбори.  
И това е достатъчно, и по-много от всичко.  
Не ти искам устата – искам само рекичката.

I do not want your mouth – I just recollect it.  
A blackbird in the haze’s jabbering like an angel.  
I find it sufficient and more than everything.  
I do not want your mouth – I just want that brooklet.

(Милчев/Milchev 2017: 3)

The missing but potentially possible form is used, since in the standard language you cannot say “this is *mucher* than anything”, but you will either say “this is *much*”, or “this is *more than anything*” and respectively you will continue with an explanation. Poetry, however, allows the existence of forms which are not typical, because another type of communication is sought – with linguistic devices outside of the language.

The last example from the book I will give is the following:

Най-хубава си колкото те има.  
Най-хубава си – даже много повече.

You are most beautiful as much as you exist.  
You are most beautiful and even more than that.

In the sentence “You are most beautiful, as much as you are there” again we can observe a selection of grammatical devices not typical for the standard language, which is expressed by the usage of the adverb *as much as*. Standard language requires the sentence to be finished differently, for example: *you are most beautiful when you are there* or *you are most beautiful, wherever you are*. But such a choice of means of expression limits the meaning. Such types of constructions separate some part of time and space, when and where the beloved can be beautiful, they set some specific circumstances. This, however, is not the suggestion the poem seeks. It can be achieved only through the use of the adverb *as much as*. The interpretation here is: “you are beautiful everywhere and always, your whole existence is beautiful.” This meaning can be expressed only through the language of poetry which has its own grammar.

Observations on the language in the poetry book of Nikolay Milchev (Милчев/Milchev 2017) prove that standard constructions, standard language turns out to be an artistic and communicative instrument insufficient to provide the full effect sought and achieved by poetry. Breaking the norm and exceeding the boundaries of the established rules are permissible in the creation of poetry.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Веселовски 1993: *Веселовски, А. Н.* Езикът на поезията и езикът на прозата. – В: Литературна мисъл, XXXVII, 3, 128–159 (Veselovski 1993: *Veselovski, A. N.* Ezikat na poeziata i ezikat na prozata. – V: Literaturna misal, XXXVII, 3, 128–159).

Жерев 1979: *Жерев, Ст.* Езикът на Райко Жинзифов. София: БАН (Zhrev 1979: *Zherev, St.* Ezikat na Rayko Zhinzifov. Sofia: BAN).

Милчев 2017: *Милчев, Н.* Ти и котките следобед: 26 стихотворения от любов. София: Симолини (Milchev 2017: *Milchev, N.* Ti i kotkite sledobed: 26 stihotvoreniya ot ljubov. Sofia: Simolini).

Стоянов 1980: *Стоянов, Ст.* Граматика на българския книжовен език. София: Наука и изкуство (Stoyanov 1980: *Stoyanov, St.* Gramatika na bulgarskiya knizhoven ezik. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo).

Haj Ross: The Language of Poetry [[https://www.academia.edu/14944616/The\\_language\\_of\\_poetry](https://www.academia.edu/14944616/The_language_of_poetry)]

GCBSL 1983: Grammar of the Contemporary Bulgarian Standard Language, volume 2, Morphology. Sofia.

Koch 1998: *Koch, K.* Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry. New York: Simon&Schuster New Zork.

McCredden 2015: *McCredden, L.* Poetry and the Limits of Language. – In: Language and Semiotic Studies, vol. 1, № 4, 95-107.