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Sound Shape and Josip Stritar's Narrative Prose

Abstract

This article examines the role of sound in literary texts, focusing on how silent reading recreates sonic effects. The research discusses the question of whether sound-meaning links are inherent or conventional, ranging from Plato's, Saussure's, Peirce's, and Jakobson's points of view on the matter. In particular, sound symbolism and Jakobson's poetic function highlight how phonetic literary tools can shape aesthetics in writing. An empirical analysis of selected Josip Stritar's 19th-century novels reveals the author's frequent use of onomatopoeia, alliteration, and rhythm to create evocative prose. In fact, though often associated with poetry, sound-based elements also enrich narrative texts in prose, suggesting specific atmospheres and emotional depth. These writing features showcase the complexity and importance of sound in literature.

Keywords: sound shape, silent reading, poetic function, sound symbolism, Josip Stritar

Introduction

Sound, an invisible yet ubiquitous entity, is fundamentally a physical-mathematical category. On the other hand, in contrast to other sensory-perceptible realities, it becomes an aesthetic category in various arts. Compared to what happens in other artistic forms such as cinema, radio, theater, and music itself, the engagement with sound and listening in literature is unique (Reyner 2008: 130). Among other things, it is linked to the question of the relationship between sound shape and meaning. Sound is a fundamental constituent of language and, thus, of literary communication (Novák 2020: 152). So, the sound-related aspects of a literary text are closely connected to phonetic and phonological linguistic categories (Blohm et al. 2021: 7 – 8).

As literature is nowadays understood primarily as a silent art form, when we

speak of sound, we cannot overlook the seemingly contradictory nature of the sound form of a literary text in the context of silent reading. Therefore, the first part of this article addresses the question of sound in silent reading. Next, the focus is on a discussion of the relationship between sound and meaning. The poetic function of the sound shape in Jakobson's theoretical framework is also examined. In the final and empirical part of the article, the sound shape as a conveyor of aesthetic function is investigated in three selected novels by the Slovenian author Josip Stritar, who wrote his works in the second half of the 19th century.

The sound of silent reading

The spoken word preceded the written word. Historically, literature primarily existed only in oral form, with sound as its fundamental medium. Written literature was a secondary phenomenon, with letters as its primary medium (Goody 2017). However, it should also be noted that it was only in the second half of the 19th century, with the spread of literacy among the population, that the shift from predominantly reading aloud (to those who were still illiterate) to private silent reading practices became firmly established. Today, we are so accustomed to effortlessly “translating” printed words into sounds (without even the need to physically produce those sounds) that we sometimes tend to forget that they actually exist (Brown 1987: 8, as cited in Novák 2017: 152).

Closely connected with silent reading is the recent concept of *auditivty* in literature. In a narrower sense, auditivty refers to the physically audible characteristics of a text. In a broader sense, instead, it denotes the potential ability of a literary work to create an aural image in the reader's mind, aesthetically conveying or reinforcing information. Although today we generally read silently, this does not mean that texts lack sonic qualities or that we cannot perceive these sound features “internally” (Novák 2017: 151). The oral and the written are connected by an agreed-upon system, determining a precise and contextual relationship between phoneme and grapheme. Written words are closely connected to their phonological interpretations in the mind of the “experienced reader”, and the two systems mutually influence each other. Blohm et al. (2021: 10 – 11) describe the process of moving from written symbols to the realization of sound shape as follows:

Orthographic symbols (written words) are tightly connected with their corresponding phonological representations in the minds of experienced readers, regardless of whether or how well the writing system represents sound. Thus, reading a word automatically activates its abstract sound representation, which is referred to as phonological recoding and comprises both phonemic and syllabic representations [...]. But what readers experience as an ‘inner voice’ [...] during silent reading is the phonetic recoding of written text. This sub-vocalization comprises not only individual speech sounds and syllables but, like overt articulation, also sentence intonation, phrasing, stress, and rhythm, partly guided by punctuation [...]. Crucially, the stream of inner

speech¹ is the actual realization of the sound shape of the written literary work of art; and it is usually these realizations that we study when we investigate sound effects of written literary texts.

The Sound and the Meaning

The question of whether there is an inherent, natural connection between the sound of a word and its meaning, or whether this connection is purely conventional, goes far back in history. According to Jakobson and Waugh (2002: 14), Plato's dialogue "Cratylus" already anticipated some central concepts and problems of modern debates in language theory. In "Cratylus", the dispute between Cratylus and Hermogenes concerns the correctness and appropriateness of names. Cratylus supports the "naturalist" position, claiming that every name is naturally connected to the thing it designates. Hermogenes, on the contrary, is a proponent of conventionalism, maintaining that it is only arbitrary convention that determines how something is called. Listening to the arguments of the disputants, Socrates leans toward Cratylus' naturalistic stance – mainly by pointing out the etymology of words – but also argues that a name is not always a reliable indicator of the essence of things. Therefore, for a true insight, one must investigate things themselves (Sedley 2003: 3 – 6). Since this ancient discussion, the arbitrariness of the sign has been central to Western linguistic thought (Hutton 1989: 63).

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913) is the most famous proponent of an arbitrary link between the two principal components of a sign, the *signified* (concept) and the *signifier* (sound pattern), which are inseparably bound together. The principle of the arbitrariness of the link between sound and meaning – that is, between the signifier and signified of the linguistic sign – and its close relationship to language conventionality is seen as one of de Saussure's core contributions to modern linguistics (Joseph 2015: 85). Nonetheless, Joseph (2015: 13 – 14) points out that even Saussure had to come to terms with relative arbitrariness, recognizing that words can be at least partially motivated by the concepts they denote.

Contrary to Saussure's binary theory, Charles Peirce (1839 – 1914) proposed a triadic model of the sign. Peirce's basic claim was that signs consist of three interrelated components: a *sign*, an *object*, and an *interpretant*. The *sign* roughly corresponds to the concept of the signifier, the *object* to the signified, and the *interpretant*, Peirce's most innovative and distinctive feature, represents how the sign/object relation is interpreted. For Peirce, signification is not simply a dyadic relationship between sign and object. A sign signifies only if it is interpreted. Thus, the interpretant is central to the determination of the content of a sign, since the

¹ "Inner speech" is mentioned by Jakobson and Waugh, who, in dealing with the question of the sound of inner speech, draw on the ideas of the Russian philologist Filipp Fortunatov (1848 – 1914). The latter states that "in a certain respect, the phenomena of language themselves appertain to the phenomena of thought," and that "language as such, when our thoughts are expressed in speech, has its being precisely because it exists itself in our thinking." (Jakobson and Waugh 2002: 82)

meaning of the latter consists of the interpretation it evokes in sign users. From the perspective of the relation of the sign to its object, Peirce divided signs into *icons*, *indices*, and *symbols*. In the case of symbols, there is a convention, agreement, habit, or law that activates a symbol and invokes the corresponding object (Atkin 2010: 367). Although most scholars agree that, in Peirce's framework, a symbol is a conventional sign, Bellucci (2021: 170) argues that a Peircean symbol may be a conventional sign as well. However, it is not necessarily so.

Edward Sapir (1884 – 1939), another American scholar from the early 20th century, was an advocate of the naturalist viewpoint. Recognizing that association between sound and meaning often appears arbitrary, Sapir asserted that some pairings of concepts and sounds are more natural than others and that people intuitively agree with such associations (Blohm et al. 2021: 12). In his article “Sound Patterns in Language” (1925), Sapir argues that speech sounds are not merely articulatory or acoustic images. They are also the raw material for symbolic expression within the appropriate linguistic context.² In this regard, Jakobson and Waugh (2002: 21) note that Sapir particularly emphasizes relational gaps between the sounds of language.

The Poetic Function of the Sound Shape

When addressing the issue of the sound form of language (cf. Jakobson & Waugh 2002), the renowned linguist Roman Jakobson (1896 – 1982) drew mainly on the concepts presented in the previous section (ancient philosophy, Plato, de Saussure, Sapir, Peirce) as well as other semiotic theories (e.g., Sanskrit grammar) that converged with his own postulates.³ According to this theoretical model, the phonemes have no autonomous meaning themselves but differentiate word meanings, derived from the interrelations between the phonemes and the definition of the phonological unit as an opposition. Jakobson's theories were also strongly influenced by the theory of relativity, which would have developed

² Sapir is regarded as the founder of ethnolinguistics, which is based on the notion that language encapsulates our conceptions of the world and our relationship to it. Together with Benjamin Lee Whorf, Sapir proposed the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – also known as the linguistic relativity hypothesis. According to John A. Lucy, such hypothesis necessarily “develop two linked claims among the key terms of the hypothesis (i.e., language, thought, and reality). First, languages differ significantly in their *interpretations* of experienced reality, both in what they choose to represent and how they organize it. Second, these language *interpretations* affect thought about reality more broadly, at either the individual or the cultural level.” (Lucy 2001: 13486). In the interpretations we might recognize some similarity with Peirce's interpretant, one of the three interrelated parts of a sign (a relational entity). Sapir's views influenced the development of European (Slavic) ethnolinguistics, alongside the theories of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who at the turn of the 18th to 19th centuries developed a theory of the direct connection between language, (national) culture and type of thinking.

³ He also made use of contemporary linguistic research, such as de Courtenay's insights into the morpheme as the smallest bearer of meaning, Trubetzkoy's studies of phonemes from the perspective of oppositions, and his own theory on phonemes, elaborated within the Prague Linguistic Circle (Jakobson & Waugh 2002: 20 – 22).

in modern physics. Moreover, his work was inspired by the theory and practice of Cubism, in which fundamental elements were not substances but rather relationships (Kučera 1983: 874). Such relationality was already explored by Peirce and Sapir in semiology and anthropology. Innovatively, Jakobson applied the concept of relationality to the six functions of language,⁴ claiming that “[t]he diversity lies not in a monopoly of some of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions” (Jakobson 1960: 353). This hierarchical order can be understood as the different relations between the individual functions in a text. The poetic function of language (i.e., the function focused on the message for its own sake) is the predominant function in literary texts, while still accounting for general linguistic questions (Jakobson 1960: 356). According to Jakobson (1960, as cited in Blohm et al. 2011: 7), the sound form fulfills a poetic function and is an integral part of a literary work, giving a marked “palpability” to the form. In other words, the poetic function draws attention to the signifier and its sound shape.⁵

Sound Symbolism

In the book “The Sound Shape of Language”, written by Jakobson together with Linda R. Waugh and first published in 1979, an entire chapter discusses sound symbolism. The latter is defined as “designating an inmost, natural similarity association between sound and meaning” (Jakobson and Waugh 2002: 182). By doing this, the authors return again to the age-old question of whether the sign is arbitrary. The concept of sound symbolism – also known in current research as sound iconicity, phonological iconicity, phonetic symbolism, or hypo-iconicity (Blohm et al. 2021: 12) – comprises not only onomatopoeic sounds and/or interjections, but also words linked together by sound, meaning or the symbolic, even emotional, value of different phonemes.⁶ Furthermore, it extends to synesthesia,⁷ understood as a kind

⁴ According to Jakobson, language must be investigated by taking into consideration the full variety of its tasks, which are tied to the six basic functions of verbal communication. Besides the poetic function, there are the emotive, referential, metalingual, phatic and conative functions (Jakobson 1960: 357).

⁵ Sound shape can be significant for the other functions as well. For instance, concerning the conative function (directed at the addressee), Jakobson explains that it “finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative, which syntactically, morphologically, and often even *phonetically* deviate from other nominal and verbal categories” (Jakobson 1960: 355) [emphasis added by the author of this article].

⁶ An example would be research on the symbolic link between vowel quality and the perception of their brightness/darkness, or the hypothesis that nasal sounds (n, m) are naturally linked to negative emotional states, whereas plosive sounds (p, d) are naturally linked to positive ones (see Blohm et al. 2021: 13 – 14; Auracher et al. 2010). For a more in-depth overview, see both the cited articles. Interestingly, studies on sound symbolism in the Slovenian context have mostly been conducted, with rare exceptions (cf. Toporišič 2008; but without naming the concept), by American scholars (cf. Priestly 1997; Priestly 2002; Pogačar and Pogacar 2024) and by researchers from German-speaking areas (cf. Neuhäuser 1981 and the references in Priestly 1997: 464).

⁷ The most striking example is Rimbaud’s sonnet “Vowels,” in which the author

of perceptual illusion or blending of sensory modes.

Blohm et al. (2021: 7) observe that in recent years⁸ there has been a growing number of empirical studies that address sound from the perspective of literary texts. Numerous contributions in this field attempt to discover universal symbolism in individual phonemes and phoneme groups, employing anthropological, psychological, or neuroscientific methods (Auracher et al. 2010: 5). However, it usually emerges that what might be valid for one specific text cannot be simply generalized even to other texts in the same language – and certainly not to the ones of other languages. Thus, the results usually are true only for the texts under discussion.⁹

Sound Shape of Poetry and Prose¹⁰

The concept of a “sound shape” that furthers the aesthetic function of a text is most frequently applied in research on poetry, as the intrinsic link between sound and meaning is most evident in poetic works (Blohm et al. 2021: 13).¹¹ In Novák’s terms, “the sonic level of the language is deliberately accentuated and elaborated in order to imbue the lyrical content with as much communicative force as possible, pushing it towards the boundaries of the instinctive, pre-semantic and pre-rational perception of reality” (Novák 2020: 162).

De Beaugrande (1978: 24) maintains that a reader of poetry is, to some extent, encouraged by the context to notice sound repetitions, as it is assumed that these are not random in poetry. Thus, an appropriate reading strategy can heighten both qualitative and quantitative observations at the phonological and prosodic levels. In poetry, sound literary tools are pervasive. In prose, they tend to be more elusive (Blohm et al. 2021: 13). However, this does not mean that auditivty in prose is unimportant. Prose – especially when it draws close to lyrical genres – also attempts to replicate or directly convey sound to express moods and emotions (Novák 2020: 162). An example can be found in the prose of the Slovenian poet, writer, playwright, literary critic, editor, and translator Josip Stritar (1836 – 1923), whose narrative prose has been described by literary historians as poetic realism.

Josip Stritar: A Sketch of His Life and Work

Josip Stritar was born in 1836 in the village of Podsmreka in present-day Slo-

assigns colors to vowels according to their “character.”

⁸ In agreement with Eugenio Coşeriu, Jakobson and Waugh date the beginning of research on this concept to the second half of the 19th century, mentioning the German linguist Georg von der Gabelentz (1840 – 1893) as an early advocate of “fruitful ideas on sound symbolism” (Jakobson and Waugh 2002: 182 – 183).

⁹ In some studies, one cannot escape the impression that interpretations of the symbolic meanings of sound form are highly subjective. To some extent, an exception is constituted by research addressing the perception of sounds by a larger sample of participants.

¹⁰ Drama, which is meant to be performed aloud, i.e., staged, is not included in this comparison. In it, however, several different elements of performance must be considered.

¹¹ The most explicit manifestation of the sound features of a text is sound poetry.

venia.¹² He studied classical languages in Vienna, where he settled. For much of his life, he worked as a private tutor, which enabled him to travel across Europe. Later, he became a professor at various secondary and grammar schools. The second half of the 19th century was his more creative and productive period. In those years, following the revolutionary wave of 1848, the Slovenian national movement became stronger. Consequently, in the second half of the 19th century, as elsewhere in Europe, Slovenian national literature became largely linked to the process of national identity formation (Dovič 2007: 73). However, Stritar was not much affected by the patriotic atmosphere in his oeuvre. Moreover, although Stritar was in close contact with Fran Levstik, the author of the Slovenian literary program and manifesto of the era, his contemporaries recognized that Stritar's works were independent and diverged from the dominant streams of the then Slovenian literature. Influenced by life in Vienna, liberal ideas, and the modern pessimism of Schopenhauer, Stritar is regarded as one of the most "European-minded" Slovenian writers of his generation (Pogačnik 1963: 27 – 31).

Between 1870 and 1880, he published the literary journal "Zvon" in Vienna, in which he printed his own works. Furthermore, in this periodical, he published a section called "Literarni pogovori" ("Conversations on Literature"), which discussed literary aesthetics and advocated *l'art pour l'art*.

Sound Shape in Stritar's Narrative Prose

How did Stritar create the sound shape of his narrative works? This will be illustrated through three of his novels, which differ in terms of plot, ideas, settings, and literary influences, but all titled after their main character. These works are "Svetinova Metka" ("Svetin's Metka"),¹³ "Zorin", and "Gospod Mirodolski" ("Mister Mirodolski"). Examples from each novel will be presented and analyzed to show the role of sound shape in the poetic function of selected Stritar's texts.

Svetinova Metka

The novel¹⁴ "Svetinova Metka" was published in 1868 in the almanac "Mladika" in Ljubljana under the pseudonym Boris Miran. The publication coincided with the last year of Stritar's studies in Vienna. The novel's main theme is a love conflict. It talks about the unhappy love between a man from a higher social class and a young peasant woman who selflessly renounces her beloved. The influence

¹² When Stritar was born (and until 1867), the territory of present-day Slovenia was part of the Austrian Empire. From 1867 to 1919, it belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After World War I, it became part of a South Slavic political entity.

¹³ Svetin is Metka's family name.

¹⁴ In Slovenian terminology, long narrative works are divided into *povesti* and novels (*romani*). According to certain classifications, "Svetinova Metka" is considered a *povest*, a genre akin to a novel but with specific differences. As this distinction is not central to the present discussion, and since the line between a *roman* and a *povest* is often blurred, all three narrative works examined here are referred to simply as novels.

of Rousseau's idyllic landscapes in this romantic-idealistic novel is evident. The rural environment is presented and exalted as the bearer of authentic values. Nature often serves as a metaphor for the characters' inner worlds and as a medium for expressing their internal moods. For example, when Metka and her would-be lover secretly spend time in the countryside, still believing their love will face no obstacles, one scene of an idyllic and offering protection and peace nature is depicted. In nature, their innocent love finds an idyllic mirror:

V tem se je bilo solnce skrilo za gore; odhajajočemu daje slové čreda belih, z zlatom obrobljenih oblakov, zbranih ob višnjavem nebu. Iz kotov dolinice vstaja mrak in prepreza počasi molčeče logove. Božji volek se oglasi v travi in prijazno škriplje svojo večerno pesem. Studenec poleg njiju sladko curi in šumi, ter obila voda grgrá in vrvrá pod njim iz pozabljenega vrča. Sreča in veselje je razlito okrog po naturi, sreča in veselje v njihovih srcih!

Čuj, kako lepo kos poje v zelenem smrečji! (Stritar [1868])

[English Translation]¹⁵

Here the sun has hidden behind the mountains; the departing orb is bid farewell by a gathering of white, gold-rimmed clouds against the purple sky. From the corners of the little valley, dusk rises and slowly overcomes the silent groves. The cricket calls from the grass and chirps its evening song. Next to them, a spring gurgles and babbles sweetly, and below it, forgotten, a jug¹⁶ overflows with an abundance of water that gargles and gushes forth. Happiness and joy flow throughout nature, happiness and joy fill their hearts!

Listen, how beautifully the blackbird sings in the green spruce!

This passage portrays the time shortly after sunset. It also highlights the silence broken only by the evening song of a cricket and the murmur of a spring. The text is highly poetic. It features onomatopoeia, asonance u – u, i – i: *curi in šumi* (“gurgles and babbles”), alliteration r – r and asonance a – a: *grgrá in vrvrá* (“gargles and gushes”), synesthesia related to sound (*prijazno škriplje*, “pleasantly chirps”), and an abundance of assonances and repeated patterns that create a poetic rhythm – for instance, parallelism and repeated structures in *Sreča in veselje... sreča in veselje* (“Happiness and joy... happiness and joy”). All these techniques contribute to a rhythmic and almost verse-like quality of the text. At least in the onomatopoeias we could detect a certain amount of sound symbolism.

A further example from “Svetinova Metka” can be found in a scene describing the feelings of a man named Valentine, who loves Metka, although she does not love him in return. The narrator depicts his intimate feelings. When Valentine realizes that Metka is in love with someone else, the story teller projects the character's inner world onto nature with the following words:

¹⁵ This and the following examples translated by Tatjana Koren.

¹⁶ The word *vrč* “jug” is used metaphorically to refer to a spring. Moreover, it contributes to the building of the alliteration in the passage (v and r within the words *grgrá in vrvrá*, “gurgles and babbles”).

Tako so vse stvari žive in vesele; žalosten je edini človek, ki hodi med njimi. V Valentinovih prsah ne sije sonce, ptiči ne pojó; zakril mu jih je črni mrak in grobna tihota. (Stritar [1868])

[English Translation]

Thus, everything else is alive and joyful; only the man who walks among them is sad. No sun shines in Valentine's breast, no birds sing; they have been darkened by black gloom and a sepulchral silence.

Here, one observes repetitions (*ne sije sonce, ptiči ne pojó*, “no sun shines, no birds sing”) and a symbolic portrayal of Valentine's somber mood. Whereas the first excerpt paints the scene with gold, white, purple, and green, this excerpt is permeated by black, pointing out the differences on a chromatic level as well.

Zorin

The novel “Zorin” was published in episodes in 1870 in the literary journal “Zvon”. The novel is often acclaimed as Stritar's finest narrative work. It is written as an epistolary novel. The main character lives in Paris. Again, the main topic is the unfulfilled love (this time) between a young man and a high-society young woman. At the end, the protagonist's suicide is clearly suggested.¹⁷ The letters, written by Zorin to an unnamed friend, discuss his daily life, his ruminations on life and art, and his emotions and longing. The novel's form and content are unmistakably influenced by Goethe's “The Sorrows of Young Werther”, as well as by Schopenhauer and Rousseau.¹⁸ There is a sentimental and idealistic tone, which reflects the protagonist's inner conflict between reality and his ideal of humanity.

Compared to “Svetinova Metka”, there are far fewer nature scenes. Nature primarily appears in dreams and childhood recollections of the main characters, Zorin and Dela. For instance, in this excerpt Zorin, after he encounters Dela, a childhood friend and the object of his love, describes his memory of his childhood spent in the countryside:

Kako ti bom pa, dragi moj, kako ti bom pravil to? Roka se mi trese, ko pišem, in viharno mi v prsah poje srce. Mojbog, mojbog, kaj bo to! Kaj me spreletava sladka groza, ko se spominjam nebeške prikazni! In pa vstaja mi pred očmi iz temine počasi počasi skoraj pozabljena podoba iz davnih časov, jasnejša in jasnejša, in glej, razgrinja se pred mano sveta dežela z zelenimi travniki, hladnimi gozdiči, nad njo pa plava mir, nedolžnost, sreča, in zdi se mi, kakor bi zelene smreke majale glave in, sladko šepetaje, klicale me in vabile: Pridi, pridi nazaj, srečen si bil med nami! O zlati časi, o nedolžna otroška leta! (Stritar [1870])

¹⁷ The question of whether publishing a novel centering on suicide would have been possible in Ljubljana at that time remains unanswered.

¹⁸ Rousseau is explicitly mentioned in the letters of Zorin, who visits Rousseau's house in Paris.

[English Translation]

But how, my dear friend – how can I tell you all this? My hand trembles as I write, and stormily my heart sings in my chest. My God, my God, what will come of it! A sweet terror seizes me as I recall that heavenly vision! And then rises before my eyes from the darkness, slowly, slowly, almost forgotten image from past ages, clearer and clearer, and behold, a sacred land with green meadows, cool groves, and, floating above it, peace, innocence, happiness, and it seems as if the green spruce trees nod their heads, whispering sweetly, calling and inviting me: Come, come back; you were happy among us! O golden days, O innocent childhood!

In this brief passage, one sees abundant poetic tools normally associated with verse, including repetitions (*Mojbog, mojbog; počasi počasi; jasnejša in jasnejša*; “My God, my God”; “slowly slowly”; “clearer and clearer”), sound-based figures like alliteration (*v prsih poje srce*; “my heart sings in my chest”, with the *p-p* and *rs-sr* patterns), and rhythmic phrasings personifications (*trees nodding their heads, whispering sweetly, calling and inviting him*). The excerpt even directly mentions sound (*poje srce*, “my heart sings”). Furthermore, there are oxymorons (*sladka groza*, “sweet terror”) and ornamental adjectives (*zeleni travniki*, “green meadows”; *hladni gozdiči*, “cool groves”). The novel also contains relatively frequent onomatopoeic sound descriptions, as in the following two examples (emphasis added by the author of the article):

Smejala sva se na vsa usta in mislim, da z nama tudi srečni metulj. Ko sva se že nekoliko utrudila, greva pod košato lipo poleg hiše, kjer nama skoraj prinesó kosilo. V slast nama je šlo vse. Evelina je jela in žvrgljala kakor lastovka pa smejala se, vse obenem! (Stritar [1870])

[English Translation]

We *laughed out loud*, and I think the happy butterfly laughed with us. When we had grown a little tired, we went under the lush linden tree next to the house, where lunch was soon brought to us. We enjoyed everything. Evelina both ate and *chirped* like a swallow, *laughing* all at once!

[...] zdi se mi, kakor da bi slišal *šumljanje* potoka tik sebe.

[English Translation]

[...] it seems to me as though I can hear the *murmuring* of a brook right nearby.

Sound tools also appear in the description of love. For example, at the end of this excerpt, love is confessed and depicted through alliteration (notably by the repetition of *m* and *s*):

Vse to pa pripovedujem tako nadrobno zato, ljubi moj, da, ako moči, umeš, zakaj je bila moja ljubezen do tega čudnega otroka tako globoka, tako mogočna, tako ukoreninjena v mojem srcu, tako spojena z *vsemi mojimi mislimi, z vsem mojim življenjem*. (Stritar [1870])

[English Translation]

And I recount all this in such detail, my dear friend, so that, if you can, you might understand why my love for this strange child was so deep, so powerful, so rooted in my heart, so bound up *with all my thoughts, with my very life*.

Gospod Mirodolski

“Gospod Mirodolski” was also published in episodes in “Zvon,” in 1876. It is thought to have been inspired by Walter Scott’s “The Vicar of Wakefield,” which Stritar had attempted to translate during his student years. Scholars describe it as a family or educational novel, in which Stritar moves away from the tragic aspects of existence toward life wisdom. The novel is thematically and ideologically the opposite of “Zorin” (Koblar 1971). Its main idea is that good upbringing can save young people from misfortune.

Compared to “Svetinova Metka” or “Zorin”, in this text, there is notably less use of onomatopoeia or other sound tools. Although nature is described, it does not symbolize the characters’ internal worlds. Still, certain poetic elements can be traced, such as in the following alliteration m – m, l – l and assonance e – e – e (emphasis added by the author of the article):

[...] hrast korenjak med *mladima lipama*, ki jima *čebele brenčé* in *šumé* po dišečem cvetji! (Stritar [1876])

[English Translation]

[...] a mighty oak stands between *two young lime trees*, with *bees buzzing and humming* among their fragrant blossoms!

Conclusions

The question of how a sign (sound form) relates to what it designates (concept) is a complex topic that has engaged researchers from the beginnings of scholarly inquiry to the present day. As the literature on this subject demonstrates, there is still no single, definitive answer regarding whether a conventional or “natural” connection exists between a name and what it names. Though a natural link may be apparent in certain cases, such findings typically cannot be generalized to a given language – or to languages in general.

Moreover, the article focuses on the sound shape and other expressive literary tools in three selected novels by the Slovenian writer Josip Stritar. Though one might assume that sound-based and related rhetorical figures – such as specific rhythmic patterns – are primarily the domain of poetry, they can also be found with some frequency in narrative prose. A close reading suggests that Stritar made broad use of sound literary tools, largely borrowed from poetic traditions, in all three analyzed works. Sound rhetorical figures undoubtedly underline the meaning of the text. Nonetheless, it can be argued that a plethora of factors contribute to the overall final poetic function, including the sound shape.

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