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in Poetical Texts**

**Elena Titova**

**Associate Professor**

**Faculty of Linguistics and Translation, English  
Language Department, Chelyabinsk State University  
Russia**

Athens Institute for Education and Research  
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece  
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209  
Email: [info@atiner.gr](mailto:info@atiner.gr) URL: [www.atiner.gr](http://www.atiner.gr)  
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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos  
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## **Phonetic Means of Expressing Contrast in Poetical Texts**

**Elena Titova**

**Associate Professor**

**Faculty of Linguistics and Translation, English Language Department,  
Chelyabinsk State University  
Russia**

### **Abstract**

A poetical text is a peculiar kind of text. It has two levels of information: factual and conceptually aesthetic. Factual is the information itself whereas conceptually aesthetic level refers to the way this information is presented, which can be revealed on all language levels (phonetic, morphological, lexical, etc.). In our study we deal with the phonetic organization of poetical texts and stress that in poems the connection between their sound organization and emotional colouring is by far obvious.

Sounds have been long looked into from the point of view of semantics, and many linguists believe that sounds can render sense and ideas. We are convinced that sounds are more likely to express emotions and attitudes rather than images in our brain. We have outlined the following five groups of sounds: light, neutral, dark, intense and aggressive.

Our study is devoted to the analysis of phonetic means used in poems of emotional contrast. We have divided poems into positively-coloured, negatively-coloured and containing emotional contrast. Usually the colouring of poems is defined by the thematic concept of the poetical text as a whole. In poems expressing contrast authors refer to contradictory phenomena of human life, contrasting feelings, changing ideas and attitudes, which is emphasized by phonetic organization.

**Keywords:** poetical text, phonetic organization, emotional colouring, euphony, dissonance, alliteration, sound combination.

**Corresponding Author:**

## **Introduction**

Poetical language is very peculiar due to its emotional character. This is the language where the smallest language units, sounds, acquire their special significance and play the greatest role in rendering the communicative intention of the author. We have defined some special features of sound organization in texts with different emotional colouring. In our research we have outlined three types of poetical texts: emotionally-positive, emotionally-negative and having contrasting ideas.

### *Phonetic Organization of Poetical Texts*

According to many linguists, sound organization of poetical texts is very significant and never occurs by chance. Here the laws of text organization are different from those that exist in the non-poetical world. An ordinary utterance will appear to be unorganized in comparison with the specially organized poetical utterance where everything is well thought over on all language levels.

The most common case is the repetition of certain phonemes, but it should also be stated that the position of repeating sounds is by far important. It appears to be some special norm which is difficult to define. Profound biological studies of the human brain suggest that talented orators and poets have the feel of how to organize their masterpieces so that they produce a necessary effect on a recipient.

What is more, repetition of certain phonemes is very often linked to the words they are used in, thus promoting and emphasising the idea expressed by a lexical unit.

In poetical texts, sounds acquire a special expressive meaning which helps to show connections between the form and the contents of the text.

Among phonetic means of poetic text organization scientists outline repetition of vowels, consonants and sound combinations, euphony and dissonance, sound imitation and sound symbolism.

As for sound imitation, there are two kinds; onomatopoeia proper and indirect sound imitation, which is revealed through combination of sounds in different words and copy or reproduce those sounds that a poet wants to highlight.

In poetry any similarity in the ideas is reflected in the sound organization of poetical texts. This sound organization is closely connected with the main idea and the thematic concept of a poem. In poems devoted to love and beautiful nature phenomena there frequently appear sounds [m], [l], [n], [i] and alike that are considered to be “gentle”, “positive”. In poetical texts with unpleasant topics, there is a greater likelihood of such sounds as [o], [u],[t], [k] and alike, which are supposed to be “dark”, “negative”. In tense and aggressive poetical texts we can observe an abundance of [r], [ai], [ei] and alike that are referred to as “tense” and “aggressive”.

Having accumulated all the sound symbolic ideas (1987 Fonagy) we have outlined the following sound qualities in the English language (where qualities refer not to the sense but to the effect produced).

<i>Sound Qualities</i>	<i>English Language</i>	
	<i>VOWELS</i>	<i>CONSONANTS</i>
<i>LIGHT</i>	i:, ɪ, e, , iə, eə, ei, æ	m, l, n, ŋ, z, w
<i>NEUTRAL</i>	ə, ʌ	h, s, θ, ð
<i>DARK</i>	u:, u, ɔ:, o, a:, au, uə, ɔi, ɜ:, əu	t, d, k, g, p, b, f, v, ʃ, ʒ
<i>INTENSE</i>	ɔi, ai, ei	w, r, j, ʃ, dʒ, ʒ
<i>AGGRESSIVE</i>		r

### **Emotions in Poetical Texts**

People tend to feel emotions, this is their human nature. But having emotions inside evokes the need to express them in different ways, either non-verbal or verbal. It is not a secret that poetical texts are highly emotional. This is one of the most common ways of sharing emotions and revealing one's inside world.

Poetry is a special language and its organization plays a significant role in showing an author's communicative intentions. Here the form in which the ideas are presented becomes more important than the ideas themselves. When we read poetical texts, we feel together with the poet, sometimes without paying attention to what is being told. It is like special waves, vibrations that occur around us and we tune into them. That is why emotions in poetical texts are all the time present and revealed on all language levels.

There are a lot of approaches to classification of human emotions. The first disputable question is how to distinguish emotions and feelings, whether they are the same notions or different ones. Many scientists believe that emotions are momentary reactions whereas feelings are long lasting ones, but still they are closely connected with each other: feelings evoke emotions and vice versa. In our research we will deal mostly with the notion emotions as in linguistics it is accepted that emotions are instantaneous reactions that are immediately revealed in texts.

One more arguable problem is the division of emotions into different kinds. Many scholars outline basic emotions and their derivatives. Other scientists state that all emotions are basic and connected with satisfying our instincts. The only classification that all scientists support is the division of emotions into positive and negative. In our research we will follow this approach as the most reliable one.

## Purpose and Methods

In our research we will analyze poetical texts that contain both negative and positive emotions contrasting with each other. We will take into consideration the phonetic means of text organization and with the help of the contextual and stylistic analysis we will outline the peculiar features of sound organization in poems with emotional contrast.

For the analysis we have taken two sonnets by John Keats and William Drummond as such poems are very good examples of emotional contrast describing contradictory phenomena and changes of attitude and are full of phonetic stylistic means that highlight their contradictory nature.

## Findings and Discussion

According to our division of poetical texts, there are emotionally positive, emotionally negative and “contrast” texts. Poetical texts that contain emotional contrast are those in which poets express both positive and negative emotions. This is a way of drawing particular attention to this or that event or phenomenon.

One example of emotionally contrasting texts is John Keats’ *Sonnet on the Sea*. In this poem special phonetic organization helps the author create a contrasting effect of positive and negative emotions and evoke similar reactions of recipients.

*It keeps eternal whisperings around  
Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell  
Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell  
Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.  
Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,  
That scarcely will the very smallest shell  
Be mov'd for days from where it sometime fell,  
When last the winds of Heaven were unbound  
O ye! Who have your eye-balls vex'd and tir'd,  
Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;  
O ye! whose ears are dinn'd with uproar rude,  
Or fed too much with cloying melody –  
Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth, and brood  
Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quir'd!*

This sonnet is devoted to the description of the sea. The author outlines its calm power, the ability to make one feel peaceful, balanced and refreshed. The beginning of the poem is full of harmony and peace. This effect is achieved with the help of both lexical means and special sound organization. From the very start of the poem we can notice an abundance of nasal [m], [n], lateral [l], median [w] sonorants and front vowels [i:], [ɪ], [e], which usually create



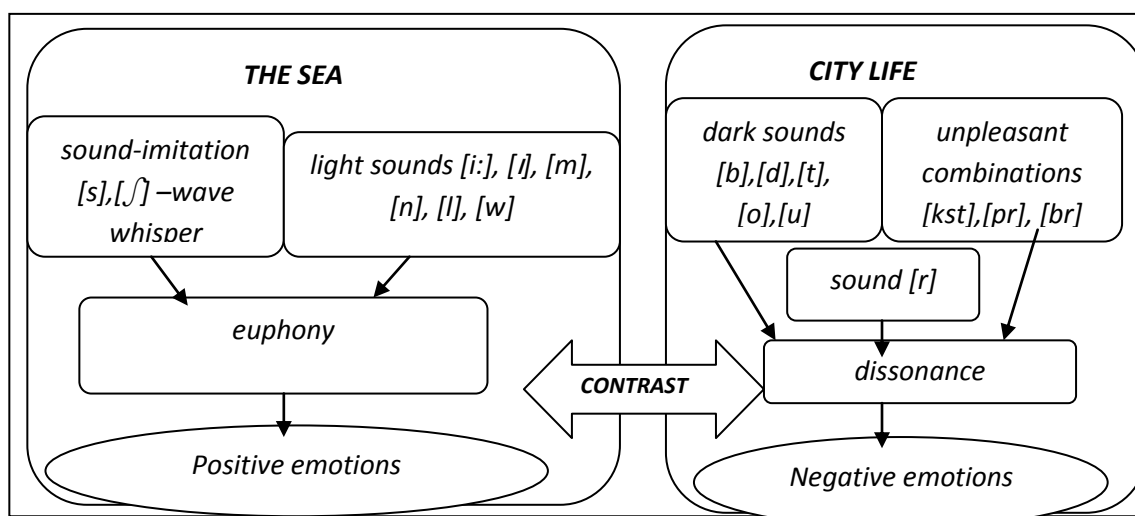
positive, “feel-good” impressions: *It keeps eternal whisperings around. Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound...*

Undoubtedly, this frequency is capable of making one feel relaxed and optimistic. It should also be noted that the author uses sound imitation, which is quite commonly deployed by poets to be able to reproduce the sounds of nature, the sea in particular. In this sonnet the sea is calm and peaceful, the idea is revealed with the repetition of sounds [s] и [ʃ] that imitate the whisper of waves. We can observe the abundance of such sounds in the first lines of the poem where John Keats is speaking about the sea: (*keeps, whisperings, desolate shores, its, swell, gluts, twice, spell, shadowy sound, such, scarcely, smallest shell, sometime*).

In the part of the poem where the author is trying to persuade city residents to come to the sea and feel the peace, this combination of friction consonants is interspersed with tense sounds, which altogether makes us feel the contrast between the sea and city life. We see a great number of “dark” sounds and unpleasant sound combinations: [b], [d], [t], [o], [u] [kst], [pr], [br] (*unbound, eye-balls, vex'd, tir'd, dinn'd, uproar rude, fed, too, brood*). Due to the English language phonetic peculiarity, English poems usually have few [r] sounds. In the poem “*Sonnet on the Sea*” the author also uses the phoneme just occasionally. It appears when John Keats describes the unpleasant features of city life, its routine hustle and bustle.

In such cases we can pay attention to the combination of such phenomena as sound imitation and sound symbolism. On the one hand, the poet recreates the noise of a city with the help of onomatopoeia, on the other hand, he lets us feel how unpleasant it is in comparison with the soft whisper of waves: *vex'd and tir'd, uproar rude – shadowy sound, smallest shell*.

The communicative intention of John Keats is to persuade a city resident to leave their city life behind and find peace and quiet in the nature, by the sea, which can fill them with harmony. The image of the sea evokes positive emotions with the help of the frequency of nasal, lateral, median sonorants, friction consonants and front vowels, relative lack of aggressive, tense [r]. When this sound does appear in descriptions of city life, it makes one willing to get back to the pleasant and relaxed atmosphere by the sea. Schematically the ideas can be represented in the following way:



In a nutshell, in this poem we can see the following phonetic means of creating contrast:

1) Sound imitation revealed with the help of friction consonants that refer to the sounds of the sea contradicts the dissonance and unpleasant combinations that refer to city life; hence there is contrast between natural sounds and city sounds.

2) An abundance of positive, pleasant sounds that are used to describe the sea and “dark” sounds together with tense and aggressive [r] when it comes to describing the city helps the poet emphasise the difference and persuade a recipient to enjoy the sounds of nature.

3) The contradiction of euphony and dissonance makes one feel positive about the nature, the sea in particular, and negative about the city.

One more example of a contrasting poem is William Drummond’s *Sleep, Silence’ child, sweet father of soft rest....*

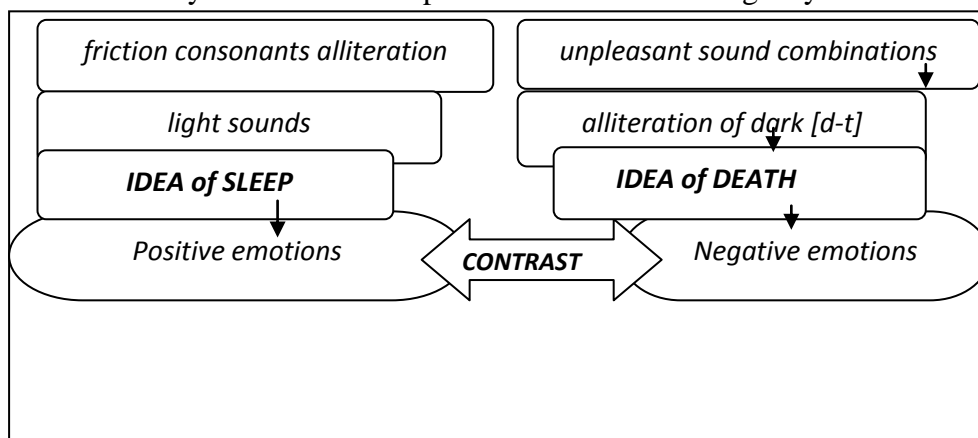
*Sleep, Silence’ child, sweet father of soft rest,  
 Prince, whose approach peace to all mortals brings,  
 Indifferent host to shepherds and to kings,  
 Sole comforter of minds with grief oppressed,  
 Lo, by thy charming rod, all breathing things  
 Lie slumbering, with forgetfulness possessed,  
 And yet o’er me to spread thy drowsy wings  
 Thou sparest, alas, who cannot be thy guest.  
 Since I am thine, O come, but with that face,  
 To inward light which thou art wont to show;  
 With fained solace ease a true-felt woe.  
 Or if, deaf god, thou do deny that grace,  
 Come as thou wilt, and what thou wilt bequeath;  
 I long to kiss the image of my death. (!!!)*

In this sonnet the poet refers to the sleep, which, in his view, is able to bring peace, help get rid of troubles. This kind of effect is achieved through the repetition of friction consonants, where [s] is the prevailing one (*sleep, silence, sweet, soft, rest, peace, host, sole, forgetfulness, possessed*). The repetition of [s] promotes the idea of the sleep making the poem sound like a lullaby at the beginning.

Apart from this alliteration, one can also notice frequent use of positive sounds and sound combinations: [i:] (*sleep, sweet*); [l] (*sleep, silence, child, all*); [m], [n] (*comforter, minds, charming*). Hence the first lines of the poem create positive impressions, peaceful atmosphere.

But at the same time we can notice the presence of unpleasant sound combinations with the aggressive [r]: [pr] (*prince, approach, oppressed, spread*); [br] (*brings, breathing, slumbering*). Thus, the poet expresses his tension, which is evoked by his low spirits. In the last lines of the poem we can observe a great amount of “dark”, negative sounds: [d-t] (*inward, light, art, wont, fained, true-felt, deaf, god, do, deny, wilt, what, death*). Moreover, this kind of sound repetition produces a stronger impression due to the combination of initial and final positions. Actually, it is nothing but drawing attention to the element which is the final one in the poem and expressed with the word “death”. So, something pleasant and peaceful turns into something dangerous and unpleasant: *sleep-death*. This contrast is absolutely revealed on the phonetic level.

Schematically the ideas can be presented in the following way:



Summing up, we can outline the following ways of expressing contrast in this poem:

- 1) Alliteration of friction consonants, [s] in particular, evokes the impression of peace and calmness in the first lines, emphasises the idea of *the sleep*.
- 2) The appearance of positive sounds at the beginning of the sonnet, adds to the creation of positive emotions.

- 3) The appearance of unpleasant sound combinations together with [r] in the continuation of the poem leads to the impression of tension, which contrasts with the initial peaceful mood.
- 4) The repetition of the combination [d-t], which is by itself “dark” and negative, promotes the idea of *death*, adds to the developing negative effect and underlines the idea of contrast between the beginning of the poem and its end.

Taking everything into account, we may say that poems which have contrasting ideas are very often phonetically organized in such a way that this contrast is revealed through sounds and sound combinations. These language units therefore acquire their special significance in poetical texts and help poets express their communicative intentions as phonetic organization is able to evoke emotional reaction of recipients.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to analyze poetical texts containing emotional contrast from the point of view of their phonetic organization.

As we have noticed in our study, contrasting ideas in poetical texts are revealed with the help of peculiar sound organization. Poets evoke positive emotions by using pleasant, light sounds, imitating sounds of nature, euphony, underlining some semantic idea by sound repetition.

Negative emotions are created by such methods as unpleasant sound combinations, abundance of dark sounds, imitation of harsh sounds, promoting some dangerous idea by sound repetition aimed at emphasizing the word.

Consequently, poems that contain emotional contrast have such a combination of phonetic means that underline the contradictory ideas, showing change of mood or different attitude of the author to different life phenomena.

Altogether such phonetic means are aimed at expressing the communicative intention of the poet.

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