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# SROVNÁVACÍ VERSOLOGIE



# SOME PROBLEMS OF THE STRUCTURE OF ASSONANCE IN FOLK AND ART POETRY

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All those more closely acquainted with the folk poetry of Slav peoples are struck by the large share which, in its verse, falls to incomplete rhymes, especially assonances of various types. The phenomenon is particularly characteristic of feminine or paroxytonic rhymes such as *noga/voda*. Only the vowels in the last two syllables of the rhyming words are identical here, while the intervocalic consonant varies. The open or closed character of the last syllable seems to have no influence upon the clarity of this situation. In other words, *noga/voda* counts for exactly as much as *nogax/voda* or as a closure in both words: *nogax/vodax*; for it seems that in sesquisyllabic rhymes, especially in melic verse, the final consonant is of practically no importance to the status of the internal one.<sup>1</sup>

All that has so far been known about rhymes of this type is what the Polish linguist Jan Karłowicz stated as early as 1882: in folk poetry "loud consonants do not rhyme with soft ones of the same organ or of another".<sup>2</sup> What is meant is that in assonances consonants phonetically voiced are not coupled with voiceless ones, so that we meet with no such assonances as *koza/kosa* or *voda/rota*. This affirmation, though made only about Polish poetry, can also be extended to the rhyme system of Croatian,<sup>3</sup> Russian, Byelorussian, and Slovak folk song.

In our days, however, it would be hard to content ourselves with so scanty a description of the assonance type in question—so much the more as in recent poetry, that of the last several decades, we witness its visible spread. It is now no more limited to the verse of folk song or in folk song style, but gains wide ground in literary poetry.

For the present, however, let us keep within the boundaries of folklore. Closer observation of the incomplete sesquisyllabic rhymes in folk song reveals certain rules or tendencies which are more detailed than the mere principle of voiced combining with voiced and inversely. For it we set up a frequency list of consonant phoneme couples which appear in assonances. This list, when referred to Polish folk song (560 different pairs of rhyming words), will run as follows:

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| 1. <i>m/n</i> — e.g. <i>sama/pana</i>   | — 88 pairs |
| 2. <i>j/l</i> — e.g. <i>moja/vola</i>   | — 75 pairs |
| 3. <i>d/g</i> — e.g. <i>zuda/długa</i>  | — 30 pairs |
| 4. <i>ń/ń</i> — e.g. <i>źmie/ożenie</i> | — 29 pairs |
| 5. <i>b/d</i> — e.g. <i>oba/voda</i>    | — 28 pairs |

<sup>1</sup> In the following remarks the material will be limited to cases where the final consonant is the same in both rhyming words.

<sup>2</sup> J. Karłowicz, *Studia nad treścią i formą pieśni ludowych II. Rymy*. Prawda 1882, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> See K. Nitsch, *Z historii polskich rymów*, Warszawa 1912. As for Russian, Byelorussian, Ukrainian, and Slovak poetry I base my remarks on my personal observation.

6. <i>l/r</i>	— e.g. <i>ńevola/ńečora</i>	— 24 pairs
7. <i>l/n</i>	— e.g. <i>xřile/novine</i>	— 23 pairs
8. <i>ř/r</i>	— e.g. <i>kořcola/řežora</i>	— 22 pairs
9. <i>ř/n</i>	— e.g. <i>xčala/řana</i>	— 21 pairs
10. <i>b/g</i>	— e.g. <i>grobu/Bogu</i>	— 18 pairs
11. <i>b/v</i>	— e.g. <i>čřeba /dřeva</i>	— 17 pairs
12. <i>ř/v</i>	— e.g. <i>sokole/glove</i>	— 14 pairs
13. <i>j/l</i>	— p.g. <i>pokoju/stolu</i>	— 13 pairs
	<i>k/t</i> — e.g. <i>přymykal/pytal</i>	— 13 pairs
14. <i>k/p</i>	— e.g. <i>oku/xlopu</i>	— 12 pairs
15. <i>ř/v</i>	— e.g. <i>ńemaly/tavy</i>	— 11 pairs
	<i>j/ń</i> — e.g. <i>żyje/stýńie</i>	— 11 pairs
16. <i>j/r</i>		— 8 pairs
17. <i>b'/ž</i>		— 7 pairs
18. <i>p/t</i>		— 6 pairs
19. <i>ř/v, j/n</i>	— 5 pairs each	
20. <i>ř/ń</i>		— 4 pairs
21. <i>b/m, g/v, m/v, n/v, ř/v, ř/v, x/k, c/t, č/p</i>	— 3 pairs each	
22. <i>ř/v, ž/ğ, m/ń, ř/ř, x/p, c/s, č/š, d/t</i>	— 2 pairs each	
23. various sporadic combinations,		33 pairs in all.

A glance is enough to notice that one feature is common not only to the highest ranks but also to the lower ones, except to those which correspond to comparatively rare occurrences. This feature is the enormous majority—and down to rank 12, the exclusiveness—of pairs including voiced phonemes (*b, d, g, v, ř*) or variants phonetically voiced in antevocalic position (*m, ř, n, ř, l, r, j*). In other words, phonetically voiced assonance visibly predominates in folk poetry as it can be observed in 90 % of the rhymes listed above. Voiceless assonance constitutes but a very narrow margin: the share of pairs like *k/t, k/p, p/t, c/s* amounts to 8,4 % only. The rest consists of the extremely rare cases when a pair is composed of a voiced and a voiceless intervocalic consonant, e.g. *d/t* or *b/p*.

The predominance of voicing in our type of assonance is no doubt in connection with the tendencies that prevail among the perfect rhymes of folk song. In 80 % of the feminine rhymes (*voda/řkoda, noga/dřoga*) the two vowels are separated either by a voiced phoneme (stop, spirant or affricate) or by a resonant whose variant is voiced in that position. Thus assonance intensifies a situation which already exists among perfect rhymes: voicing, which is a tendency in perfect rhymes, becomes almost a rule in assonance.

Let us now consider most closely the consonant pairs of the above list. The most frequent pair is *m/ń*: *m* is a nasal non-palatalized bilabial resonant, phonetically voiced in antevocalic position, while *ń* is a nasal non-palatalized pre-dental resonant, also occurring here in its voiced variant. Thus we have a series of common features versus a single different one: the place of articulation. The next rank is represented by *j/l*: in antevocalic position *j* is a consonantal variant of the phoneme (i) — open, phonetically voiced and dorsal, while *l* is a gingival resonant, also voiced in this position. The difference here consists in the size of opening and the place of articulation. Next comes *d/g*: both voiced, stop and non-palatalized, only differing in their place of articulation. The same difference occurs in the next following pairs: *ř/ń, b/d, ř/r*; here too, it is the place of articulation which determines the diversity of the phonemes. In the pair *ř/n* both consonants are resonants, voiced in antevocalic position, and gingival; they differ in a single feature: *l* is oral, while *ń* is nasal. A similar situation is that of the pair *ř/n*. In the cases of *ř/r* and *b/g* we are again faced by a different place of articulation only. The most frequent pairs of voiceless consonants—

*k/t*, *k/p*, *p/t*—are without exception pairs of stops, differing in nothing but their place of articulation.

Thus among the most frequent pairs of assonant consonants there is a marked preponderance of those in which the two terms differ by one feature only. In most cases this feature is the place of articulation.

Let us now add to this some data about so called “reinforced assonance”.<sup>4</sup> For the sake of simplicity we shall consider only one of its types—that with a cluster of two consonants of which only the first varies, as in *povabna/ladna*. Here the highest ranks fall to the pairs *b/d* and *g/d* (e.g. *ukradne/pragne*), which are followed by *l/r* (e.g. *gozałki/garki*), *l/r* (e.g. *velce/serce*) and finally *p/t* (*bapki/matki*) together with *k/p* (*pekla/cepla*). Here the voicing of the consonants in both words is no more common to a clear majority of pairs as among the assonances with a single intervocalic consonant, whereas it is even more visible that the diversity of the consonants most concerns one feature only, usually the place of articulation.

The verse of Slovak, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, and Russian folklore presents a similar state of things. There may of course be some shifts within the frequency list of pairs of the intervocalic consonants. In Slovak songs, for instance, the pairs which come to the front are *l/r* (e.g. *belo/pero*), and *l/r* (e.g. *posteli/dveri*), while in Ukrainian song a similar place is held by the pairs *l/n* (e.g. *lubyła/divýna*) and *b/d* (e.g. *baba/zrada*). These differences, however, but slightly alter the general picture. The structural consonantal features of the rhyming members remain the same: in pure assonance—an enormous majority, coming near to exclusiveness, of voiced phonemes and phonetically voiced variants; in both pure and reinforced assonance—a marked tendency to differentiate the consonants of the rhyme-follows by one feature only, mostly the place of articulation.

The rules and tendencies prevailing in the structure of folk assonance receive an interesting light from George Miller's and Patricia Nicely's inquiry into the perceptibility of consonants.<sup>5</sup> The authors have ascertained experimentally that of all the features of consonantal phonemes “voicing and nasality are much less affected by a random masking noise” than are the others. “Affrication and duration . . . are somewhat superior to place but far inferior to voicing and nasality.”<sup>6</sup> The place of articulation is the last resistant of all. This means that the consonants most frequently confounded in perception are those which differ by their place of articulation only. Thus voiced consonants with different place of articulation are treated perceptually as though they were a single phoneme (*b*, *d*, *g*). Other such common quasi-phonemes are formed by the voiceless stops (*p*, *t*, *k*) which also differ but in their place of articulation, by the nasals (*m*, *n*), the voiced spirants and affricates (*v*, *z*, *ʒ*) and the voiceless ones (*f*, *s*, *š*, *x*). These groups are not confounded with one another in perception; mistakes only happen within each single group.<sup>7</sup> Now if we add (*l*, *r*), which Miller

<sup>4</sup> “Asonans wzmochniony” — a term derived from K. Nitsch's “declining scale of rhymes”. See K. Nitsch, *O nowych rymach*, *Przegląd Współczesny* 15, 1925.

<sup>5</sup> George E. Miller and Patricia E. Nicely, *An Analysis of Perceptual Confusions among some English Consonants*. *Psycholinguistics*. Ed. by Sol Saporta. New York 1961.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>7</sup> Miller and Nicely have studied English consonants only but the results of their research have a general-linguistic character. This can be seen from the fact that the Leningrad research team, who, under the direction of L. Chistovich, have studied the recognizableness of Russian phrases, have come to the same conclusion. In phrases misunderstood and “distorted” by listeners the substitution of consonants proved not to be accidental: as a general rule “voiced consonants were replaced by other voiced ones, voiceless by voiceless”. (*Reč. Artikuljacija i vosprijatije*, Moscow 1965, p. 219.)

and Nicely did not examine, but which on the same grounds may be considered as forming a single category, we shall have nearly the whole material of folk assonance, whose consonants are most frequently coupled within the above groups and seldom overstep their limits. Consequently we are authorized to believe that in folk poetry the intervocalic consonants of assonances are in most cases differentiated by their minimum feature, the weakest from the perceptual point of view. Hence it follows that in folk verse the possibilities of phonetic structure of an assonance are relatively very limited. In other words the departure from full rhyme seems minimal in this case.

Other tendencies face us when we consider the assonance of literary verse. As a matter of fact the difference is of a rather recent date: if we prescind from medieval rhyme, assonance in Polish art poetry (so called here to distinguish it from folklore) was quite a rare apparition up to the early XX century. In its sporadic manifestation it usually had the same structure as the above characterized assonances of folklore. But from the turn of the XIX and XX century the importance of assonance in this domain has kept growing. Already in the early XX century a new principle of its structure appeared which had hitherto been practically unknown: a voiced intervocalic consonant alternates with a voiceless one, e.g. *pševrućil/zbužíł, pěklem/uległem*. These examples are taken from the work of St. Wyspiański and thus date from the first years of the XX century. A dozen of years later, after the first World War, such assonances become to multiply. Of course, they do not characterize the verse of all modern poets; there are indeed some of these for whom this type of assonance is inexistent and others who use it as exception, just as folk song does. But the work of many outstanding poets of the two inter-War decennia and of recent years is more or less strongly saturated with assonances, among which we more or less often notice structures that were formerly avoided or suppressed.

Literary critics of the inter-War period, the only ones so far who have studied the question, ascribed the diffusion of assonance (without entering into its character) to influences from Russian poetry. It is hard to solve this problem without further study. One thing is certain: both in Russian and in Polish verse the popularity of assonance goes hand in hand with a marked interest in poetical language. Moreover, the rather important position occupied, whether at once or after a short time, by a type of assonance with so marked differentiation of consonants shows a very keen awareness of the specific problems of incomplete rhyme. For it is not merely perfect rhyme that is abandoned but also a certain principle which has till then put bounds to assonance. Does, however, a complete freedom and arbitrariness now replace the former limitations in coupling the consonants of rhyme-fellows?

An answer to this question results from the following frequency list of intervocalic consonants in the assonances of recent poetry. The list is based on the complete works of K.I. Gałczyński on account of the considerable frequency of assonance in his poems. The material was composed of 305 pairs of different rhyme-fellows.

1. g/k	— e.g. <i>tego/daleko</i>	— 46 pairs
2. d/t	— e.g. <i>lody/złoty</i>	— 40 pairs
3. ć/ź	— e.g. <i>nuće/tu:će</i>	— 19 pairs
4. ś/ż	— e.g. <i>vzruśa/ruża</i>	— 18 pairs
5. g/k	— e.g. <i>drogi/łoki</i>	— 17 pairs
6. c/z	— e.g. <i>nocy/drozy</i>	— 15 pairs
b/v	— e.g. <i>niebo/dżevo</i>	— 15 pairs
7. b/p	— e.g. <i>osobe/Europe</i>	— 14 pairs
8. s/z	— e.g. <i>nosa/groza</i>	— 11 pairs

9. <i>k/v</i> —	— 10 pairs
10. <i>k/x</i>	— 9 pairs
11. <i>c/s</i>	— 8 pairs
12. <i>l/r</i>	— 7 pairs
<i>č/š</i>	— 7 pairs
13. <i>b/g</i>	— 6 pairs
<i>b/ǰ</i>	— 6 pairs
<i>m/n</i>	— 6 pairs
14. <i>b/m</i>	— 3 pairs
<i>f/v</i>	— 3 pairs
15. <i>f/p, š/z, n/r, č/ž, c/š, g/v, m/n</i>	— 2 pairs each
16. various sporadic combinations	— 31 pairs in all.

It can be seen that the pair *m/n*, which held the first place in folk assonance, here occurs extremely seldom; the pair *b/g*, also very frequent in folk song, does not appear here at all. Voiced assonance makes up, in the body of literary verse studied here, 25 % of the total number of rhyme pairs, i.e. much less than in folk verse. Voiceless assonance remains on the same level of 9 %. But what grows enormously is the share of the assonance that combines voiced and voiceless intervocalic consonant; in Gałczyński it amounts to 66 %.

Neither the list nor the percentages of the different kinds of assonance will change much if we pass from modern Polish to modern Russian poetry.<sup>8</sup> The first place here falls to the pair *d'/t* (e.g. *pomade/avtomate*), the next ones to *d/t* (e.g. *blokada/plakata*, *g/k* (e.g. *dorogu/k sroku*), *s/z* (e.g. *rosy/rozy*), *ǰ/k* (e.g. *khiǰi/liki*) and among the rarer ones *š/ž* (e.g. *noša/rogoža*).

In most cases the assonance is reinforced by the last preceding consonant (*opornaya soglasnaya*, *consonne d'appui*). We can take it as an amplification of the tradition which in classical Russian verse accompanies masculine perfect rhyme. It has, however, no influence upon the fact that the most frequent pairs of consonants are identical to the highest ranks on the Polish list (except for the pair *d'/t* whose components are absent from the Polish system of consonantal phonemes). In each of these pairs (including *d'/t*, of course) the two consonants differ but by a single feature: voicing. This is easy to check: *d/t*—both stop, non-palatalized, pre-dental; *d'/t*—both stop, palatalized, pre-dental; *g/k*—both stop, non-palatalized, back; *ǰ/k*—both stop, palatalized, back; *s/z*—both spirant, non-palatalized, dorsal; *b/p*—both stop, non-palatalized, bilabial, etc.

Thus it appears that the assonance common in our days also reveals certain tendencies, though somewhat fainter ones than in former case. As in folk song, the intervocalic consonants in the most frequent assonances differ from each other by one feature only. This time, however, voicing is the differentiating feature and is superior in importance to the place of articulation. From the point of view of perception the disagreement in voicing represents a far greater disturbance of rhyme-perfection than the difference of place of articulation. A kind of partial compensation is intended by the agreement of the other features. There is a tendency to make not only posiveness or spirancy coincide but even the place of articulation. Thus on one hand a visible disturbance is introduced, while on the other everything seems to be done to preserve agreement. Rhyme is abandoned but connections with it are not disclaimed.

<sup>8</sup> The material here consisted of poems by Mayakovski, Shchupachov (who, like most epigones, represents certain phonetic tendencies with a peculiar clarity), and Voznyesyenski.



It is significant that of all kinds of assonance this is the one used by Gałczyński, a poet whose verse is particularly "melodious", rich in song-like intonations, and among whose poems many were written as song texts. More than that: it can be observed that contemporary music hall songs have since about the end of the thirties made a more and more frequent use of assonances that combine voiced and voiceless. This may even indicate a certain change in general sensibility to the sonorousness of rhyme in fully, i.e. vocally realized verse.

These are, however, questions requiring further study. For the present we should perhaps better try to answer another question connected with the differences in the structure of assonance: how does each of its kinds influence the possibilities of word choice? To what extent does it restrict them?

To this effect let us consider the possibilities offered by the language for an accidental formation of assonances with different combinations of voiced and voiceless intervocalic consonants. As material let us take several samples of literary prose of the last few decades (M. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Szkiecownik poetycki and K. I. Gałczyński, Listy z fiołkiem and prose texts of the Zielona Gęś). Let us consider as 100 % all the haphazard assonances that can be formed with the words of such a sample. Then it will appear that assonances with both intervocalic consonants phonetically voiced are the most frequent here, making up, as the sample may be, 59 to 70 %. Voiced consonants combined with voiceless ones constitute from 26 to 37 %. The rest—from 1.3 to 4 %—consists of assonances where both intervocalic consonants are voiceless.

As we remember, voiced assonance has proved to be characteristic of folk poetry, while assonance with a difference in voicing has revealed itself as typical of literary verse. Thus now it appears that the verse of folk song exploits the type of assonance most easily formed by haphazard meetings of words, while the literary verse of our time often has recourse to an assonance for the formation of which the linguistic material only affords about half as great possibilities.

## NĚKTERÉ OTÁZKY STRUKTURY ASONANCE V POEZII LIDOVÉ A UMĚLÉ

Předmětem příspěvku je ten typ asonance, ve které slova v asonanční dvojici mají shodné samohlásky dvou posledních slabik, zatímco souhláska mezi nimi je v každém slově jiná, např. *noga/voda*. Věnujeme-li vyšší pozornost tomuto typu asonance v lidových písních polských, slovenských, běloruských, ukrajinských a ruských, vyvstanou nám obecnější pravidelnosti nebo tendence, než je dosud známá zásada rýmování znělé souhlásky se znelou a neznělé s neznélou. Jmenovitě lze ve folklórní asonanci pozorovat obrovskou převahu fonetické znělosti; asonance, v níž vystupují souhlásky neznělé, představuje jen úzký okrajový jev. Tato situace je intenzifikací tendence, která se vyskytuje i v normálním rýmu. — Mezi nejfrekventovanějšími dvojicemi asonujících souhlásek mají výraznou převahu takové páry, které se liší jen jedinou fonetickou vlastností, a to nejčastěji místem artikulace. Výzkumy rozeznávání souhlásek, prováděné v Americe a SSSR, ukázaly, že tato vlastnost je při percepci nejhůře rozeznatelná.

Zcela odlišné tendence vystupují v novějším básnictví umělé. Asonance, častá v této oblasti, se vyznačuje sklonem ke konfrontaci souhlásky znělé s neznélou (např. polské *lody/zloty*, ruské *knígi/líki*), a tedy k alternaci v rámci té fonetické vlastnosti, která je při vnímání nejnápadnější rozeznatelná. Ostatní vlastnosti se naproti tomu nejčastěji kryjí. Podobná struktura asonance proniká stále zřetelněji i do taneční a estrádní písně.

V závěru se autorka pokouší odpovědět na otázku, jak obě odrůdy struktury asonance působí na výběr slov. Prozkoumání několika ukázek umělecké prózy vede k závěru, že verš lidové písně využívá asonance, jaká se na podkladě náhodných slovních spojení vytváří nejlépeji, zatímco soudobý verš umělý často sahá k typu asonance, pro jehož vznik existují v jazykovém materiálu dvakrát menší předpoklady.