ALLITERATION AS LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON

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Статья посвячена проблеме аллитерации в английском языке. Этот феномен изучаетсяв разделе "Фоностилистические средства стилістики", но ему, как правило, не уделяется должного внимания. Представлен кратний обор проблемы на современном этапе развития самого термина"аллитерация". Поскольку аллитерация как стилисический прием используется в английском языке на протяжении нескольких веков – от античності досовременности, история возникновения этого явления и основне модели аллитеративного стихотворения, раскрытые в статье, дают возможность понять популярность использования этого феномена в поэзии, прозе, газетних заголовках, названих книг, пословицах.

Ключевые слова: аллитерация, ассонанс, аллитеративное стихотворение, силлабо-тоническая система, ритм, метр*

Статтю присвячено проблемі алітерації в англійській мові. Цей феномен вивчається у розділі "Фоностилістичні засоби стилістики", але йому, як правило, не приділяється належної уваги. Подано короткий огляд проблеми на сучасному етапі розвитку лінгвістики, висвітлено труднощі формулювання самого терміну"алітерація". Оскільки алітерація як стилістичний прийом використовується в англійській мові протягом багатьох століть - від античності до сьогодення, то історія виникнення цього явища та основні моделі алітеративного вірша,розкриті в статті, дають можливість зрозуміти популярність використання даного феномену в поезії, прозі, газетних заголовках, назвах книг, прислів`ях тощо.

Ключові слова: алітерація, асонанс, алітеративний вірш, силабо-тонічна система, ритм, метр*

The article is devoted to the problem of alliteration in English. This phenomenon is studied in the section "Photostylistic Means of Stylistics" but, as a rule, it`s not paid proper attention to. A brief view on the problem at the modern stage of development of Linguistics is presented the difficulties of defining the term "alliterations" are highlighted. As a stylistic device alliteration has been used in English during several centuries – beginning with the ancient times till nowadays, the history of the phenomenon emerging and main models of alliteration poem dwelled upon in the article make it possible to realise the popularity of the use of this phenomenon in poetry, prose, newspaper headlines, titles of books and proverbs.

Key words: alliteration, assonance, alliteration poem, syllabo-tonic system, rhythm, meter*

The present paper is devoted to the problem of alliteration. This phenomenon is studied in Stylistics, a branch of general Linguistics.

Many scholars have made an attempt to describe this phenomenon in terms of Stylistics. The former Soviet linguists l.R.Galperin and V.A. Khuharenko have treated alliteration as phonetic stylistic device. But the Western scholars Paul Dean, Jeanne Le Vasseur, Hopkings and others have considered alliteration to be a unit of rhythm in poetry. Each of the scholars has formulated the term alliteration according to his understanding. Thus, the definition of alliteration is still questionable. Neither the former Soviet linguists nor the Western scholars have yet found a complete definition of the term. The former Sovuet scientists considered that alliteration is the phenomenon characteristic of Old English poetry and which sometimes occurs in works of modern writers. But in fact, the Western scholars proved that alliteration has been widely used during different periods of the English language development as *emphasis, linkage and rhythm* in *poetry, prose, proverbs, headlines, advertisements*.

In phonostylistics *alliteration* is regarded as a specific type of sound instrumentation, however, there is no unanimous definition of the term.Some scholars do not distinguish between *alliteration* and *consonance* regarding them as the repetition of consonants close together, particularly at the beginning of words or stressed syllables.Nevertheless, most scholars delimit these two terms. While consonance is considered to be the repetition of consonant sounds in any position, alliteration is the repetition of initial consonantal or vocalic sounds or letters.

The question of origin of *alliteration* is beyond any doubt an extremely important one to perform the right interpretation of that phenomenon.

Alliterative verse came to England via the conquering Germanic tribes. The earliest surviving work in this rhythm is the **Beowulf,** probably composed in the eighth century. By Chaucer's day, almost seven hundred years after the Beowulf, alliterative verse was in a state of decline. Exactly why, when, and how this happened is a matter of some conjecture. The accident of survival or loss of antique manuscripts provides us with a questionable basis to determine answers to these questions. The existing corpus of

early English poetry, invaluable in providing us with the knowledge we do have of prosodic techniques of the earliest English poets, may mislead us if we apply modern statistical analysis to measure the seeming increase of one type of verse and the apparent decrease of another.

We guess that the growing influence of non-Germanic neighbours, the Norman-French conquest, England's own insular quality, expediency dictated by economic and political survival, and-of course-the passage of many centuries widened the breach between England and its Germanic forbears. In his **Canterbury fragment**, Chaucer gives us a view of 14th century England, an England far removed from its Germanic origins and peopled by Englishmen whose concerns lay not with a disappearing national heritage, but with contemporary events, problems, and customs. We feel no loss in the absence of alliterative verse in Chaucer's writing. Instead, what he borrows from contemporary influences or creates to meet current needs gives his poetry the vitality of life in his age.

Alliterative accentual verse is not either poetry written in a strict rhythm. It has a rhythm of its own, but that rhythm is based not on the arrangement of the syllables, but the regular repetition of the strong beats in each line. The difference is simple. To make it more understandable we will take as an example a classical English poem, which has a regular rhythm, like the insistent lines of Blake'*s* poem:

> *Tiger, tiger, burning bright*
> *In the forests of the night,*
> *What immortal hand or eye*
> *Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*

In alliterative accentual verse the rhythm is much freer, for what really matters is the number of strong beats per line. The weak syllables can be arranged as sense and art dictate.

At the lowest level, we can divide a word, phrase, sentence, or line of verse into syllables. For instance, we can count 14 syllables in the following sentence from a nursery rhyme:

<div align="center">

1   2 3 4 5 6 7   8   9 10 11 12 13 14

The king is in his counting-house, counting out his money.
</div>

But not all syllables are the same. Some syllables are heavy, and stressed; others are light, and unstressed, and there is a strong tendency to alternate between the two. This alternation can be analysed as a sequence of **beats** and **off-beats**. The heavier, more strongly stressed syllables become beats: the lighter, less stressed syllables become off-beats. In our nursery rhyme example, there is an almost exactly even pattern of beats and offbeats, though some of the beats are far stronger than others:

The **king** is **in** his **count**ing **house**, **count**ing **out** his **mon**ey.

Beat and off-beat is essentially what is measured in accentual-syllabic verse. But there are several layers of rhythmic organization above it.

Linguistically, we have to distinguish four levels of stress: primary stress, secondary stress, tertiary stress, and lack of stress. These four levels are not an absolute degree of loudness; they simply measure a scale from the strongest stresses to the weakest unstressed syllables. We can use **S** to mark primary stress, **s** to mark secondary stress, **W** to mark tertiary stress, and **w** to mark lack of stress. Then our nursery rhyme example would be marked:

<div align="center">

w   S w W w   S w   s   S w W w S w

The king is in his counting-house, counting out his money.
</div>

Alliterative accentual verse ties alliteration and rhythm together. It is the strong beats that alliterate. In *Beowulf*, the first and third beats almost always repeat the same consonant, tying the first and second halves of the line together. Often the first three beats alliterate.

<div align="center">

Old English examples:

*ge**hé**de under **heofe**num*
*ge**wát** þá ofer **wæ'g**holm*
*on**geat** þá se **gó**da*
*ne ge**wéox** hé him tó **wil**lan*
</div>

The result can sound strange to ears used to rhyme and meter, and even stranger to ears used to free verse. Like free verse, the rhythm is (relatively) free, and there is no need for a rigid rhyme scheme. There is freedom to arrange in alliterative accentual verse but it is not free verse. It imposes a discipline on the mind (and by its rhythms and repetitions, an enchantment on the ears) as strong as Homer's hexameters.Alliteration (when not overdone) makes the alliterated words stand out. When two words alliterate, they are drawn closer together mentally. When the alliterated words stand out because their meanings are important, when they stand out also because they are natural bearers of stress, when the linkage between them seems important, and natural, then they define a rhythm.

A line of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse is metrically correct if it meets the following constraints:

1. Each line contains two half-lines. Each half line must be a prosodic phrase containing one or more strong stresses.

2. Only strong stresses can bear (metrically relevant) alliteration.

3. The first strong stress in the first half-line must alliterate with the first strong stress in the second half-line.

4. The pivots (one of the strong stresses that satisfy the metrical requirements for alliteration) must be more prominent rhythmically than any non-pivot syllables in the line.

5. The final foot of the line cannot contain an alliterating strong stress.

Almost any theory of alliterative verse will contain something very close to this list of rules.

After the transition from Old English to the actually readable Middle English, the metres we are concerned with here began to be used for longer works, and in an even more relaxed way: the number of beats can indifferently be four or five, (in the latter case the caesura, still mandatory) and the patterns of alliteration within the verse offer many more choices than before, including ones that involve separate alliterative groups within the same line; a list, probably incomplete, could be this:

1. ***Traditional: aa/ax***
   Clannesse who-so kyndly cowthe comende (Cleanness)

2. ***Overdone: aa/aa***
   In a somer seson, when softe was the sonne (Piers Plowman)

3. ***Obtained by cramming one more beat in the scheme:***
   Alliterating: aaa/ax
   On rode rwly torent with rybaudes mony (Patience)

   Non alliterating: aay/ax
   Kynde hath closed therinne craftily withalle (Piers Plowman)

4. ***The last two together: aaa/aa***
   And lene thee lede thi lond so leaute thee lovye (Piers Plowman)

5. ***With a switch: aa/xa***
   And heven my happe and al my hele (Pearl)

6. ***Plainly screwed up: aa/bb***
   To pay the Prince other sete saghte (Pearl)

7. ***Screwed up and prolonged: aaa/bb***
   And bisegede, soothly, with sevene grete geaunts (Piers Plowman)

8. ***(Lo and behold) Screwed twice: ab/ab***
   And whoso bummed thereof, he boughte it therafter (Piers Plowman)

In fact most of the structures above are quite rare in comparison to the traditional ones, but the seed of anarchy, in a sense, was cast. In addition to that, an increasing interest turned, in the age of Middle English, towards the end of the verse: Langland's Piers Plowman has only feminine lines, while the anonymous Pearl is heavily rhymed.

Alliterative verse had been the product of its own providing its audience with the impact of the life of its time and conveying to us today something of the moving spirit of that age: its strife and sorrow, its happiness and cheer, its courage and arrogance, its anxiety and care. The Beowulf style has deep roots. When ancient German, Norse, and Anglo-Saxon bards sat by the hearthfire of a night-dark hall, holding their harps and singing of heroes, monsters, and gods mastered by fate, this is the style that they used. Alliterative verse is a highly complex, highly sophisticated system of prosody. The surviving manuscripts reveal that simply repeating initial consonants or vowels was not all there was to this rhythm. Indeed, were it simply a matter of alliteration, we should not designate it a rhythm at all, but a form of rhyme, "front rhyme"-because, in essence, the rhyming occurs at the front end rather than the back end of words. Scholars have long applied themselves to the task of carefully studying the Old English poems to decide what ground rules those ancient poets followed to construct their poems.