

## ONE MECHANISM OF RUSSIAN POETIC LANGUAGE

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**Abstract.** Traditionally, the phenomenon of the semantic aura of the verse metre was regarded exclusively as historically determined; the question of a potential synaesthesia (the imitative potential possessed by the rhythmic structure of a poetic text) was essentially disregarded. This paper aims to approach the problem of “metre and meaning” from the perspective of possible actualisation of certain language forms in the metrical structures of binary and ternary metres; in other words, to analyse how the metrical nature of verse determines its basic semantic model. We have come to the conclusion that the fundamental difference between Russian binary and ternary metres lies in the level of rhythmic prominence of metrically dual words, the majority of which are pronouns. The very structure of binary metres suggests a constant possibility for pronouns to be in proximity to an unstressed syllable and to receive more or less heavy stress. In ternary metres pronouns find themselves inside the circle of metrical stresses and, being inevitably adjacent to either the preceding or the following one, lose their accent and are swallowed during pronunciation. The latter, in turn, results in weakening of deictic and anaphoric language functions and undermines the established logic of textual development. That is where different, i. e., poetic, mechanisms of creating meaning come to the fore. Ternary metres put rhythmic stress on notional words, creating — in accordance with the law of poetic analogy and via omission of intermediary elements — linguistically unpredictable associations between them; binary metres emphasise semi-notional and functional words, stressing the logical and grammatical order of text development.

**Keywords:** metre, meaning, Russian poetry, rhythm, pronoun.

## Introduction

The problem of the interdependence of metre and meaning, which had already attracted the early reformers of the Russian verse, namely, V. Trediakovsky, M. Lomonosov, and A. Sumarokov, was formulated within the academic paradigm during the 1960s by K. F. Taranovsky (Taranovsky 2000). From 1980–2000, mainly in the works of K. D. Vishnevsky (Vishnevsky 1985), M. L. Gasparov (Gasparov 1999) and others, the phenomenon of the semantic aura of the verse metre was regarded exclusively as historically determined; the question of a potential synaesthesia (the imitative potential possessed by the rhythmic structure of a poetic text) was essentially disregarded. Only in more recent works (Khvorostianova 2014; Fridberg 2014) can we find attempts, inspired by Taranovsky’s ideas, to prove a connection between the semantics of the text and its metrical and rhythmic structure.

At the same time, the generally accepted understanding of rhythm as a result of the interaction between the prescribed metrical law of interchanging strong and weak positions, on the one hand, and the language system, on the other hand, allows us to approach the problem of “metre and meaning” from the perspective of possible actualisation of certain language forms in the metrical structures of binary and ternary metres, in other words, to analyse how the metrical nature of verse determines its basic semantic model.

The present state of Russian metrical theory categorically denies the existence of any fundamental differences in the rhythmic nature of binary and ternary metres. Cf. the characteristic fragment from an article by Gasparov:

“...nel’zya ne schitat’sya s tem, chto v soznanii chitatelej, pisatelej i teoretikov XVIII–XIX vv. (krome razve Chernyshevskogo) dvuslozhnye i trekhslozhnye razmery nikogda ne protivopostavlyalis’ kak dve sistemy: oni prinadlezhali k odnoj i toj zhe sillabo-tonicheskoj sisteme stiha, i predpolagalos’, chto v nih dejstvuyut obshchie normy ritma” [“...we cannot but take into account that in the perception of the readers, writers and scholars living in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (with the only exception of Chernyshevsky perhaps), binary and ternary metres were never opposed as two separate systems: it was assumed that they belonged to the same syllabo-tonic type of verse and were governed by the same rhythmic rules”] (Gasparov 1984, 176).

Note, however, that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the actual poetic practice determined the new era theoretical constructions and was, in turn, determined by them, no one questioned the existence and significance of these differences.

Two emblematic conceptions of that period — the “logometer” (Chudovsky 1914) nature of verse and the “logaoedic” nature of prose — emerged practically simultaneously and in close connection with each other. A. M. Peshkovsky wrote about their adherents:

“Vse nazvannye avtory <...> ishchut, k sozhaleniyu, ne otlichij ritma prozy ot ritma stiha, a, naprotiv, skhodstv v etom otnoshenii prozy so stihom, t. e., v sushchnosti, annuliruyut samuyu zadachu issledovaniya, poskol’ku delo idet imenno o proze. Vse oni iskhodyat kak by iz molchalivogo predpolozheniya, chto inyh ritmicheskikh form, krome tekhn, kakie dany v stihe, byt’ ne mozhet. No s lingvisticheskoy tochki zreniya takoe predpolozhenie nichem ne mozhet byt’ opravdano” [“All these authors <...> are unfortunately looking not for the differences between the rhythm of prose and the rhythm of poetry but, quite the opposite, for similarities in this respect between them, i. e., in essence, they annul the very task of their research, since the research is about prose. All of them tacitly assume that there can be no other rhythmic forms than those that are given in verse. But this assumption, from a linguistic point of view, is completely unjustified”] (Peshkovsky 1927, 44–45).

The theoretical thought of that time, with striking persistence, rejected the traditional foot-based theory of poetic speech as an empty abstraction, totally unconnected with the real prosody<sup>1</sup>, and at the same time kept looking for two-, three-, and four-syllable feet in prosaic speech (Bely 1919; Grossman 1928; Brodsky 1923; Shengeli 1923; Engelgardt 1923). However, this paradox is quite understandable if we take into account that the “word-rhythm” is equivalent to the “tonic” one (unit is a stress) and the “foot-rhythm” is equivalent to the “syllabic” one (unit is a group of syllables). Deconstruction of the Russian syllabo-tonic verse system at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was determined by the logics of the deepening division between the domains of poetry and prose, which, in terms of prosody, were endowed with the tonic or syllabic features, respectively. Poetry started being perceived as tonic in essence.

When we say that the unit of the “word-rhythm” is stress, we do not mean just any word or any stress. We refer to the so-called “significant expressions” of verse, or — retrospectively — to the “prosodic periods”, which served as a basis for A. Kh. Vostokov’s theory of folk verse (1817). The conception of a poetic line being rhythmically arranged through semantic engineering that was born in the early modern period<sup>2</sup> reveals itself, for example, in the notorious “sdvigoloiya”

<sup>1</sup> Verse was regarded not as consisting of abstract rhythmic units — syllables and feet, but of real words. The war against the invariant of metrical scheme, started already by A. Bely, led in due course to L. Timofeev’s requirement “ne svodit’ bogatstvo konkretnyh stihotvornyh ritmov k sovershenno bespoleznomu i abstraktnomu metru, a nahodit’ v kazhdom sluchae tu “normu”, kotoraya sozdana dannym stilem <...> sushchestvuet li voobshche eta edinaya metrichesкая norma, s kotoroj my sootnosim otstupayushchij ot nee ritm, kakim obrazom popal v chelovecheskoe soznanie etot ideal’nyj metricheskiy zakon?” [“not to reduce the rich variety of poetic rhythms to a completely useless and abstract metre, but find, in each case, the ‘norm’ that is created by this particular style <...> does it even exist, this universal metrical norm against which we compare the rhythm deviating from it? How did this ideal metrical law appear in the human mind?”] (Timofeev 1939, 23). See also (Chudovsky 1915; Chudovsky 1917).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. with a long forgotten, and much ridiculed in its time, idea proposed by Baron Günzburg about the *tactus*-based composition of Russian syllabo-tonic metres. Günzburg wrote in his book that “words [in ternary metres — *S.M.*] will be arranged in such a way that the stress would fall alternately on the prominent and the secondary phrase” (1915, 103).

[“shiftology”] of A. Kruchenykh. If we do not regard it as a simply ridiculous “castration of Pushkin’s work”, this academic discipline appears to be a typical phenomenon of its time, because Kruchenykh understands the shift as merging, in the process of reading, of two or more graphic words into one acoustic (phonetic) word and identifies the immanent, structural reason for the shift in the verse as the disparity between metre and language (Kruchenykh 1922; 1924). The rhythm is no longer seen as a factor of meaning distortion, but, vice versa, the meaning, or rather the sequence of “significant expressions”, is regarded as the fundamental principle of the verse’s rhythmic organisation.

The development and direction of poetic studies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were largely predetermined by the ongoing transformation of the poetic system itself, by the dismantling of the traditional syllabo-tonic system and the creation on its basis of a new tonic verse. It is important to remember that nobody at the time saw this process as a fundamental replacement of one structural principle with another and that during this transitional period, the impact of a gradual destruction of the old rhythmic model that was seemingly unable to accommodate the new content was extremely powerful.<sup>3</sup> This is why the poetic perception of the period is so intriguingly “ternary”, as opposed to the “binary” perception which was characteristic of the time that saw the zenith of the Russian classical verse. Researchers proved long ago that Russian strict-stress verse emerged from ternary metres (Tomashevsky 1929; Gasparov 1968); the only regrettable thing is that too much attention was given to the analysis of the external rhythmic manifestations of this process, and not enough attention was given to the investigation of the underlying principles of the semantic construction of the verse.<sup>4</sup>

### History of Russian ternary metres

We now turn briefly to the history of ternary metres in Russia. When ternary metres first appear, they show obvious similarity with logaoedic verse (Vishnevsky 1969a); they are still not clearly identified as the “correct” syllabo-tonic metres; and the authors of the 18<sup>th</sup> century experience specific difficulties in their application and attribution:

“I vse-taki eto bylo stanovlenie novogo i ne ochen’-to privychnogo dlya sluha togdashnego chitatelya ritmicheskogo zvuchaniya — nastol’ko neprivychnogo, chto sami avtory neredko putali trekhslozhnye razmery s logaedicheskimi formami, vo vsyakom sluchae, ohotno kombinirovali i to, i drugoe v predelakh odnogo proizvedeniya” [“And still this was also the development of a new rhythmic pattern that did not sound familiar to the readers of the time; so unfamiliar it was that authors themselves often confused ternary metres with logaoedic forms; in any case, they gladly combined both of them within one work”] (Vishnevsky 1969b, 7–8).

For example, some of G. Derzhavin’s purely dactylic poems have random amphibrachic lines, which occasionally slip in: “Ty chasto vo zerkale vodnom / Pod rdyanoy igraesh zarey, / Na zybkom lazure bezdonnom / Tenyu melkaesh tvoey...” [“Often you in the mirror of water / Play under the crimson dawn, / On the rippled, fathomless sky blueness / You flash as your own shadow”] (‘Lastochka’ [‘Swallow’]); and vice versa: “Broste svoi nedosugi, / Skachite, plyashite smelee: / Beyte v ladoshi rukami, / Shchelkayte gromko perstami” [“Cast aside your lack of free time, / Jump and dance, don’t be shy! / Clap your hands, / Snap your fingers”] (‘Lyubitel’yu hudozhestv’ [‘To the lover of the arts’]).

<sup>3</sup> Cf., for example, with the theory of a single “metrical origin” of classical and non-classical metres suggested by Bozhidar (1916) and similar ideas of S. Bobrov (1915).

<sup>4</sup> For the theorists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ternary metres, tonic verse and folk verse are united in a certain distinctive “semantic prosody”, as each of these systems is based on the count of “significant expressions”, usually bearing one stress. See, for example, (Bryusov 1924).

I. Bogdanovich's 'Oda duchovnaya' ['Spiritual Ode'] (V) has a secondary title 'Daktilicheskimi stihami' ['Written in dactylic verse'], even though it actually uses a regular alternation of anapaestic and amphibrachic lines.<sup>5</sup>

M. Kheraskov's play entitled 'Milana' contains the following line, combining lines of ternary metres with different number of feet:

“Lyubit mudrec i durak,  
 Lyubit sluzhitel' i barin,  
 Turok, Francuz i Tatarin,  
 Gde b ni lyubili, carstva takogo net, —  
 Slovom, lyubit ves' svet.  
 Hot' muchit lyubov',  
 Palit nashu krov',  
 No, vidno, priyatna lyubov'”.

[“Love is felt by a wise man and a fool,  
 Love is felt by a servant and a lord  
 By the Turkish man, by the French man, and by the Tatar man.  
 There is no such realm where people do not feel love, —  
 In other words, the whole world is in love.  
 Even though love makes us suffer,  
 And makes our blood burn,  
 Apparently, love is pleasant.”]

We can point to numerous facts to show that Russian poets of the 18<sup>th</sup> century could feel the tonic nature of ternary metres:

- (1) intermixing of lines with different anacruses and different number of feet;
- (2) sporadic intrusions of verses with different number of syllables in unstressed intervals into texts written in ternary metres; some of these inclusions are represented by lines lacking a syllable at the caesura (as in Kheraskov's example given above: “Gde b ni lyubili, tsarstva takogo net”), while some are pure tonic verses (like, for example, in Derzhavin's poem 'Na pokorenie Parizha' ['On the occasion of taking Paris']: “Vsya nas teperya vselena / Svoey uzh zashchitoy chtet; / Evropa uz svobozhdenna / Khvalnymi pesnmi poet” [“Now the whole universe / Honours us as their protection / Europe freed from chains / Sings the songs of praise”]);
- (3) predominant use of ternary metres in genres that are connected with musical performance (arias, topical songs, duets, trios, choral pieces in fantastic comedies, operas, stage plays and ballets).

The similarity between the ternary metres of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the logaoedic verse becomes curiously manifest in the rhythmical structure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century amphibrachic trimetres. Poems of a certain meditative tone (Gasparov 1999, 120–151) that are written in this metre, as well as texts connected with the tradition of translations and imitations of Heine, show a characteristic tendency to use masculine word boundary in the first strong position of the verse —

<sup>5</sup> On connection of this name with the German tradition, see (Zhirmunsky 1975).

a tendency that puts them in stark contrast with other amphibrachic works. This unusual “iambic” beginning of a line, formed by the strictly observed separation of the two first syllables, apparently emerges due to the interest of Russian authors in the German three-ictic tonic verse and its predominantly monosyllabic unstressed intervals and large number of “iambic” lines. In the work of M. A. Tarlinskaja, which analyses tonic verse in English poetry, we find the following description of the syllabic composition of a line in three-ictic tonic verse used by Heine and some other German poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

“Both English and German variants of the three-ictic *dolnik* display similar features: ‘syllabo-tonic’ lines occur, on the whole, more often than in the four-ictic verse. ‘Iambic’ lines (.11) occur in about one-third to one-fifth of the lines <...> The less frequent ‘amphibrachic’ form (.22) usually takes up about another one-fifth of literary *dolnik* texts. Thus, up to one-half of the lines in the literary three-ictic *dolnik* are ‘syllabo-tonic’” (Tarlinskaja 1993, 80).

In Heine’s poems, according to Tarlinskaja, lines with two disyllabic inter-ictic intervals account for 20.4% of all verses, while the lines using the 2 + 1 scheme account for 27.2%. Taking into account that 92.7% of lines in Heine’s three-ictic tonic verse have a monosyllabic anacrusis, it seems quite possible that Russian poets, striving to recreate features typical for the tonic verse of Kotzebue, Heine and other authors, without going beyond the limits of the traditional syllabo-tonic system, preferred to place a word with a masculine ending in the first strong position of the amphibrach, where the rhythmical inertia of the line has not yet established itself, thus achieving an illusion of combining monosyllabic and disyllabic intervals within the verse — an illusion that becomes even more prominent when the first masculine word boundary is emphasized by the boundary of syntactic segments.

The scarce logaoedic verses of Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century poets were aimed at creating the same effect but with the help of completely different techniques. Thus, three of the most well-known poems written by V. Zhukovsky (‘Zhaloba pastuha’ [‘The Lament of the Shepherd’]), M. Lermontov (‘Oni lyubili drug druga tak dolgo i nezhno...’ [‘They loved each other so long and so tender...’]) and A. Fet (‘Izmuchen zhizn’yu, kovarstvom nadezhdy...’ [‘Saddened by life, the treachery of hope...’]) (Kholshevnikov 1991) follow the same pattern: (1)—1—2...[the number of disyllabic unstressed segments can differ]...2—(n). Zhirmunsky described the structure of such lines in Fet’s poem as a combination of two iambic feet and two amphibrachic feet (Zhirmunsky 1975, 213). Examination of the arrangement of word boundaries, however, suggests one iambic foot and several amphibrachic feet: the first word with a metrical stress in these logaoedic verses has a preferential masculine ending, while the second word has a feminine or dactylic one. The rhythmical effect achieved in this way is similar to the feeling that appears when we read amphibrachic verses with the first masculine word boundary. Cf., for instance, the following Zhukovsky’s lines:

- (1) logaoedic verse: “Na tu | znakomuyu goru / Sto raz | ya v den prikhozhu; / Stoyu, | sklonyasya na posokh, / Iv dol | svershiny glyazhu” [“That familiar mountain / I visit a hundred times per day; / I stand, leaning against the staff, / Looking at the valley below from the top”];
- (2) amphibrachic trimetre: “Kuda | uleteli tak skoro? / Pechal | poselilas v dushe [...] / Edva | ya uspela rastsvest, / Uzhe, | bezotradnaya, vyanu” [“Where did you fly so fast? / Sadness has found its home in my heart [...] / Barely had I the time to bloom, / Already, miserable, I am withering”].

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and primarily in B. Pasternak’s work, “tonic” lines in which monosyllabic and disyllabic unstressed intervals can be found side by side start randomly sneaking into



poems written in ternary metres (and especially in amphibrachic trimetres).<sup>6</sup> We find 23 such cases in Pasternak's amphibrachs, with 22 of them representing the pattern (1)—2—1. Only in three cases the first word boundary does not come after the fifth syllable. In other examples, we see either a masculine ending of the second metrically stressed word—in cases when the verse does not have tribrachs: “Nad shabashem skal, | k kotorym...” [“Over the orgy of rocks, in which...”], “I vdrug — iz sadov, | gde tvoy...” [“And suddenly — from the gardens where your...”], “Lish glaz nocheval, | iz milogo...” [“Only your eye spent the night, from the sweet...”], or a hyperdactylic ending of the first metrically stressed word—in cases when there is a tribrach in the second foot: “I vypryamitsya, | kak prezhde...” [“And straighten up as before...”], “Tseluyushchikhsya | i pyushchikh...” [“Kissing and drinking...”], “Okliknutye | s pozitsiy...” [“Hailed from the positions...”].

In practically all fully stressed lines, as we can see in the examples above, there is a syntactic boundary after the second strong position. These three factors — the masculine word boundary, the syntactic division, and the omission of the unstressed syllable — act together to break the verse into two uneven parts. The second masculine word boundary in Pasternak's amphibrach sounds like a strong rhythmical break disrupting the prescribed inertia of the verse; the disruption is so strong that it also justifies, as it were, the sporadic shortening of the unstressed interval following it. (Cf. this technique with the verse structure of the “Heine-type” amphibrachic trimetre using a distinct “iambic” beginning, which sounds similar to some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century logaoedic verses.) This is easily noticeable if we compare pairs of adjacent lines using a masculine word boundary in the first and the second strong position of the verse, with one of the lines being “tonic” in type:

- (1) “Spit stroy | sosnovykh vysot, / I les | shelushitsya i kaplyami [...]” [“Sleeping are the lines of high pines, / And the forest is exfoliating, and the drops [...]”];
- (2) “Glukhaya pora | listopada, / Poslednikh gusey | kosyaki. / Rasstraivatsya | ne nado: / U strakha glaza | veliki” [“The dead season of the leaf drop / The last flocks of geese. / There is no need to be upset: / Fear sees danger everywhere”].

Unlike with the Russian poetry of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we should not be surprised to find the rhythmical “break” of the amphibrachic trimetre in Pasternak's poetry predominantly on the second strong position of the verse. If in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century it was important to prevent the emergence of the rhythmic inertia, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was important to disrupt it.

Preferences in the organisation of the several “tonic” inclusions that we find in Pasternak's amphibrachic trimetre and — much less frequently — his anapaestic trimetre are fully in harmony with the basic rhythmical tendencies that Gasparov identified in the Russian three-ictic *dolnik* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- (1) first, the gradual strengthening and, already by the 1930s–1940s, the dominance of form III (anacrusis 2/0, interval 2—1; “Ia pomnyu stupeni trona” [“I remember the steps of the throne”]) and form V (anacrusis 2/0, interval 4; “Neozhidannyi akvilon” [“Unexpected aquilon”]);
- (2) second, the preferential use of the masculine word boundary in the last monosyllabic interval (Gasparov 1968, 71–72, 83–84).

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, these poems remain distinctly anapaestic or amphibrachic: the incursions of “tonic” lines are apparently accidental in character. See Gasparov, “...it is difficult, for instance, to describe as tonic a large poem that is written from beginning to end in a regular anapaest and only in one or two verses permits a monosyllabic interval instead of a disyllabic one: such poem will be perceived as a regular anapaest with a random deviation” (Gasparov 1968, 71).

The rhythmic preferences of ternary trimetres<sup>7</sup> in Pasternak's and, to a lesser extent, Blok's work, as well as possibly in the works of other poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup>, played an important role in the development of the Russian three-ictic *dolnik*. The mechanism of rhythm formation in both systems was the same: creation of the rhythmic inertia of the line and its subsequent destruction. The difference was in the means used for bringing it into action: either by changing the feminine (dactylic) word boundary to a masculine one in ternary metres or by "shortening" the second unstressed interval in tonic verse. The contrasting rhythmic structure of the amphibrachic line, based on the dissimilarity of word boundaries, in the early modern period was no longer perceived as aesthetically significant and expressive. The updating, "enlivening" of this model was achieved by means of omitting one unstressed syllable in a corresponding inter-stress interval.

Various instances of metrical stress omissions, "dropping" unstressed syllables, and blending lines with anacruses of unequal numbers of syllables clearly indicate that Pasternak's ternary metres start revealing the "tonic" constituent of their rhythm. In other words, perception of the tonic essence of ternary metres, which was characteristic of the Russian 18<sup>th</sup> century poets, had been, in a sense, revived by the 1910s–1930s. However, while logaoedic and tonic verses of Derzhavin and his followers get "evened out" to form the regular ternary metres, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tonic verses began to supplant the ternary metres that gave birth to them. The principles of "semantic versification", developed within the traditional, rigidly regulated system possessing only a limited inventory of rhythmic resources, are now awake and imperiously breaking up the cradle that has become too small for them. Although another matter altogether, it is worth noting that only within such a strictly regulated system could these principles have emerged and gained strength.

### Pronouns as words of dual metrical natures

A significant step concerning the problem of correlation between prosody and metre was made by Russian poetic science in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a clear distinction between stressed and unstressed words was made and a special type of words with dual metrical natures were recognized.<sup>9</sup> Zhirmunsky, who should be credited with these advances, counted among these dual metrical words such word classes as pronouns, pronominal adverbs and conjunctions, monosyllabic numerals, auxiliary verbs and interjections, and pointed out the specific dual character of their accentuation: all of these words become unstressed in immediate proximity to a stressed syllable, but retain a more or less noticeable accent when they are adjacent to an unstressed syllable.

Unfortunately, the sophisticated method for differentiating the weight of stress falling on metrically dual words, which was developed by Zhirmunsky, as well as his principle of regarding stress as a system of certain quantitative relations, never took hold in poetic theory — both because of its complexity, which inevitably led to the excessive fragmentation of statistical indicators, and

<sup>7</sup> The strongest influence here is perhaps exercised by the amphibrach, since its metrical structure makes it inherently prone to be replaced by tonic verse. Russian accentual verse emerged slowly and tentatively, justifying itself at the early stage of development simply by the uneven number of syllables in unstressed intervals; and it can be seen as lucky when such a possibility was suggested by the scheme of a classical metre.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., for example, with similar rhythmical tendencies that O. A. Orlova finds in A. Tvardovsky's amphibrach (Orlova 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. with the following: "Spornymi dlya russkoj prosodii yavlyayutsya akcentnye otnosheniya oboj kategorii maloudarnyh slov, po preimushchestvu — odnoslozhnyh, rezhe — dvuslozhnyh, kotorye zanimayut kak by srednee polozhenie mezhdru slovami znachashchimi (ponyatiyami) i slovami chisto sluzhebnyimi (kak predlogi i soyuzy): syuda otnosyatsya, glavnyim obrazom, mestoimeniya i nekotorye narechiya (mestoimennye), vspomogatel'nye glagoly i nemnogie drugie" ["A controversial aspect of Russian prosody is accentual relations of a special group of lightly-stressed words, predominantly monosyllabic and more rarely disyllabic, which stand in the middle position between the notional words (concepts) and purely functional words (such as prepositions and conjunctions): they include, first and foremost, pronouns and some adverbs (pronominal adverbs), auxiliary words and a few others" (Zhirmunsky 1975, 87).

due to the lack of linguistic experimental data that would prove the hypothesis suggested by Zhirmunsky. Such data are still absent today, and we do not know if it will ever be available or even if it is at all necessary. For the practical purposes of scansion, scholars have been successfully using a set of standard operations that were first outlined by Zhirmunsky and later fully developed by Gasparov and T. V. Skulacheva (Gasparov, Skulacheva 2004).

For poetic theory, the fruitfulness of Zhirmunsky's innovation lies in the understanding of the conventional nature of poetic stress. Special laws of accentuation govern the verse; the sequence of words is laid over a predetermined rhythmic frame with mapped out strong and weak positions, so that the accentual movement is adjusted to the prescribed pattern. In this sense, it would be fruitless to compare the verse with everyday speech and general language laws. Poetic speech distorts the accent of the word as much as it distorts its sound composition.<sup>10</sup> It is important to identify the laws governing this deformation, and then, after comparing the rhythmic structure of binary metres loosened by the frequent omissions of stress, on the one hand, and the rigid rhythmic pattern of ternary metres created by fixed tonic constants, on the other, we will get a clearer understanding of the fundamental differences between these metres — differences that ultimately determined their different fates in the history of Russian poetry. The crucial point here is the metrically dual words, the majority of which are pronouns.

The level of rhythmical prominence of pronouns in binary and ternary metres is necessarily different. Frequent dibrachs in iamb and trochee create many more possibilities for stressing pronouns; the very structure of binary metres suggests a constant possibility for pronouns to be in proximity to an unstressed syllable and, according to Zhirmunsky's theory, to receive more or less heavy stress. The situation is different in ternary metres, where pronouns find themselves inside the circle of metrical stresses and, being inevitably adjacent to either the preceding or the following one, lose their accent and are swallowed during pronunciation. The only exception here — the first syllable of the anapaest — does not play such a significant role because it stands in anacrusis, i. e., is extrametrical.

It is telling to compare, for instance, N. Nekrasov's poem 'Trojka' ['Trio of horses'], where the frequent use of "ty/tvoy" ["you/your"] in unstressed positions creates an impression of a special technique of depersonalisation, removal of the addressee:

- (1) "Chto **ty** zhadno glyadish na dorogu" ["Why are you looking so hard at the road"], "Vsyo litso **tvoye** vspykhnulo vdruzg" ["The whole face of yours suddenly flashed"], "I zachem **ty** bezhish toroplivo" ["And why are you running in a hurry"], "Polyubit **tebya** vsyakiy ne proch" ["Anyone would be happy to love you"], "V volosakh **tvoikh**, chernykh kak noch" ["In your hair, black like the night"], "Skvoz rumyanes shcheki **tvoey** smugloy" ["Through the bloom of your swarthy cheek"], "Da ne to **tebe** palo na doly" ["But you were to get a different lot"], "Budet bit **tebya** muzhpriverednik" ["You will be beaten up by your demanding husband"], "Pogruzishsya **ty** v son neprobudnyi" ["You will plunge in a sleep without waking"], "I v litse **tvoyem**, polnom dvizhenya" ["And in your fact that is full of motion"], "Kak proydeshty tyazhelyi svoy put" [As you will walk your difficult road], "Ne nagnat **tebe** beshenoy troiki" ["You will not catch up with the crazy-paced horses"], —

with his love poems, where the same pronouns are placed in the metrically strong positions:

- (2) "Ya ne lyublyu ironii tvoey" ["I do not like the irony of yours"], "A nam s toboy, tak goryacho lyubivshim" ["And it's for me and you, who loved so passionately"],

<sup>10</sup> Cf. with Jakobson's commentary on the "dualism of the prescribed and actual series of stresses" in syllabo-tonic verse, rhythmical inertia of which prescribes artificial phrasing and intonation to poetic speech and changes the rhythm of the word by giving prominence to unstressed syllables (Jakobson 1923, 101–112).



“Svidanie prodlit zhelaesh ty” [“You want to continue the meeting”], “Kak ty krotka, kak ty poslushna” [“You are so gentle, so docile”], “Ya posetil tvoe kladbishche” [“I have visited your grave”], “I obraz tvoy svetley i chishche” [“And your image is more fair and pure”], “Vstrechalsya grustno ya s tobom” [“I used to meet you with sadness”], “Ni smekh, ni govor tvoy veselyy” [“Neither your laughter nor your merry speech”], “Zabudus, ty peredo mnoyu” [“I fall into reverie, and here you are in front of me”].

This hypothesis lends itself to statistical testing. If the role of pronouns in Russian binary and ternary metres is as different as we assume, it should result in their contrasting distribution across weak and strong metrical positions. One would expect to find an overrepresentation of pronouns in the strong positions in binary metres and in the weak positions in ternary metres. To test this assumption, we calculated the raw frequencies of all monosyllabic personal pronoun forms<sup>11</sup> in the poetic subcorpus of the Russian National Corpus, both for binary and ternary metres (7,266,779 and 1,202,535 words, respectively). The results are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of personal pronouns in Russian binary and ternary metres

Word forms	Ternary metres					Binary metres				
	Overall	Weak		Strong		Overall	Weak		Strong	
	Raw freq.	Raw freq.	%	Raw freq.	%	Raw freq.	Raw freq.	%	Raw freq.	%
ya ‘I’	16455	14231	25.49	2224	3.98	93480	54218	15.55	39262	11.26
ty ‘you’	8189	6480	11.61	1709	3.06	50102	26222	7.52	23880	6.85
on ‘he’	6640	5745	10.29	895	1.60	46943	27823	7.98	19120	5.48
my ‘we’	4365	3668	6.57	697	1.25	21868	11619	3.33	10249	2.94
vy ‘you’	1555	1203	2.15	352	0.63	10257	5122	1.47	5135	1.47
mne ‘I-DAT’	6268	4698	8.41	1570	2.81	35839	16670	4.78	19169	5.50
mnoj ‘I-INSTR’	739	29	0.05	710	1.27	4815	170	0.05	4645	1.33
im ‘he-INSTR / they-DAT’	922	727	1.30	195	0.35	6231	2999	0.86	3232	0.93
nem ‘he-PREP’	682	295	0.53	387	0.69	5142	1564	0.45	3578	1.03
ej ‘she-DAT’	949	754	1.35	195	0.35	6438	3000	0.86	3438	0.99
nej ‘she-PREP’	1012	363	0.65	649	1.16	7539	1603	0.46	5936	1.70
nas ‘we-PREP’	1567	751	1.35	816	1.46	10964	2705	0.78	8259	2.37
nam ‘we-DAT’	1755	1359	2.43	396	0.71	12051	5323	1.53	6728	1.93

<sup>11</sup> It does not seem reasonable to take into account forms with more than 1 syllable, since they will inevitably stretch over both weak and strong metrical positions in binary metres.

Table 1. Distribution of personal pronouns in Russian binary and ternary metres (continued)

vas 'you-ACC'	697	328	0.59	369	0.66	5893	1435	0.41	4458	1.28
vam 'you-DAT'	701	476	0.85	225	0.40	5675	2499	0.72	3176	0.91
ih 'they-ACC'	2608	2201	3.94	407	0.73	19788	9793	2.81	9995	2.87
nih 'they-PREP'	725	247	0.44	478	0.86	5656	955	0.27	4701	1.35
TOTAL	55829	43555	78.02	12274	21.98	348681	173720	49.82	174961	50.18

We have found a significant association between the metre and the metrical position of personal pronouns:  $\chi^2(1) = 15384$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The odds of a personal pronoun being used in a weak position in ternary metres are 3.5 times greater than those in binary metres (Fig. 1). Thus, our hypothesis is confirmed.

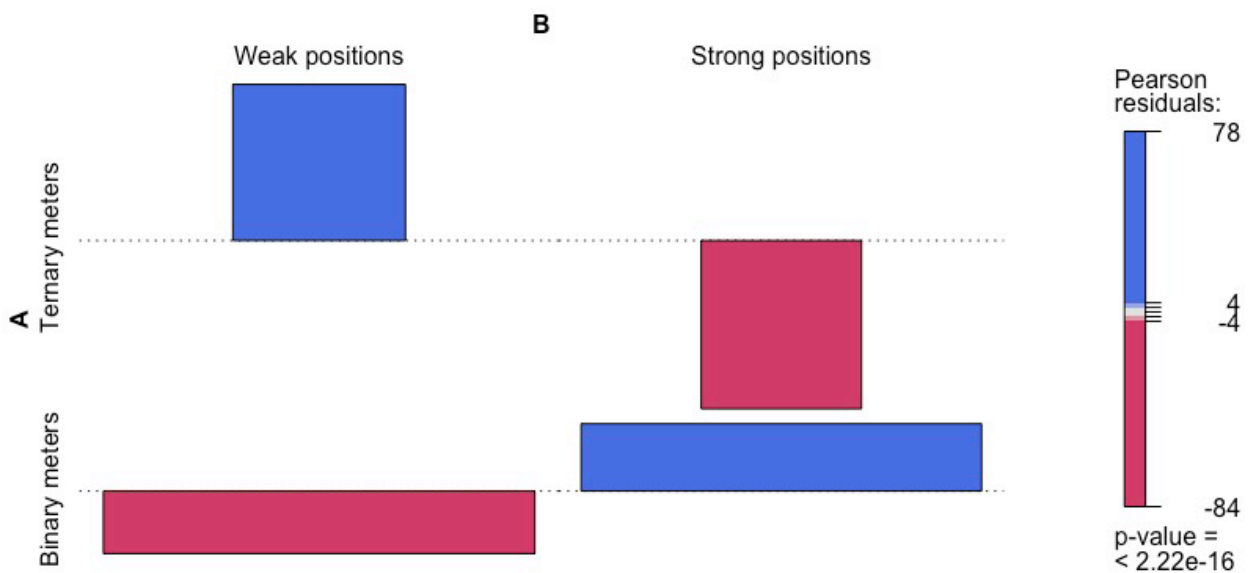


Fig. 1. Association plot of personal pronouns on weak and strong positions in Russian binary and ternary metres

However, having fitted a linear regression model to the data, with log-transformed frequency of personal pronouns as dependent variable and with metre and position as independent variables, we got the following results (Table 2):

Table 2. Coefficients of the Model.1

	B (SE)	95% CI	
		Lower	Upper
Constant	8.92***(0.28)	8.35	9.49
Metre	-2.59*** (0.40)	-3.4	-1.79
Position	-0.54 (0.40)	-1.34	0.26
Interaction term	1.15* (0.57)	0.01	2.29

Significance codes: \*\*\* —  $p < 0.001$ , \* —  $p < 0.05$ .

Overall, Model.1 was highly significant: LR  $\chi^2(3) = 41.7$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and explained substantial amount of variance: pseudo- $R^2 = 0.45$  (Cox and Snell), 0.46 (Nagelkerke). The null hypothesis that the deviance of the model does not differ from the deviance of a model without any predictors can be rejected. However, of the two predictors, only one, namely metre, has crossed the threshold of statistical significance ( $p < 0.001$ ). As for the metrical position, it has failed to make any significant contribution to the regression model ( $p = 0.89$ ), which is confirmed by the fact that its confidence interval based on the bootstrap crosses zero. Nevertheless, the interaction term of metre and position was significant, suggesting that some other factors should be taken into consideration.

With this in mind, we fitted another linear regression model to the data, this time with the following independent variables: 1) metre (binary or ternary), 2) position (weak or strong), 3) case (nominative or non-nominative), 4) person (first, second, and third), and 5) number (singular or plural) and all possible interactions between them.

Model.2 was also highly significant: LR  $\chi^2(15) = 87.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and explained a much greater amount of variance as compared to Model.1: pseudo- $R^2 = 0.72$  (Cox and Snell), 0.74 (Nagelkerke).

We used the *drop1()* function in RStudio (The R Project for Statistical Computing 2013) to remove each term from the Model.2, one at a time, and test the changes in the model's fit. The results showed that only interactions of 1) metre and position and 2) position and case make significant contribution to the model, while all other variables and interactions can be easily left out. That was confirmed by the stepwise backwards model selection based on Akaike's information criterion (AIC) with the help of the *step()* function in RStudio.

Having left only these two interactions, we fitted the Model.3 to the data. Comparing Model.2 and Model.3 with the help of *anova()* function in RStudio proved that Model.3, despite the greatly reduced number of predictors, was not any worse than Model.2 ( $p = 0.7$ ). The summary of the Model.3 is given in the Table 3:

Table 3. Coefficients of the Model.3

	B (SE)	95% CI	
		Lower	Upper
Constant	9.56*** (0.32)	8.91	10.21
Metre:ternary	-2.59*** (0.31)	-3.22	-1.97
Position:weak	0.3 (0.46)	-0.61	1.23
Case:non-nominative	-0.91** (0.34)	-1.59	-0.22
Metre:ternary : Position:weak	1.15* (0.44)	0.27	2.03
Position:weak : Case:non-nominative	-1.2* (0.48)	-2.16	-0.23

Significance codes: \*\*\*— $p < 0.001$ , \*\*— $p < 0.01$ , \*— $p < 0.05$ .

Summary: LR  $\chi^2(5) = 78.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; pseudo- $R^2 = 0.68$  (Cox and Snell), 0.7 (Nagelkerke).

These effects clearly show that distribution of personal pronouns in binary and ternary metres differs not only with regard to strong and weak metrical positions but also with regard to the pronouns' preferred case forms. To support this observation, we performed two independent one-tailed t-tests with Welch's correction to compare 1) the mean log-transformed frequencies of nominative personal pronouns on weak and strong metrical positions in ternary metres and 2) the mean log-transformed frequencies of non-nominative personal pronouns on weak and strong metrical positions in binary metres.

The first test revealed that, on average, the nominative pronouns on weak metrical positions in ternary metres produced significantly greater values ( $M = 8.45$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ) than the nominative pronouns on strong metrical positions in the same metres ( $M = 6.87$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ),  $t(7) = 3.04$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . The effect size was large:  $r = 0.74$  (Field, Miles, Field 2012, 58).

Conversely, the second test proved that, on average, the non-nominative pronouns on weak metrical positions in binary metres produced significantly lower values ( $M = 7.76$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ) than the non-nominative pronouns on strong metrical positions in the same metres ( $M = 8.61$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ),  $t(15) = -2.27$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . The effect size was also substantial:  $r = 0.5$ . Respective bar plots with 95% confidence intervals are provided in the Figures 2 and 3.

As for non-nominative forms of personal pronouns in ternary metres and nominative forms of personal pronouns in binary metres, they reveal no predisposition to either weak or strong metrical positions, as confirmed by another pair of t-tests with Welch's correction ( $t(15) = 0.51$ ,  $p = 0.3$  for ternary metres;  $t(7) = 0.33$ ,  $p = 0.62$  for binary metres).

## Conclusion

What does a text lose when it “loses” pronouns?<sup>12</sup> What language functions in the text are weakened? Apparently, two of these functions are: the deictic function (reference to the participants of a particular speech act: the speaker, the listener, as well as the object pointed at by the speaker; reference to the speech situation, expression of the presupposition concerning the existence of the object in the perception of the speaker and the listener, correlation with a particular referent) and the anaphoric function (reference to previous or subsequent positions of the text) (Krylov, Paducheva 1990; Seliverstova 1988; Paducheva 1985; Otkupshchikova 1984; Levin 1973). The text that ignores pronouns deliberately resists its correlation with a specific context of speech

<sup>12</sup> Removal of stress from pronouns together with giving prominence to other, notional, words inevitably leads to “swallowing” of the former during pronunciation and, hence, to faster reading.

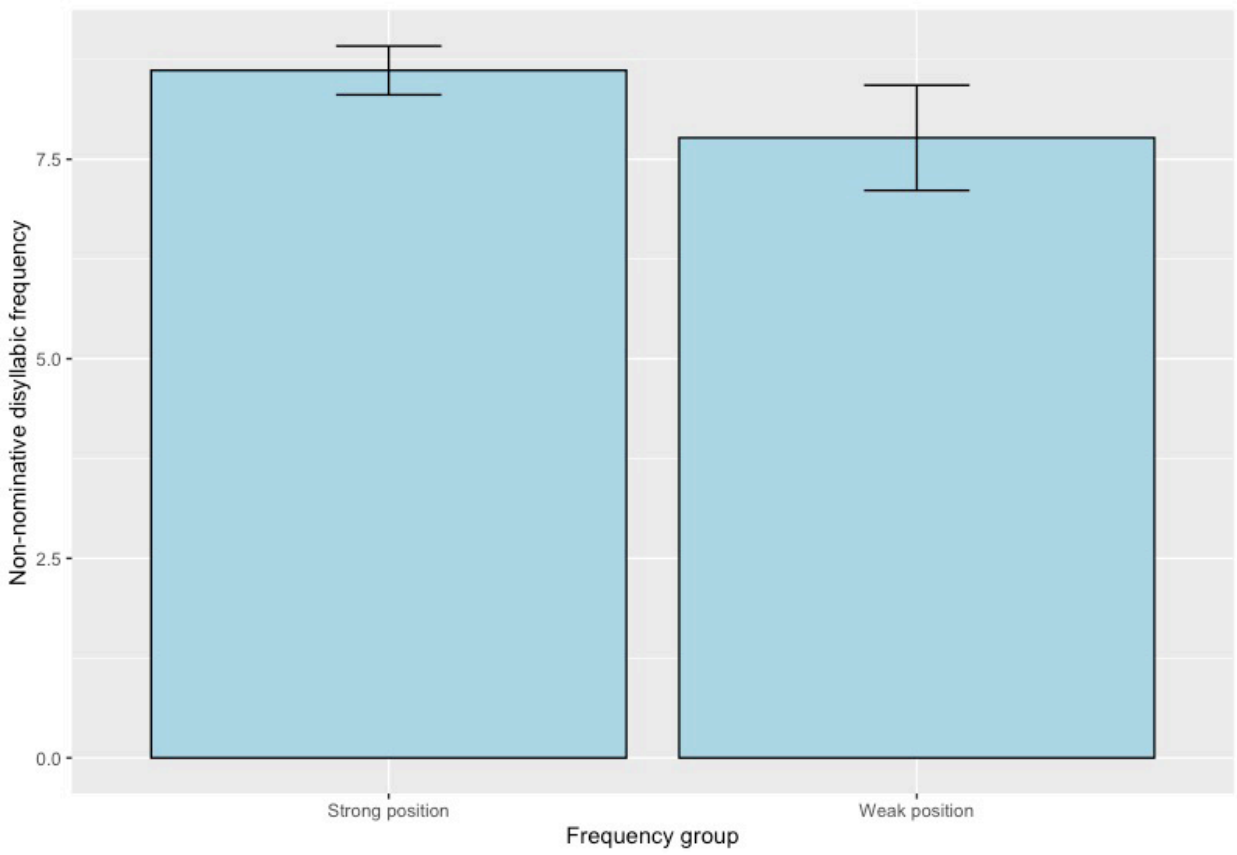


Fig. 2. Bar plots of the log-transformed frequencies of non-nominative personal pronouns on weak and strong positions in Russian binary metres

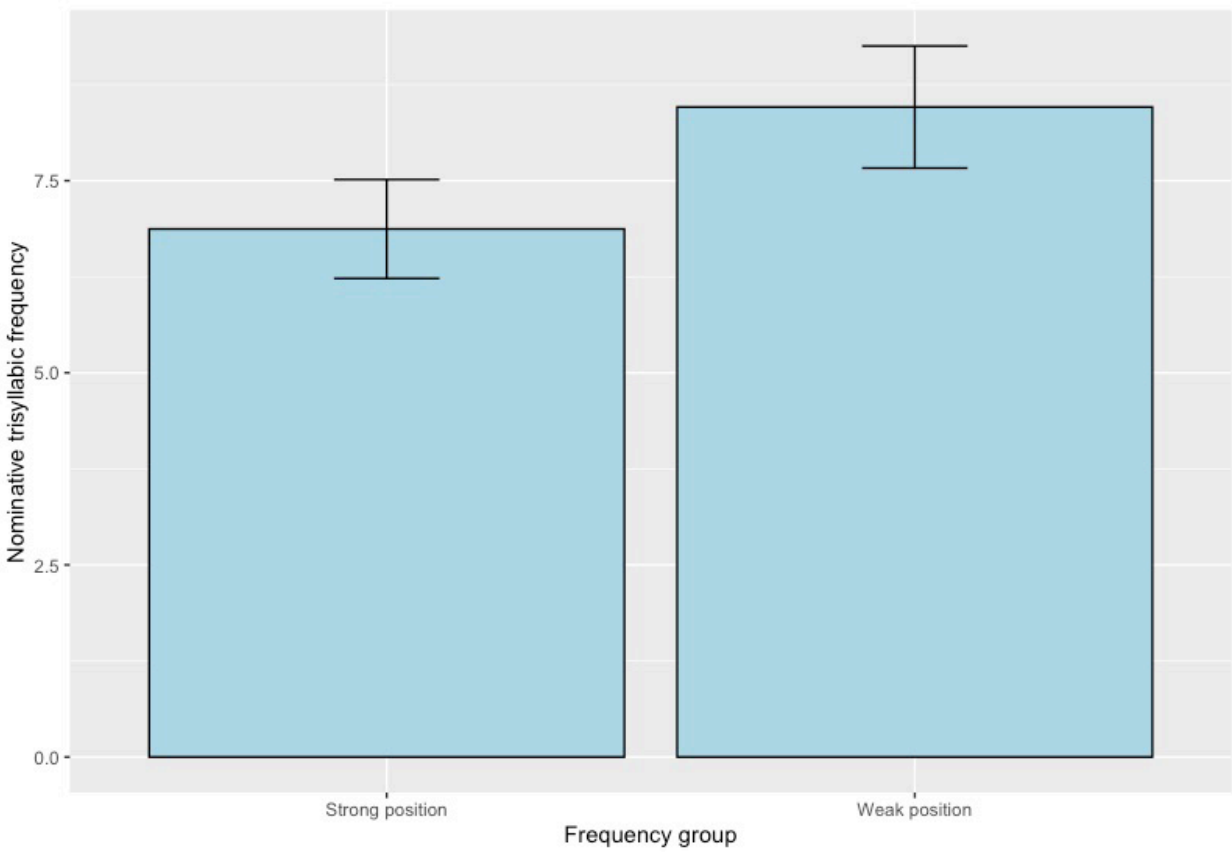


Fig. 3. Bar plots of the log-transformed frequencies of nominative personal pronouns on weak and strong positions in Russian ternary metres



situation, with extra-linguistic reality<sup>13</sup>, and destroys its own coherence, the consistence in the logic of representing thoughts. The text that gives prominence to pronouns and puts them in strong metrical positions does the opposite.

Both the loss of connection with reality ('defamiliarisation') and the disruption of familiar word combinations, as Russian formalists showed in their time, are among the most important features of a work of art and form the basis for the development of poetic language. Downplaying the weight of pronouns certainly does not turn a poem into a random series of sounds; it weakens the established logic of textual development and changes the relations between the words and between the text and reality. Thus, different, i. e., poetic, mechanisms of creating meaning come to the fore. Ternary metres put rhythmic stress on notional words, creating — in accordance with the law of poetic analogy and via omission of intermediary elements — linguistically unpredictable associations between them<sup>14</sup>; binary metres emphasise semi-notional and functional words (even those that are formally "unstressed", simply because of their frequent use in strong metrical positions of the verse), underlining the logical and grammatical order of text development.

Thus, ternary metres prove to be in a sense more "poetic" than binary ones; their very structure provides optimal opportunities for creating associative links (crystallisation of the "aesthetic meaning" of the word) and contributes more to the artistic effect. That is why Russian ternary metres and tonic verse are so similar to folk songs, lyrical songs, etc.: each of these accentual systems is essentially based on the count of "significant expressions" (Gasparov 1975, 77–107). In this sense, the evolution of the Russian literary verse represents a movement towards the folk verse, as it was predetermined in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>13</sup> Somebody might disagree: regardless of the pronouns, the connection with extra-linguistic reality is preserved by the notional words of a poetic text. This is not entirely so. Language reflects reality in the entirety of all its elements. Withdrawing the elements that ensure the internal coherence of the system leads to its instability and unpredictability. It becomes easier to create new connections, which is achieved via incorporation of language elements into a special poetic structure.

<sup>14</sup> Even the few examples of Pasternak's lines given above, when taken out of context, surprise us by their lack of coherence and create the impression of a random choice of words. The individuality of poetic style clearly reveals the systemic destruction of the mechanisms used to ensure correlation between different parts of poetic structure. Cf. with Jakobson's concept of the "differentiating rhythmic inertia" of a new verse, which significantly increases the separate value of each word stress and leads to the emergence of a special syntax; following its laws, the word group, which in ordinary speech is governed by one heavy stress, gets broken into separate, equally independent words (Jakobson 1923, 101–112).

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**For citation:** Monakhov, S. I. (2019) One mechanism of Russian poetic language. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Lexicography*, 1 (2): 315–330. DOI: [10.33910/2687-0215-2019-1-2-315-330](https://doi.org/10.33910/2687-0215-2019-1-2-315-330)

**Received** 4 August 2019; reviewed 28 August 2019; accepted 12 September 2019.

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