



GRAMMATICAL MEANS OF EXPRESSING
EMOTIONALITY IN SERGEI YESENIN'S POETRY

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Abstract. *The article examines grammatical means of expressing emotionality in the lyric poetry of Sergei Yesenin on the basis of a corpus of 163 dated poems from the first volume of his Complete Works (3,682 lines, 16,607 words). Morphological markers (diminutive suffixes, interjections, emotive particles, imperative forms, personal pronouns) and syntactic markers (exclamatory and interrogative sentences, the vocative particle O, line-initial anaphora, aposiopesis) were counted automatically and compared across four periods. The early poems express emotion mainly through diminutive suffixes, whereas from 1917 onwards exclamatory and interrogative sentences, emotive particles, imperatives and first and second person pronouns become dominant ($p < 0.001$). The results show a shift from a folk-poetic nominative model of emotionality to a dialogic and confessional one.*

Keywords. *emotionality, emotivity, grammatical means, exclamatory sentence, imperative, diminutive suffixes, emotive particles, Sergei Yesenin, corpus analysis.*

Introduction. Emotionality belongs to the most studied and at the same time the least formalised properties of poetic language. R. Jakobson defined the emotive or expressive function as the one focused on the addresser, which «aims a direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about» [1, p. 354]. In Russian linguistics E.M. Galkina-Fedoruk separated emotionality, that is the expression of feelings, from expressivity, the



intensification of the expressive force of an utterance, and showed that the two categories often coincide but are not identical [2]. V.I. Shakhovsky developed a linguistic theory of emotions in which emotivity is treated as a semantic property of language units at all levels of the system, from the morpheme to the text [3]. Grammar occupies a special place in this system because grammatical means are obligatory and recurrent, so their frequency can be measured. A.V. Kerova, analysing exclamatory sentences, regards emotionality, expressivity and evaluation as their prototypical features [4].

The emotional intonation of Sergei Yesenin has been noted by readers and critics since the 1910s, yet linguistic studies usually describe it on selected examples. Yu.A. Arskaya and A.A. Mamedov applied statistical and semantic analysis to addresses and imperatives in Yesenin's «small» poems of 1917 to 1919 and concluded that the author conducts a dialogue with the poetics of his own earlier texts rather than with the revolutionary events [5]. Yu.A. Yuzhakova and Kh.A. Karimov described Yesenin's word order and noted, among other features, a negation at the beginning of the line reinforced by verbal gradation [6]. A quantitative picture of the whole set of grammatical means across the creative periods of the poet is still missing. The aim of this article is to describe the morphological and syntactic means of expressing emotionality in Yesenin's lyric poetry and to trace how their frequency changes from 1910 to 1925.

Materials and methods. The material is the first volume of the academic Complete Works of S.A. Yesenin [7], which contains the poems that the poet himself selected for the first volume of his Collected Poems published in 1926. The main section of the volume was segmented into poems by the editorial dates. The corpus comprises 163 dated poems, 3,682 lines and 16,607 words. Following the editorial dating, the poems were divided into four periods, namely I 1910 to 1916 (58 poems), II 1917 to 1921 (33 poems), III 1922 to



1923 (17 poems) and IV 1924 to 1925 (55 poems). For poems with a double date the first year was taken.

Two groups of markers were counted. Morphological markers include nouns, adjectives and adverbs with the diminutive and endearing suffixes -оньк-/ -еньк-, -ушк-/ -юшк-/ -ышк- and -очк-/ -ечк-/ -ичк- (lexicalised words such as *девушка* or *печка* were excluded), the interjections *ах*, *эх*, *ой*, *гой*, *увы*, *эй*, the emotive particles *ведь*, *уж*, *же*, *ж*, *разве*, *неужели*, *пусть*, *пускай*, *ль*, *ну*, imperative forms and personal pronouns of the first person singular and of the second person. Syntactic markers include exclamatory and interrogative sentences counted by the final punctuation of the edition, the vocative particle *О* followed by a noun in the nominative case or by a verb, aposiopesis marked by suspension dots, and line-initial anaphora, that is two successive lines beginning with the same word. Morphological analysis was performed with the pymorphy3 analyser [8]. Frequencies were normalised per 1,000 words or per 100 lines, and the differences between periods were tested with the χ^2 goodness-of-fit test against the size of each period.

Results. Table 1 summarises the frequencies of all markers. Nine of the eleven markers differ significantly between the periods, while the frequencies of interjections and of aposiopesis remain stable.

Table 1. Grammatical markers of emotionality by period (I 1910 to 1916, II 1917 to 1921, III 1922 to 1923, IV 1924 to 1925)

Marker	I	II	III	IV	χ^2	p
Poems	58	33	17	55		
Lines	1,126	751	507	1,298		
Words	4,751	3,097	2,400	6,359		
Exclamatory sentences, per 100 lines	1.1	4.8	6.3	4.2	34.2	< 0.001



Interrogative sentences, per 100 lines	0.3	2.8	2.6	3.7	32.1	< 0.001
Line-initial anaphora, per 100 lines	1.2	1.7	4.7	3.5	22.7	< 0.001
Aposiopesis, per 100 lines	2.0	3.1	3.6	2.9	4.2	0.24
Diminutive suffixes, per 1,000 words	5.1	2.9	0.4	1.9	15.5	0.001
Vocative <i>O</i> , per 1,000 words	0.6	4.2	0.0	0.2	38.3	< 0.001
Interjections, per 1,000 words	1.5	1.3	2.1	1.9	0.8	0.85
Emotive particles, per 1,000 words	4.0	7.7	17.5	13.7	39.2	< 0.001
Imperative forms, per 1,000 words	7.2	12.9	12.1	19.0	29.0	< 0.001
Second person pronouns, per 1,000 words	10.7	16.1	14.2	18.9	12.1	0.007
First person sg. pronouns, per 1,000 words	19.8	28.1	59.6	44.5	88.4	< 0.001
Poems with an exclamation, %	19.0	42.4	76.5	43.6		
Poems with a question, %	3.4	30.3	52.9	45.5		

The syntactic markers change most sharply (Fig. 1). Exclamatory sentences occur 1.1 times per 100 lines in the poems of 1910 to 1916 and 6.3 times in those of 1922 to 1923. The share of poems containing at least one exclamation grows from 19.0% to 76.5% and then falls to 43.6% in the last



period. Interrogative sentences are almost absent from the early poems (3 cases, 0.3 per 100 lines) and reach 3.7 per 100 lines in 1924 to 1925, when 45.5% of the poems contain a question. Line-initial anaphora grows from 1.2 to 4.7 per 100 lines.

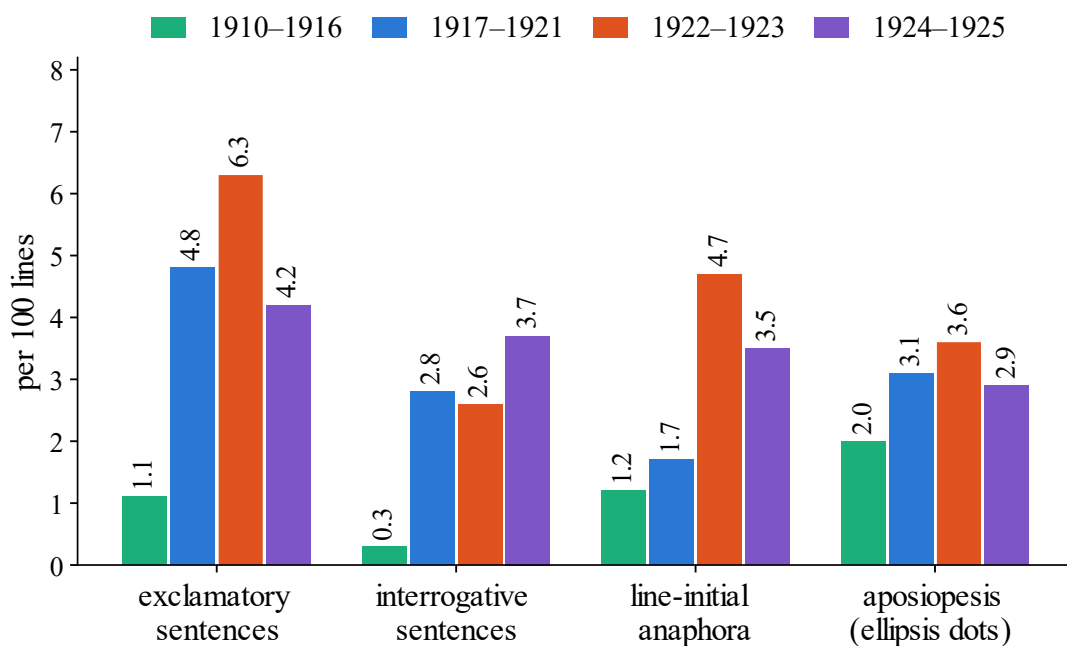


Fig. 1. Syntactic markers of emotionality in Yesenin's poems by period (per 100 lines)

Morphological and pronominal markers move in opposite directions (Fig. 2). Diminutive suffixes are most frequent in the early period (5.1 per 1,000 words, 24 of the 46 cases in the corpus) and almost disappear in 1922 to 1923 (one case). The vocative particle *O* is concentrated in the poems of 1917 to 1921 (13 of 17 cases). All other markers grow. Emotive particles increase from 4.0 to 17.5 per 1,000 words, imperative forms from 7.2 to 19.0, second person pronouns from 10.7 to 18.9, and first person singular pronouns triple from 19.8 to 59.6.

In the early poems emotion is usually transferred to the objects of the described world, and the diminutive suffix becomes its main carrier, as in «Воробышки игривые, / Как детки сиротливые» 'playful little sparrows, like little orphan children' [7, p. 17]. When the poet addresses his reader



directly, he relies on the folk-poetic interjection and address, as in «Гой ты, Русь, моя родная» [7, p. 50]. The poems of 1917 to 1921 replace the folk interjection with the solemn vocative *O* combined with imperatives, which creates a hymn-like intonation in «*O Русь, взмахни крылами*» ‘O Russia, flap your wings’ [7, p. 109] and «*O верю, верю, счастье есть!*» ‘O I believe, I believe, happiness exists!’ [7, p. 128]. The same period gives the best-known example of negation at the beginning of the line, «*Не жалею, не зову, не плачу*» ‘I do not regret, I do not call, I do not weep’ [7, p. 163], where three negated verbs of the first person form a gradation [6].

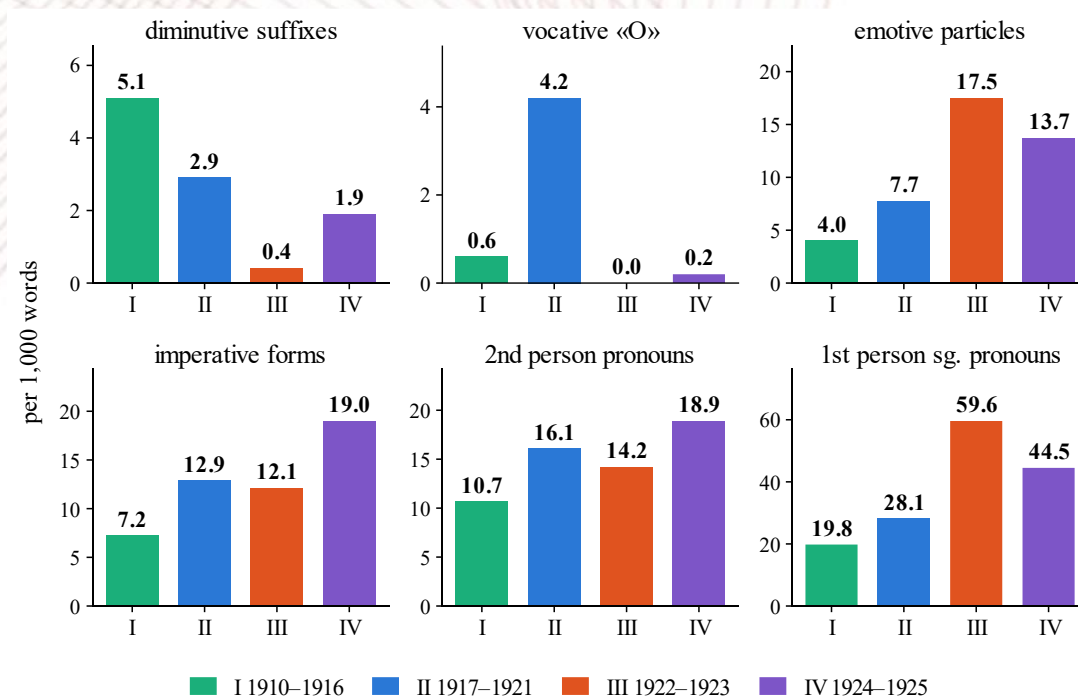


Fig. 2. Morphological and pronominal markers of emotionality by period (per 1,000 words)

In 1922 to 1923 emotionality is carried by the structure of the sentence itself. A one-word exclamation opens the poem «*Да! Теперь решено. Без возврата / Я покинул родные поля*» ‘Yes! It is decided now. Without return I have left my native fields’ [7, p. 167], and the imperative with the particle *же* and repetition intensifies the address in «*Пой же, пой*» ‘Sing, do sing’ [7, p. 173]. The late poems combine all dialogic means. «Письмо матери» opens



with a question, an address containing a diminutive noun and a repeated exclamation, «*Ты жива еще, моя старушка? / Жив и я. Привет тебе, привет!*» ‘Are you still alive, my dear old one? I am alive too. Greetings to you, greetings!’ [7, p. 179]. The farewell formula «*Прощай, Баку! Тебя я не увижу*» ‘Farewell, Baku! I shall not see you’ [7, p. 223] unites an imperative, an address and an exclamation, and the line «*Глупое сердце, не бейся*» ‘Foolish heart, do not beat’ [7, p. 273] is repeated six times as a refrain, which contributes to the high level of anaphora and imperatives in the last period.

Discussion. The data reveal two models of grammatical emotionality in Yesenin’s lyrics. The early model is nominative and folk-poetic. Emotion is attached to the name of an object through the diminutive suffix and rarely becomes a separate utterance, which is why exclamations and questions are infrequent. From 1917 onwards the model becomes predicative and dialogic. Emotion is expressed by the communicative type of the sentence, by the particle and by the imperative, and it is addressed to a second person. This shift strengthens the emotive function in R. Jakobson’s sense, focused on the addresser [1, p. 354], and at the same time activates the function oriented to the addressee, since second person pronouns and imperatives grow together with exclamations.

The periods also differ in the type of addressee. In 1917 to 1921 the addressee is Russia, God or the native fields, and the vocative *O* marks a solemn apostrophe. This agrees with the conclusion of Yu.A. Arskaya and A.A. Mamedov about the role of addresses and imperatives in the «small» poems of the same years [5]. In 1922 to 1923 the lyrical «I» dominates (59.6 first person pronouns per 1,000 words), and the emotive particles *же, уж, ведь* give the utterance a confessional tone. In 1924 to 1925 the addressee becomes a concrete person or object, the mother, a friend, Shagane or the poet’s own heart, and questions reach their maximum. The stability of interjections (1.3 to 2.1 per





1,000 words, $p = 0.85$) shows that the change concerns grammatical structure rather than the most direct lexical signals of emotion.

The study has limitations. The corpus covers only the first volume of the Complete Works, the text was obtained by optical recognition of the edition, and some markers, such as anaphora and the sentence type, were identified by formal rules that rely on the editorial punctuation. Period III is the smallest (17 poems), so its values should be compared with caution. Further work should add manual annotation of address and evaluation.

Conclusion. Grammatical means of expressing emotionality in Yesenin's lyric poetry form a system whose structure changes over time. In the poems of 1910 to 1916 emotion is expressed mainly by diminutive suffixes and rarely by the type of sentence. From 1917 onwards exclamatory and interrogative sentences, emotive particles, imperative forms and first and second person pronouns become dominant, and the vocative *O* marks the solemn apostrophe of 1917 to 1921. The shift from a nominative to a dialogic model of emotionality can be used in the linguistic analysis of Yesenin's poems in university courses and in comparing his originals with their translations.

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