# On the Semantic Structure of One Kind of Complex Poetic Signs

MILOSAV Ž. ČARKIĆ
*(Belgrade)*

**1.** It is known that semiotic theory is based upon belief that in human culture and therefore in literature itself there is always a system of signs. It is also a well known fact that the meaning of signs does not only depend upon the relation between the signifier and the signified but also upon the relation between the signs and language users in which way three aspects of signs can be differentiated: semantic, syntactic and pragmatic.

Every single aspect has its place in the semantic structure of verse discourse so that this type of poetic text carries several types of meaning. However, since in the poetic text as a second degree language modelling system (everyday language being the first) there is a complementary ordering of language sequence, poetic work (or text) as a system of sytems brings forth, above all, relational intratextual links among the signs. This is quite easily made possible in verse discourse (i.e. poetry) because of the continual parallelism[1] in its structure based upon the repetition of the same or similar textual segments (repetition of sounds and sound sequences, rhymed sequences, accented and unaccented syllables, composition elements, parts of the sound structure of the tropes, syntactic constructions, verses and stanzas. This orchestral repetition[2] which manifests itself as a systemic

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1  "The structure of poetry is that of continual parallelism within the large range of the so called technical parallelisms in Hebrew poetry, the antiphones of church music, and intricate structure of the Greek, Italian and English verse" (Hopkins 1959: 13).

2  "Tendency towards repetition can be explained as a poetic construction principle" (Lotman 1976: 123).

organization of a poetic text consists of three parts: metric and rhythmical level, phonic level and metalogic level. Within the scope of every level there are different kinds of complex signs because every simple (minimal[3]) sign (i.e. word) is at the same time a part of several paradigmatic chains which stem from both horizontal and vertical text structure of which these signs are the parts.

When we talk about complex[4] sign it is worth mentioning that they are not characteristic of a poetic text only - there are complex signs in everyday language in the form of a syntagma or a sentence. However, there is an unquestionable difference between complex signs in everyday language and complex signs in poetic language. Complex signs in natural discourse and speech acts follow each other and after they have conveyed the information they disappear from the recipient's mind; complex signs in poetic language, however, work as complex space signals which take the reader back to what he has already perceived according to the laws of the general language code. Besides, simple signs which enter the more complex signs (syntagmas and sentences) keep their autonomy and their denotational meaning.

On the other hand, simple signs which are parts of the complex poetic signs lose their independence[5] fusing in a way into one complex word or a complex sign. Such transformation of simple signs into the elements of a complex sign strongly resembles the way in which words (as simple signs) become parts of the phraseological units of natural (non-poetic) language.

Although different kinds of complex poetic signs are constituted by the process of repetition, and all that is worth talking about, this time we focus our attention on one particular kind of complex poetic signs, namely those which are the result of the repetition of the same sound sequences in two or more words with different root morphemes. In this way the words (i.e. simple signs) are brought together and owing to this there is a complex correlation among them on both the content and expression level, the result of this being the formation of a common sound segment (pseudomorpheme) and also of a common semantic core (archeseme).

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3 "In every semiotic system we can concieve the signs which are indivisible on both the expression and content level; they cannot be divided into smaller units to which other units of the other level can be added - these are the minimal signs" (Škiljan 1985: 90).

4 "A complex sign is every sign which is composed of two or more minimal signs" (Škiljan 1985: 90).

5 "The initial elementary signs are the input to various further transformations in the process of complex sign formation" (Milijić 1993: 294).

By means of repetition as one of the methods of subsequent poetic text ordering[6] on the basis of a common sound sequence (i.e. pseudomorpheme), simple language signs make unique phono-lexical strings (i.e. complex poetic signs). In this way every single complex sign is made of at least two (and often more) simple language signs. The signs constituting complex poetic signs, to certain extent, get free from the signified (i.e. content of a language sign) so that complex poetic signs, generally speaking, do not point at something which is beyond them or beyond poetic structures to which they naturally belong[7]. "Therefore the linguist faces a very delicate problem: how to find an adequate meaning-form correlation for every complex poetic sign. If one takes as true the hypothesis that complex poetic signs have their semantic structure (their content), then this content, we believe, is hard to pinpoint because it lies somewhere between basic meanings of simple language signs which constitute complex poetic signs. However, if one assumes that complex poetic signs are left without their content part it is still not possible to deny that they have semantic dimension since these signs appear as additional information carriers and this information is meaningful (even if that meaning is irrational). Consequently, on the one hand, if complex poetic signs have certain content, it cannot be easily measured by the laws of intellect and logic i.e. by the rational scientific instruments; on the other hand, if one rejects the possibility that there is a content side of a language sign, then the lack of it must be compensated by the semantic dimension of complex poetic signs. This dimension is formed in usage process, in context, in text structure, but it is also a part of the experience of a decoder and encoder in the information transfer so that it depends on the amount of culture-related information and extratextual structure.

It is unquestionable that sound repetitions bring about additional links among simple signs and to the semantic organization of the text they add meanings which are either not clearly expressed or which are not to be found in natural (non-poetic) language. In this way the sound (phonetic) structure, which in case of natural language belongs to the expression level, passes to the content level in poetry thus forming semantic structures which are inseparable from a given context. By such procedure newly made phonetic structures show that simple language signs

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6 "Complementary ordering of the speech sequence according to the criteria of mutual comparability of the signs (the relations of identity, similarity and opposition in the sound structure) enables the phonological factors per se to become semantically active" (Petković 1984: 196).

7 "The words (in poetry) obviously do not have their basic linguistic meaning - instead they convey the context in which they are used" (Vuletić 1988: 152).

(words) can escape the input-output language routine. Due to this the phonetic structure of poetic language and its semantics get interrelated in a consequential way. In other words the expression level and the content level are linked so that different simple signs (words) are closely connected and semantically correlated. Sound repetitions in poetic (unlike non-poetic) texts, organize lexical elements (simple signs) in a system of links completely independent from syntax; both systems, however, allow for the units of higher order (complex signs)[8]. Poetic constructions built in this way constitute a semantic world in itself. These constructions and semantic relations, as our research has shown, tend to be either synonymy or antonymy.

Specially productive way of phonetic (sound) converging of words which make up complex poetic signs are multiple sound relations which are active as occasional sound repetitions (within a verse - euphony) and biphonemic repetitions as part of canonic sound repetitions (at the of the lines - *rhyme*). The formation of the semantic structure of such complex poetic signs and its functioning will be analysed on the corpus of verses taken from the twentieth century Serbian poetry. There are numerous examples to prove our hypothesis but for the lack of space only two examples for each case will be given.

2. In the case of multiple euphonic relations of words (poetic signs) as the following examples show, not only is the intensity of formal relations of the elements in a branching structure (complex poetic sign) different but also the degree of their synonymy.

(a) In *Put u Gorjak* /*The Road to Gornjak*/ by Đura Jakšić the following six verses are organized on the content level as lexical-semantic contrasts (white - black, hot - cold).

> Al' šta se *zabele* u gorskome mraku?
> To je *bela* kula na crkvi Gornjaku!
> Raširila krila *labudova bela*,
> *Beloću* je snega na sebe uzela;
> Krst se na njoj *blista* suncu odgovara
> I po hladnoj steni *zlatne* pruge para
> *(Pesme*, 30).

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8 "A linguistic unit does not perform its function on its linguistic level but on the upper one" (Petković 1995: 85).

Within the opposition 'belo - crno' /white - black/ the first member has a developed system of synonymic relations (*zabele* /whiten/, *bela* /white/, *labudova* /swan/, *bela* /white/, *beloću* /whiteness/, *blista* /glitter/, *zlatne* /golden/) based upon pseudomorpheme *bel* (= beo /white/) which appears in different shapes i.e. pseudoallomorphs - *abel/bela/lab/bela/bel/bl-a/al-e*. Formal matching of the pseudomorpheme bel with the lexical unit 'beo' /white/ encreases its influence on the formation of the meaning of the archeseme, i.e. of the complex poetic sign which in its turn by virtue of its semantic features instigates related dimensions of meaning which exist in all activated lexemes. In this way in the actual sequence of synonyms: 'zabele-bela-labudova-bela-beloću-blista-zlatne' all simple signs (besides 'bela') express certain degrees of whiteness. Since words 'blista' /glitter/ and 'zlatne' /golden/ modify the concepts 'krst' /cross/ and 'pruge' /stripes/, ('krst...blista', 'zlatne pruge') which do not have the semantic feature 'blistavost' /glittering/ and 'zlatost' /goldenness/ they attribute to them certain degree of whiteness. In this way the words: 'zabele' /whiten/, 'bela' /white/, 'labudova' /swan/, 'beloću' /whiteness/, 'blista' /glitter/, 'zlatne' /golden/ which have different denotational meanings from a linguistic point of view become the elements of a complex poetic sign where all individual meanings merge into one indivisible whole. Word relations which are established later and which rely upon repeated sound sequences cause restructuring of the context, which leads to its second-degree semanticization where non-cognate simple language signs become the elements of a complex poetic sign and in a way synonyms (since they express particular shades of meaning and features of the semantic structure as a whole).

(b) We have found similar semantic structuring in the four-line stanza from Milan Rakić's poem *Na Gazi Mestanu /At Gazi Mestan/*.

Kosovski junaci, zasluga je vaša
Što poslednji beste. U krvavoj *stravi*,
Kada trulo *carstvo* oružja se maša,
Svaki leš je svesna *žrtva* junak pravi
*(Pesme*, 123).

By means of repetition of the sound sequence i.e. pseudomorpheme *strav* in the shape of the pseudoallomorph *arstv/rtva* the three lexical units 'strava' /terror/, 'carstvo' /kingdom/, 'žrtva' /victim/ are made formally dependent. However, in spite of close contact, it is hardly possible to see that these three words are semantically related in any way. On the other hand, the context (i.e. relations among 'krvava strava' /bloody terror/ - 'trulo carstvo' /rotten kingdom/ - 'svesna žrtva'

/wilful sacrifice/ reveals their mutual semantic interdependence. 'Krvava strava' /bloody terror/ is only a consequence of 'trulo carstvo' /rotten kingdom/ which could not be saved even by 'svesna žrtva' /wilful sacrifice/. If we now observe (within the scope of the established relations) the semantic functions of the words 'strava' /terror/, 'carstvo' /kingdom/, 'žrtva' /sacrifice/, we clearly see that 'trulo carstvo' /rotten kingdom/ is nothing but 'krvava strava' /bloody terror/ and pointless '(svesna) žrtva' /wilful sacrifice/. In this way three words which are total semantic non-cognates become synonymous due to the same or similar sound structure, occasional semes as well as the context.

3. Specially prominent way of phonetically motivated two-member relation is a rhyme. Two words (rarely more) that rhyme are united in poetry within a unique construction (pair) - a complex poetic sign although they are completely unrelated (grammatically, syntactically or semantically) from a linguistic point of view. The fact that the words rhyme (on the expression level) leads to the assumption that there are certain meaning relations which make their semantic features converge.

(a) In the poem *Akordi /The Chords/* by Jovan Dučić there is a stanza where the words: *'dubini - tmini'* /depth - dark/ rhyme. These words have distant denotational meanings.

Dole pod zemljom! Negde u *dubini*
Jednakim ritmom, kao muklo zvono,
Ogromno srce začu se u *tmini:*
Udari mirno, tiho monotono
*(Pesme I, 93).*

The word 'dubina' /depth/ in the semantic structure of Serbian language designates *location, space well beneath the surface* and the word 'tmina' /darkness/ *dark, dimness, twilight.* Therefore every lexeme has its autonomous meaning which cannot be related to the lexical or dictionary meaning of another word. However, when these words are used as parts of the constructions (i.e. complex poetic signs) in which they get into close contact due to their uniform sound structure, pseudo-morpheme *ini*, their semantic separateness gives way to some kind of convergence. In the complex poetic sign 'dubini-tmini' /depth-darkness/, the first member of the rhymed pair ('dubina' /depth/) together with specially emphasized construction 'dole pod zemljom' *down under the ground* suggest its possible meaning: it is probable that this 'dubina' /depth/ is filled with 'mrak' /darkness/. The concepts 'dubina' and 'tmina' become synonyms in this way because both words share one

common semantic component (archeseme) which is realized as lack of light, the space without light. The words 'dubina' /depth/ and 'tmina' /darkness/ become synonimous in the process of semantic convergence. As Lotman says, in poetry "differences between denotational meanings lose their purpose" (Lotman 1976: 167).

(b) In the poem *Za stolom /At the Table/* by Sima Pandurović there is a rhymed pair of words: 'tužni - ružni' /sad - ugly/.

> Odviše smo bili radosni i *tužni*
> Odveć smelih misli gajili i brali
> Sve plodove gorke kad su ideali
> Postali stvarnost i oblici *ružni (Pesme, 173).*

It is not hard to notice that the pair of rhymed lexemes: 'tužan' /sad/ and 'ružan' /ugly/ have different denotational meanings in ordinary language. Primary meaning of the word 'tužan' /sad/ is *'somebody who experiences sadness, somebody who is sad, sorrowful, unhappy'* and the word 'ružan' /ugly/ is *'somebody whose looks are unpleasant, disagreable, not nice to look at'*. Basic meanings of these words that rhyme can on no account be semantically related. However, the use of the pseudomorpheme *užan* (the part of the sound pattern which is the same in both words) bridges the impossible - the effect being that their meanings are no longer considered as separate and unrelated but as one indivisible whole whose parts have lost their initial semantic identity. The formal sound structure *užan* functions as a semantic link which must be special and indicative of something. For this to happen, as we have already pointed out, either one or both lexemes must lose a part of their primary meaning so that they can get mutually related. In our example this is the case with the first word in the pair ('tužan' /sad/). Its secondary meaning *'which causes sorrow, pain, depression'* brings it close to the meaning of the second word in the pair ('ružan' /ugly/) so that these two words become almost identical (the only difference being that between the feature feeling in the first word and the feature impression in the second). Two semantically totally different words when they are in contact within a complex poetic sign show considerable semantic flexibility (due to their common sound structure) so that they bocome synonyms (in the newly-formed poetic structure[9] ) and as such they are also parts of the semantic structure of the context.

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9 "Two similar phonemic sequences in contact tend to acquire paronomastic function: there is semantic attraction of the words which are phonetically similar' (Jakobson 1966: 314).

**4.** Sound repetitions (pseudomorphemes) in two or more words lead to the fact that these words are thought of as semantic equivalents. However, since equivalence is not the same as identity ('dead equation') it also comprises some differences which in certain situations can mean total oppositeness (expressed by antonyms). A productive way of such word relations can be observed in unconventional (occasional) sound repetitions (i.e. *euphony*). This kind of phonolexical relation is present in the structure of one line or of the two adjoining verses and only seldom in the structure of the lines which are well apart within a stanza.

(a) In the poem *Jedna suza /A Teardrop/* by Aleksa Šantić we find this three-line stanza.

I kobna miso moriti me stade:
Što moja nisi, i što smiraj dana
Ne nosi meni *zvijezde*, no *jade*?
　　　　　(*Pesme*, 106).

The lexemes 'zvijezde' /stars/ and 'jadi' /misery/ which are 'disparate concepts are successfully projected within a small visual interval' (Jović 1975: 69). Poetic words which are in contact due to the sound repetition (pseudomorpheme *j-de*) couple with certain changes in their semantic structure. The first word in the construction loses its basic semantic component ('celestial body') and acquires a secondary meaning ('happiness and joy'), which is all suggested by the context: 'Ne nosi meni zvijezde (= sreću) no jade' /It doesn't bring me stars (= joy) but sorrow/. In this way (i.e. due to the sound structure of the pseudomorpheme *j-de* which is common to both words and due to the activated constituent semantic components - semes, two lexical units ('star' and 'sorrow') become poetic (second-degree) antonyms whose meanings are reduced to the opposition 'joy - sorrow' (or 'happiness' - 'unhappiness').

(b) Similar situation can be found in a stanza from the poem *Starost /Old Age/* by Milan Rakić.

To dolaze draga, sve bliže i bliže
Nečekani dani nemoći i bede,
Sve se čežnje gase i sve *strasti* blede
I ko neman *starost* pre vremena stiže
　　　　　(*Pesme*, 83).

The words 'strast' /passion/ and 'starost' /old age/ have almost identical formal features and the sound sequence *strast/star-st* (pseudopmorpheme *strast/star-st*) which is common to both words provides a link so that they are semantically related

(within the complex poetic sign) the relation being that of contrast. In other words, the lexeme 'strast' /passion/ with the basic meaning of *strong emotion, enormous and uncontrollable inner drive towards something* can hardly be associated with 'starost' /old age/ which is more likely to mean quite the opposite ('uncharacteristic of old age'). Since 'strast' /passion/ is correlated with 'mladost' /youth/ it acquires a new semantic component (the meaning opposite to the 'old age' i.e. 'youth') within the complex poetic sign due to the phono-lexical parallelism ('strast - starost') so that we have the antonymic lexical and semantic relation: 'youth - old age'.

**5.** The rhyme as the most obvious way of the repetition of sound sequences (i.e. sound structures) in two-member relations is manifested as a 'two-one' word i.e. a complex poetic sign. On the other hand, these are actually two words with different meanings which are quite apart from each other in speech sequence; yet these words are related on the expression level so that they tend to converge semantically in the direction of synonymy and also, in the direction of antonymy based upon the contrast between the two activated lexical elements. These contrasts have different shapes which depend upon immediate context.

(a) In a part of the poem *Samson i Delila* /Samson i Delila/ by Laza Kostić the words which rhyme are: 'robovi' /slaves/ and 'bogovi' /gods/.

> A iz grla se ori grdan smej,
> ta dosta grdan da ga čuje Zej!
> To vole ljudi, vole *robovi*,
> al' Zej se stresa, bog nad *bogovi*'
> > (*Odabrana dela* I, 55).

Formal identity which is expressed by the sound structure *o-ovi* (i.e. by the pseudomorpheme *o-ovi*) fixes the antonymy of meanings of the two lexemes which rhyme ('robovi - bogovi' /slaves - gods/) bringing to the forefront their secondary semantic features. Namely, the concept 'bog' /god/ in the system of non-poetic language represents a '*Deity, Divinity*' and the concept 'rob' /slave/ means '*vassal, bondman, captive*'). However, these two concepts when they are the elements of a complex poetic sign form a semantic unity (by means of the rhyme) and the semantic distance between them (in non-poetic language) is transformed into antithesis in the form of the opposition: 'ordinary - extraordinary'. This semantic opposition is suggested by the context of which the rhyme 'robovi - bogovi' /slaves - gods/ is a part. 'Grdan smej' /loud laughter/ does not only have the feature of the

intensity but it also means something pejorative: *'unpleasant laughter which does not bother the slaves who even like it but which embarrasses Zeus'*. Since occasional poetic antonyms are understood as parts of the semantic fields which are active in the extra-textual communication system[10], the couple that rhymes 'robovi - bogovi' /slaves - gods/ can, apart from the opposition 'ordinary - extraordinary', emphasize contrastive meanings which are derived by association (according to similarity): 'base' ('slave') - 'sublime' ('god') or according to metonymic (place) relation: 'above' ('god') - 'below' ('slave').

(b) In a stanza from the poem *Priviđenja /Apparitions/* by Miloš Crnjanski the words: 'slap' /waterfall/ and 'kap' /drop/ rhyme.

> Tu, tu bih, u ovom životu, da me oblije *slap*
> svih divota čulnih, kao pad mirisnog mleka.
> A, čini mi se, jedna jedina, takva, blista *kap*,
> nad peskom pustiwa, i tla, zemljom daleka
> *(Lirika I*, 102).

In the rhyme 'slap - kap' /waterfall - drop/ the common semantic distinctive feature which enters the relation 'much - little' is present in both poetic and non-poetic discourse. However, there is also a certain ground for purely individual, pragmatic interpretation. Although the words: 'slap' /waterfall/ and 'kap' /drop/ are almost antonyms according to their general lexical meaning they act simultaneously like antithesis at the level of poetic semantics, which makes their contrastive semantic features particularly active (the effect of joining of the polar quantitative semantic points: 'much' and 'little').

**6.** Although a language sign in poetic discourse, as we have seen, does not lose its linguistic nature, it does lose some of its independence in the process of semantic integration of the elements of the lower structural rank (phonological/phonetic), which results in occasional semantic relations of synonymy and antonymy. Formation of archesemes which represent special conceptual constructions based upon semantic relations (synonymy and antonymy) is the process which is very much like those in logic - sound repetition in poetry goes beyond the expression level and becomes a part of the meaning structure not as a linguistic sign but as the 'icon'

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10 "In reader's mind the connections between the concepts are those to which he is used and which are proscribed by the non-poetic language norm and the semantic structure of such language" (Lotman 1976: 263).

where an archeseme takes the shape of an iconic signal. An archeseme as a semantic poetic unit reflects the complex system of intratextual semantic relations which are impossible outside the boundaries of a given poetic structure and it is not identical with the semantic units of the non-poetic language.

The archeseme points both at what is common to the members of the pair of synonyms and at what is different in the meaning of the opposites. Formalization of the elements and semanticization of their formal relations form the chain of complex poetic signs which make up an occasional word (two-one, three-one etc.) as an indivisible meaningful unit characterized by the semantic features (i.e. semes) of synonyms and antonyms. More precisely, in a poetic text in some cases these semantic features (semes) are active within complex poetic signs whose semantic structure functions on the principle of poetic synonyms and on the principle of poetic antonyms.

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## О семантической структуре одной разновидности сложного поэтического знака

В настоящей статье дается описание семантической структуры той разновидности сложного поэтического знака, которая формируется повторением тождественных звукосочетаний в составе двух и более слов, имеющих различные коренные морфемы. Таким образом звуковая (вербальная) структура, которая в естественном языке принадлежит плану выражения, переходит в поэтической речи в структуру содержания, порождая смысловые структуры, неотделимые от данного контекста. Так, различные простые знаки (слова) выступают в непосредственный контакт, благодаря чему между ними устанавливается сложная смысловая коррелятивность.

Механизмы порождения и функционирования смысловых структур данной разновидности сложного поэтического знака анализируются автором на материале стихотворений современной сербской поэзии.

В работе показано, что подключением нижестоящих ярусов (фонологического/фонетического) в поэтическом тексте простые знаки (слова) переходят в вышестоящие структуры (разновидности сложного поэтического знака), не утрачивая при этом своего языкового характера; однако о процессах порождения смысла они утрачивают ту часть своей самостоятельности, которая имеется у них в естественном языке. Представленной формализацией лексических единиц и семантизацией их формальных отношений порождается целый ряд сложных поэтических знаков, составляющих единые (неразрывные) окказиональные формально-смысловые структуры (двуединая, трехъединая, многоединая и т.д.), в которых можно выделить семантические оттенки (семы), приобретающие либо смысловые характеристики поэтических синонимов либо поэтических антонимов.