

## THE LANGUAGE OF SHAKESPEAREAN SONNETS: ON THE WAY TO COMPREHENSION

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W. Shakespeare is one of the greatest poets, playwrights and personalities of his time whose literary works are still read and admired today, 400 years after they were written [1]. In our English class we were offered to learn one of Shakespeare's sonnets by heart in the original, but many students found it hard because of its complicity. We confronted the sad fact that the greatest English poet's works cause our interest when read in the Russian language but cause difficulties when read in the original. Nevertheless, it's obvious that the author and his powerful, visual language could be better felt and understood when read and analyzed in the original.

As a result, we came up with the idea to study peculiarities of Shakespeare's language in the research project «The language of Shakespeare's sonnets. On the way to comprehension». A group of Shakespeare's sonnets was taken as a basis of studies as they are considered to be masterpieces of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century poetry where deep personal relationships and noble friendship are described.

**The aim of the research project:** to analyze the peculiarities of Shakespeare's language basing on a group of sonnets from 1 to 116 and to make own modern English interpretation of some of them in order to make them more comprehensible for students.

To fulfill the aim set above the following **tasks** have been singled out:

- to study and analyze Shakespeare's language peculiarities including morphological, syntactical, lexical features basing on a group of the author's sonnets;
- to make modern English interpretation of the selected sonnets;
- to offer the students a brochure with the original sonnets and their modern English interpretations.

The **subject** of the research: morphological, lexical, syntactical features of Shakespeare's language.  
The **object** of the research: sonnets 1 to 116 by Shakespeare.

Let's dwell on some typical Shakespeare's morphological peculiarities observed in W. Shakespeare's sonnets.

1) Word transition from one grammatical category to another is typical of Shakespeare's language. One word can be a noun, an adjective, and a verb.

For example: “*Since from thee going he went **wilful slow**...*” (Sonnet 51, line 13)

As it can be seen, Shakespeare uses the adjectives “wilful slow” instead of the adverbs “willfully slowly”.

2) As for the verb, typical second person singular endings were “-st” and “-est”: I know - thou knowest; I have - thou hast; I do - you doest (dost) and others.

For Instance: “*That due to thee which thou **deserv'st** alone.*” (Sonnet 39, line 8)

3) It should be noted that the verb “to be” had the following second person forms in Shakespearean time: thou art, thou wast, thou wert, thou wilt, thou shalt.

4) In the era of Shakespeare, the pronouns "thou, thy, thine, thee", the reflexive form "thyself" were still widely used: "**Thou** by the dial's shady stealth mayst know..." (Sonnet 77, line 8)

#### **Shakespeare's language has its syntactical peculiarities.**

Some of them are connected with the use of the verb "do" as an auxiliary verb. Such variations of this auxiliary verb as "do, does, doth, dost, did, didst" can be observed in Shakespeare's sonnets [2].

"**Why didst thou** promise such a beauteous day..." (Sonnet 34, line 1)

More examples of using the verb "do" in affirmative, interrogative and negative sentences in Shakespeare's sonnets you can see on the slides.

In the early New England period, the possibility of using several negative words in a sentence was still preserved, which can be seen in Shakespearean texts

"**None** else to me, **nor** I to **none** alive..." (Sonnet 112, line 7)

Inversion. Inverted word order in a sentence construction was a usual thing in the Early English language. Such deviations from direct word order can be observed in Shakespeare's works.

"So long **lives this**, and **this gives life to thee**". (Sonnet 18, line 14)

#### **Lexical peculiarities**

The surprising fact is that in the author's works there are more than 2000 words not previously encountered in written speech. Shakespeare boldly experimented with word formation, "sticking together" several words, adding prefixes and suffixes, turning nouns into verbs, verbs into adjectives, introducing borrowed words from other languages. Thus, new shades of meaning or completely opposite meanings were born. There is a very nice expression, "words coined by William Shakespeare" [3].

Such words as "**deep-sunken, unlettered, master-mistress**..." supplemented the lexical richness of Shakespearean sonnets.

After studying the basic language peculiarities of Shakespeare's sonnets, we got down to **the analysis and modern interpretation of 10 selected sonnets, including sonnet number 39.**

First, we paid attention to the usage of archaic forms of pronouns such as "*thy, thou, thee*", which in the process of translation were changed into modern English forms: "*your and you*".

Old forms of verb conjugation: "*thou art, deserv'st, wouldst*" were replaced into corresponding modern forms: "*are, deserve, would*".

Conditional made with the help of inverted word order, was substituted by more common modern form with "if".

***Were** it not thy sour leisure gave sweet leave*

***If** your sad missing didn't give me a sweet dream*

Auxiliary verb "doth" (do) in affirmative sentences was omitted, which is more characteristic of modern English.

Inverted word order (when the object stands before the main parts of speech in the original) was changed into more common position of the object after the subject and the predicate.

Contraction "*is't*" was replaced by "*is it*".

Some old or ponderous words and constructions were made more comprehensible with the help of more modern words. For example, phrase "*one twain*" was replaced into "*single whole*".

In order to preserve rhyme pattern and rhythm of the sonnet some words and phrases were changed into synonymous. For instance, "*praise*" changed into "*laud*". Here is the version we've got:

#### **SONNET 39 (MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

Oh, how may I sing your manners and your worth,

When you are all a better part of me?

Can praise to myself bring mirth?

Is it just laud for myself, when you are sung by me?

Then let's divide in two, while being still alive,

And we won't longer be perceived as being single whole,

After the separation I may ably thrive

To pay tribute to you, which you deserve alone.

But what a torment your absence would allow,

If your sad missing didn't give me a sweet dream

To entertain myself with thoughts of love,

Which time and thoughts so skillfully deceive,

Though heart wants us to be a single whole again,  
It's easier to praise you when you are long away.

All in all, we've made modern English interpretation of 10 Shakespearian sonnets which are presented in the leaflet, followed by our own commentaries. The practical value of this work is based on: the growth of the pupils' linguistic awareness; the formation of the language culture; the practical application of the work which comprises an informational brochure that can be used by the students of our school as well as by other language learners.

### **References**

1. Berry, R. Changing Styles in Shakespeare/ R. Berry. – London: Routledge, 2005. – 112 p.
2. Dictionary of Shakespeare. Ware, Herts [Electronic resource] – UK: Wordsworth, 2011. – Mode of access: [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2011/04/0419\\_040419\\_shakespeare.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2011/04/0419_040419_shakespeare.html) – Date of access: 20.02.2025.
3. Vernon, J. Shakespeare's Coined Words Now Common Currency/ J. Vernon. UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2009. – 45 p.