SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE, RHYTHM AND EXPRESSIVENESS IN VERSE DRAMA

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Abstract. *The linguistic system of verse drama is syntactically complex, as it integrates the structural characteristics of poetic and dramatic speech within a single text. In verse drama, the sentence simultaneously contributes to the formation of rhythm, the regulation of dramatic tempo, the expression of emotional tension, and the individualisation of characters' speech. This study comparatively examines the interrelationship between syntactic structure, rhythm and expressiveness in Mammad Rahim's verse drama Khagani and Suleyman Rustam's Gachag Nabi. The analysis focuses on syntactic parallelism, repetition, rhetorical questions, exclamatory and imperative constructions, elliptical and incomplete sentences, syntactic periods, the relationship between verse-line and sentence boundaries, the alternation of dialogic turns and syntactic tempo. Both playwrights also establish poetic rhythm through the alternation of syntactic structures. However, while Mammad Rahim's Khagani is characterised by extended syntactic constructions with aphoristic and philosophical content, Suleyman Rustam's Gachag Nabi employs short conversational turns, imperative constructions and action-oriented predicative units to generate more intensive dramatic dynamics.*

Keywords: *verse drama, syntactic structure, poetic rhythm, expressiveness, literary syntax.*

Introduction.

Verse drama combines two fundamental principles of literary language organisation, namely the poetic and dramatic principles, within a unified structure. While poetic discourse requires the organisation of speech according to verse lines, rhythm, metre, rhyme and intonation, dramatic discourse foregrounds the naturalness of dialogue, turn-taking, the dynamics of conflict and the individualisation of characters' speech. The interaction between these two principles gives syntax a distinctive function in verse drama. Here, syntactic units become instruments for accelerating or slowing dramatic action, shaping poetic rhythm, representing emotional states and expressing the playwright's ideological and aesthetic position.

Emphasising the role of rhythm in the structural organisation of discourse, I. R. Galperin observes: *"Rhythm is the chief factor which brings order into utterance"* [1, p. 129]. The regular rhythmic and phonetic organisation of speech gives rise to structured syntactic patterns, which, in turn, influence the division of discourse into semantic units. This proposition is particularly significant for verse drama, since dramatic rhythm is not limited to the periodic recurrence of syllables and stresses. Sentence length, the frequency of turn-taking, syntactic pauses, repetition and parallel constructions also contribute to the formation of dramatic rhythm.

Galperin further maintains that the rhythmic organisation of poetic discourse imposes certain constraints on syntactic and semantic structures, thereby increasing the functional importance of elliptical and fragmentary sentences, detached constructions, inversion and

asyndeton [1, p. 252]. S. E. Lyapin similarly emphasises that *"poetic discourse is divided into syntactic units, while the relationship between verse-line boundaries and the boundaries of sentences and syntagms influences the prosodic organisation of verse"* [2, p. 115]. From this perspective, the syntax of verse drama cannot be examined independently of its verse structure.

In his investigation of the distinctive features of dramatic discourse, Mick Short treats the discourse structure of dramatic language as a separate field of analysis and subsequently identifies speech acts, turn-taking, topic control and politeness mechanisms as important dimensions of dramatic communication [6, p. 169]. In verse drama, the interaction between these communicative mechanisms and poetic rhythm makes the structural organisation of dialogue particularly significant.

A. V. Nikolaeva's approach also provides a useful methodological framework for examining expressive syntax. Inversion, comparative constructions, rhetorical questions, exclamatory and imperative sentences and repetition are identified as major syntactic means of expressiveness [3, p. 113]. Particularly relevant to the analysis of literary and dramatic speech is the observation that the grammatical form of a rhetorical question does not necessarily correspond to its communicative meaning, since such a construction may simultaneously fulfil interrogative and affirmative functions [3, p. 116].

Syntactic parallelism is one of the principal mechanisms through which poetic rhythm is established in both dramatic works under consideration. The opening song performed by Zohra in Mammad Rahim's "*Khagani"* contains a sequence of optative constructions:

"May justice bloom like a colourful flower throughout the world,
May the sun of happiness spread its light.
May every sweet dream become reality,
May love, freedom and ideals endure" [4, p. 203].

The four lines preserve a common modal and semantic orientation. The original Azerbaijani verb forms *açsın, saçsın, dönsün and var olsun* convey optative meaning, transforming each line into a relatively independent predicative unit. At the same time, the general correspondence between verse-line boundaries and syntactic boundaries produces a measured, tranquil rhythm resembling that of a song. Rhythmic parallelism is reinforced by semantic parallelism: justice, happiness, truth, love, freedom and ideals are presented successively within the same syntactic model. Consequently, the syntactic organisation introduces the principal concepts underlying the ideological structure of the drama from its very beginning.

A similar pattern of parallel syntactic organisation is preserved in Khagani's response to the song:

"Sing, my little nightingale, I adore your voice,
O muse of inspiration, my beloved.
Your love gives wings to my spirit,
With you, I consider myself happy" [4, p. 203].

The first two lines are characterised by vocative and imperative meanings, while the subsequent lines contain parallel first-person predicative constructions. The structural proximity of the original expressions *"Mən sənin..." and "Səninlə özümü..."* reinforces the symmetry of poetic discourse. Thus, syntactic parallelism becomes an essential means of generating lyrical and emotional rhythm in Khagani.

In Gachag Nabi, parallelism more frequently emerges within situations of conflict and heightened emotional tension. Salim Bey's following speech provides a representative example:

"Look whom I have fed at my table,
Look from whom I have expected help,
Look whom I have trusted and relied upon,
Look whom I have kept at my door like a dog" [5, p. 159].

The repetition of the imperative gör ("look" or "see") at the beginning of all four lines creates anaphoric syntactic repetition. However, the semantic intensity progressively increases within the repeated structure. The speaker first refers to offering food, then to expecting assistance, subsequently to placing trust in another person, and finally to an explicitly derogatory evaluation. Syntactic uniformity thus provides the structural foundation for emotional escalation.

Although parallelism generates rhythm in both dramas, its functional orientation differs considerably. In Khagani, it primarily creates harmonious, lyrical and philosophical organisation, whereas in Gachag Nabi, it intensifies dramatic tension, accusation and emotional expression. Accordingly, the same syntactic device acquires different expressive meanings depending on the dramatic situation in which it occurs.

The continuation of a sentence beyond the boundaries of a single verse line is another significant source of poetic and dramatic rhythm in verse drama. Galperin explains the nature of enjambment through the disruption of correspondence between rhythmic and syntactic units: part of a syntagm is transferred to the following line, thereby weakening the pause at the verse boundary and strengthening the syntactic connection between successive lines [1, p. 256].

In Khagani, such syntactic continuity is particularly evident in extended poetic speeches:

"I shall recite it; why not? It is not difficult:
The mighty sovereign creates destinies of death,
And people marvel at his power;
Even the maidens of China cannot compete
With the women of his realm of beauty.
When the banquet of pleasure is illuminated,
Even the stars in the sky appear dim.
No royal feast comparable to his pleasures
Has ever been so delightful or so splendid..." [4, p. 232].

In the constructions corresponding to *"Gözəllik mülkündə kənizləriylə / Yarışa bilməyir Çin qızları da" and "Onun işrəti tək bir şah büsatı / Olmayıb maraqlı...",* the syntactic unit remains incomplete at the end of the verse line. The first line requires the predicate supplied in the following line. Consequently, the metrical boundary and the syntactic boundary do not coincide. Although the reader may perceive a formal pause at the end of the line, syntactic expectation encourages the continuation of reading into the next line. This technique gives Khagani's speech both poetic fluidity and a sense of continuous intellectual development.

The same phenomenon occurs in Gachag Nabi, where it more frequently functions to accelerate the narration of actions and events:

"As soon as we escaped from prison,
I saw sweat pouring from Boz At like a stream.
The Cossacks galloped after us,
The mountains trembled with the cries of "Stop them! Shoot!"
Emerging from every direction like mushrooms,

The enemies barked like mangy dogs" [5, p. 139].

The construction beginning with *"Elə ki..." ("As soon as...")* introduces a sequence of events. In the broader narrative context, the structure beginning with *"Baxdım ki..." ("I saw that...")* also contributes to the organisation of successive syntactic relations. The syntactic sequence *"Boz atı dörd nala çapsam / Onların əlindən mən nicat tapsam / Hər şey dəyişəcək..."* extends across three verse lines. This continuation weakens rhythmic pauses and accelerates the forward movement of the narrative.

The comparison demonstrates that Mammad Rahim employs extended syntactic periods primarily to develop poetic and philosophical reflection, whereas Suleyman Rustam uses them more actively to represent the sequence of actions and the dynamics of dramatic events.

One of the principal features distinguishing the syntax of verse drama from that of prose and lyrical poetry is the rhythmic function of dialogic turn-taking. The rapid alternation of speakers changes sentence length, replacing extended poetic periods with short utterances consisting of one or two syntactic components. In such cases, rhythm is determined not only by the internal metre of the verse line but also by the frequency of communicative turns.

This feature is particularly evident in a scene involving political danger and confidential information in Khagani:

"Khagani: Are you not mistaken in what you have said?
Gatekeeper: I heard it myself, clearly and distinctly...
He said that he would release a prisoner,
And tomorrow he would have him thrown into a stone dungeon...
Khagani: Tell no one.
Gatekeeper: No, Khagani...
Khagani: I have not seen you since yesterday!
Gatekeeper: As you wish.
Khagani: Hurry, leave now!" [4, p. 242].

Extended poetic speech is abandoned in this dialogue. Short constructions such as *"Kimsəyə söyləmə" ("Tell no one"), "Siz bilən yaxşıdır" ("As you wish") and "Tez ol, çəkil sən" ("Hurry, leave now")* create rapid alternation between conversational turns. The first and third constructions are imperatives. The utterance *"Səni görməmişəm əsla dünəndən!" ("I have not seen you since yesterday!")*, although formally declarative, performs the additional contextual functions of a confidential agreement and an implicit warning. Thus, the actual communicative meaning of the sentence extends beyond its grammatical form. The same mechanism is even more evident in Gachag Nabi, where Nabi's extended narrative is abruptly interrupted by Vali:

"Nabi: Emerging from every direction like mushrooms,
The enemies barked like mangy dogs.
Vali: Then? Then?
Gahraman: Be quiet! Let us hear!
Nabi: I said we must not sacrifice another life..." [5, p. 139].

Although *"Sonra? Sonra?" ("Then? Then?")* consists of a single word repeated twice, it functions as a complete dialogic turn from both syntactic and communicative perspectives. Its elliptical structure can be reconstructed approximately as "Sonra nə oldu?" ("What happened next?"). However, the playwright deliberately employs the reduced form to convey Vali's

impatience and emotional tension. The following imperative, *"Sakit, dinməyin görək!" ("Be quiet! Let us hear!")*, temporarily interrupts this accelerated rhythm.

In both works, grammatical incompleteness does not imply communicative incompleteness. On the contrary, elliptical constructions whose meanings are recoverable from the situation create the impression of spontaneous speech and increase dramatic tempo. Whereas syntactic conciseness in Khagani is primarily associated with political caution, secrecy and psychological tension, in Gachag Nabi it contributes to the dynamics of events and combat situations.

Rhetorical questions are among the most productive syntactic means of expressiveness in verse drama. As Nikolaeva observes, *"the syntactic form of a rhetorical question does not fully correspond to its logical content, and such a construction may combine interrogative and affirmative functions"* [3, p. 116].

In Khagani, the protagonist's utterance "O da kişidir?!" ("Can he be called a man?!"), occurring in a conversation involving Falaki and Izzaddin, does not represent a genuine request for information:

"Khagani: Can he be called a man?!
Izzaddin: He was expelled from the palace.
Falaki: That was very good.
Poetry has rid itself of a flatterer.
Izzaddin: Disgraceful deeds are being committed before our very eyes" [4, p. 234].

The communicative meaning of *"O da kişidir?!"* is equivalent to the negative judgement *"He is not worthy of being called a man."* The combination of the question mark and exclamation mark demonstrates that the sentence conveys not only an interrogative structure but also a strongly emotional evaluation. The succession of equally brief statements following the question increases the syntactic tempo of the scene.

In Suleyman Rustam's work, the same stylistic device expresses the ethical principles associated with heroism:

"In terrifying and dangerous battles,
Would a true man abandon his friend in trouble?!
I shouted: "Children, quickly lie down!"
"Fire as soon as I give the order!"
A dense fog covered the road,
The enemies blocked our way like a wall.
We thrust our steel-strong chests forward,
And charged ahead with fire blazing in our eyes" [5, p. 140].

Grammatically, *"Kişi, öz dostunu qoyarmı darda?!" ("Would a true man abandon his friend in trouble?!"*) is an interrogative sentence, but its actual meaning corresponds to the assertion that a true man never abandons his friend in difficulty. The rhetorical question is followed by imperative constructions such as *"tez yerə yatın!" ("lie down quickly!") and "hamınız atın!" ("all of you, fire!")*, shifting the focus from moral evaluation to immediate action.

Consequently, syntax establishes a two-stage dramatic model: first, a moral principle is articulated, and subsequently, that principle is transformed into a command requiring action. An important distinction between the two works emerges here. In Khagani, rhetorical questions

primarily serve ethical and intellectual evaluation, whereas in Gachag Nabi, they express the heroic code of conduct and initiate practical action.

The expressiveness of imperative constructions is determined by their communicative nature. Since imperatives are directly addressed to an interlocutor, they determine both interpersonal relationships and the direction of action in dramatic discourse. Nikolaeva regards imperative constructions as one of the syntactic devices that intensify attention and communicative impact [3, p. 117].

The high frequency of imperatives is particularly evident in the battle scenes of Gachag Nabi:

"Nabi: Listen to my orders, take cover in the trenches,
Do not waste your bullets by firing in vain!
My Hajar, do not delay, rush to the left trench!
Vali, the right flank is entrusted to you,
Friends, the target is clear to all of you.
First, take aim at their commanders,
Strike them down!
Mehdi: Brave men, forward, follow me!
Pierce the enemy through like a sieve!" [5, p. 152].

The original Azerbaijani imperative forms *"eşidin", "yatın", "atmayın", "yubanma", "cum", "alın", "döndərin", "gəlin" and "dəlin"* occur successively, organising the predicative centres around verbs of action. This syntactic density accelerates the rhythm of the scene. The sentences leave little time for the reader or spectator to reflect on the unfolding events; each utterance demands a subsequent physical action.

Imperative constructions also occur in Khagani, although their functions are associated with different dramatic situations. Expressions such as *"Kimsəyə söyləmə" ("Tell no one") and "Tez ol, çəkil sən" ("Hurry, leave now")* [4, p. 242] communicate political danger and cautious behaviour rather than combat operations. Thus, imperatives increase syntactic tempo in both dramas, but while they primarily generate physical action in Gachag Nabi, they are more closely associated with political and psychological reactions in Khagani.

The expressive function of repetition is not limited to the recurrence of identical words. Structural repetition may also occur through the successive reproduction of a particular sentence pattern. Nikolaeva maintains that repetition concentrates attention on specific elements of speech and strengthens their emotional impact [3, p. 117].

In Khagani, the following utterance is based on the combination of structural repetition and antithesis:

"Evil, too, possesses a banner raised high!
The shah cannot cast it beneath his feet.
A shah who embraces evil cannot conquer the world!" [4, p. 234].

The repetition of the word "şah" at the end of the second and third lines produces an epiphoric effect. The phonetic proximity and semantic opposition between *"şər" ("evil") and "şah" ("shah" or "king")* further enhance expressiveness. The recurrence of the predicative pattern *"... bilməz şah" ("... the shah cannot")* in the original text gives the statement aphoristic certainty. Although the sentences are relatively short, their ideological significance is substantial. This represents one of the instances in Mammad Rahim's dramatic writing where syntactic conciseness is combined with philosophical generalisation.

In Gachag Nabi, the repetition employed in Hajar's address to Nabi reinforces the syntactic symmetry of antithetical constructions:

"Nabi, what are you saying? Speak sensibly!
Do you not know my heart?
I have chosen this path of my own free will,
I stand beside my faithful companion.
Come, do not recall those dark days.
In this vast and sorrowful world,
We shall weep together and laugh together.
We shall live together and die together..." [5, p. 151].

The final two lines contain the antonymic pairs *"ağlamaq – gülmək" ("to weep – to laugh") and "yaşamaq – ölmək" ("to live – to die"),* which are integrated into identical syntactic patterns. The repeated use of "birgə" ("together") brings the semantic oppositions into a common emotional framework. Contrasting human experiences are presented through syntactically equivalent structures, and this equivalence expresses the spiritual unity of the characters.

In Mammad Rahim's example, repetition elevates the expressed idea to the level of a categorical statement or aphorism, whereas in Suleyman Rustam's example, it reinforces emotional attachment and lyrical dramatic intensity.

In dramatic discourse, syntactic structure is not merely an indicator of general authorial style; it also serves as a means of constructing the individual speech characteristics of dramatic characters. An examination of the protagonist's speech in Khagani reveals the parallel functioning of two syntactic models. In calm and lyrical situations, Khagani employs extended, semantically dense sentences that develop across several verse lines. In moments of political conflict and danger, however, his speech becomes noticeably shorter, with constructions such as *"Kimsəyə söyləmə" ("Tell no one"), "Tez ol, çəkil sən" ("Hurry, leave now") and "O da kişidir?!" ("Can he be called a man?!")* becoming prominent [4, pp. 234, 242]. This transformation may be interpreted as the syntactic equivalent of the protagonist's psychological state.

In Gachag Nabi, the protagonist's speech is predominantly organised around the syntax of action and decision-making. Imperative and categorical declarative constructions are particularly frequent in his utterances. However, when Nabi recounts battle events, his sentences become more extended, and subordinate and conditional relations become increasingly prominent.

Thus, Nabi's syntactic patterns also change according to the communicative situation: they acquire a narrative character when he recalls events, an imperative character when he directs combat operations, and a rhetorical or aphoristic character when he articulates moral principles.

Accordingly, syntax cannot be regarded exclusively as an indicator of authorial style. It also provides information about the behavioural patterns of dramatic characters. Khagani's identity as a poet who reflects upon words, evaluates circumstances and reaches moral conclusions is represented through extended philosophical syntactic models. By contrast, Nabi's character as a hero actively involved in events, making decisions and encouraging others to act is realised through verb-centred, imperative and dynamic syntactic constructions.

In both works, the regular organisation of syllables and verse lines provides the underlying framework of poetic rhythm. However, syntactic rhythm changes continuously

against this metrical background. Consequently, metre and rhythm should not be regarded as identical phenomena. As Galperin observes, “poetic rhythm is formed not merely by an ideal metrical pattern but also by the various modifications and contrasts occurring within that pattern” [1, p. 129].

In Khagani, syntactic rhythm primarily alternates among three models: lyrical parallelism, extended poetic periods and brief aphoristic statements. These transitions correspond to the multidimensional representation of Khagani as a poet, a thinker and an individual confronting the political environment. At times, an idea is completed within a single verse line, whereas in other instances, it extends across several lines. Rhythm consequently becomes subordinated to the emotional and intellectual movement of thought.

In Gachag Nabi, rhythmic variation more frequently follows a sequence consisting of an extended narrative passage, a brief conversational turn, an imperative construction and a subsequent return to extended speech. The abrupt interruption of lengthy poetic narration by one-word utterances such as *“Sonra? Sonra?” (“Then? Then?”)*, followed by imperative sentences and a return to the narration of events, creates a multilayered rhythm within verse drama.

This rhythmic organisation corresponds to the dynamics of the heroic plot. The alternation between narration, interruption, command and renewed narration reproduces the changing intensity of dramatic action and contributes to the audience’s perception of the unfolding events.

Conclusion. Syntactic structure, rhythm and expressiveness in verse drama constitute interrelated components of a unified poetic and dramatic system. Syntactic parallelism, repetition, rhetorical questions, imperative and exclamatory sentences, and elliptical constructions contribute both to the formation of rhythm and to the intensification of emotional expression. Variations in syntactic structures directly influence dramatic tempo, the individualisation of characters’ speech and the expressive potential of literary content. Therefore, syntax in verse drama functions as one of the principal means through which rhythm, expressiveness and dramatic dynamics are established.

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