

LATIP 2021
International Conference on Language and Technology in the Interdisciplinary Paradigm

PERFORMATIVITY IN FRENCH, ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN
VOICE AND SILENT CHARMS

Elena Krivenko (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Novosibirsk State Technical University, 20 Prospekt K. Marksa,
Novosibirsk, 630073, Russia, elena_krivenko@hotmail.fr

Abstract

Over the past decades, the study of charms in different languages has received special attention, creating the need to study them from the point of view of the performativity. The phenomenon of performativity is investigated on the basis of legal vocabulary, in colloquial language, but it has not been sufficiently studied by the example of charms, which represent an action by their nature. The article examines the voice function as one of the criteria for the performativity success. The author of this study carried out a linguistic and comparative analysis of the texts of charms in French, Russian and English and analysed the voice participation in performativity. Several types of charms have been identified in terms of voice: spoken aloud, whispered, chanted and silent. The analysis showed that the voice is necessary for the success of the charming performative, and in written charms the emphasis is on ritual actions, after which the text itself begins to be performative. Charms are considered in the layer of culture and this study makes it possible to identify general trends and national components in the history of the charms development, which will lead to a more complete analysis of charms in a multilingual aspect to identify criteria for the success of their performativity.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Charm, performativity, voice



1. Introduction

The work of such scientists as (Austin, 1986; Proskurin, 2016; Romanov & Romanova, 2009; Searle, 1969) has been devoted to the study of performatives, on the basis of legal vocabulary, political discourse, biblical texts, but practically no charming texts have been studied, though they are already performative by their nature and can be considered as a common layer in different cultures. We will study charms using the method of linguistic and cultural analysis in order to identify the criteria for the success of their performativity, which will shed light on a more complete assessment of charms in a multilingual aspect.

1.1. Performatives

The concept of "performative" was introduced by Austin in the framework of the theory of speech acts. Performatives are statements that are actions themselves, as opposed to constatives that describe reality. Uttering a performative statement means performing an action, examples include commanding, promising, giving a name (Austin, 1986). The title of his famous work "How to do things with words?" expresses the meaning of performativity in the best way.

1.2. Voice as an important condition for performative success

Performatives cannot be true or false, unlike constatives, but they can be successful or unsuccessful. The success or failure of the performative depends on the circumstances in which it was made; in connection with the above, the thesis of Proskurin (2016) is relevant. "The primordial speech act lies in the basis of the world. This speech act is successful because it leads to the creation of the world". (p. 122). Obviously, for the success of the performative, the pronunciation of words and, as a rule, the presence of other necessary circumstances is necessary; in the context of charms, these are various types of invocations and types of tense forms of verbs. In this study, we will consider how important the participation of the voice in the success of the performativity of a charm is, which explains the relevance of this work.

Taking into account the Proskurin and Feshchenko (2019) premise that the voice "imparts performativity even to meaningless sounds" (p. 315), which is confirmed by such linguistic phenomenon as glossalalia, being manifested in the Christian tradition, in shamanism and in various sects, let us assume that the voice, and namely, speaking aloud, is an important component of a successful sacred charming practice.

2. Problem Statement

According to Toporov's (1980) definition, charms are called "special texts of a formulaic nature, to which a magical power is attributed that can cause the desired state" (p. 450). In charms performativity is especially clearly manifested, as Toporova (1996) proves in her study: "The specificity of a charm designed for the simultaneous pronunciation of a text and performing a magical procedure lies in the "real

effectiveness of the word” <...> and the charm itself can be interpreted as the embodiment delocation (performativity)” (p. 13). Let's try to understand the significance of the voice for ritual practices.

3. Research Questions

In the origins of the voice there is a cry, the very first cry appears out of the necessity; it may be hunger, fear or pain; but as soon as the one to whom this voice is intended hears it, the cry turns into a call, endowed with meaning. It needs interpretation and response and requires satisfaction (Dolar, 2019, p. 98).

Like the first child's cry, the cause of the mythical cry was a need, and it retroactively turns into a request that exceeds necessity, into a call, into an act of speech. In the very initial function of circulation, speech is represented by a cry, in which the sphere of the voice is outside the language, therefore, the voice needs a more complex cultural conditioning than language acquisition, as Dolar (2019) believes. The voice acquires its magical function (the author of the term is Jakobson, 1975), who considered it a special case of the inviting-motivating function of speech, with the difference that in the case of verbal magic, the addressee of speech is not a person, but higher powers. This idea is confirmed by Vinogradova (1993): "Such a dominant role of the verbal formula increases its ritual-magical status, since the main pragmatic function of the rite is realized primarily through the word" (p. 98). In the outstanding study "Les mots, la mort, les sorts" (Words, death, destinies), Saada also speaks of the paramount voice importance for the charms: on expeditions, she only encountered language and during many months, the only empirical fact that she was able to note was speech ... Rituals of disenchantment turned out to be notable for their poverty and accidental nature: this or that ritual does not matter, because if the ritual is supported, it is the word that matters and the one who pronounces it. "Maybe then I was not so wrong in claiming that I studied the practices: in witchcraft, action is a verb." (Favret-Saada, 2011, p. 25). Well-known folklorist Toporkov (2010) also speaks about an expedition to the Vologda region, where he was recommended a healer. Addressing her himself, he recorded her work. The healer reads the charms quietly, but clearly, explaining this by the fact that she considers this method to be correct, since the person at whom the charms are directed should know what kind of text it sounds like.

4. Purpose of the Study

Our goal is to determine how important is the voice of the performativity of the charms and find out what the ratio in the corpora of voice and silent charms is.

5. Research Methods

To study the participation of the voice in the charms, we used the methods of linguistic and cultural analysis as well as comparative analysis.

5.1. Voice charms

To identify the importance of the voice, we studied texts of charms applying the linguistic method, including precise, heuristic, quantitative and inductive ones.

5.2. Silent charms

For researching silent charms, we used, with the methods mentioned above, some elements of structural and historic comparative methods.

6. Findings

Let us consider the role of the voice, that is, speaking aloud, using the example of the corpora of charming texts in the compared languages. For this study, 115 Russian charms were taken (Olonets collection) (Toporkov, 2010), 46 charms in English (Grendon, 1909), 117 charms in French Grimoires (Lecouteux, 2008). Of these, 192 charms mentioned the voice, but did not indicate the volume. Since the charms that required whispering had clear instructions about the volume of the voice, it can be concluded that the rest of the voice charms required speaking aloud.

The descriptive statistics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of voice participation in charms

charms	Russian (quantity)	English (quantity)	French (quantity)
written	1	11	54
whispered	-	-	5
pronounced aloud	76	13	24
sung	-	15	2
not mentioned voice or silent	38	7	31

6.1. Russian charms

Russian charms taken from Olonets collection were fixed in the XVII century. Before, they were transmitted traditionally from generation to generation in an oral way. The charms were used at home by men and women of all classes of people from peasant to the tsar. Traditionally, the charms were kept in secret from strangers, yet in 1721 Peter the Great made the law of punishing those who possessed the charms. All this made obstacles for charms fixation. Maybe due to these facts we see that almost all the studied charms were oral by nature. In the texts most often we found mentions that it is necessary to pronounce, to read, to recite, for example, a charm from bleeding (Toporkov, 2010, p. 538).

Кровь заговаривать. Глаголи 3.

От кости, от жилы увечной, крови раба своего имрек во веки веков. Аминь

Speak blood. say 3.

From the bone, from the sinew of the crippled, from the blood of his servant I have forever and ever. Amen

But, more often than not, it is not mentioned that the charm should have been pronounced, as we can see in the charm to win the fight (Toporkov, 2010, p. 444).

Lord, bless me, servant of God name to the river, wrestling with the servant of God in the current and in the meadow; and make me a servant of God, the name lighter than a feather and a poppy seed. I was born, the servant of God, from (o) the father and from the mother, and I will have mercy on me from the coward and the unbelted, from the black and from the simple hair, and from every daring man, subjugate me under my nose. In the name of. Amen. Amen

In this charm, there is no instruction to pronounce it, but there is also no mention of writing it. Amen, an appeal to God with a request to bless and have mercy, speaks of the oral nature of the charm, we referred it to the voice charms, for all that it can be written as a prayer for wearing on the body.

6.2. English charms

English charms seem to be voiced by nature from the point of view of the history of their transmission. Smallwood (2004) drew this conclusion after many studied springs:

The copies that survive in writing, or that have been recorded from speech in recent centuries, are the merest scattered traces of what must have been carried in innumerable heads or written thousands of times on materials that were unlikely to survive. (p. 12)

Even most sophisticated people tried to memorize them and transmit orally.

Among the English charms studied, there were none with the mention of whispering; most were with instructions for pronouncing or chanting, as we see in the charm from pain in the legs (Grendon, 1909, p. 184).

For pain in the limbs sing nine times the following charm thereon, and spit your spitte on [the place affected]: — " Malignus obligavit, angelus curavit, dominus saluavit." (Malignus obligavit, angelus curavit, dominus saluavit" means "he will soon be well").

As John Niles (2010) reminds us, modern use of the term "charm" is perhaps too limited to convey the importance of performing in these solemn healing rites (p. 27). The native term *gealdor* (or *galdor*), with its wider semantic range, more clearly means the performance derived from the verb *galan*, which means "to sing", "to enchant", "to shout out loud".

6.3. French charms

Most of French charms are collected in Grimoires which is a set of written in Latin magic recipes used for curing different pains, invoking demons, getting luck, making amulets, etc. All this can justify why written texts prevail voice ones.

One more interesting feature, there are some charms to pronounce in a low voice – to whisper - in the ear of the patient. For example, there is a charm from epilepsy "Ananizepta" (Lecouteux, 2014, p. 66). "Say this word in the patient's ear by shaking his knee. He will come to his senses without any doubt".

It is believed that we are talking about the acrostic of the following charm: "Antidotum Nazareni auferat necem intoxicationis santificet alimenta poculaque trinitas Amen" (Nazareth's remedy for

drunkenness sanctifies the drinking of the vessel, Trinity, amen). We can assume that telling the charm into the ear of the patient – or whispering may have the purpose of keeping a secret from some evil powers. The cited formula was also used to protect from the plague, the sinister evil at that period of the XIV century.

6.4. Silent charms

Along with oral charms, which are pronounced aloud, whispered or sung, regardless of whether they were recorded or memorized, there are written ones, their success did not depend on the vocal function. These charms were used as amulets, accompanied by certain rituals, although, most often they were written versions of the originally oral charms (Roper, 2003, p. 5). As mentioned above, to enhance performativity, various ritual actions were used, for example, they had to be worn at the chest, burnt, and drunk with this ash. In medieval Europe, charms had to be written in blood - their own or of animals, more often that of a bat, a black cat, a rooster, a dog. Charms were written on paper, wax, also fruits, bread, cheese, dissolved in a liquid intended for drinking.

The charm to protect livestock in the collection of charms made by Camus (2013, p. 82):

Ante	before
Superante	overcoming
Superante te	overcoming you

Earlier, this same formula is found in the 15th century - English charms against stretching in horses. In the Netherlands, *Ante † Sus ante † Per ante †* (earlier, even earlier, through earlier) cures gout.

This formula is used in a charm to make the rooster immortal. It was necessary to write the same words *Ante, Ante te, super Ante te*, make the rooster swallow the written charm, pronounce the formula three times over his beak, then nail his head to the table with a new nail, then pull the nail out. It can be assumed that the performativity of the written text was enhanced by voice and ritual actions. (Lecouteux, 2014).

In the Russian tradition, the fixation of charms began in the 17th – 18th centuries with the aim of "not forgetting, transferring or selling to another person, carrying with you or keeping at home as a talisman" (Toporkov, 2010, p. 11). Russian handwritten charms have a bookish character, relatively voluminous. The greatest focus is military and social magic; there are a large number of healing and love charms. Handwritten charms were used by all segments of the population, peasants, shepherds, hunters, fishermen, archers, soldiers, Cossacks, merchants, etc. The charms, for the most part, were rewritten by representatives of the rural clergy, which influenced them. In addition, being rewritten mainly by men, handwritten charms reflect themes, more masculine ones - war, hunting, and "bear the imprint of a male mentality and even some brutality" (Toporkov, 2010, p. 13). Completely illiterate people could also use charms carrying them as amulets, or keeping them at home. Basically, these were amulets and protective prayers, which were originally pronounced aloud.

Among the analyzed corpora of charming texts, there was one written with a specific focus. It is given in the "Olonets Collection" by Toporkov. This charm was told to write the priest and tie the head of the woman in labor with the written text to facilitate childbirth (Toporkov, 2010, p. 100).

«Во имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа. Обрете Господь наш Иисус Христос, со святым Иванном Б(о)гословом обретош(а) жену Анну, имярек, родящу, чревом болящу, не могущую ей родит(и). Реч(е) Господь наш Иисус Христос Иванну Богослову: Иди, Иванне, и рцы ей в правое ухо ко Анны, имярек: от Бога родимое и от Бога питаемое, выд(и), младенец, ко Христу, Христос зовет тя.» - "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Have our Lord Jesus Christ found, with Saint Ivan the Great, he found (a) a wife Anna, a name, giving birth, with an aching womb, she cannot give birth. Say our Lord Jesus Christ to Ivan the Great: Go, Ivan, and say into her right ear to Anna, name: from God born and from God nourished, go out (and), baby, to Christ, Christ is calling you."

It is possible that the invocation to Anna is explained by the fact that this was the name of the mother of God Mother and in the Slavic tradition she was considered the patroness of pregnant women and women in labor. And the phrase "go out, baby, to Christ, Christ is calling you." goes back to a quote from the Bible when Christ turned to the dead Lazarus: "Lazarus, go out."

It should be said that a written charm and tying it around the head or other part of a woman in labor has analogies - in French charms we find 4 ones with similar actions - to write a charm and attach it to the right hand, to the stomach, to the head (Lecouteux, 2008, pp. 101-105). For example, for a pregnant woman, one must write the psalm "Dixit iniustus" (said unfairly) on the hood of a pregnant woman, attach it to her right hand and the fetus of her belly will be preserved until delivery (Lecouteux, 2008, p. 104). The psalm and prayer take on the features of a charm in connection with ritual actions - tie it around your head, tie it to your right hand. The right hand in the overwhelming majority of cases was endowed with positive functions and was associated with luck, well-being and security. French written charms that require writing contain symbols and encrypted magic formulas stylized as Latin ones, for example, *Hax, max, pax* in a charm against nosebleeds (Lecouteux, 2008, pp. 81-82). In the 14th century, Jean Vier refers these words to the following complete formula *O rex gloriae Jesus Christe, veni cum pace in nomine Patris, max in nomine Filii, in nomine spiritus sancti, pax Gaspar Melchior Balthasar, prax max, Deux ymax* (O king of the glory of Jesus Christ, came with peace, in the name of the Father, great, in the name of the Son, in the name of the Holy Spirit, the world of Gaspar, Melchior Balthazar, great martyr, oh great God) (Lecouteux, 2014, p. 162). They can also contain meaningless words, a sequence of syllables, distorted words formed by condensing and displacing a normative language, for example, *abracadabra*. We agree with Louise Milne (2017) that charms' formulas can be written backwards or bucephalus; letters can be shuffled or rearranged. All this can be used as such a figure of speech as *adynata*, or impossibly to signify the end of the world and / or the suspension of natural law, in myths and legends *adinata* is also used as threshold signs, denoting magical space and time.

7. Conclusion

Among studied Russian charms, the overwhelming majority belongs to oral due to historical development, appearance of writing quite late in comparison with Europe and the laws forbidden to use charms. In the English tradition, the participation of the voice was most often used in the form of chanting. Written charms in English were often accompanied by rituals with oral performance. In the French charming tradition, there is an almost equal number of oral and written charms, which may be

associated with the historical period in France at the time of writing the book *Grimoires*, which covers the era from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

Analysis of charming texts suggests that the necessary condition for the charm performativity success is the voice. In very small numbers, the voice can be quiet to keep it secret from various magical powers. Often the volume is not indicated - but it is also not indicated that the charm is pronounced in a whisper, and in some cases (namely, in the English tradition) the charms require chanting. The verbal charm is performed orally, regardless of whether it is stored in memory or on paper, where the vocal function is one of the charm performer's success category. Silent charms use Latin words, magic symbols, and also require ritual actions for performative success. A written charm "works" without utterance is a text used as an amulet (jewellery that is worn or hung) and can be a reflection of past practice when words are pronounced over objects to enchant them.

References

- Austin, J. (1986). Word as an action. New in foreign linguistics. *Theory of speech acts*, 17, 22-129.
- Camus, D. (2013). *Paroles Magiques* [Magic Lyrics]. Imago.
- Dolar, M. (2019). Voice and nothing else. Ivan Limbakh Publishing House.
- Favret-Saada, J. (2011). *Les mots, les paroles, les sorts* [The words, the words, the spells]. Paris Gallimard.
- Grendon, F. (1909). The Anglo-Saxon charms. American Folklore Society.
- Jacobson, R. (1975). Linguistics and poetics (Structuralism: pros and cons). *Mysl*.
- Lecouteux, C. (2014). Dictionnaire des formules magiques. Sorbonne.
- Lecouteux, C. (2008). *Le livre des Grimoires* [The Book of Grimoires]. Sorbonne.
- Milne, L. (2017). The Terrors of the Night: Charms against the Nightmare and the Mythology of Dreams. *Incantatio*, 6, 78-117.
- Niles, J. (2010). *Homo Narrans. The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc.
- Proskurin, S. G. (2016). Early performativity. *Criticism and semiotics*, 2, 121-133.
- Proskurin, S., & Feshchenko, V. (2019). Voice and bodily deixis as manifestation of performativity in written texts. *Semiotica*, 227, 317–334. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2017-0133>
- Romanov, A. A., & Romanova, L. A. (2009). Are Political Promises Performative? *Modern political linguistics: problems, concepts, perspectives* (pp. 273–281), Volgograd.
- Roper, J. (2003). Towards a poetics, rhetorics and proxemics of verbal charms. *Folklore-electronic Journal of Folklore*, 8-49. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2003.24.VERBCHARM>
- Smallwood, T. M. (2004). The Transmission of Charms in English, Medieval and Modern. Charms and Charming in Europe (pp. 11-32), Palgrave Macmillan.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Toporkov, A. L. (2010). Russian charms from handwritten sources of the 17th - first half of the 19th century. *Indrik*.
- Toporov, V. N. (1980). Charms and myths. In *Soviet encyclopedia* (Vol. 1, pp. 450-452). *Mysl*.
- Toporova, T. V. (1996). Language and style of ancient Germanic charms. *Mysl*.
- Vinogradova, L. N. (1993). Charming formulas for childhood insomnia as texts of a communicative type. *Research in the field of Balto-Slavic spiritual culture. Charms*. Science.