Abstract. A great deal of recent studies have focused on the interpretations of aesthetic ideas in the poetic works by Thomas Hardy, and less attention has paid to each one individually. Hence, the aim of this paper is to study the artistic value of the poem “The Voice”. The interpretation of the lyrical images and artistic means of creating imagery is based on the linguostylistic analysis of verbal artistic devices, as well as several academic works and surveys from different authors connected with the works by T. Hardy, his biography and peculiarities of the poetry linguostylistic analysis are used. This research has shown that the poem “The Voice” illustrates the biographical facts about Thomas Hardy’s tragic feelings concerning his wife’s death, so that the general tone of the poem is full of melancholy and uncertainty, although the notes of hope and allusion are also described. Thus, these findings suggest that the life path of a writer always has an essential impact on his oeuvre (in this case on the poetry) which value and significance can be understood via interpreting phonetic, lexical (tropes) and syntactic stylistic devices as well as verbal means of expressing essence and feelings.

Introduction. At the beginning of the 21st century in linguistics it is observed a growing interest in linguostylistic analysis which purpose, according to Kochan (2008), is to identify, analyse and justify the system of verbal and artistic means that are not only crucial at the process of creating a system of images of the literary work but also are fundamental in artistic thinking of the writer (Kochan, 2008, p. 22). At the same time, it is undoubtedly that an artistic text of any form, genre and content is a multidimensional area for scientific research, where linguists and literary critics analyse the linguistic features of the creation of aesthetic ideas and emotional state at the linguistic level, while psychologists, culturologists, philosophers etc. do the same consequently at the extralinguistic level. Therefore, a content interpretation of the work is marked with its versatility and complexity of understanding.

Kolomiiets (2015) defines a linguostylistic analysis as the process of a scientific study of literary text, its contextual aspect and semantic-stylistic units (of which this text consists) on different levels of language, from phonetic to syntactic levels. Ultimately, the linguostylistic analysis provides a specific interpretation of the embedded verbal and artistic means, which consequently determine the originality of the literary work. In addition, an important component of this analysis is to solve the problem of identical understanding and perception of the artistic text, namely the author’s idea, inasmuch as sometimes take place cases when “the content invested
by the author and the content perceived by readers do not match” (Kolomiiets, 2015, p. 194). In this context the opinion of Betsenko (2017) is unanimous, who also notes that in the process of linguostylistic analysis the researcher studies the nature of language units, explains the writer’s choice of certain units in this context, clarifies the specifics of the compositional structure of the work and simultaneously depicts the characters’ world and the author’s world (Betsenko, 2017, p. 240).

Hence, the aim of this paper is to study linguostylistic features of the creation of imagery and images in the poem “The Voice” by English writer Thomas Hardy and to provide necessary analysis of the poem in the context of published research papers by Pinion (1976), Galperin (2014), Church (2020) and Simkin (2020).

Results and discussion. On November 27th, 1912, Thomas Hardy’s wife, Emma Gifford, died. According to the author biography, their marital relations were not approved by the parents of both families; besides, from the very beginning of their living together, passion began to give way to misery, since for wealthy Emma with her “suspicions and jealousies and affronts which must be half insane” this marriage was nothing but a mesalliance (Simkin, 2020). Just before Emma’s death, the couple already lacked family comfort and mutual understanding, both were almost completely alienated, living a separate life in different rooms in Max Gate (Thomas Hardy estate in Dorset).

The troubles of Hardy’s difficult first marriage as well as the author emotional state of losing a loved one are reflected in the poem “The Voice”, written in December 1912 and published in the poem collection “Satires and Circumstances” (1914) in the section “Poems 1912-13” (Hardy, 1994, p. 325-326).

From the very first lines the poet tells his tragic feelings of his wife’s loss; Emma is described as the “woman much missed” because only now T. Hardy understands that his wife was everything for him – air to breathe and sense to live. Involuntarily, the sadness for the beloved is expressed via a short pause, created by alliteration of the consonant sound [m]. The refrain “how you call to me, call to me” emphasizes the sorrow the lyrical voice feels over the death of his woman; the poet seems that now (as indicated by the use of the Present Simple Tense) she turns to him to say that she has become a different person. This repetition of the phrase “call to me” creates quite a tangible effect of echo, as if the woman is really calling the poet. If the line were “Woman much missed, how you call to me”, it would convey a generally sad recollection of a loved one. Instead, doubling is understood almost as an order, as if the poet begs his dead wife to call him.

In fact, the whole stanza is based on a comparison of the woman who T. Hardy fell in love with at that moment – “as at first, when our day was fair” – the lexeme “day” implies not one day, but a period of time, thus, the epithet “fair” characterizes the beautiful, easy and joyful beginning of family life, when Emma and Thomas experienced the spring of their relationship; and a woman-wife with whom T. Hardy lived for almost 40 years. Only after her death Emma became again that charming young woman who meant everything for the poet when he just threw in his lot with her in 1874 – “Saying that now you are not as you were // When you had changed from the one who was all to me” – in this way the sorrow at the beginning of the poem contrasts with the happiness and prosperity of the relationship. To put the emphasis on the bitterness of loss and heart pain for a loved one the technique of the enjambment is used, since it “violates the monotonous concurrence of the rhythmical and syntactical units of the metrical system” (Galperin, 2014, p. 257) with the help of “imperfect rhymes, inasmuch as they violate the trivial exactness of sound correspondence” (Galperin, 2014, p. 257). In our case, the stanza has a cross rhyme
ABAB, where a full (identical) rhyme call to me – all to me alternates with an incomplete (slant) one were – fair, inside the subjunctive part of a complex sentence is broken and moved to another line – this technique forms the feeling of confusion and grief.

In the second stanza, the protagonist dreams that the woman he misses is actually calling him and he hears her voice. This quatrain begins with the rhetorical question “Can it be you that I hear?”. To dispel doubts and make sure that she is alive, he strives to see her (“Let me view you, then”). The repetition of the vowel sound [u:] in the words you and view of the above mentioned sentences creates a special rhythm and enhances the effect of crying. At the same time, in the line “Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then” there is a paradoxical statement at the lexical-semantic and syntactic levels. The contradiction lies in auditory and visual perception, since the lyrical hero does not see the voice (the real speaker) but supposes her presence, he is trying to clarify that she is really here now, close to him. The phrases “can it be you” and “you would wait for me” form an imagery dialogue without any answer and indicate the strong grief the lyrical hero experiences. The described date is hypothetical and expressed in the form of a comparison with the past: how once a lyrical hero, approaching to the city (“I drew near to the town”) met his beloved, who was waiting for him; and now, if the wife were alive and this rendezvous could be repeated again, the poet would certainly recognize her in “the original air-blue gown”. Here the epithet “air-blue” describes the dress of a pure sky colour, which symbolizes the summer season (Pinion, 1976, p. 105). Moreover, the noun “town” is identified with the article the, on account of the matter concerns the real city of Launceston (or Lanson) in Cornwall, where the protagonist goes from the train station to the old parish of St. Juliot (Pinion, 1976, p. 105), and namely here, in Cornwall Thomas Hardy met his future wife Emma Gifford in 1870 (Church, 2020). Then it becomes clear why the lyrical hero dreams of seeing his beloved in the same place as 42 years ago, when on a warm summer day in the south-west of England, the poet met his beautiful Emma, “a rosy, Rubenesque complexion, striking blue eyes and auburn hair with ringlets reaching down as far as her shoulders” (Simkin, 2020) in “the original air-blue gown”. The rhetorical question at the beginning, the subordinate clause an unreal condition, the comparison as it once was – all these techniques create the atmosphere of uncertainty, hope and unfulfilled desire, the last idea is expressed with the help of an exclamation mark, which stands for the poet’s deep emotional shock.

The third stanza intensifies the uncertainty of the lyrical hero, inasmuch as the whole quatrain becomes a rhetorical question that begins with the conjunction or. The poet does not believe until the end that he hears the voice of his beloved; it seems to him that it is a shadowy light breeze (“Or is it only the breeze”). The combination of hushing [s], vowels [i:], [i] and consonants [l], [t], [n] creates an indirect onomatopoeia, aimed at imitating the sounds of the wind and transmits hesitation and emotional tension. Therefore, “the breeze” is a personified microimage of a light breeze that indifferently, “in its listlessness” travels “across the wet mead” to the lyrical hero (here the word “mead” refers to the poetic vocabulary), and then to the place where his love has disappeared (“being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness”) and she will be “heard no more again far or near” (neither nearby, nor far away). Remarkably, the author’s neologisms “listlessness” and “wistlessness” are used with the purpose both to make the sound of the lines more melodic and to complicate the imagery of the poem. The last interrogative sentence is a rhetorical one, with the help of which the author assures himself of a real but unsatisfactory end of their relationships; and consequently, comes to the conclusion that death is a part of a gloomy natural world.
The final quatrain has a slightly changed tone and rhythm which means that the poet returns to the sad reality where he is left alone without his beloved wife. He continues to exist, but it is rather difficult for him to go his own way in life alone, as long as he is constantly “faltering forward”. It is a special phonetic (alliteration of the deaf sound [f] “Thus I; faltering forward”) and syntactic (semicolon separates the nominal sentence in which emphasis is placed on the loneliness of the lyrical hero from the participial clause) structure of the first line of this stanza that involves stumbling, impatient steps. The dismal statement “Thus I” simultaneously emphasizes the presence of Thomas Hardy as a lonesome figure and describes his desire to be close to the woman he misses. The next two lines contain a landscape description, which symbolizes the commonplace poet everyday life: a gloomy everyday autumn world, where leaves fall around, and the cold north wind makes its way through the hostile thorny landscape (the author imitates wind blowing via indirect onomatopoeia formed by the alliteration of consonants [θ], [ð], [w], [f], [n], [d] and assonance of vowels [i], [u:] [ɔ:] – «Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward»). Falling of the leaves creates the atmosphere that autumn is close enough; some time might pass, and the lyrical hero continues his illusion of reunion with a beloved woman. At the same moment, the rhyme falling – calling creates a contrast between death and life which means that everything around the hero passes, except for the love to Emma that will last forever.

Besides, the fourth stanza is interconnected with the first one because the final line “And the woman calling” indicates that the voice of a woman is heard distinctly again despite the noise of the wind; she is calling again, although not as persistently as at the beginning of the poem, because there are no refrains in the final line. Even though a meeting with his sweetheart is impossible, the final words testify Thomas Hardy’s love to his wife, as well as his desire to keep “woman much missed” alive in his memories, in spite of any misunderstandings and quarrels they used to have during their matrimony.

Consequently, the poem “The Voice” has a complex structure, because it consists of four quatrains with a rhyming scheme ABAB CDCD EFEF GHGH where the feet alternates (lines A, C, E, G form a six-foot iambic, and lines B, D, F, H form a five-foot iambic). In addition, a compound rhyme (call to me – all to me, view you, then – knew you then, listlessness – wistlessness, forward – norward) in lines A, C, E, G determines the melodical poem structure.

Conclusions. To sum up, a linguostylistic analysis is a way of interpreting linguistic and stylistic signs to understand the general idea of an artistic text along with decoding its hidden content. In the course of the above given analysis, it is possible to state that “The Voice” belongs to an elegy, to the meditative lyrics of melancholy content. The title of the poem is directly related to a woman’s voice, despite the fact that the poem itself is written in the first-person and implies a poetic voice of his personal emotional experiences. Thomas Hardy describes post factum his true feelings for his deceased wife, mentioning the spring (being in love) and winter (separation) of their love, and at the same illustrates the beauty of spiritual love that keeps him attached to Emma even after her death.

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