
**GRAMMAR AS A TOOL OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION
IN CONTEMPORARY INSTAPOETRY
(BASED ON THE COLLECTION OF POEMS
“MILK AND HONEY” BY RUPI KAUR)**

Holovashchenko Yu. S.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-619-5-6>

INTRODUCTION

The definition of poetry and its aesthetic value has undergone a significant conceptual shift over the past two centuries. With the peak of traditional appraisal of literary and linguistic eloquence of the written word in the 19th century, it moved towards modernist literary experimentation with content and verbal form in the 20th century and arrived at the destination of postmodernist self-reflexive and fragmented writing, welcoming multiple interpretations, in the 21st century. In other words, “poetry, since the early-twentieth-century moderns, has been a difficult business, both in the reading and making”¹ (K. I Berens).

Presently, the evolution of poetry is continuing to take another upward turn in the endless transformational spiral. The omnipresence of digital reality, transcending the borderlines of the material world, brings poetry to a new level of creation, dissemination, and perception.

The ‘umbrella’ term for literature either produced digitally or published in a digital environment is ‘electronic literature’, or ‘e-lit’. Despite the emergence of various perspectives on the definition of e-lit, this article favors the one that has been provided by Scott Rettberg: “electronic literature is most simply described as new forms and genres of writing that explore the specific capabilities of the computer and network – literature that would not be possible without the contemporary digital context”². Thus, e-lit as a complex phenomenon embraces not only literature as a product, but the crucial elements

¹ Berens K. I. E-Lit’s #1 Hit: Is Instagram Poetry E-literature? Reading #Instapoetry: A Poetics of Instagram [edited by James Mackay and JuEunhae Knox]. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. P. 20.

² Rettberg S. Electronic Literature. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019. P. 2.

of (1) a digital setting where it is produced, (2) the cutting-edge tools of this setting, and (3) the process of human–network interaction that results in the emergence of a literary product.

At first thought, digital poetry connotes the vehicle of its creation, i.e., in the digital space, with the use of digital tools. It can hardly be argued that, for the past decade, poetry has received a substantial ‘generative touch’, which incorporates the agency of AI in poetry creation and the process of encoding a ‘deeper’ message into it. The power of AI has resulted in the fusion of poetry with other visual genres, creating a domain of the abovementioned electronic literature (E-Lit) and a brand-new genre of digital poetry, including computational poetry, video poetry, rhizomatic poetry, code poetry, code works, etc.³ Poetry as a code can be generated with the help of programming languages, and with a fair share of semantic interplay, can facilitate a contemplative reading with an interactive search of relevant meaning⁴.

Furthermore, the power of narrative as the ‘driving force’ of meaning construction has also been revised in relation to the recruitment of digital software and AI agents. It has already become apparent that a narrative, which could be the backbone of poetry or prose, may not necessarily be humanly constructed. The role of creating a narrative has been widely overtaken by computers that can process and generate data, contributing to the progression of ‘algorithmic creativity’ (S. Rettberg, J. W. Rettberg⁵). Simultaneously, despite being produced machine-wise, such narratives are decoded and experienced solely human-wise, making it clear that there is still room for a human agent to interfere with and make an assertion in the process of interpretation.

1. A Brief Outline of Instagram Poetry

A different conceptual dimension of digital poetry encompasses all poetry that has been spread through digital space. The Internet created a digital continuum that competes with traditional time-spatial constraints, bringing the digital presence of any individual to the point of ubiquity. In this light, social media have played an instrumental role in connecting people virtually, most of whom had hardly been aware of each other’s existence. As it infiltrated every sphere of our lives, it has undeniably reached the realm of literature and encouraged its proliferation on the limitless and never-ending canvas of scrollable digital folio.

³ Пожарицька О. Генеративний вірш та поезія-переробка як жанри дигітальної поезії. *Актуальні питання гуманітарних наук. Мовознавство. Літературознавство*. 2021. Вип 35, том 4. С. 147-148.

⁴ Пожарицька О. О. Поезія-код: розтлумач мене, якщо зможеш. *Вчені записки ТНУ імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія: Філологія. Журналістика*. 2021. Том 32 (71), № 1 Ч. 2. С. 180.

⁵ Rettberg S., Rettberg J. W. Algorithmic narrativity: Literary experiments that drive technology. *Dialogues on Digital Society*. 2025. Vol. 1, Issue 1. P. 37-38.

The transformation of poetry in the digital environment of social media has been quite discernible. First and foremost, what is labelled as ‘poetry’ has been produced in a way to fit into the algorithms of social media: while it can, to a certain extent, present its originality, gain a vast audience, and be within instant reach, it oftentimes has to play down on authenticity, novelty or eloquence, and be subject to the pervasion of algorithms. Thus, the so-called ‘orthodox’ idea of inspiration or literary creativity might now be labelled as ‘Algorithmically Mediated Creative Labor’ (A. De, Zh. Lu), which reflects “the conflicting demands between algorithmic conformity and authenticity”⁶ and hints at contemporary challenges of poetic meaning construction.

The circumstances listed above, however, have not ceased the art of poetry from finding its relevant linguistic form within the framework of digital media. On the contrary, merging with algorithmic specifications of a particular social media platform, poetry in terms of its linguistic form has to showcase flexibility, adaptability, and accessibility. For instance, on the leading social media platform, called Instagram, which originally held a visual stance, a melting pot of poetic pieces is commonly accompanied by visual props that constantly need to adjust to volatile and superfluous changes of algorithms in order to reach a wider audience of readers (target audience).

In order for this kind of poetry, which is free, to spread widely through the digital landscape of the social media platform, an author is expected to perform ‘platformed visibility labour’. According to C. H. Soelseth, this concept constitutes a few characteristics, such as regularly interact with the readers; effectively use hashtag strategies; engage followers to be poetic co-creators; encourage participatory distribution of poetic content; and maintain authorial authenticity, which means that ‘the poet produces poetry, readers repost or in some way respond to this poetry, the poet then posts these responses on their account, letting new readers know that their current readers are “authenticating” them’⁷.

Furthermore, Instapoetry is inherently characterized by transmediality, i.e., it has the power to transgress the digital continuum and reappear in its same (or more or less the same) shape and form in the material world. Not only is it distributed through Instagram via liking, commenting, post-sharing, and the use of hashtags, but it has also been materialized in commodities, such as pictures, mugs, exhibits, installation items, tattoos, postcards, etc.

⁶ Ankolika De and Zhicong Lu. 2024. #PoetsOfInstagram: Navigating The Practices And Challenges Of Novice Poets On Instagram. In *Proceedings of the 2024 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (CHI ’24), May 11–16, 2024, Hawai’i, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 16 p.

⁷ Soelseth, C. H. (2022). When is a Poet an Instapoet? The effect of platformization on the practice of being a poet, and instapoets as examples of poetry content creators in the Social Media Entertainment ecosystem. *Baltic Screen Media Review*. 2022. Vol. 10 (1). P. 109-112.

Instapoetry has triggered ‘the post-digital circulation process’ (C. H. Soelseth), meaning that ‘through repetition, poetry exists in multiple media ecologies and ecosystems for cultural production’⁸. C. H. Soelseth argues that there are three stages of the post-digital circulation process on Instagram poetry: the primary participatory circulation, including repetitions and reperformances by users on the social media; the secondary distribution via visual poetry content, creative collaborations, and inscriptions, which promotes platformed repetition; and the tertiary distribution via physical poetry commodities⁹.

From the vantage point of generic specificity, Instapoetry struggles to display any common generic or ‘canonical’ features, let alone put a finger on them. Scrutinizing the poetry of a single author does not necessarily and immediately allow one to pinpoint the generic aspects or make generalized statements about the poetry of other authors. Since ‘canon’ implies cultural and political peculiarities, we thus need to understand that Instapoetry stands in correlation with the wider communities that the author represents or identifies with. That being said, the form and structure of this poetry is fluctuating, unstable, literally and aesthetically recyclable and renewable¹⁰.

While some of the academia might argue whether Instapoetry is breaking and disregarding the established literary canon or attempts at its revival and refinement, the contemporary ‘free verse’ poetry, which abounds in the creative work of most young Instagram poets, prides itself on the deeper sense and symbolism that lie between simplistic and literal lines¹¹. Instagram poets and artists address the topics that strike a chord with a vast number of people. In this vein, their creative work can be considered as ‘pop poetry’, which ‘is treated as something with a strong social aspect, being something that enables connecting to each other through cultural expressions, working with the interplay between individual expression and a communal consensus’¹². In other words, Instapoetry depends much upon the background, ethnicity, and

⁸ Soelseth C. H. The media ecologies of Norwegian instapoet Trygve Skaug: tracing the post-digital circulation process of (insta) poetry through participatory-made Instagram archives. *European Journal of English Studies*. 2023. Vol. 27 (1). P. 50.

⁹ Soelseth C. H. The media ecologies of Norwegian instapoet Trygve Skaug: tracing the post-digital circulation process of (insta) poetry through participatory-made Instagram archives. *European Journal of English Studies*. 2023. Vol. 27 (1). P. 40-52.

¹⁰ Soelseth C., Ravizza E. Missed Possibilities from Unobtainable Data: The Case of Instapoetry and a Wish to Go beyond Rupi Kaur. Reading #Instapoetry: A Poetics of Instagram [Mackay James, JuEunhae Knox, ed.]. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. Bloomsbury Collections P. 55, 61.

¹¹ Янковець О., Янковець, А., Кустовська І. Сучасна американська поезія як відображення найактуальніших тем 21-го століття крізь призму діджиталізації. *Вісник науки та освіти (Серія «Філологія»)*. 2024. № 2 (20). С. 495.

¹² Soelseth C. H. Instapoetry as a post-digital phenomenon: The infrastructural effects of platformization on contemporary pop poetry. Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor in Library and Information Science Faculty of Social Sciences. OsloMet: Oslo Metropolitan University Norway, 2025. P. 94.

nationality, personal experience, and social or political stance of the author. Coming into contact with it, readers or followers can relate to that poetry, contribute to the development of the poetic meaning and dissemination via the platform, or even further, turning this poetry into a unique performative and collateral phenomenon. Eventually, Instapoetry becomes distinctive, proper, and particular in relation to the author's individuality as well as the personalities of people who can digitally and materially interact with or co-produce it.

2. The Individuality of Rupi Kaur through a Social and Literary Lens

The surge of popularity of Instagram poets (or Instapoets), such as Alison Malee, Atticus, Kate Baer, Lang Leav, Robert M. Drake, Rupi Kaur, and others, has made it crystal clear that there has been a newly designed recipe for writing a poem, whose secret ingredient, supposedly, lies in either polished algorithmic compliance, capitalist supremacy of mass consumption, vibrant emotional gradient or ... is there anything else?

A successful claim, in our opinion, to explicate the popularity of Instagram poetry, or Instapoetry, has been put forward by Maria Manning: "it is a form interested in democratizing poetic expression and dissemination, opening the form up to a wider array of personalities and identities in both the readers and writers of instapoetry"¹³. Two fair-minded implications are to be suggested here. Firstly, it is a unique authorial stance, blending social, political, economic, technological outlooks and multiplied by the scope of the particular personal experience, that makes the phenomenon Instapoetry so reverberant, realizable, and intelligible among readers on the social media platform. Secondly, the poetics of individual experience that is often marked by calamities, such as exclusion, trauma, inequity, or prejudice, is always seeking its appropriate form of expression in order to alleviate the past burden and find ways to heal. In this light, Instapoetry makes it legitimate to break poetic canons and construct uncommonly plain and minimalistic poetry backed by effective visual elements.

One of the most iconic and famed personalities among young Instagram poets is Rupi Kaur, a Canadian poet of Indian descent. Rupi Kaur can legitimately be called a worldwide social, political, and literary phenomenon in terms of the nature of her poetry, its heartfelt stance on the diverse and socially shamed complexities of womanhood, and fearless exposure of these complexities to the public via social media. "*milk and honey*", a debut self-published collection of poetry, was out in 2014 and has been republished numerous times, swiftly becoming the world's best-selling poetry book.

¹³ Manning M. Crafting Authenticity: Reality, Storytelling, and Female Self-Representation through Instapoetry. *Storytelling, Self, Society*. 2020. Vol. 16, No. 2. P. 273.

Interestingly, despite original backlash and opposition to recognizing her writing as poetry in scholarly circles, Rupī Kaur's creative work has still received significant scholarly attention worldwide. In terms of locating the artistic value of her poetry in the literary coordinate system, Tanja Grubnic identifies its aesthetics as 'nosthetics', or nostalgic aesthetics, which demonstrates wistful yearning for the methods and tools of creating poetry in the pre-Instagram era¹⁴. Another research path heads towards the exploration of trauma and beauty in Rupī Kaur's poetry; while "recalibrating cultural discourses of resilience, self-love and beauty that entwine with trauma"¹⁵, she makes a firm statement that there is a lot of beauty and grace in healing oneself after adversity and despair¹⁶. The study of the factors explicating the popularity of Rupī Kaur's poetry has also been carried out. The power of Rupī Kaur, therefore, lies in (1) plainspoken revelations of her trauma and the intricacies of womanhood amid patriarchal society, (2) her undisguised address to complex themes that resonate with a wide audience, (3) the distinctive visual appeal of her poetry, (4) a strong social media capital and personal brand, and (5) backward research marketing, reflecting her sturdy determination to self-publish as a result of publisher rejection¹⁷.

Despite abundant literary studies of Rupī Kaur's creative work, the linguistic analysis of her poetry has been scarce, covering the study of stylistic features in only five poems of Rupī Kaur¹⁸. Thus, there is still a palpable gap that needs to be filled by solely linguistic research. In fact, language itself can inherently communicate underlying messages that speak on the author's behalf. The present study is primarily focused on the linguistic analysis of contemporary Instagram poetry, namely the collection "*milk and honey*" by the authorship of Rupī Kaur. The research draws upon the potential of grammar for meaning construction and how certain grammatical structures employed communicate the leading themes of Rupī Kaur's poetry. With the starting point of grammar, we are going to make use of literary interpretation to uncover the relations between grammatical structures and major themes of her poems.

¹⁴ Grubnic T. Nosthetics: Instagram poetry and the convergence of digital media and literature. *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*. 2020. Vol. 9. Nr. 2. P. 152.

¹⁵ Gill M. M., Bhatti Sh. A. Rupī Kaur – Unapologetic Insta-poet. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*. 2024. Vol. 27. No 1. P. 89.

¹⁶ Gill M. M., Bhatti Sh. A. Rupī Kaur – Unapologetic Insta-poet. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*. 2024. Vol. 27. No 1. P. 84.

¹⁷ Aspany N. F., Murni S. N. L. Insta-Poetry as a Popular Product: A Case Study on Rupī Kaur Milk & Honey. *Poetika*. 2024. Vol. 12, No. 1. P. 15-19.

¹⁸ Wiadji L. V., Hanidar S. Linguistic Stylistic Analysis of *Instagram* Poems by Rupī Kaur, Dhiman, and R. M. Drake. *Lexicon*. 2020. Vol. 7, Nr. 1. P. 55-61.

3. Grammar and Its Potential to Construct Poetic Meaning

It is of paramount interest to observe how key ideas of Rupi Kaur's creative work obtain their manifestation through language. On the one hand, it is through words that one can instantly establish a connection with the main themes and draw relevant associations out of them; on the other hand, the current research interest lies in underlying structures, i.e. the ones that lie beneath the sheer lexical exterior, which can be spotted and, consequently, attributed to Rupi Kaur's unique writing style through an in-depth reconstruction and interpretation.

Delving into grammatical patterns can be instrumental in uncovering peculiarities of meaning construction, which are backed by cognitive mechanisms of the human brain. According to M. A. K. Halliday, a text is seen as an instantiation of the language system at a certain point and by a certain language user. Every instance of text production refers both to the specific circumstances of a situation and a common repertoire of texts¹⁹. Thus, the meaning construed depends much upon the person who conveys it and the means the person uses. In this light, grammar plays an instrumental role as a tool that shapes relevant meaning linguistically. That being said, analysing the grammatical peculiarities of Rupi Kaur's poetry, it seems plausible to trace down the patterns of thought that determined the selection of particular linguistic forms to express dominant themes of trauma and healing, as well as her feelings, personal experience, and aspirations.

One of the frequent grammatical features of poems in "*milk and honey*" is the use of **direct speech**, i.e., a representation of the exact same words that a person said. One distinctive feature of direct speech in this poetry collection, as well as in all Rupi Kaur's poetry, is the absence of quotation marks to mark the limits of somebody's remark; however, for this purpose, direct speech is mostly *italicized*, presumably, to visually stand out from the rest of the poem.

The examples of the poems below precisely illustrate this point. In the first poem, the main character seems to be in the middle of her therapy session, trying to delve into the hurtful experience of sexual abuse guided by her therapist. There are three instances of direct speech, i.e., two remarks by the therapist and one by the patient. Although their conversation seems quite short and flat, it is still possible to trace down the plethora of feelings, like mortification, pain, contempt, and emotional paralysis, that are conjured up in the heart-wrenching memories and dull replies:

¹⁹ Halliday M. A. K., Matthiessen C. M. I. M. Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar. 4th edition. London; New York: Routledge, 2014. P.27-28.

‘...
point to where his hands were
you point to the spot
between its legs the one
he fingered out of you
like a confession

how’re you feeling

you pull the lump
in your throat out
with your teeth
and say *fine*
numb really’
- *midweek sessions*²⁰

In the second example I provide, we can see another dialogue, this time the heroine with her new boyfriend. As they are trying to get to know each other, he is asking her about her occupation, which is actually rendered in indirect speech; later, however, he interrupts her and asks about her passions and cravings. It turns into an intimate moment, as she answers briskly and immediately engages in a seductive touch. The whole conversation ends on a turned-on note, featuring verbal flirting and sexual excitement. We can notice that his remarks, in terms of length and quantity, dominate the conversation; yet she also seems empowered, as her daring remarks radiate a conscious backbone of femininity:

‘he asks me what i do
i tell him i work for a small company
that makes packaging for—
he stops me midsentence
no not what you do to pay the bills
what drives you crazy
what keeps you up at night

i tell him *i write*
he asks me to show him something
i take the tips of my fingers

²⁰ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 9.

so that's what you do
you command attention
my cheeks flush as
i smile shyly
confessing
i can't help it"²¹

'you look just like your mother
i guess i do carry her tenderness well
you both have the same eyes

119

cause we are both exhausted
and the hands we share the same wilting fingers
but that rage your mother doesn't wear that anger
you're right
this rage is the one thing
i get from my father'²²

Another type of grammatical structure frequently occurring in the poetry collection “*milk and honey*” is **imperative**, i.e., the form of a verb used for giving commands and orders. One noteworthy feature of Rupi Kaur’s poetry in this collection is that it is, as characterized by Millicent Lovelock, “infused with the language of popularized psychoanalysis,” which “describes the necessary steps to recovery with a great deal of clarity, relying on direct, often literal language”²³. The poetess is, by and large, instructing her readers, or, supposedly, those who have been through the same suffering, how to overcome their trauma and alleviate its effects further in life. Her words are sincerely supportive, indeed loving, and affectionate. In the poem below, for instance, we can identify five examples of imperative, i.e., “*stay strong*”, “*grow flowers*”, “*bloom beautifully*”, “*bloom softly*”, and “*just bloom*”, three of them being repetitive and all of them connoting the idea of mental strength, inner backing, and recovery:

'stay strong through your pain
grow flowers from it
you have helped me
grow flowers out of mine so
bloom beautifully
dangerously
loudly
bloom softly
however you need
just bloom'
- to the reader²⁴

The imperative used by Rupī Kaur is mostly linguistically modest yet

²² Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 33.

²³ Lovelock M. "Healing Is Everyday Work": Instapoetry, Intimate Publics, and the Language of Self-Help. Reading #Instapoetry: A Poetics of Instagram [edited by James Mackay and JuEunhae Knox]. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. P. 134.

²⁴ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 158.

genuine and straightforward. We can generally spot simple and single sentences, sometimes broken or cut off, as in the poem illustrated above, or those that are addressed to the reader with a note of psychological guidance, mentoring, and encouraging empathy, as in the poem below:

‘accept yourself
as you were designed’²⁵

Simultaneously, “*milk and honey*” features a significant number of instances of *negative imperatives*, namely in the present tense. It might come off as if the author is committed to warning the reader against taking the wrong actions or adopting the wrong perspective of the situation. Since Rupi Kaur predominantly refers to the fact and personal experience of female victimization through violence, she now feels in the right position to advocate for harmonious and self-respectful ways to transcend the trauma without further self-harm. Thus, we can see that her ‘*don’t*’ technique is an instruction against self-delusion and misinterpretation in the relationship with a man, who might often turn out later as dominant, treacherous, or indecently intended. The two poems below illustrate the point that a self-centered and self-aware woman should be able to tell the difference between right and wrong and have the courage to step away from toxicity or dependence in the relationship:

‘don’t mistake
salt for sugar
if he wants to
be with you
he will
it’s that simple’²⁶

‘do not look for healing
at the feet of those
who broke you’²⁷

Sometimes, though, a negative imperative is accompanied by additional negation either in a clause or in a following sentence. Commonly, Rupi Kaur’s poetry is not separated by punctuation; yet, it seems plausible to

²⁵ Kaur R. *milk and honey*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 169.

²⁶ Kaur R. *milk and honey*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 83.

²⁷ Kaur R. *milk and honey*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 152.

determine the boundaries of a single sentence or idea content-wise or logic-wise. That being said, we can see that in the poem below negative imperative '*do not question*' is followed by the sentence whose subordinate clause has an additional '*he was not able to carry it*', thus, creating a double warning and menacing reminder of the male incapability to come to terms with the strength of that woman:

'when you are broken
and he has left you
do not question
whether you were
enough
the problem was
you were so enough
he was not able to carry it'²⁸

Furthermore, in the next poem, the negative imperative '*do not bother*' in the main clause is followed by '*that does not want you*' in a subordinate clause, which also reads like a strong double warning against self-deprecation, self-pity, or self-insufficiency. This single complex sentence has an instructional tone that resembles a private conversation between girl friends, where one cautions another against losing her self-worth. Indeed, plain '*don't*' is enough to realize disapproval and concern that may arise for someone who is engaged in such a relationship. Quite provocatively, in this poem, the author identifies the relationship as '*that thing*', purposefully implying that such a connection can barely be natural or characterizing a living being:

'do not bother holding on to
that thing that does not want you
- *you cannot make it stay*'²⁹

The next type of grammatical feature that imparts the main themes of the "*milk and honey*" collection is the frequent use of **negation**. The latter is widely represented by negative words and contractions. In the poem illustrated below, we can spot two examples of the use of the negative particle 'not': '*love is **not** cruel / we are cruel / love is **not** a game / we have made a game / ...*'. The negation is enacted in full form '*is not*', rather than a contracted one '*isn't*',

²⁸ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 102.

²⁹ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 145.

which could be deduced to grant particular emphasis on the particle itself. This way, it might be read and sound more formal; however, it also seems plausible that it shapes the negative meaning of the antitheses. In the first case, there is a juxtaposition of the cruelty from the standpoint of love versus people, and in the second case, there is a juxtaposition of the intricate game of love versus the mock 'love game' people have created artificially:

'love is not cruel
we are cruel
love is not a game
we have made a game
out of love'³⁰

In the next poetic example, which is graphically and semantically conceived like a prosaic piece, as if a silent self-monologue, we can find five explicit occurrences of the use of 'not' in either full or contracted form: '*as if it is **not** the choices*', '*a heart and a mind that **isn't** yours to use*', '*your actions **do not** define what will become of you*', '***isn't** it such a tragic thing*', '*but the other person **doesn't***'. These definite uses of negation bring us to a certain judgment. Unfortunately, the author has to deal with a great number of life circumstances that come as opposites or antitheses to her worldview. Intrinsically, she feels empowered to contradict or not acknowledge some things, but, in the outer world, she remains wordless and actionless. Most of these ideas are connected to her boyfriend; eventually, he becomes the target of her negation and negative energy. Another mechanism of negation is implemented through the use of linkers that bear a connotation of opposition or contrast. In this piece, we can see them in '***but instead** i sit quietly*' and '*when you can see it so clearly **but** the other person **doesn't***'. The use of 'but' clearly points to the drastic change of sense, while 'instead' in its semantics suggests an alternative or substitute, which, in this case, is diametrically opposite: while she wants to scream and shout, she chooses to sit quietly. Thus, the use of negation by Rupi Kaur is verbalized not only grammatically, but also semantically:

'you said. if it is meant to be. fate will bring us back together. for a second i wonder if you are really that naive. if you really believe fate works like that. as if it lives in the sky staring down at us. as if it has five fingers and spends its time placing us like pieces of chess. as if it is not the choices we make. who taught you that. tell me. who convinced you. you've been given a heart and

³⁰ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 126.

a mind that isn't yours to use. that your actions do not define what will become of you. i want to scream and shout *it's us you fool. we're the only ones that can bring us back together.* but instead i sit quietly. smiling softly through quivering lips thinking. isn't it such a tragic thing. when you can see it so clearly but the other person doesn't'³¹.

In the poem listed below, four instances of negation are spotted, all of which are repetitions of the phrase '*i don't*'. The poem clearly demonstrates the repetitive structure of a few complex sentences, commencing with the negation '*i don't*' and following with the subordinate clause with '*when*'. In three cases, the stylistic effect of gradation seems quite palpable: '*i don't cry i pour*', meaning that her sadness is expressed in a much more intensified form than just crying; '*i don't smile i glow*', meaning that her happiness goes far beyond simple smiles and eliminates from within; and '*i don't yell i burn*', meaning that anger she experiences is so strong that it becomes vehement and violent and is fiery association-wise:

'i don't know what living a balanced life feels like
when i am sad
i don't cry i pour
when i am happy
i don't smile i glow
when i am angry
i don't yell i burn'³²

Last but not least, we can see that negation is also manifested through the use of negative prefixes. In the poem below, for example, we can identify the use of '*neither*' in the same phrasing twice: '*neither of us is happy / but neither of us wants to leave*'. In this context, negation refers to the desired actions of both characters, meaning that they do accede to the pessimistic footing of their relationship. These examples are compelling in terms of the variety of forms of negation used in Rupi Kaur's poetry. Not only does she grammatically engage the negative particle, but also lexically and semantically includes relevant words and morphologically utilizes negative prefixes:

'neither of us is happy
but neither of us wants to leave

³¹ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 83

³² Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 108.

so we keep breaking one another
and calling it love'³³

One more grammatical structure that is frequently occurring in Rupī Kaur's poetry is **conditionals**, i.e., sentences that express probable or hypothetical situations in the past, present, or future, and predict their possible results or outcomes. In a number of poems, we can observe the use of *First Conditional*, or *Conditional Sentences Type 1*, which generally refer to real present situations and their possible outcomes in the future. In "*milk and honey*", a free verse poem with a conditional structure, as a rule, expresses a single idea contained within a complex sentence. The syntactic form of a conditional sentence presupposes that there is a clause with a condition and a result. Thus, in the two poems listed below, we can behold exactly this status quo. Using Conditional Sentences Type 1, Rupī Kaur expresses hopeful expectations in the first poem and shares valuable insights from personal life experience in the second. The literary intention behind this grammatical layout might be aimed at emotional support, or empathy, for those going through the dark times, as well as anchoring anxiety, uncertainty, and hopelessness for anybody recovering from traumatic or unhealthy relationships:

'if the hurt comes
so will the happiness
- be patient'³⁴

'if you are not enough for yourself
you will never be enough
for someone else'³⁵

In the next poem, we can find the use of a mixed conditional sentence: '*if I knew ..., I would have spent ...*'. The grammatical analysis shows that the conditional clause is of Conditional Type 2, featuring the verb '*know*' in the simple past, while the main clause is of Conditional Type 3, featuring the modal verb '*would*' followed by a perfect infinitive. Thus, Rupī Kaur refers to the idea that, with her present state of mind, she would have recognized the malice that her ex-boyfriend, or a number of them, used to possess. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the use of conditional clauses mirrors the lasting feeling of anxiety, which enables a person to think ahead of various hypothetical scenarios

³³ Kaur R. *milk and honey*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 127.

³⁴ Kaur R. *milk and honey*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 178.

³⁵ Kaur R. *milk and honey*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 194.

of events, in either the past or the future, that may have happened the other way or will not happen at all. In this context, we can sense a remorseful tone of personal ignorance about the dangerous type of men that a girl may encounter; the knowledge that the heroine had not had at the moment of their meeting, but now has, and predicts another sequence of bygone actions:

‘if i knew what
safety looked like
i would have spent
less time falling into
arms that were not’³⁶

In the next poem, we can spot two instances of using the conditional clauses, i.e., “*if / he can’t help but / degrade other women...*” and “*if toxicity is central / to his language*”. In this context, if-clauses convey the message of caution; in the end, according to the heroine, that kind of man would pretend to have a queen-like attitude towards a girl, but it will still be a deceitful masquerade. Thus, using if-clauses, the heroine gives two heedful clues and warns against undiscerning toxic signals:

‘if
he can’t help but
degrade other women
when they’re not looking
if toxicity is central
to his language
he could hold you
in his lap and be soft
honey
that man could feed you sugar and
douse you in rose water
but that still could not
make him sweet’
- *if you want to know the type of man he is*³⁷

Last but not least, Rupi Kaur also applies the structure of *Zero Conditional*, which normally refers to common or average situations and their outcomes;

³⁶ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 20.

³⁷ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 98.

general truths; rules, laws, regulations, and tendencies. In a single syntactic structure of a sentence, the author gives a definition of rape, where the if-clause pinpoints the use of four negative particles ‘not’ (‘*not doing anything*’, ‘*not ready*’, ‘*not in the mood*’, ‘*don’t want to*’), and the main clause (‘*it’s not love*’) features the antithesis-like transition to a more severe concept (‘*it is rape*’). Thus, stating a list of conditions on which the act of intimacy stands in opposition to what can be called love, the heroine deliberately makes a conceptual clash of making love and raping, making it clear that the latter happens on a physical level, disdainfully ignoring the other person’s will:

‘sex takes the consent of two
 if one person is lying there not doing anything
 cause they are not ready
 or not in the mood
 or simply don’t want to
 yet the other is having sex
 with their body it’s not love
 it is rape’³⁸

Just as importantly, the grammatical structure I would like to call special attention to is **Passive voice** in Rupi Kaur’s poetry. The quantitative analysis has identified a few instances of Passive Voice, but its use is instrumental in correlation with the themes of trauma and abuse. Since Passive Voice implies that the action is attributed to, or rather, received by the agent, it is used in poetic pieces in “*milk and honey*” to reflect that an abusive or violent act is always inflicted upon a victim and done without their consent. In the poem below, we can see two instances of passive voice: ‘*our knees / **pried open** / **by cousins** ...*’ and ‘*our bodies **touched** / **by all the wrong people** ...*’. These examples concisely illustrate the point of sexual abuse, i.e., the intimacies are done unwillingly and forcefully in relation to a female, and oftentimes they are performed by male counterparts whom the woman does not crave. Linguistically, the author compresses the passive structure and omits the ‘*be*’ auxiliary in both examples. Presumably, such a grammatical ‘play’ prompts that sexual violence can often be confused with sexual intimacy for an aggressor, meaning that this person does not bear interest in the feelings of a partner; while for a victim, it is always felt as something commanded or forced upon:

³⁸ Kaur R. *milk and honey*. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 21.

'our knees
pried open
by cousins
and uncles
and men
our bodies touched
by all the wrong people
that even in a bed full of safety
we are afraid'³⁹

Another example of passive voice is illustrated in the next poem. In this context, the inferior position of a young girl is projected from the perspective of familial upbringing, where the voice of any female is silenced, regarded as unimportant, or viewed as the one to serve male superiority. The author points out that, as a girl, *'you / have been / taught your legs / are a pit stop for men / that need a place to rest / a vacant body empty enough / for guests...'*. Indeed, this kind of awareness gives the feeling of being morally undervalued, belittled, and minimized; and such knowledge is frequently bestowed upon girls by authoritative fathers or male relatives and powerless mothers who live in constant fear of abuse. As passive recipients, small girls pick it up and, later on, have to deal with the harsh consequences of this trauma:

'you
have been
taught your legs
are a pit stop for men
that need a place to rest
a vacant body empty enough
for guests but no one
ever comes and is
willing to
stay'⁴⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The influence of Instapoets on contemporary literary art has gone far beyond initial expectations and assumptions. At first glance, oversimplistic, rhyme- and punctuation-free verse has been regarded as the upcoming imperilment of poor

³⁹ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 35.

⁴⁰ Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. P. 12.

literacy that is overtaking social media and being proliferated among younger generations of poets and writers. Nevertheless, a closer and deeper reading between the lines of this poetry has made it crystal clear that young artists, who have grown up as digital natives, have found a fresh and ingenious way with language to express themselves and their diverse experiences. Rupi Kaur, as a representative, but definitely not a single one, has succeeded in conveying complex, uneasy, and weighty themes of trauma and healing that reach out and tug at the hearts of a lot of girls and women worldwide.

The given research confirms that grammar plays a determinative function in constructing the affective and intellectual richness of Rupi Kaur's poetry. By systematically applying direct speech, imperatives, negation, conditionals, and passive voice, "*milk and honey*" constructs intimate experiences of trauma into shared stories of resilience and healing. The grammatical innocence of Kaur's poetry conceals a complex play of processes of meaning-making: direct speech creates immediacy and confession; imperatives provide therapeutic guidance; negation generates self-consciousness and resistance; conditionals create emotional expectation; and passive constructions reconstruct the victim's perspective on violence and social injustice. They illustrate the manner in which linguistic form can realize psychological state, facilitate thematic coherence, and invite active reader participation.

As well as that, the study indicates that the web environment of Instapoetry amplifies the effects of such grammatical strategies by generating interactivity, recurrence, and multimodal flow within social networks. Grammar is, therefore, no longer a technical detail but an artistic force linking personal testimony and collective experience, enabling readers to access difficult questions of gender, trauma, and empowerment through accessible and rich language.

Subsequent research might expand to consider the linguistic strategies employed by other Instapoets and follow cross-cultural differences, as well as investigate the impact of algorithmic visibility on the development of poetic grammar in online media. These studies would further our knowledge of how modern poetry continues to reinvent itself at the confluence of technology, language, and human feeling.

SUMMARY

The article analyzes the evolution of poetry during the times of digital media, focusing on the advent of Instagram poetry (Instapoetry) and its linguistic stylistics. It situates Instapoetry against the backdrop of electronic literature, where algorithmic creativity and digital dissemination reshape the poetic-making and reading process. Poets may gain visibility through online platforms like Instagram, but need to do so at the same time that they comply

with algorithmic demands while ensuring authenticity. Rupī Kaur's "*milk and honey*" is an excellent example of the above process in sparse vocabulary, emotive appeal, and visual beauty. Her poetry speaks of trauma, healing, love, and women's empowerment and invites participatory engagement by the audience. The study shows how Rupī Kaur's grammar – direct speech, imperatives, negation, conditionals, and passive voice – is a tool for meaning construction. These grammatical structures provide psychological depth and closeness, and guide readers to self-reflection and healing. The reading demonstrates that Rupī Kaur's manner fuses plainspoken emotional frankness with subtle linguistic strategies. In subverting convention in poetry, Instapoetry makes literary production democratic and expands on genre in ways that challenge traditional rules of form. Lastly, the article argues that grammar in online poetry is not solely structural but an active agency in constructing meaning and eliciting reader interaction.

Bibliography

1. Пожарицька О. Генеративний вірш та поезія-переробка як жанри дигітальної поезії. *Актуальні питання гуманітарних наук. Мовознавство. Літературознавство*. 2021. Вип 35, том 4. С. 145-154. DOI <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/35-4-21>.
2. Пожарицька О. О. Поезія-код: розтлумач мене, якщо зможеш. *Вчені записки ТНУ імені В. І. Вернадського. Серія: Філологія. Журналістика*. 2021. Том 32 (71), № 1 Ч. 2. С. 178-181. DOI <https://doi.org/10.32838/2710-4656/2021.1-2/31>.
3. Янковець О., Янковець, А., Кустовська І. Сучасна американська поезія як відображення найактуальніших тем 21-го століття крізь призму діджиталізації. *Вісник науки та освіти (Серія «Філологія»)*. 2024. № 2 (20). С. 491-501. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-6165-2024-2\(20\)-491-501](https://doi.org/10.52058/2786-6165-2024-2(20)-491-501).
4. Ankolika De and Zhicong Lu. 2024. #PoetsOfInstagram: Navigating The Practices And Challenges Of Novice Poets On Instagram. *In Proceedings of the 2024 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '24)*, May 11–16, 2024, Hawai'i, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 16 p. DOI: [arXiv:2402.19347](https://arxiv.org/abs/2402.19347).
5. Aspany N. F., Murni S. N. L. Insta-Poetry as a Popular Product: A Case Study on Rupī Kaur Milk & Honey. *Poetika*. 2024. Vol. 12, No. 1. P. 10-20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v12i1.96334>.
6. Berens K. I. E-Lit's #1 Hit: Is Instagram Poetry E-literature? Reading #Instapoetry: A Poetics of Instagram [edited by James Mackay and JuEunhae Knox]. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. P. 15-28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798765105511.ch-1>.

7. Gill M. M., Bhatti Sh. A. Rupī Kaur – Unapologetic Insta-poet. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*. 2024. Vol. 27. No 1. P. 79-90.
8. Grubnic T. Nosthetics: Instagram poetry and the convergence of digital media and literature. *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture*. 2020. Vol. 9. Nr. 2. P. 145-163. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/ajpc_00024_1.
9. Halliday M. A. K., Matthiessen C. M. I. M. Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar. 4th edition. London; New York: Routledge, 2014. 786 p.
10. Jeenen, N. The Posthuman Poetics of Instagram Poetry. Proceedings of EVA Copenhagen, 2018. 7 p. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14236/ewic/EVAC18.1>.
11. Kaur R. milk and honey. Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2015. 208 p.
12. Lovelock M. "Healing Is Everyday Work": Instapoetry, Intimate Publics, and the Language of Self-Help. Reading #Instapoetry: A Poetics of Instagram [edited by James Mackay and JuEunhae Knox]. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. P. 129-144. DOI: 10.5040/9798765105511.ch-9.
13. Manning M. Crafting Authenticity: Reality, Storytelling, and Female Self-Representation through Instapoetry. Storytelling, Self, Society. 2020. Vol. 16, No. 2. P. 263-279. DOI: 10.13110/storselfsoci.16.2.0263.
14. Rettberg S. Electronic Literature. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019. 240 p.
15. Rettberg S., Rettberg J. W. Algorithmic narrativity: Literary experiments that drive technology. Dialogues on Digital Society. 2025. Vol. 1, Issue 1. P. 37-40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/29768640241255848>.
16. Soelseth C. H. Instapoetry as a post-digital phenomenon: The infrastructural effects of platformization on contemporary pop poetry. Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor in Library and Information Science Faculty of Social Sciences. OsloMet: Oslo Metropolitan University Norway, 2025. 217 p.
17. Soelseth C. H. The media ecologies of Norwegian instapoet Trygve Skaug: tracing the post-digital circulation process of (insta) poetry through participatory-made Instagram archives. *European Journal of English Studies*. 2023. Vol. 27 (1). P. 33-59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13825577.2023.2200423>.
18. Soelseth, C. H. When is a Poet an Instapoet? The effect of platformization on the practice of being a poet, and instapoets as examples of poetry content creators in the Social Media Entertainment ecosystem. *Baltic Screen Media Review*. 2022. Vol. 10 (1). P. 96-120. DOI: 10.2478/bsmr-2022-0008.
19. Soelseth C., Ravizza E. Missed Possibilities from Unobtainable Data: The Case of Instapoetry and a Wish to Go beyond Rupī Kaur. Reading #Instapoetry: A Poetics of Instagram [Mackay James, JuEunhae Knox, ed.]. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. Bloomsbury Collections P. 53-69. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9798765105511.ch-3>.

19. Wiadji L. V., Hanidar S. Linguistic Stylistic Analysis of *Instagram* Poems by Rupī Kaur, Dhiman, and R. M. Drake. *Lexicon*. 2020. Vol. 7, Nr. 1. P. 55-61. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v7i1.64576>.

Information about the author:

Holovashchenko Yuliia Serhiivna,

Candidate of Philological Sciences,

Assistant Professor at the Department of Linguistics and Translation,

Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University

5 Sadova str., Chernivtsi, 58002, Ukraine