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PARADOXES AT LEXICAL, SYNTACTIC, AND TEXTUAL LEVELS

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ABSTRACT

The presented article aims to study the problem of contradictory concepts, ideas by discussing oxymoron and antithesis, to give an outline of these very important and frequently used stylistic devices, their peculiarities and classification; also, to identify those new classes which were revealed after meticulously studying the material under investigation. Exactly these classes are the novelty that is suggested in the given article. Besides, the article studies contradictory themes developed in the text what we call a textual paradox.

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Introduction. The aim of an author while using any kind of paradox is to convince and inspire readers/listeners as well as to evoke emotional feelings in them. It is noteworthy that each word, phrase, or idea should be as important as its counterpart. In the presented article, paradoxes are based on stylistic devices. It is a well-known fact that lexical stylistic devices are more impressive and emotional than syntactic ones, though the latter is rather informative.

The offered article deals with very interesting lexical and syntactic stylistic devices – oxymoron and antithesis that serve the same purpose, particularly to show a writer's/speaker's opposite feelings and attitude towards this or that phenomenon. Besides, the article studies contradictory themes developed in the text what we call a textual antithesis.

Let us discuss each of them separately and find similarities and differences between them.

Oxymoron. The lexical stylistic device − oxymoron is a seemingly absurd expression, a figurative combination and witty juxtaposition of conflicting concepts, a combination of words with opposite meanings. It is based on the combination of incongruous, mutually exclusive concepts, moving a contrasting sign, thus creating a new concept. "Oxymorons may be used for achieving rhetorical effects. They may remain unnoticed when the meanings of the contradictory parts are not distinguished, as in spendthrift, virtual reality, and Artificial Intelligence. Typically, contradictions of this kind are resolved by taking one term as the inferior attribute of a superior concept" [6].

Oxymoron is widely used in everyday speech (*dry wine*, *eloquent silence*, etc.), rhetoric, and fiction. It is noteworthy that when a writer/speaker uses the mentioned stylistic device, he/she minds the presence of all its constituent components. For instance, in the collocation *deafening silence*, which is a classic example of an oxymoron, both elements should be considered. At the first glance, silence cannot be deafening. Though, the phrase describes such silence which is definitely disturbing.

Oxymoron should not be confused with an intensifier which often consists of opposite concepts. For instance, the phrase *a terribly interesting film* does not mean that a film is terrible and interesting at a time. In this case, the modifier *terribly* is reduced to *very* and the whole phrase means *a very interesting film*; the word *terribly* simply intensifies the degree of the modifying word *interesting*.

Thus, there is a great difference between an oxymoron and an intensifier: oxymoron includes the meanings of a modifier and a modifying word, whereas, an intensifier – only the meaning of a modified intensified by a modifying word.

It is interesting to note, that most of the oxymora are not fixed in dictionaries, otherwise saying they do not belong to the etic level. Thus, they are "possession" of the emic level, and even here can be classified according to the frequency of usage. To develop this idea, it can be stated that under this classification oxymora fall into two classes: a) those which are widely known and can be perceived even without a context (e.g. *heavy lightness*) and b) those that are contextual (e.g. *beautiful tyrant*, *melancholy merriment*, etc.).

The next classification is based on the structure of oxymora, i.e. structural classification. According to the structure, oxymora have simple (consisting of only two elements) as well as complex structure (consisting of more than two elements). Based on studying the material on the phenomenon under investigation, the simple structure of this stylistic device can be further classified according to its constituent components. The research revealed that the formula of the great majority of oxymora having a simple structure is as follows: **adj+n**, e.g. *serious vanity, sick health, fearful bravery, painful pleasure, sweet sorrow, proud humility, expressive silence*, and others. In minor cases we also came across other formulas: **adv+adj** (e.g. *falsely true, conventionally unconventional*) and **adv+v** (e.g. *hopelessly hoped*).

Formulas of oxymora having the complex structure are various: **n+prep+n** (e.g. *feather of lead*), **n+prep+pron** (e.g. *anything of nothing*), **n+that+v** (e.g. *joy that kills*), **adj+adj+n** (e.g. *warm, scalding coolness*), **n+v+prep+n** (e.g. *honour rooted in dishonour*), **compound adj+n** (e.g. *still-waking sleep*).

The study of the material under investigation revealed different interesting cases which require special analysis.

1. The examples when an oxymoron at the same time appears to be another stylistic device.

> *No light, but rather **darkness visible***
> *Served only to discover sights of woe.*
>
> (J. Milton, Paradise Lost)

As we see, the formula of an oxymoron is **n+adj**, though, in reality, it should be **adj+n** (*visible darkness*); but the author used the stylistic inversion to emphasize the fact of absolute darkness, though sights of woe were still visible. In this case, the meanings of both words are realized simultaneously. We consider that the stylistic inversion makes oxymoron even stronger.

The same can be said about the example found in Shakespeare's tragedy "Romeo and Juliet" when Juliet learns that her beloved Romeo killed her cousin Tybalt.

> *O serpent heart hid with a flowering face!*
> *Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?*
> ***Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!***
>
> (W. Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet)

Though being the enemy of the Capulets, Romeo is an angel for Juliet. Thus, the author, with the help of oxymoron, shows the reality of the existing enmity and Juliet's feelings toward Romeo. In addition, the writer uses the mentioned stylistic device also as a stylistic inversion to emphasize the fact that Romeo was an angel for Juliet.

This stanza contains another example of an oxymoron *beautiful tyrant*. Though this example is not a stylistic inversion or any other stylistic device at the same time, we still decided to discuss it in the given section as it also shows Juliet's attitude towards Romeo; namely because of this, it can be considered as an oxymoron. If we understand the word *beautiful* as a person's visual beauty, the phrase, certainly, cannot be an oxymoron, but based on the context, we know that Juliet means Romeo's spiritual beauty that is definitely opposite of tyrant. This case can be considered only as a contextual oxymoron.

Let us discuss a stanza of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Lancelot and Elaine" where we come across two oxymora.

> *And peradventure had he seen her first*
> *She might have made this and that other world*
> *Another world for the sick man; but now*
> *The shackles of an old love straitened him,*
> *His **honour rooted in dishonour** stood,*
> *And **faith unfaithful** kept him falsely true.*
>   (Alfred Lord Tennyson "Lancelot and Elaine")

Both cases of oxymoron serve the same purpose – to describe Lancelot's temptation as he hesitates whether or not to remain true to his love for Guinevere, as he is tempted by another woman. The phrase *faith unfaithful* refers to the fact that Lancelot cannot decide to be faithful or not and the phrase *honour rooted in dishonour* – to the fact that Guinevere is really King Arthur's wife and his love is already less than honourable.

Both examples at the same time are another stylistic device, particularly root repetition – the case when not the same words are repeated but the same root. They are different words having different meanings (*faith* – noun and *unfaithful* - adjective; *honour*- noun and *dishonour* – noun with the negative prefix *-dis*), but the shades of meaning are perfectly clear. Using the oxymora as root repetitions, the author wants to emphasize the feelings he considers to be significant. In this stanza, special attention should be paid to the second case of the oxymoron which besides being a root repetition is also a stylistic inversion.

As we see, three stylistic devices are united in the phrase *faith unfaithful* – an oxymoron, a stylistic inversion, and a root repetition.

There are some more cases when an oxymoron and a root repetition are found in the same phrase.

> *Mr. Ferraro drove slowly back towards the City. This was the first time he had checked on Miss Saunders – Three prizes for piety had won his trust. Now on his homeward way he remembered that Hitler had been educated by the Jesuits, and yet **hopelessly he hoped**.*
>   (Graham Green "Special Duties")

This is a very good example of the combination of an adverb and an adjective split with a pronoun (*hopelessly he hoped*). With the mentioned oxymoron the author wants to inform a reader that the hero hoped in vain. In addition to the oxymoron and the root repetition, the phrase is also an alliteration.

2. While studying different cases of an oxymoron, we came across an example when an oxymoron is found within an idiom.

> ***Damn with faint praise**, assent with civil leer,*
> *And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;*
> *Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,*
> *Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike.*
>   (Alexander Pope "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot")

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the idiom *damn with faint praise* means "to praise someone so slightly that it suggests you do not really admire them". The explicit phrasing of the modern English idiomatic expression used by Alexander Pope in the poem, "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" can also be considered as an oxymoron as it contains opposite words *damn* and *praise* which are both realized simultaneously and with which the author wants to show insincere praise and at the same time elusive criticism.

3. Now we would like to say a few words about the case when an oxymoron is based on the symbolic meanings of its components.

> *O serpent heart hid with a flowering face!*
> *Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?*
> *Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!*
> ***Dove-feathered raven, wolvish-ravening lamb!***
>   (W. Shakespeare "Romeo and Juliet")

a) *Dove-feathered raven* – At the first glance, dove and raven both are birds and nobody considers them as antonyms. But in the context, their semantic and symbolic meanings make them an oxymoron. Dove – a symbol of peace, raven – a symbol of ill-fortune, rage. Their colours can also be taken into account while considering the phrase as an oxymoron.

b) *Wolvish-ravening lamb* – Similarly, wolf and lamb both are animals and cannot be considered as antonyms. But in the context, their semantic and symbolic meanings make them an oxymoron. Wolf – a symbol of something evil, lamb – a symbol of gentleness, innocence, and purity. *Wolvish lamb* would also be an oxymoron, but the author uses the word *ravening* to make the phrase even stronger.

Both examples, like those discussed above (*Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical*!), emphasize Juliet's attitude towards Romeo at the moment when he kills Tybalt. They are only contextual oxymora.

4. In this part, we would like to discuss a very interesting case, particularly, when a stanza consisting of 6 lines contains 10 oxymora. We call such a stanza "a stanza of oxymora".

> *Why then, **O brawling love**, **O loving hate**,*
> ***O anything of nothing** first created!*
> ***O heavy lightness**, **serious vanity**,*
> *Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!*
> ***Feather of lead**, **bright smoke**, **cold fire**, **sick health**,*
> ***Still-waking sleep**, that is not what it is!*
> *This love feel I, that feel no love in this.*
> (William Shakespeare "Romeo and Juliet")

The use of all oxymora given in the aforementioned stanza serve the same purpose – to vividly show Romeo's emotions. Exactly the contradictory words underline his inner conflict, the gravity of his difficulties. Each oxymoron as a literary tool and figure of speech works effectively in the presented passage.

The oxymora given in this stanza mostly have the same structure, that of classical one; particularly **adj+n**: *loving hate, heavy lightness, serious vanity, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health, still-waking sleep* (the latter is a compound adjective and a noun). Only three examples have different structures or require special discussion.

a) *Brawling love* – it is interesting that the word *brawling*, in reality, is not an adjective at all. *To brawl* – v (to fight in a rough, noisy, uncontrolled way), *brawl* – n (a noisy, rough, uncontrolled fight). Shakespeare formed *the* adjective from the verb contextually and composed an oxymoron in the collocation.

b) *Feather of lead* **–** the structure of the phrase is **n+prep+n**.

c) *Anything of nothing* - the structure of the phrase is **pron+prep+pron**. It is a very rare case when pronouns form an oxymoron contextually.

Thus, the analysis of the material under investigation showed that besides the classical structures (**adj+n, adv+adj**), an oxymoron can have a lot of different structures and various interesting cases of this rather remarkable phenomenon are highlighted. As has already been mentioned, a great majority of collocations forming oxymora are met on the emic level but even here there is a difference between them, particularly, some of them are widely known oxymora, and some of them are coined only in the context, the so-called contextual oxymora.

Antithesis. Antithesis is a syntactic stylistic device which is based on the opposition of objectively contrasting, antonymous pairs. It aims at drawing readers'/listeners' attention and making the choice unforgettable. "Stylistic structures of antithesis arose from the usage of opposite concepts and features to each other with the aim of increasing the manner and level of the word" [10].

Classically, an antithesis should be met in consecutive clauses or sentences, i.e. parallel constructions (full or partial). Thus, to explain the linguistic structure of an antithesis, both the semantic aspect and the structural pattern are of utmost importance. As in the case of an oxymoron, a great majority of antitheses are certainly found on the emic level. Though, a couple of examples are still fixed in dictionaries: *Man proposes, God disposes*; *Speech is silver, but silence is gold*. These phrases are so often used and so widespread, that lexicographers took them from speech to language, and thus they became the possession of the etic level. Among the whole bulk of antitheses, some are

purely contextual, i.e. created in a particular context, and some of them are widely known though, being possessed by the emic level.

The conducted research allowed us to single out different cases of the use of an antithesis.

I. Antithesis based on **antonymous pairs**. Even this group can be divided into four subgroups: a) examples in which we deal with full parallelism, b) examples of absolutely full parallel constructions, c) examples of full parallelism – antithesis + another stylistic device, d) examples constructed with the help of partial parallelism, and e) examples of partial parallelism – antithesis + another stylistic device.

a) **Full parallelism**

Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heav'n.
(John Milton "Paradise Lost")

The author uses the contrasting ideas of *reign/serve* and *Hell/Heav'n* which are antonymous pairs to achieve an antithetical effect. The mentioned sentence is fixed in dictionaries i.e. belongs to the etic level. Meanwhile, the whole phrase appears to be a proverb.

A well-known proverb *easy come, easy go* is also a classical example of antithesis meaning what is achieved easily is easily lost.

*And let my liver rather **heat** with wine than my heart **cool** with mortifying groans.*
(W. Shakespeare "The Merchant of Venice")

The antonymous pairs *heat* and *cool* make the sentence antithetical.

b) **Absolute full parallelism**

By this concept, we mean the construction in which clauses are absolutely identical syntactically.

Man proposes, God disposes.
(Source unknown)

This is a classic example of antithesis, which, as has already been mentioned, belongs to the etic level (are fixed in dictionaries). Antonymous pairs *man – God* and *proposes - disposes* makes antithesis. As we see, we deal with absolute full parallelism – noun + verb (I clause) and noun + verb (II clause).

The same can be said about the following example:

Speech is silver, but silence is gold.
(Source unknown)

Money is the root of all evil: poverty is the fruit of all goodness.
(Source unknown)

The first clause belongs to the etic level and its combination with the second clause makes the whole sentence antithesis, based on three antonymous pairs: *money – poverty; root – fruit; evil – goodness.*

c) **Full parallelism – antithesis + another stylistic device**

When Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon, he said that it was *a small step for man, but a giant leap for mankind*.

It is a case of full parallelism and at the same time contains a lexical stylistic device - hyperbole (*giant step*). Antonymous pairs: small – giant; man – mankind (the latter is a variation of concrete and abstract nouns).

d) **Partial parallelism**

Patience is bitter, but it has a sweet fruit.
(Aristotle)

It is an example of partial parallelism as the second clause, unlike the first one, has an object and its attribute. Antithesis is formed using the antonymous pairs *bitter* and *sweet* what is strengthened by the conjunction *but*.

e) **Partial parallelism – antithesis + another stylistic device**

> *Some say the world will end in **fire**,*
> *Some say in **ice.***
>
> (Robert Frost "Fire and Ice")

This example of antithesis can also be regarded as another stylistic device – zeugma what makes partial parallelism. An antonymous pair *fire – ice* makes the sentence antithetical. Moreover, in the same example, we come across one more stylistic device – an anaphoric repetition *some say*.

II. Antithesis that is not based on antonymous pairs, but certain words become antonyms in the context. Thus, we deal with **contextual antithesis**. This group can also be divided into two subgroups: a) examples of full parallelism containing another stylistic device, b) examples of absolutely full parallel constructions based on a reversal idea.

a) **Full parallelism – antithesis + another stylistic device**

> *We must learn to **live together as brothers** or **perish together as fools***.
>
> (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Though the words *brother* and *fool* cannot be considered as an antonymous pair, in this particular context they become contextual antonyms and consecutive clauses can be regarded as a contextual antithesis. Meanwhile, the sentence also contains another stylistic device, namely zeugma. Thus, the same phrase appears to be the lexical and syntactic stylistic device simultaneously.

b) **Absolute full parallelism based on a reversal idea**

> ***Integrity without knowledge** is weak and useless, and*
> ***knowledge without integrity** is dangerous and dreadful.*
>
> (Samuel Johnson)

Though Samuel Johnson's statement does not contain any single antonymous pair, the whole sentence still consists of antithetical clauses based on the inverse construction of the beginning phrase of each clause (*integrity without knowledge* vs *knowledge without integrity*) what makes the idea reverse. As we deal with the purely contextual antithesis, the words: *weak – dangerous, useless – dreadful* become contextual antonyms.

III. While analyzing the material, we came across a very interesting example of a set of antitheses used in one paragraph. As in the case of an oxymoron (a stanza of oxymora), we call this case "**a paragraph of antitheses**".

*It was **the best of times**, it was **the worst of times**, it was **the age of wisdom**, it was **the age of foolishness**, it was **the epoch of belief**, it was **the epoch of incredulity**, it was **the season of Light**, it was **the season of Darkness**, it was **the spring of hope**, it was **the winter of despair**, we had **everything before us**, we had **nothing before us**, we were **all going direct to Heaven**, we were all **going direct the other way***.

(Charles Dickens "A Tale of Two Cities")

The author uses contrasting ideas, antonymous pairs set in parallel constructions to vividly emphasize the existing conflict described in the novel, thus making the whole paragraph stylistically significant.

Textual antithesis. Under textual antithesis is implied any contrasting idea given in the text. In this case, we do not deal with specific phrases or sentence structures, but with the global ideas, viewpoints which are antithetically developed throughout the whole text. This class also comprises opposite characters of a novel, story, poem, etc.

a) **Characters**. In William Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar*, Marcus Brutus and Mark Antony can be considered as antithetical characters. Marcus Brutus is described as a nobleman who loved Rome and was in friendly relations with Julius Caesar. Unlike him, Mark Antony is characterized as a person having malicious purposes who intended to harm Caesar and take his place. The antithetical characters painted in opposite colours highlight the conflict depicted in the play.

There are a lot of literary texts depicting such opposite characters: Othello vs Iago, Tybalt vs Mercutio, Cain vs Abel, Hans vs Miller, and many others.

b) **Antithetical development of a text**. Alfred Coppard's story "Tribute" comprises both antithetical characters and antithetical development of a text. The author describes the main heroes –

Nathan Regent and Tony Vassal – as absolutely conflicting characters; even their names (Regent and Vassal) are opposite. Their life, as well as death, is utterly contrasting and consequently, the plot is developed in two opposite ways. Exactly such a development of different texts inspired us to coin the term "a textual antithesis".

Similarities and differences between paradoxes at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels. Similarities of all three stylistic devices under investigation (oxymoron, antithesis, textual antithesis) are that they serve the same purpose to highlight contradictory words, phrases, clauses, ideas, themes, characters. All of them depict an author's opposite feelings, attitude, viewpoint towards this or that phenomenon.

The main difference between the concepts under investigation is that they belong to different levels and consequently, their structures are different. An oxymoron unites two opposite words semantic meanings of which are realized simultaneously (*low skyscraper, nice rascal, optimistic tragedy,* etc.). On the other hand, an antithesis displays two contradictory ideas presented in consecutive clauses or sentences (***To be, or not to be***, *that is the question…*). As for a textual antithesis, it involves contrasting ideas, themes antithetically developed throughout the text.

Conclusions. Thus, the research was based on two stylistic devices (oxymoron and antithesis) and the third one – textual antithesis was invented during conducting the study of the material. The analysis revealed different classes of the investigated paradoxes at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels that enabled us to find out their peculiarities as well as similarities and differences between them.

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