Antithesis as a verbal contradiction and its correlation with contrast

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Abstract. The article deals with the problem of antithesis and its interpretation by modern linguists. The history of the study of antithesis as a content category of a text is considered on the works of domestic and foreign linguists. Special attention is drawn to the characteristic features of antithesis in compositional framework of the text and its correlation with contrast. Contrast is observed as semantic and functional basis of a literary text.

Keywords: antithesis, contradiction, opposition, contrast, artistic prose text.

Introduction. Most researchers distinguish contradiction as a basic factor of contrast. Common to all theories of contrast is the claim that it is always based on opposition or contradiction. In general, under opposition we understand the contradiction of thought, association of ideas, which are mutually exclusive or discrepant. Proponents of the contradiction theories D. Akhmanova, G. Andreeva, I. Arnold, N. Arutyunova, M. Bloh, N. Kapinova, O. Martynova, V. Odintsov tend to assert that contrast is predetermined by opposition between form and contents, ideal and real, large and small.

A brief review of publications on the subject. Text as an object of study has attracted the attention of specialists in different fields of knowledge (A. Kamenska, T. Radzieswka, V. Zhevintsev, M. Hventsadze and others). Means of expression language form the fabric of language and play an important role in the communicative and pragmatic organisation of a literary text.

The goal. Problems of contrast in linguistics are closely associated with the implementation of category of opposites in language in general [12], the problem of antonyms [5; 13; 14; 16], stylistic means of antithesis [2; 4; 7] and oxymoron [18] and others. Contrast is a complex cognitive entity that builds on the convergence of various contrastive imaginative means, and as a result of the dynamic and interactions of conceptual units of different levels within the text, which is primarily a phenomenon of antithesis.

Materials and methods. Semantic-syntactic structure of antithesis (from Greek antit ‘against’; thesis ‘statement’) and its stylistic function is based on a sharp contradiction between images and concepts [10]. Another ancient scholars viewed antithesis as an extremely effective oratorical method, which has a strong impact on the listener. Thus, Aristotle regarded antithesis as the major stylistic means of oratorical prose, while Feofrat asserted that antithesis covers processes where “a phenomenon attributed to the properties opposite or reverse phenomenon – the same properties, or the opposite phenomenon – properties opposite” [21, p. 216-236]. These ancient rhetorics considered figures of speech in aesthetic terms as common types of opposition in language.

In particular, in the Middle Ages antithesis was combined with dualism of hierarchical consciousness in opposition pairs: good ↔ evil, light ↔ darkness, heaven ↔ earth [10, p. 428]. In particular, this duality of perception is reflected in the Old English linguistic idioms, or “binomials” [11, p. 74], which are often formed on the basis of a combination of antonymous words and concepts (e.g. Adam and Eve, brothers and sisters, boys and girls, give and take, ins and outs).

In modern theoretical and critical literature antithesis and oxymoron are considered to be a kind of semantic contrast. Y. M. Skrebnev states that antithesis “denotes any active contradiction, emphasized co-occurrence of notions, really or presumably contrasting. The two opposed notions may refer to the same object of thought or different objects” [18, p. 163]. At the current stage of development of linguistics antithesis is actively involved in the artistic discourse, because it meets the requirements of functional prose. As a lexical and syntactic model, it enhances, succinctly represents the message and performs stylistic features, and also it is an integral part of the content information. Antithesis, after P. Dudyk, is described as “a speech expression, opposed opinions, events, behaviour of individuals in order to enhance the impression of speeches – spoken or written” [9, p. 353].

Antithesis is interpreted in the encyclopedia “The New Encyclopedia Britannica”, as “a figure of speech in which irreconcilable opposites or strongly contrasting ideas are placed in sharp juxtaposition and sustained tension” [15, p. 588]. The lexical foundation of the antithesis is antonyms and syntax – parallelism constructions. However, antithesis presented as its basic lexical material, antonymous words. Antonym is “an expression feature opposite pole of words in identical terms” [8, p. 222] and used for expressive, humorous, ironic, evaluation and other purposes.

Antithesis is a typical method of abstract or intellectual style. Ch. Bally, clarifying and deepening this view, believes that “the antithesis in the broadest sense of the word is nothing but a continuation and development of the human mind tendency to contrast notions, antithesis is a compelling example of what style and techniques reflect the natural language language trends”[3, p. 194]. In scientific papers [2; 4; 7] antithesis classification is made by the structural, semantic, stylistic and compositional principles. Researchers consider antithesis as structural and semantic principles of organization of artistic prose text, based on contradiction between various levels of linguistic elements of the text. Taking into consideration the role of different parts of speech in the formation of antithesis, we observe that potentially opposition in antithesis can be expressed by almost any part of speech “a noun (war and peace, truth and wrong) an adjective (good and naughty), a verb (to love - to hate), an adverb (late - early), a numerals (the first - the last), a preposition (under - above)” [2].

The basic structural and semantic characteristics of antithesis as a logical and stylistic means after A. N. Morohovskiy, O. P. Vorobyova, N. I. Lihoshersky are considered to be the following:

1) focusing on emphasizing the contrast, as illustrated in the following example: Mr Burton turned up at the fancy-dress party that Friday night. He was dressed as a sock and I laughed so hard. He drove me home that nights and we sat in silence. After so many years of talking neither of us knew what to say. Outside, my house he leaned over and kissed my lips: hungrily; long and hard. It was like our hellos to one another and a goodbye all at once [1, p. 74].
2) rhythmically organized full or partial parallelism of structures, such as:

Mrs Papagay judged it might be better to end the se-
ance with some perhaps uplifting written messages. It was always surprising how the living, in the presence of the
dead, continued to be pre-occupied with their living con-
cerns, great and trivial. No one but herself had been
much shocked by Sophy’s state. No one had feared for her
[6, p. 285].

3) a combination of stylistic antithesis means
(anaphora, epiphora, chiasm, alliteration, metaphor, par-
adox) shown in the following examples:

All that could be heard was the sound of the camp-fire
crackling and popping as sparks sprang out and spiralled
their way up to the sky. Owls hooted and there was the
distant snap of branches being stepped on by wanderers
beyond. There was a deathly silence around the campfire.
‘Is anyone going to answer the girl?’ Helena looked
around with an amused expression. Nobody spoke [1, p.
51].

4) the use of linguistic and contextual antonyms where
antithesis opposition is carried out by using both speech
and occasional antonyms, antonymous phrases [11, p.
188]. For example:

‘What?’ I scrambled to my feet and towered over him.
<…> ‘Your name isn’t Bobby Stanley?’ ‘No, according to
everybody else here, my name is Bobby Duke,’ he said
defiantly, accusingly, childishly. ‘Bobby Duke, you’re
rubbed my face in frustration. “What?” I repeated. ‘The
guy from the cowboy movies? Why? ’Never mind the
why.’ His face reddened. ‘I think the issue here is that
you are the only one who knows my real name. How?” [1,
p. 305].

‘When they were brought to me, in such perfect condi-
tion, <…> Harald Alabaster looked at the dead, shining
creatures. ‘Morpho Eugenia. Remarkable. A remarkable
creation. How beautiful, how delicately designed, how
wonderful that something so fragile should have come
here, through such dangers, from the other end of the
earth. And very rare. I have never seen one. I have never
heard tell of anyone who has seen one. Morpho Eugenia.
Well’ [6, p. 19].

In modern linguistics antithesis is interpreted as a
symbol of any meaningful content of contrast, although it
has always demonstrated (often through word of antonyms),
while the contrast can be implicitly, intentionally hidden [10, p. 428]. For its part, I. R. Halperin says that antithesis is an exclusively linguistic
technique that has both stylistic and logical bases. It
delineates the concept of contrast and antithesis and
recognizes that structurally and semantically they are
related [8, p. 223].

Antithesis organizes the relationship between the ideas
in the statement (“To err is human. To forgive, divine” →
It is believed that the figures not only enhance efficiency,
expressive speech, but express, primarily semantic
relationship between speech units [19, p. 114] – in this
case – between reviewers with contrasting features [20, p.
188]. Therefore, the focus of antithesis is to create con-
trast (both in macro and microcontent) can be considered
ontological in nature. There are more examples: had been
Sometimes, people can go missing right before our
very eyes. Sometimes, people discover you, even though
they’ve been looking at you the entire time. Sometimes,
we lose sight of ourselves when we’re not paying enough
attention [1, p. 483].

The abovementioned examples show that antithesis is
rhythmically organized in a parallel structure. As N. M.
Razinkina states that parallelism as a constructive element
appears in the texture of any artistic prose text in various
forms, despite the fact that the syntax of prose has a low
degree of regularity [17, p. 52]. It is important to note that
the high degree of subjective emotional evaluation
(author’s own opinions and assessments), where the
combination of parallelism (complete or partial) of the
antithesis promotes high expressiveness of expression and
serves as a means of updating the author’s subjective
modality, is considered to be peculiar for artistic prose
text.

Thus, within macrocontent, antithesis, as a means of
argumentation, contributes to the contrast prose text as we
can find in the novel “A Place Called Here” by Cecilia
Ahern (2006), which from the very beginning is built on
contradictions and contrasts. For example:

On the counter, the creamy head of the Guinness be-
gan to separate from the dark body. It was still foggy but
was becoming clearer. <…> Jack sat up straight, focused
his mind, didn’t lose his head. Thoughts began to rise to
the top and he felt close to something [1, p. 404].

Antithesis can be regarded not only as a structural and
semantic means, but also as a compositional and stylistic
principle of artistic prose text. L. V. Vertayeva believes
that as the main type of speech contradictions in a prose
text are contradictions in grammar, vocabulary and
compositional elements that are consistent levels of a text
“semantization character of different language contradic-
tions depends on the method of forming the opposition
and its relations with the context” [7, p. 170]. In this
regard, various types of contradictions have a greater or
lesser degree of autonomy in the formation of significant
meanings. Grammar contradictions become relevant in
text lexical content from which they receive more specific
semantics. As the researcher states, “lexical semantic
units have stronger potential and higher degree of
independence on the creation of significant meaning,
which is the result of understanding the semantic
content”. The researcher also suggests that the essence of
literary works is better realized with diverse oppositions as
“They give more implications, new connotative
meanings, a clear context, the author’s position is specifi-
cally observed” [7, p. 170-171]. This is particularly
evident while regarding antithesis as a type of contrast.

Results and discussions. In linguistics there is a long
debate about the correlation of contrast and antithesis
Potebnya [1999] N. L. Sokolov [1977]). Antithesis is a type of contrast, the language serves its main source of
lexical material words, antonyms. Antithesis is also con-
sidered to be a stylistic technique, in which a sharp
contrast between the concepts and images creates
contrast. These both notions, contrast and antithesis, as
structural and semantic components are implemented as a
part of one segment in different levels of language
linguistic hierarchy. Taking into account semantic
proximity of antithesis and contrast, some researchers are
trying to separate them for quantitative traits [5], other for
the structural organization [18].

L. O. Matviyevskaya relates antithesis and contrast as a
compositional principle of speech, in which, according to
the researcher, antithesis is a part of contrast [13]. We
absolutely agree with the opinion of L. T. Babakanova
that antithesis and contrast are linked in hyper-hiponemic
relations where the term “antithesis” is used to refer to the
stylistic means, and the term “contrast” is broader in
scope that includes not only linguistics but literature,
logic, philosophy [2].

Conclusion. In terms of value contrast is a complex
semantic category that has the nature of the linguistic
field, that has its centre or semantic dominant, and a kind
of peripherals. In short, the antithesis is a special type of contrast, its main means of expression, in which a sharp contrast between concepts and images can be seen. It's a figure of speech, which is based on a comparison of two opposing phenomena or features inherent usually to different denominations. Antithesis in our study is interpreted to be opposition of contextual and system antonyms, belonging to the same part of speech. In addition, the antithesis is implemented at different levels of the text, most of which are different in structure and in many cases is achieved by symmetry of opposition. So, in a fiction antithesis is rarely used in isolation, its characteristic feature is the ability to combine with other stylistic figures.

**REFERENCES**


**Antithesis as the Foundation of its Correlation with Contrast**

**References**