

STYLISTIC DEVICES IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN LITERARY TEXTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: This article presents a comparative study of stylistic devices in English and Russian literary texts, focusing on their structural, semantic, and functional characteristics. The research aims to identify the most frequently used stylistic devices, such as metaphor, simile, irony, and syntactical patterns, and to analyze their role in creating artistic meaning and emotional impact. Using a qualitative comparative methodology, the study examines selected literary works from both traditions through stylistic and discourse analysis. The findings reveal that while both languages employ similar stylistic devices, their usage differs in terms of expressiveness, structural flexibility, and cultural specificity. English literary style is characterized by conciseness and subtlety, whereas Russian literary texts demonstrate greater emotional intensity and syntactic variability.

Keywords: stylistic devices, comparative analysis, English literature, Russian literature, metaphor.

Introduction

The study of stylistic devices occupies a central place in modern linguistics and literary analysis, as it reveals how language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful artistic tool. In literary texts, stylistic devices such as metaphor, simile, irony, alliteration, and hyperbole contribute to the creation of imagery, emotional expression, and aesthetic impact. The comparative investigation of these devices across different languages provides deeper insights into both universal and culture-specific features of literary expression.

English and Russian literary traditions represent two rich and influential systems with distinct historical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. While English literature is characterized by its tendency toward conciseness, clarity, and subtle stylistic nuance, Russian literature is often noted for its эмоциональная насыщенность (emotional intensity), philosophical depth, and elaborate expressive means. These differences are reflected in the use and function of stylistic devices, making a comparative analysis particularly relevant for understanding how meaning and artistic effect are constructed in each language. In recent years, the growing interest in intercultural communication and translation studies has further emphasized the importance of stylistic analysis. Translators and linguists face significant challenges when attempting to preserve stylistic effects across languages, as many devices are deeply rooted in cultural and linguistic contexts. Therefore, a systematic comparison of stylistic devices in English and Russian literary texts can contribute to more effective translation strategies and a better understanding of cross-cultural literary interpretation.

Literature Review

The investigation of stylistic devices has long been a central topic in both English and Russian linguistic traditions, providing a theoretical basis for comparative literary studies. Geoffrey Leech defines stylistic devices as deliberate deviations from neutral language that serve expressive, aesthetic, and communicative functions in literary discourse¹⁷. His approach highlights how linguistic choices contribute to foregrounding and intensifying meaning in texts. In a similar vein, Roman Jakobson introduces the concept of the poetic function of language, arguing that in literary texts the focus shifts to the form of the message itself, where stylistic devices play a crucial role in shaping artistic effect¹⁸. Within the Russian linguistic tradition, Viktor Vinogradov emphasizes the relationship between stylistic devices and the author's individual style, noting that expressive means are deeply rooted in cultural and historical contexts¹⁹. This perspective underlines the importance of национальная специфика (national specificity) in stylistic usage. Additionally, I. R. Galperin offers a systematic classification of stylistic devices into phonetic, lexical, and syntactical levels, which remains one of the most widely used frameworks in stylistic analysis²⁰. His classification is particularly valuable for comparative studies, as it allows for structured cross-linguistic examination.

Modern stylistics has expanded beyond traditional approaches by incorporating discourse and cognitive perspectives. Peter Verdonk views stylistics as an interdisciplinary field that connects linguistic analysis with literary interpretation, focusing on how readers construct meaning through stylistic features in context²¹. This approach is especially relevant for comparative research, as it takes into account pragmatic and cultural factors influencing interpretation. Recent studies also highlight the challenges associated with translating stylistic devices between languages. Scholars point out that elements such as metaphor, wordplay, and sound patterns are often language-specific and difficult to reproduce without loss of meaning or effect²². This reinforces the importance of comparative stylistic analysis for both theoretical understanding and practical applications in translation studies.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to analyze stylistic devices in English and Russian literary texts. Selected works are examined using stylistic and discourse analysis, focusing on phonetic, lexical, and syntactical features. A contrastive method is applied to identify similarities and differences, while contextual analysis helps reveal their functional and expressive roles in each language.

Results And Discussion

The comparative analysis of English and Russian literary texts demonstrates that stylistic devices function as essential mechanisms for meaning construction, emotional expression, and aesthetic impact in both linguistic traditions. However, their

¹⁷ Baker, M. (2011). *In other words: A coursebook on translation* (2nd ed.). Routledge

¹⁸ Galperin, I. R. (1977). *Stylistics*. Higher School Publishing House

¹⁹ Jakobson, R. (1960). *Linguistics and poetics*. In T. A. Sebeok (Ed.), *Style in language* (pp. 350–377). MIT Press

²⁰ Leech, G. (2008). *Language in literature: Style and foregrounding*. Pearson Longman

²¹ Verdonk, P. (2002). *Stylistics*. Oxford University Press

²² Vinogradov, V. V. (1971). *Stylistics. Theory of poetic speech*. Nauka

distribution, structural realization, and communicative functions differ significantly due to typological, cultural, and literary factors. First, the analysis reveals that metaphor is one of the most dominant stylistic devices in both English and Russian texts. In English literature, metaphors tend to be more implicit and cognitively oriented. For example, expressions such as “Time is a thief” or “He drowned in responsibilities” illustrate how metaphor is used to conceptualize abstract ideas in a concise and accessible way. This supports Geoffrey Leech’s notion that stylistic devices operate through foregrounding, where deviation from literal meaning enhances interpretative depth²³. In contrast, Russian literary texts frequently employ extended and explicit metaphors, often combined with emotional and philosophical overtones. For instance, in Russian prose one may encounter metaphorical constructions that describe nature and human emotions in a highly elaborate manner, such as depicting the soul as a “storm-torn sea” or life as a “long, winding road filled with shadows and light”. These examples reflect a tendency toward semantic expansion and emotional intensification.

Secondly, simile as a stylistic device shows both similarities and differences across the two languages. English similes are typically concise and rely on clear comparative markers such as “like” and “as” (e.g., “as cold as ice,” “like a broken mirror”). These constructions contribute to clarity and immediacy of imagery. In Russian, however, similes often carry a stronger эмоциональная окраска (emotional coloring) and may include culturally specific references, which enhances their expressive power. This observation aligns with Viktor Vinogradov’s view that stylistic devices are closely linked to national literary traditions and authorial individuality²⁴. Phonetic stylistic devices, such as alliteration and assonance, are more systematically utilized in English poetry, where sound patterns contribute to rhythm and musicality. For example, phrases like “the whispering wind wandered westward” demonstrate how repetition of consonant sounds creates a cohesive auditory effect. While similar devices exist in Russian, their usage is often less regular and more context-dependent, as Russian literary style tends to prioritize syntactic and semantic complexity over strict phonetic patterning.

Furthermore, syntactical stylistic devices reveal notable cross-linguistic differences. English literary texts often favor relatively fixed word order (Subject–Verb–Object), which limits the use of inversion but enhances clarity and logical progression. Nevertheless, devices such as parallelism (“She came, she saw, she conquered”) and repetition are widely used to create emphasis and rhetorical effect. In contrast, Russian syntax is more flexible, allowing for frequent use of inversion, ellipsis, and extended sentence structures. This flexibility enables authors to manipulate word order for expressive purposes, emphasizing particular elements of the sentence and creating a more dynamic narrative flow. Such findings are consistent with I. R. Galperin’s classification, which highlights the importance of syntactical devices in shaping stylistic variation²⁵.

²³ Leech, G. (2008). *Language in literature: Style and foregrounding*. Pearson Longman

²⁴ Vinogradov, V. V. (1971). *Stylistics: Theory of poetic speech*. Nauka

²⁵ Galperin, I. R. (1977). *Stylistics*. Higher School Publishing House

Another important result concerns the role of irony and figurative ambiguity. In English texts, irony is often subtle and context-dependent, requiring inferential interpretation by the reader. For instance, a statement like “What a pleasant day!” used in a negative situation conveys ironic meaning through contextual contrast. In Russian literature, irony can be more explicit and sometimes intertwined with satire, reflecting broader socio-cultural commentary. This difference indicates that pragmatic and cultural factors play a significant role in stylistic interpretation.

The study also highlights the challenges associated with translating stylistic devices. Devices such as wordplay, pun, and sound-based expressions are often untranslatable or require significant adaptation. For example, English alliteration or rhyme may lose its effect when rendered into Russian due to phonological differences. Similarly, culturally bound metaphors may not have direct equivalents. This observation supports Mona Baker’s argument that achieving stylistic equivalence in translation is constrained by linguistic and cultural disparities²⁶. As a result, translators must employ strategies such as substitution, paraphrasing, or compensation to preserve the overall stylistic effect. Moreover, the findings confirm Roman Jakobson’s theory of the poetic function, according to which stylistic devices draw attention to the form of the message and enhance its communicative value²⁷. In both English and Russian texts, stylistic devices are not merely decorative but serve as integral components of meaning construction, guiding reader interpretation and shaping the aesthetic experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that while English and Russian literary texts share a common set of stylistic devices, their usage is influenced by language structure, cultural traditions, and literary conventions. English stylistics tends toward economy, precision, and subtlety, whereas Russian stylistics emphasizes expressiveness, emotional depth, and structural flexibility. These differences highlight the importance of comparative stylistic analysis for understanding cross-linguistic literary phenomena and improving translation practices.

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