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Chiasmus in Context: A Cross-Linguistic Study of a Rhetorical Figure in Russian and French Literature

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the stylistic figure of chiasmus from a systemic perspective, viewing it as part of a microsystem of rhetorical figures based on syntactic parallelism and inversion. While traditional approaches have largely examined such figures in isolation and focused on their structural or grammatical features, this research emphasizes their stylistic and functional coherence within literary discourse. The study adopts a qualitative and comparative linguistic method, analyzing examples from Russian and French literary texts. These languages were chosen for their shared inflectional morphology but differing grammatical structures – Russian being primarily synthetic with flexible word order, and French analytical with fixed syntax. This contrast enables a typological comparison of chiasmatic constructions. The analysis involved three stages: structural classification of chiasms, examination of their rhetorical and pragmatic functions, and cross-linguistic comparison. Results reveal both universal tendencies and language-specific patterns in the structure and use of chiasmus. Russian chiasmi often appear more condensed and stylistically dense, frequently occurring at the phrase or word level. In contrast, French, with its fixed word order and more rigid syntactic rules, tends

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to favor chiasmus formations that are more regular, balanced, and extended across clause-level structures. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of chiasmus not only as a stylistic device but as a functional element within a broader rhetorical system, shaped by typological and cultural features of each language.

Keywords: Chiasmus; Syntactic Parallelism; Inversion; Rhetorical Figures; Structural Typology; Russian Language; French Language

1. Introduction

The chiasmatic construction, or crisscross figure, is among the most complex and multifaceted rhetorical figures. Its emergence is the result of the convergence of several syntactic structures, including expressive constructions of syntactic parallelism, repetition, antithesis, and inversion. The term “chiasmus” comes from the structure’s resemblance to the Greek letter “chi” (χ), reflecting the crisscrossed arrangement in which the second part mirrors the first in reverse order.

Chiasmus is a highly context-sensitive and individualized figure, often appearing in aphoristic expressions, proverbs, idiomatic phrases, literary prose, and especially in poetry, where stylistic density is most pronounced. Despite its frequent occurrence in artistic texts, chiasmus has traditionally been studied in isolation and primarily from grammatical or structural perspectives, without sufficient attention to its systemic function within a broader rhetorical framework.

This study seeks to fill that gap by offering a systemic, structural, and functional-pragmatic analysis of chiasmus in two typologically distinct yet related languages—Russian and French. The research is guided by the following objectives:

- to compile a representative corpus of chiasmatic constructions from Russian and French literary texts;
- to identify and analyze the stylistic and functional features of chiasmus in both languages;
- to develop a structural classification of chiasmatic constructions based on syntactic and morphological features;
- to conduct a comparative typological analysis, highlighting both common patterns and language-specific differences in the use of chiasmus across Russian and French literary traditions.

Through this approach, the study aims to deepen our understanding of chiasmus not only as a rhetorical figure, but as a dynamic and systematic element of literary language shaped by linguistic typology and stylistic tradition.

Chiasmus can rightfully be considered one of the most effective rhetorical figures of syntax, yet it has rarely been the subject of specialized linguistic research.

References to this figure can be found as early as in the works of classical rhetoricians. For example: “Substitution occurs when two phrases, differing in content, are expressed by a rearrangement such that the second phrase, contrary to the first, appears to derive from it—for instance: ‘One must eat to live, not live to eat.’^[1] This substitution was referred to by rhetoricians as *antimetabole* or *commutation*.

In the *Short Literary Encyclopedia*, chiasmus is classified as a figure of addition and seen as a subtype of syntactic parallelism. “Chiasmus (from Greek $\chi\alpha\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ — crosswise arrangement in the shape of the Greek letter chi (χ)) is a stylistic figure of antithetical parallelism, in which parts of two parallel segments are arranged in the sequence A B = B1 A1. A common form is negative parallelism (e.g., ‘Not a blade swayed in the field – but my desolate head swayed...’). A sense of parallelism is often reinforced by word repetition (‘Our coachmen are lively, / Our troikas tireless’ – A.S. Pushkin). The degree of antithesis in chiasmus can vary greatly: from strong (‘We eat to live, not live to eat’) to weak (‘All is in me and I am in all’ – F.I. Tyutchev).”

As a linguistic term, *chiasmus* only came into use in the 19th century, but its classical names—*antimetabole*, *antimetalepsis*, *antimetathesis*, *commutation*—have been known since antiquity. A concise description with an example (*Eat to live, not live to eat*) can be found in the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, dated to the 1st century BCE. The term *chiasmus* itself stems from the Greek letter chi (χ), whose form resembles a cross, reflecting the

crisscross structure of the construction.

The structure of a chiasmus is exceptionally clear, as in: “Love the art in yourself, not yourself in the art” (Stanislavsky). Yet, its definitions are often less precise, due to the figure’s complex linguistic nature. Some scholars define it as a *double antithesis* with intersecting parts^[2–7] — thus viewing it as a combination of *antithesis* and *inversion*. Others see it primarily as a form of *reverse parallelism*, that is, syntactic parallelism plus inversion^[8–15].

Kuznets and Skrebnev^[16] interpret chiasmus as a unique type of parallelism, where the lexical structure of a previous sentence is reproduced, but the syntactic relationships among repeated elements are altered. In other words, chiasmus is *parallelism plus repetition with a change in syntactic functions*. Chiasmus is characterized as a figure of *antithetical parallelism*—a combination of antithesis and parallelism with a reordering of elements between two parallel pairs^[17].

In Dubois et al.’s *Dictionary of Linguistic Terms*, chiasmus is described as the *inversion of two symmetrical parts of a phrase*, forming either an antithesis or a parallelism^[18]. The definition emphasizes structural symmetry and notes that antithesis is optional.

Chiasmus is also defined as “a figure of speech involving the reversed (‘crosswise’) order of elements in two syntactic units connected by a common part.” This definition highlights the syntactic (formal) structure of chiasmus while omitting its semantic aspects^[19,20]. Chiasmus is one of the most expressive means of creating antithesis. Antithesis, in turn, is a mode of binary punning, where comedic effect arises from the clash of opposing meanings. Therefore, chiasmus is considered one technique of *pun formation*^[21].

A further distinction appears between scholars who view chiasmus as a form of structural parallelism^[19] and those who see it as fundamentally asymmetric^[21,22]. This debate centers on whether chiasmus should be seen as a variation of balanced structures or as a distinct figure with its own crisscross logic. The latter view is supported in this study, particularly given chiasmus’s ability to disrupt linear syntax for stylistic effect.

The functional dimension of chiasmus has also attracted growing attention. Scholars such as Voronichev^[23]

argue that its influence extends beyond the sentence level, contributing to textual cohesion, emphasis, and rhythm across larger narrative segments. Similarly, Formanovskaya^[24] highlights its architectonic and rhythmic functions, emphasizing the expressive potential of chiasmus in poetic and elevated prose.

More recent approaches, such as those by Beregovskaya^[25], move toward a transformational and cross-linguistic understanding of chiasmus. Her model introduces a three-tiered framework involving syntactic inversion, repetition with functional shift, and semantic play (e.g., puns or homonymy), which collectively deepen the expressive power of chiasmatic constructions. This multilayered view aligns closely with systemic and typological approaches, as it accounts for both structural mechanisms and semantic enrichment across languages.

Overall, the existing literature reveals both convergences and divergences: scholars agree on the fundamental inversion-based structure of chiasmus but differ in their emphasis on semantic antithesis, syntactic symmetry, transformational potential, or stylistic function. This study builds on these insights by analyzing chiasmus as a dynamic element within a system of rhetorical figures, aiming to trace both universal patterns and language-specific realizations in Russian and French.

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What structural types of chiasmus can be identified in Russian and French literary texts?
2. How do these types differ in frequency and form across the two languages?
3. What rhetorical and stylistic functions do chiasmatic constructions fulfill in each language tradition?
4. How do the typological features of Russian and French influence the construction and interpretation of chiasmus?

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and comparative linguistic approach, focusing on the structural and functional-pragmatic analysis of chiasmatic constructions in Russian and French literary texts. The research is grounded

in a systematic framework, viewing chiasmus as part of a microsystem of rhetorical figures characterized by syntactic parallelism and inversion. analysis based on the structural and functional-pragmatic examination of chiasmatic constructions in literary texts in Russian and French. The research adopts a systemic approach, which views chiasmus as a component of a microsystem of rhetorical figures organized around the principles of syntactic parallelism and inversion.

2.1. Data Collection

The corpus consists of 150 chiasmatic constructions extracted from canonical Russian and French literary texts written between the 19th and early 20th centuries. Authors were selected based on their recognized stylistic sophistication and frequent use of rhetorical figures (e.g., Flaubert, Apollinaire, Proust, Aragon in French; Tolstoy, Tsvetaeva, Blok, Tyutchev in Russian). The genres include poetry, prose fiction, and philosophical essays, enabling the study to account for genre-specific stylistic choices in the use of chiasmus.

2.2. Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted in three key stages:

1. Structural analysis: Identification and classification of chiasmatic constructions by syntactic type (lexical, morphological, syntactic), with attention to mirror symmetry, inversion, and repetition patterns in sentence structures.
2. Functional-pragmatic and stylistic analysis: Examination of the communicative roles of chiasmus in literary discourse (e.g., expressiveness, rhythm, emphasis, contrast); contextual interpretation within the stylistic norms of each language tradition.
3. Comparative-Typological Analysis: Cross-linguistic comparison to identify universal and typologically conditioned differences in the use of chiasmus; consideration of linguistic factors such as:
 - Word order flexibility (synthetic Russian vs. analytic French);
 - Tendency for longer, clause-level chiasms in

French;

- Greater variability and compactness in Russian chiasms due to its inflectional nature.

This methodological framework supported the development of a typology of chiasmatic constructions, shedding light on their structural diversity and rhetorical function in each language. The approach also allowed for cross-cultural and stylistic insights into the use of chiasmus as a communicative and aesthetic device.

3. Results and Discussion

Chiasmus is traditionally associated with central symmetry, which may manifest both semantically and grammatically. The present study focuses on examples in which this symmetry is primarily syntactic.

Consider the following examples:

Le passé me tourmente et je crains l'avenir
(Corneille) "*The past torments me, and I fear the future.*"

Charles se sentait défaillir à cette continuelle répétition de prières et de flambeaux, sous ces odeurs affadissantes de cire et de soutane (Flaubert) "*Charles felt faint at the ceaseless repetition of prayers and torches, under the cloying smells of wax and cassock.*"

In the latter, inversion is not merely adjectival but structural: a singular noun with two plural modifiers is contrasted with a plural noun with two singular modifiers.

Syntactic parallelism plays a key role in chiasmus. Some scholars classify chiasmus as a variant of syntactic parallelism:

"Reverse parallelism is typical of poetic language... where the components of the second part are arranged in the opposite order to those in the first part." (E.g., A. Blok: *K večeru vyshlo tikhoe solntse, / I veter pones dymki iz trub.*)

However, these are often inverted parallels, not full chiasmi. According to E.M. Beregovskaya, inverted parallelism constitutes a primitive syntactic chiasmus, while the complete chiasmatic construction is semantically and structurally more complex and often aphoristic.

Three primary types of chiasmus are identified:

I. Pure Syntactic Chiasmus

This basic form requires full inversion combined

with syntactic parallelism. The second part symmetrically mirrors the first. Examples:

Delit' vesel'e – vse gotovy; / Nikto ne khochet grust' delit' (Lermontov)

Automédons nashi boiki, / Neutomimy nashi troiki (Pushkin)

Rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses (Malherbe)

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down (Coleridge)

In these cases, antithesis and repetition may be present but are not obligatory.

II. Semantically Enriched Chiasmus

In this type, inversion is combined with:

- 1) Double lexical repetition
- 2) Exchange of syntactic functions

Examples:

The best man is he who lives by his own thoughts and others' feelings; the worst is he who lives by others' thoughts and his own feelings (Tolstoy)

La fin du bien est un mal; la fin du mal est un bien (La Rochefoucauld)

Sometimes, conversion occurs alongside repetition, as in:

There is much that is good and new in this book. But the good is not new, and the new is not good (Lessing)

The repetition may be morphological or partial (e.g., only roots or semantic fields).

III. Chiasmatic Pun

This advanced form involves a semantic shift:

A repeated polysemous word changes its meaning across the structure:

V Rossii dve napasti: vverkh – t'ma vlasti, vniz – vlast' t'my “Russia has two scourges: below, the power of darkness; above, the darkness of power.” (Gilyarovsky)

Alternatively, a frozen idiom is played upon by “defrosting” its literal image, creating a pun:

Poule: Brr... Il fait un froid de canard Canard: Vous avez bien raison, j'en ai la chair de poule

The humor arises from discrepancies in idiomatic imagery across languages (e.g., duck vs. goose bumps in French vs. Russian).

In some cases, the form is repeated (homonyms, paronyms), but the meaning diverges, producing a humorous twist:

Senya vez voz sena

Quand mon verre est vide, je le plains; / Quand mon verre est plein, je le vide (Ponchon)

A particularly complex case combines polysemy, homonymy, conversion, and partial repetition:

We suffer less from heart failure than from a failure of heart (Shanin)

To systematize the main structural and semantic properties of chiasmus, **Table 1** provides a summary of its features across syntactic, semantic, and pun dimensions. This overview highlights both universal and variable characteristics that define the figure (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Summary Table of Chiasmus Features.

Feature	Syntactic	Semantic	Pun
Inversion (mirror symmetry)	+	+	+
Parallelism	+	+	+
Lexical repetition	+/-	+	+
Antithesis	+/-	+/-	+/-
Syntactic function exchange		+	+
Semantic shift			+

Note: (+) mandatory, (±) optional, (–) not typical.

To better visualize the distribution and structural diversity of chiasmatic constructions across the two languages,

the following tables summarize their classification by type and syntactic domain (**Tables 2 and 3**):

Table 2. Distribution of Chiasmus Types by Language.

Structural Type	Russian (N-75)	French (N-75)	Total
Pure Syntactic Chiasmus	28	17	45
Semantically Enriched	30	40	70
Chiasmatic Pun	17	18	35

Table 3. Syntactic Domain of Chiasmus.

Chiasmus Type	Word-Level	Phrase-Level	Clause-Level
Russian	18	29	28
French	12	31	32

In the common formula AB/BA, applicable to all three types of chiasmus described, A and B can represent:

- In the first type: simple sentence constituents, usually expressed by different lexemes on each side;
- In the second type: lexemes (or lexeme roots) repeated on both sides with a shift in syntactic roles;
- In the third type: polysemous or homonymous lexemes, repeated with both syntactic function and meaning altered.

Modern stylistic decoding distinguishes between stylistic devices, which are word blocks, and principles of foregrounding, which are blocks of such devices. Chiasmus is not merely a device but a foregrounding principle—specifically, convergence, as it unites various techniques: syntactic parallelism, mirror symmetry, lexical repetition, and antithesis. Chiasmus is a fixed canonical form of convergence, much like the elegiac couplet is a fixed stanzaic form.

Mirror symmetry is an overarching aesthetic category and a sine qua non condition for the perception of chiasmus.

All syntactic operations involved in constructing the complex framework of chiasmus—inversion, parallelism, double lexical or semantic cross-repetition, and syntactic role exchange—are perceived relative to an implicit but tangibly felt axis of symmetry. This axis may be expressed through a conjunction, relative clause, or prolonged pause (graphically rendered with punctuation such as a period, comma, or semicolon).

Upon close examination of second- and third-level chiasmi, it becomes clear that they operate not with one but with three axes of symmetry:

1. A primary axis separating the left and right halves;

2. Two auxiliary axes within each half that govern the internal inversion mechanics.

These may include:

1. Verb-based valency structure:

N1 – V – N2 || N2 – V – N1

Examples:

- 1) *Liebe vertreibt die Zeit, und Zeit vertreibt Liebe*
(Love passes time; time passes love)
- 2) *Le cheval d'Avalac avala l'eau du lac, l'eau du lac avala le cheval d'Avalac*
(The horse of Avalac swallowed the lake water; the lake water swallowed the horse of Avalac)
- 3) *Ève adorait le soleil, et le soleil a doré Ève (Prévert)*
(Eve adored the sun, and the sun gilded Eve)

2. Function words (e.g., prepositions):

Adj – pr – Adv || Adv – pr – Adj

- 1) *Cette jeune fille est jolie de loin, mais loin de jolie*
(That girl is pretty from afar, but far from pretty)

3. Word boundary within a phrase:

N1 | N2 || N2 | N1

- 1) ...on prazdnuet rozhdenie dnya, kak drugie prazdnuyut den' rozhdeniya (*He celebrates the birth | of day, || as others celebrate the day | of birth*) (Krivin)
- 2) Lish' ya odin, da zhizn' moya pri mne, da ostryy kholodok na samom dne – soznanye smerti ili smert' soznaniya (*Only I remain, and my life with me, and the cold sharpness at the bottom — the awareness of death or the death of awareness*) (Chukhontsev)

4. Main vs. subordinate clause boundary:

Pp | Ps||Ps| Pp

Examples:

- *Les traductions sont comme les femmes: quand elles sont belles, elles ne sont pas fidèles; et quand elles sont fidèles, elles ne sont pas belles*
(Translations are like women: when they are beautiful, they are not faithful; when they are faithful, they are not beautiful)
- *They who would be young when they are old must be old when they are young (Those forever sick are often so because they are obsessed with health; those who are healthy do not fear illness)* (Klyuchevsky)

The number of such structural variants is vast. Symmetry, usually imperceptible, is emphasized through rearrangement in chiasmus.

The lexical background can enhance chiasmus's perceived symmetry: the more non-constituent elements from the first part reappear in the second, the more pronounced the figure's architectonic structure becomes:

Je serai pour toi l'unique au monde. Tu seras pour moi l'unique au monde (Saint-Exupéry) (*I will be the only one in the world for you. You will be the only one for me*).

Maximum symmetry appears in semantically enriched chiasmi where left and right parts share nearly identical lexical content. For example:

Que les peuples seront heureux quand les rois seront philosophes, ou quand les philosophes seront rois (Diderot)

Freude muß Leid, Leid muß Freude haben (Goethe)

(*Joy must contain sorrow, and sorrow — joy*)

However, for chiasmus to function as a figure of affective syntax (a true artistic device), formal features alone are insufficient — it must carry aesthetic intentionality. Just as dead metaphors like “network,” “table leg,” or “teapot spout” no longer evoke imagery, common expressions like “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” lack artistic charge despite formal symmetry.

To become a genuine stylistic device, a chiasmus requires the author’s aesthetic intention.

A rhetorical technique closely related to chiasmus is the contrepèterie—a wordplay device involving the transposition of sounds or syllables in adjacent words or expressions, resulting in a change of meaning. Some examples include:

1. *Aimable souvent est sable mouvant* (Desnos)

(“Often charming is shifting sand”) – a pun involving phonetic transposition.

2. *Un squelette s’offrant de silice et de craie, / il s’amibe en l’abîme et s’abime en l’abysse* (Queneau)
(“A skeleton of silica and chalk transforms into an amoeba in the abyss and dissolves in the abyss”) – built on morphological and phonetic play.
3. *C’est un vélo volé* (Prévert)
(“It’s a stolen bike”) – relies on echo and rhythm between “vélo” and “volé”.
4. From Russian (Yasnov):
“Morning: morning coffee – an ocean of bliss. A silver wing flutters above the cup – a teaspoon – a false seagull.”
(The phrase “чайная ложка – ложная чайка” [“teaspoon – false seagull”] plays on reversed syllables and imagery.)

The comparison between chiasmus and contrepèterie reveals shared features:

Both exhibit symmetry, reinforced by repetition and inversion;

However, their mechanisms differ:

- Chiasmus relies on conversion and word formation (e.g., syntactic symmetry, parallelism, semantic echo);
- Contrepèterie is based on paronomasia (phonetic resemblance and distortion).

Both belong to the broader field of verbal art and language play, yet chiasmus is a tool of affective syntax, while contrepèterie is primarily a phonostylistic device.

The mental image of the symmetric chiasmatic pattern is so deeply ingrained in our cognition that it can tolerate various structural and semantic deviations—yet still be perceived as chiasmus. Typical deviations include:

1. Addition of elements in the second part, expanding or “diluting” the symmetry:
The fathers were Russians who desperately wanted to become Frenchmen; the sons were culturally Frenchmen who desperately wanted to become Russians. (Klyuchevsky)
2. Ellipsis, where secondary elements are omitted:
Monks of one monastery were allowed to smoke during prayer. Another monastery was denied this

right. The first asked to be allowed to smoke while praying. The second — to pray while smoking. (Parable)

3. Substitution of a segment with a syntactic synonym:
A woman trying to look like a man is as unattractive as a man who looks like a woman. (Tolstoy)
4. Grammatical shift in form:
Il faut vivre comme on pense, sans quoi l'on finira par penser comme on a vécu (Bourget)
(“We must live as we think, or we will end up thinking as we have lived.”)
5. Lexical substitution of a constituent with a semantically related word.

As a result, we can identify five degrees of semantic symmetry in chiasmus:

1) Identity – Lexical Repetition

This is the most obvious and complete form of symmetry, where the same lexemes are repeated verbatim:

- *La franchise ne consiste pas à dire tout ce que l'on pense, mais à penser tout ce que l'on dit* (Livry)
(Frankness is not saying everything one thinks, but thinking everything one says.)
- *Experience without learning is better than learning without experience* (Proverb)
- *Esli Magomet ne idet k gore, to gora idet k Magometu.* (If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain) (Proverb)

2) Full Equivalence – Pronominal Substitution

Here, semantic symmetry is preserved through the substitution of one element with its referential equivalent, such as a pronoun: *Wir kommen nie zu Gedanken. Sie kommen zu uns* (Heidegger) (*We do not arrive at thoughts—they come to us.*)

3) Partial Equivalence – Synonymic Substitution

The core meaning remains stable, but one of the elements is replaced with a near-synonym or related expression:

Tak, kak khochu, ne umeyu, / Tak, kak umeyu, ne khochu. (Tvardovsky)

(*The way I want, I cannot; the way I can, I do not want.*)

Il y a de la peine oisive et du loisir qui est labeur (d'Aubigné)

(*There is idle toil and leisure that is labor.*)

4) Approximate Analogy – Semantic Field Substitution

This involves partial repetition or substitution of a key constituent with a word belonging to the same semantic field, preserving the echo or contrast:

- *Mne bor'ba meshala byt' poetom, / Pesni mne meshali byt' boytsom.* (Nekrasov)

(*Struggle kept me from being a poet, / Songs kept me from being a fighter.*)

- *S uma ty skhodish' ot Berlina, / Mne zh bol'she nraivitsya Medyn'. / Tebe, druzhok, i gorkiy khren – malina, / A mne i blanmanezhe – polyn'.* (Kozma Prutkov)

(*You go crazy over Berlin; I prefer Medyn. To you, bitter horseradish is like raspberries; to me, even blanch-mange tastes like wormwood.*)

- *Il y a des reproches qui louent et des louanges qui médisent* (La Rochefoucauld)
(*There are rebukes that praise and praises that slander.*)

5) Semantic Non-Equivalence – Compensated by Phonetic Equivalence (Homonymic Substitution)

Here, symmetry is not semantic but phonetic, based on sound similarity or ambiguity (homonymy):

- *Le bifteck peut se définir de deux façons: viande que les restaurateurs font cuire ou cuir que restaurateurs font viande* (Curnonsky) (*Beefsteak can be defined in two ways: meat that chefs cook, or leather that chefs turn into meat.*)

As long as the structure remains perceptible in all its key links—even if some links are omitted or substituted—the chiasmus remains intact. But once the sense of structural wholeness is broken, the chiasmus ceases to exist.

For example, consider Benjamin Franklin's sentence:
Contentment makes poor men rich, and discontent makes rich men poor.

This sentence seems semantically symmetrical, yet it is not a chiasmus, because its structural compression removes the heightened semantic resonance—or *hypersemantic effect*—that the chiasmatic form uniquely produces.

A rhetorical device closely related to chiasmus is the so-called *contrepièterie*—a verbal play involving the transposition of sounds or syllables in adjacent words or ex-

pressions, which alters their meaning. This phenomenon is widespread in French, English, and Russian, and is based on a phonetic rearrangement that results in a semantic twist. Examples include:

1. *My charuyemysya i churayemysya.* (Khlebnikov) (*We are enchanted and repelled*) — playing on phonetic inversion and semantic opposition.
2. *Krepche za shoferku derzhis', baran.* (*Hold on tight to the driver's door, you ram*) — a slang joke involving ambiguous interpretation of “*shoferka*” (driver's seat/door) and “*baran*” (ram/idiot).
3. *Plus que poli pour être honnête / Plus que poète pour être honni* (Desnos)
(*Too polite to be honest / Too poetic to be honored*) — inversion with near-rhyme and semantic juxtaposition.
4. *Les Jeux de la Foi ne sont que cendres auprès des Feux de la Joie* (Prévert)
(*The Games of Faith are but ashes beside the Fires of Joy*) — poetic antithesis with mirrored sounds.
5. *A half-formed wish – a half-warmed fish* (Spooner)
— An example of Spoonerism, where initial sounds are swapped to comic effect.

The comparison between chiasmus and contrepèterie demonstrates that both devices rely on symmetry, reinforced by repetition and inversion. However, they differ fundamentally in mechanism:

- Chiasmus is based on conversion and syntactic or semantic symmetry;
- Contrepèterie is a form of paronomasia, rooted in phonetic substitution.

Both are techniques of verbal play, but chiasmus belongs to affective syntax, while contrepèterie is a tool of phonostylistics.

Let us now examine chiasmatic constructions in Russian and French according to formal structural types. We can distinguish:

1. Chiasmus of Words
2. Intra-word Chiasmus
3. Chiasmus of Phrases (including free, semi-fixed, and idiomatic expressions)
4. Chiasmus of Clauses

1. Chiasmus of Words

This type is marked by a specific trait that determines its core stylistic function: the accentuation of identity between contrasting objects or phenomena. We may call this trait the compactness of the syntagmatic row.

By *compactness*, we mean that the juxtaposed words appear in immediate or nearly immediate contact, without significant interruption. Any elements that separate them are semantically empty from the chiasmus's point of view. They serve as background, providing context, reinforcing a comic or satirical undertone, or simply linking the mirrored elements.

A typical consequence of this syntactic compactness is the use of morphological derivation—that is, word formation within a repeated root or structure:

Assourdi par le brouhaha, par le bruit des plats, par le plat des bruits (Daninos)

(*Deafened by the hubbub, by the noise of dishes, by the dish of noise*) — A chiasm of AB/BA structure with derivational symmetry between “bruit” (noise) and “plat” (dish).

Après avoir généralisé universellement et universalisé généralement, il passa à l'examen du monde tel qu'il le voyait dans mille ans (Daninos)

(*After having universally generalized and generally universalized, he proceeded to examine the world as he imagined it a thousand years from now*)

These examples exhibit the AB–BA chiasmatic model, often accompanied by morphological echo and semantic inversion.

The ease of derivation in such constructions reflects the linguistic ease of shifting between meanings, which in turn symbolizes a superficial penetration into the essence of things—a key satirical message in the work of Pierre Daninos.

In the analyzed examples, the context, in addition to its clarifying and connective functions, also performs a fundamental organizing function in chiasmus—it justifies and activates the meanings of the chiasm's components. However, it does so indirectly, through hints and allusions. In such cases, the activators of the chiasm are implicit. Yet in some instances, they may also be explicit, forming a second chiasm of their own.

In these cases, the chiasmatic model is effectively

doubled, as shown in this classic French example:

L'abbé de Choisy et l'abbé Fleury écrivirent chacun une Histoire de l'église, le premier élégamment, le second savamment, ce qui fit dire que l'Histoire ecclésiastique de l'abbé Choisy était fleurie, et celle de l'abbé Fleury était choisie (Guérard)

(Abbot Choisy and Abbot Fleury each wrote a Church History: the first, elegantly; the second, learnedly. Which led people to say that Choisy's Church History was "fleurie" [flowery], and Fleury's was "choisie" [chosen].)

This example demonstrates a double chiasmus (AB – B'A'), both syntactically and morphologically. The pun here arises from the reversal of adjectives and their phonetic resemblance to the authors' surnames.

Such French wordplay is often embedded in proper names, especially when those names phonetically or morphologically resonate with the core structure. In the above case, the surname *Choisy* (meaning "chosen") and *Fleury* (meaning "flowery") become part of the pun.

Thus, the chiasmatic pun achieves maximum semantic density with minimal formal-syntactic means—a hallmark of stylistic brilliance and rhetorical economy.

The shifting of the logical emphasis within the statement often results in bivalence—that is, semantic double entendre or dilogia. Its stylistic realization often takes the form of ironic suggestion, as in the following anecdote:

Un mauvais barbouilleur, qui voulait absolument passer pour peintre, répétait qu'il allait faire blanchir le plafond de la salle, et qu'il le peindrait ensuite. Quelqu'un lui dit: "Croyez-moi, commencez par le peindre; vous le blanchirez après."

(A lousy dauber who desperately wanted to pass for a painter kept saying he would whitewash the ceiling and then paint it. Someone told him: "Believe me—start with the painting; you'll whitewash it afterward.")

This example is structured as AB – B'A', and is rich in irony, inversion, and semantic doubling. Here, the syntactic proximity (or "tightness") of the chiasmatic elements is reduced, yet the structural symmetry remains perceptible.

2. Chiasmus of Set, Semi-Fixed, and Free Word Combinations

Correlations between set phrases (*phraseological units*) and single words within a chiasmus have not been

observed. Correlations between a semi-fixed expression and a single word, or between two semi-fixed expressions, are extremely rare. Most often, chiasmus occurs within two semi-fixed combinations or between a semi-fixed and a free phrase.

For example:

Maurice: – Il y a même la fin d'une petite histoire de femme ... ou d'une histoire de petite femme (Maurice: "There's even the end of a little story about a woman... or a story about a little woman.") ^[26].

Structure: **AB(C) Δ BA(C)**

Or:

Vous mangez le plus pur de notre substance, disait un homme de lettres à un libraire: voyez que d'auteurs pauvres! – Mais aussi, repartit le libraire, que de pauvres auteurs!

("You consume the purest of our kind," said a man of letters to a bookseller. "See how many poor authors!" – "Yes," retorted the bookseller, "and how many pitiful authors!") ^[27].

Structure: **AB Δ BA**

When chiasmus involves two free word combinations, its structure becomes more complex than that of word-level chiasmus. Consider the following witty exchange:

À une actrice – Ci-inclus mille francs et dix mille compliments. – Merci, j'aurais préféré mille compliments et dix mille francs

(To an actress: "Here enclosed are one thousand francs and ten thousand compliments." – "Thank you. I would have preferred one thousand compliments and ten thousand francs.")

Structure: **(A)B Δ (A)D C(D) Δ C(D)**

In this model, we have marked the first components of the free word combinations in parentheses, indicating that the core of the chiasmus lies in the second elements—they are the ones that form the true crisscross structure.

However, the role of the first components is not merely introductory. They function as catalysts — semantically priming and energizing the chiasm. This can be seen by comparing the original with a "control" version:

mille francs et dix mille compliments; dix mille compliments et mille francs
(1000 francs and 10000 compliments; 10000 compliments

and 1000 francs).

Although the structure is formally chiasmatic, the pun vanishes. The clever reversal that created the humorous effect in the original disappears because the first components are now symmetrical and lack catalytic contrast. Thus, the pun relies not only on formal crisscrossing, but on the interaction of meaning between phrase components, especially the reordering of informational weight.

Thus, chiasmus built on two free word combinations appears as a combination of constant and variable components, in which the logical emphasis remains on the numeral. This reveals that the semantic core of the chiasmatic pun lies in the constant elements of the chiasm.

In this configuration, the formal core consists of the variable components, while the semantic core lies in the invariable ones. This creates a peculiar disassociation of the free word combinations without disrupting their overall discursive unity.

The reason for this phenomenon likely lies in the speech-semantic unity of components that are usually perceived as independent in everyday usage. Such behavior of components within free combinations in chiasmatic puns challenges the traditionally accepted notion that free phrases are additive in meaning. Instead, it seems more accurate to describe their semantics as an occasional (context-driven) fusion of meanings—since the meanings of both words refer to a shared denotatum.

In such structures, the central component of a free phrase serves as the core of this occasional fused meaning, while the peripheral component (which is not necessarily the second in the syntagmatic chain) functions as a kind of activator of this fused meaning. During interpretation, the activator and the core may switch roles in the consciousness of the interlocutors.

This type of chiasmatic pun, we believe, reveals a feature inherent to many puns: an evaluative gradation—a stylistic and semantic scaling that subtly prioritizes one interpretation over another.

In phraseological units, a common phenomenon is the internal rearrangement of elements, resulting in the formation of semi-fixed or even free combinations. Consider this example:

A remark about Beaumarchais's "The Barber of Seville": "Instead of putting his play into four acts, he would

have done better to break his four acts into pieces."

(French: *Au lieu de mettre sa pièce en quatre actes, il aurait mieux fait de mettre ses quatre actes en pièces*)

Structure: $ABC \wedge BCA$, or schematically: $AX \wedge XA$

This example illustrates several important points:

- Identity of relational structure between the core and the activator in both the phraseological unit *mettre qch en pièces* ("to tear something apart") and the semi-fixed combination *mettre une pièce en quatre actes* ("to stage a play in four acts"). The semi-fixed phrase differs from the idiom in its greater referential specificity—for example, the noun *une pièce* (a play) cannot be replaced with an indefinite *quelque chose* (something), as is often possible in idioms.
- Disassociation of the core and activator between the phraseological unit and the semi-fixed combination. While the idiom functions as a semantic whole, the semi-fixed phrase presents a dispersed structure, which allows for greater play with its elements.

3. Chiasmatic Correlations: "Word/Phrase," "Two Parts of a Complex Sentence," or "Two Sentences"

Identifying a phrase as a correlate to a single word in chiasmus is a formal convention, based primarily on structural form: the correlate may visually or syntactically resemble a complete sentence. Even though the second part of the chiasmus may contain multiple elements and cannot be cleanly broken down into independently chiasmic components, the central lexical unit remains crucial to the effect.

For instance, in a chiasm contrasting two full clauses or sentences, the key terms—such as *peintre* ("painter") and *diplomate* ("diplomat")—still function as semantic nuclei. That is why we describe such correlations as conditional.

Alternatively, the part of the sentence preceding the central component may be interpreted as a medial or contextual bridge—a structural frame that supports the crisscrossed configuration.

Such correlations are typically formed by parts of a complex sentence, where the clausal components are tightly fused, both grammatically and semantically. A common

case involves relative clauses, traditionally seen as expanded attributes modifying an antecedent, as well as elaborate adverbial clauses.

For example:

“Rubens,” said a lady, “was therefore a diplomat who amused himself by painting?” – “Pardon me, Madam,” Casanova replied coldly, “he was a painter who amused himself by being a diplomat.” ^[27].

Here, the chiasmus is embedded in paired relative clauses, highlighting the value opposition expressed by the aristocratic lady and the artist. The structure reflects a semantic inversion of roles and priorities—with Rubens presented alternately as a diplomat dabbling in art and an artist dabbling in diplomacy.

In this way, chiasmus serves as a mirror for evaluative hierarchies, making stylistic use of clausal structure to reflect contrasting worldviews.

In cases of symmetry, a particular syntactic fragment is repeated in a way that is noticeable to the reader or listener. Thus, an additional structural layer is added to the more basic form of a typical sentence. Symmetry may also manifest as equal length in the constituent parts of a sentence.

The basic structural unit of chiasmus is the word. The chiasmatic pun reveals both the structural identity and semantic resemblance among:

- Phraseological units and semi-fixed expressions;
- Semi-fixed and free combinations.

The hypothetical differentiation of semi-fixed and free expressions can be explained in terms of their meaning integration:

- a) “Usual fusion of meanings” vs. “Occasional fusion of meanings”;
 - b) This distinction is particularly relevant to chiasmatic puns, in relation to the correlation between syntagmatic proximity and the preservation of the paradigmatic identity of the chiasmus components.
- Excessive closeness in a syntagmatic chain tends to trigger morphological derivation,
 - Whereas excessive distance may disrupt the clarity of the chiasmatic verbal configuration.

The ideal model of chiasmus is $AB \wedge BA$, where

the degree of formal and semantic identity is at its highest (i.e., $A = A$, $B = B$). Close approximations to this model include:

- Disjointed chiasms, such as:
 - $(A)B \wedge (A)D$
 - $(C)D \wedge (C)B$
- And negation-inverted models, such as:
 - $AB \wedge \neg BA$
 - $AB \wedge B\neg A$
 - $A\neg B \wedge BA$
 - and so on.

The flickering of meanings arises from semantic non-identity between elements that are formally identical — that is, when $A = A$ but $B \neq B$, or $A \neq A$ and $B = B$. This concerns not only polysemous words, but also homonyms, proper names, and phraseological units.

This semantic tension — the play between sameness and difference — is a defining feature of expressive chiasmatic constructions, especially when elevated to the level of stylistic and poetic devices.

The most typical semantic outcome of chiasmus is the bivalence of meaning—most often realized as a form of ironic suggestion.

The tendency toward semantic identity between chiasm components is not accidental: it is precisely this identity that produces the comic effect by shifting the logical emphasis from the theme (subject) of the statement to the rheme (comment or predicate). This shift—central to the construction of chiasmatic puns—is both playful and pragmatic.

Thus, the semantics of the chiasm’s components serves as a unifying principle, while the form, in many cases, acts as a dividing force. Chiasmus emerges as a formal-logical tool of the pun, grounded in formal identity or formal similarity between its elements.

The analysis of chiasmatic puns has revealed the polyfunctionality of the punning context. In addition to its organizing function—that is, its role in justifying and activating the chiasmus—the context also performs clarifying, connective, and accentuating functions. It contributes to the semantic identity of the contrasted elements, and in many cases, it mirrors or duplicates the chiasmus itself.

This duplication effect not only enhances the chi-

asm's semantic economy, but also highlights its expressive compactness in contrast to more extended antithetical structures. In doing so, chiasmus demonstrates itself to be a highly condensed, aesthetically functional, and stylistically versatile rhetorical figure in both Russian and French discourse.

4. Conclusions

The study of the pragmatic conditioning of linguistic units is directly related to the concept of expressiveness. The present attempt to define the relationship between expressiveness and its neighboring categories—such as emotionality—and, where necessary, to distinguish them, aims to clarify the content of expressiveness as precisely as possible.

As a result, we may conclude that expressiveness is a broader category than emotionality, evaluativity, imagery/illustrativeness, and other related concepts.

The capacity of expressive syntactic structures to exert an impact on the communicant stems from their very nature. Like all expressive devices of language, most of these structures are built on deviation from the norm—in this case, from syntactic norms—which grants them considerable power in terms of enhancing the expressiveness of an utterance.

The pragmatic characteristics of chiasmatic constructions are shaped by the need to analyze both the internal structure of such constructions and the external conditions that determine the use of a particular chiasmus in specific communicative situations involving real interlocutors.

Chiasmatic constructions primarily exert what can be described as elementary impact—that is, they attract and retain the reader's attention. More broadly, each expressive structure possesses its own stylistic capabilities. However, we may outline the following core functions, which are common across all types of chiasmus:

- Emotional-evaluative impact
- Laconization (compression and brevity of expression)
- Topicalization (foregrounding of meaning)
- Creation of dialogic atmosphere with the reader
- Characterization (stylistic or psychological profiling)
- Imparting objectivity to the exposition

- Mitigation or intensification of categorical assertions

In literary pragmatics, a notable distinction emerges:

1. French texts tend to emphasize suggestive and explicit influence,
2. Whereas Russian texts lean toward persuasive and implicit influence.

These tendencies are shaped by a combination of linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

Differences in the use of pragmatically charged expressive constructions in the two languages can be explained by several factors. First, the orientation toward the reader's background knowledge and level of erudition accounts for the openness or subtlety of the rhetorical effect. In French literary texts, implicit pragmatics is often dominant—this is manifested in the deliberate reduction of expressive devices or in the use of minimally marked means of expression.

Secondly, the differences in the use of the chiasmatic devices discussed may also be attributed to the structural divergences between the compared languages, which are rooted in their typological classification.

The use of entire sentences as chiasmatic constructions in French literary texts does not contradict the fundamental stylistic principles of conciseness and economy of expression that govern both poetic and prose composition. This is due to the analytical character of the French language, in which grammatical relations are largely expressed through function words rather than inflection, making full-sentence chiasmi both natural and structurally compact.

By contrast, the relative flexibility of word order in the Russian language, along with its synthetic typology, accounts for the greater frequency and structural diversity of chiasmatic constructions in Russian literary texts. Russian allows for chiasmi ranging from single-word forms to full sentences and multi-clausal structures, offering broader expressive and compositional possibilities.

This typological distinction underpins not only the syntactic realization of chiasmus in both languages but also shapes the stylistic and rhetorical preferences of their respective literary traditions.

A commonality between Russian and French literary texts lies in their extensive use of chiasmatic constructions.

Although such constructions are based on the expansion of an initial sentence, they paradoxically also contribute to its condensation and rhetorical compactness. This seeming contradiction is explained by the origins of the three major types of chiasmus in living, spoken, conversational language.

When employed in literary discourse, these constructions serve to break down complex or lengthy sentences, thereby facilitating comprehension and enhancing both the expressive and aesthetic impact of the text. In this regard, chiasmatic structures—marked by rich semantics and lapidary form—are truly indispensable.

Overall, the figure of addition, i.e. chiasmus, functions as a primary rhetorical device for conveying confidence and expressing emotional steadiness. Pure chiasmus is particularly effective in ceremonial speech or in moments that call for heightened emotional intensity. By contrast, antimetabole is appropriate when it carries semantic weight, such as the highlighting of opposition.

As figures of addition, chiasmatic constructions are not merely tools for projecting rhetorical assurance; they also act as regulatory mechanisms—fine-tuning the pathos (emotional intensity) and elevation of style (solemnity) within the text. Recognizing this property, speakers and writers must wield chiasmus with deliberate care and stylistic precision.

From a stylistic perspective, chiasmus serves not only as a rhetorical ornament but as a compact vehicle for expressing contrast, irony, and symmetry. In translation studies, the presence of chiasmus raises challenges related to preserving both structure and semantic resonance. Translators must decide whether to retain the formal mirroring or prioritize equivalent rhetorical effect in the target language. From a typological linguistics standpoint, the study highlights how inflectional flexibility in Russian fosters intra-sentential chiasmus, while French tends toward balanced clausal structures due to its fixed word order and reliance on function words.

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Conceptualization, A.K. and K.K.; methodology, G.M.; software, A.L.; validation, A.K. and E.A.; formal analysis, K.K.; investigation, A.K.; resources, K.B.; data

curation, A.L.; writing—original draft preparation, K.K.; writing—review and editing, G.M.; visualization, A.L.; supervision, A.K.; project administration, E.A.; funding acquisition, K.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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