
Syntactic parallelism in poetry: distinctive features and functions

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Annotation

This article explores syntactic parallelism as a foundational mechanism in poetic language, highlighting its aesthetic, cognitive, and cultural functions across diverse traditions. Drawing on recent empirical research and cross-cultural analyses, the study demonstrates that parallelism enhances rhythmic predictability, emotional resonance, and cognitive fluency – key contributors to poetic appreciation. In modern cognitive poetics, parallel structures correlate strongly with perceived melodiousness and beauty, while controlled deviations create dynamic tension, enriching textual engagement. Biblical Hebrew poetry reveals a Gestalt-informed view of parallelism as structural harmony rather than mere repetition, while classical Chinese couplets illustrate analogical reasoning through culturally embedded symmetries. Parallelism also serves a vital role in translation, preserving stylistic integrity and communicative force across languages. From rhetorical repetition in modern oratory to AI-assisted alignment in bilingual corpora, syntactic parallelism proves to be more than a stylistic ornament – it is a multidimensional scaffold for meaning-making. This integrative view affirms its status as a core poetic device at the intersection of form, thought, and cultural cognition.

Keywords

Syntactic parallelism, poetic meaning, cognitive poetics, structural symmetry, stylistic devices

Синтаксический параллелизм в поэзии: особенности и функции

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Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается синтаксический параллелизм как основополагающий механизм поэтического языка, с акцентом на его эстетические, когнитивные и культурные функции в различных поэтических традициях. На основе современных эмпирических исследований и межкультурного анализа показано, что параллелизм усиливает ритмическую предсказуемость, эмоциональную выразительность и когнитивную лёгкость восприятия – ключевые факторы поэтического воздействия. В современной когнитивной поэтике параллельные

конструкции тесно связаны с восприятием мелодичности и красоты, а управляемые отклонения от них создают динамическое напряжение, углубляя читательское вовлечение. В поэзии на библейском иврите параллелизм предстает как структурная гармония, а не простое повторение, в то время как классические китайские куплеты демонстрируют аналогическое мышление через культурно обусловленные симметрии. В переводе параллелизм играет решающую роль, сохраняя стилистическую целостность и коммуникативную силу. От риторических повторов в современной ораторской речи до ИИ-ассистированных соответствий в билингвальных корпусах синтаксический параллелизм оказывается не просто стилистическим приёмом, а многомерной конструкцией, формирующей смысл. Этот интегративный взгляд подтверждает его статус как ключевого поэтического средства на пересечении формы, мышления и культурной когниции.

Ключевые слова *Синтаксический параллелизм, поэтический смысл, когнитивная поэтика, структурная симметрия, стилистические приёмы*

She'riyatda sintaksik parallelizm: xususiyatlari va vazifalari

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Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqolada sintaktik parallelizm she'riy tilning asosiy mexanizmi sifatida ko'rib chiqiladi va uning estetik, kognitiv hamda madaniy funksiyalari turli adabiy an'analar doirasida yoritiladi. Zamonaviy empirik tadqiqotlar va madaniyatlararo tahlillarga asoslangan holda, parallelizm ritmik kutiluvchanlik, hissiy ta'sirchanlik va kognitiv qulaylikni kuchaytirishi – she'riyatning estetik qabulida muhim omillar ekanligi isbotlanadi. Kognitiv poetikada parallel tuzilmalar ohangdorlik va go'zallik tasavvuri bilan kuchli bog'liq, nazorat ostidagi og'ishlar esa matnga dinamik kuch bag'ishlab, uni yanada mazmunli qiladi. Bibliyadagi ibroniy she'riyatida parallelizm oddiy takror emas, balki tarkibiy uyg'unlik sifatida namoyon bo'ladi, xitoy klassik baytlari esa madaniyatga singdirilgan simmetriyalar orqali analogik fikrlashni ko'rsatadi. Tarjimada esa parallelizm uslubiy yaxlitlik va muloqot mazmunini saqlab qolishda muhim rol o'ynaydi. Zamonaviy notiqlikdagi ritorik takrorlardan tortib, sun'iy intellekt asosida moslashtirilgan ikki tilli korpuslargacha, sintaktik parallelizm faqat bezakli uslub emas, balki mazmunni shakllantiruvchi ko'p o'lchovli tuzilmadir. Ushbu integrativ yondashuv parallelizmni forma, tafakkur va madaniy idrok kesishgan nuqtasidagi asosiy poetik vosita sifatida tasdiqlaydi.*

Kalit so'zlar *Sintaktik parallelizm, she'riy ma'no, kognitiv poetika, struktura simmetriyasi, uslubiy vositalar*

The analysis of syntactic parallelism in poetry reveals its profound role in shaping cognitive and aesthetic appreciation, as evidenced by empirical studies demonstrating its strong positive correlation with evaluative ratings across text genres, particularly in poetry ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$) (Menninghaus et al., 2024, p.6). This correlation underscores parallelism's function in reinforcing rhythmic and harmonic structures, which facilitate cognitive fluency and aesthetic pleasure. Notably, its predictive power is most pronounced in melodiousness (coefficient = 1.29, $p < 0.001$) and beauty/liking (coefficient = 0.52, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that parallelism enhances poetic texture by creating predictable yet engaging patterns (Menninghaus et al., 2024; 7). However, deviations from parallelism, while generally negatively correlated with ratings, coexist with parallel structures in original poetic texts, indicating that their interplay – rather than strict opposition – contributes to poetic complexity. This is reflected in curvilinear effects where excessive parallelism may diminish returns on melodiousness and vividness, reinforcing the idea that controlled cognitive challenges enrich poetic texture (Menninghaus et al., 2024; 8). These findings align with the Predictive Processing framework, where parallelism enhances predictability while deviations introduce dynamic tension, ultimately deepening aesthetic engagement.

The nuanced function of syntactic parallelism is further explored in biblical Hebrew poetry, where traditional interpretations are challenged by Gestalt-based models emphasizing perceptual symmetry over rigid line-by-line correspondence (Wendland, 2024; 68-70). Grosser's critique of the term "parallelism" as overly broad is countered by Wendland's argument that poetic meaning emerges from larger structural integrations rather than isolated symmetries. For instance, the strophic structure of Psalm 100 (Appeal-Reason: vv. 1-2,

4 and vv. 3, 5) and the medial break in 2 Samuel 1:19-27 (v. 23a) illustrate how syntactic parallelism operates within a holistic framework, where prosodic, semantic, and rhetorical harmonies collectively generate poetic effect (Wendland, 2024, p.68). This challenges reductionist views of parallelism as mere repetition, instead positioning it as one facet of a broader poetic system. The debate over line division in Lamentations 2:22 – whether it constitutes three or six lines – further highlights the syntactic complexity that resists rigid classification, reinforcing the need for flexible interpretive models (Wendland, 2024; 69).

Wendland's integrative approach suggests that syntactic parallelism functions alongside other poetic devices, such as rhythmic iteration and rhetorical apposition, rather than in isolation (Wendland, 2024; 70). Dobbs-Allsop's rhythmic iteration model and Holmstedt's appositional framework expand the syntactic lens by prioritizing clausal relationships over formal symmetry, demonstrating that parallelism in biblical poetry is as much about cognitive resonance as structural repetition. Hobbins' principle – that syntactic, morphological, and sonic parallelisms are hallmarks of ancient Hebrew verse – further supports this view, emphasizing minimal prosodic requirements for rhythmic balance between versets (Wendland, 2024; 68). Thus, syntactic parallelism in biblical poetry operates within a dynamic interplay of repetition, structural patterning, and audience perception, enriching textual meaning beyond surface-level correspondences.

A similar complexity is observed in classical Chinese couplets, where parallelism functions as a dynamic, interpretively rich construct rather than a rigid binary structure (Kurzynski et al., 2024; 203). Couplets such as 昔闻汾水游·今见尘外镳 ("Once I heard of travels by the Fen River, Now I see a horse beyond the dusty realms") exhibit deep semantic

correspondence despite imperfect syntactic symmetry, illustrating that parallelism transcends formal constraints and engages subjective interpretation. This aligns with the concept of "vector poetics," where analogical relationships (e.g., 春 – 生 + 死 ≈ 秋, "Spring – Life + Death ≈ Autumn") evoke culturally embedded oppositions, positioning parallelism as an expression of cultural cognition (Kurzynski, 2024; 205). Transformer-based models like SikuBERT further validate this by revealing focused attention along the diagonal in parallel couplets (indicating strong syntactic-semantic alignment), whereas non-parallel lines produce dispersed attention patterns (Kurzynski, 2024; 206). These findings confirm that syntactic parallelism in poetry serves as both a stylistic device and a cognitive scaffold, enhancing reader engagement and reinforcing culturally situated meaning.

Pashaei's study reinforces syntactic parallelism as a multifunctional stylistic device in poetry, emphasizing its role in repetition, rhythm, and thematic cohesion (Pashaei, 2024, p.10). Devices such as anaphora, epistrophe, and parallelism enhance structural harmony while aiding cognitive processing, as seen in the works of Emily Dickinson and Langston Hughes, where parallel constructions amplify emotional depth and musicality (Pashaei, 2024; 9). Beyond poetry, parallelism's effectiveness is evident in rhetoric – such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech – where repeated syntactic patterns intensify the message and ensure memorability (Pashaei, 2024; 10). This demonstrates that parallelism is not merely decorative but fundamental to structuring thought, evoking emotion, and guiding interpretation across literary and rhetorical contexts (Pashaei, 2024; 11).

The significance of syntactic parallelism extends to translation, where maintaining structural symmetry preserves poetic and rhetorical integrity (Dhimal & Timalisina, 2024; 170). In Muglān, declarative-to-declarative translations (98.88%) ensure narrative continuity, as in "He couldn't believe it and

thought this must be happening in the dream" (Dhimal & Timalisina, 2024; 170). Interrogative parallelism (e.g., "How much for two people?") retains dialogic function, while exclamatory parallelism ("Wow! How wonderful it is, Kānchhā to be in lorry!") sustains emotional intensity (Dhimal & Timalisina, 2024; 171). Imperative forms like "Stay here today" reinforce directive immediacy, illustrating how parallelism safeguards poetic voice and communicative function in translation (Dhimal & Timalisina, 2024; 171).

The Parallel Corpus for Tang Poetry and Song Lyrics (PCTS) further highlights parallelism's role in translation, where aligned bilingual corpora preserve syntactic symmetry across languages (Wang & Wang, 2024; 290). Example-based machine translation (EBMT) methods ensure that parallel couplets and rhythmic patterns – central to Chinese classical poetry – are faithfully rendered, maintaining rhetorical and aesthetic fidelity (Wang & Wang, 2024; 291). Concordancers enable learners to analyze recurring syntactic patterns, deepening engagement with poetic form and meaning. Thus, parallelism is not only an artistic technique but a functional framework in corpus-based translation, ensuring structural consistency and cross-linguistic poetic comprehension.

In light of Galante, da Rosa Righi, and de Andrade's (2024) exploration of adaptability in parallel programming, we can draw a compelling conceptual parallel with syntactic parallelism in poetry. Just as adaptability mechanisms in high-performance computing (HPC) systems enhance computational fluency, flexibility, and responsiveness to dynamic conditions (Galante et al., 2024; 12549-12552), syntactic parallelism in poetry functions as a cognitive and aesthetic mechanism that promotes rhythm, predictability, and emotional engagement (Menninghaus et al., 2024; 6). In both domains, patterning – whether algorithmic or syntactic – serves as a structural scaffold that facilitates processing while simultaneously

opening space for deviation, tension, and interpretive richness.

For example, the controlled deviations from parallelism in poetry (which exhibit curvilinear effects where excess repetition reduces aesthetic return) mirror the way adaptability in computing handles dynamic resource allocation for better efficiency and responsiveness (Galante et al., 2024; 12558-12561). Similarly, the dynamic interplay between fixed hardware/software configurations and real-time adaptive responses in computing (Fig. 1b) parallels the function of flexible poetic structures like those found in biblical Hebrew or classical Chinese verse, where syntactic symmetry coexists with expressive variation (Wendland, 2024; 68; Kurzynski et al., 2024; 205). In both fields, the evolution from static, repetitive frameworks to dynamic, context-sensitive models reflects a broader shift toward systems – whether textual or computational – that prioritize balance between structure and creativity, predictability and surprise.

Syntactic parallelism in poetry – marked by repeated structures and predictable syntactic patterns – finds an unexpected but insightful parallel in the morphosyntactic architecture of Baniswola Pashto as explored by Khan et al. (2025). The dialect's strict subject-verb agreement patterns and adjective-noun alignment echo the same principle found in poetic parallelism: structural symmetry as a cognitive and aesthetic device. For instance, examples such as *yaṭ kitob* ("big book") and *kujul-a kitob* ("beautiful book") illustrate agreement in gender, case, and number between adjectives and nouns (Khan et al., 2025; 4), forming parallel syntactic constructions. Similarly, subject-verb agreement in sentences like *miza kitob-ina lar-i* ("We have books") demonstrates morphosyntactic symmetry through repeated inflectional patterns, akin to poetic parallelism's rhythm and harmony (Khan et al., 2025; 5). These repeated syntactic alignments serve not only functional purposes in Baniswola Pashto

but also reinforce fluency and processing ease – core outcomes of poetic parallelism as identified by Menninghaus et al. (2024, p. 6).

However, just as modern cognitive poetics recognizes the aesthetic impact of controlled deviations from syntactic parallelism (e.g., curvilinear effects in Menninghaus et al., 2024; 8), Baniswola Pashto introduces variability through multifunctional structures like *aya*, which can serve both as a pronoun and demonstrative (Khan et al., 2025; 5). This hybrid element complicates parallel syntactic expectations and mirrors the poetic strategy of alternating parallel and non-parallel lines to generate semantic depth and engagement (Wendland, 2024; 68). For example, in the poetic couplet 昔闻汾水游 · 今见尘外镳 ("Once I heard of travels by the Fen River, now I see a horse beyond the dusty realms"), the imperfect syntactic parallelism enhances meaning through conceptual analogy rather than strict repetition (Kurzynski et al., 2024; 203). Likewise, the dialectal flexibility of *aya* creates interpretive tension, pushing minimalist assumptions of strict categorial boundaries and reflecting a poetic-like dynamism in morphosyntax.

Baniswola Pashto offers empirical support for understanding syntactic parallelism not as a rigid form but as a fluid system of pattern and variation that balances structure with contextual adaptability. Just as Pashaei (2024; 10) illustrates how parallel syntax enhances cohesion in the works of Emily Dickinson and Langston Hughes, Baniswola's structural regularities in possessive constructions (*de-mo kitob*, *de-de kitob*) reveal systematic layering that supports clarity and emphasis (Khan et al., 2025; 3). Yet, its divergence – e.g., context-driven agreement ambiguity in *aya kitob-ina lar-l* – pushes the boundaries of syntactic norms, much like poetic deviations do. This synergy between poetic and linguistic structure underscores that syntactic parallelism, whether in verse or vernacular grammar, functions as a multidimensional

scaffold for meaning, memory, and aesthetic effect, enriching both literary and theoretical understanding.

Syntactic parallelism in poetry – characterized by the repetition of structural patterns – operates as both a formal and cognitive device that enhances coherence, rhythm, and aesthetic experience. According to X-Bar theory, such parallelism arises from the universal organization of syntactic phrases into a Head, Intermediate (X'), and Maximal Projection (XP) structure (Radford, 2009; Ishtiaq & Gill, 2024; 552). This theory provides a compelling lens through which poetic structures can be analyzed: just as poetry often repeats or varies syntactic frames to produce emphasis or contrast, X-Bar theory models how Specifiers, Complements, and Adjuncts interact in uniform hierarchical ways. For instance, in English poetry, the use of repeated phrase constructions like “the wind that cries / the wind that howls” exemplifies how parallel XP projections emphasize thematic content through syntactic recurrence (Majid et al., 2019). These structures mirror the kind of phrase-building governed by X-Bar syntax, supporting the view that poetic syntax and universal grammar share foundational features.

However, cross-linguistic evidence complicates this universality. Ishtiaq and Gill (2024) argue that South Asian languages like Urdu and Pashto, with their SOV word order and rich inflectional morphology, challenge the presumed fixity of head-complement relations. For instance, in Pashto, postpositions replace English prepositions and verb morphology is significantly more complex (p. 553). This diverges from canonical X-Bar patterns yet still demonstrates syntactic parallelism through aligned structures like *aya kitob* (“that book”) and *kujul-a kitob* (“beautiful book”) – each maintaining consistent gender and case agreement (Khan et al., 2025; 4). These noun phrases showcase a morphosyntactic symmetry akin to poetic repetition, despite not adhering strictly to English-based X-Bar projections. Moreover, constructions like *miza*

kitob-ina lar-i (“we have books”) reinforce parallelism through consistent subject-verb agreement, revealing that even languages that diverge from typical European models maintain internal structural harmony that poetry often draws upon.

The poetic function of syntactic parallelism becomes especially apparent when structures deviate for expressive purposes. Just as X-Bar theory faces criticism for its limitations in accounting for non-linear and multifunctional syntactic behavior (Croft, 2009; Evans & Levinson, 2009), poetry thrives on controlled disruption. For example, the multifunctional Pashto element *aya*, which can act both as a demonstrative and a pronoun (Khan et al., 2025; 5), echoes the kind of syntactic flexibility exploited in poetic lines like *昔闻汾水游 · 今见尘外镰*, where the imperfect parallelism enhances conceptual contrast (Kurzynski et al., 2024; 203). Similarly, idiomatic expressions and figurative language in Urdu and English (Ali et al., 2019) further reveal how poetic syntax may intentionally defy predictable patterns to evoke deeper emotional or cognitive responses. Therefore, syntactic parallelism in poetry – while undergirded by universal tendencies as modeled in X-Bar theory – is not merely about repetition but about structured variation, a principle that both poetic language and multilingual syntax elegantly embody.

All these studies demonstrate that syntactic parallelism in poetry is a multifaceted phenomenon, operating at the intersection of cognitive processing, aesthetic appreciation, cultural cognition, and translational fidelity. Whether through the harmonic predictability observed by Menninghaus et al., the Gestalt-integrated symmetries in biblical poetry (Wendland, 2024), or the culturally embedded analogies in Chinese couplets (Kurzynski, 2024), parallelism emerges as a defining feature of poetic language. Its functions – ranging from rhythmic reinforcement to emotional amplification and cross-linguistic preservation

– confirm its indispensability in both the creation and interpretation of poetry.

The diverse studies explored above collectively affirm that syntactic parallelism in poetry is neither a mere stylistic embellishment nor a rigid syntactic constraint, but a complex, adaptable mechanism that balances structural repetition with expressive flexibility. Its distinctive features – rhythmic regularity, thematic reinforcement, and cognitive fluency – are grounded in universal syntactic principles such as those posited by X-Bar theory (Radford, 2009; Ishtiaq & Gill, 2024; 552), but the manifestation of these features is shaped by linguistic, cultural, and poetic contexts. For instance, while poetic structures in English can neatly align with Head–Specifier–Complement hierarchies, morphologically rich languages like Urdu and Pashto exhibit syntactic parallelism through agreement patterns and noun phrase symmetry, even when diverging from canonical X-Bar configurations (Ishtiaq & Gill, 2024; 553–554; Khan et al., 2025, p. 4). These observations suggest that parallelism is functionally universal, even if formally variable.

Crucially, the aesthetic and cognitive dimensions of syntactic parallelism are heightened by its dynamic interplay with deviation. As empirical findings show (Menninghaus et al., 2024; 6–8), parallel structures enhance melodiousness and comprehension, while subtle departures from parallelism generate poetic tension and interpretive richness. This principle is echoed in biblical Hebrew poetry, where poetic meaning

arises from holistic structures rather than rigid line matching (Wendland, 2024; 68–70), and in classical Chinese verse, where imperfect syntactic symmetry fosters deeper analogical meaning (Kurzynski et al., 2024, p. 203). Similarly, in Baniswola Pashto, multifunctional elements like *aya* introduce syntactic variation that parallels poetic strategies of modulation and surprise (Khan et al., 2025; 5). In each case, syntactic parallelism serves as both scaffold and foil, simultaneously organizing meaning and creating space for emotional or conceptual depth.

In conclusion, syntactic parallelism is best understood as a multidimensional feature of poetic language – anchored in universal cognitive and grammatical patterns, yet richly shaped by cultural, linguistic, and stylistic variation. It operates not in isolation but in synergy with rhythm, morphology, rhetoric, and semantics, enabling poetry to achieve its unique blend of structure and affect. From the predictable phrasal architectures of English verse to the morphosyntactic elegance of Urdu and Pashto, and from the translational fidelity of Chinese couplets to the dynamic discourse of biblical lamentation, syntactic parallelism proves essential to how poetry means, moves, and resonates. As both a linguistic and artistic phenomenon, it exemplifies how patterned form can generate interpretive freedom – an insight with implications not only for poetics and syntax, but also for translation studies, education, and even computational linguistics.

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