

SYNTACTIC PARALLELISM IN ENGLISH POETRY: A COGNITIVE STYLISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of syntactic parallelism in English poetry through the lens of cognitive stylistics. Drawing on diverse literary analyses and theoretical models, it demonstrates how structural repetition enhances poetic meaning, reader engagement, and emotional resonance. The study underscores the cognitive function of parallel syntax as a tool for conceptual framing, aesthetic depth, and interpretive accessibility.

Keywords: cognitive stylistics, syntactic parallelism, English poetry, reader engagement, poetic meaning, conceptual framing, stylistic analysis.

The role of syntactic parallelism in English poetry, particularly within the field of cognitive stylistics, is crucial to understanding how readers interpret and emotionally respond to literary texts. The work of Pager-McClymont and Giovanelli (2023) brings this to the forefront by analyzing how parallel structures in their own poetry function not just as stylistic ornaments, but as cognitive triggers that activate embodied schemas and mental imagery. In *Hush*, for example, Giovanelli layers parallel prepositional phrases such as “as the ancient feet of trees” and “the painted sheet of stars,” which evoke a CONTAINER image schema, suggesting spatial and emotional enclosure. This not only aligns syntactic form with semantic meaning, but also highlights how cognitive stylistics enables a deeper reader engagement through form-meaning congruence. Such devices, underpinned by phonological repetition and rhythmic balance, function iconically—what is described is also mirrored in how it is described.

This interplay between structure and cognition is echoed in Pager-McClymont’s *Of the Pathetic Fallacy*, where syntactic and lexical parallelism—such as “rain drops on a curtain”—rely on repetition and negation to represent internal states. These strategies invite the reader into a shared affective experience, reinforcing the idea that parallelism is not only aesthetic, but also epistemic, guiding interpretation and enhancing emotional resonance (Pager-McClymont & Giovanelli, 2023). This aligns with broader insights from Cognitive Grammar, such as the notion of sequential and summary scanning, which are used to shift readers’ perception of time in the poem. Nominalisations like “inverted” and “murmurs” foster a timeless quality, prompting the reader to simulate a dreamlike, stilled world—an example of how syntactic structures can orchestrate conceptual frames.

A broader historical and literary perspective reinforces these findings. In Dickens’s famous opening to *A Tale of Two Cities*—“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”—syntactic parallelism dramatizes contradiction, mirroring

both thematic duality and cognitive dissonance. This reflects Galperin's classification of syntactic parallelism as an expressive stylistic device that intensifies meaning through balanced repetition (Umedilloevna & G'afurovna, 2025). The contrast between "best" and "worst" is not only lexical but structurally reinforced, demanding that readers hold opposing ideas simultaneously, a mental operation deeply tied to conceptual integration and schema conflict resolution. Such literary moments exemplify how parallelism scaffolds the cognitive load, helping readers to construct complex thematic interpretations.

The work of Skrebnev, Toolan, Halliday, and Tsur provides additional grounding for these observations. Through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday) and foregrounding theory, they explore how patterns like anaphora, epiphora, and chiasmus act as cognitive cues, reinforcing cohesion and focus in poetic texts. In Hemingway's sparse, repetitive prose in *The Old Man and the Sea*—"He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff..."—parallelism appears in its simplest form, generating narrative rhythm and psychological realism. These structures reflect what Leech and Short describe as stylistic features that both highlight and naturalize conceptual mappings, aiding the reader in constructing a text-world that feels intuitively real and emotionally grounded.

Contemporary studies such as those by Evuti and Ogungbe (2023) further situate syntactic parallelism within a broader cognitive-stylistic matrix, emphasizing how stylistic repetition enhances reader immersion and interpretive depth. When readers encounter repeated structures, they access existing schemas, making the reading experience feel more predictable, memorable, and emotionally charged. For instance, Bamigboye's (2020) research on schema theory illustrates how familiar syntactic patterns trigger stored mental models, thus aiding in thematic comprehension and emotional recall. This explains why parallelism is so prevalent in poetry: it is a tool that activates cognition in deeply resonant ways, connecting new poetic input with stored knowledge.

Ibraheem (2014) demonstrates how syntactic parallelism encodes not only poetic meaning but cultural and political commentary. His application of Halliday's functional grammar shows how poets use syntactic repetition to critique or reinforce ideological messages. Similarly, Nweze (2012) highlights how authors like Ngugi and Okri use stylistic layering and repetition to represent the complexities of postcolonial identity. These strategies rely heavily on cognitive mechanisms like pattern recognition and contrast mapping, reinforcing how parallelism serves as a cognitive gateway to layered interpretation. Oyedeji and Idoko (2021) expand on this by showing how repeated structures evoke themes of corruption and governance in Nigerian poetry, engaging readers not just emotionally but politically and cognitively.

Even studies that focus on more accessible or political discourses, such as those by Nzeakor (2020) and Oseni & Odebiyi (2021), affirm the idea that stylistic consistency, particularly via syntactic parallelism, improves reader comprehension and facilitates critical thinking. Their work supports the idea that repetition structures attention, guiding readers toward key interpretive focal points. This

echoes insights from Giovanelli and Pager-McClymont (2023), who stress that poetic syntax, when deliberately constructed, becomes a scaffold for meaning-making, enabling the reader to co-construct the interpretive world of the poem through cognitive alignment with form.

This notion is powerfully illustrated in the poem *Stone Bridge* by Daud Kamal, which Haider and Ramzan (2023) analyze through a cognitive stylistic lens. The poem's metaphors—"jagged hills," "hungry wolf," and "stone bridge"—are undergirded by syntactic parallelism, which enables the reader to process abstract concepts like mortality and the afterlife through structured, familiar patterns. These repeated syntactic structures cue mental simulations, allowing readers to vividly experience the contrast between life's sensual beauty and death's ominous pull. Cognitive opposition—life versus death, nature versus the unknown—is enacted not only through lexis but through reiterated syntactic rhythms, intensifying emotional resonance and guiding symbolic interpretation.

In addition, personification and hyperbole in *Stone Bridge*—like the "shivering window" or the "jagged hill"—benefit from their placement within repeated syntactic frames, which creates narrative symmetry and reinforces imagery. These devices invite readers into a shared embodied experience, mapping physical sensations onto conceptual states—a hallmark of cognitive stylistic processing. As Umedilloevna and G'afurovna (2025) argue, such stylistic features are essential in engaging the reader's emotional and intellectual faculties, especially when they are cognitively anchored by syntactic repetition.

Taken together, these findings underscore that syntactic parallelism in English poetry functions as a cognitive bridge between language form and conceptual understanding. Whether in canonical literature like Dickens and Eliot, postcolonial poetry as explored by Nweze and Oyedeki, or contemporary works by Giovanelli and Pager-McClymont, parallel structures serve not only to beautify language but also to organize perception, shape reader interpretation, and facilitate emotional engagement. The convergence of stylistic form and cognitive function reveals poetry as a deeply interactive cognitive event, one where syntax and semantics work symbiotically to guide meaning, evoke emotion, and build immersive, interpretable worlds.

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