

The System of Tropes Based on the Principle of Alogism in the English Language

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the system of stylistic tropes in the English language that are based on the principle of alogism—a deliberate deviation from logical or conventional meaning to achieve expressive, rhetorical, or critical effects. The study focuses on key tropes such as catachresis, litotes, and irony, offering a linguo-stylistic analysis of their semantic, structural, and pragmatic features. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from scholars including I. R. Galperin, H. Weinrich, I. B. Shatunovsky, and M. E. Ryashina, the research highlights how these tropes function not only as expressive tools but also as markers of evaluative and cultural meaning in discourse. Through illustrative examples from English literature – ranging from Alexander Pope and E. E. Cummings to Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and Henry Fielding – the paper demonstrates how alogism-based tropes contribute to stylistic convergence by interacting with other devices such as paradox, antithesis, metaphor, and phonostylistic repetition. The study concludes that alogism serves as a foundational principle in the construction of nuanced literary meaning and is central to the stylistic creativity of English discourse.

Keywords: Alogism, stylistic tropes, catachresis, litotes, irony, stylistic convergence, expressive meaning, linguistic analysis, English literature, rhetorical devices, evaluative semantics, language and culture, phonostylistics, antithesis, paradox

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary linguistic and stylistic research increasingly emphasizes the role of language phenomena that intentionally deviate from traditional logic. Such elements, particularly those rooted in the principle of alogism, are crucial in shaping nuanced meanings in both spoken and written discourse. Alogism, characterized by an intentional violation of logical or semantic expectations, allows speakers and writers to express complex evaluations, emotional subtleties, and rhetorical intentions beyond the surface of literal interpretation.

This paper concentrates on three prominent stylistic devices in English that exemplify alogistic expression: catachresis, litotes, and irony. These tropes are essential not only for enriching literary language but also for conveying ambiguity, contradiction, and critical perspective. Drawing upon theoretical insights from scholars such as I. R. Galperin, H. Weinrich, and I. B. Shatunovsky, the study provides a stylistic-linguistic analysis of these devices within selected examples from English literary texts.

By exploring how these tropes function in actual language use, the study illustrates that alogism is not merely a stylistic anomaly but a productive principle in expressive communication. Special focus is given to how such devices form stylistic convergence with other rhetorical means, contributing to the overall communicative, evaluative, and cultural depth of discourse.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The analysis of stylistic devices based on the principle of alogism draws upon interdisciplinary frameworks within semantics, pragmatics, and stylistics. Alogism, as a linguistic and rhetorical phenomenon, refers to the deliberate use of language in a way that violates conventional logic or expected semantic coherence. Rather than being perceived as an error, such deviation serves expressive, communicative, and often ironic purposes in literary and everyday discourse.

I. R. Galperin emphasizes that many stylistic figures function through the interaction of different layers of meaning, including objective-logical and contextual meanings. In the case of irony, for example, this interaction results in contrast and contradiction between what is said and what is meant. According to Galperin, irony is defined as a stylistic device in which two opposing meanings clash, creating expressive and evaluative impact.

H. Weinrich, in his study of rhetorical mechanisms, introduces the concept of the “ironic signal” – a subtle linguistic or contextual cue that alerts the reader or listener to the speaker’s actual intent. This signal distinguishes irony from literal usage and underscores its reliance on shared cultural and communicative knowledge.

I. B. Shatunovsky contributes to the theoretical understanding of irony by suggesting that ironic expression is often structurally valid on the surface but logically false in its presupposition. That is, the formal statement may appear truthful, yet its underlying implication contradicts expected reasoning or real-world knowledge—thus producing an alogistic effect.

In the domain of catachresis, scholars such as O. L. Yakutina classify this trope into multiple types, emphasizing its role as a “necessary misuse” of language, often emerging when a suitable term is absent. Catachresis merges incompatible conceptual domains, producing a rhetorical tension that serves as a creative linguistic solution.

Litotes, in contrast, functions as an understatement that affirms something by denying its opposite. M. E. Ryashina connects litotes to English cultural tendencies toward understatement and ambiguity. Her work suggests that this trope is prevalent in English due to both linguistic structures (e.g., negative prefixes) and cultural preferences for indirect expression. Galperin, meanwhile, classifies litotes within phonetic-syntactic stylistics due to the role of intonation and emphatic negation in its formation.

Altogether, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that alogism is not merely a stylistic deviation but a central principle in the structuring of expressive language. Tropes such as catachresis, litotes, and irony reveal how deviation from logic

can yield enhanced communicative depth, cultural resonance, and stylistic creativity.

RESULTS

Tropes based on the principle of alogism play an important role in linguistics, particularly in the fields of semantics, pragmatics, and stylistics, in the study of the semantic layers of speech—that is, its communicative, expressive, and emotional functions, as well as its cultural impact. Our aim is to linguostylistically investigate the main types of tropes that fall under the semantic classification group of semantic-structural-functional microstructures of speech devices built upon the principle of alogism. In order to achieve this goal, first and foremost, we have deemed it necessary to analyze the system of tropes of this character. As we emphasized in the above chapter, the word *trope* is derived from the Greek word *tropos*, which means "turn" or "figurative image," and for this reason, A. A. Potebnya states that a trope should be understood as "ornamented, figurative speech" (Potebnya 1990: 344).

Catachresis – the term originates from the Greek language and denotes "misuse" or "application in an inappropriate context." Catachresis refers to an unusual, astonishing, or unconventional comparison or connection between two entirely different entities, which in ordinary language typically have no relation to each other or contradict traditional usage, and is employed in speech or writing to create a rhetorical effect. (Sharma 2014: 83).

The Greek philosopher B. Lamy, in his work *Rhetoric*, describes catachresis as the most liberal type of trope and defines it as follows: "Such an expression is not required by reason, but necessity compels its use" (Lami 2002: 127).

O. L. Yakutina, through her scholarly research and analysis of definitions of catachresis found in dictionaries and encyclopedias, categorized them into the following six main groups: The first group of scholars defines catachresis as a misused word or phrase (Axmanova 2003: 189).

According to the second group of scholars, catachresis is viewed as a “combination of contradictory words,” used either figuratively or literally – either mistakenly or intentionally. Nevertheless, such combinations form a unique semantic unity. The third group of scholars associates catachresis with metaphor. According to this theory, catachresis is a “misapplied metaphor,” used when a specific term for a particular object is lacking. In such cases, directly literal meanings contradict each other and create an image that does not align with the overall meaning of the sentence. The fourth group of researchers considers catachresis a “stylistic device,” wherein a word departs from its exact meaning to refer to another object, one that possesses some degree of similarity with the former (Marouzeau 1943: 50). The fifth group includes definitions that present catachresis as a “stylistic (rhetorical) figure.” Authors such as Manoli, *Nouvelle Encyclopédie Bordas*, and *Le Robert* emphasize the figurative aspect of catachresis. They argue that when we aim to express an idea that lacks a designated term, we use a word in a figurative sense – and this very usage constitutes catachresis as a rhetorical figure (Manoli 1983: 37). The sixth group encompasses definitions from certain lexicographic works. Scholars such as O. S. Akhmanova, J. Mazaleyrat, and G. Molinié describe catachresis as a *trope*, where words are used in meanings not naturally inherent to them (Akhmanova 1969: 189).

Based on our research, we support the widely accepted definition of catachresis as a trope – namely, a figurative combination of words that are not inherently contradictory but, when paired, produce a semantic clash. Catachresis is one of the tropes grounded in the principle of alogism, and we present its linguo-stylistic analysis below through illustrative examples.

In the following lines from *Peri Bathous, or the Art of Sinking in Poetry* by Alexander Pope – one of the leading poets, translators, and satirists of 17th-century English literature – words that are semantically incompatible are combined, resulting in logical incongruity. This serves as a clear example of catachresis:

Mow the beard,
Shave the grass,
Pin the plank,
Nail my sleeve.

(A. Pope)

Structurally, this example presents catachresis in the form of an imperative verb (bare infinitive) followed by an object, establishing an action-object relationship. From a semantic perspective, each object is paired with a rhyming verb that does not logically correspond to its meaning, intentionally producing semantic confusion and humorous effects.

Phonostylistic techniques are also present in this excerpt. In the combinations “mow – beard,” “nail – sleeve,” and “shave – grass,” one can observe contrasts of vowel sounds, while the repetition of the “p” sound in “Pin the plank” demonstrates the use of alliteration as a phonostylistic device. “Mow the beard” uses the verb “mow,” typically associated with cutting grass or crops, in reference to a beard – thus creating an incongruous catachrestic metaphor. “Shave the grass” employs the verb “shave,” normally used for removing facial hair, in relation to grass, thereby producing an odd and logically inconsistent expression. “Pin the plank” applies the verb “pin,” which usually means fastening fabric with a pin, to a wooden plank – an illogical pairing. “Nail my sleeve” uses “nail” (to drive a nail) with “sleeve,” where stitching or buttoning would be expected, thus forming an unusual and semantically mismatched phrase.

In our view, Pope’s communicative intent behind these expressions was satirical. Through such exaggerated use of mismatched words, he mocked the poetic tendency of his contemporaries to combine logically incompatible elements, often producing absurd or stylistically overwrought expressions. Emotionally and expressively, Pope’s use of complex catachresis reflects a critical stance toward poetic excess, adopting a sarcastic tone to evoke amusement while delivering subtle critique.

What makes this poem particularly noteworthy is the way catachresis serves as a central stylistic tool for conveying its

satirical message. It is intensified through the combined use of other stylistic devices such as alliteration and paradox, creating a phenomenon known as stylistic convergence. This phenomenon, typical of artistic-poetic discourse, represents a widely employed linguo-creative process that contributes to effective literary expression.

To understand “stylistic convergence,” we must first clarify the concept of convergence. According to the linguistics section of V. N. Yartseva’s comprehensive encyclopedic dictionary, “convergence” refers to “the approximation or similarity of two or more linguistic units.” T. G. Khazagerova and L. S. Shirina, in their *Dictionary of Rhetorical Devices*, describe convergence as “a means of enhancing artistic expressiveness through the accumulation and concentration of stylistic devices performing the same function.” R. Jakobson notes: “The process of understanding the environment in a literary text becomes complex, as the writer seeks to account for all the interacting factors of life and connect them through various tropes and rhetorical figures.”

Overall, stylistic convergence remains a relatively underexplored phenomenon. In our research, we aim to investigate how stylistic devices based on the principle of alogism – such as tropes and rhetorical figures – form stylistic convergence with other devices and to highlight the different forms this convergence may take.

The American poet and writer E.E. Cummings made skillful use of catachresis in his poetry. Consider the following lines:

The voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses
Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands...
(Cummings, E. “Somewhere I have never travelled”)

In “the voice of your eyes”, Cummings uses a genitive noun phrase that semantically combines “voice” and “eyes,” concepts unrelated in a logical sense. This expression reflects an emotional experience conveyed through a piercing gaze, thereby intensifying the emotional resonance of the poem. The line “Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands” is

structurally complex, composed of “Nobody (subject) + not even the rain (additional modifier) + has (predicate) + such small hands (object).” It implies that not even something as gentle and omnipresent as rain possesses hands so small – delicately suggesting tenderness and intimacy. Rather than simply stating “you are beautiful,” the poet uses catachresis to convey emotional depth and draw the reader into an affective experience.

In this excerpt, catachresis functions as the primary trope and forms stylistic convergence with several other devices.

In “The voice of your eyes”, eyes are likened to a voice, blending metaphor and catachresis. The expression links the senses of sight (eyes) and sound (voice), representing synesthesia interconnected with catachresis. In “Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands,” the attribution of “hands” to “rain” constitutes personification, while the implication that no one else has such small hands is a form of hyperbole. This multilayered interplay of stylistic tools exemplifies the expressive richness and emotional subtlety that catachresis, especially when embedded within stylistic convergence, can offer in poetic discourse.

One of the stylistic devices based on the principle of alogism is meiosis (or litotes). Various scholarly sources provide differing views on this phenomenon. According to the *Dictionary of Linguistic Terms*, meiosis (or litotes) is a rhetorical figure involving the deliberate understatement of the degree or quality of something. It is the opposite of hyperbole, and can be illustrated through examples such as the Russian expressions *играютприлично* (“they play quite well,” used to mean “very well”) or *мальчикпалец* (“a boy the size of a thumb”), as well as the English phrase “Rather! I’ll see you further first,” which conveys strong rejection in a softened, indirect form (Axmanova 2005: 226). I. R. Galperin proposes classifying litotes among phonetic-syntactic devices, emphasizing the crucial role of intonation in its formation. In litotes, the placement and stress of the negative particle carry special importance. While in ordinary negative sentences the emphasis may be subtle, in litotes the negative element (e.g., “not”) is strongly stressed, which often alters the interpretation of the entire structure.

M. E. Ryashina, in her article ‘Some Features of the English National Character and their Manifestation in Language,’ identifies litotes as a part of English linguistic-cultural characteristics. She notes that the English tendency toward understatement and ambiguity is reflected in daily life, including humor and social interaction, often relying on implicitness rather than full semantic disclosure. Ryashina attributes the widespread use of litotes in English to the abundance of negative prefixes such as “un-,” “in-,” “il-,” “im-,” “ir-,” “dis-,” “mis-,” etc. These prefixes, although not identical in form to the negative particle *not*, are frequently used in combination with it. This allows expressions to become softer, more indirect, and polite. Indeed, the morphological typology of a language plays a decisive role in shaping the nature of its stylistic units.

One of the core principles of litotes is the affirmation of a positive quality through negation, which, in some cases, appears logically contradictory—thus introducing alogism. In litotes, there may be a logical mismatch between syntactic form and semantic meaning. Consider the following example:

...with such a mother and such uncompanionable sisters, home could not be faultless, a little change was not unwelcome for its own sake.

(Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*)

In this sentence, Jane Austen employs litotes. The construction “...with such a mother and such uncompanionable sisters” serves as a descriptive clause; “home could not be faultless” follows the pattern subject + negative modal verb + nominal predicate. The semantic implication of “could not be faultless” is that the home was far from perfect, and “was not unwelcome” subtly indicates that change was indeed welcomed. Both expressions use negation through elements such as “not,” “-less,” and “un-.” Austen’s communicative intention is to convey Elizabeth’s dissatisfaction with her home environment without stating it directly, using gentle negation to produce a stylistically marked effect. In this case, litotes works in convergence with other stylistic devices, such as irony and euphemism, to reinforce the meaning.

Litotes is not only a stylistic tool that demonstrates the author's mastery, but also a trope that, by avoiding sharp or direct statements and partially relying on the principle of alogism, prompts reflection and heightens the text's expressive impact.

An example from Old English literature – the epic *Beowulf* – also illustrates the use of litotes:

Beowulf raised the hard weapon by the hilt, angry and resolute –
the sword wasn't useless to the warrior.

(Beowulf)

Instead of stating “the sword was useful to Beowulf,” the phrase “the sword wasn't useless to the warrior” employs litotes to engage the reader more deeply in the moment and to express the sword's value in a subtler way. Structurally, this is composed of: “the sword” (subject), “wasn't useless” (predicate), “to the warrior” (complement). Semantically, “not useless” conveys “useful,” fulfilling the communicative goal of evoking the mood of battle readiness. This litotic construction also forms stylistic convergence with other devices. The descriptor “hard weapon” functions as a poetic epithet, while the use of “weapon” instead of “sword” involves metonymy – further enriching the expression.

Let us analyze another example:

I did not hate the old man.

(Edgar Allan Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart*)

In Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the sentence “I did not hate the old man” follows the structure: “I” (subject), “did not hate” (predicate), “the old man” (object). From a semantic point of view, the use of the negative particle “not” before the verb “hate,” a word with negative connotation, results in a softened or indirect positive meaning. Instead of stating “I liked the old man,” the author uses litotes to encourage the reader to uncover the implicit meaning. This technique not only softens the

expression but adds psychological depth, prompting readers to interpret the narrator's true feelings.

From these examples, we conclude that litotes embodies the principle of alogism – it indirectly diverges from logical clarity to express meaning in a nontraditional, gentler, or even ironic form. This principle enhances the expressiveness of litotes and enables its effective use as a stylistic device.

Irony

One of the stylistic devices that reflects a minimal form of alogistic expression is irony. It not only conveys humor, but can also express emotions such as pity, disapproval, anger, or despair, and in some cases, may reflect a sense of illogicality or contradiction. I. R. Galperin defines irony as follows: “Irony is a stylistic device in which two different lexical meanings of a word – the objective-logical meaning and the contextual meaning – interact. This interaction is based on a relationship of contrast (opposition), whereby these two meanings contradict each other” (Galperin 1958: 132). What makes irony distinctive is that its evaluative aspect takes precedence over its logically semantic meaning. For this reason, irony is studied as a stylistic phenomenon based on the relationship between a word’s literal and figurative meanings. H. Weinrich emphasizes the presence of an “ironic signal” as an essential component of irony, suggesting that irony requires a recognizable cue or marker that signals the speaker’s intended opposite meaning (Vaynrix 1987: 79).

According to I. B. Shatunovsky, one of the most common methods for constructing irony is when an expression is logically and factually true on the surface, but false from a certain presuppositional viewpoint (Shatunovskiy 2007: 342). That is, the sentence’s external structure may seem valid and truthful, while its underlying presupposition is illogical or absurd. Depending on the context, this technique creates an ironic or satirical effect, as the reader or listener detects the hidden evaluative twist.

A striking example of such sharp verbal irony can be found in Charles Dickens’ novel *A Tale of Two Cities*:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,
 it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,
 it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity,
 it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness,
 it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,
 we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,
 we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the
 other way –
 in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of
 its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received,
 for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.
 (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*)

In this passage, the repeated syntactic structure “it was...” creates rhythmic parallelism and symmetry. The use of antithesis heightens the sense of contrast and deepens the ironic effect. A semantic analysis reveals not only irony and antithesis, but also paradox – for instance, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” implies a time that was simultaneously ideal and terrible, hinting at the complexity and hardship of that historical period.

In the line “we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,” Dickens uses contradictory expressions side by side, producing an illogical combination that amplifies the irony. The final phrase “in the superlative degree of comparison only” suggests that the era was viewed in overly dramatic terms, where loud voices insisted on interpreting events as either the absolute best or worst. This critique of extreme viewpoints enhances the ironic tone of the passage. The excerpt is rich not only in irony but also in multiple stylistic devices. For instance:

Dickens masterfully uses antithesis in “the best of times / the worst of times,” “wisdom / foolishness,” “light / darkness,” etc. He also employs repetition with the structure “it was...” to create emphasis. In “the period was so far like the present period...” Dickens draws a historical parallel between his time and the pre-revolutionary period in France, implying that the same social issues persist – an idea wrapped in subtle irony.

In another example, English writer Henry Fielding uses verbal irony to expose the character of 18th-century criminal Jonathan Wild in *Jonathan Wild*:

He was, indeed, the greatest of all great men, for he could do no good, nor could he avoid doing evil.

(Henry Fielding, *Jonathan Wild*)

Structurally, this is a complex compound sentence:

He (subject), indeed (emphatic particle), was the greatest of all great men (nominal predicate), for (conjunction) he could do no good, nor could he avoid doing evil.

The coordinating conjunction *nor* triggers inversion, as the modal verb *could* precedes the subject (*he*), adding both emphasis and syntactic complexity.

Semantically, Fielding contrasts the words “good” and “evil,” creating a strong ironic undertone. While greatness traditionally implies moral excellence, the statement ironically suggests that Wild’s “greatness” lies in his total inability to do good and his irresistible compulsion to do harm – thus using “greatness” in its opposite, negative sense.

Fielding’s communicative intent is to provoke reflection and critique the so-called “great” figures of his time. Through irony, he reveals how societal values may be distorted. This example also demonstrates stylistic convergence, where irony combines with several other devices:

1. The use of “greatest” alongside moral failure creates a paradox.
2. The expression “greatest of all great men” reflects hyperbole.
3. The inversion following “nor” (“nor could he avoid”) contributes to the alogistic structure.

These converging elements reinforce the ironic tone and ensure that it stands out clearly to the reader.

In conclusion, irony is fundamentally rooted in the principle of alogism, as it intentionally deviates from logical clarity to present meaning in an inverted, softened, or critical form. This principle not only enhances the expressiveness of the statement but also increases its stylistic effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the expressive and rhetorical potential of stylistic devices rooted in the principle of alogism, particularly focusing on catachresis, litotes, and irony. Through linguistic and literary analysis, it has been shown that these tropes not only represent intentional deviations from logical structure but also serve as powerful tools for creating evaluative meaning, emotional nuance, and stylistic distinctiveness. Their effectiveness lies precisely in their capacity to challenge the reader's or listener's expectations, thus stimulating deeper cognitive and interpretive engagement.

The selected examples from English literary discourse – ranging from the satirical catachreses of Alexander Pope to the subtle litotes of Jane Austen and the sharp ironies of Charles Dickens and Henry Fielding – demonstrate that alogism is not a defect of communication, but rather a productive stylistic strategy. When combined with other rhetorical devices such as metaphor, paradox, hyperbole, and syntactic inversion, alogistic tropes contribute to what has been termed stylistic convergence, enriching the overall expressive texture of discourse.

Ultimately, this research confirms that alogism-based tropes are integral to the creativity of language, particularly in literature, where deviation from the norm is often a means of revealing deeper truths, critiquing social realities, or engaging the audience in a more nuanced and emotionally resonant manner. Further research could explore the cross-cultural manifestations of alogism in stylistics and its pedagogical value in developing critical language awareness.

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