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Parallelism as a stylistic device for message projection in biblical discourse: The example of St. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, chapter thirteen

Овај чланак представља стилску анализу материјала једног одломка из Библије – 1. Коринћанима гл. 13. Рад представља покушај да се идентификују, анализирају и прокоментаришу значајне напоредне конструкције из текста које доприносе трајном деловању поруке.

⚷ Кључне речи:
Parallelism, Stylistics, Discourse, Charity, St. Paul.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

St. Paul's message in the thirteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians is a notable contribution to the discourse on love (or charity as the King James Version of the Bible renders it). Though written centuries ago, the chapter strikes the critical reader not only for its timeless theme of love but for its use of the repetitive device of grammatical parallelism to transmit and reinforce an important message in a way that makes it pertinent and applicable today as when it was first written. In form and content, the chapter provides a classic example of how to deploy parallel structures in the service of an important message.

What this stylistic analysis hopes to achieve is to foreground the parallel syntactic and lexical arrangements that enhance a blend of message with language in the text.

2.0 THEORETICAL PRELIMINARIES AND ANALYTICAL FRAME WORK

Language is a special human endowment and the most frequently used of all the means of communication available to man. Nonetheless, creativity in language use can and does influence the way a communicative purpose is achieved. Though the resources of language are vast enough to allow its users many options from which to select, the choice of

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an appropriate language to match a communicative purpose is not always an easy task. An interplay of conscious effort and divine inspiration cannot be ruled out in any harmonious marriage of language and message. After all, a theory for the origin of language is based on 'the divine source' (Yule 1996: 1). In any case, the choice the language user makes contributes to the effectiveness of his intended message and reflects his style. Since style is largely based on linguistic choices, language and style can be said to be two of a kind.

Though biblical discourse has its own register, the style of the individual writers of the sixty-six books that make up the Bible differs from one to the other depending on his background, personality, period, profession, assignment, subject of discourse and level of inspiration. The Bible can be aptly described as a compendium of books and styles.

Parallelism is the stylistic device, which St Paul employs in projecting his message on love or charity in the biblical text under close examination. The role of parallel structures in an effective message delivery has been compared to the functions of the rails of a railway, which are parallel to prevent the train from running off the track. Like the rails, the parts within a sentence can make use of parallel structures to keep message in track and on course. The principle of parallelism requires that a sentence be balanced with a sentence, a clause with a clause, a phrase or group with a phrase or group, and a word class with a class. Egbe (1996: 12), describes sentence balancing and parallelism as

> …a kind of structure that has a sequence of two clauses or sentence in which the second (i) parallels the first by way of information content and (ii) almost duplicates it in structure and length.

As Valdaeva (2003: 386) also captures it, "Parallelism is an identity of the syntactical structural of two or more sentences following each other in the speech".

Parallelism in grammatical construction, is a stylistic arrangement, in which sentence elements which are similar in content and function are expressed in similar grammatical forms. Put simply, elements of equal status are linked in similar or near similar grammatical forms.

Eko (1986: 166) has this to say on the importance of parallel structure:

> A process that allows a writer to emphase parallel ideas in sentence, or paragraphs (could be series of verbs, prepositions, phrases, and gerunds or clauses, for example). Parallel structures can provide economy and strengthen a piece of writing.

Parallelism is a device to 'emphasize' and 'strengthen' the ideas in a piece of writing. It thus creates a special, forceful impression on the reader. It makes a message appeal to 'the ear and the heart' and this could be a reason for its choice by the writer of first Corinthians, chapter thirteen.

Two main kinds of parallelism in English are (1) parallel structure in a series in which all items in a series or link should be in parallel form and (2) parallel structure in the pairing of two ideas especially when the two ideas are being compared or contrasted. On the first kind, Adegbija (1987: 74) expresses that "While enumerating, for instance, a phrase should be followed by a phrase, a clause by a clause, a noun by a noun, and a verb by a verb etc."

This arrangement is to make the sense clear, coherent and easy to follow. For the second kind, both sides of the same grammatical structure can generally be connected by any of the co-ordinating conjunctions *and, but, or nor, for,* or a correlative conjunction

like *either... or, both... and, neither... nor, not only... but also.* In this case, the two sides are expressed in an exactly or almost exactly parallel structure in a balanced sentence with two parts that 'mirror' each other.

The analytical approach in this stylistic exercise, as stated in the introduction, is to identify the striking parallel structures in the Corinthian chapter and discuss their contributions to message transmission and reinforcement in the text. This would involve an application of any of the two major kinds of parallelism as appropriate in each section of the analysis.

3.0 AN ANALYSIS OF PARALLEL STRUCTURES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS THIRTEEN

What follows is an analysis of the parallel grammatical structure that enhances the lasting impact of the message of charity in St Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians church in chapter 13 of the book. Before the analysis proper, it is considered pertinent to provide a prelude to the analysis to shed some light on the form and content of the chapter.

3.1 Prelude to Analysis

As stated earlier (1.0), the stimulus for the textual analysis is provided by the striking fact that the message on charity is entirely wrapped in parallel structures. It is equally striking that parallelism is not only evident in the grammatical constructions but also in the recurrence of figure 13 in the text. The message is located in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians and expressed in thirteen verses. Thus, there is a dexterous parallelism in the chapter position and the number of verses. This seems to hint at the direction

the message is to take through the vehicle of parallel structures.

The Corinthian chapter focuses on the description and importance of charity. Charity in the context of the chapter is spontaneous and divine love. According to the explanation in Dake's Annotated Reference Bible, Verses 1–3 express that gifts are valueless unless exercised in love; 4–7 describe the characteristics of love and 8–13 show that gifts are temporary but love and other graces are eternal. The chapter is an attempt by St Paul to 'show in an excellent way' that charity is to be preferred because it is the 'best gift' (1 Corinthians 12. 31).

3.1.1 *The Analysis*

The message of charity in the text under examination is projected through well-balanced parallel grammatical constructions. Discourse segments with parallel structures occur in all the thirteen verses of the chapter at the grammatical units of sentence, clause, group and word. For the purpose of analysis and ease of reference, the verses are presented in the notation and orthography in which they appear in King James Version of the Bible, the version that seems best suited in demonstrating features of biblical register. Parallel structures are identified and discussed in each division of this analytical section.

3.1.2 *Sentence/Clause Parallelism*

The sentence plays an important role in the organization of information in both spoken and written language. The sentence as Adejare and Adejare (1996: 35) describe it "is the largest grammatical unit made up of one or more clauses." In a related view, Egbe (1996: 78) also describes the sentence as "generally regarded ...as the longest stretch of

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1 Corinthians 13

1. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
2. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.
3. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.
4. Charity suffered long, and is kind, charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.
5. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil,
6. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.
7. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
8. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease;, whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.
9. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part.
10. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.
11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
12. For now we use through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

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construction that can be subjected to syntactic analysis." For the purpose of syntactic analysis, sentence parallelism in the text is considered under sentence types according to structure and function. These structural and functional varieties of the sentence are examined one after the other.

Sentence Types according to structure.

Sentence structure could be simple or non-simple depending on the number and types of clause, which constitute the sentence. The simple sentence consists of one clause while the non-simple type is made up of two or more clauses. Unlike the one-clause simple sentence, the non-simple type operates in such varieties as compound, complex, compound complex.

A close reading of the Corinthian text reveals the absence of clearly defined simple sentences. Where there are one-clause structures, they are not decisively separated by an end–mark punctuation like full stop; rather conjunctions, commas and semicolons with other clauses to form non-simple structures inextricably link the clauses. One conjecture is that the target audience for the message is mature Christians, not spiritual babes who could only be weaned through the milk diet of simple sentence. Reference can be made to St Paul's statement in vs 11 of the chapter under examination: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understand as a child: but

when I become a man, I put away childish things."

Nonetheless, the choice of structure might not be deliberate. It might just be in consonance with the syntax and punctuation in biblical register which seldom follow syntactic and orthographic conventions. Whichever is the case, the linguistic and non-linguistic items in the text work together for the good of the communication purpose. The non-simple structures to be considered are the compound and the complex sentence.

• *Compound Sentence*

The compound sentences in the text fall into three major categories as follows:

(a) Those with main clauses joined by a comma and a co-coordinating conjunction and indicating addition. Examples include:

> Charity suffereth long, and is kind (Vs 4)
>
> For we know in part and we prophecy in part (Vs 9)

(b) Those with main clauses joined by a comma or semi colon and coordinating conjunction, 'but' showing contrast, are:

> Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth (Vs 6)
>
> For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face-to-face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (Vs 12)
>
> And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. (Vs 13)

(c) Those with main clauses linked by a semi colon are:

> Charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself unseemly,
>
> Seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; (Vs. 4 and 5)

Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things endureth all things. (Vs 7)

The compound sentences in the text consist of two or more main clauses joined by those conjunctions identified in the three categories of the compound sentence. In each of the examples, two or more ideas of equal importance are linked by grammatically parallel or nearly parallel structures creating a relationship between similar ideas. Two important characteristics of charity – long suffering (endurance), and kind (ness) are coordinated by the conjunction 'and' in the first example under (a). The second set of examples of this addition are coordinating conjunctions showing a pairing of items, which manifest similar limitations of operation: 'know' (in part) and 'prophesy' (in part). The interrelated characteristics of charity in the two cases – long suffering and kind 'and know and prophesy' are projected in the compound structure with parallel clauses.

As if to avoid monotony, the type of coordination changes from an additive 'and' to a contrastive 'but' in other compound structures as identified in (b); in the one example in verse 6, the two cases in verse 12 and the one in verse 13. In verse 6, what charity does not rejoice in i.e. 'iniquity' runs side by side with what it delights in: 'truth.' Verse 12 has two examples of a contrastive coordination. In the first case, 'shadow' (through a glass, darkly) and reality (face to face) are juxtaposed, and in the second, 'in part', (in part), in parallel link with 'full' (even as also I am known). Verse 13 presents the three legs of the tripod stand of Christianity: faith, hope and charity and singles out the greatest of them 'charity' in the second clause of the compound sentence. It is a case of matching the general three-faith, hope

and charity with the particular or specific one, 'charity' for thematic focus, in the chapter. These instances of compound sentence with main clauses joined by a contrastive coordinating conjunction 'but' demonstrate the adroit deployment of parallel structure in the merging of opposite or contrary ideas in each sentence breath.

The third category (c) compound sentences with punctuation marks as the joining element of the clauses, provides a striking parallel in the way the characteristics of charity are piled up in the clauses. Apart from 'charity envies not' and 'charity vaunteth not itself' which are joined by a semicolon in verses 4 and 5, the rest of the main clauses are linked, like items in a series, by a comma until the end of the sentence. Verse 5 thus reads as a kind of consistent and persistent repetition of structures in parallel relationship – 'not puffed up', 'not behaved unseemly', 'seeketh not his own', 'not easily provoked', 'thinketh no evil'. The many parts mirror one another making the connection of ideas stronger. In the two related verses, what charity exhibits is also seen through the lens of what it does not manifest; hence the use of 'not' and 'no'. This repetitive mood continues in verse 7 incorporating the items for negation – 'not' 'no'. Unlike verses 4 and 5, where the focus is on what charity is not, verse 7 places emphasis on what charity is in similar grammatical form: believeth… hopeth… endureth…

In all these instances of compound sentence, elements of equal status whether expressing similar or opposite relationship of the theme of charity are orchestrated through an harmonious balance of synonymous and antithetical parallelism.

• *Complex sentence*
A complex sentence usually consists of one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. The first three verses and the 8th verse of the chapter display parallel sentences of complex structure. The complex sentences have three types of conjunction element of subordinate clauses. They are:
(a) Adverbial clauses of concession introduced by 'though' 'and though' e.g:

> Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (Vs. 1)
> And though I have the gift of prophesy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,
> And though I have all faith, so that I remove mountains and have not charity, I am nothing. (Vs. 2)
> And though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (Vs. 3)

(b) Noun clause introduced by 'whether' e.g:

> …whether there be prophecies they shall fail; whether there be tongues; they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. (Vs. 10)

(c) Adverbial clauses of time introduced by 'when' e.g:

> 'but when that which is perfect comes, then that which is in part shall be done away.
> When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: when I became a man, I put away childish things. (Vs. 11)

The three adverbial clauses of concession begin with similar or near similar structures of the 'though/and though' + 'I' – subject + a verb type as follows: 'though I have…' 'And though I bestow'. …There are also three adverbial clauses of time with the subordinator, 'when' 'But when that…', 'when I …' and 'but when I…' All three have 'when' in common; two among the three parallel structures have 'but when' and another two

share 'when I'. As it is the characteristic of complex sentence, the subordinate clauses are dependent on main clauses to make the meaning or sense complete: most of the main clauses have the straight forward subject, predicator, complement, adjunct (S) P (C) (A) structure. This made them clear, direct and easy to follow.

The subordinate noun clause of the complex sentence has three parallel structures introduced by 'whether there be' … A striking feature of all these forms of complex sentence is that each category has three complex sentences. The first type with 'though/and though' subordinator has three long complex sentences spread in three verses: 1–3. The second type with 'when' clauses, encapsulates the three complex sentences in the two verses of 10 and 11. In that descending order, the third variety with 'whether there be' pitched all its three complex sentences in one verse: 8. The message of charity is relayed through long, medium and short complex sentences, suggesting that 'variety is the spice of charity'. Thus, the complex sentences are of various complexities in terms of the length and number of subordinate clauses they contain.

Nonetheless, the recurrence of three instances in each case of the complex sentence type provokes some interest in the symbolically significant number three in Christian theology. The number brings to mind the concept of trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which though true is difficult to grasp by the natural mind. The complex, intricate, well-knit web of love in family relationship – father, mother and children seem to have a divine parallel in the trinity. This observation is also supported by the tripartite relationship of faith, hope and charity expressed in the last verse of the chapter to cap the discourse on charity. The characteristics of charity are presented in straightforward subordinate and main clauses devoid of juggery of the elements of the clause.

Sentence Types according to Function

The sentence can function in a variety of ways either as a declarative, interrogative, imperative or exclamatory sentence. The declarative is the type most common in the text followed by a few cases of the imperatives. The interrogative is absent because the writer's aim is to give information rather than ask for it.

• *The Declarative Type*
The declarative is the sentence type best suited for making statements, asserting facts, reporting issues and enumerating items. With the exception of verses 5 to 7, which are imperatives, the remaining ten verses are declaratives, stating facts and providing details on the importance and characteristics of charity. Verses 1–3 declare and emphasize the importance of charity in the exercise of spiritual gifts. Vs 4 states some characteristics of love while verses 8–13 assert the eternal value of charity in contrast to the temporal nature of gifts. The first three verses show a sharing of a strong relationship of ideas in exhibiting related ideas in parallel forms of the though/and though + predicator + complement and the optional adjunct declarative types.

S	P	A
…I	speak	with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity…

S	P	C
…I	have	the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge…
…I	bestow	all my goods to feed the poor…
…I	give	my body to be burned…

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In verse 4, the SP (A) structure of

Charity suffereth long and is kind

is balanced by similar or near similar parallel declaratives

Charity envieth not

Charity vaunteth not self, is not puffed up

Verses 8 to 13 consist of declaratives of parallel form which vary from verse to verse but all having at least the two important sentence elements of subject (S) and (P).

What the above instances prove is that the straightforward SPC (A) order enhances clarity and easy grasp of the message.

• *The Imperative Type*

The imperative sentence is the type used to issue command or give order, whether mild or forceful. This sentence type is characterized by the elision of its subject leaving the sentence with a predicator (P) complement (C) structure. The examples in the text are mainly found in verses 5–7 as follows:

Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easy provoked, thinketh no evil, Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth (Vs 6) Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all thing.

The subject-matter of discourse is not repeated here as done in Verse 4 to allow focus on the predicators indicating what charity does and does not.

It is worth pointing out that there is no rigid line of demarcation between the imperatives identified and the declarative type. Though verses 5–7 appear as imperatives in form, they still function as declaratives, enumerating the characteristics of charity. Between verses 4 and 7, there is no full stop to punctuate the flow of thought; hence, charity as the first element in verse 4, extends its function as sentence subject to verse 5 through 7. Nonetheless, verses 5–7 appear quite different from other declaratives in having its subject omitted as in imperative sentence. The verses present a series of 'commandments' 'thou shall … and thou shall not…' of charity. The emphasis is on the action to demonstrate that love is not passive.

Parallelism at group level

The groups that have significant parallel structures are the nominal and the verbal. The adjunct group is of low, insignificant occurrence to merit attention. The question of where, when, how seem not to bother St Paul, but the drumming in of the importance of charity as a Christian virtue.

• *Nominal Group*

The nominal groups are either unmodified, pre and/or post modified as appropriate to context. Thus, we have cases of Headword (H) only, Modifier and Headword (mh) and headword and qualifier (Hq) in the text. The following analysis accounts for the various nominal structures:

H	M	H	H	Q	M	H	Q
I	sounding	brass	tongues	of men	the	gift	of prophecy
Mountain	talking	cymbal	tongues	of angels			
Prophecies	all	mysteries					
Tongues	all	knowledge					
Knowledge	all	faith					
Faith	my	goods					
Hope	my	body					
Charity	in	part					

'I' and 'Charity' occur most frequently among the list of items that are described as unmodified headword (h), in verses 1–3. 'I' occurs eight times (twice in verses 1, four times in vs. 2 and twice in verse 3) while 'Charity' appears thrice (once in each of verses 1, 2 and 3). There is a strong connection between the 'I', which represents the Christian and 'charity' the object of contemplation and the subject matter of the text. In the subject position they occupied in verses 1–3, each 'I' and 'charity' are in a parallel position to other elements either within each verse or in relation to the two other verses. Thus, we have 'though I speak…' vs. 1 in parallel position to 'and though I have…' vs 2. and 'And though I bestow' … vs. 3. 'I am become' vs. 1 is also a parallel grammatical form as 'I am nothing …' vs 2 'Have not charity' repeatedly occurs in that form in all the first three verses of the chapter. In the three verses discussed, parallelism helps to establish a vital link between 'I' and 'charity' and emphasizes the vanity in 'I' without 'charity'.

There is a total shift of focus from 'I' to 'charity' from verses 4 to 10. In other words, the number of 'I' decreases while that of 'charity' increases. After St Paul has used verses 1–3 to stress the important point that a profitable 'I' needs a close ally in charity, he goes ahead in verses 4–10 to highlight the characteristics of charity transmitting it beyond the level of an abstract entity; as if to say love is not an invisible thing! It manifests itself in concrete, appreciable ways. In Vs 4 alone, charity makes three conspicuous appearances and in each case occupies parallel subject positions of the clause: charity envieth not, charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed.

Other head word (h) only items as shown in the Bible above are prophesies, tongues, knowledge (V8) which all occur in parallel relationships to one another; having each headword preceded by 'if there be'. In Verse 13 occur 'faith', 'hope' and 'charity' as distinct but interrelated, unmodified headwords.

The nominal groups of an 'mh' parallel structure of importance include 'sounding brass', 'tinkling cymbal', 'all knowledge', 'all faith', 'my goods', 'my body', 'in part'. It is clear that 'sounding brass,' and 'tinkling cymbal' are in a parallel relationship just as 'all knowledge' and 'all faith' as well as 'my goods' and 'my body'. The parallel links are aptly applied. For instance 'tinkling' is an onomatopoeic word that has to do with sound and therefore relates to sounding as in 'sounding cymbal'.

• *Verbal group*

Under the verbal group, we identify three major types viz relational, stative and action verbs. The major relational verbs are the present tense form of the verb 'to be – 'am' and 'is.' The stative verbs include 'believeth', 'hopeth', 'endureth', 'enventh', 'understood', 'thought'. The action verbs are however, most common to reinforce the message that charity is most obvious in action. The verbs are 'profited', 'bestow', 'give', 'suffer', ('not/puffed up', '(not easily) provoked', 'cease', 'vanish', 'spake', '(never) faileth'. Thus in terms of preponderance, relational verbs are of low occurrence. The significance of the choice of mostly action and stative verbs resides in the vital link between the invisible mind and physical actions. Simply put, there is an element of parallelism between thought and action, between 'belief' and 'conduct'. The stative verbs indicate the workings in the mind and the action verbs show the concrete expressions.

More of the verbs also occur in parallel relationship: modern English form of the verb in grammatical parallel to other modern English forms. The archaic forms of the verbs are also repeated in the same parallel archaic forms. For instance in verses 3 and I, we have 'though I speak'…'though I bestow'… 'though I give…' 'speak,' 'bestow' and 'give' all in the present tense form of current English are in parallel relationship. For the examples of the archaic form of the verbs in parallelism, we consider verse 7: beareth all things… hopeth and endureth all things. 'Beareth', 'hopeth' and 'endureth' are well known archaic forms

of bear, hope and endure. They are all found in similar initial positions of the imperative-like clause structures.

Two auxiliary verbs also feature in the text in line with the series of parallelisms. They are 'have' as in … 'I have the gift of prophecy' … 'I have all faith', and 'shall' in 'They shall fail'. 'It shall vanish away'. The repetition of 'have' and 'shall' in parallel constructions also strengthens the import of the message.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It seems clear from the foregoing explication, that the repetitive use of parallelism for message transmission and reinforcement is pervasive in the selected biblical text. As expressed by Valdaera (2003: 386):

Different kinds of repetition of the words and bigger elements of the speech stress the main point, main idea of the utterance and, thus, make it sound more effective.

Parallelism, as a form of grammatical construction has enhanced an effective style of message presentation. The repetitive, rhythmic flow of the parallel construction makes a melodious appeal in the reception of the serious message. Like a well-composed song, the message is not easily forgotten. The timeless appeal of St Paul's 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, is due not merely to the subject of the message but to the choice of parallel structures to convey the message with linguistic dexterity.

резюме

∑ **Параллелизм как стилистическое средство передачи сообщения в библейском дискурсе: пример 1-го послания Святого Апостола Павла к Коринфянам, гл. 13**

В работе представлен стилистический анализ материала одного фрагмента из Библии – 1. Коринфянам, гл. 13. Текст этот интересен способом употребления в нем параллельных структур, направленных на передачу сообщения о любви, точнее – милосердии. Настоящая статья представляет собой попытку вычленить, описать и обсудить те значимые параллельные конструкции, которые способствуют продолжительному воздействию сообщения. Для этих целей проводится анализ используемых схем простых и сложных предложений, а также субстантивных и глагольных словосочетаний с учетом их структуры и функции.

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