A Linguistic Study of Oxymoron

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Abstract

The study deals with the linguistic analysis of oxymoron as a figure of speech in which two words or phrases with contrasting meanings are brought together intentionally for effect. The effect can be ironic, humorous, paradoxical or merely emphatic.

The starting point of this paper is an attempt to explicate oxymoron as a figure of speech. Then the study aims at drawing general parameters by means of which the grammatical structure as well as the semantic perspective can be described. A manifestation for the various rhetorical effect of oxymoron and its kinds will also be highlighted. The practical part includes certain text extracted from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Finally, the findings of the study will be summed up in the conclusion.

الخلاصة

تتناول هذه الدراسة التحليل اللغوي للإرداف الخلفي . الإرداف الخلفي هو صيغة من صيغ الكلام تتكون من كلمتين أو عبارتين متناقضتي المعنى جمعتا سويا بقصد تحقيق تأثير ما. يمكن أن يكون هذا التأثير نام عن السخرية, أو الفكاهة, أو التناقض, أو لمجرد التأكيد . ابتدأ البحث بمحاوله لشرح الإرداف الخلفي كصيغه من صيغ الكلام . هدفت بعدها الدراسة لتوضيح المقاييس العامة التي يمكن بواسطتها وصف التركيب النحوي و الجانب الدلالي لهذه الظاهرة اللغوية كما و بينت الدراسة التأثيرات البلاغية المتنوعة للإرداف الخلفي وأنواعه. تضمن الجزء العملي بعض النصوص المقتبسة من مسرحية شكسبير رومبو و جوليت. أخيرا احتوت الخاتمة استنتاجات البحث.

1.1 Oxymoron as a Figure of Speech

Oxymoron is a literary figure of speech in which opposite or contradictory words , terms, phrases or ideas are combined to create a rhetorical effect by paradoxical means. For example, *despairing hope*, *tender cruelty*, *glad mourning* and *sad joy* (Morner and Rausch, 1997:158)

Oxymoron is a proper subset of the expressions called "contradiction in terms". What distinguishes oxymora from other paradoxes and contradictions is that they are used intentionally, for rhetorical effect , and the contradiction is only apparent, as the combination of terms provides a novel expression of some concept (Small, 2008:2).

Oxymora can also be wooden irons in that they are in violation of the principle of contradiction which asserts that nothing can be thought if it contains contradictory characteristics, predicates, attributes, or qualities.

(Lederer,2008:2)

Oxymoron, as it is given in conservapedia encyclopedia (2008:2),is a Greek term. It has an interesting etymology. It is derived from *oxy* which means sharp or pointed and *moros* which means dull , stupid, or foolish. So the word *oxymoron* is itself an oxymoron , literally meaning something like a *sharp dullness* or *pointed foolishness*.

By defining oxymoron as a two-word paradox, Zabel (2008:2) adds a fascinating dimension to the understanding of oxymoron when she links it to another important literary and rhetorical device: paradox.

Oxymoron and paradox are generally differentiated from each other in the way that the former is in the form of a phrase while the latter is in the form of a statement ,yet they are both juxtaposition of contrasted or opposed meanings, which are incompatible. In fact, oxymoron is

sometimes taken as " condensed paradox " and paradox as "expanded oxymoron" ; for example, sentences are sometimes connected semantically by what is in effect oxymoron (Chuanyu, 2008: 7) .

In general, oxymora are either expressions that are deliberately crafted to be contradictory such as *dark day* and *pretty ugly* or those phrases that inadvertently or incidentally contain a contradiction, often as a result of a punning use of one or both words as *even odds* and *divorce court* (Wegmaan, 2008: 4).

Harris (2008:11) states that the device is most effective when the terms are not common opposite. So, instead of a *low high point* one might try *depressed apex* or something similar. The same idea is highlighted by Zabel (2008:4) when he maintains that an oxymoron's unusualness makes a very effective tool in writing ; the idea one is trying to get across is more vividly described when one use an oxymoron. Especially if it is a unique one as *clearly misunderstood* or *hot ice*.

In brief, as a figure of speech, oxymoron basically has two features: firstly, it is the juxtaposition of two apparently opposed or contrasted meanings (not necessarily two words) which are incompatible; secondly, the juxtaposition is usually surprising yet does in a way make sense, thereby creating an emphatic or epigrammatic effect (Chuanyu, 2008: 8).

1.2 Oxymoron : A Grammatical Perspective

Grammatically, oxymoron is of varied frames, Lederer (2008:1) states that it can be within a word level. In this case, two forms can be realized:

a. Single – word oxymoron composed of dependent morphemes such as:

pianoforte (soft – loud), *preposterous* (before – after) , *superette* (big – small).

b. Single – word oxymoron composed of independent morphemes.

Two meaning – bearing elements that could a word in itself are welded together into a single word: spendthrift, *bittersweet*, *speechwriting* and *wholesome*.

Furthermore, oxymoron can be within a phrase level, and the words which are used together within a phrase can either be of different syntactic class (as in a, b, c and d) or of the same syntactic class (as in e and f). Specifically, the syntactic frame of oxymoron may fall into the following types: (Chuanyu, 2008: 9)

a. *adverb + adjective*

1. "And faith unfaithful kept him *falsely true*"

b. *adverb + verb*

2. " I *silently scream* for help
    That never seems to come"

c. *verb + adverb*

3. He wished that he was ill, then he could stay away from school… He
    began *groaning loudly*.

d. *adjective + noun*

4. It is an *open secret* that Mary and John are engaged.

e. *adjective + adjective*

5. The cat lay on the sofa, looking all *drowsy* and *vivacious*.

6. *hateful good*

f. *noun + noun*

7. Filling in a tax return calls for absolute *honesty* and *cunning*.

In certain instances the two contrastive nouns may be separated by a preposition as *darkness* at *noon* or *addition* by *subtraction* (Grothe, 2009:4).

Chaunyu (2008:9) adds that since what is opposed or contrasted in oxymoron is not the word form but meaning, then its syntactic frame can be more flexible than indicated in the above examples. In fact, it can be beyond phrase level, for instance:

g. *subject* vs. *predicate*

8. *Silence sings* all round me; my head is bound with a band.

h. *subject* vs. *predicative*

9. A *friend to everybody* is a *friend to nobody*.

10. This *silence* is *deafening*.

i. *subject* vs. *object*

11. The *greatest hate* springs from the *greatest love*.

j. *predicate* vs. *object complement*

12. " And is he gone? And is he gone?" she cried, and wept out outright; "then I will to the water go, and *see* him *out of sight*".

1.3 Oxymoron : A Semantic Perspective

Oxymoron is defined as a figure of speech consisting of two elements which stand in opposition. Opposition is a semantic relation between the meanings of two lexical items (Shen, 1987:108).

In terms of semantic relation, the meanings that are juxtaposed in oxymoron are, in some cases, strongly opposed, for example, *hot coldness*. According to componential analysis in semantics, among the semantic features of *hot* and *coldness*, [- cold] and [+ cold] are the strongest for each respectively. Therefore, *hot* and *coldness* are strongly opposed (the present investigation ignores the difference in syntactic category between the noun *coldness* and the adjective *cold* and focuses on the semantic or sense relation between the oxymoron's two terms; in this regard there is no relevant semantic difference between *cold* and *coldness* and both are regarded as antonyms of *hot*). But there are also many cases of juxtaposition in which the two meanings are just loosely contrasted such as *eloquent silence*. *Silence* has the basic and strong feature of [- voice]; although *eloquent* can be analyzed to have the semantic feature of [+ voice], yet compared with other features of the word, [+voice] is not so strong. Therefore, *eloquent* and *silence* are just loosely contrasted. However, the two words do justify, though in an indirect way, the   principle of binary opposition, which is indispensable in oxymoron

(Chuanyu,2008: 13   )

In other words, depending on the sense relation obtained between the two terms comprising the oxymoron, two types of oxymoron can be distinguished: direct and indirect. Examples of direct oxymora are: *wet dryness* and *sound silence* . These cases are characterized by the fact that the head noun and the modifiers represent direct antonyms. Typically, direct antonyms are two lexical items that represent two opposite poles on a certain dimension as in *hot* and *cold* where the relevant dimension is heat, *wet* and *dry* where the relevant dimension is wetness (Shen, 2007:174).

The indirect oxymoron, on the other hand, can be illustrated by examples such as *whistling silence, sunny coldness* and *watery dryness*. Intuitively, the oxymora's two terms in each of these cases are not direct antonyms; *whistle*[*ing*] in not the direct opposite of *silence*, *sun*[*ny*] is not the direct opposite of *coldness* and *water*[*y*] is not the direct opposite of *dryness*. In order to define in amore precise way the indirect antonym relation in those cases, another type of sense relation, hyponymy, should be considered. Hyponymy is the relationship that obtains between specific and general lexical items, such that the former is included in the latter. For instance , *whistle* is a hyponym (or type) of *sound*, *water* is the hyponym of *wet* (since water is a member in the set of wet entities), *sun* is the hyponym of *hot* (sun is a member in the set of hot entities). Given the sense relation of hyponymy, the indirect oxymoron can be defined as an oxymoron in which one of the terms is not the direct antonym of the other but rather the hyponym of its antonym. In *whistling silence* , *whistle*[*ing*] represents the hyponym of *sound*, which is the antonym of the head noun of the oxymoron in question- *silence* (Shen, 2007: 175).(see Shen (1987) for elaboration)

1.4 Kinds of Oxymoron

Three kinds of oxymoron can be outlined:

1. Objective Oxymoron

Objective oxymora refer to those phrases that use apparent contradictions like *pretty ugly*, *sad smile*, *same difference*, *cheerful pessimist* , *hardly easy* and *proud humility*. They are quite literal, without any hidden meanings. The individual words *pretty* and *ugly*, for example, are clear opposite. When paired together, the "marriage of opposite" results in a new expression that makes a perfect sense (Grothe,2009 :2).

2. Subjective oxymoron

Eckler (2004:4) said that in subjective oxymoron, there are no inherent contradiction between the two words. When the words are put together, a value, judgment or opinion about the quality of one of them is expressed. The contradiction between two objects is a matter of opinion. For example considering *Microsoft works* as an oxymoron implies that Microsoft cannot make a piece of software that works. An almost infinite number of these can be constructed. Whether these phrases are actually oxymora depends on the reader's point of view; someone who believes that Microsoft does work, would not think that *Microsoft works* is an oxymoron. Consequently, Lederer (2008:5) aptly coined the term opinion oxymora for such expressions. Other illustrations are: *internet security*, *business ethics*, *peacekeeper missile* and *war games*.

3. Punning oxymoron

The best – known punning oxymoron is *jumbo shrimp*. The use of *jumbo shrimp* as an oxymoron springs in part from an invitation to leap from an apparent meaning to a less apparent one. While the meaning of *jumbo* as "large" is obvious, the focus on the meaning of *shrimp* as "small", rather than its apparent meaning as " decapod crustacean", should be considered. This is the stuff that punning is made of, the compacting of two meanings into a verbal space that they do not occupy in ordinary discourse. Usually such punning oxymora depend on substitution of an alternate meaning for the noun in the phrase. Thus , *flat busted* relies on the multiple meanings of the second word, "financially broke" and "breasts". This process is at work in the likes of *even odds*, *old news* , *baby grand*, *cardinal sin* and *death benefit* (Eckler,2004 :2).

1.5 Rhetorical Effect of Oxymoron

It is generally believed that rhetoric should be based on logic, yet, though closely related, they are not the same thing and do not operate on the same level. In fact, the " rhetorical logic" usually operates on a deeper level than the " general logic". To admit that one should not be logically contradictory in thinking and using language does not mean denying the contradiction or opposition that is there in the real world. It is by no means uncommon for contrasting features to coexist in the same thing. Therefore, two contrasting judgments of the same thing , when made from different angles or at different time, for example , may actually be logical. Superficially, the rhetorical use of oxymoron violates the stereotypically accepted logic in the world, as is true of many other rhetorical devices; but in fact, such use of oxymoron not only makes sense, but, more important, also creates rhetorical effect (Chuanyu,2008: 14).

What counts for the fact that the rhetorical use of oxymoron does make sense is the power of imagination and inference of human beings and the context in which the rhetorical use of oxymoron occurs .

(Chuanyu,2008:14   )

Human beings have the tendency to reject semantic vacancy in communication. Whenever they come across an utterance that seems illogical, they resort to the relevant context, or their power of imagination and inference with the help of their knowledge or understanding of the world, trying to figure out the deeper meaning, or what the language user may actually intend to mean (ibid.).

Of course, for the rhetorical effect to be felt, the context, in various forms, of an utterance also plays an important role. It can be in the form of common knowledge as in:

13.The mother is undergoing the *joyful pain* and *painful joy* of childbirth.

As common knowledge, childbirth brings the mother physical *pain*, while to become a mother is also something *joyful*. In this sense, the mother experiences both the feelings, or a mixture of the two at the same time.

(ibid.)

The context can also be textual as in 14 and 15

14. " A *tedious brief* scene of young pyramus
   And his love Thisby; very *tragical mirth*
   Merry and *tragical* ! *tedious* and *brief*
   That is *hot ice* and *wondrous strange* snow".

In the above poetic verses, a few cases of oxymoron are employed, which are semantically incompatible , even Theseus, a character in the poem, wonders " how shall we find the concord of this discord?" Philostrate, another character, offers an answer, which immediately follows in the same text, and with this answer, the rhetorical effect felt .

(ibid; 15)

15.   A play there is, my lord, some ten words long,
   Which is as *brief* as I have known a play;
   But by ten words, my lord, it is too long,
   Which makes it *tedious*; for in all the play,
   There is not one word apt, one player fitted.
   And *tragical*, my noble lord, it is;
   For Pyramus there in doth kill himself.
   Which then I saw rehears, I must confess
   Made mine eyes water; but more *merry* tears
   The passion of loud laughter never shed.

Sometimes the clue is not explicitly given in the immediate context, but has to be found in the larger context. For example,

16. "Then had I not been thus exiled from light,
   As in the land of darkness, yet in light,
   To live a life half dead, a *living death*,
   And buried; but, O yet more miserable! "

Samson Agonistes is betrayed by his wife, and captured and put in jail, blind. Physically, he is alive, but , with the spiritual torture, he feels half dead. In fact, Milton is writing about himself, who used to be ambitious but now, being sick and blind, depressed. Without this larger context, the deep meaning of *living death* could hardly be successfully understood.

(Chuanyu,2008:16)

The power of imagination and inference of human beings and context in various forms, as shown in the above examples, are important factors that help or ensure the understanding of deeper meaning of the rhetorical use of oxymoron, thus it is being accepted. Rather than simply making sense, the rhetorical use of oxymoron usually creates strong rhetorical effect (ibid.).

Oxymoron is commonly and often purposefully used in order to achieve various rhetorical effects:

1. Drawing Attention
   The most commonly – cited purpose of all literary devices, including oxymoron, is to draw attention to the idea that they are describing, and to lend weight to its place on the page. The idea is that if the author takes the time to describe something in an unexpected way, then it must be important. For example, when Hamlet kills Polonius, Hamlet says:

17. " I must be *cruel* only to be *kind* ".

Cruelty and kindness are opposite traits, yet Hamlet pairs them together in the idea that murder is a charitable act when the victim is a betrayer.

(Small,2008:3)

Moreover, often a writer will use an oxymoron in order to deliberately call attention to a contradiction. Richard Feynman, for example, in his lecture on physics, spends a chapter discussing *dry water*. Clearly, he could have used a different phrase, such as perhaps " hydrodynamics of fluids in the limiting case of viscosity approaching zero", but the deliberate contradiction of the phrase *dry water* both adds humor to his otherwise- dry analysis, and also emphasizes the fact that the substance he is discussing is theoretical and not real (Lederer, 2008:3).

2. Brevity

 Chuanyu(2008:17) maintains that this rhetorical effect is crystallized when two opposite features co –existing in a particular thing.

18. …Dudley Field Malone called my conviction a " *victorious defeat*".

   (John Scopes: the trail that rocked the world)

In the famous Monkey Trial in 1925, John Scopes, an American high school teacher, was accused, by fundamentalists, of diffusing Darwinism in his class and convicted. In this sense the conviction was a *defeat*. Yet with many famous scientist in court as witnesses and the famous attorney's (W.J. Bryan) witty defense, the trial itself proved to be a successful lecture on Darwinism, and luckily enough, won John Scopes the scholarship to Chicago university. In this sense, however, the trial was *victorious*, both for the theory and John Scopes himself, the same trial bearing both the opposing features. No other comments on the conviction can be more appropriate than this one as scorn on the fundamentalists' foolishness and hypocrisy and admiration for the teacher's efforts on popularizing the scientific theory. This rhetorical effect, as indicated by Willis (2008:2), is also called summarizing.

3. Humor

   Oxymora are most tellingly employed in injecting a sense of ironic, ostensibly unintended, humor. The effect is to confront the reader or the listener with a sense of ludicrousness so as to render the whole sentence and the idea absurd and funny. It should be remembered that this is a purely subjective line of thinking and presupposes that the reader or listener is already familiar with the intended humor. An example of such a thought – provoking oxymoron includes *orphans of the living* (children in the foster – parent system). It has now become so common that the word oxymoron has come to mean form of humor, which is entirely unrelated to the original meaning of the word (Lederer, 2008:2).

   A more subtle rhetorical maneuver in designating an expression XY as a perceived or alleged property of objects of type Y recons true that property as if it were a defining criterion of Y and then demonstrate that it is contradicted by X. For instance, to claim that *honest politician* is an oxymoron implies politicians are inherently dishonest. In this sense, joke oxymora almost always involve stereotypes. For example , saying that *honest lawyer* is an oxymoron works on the stereotype that lawyers are   liars . *Heroic villain* and *honest thief* can be perceived similarly, i.e. since villains and thieves are bad, calling them heroic and honest is an oxymoron intended to indicate a humor (Krippendorff,2008:5).

4. Sarcasm

   Oxymoron is used to indicate sarcasm and satire especially when the opposition is between personal feelings and the reality.

19. I despise its very vastness and power. It has the *poorest millionaires*, the *littlest great* men, the *haughtiest beggars*, the *plainest beauties*, the *lowest skyscrapers*, the *dolefulest pleasure* of any town I ever saw.

In this example, six pairs of oxymora are used in describing the same society. In reality, there are indeed many millionaires… and pleasure. But in the author's eyes, they are just opposite to what they appear to be. With such a striking contrast, the emptiness, corruption and vanity of the superficially prosperous and noble society is pungently satirized .

                                        (Chuanyu,2008: 17)

Oxymoron is sometimes used as a tool for indicating sarcasm. *Military intelligence* is an oxymoron which does actually point out anything intrinsic in military structure or thinking. *Intelligence* in this context means "gathering information" about the enemy, but the humorous sarcasm comes from the implication that military policy often is ill – informed. Thus, it merely puns on the meaning of the phrase and is just a tricky way of delivering an insult (Eckler, 2004: 6).

5. Contrast

Harris (2008:15)and Fontana (2008:7) indicate that oxymoron can be useful when things have gone contrary to expectation, belief, desire, or assertion, or when one's position is opposite to another's which one is discussing. The figure then produces an ironic contrast which shows how something has been misunderstood or mislabeled.

20. Senator Rosebud calls this a useless plan; if so, it is the most *helpful useless* plan we have ever enacted.

The oxymoron used by Milton in his Paradise Lost mainly expresses sharp contrast (Willis, 2008: 2).

21. "… as one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames
   No light; but rather *darkness visible*
   Served only to discover sights of woe…"

2. Analysis

Romeo and Juliet, which ranks among Shakespeare's most popular and well – known plays, is considered by some critics to be the first and greatest example of romantic tragedy written during the Renaissance. The play centers on two youths from feuding families who, upon falling in love, attempt to defy social custom, patriarchal power, and destiny. Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet absolutely adores each other. However, the Montague family despises the Capulet family, and vise versa, because of an old grudge. How is it possible for Romeo and Juliet to love and live happily in so poisonous an atmosphere? That is the central issue of this play (Cummings, 2003:2).

As one of Shakespeare's early dramas, *Romeo and Juliet* is a vehicle through which he attempts to startle audience with his ability to manipulate language, creating puns, rhyming poetry, striking similes, metaphors, oxymora and other figures of speech (ibid; 6).

Ashton – Hay (2005:8) points out that much of *Romeo and Juliet* is about the class of opposites in family feuds, love and hate, life and death, sentiment and resentment, sympathy and antipathy, and youth and age. Girard (2007: 5) states that these oppositions are expressed by means of oxymoron which can be considered as the most pervasive rhetorical figure in *Romeo and Juliet*. It has been pointed out that oxymoron is an eminently suitable choice of figures in a play which seems deliberately concerned to dramatize the paradoxical identity of opposites. Lucking (1996:2) asserts that through oxymoron the unifying force of the play is revealed to be the "metaphysics of irreconcilable but reversible opposition" found in both the play's language and plot.

Text 1
O **brawling love** ! O **loving hate** !
O anything of nothing first create !
O **heavy lightness**, **serious vanity** !
Misshapen chaos of **well – seeming** forms !
Feather of lead, **bright smoke**, **cold fire**, **sick health** !
Still – waking sleep, that is not what it is !
This love feel I, that feel no love in this.
                    (Act I , Scene i :163-69)

At the beginning of the play Romeo is in love with a girl whose name is Rosaline. Rosaline does not love Romeo back and his heart is broken. When Romeo's friend, Benvolio comes to talk to him, Romeo is forlorn. Benvolio tells Romeo to forget about Rosaline but Romeo replies: " O teach

me how I should forget to think" meaning that his thoughts are consumed with Rosaline and cannot make sense of his emotions so he uses oxymoron to express himself. Romeo shows that being apart or rejected from someone you love can be a painful experience (Olson, 2008:61).

Here Romeo jests about the nature of love by using a rapid – fire series of oxymora. In **brawling love**, **brawl** is a hyponym of **hate** which is the direct antonym of **love**. Hence, it is an indirect oxymoron. Syntactically, it is a phrase consisting of **adjective** + **noun**.

Loving hate is a direct oxymoron in which **love** is an antonym of **hate**. It is of the syntactic frame **adjective** + **noun**. Love and hate are twin sons of different mothers, separated by birth. They have a doubleness. This ambiguity is reflected throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, whose language is riddled with oxymora. Like the poles of an electrical circuit between which runs the high voltage of emotions, love and hate create a dialogue and a dialectic, a dynamic tension which power the action and generates heat.

Heavy lightness is a direct oxymoron whose components, **heavy** and **light**, are antonymous. From a syntactic point of view, it is a phrase consisting of **adjective** + **noun**.

Serious vanity is an oxymoron in which **vanity** here means not being vain or proud, but it gives a sense of emptiness or something trivial, worthless, or pointless. In this case it is taken to be the direct antonym of **serious**. As a result **serious vanity** is a direct oxymoron which syntactically consists of **adjective** + **noun**.

Misshapen chaos of **well – seeming** forms is an oxymoron in which there are **two** antithetical **adjectives**, **misshapen** and **well – seeming** . since these adjectives are antonymous to each other, the oxymoron is a direct one.

Feather of **lead** is a phrase in which the words **feather** and **lead** are entirely different and have very diverse meanings. The yoking of two terms that are ordinarily contradictory in their meanings, forces and features such as **feather** and **lead** here is an oxymoron. Specifically, it is a direct oxymoron which, syntactically, fits the frame **noun** + **noun**. These two nouns are polar opposites.

Bright smoke is an indirect oxymoron in which the second term, **smoke**, is a hyponym of **dim** which is the direct antonym of **bright**. This oxymoron is in the syntactic form of **adjective** + **noun**.

In the phrase, **cold fire**, **fire** is a hyponym, a type, of the category "**hot** entities" which can be taken as an antonym of **cold**. Hence, **cold fire** is an indirect oxymoron which is syntactically indicated by the frame **adjective** + **noun** .

Sick health is a direct oxymoron in which **sick** and **health** stand in opposition i.e. are antonymous to each other. It is a phrase of the syntactic frame **adjective** + **noun**.

The series of oxymora said by Romeo is closed by bringing the antonymous words **still – waking** and **sleep** in the compact paradoxical phrase **still – waking sleep**. It is a direct oxymoron of the syntactic frame **adjective** + **noun**.

Through his use of oxymora, Romeo communicates confusion and bitter disappointment with love, as Rosaline has rejected him, sworn to remain chaste. The oxymora used here are instances to show just how confused, out of sort and lost Romeo is at this point in the play.

Text 2
Good night, good night ! Parting is such **sweet sorrow**,
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.
<div align="center">(Act II, Scene ii :201-2)</div>

Sweet sorrow is a mixture of just two opposite feelings (a feeling of both sweet and sorrowful) Juliet feels at the same time when parting with Romeo. Simply with these two words, the character's mingled feeling is economically and vividly depicted.

The syntactic frame of **sweet sorrow** is **adjective** + **noun**. Semantically, the second term, **sorrow**, is conceived of as an example (that is a hyponym) of the category "bitter entities "; the term **bitter** is the antonym of the first term, **sweet**. Accordingly, **sweet sorrow** is an indirect oxymoron.

Text 3
O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face !
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant ! fiend angelical !
Dove – feather'd raven ! wolfish – ravening lamb !
Despised substance of divinest show !
Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st;
A **damned saint**, an **honorable villain** !
O, nature ! What hadst thou to do in hell
When thou didst bower the spirit of a fiend
In mortal paradise of such sweet flesh?
Was ever book containing such vile matter
So fairly bound? O ! that deceit should dwell.
In such a gorgeous palace.

<div align="center">(Act III, Scene ii : 73- 85)</div>

Struggling between her love for Romeo, and criticizing him for killing Tybalt, her cousin, Juliet whips out these few lines with a whopping six oxymora. Juliet has fallen in love with a man she should regard as a murderer, now more than ever, since he has killed Tybalt. The old hatred is fighting wither new love in such a way as to turn her heart into a jumble of opposite, endlessly clashing together. The real question here is not the intrinsic reasonableness of oxymora but how appropriate they are to the chaotic situation of Juliet who resorts to them. As a lover Juliet blesses Romeo; as Tybalt's cousin she curses him. Juliet is a living oxymoron therefore.

The speech here would sound to be that of a woman whose reasons to grieve come from her lover and are directly rooted in the love affair itself, in his behavior as a lover, not in the death of some relative. Juliet has some reason to distrust the man with whom she is madly in love. She seems to fear that, in return for her love, he does not love her half as much as he should. She suspects something dreadful from the standpoint of her passion, more dreadful than the death of a dozen relatives, some infidelity of course (Girard, 2007:5).

Juliet considers Romeo as tyrant but she cannot forget that she loves him. When she refers to Romeo as a **beautiful tyrant**, she is expressing an oxymoron because the act of a tyrant cannot be referred to as beautiful. Syntactically, **beautiful tyrant** is of the frame **adjective** + **noun**. Semantically, the second term, **tyrant**, is a hyponym of the category "ugly entities". The term **ugly** is the antonym of the first term, **beautiful**. So it is an indirect oxymoron.

Before learning about Tybalt's death, Juliet might have compared Romeo to an angel, after killing her cousin, she considers him a fiend but she cannot forget the angel behind the fiend that her lover has become for her. She expresses herself by using the oxymoron **fiend angelical**. From a syntactic point of view, **fiend angelical** fits the frame of **noun** + **adjective**. Semantically, a **fiend** is the direct antonym of an **angel**. Hence, it is a direct oxymoron.

Another oxymoron that can be encountered here is **dove – feather'd raven**, now Juliet is describing Romeo by yoking two very unlike things like **dove** and **raven**. A **dove** is beautiful and thought to be majestic, whereas a **raven** is thought to be a bad omen and ugly. **Dove** is a direct antonym of **raven**. It is a direct oxymoron. Syntactically, it is **noun** + **noun**.

A further description is made by pairing the antithetical words wolfish and lamb together in the phrase **wolfish ravening lamb**. **Wolf** is connected with enmity and ugliness, while **lamb** is associated with innocence and intimacy. **wolf** can be considered as the direct antonym of **lamb**. **Wolfish ravening lamb** is a direct oxymoron. From a syntactic point of view, it is **adjective** + **noun**. The noun lamb is further modified by the adjective ravening.

Damned saint is another juxtaposition of incongruous terms. **Saint** is not likely to be referred to as **damned**. **Damned** is a feature which is supposed to be connected with **devil**. The **devil** can be taken as an antonym of **saint**. So **damned saint** is an indirect oxymoron whose syntactic frame is **adjective** + **noun**.

Honorable villain represents a mixture of two seemingly contradictory elements. **Villain** cannot be **honorable**. Rather, **honorable** is a feature which is suitable for the **noble** , the hero. The **noble** is the opposite of **villain**. Consequently, **honorable villain** is an indirect oxymoron. Syntactically, it is a phrase consisting of **adjective** + **noun**.

The excessive use of oxymoron in this speech reflects and emphasizes the mixed emotions and conflicting feelings within Juliet.

Conclusion

The general picture outlined in this paper indicates that oxymoron is a lexical device the syntactic and semantic structures of which come to clashes. It is a figure of speech that:

1. combines two words or ideas usually thought of as opposite or incompatible.
2. is intentional.
3. is short and self – contained .
4. provides emphasis .
5. is a kind of flexible employment of antonyms (direct oxymoron) or quasi – antonyms (indirect oxymoron).
6. its most widely known structure is attributive.
7. is used to produce various rhetorical functions

Concerning the use of oxymoron in Romeo and Juliet, the most frequently used structure is that of adjective + noun. The direct oxymora outnumber the indirect ones .Whether direct or indirect, oxymoron highlights the conflicts in the story. The frequency with which this device recurs is to be regarded as a key to the characters as it is used to express their mixed emotions and conflicting feelings.

Finally, it could be said that oxymoron reflects the complexities and ironies of life itself and of things not being quite what they seem.

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21

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