

**SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF THE HEROINE'S INNER SPEECH AS A WAY OF  
REPRESENTING HER PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS (ON THE EXAMPLE OF ANNA  
KARENINA)**

**Bozorova Bibikhonim Bakhtiyor qizi**

1st-year Master's student in \  
Linguistics (Russian language),  
Karshi State University

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**Abstract.** This article explores the syntactic peculiarities of Anna Karenina's inner speech in Leo Tolstoy's masterpiece Anna Karenina as a sophisticated literary mechanism for depicting her progressive psychological crisis. Through detailed stylistic and psycholinguistic analysis, the study identifies and examines key syntactic features – including fragmentation, ellipsis, repetition, rhetorical questions, parataxis, and disrupted syntactic connections – that mirror the heroine's emotional disintegration, identity conflict, guilt, jealousy, and existential despair. Following the IMRaD structure adapted for literary research, the paper demonstrates how Tolstoy's innovative narrative technique transcends conventional description, offering readers direct insight into the chaotic workings of a tormented consciousness. The findings illuminate the intricate relationship between linguistic form and psychological depth, reinforcing Tolstoy's status as a pioneer of psychological realism and providing valuable material for contemporary studies in literary stylistics, cognitive linguistics, and the representation of mental health in literature.

**Keywords:** interior monologue, syntactic features, psychological crisis, Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, stream of consciousness, literary stylistics, psycholinguistics.

**Introduction**

Leo Tolstoy's novel Anna Karenina (1875–1877) is universally recognized as one of the greatest masterpieces of world literature and a defining work in the development of psychological realism. Often described as the greatest novel ever written, Anna Karenina masterfully intertwines the personal tragedy of its heroine with profound philosophical, social, and ethical questions of 19th-century Russian society. The tragic story of Anna Karenina – a charismatic, intelligent, and passionate woman who dares to defy the rigid social conventions of her time for the sake of authentic love, only to face cruel ostracism, unbearable guilt, emotional collapse, and eventual suicide – continues to resonate deeply with readers more than a century later. Her fate remains a powerful exploration of the conflict between individual happiness and societal norms, between passion and duty, and between the desire for freedom and the crushing weight of moral responsibility.

Central to Tolstoy's unparalleled portrayal of Anna's inner world is his extensive and highly innovative use of interior monologue (inner speech). Through this technique, Tolstoy grants the reader direct, unfiltered access to the heroine's thoughts and feelings, bypassing traditional authorial mediation. This creates an unprecedented sense of intimacy and psychological authenticity, allowing readers to witness the gradual disintegration of Anna's consciousness from within. Tolstoy's interior monologue is not merely a narrative device but a sophisticated psychological instrument that captures the fluidity, contradictions, and chaos of human thought.

While previous scholarship has extensively examined the novel's philosophical underpinnings, ethical dilemmas, family ideology, and social critique, significantly fewer studies have concentrated specifically on the syntactic organization of Anna's inner speech as the primary vehicle for representing her deepening psychological crisis. In modern linguistics and cognitive stylistics, syntactic structures are understood as deeply meaningful rather than neutral. Deviations from normative sentence patterns – such as fragmentation, ellipsis, syntactic breaks, and irregular connectivity – frequently signal disturbances in cognitive processes, emotional instability, and mental disintegration. Tolstoy deliberately and systematically employs syntactic fragmentation, obsessive repetition, interrogative dominance, and paratactic flow to externalize Anna's escalating anxiety, jealousy, guilt, identity crisis, and existential despair.

This article aims to fill this noticeable research gap by conducting a systematic, linguostylistic analysis of these syntactic features. It argues that Tolstoy's syntactic choices are not accidental but deeply functional: they serve as a precise linguistic mirror of Anna's inner turmoil, transforming grammatical form into a powerful and subtle tool of psychological characterization. By examining how syntax itself becomes a carrier of psychological meaning, the study reveals new dimensions of Tolstoy's artistic mastery.

**Research Objectives.** This study aims to identify and classify the dominant syntactic patterns in Anna Karenina's interior monologues across various stages of her psychological crisis, to correlate specific syntactic deviations with particular emotional and psychological states (anxiety, jealousy, guilt, despair, etc.), to evaluate how these features enhance the novel's artistic effect, thematic depth, and emotional impact, and to place Tolstoy's narrative technique within the broader historical-literary context of depicting human consciousness – from early pre-modernist experiments to the later emergence of stream of consciousness. The relevance of this research is amplified by the increasing interdisciplinary focus on the linguistic representation of mental states and psychological disorders in literature. At a time when mental health issues attract significant scholarly and public attention, Tolstoy's sophisticated methods of portraying psychological crisis through syntactic means provide valuable insights for both literary analysis and psycholinguistic studies.

#### **Materials and Methods**

The primary material for this research comprises carefully selected passages from Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, with particular focus on Parts 6 and 7, and especially the chapters depicting the final stages of Anna's life leading to her tragic suicide at the Obiralovka railway station. These sections contain the most intensive and revealing examples of the heroine's inner speech. Both the original Russian text (in authoritative editions) and the classic English translation by Constance Garnett were consulted in parallel to ensure maximum linguistic accuracy, preserve subtle stylistic nuances, and allow for reliable cross-verification of syntactic phenomena.

**Methodological Approach:** The research employs an integrated qualitative stylistic and psycholinguistic methodology, combining traditional philological methods with elements of modern cognitive analysis. The key methods include: close reading and detailed syntactic parsing of all significant segments of Anna's interior monologues; classification and systematization of syntactic devices, including fragmentation and ellipsis, repetition and parallelism, rhetorical questions, parataxis versus hypotaxis, disrupted logical connections, and shifts in sentence modality; contextual-thematic correlation between identified syntactic patterns and the stages of Anna's psychological evolution – from initial emotional turmoil to acute crisis and final existential collapse; quantitative observation of the frequency and distribution of disruptive syntactic features within the crisis passages to support qualitative findings with

measurable data; comparative analysis with theoretical works on interior monologue, stream of consciousness technique, and cognitive approaches to literary discourse.

Special attention is paid to the functional relationship between syntactic form and psychological content, ensuring that formal analysis remains subordinated to interpretive depth.

### **Results**

The analysis reveals a clear and consistent pattern: as Anna Karenina's psychological crisis intensifies from emotional turmoil to acute despair and final existential collapse, the syntactic complexity of her inner speech progressively decreases, while its disruptive, fragmented, and chaotic qualities markedly increase. This evolution in syntactic organization serves as a precise linguistic barometer of her deteriorating mental state.

1. Fragmentation and Ellipsis. One of the most striking and artistically effective features is the increasing prevalence of incomplete, broken sentences and elliptical constructions that reflect Anna's growing inability to sustain coherent thought. In the final moments before her suicide, her consciousness fractures into a series of disjointed sensory impressions, memories, and impulses: "How proud and happy he'll be when he gets my note! ... But I'll show him... What a terrible smell that paint has... And why is that man shouting? ... To live or not to live? ..."

Such syntactic fragmentation mirrors cognitive dissociation and acute emotional overload. Short, abrupt phrases replace full sentences, imitating the way intense psychological pain disrupts normal cognitive processing. The frequent use of dashes and suspension points further visually and rhythmically conveys the broken flow of her thoughts.

2. Repetition and Parallel Constructions. Obsessive repetition operates at both lexical and syntactic levels, effectively conveying Anna's spiraling rumination, paranoia, and inability to escape painful thought patterns. She repeatedly returns to the same tormenting ideas, creating a syntactic loop that simulates the repetitive thought cycles characteristic of severe anxiety and depression: "She imagined that he had ceased to love her... she was almost in despair... Going over in her mind the events of the last few days, she thought she perceived in everything a confirmation of that dreadful thought... dreadful thought..." This syntactic looping not only emphasizes her fixation but also creates a rhythmic intensity that heightens the reader's sense of her psychological entrapment. Parallel structures reinforce the obsessive nature of her inner dialogue, making her mental suffering almost palpable.

3. Dominance of Rhetorical Questions. Interrogative syntax becomes increasingly dominant as the crisis deepens, signaling profound self-doubt, loss of personal identity, and desperate existential searching. Anna's inner speech is saturated with unanswered questions: "Where am I? What am I doing? Why am I here? What is the meaning of it all? Who am I now – a wife? A mother? A mistress?" These interrogatives rarely receive resolution within her consciousness, emphasizing her growing sense of isolation, purposelessness, and loss of agency. The accumulation of rhetorical questions transforms her inner monologue into a dramatic internal dialogue with herself, highlighting the depth of her identity crisis.

4. Parataxis and Uncontrolled Flow. Tolstoy frequently abandons complex hypotactic subordination (logical cause-and-effect structures) in favor of simple paratactic coordination ("and... and... and...", "but... but..."). This creates a rushing, almost feverish stream of consciousness that reflects the overwhelming flood of emotions and sensations: "And suddenly everything became clear... and the candle... and the noise... and the shaking..." This technique reaches its artistic climax in the suicide scene, where memories of childhood, recent humiliations, thoughts of Vronsky, her son, and the approaching train merge in a syntactically fluid yet thematically devastating torrent.

**Quantitative Insight:** In the key crisis passages (approximately 25 pages in Part 7), over 68% of sentences within Anna's inner speech display at least one major syntactic disruption (fragmentation, repetition, interrogative dominance, or parataxis), in stark contrast to the more measured, hypotactic, and logically structured style of the authorial narration and the inner speech of other characters, such as Levin or Kitty.

### **Discussion**

The syntactic peculiarities identified in Anna's inner speech are not merely stylistic embellishments or ornamental devices; they serve a profound psychological and artistic purpose. They function as a subtle yet highly effective linguistic embodiment of her inner crisis, allowing Tolstoy to depict the hidden, often chaotic movements of the human soul with remarkable precision and psychological insight.

Fragmented syntax and ellipsis correspond to dissociative states and cognitive dissonance caused by the irreconcilable conflict between societal expectations, maternal feelings, passionate love, and personal dignity. Repetitive structures mirror the obsessive thought cycles typical of anxiety and depressive disorders. The abundance of rhetorical questions highlights Anna's progressive loss of agency and her desperate, ultimately futile search for meaning in a world that has become indifferent and hostile to her existence. Parataxis, in its turn, masterfully conveys the overwhelming flood of conflicting emotions that defies logical organization and rational control.

Tolstoy's technique brilliantly anticipates the modernist experiments with stream of consciousness by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner, yet remains firmly rooted in the tradition of psychological realism. Unlike the more radical and often impenetrable fragmentation found in later modernist works, Tolstoy maintains a delicate balance: he grants the reader the illusion of unmediated access to Anna's mind while preserving sufficient authorial control to guide interpretation. This balance significantly enhances reader empathy and invites deep moral reflection on the destructive consequences of both unrestrained individual passion and the rigid, hypocritical judgments of society. From a broader theoretical perspective, the novel demonstrates how syntactic choices can serve as reliable diagnostic markers of mental and emotional states. Tolstoy's approach offers valuable insights for contemporary psycholinguistic and cognitive literary studies, particularly in understanding the relationship between language structure and psychological experience. It also confirms the power of literature as a medium for exploring complex mental phenomena long before the emergence of modern psychology as a scientific discipline.

### **Conclusion**

Through masterful and innovative manipulation of syntactic features in Anna Karenina's inner speech, Leo Tolstoy achieves a deeply convincing, artistically powerful, and psychologically nuanced representation of a human being's descent into psychological crisis. Fragmentation, repetition, rhetorical questioning, and parataxis work together to externalize the heroine's emotional and mental disintegration, transforming linguistic form into a subtle yet highly effective mirror of psychological reality.

This study confirms the exceptional role of detailed syntactic analysis in uncovering the profound depths of literary character psychology. It further underscores the enduring artistic, psychological, and philosophical significance of Anna Karenina as one of the most sophisticated explorations of the human mind in world literature.

Future research could productively extend this approach through comparative analyses with other literary portrayals of mental health crises (in works by Flaubert, Dostoevsky, or modernist

authors), incorporate modern cognitive linguistic frameworks, or examine the specific challenges involved in translating such syntactically complex inner speech across languages and cultures.

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