



Chiasmus: Structural and Functional Peculiarities in English Literary and Political Discourse

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the analysis of stylistic device of chiasmus in English literary texts. Various examples of chiasmus in English literature and how they contribute to the meaning and impact of the text is analyzed emphasizing on the fact that chiasmus can be an effective tool for stressing key themes, creating memorable phrases, and engaging the reader through its rhythmic and poetic qualities. Additionally, how chiasmus has been used in different literary genres, including poetry, prose, and drama is studied and suggestions are made that a deeper understanding of chiasmus can enhance the appreciation and analysis of English literary texts. The paper also discusses the significance of chiasmus in literary analysis, arguing that it can reveal important thematic connections and deepen the reader's understanding of the text. For instance, chiasmus can highlight contrasts or parallels between characters, events, or ideas. By analyzing the structural and rhetorical effects of chiasmus, the article demonstrates its potential to enrich literary texts in various ways.

Key words: rhetorical device, inverted parallelism, reversal of grammatical structure, symmetrical structure, wordplay, literary device, poetic technique prose writing, classical literature, political speeches.

INTRODUCTION

Stylistic devices are an essential aspect of literary expression, allowing writers to convey meaning and engage readers through the use of language. One such device is chiasmus, a rhetorical technique that involves repeating words or phrases in reverse order to create a symmetrical structure. Chiasmus has a long history in literature, with roots dating back to ancient Greek and Latin literature, and has since been utilized in various forms by writers across different periods and genres. In this article, we explore the potential of chiasmus in English literary texts, analyzing its structural and rhetorical effects and examining its significance in enhancing the meaning and impact of the text. Through a detailed analysis of examples from Shakespeare to F. Scott Fitzgerald, we argue that chiasmus can be an effective tool for emphasizing key themes, creating memorable phrases, and engaging the reader through its rhythmic and poetic qualities.

Chiasmus has its roots in classical literature, and it has been used by many famous writers, such as Homer, Aristotle, and Cicero [14:52]. Renaissance writers also made extensive use of chiasmus, with Shakespeare being a prime example. In Shakespeare's plays, chiasmus is used to emphasize contrasting ideas, such as "To be or not to be," in Hamlet. In addition, Shakespeare's chiasmic expressions in his sonnets, such as "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds" in Sonnet 116, emphasize the importance of love's constancy and stability[18:22].

The Romantic period of English literature saw a resurgence of interest in chiasmus. For example, in William Wordsworth's "*The World is Too Much With Us*," chiasmus is used to emphasize the speaker's desire for a deeper connection with nature: "*We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!*" [5:29].

Chiasmus has continued to be used in modern literature. F. Scott Fitzgerald employs chiasmus in *The Great Gatsby* to emphasize the cyclical nature of time, stating "*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past*"[8: 75]. Similarly, in Maya Angelou's poem "*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*," chiasmus is used to emphasize the speaker's longing for freedom: "But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams / his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream"[1].

There have been several researchers who have studied the use of chiasmus as a stylistic device in literature, and their findings have contributed to our understanding of the potential and effectiveness of this technique.

Welch J. W. explored the cultural and historical contexts of chiasmus in literature. His research has found that chiasmus has been used in a variety of literary genres and periods, and that it often reflects cultural values and identity[20].

Harvey A. J. on his work "Chiasmus in English Renaissance literature: The rhetorical, philosophical, and the theological significance of 'X' in Spenser, Donne, Herbert, and Browne" focused on the main features and specifics of applying the tool in the English Literature of the Renaissance age. According to his main findings, the formation of chiasmus is highly influenced by the type of text being written [10].

Farnsworth W. studied the use of chiasmus in modernist literature and found that chiasmus can create a sense of musicality and rhythmic variation in language, and that it can be used to convey complex ideas in a concise and memorable way[11].

The general trends in the research on chiasmus suggest that it can be a powerful tool for conveying meaning and emphasizing key themes in literature. Its versatility across different genres and periods, and its ability to create balance, symmetry, and rhetorical tension, make it a valuable technique for writers to explore and employ.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials used in this study include a selection of English literary texts spanning a range of genres and time periods. The texts were chosen based on their reputation as important examples of English literature and their use of chiasmus as a stylistic device. The selection of texts includes works by William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Oscar Wilde, and McCarthy C., among others, which were obtained from public domain sources.

The methods used in this study involve a close reading and analysis of the selected literary texts. Specifically, we will conduct a systematic search for instances of chiasmus within the texts, identifying and documenting each occurrence.

Overall, the materials and methods used in this study will provide insights into the potential of this stylistic device to enhance the meaning and impact of literary texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of a range of English literary texts spanning different genres and time periods demonstrates that chiasmus is a multifaceted tool, which can be used to create symmetry and balance in a text, as well as to emphasize key elements or ideas. It can also be used to create a sense of surprise or ambiguity, to create a sense of closure or resolution in a text. By reversing the order of words or phrases in the final sentence or paragraph of a text, writers can create a sense of symmetry and balance that provides a satisfying conclusion for the reader. This use of chiasmus is evident in texts such as Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, where the final sentence of the novel uses chiasmus to emphasize the central themes of the text: "*To be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love*"[2:37]. Here, the repetition and reversal of the phrase "falling in love" creates a sense of symmetry and closure, while also emphasizing the central theme of the novel.

Another key finding is that chiasmus can be used to create a sense of irony or ambiguity. By reversing the order of words or phrases, writers can create unexpected associations or connections between ideas, or can highlight the tension between opposing forces. For example, in William Shakespeare's Hamlet, where chiasmus is used to create a sense of ambiguity and uncertainty about the central character's motives and intentions: *"To be, or not to be, that is the question"*- the repetition and reversal of the phrase "to be" creates a sense of tension and conflict, reflecting Hamlet's inner turmoil [18:22].

By creating symmetry, balance, and surprise, chiasmus can help writers to engage and challenge their readers, and to communicate complex ideas and themes in a more memorable and effective way, which can be seen in the following examples:

"Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." [J.F. Kennedy]

In this famous example of chiasmus, Kennedy creates a balanced and memorable sentence by reversing the order of the clauses. This device not only adds a sense of symmetry to the sentence, but also encourages the reader to consider their own role in society, and this shows the communicative success of the message.

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair." [W.Shakespeare, Macbeth]

In this line from Macbeth, a sense of paradox and disorientation is created through chiasmus. By reversing the order of "fair" and "foul," the writer suggests that things are not always as they seem and that moral distinctions may be blurred or inverted.

"We shape our buildings, and afterward our buildings shape us." [W.Churchill]

Churchill uses chiasmus here to make a persuasive argument about the impact of architecture on society. By reversing the order of "we shape" and "our buildings shape us," he highlights the reciprocal relationship between humans and their built environment [16:34].

"It is not the years in your life but the life in your years that counts." [Adlai Stevenson II]

Here, Stevenson emphasizes the importance of quality over quantity in life. By reversing the order of "years in your life" and "life in your years," he challenges readers to focus on making the most of their experiences rather than simply accumulating time.

"Never let a fool kiss you or a kiss fool you." [M.Grothe]

In this playful citation, Grothe uses chiasmus to create a witty and memorable phrase. By reversing the order of "fool kiss you" and "kiss fool you," he suggests that one should be cautious in matters of love and romance.

"She walked into my life in Gucci sandals, and disappeared barefoot." [R. Gunesequera]

In this evocative sentence, a sense of loss and transience is conveyed. By altering the order of "Gucci sandals" and "disappeared barefoot," the author suggests that the speaker's initial impressions of the woman were ultimately proven false or fleeting.

The analysis of the above-given examples show that the use of chiasmus as a stylistic device in English literature and vernacular speech is characterized by several specific features. Firstly, it is often used to create a sense of balance and symmetry in a sentence or phrase. By reversing the order of clauses or phrases, writers can create a pleasing and memorable structure that draws the reader's attention. Secondly, to emphasize contrasts or paradoxes, by juxtaposing two opposing ideas or images in a way that creates a sense of tension or surprise. This can be particularly effective in poetry, where the use of chiasmus can help to create a sense of depth or complexity in a short space. Thirdly, to create a sense of repetition or mirroring, by echoing a phrase or idea in a slightly altered form. This can be a useful technique for emphasizing key themes or ideas in a text, or for creating a sense of unity or coherence across different sections or chapters. Finally, to create a sense of playfulness or wit, by using the device in unexpected or humorous ways. This can be particularly effective in advertising or other forms of persuasive writing, where a memorable phrase or slogan can help to sell a product or idea [5:26].

In addition, the use of chiasmus in English literature is often associated with rhetoric and persuasion. Politicians, for example, frequently use chiasmus to emphasize their key points and to create a sense of urgency or importance. This can be seen in speeches such as John F. Kennedy's in the above-mentioned line.

Moreover, chiasmus is sometimes used to add an element of surprise or irony to a text. By swapping the order of words or phrases, writers can deliver unexpected or even humorous meanings. For example, in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the character Algernon says, "*I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over*" [21:46]. Here, the use of chiasmus not only creates a sense of symmetry and balance, but also adds a humorous and ironic tone to the dialogue. Furthermore, chiasmus can be used to convey a sense of moral or ethical ambiguity. By juxtaposing opposing ideas or images, writers can create a sense of complexity and nuance in their texts. In Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, for example, the character Kurtz says, "*The horror! The horror!*" [4:72]. This phrase not only creates a sense of repetition and mirroring, but also highlights the darkness and ambiguity of Kurtz's character and the themes of the novel.

However, it is important to note that the use of chiasmus should be done with care and consideration. Overuse or misuse of this technique can lead to a text that feels contrived or unnatural. Therefore, writers should strive for a balance between the use of chiasmus and other stylistic devices, and should consider the context and purpose of their writing when deciding whether to use this technique [7:23].

Additionally, the use of chiasmus is not limited to any particular genre or time period of English literature. It has been used by writers throughout history and in various forms of literature, including poetry, drama, and prose. Some notable examples of chiasmus in English literature include Shakespeare's famous line from *Julius Caesar*, "*Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; / I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.*" This line is a classic example of chiasmus, with the reversal of the order of words in the second phrase from "praise him" to "not to praise him" [7:38].

The formation of chiasmus in English texts is influenced by several linguistic factors, including syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

Syntax plays a crucial role in the formation of chiasmus as a writer must use a specific syntactic pattern of reversing the order of words or phrases to create effect of chiasmus. This pattern can compose a balanced and memorable sentence that draws attention to its central message [11:28].

Chiasmus can be used to convey complex ideas in a more accessible way by using antonyms or contrasting ideas. For example, the chiasmus "*You forget what you want to remember, and you remember what you want to forget*" [12:76] from Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* uses antonyms to create a paradoxical statement that highlights the emotional complexity of the characters' experiences, which shows the role of semantic patterns in speech.

Pragmatics, the study of language use in context, is also important for the formation of chiasmus. Chiasmus can be used to convey social or cultural messages by using language in a way that challenges or subverts traditional power structures. For example, the chiasmus "*Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate*" from John F. Kennedy's inaugural address uses language to challenge traditional notions of power and diplomacy, imposing a pragmatic effect on the statement [14:54].

Another linguistic factor that can influence the formation of chiasmus is register. It is due to the fact that chiasmus can be used in formal or informal contexts, but the use of chiasmus in formal contexts is more common.

Finally, the use of chiasmus in English literature can also be influenced by individual writing styles. Some writers use chiasmus more frequently than others, and their use of chiasmus can be influenced by their personal preferences, writing goals, and the intended audience. For example, the use of

chiasmus in the works of Shakespeare differs from that of the works of James Joyce, who used chiasmus to create complex and experimental narratives.

Additionally, the formation of chiasmus can be influenced by the type of text being written. For example, chiasmus is often used in poetry to create a sense of symmetry and balance. In prose, chiasmus can be used to create a sense of emphasis or to highlight a particular idea or theme.

As for the positioning of chiasmus in a sentence, it should be noted that it can be used in different parts of a sentence. For instance, chiasmus can be used to invert the word order of a sentence, or it can be used to invert the word order of phrases or clauses within a sentence. The placement of chiasmus within a sentence can affect the overall impact of the sentence and the message conveyed [13:1128].

As for the forms of chiasmus, there are several different types of it that writers may employ to create a variety of effects. Here are some examples:

Antimetabole: This type of chiasmus involves the repetition of words or phrases in reverse order. For example, antimetabole makes an excellent rhetorical device for philosophers like Socrates who might need to stress a particular ethical or philosophical issue. Take for instance this moral attack by Socrates against gluttony: *'I eat to live, not live to eat.'* Here, 'eat' and 'live' have switched places being the main and infinitive ('to live,' 'to eat') verbs in either sentence. Or: *"Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true"* [M.L.King].

Stricter definitions of chiasmus maintain that it never involves the repetition of the same words, which would mean that antimetabole could not be a type of chiasmus [13:1127]. However, we hold that since it can involve the repetition of words, in which case antimetabole would be a type of chiasmus.

Parenthesis: This type of chiasmus involves inserting a phrase within a clause or sentence that mirrors the structure of the surrounding text. For example, in Shakespeare's play "Richard II," the character John of Gaunt says: *"This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, / This other Eden, demi-paradise"*[19:42]. Here, the repetition of the phrase "this" followed by a noun creates a sense of emphasis and grandeur.

Parallelism: This type of chiasmus involves repeating a phrase in reverse order twice. For example, in Alexander Pope's poem "An Essay on Man," he wrote: *"To err is human, to forgive divine"* [15:13] Here, the repeated phrase "to [verb] is [adjective]" creates a sense of balance and symmetry.

Repeated key words: This type of chiasmus involves repeating key words in reverse order. For example, in Jane Austen's novel "Pride and Prejudice," the character Mr. Darcy says: *"You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you"*[2:89]. Here, the repeated words "admire" and "love" create a sense of emphasis and intensity.

Another type of chiasmus is situational chiasmus, which involves the reversal of a situation or scenario. This type of chiasmus is less commonly used in literature, but it can still be found in examples such as *"I was never the one who did the cheating, but I always seemed to get caught" or "I thought I was teaching my child, but in reality, my child was teaching me."*[From internet forum]

There are also variations of chiasmus that are often used in English literature. One such variation is the extended chiasmus, which involves the repetition of a chiasmus structure over several lines or stanzas. An example of an extended chiasmus can be found in William Shakespeare's play "Richard II," where the protagonist laments his loss of power with the line *"For God's sake let us sit upon the ground, and tell sad stories of the death of kings"*[19:32].

Another variation involves the use of multiple chiasmus structures within a single sentence or phrase. This type of chiasmus can be found in the famous quote by Winston Churchill: *"You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life"* [16:23].

Overall, the different types and variations of chiasmus in English literature allow writers to create a wide range of effects, from creating memorable lines to expressing complex ideas in a concise and impactful way.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, chiasmus is a unique and powerful rhetorical device that has been used by many writers in English literature to enhance the impact of their writing. As we have seen, there are a variety of linguistic factors and approaches that influence the formation of chiasmus in English literature, including syntax, semantics, register and style. Through a careful analysis of examples of chiasmus in English literature, we have seen how this device can be used to create memorable and impactful statements that engage and challenge readers. While chiasmus is a versatile and effective device, it should be used judiciously and with purpose. Writers should carefully consider the context and tone of their writing when incorporating chiasmus, and should avoid overusing this device to the point of distraction. By using chiasmus effectively and thoughtfully, writers can create works of literature that are both aesthetically pleasing and intellectually stimulating. Overall, the study of chiasmus in English literature provides us with valuable insights into the ways in which writers use language to convey meaning and evoke emotion. As we continue to explore the literary possibilities of this device, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the artistry and complexity of the English language. Furthermore, the analysis of chiasmus in English literature can also contribute to our understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which these works were produced. By examining the ways in which different writers have used chiasmus, we can gain insights into the literary trends and movements of their time, as well as the cultural and social issues that were of concern. As we explore the linguistic and literary possibilities of this device, we can deepen our appreciation for the ways in which writers use language to convey meaning and emotion, and gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical contexts in which these works were produced. In order to fully appreciate the potential of chiasmus in English literature, it is important to approach it from a multidisciplinary perspective, drawing on insights from linguistics, literary theory, and cultural studies.

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