

## FUNCTIONS OF A LEXICO-SYNTACTICAL STYLISTIC DEVICE - "LITOTES"

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the functions of the lexico-syntactical stylistic device known as litotes a figure of speech characterized by the use of understatement to emphasize a point by negating its opposite. By examining various examples across different texts and contexts, this study highlights how litotes can convey irony, create a sense of modesty, and foster a connection between the speaker and the audience.*

**Key words:** *Litotes, stylistic device, understatement, irony, expressiveness, modesty, rhetorical tool, language, communication, discourse.*

Litotes are statements that use a double negative to bring out a positive meaning. It is written with the use of 'not' followed by the opposite of the adjective. Adjectives are used in their degrees of comparison to create an effect.

The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines litotes as a figure of speech "by which an affirmation is made indirectly by denying its opposite, usually with an effect of understatement". The Oxford Dictionary defines litotes as "the use of a negative or weak statement to emphasis a positive meaning". Litotes are often considered a form of verbal irony, but it is not exactly irony. While irony conveys something different or the exact opposite of a said situation, litotes use double negatives to convey something positive. Well, is it similar to euphemism? No, it isn't. Euphemism is the use of words or phrases that would lighten the severity of the situation. Litotes, on the other hand, intensify the positive effect of the sentence. Look at the following examples for a better understanding [1].

Going through some examples will help you understand clearly how it can be used. Given below are examples from literature and movies and a few examples of litotes that can be used in everyday situations. Check them out. Litotes are statements that use a double negative to bring out a positive meaning. It is written with the use of 'not' followed by the opposite of the adjective. Adjectives are used in their degrees of comparison to create an effect.

This can be useful when a writer wants to simultaneously call an image or quality into focus and dispel it through negation. For instance, when T.S. Eliot's speaker says "I am no prophet," Eliot intentionally leads the reader to imagine a prophet, even though that's exactly what the speaker claims he isn't. This effect is especially useful in showing, in literature, what could have been. In Charles Wolfe's poem, the description, "not a drum was heard, not a funeral note," makes the reader see what was, presumably, expected at a British soldier's burial, therefore making vivid the reality of the soldier's fate.

Litotes is often used as a milder, gentler way of navigating requests, criticism, and conversation in general. For instance, the phrase, "I wouldn't say no to a drink" may seem less demanding (though more indirect) than "I'd like a drink." Further, the harsh sound of criticism can often be softened through the use of litotes. For instance, "He's not as young as he used to be" is more tactful than "He's gotten old," and "She isn't exactly a world class chef" takes the edge off the statement "She's a poor cook." This effect is related to euphemism, in which soft or indirect phrasing is used in place of blunt phrasing. While litotes can be polite, it is also frequently a tool used in comic or snarky statements. "Unfortunately the senator isn't a genius" is an ironic way of insulting a senator's intelligence. Rather than being polite, it's a deliberately snarky and demeaning statement that uses irony and understatement to enhance its bite. So while litotes can help those who want to sound polite, it can also give a cutting edge to those who want to use it to win laughs or insult someone [2].

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- Sudha isn't a bad singer.
- The trip was not totally unbearable.
- The book has not been really helpful.
- I heard that Leena is not healthy.
- Renjith is going to Japan for a year. That is not such a short time.
- We are not as young as we used to be, are we?
- Our house is not bigger than yours.
- Detective novels are not so boring.
- Shanvin does not look miserable.
- Laura is not unlike her brother.

The first known mention of litotes is in a letter from Cicero in 55 BC (*De Oratore*). Cicero uses the word to mean simplicity (or frugality) of life. The meaning and the function of the word changed from 'simple' to the idea of understatement that involves double negatives, a way to state things simply [3].

Old Norse had several types of litotes. These points are denied negatives ("She's not a terrible wife" meaning "she's a good wife"), denied positives ("He's not a great learner" meaning 'he has difficulty learning'), creating litotes without negating anything, and creating litotes using a negative adjective ("Days spent in his home left him unenthused" meaning 'he preferred to be out and about') [4].

Litotes can be used to establish ethos, or credibility, by expressing modesty or downplaying one's accomplishments to gain the audience's favor. In the book Rhetorica ad Herennium, litotes is addressed as a member of the Figures of Thought known as deminutio, or understatement. It is listed in conjunction with antiphrasis and meiosis, two other forms of rhetorical deminutio. For example, a very accomplished artist might say "I'm not a bad painter", and by

refraining from bragging but still acknowledging his skill, the artist is seen as talented, modest, and credible.

In conclusion, lexico-syntactical stylistic devices play a crucial role in enhancing the richness and depth of language. By manipulating vocabulary and sentence structures, these devices allow writers and speakers to convey complex emotions, create vivid imagery, and engage their audience more effectively. From the use of parallelism and antithesis to the strategic application of various lexical choices, these tools not only embellish the text but also serve to emphasize key themes and ideas. Understanding and employing lexico-syntactical stylistic devices can significantly elevate one's writing and communication skills, making it an essential area of study for linguists, writers, and anyone interested in the art of effective expression. Ultimately, these devices highlight the dynamic interplay between language and meaning, showcasing the power of words in shaping our perceptions and experiences.

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