

THE PURPOSE OF USING CHIASMUS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: This article discusses the concept of chiasmus, or chiastic structure, has garnered significant attention in textual analysis, particularly in literary studies. This analysis emphasizes that not all instances of chiasmus are equally compelling or clear-cut; rather, they exist on a spectrum of "chiasticity." To effectively identify and evaluate chiasmus within a text.

Keywords: chiasmus, rhetorical figure, repetition, parallel constructions, conjunction, figure of speech, chiastic character.

In recent decades, commentators who find them to be chiastic have analyzed some texts. Some of the suggested inverted structures are convincing and illuminating; others seem quite marginal. Some texts are strongly and precisely chiastic, while in other cases it may only be possible to speak of a general presence of balance or framing. It is apparent that not all possible chiasms are created equal that in order to be clear in discussing chiasmus it is necessary for commentators to recognize that "degrees of chiasticity" exist from one text to the next [1,86].

Several factors need to be addressed before one can establish the presence of chiasmus in a given text. The more of these criteria that are significantly present in a particular case, the higher will be its degree of chiasticity. They are as follows:

1. Objectivity. If the process of identifying chiasmus is to produce verifiable results, the inverted parallel orders must be objectively evident. If a proposed chiasm consists of elements that are objectively observable in the texts, rather than depending on distant parallels or clever linkages that require imaginative commentary to explain, it is more likely that the chiastic character of the text is strong and less likely that the reader has imposed an arrangement upon the text which he or she alone has brought to it. The more evident and arrangement are in the text, the greater degree of chiasticity will come.

2. Purpose. Chiasmus is useful for several purposes, such as concentrating attention on the main point of a passage by placing it at the central turning point, drawing meaningful contrasts, aiding in memorization, or emphasizing the feeling of closure upon the conclusion of a lengthy repetition. Chiastic structures can enhance the sense of the passage in the ways that extend beyond the molecular meaning of individual words and phrases. It is more plausible to assert that chiasmus exists in a passage when an author appears to have intentionally put it there for a stylistic purpose.

The likelihood of such intent on the part of the author should be assessed as it relates to the ideas and the characteristics of the text itself. In addition to that the purpose of using chiasmus in English also includes that chiasmus is important to give structure and poetic form, making text more digestible and memorable, to set the scene and draw the reader from where they are into the core, from the outer courts into the inner courts and as well as to protect the essential core at the heart of the chiasmus and draw attention to it.

3. Boundaries. A chiasm is stronger if it operates across a literary unit as a whole and not only upon fragments or sections which overlap or cut across significant organizational lines intrinsic to the text. These bounded units may be short, or they may comprise a full psalm or longer periscope. That is, in determining whether a passage in the Psalms is chiastic, one should consider the parts of the psalm as a whole. To the extent that the proposed structure crosses over natural barriers, unnaturally chops sentences in half or falls short of discernable boundaries in the text as a whole, the more dubious the suggested chiasm becomes.

4. Competition with other forms. Chiasmus is more dominant in a passage when it is the only structuring device employed there. Chiasmus becomes less significant to the extent that a competing literary device or explanation of the arrangement of the words or thoughts more readily accounts for an apparently chiastic placement of elements. For example, "Hickory, Dickory, Dock" cannot be considered strongly chiastic because it is primarily a limerick.

5. Length. The longer the proposed chiasm, the higher its degree of chiasticity. A chiasm composed of six words introduced in one order and then repeated in the opposite order is more extensively chiastic than a structure composed of three repeated words. Having a large number of proposed elements, however, is not alone very significant for all the elements must bear their own weight. An extended chiasm is probably not much stronger than its weakest links.

6. Density. The more compact the proposed structure or fewer irrelevances between its elements, the higher the degree of chiasticity. Tightness in the text is indicative of greater craftsmanship, rigor, focus, intention and clarity. In assessing the density of a passage, all significant words and phrases appearing in the system must be considered.

7. Dominance. A convincing analysis must account for and embrace the dominant nouns, verbs and distinctive phrases in the text. Conversely, a weak construction relies upon relatively insubstantial or common words and ideas in the text. Accordingly, powerful chiastic structures revolve around major incidents, unique phrases or focal words, as distinguished from insignificant or dispensable parts of speech. The more significant the elements in relation to the message of the text are the greater degree of chiasticity.

8. Reduplication. If the same word or element appears over and over within the system, the likelihood is greater that some other kind of repetition, including random repetition is predominant in the passage instead of chiasmus.

9. Balance. Ideally, the elements on both sides of the proposed focal point must be nearly equal, in terms of number of words, lines or elements. It reduces clarity and focus when the two halves of a purportedly chiastic passage are not balanced.

10. Return. A chiasm is more complete where its beginning and end combine to create a strong sense of return and completion. Second in importance to the central crossing effect to a lengthy chiasm is the way the chiasm begins and ends. The overall structure becomes more apparent when the boundaries are clearly defined and where the passage begins and ends similarly.

11. Compatibility. The chiasticity of a passage is greater when it works comfortably and consistently together with the overall style of the author. Chiasm is more likely to be meaningfully present if its author used chiasmus or related forms of parallelism on other occasions as well. If a proposed chiastic word order is an isolated phenomenon in the writings of an author, there is a greater chance that the occurrence in question was simply accidental.

12. Aesthetics. Finally, there is room for subjective appreciation. Computers cannot identify chiasmus. Since human readers must judge an author's artistic success further factors become relevant in assessing a passage's degree of chiasticity, such as the author's fluency with form; consistency in sustaining the structure; balance and harmony; pliability at the turning point and meaningful applications of the form that do not resort to subtleties so obscure as to be esoteric or awkward. [2.45]

The factors mentioned above indicate the types of questions that need to be asked in identifying and evaluating a proposed complex purpose of chiasmus. In assessing the results one should obtain by asking and answering these questions, a text critic will need to apply qualitative and quantitative standards.

Chiasmus is easiest to write and yet can be made very beautiful and effective simply by moving subordinate clauses around:

"If you come to them, they are not asleep; if you ask and inquire of them, they do not withdraw themselves; they do not chide if you make mistakes; they do not laugh at you if you are ignorant". —Richard de Bury

Prepositional phrases or other modifiers can also be moved around to form chiastic structures. Sometimes the effect is rather emphatic:

"Tell me not of your many perfections; of your great modesty tell me not either".

Just as the term "menial" does not apply to any honest labor, so no dishonest work can be called "prestigious."

At other times, the effect is more subdued but still desirable. Compare the versions of these sentences, written first in chiastic and then in strictly parallel form.

On the way to school, my car ran out of gas; then it had a flat on the way home.

On the way to school, my car ran out of gas; then on the way home it had a flat.

Sitting together at lunch, the kids talked incessantly; but they said nothing at all sitting in the dentist's office.

Sitting together at lunch, the kids talked incessantly; but sitting in the dentist's office, they said nothing at all.

The computer mainframe is now on sale; available also at a discount is the peripheral equipment.

The computer mainframe is now on sale; the peripheral equipment is also available at a discount. [3.273]

Chiasmus may be useful for those sentences in which you want balance, but which cannot be paralleled effectively, either because they are too short, or because the emphasis is placed on the wrong words. In addition, sometimes a chiastic structure will just seem to "work" when a parallel one will not.

Authors use the rhetorical term Chiasmus to make a significant point or quote or to balance sentences, which may be too short to parallel. This device is effective on readers because it gets two points across but puts more stress and emphasis on the second part. Authors use this when there are two significant words or phrases that occur in the same important sentence [4.148].

Chiasmus is the term for a rhetorical device in which a sentence or phrase is followed by a sentence or phrase that reverses the structure and order of the first one. In chiasmus, the words do not have to be repeated the second sentence does not just reverse the words of the first sentence. Different words can be used. The key is that the sentence is grammatically the same, just reversed. Writers and speakers use chiasmus for the effect. Sometimes, chiasmus is implied the reversal of reality is present in the words that are spoken or written.

In conclusion, recognizing chiasmus involves a nuanced approach that takes into account these criteria. By assessing the objectivity, purpose, boundaries, competition with other forms and length of potential chiasms, commentators can arrive at a more accurate understanding of their presence and significance in texts. This framework allows for a more structured analysis of chiastic structures and acknowledges the varying degrees of chiasticity that may exist across different works.

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