Ling 103: Language Structure and Verbal Art
Parallelism and Parataxis

Parallelism or responson is the repetition of structural elements in a text in order to produce form or cohesion.

Most varieties of parallelism can be thought of as pairings or groupings of elements which form an equivalence set.

The criteria for determining what is contained in an equivalence set can be defined by linguistic properties of various kinds — phonological (sound), semantic (meaning), syntactic (word category of phrasal structure).

Parallelism can operate along different dimensions of linguistic structure:

• **Parallelism in sound: Phonological Parallelism**
  • **Rhyme:** repetition of the structural rhyme of syllables, usually at line-ends
  • **Assonance:** repetition of the structural nucleus of syllables
  • **Alliteration:** repetition of the structural onset of syllables
  • **Meter:** repetition or patterning in syllable counts or in metrical prominences (*ictuses*) or metrical constituents (*feet*)

• **Parallelism in verse structure**:
  • line divisions
  • stanzaic or periodic formulation (groups of lines)
Parallelism in syntactic structure:

**Lexical Parallelism**

- word category repetition (noun, verb, etc.)
- semantic class repetition (similar or contrastively paired words, embedded in parallel phrasal or verse structure)

**Syntactic Parallelism**

- repetition of similar phrasal structures
- ‘listing’ or ‘parataxis’
- extreme form of listing: catalogues

**Parataxis:** a syntactic structure is said to be *paratactic* if it consists of phrases which are **equal:**

- **coordination**
  - (use of conjunctions such as *and*, *or*)
  - or
- **asynthetic** form
  - (phrases which are listed without overt coordinative element)

I see the tracks of the railroads of the earth,
I see them in Great Britain, I see them in Europe,
I see them in Asia and in Africa

Walt Whitman, ‘Salut au Monde! 5:1-3’

[I see the tracks of the railroads of the earth]
[I see them in Great Britain]]
[I see them in Europe]
[I see them in Asia and in Africa]
Parataxis is opposed to subordination where one phrase is subordinated to another by a subordinating conjunction or through gerunds and participles

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,
   Sails the unshadowed main,
   The venturous bark that flings
On the sweet summer wind its purple wings
In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings
   And coral reefs lie bare,
Where the cool sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Chambered Nautilus"

[This is

   [the ship of pearl,
      [which poets feign
         [sails the unshadowed main,]
         ]
      ]
   [The venturous bark
      [that flings on the sweet summer wind its purple wings in gulfs enchanted
         [where the Siren sings
            and
            coral reefs lie bare,]
      ]
   [where the cool sea-maids rise
      [to sun their streaming hair.]}
]
Hebrew poetry of the Old Testament

- little use of subordinating structures
- instead of rhyme, there is **syntactic or semantic parallelism**

I. Syntactic Parallelism

(i)

A When Israel went forth from Egypt,
A the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

B Judah became his sanctuary,
B Israel his dominion.  

Ps. 114:1-2

A (when) X (went forth) from Y  
B  W (became) Z

(ii)

A The grass withers
A the flower fades
B when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
C surely the people is grass.
A The grass withers
A the flower fades
D but the word of our God will stand forever.  

Is. 40:7-8

These syntactic patterns behave like **rhyme** patterns in organizing the poetry, but instead of sounds, **sentence structures** or **meanings** are put into parallel relations.
Robert Lowth (1753) — early influential work on Biblical poetics

(1) **synonymous parallelism:**
   lines are *echoic*; the second line is a mere variation of the first

   How shall I *curse*, whom *God* hath not *cursed*?
   Or how shall I *defy*, whom the *Lord* hath not *defied*?

   **Num. 23:8**

   *Sun*, stand thou still upon *Gibeon*;
   And thou, *Moon*, in the *valley of Ajalon*  
   **Josh. 10:12**

(2) **antithetic parallelism:**
   second line contrasts or denies the first

   A *wise son* maketh a *glad father*,
   But a *foolish son* is the *heaviness of his mother*.

   **Prov. 10:1**

   For the Lord *knoweth* the *way of the righteous*;
   But the *way of the ungodly* shall perish.  
   **Ps. 1:6**

(3) **synthetic/constructive parallelism:** second line completes the first
   (diagnostic: first line cannot stand alone meaningfully), but the two lines have parallel structures

   Answer not a *fool* according to his folly,
   Lest thou also be like unto him.  
   **Prov. 26:4**

   As a *bird* that wandereth from her *nest*,
   So is a *man* that wandereth from his *place*.  
   **Prov. 27:18**

   *In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,*
   make straight in the *desert a highway for our God.*

• James Kugel: critique of Lowth’s classification as too rigid.
   
   Claimed that Lowth’s three types were arbitrary.
1. **Heightening or Climactic Parallelism** (also discussed by Lowth). A is the most important idea; B is a qualification of it; includes ‘heightening’ or making more precise

   I made the earth,  
   and created man upon it:  
   it was my hand that stretched out the heavens,  
   and I commanded all their host.  
   
   Isa. 45:12

   ‘my hand stretched out the heavens’ ← ‘I made the earth’  
   ‘I commanded all their host’ ← ‘I created man’

2. Grammatical **gender** may also be used in responson.

   For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent,  
   and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest,  
   until her vindication (f.) goes forth as brightness (m.),  
   and her salvation (f.) as a burning torch (m.)  
   
   Isa. 62:1

3. **Word-pairings** (both verbs and nouns) in **equivalence classes**:

   Though they dig into Sheol,  
   from there shall my hand take them;  
   Though they climb up to heaven,  
   from there I will bring them down.

   dig ↔ climb  
   my hand ↔ I  
   Sheol ↔ heaven  
   take ↔ bring down
II. Semantic Relations in Word-Pairings (classification of Krohn)

Word-pairings in Hebrew Poetry are based on several types of semantic connection.

‘Equal’ terms

Identity  the Lord ←→ God
Synonymy  wilderness ←→ desert
           harm ←→ woe
Similarity father ←→ mother
Antonymy  outside ←→ inside
Contrast  finger ←→ toe
Abstract : concrete feeling ←→ heart
           misfortune ←→ arrows
Concept : metaphor  bride ←→ bird
General : specific  child ←→ youth
Whole : part  forest ←→ tree
Material : product iron ←→ sword
Concept : characteristic  mother ←→ one who gives birth

‘Contiguous’ terms

Spatial:  stone ←→ tree trunk
Temporal:  Monday ←→ Tuesday
Causal:  peace ←→ song
Geller 1977
Another classification of word-pair relations; in addition to the above:

List: elements characterized by some understood common property

\[
\begin{align*}
et & \leftrightarrow \text{drink} \\
fat of offerings & \leftrightarrow \text{libation wine}
\end{align*}
\]

Who ate the fat of their offerings  
And drank the libation wine?  
Deut. 32:38a

Epithet: circumlocution

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{wine} & \leftrightarrow \text{blood of grapes}
\end{align*}
\]

Common Noun $\leftrightarrow$ Proper Noun

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{people} & \leftrightarrow \text{tribes of Israel}
\end{align*}
\]

Numerical

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{one thousand} & \leftrightarrow \text{ten thousand}
\end{align*}
\]

Merism: extremes of one whole

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{heaven} & \leftrightarrow \text{earth}
\end{align*}
\]

Give ear, O heavens, let me speak;  
Let the earth hear the words I utter!  
Deut 32:1

Identity of word root

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{king} & \leftrightarrow \text{kingdom} \quad \text{(both from same Hebrew root } m\, l\, k \text{)}
\end{align*}
\]

Their king shall rise above Agag,  
Their kingdom shall be exalted.  
Num. 24:7b

Metaphor: terms are related by a metaphor only in the local context

Disperse them as smoke is dispersed;  
as wax melts in fire,  
so the wicked shall perish before God.  
Ps. 68:3

\[
\begin{align*}
\{\text{smoke, wax}\} & \leftrightarrow \{\text{the wicked}\} \\
\{\text{disperse, melt}\} & \leftrightarrow \{\text{perish}\}
\end{align*}
\]
Parallelism as synoptic view

Parallelism presents a succession of images much like those in certain films. The images are not necessarily causally connected, but presented on par.

In the Song of Roland the poet makes use of parataxis of entire laisses.

This is known as the technique of laisses similaires

In some cases the laisses are similar in structure and are intended to be understood sequentially

a. French nobles one after another volunteer to take Charles’ message to Marsile.
b. Saracen nobles one after another vow to kill Roland

etc.

Other times, the laisses similaires are constructed so that the same scene is repeated with different points of view.

59
Count Roland, when he heard himself nominated,
Then spoke like a true knight:
‘Lord stepfather, it is my duty to love you.
You have appointed me to the rearguard;
Charles, the king who holds France, will not lose,
I warrant, a single palfrey or war-horse,
Nor mule of jenny, which is fit to ride,
And he will not lose a single pack-horse or sumpter
Without its first being purchased by the sword.’
Ganelon replies: ‘You speak the truth, as I well know.’ AOI.

60
When Roland hears that he was to be in the rearguard,
He spoke angrily to his stepfather:
‘A wretch, base and low-born man;
Did you think that I would drop the gauntlet,
As you dropped the staff in front of Charles?’

It’s been suggested that each laisse is like a panel in Medieval stained-glass art or tapestries, where all the events in a story are presented simultaneously, a synoptic view of events.
Further example of semantic and syntactic parallelism: Manşi Folk Poetry

The Manşi are a people inhabiting northwestern Siberia between the Ural mountains and the Ob River.

The Manşi language is the closest relative to Hungarian; the Hungarians left Asia, eventually settling in Europe in the 4th century.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries Hungarian and Finnish folklorists and linguists (Anton Reguly in 1843, Bernát Munkácsi in 1889, and Artturi Kannisto in 1905) visited the Manşis and made large collections of folk poetry.

In 1958, Robert Austerlitz, a professor at Columbia, published an analysis of Manşi poetry (and poetry in the related language Khanty) in terms of syntactic and semantic parallelism.

Austerlitz examined specifically 19 songs which were noted down from sung performances. He also examined texts which were dictated or recited by informants, but not sung.

Syntax of Mansi:

• usually Subject + Object + Verb
• modifiers precede what they modify
• dependent clauses precede main clauses
• Normally a verb signals the end of a clause and this has fact has structural importance in the poetry.
Line types and line patterning
Austerlitz identifies two types of lines:

**VERBAL** lines and **NON-VERBAL** lines.

1. **VERBAL LINES** end in a finite verb and verb phrase material preceding them, often simply a pronoun and some particle or adverbial modifiers, but sometimes containing a whole noun phrase; they are never longer than non-verbal lines

   mā tam ētmen
   toč ta nāmejawən
   naŋaŋ čōjjāttew

   I arrived
   thus I am named
   we leave (for) you

2. **NON-VERBAL LINES:** (usually patterned) constituents which are interleaved between verbal lines. These are of three types: PARALLEL, TERRACE and ISOLATED.

2a. **PARALLEL LINES:**
A and B are **parallel lines** (sharing partially identical subsegments); V is a (optional) verbal line separating them

   A  ūnt tǔnχ wuta ħūtam kurəm  forest-spirit taking three steps
   B  ūnt tǔnχ wuta ŋata kurəm  forest-spirit taking four steps
   V  moŋ sar wujtijattew        now we-take

   A  numi-sorńi ānan pirtiŋ sam  Numi-Sorni your-father good eye-with
   B  numi-sorńi jāyən pirtiŋ sam  Numi-Sorni your-father favorable eye-with
   V  sunsi                      will look-upon-it
Nearly two-thirds of all non-verbal lines are *parallel* in this sense.

X ——— jür kaśta χū nomsemana  [very common, always used]
Y ——— śom kaśta χū nomsemana

‘the thoughts of a man who seeks strength
the thoughts of a man who seeks power’

------ X  pūt jiṅk owman ār jočan,  [comparatively rare]
------ Y  pūt jiṅk owman ār sōjan

‘many rivers with currents of icy water,
many brooks with currents of icy water’

—— X —— nēmas tēŋkär  þoraŋ āj ūrta  [abundant]
—— Y —— nēmas tēŋkär patat āj ūrta

‘the little hero, shaped like a shrew-mouse,
the little hero, tall as a shrew-mouse’

X —— Y  ājaŋ woj ājälpa  chóti wērtal,  [fairly frequent]
W —— Z  kēlaŋ woj kēlälpa  chóti puštal [usu. has etym. fig.]

‘how does he make the speech of a speaking animal,
how does he open acquaintance with an acquainted animal?’

Also:

X —— W —— ājen wɔ̄ɔ̄ saṁtaŋ sij  the jingling of small coins
Y —— Z —— ūnijen wɔ̄ɔ̄ sūtŋ sij  the clattering of large coins
    [uncommon]

—— X —— W
—— Y —— Z  [very rare]

—— X —— W ——
—— Y —— Z —— [very rare]
The non-identical subsegments may contain word-pairs which are linked in a constellation owing to ceremonial usage; frequently there are number-pairs

χū ‘man’ ←→ nē ‘woman’
χūtəm ‘three’ ←→ ŋat ‘four’
tūp ‘oar’ ←→ χōp ‘canoe’
jiŋk ‘water’ ←→ ŋunt ‘forest’
tūntijen ‘goose’s’ ←→ wāsijen ‘duck’s’
χūχəttən ‘running’ ←→ manten ‘walking’
2b. TERRACE LINES:
a and b and c are subsegments of a non-verbal line:

a b wāsijen kurə miɣən poset
b c miɣən poset in ʕōŋhēmna

a b ducks’ quacking winding river branch
b c winding river branch on shore

‘on the meandering river-branch with ducks’ quacking, on the shore of the meandering river-branch’

2c. ISOLATED LINES:
lines which are not part of a parallel line set or a terrace:

Other devices used in Manši folk-song

a. Echoing: partial repetition of a line

ńūrəm wōj poščijen, poščijen,
the swamp-animal’s young ones, young ones

ūnten wōj poščijen, poščijen
the forest-animal’s young ones, young ones

b. Etymological figure:
Repetition of the same root within the line

special type: first instance of the repeated root has suffix -əŋ/-eŋ ‘being provided with/ having’

kimtəŋ saχ kimatna skirt-having furcoat’s skirt
titəŋ saχ titna sleeve-having furcoat’s sleeves

patəŋ χōpa pataŋa bottom-having canoe bottom-in
‘in the bottom of a canoe having a bottom’
Manşi prayers, charms and invocations.

Baptism Prayer

Golden Mother, watch yourself! When he begins to crawl, don’t throw sparks out at him! May he not go digging in the fireplace!

Goddess with the midnight blood-sacrifice, Mother, Goddess with the midday meal-sacrifice, Mother, if only you might approach here!

King encircling seven lands of princesses, seven lands of princes, if only you might raise up here your golden spirit of sea water, of Ob water! If only you might approach here across the mouth of the steaming bowl, of the steaming kettle!

If only you might sit down upon the goose-bone-high low table, If only you might sit down upon the duck-bone-high low table.
Magician’s song for conjuring away sickness

If the spirit of sickness arises,
I protect you with the lap of my sickness-spirit fur,
If the spirit of plague arises,
I protect you with the lap of my plague-spirit fur.
In the sleeve of my fur with sleeves,
in the lap of my fur with a lap,
you will find no ditch-covered land in which your feet
would fall,
you will find no mound-covered land in which your hands
would fall,
if the time of the spirit of sickness arises,
I protect you in the lap of my fur with a lap with a
protection against the spirit of sickness,
I protect you with a protection against the spirit of plague.
Magic song

A magician begins to conjure:

The hillside spirits everywhere, forest-spirits, my many sons, all have come, the forest-spirits everywhere all have come.
On a board with glowing coals and iron shafts, with our feather arrow set with eagle feathers given to us by our golden father encircling the seven prince-lands and the seven princess-lands, we mark six branches with marked designs, we design seven branches with marked designs.

Magic Song of the Knife Elders

Across the headland the height of a sea swan, across the headland the height of an Ob swan, Golden one with seven knives accepting blood sacrifice, Golden one with six knives accepting meal sacrifice!
Throw over your shoulders covered with sable Your wind-clothes blown through by wind, put on your seven-hair head covered with hair your wind-hat blown through by wind, gird yourself round with your rain-belt rained through by rain!

Your many sons who have taken your arrow are praying to you, your many sons who have taken your bow with harrowing cries are crying to you! Your golden father above appointed you the weight of the earth, your golden father above appointed you the seven-knives blood-sacrifice-accepting golden one, appointed you the six-knives meal-sacrifice-accepting golden one.