

Ling 103: Language Structure and Verbal Art Parallelism and Parataxis

Parallelism or responsion 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 or 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

asyndetic 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.

S.E. Gillingham

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 responsion.

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

eat ↔ drink

fat of offerings ↔ libation wine

Who ate the fat of their offerings
And drank the libation wine?

Deut. 32:38a

Epithet: circumlocution

wine ↔ blood of grapes

Common Noun ↔ Proper Noun

people ↔ tribes of Israel

Numerical

one thousand ↔ ten thousand

Merism: extremes of one whole

heaven ↔ earth

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

Deut 32:1

Identity of word *root*

king ↔ kingdom (both from same Hebrew root *m l k*)

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

{smoke, wax} ↔ {the wicked}

{disperse, melt} ↔ {perish}

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**.

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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.

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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: Manśi Folk Poetry

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

The Manśi 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 Manśis and made large collections of folk poetry.

In 1958, Robert Austerlitz, a professor at Columbia, published an analysis of Manśi 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	I arrived
toχ ta nāmejawən	thus I am named
naŋan χōjijəttew	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 tūŋχ wutə χūtəm kurəm forest-spirit taking three steps

V moŋ sar wujtijəttew now we-take

B ūnt tūŋχ wutə ŋatə kurəm forest-spirit taking four steps

V moŋ sar wujtijəttew now we-take

A numi-sorŋi ānan pirtij sam Numi-Sorni your-father good eye-with

V sunsi will look-upon-it

B numi-sorŋi jaχan pirtij 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 ——— jūr kaštā χū nomsemna [very common, always used]

Y ——— śom kašta χū nomsemna

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

———— X pūt jirk owman ār joχan, [comparatively rare]

———— Y pūt jirk owman ār sōjən

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

— X — nēməs tējkər χoraŋ āj ūrtə [abundant]

— Y — nēməs tējkər patat āj ūrtə

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

X ——— Y ājəŋ woj ājəlpə χoti wērtal, [fairly frequent]

W ——— Z kēləŋ woj kēləlpə χoti pušta [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 woχə śamtaŋ sij the jingling of small coins

Y — Z — ūnijen woχə śūtəŋ 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' ↔ hát 'four'

tūp 'oar' ↔ χōp 'canoe'

jiηk 'water' ↔ ūnt '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 miḡən poset
 b c miḡən poset in χōnḡēmna

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 Mansi folk-song

a. **Echoing:** partial repetition of a line

ńūrəm wōj pośχijen, pośχijen,
 the swamp-animal's young ones, young ones

ūnten wōj pośχijen, pośχijen
 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 -əḡ/-eḡ 'being provided with/ having'

kimtəḡ saχ kimatna skirt-having furcoat's skirt
 titəḡ saχ titna sleeve-having furcoat's sleeves

patəḡ χōpə patəḡa bottom-having canoe bottom-in
 'in the bottom of a canoe having a bottom'

Maní 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 you 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.