

# Parataxis

## Definition of Parataxis

Parataxis is derived from a Greek word that means “to place side by side.” It can be defined as a rhetorical term in which phrases and clauses are placed one after another independently, without coordinating or subordinating them through the use of conjunctions. It is also called “additive [style](#).” Parataxis is sometimes used as [asyndeton](#), in which the phrases and clauses are coordinated without conjunctions.

## The Difference Between Parataxis and Hypotaxis

[Hypotaxis](#) is the opposite of parataxis. In hypotaxis, the sentences, clauses, and phrases are subordinated and linked. However, in parataxis the phrases, clauses, and sentences are not subordinated or coordinated.

## Examples of Parataxis in Literature

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### Example #1: *Life of Caesar* (By Plutarch)

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“Veni, vidi, vici” (“I came, I saw, I conquered”)

This is among the most famous examples of parataxis. There are no conjunctions or joining words used. The phrases are used equally, which means the phrases are placed with equal status.

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### Example #2: *Bleak House* (By Charles Dickens)

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“Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better—splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one

another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foothold at street corners..."

This is also among the famous parataxis examples in literature. Here, the clauses are connected loosely, and create a lopping [discourse](#). For example, at some places conjunctions are used lightly, such as "to" and "and."

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#### **Example #3: *Sula* (By Toni Morrison)**

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"Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened, not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn't know who or what he was ... with no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no rug, no bed, no can opener, no faded postcard, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing nothing to do ... he was sure of one thing only: the unchecked monstrosity of his hands..."

In this extract, a grammatically-equal relationship is created between the phrases and clauses. Also, there are no coordinating or subordinating conjunctions between the clauses and phrases.

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#### **Example #4: *Continuities* (By Walt Whitman)**

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"Nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost,  
No birth, identity, form—no object of the world.  
Nor life, nor force, nor any visible thing;  
Appearance must not foil, nor shifted sphere confuse thy brain.  
Ample are time and space – ample the fields of Nature..."

In this excerpt, all the phrases and clauses carry equal weight. This creates the effect of piling up and compression.

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#### **Example #5: *Waiting for Godot* (By Samuel Beckett)**

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“out ... ‘into this world ... ‘this world ... ‘tiny little thing ... ‘before its time ... ‘in a god for– ... ‘what? ... ‘girl? ... ‘yes ... ‘tiny little girl ... ‘into this ... ‘out into this ... ‘before her time ... ‘godforsaken hole called ... ‘called ... ‘no matter ... ‘parents unknown ... ‘unheard of ... ‘he having vanished ... ‘thin air ... ‘no sooner buttoned up his breeches ... ‘she similarly ... ‘eight months later ... ‘almost to the tick ... ‘so no love ... ‘spared that ... ‘no love such as normally vented on the ... ‘speechless infant ... ‘in the home ... ‘no ... ‘nor indeed for that matter any of any kind ... ‘no love of any kind ... ‘at any subsequent stage ... “

Beckett has not used formal constraints (conjunctions). The clauses are juxtaposed without any clear connection, explaining one another like a single idea, in spite of mixing longer and shorter sentences.

### **Function of Parataxis**

Paratactic sentences, clauses, and phrases are useful in explaining a rapid sequence of thoughts in poetry and [prose](#). They could evoke feelings in a similar way as though they happened at once. It is a helpful device when describing a [setting](#). In simple words, parataxis helps the readers to focus on a particular idea, thought, setting, or emotion. Also, cultural theorists use it in cultural texts where a series of events is shown side by side.