

Hypotaxis

Definition of Hypotaxis

Hypotaxis is subordination of one clause to another, or when the clauses are coordinated or subordinated to one another within sentences. Hypotaxis is defined as a grammatical arrangement of constructs that work in the same way, but which play unequal roles in a sentence. It helps in defining the exact meaning of a clause. The example is given in these lines, where the second line modifies the phrase “clod of clay.”

“So sang a little Clod of Clay,
Trodden with the cattle’s feet”

(*The Clod and the Pebble*, by William Blake)

Difference Between Hypotaxis and Parataxis

[Parataxis](#) is opposite of hypotaxis. In parataxis, the sentences, clauses, and phrases are not coordinated or subordinated. Such as, “Veni, vidi, vici” or, “I came, I saw, I conquered.” (*Life of Caesar*, by Plutarch). However, in hypotaxis, the phrases, clauses, or sentences are coordinated or subordinated.

Examples of Hypotaxis in Literature

Example #1: *Mrs. Bridge* (By Evan S. Connell)

“One December morning near the end of the year when snow was falling moist and heavy for miles all around, so that the earth and the sky were indivisible, Mrs. Bridge emerged from her home and spread her umbrella.”

The remaining clauses explain the first/main clause. These subordinated clauses help in recounting the individual thought expressed in the beginning.

Example #2: *Democracy* (By Joan Didion)

“Let the reader be introduced to Joan Didion, upon whose [character](#) and doings much will depend of whatever interest these pages may have, as she sits at her writing table in her own room in her own house on Welbeck Street.”

In the above excerpt, the main clause talks about a character named Joan Didion. The remaining clauses subordinate the main description and amplify the central idea.

Example #3: *Notes of a Native Son* (By James Baldwin)

“When I was around nine or ten I wrote a play which was directed by a young, white schoolteacher, a woman, who then took an interest in me, and gave me books to read, and, in order to corroborate my theatrical bent, decided to take me to see what she somewhat tactlessly referred to as ‘real’ plays...”

The writer puts emphasis on a specific play, which he wrote in his childhood, and he further explains it in the coordinated clauses. All other descriptions highlight the main idea. Hypotaxis also helps here in making clear what the readers should be focusing on.

Example #4: *The Ring of Time* (By E. B. White)

“After the lions had returned to their cages, creeping angrily through the chutes, a little bunch of us drifted away and into an open doorway nearby, where we stood for a while in semi-darkness watching a big brown circus horse go harumphing

This excerpt is about animals, specifically lion and horse. Here, the entire passage is based on the description and surrounding of the said animals. Hypotaxis helps in giving this piece of writing special focus and an emotional touch.

Example #5: *Ode To A Nightingale* (By John Keats)

“O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim...”

The [speaker](#) longs for a drink of vintage wine in this extract. The first line expresses this longing. All the remaining lines are subordinated to this central idea, to give more information and discuss in further detail.

Function of Hypotaxis

Writers use hypotaxis when they want to convey logical, causal, or temporal relationships within the clauses in a sentence. Hypotactic writing is used effectively as a device for [argument](#) and [persuasion](#). Also, it is used to express individual and related thoughts by using subordinate clauses. The subordinate clauses help in amplifying a central idea. This writing [style](#) helps in providing a great deal of information and background about the topic at hand. Hypotactic writing style heavily depends upon complex and complicated sentences to explain ideas and thoughts in detail.