Polyptoton

Definition of Polyptoton

Polyptoton is a stylistic device that is a rhetorical [repetition](#) of the same root word. However, each time the word is repeated in a different way, such as the words Iuppiter, Iovi, Iovis, and Iovem are derived from the root word "Iove."

Features of Polyptoton

Polyptoton is the use of excessive words instead of shorter expressions. It involves an indirect way of expressing things. These words can help embellish sentences to create striking effects. In fact, it happens when the grammatical meaning can be expressed by using syntactical construction instead of morphological marking. The words in polyptoton share the same etymologies. It is sometimes used as [superlative](#) and comparative adjectives formed by adding words like "more" or "most" instead of suffixes.

Similarity with Antanaclasis

[Antanaclasis](#) is another linguistic device that is similar to polyptoton, wherein the similar words are repeated several times, but each time with different meanings, in the same phrase or sentence. For instance:

> "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

(Franklin D. Roosevelt)

Examples of Polyptoton in Literature

Example #1: *The Dry Salvages* (By T. S. Eliot)

"There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing,
No end to the **withering** of **withered** flowers,
To the movement of pain that is painless and motionless,
To the **drift** of the sea and the **drifting** wreckage,
The bone's prayer to Death its God. Only the hardly, barely
prayable
Prayer of the one Annunciation…"

There are three Polyptoton examples in the above excerpt. In the second line, the word "wither" is used in two ways (verb and adjective). Also, in the fourth line the word "drift" (noun and adjective), and the word "pray" have been used to give different senses (adjectives and nouns) each time.

Example #2: *Trolius and Cressida* (By William Shakespeare)

"The Greeks are **strong**, and **skillful** to their **strength, fierce** to their **skill**, and to their **fierceness** valiant …"

In this excerpt, Shakespeare has repeated three words in different ways. Each use of these words creates a different sense. The word, "strong" is repeated as "strength." In the same way, the root words "fierce" and "skill" are also used twice.

Example #3: *Maud A Monodrama* (By Alfred Lord Tennyson)

"My **own** heart's heart, and **ownest own**, farewell…
My **dream**? do I **dream** of bliss?
I have walk'd awake with Truth … For my **dark**-dawning youth,
Darken'd watching a mother decline
And that **dead** man at her heart and mine…
Yet so did I let my freshness **die**…

Seal'd her **mine** from her first sweet breath.
Mine, mine by a right, from birth till death.
Mine, mine—our fathers have sworn."

This is one of the perfect examples of polyptoton in which Tennyson has used the same word in various forms. Here, it is creating poetic effect by contrasting different forms.

Example #4: *Richard II* (By William Shakespeare)

> "With eager **feeding food** doth choke the **feeder** …"

Here, Shakespeare provides an interesting [contrast](#) of different forms of the same root word, "feed." This repetition also draws attention towards the paradoxical meaning of the word.

Example #5: *Barchester Towers* (By Anthony Trollope)

> "The signora at every grimace and at every **bow smiled** a little **smile** and **bowed** a little **bow**…"

This is another very good example of polyptoton. Here, the words bow and smile are used in multiple forms. "Bow" is used as a noun and then as a verb. Similarly, "smile" is used twice in two ways with different meanings.

Example #6: *Sonnet 116* (By William Shakespeare)

> "Love is not love
> Which **alters** when it **alteration** finds,
> Or bends with the **remover** to **remove** …"

Again Shakespeare has employed polyptoton as a stylistic device. The word "alter" is used as a verb, and in the same line also as a noun. In the third line, "remove" is repeated in a different sense but the root words are same.

Function of Polyptoton

Polyptoton enhances the meaning of a word persuasively and dramatically, in writing or speech, by employing a cognate of the words. It is also used to

Although it helps provide an exciting contrast of different words in a text, it is also in didactic sense to create dramatic and poetic effects. Besides, it brings a [paradox] or an [irony] in a text to the surface. It is widely used in popular dramas and poems, while several political leaders have also used this device in their speeches to emphasize specific points.