

Repetition in Writing

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I. Anaphoric Repetition

According to Otto Jespersen, anaphoric repetition means that a word is repeated and for emphasis given front position:

- a. There was to be no outrage, and no outrage there was. (noun repeated)

Charles Kingsley, Hypatia

- b. She signed delicately and delicately she panted. (adverb repeated)

Anthony Hope, Dolly Dialogues

- c. She found him perfect, and perfect in her sight he remained. (adjective repeated)

Lytton Strachey, Queen Victoria

However, it is to be noted that instead of achieving emphasis, an anaphoric repetition in a IF-clause indicates a doubt on the part of the writer as to the choice of the most appropriate word, e. g.

- a. She was going to be taken to the region of spirits, if such region there were.

Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre

- b. He wants to find out some clue as to the burglary last night, if a burglar it was.

Arthur Conan Doyle, Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

II. Multiple-item Repetition

Sometimes, two or more items are repeated in the same paragraph either to achieve strong reinforcement or to help the reader follow the continuity of thought from sentence to sentence, e. g.

- a. To me, England is the country, and the country is England. And when I ask myself what I mean by England, when I think of England when

I am abroad, England comes to me through my various senses—through the ear, through the eye, and through certain imperishable scents.

Stanley Baldwin, On England

In the above short paragraph several elements are repeated: ENGLAND four times, COUNTRY once, WHEN twice and THROUGH three times. Far from jarring on your ears, those intentional repetitions are forcefully expressive of the writer's ardent love for England. Wherever he was, the spirit of England, which appealed to him in what he saw, what he heard and what he smelt, seemed to have possessed him.

- b. When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! free at last! thank God almighty, we are free at last!"

*Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have
a Dream*

Martin Luther King, Jr. was an American minister. The grandson of a slave, he later became a prominent leader of the civil rights movement in America. In 1963 he organized the massive March on Washington, which brought more than 200,000 people together. He delivered the famous speech I Have a Dream in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. In the speech Dr. King made effective use of multiple-item repetition to get his message across to the American people. The eloquence of his rhetoric deeply moved the audience, giving them new reason to hope that his dream of a world in which all races would be treated equally might eventually come true.

- c. I have, myself, full confidence that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected, and if the best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to defend our Island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone. At any rate, that is what we are going to try to do. That is the resolve of His Majesty's Government—every man of them. That is the will of Parliament and the nation. The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the utmost of their strength. Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and fa-

mous states have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight on the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, could carry on the struggle until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

*Winston Churchill, "Dunkirk," Blood,
Sweat and Tears*

On June 4, 1940, Churchill stood before the House of Commons to deliver an account of the evacuation of some three hundred thousand men of the British Expeditionary Forces. Churchill faced the task of telling his country that with the surrender of the Belgium Army, with the defeat of the French and British Armies at Dunkirk, the British people must prepare themselves for a possible invasion of their island by German troops. After explaining the hard facts of the situation in a comparatively restrained and objective manner, Churchill concluded with an emotional appeal calculated to stir his audience to push their courage, patriotism and determination to such a point that they could face any odds. The concluding part of Churchill's speech quoted above is a classic example of persuasive appeal based on emotion. He depends heavily on the repetitive force of words and phrases. With an unerring rhetorical instinct for the cumulative effect of intentionally repeating the key words and phrases, especially the simple dramatic phrase WE SHALL FIGHT several times, he builds up to the climax WE SHALL NEVER SURRENDER and brings in the vision of the NEW WORLD STEPPING FORTH TO THE RESCUE AND THE LIBERATION OF THE OLD. Even now, at an interval of 40 years, that portion of the speech is still tremendously moving.

IV. Indirect Repetition

Repetition, as a rhetorical device, is a feature of both colloquial and formal style whereby some item is repeated in toto for purposes of emphasis, focus or thematic arrangement. Yet, there is another kind of repetition, the kind of

repetition of facial features which is often found in members of a family. All the members resemble each other, but in one case the resemblance may be of profile, in another of eyes, in still another of chin, and so on. That kind of repetition of facial features in a family is similar to the repetition of a semantic feature through synonymous words or words bearing the same identity in English writing and speech. Repetition like this involves repetition indirectly and might be termed, if you like, Indirect Repetition. The following are its rather usual forms:

1. Repetition by Addition of a Noun or Pronoun Tag

Instead of saying "My mother is a wonderful creature," people often say "She is a wonderful creature, my mother." The noun phrase MY MOTHER is added to the end of the sentence, repeating and clarifying the meaning of the pronoun SHE within it. Emphasis is thus achieved. Here are other examples, some of which are quoted from A Grammar of Contemporary English by Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik:

They are all the same, those politicians.

They are good boys, both of them.

I wouldn't trust him for a moment, that lad.

The tag can be inserted parenthetically, as well as placed finally;

He has got a bright future, your son, if he works hard.

Sometimes we have the reverse process, that is, a noun phrase is positioned initially and a pronoun substitutes for it in the relevant position in the sentence, e. g.

Your cousin Tom, I met him here this morning.

Your cousin Tom, he is awful.

That story, it was terrible.

In current English the comma between the noun phrase its pronoun substitute tends to be omitted;

It's hard for folks to tear off the land and go. Folks like us (,) that had our place.

*John Steinbeck, The Grapes of
wrath*

As indicated by Quirk, et al. in A Grammar of Contemporary English, all such constructions have some familiar dialectal flavour and are therefore very common, though they are considered by some as substandard.

2. Repetition by Noun Phrases in Apposition

As is sometimes required by clarity or emphasis, the subject of a sentence,

especially a comparatively long subject, finds its embodiment in the noun phrases standing in apposition to it at the end of the sentence, usually separated by a colon. Here is a typical example quoted from Bertrand Russell's essay *What I Have Lived For*:

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.

What are the three passions that governed Russell's life? The longing for love, the search for knowledge and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These noun phrases, while functioning as appositives to the subject **THREE PASSIONS**, serve admirably to expound it, leaving therefore no doubt as to what the three passions are. Bertrand Russell was a British philosopher and mathematician who had a rare talent for popularization both in writing and as a broad caster. He received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950. Throughout his life, Bertrand Russell was active in campaigning against war. In the above example, Russell skilfully uses Indirect Repetition to bring into prominence the three noble passions that dominated his life.

3. Semantic Repetition

A pair of synonyms can be used together as one semantic unit for emphasis. In such combinations, the second word only serves to reinforce the first by repeating its meaning, e. g.

- a. To take part in the construction of the four modernizations in China is his highest aim and object.
- b. The river turned and twisted.

Howard Spring, My Son! My Son!

- c. Every piece of information that I sought was openly and frankly given.
- d. There was then some discursive and divergent discussion as to the resemblance of the Indo-China conflict to

Anthony Eden, Memoir

- e. A stony adversary, an inhuman wretch Uncapable of pity, void and empty From any dreams of mercy.

Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

Here, Shakespeare makes effective use of two synonymous adjectives, **VOID** and **EMPTY**, to portray Shylock as a grasping, stony-hearted

moneylender.

In poetry, repetition of a semantic feature is sometimes taken as a basic unifying concept to build up thematic emphasis. Take for example the poem **CROSSING THE BAR** written by Alfred Tennyson, the poet laureate and spokesman of the Victorian age:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.
Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark.
For though from out the bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

This was the last poem Tennyson wrote in his eighty-first year. The allegory of this lyric poem is clear: Tennyson is in the evening of life, and the "clear call" of death will come soon. But when he is crossing the bar, that is, the border between life and death to go on that voyage beyond the bounds of Time and Place, he hopes then to see his Pilot, God, face to face. The poem consists of four stanzas. Take the last line of each stanza:

When I put out to sea. (stanza 1)

Turns again home. (stanza 2)

When I embark. (stanza 3)

When I have crossed the bar. (stanza 4)

As can be seen clearly, all the four lines contain the same semantic feature, that is, indirectly repeat the thematic idea of the poem. They echo one another all through the four stanzas, thus uniting to bring out most effectively the theme **CROSSING THE BAR**.

It is obvious that repetition is an effective stylistic device used to produce cumulative effect, emphasize important points and give continuity to a sentence or a paragraph. Many outstanding writers, both ancient and modern, have proved themselves masters of this technique. If one

wants to write clearly, cogently and persuasively, intentional repetition is one of the basic rhetorical devices to be learned. However, let it be warned that while repetition can be highly effective in the hands of a skilled writer, this device should be used sparingly. Only key words or phrases may sometimes be repeated for clarity or emphasis; less important terms should not be used more often than necessary, as unintentional, unnecessary repetition focuses attention on words rather than on ideas, violating consequently the requirements of rhetoric. It also suggests that the writer may be careless and unconcerned with what he or she is saying. Therefore, unless repeated for a good reason, a word or phrase should not be made conspicuous by too frequent use in the same passage.

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用以表达时间的短语, 如 at your earliest convenience, not later than..., not earlier than..., the earliest possible, the soonest possible, the sooner the better, 等等。这些短语, 乍看起来, 似乎都差不多, 但实际并非如此。所以, 我们在应用这些短语时, 要根据具体情况, 仔细推敲, 正确选用。



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to be sent directly to applicant by registered airmail or by messenger if the beneficiary is in Hongkong, but to not sent any of these shipping documents to notify party (b)

Certificate to this effect is to accompany the remaining document presented."

在预审单据时, 部分同志认为上述条款应理解为如受益人在香港就寄发票、提单和装箱单付本给开证人, 不寄任何单据给提单被通知人 (b), 也就是说, 如果受益人不在香港, 此条款对出口公司无约束。而另一部分同志则认为受益人不在香港就寄单, 在香港就由信使送单, 并出寄单证明。

对这个问题我的认识是:

来证的"..... to be sent directly to applicant by registered airmail or by messenger if the beneficiary is in Hongkong," 从用词来说, 争论双方的理解都讲得通, 但从内容来分析, by registered airmail 应该指“如受益人不在香港, 应采用航空挂号将付本单据寄给开证人,”因为受益人是在香港的话, 就不可能采用“航空挂号”, 信用证上何必提及此点呢?

以上看法不一定对, 请批评指正。

此 致

敬 礼

(吴 陈)