Polysyndeton in Shakespeare's Othello: A Case of Grammatical Deviation

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This paper tackles polysyndeton, which is one of the figures of speech, as a case of a grammatical deviation in Shakespeare's play Othello. Deviation is contrary to the normal norm that is expected to be followed in speaking or writing. Polysyndeton is the excessive use of conjunctions in the sentences: when a writer or speaker utilizes a lot of conjunctions so as to join words together instead of joining the last one, which is the norm. The paper analyses some polysyndetic examples extracted from Shakespeare's Othello as far as grammatical deviation is concerned. Overusing polysyndeton, Shakespeare deviates from the grammatical rule that reads: there should be a conjunction merely before the last item when every item is coordinated by a conjunction. This kind of deviation is intentionally used in the play for stylistic purposes to achieve some functions such as slowing down the rhythm of the utterances, adding cadence to them, balancing the polysyndetic items, showing a character's lack of grammar, and cultivating surprise and enthusiasm in the audience.

Key words: *Polysyndeton, polysyndeton functions, grammatical deviation, conjunction, Shakespeare's Othello.*

Introduction
The Concept of Polysyndeton

Deriving from Greek, the term polysyndeton means "many" (poly), "together" (syn), and "link, bind" (det). Polysyndeton is used when a writer or speaker employs many conjunctions to join the words in a list together so as to highlight the extension of the list. (Sebesta and Haynes 2010).

Polysyndeton is considered a figure of speech in which many "connecting particles" are used: one may use the same conjunction or utilize different ones. (Reich 2011). Moreover, polysyndeton is defined as the employment of conjunctions which are not grammatically needed. (Fisk 1844, Dupriez 1990). For example, if one had many spots to visit in a short period of time, they might want to highlight the greatness of the number by the use of polysyndeton. They might say, "I have to go to school and practice and the store and work and rehearsal…" (Sebesta and Haynes 2010).

Zimmerman (2005), Spencer (1998), Holcomb and Killingsworth (2010), Yefimov and Yasinetskaya (2011), Harmon (2012), Duke (2004) and Wales (2011) agree that polysyndeton is a tool of reiteration (the use of conjunctions such as and, nor, or) in a series of words, phrases or clauses. For example, "The dinner was so good; I ate the chicken, and the salad, and the turkey, and the wild rice, and the bread, and the mashed potatoes, and the cranberry sauce." In this sentence, the recurrence of "and" is not essential and could be deleted. Instead, the use of polysyndeton in this example gives a sense of the astonishing abundance of the dinner and that the speaker could not give up having or depicting all of these dishes. ("Polysyndeton", n.d.).

Furthermore, Quinn (1982) points out that choosing to have a lot of conjunctions is to form a polysyndeton, adding that polysyndeton presents "the sense of an ever lengthening catalogue of roughly equal members."

Functions of Polysyndeton

According to Farnsworth (2010, p.128-9), polysyndeton has a number of functions:

- It makes rhythm. A and B and C and D may form a regular and suitable cadence where A, B, C, and D may not do so.
- It also organizes the pace of the utterance. Putting an extra conjunction can slow an utterance down by drawing out the process of uttering it. However, it also can quicken an utterance, as when all the conjunctions show excitability and acceleration. The situation determines the result.
- It can create the idea that the speaker makes up the meaning as the utterance goes along. A normal list of items with commas between most of them and an *and* merely before the last one demands the speaker to realize when the list closes off, because just before the end is the one and only position where the *and* goes. To Put an *and* after each word on the list shows that it may be the last or not, depending on how many more things happen to the speaker.
- The speaker utilizes *and* to link items in series, rather than split them up with commas. In doing so, every one of the items is emphasized individually.

The speaker frequently uses polysyndeton in order to alter the rhythm of the text, either faster or slower, and can suggest either a sense of gravity or excitement. It can also be employed to deliberately overwhelm the reader, giving them very little space for mentally or visually breathing with the absence of commas (Bureman n.d.): for clarification, "the dog barked and pulled Jack, and growled, and raged" (Yefimov and Yasinetskaya 2011).

In addition, polysyndeton functions as a means of rhythmical organization of the utterance. That is why it is commonly used in literature. It also makes for underlining the most vital part of information. For illustration, "he no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. First the front, then the back, then the sides, then the superscription, then the seal, were objects of Newman's admiration." (Ibid. p.80).

Writers utilize polysyndeton in literature for many different reasons, some of which are even opposed to each other. Polysyndeton is also a popular literary device in the Bible, and some authors might employ it to echo a more religious and ancient manner of writing and speaking. Also, it may create an overwhelming feeling. Novelist William Faulkner uses polysyndeton to stress a different mental state, as in the following example from *The Sound and the Fury* ("Polysyndeton", n.d.): "Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass."

In this polysyndetic example, William Faulkner depicts the action of playing golf through the eyes of a cognitively handicapped adult. The recurrent use of *and* refers to a mental state that is attempting to make sense of an odd situation and put hints together. (Ibid.)

Polysyndeton can be taken as a sign that the speaker has limited control of his or her grammar. (Pons-Sanz 2014). For example, I got up, and I got dressed and I had breakfast. (Harmon 2012) Furthermore, polysyndeton is used in the exaggeration of a particularly long list of items, as in the following example: "Can you believe she wanted us to bring yams and butter and bread and eggs and jelly and hotdogs and ice-cream?" Here, the speaker reiterates the conjunction *and* in order to emphasize how very many items are being put on the list. The reason why she is stressing the word *and* every time is to make the outcome even more dramatic. Obviously, the speaker is not happy about the long list of items she has been asked to bring, and her use of polysyndeton strengthens this impression in an apparent and effective way ("Polysyndeton Rhetorical Devices" 2013).

In addition, the extensive use of polysyndeton creates a kind of sing-song rhythm in the statement that creates a particular kind of emotional charge and sometimes a ritual quality. While it's uncommon that a writer would need to produce those effects in a business or

academic document, this effect can be valuable in short stories, novels, and so on. Ernest Hemingway uses polysyndeton in the following passage from *After the Storm*:

> I said, "Who killed him?" and he said, "I don't know who killed him but he's dead all right," and it was dark and there was water standing in the street and no lights and windows broke and boats all up in the town and trees blown down and everything all blown and I got a skiff and went out and found my boat where I had her inside Mango Key   and   she   was   all right only she was full of water.

This quotation from Hemingway contrasts many things: destruction, darkness, death, scenery, and personal actions, all of which are based on each other and are thus linked and emotionally dulling since they act as a build-up of details that work together in presenting the full scene in a way that situates them all as equals (meaning that nature's destruction is as significant as discovering a boat). (Polysyndeton and Asyndeton n.d.)

Polysyndeton often lends rhetorical emphasis. It produces the effect of extensiveness and abundance of by means of exhausting summery. It creates uncertainty since the reader does not know when the end is coming. The emphasis is usually on the object coming between the conjunctions. Everything has an equal value. Polysyndeton slows up the rhythm of the prose. It may produce an impressively solemn note or suggest the flow and continuity of experience or suggest tediousness. It is an example of balance. (Spencer 1998).

Polysyndeton as a Case of Grammatical Deviation

Deviation is contrary to the norm. It is a collection of a linguistic item outside the scope of normally permitted options. It is supposed that people obey some rules (i.e. norms) when using a language. To illustrate, an "s" or "es" are to be attached to the verb of the third singular present tense or a preposition must come before a noun or gerund. (Ren an Yu 2013). But the absence of this "s" or "es" is considered as a deviation.

Writers, who aim at making their language innovative or inventive, utilize a language that is unlike what is called commonplace or daily language. They make use of unconventional or uncommon language to astonish the readers and make an influential impression on their mind. This ingenious utilization of language which deviates from the norms of literary forms is known as *linguistic deviation*. ((Leech 1969 cited in Hammeed and Al-Sadoon 2015).

Deviation is defined by Crystal (2008 p.142) as "a term used in linguistic analysis to refer to a sentence (or other unit) which does not conform to the rules of a grammar (i.e. it is ill formed)."

Geoffrey Leech, in his book, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1969), presents a systematic synopsis of deviation. He divides deviation into eight types, i.e. lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, semantic deviation, dialectal deviation, deviation of register and deviation of historical period.

Leech (1969 p.44) points out that grammatical deviation is of two types: "deviation in morphology (the grammar of the word) and deviation in syntax (the grammar of how words pattern within sentences)."

Short (1996 cited in Hammeed and Al-Sadoon, 2015) states that English is full of many grammatical rules and deviations at the same time. Grammatical deviation is the infringement of these grammatical rules (the structure of the language). Each language structure contains its own way of order of the words and sentences. Generally, it deals with the organizing of words and sentences. Thus, when a particular word order or sentence structure breaks the rule of that given language structure, grammatical deviation comes to light. In literature, it is common to detect diverse kinds of grammatical deviation other than the violation of the rules of word order. The deviation of the rule of conjunction is one kind.

Muhvic-Dimanovski and Socanac (2009) point out that conjunction is a syntactic arrangement in which two or more equal items of the same value are (con)joined, generally by means of coordinating conjunctions or coordinators that join words plainly indicating coordination. If coordination is marked, i.e. if coordinated elements are obviously joined items such as *and*, *or*, *but* in English, this is syndetic coordination. If such markers are absent, i.e. if coordination is unlike, this is asyndetic coordination. For example; he looked at her and they both looked at me (Syndetic example). while he looked at her, they both looked at me (Asyndetic example). When a construction with *and* or *or* displays more than two conjoiners, it is normal to leave out all but the last coordinator. The presence of the coordinator is an indication that the last conjoiner is going to be inserted.

Muhvic-Dimanovski and Socanac (Ibid) add that polysyndeton is stylistically marked, e.g. to mark a dramatic succession of events, or to show the open-endedness of a list: for example, "we were walking off the tennis court, and he was there and me and his wife, and he looked at her, and they both looked at me."

In spite of the fact that many rhetorical devices have correspondences with the same name and closely related effects in grammatical and linguistic parlance, some devices indeed go against appropriate grammatical forms, and polysyndeton is such "an offender." Actually, many inexperienced students use this device unintentionally when learning how to make sentences and paragraphs correctly, for it is common in everyday speech but usually improper in writing. Having been censured for using run-on sentences in your writing, polysyndeton is likely used

accidentally (and possibly ineffectively). But it can be employed deliberately in artistic writing and persuasive oral prose. It might be a suitable device but utilizing it when writing an essay or a lab report is not recommended. ("Polysyndeton Rhetorical Devices" 2013)

For example: "The sea, and the stars, and the moonlight made my head spin, leaving me neither breath nor sight nor sense, and yet I was content." In the first part of the sentence, there are two *ands*, and it is supposed that merely one *and* should be placed in any given list, and only before the last listed conjoiner. In the second part of the sentence, *nor* is reiterated twice, and because this word serves exactly like or, only in the negative, it too should only be put before the last item in the list. English teachers or professors might mark this sentence with a red pen, but in this case the technical grammatical error is making a deliberate effect which should not be stricken from the passage. ("Polysyndeton Rhetorical Devices" 2013)

George Campbell (Cited in Duffy and Carpenter 1997) believe that the impressive "multiplicity" of the situations is expressed by inserting conjunctions between each item in a series to call "deliberate attention to every circumstance, as being of importance" since "much additional weight and distinctness are given to each particular by the repetition of the conjunction." Hugh Blair (Cited in Ibid.) also advised that conjunctions can be "multiplied" so that elements in between can seem as different from one another, and the mind should have a break shortly on each entity by itself. Accordingly, if an orator's aim is to "show in how many places the enemy seemed to be at one time," the conjunction is "very happily redoubled, in order to paint more strongly the distinction of these several places." Polysyndeton is a "deviation of the common idiom" as in the following example; "my last conscious thoughts will be of the Corps, and the Corps, and the Corps." The recurrence of the coordinator *and* does give weight and distinction to the Corps.

So, polysyndeton is a "departure from the normal rule," which can enhance the rhythm or flow of your prose (Lynch 2008). To be more accurate, it is a "deviation from the conventional rule of coordination," which reads that a conjunction has to be added merely between the last two items in an enumeration of words or phrases. Enumerations of the type 'I came, saw, and conquered', which contain a conjunction just between the two final items, form the norm in modern written language. They are not regarded as examples of either asyndeton or polysyndeton. Polysyndeton means that there is a connecting particle between every item, not only between the last two ones. 'I came and I saw and I conquered' is an instance of polysyndetic coordination that consists of three main clauses. (Aurelius et. al. 2012).

Polysyndeton and Related Terms

Polysyndeton, syndeton, and asyndeton are all closely connected, in that they all refer to the utilization of conjunctions. Syndeton is the "normal usage of conjunctions," which is employed

in ordinary speech and writing; therefore, syndeton does not receive any interest to itself, and describes sentences such as, "I wore a sweater, a hat, and a scarf." Attention is given to both polysyndeton and asyndeton which are more noteworthy for they somewhat alter the regular pattern of speech. The definition of polysyndeton contrasts to that of asyndeton. Polysyndeton refers to a sentence or group of sentences that contains more conjunctions than needed; asyndeton refers to a sentence or group of sentences that leave out all conjunctions where they could be suitable. Thus, an example of polysyndeton would be, "I wore a sweater, and a hat, and a scarf, and a pair of boots, and mittens," while an example of asyndeton would be, "I wore a sweater, a hat, a scarf, mittens." The effect is obviously different between these two figures of speech. ("Polysyndeton" n.d.)

Asyndeton and polysyndeton are figures of speech by which "the thought and language are strengthened and invigorated" either by omitting or by reiterating the coordinators. Polysyndeton, or the repetition of particles, commonly needs a "solemn, deliberate and emphatic pronunciation on each particular," the asyndeton, or the deletion of particles, does not always involve a "greater swiftness and precipitancy." ((Walker 2016)

It is vital to observe that polysyndeton and asyndeton are not "necessarily indicative of a run-on sentence." A fused sentence does not have conjunctions or commas to show transition of ideas or phrases, but sentences are appropriately separated by a period. Polysyndeton and asyndeton preserve the elements of shift or connection and are grammatically functional techniques. (Bureman, n.d.).

For illustration, Caesar said about Gaul: "I came, I saw, I conquered." Lincoln concluded the Gettysburg Address, "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Caesar appears to have deleted his conjunction to speed things up; he is intensifying how rapidly the conquest of a position follows from its being sighted by a magnificent and aspirant general. On the other hand, Lincoln's deletion is more obvious. Lincoln wants these three aspects of government to be seen as forming an indivisible whole. Thus, asyndeton helps him achieve this purpose. (Quinn 1982)

Analysis of Polysyndeton in Othello

A brief summary of the play *Othello*, which is taken from the web enotes.com, is presented by the researcher in order to help the reader understand and interpret the purposes of polysyndeton.

Shakespeare's tragic story of jealousy and cheating begins in Venice, where the wicked Iago conspires against Othello, the Moor. Iago cooperates with Roderigo, a young Venetian who himself wishes for Othello's wife, Desdemona. Roderigo informs Desdemona's father, Brabantio, of her elopement.

Othello guarantees everyone that he stole Desdemona's heart by just means, not magic. He's then dispatched to Cyprus to prove himself in fight against the Ottomites, leaving Iago to organize Desdemona's journey to Cyprus.

Iago schemes to involve a soldier named Cassio in an illegal affair with Desdemona. Iago gets Cassio fired at Othello's wedding banquet, then motivates him to plead his case with Desdemona, who accepts to aid.

Giving a handkerchief that Desdemona dropped to Cassio, Iago tells Othello that Desdemona granted it to Cassio as a sign of her love. Angry with jealousy, Othello suffocates Desdemona, merely to find she has been honest all along. Othello's melancholy leads him to suicide. Iago is detained, but never reveals his true purposes for using Othello.

Some following examples are extracted from the play to show the grammatical deviations of polysyndeton and the purposes behind using this figure of speech.

Example 1:

OTHELLO. By the world,
I think my wife be honest and think she is not;
I think that thou art just and think thou art not.
I'll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face. If there be cords, or knives,
Poison, or fire, or suffocating streams,

I'll not endure it. Would I were satisfied! (Shakespeare, 2005, 3.3.383-390)

There is a grammatical deviation when repeating the coordinator *or* in the last lines. Here, the writer deviates from the norm, which says only the last conjoin is preceded by a conjunction, for stylistic purposes. Reiterating the conjunction *or* is to explain the different ways that a person may die. All the items here are given the same emphasis and importance. These series of conjunctions slow the utterances down to make the audience or readers think how Othello is so serious that he does not want to live if he uncovers Desdemona's disloyalty to be true.

Example 2:

OTHELLO. Prithee, no more: let him come when he
Will;
I will deny thee nothing.

DESDEMONA. Why, this is not a boon;
'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,
Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
To your own person. Nay, when I have a suit
Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
It shall be full of poise and difficult weight
And fearful to be granted.   (Shakespeare, 2005, 3.3.74-83)

Othello and Desdemona are talking to each other about Cassio, who loves Desdemona but she does not. Othello is doubtful of her having a relationship with Cassio. However, Desdemona shows her affection, intimacy and care to her husband when speaking to him in this soulful way. The overuse of the conjunction *or*, which is a deviation of the conventional rule of coordination, gives cadence to the utterances, creates passionate feelings and shows the importance and equivalence of all the items that are coordinated.

Example 3:

LODOVICO.
…call her back.
OTHELLO.
Mistress!
DESDEMONA. My lord?
OTHELLO. What would you with
Her, sir?
LODOVICO. Who, I, my lord?
OTHELLO. Ay; you did wish that I would make her
Turn:
Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,
And turn again; and she can weep, sir, weep;
And she's obedient, as you say, obedient,
Very obedient. Proceed you in your tears.

Concerning this sir,—O well-painted passion!— (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.1.50-59)

Here, Othello is speaking to Lodovico, who is Desdemona's cousin, who asks him to return Desdemona for Othello who questions him for returning her and emphasizes her return by the repetition of the word "turn". Othello uses too much *ands* in his speech about calling Desdemona back to make the audience think carefully of the idea of her coming back. He continues accusing her of bogus emotions even when she is crying. It can be seen how the

overuse of the conjunction *and* adds cadence to this extract, stresses the repeated words and slows rhythm down.

Example 4:

EMILIA. In troth, I think I should; and undo't when I
Had done. Marry, I would not do such a thing for a
Joint-ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for
Gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty
Exhibition; but for the whole world,—why, who
Would not make her husband a cuckold to make him
A monarch? I should venture purgatory for't.

Desdemona. Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong for the whole world!   (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.3.70-78)

Desdemona and Emilia, who is Iago's wife, are talking about cheating on husbands. They are different from each other in that Desdemona is not ready to cheat on her spouse even when she is given "for the whole world" but Emilia is ready to cheat on hers not for trivial matters but when she is given all the world. The overuse of the conjunction *nor*, which is a deviation of the conjunction norm, is stylistically motivated to add cadence to the utterances and slow them down. Here, to Emilia, all the polysyndetic items are of the same value in comparison with giving "the whole world".

Example 5:

IAGO. Nay, you must forget that.

Othello. Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned

To-night; for she shall not live: no, my heart is
Turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O,
The world hath not a sweeter creature: she might lie
By an emperor's side and command him tasks. (Shakespeare, 2005, 4.1.182-187)

Othello and Iago are talking about Desdemona. Iago is trying to mislead Othello to believe that his wife Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio. Due to this, Othello's love turns into hatred for his spouse and is ready to kill her after his heart becomes like a stone. Othello is furious, losing his command of grammar when joining all the items by the conjunction *and*. The recurrence of the conjunction *and* shows that all the items are equally significant, and adds

rhythm to the utterances by slowing them down to create suspense and excitement in the audience about what will happen to his wife.

Example 6:

EMILIA. 'Twill out, 'twill out: I peace?
No, I will speak as liberal as the north:
Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,
All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.
IAGO. Be wise, and get you home.   (Shakespeare, 2005, 5.2.218-222)

After Othello kills his wife Desdemona because of her betrayal, Emilia insists on speaking the truth, regardless of the consequences. Her speech is full of irritation and determination for she is to uncover Iago's real satanic face and how he deceives his friend, Othello. The overuse of the conjunction *and* by Emilia is to show how angry she is equalizing all the items that cannot prevent her from saying the truth. Moreover, the successive use of the conjunction creates cadence and slows down the rhythm to give a chance to the audience to understand the situation fully.

Conclusion

Polysyndeton is the recurrence of the conjunctions in the sentences in which many items are conjoined by a coordinator (and, or, nor and etc.). It has been concluded that polysyndeton breaks the grammatical rule that reads: there should be a conjunction merely before the last item when every item is coordinated by a conjunction. It is found that polysyndeton is stylistically and deliberately employed by writers to achieve some purpose. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the writer uses polysyndeton to slow down utterances, emphasize the polysyndetic items, add cadence to them, equalize all, show the characters' loss of grammar, and enhance surprise and excitement for the audience.

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