**Paronomasia**

The figure of speech paronomasia is the use of words that are deliberately similar in sound or appearance. It comes from two Greek words, *para* (“beside”) and *onomazein* (“naming”), literally meaning “to name beside.” The figure is so-called because two or more words are used that catch our attention in some way and thus draw our attention to the text. Occasionally the words may have meanings that are close to one another, but it is the sound or appearance that usually catches the reader’s attention. It is very difficult to translate a paronomasia from one language to another and it is rarely done.

The paronomasia draws our attention to a solemn or important statement that otherwise would have been less forceful and potentially unheeded. Here are a few examples:

1. Genesis 1:2 – “And the earth was formless [*tōhū*] and empty [*bōhū*]*,* and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”  
     
   The word *tōhū* means formlessness, waste, desolation. The word *bōhū* means emptiness, void. This is a paronomasia in Hebrew, but not in English. When God first formed the earth, he did not create it a waste (*tōhū)*, he formed it to be inhabited (Isa. 45:18). At some point between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:3, Satan rebelled against God which resulted in the earth becoming totally devastated, wasted and empty. The rhyming of the words in Genesis 1:2a is a forceful way of expressing the catastrophic impact of that war. Genesis2:2b begins the record of how the earth came to be what we know it as today.
2. Psalm 56:8 – “You number my wanderings [*nōdî*]. You put my tears into your bottle [*bənōdekā*].”  
     
   The similarity of sound is intended to call our attention to the fact that the tears caused by our wanderings are noted and noticed by God.
3. Ecclesiastes 7:6 – “For as the crackling of *burning* thorns [*hassîrîm*] underneath a pot [*hassîr*], so is the laughter of the fool.”  
     
   The burning of the thorns makes a noise, but it lasts only for a moment. So it is with the laughter of fools. The rhyming words in Hebrew catch the reader’s attention.
4. Hebrews 5:8 – “(although he was a son, *yet* he learned [*emathen*] obedience by the things that he suffered [*epathen*])”  
     
   The rhyming words underscore the connection between growing in spiritual maturity and learning obedience through suffering. Hebrews 2:10 says Jesus was made perfect, that is, brought to full maturity, by his sufferings. Jesus was tempted in every way just as *we are, yet* without sin.” (Heb. 4:15).

To see more uses of and commentary about figures of speech used in the Bible, use the [REV search tool](http://revisedenglishversion.com/search), and articles on figures of speech can also be found at: [stfi.org/tag/figures/](https://stfi.org/tag/figures/).

[For paronomasia, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 307-20.]