**Polyptoton**

Polyptoton is the figure of speech known as “many inflections.” An inflection is a change in the form of the root word: a change of case, gender, number, tense, mood, person, etc. Polyptoton occurs when a word is repeated one or more times with the same meaning but with a different inflection. The repetition involves the same word in the same sense, but not in the same grammatical form. Polyptoton provides word pairings that get our attention and also places a strong emphasis on the meaning of the words. Some brief examples of polyptoton are: “piped with pipes” (1 Kings 1:40); “happening happens (Eccl. 2:14)”; “prayed a fervent prayer” (James 5:17).

Here are more examples:

1. Genesis 2:16 – “Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may eat, yes, eat,’”  
     
   The last two words of the Hebrew text are “eat, eat.” However, the first verb is in one tense (the infinitive) while the second one is in a different tense (the imperfect). This could be perhaps translated as, “eating you [may] eat.” Some translations read, “you may freely eat.” In addition, the very next verse has another polyptoton. In contrast to saying that Adam may eat, yes, eat, of the trees in the garden, God says that if Adam eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he will “die, yes, die” (Gen. 2:17). The Hebrew text has “die, die,” the first word being an infinitive form of the verb and the second in an imperfect form. These two polyptotons back-to-back add significant force to the text that is very powerful.
2. Matthew 2:10 – “And seeing the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”  
     
   In the Greek text, the words *xaírō* (“rejoiced”) and *xará* (“joy”) are cognates that are paired together forming a polyptoton meaning “rejoice with joy.” The figure points to how the Magi rejoiced exceedingly with great joy when they saw the star.
3. Ephesians 1:3 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in *union with* Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”  
     
   “Blessed” (*eulogētos*) is an adjective; “has blessed” (*eulogeō*) is a participle; and “blessing” (*eulogia*) is a noun. This polyptoton with three words in one clause that derive from the root word of “bless” puts great emphasis on blessing and praising God as the One who first blessed us in Christ. Now we give our lives to God in thanksgiving for those blessings.
4. 2 Timothy 4:7 – “I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.  
     
   The phrase, “I have fought the good fight” can also be translated as “I have contended in the noble contest,” which would also be a poyptoton. The repetition with two forms of the same word emphasizes Paul’s boldness and commitment in carrying out his ministry.

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 polyptoton, see E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979. Originally published by Eyre and Spottiswoode: London, 1898), 267-285.]