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Chiasmus in *Romeo and Juliet*

Takahiro Oe

This study discusses a rhetoric, chiasmus, used in Shakespeare's (1564-1616) *Romeo and Juliet* (1597). According to Katie Wales (2001: 53), chiasmus is "a rhetorical term to describe a construction involving the repetition of words or elements in reverse order (ab:ba); also known as antimetabole." Although Shakespeare frequently employs chiasmus in many other works of his, not much research focuses on the literary device in his plays. Studies which investigate Shakespeare's chiasmus tend to end up showing the intricate construction of the rhetoric. However, they do not genuinely look into what kind of difference the rhetoric makes and why the playwright chooses to use it. Therefore, I enumerate all the examples of chiasmus which can be found in *Romeo and Juliet* and discuss their meanings and why they are used.

Chapters I and II discuss each example of chiasmus in *Romeo and Juliet*. Each chiasm has one of the three main purposes: wit games, persuasion, and representing emotions or thoughts. I would, however, argue that each example of chiasmus indicates or emphasizes different meanings which a speaker intends to tell. Some of these meanings cannot be efficiently told by anything but chiasmus. Chiasmus intriguingly gives a passage various interpretations. This ambiguity of chiasmus makes speeches and even whole stories more profound. Chapter III presents six figures which show the frequencies of chiasmus. Each of the figures is based on various parameters. Not all the figures reveal significant findings in the current study, but I hope that they will help future research find important elements and functions of chiasmus.

In this study, I suggest the three purposes of chiasmus: wit games, persuasion, and representing emotions or thoughts. However, the number of chiasms used for representing emotions or thoughts is much bigger than the other two purposes as the main text shows. Therefore, these purposes should be divided into several groups of more detailed purposes. It is also necessary to divide the chiasms into groups from different points of view. For example, the chiasms can be classified based on the number of words which the lines with chiasmus contain. Various perspectives to group chiasmus should be sought out to identify new functions of the rhetorical device.

Of many representative works of Shakespeare, I chose *Romeo and Juliet* in this study. Chiasmus should have different roles in each play of Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of two young lovers, so chiasmus is used very often to represent emotions or thoughts about the person with whom the speaker is in love. The figure of speech is employed to make the tragedy rather humorous and optimistic. It is, however, assumed that looking into another tragedy of Shakespeare will show distinct functions and features of chiasmus. In comedies, the role of chiasmus must be different in many ways. Investigating other works is necessary to understand chiasmus more deeply.

The current study focuses on the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences. Chiasmus is regarded as repetitions of meanings in reverse order. It is supposed, however, that other elements such as sound can also make chiasmus. It would require much time and effort to find the chiastic order in sound and list all the examples, but it should be an interesting study. Shakespeare might intend to create chiasmus even in sound.

In this thesis, some of the features of chiasmus remain undone. Chiasmus should still be worth investigating. The more clearly the features of chiasmus are explained, the more profoundly Shakespeare's plays are enjoyed.