Discourse Functions of Inversion in English Poetic Texts

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ABSTRACT

Inversion is a change of the normal order of the constituent parts. The Poets have been using many ways to make language become such a valuable and flexible means of transferring ideas. Sometimes, a simple way of forming a sentence or a bit strange order of words can make ideas become so impressive and unforgettable – inversion is one of those ways which create great effects for literary works.

 In fact, for English language learners, it is not easy to understand and use inversion correctly. Inversion is used a lot in English , especially in poetry. Many writers prefer to use it as a grammatical structure, discourse marker and literary device because it enables them to convey the same idea with new ways , so that things will seem to be new and more impressive.

 The present study aims at analyzing inversion as non-canonical construction which allows language users to exploit alternative word orders for a variety of purposes like: emphasizing to creating a diverse host of rhetorical effects. It is distinguishing these effects that is the task of this study.

 This study hypothesizes that the uses of inversion in literature are so diversified that are really difficult to cover all of them and the poets use inversion as a mean to express their purposes and as a way of practicing their poetic licenses.

Introduction:

English at its simplest is an SVO, Subject, Verb and Object, language. However it is not limited to SVO order.Inversion is an example of deviation from the normal order in English.It is a device for finding in long or medium term memory, the relevant context, or discourse space, in which to interpret the sentence is being processed. It is a linguistic device used for changing the discourse focus. Green(1980:120) defines inversion as " a whole range of constructions in which the subject follows part or all of its verb phrase".

Poetic Inversion

In literary texts in general, and in poetry in particular, syntax can differ from everyday usage. There is a certain amount of **poetic licence(deviation)** which makes it acceptable for a poet to deviate slightly from ordinary syntax to accommodate the sentence to the line form and metre. Such accommodations can be, for instance,inversions.The term 'poetic inversion' refers to the practice of changing the conventional placement of words. It is a literary practice typical of the older classical poetry genre. In present day literature, it is usually used for the purpose of laying emphasis.This literary device is more prevalent in poetry than prose because it helps to arrange the poem in a manner that draws the attention of the reader not only with its content but also with its physical appearance,a result of the peculiar structuring. Inversion is found mostly in the work of older classical poets. But it is sometimes used by modern writers for the sake of emphasis(Cureton,1981:182-215).

The most common simple sentence in modern English follows a familiar pattern: Subject (S), Verb (V), Object (O). However,

Shakespeare was much more at liberty to switch these three basic components. He used a great deal of SOV inversion. This order is commonly found in Germanic languages, from which English derives much of its syntactical foundation (Houston,1988:19).

Shakespeare wrote a great deal of work in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter poem); Elizabethans allowed for using inverted order, and Shakespeare not only realized that,but also he took advantage of it. By utilizing inverted word orders, Shakespeare could effectively place the metrical stress wherever he needed it most.English is heavily dependent on vocal inflection, which is not so easily translated into writing, to suggest emphasis . Shakespeare uses this colloquially in many places as a transitory device, bridging two sentences, to provide continuity. Shakespeare (and many other writers) may also have used this as a device to shift end emphasis to the verb of a clause (ibid:20)

There are many types of inversion that are used in poetry:

1.Stylistic Inversion:

Stylistic inversion is a change of word-order which gives logical stress or emotional colouring to the language units placed in an unusual syntactic position.

Galperin (1981:203) in his book "Stylistics" defines stylistic inversion as:

> *"Unlike grammatical inversion, stylistic inversion does not change the structural meaning of the sentence, that is, the change in the juxtaposition of the members of the sentence does not indicate structural meaning*

but has some superstructural function. Stylistic inversion aims at attaching logical stress or additional emotion coloring to the surface meaning of the utterance. Therefore a specific intonation pattern is the inevitable satellite of inversion".

Also Galperin states that inversion as a stylistic device is always sense-motivated. There is a tendency to account for inversion in poetry by rhythmical considerations. This may sometimes be true, but talented poetswill never sacrifice sense for form and in the majority of cases inversion in poetry is taken by considerations of content rather than rhythm (Galperin, 1981: 205).

2. Information- Packaging Inversion

The primary purpose of information packaging inversion is to package or distribute the information in the sentence in a way that is appropriate to convey it. Thus, the writer may use an inversion for such purposes as facilitating a connection between old and new information, or providing a particular perspective to the reader. These purposes include inversions used:

1. By sport commentators:

(1) *Down with the ball* ***comes Roan***.

2. To avoid the creation of a long subject NP:

(2) ***The committee members*** *argued about the bill for days.At issue was section 405, which appeared to be an attempt to weaken the controlled substances Act.*

3.To emphasize a point related to preceding information:

(3) *Reports show that passengers sustain trauma to the body and broken limbs **in this type of rollover accident**.Far more serious are the severe head injuries that cause bruising of the brain*(Cowan, 2008: 535-537).

According to Cowan (2008:534) ,there are further types of inversion;
1-Inversion after negative adverbials
When we begin a sentence with a negative adverb or adverbial phrase, we sometimes have to change the usual word order of subject and verb (often using an auxiliary verb) because we want to emphasise the meaning of the adverb. We use inversion when we move a negative adverb which modifies the verb (never, nowhere, not only, hardly etc.) to the beginning of a sentence. For example:

*(4)**I had never** seen so many people in one room.* (= normal word order)
 ***Never had I** seen so many people in one room.* (= inversion)

2-Time relationships
We use inversion after 'negative' adverbs which emphasize a time relation at the beginning of a sentence:
*(5)**No sooner had I** put the phone down **than** it rung again.*
*(6)**Hardly / Scarcely / Barely had I** got my breath back **when** it was time to go again*

3-General emphasis
We often use inversion for general emphasis with phrases that use *only*:
*(7)**Only by** patience and hard work **will we** find a solution.*
*(8)**Only in this way do we** stand any chance of success*

4. Inversion with come

We can put *first*, *next*, *now* and *then* in front position with the verb *come* to introduce a new event, when the subject follows the verb. But if a comma (or an intonation break in speech) is used after *first* (etc.) the verb follows the subject. For example:

(9)At first there was silence. **Then came** *a voice that I knew.* (not *Then a voice came …*)

At first there was silence. **Then,** *a voice* **come** *that I knew*

5.Not using inversion

We use inversion when the adverb modifies the verb, and not when it modifies the noun:

(10)**Rarely seen** *during the day, the badger is a famously shy animal.* (= inversion)

(11)**Hardly anyone** *knows about it.* (= no inversion)*.

Discourse Functions of Inversion

In Green's (1980) study of the discourse function of various "classes" of inversion, she assigns each instance of inversion a particular function and she denounces the idea that inversion is a means of relaying old information first and new information last as follows:

1.Rhythmic Function of Inversion:

   All languages make use of rhythm, and poetry exploits these rhythms to create additional meaning. Rhythm generally is "a series of alternations of build-up and release, movement and counter-movement, tending toward regularity but complicated by constant variations and local inflections". While poetic metre"is the measured arrangement of accents and syllables in poetry" and metrical deviations contribute to the rhythm of a poem,

rhythm itself is a more general phenomenon, relating mainly to the variations of speed in which a poem is likely to be read"(Attridge,1995: 3).

The rhythmic explanation of inversion is one of the earliest explanation for the occurrence of inversion.Rhythm has been regarded as the ultimate "cause" of word order, a cause of a higher nature.It refers to the metrical value of the syllables of words and phrases in a sentence. The prosodic value of syllables is described as"light" (unstressed) and "heavy" (stressed).In the literature of English ,this same distinction is often applied to words and even phrases and clauses.

Jespersen(1961:57) notes that "lighter elements can be placed near the center of the sentence while heavier elements are relegated to more peripheral place".Curme (1931:347) applies this notion to inversion in direct quotes;"heavier word , whether verb or subject ,comes last":
(12)*"Harry",continued the old man ….*

(13)*You must think that over again" our dear mother would say*.

(14)*Bob is happy, and so am I*(occurs when the subject contracts)

(15)*They say that I am happy , and so I am*(occurs when the subject does not change).
The examples above are examples of the interplay between "rhythm" and syntactic function.

Hans and Jakobsen's(1974:56)"formal weight" is synonymous with rhythm .They define formal weight as"The more complex an element is ,

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the heavier it is ,thus a subject which is modified by a relative clause is heavier than a simple verbal.." for example ,the fronting with obligatory inversion of the following sentence is said to be due to the heaviness of its subject:

(16)*Among the subject gamed at By fleet have been the capability of British forces of the Sues and the duration of the resistance that allied forces could offer to a Soviet invasion of Western Europe*.

Hans and Jakobsen also attribute other inversions to formal weight."If the subject is a weakly stressed personal pronoun, we always get straight order;if BE is complex, we normally get straight order".

(17)*pretty she was not exactly but…*

(18)*She told Marian that she might stay inside or come outside ,but locked the door must be until the morning*(ibid:57).

The arrangement of the order of words affects the rhythm of a poem. When two words have the same sound (phoneme) from the last stressed vowel onwards, they are considered to rhyme

The most noticeable rhyme is the rhyme at the end of a line, the end-rhyme. But there are also lines within lines, so-called internal rhymes Placing words within a line in a planned order can, for instance, create internal rhyme, while placing them at the end of a line can affect the rhyme scheme. This use of rhyme, of course, is mainly a sound device; however, at times rhyme can alter meaning as it can create a humorous or emotional effect that differs from a line without such rhyme(Hobsbaum,1996:83).

(19)***Whose woods these are I think I know***,

His house is in the village though,

He will not see me stopping here,

To watch his woods fill up with snow (Frost,1939 cited in Ferris,2000:101)

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter .A tetrameter is a line of poetry or verse containing four feet.The first syllable is unstressed, the second is stressed,the third is unstressed ,the fourth is stressed.Now "Know" and "Though" rhyme.They also rhyme with "snow" in the fourth line. So, Frost has inverted the words in order to make the two lines rhyme and to maintain the meter of the poem.It makes the poem different and interesting.It is just unusual enough to make the reader wonder what is different about this particular situation.

The main conclusions to be drawn about rhythm and its relation to inversion as follows:
English has a strong tendency to place rhythmically heavy(stressed and/or long and/or syntatically complex) constituents at the end of the clause rather than in medial position. Clause –initial position is another position that is commonly occupied by stressed constituents.Between these two stressed positions is a relatively unstressed position-medial position. Inversion , by moving the subject out of its unmarked position in the clause , produces stress on the subject.However , full inversion Ss and semi inversion Ss move the subject to different positions in the clause and have different rhythmic organization(Schmidt,1980:23).

2.Thematic function of inversion:

Thematization is a process used to prepose a particular sentence element as theme leaving the rest of the sentence as rheme.This function is also called topicalization because the preposed element becomes the topic ,while the remainder stands for its comment.Thethematized element is not necessarily the subject of the sentence.Other sentence elements can also be thematized:the complement,the adjunct, and the predicated theme(Muir:1972:97)

Thematicity, according to Green(1980), refers to the old/new, known/unknown information content of constituents of a clause and is best regarded as a relative property of words and phrases.inversion allows the listener first to identify the object being talked about before assigning information to it, whether new or old. This is most noticeable in the speech of sportscasters (Green,1980:584):

(20) ***Underneath is Smith***

(21) ***High in the, air to get the ball was Jim Brady***.

In this case, inversion allows the viewer to single out the player on the TV screen before processing his name. This allows the viewer to first pick out the player, make a non-linguistic representation in memory of that player and then add the (new) information given by the sportscaster: the player's name. If inversion were not used, the viewer would have to first store the name given by the sportscaster, identify the player, construct a representation of that player and his actions, retrieve the player's name and then assign that information to the representation created by the description of the player's actions. This is a much more difficult and time consuming procedure. In this instance, inversion helps

to cut down the amount of processing necessary to construct a representation.

Therefore, one could hypothesize that upon hearing/reading the first few elements of a sentence, the listener follows three steps:

1. If the sentence is SVO (and does not have any overt signals to search for a previously mentioned item of information,) construct a representation of the sentence and add it to the local discourse space.

2. Else search memory for the last mention of the item under construction and add the "new" information, i.e. what is in the predicate, to that local discourse space. Pointers are left pointing to both discourse spaces.

3. Otherwise, construct an entirely new discourse space.

Actually it is unclear where the information should be deposited. For example, a house has been robbed. The police investigate. They ask questions concerning the robbery. Then the father of the household, when asked who they think could have done it, says: "As I said before, that boy John is a thief."

As far as information system is concerned , the unmarked flow of information runs from given to new information .This means that the theme of a sentence represents given information while the rheme represents newinformation.However, in marked themes , the fronted element may carry the new information , while the deferred element will represent the given information:

(22) *My friend has a lot of books* .

(23) *A lot of books my friend has.*

The sentence (22) represents the unmarked pattern where the grammatical subject is thematized representing given information, while (23) represents the marked pattern where the subject is thematized to convey

the new information.(Halliday,1994:60) .As an example of thematic function in poetry:

(24)***Through utter drought all dumb we stood!***

Instead of the cross_ The Albatross

About my neck was hung(Coleridge,1798 cited in Duncan,1998:137)

  In these lines ,Coleridge shifts the central word in the poem"The Albatross" to the front of the verse to meet emphasis and by using this unfamiliar word order,the poet has highlighted and given prominence to the theme of the poem ,"Through utter drought all dumb we stood!" :Coleridge postpones the subject of the verse "we" until after the adjunct to convey an emotional,psychological and spiritual impact that the mariner was suffering and waiting for anyone to save him since he was the only man who still alive in the ship.The normal order would be:we stood all dumb.Coleridge shifts the central word in the poem that is "The Albatross" which becomes the topic of the poem .The poet has highlighted and given prominence to the object which is the theme of the poem.Although "The Albatross" saved the ship and lead them out of the ice jam where they were stuck ,but the mariner shoots the bird.

3.Connective Function of Inversion:

Inversions serve a connective function in the sense of Green(1980:586) "by indicating the relevance and importance of the postposed subject to the information that has been presented in the prior text"(Birner ,1996:65). Green cites its ability to connect pieces of discourse together. One can link and expand a previously mentioned proposition by anaphorically referencing it in the grammatical subject slot, thereby smoothly linking the new information in the predicate to the old,

previously mentioned information. She also notes that this connective function is used in literary texts or expository prose.

Because of the fact that the preposed element may often be retrieved from the previous text and thus presents discourse old information (or at least more familiar information than the postponed subject), it may be concluded that subject-verb inversion might be understood as a cohesive device.

Dorgeloh (1997: 48) claims that"The main claim about the discourse function of full verb inversion is that it links relatively unfamiliar information to the prior context via the clause-initial placement of information which is relatively familiar (typically evoked or inferable) in the current discourse." According to Biber(1999,911), one of the discourse functions of subject-verb inversion is thus "cohesion and contextual fit" , which may be labelled as a connective function. In fact, principles and distribution of old and given information in a sentence may be perceived as important factors determining this particular function of inversion.

Connective function can be especially perceived with inversions with initial linking so, nor or neither. Consider the following example:

(25) *"I like that." "So do I."* (Byatt, 1990: 52)

Linking (so) in the example above stands for given information that may be directly recovered from the previous context, and thus connects the clause with the previous text. Basically, it is a substitution for the whole previous utterance, i.e. (I like that).

In sum, the connective function of subject-verb inversion results from the fact that the preposed element normally presents information that is discourse old, therefore to a certain level recoverable from the context, both linguistic and extra-linguistic, i.e."directly recoverable from the

context or indirectly derivable via inferential linking or some general characteristics of the situation". Basically,subject-verb inversion links the sentence to the preceding discourse, and thus contributes to cohesion of the text (Tárnyiková 2002: 84).

4.Scene-Setting Function:

Green shows that inversion can be used to set a scene for an event or as a means to locate actors in a story. The scene-setting, and literary connecting, function of inversion identifies a locale in which the actors, the characters are placed.

(26)***Sprawled in the foreground is George Price***.

This example which is part of the description of an accompanying picture, is like the news examples: it identifies a piece of the picture ,an individual, by locating him with reference to more specifically,, in the foreground of something taken to be already salient the picture as a whole." (Green,1980; 588)

(27) ***In a little white house lived two rabbits***

An important point to note is that Green does not consider the Scene_setting function and the literary connecting function to be the same thing. In the scene setting example, the inverted element is completely new information, whereas in the literary connecting function, this does not have to be the case.In the above example, inversion is used to locate and identify an (old) entity, an event , a (previous) location, or all image, and give more (new) information about that entity,or create a context in which to embed information.

When the inverted element is new information it sets up a context in which new information can be embedded, including the information in its own predicate. When it is old information it serves to find the correct

context in which to embed the information in the predicate. Scene-setting function in poetry is as follow:

(28)*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan*

Astately pleasure_dome decree;

A damsel with a dulcimer

In a vision once I saw.(Coleridg,1816 cited in Bloom,2010:50)

In the first two lines, Coleridge shifts the adverb "Xanadu" (Obligatory adjunct fronting) to give prominence to this particular word .So,the normal word order would be:

Kubla Khan decreed a stately pleasure dome in Xanadu.

Coleridge uses poetic inversion and shifts the adjunct to describe the amazing setting of the poem"Xanadu",the fancy and beautiful palace in Mongolia owned by Kubla Khan who was the grandson of the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan.

5.The Quotative Function:

In the SVO/Q word order of direct quotations, the old information, the speaker ,is identified and the new information, what is being said , is related to him.The inversion,in postquotes puts the subject in final position. Thus, it seems to rearrange information so that the name of the speaker would be in a more focus-like position than the verb. The verb of saying is generally completely predictable anyway, and thus contains no important or new information, whereas the name of the speaker is not always predictable. If the verb is not simply say or answer, i.e., if it is semantically more complex, we should not be able to invert, as the verb adds important information. Indeed, Fowler when talking about 'bad'

inversions, claims That "only such insignificant verbs as said, replied, continued will submit to being dragged about like this" (Fowler,1940:293), where by "dragged about"he means inverted. Fowler remarks that verbs which express a more complicated notion,or that cannot rightly take a speech as an object "stand on their dignity and insight on their properplace" (ibid :294). Thus he cites as bad the following:

(29)*"No signore;" disavowed Don Abroggio.*

 (30)*"Yes," moodily consented John, "I suppose we must."*

In the following cases inversion did not occur because the verbis not a simple verb of saying:

(31)*"This is very ingenious," Babar observes. (BabarVisits Another Planet).*

(32)*"Little ones, oh little ones, where are you hiding?"the clowns repeat*.

The same verb can appear in both an inverted and non inverted frame:

(33)*"What's going on here" inquires Babar,who has Found the other elephants at last*.

we take into consideration that the function of SVI is to rearrange the material in the frame so that new information appears at the end of the frame. (De Brunhoff,1972:43)

Two major factors seem to account for this distribution and both of them follow the function of SVI:

(i) One principle is discussed in Green (1980),If the verb in the quotation frame does not add any important information to the narrative,i.e., if the verb is completely predictable from the preceding discourse,the verb does not constitute new information, and is removed

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from the frame-final position.It is not the meaning of the verb out of context which is the decisive factor, but whether the verb at that particular point in the text adds new information or not.For example,verbs like (say, ask, answer, exclaim, shout), when following the quote, are usually directly predictable from the quote and the context. Thus, a quote which is an exclamation implies that the quote was (shouted, exclaimed);a quote which is a question implies that the speaker (asked or inquired); a declarative quote implies (said or answered) (if a question preceded the quote), or one of the verbs which mean "say in a particular one or manner of voice," such as (moan, whisper, sigh, grumble, etc). Whisper, moan or sigh, these verbs can invert just as the semantically less complex say inverts. For instance,

(34)"*Get away old Cornelius" grumbles Rataxes*,

(35)*"Don't speak to me of that scoundrel Arthur."*

(ii)The second factor determining the distribution of sentences has to do not with the meaning of the verb, but with the occurrence of additional information (such as sentence adverbials, relative clauses)in the quotation frame. Two distinct principles seem to play a role in this distribution:

1_If the frame contains an adverb or an object which add important information, (again, not directly inferrable from the quote) SVI is blocked as it would remove the adverb (or the object) from the new information slot, since the adverb (or object) usually form a syntactic unit with the verb.

Thus in :

(36)*"You aren't hurt, Celeste, are you?" Babar inquires anxiously."*
No! Well then look, we are saved!"(The Travels of Babar)

where the frame contains the adverb anxiously,SVI would remove the adverb from sentence final position. This results in oddness, as in the narrative, it is important to know that Babar was anxious about Celeste's well being. Thus, the above example is not a simple question or inquiry,but the writer wants to express Babar's concern for his wife.

2_If the subject NP contains not just the name of the speaker,but also contains an adverbial clause or relative clause giving some additional details about the speaker, the whole subject NP tends to be moved to the end of the sentence by SVI.

(37)"*What is going on here?" inquires Babar, who has found the other elephants at last. (The Travels of Baber)*

Although in the above example the verb is redundant, and thus we expect SVI to apply for that reason, the heavyness or length of the subject is another reason for the application of the rule.thus, in cases where SVI should be blocked because the verb is 'heavy' a QVS order as in (41) is much better than(40):

(38) *"Mary can clean up the house" John proposed"*

(39) *"Mary can clean up the house " proposed John*

(40) *"Mary can clean up the house "John who was always afraid to be stuck with all the work, proposed.*

(41)*"Mary can clean up the house", proposed John , who was always afraid to be stuck with all the work.*

6.The Emphatic Function

The final function ,the emphatic function is a by-product of proposing a psychological discourse constructing mechanism, that process is linearly .The inverted part of the sentence is processed first and therefore is marked as special,simply because it comes first.It automatically becomes

the index for the discourse representation of that sentence and is thus emphasized. As an example of emphatic function'Shelly describes his favorite literary and political personality Milton in the following lines:

(42)Blind, old, and lonely, when his country's pride,

The priest, the slave, and the liberticide,

Trampled and mocked with many a loathed rite . . ."

The inverted syntax in the above lines aids the poet to lay an emphasis and highlight the distinctive qualities of John Milton even more.Of course there is also emphatic stress and other phonological properties .this is very complex and can not be done just in the confines of this paper(Green,1980:593).

Conclusions:

It is concluded here that:

1. This study is meant to investigate some functions of inversion in discourse. This study shows that linguistic analysis when applied to poetry would produce grammar that is different from the grammar that linguistic analysis of ordinary language would result in.

2. The syntactic deviation used by poets refers to the fact that their syntax is flexible as they authorize themselves considerable freedom in word order mostly for poetic effect and style.

3.literary texts(poetry) cannot be fairly understood without a thorough knowledge of the poetic inversion. Poets, particularly modern ones, have successfully freed themselves from constraints of what is called poetic language. The language of poetry is differently arranged.

4.Individual types were studied from the point of view of its formal properties,distribution of new and given information and functions in discourse.

5.The practical part was based on the collection of samples of inverted constructions found in poetry.Its aim was to find out which function of inversion occurs most frequently and in which genre it prevails.

6. Inverted constructions and other similar devices are more valued in genres requiring varied use of language, such as fiction. Basically, language of fiction that includes emotively charged words often provides space for experimenting with the language and provides the reader with detailed descriptions of situations and scenes.

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