

# Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

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## Zeugma

(\_litterær\_praksis) Det greske ordet “zeugma” betyr “sammenbinding” og “under samme åk”. “The essence of zeugma is the attempt to make a single expression do two semantic jobs at the same time.” (Hussain H. Mayuuf m.fl. i <https://www.hnjournal.net/3-2-44/>; lesedato 06.03.23) Ord stilles sammen som om de var like, men det er de ikke for tanken (Aarønæs 2007 s. 159). To termer forenes under en tredje term, som gjør en av de to første termene merkelig, absurd eller poetisk (Reboul 2009 s. 133). I tillegg til at konkret + abstrakt sammenstilles, kan det samtidig være f.eks. viktig + uviktig. I “Han bærer sekken og ansvaret” er sekken noe konkret og ansvaret noe abstrakt, og ansvaret er viktigst.

“Såkalt *zeugma* betegner sideordning av ledd som ikke lar seg sidestille. Figuren er velkjent:

Hun tok ungen i handa og trikken til byen.  
Geværet skal pusses med smergel og omhu.  
She went home in tears and a taxi.” (Texmo 1982 s. 53)

Ord (syntaktiske ledd) som er nødvendige for å skape den normale forståelsen, blir utelatt (Ludwig 1990 s. 116): “She went home in tears and she took a taxi (to get home).” Det kan virke som dårlig språkbeherskelse, og bør derfor brukes i sammenhenger der det er tydelig at språkfiguren er intendert (Groddeck 2020 s. 171).

“Å legge beina på bordet og planer for framtiden.” Her er den første bruken av verbet “å legge” konkret (beina legges fysisk på bordet), mens den andre er abstrakt (å legge planer er det samme som å tenke ut planer, og foregår primært inne i en persons hode). Det kan også være andre typer (semantisk) sammenstøt: “Benny and his driving licence expired last month.” Her forenes en person og en gjenstand med samme verb. Benny døde og hans førerkort gikk ut på dato.

“A general term describing when one part of speech (most often the main verb, but sometimes a noun) governs two or more other parts of a sentence (often in a series). Zeugma is sometimes used simply as a synonym for syllepsis, though that term is better understood as a more specific kind of zeugma: when there is disparity in the

way that the parallel members relate to the governing word (as a vice or for comic effect). Zeugma comprises several more specialized terms, all of which employ ellipsis and parallelism (among the governed members of the sentence). The zeugma figures are of two types: those in which the governing word is the main verb (in which case these are subsequently categorized according to the position of that governing verb), and those in which the governing word is another part of speech (usually the subject noun).” (<http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/Z/zeugma.htm>; lesedato 07.10.21)

“Zeugma, sometimes referred to as sortal crossing, is a semantic anomaly which occurs when a word or phrase has to be interpreted in two distinct ways simultaneously, thus triggering a punning effect. For example, in sentence (1) the verb *fix* is applied to the object *the problem* in the sense of “solve,” and to the second object *the blame* in a different sense, namely “assign.” In sentence (2) the verb *expire* oscillates between two different senses, i.e. “die,” which applies to the subject *he*, and “lose validity,” which applies to the second subject, *his passport*.

- (1) *Fix* the problem, not the blame.
- (2) Ted could well *expire* before his passport does.

The possibility of creating a zeugmatic structure is one of a number of criteria for distinguishing ambiguity from vagueness. As pointed out by Zwicky and Sadock (1975), the zeugmatic effect is possible only in structures in which two or more words or phrases are modified or governed by a single lexically ambiguous word, i.e. one that has more than one distinct sense.” (Agnieszka Solska i <http://www.uuxi.synthasite.com/resources/>; lesedato 06.03.23)

“There are multiple and sometimes conflicting definitions for zeugma and syllepsis in current use. [...] Grammatical Syllepsis (sometimes also called *zeugma*): where a single word is used in relation to two other parts of a sentence although the word grammatically or logically applies to only one. By definition, grammatical syllepsis will often be grammatically “incorrect” according to prescriptivist rules. However, such solecisms are sometimes not errors but intentional constructions in which the rules of grammar are bent by necessity or for stylistic effect. [...] Zeugma (often also called *syllepsis*, or *semantic syllepsis*): where a single word is used with two other parts of a sentence but must be understood differently in relation to each. This is also called “semantic syllepsis.” Example: “He took his hat and his leave.” This type of figure is not grammatically incorrect, but creates its effect by seeming at first hearing to be incorrect, by exploiting multiple shades of meaning in a single word or phrase.” (Marto Fe i <https://www.scribd.com/document/274935737/Zeugma#>; lesedato 06.03.23)

“As a rhetorical figure, zeugma is built on the conflict of syntax and semantics, representing several syntactically homogeneous, but semantically heterogeneous

elements. Zeugma, as a rule, has a nuclear word in its composition, in which, in conjunction with various actants, different meanings/shades of meanings are actualized, although “non-nuclear” zeugmas are also found. The role of the reference element is most often a verb-predicate, less often the core of the construction becomes an adjective, participle, adverb, noun. The elements of the paratactic series are usually nouns (homogeneous subjects, additions, circumstances), but the analysis also reveals cases of illogical combinations represented by other parts of speech, as well as examples with heterogeneous morphological forms within the same zeugmatic construction. The functional analysis of the zeugma demonstrates the rich stylistic potential of this rhetorical figure, which acts as a means of humor and satire in literary texts, serving to convey emotional states, semantic saturation of the utterance, and the increment of new meanings. [...] Zeugma acts as a significant method of pragmatic focusing in a literary text, being especially widely represented in modernist literature, characterized by semantic multilayering and intensity of artistic expression.” (Ju G. Timralieva i <https://philpapers.org/rec/TIMZAA>; lesedato 13.01.23)

I Peter R. Holms dikt “Forretningsmiddag” (fra *I båten om høsten*, 1979) står det: “han har valker i nakken og hele styret i ryggen”. To kroppsdelar nevnes, men den ene bruken er metaforisk (å ha styret i ryggen betyr å ha deres støtte/enighet). “Kvinnen ankom i tårer og taxi” (Reboul 2009 s. 133). I dette tilfellet er begge deler noe konkret som kan sanses direkte – både bilen og det våte på kinnet. Ellers er ofte den ene termen noe konkret og det andre noe abstrakt. Men tårer signaliserer sorg, som ikke er håndgripelig.

“A zeugma is an interesting device that can cause confusion in sentences, while also adding some flavor. Let’s take a famous example from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*: “You are free to execute your laws, and your citizens, as you see fit.” In this sentence, the word “execute” applies to both laws and citizens, and as a result, has a shocking effect. Therefore, a zeugma is a figure of speech where a word applies to multiple parts of the sentence. In the above example, it has a dramatic effect. However, sometimes the attempted use of a zeugma can be confusing. [...] The zeugma is sometimes utilized to create drama, add emotion or produce some sort of shock value. [...] For example, with the “His boat and his dreams sank” example, the zeugma creates a more powerful sentence. The emotions of a person losing a lifelong dream as a sailor are more pronounced in this sentence than in a construction such as this: The man’s boat sank. He realized his dreams were slipping away.” (<http://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-zeugma.html>; lesedato 16.01.17)

“Things get confusing – and interesting – when a word suddenly switches between two different meanings in the same sentence. Consider this example from Alanis Morissette’s song “Head over Feet,” in which the speaker describes the person whom she adores:

“You are the bearer of  
Unconditional things  
You held your breath and the door for me”

In the last line of the quotation, Morrisette asks her listeners to quickly switch between two different meanings of the same word – held – within the same sentence. This literary device is called a “zeugma,” from the ancient Greek and Latin words for yoking together. As this word origin suggests, zeugmas connect two different meanings of the same word together, setting them side-by-side to surprise, delight, or confuse audiences. [...] In “Head over Feet,” once we’ve figured out the zeugma, we can see how its two elements complement each other – the person she describes is both passionate (he holds his breath in her presence) and a gentleman (he holds the door). But zeugmas can also create tension between the two meanings for comedic or dramatic effect.” (Raymond Malewitz i <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-zeugma>; lesedato 08.08.22)

“A zeugma is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase joins together two distinct parts of a sentence. There are a few different definitions of zeugma that illustrate the ways in which this figure of speech works. The most common definition of zeugma is a word that is used once, but works in two different ways, such as in the following sentence: “She tossed her hair back and the salad.” The word “tossed” in this example has two functions in the sentence. It is a verb in both cases but refers to very different actions. Zeugma can also be as simple as the role of the word “conquered” in the sentence “Lust conquered shame; audacity, fear; madness, reason” (a quote from Cicero [som betyr det samme som “Lust conquered shame; audacity conquered fear; madness conquered reason”]). In this case, zeugma refers to the way that the verb does not need to be repeated for it is implied. The word zeugma comes from the Ancient Greek word *zeûgma*, which means “a yoking together.” Zeugma can also be referred to syllepsis [dvs. utelatelse, forkorting]. [...]

- “Now when all the clowns that you have commissioned. / Have died in battle or in vain.” – Bob Dylan, “Queen Jane Approximately”

- “A house they call the rising sun, where love and money are made.” – Dolly Parton, “The House of the Rising Sun”

- “You are free to execute your laws, and your citizens, as you see fit.” – *Star Trek: The Next Generation*” (<http://www.literarydevices.com/zeugma/>; lesedato 31.03.16).

“He was alternately cudgeling his brains and his donkey. [fra Charles Dickens’ roman *Oliver Twist*]

He carried a strobe light and the responsibility for the lives of his men.

Get out of my dreams and into my car. (Billy Ocean)

My teeth and ambitions are bared. Be prepared! (Scar)

Some of those are funny (Dickens sure could land a joke), and some of them are serious, but all of them are zeugmas. A zeugma uses one word to relate to or control two other words in the sentence, which might not have anything to do with each other. Often folks use this device to humorous effect, because the image of cudgeling brains and a donkey all at once is, when you think about it, pretty hilarious. By putting together two very unlike objects or concepts, zeugmas make us laugh, or at least crack a smile or two. Plus, the pairing also invites comparison – how are teeth like ambitions?” (<https://www.shmoop.com/literature-glossary/zeugma.html>; lesedato 06.03.19)

Den engelske dikteren Alexander Popes komiske heldediktet *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-14) inneholder disse linjene i 3. del:

“Here *Britain*’s Statesmen oft the Fall foredoom  
Of Foreign Tyrants, and of Nymphs at home;  
Here Thou, great *Anna*! whom three Realms obey,  
Dost sometimes Counsel take – and sometimes *Tea*.”

“The playfulness of the satirist is best exemplified in Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*, that apotheosis of the trivial. [...] his use of zeugma. The heroine Belinda’s protecting sylph is worried about the threat to her from

Some dire Disaster, or by Force, or Slight,  
But what, or where, the Fates have wrapt in Night.  
Whether the Nymph shall break *Diana*’s Law,  
Or some frail *China* Jar receive a flaw;  
Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade;  
Forget her Pray’rs or miss a Masquerade.  
(Canto II, 103-8)

Without distinction of importance the loss of chastity is placed beside the cracking of an ornament and the staining of a dress. In one line a whole society’s distorted values are exposed.” (Pollard 1970 s. 20)

“Examples of zeugma can be quite pleasing, as they depend on the reader to understand the multiple shades of meaning of a certain word. Oftentimes a zeugma can sound or look incorrect for a moment as it requires the reader or listener to quickly shift from one understanding to another. Thus, there can be an element of pun on the part of the author of a zeugma, as puns operate on words that have more than one meaning. However, zeugma examples are not necessarily humorous, as they may just be an innovative way of using a word. [...] In Alexander Pope’s long poem “The Rape of the Lock,” he uses an interesting example of zeugma. In the final two lines of this excerpt we see the statement “Here thou, great Anna! whom

three realms obey, / Dost sometimes counsel take – and sometimes tea.” In this case, the character of Anna who is being addressed takes both counsel and tea. Thus, the word “take” here functions in two distinct ways. [...] A clever writer, Charles Dickens created many examples of zeugma in his works of literature. In his first novel, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (also known as *The Pickwick Papers*) [...] the character Miss Bolo goes home “in a flood of tears, and a sedan-chair.” The zeugma appears in this sense of going home both in a physical and emotional state.” (<http://www.literarydevices.com/zeugma/>; lesedato 31.03.16)

Den engelske dikteren Thomas Grays dikt “Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard” (1751) har en formulering i fjerde verselinje som kan tolkes som en zeugma:

“The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o’er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.”

I Johan Herman Wessels komedie *Kierlighed uden Strømper* (1772) har Mads kjærlighetssorg på grunn av Grete, men håper det vil gi seg litt hvis han spiser seg god og mett. Mads sier: “Jeg tænkte, røget Flesk kan hielpe, hvem kan vide? Men følte Flesk og Sorg i Halsen fast at sidde”.

“Henry David Thoreau uses a zeugma example in his famous text, *Walden* [1854]. In a very long sentence describing his ideal house, Thoreau makes the statement, “where the washing is not put out, nor the fire, nor the mistress.” This clever fragment uses the phrasal verb “put out” in three different ways. The washing can literally be put out on the line, the fire can be extinguished, and the mistress can be emotionally put out if she is agitated. In Thoreau’s perfect life, none of these things would come to pass. [...] In his novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain uses a clever zeugma example. The two boys in this scene start fighting, and Twain writes that they cover themselves “with dust and glory.” Though to some, fighting would be uncouth and dirt would not be desired, it is through this very act of bravado that the boys seek glory. Thus, the verb “covered” acts in both a literal and figurative way in this excerpt. [...] In J.R.R. Tolkien’s first installment of *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, there is an excellent example of zeugma that is perhaps subtler than some of the other examples. The character of Galadriel is sending off the fellowship to deliver the One Ring to Mount Doom, and in so doing she has them drink from a communal cup of mead. In this excerpt, she “bade them drink and farewell.” The verb “bade” works both with asking them to drink and sending them off on their way.” (<http://www.literarydevices.com/zeugma/>; lesedato 31.03.16)

Den franske forfatteren Jean Echenoz bruker ofte zeugma som stilfigur, for eksempel når han i romanen *Oss tre* (1992) kaller personen Louis Meyer “en astigmatisk [dvs. med skjeve hornhinner] og polyteknisk utdannet mann.” (sitert fra

*Bokvennen* nr. 1 i 2011 s. 23) Andre formuleringer ligner zeugmaer: “Den andre uttalte seg om vindens makt, vannets tilstand, skyenes plassering og sin datters skolegang.” “Mens de satt tilfeldig plassert ved siden av hverandre, utvekslet de magasiner, sigaretter og skjønnhetsråd.” “På denne måten gikk tolv uendelige dager uten horisont, men uten fare.” (<https://oreilletendue.com/2013/02/03/les-zeugmes-du-dimanche-matin-et-des-grandes-blondes/>; lesedato 06.03.23)

Den amerikanske forfatteren Tim O’Briens novelle “The Things They Carried” (1990) “revolves around a group of soldiers in the Vietnam War who struggle to process the death of a member of their troop – a man named Ted Lavender. One of the peculiar features of this story is that it is told in a maddeningly repetitive way – the narrator will often interrupt the narrative to deliver exhaustive lists of the weapons, communication devices, articles of clothing, and other things that each soldier carries on their missions, along with the precise weight of each object. These lists occur so often in the story that first-time readers often struggle to find anything in it that looks like a plot. Mercifully, this mania for listing begins to change about a quarter of the way through the story, and this shift is marked by an intriguing zeugma. Here’s the passage:

“As a first lieutenant and platoon leader, Jimmy Cross carried a compass, maps, code books, binoculars, and a .45-caliber pistol that weighed 2.9 pounds fully loaded. He carried a strobe light and the responsibility for the lives of his men.”

The first six elements that Jimmy Cross carries give you a sense of the crazy repetition in the story. But something strange happens in the last sentence. Clearly, Cross does not “carry” responsibility in the same way that he carries a strobe light, and for this reason, the final sentence can be understood as a zeugma. So what are we to do with this literary device? O’Brien’s narrator is asking us here not only to recognize the different uses of the term “carry” but also to consider how these different kinds of carrying are related to one another. When we try to answer this question, O’Brien’s story begins to get interesting, as the things that the soldiers carry begin to change from physical objects into immaterial things, and when they do, this change is often represented through zeugmas. Here’s an example of what I mean:

“They all carried fragmentation grenades – 14 ounces each. They all carried at least one M-18 colored smoke grenade – 24 ounces. Some carried CS or tear gas grenades. Some carried white phosphorus grenades. They carried all they could bear, and then some, including a silent awe for the terrible power of the things they carried.”

O’Brien’s earlier zeugma prepares us to understand the soldiers’ obsessive cataloging of objects as attempts to manage the burden of all the other metaphysical things they carry with them. Because they cannot make sense of Ted Lavender’s death or free themselves of the guilt and fear that stems from it, they frantically

look for things in the world that they can control – for things they can carry that have a measurable weight. O’Brien’s many zeugmas in this story call our attention to this coping mechanism, showing us how his soldiers yoke together their weapons and their grief, their armor and their fear, during the terrible conditions of war.” (Raymond Malewitz i <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-zeugma>; lesedato 08.08.22)

“The zeugma suite of figures (prominently including prozeugma, mesozeugma, and hypozeugma in rhetorical figure manuals) is more natural in free-word-order languages, like Greek and Latin, which routinely place the verb in a wide range of locations throughout a sentence – in particular, at the beginning (pro-), middle (meso-) and end (hypo-) in a series of noun phrases. [...] One verb is yoked on to two subjects while grammatically it strictly refers to only one of them: The two subjects properly require two different verbs ... The second verb omitted, and the grammatical law is broken, in order that our attention may be attracted to the passage, and that we may discover that the emphasis is to be placed on the verb that is used [...] Zeugma is rather a fault than a figure, and it rarely occurs in good writing. But it must be included in the poet’s license.” (Daniel Etigson m.fl. i <https://rhetfig.appspot.com/view>; lesedato 06.03.23)

“Zeugmas come in different hues. A prozeugma is a row of phrases in which the verb used first is implied in the other parts of the sentence. Here’s an example from 16th-century English writer George Puttenham.

“Her beauty pierced mine eye, her speech mine woeful heart, her presence all the powers of my discourse.

He doesn’t rewrite the verb “pierce,” but he intended to use it throughout the sentence. [...]

The hypozeugma uses the verb at the end, but that verb applies to two or more phrases before it. Here’s a familiar example from William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears ...”

A mesozeugma uses the verb in the center of the sentence.

“First the alarm rang, then the doorbell.”

The zeugmas that are the most entertaining use different senses of a verb in the same sentence.” (Bernadette Kinlaw i <https://www.nwaonline.com/news/2018/nov/26/zeugmas-give-verbs-a-workout-20181126/>; lesedato 06.03.23)



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