

## 1.1 Palindrome: Definition and History

A palindrome is basically a word or phrase, which can be read in the same way even in backward. For example, kayak is read as kayak when the letters are read from the right to left too (Kulkarni, 2014:29).

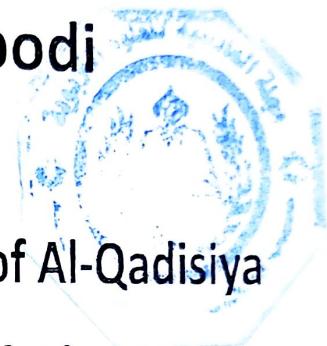
It is a word, phrase, number or other sequence of characters which reads the same backward or forward with general allowances for adjustments to punctuation, capital letters, and word dividers. Composing literature that is categorized as a palindrome is known as 'constrained writing' (Goodies, 2015:98).

Famous

# A Linguistic Analysis of Palindrome in Weird Al Yankovic's Lyric "Bob"

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examples include:

- 1.Civic.
- 2.A man, a plan, a canal-Panama.
- 3.Life is good. Good is life. (Bergerson,1973:20)

The palindrome originated in Greece and was coined by the English playwright Ben Jonson, who was the first writer to introduce this term, in the middle of the 17th century from the Greek roots palin and dromos which means "running back again" (Kulkarni,2014:30).

According to history, palindromes date back at least to 79 AD, as a palindrome was found as a graffito at Herculaneum, a city buried by ash in that year. This palindrome, called the Sator Square, consists of a sentence written in latin: "Sator Arepo Tenet Opera Rotas" (The sower Arepo holds with effort the wheels). It is remarkable for the fact that the first letters of each word form the first word, the second letters form the second word, and so forth. Hence, it can be arranged into a word square that reads in four different ways: Horizontally or vertically from either top left to bottom right or bottom right to top left. As such, they can be referred to as palindromatic as follows (Michael,1996:97):

1

4.SATOR

AREPO

TENET

OPERA

ROVAS

5.NET

EWE

TEN

Further, records of palindromic words and phrases were also found in Sanskrit and Hebrew literature.

## 1.2 Functions of Palindrome

Bergerson (1973:97) states that the purpose of using palindromes in writing, words, numbers and sentences is to create light entertainment and fun. However, some supporters have taken great initiatives in finding long palindromes that cover many sentences and poems.

The longest palindromic word in the Oxford English Dictionary is the onomatopoeic tattarrattat, coined by James Joyce in Ulysses(1922) for a knock on the door. The Guinness Book of Records gives title to detartrated, the preterite and past participle of detartrate, a chemical term meaning to remove tartrates. Rotavator, a trademarked name for an agricultural machine, is often listed in dictionaries (Stephen, 1992:52). Generally, the longer the palindrome, the less sense it makes. However, these longer examples are clever and some surprising.

ingly long word:

6. Harass sensuousness, Sarah.

7. Straw? No, too stupid a fad. I put soot on warts.  
(Fisher, 2015:1)

Further, palindromes can be used in prose, poetry and criticism. This type of poetry is also called as mirrored poetry where palindrome sentences are used which read backward as well forward, as in:

8. Lewd did I live and evil I did dwel.

This is the first sentence using a palindrome that appeared in the English language, back in 1614. In this sentence, the words read the same forward and backward (Literary Devices, 2015:1).

Further illustrations are the following poems written by Gorelick and Bagnall, respectively:

9. Day brighter

Load lighter

Smile

Lighter load

Brighter day

10. Spring in pretty blooms

Rose smells sweet, my sweet smells rose

Blooms, pretty in spring. (Short Palindrome poems, 2015:1-2)

Palindromes can be traced in classical music poetry for rhythmical effects in acoustics when a phrase once recorded and played backwards sound the same. In ancient times, the palindromes appeared in magic spells and many have taken this reversibility as a convention. Even several religious texts are full of palindromes and biologically the genes are also palindromes that their order is the same; forward as well as backward (Literary Devices, 2015:2):

11. So the last will be first, and the first will be last.  
(Matthew, 20:16)

12. And DNA and DNA and DNA. (Bergerson, 1973:63)

Palindrome may also be used in proverbs and it is called proverbial palindromes:

13. Sex at noon taxes

Dennis and Edna sinned

Live not on evil. (Fisher, 2015:1)

Besides, early palindromes were written in Greek and then in Latin. However, other cultures also took up the search for the elusive palindrome. Non-English palindromes are constructed in French, Spanish, Persian as well as Arabic languages. Arabic language is an abjad; that is, only consonants are represented as letters. Vowels are not visible as letters. Instead, they can be represented using diacritics. Palindromes in Arabic are taken

from letters (consonants) only disregarding vowels that follow/proceed them. Below, examples are taken from the Glorious Quran and Arabic literature respectively (Michael, 1996:99):

١٤. (المدثر/73) (وربك فكبر) ﴿

And thy Lord do thou glorify (Ali, 2001: 1557)

١٥. (وكل في فلك) (يس/40)

Each (just) swims along (Ali, 2001:1125)

Here, reading the ayaas backwards including vowels would not create a palindrome. However, taking out consonants only (which are here: r,b,k,f,k,b,r) and (k,l,f,y,f,l,k) can clearly create palindromes.

A poem credited to an anonymous writer contains a palindrome line:

١٦. مودته تدوم لكل هول وهل كل مودته تدوم

The line transliterates to: Mawaddatuhu tadumu li-kulli hawlin... Wahal kulla mawaddatihi tadumu. Consonants are: m,w,d,t,h,t,d,w,m,l,k,l, h,w,l,w, h,l,k, l,m,w,d,t,h,t,d,w,m. (Michael, 1996:99)

## 1.3 Perspectives of Palindrome

### 1.3.1 Palindrome: A Phonetic Perspective

Michalelsen (1998:79) mentions that a phonetic palindrome is a portion of sound or phrase of speech which

is identical or roughly identical when reversed. Some phonetic palindromes must be mechanically reversed involving the use of sound recording equipment or reverse tap effects. Another, more abstract palindromes are words which are identical to the origin when separated into their phonetic components and reversed.

In English, certain written palindromes also happen to be phonetic palindromes, particularly monosyllabic ones such as: mom, dad, and pip. However, this does not guarantee that a reversal recording of any of these words will sound identical to non-reversed speech, because certain pronunciations can cause a shift in the articulation of the vowel, differentiating the beginning from the end in its pitch (Ibid.:80).

Simple examples of four letter English palindromes include sees and deed, but a moment's reflection reveals that there is a fundamental difference between these two words. While sees and deed are both palindromes, only the latter word is pronounced the same when read in either direction /di:d/. By contrast, the word sees is pronounced as /si:z/ when read from left to right, but /zi:s/ when read in the opposite direction (The Free Library, 2014:94).

Phonetic reversal is not entirely identical to backmasking, which is specifically the reversal of recorded

sound. This is because pronunciation in speech causes a reversed diphthong to sound different in either direction, e.g., eye /ai/ becoming yah /ja:/, or differently articulate a consonant depending on where it lies in a word, hence creating an imperfect reversal (Bergeron, 1973:35).

Backmasking involves not only the reversal of the order of phonemes or phones, but also the reversal of the allophonic realizations of those phonemes. Strictly speaking, a reversal of phonemes will still result in allophones appropriate for the new position, for example, if a word with a final /t/ is reversed so that the /t/ is initial, the initial /t/ will be aspirated in line with the conventional allophonic patterns of English phonology (Bergeron, 1973:35).

Further illustrations, Michalelsen (1998:80) discovers a list of phonetic palindromes including words or phrases: Easy, Selfless, Crew work/Work crew, Dry yard, Funny enough, Let Bob tell and Sorry, Rose.

Thorpe (2011:209) states that most of the phonetic palindromes consist of 3 phonetic symbols of which the 1st and the 3rd are identical. The 1st and the 3rd phonetic symbols may represent:

1-a. The same 2 single letters in the word. In this case, the middle phonetic

symbol must represent at least 2 letters, and these just not be the same letter otherwise the word itself would be a palindrome.

b. The same 2 groups of letters in the word. In this case, the middle phonetic symbol may represent either a single letter or more than one letter.

2- Different letters/letter groups in the word. Again, the middle phonetic symbol may represent either a single letter or more than one letter.

She adds that these first and third phonetic symbols represent the same letters may include the following (bid.:210):

Long Vowel Central Symbol: Fief /fi:f/, and Church /  
tʃ:/

Short Vowel Central Symbol: Chich /tʃitʃ/, and Cack /  
æk/

Diphthong Central Symbol: Maim /meim/

Triphthong Central Symbol: Loyal /loiəl/

Consonantal Central Symbol: Exlex /eksleks/  
Concerning the first and the third phonetic symbols

represent different letters/letter combinations may also be presented by the following (Thorpe, (2011:211-12):

Long Vowel Central Symbol: Lille /li:l/

Short Vowel Central Symbol: Bibb /bib/, and Judge /  
[bɪb]/

Nasal Vowel Central Symbol: Tante /tã:t/

Diphthong Central Symbol: Cake /keɪk/

So far, the 1st and the 3rd phonetic symbols have represented consonantal sounds. Examples in which the 1st and the 3rd symbols represent vocalic sounds are a lot less common. The word uh-huh is unusual in having the 1st and the 3rd phonetic symbols representing the same letter combination: /ə hə/. The 1st and the 3rd symbols below represent different letters/letter combinations:

Long Vowel: Afar /a:fa:/

Short Vowel: Iffy /ifi/

Nasal Vowel: Enfant /ãfã/

Diphthong: Eyetie /aitai/

The same is true with 5 phonetic symbols. In these examples, it is either the middle phonetic symbols or the 2nd and the 4th symbols, which represent the vowel sounds:

Long Vowel Middle Symbol: Starts /sta:ts/

Diphthong Middle Symbol: States /steits/

Short Vowel 2nd and 4th Symbols: Cilice /silis/, Moreover, the same phonetic structure may represent more than one word, in which case the words are homophones. Phonetic symbols used (Ibid.:209):  
Long Vowels: /i:/ (as in: Bean), /a:/ (as in: Barn), /o:/ (as in: Born), and /u:/ (as in: Boon)  
Short Vowels: /i/ (as in: Pit), /e/ (as in: Pet), /a/ (as in: Pat), and /o/ (as in: Pot)  
Nasal Vowels: /ã/ (as in: Franc), and /õ/ (as in: Bon)  
Diphthongs: /ei/ (as in: Ate), /ai/ (as in: Bite), /au/ (as in: Now), and /oɪ/ (as in: Boar)  
Triphthongs: /ai̯/ (as in: Fire), /oɪ̯/ (as in: Royal), and /u̯/ (as in: Lower)

### 1.3.2 Palindrome: Semantic and Syntactic Perspectives

If a palindrome is a word, phrase, number, or other sequence of symbols or elements, whose meaning may be interpreted the same way in either forward or reverse direction, then it has the same effects and meanings (Bergerson, 1973:101).

There are many types of palindromes from many fields including math, language arts, history, music, poetry and biology. Syntactically speaking, these various types include: letter, word, phrase, name, title, number,

and date palindromes that can be explained further below:

### 1.3.2.1 Letter Palindrome

The most familiar palindromes are letter by letter. They are the most common type of English palindrome that are read the same when reversing the order of the letters, i.e., character by character (possibly ignoring white space and punctuation). For instance, level, rotor and race-car. Character by character means that each character of the word matches, and the word can be spelled the same forwards or backwards (Nelson, 2012:1).

Letter-unit represents a form of palindrome consists of words which contain symmetrical letters that look the same when turned upside down or viewed in a mirror. Further illustrations are the following:

17. Noon.

18. Oxo. (Fisher, 2015:2)

### 1.3.2.2 Word Palindrome

There are also palindromes where the unit of reversal is the word. These are referred to as word-unit palindromes. They were popularized in the recreational linguistics community by J.A. Lindon in the 1960s, but occasional examples in English are found from at least the 19th century, and several in French and Latin date to

the Middle Ages (Nelson, 2012:5).

Some palindromes use single and multiple words rather than letters. For example:

19. Stressed or desserts.

20. First ladies rule the state and state the rule: ladies first.

21. So patient a doctor to doctor a patient so. (Fisher, 2015:2)

There, instead of each character matching, the whole sentence can be read backward and forward. The individual letters do not match, but the whole words do.

Nelson (2012:1) mentions that word-unit palindromes play on polysemy and grammatical structures, whereas letter-unit palindromes foreground spelling much more, as in:

22. Mind your own business: Own your mind.

In the example above, 'mind' means something different in each of its two appearances, and 'own' is first an adjective and then an imperative verb.

In addition, word-unit palindrome can be read in columns top-to-bottom, with the same result as normal reading, making it a word-unit version of a word square:

23. Shall we all die?

We shall die all.

All die shall we-

Die all we shall. (Nelson, 2012:3)

### 1.3.2.3 Phrase Palindrome

Palindromes often consist of phrases or sentences. These are referred to as line-unit palindromes. Palindrome examples exist in phrases or sentences where punctuation, capitalization, and spacing are usually ignored, although some such as:

24. Mr. Owl ate my metal worm.

25. Live on time, emit no evil, include them (Berger-  
son, 1973:51).

Syntactically speaking, palindromic sentence is often accomplished via comparison by the use of as... as:

26. Norma is as selfless as I am, Ron.

27. Ma is as a nun, as I am. (Griswold, 2015:1)

This type is also accomplished by acronym and inter-  
jection respectively:

28. A Santa lived as a devil as NASA. (Berger-  
son, 1973:55)

29. Yo! Bottoms up, U.S. Motto, boy!

30. Stephen, my hat! Ah, what a hymn, eh, pets?

31. Step on hose-pipes? Oh no, pets. (Griswold,  
2015:5)

Moreover, line-unit palindrome is also expressed by

question and exclamation, as in:

32. Eva, can I stab bats in a cave?
33. Did Hannah say as Hannah did?
34. Dammit, I'm mad!
35. A dog! A panic in a pagoda! (Ibid.)

#### 1.3.2.4 Name and Title Palindromes

Some people have names that are palindromes. They may be read from right to left and left to right. They are included given names called short palindromic names: Ada, Elle and Aviva as well as surnames, like: Harrah, Salas and Arora or both, as in: Eve, Hannah and Otto (Goodies, 2015:101).

Some famous personalities demonstrate palindromic examples:

36. Lon Nol was a Prime Minister of Cambodia.
37. Nisio Isin was a Japanese novelist. (Literary Devices, 2015:4)

Moreover, some persons have changed their names in order to make them a palindrome, one example is an actor Robert Trebor, while others were given a palindromic name at birth, such as: the philologist Revilo P. Oliver or the flamenco dancer Sara Baras. Further, some names can be made part of a larger palindrome, like:

38. Euston saw I was not Sue.

39. Bob: "Did Anna peep?" Anna: "Did Bob?" (Griswold, 2015:3)

Palindromic names are very common in Finland and fictional media. Examples include: Olavi Valo and Stanley Yelnats who is the name of a character in a movie Holes (2003) (Ibid.:4).

A palindrome is not limited to names but also used in titles whether titles of song or album: ABBA's song "SOS" is the only Billboard Hot 100 single to have both a title and a recording artist whose names are both palindromes and in 2009 rock band "Dopapod" released an album entitled "I Saw live Dopapod Evil was I" (Nelson, 2012:8).

### 1.3.2.5 Number and Date Palindromes

A palindromic number or numeral palindrome is a number that remains the same when its digits are reversed. It is a number whose digits are the same read backward, for example: 16461, 5885 and 1881. They are studied in recreational mathematics where palindromic numbers with special properties are sought. A palindromic prime is a palindromic number that is a prime number, e.g.: 191 and 313 (Weisstein, 2015:6).

Kulkarni (2014:3) claims that palindrome can also be used in date. "2nd January 2010" is a date palindrome. When used in mm/dd/yy format, the date can be given

"01/02/2010" and the date can be read exactly the same backward. Even "1st February 2010" is a date palindrome when used in dd/mm/yy format.

## 2.1 Analysis

This section deals with the application of what has been presented in the previous section. It is going to trace palindrome in Weird Al Yankovics lyric "Bob". The empirical data of this study is collected from one main source: Internet which is available on youtube.com (see bibliography). This lyric is written by Weird Al Yankovic who is an American musician, satirist, parodist, and songwriter. In particular, he is known for humorous songs which make fun of popular culture or parody specific songs by contemporary musical acts or both Brownielocks, 1999:3).

Weird Al Yankovic is famous for his parody of well-known artists. "Bob" is a lyric song, a style parody of Bob Dylan (hence the title) as an American writer and has been influential in popular music and culture for more than five decades (Ibid.:5).

The researcher uses Thorpes model (2011) to analyze phonetic palindrome in "Bob" since it is as a whole palindromic poem including the title itself. Each line, in addition to the title, is a palindrome. It is the top and most popular song lyric that composed entirely of palin-

dromes. Like the palindromic phrase which can be read both forward and backward, the palindromic poem can also be read in both directions. The palindromic poem presents a challenge to writers in terms of both form and content. Not only must the poet use the same words in the second half of the poem as in the first, but the reverse reading must also make sense and relate to some kind of reversal of events or ideas to make the poem's form meaningful. A palindromic poem that narrates entering a mirror world or an undoing of events manipulates the form to create greater meaning (Smith, 2015:2).

### Text 1

I, man, am regal-a German am I

Never odd or even

If I had a hi-fi

Madam, I'm Adam

Too hot or to hoot

No lemons, no melon

Too bad I hid a boot

Phonetic palindromes can be found in these phrases when they are pronounced the same when read in either direction. They can be analyzed according to Thorpes model (2011) even the palindromic name in the title itself "Bob". When the first and the third phonetic sym-

ymbols represent the same letter may include short vowel central symbol.

Each line of this text represents palindrome whether it is read forward or backward and its meaning may be the same when interpreted in reverse direction. Syntactically speaking, these lines show word and line-unit palindromes when they read letter by letter in both directions to make sense of the poem itself in its form and meaning. So it can be read the same from the reverse line: I, man, am regal-a German am I where the 'l' at the end of 'regal' is the center of the palindrome. The same is true for the other lines: Never odd or even: Never odd

If I had a hi-fi: If I had

Madam, I'm Adam: Madam

Too hot or to hoot: Too hot

No lemons, no melon: No lemon

Too bad I hid a boot: Too bad I

## Text 2

Lisa Bonnet ate no basil

Warsaw was raw

Was it a car or a cat I saw?

From a phonetic perspective, these phrase-unit palindromes can be pronounced the same when read in reverse direction to create meaningful form. Name palin-

drome may be used in the first two phrases as parts of a larger palindrome when they read from right to left and left to right, as in: Lisa Bonnet ate no basil: Lisa Bonnet and Warsaw was raw: Warsaw.

The third line-unit palindrome is expressed syntactically by the use of question: Was it a car or a cat I saw?

### Text 3

**Rise to vote, sir**

**Do geese see God?**

**Do nine men interpret? "Nine men", I nod**

**Rats live on no evil star**

**Won't lovers revolt now?**

**Race fast, safe car**

From a syntactic perspective, a series of palindromes is shown here. Two phrases or line-unit palindromes are found in these sentences respectively:

Rise to vote, sir and Rats live on no evil star whereas: Race fast, safe car represents another type of palindrome, i.e., letter palindrome. Each letter of the word matches and can be spelled the same forwards or backwards to give the same effects and meanings.

The form of phrase palindrome can also be expressed by two questions in:

**Do geese see God? and Do nine men interpret? In**

the last question, the word nine represents phonetic palindrome that may be analyzed according to Thorpe's model (2011) consists of three phonetic symbols of which the first and the third are identical and may include diphthong central symbol.

#### Text 4

Pa's a sap

Ma is as selfless as I am

May a moody baby doom a yam?

The above mentioned lines give the example of word and line-unit palindromic types. They read in the same manner from the first letter to the last letter as they are going from the last letter to the first letter without affecting their meaning to make powerful form. Syntactically speaking, palindrome is carried out by means of comparison: as selfless as, to mean that both Ma and the writer are unselfish. Palindrome is also formed by a question, as in: May a moody baby doom a yam? From a phonetic viewpoint, according to Thorpe's model (2011), diphthong central symbol is used in the word baby in the same first and the third letters.

#### Text 5

Ah, Satan sees Natasha

No devil lived on

**Lonely Tylenol**

**Not a banana baton**

**No "X" in "Nixon"**

**O, stone, be not so**

**O Geronimo, no minor ego**

**"Naomi", I moan**

**"A Toyota's a Toyota"**

**A dog, a panic in a pagoda**

Name palindromes can be seen in more than one sentence where the short and the surnames are given to some people: Natasha, Nixon, and Tylenol, as a brand name of acetaminophen a popular pain reliever and fever reducer, at the end of the first, the third, and the fifth lines and also in the beginning of the seventh, the eighth, and the ninth lines respectively: Geronimo, Naomi, and Toyota as a name of the world's largest automobile manufacturer. Such palindromic names can be read from right to left and left to right with the same meanings to add rhythmical effects to the lyrics itself.

Line-unit palindrome, as another palindromic type, may also be seen in four sentences: in the second, the fourth, the sixth, and the tenth. Besides, the first palindromic sentence is syntactically accomplished by interjection: Ah.

**Text 6****Oh, no! Don Ho!****Nurse, I spy gypsies-run!****Senile felines****Now I see bees I won****UFO tofu****We panic in a pew****Oozy rat in a sanitary zoo****God! A red nugget! A fat egg under a dog!****Go hang a salami, I'm a lasagna hog**

From a syntactic perspective, palindromic name appears in the first sentence to name somebody Don which can also be carried out by interjection and exclamatory sentences: Oh, no! Don Ho!, Nurse, I spy gypsies-run!, and God! A red nugget! A fat egg under a dog! to give the meanings of strong feeling and exclamation. Word-units as another type of palindrome are used in: Senile felines and UFO tofu where the units of reversal are the words themselves where the latter can be accomplished by acronym. In addition, line-unit palindromes are also exemplified in the below phrases that read the same letter by letter forward and backward to influence the form and to create fun and entertainment.

**Conclusion**

The researcher has arrived at the following conclusions:

1. A palindrome is a word, a sentence, a symbol or even signs that can be read forward as well as backward, that is to say from right to left and left to right with the same effects and meanings.

2. It can be used in various functions in words, numbers, and sentences.

Palindromes may be traced in classical and modern music poetry for

rhythrical effects, in acoustics and in dates as well.

3. Palindromes may have different types. There are palindromes where the

unit of reversal is the letter, word, or line. These are referred to as letter-

unit, word-unit, and line-unit palindromes.

4. There exist words which sound like palindromes:

These are phonetic

palindromes and most of them considered here consist of three phonetic

symbols of which the first and the third are identical.

5. Most of palindromic cases mentioned above can be analyzed in Weird

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### Abstract

The present study deals with palindrome as one of the linguistic phenomenon. A palindrome is a term for a word, a sentence, or a number that reads the same backward as forward. It is used in writing whether in prose or poetry to create amusement and fun. It aims at applying palindrome to the lyric poem.

It tries to shed light on this concept as far as its definition, history, functions, semantic, syntactic and phonetic perspectives are concerned. While the practical section includes illustrative texts extracted from Weird Al Yankovic's lyric "Bob". The findings of the study are summed up in the conclusion.

## الخلاصة

تعنى الدراسة الحالية بالمعكوس أو القلب المستوى بوصفه أحد الظواهر اللغوية. المعكوس هو مصطلح لكلمة، لجملة، أو لرقم يمكن قراءته طرداً أو عكساً بنفس المعنى. يستعمل هذا المصطلح في الكتابة سواء كانت نثراً أو شعراً لخلق الانبساط والبهجة. تهدف الدراسة إلى تطبيق المعكوس في قصيدة غنائية.

وتحاول تسلیط الضوء على هذه الظاهرة من حيث تعریفها وتاريخها، ووظائفها، وجوانبها الدلالية، والتركيبية، والصوتية. إما القسم العملي فيتضمن عينات توضیحية مأخوذة من قصيدة غنائية لوايرد ال يانکوفک "بوب". إما نتائج الدراسة فقد لخصت في الخاتمة.