

Sentence Complexity in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*

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Abstract: Literary stylistics is a branch of applied linguistics that examines the beauty of language used by authors. It investigates the various language features systematically. It also determines the role of linguistics in making any literary interpretation. The present study aims at showing the importance of using complex sentences as a stylistic feature in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. It attempts to analyze sentence complexity in the target novel. In order to achieve this purpose, the current study uses stylistics as an approach. It also builds upon Halliday's and Matthiessen's Functional Grammar (2014). By means of complex sentences, Faulkner makes his characters' traits different and unique. The results show that simple language and simple sentences in the first section (Benjamin's section) make readers feel as if they were reading a story written by a child because of the mental disorder of Benjamin. Furthermore, the complex sentences and the stylistically rich language in Quentin's section give the reader the impression that the narrator, Quentin, is intelligent, literate and well-educated. In the third section, the colloquial language gives the reader the impression that the narrator, Jason, is an illiterate and close-minded person.

Keywords: Style, Syntax, Complex sentence, Stylistic complexity.

Introduction

The topic of the present study is concerned with the twentieth century English literature. The work examined is an American novel, *The Sound and the Fury*. This novel is written by the notable novelist, William Faulkner. Faulkner is famous for his unusual style in narrating his stories. William Faulkner is famous for using the technique of interior monologues to reflect his characters' thoughts and feelings and to reveal their secrets. In this novel, Faulkner employs different language styles for each one of the three main characters: Benjamin, Jason and Quentin.

The novel tackles the story of Compson's family in America, Mississippi, Jefferson in 1928. Quentin, Benjamin and Jason are the main characters in this story. These characters are brothers; they live together with their sister (Caddy) and their parents. They had an African-American family as their servants. The situation of the family starts to get worse because the daughter (Caddy) grows up as a promiscuous girl.

The novel is divided into four sections. In each section, the story is told by different narrators, Benjamin, Quentin and Jason respectively. Therefore, the language style, lexical choices and sentence types in each section are different and unique. The present study aims to:

- Investigate sentence complexity as a stylistic feature in *The Sound and the Fury*.
- Investigate the stylistic effect behind using sentence complexity in this novel.

The present paper tries to answer the following questions:

- How does Faulkner proceed to distinguish his characters' personalities through his selection of types of sentences?
- What are the major stylistic effects behind using sentence complexity as a stylistic feature in this novel?

I. Literature Review

The term 'syntax' refers to the structure of sentences. At the simplest level, it means the order or arrangement of words within a sentence, or the grammatical arrangement of words, phrases and clauses to give a sentence its structure. In examining syntax as a part of literary style, one considers several issues. For example, has the writer employed sentences in which the normal order of words is reversed? Is there any reason for the inversion of word order? How frequent is the inversion? Are the sentences predominantly long or short? Are they simple, compound, multiple or complex? Ordinarily, an effective style is one in which there is variety in the syntax: the writer varies the length and structure of his sentences and sometimes reverses the grammatical order of words. Such a variety is necessary to avoid monotony. Sometimes, however, a writer who wishes to create some special effects or achieve some particular purpose may employ one type of sentence predominantly (Agu, 2008).

Syntax is essential for the study of language style since it deals with the relationship of units within a larger unit, and it would give us more clarity in meaning if acquainted with the analysis of sentences and clauses. Turner (1973) states that "one purpose of the study of syntax is to detect and analyze ambiguity" (p.70). As far as syntactic structures are concerned, one may have many ways of arranging syntactic units like clauses according to the message to be conveyed.

Clauses can be linked in two different ways, the first one is structural and it includes two basic kinds of relations between clauses, binding and linking locks (Quirk et al, 2010). In linking, the two clauses are equal, either dependent or independent, to each other. The two clauses can be linked either by a comma, a semicolon, or a dash between them or by a linking conjunction (and, but, or, etc.). This type of relations is used when the two clauses contain information of the same importance.

In contrast to the first type, in subordination, the two clauses are unequal, i.e., one of the clauses is dependent while the second is independent. In this case, the two clauses can be linked either by binding conjunctions such as 'although', 'if', 'and', 'because' or by WH-words such as 'who' and 'which'. With regard to terminology, an independent clause is also called a paratactic clause, and a dependent clause a hypotactic clause. Likewise, a compound sentence is known as a paratactic construction and a complex sentence as a hypotactic construction. Simply defined, parataxis is the relation between two elements of equal status, one initiating and the other continuing; however, hypotaxis is the relation between a dependent element and its dominant. (Haliday and Mattheissen, 2014)

Fabb (2002) and Clay (2005) argue that a complex narrative text holds the literary form in a variety of ways which are inherently complex. This complexity is sometimes straightforwardly detected and described in case of non-projection; however, another kind of complexity would be less transparent to be revealed and described as projected, i.e. purposefully planned. As far as stylistics deals with the variation of style in use, the impact of complexity,

whether predictable or not, increases in this regard. Complexity may reveal a lot by implicating sometimes the nature of the characters or hinting at the intended themes at other times. In this respect, many scholars have dealt with complexity in a variety of literary and non-literary texts resulting in the fact that structure complexity relates highly to the semantic intensity of a text. Fabb (2002), accordingly, suggests that literary texts have two types of form: explicit and implicit or generated form: The first type being represented in the explicit meaning of narrative framework, the second in the meaning generated by the form of the literary work which needs to be identified by the reader.

Bellard (1992, p.18) assures that sentence structure is a very “revealing aspect of style”. To know about the structure of the sentence helps in describing a particular author's style. He (ibid) further suggests that when there is an explicit relation between the stylistic structure and the plot, it will need less inference than if there is a contrastive relation between them leading to a sudden type of complexity. In a similar vein, Jucker (1992) believes that stylistic complexity might result from sentence length which results in turn from pre- and post- modifications represented in the form of noun phrases. He suggests that such type of complexity requires a kind of inference behind the purpose of the author. Dámová (2007) states that the grammatical constructions of English are “as distinctive as those of lexis”(p.48) and the complexity of sentences which might result out of long sentences, embedded clauses, or the unusual word order flows to the meaning of the text. Wales (2011) and Furlong (2014) also support that stylistic complexity is an important factor that gives rise to implicatures about the sophistication in the author's thoughts; and the variation in syntactic structure can suggest and/or reflect the real associations in the literary work. In fact, sentence complexity is frequently a sign of mental complexity.

II. Methodology

The present study is a stylistic analysis. It aims at analyzing sentence complexity in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. In order to achieve this purpose, the study uses corpus stylistics as an approach. It also builds upon works and findings of Halliday's and Mattheissen's Functional Grammar (2014).

Since the aim of the present paper is to investigate sentence complexity, it has been useful to exploit Halliday's and Mattheissen's model in the analysis of selected novel. Halliday and Mattheissen consider a sentence with one clause as simple and others with more than one clause whether of the paratactic or hypotactic type as complex. A mixture of both hypotactic and paratactic is a mixed sentence.

III. Results and Discussion

The chosen novel consists of four main chapters. Each of the three first chapters is devoted to a main character Benjamin, Quentin, Jason respectively. As the narrator changes, the style also changes: lexical choices, sentence complexity, etc.

Chapter	Number of Sentences	Number of Complex Sentences	%
Benjamin's Chapter	826	226	27,36%
Quentin's Chapter	1509	535	35.45%
Jason's Chapter	823	452	54,92%

The first chapter (Benjamin's section) is characterized by simplicity in language which can be seen through almost all features. The majority of sentences are simple. Complex sentences occasionally appear with monotonous and often inappropriate cohesive devices. These features give the impression that the story is narrated by a child who has just acquired a new language or by someone who is mentally disabled. Given the fact that the narrator (Benjamin) is 33 years old, the interpretation leads to an inference that he has a mental disability and is a man-child like.

As the table above shows, the percentage of complex sentences in Quentin's section is more than the percentage in Benjamin's section because the first has a very complicated and breathtaking language style. Also, it is the longest section of the novel. The reader can notice that the narrator has a good use of language.

It is clear that the percentage of complex sentences in Jason's section is more than the two other sections. Therefore, Jason's style is the most complicated one among the three narrators.

Conclusion

When reading *The Sound and the Fury*, the reader can notice that the language style in each section corresponds to the characters' perspectives and attitudes which lead to their personae. In the first section, the simplicity of the language has suggested that the narrator, Benjamin, is a simple-minded person. Benjamin's peculiar associations with which he is not capable of associating things properly has implied that Benjamin is not only simple minded but also mentally disabled. Meanwhile, the complicated and stylistically rich language features in the second section have given an impression that the narrator, Quentin, is an intelligent, literate, well-educated man. However, his disorderly language, which is marked by frequent language rule violations, has also suggested that he is emotionally and psychologically fragile. It confirms Quentin's being melancholic and extremely anxious. In the third section, the informal or colloquial language gives an impression that the narrator, Jason, is an illiterate person. He is portrayed as a close-minded man.

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