24

Sentence Types in *The Lost Symbol* as a Feature

of Narrative Urgency: A Stylistic Study

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Abstract

This study conducts a stylistic analysis of selected novel extracts, aiming to identify the features that lead readers to accelerate their reading pace. Typically, readers maintain a steady pace when engaging with a novel, yet certain points in the text prompt them to read more quickly. This study focuses on the sentence types within these extracts that facilitate this shift in speed, utilising Simpson's (2014) model, which has been adapted to align with Halliday's textual metafunction (2004). Five extracts from Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol* have been chosen for this analysis and examined according to Simpson's framework. The findings indicate that these passages predominantly use simple clause structures, including both syndetically and asyndetically coordinated clauses to convey the dynamic progression of events and create NU.

أنواع الجُمل في رواية *الرمز المفقود* كميزة للعُجالة السردية: دراسة أسلوبية

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المستخلص

تُجري هذه الدراسة تحليلاً أسلوبياً لمقتطفات مختارة من رواية، بهدف تحديد السمات التي تدفع القرّاء إلى تسريع وتيرة قراءتهم. عادةً ما يحافظ القرّاء على سرعة قراءة ثابتة عند مطالعة الرواية، ولكن هناك نقاط معينة في النص تحثهم على القراءة بسرعة أكبر. تركز هذه الدراسة على أنواع الجمل داخل هذه المقتطفات التي تسهم في إحداث هذا التغير في السرعة، باستخدام نموذج سيمبسون (2014) المعدل ليتوافق مع الوظيفة النصية لهاليداي (2004). وقد تم اختيار خمسة مقتطفات من رواية دان براون *الرمز المفقود* لهذه الدراسة وتم تحليلها وفقاً لإطار سيمبسون. وتشير النتائج إلى أن هذه المقاطع تعتمد بشكل كبير على هياكل الجمل البسيطة، بما في ذلك استخدام الجمل المنسقة بوسائل التنسيق العطفية أو بدونها، لنقل ديناميكية تطور الأحداث وخلق شعور بالإلحاح السردي.

Introduction

Narrative Urgency (hence; NU), refers to a technique employed by authors in thriller, mystery, and crime genres, in which they utilise specific stylistic and cognitive strategies to quicken the reader's pace and evoke a sense of urgency in the reading experience. This approach effectively allows authors to instill a feeling of immediacy and tension in their work. According to Simpson (2014, p.5), NU arises from a particular stylistic profile encompassing several components chief among which are the sentence types which an extract is made up of.

Simpson (2014) grounds his research in earlier work within experimental cognitive psychology, reflecting an ongoing trend in stylistics to incorporate extensive psychological research on text processing and interpretation. The psychological studies referenced here are largely journal articles that explore, to varying extents, how readers perceive and engage with distinct narratives or different versions of the same narrative. Most of these studies employ quantitative methods, including judgment tasks and reading time measurements, to examine readers' expectations and preferences for certain narrative outcomes. For example, in Egidi and Gerrig's (2006) study, the focus is on the processes by which readers assess the consistency between characters' actions and their objectives. They report that participants in reading time experiments generally recognise inconsistencies between these elements. Additionally, narratives presented with a biasing context tend to be read more fluently, as readers more readily process outcomes that align with prior context. Readers also show a greater tendency to align with characters' goals when those objectives are conveyed with NU.

In a separate study by Rapp and Gerrig (2005), the researchers argue that, in the absence of explicit textual cues, readers generally prefer narratives where characters succeed in reaching their goals, rather than

experiencing failure. However, the texts used in such reading experiments are typically crafted by the researchers themselves, carefully tailored to meet specific experimental needs. To address this limitation, the present study analyses passages from an authentic novel to explore instances of NU, aiming to understand how this NU is realised in actual novels through both structural and stylistic choices. This analysis will be limited to the sentence types that are employed in the selected extracts. The core question is: What is the nature of the clausal structures in passages that encourage NU? More specifically, what types of sentence structures appear most frequently in these passages?

The first characteristic of NU aligns with Halliday's concept of the textual metafunction, which focuses on the structure of a clause and the organisation of the message within it. This organisation relies on two main aspects: information structure and thematic structure (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p.12). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p.13) describe the textual metafunction as a strand of meaning most directly associated with the nature of a text. Through textual meaning, the clause is seen as a message, with its core function being the construction of coherent text. At this point, it becomes essential to define texts, which can vary widely in length and form, whether spoken or written. Defining a text is challenging due to its lack of fixed boundaries; however, it is typically characterised by possessing "texture." In other words, language users employ a range of linguistic resources to construct texts, differentiating them from non-texts. From this standpoint, texts are unified by cohesive elements known as cohesive ties, one of which is the system of conjunctions. Reflecting this focus, Simpson's analysis centers on a particular aspect of this metafunction, specifically the clausal structure within the target texts. An intensified sense of urgency is signaled by a compositional shift to single-

clause structures, often formed as asyndetically coordinated clusters—structures without conjunctions—or as independent orthographic sentences. These clauses may also feature moodless minor units. When syndetic coordination occurs, the pattern tends to be paratactic rather than hypotactic. This results in coordination through adversative, additive, and temporal conjuncts rather than more complex forms, such as replacive, subtractive, conditional, or other conjunctive adjuncts (Simpson, 2014, p.6).

To clarify, a brief explanation of hypotaxis and parataxis is needed. These terms describe two contrasting methods of structuring sentences and clauses. Hypotaxis occurs when main clauses are connected to dependent clauses through subordinating conjunctions, creating a layered structure. This arrangement is rooted in the term "hypotaxis," derived from a Greek word meaning "arrange under." In contrast, parataxis involves the addition of sentences or clauses without conjunctions (asyndetically) or with coordinating conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, and *but* (syndetically). The term "parataxis" also originates from Greek, meaning "arrange beside" (Matthiessen and Halliday, 2009, p. 24).

According to Quirk et al. (1985, p. 342), a simple sentence comprises a single clause that can be analysed into a subject, verb, object, complement, and adverbial. A complex sentence, by contrast, consists of two clauses: one independent and one dependent. Regarding compound and complex sentences, Quirk et al. (1985, p. 550) explain that compound sentences contain two clauses linked by one of the three English coordinators (*and*, *but*, *or*), whereas complex sentences contain clauses linked by connectors other than these coordinators. The presence of such connectors forms a syndetic coordination pattern, while their absence results in an asyndetic pattern. Notably, sentences featuring reported speech are categorised as

complex by Quirk et al. (1985, p. 556), as in "He said that John would take them…," where the *that*-clause acts as a subordinator.

In summary, texts conveying NU are expected to favor simple clauses, linked either without conjunctions or with coordinating rather than subordinating conjunctions.

1. Literature Review

The linguistic approach to literary analysis has been the focus of numerous studies. In this vein, Ahmed (2021) conducted a stylistic examination of D.H. Lawrence's poem "The Snake." Her study analysed the poem across multiple linguistic dimensions: graphological, phonological, lexico-syntactic, and semantic. The findings highlighted that stylistic analysis not only enriches the interpretation of the poem but also reveals subtle elements that might otherwise go unnoticed. This method provides deeper insights into Lawrence's stylistic choices, such as his use of elongated lines, atypical punctuation, and the visual arrangement of text to mimic the physical appearance and movement of a snake.

Another study by Hasan and Hameed (2019) investigates the portrayal of political figures in Tony Kushner's play *Homebody/Kabul* through a critical stylistic lens. The researchers employ Jeffries' framework alongside corpus linguistic methods to demonstrate how textual elements can communicate underlying ideologies. This study examines representations of war and political actors, specifically analysing their characterisations. Using the "Naming and Describing" tool, the analysis uncovers that politicians are predominantly depicted as adopting an assertive stance on warfare, shaped by the actions they have publicly committed to pursue.

Rashid and Jameel (2017) applied Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) framework to analyse political discourse, specifically examining speeches from Barack Obama's 2012 presidential campaign and David Cameron's address at the Conservative Party Conference. The study

aimed to reveal the linguistic choices underlying both Obama's and Cameron's speeches through Halliday's model. Their findings indicated that material processes predominantly shape these speeches, underscoring the speakers' efforts to forge a stronger connection with their audiences. Additionally, simple sentence structures were found to be the most frequently used, highlighting a preference for directness in their communication style.

Hussein (2024) explores the concept of the sentence in stylistic studies, tracing its origins from classical and modern grammarians, as well as from linguists, particularly modern linguists who played a pivotal role in the development of stylistics. The study examines differing perspectives on this concept between Western and Arab scholars. The research is organised into three main sections following the introduction: the first section addresses the concept and structure of the sentence according to grammarians, the second examines these elements from the perspective of linguists, and the third analyses the sentence's concept and structure in stylistic studies. The conclusion summarises the key findings of the research.

The distinctiveness of the present study within the field of cognitive stylistics—and especially in relation to previous work addressing Halliday's metafunctions—lies in its examination of extracts from actual novels, focusing on linguistic features that facilitate NU. Unlike previous research, Simpson's (2014) analysis seeks to identify passages anticipated to be narratively urgent and then examines these selections using Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to uncover their defining attributes. This study will be restricted to one feature of NU which is the sentence types that create it.

2. Methodology

3.1 Data collection

This study analyses selected passages using Simpson's (2014) cognitive stylistic framework. The extracts, chosen from Dan Brown's thriller *The Lost Symbol* (2009), exemplify key narrative strategies characteristic of the thriller genre, where NU is anticipated to build tension and engagement. According to Simpson (2014), a quickened narrative pace is integral to sustaining suspense and drawing readers into the progression of events, encouraging a swift reading experience. The selected extracts capture crucial, fast-paced moments that introduce significant developments, propelling the story toward pivotal turning points.

3.2 Data analysis

According to Simpson (2014), analysing the attributes of pace acceleration within a text necessitates the examination of a combination of features. However, this study focuses exclusively on the sentence types of the selected extracts. After the selection of extracts that are expected to exhibit NU, they undergo a qualitative textual analysis to substantiate this claim. Subsequently, this analysis was reinforced through quantitative analysis. Each extract underwent scrutiny within the framework of Halliday's textual metafunction. It delved into the clausal structure of that extract, identifying sentence types and any employed conjunctions.

2.3 Findings and Discussion

This study has selected five passages from *The Lost Symbol* for an in-depth analysis using Halliday's three metafunctions. The analysis outcomes are consistent with Simpson's (2014) description of NU, particularly in terms of elements that contribute to NU. Each passage displays characteristics that align with Simpson's (2014) criteria for

increasing narrative speed, and one of these features is the types of the sentences that the writer uses to create NU.

An analysis of clausal structures in five extracts has been conducted, as detailed in Table (1) below, which specifically examines the coordination structures utilsed within each extract. The table presents the percentage of each coordination type relative to the total instances of coordination found. The first column labels the individual extracts under analysis. The second column provides the count of simple sentences within each extract that lack coordinating conjunctions. In the third column, instances of coordination are shown that omit coordinating conjunctions, relying instead on punctuation (such as a comma) or natural pauses within the sentence structure. The fourth column lists instances where coordinating conjunctions (such as *and*, *or*, *but*) are used in a paratactic structure to link independent clauses. The fifth column displays coordinations that employ subordinating conjunctions within a hypotactic structure, thereby linking independent clauses with dependent ones. Finally, the last column indicates the percentage of sentence types that contribute to NU in each extract, focusing on the first three extracts. In the last row of this column, the cumulative use of clausal structures promoting NU across all five extracts is presented. The table shoes that the clausal structures that the selected extracts employ support NU and do align with this feature of NU.

Table 1. Sentence Types in the Selected Extracts

The Textual Metafunction in the English Data					
Structure Types	Simple	Asyndetically coordinated	Paratactically coordinated	Hypotactically coordinated	Total No. and Percentages
Extract One					
Frequencies	3	7	3	1	13/ 14
Percentages	%21.42	%50	%21.42	%7.14	%92.84
Extract Two					
Frequencies	11	6	0	1	17/ 18
Percentages	%61.11	%33.33	%0	%5.55	%94.44
Extract Three					
Frequencies	8	11	1	1	20/ 21
Percentages	%38.09	%52.38	%4.76	%4.76	%95.23
Extract Four					
Frequencies	7	3	2	2	12/14
Percentages	%50	%21.42	%14.28	%14.28	%85.7
Extract Five					
Frequencies	9	5	2	4	16/ 20
Percentages	%45	%25	%10	%20	%80

The frequent use of simple sentences, asyndetic coordination, and paratactic structures with coordinating conjunctions in a narrative passage plays a crucial role in enhancing readability and reinforcing a heightened sense of urgency within the story. Simple sentences, with their clarity and brevity, make the plot more accessible, allowing readers to easily comprehend character actions and events. This straightforward approach is particularly effective for presenting crucial events or details without unnecessary complexity, thus promoting a smooth, engaging reading flow.

Asyndetic coordination, which links independent clauses without conjunctions, further intensifies the narrative's pace. This technique conveys an uninterrupted sequence of actions or events, amplifying tension and creating an immediate, high-stakes atmosphere. The lack of conjunctions mirrors the rapid progression of events, effectively simulating an urgent scenario within the story. Meanwhile, sentences joined by

coordinating conjunctions like "and," "or," and "but" provide balance and structure within the text. They allow for the presentation of connected ideas or actions, crafting a rhythmic progression that underscores significant details or moments in the plot.

In the selected extracts, this structural approach is particularly evident. For instance, when central events unfold—especially those revealing key aspects of a character's identity—the writer often adopts a simplified clausal structure. In passages disclosing a character's true nature, readers are driven by curiosity to understand the motivations behind this persona and eagerly following the narrative. This carefully structured language maintains reader engagement and accentuates narrative urgency by spotlighting pivotal moments in the story, sustaining suspense and inviting readers to anticipate what follows.

When subordinating conjunctions are employed to form dependent clauses, they add complexity to sentence structure. This complexity requires readers to process multiple layers of clauses, often demanding greater cognitive effort and time. Additionally, subordinating conjunctions establish sequences or causal relationships, prompting readers to follow a logical flow of ideas or events. This logical progression may decelerate reading pace, as each step must be mentally processed. Subordinating conjunctions also introduce a structural hierarchy, compelling readers to track both the main clause and its subordinate counterpart. Such hierarchical structuring increases cognitive load, which can further slow down the reading speed. Moreover, sentences with subordinating clauses often contain essential information that readers need to integrate with the main clause to achieve full comprehension. This requirement for deeper integration can contribute to slower reading rates.

3. Conclusions

Simpson (2014) posits that variations in NU across a narrative arise from multiple factors, one of which is the structural composition of the text itself. Drawing on Halliday's (2004) textual metafunction, Simpson examines the structural features that contribute to NU in certain passages. Unlike prior studies that use specially crafted texts, Simpson's analysis uniquely applies to five authentic extracts from published novels. His work stands out because it grounds its findings in real narrative samples rather than experimental constructs.
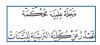
These extracts undergo a detailed textual analysis, particularly with regard to Halliday's textual metafunction. The analysis reveals that the clause structures within these passages predominantly feature simple sentences, asyndetically coordinated clauses, and paratactic arrangements with coordinating conjunctions. Such structural choices not only improve readability but also enhance the narrative's pace, providing a sense of accelerated flow.

In sum, the prevalence of simple clause structures contributes to NU. These elements streamline the reading experience, propel the plot forward, amplify emotional intensity, and cultivate a sense of suspense. Altogether, they significantly enhance the text's narrative urgency, ensuring that readers remain engaged and eager to continue.

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