

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE IN TONI MORRISON'S *PARADISE*

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Abstract

Stylistics is a discipline that is found in both language and literature. It is a platform that is used in the analysis of a text via the instrument of language. The aim of this paper is to analyse the use of different types of sentences by Toni Morrison in Paradise. A sentence consists of a subject and a predicate. It is a basic unit of English grammar. This study adopts Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as highlighted by Halliday (1985 and 1994) as the theoretical base of the work. The theory is suited for this work because it specifically looks at language as a whole system of choices existing in complex structural relations. This study uses the qualitative and quantitative methods of analyses to analyse the selected lexico-syntactic features of Morrison's selected work. The findings of this study among others reveal that, Morrison uses more simple sentences than compound and complex sentences in her novel.

Keywords: Stylistics, Sentence, Emergence and Development, Style, Lexico-syntactic,

Introduction

A sentence is the basic unit of English grammar. It consists of a subject and a predicate. A sentence can contain many elements but there must always be a verb. The other elements that may be found in a sentence besides subject and verb are objects, adverbials or adjectivals. Tomori (1977:19) is of the opinion that:

The sentence is one of the most difficult linguistic terms to define; this is partly due to the fact that an all-inclusive definition of any concept is almost impossible

to achieve, and partly because it is virtually impossible to combine the distinctive features of a written and a spoken sentence in the same definition.

However, despite this difficulty, some scholars have defined the sentence using many variables. Francis (1958) emphasizes on phonic substance of a sentence when he argues that “a sentence is as much of the uninterrupted utterance of a single speaker as is included either between the beginning of the utterance and the pause which ends a sentence-final contour or between two such pauses” (cited in Tomori 1977). In addition, Bloomfield (1933) lays emphasis on grammatical independence of the sentence when he asserts that, “each sentence is an independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form” (cited in Tomori 1977). What these definitions have in common is that a sentence can be defined using many variables but bearing in mind its independent nature.

Stylistics is a discipline that is found at the intersection of literary criticism and linguistics. Its application can be used in the study of journalism, popular texts, religious works, advertising, non-fiction, popular culture, politics, etc. According to Paul (2004: 3) “The preferred object of study in stylistics is literature, whether that be institutionally sanctioned 'literature' as high art or more popular 'non-canonical' forms of writing”. In addition, Paul (2004:2) further postulates that “stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language”. As a conceptual field of discourse, stylistics tries to establish and explain the different choices people make in the use of language in their writings. This is a common feature which is discernible in the search for dialogue, grammar, the use of active and passive voice, the distribution of sentences, i.e. simple, compound or complex, the use of registers and other language devices that depict the style of the writer.

Ullman (1971:133) is of the opinion that “Stylistics is not a mere branch of linguistics, but, a parallel discipline which investigates the same phenomena from its own point of view”. Stylistics therefore, is “that part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the use of language often but not exclusively, with special attention to the most conscious and complex use of language in literature”, Turner (1973:7). In view of this, the present study analyses how Toni Morrison used different types of sentences in her narration. What are the unique stylistic techniques at the lexico-syntactic level employed by Morrison in expressing the myriad of problems, social and cultural differences as well as difficulties and racial tendencies exhibited in the selected work? It is based on these very crucial aspects of communication between the characters that this study anchors the analysis of data.

About the book

Paradise (1997) is a book set in Ruby a fictional township in Oklahoma in the 1970s. The novel depicts a community’s struggle between its past, present and what the future holds. After the American Civil War, many African-Americans migrated to the West of the country in search of better living conditions. However, besides looking for a better life, they were also trying to isolate themselves from white segregation.

The characters in the novel try to create a community free from evils that are prevalent in the outside world. They want a community that is like paradise. But, the utopian community they desire could not be achieved because of the human capacity to wrought evil. Moreover, their sought –after community can only be achieved if human beings are perfect. The clamor for racial purity, unity, harmony and love, though desirable in any society, is sometimes a mirage that can only be wished. This is attested by how the community falls apart by disallowing American Indians, whites and light-skinned African-Americans into their midst and also their

inability to come to terms with what they mean by love. Does love mean what happens between a man and a woman? Or is it between a woman and a woman? How do women view a patriarchal society? The inability of the people in Ruby to come to terms with this leads to the creation of two different worlds in the book: the town of Ruby led by the men and the Convent which serves as a sanctuary for women who run away from men and cherish the freedom they have as well as challenge the patriarchal dominance in the society. With this development, it is only a matter of time before the inevitable happen. The men from Ruby decide to launch an attack against the five women (one is white) in the Convent because they represent what the people resent, that is, white people and light-skinned blacks. The men enter the Convent and “shoot the white girl first. With the rest [of the women] they can take their time.” (p. 3). With these developments, *Paradise* encapsulates a community that portrays good and evil, righteousness, uprightness, love and hatred, violence and wickedness. It is a community polarized between greed, jealousy, lies, murder, adultery and above all a search for freedom and emancipation.

Emergence and Development of Stylistics

The concept of style as a field of study is not a recent phenomenon. It has been in existence from ancient times. Ancient scholars like Aristotle, Cicero, Demetrius and Quintilian consider style as indispensable to thought (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2013). Rhetoric has a profound influence on styles and that is why prominent Greeco-Roman orators always feature in the discourse of styles. Arnold (1974:2 quoted in Babajide 2000) argues that: “The standard of speech which Cicero set in Latin oratory and which Augustine set in Latin preaching were the rhetorical models of Europe for a thousand years after their own times”.

Consequently, stylistics which is widely seen as an offshoot of rhetoric for more than two millennia was the exclusive preserve for

training educated men (Stockwell, 2000). Stylistics overlaps (Babajide 2000) with elocution in classical rhetoric because it uses style to achieve appropriate effect. In addition, Babajide (2000:122) further remarks that:

Elocution is the third of the five stages that are involved in the development of an oration; and, in fact, it is the essence of any discourse-spoken or written-because it is concerned with the style of speaking persuasively and effectively. It is reasonable to claim that stylistics as a discipline emanated from the elocution of classical rhetoric. This is well established in the fact that it is extremely difficult to talk about style without necessarily traversing the threshold of rhetoric. The two phenomena are so intertwined that we constantly run into the definition of the one while defining the other.

Rhetoric as a discipline has dual purposes. It is involved with linguistic form as well as appropriateness of form in a given context. The context is specifically aligned to the spoken form, even though rhetoric was also extended to forms of writing (Alan 1974 quoted in Babajide 2000). From the time of Aristotle up to the Renaissance period, different devices of style were documented. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2000):

The essayist or orator is expected to frame his ideas with the help of model sentences and prescribed kinds of “figures” suitable to his mode of discourse. Modern stylistics uses the tools of formal linguistic analysis coupled with the methods of literary criticism; its goal is to try to isolate characteristic uses and functions of language and rhetoric rather than advance normative or prescriptive rules and patterns.

However, the notion of style as espoused above contrasts with the ideas developed by stylisticians like Charles Bally (1865-1947), the Swiss philologist, and Leo Spitzer (1887-1960), the Austrian literary critic. The use of style in language according to them:

...arises from the possibility of choice among alternative forms of expression, as for example, between “children,” “kids,” “youngsters,” and “youths,” each of which has a different evocative value. This theory emphasizes the relation between style and linguistics, as does the theory of Edward Sapir, who talked about literature that is form-based (Algernon Charles Swinburne, Paul Verlaine, Horace, Catullus, Virgil, and much of Latin literature) and literature that is content-based (Homer, Plato, Dante, William Shakespeare) and the near untranslatability of the former (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2000).

In 1909, Charles Bally published his seminal work **Traité de stylistique** française which facilitated the adoption of stylistics as a separate discipline to assess literary work. This was meant to complement Ferdinand De Saussure’s concept of linguistics (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2000). Saussure’s linguistics according to Bally (1909) is inadequate to “describe the language of personal expression”. However, the development of stylistics according to Fowler (1980) can be attributed to “three direct influences: Anglo-American literary criticism; the emerging field of linguistics; and European, especially French, structuralism”.

New criticism is a term coined from the title of a book written by John Crowe Ransom *The New Criticism* (1941). It refers to the post-World War 1 literary critical theory of the Anglo-American. Prominent scholars and seminal works of this school of thought include I. A. Richards (*Practical Criticism*, 1929), William Empson (*Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1930), and T. S. Eliot’s critical essays “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1917) and “Hamlet and His Problems” (1919), (Griffith 1990). Other prominent figures of New Criticism include

Cleanth Brooks, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Penn Warren, and W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. The fundamental technique used by the proponents of this theory is subjecting a text to close analytic reading. The main thrust of the theory therefore, is that a work of art has an independent meaning without resort to anything outside the text. According to Griffith (1990:139):

The New Critics break dramatically with the nineteenth-century emphasis on historical and biographical background. They hold that understanding and appreciating a work of literature need have no connection with the author's intention, with the author's life, or with the social and historical circumstances that may have influenced the author. Everything the reader needs to understand and appreciate a work is in the work itself.

Consequently, the New Critical style espouses that in analysing a passage of prose, poetry or any given text, careful scrutiny of the passage is required. This will entail identifying elements like rhyme, meter, plot, characterization, setting, paradox, ambiguity, irony, etc. All these features will assist the reader to know the theme and also establish the unity of the work. These postulations by Griffith readily come handy when considered in relation to this study which focuses on the stylistic analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Paradise*. To make a thorough stylistic analysis of the works, it is expedient to examine as well as highlight the various linguistic devices employed therein.

Theoretical Framework

This research adopts Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as the theoretical base of the work. This model of grammar was propounded by Halliday (1985 and 1994). He was in the forefront amongst scholars who were regarded as followers of J. R. Firth. They

steered the theoretical perspective away from its earlier position of ‘scale and category’ to what came to be known as ‘systemic functional’. The term ‘systemic’ emanates from the claim that language has a network of systems. According to Farinde et al. (2015: 89):

The model looks at language as a whole system of choices existing in complex structural relations. By this, it means a system in which the choice of one thing dictates the choice of another. In the model, the notion of ‘constituency’ is vital to the analysis of grammatical structures.

Similarly, Eggins (1994: 37) postulates further the idea of constituency that “constituency simply means that things are made up of or built out of other things”. In essence, this refers to the relationship between structural elements that combine to make a meaningful sentence.

To achieve a grammatical analysis of a sentence, Halliday (1994: 17) argues that “When we take into account wordings of more than minimal length and complexity, there is the need for constituency analysis since some more structures are involved. This could be done through the use of constituency bracketing and functional labelling/tree diagramming.

Methodology/ Research Instrument

Sources of Data

The main data for this study is derived from Morrison’s, *Paradise*. The data selected include the types of sentences and their functions in the novel. *Paradise* is a book that is set in Ruby in the 1970s. The themes centre along love, purity and uprightness. It is a struggle between America’s past, present and what the future envisages.

Sample and sampling technique

This research adopted a simple random sampling technique in the analysis of the data. This technique was used in order to avert many problems which include: many and different types of sentences and sentence word order. Consequently, data was selected in the following way: *Paradise* has chapters and data was selected from all the chapters.

Method of Data Collection

This research selected Morrison's *Paradise* out of her many works because the novel is about America's reconstruction after the abolition of slave trade. We sourced the data for this study the selected text using a non-probability sampling technique. Sentences formed the basis of a novel. Morrison's work has different types of sentences. The random sampling technique is used in the selection of types of sentences because it is very difficult to analyse the whole work bearing in mind the thousands of sentences in the novel.

Analytic Procedure

Analytic Procedure

In this research, the qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis are used to analyse the utterances in the selected text. According to Xavier (2012) and Brick and Green (2007), these type analysis is about conversations, interviews and reflections as well as numerical and statistical explanations.

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of *Paradise* focused on the types of sentences used by Morrison. The study used the SFG model of analysis propounded by Halliday (1985 and 1994). The work also used the Functional labeling/Tree diagramming to analyse the types of sentences used by the writer in *Paradise*.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The study analyses the lexico-syntactic features of Toni Morrison's selected novels using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative method is mainly concerned with conversations, interviews and reflections whereas quantitative method deals with numerical and statistical explanations.

The Functional labeling/ Tree diagramming is used in examining the structural elements of sentences that Morrison used in *Paradise*. This is the best way to explain the how the various constituting elements are used to produce a meaningful whole. In Systemic Functional Grammar, the clause is made up of the following elements:

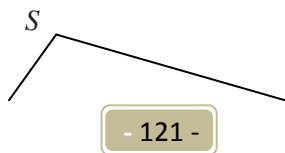
Subject (S); Predicator (P); Complement (C) and Adjunct (A).

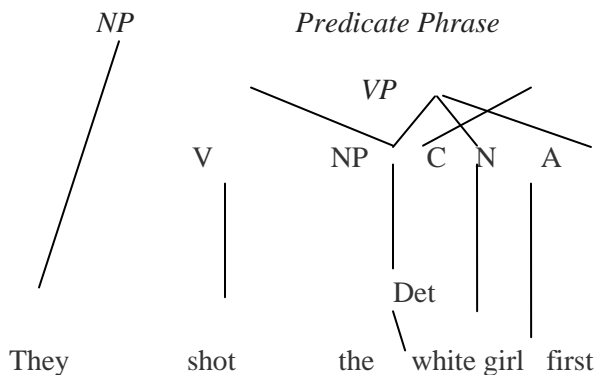
Use of simple sentences in *Paradise*

A simple sentence is also called a clause. It contains a subject and a predicate. A simple sentence can convey a statement (declarative), question (interrogative), command or exclamation.

1. "They shot the white girl first" (p. 3).
2. "He carried the equipment box through the dining-room" (p. 53)
3. "You can't stay here by yourself"(p. 97).
4. "I feel better now"(p. 177).
5. "I can't help you"(p. 239).

This sentence can be analysed using the Functional Labelling/ Tree Diagramming in the following way:





In Systemic Functional Grammar, the clause can either be alpha (α) or beta (β). The alpha clause refers to a clause that can stand alone and make sense while the beta clause cannot and has to rely on the alpha clause for its meaning. All the simple sentences above are alpha clauses (see the analysis on complex sentences for information on beta clause).

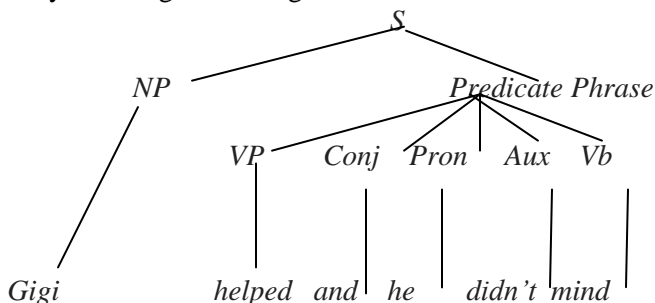
Use of Compound Sentences in Paradise

A compound sentence consists of two or more clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. A compound sentence with more than two clauses can be separated like a list and the last clause joined by a coordinating conjunction.

1. "They are nine, over twice the number of the women they are obliged to stampede or kill and they have the paraphernalia for either requirement: rope, a palm leaf cross, handcuffs, mace and sunglasses, along with clean, handsome guns" (3).
2. "Gigi helped him and he didn't mind" (p. 67).

3. “In any case, they weren’t much help, but she enjoyed the waves of raw horniness slapping her back as she walked off down the street” (p. 67).

“She knelt and emptied the sack” (p. 92) has two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. This sentence can be structurally analysed using a tree diagram:



In Systemic Functional Grammar a compound sentence has two alpha clauses, that is, two independent clauses.

α α
Gigi helped and he didn't mind

In addition, there are also variations in the structural elements of the clause in the above sentence, for example:

The first clause contains 2 structural elements of the clause:

S P
Gigi helped

Whereas, the second clause contains 3 structural elements of the clause:

S P C
He/ didn't mind.

Use of Complex Sentence in Paradise

A complex sentence has one main clause and one or more subordinate or dependent clause (s). The subordinate or dependent clause relies on the main clause for its meaning and the two clauses are joined by a coordinating conjunction, for example:

1. “The house he lives in is big, comfortable, and this town is resplendent compared to his birthplace, which had gone from feet to belly in fifty years” (p. 5).
2. “Bowed her head, closed her eyes, but when she faced him with a quiet “Amen,” he felt as though his relationship with the God he spoke to was vague or too new, while hers was superior, ancient and completely sealed” (p. 62).

The following sentence has two beta clauses and one alpha clause:

β β

α

“Bowed her head, closed her eyes,/ but when she faced him with a quiet “Amen,”/ he felt as though his relationship with the God he spoke to was vague or too new, while hers was superior, ancient and completely sealed” (p. 62),

The analysis also shows that the beta clauses have different functions:

“Bowed her head, closed her eyes” is an adverbial clause of manner, followed by a coordinating conjunction (but) while “...when she faced him with a quiet “Amen” is a relative clause.

Table 6: Frequency of use of Sentence Types

TYPE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Simple sentence	5	50
Compound sentence	3	30
Complex sentence	2	20
Total	10	100%

The above table simple sentence has the highest percentage of 50% followed by compound sentence with 30% while complex sentence has 20%.

FINDINGS

The random sampling technique used to analyse the data shows that 10 different types of sentences were examined. Morrison uses different types of sentences like simple, compound, and complex in her narration. This style shows that Morrison is not so rigid as to adopt one type of sentence. It also indicates the diversity of the characters use of language. The syntactic analysis reveals that, in *Paradise*, simple sentence has the highest frequency of occurrence which is 5 or 50%, followed by compound sentence with 3 or 30% and complex sentence with 2 or 20%.

Conclusion

Stylistics is a discipline that conveniently shelters language and literature. The discipline has afforded many analysts the platform to analyse the use of language in texts. The development of Stylistics from ancient times to the present, has afforded stylisticians the opportunity to critically examine and critique works of art be it a novel, drama or poetry. In addition, the discipline has also paved way to highlight the style of various writers, poets and playwrights.

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