

A Stylistic Study of the Use of Complex Sentences in Poe's The Black Cat

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Abstract:- The present study aims at showing the significance of using complex sentences as a stylistic feature in literary works. Specifically, it is concerned with analysing the use of complex sentences in *The Black Cat* by Edgar Allan Poe. The paper sheds lights on the stylistically useful uses of such kinds of sentences in this short story as a means of conveying ideas, depicting characters and relating events which are central to the story. The analysis is based on Leech and Short model (1981) as far as the analysis of complex sentences and their other components is concerned. It is concluded that by means of complex sentences, Poe conveys his multiple ideas and shows various aspects of the characters involved, in addition to their useful exploitation in the major events in the story.

Keywords: *complex sentence, style, The Black Cat, express, main ideas, clauses*

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is the most significant means by which communication at various levels is achieved. Literary works are one of the forms of language use, and, hence, they utilize language in a way or another for the accomplishments of such works. But what distinguishes literary works from each other is the style that each writer follows to achieve certain purposes when writing, for example, a poem a novel or any other literary work. The current paper is an attempt to investigate how a certain kind of language structure is used in literary work to convey ideas and express various literary aspects. Specifically, the study deals with the significance of complex sentences in the short story *The Black Cat* by Poe. Complex sentences are one of the grammatical structures which their stylistic use in short story can be looked at as a stylistic indication of a writer. In fact, the use of complex sentences might be considered to a greater extent a stylistic feature which is used by Poe for certain literary purposes. This study aims at spotting the significance of complex sentences in Poe's *The Black Cat* using Leech and Short model (1981) in the analysis of complex sentences as a stylistic variation in fiction.

II. AN OVERVIEW OF COMPLEX SENTENCES

A complex sentence consists of only one main clause plus one or more subordinate clauses functioning as elements in the sentence (Garcia, 2002) as in: "she telephoned while you were out". Subordination, as Wright and Hope (1996:140) state, "allows sentences to be expanded almost indefinitely with extra clauses and ideas. Subordinate clauses are very often used in grammar to describe a hierarchic structure of clauses within the complex sentence which has at least two clauses: a main clause and (one or more) subordinate clauses". Similarly, Quirk et. al. (1985) state that a complex sentence has two or more clauses, one of which can stand by itself as a complete and meaningful sentence and it is called the main clause. The other is dependent on the main clause, it is called the subordinate clause as in: "Everyone could see that he was frightened" where the subordinate clause starts from 'that' which is embedded in 'Everyone could see' which is the main clause. Strumph and Douglas (1999: 341) point out that "the main clause expresses the principal idea of the statement," and that "the subordinate clause expresses an enhancing or modifying idea; its role is to support the main clause." The subordinate clause is connected to the main clause by the use of a subordinating conjunction such as *as, if, that, etc.* Complex sentences, in general, consist of a number of clauses, these clauses are of various types and have different functions in the sentence. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:310) classify clauses into three types: finite, non-finite and verbless clauses. A finite clause is that whose verb element is a finite verb phrase. This type includes simple sentences: 'John has visited New York'. A non-finite clause is one whose verb element is a non-finite verb as in 'Having seen the pictures, he ...' A verbless clause is a clause which contains no verb element: 'Although always helpful, he...' What can be observed from the explanation of complex sentences in relation to fiction is the fact that the main clause expresses the main idea of the entire sentence and the other dependent clauses express more details concerning this main idea. In other words, they add expressive information and more details to the main clause.

III. MODEL AND CORPUS OF ANALYSIS

The style of using complex sentences and how they express various literary themes in the chosen short story is based on Leech and Short (1981) who define style as the way in which language is used. They demonstrate that complex sentences are mainly due to subordination as it is the major device for linking ideas together in a complex sentence. The co-authors maintain that such sentences are preferable if the aim of the writer is to present a complex structure of ideas. Thus, a complex structure gives and withholds information and subordinates those of extra information. In general, clauses are divided into main and subordinate. The subordinate clauses are divided into finite, non-finite and verbless clauses. Once again, a central point to the style used in the Black Cat is the fact that the main clause only states the main idea restrictively and the other subordinate clauses express more details concerning the themes, characters and events of The Black Cat. The other significant point to be stated is that the data to be analysed are going to be specific sentences taken from The Black Cat. In other words the corpus of data analysis is certain sentences, which are certainly those which are complex one. The story edition is a web edition (2014).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Before embarking in the data analysis, it is very significant to have a brief introduction to this short story. Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Black Cat," was first published in the United States Saturday Post in 1843. Poe considered it one of his best tales, and it was immediately popular. The story was reprinted in Poe's Tales in 1845 and has rarely, if ever, been out of print since. The Black Cat is a horrifying story of animal abuse and murder, told in the first person by a man who undergoes an alarming change of character. When he was young he was gentle-natured and kind to animals, but in adulthood he fell into drunkenness. He abused and then killed his pet cat, and then murdered his long-suffering wife. The story is at once a chilling tale that is hard to put down and a psychological study of an extremely disturbed mind (James, 1963). As such, the use of the complex sentences in the story can be considered a distinguished style which expresses and which are proper to the complex themes and events of the story. From the first sentence, it can be noticed that Poe's uses complex sentence to express the main idea along with its subordinate clause which express more details concerning the main event 'FOR the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief'. The main clause 'I neither expect nor solicit belief' shows the main idea that the writer focuses on. On the other hand, the subordinate clause 'which I am about to pen' is used as an effective style to express more details about the main idea; the expectation of not believing what is going to be told by the narrator. In another instance, the subordinate clause in the sentence 'Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind', which is a non-finite clause, expresses the idea that the narrator was fond of pets and this is a main event in the story.

The sentence 'I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity', to a large extent, expresses one of the main ideas in the Black Cat through the main clause 'I blush, I burn, I shudder', which is the dreadful action of the story, at the same time, the subordinate clause 'while I pen the damnable atrocity' reveals the narrator's inner agony and this gives more depicting to the main character of the novel. So the main clauses and the subordination they have play a major role in expressing the main events and depicting the main character of the story. One of the most important components of the story is the plot which shows how the story starts, develops and end. As far as the style of using complex sentences in the story, it is possible to notice that they are also used to show the plot of the story and at the same time relating the events of the story as when the narrator says 'This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but I know not how or why it was' as the clause 'what I had anticipated' reveals that the main character is in a tragic situation specially when using the word 'reverse' in the main clause and the word 'anticipated' in the subordinate clause reflecting two contradictory situations. In some instances, the style that Poe uses in his story as far as the use of complex sentences is concerned, utilizes sentences which contain many subordinate clauses in one main clause as in the sentence 'Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished'. This is perhaps a very complex kind of sentence as far as the number of clauses that it contain and, hence the number of ideas that it expresses. First of all, the non-finite clause 'Uplifting an axe' expresses a very important turning point in the story which leads later on to the brutal action of murder and the remorse finally. Another subordinate clause is 'forgetting the childish dread' which also followed by another dependent clause which modifies it 'which had hitherto stayed me hand'. A third one is 'which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal' which is also concerned with describing the brutal event around which the plot revolves. So the subordinate clauses that Poe uses are of great significance since they are concerned with depicting more details and arising more interpretations in the entire story. The latter sentence is a very clear instance of the way that Poe follows in developing the summary and the main events relying heavily on the various types of the clauses as they are the most proper reflection of the complex ideas in the story. The style of using complex sentences to express the main events and depicting all details about the character might be considered significant in a story like The

Black Cat since the story itself is very complex and deals with inner feeling and horrible situations. In fact, the use of the complex sentences by Poe is a reflection of the purposes that he is after; showing things in deep and interrelating events in a way that leaves many possible interpretations. Stylistically, this indicates that the modifying ideas in the subordinate clauses are of great significance since they describe the main ideas in the main independent clauses. Consequently, the stylistic analysis of the use of complex sentences along with the various types of clauses which they are made of reflects the complex ideas of the story. Stylistically speaking, complex ideas are reflected by the wide use of such types of sentences as the theme of the short story necessitates. The theme of the Black Cat which expresses the idea of a very strange individual who is emotionally undeveloped and unbalanced can be reflected by the use of complex sentences. The other important theme of the story is the brutal action and the remorse later on is also reflected by the use of complex sentences. As a result, the abundance of ideas in the complex sentence leads to the use of many clauses, whether main or subordinate ones.

V. CONCLUSION

The use of complex sentences in Poe's *The Black Cat* is the most significant style that he uses to express the main themes, depicting all related points of characters and showing the main events in the story. The complex sentences that the story is filled with vary according to the numbers and types of clauses that they are made up of. The essential component of the complex sentence, the main clause or the independent, reveals the idea, theme or event whereas the other subordinate clauses modify the main ones. The main stylistic function of the use of the complex sentences is to express what the writer intends to convey as far as the themes, events and characters are concerned. The relation between the structure of language and the purpose that it seeks can be clearly detected in Poe's *The Black Cat* by relating the use of the complex sentence to the literary purpose that the writer intends to achieve.

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