

**PALA**  
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Occasional Papers  
No. 4

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by  
Laura Hidalgo Downing

**PALA: The Poetics and  
Linguistics Association  
1994**

# Foregrounding of Structural Patterns and Mind-Style in Two Literary Texts

*Laura Hidalgo Downing, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid*

## Abstract

Taking as a point of departure the notion of foregrounding, I will argue that the different stylistic effects that can be appreciated in two literary texts from A. Sillitoe and W. Faulkner can be accounted for in great measure when considering the specific patterns of clause recursion that re-created in these texts. Furthermore, I will claim that, being consistent features throughout the fictional works I am analysing, the foregrounded features mentioned are key factors in the description of two very different mind-styles which reflect idiosyncratic uses of the language of the narrators in the texts described.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present a linguistic analysis of two literary texts in which structural patterns involving clause recursion can be said to account for different stylistic effects. For this purpose, I have selected two extracts, one from the novel *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* by A. Sillitoe, and the other from 'Pantaloon in Black', a short story by W. Faulkner, which will be analysed in detail. However, I will consider the stylistic effects that are present in the extracts as representative of the styles that can be said to characterise the language of the narrators in each of these fictional works.

For the linguistic analysis of the texts I will follow the systemic model (M. A. K. Halliday, 1985) and will also apply notions developed by stylisticians such as R. Fowler, G. Leech and M. Short which are relevant to the points I would like to make.

In the first place I will be working on the assumption that the patterns of clause recursion that I will describe are foregrounded features in the two texts. The notion of **foregrounding**, a term borrowed from the Prague School of Linguistics, is used by Leech and Short (1981: 48) to refer to 'artistically motivated deviation'.

They distinguish between **qualitative** foregrounding, which is 'a deviation from the language code itself' (1981: 48) – an example can be found in the poetry of e.e. cummings – and **quantitative** foregrounding, a deviance from an expected frequency' (1981: 48).

We will see that the two texts I will be analysing present mainly quantitative foregrounding involving clause recursion in the sentence structure. Leech and Short (1981: 43) point out the difficulties of measuring quantitative deviations in style, since, if strictly done, it would

suppose collecting an extensive corpus of what we would understand to be 'standard English' in a given context or situation, against which we would contrast the assumed deviations in particular texts. Since this operation is obviously impossible, I will be working rather on an intuitive basis, analysing the use of language in the texts in virtue of what Leech and Short (1981: 51-4) call the **relative norms** of the language, which in general terms refer to what is usually expected linguistically in a given context or situation.

Since it is an intuitive method that can only bring evidence up to a certain point and in a limited area, I do not wish to claim that the interpretations suggested are the only possible ones.

Finally, I will make a point of the relation between the concept of foregrounding and that of **mind-style** which is defined by Fowler in the following terms:

Cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another give rise to an impression of the world view, what I shall call a mind-style (1977: 76);

and also:

to refer to any distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual mental self (1977: 103).

This term is used mainly to account for the way in which the language of narrators and characters can be said to reflect the way they perceive reality or relate to it, for example, in the social context. A famous example is the language of Lok in Golding's *The Inheritors*, which was analysed in detail by Halliday (1985b). With reference to the two texts I am analysing I will suggest that the foregrounded features mentioned above are characteristic of the narrators' idiosyncratic uses of language throughout the two works and for this reason can be said to be key factors in the creation of two different mind-styles.

## 2. The Passages

### 2.1. Sillitoe's text

( $\alpha$  1) Now you'd think, and I'd think, and everybody with a bit of imagination would think, that we'd done as clean a job as could ever be done, that ( $\beta$  1) with the baker's shop being at least a mile from where we lived, ( $\beta$  2) and with not a soul having seen us, ( $\beta$  3) and what with the fog and the fact that we weren't more than five minutes in the place, that the coppers should never have been able to trace us. ( $\alpha$  2) But then, you'd be wrong, ( $\alpha$  3) I'd be wrong ( $\alpha$  4) and everybody else would be wrong, ( $\beta$  4) no matter how much imagination was diced out between us.



The text seems to present a contrast between features that characterise spoken, colloquial language on the one hand, and a complex structural pattern that is more typical of written, more formal varieties of language, on the other.

There are several features that characterise spoken versus written language: first, the use of co-ordination. Extensive use of co-ordination is usually said to be preferred in spoken language to subordination, since it 'simplifies the planning of sentence structure' (Leech and Short, 1981: 163). In the second place, we can notice other features, such as the first person narrative reinforced by direct address to the reader, with expressions such as 'you'd be wrong', 'you know', 'to tell you the truth', which are recurrent in the novel and which contribute to the conversational tone of the narration. Thirdly, there is the use of non-standard forms of the language, though no instances in the particular extract I am analysing. Throughout the novel we can find examples such as: the use of 'them' for the demonstrative 'those'; use of 'was' for 'were'; use of ungrammatical past participles, as in 'could have took', etc.

These features seem to go well with the colloquial character of the passage, but are even more striking if we consider the parallel structures and the lexical repetitions that seem to be so carefully arranged in the text. Also, and in spite of the predominance of paratactic relations, the length of sentence 1 and the inclusion of several subordinate and embedded clauses make it difficult to imagine that the passage could have been realised in spoken form.

Its rhetorical elaboration reminds us of a prepared speech, it is were not for the vocabulary used and the content of the text.

### **2.1.2. Mind-style and the social context**

The apparently paradoxical character of the text can be better understood if the reader has some previous knowledge of the novel and its main character, who is also the narrator: a young boy who is sent to Borstal after the theft he has been narrating just before the passage I am analysing. There is in the first page of the novel a sentence which I think is very significant for the understanding of the novel and this passage in particular:

cunning is what counts in this life, and even that you've got to use in the slyest way you can (17).

One thing he proves is that he actually *is* cunning, since, although hardly able to write, as he himself puts it (p. 13) he can handle language in a very effective way and successfully attract the reader's attention: it is the blending of the colloquial or conversational elements into a complex structure that makes the text so fascinating.

In general terms, and applying Fowler's notion to the mind-style of the narrator, we can describe it as being the instrument through which a 'world view' is given through the eyes of the narrator and main character from a social and personal perspective at the same time: it is the language and the world view of an uneducated young man, a potential criminal or outcast, who resorts to cunning as a means of protecting his integrity and individuality without giving in to external social pressures.

### 2.1.3. Analysis of text 1

This passage consists of two complex sentences:

1. Now you'd think...trace us.
2. But then...between us.

Sentence 1 is realised by an independent clause followed by three dependent clauses: the structure can be represented as follows:

$$\alpha 1 \rightarrow \beta 1 + \beta 2 + \beta 3$$

$\alpha 1$  is discontinuous, being interrupted by the three dependent clauses. Also, it presents a recursive SP pattern:

A:	Now
+ SP:	You'd think
+ SP:	(and) I'd think
+ SP:	(and) everybody would think
Od:	that we'd done...ever be done
+ Od:	that the coppers...trace us

The dependent clauses can be said to have the following structure:

β 1- SPACs:	with the baker's...lived
β 2- SPOd:	with not a soul...us
β 3- S:	what with the fog
β 3- S:	and the fact that...

place

β 1 and β 2 are non-finite ING clauses with expressed subject, while β 3 is realised by verbless clause introduced by 'what with', co-ordinated with a finite 'that' clause, also introduced by an ellipsed 'what with'.

Sentence 2 is realised by three independent clauses followed by a dependent one. The structure can be represented as follows:

$$\alpha 2 + \alpha 3 + \alpha 4 \rightarrow \beta 4,$$

where:

α 2 - SPC:	you'd be wrong
α 3 - SPC:	I'd be wrong
α 4 - SPC:	and everybody...wrong
β 4 - SPA:	no matter...us

We can conclude saying that the text presents a predominance of co-ordinated units, four of them being of the asyndetic type and five of them syndetic. The distribution of the clauses can be expressed in the following way:

- 1) Sentence 1: realised by one independent α clause dominating three co-ordinated subordinate β clauses.
- 2) Sentence 2: realised by three independent α clauses dominating a subordinate β clause.

## 2.2. Faulkner's text

(α 1) Then the trucks were rolling. (α 2) The air pulsed with the rapid beating of the exhaust and the whine and clang of the saw, (β 1) the trucks rolling one by one up to the skidway, (β 2) he mounting the trucks in turn (β 3) to stand balanced on the load he freed, (β 4) knocking the chocks out and (β 5) casting loose the shackle chains (β 6) and with his cant-hook squaring the sticks of cypress and gum and oak one by one to the incline (β 7) and holding them (β 8) until the next two men of his gang were ready to receive and guide them, (β 9) until the discharge of each truck became one long rumbling roar punctuated by grunting shouts and, as the morning grew and the sweat came, chanted phrases of song tossed back and forth. (α 3) He did not sing with them.

### 2.2.1. Foregrounded features and stylistic effect

The complexity of this passage is of a very different nature from that of Sillitoe's text, though it also has to do with clause recursion. The impression produced by this text might be compared to the visual impression of witnessing a complex situation. That is to say, a situation where several actions are taking place at the same time, as for example in a battlefield. Quirk (1962: 185) gives the example of the boy patting the dog that is wagging its tail. An observer would be able to take in the different actions at the same time, globally, whereas if he had to describe the scene he would have to order the different actions in a sequence. Faulkner, however, seems almost to overcome the restrictions imposed by the linearity of language. The description is a dynamic description where what is highlighted is not the sequence of the different actions but the duration and repetition of these actions over a period of time.

Actually, many of the actions are taking place simultaneously:

the air pulsed;  
the beating of the exhaust;  
the trucks rolling;  
he mounting the trucks;  
knocking the chocks out, etc.

In my opinion, the effect is achieved by the combination of two factors:

- a) the extensive recursion of clauses, mainly through hypotactic relationships;
- b) the recursion of VGs realised by either momentary verbs in non-finite forms or the progressive form or stative verbs. The recursion of VGs is obviously directly proportional to the recursion of clauses, so, in this sense we can say that this factor is conditioned by the first one. However, it is of great importance since it is the forms of the verbs that express the duration and repetition of the actions. The recursion of non-finite verb forms is particularly relevant since, quoting Halliday (1985: 183):

The non-finite or modalised verbal group has no deictic tense element (...) (that is what non-finite implies: not anchored in the here-& now).

It is the combination of these two aspects, extensive clause recursion or clause chaining, and the recursion of verb groups in non-finite forms, thus avoiding any stops or delimitations between the actions described, which enables us to see the scene as a whole, rather than as a sequenced union of different parts.

In addition, the recursion of embedded clauses highlights the complexity and detail of the scene, giving a kind of perspective in

depth of the description. The paraphrase of the text by a structure with shorter, simpler sentences would completely destroy these effects. The nature of the deviance of Faulkner's text then can be said to be linked to the use of extensive subordination and clause chaining in the sentence structure, to a degree that I am sure most speakers of the English language would consider 'not normal'. Givon (1983: 29) comments on the use of clause chaining in English: 'clause chaining is a stylistic option but probably of limited currency.' A reason for its limited use is that clause chaining, at least in the way Faulkner uses it, goes against the 'principle of memory' (Leech and Short, 1981: 231) in linguistic communication.

If a message is long and complex the receiver will have to make a greater effort to decode it than if it is segmented into shorter, simpler units. It is interesting to observe that this technique, which, however, is also exploited by other twentieth-century writers, is present not only in this short story but in most of Faulkner's works as one of the most distinctive features as a writer.

### **2.2.2. Mind-style and the process of consciousness**

Here we can talk of a mind-style where extensive use is made of descriptions of mental or visual experiences that seem to develop in depth rather than in length. Quoting Fowler (1977: 104): 'surface syntax is used to dramatise the structure of characters' and narrators' conscious thoughts'.

In the case of this short story, these descriptions seem to reflect the state of mind of the protagonist, a black worker at a saw-mill who has just lost his wife and tries to go on with his usual daily activities as if nothing really had happened. In this sense, the passages that reflect his train of thoughts and his perception of the world around him seem to deliberately avoid any kind of overt emotional reaction, thus anticipating the violent ending scene of the story. In the case of the passage I am analysing the protagonist himself is engulfed by the mechanical and repetitive character of the actions he is carrying out, as if that were the only aspect of reality he is conscious of. Faulkner's deliberate complexity and obscurity of have been said to be the result of a technique where language comes as close as is imaginable to the 'instantaneous complexities of consciousness itself' (see Beck, 1966: 63).

### **2.2.3. Analysis of text 2**

Proceeding with the same type of analysis, this passage consists of three sentences, of which 1 and 3 are simple sentences ('*Then the trucks were rolling*' and '*He did not sing with them*') and 2 is a complex sentence realised by the following clauses:

- α 2: the air...of the saw
- β 1: the trucks...to the skidway
- β 2: he mounting...in turn
- β 3: to stand...he freed
- β 4: knocking the chocks out
- β 5: and casting...chains
- β 6: and with him...the incline
- β 7: and holding them
- β 8: until the next...guide them
- β 9: until the discharge...back and forth

There are only three independent clauses, which in a way mark the opening and closing of the scene that is being described. The rest is a series of dependent clauses that are linked to one another either paratactically (β 2, β 4, β 5, β 6, β 7) or hypotactically (β 1, β 3, β 8, β 9).

The recursion of clauses is not limited to the sentence structure, as there are several examples of clauses embedded as postmodifiers in nominal group structures:

...to stand balanced on the load **he freed**;

...one long rumbling roar **punctuated by grunting shouts and chanted phrases.**

It is obvious that hypotactic relations, that is, relations of dependency, predominate over paratactic ones.

### 3. Conclusion

I have tried to show how clause recursion of two different types can be said to characterise a passage in novel y Sillitoe and another from a short story by Faulkner. In both cases I have assumed that the recursion of clauses in a certain pattern and reinforced by other factors produces an effect that would not be possible if such clause recursion were simplified.

Thus, in Sillitoe's text, the recursion of co-ordinated clauses allows an arrangement in a scheme of parallelisms that gives the text a highly structured quality, which contrasts with its colloquial character on the lexical level. In Faulkner's text, on the other hand, the recursion of subordinated clauses and clause chaining in combination with the recursion of non-finite verbal forms produces the effect of describing a complex situation as a whole rather than as a sequence of actions that are being repeated.

When considering the features of these two texts and comparing them to the general style of the works in which they appear, it must be said that in no way are they unique examples of such stylistic use. Rather, they exemplify the techniques used by the writers to represent the way in which the narrators relate to their own experiences, and for this reason we can talk of two different mind-styles: the first, where the narrator's language can be said to reflect social position and personal qualities, while the second can be said to reflect the process of perception of reality.

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For further information, contact:

Dr. Urszula Clark,  
University of Wolverhampton,

Castle View,  
Dudley DY1 3HR

email: [U.Clark@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:U.Clark@wlv.ac.uk)