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SENTENCE LENGTH AND COMPLEXITY IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S  
SHORT  
STORY "OLD MAN AT THE BRIDGE":  
A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS FOR TEACHERS OF LITERATURE

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**Asst. Prof. Dr. Wiaam A. Albayati, Mr. Khalid Jabir Hani.SENTENCE LENGTH AND COMPLEXITY IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S SHORTSTORY "OLD MAN AT THE BRIDGE": A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS FOR TEACHERS OF LITERATURE-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(7), 15040-15050. ISSN 1567-214x**

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### ABSTRACT

Stylistics is a widely used branch of linguistics in analysing literary works. It targets to identify the usages and meanings of literary texts and often attempts to discover the formal properties to show their significance in the interpretation and appreciation of such texts. The current study stylistically investigates Hemingway's "Old Man at the Bridge" with the aim of examining sentence length and sentences complexity. It ultimately aims to show the way the integration of linguistics within any literary text can be manipulated as a tool to reveal the message that may underlie texts. For analysing sentence length and complexity, Halliday's (1985) model has been used. The study has arrived at the fact that the variation in the length and complexity of sentences lead to elucidate the central ideas hidden in the story.

### INTRODUCTION

On the border between language and literature stands two different disciplines of appreciation and analysis: literary criticism and stylistics or linguistic approaches to style. For Crystal and Davy (1969: 10) one goal of stylistics is to make judgements, mainly critical, for good versus bad styles by analysing language habits with the aim of identifying, explaining and then classifying the linguistic features of a text. Some, like Verma (2015) believe that adopting stylistic approaches to teaching literature, for instance, could help examine and evaluate the language of the text for a better interpretation of meaning and intuitive acquisition of the text linguistic features and related literary

theories. Hence, stylistics might offer some critical and creative ways of thinking of a text as it might show how the language of literature is different from that of everyday life.

As a reaction against the subjectivity and impressionism of literary studies, stylistics, for Fish (1981: 33), aims at providing an objective account of the way language is used in literature. So, while linguistics in general and stylistics in particular, is concerned with identifying and categorising language elements being used in a text, literary studies comment on the quality and meaning in that text.

As the present paper is basically concerned with the way stylistic analyses serve a deeper and better understanding of the meaning and interpretation of a literary text, it investigates sentence length and complexity in one of Ernest Hemingway's short stories, "Old Man at the Bridge". It hypothesises that (1) there is a relationship between the sentences structure in the text of the short story and the intended themes of its author, (2) the formal properties of the story in general and the sentence length and complexity are so significant for both uncovering and proving the author's intentions behind writing his story, and (3) the stylistic analysis contributes to the interpretation and appreciation of the literary text.

To achieve this, Halliday's model (1985) is used. It is believed that Halliday's treatment of sentence as a clause complex can best account for the functional organization of sentences in terms of sentence types, whether simple, complex, mixed, and short or long and of sentences inherent meta-functions especially the ideational functions.

It is hoped that the present paper would be useful for students of literature in general and to those of the departments of English Language and Literature at the university level in particular. It gives them some insight on how the stylistic analysis of literary texts and showing the relationship between forms and functions contribute to realising and grasping the hidden ideas and thoughts of such texts. It is also hoped to be useful for teachers of literature, critics as well as linguists.

### **THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

According to Widdowson (1975: 3-6), stylistics is "the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation". He states that stylistics is not self-sufficient but a mixture of both linguistics and literary criticism. Even the term *stylistics* suggests that its first part, *style*, indicates a literary term of criticism while the second part refers to linguistics. Hence, whereas the linguist's concern is to find out the way a literary work represents the language system, the critic's is to unfold the underlying significance embodied in that literary work. Thus, a linguist treats a piece of literature as a text, while a critic treats it as a message; two different views work cooperatively to uncover the intended meaning of the author. Stylisticians, accordingly, endeavour to clarify how a piece of literature functions as a form of communication, i.e., they treat literature as discourse. Agreeing with Widdowson (ibid), Carter

(1989: 161) considers stylistics to be a bridge between linguistics and literature.

For Leech and Short (1981: 13), stylistics is a linguistic study of style which rarely undertakes analysis for its own sake. It is simply an exercise in describing what use is made of language". So, to them, as stylistics is a means of connecting language to artistic functions, the linguist's task is to answer the question, "why does the author here choose to express himself in this particular way?"; meanwhile, the critic supposedly aims to show the way such an aesthetic effect is achieved through language. This goes in line with Wales (2001: 10) who believes that the stylistics' major goal is not merely to provide a description of the formal features of a literary text for its own sake, but to show the functional significance of such features for the interpretation of that text, i.e., to closely relate the literary effects to their linguistic causes wherever felt relevant. Whereas Verdonk (2002: 3) defines stylistics as studying style in a language, Simpson (2004: 2) deepens this study to be a means 'of textual interpretation' wherein priority is assigned to that language. Language here dominates due to the fact that the various forms and their patterns and levels of linguistic structure of a text represent very important indexes of the functions of that text.

## **THE PRACTICAL PART**

### ***3.1 Summary of the Story***

The setting is a place in the countryside during the Spanish Civil War. An old man with glasses sits very tired by the side of the road close to a floating bridge that crosses a river. Rustic refugees and Republican soldiers overloaded with ammunitions and provisions escape from the advancing Fascist army. The storyteller, who says that his task is to cross the bridge and find out how far the enemy has advanced, does so and finds the old man who was sitting near the bridge when he crossed toward the enemy still sitting there when he crosses back.

He begins talking to the old man and concludes that his birthplace is San Carlos; he was the last person to leave the town, as he was worried about some animals of his own. (Evans and Wang, 2010)

The relator, apprehensively awaiting the arrival of the Fascist army and the resultant battle between the armies, asks the old man about the animals. The old man says he had charge of two goats, a cat, and four pairs of pigeons. He says a major told him to leave the town and the animals due to artillery fire. He says he has no family. He then commences to express his anxiety about what will occur to the animals. He says the cat will be all right because cats can look after themselves, but he doesn't know what will happen to the other animals. The narrator, more concerned for the old man's security than that of the animals, asks what the old man's politics are, and the old man replies he has none. He is 76, has come 12 kilometres and is too tired to go any further. The narrator tells him to walk up the road and catch a lorry to Barcelona (ibid.)

The old man thanks him, but continues to show his fear apropos the fate of the animals left behind. The narrator assures him, saying the animals will be well.

The pigeons will fly away, the storyteller says, but the old man continues to worry about the goats. The narrator tells him it is better not to think about it, and that he should get up and walk to the lorries. The old man tries to get up and walk, but he is too exhausted and sinks back down. Lastly, the narrator reflects that the old man's only luck is that cats can take care of themselves and that the day is cloudy so the Fascists aren't able to send their planes into sky (Evans and Wang, 2010).

### 3.2 Literary Analysis

Throughout Hemingway's travels as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, he was inspired to write his short piece *Old Man at the Bridge*. In reality, the story was initially written as a newsletter from the Amposta Bridge over the Ebro River on Easter Sunday in 1938 as the Fascists were set to invade the region. Hemingway was writing for the North American Newspaper Association but decided to submit this piece of writing as a short story to a magazine instead of as a journalistic article, which accounts, in some way, for its short length. (Randhawa, 2017, pp. 36-40)

For all of its unconventional origins, the story handles familiar Hemingway themes of depression, resignation, and impending death. The old man is the fatalistic hero of the story, submissive to his fate as a victim of the war. He is too old and exhausted to move, he says, and reveals, to the storyteller, and the storyteller reflects that he is sure to be killed once the Fascists approach the bridge across the Ebro. His life is extended due to the fact that the day is cloudy and the Fascists cannot set their planes into sky, and his mind is relieved by the fact that cats can care for themselves, excluding that nothing can be done for him and his death looks certain (ibid.)

As happens elsewhere in Hemingway's writings, specifically in *The Killers*, the relator of the story appears more influenced by the inescapability of the man's possible fate than by the old man. Just as the old man worries about the goats he left behind, and the narrator tells him it's better not to think about them, the storyteller worries about the old man he will leave behind, but is clearly not able to stop thinking about him (ibid.).

Yet, one remaining question arises to the reader as the story closes and the narrator laments the old man's imminent death. Why doesn't the relator help the old man at least part of the way to the lorries destined for Barcelona? Surely everyone, including the narrator and the old man, is going in the same route. Certainly, it would not be a great burden for the narrator to help a 76-year-old man who had already walked 12 kilometres along at least part of the way to safety. Are the old man's fatalism and the narrator's despair justified? Since this story began as a newsletter recounting a meeting Hemingway actually had, this question takes on more than academic significance. (Randhawa, 2017, pp. 36-40)

There is only one symbol of hope in the story. At the opening of the storyteller's conversation with the old man, the birds the old man was looking after were referred to as 'pigeons', but by the end of the story, they become 'doves', symbols of peace at the time of war. The narrator makes this shift as

he asks, 'Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?' It is uncertain whether this is a slip of the tongue, because the storyteller is obviously distracted by the imminent advent of the enemy, or if Hemingway is endeavouring to give the image of the birds flying away an even more positive hue by regarding them as symbols of peace (ibid.)

### 3.3 The Model and the Analysis

#### 3.3.1 The Model

According to M.A.K. Halliday (1985: 192-216), a *sentence* can be interpreted as a *clause complex*: a Head clause together with other clauses that modify whether paratactically or hypotactically. The mode of combination is the mode of organization of the logical subtype of the ideational metafunction. The notion of *clause complex* thus enables us to account in full for the functional organization of sentences.

**Parataxis** refers to the logical interdependency between clauses where the interdependents are of equal status, roughly comparable to coordination in traditional grammar. If two clauses are related paratactically, the primary one is initiating (1), and the secondary one continuing (2). (Halliday uses Arabic numerals to represent paratactic clauses).

||| I switched on my TV set || and there was a programme about whales. |||

1

2

||| Let's face it, || the human body is like a condominium apartment. |||

1

2

**Hypotaxis** refers to the logical interdependency between clauses where the interdependents are of unequal status. Thus, one of the clauses can be seen as a Head being modified by the other(s). If two clauses are related hypotactically, the primary one is dominant (a), and the secondary one dependent (B), roughly comparable to subordination in traditional grammar. (Halliday uses Greek letters to represent hypotactic clauses). ||| Fear of flying is quite rational || because human beings cannot fly. |||

A

B

||| Because human beings cannot fly, || fear of flying is quite rational. |||

B

a

As far as sentence boundary is concerned, Halliday uses three strokes |||, whereas only two strokes to separate between clauses ||. He uses the symbol ^ to indicate 'one clause follows another in the given order'.

In the above-mentioned example the structure can be read as a^B in which the primary clause (dominant) is followed by the secondary clause (dependent). The opposite way will be read when the order is reversed as in the second sentence as B^a in which the dependent clause precedes the dominant.

Since the aim of the present paper is to investigate sentence complexity and length, it has been found useful to exploit Halliday's model in the analysis of the story. The use of numerals and Greek letters proves to be vital and easier in literary analysis as it guides to an immediate recognition of the type of sentence used. Halliday classifies a sentence with one clause as *simple*, others with more than one whether of the paratactic or hypotactic type as *complex*. A mixture of both hypotactic and paratactic sequences, either of which may be

nested inside the other is referred to as *mixed* sentence (using both numerals and Greek letters).

### 3.3.2 Text Analysis

**Table 1:** Sentence Analysis of the Text

No	Sentence	Type	No. of words
1	An old man with steel rimmed spectacles and very dusty clothes sat by the side of the road.	Simple	18
2	There was a pontoon bridge across the river    and carts, trucks, and men, women and children were crossing it.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup>	19
3	The mule-drawn carts staggered up the steep bank from the bridge with soldiers helping push against the spokes of the wheels.	Simple	22
4	The trucks ground up and away heading out of it all    and the peasants plodded along in the ankle deep dust.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup>	21
5	But the old man sat there without moving.	Simple	8
6	He was too tired to go any farther.	Simple	8
7	It was my business to cross the bridge,    explore the bridgehead beyond    and find out to what point the enemy had advanced.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>	22
8	I did this    and returned over the bridge.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup>	8
9	There were not so many carts now and very few people on foot,    but the old man was still there.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup>	20
10	"Where do you come from?" I asked him.	Simple	8
11	"From San Carlos," he said,    and smiled.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup>	6
12	That was his native town    and so it gave him pleasure to mention it    and he smiled.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>	17
13	"I was taking care of animals," he explained.	Simple	8
14	"Oh," I said, not quite understanding.	Simple	6
15	"Yes," he said, "I stayed, you see, taking care of animals."	Simple	11
16	I was the last one to leave the town of San Carlos."	Simple	11
17	He did not look like a shepherd nor a herdsman    and I looked at his black dusty clothes and his gray dusty face and his steel rimmed spectacles    and said, "What animals were they?"	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup>	34
18	"Various animals," he said,    and shook his head.	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup>	8
19	"I had to leave them."	Simple	5
20	I was watching the bridge and the African looking country of the Ebro Delta    and wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy,    and listening all the	Mixed 1 <sup>2</sup> a <sup>B</sup> 3 <sup>4</sup>	52

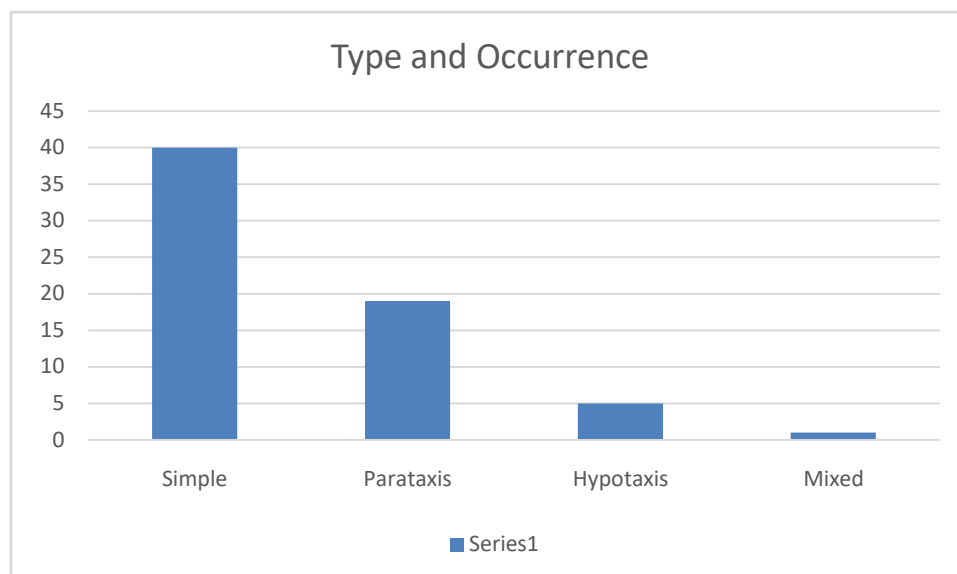
	while for the first noises that would signal that ever mysterious event called contact,    and the old man still sat there.		
21	"What animals were they?" I asked.	Simple	6
22	"There were three animals altogether," he explained.	Simple	7
23	"There were two goats and a cat  and then there were four pairs of pigeons."	Parataxis 1^2	15
24	And you had to leave them?" I asked.	Simple	8
25	"Yes.	Simple	1
26	Because of the artillery.	Simple	4
27	The captain told me to go because of the artillery."	Simple	10
28	"And you have no family?" I asked, watching the far end of the bridge    where a few last carts were hurrying down the slope of the bank.	Hypotaxis a^B	27
29	"No," he said, "only the animals I stated.	Simple	8
30	The cat, of course, will be all right.	Simple	8
31	A cat can look out for itself,   but I cannot think what will become of the others."	Parataxis 1^2	17
32	"What politics have you?" I asked.	Simple	6
33	"I am without politics," he said.	Simple	6
34	"I am seventy-six years old.	Simple	6
35	I have come twelve kilometers now   and I think now I can go no further."	Parataxis 1^2	15
36	"This is not a good place to stop," I said.	Simple	10
37	"If you can make it,    there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa."	Hypotaxis B^a	16
38	"I will wait a while," he said, "   and then I will go.	Parataxis 1^2	12
39	Where do the trucks go?"	Simple	5
40	"Towards Barcelona," I told him.	Simple	5
41	"I know no one in that direction," he said,    "but thank you very much.	Parataxis 1^2	14
42	Thank you again very much."	Simple	5
43	He looked at me very blankly and tiredly, and then said, having to share his worry with someone, "The cat will be all right, I am sure.	Simple	27
44	There is no need to be unquiet about the cat.	Simple	10
45	But the others.	Simple	3
46	Now what do you think about the others?"	Simple	8
47	"Why they'll probably come through it all right."	Simple	9
48	"You think so?"	Simple	3
49	"Why not," I said, watching the far bank    where now there were no carts.	Hypotaxis a^B	14
50	"But what will they do under the artillery    when I was told to leave because of the artillery?"	Hypotaxis a^B	18

51	"Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?" I asked.	Simple	9
52	"Yes."	Simple	1
53	"Then they'll fly."	Simple	4
54	"Yes, certainly they'll fly.	Simple	5
55	But the others.	Simple	3
56	It's better not to think about the others," he said.	Simple	11
57	"If you are rested    I would go," I urged.	Hypotaxis B <sup>a</sup>	9
58	"Get up    and try to walk now."	Parataxis 1 <sup>2</sup>	7
59	"Thank you," he said    and got to his feet,    swayed from side to side    and then sat down backwards in the dust.	Parataxis1 <sup>^</sup> 2 <sup>^</sup> 3 <sup>^</sup> 4	22
60	"I was taking care of animals," he said dully,    but no longer to me.	Parataxis 1 <sup>^</sup> 2	14
61	"I was only taking care of animals."	Simple	7
62	There was nothing to do about him.	Simple	7
63	It was Easter Sunday    and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro.	Parataxis 1 <sup>^</sup> 2	12
64	It was a gray overcast day with a low ceiling   so their planes were not up.	Parataxis 1 <sup>^</sup> 2	16
65	That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have.	Simple	23

From the above table, the study has arrived at the following statistics represented in Figure 1 below:

1. Number of simple sentences: 40
2. Number of parataxis: 19
3. Number of hypotaxis: 5
4. Number of mixed: 1
5. Number of words in the shortest sentence: 1
6. Number of words in the longest sentence: 52





**Figure 1: Type and Occurrence**

### 3.3.3 Discussion of Results

It is **clear** from the analysis above that linguistic structures are strongly connected to the message conveyed in the short story. This is manifested obviously in Sentence 20 which is the longest. It is composed of 52 words. It is the most complicated sentence in the whole story. This complication and length may be ascribed to the fact that it contains the core idea of the story. It comprises Hemingway's themes of depression, submission and approaching death. In this mixed sentence, the writer wants to say that the old man, the hero of the story, resigns to his fate as a casualty of the war.

Figure 1 shows that sentence structure slopes sharply from simple to parataxis and to hypotaxis and then by degree to mixed. The bar chart proves that the simple type of sentences is the most common type, where there are 40 sentences in the whole story. The majority of these sentences tackle simple and naïve shots of the story of the old man and the humble events experienced by him until his arrival at the bridge and during his existence there.

The text analysis demonstrates that parataxis is 19 in number. A precise examination of them manifests that they participate in the slowness of the happenings involved in the short story. They depict the floating bridge and its crossing by carts and people. It is obvious that this type of sentences intensifies the intended ideas of the writer. They strengthen the motionlessness of the action.

As for hypotaxis, the analysis above shows that they are five in number. They increase the complexity of the situation at the bridge; they include the entangled status of the old man and his thinking about his animals. In one way or another, these parataxis sentences support the notions of the old man's low spirits, his sense of giving-up and the coming soon of his death.

As for mixed sentences, the analysis displays that there is only one sentence. It occurs amid of the story. It deals with the mission of the narrator. He is

watching the movement at the bridge, anticipating the observation of the approach of the enemy and listening to the noises that will signal its arrival in addition to the submissive state of the old man there.

Regarding the number of words for each sentence in the story, the text analysis makes it transparent that there are variations of waves of high and low amplitudes mediated by the zenith of 52 words at sentence 20 approximately at the middle of the story. There is no escalation of the action. There is a mere lingering around the motionless idea of the submissive waiting of the impending fatal destiny.

The text analysis shows that the structure of the short story takes the form (Simple...Complex ... Simple ... Mixed ... Simple ... Complex ... Simple). This makes it clear that the movement of the actions is hampered many times, reaching their standstill at the middle, at sentence 20, and then again hindered. This enhances the principal notions of depression, resignation and impending death.

### CONCLUSIONS

Having analyzed the story according to sentence length and complexity, it has been found that Hemingway has succeeded in employing the form in order to fulfill his intended thoughts of depression, resignation and impending death. He achieves this via the mechanism of the impeded action. It can be inferred that the writer excels in his formal technique to realize his intended aims. It has also been concluded that the stylistic analysis has really contributed to the interpretation of the theme in the story and deepened the thoughts and ideas messaged by the authors. Hence, it verified the hypothesis that the formal properties of the story in general, like number of words and types of sentences, and the sentence length and complexity are so significant for explicating and enhancing the author's intended meaning of the story. Besides, the stylistic analysis has been shown to vitally contribute to the interpretation and appreciation of the literary text.

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