

## Syntactic Stylistic Devices in Science-Fiction

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**L**atest technological advances in computers, space travels, robotic and scientific developments became the focal point of everybody's attention and science-fiction literary genre emerged as a new means of understanding the world through speculations and story-tellings.

Science-fiction<sup>1</sup> is a contemporary literary genre which was first created in Britain by such writers as Wells, Huxley, Stapledon. The term "science-fiction" was not widely used until the 1930s, when a group of pulps featuring stories based on modern science was launched. First science-fiction stories were published in American pulp magazines such as Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* (Encyclopedia Britannica 1979). Subsequently the format was used by some other American and British magazines. Then a new genre called scientific romance, the founder of which is quintessential science-fiction writer Wells, became popular in Britain after World War I. Wells emphasized three principles governing his scientific romancing: the author's need "to domesticate the impossible hypothesis" by yoking the beautiful lies of fiction to current scientific theory, or at least to enough scientific jargon to cover the tale decently; the critical and satirical function of exotic or extraterrestrial locales used "in order to look at mankind from a distance"; and Arnoldian and anti-escapist commitments to be "critical of life" and "to make the stories reflect upon contemporary political and social discussions" (Robert Crossley 1986). Next to Wells Olaf Stapledon was the most original practitioner of the scientific romance in the first half of this century. He continued Wells's effort to define and legitimize the form.<sup>2</sup>

The science-fiction novel emerged as a distinct literary genre in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was best exemplified in the works of writers such as I. Asimov, R. Bradbury, A.C. Clarke, R. Heinlein etc. Science-fiction is a genre of fiction, the "theatrics" whereof include science and technology of the future, prophetic warnings, utopian aspirations, highly structured scenarios for completely imaginary worlds, tremendous disasters, outlandish voyages through space or time, presented in the form of sermons, reflections, parodies, satires etc. It is noteworthy that science-fiction has a close bearing with the principles of science, i.e. sci-fi stories primarily tell half-true, half-fictitious laws or theories of science. Science-fiction writers often seek out new scientific and technical developments in order to foresee the impending techno-social changes that will shock the readers' sense of cultural propriety and broaden their consciousness. Science-fiction texts include a human element, explaining what impact new discoveries, happenings and scientific developments will have on us in the future. Science-fiction texts are often set in the future, in space, on a different world, or in a different universe or dimension.

There was a time that science-fiction was largely ignored by the literary world, dismissed as beneath notice. Science-fiction was not explored, studied, and the works of science-fiction were deemed "juvenile and escapist, unworthy of criticism, incapable of addressing themselves to important and real-life concerns and were impediments to the free

operation of reader's intelligence etc. (Tallis 1984). In the years 1920-1950 pulp science-fiction experienced an explosion in America. The languages used in pulp magazines called *pulp style* met with universal disapproval and derision and many literary critics perceived them as swiftly moving, action-filled easy-reading stories with a primary emphasis on entertainment value to the exclusion of literary quality. They were said to stay firmly at a humble level of literary endeavours and show indifference to literary pitfalls with weak and awkward constructions and over-long passages of exposition; story titles resembling headlines with their use of short and simple noun phrases, needless repetition of adjectives and adverbs that serves as fillers, they are dialogues that are syntactically too complex to represent a talk and are abounding in unnatural synonyms making the passages impenetrable to readers.

But such attitudes to science-fiction started to change from about 1960 as academic interest in science-fiction was taken off. It was no longer looked upon as "crank" literature and a multiplicity of science-fiction journals were published (Mandala 2010). Proponents of science-fiction were eager to show that their genre of choice was of true value. Those who ventured to write science-fiction were attempting to write against this unleashed literary criticism. Science-fiction, once an object of ridicule and laughing is now the focus of a thriving arena of academic debate. Perhaps the re-evaluation of science-fiction has revealed that this literature is not divorced from real-life concerns and complexities of human life conditions, but essentially involved in it. Nowadays science-fiction undergoes healthy criticism.

Starting from about the 1960s a novel trend in science-fiction a "new sci-fi wave" came to the fore. First and foremost it was characterized by thematic pessimism and great willingness to experiment with style. The academic interest in this genre started to pick up when new wave works started to have an impact. They were both forcefully slammed for skin-deep stylistic experimentation and also accepted but only as worth exceptions. According to Stockwell, writers like Aldiss (*Barefoot in the Head*), Margaret Atwood and others are "avant-garde of science-fiction", sought out by academics who value "the unusual, the eccentric, unique, and deviant but not representatives of the whole" (Mandala 2012:17).

In the frames of this article we target at the syntactic structure of science-fiction writings and we especially aim at revealing the frequency of use of syntactic stylistic devices in science-fiction, a contemporary genre the construction and style of which goes beyond the scope of other literary genres.

Stylistic devices, in general, are specific, deliberate constructions or choices of language that the author uses to convey the meaning in a particular way. These literary techniques are capable of making utterances emotionally coloured. We shall consider not only the stylistic devices themselves but all the possible variants thereof employed by British and American science-fiction authors.

As it has been mentioned above, science-fiction is a genre bearing straight reference to science. However, lines of code, snippets from scientific lectures and academic texts and extracts from instruction manuals, etc. are not found in it. But as in literary writings of other genres writers try to fully impart their words, emotions, feelings to the reader. In science-fiction great attempt is made not to go too far from the literary style and smother the utterance with terminologies that may even be unknown to the reader.

Having conducted a thorough research on the theme, we have noticed a moderate use of certain syntactic stylistic devices. First of all it should be stated that the structure of science-fiction works differs from that of works of other genres. The difference basically consists in the vocabulary and degree of the emotionality attached to the utterance, which somehow impacts the author's choice of structure. The undertaken study shows that Wells and his mainstream writers wrote scientific romances which somehow differ from the American science-fiction which abounds in terminologies and is mainly built on scientific vocabulary. This is the reason why the works of the British science-fiction writers are somehow richer in such syntactic stylistic devices that attach emotional coloring, give some effusive texture to the utterances like inversion, parallel construction, climax, question in the narrative, suspense, litotes in the examples as follow.

*Between the tables was scattered a great number of cushion.*

(H. Wells "Time Machine" p.258)

*So utterly at variance is destiny with all the little plans of men. I may perhaps mention here that very recently I had come an ugly cropper in certain business enterprises.*

(H. Wells "The First Man in the Moon" p.30)

*Between the eyes, and rather above them, was a pair of great equine nostrils which were constantly in motion. The bridge of the nose was represented by an elevation in the thatch, reaching from the nostrils backwards over the top of the head. There were no visible ears. I discovered later that the auditory organs opened into the nostrils.*

(O. Stapledon "Star Marker" p.28)

As it is known any deviation from the S-P-O model is considered inversion, a SD which can often be observed in almost all literary genres. In the aforementioned examples both the modifier and predicate stand before the subject for more expressiveness for getting the desired effect. In the third passage, for instance, the author has strived to emphasize the features of the character (*between the eyes, and rather above them, a pair of great equine nostrils*), to make them more conspicuous and conveying some visual effect to the reader.

In the works of British science-fiction authors we also come across numerous cases of parallel constructions where an attempt is made to show that two or more ideas are equally important by stating them in grammatically parallel form: noun lined up with noun, verb with verb and phrase with phrase. Parallelism lends clarity, elegance, and symmetry to what is said.

Parallel constructions are often backed up by repetition of words, conjunctions and prepositions as in the example from Stapledon's *Star Marker* given below where the attributive clauses all begin with the subordinate conjunction *that*.

*I was surprised, by the way, that so many of the alien galaxies appeared to the naked eye, that the largest was a pale, cloudy mark bigger than the moon in the terrestrial sky.*

(O. Stapledon "Star Marker" p.8)

Let's show another use of parallel construction in British science-fiction. Here we have complete parallelism which maintains the principle of identical structures throughout the corresponding sentences.

*I could hear the Marlocks rustling like wind among the leaves and pattering like the rain, as they hurried after me.*

(H. Wells "Time Machine" p.90)

The next syntactic stylistic device that can often be encountered in British science-fiction is suspense a compositional device which consists in arranging the matter of a communication in such a way that the less important, descriptive, subordinate parts are amassed at the beginning, the main idea being withheld till the end of the sentence. Thus the reader's attention is held and his interest is kept up (Galperin 1981:165). For instance:

*I didn't yet suspect: but, from what I'd seen of the Marlocks-that, by the bye, was the name by which these creatures were called-I could imagine that the modification of the human type was even far more profound that among the Eloi.*

(H. Wells "Time Machine" p.84)

Here the author has used an intermediate sentence, i.e. *that, by the bye, was the name by which these creatures were called* which though gives additional information on the name, it drags the utterance and diverts the reader's attention.

Wells, the founder of science-fiction literary genre, pays considerable attention to the language and style of the writing and the use of various syntactic structures and use of well-refined vocabulary absorb the reader and open the doors to a world of a mystery where the writer attempts to demystify and detail all thoughts and assumptions. And in his writings one can find frequent use of another stylistic device i.e. question-in-the narrative which is asked and answered by one and the same person, usually the author. It helps the writer to draw readers' attention on the key idea as in the example below:

*The mercury did not trace this line in any of the dimensions of Space generally recognized? Certainly it traced such a line, and that line, therefore, we must conclude was along the Time-Dimension.*

(H. Wells "Time Machine" p.45)

Unlike Wells and his mainstream writers who wrote scientific romances and employed such devices which would make the passages more effusive, in the works of American science-fiction writers who hardly lay stress on the lyricism, expressiveness of the utterance, instead speaking about scientific innovations, robots, technical revolution we have mostly encountered such SDs as enumeration, asyndeton, break-in-the narrative, ellipsis.

*Before them, through open doorway and translucent partition, lay the kitchen, a chief's dream of up-to-the minute domestic engineering, Monel metal, continuous counter space, concealed lighting, functional arrangement*

(V. Muravyev "Science-Fiction" p.122).

In the above-given passage taken from one of Heinlein's famous works we see the employment of enumeration, a stylistic device with the help of which the author makes no attempt to have extra impact on the reader. The ensuing words (*a chief's dream of up-to-the minute domestic engineering, Monel metal*) are closely associated semantically with one another and in detail give the description of the scenery. The utterance is coherent and there is no marked pause in the natural flow of the communication.

The same cannot be said about the passage as follows:

*The shelf was towering over the guests with its top overladen with paper scraps- remainders of free fall trial, mutilated document files, piled-up frames, a bent and twisted lever of a golden casket, some antique cups and all these entangled in dust-web.* (V. Muravyev "Science-Fiction" p.162)

The enumeration here is *heterogeneous*. The words are not correlated semantically and they result in a kind of clash. The *antique cups* are semantically unassociated with *paper scraps* and document files etc. This heterogeneous enumeration gives one an insight into the great variety of miscellaneous objects which caught an eye, the littered and untidy state of the room that hosted all his guests.

In the works of most American sci-fi writers we encounter frequent use of repetition. Asyndeton, a type of repetition, is a deliberate omission of the connective where it is generally expected to be according to the norms of the literary language as in the following sentence (Galperin 1981:205):

*There was something wrong, Don felt, that was vaguely wrong: he couldn't find what it was.* (V. Muravyev "Science-Fiction" p.171)

Here the subordinate conjunction *but* is purposefully omitted and the long pause indicated by a semicolon somehow emphasizes the character's meditation, that he is trying to analyze the present situation.

*Above all, we are divided man against man. We are split into parties and factions, by greed and jealousies, petty spites and self-seeking, by unintelligence, by education, and by our inability - a mental inability - to see life steadily and see it whole, and lastly, perhaps chiefly, by our intense egotisms, both physical and intellectual.*

(J. Beresford "The Hampdenshire Wonder" p.113)

In the example given above American sci-fi writer Beresford has employed asyndeton, i.e. the repetition of conjunctions, prepositions, in this case the repetition of the conjunction *and* makes an utterance more rhythmical. It as well as expresses sequence.

From the aforesaid we can infer that science-fiction genre is a specific literary genre which by and large takes some scientific ideas either "foreseeing" where things will go in the future, or going back through time changing some aspect of science. As distinct from fantasy, the ideas brought forth in science-fiction are plausible, i.e. humanity can look forward to the achievements posited in science-fiction and as a matter of fact it expands our world unlike fantasy which transcends it. Science-fiction tries to develop the cognitive

aspect of the text. While at the outset, by many literary critics works of science-fiction were regarded as valueless, unworthy of criticism, incapable of addressing themselves to important and real-life concerns and the language as crank, swiftly moving. Nowadays science-fiction is being much researched into as unique literary genre which to a greater or lesser extent divorces itself from other literary genres regarding its language, structure and the ideas postulated therein.

## NOTES

1. Different short and abbreviated forms of the genre of science-fiction as *sci-fi*, *SF*, *Sci-Fi*, *science-fiction* (with a dash) are used by different literary critics.
2. In the United States, science-fiction remained magazine-based until the rapid growth in the production of paperback books in the 1960s.

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### **Շարահյուսական ոճական հնարները գիտաֆանտաստիկ ժանրում**

Հոդվածը նվիրված է գիտաֆանտաստիկ գրական ժանրում առկա շարահյուսական ոճական հնարների ուսումնասիրությանը: Քննարկվել են գիտաֆանտաստիկ ժանրի առանձնահատկությունները և վերլուծվել են այն շար-

րախյուսական ոճական հնարները, որոնք առանցքային նշանակություն ունեն  
անգլոամերիկյան գիտաֆանտաստիկ գրական ստեղծագործություններում:

#### **Синтаксические стилистические приемы в научной фантастике**

Статья посвящена исследованию синтаксических стилистических приемов в научно-фантастическом жанре. Здесь были обсуждены особенности жанра научной фантастики и проанализированы те синтаксические стилистические приемы, которые были широко используемые в англо-американских научно-фантастических произведениях.