

A Model for Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of Suspense

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Abstract:

Suspense is one of the main elements of detective stories. It keeps readers attracted and motivated to follow up till the end of the story. Meanwhile, readers are waiting to see whether their expectations are true or they would be surprised at the end. This study aims at developing a framework form a pragma-stylistic perspective to analyze how suspense is created in detective short stories since there is no such model in the literature. Michael Connelly's (2011) *Christmas Even* is selected as the data under analysis to test the workability of the modal. The study ends with a discussion to comment on the findings of the analysis.

Key Words: Suspense, pragma-stylistics, detective short stories, Michael Connelly.

نموذج للتحليل الاسلوبي-التداولي للتشويق

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المخلص:

التشويق هو أحد العناصر الرئيسية للقصص البوليسية. إنها تحافظ على القراء منجذبين ومندفعين للمتابعه حتى نهاية القصة. في غضون ذلك، ينتظر القراء ليروا ما اذا كانت توقعاتهم صحيحة أم أنهم سيفاجنون في النهاية. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تطوير اطار تحليل من منظور اسلوبي تداولي لتحليل كيفية انشاء التشويق في القصص البوليسية القصيره حيث لا يوجد مثل هذا النموذج في الدراسات السابقه. تم اختيار قصة عشية عيد الميلاد لميشيل كونيلى (٢٠١١) كعينه قيد التحليل لاختبار قابلية الانموذج. تنتهي الدراسة بمناقشة للتعليق على نتائج التحليل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التشويق، المنظور الاسلوبي-التداولي، القصص البوليسية القصيره، ميشيل كونيلى.

1. The Introduction

The goal of creating suspense through literary language is to keep the reader interested, to create feelings of tension and anxiety, to create a sense of ambiguity and expectancy, and to somehow prepare the reader for the logical ending of the utterance. It can also be said that this linguistic style device causes psychological effect on literature readers. The goal of pragma-stylistics is to establish a connection between the composing and reading of literary writings that took place within certain language and social contexts. This suggests that on the one hand it is literary, and on the other hand it is linguistic, with a significant emphasis on context. Pragmatic-stylistics is going to keep trying to explain how the many diverse methods of saying "the same thing" (style) are impacted by the circumstances (pragmatic variables), and it will do this all the time.

Numerous studies have investigated the concept of 'suspense,' uncovered its techniques, and analyzed the context in which it is used. According to the researcher's best knowledge, no study has been conducted primarily to examine the pragmatic stylistic manifestation of suspense. The majority of the research on 'detective short stories' was literary in nature, however, in this study, the researcher tries to bridge the gap by using a pragmatic-stylistics approach, which is linguistic in nature, to analyze the language of "suspense" in the chosen literary works.

2. Pragma-Stylistics

After the advent of conversation analysis, pragmatics, and discourse analysis in the late 1980s, stylisticians gained the tools they needed to analyze the meaning of dialogue and interaction in literary genres. This has led to the rise of pragmatic stylistics or (more commonly pragma-stylistics) (Norgaard et al., 2010, as cited in Yassir, and Al-Sieedy, 2023, p. 844).

Black (2006) argues that stylistics explores the way of comprehending the meaning of a text by readers and this can be influenced by the stylistic language, in which case it is preferable for stylistics to use the pragmatic tools given that pragmatics is concerned with language in use. (Al-Geym and Al-Tamimi, 2023, p.548)

Pragma-stylistic aims to link the writing and reading of literary texts that have taken place in the linguistic and sociocultural contexts. In this sense, it is literary on one hand and linguistic on the other with excessive emphasis on contextualization (Sell, 1991, p. 99 as cited in Saloomy, 2020, p. 326)

3. The Concept of Suspense

Several diverse narrative genres have included suspense as a key ingredient to captivate audiences. Moreover, developing a conceptualization of suspense was a major emphasis of early research to provide pertinent hypotheses and describe how suspense is created and how viewers are influenced by it. Furthermore, due to the notion's intricacy, scientists do not agree on a precise definition of the 'suspense' idea in modern linguistic space.

The meaning of suspense that can be found in several dictionaries includes "a state or condition of uncertainty and excitement, with some anxiety, when the conclusion of anything is unknown"; and/ or "the state or condition of being undecided, uncertain, or doubtful." According to Kemertelidze and Manjavidze (2013, p.693), in literature, suspense can be seen as an element employed to keep a reader or audience guessing about what will happen next while they wait with anticipation. Furthermore, it can be said that suspense is a sense of worry or expectation that the author instills in the readers. Thus, the purpose of suspense is to put the reader in a state of uncertainty and expectancy while also preparing them in some way for the logical conclusion of the utterance (Kemertelidze & Manjavidze, 2013, p.693).

Suspense is an inherent characteristic of many popular literary genres, especially detective, horror, and thriller movies, all of which deal with crimes and their consequences (Vorderer et al., 1996, p. vii). added to that, suspense is created by withholding contextually necessary information (Fill, 2003, p. 55), so it fundamentally relies on the three successive storytelling techniques of (i) creating an expectation, (ii) delaying anticipated narrative developments, (iii), and finally, resolving this conflict, which is most clearly constructed by verbal communication (Bennett & Royle 2004, p. 197). In addition, early studies primarily focused on developing a conceptualization of suspense in order to offer pertinent theories explaining how suspense is generated at various linguistic levels, from syntax to the lexicon to the text pragmatics plane, and evaluating its effects on audiences.

3.1 Types of Suspense

After reading thoroughly on types of suspense, it has been shown that there is no consensus on its types but the most salient types are: Narrative (long) suspense and short-term suspense. Narrative suspense and short-term suspense are the first types of suspense to be aware of in terms of story structure. The first draws the readers in the story by introducing them to the narrative's main problem, while the second holds them intrigued from start to finish. An excellent narrative has both.

3.1.1 Narrative (long-term) Suspense

Narrative suspense refers to long-term tension. Narrative suspense begins with a question, dilemma, or mystery that is developed throughout the story and resolved at the conclusion. Well-written narrative suspense keeps readers reading. If the author teases readers for 300 pages, the ending must be great! Suspenseful tales often end with a twist or a big reveal. This kind of anxiety is created by teasing its resolution. Avoids overwhelming readers; the persistent pressure of a big release might make them uncomfortable and irritated. The writer counters this pressure with character development, non-suspenseful story advancement, or a new suspense theme (Reedsy, 2018).

3.1.2 Short Term Suspense

Short-term suspense is just what it sounds like: A brief, momentary scene of suspense that generates a strong response from the reader. This may tie into the book's long-term suspense, or alternately can serve as a distraction or subplot. Furthermore, short-term suspense situations typically entail a discussion or confrontation between characters that ends quickly; however, it might resurface later. One of the best application of short-term suspense is to create cliffhangers-scene or chapter endings that leave the reader desperately in suspense. Cliffhangers (a classic form of suspense), end an author's story at a crucial point when all the reader cares about is what happens next, just as Shaheherazade would stop her stories so the sultan would let her live. (Reedsy, 2018).

3.2 Stages of Suspense

Based on the work of Brewer and Lichtenstein (1982) for event structure, the researchers suggest a total of four stages to create suspense; the initiating stage, the developing stage, the climax stage, and the resolution stage.

Stage 1 - Initiating Stage (trigger): Suspense is produced when an initiating act appears early in the discourse structure. An initiating stage is “an act that has the potential to lead to a significant outcome (good or bad) for one of the main characters” (Brewer, 1996, p.113).

Stage 2 - Developing Stage: Suspense is developed by details that can be placed between the initiating stage and resolution stage, and can delay the latter. Suspense is built by withholding information whether-it be crucial plot turns, twists or information about character's motives, or actions done by a character that isn't revealed until the story's conclusion. According to Wulff (1996, p. 1) suspense is based on the activity of ‘anticipation’, in which recipients evaluate incomplete given information in order to calculate future act.

Stage 3 - Climax Stage: Climax is proposed by Freytag, it is the most suspenseful part and a turning point of the plot or the highest point of anticipation in the story (Dibel, 1999).

Stage 4 - Resolution Stage: it is the final stage of suspense in the plot; the conflict has been resolved at this point of the story. It is the part of the story that reveals the final outcome and answers the question of the reader (Dibel, 1999).

4. Narrator

One of the strategies to create suspense in the study under investigation is "narrator". Types of narrators play a vital role in the style of detective fiction as a subgenre of crime fiction and mystery fiction, and they can change the interpretation of a text by influencing readers' thoughts and making them controlled by the author's language, which in turn creates suspense. Wales (2014, p. 286) states that a narrator is the person who narrates or tells a story, whether the story is fiction or nonfiction. According to Simpson (2004), narrators (the narrative voice) in fiction may be divided into three categories, depending on how actively they are involved in the events they are describing. These categories are: first-person narrator, second-person narrator, and third-person narrator. The analysis of the point of view in selected data is based on Simpson (2004). In the selected detective short story, the third-person narrator (the omniscient narrator or the implied author) helps to withhold and delay the information to misdirect the reader and, in turn, increase the level of suspense.

5. Pragma-Stylistic Strategies to Create Suspense

The section in question introduces various pragma-stylistic eclectic strategies that are utilized in detective short stories as a tool to create suspense. The strategies include vagueness, concealment, fabrication, tautology, metaphor, irony, deixis, presupposition, foregrounding, and background which violate Grice's Maxims by

delaying or withholding truth and the solution to the mystery and in turn create suspense.

5.1 The Cooperative Principles

The way Grice (1975, p. 45) described his cooperation principle is as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." Also, the Cooperation Principle can be defined as the fundamental principle that the contributors in the conversation work together in order to 'manage' their speech exchange in the most efficient possible way (Riemer, 2010, p. 119). To elucidate how his principle operates, Grice offers (as cited in Mey, 2001, p. 72), the cooperative principle which can be broken down into a number of different maxims of speech.

A. The Maxim of Quantity, regarding the quantity of information required:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

B. The Maxim of Quality, concerning to the truthfulness of the contribution:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

C. The Maxim of Relevance, According to which participants are supposed to contribute to the conversation in an appropriate and pertinent manner: Be relevant.

D. The Maxim of Manner, concerning how the content is expressed:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
4. Be orderly.

5.1.1 Violation of Gricean Maxims

Writers tend to violate Grice's maxims (1975) to create suspense. According to the study under investigation a number of strategies are used out of these violations including vagueness, concealment, fabrication, tautology, metaphor, irony, deixis, presupposition, foregrounding, and background.

5.1.1.1 Vagueness

Philosophers and linguists (Egre, & Icard, 2018, p. 359) both refer to the idea that vagueness is distinct from ambiguity. An ambiguous sentence makes the hearer think of many possible interpretations but a vague one does not, for instance,

- *Emmy is wearing a torn address.*

This utterance is not ambiguous since people have a general idea about torn, but it is vague because it does not identify what the word 'torn' refers to precisely: completely torn, partially in one position, torn on his arm only, wholly, etc. (Shuy, 2017, pp. 52-53), which means contrary to ambiguity, vagueness suggests indeterminate, context-dependent understandings of an utterance rather than communicating multiple meanings. Vagueness refers to the form of the expression that has an open range of interpretations (Salman, 2013, p. 393). In this case it violates the maxim of manner.

5.1.1.2 Concealment

People can communicate and accomplish a variety of goals by using language. Interaction and the delivery of messages with various information and intentions are accomplished through this means of communication. Language, however, can also be utilized as a means of concealing and hiding these intentions or facts. Thus, the strategy of using language to conceal truths or intents is known as concealment. Clark (1992) states that as a mode of speaking, concealment is used to keep information or intentions hidden from other people who could overhear. In the same context as Schröter (2013, p. 16) describes

concealment as a form of silence, however, concealment is fairly wordy. She claims that concealment is silence, but it is in the form of verbal communication. Grice's four maxims need to be followed during communication; otherwise, Concealment occurs as a result of the violation of these maxims (Abdulmajeed & Finjan, 2018, p.234).

5.1.1.3 Fabrication

Van Dijk (2006, p. 361) sees fabrication as a 'communicative pursuit' in which fabricators attempt to guide and control their targets without paying attention to or giving any significance to their wills. By using a variety of strategies to achieve their targeted, tendentious purposes, fabricators, in this sense, supply their targets with fake information that has been invented. In human interactions, journalism, mass communication, and warfare, as Strachman and Steck (2008, p. 385) argue, that fabrication is the ability to present something as different from what it actually is. So, it is an affirmative, intentional phenomenon meant to prevent others from learning about a knowledge that they otherwise would have known.

5.1.1.4 Selected Figures of Speech from Cooperative Principles Flouting

The use of figurative language is one of the many ways to flout Grice's CPs in addition to the methods outlined above. Several strategies, such as tautology, metaphor, and irony, will be investigated here since this study will concentrate on the analysis of figure of speech, so long as they do not follow Grice's maxims and keep the suspense going throughout the whole thing.

5.1.1.4.1 Tautology

The most suitable pragmatic theory to analyze the pragmatic function of tautologies in literary text is Grice's (1975) cooperative maxims. That is, pragmatics is the study of how words are used and how speakers convey meaning beyond the words they employ. According to

Bryson (1990), tautology expresses a concept by using almost interchangeable morphemes, words and phrases that making the same point more than once. For instance,

- *Facts are facts*

5.1.1.4.2 Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech defined differently by different scholars of linguistics, philosophy and psychology. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2008 edition) states that “metaphor is a figure of speech that implies comparison between two unlike entities, as distinguished from simile, an explicit comparison signaled by the words (like) and (as). Adam and Rosmiati (2020, p. 129) mention that, “Metaphor simply speaks about one thing that is abstract by using term from another thing which is more descriptive and easier to understand”.

5.1.1.4.3 Irony

Irony is one of the most common ingredients of nonliteral (or humorous) language. Wilson and Sperber (1993, p.76) note that irony is regarded as a complex pragmatic phenomenon since it is governed by a number of different mental processes. Irony is defined as "saying something but meaning the opposite." Irony is also considered as a pragmatic phenomenon because an ironic expression allows for the performance of some action (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 65). For example,

- *This room is very clean!*

This utterance is an example of irony, and the mother who made it was trying to convey something different from what the words themselves clearly meant. (Hutcheon, 1995,p. 65).

5.1.1.5 Deixis

Deixis has been tackled by researchers in a variety of fields of knowledge by defining them and investigating their types and functions. The phenomenon of deixis is the most evident manifestation of the relationship between language and context within the structures of languages themselves. This term is derived from a Greek word for

pointing or indicating. (Levinson, 1983, p. 54). The type of deixis examined in this study is linguistic deixis which, according to Levinson theory (1983), could be divided into five types of deixis, they are; person deixis, place deixis, time deixis, social deixis and discourse deixis.

5.1.1.6 Presupposition

Presupposition is based on the assumption that the event has already occurred and the entity existed before the time of speaking. From the very many treatments of presuppositions, the study will depend on Yule's model (1996) in covering the presuppositions to be found in the data under analysis.

According to the linguistic cues being found, Yule (1996, pp.27-30) classifies presuppositions into: *existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural, and counterfactual*. He deals with what he calls *potential presuppositions* which are indicated through linguistic forms and become *actual* only in their context of use.

Type	Example	Presupposition
existential	the X	>> X exists
factive	I regret leaving	>> I left
non-factive	He pretended to be happy	>> He wasn't happy
lexical	He managed to escape	>> He tried to escape
structural	When did she die?	>> She died
counterfactual	If I weren't ill,	>> I am ill

5.1.1.7 Foregrounding

By the use of foregrounding and burying strategies, certain aspects of a story can be made more or less prominent for plot purposes. Readers typically anticipate that important information will be highlighted with foregrounding, whereas somewhat unimportant information will be



placed in the background. Nonetheless, the opposite may frequently be true for plot purposes. (Emmott and Alexander, 2014, p. 331).

A. Deviation

As a general term, a deviation is often known as the act of moving away from what is normal or acceptable. According to Cook (1989. p. 74), linguistic deviation is “a case of non-conformity to the norms and regularities of discourse structure”. From a linguistic perspective, norm means “a standard practice in speech and writing” (Crystal, 2003. p. 319).

B. Parallelism

Parallelism and deviation are the main types of foregrounding according to Leech (1969). He argues that parallelism can be thought of as unexpected regularity and deviation as unexpected irregularity. Parallelism is more specifically the repetition of a specific grammar structure within a sentence. In addition to reflecting the sameness of structure through its syntactic function, it also bears sameness of meaning and marks rhythmical language (Ghazala, 1994 cited in Mansoor, 2013. p. 130).

5.1.1.8 Background

Crime fiction short stories ordinarily have a linear plot. In order to keep the reader or writer guessing what will happen next, the information can be placed at the pre-solution stage and this in turn can generate suspense. Burying occurs when pieces of information are brought to the front, and then, the other pieces of information are left in the background. (Stockwell and Whiteley, 2014 as cited in, Saleh and Alattar, 2023, p.68)

6. An Example of suspense analysis: Connelly’s (2011) *Christmas Eve*

Christmas Eve is a short story that talks about a crime-scene of a burglar who had been found dead in mid-heist that lead the detectives to dig deep to find out the circumstances behind that incident. The

framework developed above will be used discover how suspense is created. The narrative (long-term) suspense will be analyzed only in the following sections, knowing that all the short-term suspense cases are meant to mislead or busy the reader until the main event is resolved. Moreover, they add to the narrative suspense and help maintaining the attention of the reader attracted.

- **Initiating Stage:** the main event of the story is shown in this stage. In this story the burglar was found dead in the shop with no other clue given. The shop owner called the police telling them that the burglar is inside his pawnshop.

“On the day before Christmas of this year Servan unlocked the rear door of the pawnshop, entered and discovered that his business had been victimized a fourth time. He also discovered that the burglar was still inside. It was this discovery that ultimately brought Detective Harry Bosch and his partner, Jerry Edgar, to the Three Kings Pawnshop.”

Vagueness: the vague expression “*the burglar was still inside*” leaves the reader with puzzle since it is not known if the burglar is stealing, trying to escape or what is his/her condition inside the shop.

Deixis: the spatial deictic expression “*this* discovery “with discursal meaning refers to the beginning of a big event that led to the appearance of the detectives.

Background: the most important information is kept a secret in front of the readers. The readers are attracted to discover more clues by themselves to make their own conclusions before the detectives.

- **Developing Stage:** the dead burglar was identified as the ex-convict named Montgomery George Kelman who was on parole for a burglary conviction. The detectives went to the burglar apartment to search for more clues. In this stage, some information is revealed

partially to keep the reader motivated to follow and anticipate what is coming.

“ ... Bosch took a quick look around the one-bedroom apartment. As he expected, there was no obvious sign that the premises belonged to a burglar. This apartment was the front--the place where the parole agent visited and Kelman kept the semblance of a law-abiding life. Bosch knew that any active burglar with a parole tail would keep a separate and secret place--a safe house--for his tools and swag.”

Presupposition: the lexical presupposition “he *expected* “presupposes that the detective is having another scenario in his mind. The factive presupposition “Bosch *knew* ...“ shows the knowledge of the detective to the reader which in turn makes the reader more interested.

- **Climax Stage:** in this stage the readers’ expectations and deductions are met with revelations that might match or depart from their conclusions. In the story, a conversation was running between Bosch and Edgar about the evidence found. Bosch declares the name of the suspect behind the death of the burglar.

"Well, we got no lock picks here, Harry. I guess whoever moved the body took the picks."

"It was Servan."

... "If he put a hundred ten volts into that lock, it could've shut this guy's heart down."

..."This guy just took his glove off. He probably had sweaty hands."

"Exactly. So if the resistance was low and Servan had somehow rigged a one-ten line going directly into that lock, then the initial jolt could have contracted the muscles and left our burglar unable to let go of the pick."

The juice goes through him, hits the heart and the heart goes into V-fib."

Diexis: the personal deictic expression “*it* was Servan “refers to the suspect. The narrator is preparing the readers to see their expectations and the process of guessing they have been through whether it was true or false.

Foregrounding: important information and revelations are highlighted to the reader. The detectives narrate their point of view about how the accident took place and how the burglar died.

- **Resolution Stage:** in this stage almost everything is exposed to the reader and he/she is expecting how the narrator will disclose the case. In this story, Bosch is confronting Servan accusing him of killing the burglar with electrocution and hiding the evidence.

"So what did you do with the burglar's lock picks, Mr. Servan?"

Servan held his lips tightly together for a long moment and then shook his head.

"I don't understand."

"Sure you do, Mr. Servan. Where are the picks?"

Servan only stared at him.

"Okay," Bosch said, "let's try this one. Tell me how you wired that display case."

Servan bowed his head once.

"I have attorney now," he said. "Please, I have attorney now."

Presupposition: Bosch uses structural presuppositions “*what did you do ...? where are the picks? How you wired ...?* “. These questions imply that Servan has already done these things and the questions are meant to be answer as how he had done them.

7. Discussion

Though the analysis was confined to the narrative suspense, it was a good starting point to analyze suspense based on a framework designed for this purpose. The tools of the framework reflected how suspense was created and maintained till the end of the story line. In this case, the aim of the research was met and more analysis is needed to have comprehensive conclusions about the pros and cons of the framework developed in this study.

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