

Syntactic Analysis of Sentence Adverbials Observed in the Victorian Novel *Jane Eyre*

Eva Leláková

Department of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Humanities, University of Žilina, Žilina, Slovakia

Andrea Belúchová

Department of English Language and Literature
Faculty of Humanities, University of Žilina, Žilina, Slovakia

Abstract

The sentence structure complexity and clause positioning (Staveley, 2013) represent the striking features of the writing style of the 19-th century British fiction writers. The present syntactic study brings detailed quantitative and qualitative syntactic analyses of peripheral sentence elements, sentence (stance) adverbials, occurring in the Victorian novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), and offers their classification into style and content disjuncts. As the latter ones are generally employed by fiction in the novels' dialogues and main characters' reflections (Biber, 1999), the research questions focus predominantly on their function and frequency of use. Content disjuncts help to express the possibility or the doubt of the utterance and explain the outcome of the actions and events happening in the story. The research outcomes have confirmed that content disjuncts considerably contribute to understanding the writing style of Charlotte Brontë. This phenomenon can be further studied and developed in the syntactic analyses of other remarkable 19th century novels and novelists. The research results will find their application not only in the theory and practice of syntax but also in the process of teaching/learning English as a foreign language.

Keywords: content disjuncts, *Jane Eyre*, literary linguistics, the language of fiction, sentence adverbials, syntactic analysis

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Introduction

Language is the medium of literary texts, and to understand regularities in the formal aspects of literary texts (Hundarenko, 2019), literary linguistics research explores symmetries in the linguistic form and how the literary form exploits the linguistic form. Fabb (1997) explains: “Formal linguistic analysis of language can focus on how linguistic form is exploited in literary form” (p. 9). What is more, employing literature in the process of language acquisition undoubtedly brings positive results to the class (Chamkha & Drid, 2019). As syntax represents the maximal realization of linguistic form, governing whole sentences, its rules are more readily accessible to introspection. Syntax also facilitates the creative aspect of human language and the recursive and combinatorial abilities of utterance production (Chomsky, 1971). Syntactic expressive means (enumeration, asyndeton, polysyndeton, detached construction, ellipsis, inversion, etc.) possess a strong potential to create desired stylistic effects within an utterance (Lacková, 2012). The syntax is, therefore, the most important aspect of linguistic form to the creative use of language, so it may lead us to a safe assumption that it has a critical part to play in linguistic studies of literature. In the present study, we syntactically analyze peripheral sentence elements (=sentential adverbials) found and observed in the novel *Jane Eyre*.

Adverbials as sentence elements

Adverbials are constructions that modify the entire sentence or clause (Murcia & Freeman, 1999). Diessel (2005) adds that they represent highly movable units, and their position in the sentence plays a crucial role in interpreting their meaning. Thus, adverbials can be considered as vitally important in terms of intelligibility, which is a profoundly significant aspect of communication (Metruk, 2018a; Metruk, 2018b). As regards sentential adverbials, Espinal (1991) states: “Disjunct constituents are units of information linguistically dissociated from the proposition with which they have to be interpreted at the moment of utterance processing, yet they contribute to the final interpretation of the whole utterance.” (p. 735) According to Rafajlovičová (2004), disjuncts are optional additions to a clause expressing the attitude of the speaker/writer towards the content of the message. Unlike adjuncts, they are more loosely attached to the clause, more mobile but they are not a part of the predicate. Davidson (2003) adds that since disjuncts are less closely related to the rest of the sentence than adjuncts are, they are often separated off by commas. Comparing to Brinton (2000), disjuncts are sentence adverbs modifying the entire subject (S), not just a verb phrase (VP). Quirk et al. (1985) note that it is not the form of the disjuncts that makes them different from adjuncts or subjuncts nor is it the positions in which the adverbials are put. Disjunct adverbials appear to be attached to sentences by syntactic relations, based on graphological and tonic representations (Steward, 2008).

Quirk et al. (1985) further explain that disjuncts have a superior role as compared with the sentence elements. They are syntactically more separated, and in some cases, they are superordinate. Also, they seem to have a scope that extends over the sentence as a whole. What is more, Rafajlovičová (2004) claims that disjuncts are usually placed before or after sentence elements, between commas or parenthetically, while adjuncts are typically placed after the verb. Considering phonological property, Espinal (1991) mentions that disjuncts are independent grammatical constituents and do not participate in syntactic processes that take place within the sentence. He adds: “They are not subcategorized by verbs” (p. 735). Phonetically, disjuncts are

associated with an intonational unit independent of the one corresponding to the sentence in which they occur.

Disjuncts and their semantic and syntactic roles and features

Biber et al. (1999) provide eight major areas of meaning that the stance adverbials (=disjuncts) convey – doubt and certainty, actuality and reality, source of knowledge, limitation, viewpoint or perspective, imprecision, attitude, and style. In comparison, Alexander (1997) states the following semantic properties of disjuncts:

1. I do not want you to repeat this: *between ourselves, in strict confidence.*
2. It is just as I expected: *characteristically, logically, typically.*

As Biber et al. (1999) claim, disjuncts are realized by several syntactic forms: single word adverb, adverb phrase, prepositional phrase, noun phrase, finite clause and non-finite clause. Comparing Espinal (1991), she communicates that a wide variety of constituents bear no apparent syntactic relationship to the sentences in which they are included. She differentiates between disjunct appositive relatives, disjunct adjectival phrases, disjunct adverbial clauses and combined disjuncts. Regarding syntactic features of disjuncts, Quirk et al. (1985) specify that content disjuncts appear freely with questions in clauses. Nearly all content disjuncts realized by adverbs appear in any position in a direct or indirect question, although most of them cannot perform with imperatives. Style disjuncts appear with imperatives, even in *I* position, and they occur freely in direct and indirect questions, even initially. Moreover, disjuncts occur in finite dependent clauses.

Types of disjuncts

Quirk et al. (1985) divide disjuncts into style (modality and manner; respect) and content (degree of truth; value judgment) ones. Rafajlovičová (2004) suggests slight term variations with content disjuncts (relating to certainty and relating to evaluation). Biber et al. (1999) label disjuncts as *stance adverbials* and distinguish epistemic stance adverbials (judgment about certainty, reliability, and limitations), attitude adverbials (attitude or value judgment) and style adverbials (the manner of speaking).

Schreiber (1972) states that style disjuncts derive from a distinct intermediate functional type – manner adverb, which itself derives from a higher predicate. Style disjuncts of modality and manner are carried out by prepositional phrases and by clauses (e.g., *in short* and *putting it bluntly*). Respect disjuncts are realized by longer phrases or by clauses, thus making more explicit the respect in which a comment is being expressed (e.g., *if you understand me* and *with respect*). It may be stated that because-clauses, if-clauses, since-clauses are also *respect style disjuncts*. As well, Quirk et al. (1985) highlight that when a speaker wishes to emphasize that he/she alone is the authority, a style disjunct may be reinforced by another, even though a listener may find the co-occurrence redundant or egotistical.

Content disjuncts concentrate on the actual content and truth conditions of an utterance. Comment on the content of an utterance is of two kinds and is expressed by a wide range of adverb phrases, clauses and prepositional phrases. Content disjuncts of value judgment or evaluation

disjuncts show an attitude to an utterance through evaluation (Rafajlovičová, 2004). Eastwood (2000) confirms that content disjuncts are used to make an evaluation or comment on what we are saying. Content disjuncts of degree of truth comment on the truth value of what is said, firmly supporting it, expressing doubt and posing contingencies such as conditions or reasons. Quirk et al. (1985) categorize the following groups of content conjuncts: expressing conviction as a direct claim or an appeal to general perception, expressing a degree of doubt and stating the sense in which the speaker judges what he says to be true or false with reference to the reality or lack of reality in what is said. According to them, hypothetical clauses belong to content disjuncts on which closely reasoned discourse depends and adverbs with participle base in *-ing* are the most productive class of adverbs as content disjuncts.

Biber et al. (1999) state that stance adverbials are to be found across all registers and add that fiction marks the most common adverbials – *really* and *perhaps*. Adverbials of doubt and certainty (*perhaps* and *probably*) mark in possible conversation explanations, the outcome of events, future actions, and doubt or certainty. Fiction employs them in dialogues to imitate conversation and to give descriptions through a character's eyes rather than by an omniscient narrator. Adverbials of actuality (*actually* and *really*) are applied in dialogues or characters' reflections on states and events.

The writing style of Charlotte Brontë

In the 19th century English, the change on all levels of the linguistic organization is apparent in terms of spelling and sound, syntax, and meaning. Mugglestone (2012) states that in the context of grammar, one dominant change is the rise of progressive passive, the decline of subjunctive after *if* and *unless*, use of *got* and an infinitive split. Regarding new words in the vocabulary, there is an extensive usage of fashionable French words as well as polysyllabic and scholarly coinages marking the language of science. O'Gorman (2002) declares that the transformation of Victorian language derived from urbanization, technology, travel, and new opportunities for communication. Victorian novelists concentrated on multi-plot form, allusions, self-consciousness in narrative, and plot unity. The crucial characteristics of Charlotte Brontë's writing style is the syntax of the Victorian era and sentence complexity. With a closer look, the difference in syntax between the 19th century and Modern Standard English is in clausal positioning, which is not unreadable but might cause issues (Staveley, 2013). Charlotte Brontë frequently uses mostly historical present in her novels. When reading *Jane Eyre*, we can observe the rise in emotional tension and a new departure in the story. Aitro (2011) finds out that the author's writing style is generally educated, complex, and filled with emotion. Most of the sentences contain various adjectives and sensual images. Thus, the reader can identify with *Jane Eyre* through the complex sentence structure. Syntactically, as *Laying the Foundation* (2004) marks, Charlotte Brontë uses each type of sentence construction. However, she never uses the periodic sentence even though the story is full of surprise and mystery. Her syntax does not create additional tension. As far as the natural order of a sentence is concerned, Charlotte Brontë constructs sentences so that the subject comes before the predicate. With a closer look at *Jane Eyre*, at first, readers understand the heroine's feelings; then they understand why she behaves in a particular way (*Laying the Foundation*, 2004). Regarding passive constructions, the author uses passive voice as the projection of the subject into the object. These verbal qualities represent the difference between the style of the Age of Reason and the style of romance (Lodge, 2009). In comparison to previously stated features, an inverted order of a

sentence is used by Charlotte Brontë to create an emphatic or rhythmic effect. Another strategy is antimetabole, i.e., sentence strategy in which the arrangement of ideas in the second clause is a reversal of the first clause (Laying the Foundation, 2004). Jones (2016) claims that much of what happens in the novel is conveyed by dialogue. Brontë presents dialogues in a way to increase the realism of conversation by including a local effect. Peters (1991) adds that she parodies conventional forms of a narrative and involves a form of rhetorical exaggeration into the narrative discourse and dialogue to make an implicit statement about discourse.

Research problem and research hypotheses

The novel *Jane Eyre* has been chosen as a research sample primarily for the purpose to point out to complex sentences, typical for Charlotte Brontë's writing style, which are very likely to be shaped by different types of disjuncts applied in the 19th century Romanticism. The issue under research is dedicated to the second edition and is respectfully inscribed by the author. The book was published by the Vintage Classics Library, providing the Vintage catalog of classics publishers. It comprises 38 chapters and two volumes having 545 pages. In the research process, we were closely studying all the sentences containing disjuncts. These were subsequently collected and classified into main categories and subcategories, based on the theory described by Quirk et al. (1985). Based on the theoretical findings, we have formulated three research hypotheses. All three of them were formulated in agreement with Biber et al. (1999) factual theory.

H1: Content disjuncts appear in the language used by Charlotte Brontë in Jane Eyre more often than style disjuncts.

The first hypothesis was chosen based on the fact that content disjuncts focus on the true conditions and certain content of the utterance as well as provide an evaluation of the whole declaration. *Jane Eyre* fits in the genre of fiction where content disjuncts are quite common in comparison with style disjuncts, which are likely to be found in a higher amount in the conversation than any other register. In the language of fiction, content disjuncts are mostly used to show doubt or the possibility of the utterance.

H2: The language of Charlotte Brontë used in Jane Eyre is significant by the preference of content disjuncts of the degree of truth.

Fiction has the highest frequencies of the most common adverbials, such as *really* and *perhaps*. These disjuncts belong to the group of so-called content disjuncts. The disjunct *really* states the sense in which the speaker judges the content of the utterance to be true or false. In fiction, *really* is used in dialogues or in characters' reflections on states and events. The disjunct *perhaps* conveys a certain degree of doubt of a speaker. Moreover, the disjunct *probably* is applied in fiction in dialogues to imitate conversation and to provide descriptions through the character's eyes rather than by an omniscient narrator.

H3: Disjuncts of source of knowledge and imprecision mark only slight occurrence in the language used by Charlotte Brontë in Jane Eyre.

Disjuncts of source of knowledge as *according to* are more frequently used in the news than in fiction since they reflect the emphasis. They also represent a source of knowledge – from specific

names or publications to issues identified by their location. Disjuncts of imprecision as *like, kind of, sort of* are not common in fiction; people employ them in daily conversation.

Research interpretation

The total amount of 197 disjuncts was found in the novel *Jane Eyre*. We classified them into style disjuncts and content disjuncts and also to their subcategories – style disjuncts of modality and manner, style disjuncts of respect, content disjuncts of value judgment and content disjuncts of degree of truth. The style disjuncts occurred in the novel 18 times compared to content disjuncts appearing in the novel 179 times.

Regarding the style disjuncts, we distinguished style disjuncts of modality and manner and style disjuncts of respect. Out of the total number of 18 style disjuncts, there were six style disjuncts of modality and manner. Style disjuncts of respect were detected twelve times. Table 1 and Table 2 present the occurrence, range, amount and percentage of style disjuncts of modality and manner and style disjuncts of respect.

Table 1. *The occurrence of style disjuncts of modality and manner in Jane Eyre*

Occurrence	Range	Amount	Percentage
very low ($0 < Oc \leq 1$)	1	2	33 %
low ($1 < Oc \leq 8$)	2-8	4	67 %
high ($8 < Oc \leq 17$)	9-17	-	-
very high ($Oc > 17$)	18-59	-	-
total		6	100 %

Table 2. *The occurrence of style disjuncts of respect in Jane Eyre*

Occurrence	Range	Amount	Percentage
very low ($0 < Oc \leq 1$)	1	4	33 %
low ($1 < Oc \leq 8$)	2-8	8	67 %
high ($8 < Oc \leq 17$)	9-17	-	-
very high ($Oc > 17$)	18-59	-	-
total		12	100 %

The next step was the classification of content disjuncts into their subcategories – content disjuncts of degree of truth and content disjuncts of value judgment based on the overall number of 179 content disjuncts. Content disjuncts of degree of truth were observed 124 times (69 % of the total number of content disjuncts), while content disjuncts of value judgment occurred 55 times (31 % of the total amount).

The subcategory of content disjuncts of value judgment contains 55 disjuncts. Table 3 and Table 4 refer to the occurrence, range, amount, and percentage of content disjuncts of value judgment and content disjuncts of degree of truth.

Table 3. *The occurrence of content disjuncts of value judgment in Jane Eyre*

Occurrence	Range	Amount	Percentage
very low ($0 < Oc \leq 1$)	1	11	20 %
low ($1 < Oc \leq 8$)	2-8	13	24 %
high ($8 < Oc \leq 17$)	9-17	31	56 %
very high ($Oc > 17$)	18-59	-	-
total		55	100 %

Table 4. The occurrence of content disjuncts of degree of truth in *Jane Eyre*

Occurrence	Range	Amount	Percentage
very low ($0 < Oc \leq 1$)	1	6	5%
low ($1 < Oc \leq 8$)	2-8	32	26 %
high ($8 < Oc \leq 17$)	9-17	-	-
very high ($Oc > 17$)	18-59	86	69 %
total		124	100 %

After studying the obtained research data, we conclude that the first hypothesis has been confirmed. Content disjuncts focusing on the true conditions of the utterance appear in the language used by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre* much more often than style disjuncts. In a closer look, we have marked 179 content disjuncts in comparison to 18 style disjuncts. Content disjuncts are typical for the language of fiction, unlike style disjuncts, which are preferably used in the conversation.

Regarding the results of our empirical research, the second hypothesis has also been accepted. The language of Charlotte Brontë used in *Jane Eyre* is significant by the preference of content disjuncts of degree of truth. Our analysis showed 124 content disjuncts of degree of truth set against 55 content disjuncts of value judgment. The findings uncovered the most frequently used disjunct *indeed*, which appeared 59 times. Furthermore, the disjunct *perhaps* arose 27 times. To contrast Biber et al. (1999) theory to our research outcome, we have not found any disjunct *really*. Thus, we claim that the preferred subcategory of disjuncts used by Charlotte Brontë is that of content disjuncts of degree of truth since the disjuncts *perhaps* and *indeed*, which belong to this group, had the highest occurrence from all 197 observed disjuncts throughout the novel.

The third hypothesis has been proved as well. Disjuncts of source of knowledge and imprecision mark only a slight occurrence in the language used by Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*. Charlotte Brontë used the disjunct *according to* only once throughout the novel. Furthermore, the disjuncts *like*, *kind of* and *sort of* did not appear at all. We conclude that disjuncts of source of knowledge and imprecision are not likely to be used in *Jane Eyre*.

Conclusion

We hope that the present study will be helpful for students who study the English language and who are concerned with English syntax since it might help them fully comprehend another linguistic phenomenon. The research results can function as authentic language material for the university lecturers during their syntax courses as well as secondary school teachers during their English language seminars. We believe that the present study will be attractive and impressive for a new generation of learners since it analyses a well-known and popular literary work. Finally, we would like to point out to the fact that teaching English (as a foreign or second language) through literature is another valuable and attractive way how we can develop the learners' language. We, as language teachers, can considerably enhance emotional and intellectual interaction between the students (readers of the literary texts) and the literary texts and encourage them to take into consideration specific language elements occurring in the discussed sources and subsequently practice them in the classroom.

About the Authors:

Dr. Eva Leláková works as a senior lecturer at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, University of Žilina, Slovakia. In her research she focuses on the comparative analyses of specific lexico-semantic fields, syntactic structures of literary texts, corpus linguistics and application of the results of the matrix theory in the teaching theory and practice. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5294-2505>

Andrea Belúchová, M.A. is the graduate of the study programme: Teaching English Language and Literature in combination with Citizenship Education at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Žilina, Slovakia. In her research she deals with the analysis of syntactic structures used in the romance novels of Victorian Age. She works as a cultural translator and teacher of English. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6645-7837>

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