

A Study of Non Canonical Sentence Structures in ‘The Tell Tale Heart’ by Edgar Allan Poe

[එඩ්ගර් ඇලන් පෝ විසින් රචිත ‘The Tell Tale Heart’ හි
සම්ප්‍රදායික කතුවේ නොවන වාක්‍ය ව්‍යුහයන් පිළිබඳ අධ්‍යයනයක්]

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Abstract

The short story, ‘The Tell Tale Heart’ written by Edgar Allan Poe, is gifted with a wide range of non canonical sentences. The objective of this study is to analyze the types of non-canonical sentences of the story. The research problem centers on identifying the distinctive sentence patterns in the text. Given the lack of previous studies on

the sentence structures in this story, the findings could offer valuable insights for aspiring writers engaged in literary work. A limitation of this study is its exclusive focus on non canonical sentence structures. The research adopts a qualitative and quantitative methodology and aims to explore sentence structures beyond traditional grammar, reflecting their unique nature.

Keywords: Allan, Canonical, non-canonical, packaging, structures,

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එඩ්ගර් ඇලන් පෝ විසින් රචිත The Tell Tale Heart කෙටිකතාව, සම්ප්‍රදායානුකූල නොවන වාක්‍ය රාශියක් ඉදිරිපත් කරයි. මෙම අධ්‍යයනයේ අරමුණ කතාවේ සම්ප්‍රදායානුකූල නොවන වාක්‍ය වර්ග විශ්ලේෂණය කිරීමයි. පර්යේෂණ ගැටලුව කතාවේ ඇති සුවිශේෂී වාක්‍ය රටා හඳුනා ගැනීම කෙරෙහි කේන්ද්‍රගත වේ. මෙම කතාවේ වාක්‍ය ව්‍යුහය පිළිබඳ පෙර අධ්‍යයනයන් සිදු කර නොමැතිකම නිසා, සාහිත්‍ය විමර්ශන කටයුතුවල නියැලී සිටින ලේඛකයින් සඳහා යම් අවබෝධයක් ලබා දිය හැකිය. මෙම අධ්‍යයනයේ සීමාවක් වන්නේ එම කතාවේ සම්ප්‍රදායානුකූල නොවන වාක්‍ය ව්‍යුහය කෙරෙහි සුවිශේෂී අවධානයයි. පර්යේෂණය ගුණාත්මක හා ප්‍රමාණාත්මක ක්‍රමවේදයක් අනුගමනය කරන අතර ඒවායේ සුවිශේෂී ස්වභාවය පිළිබිඹු කරමින් සාම්ප්‍රදායික ව්‍යාකරණවලින් ඔබ්බට වාක්‍ය ව්‍යුහය ගවේෂණය කිරීම අරමුණු කරයි.

මූලපද: ඇලන්, සම්ප්‍රදායානුකූල, සම්ප්‍රදායානුකූල නොවන, වාක්‍යරටා, ව්‍යුහය

Introduction

‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ is a short Gothic horror story, written by Edgar Allan Poe, an American writer, and was published in 1843. Allan .Poe uses his words economically in the ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ to provide a study of paranoia and mental deterioration. Poe’s economic style and pointed language, with many non canonical sentences, thus contribute to the narrative content. A syntactic analysis of this text will uncover a wide range of innovations in that his artful writing has proved effective for those in the pursuit of literary advancement.

Research Background

The short story The Tell-Tale Heart by Edgar Allan Poe is widely recognized for its intense psychological narrative and distinctive stylistic features. The story presents a first-person narrator whose unstable mental state is reflected through fragmented and unconventional language use. One of the most notable aspects of the text is its extensive use of non-canonical sentence structures, which deviate from standard English word order. These structures play a crucial role in conveying the narrator’s anxiety, obsession, and distorted perception of reality. In traditional grammar, canonical sentences follow a predictable Subject–Verb–Object pattern, whereas non-canonical forms alter this arrangement for emphasis or stylistic effect. Poe’s manipulation of syntax contributes to the rhythm and emotional intensity of the narrative. The study of such structures falls within the broader field of syntax and information structure, particularly focusing on how meaning is organized and communicated. Previous research has often emphasized the literary and thematic aspects of Poe’s work rather than its grammatical features. As a result, the syntactic dimension, especially non-canonical constructions, remains relatively underexplored. Therefore, examining these structures in the story provides valuable insights into the relationship between linguistic form and literary expression.

As such, this article aims at diverse sentence structures employed by the writer with careful selection

and combination of words, phrases, maintaining naturalness and art. The story incorporates around five pages. The analysis is based on finding the application of word classes, phrases and clauses within the text in artful styles, in particular based on non-canonical way, with special reference to narrative syntax.

Statement of the Problem

A number of researches have been conducted on the stories of this writer. These non-canonical features have often been discussed only in terms of literary effect rather than grammatical form. The problem, therefore, lies in the lack of systematic linguistic analysis that connects Poe's syntactic deviations to the broader principles of non-canonical sentence structure within English grammar. This study seeks to bridge that gap by identifying and analyzing the syntactic and information-structural patterns underlying the narrator's speech. Therefore, the research focuses on What types of the non-canonical sentences employed in the short story, 'The Tell-Tale Heart'.

Aims of the Research

- To identify non-canonical sentence constructions in the text
- To identify peculiar syntactic structures in the text
- To analyse the usages of them

Significance of the Study

Edgar Allan Poe was an American poet, novelist and literary critic. Conversely,

his presence in literature, as well as in Classical erudition, have made this a source of inspiration for young writers, with, throughout the text, highlighting the syntactic flexibility and the mobility of traditional word order. As such, much more important would be the work of this kind for students and story writers, at a time when there is a dearth of study of non-canonical sentences of English. There is a void in this field as limited research has ever been conducted in this respect. Therefore this remains a promising research ground.

Limitations

This study focuses primarily on the syntactic elements of the short story concerned with special reference to the sentence level, excluding broader linguistic aspects. Additionally, it does not focus on comparative analysis with other works.

Review of Literature

There are many books and pieces of research on the sentence structures of the English language. Tufte (2006) explores how standard sentence patterns and forms contribute to meaning and art in more than a thousand wonderful sentences from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Ali, (2003) focuses on the ambiguities of Dickens' writing. Therein the types of ambiguities are stressed: genuine or pseudo ambiguities, ambiguities standing out as enemies for clarity, and deliberate or random ambiguities. Another research has been conducted by Biswas. (1971) which is based on Old English sentence and grammar patterns. Another study on

styles of sentences has been conducted by Salameh (2010) where he discusses features of literary language and non-literary language. This further shows that, using Generative Grammar, stylisticians make attempts to create deviant constructions, expanding the limits of grammaticized sentences. Lone (1984) reflects deeply on relative clauses and coordination in both languages, comparing similarities and differences. Another research has been conducted on the stylistics of James Joyce's writing by Bagchi.(2009). In that case, the researcher explores complicated sentence structures with ambiguities related to the early James Joyce writing. In addition, non-linguistic features have also been discussed. Sivaranjani(2022) has researched on the simple sentence structures of both English and Tamil.

A Stylistic Study by Dhanapanjale (2012) reveals the sentence constructions of Virginia Woolf's novel. It focuses on phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels of the writings of Virginia novels with special reference to stylistics. Jamshaid.. (2024) explores usages of tenses and the differences in word order compared to British English. Abdurrahman (2016) reflects on the complexity of sentences related to nominal clauses in William Faulkner's short story 'A Rose for Emily'. Jumhur.(2014) did a research and it has been based on nominal ellipsis types such as nominal, verbal, and clausal ellipsis with their functions. Lone (1984) discusses the common features of both languages. Andrew (1997) illustrates the comparison of word order of English and Chinese.

This book covers the prescriptive version of English grammar. Hawkins, John (1983) is primarily interested in only basic word orders. Throughout the book, Hawkins assures the viability of a notion of basic word order, drawing examples from various languages.

Another research by Lakshmi (Ed),(1996), deals with similarities and dissimilarities in word order between English and Telugu. The discussion of clause structures in English and Telugu is highlighted. Robert (1996) deals with sentence structures, constituents, sentence structure functions, sentence structure categories, phrases, sentences within sentences, and clauses. Quirk et al. (1985) discuss the clause patterns of English are extensively discussed and the syntactic functions of clause elements and order of clause elements are elaborated. Slobodanka (2002), highlights that English is an analytical language whereas Serbian is a syntactic language.

The article written by Assaiqeli, and Aladdin, (2021), discusses the diverse inversion forms found in the context of spoken corpus. The writer tries to take examples related to inversion forms therein. Perez (2018), highlights the linearization of verbal complements and adjuncts in learning advanced English. Sankaravelayuthan, and Rajendran, (2020), give a brief introduction on word order and parameters have been discussed using the basic principles, topicalization hierarchies, and Rijhoff, (2014), is mostly concerned with general ordering principles and the three linguistic categories (formal, functional,

and semantic)that are relevant for constituent order. Fries (1940), focuses on a comparison between Old English and Modern English deviations related to the kinds of inflections. Hengeveld (2004) analyzing the word order, argues that the word order possibilities of a language are partly determined by the parts of the speech system of that language. He shows that there is a balanced tradeoff between the syntactic, morphological, and lexical structure of a language.

Sankaravelayutha (2008), reflects the word order typology of English and Tamil and utilizes the output of the study for framing rules to transfer the English word order structures into Tamil word order structures. The discourse–functional account of English inversion forms has been researched by Birner, and Betty, (1994),. Kirkwood (1969), discusses the comparisons related to English and German rather than the flexibility of syntax. Payne (1992), researched various languages based on functionally and typologically oriented features, covering specific topics in language by collecting data from a wide variety of languages and language typologies. This is mainly based on investing universals of human language rather than the flexibility of word order of the English language. Vilolini, (2002), focuses on the all the aspects ;phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic, in stylistic terms. The instances of Left Dislocation in English is reflected by Couto (2025), therein he reflects many cases related to one information packaging system, dislocation. Feng (2024) highlights the

information packaging systems based on the novel-Animal Farm , where the researcher discusses packaging systems ; preposing, postposing, locations, inversions, if clauses and existential sentences. Nguyen (2013) highlights information packaging systems, illustrating and analyzing the order of occurrences in their writing .Anh (2023) discusses the flexibility of non-canonical sentences in English which can be placed according to the speaker’s or writer’s preference or needs. Francis(2010) ,throws a light into relative clauses and their extrapositions. Another study has been conducted by Hopp and et al (2023) under purview of processing to learn non-canonical word orders. In particular, it explores linguistic and cognitive predictors of sentence reanalysis in the L2 comprehension of relative clauses among the low intermediate L1 German adolescent learners of L2 English. Egashira(1997) reanalyzes topicalization and relativization in the framework of Minimalist Program put forward by Chomsky and proposes an approach to them. The issues related to locative inversion and topicalization is discussed in the article, written by Bruening in 2021. Another research conducted on dislocation and topicalization by Peter(2014) which has investigated the information structural properties of two English constructions featuring constituents in a non-canonical , left–peripheral position; Topicalization and Left Dislocation. Kamada (2015) focuses on the usages of right dislocation found in the English language , illustrating many instances.

Basic Concepts in Information Structure ; Topic, Focus, and Contrast are highlighted by Kroeger(2021) in the article ,’ Basic Concepts in Information Structure: Quynh,N(2023) researches on ‘Left Dislocation and Right Dislocation in English versus Vietnamese Equivalent in Some English and Vietnamese Short Stories’ and investigates the similarities and differences in the use of left dislocation and right dislocation in English and Vietnamese short stories. The researcher concludes that LD realized in English short stories can perform the function of contrasting while Vietnamese LD does not. Oktavianti ((2016) emphasizes the strategies of non-canonical constructions in English with illustrations. It is based on an introductory inquiry into the matter concerned.

The research discussed above has not been based on the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe. This present study will be based on the story written by Edgar Allan Poe whose pieces have been internationally acclaimed.

Methodology

The analysis employs both quantitative approach and quantitative method, under the scope of Content Analysis based on Thematic Approach. For the theoretical background, the Information structure Theory introduced by William Chafe and Michael Halliday.

Theoretical Framework

The modern linguistic concept of Information Structure is largely built

upon the work of Michael Halliday, who coined the term in 1967, but the foundational idea of a universal sentence structure based on information roles can be traced back to the 19th-century Hungarian linguist Samuel Brassai. They are two main approaches to Information Structure: Firstly, linguistic choices often distinguish between information already known or previously discussed(given information) and information new to the context. Secondly, certain choices in language reflect the distinction between the topic, which is backgrounded or assumed, and the focus, which is highlighted or emphasized (Thu Phan, 2023). For that, various constructions of sentences are applied by writers, Information structuring refers to non canonical structures used in written languages that differ from their fundamental or canonical counterparts not in terms of “truth conditions” but in the manner in which the content is communicated (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005).

Huddleston & Pullum, (2005) provide illustrative examples of both canonical and non-canonical versions. The non canonical variants’ word order is less common and subject to pragmatic constraints that do not apply to the default versions, rendering them less fundamental than their default counterparts. Moreover, Huddleston and Pullum(2005) identifies eight primary information packaging constructions in English from a syntactic perspective , which are illustrated as follows.(table 1)

Information structure	Canonical type	Non-canonical type
Preposing	He will become a clever doctor	A clever doctor he will become
Postposing	I have read all the articles she has written very carefully several times	I have read very carefully several times all the articles she has written
Inversion	A solitary woman who spent her days reading and gardening lived in a little wooden house in the middle of a deep forest	In a little wooden house in the middle of a deep forest lived a solitary woman who spent her days reading and gardening
Existential	A man is outside	There's a man outside
Left dislocation	My wife doesn't know this	My wife, she doesn't know this
Right dislocation	The people from next door are still here	They are still here, the people from next door
Cleft	Jack has a secret to tell Ann	It is a secret that Jack has to tell Ann
Passive	A bear attacked him	He was attacked by a bear
Extraposition	That he's guilty is clear	It is clear that he's guilty

While the mobility of clause constituents is generally restricted in English, a change in the position of the rheme can still be achieved through information packaging strategies (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). Cleft constructions, in general, involve dividing a sentence into two clauses; a cleft clause and a relative like clause (Parker, 2003). Preposing, also known as fronting or topicalization (Chen, 2013; Callie & Keller, 2008), refers to a sentence structure where a constituent that is typically positioned after the verb is instead placed before it (Ward et al, 2001).

Extraposition is a grammatical construction employed for postponement that supports the concepts of 'end focus' and 'end weight' (Cele-Murcia, 1987). Most clauses that use 'there' as the subject require the verb 'be' and are known as existential clauses (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005). According to OED, passive construction usually consists of an auxiliary and the past participle of the verb and usually denotes, relates to or uses a voice of a transitive verb where the subject undergoes the action of the verb. According to Lambrecht (2001), left location is defined as 'a sentence structure in which a referential constituent which could function as an argument or adjunct within a predicate-argument structure occurs instead

outside the boundaries of the clause containing the predicate to its left.

Discussion and analysis

Non canonical features and analysis (sentence level)

1. TRUE!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?

non canonical features: fronting, dash

sentence level flow-Theme → Nested focus → Rheme → Final contrastive focus

2. Above all was the sense of hearing acute.

non canonical features : Inversion (complement and subject inversion).

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → End-focus

3. and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

non canonical features : fragment , parallelism

sentence level flow-Theme – Rheme – Nuclear Focus

4. It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain;

non canonical features: extraposition. adverb inversion

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Embedded focus

5. Object there was none.

non canonical features: fronting, inversion.

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → End-focus

6. Passion there was none.

non canonical features: Fronting, inversion.

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → End-focus

7. For his gold I had no desire.

non canonical features: Fronting

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → End-focus

8. One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it.

non canonical features: appositive clause

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → End-focus

9. So by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye for ever.

non canonical features: Fronting, dash-parenthesis,

sentence level flow-Theme — Transition — Rheme

10. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what

dissimulation I went to work!

non canonical features: Fronted adverbial, ellipsis,

sentence level flow-Theme → Focus → Nested contrastive focus → Nuclear focus

11. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it—oh, so gently!

non canonical features: Fronting, parenthesis, segments

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear focus

12. And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head.

non canonical features: fronting, repetition

sentence level flow-Theme → Transition → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

13. I moved it slowly—very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep.

non canonical features: parenthesis, dash, fronting

sentence level flow-Theme → Transition → Rheme

14. And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously—oh, so cautiously—cautiously (for the hinges creaked)—I undid it just so much that a single thin

ray fell upon the vulture eye.

non canonical features: parenthesis

sentence level flow-Temporal Theme → Action → Elaborative Rheme → Nuclear Focus

15. And this I did for seven long nights—every night just at midnight—but I found the eye always closed;

non canonical features: fronting, parenthesis

sentence level flow-Fronted Theme → Temporal elaboration → Rheme

16. for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye.

non canonical features: cleft, fronting

sentence level flow-Theme → Transition → Nuclear Focus (contrast)

17. And every morning, when the day broke,

non canonical features: fronting, ellipsis

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme

18. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

non canonical features: fronting

sentence level flow-Theme → Transition → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

19. Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door.

non canonical features: fronted

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear focus

20. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine.

non canonical features: inversion

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear focus

21. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers—of my sagacity.

non canonical features: Fronting, appositives

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ End-focus

22. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts.

non canonical features: Fronting, ellipsis

sentence level flow-Theme → Action/
manner → Nuclear focus

23. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers), and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

non canonical features: parenthesis, fronting, repetition,

sentence level flow-Theme → Nested causal focus → Rheme → Nuclear focus

24. I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out—"Who's there?"

non canonical features: parenthesis, dash

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Result → Nuclear focus

25. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down.

non canonical features: Fronting

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear focus

26. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

non canonical features: fronting

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear focus

27. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me.

non canonical features: Fronting, parenthesis

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nested descriptive focus → Nuclear focus

28. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not.

non canonical features: Ellipsis

sentence level flow-Topic → Rheme → Nuclear focus

29. He had been saying to himself—“It is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor,” or “it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.”

non canonical features: Dash, ellipsis

sentence level flow-Topic → Frame → Rhemes → Nuclear focus

30. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim.

non canonical features: Ellipsis, fronting

sentence level flow-Elliptical theme → Causal frame → Rheme → Nuclear focus

31. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to feel the presence of my head within the room.

non canonical features: Cleft, parenthesis, repetition

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Parenthetical contrast → Nuclear focus

32. When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little—a very, very little crevice in the lantern.

non canonical features: fronting, repetition

sentence level flow-Temporal background → (topic) → Focused

33. So I opened it—you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily—until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and full upon the vulture eye.

non canonical features: Parenthesis, repetition

sentence level flow-Topic → Insertion → Rheme

34. It was open—wide, wide open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it.

non canonical features: Dash, paratactic, repetition

sentence level flow-Topic → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

35. And now have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the senses?—now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton.

non canonical features: fronting, parenthesis, existential

sentence level flow-shift marker → (rheme) → focus

36. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant.

non canonical features: Parallel, paratactic

sentence level flow-Topic → Rheme → Rheme-final focus	passive
37.It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!	sentence level flow-Theme→ Rheme → Nuclear Focus
non canonical features: Parenthesis, repetition paratactic	43.With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room.
sentence level flow-Topic → Rheme	non canonical features: Fronting
38.I have told you that I am nervous: so I am.	sentence level flow-Theme→ Rheme → Nuclear Focus
non canonical features: Ellipsis,	44. He shrieked once—once only.
sentence level flow-Topic → Rheme	non canonical features: parenthesis, ellipsis
39.And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror.	sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus
non canonical features: Fronting, inversion	45.In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him.
sentence level flow-Theme → Marked Theme → Rheme	non canonical features: Fronting
40. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still.	sentence level flow-Theme → (Given Topic) → (Rheme) → Focus
non canonical features: Fronting	46.But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound.
sentence level flow-Theme → Transition → Rheme → Nuclear	non canonical features: Fronting
41.But the beating grew louder, louder!	sentence level flow-Contrast → Rheme
non canonical features: Repetition	47.This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall.
sentence level flow-Contrast marker → Focus	non canonical features: Fronting
42.And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbor!	sentence level flow-Topic → Rheme → Focus
non canonical features: Fronting, dash,	48.Yes, he was stone, stone dead.
	non canonical features: Repetition, paratactic

sentence level flow-Theme (Given) → Rheme → Nuclear Focus	→ Nuclear Focus
49. There was no pulsation.	54. When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock—still dark as midnight.
non canonical features: Existential	non canonical features: dash, ellipsis
sentence level flow-Existential → Rheme	sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus
50. If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body.	55. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door.
non canonical features: Fronting	non canonical features: existential, paratactic
sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus	sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme / Nuclear Focus
51. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence.	56. I went down to open it with a light heart,—for what had I now to fear?
non canonical features: ellipsis	non canonical features: Dash, paratactic
sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus	sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme) → Nuclear Focus
52. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even his—could have detected any thing wrong.	57. There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police.
non canonical features: Fronting, parenthesis	non canonical features: Existential, dash
sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus	sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Elaborative Rheme → Nuclear Focus
53. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever.	58. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.
non canonical features: Existential, dash, ellipsis, parenthesis	non canonical features: Passive, paratactic, parenthesis
sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme	

- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme)
→ Nuclear Focus
59. I smiled,—for what had I to fear?
- non canonical features: Dash, ellipsis, paratactic
- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear Focus
60. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream.
- non canonical features: Parenthesis, fronting
- sentence level flow-Theme → → Rheme / Nuclear Focus
61. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country.
- non canonical features: Parenthesis, fronting
- sentence level flow-Theme → Discourse Marker → Rheme / Nuclear Focus
62. I led them, at length, to his chamber.
- non canonical features: fronting,
- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Rheme → Nuclear Focus
63. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed.
- non canonical features: Ellipsis
- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear Focus
64. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and
- desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.
- non canonical features: Fronting, paratactic, hypotactic, parenthesis
- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Rheme → Nuclear
65. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone.
- non canonical features: Fronting, paratactic
- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear Focus
66. The ringing became more distinct:—it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definitiveness—until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.
- non canonical features: Paratactic, repetition, parenthesis
- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear Focus
67. It was a low, dull, quick sound—much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton.
- non canonical features: apposition, dash
- sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme
→ Nuclear Focus
68. I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not.

non canonical features: Dash, paratactic, ellipsis

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

69.I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased.

non canonical features: Dash,

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

70.I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations, but the noise steadily increased.

non canonical features: Paratactic

sentence level flow-Theme→ Rheme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

71. I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observation of the men—but the noise steadily increased.

non canonical features: Paratactic, ellipsis

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

72. I foamed—I raved—I swore!

non canonical features: paratactic

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

73.It grew louder—louder—louder!

non canonical features: Repetition,

dash, ellipsis

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme → Nuclear Focus

74.Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they knew!—they were making a mockery of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think.

non canonical features: Dash, parenthesis

sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme

75. I felt that I must scream or die!—and now—again!— hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!— “Villains!”

non canonical features: Fragment, paratactic,

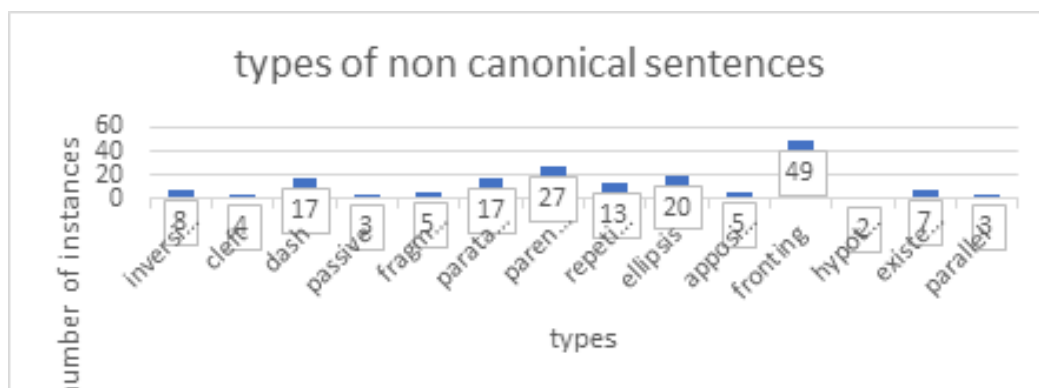
sentence level flow-Theme → Rheme

Statistical interpretation of data collected

Instances of occurrences- non canonical sentence types

This whole comprises 338 sentences/ utterances and of them, 182 sentences can be taken as non canonical sentences. As a percentage, it stands at 54% on the whole. Below is the occurrences of instances of non canonical sentences types in the text concerned.

Chart 1 –types of non canonical sentences



As per the chart, Fronting is the non canonical type most commonly used by the writer.

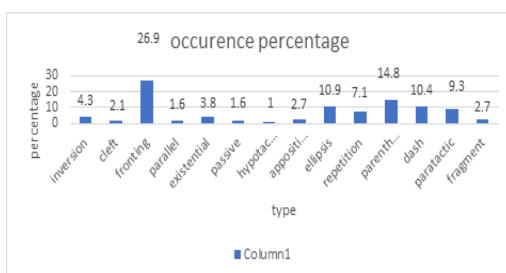
The quantitative analysis of non-canonical sentence types in *The Tell-Tale Heart* shows notable variation in their frequency of occurrence. The maximum frequency is observed in hypotactic structures (49 instances), indicating Poe’s strong reliance on complex subordination to build psychological depth and narrative tension. The minimum frequency occurs in existential constructions (2 instances), suggesting that such structures play a limited role in Poe’s stylistic framework. The average frequency across all twelve types is approximately 14.9 instances, highlighting that while certain forms—such as parenthesis (27), ellipsis (20), and dash (17)—are relatively common, others appear only sporadically. This distribution demonstrates that Poe’s syntax is characterized by both diversity and intentional imbalance, where certain non-canonical structures dominate to convey intensity and fragmentation,

while others are sparingly used to create contrast and emphasis within the narrative rhythm.

Analysis of occurrences of non canonical sentences – percentage wise

Of 182 non canonical sentences, the percentages of each non canonical type of sentence is indicted below.

Chart 2 – Occurrence of percentage (non canonical sentences)



Conclusions

The analysis of non-canonical sentence structures in *The Tell-Tale Heart* reveals that Poe’s stylistic intensity is strongly supported by his syntactic experimentation. Among the identified types, hypotactic structures (49 instances) dominate, indicating a preference for complex subordination that mirrors the narrator’s obsessive and recursive thought processes.

Parenthetical and elliptical constructions are also frequent, reflecting interruptions and hesitations characteristic of psychological instability. Repetition, dash, and paratactic patterns further enhance the rhythm of anxiety and emotional turbulence, while rarer forms such as inversion, cleft, and existential constructions contribute to localized emphasis and dramatic tension. Overall, Poe's strategic use of non-canonical syntax functions as more than mere stylistic ornamentation—it becomes an integral mechanism for enacting the narrator's fractured consciousness and heightening the story's psychological realism. This linguistic evidence confirms that syntactic deviation in Poe's prose serves as a deliberate means of shaping meaning and mood, aligning grammatical irregularity with narrative madness.

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