

# EMPHASIS: THE INHERENT ELEMENT OF MEANING AND COMPREHENSION IN LANGUAGE USE IN SKVORECKY JOSEF'S *THE ENGINEER OF HUMAN SOULS*

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## ABSTRACT

This work studies emphasis as an inherent element of meaning and comprehension in language use by using the novel: *The Engineer of Human Souls*. Language is the primary medium through which humans communicate ideas, emotions, and intensions. Therefore, effective communication requires strategic placement of the main points or ideas in a sentence which is the epicenter of intelligent writing or speaking. Emphasis, which is one of the methods of shaping meaning and enhancing understanding, refers to a conceptual technique for arranging words, sentences, paragraphs on their gradation, whereby important elements are placed on strategic location so that the desired meaning may be accentuated to the audience as originally intended by the author or writer. The problem is that second language learners find it difficult to appropriately employ emphatic devices in their writings for clarity and comprehension. The aim is to find out the extent for which the author used emphatic devices in his narrative to achieve his intended message. The theory is derived from Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG), with emphasis on emphatic structures. The source data, *The Engineer of Human souls* was diligently and painstakingly read by researcher and critically analyzed. The analysis shows that the writer of the novel sustained a good use of emphatic structures to achieve a readable and interesting prose. Some of the results of the analysis include appropriate use of periodic sentence, use of climax, use of opening a sentence with coordinate conjunction and the use of figures of rhetoric, and so on.

**Keywords:** emphasis, climax, audience, prose, comprehension

## Introduction

Grammar is defined by many linguists in different ways. The Oxford English Dictionary sees it as “the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences” (2005). Again, Yule views grammar as ‘linguistic etiquette’, that is, the identification of the ‘proper’ or ‘best’ structures to be used in a language; the study and analysis of the structures found in a language, usually with the aim of establishing a description of the grammar of English (87). But, in his Systemic Functional Linguistics, Halliday ( qtd by Allerton) defines grammar as a system of choices or options with complex relations between them (6). In the theory, Halliday sees meaning as a range of choices or options (system) from which language users choose what they want to say. That is, Halliday views grammar as resource and not as rule governed. The theoretical principles underlying the study of Emphatic structures are derived mainly from the Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Accordingly, Martin and Rose say that systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a big multi-perspectival theory with more dimensions in theory bank that might be required for any one job. SFL is called systemic because compared with other theories, it foregrounds the organization of language as options for meaning and is also functional because it interprets the design of language with respect to ways people use it to live ( 21 - 24).

According to Halliday (qtd in Kress) grammar of a language is reduced to a small set of functional components called meta-functions. The meta-functions are divided into the ideational function, interpersonal function and the textual function.

**The ideational function:** This aspect organizes language in such a way as to use it to relate the realities or experiences of the world: to express content, to convey information, messages, ideas, concepts and processes. Ideational function is divided into the experiential and logical meta-functions. The experiential meta-function is used to arrange participants and circumstances, while the logical meta-function is used to make discourse clear and coherent by using reasoning and linkages. Ideational function is realized in the clause by transitivity.

**The interpersonal function:** the interpersonal component expresses the speaker’s role in the speech situation, his/her personal commitment, and his/her interaction with others. Interpersonal function expresses the relation between language and its users, communicates the speaker’s attitudes and influences the behavior and attitudes of the hearer. This function is realized in the clause by mood and modality. It indicates personal meaning in the type of exchange going on, the role of the participant and the attitude and judgement of the speaker.

**The textual function:** This component expresses the structure of information and the relation of each part of the discourse to the whole and setting. In doing so, language is used to produce a cohesive text. (19-24)

Halliday (qtd by Melrose) states the selection of options in the textual systems such as those of theme information and Voice and also the selection of cohesive patterns and emphatic structures... tends to be determined by the symbolic forms taken by the interaction of medium, written or spoken. But it extends to much more than this, to the particular semiotic function or range of functions the text is serving. The rhetorical concepts of expository, didactic, persuasive, descriptive and the likes are examples of such semiotic functions (35). That is to say that the textual function is realized in grammar by message structure, system of theme and information, deictic, voice, presupposition and cohesive patterns of reference.

Second language acquisition studies on writing skill stress the need of producing emphatic discourse to maintain effective communication. The problem is that the second language learners have been found to have difficulty in using emphatic devices in their write-

ups. The aim of the work is to find out the extent for which the author used emphatic construction to enhance meaning and comprehension in the novel. It is also to unravel the typological perspectives of emphasis and the syntactic processes involved. It is also to examine how emphasis influences meaning and comprehension in written communication. The mastering of the typology and the syntactic processes would go a long way in helping the learners of English as a second language (ESL) to create a clear, meaningful and comprehensible text. The source data, *The Engineer of Human souls* was diligently and painstakingly read and critically analyzed by the researcher. *The Engineer of Human souls*, written in English by Josef Skvorecky, is used as the source data for analyzing emphatic structures. The expressive title: *The Engineer of Human souls* is held by many political indoctrinators to be Stalin's definition of the writer: as an engineer constructs a machine, so must a writer construct the mind of the new man.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Halliday sees grammar in three ways namely the theme, mood and transitivity systems, and they are located at the clause level. The theory is rooted in Halliday's Systemic functional grammar (SPG) of textual meta-functions. Emphatic structures are embedded in textual meta-functions and reveals the organization of the message. It gives a sense of continuity in discourse and they help to make a text emphatic, interesting, meaningful and understandable, and for this, it takes care of the positioning of the element within the clause. Emphasis could be realized by changing loose sentences into periodic sentences, by arranging ideas in the order of climax or by using strong active voice instead of the weak passive voice and so on. In view of this, the researcher has adopted this theory for through analysis of the text *The Engineer of Human souls* written by Josef Skvorecky.

### **The Concept of Emphasis**

The term "emphasis" refers to a conceptualized technique for arrangement of words, sentences, paragraphs based on their gradation, whereby important elements are placed in strategic location; the desired meaning may be accentuated to the audience as originally intended by the author (speaker or writer) Enos,415). Accordingly, Nwachukwu-Agbada says that emphasis (sentence) helps you acquire a style of writing that will add aesthetic finesse to your idea (28). In other words, emphatic construction embellishes and adds more meaning to your ideas. It gives luster, perspicuity and vividness to your thoughts such that the reader/listener would not be subjected to much strain in decoding the meaning. Melrose and Halliday say that "emphasis is the processes of shifting the new information to the right-changing the order so that the older information is given first and newer information is at the end of the sentence" (33,59). They state that it is easier for the readers to understand the sentences of older information if presented first because they feel more prepared to understand the newer information,

Nwachukwu-Agbada states that "emphasis, as a property of a good sentence deals with the question of whether it has been shown in an appropriate manner what the most important part of the sentence is (39). It states that underlining the focus of information and the rearrangement of the words in the sentence are some of the devices of achieving it in written sentence. Also Leech and Short say that "emphasis takes place when 'given' information tends to precede 'new' information in atone unit. The speaker usually starts speaking by giving information that is assumed to be shared with the hearer before giving that one that is 'new' to the hearer" (214).

Williams says "emphasis is used to highlight the importance of ideas and to accentuate meaning, and that repetition of parts of sentence with grammatical elements such as prepositional phrases, adverbial phrases along with introductory clauses serves to highlight the author's (speaker's or writer's) views (350).

### Methods of Achieving Emphasis in Language Use

These are some of the techniques of achieving emphasis in Language Use.

Hodges states that emphasis in sentence construction can be achieved through the following method:

- (a) By varying the beginning of sentences, for example:
  - (i) By opening with an adverb or an adverbial clause
  - (ii) By opening with a prepositional or participial phrase
  - (iii) By opening with a coordinating conjunction such as: but, and, or. nor, or yet
  - (iv) By using an appositive or modifier
- (b) By varying sentence length
- (c) By avoiding the loose, stringy compound sentence
  - (i) By using subordinate clause
  - (ii) By changing loose sentences into periodic
  - (iii) By using phrases
- (d) By varying the conventional subject-verb sequence, by occasionally separating subject and verb by words or phrases
- (e) By varying the usual declarative statement with an occasional question, exclamation,
- (f) exhortation or command. (319-324)

Also, Anyanwu states that the following methods are used to achieve emphasis. They are: subordination, phrases, modification, active voice, and figures of rhetoric According to Grudzina and Mary, emphasis is achieved by starting a sentence with adverbs, by preposition, by inverting subject and verb, by repeating importing ideas, by using climax, by using relative clause and rhetorical questions. As can be seen above, there are various methods through which emphasis can be achieved as put forward by different renowned authors. However, the writer has deemed it necessary to summarize the various devices and has been able to come up with the following methods that have enjoyed a relatively wider acceptance and usage for exposition and analysis of the data.

#### (a) By using figurative language or figures of rhetoric

A figure of speech is the use of a word in an imaginative rather than in a literal sense. The two chief figures of speech are simile and metaphor. A simile is an explicit comparison between two things of a different kind or quality, usually introduced by like or as- “he sprang on the foe like a lion.” A metaphor is an implied comparison- “he was a lion in the fight.” There are many other figures of speech like personification, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole and so on.

#### (b) By using periodic sentences instead of loose sentences

According to Nwankwo, a sentence in which the main clause is either placed at the beginning or completed at the beginning is called loose; one in which the main clause is either placed at the end or completed at the end is called periodic (48-49). Both types of sentence are effective. The loose sentence, more commonly used, makes for informal writing and easy reading, while the periodic sentence, by holding the reader in suspense and reserving the main idea until the end, is more emphatic.

For instance:

Loose- Practice daily if you want to become a good footballer (a clear sentence)

Periodic- If you want to become a good footballer, practice daily (more emphatic)

However, remember not to overuse the periodic sentence to the point of making your style unnatural. Variety is desirable.

#### (c) By arranging ideas in order of climax

This is a situation where ideas or things are arranged in the order of importance or ascendancy.

For example:

Unemphatic- We could hear the roar for cannon, the shrieks of the wounded, and the clash of the falling trees.

Emphatic- We could hear the roar of cannon, the clash of falling trees, and the shriek of the wounded (climax reached in “shrieks of the wounded”)

**(d) By using strong active voice instead of weak passive voice**

The active voice emphasizes the performer of the action, and the performer holds the subject position in the sentence, while the passive voice emphasizes the receiver of the action, and the subject of the sentence receives the action, the performer of the action may or may not be identified later in the sentence.

For example:

Strong- The bee, flitting from flower to flower, gathered honey.

Weak- Honey was gather by the bee as it flitted from flower to flower

Exception- If the receiver of the action is more important than the doer, the passive voice is more effective.

For example:

Emphatic- Rice is grown in Southern Nigeria.

Emphatic- Any person who attempts to escape will be shot

**(e) By putting a word or a Phrase out of natural order/ inversion of subject and verb**

When a word or a phrase is put out of natural order in a sentence, it shows that it is marked, that is, it has an unusual form or unmarked if it has the usual form. The normal word order of English is Subject+ predicate+ complement+ adjunct. For example: everyone started running all of sudden (normal word order-unmarked). All of a sudden, everyone started running (marked- unusual word order). The order is: adjunct + subject + predicator. Consequently, the adjunct part becomes the “new” emphasized part of the sentence.

**(f) By opening with a coordinating conjunction- but, and, or, nor, yet. For example:**

But the injured man, lying beside the road, waited patiently for help ( “but” makes a contrast with something in the preceding sentence such as “The young woman wept and wrung her hands”).

And the injured man, lying beside the road, waited patiently for help (“and” makes a simple addition to the preceding sentence.)

**(g) By Opening with appositives or other modifiers**

This technique is used to connect two sentences using a modifier, a relative clause or an appositive, for example:

His Royal Highness, a genial fellow, invited the governor into his palace (appositive)

Checking the android phone, Andrew discovered a missing application (-ing verb form modifier)

Delayed by a traffic jam, James went to work late (-ed modifier)

The managing director, who lives in Ogun, is visiting the company next month (a relative clause)

Relative clauses are a useful way of providing additional, nonessential information in sentence.

**(h) By starting with an adverb or an adverbial clause, for instance:**

Patently lying beside, the road, the injured man waited for help (adverb).

While the injured man was waiting for help, he lay patiently beside the road (adverb clause)

The above sentences emphasize how the subject lay patiently, waiting for help, and this creates a kind of tension building up. This technique is effective in fictional writing. In an academic essay, moving the adverb to the beginning of the sentence serves to vary the rhythm of a paragraph, thereby enhancing emphasis.

### (i) By using contrast

The use of contrasting words or phrases is another way to emphasize particular points or ideas. As with repetition, contrast is particularly effective when combined with parallelism. For example: He is not smart as a surgeon but rather crafty as a fox. Contrast is also achieved by using transitional words or phrases such as however, but, yet, although, unfortunately, on the other hand and so on. Such words pointedly distinguish one idea from another. For instance: We left early in order to beat rush hour traffic, unfortunately, we still missed our plane.

### (j) By Opening with a prepositional or participial phrase

Beside the road, lay the injured man, waiting patiently for help (prepositional phrase)

When the prepositional phrase is moved to the beginning of the sentence, the emphasis shifts from the subject- the injured man-to the location in which the man is lying. Words that are placed at the beginning or end of a sentence generally receive the greatest emphasis. They add additional information to the text and provide a sense off flow to the story/essay, making it less choppy and more pleasurable to read.

Lying beside the road, the injured man waited patiently for help (participial phrase)

### Data Analysis

**The use of periodic sentences-** This holds back its main idea or (clause by beginning with the subordinate idea or structures of modification. Examples:

*Once you know something, no one can take it away from you-p77*

*When he said that, I stood up and she stands up, brushing Mr. Zawy6natch...p101*

*"Because I am also prejudiced against revolution", and she looks sharply into Percy's innocent-infant face"-p111*

*Outside the gothic windows, a melancholic snow is falling-p125*

*When I look up from the book, I see the scorn the men of the future hold for the men of yesterday...125*

*When an uninstructed multitude attempts to see with its eyes, I see veronica in a spring dress, standing in a crowd...125*

*Last week in Toronto, I attended a meeting where the representatives of the PLO, Comrade Arafat, spoke-127*

Unfortunately, there is not a single religious soul in the classroom-130

While lenecek raised a trembling hand above the enigmatic pig, Dora was for the first time...p89

Suddenly I found myself gripped by an intense sadness-145\

The italicized words or expressions above hold back their main ideas, and they begin with subordinate structures of modification

**By arranging ideas in order of climax-** A situation where ideas or thins are arranged in order of importance or in ascending order. For example:

Nana looked at Dora coldly, scolded at her and slapped her shoulder-p103

Irene reported that thieves from nowhere barged into her house made away with her wristwatch, clothes and a car-p143

In the process, Nadia said, some are born great, some achieved greatness and others have greatness thrust in them-p177

**By using strong active voice instead of weak passive voice-**A situation where the action of the verb is performed by the subject. For instance:

I opened the door and a great bizarre spectacle greeted me-p150

The sexton shook his keys pointedly and they rattled like bones-p157

Mr. Seneka thrusts his fingers under the young man's nose-p159

Kostelec conducted a pilot study addressing the validity of the thief's claims-p104

They have involved me in many projects-p131

The Slovakia girl conducted a study on nursing and turnover-p121

Our manager sent a circular to all the employees-p213

**By opening a sentence with a coordinate conjunction-but, and, or, nor, yet**

And with this, she turns her back on the organizer provocatively...p163

But they don't do that way in books-p159

"And doesn't that amount to the same thing?" Interrupted a woman in a mink coat-p160

Yet Nadia felt that she had known the reason why Lenecek had backed out-p132

"But you said it first", says the young man-p159

**By opening a sentence with a preposition phrase, a participial phrase and the use of appositives**

In a corner, over a glass, a sullen Frank-p251

At this point, one of the cultural advisers rose to his feet...p81

"In purely romantic affairs like ours, Danny", she said unsteadily...p229

In this-in this storm-it is hard anyway, Nadia gasped-115

Coughing blood, she went to see the doctor this morning-p238

Speaking from personal experience, I can tell you that Mr. McEachen, that your good mother...p380

Angered by what Danny did, he proceeded to the lofty window and peeped outside...p318

Novak, a brilliant scholar, came in-p402

Jirina O' Relly, an olive-skinned, Czecho-italian Lollobrigida, raised a point of motion...p317

The Director's letter, maker of the republic was openly read.--89

**Starting a sentence with an adverb or an adverb clause**

Now I am deep in a field-study of our working class-and I mean deep; deep down in the mines-p82

Not wishing to embarrass Mr. Zawynatch, I don't tell him that Mrs. Santner is Czech...p83

So if you give a chance to an exile, the Czech government will give you "pro Arte Antiqua...98

Though I tried my best, not even the Venerable father Meloun would have believed me...p119

Willingly I reached for the catch...p134

Embarrassingly I looked at Irene-p228

Next morning Nadia didn't come to work-p237

Once again I walked after him-p120

**By using figures of Rhetoric**

Lenecek angrily said, “I am not carried away by it: my Euphoria born of hunger and thirst for love fades away as the days walked past-p158. (Personification- a figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstract idea is represented as possessing human or animate qualities). Here “euphoria” an abstract idea is given an animate qualities “danced past” (passed by) , and ‘fades away’ (to disappear gradually).

“Why do you talk of love, instead of bread?” Dora reprimanded her-p180 (this is synecdoche, also called change of name. That is one term is used to substitute another). “bread’ here means, material things, food and money, “love” here has its literal meaning (not used figuratively).

*I have known her for years, as a woman, she is like a mortar shell, she demolishes. She destroys* (p.231) (simile- the comparison of two things of unlike nature by using as or like). Here, the woman is likened to mortar shell (a war equipment that when explodes, demolishes and destroys things on its way).

During our days in college, Mrs. Edenvale, the Dean of Humanities told us that Alcohol is the leprosy that gnaws away at health, wealth and peace-p309. (metaphor-comparing things of unlike nature without using as or like) Here, alcohol is seen as “leprosy” ( a dangerous illness) which consumes and destroys health, wealth and peace. Again, ”leprosy” is likened to rodents that “gnaw”(to keep biting or chewing something so that it gradually disappears). Generally, the metaphors bring to the fore or reminds us about the destructive nature of alcohol in human beings. It destroys wealth, health and peace.

Besides, what man would have the courage to face ten pairs of hostile eyes which openly tear you apart-p311. “ten pairs of eyes” is figuratively used to mean “ten children” quite a good number to frighten any brave man.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study is still on emphasis: the inherent element of meaning and comprehension in language use by using the novel, *The Engineer of Human souls* by Josef Skvorecky as the source data. Josef skvorecky is a professor of English at Erindale College of the University of Toronto. His novels include: “The cowards, “Miss Silver’s Past” and “The bass saxophone”. He has written many short stories and film scripts, and is the winner of the 1980 Noustadt international prize for literature.

The work is purely on how the author used emphatic devices or constructions to achieve his narrative goal or message. Emphasis refers to a conceptualized technique for arrangement of words, sentences, paragraphs based on their gradation, whereby important elements are placed in strategic location; the desired meaning may be accentuated to the audience as originally intended by the author (speaker or writer). By controlling emphasis, readers’ attention can be focused on what is most important. That is to say, emphasis is important not only to create variety and maintain interest but also to help reader or listener easily glean the main points from the text. Moreover, understanding the concept of emphasis opens up opportunities to clarify communication and writing in writing skills for different genres. It can effectively help students improve the clarity of their communication and also determines what readers understand as important and can even change the meaning of a sentence.

Now, it becomes imperative to look at the emphatic devices as used by the author to achieve his narrative goal. Emphasis has a good meaning effect in writing. For example, one of the emphatic devices is the use of periodic sentence, which the subordinate or modifying parts are presented first while the main idea is presents last. This has the ability to arrest the interest of the reader and keep that interest in suspense till the end. The suspense created urges the reader to

read on until he reaches the climax which is the central point of the message. For example, although she is brilliant, she cannot solve a simple mathematics. This helps to unravel hidden meaning and enhances comprehension.

Also the technique of opening a sentence with coordinators such as ‘and,’ ‘but’ and ‘Yet’ shows the emphatic nature of the sentence involved. The ‘and’ construction makes a simple addition to the preceding sentence, for example, ‘And with this she turns her back on the organizers, provocatively thrusting...’ The use of ‘but’ and ‘yet’ make a contrast with something in the preceding sentence respectively. For example, ‘But they don’t talk that way in books’. Effective and emphatic sentences can often begin with a conjunction, but only when the conjunction shows the proper relation of the sentence to the preceding one. Moreover, the emphatic use of adverbs and prepositions placed at the beginning of sentences enhance emphasis and build-up of tension. Words that are placed at the beginning or end of a sentence generally receive the greatest emphasis. Moving adverb and preposition to the beginning of sentences is meant to enhance emphasis, and provide a sense of flow to the narrative, making it less choppy and more interesting and understandable.

Furthermore, elegant and judicious use of appositives and modifiers not only make the narrative very interesting and understandable but also very engaging and pleasurable. It makes the characters and their actions clearer and specific. Also, they are used to reduce redundancy, and add details, for example, my father, the Dean and Secretary, is in his office. That is My father is not only the Dean of the School of Mechanical Engineering but also the secretary. The use of appositives by the author creates syntactic movement from general to particular. This device gives writers the necessary impetus to move from the general to the particular. For example, the man is very clever; Mr. Andrew is a very clever man. Appositive sentence, the man, Mr. Andrew, is a very clever man.

Strong active verbs are copiously used to make the story vivid and engaging. For instance, strong active verbs create active mental pictures- instead of saying ‘Novak went into the room’ he used instead, ‘Novak dashed into the room’ which helps the reader see the action. It also adds energy and movement to the narrative, by making the events in the story to have a sense of immediacy and dynamic rather than dull or slow. The use of strong active verbs in the novel helps the writer convey emotions and actions without unnecessary explanation thereby making it clearer, sharper, and more memorable.

The author also used figures of rhetoric to embellish his narrative. These rhetorical devices like simile, metaphor and personification make the narrative more colourful and appealing, which make it move beyond plain, ordinary expression. Figures of rhetoric as used here transform the story into a rich, expressive and emotionally engaging narrative in the sense that it helps the writer communicate more effectively and creatively and the readers comprehend more of the intended message.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, emphasis is quite indispensable in writing. It is essential in language use because it clarifies meaning, improves comprehension, expresses emotions, prevents misunderstanding and strengthens communication. Effective use of emphasis makes language use meaningful and impactful. Without emphasis, communication would lose depth and clarity. A studious application of the techniques of emphasis will undoubtedly add colour, comprehension and vigour to communication.

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