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STYLISTIC POTENTIAL OF SYNTACTIC FRAGMENTATION IN LITERARY TEXT

The article explores the stylistic potential of syntactic fragmentation as a mechanism of affective encoding in contemporary literary discourse. Rather than treating syntax as a neutral vehicle of propositional meaning, the study adopts a stylistic perspective that foregrounds the role of grammatical organisation in the construction of literary sense. Drawing on theories of foregrounding, deviation, and sentence architecture, syntactic fragmentation is conceptualised as a stylistic strategy that deliberately deploys grammatically reduced or structurally disrupted constructions, including ellipsis, parataxis, minor sentences, clause suspension, and non-finite structures. The empirical focus of the study is Sally Rooney's novel "Intermezzo", selected for its recurrent use of non-canonical syntactic patterns at moments of heightened emotional tension. Through close qualitative analysis of selected passages, the article demonstrates how fragmented syntax functions as a structural encoding of affective states such as guilt, anxiety, emotional paralysis, and cognitive overload. Rather than naming emotions explicitly, the novel inscribes them into the grammatical fabric of narration, allowing affect to be enacted rather than described. The findings suggest that syntactic fragmentation operates as a central stylistic resource through which literary discourse produces experiential immediacy and emotional intensity beyond semantic content. By disrupting syntactic continuity, the narrative formalises emotional instability and registers internal conflict at the level of sentence structure. The study contributes to contemporary stylistics by theorising syntactic fragmentation as a distinct stylistic phenomenon and by demonstrating its sense-creating function in a contemporary novel. Future research may extend this framework to other genres, languages, and narrative traditions and may integrate corpus-based approaches to examine the distribution and stylistic salience of fragmented constructions across literary discourse.

Keywords: literary text, syntax, syntactic structure, sense vs. meaning, fragmentation, foregrounding.

Introduction. The most prominent feature of literary texts pertains to their aesthetic potential to attract and manipulate, astound and confound, tranquil or disquiet – all of those being possible through the verbal canvas of a literary text itself. Thus, they are vividly distinguished from other forms of discourse not by the continuity of unique linguistic units, but by the intensified sense-creating potential of language organised within them. A literary text constitutes “a multi-levelled and semantically heterogeneous entity linked with the cultural context” (I. Bekhta) [1, p. 57]; therefore, its significance lies in *how verbal units are arranged in order to create the environment with increased sense-generating capacity*. While

linguistic meaning is conventionally associated with semantic and grammatical properties of individual units, literary discourse mobilises these units in patterned and foregrounded ways that generate additional layers of sense at a higher-order level of interpretation. In this respect, a literary text functions as a heightened semiotic space, where meaning is not merely conveyed, but actively produced through stylistic organisation.

Problem Statement. Language use in a specific context is traditionally viewed through a stylistic lens, since it is predominantly influenced by the extralinguistic circumstances of the situation. A literary text, in this sense, signifies a vast scope



of actual linguistic experimentation, ranging from lower phonemic to higher textual hierarchical levels. The immanent property of a literary text is its power to carry an aesthetic value and evoke an extraordinary artistic impact on a reader. To implement literary aesthetic function and stand out, a literary text may employ uncommon, occasional, and episodic linguistic structures, patterns, or devices that “deviate from some norm of comparison” or are characterized by their “avoidance of the predictable” (G. Leech) [6, p. 60–61]. He also argues that “features of language within that text may depart from the norms of the text itself” [7, p. 44]. As a result, the majority of prose texts showcase the phenomenon of internal deviation, i.e., the acquisition of linguistic units of a diverse range to express literary sense (not just semantic meaning) in a specific context [7, p. 44]. A literary text as a linguistic instantiation can, thus, be regarded as verbally ephemeral, transient, and circumstantial, where every linguistic choice puts forth an additional interpretive dimension. N. Kondratenko expresses a similar point of view: a literary text employs a particular linguistic game that justifies the creation of unconventional literary texts for aesthetic purposes, resulting in a plethora of abnormal syntactic constructions that shape singular semantic features [4, pp 64–65].

Within stylistics, syntax occupies a particularly significant position in the study of the creation of literary sense. It effectively mediates between grammatical structure and experiential representation. According to contemporary Ukrainian linguists, “a sentence is a carrier of style to a much greater extent than a word. This is explained by the fact that the individual freedom of choosing structural options at the syntactic level reveals the author’s manner of unfolding thought; syntax has more structural possibilities for expressing thought than at other levels” (N. Darchuk et al.) [3, p. 5]. Hence, the present study seeks to explore the potential of atypical syntactic patterns, i.e., formal syntactic deviation and disruption, for creating additional sense that emerges at a meta-level of perception.

Literature Review. Contemporary studies of stylistics in literary texts demonstrate a diverse range of scholarly interests. One of the leading perspectives in stylistics emphasises the role of syntactic organisation in meaning-making. The concept of foregrounding “comes from the semantic opposition of literal and figurative meaning” and constitutes “a semantic oddity which demands that a linguistic form should be given something other than its normal (literal) interpretation” (Leech & Short) [7, p 30].

The findings of corpus stylistics demonstrate that syntactic patterns in fiction correlate with semantic and affective structures. Furthermore, this line of thought lays the groundwork and legitimizes the systematic analysis of clause types and deviations (Semino & Short) [10]. Literary criticism and linguistic experimentation (William H. Gass) argue that sentences create spaces where semantic properties determine the ‘architecture’ of syntax. For that purpose, complex sets of spaces where feelings, ideas, and energies may engage various syntactic features [5, p. 15, 18]. As it logically follows, non-canonical syntax functions as a creative device rather than a flaw or failure, aligning with the above-listed approaches that treat truncated or fragmented structures as stylistically salient.

Similarly, Ukrainian linguistics has recently witnessed a surge of interest in the syntax of literary texts. Elliptical constructions and aposiopeses in dialogue have been examined as stylistic devices that mirror speech patterns (I. Mykytiuk, O. Musurivska) [8]. Another perspective is research on syntactic structures in Ukrainian poetry that uses syntactic parameter analysis to describe authorial idiolects and the stylistic differentiation of sentences in poetic texts (N. Darchuk et al) [3].

Despite the abundant scholarly research on the stylistic potential of syntax in literary texts, the problem of *fragmented* stylistic patterning in a contemporary novel remains a palpable gap. The concept of *syntactic fragmentation* as a standalone research object is somewhat underdeveloped, which makes it an ambition of current research to pin it down.

The objective of the present paper is to theorise syntactic fragmentation within a stylistic framework and investigate how its linguistic expression contributes to the creation of affective and semantic sense in a contemporary novel.

Results and Discussion. In a literary text, syntax functions as a major carrier of narrative significance. Throughout the narration, readers can construct the plot’s linearity, become familiar with the main characters, and immerse themselves in the literary work’s fictional world. The role of syntactic organisation, in this vein, lies in shaping propositional content and regulating rhythm, cohesion, and cognitive processing. In other words, every single aspect of text syntax matters a great deal. Thus, literary discourse activates meaning through systematic stylistic organisation.

That being said, it is high time we speculate: what if the spine of syntactic configuration is governed by partition or disintegration? What if a literary text,

or a novel as its generic instantiation, purposefully brings on board deviating syntactic patterns with a certain aesthetic intention? These considerations can be addressed through the concept of *syntactic fragmentation*, which operates not merely as a stylistic ornament but as a structural encoding of affective disturbance. Syntactic fragmentation involves sentences that, during narration, are broken into chunks, interrupted, and dissected. Thought is repeatedly initiated, fragmented, resumed, and abandoned, producing a sense of emotional labour that cannot culminate in relief or transformation. Syntax becomes the medium through which emotional states or affective meaning are enacted rather than described, encoded rather than categorically identified, while explicit emotional lexis is avoided.

In this study, syntactic fragmentation is understood as a *stylistic strategy involving the deliberate deployment of grammatically reduced or structurally disrupted sentence forms*, e.g. ellipsis, parataxis, minor sentences, and clause suspension, *through which literary discourse foregrounds affective, cognitive, or experiential meaning*. The power of syntactic fragmentation lies in generating emotional intensity, cognitive disturbance, and experiential immediacy beyond propositional meaning.

The novel *“Intermezzo”* (2024) by Sally Rooney was selected as the study’s material. First and foremost, the paper can be regarded as a continuation of research on Rooney’s literary work and individual style. Previously, authors have focused on the mechanisms of sense creation in her novel *“Normal People”* [2]. This time, research has partly retained a ‘sense-constructing’ stance, but the focal point has shifted to the syntactic apparatus for constructing affective meaning.

The plot of *“Intermezzo”* centers on two brothers, Peter and Ivan, who have recently lost their father to a serious illness. Tangled up in grief, troubled family relationships, and silenced individual grudges, both Peter and Ivan have to embrace the uncertainty and vagueness of their lives. While accepting the status quo with its subtle complexities, both characters experience significant emotional pressure and often fail to consciously identify their feelings. Peter, who is older and regards himself as more mature, knowing, and responsible for his family and two erratic relationships, is prone to conducting his internal speech in a disintegrated way. His way of “thought presentation” (M. Short) [11], reflected in lengthy internal monologues, is characterized by fragmented clauses, ellipsis, and non-canonical sentence structures. On the surface, these may

disrupt expectations of grammatical completeness of his speech. Yet, these syntactic deviations function as foregrounded forms and prompt Peter’s intensive emotional states, such as agitation, anxiety, or dissociation, which are rendered structurally perceptible. In this way, syntax becomes a site where affect is not described but *enacted*, allowing the novel’s context to encode emotional intensity through formal instability.

Let us now turn to the novel *“Intermezzo”* itself. We will support the above discussion with salient examples from Rooney’s novel and, afterwards, present a detailed interpretative analysis of the paragraphs that feature instances of syntactic fragmentation. The selection of contextual chunks from the novel was guided by the presence of pronounced emotional tension and recurrent irregularities in syntactic structure, which were further hypothesised to signal stylistically foregrounded moments of affective encoding:

“Takes his phone from his pocket, opens the contacts list and taps Ivan’s name, see if he’s okay, and the call disconnects. Blocked number he forgot or did he. Taps again for no reason. If he’s hurt or something, just to tell him sorry. Shouldn’t have pushed me. No, it wasn’t your fault. Wave of weakness he feels as if to be sick again and finds himself touching, holding the slick wet side of wall beside him, passing cars, and he’s leaning almost crouching, his back against the brickwork. Something wrong, he can’t walk. Try Ivan again but of course there’s no answer. Can’t call Sylvia. She hates him now. Himself also he hates. Better off if he did it. Scrolling up unseeing and then finally tapping again, holding the phone to his ear. Breathing hard against the wall, picked out in the passing headlights, shielding with his hand his eyes, and the phone is ringing, three times, four, and then the voice” [9, p 369–370].

One of the most prominent syntactic features in this passage is the extensive use of *non-finite verb chains*. The passage opens with a sequence of non-finite constructions: *“takes his phone from his pocket, opens the contacts list and taps Ivan’s name, see if he’s okay”*. Finite verb forms are suspended in favour of participial or bare infinitive structures, producing a syntactic flow that prioritises action over reflection. Stylistically, this creates a sense of compulsive movement, in which behaviour unfolds automatically, without a deliberative pause. In affective terms, syntax registers urgency and emotional pressure by accelerating narration.

Another key feature is *ellipsis* and the reduction of causal or explanatory structure. *“Blocked number*

he forgot or did he” and “*Taps again for no reason*” omit syntactic completion. These constructions present clear uncertainty without resolving it, leaving doubt grammatically uncontained. Affectively, ellipsis encodes hesitation and self-questioning, while the absence of explanatory subordination prevents emotional resolution. Syntax, thus, sustains uncertainty as an ongoing state.

Subject omission contributes to the representation of self-directed affect. In sentences like “*If he’s hurt or something, just to tell him sorry*” and “*Shouldn’t have pushed me*”, grammatical subjects and finite predicates are suppressed. These reduced structures function as internalised justifications or impulses rather than fully formed thoughts. The stylistic effect is to weaken agency and responsibility at moments of emotional vulnerability, allowing affective impulse to surface without rational framing.

Syntactic minimalism functions as affective condensation. Clauses such as “*Something wrong, he can’t walk*,” “*Can’t call Sylvia*,” “*She hates him now*,” “*Himself also he hates*,” and “*Better off if he did it*” reduce syntax to its bare essentials. These minimal constructions carry high semantic and emotional density, compressing fear, isolation, and self-loathing into grammatically economical forms. The lack of elaboration prevents emotional processing and encodes despair as a static condition rather than a narrated development.

Participial constructions and delayed finite closure shape the closing sequence. The final sentence “*Scrolling up unseeing and then finally tapping again, holding the phone to his ear. Breathing hard against the wall, picked out in the passing headlights, shielding with his hand his eyes, and the phone is ringing, three times, four, and then the voice*” relies heavily on participial phrases before arriving at the finite clause “*the phone is ringing*”. This delay of grammatical resolution heightens tension and prolongs affective suspension. Syntax stretches time, allowing emotional strain to accumulate.

To summarize, the passage above constructs emotional disturbance through a patterned interplay of non-finite verb chains, ellipsis, subject suppression, syntactic minimalism, and delayed finite resolution. Each feature contributes to a discourse in which affect governs syntactic organisation, producing a sense of urgency, instability, and self-directed emotional collapse that is encoded structurally rather than articulated lexically.

Let us analyse another example in a similar way:

Reading, he glances up, trying not to walk into anyone, and back at the screen. Why at the door.

Because she doesn’t want him to come near, he thinks. Because of what happened. Everything. And has no one else to help her. Feels as if rather than breathing he is swallowing raw the dirty urban air. To think of her in pain. And what is that thought. A way of provoking in himself merely a familiar suite of bad feeling. Guilt, self-hatred, something else, worse. Nothing achieved, no solace provided. Only alternative however is not to think, not to imagine or even try. Leave her even in his own mind alone and untouched in her agony. Perform unfeelingly the various duties, pick up the medicines, call by the hospital when she needs collecting. To her it would probably make no difference. Not to be thought of, since his thoughts accomplish nothing. Why think then. Why open that part of his brain, why gaze with such dread down into the bottomless emptiness that is the suffering of another person, emptiness he can never measure or touch. Like going along to his dad’s meetings with the oncologist. Asking intelligent questions, remembering the right details, exact haemoglobin count at the last blood draw, 10.6 off the top of his head. What was it all for, the show of erudition, command of detail. Not as if it made a difference. Insurance against future shame. I was there, I served my hours, punched my time card, don’t forget. Don’t blame me. I was there. While his father sat timidly beside him, embarrassed probably by his peremptory manner. Afraid of alienating the doctors. Why even think about that now. The suffering of another person. Which he failed to stop. False show of competence only disguising the fact of his uselessness, his failure to do anything, to make anything better, to make any difference at all’ [9, pp. 277–278].

One of the most prominent syntactic features in this passage is the frequent use of **non-finite and verbless clauses** to structure consciousness. The paragraph opens with “Reading, he glances up, trying not to walk into anyone, and back at the screen.” The initial present participle suspends the sentence before any stable subject-predicate relation is established. This structure foregrounds continuity rather than completion: thought and perception are rendered as continuous and unanchored processes. Stylistically, non-finite syntax mirrors a mental state that is absorbed, distracted, and unable to settle into reflective coherence. Action and cognition unfold simultaneously, syntagmatically, without hierarchy.

A closely related feature is the recurrent use of **isolated interrogative fragments**. Questions such as “Why at the door”, “And what is that thought”, “Why think then”, and “Why open that part of his brain” are grammatically incomplete, as they

lack auxiliary verbs or full clause structure. These truncated interrogatives do not function as requests for information; instead, they stage moments of reflection. Syntax here encodes cognitive blockage: questions arise but are not syntactically elaborated, suggesting that thought itself falters at the point of articulation. The fragmentary form enacts a hesitation to fully enter the emotional terrain implied by the questions.

Another significant syntactic pattern is the accumulation of *sentence fragments beginning with conjunctions or prepositions*, such as “Because she doesn’t want him to come near, he thinks. Because of what happened. Everything.” The repetition of “*Because*” without a governing main clause creates a sense of causal excess without resolution. Reasons multiply, but none are syntactically completed. Stylistically, this pattern conveys emotional overload: the grammar registers causation without allowing it to stabilise into explanation.

The passage also relies heavily on *nominal fragments and verbless evaluative clauses*, for instance: “Guilt, self-hatred, something else, worse”. and “Nothing achieved, no solace provided”. These constructions suppress verbs of being or feeling, presenting emotions as static entities rather than processes. The effect is one of emotional inventory rather than experience: affect is listed, named, and immediately foreclosed. Syntax encodes emotional exhaustion, where feelings are recognised but no longer dynamically engaged with.

A further feature is the use of *infinitive clauses*, as in “To think of her in pain.” and “Leave her even in his own mind alone and untouched in her agony.” Detached from the main clause, these infinitives hover between intention and prohibition. They suggest possible mental actions while simultaneously withholding commitment. This syntactic indeterminacy reflects the character’s ethical paralysis: thinking is presented as both necessary and futile, with grammar unable to resolve the tension.

Some lines of the passage introduce *parataxis*: “I was there, I served my hours, punched my time

card, don’t forget.” The coordination of short, declarative clauses mimics administrative language. Emotion is displaced into procedural self-justification. Stylistically, this syntactic flattening reduces ethical engagement and reinforces the passage’s broader sense that affect has been converted into obligation and self-surveillance.

Taken together, these syntactic features construct a stylistic field in which emotion is not directly expressed but structurally constrained. Fragmentation, ellipsis, and non-finite constructions encode a consciousness that circles around suffering without entering it, registering affect as cognitive pressure rather than emotional flow. Syntax thus functions as a mechanism of emotional containment, staging the limits of thought when confronted with another person’s pain.

Conclusions. This study has shown that syntactic fragmentation operates as a central stylistic mechanism through which literary discourse encodes affect at the level of grammatical organisation. Through ellipsis, minor sentences, parataxis, and clause suspension, emotional disturbance and cognitive tension are not merely described but structurally enacted, allowing syntax to function as a primary carrier of affective sense. The analysis of Sally Rooney’s “*Intermezzo*” demonstrates that such fragmentation is systematically employed at moments of heightened emotional intensity, where grammatical disruption aligns with states of guilt, uncertainty, and emotional paralysis. In this novel, fragmented syntax emerges as a defining stylistic feature through which emotional experience is rendered as unstable, processual, and structurally inscribed in narrative form.

The study opens several avenues for further research, including comparative analyses across contemporary fiction of the Anglophone global literary community, cross-linguistic investigations of fragmented syntax, and corpus-based approaches to its distribution and stylistic salience. Such directions may further clarify the role of syntax as a core resource in the creation of literary sense.

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Головащенко Ю. С., Боднарчук А. Р. ПОТЕНЦІАЛ СТИЛІСТИЧНОЇ ФРАГМЕНТАЦІЇ В ХУДОЖНЬОМУ ТЕКСТІ

Стаття присвячена дослідженню стилістичного потенціалу синтаксичної фрагментації як механізму афективного кодування в сучасному художньому дискурсі. Синтаксис розглянуто не лише як нейтральний носій пропозиційного значення, а як організаційний рівень мови, що бере безпосередню участь утворенні літературного смислу і формуванні читацького досвіду. Враховано теорії «висунення», семантичної девіації й архітекτονіки речення і синтаксичну фрагментацію концептуалізовано як особливу стилістичну стратегію, що передбачає умисне використання граматично редукованих або структурно порушених конструкцій, зокрема еліпсису, парцеляції, мінорних і «обірваних» речень, зупинки синтаксичного розвитку та безособових структур. Такі форми розглянуто не як випадкові відхилення, а як системно вмотивовані засоби стилістичної організації художнього тексту. Матеріалом дослідження слугує роман ірландської авторки Саллі Руні “Intermezzo”, що було обрано з огляду на систематичне використання в ньому нетрадиційних синтаксичних структур у контекстах підвищеної емоційної напруги та внутрішнього конфлікту персонажів. Шляхом стилістичного аналізу відібраних фрагментів показано, що фрагментований синтаксис виконує функцію структурного кодування таких афективних станів, як провина, тривога, емоційна паралізованість і когнітивне переважанення. Емоції при цьому не названі прямо, а вписано в граматичну тканину нарації – їх не описано, а формально відтворено як внутрішній досвід персонажів. Зроблено висновок, що синтаксична фрагментація постає як ключовий стилістичний ресурс, через який художній дискурс формує досвідну безпосередність, психологічну напругу та емоційну інтенсивність поза межами суто семантичного значення. Перспективи подальших досліджень окреслено в міжжанрових, міжмовних і корпусних аналізах фрагментованих синтаксичних конструкцій у художньому мовленні.

Ключові слова: художній текст, синтаксис, синтаксична структура, значення і смисл, фрагментація, висунення.

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