The Power of the Linguistic Choices in Literature

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Abstract

Slave narratives have always been the source of multifarious examinations and the subject of so many pieces of research that it would seem at, first sight, futile to attempt to come up with other discoveries about the field understudy. However, the rationale behind undertaking this research is that the previous studies have mainly been preoccupied with how objective or subjective the slave narrative autobiographies are but they have not been interested enough in how the power of the linguistic choices attempts to influence readers. The following study manages to focus on the power of the formalist and cognitive stylistics together with the literary pragmatics and narratology on readers.

This paper follows a tripartite analysis involving three instruments, namely a corpus analysis, an empirical analysis and an investigation of published receptions. The corpus analysis includes quantitative and qualitative tools. The empirical analysis is founded on a questionnaire. These two instruments are validated by an examination of some published testimonies on the internet. It has been found that autobiographies are not mere "forms of direct access to [authors] themselves" (Olney 1972: 332 cited in Anderson 2001:3), but rather convenient ways of communication. The writer's recourse to some linguistic choices is not only due to a source of inspiration, it is rather an attempt to communicate with the reader who will be totally engaged in this work of art.

Introduction

The need to begin this research is inspired by a great preoccupation with literature and especially with slave narrative literature. It should be noted, then, that slave narrative readers feel that they have dwelled in a textured nation that brings about a mirror to and a microcosm of slaves. They could by no means explore the dimmer interiors of the self or grasp the predicament of non belonging meaning without reading slave narratives.

Probably, then, the unquestionable and considerable importance of autobiographies in knowing about the other whether he/she is a person or a nation, legitimizes the choice of *OlaudahEquiano, The Interesting Narrative* and *Other Writings* as a case study. Through this slave narrative events and linguistic styles that are carefully intertwined, the writer succeeds in bringing to the reader the dark interior side of himself and of his nation as a whole.

According to what Klarer calls "author oriented approach", in autobiographies, there does exist a connecting thread between the literary texts, on the one hand, and the biography of the writer, on the other. This dissertation seeks to highlight that autobiographies are not mere "forms of direct access to [authors] themselves" (Olney, 1972: 332 cited in Anderson, 2001: 3), but they are rather convenient ways of communication.

Since any autobiography is, above all, a literary text and any literary text is a means of communication that involves an addresser, an addressee and a message that is based on shared rules, we can, then, assume that this case study, that is *OlaudahEquiano, The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings,*is a form of communication that may have an impact on the reader since communication goes hand in hand with cognitive poetics. In this respect cognitive poetics "strives…to specify how we go about making sense of texts, which are the interpretative operations on which literature itself, as an institution is based" . (Culler, 1975: viii cited in Besbes, 2011: 136)

This means that the writer's psychological state is transmitted through his text to the reader and, hence, it causes a cognitive effect upon him/her. Therefore, the focus will be based on the intricacies of this generic form and its impact on us.

When dealing with the concept of slavery and slave narrative writings, and especially with slave narrative autobiographies, the writers of critical surveys are concerned with that vertical kind of relation. This relation is based on a tension that includes the "I" of the writer or the protagonist, on the one hand, and the "They" of the other, on the other on hand, be it a person or a nation.

The same critics, however, have not given enough interest to how the slave narrative writers manage to grab the readers' attention. The current research, then, strives through the recourse to *OlaudahEquiano, The interesting Narrative and Other Writings,* to fill in this gap by showing the effect of the linguistic style on readers.

This dissertation attempts to show that, in spite of the fact that readers are removed from writers in space and time, they get involved through the linguistic choices that are mentioned in this work of art, and create for themselves a world of fantasy that they have never experienced before.

1. Literature review

Because the major focus of this research project is the communicative task and the way the autobiographical writer seeks to influence readers, this section focuses mostly on deixis and on cognitive poetics, which stands as a bridge between cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology.

1.1Deixis and its Relation to Subjectivity

This word is derived from Greek and means "pointing". It has to do with indexing.Therefore, in an unmarked way, any speaker appears to be the deictic pivot of the act of communication. He, however, and under the impact of subjective elements in the world, uses displaced manners of deixis in order to point to other elements far away from the same context and to reach "affective ends" (Triki, 2002: 143). In this vein of writing, one can say that the use of demonstratives is not based on actual concrete distance. The speaker rather uses them to call attention to particular referents.

Pronouns, for instance, have a general meaning at the linguistic level. When it comes to specific meaning, however, we have to rely on the speech in which they were uttered. In other words, to understand what is meant by "I", one has to go back to the person who said it and to the context in which it was used. Hence, there would be two types of meanings: a general meaning derived from the linguistic system versus a specific meaning which is context dependent. In short, the specific situation depends on who is saying what to whom in what social context, as indexing involves more meanings and functions than simple reference.

This shifting nature of the linguistic devices reminds us of Jacobson and his work on shifters. For him, words have a general linguistic meaning at the "langue" level, but when it comes to specific meaning, there would be some trouble. One cannot go to specific meaning if he / she does not have access to the context of the situation. This relates to Jacobson's notion of "embruage" which is, undoubtedly, the connection of the speaker to the text. After saying that, one cannot speak about "debruage" or the attempt to be neutral in an autobiographical text.

In *OlaudahEquiano, the Interesting Narrative and Other Writings,* and concerning person deixis, the "I" of the speaker who speaks about the present situation, the situation of a European writer, is different from the "I" of the African child who speaks about his childhood with his countrymen. The temporal dimension here is very important, i.e., there are two types of "I": the present "I" that the writer associates himself with and the past "I" that he wants to distance himself from. This is clearly shown in Olaudah's description of his homeland Africa when he says: "that part of Africa known by the name of Guinea, to which the trade for slaves is carried on" (page 32) as if he was not one of the captives who are carried to Europe against their will. Because the meaning of "I" shifts from one speech event to another, this pronoun is called a shifter.

1.2 Cognitive Poetics
Cognitive poetics is a new type of literary theory. It involves a panoramic investigation of the relationship between the writers' expressions of ideas and feelings and the reading of literary texts. In fact, a careful scrutiny of this brand of literary theory shows that it is coined through a combination between cognitive linguistics and cognitive psychology.

This section takes its importance from the fact that cognitive poetics shows that there is a link between the act of purification or catharsis that one comes to when he/she finishes reading and our mental processes. Cognitive poetics, then, « strives to… specify how we go about making sense of texts, which are the interpretative operations in which literature itself, as an institution is based ». (Culler 1975: viii cited in Besbes, 2011: 136).

1.3 Cognitive Linguistics
According to the cognitive linguists Lakoff and Johnson, meaning and knowledge go hand in hand and can by no means be separated. This is better explained in the studies conducted by neurologists. Ahlsén0 maintains that:

> Neurologistics studies the relation of language and communication to different aspects of brain function. In other words, it tries to explore how the brain understands and produces language and communication. This involves attempting to combine neurological/neurophysiological theory (how the brain is structured and how it functions, with linguistic theory (how language is structured and how it functions.

In this vein, and in a retrospective survey of conceptional rhetoric, one can notice that cognitivists like Lakoff and Johnson provide extensive material illustrating how our daily use of language is pervaded by metaphorical conceptualization. For them, metaphors are not mere words. They are not just a matter of language expression but a matter of thought and reason. The language is secondary and the projection is primary.

Henceforth, a metaphor is not a gift or talent as everyone has this repertoire. These spontaneous utterances, reflecting something automatic in our mind, do not exist in poetry but everywhere in our life. It is as Hoek 1999 maintains.

> Cognitive linguisticsis not a single theory but rather best characterized as a paradigm within linguistics, subsuming a number of distinct theories and research programmes. It is characterized by an emphasis on explicating the intimate interrelationship between language and other cognitivefaculties.
> (Hoek, 1999: 134 cited in Hart and Lukeš, 2007: x)

Like Hoek1999, Hatch (1983: 2) says that "psychologists… turn to psycholinguists in the hope that it provides them with a better understanding of human cognition".

1.4 Cognitive Psychology

According to psychoanalytic literary criticism, there is a great affinity between both disciplines: psychoanalysis and literature. This reciprocal influence between psychoanalysis on the one hand and literature on the other hand has led psychoanalysists to use literature as an "exemplar", for psychoanalysis literary "criticism has sought to use psychoanalytic theory to explain literature, and even literature itself has sometimes sought to exploit psychoanalysis for creative purposes."[1]

This great preoccupation on the part of the American and European universities with the interdependency between psychoanalysis and literature has led even to the marginalization of history in dealing with literary criticism.

Psychoanalysis, then, goes deep inside the complex mind, the complex heart and the complex soul of humans to elicit their thoughts and their feelings. It can even "tell stories" as it revolves around narratives.

1.5 Cognitive Poetics in Literary Texts

A long time ago, before the emergence of the literary theory, there was a great preoccupation with the reader and the reader-oriented criticism. "The classical preoccupation with the author's intentions has led to our concern with the reader's response to a text" (Iser, 2006:5-9 cited in Besbes, 2011: 88). According to Sigmund Freud, who interprets arts through psychoanalysis, people read literature unconsciously and selectively mapping their fantasies into it. Henceforth, one can assume that literary text is a means of communication.

Therefore, cognitive poetics or this gestalt theory that links cognitive linguistics with cognitive psychology shows the extent to which literature influences readers and brings about an act of catharsis or purgation. This idea is suggested here, in this quotation from Wikipedia: "while in the mass media interest is increasingly turning to drug therapies and neurobiological explanations of behavior, elite culture manifests a continuing interpretation of the worlds of psychoanalysis and literature".

Henceforth, in the act of telling the story, writers draw the readers' attention not only to the story but also to the act of telling the tale itself. This means that writers write not only because they are inspired to write and to reach a kind of pleasure but also because they are compelled to do so, which makes the gift become a curse. This pleasure of writing, then, becomes an urgent need which is communication. Therefore, this "talk therapy is necessarily mediated by language"[2] and writers rely on writing or let's say this drug of talking to relieve them from their feeling of torture and pain.

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[1]http://www.answers.com/topic/literature-and-psychoanalysis

[2]http://www.answers.com/topic/literature-and-psychoanalysis

2. Methodology
Research Instrument
This dissertation is based on a tripartite analysis that comprises three major aspects: first, a corpus analysis second, an empirical analysis and third, an investigation of published receptions. As far as the corpus analysis is concerned, it comprises a quantitative and a qualitative analysis. As for the empirical analysis, it is based on a questionnaire. The third tool, however, is based on some evidences found on the internet[3].

2.1 Corpus Analysis
2.1.1. The Quantitative Analysis
The Quantitative Analysis comprises the Concordance Software and the manual Counting.

2.1.1.1The Concordance Software
According to Triki and Baklouti (2002:27), the concordance software is a programme on the Internet that manages to count, catalogue or index a text. It can manipulate two or more texts at the same time.

Simpson 1997 maintains that every work of literature is distinguished with specific linguistic tools that differentiate it from other works. Each writer manages to use his typical styles including sentence structure, syntactic choices, diction…etc. This can be clarified by the fact that autobiographers experience life in different manners to explain their feelings. (Halliday 1994:106) says that "language enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes around them and inside them".

In this vein, by the application of a strict corpus stylistics, stylometrics manages to come out with an objective methodology and, hence, an objective analysis.

In this autobiography, the concordance software is programmed to count the frequency distribution of the number of personal pronouns related to the first person singular "I" versus the number of personal pronouns related to the third person singular "He" and "She".

2.1.1.2 Manual Counting: Complex versus Simplex:
This tool goes back to Halliday's 1994 functional theory of clause combinations, in which he uses the terms "clause simplex" and "clause complex" instead of the structural terms simple sentence and complex sentence.

The text, then, will be divided into two tables, the first one includes the clause simplexes meaning the simple sentences and the second table includes the clauses complexes meaning the compound, the complex and the compound complex sentences. After that, this work will be given to MrMounirSmewi, ProfesseurAggrégé

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[3]http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/240009.
The_Interesting_Narrative_of_the_Life_of_Olaudah_Equiano#other_reviews

in the English Department in The Faculty of Letters of Sfax, to double check and validate the information given.

Remark: for the sake of consistency in this quantitative analysis, it will be necessary to eradicate all the interference items, namely the prologue, the summaries in the beginning of each chapter and the foot notes that may cause the concordance software to be at fault in the act of counting and to focus mainly on the story itself to dispel any confusion.

2.1.2. The Qualitative Analysis
Jacobson's model, Halliday's model and Benviniste's model

2.1.2.1 Jacobson's Model
Jacobson 1960 and to the communication model maintain that, in any communication, there is a sender who addresses a receiver. There is also a context of situation in which the active communication takes place and a bipolar code shared between the two parts.

Sender	Channel	Receiver
	Code	
	Context	
	Message	
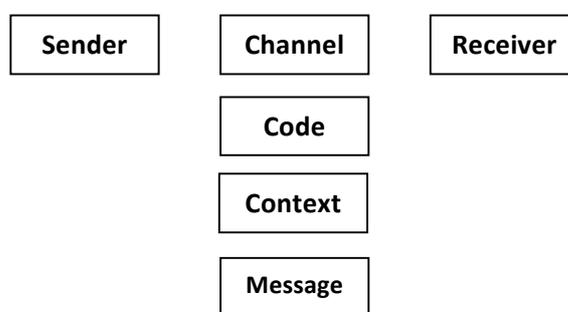
The text can be "I"- centered if the focus is on the speaker and, hence, the expressive function. It can, also, be "you"- centered if the focus is on "you" and anything that presupposes "you" like the use of the imperative, the vocative or the direct question. This is called the conative function. Sometimes, the function is not something new but its purpose is to establish a contact. For example, talking about the weather, or clearing the throat in a conference is called the phatic function or the phatic communion as its main function is to lubricate contact. In the metalingual function, however, the language talks about itself as when, for example, in a map, we have a key. If we want to refer to the world and we do not worry about the beauty of the message, this function of language, here, is a referential one. If the sender cares about the form and the beauty of language when addressing the receiver, this is called the poetic function. In general, any text has more than one of these six functions.

2.1.2.2 Halliday's Model:
Halliday and Hassan 1976 maintain that language is a social semiotic. This means that the social dimension is deeply anchored in the linguistic structure. Halliday's motto is clearly shown in the three metafunctions. The ideational metafunction shows the manner in which the speaker perceives the world and, hence, the perception of the universe is inculcated in the use of language. "Language enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them". (Halliday 1994:106).

Additionally, the interpersonal metafunction focuses on: who are the people who negotiate their social status? : "a form of exchange between speaker and listener" (page 106). Finally, the textual metafunction, in which any use of language involves a mode of interaction, be it oral, written or graphical, shows the social consequence for opting for a certain mode. These three metafunctions correspond to the field of discourse and any change of topic necessitates an immediate change of meaning.

2.1.2.3 Benviniste's Model:

Benviniste 1966 maitains:

> Le language est donc la possibilité de la subjectivité du fait qu'il contient toujours les formes linguistiques appropriées à son expression, et le discours provoque l'emergence de la subjectivité, du fait qu'il consiste en instances discrètes. Le language propose en quelque sorte des formes "vides" que chaque locuteur en exercice de discours s'approprie et qu'il rapporte à sa personne.

(Benviniste,1966: 263 cited in Triki, 1989 : 11).

In other words, in their process of enunciation, writers impregnate any linguistic item for their own affective ends. Readers, then, can infer meaning by referring to the traces left in the product. It is as Lyons maintains:

> If prepositions are treated as psychological entities, rather than as purely abstract third order entities, then it is natural to treat as their location the person (or the minds, or brains, of the persons) who has what philosophers might describe as a prepositional (knowledge, belief etc).

(Lyons, 1977: 724 cited in Triki, 1989: 1).

Literary criticism, then, is a kind of mediatory discipline in which writers use linguistic indices to reach affective ends. The objective of Cassirer's argumentative stylistics then:

> is to make semantical and logical analyses of argumentative and persuasive (influence exerting) texts to investigate which techniques the writer uses in order to achieve which effect, to reveal and expose illusory objectivity in allegedly factual statements, etc. Argumentative stylistics is consequently directed towards the question of the means used to achieve a particular effect and - vice versa – what these means, as used in a text can indicate about a non-explicitly expressed intention or attitude of the writer

(Cassirer 1975: 39 cited in Triki 1989: 13).

2.2 The Questionnaire

Because this piece of work is intended to highlight the impact of the generic form of autobiography on readers, the questionnaire will be a convenient tool that will show this close relationship between the autobiographical framework of this novel and the participants in this research.

2.3 published reception

Many testimonies coming from different readers from different parts of the world reveal this act of communication between this biracial artist who suffers from a brutal self division and the reader who manifests a great sympathy with him.

3. Finding and Discussion

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Statistical Findings
The statistical procedure that consists in counting the number of times the writer uses the personal pronouns related to the first person singular "I" and the third person singular "he" and "she" shows a striking discrepancy in the use of these personal pronouns. The inserted tables reveal instances of these great differences.

Number of uses of personal pronouns related to the first person singular " I "		
subjectpronoun " I "		2539
objectpronoun "me"		900
possessive pronouns	« mine »	999
	« my »	15
reflexiveprounon "myself"		108
Total		4561

Table N°1: Frequency distribution of the number of personal pronouns related to "I".

Number of personal pronouns related to the third person singular " He "	
subjectpronoun " he "	737
objectpronoun "him"	360
possessive pronoun "his"	384
reflexiveprounon "himself"	25
Total	1506

Table N°2: Frequency distribution of the number of personal pronouns related to "HE".

Number of personal pronouns related to the third person singular "She"	
subjectpronoun "she"	93
objectpronoun "her"	141
possessive pronoun "her", "hers"	0
reflexiveprounon "herself"	1
Total	235

Table N°3: Frequency distribution of the number of personal pronouns related to "SHE".

S pron "I" > s pron "he" > s pron "she"

O pron "me" > o pron "him" > o pron "her"

Posspron "my"/ "mine" >posspron "his">posspron "her"/ "hers"

Reflexive pron "myself" > reflexive pron "himself" > reflexive pron "herself"

Figure N°1: The gradual chronology in the use of personal pronouns.
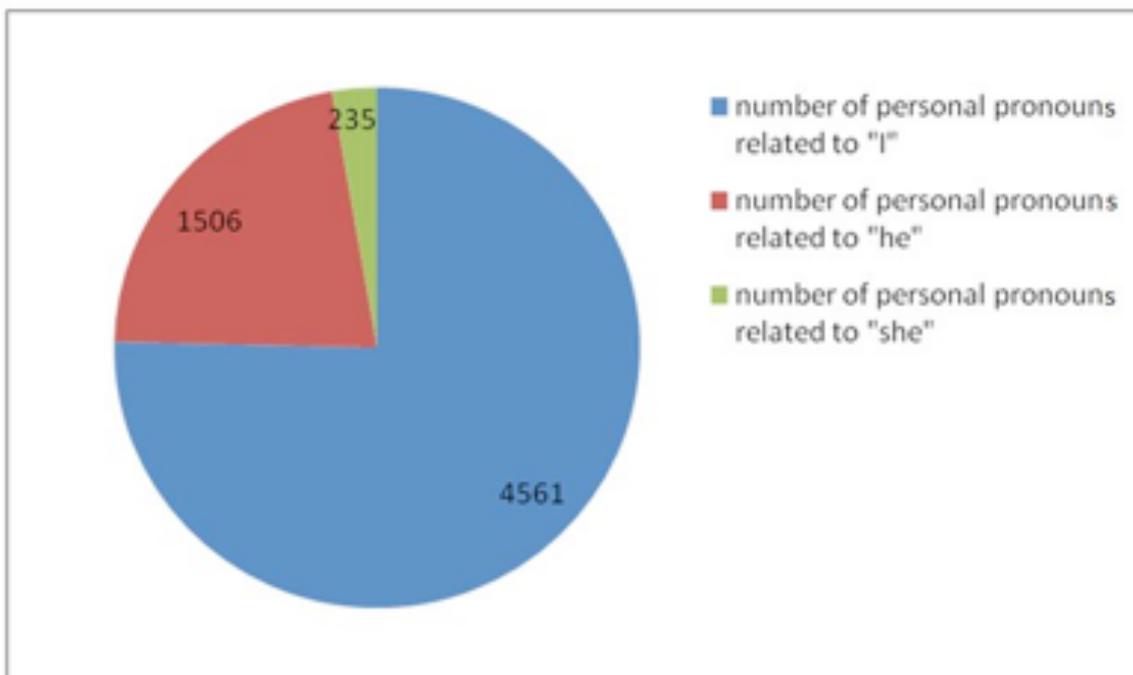

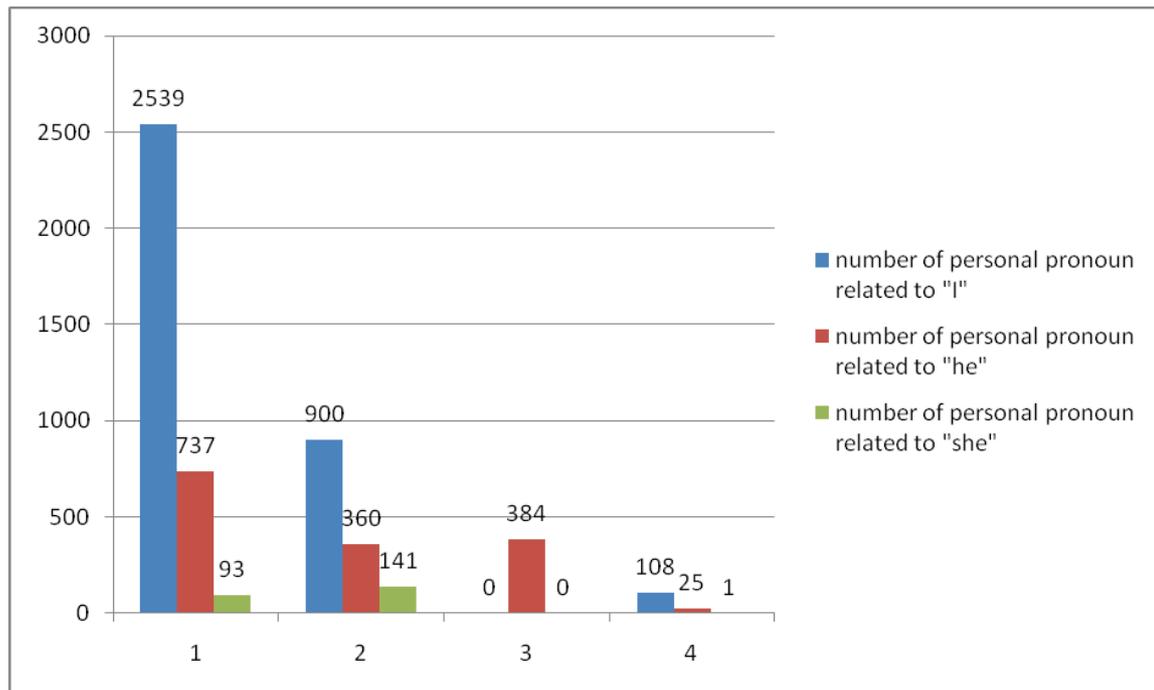**Figure N°2:** Number of personal pronouns related to" I", "HE" and "SHE".

Figure N°3: Frequency distribution of personal pronouns "I", "HE" and "SHE".

3.1.2 Questionnaire Findings:

All respondents in the research undertaken ascertained that they are so impressed by the authenticity of the writer, who addresses the readers directly, to the point that they feel that they are not reading a book but they are attending a great film, a film that reveals the life of a black, an alien, an other in the mind of European people. This is shown in the choice of item nine in the Likert scale questions and in the answers provided in question two, in the open-ended questions.

3.1.3 Published Reception Findings:

From the testimonies that are available, twenty seven participants out of thirty chose four to five stars and only three chose one to two stars. This means that the majority of respondents feel that the book is very interesting. For the sake of illustration, the following examples will be stated to furnish the research with authentic data coming from the people who read this narrative and who are interested one way or another in this piece of art.

Names of participants	Their comments about the narrative
Shovelmonkey	OlaudahEquiano and his interesting narrative provide an insight into a time and situation that few people survived to record or recall, and those that did survive were rarely ever literate. For this reason and so many others, Equiano…has a unique story to tell.
Madeline	Generally regarded as one of the best slave narratives ever written.
Nicolas Whyte	It is an absolutely riveting first-hand account, not only for the awful conditions of slavery…in the British empire of the day, but also because of Equiano's unabashed enthusiasm for naval combat.
Janelle	I love his vivid use of imagery and the style in which he wrote parts of the story.
Valentin	This was an amazing story.
Kelsey	This is a good first-person account of Equiano's life and complex identity (as an African, as a slave, as a freeman, as someone who comes to identify with English culture, as a missionary, as a man, as a Christian, as a traveler.
Christopher Sutch	This is very impressive narrative of the life of a slave and sailor.
Olivia	Interesting to know that this was probably the first slave narrative written. He uses a lot of interesting rhetorical devices to try and stir sentiments for the abolition of slavery.

Table N°4: Published receptions' comments about *OlaudahEquiano, The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings.*

3.2 Discussion:

3.2.1 Statistical Discussion:
The excessive number of the first person personal pronouns related to the first person singular "I" can be explained by the fact that the writer wants to attract the reader by speaking about himself. This can even be further supported by a frequent use of the word "reader" that is repeated 12times.

In addition to the clear existence of the voice of the protagonist throughout the whole novel, which highlights the protagonist's malaise; no one can deny the syntactic and semantic choice which evoke a great affinity between the narratorial technique of autobiography and the writer's feelings of extreme obliteration, resentment, and wretchedness, as the simple self-centered paragraphs show, that there is a tremendous use of clause complexes (76 clause complexes versus only 4 clause simplexes)[4].

The existence of long sentences that are devoted to the progress he hopes to make is steady and cumulative but these sentences are surrounded by breathless short clauses caught into small phrases. It is as if the protagonist wants to speak as much as possible about his present terrible situation through this "talk therapy". But when he fails to express his ideas, his writing style falls into a succession of interrogative sentences as if asking the reader to help him come out with some answers the questions that elude him in an experience which is typical to him.

As for the semantic choice, Olaudah's usual and intense self reference and his intention to attract the sympathy of the reader, who unconsciously reflects his fantasies into the literary work, is emphasized through the recurrent use of such words like "dreadful" 13 times , "fear" 27, "horror" 5 times, and "cruelty" 10 times. The atmosphere is very frightening with its darkness and with the word death which is used in a variety of ways like "death" 45 times, "died" 16 times, "dead" 22 times, and "die" 11 times, everything seems to be frenzied. There is no clear scene. No one can see the other. All the characters seem to be blind. The setting is darkened by a dark boy.

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[4] -   Halliday 1994 uses simplex clause and complex clause instead of simple sentence and complex sentence. A complex clause is composed of head clause or simple clause plus other clauses that modify it "there is the same kind of relationship between sentence and clause, as there is between group and word". Halliday 1994: 215.
Moreover, word group or word complex is "a head word together with other words that modify it". Halliday 1994: 215.

Chapters N°	Clause simplexes	Clause complexes
Chapter 1	0	7
Chapter 2	0	2
Chapter 3	0	1
Chapter 4	0	9
Chapter 5	0	6
Chapter 6	0	2
Chapter 7	1	9
Chapter 8	0	5
Chapter 9	2	26
Chapter 10	0	2
Chapter 11	1	6
Chapter 12	0	2
Chapter 13	4	76

Table N° 5: Frequency distribution of clause simplexes versus clause complexes.
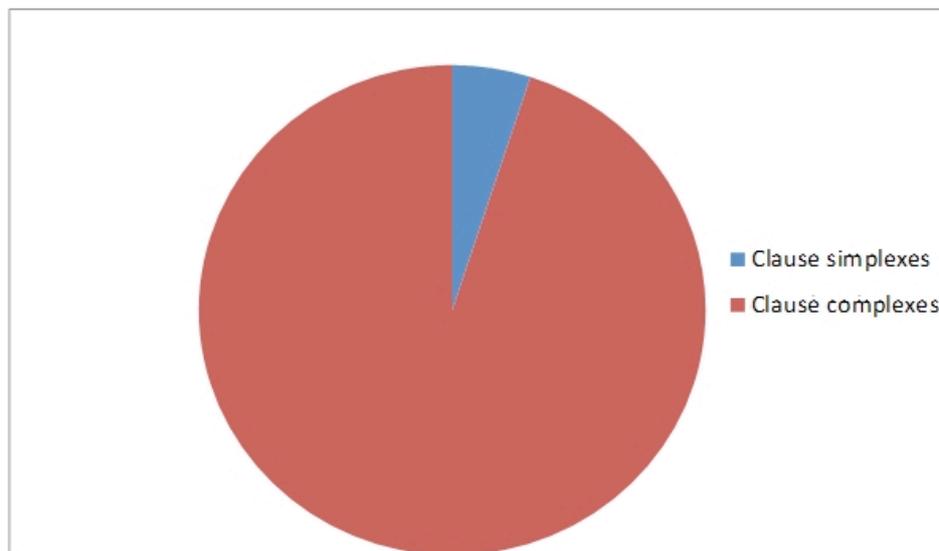

Figure 4: Frequency distribution of clause simplexes versus clause complexes

3.2.2 Questionnaire Discussion

As is suggested in the statistical findings, the questionnaire findings also show that the author's malaise is displayed through the narratorial technique of the text. The narrator's prose is enriched with an attempt to describe things as they occur.

Lying beyond the points raised above, it becomes very clear for readers of this autobiography that the analysis of Equiano's narrative through Halliday's three metafunctions shows that there are some contextual considerations ingrained in the very linguistic strata including the choice of tense, mood, and syntax. Indeed, the author uses the present to describe and the past to narrate a story which is typical to him. Moreover, he uses the declarative mood when he is at ease and the interrogative

mingled with the subjunctive when he is enraged and not able to find an outlet for his frustration.

In this vein, Olaudah's repetition of the words "cry" 7 times, "cries" 8 times, "crying" 8 times, and "cried" 14times; and the use of such expressions as "grief" 15 times, "despair" 11times reinforces the writer's sense of suffering and negation. It is as if language, Olaudah's medium of communication itself, "suffers" from a hemming in. Therefore, there is action, vivacity and scenery as it is the case in real life during his time.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary of the Findings
In reality, this dissertation manages to investigate the writer's resort to a number of linguistic and pragmatic traits that are typical to him to attract the reader. By doing so, it clarifies the influence engendered by this work of art over the reading process.

4.2 Implications
This study manages to demonstrate that the quantitative analysis that includes the measurement of the stylistic tools is of paramount importance for the researcher to validate the claims that he/she investigates. The use of this style on the part of each writer helps the reader to get inside the writer's mind revealing his typical thoughts and points of views.

As far as cognitive poetics, the back bone of this dissertation is concerned, it provides the researcher with a remarkable help in dealing with this autobiography and with its effect on readers. This tool is no longer related only to the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff 1991-1995-2003) but it touches upon every aspect of our life.

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