

The Adagio-Lento Participle: A Relevance-Theoretic Approach to Faulkner's Participial Phrases

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Abstract

No other twentieth century fiction writer seems to have provoked as much criticism as Faulkner has. Paradoxically, his writing is so often and so profusely analyzed not necessarily because it is considered the most valuable, but rather because many critics perceive it to be puzzlingly complex and perplexingly uneven. Before Faulkner gained the actual position as one of the most influential writer of the 20th century, many critics denigrated his artistic achievements as he stood accused of excessive mannerism, meaningless 'garbage' and gratuitous obscurity. In this paper we investigate one of the syntactic features of his language, namely, the Participial Phrase. We submit it to a relevance-theoretic analysis which confirms our hypothesis that Faulkner does not get carried away by his capricious stylistic mannerisms; rather this structure is entirely intentional and has a specific sought artistic function. Hence, it is not a mere idiosyncratic stylistic feature but a stylistic technique dexterously used to shape meaning and create specific pragmatic effects on the reader. We end by considering the implications of this relevance-theoretic approach for ESL/TEFL teaching.

1. Introduction

Among the wide range of Faulkner's syntactic peculiarities (ranging from unorthodox treatment of punctuation, to outsized long-pages-running sentences), our initial computational investigation highlighted the participial phrase as a foregrounded syntactic feature in almost all of his works. After outlining the main assumptions of Relevance Theory, we will adopt it to analyze this feature aiming at explicating in some detail not only the process whereby the reader derives meaning but most importantly how he is driven to the intended meaning by this feature. This will allow us to delineate its ostension and identify the writer's stylistic maneuvers to shape meaning and affect his readers.

2. Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory (henceforth RT), an inferential approach to pragmatics, is a cognitive theory (Sperber and Wilson (1981, 1985/1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1993, 1995, 1993, 2002, 2004) and Wilson (1998), 1999). It treats utterance¹ interpretation as a cognitive process and its basic claim is that what is fundamental to communication - because it is fundamental to cognition - is the pursuit of relevance. RT is based on the concept of **Relevance** which applies to the recognition of speaker intentions (Wilson and Sperber 1986b: 83) and on **the Cognitive and Communicative Principles of relevance**.

2.1 The Cognitive Principle of Relevance

The core of the Cognitive Principle of Relevance applies for any given assumption (a representation of the actual world) that is unconsciously or consciously² but intuitively³ judged to be worth the processing (i.e. judged to be the most relevant) depending on the benefits (contextual/cognitive effects) it may achieve and on the cost (processing efforts) it may incur. This is due to the fact that "... *human cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance.*" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 152) i.e.; human cognition, attention and processing resources (maximise) go to information that seems the most relevant (achieving high cognitive effects and incurring low efforts).

Thus, relevance is defined in terms of effort/effect, (input/output, cost/benefit) trade off and it is also a matter of degree: the greater the positive cognitive effects⁴, the greater the relevance; the greater the expenditure of processing effort, the more restricted the relevance.

- "*Other things being equal, the greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance.*" (ibid: 119).
- "*Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort, the lower the relevance.*" (ibid: 124).

Moreover, Sperber and Wilson claim that “*An assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context.*” (ibid: 121). Therefore, relevance is a relation between an assumption and a context, and an equation between these two and the contextual effects that they may generate. An effect is defined as the result of “*an interaction between old information and new information*” (ibid: 109). It may increase the hearer’s knowledge, it may help reassessing some information previously held, it may improve his representation of the world (ibid: 103) or it may just modify both the speaker’s and the hearer’s context. There are various possible contextual effects: Contextual strengthening, Contextual weakening/Deletion, and Contextual Implications (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 109 for more details).

The Cognitive Principle of Relevance, together with a broadly Gricean view of communication as a process of inferential intention attribution (Sperber and Wilson 1985, 1995, 1998, 2002) lay the ground for the second principle of relevance called the Communicative Principle of Relevance.

2.2 The Communicative Principle of Relevance

2.2.1 Ostensive Stimulus

The central claim of RT is that the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise and predictable enough to guide the reader towards the speaker’s meaning. Utterances raise expectations of relevance because the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition, which writers/speakers may exploit. The new assumptions formed in our minds interact either with the already existing assumptions (Old information) or with new (connected or unconnected) information (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 48); they then give birth to new assumptions (called Premises). When old and new combined premises are used in an inference process, further new information can be derived; the effect is important and is called a *multiplication effect* (ibid). When the new processed information gives rise to such a multiplication effect, it is relevant. *The greater the multiplication effect, the greater the relevance.* (ibid: 48).

Nevertheless, not all the derived assumptions in our mind have the same strength and relevance. The strength of an assumption depends on the way it was acquired (ibid: 77). If it derives from the perceptual systems, it is said to be held with a greater degree of strength. If it derives from memory, it is held with different degrees of certainty, depending on how much we trust our memory. Then, if it derives from the linguistic input system (a speaker’s utterances) its degree of certainty (and also of relevance) will depend on how much we trust the source of information

(is the speaker trustful, competent ...?) and on how much *evidence* and *overtness* are provided. The question then is to know whether it is *overtly*, *intentionally* and *deliberately* communicated to us or no. If it is so, then it must present a **stimulus**⁵.

It is at this level that Sperber and Wilson introduce a further aspect of communication within RT: its deliberate nature: any stimulus “*which makes manifest an intention to make something manifest*” (ibid: 49) is called an **Ostension** or an **Ostensive Stimulus**. They maintain that in any ostensive communicative situation, wherein the speaker intends to communicate **overtly** certain information, the hearer is guided in the process of interpretation by “*the search for relevance*” (Ibid) and by the assumption that the speaker, as a rational communicator, is aiming at optimal relevance.

2.2.2 Optimal Relevance

To help the hearer maximise the utterance relevance and guide him towards the recognition of his intention, all a speaker has to do is present a stimulus hoping that his hearer perceives it and cognitively processes it as to incur some effects.

A stimulus is then, designed to attract an audience’s attention and focus it on the communicator’s meaning “*Given the universal tendency to maximise relevance, an audience will only pay attention to a stimulus that seems relevant enough.*” (See Sperber and Wilson 1986a: 29, 58, and 61). By producing an ostensive stimulus, the speaker therefore encourages his audience to presume and **expect** that there is information relevant enough to be worth processing i.e. a guarantee of relevant information (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 266).

Since human beings tend to maximize relevance, then the speaker tends to use the most ostensive stimulus that may create precise and predictable expectations⁶ of relevance not raised by other stimuli⁷, “*every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance*” (ibid) i.e.; utterances with an ostensive stimulus “*...create expectations of optimal relevance*” (ibid). These expectations help the audience identify the communicator’s meaning. Then, the notion of optimal relevance is meant to spell out what the addressee of an act of ostensive communication is entitled to look for/to expect in terms of effort and effect. In simpler words, an addressee intuitively weights the cognitive effects and the efforts needed in the process of any kind of information; if there is a balance of adequate cognitive effects without unnecessary efforts, then we may say that the ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant and deserves the hearer’s attention and process.

As a whole, an ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to an audience iff:

- a. *It is relevant enough to be worth the addressee's processing effort.*
- b. *It is the most relevant one compatible with the speaker's abilities and preferences.* (ibid)

2.3 Ostensive-Inferential Communication

In ostensive-inferential communication, Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) argue that two layers of information issuing two levels of intentions are involved: the informative intention and the communicative intention. Ostension is a means to point out relevant information, it also points out the speaker's intention to inform the hearer of this information. Thus, this deliberate intention to inform the audience of something is called Informative intention "*to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions I*" (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 58). The deliberate overtness automatically transfers communication to a higher layer within the hierarchical structure of intention referred to as Communicative Intention (Sperber & Wilson (1986a): §1.9-12): *to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention*" (ibid: 61) i.e. the intention to inform the audience of one's informative intention introduces here the fuller characterisation of ostensive-inferential communication that involves the notions of *Manifestness and Mutual Manifestness* (See Garnham & Perner (1990), Sperber and Wilson (1990a). The strongest possible form of communication is linguistic communication as it "*introduces an element of explicitness where non-verbal communication can never be more than implicit*" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 175). This linguistic communication will limit the nebula of alternative interpretations and thus, the scope of implicatures. This will help the audience focus on the intended meaning.

This double-layered intention is both productive and inferential (recovery). From the production perspective (Ostensive), intention to communicate, results directly from the intention to fulfil the informative intention, i.e., to make the audience believe something. From the recovery perspective (inference), unless the audience correctly recognizes the speaker's informative intention, communication has failed.

As a whole, in an Ostensive-inferential communication "*the communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest to the audience a set of assumption I*" (ibid: 63)

As utterances are themselves only one source⁸ of input to the speaker's pragmatic competence, on the inferential view, they "... are not signals but pieces of evidence about the speaker's meaning, and comprehension is achieved by inferring this meaning from the evidence provided." (Sperber and Wilson 2002: 229). Though pragmatically, an utterance is not a signal, it is firstly, perceived as a phonetic stimulus "a perceptible modification of the physical environment" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 176) which triggers an automatic process of decoding⁹ to which a semantic representation is then assigned making manifest an assumption or a set of assumptions I. Here is an example (ibid: 176/177)

e.g., [itlgetkəʊld] = a phonetic stimulus analysed as a token of a particular linguistic structure [itlgetkəʊld] analysed in turn as "*it will get cold*" and assigned a semantic representation making manifest an assumption or a set of assumptions in (1):

(1) Assumptions

- a. Someone has made a sound
- b. There is someone in the house
- c. Mary is at home
- d. Mary has spoken
- e. Mary has a sore throat
- f. Mary has uttered the sentence "*it will get cold*"

2.4 Inference

Let us consider this hypothetical conversation within this context: Mohamed is about leaving, carrying a shopping basket. Fatima may react by saying (1) or (2):

- (1) Are you going to do some shopping?
- (2) Can I come with you?

This example is an instance of inference of conclusions from observed behaviour, with no word being uttered. One may just ask: What is it that makes Fatima infer a conclusion such as (1)? The reasonableness of Fatima's assumption comes from her ability to infer: When the first contextual assumption (*a shopping basket*) is added to the second one (*leaving*), she can infer that Mohamed is going to do some shopping.

It is just a plain fact about human beings that they do seem to infer all the time, they begin to infer as soon as they see another human, be it from words or from an observed behaviour. In fact, very often, it is unnecessary (even superfluous) to check the confirmation of one's hypothesis as in the question asked in (1), since Mohamed may ironically

or even sarcastically answer “No, I am going to the Pope!!”, while (2) would be a more relevant, and appreciated, response.

Moreover, since the linguistically encoded sentence meaning often underdetermines the speaker’s meaning, then, the linguistic meaning recovered by decoding is just one of the inputs to a non-demonstrative¹⁰ inference process. Thus, successful communication is not dependent on a speaker saying everything which he means, but on the stimulus and on the contextual information from the physical environment he may share with the hearer or with a wider community: shared contextual assumptions. Both contextual information and shared contextual assumptions¹¹ build up RT’s new concept, the **Mutual Cognitive Environment** (henceforth MCE) which assists the speaker in communicating and the hearer in inferring and understanding the speaker’s intention.

Sperber and Wilson have related this crucial concept (MCE) to the notion of style and have proposed a framework within which we can account for the deliberate choices a writer may do, not merely to enlarge the MCE he shares with the reader nor to assume a certain degree of mutuality indicated and communicated by style but mainly to model an utterance organization to achieve a predictable stylistic effect.

2.5 Relevance-theoretic Comprehension Heuristic

RT advocates suggest a comprehension heuristic which is claimed to be spontaneously followed in utterance interpretation:

- 1) *“Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: test interpretive hypotheses in order of accessibility,*
- 2) *and stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.” i.e., “the correct interpretation of an ostensive stimulus is the first accessible interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance” (ibid: 137)*

This procedure integrates effort and effect in the following way:

- The hearer expects at least enough cognitive effects to make the utterance worth his attention.
- The processing effort is the effort needed to achieve these effects.
- The hearer is entitled to accept the first interpretation that satisfies his expectation of relevance.

The hearer’s main goal is to construct a hypothesis about the speaker’s meaning which satisfies the presumption of relevance conveyed by the utterance. This overall task can be broken down into a number of sub-tasks:

- 1- Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content (**explicatures**) via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other Pragmatic Adjustment Processes (e.g. Lexical Narrowing/Broadening).
- 2- Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions (in RT terms, implicated premises).
- 3- Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications (in RT terms, implicated conclusions or **Implicatures**). (See Sperber and Wilson 1987b: 751)

Moreover, comprehension is an on-line process: Against a background of expectations (anticipatory hypotheses), the hypotheses about explicatures, implicated premises and Implicatures are developed in parallel. These hypotheses may be revised, elaborated or even abandoned as the utterance unfolds. Therefore the abovementioned sub-tasks should not be thought of as sequentially ordered: *“The hearer does not FIRST decode the logical form of the sentence uttered, THEN construct an explicature and select an appropriate context, and THEN derive a range of implicated conclusions”*. (ibid)

This comprehension process is much dependent not only on the hearer’s general assumption of relevance but also on his expectations about the utterance relevance to him, i.e., what benefits (cognitive effects) it is likely to achieve. Via backwards non-demonstrative inference process, those expectations contribute to the identification of explicatures and implicated premises paving the way to the whole understanding of the speaker’s intentions (ibid).

3. Methodology

Next to RT insights, we will carry out a rhetorical analysis, what modern analysts prefer calling a *“Lemon Squeeze”* study (See Lanham 2003)¹². Therefore, the sentence will be examined in its pragmatic, stylistic, rhetoric and syntactic constituents. For methodological convenience, we will first apply RT’s approach and then embark on a Lemon Squeeze study; may our binary investigation offer a full-fledged insight into the writer’s techniques, intentions and pragmatic effects on his reader.

Our first attempt is to track the inferential process, i.e. we aim at investigating how contextual assumptions lead to contextual implications and how these latter construct explicatures and implicatures. We maintain that this procedure is partly hypothetical for the main reason that we are not always conscious of thought processes. Interpretation process is mostly a subconscious procedure (See Gutt: 1998). This is why we cannot

pretend to be able to draw all the involved steps but only those, which we think, are noticeable¹³.

As we are dealing with a fictional narrative, namely The Sound and The Fury (henceforth TSAF), we presume that the fictional world of literary works opens itself to a variety of interpretations; there are as many interpretations as there are readers. Then, our interpretation does not pretend to be the most appropriate, as it is itself subject to the principle of relevance¹⁴. Following Gutt's model of meaning-analysis of texts (1998), the selected sentence is divided into two parts to ease processing, and then each part is analyzed in the following steps:

- 1- Inferential Processing:** Explicates the most important thought processes; it lists Contextual Assumptions (Implicated Premises) [CA], Contextual Implications (Implicated Conclusions) [CI], Mutual Cognitive Environment [MCE] and finally Explicatures [E].
- 2- Variables:** Traces information about characters {Ch}, locations {L}, times {T} and events {En}. Variables are updated as the inferential process evolves.
- 3- Intermediate Synopsis:** Represents an updated representation of the complete meaning communicated up to the end of the current part of the sentence.
- 4- Final Synopsis:** at the end of the processing, the final synopsis will then represent the whole representation of the investigated sentence.

The following [CAs] need not be reiterated as they are applicable for any narrative:

- [CA1] In any communication event there is an audience A_i : The audience here is the implied reader.
- [CA2] If the text is told by an omniscient narrator, then we assume it is the implied writer. If it is told by a first person narrator, then we will have to disambiguate the referent.

4. The Participial Phrase

4.1 [TSAF1]

"I slowed still more, my shadow pacing me, dragging its head through the weeds that hid the fence" (TSAF: 122).

4.2 [TSAF1] Inferential Processing1

"I slowed still more"

- [CA1] There is an unnamed narrator.
- [CA2] The narrator assumes to be known to the audience.

- [MCE1] From previous text, we know that the second section of TSAF is told by a first person narrator named Quentin
- [CI1] Disambiguation of the referent *I*: the narrator is Quentin.
- **[E1] Quentin slowed still more**
- [CI2] Quentin walks very slowly
- [CI3] Slowness is a rate demonstrating an absence of haste or hurry
- [CI4] Quentin walks very slowly, either apprehending a danger or not hurried.
- **[CI5] The writer wants the reader to feel the pace of Quentin's action: the total absence of hurry.**

4.3 [TSAF1] Variables1

- {Ch}: Quentin; {L}: Unknown; {T}: Unknown; {En}: Quentin walks slowly

4.4 [TSAF1] Intermediate Synopsis1

The narrator, Quentin, tells the reader that he is walking very slowly; there is an impression of total absence of hurry.

4.5 [TSAF1] Inferential Processing 2

"... my shadow pacing me, dragging its head through the weeds that hid the fence."

- [CA3] *"... my shadow pacing me*
- [CI6] Quentin's shadow makes him walk with slow regular strides.
- [CI7] The shadow sets the rate of moving.
- [CA4] *dragging its head*
- [CI8] The shadow moves with difficulty
- **[CI9] The action of dragging is marked by a painfully slow and effortful manner.**
- [CA5] *through the weeds that hid the fence.*
- [CI10] There is a fence.
- [MCE2] From Benjy's section, we know that the Compson's propriety is surrounded by a fence.
- [CI11] The fence is hidden, covered with weeds.
- [CI12] The weeds are thick.
- [CI13] The fence is obscured by the weeds.
- [CI14] The shadow, an unanimated object, has got a head and is given power to pace Quentin's movement, to drag its head and to move in an effortful manner through the weed-obscured fence.
- **[E2] Quentin is passing painfully, slowly, unenthusiastically and in a subdued manner through the fence.**
- **[CI15] Quentin is powerless, overwhelmed, disheartened...**

4.6 [TSAF] Variables2

- {Ch} A shadow; {L}: The Compson's propriety; {En} Quentin moves through the fence.

4.7 [TSAF] Final Synopsis

The narrator, Quentin tells the reader that he is walking very slowly; there is an impression of total absence of hurry. The shadow, an unanimated object, has got a head and is given power to pace Quentin's movement, to drag its head and to move in an effortful manner through the fence. Quentin is passing painfully, slowly, unenthusiastically and in a subdued manner through the fence; he is powerless, overwhelmed, disheartened...

4.8 [TSAF] Lemon Squeeze

The sentence is structured as follows:

[“I slowed still (an adverb referring to action or condition without change, interruption, or cessation.) more (an adjective existing or coming by way of addition) Independent Clause], [my shadow pacing me (Present Participial Phrase 1), dragging its head (Present Participial Phrase 2) through the weeds (Prepositional Phrase) that hid the fence” (Adjectival Clause)]

4.9 [TSAF1] Commentary

This sentence made up of one independent clause, two present participial phrases, one prepositional phrase and one adjectival clause, seems to act as an ostensive stimulus:

First, the information available in the MCE is relevant as it helps disambiguating the referent which fills the slot in the Logical Form [x *slowed still more*] to render an initial propositional form which in its turn explicates the first **Explicature [E1]**: [Quentin slowed still more]. After this disambiguation, the independent clause “*I slowed still more*” right away introduces a [CI2] which in its turn implicates [CI3] and [CI4]. These two Contextual Implications are initiated by each of the constituents of the independent clause “*I slowed still more*” which seem to function as a note of the same tempo: The verb “*to slow*” (not moving quickly); the adverb “*still*” (referring to action or condition without change, interruption, or cessation) and the adjective “*more*” (coming by way of addition) all imply a precise cadence. Put differently, the slow pace of the action “*to slow*” is strengthened by the use of the adverb “*still*” and it is much more slowed down by the addition of the adjective “*more*”. All of these lead to the Contextual Implication [CI5] (The writer wants the reader to feel the pace of the narrator's action: the total absence of

hurry) which by now can be considered as an intended implication, that is as an **Implicature**.

Second, the two present participial phrases: *my shadow pacing me* and *dragging its head* in [CA3] and [CA4] function as adjectives as they add more description to the action and get the reader to formulate a second **Implicature in [CI9]** that draws a vivid, living painting whose effect is "to dramatize the significance of an event" (Zemmour, D (2005) in Bourse, A (2010) Translation mine)¹⁵. Zemmour posits that the present participle is "neither really a verb nor a real adjective, [it] stands between a process and property, between action and quality, between a being and a state" (Ibid). Added to the independent clause, these participial phrases lengthen the sentence and evoke an action in progress; they draw the picture of a very 'long-drawn-out' moment, one that seems suspended somewhere in time and space: "a frozen moment" (See Bjurström, 1972). Claude Simon, like Faulkner, has much used the Present Participle in his novels and in analyzing this use, Bjurström deduces:

"The present participle is the tense wherein time or action is frozen and becomes an attribute, wherein the verb becomes an adjective (which we can call "an active adjective" to distinguish it from the past participle that designates the undergone action and which we can call "the passive adjective"" (Bjurström, 1972)

Moreover, the verbs "to pace" and "to drag" are both verbs of movement, yet both have an unanimated agent: *Shadow*, capable of setting the pace to an animate agent's movements. In the next phrase, it is even given a shape, a body with a head trying to pass painfully and tediously slowly through the fence. Faulkner does not only thrust the subject aside but this latter becomes a mere fading overwhelmed being whose hands, head, and face act independently; an erased subject (see Bjurström 1972) vanished by "an active adjective" (ibid). From TSAF to Absalom, Absalom, to Light in August, the participial phrases function similarly: "...the waitress with her demure and downlooking face and her big, too big, hands setting the plates and cups, her head rising from beyond the counter [...]" (Light in August: 133 underlining mine)

Third, [CA5] presented as an adjectival clause: [*the weeds that hid the fence*] is added where apparently unnecessary as Faulkner could have easily replaced it by one of his outstanding compound adjectives, for instance: the weed-obscured fence. Yet, its addition here is not at all affectless, rather it is relevant and intentional as on its own generates five (5) Contextual Implications [CI10-14] that definitely lengthen the

sentence and by the same token, amplify the entire scene and create a simultaneous action. The third **Implicature** in [CI15] [**Quentin is powerless, overwhelmed, disheartened**] is the final outcome that leaves the reader as overwhelmed as Quentin.

The overall structure of the sentence seems to espouse meaning or should we say the meaning takes up the form of the sentence. The pragmatic effect of such a syntactic construction would be lessened had the sentence read: [I slowed. My shadow paced me and dragged its head through the weed-obscured fence.]. It would be insignificant, had the writer limited himself to the formulation of the proposition, pragmatically enriched by the reader into the **higher explicature [E2]**: [Quentin is passing painfully, slowly, unenthusiastically and in a subdued manner through the fence.]. So, the difference between the two linguistic realizations of the same proposition in (a) and (b) is fundamentally not only at the stylistic level but on the pragmatic one as well. It is an instance of how language manipulation overpasses words and sentences to modify the reader's perception of the world.

- a. *"I slowed still more, my shadow pacing me, dragging its head through the weeds that hid the fence"* (TSAF: 122).
- b. [Quentin is passing painfully, slowly, unenthusiastically and in a subdued manner through the fence.]

In producing this sentence with its participial phrases, the writer expresses both his preferences and his abilities to provide relevant information and to formulate it in the best possible way based on his goal of getting the reader to draw not just implications but relevant Implicatures (Sperber and Wilson 2002: 3-23). Consequently, the sentence becomes optimally relevant at once. It does not require a great effort to be processed, yet, the effects are considerable i.e., "... *a substantial contextual effect, at a low processing cost.*" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 116): the reader learns more about the events in the narrative (Cognitive effects) but what the participial phrase also does, is that it creates an emotional effect. That is, the reader undergoes an emotional experience as he is led to feel the narrator's state of mind. The implicatures that have been constructed do lead to meaning building, but they essentially verb inflections that express how the narrator's action and state are to be conceived by the reader.

Furthermore, the signifying simultaneous recurrence of assonance in parallel with the 'prolonged' participial phrases "*I slowed still more, my shadow pacing me, dragging its head through the weeds that hid the fence*" sets a tone, a kind of timbre, a rhythm whereby a piece of writing can be read as a piece of music. The phonetic resonance of the sentence

attempts to capture music within language, Faulkner fosters an initial illusion of referential musical meaning through his diction (See Stimpson 2009). This stylistic feature is recurrent in all of Faulkner's novels. The opening paragraph of TSAF for instance, right away sets the tone; consider the recurrence of the sound phonemes /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/ and mainly /ŋ/:

"Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting..." [...] It was red, flapping on the pasture. Then there was a bird slanting and tilting on it." [...] Caddy was walking. Then she was running, her booksatchel swinging and jouncing behind her [...] We went through the rattling leaves. The gate was cold. [...] I could hear him rattling in the leaves. I could smell the cold. [...] They were washing down at the branch. One of them was singing. I could smell the clothes flapping, and the smoke blowing across the branch (TSAF: 13, enhancing mine)

By our accounts, Quentin's section alone has more than 1000 participial phrases. A particular instance is Quentin's very long interior monologue where a sentence begins with one independent clause *"The first note sounded"*, runs over two pages and ends up in one short independent clause *"The last note sounded"*. Let us consider the recurrence of the present participle, the sound phoneme /s/ and the explicit mentioning of the words *"note"* and *"sound"* that create a rhythmic sound space and foster a musical reading of the passage¹⁶:

"The first note sounded, measured and tranquil, serenely peremptory, emptying the unhurried silence for the next one and that's it if people could only change one another forever that way merge like a flame swirling up for an instant then blown cleanly out along the cool eternal dark instead of lying there trying not to think of the swing until all cedars came to have that vivid dead smell of perfume that Benjy hated so. Just by imagining the clump it seemed to me that I could hear whispers secret surges smell the beating of hot blood under wild unsecret flesh watching against red eyelids the swine untethered in pairs rushing coupled [...] but let no man prescribe for another mans wellbeing and i temporary and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair until time its not even time until it was The last note sounded. At last it stopped vibrating and the darkness was still again." (TSAF: 159-161 enhancing mine)

It is no wonder TSAF has become a source of inspiration for some musicians; relying on the novel, Robert W. Smith produced a musical composition called The Sound and the Fury and Coindreau (1934)

analyzed its language in musical terms. He compared its structure to a musical composition wherein the four parts of the novel reproduce the four movements of symphony: Moderato (Benjy's section), Adagio¹⁷ (Quentin's section), Allegro¹⁸ (Jason's section) and the last one subdividing itself into an Allegro Furioso, an Andante Religioso, an Allegro Barbaro and finally, a Lento¹⁹ (See Coindreau 1934: Preface).

Adagio and Lento are indeed the tempo set by the present participle on which Faulkner obsessively relies to render an **optimally** relevant structure to his readers; here are more examples:

- "[...] mother **lying** with open body lifted **laughing, holding** his father with my hand **refraining, seeing, watching** him die before he lived" (TSAF: 76).
- "... men with **inwardleaning** heads, **smoking** steadily, **lighting** and **throwing** away their constant cigarettes..." (Light in August: 314)
- "...the chalked insult, has been obliterated **lying** there **unsleeping** in the dark between them, **feeling** them unasleep too, **feeling** them **thinking** about him, **projecting** about him and **filling** the thunderous solitude of his despair louder than speech could." (Absalom, Absalom: 163)
- "Granny still **standing** in the wagon with the bent umbrella lifted and **hollering** at Ringo and me while we jumped out of the wagon and ran across the road" (Unvanquished: 52)
- "...the heavy chair **making** a **rumbling** clatter on the wooden floor almost as loud as a wagon on a wooden bridge as he rose ..." (Intruder in the Dust: 30)
- "...**sitting** supine and female and soft and immovable and not even **thinking** and apparently not **listening** either..." (The Hamlet: 98-99)
- "...no change in his harsh knotted violent face as he stood **holding** the bottle." (The Hamlet: 50)

Moreover, in many instances, the present participle is either preceded or followed by a past simple. Consider the following passages (the quotations are not italicized to avoid confusion with the writer's own italicized parts, they are quoted verbatim, yet enhancing is mine.)

- 'You don't bother me and I don't bother you,' he **thought, thinking** *I dreamed it. It didn't happen. She has nothing under her clothes so that it could have happened.* (Light in August: 180)
- "...hours; and a parasol, an umbrella too, he **thought, thinking** how she would be impervious [...] he had not spoken a hundred

- words to her in his life before this afternoon... " (Absalom, Absalom: 73)
- "Yes he **thought** *Too much, too long remembering* how he had looked at the fifth grave..." (ibid: 173)
 - *Judith (who, not bereaved, did not need to mourn Quentin **thought, thinking** Yes, I have had to listen too long)* (ibid: 124)
 - *So I must go to him, he **thought, thinking**, Now it is better than two o'clock and it will be dawn soon.* (ibid: 213)
 - "I don't even know what they are saying to her,' he **thought, thinking** *I don't even know that what they are saying to her is something that men do not say to a passing child; believing, I do not know yet that in the [...] that sleeping I know now why I struck refraining that negro girl three years ago and that she must know it too and be proud too, with waiting and pride.*" (ibid: 133)
 - "Byron **thought, thinking** how that is the sort of thing that men do to the women who belong to them" (Light in August: 116)
 - "More often that he **knew** perhaps **thinking** would have suddenly flowed into a picture, **shaping, shaped**: the long, barren, somehow equivocal counter" (ibid: 133)
 - "...approaching the door. 'She'll have the lamp this time,' he **thought thinking** *If I were to look now, I could see the light under the door As his hand swung up and back ...*" (ibid: 138)
 - "You don't bother me and I don't bother you,' he **thought, thinking** *I dreamed it. It didn't happen. She has nothing under her clothes so that it could have happened.*" (ibid: 145)
 - he **thought, thinking** how she would be impervious to weather and season since although he had not spoken a hundred words to her in his life before this afternoon, (Absalom, Absalom: 169)
 - "Judith (who, not bereaved, did not need to mourn Quentin **thought, thinking** Yes, I have had to listen too long" (ibid: 170)
 - "...that there is a logical pattern to evil, that we die, he **thought, thinking** of the expression [...] the cooling indignation, the shocked despair fading, leaving two empty globes in which the motionless world lurked profoundly in miniature." (Sanctuary: 232)
 - "Because it's more than three oclock now, he **thought, thinking**: I had forgot that. It's like just about everything was in cahoots against one man killing another." (The Hamlet: 72)

The verb *to think* in these passages seems to have different purposes and effects: when used in the simple past, the characters exercise the mind and use their power of reason in order to remember i.e., deliberate thinking. In the present participle instances, the characters involuntarily recall knowledge from memory; the flashbacks bring

recollections that are beyond their conscious thought. During these moments of remembrance time is frozen, broken, suspended waiting for the character to come back to the surface of consciousness. As a result, this involuntary recollection distends time and submerges both the character and the reader and both remain helplessly immersed and hypnotized by the flow of sensations at the same time that the moment remains suspended in time.

This is how Faulkner skillfully juggles with words and manipulates syntax not merely to portray crucial moments in his works but most importantly to put language at the service of meaning and affect his readers in an optimally relevant pragmatic way.

We think that this relevance-theoretic account of cognition, comprehension and communication might have practical implications for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Sperber and Wilson's model of communication might reveal to be of paramount help to resolve many of our queries: how do readers in a second-language situation process style? How do they resolve ambiguities and referential ambivalences? When is an input relevant? What is the actual or expected relevance of two different inputs? How can non-native readers allocate their cognitive resources and improve their inferential mechanisms to be better readers, and to predict and influence the cognitive processes of others to be better writers?

Investigating these issues will probably enable us to demonstrate that teaching techniques based on Sperber and Wilson's assumptions of how the mind works in communication processes are much more helpful than those which ignore the cognitive aspects. The cognitive support is indispensable in our teaching of a foreign language because the simple, even not so simple, understanding of its linguistic code is not at all sufficient.

5. Conclusion

The investigation of Faulkner's participial phrases led to the identification of a stylistic technique genuinely used to generate a varied set of pragmatic effects:

First, the Participial Phrase slows the sentence down and evokes an action in progress. It draws the picture of a suspended 'frozen time' that renders a profound insight into the characters minds and emotions. The inferential processing of these participles does not only help in meaning building but drags the reader into a flow of sensations. Consequently, he perceives the characters emotional experience and endurance and understands how their action and states are to be conceived.

Second, Faulkner uses the participial phrase to discriminate between the voluntary and involuntary remembrance wherein, participial constructions embed flashbacks and moments of reminiscence. During these moments, time is broken waiting for both the character and the reader to come back to the surface of consciousness.

Third, through this syntactic feature, Faulkner fosters an initial illusion of referential musical meaning which prompts a dynamic description and a rhythmic sound space. It has been a source of inspiration for many symphonies and musical readings.

This stylistic technique produces substantial cognitive and emotional effects at a low processing cost. We conclude that this use is optimally relevant and intentional.

We believe Relevance Theory might provide a sound framework for ESL/TEFL teaching; its consideration might bring home many of our queries.

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Notes

- ¹ “Language expressions - usually referred to as **utterances**, though they include both oral and written communication [...] (See Sperber and Wilson 1995: 259).
- ² “Contextual effects and processing efforts are non-representational dimensions of mental processes. They exist whether or not the individual is consciously assessing them whether or not they are conceptually represented.” (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 131)
- ³ Human beings can have two kinds of intuitions: A/ **Retrospective Intuitions**: intuitions we have about efforts already incurred in some task (physical or mental) and effects already achieved. B/ **Prospective Intuitions**: intuitions we have about efforts some task would take and about its possible effects. This goes for bodily movements, we know in advance the effort they may require and the effect they may generate (ibid).
- ⁴ The terms Contextual effect and Cognitive effects are used interchangeably because in RT context is defined in psychological terms, as a subset of a person’s cognitive environment which is brought to bear on a specific occasion for the interpretation of a certain stimulus. Thus, throughout this paper, the two terms contextual effects/ cognitive effects may be interchangeably used.
- ⁵ A stimulus is just a phenomenon among others “...one perceptible feature of the physical environment. It becomes identifiable as a stimulus only when it is recognised as a phenomenon designed to achieve cognitive effects” (ibid: 150)
- ⁶ Grice described these expectations in terms of a Co-operative Principle and maxims of Quality (truthfulness), Quantity (informativeness), Relation (relevance) and Manner (clarity) which speakers are expected to observe (Grice 1961, 1989: 368- 72)
- ⁷ Human sensory abilities can monitor a lot of information but the brain cannot process all that information at the same time, so if there are simultaneous inputs competing with one another, cognitive resources will be allocated to the most *relevant* inputs available, whether from internal or external sources. (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 266)
- ⁸ Other sources of evidence include the context and especially the speaker’s conceptual store (i.e. memory).
- ⁹ The process of decoding is automatic because we involuntarily recover the semantic representation of any (even overheard) stream of sounds (provided it is uttered in one’s native language) as we cannot choose to see the objects around us in black and white rather than in color; the linguistic decoding system “has all the hallmarks of automatic, reflex perceptual systems such as hearing and vision.” (ibid: 176) This is why it is thought to be an input system rather than a central processing system and something that precedes the comprehension process rather than a part of this process. For these reasons it cannot be autonomous and is subservient to the inferential process (Ibid).
- ¹⁰ Human beings use their assumptions to make inferences but, as assumptions are held with varying degrees of strength, there may be confirmation or disconfirmation but no proof. It is precisely because of this that Sperber and Wilson call the process of inferential comprehension **non-demonstrative** (ibid:

65-66). In the absence of proof to validate the truth of assumptions in human communication, Sperber and Wilson advance that the principle of Relevance may in many areas cater for that need. The inferences which a hearer may draw are constrained by Relevance. If there are several possible interpretations of an utterance, a hearer will derive the most easily accessible which RT defines as the most relevant. Besides, it is also the principle of relevance which decides word interpretation in terms of disambiguation and pronominal reference assignment.

¹¹ Encyclopaedic information constitutes a mental store against which hypotheses are checked, elaborated, developed or abandoned. Any unavailability of required information for the process of utterances will make the speaker's statements abstruse and incomprehensible. An effective and successful communicative act is very often due to encyclopaedic information/knowledge available to both parties in communication (shared by the speaker and her hearer).

¹² The expression "*Lemon-squeezer school of criticism*" was originally used in 1933 by the poet and critic T.S. Eliot to disparage critical methods that relied on detailed verbal exegesis (also known as close reading or practical criticism). 'Lemon squeezer' is a modern term, then, for an old-fashioned exercise--exhaustive rhetorical description. "*Find every verbal pattern you can in a given text [. . .] use the lemon squeezer as a generalized search technique that gradually exposes the fundamental shapes a prose is composed of. As you come to see these, they will determine which kinds of patterns you continue to seek and which terms--of the many overlapping ones, large scale and small--you choose as essentially descriptive [. . .]*" (Lanham, R. A. 2003)

¹³ The nature of Inference and the inference processes involved in communication have posed a serious difficulty for pragmatics. Bach and Harnish comment: "*Our empirical thinking in general is rife with generalizations and inference principles that we are not conscious of when we use them, if we are conscious of them at all. It would take us well beyond present-day cognitive psychology to speculate on the details of any of this. Whatever these processes are, whatever activates them, whatever principles or strategies are involved, they work, and work quite well.*" (Bach and Harnish 1979: 93 in Sperber and Wilson 1994: 70)

¹⁴ We refer our reader to the article elaborated by Gutt, (1998). We have followed the same steps in investigating the selected texts.

¹⁵ The original quotation is: "*... tableau vivant ayant pour effet de dramatiser la signification d'un événement [...] ni tout à fait verbe, ni véritable adjectif, [il] se situe entre procès et propriété, entre action et qualité, entre un devenir et un état*".

¹⁶ This very musical reading of TSAF has been a source of inspiration for Robert W. Smith who produced a musical composition called *The Sound and the Fury*. It is made for the Belwin-Mills series, *The Beginning Band*. The song cycles between 2 main themes, the fury, and a sorrowful slurred refrain. Alto Saxophones have the melody. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sound_and_the_Fury_\(music\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sound_and_the_Fury_(music)) December 22nd, 2010.

¹⁷ Adagio: a tempo marking indicating that the music is to be played slowly (See [Tempo Terminology, Virginia Tech department of music](#))

¹⁸ Fast; quick (ibid)

¹⁹ Very slow (ibid)