

## Constructing Neo-classicism: Functional Analysis of Periodic Sentences in *Rasselas*

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### **Abstract:**

Periodic sentences designed by Samuel Johnson are held chiefly responsible for glorious culmination of English prose. By them, balanced mood and a thoughtful way of thinking can be reflected. This paper is intended to carry out a study on how Dr Johnson constructs neoclassicism by periodic sentences. Theme system, information structure and functional stylistics within Functional Linguistics are taken as theoretical framework to look into their syntactical and textual features. All data are selected from Dr Johnson's prose *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*.

The results of the research indicate that in Dr Johnson's periodic sentences, harmonious coexistence between end weight in meaning and front weight in form can be viewed as the foregrounded features of proportion, balance and symmetry, which indicate not only revolt against dissymmetry of Baroque and Rococo, but also revival of arts in ancient Greece and Roman.

**Key Words:** Periodic sentence, Theme, Information, Communicative Dynamism, Foregrounding, Neoclassicism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Periodic sentence is particularly expressive and striking in that it is always exquisitely designed and conceived. It can be widely used in a great variety of genres such as poem, prose, novel, speech and even phone messages. General research interests within them include syntax, stylistics, rhetoric and information distribution. Due to distinguishing traits, they cannot override the in-depth discussions among linguists, stylisticians and some other researchers in terms of notions, characteristics and functions over different periods.

Nowadays, to strengthen the main information people tend to come straight to the point by using inverted sentences, loose sentences and so forth. As periodic sentences run counter to current preferences for brevity and simplicity, they are best used sparingly and seem more conspicuous and remarkable. However, the effect is no less than prominent when periodic sentences are overwhelmingly used by Samuel Johnson in his moralistic prose *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. Samuel Johnson, often referred to Dr Johnson, is a very renowned and productive writer whose works cover biographies, pamphlets, proses, poems, literary criticism and so forth. What's more, in English literature, it is Dr Johnson who puts prose to the summit by his periodic sentences (Wang, 2011). With suspense producing, sustaining and dispelling, it is going to be the process watching artistic effect unfold in periodic sentences. Therefore it is well worth studying Dr Johnson's periodic sentences by which he constructs neoclassicism.

## 2. PREVIOUS STUDIES OF PERIODIC SENTENCES

There are general disagreements about what the term *periodic* means over the days. Many scholars and researchers have devoted the bulk of their attention to definitions, classifications, features and structures of periodic sentence and established in this domain some influential models in one way or another to deal with periodic sentence and periodic style.

There is no denying that the ideas of all sentences are completed until the sentence is completed, there is still validity to study the syntactic features and functions of periodic sentence, unless the sentence ends in nonsense. Actually, no matter whether the periodic sentence stretches over one sentence or not, the vital element is suspension, both of syntax and sense, till the end.

The notion of periodic sentence may vary from person to person. The usage of this well-organized structure can be dated back to ancient Greece and Latin. Aristotle (384-322B.C.) and Socrates (469-399B.C.) are generally considered to be the western world's masters in manipulating periodic sentences. The great classicist Rose (1936) in his *A Handbook of Latin Literature* articulates the main idea in a periodic sentence is held in suspense until the end and it cannot carry out semantic and grammatical integrity till the very final of clause or phrase. And explicitly Emma (1964) delineates periodic sentence as the one that has the main clause postponed or interrupted. The definition of "period" offered in *The Random House Dictionary*

*of the English Language* (Flexner, 1987: 1440) is “a periodic sentence; a sentence, especially a well-balanced, impressive sentence”. It aims for an effect of suspense with putting main clause to the final scene, whereas loose sentence is one that “does not end with the completion of its main clause, but continues with one or more subordinate clauses or other modifiers” (ibid: 1135).

To specify periodic sentences, Read (1949) distinguishes two types of them, wherein most periodic sentences can be analyzed into subject, verb, and predicate, the subject or verb being in the nature of an extensive catalogue, while a truer periodic sentence is one in which the suspense is created by complexity of clauses. Aside from that, there is a distinction between Ciceronian periodic sentence, in which “the idea is introduced, then expanded and qualified through a complex of closely integrated dependent clauses, before being completed or resolved only as the sentence comes to an end”, and “the type of sentence that is periodic in the sense of delaying the completion of the central idea, without achieving the ‘circular’ structure of the Ciceronian period” (Corns, 1982: 35). No matter which classification criterion you stand by, what is indubitable is that periodic sentence entails certain doubt. It is noteworthy that Wilkinson (1963) attends to explore the doubt embodied in periodic sentences.

As far as Leech and Short (2001: 225) are concerned, a periodic sentence, in a strict sense, “saves its main clause to the end”. Furthermore, discussion on the delaying main information of a periodic sentence by anticipatory and parenthetical structure is presented by them. Within their scope, anticipatory and trailing constituents are two key elements facilitating to analyze periodic sentence, wherein anticipatory constituent can impose excessive burden on readers’ memory, thereby get readers involved by postponing main information. On the whole, periodic sentence tends to create some stylistic effect: dramatic quality, build-up effect as well as concentrating significance at one point. Nevertheless, loose structure results in natural simplicity and directness, which means it is more likely to be noticed with trailing constituents taking over the lead. Specifically speaking, in terms of anticipatory elements in periodic sentence, they can be subordinate clause, prepositional phrase, participial phrase, gerund phrase, appositive noun, appositive adjective, and adverb (Miles et al, 1991).

Periodic style and running style are two poles between which styles of sentence structure can vary. Lanham (2004) endeavors to illustrate these two styles and introduces some tangible ingredients for a periodic style such as suspension, parallelism, balance and climax. As is indicated, there are in periodic style balance, antithesis, parallelism and patterns of repetition. The shapes of temporal flow of information in periodic style are arranged elaborately, whereas syntax in running style is exposed successively and simply accord with chronological sequence.

In the domestic, Wang and Ding (1987) declares the concept and lists specific examples of periodic sentences. For him, use of periodic sentences is the deliberate arrangement of speakers or writers which is characterized by giving priority to subordinate elements and creating

suspense to seize the attention of the listeners or readers. The later outcomes are revealed, the more intense suspense is created; special effects can therefore be forged such as emphasis and irony in literary works.

### 3. PRINCIPLES OF END-FOCUS AND END-WEIGHT

Qin (2002) points out that the principle of periodic sentences is end-focus, seeing that the more weighty part is generally posited at the final. Leech and Short (2001) address the principle of end-focus is one principle of saliency. End-focus principle concerns with individual tone units and means that “the nuclear tone’s neutral position is at the end of the tone unit, specifically, on the last lexical item, or ‘content word’” (Leech & Short, 2001: 212). There is as well the principle of climax pertaining to a sequence of tone-units, which emphasizes the final position as the major focus of information. Although end-focus belongs to phonology, it has important implications in syntax, where the ordering of the elements of message is largely determined.

“The neutral position of focus is what we may call END-FOCUS, that is (generally speaking) chief prominence on the last open-class item or proper noun in the clause” (Quirk et al, 1972: 938). They also point out that theme and the focus are two communicatively prominent elements of the clause. The focus of information is represented by nucleus in oral English and realized by the sequential arrangement of linguistic constituents in written text. Meanwhile, focus is related to the distinction between given and new information.

Sentence is composed of different constituents with different functions. From syntactic structure, the weightier or more complex constituents will be put at the end, according to the expression habits of English language, to make the linear arrangement unfold from light to heavy. This is what the principle of end-weight embodies.

End-focus principle is based on information structure whereas end-weight principle is on syntactic structure. However, they both emphasize the significance of final part in a sentence and often work hand in hand. According to these two principles, semantically heavier element is normally placed in final position, though points of focus may fall on both end and beginning. Different choices of syntactic order will therefore result in different distributions of information, focus and weight.

### 4. APPLICATIONS OF FUNCTIONAL LINGUISTICS IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

There are various schools of Functionalism, among which Functional Linguistics has been used for a variety of purposes in terms of breadth as well as depth. Since Systemic Functional Linguistics was introduced by Halliday in the 1960s, it has been widely accepted by grammarians and linguists who have adopted theories to analyze different types of texts.

Halliday (1971) applies theories of Systemic Functional Linguistics to the analysis of *The Inheritors* of William Golding’s novel. Although Halliday does not commit himself to

functional definition of literary language, he does recognize that different kinds of literary writing may foreground different functions. He is one of the prominent scholars who apply Systemic Functional Linguistics to analysis of literature. Hasan (1988) analyzes the Lexio-grammar of Sexton's poem *Old* based on three metafunctions of Systemic Functional Linguistics and reveals the deeper meaning of the poem.

In addition, Halliday (1994/2000: 216) defines a "sentence" as a "clause complex" and treats the clause complex as the only grammatical unit above the clause, which grants an extraordinary status to clause unit in the text. Consequently, periodic sentences in English prose can also be studied as clause complex in different context from functional perspectives.

## 5. ABOUT RASSELAS

*Rasselas*, whose full name is *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, or an alternative *The Choice of Life* (Hardy, 1979: 127) is a moral prose by Samuel Johnson. It was written when Johnson was suffering some agony for his mother was gravely ill and it was not finished until his mother's death. What the work exposes is not only the voyage or adventure to Abyssinia pertaining to Egyptians and Ethiopians but also meditation of general human nature. The plot of it is by no means complicated. The key characters involved include Rasselas - Prince of Abyssinia, his sister Nekayah, her attendant Pekuah, the much-travelled old philosopher Imlac, hermit, and mad astronomer. Rasselas becomes weary of joys of the Happy Valley and therefore resolves to escape the confinement to see the world, pursuing happiness. In the searches, Rasselas, Nekayah, Pekuah and Imlac traverse the city and country, encounter various classes of society and come into contact with the world around them; nevertheless, they realize happiness always eludes their grasps and there is nothing on the path of life leading them to happiness. As a consequence, they decide to return to Abyssinia abruptly.

## 6. FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF PERIODIC SENTENCES IN RASSELAS

Syntactic analysis is carried from two aspects, one is thematic structure of periodic sentences and the other is information structure. In order to specify the constituents contributing to information delivery, information structure of Halliday (1994/2000) and communicative dynamism (CD) of Firbas (1992) are incorporated as a whole.

### 6.1 Syntactic Analysis from Thematic Structure

- (1) If I were Emperor, not the meanest of my subjects should he oppressed with impunity.  
(Ch8, P11)

If	I	were Emperor,	not the meanest of my subjects	should	he	oppressed with impunity.
Theme <sub>1</sub>			Rheme <sub>1</sub>			
structural	topical	Rheme <sub>2</sub>		finite	topical	Rheme <sub>3</sub>
Theme <sub>2</sub>				Theme <sub>3</sub>		

When a dependent clause in a clause complex precedes the clause on which it depends, dependent clause can be labeled as Theme for the whole clause complex; however, this clause complex is separated into two by comma, though one part of dependent clause is presented ahead. Meanwhile, normally comma serves to mark a division between Theme and Rheme. Thus Theme<sub>1</sub> is from the beginning to “Emperor”, and the remainder is Rheme<sub>1</sub>. If we follow strictly the basic assumption that there must be one and only one experiential element in the multiple Theme, clause complex can be analyzed in another way. In former clause, structural “if” and topical “I” combine into Theme<sub>2</sub>, whereas “were Emperor, not the meanest of my subjects” acts as Rheme<sub>2</sub>; in the latter part, finite “should” and topical “he” compose Theme<sub>3</sub>, whereas “oppressed with impunity” is Rheme<sub>3</sub>. Theme<sub>2</sub> and Rheme<sub>2</sub> are the constitutive requirement of the conditional adverbial clause representing the subjunctive mood. In dominant clause, Theme<sub>3</sub> is the beginning of a clause serving as the starting point of the message; it is the component with which the clause is concerned. The remainder of the message “oppressed with impunity” is the part in which Theme<sub>3</sub> is developed, and it is put in Rheme<sub>3</sub>. It is when we read Rheme<sub>3</sub> over that we know the detailed information of Theme<sub>3</sub>, and our expectation towards Dr Johnson’s intention falls down. Comparing Rheme<sub>2</sub> with Rheme<sub>3</sub>, the most vital information for us to understand this periodic sentence is in Rheme<sub>3</sub>, and it brings the sentence into a close.

(2)My daughter, my only daughter, from whose tenderness I expected all the comforts of my age, died last night of fever. (Ch18, P26)

My daughter, my only daughter, from whose tenderness I expected all the comforts of my age,	died last night of fever.
Theme	Rheme

In this periodic sentence, Subject is a complex of two nominal groups and one hypotactic elaborating clause traditionally deemed non-defining relative clause. Amid this complicated Subject, both the second nominal group and hypotactic elaborating clause are available to add more specific information about first part of Subject “my daughter”. Three components being a whole group complex can be viewed as a clause and thereby function as Theme. Here, heavy Subject as Theme is the peg on which the message is hung. Constituents “died of fever” are

used to account for Theme and act as Rheme. However, the verbal group is separated with an interpolated time adverbial group “last night”. Last content word “fever” suggesting cause of death occurs after long suspending in Theme and a small part of Rheme.

(3)This opinion, which perhaps prevails as far as human nature is diffused, could become universal only by its truth: those that never heard of one another would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience can make credible. (Ch31, P40)

This opinion, which perhaps prevails as far as human nature is diffused,	could become universal only by its truth:
Theme <sub>1</sub>	Rheme <sub>1</sub>

those that never heard of one another	would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience can make credible.
Theme <sub>2</sub>	Rheme <sub>2</sub>

In order to make clear how the message of this clause complex is organized, we make analysis with splitting it into two parts. Clause following colon is the appositive clause of “Truth”, so colon can be seen as the point of transition. Constituents before it can be separated as Theme and Rheme according to the position of comma as well as the logic dependency relations between two clauses. Which-clause is the embedded hypotactic elaborating clause to expand the information of Subject “This opinion”, so these two parts combine into heavy Subject as Theme<sub>1</sub>. Rheme<sub>1</sub> ends with the condition in which proposition of Theme<sub>1</sub> is valid, exactly speaking, “this opinion becomes universal”. The elements after the colon are appositive explanations of “truth”, where Theme<sub>2</sub> is the combination of pronoun “those” and its defining relative clause with which “those” is specified further. Information of Theme<sub>2</sub> hangs in the air until Rheme<sub>2</sub> comes into existence. Furthermore, there also is defining relative clause, which is used to emphasize the importance of experience to dissolve dissension, to qualify Complement “tale”. To put the whole clause complex into specific context, it is safely perceived that the weightiest part of message is put into Rheme<sub>2</sub>. From the syntactic arrangement, Rheme<sub>2</sub> occupies just a minor part, whereas Theme<sub>1</sub>, Rheme<sub>1</sub> and Theme<sub>2</sub> take over the majority parts of the clause complex.

From above discussed, it is not difficult to realize that in periodic sentence, Theme is remarkably heavier syntactically since more constituents are accumulated alongside Theme and hang in suspension. Though much shorter than Theme in syntactic arrangement, Rheme is generally presented in the focal part of the message and therefore is much weightier semantically.

## 6.2 Syntactic Analysis from Information Structure

(4)When I cast my eye on the expanse of waters, my heart bounded like that of a prisoner escaped. (Ch8, P12)

When I cast my eye on the expanse of waters,	my heart bounded like that of a prisoner escaped.
Given	New

This sentence comes to existence after the author mentions that Imlac and his father travelled to the shore of Red Sea. In this works, Imlac’s history brings to the Happy Valley the tale of man’s aspiration in the outside world, which is Rasselas’s own anticipation actually. As a young man he is inspired by the same eager hope and feels a burning desire to escape the confinement of the Happy Valley.

Information structure encodes which part of a sentence is more informative in relation to a particular context. Here, context is set at the shore of Red Sea, so “water” can be predicted. The dependent clause in clause complex serves as given information or presupposition of information. So information structure of this clause complex is based on final instead of initial position, with new information coming last. This clause complex can also be interpreted in regard to the degree of Communicative Dynamism. The presupposition “When I cast my eye on the expanse of waters” as contextually dependent elements therefore carries the lowest degree of CD. A contextually independent object “that of a prisoner escaped” will carry a higher degree of CD than the verbal group “bounded like”, for the object expresses an essential amplification of the verb. It is obvious that the degree of CD in this periodic sentence becomes incremental till the element that carries the highest. The lowest degree of CD is carried by “When I cast my eye on the expanse of waters”, and the highest is carried by “that of a prisoner escaped”, the degree carried by “my heart bounded like” ranking between. With the stretch-out of the clause complex within linear arrangement, the information it holds is gradually strengthened. At the end, the climax is reached and we get know what happens to Rasselas.

(5)Rasselas, who could not conceive how any man could reason so forcibly without feeling the cogency of his own arguments, paid his visit in a few days, and was denied admission. (Ch18, P26)

Rasselas, who could not conceive how any man could reason so forcibly without feeling the cogency of his own arguments,	paid his visit in a few days, and was denied admission.
Old	New

Ch XVIII is about the Princess finds a wise and happy man, and the main character is Rasselas. Accordingly, Rasselas is context dependent and come into our vision as given information conveying a low degree of CD. The following defining relative clause is used to elaborate Subject “Rasselas” and acts as the context dependent element. We can figure it out from this chapter when prince finds a wise and happy man and decides to learn his doctrine and imitate his life, Imlac tells him not be too hasty to trust or admire teachers of morality since “they discourse like angels, but they live like men” (Johnson, 2009: 26). As is predicated, the main information is what Dr Johnson intends to convey, to put it specifically, prince was denied to go into the inner apartment without a piece of gold. So, the backmost part is the culmination of the information and has the highest degree of CD as well.

(6)NEKAYAH, being thus reconciled to herself, found that no evil is insupportable but that which is accompanied with consciousness of wrong. (Ch35, P44)

NEKAYAH, being thus reconciled to herself,	found that no evil is insupportable but that which is accompanied with consciousness of wrong.
Given	New

It is the first sentence in Ch XXXV “The Princess languish for want of Pekuah”, so Nekayah appearing right at the outset is the context dependent element and can be identified as given information; consequently, it carries little degree of CD. Embedded clause following provides setting, wherein “thus” suggests this part can be concluded from the pretext and also acts as given information. The residual part belongs to new information in the same syntactical level. A contextually independent object carries a higher degree of CD than the predicator, for the object serves as an essential amplification of the verb and is therefore more important. It is obvious that the long complement presenting in terms of clause is more important than predicator “found”. Context independent complement of the subject can convey more important information than subject itself. Thus degree of “insupportable” is higher than that of “no evil”. Adversative “but” draws forth the exception so the following parts deliver the more important information and hold the highest degree of CD.

To conclude, information in Dr Johnson’s periodic sentences is distributed from the Given to the New. The end of the sentence is often the end focus, the culmination of the New. Moreover, the degree of CD in periodic sentence becomes increasingly accumulative till the end which carries the highest.

### 6.3 Textual Analysis of Periodic Sentences

Periodic style, with plots of ups and downs, suspense one after another, tends to inspire readers to expect. Anticipatory constituent is the main symbol of periodic sentence, including insertions, prepositions and attributive clauses that are used to delay the main clause. Four periodic

sentences with different length of anticipatory constituents are selected to specify Dr Johnson's periodic style.

(7)YE who listen with credulity to the whisper of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow, attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia. (Chapter1, P1)

The basic design can be rearranged in the following way:

YE a) who listen with credulity to the whisper of fancy,  
a1) and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope;  
b) who expect that age will perform the promises of youth,  
b1) and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow, attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.

In this sentence, the adverbial clause of concession is embedded in the main clause. Parenthetical dependent constituents contribute to the periodic structure of the sentence. There are tangible ingredients in this sentence with periodic style. At his first movement, Dr Johnson sets up a suspension composed of a "who" relative clause (a) and the balancing qualification (a1), then another parallel structure (b) and (b1), and meanwhile, these two parts build up the balance of syntactic structure. At last, it welcomes the climax.

Two parallel "who" clauses serve as anticipatory constituents because they have medial position rather than the final one. They are dependent and cannot stand on their own, and hence cannot be interpreted in isolation. "YE" is the topic of the sentence and starting point of the message, and "attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia" is what "YE" is developed. The long anticipatory constituents have to be held in memory until the end of the sentence and our attentions have to be propelled forward to the end.

In the context, the sentence is a warning to YE, the whole of mankind, who take for granted that future is bound to bring happiness and current hopes surely can come true should commit themselves to read the history of Rasselas. It is also a warning to the addressed not live under the illusion that happiness can be equated with a state of having nothing further to desire. However, if you do not read anticipatory constituents, you cannot figure out what actions "YE" should take; if you do not "attend to the history of Rasselas, Princess of Abyssinia", and consider the state of life one after another with youthful travelers in the quest for happiness, you cannot work out what on earth the long postmodifiers of "YE" mean.

(8)In families where there is or is not poverty there is commonly discord. (Ch26, P32)

In this sentence, a defining relative clause depending on prepositional group has initial position as dependent clause of the main clause. Dr Johnson provides with the cover-all case seriously by "In families where there is or is not poverty", then presents an acknowledged phenomenon.

Readers are forced to wait expectantly for the main idea, which is not so climatic but common. The anticlimactic effect is constructed. Thus it shows periodic structuring can backfire on the readers: a climax is expected, when “commonly discord” arrives, we may feel that it does not fulfill its promise.

(9)When I see and reckon the various forms of connubial infelicity, the expected causes of lasting discord, the diversities of temper, the opposition of opinion, the rude collisions of contrary desire where both are urged by violent impulses, the obstinate contest of disagreeing virtues where both are supported by consciousness of good intention, I am sometimes disposed to think, with the severer casuists of most nations, that marriage is rather permitted than approved, and that none but by the instigation of a passion too much indulged, entangled themselves with indissoluble compact. (Ch28, P35)

The adverbial clause of accompaniment serves as the introductory element and creates the anticipation of readers. There are six parallel nominal groups trailing after the verbal group. Furthermore, there are two embedded defining relative clauses with conjunctive signal “where” after the last two nominal groups. In addition, a parenthetical adverbial occurs in medial position and divide the dominant clause into two parts. The aim of such complex premodifier and interpolation is to highlight the semantic nucleus, i.e. the presence of marriage is allowed without opposing instead of being established with authoritative satisfaction. The close bond of couples only resorts to passionate stimulus. Before the main clause comes into view, readers have to bear the great burden on memory. The periodic structure here displays its full power since the introductory element is long enough to create powerful suspense. The ingredients for this periodic style are suspension, parallelism, parenthesis and climax.

(10)They deliberated awhile what was to be done, and resolved, when the inundation should cease, to return to Abyssinia. (Ch49, P66)

It is the last sentence of *Rasselas*, with “Abyssinia” carrying the weighty information. The parenthetical adverbial clause serves as anticipatory constituent to create suspension and tension; meanwhile, it shows the Nile is in flood. The word “resolve” recurs throughout large sections of the works with the force of a motivation. After reading “resolved”, readers are got in anticipation of final outcomes. Much to everyone’s surprise, “Abyssinia” comes down. Admittedly, Abyssinia is of great significance to the text for Prince of Abyssinia and his companions are discontent with life in the Happy Valley and decide to seek happiness in the outside world. After several searches, they find nothing is concluded and decide to return to the origin, Abyssinia. The focus of information persists until the final part of final sentence of the whole works. It is used to point the irony of resolving on a course of action that will lead to “happiness”.

## 7. NEOCLASSICISM

Classicism is the name exclusive to an artistic movement founded on aesthetic attitudes. The status of form, proportion, and restrained emotion are highlighted by the movement of classicism. The principles of classicism are derived from practices and guidelines of the ancients, contrasted with Romanticism. There are two major revival of classicism in the course of history: one is during the Renaissance and the other one is dominant in northern Europe during the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth century. The latter is what we normally called neoclassicism, which is not only the revival of the ancient arts but also opposition to the artistic form of Baroque and Rococo because both of them are characterized by irregularity and asymmetry. According to *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, Baroque means “extravagantly ornate, florid, convoluted and irregular in character or style” (Flexner, 1987: 170), and Rococo is pertaining to a style characterized chiefly by “smallness of scale, delicacy of color, diminutiveness of Baroque forms and playfulness of theme” (Flexner, 1987: 1665-1666). Neo-Classicism is contemporary with the Age of Enlightenment, also called the Age of Reason and involves the artistic exploitation of the tenets of the Enlightenment. Elements of symmetry, proportion, unity, harmony, and grace are all what neoclassicism advocates and respects.

## 8. SUMMARY

Why Dr Johnson selects periodic structure in preference to other alternative forms such as loose structure to deliver his expressions signify much that these periodic sentences are with motivated prominence available to us. Periodic style is one of foregrounding features and according to Halliday’s perspective; it is deflection, which is constructive prominence used to establish or enhance a new principle rather than the violation of norms and conventions.

In the realm of literature, Coleridge in his fourteenth lecture in 1818 has ever made a trenchant comment on periodic style of Dr Johnson, as follows:

“After the Revolution... a style was produced which by combining triteness of the thought with singularity and excess of manner of expression, was calculated at once to soothe ignorance and to flatter vanity. The thought was carefully kept down to the immediate apprehension of the commonest understanding, and the dress was as anxiously arranged for the purpose of making the thought appear something very profound. The essence of this style consisted in a mock antithesis, that is, an opposition of mere sounds, in a rage for personification, the abstract made animate, far-fetched metaphors, strange phrases, metrical scraps, in every thing, in short, but genuine prose. Style is, of course, nothing else but that art of conveying in the meaning appropriately and with perspicuity, whatever that meaning may be, and one criterion of style is that it shall not be translatable without injury to the meaning. John’s style has pleased many from the very fault of being perpetually translatable; he creates an impression of cleverness by never saying any thing in a common way.”

(Wang, 2011: 96-97)

Though in the nineteenth century, Dr Johnson's rationalism came under severe criticism from subsequent Romanticists, we can still find some beneficial parts within remarks above. To put it simply, the thought or the crucial information of periodic sentence is easier to acquire because it is concise and delayed to the final part; however, it is not deficient in profoundness because the heavier initial part is ingeniously conceived and overwhelmingly presented. As matters stand, the anticipatory part is long-winded or verbose, with superb presentation and a flavor of gravity, yet never short on substance. Dr. Johnson, one of the key figures in eighteenth century, takes his writing farther and farther away from his speech and refuses to express his thoughts in fairly common way. In *Rasselas*, Dr Johnson distinguishes himself by virtue of close-knit structure and exquisite design of periodic sentences.

In analyzing, we find periodic sentence is characterized by a big buildup normally leading to a little idea yet anticipatory constituents with a large proportion in syntactic layout cannot semantically overwhelm the main clause which is with tiny proportion. In Dr Johnson's periodic sentences, more constituents are accumulated in Theme syntactically while the information is displayed incrementally from beginning to the end, and usually it is last word, phrase or clause that communication to the highest. Consequently, harmonious coexistence between end weight in meaning and front weight in form can be viewed as the foregrounding representation of proportion, balance and symmetry. Dr Johnson's periodic sentences are symmetrical syntactically and semantically, as thunder answering from two horizons, wherein the focal part is put at the end, which has the force of resounding thunder. Admittedly, this is the compelling and potent mode opposing to dissymmetry and irregularity in Baroque and Rococo to a certain extent.

In the eighteenth century, an era of reason, the reason why periodic sentences occupy a privileged position in Dr Johnson's prose is that he has endeavored to construct neoclassicism which marked a return to order, proportion, propriety, regularity and harmony. We are thereby exposed to a balanced mood and a thoughtful way of thinking.

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