

A SCALE AND CATEGORY ANALYSIS OF AN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LETTER

Jill Suzanne Arcaro

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

This paper will present a short extract from an Early Modern English letter for which I have used a systemic approach to obtain not only the obvious syntactical analysis but also to show how personal style and even psychological traits of the author are reflected in his syntax. But first, let me begin by saying a few words about the historical setting, which not only makes the material more interesting but is imperative to understanding it. This is a short section taken from a letter written by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, to Francis Walsingham in July, 1587. Leicester began a short-lived military assignment in the Netherlands when he was named Commander in chief of Elizabeth I's army in September, 1585. He ascended within four months to the post of absolute governor by Dutch request but by 1587 he was already burnt out politically and would shortly be recalled to England. The linguistic example presented here is from this last period of Dudley's career. It was written during a short reassignment of Leicester's to the Low Countries from July, 1587 to November of that same year.

Aside from their linguistic interest, Robert Dudley's correspondence provides us with a fascinating historical document full of insights of separate episodes of Elizabeth's struggle against Spain's Philip II from the point of view of one of her most long-standing suitors. You may remember who Robert Dudley was if you saw the BBC's mini-series on Elizabeth I with Glenda Jackson in the part of Elizabeth. He was the man she affectionately called Robin and for whom she locked herself up when he died suddenly in 1588. Just after Elizabeth's reign began he was her suitor and they both considered marriage, but there was opposition and she never fully accepted the idea. Neither did she ever reject Dudley outright probably because of his charm, though this fragment of his letter shows a different side of his personality. Nevertheless, whenever he fell out of grace with the Queen he always managed to bounce back into favor before long.

As I mentioned, at the end of 1585 Dudley was named Commander in chief of the English army in the Netherlands. After much deliberation, the Queen had decided to help William of Nassau expell the Spaniards from the Netherlands, but she desired to do this while avoiding an all out war with Spain which then was a country militarily and financially superior. Her choice of Leicester to command the expedition put the intervention off to a bad start and delayed its effectiveness two years. To escape from the quarrels and intrigues his ambition fostered, Leicester returned to England in the winter 1586-1587. The English did not have the resources of their enemies, the Spanish; unlike Philip II they had no gold from the American territories to replenish their coffers. Elizabeth's advantage was that she concentrated her objectives on the Netherlands, while the Spanish king was forced into fighting several wars on different fronts at the same time in an effort to hold together the vast empire inherited from his father, Charles V. The result was that Philip's government was in heavy debt and had gone bankrupt once in 1575 while Elizabeth's was solvent though poor. Elizabeth tried to avoid the «snowball» effect, that is the evolution of rising responsibilities and rising costs. She set aside and promised the Dutch a fixed sum amounting to about half her total receipts at the beginning of her intervention. Though this sounds heartening and most logical on paper, the reality was that the money sent to Dudley never sufficed and there was no type of financial control in the 16th Century to trace its destination.

Leicester's return to the Netherlands began at the end of June, 1587. Elizabeth assigned him the mission of persuading the Dutch to come to an agreement with Spain. She had decided at this point to withdraw gracefully if she could. This failed because the Spaniards, being encouraged by a victory, their seizure of Sluys, were not interested in peace. In all fairness to Leicester, without means or men (the problems he had with the troops I cannot enter into here), it is not surprising that he did little or nothing. Time's assessment of this man has not brought to light new or worse accusations than those failures he was credited with, and adamantly denied, in his own lifetime. He is most famous today for his patronage of the Lord Leicester's Men, the theatrical group managed by James Burbage which performed many plays written by Shakespeare. Apart from his love of ostentation and his gallantry, Leicester has a bad reputation for his miscalculations and political blunders. However, none of the Queen's other chief councillors evade a clear-out, black and white description like Leicester. Wherever he went controversy followed. Whatever he did had its share of ambiguity and contradiction. For example, in November, 1587 when he was recalled a second time from the Netherlands he had a strong following in spite of the utter failure of his mission. This is because, considering the Netherlands as a suitable appanage for himself, he wisely became a firm Protestant defender among

the factions close to the Queen. When he chose to defend an idea he did so vigorously for as long as it was to his interest. In this case it was.

His correspondent here, Francis Walsingham, was named secretary of state and became with William Cecil, the Lord-treasurer. Together they bore the greater part of the administrative responsibility of the English government. Walsingham maintained a firm voice for decisive action in the area of foreign affairs throughout his career. Unfortunately for him his advice was rarely implemented. He had in opposition not only Elizabeth's indecisiveness but Cecil's moderation; these were his stumbling blocks. He had many friendly contacts abroad and was from the time he learnt to reason an ardent proponent of nurturing Protestantism in France and the Low Countries. Walsingham favored a militaristic version of England's foreign policy as a strategy to free the Netherlands from persecution. His belief and support of this point were unwaivering. Leicester's letters to Walsingham are interesting because they are markedly milder in tone than they normally were with his other equals. Leicester was continuously squabbling with his subordinates and equals alike. These disagreements at time became feuds with campaigning on both sides to discredit the other. One of these feuds with John Norris and Thomas Wilkes is mentioned in this extract. After 1580 when Leicester began to defend the «hawks» interpretation of the problem, this is that it should be solved militarily, he and Walsingham were support to each other in the council of state. The complaints which fill Leicester's letters to Walsingham were not recriminations but pleas for support. Leicester unburdens himself to Walsingham. He uses him as a sympathetic ear.

Here we can see in part Dudley's reaction when his secretary, a man called Junius, is illegally arrested by the Dutch. He continues talking about how his rivals, Norris and Wilkes, have spread malicious rumours concerning his responsibility for the loss of the town of Geldern.

This letter they have taken per force from him and comytted first my man to pryson, which I think was never durst to be attemptyd before and puttes me past my pacience, I assure you, for either I must suffer this to my service or revenge yt to there utter danger, for I know I can with a word make them all smart for this. It ys so, that Gelders ys lost ye day before my aryvall and geven up by Patent the Scottesman and comended thether by the count Hollock, and hath byn wholly at his smart for this. It ys so, that Gelders ys lost ye day before my aryvall and geven up by Patent the Scottesman and comended thether by the count Hollock, and hath byn wholly at his dyrectyon and comaundment, yet, se the good nature of Norryce and Wilkes, as sone as they hurd of this, reportyd to ye States, that this Patent was a coronell of my preferance, to make ye people to hate me, knowing they imputed ye matter before to the count Hollock; for in troth he was his follower and appointed by him to that place.

First we will see the clausal structure alongside the actual extract. Rankshifting is only analyzed on the level of clause as no relevant conclusions could be drawn from a lower level of analysis. The clausal linkage will be studied next. These are followed by a summary of my impressions and findings.

Clausal Structure

Structure	Text from 1587
1. Od S P A A	This letter they had taken per force from him and comytted first my man to pryson, which I think was never durst to be attempted before and puttes me past my pacience, I assure you; for either I must suffer this to my service or revenge yt to there utter danger, for I know
2. (S) P A Od A	
3. SP	
4. (S) P A	
5. (S) P Od A	
6. S P Od	
7. S P Od A	
8. (S) P Od A	
9. S P Od	
C1	
10. S P A P Z P A	I can with a word make them smart for this.
11. S P Cs S	It is so,
C1	
12. S P A	that Gelders ys lost ye day before my aryvall and geven up by Patent, the Scottesman and comended thether by count Hollock and hath byn wholly at his dyrectyon and comaundment yet, se the good nature of Norryce and Wilkes, as sone as they hurd of this, reportyd to ye States,
13. (S) (P) P A	
14. (S) (P) P A A	
15. (S) P A A	
16. P Od A	
17. A S P A	
18. (S) P Oi Od	
C1	
19. S P Cs A	that this Patent was a coronell of my preferance,
20. P Z P Od	to make ye people to hate me
21. P C Od	knowing
C1	
22. S P Od A Oi	they imputed ye matter before to the count Hollock
23. A S P Cs Cs	for in troth he was his follower
C1	
24. (S) (P) P A A	and appointed by him to that place.

Clause

Clausal Linkage

1 and 2

These are two alpha clauses (independent clauses) coordinated by the conjunction *and*

Clause	Clausal Linkage
2 and 3 3 and 4	We can see by a glance at the text that we are dealing with a relative clause but you will also see that there is no specific antecedent. What we are facing is a sentential relative clause which refers back to the entire text which precedes it. These are not full fledged subordinate clauses like the more common relative clauses. They are likened to coordination because they can easily be paraphrased as such ¹ . The main body of the sentential relatives we do not find until after <i>I think</i> in clause 3. <i>Which</i> in clause 3 is their subject. The sentential relatives are preceded and followed by the comment clauses, <i>I think</i> and <i>I assure you</i> . These in appearance are like main clauses but are similar to disjuncts in that they express Dudley's attitude.
4 and 5	These are two sentential relative clauses coordinated with <i>and</i> .
5 and 6	The comment clause 6 has already been discussed above. Here with <i>I assure you</i> the tone has changed and Dudley reiterates that what he is saying is true.
6 and 7 7 and 8	These clauses are linked by causal subordination. Note the correlative <i>either</i> which indicates that clauses 7 and 8 are two beta (dependant) clauses linked by disjunctive coordination.
8 and 9	Again these clauses are linked by causal subordination. Within clause 9 there is a rankshifted clause functioning at Od. Clause 10 is also attitudinal because of the modal verb <i>can</i> which makes clear the association between enabling circumstance and intention. ²
11 and 12 12 and 13 13 and 14 14 and 15 15 and 16 16 and 17 17 and 18	Clause 12 is a rankshifted apposed subject to the dummy subject <i>it</i> in the attributive clause which precedes it. 12-15 are all joined by the coordinating conjunction <i>and</i> . They form a series of four rankshifted clauses at S in clause 1. These clauses are joined by the concessive conjunction <i>yet</i> but before we come to the main body of the beta clause we find an intervening comment clause in 16 and a time clause in 17. The concessive is not encountered until clause 18: <i>yet (they) reported to the States</i> .
18 and 19	Clause 19 is the rankshifted Od of the Preceding clause.
19 and 20	20 is a non-finite beta clause of purpose.
20 and 21	21 is a non-finite supplementive clause with a stative verb.
21 and 22	Clause 22 is the rankshifted Od of the preceding clause.
22 and 23	Linked by causal subordination 23 is an attributive with two Cs.
23 and 24	Linked by coordination 24 is a rankshifted clause functioning at Cs in clause 23.

Conclusions

I shall not take much time commenting on the clausal structure. You surely can distinguish the subjects, predicates, objects and adverbials in the section dedicated to structure. I would like to point out that the Z elements in clause 10 and clause 20 are used to identify intervening nominal groups with phased predicators. In clause 10 for example, *them* operates at Od with regard to *make* and at S with regard to *smart*. Note that *smart* here is not an adjective. Clauses 8-10 are part of a threat, *smart* being the last in a string of catenative verbs: *can make smart*.³

We have seen two lengthy clausal complexes consisting of 10 and 14 clauses respectively. In the first sentence there is only one case of rankshifting while in the second, being longer, there are four. There is a variety of eModE lexical and verbal forms:

Early Modern English	Present Day English
per force	by force
had taken	took
was never durst to be attempted	(This is a challenge for whoever cares to suggest a PE equivalent.)
must suffer	must bare
to my service	as part of my service
is lost	was lost
comended	estrusted
thether	to that place
comaundment	command
the good nature	the good will
as sone as they hurd	as soon as they heard
to hate	hate

The infrequency of dependancy on the level of subordination and rankshift shows an extremely unsophisticated style in spite of the impression of complexity given by the length of the clausal complexes and from the PE standpoint, by the strangeness of the lexis. In the first 10 clauses there are only two cases of clearcut subordination. These two beta clauses come at the end of the sentence, one causal being subordinate to another. The threat Dudley makes when he starts talking about revenge in clause 8 stems from the anger he expresses in the first seven clauses and thus is subordinate to it. The tendency to pile up the subordinates at the end of the complex is repeated in the second sentence where again a comment clause is interposed after the string of coordinated afirmations.

Clauses 11-15 hold news from Dudley regarding specific events which have taken place. All this information is foregrounded by end-focus in the

apposed attributive construction with the dummy subject, *it*. In clause 13 there is an apposition explaining the name *Patent* further. In clauses 13, 14 and 24 we have passives which exhibit the principle of end-focus again. The agents of the passives are mentioned but the grammatical subjects are ellipted. In clauses 13 we can consider the subject of the previous clause (Gelders) to fit the context. Oddly, the agent of clause 13 (Patent) serves as the contextual subject of the following two clauses (14 and 15). Ellipsis of the subject is a prominent feature in the entire second sentence and it does not help to strengthen Dudley's clarity. The subject is ellipted also in clause 18 and in both non-finite clauses 20 and 21. Non-finite clauses have the attribution of syntactic compression which works in Dudley's favor considering his verbosity. However, since the subject must be understood intuitively (contextually) from the preceding clauses ambiguity frequently arises. The problem of ambiguity becomes critical in clauses 23 and 24 where a barrage of pre-forms, very separated from their proper nouns, leaves us perplexed on the first reading. There is also the ellipsis of the subject and part of the predicate in clause 24.

The conversational asides or comment clauses in clauses 3, 6 and 16 give us the impression that this letter could have been dictated. If this is the case what we are dealing with here is the closest that we can come to eModE spoken language.

In the first sentence Dudley is angry over the imprisonment of his secretary. This is expressed by his vocabulary which is indignant when not belligerent (force, pryson, durst to be attemped, past my pacience, suffer, revenge, utter danger, make smart). In the second sentence Dudley seeks to deny his fault for the loss of the town of Geldern through the asseveration of events in which he is not a participant (except once at Od of *hate* in clause 10). In both cases his anger and his innocence are proclaimed by the continuous use of coordination. Coordination expresses Dudley's outrage well by persistence, bordering on raving. Here we have not the naive linkage of ideas found in infantile speech, nor the logical transition of thought of a rational mind but the obsessive uniting of numerous ideas on the same theme divided by the emotional outcries of the comment clauses. Outside the boundaries of the sentence his style is identical. In terms of definite subject matter the two sentences which we have studied here have nothing to do with each other, yet they follow each other linearly. As mentioned in the introduction, the Earl of Leicester's ultimate design was to solícite Walsingham's support by stirring up his emotions. The underlying theme here is Leicester's own innocence in the face of the evil play of his enemies. If we keep this in mind the coordination and juxtaposition of these «treacheries» becomes a stylistic device to enforce them. However, so much insistence eventually has the opposite effect; instead of convincing and reassuring us it makes us wary. History has shown us that Dudley's politics were for the most part unprincipled because he did not aspire to any objective higher than his egoism let him

contemplate. The people and the state were the prime concerns of Elizabeth, Cecil and Walsingham, disinterestedly or for love we can say, but the Earl of Leicester was most concerned in carving out a foothold for himself. These lines should be understood in this light.

Notes

1. Quirk says, «the sentential relative clause is somewhat anomalous... its status is more like that of a disjunct than anything else, ...On the other hand, it can be most nearly paraphrased by a coordinate clause...». I shall try to replace Dudley's lines with coordination, «This letter they took by force from him and committed first my man to prison, and this, I think, has never dared to be attempted before and puts me past my patience.» Randolph Quirk et al., *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, page 765.
2. Jennifer Coates, *The Semantics of the Modal Auxiliaries*, page 95.
3. This is explained clearly and simply in James Muir, *A Modern Approach to English Grammar*, pages 54-55, 61-62.

Bibliography

- J. Coates. (1983) *The Semantics of the Modal Auxiliaries*, London and Camberra: Croom Helm.
- Correspondentie Van Robert Dudley Graaf Van Leycester en Andere Documenten Betreffende Zijn Gouvernement Generaal in de Nederlander 1585-1588*, (1931) Ed. H. Brugmans. 2 Vols. Utrecht: Kemink and Zoon N.V.
- C. Kennedy. «Systemic Grammar and its Use in Literary Analysis» in *Language and Literature*, (1982) Ed. R. Carter. London, Boston and Sidney: George Allen and Unwin, pp. 66-83.
- J. Muir. (1972) *A Modern Approach to English Grammar*, London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.
- G. Parker. (1984) *Felipe II*, Trans. Ricardo de la Huerta Ozores. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- A. Rowse. (1950) *The England of Elizabeth*, London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd.
- R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, J. Svartvik. (1972) *A Grammar of Contemporary English*, London: Longman.