



## STUDY OF WORD ORDER IN *THE WHITE TIGER* AND *THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST*

Prof. Vishnu Kumar Sharma

(Dean, Yagyavalkya Institute of Technology, Tonk Road, Sitapura, Jaipur, (Rajasthan))

Email: [vk\\_english75@yahoo.in](mailto:vk_english75@yahoo.in)

### ABSTRACT



The present paper deals with the importance of order of words in the study of syntax. It deals with some of the principles which are required to take an account of how a language organizes and expresses meanings with different word order. In this article the complex phenomenon of study of order of words and meaning is focused on in detail. The focus has been on when and why the speaker or writer feels the need to deviate from the normal order of words, how the same word connotes new messages in response to new situations and new positions and finally how the innovative semantic structure is applied to convey his/her intended meaning.

**Keywords:** *Deviation, Fronting, Maneuver, Normal, Syntactical.*

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## 1. ORDER OF WORDS

One of the major features of Aravind Adiga's as well as Mohsin Hamid's syntactical maneuver is the order of words. Both of them change the normal order of the parts of the clause, but Aravind Adiga constantly and beautifully changes the normal order for focus, weight, suspense and interest. For example, *Every now and then, even in a place like Laxmangarh, a ray of sunlight will break through.*<sup>i</sup> (*The White Tiger* 101) Adiga has put both the adjuncts first. This is not without reason as he wants to put stress on *Every now and then*, to show that it may happen during only election time and again to put stress on *even in a place like Laxmangarh* because people of such a small place can be cared at only elections and a man can declare himself a citizen of the democracy of India and he can think to cast his vote.

### 1.1 FRONTING

All elements of the clause have been fronted in both *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *The White Tiger*. What happens with such maneuvers can be shown with the following words from Nash:

*A little stylistic heat is generated when the theme-focus relationship is disturbed by inversions and transpositions of various kinds ... Such thematic shifts ... create a double focus of information on the shifted element and on the clause – final item ... In other cases the purport of the shift might be to create a strong end-focus on some important element ...*<sup>ii</sup>

In the following sentence, the adjunct is fronted:

*That night, I was lying in bed, inside my mosquito net, thinking about his words.* (*The White Tiger* 10)

In the normal case the focus would have been only on the noun *words* according to the principle of end focus. But here the focus is on *that night* and *words*.

Here are some other examples where the adjunct is fronted:

*With a big smile—and a namaste—I handed him the red bag.* (*The White Tiger* 300)

*Up on the broken ramparts, the monkeys gathered to look at me.* (*The White Tiger* 87)

*On the third day of travelling like this, red bag in hand, I was at Hyderabad, waiting in line at the station tea shop to buy a cup of tea before my train left.* (*The White Tiger* 293)

*Without thinking, I extended my hand.*<sup>iii</sup> (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 89)

*Often I would emerge into the car park to find that one of the tires of my rental car was punctured – far too often for it to be mere coincidence.* (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 96)

*There, it is done, and off he goes.* (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 109)

In the following examples the object is fronted:

*Calling myself Bangalore's least known success story isn't entirely true, I confess.* (*The White Tiger* 11)

*Good, I thought, just as he was turning off the lights.* (*The White Tiger* 266)

*One thing, though, he did know.* (*The White Tiger* 106)

*Rickshaw-puller he may have been—a human beast of burden—but my father was a man with a plan.* (*The White Tiger* 27)

The following examples in which the complement is fronted are worth looking at:

*Little prince, you're here at last!* (*The White Tiger* 82)

One another important device that both the writers frequently use is parenthesis. They have used parentheses effectively for multi-focus following the principle that focus normally comes at the end of a tone unit explains why a parenthesis (which is normally bordered by tone-unit boundaries) can be used rhetorically to throw emphasis on a word immediately preceding it.<sup>iv</sup>

*Though it's cool enough at night in Bangalore, I've put a midget fan—five cobwebby blades—right above the chandelier.* (*The White Tiger* 7)

In the above example the focus is even on *fan* owing to the parenthesis marked off by dashes, which would not have been there without it. The sentence would be:

**Though it's cool enough at night in Bangalore, I've put a midget fan right above the chandelier.**

In this case the focus would have been on the chandelier according to the rule of end focus.

*We international students were sourced from around the globe, sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations – interviews, essays, recommendations – until the best and the brightest of us had been identified.* (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* 04)



In the above example the focus is even on *evaluations* owing to the parenthesis marked off by dashes, which would not have been there without it. The sentence would be:

**We international students were sourced from around the globe, sifted not only by well-honed standardized tests but by painstakingly customized evaluations until the best and the brightest of us had been identified.**

In this case the focus would have been on the verb identified according to the rule of end focus.

Pronouns generally do not get end focus because they belong to closed-system items. *The neutral position of focus is what we may call End-Focus, that is (generally speaking) chief prominence on the last open-class item<sup>v</sup>* but both the writers get the focus on closed-class items by using parenthesis:

*My own feeling is that he ran through it—as fast as he could—and got to the other side—and never looked back! (The White Tiger 18)*

*All I want is that one son of mine—at least one—should live like a man. (The White Tiger 30)*

*Where else could I – without money and family contacts, and at so young an age – hope to attain such an impressive income? (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 157)*

Adiga gets the focus on the particles also by using parenthesis:

*Now, excuse me a minute while I turn the fan on—I'm still sweating, sir—and let me sit down on the floor, and watch the fan chop up the light of the chandelier. (The White Tiger 197)*

*So I threw the thing out—but before that, I got someone to teach me scanning—and you know how we Indians just take to technology like ducks to water. (The White Tiger 12)*

## 1.2 CLEFT SENTENCES

Both the novelists also mark the focus of information by the use of cleft sentences, but Adiga deals with cleft sentences differently, showing some kind of deviation as is clear from the following example:

*After my father's death, it was Kishan who took care of me. (The White Tiger 53)*

The cleft sentence *gives both thematic and focal prominence to a particular element of the clause<sup>vi</sup>* and the element which is to receive the focus follows

the verb *be*. When we consider the above example, we find that Adiga could have used – **it was Kishan who took care of me after my father's death** and in this combination the focus would have been again on **Kishan**. Adiga changes this general order unnecessarily, perhaps to show some extra emphasis. *One of the drivers—it was the fellow who liked to twirl his key chain all the time—had a mobile phone with him. (The White Tiger 152)*

In the above example Adiga breaks the first sentence into two parts and puts the cleft sentence between them and this he does to show the complexities of the driver's mind.

The school teacher was in the habit of chewing the paan and spitting everywhere on the walls all around except the one wall on which Lord Buddha's painting was there. And it is shown by Adiga with the help of a cleft sentence:

*A faded mural of the Lord Buddha surrounded by deer and squirrels decorated the fourth wall—it was the only wall that the teacher spared. (The White Tiger 29-30)*

What the brand of whiskey the Stork and his son like is the Black Dog and it is presented with the help of a cleft sentence:

*Black Dog was the first name in the first-class category of whiskey. It was the only thing that the Stork and his sons drank. (The White Tiger 75)*

When Ashok says that he doesn't believe in killing animals needlessly and denies taking meat on the ground that he knows vegetarians in America, and he thinks they're right. The Wild Boar makes him understand to eat meat with a cleft sentence:

*It's the Brahmins who are vegetarian, not us. (The White Tiger 83)*

Balram shows his relief after excruciating trip with a cleft sentence:

*It was with great relief that I drove the Honda into the gate of the Maurya Sheraton Hotel, and brought that excruciating trip to an end. (The White Tiger 199)*

Balram puts his fear of horror stories as follows:

*It was just one of those two-inch horror stories that appear every morning in the papers. (The White Tiger 314)*

Hamid is not lagging in marking the focus of information by the use of cleft sentences. Here are some examples to prove the fact.



*Instead, it was your bearing that allowed me to identify you... (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 02)*

*... it was said, with a precision that was uncanny. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 05)*

*It was immediately apparent that I would not have, in my wooing of Erica, the field to myself. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 18)*

*It was against this backdrop that I saw Erica again. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 79)*

Both Adiga and Hamid have used the **it + be + NP + relative clause** structure effectively; the less important people, things and ideas have been put in the subordinate clauses, and more important deeds, things, ideas etc. have been used not only in the main clauses, but also in form of the cleft constructions.

### 1.3 PSEUDO-CLEFT SENTENCE

Like the cleft sentence proper, the *pseudo-cleft sentence makes explicit the division between given and new parts of the communication. It is an SVC sentence with a wh-relative nominal clause as subject or complement.*<sup>vii</sup> The pseudo-cleft sentence occurs more often, however, with the wh-clause as subject. The following are virtually synonymous:

*What you need is to get yourself busy. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 137)*

It is to get yourself busy that you need.

In the above examples the first is from *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and where Hamid chooses the pseudo-cleft sentence for conveying the information while the same information can be conveyed with the structure of a cleft sentence as in the second sentence. But this depends on the choice of the writer.

Following is a classic example in which Adiga chooses wh-relative nominal clauses both as subject and complement.

*What I am describing to you here is what happens to drivers in Delhi. (The White Tiger 169)*

Here are some other examples:

*What it meant to live like a man was a mystery. (The White Tiger 30)*

*... what I thought was a trace of sadness in her voice. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 20)*

*... what I found instead was a place of skyscrapers and superhighways. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 64)*

## 2. ELLIPSES

They use all the three types of techniques – textual, structural and situation ellipses. Ellipted items can be recovered from the text, through one's knowledge of grammar/language and from the context. Functional words/closed class items like determiners, pronouns, auxiliaries and articles are ellipted so frequently. All this requires intelligence, linguistic competence, imagination and courage, and it is very rare that all these qualities are present in one writer. But these two novelists have all of them in surplus. They had to be different from the lot. They could not help it. There is the frequent use of ellipsis which does not depend on linguistic context as Quirk and Greenbaum say:

*Some types of informal ellipsis are not dependent on the linguistic context. For example, **Serves you right** can be expanded to **It serves you right.***<sup>viii</sup>

Here are some examples to substantiate the above fact:

*It's more a novella than a novel. (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 51)*

*It's my ancestral village, Pinky. (The White Tiger 80)*

*I don't just swear and curse. (The White Tiger 05)*

At times, both the writers drop even the important elements from the sentence. If such sentences are considered in isolation, they may create ambiguity. Incorrectness can be, perhaps, ascribed to them, but the situation/context helps to make these sentences clear and correct:

*A little gaudy? (The Reluctant Fundamentalist 47)*

*Seven hundred thousand rupees. (The White Tiger 32)*

*An Indian revolution? (The White Tiger 304)*

In all of the above examples, there are no subjects, almost all the rules for making a sentence are broken but the reader can easily guess by the help of situation when he/she reads the text.

Again in the following example Adiga's deviation is very much eye catchy and amazing:

*'Been thinking about what I said, Country-Mouse?' (The White Tiger 201)*

The above utterance is worth noting. First of all, what strikes is the fronting. What matters more for Country-Mouse is the thinking process, and as a result of it the verb is fronted. Further, Adiga has used the non-finite verb for making an interrogative sentence. Finally, there is the case of ellipsis, where



the ellipted words – *have you* can be recovered from the text.

Structural ellipsis is *the case where the interpretation depends on knowledge of grammatical structure.*<sup>ix</sup> In this type of ellipsis functional items like auxiliaries, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns etc. are ellipted. It can be seen especially in cases of *headlines, book titles, notices and in such written varieties as lecture notes, diaries and telegrams.*<sup>x</sup> There is many a clear case, where Adiga shows his mastery very effectively. To prove the fact following examples may be marked:

**MURDER WEEKLY**

**RUPEES 4.50**

**EXCLUSIVE TRUE STORY**

**'HE WANTED HIS MASTER'S WIFE.'**

**LOVE—RAPE—REVENGE!**

(*The White Tiger* 201)

**LUNNA SCALES CO.**

**NEW DELHI 110 055**

**YOUR WEIGHT**

**59** (*The White Tiger* 248)

**'JACKPOT' ENGLISH LIQUOR SHOP**

**INDIAN-MADE FOREIGN LIQUOR SOLD HERE**

(*The White Tiger* 72)

With the ellipting of the other structural elements, both the novelists focus the attention on just the thing they want to be in the limelight – something uncommon. In this case *the interpretation may depend on the extralinguistic context.*<sup>xi</sup> Here is the discourse that goes between Balram and Mr. Jiabao:

*Night after night, morning after morning. Amazing, isn't it? But enough of the radio.* (*The White Tiger* 291)

First of all, what strikes is the verbless plus subject-less sentence. Secondly, what strikes is the ellipsis of the subject and verb which can be recovered by the help of the question tag. Then there is again a verbless plus subject-less sentence which expresses lack of action. Finally, the thing which is amazing has to be recovered from the context when Balram talks about the Indian budget which is full of rotten and to be false soon promises to Mr. Jiabao. *Amazing, isn't it?* is only extralinguistic context which makes the reader understand that Balram must be referring to some pieces of news which people

swallow gladly as eliminating malaria till it becomes a *thing of the past*, malnutrition eradication till *there would be not one hungry child in the city by the end of the year*, turning our *villages into high-technology paradises* and so on because Balram, as the reader knows, that our politicians have awfully little work to do but befooling the people and winning elections year after year.

The most important linguistic tool that both the novelists take fuller than normal advantage of, is the ellipsis. This feature is pervasive and makes the text and narration interesting, economical, stylish and anti-boring.

<sup>i</sup> Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger* (Noida: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008) 101.

<sup>ii</sup> Walter Nash, *Designs in Prose* (London: Longman, 1985) 107.

<sup>iii</sup> Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2007) 89.

<sup>iv</sup> Randolph Quirk, Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London: Longman, 1985) 407.

<sup>v</sup> Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* (Delhi: Pearson Education, 2005) 418.

<sup>vi</sup> Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* 426.

<sup>vii</sup> Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* 428.

<sup>viii</sup> Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* 265.

<sup>ix</sup> Svartvik 257.

<sup>x</sup> Svartvik 257.

<sup>xi</sup> Svartvik 256.