

MARÍA MARTÍNEZ LIROLA  
(University of Alicante, Spain)

UDK 811.111(73)367  
Izvorni znanstveni rad  
Primljen: 27. 8. 2008.  
Prihvaćen: 1. 4. 2009.

## Functional characteristics of some processes of thematization and postponement in two short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe

### Abstract:

*In this article I am going to analyse certain anomalous syntactic structures in English (extraposition, existential sentences, pseudo-cleft sentences, passive voice and cleft sentences) following the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar, which will be helpful to understand the relationships between language and culture and language and situation. Instead of having chosen independent examples coming from a computational corpus, I have decided to analyse these structures in two short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe. With the analysis of the corpus of examples it will be proved that the use of these anomalous syntactic processes points out a clear contrast with the normal order of the English sentence, i.e. these syntactic processes clearly break SVO. In the same way, I will point out that these syntactic structures contribute to the vividness and expression of feelings in the short stories: "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Black Cat". The main aim of Allan Poe with the use of marked syntax is to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery, cruelty, and a variety of horrors.*

### Resumen:

*En este artículo vamos a analizar determinadas estructuras de sintaxis anómala en inglés (extraposición, oración existencial, oración semi-hendida, pasiva y oración hendida) siguiendo los principios de la Gramática Sistemática Funcional, escuela lingüística que nos ayudará a entender las relaciones entre lengua y cultura y lengua y situación. En lugar de haber elegido ejemplos independientes pertenecientes a un corpus informatizado, hemos decidido analizar estas estructuras en dos historias cortas escritas por Edgar Allan Poe: "The Pit and the Pendulum" y "The Black Cat". El análisis del corpus de ejemplos nos ha permitido comprobar que el uso de estas estructuras de sintaxis anómala pone de manifiesto un claro contraste con el orden normal de la oración en inglés ya que rompen claramente el orden SVO. De manera similar pondremos de manifiesto que estas estructuras sintácticas dotan de viveza y expresividad a las historias cortas que son objeto de estudio. El propósito principal de Allan Poe al usar una sintaxis marcada es provocar terror al explotar el misterio, la crueldad y una variedad de horrores.*

### 1. Introduction

This article is within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar for two main reasons: the importance of the context for the analysis of the main syntactic processes of thematization and postponement in English and because it studies

language in relation to society and analyses the main reasons for choosing between some linguistic forms or others, which is always determined for the function that those linguistic forms have in society.

The main hypothesis in this article is that Edgar Allan Poe chooses several anomalous syntactic structures (extrapositions, existential sentence, pseudo-cleft sentences, passive voice and cleft sentences) in the short stories "The Pit and the Pendulum" published in 1842 and "The Black Cat", published in 1843<sup>1</sup> as a way of adding vividness to the narration. This paper is going to be a literary analysis of these two short stories. All the instances of the marked structures under analysis were recorded and analysed. The analysis of the corpus following the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar will be helpful to understand the relationships between language and culture and language and situation.

In "The Pit and the Pendulum", after being sentenced to death by the Spanish inquisitors, a prisoner awakens and explores his dark cell. He faints and barely avoids falling into a deep pit. Awakening yet again, he finds that he is strapped to a wooden table with a great sharp pendulum swinging above him. As the blade descends, he rubs food onto his bonds so that rats will gnaw his bindings. Freed, he realizes that the heated metal walls are slowly closing in. Just before he is forced into the pit, French soldiers enter the city, and he is saved. "The Pit and the Pendulum" must be understood as a mental journey of the protagonist towards his inner self, an adventure of internal discovery, which is typical of Poe's tales (Rodríguez Guerreño-Strachan, 1999: 150).

In "The Black Cat" it is pointed out how the narrator's drinking makes him mistreat his pets. His torturing and hanging of his first cat prove his cruelty, and the conflagration that destroys his home. The narrator visits his home after it had burned. On a plaster wall he sees a mysterious image of a cat with a rope around its neck. The new cat is very much like Pluto, which the narrator had killed. The narrator reveals that evil impulses have mastered him, and within a short time he comes to abhor this second cat as strongly as he had its predecessor. He attempts to kill it with an axe, but, by mere chance he murders his wife when she deflects the blow. He walls up the corpse in the cellar. When the police come to investigate and, having discovered nothing amiss, are about to depart, what the narrator has described as the spirit of perverseness motivates him to tap the wall, whence a terrifying howl sounds. The wall is opened, the corpse revealed, with the cat atop its head, and so the narrator has conducted a near live burial.

This short story is a well known one in Poe's narrative, as Gargano (1967: 171) states:

A close analysis of "The Black Cat" must certainly exonerate Poe of the charge of merely sensational writing. The final frenzy of the narrator, with its accumulation of superlatives, cannot be ridiculed as an example of Poe's style. The breakdown of the shrieking criminal does not reflect a similar breakdown in the author. Poe, I maintain, is a serious artist who explores the neuroses of his characters with probing intelligence.

<sup>1</sup> After each example we find the year of the edition we have used and the page of the short story in which we find the example. We are using a 1998 edition.

"The Black Cat" presents the topic of social relations, of innate perversity in human beings and the absurdity of actions and feelings that takes to madness (Rodríguez Guerreiro-Strachan 1999: 151). The theme of this short story is seen as complicated by many critics "by the narrator's dogged assertion that he was pushed into evil and self-betrayal by the 'imp of the perverse'" (Gargano 1967: 170).

Poe contributed significantly to the development of the short story. According to May (1995: 8), Poe's most significant contribution to the development of the short story lies "in linking his aesthetic concept of unity [...] with his notion of psychological obsession [...] A story unified around a single effect, impression, or impulse is the aesthetic similitude of psychological obsession: although the story may contain motifs not intrinsically related to the central theme or effect, such details are presented by the author as relatively unbound, motivated by verosimilitude rather than by theme."

From what it has been said in the previous paragraphs it is clear that Poe's works reflect imagination and horror. His stories often deal with strange plots, unexpected endings and his characters are often deeply disturbed as we will see when we comment on the main examples of marked syntax we find in the two short stories. These are some of the characteristics of fantastic literature, as the following quotation by González Salvador (1984: 216-219) points out:

[...] puede decirse que la literatura fantástica será entendida como la manifestación de una ruptura del orden social y también como una ruptura en el orden de la creencia, como señalan algunos autores.

[...] lo fantástico será pues fuente de terror en la medida que contenga lo desconocido (es decir lo nunca explicado en términos racionales o lo nunca experimentado vital o emocionante) y que, por ser desconocido, es, en potencia, hostil. El miedo será una condición del relato fantástico si consideramos que lo fantástico es maléfico, lo que no implica que nos hallemos ante un relato fantástico cada vez que se expresa el miedo.<sup>2</sup>

It is also characteristic of Gothic works the creation of an atmosphere conducive to anxieties in the protagonist (Fisher 2002: 75). This atmosphere makes the reader, like the narrator, experience the tale's terror through images and discourse already circulating (Goddu, 2002: 107). Poe's narrative is original, brief and provokes an effect in the reader. In Garrison's words (1971: 33):

Poe's own comments on the craft of short fiction in the reviews and notices of Hawthorne's tales would suggest, moreover, that genre classification, as far as his own writing was concerned, was very artificial and arbitrary; in fact the only determinants he supports uniformly and systematically are the principles of originality, brevity, totality and single effect.

<sup>2</sup> Translation offered by the author: "[...] it can be said that fantastic literature will be understood as a breaking of social order and also as a breaking in the order of beliefs, as some authors point out. [...] the fantastic will be a source of terror if it makes reference to the unknown (i.e., what has never been explained in rational terms or what has never been experienced as vital or touching) and that, because of being unknown, is, in potential, hostile. Fear will be an essential condition of the fantastic tale if we consider that the fantastic is evil, which does not imply that we are in front of a fantastic tale each time that fear is expressed."

The writer must have a plan and create the events to provoke the reader. For this reason it is essential the creation of the right atmosphere so that fantastic facts can take place and an effect of terror is created. Normally, the use of stylistic and narrative resources has that end, as Poe (1984: 586) states:

A skilful artist has constructed a tale. He has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents, but having deliberately conceived a certain *single effect* to be wrought, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events, and discusses them in such tone as may best serve him in establishing this preconceived effect.

Poe's style, topics and characters make his writing very popular. The reader engages with the writing. As Thoms (2002: 133) highlights:

The popularity of the stories of Poe and his successors partly derives from this intense engagement with the text where, in the scrutinizing of evidence and the interpreting of clues, the reader becomes a detective and the detective a reader.

Since the structures under analysis will be analysed considering their thematic and information structure, part of the introduction will be devoted to offer an overview of the concepts Theme, Rheme, Given and New, focus, and the principles of end-focus and end-weight.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 579) identify the textual component of English grammar with the two types of characteristics associated with two types of resources: the structural and the cohesive. The first type of resources makes reference to the intraclausal relationships (this is the type we will be concerned with) and the second type to the interclausal relationships.

a. Structural component.

1. New and known information: information structure and focus.
2. Theme and rheme: thematic structure.

b. Cohesive component: reference, ellipsis, conjunction, lexical cohesion.

If we pay attention to the structural component, there are two systems that act in each locution:

1. The system of information - the organization of discourse in a lineal series of tonal units, each one structured in terms of given and new information. With given information we refer to those parts of the message that are known by the addressee, and therefore we can refer to them in an anaphoric way and without being stressed, and on the contrary, with new information we refer to those parts of the message that the hearer does not know, and that are not normally stressed.
2. The system of theme - the organization of the clause in theme and rheme.

Although some linguists such as Mathesius (1939) or Firbas (1957) combine the idea of theme with known information- Fries, (1981: 1-2) calls them "combiners"- in my view, the notion of theme is independent of given-new considerations- these linguists are called "separators"). Firbas (1995: 221) establishes a very clear

difference between “combiners” and “separators”: ‘Combiners are those who assume THEME<sup>3</sup> is the same thing as given and that RHEME is the same thing as NEW. Separators are those who assume THEME is something different from GIVEN and RHEME is something different from NEW.’

Halliday (1967: 212) summarizes the difference between given and theme in this way:

While ‘given’ means ‘what you were talking about’ (or ‘what I was talking about before’), ‘theme’ means ‘what I am talking about’ (or ‘what I am talking about now’), and, as any student of rhetoric knows, the two do not necessarily coincide.

Halliday defines theme from an informal point of view as “the peg on which the sentence is hung” (1970: 161), “the ground from which the clause is taking off” (1994: 38). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 64) also offer a very clear definition: “The theme is the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context.”

Halliday (1967: 204) defines new information as information which “the speaker presents [...] as not being recoverable from the preceding discourse”, whereas given information is defined as recoverable information.

Chafe (1976, 1987) defines given information in cognitive terms as “that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the hearer’s consciousness at the time of utterance” (Chafe, 1976: 30). This author (1974: 111-112) identifies given information with consciousness:

Language [...] is used primarily to increase the amount of knowledge that is shared by separate minds [...]. What a speaker shares with his addressee must be part of what is in the speaker’s consciousness at the time [...] The speaker knows he is not introducing material from his own consciousness into an empty vessel, but that his task is to introduce new things into a consciousness (the addressee’s) which already has some content [...] The speaker must make assumptions as to what the addressee is conscious of, and transmit his own material accordingly. Virtually every sentence [...] is a mixture of what, following Halliday 1967, I will call GIVEN<sup>4</sup> material, which the speaker assumes is already in the addressee’s consciousness, and NEW material, which he assumes is not.

Halliday (1967: 205) approaches the notion of given vs. new from the opposite direction; he starts with the notion of information focus: “that which is represented by the speaker as being new, textually (and situationally) non-derivable information”.

As the previous paragraphs show, Chafe and Halliday define “given” in two different ways. In this study we follow Halliday’s approach to the analysis of thematic and information structure, who identifies theme on the basis of its position in the clause and considers theme and given information two different concepts.

Inside each information unit there is one or two points of prominence, which normally consists of or contains a stressed item that represents the focus of information. In Halliday’s words (1976: 176):

<sup>3</sup> Capital letters appear in the original text.

<sup>4</sup> Capital letters appear in the original text.

Information focus relates each information unit to the preceding discourse by assigning to it a structure whose elements may be labelled 'given' and 'new'. The terms 'given' and 'new' are to be interpreted, not as 'previously mentioned' and 'not previously mentioned', but as 'assigned, or not assigned, by the speaker, the status of being derivable from the preceding discourse.

It needs to be taken into consideration that the sentence is normally headed to the more dynamic element, i.e., towards the element with more communicative dynamism. This element tends to occupy the final position, i.e., the focus is normally placed on the last lexical item in the clause. This is called the "principle of end-focus".

There is a preferred distribution of elements in the clause in accordance with their weight called the "principle of end-weight": the tendency for long or complex elements to be placed towards the end of a clause.

## 2. Extraposition

### 2.1. Formal aspects

Extraposition is a postposition process that implies substituting the postponed element by a word that replaces it. This structure appears only in nominal subordinated clauses with the function of object or subject. The subordinate sentence can be an infinitival clause or a clause introduced by *that*. The definition offered by Poutsma (1904-1916: 100) is the following:

When the subject follows the predicate in the shape of a subordinate statement or an undeveloped clause, it is mostly announced by the personal pronoun *it* by way of anticipatory or provisional subject.

Sometimes a sentence with finite verb form is extraposed as we can see in:

- (1) *The sentence had passed; and it appeared to me that a very long interval of time had since elapsed.* (1998: 137)

In other examples we find extraposition of an infinitival clause:

- (2) *It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom.* (1998: 237)

Extraposition normally appears with verbs such as *appear, seem, chance, happen, remain* and the passive of *hope, intend*, etc. (Huddleston 1984: 452) as we can observe in these examples:

- (3) *It seems probable that if, upon reaching the second stage, we could recall the impressions of the first, we should find these impressions eloquent in memories of the gulf beyond.* (1998: 136)
- (4) *The sentence had passed; and it appeared to me that a very long interval of time had since elapsed.* (1998: 137)

## 2.2. Functional aspects

If we concentrate on the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, following Halliday (1994: 61), the theme is *it* and the rheme is the rest of the structure. According to this analysis, the theme expresses known information and new information is in the rheme.

Sometimes extraposition is used to add vividness to certain facts narrated in the short story since the most important part of the information is not shared with the reader until he/she reads the end of the structure, as we can observe in the way the following psychological reaction is presented:

- (5) *It seems probable that if, upon reaching the second stage, we could recall the impressions of the first, we should find these impressions eloquent in memories of the gulf beyond.* (1998: 136)

It is also usual to use this structure to make a statement precise or highlight it in a categorical way. The following example points out that the narrator undergoes moments of physical and psychological torment, such as the fact of accidentally walling up the cat with his murdered wife, since in extreme situations, the most rational of humans is subject to mental distress (Martínez Lirola 2004: 85):

- (6) *It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom.* (1998: 237)

According to Erdmann (1990: 138-139), the main differences between extraposition and non-extraposition are the following:

[...] the main difference between extraposition and non-extrapositional syntagms is that the latter acts as a signal to the hearer to search in the discourse, in the situation or in his knowledge for a fact related to the state of affairs with which he has been presented by the speaker. [...] In contrast to non-extraposition, the extraposition *it* sentence does not signal any reference to the text up to that point, to the context, or to our knowledge about entities and events in the world.

## 3. Existential sentences

### 3.1. Formal aspects

The second marked structure of our analysis will be the existential sentence. Erdmann (1990: 51) presents this structure in the following way:

There + be/Happen + (pre-modif.) N (post-positions)

The term existential sentence was created by Jespersen. The author (1909-1949: Vol. VII: 110) explains the following regarding the main use of existential sentences:

The chief use of there-sentences is to denote the more or less vague existence or coming into existence of something indefinite; thus very frequently with the verb be [...].

Grzegorek (1984: 76) presents three characteristics shared by all existential sentences: "(1) their subject NPs are focus elements, (2) their verbs have a lower degree of C.D. than the subject NPs, (3) the verb and the notional subject are arranged according to the increasing degree of C.D., i.e. the order is: verb – subject."

Regarding the structure of the nominal group, it should be pointed out that there are normally adjectives or the indeterminate article *a* in it:

(7) *There was a rope about the animal's neck.* (1998: 233)

In the majority of the examples we find the verb *be* but in other examples we find other verbs such as *come*:

(8) [...] *all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit* [...] (1998: 135)

(9) [...] *there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse.* (1998: 233)

Sometimes this syntactic structure is followed by adjuncts:

(10) [...] *there have been moments when I have dreamed of success; there have been brief, very brief periods when I have conjured up remembrances* [...] (1998: 136)

(11) *There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute,* [...] (1998: 230)

It is also important to highlight that the nominal group can be followed by a relative clause:

(12) [...] *for I knew there were demons who took note of my swoon, and who could have arrested the vibration at pleasure.* (1998: 143)

(13) [...] *there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse.* (1998: 233)

### 3.2. Functional aspects

Existential sentences are very common in the two short stories under analysis. With regard to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, following the analysis proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 257) the theme is *there* and the rheme the rest of the structure. New information is in the rheme, i.e., in the notional subject.

Some of the examples give us information about the existence of something as we can see in the following examples. In the first one the narrator's state of mind hovers between semi-hysterical and nearly rational:

(14) *There was another interval of utter insensibility; it was brief, upon again lapsing into life there had been no perceptible descent in the pendulum.* (1998: 143)



- (15) *There was a rope about the animal's neck.* (1998: 233)

In some examples, this syntactic structure shows a certain imprecision that contributes to add to the narration a mysterious atmosphere that make the author and the readers think that supernaturalism is at work:

- (16) *There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere man.* (1998: 230)

The following example makes the reader wonder if in spite of all the pity that Poe seems to feel for the unfortunate hero, in his inmost heart he does not secretly admire the inquisitors' demoniac ingenuity. (Asselineau 1970: 18)

- (17) *And now, as I still continued to step cautiously onward, there came thronging upon my recollection a thousand vague rumors of the horrors of Toledo. Of the dungeons there had been strange things narrated- fables I had always deemed them- but yet strange, and too ghastly to repeat, save in a whisper.* (1998: 138)

Sometimes this marked structure is used to emphasize feelings or to highlight the narrator-protagonist's tormented consciousness:

- (18) *Had I been able to meet with it, at the moment, there could have been no doubt of its fate; [...]* (1998: 237)

In the next example, the tormented feeling of the narrator is made even more emphatic with the exclamation because Poe wants to highlight the fact that the narrator finds himself in a prison, in a "dungeon", cut off from the rest of the world:

- (19) *There could be no doubt of the design of my tormentors-oh! Most unrelenting! oh! most demoniac of men!* (1998: 147)

Something similar happens in the following examples: the exclamation together with the fact of finding three examples of consecutive existential sentences adds vividness to the narration and emphasize feelings:

- (20) *There was a discordant hum of human voices! There was a loud blast of many trumpets! There was a harsh grating as of a thousand thunders!* (1998: 148)

The three previous examples contribute in a very clear way to the mysterious and horrific atmosphere of the short story which is mainly characterized by the increasingly scary mental tortures, the black or faintly red cell, the loathsome presence of rats, and the anonymity of the torturers.

## 4. Pseudo-cleft sentence

### 4.1. Formal aspects

Huddleston (1984: 462) defines this structure in the following way: "The pseudo-cleft is a special case of the identifying *be* construction - the case where the

identified role is associated with a fused relative construction." The definition proposed by Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1387) is the following: "It is essentially an SVC sentence with a nominal relative clause as subject or complement."

In these kind of constructions, one sentence is identified with another. The identifier is more prominent and it is there that we find the focus of information. In Systemic Functional Grammar, Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 69) refer to this structure as "thematic equative" since theme and rheme appear as an equation. In Halliday and Matthiessen's words (2004: 69): "This kind of clause is known as a Thematic Equative, because it sets up the Theme + Rheme structure in the form of an equation, where 'Theme = Rheme'."

In the example *What the duke gave to my aunt was the teapot* we find a nominalization as theme since a group of elements is functioning as a nominal group in the sentence. Apart from the theme's nominalization, in this structure we find the verb *be* and another element in the rheme.

## 4.2. Functional aspects

Traditionally the first part of the pseudo-cleft sentence has known information; on the other hand, the part of the structure we find after the verb *be* has the focus. According to the analysis of the structure in terms of theme and rheme, it must be precised that the theme is the part of the structure we find before the verb *be* and the rheme is the rest of the sentence.

This structure is used to highlight a specific part of the information. In this kind of constructions, one sentence is identified with another. The information found after the verb *be* is normally more prominent and therefore it is there where we find the focus.

In these two examples we can observe how the protagonists of the short stories have psychological problems. Readers have to keep in mind that the facts narrated in "The Pit and the Pendulum" are caused by the psychological pressure suffered by the prisoner and those narrated in "The Black Cat" are caused by the protagonist's madness:

- (21) *But what mainly disturbed me was the idea that it had perceptibly descended.* (1998: 143)
- (22) *I had been looking steadily at the top of this hog'shead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was that fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon.* (1998: 233)

The second example makes reference to the pendulum, which is one of the main symbols in Poe's narrative. It is associated with death and with the passing of time. According to Weber (1967: 95) "It seems certain that the pendulum of the tale is not other thing than the minute hand. [...] If the pendulum represents the minute hand, it is clear that the prisoner represents the shorter hour hand."

As we can see in the previous examples, this structure accomplishes the principles of end-focus and end weight. It highlights new information placed at the end of the structure.

## 5. Passive

### 5.1. Formal aspects

Passive can be used in two different ways: as a thematization process when there is no agent, in a way that the result of the action or the person who suffers the action is emphasized; as a postposition process, the passive emphasizes the agent when it is present. If there is no agent, it can also emphasize the predicate as a postposition process.

Stein (1979: 26) defines passive in the following way: "Passive verb phrases are verbal combinations consisting of a verb + an obligatory past participle which function as verbs in a sentence and cannot be replaced by a one-word form in the present and past tense nor by a corresponding coordinated active verb phrase." This structure can appear with agent complement or without it as we can see in these two examples:

(23) *The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous.* (1998: 233)

(24) *[...] then I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!* (1998: 238)

### 5.2. Functional aspects

Halliday (1970: 161) describes the uses of the passive voice in the following terms:

[...] theme, actor and modal subject are identical unless there is a good reason for them not to be. Where they are not, the tendency in Modern English is to associate theme and modal subject; and this is the main reason for using the passive. The passive has precisely the function of dissociating the actor from this complex, so that it can either be put in focal position at the end, or more frequently, omitted, as in (29):

(29i) *This gazebo was built by Sir Christopher Wren.*

(29ii) *This gazebo is being restored.*

This structure can emphasize certain facts in the short stories and contribute to the creation of a mysterious atmosphere. In the next examples we can observe how the semantic content emphasized refers to specific acts of cruelty. It is also clear that Poe accumulates macabre and loathsome details in the narration:

(25) *I now lay upon my back, and at full length, on a species of low framework of wood. To this I was securely bound by a long strap resembling a surcingle.* (1998: 141)

(26) *Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd-by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber.* (1998: 233)

The previous examples show how the protagonists have manias and phobias. For this reason, following Basler (1977: 56) we have to keep in mind that:

In following all that the hero says, the reader must keep constantly in mind that, if the hero is suffering from obsession, his narrative cannot be accepted merely at its face value as authentic of all the facts; and he must remember that incidents and

circumstances have a primary significance in terms of the hero's mania which is often at variance with the significance which the hero believes and means to convey.

In the next example, apart from the passive voice, there is an example of topicalization and extraposition in the previous context as a way of adding vividness to the narration:

(27) *For the first time during many hours-or perhaps days-I thought. It now occurred to me, that the bandage, or surcingle, which enveloped me, was unique. I was tied by no separate cord.*(1998: 144)

The protagonist of "The Black Cat" emphasizes some characteristics of his personality with the following two examples of passive sentences which are almost consecutive (Martínez Lirola 2004: 81).

(28) *From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. [...] I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets.* (1998: 230)

In the following example the semantic content that has been placed under focus is the psychological reaction of the protagonist to the terrible facts that are narrated in the short story:

(29) *On the night of the day on which this cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire.* (1998: 232)

The passive voice can also emphasize the person who performs the action instead of the action that was taking place:

(30) *But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife.* (1998: 236)

All these examples point out that the protagonists of the short stories have psychological problems. The narrative is clearly influenced by what the narrators of the short stories think and it is evident that their evil mind takes them to madness, to perversion.

## 6. Cleft sentence

### 6.1. Formal aspects

This construction is known as cleft sentence since it comes from the division of a simple sentence in two different parts (that constitute two different sentences). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 95) refer to this structure as "Predicated Theme". Normally it starts with the pronoun *it*, followed by the verb *be*. In Krusinga's words (1931-1932: 505): "[...] the introductory *it is (was)* is completely without any meaning and serves to give front-position to some part of the sentence that can be easily interpreted as a simple one, and can easily be replaced by a simple sentence conveying the same meaning."

Delin (1992: 71-72) declares the following regarding this construction:

Clefts are focusing constructions.

Clefts serve to indicate syntactically the position of GIVEN<sup>5</sup> or NEW information. [...] Many accounts of clefts have in common the view that the use of a cleft construction, either of itself or in conjunction with a particular accent pattern, indicates that the speaker or writer considers or intends certain elements within the construction to be interpreted as FOCAL.

As regards the form of the highlighted element, in the corpus of examples it is a prepositional complement or a nominal group:

- (31) *It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.* (1998: 231)  
 (32) *It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name- and for this, above all, I loathed, [...]* (1998: 235)

Quirk et al. (1985: 1386-1387) declare that the second part of the structure can be introduced basically by *who*, *that* and 'zero pronoun' although we can also find a reduced number of examples with other *wh*- forms such as *whose*, *whom* and *which*. It is impossible to find these last two forms preceded by a preposition. In all cases, the relative pronoun that introduces the second part of the structure is *that*, as we can see in the previous examples. In all the examples found in the short stories, the second part of the structure is introduced by *that*.

## 6.2. Functional aspects

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 97) propose a double thematic analysis of cleft sentences. The first one represents the local thematic structure of the two sentences we find in this construction. The second one shows the thematic structure of the whole clause. We can illustrate both analysis with the following example:

- |   |       |             |  |       |
|---|-------|-------------|--|-------|
| (33) <i>It was even with difficulty</i> |       | <i>that</i> | <i>I could prevent him from following me through the streets.</i> (1998: 43) |       |
| a. Theme                                | Rheme |             | Theme  | Rheme |
| b.                                      | Theme |             |  | Rheme |

Grzegorek (1984: 70) declares the following on the use of cleft sentences:

Generally cleft constructions are used whenever the speaker wants to give special prominence to the new, most prominent information. He may also choose to put heavy stress on the information focus in its regular position. Clefts, however, are preferred, especially in written English where stress cannot be marked.

Cleft sentences are mainly used to contrast and emphasize. In the following example a clear contrast is established beginning with the word *but* when the narrator corrects something previously said. As we can observe, the protagonist of "The Pit and the Pendulum" is very nervous and that is why he sees reality in a way very different to normal:

<sup>5</sup> Capital letters appear in the original text.

- (34) *I dreaded the first glance at objects around me. It was not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be nothing to see.* (1998: 137)

The following example emphasizes the fact that the cat followed the narrator everywhere, "which underlines the union between the cat and the author, (i.e., the cat's presence has an impact in the narrator)" (Martinez Lirola 2004: 89).

- (35) *I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.* (1998: 231)

The cat is an important symbol in Poe's narrative, especially in "The Black Cat", where it is the element towards which the actions are referred to and start from, as Gargano (1967: 170) declares, the cat is symbolically both an accusation and a portent, an enigma to the spectators but an infallible sign to the reader.

The next example points out the way in which the characters could escape from the fire. The fact that the house was burnt is one of the climatic moments of the short story:

- (36) *The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself made our escape from the conflagration.* (1998: 232)

These examples show how "The Black Cat" presents the topic of social relations, and the absurdity of actions and feelings that takes to madness.

The following example shows how the feelings of innate perversity in human beings are even more emphatic through the focalising adverb *only*. This example points out that "Poe constantly allows unavowable thoughts and feelings to rise from the inmost recesses of his soul and gives shape in his tales to horrible imaginings." (Asselineau 1970: 19)

- (37) *It was this unfathomable longing of the soul to vex itself-to offer violence to its own nature-to do wrong for the wrong's sake-only that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute.* (1998: 232)

The previous example shows how animal and human characteristics are reversed as the narrator reveals that he is indeed quite sadistic and maniacal while the cat seems to become quite human. This example points out that the protagonist of "The Black Cat" suffers from irresistible homicidal manias.

## 7. Conclusions

The use of the anomalous syntactic processes under analysis points out a clear contrast with the normal order of the English sentence, i.e. these syntactic processes clearly break SVO. This contrast really emphasizes that these structures are a good way to express certain meanings related to the psychological reactions and acts of cruelty of the protagonists that are placed in focus within these

constructions. In the same way, these syntactic structures contribute to the vividness and expression of feelings in the short stories because the meanings expressed with them evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery, cruelty, and a variety of horrors in the readers.

These two short stories are typical of Poe's tales of horror and terror. They are characterized by the presence of supernatural elements, scenes of torture, unspeakable suffering and terrifying effects. They are told in the first-person point of view and the predominant feelings in them are guilt and madness. These short stories can be considered a *baroque*, a form of literature common in the seventeenth century which was elaborate and expressed an interest in the strange and unusual.

Poe exhibited the supernatural and the fantastic in his compositions. He created an atmosphere characterized by the sudden, the mysterious, the suspense, the sensational and the supernatural. For this reason, Edgar Allan Poe is recognized as a master of suspense since there is a feeling of interest and excitement that the readers experience as they read.

Poe uses tension and uncertainty to maintain and build readers' interest. The reader becomes more and more involved in the story and concerned about what will happen to the narrator as he faces one horror after another.

Since to a large extent, word order in English is fixed, the use of certain grammatical constructions (extraposition, existential sentences, pseudo-cleft sentences, passive and cleft sentence) is functionally relevant and presents a clear contrast with the basic word order in English.

## References

- Asselineau, R. (1970) *Edgar Allan Poe. Pamphlets on American Writers. N.89*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Basler, R. P. (1967) "The Interpretation of "Ligeia"". In R. Regan (ed.) *Poe. A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall; 51-63.
- Chafe, W.L. (1974) "Language and consciousness". *Language*, 50: 111-133.
- Chafe, W.L. (1976) "Givenness, Contrastiveness, Definiteness, Subjects, Topics and Point of View". In Ch. Li (ed.) *Subject and Topic*. New York: Academic Press; 25-56.
- Chafe, W.L. (1987) "Cognitive constraints in information flow". In R. S. Tomlin (ed.) *Coherence and Grounding in Discourse*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins; 21-55.
- Delin, J. (1992) "Why cleft? The Functions of Cleft Constructions in Discourse". In F. Dols (ed.) *Pragmatic Grammar Components*. Tilburg: Tilburg University Press; 69-92.
- Erdmann, P. (1990) *Discourse and Grammar: Focussing and Defocussing in English*. Tübingen: Newmeyer.
- Firbas, J. (1957) "On the Problem of Non-thematic Subjects in Contemporary English". *Casopis pro Moderni Filologii*, 39: 22-72.

- Firbas, J. (1995) "A Contribution on a Panel Discussion on Rheme". In M. Ghadessy (ed.) *Thematic Development in English Text*. London and New York: Pinter; 213-222.
- Fisher, B. F. (2002) "Poe and the gothic Tradition". In K.J. Hayes (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 72-91.
- Fries, P.H. (1981) "On the Status of Theme in English: Arguments from Discourse". *Forum Linguisticum*, 6.1: 1-38.
- Gargano, J. W. (1967) "The question of Poe's narrator's". In R. Regan (ed.) *Poe. A Collection of Critical Essays*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall; 164-171.
- Garrison, J.M. (1971) "The Tales as Poems" In W.L. Howarth (ed.) *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Poe's Tales*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs.
- Goddu, T.A. (2002) "Poe, sensationalism, and slavery" In K.J. Hayes (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 92-112.
- González Salvador, A. (1984) "De lo fantástico y de la literatura fantástica", *Anuario de Estudios Filológicos* VII: 207-226.
- Grzegorek, M. (1984) *Thematization in English and Polish. A Study in Word Order*. Poznan: UAM.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1967) "Notes on Transitivity and Theme in English, Part 2". *Journal of Linguistics*, 3: 199-244.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1970) "Language Structure and Language Function". In J. Lyons (ed.) *New Horizons in Linguistics*. II Vols. Harmondsworth: Penguin; 140-165.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1976) "Theme and Information in the English Clause". In G.R. Kress (ed.) *Halliday: System and Function in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 174-188.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1994) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Second edition. London: Arnold.
- Halliday, M.A.K and C.M.I.M Matthiessen (2004) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. Third edition. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Huddleston, R. (1984) *Introduction to the Grammar of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jespersen, O. (1909-1949) *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles I-VII*. London/Copenhagen: Allen and Unwin.
- Kruisinga, E. (1931-1932) *A Handbook of Present-Day English*. Fifth edition. Groningen: Noordhoff.
- Martínez Lirola, M. (2004). On some functional resources used by Edgar Allan Poe to create context in *The Black Cat*. *Morphé, Ciencias del Lenguaje*, 25/26: 75-100.
- Mathesius, V. (1939) "O Tak Zvaném Aktuálním Členění Větném" (On The So Called Actual Bipartition of the Sentence). *SaS*, 5: 171-174.
- May, Ch. E. (1995) *The Short Story. The Reality of Artifice*. New York: Twayne Publishers.
- Poe, E.A. (1984) *Essays and Review*. New York: The Library of America. /