

A STUDY ON HOW LONG AND SHORT SENTENCES SHOW THE STORY'S PACING IN ANTHONY HOROWITZ'S RAVEN'S GATE

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Abstract

Long and short sentences affect the reader's pace of reading story since they have to farce the complexity of the sentences and words used in it. In this study the impact of the use of long and short sentences on the pace of the story as implemented by Anthony Horowitz, a novelist, in his novel *Raven's Gate*, is being explored. Especially the researchers looked at what types of long and short sentences were being used in the novel and how they were building up the story line and their effect on the pace of the story. A sentence with the length of up-to fourteen (14) words is considered to be short and the one over 14 words is considered to be long in spite its grammatical form, whether it is simple or complex. The criteria are based on empirical study as mentioned by Casi Newell in the AJE (American Journal Experts) retrieved from <https://www.aje.com/en/arc/editing-tip-sentence-length/>, that "the average sentence length in scientific manuscripts is **12-17** words," with JK Rowling—the writer of *Harry Potter*—who can be considered to be representative of a modern English writer with a general audience, having the average of 12 words. For convenience we take the liberty of taking 14 words for the longest sort sentences and those which have 15 or more words are considered to be long sentences.

Key words: *pacing, short sentence, long sentence, simple sentence, complex/compound sentence*

I. INTRODUCTION

When we read a piece of writing whether it is an article of a newspaper or a novel, one of the aspects that enable the reader to read it in one sitting is its elements of style. This is especially true when we are reading a novel. Some people say that some books might be read in one sitting. They look at the book and start reading it and as it progresses they become absorb and forget about time. Of course, some of the reasons why they are able to do it because the novels they are reading are short. Yet it is very rare that they plan to do it in one sitting on purpose unless there is something the elements of the story help them to do that, either the plot, the suspense, the characterization, or the style. Style of writing involves the use of long and short sentences.

Why do people use long and short sentences in their writings? Is it not better to use just short sentences to make it easier for the reader to understand? It seems that the answer is clear that using only one type of sentence length would make their readers out of their minds, in spite of, perhaps, the materials of the stories are very interesting. The reader needs more than just a story line. Some of them like a story when there is a lot suspense in it, like that of a detective story, some like when the story is gripping with high intensity, like that of a war movie. In order to fulfill the readers' expectations a story writer must have some tools to employ so that whatever s/he is telling not to become monotonously boring. One of these tools is to vary the length of sentences as a means of expanding ideas, giving terseness, and connecting ideas with various conjunctions.

Writing is an art, in a way that there is no fix rules to follow. Every writer must have his/her own style of writing. Whatever a writer writes s/he must use a language whose very

nature is having rules for organizing thoughts. The rules are formulated in the forms of grammar. Naturally, then, sentences used by a writer in a story must follow these rules in order to catch the readers' attention. Length of sentences with their various grammatical types must have some purpose, whether the writer him/her-self realizes it or not. It is for this particular reason that the researcher, in collaboration with one of the students in his final writing of his thesis, takes an interest in looking more deeply into the use of long and short sentences of Anthony Horowitz's novel *The Raven's Gate*. Whereas the student focuses on the grammatical aspect of complex sentences, the researcher's main concern is that what the effects of long and short sentences are for the pace of the story. Do short sentences make the story run faster, and long sentences slow it down? For this question to be answered properly the researchers had to account all of the long and short sentences found in the sample used in the *Raven's Gate* story, determine their grammatical functions, and how they revealed the pace of the story. While the main grammatical functions such as subject, object and predicate did matter very much, their extensions were, as they determine whether a particular sentence would be long or not.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Sampling Procedure

The subjects under investigation are long and short sentences used in the Anthony Horowitz's novel entitled *The Raven's Gate*. We used only the beginning two sections for the samples out of the 20 sections that the book has. First we count how many sentences there are all together. Among them how many would constitute long sentences and how many short ones. From here on we would be able to find the range of the word numbers and the average length of the sentences.

2.2 Data collection

In collecting the data, the researchers implemented documentation method and techniques. For the purpose of documenting the data then the following steps were deemed to be necessary:

- In order to get the gist of how the language is used and what types of sentences and diction were chosen, the researchers read the whole story, i.e *The Raven's Gate* by Anthony Horowitz;
- The data were taken from the first two chapter sections as samples;
- Notes were taken from important points in the types of sentences; and
- The last step was the data were categorized inter terms of length of sentences, types of sentences.

2.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the researchers applied quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly how many long and short sentences were found. Secondly, we determined which sentences belong to simple sentences and which ones belong to complex and compound sentences. The researchers then figured out how these long and short sentences affect the pace of the story according to the theory delineated in Chapter II. The average length of the sentences was also counted in order to figure out and understand what age level is being aimed by the book.

III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Finding

The process of counting long and short sentences in this study took the researchers into some rather tedious, but necessary effort so that results may accountably be valid and yet perhaps in terms of quality it may still need a more rigid consideration. As could be seen in

the table below, we came up with some view on the distribution of long and short sentences. Results were obtained by the use of the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{N of specific occurrence}}{\text{N of total occurrence}} \times 100\% =$$

Table 1 Comparison of Percentages between the long and short sentences

Length	Type	Number and Percentage	
Long Sentences	Simple	-	3 = 3%
	Compound	17 = 17%	96 = 97%
	Complex*	79 = 80%	
Total number long sentences			99 = 100%
Short Sentences	Simple	-	308 = 62%
	Compound	40 = 8%	185 = 38%
	Complex	145 = 30%	
Total number of short sentences			493 = 100%
Total number of long and short sentences			592=100%

*Complex here is a combination of complex sentences and complex-compound sentences altogether.

For each of the specified types of sentences used in the sample we could just add up the two length types, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: The combinatory whole number of simple and compound/complex sentences

Type of Long & short sentences	N of Occurrence	Percentage	
Long + short simple sentences	3+308 = 311	-	53%
Long+short compound sentences	17+40 = 57	10%	47%
Long+short complex sentences	79+145 = 224	37%	
Total	592		100%

When we compare the percent

ages of the long and short sentences separately we will see how the complex/compound sentences vs. simple sentences of the two length types different as shown in table 1.

An interesting fact the researcher found in this study is that the average number of words in each sentence is 10 words. This was obtained by dividing the total number of words in the sample with the total number of sentences, i.e. 5629 (total number of words) : 592 (total number of sentences) = 10 words. This lower by two points than the average number of 12 words per sentence used in Rowling's novels.

3.2 Discussion

The comparison between long and short sentences show that short sentences far exceeds the long ones, i.e. 83%:17%, respectively, out of 592 occurrences, thus a difference by 76% points. Judging from the their occurrences, the novel Raven's Gate seems to prefer short sentences, whether they are simple or compound/complex sentences. As we see from Table 2 above, the difference between the total number of simple sentences and compound/complex sentences is not so significant, i.e. 311 : 281 53% : 47%, respectively. There is only a gap of 6% points.

In discussing the data sentences are quoted and numbered according to the real place of a particular sentence in the text with a letter R added to indicate the number is a repetition from the data in the index for example sentences number 1, 2, and 3, would appear 1R, 2R and 3R.

3.2.1 The Pace in Short Sentences

There are two things that we might be able to surmise here: *Firstly*, as the majority of sentences are short, then it makes the pace of the story runs faster. As The Novel Writer's Blog in the The Novel Factory, dated 13 Mar 2016, with an article entitled *Cracking the pace of your novel*, retrieved from <https://www.novel-software.com/blog?article=cracking-the-pace-of-your-novel>, mentioned that "It is often the case that short, sharp sentences read faster than longer sentences." Yet it is further mentioned that fast pace in a prose section should not automatically belong "exclusively" to short sentences. "It is just that a tendency towards the shorter, on average, has the effect of speeding up the section." This is very clearly shown in the following data from sentence 64R through 79R.

- 64R. He was dressed expensively in designer jeans and a soft leather jacket. **12**
- 65R. Even when he had been at school, Kelvin had always had the best gear. **14**
- 66R. "I got held up," he said. **6**
- 67R. Matt said nothing. **3**
- 68R. "You haven't had second thoughts, have you?" **6**
- 69R. "No." **1**
- 70R. "You've got nothing to worry about, Matt, mate. **7**
- 71R. It's going to be easy. **5**
- 72R. Charlie told me..." **3**
- 73R. Charlie was Kelvin's older brother. **5**
- 74R. Matt had never met him, which wasn't surprising. **8**
- 75R. Charlie was in prison, in a young offenders' institution just outside Manchester. **12**
- 76R. Kelvin didn't often talk about him. **6**
- 77R. But it was Charlie who had first heard about the warehouse. **12**
- 78R. It was fifteen minutes from the station, in an industrial zone. **11**
- 79R. A warehouse stacked with CDs, video games and DVDs. **9**

From the quote above we can see how the story proceeds, especially from the sentence 64 through 79, in which Kelvin is trying to explain to Matt why he is late to meet him. The conversation proceeds fast with short expressions, even one expression is only in one word 'no', and after the conversation the narration goes smoothly in short sentences, as it could be expected, as the blog article in *The Novel Factory* entitled *Cracking the pace of your novel* (13 Mar 2016) mentions, "Fast paced writing requires simple words; quick, easy to read words; obvious words." Retrieved from <https://www.novel-software.com/blog?article=cracking-the-pace-of-your-novel>. This is what it look when one reads the above quote.

Short sentences do not mean that they are all simple sentences—despite the majority of them are—, 185 short sentences, i.e., 38% out of 493 short sentence occurrences constitute compound/complex sentences. Their uses seem to give a jerk to the seemingly fast pace of the story in that particular section with short sentences, as shown in the following fast paced section from sentence 251R through 268R.

- 251R. "Let's go!" Kelvin hissed. **5**
- 252R. "No. We can't leave him." **6**
- 253R. "What?" **1**
- 254R. "Where's your mobile? **4**
- 255R. We have to call for help." **6**
- 256R. "To hell with that!" **4**
- 257R. Kelvin ran his tongue over his lips. **7**
- 258R. "You stay if you want to. **6**
- 259R. I'm out of here." **5**
- 260R. "You can't!" **3**
- 261R. "Watch me!" **2**
- 262R. And then he was gone, disappearing back up the corridor. **10**
- 263R. Matt ignored him. **3**

264R. The security guard groaned a second time and tried to say something. **12**

265R. Feeling sick, Matt crouched down beside him and placed a hand on his arm. **14**

266R. "Don't move," he said. **6**

267R. "I'm going to get help." **6**

268R. But help had already arrived. **5**

Secondly, a short compound/complex sentence may slow down the pace of the story as well, similar to that assumed for the long sentences. A complex sentence such as number 258R "*You stay if you want to*" does not seem to hinder in any way the fast pace of the story, but the short complex sentences number 262 (10 words), 264 (12 words), and 265 (14 word) do. This seems has to do with reader's attention to the fast, heated conversation between the two main characters, but when one is quitting, a question arises, as shown in sentence number (262R), "*And then he was gone, disappearing back up the corridor*", what's next? After ignoring the going-away Kelvin, Matt diverts his attention to the injured guard who got stabbed by Kelvin (sentences 264 and 265).

264R. The security guard groaned a second time and tried to say something. **12**

265R. Feeling sick, Matt crouched down beside him and placed a hand on his arm. **14**

The two sentences above are compound and complex sentences respectively, in spite of the fact that they are short sentences according to the criteria set up by the researcher, in which 14 words are set for the longest short sentence. These two sentences slow the pace down a little bit, but then the pace catches up as Matt and the guard converse in the ensuing texts, up to number 268R.

A few more short sentences that seem to slow down the pace of the story are revealed below (in what clearly to be instrumental to the detective's rapid stream of thought, expressed in both simple and compound/complex sentences, as shown from sentence 393R through 400R).

393R. "You're fourteen. **3**

394R. You're too young for prison. **6**

395R. But it's quite possible you could be facing a custodial sentence."

396R. Mallory stopped. **2**

397R. He had seen dozens of kids in this room. **9**

398R. Many of them had been thugs, ranging from openly defiant to snivelling and pathetic. **14**

399R. But he was puzzled by the quiet, good-looking boy who sat opposite him now. **13**

400R. Matt was somehow different and Mallory found himself wondering what had brought him here. **14**

Here, the Detective Mallory is trying to find out who Matt is as he is questioning him. In the sentence number 393 through 395 he is addressing Matt without really expecting a response as he is speaking rhetorically, and in the sentence 397 and 400R the detective is reflecting how Matt is being different from other thug boys he has known. Rhetorical statements and reflection give a sense of slowing down the pace of the story, (and they normally expressed in long sentences but the writer seems to want to show that a detective is a quick witty person who jumps into conclusion intelligently), as the *The Novel Writer's Blog* mentions,

"Summary sections involve the abstract description of events that the reader doesn't get to witness first hand. This is the place where characters **reflect** on past experiences, wonder about the future and go through events
Whatever is happening, the reader is not there in the moment and so it can feel slower."

This idea is relevant as the Detective Mallory is kind of summarizing and reflecting on Matt's personal information, in spite of the fact that it is expressed in short sentences.

3.2.2 The Pace in Long Sentences

As the researchers have already posited that what constitute a long sentence is that which contains 15 words or more. While the different number of simple and compound/complex sentences are comparatively insignificant, 53 to 47, respectively, the difference between long and short sentences is very much wide apart, as depicted in Table 1,

with the occurrences of 99 long sentences and 493 short ones, or 17% to 83%. It seems that the book is aimed at younger readers who like fast moving story with easy diction without having the burden of pondering on long sentences and words that convey philosophical truth or esoteric ideas. Still, the number of occurrences hopefully can reveal something worthwhile for the study of sentences used in a novel such as this. As Dr. Kristi Siegel of the English Department of Mount Mary College (siegelkr@mtmary.edu) says in an article entitled *Varying Sentence Length*, retrieved from <http://www.kristisiegel.com/variety.htm>, "A longer sentence,, serves to offer more details, to focus in, to probe an idea more thoroughly, or--perhaps--to present a powerful description."

The following 7 sentences are a quotation from the beginning section of the novel's first chapter.

1R. Matt Freeman knew he was making a mistake. **8**

2R. *He was sitting on a low wall outside Ipswich station, wearing a grey hooded sweatshirt, shapeless, faded jeans, and trainers with frayed laces.* **23**

3R. *It was six o'clock in the evening and the London train had just pulled in.* **15**

4R. Behind him, commuters were fighting their way out of the station. **11**

5R. *The concourse was a tangle of cars, taxis and pedestrians, all of them trying to find their way home.* **20**

6R. A traffic light blinked from red to green but nothing moved. **11**

7R. *Somebody leant on their horn and the noise blared out, cutting through the damp evening air.* **16**

The above first seven sentences are part of the main character's background, telling how he dresses up, his posture, the time, the people and the traffic. Out of those seven sentences, three are long sentences. Except number 4R, all are in compound/complex sentences. If we look at the long sentence number (2R), it is clear that the sentence is meant to give detail description about the physical appearance of the main character, Matt Freeman. The long sentence number (3R) points to the hour of the day; and the long sentence number (5R) is telling about the congested traffic. Even the short sentences of (1R), (4R) and (6R) consisting of 8, 11, and 11 words respectively, are of similar descriptive nature. The whole thing is just a background, no events. The pace of the story is still not moving. As the *Novel Factory's* blog entitled *Cracking the pace of your novel* mentions, "As a general rule, the more description and related information that a section of prose contains the slower it will read." (Retrieved from <https://www.novel-software.com/blog?article=cracking-the-pace-of-your-novel>)

The long sentence no. (14R) below, a further description of how the main character sits as first mentioned in sentence (2R), is a complex sentence. In the long sentence (17R) the narrator gives a descriptive comment about matt's future life based on how he look as he has been described in the previous sentences. Sentence (15R) categorically belongs to the short type, but it has the most number of words of the type, i.e. 14 words. It is the description of the physical appearance of the main character, including the very short sentence of 7 words in sentence (16R). It seems that the writer is trying to not make the pace of the story in this part of the description to be too tediously slow.

14R. *The way he was sitting – hunched forward with his knees apart – made him look somehow dangerous, and older than fourteen.* **20**

15R. He had broad shoulders, a well-developed, muscular body and bright blue, intelligent eyes. **14**

16R. His hair was black, cut very short. **7**

17R. *Give him another five years and he could be a footballer or a model – or, like plenty of others, both.* **21**

The long sentences of (19R) with 28 words and (20R) with 25 words are description of why he rarely uses his surname 'Freeman' as the narrator first mentions in sentence 1. The reason is put in a dependent clause with 28 words in 19, and in a compound/complex sentence in 20 with 25 words. As readers already see in sentence (18R) that the main character always calls himself Matt short of Matthew, but the narrator feels it necessary to give the details why. Thus, it is slowing down the pace of the story.

18R. His first name was Matthew but he always called himself Matt. 11

19R. *As the troubles had begun to pile up in his life, he had used his surname less and less until it was no longer a part of him.* 28

20R. *Freeman was the name on the school register and on the truancy list, and it was a name well known to the local social services.* 25

Often time things expressed in short sentences get their explanation in long compound/complex sentences, such as in (31R) and (32R). Matt's dislike of Ipswich city are put in three short sentences of 28, 29, and 30, and get detailed elaboration as to why he does not like it in (31R) and (32R) with the length of sentences of 19 and 29 words respectively. This side explanation drags the story to a halt. Slow it down.

28R. For a start, it wasn't a city. 7

29R. It was too small. 4

30R. But it had none of the charm of a village or a market town. 14

31R. *It was really just an oversized shopping centre with the same shops and supermarkets that you saw everywhere else.* 19

32R. *You could swim in the Crown Pools or you could see movies at the multiplex – or, if you could afford it, there was an artificial ski slope and go-karting.* 29

Again, long sentences are often used as an instrument for reflection, as mentioned in The Novel Factory,

"...the abstract description of events that the reader doesn't get to witness first hand. This is the place where characters reflect on past experiences, wonder about the future and go through events that are too long or unimportant to be shown in full. Months and years can pass in a single sentence. Whatever is happening, the reader is not there in the moment and so it can feel slower."

After a long series of short sentences (66R—77R) used through narration and some form of a conversation between Matt and his friend Kelvin, they then reflected how through Charlie the two of them came about to know the warehouse in the narrator's long sentences that followed, giving details about the situation related to the warehouse as shown in (80R—82R, 85R, and 87R) as if the story had stopped moving. The narrator described how the warehouse was being guarded; how the knowledge about it came about; and how to break in. All the five long sentences are of the long complex type.

80R. *Amazingly, it had no alarm systems and only one security guard, a retired policeman who was half-asleep most of the time, with his feet up and his head buried in a newspaper.* 32

81R *Charlie knew all this because a friend of his had been in to do some electrical work.* 17

82R. *According to Charlie, you could break in with a bent paper clip and you could probably walk out with a couple of hundred quid's worth of equipment.* 27

83R. It was easy, just waiting to be taken. 8

84R. That was why the two of them had arranged to meet here. 10

85R. *Matt had agreed to the idea when they were talking about it, but half of him had thought Kelvin wasn't being serious.* 22

86R. The two of them had done plenty of things together. 10

87R. *Under Kelvin's guidance, they'd stolen stuff from supermarkets, and once they'd driven off in someone's car. 16*

88R. But Matt knew this was much worse. 7

Once Matt and Kelvin got into the warehouse, Matt reflected again on what Kelvin has told him about it (154R, with 23 words) and what he has been mistaken about it (155R and 156R, 34 and 31 words respectively); and all these were described in complex long sentences. This definitely caused the story to slow down.

154R. *When Kelvin had talked about the place, he had imagined nothing more than a few racks of DVDs in an otherwise empty space. 23*

155R. *But it seemed to go on for ever, with hundreds and hundreds of shelves numbered and divided into corridors that formed a complex grid system, all lit by vast industrial lights hanging on chains. 34*

156R. *And as well as the games and the DVDs, there were boxes of computer equipment, Game Boys, MP3 players and even mobile phones, all wrapped in plastic, ready for the shops. 31*

Another thing that a long sentence could slow down the pacing of the story was when the writer used a metaphor such as in sentence (183), in which smell is compared with a dog barking, to indicate that it is a warning of danger.

183R. *The smell told him something was wrong in the same way that a dog will often bark before danger actually appears. 21*

The sentence was an attempt to elaborate the smell previously mentioned in the text. The pace of the story is stalling here as information on the meaning of 'smell' is being hinted by the author.

189R. *Matt felt his arms go weak and the DVDs cascaded to the floor, clattering around his feet. 17*

Again, as the *Writer's Relief Staff* in an article entitled *Sentence Length: the Power of Placing Periods*, contends that "Lengthier sentences are used to investigate an idea more thoroughly, give [vivid description](http://writersrelief.com/blog/2011/06/sentence-length-the-power-placing-periods/), and develop tension." (Retrieved from <http://writersrelief.com/blog/2011/06/sentence-length-the-power-placing-periods/>)

188R *Before he knew what was happening, a heavy hand had clamped down on his shoulder, spinning him round, and a voice exclaimed, "What the hell do you think you're doing?" 30*

As the above long sentence number (188R) reveals by its opening sentence "Before he knew what was happening," the reader is forced to wonder what it is really going on, is he in trouble? There is tension. The author gave some investigative information as to who the security guard is (191) or is not (190). He is not the old codger as he has heard from Kelvin.

190R. *He found himself looking into the face of a security guard and knew at once that this wasn't the old codger Kelvin had described. 24*

191R. *This was a tall, serious man in a black and silver uniform with a radio transmitter attached to some sort of holster on his chest. 25*

It seems that reflection and description of a situation related to the main character trigger the writer to profusely use words for details in compound and complex sentences, that in turns slow down the pace of the story. Upon waking up the main character Matt thought something was missing that he could not explain, but tried to reason what had been going on. This attempt to reason is described in a long complex sentence of 34 words, as shown in sentence (592R)

592R. *A single jug and a tumbler stood on the table, exactly where they had been the night before, and Matt decided that the whole experience must have been nothing more than a weird dream. 34*

IV. CONCLUSION

The researchers came into a conclusion that short and long sentences did reveal some facts that were being assumed in the theory that long short sentences speeded up the pace of the story in the novel Raven's Gate and long sentences slowed it down. What the number of long and short sentences especially revealed was that there were only 17% long sentences out of 592 occurrences of sample sentences, and 83% were of short sentences. This means that the story was fast moving by using short sentences with simple and truncated sentences. Out of 493 short sentence occurrences 62% are simple sentences and 38% are compound/complex sentences. While out of 99 long sentences, only 3% are simple sentence, and the rest, that of 97%, were compound/complex sentences.

The use of short sentences helped the reader to feel that the story progressed in a fast pace. Short sentences could seem, though, to slow down the story when they were part of a reflection of a particular character such as a detective whose mind rushed rapidly and comes into a conclusion. The long sentences were obviously slow-paced in its presentation since they were often used for describing background of an event, a reflection, giving more or detailed information about things, using a figure of speech, or being meant to develop tension or to investigate an idea.

The fact that the majority of sentences were short sentences, the story must be aimed at young readers. The average length of the sentence in the story is 10 words per sentence. This is 4 words less than that the researcher used in setting for the longest short sentence in the analysis of the story. In the analysis the longest short sentence is set at 14 words per sentence; and the longest sentence found was of 45 word length.

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