

STYLISTICS AS AN APPROACH TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: A THEMATIC TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Dr. Damasus Tuurosong¹, Dr. Rashid Hassan Pelpuo² and Justine Bakuuro³

¹Department of African and General Studies, University for Development Studies, Ghana

²Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon.

³Department of English, University of Ghana, Legon

ABSTRACT: *This write-up is a stylistic analysis of a prose passage along three thematic areas: pace, expectancy and high emotional tension. Each of these themes is carefully traced in the passage using the analysis. It is a practical application of one of the numerous approaches to Discourse Analysis-Stylistics-in the analysis of a text.*

KEYWORDS: Stylistic Analysis, Thematic, Pace, Expectancy, High Emotional Tension, Discourse Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Prose Passage

¹The drummers took up their sticks and the air shivered and grew tense like a tightened bow.

²The two teams were ranged facing each other across the clear space. ³A young man from one team danced across the center to the other side and pointed at whomever he wanted to fight.

⁴They danced back to the center together and then closed in.

⁵There were twelve men on each side and the challenge went from one side to the other. ⁶Two judges walked around the wrestlers and when they thought they were equally matched stopped them. ⁷Five matches ended in this way. ⁸But the really exciting moments were when a man was thrown. ⁹The huge voice of the crowd then rose to the sky and in every direction. ¹⁰It was even heard in the surrounding villages.

¹¹The last match was between the leaders of the teams. ¹²They were among the best wrestlers in all the nine villages. ¹³The crowd wondered who would throw the other this year. ¹⁴Some said Okafo was the better man; others said he was not the equal of Ikezue. ¹⁵Last year neither of them had thrown the other even though the judges had allowed the contest to go on longer than was the custom. ¹⁶They had the same style and one saw the other's plans beforehand. ¹⁷It might happen again this year.

¹⁸Dusk was already approaching when their contest began. ¹⁹The drums went mad and the crowds also. ²⁰They surged forward as the two young men danced into the circle. ²¹The palm fronds were helpless in keeping them back.

²²Ikezue held out his right hand. ²³Okafo seized it and they closed in. ²⁴It was a fierce contest. ²⁵Ikezue strove to dig in his right heel behind Okafo so as to pitch him backwards in the clever eke style. ²⁶But the one knew what the other was thinking. ²⁷The crowds had surrendered and swallowed up the drummers, whose frantic rhythm was no longer a mere disembodied sound but the very heartbeat of the people.

²⁸The wrestlers were not almost still in each other's grip. ²⁹The muscles on their arms and their thighs and on their backs stood out and twitched. ³⁰It looked like an equal match. ³¹The two judges were already moving forward to separate them when Ikezue, now desperate, went down quickly on one knee in an attempt to fling his man backwards over his head. ³²It was a sad miscalculation. ³³Quick as the lighting of Amadiora, Okafo raised his right leg and swung it over his rival's head. ³⁴The crowd burst into a thunderous roar. ³⁵Okafo was swept off his feet by his supporters and carried home shoulder high. ³⁶They sang his praise and the young women clapped their hands.

NB: For easy identification, the sentences have been numbered. The numbers used in the analysis therefore stand for the sentences in the passage.

Key: VF=very fast, F=fast, S=slow, 1,2,3,etc=sentences in the narrative

Pace

The narrative pace determines how quickly or slowly the writer takes a reader through a story. It relies on the combination of mood and emotion as these elements play out in the dialogue, setting and action. A story determines its own pace.

In the prose narrative above, we try to study the pace as the narrator walks with us down the plot of the narrative. The pace transition from one sentence to another which eventually determines the overall pace of the narrative piece is carefully examined in the ensuing analysis. The pace transitions between sentences are marked as being **Very Fast (VF)**, **Fast (F)** or **Slow (S)** with an accompanying explanation in each instance. At a glance, does the narrative present a fast or slow pace? We find that out.

1-2. One realises a very quick leap in pace as the narrator takes the reader right from the drummers taking up their sticks to the two teams being ranged facing each other. A revelation is quickly made about the plot of the narrative. (VF)

2 – 3 Sentence 3 is a detail upon sentence 2 and thus presents a slower pace in the narration. Sentence three does not reveal much about the plot apart from being an elaboration on sentence 2. (S)

3 – 4 Sentence 4 is an expansion of sentence 3 and therefore dictates a slower pace in the narrative just like sentence 3. It gives us detail but does not really take the reader a step further into the plot of the narrative. (S)

4 – 5 Sentence 5 heightens the pace again as it makes a revelation about the plot. The narrator gets to inform the reader of the composition of each team- twelve men on each side – as well as the order of activity in the match (the challenge went from one side to the other). (F)

5 – 6 Here we see a very fast pace as the narrator switches immediately from the team compositions to focus on the judges. The narrator did not slow down the pace with detail information as in 3 – 4 and 2 – 3. (VF)

6 – 7 We see one of the fastest paces in this narrative. The narrator did not stay on to give detail about about the five matches which ended in similar manner. He switches sharply from the judges in the opening match to the 5th match, leaving with 7 matches. Thus, we have a major unfolding of the narrative plot. (VF)

7 – 8 The narrator introduces us to new information - the throwing of a man- which was the really exciting moment. The movement from sentence 7 to 8 may not be as quick as that from 6 to 7 but we equally have an increased pace herein.(F)

8 – 9. The narrator did not dwell on details about the ‘really exciting moments’ and probably how the man was thrown but shifts focus sharply to the reaction of the audience to the throwing of the man. A swift dive into the plot is thus realized by this so we encounter one of the fastest instances of pace transition here.(VF)

9 – 10. We realize a slowing down of the pace as sentence 10 is a detail of sentence 9. In narrative pace, details create suspense as they hold the reader in anxiety. Such is the case here.(S)

10 – 11. The pace momentum increases immediately after the slow-down in 9 – 10. We are not told the details of the remaining matches after the 6th match (in which a man was thrown) but are moved to information about the last match. We are told of 12 matches and from the 6th match we are moved straight to the last match. This, just like 6-7, is one of the fastest progressions into the plot of the narrative.(F)

11 – 12. Sentence 12 is an elaboration on 11, hence we have a slow pace here.(S)

12 – 13. Sentence 13 is a further expansion of 11, thereby maintaining the slow pace in 11-12.(S)

13 – 14 . We still have a slowing down of activity here. Sentence 14 is an extension of 13.(S)

14 – 15. The pace is slowed down as the narrator chips in with some historic antecedents of the match. That is detail information which is in tune with what the narrator is on floor discussing, that is, taking the reader into some background about the annual event.(S)

15 – 16. 16 gives detail about 15, hence a slow pace is maintained. (S)

16 – 17 . 17 gives details about 16, so a slow pace is maintained. (S)

17 – 18. We see an increase in pace once again as the narrator shifts focus from the strength of the two team leaders and their previous encounter back to the event in the background- the fight. Plot development is realized.(F)

18 – 19. A strongly fast pace of narration is realized as the narrator moves from the commencement time of the contest to the contest in action. We are not bored with detail about how the contest started between the leaders but quickly introduced to the action of the contest and the ecstasy that greets it. (VF)

19 – 20. Pace is slower here as the narrator gives further description of what the atmosphere is. Plot growth is retarded.(S)

20 – 21. 21 is an expansion of 20, hence a slow pace in the narration is realised.(S)

21 – 22. A heightened pace is realized here as the narrator moves from the reaction of the crowd back to the action itself.(F)

22 – 23. Pace slows down since 23 is an extension of 22. (S)

23 – 24. Slowed pace. 24 extends 23.(S)

24 – 25. Slowed pace. 25 extends 24.(S)

25 – 26. Slowed pace. 26 Extends 25.(S)

26 – 27. We notice a movement from the action itself to the reaction of the crowd once again. There is an increase in pace here. (F)

27 – 28. Then narrator shifts back to description of the action itself in 28, increasing the pace.(F)

28 – 29. 29 expands 28, hence a slow pace.(S)

29 – 30. 30 expands 29, hence a slow pace.(S)

30 – 31. 31 expands 30, hence a slow pace. (S)

31 – 32. 32 expands 31, hence a slow pace.(S)

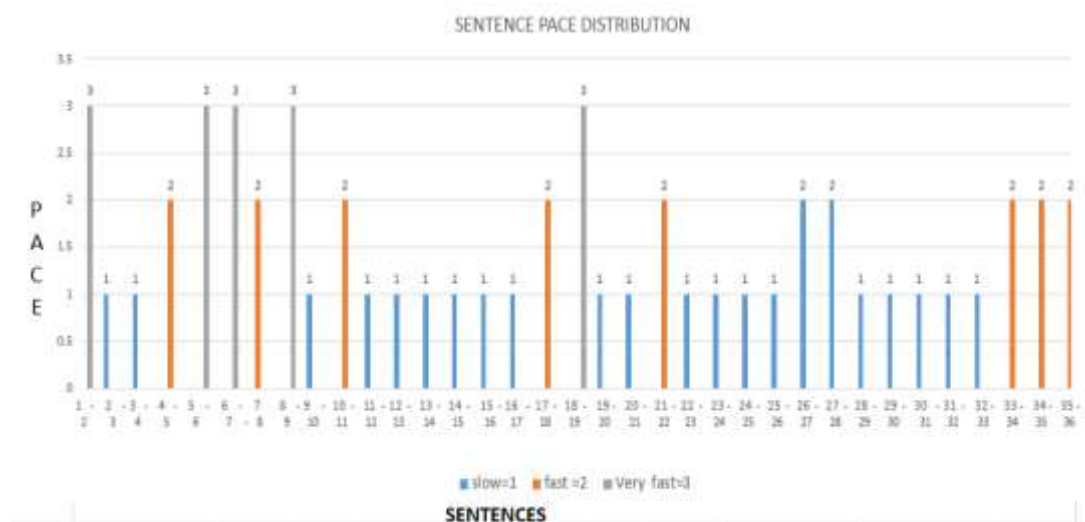
32 – 33. 33 extends 32, hence slow pace.(S)

33 – 34. Focus shifts from description of the action of wrestling to the reaction of the crowd. Hence, we have a relatively fast pace here.(F)

34 – 35. Focus again is shifted from the reaction of the crowd back to the action in progress-wrestling .We may describe it also as a fast pace.(F)

35 – 36. Attention is moved from action in progress to the reaction of the crowd, an increase in pace. (F)

The pace trend between sentences is represented in the Bar Chart below.



From the chart, it is clear that the narrative has a slow pace. A total of 20 sentences present a slow pace of narration with the remaining 16 sentences representing fast and very fast paces. 5 sentences present a very fast pace whilst 11 sentences present a fast pace. Much as the

narrator made some bold leaps into the plot structure of the narrative, his speed of narration is slowed down by details, particularly in paragraphs 5 and 6.

High Emotional Tension

The narrative is riddled with intense emotional tension right from the start up to the end. The analysis below is an illustration of this theme in the narrative piece. The sentences which depict high emotional tension are the ones numbered on the left and the relevant portions are extracted and discussed.

- 1- “...the air shivered and grew tense like heightened bow” conveys a feeling of unease and jittery among the contestants and audience. They are all seized by anxiety. The use of this personification depicts a highly expectant crowd who could not wait to see the commencement of the match.
- 2- “...two teams ranged facing each other” speaks of the fierce nature of the contest. One can imagine what would have been going on in the minds of the contestants at that moment. This further heightens the tension.
- 3- “a young man...pointed at whomever he wanted to fight” sets the tone for the beginning of action. The battle lines were then clearly defined and all was set for a smooth start of the fight.
- 4- “they danced back...and closed in” takes the reader into the action itself. The first of 12 matches had just started, watering down the overwhelming anxiety of the expectant crowd.
- 5- “...the challenge went from one side to the other”, tells us of the continuity of the contest. One man from each side locked horns with a counterpart on the other divide in turns.
- 6- “...they were equally matched...” shows the level of emotional unease. Each side is working hard to emerge victorious as the matches continued. So for the first tie to have ended without a winner, one can only fancy the emotional unrest among the contestants and supporters.
- 7- “Five matches ended in this way” speaks of the pack of emotional tension among contestants and audience alike. From the first to the fifth match if there was no winner of any of those matches then the climax of emotional tension must have been reached here.
- 8- “...a man was thrown”. There is a heightening of the tension here particularly among contestants of the defeated side in that particular fixture as well as their supporters.
- 9- “The huge voice of the crowd rose to the sky...” heightens the emotions of the defeated side in that particular fixture. Supporters would have very high expectations and contestants will be under psychological pressure to deliver and not disappoint their supporters.
- 10- “It was even heard in the surrounding villages” depicts the extent of emotional tension aroused in the defeated side. The intensity of the jubilation would put them in an even

more tensed mental state especially given that their men were equally matched with their opponents.

- 11- “The last match was between the leaders of the teams”. For there to be only one win in 11 matches and the leaders now capping up the event, emotions would have been extremely high on both sides. If the leader of the winner team in the sixth match is defeated it would mean a draw for both sides. If the reverse happens, it would mean the team that won the sixth match would record a winning margin of 2 – 0. Both sides must be on the defensive now.
- 16- “They had the same style...” tells the difficulty the contestants had in winning the match as they were both “masters in one field”. This carries with it a high emotional investment.
- 18- “...their contest begun” suggests final round match which was more or less a “do or die” affair. The leaders needed to unlock the tie which had been particularly unlocked and needed to be reinforced for a clear win. The crowd would have, at this point, been very quiet and expectant.
- 19- “The drums went mad and the crowds also” portrays the mood and atmosphere. It was a charged atmosphere with supporters of both sides cheering on their contestants. Even the side in the lead is not comfortable as a loss in that fixture could render the contest a drawn one. Emotions are highly charged.
- 20- “They surged forward...”. the emotional charge of the crowd is what causes them to surge forward as the contestants are about to lock horns.
- 21- “The palm fronds were helpless in keeping them back” indicates that the crowd is overwhelmed by their anxiety to see it all. They simply cannot help but trample on the palm fronds to catch a glimpse of the “real action”.
- 22- “Ikezue held out his right hand” takes us direct into the action of fighting. More heightening of emotions is expected at this stage.
- 23- “Okafu seized it and they closed it” continues that action in progress. Everyone present is at their bursting point of emotions, enjoying the sight of the “master fixture”. If there was any piece of emotional discomfort hiding in anyone, it had to show up at this stage. Fingers are crossed.
- 24- “It was a fierce contest” summaries it all. The narrator himself admits it and if words can describe it as “fierce” then what would emotions represent it with? Heightened emotional tension.
- 25- “Ikezue strove to dig in his right heel.....” keeps us in the action of wrestling. He is making the last effort to carry the day. But will he succeed (?). This comes with volumes of emotional and psychological tension.
- 26- “...one knew what the other was thinking” shows that it would only take luck or chance on the part of a contestant to beat his opponent since they had equal and same skills. This feeling of uncertainty regarding who carries the day further compounds the emotional tension among audience and contestants.

- 27- “The crowds had surrendered and swallowed up the drummers, whose frantic rhythm was no longer a mere disembodied sound but the very heartbeat of the people” clearly summaries the heightened emotional tension among the people at this point. The drumming was not heard or recognized as rhythm but seen as a representation of “the heartbeat of the people”.
- 28- “The wrestlers were not almost still in each other’s grip” gives a picture of the neck-on-neck lock up between the two leaders. Emotions can only get more tensed.
- 29- “The muscles on their arms and their thighs and on their backs stood out twitched” continues with the imagery of the tight lock up. None is seen as being the possible underdog in the battle. They were equally matched. But can there be a winner? Emotions can best answer this question.
- 30- “It looked like an equal match” reinforces the effort in sentence 29. They were both up to the task. Only luck or chance was being sought after to break the ice.
- 31- “...Ikezue, now desperate....” Speaks of emotional frustration. All efforts were yielding no fruits and so chances had to be taken swiftly. Ikezue was eluded by a chance, making his contender Okafo, emerge a victor.
- 32- “It was a sad miscalculation”. Ikezue had made a very expensive mistake. His opponent took advantage. More emotional unrest!
- 33- “Okafo raised his right leg and swung it over his rival’s head” speaks of the last straw that broke the camel’s back. Okafo took his chance swiftly and was the victor. How emotionally tasking it would be for Ikezue!
- 34- “ The crowd burst into a thunderous roar” tells how broken Ikezue and his supporters would have been emotionally. After all efforts and even seeming to be more of an aggressor than his opponent, he ends up losing the fight. To be highly tensed emotionally would be an understatement for Ikezue and his supporters.

In terms of vocabulary choices which manifest the theme of high emotional tension, the narrator makes use of the following expressions:

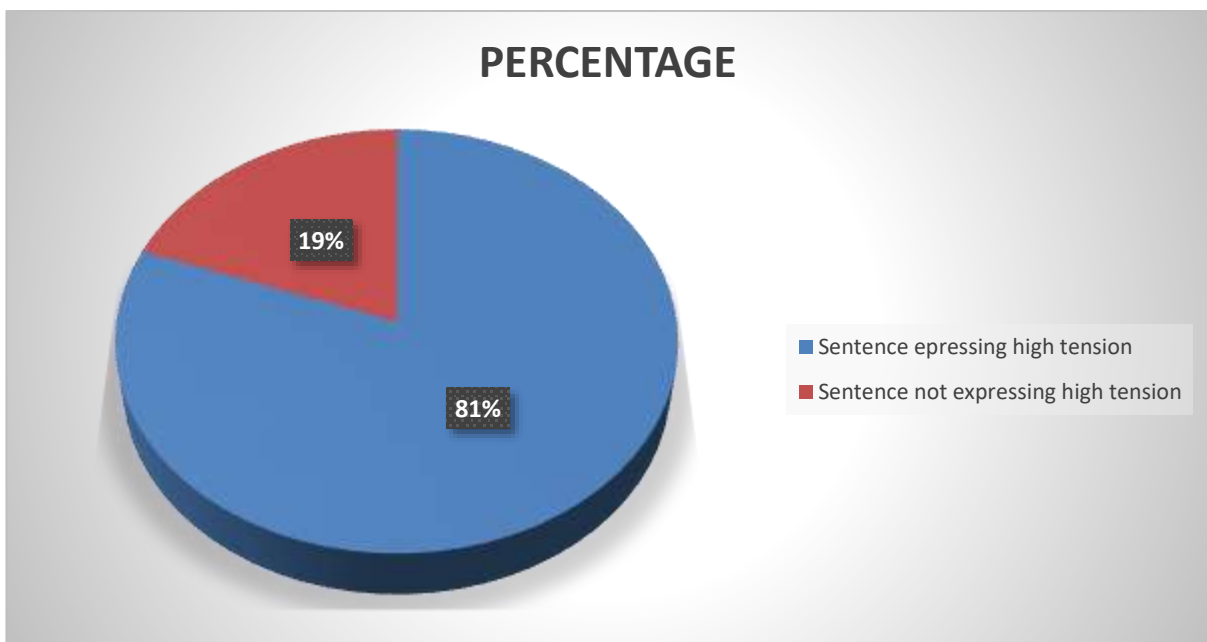
shivered/tense/tightened/bowl/ranged/pointedat/fight/closedin/challenge/judges/wrestlers/equally/matched/matches/throw/crowd/wondered/surged/mad/fierce contest/strove/frantic rhythm/grip/twitched/equalmatch/desperate/fling/miscalculation/lightning/thunderous/roar/s wept off/supporters.

As can be seen from the analysis above, 29 out of the total of 36 sentences carry in them expressions of high emotional tension. This represents 80.6% of the entire passage. If 80.6% of a passage provides evidence in support of a theme in the passage, one may conclude that the said theme is the most dominant in the particular passage. It is the case here, therefore, that high emotional tension is the most dominant theme of this narrative prose. This is represented in the chart below.

Table 1: Table showing the distribution of sentences that express high emotional tension and those that do not

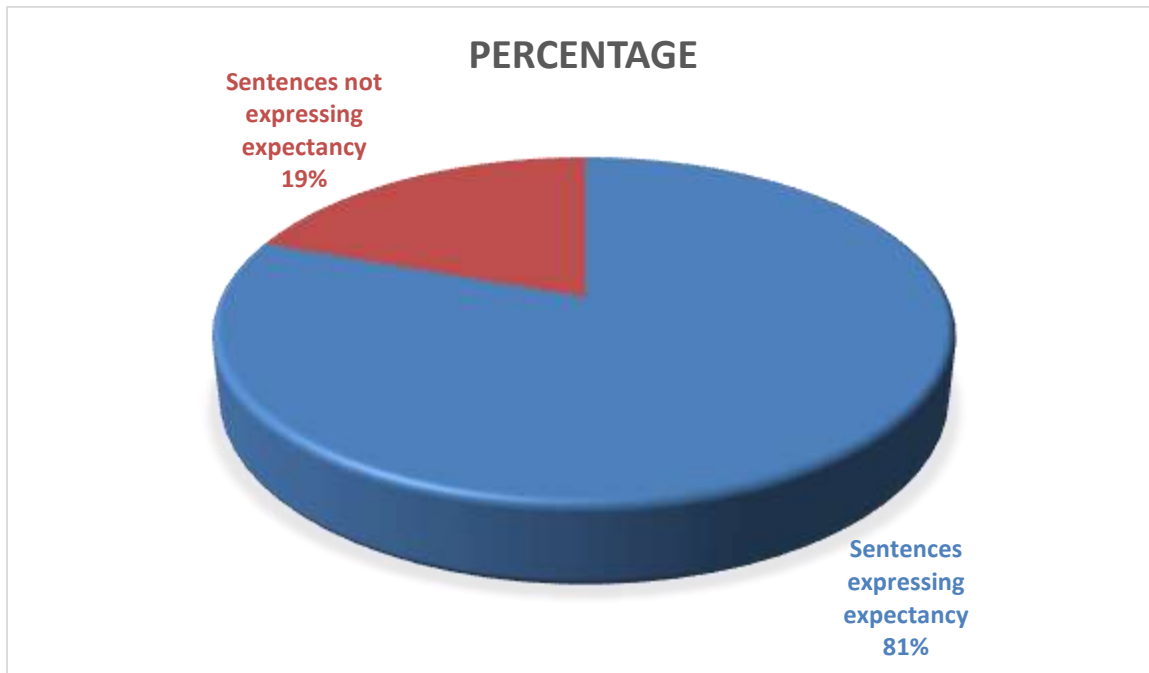
SENTENCE TYPE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Sentences expressing high emotional tension	29	81
Sentences not expressing high emotional tension	7	19
Total	36	100%

PIE CHART



SENTENCE TYPE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Sentences expressing expectancy	29	81
Sentence not expressing expectancy	7	19
Total	36	100%

PIE CHART



Expectancy

When a narrative piece has a slow pace, it is characterized by suspense. Suspense is an appropriate replacement for expectancy in literary analysis. In this prose passage, we encounter a high degree of expectancy on the part of the crowd and the wrestlers themselves and this expectancy is espoused by the striking suspense which characterize the entire narrative. As the narrator dwells on the description of the activity of wrestling, he takes the reader back to history simultaneously from time to time. He also furnishes the reader with information about the reaction of the crowd to the contest as well as the general atmosphere surrounding the contest. These deliberate digressions underpin the suspense in the narrative as the reader gets eager to get on with the description of the wrestling activity rather than history and general atmosphere of the contest. This leaves the reader with high expectancy from the contestants to deliver in much the same manner as the crowd and contestants are expectant.

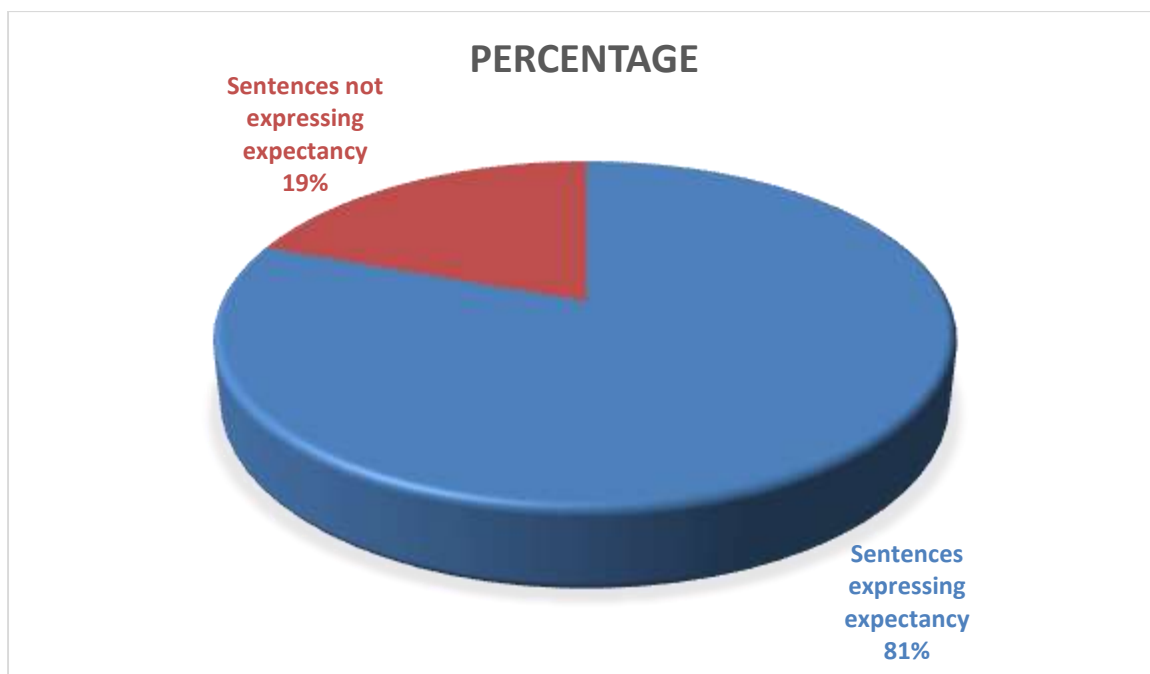
Again, the high display of emotional tension throughout the passage carries in it a strong sense of expectancy from supporters and contestants alike. Indeed, it is the anxiety to see a team winning that sparks the emotional tension. One may therefore conclude that since the narrative is evidently ridden with high emotional tension, there was a very high degree of expectancy. That is to say that expectancy is equally manifest in the 29 sentences outlined above in the discussion of high emotional tension: sentences 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34. The lexical choices (listed under high emotional tension above) which enact the emotional tension are the same which portray the expectant mood of the crowd and contestants. Likewise, the vocabulary which portray high emotional are the same vocabulary which portray expectancy in the narrative piece. They include: *shivered/tense/tightened/bowl/ranged/pointed at/fight/closed in/challenge/judges/wrestlers/equally/ matched/matches/thrown/crowd/ wondered/surged/ mad/fierce contest/*

strove/frantic rhythm/ grip/twitched/ equal match/desperate /fling/miscalculation/ lightning/thunderous/ roar/swept off/supporters.

In view of this therefore, one may represent the expectancy level of the crowd and contestants in a chart as follows:

Table 2: Table showing the distribution of sentences which express expectancy and those that do not.

SENTTENCE TYPE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Sentences expressing expectancy	29	81
Sentence not expressing expectancy	7	19
Total	36	100%



Summary

In conclusion, it is evidently clear that the prose passage has a slow narrative pace though a cursory reaching of it may not readily agree with this view. This slow pace of narration gives rise to suspense which is the literary term for high expectancy on the part of a reader or audience to progress from one level of the plot of the narrative to another.

Against this back-drop, there is high expectancy on the part of the reader, the audience in the narrative and the contestants.

The display of high emotional tension is also abundantly pointed out in the discussion with 29 sentences out of the total of 36 sentences, conveying expressions that support this claim. The passage is also ridden with expressions and vocabulary which point to this fact. As earlier

mentioned emotions are high and tensed when some expectations are being sought after. Thus, the evidence of high emotional tension in the narrative passes for evidence of expectancy in the narrative. Indeed, this prose passage evokes an atmosphere of pace, expectancy and high emotional tension.

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