

## The Character Development of Louisa Gradgrind in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*: A Statistical Syntactic Analysis of Sentence Type

Suzan Makhloof\*

Department of English, Faculty of Arts Zagazig University, Egypt

Corresponding Author: Suzan Makhloof, E-mail: m\_suzan@zu.edu.eg

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims at investigating the character mental and psychological development of Louisa Gradgrind in Dickens's *Hard Times* through statistically analyzing the sentential simplicity and complexity used in her dramatic speeches throughout the novel. Her character development can be reflected in three phases: before change, in the process of change and after change. The statistical analysis is based on Leech et al.'s (1982) binary classification of sentences according to the type and number of clauses within a sentence. This statistical syntactic analysis provides the frequencies and percentages of the occurrence of each sentence type in Louisa's dramatic speeches in these three phases. Then, these percentages are contrasted in order to reach a conclusion.

### INTRODUCTION

Leech et al.'s (1982) divide sentences into two types: "(a) a single clause, in which case it is known as a SIMPLE SENTENCE; or of (b) more than one clause, in which case it is known as a COMPLEX SENTENCE" (p. 93). They also point out that subordination and coordination of clauses within a sentence contribute to the degree of its complexity. This classification of sentence type is used in this paper to shed light on Louisa Gradgrind's character development in the novel.

In *Hard Times*, Louisa is considered one of the dynamic characters. She is one of the five children of Mr. Gradgrind who tries to fill their heads with facts only. She is forced to act and behave according to her father's factual and rigid principles which he teaches not only to his children at home but also to his pupils at school. However, Louisa is the only one who manages to rebel against her father's factual ideology. This rebellion is not fostered within her all of a sudden, yet it is triggered by many factors that grow slowly within her inner-self. Louisa's rebellion and change are the springboards of her father's rebellion against his own thoughts. The changes that Louisa undergoes are, as Toman (2008, p.199) maintains, "unidirectional, from overemphasis on 'reason' toward a more

Romantic, sympathetic attitude." The following sections are devoted to highlighting her character development in three phases: pre-change, in-change and post-change, through the distributional difference between complex, simple and minor sentences used in his dramatic speeches.

### LOUISA'S DYNAMICITY IN LIGHT OF SENTENTIAL SIMPLICITY AND COMPLEXITY

The sample of Louisa's speech consists of **187** sentences classified into three parts

1. sentences of Louisa's speech before change, which amount up to **33**;
2. sentences of Louisa's speech in the process of change, which amount up to **100**; and
3. sentences of Louisa's speech after change, which amount up to **54**.

#### Pre-change Phase

At the beginning of the novel, Louisa is seen as a submissive and powerless character. She is reproached by her "eminently

practical” (15; bk.1, ch. 3) father after being caught with her brother Tom in the circus. Her submission and impotence can be shown in her conversation with her father and then her brother Tom in the room where they are “lectured at, from their tenderest years; coursed, like little hares” (11; bk.1, ch. 3). This kind of utilitarian education makes Louisa as well as her brother, as Kearns (1992, p. 862) illustrates, “concretized fragments produced by a hard father formed from a hard system.” As a result, she finds “no happiness because she lacks the ability to work out her fancy, passion and emotion” (Thoroddsen, 2011, p. 20). She is prevented from love and pleasure, so she becomes an automaton. Ketabgian (2003, p. 667) expresses this idea when he elucidates that the “mechanical model finds its culmination in *Hard Times*’s emotionally troubled character Louisa Gradgrind, who identifies with the secret fires of Coketown’s furnaces.” This metaphorical association of Fires is “developed symbolically in reference to Louisa, who looks into the fires at home, in an effort to understand her emotional devastation” (Paroissien, 2008, p. 396). The following table shows the sentence types employed by Louisa in the pre-change phase in her speech with her father and with her brother Tom after being both caught by Gradgrind at the circus:

Table 1.1. displays that the mass of Louisa’s speech before change is devoted to the simple sentences. Sentential simplicity is an indication of directness and straightforwardness; two rules taught in Gradgrind’s school of Facts. The statistics in this table suggest that Louisa here tries to abide by these rules: more than 60% of her sentences appear to be either simple sentences or minor ones.

On the other hand, we find that Louisa does not refrain from using some complex sentence (36.4%), especially when she talks with her brother, Tom, with whom she shares a common ground. Both of them are children of the father of Facts as well as students in the School of Facts which suppresses and prohibits emotions and imagination. They are both prevented from not only going to leisure places like the circus but also to utter anything relevant to such mind-spoiling matters as their father thinks. Since all that is prohibited is the most desirable, Louisa sometimes finds it covetable to break the rigid rules of the “never-wonder” school and give her imagination free rein especially when she gazes at fire, resorting syntactically to complex sentences: “But since I have been looking at it, I have been wondering about you and me ,grown up” (58; bk.1, ch. 8). She feels very free to argue with her brother and release what she cannot express in front of her father. She cannot wish, dream or fancy except in front of her brother:

I can’t talk to you so as to lighten your mind, for I never see any amusing sights or read any amusing books that it

would be a pleasure or a relief to you to talk about, when you are tired. (56; *ibid.*).

The syntactic length that is provided by the complex sentence with its subordinate and coordinate clauses is directly proportional to the intellectual space imposed by imagination and fancy with their descriptive and analytic style. That could be why imagination favours the complex sentences to simple ones.

### In-change Phase

Thoroddsen (2011, p. 20) elucidates that “the crucial point in how her [Louisa’s] life develops is when she is prevented by her father from becoming acquainted with the circus which she wanted to see at the beginning of the novel.” She is seen by many critics as someone who is struggling between two forces and torn between two extremes. She lives in her father’s factual world. However, she wants to find some way out to the other world where fancy and imagination dominate. Gerber (1954, p. 353) points out that “Louisa falls between two extremes- Sissy Jupe, who is completely impervious to the system, and Bitzer, the ideal product of the ‘model school.’” Kearns (1992, p. 875) also agrees with Louisa’s existence “between the poles of an industrial/ fictional ‘realism’ that forbids or attenuates desire and the phantasmagoric dreamscape this reality must generate in compensation.” This could be why she accepts Bounderby’s proposal of marriage “to please her father, because he wants her ‘to consider this question ... simply as one of tangible Fact’” (Thoroddsen, 2011, p. 12).

It should be noted that Louisa’s speech with her brother Tom after the Bank robbery signifies that Louisa holds more motherly emotions toward her brother than those held by Mr.s Gradgrind herself. Thoroddsen (2011, p. 12) believes that Louisa “has neither experienced tenderness nor love from her mother or father.... She only feels love and tenderness for her brother Tom.” However, on the arrival of Harthouse, a young politician with no principles, and his seducing attempts, “the better side of her nature is awakened... and at the crisis she flees for protection to her father, who in turn is awakened to the folly of his system” (Birch & Hooper, 2012, p. 312). This can be the climax at which her character changes dramatically.

So, it takes Louisa some years later to begin to feel that there is something missing in her life, without which she feels unhappy. Indeed, we cannot observe patently the fact that Louisa starts her spiritual journey to disinter this missing link until we view her talk with her father when he comes to inform her of Bounderby’s cynical proposal of marriage, with Mr. James Harthouse at the garden and with her brother after the Bank robbery.

It is worth mentioning that 46 out of Louisa’s 100 sentences in her in- change stage are uttered in her speech with her father, most of which are complex, as shown in Table 2.1.:

Contrary to the data in Table 1.1. which show the prevalence of simple sentences in Louisa’s speech at the beginning, the figures in Table 2.1. (part 1) set forth that Louisa inclines to employ the complex sentences in her argument with her father about the marriage proposal. This deluge

**Table 1.1.** Sentence types in Louisa’s speech before change

Sentence type	Total	%
Simple sentences	13	39.4
Complex sentences	12	36.4
Minor sentences	8	24.2
Total	33	100

**Table 2.1.** Sentence types in Louisa's speech in the process of change (detailed)

Louisa's speech		Simple sentences	Complex sentences	Minor sentences	Total
Part 1	With her father about the marriage Proposal	31 %	16 56.5%	7 15.2%	46 100%
Part 2	With Mr. James Harthouse at the Garden	8 %	13 52%	4 16%	25 100%
Part 3	With her brother after the bank Robbery	1 %	31 65.5%	1 3.5%	29 100%
	Total				100

of complex sentences (56.5% of her 46 sentences) with Gradgrind unravels her strenuous efforts to persuade him and open his eyes to her vested right to feel and think as her feminine nature demands her to do, and hence to the invalidity of Bounderby's offer: "Father, do you think I love Bounderby?" (107; bk.1, ch. 15), "Father, do you ask me to love Bounderby?" (ibid.), "What do you recommend, father that I should substitute for the term I used just now?" (ibid.)...etc.

However, when she feels that she is a real no-hoper and she will not achieve anything in this argument because of her father's blinkered outlook, the pace of the argument is slackened with some simple sentences. Consequently, her father's simple personal question whether she "entertained in secret any other proposal" or not (110; ibid.), after all her repeated hints, is answered with some successive simple sentences: "What does it matter," "Father, what other proposal can have been made to me?," "Whom have I seen?," "Where have I been?" and "What are my heart's experiences?" (ibid.). This slow tempo is suggestive of her nonchalance out of her despair. Then, it seems that she becomes so disappointed that her final sentences come to reflect her emotional complexity and the hopeless case resulted from her failure to convince her father and that all her implicit appeals have fallen on stony ground.

Later, all the calculations and the statistics Gradgrind has made avail nothing but failure to Louisa's marriage. For a year, she has become capable of completely detaching herself from her life and functioning as a robot in Bounderby's presence. She concludes that her marriage is for assisting her brother Tom and that should be enough. Never does the reader encounter through the lines of the novel any spousal heart-to-heart chat between Louisa and Bounderby where she confides to him her own secrets and feelings. Moreover, never do we notice that such an arithmetic man tries to court his wife or to woo her with sweet words. Being interested in her brother's case, Mr. Harthouse manages to gain this confidence

Louisa's short talk with Mr. Harthouse in the garden and the type of sentences she uses reveal a lot about her character. As indicated in Table 2.1 (part 2), half of Louisa's sentences are complex, and the rest are simple or minor ones. It is observable that most of the sentential simplicity and fragmentation are frequent at the beginning of the conversation, which unearths her self-contained character and her reluctance to place any faith easily on anyone: "Being so impulsive"(182; bk.2, ch. 7) "I am waiting for your further reference to my brother"(ibid.), "Have you an interest in anything, Mr. Harthouse?" (ibid.)...etc. Even the few complex

sentences at the beginning are considered the shortest complex ones in the novel: "I think he makes bets"(183; ibid.), and "I know he does" (ibid.).

These short responses are replaced by longer and more complex ones when Mr. Harthouse's words begin to implicate her in her brother's gambling act by hinting at "the probability of [her] sometimes supplying him with money for these purposes?" and asking her if "Tom has borrowed a considerable sum of [her]" (ibid.). Here, the complex sentences are targeted to justify Louisa's situation and free her from any responsibility for the trouble her brother is involved in: "I would never complain of anything, and what I have done I do not in the least regret" (184; ibid.), "When I married, I found that my brother was even at that time heavily in debt" (ibid.) and "Since then, I have given my brother, at various times, what money I could spare: in short, what money I have had" (185; ibid.). Others are intended to show her worry and sorry that her brother winds up a gambler: "I have felt uneasy for the consequences of his being so involved, but I have kept these secrets until now, when I trust them to your honour" (ibid.).

It seems that Louisa is so responsive to anything related to her brother, the only one she truly loves and for whom she can sacrifice anything. This is not only evident in her speech with Mr. Harthouse in the garden but also her passionate talk with her brother himself after the Bank robbery. Statistics in Table 2.1 (part 3) reveal the frequent use of complex sentences (65.5%) as an indication of Louisa's attempt to evade accusing her brother, whom she is afraid of emotionally hurting, of robbery. Subordinations and coordinations in her sentences depict a circumlocutory way of investigation: "Tom, have you anything to tell me?"(202; bk.3, ch.8), "If ever you loved me in your life, and have anything concealed from every one besides, tell it to me" (ibid.), "My dear brother, is there nothing that you have to tell me?"(ibid.), "Is there nothing you can tell me, if you will?" (ibid.), "You can tell me nothing that will change me" (ibid.) ...etc. All these complex sentences can be replaced by only one simple direct statement: "Tom, did you rob the bank?". Instead, Louisa finds it difficult to mention the charge directly and prefers that he confesses himself. This could be why other complex sentences follow these indirect investigative statements to embrace Tom emotionally, calm his fears and reassure him that whatever he says will be undisclosed so that he may be emboldened to confess. This is clear in her following sentences: "You may be certain that I will not reproach

you”(203; bk.3, ch. 8),”You may be certain that I will be compassionate and true to you”(ibid.), “You may be certain that I will save you at whatever cost” (ibid.) and “ Say only ‘ yes,’ and I shall understand you!” (ibid.). She wants to help him by any means as a problem shared is a problem halved. Consequently, she keeps sticking to the complex sentences to make an indirect reference to the crime by pointing out their visit to Stephen Blackpool, whom Bounderby charges with stealing the money: “Ought I to say, after what has happened, that I made that visit?” (ibid.).

This technique of getting someone’s confession cannot be deployed in a police station, for instance, where a suspect is directly investigated for a crime he may or may not have committed. This signifies that Louisa cares so much about her brother and his feelings. Her affection for him is not only a sisterly but a motherly one.

For more clarity, the following line chart shows the sentential simplicity, complexity and fragmentation during the pre-eruption phase of Louisa’s development:

According to the legend, we notice that Louisa witnesses many fortune ups and downs in the slow process of change. The fluctuation in the use of the sentential types indicate how much psychologically unbalanced she is. She is in a state of unrest and confusion. More than half of the 100 sentences used are complex, as indicated in Table 2.3. below:

This overall statistical scrutiny of Louisa’s sentence types during this phase can lead us to the conclusion that Louisa is like a long-dormant volcano which begins to show some signs of erupting. This phase represents the pre-eruption of Louisa’s emotions. Her long-repressed feelings and passion are almost on the verge of explosion. However, her feeling of guilt, because she was about to run away with Mr. Harthouse, is the first to rush out, dragging with it all the other bent-up ones. She still knows what is right and what is wrong. That is why, instead of escaping with Mr. Harthouse, she elopes to Stone Lodge where she has a confrontation with her father about her upbringing. We can sense the complexity of this situation for Louisa if we statistically examine the proportions of the sentence types in her 54-sentence speech with her father after her emotional change.

### Post-change Phase

Mr. Harthouse expects Louisa to elope with him after declaring his love to her. Instead, she resorts to her father because she “knows that something is wrong about her relationship with James Harthouse, but she cannot distinguish what it is” (Thoroddsen, 2011, p. 15). Louisa wants to confront her father with the result of his education, hoping to find a solution for her dilemma. According to Bodenheimer

(1991, p. 205), in Louisa’s confrontation with her father at the end of book 2, her “suppressed powers of feeling take shape... through which she can exert any influence over her father.” She is not submissive and powerless anymore. At the beginning of the novel, she is blamed by her father for trying to find solace in the emotional world represented by the “circus.” However, at the end of the novel, the roles are switched, and the blamed becomes the blamer. Her reproachful words at the end of the novel depict the dynamicity that her personality undergoes. Louisa’s long conversation with her father at the end represents the climax of the dynamicity of both Gradgrind and his daughter Louisa. This is emphasized by Bodenheimer (1991), who states that:

The novel’s single story of change lies in the father-daughter drama of Gradgrind and Louisa. Its punishable error is Gradgrind’s denial of development in time, its climax an act of storytelling that redeems the teller [Louisa] and reforms the listener [Gradgrind]. (p. 204)

It is apparent that the data in Table 3.1. pinpoint that the highest percentage of the sentence types in Louisa’s talk with her father after change is allotted for the complex sentences. Some remarks can be made about this abundant use of complex sentences. First, Louisa is overwhelmed by a surge of emotions that finds its way out in the long, complex sentences she voices. Second, it also manifests how severely and forcefully these emotions have been long controlled. Now, Louisa lets loose a torrent of syntactic complexities mirroring her emotional ones. Besides, it attests to the fact that Louisa is openly going against the type. She has gathered the courage to argue with her father. She knows that she sacrificed an essential part of her life in conformity to his school of thought. After this sacrificial act which proved her father wrong, she can now question his philosophy and cast doubt on the whole attitude that her father used to stick to. The following line graph can shed light on this high proportion of sentential complexity:

Compared to Figures 2.1 and 3.1. shows that the number of complex sentences Louisa uses here has increased. This demonstrates the change that Louisa experiences: she becomes an entirely different woman. She is now more courageous and able to defend her desires and wishes. Now, she is not only mentally but also emotionally grown-up.

To compare and contrast the frequency of occurrence of simple sentences, complex sentences and minor sentences in the three stages of Louisa’s character development, the researcher tabulates the data as follows:

According to the legends in Table 4.1., we can see that there has been a significant decrease in Louisa’s use of

**Table 2.3.** Sentence types in louisa’s speech in the process of change (in General)

Sentence type	Total	%
Complex sentences	58	58
Simple sentences	30	30
Minor sentences	12	12
Total	100	100

**Table 3.1.** Sentence types in louisa’s speech with her father after change

Sentence type	Total	%
Complex sentences	39	72.2
Simple sentences	13	24.1
Minor sentences	2	3.7
Total	54	100

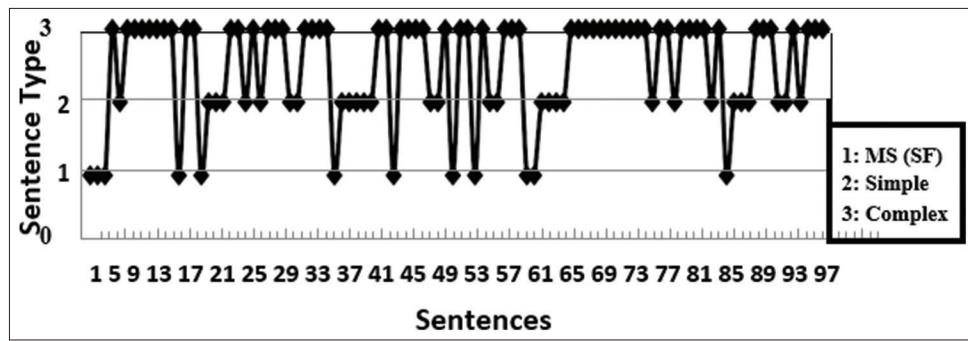


Figure 2.1. Sentence type's in louisa's speeches in the process of change

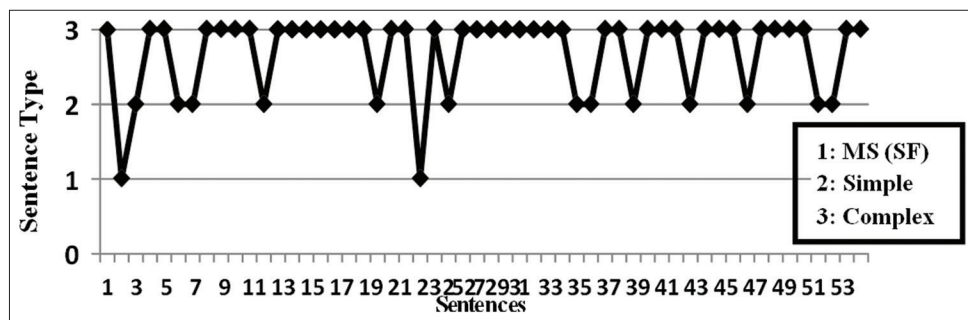


Figure 3.1. Sentence type's in louisa's speech after change

Table 4.1. Sentence types in gradgrind's speeches in all phases of character development

Sentence type	Before change	During change	After change
Simple sentences	39.4	30	24.1
Complex sentences	36.4	58	72.2
Minor sentences	24.2	12	1.1
Total	100	100	100

simple sentences as well as minor sentences from the beginning to the end of the novel. On the other hand, the percentage of Louisa's employment of the complex sentences has increased gradually to reach its peak after her change.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is evident that the statistical distribution of sentence types in Louisa's dramatic speech helps us get an insight into the mental and psychological change that Louisa Gradgrind undergoes throughout the novel. Her use of simple sentences at the beginning of the novel indicates how she is influenced by her father's factual principles. However, the fluctuation in her use of simple and complex sentences in the process of her change is parallel to the emotional ups and downs she undergoes. It also signifies her state of loss, confusion and psychological imbalance. Finally, Louisa's change is represented by her ability to revolt against the Gradgrind's school of thought, which calls for abiding only by facts and scorning fancy and feelings. This increase of sentential complexity in her speech discloses the increase in her boldness and courage to express her own emotions and repudiation of all the former beliefs instilled in her mind by her father.

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