“And” : A Faulknerian Method to Construct Long Sentences

Jianbo JIU
South China University of Technology

William Faulkner, the 1950 Nobel Prize laureate, is renowned for his highly experimental style. One of the most salient characteristics of *The Sound and the Fury* is the frequent use of long sentences "with clauses that proliferate, developing not from the main subject or verb of the sentence, but growing out of preceding clauses" (Volpe 38–39). Conrad Aiken comments Faulkner’s style as follows:

Overelaborate they certainly are, baroque and involuted in the extreme, these sentences: trailing clauses, one after another, shadowily in apposition, or perhaps not even with so much connection as that; parenthesis after parenthesis, the parenthesis itself often containing one or more parenthesis—they remind one of those brightly colored Chinese eggs of one’s childhood, which when opened disclosed egg after egg, each smaller and subtler than the last. It is as if Mr. Faulkner, in a sort of hurried despair, had decided to try to tell us everything, absolutely everything, every last origin or source or quality or qualification, and every possible future or permutation as well, in one terrifically concentrated effort: each sentence to be, as it were, a microcosm. (Aiken 137)
Faulkner constructs his long sentences by means of multiple devices, the most noticeable and frequent of which are the use of the conjunction "and", embedding and appended grouping. Due to length constraint, this essay will only focus on the use of "and", and discuss the literary functions through examples in *The Sound and the Fury*.

In the English language, the conjunction "and" is usually used only once before the last verb when there are several actions (by means of finite verbs) in succession. Readers are so used and conditioned to the past linguistic drills that they would find strange if there are more than one verb connected by "and" to denote some successive actions in an English sentence. Faulkner, however, frequently uses the equating conjunction "and" for more than one time, sometimes for quite a few times to connect two verbs and even a series of finite verbs. In fact, he takes liberties with the conjunction "and" to such an extent that the sentences have become idiosyncratic and typically Faulknerian.

In Section One of *The Sound and the Fury*, i.e. Benjy’s section, one finds abundant uses of "and". The following examples are demonstrative of Benjy’s use of "and":

It kept on making it and I couldn’t tell if I was crying or not, and T. P. fell down on top of me, laughing, and it kept on making the sound and Quentin kicked T. P. and Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn’t smell trees anymore and I began to cry. (Faulkner 42-43, hereafter page only) [2]

There are eight "ands" in the above example. We know that it is Caddy’s wedding. T. P. and Benjy have drunk too much wine without their knowledge. In order to capture what has happened consecutively, Faulkner makes use of eight “ands” to tie all these events into a continuum, which creates an accumulative effect and helps to achieve the impressionistic effect of monotony of the actions. Benjy is not conscious of what he has drunk, nor does he know what these actions really mean. He can only mechanically record what he sees and hears, but unable to figure out the connection between causes and effects, let alone to interpret and arrange them meaningfully. They are far beyond his intelligence and grasp. It is no wonder that he simply ties all the actions together by “ands”.

The following examples are all mechanical renderings of the perceptions of an idiot:

Caddy took her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she didn’t have on
anything but her bodice and drawers, and Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the water. When she got up she began to splash water on Quentin, and Quentin splashed water on Caddy. Some of it splashed on Versh and me and Versh picked me up and put me on the bank. (24)

Then we quit eating and we looked at each other and we were quiet, and then we heard it again and I began to cry. (30)

He drank and set the glass down and went and put his hand on Mother's shoulder. (45)

He wasn't fighting anymore, but we could see Caddy fighting in the mirror and Father put me down and went into the mirror and fought too. (64)

She looked in our door and came in and stooped over the bed and kissed me on the forehead. (71)

In the above examples, Benjy uses the conjunction “and” to tie several verbs together. These verbs perform a series of actions that Benjy observes and records like a camera, meaning nothing to him, which suggests Benjy's inability to comprehend what is really going on and the complex interrelationships therein. For this, Polk observes:

The section [Benjy's monologue] consists almost entirely of simple sentences, sometimes strung together with coordinate conjunctions. Just as his mind allows no distinctions among his sensations that would put them in some kind of ordered relationship, so does his language refuse what Kaluza calls a “syntactical hierarchy?” (52): there are almost no subordinate clauses in Benjy's section, and so almost no subordination, no adjectival or adverbial modifications, that would demonstrate hierarchical or causal or value relationships among the sensations Benjy registers. (Polk 106)

Quentin is educated and has good linguistic potentialities and a good command of the language. He should be able to handle the causal and spatial relationships involved instead of frequently resorting to the use of the conjunction “and” in his idiolect. However, he also uses “and” to join a string of actions. In this string the only emphasis is on the finite verbs, which, in effect, suggest actions. What is more, readers can often notice the mood in which Quentin's actions are performed.

Let's look at the following example:

[...] I carried the watch into Shreve's room and put it in his drawer and went to my room and got a fresh handkerchief and went to the door and put my hand on the
This is a short sentence, but the conjunction “and” is used five times to join the verbs to their subject “I”. This phenomenon differs from the English we are familiar with both in frequency distribution of “and” and in the choice of transitional discourse markers. If we rewrite the sentence in the conventional way, it should be something like: [...] I carried the watch into Shreve’s room and put it in his drawer. Then I went to my room. After I got a fresh handkerchief, I went to the door and put my hand on the light switch.

Let’s look at another example:

I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on. (76)

The above example consists of three sentences. The first and the last are conventional sentences. They are quoted here only to provide a context of the events. In the second sentence, Quentin is trying to destroy the watch in the hope that time might be stopped or that he may escape the effect of time. However, from the last sentence, we know that he fails to do so. The conjunction “and” is repeated four times in the second sentence, one after every action. Readers must read this sentence in one breath, and Quentin’s nervousness and neurotic determination is thus felt.

Quentin’s efforts to stop time are also shown in the following example in which he undertakes a series of simple actions which are strung together by five “ands”:

I got up and went to the dresser and slid my hand along it and touched the watch and turned it face-down and went back to bed. (73)

Let’s look at one more example:

I put on my new suit and put my watch on and packed the other suit and the accessories and my razor and brushes in my hand bag, and folded the trunk key into a sheet of paper and put it in an envelope and addressed it to Father, and wrote the two notes and sealed them. (77)

In this example, Quentin is preparing for his suicide. The conjunction “and” is used eight times to join eight verbs to the subject “I”, which is Quentin. As a result of this grammatical monotony, Quentin’s mind is presented as it registers the trivial chores he is performing mechanically and impassively. Readers are left with the
impression that Quentin is not preparing for his own death, but packing things up to go home instead, or packing things up for someone else whom he does not know. The preparation is ritualistic and his actions are mechanical.

Jason is the only “sane” person of the Compson family. His narration is basically purposeful, selective and “logical” which is indicated by his frequent use of “because”. The language pattern of his interior monologue conforms to the syntactical and grammatical convention on the whole. However, like Benjy and Quentin, he also uses “and” to join finite verbs. As Polk observes: “Jason’s guard occasionally does relax and [...] his unconscious rolls inevitably toward the precipitous edge [...]” (Polk 119)

The following example illustrates how he slips out control of his mind and into some kind of narration like Quentin’s:

I says no I never had university advantages because at Harvard they teach you how to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim and at Sewanee they don’t even teach you what water is. I says you might send me to the state University; maybe I’ll learn how to stop my clock with a nose spray and then you can send Ben to the Navy I says or to the cavalry anyway, they use geldings in the cavalry. Then when she sent Quentin home for me to feed too I says I guess that’s right too, instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me and then Mother begun to cry and I says it’s not that I have any objection to having it here; if it’s any satisfaction to you I’ll quit work and nurse it myself and let you and Dilsey keep the flour barrel full, or Ben. Rent him out to a sideshow; there must be folks somewhere that would pay a dime to see him, then she cried more and kept saying my poor afflicted baby and I says yes he’ll be quite a help to you when he gets his growth not being more than one and a half times as high as me now and she says she’d be dead soon and then we’d all be better off and so I says all right, all right, have it your way. (176 - 177)

In the above quotation, Jason thinks that his chances to success in life have been deprived of by Quentin’s suicide, his father’s death, Caddy’s promiscuity, and Benjy’s idiocy which threatens the family appearance. He is clearly in pain and is indignant, too. Although he tries to appear calm, which is indicated by the orthodox sentence structures, he does lose control of himself when he is angry. In this case, the conjunction “and” is used to show his indignation. In the above example, he seems normal at the beginning, but he becomes angry when he comes to describe the occasion when Caddy’s illegitimate daughter is sent home. To him, Caddy is to blame.
for the deprivation of his chance to success in life because the failure of her marriage has deprived him of his position in Herbert Head’s St. Louis Bank. He cannot help but using the conjunction “and” to describe the occasion:

Then when she sent Quentin home for me to feed too I says I guess that’s right too, instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me and then Mother begun to cry and I says it’s not that I have any objection to having it here; if it’s any satisfaction to you I’ll quit work and nurse it myself and let you and Dilsey keep the flour barrel full, or Ben. [...] then she cried more and kept saying my poor afflicted baby and I says yes he’ll be quite a help to you when he gets his growth not being more than one and a half times as high as me now and she says she’d be dead soon and then we’d all be better off and so I says all right, all right, have it your way. (176 –177)

On many other occasions, Jason’s narrative slips into a syntactical deviation of his own. In the following example, he is quite normal in the first paragraph, but he slips into long sentences with the conjunction “and”:

After a while he kind of sneaked his hand to his mouth and dropped them out the window. Then I knew what I had been smelling. Clove stems. I reckon he thought that the least he could do at Father’s or maybe the sideboard thought it was still Father and tripped him up when he passed. Like I say, if he had to sell something to send Quentin to Harvard we’d all been a damn sight better off if he’d sold that sideboard and bought himself a one-armed strait jacket with part of the money. I reckon the reason all the Compson gave out before it got to me like Mother says, is that he drank it up. At least I never heard of him offering to sell anything to send me to Harvard.

So he kept on patting her hand and saying “Poor little sister”, patting her hand with one of the black gloves that we got the bill for four days later because it was the twenty-sixth because it was the same day one month that Father went up there and got it and brought it home and wouldn’t tell anything about where she was or anything and Mother crying and saying “And you didn’t even see him? You didn’t even try to get him to make any provision for it?” and Father says “No she shall not touch his money not one cent of it” and Mother says “He can be forced to by law. He can prove nothing, unless—Jason Compson,” she says. “Were you fool enough to tell—” (197 –198)

We can see that one of the causes of Jason’s pain and indignation is his sister’s
promiscuity which leads to the breakdown of her marriage. Whenever Caddy's name is mentioned, or in her absence, when little Quentin is present, he becomes indignant and his sentences are inundated with “ands”. It gives the impression that his anger and indignation must be expressed in one breath, not two, let alone three or four.

Jason's indignation is also seen in the following paragraph, which is his description of the beginnings of his futile pursuit of his niece when she ran away with the “stolen” money:

I went on to the street, but they were out of sight. And there I was, without any hat, looking like I was crazy too. Like a man would naturally think, one of them is crazy and another one drowned himself and the other one was turned out into the street by her husband, what's the reason the rest of them are not crazy too. All the time I could see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to say Well I'm not surprised I expected it all the time the whole family's crazy. Selling land to send him to Harvard and paying taxes to support a state University all the time that I never saw except twice at a baseball game and not letting her daughter's name be spoken on the place until after a while Father wouldn't even come down-town anymore but just sat there all day with the decanter I could see the bottom of his nightshirt and his bare legs and hear the decanter clinking until finally T. P. had to pour it for him and she says You have no respect for your Father's memory and I says I don't know why not it sure is preserved well enough to last only if I'm crazy too God knows what I'll do about it just to look at water makes me sick and I'd just as soon swallow gasoline as a glass of whiskey and Lorraine telling them he may not drink but if you don't believe he's a man I can tell you how to find out she says If I catch you fooling with any of these whores you know what I'll do she says I'll whip her grabbing at her I'll whip her as long as I can find her she says and I says if I don't drink that's my business but have you ever found me short I says I'll buy you enough beer to take a bath in if you want it because I've got every respect for a good honest whore because with Mother's health and the position I try to uphold to have her with no more respect for what I try to do for her than to make her name and my name and my Mother's name a byword in the town. (232 - 233)

In the first two sentences, the use of language is normal. From the third sentence on, punctuation marks are abandoned and Jason uses the conjunction “and” to string together his concerns and indignation: his father's drinking, Quentin's suicide, Benjy's idiocy, little Quentin's sexual misconduct like her mother, his
preference of a whore to a girlfriend and, what is most important, his awareness of the townspeople's gossip.

Section IV is narrated basically in conventional English. However, there are some sentences tied up with the conjunction “and” as well. For example:

Then she closed it and laid it down and stacked stovewood into her crooked arm, against her breast, and picked up the umbrella and got it open at last and returned to the steps and held the wood precariously balanced while she contrived to close the umbrella, which she propped in the corner just within the door. (237)

Then she removed the overcoat and hat and took a soiled apron down from the wall and put it on and built a fire in the stove. (237)

She set the sifter down and swept up the hem of her apron and wiped her hands and caught up the bottle from the chair on which she had laid it and gathered her apron about the handle of the kettle which was now jetting faintly. (240)

Dilsey is the Compson servant for all her life. She has taken care of the family and performed her duties faithfully. In the above three examples, the conjunction “and” is used to express the continuity of activities Dilsey performed one after another: six in the first example, three in the second and four in the third. These activities take place in the morning and the series of actions show that Dilesy is in high demand; she has to look after many things and many people at the same time.

To sum up, Faulkner uses “and” to construct his salient long sentence, which are in line with his artistic intention and endeavour. He uses “and” in all the four sections of The Sound and the Fury. In the first section, he uses “and” to tie several events and actions (through verbs) into a continuum, which creates an accumulative effect and helps to achieve the impressionistic effect of monotony of the actions. The thirty-three-year-old Benjy observes and records these actions like a camera. These actions are meaningless to him because he is an idiot with the mentality of a three-year old and unable to understand what is really going on and the complex interrelationships.

In the second section, the intelligent and well-educated Quentin also uses “and” to join a string of actions. In this string the only emphasis is on the finite verbs, which, in effect, suggest actions. Readers can often notice the mood in which Quentin’s actions are performed.

In the third section, the pragmatic Jason also uses “and” to join finite verbs. Although he generally uses orthodox sentences, he does lose control of himself when
he is angry. In this case, “and” is used to show his indignation towards his family members and his townsfolk. It gives readers the impression that his anger and indignation must be expressed in one breath, not two, let alone three or four.

Although Section IV is narrated basically in conventional English, there are some sentences tied up with the conjunction “and” as well. Dilsey, the Compson servant, sometimes uses “and" to express the continuity of activities she performs one after another. These activities take place in the morning and the series of actions show that Dilesy is in high demand.

Notes:
[1] The author is deeply indebted to Professor Qin Xiubai for his stylistic expertise and critical acumen during the writing of this essay. This paper is one of the publications of the project “A Stylistic Study of The Sound and the Fury”, which is jointly funded by the “Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities” (中央高校基本科研业务费) and “The Twelfth Five-Year Plan of Philosophy and Social Sciences of Guangdong Province 2015” (广东省哲学社会科学“十二五”规划2015年度后期资助项目)。
[2] For more details on Faulkner’s artistic intention in using long sentences, please refer to my essay “Idiosyncrasies and Literary Functions of Long Sentences in The Sound and the Fury”, Comparative Literature: East & West, 23, Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2015: 40 – 49.

Works Cited:
Aiken, Conrad. “William Faulkner: The Novel as Form”, William Faulkner: Three Decades of Criticism, eds. Frederick J. Hoffman and Olga W. Vickery. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1960: 135 – 141.
Faulkner, William. The Sound and the Fury. Middlesex: Penguin, 1964.
Liu, Jianbo. “Idiosyncrasies and Literary Functions of Long Sentences in The Sound and the Fury”, Comparative Literature: East & West, 23, Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 2015: 40 – 49.
Polk, Noel. Children of the Dark House: Text and Context in Faulkner. Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1996.
Volpe, Edmond L. A Reader’s Guide to William Faulkner. New York: Octagan, 1974.
Jianbo LIU, Ph. D. and professor of School of Foreign Languages, South China University of Technology. He has published 39 academic essays, about 30 textbooks and one academic book. He has also translated and published seven literary works. His major research fields include studies on British and American literature, and the English language education. He is currently Member of the State Steering Committee of College English Teaching, executive member of China English Language Education Association, Deputy Director of the Steering Committee of Foreign Language Teaching in Guangdong Province.