Syntax Influences and Effects: A Syntactical Analysis of Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury, Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card, and Skyward by Brandon Sanderson

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Introduction

Different grammatical constructions and syntactic choices are one of the primary factors affecting a writer's unique style. In this paper, I analyze how syntax contributes to the style and discourse of the openers (first thousand words) of three different works: *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *Ender's Game* by Orson Scott Card, and *Skyward* by Brandon Sanderson. Each of these writers cites the previous writer as an influence on his work. Ultimately, while this influence is evident particularly between Card and Sanderson, each of these three writers uses his syntax to achieve the distinct style and aesthetic of his work, from Bradbury's lyricism and scene setting to Card's and Sanderson's exposition.

Authors and Influences

Ray Bradbury (1920-2012), author of *Fahrenheit 451,* had a long and influential writing career (Gregersen). Indeed, Orson Scott Card (1951-Present), author of *Ender's Game* ("About Orson Scott Card"), cites Bradbury as a stylistic influence on his writing (Card, "Thoughts on Ray Bradbury"). In turn, Card's writing has influenced many authors, including Brandon Sanderson (1975-Present), who read Card's writing growing up ("About Brandon") and who cites *Ender's Game* as an influence on his novel *Skyward* (Sanderson, "Officially Announcing: Skyward").

Ray Bradbury – *Fahrenheit 451*

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the first of these three authors, Ray Bradbury, gave his writing a rhythmic, lyrical, and almost poetic effect, matched with long flowing sentences. This style is apparent within the first few sentences:

It was a pleasure to burn.

It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and *changed*. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. (Bradbury 33)

Adverbial and Adjectival Constructions

One of Bradbury's most used structures is adverbs. Adverbs' recursive nature allows Bradbury to create his long sentences. Additionally, the mobility of adverbs and adverbial constructions allows him to place them where they best suit his intended meaning (Tufte 95-96) and to maintain a variety of sentence structures (Black 99).

Indeed, Bradbury uses prepositions (both adverbial and adjectival) at the beginning, middle, and end of his sentences. Prepositions can be used for "striking metaphorical and poetic effect" (Tufte 122), as they are in Bradbury's writing with sentences like "He strode *in a swarm of fireflies*" (Bradbury 33, emphasis added). Additionally, prepositions contribute to the "movement, progression" (Tufte 119), and rhythm (Tufte 119-122) of Bradbury's writing as seen most evidently in some of his long sentences: "He walked *out of the fire station* and *along the midnight street toward the subway* where the silent air-propelled train slid soundlessly *down its lubricated flue in the earth…*" (Bradbury 34, emphasis added).

Another construction giving Bradbury's writing a flowing, continuous effect is active participial phrases, both adverbial and adjectival (Black 177): for example (an active adjectival participial phrase), "His inner mind, *reaching out to turn the corner for him*, had heard the faintest whisper" (Bradbury 35, emphasis added). Participial phrases also add rich detail to Bradbury's writing (Black 177). Furthermore, these dependent clauses can give prose "added weight, [and] create … parallel rhythms and stresses … [and] cadence" (Tufte 139), match-

ing Bradbury's rhythmic writing. The "predictable rhythms" (Tufte 140) of dependent clauses also "make them a frequent choice in ceremonial and other formal prose" (Tufte 140). While Bradbury's writing is not formal in certain senses (it is not written in the style of an academic paper, for example), it is certainly not colloquial. For instance, Bradbury uses some elevated diction—with words like "venomous" (34) and "symphonies" (34)"—and has fairly complex sentence structures.

More specifically, *active* participial phrases (which Bradbury favors), with their *-ing* verbs, "convey a sense that the action is happening now" (Tufte 68). Bradbury's use of active participial phrases coupled with his use of *-ing* adjectives gives his writing a sense of immediacy.

As shown in some of the above quotes, Bradbury often uses commas to offset all of these adverbial and adjectival constructions, which adds emphasis to the offset phrase (Tufte 97). Since much of the important information and scene work that Bradbury does is in these prepositional phrases, this emphasis draws the reader's attention to the important content in his sentences.

Verb Types

In regards to verbs, Bradbury uses many intransitive verbs, likely because much of his sentences' actual content is contained within adverbial phrases: for instance, "…the books *went* up in sparkling whirls and *blew* away on a wind turned dark with burning" (Bradbury 33, emphasis added). Indeed, this type of sentence (long with a short nucleus) "can help to create a distinctive impact and texture" (Tufte 31), and relatedly, intransitive verbs allow for flexible emphasis and stress (Tufte 16). These two combined facts help Bradbury create the rhythm in the sentences in *Fahrenheit 451*.

Bradbury also commonly uses transitive verbs in *Fahrenheit 451*: for example, "…the silent air-propelled train … *let* him out with a great puff of warm air onto the cream-tiled escalator rising to the suburb" (Bradbury 34, emphasis added). Virginia Tufte notes, "Maximum activity often finds expression in the transitive, where the action of the verb crosses over to an object" (18) and says when "an adverb or prepositional phrase occupies the terminal slot" (18) in a sentence, they "receive … a strong share of attention" (18). In other words, transitive verbs give energy to Bradbury's writing and complement his use of prepositional phrases.

Sentence Structure and Whole Sentence Modifiers

Bradbury opens *Fahrenheit 451* with a string of clefts—also called extraposed sentences (Black 249): "It was a pleasure to burn. It was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and *changed*" (Bradbury 33). This sentence structure allows Bradbury to give the second part of the sentences emphasis (De-Carrico 193), which is significantly stronger and more interesting than if he had used typical sentence structure, which would have emphasized the abstract concept of pleasure in the sentences.

Throughout the entire opener, Bradbury uses dependent clauses—adverbial, adjectival, and nominal (DeCarrico 148)—often surrounding his main clause with dependent clauses. These dependent clauses frequently hold the important information in the sentence, which he does in the following sentence with the *when* dependent clause nested within the *that* dependent clause: "He knew *that when he returned to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked in the mirror*" (Bradbury 34, emphasis added). These two choices make Bradbury's writing seem softer or less direct, adding to the ethereal atmosphere and Montag's spell-like state that Bradbury develops around Montag's fascination with fire and Montag's encounter with Clarisse. When Bradbury breaks this structure (often with a short sentence), the sentence stands out, receiving emphasis and serving as necessary stylistic variation to slow the reader's reading pace.

Finally, Bradbury uses coordinating conjunctions, often allowing him to create his long sentences with multiple prepositional phrases like the following: "He walked out of the fire station *and* along the midnight street…" (Bradbury 34, emphasis added). Tufte notes that conjunctions can give writing a sense of "rhythm or pace" (125), which adds to the rhythm of the prepositional phrases and Bradbury's overall writing.

Orson Scott Card – *Ender's Game*

Orson Scott Card's writing is of significant contrast to Bradbury's. The tone in *Ender's Game* is more detached, almost clinical at times, and less lyrical, as is evident within the first few paragraphs,

Ender nodded. It was a lie, of course, that it wouldn't hurt a bit. But since adults always said it when it *was* going to hurt, he could count on that statement as an accurate prediction of the future. Sometimes lies were more dependable than the truth….

The monitor gone. Ender tried to imagine the little device missing from the back of his neck. (Card, *Ender's Game* 32)

This style is more direct than Bradbury's style. However, *Ender's Game* does have a military setting, so this style matches much of the events in and setting of the story. Additionally, unlike *Fahrenheit 451*, *Ender's Game* has a child for the main character and focuses more intensely on the main character's inner world. *Ender's Game* also uses significantly more dialogue in the opener than *Fahrenheit 451*, including an introductory section of pure dialogue.

Adverbial and Adjectival Constructions

Continuing the contrast with Bradbury, Card—while he employs a fair number of adverbs and adverbial phrases (adverbs are very common in English writing)—uses significantly fewer adverbial structures than Bradbury. In large part, this contributes to his shorter sentence length. Card also uses shorter breath units, giving his writing a choppier feel, which in turn, gives his writing somewhat of a "childlike" (DeCarrico 136) feel, matching the main character's age.

While Card does not use as many active participial phrases as Bradbury does, he does use *-ing* words, notably with three within one sentence describing Ender in pain: "He could feel his legs *thrashing*, and his hands were *clenching* each other, *wringing* each other so tightly that they arched [sic.]" (Card, *Ender's Game* 33, emphasis added). These *-ing* words add immediacy to the overall work, and in the scene that this sentence is from, they add urgency to Ender's pain and panic (Tufte 68).

Verb Types

As he uses fewer adverbial constructions than Bradbury, Card's writing uses significantly fewer intransitive verbs. However, he uses many transitive verbs, which typically place emphasis on the direct object (Tufte 18). For example, Card places emphasis on Ender's fear of Peter through the direct objects in this excerpt: "But Ender *knew*, even as he *thought* it, that Peter wouldn't leave him alone. There *was* something in Peter's eyes…" (Card, *Ender's Game* 32, emphasis added). In this way, Card is able to focus on his sentence's content and on establishing his narrative.

Card also makes extensive use of linking verbs. Tufte notes that these verbs can emphasize an assertion and "create an insistence" (11). In the beginning of a novel, these assertions can help the author establish different elements of the story, which aligns with Card's focus on exposition. Card is able to use this in the following excerpt to establish Peter's personality: "…Peter *was* too dangerous. Peter *got* so angry" (Card, *Ender's Game* 32, emphasis added). This assertiveness also supports the military setting that develops later in the novel.

Finally, Card uses a variety of infinitive phrases (nominal, nominal complement, and adjective complement), which "cultivate ease and economy of style" (Tufte 74), "expand … finite verbs, … [and] open up a main verb phrase for important expansions" (Tufte 73). These effects allow Card to efficiently set up his story and add expository details to his opener as he does with the first mention of the Buggers in the main narrative section: "…when he [Peter] wants *to play Buggers and astronauts*, maybe I won't have *to play*…" (Card, *Ender's Game* 32, emphasis added).

Sentence Structure and Whole Sentence Modifiers

Throughout this opener, Card generously uses interrogative sentences, especially within dialogue. These questions propel the dialogue and narrative forward: Questions demand answers.

In addition to questions, Card uses some imperative sentences (mostly in the dialogue between the doctor and the nurse). Imperative sentences have a "commanding nature" (Tufte 209), which has a twofold effect in this text. First, coupled with the clipped nature of these imperative sentences, the commanding tone adds urgency to the dialogue between the doctor and the nurse and, largely, Ender's situation (and the panic of his situation) as his monitor is removed. Second, it helps establish the military atmosphere of the rest of the book.

Another structure Card uses is fragments, which Card uses in the introductory dialogue and when Ender is contemplating his relationship with his brother. In the dialogue section, the fragments simulate speech (people

often speak in fragments), and as short fragments, they give the speech a clipped feeling, matching the expected idiolects of who we later learn are members of the military. In the second instance, when Ender is thinking, the fragments help simulate thought: We often do not think in complete sentences. These are short fragments as well, which feel disjointed when placed next to each other, matching Ender's disjointed and conflicting feelings on his present situation—the monitor's being removed—and whether it will make Peter stop hating him.

In contrast to Bradbury's sentences' mostly starting with an introductory phrase, Card often begins his sentences with the main clause: for example, "The doctor was trembling; his voice shook as he spoke" (Card, *Ender's Game* 33). This makes Card's writing feel more direct since the sentence's main point is in the main clause, placed at the front of the sentence.

While Bradbury uses some dependent clauses, Card's writing abounds with dependent clauses (especially relative clauses, nominal clauses, and adverbial clauses): "…Peter won't hate me anymore. I'll come home and show him *that the monitor's gone*, and he'll see *that I didn't make it either*" (Card, *Ender's Game* 32, emphasis added). Card's writing is less "formal" (Tufte 140) than Bradbury's writing; however, dependent clauses are also common "in the *opening chapters* and narrative passages of novels, where authors often want to impart details quickly" (Tufte 140, emphasis added). This aligns with Card's more utilitarian style and his expositional opener.

Card also distinctively uses two types of whole sentence modifiers. First, Card uses vocative modifiers, like when the nurse addresses Ender: "'Are you all right, *Andrew*?'" (Card, *Ender's Game* 33, emphasis added). Vocative modifiers can set tone (Black 239) and are often "considered informal" (Black 238). Since Card uses his vocative modifiers in dialogue, they give the characters' speech an informal tone. Second, Card uses adverbial conjunctions, which largely add cohesion to the story (Tufte 239, 243) but can also create an order to sentences or "establish a unity of spatial or temporal order, or a pattern or method" (Tufte 241). This is reflected in the procedural, cause-and-effect elements as Ender ponders the different possible effects of his monitor's coming out.

Finally, Bradbury, Card, *and* Sanderson all make extensive use of pronouns, which prevent them from "use[ing] the same nouns over and over" (Tufte 49) and give the writing a sense of "cohesion" (Tufte 49). However, pronouns also clarify the intended listener in dialogue (DeCarrico 119), which Card uses to especially great effect when he uses the second person pronoun "you" in the opening dialogue. This pronoun gives the reader some context of the conversation without explicitly doing so (DeCarrico 104), contributing to "greater efficiency of expression" (DeCarrico 119).

Brandon Sanderson – *Skyward*

Brandon Sanderson's writing is more similar to Card's than Card's is to Bradbury's. In many ways, Sanderson is a slightly more concentrated version of Card's writing as seen within the first two paragraphs:

> Only fools climbed to the surface. It was stupid to put yourself in danger like that, my mother always said. Not only were there near-constant debris showers from the rubble belt, but you never knew when the Krell would attack.
>
> Of course, my father traveled to the surface basically every day—he had to, as a pilot. I supposed by my mother's definition that made him *extra* foolish, but I always considered him extra brave. (Sanderson, *Skyward* 1)

As is evident, the narration in this text is more childish than Card's, despite the main characters' similar age. Notably, though, in the introduction to *Ender's Game,* Card explains this choice, saying he wanted his readers to experience a child's feelings' being as significant as the reader's feelings as an adult (Card, *Ender's Game* 20-21). This difference may also be explained by the intended audience of the two texts. *Ender's Game* has a target audience of adults while *Skyward* is "a kind of borderline YA/Adult project" (Sanderson, "Officially Announcing: Skyward").

Also similar to Card (and contrasting Bradbury), Sanderson's text has a focus on exposition in addition to worldbuilding, for which Sanderson is well known.

Adverbial and Adjectival Constructions

Like Bradbury and Card, Sanderson makes use of the active participial phrase, which, as in Bradbury's

and Card's writing, give Sanderson's writing a sense of immediacy (Tufte 68) as in the following example: "I hurried after my father, *carrying a lantern to light the rubble-strewn cavern*" (Sanderson, *Skyward* 1, emphasis added). All three of these texts are written in past tense, so the participial phrases add necessary urgency to the stories.

Another type of dependent clause that Sanderson uses (like Card) is the adverbial clause. Dependent clauses have a similar effect on Sanderson's writing as they do on Card's writing. Dependent clauses are useful "to impart details quickly" (Tufte 140), which Sanderson uses to help worldbuild and establish his narrative: "Stuffed bears were for babies, *even if you'd fashioned your own mock power armor for yours out of string and broken ceramics*" (Sanderson, *Skyward* 2, emphasis added).

Verb Types

Sanderson uses similar verb types to Card, with a similar proportion of intransitive verbs and a higher proportion of transitive verbs, and as in Card's writing, the transitive verbs help with the exposition, rather than having a Bradbury-like lyricism. Additionally, like Card, Sanderson uses many linking verbs, which can "create an insistence" (Tufte 11). This insistence allows Sanderson to firmly establish his world and narrative, helping the readers suspend their disbelief.

Sentence Structure and Whole Sentence Modifiers

Like Bradbury, Sanderson uses a cleft early in his opener (in his second sentence): "It was stupid to put yourself in danger like that, my mother always said" (Sanderson, *Skyward* 1). As it does with Bradbury's writing, this cleft makes the opener stand out with unique emphasis and sentence structure (DeCarrico 193).

Overall, like Card, Sanderson begins most of his sentences with the main clause. While this does give his writing a more direct tone, it also makes the tone feel somewhat simplistic (which the direct tone adds to), and this simple, direct tone is what one would expect from both a child narrator and a child main character.

Adding to this "childlike" (DeCarrico 136) narration is Sanderson's use of shorter breath units (DeCarrico 136), which is especially important since both the narrator and the main character are a child.

In regards to whole sentence modifiers, Sanderson uses vocative modifiers in dialogue—although not as many as Card—which help set an informal tone (Black 238-239), establishing the narrator's comfortable and familiar relationship with her father.

Finally, in addition to the above-mentioned adverbial dependent clauses, Sanderson uses relative clauses, nominal clauses, and nominal appositives, which, as dependent clauses, are to be expected in novel openers (Tufte 140) and can be used "to impart details quickly" (Tufte 140). Appositives in particular are good for clarifying details or adding details to a text (Tufte 191). Sanderson uses this effect to establish aspects of the world he is creating and the narrator's life. Overall, these dependent clauses have a similar effect to the adverbial clauses by allowing Sanderson to add details that flesh out his narrative as in the following excerpt: "I had even drawn a pin on the left over my heart, like the one he wore—*the pin that marked him as a pilot*" (Sanderson, *Skyward* 2, emphasis added).

Conclusion

Despite their varying uses of syntax and grammatical constructions, Ray Bradbury, Orson Scott Card, and Brandon Sanderson all use syntax to create writing styles that successfully craft and support their narrative, bringing their scenes, stories, and characters to life. These authors' syntactical choices allow them to focus on different elements in their openers, with Bradbury's focus on scene setting and poetic style and Card's and Sanderson's focus on more expositional elements. Overall, this analysis shows that different types of syntactical constructions with their different effects each have a role to play in crafting effective stories and style.

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