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Constructing Narrative Space: A Systemic Functional Analysis of Prepositional Phrases in O. Henry's *The Last Leaf*

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Abstract: This study examines the role of prepositional phrases (PPs) in narrative construction through a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis of O. Henry's The Last Leaf. Focusing on circumstantial elements within the transitivity system, this research demonstrates how PPs contribute to experiential meaning, thematic progression, and textual cohesion. The findings reveal that PPs function not only as syntactic adjuncts but also as crucial devices for setting construction, mood development, and symbolic representation. Spatial and temporal PPs establish narrative immersion, while marked themes foreground key details, reinforcing textual coherence. The study highlights the pedagogical implications of teaching PPs as meaning-making tools in ESL contexts, suggesting a more contextualized approach to grammar instruction. By bridging linguistic theory and literary stylistics, this research underscores the multifunctional nature of PPs in shaping narrative discourse.

Keywords: Prepositional Phrases, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Circumstantial elements, Narrative construction, Textual cohesion.

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1. Introduction

Language is not just a communication tool but also a medium for shaping reality. SFL, developed by Halliday, views language as a meaning-making resource, emphasizing its functional role in different contexts. This study applies the SFL to analyze the often-neglected role of PPs in constructing narrative settings. PPs, typically consisting of a preposition followed by a noun phrase, express spatial and temporal relationships. Although ubiquitous, their stylistic and functional significance in descriptive

prose remains understudied (Biber et al., 2021; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). In narratives, PPs situate characters and events, enriching the setting and atmosphere. While syntactically optional, they provide crucial details that shape reader perception (Toolan, 2016). This study examines *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry, a short story dense with spatial and temporal PPs.

Despite their importance, PPs are often marginalized in linguistic and stylistic research, which tends to focus on transitivity, modality, and thematic structures (Martin & Rose, 2007; Thompson, 2021). PPs are frequently taught as peripheral rather than essential to meaning. This study challenges that view by demonstrating their narrative significance.

In the SFL, PPs function as circumstantial elements within the transitivity system, providing temporal, spatial, and causal context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Although sometimes considered syntactically optional, they are semantically vital, particularly in literary settings. Recent research supports this perspective. Ryu (2020) noted that circumstantial elements enhance discourse coherence, whereas Guo and Feng (2022) highlighted PPs' role in spatial deixis. Cognitive stylistics further suggest that spatial language (Stockwell, 2002; Harrison et al., 2020) aids narrative immersion by helping readers construct mental models of fictional worlds. Thus, PPs are not mere grammatical accessories but key meaning-making tools.

This study employs a qualitative, SFL-based analysis of PPs in *The Last Leaf*. The focus is on their semantic types (location, time, manner, cause) and syntactic roles within clauses, particularly their contribution to ideational metafunction. While interpersonal and textual metafunctions are acknowledged, the primary emphasis is on experiential meaning, as it directly relates to setting construction.

The Last Leaf is ideal for this analysis because of its concise yet vivid descriptions. Its accessibility also has broader pedagogical implications. Traditional grammar teaching often decontextualizes PPs, reducing them to memorization exercises. By demonstrating their functional role in the literature, this study advocates for more contextualized grammar instruction, benefiting ESL learners in reading and writing. This research bridges a gap in the field of SFL and stylistics. While the SFL has been widely applied to narratives (Butt et al., 2020; Martin, 2017) and spatial descriptions have gained attention (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017), few studies have focused specifically on PPs. By analyzing their role in setting construction, this study enhances the understanding of grammar as a meaning-making tool in the literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Foundations of Systemic Functional Linguistics and Circumstantial Meaning

SFL, developed by Halliday, views language as a social semiotic system operating through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 1970, 1973, 1978). The ideational metafunction, central to this study, encodes experiences via the transitivity system, comprising processes (verbs), participants (nouns), and circumstances (often PPs) (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014).

Halliday (1967) highlights that PPs function as circumstantial adjuncts, detailing location, time, manner, cause, and accompaniment, thus shaping experiential meaning. These elements are not syntactically peripheral but crucial for contextual embedding (Halliday, 1973). In narratives, PPs situate actions in time and space, reinforcing lexicogrammatical density (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999).

2.2 Role of Prepositional Phrases in Narrative and Thematic Structures

PPs contribute to textual cohesion and thematic progression in narratives. When placed clause-initially, they act as marked themes, foregrounding setting and temporality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014). Halliday's (1971) analysis of Inheritors demonstrated how PPs shape spatial mapping, mood, and tone, a feature evident in O. Henry's Last Leaf, where setting carries symbolic weight.

Additionally, PPs enhance cohesive harmony by anchoring narrative events to a consistent spatiotemporal

framework (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1997). They also serve as grammatical metaphors in technical discourse but retain experiential concreteness in the literature (Halliday, 1998).

2.3 Recent Empirical Research on Prepositional Phrases

Recent empirical research has provided substantial validation for Halliday's theoretical framework regarding PPs through various linguistic investigations. Ryu (2020) demonstrated that PPs significantly enhance textual coherence in EFL writing, supporting their functional importance in discourse organization. Similarly, Guo and Feng's (2022) corpus-based study revealed how spatial PPs contribute to narrative immersion in English fiction by establishing clear spatial frameworks for readers. In addition to supporting the pedagogical value of PPs, Zhang and Wang (2023) reported that these structures help EFL learners materialize abstract concepts in their writing. Comparative research by Manar et al. (2023) offered insights into differences in cognitive processing, examining how deaf and hearing students employ PPs differently in narrative construction. Ramli's (2024) work on journalistic texts highlighted the potential for misinterpretation when PPs are ambiguously structured, emphasizing the need for precise circumstantial language. Contemporary linguistic discussions have advanced the concept of "circumstantiation", refining our understanding of how circumstantial elements contribute to both logical progression and experiential meaning in texts. Complementing these developments, Ungerer's (2023) classification of PPs as semantically independent sentence adjuncts further corroborates their significance within the SFL, demonstrating their autonomous role in meaning-making despite their traditional classification as peripheral elements. These collective findings reinforce the fundamental role of PPs in both theoretical linguistics and practical language applications.

This study applies SFL to analyze PPs in *The Last Leaf*, examining their role in setting construction, mood, and thematic cohesion. Phrases such as "on the bricks of the next house" or "in the bed near the window" do more than denote location—they convey emotional and narrative tension. By synthesizing Hallidayan theory with contemporary research, this study contributes to literary linguistics and applies the SFL.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach within the SFL framework (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). SFL views language as a meaning-making resource, making it suitable for analyzing how prepositional phrases (PPs) construct experiential meaning in literary discourse. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative textual analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of grammatical and semantic functions, particularly within the ideational metafunction (Eggins, 2004). SFL's transitivity system is used to examine PPs as circumstantial elements, revealing how they contribute to setting, mood, and narrative progression (Halliday, 1994). This approach differs from content or thematic analysis by focusing on how linguistic structures create meaning rather than just categorizing content.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data are O. Henry's short story *The Last Leaf*, selected for its rich use of setting descriptions and compact narrative structure. The story's confined spatial and temporal setting makes it ideal for analyzing how PPs function in narrative construction (Halliday, 1971). The emotional and symbolic weight of the setting in the story underscores the importance of circumstantial elements, particularly PPs.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process began with a close reading of the text to identify all PPs functioning as circumstantial adjuncts, which provide information about where, when, how, why, and with whom an action occurs. Each clause was systematically examined, and relevant PPs were extracted and compiled into a dataset. These PPs were then classified according to Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) typology, which includes categories such as Location, Manner, Cause, Accompaniment, Role, Matter, and Angle. To ensure accuracy, ambiguous cases were resolved through contextual interpretation on the basis of SFL

principles. To enhance reliability, interrater agreement was assessed by having a second coder independently analyze a 20% sample of the data. Any coding discrepancies were resolved through discussion and reference to established SFL frameworks (Eggins, 2004; Thompson, 2014).

3.4 Analytical Framework

The study employed the SFL as its analytical framework, specifically focusing on the transitivity system to examine how PPs function as circumstantial elements in clauses. The analysis followed a structured approach: first, each PP was classified on the basis of its semantic role within the clause. Next, thematic analysis was conducted to determine whether PPs appeared in thematic (clause-initial) or rhematic positions, as their placement influences textual cohesion and emphasis (Halliday, 1994). Additionally, the narrative function of PPs was assessed to understand their role in constructing setting, mood, and reader orientation, drawing on insights from Ryu (2020) and Guo & Feng (2022). Finally, a cohesion analysis was performed via Halliday & Hasan's (1985) model to explore how PPs contribute to interclausal connections through mechanisms such as reference, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. This multilayered approach ensured a comprehensive examination of how PPs shape meaning and structure in literary discourse.

4. Findings

4.1 Prepositional Phrases as Circumstantial Elements

In alignment with the ideational metafunction of the SFL, the prepositional phrases in *The Last Leaf* predominantly function as circumstantial elements, providing crucial information about location, time, manner, and cause. These PPs support transitivity structures by specifying the "where" "when," and "how" of the processes represented in the clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Their frequency and variety reveal how linguistic choices support the narrative's spatial and emotional dimensions. One of the opening lines of the story clearly illustrates this function:

In a small part of the city west of Washington Square, the streets have gone wild. They turn in different directions. They are broken into small pieces called 'places'.

Here, the PP *In a small part of the city west of Washington Square,….* serves as a circumstantial element of location: Place. This type of circumstantial detail places the reader in a specific physical space, forming the geographical anchor for the entire narrative. The placement of the PP at the beginning of the clause also demonstrates its thematic role, as discussed by Halliday (1994), highlighting the importance of spatial setting in the story's thematic development. Similarly,

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick houses Sue and Johnsy had their study

The clause demonstrates the use of a PP (*"At the top of a squatty, three-story brick house"*) as both a spatial and thematic foregrounding device. It sets the scene for the action that follows and contributes to the construction of social context by detailing the modest living conditions of the characters, which in turn echoes the broader themes of poverty, struggle, and community.

4.2 Temporal and Spatial Cohesion through PPs

Prepositional phrases in *The Last Leaf* are instrumental in constructing both temporal and spatial cohesion. Halliday and Hasan (1985) argue that textual cohesion arises from grammatical and lexical devices that bind parts of a text together. In this narrative, PPs often serve this role by linking episodes and maintaining spatial continuity across scenes. For instance:

Toward winter a cold stranger entered Greenwich Village. No one could see him. He walked around touching one person here and another there with his icy fingers. He was a bad sickness. Doctors called him Pneumonia.

The PP *Toward winter* provides the temporal framework, establishing a setting that aligns with the seasonal imagery often associated with decline and death. It reflects the character's internal state and

prefigures Johnsy's illness, thus reinforcing the narrative's thematic undercurrent. Other spatial PPs, such as:

On the bricks of the next house, through the window, in her bed and *at the foot of the ivy-covered wall*

All serve to create a vivid and consistent spatial matrix. According to Guo and Feng (2022), such spatial referents are critical in fiction, as they allow readers to visualize the movement and position of characters, enhancing immersion. By repeatedly locating characters and objects within specific confines, the narrative achieves tight spatial cohesion that supports its claustrophobic mood and symbolic setting.

Zhang and Wang (2023) affirm that such cohesion strategies are essential for narrative immersion, particularly in texts where physical space serves both a literal and figurative function. In *The Last Leaf*, the physical boundaries of the apartment and the wall outside Johnsy's window become metaphoric constraints on her will to live, and the consistent spatial references reinforce this symbolism.

4.3 Contribution to Mood and Atmosphere

One of the key narrative functions of PPs in *The Last Leaf* lies in their ability to establish and maintain mood. This aligns with Halliday's (1971) claim that circumstantial elements in literary texts often contribute to the development of tone and stylistic texture. Consider the following:

A persistent, cold rain fell, mingled with snow.

The rain still beat against the windowpanes.

Here, the PPs *with snow* and *against the window panes* serve as circumstances of Manner and Location, respectively. These elements are not strictly necessary for understanding the process ("was falling" or "beat"), but they enrich the clause by evoking sensory imagery. The cold, relentless environment mirrors Johnsy's emotional despondency, making the setting an extension of the characters' psychological state. Moreover:

It was clinging to its stem just outside the window.

The PP *just outside the window* is a deceptively simple spatial reference, but its position—both syntactically and narratively—imbues it with symbolic weight. The leaf, and its location outside the window, becomes a metaphor for hope and perseverance. Thompson (2014) emphasized that the textual role of adjuncts includes their ability to modulate affect and reader engagement, a role clearly fulfilled by spatial PPs in this context. Mood is further intensified through repeated reference to weather and setting, such as:

The day wore away, and even through the twilight, they could see the lone ivy leaf clinging to its stem against the wall.

This instance combines both temporal and spatial circumstances (*through the twilight* and *against the wall*) to create a melancholic and suspenseful atmosphere. These circumstantial elements act cumulatively to build a thematic tension between despair and hope, mirroring the central narrative arc.

4.4 Thematic Foregrounding through Marked Themes

Marked themes—elements placed at the beginning of a clause that are not typically expected in that position—are another important function fulfilled by prepositional phrases in the story. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) argue that such thematic structures draw attention to information that the writer deems important. In *The Last Leaf*, many clauses begin with PPs that set the thematic frame before the process unfolds. For example:

At the foot of the ivy-covered wall was the blank side of the next house.

Here, the PP *"At the foot of the ivy-covered wall"* is a marked theme that establishes spatial context before introducing the subject. This ordering creates a dramatic focus on setting, foregrounding the wall that will later play a central symbolic role in the story. Another example:

In the afternoon they found the doctor's orders waiting.

The PP *In the afternoon* is a temporal marker that adds nuance to the unfolding narrative. These thematic prepositional elements guide the reader's attention and temporally structure the narrative sequence. Ryu (2020) reported that learners who used prepositional marked themes produced more coherent and reader-oriented texts—findings that reinforce the rhetorical function of these constructions in professional literary writing. In addition to thematic structuring, these marked PPs often carry a narrative or symbolic function. For instance:

On the bare wall a penciled drawing of a man with a lantern had been sketched.

The use of *"On the bare wall"* as the marked theme not only locates the visual focus but also hints at symbolic light or guidance, which later correlates with Behrman's sacrificial act. The drawing becomes a foreshadowing device embedded in a circumstantial element.

4.5 Symbolism and Ideational Interplay

A noteworthy finding in this study is the symbolic layering present in prepositional phrases, revealing that their function extends beyond mere clause adjuncts. Many spatial and temporal PPs carry metaphorical or ideational weights.

The repetition of the phrase *"outside the window"*, for instance, constructs a spatial dichotomy between life (inside) and death or the unknown (outside). As Johnsy stares *"out of the window"* at the ivy leaf, the external becomes a canvas upon which internal emotional states are projected. Halliday (1971) describes this interaction as a linguistic realization of symbolic meaning, where grammar enacts metaphor. Furthermore, phrases such as:

by the bedside, on the floor, and *over the shoulders*

It serves not only to localize action but also to humanize and sensitize interactions. These PPs help construct affective meaning, shaping the reader's empathy and emotional response. As Eggins (2004) explains, circumstances serve as "optional but meaning-laden" components of the clause, capable of expanding and intensifying the experiential landscape.

The analysis of *The Last Leaf* revealed that prepositional phrases perform multiple significant functions in the narrative. They not only serve as circumstantial elements that support transitivity structures but also contribute to thematic foregrounding, textual cohesion, mood construction, and symbolic resonance. Through marked themes and ideational elaboration, PPs in O. Henry's story contribute deeply to the realization of both plot and poetic meaning.

5. Discussion

5.1 Experiential Meaning-Making through Circumstantial Phrases

One of the central tenets of SFL, as articulated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), is that language is a resource for making meaning, especially experiential meaning through ideational metafunction. Prepositional phrases, when functioning as circumstantial elements, serve to enrich this experiential landscape by providing details about location, time, manner, cause, and other dimensions.

The findings from *The Last Leaf* support this theory. The frequent use of PPs, such as *in a small part of the city west of Washington Square* and *at the top of a squatty, three-story brick house*, illustrates how writers use spatial and temporal adjuncts to build a textured world. These circumstantial elements are not mere add-ons; they perform essential narrative functions, establishing the physical, social, and psychological settings in which the story unfolds. As Eggins (2004) noted, such elements help flesh out the process structure of the clause, contributing significantly to the reader's comprehension and imagination.

Moreover, these findings align with Guo and Feng's (2022) assertion that PPs play a critical role in constructing reader immersion through spatial anchoring. In O. Henry's narrative, the spatial constraints

mirror the emotional constraints of the characters. Thus, the SFL framework not only validates the grammatical function of PPs but also emphasizes their semantic and narrative utility.

5.2 Thematic Structure and Foregrounding

The role of PPs in thematic foregrounding is another significant finding of this study. Halliday (1994) highlights the importance of the theme in the clause structure, defining it as the element that serves as the point of departure for the message. The marked use of PPs as clause-initial themes (e.g., *in the afternoon, at the foot of the ivy-covered wall*) foregrounds particular experiential meanings, steering the reader's attention toward setting, mood, or symbolic cues.

This finding also corroborates Ryu's (2020) study on EFL student narratives, which revealed that PPs used as marked themes helped establish coherence and reader orientation. In *The Last Leaf,* these thematic PPs contribute to narrative pacing and focus, marking shifts in time and space and occasionally introducing metaphorical or emotional significance. This further supports Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) claim that the thematic structure is a key locus of meaning-making.

What becomes evident is that O. Henry employs thematic prepositional phrases to manipulate the reader perspective, emphasizing the external world to mirror internal states. This interaction between thematic and ideational metafunctions illustrates the integrative power of the SFL in literary stylistics, revealing how form and meaning coevolve.

5.3 Cohesion and Narrative Continuity

Another layer of significance in the study's findings is the contribution of PPs to textual cohesion. According to Halliday and Hasan (1985), cohesion is realized through lexical and grammatical devices that link sentences and clauses across a text. In *The Last Leaf*, prepositional phrases such as *through the window*, *on the bricks of the next house*, and *by the bedside* serve as cohesive devices, maintaining continuity across narrative sequences.

Thompson (2014) argues that textual metafunction is often overlooked in stylistic studies, despite being crucial for understanding how texts are held together. This study shows that circumstantial PPs act as bridges between events and scenes, creating a cohesive spatial and temporal framework. In doing so, they also modulate the mood and guide the reader's attention.

The recurrence of PPs linked to a singular motif—the ivy leaf outside the window—demonstrates how spatial cohesion can reinforce symbolic meaning. Zhang and Wang (2023) emphasized the role of such lexical patterns in building narrative immersion, particularly in learner texts. The same principle operates in professional literature, illustrating the universality of SFL insights across genres and proficiency levels.

5.4 Symbolism and Ideological Projection

One of the more nuanced contributions of this study is its demonstration that prepositional phrases, beyond their syntactic role, often carry symbolic and ideological weight. Halliday (1971) proposed that language enacts ideology and that literary style is one of its most powerful vehicles. In this context, PPs such as those *outside the window* or *against the wall* become not just spatial referents but ideologically charged metaphors.

The persistent juxtaposition of interior and exterior spaces, realized through spatial PPs, creates a dichotomy between life and death, hope and despair. These motifs are enacted linguistically, turning grammar into narrative structure and symbolic discourse. The ivy leaf's placement *just outside the window* reflects Johnsy's oscillation between surrender and survival.

This insight supports the notion of the clause as a multifunctional unit, where the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions intersect. As Eggins (2004) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) maintain, literary grammar operates at all these levels simultaneously. Thus, circumstantial PPs can be interpreted not only as grammatical devices but also as symbolic instruments.

5.5 Pedagogical and Analytical Implications

The findings of this study have several implications for both pedagogy and linguistic analysis. For educators in ESL and EFL contexts, the role of prepositional phrases in narrative construction offers a useful entry point for discussions of grammar as meaning. Instead of treating PPs as peripheral grammatical elements, instructors can highlight their semantic richness and narrative potential.

Ryu's (2020) research on learner writing emphasized the instructional value of teaching circumstantial elements, showing that such knowledge enhances both writing quality and coherence. The current study extends this claim to literary analysis, suggesting that even advanced texts benefit from SFL-informed approaches to clause analysis. In doing so, it validates the SFL as a flexible and powerful tool for understanding both learner discourse and expert discourse.

In terms of future research, the findings open several paths. Comparative studies between different literary genres or authors could reveal varying uses of PPs in narrative style. Additionally, cross-linguistic comparisons could explore how different languages use circumstantial structures for setting construction.

The findings contribute to literary stylistics, linguistic theory, and pedagogical practice, offering a more nuanced appreciation of how language works in the literature. As such, the study confirms Halliday's view that language is not just a tool for expressing meaning but also a system for constructing and negotiating reality in discourse.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

The primary aim of this research was to investigate the role of PPs in setting descriptions and overall narrative structures within the short story *The Last Leaf*. By applying the SFL framework, particularly Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) transitivity and thematic systems, the study revealed that PPs were not only syntactic adjuncts but also integral to constructing meaning at the ideational, interpersonal, and textual levels:

First, PPs frequently serve as circumstantial elements that provide details about location, time, cause, and manner. These circumstantial meanings enriched the experiential dimension of the narrative, grounding abstract emotional content in tangible, sensory details. This aligns with the ideational metafunction of language.

Second, prepositional phrases often appear in thematically marked positions, allowing the author to foreground specific spatial or temporal information and steer reader interpretation. This highlighted their textual function in organizing information and constructing coherent discourse.

Third, PPs contributed to cohesion and continuity within the narrative. Their repetition and recurrence around central motifs (e.g., *the ivy leaf, the wall,* and *the window*) provided spatial and symbolic anchors, enhancing immersion and reinforcing narrative tension.

Fourth, PPs often have symbolic and emotional weights. Their consistent use in contrasting interior and exterior spaces symbolized the character's emotional struggles, the proximity of death, and the persistence of hope. This revealed their interpersonal and symbolic functions in literary discourse.

Finally, the pedagogical value of PPs was also evident. Highlighting their narrative and symbolic roles can enhance ESL learners' understanding of how grammar can be used creatively to express nuanced meanings.

6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study affirm the theoretical propositions of Hallidayan linguistics, particularly the multifunctional view of language. The clause is not merely a unit of grammar but also a site for multiple simultaneous meaning-making processes. Prepositional phrases, often dismissed in pedagogical contexts

as secondary, are shown to be central to both semantic and stylistic operations in narrative texts.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates the effectiveness of the SFL as a tool for literary stylistics. The integration of transitivity, thematic structure, and cohesion analysis allows for a multilayered understanding of how texts function. This affirms Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) view that language serves as a resource for constructing reality, both physically and symbolically.

Practically, this research has applications for literary pedagogy, particularly in ESL/EFL classrooms. It provides a model for teaching grammar through the literature—not as a set of decontextualized rules but as a living system that authors use to shape meaning and emotion. By exploring how prepositional phrases work in real text, learners can develop greater syntactic awareness and narrative sensitivity.

6.3 Recommendations for Language Teaching and Literary Analysis

a) Integrating the SFL into the ESL/EFL Curriculum: Educators should consider incorporating SFL frameworks into the teaching of grammar and writing. Traditional approaches that isolate grammatical elements from meaning-making contexts tend to fail in engaging students or enhancing their expressive capabilities. In contrast, teaching prepositional phrases as carriers of circumstantial, thematic, and symbolic meaning can transform grammar instruction into a more purposeful and analytical activity.

b) Using Literary Texts for Grammar Awareness: Literary texts, particularly short stories such as *The Last Leaf*, provide rich material for grammar awareness. They offer authentic contexts in which grammatical forms carry narrative and emotional weight. Instructors should use annotated literary passages to highlight how PPs function in setting, theme progression, and characterization. This approach can improve learners' ability to interpret and produce more complex and expressive sentences.

c) Promoting Stylistic Analysis among Students: Introducing students to stylistic analysis through the SFL can foster a deeper appreciation of literary crafts. Rather than focusing solely on thematic content, educators can guide students to examine how form and function interact. Questions such as "Why does the author begin the sentence with a PP?" or "What effect does the spatial setting create on the mood?" can encourage critical thinking.

d) Bridging Linguistics and Literary Studies: This study shows that linguistic theory and literary criticism are not mutually exclusive but are deeply interconnected. Future syllabi in literature and linguistics programs should promote interdisciplinary analysis. Linguists can benefit from seeing grammar in action, whereas literary scholars can gain new tools for textual analysis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should expand the scope of this study beyond a single short story to explore prepositional phrase (PP) usage across various literary and linguistic contexts. One promising direction involves comparative genre studies, which analyze how PPs function differently in poetry, drama, and nonfiction than in prose fiction. Cross-linguistic research could also yield valuable insights by examining how different languages employ circumstantial elements to achieve similar narrative effects. Large-scale corpus-based studies would help quantify the frequency, thematic positioning, and functional distribution of PPs across literary texts, providing empirical data to complement qualitative analyses. From a pedagogical perspective, developmental studies could track how second language learners at different proficiency levels acquire and utilize PPs in narrative writing, assessing the impact of targeted grammar instruction. Additionally, multimodal research could explore the interplay between linguistic and visual elements in graphic novels or illustrated texts, investigating how spatial settings are coconstructed through both PPs and imagery. These diverse approaches collectively deepen our understanding of prepositional phrases as crucial meaning-making resources across multiple dimensions of language and communication.

Limitations of the Study

Like any focused study, this research has its limitations. First, the analysis was confined to a single text,

which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the interpretive nature of stylistic analysis entails a degree of subjectivity. Although grounded in a rigorous framework, some functional classifications may be open to alternative readings. Additionally, the scope of the study was limited to prepositional phrases. Other elements, such as adverbs, mood adjuncts, and nominal groups, also contribute to setting and should be explored in future research. Finally, while the study highlights pedagogical implications, it does not include empirical classroom data.

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