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## **Continuous tenses in British and American fiction: A frequency based comparison**

### **Introduction**

The goal of the study is to establish the differences and similarities in the usage of the Continuous and Perfect Continuous Tenses in the texts of British and American writers on the one hand, and between the female and male writers on the other hand. For this purpose we investigated the prose texts of some British and American writers: Jane Austen, Susan Ferrier, Agatha Christie, Joan K. Rowling, Daphne du Maurier, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, Margaret Mitchell, J. Carol Oats, H. Beecher Stowe, Louise Erdich, Margaret Truman, Tess Gerritsen, Ernest Hemingway, Fitzgerald, John Updike, Sidney Sheldon, T. Wolf, and Theodore Dreiser.

The prose texts of these writers have never been studied from the point of view of a quantitative grammatical in this aspect. This is the first attempt of this sort. Marie Teshitelova and Reinhard Koehler, who have collected all the works of quantitative linguistics, do not mention any research in this respect neither on the writers mentioned above, nor any other English and American writers. Thus one could call this a pioneering study. It is important for us to find out that no other writers were investigated by quantitative methods concerning the frequency of the use of the Continuous and Perfect Continuous Tenses in their texts. We can find an enormous amount of detailed description of the application of quantitative methods on many problems, but not the one under our investigation in the famous books *Quantitative Methods in Linguistics* by Marie Teshitelova (1992), and *Bibliography of Quantitative Linguistics* by Reinhard Koehler (1995). It is necessary to use the methods of quantitative linguistics in order to juxtapose the styles of different writers and discover their differences, which can be vividly seen by the usage of various grammatical features.

The investigation of this sort obtains a lot of new information. One can see that the grammatical parameters of the male and female prose writers as well as their individual characteristics are sometimes different and sometimes similar. The results of the research are quite important because original methods of the investigation of the style and grammar features of the British American writers are applied. The results obtained in this research may help to place correctly different British and American writers in their use of the Continuous and Perfect Continuous Tenses. In its turn, it can help scholars to discern minute differences between the writers.

## Materials and Methods

The material of this research consists of the prose texts by 21 writers: Five female British writers, three male British writers, American writers and seven male American writers. For the detailed description of the material see the Appendix.

We used the methods of mathematical linguistics, which are described in many books on mathematical linguistics. Let us just remark some of them (Piotrowsky et al., 1997; Tambovtsev, 2001, 2002, 2003). There are many mathematical methods in linguistics but we have chosen the most simple of them, which can be understood by every classical linguistic student, not concerned with mathematics. At the same time this simple method allows a linguist to find intrinsic and covered linguistic tendencies in the text of every author. It is the calculation of the frequencies of occurrence of some English Tenses (Continuous and Perfect Continuous) on the sample of 10 thousand words of every author. The metrico - graphical method helps us to reveal some regularities. We represented the results of calculations in the form of several tables because it discovers the concealed regularities of the dynamical functioning of the given English Tenses as the grammatical features of the style of the chosen writers.

Our task is twofold. On the one hand, we investigate the prose of female and male writers in the chosen aspect. On the other hand, we also thought to investigate the difference between American and British prose in the same aspect. This set of writers is big enough to come to certain reliable conclusions. The limitations on time and space do not allow us to take up more writers. However, we understand perfectly well that one needs more writers to make further and more solid conclusions.

### Individual writers and their texts

(see Appendix)

### Choice of Features and Samples

It is necessary to point out that in our research we do not take into account the semantic features of the text. We focus on the formal grammatical features we have chosen. We research the text as a sort of object. This object has many possible features, of which we have chosen several:

**Past Continuous Tense**

**Present Continuous Tense**

**Future Continuous Tense**

**Subjunctive Form of the Continuous Tense, i.e. modal verbs with this tense**

**Past Perfect Continuous Tense**

**Present Perfect Continuous Tense**

**Future Perfect Continuous Tense**

We consider these features to be significant since they are usually described as essential in English (Crystal, 1997: 204-205). Thus we can state that we have received some essential quantitative grammatical features for every writer. It is important to point out that these features characterise the peculiarities of each writer fairly well and allow us to differentiate one writer from the other. One can say that our method is, in a way, a descriptive estimation of a writer but this description is not subjective, since we fix the frequency of occurrence of several essential

features mathematically. Therefore, the results of the description are quite objective from this point of view. One can say that every reader feels the prose of this or that writer in their own way. So, the perception of an individual reader may be subjective. We can't say that the perception of this reader is objective; on the contrary, it is quite subjective. But one can be sure that our quantitative data are objective. Thus, these results, represented in graphical form and in tables, allow us to make solid and reliable conclusions.

The question of what size sample we must take is difficult. Different population sizes are consulted in indifferent fields of quantitative linguistics. In phonological statistics the size of the population sample is usually 1000 units. In this case, we deal with lexical statistics. Therefore, a unit is a word not a phoneme. So, it may need more units than one thousand. In fact, the sample should not be too small. Consequently in grammatical statistics, like ours, the sample should be of the size that does not allow the chosen characteristics to fluctuate too much. We have noticed that the sample of 1000 words allows a great fluctuation, so we had to take a bigger sample. It turned out that the sample of 10000 words for the occurrence of each of the seven features is all right, at least, not too small. If we take a sample less than that, the data fluctuate too much. This means that the smaller samples do not represent the author's text adequately. If the sample is too big, then it is more time and effort consuming than justified by the results.

However, it is more important to pay attention to the fact that the samples of the writers should be equal. One can't state anything, that is whether the texts are similar or not, when samples are not equal. Thus, we should take a sample of the same size for every author. One can measure the similarity of the texts if the samples are equal. In this study the samples are equal, which means that the results are quite commensurable. It's quite necessary that the material for the research is commensurable. The samples of the same sizes allow us to receive commensurable results for all the authors. The frequency of occurrence of the chosen features may show the distance between the authors in the feature being measured. Therefore, the more similar two texts are, the less the distance between them.

One can see that the distance is directly proportional to the values of the frequency of occurrence. That is, we measure the difference. This is why one can state the following rule: the less the difference is, the greater the similarity between the texts is. We use the terms "similarity" and "distance" in their usual meaning reflected in a dictionary, but not in the strict mathematical definition. So, we understand similarity and distance as a measure of space between two points, places or objects (Hornby, 1984: 177). This states the degree or amount of separation between two objects (Webster, 1965: 242). One can thus say that the objects (in this case - texts) are closer if they are more similar.

The main assumption in this work is that every text sample of an author is an object with certain values of the selected features to measure the distances with. One can assume that the totality of all the objective features of some text may be called the style of that text. In this case we don't speak of the meaning of the text. Our approach is formal, i.e., our approach takes into consideration the concrete forms of the text, embodied in some forms of words. We measure the numerical characteristics of a certain text to compare it with some other texts by the same or different authors. These numerical characteristics are the frequencies of occurrence of certain

chosen forms, called features (Tambovtsev, 2003). The values of these features construct the stylistic mosaic of this or that text.

In this case the selected features are the values of the frequency of occurrence of some grammar forms. We believe that the frequencies of these forms show certain concrete manifestations of the tendencies of an author. We assume the tendency toward certain modes of grammar to be stable enough to produce an underlying linguistic stability. In our study we must distinguish between insignificant fluctuations of the selected features which do not affect the basic character of the author's style, on the one hand, and the significant fluctuations which indicate stylistic differences, on the other hand.

Our study uses the methods of mathematical linguistic. One can't help agreeing with Lubomir Dolezhel and Richard W. Bailey, who think that not only linguistics, but also many other fields in the humanities have profited from the application of mathematical models and techniques. Stylistics has become the crossroads for the interests of linguists and mathematicians to yield some new models. The statistical investigation of texts can explain the intrinsic features inherent in the text (Dolezhel et al., 1969: VII, etc.). We agree with the definition of style given by Werner Winter, who believes that style may be said to be characterized by a pattern of recurrent selections from the inventory of optional features of a language (Winter, 1969: 3). Like Dolezhel, we adhere to the foundations of the statistical theory of style, which considers style to be a probabilistic phenomenon. We can regard style as a preference for one or another mode of expression. The overall character of style is called forth by the degree of presence (or absence) of a certain mode of expression, rather than by its exclusive use or complete suppression (Dolezhel, 1969: 10 - 11). In other words a probabilistic approach takes into account the frequency with which this or that feature is used in the text (Tambovtsev, 1997: 171 - 172).

We do not think that L. Dolezhel is right to assume that a numerical stylistic theory can only be said to account for stylistic differences between texts (Dolezhel, 1969: 11). In fact, it can provide different measures, which allow us to construct a taxonomy of styles. Nevertheless, we agree with L. Dolezhel that style-forming processes are to be considered a fundamental component of linguistic performance: style originates in the process of producing (encoding) a text by a certain author (Dolezhel, 1969: 11). In our opinion, a probabilistic approach may reveal a substantial part of linguistic performance.

Speaking about style as a statistical concept, Gustav Herdan defines style as the general characteristics of a person's way of expressing himself in language. What Herdan's definition implies is that no matter what somebody who is said to have a style of his own is writing about, it will bear the imprint of the personality of the writer. Thus, for G. Herdan, "style" is used in the sense of a subconscious tendency, which the writer obeys. It implies that the linguistic performance of a person is much a matter of the particular mental make-up of the individual (Herdan, 1966: 70). It is necessary to point out that authorship is directly connected with the individual style of the author. So one can say that the author is his style.

A specialist in the studies of authorship attribution, David L. Mealand, remarks that anyone familiar with literature knows that there are differences that we sense almost instantly and instinctively when we move between texts by different authors. We just know that their style is

different. Different authors write in different ways and they express themselves differently (1999: 479). Thus, the authorship attribution method allows us to define the degree of affinity between the authors. So, the method of authorship attribution studies is close to our method if we look on the problem of the distance between the authors from the following angle: the less the distance, the similar the texts under study, i.e. the more affinity between the authors. If the texts are similar enough, one can claim that the author is the same. For this reason we took texts of different authors and the texts of the same author. We try to put forward another attribution method to the many other methods which already exist. The uses of these methods may be found else where (Holmes, 1985: 328 - 329; Rudman, 1998: 352 - 353). However, we can't help agreeing with Joseph Rudman that for every paper announcing an authorship attribution method that "works", there is a counter paper that points out real or imagined crucial shortcomings (Rudman, 1998: 352).

This happens because it is possible to find better features as the basis for analysis. Nevertheless, we believe that the quantitative values of the chosen features may be reliable clues to judge the cognising process of different authors. The result of this process may be some special sort of the text, which has different values of different features. The features which we selected do not seem to depend on any situation being described in the text, but they seem to show the peculiar way this or that author depicts that reality. Our selected features do not intersect. Nevertheless, our study is only a small step to solve the problem of grammatical features, which can differentiate the styles of different authors. This needs deeper and further studies to learn if there are some more stable grammar phenomena than those mentioned above in texts of an author.

One can see that to differentiate texts stylistically it is possible to use many characteristics, among them, for instance, the length and types of syllables, of words, sentences, the richness of vocabulary, as presented by G. U. Yule in 1944, or concentration of vocabulary, by P. Guiraud, M. Teshitelova, J. Mistrik, etc. (Brainerd, 1974: 248 - 252; Fucks, 1968; Teshitelova, 1992: 160 - 176).

Let us consider in detail the features taken for our study defined by different grammars of English: M. A. Belyaeva, V. L. Kaushanskaya, R. L. Kovner, and others (Belyaeva, 1971: 165; Kaushanskaya et al., 1967: 170).

## **Results**

We depict the results of our research in the tables and graphically. Before going into details of our results we should discuss the chosen grammatical features. Moreover, we must consider not only Present continuous tense, but the notion of tense in general. Similarly, we must consider not only Past Continuous Tense, but also the notion of Past versus Present or Future, Perfect Continuous versus Continuous, etc.

We took for our research several grammars which discuss the English tenses chosen for this study to see different and similar points of view. Roderick Jacobs agrees with Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik that every language has its peculiar problem of Tense identity, and verb Tense and Aspect are two of the most problematic areas of English. They think that one serious problem in dealing with the English Tense system is our tendency to treat the verb forms as directly corresponding to the grammatical properties of time reference, form, and meaning. They should

be treated as distinct dimensions since in no language do tenses and time references match up on a one-to-one basis.

We think that it is necessary to understand Tense and Aspect as having to do with form. Tense is the grammatical marking on verbs that usually indicates time reference relative to either the time of speaking or the time at which some other situation might be in force. When we deal with Tense, we're dealing with actual language forms used to represent time reference notions. Indeed, we're not even concerned with all the kinds of language forms used for time reference, but just the verb forms. (Jacobs, 1995: 187).

Dennis Freeborn expressed quite an unusual point of view that there are only two Tense forms in English. It seems puzzling, because it is quite clear that we can refer to past, present and future time, and that, therefore, there should be at least three tenses to do this. But if we limit the strict use of tense to a grammatical, marked form of verbs, you can see that in English there is no future tense form of the verb, because we can't refer to the future by simply inflecting the verb. We have to use additional auxiliary verbs (Freeborn, 1993: 92)

### **The Present Continuous Tense**

The Present Continuous Tense is often called "The Present Progressive Tense". It is one of the more complex bits of Modern English grammar. One should be aware of the fact that some specialists in grammar prefer to talk about *aspect*, but not *tense*. Expressing this point of view (e.g., Lyons, Quirk, etc.) David Crystal writes that aspect is a category used in grammatical descriptions of verbs, referring primarily to the way the grammar marks the duration or type of activity denoted by the verb. In the English language there is a contrast between the "indefinite, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous" aspect. This is shown in different forms of the verb, that is, formally. The English verb makes a formal distinction, which is usually analysed as aspectual: the contrast between "continuous" (or "progressive") and "simple" (or "non-progressive") duration of action. The perfect aspect classically refers to the completion of an action. The continuous aspect expresses duration of an action without specifying completion (Crystal, 1980: 14). Tense is a grammatical category which marks the time at which the action denoted by the verb took place. Traditionally, a distinction is made between past, present, and future tense forms, often with further divisions (perfect, pluperfect, etc.). In linguistics, the relationship between tense and time has been the subject of much study. It is now plain that there

Tense forms (that is the variations in the morphological form of the verb) can be used to signal meanings other than temporal ones (Crystal, 1980: 352). This is especially vivid in the case of modal verbs, which are used with various English tenses and aspects. In this case the verb forms which coincide with some tense forms express neither the tense nor the aspect, but the attitudes on the part of the speaker towards the factual content of his utterance, e.i., uncertainty, definiteness, vagueness, possibility, etc (Crystal, 1980: 230). We had to introduce a special class of the continuous forms with the modal verbs since they referred neither to the past, present or future continuous tense. Let us give some examples:

What can be coming now? (H. Beecher Stowe. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. 18.

A man can't put his nose into the door, but you think he must be coming to buy him. (ibid., p.11)

We would be willing, sir, to increase the rate of compensation. (ibid. p. 13)

She noticed that they were pleased and thoughts of her sister's home and the meal that would be awaiting her quickened her steps. (Th. Dreiser. *Sister Carrier*, p. 13).

Her face shows none of the worry she must be feeling about why nobody comes for the boy. (John Updike. *Rabbit, Run*, p. 25).

He's seen it there all winter but he always thought some kid would be coming back for it. (ibid., p. 12)

The dogs got to know me - by the end of the year they'd be waiting for me. (T. Wolf. *This Boy's Life*, p. 13)

Let us again stress that many English grammars point out that we use the Present Continuous Tense to talk about some action at the moment of speaking (Burgess et al., 2003: 175; Gude et al., 2002: 136; Gude et al., 2003: 134; Eckersley, 1965-a: 99; Haines et al., 1997: 200-201; Hewings, 2001: 2; Murphy, 1995: 2-3; Soars, 2001: 132-133). Besides describing the main idea of the Present Continuous Tense as some action at the moment of speaking, many of them point out to some other additional aspects. Constant practice embeds them in a writer's style so that it all seem natural. Thus we take up the hard task of analysing all the use of the Present Continuous Tense in the texts of some British and American male and female writers.

### **Frequency of use of the present continuous tense by different writers**

Let us analyse in detail how the given British and American female and male writers use the Present Continuous (Progressive) Tense. We can notice that every writer uses the Present Continuous Tense differently, though there are some common tendencies. First of all, it is interesting to see in how many cases the Present Continuous Tense is used in its main function, that is, the author describes something which is happening at the moment of speaking. But before that let us consider the usage of the Present Continuous Tense in general. The mean of the frequency of occurrence vividly indicates that the British male writers do not use it as often as the American male writers (c.f. 2.0 vs 21.7). In general American male writers use it much more often. British female writers also do not use it as often as the American female writers (c.f. 13.2 vs 21.1). American male and female writers use the Present Continuous Tense more or less equally (c.f. 21.7 vs 21.1). This may be because of the fact that they all happen to be more modern writers.

As a matter of fact, we noticed that some British male writers (e.g. Daniel Defoe) do not use the Present Continuous Tense at all. Some British male writers use it rather seldom (only 3 times each, i.e. Jonathan Swift and Charles Dickens). We are apt to attribute it to the time of the creation of their novels. In fact the female British writers also follow the same tendency. In the books of the older British female writers the Present Continuous Tense is used much less (e.g. Susan Ferrier - 8 and Jane Austen - 6), than in the prose of more modern female writers (Daphne Du Maurier - 9, Agatha Christie - 20, Joan K. Rowling - 23). The tendency seems to be that the Present Continuous Tense is used more in modern prose. This tendency is observed in the prose of the American writers as well, both male and female.

Theodore Dreiser used the Present Continuous Tense 10 times in the sample of 10 thousand words. Some of his sentences clearly indicate that he describes something, which is happening at the moment of speaking. Let us give examples:

I am looking for something to do. (Dreiser. *Sister Carrie*, p. 9)

In this sense it is also used in the Past Continuous Tense.

She noticed that men and women were smiling. (Dreiser. *Sister Carrie*, p. 13)

However, we found only one case in this meaning for the Present Continuous Tense. There are 4 cases with Present Continuous Tense used by Dreiser to show Future, that is the construction *is (are) going to*.

I am going to study stock at our place and get new samples. (Dreiser. *Sister Carrie*, p.3)

We found no cases when Dreiser uses Present Continuous Tense to show the action going on at the time of speaking, that is in its main sense. There are 5 cases showing something, which is happening around now but not necessarily at the moment of speaking and 3 cases with the "is (am, are) going to" construction, which indicates to the nearest future.

They are putting up great buildings there. (Dreiser. *Sister Carrie*, p. 3)

There is 1 case in Dreiser's sample when Present Continuous Tense is used to depict a changing situation over a period of time.

Chicago is getting to be a great town. (Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p.4)

John Updike uses Present Continuous Tense in its main sense that is to describe something which is happening at the moment of speaking in 17 cases, out of overall 23 cases. Thus, it covers the majority of cases.

She is watching a group of children called Mouseketeers. (Updike, *Rabbit*, p.14)

John Updike uses the construction *is (are) going to* to show future only once.

They are going to wake up some fair morning without a protector. (Updike. *Rabbit*, p. 23)

We found 3 cases when Updike uses Present Continuous Tense to show something which is happening around now but not necessarily at the moment of speaking.

I am giving it up. (Updike. *Rabbit*, 14)

Again only 1 Updike's case is found when Present Continuous Tense is used to depict a changing situation over a period of time.

It feels like he is reaching down through years to touch this tautness. (Updike, p. 10)

It is not always possible to distinguish if the author uses the Present Continuous Tense in its main sense from a sentence. It is often necessary to take the context into account. Generally speaking, the British and American writers, both male and female, use the main sense of the Present Continuous Tense only in the half of the cases. One can see more details in the Tables and the Figures.

### **The Continuous Tense**

The Continuous Tense consists of the Past, Present and Future Continuous Tense. One has to understand what the Continuous Tense means in general. Madeline Semmelmeier and Donald Bolander also call the Continuous forms the progressive forms of a verb. They show that the action is continuing. So, the Progressive forms are used to show that an action is continuing or progressing at the time indicated by a particular tense (Semmelmeier et al., 1987: 121). Roger Lass calls the Continuous Tense as a Progressive Tense, because an activity, expressed by it, is currently in progress. He thinks that the progressive tense encodes the notion "being in process of doing something". Roger Lass notes that progressive normally occurs only with verbs of "action", rather than "state" (Lass, 1987: 163).

Male and female writers employ Continuous Tense similarly. Nevertheless, there are some peculiar tendencies. The same can be said about the American and the British usage.

Both Theodore Dreiser and Daphne du Maurier use Continuous Tense in the same way: Theodore Dreiser - 0,03%; Daphne du Maurier - 0,03%. For some reason, J. K. Rowling uses Continuous tense by six times more (0,19%). May be, Rowling is more interested in the process of the action than either Du Maurier or Dreiser. They are more interested in facts and results of the action, rather than in its process. This feature seems to be characteristic only for Joan K. Rowling. In order to understand the Continuous tenses better, one should also consider other tenses, for instance, the Indefinite Tenses, the Perfect Tenses, the Past Tenses, the Future Tenses, etc.

Roger Lass marks the Perfect Tense as a modified component that itself on a cline somewhere between a simple tense like past and a true aspect like progressive (continuous). The Perfect Tense can function as a kind of second-order tense, encoding the notion "prior-to", but in relation to something other than the speaker's zero point (Lass, 1987: 164). Raymond Murphy states that Perfect Tense is used when the action is finished, but there is a connection with the event, about which the speaker talks.

Our data show that the use of the Perfect Tense in the female prose is dispersed. It may indicate the emotional inclinations of women. In general the mean usage of the Perfect Tense in the male prose is much greater: Daphne du Maurier - 0,18%; Joan K. Rowling - 0,19%; Theodore Dreiser - 1,90%. On the other hand, the frequent usage of the perfect tense may be a characteristics of American prose, which Dreiser represents. Therefore, British English, which Rowling and Daphne du Maurier represent, shows low usage.

Let us compare the Continuous Tense and the Perfect Continuous Tense. The Perfect Continuous Tense is used for the activity that has recently stopped or just stopped. There is a connection with

the Present (Murphy, 1995: 14). The Perfect Continuous Tense has the same features as the Perfect Tense and the Continuous Tense. This is why, we must consider these both Tenses to understand Perfect Continuous. All the writers don't use Perfect Continuous Tense as much as Perfect Tense or as Continuous Tense. The male prose (Dreiser) doesn't use Perfect Continuous Tense at all. Daphne Du Maurier uses very little of it - 0,0013%, Rowling uses - 0,01%. This is why, it is strange. I mean that I don't understand why we should study Perfect Continuous Tense at school if, in fact, it is not practically used either in British or in American English. Rowling uses Perfect Continuous very little, but more emotionally than Daphne du Maurier. It is strange that Theodore Dreiser does not use it all. It may be so, that Perfect Continuous Tense is too complex for the simple ordinary Americans depicted by Theodore Dreiser.

Let us compare the Continuous Tense and the Indefinite Tense. The usage of the Indefinite Tenses does not allow us to state that there is any difference between the prose of male writers (Dreiser - 1,00%) and female writers (Rowling - 1,05%). There is no difference between British and American prose, as well. However, there is a great difference between Dreiser and Rowling, on the one hand, against Du Maurier on the other hand (0, 50%). Again, the female prose is more emotional than the male prose.

### **The Continuous Tense and Modal Verbs**

Since the modal verbs are used with the forms of Continuous and Perfect Continuous tenses, it is necessary to touch upon the notion of modality. Michael Halliday describes modality as the type of the speaker's opinion regarding the probability that his observation is valid (Halliday, 1988: 332). It is necessary to underline that modal verbs do not describe the action. Modal verbs express the attitude of the speaker towards the action, but not the action itself. Roger Lass regards Modality in addition to expressing some proposition or basic conceptual content. Modality is closely connected with but not identical to the traditional grammatical category of mood. One central group of modalities is encoded in a small but important group of verbs: the modal auxiliaries, or modals (Lass, 1987: 165 - 167).

We shall consider the modal verbs further. Raymond Murphy thinks that we use the modal verb *can* to say that something is possible or that somebody has the ability to do something (Murphy, 1995: 52). We use *must* to say that we feel sure something is true (Murphy, 1995: 56). We use the modal verbs *may* or *might* to say that something is a possibility (Murphy, 1995: 58). We use the modal verb "must" and "have to" to say that it is necessary to do something. Sometimes, it doesn't matter which of the modal verbs is used, but sometimes, it is of vital importance. The modal verb *Must* - is personal. The modal verb *Have to* - is impersonal. We use the modal verb *must* when we give our personal feelings. We use the modal verb *have to* for facts, not for our personal feelings (Murphy, 1995: 62).

There is some difference between the use of modal verbs in the prose of male (Dreiser - 0,16%) and female (Rowling - 0,12%, Du Maurier - 0,22%) writers. Dreiser is between these two female writers. Daphne du Maurier is more emotional in the use of the Modal verbs and Joan K. Rowling is less emotional. Probably, there is no difference between American and British use of the Modal Verbs.

In fact, Subjunctive Mood is closely connected with the Modal Verbs. E. A. Natanson defines four groups of forms, which characterise an action as unreal, probable, possible, desirable, necessary, etc. They are called the Subjective Mood (Natanson, 1968: 151). Madeline Semmelmeier and Donald Bolander point out that careful writers and speakers use the subjective mood to express a wish, a condition that is contrary to fact (not true) and a condition of uncertainty (it may be true or not true). Sometimes careful writers and speakers also use the subjective mood in making a suggestion, in making a demand, or in expressing a need (Semmelmeier et al., 1987: 141). We should bear in mind the remark of Roger Lass that modality is closely connected but not identical to the traditional grammatical category of mood (Lass, 1987: 167). This is why we look separately the feature of modality and the feature of subjunctive mood. Actually, there is no difference between female and male prose (Joan K. Rowling - 0,04%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,05%; Daphne du Maurier - 0,10%).

The mean values indicate that there is no difference between the American and the British prose. So, this feature does not differentiate the female prose from the male prose - on the one hand, and American prose from the British prose - on the other hand. Nevertheless, it is not quite useless because it vividly differentiates the individual styles. Suppositional Mood is also closely connected with the modal verbs. This feature is often united with the previous feature of the subjunctive mood. Since they are very close in sense, this feature also does not differentiate female prose from the male prose, and American prose from the British prose (Daphne du Maurier - 0,02%; Joan K. Rowling - 0,03%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,03%).

### **The Past Continuous Tense and the Past Aspect in General**

Roger Lass defines Tense and Aspect as time - related forms of a typical English verb. He denotes that "Past" includes the following Tenses:

- a) Past Simple
- b) Past Progressive
- c) Past Perfect
- d) Past Perfect Progressive

At the first stage of our investigation we analysed only Past Continuous, which is called by Roger Lass and some other specialists in grammar Past Progressive. This Tense is usually defined by all English grammars in more or less the same way Roger Lass does (Lass, 1987: 159-161).

Nevertheless, it is advisable to compare the Past Continuous Tense with the other Past Tenses. Raymond Murphy describes Past Simple as a problem. He insists that there is a special problem of Past-time reference in English: the question of how to choose between the use of the past tense and the use of the perfect aspect. The past tense is used when the past happening is related to a definite time in the past, which we may call "then". Hence, the simple past tense means 'past-happening-related-to-past-time' (Leech, et al., 1994: 68).

One can say that the usage of the Past Tenses in the English language is well reflected by the prose of the British and American writers. May be, the usage of the Past Tenses in the English language is a common phenomenon, which has no special tendencies, which the English or American prose can reflect. The usage of the Past Tenses does not indicate the difference between the female prose and the male prose, and between the American and British prose

(Daphne du Maurier - 0,83%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,86%; Joan K. Rowling - 1,20%). Joan K. Rowling shows the greatest emotional instability.

### **Present**

Earlier we described the Present Continuous Tense. Now, we'd like to say some words about the Present in comparison with the Past. Roger Lass defines the Present Tense for finite verbs in the form of Present, Present Progressive, Present Perfect, Present Perfect Progressive. He points out that the "simple" forms of the verbs constitute the Past Simple or Past Indefinite and the Present Simple, or Present Indefinite (Lass, 1987: 159-160).

The usage of all the Present Tenses does not allow us to distinguish between the female and male prose, and American and British English: Joan K. Rowling - 0,21%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,23%; Daphne du Maurier - 0,45%. Daphne du Maurier is the most emotional in the usage of the Present Tenses. Nevertheless, the difference between the individual styles of Joan K. Rowling and Daphne Du Maurier is quite vivid.

### **Future**

We have discussed the Past and the Present. Now it is time to speak about Future in general. Roderick Jacobs emphasises that the use of the Future Progressive and Future Perfect involves two auxiliary verbs: "shall" and "will" (Jacobs, 1995: 191). Roger Lass, like numerous other English grammarians, doubts that future is a real tense in English. He believes that there's reason to doubt whether it's really appropriate to talk of a "Future Tense" in English, as a genuine morphological category. He asks if there is really a grammatical category "Future", or merely a conceptual one and a collection of constructions that mark it in one way or another? The answer here is, as usual, "yes" to both alternatives (Lass, 1987: 160-162). It is interesting to notice that none of our writers used "shall". Usually they used contracted form "I'll", "we'll". And according to Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik, the use of "shall" is rather formal. (Leech et al., 1994: 76).

The graphs of all three writers show the same tendencies: Joan K. Rowling – 0.03%; Theodore Dreiser – 0.03%; Daphne du Maurier – 0.03%.

### **Active and Passive Voice**

All Continuous Tenses may be in the Active and Passive Voice. This is why, it is advisable to consider these forms. Dennis Freeborn points out that the passive form of a verb predicate is related to its active form. The active voice is thought of as more basic, and is unmarked. (Freeborn, 1993. - p. 117). Roderick Jacobs points out that the active voice order agent-action-theme seems to most English speakers the more "natural" order (Jacobs, 1995. - p.159). It's certainly the more common order. Many writing handbooks disapprove of passives. "Use active verbs", urges William Zinsser in his highly respected text on non-fiction writing, "unless there is no comfortable way to get around using a passive verb. The difference between an active-verb style and a passive-verb style-in pace, clarity and vigour is the difference between life and death for a writer." Additionally, since the agent need not be specified in passive clauses, the passive voice has been stigmatized by George Orwell and other writers as a form used by unscrupulous

politicians and others to deceive and confuse the public. Orwell's charges and Zinsser's recommendations have some validity. However, as we shall see, these critics overlook the fact that in some contexts a passive clause may be stylistically superior to its active counterpart.

By the use of Active Voice the writers differ greatly. It is possible to distinguish the female prose from the male prose. It is striking to find out that the female prose is more active than the male prose (Theodore Dreiser - 0,85%; Daphne du Maurier - 1,10%; Joan K. Rowling - 1,22%). Theodore Dreiser as the representative of the American prose is less active. As far as Passive Voice is concerned, all the writers are the same (Joan K. Rowling - 0,06%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,06%; Daphne du Maurier - 0,07%).

## Conclusions

Any text is considered here as a certain linguistic object with certain chosen features. The features have different frequency of occurrence. Here the chosen features are

The Present Continuous Tense.

The Past Continuous Tense.

The Future Continuous Tense

The Present Continuous Tense shows that some British male writers, e.g., Daniel Defoe, do not use the Present Continuous Tense at all. Some British male writers use it rather seldom (only 3 times each, i.e. Jonathan Swift and Charles Dickens). We are apt to attribute it to the time of the creation of their novels. In fact the female British writers also follow the same tendency. In the books of the earlier female British writers the Present Continuous Tense is used much less, e.g., Susan Ferrier - 8 and Jane Austen - 6, than in the prose of more modern female writers (Daphne Du Maurier - 9, Agatha Christie - 20, Joan K. Rowling - 23). The tendency seems to use The Present Continuous Tense more in modern prose. Let us consider the usage of the Present Continuous Tense in general. The mean of the frequency of occurrence vividly indicates that the British male writers do not use it as often as the American male writers (c.f. 2.0 vs 21.7). In general American male writers use it much more often. British female writers also do not use it as often as the American female writers (c.f. 13.2 vs 21.1). American male and female writers use the Present Continuous Tense more or less equally (c.f. 21.7 vs 21.1). This is mostly because they all happen to be more modern writers.

This feature, that is "Present Tense", shows that the usage of the Present Tense does not allow us to distinguish between some female and male prose: Joan K. Rowling - 0,21%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,23%; Daphne du Maurier - 0,45%. Daphne du Maurier is the most emotional in the usage of the Present Tenses.

It is not always possible to distinguish if the author uses the Present Continuous Tense in its main sense from a sentence. It is often necessary to take the context into account. Generally speaking, the British and American writers, both male and female, use the main sense of the Present Continuous Tense only in the half of the cases. One can see more details in the Tables and the Figures. Therefore, it goes without saying that the teachers of English must pay attention to those cases when the Present Continuous Tense is used to show the action happening around now but not necessarily at the moment of speaking or in the nearest future.

The Past Continuous Tense is used less by the British male than female writers. It is vividly seen by their mean frequency (c.f. 15.3 vs 20.8). American writers use it more often (c.f. female - 28.9 vs male - 35.0).

1. The general feature, that is "Continuous", shows that neither male, nor female prose use Continuous Tense differently. The same can be said about the American and the British usage. Both Theodore Dreiser and Daphne du Maurier use Continuous Tense in the same way: Theodore Dreiser (0,03%), Daphne du Maurier (0,03%). For some reason, Rowling uses Continuous by six times more (0,18%). May be, Joan K. Rowling is more interested in the process of the action than either du Maurier or Dreiser. This feature is characteristic only for Joan K. Rowling. So, the Continuous Tense differentiates the female prose very much. Therefore, the individual style plays the greater role than the group style.
2. The second general feature, that is "Perfect Continuous", shows that all the writers don't use Perfect Continuous as much as Perfect or as Continuous. The male prose (Theodore Dreiser) doesn't use Perfect Continuous at all. Daphne du Maurier uses very little of it (0,001%), Joan K. Rowling uses ten times more (0,010%). Though, the absolute use is very small, still there is a great difference between the female and male prose on the one hand, and between the American prose and British prose on the other hand. More over, there is a great difference in the female individual styles.
3. The eighth feature, that is "Subjective Mood", shows that there is no difference between female and male prose (Joan K. Rowling - 0,04%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,05%; Daphne du Maurier - 0,10%). The mean values indicate that there is no difference between the American and the British prose. So, this feature does not differentiate the female prose from the male prose - on the one hand, and American prose from the British prose on the other hand. Nevertheless, it is not quite useless because it vividly differentiates the individual styles.
4. The tenth feature, that is "Past Tense", shows that the usage of the Past Tense does not indicate the difference between the female prose and the male prose, and between the American and British prose (Daphne du Maurier - 0,83%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,86%; Joan K. Rowling - 1,20%). Joan K. Rowling shows the greatest emotional instability (Fig. 10 A).
5. The twelfth feature, that is "Future", shows that the graphs of all 3 writers have the same tendencies (Joan K. Rowling - 0,03%; Theodore Dreiser - 0,03%; Daphne du Maurier - 0,03%).
6. The following features: The Perfect Continuous Tense, The Continuous Tense, The Indefinite Tense, Participle 1, Participle 2, Gerund, Verbal noun, The Past Tense, The Present Tense, Negative distinguish the female and the male prose - on the one hand, and the American and the British - on the other hand, quite well. It means that the features mentioned above separate the writers into groups. Other features work only on the individual level. The following features: The Perfect Tense, The Infinitive, The Modal Verbs, The Subjective Mood, The Suppositional Mood, The Future Tense, Active and Passive Voice, Emphatic, can distinguish writers only individually, not as a group.
7. It is necessary to state that all the chosen features distinguish all the writers individually very well. To express it plainly, it means that basing on these 16 features, one can easily find out the individual styles of every writer, that is, to recognise every writer and to distinguish one writer from another. All these features show the emotional stability of every writer.

## Appendix 1

### List of Authors

Jane Austen  
 Agatha Christie  
 Daniel Defoe  
 Theodore Dreiser  
 Louise Erdich  
 F. Scott Fitzgerald  
 Tess Gerritsen  
 Ernest Hemingway  
 Daphne du Maurie  
 Margaret Mitchell  
 J. Carol Oats  
 Joan K. Rowling.  
 Sidney Sheldon  
 Harriet Beecher Stowe  
 Jonathan Swift  
 Margaret Truman  
 John Updike  
 Tobias Wolf

## Appendix 2

### Books used in the study

#### Female British Writers

**Jane Austen.** Sense and Sensibility. - New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961 . 313 pp. It is classified as a novel. It was published in 1811.

**Susan Edmonstone Ferrier.** Marriage. - London: Virago Press Ltd., 1986. - 513 pp. Susan E. Ferrier wrote this novel in 1810, but published it anonymously in 1818.

**Daphne du Maurier.** Rebecca. - London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1992. - 397 pp. The novel was first published in 1938.

**Joan K. Rowling.** Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. - New York: Scholastic Inc., 1999. - 341 pp. The first publication of the novel was in 1999.

#### Male British Writers.

**Daniel Defoe.** The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner. - London: Everman's Library, 1963. - 334 pp. The novel was first published in 1719.  
**Jonathan Swift.** Gulliver's Travels. - Edinburgh: Wordsworth Classics Ltd. Lomond Books, 1996. - 224 pp. The novel was first published in 1726.

#### Female American Writers.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe.** Uncle Tom's Cabin or Negro Life in the Slave States of America. - Wordsworth Classics, 2003. - 438 pp. It was first published in 1850.

**Joyce Carol Oats.** Them. - Greenwich (USA): Fawcett Crest Book Publications, Inc., 1970. - 478 pp. The novel was first published in 1969.

**Margaret Mitchell.** *Gone With the Wind.* - New York: Avon Books, 1973. - 1024 pp. It was first published 1936.

**Louise Erdrich.** *The Beet Queen.* - New York: Bantam Books, 1987. - 303 pp. The novel was first published in 1986.

**Tess Gerritsen.** *Life Support.* - New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997. The novel was first published in 1997.

**Margaret Truman.** *Murder in Havana.* - New York: Fawcett Books, 2002. - 373 pp. The detective story was first published in 2001.

#### **Male American Writers.**

**Theodore Dreiser** "Sister Carry". - New York - USA: New American Library, 1980. - 475 pp. Theodore Dreiser ( 1871 - 1945) wrote this novel in 1900.

**Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald.** *The Great Gatsby.* - New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968. - 182 pp. The novel was first published in 1925.

**Ernest Hemingway.** *Fiesta (The Sun Also Rises).* In : *The Essential Hemingway.*- Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964, p. 9 - 190. The novel was first published in 1926.

**Tobias Wolf.** *This Boy's Life.* - New York: Grove Press, 1989. - 288 pp. The memoir was first published in 1989.

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