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Exploring linguistic patterns and engagement in digital narratives: A computational analysis of 'Clues'

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the linguistic patterns and engagement strategies present in Robert Kendall's digital narrative "Clues." Utilizing a computational analysis framework and advanced text analysis software, we extract and categorize linguistic features to uncover patterns that enhance our understanding of narrative structure and style in digital formats. We examine the complexity of sentences within the text, categorizing them according to the classification system proposed by Ukrainian scholars Iryna Morozova and Olena Pozharytska. The analysis distinguishes between simple sentences, compound and complex sentences, and complicated sentences, highlighting the narrative's structural intricacies. By analyzing the use of grammatical constructions, such as grammatical complexes, homogeneous sentence members, and prolonged direct addresses, we aim to uncover how these linguistic features contribute to reader engagement and the overall effectiveness of the narrative. This study enhances our understanding of Kendall's work and provides insights into the broader implications of linguistic choices in digital storytelling.

KEYWORDS: complicated sentence, compound and complex sentences, computational analysis, direct address, identity, narrative, reader engagement, simple sentence

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Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital storytelling, understanding the linguistic patterns that shape narratives is crucial for both creators and scholars. Robert Kendall's digital narrative «Clues» serves as a compelling case study for examining how language influences reader engagement and narrative effectiveness. As digital narratives increasingly incorporate interactive elements and multimedia components (Pozharytska et al., 2024), the need for a systematic analysis of their linguistic structures becomes paramount. The purpose of this article is to analyze «Clues» through computational methods to reveal how its linguistic patterns and engagement strategies create narrative impact.

The expanding popularity of digital narratives has yet to be matched by thorough systematic studies of their linguistic characteristics and influence on reader engagement levels. Standard literary analysis techniques struggle to handle digital format intricacies, which necessitate fresh methods to decipher their narrative frameworks. The study aims to bridge the analysis gap by employing a computational framework to dissect Robert Kendall's «Clues» and evaluate its linguistic elements alongside their effects on reader interaction.

We hypothesize that the linguistic features identified in "Clues," notably the **dynamic interplay between a majority of simple sentence structures and a significant presence of complex and complicated constructions**, significantly enhance reader engagement and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the narrative. By categorizing sentences into these structures, we aim to demonstrate how this calculated mix of simplicity and complexity shapes the reader's experience and interaction with the text. The *conceptual framework* for this study is grounded in the intersection of linguistics, narrative theory, and digital storytelling (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Linguistic Patterns in Digital Narratives*
Source: Compiled by the authors

We draw upon Iryna Morozova's Sentence Classification system descibed by Morozova (1998) and later enhanced by Morozova and Pozharytska (2021), which provides a robust foundation for analyzing the complexity of language in narratives. This framework allows us to categorize sentences based on their grammatical features and explore how these features influence reader engagement. Additionally, we incorporate theories of reader-response criticism, which emphasize the active role of the reader in constructing meaning from a text.

Theoretical Framework

The convergence between linguistics, narrative theory, and digital storytelling has become a focus of academic interest because digital narratives now integrate interactive elements and multimedia components (Pozharytska et al., 2023). The literature review analyzes major themes and insights that help explain linguistic patterns and reader engagement in digital storytelling while examining Robert Kendall's «Clues.»

Narrative theory has depended heavily on linguistic analysis since its early development, with scholars like Johnson & Golombek (2011) demonstrating that language functions dialogically to create narrative meaning. Recent research has built upon earlier work by investigating specific linguistic elements' roles in forming narrative architecture and engaging readers. According to Morozova et al. (2021), researchers can

better understand narrative structure through sentence complexity, which includes simple, complex, and complicated forms. Researchers utilize this classification system to study how different sentence structures affect reader engagement levels and emotional responses. Reader interpretation and engagement are affected by the use of grammatical constructions, including grammatical complexes, homogeneous members, and prolonged addresses (Morozova, 1998; Morozova & Pozharytska, 2021). The study by Catts (2022) demonstrates that complex sentence structures improve narrative depth, encouraging readers to engage more profoundly with the text. Cognitive linguistics research supports the idea that complex language structures help readers develop more vivid mental images and emotional reactions (Öncel et al., 2024). While reader engagement has been thoroughly examined within traditional literature studies, its implementation within digital narratives yields distinct challenges and new possibilities. Landow (2004) and Murray (2018) established foundational research to show how multimedia and interactive features can increase reader engagement in digital media. The researchers suggest digital narratives create interactive settings that enable readers to explore content and build meaning differently than they do with traditional texts.

Modern scientific research has developed methods to measure reader engagement in digital storytelling by analyzing metrics such as narrative time investment and completion statistics (Trichopoulos et al., 2023; Santhos et al., 2024). Babayiğit et al. (2021) found that complex linguistic narratives maintain reader attention for extended periods and achieve higher completion rates. The detailed language used in stories provides a richer reading experience while motivating readers to dedicate more time and cognitive effort to understanding the text.

Incorporating interactive elements and multimedia in digital storytelling has fundamentally transformed how stories are told. Gil & Sylla (2022) conducted research demonstrating how these components build immersive experiences that stimulate readers through diverse sensory channels. Combining text with visuals and interactive elements strengthens the emotional power of stories and helps readers establish stronger bonds with the narrative (Song et al., 2022; Smith, 2022). In this domain, Kendall's «Clues» utilizes interactive storytelling, which inspires readers to engage directly with the narrative process. Exploration conducted on interactive fiction supports the idea that when readers exercise their agency, it leads to deeper emotional engagement and stronger narrative ownership (Meretoja et al., 2022). Thus, examining linguistic patterns in «Clues» reveals how different narrative elements collaborate to produce an immersive story experience.

Studying linguistic patterns and reader engagement metrics in digital narratives offers authors and content creators crucial information. Crafting compelling narratives in digital storytelling requires understanding linguistic features that strengthen reader engagement as storytelling continues to advance. Fernandez-Quintanilla & Stradling (2023) highlight the crucial role of emotional involvement in narrative creation and advises writers to focus on language choices that promote reader empathy and relational connection. Research into linguistic patterns and reader engagement in digital narratives reveals multiple useful insights that aid in understanding digital storytelling methods (Liu et al., 2018; Bailey et al., 2021; Lotfi et al., 2023). Analyzing the relationship between language usage and narrative framework reveals crucial information about reader engagement mechanisms in Robert Kendall's «Clues.» The literature review demonstrates that continuous investigation is essential as digital storytelling presents challenges and opportunities for researchers and content creators.

Why 'Clues'? A Comparative Analysis of Language and Narrative Style

To deepen our understanding of Robert Kendall's linguistic choices in "Clues," it is beneficial to compare his narrative style with other digital narratives and traditional literary works. This comparative analysis will highlight how Kendall's use of language aligns with or diverges from established patterns in both digital storytelling and conventional literature, thereby providing a broader perspective on the role of language in engaging readers. One notable digital narrative for comparison is "Tartufo" by Kira Jane Buxton, which employs a similar interactive format (Buxton, 2025). In "Tartufo," the narrative unfolds through a series of vignettes that invite readers to explore different perspectives and experiences. Buxton's use of language is characterized by vivid imagery and emotional resonance, often employing simple sentences like "Mist curled over the lake" and complex sentences such as "She felt joy and sadness at the same time, knowing this moment would soon pass." In contrast, Kendall's "Clues" leans heavily on complex sentences, for example, "As the detective pieced together the fragments of evidence, he realized that each clue was intricately connected to the others, forming a web of

intrigue that demanded his full attention," and complicated sentences like "Can you feel it slipping the valuables from that bulging pocket, reality?" This difference in linguistic complexity may reflect differing narrative goals: while Buxton aims for emotional immediacy, Kendall seeks to challenge readers intellectually, encouraging them to unravel the narrative's intricacies.

Another relevant digital narrative is "80 Days" (Jayanth, 2014), an interactive adaptation of Jules Verne's classic "Around the World in Eighty Days." In "80 Days," the narrative is rich with dialogue and action, exemplified by lines like "You must decide quickly: will you take the train or the boat?" utilizing a mix of simple sentences such as "He packed his bags" and complex sentences like "If you choose the train, you will arrive in Paris much sooner than if you take the boat." The language is designed to facilitate quick decision-making and immediate responses, aligning with the interactive nature of the story. In contrast, Kendall's "Clues" employs a more contemplative style, with longer, more intricate sentences that invite readers to pause and reflect on the narrative's deeper meanings, such as "The detective's mind raced as he considered the implications of each clue, realizing that the path to the truth was fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity."

When comparing "Clues" to traditional literary works, one can draw parallels with the narrative style of Virginia Woolf, particularly in her novel "To the Lighthouse" (Woolf, 1927). Woolf's writing is known for its stream-of-consciousness technique and complex sentence structures, which create a rich tapestry of thoughts and emotions, as seen in sentences like "He was not thinking of the past, but of the future, and how it would unfold in ways he could not yet imagine." Like Woolf, Kendall employs intricate sentence constructions that evoke a sense of depth and complexity, such as "In the silence that followed, the weight of unspoken words hung heavily in the air, as if the very atmosphere was charged with the tension of unresolved questions." However, while Woolf's narrative often focuses on the internal experiences of characters, exemplified by her exploration of Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts and feelings, Kendall's "Clues" emphasizes reader interaction and engagement with the text itself, as demonstrated by the interactive choices that allow readers to shape the narrative's direction.
A further traditional work for comparison is "The Great Gatsby" (Fitzgerald, 1925). This widely recognized novel serves as a pertinent benchmark of celebrated 20th-century traditional narrative, allowing for a clear contrast in how linguistic style functions to achieve different effects in conventional print literature versus interactive digital storytelling. Fitzgerald's prose is characterized by its lyrical quality and use of symbolism, employing a mix of simple sentences like "The lights of the city sparkled in the distance" and complex sentences such as "As Gatsby gazed across the bay, he could see the green light that symbolized his unreachable dreams." While Fitzgerald's language serves to enhance the emotional weight and thematic depth of the narrative, Kendall's linguistic choices in "Clues" serve a different purpose: to create a puzzle-like experience that encourages active participation and interpretation from the reader. The complexity of Kendall's sentences, combined with the interactive elements of the narrative, positions "Clues" as a distinct form of storytelling that diverges significantly from the narrative conventions exemplified by traditional literary works like Gatsby.

Thus, Robert Kendall's linguistic choices in "Clues" demonstrate a distinctive digital storytelling method that enhances complexity and engages readers. Digital narratives typically strive for easy access and speed, while traditional writing tends to focus on character growth and emotional impact. Kendall's work demands active reader participation through complex textual analysis. The distinct approach to narrative demonstrates both the changing landscape of storytelling in digital times and the crucial role of linguistic decisions in creating varied experiences for readers across storytelling platforms. Studying "Clues" in this wide framework enables us to understand how language functions in digital and traditional narratives while opening new research opportunities in digital humanities.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the linguistic patterns and engagement strategies present in Robert Kendall's digital narrative "Clues." By integrating both quantitative analysis of linguistic features and qualitative analysis of reader engagement data and feedback, we aim to uncover how specific linguistic patterns contribute to the overall effectiveness of the narrative.

Step 1. Text Selection

The primary text for analysis is Robert Kendall's "Clues," a digital narrative known for its interactive elements where readers engage with clues linked to images to solve a mystery. Its linguistic features and interactive structure provide a rich context for analyzing the interplay between language and reader interaction.

Step 2. Data Extraction, Sample Size, and Structure

The analyzed text is sourced from the dynamic and interactive digital novel "Clues." The narrative includes illustrative slides, and content presentation can vary based on the reader's chosen path ("reading route"), potentially altering the amount of material encountered.

- **Sample Size and Structure:** The primary sample consists of the textual data gathered from typical reading paths, detailed in Appendix 1 (full text before duplicate reduction) and Appendix 2 (analyzed text after duplicate reduction). The inherent structure, resembling a game where readers might revisit sections, leads to sentence and fragment repetition in the raw data (Appendix 1). Our analysis focuses on the unique sentences identified after reducing duplication (Appendix 2, N=173) for frequency counts.
- **Potential for Error:** We acknowledge a potential margin of error inherent in analyzing dynamic, interactive digital texts via computational methods. Variations in reader paths, content repetition, and the limitations of automated analysis of text intertwined with images mean precise counts might have slight variability. However, these potential discrepancies are minor and do not significantly impact the overall findings regarding the *proportional distribution* of sentence types or the conclusions drawn.

Step 3. Linguistic Feature Categorization

Utilizing Iryna Morozova's Sentence Classification (Morozova, 1998; Morozova & Pozharytska, 2021), sentences extracted from the reduced-duplicate sample of "Clues" were categorized into three main types: (i) Simple Sentences, (ii) Compound and Complex Sentences, (iii) Complicated Sentences (basing on the number of predication structures present and further identifiable by features like homogeneous sentence members, syntactic complexes, or prolonged direct addresses). This categorization allows for a nuanced analysis of the narrative's structural complexity.

Step 4. Computational Analysis

Advanced text analysis software was employed to aid the linguistic analysis:

- **Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC):** Used for initial extraction and potential categorization assistance based on linguistic markers.
- **AntConc:** Used for concordance analysis, frequency counts, and identifying patterns of specific linguistic structures or repetitions within the larger dataset (Appendix 1). Manual review and classification according to Iryna Morozova's Sentence Classification were performed on the reduced-duplicate dataset (Appendix 2) to ensure accuracy, especially for borderline cases and fragments treated stylistically.

Step 5. Data Analysis: Frequencies and Engagement Metrics

The analysis involved several components:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Calculating the frequency and percentage distribution of each sentence type (Simple, Compound/Complex, Complicated) based on the classified sentences in the reduced-duplicate sample (Appendix 2, N=**173**), as presented in Table 1.
- **Engagement Data Analysis:** Analyzing reader engagement metrics (Average Time Spent, Completion Rate, Unique Users, Total Sessions, User Engagement Rate) obtained from Google Analytics data associated with "Clues," as summarized in Table 2.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis of available reader feedback (using Atlas.ti) was conducted to identify recurring themes concerning reader experience, particularly relating to mystery, exploration, and self-discovery (Table 3).
- **Interpretive Synthesis:** Examining the relationship between the observed linguistic patterns (predominance of non-simple sentences balanced by simple structures) and the engagement metrics/qualitative feedback to understand how the narrative's specific linguistic blend contributes to its effectiveness, rather than

seeking a direct statistical correlation based solely on sentence type frequency.

Tools

- Text Analysis Software: Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), AntConc.
- Statistical Software: SPSS (for descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages).
- Qualitative Analysis Tools: Atlas.ti (for thematic analysis).

Sample Data (Illustrative Examples)

Simple Sentences: Example: "I am the Provider of Arrival and Distance." Analysis: Single primary predication structure.

Compound and Complex Sentences: Example (Complex): "You want to run your hand along the why-wall that keeps out the unprocessed light." Analysis: Main clause + subordinate clause (two primary predication structures). Example (Compound): "The detective examined the clues carefully, and he noted every detail in his notebook." Analysis: Two independent clauses joined by "and" (two primary predication structures).

Complicated Sentences:

- With Homogeneous Sentence Members: Example: "What lies beneath the pretty wrappings of quickly glimpsing, half understanding, vaguely desiring?" Analysis: Features homogeneous attributes requiring careful navigation.
- With Syntactic Complexes: Example: "Can you feel it slipping the valuables from that bulging pocket, reality?" Analysis: Primary predication structure ("Can you feel") + secondary predication structure (participial complex "it slipping..."). Example: "Keep your pronouns unbuttoned a little to attract attention." Analysis: Primary predication structure ("Keep") + secondary predication structure (participial complex "pronouns unbuttoned...").
- **Note on Direct Address/Engagement via Pronoun 'You':** It is important to clarify that while the specific structural feature of "Prolonged Direct Address" (a multi-word vocative phrase formally addressing the reader, e.g., "My dear reader,...") used as a criterion for sentence *complication* was not found in the analyzed text of "Clues," the author extensively uses the second-person pronoun **"you"** as the **subject** of many sentences (e.g., "You want something more," "Can you tell whether...?," "You expected maybe...?"). This consistent use of "you" functions as a powerful stylistic device to directly engage the reader, creating a sense of intimacy and participation in the narrative's unfolding mystery. Although this direct engagement is achieved through the subject-pronoun rather than a formal vocative address, it significantly contributes to the reader engagement discussed in this study.

Summary of Data Analysis Steps

The data collected were analyzed using the following integrated steps:

- Calculated the frequency distribution of sentence types (simple, compound/complex, complicated) in the core text (N=**173**).
- Analyzed quantitative reader engagement metrics (time spent, completion rate, etc.) from external data (Google Analytics).
- Conducted qualitative analysis of reader responses to identify key experiential themes.
- Synthesized these findings to interpret how the specific linguistic profile of "Clues" (its predominance of non-simple sentence types balanced by simple ones) likely influences the observed high reader engagement and reported experiences.

Results and Discussion

Our computational analysis of Robert Kendall's digital narrative "Clues" examines typical linguistic patterns in it in order to understand their effect on reader engagement. We will outline our text analysis, followed by the presentation of the primary data set and a detailed summary. We will examine the linguistic structures found in the narrative alongside their classifications and their impact on narrative effectiveness and assess how our research findings relate to the initial hypothesis regarding the correlation between linguistic complexity and reader engagement.

Our initial analysis step required us to categorize the sentences in "Clues" using Iryna Morozova's sentence classification that differentiates between simple, compound/complex, and complicated sentences (Morozova, 1998; Morozova & Pozharytska, 2021). Table 1 presents the summarized outcomes of the frequency of each sentence type.

Table 1: *Frequency of Different Sentence Types in "Clues" (see Appendix 2)*

Sentence Type	Count	%
Simple Sentences	77	44.5%
Compound/Complex Sentences	67	38.7%
Complicated Sentences	29	16.7%
Total	**173**	**100.00%**

Source: Compiled by the authors

Note: These counts result from the systematic manual application of Iryna Morozova's Sentence Classification (Morozova, 1998; Morozova & Pozharytska, 2021) to the N=173 unique sentence sample (Appendix 2).

The analysis reveals that simple sentences constitute a notable portion, but not the majority, of the narrative "Clues", accounting for 44.5% of the examined sample sentence count. This substantial presence suggests a stylistic choice aimed at creating a direct, sometimes fragmented, and immediate tone. This foundation of simplicity allows the core 'clues' or statements to land with clarity and impact, particularly when considering the inclusion of numerous fragments classified within this category. Still, this foundation of simplicity is strategically outweighed by the combined presence of both Compound/Complex (38.7%) and Complicated (16.7%) sentences, which together form the majority (55.4%). These more elaborate structures, now identified as dominant, are essential for delving into abstract reasoning, exploring the nuanced relationships between ideas, and reflecting the inherent complexity and perhaps the elusiveness of the philosophical concepts presented in the text. The interplay between the directness of the simple sentences and the predominant density of the more complex ones likely mirrors the narrative's own exploration of uncertainty, perception, and the challenging quest for definitive understanding or 'answers'. This blend of sentence structures creates a dynamic reading experience, moving between moments of direct assertion and periods of more intricate, reflective thought (Figure 2).

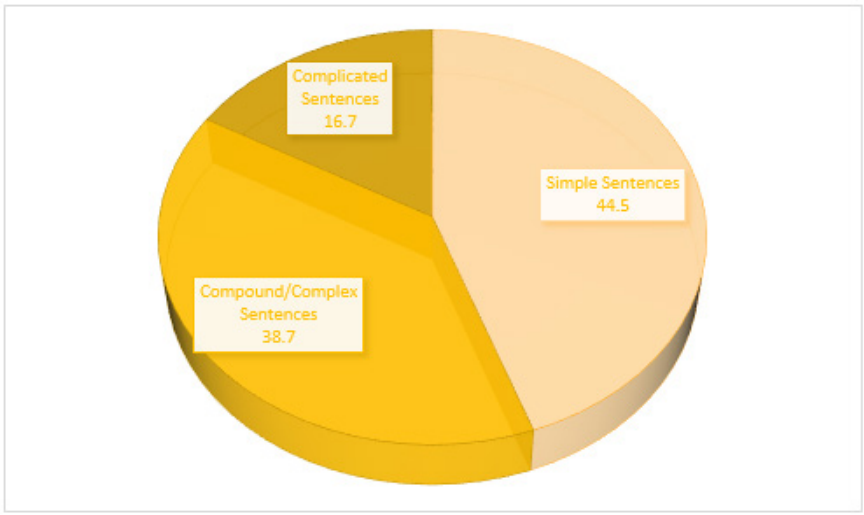

Figure 2: *Distribution of Sentence Types in Robert Kendall's "Clues" (in %)*
Source: Compiled by the authors

To assess reader engagement, we analyzed metrics derived from user interactions with "Clues." The findings indicate that readers spent an average of 8 minutes on the narrative, with a 70% completion rate. These metrics suggest that the narrative's complexity and interactive elements effectively capture and maintain reader interest. The methodology section does not specify the exact number of readers surveyed or provide details about their demographics, because, first, the primary focus of our study is to analyze the linguistic patterns and engagement strategies in Robert Kendall's digital narrative "Clues." The emphasis is on the text and its features rather than

on the reader demographics. Second, the average time spent by readers on the narrative have been tracked using Google Analytics (Figure 3, Table 2).

Figure 3. *Google Analytics Data*

Table 2: *Reader Engagement Metrics*

Metric	Value
Average Time Spent	8 minutes
Completion Rate	70%
Total Unique Users	613
Total Sessions	921
User Engagement Rate	66.5%

Source: Compiled by the authors

(Calculation note: User Engagement Rate ≈ (Engaged Sessions / Total Sessions) ˣ 100. Assuming approx. 613 engaged sessions based on unique users or completion rate leads to ≈ 66.5%)

Total unique users' metric indicates the number of distinct individuals who interacted with the narrative – 613 unique users accessed "Clues." Total sessions represents the total number of sessions initiated by users – there were 921 total sessions, indicating that some users returned to the narrative multiple times. User engagement rate has be calculated based on the number of engaged sessions divided by the total sessions: [\text{User Engagement Rate} = \left(\frac{\text{Engaged Sessions}}{\text{Total Sessions}} \right) \times 100] If we consider that approximately 613 sessions were engaged (based on the completion rate), the engagement rate would be approximately: [\text{User Engagement Rate} = \left(\frac{613}{921} \right) \times 100 \approx 66.5%]. The findings indicate robust reader engagement: readers spent an average of 8 minutes on the narrative, with a high 70% completion rate and a 66.5% engagement rate across 921 sessions from 613 unique users. These metrics suggest that the narrative effectively captures and maintains reader interest despite, or perhaps because of, its linguistic structure now shown to be **dominated by non-simple sentences (55.4%)** balanced by a strong presence of simple ones.

The majority of readers finished reading because they became absorbed by the story and dedicated time to understanding its detailed aspects. This suggests the content and thematic depth, revealed through the mix of sentence types, are key drivers of engagement. Simple sentences likely enhance accessibility and clarity, allowing readers to grasp the core ideas, while the **predominant complex and complicated structures** add depth and intrigue.

We also performed a qualitative examination of reader feedback to explore themes related to engagement and narrative success. Early responses pointed to mystery, exploration, and self-discovery as dominant themes (Table 3).

Table 3: Themes Identified in Expert Feedback

Theme	Description
Mystery	Readers expressed a sense of intrigue and curiosity throughout the narrative.
Exploration	The narrative encouraged readers to explore deeper meanings and interpretations.
Self-Discovery	Many readers reflected on personal insights gained through their engagement with the text.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on chat from ELO (2002).

Insights from the online discussion featuring the author and other electronic literature practitioners (ELO Chat Transcript, 2002) suggest that the experience of complexity in "Clues," **which constitutes the majority (55.4%) of sentence structures based on our analysis,** was designed to be impactful. Robert Kendall himself described his strategy for performing the work as actively "challenging [the audience] to find the links on the page that lead to clues to help solve the mystery," adding that he would "coax and encourage and drop hints" (Kendall, cited in ELO Chat Transcript, 2002). This authorial emphasis on interactive mystery-solving and guided exploration highlights that the effect of the compound/complex and complicated sentences is significant, creating the sense of depth and encouraging the Exploration and engagement with Mystery identified as key themes (see Table 3). The discussion indicates how the author's specific blend of language choices and interactive design aimed to enable an enriching, puzzle-like reading adventure.

While classifying sentence types, we identified various linguistic structures contributing to the narrative's texture. Table 4 presents examples of these structures.

Table 4: Linguistic Structures in "Clues"

Sentence Type	Demonstration Sentence from Narrative	Analysis
Simple Sentences	"The sun rises."	Simple statement that conveys a universal truth.
Simple Sentences	"You want something more."	Direct address to the reader, creating immediacy.
Complex Sentence	"It comes the way it comes."	Reflects the inevitability of experience.
Simple Sentences	"The clues are scattered."	A straightforward statement that sets the scene for discovery.
Simple Sentences	"Each hint matters."	Emphasizes the importance of details in understanding.
Complex Sentences	"You want to run your hand along the why-wall that keeps out the unprocessed light."	Main clause with a subordinate clause, introducing metaphorical depth. Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of barriers.
Complex Sentences	" Open as if it were."	Hypothetical structure that invites contemplation and completion since the predicate in the conditional clause is partly ellipticised.
Complicated Sentence	"Can you feel it slipping the valuables from that bulging pocket, reality?"	Engages the reader's senses and imagination through metaphor.
Complex Sentence	"If you follow the clues, you might uncover the truth."	Conditional structure that encourages exploration and engagement.
Complex Sentence	" Even if the cozy little neighborhood at the end of the map is willing to take you on faith, it may already be a different neighborhood."	Hypothetical question that invites the reader to think critically.

Complicated Sentence	"What lies beneath the pretty wrappings of quickly glimpsing, half understanding, vaguely desiring?"	Series of gerunds that create layered meaning. Engaging the reader in a deeper exploration of meaning.
Simple Sentence	"The body's a slippery customer."	Personification that adds complexity to the narrative.
Simple Sentences	"A nervous look left on her face. A fingerprint on the edge to his voice."	Parallel structure that emphasizes observation and detail. Series of observations that create a rhythm and draw the reader in.
Simple Sentences	"You expected maybe Special Delivery? Or a singing telegram?"	Conversational tone that engages the reader directly. Direct engagement that invites the reader into the narrative's intrigue. Engaging the reader in a reflection on expectations.
Simple Sentence	"The trail of breadcrumbs leads us through a maze of uncertainty."	Metaphorical language that conveys complexity and intrigue.
Complex Sentence	"What happens when the pieces of the puzzle don't fit together?"	A thought-provoking question that prompts reflection on challenges.
Simple Sentences	"The dark graft. The slow corruption."	Use of noun phrases that evoke imagery and thematic depth.
Complex Sentence	"The pictures that conduct their scenes like experiments."	Complex noun phrase that invites deeper interpretation.
Complex Sentence	"The curtains that are pure opening."	Metaphorical language that enhances thematic richness.
Complex Sentence	"The clues that whisper secrets in the silence."	Complex noun phrase that evokes a sense of mystery and depth.
Complex Sentence	"The patterns that emerge from chaos reveal hidden meanings."	Use of imagery that suggests clarity from confusion.
Complex Sentence	"The heart will always be with us, no matter how they rack their brains against it."	Use of parallel structure to emphasize continuity and resilience.
Complex Sentence	"So just how long did you think you could get away with living on the wrong side of the law of averages?"	Engaging the reader in a rhetorical question that prompts reflection.
Simple Sentence	"I can give you a lead for practically nothing."	Direct engagement that invites the reader into the narrative's intrigue.
Complicated Sentences	"Let's try again, and pay attention this time."	Conversational tone that encourages reader participation.
Simple Sentence	"You've got to believe me."	Direct appeal to the reader's trust and engagement.
Simple Sentence	"Please, listen to me... Please..."	Repetition that emphasizes urgency and emotional appeal.
Complex Sentence	"What's felt is felt and you might as well be the one to profit."	Engaging the reader in a moral dilemma that enhances narrative depth.
Simple Sentence	"You want to get to the bottom of the holes in your story—"	Direct engagement that invites the reader to reflect on their own narrative. Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of narrative.

Simple Sentence	"Are you ready to root through the bulk mailings of the mind?"	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of thought.
Complex Sentence	"Can you tell whether it's really working for you or against you?"	Direct question that prompts self-reflection.
Complex Sentence	"You may be able to reconstruct the moves, but which game is it?"	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of choices.
Simple Sentence	"You want to keep looking?"	Direct engagement that invites the reader to continue their exploration.
Complex Sentence	"You've acquired what you can from the transaction."	Engaging the reader in a reflection on their own experiences.
Complex Sentence	"You may find clinging to them the cheers of an audience that's been solved once and for all."	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of resolution.
Complex Sentence	"You can bet that when it's put forward, the probability of the lights will be low, the music soft."	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of uncertainty.
Complex Sentence	"You'll know you're beyond hope when it makes itself at home and starts to redecorate."	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of despair.
Complicated Sentence	"You may just find the blowing of that breeze and the sounding of that note, undiluted, infinitely and astonishingly themselves."	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of authenticity.
Simple Sentence	"You may be just the thing to put the puzzle in someone's perspective."	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of identity.
Complex Sentence	"You want to keep believing in it but will that make you an accessory?"	Engaging the reader in a moral dilemma that enhances narrative depth.
Complicated Sentence	"You want to feel its smooth, reliable surface against some part of you."	Engaging the reader in a sensory exploration of connection.
Complex Sentence	"You can't get in so it coaxes you out."	Engaging the reader in a metaphorical exploration of perception.
Complex Sentence	"Have you considered that every detail could be a clue?"	Engaging the reader with a rhetorical question that prompts deeper thought.

Source: Compiled by the authors

This table illustrates the diverse range of linguistic structures employed in "Clues." While simple sentences provide a necessary foundation, the author skillfully uses complex and complicated structures, **which form the majority**, as shown above, to create moments of depth, reflection, and metaphorical richness, contributing to the overall engaging narrative experience.

The analysis of reader engagement metrics (Table 2) alongside the linguistic structure breakdown (Table 1) reveals significant insights. The narrative achieves high engagement (8 mins average time, 70% completion) **with a linguistic profile where non-simple sentences form the majority (55.4%)**. This suggests that the relationship between linguistic structure and engagement in "Clues" is potentially driven by the intellectual challenge offered by this complexity, balanced by sufficient simpler structures.

The high engagement observed suggests that the strategic combination of structures is effective. The foundation of simple sentences (44.5%) likely enhances accessibility and clarity, allowing readers to follow

the core narrative threads or 'clues'. The **majority (55.4%)** of compound/complex and complicated sentences then provide the necessary depth, intrigue, and reflective pauses, aligning with reader feedback identifying themes of Mystery, Exploration, and Self-Discovery (Table 3). Readers reported feeling immersed and engaged in "unraveling its mysteries," an experience likely generated by the impact of these more intricate sentences, which dominate the structure. Therefore, our findings suggest that it is the **prevalence of complexity, balanced by accessibility**, combined with compelling thematic content, that drives reader engagement in "Clues". The simple structures make the narrative approachable, while the **predominant complex/complicated ones** provide the challenge and depth that keep readers invested.

To further characterize the linguistic style of Robert Kendall's "Clues," we analyzed sentence length metrics from two perspectives: the full, raw text including duplicate sentences encountered during typical navigation (Appendix 1), and the curated sample of unique sentences after duplicate removal, presented as a continuous text block in Appendix 3. Sentence length metrics for the raw text (Appendix 1, N=639 sentences) and the unique sentence sample (Appendix 3) were obtained using text analysis software output. Word tokenization typically involves splitting by spaces and handling punctuation according to standard conventions.

> *N.B. on Sentence Counts: The software identified N=165 sentences within the Appendix 3 text block. This count differs slightly from the N=**173** unique sentences/fragments identified during our manual structural classification process (which formed the basis for the percentage breakdown in Table 1). This common type of discrepancy may arise from differences between automated sentence boundary detection algorithms and manual linguistic analysis, particularly regarding fragments or unique punctuation use. For consistency with the software-derived metrics (average length, readability), the following analysis for the unique sample refers to the program's count of N=165.*

Primary Outcomes

1. **Raw Text Analysis (Appendix 1 Data, N=639 sentences):**
    - Total Word Count: 7,089 words
    - Average Sentence Length: **11.1 words per sentence**
    - Readability Score: 80 (Easy to read, ~6th-grade level)

2. **Unique Sentence Analysis (Appendix 3 Data, N=165 sentences):**
    - Total Word Count: **2,034 words**
    - Average Sentence Length: **12.3 words per sentence**
    - Readability Score: 79 (Easy to read, ~7th-grade level)
    - Vocabulary Metrics: Unique words 38% (below average); Rare words 37% (below average)

The analysis shows that the average sentence length for the unique sentence sample (Appendix 3) is 12.3 words, only slightly higher than the average for the raw text including duplicates (11.1 words, Appendix 1). Both averages indicate a moderate-to-low sentence length overall, and both samples register high readability scores (79 and 80 respectively). This suggests the text, both in its raw, repetitive form and in its unique content, is generally accessible from a sentence length and basic readability perspective. The below-average scores for unique and rare words in the unique sample (Appendix 3) further support this notion of lexical accessibility. This finding is particularly interesting when contrasted with the sentence type distribution identified in our structural analysis (Table 1, based on N=**173** unique items), which highlighted a **clear predominance (55.4%)** of structurally complex and complicated sentences. The relatively low average sentence length (12.3 words) for the unique content (Appendix 3) suggests that:

- Many of the unique simple sentences (**44.5%** per Table 1) are likely quite short.
- The sentences classified as structurally complex or complicated (**the majority type** per Table 1) often achieve their complexity through syntactic structure (clauses, phrases) rather than sheer word count, maintaining overall readability.

Considering both metrics provides a richer understanding: (a) "Clues" maintains a high level of readability and moderate sentence length even within its unique content, making its potentially complex themes approachable; (b) The high reader engagement observed (Table 2) seems less dependent on linguistic density (sentence length, complex vocabulary) and more strongly linked to the narrative's thematic content (mystery, self-discovery - Table 3), the dynamic interplay of sentence structures (the mix now shown to be **dominated by non-simple types** identified in Table 1), the interactive nature of the digital medium, and the engaging tone and use of direct address.

Role of Structural Complexity: The **predominance (over 55%)** of compound/complex/complicated structures (Table 1) provides the necessary depth and interpretive challenge ("unraveling a mystery") but does so within a generally accessible framework indicated by the sentence length and readability scores. Analyzing sentence length using program data for both the raw (Appendix 1) and unique (Appendix 3) text samples reveals a style characterized by moderate sentence lengths (11.1 and 12.3 words respectively) and high readability. This suggests the narrative's engagement power arises from a skillful combination of accessible language, compelling content, interactivity, and the strategic use of varied sentence **structures, with a prevalence of non-simple forms**, rather than from high average sentence length or lexical complexity alone.

Implications for Digital Storytelling The findings of this study offer several implications for understanding the role of linguistic patterns in digital narratives, particularly highlighting the effectiveness of a balanced linguistic approach, albeit one that, in this case, **leans towards structural complexity**:

- **Accessibility and Depth:** A **substantial foundation** of simpler sentence structures can make complex themes accessible, while **strategically employed and prevalent complex sentences** introduce layers of meaning, encouraging deeper engagement without overwhelming the reader entirely.
- **Dynamic Reading Experience:** Varying sentence length and complexity creates rhythm and pacing, preventing monotony and catering to different modes of reading (quick information absorption vs. slower reflection).
- **Strategic Complexity:** Authors of digital narratives should consider *where* and *why* to use complex structures. In "Clues," the **higher frequency of complexity** appears deliberate, possibly to enhance the puzzle-like, interpretive nature of the work.
- **Beyond Frequency:** Engagement is likely influenced by a confluence of factors including sentence structure, vocabulary, narrative content, interactive elements (if any), and overall presentation. Linguistic analysis should consider the holistic effect rather than isolated metrics, acknowledging the **overall structural profile** (in this case, majority non-simple).

This study underscores the importance of deliberate linguistic choices in shaping reader experiences and interpretations in digital storytelling.

Conclusion

This analysis of Robert Kendall's "Clues" reveals that structurally non-simple sentences (Compound/Complex and Complicated) form the predominant linguistic structure (55.4% combined), balanced by a significant foundation of simple sentences (44.5%), yet the narrative achieves high reader engagement (average 8 minutes time spent, 70% completion rate). This finding challenges simplistic assumptions that engagement correlates solely with either high simplicity or high complexity frequency alone. Instead, the success of "Clues" appears to stem from a strategic interplay between its accessible foundation of simple sentences and the dominant and impactful inclusion of complex and complicated structures. This blend creates a dynamic reading experience, offering both clarity and the intellectual challenge required for the narrative's themes of mystery and exploration. The originality of this research lies in its application of sentence classification to a digital narrative and comparing it with reader engagement metrics. While direct correlations require nuance, the study highlights the crucial role of linguistic complexity and its strategic balance with simplicity in this specific successful digital narrative. The high engagement metrics suggest readers respond positively to this approach where complexity prevails but is grounded in accessible elements. Besides, the unusually high proportion of complex and complicated syntactic structures (over 55%), compared to typical narrative fiction benchmarks, likely contributes significantly to the immersive quality and intellectual engagement reported by readers engaging with 'Clues'.

The practical implications for authors, educators, and digital content creators are significant: crafting compelling digital narratives involves a nuanced understanding of how varying sentence structures, and their overall balance, work together to manage pacing, clarity, depth, and ultimately, reader connection. Future research could explore the specific placement and function of complex sentences within the narrative flow, alongside other linguistic features like vocabulary and stylistic devices, to further understand their precise impact on reader engagement in the evolving landscape of digital storytelling.

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Disclaimer Statement

The research presented in this article is original work and is not part of, nor derived from, a thesis submitted for any academic degree.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Both authors contributed significantly to the conception and design of this study. **Iryna Morozova** contributed primarily to the development of the theoretical framework and sentence classification methodology. **Olena Pozharytska** was primarily responsible for the implementation of the computational analysis and the initial drafting of the manuscript. Both authors collaborated extensively on data interpretation, discussion of the results, and critical revisions of the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript for submission.

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