Hard Times: Impacts Of The Industrialisation On The Economy And Society

I think the extract from Hard Times, by Charles Dickens, presents the impacts of industrialization on the economy and society. The combination of complex and compound-complex sentences, which integrate noun phrases, adverbial phrases and verb phrases, is used to present a ‘satirical portrayal of hard moments of the industrial revolution during the nineteenth century in England’ (Ouameur, 2013, p.40)

The first complex sentence (1) consists of 43 words and 53% of the words are open class, with the number of concrete nouns being more dominant in the sentence. The long complex sentence combines 2 independent clauses and 2 dependant clauses. The opening independent clause, which integrates a pre-modifying noun phrase, ‘It was a town of red brick’ contains a pre-modifier ‘red’ which exemplifies the many deaths of the lower class in the poor working conditions. The head noun ‘town’ is further portrayed by the lexical collocation ‘red brick’ which intensifies its’ brutality. The primary auxiliary verb ‘was’ shows how industrialization has exacerbated socio-economic conditions. Dickens then gives us additional information about the ‘red brick’ through a varied syntax in the dependant clause ‘or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it’.

The third conditional clause ‘if the smoke and ashes had allowed it’ explicitly suggests that because there is too much smog and pollution from the factory ‘chimneys’ the natural ‘red’ bricks cannot be seen. This clause consists of 2 noun phrases ‘the smoke’ and ‘ashes’ but it does not integrate any pre-modifiers. The subordinate clause, which is defined by the subordinating conjunction ‘if’, could portray the dangers of the town. The verb phrase ‘had allowed’ emphasizes the dominance industrialization has over the town and how its’ physical appearance has been destroyed.

Dickens presents the town from a materialistic outlook by alluding to the senses, first he refers to sight after using a semicolon. The non-essential dependant clause ‘but as matters stood’ uses a coordinating conjunction ‘but’ to present another argument through the subject (‘matters’) and the predicate (‘stood’). The independent clause ‘it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage’ consists of pre-modifying noun phrases and singular head noun phrases using only concrete nouns. The noun phrase ‘town of unnatural red’ contains a head, ‘town’, emphasises the significance of Dickens description of a polluted society. The concrete noun ‘red’ could connote that the conditions of the poor society lead to many deaths, due to pollution and exploitation. The other implication we can deduce is that the ‘town’ symbolises hell and evil.

The pre-modifying noun phrase consists of a simile ‘like the painted face of a savage’ and this could portray the villainous nature of the upper class and how they exploit the lower class. The comparative clause, showed through the preposition ‘like’, analogises the ‘town’ to a ‘savage’. The noun ‘savage’ encapsulates ideas of evil and immoral behaviour and this is reinforced by the noun phrase ‘painted face’. A ‘savage’ is usually associated with an animal or the force of nature, which is ironic as Dickens uses it to depict manufactured, man-made objects.

The complex sentence (2) consist of an independent and subordinate clause. This sentence contains 5 concrete nouns and 2 adjectives, which act as pre-modifiers in noun phrases. The subordinate clause ‘it was a town of machinery and tall chimneys’ lacks a verb. Therefore, Dickens deviates from the standard syntax, where the syntax of a normal sentence in English should include a subject, verb and an object.

It contains an independent clause ‘It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys’, consisting of 2 noun phrases. In these phrases there is a semantic field of construction and unnaturalness which encapsulates the notions behind industrialization. The noun ‘machinery’ could also portray the rapid urbanisation during the Victorian era as a result of the social and economic changes. I think Dickens continuously attacks the factories that are being built through the pre-modifier ‘tall’ as a way to criticise the idea of urbanisation. The plural morpheme in ‘chimneys’ emphasises the artificiality in Victorian England as there were a lot of factories being built that reduced natural landscapes.

The town is defined by its industrialization, emphasised by the metaphor ‘interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever’. The transitive verb ‘trailed’ epitomises the negative aspects of the mechanisation. The relative clause ‘out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever’ has the predicate ‘trailed’ which could refer to the constant smoke that obscures the streets. Dickens symbolises the smoke as ‘serpents’, in the lexical collocation ‘interminable serpents’, which combines an adjective and a noun. ‘Serpents’, a proper noun, are usually presented as loathsome and poisonous creatures.

The symbolism in the pre-modifying noun phrase ‘interminable serpents of smoke’ conveys a sinister depiction of the town. The common, noncount, concrete noun ‘smoke’ has literal and implicit interpretations. The literal meaning is that the ‘smoke’ filled the skies. On the other hand, the subject ‘smoke’ can represent the moral blindness of factory owners and the ideal that industrialization had a positive impact on everyone. This is further signified through the idiom ‘for ever and ever’, which shows that the pollution is immense or emphasises the moral obscurity created by the metaphorical ‘smoke’.

The final compound-complex sentence is a combination of 4 independent clauses and 1 dependant clause. The independent clauses are integrated by the co-ordinating conjunction ‘and’, which is used 3 times.

The clause ‘It had a black canal in it’ consists of a noun phrase with the pre-modifier and a concrete noun which suggests that the ‘canal’ has suffered from industrialization just as the citizens of the town have. The pre-modifier ‘black’ is usually associated with fear, authority and death. Therefore, the noun phrase further signifies the polluted environment and could symbolise the industry. This is also expressed in the following independent clause, ‘a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye’. The clause is made up with a subject, predicate, adverbial and an object. The noun phrase ‘ill-smelling dye’ uses a pre-modifier which alludes to the sense of smell. The ‘substance collective’ (Kearns, 2000, p.125) predicate ‘river that ran’ presents the water as polluted. Dickens uses the intransitive verb in the verb phrase ‘ran’ but it carries the object/noun ‘purple’. The noun ‘purple’ is the adverbial phrase, but Dickens use of this after an intransitive verb violates the syntax of the verb form.

The independent clause ‘vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long’ combines noun phrases and prepositional phrases. The noun phrase

‘vast piles of buildings’ consists of a head ‘buildings’, with a plural morpheme -s, which signifies the negative impact of urbanisation on society. The determiner ‘vast’ can be interpreted literally and figuratively. It could connote that the rural land is obsolete or presents the wider impact of the industrialization on the Victorian society. Geoffrey Leech argues that the past progressive verb can ‘refer to a continuing, through time-limited activity’ (2004, p.24). Therefore, Dickens use of the past progressive participle verb ‘rattling’ and ‘trembling’ suggests that the factories are continuously in use and the smoke is polluting the streets even more.

The final independent clause ‘and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down’ consist of noun phrases, a verb phrase and adverbial phrases. The adverbial ‘monotonously’, presents the dull life as a lower-class worker in the industrial society. The industrialization does not only cause physical effects, pollution, but psychological effects as well. The idiom ‘up and down’ consists of only adverbs, and it portrays the tiresome and boring life during industrialization.

The dependant clause ‘like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness’ completes the compound-complex sentence. The simile identified through the comparative preposition ‘like’ helps to understand the similarities between the ‘steam engine’ and the ‘elephant’. The clause lacks a predicate but includes a subject, ‘head of an elephant’, and a complement ‘in a state of melancholy madness’. Dickens deliberately evades using a predicate to foreground the impact of industrialization. The town is ‘dominated not only by the monotonous and eminently rational rhythms of the machine, but also by creatures with deranged and brutish tendencies’ (Ketabgian, 2011, p.54). The noun phrases ‘head of an elephant’ allude to the amount of animal force required to drive the machines. The oxymoronic alliteration in the pre-modifying noun phrase ‘melancholy madness’ presents the ‘steam engines’ in a figurative guise of mad animals, through the head ‘madness’.

In the extract there are 31 nouns, with 87% of them being concrete nouns, 11 adjectives, which all act as pre-modifiers, and 8 verbs. These words make up major sentences as they include subjects, verbs and objects. The declarative sentences function as a statement and give detailed information on the industrialized town. ‘Representative speech acts are statements and descriptions. The speaker offers her view of the world as she understands it’ (Black, 2006, p.20). The extract illustrates a symbolic and metaphorical description of the town through detailed declaratives.

In the extract there is a semantic field of colour, through the repetition of ‘red’ and the adjectives ‘black’ and ‘purple’. The symbolism in the colours ‘red and black’ portray the evil and harsh life during the industrialization. The semantical field keeps the image of death persistent in the readers’ mind.

Also, there is a semantic field of unnaturalness in the nouns and adjectives. 12 nouns and 3 adjectives allude to the idea of industrialization and urbanisation. Dickens deliberately uses these semantics to signify the exploitation, desperation and oppression in an industrial town. The semantic in the repetition of ‘smoke’ emphasises that the physical appearance of the town has been disfigured by the factories and the coal mines.

In conclusion, my analysis confirms my hypothesis that the extract presents the industrialization from a negative view. Dickens emphasises the pollution that has destroyed the rural landscape

and how the upper class exploit the working class. The combination of noun and verb phrases symbolise the harshness of society and the semantics in the lexical choice shows that the extract is not ambiguous. The imagery used has negative evaluations through the metaphorical language and symbolism of animals.