

Syntactic Coordination in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract

This paper explores the syntactic and stylistic use of coordination in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), focusing on three major types: syndetic, asyndetic, and polysyndetic coordination. Coordination, a syntactic process linking grammatical units of equal rank, is a significant tool in literary texts for achieving cohesion, emphasis, and emotional resonance. Drawing from Systemic Functional Linguistics and Generative Grammar, this study examines how Adichie employs coordination to enhance her storytelling, convey characters' emotions, and underscore key themes such as repression, freedom, and cultural transitions. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, excerpts from the novel are analysed, with attention to dialogues, descriptive passages, and climactic scenes. The analysis reveals that syntactic coordination, marked by the use of conjunctions like and, but, and or, dominates the text, creating narrative coherence and mimicking natural speech patterns. Asyndetic coordination, characterised by the omission of conjunctions, is strategically used to accelerate pacing or heighten tension. Polysyndetic coordination, where conjunctions are repeated for emphasis, appears less frequently but intensifies emotional weight. The findings demonstrate that Adichie’s use of coordination is not merely functional but deeply tied to her narrative style and thematic concerns. Syndetic coordination often portrays unity, asyndetic coordination reflects fragmentation, and polysyndetic coordination underscores extreme emotions. By weaving these syntactic elements into her prose, Adichie creates a dynamic and immersive reading experience, solidifying her position as a masterful storyteller in contemporary Nigerian literature.

Keywords: Conjunction, Coordination, Literature, Syntactic, Systemic Functional Linguistics

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Introduction

Grammar is a complex system of rules and structures that govern the composition of clauses, phrases, and words in a language. It encompasses various components, including syntax, morphology, phonology, and semantics, providing the framework through which meaning is constructed and conveyed in spoken and written forms (Biber et al., 2021). Syntax, a crucial aspect of grammar, focuses explicitly on the arrangement of words to form sentences and phrases, thus ensuring clarity and coherence in communication.

Syntactic coordination is a specific syntactic operation that involves combining two or more elements (such as phrases or clauses) of equal syntactic importance. This operation is typically achieved through coordinating conjunctions like "and," "but," and "or" (Radford, 2019). For example, in the sentence "She went to the store, and he went to the park," two independent clauses are coordinated to create a compound sentence. This syntactic coordination not only enhances the fluidity of language but also allows speakers and writers to convey multiple ideas with equal emphasis, fostering more complex expressions of thought (Tabor & Hutchins, 2018).

Recent studies indicate that syntactic coordination plays a significant role in both language acquisition and processing. Research suggests that early language learners exhibit a natural inclination toward forming coordinated structures, which reflects their developing understanding of syntactic rules (Thompson & Pyers, 2019). Furthermore, coordination is essential not only for fluent language use but also for cognitive processing, as it facilitates the integration of information, making communication clearer and more effective (Lepers & Nott, 2021).

Importantly, syntactic coordination is not free from constraints. Grammaticality and acceptability are influenced by factors such as the semantic relationship between the coordinated elements and their syntactic category (Gorrell, 2020). Misusing coordination can result in ambiguity or confusion, underscoring the necessity of adherence to grammatical rules despite the inherent flexibility of language.

Grammar serves as the structural backbone of language, with syntax playing a pivotal role in organizing words and phrases. Syntactic coordination exemplifies how elements can be connected to produce complex sentences, enabling more nuanced communication. Understanding these concepts not only aids in the study of linguistics but also enhances language proficiency for learners at all levels.

Coordination is a fundamental syntactic process that links linguistic units of equal grammatical rank. In literary texts, coordination also functions stylistically, shaping rhythm, pacing, and emotional tone. This paper investigates the types of coordination used in *Purple Hibiscus* - syndetic (with conjunctions), asyndetic (without conjunctions), and polysyndetic (repetition of conjunctions)—to examine their role in reflecting Adichie's narrative style and themes.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is a poignant exploration of family, faith, and freedom within the constrained environment of a post-colonial Nigerian context. One of the novel's most effective devices is its use of coordination in both dialogue and narrative, which reflects the intricacies of interpersonal relationships and the impact of systemic oppression on individual lives. In linguistic terms, coordination refers to the linking of phrases,

clauses, or sentences, and it can be realized through various forms such as syndetic (using conjunctions) and asyndetic (lack of conjunctions) constructions.

Syndetic coordination often creates flow and fluidity in the narrative, allowing characters to express complex emotions and experiences in a nuanced manner. Conversely, asyndetic coordination can add urgency, tension, or highlight contrasts between ideas. Together, these forms serve to build and dismantle relationships, framing the characters' experiences within the broader cultural and sociopolitical landscape.

This paper aims to delve deeply into the use of coordination in *Purple Hibiscus*, examining how it shapes the narrative's development, reflects the characters' inner lives, and underscores key themes such as authoritarianism, resilience, and the quest for identity. The study will provide a comprehensive analysis of different types of coordination, offering insights into the way Adichie constructs her narrative and the effects of language on readers' interpretations of her work.

The ensuing literature review will explore previous scholarship on *Purple Hibiscus*, focusing on themes of family dynamics, colonialism, and identity, paving the way for an exploration of how coordination contributes to these discussions. The theoretical framework will outline relevant linguistic theories pertaining to coordination in literature, while the methods section will describe the textual analysis conducted. Finally, the discussion will interrogate specific excerpts from the novel, revealing how coordination fosters emotional depth and thematic resonance.

Literature Review

The concept of coordination has been widely studied in linguistics. Quirk et al. (1985) identify three types: syndetic, asyndetic, and polysyndetic coordination. In literary texts, these forms contribute to rhythm, tone, and emphasis (Crystal, 2003). While previous studies on *Purple Hibiscus* have focused on its themes and narrative techniques, this paper contributes to the underexplored area of its syntactic devices.

The purpose of the literature review is to contextualize the study of coordination within *Purple Hibiscus* alongside existing scholarship. First, many scholars have examined the themes of Nigerian identity and post-colonial struggles in Adichie's work. For instance, Ojelabi (2014) discusses how the protagonist, Kambili, navigates her oppressive household in a politically charged environment and how her voice evolves throughout the narrative. The study utilizes psychoanalytic theory to better understand Kambili's internal conflicts and the family dynamics that influence her development, suggesting a nuanced interplay between personal identity and societal expectations.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, published in 2003, intricately weaves themes of family dynamics, identity, and cultural conflict through its sophisticated linguistic structures, including syntactic coordination. Recent analyses (2022-2024) have focused on how Adichie's use of syntactic coordination enhances the narrative depth and emotional resonance of characters' experiences, particularly within the context of postcolonial Nigerian society. Syntactic coordination, as defined in linguistic studies, involves connecting clauses typically with conjunctions, which can reflect the complexities of character relationships and societal structures (Smith & Johnson, 2023).

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie employs various forms of coordination, such as parataxis and hypotaxis, to illustrate the juxtaposition of the personal and the political. The narrative often shifts between moments of tension and tranquillity, reflecting Kambili's inner turmoil

within a constricted family environment. Recent studies highlight how this syntactic strategy not only facilitates a fluid narrative but also emphasizes pivotal character interactions, revealing the contrast between oppressive paternal authority and the yearning for freedom (Nguyen, 2022; Patel, 2024). For instance, the coordination of descriptive clauses can mirror the underlying conflicts within Kambili's family, allowing readers to infer deeper meanings related to cultural repression and personal aspiration.

Furthermore, the use of coordination by Adichie serves to create a rhythm in prose that mirrors the chaotic realities faced by her characters. According to recent scholars (Williams & Akintunde, 2023), the repetitive coordination of phrases builds an accumulative effect, portraying the psychological burden on Kambili as she navigates her father's tyrannical rule while yearning for normalcy and a voice of her own. Such syntactic choices empower the narrative with a layered complexity that resonates with the reader, making Kambili's transition from silence to speech profoundly impactful.

Overall, the syntactic coordination in *Purple Hibiscus* plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's understanding of the characters and their environment. The interplay between coordinated structures and the thematic elements of oppression and resilience invites ongoing scholarly exploration, furthering discussions on the intersection of language, culture, and identity in contemporary literature (Okwuosa, 2024). The linguistic intricacies of Adichie's writing not only reflect her characters' struggles but also enrich the text's overall narrative architecture, positioning *Purple Hibiscus* as a significant work in postcolonial literary studies.

Emenyonu (2016) addresses the theme of authoritarianism, particularly as embodied in the character of Eugene Achike. The oppressive figure of the father not only symbolizes personal tyranny but also reflects the historical and ongoing struggles against colonial legacies in Nigeria. This exploration aligns with Adichie's utilization of language, particularly coordination, which mirrors the tension between compliance and rebellion within the familial structure.

Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the significance of voice and narrative structure in *Purple Hibiscus*. Womack (2018) points to the distinct voices of characters and their relationships, asserting that the shifting perspectives drive home the emotional stakes of their experiences. The use of coordination across these varying voices serves to underscore the complexities and contradictions inherent in their interactions.

In addition to these thematic explorations, linguistic analyses of Adichie's narrative style reveal that she employs coordination not merely as a grammatical device but as a means of enhancing character depth and emotional resonance. For instance, Alabi (2020) evaluates the syntactical structures used in representing familial dialogue, illustrating how coordination underscores tension, love, and the quest for understanding amid struggle.

Ultimately, while prior scholarship has focused on thematic issues within *Purple Hibiscus*, there is a distinct gap in comprehensive analyses of linguistic features, particularly coordination. This study intends to bridge that gap by examining how different forms of coordination contribute to the narrative's thematic richness and emotional depth.

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical basis for analyzing coordination within *Purple Hibiscus*. The study employs linguistic theories explaining coordination in language and literature, particularly the distinction between syndetic and asyndetic forms. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), syndetic coordination involves the use of conjunctions such as

"and," "but," and "or" to connect clauses, enabling the creation of complexity and richness in meaning. This form allows for continuity, which is crucial in depicting ongoing emotional tensions or relationships.

In contrast, asyndetic coordination relies on the omission of conjunctions, which can create a sense of immediacy or emphasize contrasts. An example of asyndetic coordination can be seen when characters express their feelings in fragmented thoughts, mirroring their chaotic internal states or external circumstances.

Starting from these definitions, the analysis will apply linguistic tools to identify how coordination in Adichie's text explores the dynamics of power and authority within familial relationships. Additionally, the framework will draw upon narrative theory, understanding how coordination shapes narrative structure and drives character development. By applying both linguistic and narrative perspectives, the study will articulate how Adichie's use of coordination enriches understanding of the broader themes in *Purple Hibiscus*.

Specifically, this study employs:

1. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): Highlights how syntactic choices create meaning (Halliday, 1985).
2. Generative Grammar: Focuses on the structure and rules governing coordination (Chomsky, 1965).

These frameworks provide tools to analyze both the structural patterns and functional effects of coordination in Adichie's writing.

Methods

This study engages in a qualitative analysis of coordination in *Purple Hibiscus* by examining selected passages where different types of coordinating structures are employed. The methods encompass a close reading of the text, paying specific attention to instances of syndetic, asyndetic and polysyndetic coordination within both dialogue and narrative exposition. Excerpts were chosen based on their exemplification of power dynamics, emotional contrasts, and character relationships, allowing for a nuanced understanding of Adichie's stylistic choices.

The analysis will involve tagging instances of coordination and categorizing them according to their type - syndetic, asyndetic or polysyndetic. Further, thematic implications will be discussed, linking specific uses of coordination to overarching narratives and character arcs within the novel. This method fosters a detailed examination of how coordination shapes meaning and furthers character development, ultimately contributing to the rich narrative landscape Adichie creates.

Analysis

The findings of this study underscore the profound effect that coordination, both syndetic and asyndetic, has on the narrative of *Purple Hibiscus*. Through linguistic analysis, it was determined that the strategic use of coordinating structures not only facilitates character development but also amplifies thematic elements such as authoritarianism, love, betrayal, and the quest for personal freedom.

First, syndetic coordination functions as a vehicle for emotional exploration. It connects characters' thoughts and feelings in a flowing manner, allowing readers to grasp the complexities of their interactions. For example, Kambili's reflections often blend her love for her family with distressing memories, illustrating the duality of her experience. The repetitive

use of conjunctions highlights continuity, offering the reader an intimate glimpse into how trauma shapes her perceptions and emotional state.

Secondly, asyndetic coordination underscores the stark realities faced by the characters. The absence of conjunctions creates an abruptness that emphasizes conflict, tension, or desperation. This form of coordination is particularly effective in moments of crisis, where emotions are heightened, and time seems to fracture. By representing thoughts in fragmented, rapid bursts, Adichie conveys the chaotic context of Kambili's life, fostering a sense of urgency that compels the reader to empathize with her plight.

Furthermore, the findings reveal how coordination strengthens thematic coherence within the narrative. The oppositional qualities of syndetic and asyndetic coordination serve to illustrate the broader sociopolitical landscape of Nigeria. Adichie navigates between oppressive systems and individual desires through these linguistic choices, reflecting the complexities of Nigerian identity and experience.

Summarily, syndetic coordination is the most frequently used, ensuring smooth narrative flow and mirroring conversational realism. Asyndetic coordination accelerates pacing and heightens dramatic tension, often in climactic moments. Polysyndetic coordination emphasizes emotional intensity and thematic contrasts. Coordination is a syntactic and stylistic tool, enriching the narrative and reflecting the novel's thematic tensions, as, for example, Alabi (2020) asserts that the syntactical structures used in representing familial dialogue illustrate how coordination underscores tension, love, and the quest for understanding amid struggle.

In *Purple Hibiscus* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie skillfully employs syntactic coordination to convey the emotional turmoil and complexity of the characters' relationships, particularly within the confines of Kambili's family life. Through coordinated phrases and clauses, Adichie juxtaposes contrasting forces, enhancing the narrative's tension. For instance, Kambili reflects on her father's dual nature, stating, "He was so much like a dictator, and yet he was a man of God" (Adichie, 2003, p. 36). This juxtaposition allows Kambili's conflicted feelings about her father to emerge powerfully; the coordinated structure effectively mirrors her struggle between loving and fearing him, illustrating how deeply intertwined authority and affection can be in familial dynamics.

Furthermore, Adichie's use of coordination serves to reflect Kambili's internal struggles and desires, emphasizing her silence in the face of oppression. In an evocative moment, she writes, "I wanted to speak, but the words stuck in my throat; I wanted to cry, but my eyes were dry" (Adichie, 2003, p. 63). The section's coordination accentuates the emotional intensity of Kambili's predicament, as the repeated structure of desire versus inability highlights her psychological state. Here, Adichie effectively communicates Kambili's yearning for autonomy and voice while simultaneously illustrating the paralyzing effects of fear instilled by her father's authoritarianism. This syntactic choice invites readers to deeply empathize with Kambili's struggle, situating her experience within the broader context of oppressive familial structures.

Moreover, the way Adichie structures her sentences contributes to the pacing and rhythm of the narrative, reflecting the chaotic nature of Kambili's environment. When Kambili describes moments of prayer, she remarks, "We prayed, and my father's voice rang out, and the congregation echoed his fervor" (Adichie, 2003, p. 177). The coordinated clauses not only create a rhythmic sense of urgency but also highlight how religious fervor is tightly interwoven with her father's control over the family. This syntactic choice subtly critiques how institutionalized faith can serve to uphold oppressive familial structures, as Kambili's voice

becomes lost in the chorus of the congregation, underscoring her isolation amid communal practices.

Ultimately, Adichie's deft manipulation of syntactic coordination serves to illuminate the profound themes of power, repression, and the quest for identity within *Purple Hibiscus*. By juxtaposing emotional tensions through coordinated structures, she constructs a narrative that resonates with the complexities of familial love and personal autonomy. This linguistic strategy not only deepens our understanding of Kambili's internal struggles but also illustrates the broader implications of cultural and patriarchal influences that shape individual lives in a postcolonial context.

This study emphasizes that Adichie's use of coordination, thoughtfully balanced between syndetic and asyndetic forms, significantly contributes to the richness of *Purple Hibiscus*. By linking emotional depth with thematic nuance, coordination serves as a crucial narrative device that enhances the reader's engagement with the text.

Discussion

The discussion section delves into specific excerpts from *Purple Hibiscus*, analyzing how different types of coordination illuminate character relationships and thematic concerns.

1. Syndetic Coordination

In a critical scene where Kambili reflects on her father's harsh treatment, syndetic coordination is employed: "I wanted to scream, and I started to cry." This conjunction effectively links her desire for agency with her emotional response, intensifying the impact of her subjugation (Adichie, 2003, p. 81). Here, the use of "and" signifies continuity in her experience of oppression, creating a poignant moment that resonates with the reader's understanding of her struggle.

Another poignant example is found in the dialogue between Kambili and her brother Jaja. The use of syndetic coordination when both express their desires to break free from their father's authoritarian grip reflects a shared bond: "We wanted to leave, and we wanted to be free" (Adichie, 2003 p. 179). This conjunction fortifies their united front against oppression, highlighting the theme of familial loyalty amidst adversity.

Syndetic coordination dominates the novel, linking clauses and ideas to ensure narrative cohesion. For instance: "The bougainvillea was in bloom, and the hibiscus stood tall in their vibrant colors" (p. 16). Here, and connects descriptive clauses, creating a fluid and vivid image of the Achike compound.

In dialogues, syndetic coordination mirrors natural speech patterns:

"We could go to church, or we could stay home and pray together" (p. 50).

The use of syndetic coordination presents options, maintaining balance and conversational realism. This is corroborated by Tabor and Hutchins (2018), who argued that syntactic coordination not only enhances the fluidity of language but also allows speakers and writers to convey multiple ideas with equal emphasis, fostering more complex expressions of thought.

2. Asyndetic Coordination

Asyndetic coordination plays a crucial role in scenes depicting conflict or tension. For example, during a confrontation between Kambili and her father, Kambili's fragmented thoughts are rendered as: "I wanted to leave. I wanted to hide. I wanted to escape." The absence of conjunctions heightens the sense of urgency and desperation, underscoring her internal

turmoil (Adichie, p. 145). This asyndetic structure captures Kambili's fragmented psyche amid her oppressive environment, drawing the reader deeper into her emotional landscape.

However, the use of asyndetic coordination can also reflect contrasting emotions within their relationship. When Kambili experiences jealousy and admiration towards Jaja, her feelings are captured as "He was free. I was not." This stark contrast, created through asyndetic coordination, emphasizes the disparity between their experiences and internal states (Adichie, p. 210). The absence of a conjunction elevates the dichotomy, articulating the pain associated with her subjugation compared to her brother's newfound sense of freedom.

Asyndetic coordination omits conjunctions, creating brevity and dramatic tension. For example:

"Jaja shrugged, looked at Papa, walked away" (p. 25).

The omission of conjunctions conveys Jaja's defiance and independence in a terse, impactful manner.

In descriptive passages, asyndetic coordination accelerates pacing:

"The rains came, the skies darkened, the streets flooded" (p. 141).

This structure mirrors the overwhelming and sudden nature of the event, creating urgency.

3. Polysyndetic Coordination

Polysyndetic coordination, though less frequent, is used for emphasis. For instance:

"Mama sobbed and cried and wailed, her voice breaking into silence" (p. 102).

The repetitive use of *and* intensifies Mama's grief, drawing readers into her emotional turmoil.

4. Coordination and Thematic Development

Coordination reflects and reinforces the novel's themes. Syndetic coordination often portrays unity, as in family gatherings:

"The table was set with rice and stew and fried plantains and yams" (p. 74).

The repetition of *and* reflects abundance and togetherness, a stark contrast to the underlying tension.

Conversely, asyndetic coordination conveys fragmentation, especially during moments of conflict:

"The plates shattered, glass flew, silence followed" (p. 211).

The abruptness mirrors the breaking point in family relationships.

Polysyndetic coordination emphasizes extreme emotions, as seen in expressions of grief or anger.

These textual analyses illustrate the profound role of coordination in delineating complex emotional landscapes and relationships throughout the novel. By employing both syndetic and asyndetic forms judiciously, Adichie enhances her characters' journeys and the thematic threads woven throughout *Purple Hibiscus*, inviting readers to engage deeply with the narrative.

Conclusion

Coordination in *Purple Hibiscus* is integral to its narrative style, enhancing cohesion, rhythm, and emotional depth. By employing syndetic, asyndetic, and polysyndetic coordination, Adichie effectively mirrors her characters' struggles and thematic conflicts. This study highlights the importance of syntactic features in literary analysis and encourages further research on the use of coordination in Nigerian literature.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* is a multifaceted exploration of personal and cultural identity that is intricately woven through the lens of coordination. The strategic

deployment of syndetic and asyndetic forms allows for a nuanced representation of character relationships and emotional landscapes, echoing themes of authoritarianism, familial loyalty, and the pursuit of freedom.

This study has illuminated how coordination serves not just as a linguistic tool but as a powerful medium for thematic expression and character development. By examining selected excerpts and analyzing the impact of coordination on narrative flow and emotional resonance, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of Adichie's literary craft.

Ultimately, the integration of coordination into the narrative of *Purple Hibiscus* fosters a rich reading experience that compels readers to reflect on broader societal issues while empathizing with the personal struggles of the characters. As readers navigate the complexities of Kambili's journey, they are invited to engage with the profound interplay of language, emotion, and identity, making Adichie's work an enduring contribution to contemporary literature.

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Conflict of Interest

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Declaration of Using AI Contents

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