

# Psycholinguistic Approach in Reading Nathan Filer's *The Shock of The Fall*

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## Abstract

The research paper spotlights the aspects of Nathan Filer's *The Shock of the Fall* by using psycholinguistic approach. It has information about the novel and the novelist in a concise manner. Language is not only a tool to understand human emotions, but also a tool to understand the psychology of human beings. The paper discusses the definition, origin, and development of psycholinguistics and psycholinguistic approach. It brings out the researcher's comprehension of the novel by reading it using psycholinguistic approach. A non-linear narration of events in the book anticipates readers to apply psycholinguistic approach. The paper enhances the quality of novel reading with particular reference to reading psychological fiction. It has the testimonials of Norita Purba, Lalit Kumar Yadav, Mehmet Demirezen, Yuan Linyang, Parimala Fathima, and Elizabeth Bates. The main objective of the study is to analyse the implicit meanings of Filer's writing in the novel through his selection of different fonts and sentence structures. The paper projects the role of psycholinguistics in literature. It outlines the four benefits of using psycholinguistic approach in the novel to substantiate the research findings.

**Keywords:** Psycholinguistics, Psycholinguistic Approach, Psychological Fiction.

*The Shock of the Fall* is a novel that belongs to psychological fiction, a subgenre in literature. It was the debut novel of Nathan Filer, a psychiatrist turned writer. In 2013, it was published in the United Kingdom. In the same year, it was published again in the United States with the changed title *Where the Moon Isn't*. Major themes in the novel are loss, guilt, and mental illness. Three timelines in the story are the present, the past, and the past's past. The book should be read with psycholinguistic approach to progress through the events in the protagonist's life.

Nathan Filer is a British poet, novelist, and psychiatrist. In 1980, he was born in Bristol, England. He graduated from Ridings High School. In 2002, he completed a mental health degree at the University of the West of England. He contributed to various literary events as a poet. He worked as a mental health practitioner. With his experience in psychiatry, he studied Master of Arts in Creative Writing to develop his idea of the novel into a published work of fiction. After publishing *The Shock of the Fall* in 2013, he published his non-fiction work, *The Heartland: Finding and Losing Schizophrenia* which was

republished with the title *This Book Will Change Your Mind About Mental Health: A Journey Into the Heartland of Psychiatry*.

Understanding the term psycholinguistics is necessary to apply psycholinguistic approach in the novel, *The Shock of the Fall*, by Nathan Filer. "Psycholinguistics is an integration of two disciplines; psychology and linguistics. Psychology is the study of mind and behaviour; linguistics is the study of language. So, in general, psycholinguistics can be defined as the study of mind and language" (Purba 47). Language is the key feature of human beings. It directly or indirectly shows the mentality of a person. The language used by a person determines who they are inside their mind.

At the early stage, psycholinguistics merely formed as an idea in psychology. Later, it came into practice in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1936, Jacob Robert Kantor, an American psychologist, first used the term psycholinguistics in his book, *An Objective Psychology of Grammar*. Psycholinguistic theory portrays the relationship of the mind with the language of a human being. The approach

that uses psycholinguistic theory is called as psycholinguistic approach. "The three basic areas of psycholinguistics are language creation, language perception, and language use" (Yadav 282). These three areas connect human beings mutually.

Most of the time, a conditioned psychological system conditions the linguistic traits of a person. "The psycholinguistic approach covers many scientific fields such as cognitive psychology, behaviourism, psychology, applied psychology, linguistics, mentalism, nativism, biological linguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, rationalism, etc.," (Demirezen 35). When a reader reads a novel, the reader has to put himself in the shoes of the characters in the story to understand their psychology. Therefore, the approach is known as psycholinguistic approach in reading psychological stories.

Novel reading is a psychological activity. Those who read novels can understand the psychology of the characters and the novelist through the use of language in the novels. In this way, psycholinguistics plays a vital role in reading novels. In psycholinguistic approach, psychological meaning of the text is more important than the literary meaning of the text. Psychological fiction is a genre in novels and a subgenre in literature. This type of novel explores the psychology of characters by outlining their thoughts. Readers who indulge in reading psychological fiction should understand psycholinguistic approach to develop a sense of psycho-literary astonishment.

Even though the novelist may project the plot in a non-linear manner, the readers should comprehend the text to entertain themselves or interpret it for their academic or non-academic intentions. "Reading comprehension, in essence, is a complex psychological process. There are many factors that affect reading comprehension, but among them, vocabulary and practical application are the two critical factors" (Linyang 90). A profound understanding of the author's background facilitates readers to understand the lexical items in their literary works.

In the novel, *The Shock of the Fall*, Matthew Homes is the protagonist who is 19 years old. He says about his past, which is his age of nine. He speaks to the readers

rather than other characters in the novel. The novel begins with, "I should say that I am not a nice person. Sometimes I try to be, but often I'm not. So, when it was my turn to cover my eyes and count to a hundred – I cheated" (TSOTF, Filer 1). Filer begins the novel by making readers remember their childhood games. Even an honest person might cheat in their childhood. In this way, the readers can connect themselves with the narrator and protagonist of the novel.

Nathan Filer has used spoken English instead of written English in the novel to establish a connection with the mind of readers. Matthew Homes tells the readers, "I'll tell you what happened because it will be a good way to introduce my brother. His name's Simon. I think you're going to like him. I really do. But in a couple of pages, he'll be dead. And he was never the same after that" (TSOTF, Filer 5). The dialogue as mentioned above holds a unique position on the rear cover of the novel. It has the word And at the beginning of the sentence, which shows the significance of colloquial language in the novel.

Matthew Homes moves the story of his life from childhood to adolescence, including his feeble mental state. He explicitly tells the readers, "And you'll never guess what he did" (TSOTF, Filer 30). In the sentence, the pronoun he refers to Steve, the occupational therapist in the asylum. He lets Matthew use his computer to type what he thinks about his past. Nathan Filer has brought out some pictorial representations in the book by being Matthew Homes in his mind. The pictures are disorderly drawn which shows the mental disorder of Matthew to the readers.

Filer has used italicised sentences to describe Matthew's mental illness, "*I keep digging, telling him to stop being a baby, to hold the torch still, and he holds it with trembling hands, until her button eyes glisten in the beam*" (TSOTF, Filer 49). He has used prominent words in bold letters to embed them in the mind of readers. In such a way, he combines his knowledge of psychology with literature to produce this masterpiece. Matthew Homes says, "The important part was this new doctor asked to speak with Mum in private, and their conversation was the beginning of a whole new chapter in our lives" (TSOTF, Filer 53).



"Psycholinguistics is the most effective approach for improving the comprehensive reading strategy in teaching learning process" (Fathima et al. 5905). There are four benefits of using psycholinguistic approach in the book: readers can understand the psychology of the novelist Nathan Filer. They can understand the psychology of the protagonist, Matthew Homes. The novelist Nathan Filer can understand the psychology of the readers. The protagonist, Matthew Homes, communicates with the readers by understanding their psychology.

Those who are emotionally disturbed often use offensive language and the novel, *The Shock of the Fall*, depicts it rightly. "The purpose of psycholinguistic research is to uncover universal processes that govern the development, use, and breakdown of language" (Bates et al. 369). Filer has related the language of the protagonist to the mind of readers. It enables them to gain the perspective of the protagonist with a better understanding of their psyche. Filer has applied psycholinguistics in the novel. Rather than merely narrating the story, he uses the novel as a tool to communicate with readers. So, reader-response theory becomes one of the future research scopes of the novel. The theory was devised by Louise Rosenblatt and popularised by Wolfgang Iser.

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## Abbreviation

TSOTF – *The Shock of the Fall*