

Information Syntactic Reduction in Telecinematic Discourse

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Abstract:

The present study investigates the concept of Syntactic Reduction, a fundamental linguistic process involving the omission and substitution of linguistic constituents, in Telecinematic Discourse. Drawing upon Rodney Huddleston's comprehensive examination of Reduction, the study explores the three main classifications of this phenomenon: the reduction of Noun Phrases (NPs), clauses, and Verb Phrases (VPs). Downton Abbey, British TV series, season one is used as the corpus for investigating this phenomenon. The findings have shown that higher social classes characters demonstrated a preference for employing complex and elaborate techniques of information reduction, contributing to a richer and more sophisticated use of language. Conversely, characters from lower social classes exhibited a tendency to utilize a smaller number of constructions and more direct linguistic constructions for information reduction, reflecting distinct communication patterns within the hierarchical structure portrayed in Downton Abbey.

Keywords: Telecinematic Discourse, Syntax, Information Packaging, Reduction.

الإيجاز النحوي للمعلومات في الخطاب التلسينمائي

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ملخص البحث:

تتناول هذه الدراسة مفهوم الإيجاز النحوي في الخطاب التلسينمائي. تهدف الدراسة إلى استخراج الإيجاز في الموسم الأول من مسلسل "داونتون آبي" وتحديد الشخصيات الأكثر استخداماً للإيجاز و ذلك بناءً على الفحص الشامل الذي قام به رودني هادلستون لهذا المفهوم النحوي. أظهرت النتائج أن شخصيات الطبقات الاجتماعية العليا أبدت تفضيلاً لاستخدام تقنيات معقدة ومتقنة لإيجاز الخطاب، مما يساهم في استخدام لغوي أكثر ثراءً وتطوراً. وعلى النقيض من ذلك، أظهرت الشخصيات من الطبقات الاجتماعية الدنيا توجهاً نحو استخدام عدد أقل من الإيجاز النحوي، مما يعكس أنماط تواصل مختلفة داخل البنية الهرمية التي يصورها "داونتون آبي".

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطاب التلسينمائي، علم النحو، نظم المعلومات، الإيجاز

1. Introduction

Telecinematic discourse has been the focus of many discourse studies; however, quite few ones have approached it syntactically. The present research aims at investigating one of the many information packaging constructions, namely information syntactic reduction in "Downton Abbey". The concept of information packaging centers on how speakers convey ideas beyond content, employing linguistic variations known as "information packaging constructions." These variations manipulate word order and form to express the same concept in distinctive ways. Huddleston subsequently categorized nine constructions for packaging information, encompassing passive, extraposition, existential, clefts, dislocation, preposing, postposing, inversion, and reduction. It is hypothesized that there is a non-uniformity in the employment of information syntactic reduction across characters and social classes. Due to their aristocratic living style, high social class characters are expected to use more complex and elaborate ways to reduce information, while characters of lower social class tend to use simpler and more direct constructions.

The importance of this research stems from the fact that it breaks new ground through investigating information packaging constructions in telecinematic discourse. It is one of the few studies that combine these two branches of linguistics: syntax and discourse analysis. This research is limited to the application of Huddleston's comprehensive examination of Reduction to "Downton Abbey," by Julian Fellowes. The scope of the analysis will be limited exclusively to the dialogues of the characters..

2. Reduction

Information syntactic reduction is a process where old information is reduced or omitted. This can be done through the use of pronouns, ellipsis, or other pro-forms. Pro-forms are words or phrases that can be used to refer to something else without explicitly naming it. Pronouns are the most common type of pro-form, but there are also other types, such as demonstratives (e.g., this, that), articles (e.g., the, a, an), and some quantifiers (e.g., all, some, many). Ellipsis is the complete omission of a word or phrase that is understood from the context (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

Halliday (1994) already discusses reduction through ellipsis and substitution, explaining that ellipsis implies information by omitting elements, thereby shaping the structure of discourse and establishing connections within the text. It creates a relationship within the text's wording. For instance, in the dialogue "Why didn't you lead a spade? -I hadn't got any," the listener infers "spades" to comprehend the response. Both ellipsis and substitution function as cohesive tools. Ellipsis acts as a placeholder, indicating omitted elements and their grammatical roles, while substitution replaces these elements. Various grammatical contexts allow for either only ellipsis or substitution, or in some cases, both options are viable, such as in the phrase "I preferred the other [one]."

Downing and Locke (2006) explain that ellipsis involves omitting recoverable elements in clauses, emphasizing new information and improving coherence. It occurs textually, where shared elements in consecutive clauses are omitted, or situationally, particularly in conversational contexts where unstressed pronouns or functional items are frequently dropped. Also, there are different types of ellipsis: initial, medial, and final. In speech imitations, situational ellipsis is common, but there's a limit to the amount of material that can be omitted while maintaining coherence. Substitution, another linguistic mechanism, replaces recoverable information with 'filler' words, like "do so" or "not," to avoid repetition in clauses. Unlike ellipsis, substitution doesn't leave an empty slot but replaces the omitted material.

2.1 Reduction of NPs

Under this category, there are primarily three different kinds of reduction to take into consideration.

2.1.1 Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are words that are used to refer to nouns or noun phrases. The most common personal pronouns in English are *I*, *you*, *he*, *she*, *it*, *we*, and *they*. Personal pronouns can be used to refer to people, animals, things, or ideas.

Person is a grammatical category that is used to distinguish between the speaker (1st person), the addressee (2nd person), and everyone else (3rd person). Personal pronouns are always marked for person. For example, "Wow, __ hardly recognized myself!" This occurs in very informal speech and involves the omission of a subject pronoun for the first person (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

Gender is a grammatical category that is used to distinguish between male (masculine), female (feminine), and non-binary (neuter) nouns. Personal pronouns are marked for gender in the 3rd person singular (Huddleston, et al. 2022). For instance, "My mom. She was very excited when I came here." The pronoun "she" heads the noun phrase in a subject position. It is a reduced form of the noun phrase "my mom".

Themselves is a singular reflexive pronoun that is used to refer to someone who is not male or female. Themselves is becoming more common in English usage. For example, "My friends enjoyed themselves at the party." The pronoun "themselves" is anaphoric to the previously mentioned noun phrase, "My friends" (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

2.1.2 The Pro-Forms One and Others

In the example, “She left us six pears; this one is riper than the others /the other ones.” The forms one and others, unlike pronouns, possess an antecedent that is not a complete noun phrase: in this particular instance, the antecedent is “pears”, rather than “six pears”. From a syntactical perspective, these words are classified as common nouns rather than pronouns. Furthermore, these forms differ from pronouns in that they can be modified by determiners, such as “this” and “the” as seen in the example. Also, these forms exhibit a prototype characteristic by showing a grammatical distinction between singular forms (one/other) and plural forms (ones/others), which is indicated by the plural suffix-s (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

2.1.3 The Fused Head Construction

These constructions are often interpreted anaphorically, meaning that their meaning depends on something that has already been mentioned in the text. For example, in the sentence “I need some ink, but I can't find any,” the fused determiner-head “any” is interpreted anaphorically as “any ink.” Similarly, in the sentence “I had put some mangoes on the table and as usual Max took the largest,” the fused modifier-head “largest” is interpreted anaphorically as “largest of them,” meaning “largest of the mangoes.” (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

Fused head constructions are typically formed with pro-forms, which are words that stand in for other words or phrases. In the examples above, the pro-forms are “any” and “largest.” Pro-forms are mostly determiners and adjectives, not pronouns (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

2.2 Reduction of Clauses, VPs, and Other Phrases

2.2.1 Reduction of Clauses

Examples from the show might illustrate the cases of clause reduction:

1. Lady Sybil: Granny, you're a romantic!

Violet: I've been called many things, but never that.

2. Isobel: She's forbidden us to say anything to her son.

So, do we break a patient's confidence and disobey her orders? Or not?

Cora: We can't. If she's forbidden it.

Noun phrases such as “that,” “this,” and “it” can function as antecedents for clauses instead of noun phrases, as seen in examples [1] and [2] (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

3. Branson: She's not badly hurt, is she?

Lady Mary: I don't think so.

“So” can function as a type of 'pro-clause', as demonstrated in example [3] above. It mostly operates as an internal complement that is authorized by verbs such as believe, think, seem (as in It seems so), etc. (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

4. She's coming round to see us, but she didn't say when ___.

In such case, the interrogative content clause is reduced to its initial phrase and the rest of the clause is omitted (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

2.2.2 Reduction of Verb Phrases

The following dialogues are taken from the show to illustrate VP reductions:

1. Thomas: I've been accepted for a training scheme for the army medical corps.

Mr. Carson: Have you indeed?

Thomas: Yes, and I want to do it.

2. Edith: You can't be leaving yet.

Anthony: I'm afraid I must ___.

3. Matthew: It's very difficult, Carson. For her, for Lady Mary, for everyone.

Carson: It is Mr. Crawley, but I appreciate your saying so.

4. Mary: I'd never marry any man that I was told to.

- The noun phrases "this," "that," and "it" can be used with the lexical verb "do" to create a "pro-VP." In the context of [1] “do it” is understood anaphorically as the character's desire to “participate in the army medical corps training scheme.”
- The form “so” in “saying so” in the third example refers back to Matthew's acknowledgment of the difficulty of the situation.
- An example like [2] includes the ellipsis of the complement of a verb phrase “I must leave.”
- In [4], there is an omission of a verb phrase (VP) after the infinitival marker "to".

There is also a limited set of lexical verbs that permit the ellipses of their whole non-finite complement. For example, the verb "try" in “I don't promise to get it finished today, but I'll try ___.” can be interpreted as "try to get it finished today"(Huddleston, et al. 2022).

Likewise, certain verbs, like "know" in “They asked me who informed the press, but I don't know ___.” allow for the omission of a content phrase complement "I don't know who informed the press” (Huddleston, et al. 2022).

2.2.3 Pro-Forms for Predicative Complements and Locative PPs

1. She was an excellent manager, or at least she seemed so.
2. He was born in Boston and lived there all his life.

"so" can be used in various ways outside the ones discussed above. Specifically, it can serve as a predicative complement, allowing for different types of antecedents, such as noun phrase "an excellent manager" as shown in [1] (Huddleston, et al. 2022:389).

The preposition "there" is commonly employed as an anaphoric reference to a locative statement, as exemplified in [2]. It can also be used deictically, for example, in the sentence "Just put it over there." (Huddleston, et al. 2022:389).

Information reduction is a common feature of human language. It is used in both spoken and written language, and it can be found in all languages.

3. Telecinematic Discourse

Piazza, Bednarek, and Rossi examine the linguistic aspects of fictional and narrative film and television from multiple perspectives, using diverse data and engaging in comprehensive discussions. They explore the nature of language, its connection to reality, and its roles in fictional storytelling. They also consider the similarities and differences between film and television discourse, as well as the conventions and expectations that these media forms adhere to (Piazza et al., 2011).

In their book, they explore the linguistic aspects of fictional and narrative film and television. They argue that both film and television are multimodal narratives, meaning that they use both verbal and visual elements to tell stories. They discuss the importance of discourse in film and television, noting that it serves several key functions such as character development which means that discourse can be used to reveal a character's thoughts and cognitive perspectives. Narrative genre, as in discourse can be used to establish the genre of a film or television show and audience engagement, that is discourse can be used to engage the audience and keep them invested in the story (Piazza et al., 2011).

Piazza, Bednarek, and Rossi also focus on the specific characteristics of telecinematic discourse, highlighting the following key points:

- The relationship between represented and interactive participants: Film and television productions operate within a dual framework, with characters within the narrative interacting with the external viewers. This relationship is typically interpreted as an individualized experience in film, but it can be more continuous and recurrent in television.

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- The interface between the verbal and the visual discourse: Verbal and visual discourse are seamlessly integrated in both film and television. This can be seen in examples such as the scene in David Fincher's film *Seven* where Tracy's severed head is discovered, or in episodes of the television show *The Wire* where the two modes are used to enhance viewer comprehension.
- The issue of the definition of characters: Characters in film and television are often portrayed in a dynamic way, where they are understood in relation to their context and their interactions with other characters. However, there are some key differences in how characters are portrayed in these two media. In film, characters are typically contained within a single textual entity, while in television, they must be understood in the context of a serialized narrative. Additionally, characters in film narratives often undergo a transformation within a settled timeframe, while characters in television narratives tend to remain relatively stable in order to maintain continuity with the audience.
- The relationship between real life and fictional discourse: Telecinematic texts can be seen as a representation of the world, encompassing its temporal, spatial, and discursive dimensions. This representation is always aligned with the socio-cultural conventions of the society in which it is created.

Later on, Christian Hoffmann (2020) proposed a new definition of telecinematic discourse that differs from the traditional account by Piazza, Bednarek, and Rossi (2011) in three keyways: (Hoffmann, 2020).

- Scope: Hoffmann defines telecinematic discourse more broadly to encompass all forms of cinematic and semiotic elements, both verbal and visual, that contribute to the creation of meaning in films and television programs.
- Genres: Hoffmann includes both fictional and non-fictional genres of cinema and television in his definition of telecinematic discourse.
- Focus: Hoffmann focuses on the interplay between aural film discourse (verbal language) and visual cinematic discourse (non-verbal semiotic resources) in the creation of telecinematic experiences.

Based on the three essential differences, Hoffmann proposed a novel, potentially elaborate definition of telecinematic discourse: “Telecinematic discourse refers to the use (and interplay) of both (aural) film discourse and (visual) cinematic discourse. While film discourse refers to the use of verbal language in all of its possible forms, shapes and shades of expression (spoken and written, monologue and dialogue, diegetic and non-diegetic), cinematic discourse describes the manifold (visual) techniques and semiotic resources (apart from aural language) which directors strategically apply to create comprehensive, complex telecinematic experiences for a given audience at home or in cinemas.” (Hoffmann, 2020). Hoffmann's definition is more comprehensive and representative of the diverse range of films and television programs that are produced today. It also reflects the increasing convergence between

feature films and television series in terms of production values, technology, and distribution.

4. Methodology and Data

Season one of British TV series *Downton Abbey* by Julian Fellowes has been chosen for the investigation of syntactic information reduction. For carefully studying information reduction, Huddleston's categorization of Information Packaging Constructions, with a focus on Reduction, is essential. The main goal is to identify the characters' information reduction ways in "Downton Abbey." The investigation will examine the use of Reduction, focusing on class differences, in order to arrive at the idea that upper-class characters use more information reduction strategies. To facilitate a holistic understanding, the researcher begins with the presentation of a comprehensive table illustrating the typology and frequency of each Information Packaging Construction across episodes. This foundational overview aims to establish a baseline for subsequent in-depth analyses. Examples from "Downton Abbey" will be presented to enhance the interpretive framework. These examples support the analytical interpretations and show how theoretical constructs appear in the narrative. The analysis seeks to offer a thorough and detailed examination of information reduction in "Downton Abbey." It aims to illuminate the complex ways through which characters, defined by their social status, use and manipulate language to communicate and withhold information.

5. Findings

The results of our analysis show a prevalent employment of Reduction constructions across the seven episodes. This use of Reduction extends to both upper and lower social class characters in "Downton Abbey." However, there is a higher frequency of information reduction among upper-class characters compared to their lower-class counterparts.

The first season of this show is characterized by a distinctive pattern of linguistic use; the use of reduction is featured heavily in the discourse rather frequently. This linguistic phenomenon is not unique to any one social level, as shown by the fact that members of both higher and lower social classes use reduction in their speech. The extent to which reduction is utilized by characters from various social strata is the primary factor that differentiates them from one another.

It has been observed that members of characters who belong to higher social classes use "reduction" more frequently in their conversation. By using the technique of reduction, these characters establish a verbal barrier between themselves and characters from lower social levels, and thus strengthening their more superior standing.

On the other hand, characters from lower-class societies also make use of reduction, albeit to a lesser level than the upper-class figures. Their use of reduction may be explained by their aspiration to imitate the speech patterns of the upper class in order to achieve social acceptance or improve their own social status. This event illustrates the complicated interplay between linguistic change and social mobility.

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The Table below displays the frequency of information reduction across the seven episodes of the first season of Downton Abbey.

Table.1 Frequency of Information Reduction in Downton Abbey Season One

Information Reduction							
Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3	Episode 4	Episode 5	Episode 6	Episode 7	Total
28	20	21	92	47	57	95	360

The following are some instances of the information Reduction that are used in each episode of the first season of Downton Abbey:

Episode One:

A detailed examination of information packaging constructions within the first season episodes of "Downton Abbey" unveils the strategic utilization of Reduction in varied instances. For instance, in the first episode, the construction that was commonly used among other constructions is reduction, that is for easy exposition as well as to reduce a constituent that represents an old information. For instance, Carson's response to Robert exemplifies anaphora and antecedent, where the pro-form "so" functions as a linguistic placeholder, replacing prior details in Robert's question as shown in this dialogue:

Robert: Is it true? What they're saying?

Carson: I believe so, milord.

Such cases of ellipsis can be covered by the generalization of the two concepts anaphora and antecedent, in which the anaphoric expression (so) in Carson's reply is a replacement to the previous details in Robert's question. Therefore, (so) is a pro-form and it is interpreted anaphorically as "what they're saying is true."

Episode Two:

As the story progresses, there is a persistent continuation in employing information reduction. This linguistic strategy is observable in various instances across social strata:

a- *Violet: How do you find being home again? Your father must be glad you're back*

Mr. Molesley: he is, your ladyship.

b- *Cora: O'Brien! Were you discussing Mr Crawley?*

O'Brien: yes, my lady.

Cora: is it your place to do so?

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c- Cora: *I'm glad to catch you alone. You've driven the others away.*

Marry: *Oh, perhaps I have__.*

d- Marry: *have you mentioned this to Granny? Did she laugh?*

Cora: *why would she__? It was her idea.*

e- Robert: *have you been able to explore the village?*

Mrs Crawley: *indeed I have__.*

These dialogues exemplify several forms of information reduction: Mr. Molesley's reply, "he is, your ladyship," utilizes ellipsis to suggest a deleted complement; Cora's "is it your place to do so?" provides the use of the pro-form "so" to replace an antecedent "discussing Mr. Crawley"; Marry's reply "maybe I have__" implies "perhaps I have driven the others away"; Cora's "why would she__? It was her idea" employs ellipsis "why would she laugh?"; and Mrs. Crawley's statement "indeed I have__" omits the conclusion, meaning that she has already carried out the action.

Episode Three:

Reduction remains common in the third episode, mostly in Marry's speech, as in:

a- Evelyn: *my mother never used to allow brays for unmarried girls.*

Marry: *Nor does mine.*

b- Carson: *And if I may say so, your ladyship, you are still very young.*

Marry: *Am I__?*

c- Carson: *Even a butler has his favorites, m' lady.*

Marry: *Does he__?*

These instances of reduction involve concise and elliptical responses that Marry provides. They draw attention to significant character developments and pivotal moments within the storyline.

Episode Four:

In this episode, reduction dominates with 92 uses. Although reduction is used by both upper and lower classes, however, the upper class tends to reduce elements more often in their speech. For instance:

a- Anna: *I'm glad you think better of Mr. Crawley, these days.*

Marry: *Who says I do?*

b- Branson: *Is that all, m' lord?*

Robert: *It is.*

c- Violet: *The eldest boy's taken. It was announced last week. Of course, most of the good ones are.*

In the first two examples (a and b), reduction is recognized as ellipsis, where a constituent is completely omitted. The full form for (a) is "Who says I think better of Mr. Crawley?", and for (b) "it is all." In (c), Violet employs reduction in three distinct forms: pronoun replacement, pro-form usage, and ellipsis. Firstly, "it" serves

as a pronoun substitute for the phrase "*the eldest boy is taken.*" Furthermore, "*the good ones*" functions as a pro-form that replaces the previously specified noun phrase, "*the boys,*" in order to prevent unnecessary repetition of the complete noun phrase. The final application of reduction is excluding the complement "*most of the good boys are taken.*"

Episode Five:

Reduction is not absent in this episode. Here are some instances of information reduction:

a- Violet: We'll see some beautiful examples right across the show. Won't we, Mr. Molesley?

Mr. Molesley: If you say so, your ladyship.

b- Marry: But if you tell Granny I said so, I'll denounce you as a liar.

Matthew: I wouldn't dare__.

c- Mr. Bates: Unless it's been moved for some reason.

Robert: But why would it be?

These examples illustrate various types of reduction. In (a) "*so*" is a pro-form and it can serve as a predicative complement, allowing for different types of antecedents, such as the verb phrase "*We'll see some beautiful examples right across the show*" as shown in (a). in (b) Marry uses the pro-form "*so*" for the same purpose which is replacing an already mentioned clause, Matthew also replies with a form of reduction "*I wouldn't dare*" as in "*I wouldn't dare to tell her.*"

Noun phrases such as that, this, and it can have clauses rather than NPs as antecedent, as in (c) where "*it*" refers back to "*it has been moved for some reason.*"

Episode Six:

In this episode, the utilization of reduction is still of a high rate with 57 in total, 33 of them were used by the characters of the upper class. For example:

a- Marry; *But who told them, if not you?*

b- Robert: *have you heard from Marry?*

Matthew: *No. Have you?*

c- Lady Sybil: *Can Branson drive me into Ripon on Friday evening?*

Robert: *I don't think so.*

Lady Sybil: *I've missed two and I simply must be there.*

These examples show the same types of reduction that have been discussed in the previous episodes. What's new is the preposition "*there*" in (c) which is commonly used anaphorically with a locative expression as antecedent.

Episode Seven:

The use of reductions remains prevalent and reaches the 95 uses in the last episode. This kind of utilization may reflect the emphasis of arriving at the climax of character arcs and resolutions. Here are examples of information reduction used:

- a- *O'Brien: Depends on the maid, m' lady.*
Cora: Of course it does.
- b- *Thomas: I've been accepted for a training scheme for the army medical corps.*
Mr. Carson: Have you indeed?
Thomas: Yes, and I want to do it.
- c- *Edith: You can't be leaving yet.*
Anthony: I'm afraid I must__.
- d- *Mr. Carson: I know you have spirit, milady. And that's what counts. It's all that counts in the end.*
- e- *Mr. Molesley: Do you know if she's got anyone special in her life?*
Mr. Bates: I'd like to say she hasn't__.
- f- *Rosamund: I'm sorry, mama, but you know me. I have to say what I think.*
Violet: why? Nobody else does.

These instances include various types of reduction. The types of reduction used are as follows: in [a] there is ellipsis of the complement of a verb phrase headed by an auxiliary verb, in which "it does" stands for "it depends on the maid." Another type is presented in the context of [b] where "it" can be used with the lexical verb "do" to create a "pro-VP." So, "do it" is understood anaphorically as the character's desire to "participate in the army medical corps training scheme." An example like [c] includes the ellipsis of the complement of a verb phrase "I must leave." In [d] "that" stands for a clause antecedent which is "you have spirit" [e] and [f] have similar cases as [a] and [c].

These examples reveal how various strategies of reduction are utilized in each episode to enhance the storytelling, convey development of characters, and strengthen the narrative. It also has been noted that the use of Reduction is consistently employed in all episodes of the first season by both social classes. However, characters of higher social class often use more information reduction in comparison to those from lower-class backgrounds.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research paper investigates information syntactic reduction in "Downton Abbey," specifically focusing on the reduction of noun phrases, clauses, and verb phrases. The findings show that characters from higher social classes demonstrate a preference for employing complex and elaborate techniques of information reduction, resulting in a more sophisticated use of language. On the other hand, characters from lower social classes tend to use simpler and more direct linguistic constructions for information reduction. This reflects distinct communication patterns within the hierarchical structure portrayed in "Downton Abbey." The study contributes to the understanding of telecinematic discourse and provides insights into the relationship between language and social class. Overall, it

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highlights the importance of syntactic reduction in conveying information effectively and efficiently in telecinematic discourse.

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