

Experiment II

Segmenting Literature into a Hierarchy of Topically Continuous Segments

The Guidelines

Objective. The purpose of this experiment is to discover how well people can identify topic fluctuations in literature. In particular, we want to see how well people can identify overall topical structure in literary texts.

Background. In this experiment, you are asked to read two chapters from the novel *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins and to find places where the topic changes. Of course no two sentences are on exactly the same topic, it changes continually. Some of the changes are minor, while others are quite dramatic. Your task is to build a particular kind of a detailed hierarchical outline for each chapter. The top level of your outline will correspond to the most perceptible topic shifts. Once you have identified those, you will need to examine each of the segments and split them again, this time considering less pronounced fluctuations. You will need to repeat this process recursively, until you reach the paragraph level. Your structure will look like a tree, with the story divided into top-level segments, the top-level segments divided into smaller sub-segments, those ones further subdivided, etc.

Topic is a somewhat elusive term, but since the objective here is to see how people do it in a relatively unrestricted environment, I will not give technical definitions. When in doubt as to whether you should include a particular topic fluctuation in your annotation, consider the unity of time, space, characters and of the theme in two adjacent spans of text. There should be more unity inside each segment you identify than across them.

Procedure.

Your task will consist of the following steps:

1. Record the time when you begin working.
2. Read a chapter assigned to you and divide it into coarse topical segments.
3. Select a coarse segment and further divide based on finer topic fluctuations. Just as at the top level, such a segment may correspond to an action, a description, a reflection on a particular theme, etc. It is important that there be more unity within a segment than across two adjacent segments at the same level.
4. Repeat Step 2 for each segment (and then its sub-segments) until your smallest segments correspond to paragraphs. You do not have to segment individual paragraphs any further.
5. Repeat Steps 3 and 4 for each top-level segment.
6. Record the time when you stop working. If you take breaks, please record them as well.
7. If you encounter difficulties, such as doubts as to whether a topic change is pronounced enough to include it in your outline, difficult passages, etc., please record them.

You also need to provide a short description for each segment (including the top-level ones). As your segments become smaller, it is likely that labeling them will become more and more difficult. If you cannot find an appropriate label, write “no label” or a comment of your choice.

Also, as the segments become smaller, you may find it more and more difficult to subdivide them further. It is all right if you absolutely cannot reach the paragraph level and have to stop at a higher level. In this case, write “could not split further” or your own comment.

Dialogues merit a special note. Essentially, in dialogues every utterance corresponds to a paragraph. If speakers are laconic, segmentation may become very difficult. Therefore, you can stop segmenting dialogues once you find further segmentation problematic, most likely above the paragraph level. (In that case, please record your difficulty. I do not imply that every dialogue is difficult to segment).

Example. Please find included an example segmentation of Chapter 3 of *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins. You may or may not agree with this segmentation – it is just an example. (The task description follows the example.)

Example of a chapter segmented hierarchically.

The Moonstone

A ROMANCE

By Wilkie Collins

CHAPTER III

1 The question of how I am to start the story properly I have tried to settle in two ways. First, by scratching my head, which led to nothing. Second, by consulting my daughter Penelope, which has resulted in an entirely new idea.

2 Penelope's notion is that I should set down what happened, regularly day by day, beginning with the day when we got the news that Mr. Franklin Blake was expected on a visit to the house. When you come to fix your memory with a date in this way, it is wonderful what your memory will pick up for you upon that compulsion. The only difficulty is to fetch out the dates, in the first place. This Penelope offers to do for me by looking into her own diary, which she was taught to keep when she was at school, and which she has gone on keeping ever since. In answer to an improvement on this notion, devised by myself, namely, that she should tell the story instead of me, out of her own diary, Penelope observes, with a fierce look and a red face, that her journal is for her own private eye, and that no living creature shall ever know what is in it but herself. When I inquire what this means, Penelope says, "Fiddlesticks!" I say, Sweethearts.

3 Beginning, then, on Penelope's plan, I beg to mention that I was specially called one Wednesday morning into my lady's own sitting-room, the date being the twenty-fourth of May, Eighteen hundred and forty-eight.

4 "Gabriel," says my lady, "here is news that will surprise you. Franklin Blake has come back from abroad. He has been staying with his father in London, and he is coming to us to-morrow to stop till next month, and keep Rachel's birthday."

5 If I had had a hat in my hand, nothing but respect would have prevented me from throwing that hat up to the ceiling. I had not seen Mr. Franklin since he was a boy, living along with us in this house. He was, out of all sight (as I remember him), the nicest boy that ever spun a top or broke a window. Miss Rachel, who was present, and to whom I made that remark, observed, in return, that SHE remembered him as the most atrocious tyrant that ever tortured a doll, and the hardest driver of an exhausted little girl in string harness that England could produce. "I burn with indignation, and I ache with fatigue," was the way Miss Rachel summed it up, "when I think of Franklin Blake."

6 Hearing what I now tell you, you will naturally ask how it was that Mr. Franklin should have passed all the years, from the time when he was a boy to the time when he was a man, out of his own country. I answer, because his father had the misfortune to be next heir to a Dukedom, and not to be able to prove it.

7 In two words, this was how the thing happened:

8 My lady's eldest sister married the celebrated Mr. Blake—equally famous for his great riches, and his great suit at law. How many years he went on worrying the tribunals of his country to turn out the Duke in possession, and to put himself in the Duke's place—how many lawyer's purses he filled to bursting, and how many otherwise harmless people he set by the ears together disputing whether he was right or wrong—is more by a great deal than I can reckon up. His wife died, and two of his three children died, before the tribunals could make up their minds to show him the door and take no more of his money. When it was all over, and the Duke in possession was left in possession, Mr. Blake discovered that the only way of being even with his country for the manner in which it had treated him, was not to let his country have the honour of educating his son. "How can I trust my native institutions," was the form in which he put it, "after the way in which my native institutions have behaved to ME?" Add to this, that Mr. Blake disliked all boys, his own included, and you will admit that it could only end in one way. Master Franklin was taken from us in England, and was sent to institutions which his father COULD trust, in that superior country, Germany; Mr. Blake himself, you will observe, remaining snug in England, to improve his fellow-countrymen in the Parliament House, and to publish a statement on the subject of the Duke in possession, which has remained an unfinished statement from that day to this.

9 There! thank God, that's told! Neither you nor I need trouble our heads any more about Mr. Blake, senior. Leave him to the Dukedom; and let you and I stick to the Diamond.

10 The Diamond takes us back to Mr. Franklin, who was the innocent means of bringing that unlucky jewel into the house.

11 Our nice boy didn't forget us after he went abroad. He wrote every now and then; sometimes to my lady, sometimes to Miss Rachel, and sometimes to me. We had had a transaction together, before he left, which consisted in his borrowing of me a ball of string, a four-bladed knife, and seven-and-sixpence in money—the colour of which last I have not seen, and never expect to see again. His letters to me chiefly related to borrowing more. I heard, however, from my lady, how he got on abroad, as he grew in years and stature. After he had learnt what the institutions of Germany could teach him, he gave the French a turn next, and the Italians a turn after that. They made him among them a sort of universal genius, as well as I could understand it. He wrote a little; he painted a little; he sang and played and composed a little—borrowing, as I suspect, in all these cases, just as he had borrowed from me. His mother's fortune (seven hundred a year) fell to him when he came of age, and ran through him, as it might be through a sieve. The more money he had, the more he wanted; there was a hole in Mr. Franklin's pocket that nothing would sew up. Wherever he went, the lively, easy way of him made him welcome. He lived here, there, and everywhere; his address (as he used to put it himself) being "Post Office, Europe—to be left till called for." Twice over, he made up his mind to come back to England and see us; and twice over (saving your presence), some unmentionable woman stood in the way and stopped him. His third attempt succeeded, as you know already from what my lady told me. On Thursday the twenty-fifth of May, we were to see for the first time what our nice boy had grown to be as a man. He came of good blood; he had a high courage; and he was five-and-twenty years of age, by our reckoning. Now you know as much of Mr. Franklin Blake as I did—before Mr. Franklin Blake came down to our house.

12 The Thursday was as fine a summer's day as ever you saw: and my lady and Miss Rachel (not expecting Mr. Franklin till dinner-time) drove out to lunch with some friends in the neighbourhood.

13 When they were gone, I went and had a look at the bedroom which had been got ready for our guest, and saw that all was straight. Then, being butler in my lady's establishment, as well as steward (at my own particular request, mind, and because it vexed me to see anybody but myself in possession of the key of the late Sir John's cellar)—then, I say, I fetched up some of our famous Latour claret, and set it in the warm summer air to take off the chill before dinner. Concluding to set myself in the warm summer air next—seeing that what is good for old claret is equally good for old age—I took up my beehive chair to

go out into the back court, when I was stopped by hearing a sound like the soft beating of a drum, on the terrace in front of my lady's residence.

14 Going round to the terrace, I found three mahogany-coloured Indians, in white linen frocks and trousers, looking up at the house.

15 The Indians, as I saw on looking closer, had small hand-drums slung in front of them. Behind them stood a little delicate-looking light-haired English boy carrying a bag. I judged the fellows to be strolling conjurors, and the boy with the bag to be carrying the tools of their trade. One of the three, who spoke English and who exhibited, I must own, the most elegant manners, presently informed me that my judgment was right. He requested permission to show his tricks in the presence of the lady of the house.

16 Now I am not a sour old man. I am generally all for amusement, and the last person in the world to distrust another person because he happens to be a few shades darker than myself. But the best of us have our weaknesses—and my weakness, when I know a family plate-basket to be out on a pantry-table, is to be instantly reminded of that basket by the sight of a strolling stranger whose manners are superior to my own. I accordingly informed the Indian that the lady of the house was out; and I warned him and his party off the premises. He made me a beautiful bow in return; and he and his party went off the premises. On my side, I returned to my beehive chair, and set myself down on the sunny side of the court, and fell (if the truth must be owned), not exactly into a sleep, but into the next best thing to it.

17 I was roused up by my daughter Penelope running out at me as if the house was on fire. What do you think she wanted? She wanted to have the three Indian jugglers instantly taken up; for this reason, namely, that they knew who was coming from London to visit us, and that they meant some mischief to Mr. Franklin Blake.

18 Mr. Franklin's name roused me. I opened my eyes, and made my girl explain herself.

19 It appeared that Penelope had just come from our lodge, where she had been having a gossip with the lodge-keeper's daughter. The two girls had seen the Indians pass out, after I had warned them off, followed by their little boy. Taking it into their heads that the boy was ill-used by the foreigners—for no reason that I could discover, except that he was pretty and delicate-looking—the two girls had stolen along the inner side of the hedge between us and the road, and had watched the proceedings of the foreigners on the outer side. Those proceedings resulted in the performance of the following extraordinary tricks.

20 They first looked up the road, and down the road, and made sure that they were alone. Then they all three faced about, and stared hard in the direction of our house. Then they jabbered and disputed in their own language, and looked at each other like men in doubt. Then they all turned to their little English boy, as if they expected HIM to help them. And then the chief Indian, who spoke English, said to the boy, "Hold out your hand."

21 On hearing those dreadful words, my daughter Penelope said she didn't know what prevented her heart from flying straight out of her. I thought privately that it might have been her stays. All I said, however, was, "You make my flesh creep." (NOTA BENE: Women like these little compliments.)

22 Well, when the Indian said, "Hold out your hand," the boy shrunk back, and shook his head, and said he didn't like it. The Indian, thereupon, asked him (not at all unkindly), whether he would like to be sent back to London, and left where they had found him, sleeping in an empty basket in a market—a hungry, ragged, and forsaken little boy. This, it seems, ended the difficulty. The little chap unwillingly held out his hand. Upon that, the Indian took a bottle from his bosom, and poured out of it some black stuff, like ink, into the palm of the boy's hand. The Indian—first touching the boy's head, and making signs over it in the air—then said, "Look." The boy became quite stiff, and stood like a statue, looking into the ink in the hollow of his hand.

23 (So far, it seemed to me to be juggling, accompanied by a foolish waste of ink. I was beginning to feel sleepy again, when Penelope's next words stirred me up.)

24 The Indians looked up the road and down the road once more—and then the chief Indian said these words to the boy; "See the English gentleman from foreign parts."

25 The boy said, "I see him."

26 The Indian said, "Is it on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel to-day?"

27 The boy said, "It is on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel to-day." The Indian put a second question—after waiting a little first. He said: "Has the English gentleman got it about him?"

28 The boy answered—also, after waiting a little first—"Yes."

29 The Indian put a third and last question: "Will the English gentleman come here, as he has promised to come, at the close of day?"

30 The boy said, "I can't tell."

31 The Indian asked why.

32 The boy said, "I am tired. The mist rises in my head, and puzzles me. I can see no more to-day."

33 With that the catechism ended. The chief Indian said something in his own language to the other two, pointing to the boy, and pointing towards the town, in which (as we afterwards discovered) they were lodged. He then, after making more signs on the boy's head, blew on his forehead, and so woke him up with a start. After that, they all went on their way towards the town, and the girls saw them no more.

34 Most things they say have a moral, if you only look for it. What was the moral of this?

35 The moral was, as I thought: First, that the chief juggler had heard Mr. Franklin's arrival talked of among the servants out-of-doors, and saw his way to making a little money by it. Second, that he and his men and boy (with a view to making the said money) meant to hang about till they saw my lady drive home, and then to come back, and foretell Mr. Franklin's arrival by magic. Third, that Penelope had heard them rehearsing their hocus-pocus, like actors rehearsing a play. Fourth, that I should do well to have an eye, that evening, on the plate-basket. Fifth, that Penelope would do well to cool down, and leave me, her father, to doze off again in the sun.

36 That appeared to me to be the sensible view. If you know anything of the ways of young women, you won't be surprised to hear that Penelope wouldn't take it. The moral of the thing was serious, according to my daughter. She particularly reminded me of the Indian's third question, Has the English gentleman got it about him? "Oh, father!" says Penelope, clasping her hands, "don't joke about this. What does 'it' mean?"

37 "We'll ask Mr. Franklin, my dear," I said, "if you can wait till Mr. Franklin comes." I winked to show I meant that in joke. Penelope took it quite seriously. My girl's earnestness tickled me. "What on earth should Mr. Franklin know about it?" I inquired. "Ask him," says Penelope. "And see whether HE thinks it a laughing matter, too." With that parting shot, my daughter left me.

38 I settled it with myself, when she was gone, that I really would ask Mr. Franklin—mainly to set Penelope's mind at rest. What was said between us, when I did ask him, later on that same day, you will find set out fully in its proper place. But as I don't wish to raise your expectations and then disappoint them, I will take leave to warn you here—before we go any further—that you won't find the ghost of a joke in our conversation on the subject of the jugglers. To my great surprise, Mr. Franklin, like Penelope, took the thing seriously. How seriously, you will understand, when I tell you that, in his opinion, "It" meant the Moonstone.

A possible segmentation.

I: paragraphs 1-2: Introduction and Penelope's suggestion.

1. Paragraph 1: Writing struggles.
2. Paragraph 2: Penelope's idea.

II: paragraphs 3-11: Mr. Franklin Blake.

1. Paragraphs 3-4: Mr. Blake's upcoming visit.
 - a. Paragraph 3: The day.
 - b. Paragraph 4: The announcement.
2. Paragraphs 5-11: Who is Mr. Blake?
 - a. Paragraph 5: Franklin Blake as a boy.
 - b. Paragraphs 6-7: Transition paragraphs.
 - c. Paragraph 8: Mr. Blake Senior.
 - d. Paragraphs 9-10: Transition paragraphs.
 - e. Paragraph 11: Franklin Blake's travels.

III: paragraphs 12-16: The Indians on the terrace (a note: paragraphs 12-13 are hard to classify).

1. Paragraphs 12-13: Description of the day (note: these paragraphs are a transition, they hardly form a segment in themselves).
 - a. Paragraph 12: The ladies leave.
 - b. Paragraph 13: Betteredge alone..
2. Paragraphs 14-16: The Indians.
 - a. Paragraph 14. Discovery of the Indians.
 - b. Paragraph 15: Description of the Indians and their request.
 - c. Paragraph 16: Refusal.

IV: paragraphs 17-33: Penelope's story

1. Paragraphs 17-19. Penelope and her observation.
2. Paragraphs 19-33. The hypnosis.
 - a. Paragraphs 19-22: The relationship between the Indians and the boy.
 - b. Paragraphs 23-33: The hypnosis.
 - i. Paragraph 23: Aside note.
 - ii. Paragraphs 24-30: Questions about the English gentleman. (A note: it is difficult to segment further, even more so – to find labels)
 1. Paragraphs 24-26: Can you see the gentleman?
 2. Paragraphs 26-28: Can you see "it"?
 3. Paragraphs 29-30: Will the gentleman arrive today?

iii. Paragraphs 31-33: The end of the hypnosis. (A note: it is hard to decide whether paragraphs 24-30 and 31-33 should be merged into one sub-segment or not).

1. Paragraphs 31-32: The boy is tired.

2. Paragraph 33: Leaving.

V: paragraphs 34-38: What is "It"? (A note: paragraphs 34-35 are hard to classify, they are a transition between Episodes 4 and 5)

1. Paragraphs 34-35: The butler's interpretation.

a. Paragraph 34: Aside note.

b. Paragraph 35: Interpretation.

2. Paragraphs 36-37: Penelope's reaction.

3. Paragraph 38: Franklin Blake's reaction.

The Task

Please print this package before you begin work. You may record your segmentation on the computer, but we would like you to have a paper copy of the chapter with numbered paragraphs before your eyes.

Important: Please record the time when you start the experiment and also when you finish it. If you take breaks, please record the times when you are not working.

Please re-read the following chapter from *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins. Then segment it following the instructions above. If you have any comments about specific passages you find challenging, please write such comments down. If you have any general comments or remarks, please write them down, too.