

A Syntactic Profile of (Re)Telling in *The Woman Warrior*

Riley Huo

December 21, 2023

1 Introduction

In the study of storytelling and retelling, Deborah Schiffrin (2006) has shown that survivors' retelling of traumatic experiences provides crucial insight into their narrative motivations and the linguistic negotiations within narration. Building on Schiffrin's framework, this paper continues to explore the linguistic struggles contained in the (re)telling of traumatic history using texts from Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir, *The Woman Warrior* (1976). Borrowing from narrative analysis' local inspection of sentences (Schiffrin 2006, Bamberg 1997) and discourse analysis' statistical study of global variables (Kotek et al 2021), this paper develops a global profiling method of sentence-level variables. This paper also uses the computer-mediated profiling method to show how Kingston attempts to perform a narrative move to reconstruct an erased history while demonstrating the difficulty of rendering such a history using different narrators.

2 Data and Method

2.1 *The Woman Warrior* and “No Name Woman”

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, published in 1976, is a collection of interconnected (auto)biographical stories. In addition to providing an account of Kingston's own life, the stories renders the other women in the author's matrilineage, including her mother and aunts. The book's (auto)biographical content draws on sources that are not strictly verifiable: Kingston blends her family's oral history with Chinese folk religion as well as her imagination.

In *The Woman Warrior*'s first chapter “No Name Woman”, Maxine¹ offers three monologic accounts of her aunt's life (and death), once through her mother's narration, and twice through her own narration. At the beginning of the chapter, Maxine's mother reveals the aunt's history as a family secret: in 1924, the aunt had an extramarital pregnancy in China when her husband was working in the United States. Upon learning about the pregnancy, the villagers raided the aunt's family while Maxine's mother had to witness it. The next day, the aunt and her newborn baby were found dead in the family well. Maxine's mother then uses this story to warn Maxine not to engage in any sexual wrongdoing (1976: 3-5). After living with this family secret for twenty years and often feeling haunted by her dead aunt, Maxine decides to offer her speculation about what happened from her aunt's perspective. Maxine first offers a short, definitive account that a man in the village had repeatedly raped her aunt and instigated the raid (1976: 6-7). Later, she develops a more detailed account with less certitude. Perhaps her aunt had love for her inseminator

¹Per traditions, “Kingston” is used to indicate the author of the book and “Maxine” is used to indicate the protagonist-narrator.

and chose to commit adultery. While developing a backstory about the village's kinship culture, Maxine briefly departs to elaborate on her own relationship with the Chinese kinship culture. She then returns to the account and deduced that the villagers raided the family partially to preserve morality, and partially to discharge their anger caused by poverty. Maxine concludes the account by imagining her aunt's self-helped labor, her encounter with the baby, and her suicide-infanticide (1976: 7-15).

At the end of the chapter, Maxine reframes the secrecy around her aunt as the family's punishment for the aunt's "wrongdoing", the nature of which remains unknown. For this reason, Maxine feels a need to break the silence and to "devote pages of paper to her" (1976: 16). Throughout the chapter, the aunt's history is not told by its dead owner, but by the living others whose voices necessarily render the history differently from the owner. This difference constitutes a redoing of the original telling that might have simply happened as a death. If the aunt had offered a telling of her story through death, then the three accounts in "No Name Woman" would each become the first turn of retelling, the second turn of retelling, and the third turn of retelling. This linear sequence can be understood under the narrative-analysis framework of retelling.

2.2 Retelling and Positioning

In Deborah Schiffrin's work on retelling (2006), she analyzed Holocaust survivor Susan Beer's recounts of her story. Schiffrin observes a "move towards performativity" (2006: 274) in Beer's retelling of the same story over time. Based on the factual event where a group of Jews fell for a capture scheme set up by the Nazis, this move originated from a technical recount and became an emplotted story about deception. The later versions of retelling share an increased use of devices such as the passive positioning of acting victims (2006: 220), evaluative post facto commentaries (2006: 227-228), and the representation of collective mental states (2006: 229-236). Schiffrin explains this "move" as Beer's attempt to convey the "importance" (2006: 274) of her experience.

The turns of retelling in "No Name Woman" can be understood under a similar framework: a sequence of accounts that constitutes a movement towards a narrative goal set forth by the editor-author (Kingston) that compiled the accounts. To investigate the sequential variations in the retellings as well as the goal, the paper considers the three slightly interdependent retellings as separate narrative segments with their own beginnings and endings. This paper will conduct a detailed comparison of the first retelling (by Maxine's mother) and the third retelling (by Maxine). A noteworthy difference here is that while Beer's accounts move towards a performance that contains an evaluative distance from the traumatic experience, Kingston's compilation of accounts seems to move back towards the traumatic experience from a performance that contains an evaluative distance. Nevertheless, Schiffrin's analysis offers a selection of analytical tools that can be applied to the narrative segments in "No Name Woman".

One of the tools Schiffrin used is a version of positioning theory developed by Michael Bamberg (1997). In Bamberg's original publication, there are three levels where animate participants can position themselves or be positioned within/around storytelling: Positioning Level 1 is how "characters [are] positioned in relation to one another within the reported events" (Bamberg 1997: 337), Positioning Level 2 is how "the speaker position[s] him- or herself to the audience" (Bamberg 1997: 337), and Positioning Level 3 is how "narrators position themselves to themselves" (Bamberg 1997: 337). In the "Visual Results" section, this paper will show that Positioning Level 1 can foreground narratives with different granularities of perspectives, and a narrative can use Positioning Level 2 of to accomplish interpersonal tasks, and, finally, a participant's movement between Level 1 and Level 2 positions can enable them to tell a multivocalic history.

2.3 Syntactic Profiling

In the aforementioned literature, both Schiffrin and Bamberg conducted local analyses of phrases and sentences to generate insights into the positioning of characters. Central to the syntactic analyses is the predicate-argument relationship. This paper will briefly review the definition of this relationship before incorporating it into a more global analytical strategy.

Andrew Carnie offers a helpful definition of predicates and arguments:

The syntactician’s definition of predicate is based on the mathematical notion of a “relation”. The predicate defines the relation between the individuals being talked about and the real world – as well as among themselves. The entities (which can be abstract) participating in the relation are called arguments. (2013: 58)

In other words, an action, a feeling, or an event constitutes the predicate of a sentence, and the participant that initiates the action, perceives the feeling, or undergoes the event constitutes the argument. The relationship between argument and the predicate—the initiating, perceiving, or undergoing—constitutes what is called the thematic relation.

Researchers have exploited thematic relations as a statistic variable in profiling linguistic representations in various types of literature. One of the latest iterations of this lineage of research, Hadas Kotek et al (2021) used example sentences in linguistic journals as data, and analyzed the linguistic properties of person arguments (arguments that represent a person or people) on various registers, including their fulfillment of thematic relations. They found that the arguments representing men are more likely to fulfill agentive thematic relations (i.e., to be the initiators) and the arguments representing women are more likely to fulfill passive thematic relations (i.e., to be the observers and recipients) (2021: 661). Kotek et al developed a socio-ethical stance by using linguistic agentivity and passivity as proxies for the reinforcement and reproduction of sociological agency and passivity (2021: 671-672).

This paper will extend this syntactic-statistical methodology and apply it to narrative discourses. Instead of focusing on the sociological implications of syntactic patterns, this paper focuses on the syntactic patterns and the interpretive possibilities they contain with respect to positioning.

2.3.1 Schema

Following Kotek et al’s methodology, this paper utilizes a parsing model that retrieves person arguments as variables from the narrative segments under consideration. The parser records several pre-labeled features: phi-features (person, gender, number), theta roles (made up of thematic relations), and grammatical functions. Additionally, the schema incorporates arguments’ interactional roles with respect to Level 2 positioning. See sample data in Figure 1.

The possible categorical values for each feature are specified below.

1. Interactional Role: {mother, father, parents, aunt, Maxine, NA}

The interactional roles represent all the participants, both explicit and implicit ones, in the context of Maxine’s consideration of her aunt: “mother”, “father”, and “parents” provide information and opinions about what might have happened, and “aunt” haunts “Maxine” and prompts “Maxine” to retell her story.

2. Gender: {feminine, masculine, NA}

The gender feature here refers to grammatical gender, which, in English, is a binary feature that only holds among animate nominals in the texts under consideration. This binary

	Interactional Role	Gender	Person	Number	Theta Role	Grammatical Function
38	aunt	feminine	third	singular	theme	subject
0	Maxine	feminine	second	singular	agent/source	subject
3	mother	feminine	first	singular	agent/source	subject
44	NA	masculine	third	singular	theme	subject
111	aunt	feminine	third	singular	agent	subject
114	father	masculine	third	singular	theme	direct object
12	NA	masculine	third	plural	possessee	direct object
60	NA	NA	third	plural	agent	subject
20	NA	masculine	third	singular	agent	subject
126	Maxine	feminine	second	singular	experiencer	subject

Figure 1: Sample Data

representation is not a reflection of sociological gender which has more than two possible values. In this paper, the grammatical gender can either be observed from a given lexicon (e.g. mother, father, aunt, she, her, he, and him) or be inferred through the lexicon’s antecedent, its coreferential lexicon that appears earlier in the text. Grammatical genders that are unknown and mixed genders are recorded as NA.

3. Person: {first, second, third}

The person feature is a reflection of the relationship the argument has with the speaker and the audience.

4. Number: {singular, plural, NA}

The number feature can either be inferred from the lexicon under consideration through its morphology or through its antecedent.

5. Theta Role: one or more element(s) from the set of thematic relations: {agent, causer, experiencer, theme, goal, source, location, instrument, beneficiary, possessor, possessee}

The list of thematic relations here is a combination of the lists provided by Andrew Carnie (2013) and Sportiche et al (2014). Their definitions are listed below.

- (a) “The initiator or doer of an action is called the agent.” (Carnie 2013: 229) In other words, this is “a person or entity (intentionally) causing or doing something”. (Sportiche et al 2014: 141)
- (b) The causer is “a cause (*The rock broke the window, This made him cry*).” (Sportiche et al 2014: 141) A causer is differentiated from an agent: a causer often does not have an intention of doing, while agents have an intention of doing.
- (c) “Arguments that feel or perceive events are called experiencers.” (Carnie 2013: 230)
- (d) “Entities that undergo actions or are moved, experienced, or perceived are called themes.” (Carnie 2013: 231) “Often more broadly used as a wastebasket for things that do not fit anywhere else e.g. *John is tall, Mary thinks that it is raining*.” (Sportiche et al 2014: 142)
- (e) “The entity towards which motion takes place is called a goal. Goals may involve abstract motion.” (Carnie 2013: 231)

- (f) “The opposite of a goal is the source. This is the entity from which a motion originates” (Carnie 2013: 231).
- (g) “The place where the action occurs is called the location” (Carnie 2013: 231).
- (h) “The object with which an action is performed is called the instrument” (Carnie 2013: 231).
- (i) “[T]he one for whose benefit an event took place is called the beneficiary” (Carnie 2013: 231).
- (j) “Possessor: is a possessor (*Susan has a book, Susan owns books, These books belong to Susan*).”
- (k) “Possessee or possessed: what is possessed (*John owns books, John’s books*).” (Sportiche et al 2014: 141)

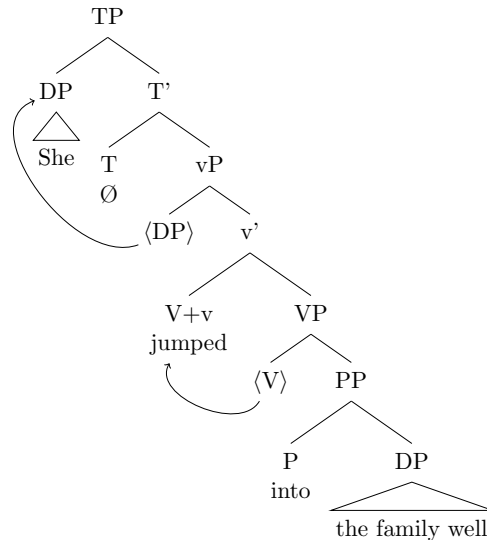
6. Grammatical Function: {subject, direct object, indirect object, object of preposition}

Subjects of a sentence are what show phi-feature agreement with the predicates. Direct objects are what follow the predicates and usually fulfill the theme thematic relation. Indirect objects are what follow the predicates and usually fulfill the goal thematic relation. Object of prepositions are what follow prepositions. There exist other types of grammatical functions that do not constitute the direct mentioning of a person (in the form of a determiner phrase) and are not under consideration here.

2.3.2 Labeling Procedure

The procedure of labeling personal arguments involves deconstructing sentences with syntax trees. The final sentential representation of argument structures can render some arguments pronounced (with lexicons) and other arguments silent (without lexicons). At the same time, both pronounced arguments and silent arguments contribute to the narration of “*who* did what” and “what happened to *who*”. In order to construct complete profiles of the narrative segments, this paper records both types of arguments with the help of syntax trees. Within tree representations, both phonologically pronounced arguments and phonologically silent arguments (as well as their associated syntactic features) become visible. See sample trees and the retrieval of person arguments below.

- (1) She jumped into the family well. (Kingston 1976: 3)



(2) I remember looking at your aunt one day when she and I were dressing; (Kingston 1976: 3)



The syntax tree suggests that there are 4 person arguments in (2): *I*, *PRO* (a silent element that is coreferential with its antecedent, *I*), *your aunt*, and *she and I* as one element. *PRO* arises from a subject-control structure, where the subject of a higher TP is coreferential with a silent element that is the subject of a lower TP. The arguments’ syntactic features can be inferred similarly to the argument in (1), and are displayed in Figure 2.

Sentential Representation (Not recorded)	Interactional Role	Gender	Person	Number	Theta Role	Grammatical Function
I	mother	feminine	first	singular	experiencer	subject
PRO	mother	feminine	first	singular	agent	subject
your aunt	aunt	feminine	third	singular	theme	object of preposition
she and I	NA	feminine	first	plural	agent	subject

Figure 2: Data Points in (2)

3 Visual Results

Since the stories in “No Name Woman” are stories about gender-based trauma, this paper will first compare the profiles of arguments with different genders. In addition to presenting aggregate distributions, the paper will develop representations on the temporal register to observe linguistic patterns pertaining to Level 1 and Level 2 positioning as mentioned earlier.

3.1 Aggregate Results

In the mother’s retelling, as Figure 3 suggests, the gender markup of arguments follows a ratio of 48:27:60 (feminine:male:NA). Arguments with the feminine gender have a wide range of distribution across categories of thematic relations, while arguments with the masculine and the unmarked gender tend to populate certain categories (most notably, the agent category) and not others. Using linguistic agentivity as a proxy for personal agency, linguistic passivity as a proxy for personal passivity, and linguistic experientiality as a proxy for personal experientiality, this paper observes some gendered discrepancies. Arguments with the feminine gender feature display less agency, more passivity and more experientiality, and arguments with the masculine gender feature display more agency, less passivity and less experientiality. Figure 4 suggests that this discrepancy persists when the grammatical function is fixed to be subject. In other words, when arguments show up at the subject position, which is often associated with agency, they can still display varied levels of agency by gender.

Maxine’s retelling exhibits different patterns, as suggested by Figure 5 and Figure 6. There are fewer arguments with the masculine gender and fewer arguments with the unmarked gender by the ratio (feminine:male:NA = 218:66:137). Arguments with different genders have similarly wide ranges of distributions. Arguments with the feminine gender feature display more agency and less passivity, arguments with the masculine gender feature display less agency and more passivity, and the two groups are similarly experiential. Figure 6 suggests that this discrepancy persists when the grammatical function is fixed to be subject.

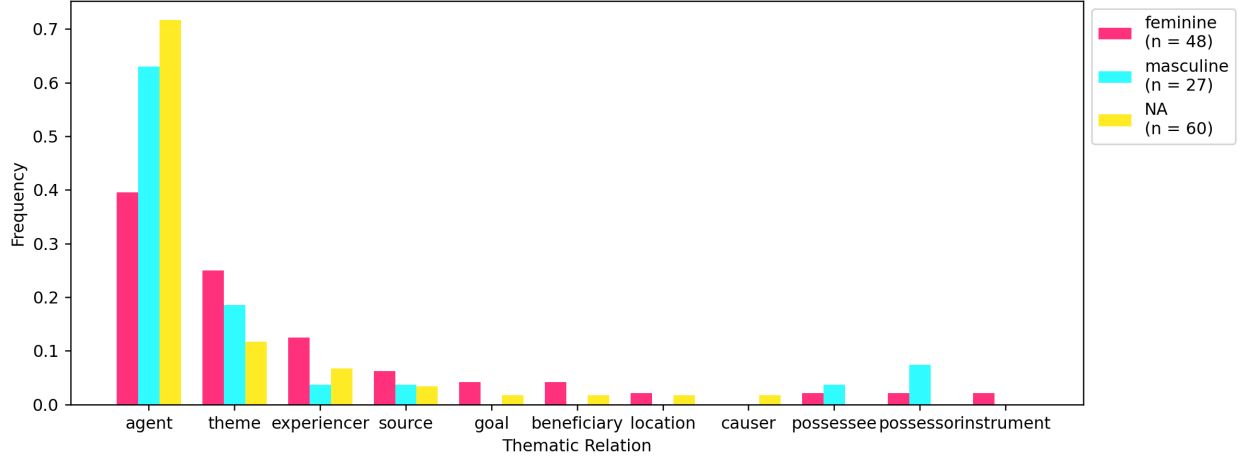


Figure 3: Comparison of 3 Conditional Distributions in Mother’s Retelling:
 $P(\text{Thematic Relation}|\text{Gender})$

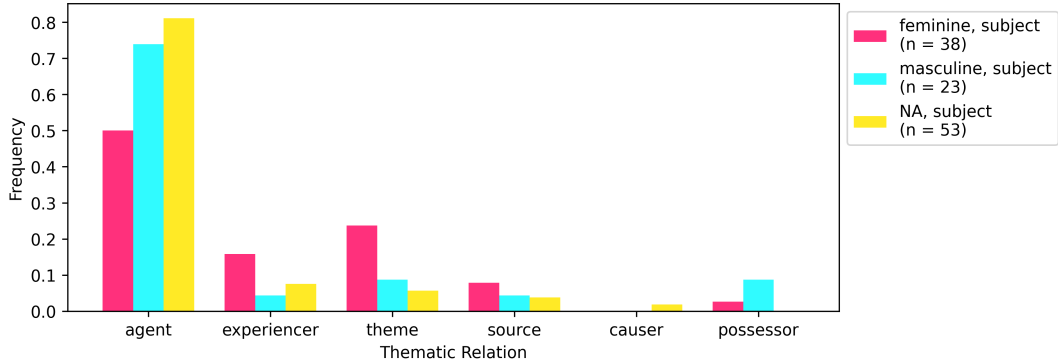


Figure 4: Comparison of 3 Conditional Distributions in Mother’s Retelling:
 $P(\text{Thematic Relation}|\text{Gender, Grammatical Function=Subject})$

3.2 Temporal Results

To have a granular view of the narrative segments’ internal structures, this paper also visualizes the data on a temporal register according to the appearance order of the data points. To access sentence-level positioning, the paper incorporates three thematic relations in this visualization: “agent”, “theme”, and “experiencer” as proxies for agentic positioning, passive positioning, and experiential positioning. The following graphs (Figure 7 through Figure 12) illustrate the appearances of personal arguments on the first row and each argument’s fulfillment of thematic relation on the second, third, and fourth row.

As an example, Figure 7 can be interpreted in the following ways. The legend displays the set of arguments the graph considers out of all arguments, namely arguments with the interactional role in the set Maxine, aunt, mother, parents, father. The first color block on the “Appearance” row is yellow, and this means the first argument in the represented narrative segment has the interactional role of Maxine. In the vertical direction of this yellow block, another yellow block shows up in the “Fulfillment of ‘agent’” row; this means the argument under consideration fulfills the thematic relation of agent. In certain cases, an argument under consideration fulfills a thematic relation that is not in the set of agent, theme, experiencer, and will have three empty/white color blocks

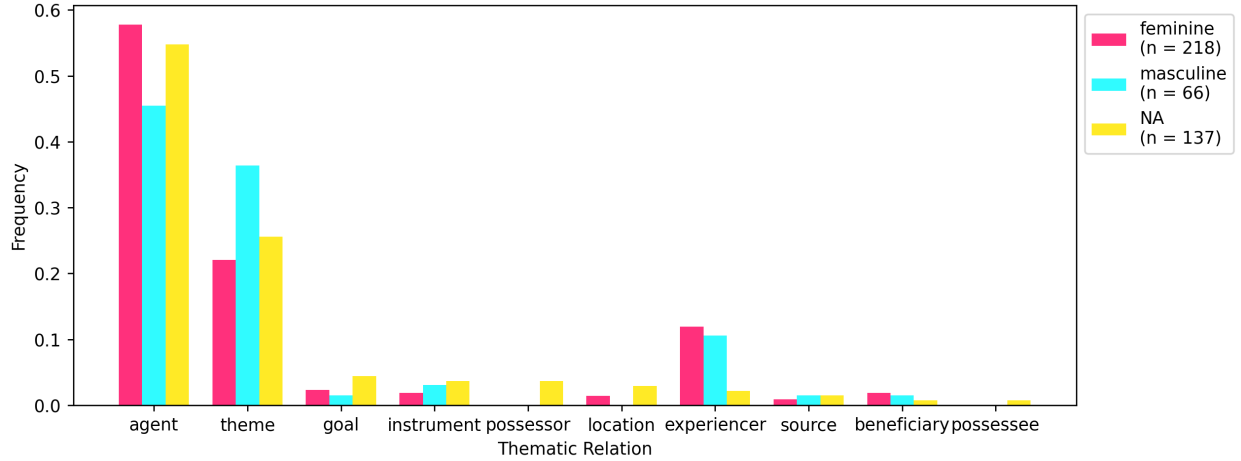


Figure 5: Comparison of 3 Conditional Distributions in Maxine’s Retelling:
 $P(\text{Thematic Relation}|\text{Gender})$

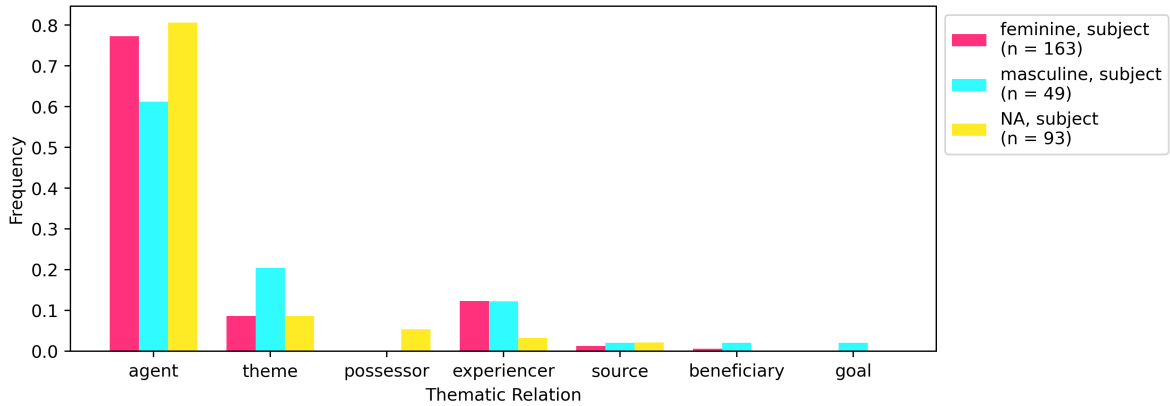


Figure 6: Comparison of 3 Conditional Distributions in Maxine’s Retelling:
 $P(\text{Thematic Relation}|\text{Gender, Grammatical Function=Subject})$

under its “Appearance” block. The next color block on the “Appearance” row is empty/white as well as every block underneath it; this means the argument is not in the set of arguments under consideration. While the graph reserves space for this argument to reconstruct the pace of argument appearances, the graph does not illustrate the nature of this argument.

3.2.1 Frames

The mother’s retelling and Maxine’s retelling are taken out of the global environment of the family’s discussion about the aunt’s “wrongdoing”. When this paper isolates the narrative segments from the rest of the interaction, it does so by cropping out paragraphs using markers such as “You must not tell anyone” (Kingston 1976: 3) and “My aunt must have lived in the same house” (1976: 7). Nevertheless, both segments end up retaining their interactional edges either in the beginning or at the end. These edges bridge the gaps between the interaction world and the story world and operate as frames for the story worlds under construction.

To illustrate, the mother’s narration begins and concludes with the following frame:

“You must not tell anyone,” my mother said, “what I am about to tell you. In China

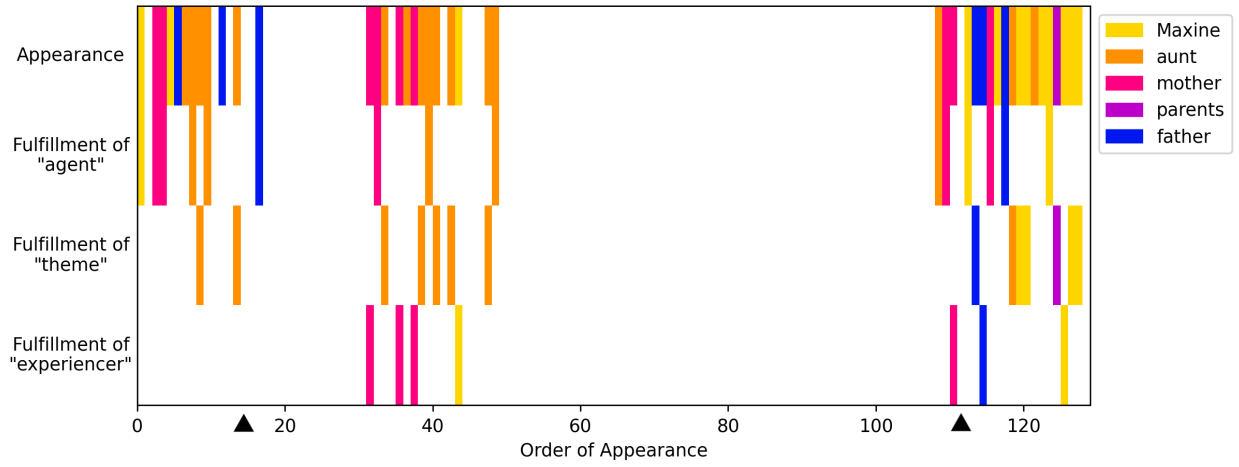


Figure 7: Temporal Appearances in Mother's Retelling by Interactional Role

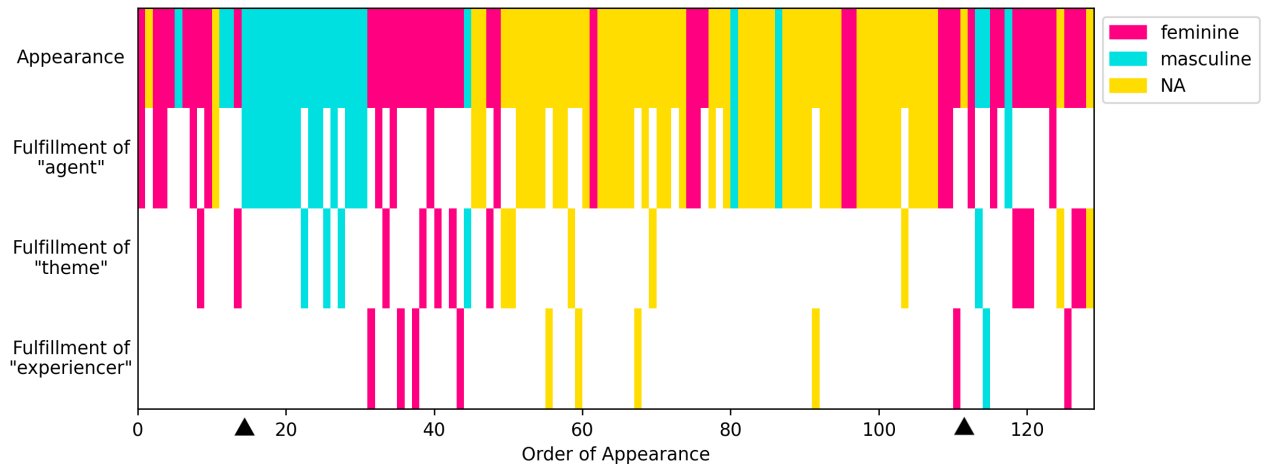


Figure 8: Temporal Appearances in Mother's Retelling by Gender

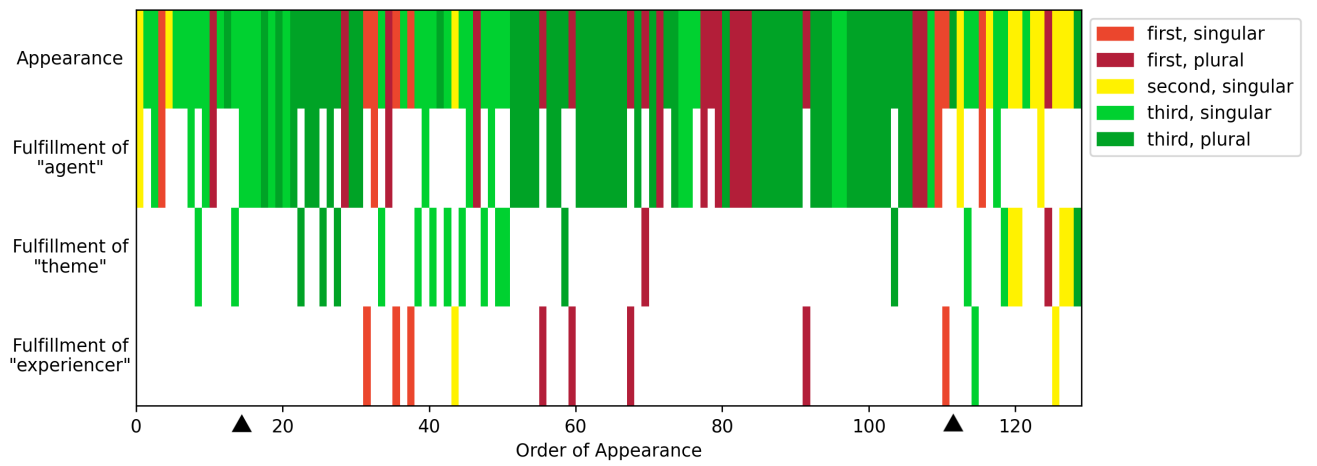


Figure 9: Temporal Appearances in Mother's Retelling by Person and Number

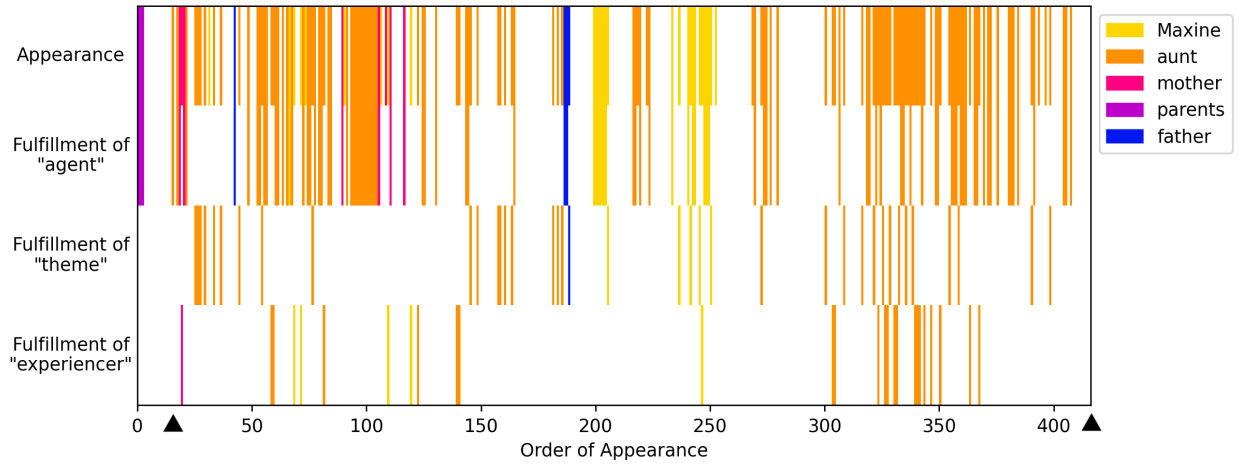


Figure 10: Temporal Appearances in Maxine's Retelling by Interactional Role

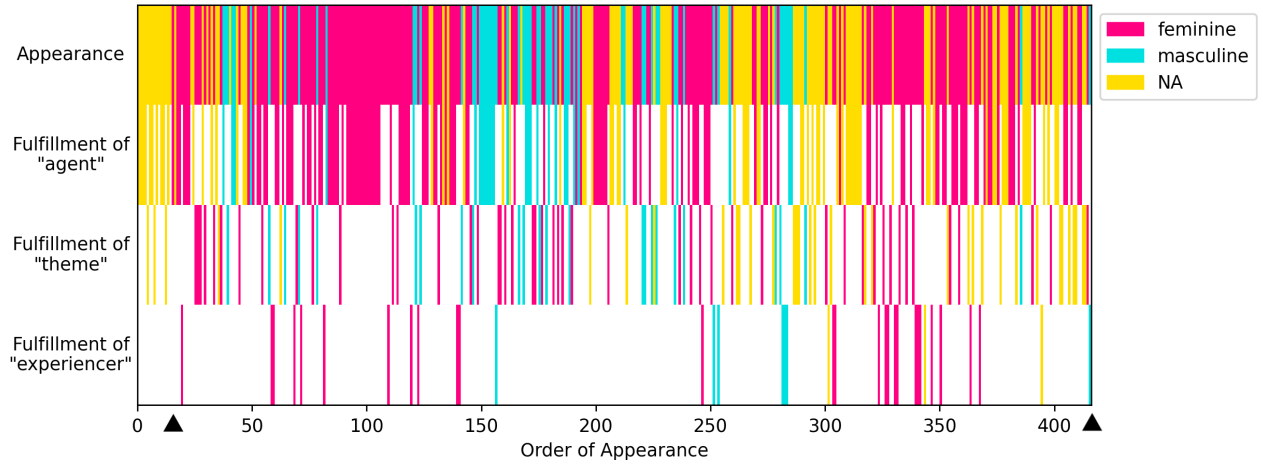


Figure 11: Temporal Appearances in Maxine's Retelling by Gender

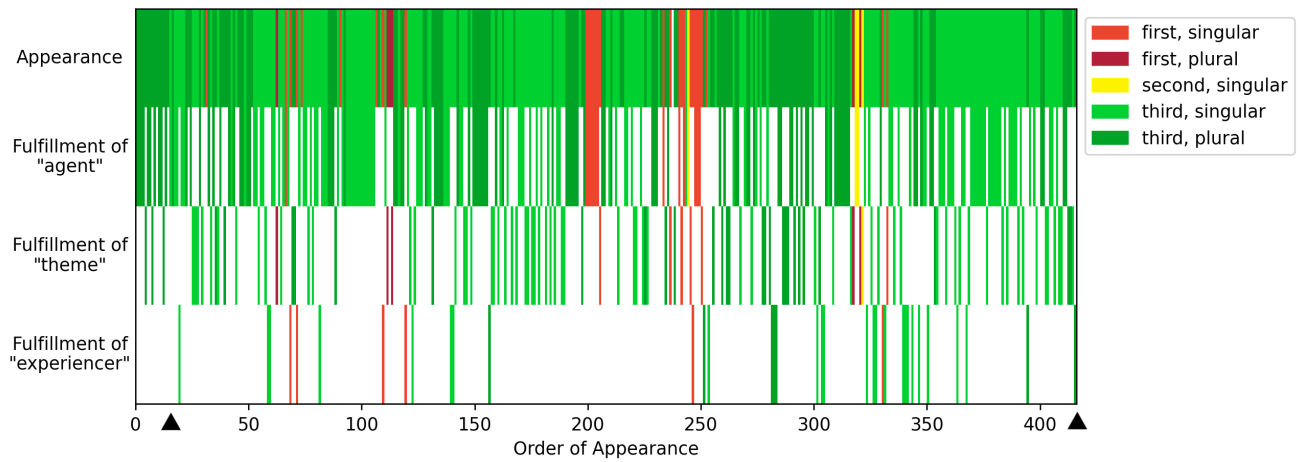


Figure 12: Temporal Appearances in Maxine's Retelling by Person and Number

your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born. (Kingston 1976: 3)

“Don’t let your father know that I told you. He denies her. Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don’t humiliate us. You wouldn’t like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful.” (Kingston 1976: 5)

Within the mother’s narration, the aunt’s story begins and ends with the following sentences:

“In 1924 just a few days after our village celebrated seventeen hurry-up weddings—to make sure that every young man who went ‘out on the road’ would responsibly come home—your father and his brothers and your grandfather and his brothers and your aunt’s new husband sailed for America, the Gold Mountain. (Kingston 1976: 3)

The next morning when I went for the water, I found her and the baby plugging up the family well. (Kingston 1976: 5)

To delimit the interval of the 1924 story within different narrative segments, this paper places black triangle markers under the horizontal axis to show the story’s beginning and end.

As Figure 7 suggests, in the mother’s retelling, 4 interactional roles—“Maxine”, “mother”, “father”, and “aunt”—emerge simultaneously in an alternating manner before the 1924 story unfolds (see horizontal axis: 1-16), and 5 interactional roles—the previous 4 and “parents”—emerge in the same way immediately after the story concludes (see horizontal axis: 113-128). While the father is not physically present in the mother-daughter address, the mother positions him within the address as a parental figure in parallel to herself. Simultaneously, the mother starts to articulate the consensus between herself and her husband. This setup helps the addresser, the mother, to underpin her parental authority to prompt the addressee, Maxine, to process the 1924 story as a cautionary tale.

Figure 10 contains a different frame structure: only half of the parental-lecture frame is present, as indicated by the occurrence of the interactional parents (see horizontal axis: 1-3). This half frame is reflected in the original text: “[o]n nights when my mother and father talked about their life back home, sometimes they mentioned an ‘outcast table’ whose business they still seemed to be settling, their voices tight.” (Kingston 1976: 7) As Maxine develops her version of the story (after the triangle mark), the interactional participants’ corresponding characters continue meagerly permeating the story, but they never constitute sizable appearances. Maxine concludes her narrative segment by imagining the aunt character’s suicide-infanticide without elaborate commentary (Kingston 1976: 15). On Level 2, Maxine seems to be able to position herself as a storyteller somewhat distantly from her mother and her father, the moral lesson they try to impart, and the shame they try to instill. In the paragraph that follows this narrative segment, Maxine does bring her account into the context of family consensus, but she separates this contextualization from her account by paragraph spacing and sectional spacing. By doing so, Maxine allowed herself to develop her own point of view on the controversy, away from parental scrutiny.

3.2.2 Foregrounding

Within the triangle-marked intervals of storytelling, the mother and Maxine foreground the 1924 story differently. As Figure 8 and Figure 9 suggest, the mother’s retelling is foregrounded in male agency through both singular characters and plural characters, a combination signifying a degree of individuation (see horizontal axis: 17-30). In the original text, this episode of “men doing things”

is about the men in the village leaving for the United States for jobs. This foregrounding introduces the men characters as both individuals and a collective. Implicitly, the same setup positions the mother's own character and the aunt character among another collective as deindividuated observers. This (de)individuation pattern wavers after the foregrounding, but eventually returns.

On the other hand, Maxine's retelling, as shown in Figure 11, is grounded in a gradual move towards female agency (see horizontal axis: 20-120). Specifically, as shown in Figure 10, it is a gradual move towards the aunt character's agency. Combining Figure 10 and Figure 12 shows that third-person plural characters are subtly and continuously positioned against the aunt character to highlight the individuality of the aunt character. This foregrounding introduces a highly personal tone via the repetition of "aunt doing things". In the original text, this interval contains a description of the aunt's marriage and family background as well as an elaboration of her being in a relationship with her lover. The appearances of highly agentic women characters (see horizontal axis: 70-120), almost formed to the exclusion of the appearances of men characters, reflect the narration about how the aunt character tends to her appearance to please her lover. This foregrounding is put to an end as Maxine diverges to probe the male gaze and the kinship culture, before completely departing to tell a story about herself.

The different foregroundings, based on different Level 1 positioning strategies, construct different granularities of perspective that may perpetuate themselves throughout the narrative segments. More obviously in the mother's narration, her perspective originates as her observation of one collective (men leaving the village) when she is a member of another collective (people staying in the village) and in the end manifests as her commentary about one collective (the villagers) when she speaks as the member of another collective (her family).

3.2.3 Ending

In the mother's retelling, as represented by Figure 7, the 1924 story ends at a blank color block (see horizontal axis: 112). This argument is *her and the baby* in the sentence "The next morning when I went for the water, I found her and the baby plugging up the family well." (Kingston 1976: 5) Also in Figure 7, the mother's retelling as a whole ends at another blank color block at the final point of the horizontal axis. This argument is *The villagers* in the sentence "The villagers are watchful." (Kingston 1976: 5). In Maxine's retelling, as represented by Figure 11, the ending of the story and the ending of the narrative segment co-occur at the final blue color block. This argument is *The villagers* in the sentence "It was probably a girl; there is some hope of forgiveness for boys." (Kingston 1976: 15).

Between the two segments, there is a shift in their ending foci from ungendered, plural arguments to gendered, singular arguments. In zooming in on the manifestation of a moral doctrine through specific individuals, this shift spotlights the patriarchal oppression, which has been the unstated premise of the aunt's story throughout. By filling "the villagers"'s position with "boys", Maxine removes the readers from their previous position concerning morality per se, and confronts them with morality's interaction with gender. As Maxine hints, perhaps the most dangerous crime the aunt committed was behaving freely as a woman in a semi-feudal society.

3.2.4 Permeability

The vertical axis of the temporal graphs shows how groups of arguments can occupy different categories of thematic relations. Some groups of arguments occupy more rows of thematic relations with low horizontal density on their rows of occupation, and other groups of arguments occupy fewer rows of thematic relations with higher horizontal density on their rows of occupation. This

paper will refer to this discrepancy as the difference in arguments' permeability with respect to the thematic relations under consideration: the first kind of arguments is considered more permeable than the second kind.

An overview of the 6 temporal graphs shows that some person arguments are more permeable than others, and the same person argument can show different degrees of permeability at different times. Some of the differences in permeability (e.g. by gender) reflect the same patterns discussed in the section "Aggregate Results". Notably, in the mother's narrative segment, the aunt appears less permeable than the rest of the participants and characters, as shown in Figure 7: the aunt never fulfills the experiencer thematic relation while other arguments fulfill all 3 thematic relations. This difference can be explained by the frame within which the retelling happens: the parents continue punishing the aunt by suppressing her experience. The aunt becomes more permeable in Maxine's retelling, an act of devotion in hindsight.

3.2.5 Entanglement

Figure 10 and Figure 12 show a significant amount of authorial intrusion (the author being the narrator Maxine) in the middle part of Maxine's narration about her aunt (see horizontal axis: 200-250). This intrusion can be seen as an autobiographical takeover and a continuation of the more subtle incorporation of autobiographical content (see horizontal axis: 20-125). Since the book is largely autobiographical, the incorporation of Maxine's personal experience is not surprising. However, the sudden change in the autobiographical modality and the time/position of its occurrence demand an inquiry.

In the original text, the more subtle incorporation takes place first as Maxine imagines her aunt combing her hair and remembers how her mother used to take care of her hair. The incorporation continues as Maxine imagines the village's kinship culture and remembers how she navigates her Chinese American identity. What triggers the takeover might be found in Figure 10 (see horizontal axis: 125-190): dense appearances of men characters. In the original text, the appearances are made up by Maxine imagining the men in her aunt's family successfully or unsuccessfully repressing their urges in a sexually conservative society. Per Maxine's explanation, the kinship culture in the village prioritizes and idolizes siblinghood among people who are not blood-related, almost to the exclusion of romance. The autobiographical takeover happens during Maxine's reflection on her own compulsory practice of the kinship culture, and, as a result, her having "no dates" (Kingston 1976: 12) for a long time during her adolescence. "No dates" might be too casual to capture the sizable impact this reflection generated on the graphs. What is left unsaid in the text is perhaps Maxine's concealed feelings of shame concerning sexuality or romance.

The narrator Maxine, a Level 2 participant, develops an account of her own history by intrusively positioning herself in the story about her aunt, a Level 1 character. This cross-level positioning produces an adjacency that allows Maxine to temporarily be in touch with her aunt's experience, and find a similarity to construct her own Level 1 character. As Deborah Schiffrin argues, "multi-vocalic oral histories and continuously constructed life stories arise not just from personal actions and interactions that make up 'first-hand' experience, but also from various kinds of vicarious experience." (2006: 211) Under this framework, Kingston's memoir would be her "multi-vocalic history", a history she constructs through both her "first-hand experience" and, in this case, the "vicarious experience" provided by her aunt's story.

4 Conclusion

If Susan Beer’s retellings show a “move towards performativity” (2006: 274), what do Kingston’s retellings say about her narrative move? In a broader discursive context, the mother fulfills multiple interactional roles in her retelling: she is her husband’s wife, Maxine’s mother, the aunt’s close relative, a woman who tells the story of another woman, a woman who tells the story about herself (see “Future Work”), and a woman who addresses another woman. The multiplicity in her storytelling position produces a series of protocols that might be in conflict with one another. The self-positioning as an observer and the evaluative distance she employs might both be necessary given the protocols she is in negotiation with. As a response to her mother’s retelling, Maxine’s retelling probes a personal history that had been overwhelmed by a collective history, a crime whose nature remains unknown. Being given a story that underwent erasure, she feels the need to invent a new one. She does so by revealing the issue of gender and subversively positioning the aunt as an agent and an experiencer in her retelling. Simultaneously, through retelling her aunt’s history, Maxine finds a portal to reconstruct a piece of her own history that might have been too dangerous to bear remembrance.

A crucial difference between the retellings is that the mother’s retelling happens in person during a conversation, and Maxine’s retelling happens through her imagination. Both the negotiation with narrative protocols and the avoidance of them through imagination demonstrate the inherent difficulty in rendering a purported history of female shame intelligible. Nevertheless, it is through imagination and the isolation it provides that Kingston attempted to move towards an erased history, towards a purported shame as well as a new verdict, and towards remembrance.

5 Future Work

On the register of narrative analysis, this paper is leaving an important pattern unexplored, providing an opportunity for future work. A significant “blank” pattern takes place in the mother’s narration, as represented by Figures 7, 8, and 10 (see horizontal axis: 50-110). The blank is a disconnect between Level 1 and Level 2 positioning, during which the story characters stop being coreferential with the interactional participants. It is also an opaque expression of “we saw that they did things”, where *they* repetitively reconstruct a doing in a largely deindividuated manner. In the original text, the dense appearances of *theys* can be traced back to the mother’s witness of the raid that happened at her home—the mother was implicated in the violence not only as an observer, but also as a victim.

As Deborah Schiffrin points out: “[s]urvivors’ oral histories reveal continuous struggles with ‘what happened,’ with how to convey what happened, and with how to integrate the self of past experience with the self of current existence.” (2006: 214) The blank, the disconnect between her storytelling self and her experiential self, as well as the evaluative distance she keeps from the aunt’s experience, might require an analytical framework of trauma to further elucidate.

On the technical register, this paper presents an opportunity to refine methods of global syntactic profiling. Suitable variables here include the predicate types among verbs (unergative, unaccusative, 2-place, 3-place, and passive) and the predicate types among specificational copular sentences (verbal, adverbial, nominal, and prepositional). Both categories can provide further insight into the behavior of arguments beyond thematic relations.

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