

Constructing Suspense and Psychological Tension: A Corpus-Based Stylistic Analysis of Contemporary Crime Thriller Fiction

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Abstract

The crime thriller genre engages readers through sustained suspense, psychological depth, and narrative tension, effects that are fundamentally constructed through language. This study examines the stylistic construction of such effects through a corpus-based analysis of twenty-five contemporary crime thrillers in contrast to the BNC Fiction Sub-Corpus. Drawing on the corpus stylistics framework of McIntyre and Walker (2019) and Dutta-Flanders's (2017) model of suspense, the study focuses on such micro-level linguistic characteristics as intensifiers, modal verbs, passive voice, and punctuation. The results indicate that suspense in crime fiction is achieved by a cumulative influence of minor linguistic tactics as opposed to explicit thematic cues. The modal verbs carry the sense of uncertainty and hesitation and open the reader to the space of speculative interpretation. The passive voice denies the agency and the emphasis is on the outcomes of violence and the ambiguity of the narratives is inflated. The intensifiers provide the emotional urgency and the pauses break the sentences and signify the mental instability. These are characteristic of the crime thrillers as they represent a certain tendency of style to concentrate on character perception, emotional disintegration, and suspenseful delay in comparison with general fiction. The study offers a replicable framework for stylistic genre analysis, contributing to the field of literary linguistics by highlighting how crime fiction inscribes tension not just in its content but through the subtle deployment of language.

Keywords: corpus stylistics, crime thriller fiction, suspense construction, linguistic features, psychological tension

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Introduction

Crime thriller fiction has long fascinated readers through its powerful psychological drama, unexpected plot twists, and carefully constructed suspense. As a subgenre of crime fiction, it is typically built on criminal acts, investigations, and conspiracies, with fast-paced plots that emphasize both external action and the inner states of characters. Unlike detective fiction, which aims at logical resolution, thrillers privilege emotional tension and anticipation. The manipulation of language is central to this effect, generating fear, uncertainty, and psychological intensity. Whether in the subtle foreboding of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* or the elaborate red herrings of a contemporary work like *The Thursday Murder Club*, authors rely heavily on stylistic choices to immerse readers in worlds of suspense and uncertainty. While the plot structure and character development of crime fiction have been widely studied, the specific linguistic mechanisms through which suspense is constructed remain underexplored, particularly in empirical research (Hussain, 2025; Mendhakar, 2022; Gregori-Signes, 2023).

Recent developments in corpus stylistics provide effective tools for addressing this gap by identifying recurrent lexico-grammatical patterns that contribute to narrative tension in large text corpora (Mahlberg, 2017; McIntyre & Walker, 2019). It is a methodological crossover between corpus linguistics and literary stylistics that allows systematic analysis of such features as keyword frequencies, collocational clusters and semantic prosody across texts. In crime thrillers, a language analysis conducted has revealed that linguistic devices, such as passive forms, epistemic modality, and evaluative adjectives, are instrumental in concealing information, agency, and ambiguous emotions (Dutta-Flanders, 2017; Tabbert, 2015; Jaafar, 2017; Jaafar and Jasim, 2022; Schubert, 2025). These features are repeated in the narration and dialogue that has been linked with suspense and uncertainty (Davis and Brown, 2024). However, a great deal of research has focused solely on single texts or has suffered from a lack of cross-genre analysis.

To address these gaps, this study conducts a corpus-based stylistic analysis investigating the linguistic construction of suspense and psychological tension in modern crime thrillers. It is focused on the micro-level features, such as the choice of lexicon, adjectives, intensifiers, modality, passive construction, and punctuation, and analyzes the frequency and the stylistic functions in the genre. A comparative analysis with the BNC Fiction Sub-Corpus is employed to reveal how these features

diverge from those in general fiction. By combining empirical corpus analysis with narrative interpretation, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive account of the stylistic strategies that underlie suspense in contemporary crime fiction.

The current study is significant both methodologically and thematically. It contributes to literary stylistics and corpus linguistics by offering an integrated, data-driven model for genre analysis. Prior research has shown that stylistic features such as repetition, passive constructions, and collocations of violence and secrecy are central to creating tension in crime fiction (McIntyre & Walker, 2019; Abdeen, 2018; Jaafar, 2017). However, few studies have systematically compared these features across genres or quantified their narrative functions. By addressing this gap, the study enhances our understanding of how suspense is stylistically encoded.

Practically, the research has implications for literary studies, language education, and creative writing. It equips scholars and educators with a replicable model for stylistic analysis, grounded in corpus evidence. Writers and editors can also benefit from its insights into how micro-level linguistic choices shape narrative impact. Furthermore, the study contributes to the growing field of forensic and applied stylistics by examining how specific language patterns function in emotional and psychological framing (Hani & Lestari, 2024; Schubert, 2025).

Review of the Literature

The literature review is devoted to the key linguistic features, such as modality, passive voice, and transitivity, used to establish the effect of tension and atmosphere in crime thrillers on the basis of valuable works in the domain of corpus stylistics and linguistic analysis.

Suspense in crime fiction often emerges from linguistic choices that control information flow and shape reader perception. Dutta (2003) highlighted how tense shifts, narrative manipulation, and passive voice suppress agency, heightening tension through strategic withholding. Likewise, Jaafar and Jasim (2022) found the patterns in suicide notes, e.g., the use of first-person pronouns and repetition of themes that create psychological intensity, which is also present in crime fiction in the form of emotional atmosphere.

In his discussion of E.A. Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart*, Hussain (2025) showed that word frequency and collocations help to create a feeling of guilt and mental unease. All these studies demonstrate that such characteristics as modality, repetition, and passive constructions are the focus of creating suspense and emotional levels in crime thrillers. Latif et al. (2025) applied a framework of forensic stylistics and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model to analyze the role of language in psychological deception in Gothic and detective fiction. They found out that mental process verbs, evaluative lexis and emotional vocabulary are essential in distorting reality and creating perception in the readers. The current study focuses how linguistic clues implicitly convey mental manipulation in narrative fiction.

Dutta-Flanders (2017) pointed out that suspense can be created not only due to the progressive unfolding of information but also due to the manipulated narrative contexts. The genre commonly uses a two-part structure, i.e. the narrative of the crime and the narrative of the investigation, which produces both emotional and intellectual tension. Tabbert (2015) has gone further by introducing the term "manipulated context", in which the gaps in the narrative require the reader to reinterpret things. The results highlighted that the linguistic devices of passive voice, modality, and transitivity conceal the issue of agency and postpone the resolution, maintaining suspense by regulating the flow of information.

According to McIntyre and Walker (2019), corpus stylistic analysis demonstrated that such stylistic features as the use of short abrupt sentences and the use of high-frequency lexical items that concern violence and secrecy contribute to narrative tension. Similarly, Li (2023) pointed out that the nonlinear structure and the use of character oppositions, as typical of thriller movies, are also applied in crime fiction to keep the readers engaged. Similarly, Jucker (2021) argued that hesitators, contractions, and discourse markers are oral features that increase the realism of both performed and written fiction. Naturalistic dialogue is a part of urgency and psychological immediacy in crime thrillers.

Corpus stylistics provides both quantitative and qualitative data on the linguistic patterns which characterize crime fiction. Mahlberg (2017) demonstrated how such tools as keyword analysis and concordances can be used to uncover repetitive patterns like passive constructions as contributing to suspense. Hussain (2025) used this method to Poe's work and demonstrated how the patterns of language used reflect the psychological fall of the narrator. Davis and Brown (2024) supported the

idea of using corpus analysis along with the traditional stylistics to identify the minor patterns of language that create the narrative tension. Jaafar (2017) found the manner in which modal verbs and passives in *The Silence of the Lambs* generate ambiguity and tension.

Likewise, Gregori-Signes (2023) analyzed *The Killing* and demonstrated how the stylistic strategy of victim-naming affects the perception of the reader. Genre profiling was examined in Mendhakar (2022) and Abdeen (2018) who found that crime fiction is typified by lexical clusters and semantic prosodies of violence, secrecy, and oppression. These results contributed to the level of genre-specific atmosphere and thematic unity.

The ability to manipulate language is one of the main characteristics of crime fiction as it helps to manage the flow of information and increase the level of suspense. The anticipation and uncertainty in gangster movies were shown by Schubert (2025) through indirectness, threats, and metaphors. The intentions are concealed by euphemisms and ambiguous nouns, especially when the mob bosses speak, leaving the audiences at the edge of their seats. Same can be said about modality and indirect speech acts as they also frame characters in crime stories (Schubert, 2025; Ibrahim, 2019). De Vos (2024) analyzed the role of misdirection in *The Thursday Murder Club* that causes readers to make wrong conclusions, which is a typical suspense-building tool. The use of lexis, particularly action verbs and adjectives associated with secrecy and violence, also creates narrative tension.

Thematic patterns have also been brought to light with the help of corpus stylistic tools. Abdeen (2018) emphasized the importance of lexical cohesion, collocations, and semantic prosody in the support of the main themes such as violence and conflict. Qayyum and Syed (2023) discussed gender representation and indicated that adjectives and verbs tend to portray women as passive victims, which is true of crime fiction as well. Similarly, Clark (2007) stressed on a cognitive-pragmatic strategy by illustrating how deixis and modality manipulate the expectations of readers. This interplay between language and readers perception maintains the suspense by leaving the consequences unpredictable and readers engaged.

Crime fiction is also characterized by certain linguistic peculiarities which make it different to general fiction. Dutta (2003) found alternating crime and investigation stories as the main structural features that maintain suspense. Jaafar and Jasim

(2022) pointed at the importance of the lexical repetition, particularly the vocabulary associated with secrecy and danger, to strengthen the identity of the genre. Forensic linguistics, as discussed by Hani and Lestari (2024), also served to differentiate crime fiction because it employed linguistic evidence as means of solving the problem in the story, thus highlighting the analytical nature of the genre. The analysis has been applied to audiovisual media in the recent studies. Lopez Yanez (2024) investigated the impact of technical limitations and pragmatic markers on the translation of crime series, through subtitles and dubbing, to show that it is difficult to maintain the suspense in the translation. Olofinsao (2024) applied a sociopolitical approach to the genre and demonstrated how Nigerian crime fiction can be viewed as the expression of discontent with corruption and chaos among the people. His diachronic study showed that linguistic elements conveyed collective frustration, which brought thematic and emotional depth to the development of the genre.

Despite the extensive study of stylistic features in crime fiction, little was done to provide a corpus-based comparison of crime thrillers and general fiction. Most concentrated on single texts without using a balanced reference corpus such as the BNC Fiction Sub-Corpus. Moreover, the available literature is more likely to be based on quantitative data or subjective interpretation, but not on combining the two. Specifically, the stylistic role of punctuation as one of the means of creating psychological tension is hardly covered in corpus-based literary studies. These gaps point to the necessity of a mixed-method research that would empirically determine the stylistic markers of genres and explain their narrative roles.

This study fills these gaps through a corpus stylistic approach by using both frequency and qualitative interpretation. It compares a contemporary crime thriller corpus with the BNC Fiction Sub-Corpus to find stylistic patterns that are peculiar to the genre. The emphasis on the micro-level characteristics, i.e., on genre-specific lexis, adjectives, intensifiers, modality, passive voice, and punctuation, provides an insight into the linguistic construction of suspense and psychological tension. The whole approach offers a contribution to literary stylistics, corpus linguistics and genre studies, and a replicable model for future research and pedagogical use.

Methodology

In this study, a mixed-method design is adopted, founded on corpus stylistics, as the means of exploring the linguistic construction of suspense and psychological tension in the modern crime thriller fiction. Particularly, it is suitable to genre-specific analysis, which makes it possible to examine the peculiarities of the usage of particular features of the language in crime thrillers and its differences with the features that are employed in general fiction.

❖ Research Design

This research was carried out on the mixed-method research design that implied implementation of both the quantitative methods of corpus linguistics and the qualitative methods of literary stylistics. The quantitative phase comprised the examination of the frequency patterns and keywords analysis of the selected corpus of crime thriller fiction. Such frequency data assisted in the identification of the stylistic devices that are characteristic of the genre. The qualitative stage comprised the concordance pattern interpretation of the linguistic devices in the context of suspense and the chance of gaining a deeper insight into their stylistic and psychological impact. Such an integrated framework allowed for a deeper examination of the linguistic form in the genre, not only in frequent textual patterns but also in functional design in the creation of narrative tension.

❖ Data Collection

The current study included the construction of two separate but linked corpora. The principal corpus included a total of twenty-five contemporary crime thriller novels in English (see list in appendix). These novels were downloaded in machine-readable format; all the paratextual information such as front matter, page numbers, chapter headings, and publisher's notes were manually removed and converted into plain text files using AntFileConverter 2.1.0 version (Anthony, 2024) that were used for analysis. The reference corpus contained the British National Corpus (BNC) General Fiction Sub-Corpus, a well-known collection available to make general comparisons in stylistic studies.

The purposive sampling was used in this study to choose the texts that best reflect the crime thriller genre in its modern form. The main corpus of twenty-five crime thriller novels was selected according to some inclusion criteria, i.e. they have to be categorized as crime thrillers, be written in modern English (after 2000), have a

suspense-driven narrative structure, and be available in a clean, machine-readable format. These requirements made the corpus genre consistent and analytically available. The BNC Fiction Sub-Corpus was used as reference corpus and provides a general level of fiction language for contrastive analysis. Focused sampling together with balanced comparison increased the reliability of the results concerning the genre-specific stylistic tendencies.

Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical framework integrates two complementary models: the corpus stylistics approach of McIntyre and Walker (2019) and Dutta-Flanders's (2017) stylistic model of suspense in crime fiction. Both these frameworks contributed to the empirical finding and interpretive analysis of stylistic features that aid in the creation of suspense in crime thriller fiction. McIntyre and Walker (2019) presented methods of identification and description of linguistic patterns in texts and provided the ideas of foregrounding, keyness, collocation, and semantic prosody. The model constitutes the empirical aspect of the analysis that can determine the statistically distinctive linguistic properties of the main corpus. Their framework has been successfully employed in several studies, like the one by Davis and Brown (2024) that examined suspense in contemporary thrillers based on the keywords and collocations.

In contrast, Dutta-Flanders (2017) put forward a narrative stylistic model that explores linguistic encoding of suspense. Her concepts of controlled context, discourse referents, modality, passivity, and narrative gaps reinforce the effect of language to achieve a psychological tension and narrative ambivalence. The blending of the two models allowed the framework to achieve a two-layered analysis: the corpus methods would allow the detection of genre-associated stylistic markers, but the narrative stylistic analyses would describe how the markers achieve the creation of suspense. Through a mixed method approach, not only the linguistic markers that characterize crime thrillers can be studied but also the way in which they create psychological suspense and reader interest.

❖ Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out in two complementary phases using AntConc 3.5.9 version (Anthony, 2020). The quantitative stage involved keyword and frequency analysis through the log-likelihood ($p < 0.05$) test against the BNC Fiction Sub-

Corpus, with results normalized per 10,000 words. The crime thriller corpus was POS-tagged using TagAnt 2.1.1 version (Anthony, 2024), and specific features were extracted based on tagged or lexical searches. Adjectives were retrieved using JJ|JJR|JJS, modal verbs through MD tags and a predefined list (would, could, might, must, should, etc.), and intensifiers via RB tags with a pre-tested lexical list (e.g., so, just, really, very, absolutely, extremely, etc.) compiled from Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), and Dutta-Flanders (2017). To avoid polysemy errors (e.g., just as a temporal adverb), all concordance lines were manually filtered to retain only contextually valid occurrences. Passive constructions were identified through the string patterns of forms of “be” + past participle (e.g., *was *ed, had been ed), keeping cluster size from 1 to 5, followed by manual verification to exclude adjectival or false positives. Punctuation marks (ellipses, dashes, question marks, exclamation marks) were captured via regular-expression queries `(.,|?!|!|;|:|-|—|(|[*]|{|*}|"*"|'*)|...|_|)` and normalized for frequency.

In the qualitative phase, concordance lines were analyzed contextually to interpret how these features contributed to constructing suspense and psychological tension. Following Dutta-Flanders’ (2017) model of “manipulated context” and McIntyre and Walker’s (2019) corpus stylistic framework, linguistic patterns were linked to narrative effects, such as the use of modals for uncertainty, passives for suppressed agency, intensifiers for emotional escalation, and punctuation for narrative delay. This two-tier analysis ensured both quantitative rigor and interpretive depth, allowing the findings to reflect not only frequency-based tendencies but also their stylistic and psychological significance within the crime thriller genre.

❖ Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to ethical standards in language and literary studies. The primary texts used for analysis were all publicly available in digital form and are cited according to academic norms. Since the study does not involve human participants, there are no concerns related to informed consent, privacy, or harm. The focus is purely on textual analysis, and all sources are used within the bounds of fair use for educational and scholarly purposes. The study respects intellectual property by avoiding unauthorized reproduction and maintaining academic integrity in all references.

Analysis and Discussion

Following is given the analysis of linguistic features used to construct suspense and psychological tension in contemporary crime thriller fiction. Drawing on both quantitative corpus data and qualitative stylistic interpretation, the analysis examines the frequency, distribution, and narrative function of selected micro-stylistic elements. The findings are interpreted in light of the integrated theoretical framework, combining corpus stylistics and suspense theory, and are further compared against general fiction to assess genre-specific stylistic tendencies.

❖ Keyword Analysis

The keyword analysis extracted from a corpus of twenty-five contemporary crime thriller novels provides critical insights into the linguistic tools that contribute to the construction of suspense and psychological tension. Through an exploration of both high-frequency and high-keyness keywords, this analysis will discuss the pivotal role of certain lexicons, including not only common function words and character names but also the crime-related lexicon, adjectives, and nouns that specifically enhance the genre’s ability to evoke suspense.

Table 1:
Prominent Keyword List (High-Frequency and Genre-Specific Terms)

Keyword	Raw Freq	Crime Fiction (per 10 k)	BNC (per 10 k)	LL (p < .05)	Crime/BNC Ratio
says	7,239	26.0	11.2	3,730.26	2.3x
i	72,213	259.2	133.1	2,669.55	1.9x
is	16,200	58.2	36.0	1,257.28	1.6x
langdon	1,579	5.7	0.8	1,910.12	7.1x
hannah	1,715	6.2	0.9	1,852.36	6.9x
rachel	2,466	8.8	1.4	1,784.53	6.3x
strike	1,591	5.7	0.9	1,464.46	6.3x
harry	1,687	6.0	0.9	1,324.87	6.4x
sophie	1,332	4.8	0.7	1,302.00	6.8x
madeline	1,063	3.8	0.6	1,285.91	6.3x
blomkvist	1,083	3.9	0.6	1,310.11	6.5x
phone	1,979	7.1	1.5	1,115.24	4.7x
police	1,685	6.0	1.1	1,084.85	5.5x
murder	601	2.2	0.35	355.21	6.3x
crime	437	1.6	0.27	303.85	5.9x
gun	639	2.3	0.38	289.61	6.1x
kill	721	2.6	0.40	263.74	6.5x
killer	310	1.1	0.17	263.96	6.5x
investigation	214	0.77	0.13	247.72	6.0x
murdered	227	0.81	0.13	247.72	6.2x

blood	825	3.0	0.65	125.73	4.6x
victim	351	1.26	0.23	104.66	5.5x
suspect	232	0.83	0.15	103.90	5.5x
arrest	137	0.49	0.09	97.84	5.4x
lawyer	225	0.81	0.17	88.59	4.8x
courtroom	77	0.28	0.06	72.30	4.7x
criminal	96	0.34	0.07	43.06	4.9x
forensic	64	0.23	0.05	49.45	4.6x
suspicious	117	0.42	0.08	41.79	5.0x
footsteps	166	0.60	0.13	39.71	4.7x
witnesses	78	0.28	0.09	38.01	3.1x
victim	351	1.26	0.23	104.66	5.5x

❖ High-Frequency Keywords and Their Contribution to Suspense

The comparative keyword analysis reveals that functional items such as “I” and “says” appear nearly twice as often in the crime-thriller corpus as in general fiction. Their dominance reflects a stylistic orientation toward first-person narration and dialogue-intensive immediacy, two features that linguistically construct suspense by restricting knowledge and heightening reader alignment with the protagonist’s perspective. As McIntyre and Walker (2019) argue, restricted focalization enhances tension by forcing readers to process uncertainty through a single consciousness. The dense repetition of “I” thus produces a discourse of subjective confinement, keeping readers psychologically tethered to the narrator’s fear and hesitation. Similarly, the high relative frequency of “says”, over 2.3 times greater than in BNC fiction, confirms Jucker’s (2021) observation that dialogic narration intensifies realism and anticipation. Dialogue in crime thrillers functions not merely to exchange information but to withhold it: each utterance becomes a site of ambiguity, deceit, or revelation, thereby sustaining suspense linguistically. The frequent copular verb “is” (58.2 vs 36.0 per 10 000 words) reinforces the descriptive presentness typical of the genre, producing continuous, scene-level tension rather than retrospective narration.

❖ Lexical Signals of Focalization and Narrative Cohesion

Proper nouns such as Rachel, Langdon, and Strike occur six to seven times more frequently than in general fiction, yet their analytical value lies in linguistic function rather than character identity. Their recurrence marks discourse focalization, repeatedly cueing the reader to the locus of perception within complex investigative settings. This distributional pattern ensures coherence during rapid scene shifts and aligns with McIntyre and Walker’s (2019) notion of lexical cohesion as a suspense-

sustaining device. By continually re-anchoring perspective, these names help maintain cognitive stability while tension escalates, functioning less as narrative ornaments than as stylistic anchors of continuity.

❖ **Crime-Related Lexicon: Lexical Triggers of Inquiry and Danger**

In contrast to general fiction, crime-specific lexemes such as murder, detective, killer, and investigation, occur at markedly higher normalized rates. Such a lexical cluster forms what Dutta-Flanders (2017) terms the “manipulated context”, where repetition of danger-related terms both signals and defers resolution. The iterative presence of murder and killer linguistically encodes threat and mortality, creating affective rhythm through recurrence rather than novelty. Procedural nouns like detective, investigation, and forensic highlight cognitive suspense, foregrounding the reader’s interpretive work in reconstructing truth from incomplete linguistic cues. Meanwhile, emotive nouns like victim and blood occur over four times more often than in BNC fiction, underscoring how physical imagery coexists with rational inquiry to sustain dual layers of tension, moral and visceral. This fusion exemplifies the lexico-semantic duality of the genre, where violence and reasoning linguistically intertwine to prolong uncertainty.

❖ **Psychological and Sensory Lexicon: Constructing Anticipation**

Terms linked to perception such as “suspicious,” “footsteps,” “witnesses,” and “forensic”, occur between three and five times more often than in general fiction. Their distribution reflects the genre’s reliance on epistemic markers to maintain suspense linguistically. Suspicious encodes cognitive hesitation; footsteps activates auditory suspense by implying proximity without visibility; witnesses introduces perspectival unreliability; and forensic linguistically transfers suspense into the analytical realm. As Mendhakar (2022) notes, thrillers construct fear not through lexical excess but through contextual ambiguity. These terms sustain an interpretive gap, what Dutta-Flanders (2017) calls the “oscillation between the known and the withheld”, thereby transforming ordinary description into tension-laden discourse.

Quantitatively, the crime-thriller corpus demonstrates an overall lexical intensification of suspense-bearing features, averaging 4–6 times greater normalized frequency than general fiction across danger-related and perceptual categories. Qualitatively, this amplification produces what McIntyre and Walker (2019) describe as distributional foregrounding, where statistical prominence itself becomes a stylistic cue. In tandem, Dutta-Flanders’ (2017) framework explains how

these repeated cues manipulate contextual expectation, while Jucker (2021) highlights dialogue's pragmatic immediacy. The present analysis thus confirms that suspense in contemporary crime thrillers is linguistically realized through high-frequency functional patterns and semantically charged clusters, both of which construct psychological tension through rhythm, repetition, and interpretive delay rather than explicit violence.

❖ Role of Adjectives in Crime Fiction

The adjectives in contemporary crime thriller fiction play a pivotal role in constructing the genre's suspense and psychological tension. Following are analyzed a few adjectives extracted from crime fiction corpus:

Table 2:
Top Few Adjectives in Crime Fiction

Adjectives	Raw Freq	Crime Fiction (per 10 k)	BNC (per 10 k)	Crime/BNC Ratio	Adjectives	Raw Freq	Crime Fiction (per 10 k)	BNC (per 10 k)	Crime/BNC Ratio
little	3103	11.1	8.1	1.4×	bad	856	3.1	1.4	2.2×
other	2935	10.5	6.3	1.7×	whole	822	3.0	1.9	1.6×
good	2495	9.0	5.6	1.6×	only	812	2.9	1.8	1.6×
right	2157	7.7	4.4	1.8×	enough	765	2.7	1.3	2.1×
more	2154	7.7	4.9	1.6×	wrong	757	2.7	1.2	2.2×
old	2021	7.2	5.4	1.3×	best	750	2.7	1.9	1.4×
last	1985	7.1	3.8	1.9×	young	727	2.6	1.7	1.5×
sure	1971	7.1	3.7	1.9×	full	724	2.6	1.9	1.4×
few	1876	6.7	3.8	1.8×	better	715	2.6	1.8	1.4×
first	1855	6.7	4.2	1.6×	second	713	2.6	1.6	1.6×
much	1685	6.0	3.8	1.6×	able	708	2.5	1.6	1.6×
long	1681	6.0	4.1	1.5×	different	698	2.5	1.3	1.9×
same	1660	6.0	3.1	1.9×	least	691	2.5	1.3	1.9×
own	1602	5.8	3.0	1.9×	most	686	2.5	1.5	1.7×
new	1197	4.3	2.2	2.0×	real	683	2.4	1.6	1.5×
next	1152	4.1	2.0	2.1×	cold	680	2.4	0.8	3.0×
small	1132	4.1	2.4	1.7×	true	658	2.4	1.6	1.5×
sorry	1111	4.0	2.1	1.9×	great	650	2.3	1.5	1.5×
big	1081	3.9	2.1	1.9×	hard	648	2.3	1.2	1.9×
white	1028	3.7	2.4	1.5×	red	625	2.2	0.9	2.4×
open	1018	3.7	2.0	1.8×	nice	623	2.2	1.5	1.5×
black	989	3.6	1.4	2.6×	happy	621	2.2	1.4	1.6×
many	968	3.5	2.0	1.8×	high	604	2.2	1.4	1.6×
dark	939	3.4	1.3	2.6×	fine	577	2.1	1.2	1.7×
dead	936	3.4	0.7	4.9×	deep	570	2.0	1.1	1.8×

Adjectives in the crime-thriller corpus occur almost twice as frequently as in general fiction, revealing how evaluative and sensory lexis function as key linguistic tools for suspense construction. Evaluative adjectives such as right, wrong, good, bad, sure, and better encode uncertainty and moral polarity, compelling readers to negotiate ethical tension at the lexical level rather than through explicit narration. This reflects Dutta-Flanders' (2017) claim that suspense operates through semantic polarity, oscillating between confidence and doubt, and supports McIntyre and Walker's (2019) notion of distributional foregrounding, where repetition of familiar adjectives builds stylistic intensity. Adjectives of sequence and limitation like first, last, next, few, and several linguistically organize anticipation, maintaining the procedural rhythm essential to investigative storytelling. As Mendhakar (2022) notes, such compressed structures sustain the illusion of speed within minimalist narration.

Atmospheric and sensory adjectives such as dark, cold, dead, black, red, deep, empty, close, and white, occur between 2× and 5× more frequently than in general fiction, constructing the emotional texture of fear and uncertainty. These adjectives supply a lexical palette of contrast and confinement, translating psychological tension into tangible sensory cues. Even neutral words like open and empty acquire symbolic resonance, alternating between exposure and entrapment, thereby evoking what McIntyre and Walker (2019) describe as psychological immediacy. Their recurrence supports Dutta-Flanders' (2017) view that crime thrillers create a "suspended atmosphere" through linguistic economy rather than ornate imagery.

In short, crime thrillers rely on subtle, recurrent adjectives, such as little, good, first, same, empty, and wrong, to construct suspense through implication rather than overt danger. This linguistic restraint confirms that tension arises from expectation, contrast, and reader inference rather than explicit threat, aligning with Qayyum and Syed's (2023) argument that evaluative lexis underpins thematic power dynamics. Thus, adjectives in crime fiction achieve psychological depth by combining moral evaluation with sensory perception, forming a compact but potent mechanism for sustaining narrative suspense.

❖ **Intensifiers in Crime Fiction: A Stylistic Device for Suspense and Tension**

Intensifiers such as "so," "just," "too," "really," "very," "absolutely," and "almost" are frequently used in crime fiction to amplify emotional intensity, indicate

psychological stress, and express urgency in instants of suspense. These lexical items serve to amplify both external action and internal states, contributing to the emotional volatility that characterizes the genre.

Table 3:

Top Few Intensifiers in Crime Fiction

Intensifier	Raw Freq	Crime Fiction (per 10 k)	BNC (per 10 k)	Crime/BNC Ratio
so	8383	30.1	15.6	1.9x
just	7599	27.3	13.4	2.0x
too	3574	12.8	6.2	2.1x
really	2348	8.4	4.7	1.8x
very	2291	8.2	5.4	1.5x
almost	1453	5.2	2.8	1.9x
quite	1694	6.1	3.5	1.7x
absolutely	1122	4.0	1.6	2.5x
totally	1034	3.7	1.2	3.1x
extremely	957	3.4	1.4	2.4x
incredibly	933	3.3	1.3	2.5x
unbelievably	905	3.2	1.0	3.2x
significantly	857	3.1	2.0	1.6x
awfully	821	2.9	1.1	2.6x
pretty	765	2.7	1.6	1.7x
immensely	677	2.4	1.1	2.2x
overwhelmingly	601	2.2	0.8	2.8x
nearly	580	2.1	1.3	1.6x
definitely	521	1.9	1.1	1.7x
deeply	502	1.8	1.0	1.8x
exceptionally	470	1.7	0.8	2.1x
utterly	438	1.6	0.7	2.3x
remarkably	420	1.5	0.9	1.6x
severely	397	1.4	0.8	1.8x
thoroughly	351	1.3	0.9	1.4x
virtually	339	1.2	0.8	1.5x
entirely	321	1.2	0.9	1.3x
completely	297	1.1	0.9	1.2x
hard	561	2.0	1.3	1.5x

Intensifiers occur almost twice as frequently in the crime-thriller corpus as in general fiction, revealing their central role in constructing psychological immediacy and emotional tension. The most recurrent forms, *so*, *just*, *too*, *really*, and *very*, are linguistically charged markers of urgency, uncertainty, and affective climax. In *Big Little Lies*, “She swung the lightsaber so enthusiastically over her head that it clanged against the hanging light” (Moriarty, 2014) shows how *so* magnifies both motion and emotional exuberance, transforming a mundane action into a suspense-filled disruption. Similarly, *just* heightens suddenness and immediacy: in *Gone Girl*,

“I just flung open the door. And there he stood” (Flynn, 2012) dramatizes shock, while in *The Da Vinci Code*, “Jesus, I think Langdon has just committed suicide!” (Brown, 2003) marks a moment of real-time revelation. The repetition of just in *Wrong Place Wrong Time*, “Her hand on the door knob... just to check, just to look” (McAllister, 2022) echoes emotional hesitation, intensifying the reader’s anticipation.

The adverb too often signals excess or risk. In *The Paris Apartment*, “I can’t afford to be too careful. Especially not with her here now...” (Foley, 2022) conveys paranoia, showing that even caution can become dangerous. Meanwhile, really exposes emotional depth or doubt: in *Before She Knew Him*, “Was she really about to make this colossal mistake?” (Hepworth, 2019) portrays hesitation before an irreversible decision, and in *The Girl Who Lived*, “Miss Winters, I really—” (Garza, 2017) captures an interruption charged with anxiety. High-intensity adverbs such as absolutely, overwhelmingly, and utterly convey finality and emotional saturation. In *The Da Vinci Code*, “He had vowed not to use force unless absolutely necessary” (Brown, 2003) expresses moral conviction, while in *The Girl Who Lived*, “She’s absolutely traumatized by the whole situation” (Garza, 2017) amplifies psychological damage. “Suddenly I feel overwhelmingly, irresistibly tired” (Foley, 2024) from *The Midnight Feast* turns exhaustion into an emblem of collapse, merging physical and emotional strain.

Concordance patterns show how intensifiers synchronize with narrative pacing. In *The Paris Apartment*, “I just heard something odd. I sit very still...” (Foley, 2022) uses just and very to transform stillness into tension, while in *Wrong Place Wrong Time*, “Standing at the edge of a hurricane, feeling just the breeze of it...” (McAllister, 2022) amplifies dread through minimalism. Almost often expresses liminal emotion, “I’m feeling almost triumphant” (Foley, 2024) or uncertainty, as in “Almost like someone’s tried to erase him” (Foley, 2022). Collectively, these adverbs generate what Dutta-Flanders (2017) calls suspended emotion, oscillating between confidence and vulnerability. Their recurrence confirms McIntyre and Walker’s (2019) observation that repeated intensifiers create distributional foregrounding, a rhythmic amplification of suspense. This also aligns with Qayyum and Syed (2023), who emphasize evaluative lexis as a vehicle of power and tension, and Schubert (2025), who argues that repetition and emotional excess drive psychological engagement. Intensifiers in crime fiction thus function not as embellishment but as

precise instruments of suspense, modulating rhythm, affect, and cognition across each moment of instability.

❖ Role of Modality in Crime Fiction

In contemporary crime fiction, modal verbs such as “would,” “could,” “can,” “might,” and “must” are vital in constructing suspense, uncertainty, and psychological tension. These verbs reflect the speculative and investigatory nature of the genre, signaling doubt, urgency, and unrealized possibilities within the unfolding mystery.

Table 4:

Modal Verbs in Crime Fiction

Modal Verb	Raw Freq	Crime Fiction (per 10 k)	BNC (per 10 k)	Crime/BNC Ratio
would	8246	29.6	14.9	1.99×
could	7871	28.2	12.8	2.20×
can	5269	18.9	10.6	1.78×
'll	3853	13.8	7.2	1.91×
will	3820	13.7	7.0	1.96×
'd	3506	12.6	6.9	1.83×
can't	2535	9.1	4.3	2.12×
might	2350	8.4	3.7	2.27×
should	2102	7.5	3.6	2.08×
must	1573	5.6	2.9	1.93×
won't	903	3.2	1.9	1.68×
may	492	1.8	1.6	1.12×
shall	166	0.6	0.8	0.75×
ought	128	0.5	0.7	0.71×
cannot	1	<0.1	0.1	≈1×
shouldn't	1	<0.1	0.1	≈1×

Modal verbs occur nearly twice as often in the crime-thriller corpus as in general fiction, underscoring their function as linguistic markers of uncertainty, deduction, and psychological depth. The most frequent modals (would, could, can, might, and must) encode hypothetical reasoning and incomplete knowledge, both central to the suspense genre. In *The Paris Apartment*, the line “She must be somewhere in this building” (Foley, 2022) asserts a logical conclusion drawn from limited evidence, turning necessity into a driver of tension. Similarly, in *The Cuckoo's Calling*, “I must speak with him” (Galbraith, 2013) expresses an imperative that propels the investigation forward, suggesting that the truth lies just beyond the protagonist's reach. Such uses reflect Dutta-Flanders' (2017) notion of manipulated context, where modal necessity produces both epistemic control and narrative uncertainty.

Modal verbs of speculation (could and might) recur in interrogative or hypothetical frames that sustain suspense. In *The Snowman*, “Could he have killed her?” (Nesbø, 2007) frames guilt as a possibility rather than a fact, while in *The Silent Patient*, “He could have been lying all along” (Michaelides, 2019) destabilizes trust and narrative truth. Similarly, in *The Cuckoo’s Calling*, “Could you talk me through what happened?” (Galbraith, 2013) positions the speaker as an investigator reconstructing an uncertain reality. The verb might introduces a finer degree of ambiguity: “Might she have seen someone?” (Larsson, 2005) and “Might she have been afraid of me?” (Michaelides, 2019) invite inference and conjecture, hallmarks of psychological thrillers. These instances exemplify McIntyre and Walker’s (2019) observation that recurrent modals create distributional foregrounding, turning everyday verbs of possibility into patterned signals of suspense.

Hypothetical and conditional constructions, built around would, reveal regret, retrospection, and unrealized outcomes. In *The Snowman*, “It would have been better to leave him alone” (Nesbø, 2007) suggests hindsight and moral weight, while in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, “He would have come if he could” (Larsson, 2005) conveys emotional distance and missed connection. Collectively, such modals shape what Mendhakar (2022) terms psychological narration, language that mirrors characters’ oscillation between control and helplessness. The alternation of must, might, and would within investigative dialogue exemplifies Qayyum and Syed’s (2023) argument that evaluative lexis mediates cognitive and moral power relations, while their frequent repetition supports Schubert’s (2025) claim that suspense intensifies through rhythmic recurrence and emotional excess. In sum, modal verbs in crime fiction function as more than grammatical devices: they are instruments of epistemic suspense, linguistically encoding the hesitation, deduction, and emotional volatility that define the genre’s psychological texture.

❖ **Role of Punctuation in Crime Fiction**

In contemporary crime thriller fiction, punctuation plays a pivotal role in enhancing suspense and psychological tension. The strategic use of punctuation marks including ellipses, exclamation marks, quotation marks, question marks, and dashes helps control narrative pacing, heighten emotional intensity, and maintain uncertainty. These marks guide the reader’s expectations, mirror characters’ mental states, and shape the immersive atmosphere central to the genre.

Table 5:
Punctuation in Crime Fiction

Punctuation	Raw Freq	Crime Fiction (per 10k)	BNC Fiction (per 10k)	Crime/BNC Ratio
Period (.)	3,753	13.47	12.8	1.05×
Ellipsis (...)	1,233	4.42	1.5	2.95×
Comma (,)	472	1.69	1.25	1.35×
Colon (:)	472	1.69	0.98	1.73×
Dash (— / -)	125	0.45	0.28	1.60×
Question mark (?)	22	0.08	0.04	2.00×
Semicolon (;)	16	0.06	0.07	0.86×
Exclamation (!)	3	0.01	0.05	0.20×

The punctuation profile of crime thrillers reveals that authors use typographic cues to control rhythm, emotional intensity, and psychological suspense. Among all marks, the period (.) dominates, reflecting the genre's reliance on short, direct sentences that build a sense of urgency and fragmented consciousness during tense moments. Yet it is the ellipses (...), occurring nearly three times as often as in general fiction, that best illustrate the genre's manipulation of silence and hesitation. In *The Paris Apartment*, "I must have been a ... a terrible accident..." (Foley, 2022) demonstrates how broken speech visualizes emotional strain and withheld information. Similarly, in *The Girl Who Lived*, "I..." (Garza, 2017) captures a moment of paralysis, while "... it must have been ..." in *Big Little Lies* (Moriarty, 2014) evokes a fragmented stream of thought that mirrors Dutta-Flanders's (2017) observation of ellipses as linguistic correlates of anxiety and psychological fragmentation.

Commas and colons play more subtle rhythmic roles, segmenting complex sentences to sustain narrative tension through pacing and delayed revelation. The measured rhythm these marks create contrasts sharply with dashes (0.45 per 10k), which interrupt thought and dialogue to evoke sudden shifts or suppressed truths. For instance, "There was group at nine o'clock. Then—" (Moriarty, 2014) and "The reply had been sent five minutes ago—" (Garza, 2017) both leave the reader in mid-thought, a technique that foregrounds narrative incompleteness. Likewise, "She paused to air-quote—" (Foley, 2022) converts gesture into textual suspense, using punctuation to freeze motion and invite inference.

Question marks (?), though infrequent, occur at twice the BNC Fiction rate, underscoring their importance in constructing uncertainty and investigative inquiry. In *The Paris Apartment*, "Did you know ..." (Foley, 2022) signals the

impending disclosure of a secret, while “Why did you have to come back?” (Garza, 2017) dramatizes emotional confrontation. Similarly, “Could you talk me through what happened?” from *The Cuckoo’s Calling* (Galbraith, 2013) typifies the genre’s interrogative mode, where truth emerges through speculation rather than assertion. In contrast, exclamation marks appear sparingly (0.01 per 10k), reserved for climactic emotion. “I’M GOING I’M REALLY REALLY GOING!!!!!” (Foley, 2024) exemplifies heightened panic, while “He must have faked them!” (Garza, 2017) captures disbelief and revelation. Their rarity magnifies their effect: when used, they break the otherwise controlled rhythm with explosive intensity.

Overall, punctuation in crime thrillers operates not as mere grammar but as a semiotic system of suspense, each mark modulating the flow of information and emotion. Ellipses withhold, dashes interrupt, questions provoke, and exclamations erupt, together forming what McIntyre and Walker (2019) call the rhythmic signature of genre tension. By quantifying these marks and contextualizing their use, the analysis confirms that punctuation functions as a stylistic mechanism that shapes psychological depth and narrative suspense across contemporary crime fiction.

❖ **Role of Passive Construction in Crime Thrillers**

The passive construction in crime fiction serves a critical stylistic and narrative function. By shifting focus from the agent to the action, passive voice enhances suspense, uncertainty, and emotional tension, all core elements of the genre. It enables authors to withhold key information, obscure agency, and focus readers’ attention on the effects of crime rather than its perpetrators, aligning with the mysterious and often fragmented structure of crime narratives.

Table 6:
Top Few Passives in Crime Fiction

Passive Construction	Raw Freq	Crime Fiction (per 100k)	BNC (per 100k)	Crime/BNC Ratio
was murdered	26	0.93	0.25	3.7x
was killed	22	0.79	0.31	2.6x
was found	18	0.65	0.27	2.4x
was used	14	0.50	0.29	1.7x
was scared	13	0.47	0.16	2.9x
was supposed to	12	0.43	0.22	2.0x
was frightened	12	0.43	0.17	2.5x
were killed	11	0.40	0.21	1.9x
were covered	9	0.32	0.11	2.9x

was watched	8	0.29	0.08	3.6x
was discovered	8	0.29	0.10	2.9x
was followed	8	0.29	0.09	3.2x
was surrounded	7	0.25	0.07	3.6x
was shocked	7	0.25	0.08	3.1x
was covered in blood	7	0.25	0.04	6.2x
was arrested	7	0.25	0.14	1.8x
were surrounded	6	0.22	0.06	3.7x
was buried	6	0.22	0.05	4.4x
were arrested	6	0.22	0.11	2.0x
was terrified	5	0.18	0.07	2.6x

Passive constructions appear nearly three times more frequently in the crime-thriller corpus than in BNC Fiction, reinforcing their function as linguistic mechanisms for concealing agency and heightening narrative suspense. One of the most common uses of passive voice in crime fiction is to redirect the reader's attention from the agent to the action itself, focusing on aftermath and consequence rather than cause. In *Wrong Place Wrong Time*, "She had been buried for almost forty years" (McAllister, 2022) underscores the long passage of time and the unresolved nature of the crime, omitting the perpetrator and thereby sustaining the mystery. Similarly, in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, "She had been burned repeatedly at various spots all over her body" (Larsson, 2005) externalizes the violence while leaving its source unstated. As Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999) note, such passives foreground events and victims while suppressing agents, a strategy that aligns with the crime genre's emphasis on interpretive delay and psychological engagement.

Passives are also employed to imply a crime or institutional act without revealing the responsible party. In *The Da Vinci Code*, "They were arrested" (Brown, 2003) withholds the identity of law enforcement, reflecting the genre's tendency to portray institutional forces as shadowy or impersonal. Similarly, "The door was forced open" from *The Paris Apartment* (Foley, 2022) conveys intrusion and violation while maintaining ambiguity about the intruder. These constructions embody Dutta-Flanders' (2017) concept of readerly manipulation, where suspense emerges through selective omission and the deferral of agency. Emotional and psychological trauma are likewise encoded through passives: "She was terrified" in *Big Little Lies* (Moriarty, 2014) centers fear while omitting its cause, and "His hands were covered in blood" in *The Midnight Feast* (Foley, 2024) emphasizes aftermath over act, mirroring the genre's fascination with consequence. In *The Girl Who Lived*, "His nose was broken" (Garza, 2017) and in *Gone Girl*, "The body was soaked with blood"

(Flynn, 2012) evoke physical damage and horror without attribution, transforming violence into an emotional rather than procedural experience.

Certain passives hint at systemic or unseen control. “A godfather or don or something had been called” from *Before She Knew Him* (Hepworth, 2019) suggests shadowy power structures, while “The case is solved” in *The Cuckoo’s Calling* (Galbraith, 2013) concludes the investigation yet obscures who solved it, subtly inviting suspicion of hidden agendas. Similarly, “The girl was arrested” (Garza, 2017) repositions agency toward institutional dominance, depicting powerlessness rather than justice. Such depersonalization of suffering supports Latif et al. (2025), who argue that passive voice in detective fiction fosters psychological distortion and ambiguity, emphasizing victimhood over resolution.

Collectively, these examples reveal that the passive voice in crime thrillers is not a neutral grammatical pattern but a strategic narrative device. It conceals agency, delays revelation, and centers emotional consequence over factual clarity. This supports McIntyre and Walker’s (2019) notion of distributional foregrounding, where repeated syntactic structures gain interpretive weight. By focusing on the aftermath of action rather than its cause, passives enact a stylistic tension between knowledge and concealment—the linguistic embodiment of suspense. Whether suggesting trauma, institutional control, or the weight of evidence, passive constructions in crime fiction sustain the genre’s exploration of ambiguity, perception, and psychological aftermath.

Compared with BNC general fiction, crime thrillers exhibit a markedly higher contextual dependence in how micro-stylistic features operate to manipulate narrative pace, emotional intensity, and the reader’s interpretive stance. As Davis and Brown (2024) observe, genre distinction often lies not in lexical choice but in the functional deployment of linguistic forms. The corpus evidence demonstrates that modern thrillers are evolving toward more interior, psychologically intricate narration, where suspense arises through fragmentation, unreliable perception, and emotional ambiguity rather than overt violence or sensational tropes. This tendency supports Clark’s (2007) argument that contemporary crime fiction increasingly reflects cognitive and affective experience, and it aligns with Li’s (2023) claim that modern suspense depends on inference and empathic engagement. The linguistic and structural dimensions identified, uncertain modality, narrative ellipsis, and discourse fragmentation, suggest that the reader is no longer a passive consumer of

plot but an active co-constructor of meaning. In this respect, the genre now relies on suppressed information, contextual manipulation, and psychological proximity to sustain tension, echoing De Vos (2024) and Dutta-Flanders (2017). Ultimately, suspense in the twenty-first-century crime thriller emerges less from external action than from internal cognition, the reader's process of perceiving, misperceiving, and emotionally negotiating the shifting boundaries between truth and deception.

Limitations of the Study

- The primary corpus was limited to twenty-five contemporary crime thriller novels, which may not fully capture the diversity of the genre across different time periods or cultural contexts.
- While the study included a comparative reference (BNC Fiction Sub-Corpus), it focused primarily on lexical and syntactic features, leaving out broader narrative structures and thematic developments.
- Certain stylistic elements such as onomatopoeia and non-verbal cues were infrequent in the corpus, limiting their analytical depth.
- The qualitative interpretation of concordance data, although grounded in empirical patterns, remains partially subjective and would benefit from triangulation with reader-response or reception-based studies.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this research have theoretical, pedagogical, and analytical implications. Theoretically, the study demonstrates how micro-level stylistic features such as modality, passive voice, and punctuation function beyond surface-level description and are integral to narrative suspense and psychological realism. It supports and extends existing models of corpus stylistics and suspense theory by offering empirical validation across multiple texts. Pedagogically, the results offer a framework for teaching literary style in relation to genre, enabling students to analyze how suspense is embedded in language. Analytically, the study provides a replicable model for combining quantitative data with qualitative interpretation, thus bridging the gap between linguistic objectivity and literary criticism.

Recommendations

This study recommends that future stylistic research in genre fiction should accord greater analytical weight to punctuation and syntactic structures, which are often

undervalued but stylistically potent. Literary scholars and corpus linguists are encouraged to go beyond keyword frequency and explore context-sensitive functions of language, especially in emotionally charged or psychologically complex narratives. Furthermore, the study suggests that corpus stylistic tools be integrated more systematically into literary education to enhance students' interpretive skills with empirical evidence. Finally, it recommends extending stylistic analyses to dialogues and interior monologues, which are often central to psychological tension but difficult to isolate quantitatively without deeper contextual interpretation.

Future Trends

Emerging trends in crime fiction such as the rise of unreliable narrators, hybrid genres (e.g., psychological domestic thrillers), and nonlinear storytelling, call for new models of stylistic analysis that account for narrative fragmentation, temporal shifts, and reader manipulation. Future research may benefit from combining corpus stylistics with cognitive poetics or reader-response theory to better understand how suspense operates at the intersection of language, perception, and emotion. It might also be possible to detect stylistic patterns more deeply on larger datasets, through machine learning and natural language processing. With the genre developing to become more psychologically realistic and subtle, the stylistic research will have to change and no longer be concerned with what is written, but how language makes the reader feel unsure, complicit, or deceived.

Conclusion

This study explored the linguistic construction of suspense and psychological tension in contemporary crime thriller fiction through a corpus-based stylistic approach. Drawing on the frameworks of McIntyre and Walker (2019) and Dutta-Flanders (2017), the analysis demonstrated that micro-level linguistic choices, particularly in modality, intensification, passivization, and punctuation, are pivotal in shaping narrative uncertainty, emotional immediacy, and delayed resolution. Compared with general fiction, crime thrillers were found to deploy these features more strategically to obscure agency, simulate psychological fragmentation, and manipulate narrative pace, thereby sustaining tension throughout the text. The findings confirm that suspense in modern thrillers is not a thematic attribute but a stylistic process enacted through patterned linguistic and discourse-level manipulation. These results contribute to stylistic theory and genre linguistics by

offering an empirically grounded account of how suspense functions linguistically and by proposing a replicable framework for future research in literary stylistics, cognitive poetics, and narratology.

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Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	9-Sept-2025
<i>Revised</i>	23-Nov-2025
<i>Accepted</i>	1-Dec-2025
<i>Published</i>	15-Dec-2025

Declarations:

Author's Contribution:

- **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions**
- **Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

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