

Article

Language, Time and Power in Africanfuturist and American Science Fiction

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Abstract

This study investigates how time is stylistically constructed as linear and fragmented in selected African and American science fiction, using Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). It analyzes Project Hail Mary (Weir, 2021), Remote Control (Okorafor, 2021), The Space Between Worlds (Johnson, 2020), and Far From the Light of Heaven (Thompson, 2021). Drawing on close reading, the study examines how temporal meaning is realized through transitivity and agency, cohesion and reference, tense-aspect-modality, and clause organization. Findings show four distinct chronotopic systems: (a) Project Hail Mary constructs instrumental, linear time as measurable and manageable through sequential clause chaining and precise temporal lexis; (b) Remote Control constructs mythic, cyclical time through memory-based cohesion and symbolic temporal markers; (c) The Space Between Worlds constructs fragmented, multiversal time through repetition, shifting agency, and ontological multiplicity; and (d) Far From the Light of Heaven constructs technologically mediated, recursive time through delayed communication and investigative reverse chronology. Across texts, temporality is ideologically shaped rather than neutrally physical. The study conceptualizes shreds as micro-level syntactic ruptures (fragments, ellipses) and shards as macro-level chronological ruptures (flashbacks, recursions, parallel worlds), and argues that science fiction constructs time as a dynamic experiential system.

Keywords: Temporality, Fragmentation, Linear time, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Africanfuturism, Science fiction

Introduction

Science fiction provides a privileged site for exploring time, space, and technological possibility, particularly in narratives of interstellar travel where time ceases to be linear and space becomes elastic (Roberts, 2006; James, 1994). Language in these texts does not merely describe events; it constructs scientific and cultural reality through stylistic choice, which makes stylistic analysis valuable for examining how meaning is produced in science fiction discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

In American hard science fiction, temporal calculation and relativity are often grounded in astrophysics, engineering logic, and empirical science. Time is represented as measurable, reversible, or dilatable through technology. This tradition reflects a broader scientific optimism associated with industrial and postindustrial development and aligns with a Western philosophical orientation toward linear time and progress (Booker, 2006; Roberts, 2006). Narratives of space travel rely on precise temporal computations, including time dilation, light-speed travel, and interplanetary mission timing.

In contrast, African science fiction and Africanfuturism often engage time from a different epistemological standpoint. Time is depicted as cyclical, relational, and culturally situated, shaped by memory, ancestry, and lived experience rather than mathematical quantification alone (Eshun, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Okorafor, 2019). This reflects Indigenous



African conceptions in which past, present, and future are interrelated. Space-time is thus not only scientific but also cultural and symbolic, linked to identity, history, and community survival.

Genre conventions are not culturally neutral; they are informed by historical experience, philosophical orientation, and ideological positioning (Csicsery-Ronay, 2008; Suvin, 1979). Whereas American narratives tend to emphasize technological control over space-time, African-centered narratives integrate scientific imagination with cultural meaning systems to produce hybrid representations of futurity that defy purely empirical understanding.

This study examines how selected American and African science fiction texts construct temporal calculation and relativistic space-time through stylistic choices. It asks how language simultaneously encodes scientific concepts and cultural meaning, and how grammar, lexis, and narrative structure shape readers' perceptions of time, movement, and cosmic experience. The central metaphor of shreds and shards is theorized here as fragmentation at two levels: shreds refer to micro-level syntactic ruptures—fragments, ellipses, minor sentences, and interrupted clauses—that break textual continuity; shards refer to macro-level chronological ruptures—flashbacks, recursions, delayed causality, and parallel worlds—that break chronological continuity. Together, they realize fragmented temporality.

The study addresses three research questions: (a) How is linear, measurable time lexicogrammatically realized in the selected texts? (b) How is fragmented time realized through disruptions in cohesion, agency, and sequencing? and (c) What ideological and cultural work do these temporal constructions perform? The objectives are to describe the lexico-grammatical resources of temporality, compare linear and fragmented systems across the corpus, and interpret their cultural politics within an SFL framework.

Literature Review

Science fiction scholarship has long treated time as both scientific problem and narrative resource. Foundational histories by Roberts (2006) and James (1994) established that the genre systematically translates physics into story: Roberts (2006) argued that science fiction continuously reworks scientific discourse into cultural narrative, whereas James (1994) showed how twentieth-century science fiction foregrounds human finitude in space and time through technological extrapolation. In interstellar narratives this translation becomes acute, because light-speed limits, time dilation, and communication delay disrupt simultaneity and make temporal coordination itself dramatic (Thorne, 2014). Booker (2006) demonstrated that American science fiction in particular frequently figures time as a quantifiable, manageable resource—counted down, budgeted, and optimized—reflecting a scientific-rationalist ideology in which control over time legitimates technological heroism.

A second strand examines how such temporalities are linguistically built. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) showed that experience is construed through transitivity, tense, and circumstantiation, with time realized as participant, process, and circumstance rather than as backdrop. Halliday and Hasan (1989) added that cohesion—reference, ellipsis, conjunction—sustains or breaks temporal continuity across clauses. Applied to speculative fiction, Stockwell (2002, 2013) argued that grammar simulates alternative physics: deviant deixis, modalized futures, and stretched aspect invite readers to cognitively model worlds they have never inhabited. Toolan (2012) and Simpson (1993) likewise showed that tense switching, aspectual choice, and modal verbs such as will, may, might, and could encode

prediction, probability, and epistemic stance, which is crucial where outcomes are uncertain and causality is delayed. Semino (2008) added that abstract temporal relations are typically rendered through spatial metaphor – distance, motion, bleeding, calcification, collapse – a resource all four novels in this corpus exploit.

Narratology supplies the macro-poetics of fragmentation. McHale (1987) identified disrupted sequence, embedded retrospection, and ontological pluralization as hallmarks of postmodernist fiction, while Herman (2009) and Ryan (2015) showed how achrony, embedded timelines, and interactive branching redistribute story-order and discourse-order. Hayles (2017) extended this to the cognitive nonconscious, arguing that contemporary technoculture distributes cognition across humans and systems so that machine processing time and human phenomenological time diverge – a tension central to Thompson's and Weir's shipboard AIs. In relativistic storytelling these devices are more than ornament: they formally enact the physics they describe, separating characters into non-shared nows and forcing readers to hold multiple temporal planes at once.

African speculative fiction reframes this conversation. Rather than treating nonlinear time as paradox to be solved, Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist criticism treats it as epistemology. Eshun (2003) theorized Black Atlantic futurity as counter-memory that revises colonial progress narratives; Okorafor (2019) distinguished Africanfuturism as rooted in African cosmologies, technologies, and futures rather than diasporic estrangement alone; and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020) situated such futures within decolonial struggles over knowledge and being. Mbembe (2019) and Fabian (1983) further reminded critics that colonial modernity denied coevalness to African subjects by placing them in another time; to write cyclical, ancestral, or simultaneous time is therefore a political act. In this view, memory, proverb, ritual return, and communal witnessing are not pre-scientific residues but temporal technologies that bind past obligation to future survival.

The chronotope concept synthesizes these insights. Following Bakhtin (1981), time-space configurations can be read as generic ideologies: the road, the ship, the threshold, and the laboratory each license distinct movements and encounters. Ricoeur (1984) added that narrative emplotment humanizes cosmic time by mediating between lived duration and measured succession. Csicsery-Ronay (2008) and Suvin (1979) located science fiction's specificity in cognitive estrangement and technosublime yet insisted that estrangement is never culturally neutral. Fairclough (1995) provided the discourse-ideological corollary: choices of nominalization, passivization, modality, and sequencing naturalize particular relations of power – who waits, who calculates, who is disposable, whose delay matters.

Despite this richness, systematic comparison remains scarce. Most stylistic work treats either hard-SF problem-solving or Afrofuturist mythopoesis, rarely both within one framework, and most thematic work invokes SFL without coding transitivity, cohesion, and modality consistently. The present study addresses that gap by applying a shared SFL grid to two American-focused and two African-focused novels that all foreground interstellar transit and technological mediation, asking not only how time is represented but how shreds (sentence-level ruptures) and shards (chronology-level ruptures) perform different politics of time.

Fragmentation itself requires theorization because shreds and shards operate differently across scales. At sentence level, ellipsis, asyndeton, and minor sentences create what McHale (1987) called weak narrativity – continuity sufficiently broken to demand inferencing but

not so broken as to prevent world-building. At discourse level, anachrony, recursion, and parallel-world branching create strong fragmentation, where readers must maintain competing timelines without a privileged now (Herman, 2009; Ryan, 2015). Postcolonial criticism adds that these scales carry unequal prestige: modernist fragmentation is often celebrated as innovation, whereas oral-epic accumulation or ancestral return is misread as pre-modern repetition (Fabian, 1983; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). By distinguishing shreds from shards, this study avoids collapsing style into plot and makes it possible to show, for instance, how Okorafor's additive shreds sustain flow while Johnson's parallel shards systematize rupture, even though both depart from linearity.

This broadened review therefore treats temporality as simultaneously grammatical, cognitive, and decolonial: grammatical in its lexicogrammatical realization, cognitive in its demands on readers who must simulate non-shared nows, and decolonial in its uneven distribution of who may narrate the future as progress, return, investigation, or multiplicity. The analysis that follows keeps all three pressures in view.

Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Linguistics

The study is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Halliday & Hasan, 1989), which treats language as a meaning-making resource shaped by context and use. Time is treated not as a fixed physical given but as a discourse product realized through patterns of wording and structure. Following Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the analysis focuses on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions as they converge in temporal construction.

Four SFL-informed analytical domains are operationalized. First, transitivity and agency: who does what to whom under what circumstances, including material, mental, and relational processes and shifts in agency (e.g., human vs. technological Actors). Linear time is expected to show stable agency and cause-effect chains; fragmented time is expected to show shifting, distributed, or effaced agency. Second, cohesion and reference: reference chains, ellipsis, substitution, and conjunction that sustain or disrupt temporal continuity. Third, tense, aspect, and modality: past/present/future contrasts, perfect and progressive aspect, and modal prediction or uncertainty. Fourth, clause and discourse organization: clause complexes (parataxis vs. hypotaxis), thematic progression, temporal circumstantials in initial position, and sequencing (chronological vs. recursive or parallel).

Within this framework, shreds are operationalized as textual fragmentation—minor sentences, staccato declaratives, elliptical flashback fragments, and interrogative isolates that rupture cohesion. Shards are operationalized as experiential and logical fragmentation—retrospective triggers (before), sequential pivots (then), recursive loops, and multiversal repetitions that rupture chronology. Linear temporality is identified through sequential chaining, stable reference, and quantified temporal lexis; fragmented temporality is identified through disrupted cohesion, agency shifts, and nonlinear sequencing.

Method

Corpus and Editions

The corpus comprises four contemporary science fiction novels selected for their sustained engagement with space-time, interstellar travel, and technological mediation, and for contrast between American hard science fiction/problem-solving traditions and

African/Africanfuturist traditions: *Project Hail Mary* by Andy Weir (2021, Ballantine), *Remote Control* by Nnedi Okorafor (2021, Tor), *The Space Between Worlds* by Micaiah Johnson (2020, Del Rey), and *Far From the Light of Heaven* by Tade Thompson (2021, Orbit). Weir and Johnson are situated here as American-focused; Okorafor and Thompson as African/African diasporic-focused, recognizing Thompson's British-Nigerian positioning as productively hybrid. All page citations refer to the first U.S./U.K. hardcover or paperback editions stated above unless otherwise noted.

Design, Data Collection, and Analysis

The design is qualitative, stylistic, and discourse-oriented. Data collection proceeded through close reading. Excerpts involving temporal lexis (e.g., seconds, minutes, days, years, before, then, already, always, never), spatial transformation, motion, calculation, and technological process descriptions were extracted and classified by temporal function (measurement, sequencing, retrospection, recursion, multiplicity).

Analysis applied the four SFL domains above. Each excerpt was coded for (a) temporal lexis and circumstantials, (b) process type and participant agency, (c) cohesive ties and reference stability, and (d) clause relations and narrative sequencing. Linear versus fragmented functions were compared within and across texts. To support transparency, representative lexical and syntactic patterns are summarized in Tables 1–4, which list the pattern, illustrative wording, location, and stylistic function. Tables are interpretive condensations; wording is quoted or lightly normalized from the source editions for grammatical citation without altering temporal markers.

Results and Discussion

Project Hail Mary: Instrumental, Linear Time

Weir constructs what this study terms engineering time: time as a measurable, budgetable resource to be optimized under existential pressure (see Tables 1–2). Lexically, seconds and minutes realize micro-interval precision during diagnostic checks and improvisatory repairs, whereas days tracks consumables and bodily endurance and years scales crisis to interstellar magnitude—the Tau Ceti voyage and Earth's parallel decay. The retrospective trigger before repeatedly returns Grace to an Earth past initially lost to amnesia, while the sequencer then chains trial to result with laboratory inevitability. The aspectual adverbs already and soon compress horizon, marking astrophage consumption as a race in which velocity matters more than duration.

Syntactically, the novel favors paratactic clarity and causal explicitness. Staccato declarative fragments such as “Math. Science. Facts.” perform post-comatose retrieval as modular reboot; the syntax embodies cognition rather than describing it. Imperative self-address (“Don’t panic. Check the seals. Look at the readouts.”) and elliptical logs (“Day 42. Still no signal. Dammit.”) stage self-regulation through fragmented textual shreds that are immediately reintegrated into procedure. Interrogative self-correction (“Why is the temperature dropping? No, wait—it’s the pressure.”) enacts hypothesis-test-revision in real time, while causal fronting (“Because the hull is porous, Grace had to improvise a seal”) and conditional speculation (“If the spin-drive fails here, I’m dead”) make cause, risk, and contingency grammatically explicit.

In SFL terms, ideational meaning centers stable human Actors (Grace, Rocky as collaborator) acting through material processes upon technological Goals within extensively quantified

Circumstances of time and manner. Even when systems act, they do so as extenders of human intention. Textually, Theme progression is strongly sequential: temporal Circumstances in initial position orient, Rhemes deliver results, and conjunction chains (then, so, because) suture shreds into line. Interpersonally, low modalization around procedure contrasts with high modalization around survival, producing competent certainty inside radical uncertainty. The politics here is techno-optimist and managerial: fragmentation – amnesia, delay, isolation – is a problem to be solved by method, budgeting, and collaboration, and linear time is the moral reward of correct calculation.

Remote Control: Mythic and Cyclical Time

Okorafor constructs mythic, cyclical time in which ordinary chronology is periodically suspended and re-sacralized (see Tables 1–2). The noun moment marks thresholds – Sankofa’s entry into a village – where collective mood shifts and lethal mythic presence replaces administrative time. Years measures not mission elapsed but pilgrimage endured, structured by the Akan ethic of Sankofa: return to the past in order to move forward. The absolutes always and never encode inevitability and prohibition around the alien seed and motorized transport, installing a deterministic cosmology inside an otherwise realist Ghanaian road narrative. Before pivots Fatima’s innocent childhood from Sankofa’s cursed aftermath, while already registers how quickly rumor and folklore outrun the walker. The late, retrospective noun time seals transformation from child to mythic figure partially outside standard chronology.

Syntactically, Okorafor draws on oral poetics. Anaphoric self-definition (“I am Sankofa. I belong wherever I want to belong.”) refrains identity across displacement. Minor sentences (“Silence. Dead.”) pronounce shock as discrete, sensational shreds before narrative rebuilds continuity. Simple coordination (“The sun was hot and the dust rose.”) and polysyndeton (“And she walked and she climbed and she survived.”) prefer addition to subordination, slowing pace to foot travel and piling world through accumulation. Prepositional fronting grounds estrangement locally (“In the shea tree farms of Wulugu, aliens existed”), imperatives hail sensory co-presence (“Look around. Smell the palm trees.”), and periodic compound-complex sentences synchronize hum, atmospheric shift, and knowing into suspenseful arrival.

SFL analysis clarifies the contrast with Weir. Processes are frequently relational, existential, and behavioral (being, belonging, watching, waiting) rather than transformative-material, and agency is distributed across child, community, landscape, and seed rather than concentrated in an engineer. Cohesion is memory- and place-based: lexical chains around dust, road, market, and song sustain continuity where dates do not. Modality is gnomic and proverbial rather than probabilistic, asserting what must be. Politically, cyclical time refuses colonial coeval denial: to carry the past forward as obligation is to claim contemporaneity on African terms, making survival a matter of meaning and return rather than optimization and escape.

Far From the Light of Heaven: Recursive, Investigative Time

Thompson organizes time as procedural epistemology: to solve the murder aboard the Ragtime is to reconstruct chronology (see Tables 3–4). Temporal Circumstances in Theme position (“For days, the ship hummed...”; “In a matter of seconds, the airlock sealed.”; “When the lights flickered, everything changed.”) make orientation itself the mystery’s condition. Duration metaphors in past-perfect aspect (“Years had bled into one another until

time lost its shape.") and impersonal durations ("It had been decades since anyone checked the outer bulkheads.") render long-haul transit as psychological degradation and institutional neglect. Simile-distortion ("Minutes crawled like hours inside the chilled vault.") and iterative reduplication ("Day after day, the automated reports repeated the same error.") stretch or loop duration to reflect investigative impasse.

Fragmentation appears as traumatic and bureaucratic shreds. Elliptical flashbacks ("Cold corridors. Red flashing lights. Screams.") intrude as involuntary sensory shards, breaking procedural sequence to mark repressed return. Prepositional accumulation ("In the heart of the ship, beneath the rusted plating, among the wiring, lay the truth.") spatializes truth as depth requiring descent. Isolated interrogatives ("Who shut down the core?") collapse systemic causality into a single accountable question, while parenthetical technical insertions embed exposition without halting inquiry. Durative adverbials, absolutes ("Their oxygen supplies dwindling, the team pushed forward..."), and correlative balance ("Neither the automated systems nor the human crew could predict...") split background countdown from foreground action and equate human and machine fallibility.

Transitivity analysis shows deliberately ambiguous agency: middle and passive constructions obscure who acted, and AI calculations proceed in parallel clauses while human time dissolves for the crew. Cohesion is cataphoric and delayed—pronouns and definite references resolve only after forensic reassembly—so textual continuity must be earned. Modality is heavily deontic and evidential (must secure, appears to have failed, reportedly), fitting detection. The politics is infrastructural: recursive time exposes how maintenance deferred, reports ignored, and automation trusted become lethal. To reassemble shards into sequence is to assign responsibility where systems diffuse it.

The Space Between Worlds: Fragmented, Multiversal Time

Johnson most fully ontologizes fragmentation through the multiverse premise, in which traversability depends on counterparts already dead (see Tables 3–4). Antithetical parallelism ("History on Bloodroot is measured in extractions; personal history is measured in omissions.") makes balanced syntax perform parallel worlds. Directionality metaphors invert agency ("Days bled backward as the logs were unspooled."; "Seconds bled into minutes. Minutes calcified into hours."), turning time into a substance that wounds, flows, and hardens. Parenthetical epizeuxis ("Later—always later—the answers would arrive, too detached to matter.") encodes institutional fatalism, while triadic asyndeton anchored by temporal Theme ("In the interim, they waited. They breathed recycled air. They watched the chronometer bleed numbers.") loops urgency into stasis. Micro-temporal theses ("Milliseconds mattered.") route planetary catastrophe through infinitesimal decision windows, and the then-triad ("Then came the jump. Then came the silence. Then came the reckoning.") reimposes strict succession upon permitted simultaneity.

Further patterns deepen the system: correlative framing ("Before the cryo-sleep, there was Lagos. After the wake, there is only blood.") severs geography from history at technological rupture; subordinate pairings contrast machine calculation with human dissolution ("While the artificial intelligence calculated probabilities, time dissolved for the human crew."); concessive generational clauses ("Generations had passed since Earth, yet the old hatreds remained...") deny progress; and deictic countdowns ("There is a synchronization point at 04:00 hours.") import thriller periodicity into cosmology. Lexically, years accumulates structural waiting, seconds pressurizes transit calibration, and the absolutes never, always, already, and past mark systemic finality, entrapment, predetermination, and haunting.

SFL reading highlights shifting participant roles: Cara is alternately Agent, Medium, and double across worlds, so reference chains deliberately fail to cohere into one self. Material processes of extraction and traversal alternate with mental processes of dread and recognition, and modality oscillates between deterministic (inevitable death of selves) and insurgent (refusal to comply). Cohesive shreds—em-dashes, asyndeton, bled/calcified lexical strings—are not noise but world-rule. Politically, multiversal time literalizes disposability: empire harvests parallel Black life while narrating merit and necessity. Fragmentation here is neither puzzle nor pilgrimage but condition: trauma structured as possibility itself.

Cross-Textual Comparison: Four Chronotopes

Comparison clarifies four chronotopes. Instrumental time (Weir) treats duration as resource: precision, scheduling, and timely action secure survival, and textual shreds are reintegrated into method. Mythic time (Okorafor) treats duration as return: pilgrimage, refrain, and accumulation secure meaning, and shreds produce flow rather than breakdown. Recursive-investigative time (Thompson) treats duration as evidence: fronted Circumstances, delayed reference, and distributed agency require reassembly, and shards index institutional failure. Multiversal time (Johnson) treats duration as multiplicity: parallelism, inversion, and repetition expose expendability, and fragmentation is ontological.

Two axes organize the field. On density versus flow, Weir compresses through short declaratives and quantified lexis, Okorafor extends through additive periodicity and parable rhythm, Thompson suspends through deferral and descent, and Johnson oscillates between compression (milliseconds) and stasis (waiting). On epistemology versus ontology, Thompson grounds time in knowing—what can be established in what order—whereas Johnson grounds it in being—what selves are possible given which deaths. The politics follow: who is authorized to measure, to remember, to investigate, and to survive across worlds differs by tradition, technology, and embodiment. Temporality emerges as culturally differentiated labor rather than neutral container.

Methodologically, the shared SFL grid makes these differences commensurable without flattening them. Coding the same four domains across all novels reveals that similar surface devices—fragments, fronted temporals, absolutes—perform divergent functions depending on transitivity and cohesion: Weir's fragments consolidate agency, Okorafor's fragments communalize witness, Thompson's fragments traumatize recall, and Johnson's fragments ontologize multiplicity. This confirms Fairclough's (1995) claim that formal choice naturalizes power only in context, and it justifies retaining culturally specific chronotope labels rather than reducing all nonlinearity to a single postmodern condition.

Conclusion

This study set out to describe how linear and fragmented time are lexicogrammatically realized across African and American science fiction, to compare those systems, and to interpret their cultural politics. Findings confirm that temporality is actively constructed at clause level. *Project Hail Mary* realizes linearity through quantified lexis, sequential chaining, stable human agency, and causal explicitness; *Remote Control* realizes cyclicity through symbolic lexis, oral-additive syntax, place-based cohesion, and gnomic modality; *Far From the Light of Heaven* realizes recursion through fronted temporals, delayed cohesion, distributed agency, and evidential modality; and *The Space Between Worlds* realizes multiplicity through parallelism, directionality metaphors, discontinuous reference,

and fatalistic modality. Shreds and shards name this variation precisely: micro-ruptures can be solved, sung, suffered, or systematized, while macro-ruptures scale from amnesiac flashback to bureaucratic loop to parallel ontology.

Theoretically, the study advances an SFL account of science-fictional chronotopes. By coding transitivity, cohesion, tense-aspect-modality, and clause organization together, it shows how cosmology is performed grammatically rather than merely stated thematically: engineering optimism, ancestral return, infrastructural suspicion, and disposability each have distinctive lexicogrammatical signatures. The distinction between shreds and shards offers a portable heuristic for future stylistics – attending first to sentence rupture, then to chronology rupture, then to their ideological conversion. It also bridges hard-SF poetics, Africanfuturist epistemology, and discourse-ideological critique without reducing one to the other.

Pedagogically and critically, the taxonomy invites teaching science fiction as temporal literacy: tracing how then, before, already, always, and never, or how Theme placement and passive agency, train readers to inhabit different nows. For writers and critics, it clarifies craft choices – when to fragment the sentence versus the timeline, and to what political effect. Limitations must be acknowledged. The four-text corpus cannot represent whole traditions; edition-specific pagination limits replicability; and textual analysis alone cannot show how actual readers process shredded versus linear sequencing. The corpus also leans toward Anglophone, commercially prominent novels, leaving aside short fiction, translation, and independent publishing where temporal experiment is often most radical.

Future research should therefore extend the grid in three directions. First, corpus-assisted extension to larger samples could quantify temporal markers and test whether engineering density versus oral flow generalizes. Second, reception extension through think-aloud or eye-tracking protocols could examine cognitive load and immersion under recursive and multiversal conditions. Third, decolonial extension could foreground non-Anglophone African languages, oral performance contexts, and Indigenous calendars as co-theories of time rather than background. Science fiction will continue to require such work because its novum continually renegotiates what counts as on time, out of time, or owed time. Attending to shreds and shards keeps that negotiation visible at the level where readers actually experience it: the sentence unfolding in time.

Finally, the shreds-and-shards heuristic reframes the politics of time as editorial as well as cosmological: who gets to cut, splice, and sequence duration – engineer, ancestor, investigator, or corporation – determines whose continuity counts as history and whose interruption counts as noise. Future stylistics should therefore attend not only to what futures are imagined but to what grammars of time make those futures livable, accountable, or escapable.

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Tables

Table 1

Temporal lexis (Project Hail Mary)	Function
seconds; minutes	Micro-interval precision; countdown pressure
days; years	Shipboard resources; interstellar scale and loss
before / then	Retrospective trigger / rigid sequencing
already; soon	Urgency; velocity over duration

Note. Locations refer to first U.S./U.K. editions listed in Method; wording lightly normalized for citation.

Table 2

Temporal lexis (Remote Control)	Function
moment	Mythic threshold; suspension of ordinary time
Years	Pilgrimage; cultural memory
always / never	Inevitability; absolute restriction
before; past	Pivot from innocence; philosophical retrieval (Sankofa)

Note. Locations refer to first U.S./U.K. editions listed in Method; wording lightly normalized for citation.

Table 3

Temporal syntax (Far From the Light of Heaven)	Function
Temporal clause fronting (When...; For days...)	Orientation as suspense; oppressive duration
Elliptical fragments (Cold corridors...)	Traumatic shreds; involuntary recall
Durative extension; iterative reduplication	Stretched transit; bureaucratic loop
Interrogatives; absolutes; correlatives	Detection; split temporality; human-system failure

Note. Locations refer to first U.S./U.K. editions listed in Method; wording lightly normalized for citation.

Table 4

Temporal syntax (The Space Between Worlds)	Function
Antithetical parallelism; inverted directionality	Parallel worlds; time retreating
Epizeuxis; triadic asyndeton	Fatalistic lag; deadened waiting
Micro-temporal nominals; then-triad	Urgency; reimposed order on simultaneity
Prepositional framing; concessive generational clauses	Rupture by technology; persistence of violence

Note. Locations refer to first U.S./U.K. editions listed in Method; wording lightly normalized for citation.

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