

# An Emotional Narrative Through the Legal English in *Villette*

Wenya Zhang, Di Liu\*

Jilin International Studies University, Jilin 130000, Changchun, China

\*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

**Copyright:** © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the study of stylistic features of legal English. It explores the specific way in which some emotional stories are expressed in *Villette*, a popular novel written by Charlotte Bronte. It takes into consideration the ways in which legal language features are related to communicating literary emotions. The research shows that Victorian women writers had unique artistic abilities regarding their description of emotions. From this research, we can see that the book describes the feelings of Lucy Snowe using legal English. And they are accurate, objective and standardized. This cross genre method of storytelling results in a large, but confined internal world for the characters. It creates an impossible artistic impression of one-of-a-kind that is a mixture of cause and emotion. Also demonstrates the amazing creativity and artistry of the Victorians.

**Keywords:** Legal English; “*Villette*”; Emotional Narrative; Linguistic Features

**Online publication:** April 21, 2026

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research background

Interdisciplinary research becomes more and more profound every year. Emotional narrative is an important part of literary studies. It has become an increasingly significant area of study for scholars. Zhou Yanhua wrote an essay in 2019. It gave some clear information on what people are looking into at the moment. It is changing its way of doing research. Emotional theories have become slowly but surely an important subject of study. It connects all the different types of research work together <sup>[1]</sup>.

Legal English, as a specific type of English belonging to the category of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), has its own clear and distinct features. It expresses itself with a great deal of precision. It adheres to the language rules when employed. It adopts objective ways of saying things. It has a careful and precise way of writing. All of these points are known by everybody. Sun Yihua and Zhou Gungran published a book in 1997. The book is called Legal Linguistics. They looked at the special parts of how lawyers talk. Analysis covers three parts: Lexical system, syntactic structure and discourse organization <sup>[2]</sup>. Legal language differs from everyday speech.

It has four basic and necessary characteristics. These special language features of legal English may provide us with some fresh thoughts and ideas. They can be applied to actual literary creation work.

## **1.2. Research objectives and significance**

This study mainly focuses on the linguistic features of legal English and analyzes the language strategies of emotional narration in *Villette*. Applying the linguistic characteristics of legal English to literary analysis can demonstrate the unique language art of the novel in terms of emotional expression<sup>[3]</sup>.

This research looks into the emotions written by Victorian writers. According to their own special social and cultural circumstances. This study will provide much more about how they write emotionally. This study watches what they said about their feelings back then. This study also discovers how they try to strike a balance when writing. Expressing emotions while following social norms. In 2000, Xiao Yunshu put forward his view. Legal English often uses the passive voice in its expression. The passive voice is used to show objectivity<sup>[4]</sup>. This kind of language feature is also needed for telling emotional stories in literary works.

## **1.3. Research scope and issues**

This paper does an in-depth study of the emotional narrative sections in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette*, with a main emphasis on three interconnected parts. The first one is the emotional narrative section about the main character's experience of leaving home. The aspect is to examine how the emotions expressed in the novel correspond to the exactitude characteristics of legal English through observation of the author's use of precise language. Transferring complicated emotions and analyzing the strategies for particular terms and professional expressions in the emotional description. The second part is about studying how narrative language conveys the internal world of characters through objective means and emphasis is placed on special functions of the third-person narrative. Perspective and passive voice for emotional expression, and how that grammatical means allows that distance from the story, but makes it more emotionally tense. The third aspect is to study the influence of the normative characteristics of legal English on the discourse structure of emotional narration and deeply analyze the organizational role of the logicity and coherence of sentence structures in emotional narration, and explore the influence of such structured expression on the emotional experience of readers. T By means of such a comprehensive analysis of these three dimensions, this paper will work out a complicated relationship between emotional narration and law. Discourse Features in *Villette* will provide a new theoretical standpoint for an understanding of the narrative strategies in Victorian novels. This research has utilized the latest research results of emotional narratology in theory.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Relevant theoretical framework**

Hogan thought that emotional structure is the most important part of emotional narratology's theoretical framework. Emotional structure is the primary method for constructing a story. Hogan had another thing to say. Emotional elements are a psychological feedback system. They work if readers understand and get what literary works mean. Those elements would form the structure of narrative texts naturally. Regarding the narrative strategy, literary works mostly adopt the method of arousing emotions. These methods were devised and put into action. They lead readers to have certain feelings. This kind of emotional experience will also impact the reader. It alters the manner in which they interpret the hidden meaning within the text. This theoretical viewpoint

provides us with a considerable amount of theoretical groundwork. It supports the examination of emotional narrative techniques in *Villette* for this study <sup>[5]</sup>. Andersen carried out a lot of research in 2016. He checked out how tales and feelings fit together. It was part of his job. This research gives a way to do things. It can help people know how feelings are shown in written words <sup>[6]</sup>. Yu Lei wrote something in 2022, where he said something. Emotional elements focus on a feedback mechanism of psychology. Readers demonstrate this mechanism when they believe literary works. And these elements would pass on to the structural elements of narrative texts from within <sup>[7]</sup>. Narrative strategies, literary works employ ways of utilizing emotional arousal. These mechanisms are carefully thought out. They make the readers feel some emotions. This type of emotional experience then influences the reader. It affects the way they know the deep meaning of the text. This theoretical idea provides us with a good theoretical basis. It helps to prove the study of emotional narrative methods in *Villette* in this research.

## **2.2. Overview of previous studies**

The language analysis framework created by this research is mainly achieved through the theoretical accomplishments in legal linguistics <sup>[8]</sup>. Legal language is different from other kinds of language because it has special words, how those words fit together, and how people talk about things using these special words. In terms of its essential features, there are four main differences between legal language and ordinary language: First, to strive for accurate expression and avoid ambiguity. Second, maintaining objectivity and neutrality, and avoiding subjective judgment; third, adhering to professional norms to ensure the uniformity of expression; fourth, particularly emphasizing the rigor of logic to make the argument self-consistent. These theoretical achievements provide a very important theoretical foundation for this paper to analyze the emotional narrative mechanism of the text of *Villette*.

In legal English research, in terms of vocabulary, legal English has many professional terms, very high expression accuracy, standardized forms, etc. Syntactically, it has complicated and various sentences, full sentence parts, and strict logic, etc. <sup>[9]</sup> He Ziran (1997) analyzed the rules of language use from a pragmatic point of view, which gave an important theoretical basis for understanding the functional features of legal English <sup>[10]</sup>.

## **3. Research methods**

### **3.1. Research design**

The research uses a qualitative analysis method. Legal English's linguistic features are used as the starting point for the analysis. It makes a close study of the emotional narrative texts in *Villette*. According to the standard of detailed reading of the text combined with theoretical analysis, it is analyzed. It talks about some types of language. It explains those as well. So this shows how the different areas of legal English are linked to each other and to emotional stories. All of the text of *Villette* is read through carefully and systematically. Parts that have an emotional narrative are selected. Then the texts that have been marked are sorted and grouped. Classification is done through three aspects of legal English. They are accuracy, objectivity, and standardization. Subsequently, the methods of linguistic analysis are used. Detailed analysis is done on the features of texts in different perspectives.

### **3.2. Text selection**

The research uses a qualitative method of analysis. Legal English features that are linguistic in nature are used as the starting point for the analysis. It makes a close study of the emotional narrative texts in *Villette*. According

to the standard of detailed reading of the text combined with the theoretical analysis, it is analyzed. It rants about some kinds of language things. It explains those as well. So this illustrates how the different parts of legal English relate to each other and emotional stories. All of the text of *Villette* is read through, carefully and systematically. Parts that have an emotional narrative are chosen. Then the texts that are marked are sorted and grouped. Classification is done via three aspects of legal English. They are accuracy, objectivity and standardization. Subsequently, linguistic analysis methods are applied. Detailed analysis is conducted on the features of texts from various perspectives.

### **3.3. Text analysis tools**

The research is about 3 main analytical dimensions of legal English: accuracy, objectivity, and standardization. It looks at the text in three parts: which words were picked, how sentences are built, and what kind of talk it uses. Vocabulary-wise, it mostly looks into the traits of word choices used to express feelings in the novel, as well as how accurate, professional, and standardized the language is. Sentence structure, it mainly studies the features of the sentence patterns in emotional narration, and also checks the completeness, complexity, and logic of the sentence structure. Discourse style, it analyzes the narrative point of view and voice selection of emotional narration, and looks at the use of objective methods.

## **4. Research results and analysis**

### **4.1. Result presentation**

Based on a detailed reading of the text of *Villette*, this study has found that the emotional narrative of the novel exhibits legal English language characteristics in three dimensions: Firstly, the precision of vocabulary selection - Lucy often uses precise and specific words when describing emotions, such as using “solitude”, “isolation”, “seclusion” to distinguish different aspects of the sense of loneliness, and using degree words like “slightly”, “moderately”, “deeply” to precisely measure the intensity of emotions, in order to avoid vague expressions; Secondly, the objectivity of the narrative perspective - Lucy usually objectively describes her own emotions from the perspective of an observer, forming a rhythm pattern of “assertion and withdrawal” (p. 19), which is both immediate and retains a sense of distance, this self-estranged narrative method gives emotional narrative a special tension; Thirdly, the standardization of sentence structure - emotional paragraphs present the “unstable opposites” structure: “surface and depth, illusion and disillusion, reason and feeling, public and private” (p. 19). The appropriate use of long sentences and subordinate clauses brings a rigorous logic and layering to the narrative, and Lucy calls herself “a disguised figure” (p. 308), using “nobody” and “somebody” to dialectically define identity, the core paradox “we can never be rightly known” (p. 99) makes the emotional narrative not accept ultimate interpretation, thereby constituting a poetic resistance to the Victorian norms of female identity. In general, Charlotte Brontë selects precise, objective and standardized language characteristics, achieving a subtle balance between rational restraint and emotional authenticity.

### **4.2. Result analysis**

According to the reading of the text of *Villette*, it is found that the emotional narrative of the novel has three legal English language features: First, the accuracy of word choice - Lucy tends to use exact and particular terms to depict feelings, for instance, she utilizes “solitude,” “isolation,” “seclusion” to differentiate various facets of the sensation of loneliness, and employs degree adverbs such as “slightly,” “moderately,” “deeply” to accurately

gauge the strength of emotions, thus avoiding vague expressions; Second, the objectivity of the narrative viewpoint - Lucy mostly describes her own emotions in an objective manner from the viewpoint of an observer, creating a rhythmic pattern of “assertion and withdrawal” (p. 19), which is both immediate and distant, this estranged self-narrative approach creates a special tension for the emotional narrative; Third, the standardization of sentence construction - emotional paragraphs have the “unstable opposites” construction: surface and depth, illusion and disillusion, reason and feeling, public and private (p. 19). Appropriately used long sentences and subordinates give the story a strict logic and layers, and Lucy refers to herself as “a disguised figure” (p. 308), employing “nobody” and “somebody” to dialectically define identity, with the central paradox “we can never be rightly known” (p. 99) making the emotional narrative uninterpretable, thus forming a poetic resistance against Victorian norms of female identity. Generally speaking, Charlotte Brontë selects exact, objective, and standardized language features, and creates a delicate balance between rational self-control and genuine emotionality.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Research findings**

This research has worked out a good match. *Villette*'s emotional story is quite at home in the language characteristics of legal English. Back then there was a certain social situation. Women writers used soft and gentle words to show how they felt. Legal English stands for standardized and logical talk. And for this sort of emotional expressiveness this form had some decent linguistic resources to work with. Elements of legal language have been introduced in the tale. In order to get a good balance, it did that. Having control over one's thoughts and feelings can be challenging.

This language strategy choice illustrates the creative problem and wisdom of women writers in the Victorian period. On the contrary, at the time when, people had a general aesthetic expectation of expressing feelings in an implicit and restrained way and it was considered uncouth to pour out one's feelings directly, while on the other hand, literary creation needed to truthfully represent human emotional experiences. Charlotte Brontë has found a way that could satisfy the needs of the society and could really express her feelings. It also demonstrates the close connection between the legal language and literary language even though their functions are different, both seek accuracy, conformity to norms, and logicalness in the form of language. This similarity gives a theory reason for interdisciplinary literary language studies.

### **5.2. Research significance**

It has academic value. It expands the scope of the *Villette*-related research. Before, many studies looked at it from 3 different points of view. Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Romanticism. This study does something else. It begins with the linguistic features of legal English. It provides a new beginning. This entry point helps us to figure out the emotional artistry of the novel. This linguistic analysis way of looking at things is helpful. It specifies the way in which the novel presents emotions in its own way and unique means. It also helps people know better about Charlotte Brontë's writing skills. And this study tries too. For the interdisciplinarity of legal linguistics and literary studies. To prove that the linguistic analytical method is useful. They are used in literary research. Looking at it more broadly in academia, Victorian writers tended to be nervous in their work. Expressing feelings or following societal rules. The language strategies discovered in this study are more broadly applicable. Future research may use this analysis framework. It can examine the works of writers from different eras.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Research limitations

Although this study has achieved the aforementioned findings, it also has certain limitations. Firstly, in terms of the scope of the research subjects, this study focused on the single text *Villette* and conducted related work. Although representative emotional narrative segments were selected for analysis, no systematic comparative work was carried out for other works. This, to some extent, limited the universality of the research findings.

Then, at the level of research method, this paper mainly used qualitative analysis, which was based on careful reading of the text and theoretical interpretation. It did not use quantitative research methods such as corpus linguistics. Although this research tendency can ensure a certain depth of analysis, it has deficiencies in terms of the accuracy of statistics and objective verification.

This study was based on some relevant results from two areas. These areas are legal linguistics and emotional narrative studies. The theoretical construction stage was focused on. Other languages had less attention. They may alter the presentation of emotions. Scientific English and Business English for example. In fact, Victorian literary works were also influenced by multiple professional discourses. Future research could broaden its theoretical perspective. It has the ability to look at how different parts of the text work together. This research will focus on how these features work in an emotional story.

### 6.2. Future perspective

Future research can apply this analytical framework. It could be used with Charlotte Brontë's other works as well. For example, *Jane Eyre* and *Shirley* are two examples of such works. To examine whether the linguistic features of legal English are universal. Researchers can also use the corpus method. This technique is for quantity analysis. It can make the research more objective and accurate. Future studies may examine the relationship between different discourses. Legal English and other professional discourses are focused on. Religious English, Scientific English, etc. The exploration is about the emotions of telling stories. Another option would be to do a comparison. To compare Charlotte Brontë to other women writers of her time. This kind of research would help folks achieve a better understanding. It will bring about a fuller understanding of the techniques of emotional writing on the part of Victorian women writers.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Zhou Y, 2019, Emotional Turn and the New Transformation of the Discourse Framework of Artistic Emotional Theory. *Journal of Southwest University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 5: 1–8.
- [2] Sun Y, Zhou G, 1997, *Legal Linguistics*. China University of Political Science and Law Press, Beijing.
- [3] He S, Mei D, 1999, *Modern Linguistics*. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing.
- [4] Xiao Y, 2000, A Preliminary Study on the Grammar Features of Legal English. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 21(4): 48–54.
- [5] Hogan PC, 2011, *Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- [6] Andersen PT, 2016, *Story and Emotion: A Study in Affective Narratology*. Scandinavian University Press, 28.

- [7] Yu L, 2022, Why Emotion Can Be Considered Science? A Review of Hogan's Literature and Emotion. *Foreign Literature*, 3: 178–181.
- [8] Chen J, 1998, *Introduction to Legal Linguistics*. Shaanxi People's Publishing House, Shaanxi.
- [9] Liu J, Li J, 1997, A Preliminary Study on the Lexical and Syntactic Characteristics of Legal English. *Xianning Normal College Journal*, 11: 65–67.
- [10] He Z, 1997, *Pragmatics and English Learning*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai.

**Publisher's note**

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.