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The Language of Anxiety: A Stylistic Reading of T. S. Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Le langage de l'anxiété : une lecture stylistique de The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock de T. S. Eliot

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Abstract:

This study presents a stylistic analysis of T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, exploring how linguistic structures articulate modernist anxiety, paralysis, and fragmentation. Drawing on Finch's (2003) model of textual analysis and Mills's (1995) feminist stylistics, the paper examines five levels of linguistic organization, phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, and lexical. Findings reveal that Eliot's alternation between rhyme and free verse, use of syntactic parallelism and deviation, and morphological manipulation through affixation and repetition together construct a "grammar of hesitation" reflective of Prufrock's indecision and alienation. The repetition of *time* and other temporal markers semantically enacts existential paralysis, while the dominance of concrete nouns and cohesive devices highlights the density and inertia of modern experience. The study concludes that Eliot transforms linguistic form into a vehicle of psychological revelation, where rhythm, syntax, and diction embody the crisis of expression central to modernist consciousness.
Keywords: *Stylistics- Modernist Anxiety- Linguistic Organisation- T. S. Eliot- The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

Résumé: Cette étude propose une analyse stylistique du poème *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* de T. S. Eliot, afin d'examiner comment les structures linguistiques expriment l'anxiété, la paralysie et la fragmentation propres au modernisme. En s'appuyant sur le modèle d'analyse textuelle de Finch (2003) et sur la stylistique féministe de Mills (1995), l'article explore cinq niveaux d'organisation linguistique : phonologique, syntaxique, morphologique, sémantique et lexical. Les résultats révèlent que l'alternance chez Eliot entre la rime et le vers libre, l'usage du parallélisme et de la déviation syntaxiques, ainsi que la manipulation morphologique par l'affixation et la répétition, construisent une « grammaire de l'hésitation » reflétant l'indécision et l'aliénation de Prufrock. La répétition du mot *temps* et d'autres marqueurs temporels traduit sémantiquement la paralysie existentielle, tandis que la prédominance des

noms concrets et des dispositifs de cohésion souligne la densité et l'inertie de l'expérience moderne. L'étude conclut qu'Eliot transforme la forme linguistique en un véhicule de révélation psychologique, où rythme, syntaxe et diction incarnent la crise d'expression au cœur de la conscience moderniste.
Mots-clés : stylistique- anxiété moderniste-organisation linguistique- T. S. Eliot-*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

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Introduction

The interrelation between stylistics and language remains central to contemporary literary analysis, for it is through language that the literary imagination materializes. Stylistics, broadly defined, is the systematic study of linguistic style in literary and non-literary texts, with particular attention to the patterned use of language as an aesthetic medium. The term itself, deriving from *style* in literature and the linguistic suffix *-ics*, signals this interdisciplinary intersection between linguistic form and literary function. As Thornborrow and Wareing (1998) observe, stylistic analysis negotiates the delicate boundary between linguistic description and literary interpretation, emphasizing that the writer's style and linguistic choices are mutually constitutive. While prose and drama often exhibit a more transparent relationship between structure and meaning, poetry, given its density, condensation, and abstraction, demands a heightened sensitivity to language as both a vehicle of meaning and a site of aesthetic experimentation. Thus, the study of poetry foregrounds the materiality of language itself: its rhythms, repetitions, and syntactic play become the conduits through which imagination, emotion, and vision are communicated. In Eliot's own words, every poet "wrestles with words and meaning," revealing that the poetic act is as much linguistic construction as it is artistic revelation.

Stylistics, then, is not merely a descriptive tool but a mode of textual interpretation that privileges language as the primary means through which literary meaning is constituted. For the stylistician, the formal properties of language (its morphology, syntax, phonology, and semantics) serve as gateways to understanding how texts function within discourse. While linguistic features alone cannot exhaust the interpretive potential of a literary text, their systematic description provides the scaffolding for an informed analysis of how meaning is

produced and perceived. As Fish (2021) reminds us, stylistic awareness extends beyond literary art to the linguistic creativity of everyday discourse, journalism, advertising, and popular culture, yet in literature it acquires its fullest expressive power. The study of stylistics, therefore, does not simply catalogue linguistic devices; it explores how those devices evoke affect, shape perception, and dramatize consciousness.

The evolution of stylistics from its early structuralist phase to its more interpretive and discourse-oriented orientations has expanded the scope of literary inquiry. Bradford (1997), for instance, demonstrates that close attention to noun and verb phrase patterns yields insights into how linguistic form encodes ideology and voice within a text. Literary stylistics today thus seeks not only to describe but to interpret, linking textual form to contextual meaning. As Carter and Simpson (1989) assert, the stylistician's task is to draw eclectically upon linguistic insights to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of language than literary criticism alone can offer. In this regard, stylistics mediates between the scientific precision of linguistics and the hermeneutic depth of literary interpretation.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the present study examines the stylistic architecture of T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915), one of the defining poetic articulations of modernist anxiety and alienation. Specifically, it addresses two central research questions: (1) What linguistic organisations does Eliot deploy in the poem? and (2) How do these linguistic structures contribute to the construction of meaning and the articulation of modernist subjectivity? By approaching *Prufrock* through the lens of stylistic analysis, the study aims to reveal how Eliot's manipulation of linguistic form, at the phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, and lexical levels, constitutes a "language of anxiety," rendering psychological fragmentation as a formal principle of modernist poetics.

1 Background to The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1915, stands as a seminal work in the emergence of Anglo-American Modernism. Composed during Eliot's years of intellectual formation at Harvard and subsequently in Europe, the poem encapsulates the moral and psychological disquiet that would come to define the modernist sensibility. Written on the eve of the First World War, a period of profound epistemological and cultural upheaval. The poem captures a consciousness fractured by doubt, self-surveillance, and spiritual exhaustion. Britain, then at the height of its industrial and imperial modernity, forms the implicit backdrop against which Eliot's

alienated speaker navigates an urban landscape of decay, desire, and deferred action.

Prufrock takes the form of a dramatic monologue, a genre Eliot inherits from Robert Browning but radically transforms. Unlike Browning's speakers, who reveal themselves through confident assertion, Prufrock speaks through hesitation, evasion, and self-interruption. His addressee, ostensibly a woman but perhaps also an imagined or internalized auditor, remains elusive, underscoring the poem's preoccupation with unfulfilled communication and emotional paralysis. As Clemens (2022) observe, the poem dramatizes "the duality of the self divided between desire and self-loathing," its monologic voice both confessional and performative.

The poem's opening invitation, "Let us go then, you and I," immediately enacts this psychological division: the pronoun "you" functions as both interlocutor and projection of the speaker's divided consciousness. Through a series of wandering meditations, Prufrock reveals an acute awareness of his own inadequacy, oscillating between self-assertion and self-effacement. His fixation on minute physical details such as his morning coat, his collar, his "bald spot in the middle of [his] hair" betrays a profound anxiety about appearance and judgment. Beneath the surface of urbane manners lies a psyche immobilized by fear of exposure and rejection. As Madlool (2023) argues, Prufrock's world is defined by "syntactical halts and deflationary imagery," which mirror his inability to reconcile desire with action.

Eliot's use of fragmented imagery and ironic juxtaposition situates *Prufrock* within the modernist project of rendering consciousness in flux. The grotesque wish to "be a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" exemplifies this self-alienation: the human subject retreats into abstraction, seeking refuge in metamorphosis (Hossain, Rahman and Chowdhury, 2025). Prufrock's self-presentation (fashionable, observant, intellectually aware) is continually undermined by his own admissions of indecision and failure. His voice oscillates between performance and confession, the coherence of the lyric "I" dissolving into a multiplicity of masks. Through this unstable persona, Eliot articulates the quintessential modernist theme of dissonance between language and being, desire and articulation.

Ultimately, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is less a love poem than an anatomy of consciousness, an internal soliloquy in which linguistic structure becomes the medium of psychological revelation. The city's "half-deserted streets" mirror Prufrock's own fragmented psyche, while the poem's oscillation between lyric beauty and ironic distance enacts the modern predicament: the

impossibility of genuine connection in a world rendered incoherent by modernity's own excesses.

2. Theoretical Background

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that synthesizes Finch's (2003) model of textual analysis with Mills's (1995) feminist stylistics, thereby integrating linguistic, discursive, and ideological dimensions of literary meaning. The combination of these approaches provides a robust interpretive apparatus for examining how Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* constructs subjectivity and articulates modern anxiety through stylistic form.

Finch's (2003) model posits that a text can be analyzed at three interrelated levels: the micro-level of linguistic form, the intermediate level of discourse organization, and the macro-level of communicative function. At the micro-level, the focus rests on the structural properties of language-the morphology, syntax, and phonology that constitute the formal architecture of the text. This level addresses how patterns of sound, rhythm, and grammatical arrangement generate aesthetic and semantic effects. The intermediate level conceives of the poem as a site of discourse, emphasizing cohesion, coherence, and the interplay of voice, tone, and perspective. Here, language is treated not as a static system but as a dynamic process of meaning-making that encodes the poet's consciousness and worldview. The macro-level, finally, engages with the discursive and communicative dimensions of the text: how it constructs relationships between author, reader, and society. Drawing on Jakobson's (1960) communication model, Finch's approach underscores that meaning arises not solely from linguistic form but also from the contextual and ideological conditions of its production and reception.

This study extends Finch's framework through the lens of feminist stylistics, as articulated by Mills (1995), to explore how language encodes and reproduces social hierarchies, particularly those of gender and power. Feminist stylistics moves beyond description to interrogate the ideological implications of linguistic choice, foregrounding the ways in which textual forms participate in cultural constructions of gendered identity. Mills argues that linguistic structures, ranging from transitivity patterns and deixis to metaphorical and lexical selection, reflect and reinforce the asymmetries between men and women inscribed within discourse. In this sense, the feminist stylistic perspective complements Finch's model by extending the analysis of form and function into the realm of ideology and representation, thereby connecting linguistic features to broader questions of social meaning.

Feminist critics such as Butler (1990) and Tyson (2023) further emphasize that literature operates as a site where identity is both performed and contested. The representation of women—or, in Eliot's case, the absence or abstraction of the feminine—reveals how discourse mediates power and subjectivity. Within this framework, *Prufrock* can be read as a text that dramatizes not only male anxiety but also the gendered structures that produce and sustain that anxiety (Hossain et al., 2025). As Wales (1997) observes, feminist stylistics challenges the traditional canon by questioning evaluative criteria that privilege "universal" or "neutral" voices—criteria that have historically excluded or diminished women's linguistic and literary expression. By interrogating these assumptions, feminist stylistics exposes the ideological nature of language itself and its role in shaping the perceived "objectivity" of literary discourse.

In uniting Finch's structural-linguistic model with Mills's ideological critique, this study advances a stylistic reading that is both formal and political. It treats Eliot's poetic language as a site where modernist fragmentation intersects with discursive constructions of power, gender, and selfhood (Hossain et al., 2025). Through this dual theoretical orientation, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* emerges not merely as a psychological portrait of paralysis but as a linguistic performance of anxiety—one in which syntax, rhythm, and diction become the very grammar of modern alienation.

3. Method and Data

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive design, an approach suited to exploring the intricate relationship between language, form, and meaning in literary texts. As Creswell (2014) explains, qualitative inquiry seeks to understand how individuals or cultural artefacts construct and express meaning within specific contexts. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on measurable data, qualitative analysis privileges description, interpretation, and the uncovering of patterns of significance embedded in verbal or symbolic expression (Muijs, 2004). Within the field of stylistics, such an approach enables a nuanced reading of linguistic form as both an aesthetic and communicative act, a method particularly apt for examining poetry, where meaning is not merely denotative but resonant, metaphorical, and affective.

The study engages in text-based qualitative analysis, combining elements of stylistic description and interpretive discourse analysis. As Afful et al. (2022) note, qualitative stylistic analysis allows for an in-depth investigation of how linguistic choices reveal underlying social and psychological realities. Similarly, Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) emphasize that qualitative methods employ interpretive

reasoning and descriptive language to probe the complexities of human expression and cultural meaning. The present research, therefore, employs a contextually grounded, interpretive approach to identify and explicate the stylistic devices that constitute what this study terms Eliot's *language of anxiety*.

The primary text for analysis, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, was purposively selected because of its emblematic status within early twentieth-century modernist poetics and its sustained engagement with themes of alienation, indecision, and fragmentation. As Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2013) observe, purposive sampling is appropriate when the objective is to select a case that best illuminates the phenomenon under investigation. *Prufrock* exemplifies the linguistic manifestations of modernist anxiety, the disjointed syntax, disrupted rhythms, and repetitive diction that externalize the speaker's psychological unrest. These stylistic features render the poem an ideal text through which to explore the intersection of linguistic structure and emotional consciousness.

The analytic procedure followed the principles of content analysis adapted for literary stylistics. The poem was subjected to a close, systematic reading at multiple levels of linguistic organization, including phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, and lexical, as outlined in Finch's (2003) model of text analysis. Each level was examined in relation to its discursive and ideological function, informed by Mills's (1995) feminist stylistics and Jakobson's (1960) communicative model. Through this layered interpretive process, the study sought to identify the linguistic patterns through which Eliot's text enacts what may be described as the *aesthetics of hesitation*, a stylistic embodiment of the modernist condition of anxiety.

4 Discussion and Findings

The analysis focused on five dimensions of linguistic organisation in T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, and lexical) and examined how these stylistic structures participate in the poem's construction of meaning, particularly its articulation of modernist anxiety. Each level of analysis illuminates a distinct but interrelated mode through which Eliot's poetic language registers psychological dissonance, fragmentation, and self-conscious hesitation. Following Finch's (2003) model of textual analysis, the discussion proceeds from the micro-level of linguistic form to the macro-level of discourse and communicative function, situating stylistic features within both aesthetic and affective frameworks. The first dimension of analysis concerns the poem's phonological organization, the patterned orchestration of sound that underwrites its emotional and rhythmic texture.

4.1 Phonological Parallelism and the Sound of Anxiety

Phonological parallelism refers to the patterned recurrence of similar sounds within or across lines of verse, creating a sense of rhythm, cohesion, and tonal resonance. In *Prufrock*, Eliot's strategic use of such sound correspondences generates a subtle tension between musical harmony and psychological unease. Instances of phonological parallelism occur throughout the poem, notably in the following lines:

(1) *The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,*
(2) *The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes.*
(3) *My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,*
(4) *My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin-*
(5) *I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,*
(6) *And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker.*

In lines (1) and (2), the repetition of *window-panes* establishes an end rhyme that momentarily stabilizes the poem's rhythm, while the internal echo of *fog* and *smoke* reinforces the semantic blurring that pervades Eliot's urban imagery. The assonantal pairing of *chin/pin* (lines 3–4) and *flicker/snicker* (lines 5–6) similarly enacts a sonic mirroring that both unites and destabilizes the verse. These phonic correspondences create a cyclical, almost suffocating musicality, a looping effect that mirrors the persona's obsessive self-reflection and emotional paralysis. The recurrence of similar sounds functions less as an ornamental device than as an aural manifestation of anxiety: repetition here signifies entrapment rather than resolution.

Eliot's manipulation of metre further intensifies this effect. Although the poem intermittently employs iambic pentameter, it frequently subverts metrical regularity through spondaic and trochaic substitutions, disrupting the rhythmic expectation established by the verse form. The tension between the latent order of metre and the disruptive force of variation parallels Prufrock's oscillation between control and chaos, precision and hesitation. As the poem progresses, the early traces of rhyme dissolve into the loose cadences of free verse, a transition that symbolically enacts the speaker's psychological disintegration and the erosion of coherent selfhood.

This deliberate fragmentation of sound and rhythm constitutes what may be termed the *phonology of anxiety*, a stylistic structure through which Eliot renders interior unease as auditory texture. The restless movement from patterned rhyme to disrupted cadence captures the instability of modern consciousness, where the

search for order collapses into the very disorder it seeks to master. In this sense, phonological parallelism in *Prufrock* operates not merely as a formal device but as a mode of affective expression, translating psychic tension into acoustic dissonance. Moreover, this pattern of repetition and disruption anticipates the syntactic fragmentation that characterises the poem's linguistic architecture, linking sound and structure in a shared rhetoric of uncertainty.

4.2 *Syntactic Parallelism and the Grammar of Hesitation*

In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, Eliot's deployment of syntactic parallelism constitutes one of the most striking mechanisms through which he organizes rhythm, thought, and emotional cadence. Syntactic parallelism refers to the patterned recurrence of grammatical structures such as noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional or adjectival phrases across lines of poetry. This repetition not only creates cohesion and rhythmic stability but also mirrors the speaker's compulsive mental circling, his inability to progress from contemplation to action. Through such linguistic patterning, Eliot externalizes Prufrock's psychological paralysis: the self becomes entrapped within its own syntax, its speech looping endlessly around deferred utterance.

The poem opens with an invitation that is both directive and hesitant, "*Let us go then, you and I*" a construction that foregrounds the speaker's divided consciousness. The grammatical simplicity of the clause belies a deep ambivalence: the inclusive "*us*" implies intimacy, yet its indeterminacy leaves the addressee undefined. This tension between assertion and uncertainty persists throughout the poem and is syntactically realized in the recurrence of parallel structures. Consider the following sets of lines:

(1) *The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,*
(2) *The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes.*
(3) *And I have known the eyes already, known them all-*
(4) *For I have known them all already, known them all:*
(5) *And I have known the eyes already, known them all-*
(6) *And I have known the arms already, known them all-*

In lines (1) and (2), the parallel noun phrases- *The yellow fog / The yellow smoke*- follow an identical syntactic structure: *determiner* + *premodifier* + *headword* + *relative clause*. The repetition of *that rubs its back / muzzle upon the window-panes* creates a syntactic and semantic doubling that enacts the monotonous continuity of Prufrock's world. As Yankson's notion of *paradigmatic relationship* suggests, the lexical substitution of *fog* and *smoke* within the same grammatical slot highlights

both sameness and difference: the substitution changes little in meaning, reinforcing the stasis that defines the poem's atmosphere. The linguistic repetition thus performs the poem's central theme—the paralysis of variation without progress.

A similar pattern recurs in lines (3) through (6), where the iterative structure *"I have known… known them all"* functions as a syntactic refrain. The coordination of clauses through *and* and *for* generates a cumulative effect of self-referentiality. The syntax folds back upon itself, dramatizing the speaker's compulsive introspection. As Leech (2014) observes, poetic language often permits "deviation from expected patterns" as a means of creative reorientation; in Eliot's case, however, this deviation becomes symptomatic of disorientation. The mechanical repetition of *known* suggests knowledge exhausted of novelty, an epistemological fatigue mirrored in the circular syntax of Prufrock's thought.

Eliot further manipulates syntactic expectation through deviation and fragmentation, strategies that reinforce the poem's representation of hesitation. In lines such as

When the wind blows the water white and black
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

the poet deliberately disturbs grammatical completeness. The first example omits the necessary punctuation and verbal complement that would normally complete the clause, leaving the syntax suspended in indeterminacy. The second, beginning with *"Am"* rather than *"I am"* erases the subject pronoun, destabilizing the grammatical marker of self. This omission enacts linguistically what the poem dramatizes psychologically: a fractured identity unable to assert its own presence in language. Similarly, the repetition of interrogatives introduced by coordinating conjunctions (*"And should I then presume?"*, *"And how should I begin?"*) subverts conventional syntactic hierarchy, creating an effect of unanchored questioning. The proliferation of questions without resolution transforms syntax into a record of existential anxiety.

The poem's syntax alternates between parataxis, the juxtaposition of clauses without coordination or subordination, and hypotaxis, where dependency signals logical or hierarchical relation. In the line *"After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,"* Eliot employs hypotaxis to convey temporal sequence and order. Yet this order collapses in the later line *"After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor-"*, where repetition of *after* creates paratactic

accumulation without syntactic closure. The prepositions pile up like the detritus of experience, their grammatical equivalence erasing difference. The paratactic flow, unmediated by conjunctions, mirrors the speaker's psychological drift, a linguistic analogue to the stream of unanchored consciousness characteristic of modernist poetics.

This syntactic instability often culminates in enjambment, where clauses spill over line boundaries, dissolving grammatical finality. In the sequence:

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while…

the interrogative form remains unresolved; the sentence runs beyond the line, deferring its conclusion. The absence of terminal punctuation enacts the speaker's inability to contain thought within syntactic limits. The lineation itself becomes an index of the mind's fragmentation. Eliot thus transforms grammatical incompletion into a stylistic signature of modernist anxiety, what might be termed the *grammar of hesitation*.

The cumulative effect of Eliot's syntactic strategies (parallelism, deviation, parataxis, and enjambment) is to produce a linguistic rhythm that mirrors the psychological rhythm of anxiety: recursive, interrupted, and perpetually on the verge of articulation. Syntax, in *Prufrock*, does not simply convey meaning; it dramatizes the very process of meaning's failure. Through the manipulation of grammatical form, Eliot gives language the texture of hesitation, translating the paralysis of modern consciousness into a syntax of perpetual deferral.

4.3 Morphological Deviance and the Linguistics of Fragmentation

Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* achieves much of its stylistic vitality through the poet's manipulation of morphological structure, the internal formation and modification of words to evoke complex psychological and semantic resonances. Morphology, as a level of linguistic organisation, concerns not only the grammatical inflection of words but also the creative reconfiguration of form to produce meaning. In *Prufrock*, Eliot's morphological choices, his use of affixation, pluralization, compounding, and orthographic deviation, operate as microcosmic reflections of the poem's larger aesthetic of dislocation and anxiety. Through these formations, the poet materializes hesitation, repetition, and incompleteness at the very level of the word.

One of the most salient morphological strategies Eliot employs is affixation, particularly prefixation and suffixation, to convey the psychological condition of indecision and self-reversal that defines the speaker's consciousness. Words such as *"indecisions," "visions,"* and *"revisions"* exemplify the poet's sensitivity to morphological nuance. The prefixes *in-* and *re-* are semantically loaded: *in-* negates or internalizes, while *re-* implies recurrence or re-enactment. Thus, in the lines-

"And time yet for a hundred indecisions,"
"And for a hundred visions and revisions,"

the morphological repetition of *re-* and *in-* enacts a cycle of movement without progress. The speaker's "indecisions" are continually "revised," but never resolved. Eliot's morphology, here, encodes paralysis: each prefix transforms the potential for action (*vision*) into recursive anxiety (*revision*), a linguistic embodiment of Prufrock's perpetual deferral.

Equally significant is Eliot's systematic use of the inflectional plural morpheme *-s* across a range of lexical items: *streets*, *nights*, *hotels*, *restaurants*, and *oyster-shells*. This recurring pluralization performs more than a grammatical function; it contributes to the texture of accumulation that pervades the poem. The proliferation of plural nouns constructs an urban landscape of multiplicity and sameness, where repetition substitutes for vitality. The morphological repetition mirrors the poem's rhythmic monotony and reinforces the speaker's existential sense of redundancy. Each plural form gestures toward abundance but delivers only the echo of emptiness, transforming grammatical plurality into an aesthetic of futility.

Eliot's morphological artistry also extends to graphological and orthographic stylization, such as his use of the hyphen and the variant spelling *"worth while."* The recurrent line endings-

"And I have known the eyes already, known them all-"
"And I have known the arms already, known them all-"

feature the em dash (-), which functions not merely as punctuation but as a morpho-graphological device of interruption. The dash visually and rhythmically enacts the speaker's arrested thought, signalling both continuation and incompletion. Each hyphenic mark suspends closure, compelling the reader into the same pattern of hesitation that structures Prufrock's consciousness. The repetition of these truncated lines throughout the poem reinforces their cyclic and obsessive quality; morphologically and visually, the dash becomes a signifier of the recursive anxiety that defines the poem's emotional landscape.

Similarly, the nonstandard form *"worth while"* (instead of *"worthwhile"*) carries symbolic weight. On the surface, it may appear as a typographical idiosyncrasy; yet, read morphologically, the separation of *worth* and *while* introduces semantic tension between value (*worth*) and temporality (*while*). The spacing fractures the lexical unity of the compound, mirroring the thematic fragmentation that pervades the poem. This orthographic deviation thus encodes, at the level of word formation, Eliot's vision of a world in which meaning and duration, worth and while, refuse to cohere.

Through these morphological and graphological strategies, Eliot renders visible the linguistic texture of modernist anxiety. Prefixes loop into negation, plurals multiply into emptiness, and hyphens punctuate thought into stasis. Morphology, in *Prufrock*, is not a neutral grammatical system but a stylistic and psychological mechanism: the poem's smallest linguistic units reverberate with the same hesitation, repetition, and fragmentation that structure its overall discourse. In this way, Eliot transforms morphology into an index of modern subjectivity, an art of broken forms that articulates the linguistic essence of existential unease.

4.4 Semantic Indeterminacy and the Anxiety of Time

At the semantic level, Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* operates through a network of recurring signifiers that mediate the poem's central preoccupation with time, hesitation, and the fragmentation of modern subjectivity. The linguistic organisation of meaning in *Prufrock* is most vividly realized through the obsessive repetition of the lexeme *time*, whose recurrence transforms a quotidian concept into a symbolic expression of existential paralysis. This is exemplified in the following lines:

There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions…

The semantic density of the word *time*, repeated more than thirty times throughout the poem, functions as both motif and malaise. Its reiteration simultaneously asserts and erodes meaning. On one hand, *time* suggests agency and the potential for deliberate action: "there will be time to murder and create." On the other hand, the excessive repetition empties the term of its semantic substance, producing a verbal echo that mirrors the futility of the speaker's

introspection. This semantic circularity enacts what Madlool (2023) describes as "syntactical halts of modern consciousness," moments where language folds in on itself and meaning disintegrates under the weight of repetition.

Eliot's manipulation of *time* thus performs a paradoxical function. The more the persona invokes it, the less mastery he appears to have over it. The word's recurrence accentuates the disjunction between subjective experience and temporal progression: *time* is always anticipated, never inhabited. The repetition does not reassure but rather intensifies a sense of insufficiency, "no matter how much time there is, there is never enough." In this sense, Eliot's semantics of temporality aligns with modernist explorations of deferred being and existential fragmentation. The word becomes a linguistic manifestation of anxiety itself: an endlessly deferred promise of control over the uncontrollable.

The semantic field of *Prufrock* extends beyond *time* to encompass the imagery of measurement, decay, and hesitation: "*measured out my life with coffee spoons,*" "*the evening is spread out against the sky,*" "*the yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes.*" Each phrase operates as a semantic compression of modern experience, where trivial actions and ephemeral perceptions substitute for meaningful human connection. The language of the poem, saturated with temporal markers and sensory decay, thus transforms semantics into a theatre of anxiety: meaning flickers between assertion and negation, between what is said and what cannot be said.

4.5 Lexical Density and the Poetics of Alienation

At the lexical level, Eliot's diction reinforces the same paradox of abundance and emptiness that characterises the poem's semantic structure. The vocabulary of *Prufrock* oscillates between open-class words, which carry content and emotional resonance, and closed-class words, which provide syntactic linkage and rhythm. A quantitative examination of lexical distribution, presented in Table 1 below, reveals the predominance of nouns and verbs, categories that foreground materiality and action, even as the poem's speaker remains paralyzed by inaction.

Table 1: categories that foreground materiality and action

Word Class	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nouns	167	45
Verbs	143	39
Adjectives	58	15
Adverbs	2	0.5
Total	**370**	**100**

The relative scarcity of adverbs (0.5%) and the dominance of nouns (45%) and verbs (39%) are stylistically significant. The nominal and verbal density of Eliot's diction mirrors Prufrock's obsessive engagement with concrete, external phenomena—the "streets," "hotels," "faces," and "voices" that populate his world. Yet, paradoxically, these words do not denote vitality or presence but rather alienation and fragmentation. The nouns are overwhelmingly concrete, referring to physical objects and urban spaces, while the abstract nouns (*visions, decisions, progress*) appear only sporadically, marking failed attempts to transcend material constraint. The lexicon, though dense and tactile, remains semantically inert; it catalogues the world without inhabiting it.

Eliot's selective deployment of proper nouns, notably *Michelangelo*, introduces an ironic tension between cultural grandeur and the banality of Prufrock's self-awareness. The repeated invocation of *Michelangelo* in the social chatter of women ("In the room the women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo") transforms the proper noun into a symbol of aesthetic alienation. What should signify transcendent art becomes a token of superficial conversation, emblematic of a world where cultural reference replaces authentic emotion. The lexical texture of the poem thus becomes an index of alienated modern consciousness: language itself has become overburdened, commodified, and estranged from meaning.

Finally, Eliot's use of closed-class words (prepositions, determiners, and conjunctions such as *and, of, in, at*) establishes a rhythm of accumulation that mirrors the poem's paratactic flow. The incessant recurrence of *and* in particular performs the grammar of continuation without progression, echoing Prufrock's inability to conclude or decide. Lexically, the conjunction functions as a hinge of anxiety: it joins without resolving, connects without synthesizing.

Taken together, the semantic and lexical analyses reveal that *Prufrock*'s linguistic texture is one of measured hesitation. Words proliferate, but meaning recedes; time accumulates, but action dissolves. Through his intricate manipulation of word choice and meaning, Eliot transforms language itself into the stage upon which modern subjectivity enacts its drama of fragmentation. The poem's lexicon and semantics converge to produce what might be termed *the poetics of alienation*, a discourse where anxiety is not merely described but linguistically inscribed.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comprehensive stylistic analysis of T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, examining how the poet's manipulation of linguistic organization (phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, and lexical) constructs what may be termed a *language of anxiety*. Guided by Finch's (2003) model of textual analysis and informed by Mills's (1995) feminist stylistics, the analysis demonstrates that Eliot's formal innovations are not merely aesthetic choices but discursive strategies through which psychological, social, and ideological meanings are articulated. At the phonological level, Eliot's use of parallelism, assonance, and rhythmic irregularity transforms sound into a medium of psychological expression. The oscillation between rhyme and free verse, and between patterned cadence and disruption, enacts the poet's dramatization of inner turmoil and hesitation. The poem's musical texture, rather than soothing, becomes dissonant, an auditory embodiment of Prufrock's anxious consciousness.

At the syntactic level, Eliot's deployment of parallelism, deviation, parataxis, and enjambment reveals a grammar of hesitation that mirrors the speaker's indecision and fragmented thought. The repetition of syntactic structures, particularly interrogatives and self-referential clauses, creates a recursive verbal rhythm in which thought circles endlessly upon itself. Syntax, in *Prufrock*, thus becomes an index of psychological stasis: language continually begins but rarely concludes, dramatizing the impossibility of resolution in both thought and feeling. The morphological analysis further underscores Eliot's subtle manipulation of word formation as a carrier of meaning. The poet's use of affixation (*indecision*, *revision*, *repetition*) linguistically encodes the cyclical patterns of anxiety and self-doubt that govern the poem. Similarly, the recurrent use of pluralization and graphological devices such as the dash visually enacts fragmentation and suspension. Even orthographic deviations, such as *"worth while"*, reflect Eliot's sensitivity to form as a mirror of psychological fracture.

At the semantic level, the study reveals how Eliot constructs meaning through indeterminacy. The obsessive recurrence of the word *time* functions as both the axis and the abyss of the poem's meaning. Its repetition strips it of stability, transforming it from a measure of progress into a symbol of existential inertia. The semantic field of temporality—interlaced with imagery of fog, smoke, and decay—thus articulates the dislocation of modern experience. Meaning in *Prufrock* emerges not from assertion but from reiteration and deferral, a linguistic reflection of the poet's vision of human paralysis. At the lexical level, the predominance of concrete nouns and dynamic verbs, juxtaposed with sparse

abstraction, situates the poem in a world saturated with materiality yet devoid of transcendence. The lexical texture—at once tactile and alienated—reflects a consciousness overwhelmed by perception but starved of significance. Closed-class words, functioning as cohesive devices, further bind the text into a rhythm of accumulation without progression, reinforcing the poem's atmosphere of suspended motion.

Taken together, these findings affirm that Eliot's *Prufrock* transforms language itself into the very substance of modernist anxiety. Through his intricate manipulation of sound, syntax, and sense, Eliot constructs a discourse of fragmentation wherein linguistic form and psychological content are inseparable. The poem's stylistic fabric enacts its thematic core: the disjunction between thought and action, desire and expression, self and world. Moreover, viewed through a feminist-stylistic lens, Eliot's representation of paralysis and self-consciousness exposes not only an individual crisis but also the gendered dimensions of modern alienation, where the male voice, burdened by its own self-surveillance, becomes both subject and symptom of the social anxieties it articulates.

The study demonstrates that meaning in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is not merely conveyed by language but is generated through its stylistic performance. Eliot's poem stands as a paradigm of modernist experimentation in which linguistic form becomes the site of emotional and philosophical struggle. The "language of anxiety" that permeates *Prufrock* is thus both a linguistic phenomenon and a cultural condition, an enduring testimony to how modernism redefined the relationship between language, consciousness, and art.

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