

## SEMANTIC PROSODY IN THE RUNAWAYS: A CORPUS-BASED INVESTIGATION OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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### Abstract

*This study explores the use of semantic prosody in Fatima Bhutto's The Runaways to discover how language patterns contribute to the political and ideological discourse of the novel. Relying on the model of semantic patterning developed by Michaela Mahlberg, the analysis targets key terms, ideological words and lexical clusters with a corpus-based study of the text conducted with the software Lancbox X. These keywords and phrases serve as anchors around which themes of the text, such as identity, displacement, social control and ethical doubts, are intertwined; the study ascribes either positive or negative semantic prosody to them. A clearer understanding of the ideological thrust of the novel emerges from the analysis and reveals how Bhutto uses language to achieve it. The study concludes with the recommendation that the interplay between language and ideology can be understood better by applying semantic prosody and corpus stylistics to further literary texts.*

**Keywords:** Corpus linguistics, Political discourse, Semantic prosody, The Runaways

### Introduction

Semantic prosody is a key concept in corpus linguistics. It refers to the way certain words acquire a particular evaluative or attitudinal meaning, such as positive, negative, or neutral, based on their co-occurrence with certain sets of words. The origins of semantic prosody can be traced back to John Sinclair's work in the 1980s and 1990s. Sinclair, a corpus linguistics pioneer, emphasized understanding language in context rather than through isolated examples. He proposed that meaning emerges from extended units of language and not just individual words (Sinclair, 1991). He worked with and mentored many who developed and expanded his seminal ideas. Bill Louw, one of those, formally introduced the term "semantic prosody" in 1993. He observed that certain verbs, like 'cause', frequently collocated with words denoting negative outcomes. For example, one might say, "He caused trouble," "He caused some harm," or "He caused a whole lot of concern." Placing those together, you might say that the verb 'cause' has a negative semantic prosody. Semantic prosody denotes the evaluative or attitudinal meaning a term takes on through its regular collocations (Louw, 1993).

The basic foundation of semantic prosody is collocation; that is, the habitual word combinations that occur in a given context. According to Sinclair (1991), collocations are word groups that tend to appear together more frequently than random chance would suggest. The identification of collocational patterns has traditionally been the province of linguists working with smaller sample sizes, but with the advent of computers, we now have both the power and the speed to work with much larger samples. Semantic prosody has the next level of sophistication, which is evaluative semantics, built in to it. In the past few years, corpus linguistics tools have developed. They include Sketch Engine and Lancs Box. These tools allow

researchers to pinpoint the meaning of semantic prosody. That is to say, semantic prosody is now more visible and more precisely definable than it has been in the past.

The language of political discourses contains certain ideologies or particular identities. Although one might too narrowly define political discourse as confined to formal speeches or policy documents, yet the holistic language of politics is being spoken in both the public and private spheres. Van Dijk (1997) defines these forms of political discourse as forms of persuasion (for instance, to get people to vote) or even, in some cases, as forms of resistance to some political or social change. According to Fairclough (1995), political discourse is a major area where language and power meet. Fairclough (1995) states that political discourse assumes the central role in molding the social reality we all share. It does this by encoding in us, and in our social interactions, power relations and ideological assumptions.

A novel can be classified as political discourse if it presents language, characters, and themes of power, governance, ideology, and resistance. By using key terms such as freedom, authority, justice, and resistance, it reflects, critiques, or reinforces political structures (Fairclough, 1995; Eagleton, 2005). The novel makes readers question or agree with certain political ideologies through character dialogue, narrative choices, and emotional framing (Lazar, 2005). Partington et al. (2013) argue that a novel can construct a critical stance toward political authority, revealing its underlying ideological message by frequently associating the word 'government' with negative verbs like 'suppress' or 'control'. Several studies have explored how the novel 'The Runaways' functions as political discourse by analyzing the metanarrative of jihadism, radicalisation and postcolonial resistance (Aisha and Khan, 2023; Kharal et al., 2022; Sani et al., 2024).

Corpus linguistics is both a methodological approach and a theoretical perspective. As a methodology, it employs computer-assisted analysis to examine language in an empirical and systematic fashion. It is concerned with the where, when, and how questions of language usage. Its theoretical framework emphasizes that meaning arises from patterns of repeated usage, often leading to discoveries about grammar, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse. One of the foundational assumptions is that authentic language data can reveal the underlying regularities and variations of a language that might not be evident in constructed examples. Sinclair (1991) states that corpus linguistics challenges traditional linguistics. "...it insists that language should be studied in context and in extended units of meaning, not just in isolated sentences. This is an empirical approach to the study of language" (p. 4, in McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Sinclair (1991) asserted that corpus linguistics lets researchers study not just meaning but also the extended units of meaning that carry it, allowing them to move beyond the narrow confines of sentence-level analysis.

Pakistani author and political commentator Fatima Bhutto was born on May 29, 1982, in Kabul, Afghanistan. Fatima Bhutto is a member of the prominent Bhutto political family, with her grandfather, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and aunt, Benazir Bhutto, both having served as prime ministers of Pakistan. Bhutto is known for her novels and memoirs that examine themes of identity, violence, and the political landscape of South Asia and the Middle East. She was educated at Columbia University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Her literary output consists of the memoir *Songs of Blood and Sword* (2010) and the novels *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* (2013) and *The Runaways* (2019). Her writing has a distinctive quality of delving deeply, both personally and politically, into matters of conflict and extremism. Time and again, she reveals the elusive, hidden and marginalized areas to expose nuances of war, identity and power.

*The Runaways* (2019), a novel by Fatima Bhutto, deals with identity, alienation, and becoming radical through the lives of three young individuals from very different parts of the world. Anita from Karachi's slums, Monty from an elite Pakistani background, and a British teenager of

Pakistani descent, Sunny. In their search for identity, purpose, and belonging, these three are drawn into the world of Islamic extremism. The novel explores how alienation, economic disparity, cultural dislocation, and personal trauma can lead individuals down radical paths. Showing how societal failures and emotional voids can push young people toward extremism, Bhutto offers a nuanced, humanizing portrayal of the factors behind radicalization. Their lives intersect, and we get a look at the dynamics that lead these three characters to become radicalized.

### **Problem statement**

Although interest is growing in the intersection of language and ideology in fiction, very few studies have been done to empirically establish the link between them. *The Runaways* is a contemporary novel by Pakistani writer Fatima Bhutto that presents themes such as identity, displacement, and ideological tension. However, little research has examined how the novel's language choices, particularly patterns of collocation and semantic prosody, contribute to the subtle construction of these themes. To begin to address this gap, the researchers have undertaken a study of the language of *The Runaways*. The tools of corpus linguistics and semantic prosody are used to look closely at the word choices, phrases, and evaluative associations that form the thematic structure of the novel.

### **Research Objectives**

- To investigate the collocational patterns of terms related to identity, displacement and social control.
- To analyze how semantic prosody influences the evaluative meanings of nouns and verbs which are shaped by their collocational relationships and reinforces the novel's exploration of social and political challenges.
- To examine how specific lexical bundles and semantic prosody patterns work together to reinforce the themes of hope and struggle, through their recurrent usage in the narrative.

### **Research Questions**

- 1 What patterns of collocation in *The Runaways* contribute to the construction of such themes as displacement, belonging, and social control?
- 2 What influence does semantic prosody have on the evaluative meanings of nouns and verbs related to novel's exploration of social and political challenges?
- 3 How do recurrent lexical patterns and their semantic prosody in *The Runaways* reflect broader ideological and political discourses?

### **Significance of the study**

The semantics prosody and corpus stylistics of Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* is a relatively unexplored topic in the field of applied linguistics. Bhutto's semantic choices in *The Runaways*, particularly regarding collocation, do far more than merely convey the surface meaning of the text. The findings yield insight into the path the text takes toward unfolding its implicit "true" meaning. It also investigates how language reflects social and ideological positioning, even within fictional narratives.

### **Literature Review**

*The Runaways* by Fatima Bhutto has attracted the interest of scholars, who are drawn to its complex portrayal of identity and dislocation, ideological transformation, and political anxieties in the post-9/11 world. The novel is set across Pakistan, the UK, and the Middle Eastern regions, and it tells the story of three young people whose lives are—and not by mere coincidence—fractured in a supposedly globalizing world. Their lives, we find, are not just fractured for purely individual reasons, but also for some quite visible global ones, as they

become caught up in putatively world-encompassing ideologies. Scholars have been exploring the novel's many themes from a number of different angles—psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and postmodern.

Sarwar et al. (2023) take a Freudian psychoanalytic approach to *The Runaways*, and it is the emotional and psychological problems of the male protagonists that they focus on. Their inquiry goes into issues of repression, abandonment, and father-son dynamics, and they work to reveal how radical decisions are often prompted by very deep-seated psychological conflicts. However, none of them examines how, in the process of implementing those radical decisions, the male characters make use of language itself to carry the kinds of meaningful, and sometimes conflicting, ideological messages that could be part of what drives the narrative. In contrast, Aisha and Khan (2023) examine the process of radicalization in the novel, especially in the characters of Monty and Sunny. They place Bhutto's narrative in the wider socio-political framework of Muslim youth, identity crises, and anti-Western feelings. Their method is predominantly qualitative and thematic.

Kharal, Naseem, and Muhammad (2022) examined how *The Runaways* unravels the metanarrative of jihadism in a postmodern way. Their analysis is not so much looking at Bhutto's text for the linguistic tools that enable this profound narrative undertaking. Sani et al. (2024) take a postcolonial approach to examine how the novel portrays "the Other" and forms of resistance. While their article offers valuable insights into representation patterns and ideological divisions, it overlooks the fine lexical patterns that support these broader themes. Shah et al. (2021) argue that trauma theory is a vital analytical tool for working out how literature handles the all-too-frequent occurrence of tormented souls in our world. It offers us a way to understand the representations of complex psychological and emotional wounds left in the wake of violence and displacement. By applying Cathy Caruth's trauma theory the study shows that trauma itself is an unassimilated event a barely comprehensible experience that all too often returns in the form of disrupted, fragmented memories and maddeningly elusive language.

The study by Saqib et al. (2024) investigated Fatima Bhutto's novel *The Runaways* through the lens of Stuart Hall's representation theory. It analyzes how the text depicts the identities and experiences of its protagonists in a postcolonial world. At the center of this narrative is the resistance to impose identities and social norms. The analysis looks at the structure of the narrative and the development of its characters and what that might tell us about the possible post-postcolonial world Bhutto imagines. Ashfaq, Cheema, and Bashir (2025) examined the intersections of identity, religion, and nationalism in a rapidly changing global landscape. Its primary aim is to interpret how *The Runaways* challenges dominant narratives surrounding identity formation, national belonging, and cultural displacement.

Sahar, Saif, and Khan (2024) spotlight the brutality and unjustness of men's behavior, particularly in Pakistani society, as illustrated in Fatima Bhutto's novel *The Runaways* (2019). *The Runaways* exposes the persistent objectification and suppression of women in Pakistan and critiques the social structures that undermine female emancipation and feminist aspirations. Sudha (2020) argues that young, impressionable minds are the most susceptible to being misled by extremist ideologies. The association of one with the other results in nothing short of catastrophic consequences. The global literary marketplace may be located in the West, yet a burgeoning interest in Anglophone Pakistani literature, particularly in the wake of 9/11, carries with it an allure of fetishized depictions of minoritized identities. This article argues that while *The Runaways* resists Eurocentric cosmopolitan liberalism on an ideological level, it occasionally falters in its portrayal of Pakistan and Islamic practices. (Kamal (2023)

Iftikhar, Saddique, and Nawaz (2022) examined the three main characters—Anita, Sunny, and Monty in Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* through the lens of Phebe Cramer's theory of defense



mechanisms, as outlined in her book *Protecting the Self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*. Cramer emphasizes denial as a central defense mechanism, and this analysis applies her framework to key events in the protagonists' lives. Faced with moral and existential anxieties, the characters undergo personality changes while confronting harsh realities such as poverty, migration, disaffection, violence, alienation, exploitation, and dislocation. Rabbi et al. (2023) examine how young adults experience alienation in the contemporary post-9/11 context, which impacts their involvement in terrorist activities in *The Runaways*. This investigation happens through a psychoanalytic lens using Lacan's concept of the Other that incidentally makes room for discussing some not-often-acknowledged ideological divisions among terrorists.

Anam et. al's. (2021) research is notable as it had analyzed the audacious and deadly assault waged, not just on the military and police, but also on the innocents caught in the crossfire. Ashraf and Hussain (2022) analyzed Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways*, where individuals turn to extremism as a response to radicalization. In *The Runaways*, three very different young people become involved with extremist religious groups for a variety of reasons. Drawing on Neumann's theory of radicalization, the study discusses the identity crises, frustration with society, and poverty that push these characters to accept religious discourses that result in violent action.

Worldwide research into semantic prosody (Louw, 1993; Partington, 1998; Mahlberg, 2013) illustrates how words often take on positive or negative meanings based on their frequent collocates, or what Sinclair (1991) referred to as "the company they keep." Take, for instance, the work of Spencer (2011), who shows that semantic prosody in literary texts can be harnessed to generate emotional and narrative tone by means of co-textual patterns repeated across a text. Or consider the analyses of Ruihua Zhang 2013, Yen-Yu Lin & Chung 2016, and Changhu Zhang 2010, who have done prosody shift, adverbial intensifier, and mental verb work and have come up with results that are both quantitative and remarkably deep in their theoretical implications. Nevertheless, these collected studies have mainly emphasized non-literary texts or well-known Western literary works for example, Lovecraft and Shakespeare, and none has looked at narratives of radicalization from South Asia or the period after September 11. They have also not dealt with the kind of literature that, like *The Runaways*, offers both a socio-political critique and renders a contemporary ideological discourse.

*The Runaways* has been richly thematically analyzed, (Sani et al. 2024, Sahar, Saif, & Khan 2024, Aisha and Khan 2023), but none of the studies done to date have examined how the narrative creates emotional intensity, ideological nuance, or moral ambiguity using semantic prosody or corpus stylistics. No research exists in this area, particularly not using the framework of lexical bundles and semantic clusters that Mahlberg (2013) provides. This is a clear methodological and geographic gap.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study has its foundations in the theory of semantic prosody, as developed and expanded by Michaela Mahlberg (2013) in the field of corpus stylistics. Semantic prosody is the phenomenon where certain words are found to co-occur with other words that have a consistent and evaluative meaning (positive, negative, or neutral). Louw (1993) introduced the concept, and Sinclair (1996) refined it. Mahlberg, however, takes a very different approach and gives the concept a distinctly discourse-oriented and literary focus. She argues that semantic prosody is crucial to understanding the meaning of a word beyond its immediate context.

Mahlberg's approach treats language as patterned and motivated in its functions. The meanings of words are often realized through lexico-grammatical patterns that recur in different contexts. This view is integrated with Sinclair's idiom principle, which posits that language users process prefabricated chunks of language rather than isolated words. In narrative texts, semantic

prosodies contribute to the coherence and cohesion of the narrative and also reflect the author's ideological viewpoint.

One of the innovative features of Mahlberg's framework is her emphasis on how semantic prosodies function discursively, especially in fictional texts. Unlike earlier studies that focused primarily on non-literary corpora, Mahlberg demonstrates how fictional constructs use prosodic patterns to not only build characters but also deliver moral judgments and guide—sometimes in subtle or ironic ways—reader interpretation. Therefore, in her study, semantic prosody is used not just to describe the lexical behavior of individual words but to investigate how literature as a whole communicates social, emotional, and ethical meanings through repeated patterns of language.

To reveal these meanings, this study takes a mixed-methods corpus stylistic approach, combining the quantitative analysis of node words and their collocates with the qualitative interpretation of their contextual usage. This framework allows for the systematic investigation of how evaluative meanings emerge from repeated language patterns and how these patterns uphold the text's broader narrative and ideological function.

Utilizing the tool LancsBoxX, the study first quantitatively identifies frequent collocates and concordance patterns. These findings are then interpreted qualitatively to understand how the data-driven results contribute to narrative stance, characterization, and thematic development. This method-integrating study presents a sophisticated means of approaching the question of how evaluative meanings affect reader perception and illustrates how those meanings are reflective of the text's ideologies.

### Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods research design to fulfil its objectives, using Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* (2018) as its primary data source. This literary work was selected for its rich thematic content, particularly in exploring concepts such as freedom, belonging, and identity among three young protagonists. The entire text of *The Runaways* served as a single-text corpus, facilitating a focused analysis of linguistic patterns within a contained narrative. Researchers applied a purposive sampling technique to identify key node words aligned with the novel's main themes. Prominent themes like freedom, escape, family, faith, and home were noted for their frequency, which determined the selection of qualifying node words for the study. This study's data were gathered by transforming *The Runaways*, a book by Fatima Bhutto, into a machine-readable file. This file was then put into a corpus analysis tool, LancsBox X. Using this tool and the digital version of *The Runaways*, several steps were taken to identify semantic prosody within the book. These steps served two main purposes. First, they allowed examination of the text in a not-so-ordinary way that provided glimpses into unsuspected meanings and associations. Second, they made it possible to perform examinations using computational means.

### Data Analysis

A corpus-based analysis of the semantic prosody of the novel *The Runaways* aims to uncover evaluative meanings which are subtly embedded in recurrent phraseology. Data are extracted from a corpus of 105,000 tokens, which is the plain text of the novel. Later that plain text corpus was added to LancBoxX. Through this software, the researchers determined the prosodic tendencies of the frequently occurring key terms and lexical bundles and investigated their surrounding co-texts.

To realize the first objective, which is “investigate the collocational patterns of terms related to identity, displacement and social control”, the analysts examined the collocational patterns of key terms and their prosodic tendencies (positive, negative or neutral) to demonstrate how apparently neutral or habitual vocabulary contributed to the novel's representation of themes such as identity, displacement, freedom and power dynamics. Broader ideological narratives

embedded in the discourse of the novel have been presented through the findings of the semantic prosodic analysis

**Table 1.** *Collocation patterns of the lexical words related to the themes of identity, displacement and social control.*

Key Term	Frequency	Frequent Collocates	Collocate Type	Semantic Prosody	Interpretation
Pakistani	8	Real corrupt, arrest warrant, playboy politician, burning passport	noun, verb, adjective	Negative	Pakistani identity is framed as shameful
Islam	21	Light of solidarity, Fighting to Protect, glory of, illumination of	noun, adjective, verb	Positive	Islam is a religion of light and solidarity; it is something to be protected
Journey	15	Secret, long, difficult, insult and wrong turn	adjective, noun	Negative	Journey is associated with hardships and it expresses the theme of displacement
Alone	56	Dark, beaten, exposed, trembling, unprotected	Adjective, verb	Negative	Loneliness in a foreign land symbolizes insecurity and identity crisis
Power	19	England and cold, faith, financial world, strength, truth, threat, defuse	Noun, adjective, noun	Neutral	Power is associated with England, foreigners feel weak but it also embodies faith and truth

Table 1 presents some selected key terms which recur across the corpus and are linked to the themes of identity, displacement, and social control. Terms related to nationality and religion indicate a search for self-definition such as *Pakistani* and *Islam*. These terms are frequently embedded in contexts that reflect fragmented or unstable identities. The word *Pakistani* often co-occurs with expressions like *corrupt*, *arrest*, *burning passport*, reinforcing the theme of identity conflict. Conversely, the term *Islam* has positive prosody as it has common collocates such as *light of solidarity*, *glory*, *illumination*. Islam is presented as a source of strength and glory. It contributes to the theme of belonging in an estranged society. Furthermore, terms like *journey* and *alone* have negative prosody and reveal the theme of displacement. The word *journey* is surrounded by the words *secret*, *long*, *wrong turn*, *insult* and the neighboring words of *alone* are *dark*, *beaten*, *exposed* and *unprotected*. As the leading characters of the novel

struggle hard to find a purposeful life, the words like journey and alone with negative prosody expose the hardships of their struggle.

The word *power* has neutral meaning as it has collocations which reflect social control like England, cold, threat and financial world. On the other hand, the word power is associated with *faith*, *strength* and *truth* which show the positive prosody of this term. The semantic prosody surrounding these terms, in line with Mahlberg's model of semantic patterning, reveals how language constructs implicit evaluations of power and marginality. By portraying individuals as caught between external control and internal crises of identity, ideological framing of the text is exposed through the collocational behavior of these key terms.

To achieve the second objective, i.e. to analyze how semantic prosody influences the evaluative and reinforces the novel's exploration of social and political challenges, some nouns and verbs shaped by their collocational relations were chosen and analyzed through KWIC feature in LancsBoxX.

**Table 2:** *Semantic prosody and thematic implication of the node words highlighting political and social challenges.*

Node Words	Frequent collocates	Semantic prosody	Evaluative Meaning	Thematic Implications
<b>(Nouns &amp; Verbs)</b>				
Faith	Hurts, mission, Commitment, understanding, Simple power	Mixed tone, dominantly positive	may be noble or radical	Shows the confusion, disbelief and doubts under political crisis
Freedom	fighter, hated, lies, wishes, fight building,	Ambiguous/negative	Fought and politicized	Highlights postcolonial struggles for identity
Belong	Anywhere, now, need, movement, where	Negative	Isolation and alienation	Identity crisis and dislocation
Infidels	Moral collapse, corruption, decay, kill	Negative	Linked with moral bankruptcy and spiritual degradation	Reflects the crisis of belief under political pressure
Radical	Hatred, violence, terrorist	Negative	Frames hostility	Reflects radical manipulation of belief
Jihad	Blessed, pride, love, true war	Positive	glorified	Ideological beliefs



The table above with mixed prosodic pattern shows how language subtly reveals that meaning is not just in the word itself, but in its frequent company. The chosen words are semantically rich and emotionally loaded words that reinforce the novel's themes of radicalization, exile, loss, and the search for meaning. The noun *faith* is portrayed as painful as well as purposeful. *Freedom* reflects the fragile and conflicted nature in the narrative as tied closely to violence disillusionment, and unfulfilled aspirations. The words *infidels*, *radical*, and *jihad* all represent the dilemma of youth and the ideological influences upon them in a postcolonial country. These words function as dehumanizing labels and moral condemnations. Jihad becomes a rhetorical tool used by recruiters to give meaning to disillusionment. Characters believe they are doing something noble or religious, but it leads to violence. The novel implicitly critiques how religious language is hijacked by political agendas.

Mahlberg has adopted Sinclair's idea of the extended unit of meaning which suggests that meaning is not only conveyed through individual words but in recurrent multi-word sequences or clusters. These lexical clusters patterns and their semantic prosody reflect broader ideological and political discourses in literary texts.

Thus, our third objective is to examine how specific lexical bundles and semantic prosody patterns work together to reinforce the themes of hope and struggle, through their recurrent usage in the narrative. The table below presents repeated lexical clusters from *The Runaways*, contributing to the recurring themes of the novel.

**Table 3.** *Frequent lexical bundles highlighting ideological and political challenges*

Lexical Bundles	Frequency	Top collocates	Semantic prosody	Discourse function	Ideological/political discourse
For a moment	35	Stared watched swayed hesitated	Neutral	Shows hesitation, fear or hope	Highlight theme of identity
In the middle of	22	War, nowhere desert night terror	Negative	Feeling of being lost, invaded and overwhelmed	Reflect displacement in a foreign land, ideological challenges in middle of war
He wanted to	20	Try hear connect tell see	positive	Expresses desire, and intention	Looking for emotional connection in an estrange land
Shook his head	20	Sorry Sadly trying no angrily	Negative	Signals rejection, refusal, denial and disapproval	Ethical or emotional distancing from political or ideological voices
The first time	19	Knocked noticed feeling	positive	Predicts change and transformation	Ideological awakening, identity discovering

All the 18 time	dared understood Sorry answer racists code noises	negative	Implies ongoing struggle, burden and pressure	Oppressive conditions, pressure of proving loyalty and sincerity
There was 9 something	Strange different dirty menacing untrue	Negative	Situation threat suspense	Introduces of ideological unease or ,fear and ethical doubts
He was 9 going to	Break, move, need, lie low, find	Positive	Indicates anticipation	Identity reformation, redemption, building connections

These lexical bundles reveal *The Runaways* significant themes of struggle and hope. The phrases like *for a moment*, *he wanted to*, *the first time* reflect aspiration and possibility, especially in moments of reflection or resistance. The phrases like *the first time* and *he was going to* with positive collocates carry hopeful and transformative semantic prosodies. The critical emotional and ideological awakenings are marked by the cluster. *The first time* suggesting the moments of connection, personal realization, or moral turning points that shape the characters' identities. It initiates new ways of thinking or feeling by signaling a break from passivity. The characters navigation in identity crises and ideological pressure is highlighted through the recurrent use of *didn't want to* and *all the time*. These phrases also depict mental and emotional conflict Similarly semantic patterns such as *in the middle of*, *he shook his head*, and *there was something* carry distinctly negative semantic prosodies that reflect the emotional and ideological struggles of the characters. The individuals' moments of conflict or confusion, capturing their entrapment between competing cultural, religious, and personal pressures are depicted by the frequent use of the phrase *In the middle of*. Likewise, in response to radical or oppressive forces *he shook his head* conveys disapproval, hesitation, or emotional dissonance, marking resistance or inner turmoil. Meanwhile, within ideological systems where individuals cannot fully articulate or escape "there was something" introduces a tone of ambiguity or unease, hinting at the characters' intuitive recognition of danger or deception.

These bundles are semantically tinted with fear and conflict. Together, these lexical bundles form the stylistic backbone of *The Runaways*. They are not just repetitive patterns, they shape meaning, guide emotional tone, and encode evaluative judgments about faith, agency, and belonging.

### Conclusion

This study shows how Michaela Mahlberg's semantic prosody theory, along with methods from corpus stylistics, provides new insights into the evaluation language in *The Runaways*. By taking a close look at key node words in the novel and their collocational environments, the analysts of this study reveal how semantic prosody works in a way to make meaning from the words around the node to help form evaluations of the themes in the story. In this study, the collocative patterns of the node words *Pakistani*, *Islam*, *journey*, *alone* and *power* highlight the themes of identity, displacement and social control. Similarly, the co-occurring words of the node words *jihad*, *faith*, *radical*, *freedom* and *infidels* Having negative prosody also gives us

some idea of political and social challenges that individuals have to face in a foreign land. The lexical bundles, such as *in the middle of, there was something, shook his head, and he was going to*, carry negative prosody and reveal the theme of struggle, threat and ethical doubts. Similarly, the apparently simple phrases like *for the first time* or *all the time* carry significant ideological weight, revealing the themes of radicalization, resistance, identity reformation, and moral unease.

This study demonstrates the powerful potential of combining corpus-based quantitative methods with qualitative literary analysis to uncover evaluative meanings in fiction that are not readily apparent. To uncover hidden discourse strategies, it is recommended that future researchers apply similar corpus-informed methods to other politically engaged literary texts. Additionally, integrating this kind of analysis in educational settings can help students critically examine how meaning and ideology are constructed through language in fiction.

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