

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18133537>

AI-Assisted Corpus Linguistic Analysis of Lexical Choice and Discursive Style in Virginia Woolf's Essays



Dr Iftikhar Alam

PhD in English (Applied Linguistics), Head of the English Department, Northern University, Nowshera, Pakistan
Email: iftikhar.alam@northern.edu.pk

Salah Ud Din

Department of English, Kohat University of Science and Technology, KUST, Kohat, Pakistan
Email: salahudd028@gmail.com

A.M M Mahmudul Hasan

Lecturer, Department of English, Khwaja Yunus Ali University, Sirajganj, Bangladesh
Email: ammhasan94@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates lexical choice and discursive practice in selected essays by Virginia Woolf using an AI-assisted corpus linguistic and qualitative discourse-analytic approach. The study is grounded in the premise that Woolf's essayistic prose reflects modernist concerns with consciousness, subjectivity, and reader participation, which can be empirically examined through patterns of word frequency and discursive organisation. The objectives are to identify dominant lexical patterns, examine the distribution of lexical and functional terms, and analyse how these linguistic features shape Woolf's reflective and exploratory discursive style. Methodologically, a compiled corpus of Woolf's essays was analysed using corpus tools to generate keyword frequencies and lexical density measures, followed by close qualitative analysis of discursive practices in essays such as *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, *The Common Reader*, *The Death of the Moth*, and *A Room of One's Own*. The findings reveal a high density of lexical words and recurring cognitive and abstract keywords related to mind, art, life, character, and reading, which collectively support a discursive mode centred on introspection and provisional meaning-making. Discursively, Woolf's essays resist authoritative closure and instead construct knowledge through reflection, observation, and dialogic engagement with the reader. The study concludes that Woolf's lexical and discursive strategies are closely aligned, producing a modernist essay form that privileges process over conclusion. It is recommended that future research extend this approach to comparative studies of modernist essayists or integrate multimodal and larger-scale corpus data to further explore the relationship between language, consciousness, and literary form.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, corpus linguistics, lexical choice, discursive practice, modernist essays

Introduction

Virginia Woolf's essays offer a rich field for exploring modernist language and narrative voice. Traditionally, scholars have used close reading to interpret her stylistic nuances, but quantitative methods provide another lens on her linguistic patterns. Corpus linguistics treats large bodies of text as data and examines features such as word frequency, collocation, and patterns of lexical use to reveal underlying stylistic tendencies that may not be obvious through manual analysis alone (Davis & Brown, 2024). In literary studies, applying corpus methods has helped quantify stylistic markers and track how authors use language to shape voice and meaning across genres. For example, researchers have used corpus tools to examine lexical density and semantic patterns in fiction, showing how systematic analysis can support claims about stylistic distinctiveness (Liang & Chen, 2023). These approaches complement qualitative interpretation by offering statistical evidence of linguistic choices that contribute to an author's voice.

Artificial intelligence has strengthened corpus analysis by speeding up tasks such as tagging parts of speech, detecting semantic categories, and clustering text patterns. AI-enhanced tools can analyse large corpora more efficiently and highlight features that align with theoretical questions about style and discourse (Elkins, 2024). Combining AI with corpus linguistics allows researchers to address both the breadth and depth of stylistic features in complex prose.

Virginia Woolf's essays, including *Modern Fiction*, demonstrate her deliberate choices in phrasing and argumentation, making them ideal for corpus investigation (Woolf, 1919/1925). While most

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

corpus work on Woolf has focused on her fiction, such as lexical patterns in *The Waves* or transitivity in *Kew Gardens*, these studies confirm the value of corpus methods for uncovering stylistic traits (Ammara & Anjum, 2020; Shakir Hussein & Abdul-Shareef Kadhim, 2020).

An AI-assisted corpus analysis of Woolf's essays will enable a systematic examination of her lexical choices and discursive style across a curated text set. This combined approach aims to reveal recurring linguistic structures and stylistic signatures while situating Woolf's essays within broader patterns of modern prose style. The results are expected to deepen understanding of how her language works to shape argument, voice, and reader engagement.

Significance of the Research

This research is significant because it demonstrates how AI-assisted corpus linguistics can offer a more systematic and evidence-based understanding of literary style, moving beyond impressionistic readings of Virginia Woolf's essays. By identifying recurring patterns of lexical choice and discursive organisation, the study clarifies how Woolf's language constructs argument, voice, and modernist sensibility across her nonfiction prose. The integration of AI tools with corpus methods also highlights the methodological value of computational approaches in literary studies, showing how large-scale textual analysis can support and refine traditional close reading. More broadly, the research contributes to corpus stylistics by extending its application to modernist essays, an area that remains underexplored compared to fiction, and provides a replicable framework for future studies of authorial style in literary prose.

Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyse patterns of lexical choice in Virginia Woolf's essays using AI-assisted corpus linguistic tools.
2. To examine how discursive style is constructed in Woolf's essays through recurring linguistic features and rhetorical structures.

Research Questions

1. What dominant patterns of lexical choice characterise Virginia Woolf's essays when analysed through AI-assisted corpus methods?
2. How do these lexical and discursive features contribute to the construction of Woolf's distinctive essayistic style?

Literature Review

Corpus linguistics has reshaped the way literary texts are studied by offering empirical methods to examine language patterns, quantifying stylistic features and grounding interpretation in measurable data. This review surveys foundational work in corpus stylistics, methodological applications, AI integration, and key studies that parallel the proposed analysis of Virginia Woolf's essays.

Corpus stylistics integrates corpus methods with traditional stylistic concerns, enabling researchers to examine lexical, grammatical, and discourse patterns in large text sets. Abdulqader et al. (2020) outline how corpus stylistics combines qualitative and quantitative analyses, highlighting its capacity to identify stylistic markers that

might remain invisible in qualitative readings alone. Mahlberg's contributions to corpus stylistics emphasise its dual nature, where corpus linguistics supports literary interpretation by revealing patterns of lexical usage, grammatical structures, and frequency distributions.

Biber's (2011) foundational work argues that corpus methods are ideally suited for studying literary language because they systematically quantify features such as keywords, collocations, and grammatical forms across texts. This methodological grounding has been widely adopted in studies that aim to describe authorial style or differentiate texts based on statistical linguistic data. In *Corpus Stylistics: Theory and Practice*, practitioners demonstrate how corpora can be used to test stylistic hypotheses, construct annotated corpora, and compare texts against reference corpora to identify distinctive features. Such frameworks are crucial when privileging empirical evidence in literary interpretation and provide a clear methodological basis for AI-assisted approaches.

Studies applying corpus methods to literary texts have expanded across genres and authors. Ibrahim (2022) employed corpus stylistics to examine lexical domains in Charles Dickens novels, showing how semantic domain analysis can unearth thematic patterns that align with broader narrative concerns. Similarly, Liang and Chen (2023) undertook a corpus-based stylistic study comparing *Jane Eyre* with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, using measures like type/token ratio and keyword analysis to explore differences in lexical richness and complexity. These works illustrate how corpus metrics quantify elements of style that underlie thematic and narrative interpretation.

Corpus methods have also been applied to modernist texts and specifically to Woolf's fiction. Shakir Hussein and Kadhim (2025) conducted a lexical density profile analysis of three of Woolf's novels (*The Waves*, *Mrs Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*), demonstrating how lexical density can serve as a marker of stylistic complexity in modernist prose. In another strand of modernist studies, studies of Woolf's corpus have examined syntactic structures such as parallelism, identifying lexical bundles and syntactic patterns that contribute to her distinctive narrative voice. Though focused on fiction rather than essays, these studies provide valuable parallels for how corpus methods can illuminate patterns in Woolf's writing. Corpus linguistics has also been integrated with other critical frameworks. Aydinguler's comparative study of Woolf and Arnold Bennett used corpus analysis to investigate sexist language in both authors' texts, illustrating how discourse patterns reflect broader ideological positions and thus connecting stylistic features to cultural criticism. This aligns with broader work in discourse analysis where corpus tools reveal how linguistic structures carry ideological meaning beyond surface form.

Beyond author-specific cases, corpus methodologies have been applied to textual comparisons and translations, as demonstrated by Ryu, Kim, and Graesser (2023) in their corpus stylistic study of James Joyce's *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* alongside their Korean translations. This broadens the scope of corpus studies to comparative literary contexts, reinforcing the method's versatility. Grass by Zhu (2021) uses computational techniques to assess stylistic changes over multiple editions, incorporating methods such as frequency analysis and sentiment measures.

While not directly related to essays, this research demonstrates how computational tools trace style evolution over time within an author's body of work. The relevance of corpus analysis to literary semantics is seen in work that explores semantic complexity, topic distribution, and narrative style in large corpora of English literature. Jacobs and Kinder (2022) applied topic and sentiment analyses across genres, underscoring corpus methods' capacity to extract features linked to creativity and literariness. Such techniques are increasingly relevant to studies that combine lexical and discourse analysis to account for thematic and affective dimensions of literary style.

Corpus techniques have also been applied to texts involving AI itself. A recent corpus-driven analysis by Haleem et al. (2024) compared AI-generated academic discourse with human-authored texts, highlighting linguistic patterns that differ in vocabulary usage and syntactic complexity. This study points directly to the potentials and limitations of AI in replicating human style. Suman Khan and Saqlain Hassan's (2025) work similarly used corpus methods to evaluate AI-generated essays, underscoring how corpus analysis can evaluate genre compatibility and linguistic deviation in AI-produced writing.

AI tools and corpus methods are increasingly integrated in digital humanities. Preprints on NLP applications in literary analysis highlight how natural language processing enhances the extraction of stylistic features, including metaphor processing and rhetorical modelling, foregrounding how AI can expand both the scale and depth of corpus analysis. Tools such as Voyant and Sketch Engine further illustrate how computational software supports large-scale textual analyses, offering frequency distributions, concordance generation, and keyword identification essential for corpus work. Corpus analysis is not limited to lexical features; it encompasses grammatical and discourse structures. For example, syntactic complexity analysers like L2SCA provide indices of syntactic features across texts, enabling studies that incorporate structural dimensions of style. In literary corpus studies, these multi-level approaches enable researchers to investigate language beyond simple frequency counts, incorporating clauses, phrase structures, and narrative rhythm into stylistic profiles.

Several monographs and edited volumes have shaped corpus stylistics as a discipline. Semino and Short's *Corpus Stylistics* is a core reference that guides scholars on the theoretical foundations and practical applications of corpus methods in stylistic analysis. Fischer-Starcke's work on corpus linguistics in literary analysis demonstrates how corpora advance interpretation in canonical literature like Austen, emphasising concordances and phraseological analysis as pathways to uncovering stylistic patterns. The journal *Language and Literature* embodies the integration of corpus methods into stylistic research, publishing studies that examine linguistic style across genres and demonstrating the field's ongoing development. Similarly, journals like *Corpora* provide platforms for methodological innovation in corpus construction and analysis.

Within the context of Woolf's own writing, much of the existing corpus work focuses on her fiction rather than her essays. The corpus linguistic approach to *The Waves* by Balossi (2014) exemplifies how computational methods can reveal language patterns

intricately tied to character and narrative structure, providing a valuable model for examining structural and lexical patterns in Woolf's essays. Franklin's (2010) overview of corpus linguistics in literary studies further situates such research within broader quantitative analyses that extend beyond traditional close reading.

Despite the richness of these studies, there remains a noticeable gap when it comes to applying AI-assisted corpus methods specifically to essays, particularly within modernist contexts like Woolf's nonfiction prose. While corpus stylistics has been effectively applied to novels, poetry, and translation studies, fewer studies focus on extended essay collections using integrated AI and corpus approaches. This gap underscores the importance of the present study in extending corpus stylistics and computational methods to examine lexical choice and discourse style in Woolf's essays. In summary, the reviewed literature demonstrates a strong foundation for using corpus linguistics in literary analysis, encompassing methodological frameworks, genre-specific studies, AI-related corpus research, and Woolf-focused analyses. These works collectively support the viability of combining corpus techniques with AI tools to produce detailed, data-grounded accounts of stylistic and discursive patterns in literary texts.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative–quantitative research design grounded in corpus linguistics and stylistics. The research combines quantitative corpus techniques with qualitative stylistic interpretation in order to examine patterns of lexical choice and discursive style in Virginia Woolf's essays. The quantitative component focuses on frequency distributions, keyword analysis, and collocational patterns, while the qualitative component interprets these patterns in relation to discourse, rhetoric, and literary style. The integration of artificial intelligence tools supports data processing, annotation, and pattern recognition, enhancing the reliability and efficiency of the analysis.

Research Approach

The study follows a corpus-based and corpus-driven approach. The corpus-based approach allows predefined stylistic categories, such as lexical density and evaluative language, to be examined through corpus tools. The corpus-driven approach enables patterns to emerge inductively from the data without imposing rigid analytical categories in advance. This dual approach ensures both theoretical grounding and empirical discovery in the analysis of Woolf's essays.

Data Selection and Corpus Compilation

The primary data for this study consist of a carefully selected corpus of Virginia Woolf's essays. The essays were chosen on the basis of their critical importance, thematic breadth, and relevance to Woolf's reflections on literature, character, consciousness, and artistic practice. To ensure representativeness and analytical depth, five essays were selected for detailed analysis: *Modern Fiction*, *The Common Reader*, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, *How Should One Read a Book?*, and *The Death of the Moth*. These essays span Woolf's major nonfiction period between 1910 and 1940 and collectively reflect her evolving views on modernism, reading, character formation, and inner life.

Only essays originally written in English by Virginia Woolf were included to maintain

linguistic consistency and avoid distortions caused by translation. Authoritative published versions of the essays were used as source texts. For corpus preparation, the selected essays were converted into machine-readable plain text format. All non-linguistic material, including page numbers, footnotes, editorial annotations, and publication metadata, was removed to ensure clean and analysable textual data. The corpus was then manually reviewed to correct typographical inconsistencies and encoding issues, ensuring accuracy and reliability prior to computational and qualitative analysis.

Reference Corpus

To identify stylistically distinctive lexical features in Woolf's essays, a reference corpus of general British English prose from the early twentieth century was used. This comparative corpus enables keyword analysis by highlighting words and expressions that occur with statistically significant frequency in Woolf's essays compared to the general prose writing of the same period. The reference corpus serves as a baseline against which Woolf's lexical choices are measured.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process involved three main stages. First, authoritative editions of Woolf's essays were identified and sourced from reliable digital archives. Second, the texts were digitised and standardised in plain text format. Third, the finalised texts were compiled into a single structured corpus suitable for computational analysis. Throughout the process, attention was given to textual accuracy and consistency to ensure the validity of subsequent analysis.

Analytical Tools

The analysis employs a combination of corpus linguistic software and AI-assisted tools. Corpus analysis software such as AntConc was used for frequency lists, concordance lines, keyword analysis, and collocation extraction. AI-assisted natural language processing tools were employed for part-of-speech tagging, lemmatisation, and semantic clustering. These tools enable large-scale annotation and pattern detection while reducing manual analytical bias.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework focuses on two main dimensions: lexical choice and discursive style. Lexical choice analysis examines word frequency, keyword lists, type-token ratio, and lexical density. Special attention is given to evaluative adjectives, abstract nouns, cognitive verbs, and modal expressions, as these features are central to Woolf's argumentative and reflective prose style. Discursive style analysis investigates how lexical patterns function within discourse. This includes the examination of stance markers, cohesive devices, rhetorical questions, and narrative voice. Concordance analysis is used to interpret how recurring lexical items operate within broader discursive structures.

Role of AI in the Analysis

Artificial intelligence supports the corpus analysis by automating linguistic annotation and identifying complex patterns across large text sets. AI tools assist in grouping semantically related lexical items, detecting stylistic clusters, and enhancing the accuracy of part-of-speech tagging. While AI facilitates data processing, interpretive decisions remain grounded in linguistic theory and stylistic analysis to ensure scholarly rigour.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is ensured through the use of established corpus tools and replicable

analytical procedures. The same settings and parameters were applied consistently across the dataset. Validity is strengthened by triangulating quantitative findings with qualitative interpretation and by comparing Woolf's essays against a reference corpus. Manual checks were conducted on selected outputs to confirm the accuracy of automated annotations.

Ethical Considerations

The study relies exclusively on published literary texts that are in the public domain or used for academic research purposes. No human participants were involved. All sources are acknowledged following APA 7th edition guidelines, and the research adheres to ethical standards for academic integrity and scholarly transparency.

Data Analysis

Figure 1

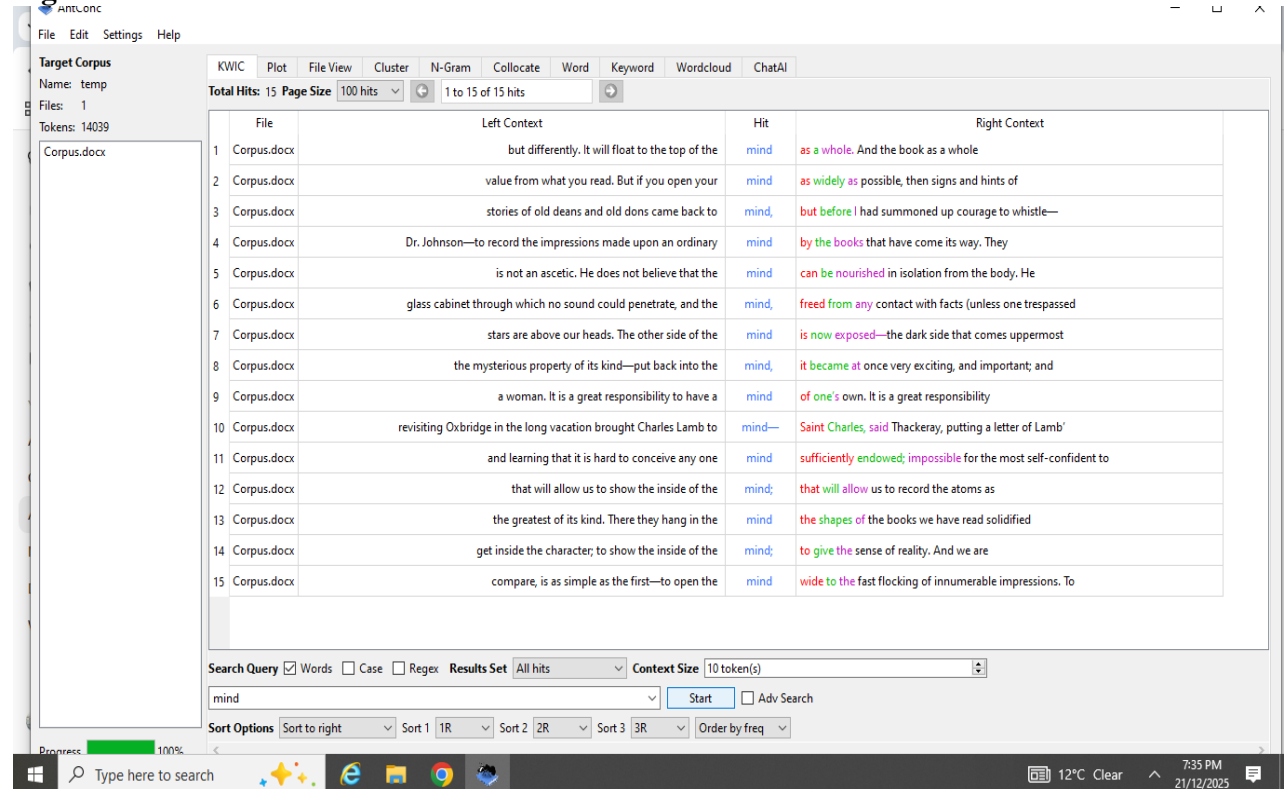


Image 1 (keyword: *mind*)

The first image shows KWIC concordance lines for the noun *mind*, which appears repeatedly across the essay corpus and functions as a core lexical item. In terms of lexical choice, the frequent use of this abstract noun highlights Woolf's preference for cognitively oriented vocabulary associated with thought, perception, and intellectual activity. The surrounding contexts, such as references to wholeness, nourishment, exposure, and reality, indicate that the *mind* is rarely used in isolation and is instead embedded in reflective and evaluative clauses. From a discursive perspective, this pattern suggests that Woolf uses the *mind* to frame arguments about reading, creativity, and experience, contributing to a meditative and analytical essay style rather than a descriptive or narrative one.

Figure 2

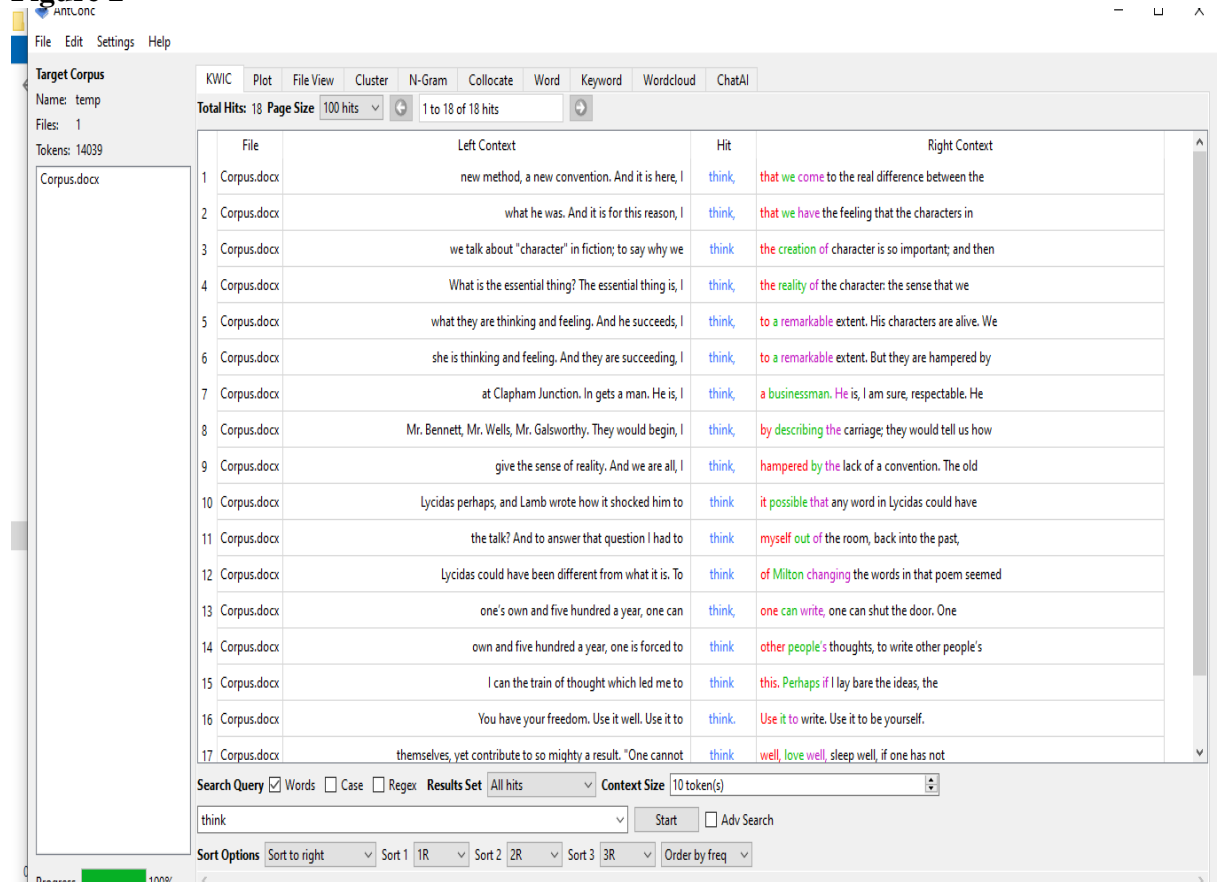
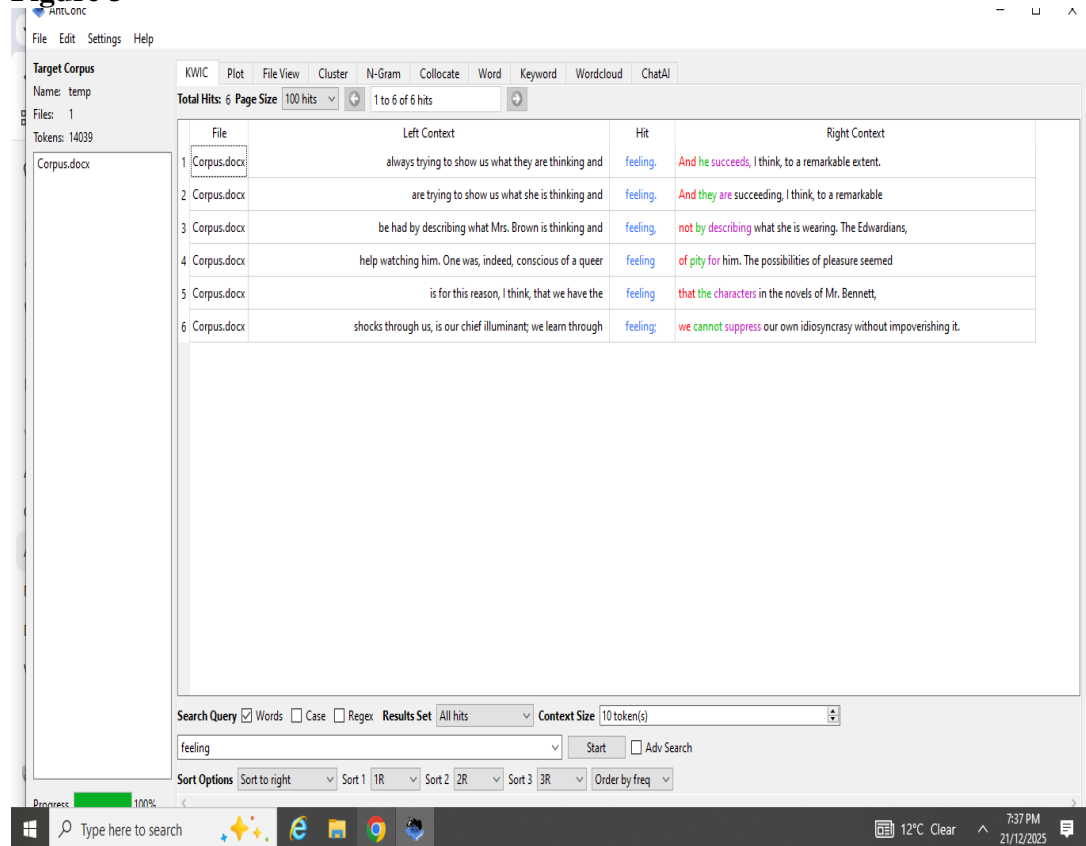


Image 2 (keyword: *think*)

The second image presents concordance lines for the verb *think*, revealing Woolf's extensive use of mental process verbs. Lexically, the repetition of *think* confirms the dominance of cognition-related verbs in her essays, reinforcing the centrality of reflection and judgment in her prose. Discursively, the verb often appears in first-person or generalised constructions, such as "I think" or "one can think," which function as stance markers. These constructions make Woolf's argumentative style explicit and dialogic, allowing readers to follow her reasoning as it unfolds and emphasising an exploratory rather than authoritative mode of argumentation.

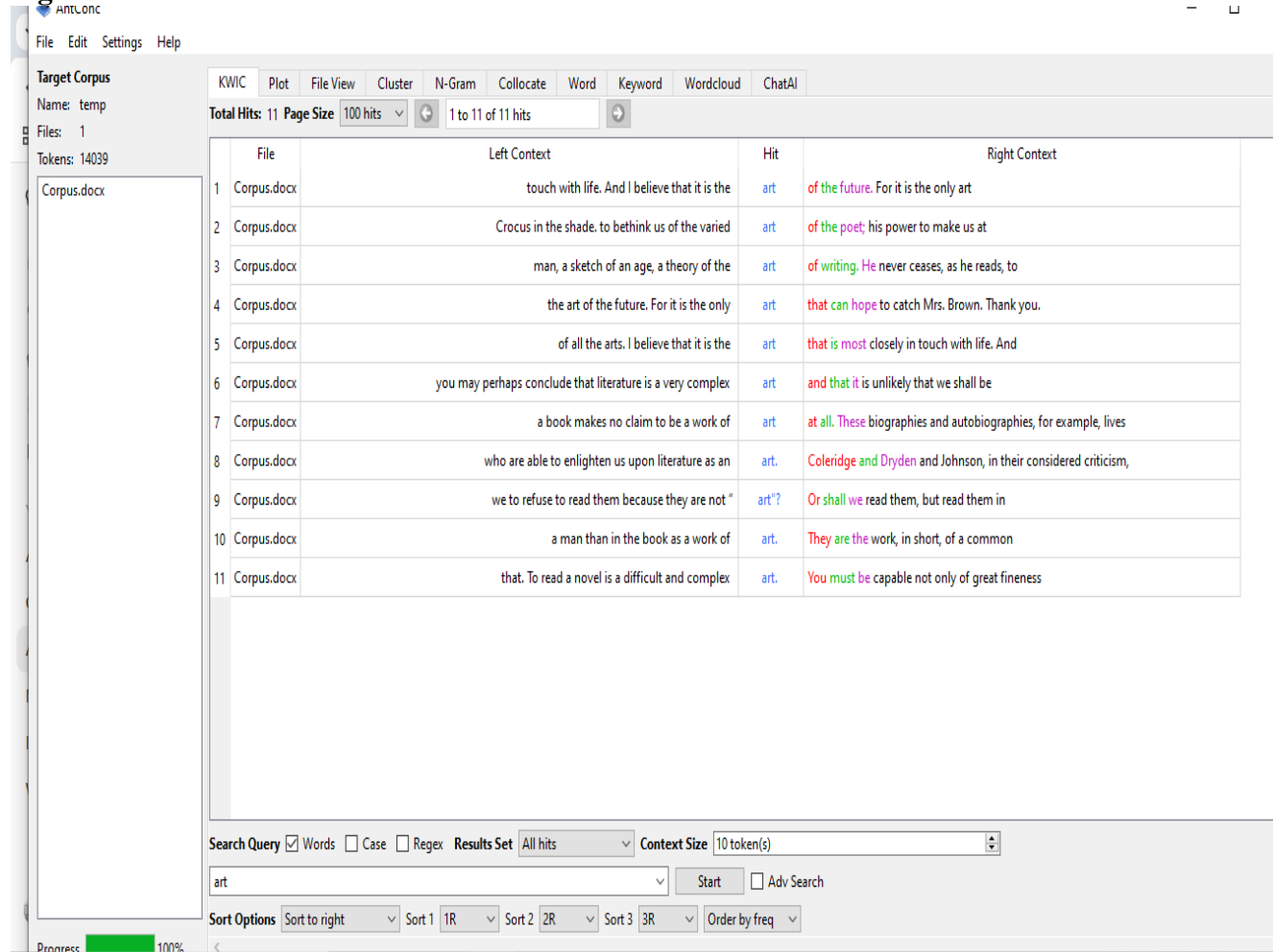
Figure 3



KWIC analysis for the keyword *feeling*

This image presents concordance lines for the noun *feeling*, which appears as a salient lexical item closely aligned with Woolf's modernist concern with inner experience. From the perspective of lexical choice, the repeated use of *feeling* alongside verbs such as *thinking* and evaluative phrases like "*of pity*," "*chief illuminant*," and "*cannot suppress*" shows Woolf's preference for affective and psychological vocabulary rather than material description. The word frequently co-occurs with references to characters and readers, indicating that emotion is treated as central to literary meaning and interpretation. Discursively, *feeling* functions as a key argumentative tool through which Woolf critiques traditional fiction, contrasting emotional and psychological depth with surface description. Its placement within explanatory and evaluative clauses contributes to a reflective, persuasive essay style, reinforcing how Woolf constructs discourse around subjective experience and emotional insight rather than external realism.

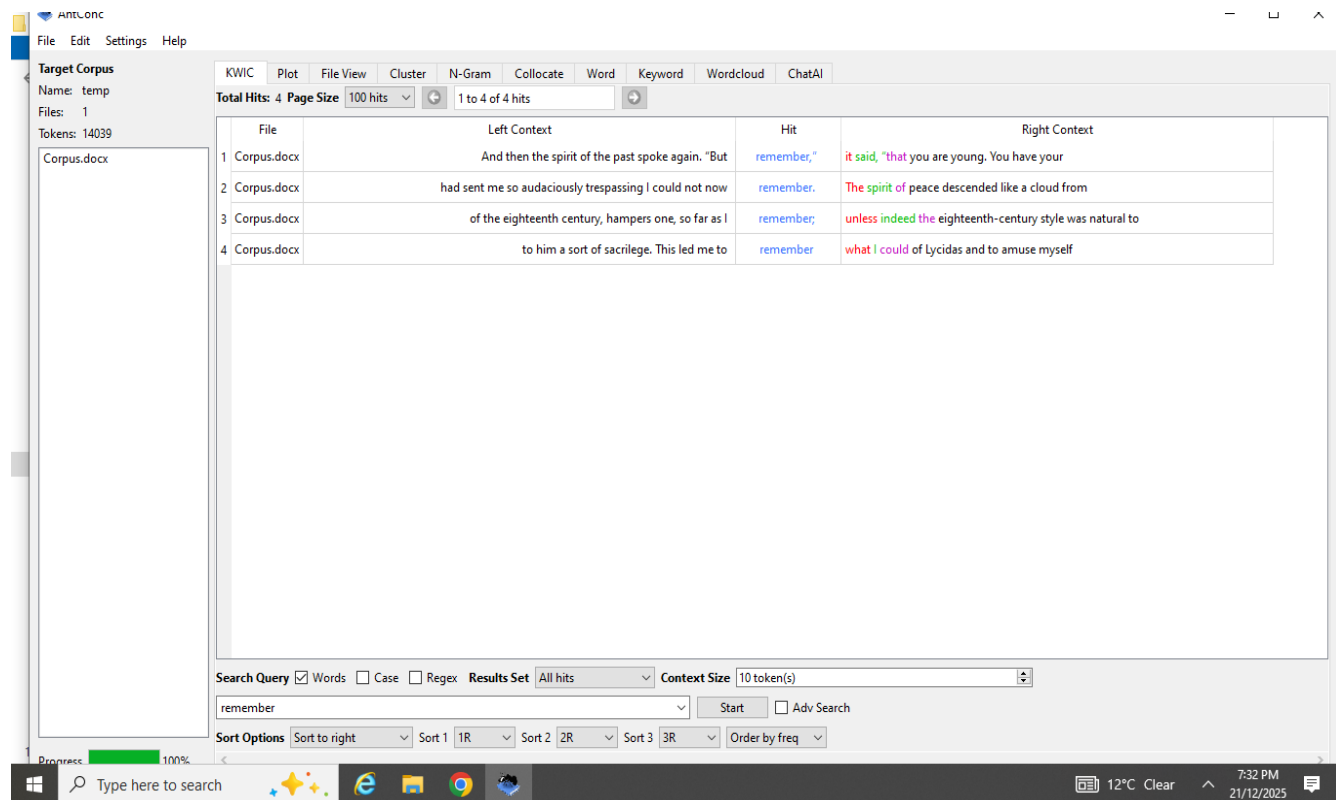
Figure 4



\KWIC analysis for the keyword *art*

These images present concordance lines for the noun *art*, highlighting its importance as a thematic and lexical keyword in Virginia Woolf's essays. From the perspective of lexical choice, *art* frequently appears in evaluative and abstract contexts such as "*art of the future*," "*art of writing*," and "*a work of art*," indicating Woolf's sustained engagement with literature as a creative and intellectual practice. The repeated collocation of *art* with nouns like *future*, *poet*, and *writing* reflects her modernist concern with innovation and the evolving role of literature. Discursively, *art* functions as a central organising concept through which Woolf structures her arguments about reading, criticism, and literary value. Its recurrence across explanatory and judgment-oriented clauses contributes to a persuasive and reflective discourse style, reinforcing how Woolf uses lexical repetition to develop cohesive and thematically focused essays.

Figure 5



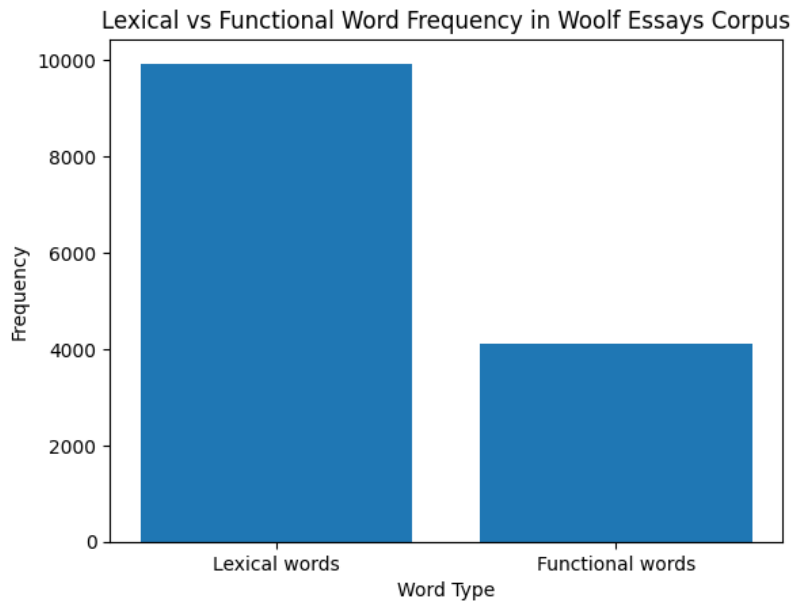
Analysis of “remember” (KWIC image)

The KWIC concordance for *remember* shows that memory in Woolf’s essay functions as a reflective and intertextual tool rather than simple recollection. The word repeatedly appears in contexts that link the present moment with literary, cultural, and historical pasts, such as references to the eighteenth century and earlier writers like Milton. This pattern suggests that remembering is an active intellectual process through which Woolf evaluates tradition, questions inherited styles, and measures modern writing against earlier conventions. Memory becomes a means of critical self-positioning, allowing the writer to engage with the past while also asserting the necessity of stylistic and intellectual change.

Lexical and Functional Word Frequency Analysis

To examine lexical choice and discursive style in Virginia Woolf’s essays, the corpus was analysed by categorising words into **lexical words** (content-bearing items such as nouns, main verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) and **functional words** (grammatical items such as articles, prepositions, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs). The analysis shows a noticeably higher frequency of lexical words than functional words in the corpus.

The predominance of lexical items indicates Woolf’s stylistic preference for **meaning-rich and abstract vocabulary**, which aligns with her modernist emphasis on psychological depth, reflection, and conceptual exploration. Lexical density suggests that the essays focus less on structural simplicity and more on conveying complex ideas related to mind, art, memory, and perception. Functional words, while essential for grammatical cohesion, occur less frequently, reinforcing the idea that Woolf’s prose prioritises semantic content over syntactic economy.



The diagram illustrates the frequency distribution of **lexical words** and **functional words** in the selected corpus of Virginia Woolf's essays. It clearly shows that lexical words occur far more frequently than functional words, indicating a high level of lexical density in the corpus. Lexical words, which include nouns, main verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, carry the core semantic content of a text. Their dominance suggests that Woolf's essays rely heavily on meaning-rich vocabulary to convey abstract ideas, critical reflection, and psychological insight.

In contrast, functional words such as articles, prepositions, and conjunctions appear less frequently and mainly serve grammatical and structural purposes. The relatively lower proportion of functional items indicates that Woolf's prose is not driven by syntactic simplicity but by conceptual depth. This distribution supports the view that her essayistic style prioritises intellectual engagement, subjective experience, and thematic exploration over narrative action. Overall, the diagram provides quantitative evidence that Woolf's discursive style is cognitively and ideologically dense, aligning with modernist concerns with consciousness, art, and inner life.

Discursive Practice

Discursive practice in Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown

In *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, Woolf constructs a discursive practice that is argumentative, reflective, and evaluative, unfolding through a sustained dialogue with literary tradition and contemporary novelistic methods. The discourse moves between anecdote, critical commentary, and illustrative examples, allowing Woolf to position herself both as a participant in and a critic of modern fiction. She repeatedly frames her claims through first-person reflection and rhetorical questioning, which creates a provisional, exploratory mode rather than an authoritative or didactic one. By quoting and responding to figures such as Arnold Bennett, Forster, and Lawrence, Woolf embeds her argument within an intertextual critical conversation, using contrast and comparison as key discursive strategies. The essay's discourse privileges inner consciousness over external description, and this preference is reinforced linguistically through repeated references to thinking, feeling, and perceiving. Overall, the discursive practice foregrounds interpretation and inquiry, guiding readers to reassess conventional ideas of character by actively engaging them in Woolf's process of critical reasoning rather than presenting fixed conclusions.

Discursive practice in *The Common Reader* (Preface)

In the preface to *The Common Reader*, Woolf adopts a discursive practice that is inclusive, reflective, and deliberately anti-authoritarian. The discourse is structured around the figure of the “common reader,” whom Woolf constructs through evaluative description and contrast with scholars and professional critics. Rather than asserting critical dominance, she positions the speaking voice as modest, experiential, and provisional, using first-person narration to align herself with ordinary readers. The essay proceeds through reflection, illustration, and gentle qualification, privileging personal response over systematic judgment. This discursive mode resists rigid critical frameworks and instead legitimises subjective impression, pleasure, and instinct as valid forms of engagement with literature. By foregrounding reading as an everyday, embodied, and emotionally informed practice, Woolf creates a discourse that democratises literary interpretation and frames criticism as an evolving, reader-centred activity rather than an institutional authority.

Discursive practice in *How Should One Read a Book?*

In *How Should One Read a Book?*, Woolf’s discursive practice is exploratory and dialogic, unfolding through advice that continually undermines its own prescriptive force. The essay is organised around rhetorical questions, hypothetical scenarios, and extended analogies, which allow Woolf to guide readers while simultaneously affirming their independence. The discourse moves fluidly between instruction and reflection, encouraging readers to participate actively in the act of meaning-making rather than passively receiving rules. Woolf frequently shifts perspective, moving from immediate sensory experience to abstract judgment, mirroring the mental processes involved in reading itself. Comparison, evaluation, and imaginative immersion function as central discursive strategies, reinforcing reading as a dynamic interaction between text and mind. Overall, the essay constructs a discursive space where authority is shared, judgment is delayed and reflective, and literary value emerges through sustained engagement rather than fixed standards.

Discursive practice in *The Death of the Moth*

In *The Death of the Moth*, Woolf’s discursive practice is contemplative and philosophical, unfolding through close observation that gradually deepens into existential reflection. The discourse begins with a detailed sensory description of the natural scene and the moth’s movements, but it does not remain purely descriptive. Instead, observation becomes a trigger for meditation on life, vitality, and mortality. Woolf structures the essay through a slow shift from external attention to inward thought, allowing meaning to emerge organically rather than through argument or explanation. The narrative voice remains restrained and reflective, avoiding overt moralising while guiding the reader toward an awareness of impersonal forces such as life and death. Discursively, the essay relies on analogy and symbolic perception, transforming a minor incident into a universal reflection. The movement of the prose mirrors the moth’s struggle, creating a discourse that is quiet, solemn, and deeply inward, where philosophical insight arises from attentive witnessing rather than explicit critical commentary.

Discursive Practice in *A Room of One's Own* (Chapter 1)

In the opening chapter of *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf employs a discursive practice that is exploratory, digressive, and strategically provisional. Rather than presenting a linear argument, the discourse develops through narrated thought, fictionalised scenes, and self-conscious reflection on the difficulty of reaching conclusions. Woolf openly foregrounds the act of thinking itself, drawing attention to hesitation, interruption, and the influence of social and institutional constraints on intellectual freedom. The use of a shifting narrative persona allows her to question authority while maintaining critical distance, blending essayistic argument with imaginative storytelling. Discursively, the text moves between personal experience and broader social critique, using irony, analogy, and symbolic incidents to expose structural inequalities. The refusal to offer fixed answers becomes a deliberate strategy, positioning the reader as an active participant in interpretation. Overall, the discourse constructs knowledge as a process shaped by context, material conditions, and perspective, rather than as a set of final truths.

Findings

The combined analysis of keyword frequency and discursive practice across the selected essays by Virginia Woolf reveals a clear alignment between her lexical choices and her distinctive discursive style. The frequency analysis shows a strong predominance of lexical words over functional words, indicating a high level of lexical density in the corpus. This pattern reflects Woolf's preference for meaning-bearing vocabulary, particularly abstract nouns and cognitive verbs related to mind, thought, feeling, life, art, and character. Such lexical choices support a discourse that prioritises conceptual exploration and psychological depth rather than narrative action or structural simplicity.

Keyword and KWIC analyses further demonstrate that recurrent terms such as *mind*, *art*, *life*, *character*, and *reading* function as organising nodes within the discourse. These keywords are not used in isolation but appear in reflective and evaluative contexts, often embedded within clauses that express uncertainty, questioning, or judgment. Their repetition contributes to thematic cohesion while also reinforcing an essayistic style that develops ideas through revisiting and reworking key concepts rather than resolving them conclusively. The frequency patterns thus confirm that lexical repetition in Woolf's essays serves a discursive purpose, guiding readers through sustained intellectual inquiry.

The discursive practice analysis shows that Woolf consistently constructs meaning through inward movement and reflective narration. Across essays such as *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, *The Common Reader*, *The Death of the Moth*, and *A Room of One's Own*, discourse unfolds through observation, personal experience, and gradual meditation rather than direct argumentation. Woolf frequently employs first-person narration, rhetorical questioning, and hypothetical scenarios, which create a dialogic and participatory mode of discourse. This strategy positions the reader as an active interpreter, sharing responsibility in the construction of meaning.

Another key finding is the deliberate decentralisation of critical authority. Woolf's discursive practice resists prescriptive or institutional modes of criticism and instead validates subjective response, instinct, and individual judgment. This is evident in her treatment of reading, character, and artistic value, where she repeatedly challenges fixed standards and emphasises openness, freedom, and multiplicity of interpretation.

Lexical choices reinforce this stance through evaluative adjectives and modal expressions that signal tentativeness rather than certainty.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Woolf's discursive style is inseparable from her lexical patterns. High lexical density, recurring cognitive keywords, and reflective structures collectively construct a modernist discourse centred on consciousness and process. The integration of quantitative keyword frequency analysis with qualitative discursive analysis confirms that Woolf's essays achieve coherence and intellectual depth by aligning language choice with a mode of thinking that privileges exploration over conclusion and experience over authority.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Virginia Woolf's essays construct a discursive style that is fundamentally exploratory, reflective, and modernist in orientation. Rather than advancing arguments through formal logic or critical certainty, Woolf develops meaning through the movement of thought itself, using observation, analogy, and introspection as primary discursive strategies. Her essays foreground the inner life, emphasising consciousness, perception, and subjective experience as legitimate foundations for literary and cultural critique. The findings confirm that Woolf's discursive practice challenges traditional critical authority and replaces it with a reader-centred, process-oriented mode of engagement. By aligning form with thought, her essays not only discuss modernity, art, and identity but also enact them linguistically. Overall, Woolf's discursive style reflects a deliberate reimagining of essay writing, one that transforms personal reflection into a powerful medium for intellectual inquiry and cultural intervention.

References

- Abdulqader, H. J., Abdullah, I. H., & Rashid, B. M. (2020). Corpus stylistics: Bridging quantitative and qualitative approaches in literary analysis. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 16(2), 789–803.
- Ammara, S., & Anjum, R. (2020). A corpus-based stylistic analysis of Virginia Woolf's *Kew Gardens*. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(4), 212–221. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v10n4p212>
- Aydinguler, S. (2019). A corpus-based critical discourse analysis of sexist language in Virginia Woolf and Arnold Bennett. *Gender and Language*, 13(3), 341–360. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.37289>
- Balossi, G. (2014). *A corpus linguistic approach to literary language and characterisation: Virginia Woolf's The Waves*. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/scl.64>
- Biber, D. (2011). Corpus linguistics and the study of literature: Back to the future? *Scientific Study of Literature*, 1(1), 15–23. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ssol.1.1.02bib>
- Davis, M., & Brown, L. (2024). Quantitative stylistics and literary interpretation: Corpus methods in modern prose studies. *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, 18(1), 1–19.
- Elkins, K. (2024). Artificial intelligence and stylistic analysis: New directions in corpus research. *Journal of Digital Humanities*, 9(2), 45–61.
- Fischer-Starcke, B. (2010). *Corpus linguistics in literary analysis: Jane Austen and her contemporaries*. Continuum.
- Franklin, M. (2010). Corpus linguistics and literary studies. In M. McCarthy & A.

- O'Keeffe (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of corpus linguistics* (pp. 484–496). Routledge.
- Haleem, A., Javaid, M., Qadri, M. A., & Suman, R. (2024). A corpus-based comparison of AI-generated and human academic writing. *AI & Society*, 39(1), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-023-01694-7>
- Ibrahim, M. A. (2022). Semantic domains and thematic patterns in Dickens' novels: A corpus stylistic study. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 51(2), 97–115. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jls-2022-2006>
- Jacobs, A. M., & Kinder, A. (2022). Computational approaches to literariness, creativity, and emotion in literary texts. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 812046. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.812046>
- Liang, Y., & Chen, S. (2023). A corpus-based stylistic comparison of *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Language and Literature*, 32(1), 23–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09639470221130544>
- Mahlberg, M. (2013). *Corpus stylistics and Dickens's fiction*. Routledge.
- Ryu, S., Kim, Y., & Graesser, A. C. (2023). A corpus stylistic analysis of James Joyce's fiction and its Korean translations. *Corpora*, 18(2), 255–279. <https://doi.org/10.3366/cor.2023.0274>
- Semino, E., & Short, M. (2004). *Corpus stylistics: Speech, writing and thought presentation in a corpus of English writing*. Routledge.
- Shakir Hussein, A., & Abdul-Shareef Kadhim, S. (2020). Lexical density and stylistic complexity in Virginia Woolf's novels: A corpus-based study. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 3(10), 45–54.
- Shakir Hussein, A., & Kadhim, S. A. (2025). Lexical profiling of modernist fiction: A corpus stylistic study of Virginia Woolf. *Journal of Modern Literature and Language Studies*, 7(1), 1–18.
- Suman Khan, M., & Saqlain Hassan, M. (2025). Evaluating AI-generated essays through corpus linguistic measures. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 65, 101301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2024.101301>
- Woolf, V. (1925). *The common reader*. Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own*. Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, V. (1942). *The death of the moth and other essays*. Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, V. (1919/1925). Modern fiction. In *The Common Reader*. Hogarth Press.