Structural analysis of the prosaic stroph as a complex syntactic construction

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates major theoretical perspectives on the *prosaic stroph* (or *prosaic stanza*) as a complex syntactic construction that operates at the intersection of sentence grammar and discourse structure. Scholars have long debated how extended syntactic units such as the *period*, *paragraph-sentence*, and *stroph* contribute to textual cohesion and rhythm in prose. The review traces the evolution of these concepts from classical rhetoric to modern linguistics, highlighting the structural, semantic, and functional dimensions of the prosaic stroph. Attention is given to its relationship with the *period*, mechanisms of cohesion, rhythm, and its communicative role in literary and academic discourse. The synthesis underscores the prosaic stroph as an essential unit for understanding stylistic and cognitive organization in language.

Keywords:	prosaic stroph, complex syntactic construction, period, cohesion, rhythm, discourse structure, text linguistics

The study of complex syntactic constructions has traditionally occupied a central role in both theoretical and applied linguistics. From the earliest rhetorical theories to contemporary discourse studies, researchers have sought to understand how extended syntactic structures generate meaning, rhythm, and stylistic effect. Among these constructions, the *prosaic stroph* stands as one of the least examined yet structurally sophisticated units.

The *prosaic stroph*—also called the *prosaic stanza*—is a sequence of sentences or clauses that form a semantically and rhythmically unified whole (Galperin, 1981; Kovtunova, 2012). It represents a level of syntactic organization beyond the sentence but below the paragraph. Scholars recognize it as an intermediary construct that links syntactic, semantic, and stylistic dimensions of text (Vinogradov, 1980).

While the concept originated in classical and Slavic stylistic traditions, parallels exist in Western linguistic frameworks under terms such as *syntactic period*, *macro-sentence*, or *discourse segment* (Chafe, 1994; Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Despite terminological differences, these units share the same structural essence: a grouping of clauses or sentences bound by cohesive devices and rhythmic patterns that express a unified idea.

This review consolidates research on the prosaic stroph's structural, semantic, and functional characteristics. It also situates the concept within broader syntactic theories, including *period construction*, *super-syntax*, and *text linguistics*. The goal is to clarify how linguists conceptualize the stroph as a complex syntactic formation and how this understanding contributes to our

interpretation of prose rhythm and discourse organization.

The roots of the prosaic stroph can be traced back to classical rhetoric, where the *period* was central to oratorical composition. Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian defined the *periodos* as a rhythmically complete sentence consisting of several clauses forming a harmonious whole (Kennedy, 2007). Cicero's *De Oratore* emphasized that a good period achieves both rhythm and sense unity — "a rounded whole, complete in rhythm and thought."

In these traditions, syntax was inseparable from rhythm and cadence. The period served not merely grammatical but also aesthetic purposes, establishing a balanced flow in speech. Later scholars (Curtius, 1948; Lausberg, 1998) extended this idea to written prose, noting that rhetorical balance created coherence and emphasis.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the focus of linguistics shifted from rhetorical composition to structural analysis. The concept of the *period* evolved into a syntactic unit with complex internal structure. Scholars such as Vinogradov (1980) and Peshkovsky (1956) in the Russian linguistic tradition proposed that extended syntactic constructions could express complex logical relations and emotional movement within prose.

Western linguistics, represented by Jespersen (1924) and later Halliday (1985), also acknowledged *macro-syntactic structures* — sequences of clauses unified by cohesion and intonation. Halliday's *Systemic Functional Linguistics* emphasized that discourse cohesion relies on grammatical and lexical ties beyond sentence boundaries, echoing earlier rhetorical observations (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

The term *prosaic stroph* appeared primarily in Slavic linguistics, particularly in stylistic studies of prose rhythm and cohesion. Kovtunova (2012) and Galperin (1981) defined it as a syntactic and stylistic unit larger than a sentence but smaller than a paragraph — a cluster of sentences connected by rhythm, tone, and meaning.

Vinogradov (1980) viewed it as a reflection of the author's syntactic thinking, a manifestation of the flow of thought that determines textual rhythm. The stroph often corresponds to thematic segments, functioning as a bridge between grammar and narrative structure.

In English stylistics, a similar concept exists implicitly in studies of syntactic rhythm and paragraph organization (Crystal, 2008; Sinclair, 1991). Although not labeled "prosaic stroph," these studies recognize extended syntactic clusters governed by rhythm and cohesion.

Traditional grammar limits syntactic description to the sentence. However, text linguistics and discourse analysis argue that syntax extends to the supra-sentential level (van Dijk, 1997). The prosaic stroph embodies this principle: it is formed through the syntactic linkage of clauses and sentences via subordination, coordination, and referential devices.

Chafe (1994) introduced the notion of *discourse units*, observing that spontaneous speech and writing consist of thought packages reflecting cognitive segmentation. Similarly, Sinclair (1991) described *units of meaning* that function as recurrent syntactic blocks. Both perspectives align with the concept of the prosaic stroph as a macro-unit of thought.

According to Kovtunova (2012), the prosaic stroph has a hierarchical syntax, consisting of a main nucleus (central proposition) surrounded by dependent and modifying clauses. This mirrors the compositional principle of the *period*, where parts build toward a culmination. Yet, unlike the period, the stroph allows asymmetry and openness, reflecting natural discourse flow.

Let's discuss above mentioned ideas with some examples:

*"She felt herself in harmony with the sea, the waves rising and falling like the rhythm of her thoughts; and though she knew the day would end, she wished it might continue in its golden stillness, with light and silence perfectly mingled." (*Virginia Woolf – *To the Lighthouse*)

This passage represents a prototypical prosaic stroph, where several clauses are bound into a semantically unified, rhythmically balanced unit. The structure unfolds as follows: *"She felt herself in harmony with the sea"* — is a main clause that establishes the core proposition. "the waves rising and falling like the rhythm of

her thoughts" — is dependent clause that express metaphorical expansion through parallel imagery. "and though she knew the day would end" — is causal extension that introduces concessive relation. "she wished it might continue in its golden stillness, with light and silence perfectly mingled" — closure that completes the rhythmic and semantic circle.

From a syntactic standpoint, this construction operates beyond the sentence level: semicolons and conjunctions create a rhythmic continuity that mirrors the waves described in the text. The stroph thus integrates grammatical cohesion (through conjunctions) and semantic rhythm (through parallelism and metaphor).

According to Kovtunova (2012), this exemplifies the "syntactic unity of rhythm and meaning," where clause boundaries coincide with emotional gradation. The stroph here is not strictly periodic (it lacks symmetrical closure), yet it achieves coherence through rhythmic progression — an essential feature distinguishing it from the classical *period*.

"Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city." (*Charles Dickens – Bleak House*)

This excerpt demonstrates how repetition and parallel syntactic structures establish the unity of a *prosaic stroph*. The passage consists of multiple clauses and nominal fragments linked by anaphora ("Fog everywhere. Fog up the river... Fog down the river..."). The repeated word *fog* functions as a rhythmic and semantic anchor. Each clause begins with *Fog + prepositional phrase + relative clause*, producing structural rhythm. The entire stroph conveys the pervasiveness of fog, symbolically extending to moral and social obscurity.

Vinogradov (1980) would classify this as a semantic-stylistic stroph — where the rhythm of syntax reflects thematic meaning. Unlike the classical *period*, this stroph achieves unity through lexical recurrence rather than syntactic closure. Its rhythm is open-ended and accumulative, inviting the reader into an expanding image rather than leading to a fixed rhetorical conclusion.

"A mass of Latin words falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outline and covering up all the details. The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink." (George Orwell – *Politics and the English Language*)

This example illustrates how a series of syntactically and semantically related sentences can form a unified *prosaic stroph*. Together, these sentences construct a macro-syntactic block that functions as one communicative whole — what Chafe (1994) calls a *discourse unit* or *thought package*. The cohesion arises through logical progression (cause–effect) and metaphorical consistency, not through overt grammatical connection.

This exemplifies the *prosaic stroph's supra-sentential nature*: though composed of distinct sentences, it possesses rhythmic and semantic unity equivalent to a single extended period. The stroph thus demonstrates Halliday and Hasan's (1976) notion of *cohesion in English* through lexical, causal, and referential ties that transcend sentence boundaries.

The structural analysis of the prosaic stroph reveals it as a vital linguistic phenomenon that operates at the intersection of syntax, semantics, and stylistics. It serves as a bridge between the sentence and the paragraph, demonstrating that meaning in prose often unfolds through rhythmically and semantically unified clusters rather than isolated sentences. The reviewed linguistic theories—from classical rhetoric to contemporary text linguistics—confirm that the prosaic stroph continues the tradition of the period, yet expands it to accommodate the dynamics of modern prose thought and expression.

As the examples from Woolf, Dickens, and Orwell illustrate, the prosaic stroph functions as a macro-syntactic unit characterized by cohesion, gradation, and rhythmic balance. Its formation relies on a network of linguistic mechanisms such as conjunction, parallelism, anaphora, and lexical recurrence, which together create a coherent and emotionally expressive text block. This construction not

only structures discourse but also mirrors the author's cognitive and stylistic intent.

Moreover, the study highlights that the prosaic stroph embodies the rhythm of thought—a syntactic reflection of human cognitive sequencing. Its openness, asymmetry, and flexibility distinguish it from the rigid classical period and make it particularly suited to representing the fluidity of modern narrative consciousness. Therefore, understanding the stroph's structure enhances both linguistic theory and literary stylistics, allowing for deeper insight into how language organizes meaning at higher levels of discourse.

In conclusion, the prosaic stroph stands as an essential concept for modern linguistics, integrating syntactic form, semantic coherence, and rhythmic expressiveness. Further research—especially through corpus-based and cognitive approaches—should aim to systematize its typology and explore its cross-linguistic realizations in English, Uzbek, and other languages, thereby deepening our understanding of complex syntactic constructions and their communicative potential.

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