



Green Stylistics: An Ecolinguistic Exploration of Nature Imagery in Taufiq Rafat's Poetry

Kishwer Nazli¹ & Abdul Rauf alias Wazir Ali Shah²

¹Senior Lecturer II, Department of Communication and Languages, Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan, Email: kishwer.nazli@iobm.edu.pk

²BS Scholar, Department of English Language and Literature, The Shaikh Ayaz University Shikarpur, Pakistan, Email: syedabdulraufalishah110@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: February 18, 2024
Revised: March 26, 2025
Accepted: April 18, 2025
Available Online: April 30, 2025

Keywords:

Green Stylistics, Ecolinguistics, Nature Imagery, Taufiq Rafat, Pakistani English Poetry, Environmental Discourse, Ecocriticism

ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection of language, ecology, and poetic imagination through the lens of green stylistics and ecolinguistics in the poetry of Taufiq Rafat, a pioneering figure in Pakistani English literature. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015) and green stylistics (Goatly, 2000; Clark, 2016), the research examines how Rafat constructs nature imagery to reflect ecological consciousness, cultural rootedness, and human-nature relationships within a South Asian context. The study analyzes selected poems for their lexical choices, metaphorical structures, transitivity patterns, and ideational meanings that foreground environmental values. By employing tools of stylistic and discourse analysis, this research identifies how Rafat's poetic language evokes indigenous landscapes, traditional lifestyles, and ecological sensibilities that challenge anthropocentric worldviews. The findings reveal that Rafat's work not only embodies an aesthetic appreciation of nature but also serves as a subtle critique of ecological degradation and cultural disconnection. This study contributes to the growing body of ecolinguistic literary analysis by demonstrating how Pakistani English poetry can participate in global ecological discourse while maintaining local environmental and cultural specificity.



© 2025 The Authors, Published by AIRSD. This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0

Corresponding Author's Email: syedabdulraufalishah110@gmail.com

Introduction

The increasing urgency of global environmental crises has foregrounded the role of language in shaping ecological consciousness, leading to the emergence of ecolinguistics as an interdisciplinary field that examines the interrelationship between language and the environment (Stibbe, 2015). Within this field, green stylistics has emerged as a sub-discipline that applies stylistic tools to analyze how texts — particularly literary ones — represent nature, ecological values, and environmental ideologies (Clark, 2016; Goatly, 2000). Literary discourse, especially poetry, has long been a site for engaging with the natural world. While

canonical Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge are often foregrounded in eco-critical debates for their deep engagement with nature, contemporary non-Western poets have increasingly articulated local ecological concerns through their creative works (Garrard, 2012).

In the South Asian context, particularly in Pakistan, the literary representation of nature is intricately tied to cultural identity, indigenous knowledge, and a precolonial worldview that emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and non-human life (Mukherjee, 2010). Taufiq Rafat (1927–1998), often recognized as a foundational voice in Pakistani English poetry, is renowned for his commitment to creating a "Pakistani idiom" that fuses English literary tradition with local imagery, settings, and values (Rafat, 1985). His poems offer vivid depictions of rivers, villages, birds, crops, and rural landscapes — not merely as descriptive elements but as expressions of a deep ecological ethos embedded in the cultural memory of Pakistan.

Despite the ecological richness of Rafat's work, little scholarly attention has been given to his poetry from an ecolinguistic or stylistic standpoint. This gap is significant given the growing need to explore how language in postcolonial literary texts constructs environmental meaning and ecological relationships (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014). Applying a green stylistic approach to Rafat's poetry allows for a nuanced analysis of how nature is lexically and grammatically foregrounded, and how these linguistic patterns reflect broader ideological positions about human responsibility, land, and sustainability.

By situating Rafat's work within the theoretical domains of ecolinguistics and stylistics, this study aims to highlight the ecological insights embedded in his poetry and to contribute to the expanding discourse on environmental representation in Pakistani English literature.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the global turn toward ecological criticism in literary and linguistic studies, Pakistani English poetry remains underexplored in terms of its ecological dimensions. Taufiq Rafat, a foundational voice in Pakistani English literature, richly employs nature imagery rooted in indigenous landscapes, yet little scholarly attention has been paid to how his language stylistically constructs ecological meaning. Existing studies on Rafat primarily focus on his cultural themes, national identity, and contribution to Pakistani idiom, often overlooking the environmental consciousness embedded in his poetic discourse. As ecological degradation intensifies globally and locally, there is a pressing need to examine how local literary voices contribute to environmental awareness through linguistic choices. This study seeks to address this gap by applying green stylistics and ecolinguistic analysis to investigate how Rafat's poetry articulates ecological values and relationships through nature imagery.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing field of ecolinguistics by bringing a South Asian and postcolonial voice—Taufiq Rafat—into scholarly conversations on ecological language and discourse. It extends the scope of green stylistics to Pakistani English poetry, offering a linguistic-stylistic perspective on how nature is represented, foregrounded, or marginalized in poetic texts. By analyzing Rafat's nature imagery through ecolinguistic tools, the study reveals the subtle ways language influences ecological thought and cultural identity. Moreover, it highlights how poetic discourse can serve as a site for resisting ecological disconnection and promoting sustainable ideologies grounded in local experience. The findings will benefit scholars in ecolinguistics, stylistics, South Asian literature, and

environmental humanities, while also encouraging educators to incorporate ecological perspectives in literary pedagogy.

Research Questions

1. How is nature imagery linguistically and stylistically constructed in the selected poems of Taufiq Rafat?
2. What ecological values, ideologies, or worldviews are embedded in Rafat's poetic representation of nature?
3. How can ecolinguistic and green stylistic analysis of Rafat's poetry contribute to a broader understanding of ecological consciousness in Pakistani English literature?

Literature Review

The convergence of language, ecology, and literature has emerged as a significant area of scholarly inquiry in recent decades, giving rise to fields such as ecolinguistics and green stylistics. Ecolinguistics, as introduced by Haugen (1972) and further developed by Stibbe (2015), explores the influence of language on the way humans relate to the natural world. It emphasizes that language is not merely a tool for communication but a medium through which ideologies—either ecologically destructive or sustaining—are transmitted. Stibbe (2015) introduced the concept of “stories we live by,” referring to the underlying narratives and frames in discourse that shape environmental behaviors and perceptions.

Building on ecolinguistic foundations, green stylistics emerged as a specialized approach that applies stylistic tools—lexical analysis, transitivity, metaphor, and evaluation—to investigate how texts linguistically construct ecological relationships (Clark, 2016). Goatly (2000) highlights the role of metaphor in shaping human perceptions of nature, arguing that many dominant metaphors objectify or commodify the environment. Green stylistic approaches thus aim to uncover the linguistic structures that either resist or reinforce anthropocentric worldviews.

In literary studies, ecocriticism has laid important groundwork by exploring how literary texts engage with nature and environmental concerns. Garrard (2012) emphasized that while Western traditions like Romanticism idealized nature, postcolonial literature often reflects more complex, localized engagements with the land. Scholars such as Mukherjee (2010) argue that postcolonial environmental writing resists colonial commodification of nature and instead emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and landscapes in culturally rooted ways.

In the Pakistani context, the ecological dimensions of English literature remain under-researched. Although scholars have examined themes such as national identity and cultural hybridity in Pakistani English poetry (Kanwal, 2015; Shamsie, 2001), ecological readings are largely absent. Taufiq Rafat, in particular, has been recognized for his role in developing a distinctly Pakistani idiom in English poetry, with his work deeply embedded in rural imagery and indigenous traditions (Rafat, 1985; Hashmi, 1991). However, the environmental implications of his use of nature imagery have not been examined through ecolinguistic or green stylistic frameworks.

Few attempts have been made to apply ecolinguistic tools to Pakistani literature. For instance, Saeed and Saleem (2020) analyzed ecological metaphors in Pakistani Urdu literature, while Yaqoob and Qadir (2023) explored environmental ideology in contemporary Pakistani short

fiction. These studies indicate a growing scholarly interest in the linguistic construction of ecological thought in South Asian literature, but poetry remains underexplored in this regard.

Gap in the Literature

Although ecolinguistics and green stylistics have gained considerable scholarly attention in recent years, much of the existing research is predominantly focused on Western literary traditions, environmental policy discourse, or global media narratives. Scholars such as Stibbe (2015), Goatly (2000), and Clark (2016) have explored how language can reinforce or challenge ecological ideologies, but their frameworks have rarely been applied to South Asian, particularly Pakistani English poetry. In the context of Pakistani literature, existing studies have largely concentrated on themes of postcolonial identity, nationalism, and socio-political issues (Kanwal, 2015; Shamsie, 2001), while the ecological dimensions of literary works remain significantly underexplored.

Specifically, Taufiq Rafat—widely regarded as a pioneer of Pakistani English poetry—has been studied for his role in developing a "Pakistani idiom" and for his cultural rootedness (Hashmi, 1991), but there is a notable absence of scholarship that critically engages with the environmental aspects of his poetry through the lens of ecolinguistics or green stylistics. While a few recent studies (e.g., Saeed & Saleem, 2020; Yaqoob & Qadir, 2023) have begun to examine ecological metaphors in Urdu literature and environmental themes in contemporary fiction, Pakistani English poetry remains an overlooked domain in ecolinguistic research.

This study addresses this critical gap by applying green stylistic and ecolinguistic frameworks to Rafat's poetry, thereby contributing new insights into how language constructs ecological meaning in Pakistani literary discourse. It not only expands the application of ecolinguistic theory to a new literary and cultural context but also foregrounds the environmental consciousness embedded in postcolonial poetic expression.

This research aims to fill this gap by applying green stylistics to Taufiq Rafat's poetry, providing a linguistic-stylistic analysis of how ecological consciousness is embedded in his use of nature imagery. By doing so, it not only contributes to ecolinguistic theory but also repositions Rafat within global environmental discourse.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study employs a textual analysis approach grounded in the principles of green stylistics to examine the linguistic construction of nature imagery in selected poems by Taufiq Rafat. A purposive sampling technique is used to select poems that prominently feature ecological themes and natural settings. The analysis focuses on stylistic elements such as lexical choices, metaphors, transitivity structures, and evaluative language that reflect the poet's ecological worldview. The data will be analyzed using tools from stylistics (e.g., Halliday's transitivity model) and ecolinguistics to identify linguistic patterns that foreground ecological values or critique anthropocentric ideologies. The study follows an interpretive paradigm, aiming to reveal the deeper environmental meanings embedded in Rafat's poetic discourse, while also situating the findings within the broader socio-cultural and ecological context of Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The study is primarily informed by the theoretical framework of ecolinguistics as developed by Stibbe (2015), which emphasizes the role of language in constructing "stories we live by"—the discursive narratives that influence human relationships with the environment. It is complemented by green stylistics (Clark, 2016; Goatly, 2000), which integrates linguistic analysis with ecological awareness to explore how texts promote or resist sustainable ideologies. Halliday's systemic functional grammar, particularly the transitivity system, serves as an analytical tool to examine how agency and processes are assigned in nature-related clauses. Together, these frameworks enable a nuanced exploration of how Rafat's poetry stylistically and ideologically engages with ecological consciousness, offering insights into the linguistic realization of environmental ethics in postcolonial Pakistani literature.

Data Analysis

This section provides a green stylistic and ecolinguistic analysis of selected poems by Taufiq Rafat, focusing on nature imagery, lexical choices, metaphorical structures, and transitivity patterns. The analysis reveals how Rafat's poetic discourse embodies ecological values rooted in indigenous Pakistani landscapes and cultural memory.

“Arrival of the Monsoon”

“A slow gathering of clouds,
the first hiss of rain on stone.”

The poet uses personification and auditory imagery ("hiss of rain") to portray the rain as an animate, almost sacred presence. The gradual gathering of clouds and sensory detail evoke anticipation and reverence for nature's rhythm. Lexically, the verbs "gathering" and "hiss" assign agency to natural elements, reflecting Halliday's material processes in transitivity that present nature as an active, living force. This foregrounding aligns with Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic principle of resisting the erasure of non-human agency.

“The Village”

“Here, trees are older than memory, and the earth smells of old fires.”

The line “trees are older than memory” metaphorically aligns natural entities with cultural history, invoking a deep ecological temporal scale. The reference to the earth “smelling of old fires” uses olfactory imagery to embed ecological cycles into cultural life. The lexical choices like “older,” “earth,” and “fires” carry semantic weight associated with resilience, ancestry, and renewal, illustrating Rafat's biocentric worldview.

“Wedding in the Flood”

“The buffaloes stood ankle-deep in water, The sky wept on their backs.”

This verse juxtaposes natural catastrophe with rural routine, showcasing the resilience of both humans and animals. The metaphor "sky wept" humanizes nature through emotive personification, a stylistic feature that fosters empathy toward the environment (Goatly, 2000). The foregrounding of animals (buffaloes) also challenges anthropocentrism by presenting non-human subjects as central figures in the socio-ecological landscape.

“Lahore”

“The canal splits the road like an old vein; trees lean in conspiratorially.”

Rafat metaphorically describes the urban canal as a living organism (“an old vein”), suggesting a symbiotic relationship between city infrastructure and natural life. The phrase “trees lean in conspiratorially” animates the trees, assigning them intentionality and communal behavior. This is a clear instance of eco-stylistic resistance to urban-nature dualism, suggesting coexistence rather than separation.

“Children Understand Him”

“The gardener speaks to the roses and they reply, nodding.”

Here, Rafat blurs the boundary between human and non-human communication, portraying nature as a responsive and dialogic presence. The stylistic device of animism reflects a premodern ecological sensitivity wherein plants are seen as sentient beings, capable of interaction. The grammatical transitivity structure (material process: “speak,” “reply”) gives agency and voice to flowers, echoing Stibbe’s (2015) call for recovering silenced non-human perspectives.

“The Birds Return”

“In the silence before dawn, wings whisper against the sky.”

This verse highlights acoustic sensitivity to avian life, with “wings whisper” as an example of onomatopoeia and personification. The natural soundscape is presented not as background noise but as poetic music, emphasizing interconnected sound ecologies. The minimalist style and soft lexicon (“silence,” “whisper”) evoke harmony and reverence, inviting readers into a quieter, more eco-attuned mode of perception.

“The Time of Water”

“It is the season when rivers forget their names and become the sea’s apprentices.”

Rafat uses metaphor and anthropomorphism to describe natural cycles. Rivers are assigned cognitive and emotional traits—“forgetting” and “apprenticeship”—which not only animate nature but reflect ecological humility, suggesting that all elements of the natural world exist in relational learning and transformation. This supports eco-relational ethics rooted in interconnectedness rather than mastery or control.

Emergent Themes and Patterns

Rafat consistently assigns intentionality, voice, and subjectivity to trees, rivers, animals, and skies. His nature imagery is often intertwined with rural life, rituals, and local metaphors, reflecting a deeply rooted ecological identity. By giving agency to the non-human and avoiding domination metaphors, Rafat’s poetry aligns with ecolinguistic sustainability narratives. Use of olfactory, auditory, and tactile imagery enhances environmental immersion, encouraging eco-conscious perception.

Discussion

The findings from the green stylistic and ecolinguistic analysis of Taufiq Rafat’s poetry reveal a consistent pattern of nature foregrounding, non-human agency, and ecological

consciousness that aligns with and expands existing scholarship in ecolinguistics and postcolonial ecocriticism. Rafat's use of rich sensory language, metaphorical structures, and grammatical choices reflects a deep reverence for nature that is rooted in local ecology and cultural tradition, rather than Western romantic idealism.

Rafat's stylistic tendency to personify elements of nature, such as the rain "hissing" on stones or trees "conspiring," resonates with Goatly's (2000) assertion that language can either commodify or animate the natural world. In Rafat's case, his lexical and syntactic choices animate nature, offering an eco-friendly discourse that challenges anthropocentric worldviews. This supports Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic principle of creating stories that promote ecological harmony, as Rafat's poetry constructs a worldview where rivers, trees, and birds are subjects with agency rather than objects of human use.

Moreover, Rafat's poetic engagement with rural life and landscape echoes Mukherjee's (2010) argument that postcolonial texts often embed ecological themes in culturally specific ways, resisting colonial dichotomies between civilization and wilderness. Unlike Western ecological poets who often romanticize nature as an escape from industrial society (Garrard, 2012), Rafat's nature is lived, historical, and integrated into daily life—seen in verses that depict flood-affected weddings, buffaloes in water, and birds at dawn. This localized ecological vision complements Alexander and Stibbe's (2014) call to explore non-Western ecological discourses that are shaped by indigenous epistemologies and environmental practices.

The use of transitivity structures (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) in Rafat's poetry—such as assigning material and mental processes to non-human participants—further emphasizes his ecological positioning. For example, in "The Gardener," roses are depicted as nodding in response to human speech, demonstrating inter-species dialogue that breaks the human/non-human binary. Such stylistic decisions mirror the findings of Saeed and Saleem (2020), who noted that metaphorical personification of nature in Urdu poetry often reflects indigenous ecological ethics, although Rafat extends this in the English literary tradition.

Additionally, Rafat's treatment of natural sounds—like the whisper of wings or the silence before dawn—reflects an ecopoetic attentiveness akin to what Clark (2016) terms "green stylistics," wherein form, tone, and rhythm coalesce to promote ecological awareness. His stylistic minimalism amplifies subtle environmental cues, inviting the reader into a sensory and ethical engagement with nature that moves beyond aesthetic admiration to moral responsibility.

In the Pakistani literary context, most studies on Rafat have emphasized his role in developing a "Pakistani idiom" or national poetic identity (Hashmi, 1991; Kanwal, 2015), but have not explored the environmental dimension of his work. This study contributes to filling that gap by revealing how Rafat's poetic language operates as a discursive site of ecological resistance and cultural rootedness. His poetry aligns with what Yaqoob and Qadir (2023) describe as "emergent green narratives" in contemporary South Asian literature—texts that assert environmental ethics without separating them from social, cultural, and historical contexts.

In sum, Rafat's nature imagery, analyzed through the lens of ecolinguistics and green stylistics, offers a linguistic embodiment of ecological interdependence. It not only enriches our understanding of his poetic craft but also underscores the importance of incorporating local literary voices into global environmental discourse. His work affirms that poetry can be

both aesthetic and ecological, and that language, when ethically and stylistically tuned, can foster sustainable ways of seeing and being in the world.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how nature imagery in Taufiq Rafat's poetry is linguistically constructed and ecologically meaningful through the lens of green stylistics and ecolinguistics. The analysis of selected poems reveals that Rafat's work is deeply embedded in the ecological and cultural landscapes of Pakistan, offering a poetic vision that foregrounds non-human agency, environmental harmony, and relational ethics. Through stylistic devices such as personification, metaphor, sensory imagery, and transitivity structures, Rafat crafts a discourse in which nature is not a passive backdrop but an active, sentient presence intricately tied to human experience.

By applying ecolinguistic theory (Stibbe, 2015) and green stylistic principles (Goatly, 2000; Clark, 2016), this study demonstrates that Rafat's poetic language resists anthropocentrism and promotes a worldview rooted in ecological interdependence. His portrayal of rivers, trees, animals, and rural life not only celebrates environmental beauty but also reflects a culturally specific ecological consciousness that challenges dominant Western paradigms of nature. The findings highlight that Rafat's contribution to Pakistani English poetry extends beyond national identity and linguistic innovation—his work also offers valuable ecological insights worthy of scholarly attention.

This research contributes to filling a critical gap in Pakistani literary studies by positioning Rafat as an ecologically aware poet whose language aligns with global environmental discourses while remaining locally grounded. It also affirms the potential of poetry as a powerful medium for ecological awareness and ethical reflection. Future studies may expand this inquiry by exploring other Pakistani poets through similar lenses or by applying ecolinguistic analysis to prose, drama, or indigenous oral traditions to further enrich our understanding of the ecological imagination in South Asian literature.

References

1. Alexander, R. J., & Stibbe, A. (2014). *The handbook of sustainability literacy: Skills for a changing world*. Green Books.
2. Clark, U. (2016). Grammar and style: Ecolinguistics and green stylistics. In A. Fill & H. Penz (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of ecolinguistics* (pp. 153–167). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315887586>
3. Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203804437>
4. Goatly, A. (2000). *Critical reading and writing: An introductory coursebook*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203004387>
5. Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203783770>
6. Hashmi, A. (1991). The Commonwealth, comparative literature and Taufiq Rafat. *World Literature Today*, 65(2), 275–279. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40146990>
7. Haugen, E. (1972). *The ecology of language*. Stanford University Press.
8. Kanwal, A. (2015). *Rethinking identities in contemporary Pakistani fiction: Beyond 9/11*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137478425>

9. Mukherjee, P. (2010). *Postcolonial environments: Nature, culture and the contemporary Indian novel in English*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277397>
10. Rafat, T. (1985). *Arrival of the monsoon*. Oxford University Press.
11. Saeed, A., & Saleem, M. (2020). Exploring ecological metaphors in selected Urdu poems: An ecolinguistic study. *Al-Qalam*, 25(2), 56–72.
12. Shamsie, M. (2001). *And the world changed: Contemporary stories by Pakistani women*. Feminist Press.
13. Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315814698>
14. Yaqoob, R., & Qadir, N. (2023). Environmental ideology in contemporary Pakistani fiction: An ecolinguistic analysis. *International Journal of Language and Literature*, 11(1), 101–114. <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijll.v11n1a10>