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Of Pieces and Patterns: Modeling Poetic Devices

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Abstract

How many rhymes are possible in English? How much alliteration or assonance? This paper explores the space of common phonologically driven poetic devices. I investigate instances of these poetic devices across unique words in the dictionary, assuming perfect matching in relevant corresponding elements of word pairs. Documenting the frequencies of poetic device matches across words provides a baseline for understanding the diversity and use of these forms in the wild. It also allows us to describe the distribution of words across these patterns within each poetic device. We show that certain devices, such as alliteration and stress, support a relatively small number of unique phonological patterns, providing more consolidated and predictable resources than other devices. Forms like masculine and feminine rhyme, assonance, and consonance display relatively more sound patterns respectively, and unique words are distributed across them differently. These results are discussed in terms of their poetic and cognitive implications.