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Syntax and Semantics of Existential Motifs in Samuel Beckett's Plays of the 1950s–1960s

Hama Ali Hussen Hama Ameen Sofi

Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia
h.hussen80@yahoo.com

Abstract. Samuel Beckett's classic plays, such as "Waiting for Godot", "Endgame", and "Happy Days", are widely recognized for their deep examination of existential issues. Beckett's profound influence stems from, alongside with many other sources, his skillful usage of the language, namely syntax, to effectively express the fundamental folly, sorrow, and isolation in "modern" human life. This research thoroughly examines the language components integrated into the syntactic structure of the denoted plays. Through detailed analysis of Beckett's usage of certain types of word combinations and sentences the article emphasizes the crucial function of syntax in conveying existential concerns. The main objective of this work is to describe complex relationship between syntax and existential absurdity in Beckett's plays. Pauses, repetition, fragmentation, and inversion are treated as fundamental patterns that contribute to themes of decay, futility, and alienation. The work applies a multifaceted approach to conducting a comparative study of the plays, with a specific focus on hermeneutical interpretation of their syntactic patterns. In essence, this study deepens scholars' knowledge in the sphere of the style of Beckett's plays by clarifying how syntactic elements such as pauses, elliptical constructions, repetitions, and omissions convey existential (according to their origin) motifs. Instead of being merely literary themes, these motifs are understood as expressions of a "existential grammar of survival," where language is seen as the last resort in a world where meaning is constantly questioned.

Keywords: Samuel Beckett, plays, existentialism, motif, absurdity, isolation, language, syntactic means, semantics.

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Научная статья

Синтаксис и семантика экзистенциальных мотивов в пьесах С. Беккета 1950-х — 1960-х годов

Хама Али Хуссен Хама Амеен Ха Софи

Нижегородский государственный лингвистический университет имени Н. А. Добролюбова
Нижний Новгород, Россия
h.hussen80@yahoo.com

Аннотация. В классических пьесах Сэмюэля Беккета, таких как «В ожидании Годо», «Эндшпиль» и «Счастливые дни», глубоко исследуются экзистенциальные проблемы. В то же время влияние Беккета на зрителей и читателей в значительной степени определяется, помимо других факторов, использованием стилистических средств, в том числе синтаксических конструкций, способствующих вербальному оформлению тем фундаментальной абсурдности и трагичности человеческой жизни, тотального одиночества человека. В данном исследовании подробно рассматриваются основные языковые компоненты, интегрированные

в синтаксическую структуру анализируемых пьес. Сфокусированная на использовании Беккетом ключевых (повторяющихся) синтаксических конструкций, статья исследует то, каким образом значимые проблемы экзистенциальной философии оформляются в его пьесах на синтаксическом уровне. Основная цель данной работы — проанализировать взаимосвязь синтаксических средств и экзистенциальных тем в пьесах С. Беккета 1950-х — 1960-х годов. Анализ стилистических особенностей текстов — пауз, повторов, фрагментаций, эллиптических конструкций, умолчаний — позволяет свидетельствовать о том, что беккетовский синтаксис имеет семантику, выражающую мотивы распада бытия, тщетности социальной или любой другой деятельности, отчужденности человека от человека.

В исследовании используется синтез подходов к сравнительному изучению пьес с акцентом на герменевтической интерпретации повторяющихся синтаксических моделей. Статья углубляет научное представление о стилистике пьес Беккета, уточняя, каким образом используемые синтаксические средства выражают экзистенциальные по своему происхождению мотивы.

Ключевые слова: Сэмюэль Беккет, пьесы, экзистенциализм, мотив, абсурд, замкнутость, язык, синтаксические средства, семантика.

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Introduction

Samuel Beckett's celebrated plays, such as *Waiting for Godot* (1954)¹, *Endgame* (1957), and *Happy Days* (1961), can be interpreted as profound aesthetic examinations of existential concepts, skillfully interwoven with the subtleties of language. Although prior studies have recognized the importance of language choices in Beckett's works, there is still a strong requirement for a thorough investigation of how syntactic aspects contribute to the overall existential story.

Beckett's novels frequently portray persons who are struggling with the irrationality of their situations. These individuals discover significance by employing intentional repetition, purposeful fragmentation, and strategic use of pauses in their conversations. This research acknowledges the necessity of exploring these complex grammatical details in order to enhance our understanding of the deep philosophical questions embedded in Beckett's writing.

An overview of current literature indicates a wide range of viewpoints on Beckett's sentence structure and its implications for existence. Katz examines how the difficulties of expressing consciousness and the breakdown of coherent subjectivity are reflected in Beckett's disjointed, minimalist sentence structure. He contends that Beckett purposefully destabilizes his syntax in order to align form with themes of silence, disintegration, and the boundaries of language — all of which are central to Beckett's existential vision [Katz, 1999, pp. 45–48].

In their turn, Rahimipoor and Edoyan [Rahimipoor, Edoyan, 2012, pp. 12–13], specifically researching the existential themes present in Beckett's plays, highlight the importance of syntactic analysis in detecting the portrayal of existential absurdity in these works. Rozik [Rozik, 2008, pp. 198–200] explores the relationship between syntax and performance, specifically focusing on how syntactic choices influence the theatrical experience and audience reaction. Bhatti, Azher and Abbas stress that in order to fully comprehend the narrative structures in *Waiting for Godot*, a careful examination of syntactic elements is necessary. Their analysis sheds important light on Beckett's purposeful use of language to reaffirm existential concerns by showing how syntactic choices support the play's themes of absurdity and fragmentation [Bhatti, Azher, Abbas, 2019, pp. 93–106]. Shahid looks at how Beckett's use of silence and pauses questions conventional language structures. She contends that these features let readers find meaning outside of standard language [Shahid, 2018, p. 4]. Bell examines Beckett's minimalist writing in relation to his anthology *Têtes-mortes*. In the article *Between Ethics and Aesthetics: The Residual in Samuel Beckett's Minimalism*, Bell explores how Beckett's style, characterized by sparse language and subtle syntactic variations, serves to convey themes of incommunicability and the residual aspects of human experience [Bell, 2011, pp. 32–53].

¹ The year of the first publication of the play's English version is denoted here.

Different aspects of syntactic patterns used in this or that play by Beckett, and their semantics, are researched by other less influential scholars offer a thorough study of Beckett's syntactic decisions and their semantic consequences. Scholars investigate how agentless material processes and fragmented syntax in *Waiting for Godot* support the depiction of a chaotic and pointless human existence [Abbas 2019, pp. 94–97]; [Pountney, 1978, pp. 239–243]; [Iqbal, Saniad, Qureshi, Sultan, 2020, pp. 30–33].

The broken logic of mental processes and communication is reflected in Beckett's characters' speech patterns. Their language serves as an echo chamber for skepticism, silence, and ontological confusion rather than as a means of communication. Every pause is laden with philosophical significance, and every incomplete sentence illustrates the impossibility of closure or certainty, turning syntax into a metaphysical landscape.

Given this, Beckett's linguistic fragmentation could be seen as a syntax of despair, in which both the speaker and the listener are continuously unable to find meaning. Having stated all this, we bring forward the central thesis of this article — grammar of isolation and absurdity can be described in its form and meaning on the material of Beckett's three plays: *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*.

This study employs a combination of hermeneutics and comparative analysis to explore the key (most characteristic, permanently used) syntactic means in Samuel Beckett's plays and their role in delivering existential issues. The primary texts for this study are Beckett's plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*. These works form the basis for a chronological syntactic analysis. Secondary sources include books, scholarly articles, and critical essays that focus on language, syntax, and existential themes in Beckett's writings.

The comparative approach in this study examines Beckett's use of syntactic devices in three of his plays, comparing them to each other. Additionally, it analyzes how Beckett's strategies evolve within his own body of work. This comparative perspective aims to deepen the understanding of Beckett's linguistic innovations within the broader context of literary and dramatic traditions.

Major part

Syntactic patterns in Beckett's plays (an outline)

In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett highlights themes of waiting and the absurdity of human existence through a disjointed structure and repetitive dialogue. The repetition of phrases like “Nothing to be done” underscores the characters' powerlessness and the cyclical nature of their situation. In *Endgame*, silences and pauses create a rhythm that reflects the characters' stagnation and the inevitability of their end. The fragmented dialogue demonstrates how their attempts at communication lead to a breakdown of meaning in a hopeless environment. *Happy Days* emphasizes the absurdity of the protagonist's circumstances and her resilience through repetitive and broken syntax. The protagonist's disjointed speech patterns reveal her efforts to make sense of her deteriorating situation and maintain a semblance of normalcy.

The approach of hermeneutics allows unveiling deeper meanings in Beckett's linguistic choices based on interpretation of existential motifs in the chosen plays. In *Waiting for Godot*, the haphazard and repetitive syntax mirrors the absurdity and meaninglessness of the characters' lives, with their endless waiting symbolizing the existential quest for purpose in an indifferent universe.

In *Endgame*, the characters' emotional and physical isolation is reflected in the pauses and silences of the dialogue, highlighting their inability to form meaningful connections. *Happy Days* portrays resilience in absurdity through the protagonist's rambling speech patterns and repeated phrases, capturing her attempt to find meaning and normalcy despite worsening circumstances.

Close reading involves a detailed examination of passages, focusing on minute details that might carry profound symbolic meaning. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of Beckett's linguistic decisions and their significance in expressing existential themes. Key sections from each play are analyzed for their use of syntactic devices like pauses, repetition, and fragmentation.

For example, in the opening dialogue of *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon asks, “Well, shall we go?” And gets an answer from Vladimir, “Yes, let's go”. But the following remark informs us that they “do not move” [Beckett, 1965, p. 51]. This scene symbolizes the characters' helplessness and the futility of their situation. In *Endgame*, the line “Me to play” [Beckett, 1970, p. 68] recurs in Act 1, suggesting the

characters' awareness of being trapped in an endless cycle, reflected in the disjointed syntax. In *Happy Days*, the protagonist's repeated words about a happy day ("another heavenly day" / "another happy day" / "this is going to be a happy day" / "what a happy day for me" / "a happy day", etc. [Beckett, 1966, pp. 1, 9, 22, 31] underscores her existential struggle to find happiness and purpose amid dire circumstances, with her disjointed and repetitive speech highlighting the absurdity of her situation.

Distinct patterns emerge from a comparative study of the syntactic elements in *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days*. While *Waiting for Godot* emphasizes cyclical waiting via repetition and fragmentation, *Happy Days* shows how shifting syntax reflects Winnie's changing situation. In *Endgame* the emotional desolation is intensified by a spare style, sharp speech, and disjointed communication. This variety demonstrates how adaptable Beckett's grammatical choices are when expressing existential concerns.

This analogy shows that Beckett's syntax actively dramatizes internal states rather than passively reflecting despair. Every pause, passage, or phrase that is repeated turns into a sculpture of existential resistance or submission. The language is theatrical not only in its delivery but also in the way it portrays philosophical and psychological conflicts in real time. Beckett's syntax defies conventional grammatical demands for coherence and communication, reflecting the very breakdown of certainty that his characters experience. Thus, syntax becomes existential syntax, a grammar of philosophical endurance, confusion, and survival.

What makes Beckett's syntactic structures especially powerful is their ability to carry emotional and thematic weight without narrative development. These plays unfold not through plot but through language itself — language that breaks, hesitates, returns, and stalls, mirroring human consciousness under existential pressure.

Thematic and emotional implications of syntactic decisions are significant. In *Waiting for Godot* the characters' sense of futility is reinforced by repetition and fragmentation. *Happy Days* uses changing syntax to represent emotional experiences. *Endgame* enhances the impression of futility by achieving existential sorrow via sparse lexis and bleak grammar.

Thematic resonance and emotional involvement may be shaped and enhanced by grammatical choice. Significant syntactic contributions are made to the depiction of existential absurdity. In *Waiting for Godot*, the ludicrous waiting is emphasized by fragmentation and repetition. *Happy Days* emphasizes the ridiculousness of time and solitude via changing terminology. *Endgame* captures the protagonists' fruitless quest for meaning with short incomplete phrases.

Ultimately, the unique syntactic landscape of each play creates a language-world that embodies existential disorientation. Beckett's choices invite not just intellectual interpretation, but emotional immersion into states of isolation, endurance, and absurd hope. Syntax is used not to resolve questions, but to pose them — to leave the audience suspended, like the characters, in uncertainty. This dynamic and deliberate use of grammar elevates Beckett's drama beyond abstract philosophy, rooting it in the concrete mechanics of language itself. The emotional texture of these plays is inseparable from their syntactic form, making grammar a profound philosophical instrument in Beckett's hands.

Semantics of syntactic means in "Waiting for Godot"

One of the play's unique grammatical features is repetition. In *Waiting for Godot* the phrase that Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly say, develops into a rhythmic pattern that dominates the conversation. This repetition highlights the protagonists' never-ending expectation while simultaneously highlighting how boring and pointless their circumstances are. Vladimir muses, "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!" [Beckett, 1965, p. 38], corresponding to the motifs of existential emptiness and of eternal recurrence.

Fragmented sentences and the way in which they convey uncertainty construct the stylistic feature of fragmentation. Beckett portrays existential agony and doubt in fragmented phrases. As an example, the grammatical fragmentation in Estragon's broken statement, "I forgot" [Beckett, 1965, p. 56], reflects the characters' shattered world and their battles with memory and purpose. The intensity of the picture of existential ambiguity and the characters' fractured lives is added to by the use of fragmented terminology.

An examination of the dialogue's use of silence reveals deliberate pauses and silences that foster periods of deep reflection. In the conversation between Estragon and Vladimir, Estragon says, "Let's go". Vladimir responds, "It's not possible". Estragon queries, "Why not?" to which Vladimir replies, "We're waiting for Godot" [Beckett, 1965, p. 10, 74, 80]. The elliptical pauses provide a feeling of existential pondering and highlight the characters' constant state of waiting while also enhancing the dialogue's pace.

These syntactic elements — repetition, fragmentation, and pause — are essential dramatic devices that represent the characters' philosophical and psychological states rather than merely being decorative elements. The characters' entrapment in time and thought is structurally expressed through repetition, which goes beyond simple linguistic recurrence. More than just broken speech, fragmentation dramatizes confusion and a weakened hold on reality and identity. Silences and pauses are not voids in conversation; rather, they are existentially dense moments in which meaning falters, falls apart, or arises in ambiguity.

These syntactic devices demonstrate Beckett's strong belief that form is a reflection of existence. The characters' existential state is reflected in the way they speak. Thus, the play turns into a linguistic space where absurdity is performed, as well as told. According to this perspective, language serves as a battlefield rather than a means of communication, and Beckett's grammar serves as the setting for that conflict.

The play's more profound thematic implications may be effectively communicated via deliberate use of silence as a syntactic device. The purpose of this syntactic analysis is to examine the effects of repetition, fragmentation, and pauses in *Waiting for Godot*, offering an understanding of how these syntactic devices support the existential storyline of the play.

Semantics of syntactic means in "Happy Days"

Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* has a unique story structure that centers on Winnie, a lady who is buried in the ground up to her waist and then her neck. The play is split into two acts, each of which depicts Winnie's coping strategies and existential reflections as she struggles with time and loneliness. Winnie is buried up to her waist in Act 1, and her early hope and efforts to preserve some sort of normality are reflected in the syntactic elements. Act 1's tone is best summed up by Winnie's upbeat comment, "Another heavenly day", which highlights a daily pattern [Beckett, 1966, p.1] and which is stressed as a mental figure of self-persuasion by a repeated exclamation: "Oh this is a happy day! This will have been another happy day!" [Beckett, 1966, p. 22].

In Act 2, Winnie is buried up to her neck, which exacerbates her situation. The semantical and grammatical elements change to represent her difficulties, and the word "day", instead of the attribute "happy" gets a much less definite "that", which refers to the past. Finished statements and pathetic exclamations transform into short nominative phrases ("That day" [Beckett, 1966, p. 24, 25]) which are repeatedly used with more and more pauses (denoted with suspension points), or simple questions like "What day?". They lose the intonation of certainty or persuasion and tend to reflect the meaning of 'lost sense' in the monotonous and inevitable circumstances of life getting closer and closer to death [Gontarski, 2009, pp. 327–341]. Winnie's attempts at grammar become more disjointed as she struggles with her captivity, on the verge of death, with no hopes for "another happy day" to come and be repeated [Beckett, 1966, *Happy Days*. p. 9], expressing how repetitious and restricted her speech is and signifying the boundaries imposed by her physical imprisonment (pointing at spiritual, at existential imprisonment, of course, too) [Tippett, 2020, pp. 201–202 ; Gilbert, 1993, pp. 439–453].

Llewellyn Brown talks about how Winnie's language reflects her psychological state by becoming more repetitive and fragmented. He clarifies that Winnie uses refrains and clichés as a coping strategy to get through the routine of her life and the approaching death. Brown observes that Winnie uses these borrowed phrases which are frequently taken from works of literature that deal with death or despair — almost robotically, like jingles. This reflects her jumbled emotional state and shows a disengagement from their original meaning [Brown, 2011, pp. 9–25].

The syntactic change between the two acts pointed out by the scholars within the context of the three analyzed plays should be understood as a semantic descent, a slow linguistic disintegration that reflects psychological decline, rather than just a change in tone or register. Both hope and coherence

are undermined when organized, hopeful affirmations give way to disjointed, unclear references. In this situation, syntax turns into a gauge of Winnie's existential state: as her physical restraint increases, her grammar tightens and her language becomes disoriented, reflecting the expanding boundaries of her awareness.

Beckett's idea of language as both a cage and a shield is reinforced by frequent usage of clichés and fragmented phrasing. These syntactic patterns are profoundly significant manifestations of Beckett's existential critique; they are not coincidental. The internal collapse of a character who clings to language as the last vestige of identity and order in a collapsing world is dramatized by the evolution of sentence structure, from expressive clarity to blurred fragments.

Semantics of syntactic means in "Endgame"

Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* is known for its spare use of language, which perfectly captures the hopeless and lonely setting in which the protagonists live. The drama portrays existential sadness and a feeling of futility via brief conversation, broken communication, and a dismal syntax, among other things. Beckett makes extensive use of snappy speech in *Endgame*. "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished", is a concise remark by Hamm that perfectly demonstrates the economy of words [Beckett, 1970, pp. 1, 50]. The protagonists' acceptance of their fate and the conclusion of their existential journey are highlighted by this understated style. The dialogue between the characters in *Endgame* is fragmented. Clov's disjointed reply, "Why this farce, day after day?" [Beckett, 1970, p. 32], sums up the dialogue's overall ambiguity and doubt [Bixby, 2018, pp. 112–127].

Ham's statement, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" [Beckett, 1970, p. 18], perfectly captures the tragicomic tension of the play. Here Beckett's syntax and disjointed conversations, as Ruby Cohn notes, depict a society in which "communication fails, but silence is unbearable" [Cohn, 1992, p. 148]. In general, Beckett employs syntax in *Endgame* as a means of existential critique in addition to being a formal device. The fragmented dialogue reveals the ridiculousness of meaning-making in a world devoid of coherence, while the sparseness of language reflects emotional inertia. Syntax turns into a representation of imprisonment, just as much of a prison as the actual location where the characters reside.

Particularly powerful is the way repetition and hesitation structure the rhythm of despair. The stuttering cadence of Hamm's monologue and Clov's questioning phrases reflect not only the collapse of narrative progression but the paralysis of thought itself. Through this breakdown in grammatical continuity, Beckett crafts a language of existential stasis — syntax as stillness, as resignation, as waiting for an end that never truly arrives.

Comparative analysis across the plays

A comparative syntactic analysis finds startling parallels between Samuel Beckett's dramas *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days*, and *Endgame*, which all explore existential dread and the human predicament. Beckett uses a spare style of discourse in all of these pieces, creating brief conversations that highlight the pointlessness of communication and accentuate the characters' loneliness.

A common syntactic strategy in the plays is repetition, which gives them a rhythmic cadence that reflects the cyclical nature of the characters' lives. Words echo, reiterating the monotony and never-ending waiting that are at the heart of their existence. Beckett's style is further characterized by the purposeful fragmentation of grammar, where phrases are broken or abbreviated to depict the characters' fragmented reality.

The characters always wonder about the purpose of existence, which gives rise to existential concerns expressed via syntactic inquiry. The characters' fruitless efforts to find meaning in their obviously meaningless lives are expressed via the grammar. The grammar itself has this dark, absurdist comedy, as deep ideas are expressed in apparently everyday language, causing a contradiction that makes people laugh and feel uncomfortable at the same time.

Syntactic choices eloquently depict feelings of separation and isolation. The difficulty of the characters to cross emotional divides is reflected in the grammar as they attempt to communicate via words. The plays are punctuated by silence, a potent syntactic device that evokes feelings of emptiness

and hopelessness. By strategically placing ellipses and pausing between sentences, the author creates a mood that gives voice to not only the spoken word but also the unsaid and unspeakable.

This comparative reading makes it abundantly evident that Beckett's dramas have deeply philosophical syntax in addition to being structural. The existential emptiness is expressed through the minimalist and fractured grammar, and the agony of perpetual recurrence is captured through repetition. As a syntactic device, silence carries metaphysical weight and communicates powerfully through omission. In addition to using language, these plays explore its boundaries, manipulate it to convey the inexpressible, and demonstrate how syntax can serve as a mirror of internal disarray as well as a framework for existential contemplation.

Syntactic patterns are used in Beckett's plays to generate temporal dislocation, when past, present, and future tenses change suddenly and become muddled. By stressing the cyclical and random quality of their experiences, this syntactic device highlights the characters' confused sense of time. Essentially, the minimalist dialogue, repetition, broken syntax, existential questioning, absurdist humor, isolation, silence, and temporal dislocation that characterize Beckett's unique syntactic choices all come together to create a linguistic tapestry that captures the profound and difficult aspects of the human experience in *Happy Days*, *Waiting for Godot*, and *Endgame*. In the end, Beckett's syntactic minimalism unveils a novel linguistic structure that subverts narrative conventions to present the human condition in its most unadulterated and primal state.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be stated that unique patterns have been found via syntactic analysis of Samuel Beckett's plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* and *Happy Days*. Every piece uses different syntactic devices, such as fragmentation, repetition, and reserve (or silence), to depict existential concerns in a subtle way. The comparative research has shown how adaptable Beckett's language choices are in portraying many aspects of the human experience. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of syntactic analysis in comprehending Beckett's works. Beyond the obvious storyline, Beckett's purposeful use of grammar becomes apparent as a potent means of expressing the motifs of existential absurdity, dissatisfaction with the process of life, and total isolation and uncertainty of an individual. The way that Beckett expresses the nuances of his existential study via language is enhanced by his use of syntactic choices, which serve as a linguistic canvas of the plot, images and themes.

This analysis shows that Beckett's use of syntax is a profound way to reflect the inner emptiness and cyclical suffering of human existence rather than just a stylistic device. His plays offer a philosophical framework where the inability to communicate turns into a metaphor for existential loneliness through simple and broken language. The inference made is that syntax itself turns into a philosophical gesture, reflecting the search for meaning in an uncaring and chaotic universe.

This work paves the way for further investigation into the domain of syntactic analysis in existential literature. Subsequent research endeavors may explore in further detail the dynamic syntactic terrain that exists across various existentialist writers and genres. Examining the ways in which linguistic decisions support the more general philosophical questions and themes found in existential literature may provide insightful information about the relationship between language and existential philosophy.

Finally, the syntactic analysis of Beckett's plays not only helps us better comprehend his plays, but it also raises important questions that need to be answered in the context of existential literature and further research into the dynamic area of syntactic analysis.

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Information about the author

Sofi Hama Ali Hussien Hama Ameen — PhD Student in Literature of the Peoples of the World, Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod.

Research interests: Syntax and Semantics of Existential Motifs in Samuel Beckett's Plays, comparative analysis.

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