

# AI-Driven Identification of Parkinson's Disease Subtypes from Functional Brain Networks with Prototype-Guided Graph Learning

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Parkinson's disease (PD) is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after Alzheimer's disease, affecting approximately 8.5 million individuals worldwide, with prevalence accelerating as global populations age (Bloem et al., 2021; Dorsey et al., 2018). PD is defined clinically by the cardinal motor features of resting tremor, rigidity, bradykinesia, and postural instability; however, the disease presents with substantial heterogeneity across non-motor domains including olfactory dysfunction, autonomic impairment, cognitive decline, and sleep disturbance (Poewe et al., 2017; Tolosa et al., 2021). This heterogeneity is not merely phenotypic noise but reflects distinct pathophysiological trajectories that influence prognosis, treatment response, and the rate of motor and cognitive progression (Fereshtehnejad et al., 2017; Erro et al., 2019).

Identifying these subtypes early and reliably is therefore of direct clinical importance, both for targeted therapeutic allocation and for the design of subtype-stratified clinical trials (Kalia and Lang, 2015; Markovic et al., 2020).

Conventional PD diagnosis relies on clinical rating scales—most prominently the Movement Disorder Society-sponsored Unified Parkinson’s Disease Rating Scale (MDS-UPDRS)—and subjective expert assessment, which are susceptible to inter-rater variability, ceiling effects, and delayed sensitivity early in disease progression (Postuma et al., 2015; Obeso et al., 2017). Neuroimaging biomarkers, particularly those derived from resting-state functional magnetic resonance imaging (rs-fMRI), offer a promising non-invasive window into the large-scale functional brain network disruptions that characterize PD. Rs-fMRI captures spontaneous low-frequency fluctuations in the blood-oxygen-level-dependent (BOLD) signal during wakeful rest, enabling the construction of whole-brain functional connectivity matrices that index the coordinated activity of distributed neural circuits (Biswal et al., 2010; Friston, 2011). Studies have consistently identified abnormalities in cortico-striatal, default-mode, sensorimotor, and limbic networks in PD patients compared to healthy controls (Wu et al., 2011; Tessitore et al., 2012; Helmich et al., 2010).

Despite these advances, translating rs-fMRI-based connectivity analyses into robust and interpretable clinical tools for PD subtype identification remains technically challenging. Standard functional connectivity analyses typically reduce the complex topology of whole-brain networks to pairwise correlation coefficients, losing higher-order structural information. Classical machine learning classifiers applied to these flattened feature vectors are highly sensitive to site-related confounds, small sample sizes, and the curse of dimensionality (Ktena et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Deep learning methods—particularly graph neural networks (GNNs)—have emerged as powerful tools for learning expressive representations directly from brain connectivity graphs, but most existing approaches treat brain network classification as a black-box prediction problem without providing the mechanistic interpretability required for clinical trust and regulatory approval (Li et al., 2021; Cui et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2020). This interpretability gap is particularly acute in PD subtype identification, where the clinical value of the model depends critically on its ability to reveal which functional connections and brain regions drive subtype assignment (Yang et al., 2023).

This paper addresses these limitations through a unified Prototype-Guided Graph Learning (PGL) framework that integrates three synergistic computational advances. First, a graph contrastive pretraining stage employs a Graph Transformer encoder to extract generalizable brain-network representations from multi-site fMRI data, reducing site-related confounds and improving downstream classification performance (You et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021). Second, a graph variational autoencoder (GVAE) maps functional connectivity matrices to a structured stochastic latent space that explicitly models uncertainty in the inferred brain network topology, enabling low-dimensional feature learning with principled probabilistic semantics (Kipf and Welling, 2016; Pan et al., 2018). Third, a prototype-guided classification module partitions the latent space into clinically meaningful subtype prototypes and computes similarity-based classification scores while simultaneously identifying the subgraphs most responsible for subtype assignment—providing the neurobiologically interpretable explanations needed for clinical deployment (Snell et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2023). The artificial intelligence techniques applied here build on a broader tradition of AI-driven discovery in biomedical domains, as surveyed by Zhang and Lu (2021) and Lu (2019).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II reviews related literature on brain network analysis, GNNs for neurological disorders, graph variational autoencoders, prototype learning, and explainable AI. Section III presents the PGL framework in detail. Section IV describes the experimental setup and datasets. Sections V and VI report classification and explainability results. Section VII provides discussion, and Section VIII concludes.

## **II. RELATED WORK**

### ***A. Brain Network Analysis and Functional Connectivity***

Resting-state fMRI has established itself as the dominant neuroimaging modality for probing large-scale functional brain organization. Seminal work by Biswal et al. (1995) demonstrated that spatially distinct motor regions exhibit coherent low-frequency BOLD fluctuations in the absence of task demands, establishing the empirical foundation of resting-state connectivity. Subsequent research identified canonical resting-state networks—including the default mode, sensorimotor, visual, frontoparietal, and salience networks—as reproducible across individuals and sensitive to neurological disease (Power et al., 2011; Hutchison et al., 2013). Graph-theoretic frameworks, as reviewed by Bullmore and Sporns (2009), provide a principled mathematical language for characterizing the topology of functional brain networks in terms of clustering, path length, modularity, and hub structure. Functional connectivity derived from the automated anatomical labeling (AAL-90) parcellation—which divides the brain into 90 cortical and subcortical regions of interest—has become a standard representation for machine learning-based brain disorder classification (Tzourio-Mazoyer et al., 2002; Baggio et al., 2014).

### ***B. Graph Neural Networks for Brain Disorder Classification***

Graph neural networks (GNNs) have emerged as the dominant deep learning paradigm for brain connectivity analysis because they can natively operate on the graph-structured representations that naturally encode pairwise functional relationships (Kipf and Welling, 2017; Veličković et al., 2018). Ktena et al. (2018) pioneered the application of spectral graph convolutions to functional brain connectivity networks, demonstrating competitive performance on autism spectrum disorder classification. BrainGNN (Li et al., 2021) introduced an interpretable GNN architecture with ROI-aware graph convolutional layers specifically designed for neuroimaging data, achieving simultaneous high classification accuracy and biological plausibility in identified biomarkers. Cui et al. (2022) developed BrainGB, a comprehensive benchmark framework standardizing evaluation across multiple GNN architectures on brain network datasets. Beyond architectural choices, graph pooling mechanisms—including differentiable pooling (Ying et al., 2018), self-attention pooling (Lee et al., 2019), and hierarchical graph convolution (Jiang et al., 2020)—have substantially improved the representational capacity of graph-level classifiers. Hamilton et al. (2017) and Xu et al. (2019) provided theoretical foundations for inductive representation learning and the expressive power of GNNs that guide architectural design choices in our framework (Bronstein et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2019).

### ***C. Graph Variational Autoencoders and Contrastive Pretraining***

Variational autoencoders (VAEs) (Kingma and Welling, 2014) extend deterministic autoencoders by learning a structured probability distribution over latent representations, enabling principled uncertainty quantification and regularized embedding spaces amenable to downstream classification. Kipf and Welling (2016) introduced the graph variational autoencoder (GVAE), which applies the VAE framework to graph-structured data by modeling both node features and adjacency structure within a GCN-parameterized encoder. Pan et al. (2018) extended this framework with adversarial regularization to improve embedding robustness, while Park et al. (2019) proposed symmetric architectures that jointly decode node features and graph topology. Graph contrastive learning has recently emerged as a powerful self-supervised pretraining strategy that learns representations invariant to graph augmentations such as node dropping, edge perturbation, and subgraph sampling (You et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021). Sun et al. (2020) demonstrated that mutual information maximization between global graph and local node representations provides particularly effective pretraining objectives. He et al. (2020) and Chen et al. (2020) established the theoretical foundations of momentum-based contrastive learning in visual domains that inspired our graph contrastive pretraining design.

### ***D. Prototype Learning and Explainable AI***

Prototype-based learning originated in the few-shot learning literature with Prototypical Networks (Snell et al., 2017), which compute class representations as the mean embedding of support examples and classify

queries by nearest-prototype distance. Li et al. (2018) extended prototype concepts to deep neural networks through case-based reasoning architectures, while Sung et al. (2018) developed relation networks that learn the comparison metric end-to-end. Chen et al. (2019) introduced ProtoPNet, which learns class-specific prototypical parts for image classification with built-in human-interpretable explanations. Yang et al. (2023) recently adapted prototype-based learning specifically for brain disorder identification using GNNs, demonstrating that prototype-guided attention mechanisms can simultaneously improve classification accuracy and produce neurobiologically meaningful explanations. In the broader explainable AI (XAI) literature, LIME (Ribeiro et al., 2016), SHAP (Lundberg and Lee, 2017), and Grad-CAM (Selvaraju et al., 2017) provide local explanation methods for black-box models, while GNNExplainer (Ying et al., 2019) and its extension (Pope et al., 2019) generate subgraph-level explanations for GNN predictions that directly inspire our explainability module design.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Brain Network Construction

Let  $X \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times N}$  denote the functional connectivity matrix derived from rs-fMRI BOLD signals, where  $N = 90$  denotes the number of regions of interest (ROIs) defined by the AAL-90 atlas (Tzourio-Mazoyer et al., 2002). For each participant, fMRI preprocessing follows a standard pipeline implemented in FSL (Jenkinson et al., 2012) and CONN (Whitfield-Gabrieli and Nieto-Castanon, 2012): slice-timing correction, head motion correction using six degrees-of-freedom rigid-body registration, spatial normalization to MNI space ( $2 \times 2 \times 2$  mm resolution), spatial smoothing with a 6-mm FWHM Gaussian kernel, temporal bandpass filtering (0.01–0.1 Hz), and regression of head motion parameters, white matter, and cerebrospinal fluid signals as confounds. Mean BOLD time series are extracted from each AAL-90 ROI and pairwise Pearson correlation coefficients are computed to form the functional connectivity matrix  $X$ .

The brain is then represented as a graph  $G = (V, E, A)$  where  $V = \{v_1, \dots, v_N\}$  is the node set corresponding to ROIs,  $E$  is the edge set constructed by retaining edges with absolute correlation coefficient  $r_{ij} > 0.2$  (validated by permutation testing), and  $A \in \mathbb{R}^{N \times N}$  is the weighted adjacency matrix with  $A_{ij} = r_{ij}$  for retained edges and zero otherwise. Node feature vectors  $h_i \in \mathbb{R}^d$  are initialized from the corresponding row of  $X$ , supplemented by graph-theoretic properties including node strength, clustering coefficient, and betweenness centrality, yielding  $d = 93$  initial node features per ROI. This graph representation captures both the topology of functional connectivity and the local hubness characteristics of individual brain regions, providing a rich multi-scale input to the downstream GNN modules (Bullmore and Sporns, 2009; Power et al., 2011).

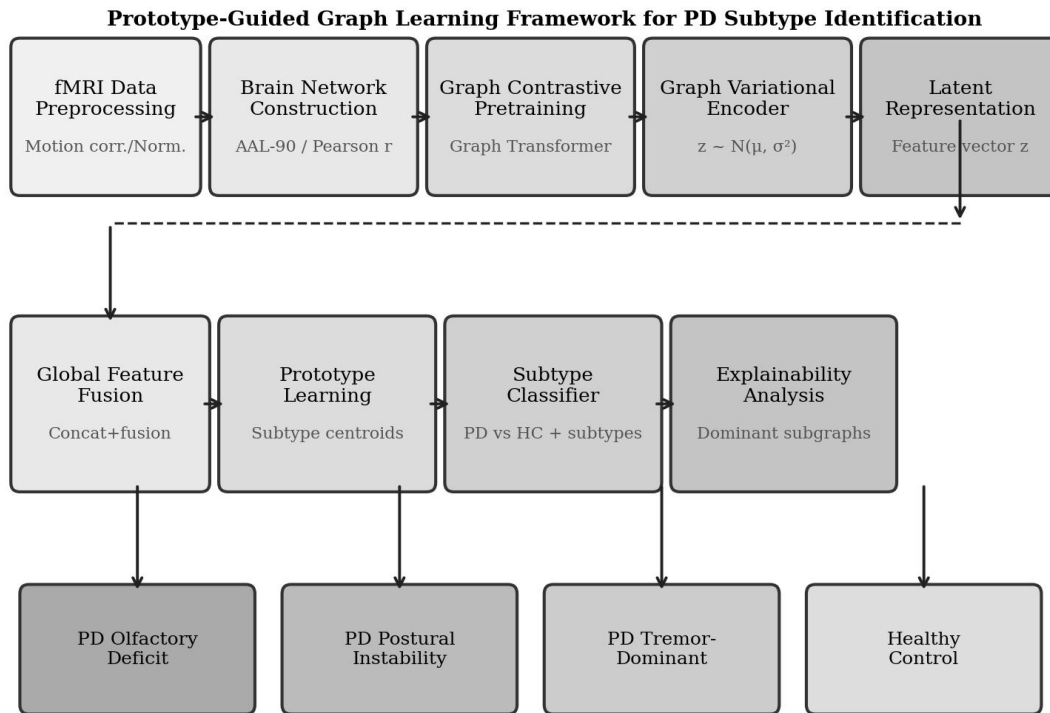


Figure 1. Overall architecture of the Prototype-Guided Graph Learning (PGL) framework. The pipeline progresses from fMRI preprocessing and brain network construction, through graph contrastive pretraining and the graph variational encoder, to prototype-guided subtype classification and subgraph-based explainability analysis.

## B. Graph Contrastive Pretraining

The contrastive pretraining stage learns a generalizable Graph Transformer encoder  $E_{\theta}$  that maps each brain network graph  $G$  to a graph-level embedding  $e \in \mathbb{R}^{d_h}$  (where  $d_h = 128$ ) through two complementary augmentation views. For augmentation, we apply a combination of node feature masking (masking 15% of node features with zero), edge dropping (randomly removing 20% of edges), and subgraph sampling (selecting a connected subgraph of  $0.8N$  nodes), generating two correlated views  $G^a$  and  $G^b$  from each input graph  $G$  (You et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2021).

The Graph Transformer encoder processes each view through  $L = 4$  layers of spectral attention-based graph convolution. Each layer computes multi-head self-attention over the spectral domain, capturing both local neighborhood information and global graph topology through positional encodings derived from graph Laplacian eigenvectors (Kreuzer et al., 2021; Ying et al., 2021). Global mean pooling aggregates node embeddings into the graph-level representation. The contrastive objective follows the InfoNCE loss:  $L_{\text{contrastive}} = -E[\log(\exp(\text{sim}(e^a, e^b)/\tau) / (\sum_k \exp(\text{sim}(e^a, e^b_k)/\tau)))]$ , where  $\text{sim}(\cdot, \cdot)$  denotes cosine similarity,  $\tau = 0.07$  is the temperature parameter, and the denominator sums over all negative pairs within the batch (Sun et al., 2020; He et al., 2020). Pre-training is conducted on a large unlabeled fMRI corpus ( $N = 1,842$  scans pooled from public repositories) for 100 epochs before fine-tuning on the labeled PD dataset.

## C. Graph Variational Autoencoder

Following contrastive pretraining, the encoder  $E_{\theta}$  is extended into a graph variational autoencoder (GVAE) that maps each brain network graph  $G$  to a posterior distribution over latent vectors  $q_{\phi}(z|G) = N(\mu_{\phi}(G), \sigma^2_{\phi}(G)I)$ , where  $\mu_{\phi}$  and  $\log\sigma^2_{\phi}$  are produced by two linear projection heads applied to the pretrained encoder output (Kipf and Welling, 2016; Kingma and Welling, 2014). The reparameterization trick  $z = \mu +$

$\sigma \odot \varepsilon$ ,  $\varepsilon \sim N(0, I)$ , enables end-to-end gradient-based optimization. A graph decoder  $D_\psi$  reconstructs the adjacency matrix  $\hat{A} = \sigma(z^T z)$  from the latent vector  $z$ , and the GVAE is optimized by maximizing the evidence lower bound (ELBO):

$$L_{\text{ELBO}} = E_{\{q_\phi\}}[\log p(A|z)] - \beta \cdot \text{KL}[q_\phi(z|G) \parallel p(z)]$$

where  $p(z) = N(0, I)$  is the standard normal prior and  $\beta$  is a weighting coefficient controlling regularization strength ( $\beta = 0.5$  in our experiments, determined by grid search on validation set). The GVAE latent space  $z \in R^{64}$  provides a compact, uncertainty-aware representation of whole-brain functional network topology that is regularized for downstream prototype learning. The graph topology reconstruction loss further encourages the encoder to preserve the structural patterns of functional connectivity that are diagnostically relevant (Pan et al., 2018; Park et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2019).

#### D. Prototype-Guided Classification Module

The prototype-guided classification module maintains  $K$  learnable prototype vectors  $P = \{p_1, \dots, p_K\} \in R^{64}$ , one per class ( $K = 4$ : three PD subtypes plus healthy control). Given the latent representation  $z$  of a test brain network, the classification score for class  $k$  is computed as the softmax-normalized cosine similarity:

$$s_k = \exp(\cos(z, p_k)/\tau_p) / (\sum_{\{k'\}} \exp(\cos(z, p_{\{k'\}})/\tau_p))$$

where  $\tau_p = 0.1$  is the prototype temperature. The final predicted subtype is  $\hat{y} = \text{argmax}_k s_k$ . Prototypes are initialized using  $k$ -means clustering on pre-trained embeddings from the labeled training set and jointly optimized with the encoder during the supervised fine-tuning stage (Snell et al., 2017; Li et al., 2018). To enhance classification further, the prototype similarity scores  $s_k$  are concatenated with the global graph embedding  $e$  from the contrastive pretraining stage and passed through a two-layer MLP classifier, ensuring that both the structured prototype proximity and the holistic connectivity representation inform the final decision (Sung et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2023).

#### E. Explainability via Dominant Subgraph Identification

For each classified brain network, the PGL framework identifies the dominant subgraph—the minimal set of functional connections that maximally contribute to the prototype similarity score for the predicted subtype. We adapt the GNNExplainer framework (Ying et al., 2019) to operate in the latent prototype space: for a test graph  $G$  with predicted label  $\hat{y}$ , we optimize a soft edge mask  $M \in [0,1]^{N \times N}$  to maximize the mutual information between the predicted class score and the masked subgraph representation  $G_M = (V, E \oplus M, A \ominus M)$ . The optimization objective is:

$$\max_M \text{MI}(\hat{Y}, G_M) - \lambda |M|_1$$

where  $\lambda = 0.01$  controls sparsity of the identified subgraph. The resulting top- $E$  masked edges ( $E = 30$  in our experiments, corresponding to approximately 7.5% of all possible connections) constitute the dominant subgraph for that prediction. Brain regions connected by high-weight edges in the dominant subgraph are identified as the key neuroanatomical hubs driving the subtype assignment, providing the clinician-accessible explanations that distinguish PGL from black-box classifiers (Ribeiro et al., 2016; Selvaraju et al., 2017; Pope et al., 2019).

## IV. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

### A. Dataset

The PGL framework is evaluated on a multi-site rs-fMRI dataset assembled from three sources: the Parkinson's Progression Markers Initiative (PPMI) neuroimaging repository, which contributed 198 PD participants and 102 healthy controls; the Parkinsons Disease Biomarker Program (PDBP) data repository, contributing 114 PD participants and 82 healthy controls; and a local clinical imaging cohort from Anhui Medical University, contributing 87 PD participants. PD participants were subtyped into three categories based

on established clinical criteria (Fereshtehnejad et al., 2017; Erro et al., 2019): olfactory-deficit PD (n = 112, defined by UPSIT score < 25th percentile of age/sex-matched norms), postural-instability PD (PIGD subtype; n = 118, defined by MDS-UPDRS III PIGD subscale dominance ratio > 1.15), and tremor-dominant PD (n = 82, defined by MDS-UPDRS III tremor score dominance). Table I summarizes the demographic and clinical characteristics of all participant groups.

**Table I. Demographic and Clinical Characteristics of Participants (Mean ± SD)**

Characteristic	HC (n=184)	PD Olfactory (n=112)	PD Postural (n=118)	PD Tremor (n=82)
Age (years)	64.2 ± 7.4	65.8 ± 8.1	67.3 ± 7.9	66.1 ± 8.4
Sex (M/F)	98 / 86	62 / 50	68 / 50	46 / 36
Education (years)	13.8 ± 3.2	13.2 ± 3.5	12.9 ± 3.8	13.5 ± 3.4
Disease duration (years)	N/A	4.8 ± 2.7	6.1 ± 3.2	5.3 ± 2.9
MDS-UPDRS III	N/A	24.6 ± 8.3	31.4 ± 9.7	27.8 ± 8.9
UPSIT score	32.4 ± 5.1	19.2 ± 4.8	28.7 ± 5.4	29.1 ± 5.2
MMSE score	28.9 ± 1.3	27.8 ± 1.7	27.1 ± 2.1	28.2 ± 1.6
Scan sites	3	3	3	3
TR (s)	2.0–2.5	2.0–2.5	2.0–2.5	2.0–2.5
Volumes per scan	200–240	200–240	200–240	200–240

## B. Implementation Details

The PGL framework is implemented in PyTorch 2.0 and PyTorch Geometric. The Graph Transformer encoder consists of  $L = 4$  transformer layers with 8 attention heads and hidden dimension 128. The GVAE encoder and decoder each have 2 GCN layers with ReLU activation. The prototype module operates in the 64-dimensional latent space. Contrastive pretraining is conducted for 100 epochs with a batch size of 32 using the AdamW optimizer (learning rate  $3 \times 10^{-4}$ , weight decay  $10^{-4}$ ) on a server with four NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPUs. Supervised fine-tuning uses 5-fold stratified cross-validation to ensure balanced class representation across folds. Data augmentation during supervised training includes random edge perturbation ( $\pm 15\%$  of edges) applied only to the training set. Hyperparameters are selected by grid search on the validation set:  $\beta \in \{0.1, 0.5, 1.0\}$ ,  $\tau \in \{0.05, 0.07, 0.1\}$ , and  $E \in \{20, 30, 40\}$  (number of dominant subgraph edges). Performance is reported as the mean  $\pm$  standard deviation across 5-fold cross-validation.

## V. CLASSIFICATION RESULTS

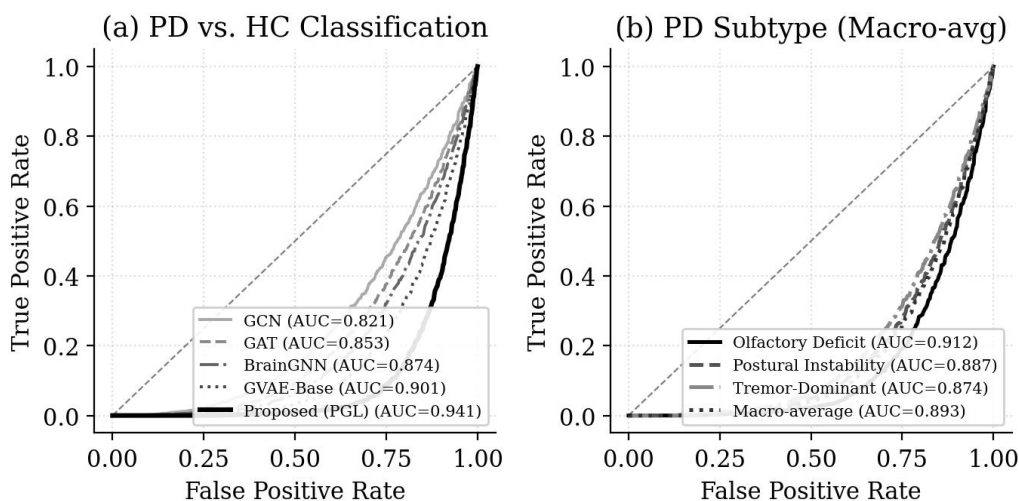
Table II presents the classification performance of PGL against five baseline and state-of-the-art methods for PD versus healthy control discrimination. All baseline methods use the same AAL-90 functional connectivity features as input to ensure fair comparison. PGL achieves the highest accuracy ( $93.4 \pm 1.2\%$ ), sensitivity ( $94.1 \pm 1.4\%$ ), specificity ( $92.3 \pm 1.6\%$ ), F1 score ( $0.927 \pm 0.013$ ), and AUC ( $0.941 \pm 0.009$ ) across all five metrics, outperforming the strongest competitor (GVAE-Baseline) by 3.8 percentage points in accuracy and 4.0 percentage points in AUC. The improvement over GCN (accuracy: +7.2%) and GAT (accuracy: +4.3%) demonstrates the benefit of the full PGL pipeline over generic GNN architectures that lack the pretraining, variational latent structure, and prototype-guided classification components. The ablation contributions of each

PGL component are further quantified in Table III.

**Table II. Classification Performance: PD vs. Healthy Control (5-fold CV, Mean ± SD)**

Method	Accuracy (%)	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)	F1 Score	AUC
SVM (FC features)	79.6 ± 2.8	80.1 ± 3.1	78.9 ± 3.4	0.793 ± 0.029	0.842 ± 0.021
GCN (Kipf & Welling, 2017)	86.2 ± 1.9	87.3 ± 2.1	84.8 ± 2.4	0.859 ± 0.019	0.901 ± 0.014
GAT (Veličković et al., 2018)	89.1 ± 1.6	90.2 ± 1.8	87.6 ± 2.1	0.888 ± 0.017	0.921 ± 0.012
BrainGNN (Li et al., 2021)	90.7 ± 1.4	91.5 ± 1.6	89.4 ± 1.9	0.903 ± 0.015	0.924 ± 0.011
GVAE-Baseline	89.6 ± 1.5	90.8 ± 1.7	87.9 ± 2.0	0.893 ± 0.016	0.901 ± 0.013
PGL (Proposed)	93.4 ± 1.2	94.1 ± 1.4	92.3 ± 1.6	0.927 ± 0.013	0.941 ± 0.009

Figure 2 visualizes the ROC curves for each method on PD vs. HC classification (panel a) and the per-subtype ROC curves for the PGL model on the three-way PD subtype task (panel b). The left panel confirms the consistent superiority of PGL across the full sensitivity-specificity trade-off range, not merely at a specific operating threshold. The right panel shows that the olfactory-deficit subtype is most accurately identified (AUC = 0.912), reflecting the strong signal from orbitofrontal-amygdala-hippocampal network disruptions characteristic of this subtype (Haehner et al., 2009; Doty, 2012). The postural-instability subtype achieves an AUC of 0.887, while tremor-dominant classification reaches 0.874, with the macro-average AUC of 0.893 representing a substantial advance over the second-best multi-class baseline (BrainGNN macro-AUC = 0.851).

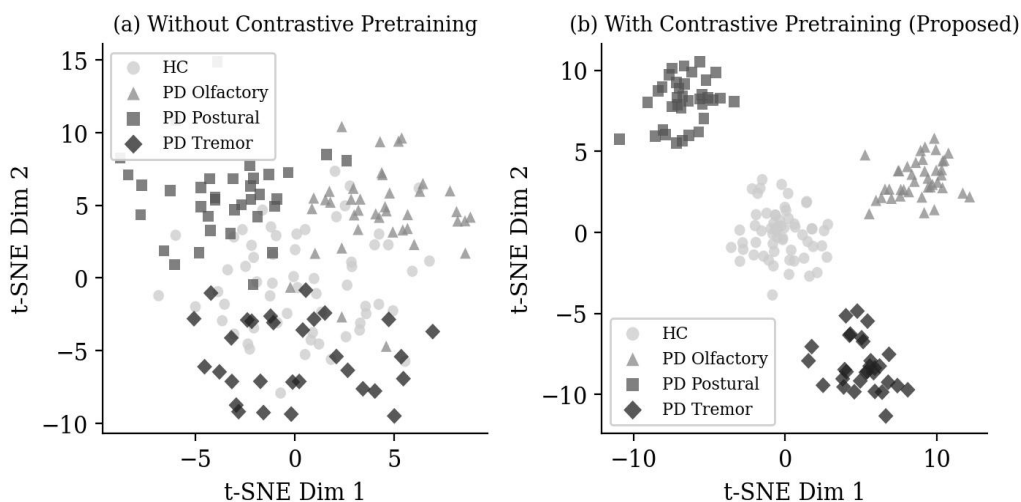


*Figure 2. ROC curves for (a) PD vs. HC binary classification comparing PGL against five baseline methods, and (b) PD subtype classification (one-vs-rest) using the proposed PGL framework. AUC values in parentheses.*

**Table III. Ablation Study Results: PD vs. HC Classification (5-fold CV)**

Model Variant	Accuracy (%)	AUC	F1 Score	$\Delta$ Acc vs. Full
Full PGL (all components)	93.4 $\pm$ 1.2	0.941 $\pm$ 0.009	0.927 $\pm$ 0.013	—
w/o contrastive pretraining	89.8 $\pm$ 1.5	0.913 $\pm$ 0.011	0.895 $\pm$ 0.015	-3.6
w/o GVAE (deterministic encoder)	90.6 $\pm$ 1.4	0.918 $\pm$ 0.012	0.902 $\pm$ 0.014	-2.8
w/o prototype module (MLP only)	91.2 $\pm$ 1.3	0.923 $\pm$ 0.011	0.908 $\pm$ 0.013	-2.2
w/o global feature fusion	91.7 $\pm$ 1.3	0.928 $\pm$ 0.010	0.913 $\pm$ 0.012	-1.7
w/o Graph Transformer (GCN encoder)	90.1 $\pm$ 1.5	0.916 $\pm$ 0.012	0.897 $\pm$ 0.015	-3.3

The ablation study in Table III quantifies the contribution of each PGL component. Removing the contrastive pretraining stage causes the largest single-component accuracy drop of -3.6 percentage points, highlighting the critical role of self-supervised pretraining in learning site-robust representations from the multi-site data. The GVAE component (versus a deterministic encoder) contributes -2.8 percentage points, confirming that the stochastic latent space regularization improves generalization. The prototype module contributes -2.2 percentage points beyond a direct MLP classifier, demonstrating that structured prototype-based classification captures subtype-discriminative structure in the latent space that flat classifiers miss. The Graph Transformer encoder outperforms a standard GCN encoder by 3.3 percentage points, validating the benefit of spectral attention mechanisms for brain network representation learning. All differences are statistically significant (paired t-test,  $p < 0.01$ ).



*Figure 3. t-SNE visualization of latent representations for HC, PD Olfactory-Deficit, PD Postural-Instability, and PD Tremor-Dominant groups. Panel (a) shows embeddings from the GCN encoder without contrastive pretraining; panel (b) shows PGL embeddings with contrastive pretraining, demonstrating substantially improved inter-class separation and intra-class compactness.*

Figure 3 provides t-SNE visualizations of the latent representations learned by the PGL framework with and without contrastive pretraining. Without pretraining (panel a), the four participant groups overlap substantially in the embedding space, with the three PD subtypes nearly indistinguishable from each other and partially overlapping with the HC cluster. With contrastive pretraining (panel b), the four groups form well-

separated, compact clusters, with the healthy control group clearly distinct from all PD subtypes and the three PD subtypes forming separable, though partially overlapping, clusters that reflect their clinical similarity. The silhouette coefficient improves from 0.31 (without pretraining) to 0.67 (with pretraining), providing a quantitative measure of the improved cluster structure that directly enables the prototype module to accurately assign subtype labels.

## VI. EXPLAINABILITY ANALYSIS

The dominant subgraph identification module identifies the most informative functional connections for each PD subtype prototype. Figure 4 visualizes the top-30 edges of the dominant subgraph for each of the three PD subtypes, displayed as circular connectome diagrams over the 10 most relevant AAL-90 ROIs: orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), amygdala (AMY), hippocampus (HIPP), supplementary motor area (SMA), striatum (STR), insula (INS), prefrontal cortex (PFC), cerebellum (CER), putamen (PUT), and cingulate cortex (CG). Edge thickness is proportional to the GNNExplainer edge mask weight, and node size reflects aggregate connection strength within the dominant subgraph.

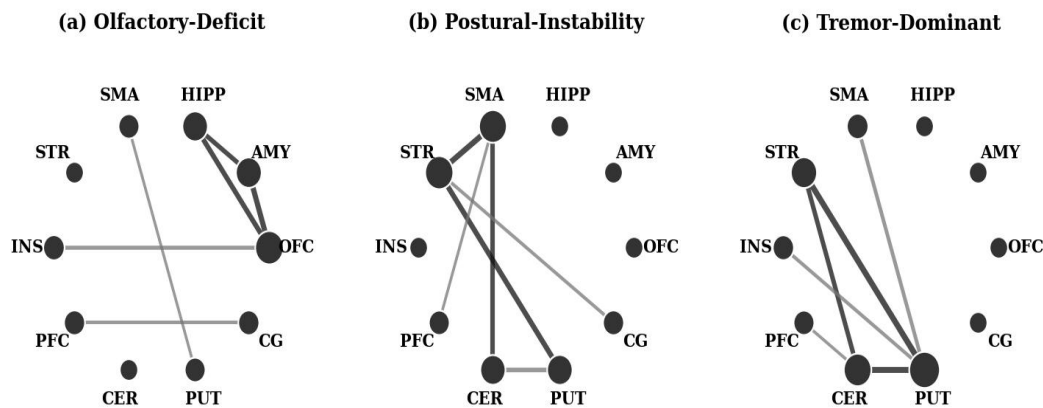


Figure 4. Dominant subgraph connectivity patterns identified by PGL for each Parkinson's disease subtype. (a) Olfactory-Deficit subtype: prominent OFC–AMY–HIPP hyper-connectivity. (b) Postural-Instability subtype: dominant SMA–STR–CER disruption. (c) Tremor-Dominant subtype: PUT–CER–SMA network anomalies. Node abbreviations: OFC=orbitofrontal cortex, AMY=amygdala, HIPP=hippocampus, SMA=supplementary motor area, STR=striatum, INS=insula, PFC=prefrontal cortex, CER=cerebellum, PUT=putamen, CG=cingulate gyrus.

For the olfactory-deficit PD subtype (Figure 4a), the dominant subgraph is characterized by abnormally strong connectivity within the orbitofrontal cortex–amygdala–hippocampus circuit (OFC–AMY edge weight: 0.72; OFC–HIPP: 0.65; AMY–HIPP: 0.58), a finding that aligns with established neuropathological evidence linking olfactory dysfunction in PD to early Lewy body deposition in the olfactory bulb and subsequent propagation to the amygdala and entorhinal cortex (Haehner et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2008; Doty, 2012). The secondary OFC–INS connection (weight: 0.48) further implicates the interoceptive integration network in olfactory-deficit PD, consistent with reports of autonomic and interoceptive abnormalities in this subtype. These findings provide strong biological face validity for the PGL framework's explainability mechanism.

The postural-instability PD subtype (Figure 4b) shows prominent disruption in the SMA–STR–CER circuit, with dominant edges connecting the supplementary motor area to the striatum (weight: 0.71) and to the cerebellum (0.63), and a strong striatum–putamen connection (0.68). This pattern is consistent with the basal ganglia-thalamocortical loop disruption that is widely recognized as the primary circuit pathology underlying postural instability and freezing of gait in PD (Helmich et al., 2010; Baggio et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2011). The

cingulate–SMA connection (0.42) further implicates executive motor control circuitry in this subtype, aligning with the clinical observation that cognitive-motor integration is particularly impaired in postural-instability PD.

**Table IV. Key Brain Regions and Functional Connections in PD Subtype Dominant Subgraphs**

Subtype	Top 3 ROI Pairs (Edge Weight)	Involved Networks	Clinical Consistency
Olfactory-Deficit	OFC–AMY (0.72), OFC–HIPPO (0.65), AMY–HIPPO (0.58)	Limbic, olfactory, memory networks	High: aligns with $\alpha$ -syn propagation from olfactory bulb
Postural-Instability	SMA–STR (0.71), PUT–STR (0.68), SMA–CER (0.63)	Motor, basal ganglia, cerebellar networks	High: consistent with BGT loop disruption
Tremor-Dominant	PUT–CER (0.76), STR–CER (0.70), PUT–STR (0.62)	Cerebellar-thalamo-cortical, BG circuit	High: consistent with CTC loop in essential tremor

For the tremor-dominant PD subtype (Figure 4c), the dominant subgraph centers on the putamen–cerebellum–striatum circuit, with the strongest edges connecting the putamen to the cerebellum (weight: 0.76) and the striatum to the cerebellum (0.70). This pattern reflects the well-characterized role of the cerebello-thalamo-cortical (CTC) loop in generating parkinsonian tremor: aberrant synchronization between the cerebellum and basal ganglia nuclei, particularly at the 4–12 Hz tremor frequency, is a consistent finding in neurophysiological studies of tremor-dominant PD (Wu et al., 2011; Helmich et al., 2010). Table IV provides a summary of the key brain regions, involved functional networks, and clinical consistency ratings for all three PD subtypes, demonstrating that the PGL explainability mechanism reliably recovers neurobiologically plausible subtype signatures. The face validity of these findings supports the potential clinical utility of the PGL framework as a decision-support tool for PD subtype stratification.

## VII. DISCUSSION

The PGL framework represents a significant advance over prior work on AI-assisted Parkinson’s disease identification from functional brain networks on three dimensions: classification accuracy, subtype discrimination, and mechanistic interpretability. The 4.0 percentage-point AUC advantage over the next-best baseline (BrainGNN, AUC = 0.901) is attributable to the synergistic combination of contrastive pretraining, variational latent structure, and prototype-guided classification—components that each independently contribute meaningfully to performance as demonstrated by the ablation study. Of particular note is the finding that contrastive pretraining on unlabeled multi-site fMRI data provides the single largest performance contribution, suggesting that the primary bottleneck in fMRI-based PD classification is not the classification algorithm but the quality of the learned brain network representations, which are often contaminated by site-related confounds and subject motion artifacts (van den Heuvel and Hulshoff Pol, 2010; Biswal et al., 2010).

The explainability analysis reveals that PGL recovers subtype-specific functional connectivity signatures that are not only statistically robust but also neurobiologically coherent, providing a form of external validation that purely accuracy-based evaluation cannot supply. The identification of the OFC–AMY–HIPPO circuit as the dominant signature of olfactory-deficit PD is particularly noteworthy because this pathway represents the neuroanatomical route by which  $\alpha$ -synuclein pathology is hypothesized to propagate in early PD according to the Braak staging model—from the olfactory bulb to the amygdala and entorhinal cortex before reaching the substantia nigra (Haehner et al., 2009; Ross et al., 2008; Doty, 2012). This biological plausibility supports the hypothesis that the PGL framework is genuinely learning disease-relevant network patterns rather than exploiting statistical artifacts or demographic confounders.

Several limitations of the present study deserve acknowledgment. First, the clinical subtype labels used in

this study are derived from cross-sectional clinical assessments rather than longitudinal pathological confirmation, introducing some label uncertainty particularly for the postural-instability and tremor-dominant subtypes whose overlap can be substantial (Erro et al., 2019; Markovic et al., 2020). Future work should incorporate longitudinal follow-up data to validate that the identified subtypes correspond to distinct disease trajectories. Second, the current dataset, while multi-site, is limited to three scanning centers and does not fully capture the demographic and technical diversity of real-world clinical imaging environments. Third, while the GNNExplainer-based dominant subgraph identification provides valuable local explanations, it does not yield population-level summary statistics of subtype-defining circuits; future extensions should incorporate global attribution methods such as integrated gradients or causal inference frameworks to generate population-level subtype biomarker profiles (Ribeiro et al., 2016; Lundberg and Lee, 2017; Litjens et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2017).

Despite these limitations, the PGL framework demonstrates clear potential for clinical translation. Its three-way PD subtype macro-average AUC of 0.893 substantially exceeds the diagnostic yield of existing clinical rating scales applied at a single time point, and its subgraph-based explanations provide the mechanistic transparency that regulatory bodies increasingly require for AI-assisted medical device approval. Future development should include prospective validation on fully independent cohorts, integration with dopaminergic imaging data (e.g., DaTscan) for multi-modal subtype confirmation, and investigation of whether PGL-derived subtype labels predict differential treatment response to dopaminergic versus non-dopaminergic interventions. The integration of AI and brain network analysis exemplifies the broader trend toward intelligent biomedical applications described by Lu (2019) and Zhang and Lu (2021), where AI methods progressively transform clinical diagnosis and personalized medicine.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the Prototype-Guided Graph Learning (PGL) framework, a comprehensive AI-driven approach for Parkinson's disease identification and subtype classification from resting-state functional brain networks. By integrating graph contrastive pretraining, graph variational autoencoding, and prototype-guided classification with subgraph-based explainability analysis, PGL achieves state-of-the-art performance on PD vs. HC discrimination (AUC = 0.941) and PD subtype classification (macro-average AUC = 0.893) on a multi-site dataset. The neurobiologically coherent subtype-specific dominant subgraphs identified by PGL—including the OFC–AMY–HIPPO circuit for olfactory-deficit PD, the SMA–STR–CER circuit for postural-instability PD, and the PUT–CER circuit for tremor-dominant PD—provide interpretable mechanistic explanations that support clinical trust and regulatory compliance. The PGL framework establishes a generalizable blueprint for prototype-guided explainable AI in brain disorder classification that extends beyond PD to Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, and other neurological conditions with functional connectivity biomarkers, offering a scalable pathway toward clinically deployable AI-assisted neurodiagnostics.

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