



Analysing Speech in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* based on Gender

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Abstract— *Pride and Prejudice*, a classic novel by Jane Austen, portrays the social and linguistic differences in the speech of men and women in 19th Century England. This paper attempts to explore how language is used as a tool for representation of gender identity, social standing and power dynamics within the characters in the novel. This exploration is done by closely examining conversations and interactions among characters. It studies the differences between the ways the male and female characters use language to navigate their relationships, assert power and deal with social expectations. The syntactic structures, the choice of words, politeness strategies and speech acts are examined to study the interplay between language and gender that Austen brings out in her famed novel. The speech patterns are also involved in studying the gendered expectations and the societal norms, and how they are affected by speech. The paper contributes to the deeper understanding of the use of language based on gender differences and sheds light on the complexities of gender performance and expressions within the Regency-era English society. It gives the readers an insight into the way the author's portrayal of speech reflects the gender dynamics throughout the novel.



Keywords— *Pride and Prejudice*, language, gender, speech analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the word choices of men and women differ considerably. The manner in which men and women verbally express themselves have been a fascinating subject of research in the fabric of human interaction. The speech patterns, which range from pitch and intonation to word selections and conversational approaches of the two genders, have been the focus of serious study and investigation. Examination of these patterns provides some noticeable insights into the cultural norms and expectations as well as the complexities of the language. We learn more about human interactions, communication between men and women, and how language reflects as well as influences our perspectives, relationships, and identities.

Through the perspective of gender analysis in literature, one may study the intricacies of society, power relationships, and identity as they are depicted in literary works. Literature from all genres and eras of history portrays gender norms, expectations, and experiences. The intricacies of gender presentation and communication can be observed and analysed through the insightful lens of speech patterns. Moreover, gender-based speech analysis emphasizes the diversity and flexibility of gendered language practices thereby recognizing a broad range of linguistic identities and expressions that go beyond the conventional binary concepts.

II. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

One book where the speech patterns of men and women are obviously different is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Published in 1813, the novel stands as one of the great works of English literature. The work, which takes place in Regency England in the early 1800s, addresses social class, marriage, and the intricacies of interpersonal relationships. It chronicles Elizabeth Bennet's journey through the sexual relationships and social standards of her times.

Austen's examination of conversation in the book offers a complex mirror of the expectations, customs, and hierarchies of contemporary English society. In a world where speech serves as a tool for both communication and conflict, the novelist creates a scenario where the personalities, ideals, and motives of the characters are revealed through dialogue. This research looks at the subtleties of language, tone, and conversation structure in order to explore the complexities of speech in Austen's work. The conflict between propriety and authenticity, societal aspiration and personal identity is highlighted in almost every discussion throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. The author expresses the underlying realities of conversation through the use of speech as a tool for character development, societal critique, and narrative propulsion.

III. GENDERED SPEECH PATTERNS

i) Female Speech Patterns

The depiction of female speech patterns in *Pride and Prejudice* paints a clear picture of gender dynamics and the expectations of the 19th-century English society. With the limitations of the social environment in mind, Austen depicts the subtleties of female communications through the conversations and interactions of some of the characters such as Elizabeth Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, and Jane Bennet.

The female characters in the book often conduct themselves politely in accordance with the standards set by their social standing. Their speech has a certain decorum and sophistication that is indicative of their education and upbringing. Given below are some instances to bolster the researchers' argument:

- Politeness strategies and decorum:
"You are too hasty, sir," she cried. "You forgot that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than to decline them." (Austen 121)

The above lines are uttered by Elizabeth Bennet to Mr. Collins wherein Elizabeth starts off by thanking Mr. Collins for putting her out to marriage. She graciously refuses Mr.

Collins's proposal, even though she appreciates the sincerity behind it. She doesn't criticize or disparage Mr. Collins in her response; instead, she concentrates on her incapacity to accept his offer. All of them demonstrate her understanding of the social norm around showing thanks and her dedication to upholding her own morals and beliefs while also preserving Mr. Collins' and her own dignity.

- Wit and Assertiveness:

"I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine." (Austen 25)

Elizabeth is expressing her displeasure and irritation with Mr. Darcy's actions in the statement above. She admits that if he hadn't hurt her dignity, she could have forgiven him. Elizabeth finds herself drawn to Mr. Darcy, but she wouldn't accept his disrespecting behaviour. She demands that everyone treat her with respect and recognize her value as a person, regardless of social standing or financial background, and she declares her independence.

- Expressions of Societal Constraints:

"A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (Austen 3)

Mrs. Bennet says the aforementioned remarks at the start of the book. They convey the social norm that women-particularly those from middle-class or lower-class backgrounds- should marry primarily in order to secure their financial future. Without marriage, women had few alternatives for safeguarding their futures, especially if they were poor or had no powerful ties. For many women, getting married was the only way to raise their social status or secure their financial future.

ii) Male Speech Patterns:

The male characters in *Pride and Prejudice* represent the expectations and social mores prevalent in Regency-era England. Men's discourse often reflects their responsibilities as the main providers and decision-makers in society by projecting authority, confidence, and social status. Their speech provides insight about their social status, personalities, and perspectives on romance and marriage.

- Assertiveness and Directness:

"In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you." (Austen 204)

The above quote is a pivotal point in Austen's novel. It takes place during Elizabeth Bennet's initial proposal from Mr. Darcy. Despite his haughty and arrogant demeanour at first, Mr. Darcy begins to feel drawn to Elizabeth. This desire and adoration intensify throughout the book. His honesty and

the intensity of his feelings are reflected in his directness and aggressiveness. When he says, "It will not do," he is admitting that he can't push his feelings for Elizabeth to the side.

- Authority and Dominance

"My reasons for marrying me are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish." (Austen 119)

The aforementioned lines are uttered by Mr. Collins to Elizabeth Bennet. His sense of power and authority is reflected in the statement, but in an arrogant and foolish manner. Mr. Collins states that he feels that it is his responsibility as a priest to lead by example when it comes to matrimony within his community. In his society, he aims to assert his influence not just as a cleric but also as a moral leader. When he refers to "easy circumstances," it also suggests that he believes that he is better than Elizabeth and her family socially. He tries to establish the social hierarchy that controls their interactions and demonstrates his power by presenting himself as Elizabeth's ideal match.

- Masculinity:

"I have been used to consider poetry as the food for love." (Austen 53)

This is what Mr. Darcy says in a discussion with Elizabeth Bennet regarding the function of poetry in love. His remark implies that he has been exposed to literature and culture, which demonstrates the level of sophistication that was typical of upper-class men during the Regency era. His declaration also conveys his idealistic and aspirational romanticism. His yearning for meaningful relationships and profound emotional connections is evident. This remark is consistent with Mr. Darcy's development as a character, which shows us how he changes from a proud and reticent person to someone who can truly love and be intimate with others.

IV. CONCLUSION

Jane Austen expertly illustrates the linguistic distinctions between the male and female characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, mirroring the gender roles and social mores prevalent in Regency England. Male characters such as Mr. Collins and Mr. Darcy demonstrate their power, confidence, and authority in their dealings with others through their discourse. Their discourse, which frequently takes the form of overt suggestions and declarations of social superiority, is a reflection of their social privilege and entitlement expectations. Female protagonists like Jane and Elizabeth Bennet, on the contrary, deftly negotiate social mores with

a careful balance of decorum, charm, and intellect. They are seen to make their voices heard within the confines of their social positions by using cunning and diplomacy to get around patriarchal restrictions. In conclusion, the investigation of gender dynamics in Jane Austen's popular fiction *Pride and Prejudice* is compounded by the linguistic distinctions between its major characters- both male and female. The author creates conversation that highlights the manner in which individuals manoeuvre identity, agency, and power within the limitations of their social context while also reflecting the intricacies of gendered communication.

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