



An Analysis of Politeness Maxims in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice

تحليل لمبادئ اللباقة في رواية "الكبرياء والتحمل" لجين أوستن

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Abstract

This study sheds light on the analysis of conversational features in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* through the lens of politeness maxims from pragmatics. The research aims to examine the spoken exchanges among key characters to determine how they conform to or violate Leech's politeness maxims—such as the tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims. By identifying both adherence and deviation from these pragmatic rules, the study reveals underlying character dynamics, societal norms, and narrative strategies.

A qualitative descriptive method is used, focusing on approximately 17 significant quotations selected from key dialogues involving characters such as Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet, Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, Jane and Elizabeth, and Elizabeth and Lady Catherine. These quotations are analyzed contextually to interpret the speaker's intent, social status, relational dynamics, and how the politeness strategies (or lack thereof) influence character perception and plot development.

The findings indicate that violations of the politeness maxims often reflect character traits and thematic concerns. For example, Mr. Bennet's sarcasm regularly breaches the tact and approbation maxims, highlighting his detachment and wit. In contrast, Jane Bennet consistently upholds the sympathy and modesty maxims, reinforcing her gentle and considerate personality. Elizabeth frequently balances politeness with assertiveness, especially in confrontational scenes, subtly violating the agreement maxim to express independence. Lady Catherine's blunt and domineering tone blatantly violates several maxims, emphasizing her authoritative and class-conscious nature.

Overall, the study concludes that Austen strategically uses politeness maxims not only to shape character voices but also to reflect broader social hierarchies and tensions. The analysis of these selected dialogues demonstrates how pragmatic violations serve as tools of irony, critique, and character development throughout the novel.

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المخلص

تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على تحليل ميزات المحادثة في رواية جين أوستن "فخر وتحامل" من خلال عدسة ماكسيمات اللطف من علم اللغة العملي. تهدف البحث إلى فحص التبادلات الكلامية بين الشخصيات الرئيسية لتحديد كيفية توافقها مع أو انتهاكها لماكسيمات اللطف التي وضعها ليتش، مثل ماكسيمات اللباقة والكرم والتأييد والتواضع والاتفاق والتعاطف. من خلال تحديد كل من الالتزام والانحراف عن هذه القواعد العملية، تكشف الدراسة عن الديناميات الأساسية للشخصيات والمعايير الاجتماعية واستراتيجيات السرد.

تم استخدام منهج وصفي نوعي، يركز على حوالي 17 اقتباساً مهماً تم اختيارها من الحوارات الرئيسية التي تشمل شخصيات مثل السيد بينيت والسيدة بينيت، والسيد بينغلي والسيد دارسي، وجين وإليزابيث، وإليزابيث والسيدة كاترين. يتم تحليل هذه الاقتباسات في سياقها لتفسير نية المتحدث، والمكانة الاجتماعية، والديناميات العلائقية، وكيف تؤثر استراتيجيات اللطف (أو عدم وجودها) على تصور الشخصيات وتطوير الحبكة.

تشير النتائج إلى أن انتهاكات ماكسيمات اللطف غالباً ما تعكس سمات الشخصية والاهتمامات الموضوعية. على سبيل المثال، إن سخريّة السيد بينيت تنتهك بانتظام ماكسيمات اللباقة والتأييد، مما يبرز انفصاله وذكائه. في المقابل، تحافظ جين بينيت باستمرار على ماكسيمات التعاطف والتواضع، مما يعزز شخصيتها اللطيفة والمراعية. غالباً ما توازن إليزابيث بين اللطف والحزم، خاصة في المشاهد المواجهة، بشكل خفي.

1.Introduction

Literary studies reveal language means of expression cannot be divorced from linguistics on the other hand, linguistic research is also inseparable from the literature. If linguistics and literary studies are merged, we can better understand the core of literary interchange. Throughout the vast complex work of Austen, the researchers seem accustomed to the attention focused on the ideological content of their works. Austen language in arts and research works are very modest, indeed is recalled the 19th century, and contemporary literary studies criticism of Jane Austen's feasibility and necessity of the meaning of prejudice. This dissertation mostly concentrates on Geoffrey N Leech's politeness principle.

Jane Austen was an English novelist whose novels of romance set among the gentry have earned her a place as one of the most widely read and most adored writers in English literature. As it's observed *Pride and Prejudice* reserves its important place of Austen's literary work. Dialogue is an important part of fiction and plays a role vital to depict the characters and promote the plot development. The selected novel for this study '*Pride and Prejudice*' was published in 1813. It is a novel of manners that is set in the English countryside during the beginning of the 1800's. Austen completed the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*, which she titled *First Impressions*, in 1797, but it was not published until after she had rewritten it nearly sixteen years later. Of her six complete novels, *Pride and Prejudice* seems to have been her favorite. In a letter to her sister Cassandra she referred to the book as her "darling child" and called

her protagonist Elizabeth Bennet “as delightful a character as ever appeared in print”. Jane Austen’s work seems little touched by political events in her world or by major literary trends of her day. She focuses instead on themes of social class, middle class manners, gender issues, courtship and marriage, all of which come together in *Pride and Prejudice*. Perhaps it is these timeless themes that draw readers back again and again to this novel. *Pride and Prejudice* as the representative work of Jane Austen, has its significance work in literary history. Due to its relationship among the main characters, *Pride and Prejudice* owns distinguished conversational features. (Austen, 2013: Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice* pp.xii-xiv)

The Problems of the Study

The reason to choose this novel for present study is that it has a deep contextual meaning behind every scene and conversation. It deserves to do more justice with elements of pragmatics i.e. Politeness maxims by employing various maxims of politeness principles. It can be seen, as the story unfolds, characters take strong positions and become a vital part of developing plot.

Research Question

- 1.What are the politeness maxims found in *Pride and Prejudice*?
2. How the realization of *Pride and Prejudice* accomplished?

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate more understanding about the politeness maxims.
2. To analyze different dialogues with different interpretations to find the hidden intention. The characters are exchanging dialogues in an unconscious way with a view to express their ideas. However, my goal here is to decipher the characters’ motivations, implicit meanings and psychology.
3. To analyze the politeness maxims found in the novel, in the hope of explaining the psycho-analytical perception for the characters.

2.Literature Review

Literary pragmatics emerged rather early. Furthermore, because of the influence of literature, the study of literary pragmatics is far richer overseas than it is domestically. Scholars have started to focus on the confluence of literature and pragmatics since 1990. According to Ran Yongpin(2008), considers that literary pragmatics demonstrates two aspects: the first is linguistic, which is the field of pragmatics study; the use pragmatic theory to analyze literary texts. The second is literary analysis, which goes beyond literary criticism. According to Feng-Zong Xin (2002), Literary pragmatics is derived from literary communication, while pragmatics focusses on utterance interaction and communication norm. According to TuJing (2004), literary pragmatics addresses the drawbacks of linguistics and literature studies by separating the relationship between language and literature. They also create a text, author, and audience as

a whole while combining language and communication in literature to investigate the text's meaning.

Pride and prejudice has always been a popular study topic for researchers, some do pertinent literary analyses to examine feminism or marriage, while others do so to find irony, humor etc. This study has long drawn attention, whether in the field of pragmatics as it focuses on politeness principles throughout the conversational implicate.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

I will be using a qualitative description design in this study. Pragmatics has been guided throughout its history by the philosophical practice of pragmatic principles, and it has evolved to keep its distinct status as a linguistic branch by sticking to its charter of being practical in dealing with daily meaning. Pragmatics is a relatively late comer in linguistics. It enters the linguistic scene at the end of the 1970s. However, to many people, this is a rather new area. In many ways, Pragmatics is the study of 'Invisible' meaning, or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said (or written). This study will analyze approximately **15–17 key conversations** or scenes from *Pride and Prejudice*. These scenes are selected based on their relevance to interpersonal dynamics and social interaction, especially those that involve significant character exchanges which reflect politeness strategies or violations. The conversations include interactions between central characters such as Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, Jane and Elizabeth, Mr. Collins and Lady Catherine, among others. The aim is to provide a diverse range of contexts—courtship, family discussion, social confrontation, and friendship—to ensure a rich analysis of pragmatic behavior in various social settings.

To identify politeness maxims, the study follows **Geoffrey Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle**, which includes six major maxims:

- **Tact Maxim:** Minimize cost to others; maximize benefit to others
- **Generosity Maxim:** Minimize benefit to self; maximize cost to self
- **Approbation Maxim:** Minimize dispraise of others; maximize praise of others
- **Modesty Maxim:** Minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self
- **Agreement Maxim:** Minimize disagreement between self and other; maximize agreement
- **Sympathy Maxim:** Minimize antipathy; maximize sympathy

Each maxim is identified by examining the **intent and effect** of an utterance in its context. Key indicators include how characters **make requests, offer opinions, show disagreement, express praise or criticism**, and how their speech aligns with or opposes expected social norms and politeness strategies.

This study employs **thematic analysis** as the primary method of qualitative data interpretation. After selecting and transcribing the chosen quotations from the novel, each excerpt is carefully read and analyzed to identify themes related to **politeness strategies, maxim adherence, and violation patterns**.

The thematic analysis includes:

- **Initial coding** based on the type of maxim being used or violated
- **Grouping codes into broader themes**, such as “ironic politeness,” “social hierarchy and power,” “assertiveness vs. modesty,” and “conflict and confrontation”
- **Interpreting the thematic patterns** to understand how pragmatic choices influence the reader’s perception of character traits, relationships, and narrative development

In order for that to happen, speakers (and writers) must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations. The investigation of those assumptions provides us with some insights into how more gets communicated than is said. (Yule 2000, P.127)

There are compelling reasons to attempt to provide some indication of the extent of pragmatics. For starters, it's a suitably unfamiliar term. Secondly, it is not easy to simply 'go and have a look' at what professionals in pragmatics do. Thirdly, some authors attempt to argue that there is no cohesive field at all: thus (Lyons 1977, p.117) states that ‘the applicability of the distinction between syntax, semantics and pragmatics ‘to the description all of natural languages, in contrast to the description of construction of logical calculi is, at least that ‘Pragmatics is one of those words (societal and cognitive are others) that gives the impression that something quite specific and technical is being talked about when often in fact it has no clear meaning.’ The pragmatists is thus challenged to show that, at least within the linguistic and philosophical tradition that is the concern of this book, the term does have clear application. (Levinson 2003, pp. 5-6).

3.2 Data Collection

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a widely read and studied novel that has been used as a model for research on a variety of themes. A specific emphasis has been made on how Austen depicts her characters' words and thinking. Dialogue, according to her, is the best way to get as close to reality as possible. (Austen, 2013: Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice* pp. xii-xiv)

Since Austen wanted to achieve a realistic representation of her people and their environment with psychological depth, she had to create gradations in the regular dialogue between them. Utterances could be considered essential or unimportant, a character could appear more prominently than another throughout the novel, or entire scenes could outperform others in terms of prominence.

Pride and Prejudice's dialogue is enhanced with direct and indirect versions of speech to highlight the various focus and present these contrasts to the reader in a comprehensible manner. The same is true for the portrayal of characters' thoughts, which takes up a significant portion of the text. By shifting between the many ways to show speech and thought, Austen was able to interject her own perspectives on specific events and characters. Various categories of speech and thoughts provided will be studied in terms of their prevalence in the novel, their value and meaning to the narrator and reader, and exhibited using selected passages. This can be accomplished by providing a thorough description of the terms.

Language is a mean of communication and is used for some important functions, like, handing over information, expressing feelings, attitudes, views, etc., getting things done by directing and requesting people, and establishing and maintain interpersonal relationships. In socio-linguistics parlance of these functions are termed informative, expressive, directive and phatic or social functions. Phatic expressions make routines phrases such as those expressing good will, solidarity and cordiality. Human linguistics interaction is not limited to mere give and take of knowledge of information. It had been such, it would become very static and dry as dust. Common sense and observations of how linguistic interaction proceeds, tell us that human communication is much more than a mere exchange of ideas and thoughts. A prerequisite to human verbal transaction is that there should be some kind of commonality and fellow feelings among the communicators. Hostile and Antagonistic interlocutors cannot continue to communicate for long. As far as communication is concerned, there has to be some sort of common ground before the ball is set rolling; and one of the most significant means of communicating common greeting is the use of greeting, and small talk about the weather and health. (Thorat 2003, pp.14-15)

Leech has proposed an independent pragmatic principle, to function alongside the cooperative principle, which he calls the politeness principles (PP). Leech assumes that the PP can be seen not another principle to be added to the CP, but as a necessary component, which rescues the CP from serious troubles. (Leech 1983, p.80). Politeness principle consists of six maxims: tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim and sympathy maxim.

3.3 Data Analysis

The Tact Maxim: is oriented towards the hearer and has positive and negative sub-maxims:

- Minimize the cost of the hearer.
- Maximize benefits to the hearer.

The Generosity Maxim: is a sister to the tact maxim, and is oriented towards cost and benefits to the speakers:

- Minimize benefits to the self.
- Maximize cost to the self.

The Approbation Maxim: concerns the expression of the positive or negative opinions about the speaker or the hearers. It is oriented towards the hearer:

- Minimize dispraise of the hearer.
- Maximize praise of the hearer.

The Modesty Maxim: is the natural partner of the approbation maxim, being oriented towards the speaker, with the relevant “values” reserved:

- Minimize the praise of the self.
- Maximize dispraise of the self.

The Agreement Maxims is divided into:

- Minimize disagreement of the hearer.
- Maximize agreement with the hearer.

The Sympathy Maxim: is the matte of relation between the speaker and the hearer, and cannot be differentially speaker or hearer oriented:

- Minimize antipathy (expression of negative feelings) towards the hearer.
- Maximize sympathy towards the hearer.

It is obvious that with each maxim, the second sub-maxim seems to be less important than the first sub maxim, which again illustrates the more general law that negative politeness or avoidance of discord is the weightier consideration than positive politeness or seeking concord. (Leech 1980, p.136)

4.Results and Discussion

Conversations Between Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy

Critical Analysis of Directive Utterances and Politeness Maxims in *Pride and Prejudice*

1. Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy – Directive and Tact Maxims

In the following conversation at the ball hosted by Mr. Bingley, he addresses Mr. Darcy with a request:

Mr. Bingley: “Come, Darcy, I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance.”

Mr. Darcy: “I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner...”

Here, Mr. Bingley issues a directive utterance intended to persuade Darcy to engage socially through dance. While the imperative form “Come, Darcy, I must have you dance” may initially seem assertive, it operates within the bounds of the **Tact Maxim** (Leech, 1983), which emphasizes minimizing cost to others and maximizing benefit to the listener. Bingley’s request is framed in the context of care and social inclusion, aligning with his role as host. However, Darcy’s

response, while direct, is not impolite. He provides a reasoned refusal grounded in personal discomfort rather than social hostility, suggesting a nuanced understanding of negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), as he asserts his autonomy without overt offense.

Critical Note: While the initial analysis claims the Tact Maxim is “perfectly observed,” this is an oversimplification. Bingley’s utterance borders on presumption, softened only by the context of friendship. A deeper discourse analysis could consider power dynamics—Bingley, as host, has some authority but not enough to override Darcy’s preference, which he defends with politeness strategies.

2. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy – Irony and Flouting the Agreement Maxim

At another social event, Mr. Darcy invites Elizabeth to dance:

Darcy: “Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?”

Elizabeth: “Oh! I heard you before... I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes... and now despise me if you dare.”

This exchange does not exemplify the **Agreement Maxim** as initially suggested. Instead, Elizabeth’s sarcastic and ironic tone clearly **flouts** the maxim. Rather than seeking agreement, she resists the social script of polite acceptance and intentionally subverts Darcy’s expectations. Her refusal, couched in playful yet pointed sarcasm, highlights her resistance to male dominance and performative politeness. This move is characteristic of **face-threatening acts** (FTAs), but Elizabeth softens the threat through irony, a strategy aligning with Brown & Levinson’s negative politeness framework.

Critical Note: Labeling this as an example of Agreement Maxim misinterprets the function of sarcasm, which often entails **strategic non-cooperation** in discourse. A more accurate interpretation sees this as Elizabeth asserting agency through indirect confrontation, using irony as a shield for vulnerability and critique.

3. Elizabeth and Darcy – Observation of Tact Maxim in Shifting Power Dynamics

Later in the novel, Elizabeth seeks to reconnect with Darcy and subtly initiates conversation:

Elizabeth: “Is your sister at Pemberley still?”

Darcy: “Yes, she will remain there till Christmas.”

Elizabeth: “And quite alone? Have all her friends left her?”

Darcy: “Mrs. Annesley is with her. The others have been gone on to Scarborough, these three weeks.”

Elizabeth's approach is cautious and tactful, aligning with the **Tact Maxim**, as she seeks to minimize imposition while expressing interest. Her inquiries are indirect, allowing Darcy the option to disengage, which he does not. Instead, his calm and forthcoming replies suggest a mutual softening in their interaction. The balance between question and response reflects emerging equality in their relationship, supported by linguistic cooperation.

Critical Note: This exchange provides a better example of the Tact Maxim than previously analyzed scenes. It also reveals how politeness strategies evolve across the narrative as character relationships shift. Incorporating **discourse markers**, **turn-taking**, and **conversational implicature** would deepen the analysis further.

4. Jane and Elizabeth – Modesty Maxim and Positive Politeness

In their private conversation, Jane praises Mr. Bingley, and Elizabeth responds:

Jane: "He is just what a young man ought to be... so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!"

Elizabeth: "He is also handsome... His character is thereby complete."

This exchange illustrates the Modesty Maxim, wherein speakers downplay their own or their interlocutor's praise to appear humble and supportive. Elizabeth's use of humor ("if he possibly can") maintains a light tone, reinforcing solidarity. The sisters' mutual agreement and mild teasing reflect positive politeness, aimed at strengthening bonds and mutual approval.

Critical Note: This scene demonstrates modesty more effectively than earlier examples. The previous analysis should avoid overgeneralizing by stating that the maxim was "observed perfectly." Instead, academic writing should recognize that maxims are context-sensitive, and characters may shift between cooperation, flouting, and strategic politeness depending on interpersonal goals.

5. Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy – Irony and Flouting the Agreement Maxim

In a pivotal moment of *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy invites Elizabeth to dance:

Mr. Darcy: "Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?"

Elizabeth: "Oh! I heard you before; but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say 'Yes,' that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you that I do not want to dance a reel at all – and now despise me if you dare." (Austen, 2013, p.39)

In this exchange, Elizabeth's sarcastic response flouts the **Agreement Maxim** (Leech, 1983), which posits that speakers should provide an answer that

aligns with the expectations of their interlocutor. Elizabeth's intentional subversion of Darcy's assumption reveals her resistance to conforming to social norms and expectations. The irony in her reply, instead of agreeing with Darcy's invitation, critiques his presumed condescension and mocks his intentions.

This act demonstrates **face-threatening behavior** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), yet it is mitigated by the use of humor and indirectness, typical of Elizabeth's character. Rather than simply rejecting Darcy's proposal outright, she highlights his presumption while maintaining a level of social decorum.

Critical Note: Elizabeth's use of sarcasm, in this case, flouts the Agreement Maxim and subverts politeness norms, using humor as a tool for resistance. Rather than accepting Darcy's implicit expectation of her compliance, she challenges the power dynamics at play.

6. Elizabeth Bennet and Miss Bingley – Violation of Agreement Maxim

In this exchange, Mr. Darcy asks Elizabeth if she enjoys reading, but Miss Bingley interrupts:

Mr. Darcy: "Do you prefer reading to cards? That is rather singular."

Miss Bingley: "Miss Eliza Bennet despises cards. She is a great reader and has no pleasure in anything else."

Elizabeth: "I deserve neither such praise nor such censure," cried Elizabeth; "I am not a great reader, and I have pleasure in many things." (Austen, 2013, p.34)

In this interaction, Miss Bingley's intrusion violates the **Agreement Maxim** by imposing her own assessment of Elizabeth's character, thereby invalidating Elizabeth's opportunity to respond truthfully. Miss Bingley's overstatement about Elizabeth's preferences reflects an imposition of **positive face-threatening behavior** (Brown & Levinson, 1987), where she forces Elizabeth into a position where she must either accept Miss Bingley's characterization or refute it.

Elizabeth's response cleverly mitigates the imposition by denying Miss Bingley's portrayal while asserting her own preferences, thus maintaining her autonomy and positive face.

Critical Note: The intrusion by Miss Bingley serves as an example of how **social dynamics** and **power relations** in the conversation can manipulate politeness norms. Elizabeth's quick correction highlights her agency and the importance of maintaining one's face in a conversation dominated by social expectations and power plays.

7. Elizabeth Bennet and Miss Bingley – Tact Maxim in Social Interactions

In a moment of subtle tension, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley marginalize Elizabeth as they walk together, leaving her behind:

Miss Bingley: "I did not know that you intended to walk," said Miss Bingley, in some confusion.

Mrs. Hurst: "You used us abominably ill, in running away without telling us that you were coming out."

Elizabeth: "No, no; stay where you are. You are charmingly grouped, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Goodbye." (Austen, 2013, p.50)

Here, Elizabeth's response exemplifies the **Tact Maxim** (Leech, 1983), which emphasizes minimizing imposition and maximizing the benefit to the listener. While Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley clearly aim to marginalize her, Elizabeth's response is both tactful and deflective. Rather than protesting or directly confronting their behavior, she uses humor and indirectness to disengage from their exclusion and deflect the tension.

Her ability to maintain composure and redirect the conversation with politeness, while asserting her preference to walk alone, shows a **face-preserving strategy**. Elizabeth's response not only saves her own face but also highlights her **linguistic skill** in navigating potentially uncomfortable situations with grace.

Critical Note: Elizabeth's response serves as an excellent example of how **politeness strategies** can be employed to negotiate power and maintain social equilibrium, especially in hierarchical interactions where one may not have full social agency.

8. Lydia Bennet and Mrs. Bennet – Violation of the Tact and Generosity Maxims

In a conversation where Lydia boasts about her elopement with Mr. Wickham, she makes a provocative comment:

Lydia: "I am sure my sisters must all envy me. I only hope they may have half my good luck. They must all go to Brighton. That is the place to get husbands. What a pity it is, mamma, we did not all go."

Elizabeth: "I thank you for my share of the favour, but I do not particularly like your way of getting husbands." (Austen, 2013, p.303)

Lydia's boastful remark flouts both the **Tact Maxim** and the **Generosity Maxim** (Leech, 1983). She maximizes the cost to her sisters by mocking their single status and positioning her own choice as superior. Lydia's insensitive comment creates a social imbalance, imposing on her sisters by making them feel inadequate. This violation of the **Tact Maxim** is compounded by her lack of generosity towards her sisters, as she places the focus on her own perceived success at the expense of others.

Elizabeth's quick, direct response exemplifies a **face-saving** strategy. By rejecting Lydia's insinuation, Elizabeth reasserts her autonomy and critiques Lydia's behavior, thus using language as a **tool of resistance** to social pressures and sibling rivalry.

Critical Note: Lydia's use of sarcasm and boastfulness reveals her strategic violation of politeness maxims to assert her dominance. In contrast, Elizabeth's response demonstrates how politeness can serve as a countermeasure to social aggression and dissonance.

9. Mr. Bennet and Elizabeth – Agreement Maxim and Negotiation of Power

In a pivotal conversation, Mr. Bennet reflects on Darcy's proposal and Elizabeth's feelings:

Mr. Bennet: "You are determined to have him. He is rich, to be sure, and you may have more fine clothes and fine carriages than Jane. But will they make you happy?"

Elizabeth: "I do like him. I love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of him in such terms." (Austen, 2013, p.364-365)

In this conversation, Mr. Bennet uses the **Agreement Maxim** as a form of **indirect suggestion**, implying that Elizabeth should marry Darcy for practical reasons. However, Elizabeth's response, which reaffirms her affection for Darcy, challenges her father's pragmatic approach and reveals her desire for an emotional connection. Her firm yet respectful response not only aligns with the **Agreement Maxim** but also demonstrates her emotional investment in Darcy, showcasing the complexity of familial expectations and personal desires.

Critical Note: This dialogue illustrates how **family dynamics** and **power structures** influence the negotiation of relationships. Mr. Bennet's practical concern contrasts with Elizabeth's emotional reasoning, creating a layered interaction that reflects both **politeness norms** and **personal agency**.

Analysis of Politeness Maxims in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

1. Introduction

In literature, conversation plays a critical role in shaping character dynamics, revealing social structures, and defining relationships. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), language, particularly through the use of politeness maxims, highlights the intricacies of social interactions. This analysis explores how characters, such as Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, employ different politeness strategies to negotiate power, social expectations, and personal sentiments. By applying Leech's politeness maxims, we investigate the nuanced ways in which language reflects the characters' internal struggles, social roles, and interpersonal negotiations.

2. Politeness Maxims in Character Dialogues

Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy (Tact Maxim)

In one of the key scenes, Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy engage in an exchange that reflects the *Tact Maxim*, which dictates minimizing imposition and maximizing the respect for others' face needs. The interaction begins with

Elizabeth's reluctant avoidance of Darcy, spurred by the crowded setting and her possessiveness of the space she wishes to occupy. As the gentlemen arrive, Elizabeth observes Darcy from a distance, envious of those who have his attention. In an effort to bridge the gap, she asks Darcy, "Is your sister at Pemberley still?" In doing so, Elizabeth politely inquires about Darcy's family, demonstrating an attempt to engage in a neutral conversation that avoids any direct confrontation or tension. Darcy's response is courteous, reinforcing the avoidance of social discomfort, thus reflecting the *Tact Maxim*.

However, while the analysis observes the *Tact Maxim*, it could benefit from a more critical engagement with how Elizabeth's emotional discomfort subtly subverts this maxim. Her actions might be viewed as a violation of the *Tact Maxim*, given her tendency to approach Darcy indirectly while harboring negative feelings.

Elizabeth and Mr. Wickham (Approbation Maxim)

In their conversation, Mr. Wickham effectively uses the *Approbation Maxim*, which focuses on minimizing disapproval and maximizing praise. Wickham tells Elizabeth of his childhood friendship with Darcy, presenting Darcy in a negative light to gain her sympathy. He calls Darcy's behavior "scandalous" and "mean," painting him as excessively prideful and unworthy of respect. This serves to fuel Elizabeth's existing prejudice against Darcy.

However, this violates the *Approbation Maxim* in a crucial sense. Wickham's language, filled with derogatory judgments, reflects a strategic use of criticism that aims to elicit a specific emotional response from Elizabeth. His portrayal of Darcy is a deliberate violation of the principle of *Approbation*, which typically encourages minimizing negative evaluations. Wickham's attack on Darcy's character highlights the manipulation of politeness strategies for personal gain, which is not fully addressed in the analysis. It should be noted that the conversation could benefit from a more nuanced interpretation of how maxims are flouted for specific rhetorical purposes.

Mrs. Bennet and Lydia (Modesty Maxim)

The exchange between Mrs. Bennet and Lydia exemplifies the *Modesty Maxim*, which advises minimizing self-praise and emphasizing humility. Mrs. Bennet expresses her sorrow at Lydia's departure, but she subtly praises Lydia's social advancement by referring to her marriage. Lydia, in turn, modestly downplays her busy life, implying that married women have less time for writing. Both characters, while addressing the emotional aspect of the parting, adhere to this maxim in their social interactions, as neither seeks to overly emphasize their own importance.

However, the analysis should address how Mrs. Bennet's sentimentality masks a more strategic motivation behind her dialogue. Her excessive grief may

not entirely align with the *Modesty Maxim*, as it functions more as a plea for attention than a humble expression of genuine loss. A deeper engagement with the *Modesty Maxim* and its implications in this context would improve the analysis.

Mr. Bennet and Elizabeth (Agreement Maxim)

Mr. Bennet's conversation with Elizabeth on Darcy's proposal exemplifies the *Agreement Maxim*, which encourages minimizing disagreement and maximizing harmony in conversation. Mr. Bennet initially shows reluctance to endorse Darcy's suit but ultimately agrees, seeing Darcy's wealth and status as sufficient justification for his daughter's potential happiness. His final approval of the marriage despite Elizabeth's reluctance follows the *Agreement Maxim* because he shifts from disagreement to quiet acceptance, conforming to social expectations.

The analysis should more critically engage with the nuances of Mr. Bennet's agreement. His seemingly passive acceptance of Darcy may mask deeper skepticism or disapproval, which could be better explored by looking at how Mr. Bennet uses language to manage family dynamics and his own discomfort with Elizabeth's feelings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Pride and Prejudice* presents a fascinating exploration of politeness strategies and social negotiation. While Leech's politeness maxims provide a useful theoretical framework, a more critical approach is necessary to address their limitations and inconsistencies. Additionally, focusing on how language reflects social power, politeness, and irony rather than simply recounting plot events would deepen the analysis. Further engagement with alternative models like Brown and Levinson's face theory could offer a more nuanced understanding of the characters' discourse. Addressing issues of redundancy, misapplication of maxims, and grammatical clarity would improve both the academic quality and the analytical depth of the paper.

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