

# Appreciation of Literary Language of *Pride and Prejudice*

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**Abstract**—As the most wildly read novel written by Jane Austen, the language of *Pride and Prejudice* is profuse and varied. The style of this fiction sometimes can be euphemistic and profound, on the other hand, sometimes are humorous and ironic. For more than five score, there are abundant researches about Jane Austen's language techniques. However, the great accomplishments of Austen's artful language are inexhaustible, which deserve a further study. The thesis intends to analyze the style and structure of narration and dialogue. Another goal is to discuss the two types of language's great affection and the way author makes the fiction iconic and dramatic by using language skills. The thesis could relate to the different aspects of the language features, nevertheless the main target lies in seizing the relationship between the language structure and the artistic effect.

**Keywords**—syntactic structure; language feature; dialogue; monologue; irony

## I. INTRODUCTION

Jane Austen, a female British novelist, lived and worked at the turn of last century. The primary sources of her works are from her father's collection of books. Her works, during her girlhood, were mainly imitating the popular novels in a facetious way and that has set the tone of irony. Jane Austen has written six novels in all: *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*. Among them, *Pride and Prejudice* is her representative work which is not only the marvel of English literature, but also the literary treasure among the world. The famous British novelist and dramatist William Somerset Maugham has placed it on one of the ten famous classic novels in the world.

There is no doubt that Jane Austen is expert in characterization and she has been compared with Shakespeare. The substantial in content of *Pride and Prejudice* is attributed to the creation of all the vivid characters, the use of irony and the description of linguistic form and psychological. As a tool to express, language has played an important role in this work. The chosen words are polished; readers only can feel it when they savor it. A British critic once said that the language in *Pride and Prejudice* is neat and rhythmized like poem and the conversations are smooth and humorous like drama. The ingenious selection of the words by Austen made this work smooth but not shallow. Austen herself said, create a novel is

just like to draw a picture on a small piece of ivory with a brush which is sharp and thin. In addition, humorous and ironic the two main features of *Pride and Prejudice* have made this novel is full of artistic affection. Therefore, this novel's great power of language has been shown by several different means, especially through main characters' dialogues.

Though some critics accuse Austen of portraying a limited world, describing an ambiguity about emotion, *Pride and Prejudice* is still well accepted in the world. It owns its greatness to the fact that it appeals readers by depicting things in life in a brilliant way.

## II. FEATURE OF LANGUAGE

Reading *Pride and Prejudice* is just like watching a drama. Although words are written on the paper while dramas are motion images, Austen's language just has this power can lead readers into her world. With dramatic language and organized syntactic structure, Austen is ready to show her readers a comical but real world. Language in *Pride and Prejudice* has a lot of great features, however in this part this thesis will focus on two prime features, theatricality and structure's arrangement.

### A. Theatricality

It is doubtless that those who have read *Pride and Prejudice* will speak highly of the artful effects elicited by humor and irony. To a great extent, this kind of effect produced by ingenious arrangement of syntactic structure and polished linguistic form. The first sentence of this fiction has shown the author's literary technique perfectly, which has been evaluated as the most intriguing sentence among English novels.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a fortune must be in want of a wife". This sentence has represented Jane Austen's art of irony, which is implicit but barbed, laconic and original. As an Austen researcher Norman Page said, the whole sentence stated a ridiculous thought with a solemn syntactic structure. That is to say, Austen uses the strong contrast between style and content—the ridiculous thought and solemn syntactic structure—to afford the dramatic results. The main clause "it is a truth universally acknowledge" is solemn and formal, especially the word "universally" has enhanced the grave atmosphere. What can be imagined is that there will be an

expectation in readers' minds because the use of formal style in the main clause. The reader may hold the idea that it is the universally acknowledged truth or moral sense that author tends to state; however, the content in the subordinate clause has dispelled the expectation perfectly.

It is well-known that the harmony between content and style is a common rule of literary linguistics; nevertheless, Austen uses this rule conversely. Austen states a vulgar opinion in an elegant way and that will bring readers an anomalous feeling and push readers to ruminate over the meaning. This is a typical dramatic structure. This sentence has epitomized the artful purpose and linguistic form of Austen. It has announced the basic moral conflict directly and set the ironic tone of this novel.

### *B. The Ingenious Arrangement of Syntactic Structure*

The author applies the dramatic structure repeatedly to manifest the conflict. For that reason, Austen uses the original syntactic structures and the selective words instead of mild drawing. The first long sentence in chapter 3 is a good example for dramatic structure.

"The gentleman pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his accompany, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend".

Although this sentence includes 91 words the meaning is still distinct. Norman Page has split the sentence as follow.

- A1. The gentleman pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man,
- A2. the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and
- A3. he was looked with great admiration for about half the evening,
- B. till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity;
- C1. for he was discovered to be proud,
- C2. to be above his accompany, and
- C3. above being pleased;
- D1. and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and
- D2. being unworthy to be compared with his friend.

This sentence is well arranged and its gradation is distinct. A1 — A3 are a three-part structure, which has described the initial reaction to Darcy from the guests at the ball. In A1 and A2 Austen has selected two words, "pronounce" and "declare", with formal style and

exaggerated meaning. These two words have set a sonorous and dignified tone. A3 is the conclusion of A1 and A2, has enhanced the dramatic effect. All these three coordinate clauses are of balanced and similar length. While the clause B elicits an abrupt turn with the help of "till" to down the enthusiasm of the admired Darcy to a freezing point. The enhanced effect of this sentence due to the two nouns "disgust" and "popularity" with strong emotion and a phrase "turn the tide of" with a inflated meaning. C1—C3 have revealed that almost at the same time guests changed their perception of Darcy because of his proud attitude. What should be noticed is another three-part structure—C1, C2 and C3. This three-part structure is formed by three short infinitive phrases which has fast the pace of the whole sentence. The first part of this sentence speaks highly of Darcy that he is much handsomer than Mr. Bingley. However, D2 states that Mr. Bingley deserves a better evaluation compared with Darcy. This kind of contrast shows an ironic praise and a suspicious blame. Many critics consider that this sentence indicates that Austen's language skills have reached a high excellence.

Furthermore, Austen is not only skillful in using long sentences, but also is clever at the short sentences. There is an example for this.

Sentence 1: Elizabeth made no objection; the door was then allowed to be shut, and the carriage drove off.

Sentence 2: Lydia's voice was heard in the vestibule; the door was thrown open, and she ran into room.

Each of the two sentences includes three short clauses but there are only four of them include subjects and predicates. The author avoids other modifier in order to refine the structure. The two sentences have drawn a series of rapidly changed pictures to manifest the action that Elizabeth comes hasty and Lydia leaves in a hurry. Short sentence is an efficient method to describe outer act as well as portray inner change.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has shown her ingenuity by arranging the syntactic structure. Combining the technique of sentence organizing with the skill of irony is a key factor that made this novel with great affection.

## III. THE USE OF IRONY

The most important feature of *Pride and Prejudice* is the use of irony. This also is the most praiseful skill that Austen has widely used in her works. Irony is essential to create all these characters like Mr. Collins and Mrs. Bennet. Owing to the use of ironic language the theme has been express perfectly. In this part, this thesis will discuss the definition of irony and the way author uses irony to express the novel's theme.

### *A. The Definition of Irony*

The word "irony" is originated in ancient Greek. The definition of irony is a continually developed process.

There are three meanings of irony in ancient Greek: 1. Pretending ignorant. 2. Socratic irony—one has betrayed his intention unconsciously under Socrates' questioning. 3.

Romanesque irony—the literal meaning is inconsistent with the true meaning.

In the 19th century, based on romanticism literature theory, German writers have transformed the irony from rhetoric into a creation principle. German critic Friedrich Don Schlegel has announced that as a creation principle, irony reveals a fact that the nature of the world is paradoxical. That's why only an equivocal attitude could concentrate on the completeness of contradiction of the world. In addition, in the 20th century, new critics have developed the concept of irony further. Critic Brooks has explained irony in a detailed way; he defines irony as a distinct distortion of narrations, which is distorted by context. The meaning of a sentence can be reversed by context, and that is so called irony.

In verbal irony, the writer's meaning or even his or her attitude may be different from what he or she says. At the beginning of the novel, Elizabeth is just a young girl without experience, and also slightly immature. She requires a growth in both experience and maturity before she can grow in self-consciousness. However, the reader does not grasp Elizabeth's need completely to grow until the discovery of her mistaken judgments of Wickham and Mr. Darcy. An example of situational irony in *Pride and Prejudice* is Elizabeth's decision to keep Wickham's true nature a secret. She debates making her knowledge public but decides, "that is ought not to be attempted...I am not equal to it. Wickham will soon be gone; and therefore, it will not signify to anybody here, what he really is". Elizabeth is tragically wrong; in an ironic twist, Lydia runs away with Mr. Wickham and the scandal threatens to ruin the entire Bennet family. Upon learning of their elopement, Elizabeth remarks, "Had I but explained some part of it only—some part of what I learnt, to my own family! Had this character been known, this could not have happened".

#### *B. The Theme Expressed by Irony*

The theme of *Pride and Prejudice* is about wealth, status and marriage. At the very beginning of the novel, author presents the theme by using ironic language: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of fortune must be in want of a wife." The literal meaning of this sentence may widely accept by readers. However, this is Mrs. Bennet's opinion about her attitude towards her five daughters' marriage. Thus, the ironic theme has been presented by this sentence. For affording an ironic result, Austen combines Mrs. Bennet with a holy truth; therefore, the tone of irony has been set. From this beginning author uses ironic language to manifest the theme of this novel, and combines marriage with wealth closely. Moreover, with the development of the story, irony has been used by author through the whole novel.

Jane Austen never preaches her readers a sermon in her works, while she usually hides the sermon into humorous language and attractive plot. Therefore, the readers can acquire some meaningful truth from a pleasant reading. Book heroine Elizabeth's from a small landowner family, therefore Darcy's pride has made Elizabeth's Prejudice. That is why

when they met each other for the first time their words are full of irony and sarcasm.

Elizabeth: And that put paid to it. I wonder who discovered the power of poetry in driving away love.

Darcy: I thought poetry was the food of love.

Elizabeth: Of a fine, stout love, it may. But if it is only a vague inclination one poor sonnet will kill it.

Darcy: So, what do you recommend to encourage affection?

Elizabeth: Dancing. Even if one's partner is barely tolerable.

When Darcy ignores family status and wealth gaps proposes to Elizabeth, there is only a rejection. Finally, they have formed a happy opportunity of each other until Elizabeth gets to know Darcy and has realized how wonderful Darcy is.

What's more, the use of irony has not restricted to literal aspect. Rising to spiritual level, readers can go deep into Austen's inner world and see through the different kinds of marriages presented in this novel.

Elizabeth, with a strong sense of self-esteem, is passionate in thinking, and these have made her independent on marriage issue. Lastly, her wisdom has made her a happy life. However, the marriages of Lydia and Charlotte, compared with Elizabeth's, are unfortunate. Among them, from elope to marry, Lydia and Wickham are those who abandon themselves to physical and sensory desires which has made them the most unfortunate. Wickham used to be a handsome and polite man, however his purpose of marry Lydia is just for money to pay his debt. What about Lydia? She is a beautiful girl with an empty head. All she wants is sensuous pleasure. After Darcy helps them to pay Wickham's debt and ends this scandal, Lydia and Wickham doesn't feel shame about it at all. Austen's words for describing Lydia and Wickham are full of irony and criticism..

"His countenance rather gained in austerity; and he scarcely opened his lips. The easy assurance of the young couple, indeed, was enough to provoke him. Elizabeth was disgusted, and even Miss Bennet was shocked. Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless".

As for Charlotte and Collins, their marriage is totally based on economic base. This is another exemplification of misfortune. Although Charlotte knows Mr. Collins "to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary", she still wants to marry him because

"Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honorable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want".

Through the plot Austen has shown her ironic attitude towards treating marriage as a tool to achieve one's

individual benefits. She has manifested those marriages; meanwhile, she also has manifested the clownish of Mrs. Bennet about her craving for giving her daughters to wealthy single men. Stories like these are happening every day in those years. Perhaps the most significant thing to a family with daughters is to give their daughters to rich single men. People like that usually will ignore the truth of those kinds of marriages, however the truth is most of those marriages are miserable. Now Austen stands out and uses irony as weapon to unmask the truth, and she also illustrates marriage is not only about wealth, but also about love and fight for one's own fate. Consequently, the ironic effect of this novel has been enhanced.

#### IV. THE USE OF DIALOGUES AND MONOLOGUES

##### A. *Characters Depicted by Dialogues*

There is another prime method to analyze the figures' characters—dialogue, which acts as a major component part of this novel. R. A. Brower thinks that this novel determines the figures' characters by the way they talk and the way they discussed and others' opinions about these figures. From this aspect, Brower praises this novel is full of theatricality. Due to different characters of the figures, dialogues in this novel have all kinds of style and bright individuality.

The style is the man. Once the figures begin to speak, their status and characters will be exposed. This is a strong evidence of characters depicted by dialogues. These are some examples: Lydia gives to the use of slang reflecting her trumpery, for example "a little sea-bathing would set me up forever" (set up: [informal] make healthier, stronger, livelier, etc.). While Darcy is guarded in his selection of words, for example "I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these". Seriousness and complacency are shown by this sentence, and that has suggested Darcy's noble status. Lady Catherine, a typical rich, fussy old lady, prefers ferocious language. However, Mrs. Bennet tends to speak superficially and shout frequently.

There is a character that deserves a further analysis: Mr. Collins, one of the comic characters describes emphatically and intentionally by Austen. His propose speech to Elizabeth has proved his rambling speaking style which is full of long and convoluted sentences. Just like the famous saying goes—style shows the man. Here are some sentences taken from his proposal to Elizabeth:

"My reasons for marring are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman..."

"Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness..."

"Thus, much for my general intention in favour of matrimony..."

Mr. Collins originally intends to show off his profound mind and sincere emotion. But it turns out to be to run counter to his intentions and proves that he is only making a fool of himself. His speech thoroughly reveals his icy cold affection and the shallowness of his mind.

Through their dialogues readers can easily perceive the personalities and images.

##### Darcy

The most dramatic dialogues in *Pride and Prejudice* occurred between Elizabeth and Darcy. After their first met, Darcy is attracted to Elizabeth while Elizabeth partially rejects him; so that there is a misleading and strained feeling hidden in their conversation. Here is the conversation:

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

...

"Oh!" said she. "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."

"Indeed, I do not dare."

Darcy invites Elizabeth to dance to approach her. However, owing to his pride, the language and style he uses for inviting is inappropriate. Firstly, the word "reel" could be a factor offending Elizabeth. In the 18th century, "reel" might be considered as a kind of yokelish rejected by the ladies at a ball especially in London area. Thus, Elizabeth may deem that Darcy treats her as a suburban girl and invites her to dance a reel for despising her taste. Secondly, "great inclination" is inappropriate either. It can allude to Elizabeth as a butterfly without dignified behavior. Thirdly, "seize such an opportunity" is liable to cause Elizabeth's misunderstanding. Why should this be considered as an opportunity when a wealthy young man invites a woman of lower origin to dance? Lastly, the style of Darcy's inviting language is too formal to match the local social situations. Darcy and Elizabeth are unfamiliar with each other; therefore Darcy should use the sentence patterns such as "May I have the pleasure of...". Nevertheless, Darcy uses a negative question expecting the positive answer with a pressing momentum.

Darcy is a master of great estate of Pemberley. He was born and brought up in the aristocracy with wealthy family property. It is this condition that cultivates his pride. From the dialogue above readers can find out this feature easily.

##### Elizabeth

Elizabeth is the female protagonist of *Pride and Prejudice*. She is a twenty-year-old lady who possesses brains, beauty, musical talent, confidence and independence. Her admirable wit is reflected in her conversation with Lady Catherine. One of a gripping scene of this novel is their last conflict. Here is a part of their conversations.

"Miss Bennet, do you know who am I? I have not been accustomed to such language as this. I am almost the nearest



relation he has in the world, and am entitled to know all his dearest concern."

"But you are not entitled to know mine; nor will such behavior as this ever induces me to be explicit."

Here, there is a heated dispute between an overbearing lady from a wealthy and influential clan with a normal girl stubborn but clever. Elizabeth recriminates to Lady Catherine by repeating the phrases "be entitled to know" used by Lady Catherine, and against "such behavior as this" by using "such language as this". From that readers can know how smart and indomitable she is.

The following conversation has shown their characters.

"I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. You may ask questions, which/shall not choose to answer."

"This is not to be borne. Miss Bennet. I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew made you an offer of marriage?"

"Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible."

"It ought to be so, it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason..."

"This is not to be borne", "It ought to be so, it must be so", this fearfully peremptory tone comes from a lady used to give orders to her servants, which has illustrated her dominating style. However, Elizabeth refuses to show her weakness. The modal verbs "may" in her words ("you may ask questions") is tactful but mild, ironic but polite. Moreover, the word "shall" in "I shall not choose to answer" has demonstrated her determination directly. In addition, when Elizabeth retorts Lady Catherine resolutely, readers can get a sense of her energy from her speech. Only with these qualities can she be neither haughty nor humble and remain unruffled mood in their conversation.

#### *B. Characters' Psychological Activities Presented by Monologues*

There is another means Austen uses frequently to depict the figures' characters—monologue. These monologues have distinct features, and usually be used to manifest figures' fiercely inner condition and mental conflict. The thirteenth chapter of this novel has meticulously depicted the process of Elizabeth's psychological growth. She has recognized her prejudice to Mr. Darcy gradually. This is a shock to her.

"How despicably have I acted!" she cried, "I, who have prided myself on my discernment! —I, who have valued myself on my abilities! Who have often disdained the generous candor of my sister, and gratified my vanity in useless or blamable distrust. —How humiliating is this discovery! —Yet, how just a humiliation!"

This part of monologue has vividly reflected the inner change of Elizabeth with short sentences. A prominent feature in this structure is that author continually uses three elliptical sentences: "I, who ...". This kind of elliptical sentence carries more weight than complete sentence and has

emphasized the guilty of Elizabeth. There is a part of monologue which is similar to the modernist novels' interior monologues. It has expressed a complex emotion of Elizabeth when she met Darcy in his manor. Here is the interior monologue:

"She was overpowered by shame and vexation. Her coming here was the most unfortunate, the most ill-judged thing in the world! How strange must it appear to him! In what a disgraceful light might it not strike so vain a man! It might seem as if she had purposely thrown herself in his way again! Oh! Why did she come! Or, why did he thus come a day before he was expected!"

Elizabeth's monologue has manifested a deep personal emotion. On contrast, the next monologue of Mrs. Bennet has manifested a quite distinct emotion.

"Good gracious! Lord bless me! Only think! Dear me! Mr. Darcy! Who would have thought it! And is it really truth? Oh my sweetest Lizzy! How rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane is nothing to it—nothing at all. I am so pleased—so happy. Such a charming man! — So handsome! Oh, my dear Lizzy! Pray apologize for my having disliked him so much before. I hope he will overlook it. Dear, dear Lizzy. A house in town! Everything that is charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh Lord! What will become of me? I shall go distracted."

Mrs. Bennett's monologue owns more noise without deep thought. The extremely short sentences, the overly used exclamatory sentences and the continually called Lord all gathered to reveal a strong and impetuous emotion. There is a distinct syntactic feature—using single sentences including only one noun or adjective numerously. Like "Mr. Darcy!", "Oh my sweetest Lizzy!", "So handsome!", "Ten thousand a year!" These extremely short sentences have projected Mrs. Bennet's emotion and character vividly through fully plentiful rhymes and rhythms. In this way, a frivolous, excitable, and narrow-minded woman is coming alive on the paper.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The colorful language and great skills in *Pride and Prejudice* have made a significant contribution to creating characters. Through all the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen has revealed readers her profound comprehension of human nature with the most splendid language. Austen's great language skills have made this novel full of wit and humor and gave her readers a memorable retelling. A great literary work should include these factors, valuable thoughts, talented author and skillful language. Among these three factors, skillful language is the most visualized and powerful tool to express talented author's valuable thoughts. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the use of irony helps readers to understand the core value in a relaxed way. The organized language and sentences have created a vivid world that makes readers think of paintings and wood carvings. Dialogues and monologues are two important means to shape every character. Therefore, the study of literary language is indispensable and deserves a further research.

Austen's writing style is acrid but not aggressive. Her ironic style brings readers humorous and comfortable instead of feeling sarcastic. Except wonderful language skills, high spiritual level and profound thoughts are other shining points.

It is the ever-charming themes, skillfully constructed plots, together with delicately represented characters and personalities have made *Pride and Prejudice* attractive enough. Though there is no violence or abstruse philosophic theory in the novel, it still attracts readers' generation after generation. As one of the most welcomed publishers in British, it has been adapted for television and movie and won many kinds of prizes. The latest two centuries have witnessed the novel's fascination and so will the coming years.

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