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Social Class Representation Through Language in Pride and Prejudice

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Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis representasi kelas sosial melalui penggunaan bahasa dalam novel Pride and Prejudice karya Jane Austen dengan menggunakan perspektif sosiolinguistik. Penelitian menerapkan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik membaca dekat dan pencatatan terhadap dialog serta ujaran tokoh yang berasal dari latar sosial berbeda. Data dipilih berdasarkan kemunculan unsur pilihan kosakata, tingkat formalitas, strategi kesopanan, gaya berbicara, ekspresi emosi, dan sikap terhadap hierarki sosial. Tokoh yang dianalisis meliputi Mr. Darcy, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Miss Bingley, Charles Bingley, Elizabeth Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Lydia Bennet, Mrs. Philips, dan Mr. Collins. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tokoh kelas atas cenderung menggunakan bahasa yang lebih formal, terkontrol, terstruktur, dan berorientasi pada status untuk mempertahankan wibawa serta jarak sosial. Sebaliknya, tokoh dari posisi sosial yang relatif lebih rendah lebih sering memakai tuturan yang langsung, personal, emosional, dan berkaitan dengan kehidupan sehari-hari. Elizabeth Bennet memperlihatkan bahwa bahasa juga dapat digunakan untuk menegosiasikan dan menantang batas kelas, sedangkan penggunaan bahasa Mr. Collins menunjukkan bahwa formalitas yang berlebihan tidak selalu mencerminkan kecanggihan berbahasa. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa bahasa dalam novel tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai penanda identitas, kekuasaan, hubungan sosial, dan keanggotaan kelas. Dengan demikian, Pride and Prejudice menggambarkan perbedaan sosial masyarakat Inggris abad kesembilan belas melalui pola bahasa para tokohnya.

Kata Kunci: Sosiolinguistik, Kelas Sosial, Pride And Prejudice, Representasi Bahasa, Hierarki Sosial

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the representation of social class through language use in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice from a sociolinguistic perspective. It employs a descriptive qualitative method using close reading and note-taking techniques to examine dialogues and utterances produced by characters from different social backgrounds. The data were selected based on lexical choice, level of formality, politeness strategies, speaking style, emotional expression, and attitudes toward social hierarchy. The analyzed characters include Mr. Darcy, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Miss Bingley, Charles Bingley, Elizabeth Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Lydia Bennet, Mrs. Philips, and Mr. Collins. The findings show that upper-class characters tend to use more formal, controlled, structured, and status-oriented language to maintain authority and social distance. In contrast, characters from relatively lower social positions more frequently employ direct, personal, emotional, and everyday expressions. Elizabeth Bennet demonstrates that language can also be used to negotiate and challenge class boundaries,

while Mr. Collins's excessive formality indicates that elaborate vocabulary does not necessarily represent genuine linguistic refinement. These findings confirm that language in the novel functions not only as a means of communication but also as a marker of identity, power, social relations, and class membership. Therefore, Pride and Prejudice portrays the social divisions of nineteenth-century English society through the distinctive linguistic patterns of its characters.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Social Class, Pride And Prejudice, Language Representation, Social Hierarchy

BACKGROUND

Language is an important aspect of human reference to share emotions, thought, and identity. Multilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility and cultural appreciation, reinforcing individual and collective identities (Pandey, 2025), Conversely, while language is a powerful tool for connection and identity, it can also create barriers, leading to misunderstandings and social divisions. The complexities of language can sometimes obscure meaning, complicating human interactions and emotional exchanges (Jeon, 2023). People of different social classes tend to speak differently, in manner, politeness, and choice of language The concept of politeness is not universal; it is shaped by community values and expectations, which can differ widely even within the same language group (Schneider & Placencia, 2017). There is a deep relationship between language and society (Syahputra, Seli and Syafitri, 2024)

. Society often develop distinct linguistic features, including dialects and sociolects, which reflect their unique social and cultural contexts (Muhid & Yassi, 2024). Society show a contrast specification in the level of social classes such as specific vocabularies and language use. Language serves as a marker of social identity, with distinct dialects and speech patterns indicating class differences, as seen in the film "My Fair Lady" where characters employ code-switching to navigate social contexts. (Aulia and Chandra , 2025) Social interactions are influenced by the alignment of communication styles; parallel communication fosters interaction, while disparate styles hinder it (Hasbullah & Al-Pansori, 2022). Literary texts often represent social hierarchy and members of social groups in language. As said by Mittal (2024), the use of language differs according to the social strata of the location, the language of profession, and the gender difference, Jane Austen's novels critique class hierarchies and gender expectations, revealing the moral and social constraints of her time while advocating for intellectual independence and ethical conduct (qizi hsl 2025).

An example of a literary work that shows the relationship between language and social class is Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen. The novel represents the social structure of nineteenth century England through the characters and dialogues. The use of formal titles and specific language styles among characters, such as Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet, highlights their social standings and the expectations tied to them. The characters are from different social classes and we can see this through the way they talk and interact with other characters. The use of formal language in dialogues, particularly in Mr. Darcy's speech, emphasizes his adherence to social norms and expectations, contrasting with Elizabeth's more direct and candid communication style(Sayson et al., 2025). For example, Mrs. Bennet often uses an emotional and less refined language and Mr. Darcy and Lady Catherine use a more formal and polite language, showing their upper-class background.

This idea is also supported by Atakishiyeva and Muthmainnah (2026) in *Language, Power, and Politeness in Pride and Prejudice: A Linguistic Look at Jane Austen's Dialogue*, who state that the language and politeness strategies used in the novel reflect the characters' power and social hierarchy.

In addition, the language in the novel also shows how people of lower and upper classes see and evaluate each other. Upper-class characters in literature often use language that reflects their education and social standing The manner of speaking, including tone and

style, is often indicative of upper-class status, further establishing social distance from lower classes (Ivushkina, 2025). The complexity of their language often serves to create social distance from lower classes, reflecting their perceived superiority (Ivushkina, 2025). This includes the use of foreign languages, abstract thinking, and allusions, which serve to distinguish them from lower-class characters and create a sociolect that reinforces class boundaries (Ivushkina, 2025). In dialogues, the reply of characters is often depend on their perception of social ranking, which influences the selection of words, tone, and levels of politeness. As said by Holmes (2018), people use language to signal aspects of their social identity, including their social class and status.

Moreover, previous studies have discussed the relation between language and social class in Pride and Prejudice. As Lin (2026) in Social Class Differences Reflected in the Language Used in Typical Social Scenes in Pride and Prejudice states: In the book, conversation style and word choice become key indicators of social class. Moreover, Onuegwunwoke et al. (2025) argue in Analyzing Syntactic Patterns and Social Hierarchies in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice that social hierarchy and characters' educational backgrounds are reflected in sentence structures and syntactic patterns. Most of the previous studies focus on the concept of romance and society, rather than directly looking at how the socioeconomic class is represented through the language of the characters. This study therefore aims to apply a sociolinguistic approach to the representation of socioeconomic class in Pride and Prejudice Character names in *Pride and Prejudice* are not arbitrary; they serve to signify social status and character traits, reflecting the societal norms of the Regency era (Badi et al., 2023).

METHOD

The datas collected for this social class linguistics study are using the qualitative descriptive methodological research by analyzing dialects and sociolects which reflect their unique social and cultural contexts by *Pride and Prejudice Novel by Jane Austin.* Qualitative research is used to comprehend how individuals perceive their surroundings" (Ugwu & Eze, 2023, p. 20)

The novel portrays social hierarchy and class distinctions through the language used by its characters. According to Lin (2026), conversation style and vocabulary choice in Pride and Prejudice reflect differences in social class. This methodological insight complements the sociolinguistic perspective, where language is studied not only as a system of rules but also as a social phenomenon (Muhid & Yassi, 2024). Furthermore, Atakishiyeva and Muthmainnah (2026) stated that politeness strategies and language use in the novel indicate power relations and social hierarchy among the characters. Therefore, the data of this study consist of dialogues, expressions, and utterances spoken by several characters from different social classes, such as Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet, Charles Bingley, Lady Catherine, Mrs. Bennet, Lydia Bennet, Mrs. Philips, and Mr. Collins. These dialogues were selected because they represent differences in vocabulary choice, speaking style, politeness strategies, and formal or informal language that indicate social class representation in the novel.

Close reading and note taking approaches were used in the collection of the data. The researcher studied the classic "Pride and Prejudice" attentively and again to comprehend the social interaction among the characters. Then, the researcher searched and selected dialogues linked to social class representation, especially expressions indicating the disparities of vocabulary choice, speaking style, politeness methods, and formal or informal language. The dialogues picked were sorted according to the socioeconomic class of the characters, for example, upper-class characters and lower-class characters. Qualitative data collection is the "process of identifying, classifying, and interpreting textual data related to the research topic" (Creswell, 2015). The data acquired, were then utilized to study the reflection of socioeconomic class in language in the novel.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that language use in *Pride and Prejudice* is closely related to social class differences among the characters. These differences can be identified through patterns of formality, lexical choice, communicative purpose, emotional expression, and attitudes toward social hierarchy. Language in "Pride and Prejudice" is used strategically to convey social attitudes and emotional states. Upper-class characters often use irony and understatement to express their views subtly, reflecting their social norms and expectations (Ivushkina, 2025).

The data suggest that language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a marker of social identity and class distinction within the novel. Characters belonging to the upper social class generally employ language that is more formal, controlled, and status-oriented. Their dialogues are characterized by a structured syntax, often adhering to the Subject-Verb-Object format, which contributes to the clarity and formality of their communication(Sayson et al., 2025).

Their speech tends to demonstrate self-restraint, social awareness, and a strong concern for maintaining prestige. This pattern is particularly evident in the language of Mr. Darcy, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Charles Bingley, and Miss Bingley.

For example, Darcy states:

“She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me.”

In another conversation, he says:

“To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either.”

These utterances demonstrate Darcy’s tendency to communicate through concise and carefully structured statements. Rather than relying on emotional reactions, he frequently expresses opinions through rational judgement and logical reasoning. His language reflects confidence and social authority, both of which are associated with his privileged social position. The way Darcy evaluates others also indicates an awareness of social hierarchy, suggesting that language can function as a tool for maintaining class boundaries.

A similar linguistic pattern can be observed in Lady Catherine’s speech. She declares:

“You ought to know that I am not to be trifled with.”

She also states:

“Miss Bennet, I am shocked and astonished.”

These utterances reveal a highly authoritative style of communication. Lady Catherine often positions herself as a figure whose opinions should be respected and followed. Her speech reflects aristocratic confidence and reinforces social distance between herself and other characters. Through her language, power relations become visible in everyday interaction.

Class consciousness is also evident in Miss Bingley’s speech. Referring to Elizabeth’s family, she uses the expression:

“low connections.”

This phrase demonstrates how family background and social networks are used as criteria for evaluating an individual’s social worth. Rather than focusing on personal qualities, Miss Bingley’s language emphasizes inherited status and social reputation. Such expressions illustrate how members of the upper class use language to reinforce distinctions between social groups.

Although Bingley belongs to the same social class as Darcy, his language displays a somewhat different characteristic. Compared to Darcy's reserved and analytical style, Bingley tends to communicate in a friendlier and more approachable manner. Nevertheless, his speech remains polite, controlled, and socially appropriate. This suggests that refinement within the upper class may be expressed through different communicative styles while still adhering to shared social norms.

In contrast, characters associated with relatively lower social positions tend to employ language that is more personal, emotional, and expressive. Research indicates that female characters in "Pride and Prejudice" use linguistic features that convey uncertainty and politeness, such as lexical hedges and intensifiers. This contrasts with male characters, who tend to use more assertive language(Janah & Tarwiyah, 2018).

Their speech is often connected to everyday concerns, family matters, and individual feelings. This pattern can be observed in the language of Elizabeth Bennet, Mrs. Bennet, Lydia Bennet, Mrs. Philips, and, in certain respects, Mr. Collins.

Elizabeth Bennet states:

"I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine."

In another conversation, she says:

"He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal."

Unlike Darcy, who frequently relies on rational argumentation, Elizabeth openly expresses personal feelings and individual perspectives. Her language demonstrates self-respect and emotional awareness. At the same time, her statement regarding equality reflects resistance toward rigid social hierarchy. Through her speech, Elizabeth challenges the assumption that wealth and rank alone determine an individual's value.

A stronger emotional tendency appears in Mrs. Bennet's speech. She enthusiastically states:

"What a fine thing for our girls!"

This utterance reflects spontaneous emotional involvement and reveals her preoccupation with marriage as a means of social and economic security. Throughout the novel, Mrs. Bennet frequently expresses excitement, anxiety, and frustration in a direct manner. Her speech is less restrained than that of upper-class characters and often prioritizes emotional expression over social formality.

Similar characteristics can be observed in Lydia Bennet's language. Lydia frequently speaks impulsively and enthusiastically, particularly when discussing officers, social gatherings, and entertainment. Her utterances often reflect immediate emotions rather than careful consideration. This tendency portrays her as energetic and outspoken, but also lacking the restraint that is highly valued within upper-class society.

Mrs. Philips likewise demonstrates a more informal communication style. Many of her conversations revolve around domestic matters, neighbourhood news, and gossip. The language she uses reflects everyday social interaction rather than concerns about prestige or authority. This characteristic further distinguishes her speech from that of characters belonging to higher social groups.

Another interesting case is Mr. Collins. Although he attempts to speak formally and respectfully, his language often appears excessively elaborate. For example, he states:

"I should have great pleasure, I am sure, in obliging the company."

Compared with the concise language of Darcy or the direct speech of Elizabeth, Mr. Collins's utterances tend to be lengthy and overly ceremonial. His excessive use of formal expressions often creates an impression of artificiality rather than genuine refinement. This finding suggests that linguistic sophistication is not determined solely by formal vocabulary but also by the speaker's ability to use language naturally and appropriately within a social context.

Overall, the findings indicate that language use in *Pride and Prejudice* reflects broader social divisions within nineteenth-century English society. Upper-class characters generally employ more formal, controlled, and status-oriented language, whereas characters from relatively lower social positions tend to use more personal, emotional, and expressive forms of communication. These differences are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. **Differences in Languange use between Upper-class and Lower-class**

Upper class	Lower class
Speak in a more formal and polite manner	Speak in a more casual and direct manner
Often appear arrogant or superior	More honest and straightforward
Highly concerned with social status	More focused on feelings and everyday life
Use more elegant and refined vocabulary	Use simpler and more basic language
Maintain family image and honor	More freedom in speaking
Language is used to demonstrate power and social class	Language is used to express feelings and personal opinions

Table 1 demonstrates that language in *Pride and Prejudice* functions as more than a communicative tool. It serves as a representation of social identity, class membership, and power relations. The contrast between upper-class and lower-class speech highlights how social hierarchy is constructed and maintained through everyday linguistic practices. At the same time, characters such as Elizabeth Bennet show that language can also become a means of questioning and negotiating those social boundaries.

CONCLUSION

The language use in Pride and Prejudice is not casual talking but a true representation of the socio-economic stratification of the characters. Upper class characters such as Mr Darcy, Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley tend to speak in a very formal and controlled way. This linguistic pattern is a tactic to keep the social distance and keep the boundaries of the class, which stresses a profound sence of their social power and status. Mrs. Bennet, Lydia and Mrs. Philips, on the other hand, speak more emotively, informally and expressively. Their talk is little restrained by the proprieties of society, and deals directly with present feelings and domestic affairs.

Furthermore, this study highlights that the real sophistication of the language is not based on sophisticated vocabulary as demonstrated by Mr. Collins's rhetorical errors. His speech is unnatural, too formal and complicated, showing the fact that the real sophistication of the upper class is to use language naturally in its social context. But Elizabeth Bennet is a dynamic character, whose intellectual confidence is matched by emotional authenticity. Elizabeth demonstrates how language can be used to resist and negotiate social inequalities and in her conversations she is able to maneuver with skill and at times challenge the rigid, class-based linguistic barriers.

The qualitative descriptive study finds that the sociolects and dialects are powerful markers of social identity and power relations in literary works. Future research could explore these findings, using different sociolinguistic frameworks such as politeness theory to investigate the specific conversational strategies discussed in this paper, or critical discourse analysis to investigate more deeply the underlying power systems. A fuller understanding of

the relationship between language and social class in the nineteenth century would also be helped by a wider comparative context, including other literary works from the same Regency period.

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