

Sarcasm and Indirect Speech in Elizabeth Bennet's Dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice* 2005

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Elizabeth Bennet uses indirect speech acts and sarcasm in her language in Joe Wright's 2005 *Pride and Prejudice* movie version. Elizabeth, who is well known for her independence, wit, and intelligence, challenges social norms and expresses her views through these linguistic tactics, especially with relation to marriage and gender roles. Pragmatic discourse analysis was used in a qualitative descriptive research technique. Using pragmatic theories and contextual clues, data from a selection of Elizabeth Bennet's dialogues were examined for instances of indirectness and sarcasm. The results show that while indirect speech acts enable Elizabeth to remain courteous and steer out of direct conflict, particularly with authority figures, sarcasm serves as a subtly effective method of resistance against social pressures. According to the study, Elizabeth's discourse demonstrates her pragmatic intelligence and capacity to navigate her social environment by combining indirect speech acts and sarcasm to convey multiple meanings and subvert social norms. This study advances our knowledge of pragmatic techniques used in literary film adaptations and their function in social commentary and character development.

Keywords: *Elizabeth Bennet; Pride; Prejudice; Sarcasm; Indirect speech-act.*

INTRODUCTION

In the study of language and communication, speech acts are an essential concept that describes how speakers carry out activities through utterances that have meanings beyond their literal interpretations (Kabalmay & Susanto, 2025). Effective interpersonal contact and social coordination depend on speech acts, which include a variety of communicative tasks such as asking, promising, commanding, questioning, and criticizing (Padang et al., 2022). The intentional effects and social roles that these activities fulfill within a particular context are just as important as the words that are spoken (Eragamreddy, 2024). Because the speaker's intended meaning differs from the literal expression, indirect speech acts are particularly significant among the different types of speech acts (Nurdiana, 2019). This means that the listener must be able to deduce the speaker's true intent from contextual cues, shared cultural knowledge, and pragmatic competence. In societies that value civility and social harmony, this indirectness is frequently used to soften requests, deflect embarrassing behavior, or offer criticism in a way that is acceptable to others (Sari, 2023). Speakers can negotiate intricate interpersonal connections and societal hierarchies by employing indirect speech acts, which

enable them to voice dissent or disagreement without inciting open hostility or offense (Bendtz et al., 2022; Hamnu & Putra, 2023; Maghfira & Ariyanti, 2014).

Sarcasm, a complex type of verbal irony in which speakers say one thing but imply something else, is closely related to indirect speech acts (Attardo, 2003). Sarcasm is usually used to ridicule or criticize social standards, actions, or people (Igaab & Wehail, 2023). By subtly yet effectively fusing humor, irony, and societal criticism, sarcasm serves as a potent pragmatic tool that communicates complex meaning. The listener's capacity to interpret situational cues, tone of voice, facial expressions, and shared cultural and interpersonal knowledge all play a significant role in how effective sarcasm is (Riandika et al., 2025). Sarcasm, as opposed to direct criticism, lowers the danger of social retaliation by enabling speakers to reveal hypocrisy, question authority, or query social norms while preserving a facade of civility or fun. Because of its complexity, sarcasm is a valuable topic for pragmatic analysis, demonstrating how language may be strategically employed to negotiate social norms and power.

In literary and film adaptations, indirect speech actions and sarcasm are essential in defining character identities and providing sophisticated social criticism (Yunus & Mustikawati, 2023). Elizabeth Bennet, the main character in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, is a well-known example. Elizabeth is praised for her keen intellect, passionate independence, and quick witqualities that enable her to subvert the constrictive social mores of Regency England. In order to express her personal views, question social norms especially those pertaining to marriage, gender roles, and class and demonstrate her independence in a patriarchal society, she regularly uses indirect speech acts and sarcasm in her dialogues. Elizabeth successfully strikes a balance between social grace and resistance by using these practical strategies to critique society while upholding the manners expected of her social class. In a number of adaptations, including Joe Wright's 2005 film adaptation, Elizabeth's character has been returned to and reinterpreted, and her practical use of language still strikes a chord with modern viewers. Her use of wit, irony, and indirectness as means of subtly defying social norms and demands is highlighted in the movie (Sun, 2022). This study attempts to determine how Elizabeth Bennet's use of sarcasm and indirect speech actions contributes to the development of her nuanced character and her role as a subtly perceptive social critic. Elizabeth's ability to maneuver, compromise, and defy the societal restrictions placed upon her is better understood thanks to this practical approach, which also touches on more general issues of gender, power, and agency that are relevant in both historical and contemporary settings.

Elizabeth Bennet, a central figure in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth, who is well-known for her humor, intelligence, and spirit of

independence, defies social norms with a special fusion of charm and rebellion. Elizabeth is portrayed in contemporary readings as a trailblazing feminist who questioned the constrained roles that Regency England's women were expected to play. Elizabeth is frequently commended for her capacity to think critically and voice her thoughts, especially when they deviate from accepted social mores. Because of her "something more of quickness than her sisters," she is portrayed as her father's favorite and her mother's source of pride and annoyance. She stood out from many of her peers because she refused to mindlessly follow patriarchal norms and insisted on being married for love rather than money. Her character's depth and authenticity are enhanced by her early biases and poor decisions, especially with regard to Mr. Darcy. Her ability to grow and reflect on herself, however, enables her to get above these prejudices and develop a more complex view of both herself and other people.

Elizabeth's character is frequently updated in *Pride and Prejudice* adaptations to appeal to modern audiences, such as the 2005 Joe Wright picture. Adaptations may highlight particular characteristics or provide fresh perspectives on her inner conflicts, but the fundamental elements of her personality: wit, independence, and intelligence remain constant. Elizabeth Bennet's ongoing appeal stems from her capacity to represent women's opportunities and struggles in a society that is changing. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Elizabeth Bennet's use of indirect speech acts and sarcasm shapes her persona and her function as a social critic in *Pride and Prejudice*. We can learn more about her complicated personality and the techniques she uses to function in her social environment by closely examining her speech.

This study deepens our understanding of pragmatic strategies in literary film adaptations, specifically how sarcasm and indirect speech acts are used for social critique and character development. The findings are relevant for scholars in linguistics, literature, and film studies, and offer practical insights for teaching pragmatics and discourse analysis. How does Elizabeth Bennet use sarcasm in her dialogue to critique societal norms and express her opinions in *Pride and Prejudice* (2005). How do sarcasm and indirect speech acts intersect in Elizabeth Bennet's dialogue to convey layered meanings in *Pride and Prejudice* (2005). Previous research has explored pragmatic aspects in *Pride and Prejudice*, both in the novel and its film adaptation. Zhang and Amin both apply Grice's Cooperative Principle to analyze how characters' dialogue often flouts conversational maxims, creating implied meanings that enrich character development and add humor and irony (Amin, 2024; Zhang, 2024).

Zhang focuses on the early chapters of the novel, while Amin highlights the importance of context and psychoanalytic perspectives in interpreting the

pragmatic functions of dialogue, especially in building narrative tension and shaping reader perceptions. In contrast, Septyanasari examines the pragmatic functions of sarcasm in film dialogue, showing that sarcasm is not only entertaining but also serves as a tool for social critique and personal expression. Septyanasari emphasizes that sarcasm, as an indirect speech act, requires the audience to infer meaning beyond the literal words, adding depth to character portrayal and thematic complexity in film narratives (Septyanasari & Hartati, 2024). Overall, these studies agree that sarcasm and indirect speech acts are central to character development, plot progression, and social critique in both the novel and its film adaptation. However, this study will specifically focus on how these pragmatic strategies are adapted and employed in Elizabeth Bennet’s dialogue in the 2005 film version of *Pride and Prejudice*.

METHODS

Subjects of Research

The subject of this research is the dialogue spoken by the character Elizabeth Bennet in the film *Pride and Prejudice* (2005). The data consists of selected utterances chosen based on their relevance to the research focus, specifically instances where sarcasm and indirect speech acts are employed to critique societal norms and express personal opinions.

Instruments

The primary research instrument in this study is the researcher themselves (human instrument). As the main analyst, the researcher is responsible for selecting, transcribing, classifying, and interpreting the data to uncover layered meanings and pragmatic strategies. (*Note: As this is a textual analysis of a film, interview questions are not applicable*).

Data Collection

The data collection technique involves several key steps: (1) Observation: The researcher watches the film *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) comprehensively; (2) Identification: Relevant dialogues containing sarcasm or indirect speech acts are identified; (3) Transcription: The selected dialogues are transcribed verbatim along with their time codes to ensure accuracy and context; and (4) Classification: The findings are organized into tables for pragmatic classification and frequency analysis before being interpreted in the discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main dialogues of Elizabeth Bennet are listed in a table along with their time codes and classification as either indirect speech acts, sarcasm, along with contextual interpretation.

Table 1. Classification and Analysis of Elizabeth Bennet’s Dialogue

Time Code	Dialogue	Classification	Analysis
13:08	“Dancing. Even if one’s partner is barely tolerable.”	Sarcasm	The phrase ‘barely tolerable’ is ironic and cutting, mocking Mr. Darcy’s earlier remark about Elizabeth being ‘tolerable but not handsome enough to tempt me’. Elizabeth sarcastically destroy Mr. Darcy’s pride while maintaining a playful tone.
13:45	“I agree entirely. Only the deepest love will persuade me into matrimony, which is why I will end up as an old maid.”	Sarcasm	The claim of ‘deepest love’ contrast with the self-deprecating prediction of becoming an ‘oldmaid’. She critique societal pressure on women to marry while mocking herself lightly.
15:14	“Oh, mama please. it’s 10 in the morning.”	Indirect Speech Act	A subtle request for her mother to stop the conversation.
16:53	“Though she may well perish with the shame of having such mother.”	Sarcasm	The hyperbolic use of ‘perish with shame’ critiques her mother’s embarrassing behaviour without outright disrespect.
22:54	“Dear, I can not tease you about that. What a shame for I did dearly love to laugh.”	Sarcasm	The irony in ‘dearly love to laugh’ masks her disappointment in Darcy’s lack of humor. Elizabeth conveys her critique of Darcy’s lack of humor demeanor while feigning politeness.
27:40	“Do the pleasant attentions proceed from the impulsive of the moment or are they result of previous study?”	Indirect Speech Act	The question subtly challenges Mr. Collins’s sincerity without accusing him directly. Elizabeth tests Mr. Collins’s intentions through polite ambiguity.
28:08	“Believe me. no one would respect your manners to be rehearsed.”	Sarcasm	The remark sarcastically dismisses Mr. Collins’s earlier attempt at politeness. Elizabeth mocks his stiff compliments while pretending to complement him.
39:48	“No, I prefer to be unsociable and taciturn. makes it more enjoyable, don’t you think?”	Sarcasm	The exaggerated preference for being ‘unsociable and taciturn’ is ironic. Elizabeth humorously critique Darcy’s reserved nature while pretending agreement.
62:05	“With three younger sisters grown up, your ladyship can hardly expect me to own to it.”	Indirect Speech Act	Elizabeth subtly deflects Lady Catherine’s criticism without outright refusal. She uses indirectness to maintain politeness while resisting Lady Catherine’s intrusion.
64:48	“Perhaps you should	Sarcasm	The suggestion to ‘practice’ mocks Darcy’s

	take your aunt’s advice and practice.”		earlier admission about his conversational difficulties. Elizabeth points out Darcy’s social awkwardness under the guise of helpful advice.
69:18	“Sir, I appreciate the struggle you have been through and I am very sorry to have caused you pain. Believe me it was unconsciously done.”	Indirect Speech Act	Elizabeth expresses regret diplomatically without fully accepting responsibility. She acknowledges Darcy’s feeling while maintaining emotional distance.
69:34	“I’m sure that the feelings, which, as you told me, have hindered your regard will help you in over coming it.”	Indirect Speech Act	The remark references Darcy’s earlier insults about her family while indirectly rejecting his proposal. She indirectly told him to move on or ‘get over it’.
91:55	“Sir, I think it is too late.”	Indirect Speech Act	Instead of saying ‘No,’ she conveys subtle rejection without harshness, implying that the opportunity has passed.
101:34	“So soon.”	Indirect Speech Act	This short sentence suggests surprise or mild critique without explicit disapproval. She indirectly comments in disappointed on Mr. Darcy’s quick leave.

Following the classification of sarcasm types presented in Table 1, the next step is to summarize their occurrence frequency. Table 2 below provides an overview of how often each type appeared in the analyzed data.

Table 2. Frequency of Sarcasm and Indirect Speech Act in Elizabeth Bennet’s

Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sarcasm	7	50%
Indirect Speech Act	7	50%
Total	14	100%

The Pragmatic Balance: Elizabeth Bennet's Equal Use of Sarcasm and Indirect Speech

Sarcasm and indirect speech acts are equally prevalent, each occurring seven times, or 50% of the total cases, as can be shown from the study of the 14 dialogues. Elizabeth Bennet's skill at using language to negotiate intricate social situations is demonstrated by her well-balanced employment of both pragmatic techniques. She successfully conveys social critique while upholding the required decorum required by Regency-era social conventions by cleverly blending sarcasm and indirectness. Elizabeth uses sarcasm as a sarcastic yet humorous tool to criticize other characters' actions and society norms. It enables her to subtly and humorously convey intellectual resistance and dissent while exposing hypocrisy and absurdity without taking offense.

However, Elizabeth can express her objectives more subtly and courteously using indirect speech acts, which is especially useful when speaking with people in positions of authority like Lady Catherine and Mr. Darcy. She uses this tactic to maintain social cohesion and steer clear of direct conflict, which could be harmful in a society with strict hierarchies. Elizabeth demonstrates her pragmatic competence and social intelligence by using indirectness to voice her thoughts and negotiate her social position without going against the anticipated standards of civility and respect.

Furthermore, Elizabeth's dialogue's use of sarcasm and indirect speech actions reveals her nuanced personality, which is both assertive and tactful, critical yet socially conscious. By adding layers of meaning and allowing her to voice criticism and independence without resorting to overt disobedience, this dual method enhances her interactions. It also fits with *Pride and Prejudice's* gendered speech patterns, as women's language frequently strikes a balance between politeness and expressiveness in order to go around social norms. In conclusion, Elizabeth Bennet's equal use of indirect speech actions and sarcasm demonstrates her linguistic agility in handling social connections and voicing her opinions. The importance of pragmatic tactics in literary characterization and social critique is demonstrated by this balance, which enables her to effectively criticize societal conventions while upholding the decorum and politeness required for her social environment.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to meticulously analyze the pragmatic utilization of sarcasm and indirect speech acts within Elizabeth Bennet's dialogue in the film *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) and to explore the interaction between these two techniques in conveying layered meanings and social critique. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that Elizabeth Bennet employs both pragmatic strategies in a sophisticated and perfectly balanced manner, with each accounting for 50% of the total documented cases. Sarcasm is identified as a powerful instrument for effective social critique and personal expression, enabling her to humorously challenge restrictive social norms, particularly those concerning marriage and etiquette, without resorting to explicit confrontation. Conversely, indirect speech acts are strategically deployed to maintain social harmony and adhere to required decorum, especially when engaging with figures of higher authority. The successful intersection of these two techniques creates nuanced and multi-layered dialogue, allowing Elizabeth to safely assert her autonomy and critique societal standards while expertly navigating complex social hierarchies. The results underscore the essential contribution of pragmatic analysis to literary and film studies, as

Elizabeth’s linguistic agility is pivotal to her portrayal as an intelligent, independent heroine, affirming the potency of language as a tool for self-definition and resistance. Based on these findings, it is recommended that future researchers explore the pragmatic dimensions of other characters or different adaptations of Jane Austen’s works, while educators are encouraged to integrate pragmatic analysis to enhance understanding of character development and social critique in literature. It is hoped that this research will inspire continued application of pragmatic strategies in the study of cinematic and literary works.

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