



INTERPRETATION OF PRAGMATIC MEANS OF NARRATION IN THE NOVEL “JANE EYRE”

Nasreddinova Farzona Shuxratovna

Research Intern at Samarkand

State Institute of Foreign Languages

e-mail: farzonanasreddinova@gmail.com

+99890)655-94-94

Abstract

This article examines how Charlotte Brontë uses language in “Jane Eyre” to do more than just tell a story. It focuses on pragmatic tools such as speech acts, indirect meaning (implicature), politeness, and deixis to show how the main character, Jane, expresses her identity and deals with social power. The analysis is based on ideas from well-known scholars like Grice, Searle, Brown and Levinson, and Bakhtin. By looking closely at important parts of the novel, the article shows that Jane’s way of speaking changes as she grows stronger and more independent. These language choices also help Brontë involve the reader and highlight deeper themes like gender and personal freedom. The study concludes that pragmatic analysis helps us better understand how characters communicate and how novels create meaning through language.

Keywords: pragmatic means, speech acts, implicature, politeness theory, deixis, narrative voice, identity, power, reader engagement

Introduction

Scholars from a wide range of fields, including feminist theory, postcolonial studies, narrative ethics, and psychological realism, have been interested in Charlotte Brontë’s “Jane Eyre” since it was first published in 1847. The novel’s enduring appeal is rooted in its intensely personal first-person narrative voice, which is not only emotionally and rhetorically complex but also introspective. More than just reciting a series of life events, Jane Eyre’s narration engages in acts of moral positioning, self-definition, persuasion, and judgment [9]. Such a



narrative voice is worth considering from linguistic pragmatics as well as from literary or thematic viewpoints.

Although the novel's thematic content and ideological tensions – such as its criticisms of Victorian gender roles, its religious discourse, or its gothic and romantic elements – have been the subject of much research, the practical purposes of Jane's narrative techniques have gotten relatively less consistent attention. The novel's power, however, comes from the narrator's ability to use language not just descriptively but “performatively” – that is, to subtly challenge the norms of her social environment, to imply, to resist, and to align with the reader. The framework of pragmatic analysis, which takes into account how meaning is created in context and how speakers (or narrators) accomplish communicative effects beyond literal semantics, provides the best understanding of these functions [7].

Using specific pragmatic means of narration, including implicature, speech acts, deixis, politeness strategies, and dialogic positioning, Brontë shapes the reader's engagement with Jane's identity, moral stance, and relational dynamics. This article offers a pragmatically oriented reading of Jane Eyre. Through the application of fundamental pragmatic theories such as Bakhtin's dialogism, Grice's Cooperative Principle, Searle's Speech Act Theory, Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, and Relevance Theory, the study seeks to reveal the complex ways in which the narrative voice serves as a site of personal agency and ideological negotiation.

Using this method, the analysis aims to show that Jane Eyre's first-person narrative is a highly practical structure rather than just a stylistic device. By employing intricate linguistic strategies that both mirror and defy the limitations of her social environment, Brontë's narrator turns storytelling into a means of self-affirmation, moral positioning, and dialogue with the reader. By highlighting how practical tactics support the narrator's authority and the novel's larger critique of power, gender, and identity, this viewpoint brings something new to the study of Brontë.



Literature Review

Examining how narration functions not only to tell a story but also to perform actions, negotiate identities, and involve readers in implied dialogue has become easier in recent decades thanks to the convergence of pragmatics and literary analysis. This intersection gives rise to the idea of “pragmatic means of narration”, which refers to the use of linguistic strategies that depend on context, including speech acts, implicatures, deixis, politeness, and dialogism, in narrative discourse. Through the complex interaction of language, speaker intention, and reader inference, these methods go beyond surface semantics to influence interpretation.

H.P. Grice’s theory of the Cooperative Principle and conversational implicature is a fundamental place to start when learning pragmatic strategies [4]. According to Grice, cooperative language use in context is supported by the following maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Grice suggested that effective communication depends on adherence to these principles. Usually, when a speaker (or narrator) disregards these rules, implicature is created, allowing the reader or listener to deduce meanings that are not explicitly stated. This mechanism is essential to character development, irony, and understatement in literary texts. In order to convey judgments or emotional undercurrents without making explicit declarations, narrators frequently use implicature, particularly those with strong subjective voices like Jane Eyre’s.

Building on this, John Searle’s Speech Act Theory offers a taxonomy of performative language use, or how words serve to alter reality rather than just describe it [5]. Speech acts are divided into expressives, directives, declaratives, assertives, and commissives, each of which corresponds to a distinct social interaction. Speech acts in narrative fiction take place on several levels, including those between characters, the narrator’s introspection, and the narrator’s interaction with the reader. These actions are used by the first-person narrator, especially in “Jane Eyre”, to establish moral agency, create identity, and subvert hierarchical structures. Her emotional appeals, assertions of autonomy, and rhetorical questions are not merely expressive; they are also acts of commissive and assertive behavior woven throughout the story.



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Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, which describes how speakers negotiate social relationships using linguistic strategies meant to preserve face – both their own and that of others – complements this performative element [3]. Understanding how power, hierarchy, and intimacy are negotiated in language requires an understanding of the ideas of “positive face” (the desire to be liked and included) and “negative face” (the desire not to be imposed upon). Indirectness, hedging, and mitigation are examples of politeness strategies used in literary narration. Narrators may employ these strategies to stay in sync with the reader or to mirror social constraints placed on characters. These tactics turn into useful tools for both survival and covert resistance, particularly in stories set in strict social stratification like Victorian England.

Although the aforementioned frameworks place a strong emphasis on interpersonal and interactional pragmatics, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism offers a more comprehensive understanding of language as essentially social and polyphonic. According to Bakhtin, no utterance exists in a vacuum; all discourse is in conversation with earlier utterances and anticipates future reactions [2]. In narrative fiction, where the narrator's voice frequently engages with multiple ideological positions, representing conflicting worldviews and internal tensions, this viewpoint is especially pertinent. This dialogism is best exemplified by the narrative voice in “Jane Eyre”, which engages in a continuous internal dialogue while navigating religious obligation, gender expectations, romantic desire, and moral selfhood.

Relevance Theory, introduced by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, adds even more complexity to this conversation by refining Gricean pragmatics by contending that communication depends on the pursuit of optimal relevance rather than on set maxims [11]. Assuming a cognitive environment of shared assumptions, this theory states that speakers give just enough information to lead the listener toward the intended inferences. This results in a model of narrative discourse where the reader continuously fills in interpretive gaps as an active inferred. Thus, the narrator's economy of language and selectivity turn into practical acts that rely on the reader to understand hidden motives, ethical stances, and emotional tones. Brontë makes extensive use of this pragmatic inference in “Jane Eyre”, particularly in passages where Jane's inner feelings are hinted at



rather than expressed in detail, forcing the reader to piece together her inner state using the context.

When combined, these theories provide a thorough framework for examining the pragmatic means of narrative. They show how narrators employ language to perform actions, build relationships, and traverse ideological landscapes in addition to telling stories. Such a framework, when applied to “Jane Eyre”, allows one to follow how Brontë’s use of first-person narrative develops into a site of pragmatic complexity, where carefully calibrated linguistic strategies reveal assertion, resistance, and ethical positioning. In addition to improving our comprehension of narrative technique, this intersection of speech act theory, implicature, politeness, dialogism, and relevance highlights the narrator’s agency in influencing the reader’s moral and emotional response to the text.

Results and Discussion

An examination of selected excerpts from “Jane Eyre” demonstrates that Charlotte Brontë’s narrative is intricately composed of pragmatic strategies that fulfill not only aesthetic and stylistic objectives but also substantial ideological, relational, and psychological roles. These strategies, especially speech acts, implicature, politeness theory, deixis, and dialogic positioning, work together to make a complete system that Jane Eyre uses to build and express her own identity. Additionally, Brontë’s utilization of these techniques enhances a complex representation of social power dynamics and moral agency, while concurrently involving the reader as an interpretive participant.

Throughout the novel, “speech acts” serve as a primary mechanism through which Jane establishes her moral and emotional independence. In emotionally charged confrontations, Jane’s statements serve as more than simple declarations or inquiries; they constitute acts of resistance, refusal, or identity affirmation. For example, when she scolded Rochester, she said, “Do you think, because I am poor, unknown, plain, and small, I am soulless and heartless?” “You think wrong!” [1] Jane does a strong, assertive, and expressive thing by rejecting social hierarchies that are forced on her and standing up for her own worth. In the same way, her response of “I am not an angel ... I will be myself” [1] is both a statement of who I am and a rejection of gendered idealization. These instances demonstrate



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how Brontë employs speech acts to delineate Jane's progression from social subjugation to moral autonomy.

The analysis also highlights the significance of "politeness strategies", as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson, in influencing the pragmatic tone of diverse social interactions. In the earlier parts of the book, Jane often uses "negative politeness", like when she carefully tells Rochester that a visitor has come ("Are you aware, Mr. Rochester, that stranger has arrived?" [1]). The way she talks – hedging, being indirect, and using formal address ("sir") – shows that she is lower on the social ladder and doesn't want to threaten the face of a higher-up. In contrast, Jane's later confrontations with Rochester or St. John show a clear shift toward positive politeness and even bald-on-record strategies, as she becomes more sure of her right to be treated equally. This progression reflects her psychological development and emphasizes the correlation between pragmatics and character growth.

"Implicature", particularly as defined by Grice's maxims, plays a subtle yet crucial role in character interactions. Brontë frequently constructs dialogue in which the literal meaning is at odds with the intended implication, thereby inviting the reader to participate in meaning-making. For example, Rochester's comment that Jane is "quaint, quiet, grave, and simple" [1] might superficially appear descriptive, yet through tone and context, it carries an implicit judgment – at once admiring and patronizing. Such violations of the maxims of relevance or manner create layered meanings that Jane often silently resists or reinterprets, contributing to the novel's dialogic texture. This aligns with Bakhtinian heteroglossia, as multiple voices and perspectives coexist and contend within the text [2].

The use of "deictic expressions" further enhances the novel's pragmatic complexity, particularly in anchoring Jane's evolving sense of self within specific social and spatial contexts. The narrative frequently oscillates between present-tense reflections and past events, with temporal deixis ("now", "then"), spatial deixis ("here", "there"), and personal deixis ("I", "you", "we") serving to position both narrator and reader. Pivotal moments such as "Reader, I married him" illustrate this: the direct address uses deixis to collapse narrative distance, inviting the reader into Jane's inner world and aligning them with her moral vision. Such



strategies are deeply pragmatic in their effect, constructing a form of narrative intimacy that transcends mere storytelling.

Another important finding is the “interpersonal function” of pragmatic means in scenes marked by power asymmetry. In interactions with figures like Mrs. Reed or Mr. Brocklehurst, Jane’s speech reflects both external submission and internal resistance. Her early use of indirect refusals, mitigated speech, and strategic silence gradually gives way to overt refusals and assertive declarations. These shifts are not simply psychological; they are “linguistically enacted” through changes in speech strategies. For example, her reaction to Mrs. Reed’s rejection – “They are not fit to associate with me!” [1] – functions as a “counter-assertive speech act”, undermining the insult through ironic inversion. Likewise, Rochester’s own commands (“Let Miss Eyre be seated” [1]) reflect a formal directive speech act, but Jane’s narrative voice infuses the moment with implied critique, highlighting the affective gap between speaker and addressee.

Importantly, pragmatic strategies not only structure dialogue but also facilitate “narrative positioning” – that is, how Jane frames events, evaluates others, and guides the reader’s judgment. Her use of ironies, rhetorical questions, and elliptical statements creates a subtle narrative irony that allows her to critique Victorian norms without overt didacticism. Through these devices, Brontë encourages the reader to infer Jane’s moral judgments rather than accept them passively, thereby inviting ethical engagement and co-construction of meaning.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Charlotte Brontë’s “Jane Eyre” makes deliberate and effective use of pragmatic means of narration – particularly speech acts, implicature, politeness strategies, and deixis – to construct Jane’s identity, express power dynamics, and engage the reader. These linguistic strategies are not merely stylistic but serve as tools for resistance, self-assertion, and moral commentary.

As Jane matures, her pragmatic choices shift from polite, indirect forms to more assertive and self-defining speech, reflecting her psychological and social development. Brontë’s dialogic narrative style, especially her use of direct address and narrative deixis, fosters reader involvement and deepens the ethical and emotional dimensions of the story.



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