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AN ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC STUDIES ON MAJOR FICTION BY JANE AUSTEN

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Abstract: The current article is devoted to the critical analysis of linguistic studies on Jane Austen's fiction. As one of the greatest novelists in English language and even regarded as being equal to the greatest dramatist William Shakespeare Jane Austen's universal popularity lies in her ability to create the illusion of psychologically believable and self-reflecting characters. She is good at the penetrating revelation of characters, complex insight and sophisticated comic vision. In her novels, she searches for the harmony of personal desire and social norm, the growth of female selfhood and the interaction of present and memory, negotiation and relationship between different characters, which are closely related to her excellent mastery of language. However, Austen's focus on three or four families in a country village as her writing subject misleads others to underestimate her art, and the critics just emphasize the wit, elegance and precision of her style without recognizing the originality and innovativeness of her language. Her superficially narrowness does not necessarily mean she does not care about her art at all. On the contrary, she has been highly conscious of the use of language by exercising her own way towards the realization and solution to her art. She often expresses her awareness of language explicitly or implicitly in her letters to her family and friends, and thus her insistence on faithful and neat writing is quite obvious and her style is consistent with growth and

improvement. Speculations on her artistic development are quite meaningful and necessary to enlarge the horizon to understand Austen's fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Since a very long time ago, readers and critics have paid close attention to Jane Austen's fiction, and both professional critics of literature and English students find her works to be very appealing (Woolf, 1975). She is defined as having a moral responsibility to a fine distinction of human ideals. "The wit of Jane Austen has for partner the perfection of her taste," Virginia Woolf (1975: 177) wrote. Her snob is a snob, and her stupid is a fool. She is referred to as "Shakespeare in prose" and is thought to possess attributes similar to Shakespeare's.

Austen started writing when she was twelve years old and continued until her death, finishing six novels, letters, juvenilia, and fragments. *Pride and Prejudice*, one of her early works, is an example of the sarcastic humor popular in the 18th century. *Emma* is regarded as her most mature work, while *Persuasion*, her final book, is considered to be on the verge of modern writing due to its subtle psychological portrayal (1985). People enjoy reading her writings because they are energizing and amusing. Her writing is also humorous and exquisite.

However, throughout the 19th century, writers and critics typically avoided her fiction out of prejudice for her limited subject matter, which was associated with her "country gentlemen, ladies, snobs, bores, and social climbers." Additionally, Austen's description of her work as "small square two inches of ivory" misled viewers into thinking that it was shallow and limited.

Her novels sold not very well compared with those contemporary writers such as Walter Scott. And the critics did not comment much on them. Instead, they just did very general studies on Austen's achievements on language and they tended to ignore her art of language by paying more attention to the entertainment and morality that her novels contained.

As the 20th century rolled around, the literary community started to show a lot of interest in her fiction. The readers and authors of her time were well aware of Jane Austen's skill with words. An unidentified critic in the *Edinburgh Magazine* found in

Jane Austen's books "more permanent delight in those familiar cabinet pictures, than even in the great historical pieces of our more eminent modern masters" (Watt, 1962: 3).

Her use of language was admired for its capacity to paint a clear picture of her characters and situations. Other reviewers also expressed interest in Austen's language at the same time, either by complimenting her writing abilities or by trying to identify her language in general. Their attention was currently on Austen's word choice. The most celebrated poet and novelist of his time, Sir Walter Scott, freely complimented Jane Austen's Emma.

Read *Pride and Prejudice*, a very well-written work by Miss Austen, again and at least a third time, he noted in his private journals. The young woman had a gift for capturing the interactions, emotions, and personalities of everyday life, which is, in my opinion, the most magnificent gift I have ever encountered (Watt, 1962: 3).

Then, in 1939, Mary Lascelles published her important book *Jane Austen and Her Art*, which was one of the first and best in-depth analyses of Austen's writing. This was the first comparative thorough and systematic study of Jane Austen's art. She claimed that Jane Austen's writing in the novel demonstrated "a curiously chameleon-like faculty" that changed depending on the character and circumstance. She first introduced Jane Austen by telling a brief account of her life and asking questions about the quantity, quality, and impact of her reading before turning to her use of language to explore the artistry of the author, particularly in light of the narrator's specific issues.

She believed that there was undoubtedly something to be said about Jane Austen's narrative style, and she believed that Austen's style was best exemplified by the idea that using the right words in the right context was the genuine definition of a style. She looked at Austen's use of vocabulary, characters who consistently conveyed her opinions, and a diversity of dialogues and points of view to examine how she controlled language as a tool. She primarily focused on the language's structural and semantic aspects.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Jane Austen's language was given warm, careful consideration in the late 20th century when stylistic possibilities to debate English books were expanded. The critics gradually paid more attention to Austen's language and attempted to apply linguistic knowledge to her novels, but they focused on the semantics of language rather than its lexical meaning.

Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel was edited by David Lodge in 1966. The article "The Vocabulary of Mansfield Park" in this book extensively detailed the word choices in Jane Austen's debut work Mansfield Park. K. C. Phillips wrote Jane Austen's English in 1970 to better explain her linguistic traits. On Nineteenth Century Fiction, Donald D. Stone published "Sense and Semantics in Jane Austen" in 1970. They all made an effort to analyze Jane Austen's fictional language, but they tended to stay away from linguistic words. After carefully researching Austen's writing style, Norman Page published The Language of Jane Austen in 1972 as a groundbreaking work on her language. In Austen's fiction, he was "aware of a disparity between subject-matter and significance" (Page, 1972: 7). Her fiction's apparent shallowness actually hid substance. Page (1972) added that her fiction's success was a victory of style and that it could be explained in terms of specific linguistic traits. By examining the social context of her terminology, dialogues, rhetorical strategies, and epistolary art, he conducted a thorough analysis of her language.

Other academics have also studied Austen's language in a variety of ways. Geoffrey Nash published a book in 1980 called Light, Bright, and Sparkling to provide notes on Jane Austen's previous classic Pride and Prejudice, which some have referred to as the most often repeated English novel. According to Nash's analysis of the book's language, Austen did a good job of capturing the personalities of her characters. For example, "Mrs. Bennet's speeches always reflect her mind: they ramble on with no obvious direction except the general theme of her daughter's superiority" (1980: 57). He claimed that Jane Austen's irony "expressed its meaning indirectly, through what only appeared to be polite conversation" and "satire makes use of humor and irony,

and in Jane Austen, usually has a social meaning” (1980: 59). In this novel, Jane Austen’s mastery of dialogues was well displayed.

The York Notes on Jane Austen's works, which covered both the traditional literary study and the study of her linguistic traits, were published in the years that followed. With the help of Angela Smith's notes, York Notes: Jane Austen Persuasion was released in 1980. Summary and analysis of the novel, including its language, were provided in the book. By relating Austen's remarks to moral and legal judgment and moral discrimination, she explored the author's concerns with these issues.

The words "sacrifice," "consciousness of right," and "maturity of mind" are only a few examples of the moral qualities that were discussed in the novel. She asserted that there was always a legal strain in the language, and that persuasion and sensitivity to persuasion are two significant parts of those moral qualities. Reading this book was like going on a voyage of self-improvement and self-judgment because Austen's language generally demanded that readers continually judge, evaluate, and distinguish.

In 1981, *York Notes; Jane Austen Emma* was published with the notes provided by Barbara Kayley, whose book was different from other two books by exploring the style of *Emma* in more details and greater depth. In the book, she argued that the narrative was orderly in both content and style, and dialogues were used by Austen as an efficient way to shape the characters and help with the plot development. She pointed out that the “dialogue of Emma was lively and spontaneous, much of it was formal, as was natural for the gentility of the time; it gives a balanced and well-organized impression, falling into antitheses, parallels and sequences”. She found that different characters had different styles and paces of conversations. She also mentioned the vividness brought by indirect speech, which drifted now and then into direct speech. This kind of narrative was highly valued as being very helpful with the sustained picture. All in all, most of the studies emphasize the linguistic achievements of Jane Austen from the perspective of literary research.

There seems to be an increase in linguistic research on Austen's use of language in the second half of the 20th century under the direction of stylistics and narratology.

An Understanding of Jane Austen's Novels, written by John Odmard in 1981, examined Austen's language on a more theoretical level of semantic fields and the actual point of view. He looked at the most important patterns in Austen's word choices from the viewpoint of the real point of view in Part IV, Ordering One's Priorities-. Semantic Fields and the Real Point of View. He asserted that "words are an important tool for directing the reader to the moral framework in Jane Austen's fictional world."

Because he started talking about the pattern of Austen's word choices rather than the fragments of diction, his research was more significant than that of earlier critics. The link between words' syntagmatic or paradigmatic senses was the subject of semantic field theory. Material values, social values, and moral values were the three categories he used to categorize Austen's language. Each field had linked and hierarchical terms that aided in the reiteration and clarity of certain values. Austen gave her readers a key words group in this way so they could judge and categorize the viewpoints of the heroines

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In 1988, the book *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen's Novels*, was written by Laura G. Mooneyham, which gathered a representative collection of critical essays on Jane Austen's works. The author entitled the third part "*Pride and Prejudice-. Towards a Common Language*" which delved into the language of both the protagonist and the antagonist. The author argued that both the hero Darcy and the heroine Elizabeth had their special language. According to the author, Darcy's language was formal, precise and stolid by "speaking with a detachment born of his intellectual superiority. Such language is not suited to intimacy but to the exercise of authority". While Elizabeth's language was "dominated by a prevailing sense of irony and the wit such an ironic viewpoint generates" and "subversive, that is, she seeks to undermine his authority, both temporal and linguistic, through verbal aggression". The first half of this novel was in some sense not only the conflict between Darcy and Elizabeth but also the misinterpretation of language. The author just gave a rather general impression of the language in the novel, without giving first

illustration of the linguistic features of the character's language in the novel.

In 1991, Myra Strokes in her book *The Language of Jane Austen* studied some aspects of Austen's vocabulary. She held the opinion that "literature of the past requires some re-orientation from the reader, for the meaning attributed to words changes, radically or subtly, from period to period". Thus, she made great efforts in exploring the social context including time, place and manner of Austen's vocabulary, the conceptual context, and the vocabulary referring to head and heart in Austen's fiction. Her diachronic study was the semantic re-orientation of the vocabulary, which concerned the meaning changes of words in Austen's fiction.

In recent years, studies on Jane Austen's art of language have come into a new age of diversity. They range from the stylistic and pragmatic studies to corpus searches. In 2002, the book *Romantic Austen* was written by Clara Tuite. She discussed the topic "Sensibility, free indirect style and the Romantic technology of discretion", and she argued that Austen employed some new mechanisms as strategies of realist narrative, namely irony, ambiguity and free indirect discourse, which served as a language of sympathy. Among them she emphasized that "free indirect discourse is a defining feature of Austen's realism, and a technique which Austen finessed". According to her, free indirect discourse was a form of doubleness of voices as "an internalization of an externalized process". And her highly self-conscious strategy distinguished Austen as a realist instead of a romanticist. Free indirect discourse was a notable grammatical usage, also called represented speech and thought. It referred to the way that the reports of what a character said and thought shift in pronouns, adverbs, tense and grammatical mode as we moved or hovered between the direct narrated reproductions of these events as they occurred to the character and the indirect representation of such events by the narrator. According to her, the free indirect discourse inscribed feminine authority and refinement of feeling and discretion.

CONCLUSION

Since the 1990s, books and articles on Austen's language have been published. The majority of the studies, however small in number, focus on the storytelling and rhetorical strategies. Austen's narrative abilities were extensively discussed by Zhang

Jieming in his paper "On the Narration of *Pride and Prejudice*" from 1991. Lin Wencheng conducted research on Jane Austen's use of irony in her fiction in 1998. In his work "On the Form of *Pride and Prejudice*" published in 2001, Chen Jun examined the plot and narration in relation to Austen's aesthetics.

Li Weiping conducted an inspirational analysis of Austen's work in his 2003 book *A History of the Artistic Development of the English Novel*. Li emphasized how innovative and fresh Austen's writing was. Her shorter titles and content reflected the style of English novels written in the 19th century, and the dialogue had a big impact on the issues and characters. He thought Austen was adept at crafting her novels using omniscient narrative, which made them credible and appealing. There has been only one Ph.D. book till now, namely "An Intertextual Reading of Jane Austen's Novels" by Xu Libing in 2003, who mainly gave a further study of Jane Austen's inheritance from Fielding and Richardson, and the development she had made. She pointed out that Austen made good use of the classical means of a third person narrative, which was the form of her novels derived from the epistolary style.

Compared with Henry Fielding, Jane Austen was far more delicate, elegant in dealing with similar structures and devices. Her usage of irony and the theater, characterization was better integrated in her characters and stories. However, considering Austen's reputation and influence in the West, the intellectual interest in her fiction is far from being sufficient. On the whole, most of the studies lack creativity in dealing with Jane Austen's language style in general, not to mention the studies of interpersonal relationship from the linguistic perspective.

In general, there was still a long way for critics and scholars at home to keep pace with the world-class study of Austen. The researches of her art of language and style were still inadequate. The overall picture of linguistic studies of Jane Austen's art of language has just been outlined, yet this book is mainly concerned with a detailed interpretation and analysis of Austen's linguistic features in her major fiction. Since there is still insufficient study of the application of linguistics to the interpersonal relationship, this book aims to explore Jane Austen's art of language from the

perspective of linguistics in the realization of different interpersonal relationships of her major fiction.

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