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Analysing Syntactic Patterns and Social Hierarchies in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract

This study examined how syntactic patterns in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice encoded and reflected social hierarchies in early nineteenth-century England. Guided by Systemic Functional Grammar and Transformational Generative Grammar, it employed a qualitative descriptive approach with purposively selected utterances from characters across social strata. The findings revealed that upper-class characters predominantly used complex hypotactic structures and nominalisations, signaling education, authority, and emotional restraint. Middle-class speakers employed balanced coordination and interrogatives, reflecting adaptability, politeness, and intellectual confidence. Conversely, lower-class characters frequently used paratactic and exclamative constructions, indicating social anxiety and linguistic insecurity. Thus, these syntactic variations functioned as a semiotic code constructing and reinforcing class distinctions within the novel. The study underscored the value of integrating syntactic and sociolinguistic analyses into literary studies, particularly within Nigerian university curricula, to enrich understanding of how grammar encodes ideology and social identity. It recommended further comparative study on the syntactic representation of social class in both African and European literary traditions. While the qualitative design provided in-depth insights, the purposive sample limited generalisability. Future study could benefit from larger corpus-based analyses and inclusion of diverse linguistic frameworks to deepen understanding of language and social stratification in literature. Finally, this study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by illuminating the nuanced role of syntax in portraying social power dynamics in a classic literary work.

Keywords: Syntax, Social Hierarchy, Linguistic Variation, Class Distinction, Pride and Prejudice

Introduction

Language functions as a **system of social stratification and identity formation**. How individuals speak, write, or structure their sentences often reveals much about their educational background, social position, and worldview. As Ezeigbo (2021) notes, "language in literary discourse is never neutral; it is a mirror of society, reflecting class, gender, and ideology" (p. 37). One fundamental axis by which syntax marks social rank is the opposition between subordination and coordination. Njoku and Izuagba (2007, p. 39) explain that, "Subordination is also known as a dependent clause because it depends on the main clause for its full meaning". Hypotactic constructions, sentences with multiple embedded clauses, relative clauses, and nominalisations tend to convey deliberation, informational density and formal orientation. Onuegwunwoke (2024) opines that, "Syntax identifies the hierarchical organisation of sentences which are typically made up of smaller units. These units are: words, phrases, clauses, and sentences" (p. 89). Sentence length and rhythmic balance contribute to the syntactic indexing of hierarchy.

Certainly, in this hierarchy, meaning must be conveyed. According to Fromkin *et al* (2011), "Much of the meaning of a sentence is interpreted from its d-structure" (p. 129). Yule (2010) adds that, "The deep structure is an abstract level of structural organisation in which all the elements determining structural interpretation are represented" (p. 98). Austen

manipulates the same resources to stage power dynamics. The staged power dynamics are within social encounters like proposals, requests, and confrontations in the novel. This, of course, repeatedly displayed distinct syntactic strategies that aligned with speakers' social leverage. In support of this, Onuegwunwoke (2024) notes that, "Simple sentences convey clarity or emphasis. Complex sentences suggest sophistication or detailed reasoning. Short sentences often create tension or emphasis. Long sentences may reflect a descriptive tone" (p. 90). Syntactic fluctuation also marks social mobility and aspiration. Characters attempting upward movement or negotiating newly acquired status display hybrid syntax, occasional adoption of elite hypotaxis, interrupted by paratactic slips under emotional pressure. This instability is meaningful. A sentence that begins with an elaborate subordinate clause but ends with fragmented exclamations exposes a failure to sustain the composure associated with established gentility. In the analysis below, we will see how Austen uses such mixed syntactic patterning to dramatise social tension.

Syntactically, descriptions of space and setting likewise encode hierarchy. On this, Carnie (2007) stresses that, "The notions we use to capture these intuitions are constituency and hierarchical structure" (p. 64). In the novel, estates associated with landed permanence and patrimonial authority are depicted through layered embedding and cumulative relative clauses. These are syntactic accumulation that projects depth, lineage and continuity. In contrast, as we are going to see, transient domestic scenes and provincial chatter employ lighter, immediate clause patterns. The syntactic texture of description, therefore, parallels social valuation. As such, architecture and landscape are linguistically built with the same structural accumulations that index social weight. Gender interacts with syntax to produce further gradations in social positioning. Women's speech in the novel, as we will see in the analysis, contains pragmatic mitigators and indirect construction forms tied to cultural expectations of politeness and deference.

Recurrent syntactic patterns also function ritually. Social exchanges, introductions, proposals, and negotiations over marriage and fortune deploy conventional syntactic frames that mark participation in elite ritual. Those outside the ritual either lack these syntactic markers or use them unevenly, signalling their peripheral position or their aspirational mimicry. Aboh (2022) emphasises that "syntactic patterns are shaped by social positioning, and in literary contexts, syntax functions as a symbolic structure of power" (p. 92). Similarly, Adegbite (2019) explains that in English literary texts, the author's manipulation of syntax can reveal "social inequality, politeness hierarchies, and ideological resistance" (p. 15). The ritualised syntax is therefore both performative and exclusive. It simultaneously creates and enforces social boundaries.

Nigerian scholars have drawn parallels between such linguistic encoding of class and the **Nigerian sociolinguistic environment**. Emenanjo (2018) argues that syntax often acts as "a linguistic metaphor for power, used to establish dominance or subservience in communication" (p. 41). Similarly, Nwogu and Egonu (2020) identify how syntactic constructions in English discourse "serve as subtle indicators of prestige, authority, or exclusion" (p. 58). Thus, Austen's deployment of syntax operates as an early literary instance of **linguistic class demarcation**, a practice still observed in contemporary discourse. The 1982 Macmillan Students' Edition edited by James Gibson is particularly significant for syntactic analysis because it preserves **original orthography and punctuation**. These are essential for studying syntactic variation and discourse coherence. Gibson's editorial framework provides explanatory notes clarifying historical and social

contexts that influence character speech. This version, widely used in tertiary English studies across Nigeria, offers an accessible yet authoritative base text for examining the **intersection of linguistic form and social meaning**. As Abiodun (2023) observes, “students’ editions that retain grammatical fidelity to the author’s style enable researchers to identify structural patterns that correspond to thematic and ideological structures” (p. 76). Therefore, this edition serves not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a reliable syntactic corpus.

In contemporary scholarship, there is a renewed interest in **linguistic hierarchies and social stratification** within literary texts. Global researchers like Culpeper (2021) and Carter (2020) emphasise that syntax in fiction often functions as a form of “social semiotics”, where grammatical variation communicates class differences, education levels, and moral values. Nigerian linguists, similarly, highlight the socio-pragmatic implications of syntax. Okoro (2021) asserts that “syntax mediates social reality, constructing the reader’s perception of civility, authority, and cultural order” (p. 112). The Regency era valued linguistic decorum as a mark of social respectability. Austen’s novel captures this ideology by assigning specific syntactic patterns to characters based on class, gender, and education. **Aristocratic characters** like Lady Catherine de Bourgh exhibit syntactic dominance through **imperative and declarative forms**, reflecting authority. We could see an instance in her discourse with Miss Bennet, “You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my nephew! Unfeeling, selfish girl! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?” (Austen, 1982, p. 276). Such linguistic mapping reveals a **syntactic mirror of social order**, where grammar itself becomes a marker of class consciousness. As Chomsky (2014) explains, syntactic competence underlies the generation of meaning and coherence. In Austen’s world, that competence doubles as **a social skill**, distinguishing the refined from the vulgar, the educated from the ignorant.

Statement of the Problem

The core problem motivating this study is that **previous scholarship on *Pride and Prejudice* has not sufficiently analysed how syntactic patterns reflect, construct, and sustain social hierarchies** among characters and within the narrative voice. While themes of class and gender have been widely discussed, their linguistic realisations, particularly through sentence structure, remain marginal in research. The absence of syntactic-focused inquiry limits our understanding of how Austen’s language achieves its social precision and its enduring realism. Most critical studies of the novel have traditionally approached class and hierarchy from thematic, sociological, or stylistic perspectives. Few have undertaken systematic linguistic or syntactic investigations linking sentence structure to the portrayal of social rank. Even those who examine Austen’s language tend to focus on her irony, discourse strategies, or lexico-semantic choices, leaving the grammatical underpinnings of her social commentary underexplored. The existing body of scholarship thus demonstrates an imbalance. While Austen’s style is celebrated for its refinement, wit, and realism, the syntactic mechanisms that produce these effects, and their connection to the depiction of class hierarchy, are insufficiently articulated in linguistic terms.

Another aspect of the problem is pedagogical. In university contexts, especially in Nigeria, *Pride and Prejudice* is often taught as a literary text emphasising moral values, plot development, and themes of marriage and class. Students are seldom guided to notice how grammar and syntax participate in meaning-making. Consequently, a generation of learners

encounters Austen's prose without understanding how her linguistic artistry reinforces her social critique. This neglect also limits the integration of syntax and discourse studies into literature curricula, despite current educational reforms promoting interdisciplinary approaches. Moreover, there exists a theoretical gap in connecting syntactic structure with social function. Traditional syntactic theory often concerned with abstract sentence rules, has not sufficiently incorporated the sociological dimensions of grammar. Functional linguists, particularly within Systemic Functional Grammar, argue that syntax operates in the interpersonal metafunction, helping speakers construct social roles and relations. Yet, very few studies have applied such frameworks to early English fiction in a way that highlights the grammatical encoding of hierarchy. Thus, an analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* through the lens of syntactic patterning promises to fill both theoretical and empirical gaps in linguistic and literary research.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate how syntactic patterns in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* encode and reflect the social hierarchies that define the novel's world. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify and categorise the predominant syntactic patterns used in *Pride and Prejudice*.
2. To examine how variations in syntactic structures correspond to the social status, education, and power relations among characters in the novel.
3. To analyse the relationship between syntactic complexity and communicative authority.
4. To demonstrate the pedagogical and theoretical implications of syntactic analysis for literary interpretation, especially within the Nigerian university context, where Austen's novel is widely studied.

Research Questions

Based on the stated objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions;

1. What are the dominant syntactic patterns used by Jane Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*, and how are these patterns distributed across narrative and character speech?
2. How do syntactic variations reflect or construct social hierarchies among the characters in *Pride and Prejudice*?
3. In what ways can an understanding of syntactic patterns enhance literary analysis and classroom interpretation of Austen's novel in the Nigerian higher education context?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study centres on Halliday's **Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)** and Chomsky's **Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG)**. Halliday's SFG provides the interpretive lens for understanding how syntactic choices enact and sustain social hierarchies, while Chomsky's TGG offers the formal tools for identifying and classifying those syntactic constructions. The theoretical synthesis recognises that language

is both a **formal system** and a **social practice**. This aligns with contemporary linguistic study in both Nigeria and the wider academic world. SFG, initially developed by **M. A. K. Halliday** in the 1960s and later refined by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), conceives of language as a **social semiotic system**, a resource for making meaning in context. According to Halliday (2014, p. 30), language is not merely a set of structures or rules but “a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning”. The syntactic choices made by speakers or writers are, therefore, not arbitrary but motivated by the social contexts in which communication occurs.

SFG operates through three **metafunctions** of language: (i) **Ideational metafunction** (representing experience and logical relations). (ii) **Interpersonal metafunction** (enacting social roles, attitudes, and hierarchies). (iii) **Textual metafunction** (organising language into coherent messages). For this study, the **interpersonal metafunction** is the most relevant, as it directly relates to how syntactic structures encode **social relations** and **hierarchical power** among Austen’s characters. Halliday (2014, p. 83) argues that grammar reflects “the social roles of interactants”, making syntax a key tool in understanding social hierarchies. Halliday’s framework explains how **syntactic patterns function as realisations of social relationships**. For instance, “declarative sentences often represent authority or confidence, while interrogative or elliptical structures may index politeness, subordination, or uncertainty” (Eggins, 2004, p. 153). **Okoro (2021)** asserts that syntactic forms are “crucial indicators of power distance and politeness in English discourse” (p. 47). Similarly, **Agwu (2023, p. 78)** observes that “Halliday’s functional grammar offers a dynamic model for interpreting how social meaning is embedded in grammatical choices”, an approach relevant to analysing social class in Austen’s England as well as in contemporary Nigerian English contexts. A core component of SFG is the analysis of **clause structure**, which Halliday (2014, p. 143) identifies as the “nexus of exchange” in communication. Clauses are seen as **exchanges of information or goods and services**, involving a giver and a receiver. In literary discourse, these exchanges correspond to relationships of dominance, equality, or submission. This resonates with **Eggins and Slade’s (2006, p. 217)** assertion that “clause choices realise interpersonal meanings, defining how interactants position themselves in relation to one another”. The interplay between **syntax and power** has also been examined in recent Nigerian studies. **Dada and Ogunrinde (2020, p. 160)**, analysing public discourse through SFG, conclude that “syntactic structures are not neutral forms but ideological instruments for asserting or negotiating power”. By applying the same logic to Austen’s novel, one can reveal how syntactic form mediates class relations between characters.

On the other hand, TGG provides the structural foundation necessary for identifying and describing the formal features of syntax. Chomsky (1981, p. 24) argues that “language competence is based on an internalised set of grammatical rules that generate an infinite number of sentences from a finite number of elements”. In *Lectures on Government and Binding*, Chomsky (1981, p. 45) explains that, “syntactic structures are hierarchical rather than linear; each sentence can be analysed into **deep structure** (underlying meaning) and **surface structure** (actual expression)”. This distinction is crucial for understanding Austen’s syntactic sophistication. **Radford (2009, p. 67)** notes that complex subordination and movement phenomena often correlate with cognitive and stylistic control, a linguistic reflection of intelligence and education traits that Austen consistently associates with characters of the higher class.

The integration of SFG and TGG provides a balanced methodological approach. As **Thompson (2014, p. 22)** observes, “Halliday’s functional model complements rather than contradicts the generative model: the former interprets the uses of structure that the latter describes”. In the context of *Pride and Prejudice*, TGG identifies how sentences are constructed through transformations, embeddings, and hierarchical phrase rules, while SFG explains **why** those structures occur in particular social contexts. This dual application mirrors the interdisciplinary trend in Nigerian linguistic studies. **Okoro (2021, p. 51)** advocates for “a synthesis of structural and functional linguistics to capture both the mechanics and pragmatics of English usage in literature”. Similarly, **Agwu (2023, p. 82)** recommends blending Hallidayan analysis with Chomskyan description to achieve “a holistic interpretation of linguistic artistry in English novels”. In this study, therefore, **TGG provides the descriptive grammar of Austen’s syntax**, while **SFG interprets the social significance** of those grammatical choices. The fusion of SFG and TGG enables a nuanced reading of how **syntactic structures articulate class and power** in *Pride and Prejudice*. According to Halliday (2014, p. 256), “grammar is not merely form but a meaning potential”, meaning that each syntactic configuration in the novel is a microcosm of its social world. This idea resonates with **Chomsky’s (1981, p. 48)** claim that syntax embodies “the mental representation of linguistic competence”, which in literary contexts can be linked to characters’ intellect and social training. Through this dual framework, syntax becomes a **mirror of social identity**.

Synopsis of *Pride and Prejudice* (James Gibson, 1982 Edition)

Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, edited by James Gibson (1982), remains one of the most linguistically and socially insightful novels in English literature. Set in early 19th-century rural England, the novel explores the intricate relationships between **language, class, and social hierarchy**. It reveals how **syntactic structures** and **linguistic patterns** reflect and reinforce social positions, gender expectations, and individual dispositions. The narrative unfolds primarily in Hertfordshire, with occasional transitions to more affluent locations like Netherfield Park, Rosings Park, and Pemberley. These geographical transitions are not mere physical displacements but **linguistic and social shifts**. Each space is marked by distinctive speech manners, syntactic sophistication, and conversational etiquette corresponding to class stratification. The 1982 Macmillan edition maintains Austen’s original syntax and punctuation. It provides an authentic textual basis for syntactic analysis and discourse interpretation. The novel opens with Austen’s iconic ironic statement by Mrs. Bennet, “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (Austen, 1982, p. 3). This opening line encapsulates the syntactic economy and social insight that permeate the novel.

The omniscient narrator uses complex syntactic inversion to foreground social norms of marriage and economic security. It sets the tone for the subsequent exploration of **social hierarchies through linguistic expression**. The novel has 61 chapters, where 1-6 is exposition. In this exposition, we see the Bennet family, of modest social standing, consists of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and their five daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia. Their mother’s obsession with marrying them off to wealthy men introduces a recurring **syntactic pattern of pragmatic urgency and elliptical phrasing**, as Mrs. Bennet’s hurried and unrefined speech reveals her lower-middle-class sensibilities. The arrival of Mr. Bingley, a wealthy bachelor who rents Netherfield Park, excites the social ambitions of the Bennet family. His friend, Mr. Darcy, appears proud and aloof. From this point, Austen’s

syntax begins to delineate class distinctions. Chapters 7-23 have the rising action. We see social interactions unfold at balls and dinner parties, and **syntactic contrasts** reflect the dynamics of pride and prejudice. The climax starts from chapters 34-46, after Darcy's letter reveals his true character and the circumstances surrounding Wickham, Elizabeth's perception shifts. The falling action starts from chapters 47-55. Here, the Lydia-Wickham elopement scandal introduces syntactic disarray in dialogue and narration. It echoes moral and social chaos. Resolution begins from chapters 56-61 as the actions gradually come to an end.

Methodology

Research Design: This study adopted a **qualitative descriptive design**. It draws on textual analysis to examine syntactic patterns and their relationship to social hierarchies in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1982, ed. James Gibson, Macmillan). The design was chosen because the study aimed to interpret language in context rather than measure it statistically. Descriptive analysis was used to identify syntactic features systematically and interpret their social implications. This approach aligns with the view that syntax reflects both cognitive control (TGG) and social function (SFG), making it suitable for analysing how Austen uses grammatical structures to encode social hierarchy and identity.

Source of Data: The data were derived from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), specifically from the **1982 Macmillan Students Edition** edited by **James Gibson**. It provides scholarly annotations suitable for linguistic analysis. The novel, a canonical work of English literature, was selected for its intricate portrayal of class distinction, social mobility, and gendered power relations. The setting of the novel, Regency England, offers a stratified social context where linguistic performance is closely tied to class position, making it ideal for syntactic-sociological inquiry. The source text was divided into **three social categories of speakers** for analysis. They are the upper class, middle class, and lower class or the aspirational middle class. This classification allowed for comparative analysis of syntactic variation across class lines.

Population and Sampling Technique: The population consists of all the **syntactic occurrences** in *Pride and Prejudice* that relate to social interaction and hierarchy. From this linguistic population, a **purposive sampling method** was used to select relevant data. The sample comprises **sixty (60) syntactically significant utterances and sentences** drawn from the dialogues and narrative commentaries of major characters in the novel.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a structured procedure that included **textual reading and annotation, extraction of syntactic samples, categorisation, and documentation**. This systematic method ensured that data were both linguistically valid and socially contextualised.

Analysis

Analysis of Syntactic Patterns of the Upper Class in the Novel

Upper-class characters like **Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mr. Darcy, and Miss Caroline Bingley** exhibit syntactic structures that reflect control, certainty, and social dominance. Their syntax encodes **power relations** through the **mood system**, particularly the

dominance of declarative and imperative moods. Miss Caroline Bingley's utterances exhibit deep hierarchical structure, combining multiple clauses with embedded transformations that create a complex, formal, and highly structured sentence typical of aristocratic discourse. Example;

"I do not pretend to regret anything I shall leave in Hertfordshire, except your society, my dearest friend; but we will hope, at some future period, to enjoy many returns of the delightful intercourse we have known, and in the meanwhile may lessen the pain of separation by a very frequent and most unreserved correspondence. I depend on you for that" (p. 93).

In the foregoing instance, Miss Caroline expresses a content focus on personal feelings about departure from Hertfordshire. The choice of material and relational processes *I do not pretend to regret...* shows a judgment and evaluation of her own feelings. The circumstance is clearly set, *departing from Hertfordshire, 'leaving your society'* as the only thing regretted. The clause *we will hope...* indicates future intention and expectation, showing the social dimension of hope and continuity. The phrase about *frequent and most unreserved correspondence* specifies the modality and frequency, enhancing the ideational detail. The sentence contains several declarative moods, typical of asserting and stating facts or intentions. The first clause has a negative declarative *I do not pretend to regret anything...*, signals Miss Caroline's position and a subtle defensive stance. The use of modal verbs *shall, will, and may* modulates commitment, showing politeness and strategic interpersonal positioning. Through terms like *my dearest friend*, she enacts closeness, affection, and formality, reinforcing social roles. The closing clause *I depend on you for that* is a declarative mood functioning as a polite but firm expectation/request to Jane Bennet for continued correspondence, reflecting interpersonal negotiation. The Theme at the start of the clause is *I*, foregrounding Miss Caroline's commitment and position. The text unfolds as a complex message with multiple clauses linked by coordinators *but, and*, maintaining coherence. The use of nominalisation *intercourse, correspondence* helps package complex processes into entities, lending formality and density to the message. At the deep structure level, her sentence expresses multiple propositions like lack of regret for things left behind, exception of society, future hope of interaction, and dependence on the friend. The surface structure reveals complex compound-complex sentences, created through the following transformations:

Coordination: Connecting clauses with *but* and *and*.

Subordination: Embedded clauses introduced by temporal or conditional elements *at some future period, in the meanwhile*.

Nominalisation: Using nouns formed from verbs or verb phrases to condense meaning, e.g., *correspondence, intercourse*.

Passivisation not explicit here, but modal auxiliaries *shall, will, and may* show futurity and modality transformations.

Movement transformations have been used to front elements for emphasis, e.g., *my dearest friend* inserted for personal address. Her intentions are encoded in the choice of declarative and modal auxiliary constructions, supporting a polite and socially strategic utterance. The complexity and formality of the syntax align with her social status and the pragmatic purpose of maintaining an amicable and promising farewell. The sentence reveals

sophisticated hierarchical phrase structure rules, with embedded clauses and multiple layers of subordination consistent with high syntactic complexity typical of elite speech.

Lady Catherine's speeches are also typical of the upper class. Examples: "Miss Bennet, I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young woman. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have given me the assurance I require" (p. 276). This is a complex-compound declarative sentence, composed of multiple independent and dependent clauses linked together. The sentence is marked by formality and assertiveness, typical of Lady Catherine's authoritative and commanding character. The sentence also reflects Lady Catherine's imperious and controlling personality. It emphasises her high social status and expectation of obedience. It uses strong modal verbs, *will*, and *shall* to convey firm intentions. The construction combines emotional reaction, shocked and astonished judgment, *expected to find a more reasonable young woman*, and a commanding demand. It showcases Austen's use of formal and sometimes archaic sentence structures to highlight social hierarchy and power dynamics.

These are other instances from Lady Catherine: "Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education". (P. 129). This is a declarative complex sentence with modal and adverbial components, asserting that Elizabeth Bennet's mother was heavily involved in her education. It contains a main clause: *Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education*.

"This must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening in summer; the windows are full west" (p. 271).

"You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey hither. Your own conscience must tell you why I come". (p. 272).

"...; but otherwise I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line". (p. 129)

"You must not act without consulting me; I insist you follow propriety". (p. 271).

From the structures above, the dominance of **imperative mood** and **declarative assertiveness** reflects her authoritarian nature. These clauses show **obligation** *must* and **impersonal formality**. From a TGG perspective, these structures can be analysed as underlying modal transformations expressing necessity and social imposition. The modal auxiliary *must* project the speaker's authority, while the declarative structure reinforces dominance.

Similarly, Darcy's utterances:

"I certainly shall not. You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner" (p. 9). This is a declarative sentence expressing a strong and definite refusal of an action. It uses *shall* be combined with certainty and not to emphasise Mr. Darcy's firm intention on the subject of discussion with Mr. Bingley. *I* is the subject pronoun, *shall* is a modal auxiliary verb often used to indicate future determination, *certainly* is an adverb intensifying the refusal, and *not* negates the verb phrase. Below are many instances from Mr. Darcy:

"Yes, indeed, and received no inconsiderable pleasure from the sight". (p. 20).

This is a complex sentence with an implied subject in the second clause. *Yes, indeed* is an interjection expressing affirmation. The main clause *received no inconsiderable pleasure from the sight* is a predicate phrase missing an explicit subject.

"Tell me once for all, are you engaged to him? (p. 275).

The above are polite structures that are syntactically commanding. In SFG terms, these are instances of **interpersonal mitigation**, where syntax both enforces and conceals authority, a reflection of upper-class decorum. **Mr. Darcy**, in his exchanges with Elizabeth, often employs **compound-complex sentences** with multiple subordinate clauses and embedded conditionals. We could see this when he expresses reflection and conditional reasoning. Examples;

"If I had been less proud, I might have acted differently; yet, perhaps, it was necessary to learn humility before deserving happiness" (p. 283).

"You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affection and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever" (p. 283).

"I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every proper feeling, I am sure you did. The turn of countenance I shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way, that would induce you to accept me" (p. 284).

These structures demonstrate **hypotaxis**, the subordination of clauses, revealing a mind capable of abstract reasoning and social control. Halliday interprets such hypotactic structures as markers of **ideational complexity**, typically associated with education and status.

Analysis of Syntactic Patterns of the Middle Class in the Novel

The middle-class characters Jane Bennet, **Elizabeth Bennet**, **Mr. Charles Bingley**, and **Charlotte Lucas** exhibit **syntactic balance** and **rational coordination**.

Mr. Bingley, though wealthy, speaks with modesty. His syntax is often **compound rather than complex**. Example: "Come, Darcy, said he, 'I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had much better dance'" (p. 9). *Come, Darcy*, is an imperative sentence where Mr. Bingley is giving a polite command to Mr. Darcy to join the dinner dance. *I must have you dance* is a declarative sentence expressing Mr. Bingley's insistence that Mr. Darcy should dance. *I hate to see you standing by yourself in this stupid manner*, which is also declarative, stating Mr. Bingley's dislike of Mr. Darcy standing alone. *You had much better dance* is a modal declarative sentence providing advice. These sentences collectively serve a directive function. To persuade and encourage Mr. Darcy to dance rather than stand alone awkwardly at the dinner party. The style is conversational and friendly, mixing commands, statements of fact, and advice to achieve a social goal. Another example is seen when he noted that, "I like the country, and I find the people most agreeable" (p. 92). This is a compound declarative sentence that

combines two simple sentences into one using a coordinating conjunction. This use of coordination without heavy subordination signals **social flexibility and friendliness**, bridging class divides. As Odebunmi (2021) notes, “syntactic economy and politeness markers index accommodation strategies in English discourse” (p. 39).

Elizabeth Bennet’s language reflects her intellectual independence and composure. Her sentences often blend **coordination** with **conditional subordination**, allowing nuanced expression. Her syntax balances necessity with decorum, linguistically embodying the middle-class realism of survival over sentiment. Example: “If your pride had not offended me, I might have responded with more civility, but sincerity is the foundation of my regard” (p. 277). Here, coordination, *but* and subordination *if*, combine to show **mental poise** and logical reasoning typical of Austen’s portrayal of educated middle-class women asserting moral intelligence within patriarchal limits. Halliday explains that such **balanced clause relations** express interpersonal negotiation rather than hierarchy, signalling an **egalitarian ethos**. Chomsky’s TGG interpretation would identify multiple transformational layers of surface forms derived from deep logical relationships, showing Elizabeth’s intellectual complexity. She also employs **complex subordination** and **conditional clauses** that reveal rational independence rather than submission. Examples: “That is very true’, replied Elizabeth, ‘and I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine” (p. 16).

“A man who has once been refused! How could I ever be foolish enough to expect a renewal of his love? ...there is no indignity so abhorrent to their feeling” (p.263).

“My dear Jane! Exclaimed Elizabeth, ‘You are too good... or loved you as you deserve”. (p. 106).

These structures demonstrate **hypotactic subordination**, where the dependent clause conditions the truth of the main clause. Elizabeth’s syntax thus challenges patriarchal and class constraints. She employs **rhetorical interrogatives** and **conditional subordination** as tools of linguistic empowerment, a syntactic rebellion against hierarchical norms.

Jane Bennet is a fundamentally kind-hearted and beautiful young woman of modest social status but great moral worth. She is the eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Bingley’s fiancée. She acts as a foil to her more spirited sister Elizabeth, contrasting Elizabeth’s critical and lively nature with her own composed and kind disposition. She notes, “You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be! Engaged to Mr. Darcy! No no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible” (p.288). This is a series of exclamatory and declarative sentences. The sentences express strong emotion, particularly surprise, disbelief, and denial. The use of short, fragmented sentences, *This cannot be! Engaged to Mr. Darcy!* heightens the emotional intensity and reflects shock. The sentence includes a direct address to *Lizzy*, which personalises the speech and shows a close relationship. The phrase *No no, you shall not deceive me* is a negative imperative, commanding a refusal to accept the possibility.

Analysis of Syntactic Patterns of the Lower Class in the Novel

Mrs. Bennet and Lydia Bennet frequently employ **parataxis**, simple coordination, and **exclamatory forms**, revealing emotional impulsiveness and social insecurity. Mrs Bennett

embodies the social anxiety attached to marriage and female security in Austen's time, with her often laughable obsession with advantageous matches. Example: "If I can but see one of my daughters happily settled at Netherfield, and Mrs. Bennet to her husband, 'And all the others equally well married, I shall have nothing to wish for" (p. 8). She is the mother of the Bennet sisters. She is characterised by her nervous, frivolous, and often foolish behaviour. She is primarily obsessed with marrying off her daughters to secure their financial futures, given the family estate's entailment to a male heir. Examples;

"Oh! my dear brother,' replied Mrs. Bennet, 'that is exactly what I could most wish for" (p.221).

"Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!" (p. 3)

These utterances combine **fragmented coordination** and **exclamatory mood**, both syntactic indicators of **informality and affective emphasis**. The repetitive coordination *A single man... what a fine thing...* exemplifies what Halliday calls **paratactic enhancement**, typical of conversational, unplanned speech. From a TGG standpoint, such sentences reveal minimal embedding and a linear syntactic structure, hallmarks of unrefined, spontaneous communication. The syntax mirrors the character's limited education and social awareness, reinforcing Austen's subtle link between **syntax, education, and class consciousness**.

Similarly, Lydia Bennet is portrayed as an immature, frivolous, and self-indulgent person. Example: "Do you know, mamma, that my uncle Philips talks of turning away Richard? And if he does, Colonel Forster will hire him. My aunt told me so herself on Saturday. I shall walk to Meryton tomorrow to hear more about it, and to ask when Mr. Denny comes back from town" (p. 55). Here, Lydia's utterance is primarily a compound sentence made up of multiple clauses connected by coordinating conjunctions and, if. It is spoken in an informal narrative style typical of lively, youthful speech. The tone conveys gossip and planning, reflecting Lydia's spirited and somewhat impulsive personality. Overall, the sentence captures Lydia's talkative, spirited character and her interest in local affairs and officers, which is consistent with her role as the youngest Bennet sister who is preoccupied with social events and military officers stationed nearby. Example: "Oh! said Lydia stoutly, 'I am not afraid; for though I am the youngest, I'm the tallest" (p. 7). The constant use of the exclamation "Oh" also depicts insecurity; "Oh! yes- it would be much better to wait till Jane was well, and by that time most likely Captain Carter would be at Meryton again" (p. 36). Lydia is flirtatious, recklessly driven by a desire for gaiety and attention, and without concern for the consequences of her actions. Her elopement with Mr. Wickham creates a significant crisis in the novel. **Her utterances rely on short declaratives and exclamatory sentences**. Examples: "I am sure he loves me! We shall be married soon!" (p.119). The syntax is minimal, lacking embedded clauses and thus portrays **immaturity and naivety**. From Halliday's interpersonal perspective, Lydia's structures indicate an emphasis on **emotion and immediacy** over reflection or complexity.

Mr. Collins represents an intriguing syntactic anomaly and **an overextension of complexity**. His speech contains **overly long sentences** filled with **nominalised phrases and embedded complements**, imitating upper-class decorum but achieving parody. Examples: "I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a

serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess; for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction" (P. 55). In this sentence, he discusses books and young ladies in a tone that appears patronising, implying that he believes women are generally uninterested in serious literature, which reflects his narrow and condescending outlook. Another instance: "I am particularly obliged to you for this friendly caution, and you may depend upon my not taking so material a step without her ladyship's concurrence" (p. 99).

Mr. Collins's speech reflects his character as a sycophant and a social pretentiousness, often lacking genuine warmth or wit. His language is a mixture of formal politeness, flattery, and self-promotion, which Austen uses to satirise superficiality. "It would give me the greatest honour imaginable to be permitted, through your gracious condescension, to offer my humble respects to Lady Catherine, whose virtues command universal admiration" (p. 136). This run-on construction exhibits **hypotactic excess**, which, according to Adegbite (2019), is "linguistic inflation serving social aspiration" (p. 117). Halliday's model interprets such syntax as an **interpersonal façade** language performing social mobility rather than expressing natural fluency. Mr. Collins's convoluted grammar thus becomes a linguistic symbol of **class pretension and servility**.

Analysis of Syntax as a Marker of Social Power

Language in Austen's fictional world acts as a **symbol of social positioning**, and syntax becomes a subtle but powerful indicator of class hierarchy. In the novel, characters of higher rank, like Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Mr. Darcy, display control through **imperative and declarative structures**, which express command, judgment, and confidence. For instance, Lady Catherine's utterance, "You have no regard, then, for the honour and credit of my nephew! Unfeeling, selfish girl! Do you not consider that a connection with you must disgrace him in the eyes of everybody?" (p. 276). The syntax here reflects power disguised as civility. The mood choice, imperative with modal softening, embodies Halliday's concept of **tenor**, revealing how linguistic form aligns with social role.

Mr. Darcy's syntax equally demonstrates dominance through **nominalisation and embedding**, as seen in his proposal speech. "The country", said Darcy, 'can in general supply but few subjects for such a study. In a country neighbourhood, you move in a very confined and unvarying society. 'But people themselves alter so much that there is something new to be observed in them forever.' (p. 34).

Another example from Mr. Darcy: "Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?" (p. 192). This interrogative sentence, though superficially polite, contains embedded subordination *in the inferiority of your connections* that positions the speaker as intellectually and socially superior. Chomsky's TGG explains such complexity as the product of multiple syntactic transformations that project abstract thought into structured language. It is a feature associated with educated and reflective characters.

The middle-class Bennet family, especially **Elizabeth Bennet**, provides a contrast in syntactic patterns that reflect both aspiration and resistance. Elizabeth's syntax demonstrates her **intellectual independence** and **critical engagement** with the upper class. Her sentences often exhibit **conditional and concessive subordination**, reflecting

rational evaluation rather than submissive politeness. Example: “I remember hearing you once say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its being created?” p.74. This sentence is an example of a complex sentence with multiple levels of embedding and complement clauses. It demonstrates the generative grammar principles of hierarchical phrase structure, recursion, and transformational operations like embedding and parenthetical insertion. The syntax is explicit in encoding semantic relations of memory, reported speech, and modal assumptions about Mr. Darcy’s cautious nature. This aligns with Chomsky’s framework, where surface forms are generated from deep structures through transformations, supporting the infinite creativity and complexity of language.

Characters like **Mrs. Bennet** and **Lydia Bennet** reveal syntactic simplicity and spontaneity, features that signal their lower educational and social levels. Their speech often comprises **paratactic structures**, **exclamations**, and **repetitions**, consistent with unplanned spoken discourse. For instance, Mrs. Bennet exclaims, “Oh! single, my dear, to be sure! A single man of large fortune; what a fine thing for our girls!” (p. 3). This utterance lacks embedded clauses or cohesive subordination. Instead, it depends on **linear coordination**, producing a rhythm of excitement rather than reflection. Mrs. Bennett’s syntax reinforces her obsession with marriage and social mobility while simultaneously exposing her lack of sophistication. Through such speech patterns, Austen subtly critiques the class-driven aspirations of the lower gentry.

Although this study focuses primarily on syntax and social hierarchy, gender intersects significantly with class in Austen’s portrayal of language. Upper-class women like Lady Catherine employ **syntactic authority**, while middle-class women like Elizabeth Bennet balance **syntactic assertiveness with politeness**. Halliday’s **interpersonal metafunction** provides insight into this dynamic. The choice of **mood structures**, declarative, interrogative, and imperative, reflects power distribution. Lady Catherine’s declaratives enforce superiority: “I am most serious about this matter” (p. 276), whereas Elizabeth’s interrogatives question male assumptions: “Do you think any consideration would tempt me to accept your proposal?” (p. 276). Beyond character portrayal, Austen’s syntax serves as **social commentary**. Through varying clause structures and sentence complexity, she dramatises England’s hierarchical society. The **upper class’s formal syntax** reflects detachment and restraint. The **middle class’s conditional syntax** reveals aspiration and negotiation, and the **lower class’s parataxis** underscores emotional excess and lack of refinement.

Discussion of Findings

1. The study found that upper-class characters like Mr. Darcy, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and Caroline Bingley often employ multi-clausal, hypotactic, and nominally dense sentences, reflecting intellectual sophistication and formality. In the SFG sense, their language exhibits high lexical density and grammatical intricacy, features typical of educated, elite discourse. Similarly, Mr. Darcy’s syntax is characterised by balanced coordination and controlled subordination, projecting self-restraint and class consciousness. His early speech patterns are syntactically complex but emotionally restrained, indicating both intelligence and social pride. However, in later chapters, his syntactic patterns become simpler and more direct, signalling emotional humility and the

erosion of class-based arrogance. This shift reflects Austen's moral evolution of character through syntactic change, a linguistic mirror of social and personal transformation.

2. In contrast, middle-class characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Bingley exhibit moderate syntactic complexity, with a balance between formal subordination and conversational directness. Elizabeth's utterances combine declarative and interrogative clauses, often with syntactic parallelism and ellipsis, showing both intellect and spontaneity. This pattern aligns with her middle-class position, educated but not aristocratic, assertive yet socially aware. Mr. Bingley's dialogue, though courteous, is syntactically less dense than Darcy's, relying on simple coordination and positive declaratives, which highlight his geniality and openness. The syntactic economy of his speech embodies his middle-class social mobility, respectful of upper-class norms yet linguistically adaptable.

3. The lower social tier, represented by Mrs. Bennet, Lydia, and Mr. Collins, displays linguistic patterns marked by redundancy, exclamatives, and parataxis features often associated with lower sociolects or limited formal education. Mrs. Bennet's frequent run-on sentences and loose coordination convey emotional volatility and lack of restraint. From a TGG perspective, her utterances contain non-canonical word orders and excessive modifiers, reflecting spontaneous, unplanned speech. Mr. Collins, though technically middle-class by occupation, linguistically aspires upward, adopting overly elaborate, hyper-correct syntactic constructions. His use of long, deferential subordination chains and self-referential clauses reveals linguistic insecurity and social pretension. Thus, syntax becomes a vehicle of class mimicry, demonstrating that social hierarchy is both maintained and contested through linguistic form.

4. The findings also show that syntactic form is used ideologically to reproduce class distinctions. The narrator's syntax aligns with the upper-class register, grammatically refined and lexically precise, indicating Austen's mastery of elite discourse. Yet, through free indirect discourse, the narrator occasionally mirrors Elizabeth's more dynamic syntax, signalling sympathy with middle-class sensibilities. This syntactic fluidity bridges class boundaries and underlines Austen's subtle critique of rigid social hierarchies. Hence, syntactic variation operates on multiple levels: it distinguishes characters, marks social boundaries, and dramatises power relations. Austen's syntactic choices reveal not only social identities but also moral judgments embedded in classed discourse.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* employs distinct syntactic patterns that effectively construct and reflect the social hierarchies of early nineteenth-century England. The analysis reveals that upper-class characters consistently use complex, hypotactic sentence structures and nominalisations to signify education, authority, and composure, while middle-class characters utilise more balanced coordination and conditional subordination reflecting politeness and intellectual confidence. Lower-class or aspirational characters tend toward simpler, paratactic, and exclamative syntactic forms, delineating social anxiety and insecurity. These syntactic choices act as a linguistic code encoding class distinction and power relations, reinforcing the social order within the novel's narrative. The integration of SFG and TGG frameworks enabled a nuanced interpretation of how syntax functions not only as a formal structure

but also as a social semiotic resource. The findings also underscore the importance of incorporating syntactic and sociolinguistic analyses into literature curricula, particularly in Nigerian university settings, to deepen students' understanding of the ideological underpinnings of grammar and stylistics. However, this study's qualitative approach and purposive sampling suggest the need for future study employing larger corpus-based data and quantitative methods. Expanding the theoretical scope to include other linguistic frameworks could further enrich interpretations of language and class in literary texts. Ultimately, this study contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by illuminating the critical role of syntax in portraying social status and power in classic literature.

Recommendations

1. Linguistic and literary scholars should integrate **syntactic analysis** into literary criticism to uncover hidden layers of social meaning in texts. Syntax, as demonstrated in *Pride and Prejudice*, is not merely grammatical; it is ideological. Nigerian and global scholars can adopt similar analytical frameworks to explore how sentence structures in other novels reveal social hierarchies, identity, and power relations.
2. English language educators, especially in Nigerian universities, should employ examples from classical literature, such as Austen's works, to teach **functional syntax**. Through contextual examples, students can learn how grammatical choices express tone, politeness, authority, and emotional control. This will make grammar instruction **communicative and culturally relevant**, bridging the gap between linguistic form and social function.
3. Future researchers should conduct comparative analyses between **Austen's syntax** and that of Nigerian writers to explore how syntax reflects social hierarchies across cultures. Such studies would enrich global linguistic discourse and highlight how grammatical variation encodes class and gender dynamics differently in British and African societies.
4. Literary analysts should recognise that **syntactic structure can serve as characterisation**. In Austen's fiction, the grammatical construction of speech often communicates more than its semantic content. Similar approaches can be used to study character psychology and moral positioning in other canonical and contemporary works.
5. There is a need for greater collaboration between **linguists, sociologists, and literary scholars** to deepen understanding of how syntax functions as a social variable. Interdisciplinary approaches can combine linguistic theory with social realism to reveal how grammar shapes and reflects cultural values, particularly in postcolonial contexts.

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