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**SMALL TALK IN THE NOVELS OF J. AUSTEN:
A LINGUOPRAGMATIC ASPECT**

MA Paper

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ABSTRACT

This study examines small talk as a linguopragmatic phenomenon in literary discourse, focusing on its functions, structure, and social significance in Jane Austen's novel "Emma." Traditionally regarded as trivial or purely phatic communication, small talk is reconsidered in this research as a meaningful and structured form of interaction that plays a crucial role in maintaining social relationships, constructing identities, and reflecting power dynamics.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on key approaches in pragmatics and discourse analysis. Speech act theory provides a foundation for understanding how utterances function as social actions, while politeness theory explains how speakers manage interpersonal relations and maintain social harmony. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is employed as the main methodological tool, allowing for the examination of how language reflects and constructs social hierarchy, ideology, and power relations.

The material of the research consists of selected conversational episodes from "Emma," which represent various forms of small talk in different communicative contexts, including private conversations and social gatherings. The analysis is conducted at multiple levels: lexical, sentence, and text. At the lexical level, attention is given to the use of evaluative vocabulary, politeness markers, and expressions that reflect social classification. At the sentence level, the study examines syntactic structures such as modality, ellipsis, and passive constructions, which contribute to politeness and indirectness. At the text level, the focus is on coherence, framing, topic management, and the role of silence in structuring interaction.

The findings demonstrate that small talk in "Emma" is a highly organized and socially meaningful form of communication. It functions as a mechanism for reinforcing social hierarchy, as characters of different status employ distinct conversational strategies. At the same time, small talk serves as a tool for identity construction, as individuals use language to present themselves and negotiate their social roles. The study also reveals that politeness is closely linked to power, as it can both maintain and challenge social structures. Moments of conversational disruption highlight the fragility of social norms and the ethical implications of language use.

In conclusion, the research shows that small talk in literary discourse is far from insignificant. It represents a complex communicative practice that reflects broader social and ideological processes. The integration of pragmatics and critical discourse analysis provides a comprehensive approach to understanding how everyday conversation functions within a literary context.

Keywords: *small talk, linguopragmatics, politeness, discourse analysis, social hierarchy, Jane Austen, Emma*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary linguistics and literary studies, increasing attention is paid to everyday forms of communication that, despite their apparent simplicity, play a crucial role in structuring social interaction. One such form is small talk, commonly understood as informal, polite conversation on seemingly trivial topics such as weather, daily routines, or general observations. Traditionally, small talk has been perceived as superficial or functionally insignificant, as it does not primarily aim at the transmission of factual information. However, modern research in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis has demonstrated that small talk performs essential communicative, social, and cognitive functions. It contributes to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships, facilitates social cohesion, and helps speakers navigate complex social environments.

In literary discourse, small talk acquires an additional layer of significance. Fictional dialogue does not merely imitate real-life communication but transforms it into a meaningful narrative device. Through small talk, authors construct characters, represent social norms, and encode ideological meanings. In this context, the novels of Jane Austen provide particularly rich material for analysis, as they are characterized by a high density of dialogue and a detailed representation of everyday social interaction. Austen's works depict a society in which conversation is a central mode of communication, and even the most trivial exchanges carry important social implications.

The degree of scholarly investigation of this topic confirms its interdisciplinary relevance. Small talk has been widely examined in sociolinguistics, where it is often associated with the concept of phatic communication. Coupland (2014) defines small talk as a form of interaction that prioritizes social connection over informational content, emphasizing its role in maintaining interpersonal relationships. Similarly, Jaworski (2014) highlights the interaction between small talk and silence, arguing that both function as complementary strategies in managing conversational flow and social distance. These approaches demonstrate that small talk is not merely "empty" communication but a structured and meaningful social practice.

From a pragmatic perspective, speech act theory provides an important theoretical framework for analyzing small talk. Levinson (1980) explains that language functions as a form of social action, where utterances perform communicative acts such as requesting, promising, or greeting. Within this framework, small talk can be understood as a sequence of speech acts that serve relational rather than informational purposes. Politeness theory further expands this perspective by examining how speakers manage face and social harmony through language. Brown (2015) emphasizes that politeness strategies are essential for maintaining interpersonal relationships, particularly in situations where communication may threaten the social image of participants.

In addition to pragmatics, discourse analysis offers valuable tools for studying small talk as a structured form of interaction. Gee (2010; 2025) conceptualizes discourse as a social practice that integrates language, context, and identity, while Flowerdew (2008) highlights the role of discourse analysis in uncovering patterns of meaning within communication. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough (1995), extends this approach by focusing on the relationship between language, power, and ideology. CDA allows researchers to examine how seemingly neutral forms of communication, such as small talk, can reproduce social hierarchies and cultural norms.

Within literary studies, discourse-oriented approaches have also gained prominence. Short (1990) and Carter and Simpson (2003) demonstrate that the analysis of dialogue can reveal important stylistic and pragmatic features of literary texts. In the case of Jane Austen, conversational interaction plays a central role in narrative development, character construction, and the representation of social relations. However, despite the extensive body of research on Austen's works, small talk has rarely been examined as an independent object of linguopragmatic analysis. Most studies focus on politeness strategies, conversational implicatures, or narrative techniques, without isolating small talk as a distinct communicative phenomenon.

This research gap highlights **the relevance of the present study**, as small talk remains an essential yet underexplored aspect of communication in both real-life interaction and literary discourse. The integration of pragmatics and critical discourse analysis provides an effective framework for examining how language operates within social contexts. The novel "Emma" offers valuable material for such analysis, enabling a deeper understanding of how language constructs social hierarchy, identity, and power relations.

The **object of the research** is small talk as a communicative phenomenon in literary discourse and the **subject** is the linguopragmatic features of small talk in "Emma" by Jane Austen, including its lexical, syntactic, and discursive characteristics, as well as its role in constructing social meaning and interpersonal relations.

The **aim of the paper** is to analyze small talk in "Emma" by Jane Austen from a linguopragmatic perspective using the tools of critical discourse analysis in order to identify its communicative functions and its role in reflecting social hierarchy, identity construction, and power relations.

To achieve this aim, the following **tasks** are set:

- 1) to examine small talk as a linguistic and literary phenomenon;
- 2) to analyze theoretical frameworks of speech act theory and politeness models relevant to small talk;
- 3) to explore critical discourse analysis as a methodological approach to studying literary dialogue;
- 4) to conduct a comprehensive critical discourse analysis of small talk in "Emma" by Jane Austen, including the identification of key conversational

scenes, the analysis of lexical and phrase-level features, the examination of sentence-level structures, the analysis of text-level organization, and the interpretation of broader ideological aspects such as identity, power, and resistance.

The **data** consists of selected dialogues and conversational episodes from the novel “Emma” by Jane Austen, which provide representative examples of small talk in different communicative contexts, including private conversations, social gatherings, and public interactions. These excerpts are analyzed as instances of naturally structured interaction within a fictional yet socially realistic environment.

The **methods** include descriptive analysis, which is used to identify and classify linguistic features of small talk; pragmatic analysis, applied to examine speech acts, communicative intentions, and politeness strategies; critical discourse analysis, employed to investigate how language reflects and constructs social power, hierarchy, and ideology; contextual analysis, used to interpret dialogue within its narrative and social framework; and comparative analysis, which allows for the identification of differences in conversational behavior across characters. The combination of these methods ensures a multidimensional approach to the study of small talk as both a linguistic and a social phenomenon.

The **theoretical significance of the paper** lies in its contribution to the fields of linguopragmatics and discourse analysis by demonstrating that small talk is not a peripheral form of communication but a structured and meaningful practice that reflects complex social processes. The study expands existing theoretical approaches by integrating pragmatic and discourse-analytical perspectives in the analysis of literary dialogue.

The **practical value** of this research lies in its applicability to educational practice, especially in the areas of English language teaching, stylistics, and discourse-oriented studies. The insights obtained can be incorporated into courses focused on literary interpretation, pragmatics, and intercultural communication, as well as used for designing instructional materials that address conversational behavior and its social functions. In addition, the study enhances understanding of how language functions within socially organized contexts, which is important for both academic settings and real-life professional interaction.

The **structure of the paper** is determined by its aim and tasks. The paper consists of an introduction, two chapters, conclusions, and a list of references. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical foundations of the study, including the analysis of small talk in linguistics and literary discourse, speech act theory and politeness models, and critical discourse analysis as a methodological framework. Chapter 2 is devoted to the practical analysis of small talk in “Emma”, including the examination of conversational scenes, linguistic features at different levels, discourse organization, and ideological implications. The

conclusions summarize the main findings of the research and outline prospects for further investigation.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Small talk in linguistics and literary discourse.

In linguistics, small talk is commonly understood as a type of phatic communication in which the main goal is not to convey significant information, but to initiate and sustain interpersonal contact between speakers. This phenomenon is closely related to the concept of phatic communion introduced by Malinowski, which refers to language use oriented toward establishing social bonds rather than sharing factual content. In contemporary sociolinguistics and discourse studies, small talk is viewed as an important component of everyday communication that contributes to interpersonal cohesion and social harmony (Coupland, 2014).

Researchers emphasize that small talk performs a number of pragmatic and social functions in conversation. Although it often revolves around neutral or routine topics such as weather, daily activities, or general observations, its communicative role is far from trivial. According to Coupland (2014), small talk helps participants initiate interaction, maintain conversational flow, and negotiate social relationships. It also allows speakers to reduce interpersonal distance and create a comfortable communicative environment.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, small talk reflects cultural norms and communicative conventions specific to particular speech communities. The choice of topics, linguistic forms, and interactional strategies used in small talk may vary depending on cultural context, institutional setting, and social roles of interlocutors (Coupland, 2014). Jaworski (2014) points out that small talk should not be viewed merely as superficial conversation. Instead, it constitutes a meaningful interactional practice that helps regulate social relations and manage communicative expectations.

In many communicative situations, small talk functions as a mechanism for organizing interaction and structuring discourse. Conversation analysis demonstrates that brief informal exchanges often occur at the beginning or end of interactions and serve as transitional elements between different stages of communication. These exchanges can prepare participants for more serious discussion or help them gracefully conclude an interaction.

Small talk is also widely present in institutional and professional discourse. In workplace communication, for instance, it may function as a bridge between informal interpersonal interaction and task-oriented dialogue. Discourse markers frequently signal transitions from casual conversation to work-related topics, allowing participants to move smoothly between different

communicative modes. Such transitions illustrate how small talk contributes to the overall organization of discourse.

In addition, small talk can play an important role in professional interactions that require trust and cooperation. In clinical discourse small talk helps establish rapport between participants and creates a more supportive communicative environment. Even brief conversational exchanges may facilitate cooperation and reduce social tension between speakers.

Another important dimension of small talk concerns its relationship with silence and pauses in communication. Jaworski (2014) argues that silence and small talk may function as complementary interactional strategies. While silence can signal hesitation, reflection, or social distance, small talk often serves to fill communicative gaps and maintain interactional continuity.

Therefore, small talk should be understood not as insignificant or meaningless speech but as a complex communicative phenomenon that plays a vital role in structuring interpersonal interaction. Its pragmatic, social, and organizational functions make it an important object of study within sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis.

Beyond its role in everyday interaction, small talk also serves as a significant component of literary discourse. Fictional dialogues frequently imitate natural conversational patterns in order to create realistic representations of social interaction. In literary texts, small talk may appear in casual conversations between characters, introductory exchanges, or moments of interpersonal negotiation. Such interactions often perform not only communicative but also stylistic and narrative functions within the structure of a literary work.

Scholars in discourse stylistics emphasize that literary dialogue often reflects real-life communicative practices while simultaneously serving artistic purposes. Carter and Simpson (2003) argue that discourse analysis provides valuable tools for examining how language functions in literary texts. Through the analysis of conversational patterns, researchers can explore how authors reproduce everyday communication and construct social meaning through dialogue.

Small talk in fictional discourse frequently reflects the principles of phatic communication. Urbanová (2007) notes that phatic communion plays a significant role in fictional dialogues, where characters use routine conversational formulas to maintain social relationships and demonstrate politeness. Such exchanges may include greetings, comments about the environment, or neutral conversational topics that help establish interpersonal connections between characters.

The presence of small talk in literary texts often contributes to characterization and the development of social relationships within the narrative. By engaging in seemingly trivial conversation, characters reveal aspects of their personalities, social status, and attitudes toward others. According to Miall

(2003), literary discourse combines linguistic structures with interpretative frameworks that allow readers to infer implicit meanings from dialogue and interaction.

The analysis of conversational elements in literature is closely connected to the broader field of discourse analysis. Tan (2013) emphasizes that literary discourse represents a complex interaction between linguistic form, narrative context, and reader interpretation. Everyday conversational phenomena such as small talk therefore become meaningful narrative devices that shape the reader's understanding of character relationships and social dynamics.

Researchers also highlight the pedagogical and interpretative value of analyzing dialogue in literary texts. Literary discourse provides a rich environment for studying pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language. Through literary dialogue, readers and students can observe how conversational strategies operate in socially meaningful contexts.

From the perspective of stylistics, discourse analysis helps reveal how authors structure dialogue to achieve specific narrative effects. Stylistic analysis of discourse allows scholars to examine how linguistic choices influence readers' interpretation of literary communication. Similarly, patterns of discourse in literary discussions often reflect broader communicative principles that govern real-life interaction.

Recent studies also suggest that the development of small talk as a communicative practice reflects broader cognitive and cultural processes. Small talk has evolved as a complex socio-cognitive phenomenon shaped by cultural norms, communicative expectations, and interpersonal strategies.

Consequently, small talk in literary discourse should be viewed not merely as background conversation but as an important stylistic and communicative device. By reproducing everyday conversational patterns, authors create realistic interactions that contribute to narrative development, characterization, and the construction of social meaning within literary texts.

1.2. Speech act theory and politeness models.

Speech act theory constitutes one of the foundational approaches in pragmatic linguistics and provides an essential framework for understanding how language functions as social action (Austin, 1962; Levinson, 1983). The theory was first formulated by J. L. Austin in his lectures later published as "How to Do Things with Words", where he argued that utterances do not merely describe reality but perform actions. Austin (1962) introduced the distinction between three dimensions of meaning: the locutionary act, which involves the production of a meaningful utterance; the illocutionary act, which expresses the speaker's communicative intention; and the perlocutionary act, which refers to the effect of the utterance on the hearer. These ideas were subsequently

developed by John Searle, who systematized speech acts and proposed a functional classification that remains central to contemporary pragmatic research (Searle, 1969, 1979).

According to Searle (1969, 1979), speech acts can be divided into five major categories depending on the communicative purpose of the speaker. Representatives (or assertives) commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition, as in the statement "*Jane Fairfax has arrived.*" Directives are intended to influence the hearer's behavior and include requests, questions, and suggestions, for example: "*Have you heard from Miss Fairfax so lately?*" (Austen, 2008). Commissives commit the speaker to a future course of action, as in "*I will call on Miss Bates tomorrow.*" Expressives convey psychological states such as gratitude, apology, or admiration; Miss Bates's enthusiastic "*You are extremely kind!*" (Austen, 2008) illustrates this category. Declarations bring about an institutional change simply by being uttered, as in "*I now pronounce you husband and wife.*" Among these categories, directives and expressives are especially relevant to the analysis of small talk, since everyday conversation relies heavily on greetings, compliments, questions, thanks, and polite offers (Yule, 1996).

Speech act theory assumes that every utterance contains not only propositional content but also an illocutionary force that reflects the speaker's communicative intention (Austin, 1962; Yule, 1996). This perspective makes it possible to analyze how particular linguistic forms are selected in order to achieve specific interpersonal goals. In the context of small talk, speech acts often serve relational rather than informational purposes: a question may function primarily as a sign of attention, while a compliment may reinforce solidarity rather than communicate new information. Thus, speech act theory provides a practical analytical tool for identifying the communicative actions that structure everyday conversation and literary dialogue.

A further key element of speech act theory is the differentiation between direct and indirect speech acts. Direct speech acts explicitly express the communicative intention of the speaker, whereas indirect speech acts rely on contextual interpretation. Indirect speech acts frequently function as politeness strategies because they allow speakers to convey intentions in a less imposing manner.

Speech acts are closely related to discourse organization and conversational structure. In conversational discourse, utterances rarely occur in isolation; instead, they form sequences of interaction that reflect communicative intentions and social expectations. Speech acts must therefore be analyzed

within the broader context of discourse, where meaning emerges through interaction between participants.

The relationship between speech acts and politeness has become a major topic in pragmatic research. Politeness strategies often shape how speech acts are realized in communication. Many speech acts, particularly requests, refusals, or criticisms, are inherently face-threatening and therefore require mitigation strategies in order to preserve social relationships.

Consequently, the analysis of speech acts is closely connected with the study of politeness. While speech act theory focuses on identifying communicative actions, theories of politeness account for how these actions are influenced by social conventions and interpersonal factors. The relationship between these two approaches represents an important area of inquiry in modern pragmatic studies.

The study of politeness in pragmatics is closely associated with the work of Paul Grice, whose Cooperative Principle explains how interlocutors normally assume that participants in conversation contribute in a rational and relevant manner (Grice, 1975). Grice formulated four conversational maxims – quantity, quality, relation, and manner – which guide effective communication. For example, in response to the question “*Have you heard from Miss Fairfax so lately?*” (Austen, 2008), Miss Bates provides extensive and highly detailed information. Although her reply often exceeds what is strictly required, the exchange remains interpretable because speakers continue to assume cooperative intentions.

Building on Grice’s work, Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987) developed one of the most influential models of politeness. Their theory is based on the concept of *face*, originally introduced by Erving Goffman (1967), which refers to an individual’s public self-image. Brown and Levinson distinguish between positive face, the desire to be appreciated and approved of, and negative face, the desire to act freely without imposition. They identify several strategies for managing potentially face-threatening acts, including bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

These strategies are particularly relevant to the analysis of small talk. Miss Bates’s expression “*You are extremely kind!*” (Austen, 2008) illustrates positive politeness, as it reinforces solidarity and approval. Emma’s indirect question about Jane Fairfax demonstrates negative politeness, since it minimizes imposition while maintaining social distance. Indirect and ambiguous remarks, including some of Emma’s ironic comments, may function as off-record strategies that rely on contextual interpretation. Together, Grice’s Cooperative Principle and Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory provide an essential framework for understanding how conversational participants maintain social harmony and negotiate interpersonal relations through language.

Politeness theory developed as an extension of pragmatic approaches to communication and focuses on how speakers manage interpersonal relations

through language. Politeness strategies are particularly relevant in situations where speech acts may threaten the social image, or “face,” of interlocutors. Politeness refers to linguistic and behavioral strategies that speakers use to maintain social harmony and demonstrate respect for others during interaction.

In pragmatic studies, politeness is often examined through different theoretical models that attempt to explain how speakers mitigate potentially face-threatening acts. These models focus on the role of social norms, cultural expectations, and communicative intentions in shaping linguistic behavior.

At the same time, politeness theories have been widely discussed and critically evaluated in recent research. Traditional models of politeness sometimes oversimplify the complexity of interpersonal communication by focusing primarily on universal principles rather than cultural variability. Similarly, Arundale (1999) proposes an alternative approach that views politeness not as an individual strategy but as a relational process emerging from interaction between participants.

Modern pragmatic research also pays increasing attention to the concept of impoliteness, which examines how language may intentionally threaten or challenge social relationships. Culpeper and Terkourafi (2017) emphasize that the study of (im)politeness provides insights into how speakers negotiate power, social distance, and emotional stance within discourse.

The connection between speech acts and politeness strategies is particularly relevant in stylistic and discourse-oriented studies. Bousfield (2023) notes that speech act theory can be integrated with stylistic analysis to explore how politeness and impoliteness are represented in various forms of discourse, including literary dialogue. Such approaches demonstrate that pragmatic phenomena are closely linked to linguistic choices and communicative context.

Empirical studies also show that politeness strategies vary depending on communicative settings and institutional contexts. Speakers frequently adapt their speech acts and politeness strategies according to social roles and communicative goals, particularly in educational environments where maintaining respectful interaction is essential.

Consequently, speech act theory and politeness models together provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing pragmatic aspects of communication. While speech act theory focuses on the actions performed through language, politeness theory explains how these actions are modified by social norms and interpersonal considerations. Their integration allows researchers to examine how communicative intentions, social relationships, and cultural conventions interact within discourse.

1.3. Critical discourse analysis: methodology and toolkits.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) represents an interdisciplinary approach to language study that examines the connections between discourse, power, and

social organization. Unlike more descriptive forms of discourse analysis that focus primarily on linguistic structures, CDA aims to uncover how language contributes to the formation and maintenance of social inequality and ideological systems. As a methodological framework, it integrates linguistic examination with social theory in order to explore the role of discourse in shaping social practices and institutional processes (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018).

A fundamental principle of CDA is that discourse is not a passive reflection of reality but an active force in its construction. Through specific linguistic choices, rhetorical techniques, and representational patterns, discourse can either sustain or challenge existing power relations. Gee (2025) argues that discourse analysis should therefore consider not only textual features but also the broader social contexts in which language operates. This perspective emphasizes the need to view discourse as a form of social action embedded within cultural and institutional settings.

CDA has been applied across a wide range of disciplines, including media research, political communication, education, and policy studies. It enables scholars to investigate how ideologies and power structures are encoded in language and other semiotic forms. For instance, Carta and Wodak (2015) show how discourse analysis can reveal the construction of collective identities within political institutions such as the European Union, demonstrating the role of language in shaping political narratives and defining social belonging.

Methodologically, CDA involves a systematic examination of texts, discursive practices, and broader social contexts. Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon (2012) note that critical discourse analysis often combines qualitative methods with rhetorical analysis in order to uncover implicit assumptions and ideological structures within texts. Such approaches allow researchers to move beyond surface-level linguistic description and investigate deeper social meanings embedded in discourse.

An important aspect of CDA concerns the analytical tools used to examine discourse. Gee (2010) proposes a practical toolkit for discourse analysis that includes strategies for identifying patterns of meaning, social identities, and relationships constructed through language. These tools encourage researchers to analyze how linguistic choices position speakers and audiences within particular social contexts.

Machin and Mayr (2023) highlight the importance of multimodal analysis in contemporary discourse studies. In many communicative environments, meaning is constructed not only through language but also through images, layout, and other semiotic resources. As a result, CDA increasingly incorporates multimodal approaches that examine how different modes of communication interact to produce ideological meanings.

Resource-oriented approaches to discourse analysis emphasize the importance of providing practical analytical frameworks for students and

researchers. Jones (2024) describes discourse analysis as a methodological toolkit that enables scholars to explore how language constructs social reality across various communicative contexts.

Thus, critical discourse analysis represents a comprehensive methodological framework that integrates linguistic analysis with social critique. By examining how discourse shapes ideologies, identities, and power relations, CDA provides valuable tools for understanding the broader social implications of language use.

Contemporary research in critical discourse analysis has expanded the methodological scope of CDA by incorporating new analytical frameworks and interdisciplinary perspectives. Scholars increasingly emphasize that discourse analysis should address complex communicative environments where language interacts with technology, institutional practices, and social identities. For example, Brock (2018) introduces the concept of *critical technocultural discourse analysis*, which examines how technological platforms and digital cultures shape discursive practices and ideological meanings. This approach highlights the growing importance of analyzing discourse within technologically mediated environments.

Critical discourse analysis is also widely used in policy and institutional studies. Hyatt (2013) proposes a framework known as *critical policy discourse analysis*, which allows researchers to investigate how policy texts construct particular social realities and influence educational or institutional practices. Such analyses focus on the ways language frames problems, assigns responsibilities, and legitimizes specific political or administrative decisions.

Another important dimension of CDA involves the study of discourse as a site of resistance and social change. Flowerdew (2008) argues that discourse analysis can reveal how marginalized groups challenge dominant narratives through alternative discursive strategies. By examining these strategies, researchers are able to identify the linguistic mechanisms through which social actors contest ideological structures and negotiate new forms of representation.

Within educational research, CDA has been widely applied to analyze institutional documents, teaching practices, and professional discourse. Mullet (2018) proposes a general framework for applying critical discourse analysis in educational studies, emphasizing the need for systematic procedures that connect textual analysis with broader social contexts. Similarly, Rogers and Mosley Wetzel (2013) highlight the pedagogical potential of CDA as a tool for developing critical literacy and encouraging students to reflect on the ideological dimensions of language.

Empirical studies demonstrate how CDA can be used to examine discourse within specific professional fields. For instance, critical discourse analysis has been applied to investigate educational materials designed to promote cultural competence in nursing education. Such analyses illustrate how

institutional discourses construct professional identities and shape expectations about social and cultural awareness in healthcare contexts.

Recent methodological discussions also emphasize the importance of expanding discourse studies beyond traditional analytical toolkits. Contemporary discourse research should incorporate reflexive and relational approaches that consider the researcher's own position within the analytical process. Such perspectives encourage scholars to critically reflect on how knowledge production itself is shaped by discourse and power relations.

Taken together, these developments demonstrate that critical discourse analysis has evolved into a flexible and multifaceted methodological framework. By combining linguistic analysis with social theory and interdisciplinary tools, CDA enables researchers to investigate how discourse constructs identities, legitimizes institutions, and shapes ideological meanings across diverse communicative contexts.

1.4. Jane Austen's biographical context and its impact on the representation of small talk.

The theoretical and methodological approaches outlined above provide a solid framework for examining conversational practices in literary discourse. In particular, pragmatics and critical discourse analysis enable scholars to investigate how everyday communicative phenomena, including small talk, function within broader social, cultural, and ideological contexts. As noted by Norman Fairclough (1995), discourse is not merely a reflection of reality but a form of social practice that both constructs and is constructed by social relations. From this perspective, literary dialogue can be approached as a site where linguistic choices encode social meanings, power relations, and cultural norms.

Within this framework, the novels of Jane Austen constitute particularly valuable material for linguopragmatic analysis. Austen's fiction is characterized by an extensive use of dialogue and a detailed representation of everyday social interaction in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England. As emphasized by Geoffrey Leech (1983), politeness is a central organizing principle of social communication, and Austen's novels provide a rich illustration of how politeness strategies operate within a highly codified social environment. Conversations in her works frequently revolve around seemingly trivial topics typical of small talk; however, these exchanges simultaneously perform complex communicative functions, including the negotiation of social hierarchy, the management of interpersonal distance, and the expression of implicit attitudes.

Austen's distinctive use of polite conversation is closely linked to her biographical and socio-cultural context. Born in 1775 into a clerical family belonging to the rural gentry, she spent most of her life within a relatively closed social milieu structured around visits, dinners, balls, and other forms of

regulated social interaction. As argued by Claudia L. Johnson (1988), Austen's position as a woman writer in a patriarchal society limited her access to public discourse, directing her creative focus toward the domestic and social spheres. This biographical constraint, however, became a productive source of literary innovation: Austen developed a narrative technique in which everyday conversation serves as a primary means of representing social reality. Her acute observation of conversational norms, including indirectness, mitigation, and strategic ambiguity, reflects both her personal experience and her critical stance toward the social conventions of her time.

Scholars widely acknowledge Austen's contribution to the development of conversational realism in the English novel. As noted by Mary Favret (1993), Austen transforms ordinary dialogue into a sophisticated narrative instrument capable of conveying irony, tension, and evaluative meaning. Similarly, Page (1972) and Burrows (1987) demonstrate that Austen's narrative technique relies heavily on dialogue as a means of characterisation and moral assessment. Through subtle manipulations of conversational structure – such as ellipsis, indirect speech, and implicature – Austen creates a multilayered communicative space in which what is unsaid often carries greater significance than explicit statements.

Recent research increasingly approaches Austen's dialogue from a linguopragmatic perspective. Drawing on the theoretical framework proposed by Paul Grice (1975) and further developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987), scholars analyse conversational implicatures, politeness strategies, and facework in Austen's novels. For instance, recent studies demonstrate that politeness strategies and address forms in *Pride and Prejudice* function as markers of social hierarchy and interpersonal relations, while pragmatic analyses highlight how politeness is used to maintain social harmony and negotiate interpersonal distance. Furthermore, Alamoudi (2021) shows that conversational implicatures in Austen's dialogues contribute significantly to characterisation and the development of narrative dynamics, particularly through indirectness and implied meaning.

Although Austen's dialogue has been widely examined, small talk has rarely been treated as an independent object of analysis. Existing research tends to focus on broader aspects such as politeness, implicature, or narrative technique, without specifically addressing small talk as a distinct communicative practice. This limitation underscores the relevance of the present study, which approaches small talk as a structured form of interaction with its own pragmatic functions. Drawing on contemporary approaches in discourse analysis and pragmatics, the study aims to offer a more refined understanding of how everyday conversational practices function within Austen's literary discourse and shape the representation of social interaction.

CHAPTER 2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SMALL TALK IN “EMMA”

2.1. Key small-talk scenes in “Emma”.

In Jane Austen’s “Emma”, seemingly trivial small talk provides insight into social relationships and character dynamics. Small talk, defined as polite, surface-level conversation on unimportant topics, is a recurring feature of social interactions throughout the novel, particularly in gatherings at Hartfield and within the wider community of Highbury. These conversational exchanges may appear insignificant at first glance; however, they perform important communicative and social functions. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach allows us to examine how such interactions contribute to the reinforcement of social norms, hierarchies, and interpersonal expectations.

Following John Flowerdew’s CDA framework, small talk can be analyzed at multiple levels, including lexical choices, sentence structure, discourse organization, and broader ideological context. This multi-layered approach makes it possible to uncover how seemingly ordinary conversations encode complex meanings related to politeness, power, gender roles, and class distinctions. By analyzing key excerpts involving characters such as Emma Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley, Harriet Smith, and Miss Bates, it becomes evident that Austen deliberately uses everyday dialogue as a narrative tool to reflect and shape social reality.

The selection of excerpts was based on functional criteria derived from the works of Malinowski (1923), Coupland (2014), and Jaworski (2014). Only those dialogues were included in which the primary purpose of communication was not the transmission of new information, but the establishment, maintenance, or regulation of interpersonal contact. Typical indicators of small talk included neutral and socially acceptable topics such as health, weather, visits, and social events, as well as the use of politeness formulas, compliments, inquiries about well-being, and other phatic speech acts.

Several scenes in the novel center specifically on small talk and provide rich material for analysis. One of the most illustrative examples can be found in the evening gatherings at Hartfield, where Emma’s father, Mr. Woodhouse, entertains guests such as Miss Bates and Mrs. Goddard. His conversation is characterized by repetitive, polite concern for others’ well-being, particularly regarding food and health. For instance, he carefully advises his guests on what they should or should not eat: *“Miss Bates, let Emma help you to a little bit of tart – a very little bit... Ours are all apple-tarts... I do not advise the custard. Mrs. Goddard, what say you to half a glass of wine... in a tumbler of water? I do not think it could disagree with you.”* (Austen, 2008).

At first glance, this exchange appears as harmless hospitality and polite concern. However, from a discourse perspective, it reveals more than simple

kindness. Mr. Woodhouse's insistence on regulating others' consumption reflects his anxious personality and desire to maintain control within his domestic sphere. His small talk is not merely phatic; it also functions as a subtle form of authority, as he directs the behavior of his guests under the guise of care. The repetition of similar topics – food, health, and safety – creates a predictable conversational pattern that structures social interaction in his household.

Another important group of scenes that illustrate the function of small talk involves the interactions between Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith. While Harriet's narratives initially appear as innocent and enthusiastic descriptions of everyday experiences, they also reveal how small talk can become a site of influence and reinterpretation. For example, Harriet eagerly recounts her visit to the Martin family, praising their lifestyle in detail: she speaks with admiration about "*Mrs. Martin's having eight cows*" and the comfort of the house, presenting rural life as pleasant and desirable (Austen, 2008). At this stage, her speech is marked by emotional involvement and uncritical evaluation, reflecting her sincerity and limited social awareness.

Emma's reaction gradually alters the direction of the conversation. Although she initially "*encouraged her talkativeness*", she begins to intervene once she understands Harriet's attachment to Mr. Martin. Instead of openly contradicting Harriet, Emma subtly reframes the topic, shifting attention away from the Martins and introducing alternative perspectives. This indirect strategy allows her to maintain the appearance of polite engagement while influencing Harriet's interpretation of events. The conversational shift is not abrupt but achieved through careful redirection, demonstrating how small talk can be manipulated without violating norms of politeness.

The asymmetry between the speakers becomes particularly evident in the structure of their exchanges. Harriet's contributions are expansive, emotional, and confirmatory, whereas Emma's responses are more selective and evaluative. The description of Harriet as a "*humble, grateful little girl*" captures this imbalance, positioning her as dependent and reinforcing Emma's authority within the interaction. In this context, small talk does not simply maintain social harmony but actively shapes perception and reinforces hierarchy, turning everyday conversation into a subtle instrument of control.

From a CDA perspective, these interactions reveal how everyday conversation encodes power relations at both micro- and macro-levels. Emma's ability to control the direction and interpretation of small talk demonstrates that even the most trivial exchanges can function as instruments of social regulation, shaping both individual identity and collective norms within the fictional community.

A contrasting example of small talk can be observed in the speech of Miss Bates, one of the most distinctive characters in the novel. Known for her excessive verbosity, Miss Bates represents an extreme form of phatic

communication. She is explicitly described as “*a great talker upon little matters*” whose speech is “*full of trivial communications and harmless gossip*” (Austen, 2008). Her discourse is dominated by rapid topic shifts, repetitions, and detailed but insignificant information, creating the impression of continuous verbal flow without clear structural organization.

In one scene, her conversation unfolds as an uninterrupted stream of associations: “*Oh! yes – Mr. Elton, I understand – certainly as to dancing – Mrs. Cole was telling me that dancing at the rooms at Bath was... and, would you believe it, we had a letter from Jane this very morning...*” (Austen, 2008). This utterance exemplifies how multiple topics are compressed into a single turn, with minimal syntactic boundaries and constant digressions. The flow of speech continues as Miss Bates recounts Mrs. Cole’s reaction, searches for the misplaced letter, apologizes for its brevity, and shifts to remarks about her mother’s eyesight and Jane’s expected visit, all within one extended sequence. The absence of pauses or turn-taking opportunities effectively prevents other participants from contributing, allowing her to dominate the interaction.

Emma’s responses in these exchanges are notably restrained and formulaic. She produces minimal, polite utterances such as “*Have you heard from Miss Fairfax so lately? I am extremely happy. I hope she is well?*” (Austen, 2008), which function primarily as conversational tokens rather than genuine inquiries. These responses sustain the interaction while avoiding deeper engagement, illustrating the phatic function of small talk as a means of maintaining social contact without informational exchange. Miss Bates, “*happily deceived*” by this politeness, interprets Emma’s remarks as sincere interest and responds with exaggerated gratitude: “*You are extremely kind... nobody’s praise could give us so much pleasure as Miss Woodhouse’s.*” (Austen, 2008).

At the same time, the narrative reveals a divergence between external behavior and internal evaluation. Emma privately considers her own polite remarks “*silly*” and seeks an opportunity to withdraw from the conversation, indicating that her participation is motivated by social obligation rather than genuine interest. This contrast exposes the dual nature of small talk as both a surface-level performance of politeness and a masking of authentic attitudes.

Miss Bates’s incessant speech can be interpreted as a form of social survival. As a “*poor old maid*” with limited social power, she relies on continuous verbal presence to secure her inclusion within the community. Her “*quiet prosings*”, though often dismissed by Emma, serve an important function: they fill conversational space, prevent silence, and maintain her visibility in social interaction. From a CDA perspective, her talkativeness reflects the intersection of language and social status, demonstrating how individuals with limited authority may use discourse to negotiate their position within a hierarchical structure.

Emma's management of these interactions further highlights the regulatory function of small talk. By offering minimal responses and maintaining outward politeness, she allows the conversation to continue without disruption while subtly controlling its progression. This dynamic illustrates how conversational asymmetry is maintained through linguistic strategies, reinforcing both individual roles and broader social hierarchies within the novel.

The ball at the Crown Inn provides a particularly revealing context in which small talk intersects with social exclusion and restoration of hierarchy. In contrast to the controlled and repetitive exchanges at Hartfield, here conversational norms are disrupted through the strategic use of silence. When Harriet is left without a partner, Mr. Elton deliberately avoids interaction, creating a communicative gap that functions as a form of social exclusion. His refusal to engage in even minimal polite exchange transforms the absence of small talk into a meaningful act, demonstrating that silence itself can operate as a face-threatening strategy.

This moment is contrasted by Mr. Knightley's intervention, which restores the expected structure of polite interaction. The narrative emphasizes that he "*stepped forward*" to invite Harriet to dance (Austen, 2008). Although his exact words are not recorded, the act of invitation itself constitutes a conventional form of small talk, re-establishing Harriet's social presence within the group. His behavior reflects the norms of positive politeness, as he acknowledges Harriet's social value and mitigates the previous slight through respectful engagement.

The contrast between Elton and Knightley highlights two opposing uses of communicative behavior. Elton's silence functions as an exclusionary mechanism, reinforcing social hierarchy by denying Harriet recognition, while Knightley's polite interaction performs an inclusive function, restoring balance and dignity. This opposition demonstrates that small talk is not limited to verbal expression but also includes the strategic absence or presence of interaction.

Harriet's reaction further underscores the emotional and social impact of these exchanges. The restoration of polite communication not only alleviates her immediate discomfort but also reshapes her perception of Knightley, illustrating how small talk can influence interpersonal interpretation and attachment. The scene thus reveals that even minimal conversational acts carry significant pragmatic weight.

From a CDA perspective, this episode illustrates how conversational practices encode power relations within a social setting. The control over participation – whether through speech or silence – determines inclusion and exclusion within the community. Small talk, therefore, operates as a mechanism through which social hierarchy is both challenged and reinforced, making it a crucial element in the representation of interpersonal dynamics in the novel.

An even more revealing scene occurs during the picnic at Box Hill, where small talk becomes the vehicle for a significant social conflict and exposes its

inherent fragility. Unlike the controlled and stabilizing function of small talk observed in earlier scenes, here it takes the form of playful social interaction that gradually turns into a mechanism of exclusion. In an attempt to entertain the group, Emma and Frank Churchill initiate a conversational game, inviting each participant to contribute either “*one thing very clever... or two things moderately clever – or three things very dull indeed*”, with Emma “*engaged to laugh heartily at them all*” (Austen, 2008). This prompt represents a conventional form of small talk structured as light, socially acceptable amusement, where wit and triviality are expected and encouraged.

Miss Bates, consistent with her habitual self-deprecation and eagerness to participate, responds with good-natured compliance. She remarks that “*three dull things*” will “*just do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan’t I?*”, expressing “*the most good-humoured dependence*” on the approval of others (Austen, 2008). At the pragmatic level, this utterance functions as a strategy of negative self-presentation, allowing Miss Bates to pre-empt potential criticism by framing herself as harmless and socially acceptable. Her willingness to conform to the expectations of the game reflects her marginal social position and her need to maintain inclusion through compliance.

However, Emma’s response disrupts the cooperative nature of the interaction. Her remark – “*Ah! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty... you will be limited as to number – only three at once*” (Austen, 2008) – transforms the playful framework into a site of implicit aggression. Although presented as a continuation of the game, this statement constitutes a face-threatening act, implying that Miss Bates habitually speaks excessively and without value. The use of mitigation (“*there may be a difficulty*”) masks the directness of the insult, illustrating how politeness strategies can be employed to conceal rather than soften communicative aggression.

The immediate reaction reveals the instability of small talk as a social practice. Miss Bates is initially “*deceived by the mock ceremony*”, failing to recognize the insult, but soon becomes aware of its implications and responds with visible embarrassment. Her inability to challenge Emma openly reflects the constraints imposed by social hierarchy, as her lower status prevents direct confrontation. The surrounding group reacts with discomfort, and the narrative notes that “*some looked very stupid about it*” (Austen, 2008), indicating a collective awareness of the breach of social norms. The conversational flow collapses, and the previously light-hearted interaction gives way to silence and tension.

Mr. Knightley’s response further emphasizes the moral dimension of the episode. Although he refrains from immediate public criticism, his disapproval is evident, and his later reproach of Emma underscores the ethical responsibility inherent in communication. This shift highlights that small talk is not merely a

neutral or decorative element of discourse but a socially regulated practice governed by expectations of respect and restraint.

From a CDA perspective, this scene demonstrates how small talk can function as an instrument of symbolic domination. What begins as a cooperative and inclusive activity becomes a means of reinforcing social inequality, as Emma uses her superior status to humiliate Miss Bates under the guise of wit. The episode also reveals the dual nature of small talk: while it can maintain social harmony, it can equally expose and intensify underlying power relations. The breakdown of interaction at Box Hill illustrates that the effectiveness of small talk depends on the participants' adherence to shared norms; once these norms are violated, even the most trivial exchange can produce significant social consequences.

Thus, the Box Hill episode represents a critical moment in the novel, where small talk ceases to function as a stabilizing mechanism and instead becomes a site of conflict, revealing the complex interplay between language, power, and social hierarchy.

Taken together, these scenes demonstrate that small talk in "Emma" functions as a complex communicative phenomenon that operates across multiple levels of discourse. It structures interaction, reflects social roles, and encodes ideological meanings related to power, gender, and class. Among the various dimensions identified through CDA, the most significant for this analysis is the relationship between politeness and social hierarchy. This dimension is particularly revealing because it shows how everyday conversational practices subtly reinforce social structures, making small talk a key element in the representation of social reality within the novel.

2.2. Word/phrase-level analysis: lexicon of politeness and class.

At the micro level, the diction used in small talk reveals important aspects of character attitudes and social categorization. In "Emma", seemingly trivial lexical choices often carry meanings that extend far beyond their surface-level function. Austen carefully constructs the vocabulary of everyday conversation in such a way that it reflects class distinctions, interpersonal evaluations, and implicit social hierarchies.

At the micro level, the diction in small talk reveals character attitudes and social categorization not only through evaluation but also through explicit classificatory labels that divide individuals according to perceived social rank. In everyday conversation, these labels often appear casual; however, they carry strong ideological implications. Emma's description of Mr. Martin as "*very plain, remarkably plain*" and lacking "*gentility*", even bordering on "*clownish*", illustrates how lexical choice encodes social judgment (Austen, 2008). The cumulative effect of these adjectives constructs an image of inferiority, culminating in the implicit categorization of Martin as socially

unworthy. The term “*inferior*”, whether stated directly or implied through evaluative language, functions as a marker that positions him outside the genteel class to which Emma belongs.

This classificatory tendency becomes even more evident when Harriet adopts similar vocabulary under Emma’s influence. Her reference to “*real gentlemen*” introduces a seemingly simple but ideologically loaded distinction, suggesting a fixed category of men defined by refinement and manners (Austen, 2008). The phrase itself is vague, yet it presupposes a shared understanding of social norms, reinforcing the division between those who meet these expectations and those who do not. In this way, small talk becomes a medium through which class boundaries are not only described but actively reproduced.

Positive classification follows the same pattern. Emma’s approval of Mr. Knightley is expressed through the metaphor that “*gentleman [is] so plainly written*” on him, presenting social status as an inherent and visible quality (Austen, 2008). This figurative expression naturalizes class identity, suggesting that gentility is self-evident rather than socially constructed. Such language reinforces the stability of hierarchy by framing it as an observable fact rather than a subjective evaluation.

A contrasting lexical strategy can be observed in Miss Bates’s speech. Unlike Emma, she avoids classificatory or exclusionary terms, relying instead on a vocabulary rich in politeness and approval. Her frequent use of honorifics such as “*Mr.*”, “*Mrs.*”, and affectionate expressions like “*dear Jane*”, combined with adjectives such as “*kind*”, “*happy*”, and “*obliging*”, creates an inclusive and non-confrontational discourse (Austen, 2008). This difference in diction reflects her social position, as her reliance on positive evaluation functions as a means of maintaining acceptance within the community.

Thus, even at the level of individual words, small talk in “*Emma*” operates as a mechanism of classification. Lexical choices do not merely describe social reality but actively construct and reinforce it, revealing how language encodes hierarchy within seemingly trivial exchanges.

While classificatory terms explicitly divide characters into social categories, metaphorical and idiomatic expressions in small talk operate more subtly, conveying attitudes through figurative evaluation. Although everyday conversation in “*Emma*” is generally straightforward, occasional metaphors reveal underlying ideological positions and personal biases. Emma’s description of Mr. Martin provides a striking example: she predicts he will become “*a completely gross, vulgar farmer, thinking of nothing but profit and loss*” (Austen, 2008). The adjectives “*gross*” and “*vulgar*” construct a metaphorical image of coarseness associated with rural life, while the idiomatic phrase “*nothing but profit and loss*” reduces his identity to purely economic concerns. This figurative language transforms a seemingly casual remark into a strongly evaluative statement, reinforcing a class-based stereotype within the flow of small talk.

Emma's use of exaggeration further intensifies this effect. Her suggestion that Mr. Martin might be "*a degree or two nearer gentility*" than expected (Austen, 2008) implies a hierarchical scale of refinement, where social status can be measured in incremental steps. This phrasing presents gentility as a quantifiable quality, reflecting a worldview in which class distinctions are both rigid and systematically evaluated. Even when expressed in a conversational tone, such metaphoric scaling reveals deeply embedded assumptions about social mobility and value.

Metaphorical language in small talk, however, is not limited to negative evaluation. It can also serve a socially cohesive function, particularly in the form of playful or complimentary expressions. During the Box Hill scene, Mr. Weston introduces a riddle whose solution is Emma's name, describing its elements as "*express perfection*" (Austen, 2008). This metaphor elevates Emma by equating her identity with an abstract ideal, transforming a simple wordplay into a form of social praise. Although Emma internally recognizes the remark as trivial – a "*very indifferent piece of wit*" (Austen, 2008) – she nevertheless responds with visible pleasure, demonstrating the pragmatic value of such expressions in reinforcing social bonds.

Thus, metaphor and idiom in small talk function as indirect carriers of evaluation. Whether used to express disdain or admiration, they allow speakers to encode attitudes without abandoning the conventions of polite conversation. Even when infrequent, these figurative elements contribute to the construction of social meaning, revealing that small talk in "Emma" operates not only through explicit classification but also through more nuanced linguistic strategies.

Another important feature at the micro level is the use of modality and hedging, through which characters regulate the degree of certainty, imposition, and politeness in small talk. Modal verbs and softening expressions allow speakers to present opinions in a way that minimizes potential offense, thereby maintaining social harmony. Mr. Woodhouse's speech provides a clear example of this strategy. His remark "*I would not recommend an egg boiled by any body else; but you need not be afraid...*" (Austen, 2008) combines caution with reassurance: the modal "*would not*" mitigates the directive force of his advice, while "*need not be afraid*" softens the imposition by framing it as concern. In this way, his persistent regulation of others' behavior is linguistically presented as benevolent rather than controlling.

Miss Bates's discourse demonstrates an even more pronounced reliance on hedging. Her utterance "*I shall be sure to say three dull things... shan't I?*" (Austen, 2008) illustrates how tag questions function as devices of alignment, inviting confirmation and reducing the risk of disagreement. Her frequent use of phrases such as "*I am sure,*" "*very likely,*" and "*perhaps,*" along with repeated expressions of gratitude like "*so very kind of you,*" creates a highly mitigated form of speech that reflects her dependence on social approval. These linguistic

choices signal her awareness of her marginal position and her need to remain agreeable within the interaction.

Harriet's speech similarly relies on tentative modality, as she formulates her opinions through softened expressions such as "*I think*" or "*maybe... not so genteel*" (Austen, 2008). This pattern indicates her reluctance to assert herself independently and reinforces her subordinate role in relation to Emma. By contrast, Emma's language becomes noticeably less mitigated when addressing those she considers socially inferior. Her direct statement "*He is very plain, undoubtedly*" and her remark "*You will be limited... only three at once*" (Austen, 2008) lack hedging, increasing their evaluative force and revealing her confidence in asserting judgment.

At the same time, Emma demonstrates pragmatic flexibility, adjusting her modality in more formal contexts or when addressing socially equal or superior interlocutors. A different pattern emerges in the speech of Mrs. Elton, whose expressions such as "*I assure you*" or "*upon my word*" (Austen, 2008) convey assertiveness without sufficient mitigation, often appearing intrusive rather than polite. Her tendency to address Mr. Knightley informally further signals a deviation from expected norms.

These variations illustrate that modality is not merely a grammatical feature but a key indicator of social awareness. The degree of hedging employed by each character reflects their position within the social hierarchy and their sensitivity to the expectations of polite interaction, revealing how small talk encodes power relations at the level of linguistic form.

Alongside lexical choice and modality, presupposition plays a crucial role in shaping the implicit meaning of small talk. Unlike overt evaluation, presuppositions operate indirectly, embedding assumptions within seemingly neutral statements and relying on shared knowledge between interlocutors. In "Emma, such assumptions often reflect social norms and reveal underlying biases that structure interaction.

For instance, when Mrs. Cole remarks that "*I know you cannot have heard from Jane lately, because it is not her time for writing*" (Austen, 2008), the statement presupposes both the regularity of Jane's correspondence and Miss Bates's dependence on these letters as a central element of her social life. This assumption is presented as self-evident, requiring no confirmation, which illustrates how small talk frequently relies on shared expectations rather than explicit information.

A similar mechanism appears in Miss Bates's own speech when she addresses Emma: "*since you are so kind as to wish to hear what she says...*" (Austen, 2008). Here, the presupposition of Emma's genuine interest functions as a politeness strategy, maintaining the illusion of mutual engagement. In reality, Emma's attention is largely performative, yet the structure of small talk allows this discrepancy to remain unchallenged.

Presupposition can also carry evaluative force, particularly when used to express criticism indirectly. Emma's remark at Box Hill – "*you will be limited... only three at once*" (Austen, 2008) – presupposes that Miss Bates typically exceeds acceptable limits of speech. The insult is not stated explicitly but is inferred through the assumption embedded in the utterance. This allows Emma to maintain the outward form of polite interaction while simultaneously undermining her interlocutor.

A comparable pattern is evident in Emma's earlier assessment of Mr. Martin, where she claims that he "*has no air of gentility; I had imagined him a degree or two better*" (Austen, 2008). This statement presupposes that a certain level of refinement is expected and shared as a standard, positioning Emma's perspective as normative. Even routine expressions such as "*I hope you are quite well*" rely on similar mechanisms, presuming a shared baseline of health and mutual concern without requiring explicit verification.

Through these examples, it becomes clear that presupposition is a key device in small talk, allowing speakers to communicate attitudes and assumptions without direct articulation. By embedding social expectations within ordinary phrases, Austen demonstrates how conversational interaction subtly reinforces shared norms while also providing a means for indirect evaluation and critique.

The role of politeness markers and forms of address becomes especially evident when considering how characters maintain social distance and signal respect within everyday interaction. Small talk in "Emma" is saturated with conventional expressions of courtesy, which function not merely as formalities but as indicators of social positioning. Titles such as "*Miss*", "*Mr.*", and "*ma'am*" appear consistently throughout dialogue, structuring interaction according to established norms of hierarchy and decorum. These forms of address do not simply identify individuals but also reinforce the relative status of speakers and interlocutors within the social framework of Highbury.

Miss Bates's speech offers the clearest example of this pattern. Her discourse is characterized by an abundance of politeness markers that emphasize gratitude, admiration, and deference. Expressions such as "*Thank you, dear Miss Woodhouse, you are all kindness*" and repeated phrases like "*so obliging of you*", "*you are very kind*", and "*we are so grateful*" (Austen, 2008) create a highly ritualized form of interaction. These formulaic utterances serve a dual function: they sustain the flow of conversation and simultaneously reinforce her subordinate position. By continuously expressing appreciation, Miss Bates aligns herself with the expectations of politeness required for someone of limited social standing, ensuring her acceptance within the community.

A similar dynamic can be observed in Harriet's speech, which is marked by consistent deference toward Emma. Her use of "*Miss Woodhouse*" and her generally tentative, respectful tone reflect her dependence and desire for approval (Austen, 2008). Unlike Miss Bates, whose verbosity fills

conversational space, Harriet's politeness is expressed through agreement and restraint. In both cases, politeness markers operate as linguistic signals of lower status, functioning as tools for maintaining favorable social relations.

In contrast, characters of higher social standing display greater flexibility in their use of address forms. Emma and Mr. Knightley, positioned at the top of the local hierarchy, employ fewer overt markers of deference when speaking to those below them. Emma, for instance, may refer to individuals such as "*Mr. Martin*" in a tone that carries implicit evaluation rather than respect, or use informal references when discussing those she considers socially inferior. However, her behavior shifts in more formal settings, where adherence to politeness conventions becomes necessary to preserve social decorum.

Politeness markers also acquire additional meaning when used strategically rather than sincerely. Emma's remark at Box Hill, delivered in a "*mock ceremony of manner*" (Austen, 2008), demonstrates how exaggerated politeness can function ironically. The outward form of respect contrasts sharply with the underlying insult, revealing that politeness is not inherently linked to genuine regard but can be manipulated to achieve communicative effects. In this context, expressions of apology or deference serve not to mitigate offense but to disguise it, allowing the speaker to maintain the appearance of civility while violating its principles.

These patterns illustrate how small talk operates as a space in which politeness strategies are both enacted and subverted. Positive politeness, expressed through compliments and affiliative language, coexists with negative politeness, manifested in formal address and mitigation. At the same time, deviations from these norms – whether through excessive familiarity or exaggerated courtesy – signal shifts in power relations and social awareness. The careful distribution of politeness markers thus reflects each character's position within the hierarchy and their ability to navigate its expectations.

Taken together, the word- and phrase-level features of small talk in "Emma" – including classificatory vocabulary, metaphorical expressions, modality, hedging, presupposition, and forms of address – demonstrate that even the most ordinary elements of conversation are deeply embedded in the social structure of the novel. Through these linguistic choices, Austen reveals how characters negotiate status, express evaluation, and maintain the delicate balance of politeness that defines their social world.

In sum, the word- and phrase-level features of small talk in "Emma" – including presuppositions, politeness markers, forms of address, and hedging strategies – reveal the intricate relationship between language and social structure. Even the most ordinary conversational elements contribute to the construction of hierarchy, identity, and interpersonal relations. Through these subtle linguistic choices, Austen demonstrates that small talk is not insignificant but deeply embedded in the social and ideological fabric of the novel.

2.3 Sentence-level analysis: structure and emphasis in conversations.

At the sentence level, the structure of small talk in “Emma” reveals how characters manage politeness, emphasize certain meanings, and regulate interpersonal dynamics through syntactic choices. Austen’s dialogue demonstrates that even the simplest conversational exchanges are carefully organized, and that grammar itself becomes a tool for expressing social relationships. In particular, the distribution of agency, the choice of grammatical subject, and the degree of explicitness all contribute to the communicative effect of small talk.

Building on lexical and phrase-level features, sentence structure in small talk further reveals how speakers distribute agency and manage interpersonal relations through grammatical choices. One of the most revealing aspects at this level is transitivity, which determines who appears as the subject of an action and how responsibility or involvement is framed within the utterance. In “Emma”, these patterns are closely tied to politeness and social positioning.

Miss Bates’s speech provides a particularly illustrative example of how agency is constructed through syntax. Her sentences are typically organized around a sequence of active constructions in which she herself appears as the grammatical subject: “*I do not know that I ever saw anybody more surprized... I was reading it to Mrs. Cole... I was reading it again to my mother...*” (Austen, 2008). The repeated use of “I” creates a cumulative effect, presenting her as constantly engaged in action. However, this apparent agency does not signal authority. Instead, it reflects her role as a narrator of trivial events, whose continuous verbal activity serves to sustain interaction rather than to assert control. The syntactic prominence of the first-person subject thus corresponds to her need to remain socially visible through speech.

A different pattern emerges in Emma’s conversational strategies, particularly when she seeks to maintain politeness or avoid direct imposition. In such cases, she frequently assigns agency to her interlocutor. For example, her question “*Have you heard from Miss Fairfax so lately?*” (Austen, 2008) places Miss Bates in the position of the grammatical subject, thereby transforming what could be a direct request into a neutral inquiry. This shift reduces the directive force of the utterance and aligns with the conventions of polite small talk, where explicit demands are typically avoided.

Emma’s use of transitivity becomes even more significant in evaluative contexts. When expressing judgment, she often avoids personal attribution by employing generalized constructions. Her statement “*What is passable in youth is detestable in later age*” (Austen, 2008) removes the speaker as an explicit agent, presenting the evaluation as an objective principle rather than a subjective opinion. The absence of “*I think*” or similar markers allows Emma to universalize her perspective, reinforcing her authority while maintaining the appearance of rational detachment.

The manipulation of agency becomes especially visible in moments of tension, where syntactic choices reveal shifts in control and responsibility. When Emma's composure falters, her sentences begin to foreground her own role more explicitly. This is reflected in her later self-reflection, where she acknowledges: "*I must tell you truths while I can*" (Austen, 2008). The use of the first-person subject here signals a departure from her usual indirectness, indicating a moment of moral recognition in which responsibility can no longer be concealed behind generalized formulations. The explicit presence of the speaker as agent contrasts with her earlier tendency to obscure authorship of judgment.

Mr. Knightley's speech offers a different model of syntactic control, combining clarity with moral authority. His statement "*Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!*" (Austen, 2008) demonstrates a balanced use of agency. The first sentence foregrounds the circumstances of Miss Bates, directing attention away from Emma, while the second employs the impersonal pronoun "*It*", which allows the criticism to remain direct yet not overtly accusatory. This structure enables Knightley to deliver a strong moral evaluation without violating the conventions of polite interaction.

At the same time, his behavior in social settings illustrates how agency can be deliberately minimized to maintain harmony. During the Crown Inn ball, instead of explicitly commenting on Mr. Elton's behavior, Knightley intervenes through action and neutral conversation. By engaging Harriet in light, impersonal small talk – focusing on shared surroundings rather than individuals – he avoids assigning blame or creating discomfort. Utterances framed around neutral subjects, such as references to the environment or the situation, allow him to restore balance without disrupting social decorum. In this context, the absence of explicit agency functions as a strategy of politeness.

These variations highlight a broader pattern: speakers adjust transitivity depending on their social role and communicative intent. Characters with higher status, such as Emma and Knightley, often reduce explicit agency in order to appear tactful and controlled, especially in formal interaction. By contrast, characters like Miss Bates, whose speech is driven by the need for social inclusion, rely heavily on first-person constructions, filling discourse with personal actions and experiences.

Thus, the distribution of agency at the sentence level is closely linked to issues of power and politeness. Syntactic choices determine not only who performs an action but also how responsibility, evaluation, and interpersonal alignment are presented. In small talk, where directness is often avoided, the manipulation of subject position becomes a subtle yet effective means of maintaining social balance while simultaneously encoding hierarchy.

The use of passive and impersonal constructions in "*Emma*" further demonstrates how sentence structure contributes to politeness by obscuring agency and softening directness. In small talk, such forms are especially useful

when a speaker wishes to avoid open confrontation or to present a statement as neutral rather than personally motivated. By removing or backgrounding the agent, passive phrasing allows unpleasant meanings to be expressed without explicit attribution of responsibility.

A particularly revealing example occurs during the Box Hill episode, when Emma tells Miss Bates that “*you will be limited as to number – only three at once*” (Austen, 2008). The phrase “*will be limited*” conceals the source of the limitation, avoiding the more direct and openly offensive formulation “*I will limit you*” or “*we will limit you.*” This syntactic choice makes the insult appear less personal and more like an external rule or condition. The effect is pragmatically significant – the sentence retains the outward form of polite conversational play while masking its function as an act of humiliation. In this way, passive or quasi-passive structure becomes a vehicle for covert aggression.

A similar tendency can be observed in Emma’s later reflections on the incident. Her remorse is expressed through formulations that shift focus away from direct self-accusation and toward consequences and reparation. When she wonders how she could have “*exposed herself to such ill opinion*” and resolves that future *attention* may repair the damage (Austen, 2008), the language places emphasis not on the active wrongdoing itself but on the possibility of correction. The agent is partially backgrounded, and the sentence structure allows Emma to reframe the event in terms of social recovery rather than explicit confession. Such constructions reduce the harshness of self-attribution and align with the conventions of polite moral reflection.

Impersonal structures serve a similar function in more neutral contexts. Expressions such as “*It is to be hoped*” or “*it would be desirable*” are characteristic of polite social discourse because they transform personal wishes into generalized observations. Instead of asserting “*I hope*” or “*I want,*” the speaker presents the statement as a shared or detached perspective. This reduces personal assertiveness and helps maintain an atmosphere of civility, particularly in a society where overt directness can appear socially inappropriate.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, the use of passive and impersonal syntax reflects the importance of restraint in polite interaction. By deleting agents or shifting attention away from responsibility, speakers preserve the surface harmony of conversation even when the underlying meaning is critical, defensive, or strategic. Austen’s dialogue thus shows that grammatical form itself participates in the negotiation of power, blame, and decorum within everyday small talk.

Ellipsis and omission constitute another significant syntactic feature of small talk in “Emma”, particularly in moments of rapid or emotionally charged interaction. These structures involve the reduction or omission of elements that would normally be required in a complete sentence, relying instead on shared context for interpretation. In conversational settings, such ellipsis does not

hinder understanding; rather, it enhances the immediacy and expressive quality of speech while aligning with conventions of politeness and social tact.

Miss Bates's discourse provides the most striking example of this phenomenon. Her speech at the Crown Inn ball unfolds as a sequence of fragmented utterances: "*So very obliging of you! – No rain at all. Nothing to signify. I do not care for myself. Quite thick shoes. And Jane declares – Well! – Well! This is brilliant indeed!... Could not have imagined it. – So well lighted up... Oh! Mr. Weston, you must have had Aladdin's lamp...*" (Austen, 2008). The frequent use of dashes signals abrupt shifts in topic and the omission of syntactic elements, producing a rhythm that mirrors spontaneous thought. Sentences such as "*So very obliging of you*" lack an explicit subject and verb, yet the intended meaning remains clear within the context. These omissions create an effect of enthusiastic immediacy, reflecting Miss Bates's emotional involvement and her desire to maintain continuous interaction.

At the same time, ellipsis serves a politeness function. By avoiding fully articulated subject–verb–object constructions, Miss Bates reduces the explicitness of her statements, which might otherwise appear overly direct. For example, instead of clearly specifying the agent in an expression of gratitude, she relies on elliptical forms such as "*So kind of her... two such offers in one day!*" (Austen, 2008). This allows her to convey appreciation without emphasizing responsibility or imposing interpretative weight on her interlocutors. The omission of grammatical detail thus aligns with her deferential communicative style, enabling her to remain socially acceptable while expressing strong emotion.

In contrast, Emma's speech is characterized by syntactic completeness and control. Her sentences are typically well-formed and carefully structured, reflecting both her education and her social confidence. Elliptical constructions appear only rarely, usually in moments of emotional tension or internal conflict. Following Mr. Knightley's criticism, for instance, Emma struggles to articulate her response, and the narrative emphasizes her silence rather than presenting fragmented speech. This absence of ellipsis highlights her difficulty in maintaining composure, suggesting that syntactic disruption is associated with a temporary loss of control.

The contrast between these patterns reveals how ellipsis is linked to social identity and communicative purpose. In Miss Bates's case, fragmented syntax signals enthusiasm, insecurity, and a need for continuous engagement, while also functioning as a strategy of politeness. In Emma's speech, syntactic completeness conveys authority and restraint, with deviation from this norm indicating emotional disturbance.

From a discourse perspective, ellipsis and omission contribute to the informal and dynamic nature of small talk, while also reflecting hierarchical distinctions. The more fragmented and spontaneous the syntax, the more it tends to be associated with lower status or heightened emotional involvement,

whereas controlled and complete structures signal confidence and social authority. Through these variations, Austen demonstrates that even the absence of grammatical elements plays a meaningful role in shaping interaction, reinforcing the connection between linguistic form and social structure.

Topicalization – the ordering of information within a sentence that determines what is presented as the theme and what is relegated to the rheme – plays a crucial role in shaping small talk in “Emma”. At this level, sentence structure reveals not only what is being communicated but also how speakers manage attention, politeness, and social priorities. By placing certain elements at the beginning of an utterance, characters foreground what they consider socially appropriate or strategically advantageous, thereby guiding the interpretation of the interaction.

Mr. Woodhouse’s speech provides a clear example of how thematic positioning reflects both personal concerns and social expectations. His utterance “*Mrs. Bates, let me propose your venturing on one of these eggs*” (Austen, 2008) foregrounds the addressee and her well-being, immediately establishing the interaction as attentive and considerate. The initial placement of “*Mrs. Bates*” followed by the offer of food directs the conversation toward comfort and care, which are central themes in his discourse. This ordering aligns with the conventions of polite society, where expressions of concern function as safe and acceptable topics for small talk.

A similar pattern can be observed in Miss Bates’s speech, where topicalization consistently prioritizes politeness and positive evaluation. Her utterances often begin with expressions such as “*So happy to hear it... Very well, I thank you, ma’am. I hope you are quite well... So obliged to you for the carriage!*” (Austen, 2008). By foregrounding gratitude and approval, she establishes a tone of deference before introducing any additional information. In another instance, she remarks “*such a beautiful shawl – Mrs. Dixon’s wedding-present... so kind of her to think of my mother!*” (Austen, 2008), beginning with admiration and only subsequently providing contextual details. This structure ensures that the interaction remains socially agreeable, as the thematic focus consistently reinforces politeness and goodwill.

Emma’s sentence organization reflects a different communicative strategy, particularly when she adopts a more instructive or evaluative stance. Her statement “*The older a person grows, Harriet, the more important it is that their manners should not be bad*” (Austen, 2008) foregrounds a general principle, presenting it as an objective rule before applying it to a specific case. By placing the abstract standard at the beginning of the sentence, she frames her judgment as rational and universally valid, thereby strengthening her authority within the conversation. A similar tactic is evident in her Box Hill remark, where she introduces the statement with “*there may be a difficulty...*” before delivering the critical content (Austen, 2008). This thematic delay creates an appearance of mitigation, although the underlying intention remains clear.

Mr. Knightley's use of topicalization further illustrates how sentence structure can direct moral interpretation. In his reprimand, "*Her situation should secure your compassion*" (Austen, 2008), the phrase "*Her situation*" is placed at the forefront, emphasizing Miss Bates's social and economic circumstances as the primary consideration. This ordering compels both Emma and the reader to focus on the ethical context before encountering the subsequent judgment. The thematic emphasis thus reinforces the seriousness of his criticism while maintaining a controlled and reasoned tone.

These patterns demonstrate that topicalization in small talk is not arbitrary but strategically motivated. By selecting what to foreground, speakers manage the flow of conversation, maintain politeness, and subtly influence interpretation. The arrangement of theme and rheme allows characters to align their utterances with social norms, whether by emphasizing care, expressing gratitude, asserting authority, or guiding moral evaluation. In this way, sentence structure becomes an essential tool for navigating interpersonal relations and sustaining the delicate balance of civility within the novel's social world.

Repetition and parallelism constitute another important feature of sentence-level organization in small talk, shaping both the rhythm and the expressive force of conversational exchanges. These structures are not merely stylistic devices but reflect the speaker's emotional state, communicative intent, and social positioning. In "*Emma*", Austen uses repetition to create distinct speech patterns that differentiate characters and reinforce their roles within the social hierarchy.

Miss Bates's discourse is particularly marked by repetitive and loosely structured syntax. Her speech often unfolds through a sequence of similar constructions, as in "*Mrs. Elton had most kindly sent Jane a note... But two such offers in one day! – Never were such neighbours*" (Austen, 2008). The repetition of evaluative patterns emphasizes her gratitude and admiration, creating a cumulative effect that mirrors her emotional intensity. This type of parallelism is not carefully controlled but rather spontaneous, reflecting her need to sustain interaction and to express appreciation in a socially acceptable way.

A comparable pattern appears in Harriet's speech, where repetition signals enthusiasm and lack of critical distance. Her description of the Martin household relies on additive structures: "*two parlours... and... an upper maid... and... eight cows... a very pretty little Welch cow indeed*" (Austen, 2008). The repeated conjunction "*and*" creates a sense of accumulation, with each new detail presented as equally significant. This syntactic pattern conveys her excitement while also highlighting her impressionability, as she focuses on concrete details rather than abstract evaluation.

In contrast, Emma employs parallelism in a more controlled and rhetorical manner. Her statement "*What is passable in youth is detestable in later age*" (Austen, 2008) exemplifies balanced antithesis, where two opposing ideas are presented in a symmetrical structure. This type of parallelism enhances the

authority of her speech, giving it the appearance of a general principle rather than a personal opinion. Through such constructions, Emma reinforces her role as a figure of guidance and judgment.

Mr. Knightley's speech demonstrates the most deliberate and effective use of parallel structure. In his reproach of Emma, he accumulates clauses through repetition: "*to have you now... laugh at her, humble her – and before her niece, too – and before others...*" (Austen, 2008). The repeated "*and*" intensifies the criticism by highlighting the multiple dimensions of Emma's wrongdoing. His further insistence "*I must, I will – I will tell you truths*" reinforces this effect, creating a measured and emphatic rhythm that reflects his moral authority.

These variations illustrate that repetition and parallelism function as markers of both emotional expression and social identity. Spontaneous and excessive repetition is associated with enthusiasm and lower status, while controlled and balanced structures signal authority and rhetorical skill. Through these patterns, Austen demonstrates how sentence structure contributes to the tone of small talk, shaping it as lively, excessive, or morally charged depending on the speaker.

In conclusion, the sentence-level analysis of small talk in "Emma" demonstrates that syntactic choices are central to the construction of meaning and social relations. Features such as transitivity, passive voice, ellipsis, topicalization, and parallelism work together to shape how characters express themselves and interact with others. These structures enable speakers to maintain politeness, manage emphasis, and navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. Ultimately, Austen's use of sentence-level variation reveals that even the most ordinary conversational forms are deeply embedded in the social and ideological framework of the novel.

2.4. Text-level analysis: coherence, framing, and silences in social dialogue.

Beyond individual words and sentences, Austen's representation of entire conversational exchanges reveals how small talk operates as a structured social practice within the world of "Emma." At the text level, dialogue follows recognizable patterns that correspond to the conventions of polite Regency society. These conventions govern not only what topics are discussed but also how conversations are initiated, maintained, and concluded. As a result, small talk functions as a genre with its own internal rules and expectations.

One of the most important features of this genre is its ritualized nature. Conversations typically begin with greetings, inquiries about health, or polite remarks about the immediate environment. These opening moves establish a tone of civility and mutual respect, ensuring that interaction proceeds smoothly. For example, when characters meet at social events, they instinctively engage in formulaic exchanges such as polite inquiries and expressions of pleasure. These

routines are not merely decorative – they serve to reinforce social bonds and confirm shared norms of behavior.

Miss Bates’s speech provides a particularly vivid illustration of how these conventions operate. Her extended monologues often combine multiple elements of polite discourse into a single continuous flow. She expresses gratitude, comments on the weather, praises the arrangements of the gathering, and inquires after the well-being of others, all within a single stretch of speech. For instance, her enthusiastic remarks may include phrases such as “*So very kind of you... No rain at all... I hope you are quite well...*” (Austen, 2008). Although the content appears trivial, the structure of her speech follows a recognizable pattern of polite interaction.

Emma’s response to such conversations highlights another aspect of text-level organization. She anticipates these routines and adjusts her behavior accordingly, often allowing Miss Bates to continue speaking while contributing minimal responses. This demonstrates that coherence in small talk is not only linguistic but also social – participants understand their roles and expectations within the interaction. Emma’s restrained participation ensures that the conversational flow remains uninterrupted, even when she internally perceives it as tedious.

Another important convention concerns the distribution of conversational turns. In larger gatherings, conversation often divides into smaller groups, with participants engaging in parallel exchanges. This reflects the broader structure of social interaction, where individuals align themselves according to familiarity, status, or shared interests. The organization of dialogue in such scenes mirrors the organization of society itself, reinforcing existing social divisions.

At the same time, Austen uses deviations from these conventions to signal disruption. When characters fail to follow the expected patterns of polite conversation, the effect is immediately noticeable. For example, moments of silence, abrupt topic changes, or inappropriate remarks stand out precisely because they violate the established structure of small talk. These disruptions reveal underlying tensions and highlight the importance of conversational norms in maintaining social harmony.

Thus, at the text level, small talk in “Emma” is highly organized and rule-governed. Its coherence is not accidental but reflects the social logic of the community in which it occurs. By adhering to or deviating from these conventions, characters communicate not only information but also their position within the social hierarchy and their adherence to the norms of polite society.

Another crucial dimension of text-level analysis in “Emma” is the role of narrative framing and point of view in shaping the interpretation of small talk. Austen rarely presents dialogue as a neutral sequence of utterances. Instead, conversations are embedded within narrative commentary that guides the reader’s perception and often introduces an element of irony. Through this

framing, seemingly trivial exchanges acquire additional layers of meaning that extend beyond their immediate conversational function.

A significant feature of this technique is the alignment of narration with Emma's perspective. Because much of the novel is filtered through her consciousness, small talk is frequently presented in a way that reflects her judgments and biases. For instance, after listening to extended conversations involving Miss Bates, Emma internally characterizes them as tedious and repetitive. This narrative framing positions the reader to perceive the same dialogue as excessive or monotonous, even though, within the social context of Highbury, such speech is entirely appropriate.

Similarly, moments of politeness are often reframed by narrative commentary to reveal their underlying insincerity. When Emma makes courteous remarks, these are sometimes described indirectly as exaggerated or unnecessary, suggesting that her politeness is performative rather than genuine. This creates a contrast between what is said and what is meant, emphasizing the gap between outward behavior and internal attitude. As a result, small talk becomes a site of irony, where language functions on multiple levels simultaneously.

Narrative framing is particularly important in scenes where social norms are disrupted. During the Box Hill episode, for example, the conversation initially appears playful and light-hearted. However, once Emma's remark crosses the boundary of acceptable politeness, the narrative perspective shifts to emphasize her realization of wrongdoing. The event is later framed as a deeply regrettable moment, transforming what seemed like casual conversation into a morally significant incident. This retrospective framing encourages the reader to reinterpret the dialogue not as harmless banter but as an expression of social insensitivity.

Another aspect of framing involves the reactions of other characters within the scene. Even when not explicitly verbalized, their responses contribute to the interpretation of small talk. A look of disapproval, a pause in conversation, or a change in tone can signal that a boundary has been crossed. These non-verbal or minimally verbal cues are integrated into the narrative, shaping the reader's understanding of the interaction.

Furthermore, shifts in point of view occasionally allow alternative perspectives on the same conversation. While Emma may interpret certain exchanges as trivial or amusing, other characters – particularly Mr. Knightley – perceive them in a more serious light. His observations often counterbalance Emma's judgments, providing a moral framework that challenges her interpretation of events. This contrast highlights how the meaning of small talk is not fixed but depends on the perspective from which it is viewed.

Thus, narrative framing plays a central role in the text-level organization of small talk in "Emma." It transforms ordinary dialogue into a complex communicative phenomenon, where meaning emerges not only from what is

said but also from how it is presented and interpreted. Through this technique, Austen reveals the underlying social and ideological significance of everyday conversation.

Another essential element of text-level organization in “Emma” is coherence – the way conversational topics are introduced, developed, and connected within social interaction. Although small talk is often perceived as fragmented or superficial, Austen demonstrates that it follows its own internal logic. Even when conversations appear to shift rapidly from one subject to another, these transitions are usually socially motivated and contextually meaningful.

Miss Bates’s speech provides a particularly illustrative example of this type of coherence. At first glance, her talk seems disorganized, as she moves quickly between different topics without clear structural boundaries. However, a closer analysis reveals that her discourse is held together by a network of associations related to people, events, and shared social concerns. Her references to letters, weather, visits, and acquaintances are not random – they form a coherent chain of polite communication that connects all participants in the conversation. Each topic serves as a link to another, maintaining continuity and preventing conversational breakdown.

Topic management in small talk is also closely connected to social sensitivity. When a subject risks becoming too serious or uncomfortable, speakers often shift to a safer topic in order to preserve harmony. This can be observed in group settings, where participants collectively avoid subjects that might create tension. For example, when a conversation begins to lose its light and agreeable character, a new topic – such as a game, a social anecdote, or a comment about the surroundings – may be introduced to restore balance. These transitions are rarely abrupt; instead, they are carefully negotiated through subtle linguistic cues.

The Box Hill scene offers a clear example of how coherence can be disrupted. Initially, the conversation follows the expected pattern of playful small talk, with participants engaging in light verbal exchanges. However, Emma’s remark introduces an element of discomfort that interrupts the natural flow of interaction. The coherence of the conversation breaks down, and the participants struggle to maintain the established tone. Attempts to introduce new topics or restore lightness reveal the difficulty of reestablishing balance once social norms have been violated.

Another aspect of coherence concerns the distribution of conversational roles. In well-managed interactions, participants contribute in ways that sustain the overall structure of the dialogue. Some individuals introduce topics, others respond, and others facilitate transitions. In “Emma”, these roles are often shaped by social hierarchy. Characters of higher status, such as Emma, have greater control over topic selection and direction, while others, like Harriet or Miss Bates, tend to follow or elaborate on existing topics. This unequal

distribution of conversational authority reflects broader patterns of social organization.

Conversely, moments of incoherence often signal underlying tensions or shifts in power. Sudden pauses, awkward transitions, or overly extended monologues can indicate that the balance of interaction has been disturbed. For instance, when Miss Bates continues speaking without recognizing a negative reaction, the resulting mismatch between her expectations and the actual response creates a sense of discomfort. Such moments highlight the fragile nature of conversational coherence and its dependence on shared understanding.

Thus, coherence in small talk is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a social achievement. It requires participants to coordinate their contributions, manage topics sensitively, and respond appropriately to contextual cues. Austen's portrayal of these processes demonstrates that even the most ordinary conversations are structured by complex social and communicative principles.

An equally important dimension of text-level analysis in "Emma" concerns the role of silence and communicative gaps within social interaction. While small talk is typically associated with continuous verbal exchange, Austen demonstrates that what remains unsaid can be just as meaningful as spoken language. Silence, pauses, and the absence of expected responses function as powerful indicators of social tension, hierarchy, and emotional restraint.

One of the most striking examples of meaningful silence can be observed in the character of Jane Fairfax. Unlike Miss Bates, whose speech fills conversational space, Jane often remains quiet during social gatherings. Her limited participation in small talk reflects both her reserved personality and her complex personal situation. Silence, in her case, functions as a protective strategy – it allows her to avoid drawing attention to herself and to conceal information that cannot be openly discussed. This contrast between excessive speech and strategic silence highlights the different ways in which characters navigate social interaction.

Harriet Smith's silence represents another form of communicative limitation. In many of her interactions with Emma, Harriet speaks little and relies on Emma to guide the conversation. Her pauses and minimal responses signal uncertainty and dependence, reinforcing her subordinate social position. In such cases, silence does not indicate indifference but rather a lack of confidence and authority within the interaction. Emma's tendency to speak on Harriet's behalf further emphasizes this imbalance, as it reduces Harriet's opportunity to express her own perspective.

Silence also plays a crucial role in moments of social disruption. Following Emma's inappropriate remark at Box Hill, the conversational atmosphere changes noticeably. The previously lively exchange gives way to discomfort, and the absence of immediate response underscores the seriousness of the situation. This pause functions as a collective recognition that a social

boundary has been crossed. Unlike ordinary conversational pauses, which facilitate turn-taking, this silence carries evaluative meaning and reflects shared awareness of impropriety.

Mr. Knightley's use of silence further illustrates its communicative power. Rather than immediately confronting Emma in public, he withholds direct criticism, allowing the weight of the situation to become apparent through his restrained reaction. His silence conveys disapproval more effectively than explicit speech, demonstrating that absence of language can function as a form of moral judgment. When he later addresses the issue directly, his words gain additional force because they follow a period of reflective restraint.

In addition to individual silences, Austen also uses gaps in dialogue to suggest unspoken tensions and hidden meanings. Characters may avoid certain topics, interrupt themselves, or shift conversation abruptly, leaving important issues unarticulated. These gaps invite the reader to interpret what lies beneath the surface of polite interaction. In this way, silence becomes an integral part of the communicative system, complementing spoken language and enriching the interpretative depth of the text.

In conclusion, the analysis of text-level features in "Emma" demonstrates that small talk is a highly structured and meaningful form of communication. Coherence, narrative framing, topic management, and silence all contribute to the construction of social interaction within the novel. While small talk appears to focus on trivial matters, its organization reflects deeper patterns of power, identity, and social expectation. Through both speech and silence, Austen reveals the complexity of interpersonal communication and the subtle ways in which language shapes social reality.

2.5. General discussion: ideology, identity, power, and resistance in "Emma"'s small talk.

Stepping back from the detailed linguistic analysis, a broader critical discourse perspective allows us to examine how small talk in "Emma" reflects and reproduces larger social ideologies and power relations. These seemingly trivial conversational exchanges function as a micro-level representation of the novel's central themes – particularly those related to class hierarchy, gender expectations, and moral responsibility. Through everyday dialogue, Austen constructs a social world in which language becomes a primary means of organizing relationships and maintaining social order.

One of the most prominent ideological dimensions present in small talk is the reinforcement of social hierarchy. Within the community of Highbury, conversational behavior is closely tied to class position. Members of the upper social strata are expected to engage in controlled, polite, and measured interaction, while individuals of lower status must demonstrate deference, gratitude, and sociability in order to secure acceptance. These expectations are

not explicitly stated but are consistently enacted through patterns of speech and interaction.

Emma herself articulates this ideology in her reflections on social respectability. She suggests that a woman's social standing depends not only on her behavior but also on her financial situation, implying that poverty combined with unmarried status results in social marginalization. This belief informs her initial attitude toward Miss Bates, whose economic vulnerability and unmarried status place her in a precarious social position. As a result, Miss Bates's excessive small talk can be interpreted as a compensatory strategy – a way of maintaining visibility and goodwill within a society that does not grant her inherent authority or respect.

The dynamics of small talk repeatedly illustrate how this hierarchy is maintained. Miss Bates's speech is characterized by constant expressions of gratitude, politeness, and enthusiasm, reflecting her dependence on the goodwill of others. Her conversational style ensures that she remains socially acceptable, even if she is not fully respected. In contrast, Emma's position allows her greater flexibility in how she speaks. She can choose when to engage, when to withdraw, and even, at times, when to disregard the expectations of politeness.

However, the novel also emphasizes that higher social status entails moral responsibility. This is most clearly articulated through Mr. Knightley, who insists that those in positions of privilege must act with kindness and consideration. His response to Emma's behavior at Box Hill underscores the idea that social power should be accompanied by empathy. Small talk, in this context, becomes not merely a form of polite interaction but a test of character.

Thus, at the ideological level, small talk in "Emma" serves to reinforce a hierarchical social structure while simultaneously exposing its moral implications. It reveals how power is distributed within the community and how individuals are expected to navigate their roles within that structure. At the same time, Austen suggests that these norms are not absolute – they can be challenged, reconsidered, and transformed through individual reflection and ethical awareness.

Another central dimension of small talk in "Emma" concerns the construction of identity. Characters do not merely exchange information through conversation – they actively perform and negotiate their social roles through the way they speak. Small talk becomes a key mechanism through which individuals present themselves, influence others' perceptions, and position themselves within the social hierarchy of Highbury.

Emma Woodhouse provides the clearest example of identity construction through discourse. As a socially privileged and self-assured character, she consistently performs the role of a gracious hostess and influential member of the community. In social settings, she carefully manages conversation by introducing topics, responding appropriately to others, and ensuring that interactions remain smooth and controlled. Even when she internally finds

certain exchanges tedious, she maintains the outward appearance of attentiveness. Through this controlled use of small talk, Emma reinforces her identity as a central figure in the social network – someone whose approval and participation carry weight.

In contrast, Harriet Smith's identity is far more fluid and susceptible to external influence. At the beginning of the novel, her conversational style reflects her uncertainty and lack of social confidence. She tends to repeat information, express admiration, and rely on others to guide the direction of conversation. Under Emma's influence, however, Harriet begins to adopt a different lexical and stylistic pattern, incorporating references to "*gentlemen*" and more refined social categories. This shift demonstrates how identity can be shaped through discourse – by changing the way she speaks, Harriet gradually adopts a new understanding of herself and her place in society.

Miss Bates represents a different type of identity construction, one that is almost entirely dependent on verbal behavior. Her constant flow of small talk defines her social persona as a talkative, harmless, and agreeable member of the community. She frequently acknowledges her own tendency toward excessive speech, even joking about it, which indicates a degree of self-awareness. However, this self-presentation also functions as a survival strategy. By maintaining a continuous stream of polite and enthusiastic conversation, she secures her inclusion within social interaction despite her lack of economic or social power.

Jane Fairfax, by contrast, constructs her identity through restraint and silence. Her limited participation in small talk conveys an image of composure, propriety, and emotional control. Unlike Miss Bates, she does not seek to fill conversational space but instead carefully regulates her speech. This selective participation allows her to maintain a sense of dignity and independence, even in situations where she is socially vulnerable. Her silence, therefore, becomes an integral part of her identity.

Mr. Knightley's conversational style reflects yet another model of identity. His speech is measured, direct, and purposeful, avoiding unnecessary elaboration. He participates in small talk when required by social convention but does not rely on it as a means of self-presentation. This restraint contributes to his image as a morally grounded and trustworthy individual. His authority is not established through dominance in conversation but through consistency and sincerity.

Thus, small talk in "Emma" functions as a form of identity work. Through their linguistic choices, characters construct, negotiate, and sometimes transform their social selves. The way they speak reveals not only who they are but also who they aspire to be within the social structure of the novel.

A central dimension that unifies the analysis of small talk in "Emma" is the operation of power within conversational interaction. Small talk, although outwardly polite and seemingly insignificant, functions as a subtle mechanism

through which social power is exercised, negotiated, and sometimes contested. The distribution of speaking roles, the control of topics, and the degree of directness all reflect underlying asymmetries in social status.

In the community of Highbury, conversational authority is closely linked to social position. Characters of higher status, such as Emma, possess greater control over the direction and structure of interaction. They can initiate topics, shift conversations, and determine who participates and to what extent. Emma, for instance, frequently guides conversations in a way that aligns with her intentions, particularly in her interactions with Harriet. By selecting acceptable topics and subtly redirecting Harriet's attention, she shapes not only the flow of conversation but also Harriet's perception of reality.

This control over discourse illustrates how power operates at a micro level. Emma's influence is rarely explicit – she does not issue direct commands – yet her conversational dominance allows her to define what is considered appropriate or desirable. Harriet's limited participation further reinforces this imbalance. Her tendency to listen rather than speak reflects her lower position within the social hierarchy, while Emma's active role confirms her authority.

At the same time, small talk can be used strategically to reinforce or challenge social relationships. Mr. Elton's behavior provides a clear example of how politeness may function as a form of social manipulation. In his interactions with Emma, he adopts a courteous and attentive manner, aligning himself with what he perceives to be a socially advantageous connection. However, once his intentions are revealed and rejected, his politeness disappears, exposing the instrumental nature of his earlier behavior. This shift demonstrates that politeness in small talk is not always sincere but can serve as a calculated strategy within power relations.

Mr. Knightley's role offers a contrasting model of power. Unlike Emma, he does not dominate conversation through control or manipulation. Instead, his authority is expressed through restraint and moral clarity. He intervenes in conversation only when necessary, particularly when ethical boundaries are crossed. His criticism of Emma following the Box Hill incident highlights the responsibility that accompanies social power. By emphasizing the importance of compassion and respect, he redefines the purpose of polite interaction as a means of supporting, rather than undermining, others.

Small talk also reveals how power can be exercised through inclusion and exclusion. The decision to engage someone in conversation, to listen attentively, or to ignore them altogether carries significant social implications. Moments in which characters are excluded from interaction – whether through silence or lack of acknowledgment – demonstrate how conversational practices can reinforce marginalization. Conversely, acts of inclusion, such as inviting someone into dialogue or responding with genuine interest, function as expressions of social recognition.

Ultimately, the analysis shows that small talk in “Emma” is a form of symbolic power. It operates through subtle linguistic choices rather than overt authority, shaping relationships and social structures in ways that are often invisible but deeply influential. Austen’s depiction of conversation thus reveals that language is not merely a medium of communication but a central mechanism of social organization.

Despite the strong presence of social norms and hierarchical constraints, small talk in “Emma” also allows for moments of resistance and subtle subversion. While most characters operate within the established conventions of polite interaction, some use conversational strategies to challenge, negotiate, or quietly undermine these expectations. Such moments reveal that discourse is not only a means of maintaining social order but also a space in which agency can be exercised.

One of the most notable forms of resistance is strategic silence or minimal participation. Jane Fairfax exemplifies this approach. Rather than engaging actively in small talk, she often limits her contributions to brief, controlled responses. This restraint is not simply a reflection of her personality but also a deliberate way of maintaining autonomy within a socially constrained environment. By avoiding excessive participation, she resists the intrusive curiosity and patronizing attention of characters such as Mrs. Elton. Her silence becomes a protective mechanism, allowing her to retain dignity and avoid becoming an object of social scrutiny.

Another form of resistance can be observed in deviations from expected conversational behavior. While polite society values agreement and harmony, certain characters occasionally reject these norms. For instance, individuals who speak too directly or express dissatisfaction disrupt the smooth flow of interaction. Such behavior may be perceived as socially inappropriate, yet it also exposes the artificiality of polite discourse. By refusing to conform fully to conversational expectations, these characters highlight the tension between sincerity and social performance.

Emma herself provides an important example of unintended resistance. Her remark at Box Hill, although socially inappropriate, represents a moment in which the conventions of politeness are openly violated. This incident reveals the fragility of social norms – once broken, the underlying tensions they conceal become visible. Emma’s subsequent realization and remorse demonstrate that resistance is not always constructive; it can lead to social rupture and require reconciliation. Nevertheless, this moment is crucial in exposing the limitations of polite discourse as a system that can mask, but not eliminate, underlying inequalities.

Resistance is also evident in the gradual development of characters who begin to assert their own voices. Harriet Smith, for example, initially relies heavily on Emma’s guidance in conversation, often deferring to her opinions and adopting her language. However, as the narrative progresses, Harriet

becomes more capable of expressing her own feelings and making independent decisions. This shift is reflected in her conversational behavior, as she moves from passive agreement to more confident participation. Her eventual assertion of personal choice represents a subtle but significant challenge to the influence previously exerted over her.

In addition, resistance can take the form of selective engagement with social expectations. Characters may outwardly conform to politeness norms while internally questioning or reinterpreting them. This duality reflects the complexity of social interaction, where individuals must balance personal authenticity with the demands of their environment. Austen's portrayal of such behavior suggests that conformity is not always absolute but can coexist with individual agency.

Thus, while small talk in "Emma" largely reinforces social norms, it also provides opportunities for resistance and transformation. Through silence, deviation, and gradual assertion of identity, characters navigate and sometimes reshape the constraints imposed upon them. These moments of resistance highlight the dynamic nature of discourse, demonstrating that even within highly regulated systems of communication, there remains space for individual expression and change.

Another important dimension of small talk in "Emma" concerns its connection to broader cultural context and shared knowledge. Conversations within the novel are not isolated linguistic events – they are embedded in a network of social references, cultural practices, and commonly understood symbols. These elements contribute to the realism of dialogue and reinforce the idea that small talk functions as a culturally specific form of interaction.

In the social world of Highbury, small talk frequently incorporates references to familiar places, activities, and cultural practices. Mentions of visits, letters, books, or social gatherings serve not only as topics of conversation but also as markers of belonging within a particular social group. When characters discuss everyday matters, they implicitly rely on shared understanding of what is considered appropriate, interesting, or worthy of attention. This shared knowledge allows communication to proceed smoothly, as participants recognize and respond to common references without the need for detailed explanation.

Literary and cultural references occasionally appear within these exchanges, further reinforcing social identity. For example, conversations about reading or leisure activities reflect the educational background and tastes of the characters. Such references signal inclusion within a certain cultural sphere and contribute to the construction of social identity. At the same time, they reveal differences between characters, as not all individuals share the same level of cultural familiarity or refinement.

Small talk also reflects broader social practices related to etiquette and behavior. Topics such as weather, health, travel, and domestic arrangements are

not random – they correspond to culturally accepted forms of polite conversation. These conventions create a stable framework within which interaction can occur, reducing the risk of conflict or misunderstanding. By adhering to these patterns, characters demonstrate their awareness of social expectations and their ability to participate appropriately in communal life.

At the same time, Austen subtly exposes the limitations of these conventions. While small talk provides a means of maintaining social harmony, it can also restrict the expression of more meaningful or complex ideas. Characters often avoid discussing personal concerns or controversial topics, choosing instead to remain within the safe boundaries of polite discourse. This limitation highlights the tension between social conformity and individual expression, suggesting that the rules governing conversation may both facilitate and constrain communication.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, these cultural references and conventions contribute to the intertextual dimension of small talk. Conversations draw upon shared social knowledge and, in doing so, connect individual interactions to a broader cultural framework. This intertextuality enhances the coherence of dialogue and reinforces the sense that characters are part of a larger social system.

Thus, small talk in “Emma” is deeply embedded in its cultural context. It reflects the norms, values, and practices of the society in which it occurs, while also revealing the constraints that such norms impose on communication. Through this interplay between language and culture, Austen demonstrates that even the most ordinary conversations are shaped by broader social forces.

Bringing together the previous observations, it becomes evident that small talk in “Emma” operates as a complex communicative system in which ideology, identity, power, and resistance intersect. Although these conversational exchanges appear trivial on the surface, their cumulative effect reveals deeper patterns that structure social life within the novel. At this level of analysis, it is possible to identify the dominant dimension that underlies and connects all others – namely, the relationship between social hierarchy and power as expressed through politeness.

Across lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, politeness consistently functions as a mechanism for regulating social interaction. It determines how characters address one another, how they structure their sentences, and how they manage conversational flow. However, politeness is not neutral. It is closely tied to the distribution of power within the community, shaping who has the right to speak, who must listen, and how individuals are expected to behave in different contexts.

The most revealing moments in the novel occur when this system of polite interaction is disrupted. Emma’s behavior at Box Hill illustrates how quickly the balance between politeness and power can break down. Her remark, though framed as light conversation, exposes the underlying inequality that governs

social relations. The immediate reaction – discomfort, silence, and eventual moral correction – demonstrates that small talk is not merely decorative but deeply connected to ethical norms.

At the same time, the resolution of the narrative suggests that politeness can be redefined. Through reflection and personal growth, Emma learns to use language not as a tool of control but as a means of empathy and inclusion. Her later interactions with Miss Bates, characterized by genuine attentiveness and respect, illustrate a shift from superficial politeness to sincere communication. This transformation highlights the potential of small talk to contribute positively to social relationships when guided by moral awareness.

While other dimensions such as gender roles and identity construction are clearly present, they ultimately operate within the broader framework of social hierarchy. Gender expectations influence who speaks and how, and identity is constructed through discourse, but both are shaped by the underlying distribution of power. For this reason, the analysis suggests that the most productive focus for further research is the role of politeness in maintaining and negotiating social hierarchy.

In this context, small talk can be understood as a performative practice through which social order is both reproduced and, at times, challenged. It reinforces existing structures by encouraging conformity to established norms, yet it also provides opportunities for change when those norms are questioned or reinterpreted. Austen's depiction of conversation thus reveals the dual nature of language as both a stabilizing and a transformative force.

In conclusion, small talk in "Emma" is far from insignificant. It functions as a central mechanism through which characters enact social roles, express values, and negotiate relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research has demonstrated that small talk should be interpreted as a complex and meaningful communicative phenomenon rather than a marginal or purely phatic form of interaction. Within the framework of modern linguistics, small talk functions as an essential mechanism for maintaining interpersonal relationships, establishing social cohesion, and regulating communicative behavior. Although it is traditionally associated with trivial topics and superficial exchanges, its communicative value lies in its ability to structure social interaction and facilitate mutual understanding between speakers. In literary discourse, small talk acquires additional significance, as it becomes a narrative and stylistic tool through which authors represent everyday communication, construct character identities, and encode social meanings. The analysis confirms that small talk plays a central role in reflecting the social reality depicted in the novels of Jane Austen, with particular emphasis on the novel "Emma" (1815), which serves as the primary material for this study.

The theoretical analysis of pragmatic frameworks has shown that small talk is closely connected with the principles of speech act theory and politeness models. From the perspective of speech act theory, small talk consists of a sequence of communicative acts that serve relational rather than informational purposes. These acts include greetings, inquiries, expressions of agreement, and other forms of interaction that facilitate social bonding. From the perspective of politeness theory, speakers rely on specific communicative strategies to maintain social balance and manage relationships. Indirect formulations, hedging, and established politeness conventions allow them to avoid conflict and preserve the public image of both themselves and their interlocutors. Thus, small talk can be understood as a domain in which communicative intentions and social norms are closely intertwined, reflecting both individual agency and collective expectations.

Employing critical discourse analysis allows small talk to be understood as a socially embedded practice that both represents and actively produces power relations and ideological frameworks. From this perspective, discourse is not neutral but actively participates in shaping social reality. By analyzing language at lexical, syntactic, and textual levels, the study has revealed how small talk contributes to the reproduction of social hierarchy, the construction of identity, and the negotiation of power. Critical discourse analysis has proven to be an effective methodological framework for uncovering the implicit meanings and social implications embedded in everyday communication, particularly within the context of Austen's fictional social world.

The practical analysis based on the novel "Emma" has demonstrated that small talk is systematically integrated into the narrative and plays a crucial role in the representation of social interaction. The identification of key

conversational scenes has shown that small talk appears in various communicative contexts, including private conversations, social gatherings, and public events. These scenes reveal that small talk functions as a mechanism for establishing contact, maintaining relationships, and regulating social behavior. At the same time, the findings suggest that the patterns observed in “Emma” are representative of broader conversational tendencies characteristic of Austen’s novels in general.

At the lexical level, the study has shown that word choice plays a significant role in expressing social hierarchy and interpersonal attitudes. The use of evaluative vocabulary, politeness markers, and terms of address allows characters to signal their social positions and relationships with others. Language becomes a tool for categorizing individuals and reinforcing distinctions between different social groups. These features, clearly observable in “Emma,” can be considered typical of Austen’s broader narrative style, in which dialogue functions as a key indicator of social structure.

At the sentence level, the research has revealed that syntactic structures play an important role in shaping communicative behavior. Features such as modality, passive constructions, ellipsis, and thematic organization allow speakers to adjust the level of directness and control the presentation of information. These structures contribute to the expression of politeness and indirectness, enabling characters to navigate socially sensitive situations. The findings indicate that such syntactic patterns are not arbitrary but reflect general communicative norms characteristic of the society depicted in Austen’s novels.

At the text level, the analysis has demonstrated that small talk is characterized by coherence, structured topic management, and narrative framing. Conversations follow established patterns that ensure the smooth flow of interaction and maintain social harmony. The organization of dialogue reflects the expectations of polite society, while deviations from these patterns signal social tension or conflict. Silence and communicative gaps also play a significant role, indicating emotional restraint, social inequality, or underlying tensions. These features further confirm that small talk in Austen’s works operates as a coherent and meaningful discourse system.

The general analysis of the results has shown that small talk in Austen’s novels, as illustrated by “Emma,” is closely connected to broader ideological processes, particularly those related to identity construction, social hierarchy, and power dynamics. Characters use small talk as a means of presenting themselves and negotiating their social roles. Conversational behavior reflects not only individual characteristics but also social expectations and cultural norms. The study demonstrates that small talk functions as a mechanism for maintaining social order, while also allowing for moments of resistance and transformation.

The analysis has also revealed that politeness plays a central role in the relationship between language and power. Politeness strategies regulate

interaction by defining acceptable behavior, but they are also closely linked to social hierarchy. Characters of higher status have greater control over conversation, while those of lower status rely on politeness to maintain their position. At the same time, small talk can serve both as a tool of social control and as a means of individual expression.

In conclusion, the study confirms that small talk in the novels of Jane Austen, examined through the case of “Emma” (1815), is a complex and multifunctional communicative practice that reflects broader social and ideological processes. It serves as a key mechanism for constructing social relationships, expressing identity, and negotiating power. The integration of pragmatics and critical discourse analysis provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how language functions within both linguistic and literary contexts. The results of the research contribute to the fields of linguopragmatics, discourse analysis, and literary studies, demonstrating that even the most ordinary forms of communication can reveal significant insights into the structure of social interaction and the nature of human communication.

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