

The Pragmatics of Courtship in Selected British Novels

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Abstract

Despite the fact that courtship is prevailing over time and place, it has remained somehow pragmatically unexplored. It refers to an interpersonal interaction involving two people from the opposed sex in pursuit of a successful marriage. The current study tries to bridge the gap in the literature by investigating courtship in selected British Victorian novels from a pragmatic perspective. Specifically, this study attempts to do this task by answering the following questions: What are the pragmatic aspects of courtship in the data scrutinized? And what are the pragmatic strategies used to manifest these pragmatic aspects? The study hypothesizes that *Participants in the British novels examined utilize certain strategies of courtship more frequently than others*. Based on the findings, it can be asserted that the British novels selected are loaded with the pragmatic manifestations of courtship. These are pragmatic by nature because they cannot be interpreted apart from their context of use. Additionally, the eclectic model of courtship designed has proven to be successfully workable in analyzing the data of this work.

Keywords: courtship, pragmatics, novels, strategies, interaction, aspects

1. Introduction

According to Thornton (1990), courtship implies a period during which couples develop a romantic relation in pursuit of getting married. It is said that people from various societies uphold different rites of passages. Some of these comprise birth, initiation, marriage and death. In each of these rites language is the central entity. Courtship is ubiquitous in literary texts where it is the only means that can lead to a successful marriage. Suitors resort to employing different strategies in order to capture ladies' attention. Therefore, both the man and the lady have to engage in lengthy exchanges repeatedly where interaction takes place.

1.1 Definitions

It is assumed that since individuals have been evolving for hundred thousand years ago physiologically as well as socially, their behaviours and traditions evolve in the same way. This is the reason why courtship has a few definitions that are slightly different (Heimisdottir, 2015). Courtship has been identified as the time when two people have a romantic relation prior to getting married, or the process of developing such relation (Hornby, 2010, p. 350). Similarly, Chirchir (2016) suggests that courtship refers to a stage between the wooing stage and the wedding day. It is distinguished by the use of language.

Due to the fact that interaction is essential for sustaining good interpersonal connections and this can be attained typically through language, language is crucial to courtship. It is the medium via which the people concerned get to know each other well and reveal their true intentions. As for this study, courtship is taken to signify an interpersonal interaction involving two people from the opposite sex and lasting from dating to marriage. Besides, courtship varies over time and place.

1.2 The Discourse of Courtship

According to Cornish (2006), interaction is a dialogic practice comprising two or more participants sharing a common cultural and personal background. That is, communication is basically a joint activity grounded on the active participation of the interlocutors and the coordination of their actions verbal as well as non-verbal. It is said that courtship and marriage continue to be an indispensable future goal for most young adults and proceed to be a significant personal, social, cultural and economic way in which they accord value to their lives (Singh, 2013).

Grossi (2014) mentions that marriage has been crucial for sexual expression, the reproduction of children, the foundation of society and of social and political treaties. Additionally, it has been regarded as an important way to legalize property, citizenship and the granting and receiving of care. According to Heimisdottir (2015), while primitive instincts may assume a role in courtship in most people, social and cultural factors constitute the frame within which it is normally expressed. It is central for people to procreate children. Courtship is universal in the sense that it occurs in different societies across the globe. Each has its own courtship manner and traditions. Swertz (2013) suggests that courtship is intrinsic and fashioned by culture. Hence, culturally formed courtship patterns have to be passed from one generation to the next. As such it changes over time

1.3 Pragmatic Trends: Context and Intention

Mey (1999) says that in order to comprehend an utterance, one is required to recognize the conditions surrounding its being uttered. In its broadest sense, context encompasses the cultural, political, and economic situations of people whose activities and words are endeavoured to identify or capture within the context of language. So as to determine the real intentions of speakers involved in an interaction, some factors need to be taken account of. Most of these factors can suggest an adequate confirmation to an addressee to reconstruct the intention of a certain speaker within a linguistic exchange (Bousfield, 2008).

2. Method

This section will focus on developing a pragmatic model to be used for analyzing the data of the present paper. The model intended to be designed for the analysis of the data of this work, is grounded on the ideas that have been discussed formerly. Besides, it is based on Searle's (1969) speech act theory, Lakoff's (1973) principles of politeness, presuppositions, and pragma-rhetorical tropes. These components are illustrated below:

2.1 Speech Act Theory

It has been proposed that written or spoken discourse consists of a series of ordered speech acts that convey communicative action and permit the negotiation of meaning in situated contexts (Felix-Brasdefer, 2014).

There are numerous categorizations of speech acts, however this study follows the classification of Searle (1969). Hence, the main categories of speech acts are representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. These acts, which are forms of doing things with words, can be utilized as strategies to realize various functions in the literary discourse.

Concerning this study, speech acts employed by the speaker embrace stating, suggestion, request, promise and compliment. They may be direct (when there is a straight correspondence between the syntactic form of an utterance and its illocutionary force) or indirect (when the mapping between form and function is not direct as in "Why don't you confirm the flight?" which is intended to make an order) (Black, 2006).

2.2 Politeness Principles

According to Paltridge (2006), politeness is significant for understanding why people are inclined to say things in a particular way in spoken and written discourse. Lakoff (1973) offers a conversational-maxim approach to politeness. Politeness can be considered as an extension of the cooperative principle, where Grice's maxims are enhanced by other rules or principles. That is, in this model, the interpersonal rule *be polite* supplements the cooperative principle which she rephrase as the rule *be clear*. Lakoff (1973) presents three sub-rules of politeness. These are: *Do not impose*, *Give options*, and *Make the addressee feel good-be friendly*.

2.3 Presuppositions

Speakers typically assume some information to be already known by their hearers. Such information will usually not be conveyed and consequently will be regarded as part of what is communicated. The technical term utilized to account for this kind of information is presupposition (Yule, 1996).

Moreover, presupposition triggers denote several expressions and constructions that give rise to presuppositions. These can be classed into three categories: existential, lexical and structural (Birner, 2013).

2.4 Pragma-Rhetorical Tropes

According to Mick and McQuirrie (1996), the main concern of rhetoric has always been discovering the most influential means of conveying a thought in a certain situation. That is, when persuasion is the prime aim, the manner in which a statement is portrayed may be more significant than its propositional content. Four tropes will be utilized in the analysis of the data selected. These include:

2.4.1 Metaphor

Metaphor requires an embedded relation of sameness. Hence, in the example a *headlong flight into bonds* which occurs in a financial page of a newspaper, the reader is asked to see something as something else. That is, the widespread selling of shares as disorderly flight. The impact of this is to maximize some aspects of the situation and minimize others. A novel metaphor initiates a search for a figurative interpretation rather than a literal one (Cruse, 2006)

2.4.2 Irony

Black (2006) states that a noticeable demarcation between what is said and the situation is often indicative of irony. Similarly, Wales (2011) states that irony arises whenever the words are used to distinguish the meaning required in the context and apparently intended by the speaker. Utterances such as *Aren't you clever!* or *What lovely weather!* are recurrent in speech and are not to be taken literally. Addressed to another person, it is often sarcastic serving as an oblique polite form of criticism.

2.4.3 Amplification

According to Harris (2008), amplification enables one to draw attention to a word or an idea to ascertain that the reader will comprehend its effect or supremacy in the argument. The strategy of amplification essentially includes ways of manipulating sentences in order to position specific words or phrases in the spot of emphasis. Nevertheless, amplification is a much wider concept than emphasis (Fahnestocks, 2011).

2.4.4 Rhetorical Question

Abrams and Harpham (2009) claim that a rhetorical question denotes a sentence assuming the grammatical form of a question. It is employed to achieve a greater expressive force than a

straight assertion.

Pulling together all the ideas presented above helps us to introduce the model of data analysis in the form of the figure below:

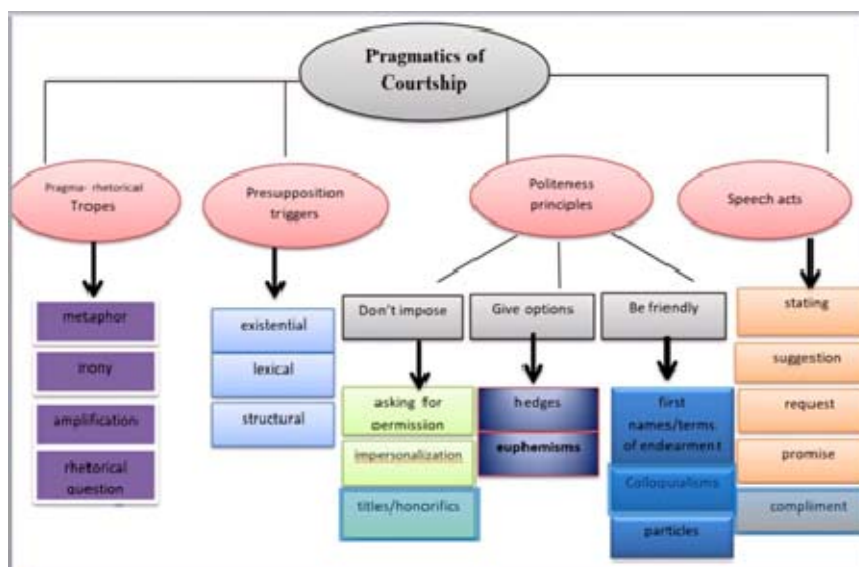


Figure 1. The eclectic model for the analysis of courtship

3. Results

The data are provided by three British novels by Jane Austen. These are : *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Persuasion*. Six different examples are quoted in order to be analyzed in accordance with the eclectic model developed by this study. Three instances are selected as illustrative examples representing the analysis of the other examples.

3.1 Data Description

According to Cardell (2012), Austen's works reflect her own life or that of people close to her. Her novels portray the way of life at that time where class discrimination is very significant. Besides, they depict the opportunities of marriage and romance.

Additionally, her works focus on the complications of courtship and the pursuit of love where heroines have to oppose to social expectations and impediments while seeking to find a partner who meets their own values and goals (Basheer, 2023).

The exercise of arranging marriages according to possible achievements has been in use among British wealthiest families since at least the fourth century. The impact of such a procedure is the establishment of what can only be referred to as a "market" in which women are most often little more than unfortunate pawns (Liria Marrero, 2012).

By the time of Austen's birth, the marriage market has reached such proportions that marriage

itself has become little more than a commercial management rather than a sacred institute necessary for the persistent stability of civilized society. Hence, it has been reduced to an object of ridicule for the stylish classes and is considered as being directly answerable for the ethical corruption of youths (Liria Marrero, 2012).

3.2 Data Analysis

In this section, the analysis to be conducted is a qualitative one which fetches for the manifestation of the pragmatic aspects of courtship in the selected British novels. The analysis is carried out by means of the model designed by this study.

Example₁:

“I was simple enough to think, that because my FAITH was plighted to another, there could be no danger in my being with you; and that the consciousness of my engagement was to keep my heart as safe and sacred as my honour. I felt that I admired you, but I told myself it was only friendship; and till I began to make comparisons between yourself and Lucy, I did not know how far I was got. After that, I suppose, I WAS wrong in remaining so much in Sussex, and the arguments with which I reconciled myself to the expediency of it, were no better than these:—The danger is my own; I am doing no injury to anybody but myself. Elinor, I come here with no expectations, only to profess, now that I am at liberty to do so that, my heart is and always will be yours.”

(Austen, 2008)

a. Speech acts

The speaker Edward issues a series of assertions. These function as a preparation for the next speech act. He states that he wrongly believes that what the addressee (Elinor) feels for him is only friendship and that he harbours unrequited love and puts his own heart at risk. Here, the speaker tries to justify his wrong behaviour towards the addressee represented by his continuing engagement to another lady whom he does not love. His reason for coming is to court Elinor which she accepts. He becomes out of the engagement to Lucy as the latter has been married to his brother Robert.

Another speech act is performed by the speaker when he says “my heart is and always will be yours”. In uttering these words, Edward undertakes an obligation to give his heart to Elinor forever. He says something about a future act which he himself will perform. That is, he promises that he will not fall in love with another woman. He believes that this act is to Elinor’s benefit.

b. Politeness principles

As for politeness principles, the speaker resorts to the second one: *Give options*. This is realized by means of a hedge to convey uncertainty on the part of the speaker in spite of his confidence in the answer he produces. *After that, I suppose, I WAS wrong in remaining so much in Sussex*. The speaker employs the adverbial *I suppose* to convey that he is not totally sure that staying in Sussex is right or appropriate. As such, the speaker acknowledges the risk

that he has violated the quality maxim

The politeness principle *Be friendly* can be identified in the previous instance. This is actualized through the speaker when he uses the hearer's first name (Elinor). He is inclined to create a feeling of familiarity with the hearer and to imply friendship. Such friendship is a manifestation of their actual feelings as they both love each other.

c. Presuppositions

An existential presupposition is presumed to be imbedded in the noun phrase *the argument*. It presupposes the existence of a certain argument known by both speaker and hearer. Another existential presupposition is triggered by the proper nouns Lucy, Elinor and Sussex. This is due to the fact that proper nouns assume the existence of their referents.

d. Pragma-rhetorical tropes

To increase effectiveness on the addressee the speaker employs a metaphor *I am doing no injury to anybody but myself*. Here, the pain of unrequited love which the speaker endures is emphasized and exploited to minimize the impact of the speaker's previous wrong conducts towards the addressee. He wants to enhance an argument that the suffering and pain are mutual.

Moreover, the speaker utilizes another pragma-rhetorical trope of amplification. He lists his wrong doings in such a way that they formulate a series. Each action is more acute than the other and the last one is the most severe of all. Engaging to Lucy, admiring Elinor, making comparisons between the two, remaining long in Sussex, and doing injury to himself.

Example₂:

You pierce my soul. I am half agony, half hope. Tell me not that I am too late, that such precious feelings are gone forever. I offer myself to you again with a heart even more your own than when you almost broke it, eight years and a half ago. Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone I think and plan. Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes? I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me. You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice when they would be lost on others. Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice, indeed. You do believe that there is true attachment and constancy among men. I must go, uncertain of my fate; but I shall return hither, or follow your party, as soon as possible. A word, a look will be enough to decide whether I enter your father's house this evening or never.'

(Austin, 2019)

a. Speech acts

As regards speech acts, the speaker Captain Wentworth produces a speech act of request. He

asks the addressee (Anne) not to prolong his agony and agree to marry him. He wants her to accept his marriage proposal and his utterance accounts as an attempt to get her to do so. Additionally, the speaker expresses a speech act of stating when he states that he believes that men do not forget their beloved ones quickly as the addressee seems to think. He asserts that even though he is undetermined and indignant in consequence of being rejected, he is steadfast as he cannot forget her after eight years of separation. He confesses his love and devotion to her.

Moreover, a speech act of compliment is performed by the speaker “Too good, too excellent creature! You do us justice.” Captain Wentworth indicates that he likes something of the addressee, i.e. being good, excellent and just. He praises Anne and compliments her exceptional merits and qualities.

b. *Politeness principles*

It can be seen that the politeness principle: *Give options* is manifested through the use of hedges which indicate that the speaker is not quite sure about what he is reporting or saying “I must go, *uncertain* of my fate” “or follow your party, *as soon as possible*”. He expresses the idea that attending the addressee’s party that evening is possible or likely to happen.

Be friendly is another politeness principle that can be demonstrated in this instance. The speaker compliments the addressee’s exceptional qualities of being, worthy, intelligent and fair. In case the addressee accepts the compliment this suggests that the speaker’s opinion matters to her as in this example.

c. *Presuppositions*

Existential, lexical and structural presuppositions occur in the previous instance. First, existential presupposition is presumed to be present in the definite nouns *Bath* and *this evening*. Lexical presupposition is triggered by the verb *gone* which refers to a change of state. Here, it assumes that Captain Wentworth and Ann have held feelings for each other. This also includes another lexical presupposition embedded in the iterative *again*. It presupposes that the speaker courted the addressee before.

Finally, structural presuppositions are said to be imbedded in the comparative clauses *too late*, *a heart even more your own than when you almost broke it*, and *that man forgets sooner than woman*.

d. *Pragma-rhetorical Tropes*

To influence the addressee, the speaker utilizes a metaphor *You pierce my soul*. Via portraying his soul as being pierced by his lady, Captain Wentworth emphasizes the intensity of the feelings of pain and agony, and the torture he has endured in consequence of being previously rejected by the addressee. He tries to affect the addressee to accept his courtship and marriage proposal.

Moreover, the speaker employs rhetorical questions *Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes?* Through rhetorical questions, the speaker shows that what he

proposes to the addressee has already been accepted. Captain Wentworth aims at provoking the addressee's agreement with that being conveyed by rhetorical questions and acting accordingly. The rhetorical questions function as indirect assertions.

Example₃:

"You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. My affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject forever. It taught me to hope, said he, as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain, that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly. You, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased.

(Austen, 1998)

a. *Speech acts*

As for speech acts, this example is initiated by a speech act of compliment *You are too generous to trifle with me*. Mr. Darcy shows that he likes something of the addressee. He compliments her tolerance and understanding of his own feelings portraying her as being too generous to do so. Then, he performs a speech act of request asking the addressee to inform him whether the feelings of indifference she once held for him have changed or remained as before. His utterance accounts as an attempt to get the addressee to tell him.

Moreover, he produces a series of assertion to justify his request *It taught me to hope, said he, as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before*. He asserts that the addressee's last conversation with his aunt (Lady Catherine) has made him renew his request in the vain hope that she will accept to be courted to him.

Finally, a speech act of stating occurs here. The speaker states that he believes that if the addressee had rejected him, she would have told that to Lady Catherine *I knew enough of your disposition to be certain, that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly*.

b. *Politeness Principles*

As regards politeness principles, *Be friendly* is manifested in the example in question. It occurs twice. First, it is realized through the use of the addressee's first name *Elizabeth* and terms of endearment can also be identified here *dearest* and *loveliest*. These are employed to reflect a genuine feeling of familiarity between Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth. Then, the same principle is actualized through the utilization of compliments *You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased*. This shows that the speaker admires the addressee for her good qualities. He portrays her as being worthy of happiness and pleasure.

c. Presuppositions

An existential presupposition is believed to be embedded in the definite noun phrase *this subject*. It presupposes the existence of a certain subject known by both speaker and addressee. Existential presuppositions can also be triggered via the proper nouns *last April*, *Lady Catherine* and *Elizabeth*. These assume the reference to a specific April, and the existence of certain individuals named Catherine and Elizabeth. In addition, a lexical presupposition is acknowledged to be present in the factual verb (knew). This presupposes the speaker's awareness of the addressee's nature.

Furthermore, this instance is also characterized by employing structural presuppositions. These occur in the counterfactual conditional *had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly*. It means that the addressee has not decided to reject the speaker's courtship. Another structural presupposition occurs in the temporal clause *I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before*.

d. Pragma-rhetorical Tropes

The speaker employs a rhetorical question *What do I not owe you*. By resorting to a rhetorical question, the speaker shows that he believes that his proposal has already been accepted by the addressee. Mr. Darcy employs this as strategy in order to persuade Elisabeth to accept his proposal. The rhetorical question functions as a strong assertion. Mr. Darcy believes that the addressee is the reason behind the positive transformation in his character and that he owes her everything.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

The current section is intended to enhance the findings of the pragmatic analysis quantitatively by means of the percentage equation.

Table 1. Pragmatic strategies of courtship in the data selected

Pragmatic strategies	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Speech acts	18	33.3%	54
Politeness principles	12	22.2%	
Presuppositions	14	25.9%	
Pragma-rhetorical tropes	10	18.5%	

4. Discussion

The results shown in the table above demonstrate that the pragmatic strategies of courtship are recurrently employed in the data scrutinized. However, speech act strategies are used with a higher frequency than others. This is enhanced by the percentage 33.3%. This finding indicates that the participants in the data analysed resorted to some strategies of courtship

rather than others such as speech acts and presuppositions in order to engage their ladies. This confirms the hypothesis of this study: *Participants in the British novels examined utilize certain strategies of courtship more frequently than others.*

The findings reveal that pragma-rhetorical tropes such as metaphor or rhetorical questions are the least frequent in the data. This can be attributed to the idea that these strategies are employed to exercise emphatic effect on individuals. Due to the fact that the participants in the instances scrutinized know each other for a considerable period of time, they do not need to employ these strategies heavily to influence their ladies since in most cases the act of courtship has been undertaken repeatedly.

5. Conclusions

Courtship is a notion that can be manifested pragmatically and this has been proven by the instances selected for the analysis.

As regards the pragmatic aspects of courtship, the analysis has revealed that speech acts, politeness principles, presuppositions and pragma-rhetorical tropes represent the pragmatic aspects of courtship dominating the data specified. Each is realized by an array of strategies.

The principles of politeness *Give options* and *Be friendly* delineated by the current study both occur in the data. Nevertheless, the principle *Do not impose* has not been resorted to by the interlocutors in the data scrutinized. This can be attributed to the fact that the aim of this principle is to maintain distance and to create a feeling of aloofness between the persons involved.

As for speech acts, the analysis demonstrates that stating, request, promise and compliment are dominant in the data understudy. However, speech acts such as suggestion has never been attested in the analysis. Metaphor, amplification, rhetorical questions comprise the pragma-rhetorical tropes that are occasionally employed in the selected British novels. Nevertheless, irony has never been observed in the data in question.

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