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**Lexical Patterns of Marriage Discourse in Jane Austen's Novels: A
Corpus-Assisted Concordance Analysis**



¹Naeem Arshad

²Uswa Shahid

³Behzad Anwar

¹Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Graduate College, Pasrur.

²PhD Scholar, Department of English, University of Gujrat.

³Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Gujrat. behzad.anwar@uog.edu.pk

Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of marriage in Jane Austen's six major novels through a concordance-based linguistic analysis. Focusing on the frequency and contextual usage of key terms such as *marriage*, *matrimony*, *wedding*, and *material*, the research explores how these lexical choices reflect underlying social and cultural attitudes. The analysis reveals the thematic connections between marriage and issues of financial security, social mobility, and gendered expectations. By integrating quantitative data with qualitative analysis, the study constructs a nuanced narrative that balances the romantic ideals associated with marriage against the pragmatic realities of 19th-century England. The findings also suggest that Austen critically engages with materialism and interrogates self-destructive societal norms. Her focus extends beyond social complexities to a profound exploration of the human condition. This study highlights Austen's subtle critique of the institution of marriage, both at the personal and societal levels.

Keywords: Marriage, Matrimony, Wedding, Social stratification, Financial security, Social mobility, Material, Emotions, Expectations.

Introduction

Marriage is a central theme in Austen's work. It serves as a microcosm for exploring the socio-economic, emotional, and cultural dynamic of 19th century England. During the period in which Austen was writing, marriage was not merely viewed as an expression of love or romantic attachment; rather, it functioned as a societal institution that dictated individuals' lives and defined their social roles and personal identities. If we look at one of the aspects of the marriage at that time it was taken as a practical means to have stability at financial level and to have social status. This is the main reason that marriage at that time was intertwined with the structure of the class and to be stable at the financial level.

Austen is frequently celebrated as an advocate of romantic relationships based on companionship and mutual respect. Furthermore, there is a visible criticism on the constructs of the society at the time Austen was writing. Marriage is described as a transaction rather than the expression of sentiments. She developed such a narrative

which just poses marriage with the societal structuring, necessities of the finance and suicidal expectations. This comparison is very evident in her description of heroines who navigate the shaky balance between individual desires and familial or societal pressure. For instance, Elizabeth Bennet refuses to marry for stability in *Pride and Prejudice*. And Anne Elliot resists family pressures in *Persuasion*. This exemplifies the tension between individuals' desires and external limitations in Austen's era. Austen's critique of commodification of marriage is apparent in her writings. She envisions alternative models of partnership and companionship based on mutual respect, genuine affection and intellectual and moral guidance.

This study employs concordance analysis to examine Austen's linguistic treatment of marriage and its related themes. Her six novels, (1) *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), (2) *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), (3) *Mansfield Park* (1814), (4) *Emma* (1815), (5) *Northanger Abbey* (1817a), and (6) *Persuasion* (1817b) have been utilized. As concordance analysis involves examining the frequency and contextual usage of specific words and phrases to approach underlying patterns and themes, data collected from this kind of analysis provides a linguistic lens to explore the broader themes.

In Austen's selected novels, the term 'marriage' appears 209 times. Marriage being a central theme in Austen's writings is quite evident from its recurrence. Its significance in plotting of characters' lives and building of narrative structures is prominent as well. Yet, the context in which the term is used varies across different novels. And this aspect unveils the multifaceted nature of marriage. It is portrayed as both romantic and a social contract. In *Sense and Sensibility*, 'marriage' is often used in context of financial security, inheritance and social mobility and in *Emma*, the term intersects with social dimensions, class dynamics and personal choice.

In a similar manner, the word 'matrimonial' occurs 8 times only which is less frequent. The term utilizes different sort of transactional as well as formal connotations which basically depict the social framing of the marriage in England. For example, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the phrase 'matrimonial felicity' is notably repeated by Mr. Collins, reflecting his attempt to justify a utilitarian approach to marriage while Bennett talks about the emotional compatibility. The data also reveals that Austen uses her characters to critique destructive societal norms, particularly through her efforts to balance emotional depth with relational dynamics in her

portrayal of marriage and social expectations. The term wedding is used 38 times. It provides the reader another dimension. If we focus in the day, we can see that the term also gives the idea of the issues of irony. By utilizing different techniques, the novelist also highlights the severe attention between the individual realities and social expectations. There are numerous examples which are found in the characters of Austin, for example, if we look at the character of Catherine 's Moreland as well as the director of Henry Tilney. The term wedding basically provides the reader with a combination of numerous aspects, for example, a way of narration is a way to depict personal and social resolutions.

Finally, the use of word 'material' appears 52 times and reflects a pragmatic lens to view marriage and matrimony. Collocations such as "material advantage", and "material consideration" portray the financial grounds of matrimony. In Mansfield Park, Mary Crawford's emphasis on 'material advantage' depicts the prioritization of wealth and status. In contrast, Fanny Price poses moral integrity and emotional depth. Through these kinds of contrasts, Austen critiques the materialistic values that often serve as a ground for matrimonial decisions. But at the same time, she openly advocates unions based on shared values and genuine affections.

Marxist theory has been used for the literary interpretation of the theme 'Marriage and social Stratification'. Austen is called Marxist even before Karl Marx as she talked about economic realities and class realities prior to Marx. By pairing the linguistic analysis with thematic exploration, this study aims to uncover the complex patterns of Austen's portrayal of marriage with respect to social, emotional and economic viewpoints. It addresses a significant gap in Austen scholarship through integration of quantitative concordance analysis with qualitative literary critique. The following research questions guided the researchers to explore the theme of marriage in Austen's novels.

Research Questions

1. What linguistic patterns has Austen used for marriage?
2. What does the concordance of word marriage reveal about social and gender roles?

Literature Review

Austen's novels have always been considered as an insightful commentary on the social dynamics of the Bridgeton era, intersections of marriage, class, and gender in

particular. Researchers have already explored these themes through various lenses. Different researches are already offering incisive explanation on institution of marriage that Austen critiques. However, few studies logically dissect or systematically analyze Austen's dealing of themes relating to marriage through computational strategies, leaving a gap that this study aims to fill. This literature review places in context the already existing research within broader academic discourse on marriage and class in Austen's works.

Marriage and matrimony in Austen's work is one of the central themes, narrative driver as well as a tool to interrogate and criticize societal values. Austen may have had a sharply critical mind (Pittock, 2003) for she gently critiques the societal expectations regarding marriage in her novels. Financial and societal motifs are main catalysts of marriage market of eighteenth and nineteenth century England as depicted in Austen's novels. There is a tension between romantic ideals and practical factors of marriage in her works, and Austen clearly seconds the idea of companionate marriage as well as acknowledging the economic imperatives that often dictate marital choices. The need for marriage especially those from the middle to lower class society is to lift the economic status in a chaotic era as portrayed in *Pride and Prejudice*. When it comes to genteel woman, they must either have money or marry money (Hume, 2013), and this novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, sometimes portrays the suffering of the main character through the whole story (Amelia & Dintasi, 2019).

Some other scholars focus on how marriage is depicted as a transaction, with discussion of dowries and inheritance serving as plot elements. In Austen's view inheritance system was adopted to measure the social class and apply matchmaking (Heaverly, Endang & Kasih, 2020). For families with only daughters and no sons, the parents' wealth is often likely to pass to the brothers or male heirs within the family, reflecting the belief that men are the rightful successors to inherit family assets. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, this practice is exemplified through the inheritance system affecting the Bennet family and Mr. Collins.

Alternatively, in *Emma* Austen presents marriage as an intersection of love, social expectations, and gender hierarchy. Concerning marriage and matrimony, *Emma* not only offers a narrative about individual characters but also provide a broader commentary on gender inequalities (Tariq, Shah & Mahmood, 2024). The

novel ultimately champions the companionate marriage, while critiquing the materialistic and societal expectations associated with matrimony in the period.

Austen's handling of class structure and social stratification is inseparable from her inquiry and exploration of marriage. The comparative analysis of novels of Austen, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Emma*, highlights Austen's keen observation of social class structure and the way it shapes romantic match and relationships. Austen's nuanced portrayal of characters and their interactions sheds light on the challenges, limitations, and sources of empowerment for individuals within societal structures and social stratification (Hasan, 2023). Various scholars have examined treatment of marriage as a social and economic institution in eighteenth and nineteenth century England from Austen's work. The only way to improve social status was through marriage and marrying men of higher social class in that era (Nisa, 2023).

Austen portrays the rigid class structures of her time depicting social mobility tied strongly to marriage and matrimony. For example, Elizabeth Bennet's ascent in *Pride and Prejudice* through her marriage represents upward mobility within social frameworks. The lasting significance of *Pride and Prejudice* is in comprehension of the dynamics of social class and marriage (Bagthaliya, 2023). Differently, in *Emma* Austen often critiques the limitation and constraints imposed by class structure and social stratification through her characters who defy societal expectations while offering varied view points on marriage. Austen critiques the traditional ideas of using marriage to seek class security and improve social status in *Emma*, where several protagonists experience a dramatic change in the face of love and marriage and finally accomplish the life decision, inspiring people to consider real marriage carefully irrespective of social stratification (Yun, 2021).

If it is indeed, "a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife," then it must also be known that a single woman not in possession of a good fortune is forced to be in want of a husband in possession of one in Regency era. Austen's writings present a period characterized by the need for women to preserve themselves from want through the institution of marriage. A clear example is Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*. Regency patriarchy influences the lives and choices of individuals such as Charlotte,

who has to make decisions within societal constraints in pursuit of a stable future (Alkassab, 2024).

Austen's novels provide one single ground when it comes to plots and settings, and these settings connect the concept of marriage with multiple different themes. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen explores the relationship between marriage and class revealing how social hierarchies and financial considerations influenced romantic relationships when marriage and social class were crucial (Bagthaliya, 2023). Likewise, through the experiences of Anne Elliot in her novel *Persuasion*, Austen inspects the influence of social stratification on marriage choices, successfully conveying an understanding of social class and expectations (Phaiyarom, 2023).

There is support as well as defiance of social class in marriage and matrimony in Austen's work, evidently portraying class boundaries as reinforcing in some cases and subverting in others. Characters like Lady Catherine in *Pride and Prejudice* and Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* are portrayal of significance of getting married within one's class. On the contrary, Austen also champions defying class for companionship, as depicted in Elizabeth Bennet's marriage to Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and Fanny Price's union with Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, where love wins against class.

While traditional literary analysis has provided extensive and deep insight into marriage and class, linguistic concordances and other tool-based approaches to text analysis in the digital humanities have opened new windows to explore these themes (Arnold et al., 2019). Different computational methods have been applied on different works of different authors, but their use in Austen studies is yet limited. Several scholars have applied text-mining techniques to examine gendered language and thematic patterns in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature but few have marriage and class in Austen's novel as the focal point. This gap draws attention towards the importance of concordance analysis to contribute to Austen's scholarship. Systematic and data-driven exploration of Austen's texts is provided to get the broader idea of textual pattern (McKee, 2003). This study can bridge the gap between traditional literary criticism and digital humanities. The use of unconventional tools to map the themes of marriage and matrimony to provide new researchers a creative lens to explore Austen's work.

Methodology and Data Collection

This study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating quantitative results from concordance analysis with qualitative literary interpretation to construct a comprehensive understanding of the texts. By combining corpus-based analysis with traditional literary analysis, the study effectively addresses both micro-level linguistic patterns and macro-level thematic developments. A corpus of Austen's six novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1817a), and *Persuasion* (1817b) has been compiled for the concordance analysis. The detail of the corpus is as follows:

Table 1: Details of a Corpus

S. No	Novel	Tokens	Types
1	Sense and Sensibility	125451	7028
2	Pride and Prejudice	119862	7538
3	Mansfield Park	164924	7797
4	Emma	161990	7102
5	Northanger Abbey	78161	6032
6	Persuasion	91136	5904
7	Total	741524	15762

Tokens = Total number of words in each novel.

Types = Number of unique words in each novel.

Total Types = Unique word types across all novels combined, with overlaps removed.

The text of these novels provides a specimen to study the themes related to marriage and it provides a rich corpus for analyzing the linguistic construct as well. Each novel is carefully selected for its unique portrayal of marriage and matrimonial relationships, societal norms, and gendered expectations.

Analysis

To conduct analysis, AntConc software is employed. It is a widely used tool in corpus linguistics to generate detailed concordances. Concordance analysis involves examining a particular word or phrase within a text, along with its context. It identifies patterns of usage and thematic significance. Terms that are selected for this study are 'marriage', 'matrimonial', 'wedding', and 'material'. These key words have

been chosen because they cover various dimensions of Austen's dealing of institution of marriage, its romantic and ceremonial aspects to its financial and pragmatic consideration.

In order to collect the quantitative data, frequency analysis has been done. It identifies how often each of the key terms appears. For example, 'marriage' is found to be occurring 209 times across six novels. Similarly, 'wedding' appeared 38 times, while 'matrimonial' and 'material' are used sparingly. All these terms, despite their frequency rate are thematically rich.

Beyond frequency analysis, the study has examined collocations and clusters as well. This approach provides insights (Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1998) into how Austen has structured the discussions of marriage within her narratives. For example, 'marriage' often appears alongside terms like 'fortune', 'settlement', and 'security' uncovering the economic implications relating to marriage. Likewise, the term 'material' is frequently linked with phrases such as 'material advantage' and 'material consideration', reflecting the pragmatic concerns that shaped the matrimonial decisions in Austen's time.

Result and Discussions

Marriage as an Ultimate Prevalent Theme in Austen's Novels

The word marriage has occurred for almost 209 times which plays a very vital role in the narrative as well as the thematic foundation of the novel. The theme reflects the significance of the marriage in 19th century in the England. Whenever we do the analysis at the contextual level it domestic the multipurpose implications of the characters which are found in the novel of Austen. If we look at the insights which are given by the term, we can see that the term works on the levels and adds to some of the plotting. It further symbolizes and unfolds the imperative of the economic as well as societal forms along with some of the emotional as well as aspirational journey of protagonists of Austen.

In the novel sense and sensibility, the world marriage is described with the theme of social status as well as financial security. It can be seen by the opposing approaches of the dashboard sisters. Then if we look at the word marriage in the novel pride and prejudice it varies of the Bennett sisters who uncover various outcomes and motivations which are associated with matrimony. A number of portrayals of the word

marriage in the novel of Austin typically criticize the institutional flaws by offering a VN of companionship.

Formal Undertones and Matrimonial

Although this term appears only for eight times in the novels which have been selected for the corpus analysis, there are different undertones which are associated with the term matrimonial. The term for praise different sort of the Richard views which are depicting marriage as a sort of contract instead of a romantic commitment. The contextual analysis of this term provides a ground to draw the defense between marriage emotional and legalistic dimensions.

For instance, in the novel pride and prejudice matrimonial is the term which is mostly used by Mr. Collins in order to have emphasis over the two things for example he gives significance to social and economic benefits instead of the emotional connection which is associated with the marriage. Same is the case with the character of Emma as she uses this term to describe the union and the calculated alliance which is taken by characters. Furthermore, examples of these types shed light on the impersonal nature of the marriage

Wedding as Social and Transactional Contract

Looking at the word wedding, it appeared for 38 times in the novel of Austin. It describes the idea of romantic narratives. From the novels of Austin one thing is very clear and it is quite evident that weddings in the novels of Austins are more than applied Driver. Which means to state that they are having a very rich symbolic significance. Events which are mentioned in the novels of Austin specifically wedding events they describe or reflect the dynamics of class growth at personal levels and norms of the society. They further domestic the truth at deeper levels and the relationship relationships they are having with each other.

For example, if we analyze the wedding of Miss Taylor and Harriet Smith did depict the class influence and social standing. If we look at the wedding after the two Miss Taylor with Mr. Weston, it is portrait just as a harmonious union it talks about the social position of corrector instead of focusing on the happiness. On the other side the portrayal of Harriet Aspire is advantages marriage that highlights and uncovered the constraints which are imposed on her by status. That is very uncertain. It further states the Complex interplay between the personal choices as well as that of Class

Austen has treated the term wedding in a sense of subtle irony.

Many-sided and Complex Use of Material

These in other word, which is material as it appears 52 times in the novels of Austin. This word projects very pragmatic idea of marriage. This term is basically combination of different ideas and in a sense different collocations for example which are mentioned in the novels. The best collocations we can derive from the word material as they are in the novel are following material; change material, advantage and material consideration. This word highlights the practical concerns which are related to the matrimonial decisions.

If we look at the novel *Sense and Sensibility*, this term material narrates the theme of financial stability. In *Mansfield's Park*, the idea of the material advantage is in the limelight to marry Crawford's World View. One thing is very common in the novel of Austen is that he uses the dichotomy. Dichotomy in a sense between two things that is emotional authenticity as well as materialism which is significant in her writings. In her writings, we can see that there is a critique to the attitudes of mercenary and further it advocates the unions which are based on affection and love.

Economic Elevation Through Matrimony

When Austen's writings are explored, the institution of marriage is found to be deeply entwined with economic considerations. It reflects the socio-economic realities of Regency England. In *Pride and Prejudice*, it is clearly portrayed that families with limited means face economic imperatives. Illustration of Mrs. Bennett's pursuit of wealthy husbands for her daughters and her fixation on advantageous marriages reflects the financial position of women and sacrifices they were compelled to make in 19th century England. Charlotte Lucas's rational decision to marry Mr. Collins exemplifies these sacrifices. The character of Charlotte has been portrayed by Austen as both sympathetic and critical. It highlights the limitations imposed by societal expectations.

Romantic Love Counter to Societal Duty

The tension between romantic love and societal duty is very apparent in Austen's writings. The frequent associations of 'duty' with terms like 'family' and 'expectations' has been revealed through concordance analysis, reflecting the presence of external factors to be faced by Austen's characters. In *Persuasion*, Anne

Elliot's rejection of Captain Wentworth epitomizes the clash between personal desire and familial obligation. Initially, she sacrifices her happiness for the sake of societal expectations. But her eventual union with Captain Wentworth represents a triumph of personal conviction over external limitations. Austen has portrayed her belief in the transformative power of authentic emotions through the character of Anne.

Conclusion

There are different themes of marriage which are found in the writings of Austen as they play a very strong role in the understanding of the institution of marriage. Furthermore, we can see that there are different roles of matrimony and marriage, which are there in the framework of socio-economic condition of the society. Although the narratives which are mentioned by Austen, she examines the aspect of the marriage not merely as a social contract but also as a romantic bond between two partners. The findings which have been derived through the concordance analysis also state that there are some of the linguistic as well as thematic trends which are employed by the writer in order to depict the true dynamics of the institution of marriage. For example, matrimonial wedding material and marriage, they are used in such a way that they describe the complex underpinning of the suicidal term's emotional aspirations and different agencies which are either individual level are at institutional level.

The term 'marriage' appearing 209 times in Austen's writings is the central theme of her novels. She examines the duality of marriage. Marriage used to be both, a romantic bond as well as socially influenced contract in 19th century England. We can see from the data that Austen doesn't shy away from the harsh realities the way she is acknowledging such type of problems which are found in her era. If we look at a word that is material which is found in her novels, it presents the pragmatic considerations which are found in the discussion about marriage. The study utilized the concordance analysis in order to look at the thematic ideas and procedures at the linguistic levels which are found in the Austen's writing.

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