

Original article

First Impressions are not the Last Impressions: A Phonetic Study Based on TER in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of phonetics and speech patterns in shaping characters' perceptions within Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Originally titled *First Impressions*, Austen's novel utilizes these elements to critique social prejudice, class expectations, and the risks inherent in hasty judgments. By employing Textual Emotional Recognition (TER) as a methodological framework, this research conducts a literary emotion analysis with a specific focus on phonetic features. Adopting this phonetic lens, the study uncovers the emotional architecture of Austen's narrative, establishing a bridge between vocal speech patterns and readers' perception of emotional shifts. Consequently, the findings reinforce the novel's central theme: that first impressions are not the last impressions, a concept that remains highly relevant in the modern social media era. Ultimately, identifying emotions within textual data demonstrates that emotion recognition is paramount to successful communication between individuals. That's because awareness of phonological emotional cues allows individuals to articulate feelings more clearly and mitigate the threats posed by first impressions.

Keywords. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, Phonetics, Speech Patterns, First Impressions.

Introduction

TER as a literary emotion analysis

TER (Textual Emotional Recognition), is a linguistic approach to literary emotion that emphasizes the role of phonetic features and sound patterns in shaping emotional resonance within literature. Traditionally, emotion recognition utilized models with discrete emotion categories [1]. TER functions as a critical tool grounded in the acknowledgement of prosody matrices. Through analyzing linguistic devices, it interprets how texts embed and transmit emotion through lexical rhythm and phonetic texture. Emotions such as joy, anger, love, and fear are revealed through language structure and sound. The connection between a word's phonetic content and its meaning is gaining traction [2,3].

Building upon this framework, this paper applies TER as a phonological syntactic analysis across Mr. Darcy's pivotal letter to Elizabeth, the scene after his rejected marriage proposal (Chapter 35, Volume 2) (1797). By utilizing a phonetic lens, this study explores how specific phonological features develop emotional expressions. Moreover, TER exceeds literal word meanings to discover how the sounds and phonemes of characters' language evoke impression responses. Mr. Darcy's speech, for instance, contains phonological cues that shift from pride and arrogance to humility, vulnerability, love, and moral conviction at the end. Ultimately, recognizing these literary expressions is crucial to adaptive social behavior and successful communication, helping individuals navigate complex relationships and social circumstances or maintain composure under pressure, and make informed choices to stay calm when communication gets complicated. As a result, developing an awareness of emotion recognition helps one realize feelings more clearly and avoid misjudgments.

Pride and Prejudice vs. First Impressions

Jane Austen began her masterpiece in 1796, after she stayed at Goodnestone Park in Kent with her brother Edward and his wife. Originally titled "First Impressions", it was composed between October 1796 and August 1797.[5]. On November 1, 1797, Austen's father sent the manuscript to London bookseller Thomas Cadell; however, the offer was declined by return post. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pride_and_Prejudice Austen eventually revised the manuscript and altered it to *Pride and Prejudice*. Finally, in 1813, Austen sold the copyright to Thomas Egerton of the Military Library, Whitehall, in exchange for £110 [6].

The title change may have occurred to avoid confusion with two other contemporary works published under that name: a novel by Margaret Holford and a comedy by Horace Smith [7,8]. Additionally, Austen was likely influenced by the

final chapter of Fanny Burney's novel *Cecilia*, where the phrase "sufferings and oppositions" as the result of "pride and prejudice" appears three times in block capitals [9]. The novel is notable for its use of free indirect speech, a narrative technique defined as "the free representation of a character's speech, by which one means, not words actually spoken by a character, but the words that typify the character's thoughts, or the way the character would think or speak, if she thought or spoke" [10]. Furthermore, due to the volume of letters throughout the novel, it is considered an epistolary novel. The term "epistolary" /ɪˈpɪstələəri/ derived from the Greek (epistolē) (ἐπιστολή), refers to fiction written as a series of letters between the fictional characters, a format that providing a sense of realism to the narrative [11].

In addition, this narrative structure, through the exchange of letters, allows the reader to gain further knowledge of the characters' feelings. Particularly, the characters who learn to revise their impressions are the co-protagonists, Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. They evolve through their correspondence exchange, and by confronting their prejudices, eventually being rewarded with personal growth and enduring love. Ultimately, while the original title, *First Impressions*, was shifted, it reflects the central theme of initial misunderstandings between characters.

Hypothesis statement

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* reveals how Phonetics and speech patterns in characters' language evoke specific impressions and responses. Through the application of Textual Emotional Recognition (TER), this study demonstrates that Austen's stylistic use of phonological cues proves that first impressions are rarely first.

The purpose and significance of the study

This study seeks to identify misjudgments in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Demonstrating correlations between phonetic density and perceived emotions. While *Pride and Prejudice* has been adapted into stylized films and analyzed extensively numerous times, this research attempts to add a new dimension to the novel's description through an analysis of its vocal expressions and perceived emotions. This focus yields practical insights for the reader, highlighting how a narrow perspective clouds initial judgment that is often inherent in first impressions.

Literature Review

Phonetics as a critical approach to literature

Using TER to analyze literary emotions is often called "written" or "implicit" prosody. In linguistics, Prosody (/ˈprɒsədi,ˈprɒz-/) is the study of speech elements, including intonation, stress, rhythm, and loudness, that occur with phonetic segments (vowels and consonants) or extend across more than one phonetic segment, known as suprasegmental [12].

In this literary theory, authors use specific linguistic cues to make readers hear the text in their heads. According to Fodor (2002), the implicit Prosody Hypothesis, prosodic structures generated during silent reading match those produced when reading aloud. Therefore, implicit prosody is language-dependent and reflects the accent spoken by the reader [13]. Reconstructing prosody through text is a fascinating and nuanced approach. It goes beyond word meanings to explore how the sounds of language evoke emotional responses.

Additionally, Prosody serves as a vital linguistic tool that communicates a speaker's obvious or underlying emotional state and intent through variations in tone and duration. Normally, prosody focuses on how variations in tone and duration convey emotion, allowing us to express sarcasm, enthusiasm, or frustration. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in shaping meaning it provides grammatical structure by acting as spoken punctuation, such as in tone, where stress can distinguish word classes. Linguistic prosody is a key component of the linguistic system; being part of grammar, it interfaces with language domains, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics [14]. The linguistic prosody is part of the language system [15]. However, emotional prosody is not well-described within the linguistic theory; it is often employed in literature to include varied speech communication phenomena. Affective prosody expresses meanings like anger, joy, and sadness; it is relatively consistent across cultures.

Most studies agree that there are specific elements of prosody that are relevant to the process of text emotional recognition into phonetic units: pitch, tension, length, and pausing all contribute to the chunking process. For instance, Kuhn et al. (2010, p. 235) explain that word-final lengthening, declination, and pausing usually signify the end of a unit. Apart from pitch, the encoding of amplitude modulations appears to be important for speech intelligibility [16].

Prosodic Features

These elements represent the primary textual cues and their voice quality features used to convey emotional depth within a narrative novel. By translating visual signals into emotional markers, authors allow readers to hear the cadence and intent behind a character's words.

Intonation and Tempo (Pitch or Tone)

Intonation refers to the melodic rise and falls of pitch signaled by "punctuation melody", which signals varying meanings, emotional states, and grammatical structures such as the distinction between a statement and a question. In TER, this is frequently identified as "feature density". As a key element of prosody, intonation helps speakers signal whether a thought group represents a statement, a question, an expression of surprise, or expresses other unspoken meanings [17]. The pitch contours of a text are implied by punctuations like commas, question marks(?), exclamations(!), periods, and ellipses (...). High punctuation density often indicates a higher pitch, signals of excitement, surprise, panic, agitation, anger, or fragmented thought. Conversely, a lower pitch density expressed through long, uninterrupted stretches of words suggest calm, monotony, sadness, resignation, or deep contemplation.

Intensification

Intensification refers to the strengthening of the force or impact of speech. This involves the use of stress, loudness, repetition, or the addition of specific intensifiers such as very, really, or so. Broadly, intensification is a general device used by speakers to convey their message more clearly and to strengthen their position on it [18]. In a written context, authors use graphical stress as the most direct way to signal emotion. In context, more forceful and louder intensity is equivalent in **bolding**, *italics*, repetition of words, or the use of loaded adjectives and exclamations to reflect anger or joy. Furthermore, reduced or subdued intensity is often found in hesitations or internal monologues that suggest uncertainty, sadness, or fear.

Rate and Tempo (duration)

Narrative tempo, or the perceived speed of speech within a context, often concentrates on sentence length. According to the theory of narrative duration, Genette states that: "the speed of a story is manipulated by the relationship between the length of the text and the dramatic time passing" [19]. The tempo feature is considered "high" when authors utilize short, punchy, and clipped speech to convey excitement, agitation, urgency, panic, enthusiasm, or anger. Conversely, long or slow speech patterns typically correlate with states of sadness, sorrow, serenity, and physical fatigue. Writers combine punctuation, sentence length, and rhythmic flow to simulate how speech rate feels in real conversation. Frequent use of paragraph breaks, dashes (-), exclamation marks (!), or ellipses; create "staccato" rhythm, while long, unbroken blocks of text with commas and semicolons create a "legato" rhythm, mirroring a heavy or depressed emotional state [20].

Table 1. Emotion Recognition Values Based on Prosody Features- Elements- Emotional Recognition Value accurate according to the novel (First Impressions vs. Last Impressions).

Feature	Prosodic Element	Emotional Recognition Value	First Impressions	Last Impressions
Punctuation Density	Intonation / Pitch	Mark's excitement, panic, or surprise	High density of (!, ?) indicates (Surprise/Agitation)	Low density use (., ;) indicates (Resignation / Calm)
Graphical Stress	Intensity/ Loudness	Remarks anger, authority, or joy	Italics and loaded adjectives (forceful / louder intensity)	Absence of stress markers (Calm / sincerity)
Sentence Length	Tempo / Duration	marks urgency, serenity, or sadness	Short, quick, and clipped duration (urgency/agitation)	long duration (Deep contemplation/thoughtfulness)

Analysis

The Emotional Development

This phonological analysis does not merely quantify emotion; it reveals the emotional evolution of characters, the thematic resonance of tone, and the psychological realism embedded in literary structure. The turning point scene that perfectly illustrates the theme “first impressions are not the last impressions” in *Pride and Prejudice* is Elizabeth’s confrontation with Mr. Darcy following his first proposal, then his last letter to her.

This confrontation sets the stage for emotional and perceptual transformation. Elizabeth’s phonological distribution is full of conviction, but it’s also the moment when her rigid first impression begins to crack. While Darcy unexpectedly proposes to Elizabeth, she rejects him fiercely, citing his pride and rigidity, his role in separating Jane and Bingley, and his mistreatment of Wickham. Her speech is emotionally charged and rich with phonological cues that reflect her anger, disappointment, and moral conviction.

Elizabeth’s words are a direct reflection of the theme: her initial impression of Darcy was so negative that it shaped all her subsequent judgments. Then, Darcy’s written response ushers in a new emotional tone, leading to mutual reevaluation and reversing Elizabeth’s prejudicial judgments. After reading Darcy’s letter, she feels deep regret and shame for her misjudgment. Her opinion is reinforced by Wickham’s lies but later overturned when Darcy’s true character is revealed. Over time, her emotions grow into love and happiness as she accepts Darcy.

Moreover, Darcy recognizes Elizabeth’s intelligence and integrity, leading to his transformation and humility. Darcy’s social status, pride, and arrogance make him dismissive early on. However, his failed proposal reveals emotional depth and insecurity; his vulnerability and love, his growth and humility. Darcy’s transformation is expressed in his letter, where he emotionally learns to value character over class. This letter is Darcy’s attempt to explain his actions and redeem himself. It’s formal, yet there’s a tonal shift in his emotions from his earlier prideful demeanor.

To identify emotions manually, without employing phonetic or audio-analysis equipment, just based on TER theoretical framework, the two-table analysis framework will be divided into three matrices based on prosody features. Constructing these features from Elizabeth and Darcy’s exposition before and after Darcy’s letter. The letter is silent but carries a distinct “internal voice” for Elizabeth as she reads it. Using TER on the letter will reveal the phonological cues that reflect their first impressions that do not last.

Key Quotes and Comparative Framework

Pre- Mr. Darcy’s Letter / Elizabeth Bennet’s initial Encounters

“His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world...”

“From the very beginning, from the first moment, I may almost say, of my acquaintance with you, your manners... were such as to form the groundwork of disapprobation...”

“It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion to be secure of judging properly at first.”

Post- Mr. Darcy’s Letter / Elizabeth Bennet’s Shift “How despicably have I acted!” she cried; “I, who have prided myself on my discernment! I, who have valued myself on my abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister and gratified my vanity in useless or blameable distrust. How humiliating is this discovery! Yet, how just a humiliation! Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either was concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.”

Table 2. Comparative Framework of Elizabeth's Impressions

Feature	Prosodic Element	Emotional Recognition Value	Quotations	First Impressions Pre- Mr. Darcy's Letter/ Initial Reaction	Last Impressions Post Mr. Darcy's Letter / Realization
Punctuation Density	Intonation / Pitch	Remarks excitement, panic, or surprise	"How despicably have I acted!" vs. "Till this moment I never knew myself."	High density of question marks and dashes indicates high pitch; suggests erratic and agitation.	Low density/use of periods and semicolons indicates falling pitch; suggests resignation and calm.
Graphical Stress	Intensity/ Loudness	Remarks anger, authority, or joy	"Most disagreeable man" vs. "how just a humiliation!"	Italics and loaded adjectives; suggests forceful and louder intensity.	Absence of stress markers suggests moderate, calm, and sincerity.
Sentence Length	Tempo / Duration	Remarks urgency, serenity, or sadness	"His character was decided." Vs. "I, who have valued myself on my abilities... I, who have... disdained..."	Short, quick, and clipped duration; rapid tempo suggests urgency, defensiveness, and agitation.	long duration; slower tempo suggests deep contemplation and thoughtfulness.

Key Quotes for "first impressions" Mr. Darcy's Proposal

"In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."

"His sense of her inferiority- of its being a degradation- of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination, were dwelt on with a warmth which seemed due to the consequence he was wounding..."

Key Quotes for "Last Impressions" Mr. Darcy's Letter

"Be not alarmed, madam, on receiving this letter, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition of those sentiments or renewal of those offers which were last night so disgusting to you. I write without any intention of paining you, or humbling myself, by dwelling on wishes which, for the happiness of both, cannot be too soon forgotten..."

"The motive which I thus acknowledged was, in truth, one of the least exceptionable of those which influenced me. I had not been long in Hertfordshire before I saw, in common with others, that Bingley preferred your eldest sister to any other young woman. But it was not till the evening of the dance at Netherfield that I had any apprehension of his feeling a serious attachment. ... I had often seen him in love before."

And on Wickham: "His own father did not treat him ungenerously; for, on his leaving college, he was maintained in the hope of being provided for in the church. ... But the church was not his object; he preferred the army. ... His life was a life of idleness and dissipation."

Table 3. Comparative Framework of Mr. Darcy's Impressions

Feature	Prosodic Element	Emotional Recognition Value	quotations	First Impressions (The First Proposal)	Last Impressions (Mr. Darcy's Letter)
Punctuation Density	Intonation / Pitch	Remarks authority, internal conflict, or abruptness.	"In vain I have struggled. It will not do." Vs. "I write without any	High density of periods and stops indicates rising-falling pitch and suggests struggle.	Low density/use of complex punctuation; indicates level pitch; suggests explanatory, steady, and linking

			intention of paining you;"		ideas. (legato or smoother rhythm)
Graphical Stress	Intensity/ Loudness	Remarks pride, social rank, or defensiveness.	"inferiority... degradation.. family obstacles" vs. "I must be allowed to defend myself."	Italics and loaded adjectives; suggests high decibel and authoritative intensity.	Absence of stress markers indicates; lower intensity and suggests calm and sincerity.
Sentence Length	Tempo / Duration	Remarks urgency, concern, calculation, or reflection.	"My feelings will not be repressed." Vs. be not alarmed, madam, on receiving this letter, by the apprehension of its containing any repetition..."	Short, quick, and clipped duration; rapid defensive tempo; suggests agitation and fighting the prejudices	long duration; slower tempo suggests deep contemplation and thoughtfulness.

Conclusion

To conclude, the theme “First impressions are not the last impressions” in *Pride and Prejudice* is deeply emotionally reactive. This is evident through the application of (Text Emotion Recognition), TER —a method that analyzes vocal cues to detect emotional states. While the novel itself is written text, we can simulate TER by imagining how characters would sound if their lines were spoken aloud, considering how their intonation, pitch, and rhythm reflect evolving emotions. Furthermore, prosody adds the acoustic texture, making communication clear and expressive. Without it, dialogue would appear flat and robotic, making comprehension difficult. It effectively demonstrates how visual signals are translated into emotional markers, helping the reader hear the rhythm and intent of the characters. These prosodic features effectively map the transition from first impressions to last impressions by the protagonists in *Pride and Prejudice*. Moreover, TER reveals how Austen uses emotional intelligence and rational growth to challenge the idea that first impressions are reliable. When paired with performance (e.g., audiobooks, theater), TER can guide actors in modulating their delivery to reflect emotional arcs with precision. TER does more than just track emotion—it maps character growth. In addition, the reader is allowed to gain deeper knowledge of the character's internal feelings through the letters exchanged in this novel. Darcy's letter to Elizabeth is a primary example; through his written letter, both the reader and Elizabeth gain insight into Wickham's true character. Mr. Darcy's letter marks a dramatic shift in the novel's trajectory, forcing both characters to confront truth and misunderstanding.

The letter serves as a narrative device that reorients Elizabeth's perception and the reader's understanding of Darcy. By offering a detailed account of his actions and motivations, the letter reveals a more vulnerable and introspective side of him. Darcy's tone is measured and introspective; the slow pace and soft intensity reflect his emotional restraint, showing a hint of regret and respect for Jane. On the other hand, Elizabeth's reaction to the letter is pivotal. It marks the beginning of her emotional maturity and self-awareness. The letter forces her to confront her own prejudice and recognize the flaws in her judgment, proving that initial misconceptions can be misleading and that true character often lies beneath the surface. The letter itself becomes a symbol of transformation. It's not just a plot device—it's a moment of emotional reckoning; it's a bridge between two people who have misunderstood each other. It represents vulnerability, growth, and the possibility of reconciliation. As a symbol of truth and reconciliation, the letter deepens the novel's central themes and reminds us that understanding requires both courage and openness.

Elizabeth's sarcasm and Darcy's stiffness are vocal manifestations of misjudgment. But as they confront their biases, their emotional tones evolve. This transformation is what makes their love story so compelling. It's not just about falling in love—it's about learning to listen, emotionally, and vocally. Their final decisions are based on reasoned understanding, not impulsive judgment. It's not just about romance—it's about learning to see beyond surface judgments and embracing complexity. Ultimately, this research examines emotional content in written language to highlight how essential it is for people to recognize these feelings to communicate effectively. By understanding Text Emotional Prosody, individuals can express themselves more precisely and reduce the potential biases or misunderstandings that often arise from initial encounters, especially in the modern landscape era, where individuals

can bridge the gap created by digital distance and reduce the risks of misunderstanding often triggered by online first impressions.

Conflict of interest. Nil

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