

EVALUATIVE ADJECTIVES AND GENDERED IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S JANE EYRE: A CORPUS-BASED STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Bohdanova Mariia Ihorivna,

PhD Student, Department of English Philology and Linguodidactics
Zaporizhzhia National University
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-9062-9635

This corpus-based stylistic study examines evaluative adjectives as mechanisms of gendered identity construction in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre (1847). Employing Appraisal Theory within a Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, the research systematically codes 71 evaluative adjectives across three characterisation perspectives: Jane's self-descriptions (26 instances), Jane's portrayals of Rochester (34 cases), and Rochester's characterisations of Jane (11 instances). Quantitative analysis reveals striking gendered asymmetries in polarity distribution: Jane's self-characterisation demonstrates 61% negative valence dominated by physical descriptors ("plain", "poor", "little", "obscure"), while Rochester's evaluation employs 73% positive adjectives emphasising aesthetic idealisation.

The study identifies a systematic compensation mechanism wherein Jane concedes physical inadequacy while asserting moral superiority ("soul", "heart", "independent"), enabling resistance to Victorian beauty ideology without direct ideological transgression. Jane constructs Rochester as an Anti-romantic hero through negative formulations ("not handsome", "neither tall nor graceful") that paradoxically establish masculine authority, revealing how identical linguistic structures carry asymmetric gendered meanings. The research demonstrates that evaluative language functions as an ideological negotiation site rather than mere reflection: Bronte creates a narrative voice simultaneously embedded in and resistant to Victorian gender constraints, revealing linguistic agency within structural limitations. Methodologically, the study advances literary linguistics by demonstrating that corpus-based approaches productively illuminate individual literary texts through mixed-methods synthesis of quantitative pattern identification and qualitative contextual interpretation, providing empirical grounding for feminist literary criticism.

Key words: *evaluative adjectives, gendered identity construction, Jane Eyre, corpus stylistics, Appraisal Theory, Victorian literature, feminist linguistics.*

Богданова Марія. Оцінні прикметники та конструювання гендерної ідентичності в романі Шарлотти Бронте «Джейн Ейр»: корпусно-стилістичний аналіз

У статті проаналізовано оцінні прикметники як механізми конструювання гендерної ідентичності в романі Шарлотти Бронте «Джейн Ейр». Спираючись на теорію оцінювання в межах системно-функціональної лінгвістики, ми систематично кодуємо 71 оцінний прикметник у трьох перспективах характеристизації: самоопис Джейн (26 одиниць), опис Рочестера головною героїнею (34 одиниці) та характеристики Джейн надані Рочестером (11 одиниць). Кількісний аналіз виявляє суттєві гендерні асиметрії: самохарактеристика Джейн містить 61% негативно маркованих прикметників, використаних переважно на опис зовнішності ("plain", "poor", "little", "obscure"), натомість Рочестер послуговується 73% позитивними прикметниками описуючи красу Джейн. Дослідження розкриває систематичний компенсаційний механізм: Джейн визнає фізичні недоліки, водночас утверджуючи моральну перевагу ("soul", "heart", "independent"), що дозволяє їй чинити опір вікторіанській ідеології краси без прямого ідеологічного виклику. Джейн творить образ Рочестера як антиромантичного героя використовуючи негативно-марковані конструкції ("not handsome", "neither tall nor graceful"), які парадоксально встановлюють маскуліну авторитетність і демонструють, як ідентичні мовні структури набувають різних гендерних значень.

Результати дослідження засвідчують, що оцінна мова функціонує як простір ідеологічного діалогу, а не пасивного відображення: Бронте створює наративний голос, одночасно занурений у вікторіанські гендерні обмеження та опірний до них, виявляючи можливості лінгвістичної агентності в межах структурних констрейнів. Методологічно дослідження демонструє продуктивність корпусних підходів для аналізу окремих літературних творів через інтеграцію кількісної ідентифікації патернів і якісної контекстуальної інтерпретації, забезпечуючи емпіричне підґрунтя для феміністської літературної критики.

Ключові слова: *оцінні прикметники, конструювання гендерної ідентичності, «Джейн Ейр», корпусна стилістика, теорія оцінювання, вікторіанська література, феміністська лінгвістика.*

Introduction. Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre constitutes a seminal text in the literary representation of female subjectivity and identity formation. The novel's first-person narrative voice enables sustained linguistic self-fashioning, providing an ideal site for examining how evaluative language constructs gendered identity. While Jane Eyre has received extensive critical attention through feminist [3] and psychoanalytic [7] approaches systematic linguistic analysis of evaluative adjectives in gendered character construction remains underexplored.

Evaluative adjectives – linguistic forms expressing appraisal, judgment, or attitude toward entities – serve as

crucial mechanisms for character portrayal in narrative fiction [4]. In Victorian literature, where gender ideology prescribed strict boundaries for masculine and feminine behaviour, evaluative language becomes particularly significant as a site of both conformity and resistance. Jane's declaration – "Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?" [1, c. 363] – exemplifies how adjective clusters simultaneously invoke and challenge social norms. Despite extensive critical engagement with Jane Eyre, corpus-based methodologies analysing distribution, frequency, and polarity of evaluative adjectives in character construction remain rare [2; 5].

Existing stylistic analyses favour qualitative close reading without quantitative support, while linguistic studies of Victorian fiction rarely systematically address gender and evaluation.

This study addresses this methodological gap by integrating corpus linguistics with Appraisal Theory [6] to provide quantitative and qualitative analysis of evaluative language patterns. The research objectives are:

- to identify and code evaluative adjectives characterising Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester;
- to analyse frequency distributions across semantic categories and polarity patterns in relation to gender;
- to investigate linguistic compensation strategies in female self-presentation;
- to illuminate how evaluative language reflects Victorian gender ideology while enabling narrative resistance.

The research questions are:

RQ1: How are evaluative adjectives distributed across semantic categories and polarity in Jane’s and Rochester’s characterisations?

RQ2: How does Jane’s evaluative self-characterisation negotiate Victorian gender ideology?

RQ3: How do Rochester’s evaluations of Jane reframe or override her self-assessments?

Materials and methods. This study employs Appraisal theory [6], a Systemic functional linguistics framework, focusing on the attitude subsystem to analyse how evaluative adjectives encode character judgments and physical appreciations. Literary stylistics and gender theory frameworks contextualise adjectives as ideological markers.

Analysis focused on Chapters 1–2 (Jane’s childhood and early self-perception at Gateshead), 12–13 (first encounter with Rochester and initial mutual characterisations), 23 (proposal scene with concentrated evaluative language negotiation), 26–27 (post-betrayal emotional crisis and identity reassertion), and 37–38 (reunion and transformed characterisations reflecting relational equality). These chapters were selected to capture key developmental phases in both characters’ evaluative trajectories. All evaluative adjectives directly characterising Jane or Rochester in these selected chapters were extracted and coded, yielding 71 instances that constitute a focused mini-corpus of key moments rather than a comprehensive sample of the entire novel.

Systematic manual extraction identified evaluative adjectives expressing judgment, appreciation, or affective assessment. Each adjective was coded across three

dimensions: Semantic category (Physical, Moral/Character, Emotional, Intellectual, Social); Polarity (Positive, Negative, Neutral/Mixed); Frequency. Data were organised by perspective, yielding 71 coded instances: Jane’s self-descriptions (26), Jane’s descriptions of Rochester (34), Rochester’s descriptions of Jane (11). Adjectives can be assigned to more than one semantic category (e.g., poor as both physical and social), so category percentages per perspective sum to more than 100%. All percentages are calculated over the number of adjectives in that perspective ($N = 26 / 34 / 11$) (Table 1, 2).

Analysis integrated quantitative methods (frequency distributions, polarity ratios) with qualitative discourse analysis examining rhetorical functions and compensation strategies. A second coder independently annotated 30% of the data; inter-rater agreement reached 85% (percentage agreement), and remaining discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Discussion. The systematic analysis of evaluative adjectives in Jane Eyre reveals 71 coded instances distributed across three distinct characterisation perspectives. Jane’s self-description accounts for 26 adjectives (37% of the corpus), her portrayal of Rochester comprises 34 adjectives (48%), while Rochester’s characterisation of Jane yields 11 adjectives (15%). This distribution pattern itself constitutes a significant finding. The pronounced asymmetry between Jane’s extensive self-characterisation and Rochester’s minimal self-description reflects fundamental differences in how Victorian gender ideology positioned women and men in the articulation of identity. Women operated under cultural imperatives requiring constant linguistic self-negotiation and social image management. At the same time, men’s identities remained anchored in public achievement and legal status, demanding comparatively little verbal self-justification.

Physical appearance emerges as the dominant semantic category across all three perspectives, consistently comprising 58–59% of evaluative language. This finding aligns with Victorian literary conventions that privilege visual description in character construction. However, the functional deployment of physical descriptors varies substantially depending on both the speaker and the subject being characterised. The polarity analysis reveals particularly striking asymmetries. Jane’s self-characterisation demonstrates overwhelmingly negative valence, with 61% of adjectives carrying unfavourable connotations. Only 31% of her self-descriptors are positive, while 8% are neu-

Table 1

Frequency distribution of evaluative adjectives by semantic category

Semantic Category	Jane → Self	Rochester → Jane	Jane → Rochester
Physical appearance	15 (58%)	8 (73%)	20 (59%)
Moral/Character traits	9 (35%)	2 (18%)	12 (35%)
Emotional states	8 (31%)	1 (9%)	8 (24%)
Intellectual qualities	2 (8%)	0 (0%)	2 (6%)
Social/Professional status	7 (27%)	0 (0%)	3 (9%)
Total adjectives coded	26	11	34

tral or ambiguous. This stands in sharp contrast to Rochester's evaluation of Jane, which employs 73% positive adjectives, and to Jane's balanced portrayal of Rochester at 47% negative and 35% positive polarity.

The frequency analysis of specific adjectives provides further insight into these patterns. Jane's most repeated self-descriptor, "*plain*", appears four times across the narrative – a frequency matched only by "*grim*" in her characterisation of Rochester. The semantic clustering of Jane's negative self-descriptors proves particularly illuminating: "*plain*" (4 occurrences), "*poor*" (3), "*little*" (3), and "*obscure*" (2) form a constellation of physical and social inadequacy. These four adjectives converge in what has become the novel's most iconic moment of self-characterisation: "*Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless?*" [1, c. 363]. This concentrated deployment of negative evaluative language functions as more than mere description; it represents a strategic rhetorical move within Victorian discourse.

The positive adjectives in Jane's self-characterisation cluster exclusively within the moral and character domain rather than the physical. "*Independent*" appears twice, representing the quality toward which her entire developmental trajectory aims. "*Free*" occurs once but carries substantial thematic weight, as do her assertions regarding "*soul*" and "*heart*". This semantic distribution reveals what we term a compensation mechanism in Jane's identity construction strategy. She concedes physical and social deficits while asserting that she has equivalent or superior moral and spiritual worth. This linguistic pattern enables Jane to acknowledge Victorian society's judgments about her appearance and class position while simultaneously relocating human value from the external, socially determined sphere of physical beauty to the internal, self-determined realm of moral character.

The rhetorical structure operating in Jane's famous self-characterisation merits close examination. The four-adjective sequence of negative descriptors functions as a con-

cession move – Jane accepts Victorian judgments without disputing their factual accuracy. She does not claim beauty, wealth, prominence, or physical stature. However, the immediate rhetorical reversal – "*You think wrong! I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart!*" [1, c. 363] – reframes the evaluative framework entirely. The interrogative format exposes the logical disjunction between physical appearance and inner worth, while the emphatic assertion establishes not merely adequacy but equality of spiritual and emotional substance despite acknowledged social inequality. The comparative construction "*as much ... as you*" proves particularly significant, asserting parity with Rochester despite his superior class position and thereby claiming equality across both gender and class boundaries through shared humanity.

This rhetorical pattern recurs with systematic consistency throughout Jane's self-characterisation: physical plainness conceded, moral worth asserted; social marginalisation acknowledged, spiritual equality claimed; material poverty accepted, emotional richness insisted upon. The strategy enables Jane to resist Victorian beauty standards and class hierarchies without mounting direct ideological challenges that would position her as socially transgressive. She operates within available discourses – accepting the evaluative lexicon of "*plainness*", "*poverty*", and "*obscurity*" – while strategically relocating the site of human value from external appearance to internal character.

Jane's relationship to the adjective "*plain*" requires extended analysis, given its frequency and ideological significance. Within Victorian discourse, "*plain*" functioned as a euphemistic code for female unattractiveness, serving as a socially acceptable alternative to more explicitly negative terminology. To be designated "*plain*" signified failure at what Victorian ideology constructed as women's primary social function: the cultivation and display of beauty. Through repeated self-identification as "*plain*", Jane participates in her own aesthetic objectification, internalising the evaluative male gaze that assessed women primarily as

Table 2

Polarity distribution in Victorian character portrayal

Polarity	Jane → Self	Rochester → Jane	Jane → Rochester
Positive (+)	8 (31%)	8 (73%)	12 (35%)
Negative (-)	16 (61%)	2 (18%)	16 (47%)
Neutral/Mixed (±)	2 (8%)	1 (9%)	6 (18%)
Total	26 (100%)	11 (100%)	34 (100%)

Table 3

Most frequent evaluative adjectives

Jane's Self-Description	Frequency	Jane's Description of Rochester	Frequency
plain	4	grim	4
poor	3	dark	3
little	3	stern	2
independent	2	peculiar	2
obscure	2	strong	2

visual objects. However, her deployment of “plainness” demonstrates increasing strategic sophistication across the narrative. Early instances present plainness as a painful fact requiring endurance – “*Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain*” [1, c. 229] – representing straightforward self-assessment without evident resistance. Later usage, particularly during courtship with Rochester, deploys plainness defensively against romantic idealisation: “*Don’t address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess*” [1, c. 371]. This insistence on plainness, even when explicitly declared beautiful by her lover, demonstrates resistance to objectification and idealisation. Jane refuses to be transformed into a romantic object, insisting instead on authentic self-definition, even when that definition carries social devaluation. The addition of “*Quakerish*” proves particularly revealing, connecting plainness to religious sincerity and moral gravity. Quaker women’s plain dress signalled chosen simplicity and spiritual depth rather than unfortunate aesthetic deficit, enabling Jane to reframe lack as an ethical choice.

Jane’s characterisation of Rochester reveals parallel structural patterns with crucial gendered variations. Physical description similarly dominates at 59% of evaluative adjectives, yet rather than constructing deficiency, these descriptors establish masculine presence, authority, and power. Rochester emerges as what we designate an *anti-romantic hero* through explicit negative constructions that define him by contrast with conventional romantic ideals. Jane’s initial extended observation articulates this pattern: “*Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will*” [1, c. 163]. The counterfactual construction establishes that Rochester is explicitly not handsome, not heroically configured, and not young, yet these absences function as enabling conditions for the relationship rather than constraints. Additional negative formulations elaborate this pattern: Rochester is “*neither tall nor graceful*” [1, c. 172], his nose proves “*more remarkable for character than beauty*” [1, c. 171], and his appearance generally lacks conventional masculine attractiveness markers. Crucially, Rochester’s divergence from beauty standards appears without accompanying anxiety or compensatory strategies. His worth locates naturally in *character* rather than *beauty* – an evaluative standard Jane must argue strenuously to establish for herself, but which applies to him without justification.

Jane’s physical descriptions of Rochester employ a distinctive semantic cluster emphasising solidity, strength, and severity. As Table 3 demonstrates, “*grim*” appears four times with identical frequency to “*plain*” in Jane’s self-description, yet signalling entirely different implications. Jane notes “*his grim mouth, chin, and jaw – yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake*” [1, c. 171] with emphatic repetition and metanarrative commentary foregrounding Rochester’s stern appearance. “*Dark*” appears three times, constructing impressions of shadow and mystery. Physical solidity emerges through terms including “*granite-hewn features*”, “*massive head*”, “*broad-chested*”, “*athletic*”, and “*square forehead made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair*” [1, c. 171–172]. These adjectives construct masculinity

through imagery of stone, weight, angularity, and physical strength rather than aesthetic appeal. The polarity distribution for Rochester shows 47% negative adjectives, yet many coded as technically harmful – “*stern*”, “*rough*”, “*grim*”, “*ireful*” – function within Victorian gender ideology to signal masculine authority, decisiveness, and power rather than inadequacy. This reveals a fundamental principle: identical linguistic structures carry different gendered meanings. Negative adjectives applied to women signal failure at prescribed femininity; identical negative adjectives used to men often signal successful masculinity, particularly when suggesting strength, authority, or emotional restraint.

Jane frequently characterises Rochester through contradictory adjective pairings that emphasise psychological complexity: “*frigid and rigid*” [1, c. 187] in the morning transforms to “*expanded and genial*” [1, c. 187] in the evening; “*grim*” appearance coexists with capacity for genuine “*smiles*”; “*peculiar*”, “*reserved*” and “*brooding*” qualities combine with “*clever*” intelligence and warm intimacy. This linguistic construction of contradiction positions Rochester as psychologically deep and emotionally variable – qualities associated with interiority and individual subjectivity rather than social conformity. The substantial proportion of neutral or ambiguous adjectives in Rochester’s characterisation (18%) reflects this complexity, suggesting masculine identity encompasses contradiction and multiplicity to degrees that rigidly policed feminine identity may not permit. Rochester’s transformation following physical injury reveals significant evaluative shifts. Though “*blind*” and diminished, his characterisation incorporates adjectives of emotional warmth previously absent: “*smiles played over his face, joy dawned on his forehead*” [1, c. 629] and “*his lineaments softened and warmed*” [1, c. 629]. The description of “*a tear slide from under the sealed eyelid, and trickle down the manly cheek*” [1, c. 639] exemplifies the novel’s sophisticated negotiation of masculinity, as blindness and tears coexist with the assertion of the “*manly cheek*” preserving masculine identity even in vulnerability.

Rochester’s characterisation of Jane produces a dramatic reversal of her self-assessment, illuminating power dynamics inherent in gendered evaluation. Where Jane employs 61% negative polarity in self-description, Rochester deploys 73% positive adjectives – a striking inversion clearly visible in Table 2. His characterisations privilege physical beauty: “*blooming*”, “*smiling*”, “*pretty*” (twice), “*sunny-faced*”, “*dimpled*”, “*rosy lips*”, “*satinsmooth hazel hair*”, “*radiant hazel eyes*”. This concentration of positive physical descriptors directly contradicts Jane’s consistent self-identification as “*plain*”, revealing how male observers claimed cultural authority to redefine female worth despite women’s self-knowledge.

The positive adjectives in Jane’s self-characterisation cluster exclusively within the moral and character domain rather than the physical. “*Independent*” appears twice, representing the quality toward which her entire developmental trajectory aims. “*Free*” occurs once but carries substantial thematic weight, as do her assertions regarding “*soul*” and “*heart*”. This semantic distribution reveals what we term a compensation mechanism in Jane’s identity con-

Most frequent evaluative adjectives

Jane's Self-Description	Frequency	Jane's Description of Rochester	Frequency
plain	4	grim	4
poor	3	dark	3
little	3	stern	2
independent	2	peculiar	2
obscure	2	strong	2

struction strategy. She concedes physical and social deficits while asserting that she has equivalent or superior moral and spiritual worth. This linguistic pattern enables Jane to acknowledge Victorian society's judgments about her appearance and class position while simultaneously relocating human value from the external, socially determined sphere of physical beauty to the internal, self-determined realm of moral character.

The rhetorical structure operating in Jane's famous self-characterisation merits close examination. The four-adjective sequence of negative descriptors functions as a concession move – Jane accepts Victorian judgments without disputing their factual accuracy. She does not claim beauty, wealth, prominence, or physical stature. However, the immediate rhetorical reversal – “*You think wrong! I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart!*” [1, c. 363] – reframes the evaluative framework entirely. The interrogative format exposes the logical disjunction between physical appearance and inner worth, while the emphatic assertion establishes not merely adequacy but equality of spiritual and emotional substance despite acknowledged social inequality. The comparative construction “*as much ... as you*” proves particularly significant, asserting parity with Rochester despite his superior class position and thereby claiming equality across both gender and class boundaries through shared humanity.

This rhetorical pattern recurs with systematic consistency throughout Jane's self-characterisation: physical plainness conceded, moral worth asserted; social marginalisation acknowledged, spiritual equality claimed; material poverty accepted, emotional richness insisted upon. The strategy enables Jane to resist Victorian beauty standards and class hierarchies without mounting direct ideological challenges that would position her as socially transgressive. She operates within available discourses – accepting the evaluative lexicon of “*plainness*”, “*poverty*”, and “*obscurity*” – while strategically relocating the site of human value from external appearance to internal character.

Jane's relationship to the adjective “*plain*” requires extended analysis, given its frequency and ideological significance. Within Victorian discourse, “*plain*” functioned as a euphemistic code for female unattractiveness, serving as a socially acceptable alternative to more explicitly negative terminology. To be designated “*plain*” signified failure at what Victorian ideology constructed as women's primary social function: the cultivation and display of beauty. Through repeated self-identification as “*plain*”, Jane participates in her own aesthetic objectification, internalising

the evaluative male gaze that assessed women primarily as visual objects. However, her deployment of “*plainness*” demonstrates increasing strategic sophistication across the narrative. Early instances present plainness as a painful fact requiring endurance – “*Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain*” [1, c. 229] – representing straightforward self-assessment without evident resistance. Later usage, particularly during courtship with Rochester, deploys plainness defensively against romantic idealisation: “*Don't address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess*” [1, c. 371]. This insistence on plainness, even when explicitly declared beautiful by her lover, demonstrates resistance to objectification and idealisation. Jane refuses to be transformed into a romantic object, insisting instead on authentic self-definition, even when that definition carries social devaluation. The addition of “*Quakerish*” proves particularly revealing, connecting plainness to religious sincerity and moral gravity. Quaker women's plain dress signalled chosen simplicity and spiritual depth rather than unfortunate aesthetic deficit, enabling Jane to reframe lack as an ethical choice.

Jane's characterisation of Rochester reveals parallel structural patterns with crucial gendered variations. Physical description similarly dominates at 59% of evaluative adjectives, yet rather than constructing deficiency, these descriptors establish masculine presence, authority, and power. Rochester emerges as what we designate an *anti-romantic hero* through explicit negative constructions that define him by contrast with conventional romantic ideals. Jane's initial extended observation articulates this pattern: “*Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will*” [1, c. 163]. The counterfactual construction establishes that Rochester is explicitly not handsome, not heroically configured, and not young, yet these absences function as enabling conditions for the relationship rather than constraints. Additional negative formulations elaborate this pattern: Rochester is “*neither tall nor graceful*” [1, c. 172], his nose proves “*more remarkable for character than beauty*” [1, c. 171], and his appearance generally lacks conventional masculine attractiveness markers. Crucially, Rochester's divergence from beauty standards appears without accompanying anxiety or compensatory strategies. His worth locates naturally in *character* rather than beauty – an evaluative standard Jane must argue strenuously to establish for herself, but which applies to him without justification.

Jane's physical descriptions of Rochester employ a distinctive semantic cluster emphasising solidity, strength, and severity. As Table 3 demonstrates, “*grim*” appears four

times with identical frequency to “plain” in Jane’s self-description, yet signalling entirely different implications. Jane notes “his grim mouth, chin, and jaw—yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake” [1, c. 171] with emphatic repetition and metanarrative commentary foregrounding Rochester’s stern appearance. “Dark” appears three times, constructing impressions of shadow and mystery. Physical solidity emerges through terms including “granite-hewn features”, “massive head”, “broad-chested”, “athletic”, and “square forehead made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair” [1, c. 171-172]. These adjectives construct masculinity through imagery of stone, weight, angularity, and physical strength rather than aesthetic appeal. The polarity distribution for Rochester shows 47% negative adjectives, yet many coded as technically harmful – “stern”, “rough”, “grim”, “ireful” – function within Victorian gender ideology to signal masculine authority, decisiveness, and power rather than inadequacy. This reveals a fundamental principle: identical linguistic structures carry different gendered meanings. Negative adjectives applied to women signal failure at prescribed femininity; identical negative adjectives used to men often signal successful masculinity, particularly when suggesting strength, authority, or emotional restraint.

Jane frequently characterises Rochester through contradictory adjective pairings that emphasise psychological complexity: “frigid and rigid” [1, c. 187] in the morning transforms to “expanded and genial” [1, c. 187] in the evening; “grim” appearance coexists with capacity for genuine “smiles”; “peculiar”, “reserved” and “brooding” qualities combine with “clever” intelligence and warm intimacy. This linguistic construction of contradiction positions Rochester as psychologically deep and emotionally variable – qualities associated with interiority and individual subjectivity rather than social conformity. The substantial proportion of neutral or ambiguous adjectives in Rochester’s characterisation (18%) reflects this complexity, suggesting masculine identity encompasses contradiction and multiplicity to degrees that rigidly policed feminine identity may not permit. Rochester’s transformation following physical injury reveals significant evaluative shifts. Though “blind” and diminished, his characterisation incorporates adjectives of emotional warmth previously absent: “smiles played over his face, joy dawned on his forehead” [1, c. 629] and “his lineaments softened and warmed” [1, c. 629]. The description of “a tear slide from under the sealed eyelid, and trickle down the manly cheek” [1, c. 639] exemplifies the novel’s sophis-

ticated negotiation of masculinity, as blindness and tears coexist with the assertion of the “manly cheek” preserving masculine identity even in vulnerability.

Rochester’s characterisation of Jane produces a dramatic reversal of her self-assessment, illuminating power dynamics inherent in gendered evaluation. Where Jane employs 61% negative polarity in self-description, Rochester deploys 73% positive adjectives – a striking inversion clearly visible in Table 2. His characterisations privilege physical beauty: “blooming”, “smiling”, “pretty” (twice), “sunny-faced”, “dimpled”, “rosy lips”, “satin-smooth hazel hair”, “radiant hazel eyes”. This concentration of positive physical descriptors directly contradicts Jane’s consistent self-identification as “plain”, revealing how male observers claimed cultural authority to redefine female worth despite women’s self-knowledge.

Table 4 illustrates stark contrasts in Beauty discourse across perspectives. Rochester’s diminutive forms – “pale, little elf” [1, c. 406], “mustard-seed” [1, c. 406] – simultaneously express affection and maintain power hierarchies through size emphasis. Significantly, he echoes Jane’s self-assessment – “poor and obscure, and small and plain as you are” [1, c. 365] – before reframing her as “a beauty in my eyes” [1, c. 371], a phrase marking evaluation as subjective male perception rather than objective truth. His metaphorical characterisations – “wild, frantic bird” [1, c. 364], “strange, almost unearthly thing” [1, c. 365] – shift focus from conventional beauty to emotional intensity, aligning with Jane’s emphasis on “soul” and “heart”.

The comparative analysis reveals systematic gendered asymmetries in the deployment of evaluative language. Jane engages in comprehensive self-characterisation across all semantic categories, reflecting Victorian women’s precarious social positioning and the constant linguistic negotiation it requires. Rochester characterises Jane primarily physically (73% of adjectives), while Jane’s characterisation of Rochester, though physically focused (59%), incorporates substantial character analysis (35%). Most significantly, Rochester never engages in the anxious, negative self-characterisation that marks Jane’s identity work. His single self-description – “a crumpled, scratched page” [1, c. 366] – occurs during emotional extremity and employs figurative language, suggesting divergence from beauty standards carries profoundly different weight across genders.

Both characters undergo an evaluative transformation that converges toward relational equality. Jane’s trajectory –

Table 4

Comparative “Beauty Discourse” Patterns

Aspect	Jane → Self	Rochester → Jane	Jane → Rochester
Beauty-related terms	plain (4×), not a beauty, obscure, little	pretty (2×), beauty, blooming, radiant, delicate	negative formulations: “not handsome”, “neither tall nor graceful”
Compensatory terms	soul, heart, independent, free	–	character (over beauty), strong, masculine
Dominant strategy	Physical negation + moral assertion	Aesthetic idealization	Anti-romantic hero
Overall tone	Self-deprecating (61% negative)	Admiring (73% positive)	Realistic (47% negative)

from others' hostile judgments through self-definition via negation to positive assertion – parallels Rochester's progression from harsh authority through contradiction to emotional openness. The narrative resolution pairs his physical diminishment with her social elevation, creating linguistic convergence: Rochester becomes partially feminised through emotional adjectives, Jane partially masculinised through autonomy descriptors. The study demonstrates that corpus methods can be productively applied to individual literary texts, with intensive coding enabling detailed contextualization alongside pattern identification. This mixed-methods approach synthesises linguistic precision with interpretive depth, advancing literary linguistics by grounding interpretive claims in empirical data.

Results and Conclusions. This corpus-based analysis of 71 evaluative adjectives reveals three principal gendered

patterns in *Jane Eyre*: compensation mechanism (physical self-deprecation paired with moral assertion), anti-romantic hero construction (negative formulations establishing masculine authority), and male definitional authority (Rochester's reversal of Jane's self-assessment).

The theoretical contribution demonstrates evaluative language as an ideological negotiation site rather than a mere reflection. Bronte creates a voice simultaneously embedded in and resistant to Victorian gender ideology, revealing linguistic agency within structural constraints. Limitations include a single-text focus. Future research should pursue: comparative Victorian corpus analysis; diachronic pattern tracking; authorial gender comparison; pedagogical application for stylistics instruction. Such research would illuminate whether these patterns represent period-wide conventions or Bronte-specific feminist strategies.

Bibliography:

1. Bronte, C. *Jane Eyre*. Kharkiv : Folio, 2021. 653 p.
2. Culpeper, J. *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts*. London : Routledge, 2021. 344 p.
3. Gilbert, S. M., Gubar, S. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven : Yale University Press, 1979. 732 p.
4. Leech, G., Short, M. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. 2nd ed. Harlow : Pearson Longman, 2007. 425 p.
5. Mahlberg, M. *Corpus Stylistics and Dickens's Fiction*. New York : Routledge, 2013. 240 p.
6. Martin, J. R., White, P. R. R. *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 278 p.
7. Moglen, H. *Charlotte Bronte: The Self Conceived*. New York : W. W. Norton & Co, 1976. 264 p.

References:

1. Bronte, C. (2021). *Jane Eyre*. Folio.
2. Culpeper, J. (2001). *Language and characterisation: People in plays and other texts*. Pearson Education/Routledge.
3. Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (1979). *The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. Yale University Press.
4. Leech, G., & Short, M. (2007). *Style in fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose (2nd ed.)*. Pearson Longman.
5. Mahlberg, M. (2013). *Corpus stylistics and Dickens's fiction*. Routledge.
6. Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
7. Moglen, H. (1976). *Charlotte Bronte: The self conceived*. W. W. Norton & Co.

Дата першого надходження рукопису до видання: 28.10.2025

Дата прийнятого до друку рукопису після рецензування: 25.11.2025

Дата публікації: 24.12.2025