

# A Model for the Pragmatic Analysis of Gossip

## نموذج لتحليل الاغتياب تداوليا

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### المخلص

يعرف الإغتياب على أنه عبارة عن معلومات ايجابية أو سلبية تدور حول السلوكيات الغير مقبولة إجتماعيا لطرف ثالث ( غالبا ما يكون غائبا وقت الحديث أو قد يكون حاضرا من دون مشاركة في الحوار). إن موضوع الإغتياب من السعة والتشعب بمكان إلى حد تناوله بشيء من التحليل ضمن حقول علمية مختلفة. لقد زخرت عدة من الدراسات بمحاولات مختلفة لتحليل هذه الظاهرة براغماتيا. وعلى الرغم ذلك عانت تلك المحاولات من عدم الدقة أحيانا وإحتوائها على الثغرات في أحيان أخرى أضف لذلك كله عدم تمكنها من طرق الموضوع بصورة وافية. لذا تنطوي هذه الدراسة على محاولة لتطوير نموذج لتحليل الإغتياب براغماتيا حيث إستندت الدراسة إلى اثنين من النماذج السابقة وما إهتدى إليه الباحثان من مشاهدات براغماتية للموضوع. تمت عملية التحقق من فعالية عمل النموذج بواسطة اجراء تحليل البيانات المستحصلة من رواية اوستن (أما/Emma) وبرهنت الدراسة على فعالية عمل النموذج التحليلي باستخدام عملية التحليل والتي خلصت إلى نتائج براغماتية تتعلق بمسألة الإغتياب في الرواية قيد البحث.

### Abstract

Gossip is a positive or a negative evaluative information about contextually determined and deviant acts of third party(ies) (most often

non-present, but potentially present in the conversation). However, gossip is a broad topic that has been approached from different angles. Several studies have attempted to tackle gossip pragmatically. Yet, those attempts have suffered from many gaps and drawbacks, in addition to the insufficient accounts that characterize them. Accordingly, this paper is an attempt to develop a pragmatic model for the analysis of gossip. This model is based upon two relevant previous models of gossip as well as the pragmatic observations made by the researchers concerning the topic.

The validity of the developed model has been tested by means of analyzing twenty gossip situations taken from Jane Austen's *Emma*. As a result, the developed model has proved its validity in pragmatically analyzing gossip on the basis of the pragmatic findings and conclusions arrived at in that novel.

### **1. Introduction**

People gossip constantly at the office, over the fence within families and at happy hour. Everyone gossips. Gossip occurs in every society, among young and old people. You can gossip with just a few people or with a lot, depending on the medium you use to transmit your information. Thus, gossip is the spoken script for most face-to-face encounters.

Yet, few people understand gossip's complex nature. Some think it is negative, especially targets (people spoken about), who have experienced its negative effects. However, some view gossip as a positive aspect of life, in that it enhances social cohesion and acculturation (Schmidt, 2004:1).

Nowadays, gossip has been tackled more deeply at different levels. For instance, there have been studies (such as Eder and Enke's 1997), that have touched upon the linguistic side of gossip, i.e. investigating and analyzing gossip via the employment of pure linguistic tools. Other studies such as Stouck and Giltrow (1991) and Prodan's (1998) have approached gossip on the pragmatic and the sociolinguistic levels, yet rather rapidly and superficially. That is, the pragmatic level has been treated quickly and haphazardly. In other words, the pragmatic principles involved in composing the pragmatic structure of gossip have been dealt with without giving a full account of their employment in gossip. Besides Prodan's (ibid.) work limits itself to the negative side of gossip, whereas many scholars (See Gluckman (1963), Dunbar (1996) and De Baker

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(2005)) who have investigated the topic agree that gossip does have a positive facet.

Consequently, the current paper endeavours to lay down a pure pragmatic perspective of gossip through developing a model devoted to analyze gossip pragmatically apart from any sociological, biological or any other non-linguistic prospect. The validity of the model will be verified against data represented by different situations chosen randomly from Austen's Emma.

**2. Definition**

Gossip assumes a crucial part of our daily life exchanges; therefore many scholars have attempted to define and scrutinize this phenomenon. Various researchers have defined gossip differently. Some see it only as negative talk behind someone else's back. In this regard, Besnier (1994:9) defines gossip as "a negatively evaluative and morally laden verbal exchange concerning the conduct of absent third parties that takes place within a bounded group of persons in a private setting, the gist of which is generally not intended to reach the ears of its victim". Similarly, Emler (1994:177) considers gossip as unreliable and inaccurate, an entirely fallible source of information about other people.

Others generalize gossip to any talk about a given individual, present or not. In this respect, Dunbar (2004) (Cited in Foster; 2004:80) defines it broadly as 'conversation about social and personal topics', whereas Hess and Hagen (2006:339) believe that the most useful definition of gossip would be: "gossip is a personal conversation on social topics. The information exchanged, truthful or deceptive, can benefit the sender, the receiver, or both."

It seems that the above mentioned definitions have included the everyday understanding of the term gossip which is not sufficient to encompass gossip; therefore a more operative definition of gossip can be produced through incorporating the three basic components of the structure of gossip: content, circumstances (context) and functions. In addition to the minimal decisive feature in the structure of gossip, that is the third party property which is stressed by many scholars such as Foster (2004) and De Baker (2005). These interlated components and the third party minimal feature play a pivotal role in apprehending gossip. Therefore, De Backer's(2005:38) account of gossip meets and covers all

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the aforementioned constructing components of gossip. According to De Backer (ibid.:40)

“Gossip is information about the deviant or surprising (which both depend on the context) traits and behaviors of one (or more) third person(s) (most often non-present, but potentially present in the conversation), and where the sender has true/false knowledge of the gossip content.

De Backer’s (ibid.) definition relates the functions of gossip to their context and adds another defining characteristic of gossip (i.e. the elements of surprise and deviance). For that reason, De Backer’s (ibid.) account of gossip is adopted by this paper .

**2.1 Models of Gossip**

Only the models of gossip that can be utilized in developing the pragmatic eclectic model targeted by this paper are discussed below.

**2.1.1 Eder & Enkes’ (1991) Model for a Basic Structure of Gossip Episode**

A model of basic structure of a gossip episode is advanced by Eder and Enke (1991:496) to define gossip, stressing that gossip involves evaluative conversations or episodes in which there is a positive or negative evaluation about other persons. Despite the fact that Eder and Enkes’ (ibid.) model is about the (basic) structure of gossip, their findings reveal that it is a flexible one but the ordering of acts is critical. This structure comprises two key elements that identify gossip: the identification of a target and an evaluation of the target acts (Ibid: 497).

Thus, gossip episodes are initiated by identifying the target of gossip episode (gossipee) before an evaluation is made, since the target is not present. Once identification and evaluation occur, a variety of acts can follow. These include explanations, expansion on the evaluation, support, exaggerated effect and challenges. In other words gossip episodes proceeds through two stages:

- Beginning of episode stage: Here, a participant in the exchange identifies the target of gossip and usually evaluates him/her negatively while a second participant either supports or challenges it.
- Possible acts in response/explanation act: At this stage the gossiper offers a summarized or expanded explanation for his initial evaluation

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of the target of gossip. Then a series of possible acts (strategies) are adopted by the gossiper or any other participant, since participants in the gossip episode have numerous opportunities to participate through recursing to one of the following strategies:

- **Support:** Discussing the acts of an absent third party is potentially face threatening, therefore a need rises to obtain an explicit support given for the gossip to proceed. This support act is actualized by expressing similar ideas to those related by the gossiper, asking questions, or using assessments to show involvement in the gossip episode.
- **Expansion:** This is another strategy whereby the gossip initiator or other participants can strengthen the initial evaluation provided by the gossiper. It is intended to offer further evaluation.
- **Exaggerated effect:** Here, the effects of the acts already evaluated are maximized by the gossiper or his interlocutors to extend the gossip exchange. Some exaggerated effect expressions such as “God damn” are used to exercise a deep impact on the interlocutor.
- **Challenge:** This strategy is adopted by receivers of gossip in response to the evaluations made by the gossipmonger. Nevertheless, it basically occurs when the indirect evaluations are offered or the participant misinterprets implicit remarks.

It seems that the above mentioned acts represent kinds of strategies that are supposed to appear in the novel under study. This leads to doing two things:

1. The strategies proposed by the model are adopted.
2. The strategies adopted are liable to modification (which includes making some change to an already existing strategy; or adding some possible one) and this is to be done in accordance with the data of the present paper.

### **2.1.2 Brusk’s (2010) Model for Gossip Initiation:**

Brusk (2010:141) develops what he calls a computational model for gossip initiation, depending on previous pieces of work in the field, such as Eder and Enkes’ (1991). The proposed model proceeds as follows: When the participants are engaged in a conversation, the stage of ‘Gossip Initiation’ is triggered (The source state is unspecified, but it can be assumed that the participants have greeted each other and perhaps talk for a while before gossip is initiated).

Then the target of gossip is selected via the ‘Select Target’ strategy. After that, the transition from ‘Select Target’ strategy to ‘Establish Gossip’ strategy is activated. If there is no target that fulfills the initial criteria, the gossip is cancelled (never initiated). If the target is found, the next step is to establish the relationship between participants.

## **2.2 An Eclectic Pragmatic Model**

The model which is intended to be developed by this paper is based on the findings arrived at through surveying the aforementioned models, alongside with the observations made by the researchers themselves.

This model can be illustrated as follows:

### **2.2.1 Pragmatic Structure**

Gossip is a communicative face-to-face process which consists of three stages: the initiation stage (IS), the explanation of gossip acts stage (EGAS), and the evaluation stage (ES). These three stages are pragmatically composed of certain pragmatic components forming the pragmatic structure of gossip which can be illustrated as follows:

The initiation stage incorporates two major pragmatic elements, namely; presupposition and speech act distributed over two sub-stages. However, the speech act element forms the ‘triggering gossip’ sub-stage which is used to trigger gossip. As for the second part of the initiation stage, it is built on the presupposition pragmatic component, employed to identify the gossipee.

As regards the explanation of gossip acts stage, it comprises three pragmatic components, viz. presupposition, conversational implicatures and politeness. These pragmatic elements occupy three different complementary parts (sub-stages) that can be illustrated as follows. The first sub-stage is taken over by the presupposition element. As for the second sub-stage, it includes the conversational implicatures. Finally, the maintaining sub-stage embraces the conversational implicatures and politeness elements.

Eventually, the evaluation stage encompasses only one pragmatic element, which is the speech act component.

To sum up, the gossip process actualized by the eclectic model developed by this study reveals that the pragmatic structure of gossip consists of four major components, viz. speech act, presupposition, conversational implicatures, and politeness distributed over three stages (See Figure (1) below).

### 2.2.2 Pragmatic Strategies

The three stages mentioned above have their own pragmatic strategies which are used to realize each of the aforementioned pragmatic components involved in the gossip process, as such; each will be briefly discussed.

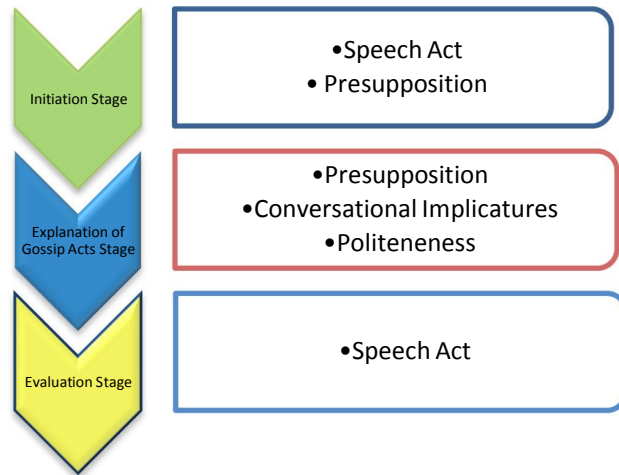


Figure (1) A Pragmatic Structure of Gossip

#### 2.2.2.1 Initiation Stage

Generally, the initiation stage incurs two important elements: a speech act and a presupposition which are actualized by employing various pragmatic strategies distributed over two sub-stages as follows.

##### 2.2.2.1.1 Triggering Gossip

The data of this work reveal that gossip exchanges can be triggered by employing a vocative strategy coupled with one of the following speech act strategies that include (telling, claiming, stating, and criticizing).

##### 2.2.2.1.1.1 Vocatives

A vocative is usually a noun phrase, denoting the one or more persons to whom the sentence is addressed. It is either a Call, drawing the attention of the person or persons addressed, or an Address expressing the speaker's relationship or attitude to the person or persons addressed (Quirk et al, 1985:773).

Gossipers can employ these two strategies to achieve gossipy functions such as (intimacy, manipulation, control) (See for example De Backer

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(2005:40-5)). They can trigger a gossip exchange and then manipulate or control their audience thoughts or attitudes to the gossipee by recouring to one of these two vocative strategies. According to Kubo (2004:333), the vocative pragmatic sub-strategies are used for issuing certain illocutionary acts accompanied by concomitant perlocutionary acts. These perlocutionary can help affect or tamper with the ideas of the receivers of gossip and consequently achieve gossip functions.

### **2.2.2.1.1.2 Speech Act Strategies**

Speech act strategies are the pragmatic means, representing the speech act component, which might be employed by gossipers to trigger their gossip exchanges. This can be realized by issuing one of the following speech acts:

#### **a. SA of Telling**

This speech act strategy belongs to the macro class of Searle's (1969:66) assertives, which commits S (in varying degrees) to something being the case, i.e., to the truth of the expressed proposition (Edmondson, 1981:144). Furthermore, it can be understood by the fact that most tellers give the source of information or the reason of giving the information. So, telling strategy might be used to trigger gossip interactions and prepare the interlocutor for the explanations that follows (ibid.:145).

#### **b. SA of Stating**

This is another speech act incorporated under the umbrella term of Searle's (ibid.) assertives. SA of stating is issued to express opinions or viewpoints about other people, accordingly attitudes to the gossip targets might be explicitly or implicitly manifested via enacting the stating SA.

#### **c. SA of Claiming**

Claiming is another example of the assertive class of speech acts. Although it has the power of assertion, it differs from the two aforementioned assertive SAs in that the speaker gives exact source of experience, depending on his own knowledge of the aberrant acts of the gossipee(s) (ibid.).

#### **d. SA of Criticizing**

Gossip conversations are commenced sometimes by issuing a speech act of criticizing which is undertaken by gossipers to bring forth pejorative evaluations of the gossipee's behaviour. Yet, it has to be differentiated from other similar acts such as blame or detest (Jackson,

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1986: 222). This is done by consulting the felicity conditions of these speech acts (See Searle (1969) and Edmondson (1981)).

### **2.2.2.1.2 Gossipee Identification**

The identification of the gossipee is the most powerful trigger of gossip interlocutions; therefore the pragmatic presupposition triggers coupled with epithets are utilized for identification purposes.

#### **2.2.2.1.2.1 Epithet**

Prodan (1998:79) defines Epithets as short descriptions preceding names, function in similar ways to presupposition and are found in abundance in gossip situations. Besides, epithets involve a description of somebody's character or most important quality. In this respect "poor" is the most common and widely used epithet that serves to distance the community from the victim/recipient of sympathy (Corazza, 2004:17).

1. Poor Jane, I don't know how she can live with a villain like Eddy.

#### **2.2.2.1.2.2 Presupposition Triggers**

Identifying the gossipee is actualized by gossipers through using the following pragmatic strategies of presupposition (Prodan, 1998: 75):

##### **a. Existential Presupposition**

Proper names (e.g. Emma, Eliza), possessives (her uncle, your cousin, my brother etc...) are usual manifestations of existential presupposition (See also Levinson (1983), Yule (2000) and Huang (2007)).

2. Mr. Elton's manners are not perfect, but there is such a good-temper and good-will in Mr. Elton as one cannot but value (Austen,1816/1984:).

##### **b. Temporal Clauses**

Presupposition is triggered by a temporal clause usually followed by referent name or possessive (Huang; 2007:65).

3. After she shot to stardom in a romance film Jane married. (ibid.)

##### **c. Cleft Sentences**

The presupposition here is triggered by two sub strategies: cleft and pseudo-cleft sentences.

4. It was Baird who invented television. (Cleft sentence)

5. What Baird invented was television. (Pseudo-cleft sentence) (Ibid.: 66)

#### **2.2.2.2 Explanation of Gossip Acts Stage**

The second stage embraces three sub-stages that include three pragmatic elements: the summary of gossip acts comprises the presupposition component which is actualized via using projection and

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modality; the expansion of those acts contains the conversational implicatures embodied in the pragma-rhetorical tropes; and maintaining the gossip acts which encompasses the conversational implicatures element generated by infringing the cooperative principle maxims and the politeness component realized by means of observing the politeness maxims of Leech (1983).

### **2.2.2.2.1 Summary of Gossip Act**

Summarizing deviant behaviour is basically achieved via adopting projection and modality strategies (Prodan, 1998: 75)

#### **2.2.2.2.1.1 Projection**

According to (ibid.:62), projection is defined as an explicit introduction of a person's speech (direct or indirect) or thoughts.

##### **2.2.2.2.1.1.1 Types of projection**

Projection strategies are classified into three major classes according to the type of the projecting elements involved in the projection process:

##### **2.2.2.2.1.1.1.1 Projection Devices**

Generally, projection devices include the following:

###### **a. Reporting Projecting Devices**

Reporting speech projecting sub-strategy that is realized by the use of one of the following verbs: (say, remark, observe, point out, report; ask, demand, inquire, reply, explain, protest, continue, warn, insist, complain, shout, boast, murmur, stammer) (Halliday, 1985:229).

###### **b. Ideas Projecting Devices**

Ideas can be embedded in nouns. The projecting element here is the mental process noun (or idea) that functions as head of nominal group. Some of the principal nouns of projection, as reported by Halliday (1985: 240) are: (thought, belief, knowledge, feeling, notion, suspicion, sense, idea, expectation, view, opinion, prediction, assumption, conviction, and discovery. doubt, problem, question, issue, wish, desire, hope, fear, intention, desire, hope, inclination, decision, resolve) (ibid:231).

###### **c. Facts Projecting Devices**

Here a fact is projected impersonally, either by a relational process (it is the case that...) or by impersonal mental or verbal process and this projection may be made explicit, as in:

it is /may be / is not(the case) that...(ibid:235)

##### **2.2.2.2.1.1.1.2 Nebulous-Agent Projection**

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When projecting clauses are characterized by pronouns or nouns with unstable or unclear referents, the process is called nebulous-agent projection. For example, "They say, some say that ..... (Prodan,1998:66).

This sub-strategy distances the gossip from the knowledge base of his/her community. In this sense, the gossip attempts to bond his/herself with his/her audience against "some people"(Stouck and Giltrow, 1991:568).

### **2.2.2.2.1.1.3 Agentless Projection**

Agentless projection, in which a clause is projected, but not attributed to a speaker/thinker, has "the effect of appearing to distribute the claim more widely, beyond the scope of the immediate, contingent, and possibly interested position of the speaker, and situating the proposition in the larger community of consensus" (ibid.).

6. They are believed to be perfect match, but they have had several clashes lately.

### **2.2.2.2.1.1.2 Modality**

Modality is defined as the term for a cluster of meanings centered on the notions of necessity and possibility: what must be or what merely might be (Griffiths; 2006:110). However, expressions of modality exhibit an intriguing spectrum of partially similar meanings or interpretations that can be distinguished mainly into two broad kinds depending on the underlying speech function of the clause: deontic and epistemic (Halliday; 1985: 335).

#### **a. Deontic Modality**

Deontic modality enables language users to express their attitudes as to whether a proposition relates to an obligatory situation or permissible one, or somewhere in between. It indicates permission or obligation, encoding the world's social constraints. Hence, gossipers may exploit deontic modality markers to show obligation towards their audience to achieve, for instance, the gossip goal of intimacy.

#### **b. Epistemic Modality**

Epistemic modality expresses the possibility of a proposition's being true in fact, given what is already known. Additionally, Prodan (1998:69-70) argues that epistemic modality encodes the speaker's limits of knowledge, playing a significant role in the mechanisms of gossip. What differentiates epistemic modality from deontic modality, in addition to the context, is that the former is centered on a proposition contained in

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the sentence, while the latter may be centered on some entity or entities, typically denoted by the subject of the sentence.

Gossipers may utilize these pragmatic strategies to draw conclusions, issue judgments, and even to manipulate or tamper with information they provide their audience with in order to control their attitudes and opinions towards certain persons' acts.

**2.2.2.2.2 Expansion of Gossip Acts**

Pragma-rhetorical tropes are adopted by gossipers to expand on the deviant or the socially disapproved acts (behaviour) of their gossipees.

**2.2.2.2.2.1 Clarification Tropes**

Some tropes may be used to clarify the speaker's ideas, attitudes and to show his/her evaluation of certain topic or person (Harris, 2008:2).

Those tropes include:

**a. Metaphor**

Metaphor is defined as a figure of similarity, a word or phrase is replaced by an expression denoting an analogous circumstance in a different semantic field (Gibbs; 2001:326). The comparison adds a new dimension of meaning to the original expression. Unlike simile, the comparison is not made explicit ('like' or 'as') are not used (For more details of metaphor, see Mihas (2005), McGlone (2007), Rozina and Karapetjana (2009:118)).

Pragmatically speaking, metaphor is not only rendered from the flouting of Grice's conversational maxims, but also from violating Sperber and Wilsons' relevance maxim. Thus, metaphor may be a suitable pragma-rhetorical device at the gossipers' disposal to convey their opinions, evaluations, attitudes toward their victims (gossipees) indirectly, as in:

7. " He's a monster, how could he have done such a bad thing?" (Austen, 1984: 56).

**b. Simile**

Simile is an explicit comparison (using "like" or "as") between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common. Two things are openly compared with each other, introduced by 'like' or 'as' (Cruse, 2006: 165). However, explicit comparisons might be used effectively to leave the desired impact on the listeners.

8. A: Jasmine is a delicate pretty girl.

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B: She walks like a proud peacock. Whom does she think to fool with her fake gentle smile?

Here the gossip B elaborates on the deviant behaviour of Jasmine, the gossipee, to whom she directs her claims and accusations via employing the pragma-rhetorical strategy of simile

intended to maximize the condemned acts by means of explicit comparison.

**c. Irony**

Irony is defined as a discrepancy between what a speaker says and what he or she believes to be true, such as the utterance “What a sunny day” during a storm (Xiang Li, 2008:5).

As for the relation between irony and the pragmatic issues, irony is traditionally seen as sub-strategy of a broader category of indirect speech acts as well as conversational implicatures, on which it entirely relies, Attardo (2001:165) maintains. Pragmatically speaking, any utterance (depending on the context) can be used for the purpose of irony, whether it signals the opposite or echoes some other person attitude. This ironic utterance is meant to actualize certain gossip functions via the employment of different pragma- rhetorical devices such as hyperbole, rhetorical questions, metaphors, excessive politeness etc...

**2.2.2.2.2 Emphasis Tropes**

Mendoza and Peña (2007:152) argue that some tropes, such as overstatement and understatement, are basically employed by speakers for emphatic purposes. The emphasis tropes comprise:

**a. Rhetorical Questions**

Rhetorical questions (RQs) are generally defined as questions that neither seek information nor elicit an answer (Han, 1997:3). Moreover, a rhetorical question is an effective pragma-rhetorical tool that might employed gossipers to persuade receivers of gossip of their own ideas and beliefs, or to validate the claims they raise against a third party.

Pragmatically speaking, rhetorical questions have the illocutionary force of an assertion of the opposite polarity from what is apparently asked. That is, a rhetorical positive question has the illocutionary force of a negative assertion, and a rhetorical negative question has the illocutionary force of a positive assertion (Black, 2006:26).

**b. Overstatement (Hyperbole)**

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Hyperbole is defined as a figure of speech involving deliberate exaggeration for rhetorical effect, to increase impact or to attract attention. Exaggeration may be negative or positive (Cruse, 2006: 80).

After metaphor, hyperbole is the most common trope. Accordingly, it might be adopted by gossipers to magnify the deviant deeds or rejected actions of others (gossipees) and in the meantime achieving gossip goals. Estranging gossipees, for instance, from the society of gossipers may bond gossip participants and group them in community of consensus about good behaviour.

### **c. Understatement (Litotes)**

Understatement is a by-product of flouting the maxims of quantity and quality. An understatement is a statement which, somehow, because it is conspicuously less informative than some other statement, can be used to express the meaning of the more informative statement (Ruiz, 2006: 6). Such purposeful uninformativity runs counter to the Gricean principle that one should do what one can to make oneself understood, but it is consistent with the contrary principle that one should do no more than one has to.

#### **2.2.2.2.3 Maintaining Explanation of Gossip Acts**

The third sub-stage of explanation act stage is used to maintain the explanations, expansions and deviant behaviours specified by the aforementioned strategies of this stage.

##### **2.2.2.2.3.1 Infringing the maxims**

When speakers infringe the Gricean maxims, they generate conversational implicatures exploiting them for communicative purposes. Grice (1975) states four occasions in which these conversational implicatures are generated as follows:

1. The 'Silent' Violation of the maxims. When s/he wants to lie, deceive or manipulate, since s/he knows that the hearer will not capture the real intended meaning (Grundy, 2000:73).
2. The speaker's desire to fulfill two conflicting maxims (maxims in clash) results in his /her flouting one maxim to invoke the other.
3. Opting out of the Cooperative Principle (CP), by saying 'I can't say more, my lips are sealed', in order to avoid divulging a secret.
4. The last and most important category of non-observance of the maxims is maxim-flouting. Here the speaker exploits an obvious infringement of one of the maxims in order to generate an implicature.

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Infringing the conversational maxims as illustrated above provides interactants (gossipers) with a powerful pragmatic device to achieve their conversational gossipy goals.

### **2.2.2.2.3.2 Politeness strategies**

Leech's (1983) maxims might be exploited by gossipers to sustain their gossip interactions and maintain their evaluations. These include the following:

- Tact maxim (in directives [impositives] and commissives): minimise cost to other; [maximise benefit to other]
- Generosity maxim (in directives and commissives): minimise benefit to self; [maximise cost to self]
- Approbation maxim (in expressives and decelerations [assertives]): minimise dispraise of other; [maximise praise of other]
- Sympathy maxim (in decelerations): minimise antipathy between self and other; [maximise sympathy between self and other] (Leech, 1983:104).

Leech (Ibid: 107) believes that "Politeness Principle is required to mitigate the intrinsic discourtesy of the goal".

9. Could you lend me your ears? for what I have mentioned is real? (as said by a gossiping female friend to her colleague)

The speaker/gossiper uses the tact maxim (which is actualized here by the use of the modal " Could") to establish intimacy with the addressee, and support the explanations provided by him for the sake of keeping the gossip session open.

### **2.2.2.3 Evaluation Stage**

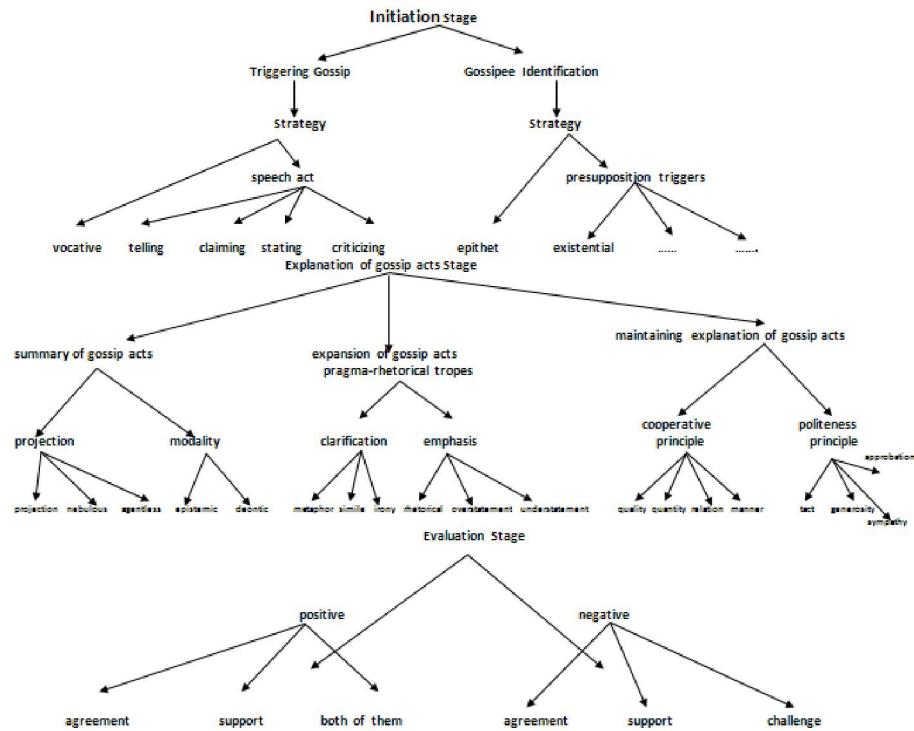
This is the final stage which wraps up the whole process of gossip. It includes strategies via which this stage is described as positive or negative.

The evaluation stage might conclude with one of the following positive strategies: agreement or support or both of them. These strategies are considered 'positive' because adopting them entails bonding gossipers and introducing them to a world of consensus and solidarity by reaching some good conclusions about their gossipee.

On the other hand, the evaluation stage becomes negative when the deviant or unaccepted behaviour of the gossipee is realized finally, getting the gossip participant's approval regarding it. This occurs if one of the following strategies is adopted: agreement or support or challenge.

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For more clarification, the above discussed model (which will be adopted for analyzing the data of the present paper is systematically introduced in Figure (1) below, where each arrow ( ) is to be read as ‘by means of’. Thus, the initiation stage is initiated by means of triggering gossip which is done by means of vocative, telling, stating, claiming and criticizing; as well as identification of gossipee actualized by the use epithet and presupposition strategies; and this leads to the explanation act stage which is performed by means of summarizing, expanding and maintaining acts, and this, in turn, leads to the evaluation stage which can be either positive or negative.



**3. Data Collection and Description**

**3.1 Data Collection**

The data of this paper are collected from Jane Austen’s Emma. Thus, twenty conversational situations which represent all the gossip situations in this novel have been scrutinized. However, due to the limits of this

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study, five conversational situations have been chosen as illustrative examples to represent the analysis of the rest of the other situations. This is done so because the major aim here is to test the workability of the pragmatic model developed by this study rather than other things.

### **3.2 Data Description**

Generally, the data under analysis are characterized by the following features:

1. Length: They are lengthy and sometimes very lengthy to the degree that they take over two or three whole pages.
2. Variation: As far as the participants and topics are concerned, they are various. The participants come from different classes of society (to mention just an example): an ex-governess and her lady as in the gossip interaction between Mrs. Weston, and Emma, see situation (4) below. As regards the topics, various ones are discussed through the twenty gossip situations of the novel. They include: stating certain characteristics (as when Harriet states the general characteristics of Mr. Martin, see situation (1) below), persuading the interlocutor of the gossiper's attitudes towards the gossipee (as in the gossip exchange between Mrs. Weston, Isabella and Emma, see situation (4) below), and marriage (as in the conversation between Mr. Knightly and Emma, see situation (5) below).
3. Understandability: The language used in the gossip situations of this novel is perceivable. That is, the language used by Austen's characters in Emma is easily captured since it provokes the ordinary daily life talks and conversations.

## **4. Data Analysis and Findings**

### **4.1 Data Analysis**

#### **4.1.1 Methods of Analysis**

The analysis of the data is done by means of the following procedures:

1. The eclectic model as developed by this paper is used to analyze the data of the work.

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2. Statistically, the percentage equation is utilized to calculate the findings of the analysis.

**4.1.2 Overall Analysis**

In connection with the overall analysis of the results of all the data under scrutiny, various findings are advanced below.

**4.1.2.1 Pragmatic Structure**

The analysis shows that gossip is an interpersonal process which consists of three stages: the initiation stage (Henceforth IS), the explanation of gossip acts stage (Henceforth EGAS), and the evaluation stage (Henceforth ES). These stages are composed of certain pragmatic components forming the pragmatic structure of gossip which can be illustrated as follows: the initiation stage contains two pragmatic elements, viz. speech act and presupposition; while the second stage consists of three pragmatic components and these are: presupposition, conversational implicatures and politeness; finally the evaluation stage embraces only one pragmatic constituent, that is the speech act. These results are tabulated in Table (1) and sketched out in Figure (3) below.

Table (1) Percentages of All the Pragmatic Components of Gossip

IS	Speech Act		Presupposition	
	50%		50%	
EGAS	Presupposition	Conversational Implicatures		Politeness
	40%	35%		25%
ES	Speech Act			
	100%			

The aforementioned pragmatic components are realized by certain pragmatic strategies which are elucidated in (4.1.2.2) below.

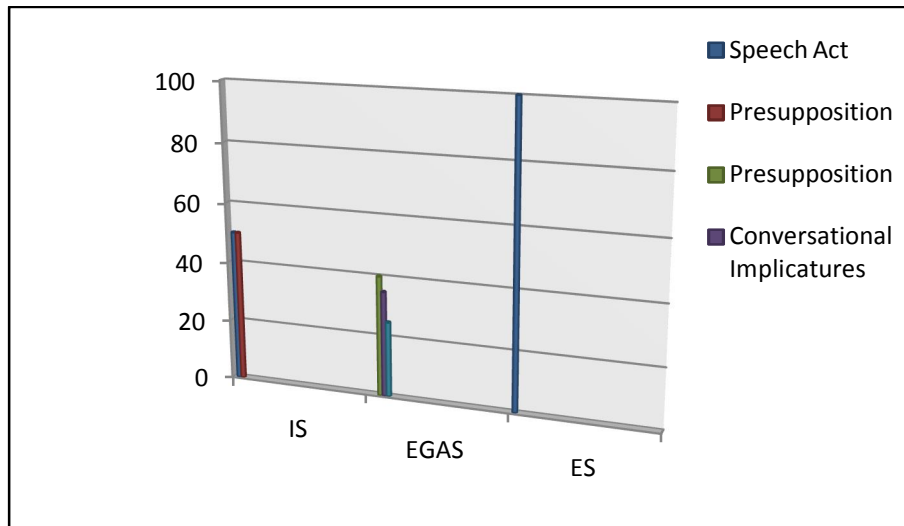


Figure (3) Total Rates of All the Pragmatic Components of Gossip

4.1.2.2 Pragmatic Strategies

The analysis of the speech act strategies employed in the IS reveals that the SAs of telling, claiming, stating, and criticizing are all used in triggering gossip. However, the SA of telling is the most frequently used one. The frequency of using this SA has amounted to 40%, while that of using claiming, stating, and criticizing have amounted to 10%, 20%, and 10% respectively. As for the presupposition strategies which are used in the gossipee identification sub-stage, the analysis indicates that the existential presupposition strategy realized by the proper name has the highest percentage, i.e 100%.

As regards the analysis of the data in the EGAS, it shows that the projection and modality strategies are more frequently utilized by gossipers in the EGAS than the emphatic trope strategies. This finding is supported by the leading frequencies reaped by those two strategies (100% and 70% respectively).

Finally, the analysis reveals that the negative strategies of agreement and challenge have the highest percentages (20% and 25%) among all the other strategies of the evaluation stage.

All the results mentioned above are introduced in Table (2) and elucidated in Figure (4) below.

Table (2) Percentages of the Overall Occurrences of All the Pragmatic Strategies of Gossip Process



Figure (4) Total rates of the Pragmatic strategies of the Three Stages of Gossip

**4.1.2.3 Illustrative Analyzed Examples**

Situation (1): Emma: What sort of looking man is Mr. Martin?

Harriet: Oh! Not handsome—not at all handsome. I thought him very plain at first, but I do not think him so plain now. One does not, you know, after a time. But did you never see him? He is in Highbury every now and then, and he is sure to ride through every week in his way to Kingston. He has passed you very often.

Emma: That may be, and I may have seen him fifty times, but without having any idea of his name. A young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanries are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is, therefore, in one sense, as much above my notice as in every other he is below it.

Harriet:: To be sure. Oh yes! It is not likely you should ever have observed him.

This gossip situation (Chapter IV, page 18) is triggered when Emma asks Harriet, her best friend, some questions about Mr. Martin’s, the gossipee, personality. So, Harriet takes this opportunity to influence Emma’s ideas of Mr. Martin’s character and convince her of the good qualities he has.

The initiation stage (Henceforth IS) is launched through commencing the gossipee identification (Henceforth GI) sub-stage embraces a presupposition element embodied in the existential presupposition strategy ‘Mr. Martin’, used to define the gossipee. After that, the sub-stage of triggering gossip (Henceforth TG) is motivated by the gossiper, Harriet, by means of issuing a speech act of claiming (Oh! Not handsome—not at all handsome) which embodies the speech act element of gossip structure. This claiming strategy is used to advance a disparaging view of the gossipee’s acts.

The explanation of gossip acts stage (Henceforth EGAS) is achieved by activating the summary of gossip acts sub-stage which comprises the presupposition element represented by the pragmatic strategy of projection realized by the verbs ‘thought’ and ‘think’ in (I thought him

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very plain at first, but I do not think him so plain now). Additionally, the epistemic modality adverb 'sure' is employed to assert the gossipers' ideas. The modals 'may' in (may be, and I may have seen) are used to confirm what is issued by the gossipers. Then, the gossip expansion is achieved by employing the overstatement strategy which includes the conversational implicatures element (I may have seen him fifty times, but without having any idea of his name) to maximize and extend the effect of the modalized acts. Finally, the sub-stage of maintaining the gossip acts is triggered by only infringing the maxim of quantity via illustrating further explanations to vouch for the negative nature of the gossip acts (A young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity).

The evaluation stage (Henceforth ES) is completed by a negative evaluation introduced in the form of agreement to the gossipers' assertion of the simple pejorative side of the gossipee's gossip acts. Likewise, the agreement (Oh yes! It is not likely you should ever have observed him) is actualized by employing a speech act of stating strategy which represents the pragmatic speech act element of gossip pragmatic structure.

Situation (2): Elton I cannot rate her beauty as you do, but she is a pretty little creature, and I am inclined to think very well of her disposition. Her character depends upon those she is with; but in good hands she will turn out a valuable woman.

Emma: I am glad you think so; and the good hands, I hope, may not be wanting.

Elton: Come, you are anxious for a compliment, so I will tell you that you have improved her. You have cured her of her school-girl's giggle; she really does you credit.

Emma: I should be mortified indeed if I did not believe I had been of some use.

In situation (2) ( Chapter V, page 25) Mr. Elton, the gossip, attempts to get intimate with the gossip receiver, Emma, through praising the gossip acts of the gossipee, Harriet since she's Emma's very close friend and follows her steps of etiquette and polished behaviour. Consequently, discussing her acts positively get the gossip closer to Emma.

Here, the IS is started by the TG sub-stage which is activated by the gossip, Mr. Elton, who use a speech act of telling strategy (I cannot rate

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her beauty as you do) which embodies the speech act element of gossip pragmatic structure and it is intended to specify the gossiper's positive view. As for the GI sub-stage, it encompasses a presupposition element embodied in the existential presupposition strategy 'she' used to define the gossipee.

The EGAS is achieved by actuating the summary of gossip acts sub-stage which includes the presupposition element represented by the projection verb 'think' in (I am inclined to think very well of her disposition). Besides, the epistemic modal 'will' is employed to consolidate the gossiper's projected opinion of the gossipee's gossip acts. At the same time, the gossip expansion is realized by employing the understatement strategy which contains the conversational implicatures element (she is a pretty little creature) to amplify and expand the impact of the modalized acts. Finally, the sub-stage of maintaining the gossip acts proceeds through breaking the maxim of relation via giving apparently unrelated explanations to prove the positively oriented gossip acts (are anxious for a compliment, so I will tell you.....). Also the tact maxim (which stands for the politeness element) is observed in (I should be mortified indeed) in order to show the gossiper intimacy towards the gossip receiver and therefore achieving the gossip function of intimacy.

The ES is ended by a positive evaluation introduced in the form of agreement to the gossipers' attitude of the gossipee's gossip acts. This agreement (did not believe I had been of some use) is realized via the issuance of a speech act of stating strategy which represents the speech act element of gossip pragmatic structure. It is used here to confirm the positive evaluation made by both gossip participants.

Situation (3): Emma: To be an old maid at last, like Miss Bates! That is as formidable an image as you could present, Harriet; and if I thought I should ever be like Miss Bates! So silly—so satisfied— so smiling—so prosing—so undistinguishing and unfastidious— and so apt to tell everything relative to everybody about me, I would marry to-morrow. But between us, I am convinced there never can be any likeness, except in being unmarried.

Harriet: But still, you will be an old maid! And that's so dreadful!

Emma: Never mind, Harriet, I shall not be a poor old maid; and it is poverty only which makes celibacy contemptible to a generous public! A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous,

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disagreeable old maid!. Poverty certainly has not contracted her mind: I really believe, if she had only a shilling in the world, she would be very likely to give away sixpence of it

Harriet: That is a great charm.

This gossip conversation (Chapter V, page 25) is intended to tackle marriage which is one of the major themes of this novel. The gossip, Emma wishes to control her receiver's of gossip (Harriet) opinion about Emma's marriage through setting Miss Bates, the gossipee, as a bad example to be followed in pursuing a dream of marriage.

In this situation, the IS is engendered by the GI sub-stage which incurs a presupposition element represented by the existential presupposition strategy 'Miss Bates' used to identify the gossipee. As regards the TG sub-stage which consists of the speech act element, it is initiated by issuing a speech act of criticizing strategy (To be an old maid at last, like Miss Bates! That is as formidable an image as you could present) that introduces the gossip's negative view of the gossipee's gossip acts.

The subsequent EGAS is commenced by triggering the summary of gossip acts sub-stage which includes the presupposition element represented by the projection verb 'thought' in (I thought I should ever be like Miss Bates! So silly—so satisfied). Also, the deontic modal 'should' is utilized by the gossip to stress the criticism raised by her in the IS. At the same time, the gossip expansion is achieved by employing the overstatement strategy (So silly, so satisfied, so smiling, so prosing, so undistinguishing and unfastidious, and so apt...) which incorporates the conversational implicatures element. This element is generated by breaking the maxims of quality and quantity through providing overstated unjustified additional information about the gossipee. Finally, the sub-stage of maintaining the gossip acts embraces two pragmatic elements. The first element of this sub-stage is the conversational implicatures produced by violating the maxim of quantity (A single woman, with a very narrow income, must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid) to vindicate the gossip's expanded negative point of view of her victim of gossip. Whereas the second element of this sub-stage is politeness expressed by abiding by the sympathy maxim in (if she had only a shilling in the world, she would be very....).

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The ES incorporates the speech act element of gossip pragmatic structure. This final stage is concluded by a negative evaluation presented in the form of agreement to the gossipers' attitude of the gossipee's gossip acts. This agreement is actualized by issuing a speech act of stating strategy embodied in the statement (That is a great charm).

Situation (4): Emma: Mr. Elton's manners are not perfect, but there is such a good-temper and good-will in Mr. Elton as one cannot but value.

Mr. Knightley: Yes, with some slyness, he seems to have a great deal of good-will towards you.

Emma: Me! Are you imagining me to be Mr. Elton's object?

Mr. Knightley: Such an imagination has crossed me, I own, Emma; and if it never occurred to you before, you may as well take it into consideration now.

Emma: Mr. Elton in love with me! What an idea!

Mr. Knightley: I do not say it is so; but you will do well to consider whether it is so or not, and to regulate your behaviour accordingly. I think your manners to him encouraging. I speak as a friend, Emma. You had better look about you, and ascertain what you do, and what you mean to do.

Emma: I thank you; but I assure you, you are quite mistaken. Mr. Elton and I are very good friends and nothing more.

In this gossip exchange (Chapter VIII, page 34) Mr. Knightley, the gossip, attempts to influence the attitudes of the gossip receiver, Emma, through persuading her that Mr. Elton is not the right person in spite of his affections for her.

The IS, here, is started by the GI sub-stage which is composed of a presupposition element represented by the existential presupposition strategy 'Mr. Elton'. The TG sub-stage is initiated by issuing a speech act of telling strategy (Mr. Elton's manners are not perfect, but there is such a good-temper and good-will in ..... ) used to pass on the gossipers' positive view of the gossipee's gossip acts.

The EGAS is launched by bringing in the summary of gossip acts sub-stage actualized by the projection verb 'seems' in (seems to have a great deal of good-will towards you). Additionally, the epistemic modality markers 'never' and 'may' are exploited to support gossip information given in the IS (never occurred to you before, you may as well take it into consideration now). After that, the gossip expansion is

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brought forward by means of the rhetorical question strategy (Me! Are you imagining me to be Mr. Elton's object?). This strategy contains the conversational implicatures element which is generated here by infringing the maxim of quality. Eventually, one pragmatic element composes the maintaining of the gossip acts, which is the politeness component invoked by observing the generosity maxim in (You had better look about you, and ascertain ....). This can be illustrated by the fact the gossipier attempts to politely get intimate with his interlocutor by offering her a piece of advice.

The ES is accomplished by a positive evaluation advanced by the gossip recipient, Emma, in a very unusual way, as she partially agrees to the positive nature of the gossip acts of the gossipee. This agreement is actualized by issuing a speech act of stating strategy embodied in the statement (Mr. Elton and I are very good friends and nothing more).

Situation (5): Emma: She is an odd woman!—But I never allow myself to speak ill of her, on Frank's account; for I do believe her to be very fond of him. I used to think she was not capable of being fond of anybody, except herself: but she has always been kind to him. And it is no small credit, in my opinion, to him, that he should excite such affection; for, though I would not say it to anybody else, she has no more heart than a stone to people in general; and the devil of a temper.

Mrs. Weston: Mrs. Churchill rules at Enscombe, and is a very odd-tempered woman; and his coming now, depends upon her being willing to spare him.

Isabella (Mrs. Knightley): Oh, Mrs. Churchill; everybody: and I am sure I never think of that poor young man without the greatest compassion. To be constantly living with an ill-tempered person must be dreadful. It is what we happily have never known anything of; but it must be a life of misery. What a blessing, that she never had any children! Poor little creatures, how unhappy she would have made them!

In this gossip interaction (Chapter XIV, pages 69-70), Mrs. Weston and Isabella, the gossipers, manipulate and influence the ideas of the gossip receiver, Emma, to the gossip victim, Mrs. Churchill, by criticizing the bossy hard-hearted character of her to persuade Emma that she controls her adopted son's life, giving him misery and sufferance.

The IS, here, is started by the GI sub-stage which engenders a presupposition element incorporated in the existential presupposition

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strategy ‘she’ and ‘Mrs. Churchill’. Whereas, the TG sub-stage which comprises the speech act element is activated by issuing a speech act of telling strategy (is an odd woman!—But I never allow myself to speak ill of....) intended to indirectly express the gossiper’s negative view of the gossipee’s gossip acts.

The EGAS is initiated immediately by activating the summary of gossip acts sub-stage motivated by the projection verbs ‘believe’ and ‘think’ in (I do believe her to be very fond of him. I used to think she was not capable of being fond of anybody, except herself). Also, the deontic modal ‘should’ is utilized by the gossiper to enhance his issued claims concerning the aberrant acts of the gossipee, Mrs. Churchill. Immediately, the gossip is expanded by means of a metaphor strategy (she has no more heart than a stone to people ...) which contains the conversational implicatures element. This element is generated by infringing the quality maxim by means of a metaphoric expression ‘stone’ which is intended to depict the merciless cruel acts of the gossipee. Finally, the sub-stage of maintaining the gossip acts is accomplished by violating the maxims of quantity and relation (To be constantly living with an ill-tempered person must be dreadful. It is what we happily have never known anything of; but it must be a life of misery) to stress the gossiper’s expanded negative point of view of her victim of gossip.

The ES is concluded by a negative evaluation illustrated in the form of support to the gossipers’ attitude which is offered by the gossip receiver, Mrs. Knightley. This support is realized by the issuance of the speech acts of stating and criticizing strategies embodied in the statements (everybody: and I am sure I never think of that poor young man without the greatest compassion. To be constantly living with an ill-tempered person must be dreadful. It is what we happily have never known anything of; but it must be a life of misery).

**4.2 Findings**

The statistical analysis arrived at by applying the percentage equation reveals the following:

1. Existential presupposition (represented by the proper noun) is employed 100% in the IS.
2. The percentage of projection and modality employment in the EGAS is 100%, which is very much higher than that of the Gricean

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conversational maxims which is 60% (which has been calculated by summing the percentages given below of the total number of the strategies which is four).

3. In the ES, the percentages of evaluation strategies have been distributed as follows:

Positive evaluation: 40%.

Pejorative evaluation: 60%.

4. In the ES, the speech act of stating strategy has a leading frequency that amounts to 60% because it is used (either solely or in collaboration with the criticizing strategy) to express agreement on, or support of the negative evaluations made by gossipers.

**5. Conclusions**

The developed model has proved its validity in pragmatically analyzing gossip, as it has successfully revealed many pragmatic aspects associated with gossip as illustrated below in the findings arrived at by this work.

1. Existential presupposition, represented by the proper name and possessive pronoun, is the only kind of presupposition that is used to initiate IS with a percentage of 100%. This is illustrated by the fact that specifying the third absent party (gossipee) is a minimal feature for triggering gossip interaction therefore; the gossipee must be identified clearly in order to keep the gossip channel open.
2. In the EGAS, projection and modality has been shown to be more significant than the rhetorical devices, due to the fact that projection and modality has been employed in all the situations with a percentage of 100%, whereas the percentage of the employment of the rhetorical devices and the Gricean conversational maxims is only 60%.
3. Emphatic tropes have been employed more frequently whenever gossipers wish to support their pejorative attitudes to the gossipee and amplify the impact of the gossipee's gossip acts on their interlocutors. This conclusion is supported by the high percentage reaped by them which amounts to 80%.
4. Agreement and support are the most common pragmatic strategies of negative evaluation in that they have the highest percentages that amount to 40% and 20% respectively.
5. In the ES, the negative rather than the positive type of gossip is dominant. This dominance is supported by the overall results of

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negative evaluation which amount to 60% in the novel under investigation.

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