

Original Paper

An Analysis of Request Speech Acts in *Jane Eyre*: A Corpus-Based Local Grammar Approach

Keyi Zhang¹

¹ School of English Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai 200083, China

Received: July 20, 2026

Accepted: August 21, 2026

Online Published: August 24, 2026

doi:10.22158/eltls.v8n4p167

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v8n4p167>

Abstract

Request speech acts are key elements in literary text construction, and Jane Eyre offers an ideal exemplar for their examination, with ample scope for interpretation. This study attempts to analyse the local grammatical patterns of request speech acts in Jane Eyre using a custom-built corpus. It aims to identify the types and frequencies of these patterns, to explore how different characters deploy requests, and to examine how such differences reflect the characters' social status, personality traits, and psychological development. The findings suggest that various patterns of request speech acts exist in Jane Eyre, and the frequency of the pattern "Requestee + Hinge + Requested action" is the highest. In-depth analysis indicates that characters differ greatly in their use of request speech acts; the patterns of variation in these acts reveal not only the personality characteristics of various characters but also the novel's core issues and the development of the storyline. This study enriches the understanding of the linguistic features of Jane Eyre, presents a fresh angle of view and approach to researching literary texts using a corpus, and offers insight into the applicability of local grammar to literary studies.

Keywords

Local grammar, Request speech act, Corpus stylistics, Jane Eyre

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

A gem in Victorian women's fiction, *Jane Eyre* stands as a milestone in the development of the nineteenth-century English novel. The first to explore its revolutionary psychological realism and irreplaceable womanly nature in the literary circle, it has long been a highlight of criticism. So far, many scholars have made fruitful explorations of its thematic concerns, protagonist construction, and narrative strategy. Nevertheless, very few look into its micro-linguistic principles, especially the

patterns of speech acts and their function in dialogue.

For the development of linguistic methods, corpus methods and local grammar theory offer new prospects for the microanalysis of literary texts. The former seeks to identify systemic language patterns using quantitative methods, while the latter is better able to analyse the mechanism of functional realisation in a specific domain context. In *Jane Eyre*, characters' dialogue not only advances the plot but also represents social relationships and power structures in linguistic form. For instance, the different patterns in sentence structure choice, modal verb usage, and politeness strategies for the speech act of requesting adopted by different characters provide a lifelike reflection of social class divisions in Victorian society. A thorough study of it will provide a more nuanced linguistic basis for understanding the social significance and literary value of the work.

1.2 Research Objectives and Significance

This study uses corpus analysis tools, informed by a theory of local grammar, as a systematic approach to exploring the lexicogrammatical patterns and literary functions of request speech acts in *Jane Eyre*. It focuses on revealing how the use of tactical language relates to character and plot.

In the field of literary studies, mainstream critical approaches have traditionally prioritised qualitative readings of thematic motifs, characterisation, and narrative architecture, giving comparatively little attention to fine-grained linguistic mechanisms. This study presents a framework for local grammar that extends literary analysis and provides a systematic, data-driven approach to the study of texts. Local grammar has its roots in the practical needs of computerised study of natural language processing. It draws from early notions of what has since been called "restricted language" (Firth, 1968) and "sublanguage" (Harris, 1982). It encompasses all aspects of lexicology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics within a single analytic framework, and systematically matches form to function.

As a crucial advancement in corpus linguistics, local grammar theory opens innovative avenues for phraseological description, discourse analysis, and text modelling (Su & Wei, 2020). However, domestic scholarship on local grammar remains largely in its exploratory stage, and researchers remain relatively unfamiliar with this emerging approach (Zhang & Wei, 2018). Existing studies focus primarily on theoretical exposition, as exemplified by Wei's (2017) in-depth analysis of the application background, methodological principles, and defining characteristics of local grammar within corpus linguistics. Empirical studies, however, especially on literary texts, are extremely limited. Consequently, this paper investigates the speech act of request in *Jane Eyre* from a linguistic perspective, serving as an empirical case to explore the application of local grammar to literary study.

1.3 Research Methodology

The research methods involve both quantitative corpus and qualitative text analyses. Specifically, instances of request speech acts were identified from an electronic corpus compiled from *Jane Eyre* using AntConc, a concordancing software tool. The retrieved requests were then categorised and quantitatively analysed using principles of local grammar to determine overall patterns in their structure and distributional characteristics. The patterns were then discussed in relation to character

development and important story turns to explain variation in the uses of request forms across characters.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Review of Research on Local Grammar

Local grammar, proposed in contrast to general grammar, refers to a linguistic research approach that focuses on describing the meaning or function of specific discourse domains (Hunston & Su, 2019). In recent years, it has drawn increasing attention within linguistic research.

Research methods and the theory of local grammar constitute one of the main research issues in this field. Since the advent of local grammar, many corpus linguistics scholars worldwide have paid close attention to it, prompting us to probe its theoretical applicability more broadly. After its domestic introduction, local grammar has been investigated profitably in specific discourse functions such as acknowledgement, apology, and request (Su, 2017, 2018; Su & Wei, 2018), and some scholars subsequently provide a comprehensive review of general research trends in the field of local grammar (Su & Wei, 2020). In addition, Su and Wei (2023) traced back the historical roots and discussed methodological characteristics of three paradigms (local grammar, construction grammar, pattern grammar), and proposed the “meaning-pattern combination” analysis model, which shows that the exploration of grammatical patterns from a local grammar perspective enables us to describe more subtle mapping of form and meaning. Moreover, as a methodological issue in corpus research, Xu (2023) pointed out that post-classical research in corpus research stresses the importance of analysing the mechanism of form-meaning alignment from the perspective of comprehensive context, which offers a valuable and abundant theoretical basis for research in local grammar. Besides, Zhang (2025) has summarised the theoretical mechanism and application results in local grammar systematically, which not only shows the powerful descriptive ability and operational power of this paradigm in the study of corpus-based form-function mapping in a special context but also delineates the academic roadmap for future combination between local grammar and computational, social, and cognitive paradigms.

Another important trend in local grammar studies is cross-disciplinary comparative studies. For instance, the semantic characteristics of the phrase of exemplification across various academic disciplines (e.g., soft disciplines vs hard vs hard disciplines) were compared by Zhang and Li (2021), highlighting the influence of disciplinary cultural differences on language. Studies of discourse functional analysis using the local grammar approach have also attracted considerable attention. For instance, Liu (2024) studied the phrase “the X is that/to” in the U.S. State of the Union addresses, demonstrating the productivity and dynamic semantic shift of phrasal items under constraints of local grammatical patterns. Meanwhile, the pedagogical implications of the local grammar approach in language instruction have increasingly been noticed. For instance, Zhang et al. (2023) studied health metaphors in business and economics discourse. They analysed their local grammar patterns and

discourse functions, revealing how the local grammar approach can open new horizons for second-language metaphor instruction. In addition, other studies have adopted the local grammar approach to do the cross-disciplinary comparison of the speech acts of exemplification among MOOC instructors of different disciplines, discovering the high-frequency occurrence of the pattern of exemplification in the MOOC discourse register with only slight cross-disciplinary variation, expanding the applicability of the local grammar approach to the analysis of educational discourse (Li & Xie, 2025). Overall, however, there have been relatively few empirical studies on literature via a local grammar approach.

2.2 Review of Research on Request Speech Acts in Local Grammar

Speech Act Theory, founded by Austin (1962), asserts that language can be regarded as a type of action. According to speech act theory, the different types of speech acts were classified, and Searle (1969) further expanded them into five major categories. One of the categories, called directives, is the request speech act. In request speech acts, the speaker seeks to lead the hearer to do something, representing a hearer-detrimental and speaker-beneficial transaction. The major advantages of local grammar in language description include its systematicity, intuitiveness, and delicacy. As a result, local grammar is particularly well-suited to studying the speech act (Su, 2017; Su & Wei, 2018).

Su (2017) provided a corpus-based analytic demonstration of how a local grammar approach to speech acts is feasible, extracted and identified request speech act exemplars using corpus analytic tools, and proposed a full set of local grammar patterns. Su and Wei (2022) continued the study in this vein. Their local grammar approach to speech act studies in English formally proposed the concept of the request local grammar's method and theory to the domestic academia, and adopting the local grammar approach, they systematically analysed the request speech act, developed a refined scheme of functional term labelling, and defined the analysis terminologies of the request local grammar presented hereafter (Table 1).

Table 1. Functional Labels for a Local Grammar Analysis of Request (Su & Wei, 2022)

Functional term	Explanation
Requester	The one who requests, typically expressed implicitly in indirect request.
Requestee	The addressee to whom the request is directed to.
Intended action	The action that the Requester him/herself wants to perform.
Requested action	The action that the Requester wants the Requestee to perform.
Hinge	The formal element that links different elements.
Indicator	The formal element that signals a request is being made, usually present in indirect request.
Mitigator	The formal element that mitigates the face-threatening act of requesting.

Research in this line helps enhance the accuracy of labelling speech acts, promote corpus-based approaches to speech act studies, and show how local grammar can help characterise linguistic functions and carry out pragmatic analysis. Following the labelling model optimised by Su and Wei (2022), this study labels the request speech acts and calculates their frequencies. Specifically, the research processes are introduced as follows.

3. Research Design

3.1 Research Questions

For a systematic study of request speech acts in *Jane Eyre*, the following three questions are examined:

- (1) Which local grammar patterns of request are found in *Jane Eyre*, and which of them are the most frequent?
- (2) What character-specific variations can be observed in the request patterns, and how do these variations reflect the personalities of the characters?
- (3) Do *Jane Eyre*'s request patterns change across different narrative stages, and if so, how do these changes align with the novel's themes and plot development?

3.2 Corpus Construction

The corpus was built from the digital edition of *Jane Eyre*, which was taken from Planet eBook (<https://www.planetebook.com/jane-eyre/>). The source file was first turned into plain text. Then, EmEditor was used to clean the text by removing non-story elements, such as the front matter. This left a clean text of about 1.02 million characters. Next, TreeTagger was used for part-of-speech tagging, and the final corpus was named the "Corpus of the Main Text of *Jane Eyre*". Finally, AntConc (version 3.5.8) was used to identify, collect, and statistically analyse all data on requested speech acts in the book.

3.3 Data Extraction Procedure

Among the various aspects of local grammar studies, two essential steps are data retrieval and labelling of functional elements (Su & Wei, 2022). As this study aims to investigate speech acts of request rather than reporting clauses about requesting, the data set was limited to request speech acts in direct speech (i.e., character speeches and letters).

Speech acts of request can be retrieved by searching for formal linguistic manifestations of requests (see Table 2). In this study, the corpus software programme AntConc was first used to identify items that met these criteria. As speech acts of request in the literature often employ indirect requests or implicit linguistic markers, an additional close reading of the corpus was systematically conducted to complement the search method and obtain a comprehensive dataset. The candidate items were then manually filtered and categorised against Su and Wei's (2022) local grammar model for requests. Through a multi-round screening of the data, a final dataset of 96 request items was formed.

Table 2. An overview of Local Grammar Patterns of Request (Su & Wei, 2022, p. 809)

Conventionalised forms	Local grammar patterns
Can/could/may I/we VP	Indicator + Mitigator + Intended action
Can/could/will/would you VP	Indicator + Mitigator + Requested action
I/we 'd/would like to-inf.	Requester + Hinge + Intended action
I/we want to-inf.	
You have to-inf. / must VP	Requestee + Hinge + Requested action
I/we want you to-inf.	Requester + Hinge + Requestee + Requested action
Would you like to-inf.	Indicator + Requested action
Would/do you mind VP	
I/we wonder if ...	Requester + Hinge + Indicator + Requested action
Would you like me to-inf.	Indicator + Requester + Intended action

4. Results and Discussion

Jane Eyre explores female independence and personal agency in romantic relationships. The novel traces the story of an orphaned girl who is mistreated at her aunt's home and later sent to Lowood School. As an adult, she becomes a governess at Thornfield Hall and develops an attachment to its owner, Rochester. Just before their wedding, she learns that Rochester already has a wife, Bertha, who has a severe mental illness. This discovery leads her to leave Thornfield in distress. After roaming without direction, she finds shelter with her cousin St. John and his two sisters. St. John then proposes marriage as part of his missionary plans, but Jane ultimately chooses to return to the now-blind Rochester, and the two are reunited.

The analysis that follows links the empirical data to the novel's storyline. It examines local grammatical features and the pragmatic functions of requests from three angles. Corpus-based methods allow for the quantification of authorial style and literary techniques. Pragmatic labelling and statistical analysis can reveal patterns that may not be visible otherwise. The findings of this study provide a compelling illustration of the empirical efficacy of this approach.

4.1 Classification and Frequency Analysis of Request Local Grammars

4.1.1 Local Grammar Patterns of Request in *Jane Eyre*

After detailed labelling of the 96 requestive speech acts extracted from *Jane Eyre*, all local syntactic patterns related to requests in the novel were systematically identified, classified, and counted, data analysis revealed that, in addition to the formal directives listed in Table 2, requestive speech acts frequently appear in the syntactic structure "You will VP..." This structure was classified under the "Requestee + Hinge + Requested action" pattern. Table 3 summarises the classification. This finding enriches the empirical results of this study, and offers a beneficial supplement to the request local grammar model established by Su and Wei (2022).

Table 3. Local Grammar Patterns of Requests in *Jane Eyre*

Conventionalised forms	Local grammar patterns	Example	Frequency
Can/could/may I/we VP	Indicator + Mitigator + Intended action	Can I do anything? p. 172	15
Can/could/will/would you VP	Indicator + Mitigator + Requested action	Can you tell me some of them? p. 32	18
I/we 'd/would like to-inf.	Requester + Hinge +	I want to speak to her. p. 338	8
I/we want to-inf.	Intended action		
You have to-inf. / must / will VP	Requestee + Hinge + Requested action	You must just stand on one side. p. 172	45
I/we want you to-inf.	Requester + Hinge + Requestee + Requested action	I want you to come here. p. 10	2
Would you like to-inf.	Indicator + Requested action	Would you like to drink. p. 25	5
Would/do you mind VP			
I/we wonder if ...	Requester + Hinge + Indicator + Requested action	I wonder if she saw anything. p. 26	3
Would you like me to-inf.	Indicator + Requester + Intended action	/	0

Table 3 presents the local grammatical realisations of request speech acts in *Jane Eyre*. Considerable structural variation is observed across the patterns. The “Indicator + Requester + Intended action” pattern is absent from the text, while all other patterns are attested. This set of occurrences broadly confirms the request local grammar framework proposed by Su and Wei (2022).

The identified patterns cover all three request strategies defined in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989): direct, conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect strategies. This distribution illustrates how characters adjust their linguistic choices and pragmatic intentions according to shifting social encounters. At one end of the continuum are direct, authoritative realisations such as “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action” (e.g., *You have to-inf. / must / will VP*). In the middle range lie conventionalised polite requests of the form “Indicator + Mitigator + Requested action” (e.g., *Can/could/will/would you VP*). At the other end are more indirect, nuanced forms like “Requester + Hinge + Indicator + Requested action” (e.g., *I wonder if...*). These distinct structural selections reflect power asymmetries and status differences among characters, while also pointing to their sensitivity in balancing politeness, indirectness, and contextual parameters during speech act performance.

4.1.2 Analysis of High-Frequency Request Local Grammar Patterns

Regarding frequency, “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action” (*You have to-inf. / must / will VP*) is the

local grammar pattern that occurs most frequently in the text, used in 45 instances, i.e., representing 46.9% of the total number of speech acts of request. The pattern conveys the directness of the request by using the verb have to or the modals must or will, which gives specific instructions to the requestee in a very clear and assertive manner. It demonstrates the speaker's personal power and authority, or a firm, direct requirement in a specific situation. This frequent occurrence reveals noticeable power imbalances in certain narrative situations, where characters of high power instruct and order the actions of characters of low power. Jane, having a terrible dream the night before her wedding, gets no explanations or any solace from Rochester. He instructs Jane to remain in his ward's room: "You must share it with her tonight, Jane" (p. 435). Because of rigid gender roles and class hierarchies of the Victorian era, Rochester occupies a distinctly superior social position. He therefore does not attempt to mitigate the message and issues an unhedged, assertive request that reveals his power advantages in a given interaction.

The high frequencies of "Requestee + Hinge, Requested action" also shed light on the novel's complicated relational patterns and overall power hierarchy. Among the 45 occurrences of this pattern, 42 of them are direct requests Jane receives from other characters. This lopsided frequency of direct requests reflects the unequal position Jane holds and thus also embodies the outsider role the character plays in her social context. In her interpersonal relations, Jane frequently receives characters' direct requests addressed to her, thereby exposing an imbalance of power between them. From her aunt's bossy commands, her cousin's aggression, to the institutional request made on her at Lowood School and the haughty interactions with other characters at Thornfield Hall, almost every character in this book refers to her patronisingly, distantly, or coldly. The high frequencies of direct requests indicate the fragile position Jane holds in social interactions, and at the same time, serve as an indication of the rigid class hierarchy and gender disparity deeply rooted in Victorian times.

Two other patterns with relatively high frequency also deserve mentioning here: "Indicator + Mitigator + Requested action" (*Can/could/will/would you VP...*) occurs 18 times (18.8%), and "Indicator + Mitigator + Intended action" (*Can/could/may I/we VP...*) occurs 15 times (15.6%). Both patterns weaken the illocutionary force of requests using modal verbs, thus making the requests sound more polite. Their regular appearance suggests that the characters generally follow politeness principles in their day-to-day social interactions. As in this example: "Would you like to drink, or could you eat anything?" (p. 25), Bessie the nursemaid directs the request towards Jane, the hearer. This sentence not only shows the speaker's intention, but also does not impose on the hearer to fulfil her desire with the force of a direct command. In a word, these two other patterns present the social manners and indirect communicative strategies which permeate the entire book. Together, these two secondary patterns reveal the social etiquette and indirect communication strategies embedded throughout the novel.

4.2 Variation in Request Speech Acts Across Characters

In *Jane Eyre*, request speech acts play a key role in interaction. They also serve as a major means of revealing characterisation, social standing, and power dynamics. The preferred request local grammar

patterns vary markedly across characters.

4.2.1 Request Patterns in Interactions Between Jane Eyre and Rochester

At the initial encounter between Jane Eyre and Rochester, both parties open the conversation with request speech acts, but the language they use presents a remarkable contrast. At that time, even though Jane had no idea who Rochester really was, her language indicates a sense of reserve and respect. In contrast, Rochester makes his purposes known with declarative, unhedged directives. For example, Jane uses the “Indicator + Mitigator + Intended action” pattern to politely inquire, “Can I do anything?” (p. 172), demonstrating sensitivity to the other person’s needs. Rochester answers her by “You must just stand on one side” (p. 172), realising the “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action” pattern with direct imperative requests. This clash between politeness and authority sets the complex tone for the relationship between the two from the very beginning.

At the moment when Jane learns about Rochester’s previous marriage, and decides to go away, Rochester’s request speech acts reveal more about his underlying personality. At this turning point, Rochester still fails to move beyond the economic and class distance between them, using direct requests to pressure Jane into complying with him. Assuming that he can keep dominating the relationship between the two, he continues to exercise linguistic pressure, using the “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action” pattern but not employing any mitigators: “Jane, you must be reasonable...” (p. 463).

From a quantitative perspective, Jane performs 30 request speech acts across the novel. Among these 30 requests, 19 use the “Indicator + Mitigator + Intended action” or “Indicator + Mitigator + Requested action” schema, indicating that Jane tends to combine indicators with mitigators when making her requests. She only uses the straightforward “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action” schema three times. On the other hand, Rochester only makes 15 requests in the novel, 13 of which adopt the schema of “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action”, which is mostly realised syntactically as “You must VP...”. The numerical comparison illustrates their differences in making requests and reveals a significant social power imbalance between the two.

4.2.2 Request Patterns of Supporting Characters

Apart from the speech acts of request between Jane Eyre and Rochester, those used by the supporting characters also demonstrate specific characteristics that reflect their power and social status in the novel. Mrs Reed, the aunt of Jane Eyre, performs the speech act of requesting with strong oppressive characteristics. At the beginning of the novel, Jane dwells in Mrs Reed’s house, and she is in a weak and dependent state, while Mrs Reed is the absolute authority at home. Thus, Mrs Reed consistently adopts the “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action” pattern, as seen in “You will now stay here an hour longer” (p. 23). Through such direct imperative utterances, she exerts control and restraint over Jane, highlighting both her rejection of the protagonist and her ruthless personality.

Furthermore, the interactions between St. John and Jane, particularly their discourse surrounding his marriage proposal and missionary ambitions, illustrate a clear contrast in their choice of request local

grammar patterns. St. John addresses Jane with eight request speech acts in total, every single one conforming to the “Requestee + Hinge + Requested action” pattern. He insists repeatedly that Jane accept his proposal and go abroad with him, saying “A missionary’s wife you must—shall be” (p. 613). This severe choice reveals his authoritative attitude and shows his tendency to use Jane as a tool for his religious work, instead of seeing her emotional needs and her own free will. Such a disregard for language formulation signals that St. John fails to engage with Jane on an equal footing.

Unlike St. John’s forceful request, Jane’s reaction to the request, as a speech act, indicates that she strongly insists upon emotional independence and self-worth. She turns to a little-used pattern, “Requester + Hinge + Intended action,” to bravely declare her true intention of quitting the village schoolmistress job and leaving St. John: “I want to enjoy my own faculty...” (p. 594). This realisation underlines her pursuit of self-worth and reflects her desire to lead an independent life. By designing distinct request patterns to suit different characters, the author clearly portrays each character’s personal traits. This literary pattern makes the characters more multidimensional and thus offers readers a penetrating perspective on human nature and social relationships.

4.3 Variation in Request Speech Acts Across Narrative Stages

Request, as a key linguistic action, undergoes noticeable changes in both its formal and functional aspects throughout the storyline’s progression. With Jane Eyre as the first-person narrator in the novel and her requests dominating all other linguistic actions in the target corpus (31.3%), this study focuses primarily on Jane’s requests across different stages of her life, aiming to uncover her underlying psychological motivations and personal development.

In the first stage of the novel, Jane has been in a vulnerable position for a long time, and her requests throughout her life at her aunt’s home and at Lowood School clearly express profound deference and hesitancy. Jane regularly uses the “Indicator + Mitigator + Intended action” construction (*Can/could/may I/we VP...*), like “May I go up and speak to her?” (p. 121). The requests reflect an insecurity she feels and a constant need for external acceptance. When Jane is highly motivated or has a desire to do something, she still must ask others for permission for the requested action, which shows her suppression in society and emotions.

Later, as Jane grows up, especially after she goes to Thornfield Hall and meets Rochester, she slowly begins to show her self-respect and resistance. During this stage, her request speech acts express more independence and confidence. Jane still employs mitigating modals such as *can* or *could*, but she makes them more assertive, as is evident in her sentence: “Can you tell me where he is?” (p. 174).

At the climax of the novel, Jane faces a crucial emotional and moral dilemma. After Jane finds out that Rochester is already married and decides to leave, her speech acts of requesting become more determined. She states her request straightforwardly using the structure “Requester + Hinge + Intended action”: “I want to go on as usual for another month” (p. 412). At the same time, Rochester’s requests toward Jane undergo parallel changes. He begins using softer expressions for the first time. Following a misunderstanding, he issues a request for reconciliation: “Can you listen to me?” (p. 464). This

development suggests his emotional reliance on Jane and his increasing regard for her. It brings to light the nuanced shifts in their power relations. It also points to Jane's ongoing growth in maturity and self-reliance.

At the end of the novel, Jane and Rochester reunite. They finally reach a state of emotional balance and equality. At this time, Jane's requests are unusually self-assured and assertive. In particular, she uses the form "Requestee + Hinge + Requested action" (*You have to-inf. / must / will VP...*) to Rochester for the first and the only time: "...you must wait till tomorrow" (p. 669). Such a pattern choice not only highlights her emotional autonomy but also confirms her sense of self-worth. At this stage, Jane has grown from a young, insecure and repressed girl to a self-assured and independent woman, and her request patterns have developed from early deference to assertion. More than reflecting Jane's personal transformation, this development contributes to the novel's deep examination of female independence and self-fulfilment.

Through the analysis of the sequential stages of Jane's request speech acts, this study finds that different intra-character local grammars are realised in varied patterns throughout the novel. These variations reflect changes in her psychological state and social environment. They also contribute significantly to plot progression and gist elaboration of the novel.

5. Conclusion and Implications

5.1 Summary

Drawing on pragmatic and quantitative approaches, this corpus-assisted study of local grammatical features demonstrates Brontë's characterisation and complex plotting in *Jane Eyre*. Using corpus techniques, the research extracts and investigates patterns of requests in *Jane Eyre*, including their local grammatical realisations, type-token distributions, and social and literary relationships. The results indicate that the patterns of request speech acts in *Jane Eyre* are a series of local grammar patterns. The typical pattern is "Requestee + Hinge + Requested action", which displays the power differences and hierarchical relationships between characters. Additionally, the differences between characters in their use of patterns characterise their personalities and, at the same time, interweave with the theme and the plot's development. Jane Eyre's requests gradually evolve from early deference to mature assertiveness, tracing her psychological journey from insecurity to independence. Concurrently, characters such as Rochester, Mrs. Reed, and St. John deploy specific local grammar realisations that project their respective dispositions or privileges.

This study contributes to the existing analysis of Brontë's stylistic characteristics and opens up a new way of exploring literary texts as well. Combining the concepts of local grammar and corpus research approaches, it illustrates an underlying relationship between form and function. Furthermore, the study suggests that local grammar has the potential to analyse literary texts and offers quantitative, empirical data for analysing Brontë's delicate representation of dialogue.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

Despite these findings, a few limitations should be taken into consideration. Firstly, by concentrating on one type of speech act, namely, requests, other speech act types, such as thanks or apologies, are excluded from this study, which might hinder in-depth insight into the linguistic resources of the novel as a whole. Secondly, some request speech acts are expressed in imperative forms. However, there is a gap in the theoretical study of imperative local grammars, and counting imperative expressions in corpora is a huge challenge (Su, 2017), which consequently impacts the quality of analysis. Lastly, constrained by the size of the single-text corpus, the results of this study are not readily applicable to the literature in general.

5.3 Directions for Future Research

The analytical value of local grammar in literary studies deserves further attention. Based on the findings reported here, future research may proceed along several complementary lines. One line would broaden the analytical scope to encompass a wider range of speech-act categories, allowing examination of varied linguistic realisations across different literary texts. A second line would apply the same framework to other works or to distinct genres, thus testing how far the generalizability of local grammar approaches extends. A third line would address theoretical gaps that remain unresolved, an effort that could advance corpus-based local grammar inquiry. It is hoped that the present study will serve as a modest reference point for later investigations that employ local grammar theory in literary contexts.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things With Words*. Oxford: Calderon Press.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, J., & Kasper. (1989). *Cross-cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*. Nerwood NewJersey: Ablex.
- Brontë, C. (1847). *Jane Eyre*. Planet eBook. <https://www.planetebook.com/jane-eyre/>
- Firth, J. (1968). A Synopsis of Linguistic Theory, 1930-55. In F. R. Palmer (Ed.), *Selected Papers of J. R. Firth (1952-59)* (pp. 168-205). London: Longmans.
- Harris, Z. (1982). Discourse and sublanguage. *Sublanguage: Studies of language in restricted semantic domains*, 231-236.
- Hunston, S., & Su, H. (2019). Patterns, constructions, and local grammar: A case study of “evaluation”. *Applied Linguistics*, 40(4), 567-593. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amx046>
- Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2025). A comparative study of exemplification in MOOC teacher talk across disciplines: A local grammar approach. *Foreign Language Education*, 46(4), 56-62.
- Liu, Y. (2024). An expansion of studies on phraseological items through the approach of local grammars: A case study of the X is that/to in U.S. State of the Union Address. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 56(4), 496-506+638.
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University.

- <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173438>
- Su, H. (2017). Local grammars of speech acts: An exploratory study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 111, 72-83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2017.02.008>
- Su, H. (2018). "Thank bloody God it's Friday": A local grammar of thanking. *Corpus Pragmatics*, 2(1), 83-105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41701-017-0024-9>
- Su, H., & Wei, N. (2018). "I'm really sorry about what I said" A local grammar of apology. *Pragmatics*, 28(3), 439-462. <https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.17005.su>
- Su, H., & Wei, N. (2020). Local Grammar Research in the Context of Corpus Linguistics: Retrospect and Prospect. *Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education*, (04), 40-45+7.
- Su, H., & Wei, N. (2022). A local grammar approach to speech act studies in English. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 54(6), 803-814+958.
- Su, H., & Wei, N. (2023). Pattern grammar, construction grammar, and local grammar: Convergences and divergences. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 55(06), 925-937+961.
- Wei, N. (2017). A corpus-based study of local grammar: Background, methods, and features. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 40(01), 10-12.
- Xu, J. (2023). Post-classic era research methods in corpus linguistics and their theoretical implications. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 55(03), 442-454+481.
- Zhang, L & Li, X. (2021). Local Grammars across Disciplines: A Case Study of Exemplification. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (06), 12-22+147.
- Zhang, L., & Wei, N. (2018). Local Grammar: Evolution, Status Quo, and Prospects. *Contemporary Linguistics*, 20(1), 103-116.
- Zhang, L., Tong, F., & Xiong, Z. (2023). Applying local grammar in second language teaching: A case study of health metaphor in academic discourse of economics and management. *Journal of Zhejiang Sci-Tech University (Social Sciences)*, 50(5), 559-568.
- Zhang, M. (2025). An Analytical Review of the Theoretical Mechanisms and Application Development of Local Grammar. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 48(5), 112-122. <https://doi.org/10.37547/ijp/Volume05Issue03-34>