

The Language about Food, Drink, and Meals Used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma*

Eiko TATSUMOTO

0. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the contexts of or the passages containing the language about food (e.g. a baked apple, an egg, a muffin, a tart, and pork), drink (e.g. water and wine), and meals (e.g. dinner and supper) used for Mr. Woodhouse in Jane Austen's (1775-1817) *Emma* (1816).¹ Jane Austen tends to use negative expressions for the purpose of characterization in the speech in her works. Negative expressions,—for example, the contracted forms “-n't,” the negative adverbs “*barely*, *hardly*, *rarely*, *scarcely*, and *seldom*,” the double negations such as “not uncommon” and “not unhandsome,” and “not + verbs of negative meaning”—are employed not for all characters, but for specific characters of a certain social rank or those who are distinguished in some other way. If we have a close look at this topic, we find that the double negations “not unwholesome” and “not deny” used by Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* represent his timorous or hesitant attitude to life.

It seems that there is a close connection between life and expression in Jane Austen's works. When we draw attention to the context and the language about food used for characters, we can see the characterization which Austen tries to demonstrate. In the paper the former refers to “expression,” and the latter plays a part of “life.” A few aspects of the context and the language about food used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* have been discussed by Hiroko Naono (1986), Maggie Black and Deirdre Le Faye (1995), and they consider his expressions for food represents his timorous or hesitant attitude to life. We shall have a closer look at the way in which Jane Austen describes the context and the language about food used for Mr. Woodhouse.

In order to look at the use of the context and the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse in more detail, focusing on certain aspects, we shall be concerned with types of the context and the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* and their frequency (section 2) and some linguistic expressions in the context: how the context and the language of food and meals relating to Mr. Woodhouse is used effectively (section 3).

1. The features of Jane Austen's use of the language about food and meals, and the

¹ The text used for the paper is *Emma* (1816), *The Novels of Jane Austen*, 5 vols. the third edition, edited by R. W. Chapman. London: Oxford UP, 1932-34. The abbreviated title used for the paper is *E*.

plot of *Emma*

As Jane Austen herself says, “— 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on —,”² the ordinary daily life of the upper-middle class in the country is described in her novels. For instance, there are a routine visit, a party, a picnic and so on. Therefore, the range of her stories is limited. The ordinary daily life clearly and deeply reflects on each characterization. As Jane Austen further says, “... an artist cannot do anything slovenly,”³ and the story is skilful; similarly, the description of the characters is well done.

In terms of characterization, meaning “distinction by means of peculiar features or characteristics” (*OED* s.v. characterization 2.), there are narrative, evaluation from others, and the character’s own speech. K. C. Phillipps (1970: 11) points out: “the English of the dialogue is especially interesting,” and “differences of character all reveal themselves in slight variations of speech,” and he suggests the importance of characterization in the language which the character uses. Moreover, Norman Page (1986: 264) says, “Jane Austen’s characters ... continually betray their own follies and frailties through their speech. In the work of few novelists does dialogue carry such a significant burden,” and he suggests that characterization by speech is particular to Jane Austen.

Before coming to the main topic, the following brief sketch is necessary. Maggie Black and Deirdre Le Faye (1995: 19) suggests that Austen was much more interested in the social interaction of her characters than in what they ate, hence in her dinner-party scenes the emphasis is on their conversation and unspoken thoughts rather than on the food before them; indeed, it is significant that only her sillier or more unattractive characters talk specifically about food. *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* are the two novels of Jane Austen’s maturity that contain the most numerous references to food, according to Black and Le Faye (1995: 22). The language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma*, therefore, seems to be found frequently.

The plots of *Emma* may be summarized as follows:⁴ The eponymous young heroine of the novel, Emma Woodhouse, is initially presented as uniting “some of the best blessings of existence.” She has good looks, intelligence, a happy disposition, great wealth, and a high status in the community. However, she has been spoiled by all these so-called blessings, and having had “rather too much her own way” for most of her twenty-one years, she has become quite conceited, with a tendency to arrogance and snobbery in her attitudes to others. In particular, she has an exaggerated sense of her

² No. 100, To Anna Austen, 9 Sept. 1814, p. 401. (*Jane Austen’s Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, The second edition, edited by R. W. Chapman. London: Oxford UP, 1979.)

³ No. 11, To Cassandra Austen, 17 Nov. 1798, p. 30. (*Jane Austen’s Letters to her Sister Cassandra and Others*, The second edition, edited by R. W. Chapman. London: Oxford UP, 1979.)

⁴ This summary is derived mainly from Poplawski (1998: 319-20).

own superiority in the community, a brash overconfidence in her own opinions and judgments, and a complacent lack of critical self-awareness. By the end of the novel, largely by her own careful self-scrutiny though sometimes aided by the criticisms of one of her friends, Mr. Knightley, she has come to recognize her “insufferable vanity” and “unpardonable arrogance” in trying to control the destiny of others; she realizes that she has been “universally mistaken.” Emma finally marries Mr. Knightley. We have so far observed each outline. Based on the above, we shall begin by observing the real subject of food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* from the following (section 1).

2. The types of the context and the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* and their frequency

This section will consider how the contexts and the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse occur, and we shall concentrate on the types of passage containing the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* and their frequency. There are some significant characteristics with regard to the use of the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse. They can be classified into four groups: A. narrative, B. narrative and Mr. Woodhouse’s own speech, C. Mr. Woodhouse’s own speech, and D. other characters’ speech. The following examples illustrate these:

A. Narrative

- (1) Mr. Woodhouse considered eight persons at dinner together as the utmost that his nerves could bear— [narrative] (*E* 292)⁵

B. Narrative and Mr. Woodhouse’s own speech

- (2) Such another small basin of thin gruel as his own, was all that he could, with thorough self-approbation, recommend, though he might constrain himself, while the ladies were comfortably clearing the nicer things, to say:
“Mrs. Bates, let me propose your venturing on one of these eggs. An egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome. Serle understands boiling an egg better than any body. I would not recommend an egg boiled by any body else— but you need not be afraid— they are very small, you see— one of our small eggs will not hurt you. Miss Bates, let Emma help you to a *little* (italics in original) bit of tart— a *very* (italics in original) little bit. Ours are all apple tarts. You need not be afraid of unwholesome preserves here. I do not advise the custard. Mrs. Goddard, what say you to *half* (italics in

⁵ The letter and the number in brackets after the examples show the work and the page. The proper names in square brackets are those of characters in the novels. The explanation in the square brackets— for example, in example (3), “[Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Emma Woodhouse]”— indicates that Mr. Woodhouse speaks to Emma Woodhouse.

original) a glass of wine? A *small* (italics in original) half glass — put into a tumbler of water? I do not think it could disagree with you.” [narrative and Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Mrs. Bates, Miss Bates, and Mrs. Goddard] (*E* 24-5)

C. Mr. Woodhouse’s own speech

- (3) “The muffin last night — if it had been handed round once, I think it would have been enough.” [Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Emma Woodhouse] (*E* 170)

D. Other characters’ speech

- (4) “— only we do not have them baked more than twice, and Mr. Woodhouse made us promise to have them done three times —” [Miss Bates ⇒ Mrs. Weston] (*E* 238)

For the moment, it may be useful to look more closely at some of the more important features of the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse. The following table shows the types and the pages of the passages about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse.

Table 1 The types and the pages of the passages about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse

	Types	Pages
1	narrative	19
2	narrative	24
3	narrative and Mr. Woodhouse’s speech	24-5
4	Mr. Woodhouse’s speech	170
5	Mr. Woodhouse’s speech	172
6	Mr. Woodhouse’s speech	210
7	Mr. Woodhouse’s speech	210
8	narrative	211
9	Miss Bates’s speech	237
10	Miss Bates’s speech	238
11	narrative	292
12	Miss Bates’s speech	329

Judging from the above, it is clear that “narrative” and “narrative and Mr. Woodhouse’s speech” occur at the beginning of the novel, “Mr. Woodhouse’s speech” in the middle, and “other characters’ speech, Miss Bates’s speech” in the second half, though narrative occurs once in the middle (p. 211) and once in the second half (p. 292). As is shown in the table, it is noteworthy that the other characters’ speech is all of one of his friends,

Miss Bates. The next point to examine is the frequency of the passages about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 The frequency of the passages about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse

Types	Freq.
narrative	4
narrative and Mr. Woodhouse's speech	1
Mr. Woodhouse's speech	4
other character's speech (Miss Bates's speech)	3

As is shown above, with the exception of the type "narrative and Mr. Woodhouse's speech," the frequencies are similar and nearly consistent in the other three types.

We have so far observed Jane Austen's use of the language about food and meal used for Mr. Woodhouse. We shall make some observations on the context in the following section.

3. Some linguistic expressions in the context of the language of food and meals relating to Mr. Woodhouse

This section will attempt to observe how the language of food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse is used to create his characterization, focusing on some linguistic expressions in the context and so on.

Let us now attempt to extend the observation into Mr. Woodhouse's characters. He is depicted as a timorous or hesitant man throughout the novel. The point to examine is how the context and the language of food and meals relating to Mr. Woodhouse is used effectively. We shall observe it from the beginning of the novel to the end.

First of all, Mr. Woodhouse is described at the beginning of the novel as follows:

- (5) ... for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have recommended him at any time. (*E* 7)

Next, at the beginning of the novel, in the context of the following two examples of the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse, we can see his timid expressions or feelings (with underlining) for food and meals, in this case, supper.

- (6) ... and the wedding-cake, which had been a great⁶ distress to him, was all

⁶ Underlines, wavy underlines, bold underlines, and double underlines are all mine.

eat up. His own stomach could bear nothing rich, and he could never believe other people to be different from himself. What was unwholesome to him, he regarded as unfit for any body; and he had, therefore, earnestly tried to dissuade them from having any wedding-cake at all, and when that proved vain, as earnestly tried to prevent any body's eating it. [narrative] (E 19)⁷

- (7) Upon such occasions poor Mr. Woodhouse's feelings were in sad warfare. He loved to have the cloth laid, because it had been the fashion of his youth; but his conviction of suppers being very unwholesome made him rather sorry to see any thing put on it; and while his hospitality would have welcomed his visitors to every thing, his care for their health made him grieve that they would eat. [narrative] (E 24)⁸

In (6), Mr. Woodhouse's concern about one of his friend's, Mrs. Weston's wedding cake is described. Here, some timorous expressions about food, the wedding cake are used, and his attentive disposition for others is introduced to the readers by narrative. Moreover, the intensive words "great" (with wavy underlines) is shown so as to emphasize the word "distress" in (6). The example in (7) is a scene in which Mr. Woodhouse entertains his friends at home. Several concerning expressions of his about supper are seen, in addition to these expressions, but what has to be noticed that intensive words "very" and "rather" are employed effectively to emphasize his feelings. His growing sadness is thus revealed by these intensive words.

Next, we can divide the passages about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse into two types "narrative and Mr. Woodhouse's speech" below when continuing to read the novel in (8) below:

- (8) Such another small basin of thin gruel as his own, was all that he could, with thorough self-approbation, recommend, though he might constrain himself, while the ladies were comfortably clearing the nicer things, to say: "Mrs. Bates, let me propose your venturing on one of these eggs. An egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome. Serle understands boiling an egg better than any body. I would not recommend an egg boiled by any body else — but you need not be afraid — they are very small, you see — one of our small eggs will not hurt you. Miss Bates, let Emma help you to a little (italics in original) bit of tart — a very (italics in original) little bit. Ours are all apple tarts. You need not be afraid of unwholesome preserves here. I do not advise the custard. Mrs. Goddard, what say you to half (italics in

⁷ Black and Le Faye (1995: 26).

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original) a glass of wine? A *small* (italics in original) half glass – put into a tumbler of water? I do not think it could disagree with you.” [narrative and Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Mrs. Bates, Miss Bates, and Mrs. Goddard] (*E* 24-5)

In (8), the passage moves from narrative to his own speech. Not only many attentive expressions for food and drink for others' health are shown in the scene describing him entertaining his friends at home as in (7), but also the double negation “not unwholesome” used by Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* represents his timorous or hesitant attitude to life, as mentioned in Introduction and as Page (1972: 47) and Naono (1986: 172) point out. More noteworthy is that the intensive word “very” is shown three times so as to stress strongly the words “soft,” and “small,” and “a little bit.”

Regarding Mr. Woodhouse's own speech, the passages about food and meals used after “narrative and Mr. Woodhouse's speech” are as follows:

(9) “... The muffin last night—if it had been handed round once, I think it would have been enough.” [Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Emma Woodhouse] (*E* 170)

(10) “... I have often wished—but it is so little one can venture to do —small, trifling presents, of any thing uncommon—Now we have killed a porker, and Emma thinks of sending them a loin or a leg; it is very small and delicate—Hartfield pork is not like any other pork—but still it is pork—and, my dear Emma, unless one could be sure of their making it into steaks, nicely fried, as our's are fried, without the smallest grease, and not roast it, for no stomach can bear roast pork—I think we had better send the leg—do not you think so, my dear?” [Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Emma Woodhouse] (*E* 172)⁹

(11) “That's right, my dear, very right. I had not thought of it before, but that was the best way. They must not over-salt the leg; and then, if it is not over-salted, and if it is very thoroughly boiled, just as Serle boils our's, and eaten very moderately of, with a boiled turnip, and a little carrot or parsnip, I do not consider it unwholesome.” [Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Emma Woodhouse] (*E* 172)¹⁰

(12) “Perry tells me that Mr. Cole never touches malt liquor.” [Mr. Woodhouse ⇒ Mr. Weston] (*E* 210)

In (9), the hospitality of Mr. Woodhouse and Emma to their friends is described. Here

⁹ Black and Le Faye (1995: 26).

¹⁰ Black and Le Faye (1995: 26).

the word “enough” (with bold underlines) shows his natural concern related to attentive attitudes. The intensive words “so,” “very,” “very thorough,” and “very moderately” are shown so as to emphasize the words “little” and so on, in addition to the use of some understatement expressions for pork, in order to give one of his friends poor Miss Bates food in (10) and (11). In (12), the negative expression is applied in scenes where Mr. Woodhouse is talking about one of his friends, Mr. Cole.

Next, we can examine the language of food and meals for Mr. Woodhouse by others (other characters’ speech), although narrative is included twice in examples (13) and (16). In other words, what is important is that Mr. Woodhouse’s thought or opinion is given also through other characters’ speech. This use of other characters’ speech to show his thought about food and meals is reflected in his characterization. The following may serve as examples:

- (13) ... if she [Emma] came home cold, she would be sure to warm herself thoroughly; if hungry, that she would take something to eat; that her own maid should sit up for her; and that Serle and the butler should see that every thing were safe in the house, as usual. [narrative] (*E* 211)
- (14) “—I have so often heard Mr. Woodhouse recommend a baked apple. I believe it is the only way that Mr. Woodhouse thinks the fruit thoroughly wholesome.” [Miss Bates ⇒ Mrs. Weston] (*E* 237)
- (15) “—only we do not have them baked more than twice, and Mr. Woodhouse made us promise to have them done three times—” [Miss Bates ⇒ Mrs. Weston] (*E* 238)
- (16) Mr. Woodhouse considered eight persons at dinner together as the utmost that his nerves could bear— [narrative] (*E* 292)
- (17) “... there was a delicate fricassee of sweetbread and some asparagus brought in at first, and good Mr. Woodhouse, not thinking the asparagus quite boiled enough, sent it all out again.” [Miss Bates ⇒ Jane Fairfax] (*E* 329)

The example in (14) and (15) is a scene in which Miss Bates talks of Mr. Woodhouse’s thought about a baked apple. In (15), especially, it is interesting to note that his natural anxiety is revealed clearly in that he “made us promise to have them done ‘three times’,” not ‘twice’ as Miss Bates says that “we do not have them baked more than twice” in the example, as Black and Le Faye (1995: 26) also point out. In (17), Mr. Woodhouse’s attentive feelings about food are expressed. Thus, other characters’ speech also proves his characterisation in a similar way to Mr. Woodhouse’s own speech.

Incidentally, two examples (13) and (16) which are found among those in which

Miss Bates's speech appears are described by narrative. Regarding the passage of narrative in which Mr. Woodhouse's anxious attitudes about food and meals is described, in (13), some promises arising from Mr. Woodhouse's nervous about his daughter, Emma, who is going to the party, is mentioned, and Mr. Woodhouse's negative view about the number for dinner is described in (16), although no linguistic expression appears either in (13) and (16).

As an example contrasting with Mr. Woodhouse's language for food and meals, let us observe Emma's case below:

(18) ... and her last pleasing duty, before she left the house, was to pay her respects to them as they sat together after dinner; and while her father was fondly noticing the beauty of her dress, to make the two ladies all the amends in her power, by helping them to large slices of cake and full glasses of wine, for whatever unwilling self-denial his care of their constitution might have obliged them to practise during the meal. — She had provided a plentiful dinner for them; she wished she could know that they had been allowed to eat it. [narrative] (*E* 213)

In (18), Emma's hospitality at home to her friends is depicted before going to the party. As shown above, interestingly, opposite to Mr. Woodhouse's attitudes of reserve towards food and meals, his daughter, Emma adopts positive attitudes, as shown by her use of the positive expressions "large slices of," "full glasses of" and "plentiful" (with double underlines) for food, drink, and dinner. Such attitudes in Emma, therefore, prove her father's contrastingly timorous or hesitant attitude to life adequately.

4. Final remarks

So far we have observed Jane Austen's use of the context and the language about food, drink, and meals for Mr. Woodhouse in terms of: (I) the types of the context and the language about food and meals used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma* and their frequency and (II) some linguistic expressions in the context of the language of food and meals relating to Mr. Woodhouse. The following two results were obtained. Firstly, regarding types of the context and the language about food and meal used for Mr. Woodhouse in *Emma*, several types occur, and the frequency of each, with the exception of the type "narrative and Mr. Woodhouse's speech," is similar and nearly consistent in the other three. Secondly, as for some linguistic expressions in the context of the language of food and meals relating to Mr. Woodhouse, not only his understatement for food and meals are found clearly, but also intensive words and so on to emphasize his attentive attitudes towards them are used.

Jane Austen tends to use the context and the language about food and meals for Mr. Woodhouse for the purpose of characterization in four types of passages, narrative,

narrative and his own speech, his own speech, and other characters' speech, revealing Jane Austen's art of characterisation. These four types appear throughout the novel as follows: narrative and "narrative and his own speech" at the beginning of the novel, his own speech in the middle, and other characters' speech in the second half— that is to say, to begin with, at the first of the novel, Mr. Woodhouse's character is introduced for the reader by being mentioned in narrative, next, the passage in which his hesitant expressions about food and drink appear moves from narrative to his own speech in the type "narrative and his own speech." Furthermore, Mr. Woodhouse's own speech proves his timorous attitudes, and finally, his anxious attitudes are shown and proved even by other characters' speech. We have found that Jane Austen uses different varieties of types of language referring to food and meals for Mr. Woodhouse and adeptly creates his characterization.

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