Copyright © the author(s)

Language Style Analysis in the Short Film '*The Mourning Bird*'

Fista Elma Ratu Indayani[1]*, Abdul Muhid[2], Agus Syahid[3], Titik Ceriyani Miswaty[4], Ni Ketut Putri Nila Sudewi[5]

[1,2,3,4,5] Universitas Bumigora

Corresponding Author:
Fista Elma Ratu Indayani[1]*
2004020012@universitasbumigora.ac.id

Abstract

This study explores the use of language style in the short film *The Mourning Bird* by applying Martin Joos' theory of five language registers: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the analysis focuses on identifying and classifying the types of language styles present in the film, and determining which style is most dominant. The dialogues are examined based on their level of formality and the context in which they occur, with attention to how each style contributes to character development and emotional expression. The findings reveal that casual and intimate styles are most frequently used, reflecting the film's focus on family relationships, grief, and interpersonal tension. This study confirms that language style plays a critical role in short-form storytelling and supports the application of stylistic theory in film and media studies. The insights from this research may benefit linguists, educators, and filmmakers interested in narrative strategy and character portrayal through language..

Keywords: *language style, Martin Joos, stylistics, short film, The Mourning Bird, film dialogue.*

Introduction

Language serves as a core instrument in human communication, not only for expressing ideas and emotions but also for shaping social meaning. In stylistics, the analysis of language style allows us to understand how messages are structured and conveyed beyond surface meaning. As Keraf (2010) states, language style is a way of using language that reflects the speaker's character and personality, functioning not only as a communicative tool but also as a means of artistic and emotional expression. Leech and Short (2007) further emphasize that stylistic features such as diction, syntax, and tone serve as keys to unlocking meaning in both literary and non-literary texts. In cinematic narratives, particularly in short films, language style becomes an essential element in delivering tone, building character, and intensifying emotional impact.

Short films have emerged as a powerful medium in contemporary audiovisual storytelling. Despite their brevity, they often encapsulate deep emotional journeys and layered character development. Language style in this context plays a vital role. Kozloff (2000) argues that film dialogue is not merely for conveying information, it also serves as a vehicle for revealing character, establishing relationships, and reinforcing thematic elements. Batty and Waldeback (2008) add that in short films, every line of dialogue must fulfill multiple purposes due to time constraints. Berliner (2017) also notes that film dialogue reflects emotional states, subtext, and character dynamics, making its analysis indispensable to understanding a film's structure and message. These insights highlight

the significance of stylistic analysis in unpacking the narrative and emotional layers embedded within concise cinematic works.

One short film that provides rich material for such analysis is *The Mourning Bird*. This coming-of-age drama, born from true events, explores themes of grief, morality, family tension, and youth violence. The film centers on the psychological journey of a young boy named Kai and his family, dealing with the murder of his brother. The interactions between characters are laden with emotional weight, expressed primarily through spoken language. This makes the film an ideal object for studying how different language styles function within a tight emotional and narrative frame. Analyzing language in *The Mourning Bird* allows us to observe how stylistic variation reflects not only the characters' emotions and relationships but also the film's broader themes of loss and recovery.

To analyze these stylistic choices, this study employs Martin Joos' theory of language style, as introduced in *The Five Clocks* (1967). Joos categorizes spoken language into five levels of formality: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Each register reflects specific social settings, levels of familiarity, and communicative purposes. This framework has been widely applied in stylistic and sociolinguistic research. Holmes (2001), for instance, affirms that the selection of language style is influenced by social context, relationships, and the speaker's intentions. Likewise, Yule (1996) highlights the functional role of language variation in achieving communicative goals across different social settings.

Previous studies have successfully applied Joos' theory to cinematic texts. Aprilia et al. (2022), in their study of *The Ron Clark Story*, found that casual and consultative styles were most prevalent, used to depict the emotional transformation of students and educators. Swantara et al. (2024) investigated the use of language styles in *Little Buddha* and revealed that intimate style dominated due to the film's reflective and spiritual tone. Putra et al. (2024) analyzed *Premature*, a youth-focused film, and found casual style as the dominant register, associated with adolescent dialogue and emotional vulnerability. These findings affirm the relevance of Joos' theory in identifying how language style conveys narrative functions, character psychology, and social interaction in films. Despite this, studies specifically examining short films and particularly those focused on familial trauma and youth identity remain limited. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute new insight through a focused case study of *The Mourning Bird*.

The objective of this study is to identify and classify the language styles found in *The Mourning Bird*, and to determine which type of language style is most dominant in the film. By doing so, the research aims to show how language choices contribute to narrative depth, character realism, and emotional authenticity. The findings are expected to offer theoretical contributions to the field of stylistics and practical insights for filmmakers, educators, and linguistic researchers.

Method

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the language styles used in the short film *The Mourning Bird*. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research emphasizes understanding complex phenomena in natural contexts through non-numerical data such as words, images, and observations. This approach is particularly suitable for stylistic analysis, as it enables an in-depth exploration of how language choices reflect emotional, social, and narrative functions within cinematic dialogue.

The data source for this study is the short film *The Mourning Bird*, which was retrieved from YouTube. The film was selected due to its rich emotional content and the variety of

interactions among characters, making it an appropriate subject for analyzing language register. As emphasized by Denzin et al. (2023), qualitative studies are often grounded in real-world settings and rely on naturalistic data dialogue in this case to capture meaning and social interaction.

The data collection process involved several stages. First, the researcher watched the film multiple times to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the context. Dialogues from the film were screen-captured and transcribed to preserve accuracy. Each line of dialogue was then categorized based on Martin Joos' (1967) classification of language styles: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. The classification was guided by contextual cues such as the relationship between speakers, the emotional tone of the scene, and the social setting in which the conversation occurred.

In line with the techniques proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2012), the data were analyzed through a combination of coding, categorization, and interpretation. Linguistic features including sentence structure, vocabulary choice, and level of formality were examined to determine the language style of each utterance. The analysis also considered how shifts in style reflected changes in character relationships and emotional states. Triangulation and expert consultation were applied to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

This methodological framework allows for a systematic exploration of how language style functions as a narrative tool in short film. It emphasizes the central role of language in conveying psychological and relational dynamics, aligning with the interdisciplinary goals of linguistic and film analysis.

Results

Language Style Findings in *The Mourning Bird*

Table 1. Language Style FIndings in *The Mourning Bird*

No.	Dialogue	Timestamp	Language Style
1.	***Police Officer***: *"Is it okay if we come in for a moment?"* ***Kai's Mom***: *"Yup."* ***Police Officer***: *"Thank you."*	00:00:58	Formal
2.	***Kai's Dad***: *"What choice do I have to keep it moving forward, we can't dwell."* ***Kai's Mom***: *"Dwell? No, you didn't lose 20 at the book because your son was murdered."*	00:08:32	Formal
3.	***Kai's Mom***: *"Do you think maybe you could try and talk to him, tell him how you feel? It might help."*	00:05:50	Consultative
4.	***Funeral Director*** *(on phone): "Hi, I'm calling in regards to the Anderson funeral. Trevor, yeah, we're doing okay. I just need to check on the outstanding payments for the service."*	00:03:22	Consultative
5.	***Kai***: *"He's there, look at him. Yes we got him, we've won, we've done it!"*	00:06:41	Casual
6.	***Kai's Mom:*** *"Kai, I'm not mad at you. Kai, talk to me please. Tell me how you feel, I don't know. Do you miss him? I miss him too and you, I miss you."*	00:09:18	Intimate

Discussion

Data 1 Identified as Formal Style

Dialogue:
Police Officer: "Is it okay if we come in for a moment?"
Kai's Mom: "Yup."
Police Officer: "Thank you."

Analysis

This excerpt illustrates a clear example of formal language style. The police officer's polite and structured phrasing, such as "Is it okay if…," reflects the professionalism expected in interactions between law enforcement and civilians. Joos (1967) describes formal style as being used in serious or official situations where the speaker is required to maintain distance and structure. In this scene, the officer's tone reinforces authority and respect, emphasizing the sensitive context of the home visit. The complete, grammatically correct sentences and restrained vocabulary are typical features of formal language style, aligning with Leech and Short's (2007) assertion that style is shaped by the speaker's role and purpose in context..

Data 2 identified as Formal Style

Dialogue*:*
Kai's Dad: "What choice do I have to keep it moving forward, we can't dwell."
Kai's Mom: "Dwell? No, you didn't lose 20 at the book because your son was murdered."

Analysis

Despite the emotionally heated nature of the exchange, both speakers maintain grammatical structure and objective tone, which categorizes this as formal style. The father's attempt to intellectualize grief and the mother's rebuttal both reflect an effort to control emotion through structured language. Joos (1967) explains that formal style is often used in serious topics requiring neutrality or composure. The characters' word choices show a tension between emotional depth and verbal restraint, supporting Kozloff's (2000) view that even conflict-ridden film dialogue can maintain stylistic discipline to enhance realism.

Data 3 identified as Consultative Style

Dialogue*:*
Kai's Mom: "Do you think maybe you could try and talk to him, tell him how you feel? It might help.""

Analysis

In this scene, Kai's mother is cautiously asking her husband to open up communication with their son. The use of modal verbs ("could," "might") and the question format indicate a semi-formal, consultative style. According to Joos (1967), consultative style is used when one speaker has slightly more authority or when careful negotiation is involved. The mother's tone shows concern, but she remains respectful and indirect, avoiding confrontation. Holmes (2001) adds that this register is common in situations involving guidance or sensitive advice—exactly the purpose of this dialogue in a grieving household.

Data 4 identified as Consultative Style

***Dialogue**:*
Person on telephone: "Hi, I'm calling in regards to the Anderson funeral. Trevor, yeah, we're doing okay. I just need to check on the outstanding payments for the service."

Analysis

This dialogue contains clearly transactional language. It involves professional vocabulary ("in regards to," "outstanding payments") and is spoken with the intent of acquiring or confirming specific information. Joos (1967) classifies this as consultative, where the exchange is formal but allows for participation. In this case, the speaker acts within a business role, reinforcing the partial social distance between speaker and listener. The speaker's politeness combined with procedural language supports Holmes' (2001) observation that consultative language is often used in service-oriented or semi-professional interactions.

Data 5 Identified as Casual Style

***Dialogue**:*
Kai: "He's there, look at him. Yes, we got him, we've won, we've done it!"

Analysis

This example clearly illustrates casual style, characterized by exclamatory repetition, contractions, and emotionally expressive language. Joos (1967) defines casual style as common among peers or in informal settings where background information is shared. Here, Kai expresses victory and excitement, likely in a friendly or competitive context. The tone is unguarded and enthusiastic. According to Leech and Short (2007), casual style reveals speaker emotion and immediacy, allowing characters to express themselves naturally without structural formality.

Data 6 Identified as Intimate Style

Dialogue:
Kai's Mom: "Kai, I'm not mad at you. Kai, talk to me please. Tell me how you feel, I don't know. Do you miss him? I miss him too and you, I miss you."

Analysis

This monologue is highly emotional and fragmented, which marks it as intimate style. Joos (1967) states that intimate language is used between close individuals—family members or partners—and is often characterized by repetition, shortened phrases, and deep emotional content. The mother's repeated mention of Kai's name, her pleas, and the overlapping of sentences show her vulnerability and desperation. This type of language, according to Kozloff (2000), fosters audience empathy and draws them into the character's internal state. It is the most emotionally resonant form of speech in the film, reflecting both grief and unconditional love.

Furthermore, the mother's repeated use of her son's name ("Kai") is not only a marker of intimacy but also a linguistic strategy to regain emotional connection. In

intimate style, name repetition often functions as an appeal for attention and a reassurance of presence, especially during emotionally fraught moments. According to Yule (1996), such features are common in emotionally charged speech where the speaker seeks closeness or reconciliation. The disjointed structure and overlapping clauses mirror natural speech patterns in moments of vulnerability, capturing the raw emotional undercurrents that formal or consultative styles would suppress. This use of unfiltered speech highlights the urgency of the mother's desire to communicate with her grieving child.

Additionally, the absence of formal linguistic markers like complete syntax and structured grammar further emphasizes the sincerity of the moment. Kozloff (2000) notes that emotionally rich film dialogue often sacrifices grammatical accuracy for expressive authenticity, a hallmark of intimate style. The mother's phrase, "I miss him too and you, I miss you," illustrates a blend of grief and love in a single breath, underscoring the layered emotional struggle. This emotional layering, conveyed through stylistic intimacy, invites the audience to empathize deeply with the character's psychological state, reinforcing the film's exploration of trauma and healing within a family dynamic.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify and classify the types of language style used in the short film *The Mourning Bird* by applying Martin Joos' five-style framework. The analysis revealed four language styles, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. While no examples of frozen style were found. Among these, casual and intimate styles emerged as the most dominant, particularly in emotionally charged family interactions and peer-based conversations.

The use of casual style helped reflect the natural, spontaneous language of adolescents and family members navigating grief, while intimate style emphasized vulnerability and emotional closeness in parent-child dialogue. Formal and consultative styles were used selectively, often in scenes involving professionals or emotionally restrained exchanges, maintaining social structure and respectful tone. The absence of frozen style supports the realistic and contemporary tone of the film, as there are no ceremonial, religious, or legalistic scenes that require such rigid and impersonal language.

Overall, the findings confirm that language style in *The Mourning Bird* is not arbitrary but closely tied to the film's emotional themes and narrative goals. Through stylistic variation, the film creates authenticity, deepens character development, and enhances the viewer's emotional engagement. This study contributes to the broader field of stylistics and film analysis by demonstrating how Joos' theory can be effectively applied to short-form cinema, offering insights for linguists, educators, and screenwriters alike.

References

Aprilia, N., Ramadhan, A., & Putri, R. (2022). An Analysis of Language Style in The Ron Clark Story Movie. *Journal of English Language Studies, Literature, and Education.*, 1–3. https://doi.org/10.22159/ijss.2022.v10i2.43501

Batty, C., & Waldeback, Z. (2008). *Writing for the Screen*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-05057-1

Berliner, Todd. (2017). *Hollywood Aesthetic: Pleasure in American Cinema.* Oxford University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Pearson. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=4PywcQAACAAJ

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE Publications. https://books.google.co.id/books?id=EbogAQAAQBAJ

Denzin, N. K., Lincoln, Y. S., Giardina, M. D., & Cannella, G. S. (2023). The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.).

Holmes, J. (2001). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Pearson Education.

Joos, M. (1967). *The Five Clocks: A Linguistic Excursion into the Five Styles of English Usage.* Harcourt, Brace & World.

Keraf, G. (2010). *Diksi dan Gaya Bahasa.* Gramedia.

Kozloff, S. (2000). *Overhearing Film Dialogue.* University of California Press.

Leech, G. N. ., & Short, Mick. (2007). *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. Pearson Education.

Swantara, M., Wayan Suastini, N., & Dewa Ayu Devi Maharani Santika, I. (2024). *An Analysis of Language Style in Little Buddha Movie*. https://doi.org/10.22334/traverse.v5i1

Yoga Putra, I. M. P., Devi Maharani Santika, I. D. A., & Perdana Skolastika, I. M. (2024). *Analysis of Language Style Uttered by the Characters in Premature Movie*. https://doi.org/10.22334/traverse.v5i1

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics.* Oxford University Press.