

An Analysis of Language Style and Social Factors in the Main Characters in *Turning Red* Movie

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Abstract:

This study explores the types of language and examines the social factors that influence the most dominant style found in the *Turning Red* movie. The research focuses on the two main characters, Mei Lee and Ming Lee, and uses Martin Joos's (1967) theory of language style and Holmes's (2013) theory of social factors. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the dialogues in the movie were analyzed and categorized into five types of language styles: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. The result show that all five language styles, frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate are found in the film. Among them, the casual style is the most dominant. Therefore, the analysis of social factors focuses specifically on the casual style. The results reveal that casual style is influenced by several social factors, such as the participants close relationship, informal setting, personal topics, and emotional function. Overall, *Turning Red* shows how language use reflects social context. The dominance of casual style highlights the warmth, honesty, and emotional connection between the characters, making their interactions feel natural.

Keywords: language style; social factor; *Turning Red*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi jenis-jenis bahasa dan menganalisis faktor-faktor sosial yang mempengaruhi gaya bahasa dominan yang ditemukan dalam film *Turning Red*. Penelitian ini berfokus pada dua karakter utama, Mei Lee dan Ming Lee, dan menggunakan teori gaya bahasa Martin Joos (1967) serta teori faktor sosial (2013) tentang faktor sosial. Dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, percakapan dalam film dianalisis dan dikategorikan ke dalam lima jenis gaya bahasa: beku, formal, konsultatif, santai, dan intim. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa kelima gaya bahasa, beku, formal, konsultatif, santai, dan intim, terdapat dalam film. Di antara mereka, gaya santai adalah yang paling dominan. Oleh karena itu, analisis faktor sosial difokuskan secara khusus pada gaya santai. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa gaya santai dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor sosial, seperti hubungan dekat antara peserta, setting informal, topik pribadi, dan fungsi emosional. Secara keseluruhan, *Turning Red* menunjukkan bagaimana penggunaan bahasa mencerminkan konteks sosial. Dominasi gaya santai menonjolkan kehangatan, kejujuran, dan koneksi emosional antara karakter, membuat interaksi mereka terasa alami.

Kata kunci: gaya bahasa; faktor sosial; *Turning Red*

INTRODUCTION

In everyday interactions, speakers often change the way they speak depending on who they are talking to, the situation, and the topic being discussed. A person may use a polite tone with well-structured sentences when speaking to a superior or an older person, but when speaking to friends, the tone and sentence structure will become more relaxed and informal. These changes reflect what sociolinguists refer to as language style variation, a phenomenon that shows how social context shapes linguistic behavior (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Film dialogue provides a very interesting context for studying these stylistic changes because it involves communication similar to that in real life (Aprilia et al., 2022). Although scripted, film language often mirrors spontaneous conversation through its use of natural speech patterns, interruptions and informal expressions (Purba et al., 2021). Dialogue in films not only serves as a tool for developing the plot, but also as a means of revealing the social identity, relationships, and emotional states of the characters (Saputra & Sumaryana, 2025).

The film *Turning Red*, Pixar (2022), directed by Domee Shi, is an interesting example of an animated film that expertly uses language to communicate its main themes. The film tells the story of Mei Lee, a 13-year-old Chinese-Canadian girl living in Toronto in 2002 who experiences struggles in her teenage years, who is even more severely demanded by hopes from her traditional family and challenges in embracing her individuality. When Mei realizes that she can turn into a giant red panda, where Mei's inner emotions and independence change. The dialogue in *Turning Red* reflects not only Mei's personal struggle against the red panda in itself, but also the tension between generations and cultures within the Mei family, so it can be made a good subject for linguistic analysis. As noted by Noprianti & Padmadewi (2022), studying film dialogue provides valuable insight into how social factors shape language choice, thereby offering a productive site for sociolinguistic exploration.

To analyze the linguistic aspects of the film, this study employs Martin Joos's framework of language style and Holmes' of social factors and dimension. Joos (1967) categorized languages into five different styles: Frozen Style, Formal Style, Consultative Style, Casual Style and Intimate Style. Each style in this language represents a different level of formality and social function, ranging from very formal one such as Frozen Style, to very casual one such as in everyday conversation styles. The way we talk can be

very different depending on the situation and conditions at the time.

Additionally, social factors, proposed by Holmes (2013), are used to explain the contextual in data analysis. Some relate to the users of language, the participants; others relate to its uses. Who is talking to whom (e.g. wife - husband, customer – shopkeeper, boss – worker) is an important factor. The setting or social context (e.g. home, work, school) is generally a relevant factor too. Building on this, Eckert & Rickford, (2001) emphasize that style shifts also serve as expressions of social identity and group affiliation, suggesting that film characters use language not only to mark formality but to perform aspects of identity. The aim or purpose of the interaction (informative, social) may be important. And, in some cases, the topic has proved an influence on language choice. The research aims to answer three main questions: (1) What types of language styles are used by the main characters in the movie *Turning Red*? (2) Which language style is most frequently used by the main characters? and (3) What social factors influence the use of the most dominant language style in the movie *Turning Red*?. These questions will help classify the style of each utterance using Joos's framework, while Holmes' social factors and dimensions will help explain why a particular style appears in each scene.

Language style topic has been researched in several study. Nabilah & Candria (2023) analyzed Charlotte's language style in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton story series* (2023). Khotimah (2019) conducted to analyze language styles use in *The Queen* film. Swantara et al., (2024) focused on the use of language style in the movie "Little Budha" which shows how language styles are used in society. Safitri & Pramudyawardhani (2024) analyzed the language style in Walt Disney *Pinocchio* movie (2022). Dewi & Skolastika (2024) focused the language style in the movie "Instant Family". In addition, Dewi et al., (2023) focused on language style and the factor that influence the use of language style found in "Clouds" movie. Although several previous studies have examined language style and social factors in films, some aspects are less explored. Some previous study focused on film series, while this study focuses on analyzing animated films that provide different narrative and linguistic context. This study aims to fill this gap by combining the frameworks of Joos (1967) and Holmes (2013) to analyze the linguistic behavior of the main characters, Mei Lee and Ming Lee in *Turning Red* movie.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Style

Joos (1967) introduced an innovative framework for understanding language styles, dividing them into five different levels: Frozen Style, Formal Style, Consultative Style, Casual Style and Intimate Style. These styles are defined based on their formalities, context of use and relationships between speakers. Joos (1967) theory has been the basis in sociolinguistics, offering a clear structure to analyze how individuals adapt their language to fit various social situations. His classification is as follows:

- i. Frozen style: The most formal and fixed, often used in highly ritualistic or ceremonial contexts e.g. traditional rituals
- ii. Formal Style: To used instructed settings, such as academic presentations, speeches, or professional discussions.
- iii. Consultative Style: A transitional style that combines formal and casual communication. This style is usually seen in professional interactions, such as between doctors and patients, where feedback and clarification are expected.
- iv. Casual Style: Casual Style dominates informal everyday communication and is often found between friends, colleagues or individuals in a relaxed environment.
- v. Intimate Style: The least formal style and is intended for close relationships, such as family members, couples or close friends.

Social Factors

Holmes (2013) argues that every utterance is deeply implant in social context. Rather than treating language as a neutral code, Holmes proposes that speakers continually adjust their words, structures, and intonation to fit four interlocking social factors that are participants, setting, topic and function. These factors provide a practical tool for explaining why a speaker select a particular style in particular moment. Her classification is as follows:

- i. Participants: The relationship between the speaker and the addressee, such as parent and child, teacher and student, or friends strongly influences language style. Power differences, familiarity, age, and cultural expectations all matter.
- ii. Setting: The physical location and the social occasion. Formal places or ceremonial situations usually demand more careful and polite language, while informal environments allow relaxed speech.

- iii. Topic: The subject of conversation affects vocabulary, grammar, and tone. Serious or sensitive topics often require precise and neutral language, whereas light or playful topics invite informal expressions.
- iv. Function: The purpose of the conversation whether to inform, request, persuade, comfort, or express emotion.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design because it aims to describe the language style and the social factors influencing them in the *Turning Red* movie. The primary data source of this research is the animated *Turning Red* movie, directed by Domee Shi and produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The data consist of spoken utterances by the main characters, Mei Lee and Ming Lee, which were taken from the movie's transcript and verified by repeated viewings to ensure accuracy. The process of data collection involves several steps, such as watching the film repeatedly, transcribing and verifying that each dialogue is correct, and selecting relevant data. The data were analyzed using Joos (1967), who proposed the five types, there are frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate and Holmes (2013), who introduced the concept of social factors influencing language choice, there are participants, setting, topic, and function. The analysis process was conducted in several stages. The first step was to identify the types of language styles according to Martin Joos, calculate how often each language style appeared, and determine the most frequently used language styles. The most frequently appearing language styles were then analyzed in relation to social factors according to Janet Holmes. The analysis of these factors allowed researcher to explain how social factors influence the use of certain language styles in films.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the language styles used by the main characters, Mei Lee and Ming Lee, in the *Turning Red* movie. The analysis followed Joos (1967) theory of language styles, which classifies language style into five categories, that is frozen, formal, consultative, casual and intimate. In the findings section, the researcher found 20 data of language style in *Turning Red* movie. After classifying the data source, there are several types of language style. The classification can be seen from the table below:

Table 1. Categorization and Frequency of Language Style in Turning Red Movie

No	Type of Language Style	Frequency
1.	Frozen style	1
2.	Formal Style	2
3.	Consultative Style	1
4.	Casual Style	14
5.	Intimate Style	2
Total		20

The following is an explanation of Mei Lee and Ming Lee’s dialogue on each type of style, as well as the social factors that influence her choice of language style.

Language Style

Frozen Style

Ming Lee: Sun Yee, revered ancestor, guardian of the red pandas. We humbly thank you for protecting and guiding us. Especially Mei-Mei.

Mei Lee: May we continue to serve and honor you and this community.

Both: Always

The dialogue between Ming and Mei shows characteristics of the frozen style, which according to Martin Joos Theory. This style is characterized by a very formal tone, fixed expressions, and use in ritual or ceremonial situations. In this scene, Ming and Mei speak respectfully, expressing their gratitude to Sun Yee, their revered ancestor. Because of this respectful and ceremonial context, their conversation sounds more structured and formal than everyday conversation.

Formal Style

Ming Lee: Our Family runs one of the oldest temples in Toronto. And the most unique. Instead of honoring a god, we honor our ancestors.

Mei Lee: And not just the dudes either.

Ming Lee: Our most revered ancestor, Sun Yee, was a scholar, poet, and defender of animals. She dedicated her life to the creatures of the forest. Especially the red panda.

The dialogue between Ming and Mei shows characteristics of formal style, which according to Martin Joss theory. This style is typically used in situations that require clear and structured communication. In this situation, Ming explains the history and significance of their family temple to the visitors, so she speaks carefully dan informatively. The sentence “Our Family runs one of the oldest temples in Toronto. And the most unique. Instead of honoring a god, we honor our ancestors” shows how formal style uses by using clear sentence and focused to convey information to the listeners.

Consultative Style

Miriam: What is with you? You're being weird.

Mei Lee: I'm Just really excited about Math. (Doors Open)

Teacher: All right, guys. The quadratic formula. Let the fun begin. Who can tell me how the formula begins? X equals...

The dialogue between Mirian, Mei Lee and the teacher shows the consultative style, one of the language styles in Martin Joos' theory. This style is often used in everyday interactions involving the exchange of information or instruction between speakers who have semi-formal or professional relationships. Consultative style usually has a more relaxed structure than formal style, but remains organized and clear because it serves to convey ideas effectively in professional or semi-formal situations. The teacher says, "All right, guys. The quadratic formula. Let the fun begin. Who can tell me how the formula begins? X equals..." This shows an instructional tone where the speaker gives information and asks for a response. Consultative style usually appears in situations where one person has more knowledge or authority, like a teacher with students.

Casual Style

Priya: This sounds like a boy-girl party. Are we allowed to boy-girl parties?

Mei Lee: Guys! Two hundred bucks will put us over the top! We have to do this. We'll meet at Tyler's, I'll do my thing and then we'll bounce. Easy-peasy.

This dialogue between Priya and Mei Lee reflects casual style in Martin Joos' language style theory. This style is used in casual, informal, and usually social situations between close friends or close social groups. Casual style is often characterized by everyday use of language, informal expressions and looser sentence structures. The choice of phrases such as "we'll bounce" and "easy-peasy" emphasizes the casual nature of the conversation, with the use of slang or everyday idioms indicating a sense of comfort among the characters. Contextually, the dialogue takes place in a relaxed planning atmosphere among friends, making casual language styles relevant.

Intimate Style

Ming Lee: Sweeties, it's okay. Mommy is here.

Mei Lee: What's happening to me?

This dialogue between Ming and Mei tells the intimate style in Martin Joos' language style theory. This style is used in very personal and close communication, often among close family members, couples, or very intimate friends. Intimate style is characterized by the use of affectionate language, personal greeting, and sometimes with emotional

expressions that are not fully expressed explicitly but understood through deep relationships between speakers. Ming said, "Sweeties, it's okay. Mommy is here," showing a very loving and soothing tone. The use of the word "Sweeties" as a nickname reflects the close emotional connection between a mother and her child.

Social Factors

Participants

The relationship between the speaker and listener plays an important role in shaping the choice of language. In *Turning Red*, both Mei Lee and Ming Lee use the casual language style, but in different ways depending on who they are talking to. Mei Lee mostly uses casual speech when she talks with her close friends that are, Miriam, Abby, and Priya. They are all the same age and share a similar background, so their conversations sound relaxed, fun, and full of slang or idiomatic expressions. This shows comfort and emotional closeness between them, with no social distance or power difference.

Ming Lee, on the other hand, uses casual language mainly when she speaks to Mei in private or family settings. Even though she is a parent and holds authority, some of her conversations with Mei still sound warm and informal, especially when she tries to comfort her daughter or talk to her in a caring way. For example, when Ming says "Sleep tight", the tone is relaxed and intimate rather than strict or formal. This shows that their relationship as mother and daughter also allows moments of casual, emotional communication. These examples support Holmes (2013) theory that the relationship between participants, including their level of closeness, power, and social distance shapes how language is used. Mei speaks casually because she shares equality and solidarity with her friends, while Ming sometimes shifts into a casual style to show warmth and affection toward her daughter. In both cases, casual speech reflects emotional closeness and a desire to connect rather than maintain distance or authority.

Setting

In *Turning Red* movie, both Mei and Ming adjust their conversation style depending on the setting in which the interaction takes place. Most of Mei's conversations occur in informal settings, such as in her room, at school or out of school with her close friends. These relaxed environments can influence natural and spontaneous conversations. Meanwhile, Ming's conversations often occur in private

family settings, which occur at home. This can create a relaxed and warm atmosphere at home. According to Holmes (2013) theory, this kind of environment encourages Mei and Ming to use relaxed style to express affection, comfort, and emotional closeness. Therefore, the environment plays an important role as a factor in language choice, showing that context deeply influences the way people talk to each other.

Function

The function in conversation refers to the purpose or intention behind the speaker's use of language, such as providing information, expressing feelings or building relationships. In the *Turning Red* film, the most common function of conversation using a casual style is to maintain closeness and emotional connection, particularly between Mei Lee and her close friends and between Mei Lee and Ming Lee, that is her mother. For Mei Lee, the use of casual language helps strengthen the bonds of friendship. When they are in situations such as joking around or using slang with their friends, the purpose is to express closeness and affection. For Ming Lee, the function of casual language can be to show feelings of love and care. This can foster a more intimate and warm relationship, thereby diminishing the authority gap between mother and daughter. According to Holmes (2013) theory, casual language helps characters express affection and build a more intimate bond.

Topic

In *Turning Red*, most of the casual conversations revolve around their daily lives, friendships, and family, creating a more relaxed and natural conversation. For Mei Lee, most of her conversations with friends revolve around school life or topics common to teenagers. For Ming Lee, casual language is used when discussing family life. As Holmes (2013) theory explains, these topics shape how people communicate, and in this film, informal topics encourage the use of casual language that conveys closeness and comfort.

CONCLUSION(S)

This research analyzed the types of language styles used in the *Turning Red* movie and examined the social factors that influence the choice of those styles base on Holmes framework. Based on data analysis, it was found that in the conversations in the *Turning Red* movie, there were a variety of language styles used. Variations of the language style include frozen style, formal style, consultative style, casual style, and intimate style. Among them, casual style is the most common language style, with fourteen occurrences.

The frequency of use of this casual language style reflects that most conversations in *Turning Red* happen in relaxed and friendly situations. The use of casual style allows the characters especially Mei Lee and her friends to convey closeness and solidarity. Even Ming Lee, uses casual style to showing care or emotions toward her daughter. This makes their conversations sound more real and emotionally connected. Based on social factors, the reasons for the frequent use of casual language can be seen in the participants, setting, function, and topic. The participants are close friends and family members, which makes communication more relaxed. The settings, such as school and home, are found in the *Turning Red* movie, depicting everyday places where people often speak informally. Furthermore, the function of conversation in the film is to express feelings and build relationships. Lastly, the topic discussed is about daily life, friendship and family which build natural communication.

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