

# Language Style in Destin Daniel Cretton's *Just Mercy* Movie (2019)

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## Abstract

*This research discusses the language style used by the main character in Just Mercy movie (2019). The aims of this research are to explain the types of language style in Just Mercy movie (2019) and to explain the social factors which influence the main character use the language style. The researcher applied language style theory by Joos. The method of this research is descriptive qualitative research. The data are taken from the utterances of the main character in Just Mercy movie (2019). In collecting data, the techniques applied by the researcher are watching, reading, identifying, classifying, and selecting. The data analysis method is done by displaying, explaining, and interpreting. The result shows that the researcher has found all types of language style. The most dominant language style that used by the main characters is casual style. Holmes' theory of social factors is also used in this research. The result shows that the factors participant, setting, topic, and function influence the use of language style.*

**Keyword:** *language style, social factors, just mercy move*

## Introduction

Speaking of language, people have their own style in expressing their thoughts and feelings through different language styles. The choice of style is dependent upon several factors, one of which is the factor that includes the situation. According to Missikova (2003: 16), language style refers to a way of speaking and/or a type of utterance that is formed through the deliberate and intentional selection, systematic patterning, and application of linguistic and extra-linguistic means in relation to the topic, situation, function, author's intention, and content of an utterance. Additionally, Joos (1967) states that there are different levels of formality depending on the situation. Through his book entitled *The Five Clocks*, he proposed the concept of five language style namely frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate.

There are various ways to learn about language styles, including movies, novels, speeches, and so on. On this occasion, the researcher wants to analyze the language style used by the character in a movie because basically the utterance produced by the characters in the movie is the representation of conversation in real social life. The researcher chooses *Just Mercy* movie to know the language style used by the main character of the movie. *Just Mercy* is an American biographical movie directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, released in 2019, and based on the award-winning nonfiction bestseller *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*. The movie tells about young lawyer Bryan Bryan (Michael B. Jordan) and his fight for justice. After graduating from Harvard, Bryan had his pick of lucrative jobs. Instead, he moves to Alabama to defend those who have been wrongfully convicted or who have not had adequate representation, with the help of local advocate Eva Ansley (Brie Larson). One of his first cases is Walter McMillian (Jamie Foxx), who is sentenced to death in 1987 for the murder of an 18 years old girl despite testimony proving his innocence. In the years that follow, Bryan has faced racism, as well as legal and political manouverings, while fighting for McMillian's life.

## **Literary Review**

### **Language Variety**

The existence of social interaction activities carried out by a very diverse community or group, as well as speakers who are not homogeneous, both contribute to language variety. In everyday life, without realizing it, the language we use varies according to situations and conditions, so it can cause variations in language. Language variety is the diversity of languages caused by certain factors.

Wardhaugh (2006: 25) defined language variety as a set of human speech patterns (sounds, words, and programming features) associated with external factors such as geographic areas and social groups. Meanwhile, according to Holmes (2013: 6), the term of variety is broad which includes *different accents, different linguistic styles, different dialects and even different language which contrast each other for social reason*. Furthermore, she classify the variety of languages based on the users and the uses. Based on its users, there are standard

languages, dialects, idiolects, jargons, and vernacular. On the other hand, the varieties of languages based on their usage are styles and registers. However, in this study, the researcher will focus on one of the language variety, namely language style.

### **Language Style**

According to Hudson (1980: 48) the term style is widely used in sociolinguistics to refer to varieties according to use. In addition, Wardhaugh (2006: 51) said that people can speak very formally or very informally, their choice being governed by circumstance. A similar opinion was also expressed by Holmes (2013: 262). She said that styles are analyzed along a scale of formality. The both statements delivered by Wardhaugh and Holmes emphasized that the choice of words has to be adjusted accordingly the surrounding environment when people talk to each other, both in formal and informal situations. Joos provided an analysis of English style in his oddly titled book, *The Five Clocks* (1967). The ‘clocks’ represented various degrees of formality in spoken and written English, which Joos classified as "frozen," "formal," "consultative," "casual," and "intimate" (Coupland, 2007: 10).

#### 1. Frozen Style

The frozen style is the most formal language used in solemn situations and official ceremonies, for example in state ceremonies, sermons in mosques, oath-taking procedures, statutes, notary deeds, and decrees. Sutherland (2016: 106) stated that this is an immutable language. Words are often old fashioned, not used outside of unusual situations. The hallmark of the frozen style is printed and unchanging language. For example, prayers, wedding vow, preamble to the constitution, laws, and bibliographic references.

#### 2. Formal Style

The formal style is usually used in formal situations, using formal language, such as speech such as in political speeches, formal meetings of the board of directors in an institution and so on. It can be said that this language is used in formal situations. According to Sutherland (2016: 7) it is usually considered “one-way”, in that the producer is the

only one participating in the language event. The formal style is used by speakers who are at a distance from their listeners. The speaker must plan and frame the entire sentence he wants to convey. In order for the language style to become formal, the speaker should avoid repetition and other terms that tend to be casual. In addition, this style may also be used in speaking to a single hearer.

### 3. Consultative Style

According to Joos (1976: 23) consultative style is that show our norm for coming to term with strangers who speak our language but whose personal stock of information may be different. Sutherland (2016: 108) defined that consultative is used in polite conversations with strangers, acquaintances, and even with friends in formal situations. As previously explained, the formal style is "one way", while the consultative style is "two way" participation. It means that both speaker and listener are actively in the conversation. The listener usually response to the speaker by simple signal, "yes", "no", "yeah", "unhuh", "that's right", "oh, I see", "yes I know", 'well'. This style usually used in spoken interactions such as consulting with doctors, teachers or connecting with coworkers and can also take the form of written interactions such as chatting via email with business or institutional colleagues.

### 4. Casual Style

Casual style is defined as the style used for conversation in our casual or normal situations. People tend to use this style when they talk to friends, family and people who have close relationships. This style is commonly used in everyday conversations. One of the characteristics of this style is the use of a first name or even a nickname in addressing one another rather than a little name and last name. This style is characterized by two features "slang" and "ellipsis" (Joos 1967: 23).

### 5. Intimate Style

Intimate style is used in certain conditions that can only be understood by someone who has a very close or intimate relationship so that it

requires certain languages that can be immediately understood quickly (either verbal / word or sign language / gesture). Sutherland (2016: 109) says that this intimate is the private language used by spouses, lovers, parents with children, and others who share long-term positive social bonds.

### **Social Factors**

Language and society are closely linked. Society conditions have an impact on language change. There are many aspects in society that vary the use of language. As stated by Holmes (2013: 9) that the language used is designed by several relevant factors that fit to the context, and can be grouped as follows:

1. Participant

Participant consist of who is speaking and who are they speaking to. These participants are needed in order for communication to run smoothly (feedback between the speaker and the listener).

2. Setting

Setting can refer to a situation, place, and time. Setting is generally a relevant factor in any conversation. There must be a background to the situation, where and when the conversation took place. Setting can be in the form of place or time of the conversation. Setting of the place where participants speak.

3. Topic

Topic is what is being talked about by the participant. This factor is related to the relationship and interaction of the participants because what is being talked about and what the purpose of the conversation, makes someone will use different language to adjust to the topic and purpose of the conversation.

4. Function

It refers to why are the participants speaking. The function could be to gather information, to engage in discussion, to express one's feelings, etc.

### **Research Methodology**

In this chapter the researcher used descriptive qualitative method as the principle instrument of the research. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982: 27) qualitative research is a study that produces descriptive data in the form of writer or oral words of the people or behaviour observed. This approach is directed towards the individual's background as a whole.

This study was included in qualitative research because the data were taken from words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Moreover, the sentences were analysed descriptively to describe and to explain in detail the phenomena of sentences based on language styles theory.

## Discussion and Findings

### Findings

This present study reports the results of the data analysis. After analyzing the language styles utterance from *Just Mercy* movie, the researcher finds 32 data containing language style. Then, the researcher classifies the data based on Joos's theory such as formal style, casual style, consultative style, and intimate style.

The findings of language style used by the main character in *Just Mercy* movie (2019) is showed in Table 4.1

**Table 4.1: Language Style Found in Just Mercy**

No.	Types of Language Style	Found data analysis
1.	Frozen Style	4
2.	Formal Style	9
3.	Consultative Style	4
4.	Casual Style	13
5.	Intimate Style	2
Total Data		32

Based on the table above, there are five types of language styles found in the movie. They are frozen style (4 data), formal style (9 data), consultative style (4 data), casual style (13) and intimate style (2).

For the second finding that is about the factors which influence the main character using certain language style based on Holmes's theory. The researcher

found that there are four factors which influence the use of language style, namely participant, setting, topic, and function.

### **Discussion**

Discussion is the main part of this research. Here, the researcher will present further explanation from the research finding. In this discussion the researcher will explain the types of language styles used by the main character in *Just Mercy* movie. Afterwards, the researcher explains social factors which influence the main character using certain language styles in *Just Mercy* movie. The detail explanations are as follow:

#### **Language Style used by the main character in Just Mercy movie**

##### **Frozen Style**

Among the five language styles proposed by Joos, frozen style is the most formal which is used in very formal situations. It is called frozen style because the language never changes, it has a fixed pattern. Below are some examples of frozen style that are used by main character in *Just Mercy* movie.

##### **Data 1 (01:29:56-01:30:00)**

*Judge* : All right, if we are ready, then, we will proceed.  
*Mr. Bryan?*  
*Bryan* : Thank you, Your Honor.

This utterance happened when Bryan becomes McMillian's counselor. Bryan appealed to the local court to grant McMillian a retrial. The judge opened the trial and then allowed Bryan to speak.

The data above can be categorized as frozen style. The main character uses a frozen style because this speech is presented in a very serious occasion that takes place in court. The words "*Your Honor*" indicates one of the sign of frozen style, that is the language has a fixed form and cannot be changed. Additionally, it indicates that the Judge granted Bryan permission to continue his work as victim's advocate.

##### **Formal Style**

Formal style is used in situations where the speaker is highly careful about the pronunciation, word choice, and sentence structure. This style is usually used in speaking to medium or large groups. It is also may be used in single hearer;

strangers, older persons, or professionals. Below are some examples of formal style that are used by main character in *Just Mercy* movie.

**Data 2 (00:05:28-00:05:44)**

*Bryan* : *Hi, Mr. Davis. I'm Bryan.*

*Henry* : *Henry*

*Bryan* : *I'm The Southern Prisoners Defense Committee, they sent me here to tell you that they don't have a lawyer for you yet, but they hope to soon.*

The situation happened when Bryan met with his first client. His name is Henry, a prisoner on death row. The data above shows that Bryan uses formal style. One of the characteristics of formal style is used for single hearer and stranger. It can be seen in the sentence “*Hi Mr. Davis. I'm Bryan.*” indicates in formal situation because Bryan meets with someone for the first time.

**Data 4 (00:39:35-00:39:50)**

*Minnie* : *You the lawyer.*

*Bryan* : *Yes, ma'am. My name is Bryan Stevenson.*

*Minnie* : *I'm Johnny D's wife, Minnie.*

*Bryan* : *Pleasure to meet you.*

The conversation above occurred after Darnell Houston, a friend of McMillian's family revealed information that he could prove Walter's innocence. Then, Bryan asks him to testify that.

The data above can be categorized as formal style because Bryan utterance has a characteristic of formal style such the use of modal verb to show polite request in formal form. It can be seen in the sentence “*Would you be willing to sign a statement we could use in court?*”. According to the Cambridge online dictionary, certain modal verbs are usually used by speakers in a formal or polite manner.

**Data 5 (01:05:50-01:05:46)**

*Miller* : *That's everything we got on Myers. You can make copies over there.*

*Bryan* : *Thank you, ma'am.*

*Miller* : *Sure, baby.*



The conversation above occurred when Bryan came to the Escambia County Evidence Archive to obtain a copy of Ralph Myers' statement. Utterance from the data above is categorized as a formal style because the way Bryan speaks is very polite. It can be seen from the sentence "*Thank you, ma'am.*" which is formally used when talking to women and the situation is still formal because the woman is a stranger. They were also in a new situation because of their first meeting.

**Data 6 (02:05:43-02:07:42)**

*Bryan : I came out of law school with grand ideas in my mind about how to change the world. But Mr. McMillian made me realize we can't change the world with only ideas in our minds. We need conviction in our hearts. This man taught me how to stay hopeful, because I now know that hopelessness is the enemy of justice. Hope allows us to push forward, even when the truth is distorted by the people in power. It allows us to stand up when they tell us to sit down, and to speak when they say be quiet. Through this work, I've learned that each of us is more than the worst thing that we've ever done; that the opposite of poverty isn't wealth, the opposite of poverty is justice; that the character of our nation isn't reflected in how we treat the rich and the privileged, but how we treat the poor, the disfavored and condemned. Our system has taken more away from this innocent man than it has the power to give back. But I believe if each of us can follow his lead, we can change this world for the better. If we can look at ourselves closely. And honestly. I believe we will see that we all need justice. We all need mercy. And perhaps, we all need some measure of unmerited grace. Thank you.*

The situation occurred when Bryan delivered a speech about injustice in the United States legal system to the senators seated in a semicircle across from him. Behind them, a room full of journalists and public figures.

The data above can be categorized as formal style because Bryan uses formal speech to convey his thoughts. One of the characteristics of the formal style is that the speaker must plan and frame the entire sentence he wants to convey. Apart from that there was no feedback from listeners.

## Consultative Style

Consultative style is used in semi formal communication. This style is a type that is required from all speakers. While one is speaking at intervals the other gives short responses. Below are some examples of consultative style that are used by main character in *Just Mercy* movie.

### Data 7 (01:00:23-01:00:50)

Walter : *So, if we ain't got Darnell, what's the next move?*

Bryan : *I think we should talk to Ralph Myers.*

Walter : *No.*

Bryan : *Just listen to me for a second. I know it's risky, but the only way to find out what he really knows is for me to get him talking.*

The conversation above occurred at the visiting room of Holman prison. Bryan visits his client to break the news of their recent defeat in court.

From the utterance of the data above, this conversation uses consultative style. According to Joos' theory, the consultative style defined into two kinds. The first, the speaker supplies background information whether the addressee is understood or not. The second, the addressee participates continuously while the one is speaking, at intervals the other giving short responses or standard signals such as "yes", "no", "well" as seen as in the conversation above. The utterance of Bryan is categorized as the second kinds of consultative style where Walter as the client, is giving short responses.

### Data 8 (01:02:11-01:02:37)

Bryan : *I just wanna say thanks for meeting me, Mr. Myers. Can we start by talking about your testimony against Johnny D?*

Myers : *No. I ain't talkin' about him.*

Bryan : *That's the only reason why I'm here.*

Myers : *You don't like it, leave.*

The conversation takes place when Bryan visits Ralph Myers, a witness from McMillan who is currently imprisoned. Bryan's own visit to ask Myers directly about his testimony against McMillan because there were irregularities in the McMillan case. But the meeting was fruitless because Ralph did not want to tell Bryan.

The data above can be described as consultative style because there are questions and answers among participants. In the conversation above, the question can be seen in Bryan's utterance "*Can we start by talking about your testimony against Johnny D?*" while the answer is said by Myers. Myers also responded with short answers that made the conversation fall within a consultative style. The situation of the conversation was less formal even though it was their first time meeting. It can be seen from Bryan's utterance *I just wanna say thanks for meeting me, Mr. Myers.*

### **Casual Style**

Casual style is common among peers and friends. There is free and easy participation of both speaker and hearer. The vocabulary to use is informal. Below are some examples of casual style that are used by main character in *Just Mercy* movie.

#### **Data 9 (00:08:58-00:09:04)**

- Eva* : *So, an 18-year-old white girl is murdered in broad daylight and the Sheriff can't solve the crime for how long?*
- Bryan* : *Almost a year.*
- Eva* : *And then some other guy who's charged with a different murder says that he can tell them who did it if he gets a lower sentence. And the guy that he says did it, happens to be a black man from a poor community that no one would think twice about?*
- Bryan* : *There's gotta be more evidence than this. I wanna set a meeting with the D.A.*
- Eva* : *Tommy Chapman just took over for Pearson a few months ago. He used to be a public defender.*

The conversation above occurred at Eva's house. They talked about the irregularities of Ronda Morison's murder case from a collection of testimony files obtained by Bryan.

The data above can be categorized as casual style because the main character talks to his close friends and the situation is relaxed. One of the characteristics of this style is the slang used. It can be seen in the utterance "*There's gotta be more evidence than this. I wanna set a meeting with the D.A.*".

The words such *gotta* and *wanna* are slang because its omission from *got to* and *want to*.

**Data 10 (01:47:37-01:50:42)**

*Bryan* : *Walter, I'm so sorry.*  
*Walter* : *You ain't quittin', is you?*  
*Bryan* : *Of course not.*  
*Walter* : *Then there ain't no reason for you to say you're sorry.*

The conversation above occurred at the visiting room of Holman prison. Bryan visits Walter because his defendant's motion was rejected by the court and he intends to apologize about that.

The data above can be categorized as casual style because Bryan addressed Walter's name without a rank or title. It can be seen in the utterance "*Walter, I'm so sorry*". Besides, the situation is informal and they are get acquainted after working together.

**Data 11 (01:55:17-01:55:26)**

*Bryan* : *Tommy Chapman is asking the court to stay the proceedings so he can open up a new investigation. He's tryna buy time to rebuild his case.*  
*Eva* : *That son of a bitch.*

The conversation above occurred at EJI office after Bryan received information that Tommy Chapman asked the court to postpone McMillian's trial. Then he told Eva, his co-worker as well as his friend in his office.

The data above can be categorized as casual style because the main character talks to his close friends and the situation is relaxed with a bit of tension. One of the characteristics of this style is the shortened word or slang used. It can be seen in the utterance "*He's tryna buy time to rebuild his case.*" because the word "*tryna*" is a slang word for *trying to*.

**Intimate Style**

Intimate style is used in conversation between people who are very close. The language used in this style may not be shared in public. Below are some examples of intimate style that are used by main character in *Just Mercy* movie.

**Data 12 (00:08:58-00:09:04)**

*Bryan : Pop, how we looking up there?*

*Alice : Just added three quarts of water, but you should check again when you get there.*

*Bryan : All right. Thanks*

The conversation above occurred when Bryan was packing for his move to Alabama. He asked his father about the fuel supply for his car.

The data above can be categorized as intimate style because the conversation contains a characteristic of intimate style. Bryan used a certain word to address his father. It can be seen in the sentence “*Pop, how we looking up there?*”. According to Cambridge Dictionary, “pop” is an informal term for a father. Besides, Bryan calling his father with the word pop is to show his affection.

#### **Data 13 (00:10:16-00:10:30)**

*Bryan : I don't wanna move far away from you. I love you. But you always taught me to fight for the people who need the help the most.*

*Mother : I am very proud of you, son.*

This conversation happened when Bryan was about to move to Alabama for work and asked his mother for permission.

The data above can be categorized as intimate style. It can be seen in the utterance “*I don't wanna move far away from you. I love you.*”. The sentence “*I love you*” shows an intimate style because it is characterized as a family relationship that has a special relationship. Bryan expresses his love for his mother by using the word “*love*” which is a personal code to communicate with others who have a special place in the heart.

#### **Social Factors Which Influence the Main Character Using Certain Language Style**

The researcher notices at four aspects that influence the main character using different styles based on Holmes theory. They are participants, setting, topic and function. As stated by Holmes (1992: 11), the way people speak is influenced by the social context in which they speak. This involves who can hear us and where we speak, as well as how we feel about the person we are talking to, can influence the use of certain styles.

The first factor is the participants. This factor of participants had a big influence in the use of language style. When the main character speaks with someone who has high position, he will use frozen or formal style. Otherwise, the main character will use casual or intimate style when he speaks to someone who has a close relationship with him.

The second factor is the setting. This factor also affects the use of language style in *Just Mercy* movie. When in a formal situation the main character chooses to speak in a formal style and in an informal situation the main character is more relaxed to speak in a casual style. Holmes (2013:26) states that setting is related to the influence of the way people choose the appropriate code or variation. From Holmes' statement, we can correlate where the character is often and under what conditions because the setting consists of place, time and condition.

The third factor is the topic. This factor has an important influence because it tells what is being talked about. It deals with relationships and interactions between participants.

The last factor is function. This factor has an important purpose. The functions of the main character's utterances vary because they serve distinct purposes in each utterance.

### **Social Factors Found in Frozen Style**

Frozen style can be used in communication due to several factors. As we know that this style is only used in very serious situations. For example, in this movie the frozen style appears in a court setting. The psychology of the main character is also very serious because in this movie the main character acts as a lawyer. Then, the other participant are Judges, jury, other lawyers, and witnesses.

### **Social Factors Found in Formal Style**

The most dominant participant factor makes the main character use a formal style. Here, most of the conversations take place between the main characters and strangers. As we know that Joos explained that formal style occurs with a stranger or someone who has a high position. Participants who influence the main character use this style such as strangers, and clients. In addition, the formal style is also influenced by the setting. For example, the formal style appears in several places

such as law office, prison, McMillian's house and out of court. All these settings cannot be used as clues without knowing the topic of the speech.

### **Social Factors Found in Consultative Style**

The dominant social factor in every conversation that contains a consultative style is the participant. Although, all factors influence to use this style. The participants, as Joos said, occurred in the conversation between strangers. In this movie, the participant is between lawyer and witness. It was the participant who performed in this style. Setting in the conversation when the speech is delivered in prison. The topic is negotiating with the witness to give a genuine statement regarding his testimony to McMillian. The function of the topic was to let Bryan know information from the witness directly.

### **Social Factors Found in Casual Style**

Sometimes, when we talk to someone, we have to know where and what situation we are in at that time. In this movie the main character delivers a speech in several places. For example, in this movie the setting is at the EJI office, Eva's house, prison, and outside the court. After that, this style has several topics from all the data that has been summarized, namely giving praise, telling about a thing, and discussing a case.

### **Social Factors Found in Intimate Style**

In this movie, the main character only uses an intimate style for his parents. The setting in this movie also affects the main character using an intimate style. There is one place that appears in this movie, namely in Stevenson's house. The topic of this style in this movie is about personal matters and the function is to show affection.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study discusses the language style that used by the main character in *Just Mercy* Movie. The data were taken from the utterances of the main character. The first objective research is to describe the types of language style used by the main character in *Just Mercy* movie. Based on the discussion in the previous chapter, the researcher concludes that the main character uses all types of language styles. According to the research findings, there are 4 data of

frozen style, 9 data of formal style, 4 data of consultative style, 13 data of casual style, and 2 data of intimate style. The casual style dominates all the styles which are occurred in all situations except in the court session which is very formal situation and the intimate style is the least style among of all.

After classifying the types of language style, the researcher describes the social factors which influence the main character using certain language style. The researcher uses Holmes' theory. The researcher is able to conclude that there are various participants, settings, topic, and function for each type of language style. Moreover, those aspects are inseparable in understanding the language style used by the main character.

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