

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background of the study, research problems and objectives, review of the previous studies, as well as the study's novelty and significance.

1.1 Background of the Study

Among the branches of linguistics, sociolinguistics focuses more on language function, context, and social meaning instead of only grammar and linguistic structure (Hymes, 2020). Exploring many interesting phenomena, such as speech level, dialect, and code-switching, sociolinguistics studies often serve to suggest a connection between language and society. Language style is one of the interesting research topics in the scope. The term "language style" was explained by Martin Joos in 1967, and since then, it has gained much attention. Joos elaborated a theory in which he divided language styles into five categories based on the formality degree: frozen style, formal style, consultative style, casual style, and intimate style (Joos, 1967). For the past few decades, this topic has continued to attract many researchers, marked by several remarkable studies, such as Bell's (1984) and Chaika's (1982)

Language style remains an interesting topic today, as it is a phenomenon very close to our daily communication. In practice, different language styles can be employed, depending on the environment, situation, or communicative purposes (Salsabila & Permanasari, 2022). To systematically explain the reasons behind style

shifts, Holmes (2013) proposed four social factors: setting, participant, topic, and function. These factors influence how people choose their language style in different situations. For example, people tend to use a formal language style in an academic setting to show professionalism and capability. On the other hand, people may consider using casual language in informal settings, such as a meeting with a friend.

Both Joos' and Holmes' theories have been adapted in many works to analyze language styles, both in real-life and literary settings. The preceding studies not only prove the importance of the topic but also serve as crucial findings for exploring language style. Previous studies were able to categorize the utterances into different types of language styles, figure out the most frequent one used, and examine the social factors. Moreover, most previous works on movies found sufficient data to provide analysis (Salsabila et al., 2023; Rosyda, 2021; Nabilah & Candria, 2023). This indicates that movies can be a great medium to explore language style, especially when they consist of certain realistic phenomena.

The recent musical movie *Mean Girls* (2024) serves as a vivid representation of communication dynamics among teenagers. Being a remake version of the popular classic chick flick *Mean Girls* (2004), the movie covers many real-life phenomena, such as fake friendships and bullying. As stated by Nielsen (2024), not only was the character portrayal amazing, but the interaction among characters was also captivating. One main character who really stood out was Regina George. As the "queen bee" of the popular girls, Regina uses language in certain ways to control social boundaries and appear dominant (Putri et al., 2024;

Hanafi & Setyowati, 2026). For example, she tends to talk casually despite the setting and context, including when she is talking to teachers or distant schoolmates. This particular pattern is rarely addressed in previous studies, which found that teenage characters may also employ a formal style in situations when its use is expected (Salsabila et al., 2023; Rosyda, 2021; Febriani et al., 2019). Regina's interesting communicative behavior helps build an engaging storyline, driving several researchers to examine various aspects of the movie.

Earlier studies on *Mean Girls* (2024) focused on pragmatic aspects such as lexical choice, and the movie is rarely analyzed from a sociolinguistics view. More specifically, no study has explored Regina's language use, though she shows interesting patterns. This gap can be a challenging research focus, as stated by Al Hakim (2025), research regarding language styles in character-driven stories is needed to uncover the social dynamics. Therefore, the author was interested in analyzing the language style used by Regina George. Moreover, Chaika (1982) mentioned that language style can be a means to construct one's social identity, either to reveal or conceal certain traits. This signals that exploring Regina's language style may also uncover how her language use reflects her characterization.

1.2 Research Problems

Language style in literary works is a frequently studied topic; However, the analysis of characterization through language style analysis remains underexplored (Salsabila et al., 2023; Rosyda, 2021; Nabilah & Candria, 2023). Though Ghaniyah & Sugiharti (2025) have connected language style and character identity, the

analysis does not cover how social factors contribute. This limits thorough analysis of the character's trait, especially if they show an interesting pattern. Addressing this gap, this study aims to analyze Regina's language styles and their social factors to examine how it reflects her characterization. To achieve this purpose, three research questions guide this study:

1. What are the language styles used by Regina George in *Mean Girls* (2024)?
2. Why do certain language styles tend to be used by Regina George in *Mean Girls* (2024)?
3. What does Regina George's language style pattern imply about her characterization?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research problems above, this study's objectives are to explore the types of language styles used by Regina George in *Mean Girls* (2024) and the motives behind her language styles, as well as how her language style demonstrates her characterization.

1.4 Review of Previous Studies and Novelty

To enhance the reliability of the study, eleven previous studies have been reviewed. The studies chosen have either similar theoretical frameworks or research objects. This reviewing process helps in developing the framework and justifying the incoming results of the study.

Several studies were found analyzing language style in literary works using Joos' (1967) language style framework. A study on the coming-of-age movie *To*

All the Boys I've Loved Before found that the intimate style was the most used language style, followed by the consultative and the casual style (Febriani et al., 2019). It was concluded that language style can differ depending on the participant and setting, though these two factors were not discussed thoroughly. On the other hand, Putri et al. (2023) explored the novel *The Sea Speaks His Name* and found that the majority of the data uses casual and consultative styles. The author concluded that it signals the different relationships the characters have with each other. However, it was not fully specified how the characters shift their style.

Furthermore, several studies focus on analyzing the language style of a single character using Joos' and Holmes' framework. For example, Salsabila et al. (2023) found that the main character in *Hala* frequently uses casual and formal styles. However, while participant and context were repeatedly mentioned as social factors, it was not discussed how function also affects the character's language style. Besides, a study held by Rosyda (2021) concluded that the main character in *Wonder* mostly uses casual and intimate style, and the participant is the most important social factor. Unfortunately, the study shows limited exploration of social factors other than the participant. Another study focusing on one main character in a movie was conducted by Nabilah & Candria (2023), where they found that the main character mainly uses casual and consultative styles. However, the analysis was limited to the language styles the character uses with her closest ones.

Extending the analysis, one study explored how a character's language style can reflect their identity. Ghaniyah & Sugiharti (2025) found that the main character in *The Bear* repeatedly uses casual language. This reflects his egalitarian identity,

since he does not really care about hierarchy and prefers genuine relationships. Though this study demonstrates how language style can be a tool of character analysis, the analysis was limited to the most frequently used style. As a result, it was not discussed how the motives behind a character's stylistic choice contribute to their characterization.

Besides, several studies have explored the movie *Mean Girls* (2024) from linguistic perspectives. Ostendi (2024) compares the use of slang words in *Mean Girls* (2004) and (2024) and found that there are differences in the slang used in both movies. Exploring the same topic, Hanafi & Setyowati (2026) found that the main characters in *Mean Girls* (2024) use slang to construct identity and maintain dominance. While serving important findings, the analyses of these studies are limited to lexical variations. Meanwhile, Nielsen (2024) and Febiola (2025) used Lakoff's theory to compare the gendered linguistic markers in *Mean Girls* (2004) and (2024). The result reveals that there is a decrease in the gendered language used by the female characters, and there are some differences between the female language used in those movies. Lastly, Putri et al. (2024) examined the use of flouting maxims in *Mean Girls* (2024) and found that characters deviate from the conversational rules to construct images or convey messages. These studies, although they provide important findings, are still limited to pragmatic analysis.

While several studies have analyzed language styles of fictional characters and their social factors, the connection between language style and characterization remains rarely explored. Although Ghaniyah & Sugiharti (2025) have connected language style and character identity, the analysis lacks exploration of how the

social factors contribute to characterization. Moreover, research on the character Regina George in *Mean Girls* (2024) has rarely covered the sociolinguistics aspect. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the language style used by Regina, their social factors, and how the pattern reflects her characterization.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research accentuates that language style analysis is way more than just lexical choice examination. By further connecting Regina's characterization and her stylistic behavior, this study could gain insights about how language style can be a tool in characterization for fictional characters.