

e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 1

MAY 2026



Faculty of Literature

Islamic University of North Sumatra

e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-ISSN: 2655-9080

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 1

MAY 2026

**FACULTY OF LITERATURE
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF NORTH SUMATRA**



Journal of Language

Journal of Language (JoL) is an open access and a peer reviewed scientific journal covering research reports in linguistics, literature or language teaching, and critical evaluations of books on the related areas published by Faculty of Literature, Islamic University of North Sumatra (UISU), Medan, Indonesia. The main objective of JoL is to provide a platform for scholars, academicians and researchers to share the contemporary thoughts mainly in the fields of language, literature, and language teaching. This journal is published twice a year in May and November.

Editor in Chief

Prof. Dr. M. Manugeren, M.A.

Editor

Prof. Dr. M. Manugeren, M.A., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Purwarno, S.S., M.A., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Dr. Pardi, S.S., M.S., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Sri Wulan, S.S., M.S., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Muhammad Fatih Suhadi, S.S., M.S., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Chairuddin, S.Pd, M.S., Universitas Samudra, Langsa, Indonesia

Editorial Board

Prof. Aiman Sanad Al-Garallah, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Jordan
Prof. Majed S Allehaibi, Jazan University, Saudi Arabia
Prof. Efendi Barus, M.A., Ph.D, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Prof. Jumino Suhadi, M.A., Ph.D, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Prof. Dr. M. Manugeren, M.A., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Prof. Amrin Saragih, Ph.D, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia
Dr. Ni Luh Nyoman Seri Malini, Universitas Udayana, Bali, Indonesia, Indonesia
Dr. Rahmah Fithriani, Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Dr. Harun Al Rasyid, M.A., Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Dr. Jumat Barus, M.S., Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia
Dr. Mukhalad Malik Almutalabi, Cihan University, Slemani, Iraq
Dr. Devi Pratiwy, M.Hum, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Dr. Wan Anayati, M.A., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Dr. Rahmawati, S.Pd, M.Si, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Dr. Aprili Yanti, S.Pd, M.Si, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Andang Suhendi, S.S., M.A., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Susu Ekalestari, S.S., M.Hum, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
Zulfan Sahri, S.S., M.S., Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

Published by

Sastra UISU Press

Jl. Sisingamangaraja Teladan Medan 20217

Telp. (061) 7869911, e-mail: admin@sastra.uisu.ac.id

Journal_language@sastra.uisu.ac.id



Journal of Language

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Misuse of “Besides” in Spoken English: Error Patterns in Chinese University Students’ Group Discussions Wu Hao	1 – 12
A Structuralist Analysis of Binary Oppositions in Bella Swan’s Characterization in <i>The Twilight Saga: New Moon</i> Nabila Rayati, Ely Ezir, Sempa Br. Perangin Angin, Doni Efrizah, Nurbaiti Ali	13 – 22
Digital Ethics in Anime: A Critical Analysis of Light Yagami in <i>Death Note</i> for English Learning Lika Silvia Batubara, Bendra Wardana	23 – 28
Unveiling Interpersonal Depth: Social Penetration and Friendship Types in Nat Gould’s <i>Fast as the Wind</i> Yussuf Faulandi, M. Ali Pawiro, Nurbaiti Ali, Doni Efrizah, Eka Surya Fitriani	29 – 39
Disability and Structural Injustice in <i>Miracle in Cell No. 7</i>: A Critical Disability Analysis Doni Efrizah, Dela Pebriani, Clara Puspita, Purwarno Purwarno	40 – 49
A Syntactic Analysis of Noun Phrase Structures in <i>The Jakarta Post</i> Editorials Juli Anjani, Ely Ezir	50 – 62
Negotiating Work-Life Balance: A Sociological Literary Analysis of the Protagonist’s Struggles in Almira Bastari’s <i>Home Sweet Loan</i> Feby Rahmadhani, Sri Wulan	63 – 74
The Effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in Enhancing Junior High School Students’s Simple Sentence Construcion Fany Anggreini, Devi Pratiwy	75 – 88
Female Masculinities in Kevin Kwan’s <i>Crazy Rich Asians</i>: Power, Courage, Leadership, and The Reconfiguration of Gender Identity Nur Latifah, Zulfan Sahri	89 – 101

The Effectiveness of Picture-Based Instruction in Enhancing EFL Vocabulary Mastery: A Qualitative Study at Islamic Junior High School in Indonesia	102 – 117
Amalia Rahmadani, Andang Suhendi	
Form of Intimidation and Female Resistance in Eka Kurniawan's <i>Beauty is a Wound</i>	118 – 131
Jurdi Yuda Pangestu, M. Ali Pawiro	
A Sociological Analysis of Child Abuse and Psychological Trauma in Colleen Hoover's <i>Hopeless</i>	132 – 145
Nadya Ramadani, Purwarno Purwarno, Triana Lestari, Risa Umami, Edward Dolmer Panggabean	
A Psychological Analysis of Paranoid Personality Disorder in William Shakespeare's Drama <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	146 – 158
Perveen Sonia Mahid, M. Manugeren, Hidayati	
Rigid Social Structure of the Nineteenth-Century England in Jane Austen's Novel <i>Pride And Prejudice</i>	159 – 170
Kesya Aprillia Balqis, M. Manugeren, Wan Anayati	
Symbolism in Alfonso Cuarón's <i>A Little Princess</i>: A Percian Semiotic Analysis	171 – 182
Siti Nurhaliza, Safitri Hariani	
Code Mixing on Beby Tsabina TV: A Sociolinguistics Study of Youtube Content	183 – 196
Enny Nurhaliza, M. Manugeren, Idawati Situmorang	
Repentance in Nicholas Sparks' Novel <i>The Last Song</i>: A Literary Psychological Analysis	197 – 208
Pardi, Lavia Amalia Arun	
The Caste System in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Novel "<i>Bumi Manusia</i>"	209 – 224
Zukhaira Hayati, Muhammad Fatih Suhadi	
A Psychological Analysis of the Protagonist's Attitude Change in Jennifer Niven's <i>All The Bright Places</i>	225 – 236
Agustina Purba, Pardi	
Exploring Psychopathic Traits in David Leslie Johnson's Film <i>Orphan</i>	237 – 250
Pardi, Nadhira Muthia	
Arendtian Rightlessness and Palestinian Exile in Mourid Barghouti's <i>I Saw Ramallah</i>	251 – 262
Mohammad Ilham Fahmi Rusdi, Halimi, Abdul Basid	

Misuse of “Besides” in Spoken English: Error Patterns in Chinese University Students’ Group Discussions

Wu Hao

Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China

E-mail: 1198808535@qq.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: January 11, 2026 Accepted: January 26, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	Conjunctions are essential for organizing discourse and signaling relationships between ideas, yet second language learners often struggle to use them accurately in spoken English. Among these, “besides” is particularly challenging due to its nuanced semantic and pragmatic functions. This qualitative study adopts Conversation Analysis (CA) to investigate the use of “besides” by Chinese university students in advanced English group discussions. Drawing on 15.9 hours of recorded interactional data from five Chinese undergraduates, the study identifies non-target-like uses of “besides” in naturally occurring talk. Five error types are found: misuse as a simple listing connector, misuse as an afterthought marker, overuse to connect aligned ideas, overuse as a redundant connector, and underuse as a clarifying connector. These errors stem from the complexity of “besides”, negative transfer from native-language conjunctions, instructional emphasis on surface-level coherence, and limited systematic training in spoken and written academic English. The study highlights the importance of understanding connectives in both semantic and pragmatic contexts and suggests pedagogical strategies to improve learners’ accurate and contextually appropriate use of “besides” in spoken English.
Keywords: “besides” conjunctions conversational analysis group discussion	
Corresponding Author: Wu Hao Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua, China E-mail: 1198808535@qq.com	

1. Introduction

Conjunctions play a crucial role in organizing discourse, signaling logical relationships between ideas, and facilitating comprehension in reading, writing, and speaking. Scholars have emphasized their importance for interclausal integration and overall coherence (Geva, 1992; Millis & Just, 1994). At the same time, research in second language acquisition has consistently highlighted the challenges that English learners face in using connectives appropriately (Yeung, 2009; Larsen-Walker, 2017). Common issues include overuse, underuse, and misuse, with overuse particularly leading to problems in discourse coherence and clarity (Yeung, 2009).

However, despite the centrality of conjunctions for discourse development, most studies have focused on writing and reading, often using corpus-based analyses to examine the frequency and distribution of specific connectives. While these approaches have yielded valuable insights into patterns of misuse and overuse, they provide limited understanding of how conjunctions function in spoken interaction, where learners must deploy them in real time to maintain coherence, manage turn-taking, and respond to peers. Furthermore, previous research has typically examined connectives collectively rather than investigating individual

items, leaving questions about the distinct functions and difficulties associated with specific words largely unexplored.

Among additive conjunctions, “besides” is particularly interesting. Although it appears simple and commonly used in everyday English, it carries nuanced pragmatic and rhetorical functions, making it prone to errors in learner speech. Understanding how learners use “besides” in spoken English can provide insights into broader challenges of connective use in L2 discourse, inform teaching practices, and help address the gap between written-focused research and the realities of classroom interaction.

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a conversational analysis approach to examine learners’ use of “besides” in peer group discussions. By focusing on real-time speech, this research aims to identify how learners deploy this conjunction and the types of non-target-like usage that occur. Specifically, this study addresses the following research question: What are the specific error patterns in Chinese university students’ spoken English involving the conjunction “besides”, and what linguistic or pedagogical factors contribute to these errors?

By bridging pragmatic and discourse-analytic perspectives, this study contributes to applied linguistics by offering a fine-grained account of connective use in spoken L2 interaction and by providing pedagogically relevant insights into the teaching of discourse cohesion in classroom contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Functional and Pragmatic Uses of “Besides” as a Conjunction

Conjunctions are lexical items that serve as key cohesive devices, marking abstract relationships—such as additivity, causality, adversity, and temporality—between idea units in written and spoken discourse (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 226). Along with other cohesive resources, they contribute to the logical organization and coherence of texts. Within this system, “besides” is typically categorized as an additive conjunction.

A corpus-based study of native English usage identifies five main functions of “besides”: as a rhetorical discourse link connecting argumentative discourse; as an operator of pragmatic force introducing propositions that reinforce claims; as a marker of final point signaling a decisive reason; as a marker introducing an alternative viewpoint; and as an afterthought marker adding supplementary reasons to an argument that is already interactionally complete. These functions highlight the pragmatic versatility of “besides” and its sensitivity to discourse context (Yeung, 2009).

2.2 Conjunctions in L2 Discourse: Functions, Debates, and Difficulties

2.2.1 Significance of Conjunctions in Meaning Construction

Conjunctions play a crucial role in organizing discourse and enhancing comprehension in both spoken and written language (Geva, 1992; Millis & Just, 1994). Knowledge of conjunctions also contributes to reading comprehension beyond vocabulary (Crosson & Lesaux, 2013) and is related to overall text quality in L2 writing (Chiang, 2003; Hinkel, 2001). Beyond cohesion, conjunctions support temporal and causal meanings, with interpretation depending on context and pragmatic factors rather than fixed semantics (Xu & Steinbach,

2024). This underscores that conjunctions are resources for meaning construction, not merely formal markers.

2.2.2 Debates on Conjunction Use in L2 Performance

While conjunctions are essential for discourse cohesion, their relationship with language performance is debated. Some studies link frequent conjunction use to learners' ability to construct complex arguments and higher writing quality (Appel & Szeib, 2018; Leedham & Cai, 2013; Perrez, 2004; Spooren & Sanders, 2008; Yang & Sun, 2012), and they have been used as indicators of L2 speaking performance (Michel, 2013). However, overuse or misuse may lead to redundant or superficial coherence (Crewe, 1990; Lei, 2012). Research also suggests that conjunction choice reflects cumulative linguistic experience rather than categorical proficiency differences (Torres Cacoullos & LaCasse, 2025). This debate points to a tension between quantity-oriented measures of conjunction use and qualitatively informed accounts that attend to how connectives function in discourse contexts.

2.2.3 Challenges in Learning and Using Conjunctions

Conjunctions—especially linking adverbials—are widely recognized as challenging for L2 learners (Larsen-Walker, 2017; Lindstrom & Lubinska, 2022; Yeung, 2009). Difficulties stem from their abstract and discourse-dependent nature, requiring learners to infer relations between propositions that are not explicitly marked (Fraser et al., 2021). In particular, Fraser et al. (2021) emphasize that learners' difficulty lies not only in recognizing logical relations, but also in interpreting the pragmatic force of connectives as they are deployed in context. Cross-linguistic differences further complicate learning, as mismatches in semantic and pragmatic properties between languages can lead to persistent transfer errors (Gao et al., 2025). Gao et al. (2025) further show that such transfer effects are especially pronounced in discourse-pragmatic choices, where learners rely on L1-based assumptions about appropriateness rather than formal semantic equivalence.

2.3 Research Gap

Research has highlighted the importance of conjunctions and documented the challenges L2 learners face. However, most studies focus on reading and writing, with limited attention to spoken discourse. Research on specific connectives, including “besides”, has mainly used corpus-based and quantitative approaches, emphasizing patterns of overuse, underuse, or misuse, while offering little insight into their production and interpretation in real-time interaction. While corpus-based studies provide valuable statistical insights into connective frequency and distribution, they often overlook the interactional contingencies through which connectives acquire meaning in moment-to-moment talk.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a Conversation Analysis (CA) approach to examine learners' use of “besides” in peer group discussions. By analyzing student–student interaction, it investigates how non-target-like uses emerge within specific sequential contexts, complementing frequency-based accounts and providing pedagogically relevant insights for teaching conjunctions in spoken English.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research question: What specific errors arise in spoken English when Chinese university students lack sufficient knowledge and mastery of the correct use of “besides”?

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Conversation Analysis and Connective Use

Conversation Analysis (CA) provides a micro-analytic framework for examining how meaning is constructed through sequential organization in naturally occurring interaction. Rather than treating linguistic items as context-independent forms, CA emphasizes how participants deploy resources such as connectives to accomplish social and interactional actions in real time. From a CA perspective, connectives like “besides” are not merely markers of logical relations, but interactional resources whose pragmatic functions depend on their sequential positioning, turn design, and recipients’ uptake. This framework is particularly well suited to the study of connective misuse in L2 spoken discourse, as it allows researchers to examine how non-target-like uses arise, are oriented to, or remain unnoticed within ongoing interaction. By linking connective errors to their local interactional environments, CA enables a deeper understanding of why certain uses are problematic beyond frequency-based descriptions, thereby bridging corpus-based findings and discourse-pragmatic accounts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context and Participants

This study investigates the types of errors in the use of the conjunction “besides” by Chinese English learners in academic oral discussions, with a focus on group interactions. Participants are third-year undergraduates enrolled in an advanced English course. Compared with high school learners, their higher proficiency makes any errors, especially in the use of “besides”, particularly noteworthy.

The study centers on one group of five students—Ming, Gina, Shea, Kelly, and Morty—recognized for their dynamic discussions and smooth interactions, making them ideal for in-depth analysis. Across 13 discussion sessions, each lasting 45 minutes to 2 hours, the group contributed 15.9 hours of recorded data. Analysis focuses on sessions three through eleven, excluding the first and final sessions to minimize adjustment effects and potential disengagement. The focus on a single group reflects a qualitative, case-oriented research design that prioritizes depth of interactional analysis over sample size. Rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, this design allows for close examination of recurrent patterns of connective use within a stable interactional environment. The findings are therefore intended to be analytically transferable to similar instructional contexts.

Discussions involved various texts, including literary excerpts (*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Great Gatsby*) as well as expository and argumentative passages. Each session included multiple segments: Language comprehension, Narrative comprehension, Narrative production, Critical evaluation, and Collaborative reasoning. Following Yeung (2009), the study specifically targets the Collaborative reasoning segment, where students present multiple perspectives and justify their points, providing an ideal context for examining the rhetorical and functional use of “besides” in spoken academic discourse.

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to data collection. To ensure ethical compliance, pseudonyms are used throughout the paper, and all audio recordings and transcripts were used solely for research purposes.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected via weekly audio recordings of the group discussions. Students were divided into six groups at the course outset, and this study focuses on the group with the most dynamic interaction. Discussions were designed to elicit authentic academic language, emphasizing argumentative reasoning and collaborative idea development.

Recordings were transcribed using Folker (version 1.3.1), applying a modified Jeffersonian notation adapted for group interaction (see Appendix). Transcripts captured turn-taking, pauses, overlaps, and other interactional features essential for Conversation Analysis (CA), the study's methodological framework.

3.3 Data Analysis

Conversation Analysis (CA) was employed to examine learners' use of "besides" and identify errors. The analysis proceeded in two steps: first, all instances of "besides" in the targeted segments were identified; second, each instance was evaluated for appropriateness, guided by Yeung's (2009) five key uses.

Following initial identification, each instance was examined in its sequential context, with attention to turn position, interactional function, and participants' responses, in line with CA principles. To ensure analytical reliability, the transcriptions and preliminary analyses were independently reviewed by two applied linguistics researchers familiar with CA. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. This validation process strengthens the trustworthiness of the analysis by ensuring consistency in the identification and interpretation of non-target-like uses.

This approach enables a detailed exploration of error types and their implications for academic spoken English. By focusing on authentic, interactionally rich discussions, the study sheds light on learners' real-time linguistic choices and how they negotiate meaning and construct arguments in English.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study categorizes the errors made by Chinese English-major undergraduates in using "besides" into three types: misuse, overuse, and underuse (see Table 1). Five interaction excerpts were selected for detailed conversational analysis.

Table 1

Incorrect Uses of "Besides" in Spoken English by Chinese Learners

Error Type	Specific Error	Corresponding Examples
Misuse	1. Misuse as a simple listing connector	<i>Example 1</i>
	2. Misuse as an afterthought maker	<i>Example 2</i>

Overuse	3. Overuse as a connector for aligned ideas	<i>Example 3</i>
	4. Overuse as a redundant connector	<i>Example 4</i>
Underuse	5. Underuse as a clarifying connector	<i>Example 5</i>

4.1.1 Misuse

(1) Misuse as a Simple Listing Connector

Participants are asked to take a position and debate whether college students should read literary classics for humanistic thinking or focus on scientific thinking. All additive connectors are bolded, and “besides” is bolded and italicized.

Example 1

→ **001 Morty** I think it’s important for college students to read more literary classics. ***Besides*** (2.0), reading novels can improve communication skills, **and, and** they help us understand different cultures. (3.0) **Furthermore**, they can help us become more caring.

002 Gina I don’t agree with you. I believe students should focus more on developing scientific thinking to keep up with technological advances.

In this example, Morty’s use of “besides” (line 001) is inappropriate because it functions as a simple listing connector rather than serving an argumentative role. Instead of strengthening the preceding claim, “besides” merely introduces an additional factual point—namely, that reading novels improves communication skills—resulting in a list-like structure rather than a coherent argument.

A more appropriate connector in this context would be “in addition” or “moreover”, which are better suited to elaborating factual points without invoking argumentative reinforcement. “Besides” would have been appropriate only if the speaker had intended to frame the point as further support for the central claim rather than as an additional fact.

Corrected version:

Morty: I think it’s important for college students to read more literary classics. **In addition**, reading novels can improve communication skills, and they help us understand different cultures. **Moreover**, they can help us become more caring.

(2) Misuse as an Afterthought Maker

The discussion topic concerns whether Alice should follow the rabbit into the hole. Students were asked to take a position and support it with evidence from the text or their own experience.

Example 2

001 Ming I believe Alice should follow the rabbit, because (1.0) if she hadn’t, she would have missed the entire adventure and the lessons she learned along the way. I think it’s a key moment for her personal growth.

002 Gina But don’t you think it was too:: dangerous? She didn’t know (2.0) where the hole would lead. She may get hurt. It is a [hasty decision.]

003 Shea [Yes, yes.]

004 (2.0)

005 **Ming** But, but sometimes taking risks is part of growing, you know. Following the rabbit led her to discover new worlds. **And** finally, it was an opportunity for her to face those challenges and grow stronger.

006 (3.0)

→ 007 **Ming** *Besides*, the rabbit itself stands for curiosity and adventure, which are central themes in the story.

In this example, “besides” functions as an afterthought marker, introducing a new idea after the speaker has already produced a concluding move (“And finally, it was an opportunity for her to face challenges and grow stronger”). As a result, the use of “besides” disrupts the sequential organization of the argument and creates uncertainty about whether the speaker is extending or reopening the discussion.

(3) Summary of Misuse

Overall, misuse of “besides” in these two cases stems from learners’ difficulty in aligning the connector with the argumentative stage of discourse. When treated as a neutral listing device or used after a closing move, “besides” fails to perform its pragmatic function of reinforcing an ongoing argument, thereby weakening coherence in spoken interaction.

4.1.2 Overuse

(1) Overuse as a Connector for Aligned Ideas

The following discussion concerns whether students agree with Mr. Darcy’s description of an accomplished woman.

Example 3

001 **Shea** I think Jane Austen’s description of an accomplished woman is too narrow. For instance, she argues that a woman must excel in many areas (1.0) such as music, drawing, and languages. This was really unrealistic at that time.

→ 002 **Ming** Yes, I agree, but we also need to consider that in Austen’s time, these skills were very important. (2.0) *Besides*, u::h, *besides* they were seen as part of a, I mean, well-rounded education that was important for social [class].

→ 003 **Morty** [Yeah?], but I still think people focused too:: much on superficial qualities. (3.0) *Besides*, a woman’s character and intellectual depth should also be prioritized.

In this excerpt, “besides” (line 002, 003) is repeatedly used to connect ideas that are already aligned with the same stance. Rather than introducing a new perspective or shifting rhetorical focus, “besides” redundantly restates support for an existing position, interrupting the natural flow of the discussion.

(2) Overuse as a Redundant Connector

This excerpt discusses the same topic as the previous one.

Example 4

- 001 Morty** I think Mr. Darcy’s definition of an accomplished woman is rooted in social class and accomplishments that please society.
- 002 Ming** Yes, but he also mentions that an accomplished woman must improve her mind through extensive reading, right? That’s the most important part of the description, I think.
- **003 Gina** I agree with your idea. **And besides** (2.0), **besides**, u::h (1.0) it highlights how Darcy’s view of an accomplished woman is more about status than personal fulfillment.
- 004 Shea** His ideas were more about conforming to societal [expectations.]
- 005 Gina** [Yeah.]

Here, “besides” appears after “and” (line 003), resulting in functional duplication. The hesitation and repetition suggest that “besides” is used as a filler rather than a purposeful connective, increasing redundancy and weakening discourse clarity.

Corrected version:

Gina: And it highlights how Darcy’s view of an accomplished woman is more about status than personal fulfillment.

(3) Summary of Overuse

Across both cases, overuse of “besides” reflects learners’ attempts to impose surface-level cohesion without rhetorical necessity. Excessive connector use does not enhance coherence and may instead obscure logical progression in spoken discourse.

4.1.3 Underuse as a Clarifying Connector

Although misuse and overuse were more frequent, instances of underuse were also observed. The following excerpt concerns whether characters in *The Great Gatsby* should attend Gatsby’s funeral.

Example 5

- 001 Shea** I think they should come to Gatsby’s funeral. It’s the right thing to do. (1.0) They should show respect for someone (1.0) who was part of their lives. Gatsby was loyal to his friends, even when they weren’t loyal to him.
- 002 Ming** But they didn’t really care about him when he was alive. Everyone wa:::s, everyone just used him for his parties. It seems unfair to show up now that he’s dead.
- **003 Morty** Yes, but they should still come to show respect. It’s a matter of responsibility. They should have been there for him in life. (2.0) They can, they could show up at his funeral to make up for their past mistakes. (3.0)
- **004 Kelly** You mean they should come to apologize for not respecting him before?

In this interaction, Morty (line 003) fails to mark the second justification as an additional rather than explanatory point. Without an explicit additive connector such as “besides”, Kelly (line 004) interprets the utterance as a clarification, leading to a breakdown in mutual understanding.

Corrected version:

Morty: They should come to show respect for Gatsby. *Besides*, it’s a chance to make up for their past mistakes.

4.2 Discussion

The present study categorized errors in the use of “besides” by Chinese English-major undergraduates into three broad types—misuse, overuse, and underuse—and illustrated five specific error patterns through selected interactional excerpts. By examining learners’ use of “besides” in academic oral discussions, this study both corroborates previous findings on conjunction use and extends them by revealing how such errors emerge in real-time peer interaction.

Previous research has emphasized the role of conjunctions in discourse cohesion and comprehension (Geva, 1992; Millis & Just, 1994; Crosson & Lesaux, 2013). Consistent with this literature, our findings show that inappropriate use of “besides” can disrupt coherence in spoken discourse. However, much prior work has relied on corpus-based or quantitative approaches (Yeung, 2009; Hinkel, 2001; Chiang, 2003), focusing on distributional patterns rather than interactional deployment. By adopting an interaction-based analysis, the present study addresses this gap and demonstrates how learners mobilize “besides” moment by moment in peer discussion.

Misuse of “besides” occurred mainly as a simple listing connector or as an afterthought marker. These patterns align with previous claims that conjunctions are abstract and context-sensitive, posing challenges for L2 learners (Fraser et al., 2021; Larsen-Walker, 2017). Importantly, the present findings indicate that such misuse is not only lexical but interactional in nature. In spoken discourse, misuse often reflects limited interactional competence, particularly learners’ difficulty in aligning connective choice with sequential positioning and projecting argumentative structure in real time.

Overuse, including the use of “besides” to connect already aligned ideas or as a redundant marker, echoes instructional influences noted in earlier studies (Crewe, 1990; Lei, 2012). Our analysis suggests that in spoken interaction, overuse often functions as a compensatory strategy through which learners attempt to impose surface-level cohesion or enhance the perceived organization of their speech. This supports previous cautions that frequent conjunction use does not necessarily indicate higher discourse competence (Perrez, 2004; Spooren & Sanders, 2008), particularly in oral contexts.

Underuse of “besides” is consistent with observations that L2 learners may struggle with the pragmatic deployment of connectives (Xu & Steinbach, 2024; Gao et al., 2025). In spoken interaction, underuse appears less related to insufficient knowledge than to cognitive load during spontaneous speech. When learners simultaneously formulate ideas, monitor peer

contributions, and maintain participation, explicit marking of additive relations may be deprioritized.

Overall, learners’ difficulties with “besides” reflect the combined influence of linguistic complexity, potential L1 transfer, and instructional practices. By situating these errors in naturalistic interaction, this study extends previous research on additive conjunctions and offers pedagogical implications. Teaching materials should move beyond presenting “besides” as a general additive synonym and instead highlight its pragmatic and interactional functions in spoken discourse. Activities such as discourse reconstruction, guided role-play, and comparison of learner and target-like examples may help learners develop greater sensitivity to connective use.

While the present findings offer interactional insights into learners’ use of “besides” in spoken discourse, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study draws on a relatively small dataset and focuses on learners sharing the same L1 background, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The analysis is also restricted to selected excerpts rather than longitudinal developmental data. Future research could address these limitations by expanding participant diversity, adopting cross-linguistic or comparative designs, and examining how instructional input shapes the spoken use of additive connectives over time. Such work would further clarify whether the patterns identified here reflect broader tendencies in L2 interaction or context-specific practices.

5. Conclusion

This study identified three broad types of errors in Chinese English-major undergraduates’ use of “besides”—misuse, overuse, and underuse—realized through five recurrent patterns. By analyzing these errors in naturalistic peer interaction, the study contributes to research on conjunction use by highlighting interactional deployment in spoken discourse rather than merely distributional patterns. The findings underscore that learners’ difficulties with “besides” are closely tied to discourse organization in real time. This interaction-sensitive perspective complements previous corpus-based research and highlights the importance of considering connectives as tools for meaning-making in spoken communication. Pedagogically, instruction should go beyond treating “besides” as a neutral additive synonym and instead emphasize its pragmatic positioning and discourse function. Raising learners’ awareness of when and why “besides” is interactionally appropriate may support more coherent and purposeful spoken argumentation. Although limited by sample size and participant homogeneity, the study lays the groundwork for future research to examine additive connectives across diverse L1 backgrounds, instructional contexts, and developmental stages. Overall, this study underscores the importance of integrating pragmatic and interactional perspectives into L2 instruction, highlighting that mastery of connectives such as “besides” requires not only lexical knowledge but discourse sensitivity.

References

Appel, P., & Szeib, A. (2018). Linking adverbials in L2 English academic writing: L1-related differences. *System*, 78, 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.08.008>

- Chiang, S. (2003). The importance of cohesive conditions to perceptions of writing quality at the early stages of foreign language learning. *System*, 31(4), 471–484. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2003.02.002>
- Crewe, W. J. (1990). The illogic of logical connectives. *ELT Journal*, 44(4), 316–325. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/44.4.316>
- Crosson, A. C., & Lesaux, N. K. (2013). Does knowledge of connectives play a unique role in the reading comprehension of English learners and English-only students? *Journal of Research in Reading*, 36(3), 241–260. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9817.2011.01501.x>
- Fraser, C., Pasquarella, A., Geva, E., Gottardo, A., & Biemiller, A. (2021). English language learners' comprehension of logical relationships in expository texts: Evidence for the confluence of general vocabulary and text-connecting functions. *Language Learning*, 71(3), 872–906. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12453>
- Gao, N., Zhou, P., & Crain, S. (2025). Conjunction is polarity sensitive in Mandarin. *Language Acquisition*, 32(3), 245–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10489223.2025.2479511>
- Geva, E. (1992). The role of conjunctions in L2 text comprehension. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26(4), 731–747. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586871>
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London, UK: Longman.
- Hinkel, E. (2001). Matters of cohesion in L2 academic texts. *Applied Language Learning*, 12(2), 111–132.
- Larsen-Walker, M. (2017). Can data-driven learning address L2 writers' habitual errors with English linking adverbials? *System*, 69, 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.08.005>
- Leedham, M., & Cai, G. (2013). “Besides” ... on the other hand: Using a corpus approach to explore the influence of teaching materials on Chinese students' use of linking adverbials. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 22(4), 374–389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2013.07.002>
- Lei, L. (2012). Linking adverbials in academic writing on applied linguistics by Chinese doctoral students. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 11(3), 267–275. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2012.05.003>
- Lindström, E., & Lubinska, D. (2022). Target-like and non-target-like conjunctive relations in L2 Swedish beginner writing. *Linguistics and Education*, 71, Article 101073. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101073>
- Michel, M. C. (2013). The use of conjunctions in cognitively simple versus complex oral L2 tasks. *The Modern Language Journal*, 97(1), 178–195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.01431.x>
- Millis, K. K., & Just, M. A. (1994). The influence of connectives on sentence comprehension. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 33(1), 128–147. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jmla.1994.1007>
- Perrez, J. (2004). The use of connectives by French learners of Dutch: A first inquiry. *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 71(1), 81–92.

- Spooren, W., & Sanders, T. (2008). The acquisition order of coherence relations: On cognitive complexity in discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40(12), 2003–2026. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.04.021>
- Torres Cacoullos, R., & LaCasse, D. (2025). Bilingual clause combining: A variable equivalence hypothesis for conjunction choice. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 29(5), 1202–1218. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069241265587>
- Xu, Z., & Steinbach, M. (2024). Temporality and causality in asymmetric conjunction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 233, 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2024.09.006>
- Yang, W., & Sun, Y. (2012). The use of cohesive devices in argumentative writing by Chinese EFL learners at different proficiency levels. *Linguistics and Education*, 23(1), 31–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2011.09.004>
- Yeung, L. (2009). Use and misuse of “besides”: A corpus study comparing native speakers’ and learners’ English. *System*, 37(2), 330–342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2008.11.007>

Appendix: Transcription Notations

(.)	untimed perceptible pause within a turn underline stress
.	yes/no question rising intonation, phrase-final intonation
?	yes/no question rising intonation, phrase-final intonation
:	lengthened vowel sound
=	latch
→	highlights point of analysis
[]	overlapped talk

A Structuralist Analysis of Binary Oppositions in Bella Swan's Characterization in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*

Nabila Rayati¹, Ely Ezir², Sempa Br. Perangin Angin³, Doni Efrizah⁴

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

³Politeknik Mandiri Bina Prestasi, Medan, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: nabilarayati02@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: April 07, 2026

Accepted: April 22, 2026

Published: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

Bella Swan

binary opposition

characterization

Lévi-strauss

New Moon

structuralism

the Twilight Saga

Abstract

This study examines the characterization of Bella Swan as the protagonist in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009) through Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory, particularly the concept of binary opposition. By focusing on narrative and symbolic contrasts, the analysis explores how meaning is constructed within the protagonist's development. A qualitative descriptive method is applied through the analysis of selected scenes and dialogues from the film. The findings indicate that Bella Swan's characterization is shaped by dominant binary oppositions, including love versus loss, courage versus fear, humanity versus the supernatural, and Edward versus Jacob. These oppositions position her as a structural protagonist who embodies emotional and ideological tensions within the narrative. She also functions as a mediating figure between conflicting value systems, reflecting the dynamic and relational nature of identity construction in cinematic texts. Unlike previous studies that emphasize romantic themes or surface-level character analysis, this research highlights the underlying structural system that actively constructs the protagonist's identity. The findings contribute to literary and film studies by demonstrating how meaning in film can be systematically interpreted through Lévi-Straussian structuralism.

Corresponding Author:

Nabila Rayati

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: nabilarayati02@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Film is widely recognized as a cultural text that communicates meaning through a combination of visual, verbal, and narrative elements. As a form of popular culture, film does not only function as entertainment but also as a medium that constructs and conveys social meanings, values, and ideologies. In literary and film studies, film can be analyzed as a structured system of signs that produces meaning through narrative organization and character relations (Bordwell & Thompson, 2019).

One important aspect of film analysis is characterization, which refers to the way characters are constructed and developed within a narrative. Characterization includes the presentation of personality traits, emotional expressions, motivations, and moral values that shape how audiences interpret a character's role in the story (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). In narrative films, protagonists are particularly significant because they function as the central focus of the story and often embody the major thematic tensions of the narrative (Patmarinanta & Ernawati, 2017).

Bella Swan in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009) is portrayed as the central protagonist who experiences emotional instability, loss, and identity crisis following her separation from Edward Cullen. Her characterization is constructed through a series of emotional contrasts such as strength and vulnerability, dependence and independence, as well

as love and isolation. These oppositional traits indicate that her character can be effectively analyzed through a structuralist framework based on binary opposition.

Structuralism, as proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963), emphasizes that meaning is generated through underlying structures of oppositions within a system. In literary and film analysis, binary opposition is used to reveal how meaning is constructed through contrasting elements such as life/death, love/hate, presence/absence, and stability/instability. These oppositions are essential in shaping character identity and narrative development.

Previous studies on *The Twilight Saga* have predominantly focused on themes such as romance, fan culture, gender representation, and popular culture discourse. For instance, several studies have examined the romantic ideology and adolescent identity construction in the *Twilight* series, emphasizing emotional engagement and cultural consumption rather than structural narrative patterns. However, these studies rarely investigate the structural relationships underlying character formation, particularly through binary opposition analysis. This indicates a research gap in structuralist film analysis, especially in understanding how Bella Swan's characterization is constructed through oppositional narrative structures.

Therefore, this study applies Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory of binary opposition to analyze Bella Swan's characterization in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*. This approach aims to uncover the underlying oppositional structures that shape her identity and narrative role as the protagonist.

This study is significant in two ways. Theoretically, it contributes to structuralist film analysis by expanding the application of binary opposition in understanding character construction in contemporary popular films. Practically, this research can be used as a reference in literature and film studies classrooms to help students analyze character development through structuralist frameworks, particularly in popular culture texts.

Based on this background, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How is Bella Swan portrayed as the protagonist in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*?
2. How do binary oppositions within the narrative structure shape Bella Swan's characterization from a structuralist perspective?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Film

Film is widely recognized as both an artistic expression and a cultural product that functions as an audio-visual medium of mass communication. According to Stringer (2003), film integrates technological, aesthetic, and narrative elements to convey meaning and engage audiences across different contexts. As a cultural artifact, film not only reflects social realities but also constructs ideological perspectives that influence viewers' understanding of the world. In addition, film can be understood as a system of signs in which meaning is constructed through structures, symbols, and relationships rather than isolated elements (Lin et al., 2023). This perspective aligns with structuralist approaches that emphasize the importance of relational meaning in narrative analysis. Furthermore, meaning in film is produced through the interaction of narrative structures such as contrast and alternation, which shape both plot development and character construction (Schmidt, 2024). Moreover, film narratives are constructed through the integration of dialogue, performance, and visual elements, which collectively contribute to meaning-making processes within cinematic texts (Zhou & Bamman, 2024).

In contemporary literary studies, film is increasingly analyzed as a form of text that can be interpreted similarly to written literature. As argued by Purwarno and Efrizah (2025), literary works including films, serve as sites of meaning-making where cultural, ideological, and symbolic elements intersect. Their work highlights how literary analysis can uncover deeper structures of power, representation, and resistance within a text. This perspective

reinforces the view that film narratives can be critically examined beyond their surface-level storytelling.

Furthermore, film also functions as a medium of intercultural dialogue. Efrizah et al. (2025) emphasize that literary and cinematic texts facilitate exchanges between different cultural frameworks, enabling audiences to interpret values, identities, and ideologies across cultural boundaries. This perspective is relevant to *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, which presents a hybrid narrative combining human and supernatural elements within a modern cultural setting.

2.2 Characterization in Film

Characterization is one of the most important elements in narrative analysis because it determines how audiences understand and interpret characters within a story. According to Abrams and Harpham (2015), characterization refers to the methods by which authors or directors present and develop characters' traits, personalities, motivations, and moral values. Characterization can be presented through direct characterization, where traits are explicitly stated, and indirect characterization, where traits are revealed through actions, dialogue, appearance, and interactions with other characters.

In film, characterization plays a crucial role in shaping narrative meaning because characters function as the main carriers of ideology, conflict, and emotional development. Through characterization, audiences are able to interpret the psychological and moral dimensions of a character, particularly the protagonist who drives the narrative progression. In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, Bella Swan's characterization is constructed through both direct emotional expressions and indirect narrative cues, such as her behavior, decisions, and relationships, which reflect her internal conflict and identity crisis.

2.3 Structuralism by Claude Lévi-Strauss

This study adopts the structuralist framework proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, particularly focusing on the concept of binary opposition. Structuralism views literary and cinematic texts as systems governed by underlying structures that shape meaning. Rather than focusing on the author's intention, structuralism emphasizes the relationships between elements within a narrative.

Lévi-Strauss (1963) argues that meaning is generated through binary oppositions, such as life/death, nature/culture, and good/evil. These oppositions function as fundamental cognitive structures that influence how narratives are constructed and interpreted. In this sense, characters are positioned within these oppositional frameworks, either embodying one side or negotiating between them.

However, while Lévi-Strauss's theory is highly effective in revealing underlying narrative structures, it has been criticized for being too rigid and universalizing, as it tends to reduce complex characters and cultural contexts into simplified oppositional pairs. Despite this limitation, the theory remains highly applicable in narrative film analysis because films often rely on visual and emotional contrasts to construct meaning, especially in mainstream cinema where binary structures such as love/hate, presence/absence, and strength/weakness are strongly emphasized.

In addition, binary oppositions create narrative tension, which is essential for plot development and character transformation. As noted by Efrizah and Purwarno (2026), literary texts often reveal underlying patterns of domination, resistance, and ideological struggle when examined through structural relationships. Their study demonstrates that structural analysis can uncover hidden meanings embedded within narrative conflicts, particularly through oppositional forces.

Applying this framework to film analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how narrative elements such as characterization, dialogue, and plot function within a system of signs. By identifying binary oppositions in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, this study aims to examine how these structures shape Bella Swan's character and contribute to the overall meaning of the film. This perspective is reinforced by recent studies highlighting the continued relevance of binary opposition in contemporary analysis. For instance, Akhtar et al. (2025) demonstrate that binary oppositions function not only as thematic contrasts but also as structural mechanisms that shape narrative meaning and character development. This reinforces the applicability of structuralist theory in analyzing modern cinematic narratives.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study is based on a structural relationship between film narrative elements and character construction. The conceptual framework of this research can be illustrated as follows:



In this framework, film functions as the primary text that contains narrative structures. Within the narrative, binary oppositions emerge as organizing principles that shape character interactions and conflicts. These oppositional structures directly influence characterization, particularly in the construction of Bella Swan as the protagonist. Ultimately, the interaction between narrative structure and characterization produces the overall meaning of the film.

3. Research Method

3.1 Study Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the characterization of the protagonist in the film. This approach is appropriate as it allows for an in-depth interpretation of narrative elements, particularly in understanding how meaning is constructed through character and structure.

Qualitative research focuses on exploring and interpreting meaning derived from textual and contextual data (Creswell, 2014), and emphasizes analysis within natural contexts where the researcher acts as the primary instrument (Sugiyono, 2016). This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to systematically describe and interpret the characteristics, behaviors, and roles of the protagonist. The primary data source is the film *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* (2009), directed by Chris Weitz, while the unit of analysis consists of selected scenes, dialogues, and character actions that reflect binary oppositions related to Bella Swan's characterization.

In addition, this study applies a thematic coding technique to systematically identify and categorize patterns of binary oppositions within the data. The coding process involves labeling relevant scenes and dialogues based on recurring themes related to oppositional structures. To ensure the validity of the findings, this study employs theory triangulation by comparing the data interpretation with structuralist concepts proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss and supporting literary theories.

3.2 Data Collection

The data were collected through several systematic steps. First, the film was repeatedly observed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative. Second, relevant scenes and dialogues were identified and selected based on their significance in representing Bella Swan's character development. The selection of scenes was based on specific criteria, namely: (1) scenes with high emotional intensity that reflect Bella's internal conflict, (2)

scenes that frequently depict her interactions with opposing characters or forces, and (3) scenes that hold significant narrative importance in advancing the plot and character development. Third, elements of the narrative that reflect binary oppositions were identified, particularly those related to emotional conflict and character positioning. Finally, the selected data were categorized based on thematic oppositions, such as love versus loss, human versus supernatural, and courage versus fear.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a structuralist approach based on the theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, focusing on the concept of binary opposition. The analysis aims to examine how meaning is constructed through oppositional relationships within the narrative.

The analysis was conducted through the following steps:

1. Identifying key binary oppositions in the narrative that relate to Bella Swan's character.
2. Examining how these oppositions generate narrative tension and influence the protagonist's development.
3. Interpreting Bella Swan's character as a structural element shaped by conflicting forces.
4. Analyzing her role as a protagonist within the framework of structuralism.
5. Coding the identified data into thematic categories of binary opposition using a thematic coding framework.
6. Validating the interpretation through theory triangulation to ensure consistency between the data and structuralist principles.

4. Discussion

4.1 A Structuralist Approach to Film Analysis

The structuralist theory proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss emphasizes that meaning is not derived from isolated elements, but from the relationships and oppositions between them. In this framework, texts including films, function as systems of signs structured by binary oppositions. Therefore, characters are not merely narrative agents, but structural elements positioned within a network of relationships that generate meaning.

In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, Bella Swan is constructed as a central structural figure through whom various oppositional forces are articulated. Rather than functioning solely as a romantic heroine, she operates as a mediator of conflicting values embedded within the narrative. Her character is positioned at the intersection of multiple binary oppositions, including love versus loss, human versus vampire, happiness versus sorrow, courage versus fear, and Edward versus Jacob. These oppositions not only shape the progression of the plot but also define Bella's identity and psychological development.

Structurally, Bella's role as a protagonist can be understood as a mediating agent who negotiates tensions between opposing forces rather than merely experiencing them. Her transformation throughout the narrative reflects an ongoing process of navigating, reconciling, and internalizing these contradictions. Thus, her character is not static but dynamically constructed through structural relationships.

This finding differs from previous studies that primarily interpret Bella Swan as a passive romantic figure, such as the study by Nurjanah and Sibuea (2025), which emphasizes character development through narrative structure. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that her narrative significance lies in her structural position within a system of oppositions.

4.1.1 Binary Opposition as a Narrative Structure

Within the structuralist framework proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, binary opposition functions as a fundamental mechanism for constructing meaning in narratives. Rather than being merely thematic contrasts, binary oppositions serve as organizing principles that shape the structure of a story and determine the relationships between its elements.

In narrative texts, binary oppositions operate by establishing tensions between two contrasting concepts, such as life and death, presence and absence, or stability and instability. These oppositions create a dynamic system in which meaning is continuously produced through conflict and resolution. Characters, in particular, are often positioned within these oppositional structures, either representing one pole or mediating between them.

In the context of film, binary oppositions are not only conveyed through dialogue but also through visual elements, character interactions, and plot development. This makes film a complex medium where structural relationships can be observed at multiple levels simultaneously. The interaction between opposing forces becomes a driving factor in shaping both narrative progression and character transformation. This view is consistent with Akhtar et al. (2025), who argue that binary oppositions function not only as thematic contrasts but also as structural mechanisms that organize narrative meaning and character development.

In *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*, binary opposition plays a crucial role in structuring the narrative and defining the protagonist's identity. Bella Swan is consistently positioned between opposing forces, which not only generate conflict but also contribute to her development as a character. Within this oppositional framework, meaning is not fixed but continuously negotiated through Bella's shifting alignment with different structural poles.

4.2 Narrative Structure and Binary Opposition in Shaping Bella Swan's Character

According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, narratives are fundamentally structured around binary oppositions, which generate meaning through contrast and tension. In Bella Swan's character arc, several key oppositions emerge as central mechanisms that drive both narrative progression and character development.

4.2.1 Love vs. Loss

The primary structural conflict in Bella's character is represented through the opposition between love and loss. Her emotional attachment to Edward Cullen forms the foundation of her identity, while his departure creates a profound sense of absence and disorientation.

Edward: "You don't belong in my world, Bella."

Bella: "There's a hole in my chest... like someone ripped it open." (Weitz, 2009, 00:21:50)

Structurally, love operates as a stabilizing force, while loss functions as a disruptive element that fragments Bella's sense of self. Bella's prolonged depression can be interpreted not merely as emotional suffering, but as a structural condition in which the absence of one pole (love) destabilizes the entire narrative equilibrium.

This finding supports previous studies on emotional dependency in romantic narratives; however, it extends them by demonstrating that such dependency is structurally produced through binary opposition rather than purely psychological factors. This interpretation aligns with Akhtar et al. (2025), who emphasize that binary oppositions operate as structural mechanisms shaping both character development and narrative meaning. Similarly, Nurjanah and Sibuea (2025) highlight that character development in film narratives is influenced by narrative structures and relational dynamics. However, the present study further demonstrates that such development is specifically organized through oppositional structures that systematically construct the protagonist's identity.

4.2.2 Human vs. Supernatural Being

Another significant opposition is the conflict between the human and the supernatural. Bella's desire to become a vampire reflects her rejection of human limitations and her aspiration to transcend her current identity.

Bella: "I want you to change me."

Alice: "You're not one of us." (Weitz, 2009, 01:35:10)

Within this oppositional structure, humanity represents limitation and mortality, while the supernatural signifies power and permanence. Bella is positioned between these two categories, fully accepted in neither, making her identity inherently unstable.

This condition highlights her role as a liminal figure who destabilizes fixed categorical boundaries, reinforcing Lévi-Strauss's idea that meaning emerges through relational differences rather than fixed identities. Unlike earlier studies that interpret this conflict as a romantic fantasy, this analysis reveals it as a structural mechanism that constructs identity through exclusion and aspiration.

4.2.3 Courage vs. Fear

Bella's risky behaviors, such as motorcycle riding and cliff diving, illustrate the opposition between courage and fear. However, these actions are not purely expressions of bravery but are driven by emotional vulnerability and psychological distress.

Bella: "If I jump, I'll see him again."

Jacob: "Are you trying to kill yourself?" (Weitz, 2009, 00:26:00 - 00:28:00)

Within this framework, courage and fear are not binary opposites in a strict sense, but interdependent forces that coexist within the protagonist. Bella's actions demonstrate that fear can transform into seemingly courageous behavior. Structurally, this tension redefines conventional heroism by presenting courage as a product of emotional instability rather than rational control. This interpretation challenges traditional character analysis that separates bravery from vulnerability, showing instead that both are structurally interconnected.

4.2.4 Edward's Love vs. Jacob's Care

The opposition between Edward and Jacob represents two contrasting forms of emotional attachment. Edward embodies intensity, danger, and passion, while Jacob represents stability, warmth, and emotional support.

Jacob: "I'm not giving up. I'll be here as long as you need me." Bella: "Don't make me choose, Jacob. Because it'll be him. It's always been him." (Weitz, 2009, 01:15:40)

Structurally, Edward and Jacob function as opposing poles that represent desire versus security. Bella's preference for Edward reflects a willingness to embrace risk and emotional intensity. Within this oppositional framework, Bella's choice is not merely romantic but structural, as it aligns her identity with a particular value system.

This finding differs from previous studies that frame the Edward-Jacob conflict as a simple love triangle, as it reveals a deeper structural function in shaping the protagonist's identity.

4.3 Bella Swan's Character Development

Bella Swan's character development in *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* reflects a gradual transformation shaped by structural tensions. At the beginning of the film, she is portrayed as emotionally fragile, dependent, and psychologically vulnerable. Her identity is largely defined by her relationship with Edward, and his absence results in emotional disintegration. This pattern reflects what Akhtar et al. (2025) describe as the role of binary

opposition in generating character transformation through continuous tension between opposing forces.

However, as the narrative progresses, Bella begins to regain agency through her interactions with Jacob and her engagement with the external world. This transition marks a shift from passivity to activity, indicating the beginning of her structural transformation.

Her confrontation with the Volturi in Italy serves as a pivotal moment in her development. In this scene, Bella demonstrates decisiveness and autonomy, asserting her desire to become a vampire:

Bella: "This is what I want. This is what I've always wanted." (Weitz, 2009, 01:45:00)

Structurally, this moment represents a temporary resolution of multiple oppositions, particularly human versus supernatural and fear versus courage. Bella's development can therefore be understood as the result of continuous negotiation between opposing forces rather than a linear progression of character growth.

Importantly, Bella's transformation does not eliminate these contradictions but integrates them into a more complex identity. She emerges as a protagonist who embodies both vulnerability and strength, reflecting the dynamic nature of character construction in narrative texts.

Thus, Bella Swan can be understood as a structural protagonist whose development is driven not by linear progression, but by the tension and interaction between opposing elements. Her character exemplifies how narrative meaning is generated through conflict, mediation, and transformation.

4.3.1 Bella Swan as a Structural Protagonist

From a structuralist perspective, Bella Swan can be interpreted not merely as a central character, but as a structural protagonist whose role is defined by her position within a network of binary oppositions. In line with the theory proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, characters function as elements within a system of relationships rather than as isolated individuals with fixed identities.

Bella's character operates as a mediating figure who navigates and negotiates between opposing forces. Throughout the narrative, she is consistently positioned between contrasting elements, such as love and loss, human and supernatural, and safety and danger. This positioning allows her to function as a bridge that connects and reconciles these oppositions, making her essential to the production of meaning within the story.

Within this relational system, Bella functions as a dynamic structural subject whose identity is continuously reconstructed through interaction with opposing elements.

Furthermore, Bella's role as a structural protagonist challenges traditional notions of heroism. Unlike conventional protagonists who are defined by strength or dominance, Bella's significance lies in her emotional depth and her ability to endure and navigate internal conflict. Her vulnerability becomes a central aspect of her structural function, as it enables the narrative to explore complex psychological and ideological tensions.

This perspective supports contemporary narrative studies that emphasize relational identity construction rather than fixed character traits.

In this sense, Bella Swan embodies what can be described as a "dynamic structural subject," whose identity is continuously shaped and reshaped through interactions with opposing forces. Her development is not linear, but relational, reflecting the fundamental principles of structuralist analysis. Therefore, her character not only drives the plot but also serves as a key mechanism through which the narrative constructs and communicates meaning.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that Bella Swan's characterization is not driven by isolated emotional experiences, but by her structural position within a system of binary oppositions that continuously shapes and reshapes narrative meaning.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* constructs meaning through a structured system of binary oppositions rather than through linear narrative progression. These findings demonstrate that binary oppositions function as the primary mechanism shaping both character and narrative meaning. Rather than merely identifying thematic contrasts, these oppositions operate as structural forces that construct Bella Swan's characterization. The oppositions of love versus loss, human versus supernatural, courage versus fear, and Edward versus Jacob not only represent conflicts but also systematically organize the narrative and define the protagonist's position within it.

Furthermore, Bella Swan is best understood as a structural protagonist who functions as a mediating figure within a network of opposing forces. Her identity is not fixed, but continuously constructed through the negotiation of conflicting elements, indicating that character development in film narratives is inherently relational and dynamic.

This study contributes to literary and film theory by extending the application of Lévi-Straussian structuralism to contemporary popular cinema, demonstrating that mainstream films can be analyzed as complex systems of relational meaning. In addition, this research has pedagogical implications, particularly in literature and film studies, as it offers a structured approach for analyzing characterization through binary opposition in classroom settings.

For future research, it is recommended that structuralist analysis be combined with other theoretical perspectives, such as psychoanalysis or feminist criticism, to explore deeper psychological and ideological dimensions of character construction. Such integration would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is produced in cinematic narratives.

References

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2015). *A glossary of literary terms* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Akhtar, F., Sohail, A., & Firdous, N. (2025). Exploring binary oppositions in O. Henry's "The Last Leaf": A structuralist perspective. *Journal for Social Science Archives*, 3(2), 415–424. <https://doi.org/10.59075/jssa.v3i2.247>
- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (2019). *Film art: An introduction* (12th ed.). McGraw-Hill
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Efrizah, D., & Purwarno, P. (2026). Jungles of Resistance: Reading Ecological Subjugation in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 12(1), 117-124. <https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v12i1.62>
- Efrizah, D., Sari, I., Rosida, S., Ali, N., & Fitriani, E. S. (2025). Intercultural dialogue between the Malay-Islamic world and the West: Insights from English literature and Malay classical texts. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Islamic Community Studies* (pp. 546–554). <https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/ICIE/article/view/617>
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural anthropology* (C. Jacobson & B. G. Schoepf, Trans.). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Lin, Y., Ni, X., & Xiang, S. (2023). Structuralist perspectives on the wholeness and synchronie of non-linear film narratives: The film *Babel* as an example.

- Communications in Humanities Research*, 20, 160–165.
<https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/20/20231329>
- Nurjanah, & Sibuea, T. (2025). Reviewing protagonist's character development based on the narrative structure in a movie: A case study of *Carry-On* (2024): An analysis based on Syd Field's three-act structure and Lajos Egri's character dimensions. *Dialektika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra dan Budaya*, 12(2), 271–286.
<https://doi.org/10.33541/dia.v12i2.7756>
- Patmarinanta, A., & Ernawati, D. (2017). *Narrative structure and character analysis*. Malang, Indonesia: Universitas Negeri Malang Press.
- Purwarno, P., & Efrizah, D. (2025). *English literary trails: From Shakespeare to postmodernism*. Payakumbuh: Serasi Media Teknologi. ISBN: 978-623-89903-3-7
- Schmidt, K.-H. (2024). How films convey meaning through alternating structures. *Frontiers in Communication*, 9, 1338813. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1338813>
- Stringer, J. (2003). *Film blockbuster*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Sugiyono. (2016). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung, Indonesia: Alfabeta.
- Weitz, C. (Director). (2009). *The Twilight Saga: New Moon* [Film]. Summit Entertainment.
- Zhou, N., & Bamman, D. (2024). Once more, with feeling: Measuring emotion of acting performances in contemporary American film. *arXiv*.
<https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2411.10018>

Digital Ethics in Anime: A Critical Analysis of Light Yagami in *Death Note* for English Learning

Lika Silvia Batubara, Bendra Wardana

Department of Computer Engineering, Politeknik Unggulan Cipta Mandiri
Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: lika@ucmcampus.ac.id

Article Info

Article history:

Received: April 08, 2026

Accepted: April 22, 2026

Published: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

anime

critical thinking

digital ethics

English language teaching

Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed how individuals interact, make decisions, and engage with ethical issues, particularly within technology-driven environments. In educational settings, digital media has been widely utilized to support English language learning; however, its implementation has largely emphasized linguistic competence, often overlooking the development of students' ethical awareness. Despite the growing integration of digital tools in English language teaching, their potential role in fostering ethical reasoning remains insufficiently explored, especially among students in computer-related disciplines. This gap underscores the need for a more integrative pedagogical approach that connects language acquisition with critical ethical reflection. This study aims to investigate how digital ethics is represented through the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note* and to examine its potential as a pedagogical resource in English language teaching. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study applies literary analysis, digital ethics frameworks, and principles of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The findings indicate that the character embodies central ethical issues such as power, justice, and responsibility, while illustrating how the misuse of authority can result in significant moral consequences. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that anime narratives can serve as an effective medium for engaging students with complex ethical dilemmas in technology-oriented contexts. The use of anime also provides meaningful and relatable contexts that enhance language comprehension and stimulate critical thinking. This study contributes to the intersection of digital ethics and ESP by positioning anime as an innovative pedagogical tool for promoting ethical engagement in English language learning.

Corresponding Author:

Lika Silvia Batubara

Department of Computer Engineering, Politeknik Unggulan Cipta Mandiri Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: lika@ucmcampus.ac.id

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has changed the way people interact, access information, and make decisions in everyday life. In the field of computer science, this development also brings new challenges, especially related to ethical issues such as data privacy, decision-making systems, and the use of technology without proper control. Because of this, students in computer-related fields are expected not only to understand technical aspects but also to be aware of ethical responsibilities in using technology (Floridi, 2013; Moor, 1985).

At the same time, the use of digital media in English language teaching continues to grow. Many teachers use videos, animations, and other digital tools to make learning more interesting and effective. Previous studies show that digital media can increase students'

motivation and help them understand language in context (Fathali, 2020; Djekidel & Rogti, 2025). One type of media that has gained attention is anime, which provides authentic language, engaging stories, and cultural context that support language learning (Uy et al., 2023).

In addition to supporting language learning, anime also presents meaningful stories that often contain moral and ethical issues. One example is the anime *Death Note*, which tells the story of Light Yagami, a character who has the power to control life and death. From a literary perspective, this character can be related to the concept of a tragic hero introduced by Aristotle. From a broader perspective, the story also reflects ethical problems that are relevant to modern technology, especially in terms of power and responsibility.

However, most previous studies focus mainly on how digital media improves language skills and pay less attention to how it can be used to develop students' ethical awareness. This shows that there is still a gap in integrating language learning, digital media, and ethical discussion, especially for students in technology-related fields. Despite the increasing use of digital media in English language teaching, its role in fostering student's ethical reasoning remains underexplored. This indicates the need for a more integrative approach that connects language learning with ethical reflection.

This study argues that anime narratives, particularly *Death Note*, can function as a meaningful pedagogical tool to foster both language skills and ethical awareness in English learning contexts.

This study is important because it offers a different approach by combining digital ethics, literary analysis, and English language teaching. It contributes to the integration of ethical awareness into English learning by positioning anime as a medium for critical engagement with ethical issues.

Based on this background, this study aims to critically analyze how digital ethics is represented through the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note* and to examine its potential as a pedagogical resource in English language teaching.

2. Literature Review

Literature review is an important part of research because it explains the theories and concepts that support the study and shows how the research is positioned within existing knowledge. In this study, the literature review focuses on digital ethics, tragic hero in literary studies, the use of anime in language learning, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

Digital ethics is closely related to how technology is used responsibly. While Floridi (2013) conceptualizes digital ethics in terms of information responsibility, privacy, and the broader impact of technology on human life, Moor (1985) emphasizes the role of ethical decision-making in situations of technological ambiguity. These perspectives highlight that ethical awareness is essential, particularly for students who will engage with technology in their future careers. However, both frameworks are often discussed separately and remain underutilized in educational contexts, especially in language learning.

In literary studies, the concept of tragic hero helps explain how characters develop through moral conflict. Aristotle (1996) describes a tragic hero as a character with admirable qualities but also a flaw that leads to downfall. This concept becomes relevant when connected to ethical analysis, as it provides a framework for understanding moral dilemmas in narratives. In modern contexts, this can be seen in the character of Light Yagami in *Death Note*, whose transformation reflects a shift from justice-driven intentions to ethical ambiguity.

In the field of English language teaching, digital media has been widely used to improve student engagement and language comprehension (Fathali, 2020; Djekidel & Rogti, 2025). However, most studies tend to focus on linguistic outcomes rather than examining how

digital media can facilitate ethical reflection. This suggests that the pedagogical potential of digital media has not been fully explored beyond language acquisition.

Anime, as part of digital media, offers unique advantages as a learning resource. It provides authentic language, cultural context, and engaging narratives that support learning (Uy et al., 2023). More importantly, anime often presents complex ethical issues, creating opportunities for critical discussion in the classroom. This positions anime not only as a linguistic resource but also as a medium for ethical engagement.

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) focuses on aligning language learning with students' academic or professional needs. Richards (2006) emphasizes that learning should be relevant to real-world contexts, while Chapelle (2003) highlights the role of technology in providing authentic learning materials. However, the integration of ethical dimensions within ESP, particularly for technology-related fields, remains limited.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that although digital ethics, literary analysis, digital media, and ESP have been widely studied, their integration remains underexplored. This study positions itself at the intersection of these fields by proposing anime as a pedagogical tool to bridge language learning and ethical awareness, particularly for students in computer-related disciplines.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how digital ethics is represented through the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note*. This approach is appropriate as the study focuses on interpreting meanings, values, and ethical perspectives embedded in narrative and visual data rather than numerical data.

The primary data source is the anime *Death Note*, particularly selected scenes and dialogues involving the main character. The data were purposively selected based on their relevance to ethical issues such as power, justice, and responsibility.

Data collection was conducted through observation and documentation. The researcher repeatedly watched the anime to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and to identify significant scenes reflecting ethical dilemmas. Relevant dialogues and actions were transcribed and organized for further analysis.

The data analysis followed a thematic coding process adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006). The procedure consisted of several stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated viewing, (2) initial coding of significant dialogues and scenes, (3) grouping codes into broader themes such as power, justice, and responsibility, and (4) interpreting the themes in relation to digital ethics and literary perspectives.

To ensure the credibility of the analysis, data interpretation was cross-checked by re-examining the selected scenes and comparing them with relevant theoretical frameworks. In addition, the analysis applied theoretical triangulation by integrating perspectives from digital ethics (Floridi, 2013; Moor, 1985) and literary theory (Aristotle, 1996) to strengthen the validity of the findings.

The analytical framework of this study is based on the integration of digital ethics theory and the concept of tragic hero, which allows for a deeper examination of moral conflict and ethical reasoning in the narrative.

This method is considered appropriate because it provides a systematic and in-depth analysis of both narrative structure and ethical dimensions, supporting the objectives of this study.

4. Discussion

This section moves beyond descriptive explanation to critically interrogate how Light Yagami's character reflects deeper ethical structures relevant to contemporary digital systems. Rather than treating the narrative as a simple illustration, this discussion positions *Death Note* as a conceptual framework for analyzing power, authority, and ethical failure in technologically mediated environments.

Table 1

Summary of Key Findings

Aspect	Description
Power	Centralized and unregulated authority
Justice	Subjective moral absolutism
Responsibility	Systemic absence of accountability
Tragic Hero	Ethical collapse driven by epistemic arrogance
Learning Potential	Enables critical-ethical engagement in language learning

4.1 Digital ethics representation

The findings reveal that Light Yagami embodies a form of centralized authority that operates without transparency or external regulation, rather than merely reflecting individual misuse of power. Throughout the story, the character is shown as someone who has full control in making decisions without any external supervision

"I will become the god of a new world."

This statement does not simply reflect personal ambition, but rather mirrors algorithmic authoritarianism, where decision-making systems operate without transparency, ethical oversight, or accountability. In this sense, Light can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of how power becomes embedded within systems that claim objectivity while enforcing subjective control.

More critically, Light's decision-making reflects patterns of algorithmic bias, where judgments appear neutral but are shaped by underlying assumptions and selective criteria. His definition of justice is not universal, but constructed through his own perspective, similar to how biased datasets influence automated systems in real-world technological environments.

This situation can be linked to modern technological systems, especially those involving artificial intelligence. However, beyond analogy, this demonstrates a conceptual transfer in which fictional narrative is used to understand real-world ethical risks in AI systems.

According to Floridi (2013), technology must be used with ethical awareness, especially when it affects human life. Moor (1985) also emphasizes that technology influences human decisions, which makes ethical control very important.

Furthermore, Light's surveillance practices—monitoring individuals, collecting information, and making unilateral decisions—can be interpreted through the lens of surveillance capitalism, where data is used to predict and control human behavior.

From this discussion, it can be understood that the concentration of power without transparency or accountability reflects systemic ethical risks present in both fictional narratives and contemporary digital systems.

4.2 Tragic hero interpretation

From a literary perspective, Light Yagami can be categorized as a tragic hero; however, this classification requires deeper interrogation rather than surface-level description.

This transformation reflects not only character development but also a shift toward moral absolutism, where personal judgment replaces collective ethical reasoning.

Another dialogue that reflects this transformation is:

"I am justice."

This statement represents a collapse between subjective belief and universal truth, where Light positions himself as the sole authority of morality. Such a stance reveals an epistemological problem, in which the character fails to recognize the limits of his own reasoning. This shift from idealism to self-centered thinking highlights the internal conflict that defines a tragic hero.

From a broader perspective, this mirrors challenges in AI ethics, where decision-making systems often operate on incomplete or biased data while presenting outcomes as objective and definitive. Thus, Light's tragic flaw is not merely arrogance, but a systemic failure to accommodate alternative perspectives and ethical accountability.

This finding confirms that classical literary theory can still be applied to modern narratives, including anime, while also demonstrating its relevance in analyzing ethical issues within technological systems.

4.3 Implications for English language learning

The findings also show that the anime *Death Note* can be used as an effective learning resource in English language teaching. However, beyond its role as a language learning tool, this study positions anime as a medium for critical ethical engagement. The dialogues provide authentic language that can help students improve their vocabulary and comprehension.

In addition, the story presents situations that can be discussed in the classroom. Students are not only learning the language but also encouraged to think about ethical issues. Importantly, this approach enables conceptual transfer, where students connect fictional narratives with real-world issues such as algorithmic bias, surveillance systems, and ethical decision-making in technology. This supports previous studies showing that digital media can improve engagement and learning outcomes (Fathali, 2020; Djekidel & Rogti, 2025).

Furthermore, the use of anime can make learning more interesting and relatable. As shown by Uy et al. (2023), engaging content can motivate students to participate more actively. At the same time, discussions about ethical issues can help students develop critical thinking skills, which is also supported by Healy and Ijiri (2025).

Overall, this study demonstrates that anime functions not only as a pedagogical tool for language acquisition but also as a framework for integrating ethical reasoning into English language learning, particularly in technology-related fields.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that the character Light Yagami in the anime *Death Note* represents important aspects of digital ethics, especially related to power, justice, and responsibility. The findings indicate that the character's actions reflect how authority, when not balanced with ethical awareness, can lead to serious consequences.

More importantly, this study demonstrates that Light Yagami's character can be interpreted as a representation of ethical risks in contemporary digital systems, particularly those related to centralized decision-making, lack of accountability, and the potential for algorithmic bias.

In addition, the character can be understood as a tragic hero, whose downfall is mainly caused by internal factors such as ambition and a strong desire for control. This extends the

concept of tragic hero beyond literary analysis by linking it to ethical challenges in technology-mediated environments.

The results also show that anime can be used as an effective and engaging learning resource in English language teaching. Through meaningful stories and authentic language, students can improve their language skills while also developing critical thinking and ethical awareness.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study highlights the potential of anime as a medium for integrating language learning with ethical reasoning, particularly in ESP contexts for students in technology-related fields.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the integration of digital ethics and literary analysis by demonstrating how narrative texts can function as analytical frameworks for understanding ethical issues in modern technological systems.

From a practical perspective, this study offers an approach for educators to incorporate ethically rich digital media into English language teaching, enabling students to engage critically with real-world technological dilemmas while developing linguistic competence.

Based on these findings, the use of anime in language learning has strong potential to be developed further, especially as a medium to integrate language skills with ethical discussion.

Future research should explore classroom-based implementations and examine how this approach influences students' ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and language proficiency in diverse educational contexts.

References

- Aristotle. (1996). *Poetics* (M. Heath, Trans.). Penguin Books.
- Chapelle, C. A. (2003). *English language learning and technology*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Djekidel, O. N. E., & Rogti, M. (2025). AI-generated animated visuals and their effect on EFL learning outcomes: A systematic review with pedagogical implications. *Journal of Educational Research*, 12(1), 45–60.
- Fathali, S. (2020). The role of ICT in EFL learners' engagement. *CALL-EJ*, 21(2), 45–62.
- Floridi, L. (2013). *The ethics of information*. Oxford University Press
- Healy, S., & Ijiri, A. (2025). Integrating AI tools in EFL classrooms: Impacts on learner autonomy and engagement. *Journal of Language Teaching and Technology*, 10(2), 78–92.
- Moor, J. H. (1985). What is computer ethics? *Metaphilosophy*, 16(4), 266–275.
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge University Press.
- Uy, J. C., Kilag, O. K. T., Rabi, J. I. I. A., Poloyapoy, K. B. M., Balicoco, J. R. M., & Poloyapoy, B. N. M. (2023). Anime-inspired English learning: A unique approach. *Excellencia: International Multi-Disciplinary Journal of Education*, 1(4).

Unveiling Interpersonal Depth: Social Penetration and Friendship Types in Nat Gould's *Fast as the Wind*

Yussuf Faulandi¹, M. Ali Pawiro², Nurbaiti Ali³, Doni Efrizah⁴

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

^{3,4}Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: yussuffaulandi@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: April 08, 2026 Accepted: April 22, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	Interpersonal relationships and friendship are central themes in literary works, yet they are rarely examined through communication theories such as Social Penetration Theory. This study addresses the limited application of communication theories in literary analysis by examining interpersonal relationships in <i>Fast as the Wind</i> by Nat Gould. It highlights the contribution of integrating communication theory into literary studies, particularly in understanding character interaction and relational development. A qualitative descriptive method is employed using content analysis of dialogues and narrative elements that reflect communication patterns and self-disclosure. The analysis reveals that social penetration occurs through four stages: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange, indicating a progression from superficial interaction to deeper emotional intimacy. Three types of friendship are identified: reciprocal, receptive, and associative, with reciprocal friendship as the most dominant. The results further show that trust, self-disclosure, and social context play significant roles in shaping interpersonal depth and relational dynamics among characters. The horse racing setting not only creates competition but also fosters cooperation and strong interpersonal bonds. These findings reinforce the relevance of communication theories in literary analysis and expand their applicability in interpreting interpersonal dynamics in fictional narratives.
Keywords: <i>friendship</i> <i>interpersonal relationships</i> <i>literary analysis</i> <i>Nat Gould</i> <i>social penetration theory</i>	
Corresponding Author: Yussuf Faulandi Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia E-mail: yussuffaulandi@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

Literature is a form of artistic expression that reflects human experiences, emotions, and social realities through imaginative language. Beyond its aesthetic function, literature provides a medium for examining interpersonal relationships and social interactions. Astuti (2021) defines literature as a creative work constructed by an author, while Efrizah (2025) emphasizes that literature represents a dynamic interaction between language, culture, and contemporary contexts in a multicultural and digital era. Thus, literary works can be understood as representations of human relationships that allow analysis through communication perspectives.

One of the most prominent forms of literature is the novel, which presents a broad representation of human experiences, including interpersonal relationships. According to Mulyono (2022), novels explore themes such as love, conflict, struggle, and friendship, allowing readers to understand the complexity of human behavior and emotional development. As such, novels offer a relevant context for analyzing how interpersonal relationships are formed and developed within specific social settings. In this sense, literary

works can be viewed as representations of social and interpersonal dynamics that enable deeper interpretation through theoretical perspectives (Purwarno & Efrizah, 2025).

Friendship is one of the most essential aspects of human relationships frequently portrayed in novels. It involves emotional closeness, trust, and mutual support, forming a significant part of individuals' social lives (Intan et al., 2021). Through friendship, individuals share experiences, thoughts, and feelings, creating meaningful interpersonal bonds. In literary narratives, friendship is not static but develops dynamically through interaction, communication, and situational contexts.

To analyze the development of friendship, this study applies Social Penetration Theory proposed by Altman and Taylor (1973). This theory explains that interpersonal relationships develop gradually through self-disclosure, moving from superficial communication to deeper and more intimate levels (Sari, 2023; Putri et al., 2025). The process is commonly illustrated through the "onion model," where each layer represents increasing levels of personal disclosure and intimacy. Therefore, Social Penetration Theory offers a systematic and analytical framework for examining how relational depth is constructed within literary texts.

This study focuses on the novel *Fast as the Wind* by Nat Gould, which portrays interpersonal relationships within the context of horse racing and family life. The story follows Picton Woodridge in his efforts to prove his brother's innocence while maintaining relationships with other characters such as Dick Langford and Rita Langford. These interactions provide a rich representation of relational dynamics shaped by trust, loyalty, and shared experiences, making the novel particularly relevant for theory-driven analysis of interpersonal relationships.

Despite the growing number of studies on interpersonal relationships in literary works, most previous research has primarily focused on general themes of friendship or character relationships without applying a specific communication theory as an analytical framework, resulting in largely descriptive interpretations that fail to explain how relational processes develop.

Furthermore, although Social Penetration Theory has been widely applied in communication studies, its application in literary analysis, particularly in examining friendship in novels, remains limited. Previous literary studies have examined relationships among characters through descriptive analysis of interaction and emotional bonds. For example, studies by Khairunnisa and Manugeran (2021) explore interpersonal dynamics in literary texts; however, such studies do not employ communication theories to explain relational development. In contrast, other literary studies focus on broader ideological and thematic issues. Efrizah and Purwarno (2026), for instance, analyze literary texts through ideological perspectives, emphasizing macro-level interpretations rather than interpersonal processes.

These contrasting approaches indicate a critical gap in literary studies, where interpersonal relationship development has not been sufficiently examined through a systematic theoretical framework. In addition, research on Nat Gould's *Fast as the Wind* is still scarce, with most discussions emphasizing issues of justice and conflict rather than relational dynamics. This limitation highlights the need to integrate communication theory into literary analysis to provide a more comprehensive understanding of character relationships.

This study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Social Penetration Theory into literary studies, methodologically by employing qualitative content analysis to examine relational processes within narrative texts, and academically by enriching interdisciplinary research between communication and literature. Moreover, unlike previous studies that emphasize descriptive interpretations, this study offers a novel perspective by systematically applying Social Penetration Theory to examine relational depth and

interpersonal dynamics in a literary context, thereby bridging communication theory and literary analysis.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the levels of social penetration and the types of friendship depicted in Nat Gould's novel *Fast as the Wind*. The research problems are formulated as follows:

1. What are the levels of social penetration depicted in Nat Gould's novel *Fast as the Wind*?
2. What types of friendship are portrayed among the characters in Nat Gould's novel *Fast as the Wind*?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Penetration Theory

Social Penetration Theory, proposed by Altman and Taylor (1973), explains how interpersonal relationships develop through gradual self-disclosure. The theory emphasizes that relationships evolve from superficial interactions to deeper levels of intimacy as individuals begin to share more personal information (Griffin et al., 2019). This process reflects the dynamic nature of human communication, where trust and closeness are built over time.

A central concept in this theory is the onion model, which illustrates personality as consisting of multiple layers. The outer layer represents general information such as physical appearance and basic identity, while deeper layers contain personal values, emotions, and private experiences. As relationships develop, individuals gradually reveal these deeper layers, leading to stronger emotional connections.

Self-disclosure is the core mechanism of social penetration. It refers to the process of sharing personal information with others, which enables relationship development. This process is reciprocal, meaning that when one individual shares information, the other tends to respond similarly. Such reciprocity is essential for building intimacy, reducing uncertainty, and strengthening interpersonal bonds.

Recent studies in communication and literary analysis indicate that interpersonal relationships in narrative texts are dynamic and influenced by social and psychological factors, yet the systematic application of Social Penetration Theory in literary contexts remains limited.

2.2 Stages of Social Penetration

Altman and Taylor (1973) identify four main stages in the development of interpersonal relationships:

1. **Orientation Stage**
This is the initial stage where communication is superficial and limited to general information. Individuals tend to be cautious and avoid conflict.
2. **Exploratory Affective Exchange Stage**
At this stage, individuals begin to share opinions and preferences. Communication becomes more relaxed, and a basic level of trust starts to develop.
3. **Affective Exchange Stage**
Relationships become closer as individuals share more personal experiences and emotions. There is greater openness, although some sensitive topics may still be protected.
4. **Stable Exchange Stage**
This is the deepest level of relationship development, characterized by high intimacy, trust, and mutual understanding. Communication becomes open, honest, and efficient.

These stages demonstrate that relationship development is a gradual process, moving from surface-level interaction to deep emotional connection.

However, existing studies often treat these stages as general communication patterns and rarely contextualize them within literary narratives, where relational development is shaped by plot, setting, and character construction.

2.3 Friendship

Friendship is an interpersonal relationship characterized by mutual support, trust, and positive interaction. According to Wright (in Septian & Pardi, 2022), friendship involves a productive and supportive relationship that contributes to individual development. It is not only a source of emotional comfort but also a means of personal growth.

In social contexts, friendship provides a safe space for individuals to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment. This aligns with the concept of social penetration, where openness and trust are essential for deepening relationships. Therefore, friendship can be understood as a dynamic relationship shaped by communication, shared experiences, and emotional connection.

Previous literary studies also highlight that literary texts can represent complex human and social relationships, which can be interpreted through specific theoretical frameworks to reveal deeper meanings (Efrizah & Purwarno, 2026). However, this study primarily focuses on ecological and ideological aspects rather than interpersonal relationships among characters. Similarly, friendship in novels reflects complex emotional bonds and interpersonal dynamics that can be analyzed through theoretical perspectives (Khairunnisa & Manugeran, 2021). Nevertheless, the analysis tends to remain descriptive and does not systematically apply a communication-based framework. Furthermore, Desiyanti et al. (2024) emphasize that character development in novels is closely related to social interactions and relationships, yet the study mainly focuses on individual development rather than the dynamics of friendship itself. These differences indicate that previous studies have not fully examined friendship as a process of interpersonal development using a communication theory, particularly in integrating relational depth and interaction patterns within literary texts.

2.4 Types of Friendship

Wright (in Blieszner et al., 2019) categorizes friendship into three main types:

1. Reciprocal Friendship
A balanced relationship in which both individuals equally give and receive support, trust, and care.
2. Receptive Friendship
An unbalanced relationship where one individual gives more support while the other receives more, yet both still benefit from the relationship.
3. Associative Friendship
A casual relationship based on social interaction, such as between classmates or colleagues, without deep emotional involvement.

These types of friendship help explain the variation in relationship closeness and interaction patterns among individuals. Nevertheless, previous studies rarely integrate friendship types with stages of interpersonal development, resulting in a limited understanding of how different forms of friendship correspond to varying levels of relational depth in literary narratives.

Therefore, this study positions itself at the intersection of communication and literary studies by applying Social Penetration Theory to analyze both the stages of interpersonal

development and the types of friendship in a literary context. Unlike previous studies that focus on ideological issues, descriptive character analysis, or individual development, this research offers an integrated framework for examining interpersonal depth and friendship types in Nat Gould's *Fast as the Wind*.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze social penetration and friendship in Nat Gould's novel *Fast as the Wind*. A qualitative approach is appropriate because this research focuses on interpreting meanings and understanding interpersonal relationships as represented in literary texts. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is used to explore and interpret the meaning of social or human problems, particularly through textual analysis and in-depth interpretation. In literary studies, this approach is relevant for examining characters, dialogues, and narrative structures to reveal meanings related to human experiences and social interactions.

The descriptive method is used to systematically describe how friendship is formed, developed, and represented through the characters in the novel. This approach allows the researcher to interpret the process of self-disclosure and the development of intimacy based on Social Penetration Theory, as well as to classify the types of friendship depicted in the story.

The primary data source of this study is the novel *Fast as the Wind* by Nat Gould. The unit of analysis in this study consists of dialogue exchanges and narrative segments that explicitly represent interpersonal interactions, self-disclosure, and relational development among characters. The data include selected dialogue units and narrative descriptions that reflect communication patterns and friendship dynamics. The data were collected through close reading of the novel, followed by identifying and selecting relevant parts related to friendship and social penetration.

The data analysis was conducted using a thematic coding process. First, the researcher performed open coding by identifying segments of dialogue and narration related to interpersonal interaction and self-disclosure. Second, axial coding was applied to categorize the data into the four stages of social penetration (orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange) and the three types of friendship (reciprocal, receptive, and associative). Third, selective coding was conducted to interpret patterns and relationships between stages of social penetration and types of friendship.

The data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on relevant data while excluding unnecessary information. Then, the data were organized and presented in a descriptive form to identify patterns of relationship development. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the data based on Social Penetration Theory and friendship classification to explain how interpersonal relationships develop and what types of friendship are represented in the novel.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applies credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is achieved through prolonged engagement with the text and careful data selection. Dependability is ensured by maintaining a clear and consistent analytical procedure throughout the study. Confirmability is established by grounding interpretations in textual evidence, such as direct quotations from the novel, to minimize researcher bias.

4. Discussion

4.1 Levels of Social Penetration in *Fast as the Wind*

The analysis of *Fast as the Wind* demonstrates that interpersonal relationships among the characters evolve through gradual stages of social penetration, as proposed by Altman and Taylor (1973). These stages are reflected through patterns of communication, emotional involvement, and the depth of self-disclosure within the horse racing environment.

At the orientation stage, communication remains superficial and limited to general topics. This stage can be observed in the early interactions among characters such as Picton Woodridge and members of the racing community, including Dick Langford. Their conversations tend to focus on shared environments, such as horse racing activities and social settings, without involving personal or emotional disclosure. This reflects the cautious nature of initial interactions, where individuals aim to maintain a positive impression and avoid conflict.

However, even at this stage, the novel suggests that social interaction is important in building connections, as seen in the statement:

“It’s not just about the races; it’s about the relationships we build.”

This suggests that even at the orientation stage, interpersonal awareness is already embedded within the social structure of the narrative, indicating that relationship formation is not entirely neutral or superficial. Rather than functioning merely as an initial stage, the orientation phase in this novel appears to be socially conditioned by the shared environment of horse racing, which accelerates relational awareness. This finding extends Social Penetration Theory by showing that early-stage interaction may already contain implicit relational intentions shaped by context.

As relationships develop, they move into the exploratory affective exchange stage, where individuals begin to share personal preferences, opinions, and limited emotional expressions. This stage is evident in Picton’s interactions with Dick and Rita, where communication becomes more relaxed and open. The characters begin to move beyond formal interaction and show signs of familiarity and trust.

The process of increasing openness is also supported by the existence of mutual understanding within the community, as reflected in the idea that relationships are built through shared experiences and communication. This indicates that the breadth of communication expands, allowing individuals to explore different aspects of each other’s personalities.

The affective exchange stage represents a deeper level of interpersonal communication, where individuals begin to express personal feelings and emotional concerns. In the novel, this stage is clearly reflected in Picton’s relationship with Rita and his emotional connection with Hector. At this level, communication is no longer limited to surface-level topics but involves deeper emotional engagement.

This is supported by the statement:

“It’s not just the financial backing, but the trust you’ve placed in us that truly counts.”

This suggests that emotional trust operates not only as an outcome of social penetration but also as a driving force that accelerates movement between stages. Unlike the linear progression proposed by Altman and Taylor (1973), the findings indicate a more dynamic process in which trust can precede deeper disclosure, particularly in high-stakes social environments. This extends the theory by highlighting the role of contextual urgency in shaping relational depth. In addition, emotional openness is also reflected in supportive interactions among characters, such as:

“Your willingness to listen and understand my concerns means the world to me.”

This suggests that self-disclosure in the novel is not purely informational but relationally strategic, functioning to reinforce emotional bonds rather than merely reveal personal content. This challenges the traditional view of self-disclosure as a gradual and neutral process, showing instead that it can be intentionally used to sustain interpersonal closeness.

At the stable exchange stage, relationships reach the highest level of intimacy, characterized by mutual trust, openness, and strong emotional bonds. This stage is reflected in the consistent loyalty and support among characters, especially in challenging situations such as Hector’s imprisonment and Picton’s struggle.

The stability of these relationships is reinforced by shared values and long-term commitment, as seen in the statement:

“Our friendship is built on mutual respect and support. I’m here for you, always.”

This quotation reflects a level of communication where individuals fully understand and trust each other, which is the defining characteristic of stable exchange. At this stage, relationships become predictable, and individuals can anticipate each other’s responses and behaviors.

Moreover, the analysis shows that social penetration in the novel is influenced by the context of the horse racing environment, which combines cooperation and competition. While competition may create tension, it also strengthens relationships through shared experiences and mutual dependence. This indicates that social penetration is not only a linear process but also dynamic, influenced by situational factors.

Another important aspect is the presence of reciprocity in self-disclosure, where openness from one character encourages openness from another. This can be observed in the balanced exchange of emotional support among characters, reinforcing the development of intimacy.

Furthermore, these findings differ from previous studies that tend to treat social penetration as a relatively structured and progressive process of self-disclosure (Sari, 2023). In contrast, this study demonstrates that relational development in literary contexts is highly influenced by narrative setting and character motivation, suggesting that Social Penetration Theory requires contextual adaptation when applied to fictional texts. This indicates that interpersonal development in literature is not always linear, but may fluctuate depending on situational and emotional dynamics, thereby extending the conventional understanding of the theory.

Overall, the novel illustrates that social penetration occurs gradually through stages of communication, moving from superficial interaction to deep emotional connection. The findings support the theory that intimacy develops through continuous interaction, trust, and mutual self-disclosure, while also extending it by emphasizing the role of context and relational strategy.

4.2 Types of Friendship in *Fast as the Wind*

The findings also reveal that different types of friendship are represented in the novel, based on Wright’s classification (in Blieszner et al., 2019). These include reciprocal

friendship, receptive friendship, and associative friendship, each reflecting different levels of closeness and interaction.

First, reciprocal friendship is the most dominant type found in the novel. This type is characterized by mutual support, balance, and equality in the relationship. The interaction between Picton and Rita clearly reflects this type, as both characters contribute emotionally and support each other.

This is evident in the statement:

“Our friendship is built on mutual respect and support. I’m here for you, always.”

This suggests that reciprocal friendship in the novel is not only based on balance but also on emotional interdependence, where both characters rely on each other to maintain psychological stability. This expands Wright’s classification by indicating that reciprocity may involve deeper emotional dependency rather than simple equality of exchange.

Receptive friendship is reflected in relationships where one individual plays a more supportive role, while the other receives emotional support. This type of friendship emphasizes empathy, understanding, and the willingness to listen.

This is clearly illustrated in the statement:

“Your willingness to listen and understand my concerns means the world to me.”

This suggests that receptive friendship, often considered unbalanced, may still produce strong relational bonds through emotional asymmetry. Rather than being a weaker form of friendship, this type demonstrates that imbalance can coexist with meaningful interpersonal connection, particularly in situations requiring empathy and support.

Receptive friendship is also evident in situations where characters provide reassurance and emotional comfort, especially during moments of difficulty. This indicates that friendship is not only based on equality but also on the ability to respond to the emotional needs of others.

Associative friendship is observed in relationships that are based on shared activities, professional interaction, and mutual respect. This type of friendship is common in the broader horse racing community, where individuals interact as colleagues or acquaintances.

This is reflected in the statement:

“Our shared interests and mutual respect have forged a bond...”

This suggests that associative friendship functions as a structural foundation for deeper relationships, rather than merely a superficial interaction. In this context, shared activities serve as an entry point for potential social penetration, indicating that even low-intimacy relationships hold the potential for development.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that these types of friendship are closely related to the levels of social penetration. Reciprocal friendship tends to develop at deeper levels of penetration, while associative friendship remains at a more superficial level. Receptive friendship may occur at different levels depending on the degree of emotional involvement. This relationship between social penetration and friendship types indicates that interpersonal relationships are dynamic and influenced by both emotional and situational factors.

These findings contrast with previous literary studies that primarily describe friendship as static categories (Khairunnisa & Manugeran, 2021), as this study demonstrates that friendship types are fluid and interconnected with the stages of social penetration. This

indicates that friendship should be understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed classification.

4.3 The Role of Trust, Social Context, and Relationship Dynamics

An important finding of this study is that trust, social context, and relational dynamics play a crucial role in shaping interpersonal relationships in *Fast as the Wind*. These elements are closely related to the process of social penetration and significantly influence the formation and development of friendship among the characters.

Trust emerges as a fundamental aspect of relationship development. In line with Social Penetration Theory, self-disclosure becomes more meaningful when it is supported by trust (Altman & Taylor, 1973). This is reflected in the statement:

“It’s not just the financial backing, but the trust you’ve placed in us that truly counts.”

This indicates that relationships in the novel are not merely based on external or material factors, but are deeply rooted in emotional trust. As trust increases, characters become more willing to share personal thoughts and feelings, which leads to deeper levels of intimacy.

In addition, self-disclosure is closely related to emotional support, as seen in the interaction:

“Your willingness to listen and understand my concerns means the world to me.”

This shows that openness and empathy are essential components in strengthening interpersonal bonds. The willingness to listen and understand reflects a deeper level of communication, which supports the development of both social penetration and friendship.

Furthermore, the social context of the horse racing environment also plays a significant role in shaping relationships. Although the environment is highly competitive, it also fosters cooperation and mutual dependence among individuals. This is reflected in the statement:

“It’s not just about the races; it’s about the relationships we build.”

This suggests that shared experiences and social interaction contribute significantly to the development of relationships.

The findings also indicate that interpersonal relationships in the novel are dynamic rather than static. Relationships may develop, strengthen, or fluctuate depending on situational pressures and character motivations. This suggests that social penetration does not always follow a strictly linear progression, but may shift depending on contextual and emotional factors, thereby extending the original framework of the theory.

Moreover, there is a strong interconnection between the levels of social penetration and the types of friendship identified in this study. Deeper levels of penetration tend to result in reciprocal friendship, characterized by mutual support and emotional closeness, whereas more superficial interactions are associated with associative friendship, which is based on shared activities rather than emotional intimacy. This finding suggests that friendship types are not independent categories but are closely shaped by the depth of interpersonal communication, as reflected in the following statement:

“Our shared interests and mutual respect have forged a bond...”

This suggests that not all relationships reach the same level of intimacy, and that different types of friendship emerge depending on the depth of interaction and emotional

involvement. It also reinforces the idea that relational development is both gradual and context-dependent. This study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that trust, self-disclosure, and social context function as interconnected variables that shape both the depth and type of interpersonal relationships. Unlike previous studies that examine these elements separately, the findings reveal that they operate simultaneously within the process of relational development. This integrated perspective offers a more holistic understanding of interpersonal dynamics in literary narratives.

4.4 Discussion Summary

The findings of this study indicate that social penetration and friendship in *Fast as the Wind* are closely interconnected. The development of interpersonal relationships is influenced by gradual self-disclosure, trust, and emotional interaction among the characters.

The analysis shows that relationships evolve through different stages of social penetration, from superficial interaction to deep emotional intimacy. At the same time, various types of friendship, namely reciprocal, receptive, and associative, emerge depending on the level of closeness and interaction.

In addition, the social environment of horse racing plays a significant role in shaping these relationships, demonstrating that competition and cooperation can coexist in the development of interpersonal bonds.

Therefore, this study not only confirms the relevance of Social Penetration Theory in literary analysis but also extends it by emphasizing the importance of context, relational strategy, and emotional dynamics in shaping interpersonal depth. These findings suggest that literary texts provide a unique space for reinterpreting communication theories, particularly in understanding how friendship evolves within complex social environments.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzes social penetration and types of friendship in Nat Gould's novel *Fast as the Wind* by applying Social Penetration Theory and the classification of friendship. The findings show that interpersonal relationships among the characters develop through gradual stages, starting from superficial interaction to deeper emotional intimacy. These stages are reflected in the characters' communication patterns, levels of self-disclosure, and emotional involvement.

The analysis confirms that the stages of social penetration, namely orientation, exploratory affective, affective exchange, and stable exchange, are represented in the novel. However, the findings suggest that the development of relationships is not always strictly linear, as it is influenced by trust, situational conditions, and the social context of the narrative. This indicates that Social Penetration Theory can be applied more flexibly when used to interpret interpersonal relationships in literary texts.

In addition, the study identifies three main types of friendship, namely reciprocal, receptive, and associative. Reciprocal friendship appears as the most dominant type, reflecting balanced emotional exchange, while receptive and associative friendships show different levels of emotional involvement. The findings also indicate that the types of friendship are closely related to the levels of social penetration, suggesting that relational depth and friendship patterns develop simultaneously rather than separately.

Theoretically, this study shows that Social Penetration Theory is not only relevant for analyzing real-life communication but can also be used to understand how interpersonal relationships are constructed in literary narratives. In terms of practical contribution, this study demonstrates that literary works can be analyzed through a communication perspective to reveal how trust, self-disclosure, and emotional interaction shape relationships between characters. However, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single novel,

which limits the scope of the findings. Second, the analysis is based on qualitative interpretation, which may lead to different results if examined from other perspectives. Therefore, future research is suggested to examine similar issues in different literary works or cultural contexts, as well as to conduct comparative studies to gain a broader understanding of social penetration and friendship in literature.

References

- Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Astuti, D. W. (2021). Analisis Nilai Moral Dalam Novel 5 Cm Karya Donny Dhiringantoro Sebagai Alternatif Bahan Pembelajaran Sastra Di Sma. *Sasindo*, 9(1), 29–54. <https://doi.org/10.26877/sasindo.v9i1.10643>
- Blieszner, R., Ogletree, A. M., & Adams, R. G. (2019). Friendship In Later Life: A Research Agenda. *Innovation In Aging*, 3(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igz005>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Desiyanti, D., Pawiro, M. A., & Ezir, E. (2024). Intellectual development in Andrea Hirata's *Ayah*. *Journal of Language*, 6(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v6i1.9071>
- Efrizah, D. (2025). *LinguaScape: An Interactive Map of English Language and Literature in the Digital and Multicultural Age*. Serasi Media Teknologi.
- Efrizah, D., & Purwarno, P. (2026). Jungles of Resistance: Reading Ecological Subjugation in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 12(1), 117–124. <https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v12i1.62>
- Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2019). *A first look at communication theory* (10th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Intan, T., Hasanah, F., & Wardiani, S. R. (2021). Kekerasan Dalam ‘Persahabatan Beracun’ Antarperempuan Pada Novel Antéchrista Karya Amélie Nothomb. *Diksi*, 29(2), 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.21831/diksi.v29i2.41380>
- Khairunnisa H., K. A., & Manugeran, M. (2021). Philia As Friendship In Nicholas Sparks' Novel *The Longest Ride*. *Journal of Language*, 3(2), 135–142. <https://doi.org/10.30743/Jol.v3i2.4489>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mulyono, A. (2022). Analisis Psikologi Novel Cermin Cinta Karya N. Riantiarno. *Alinea : Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Dan Pengajarannya*, 2(2), 139–147. <https://doi.org/10.58218/alinea.v2i2.197>
- Purwarno, P. & Efrizah, D. (2025). *English literary trails: From Shakespeare to postmodernism*. Payakumbuh: Serasi Media Teknologi. ISBN: 978-623-89903-3-7
- Putri, C. A., Ike Desi Florina, & Sarwo Edy. (2025). Penerapan Teori Penetrasi Sosial dalam Analisis Komunikasi Interpersonal Keluarga Non-Biologis pada *Family by Choice*. *KOMUNIKA*, 12(2), 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.22236/komunika.v12i2.19155>
- Sari, P. W. (2023). Self-disclosure interaction in online networks in social penetration theory. *Jurnal Common*, 7(1), 13–21. <https://doi.org/10.34010/common.v7i1.8144>
- Septian, D., & Pardi, P. (2022). Kinds of Friendship in James Dashner's Novel *the Death Cure*. *Journal Of Language*, 4(1), 142–147. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v4i1.5276>

Disability and Structural Injustice in *Miracle in Cell No. 7*: A Critical Disability Analysis

Doni Efrizah¹, Dela Pebriani², Clara Puspita³, Purwarno Purwarno⁴

¹Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

^{2,4}Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

³Politeknik Mandiri Bina Prestasi, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: defriz19@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: April 06, 2026

Accepted: April 22, 2026

Published: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

critical disability theory;
discourse analysis;
institutionalized ableism;
intellectual disability;
legal discourse;
social stigma;
structural discrimination

Abstract

This study examines how intellectual disability and structural injustice are constructed in *Miracle in Cell No. 7*, directed by Hanung Bramantyo. It aims to analyze the discursive construction of disability and the reproduction of structural discrimination within legal and social contexts. Using a qualitative research design with a critical discourse analysis approach, this study applies Critical Disability Theory to interpret selected dialogues and key scenes that reflect power relations and institutional practices within the narrative. The findings reveal that intellectual disability is constructed as deviance within legal discourse, leading to discursive marginalization and the denial of agency. Discrimination operates structurally through institutional mechanisms such as coercive interrogation, lack of accommodation, and biased legal procedures within the criminal justice system. At the social level, stigma and dominant cultural narratives construct disability as a marker of danger and incompetence, reinforcing exclusion and legitimizing injustice. The novelty of this study lies in highlighting how cinematic narratives reproduce institutionalized ableism across both legal and social domains. It contributes to Critical Disability Studies by emphasizing discrimination as a multidimensional and structurally embedded phenomenon shaped by power relations. Practically, the study underscores the need for disability-inclusive legal frameworks and increased social awareness to promote justice, equality, and dignity for persons with disabilities.

Corresponding Author:

Doni Efrizah

Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: defriz19@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Currently, many films explore social issues and highlight injustices within society. One such film is *Miracle in Cell No. 7* by Hanung Bramantyo (2022), a remake of a South Korean film. This adaptation sheds light on the discrimination faced by people with disabilities. Discrimination, often rooted in social prejudice, manifests in various forms and reflects deep-rooted systemic inequalities that persist across different aspects of life (Williams et al., 2019).

According to Bohren et al. (2022), discrimination is not only a moral issue but also has significant social and economic consequences. From this perspective, discrimination arises from unequal treatment based on group identity, which ultimately weakens marginalized groups. Although the Indonesian Constitution (Article 28I paragraph 2) guarantees equal rights for all citizens, in practice, individuals with disabilities are still frequently subjected to unfair treatment.

Persons with disabilities are an integral part of society and possess the same rights, obligations, and roles as other citizens. However, they often face barriers in participating fully in social life due to both physical and social environments (Hackett et al., 2020). Disability refers to long-term conditions, including physical and mental limitations, which may hinder individuals' ability to carry out daily activities and engage in society.

Muster (2023) explains that despite ongoing efforts to promote equality and inclusion, there are still gaps in understanding disability justice, particularly within institutional systems such as the criminal justice system. Similarly, Taruk Allo (2022) argues that stereotypes and misconceptions about disability often become the root causes of discrimination, affecting various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social participation. Therefore, changing societal perceptions is essential in creating a more inclusive and equitable environment.

The film portrays the life of Dodo Rozak, a father with an intellectual disability who works as a balloon seller and lives happily with his daughter. His life changes drastically when he is falsely accused of murdering a child. Due to his cognitive limitations, Dodo is unable to explain the situation clearly, leading to his imprisonment and eventual death sentence. Throughout the story, the film illustrates how his disability makes him vulnerable to misunderstanding, manipulation, and injustice within the legal system.

Despite the tragic narrative, the film also highlights themes of love, empathy, and solidarity, particularly through the relationship between Dodo and his daughter, Kartika, as well as the support he receives from fellow inmates. These elements provide a powerful contrast to the structural injustice he experiences.

Previous studies on *Miracle in Cell No. 7* have predominantly focused on its emotional narrative, moral values, and themes of family and empathy. While these studies provide valuable insights into the film's affective dimensions, they tend to overlook how disability is constructed within broader systems of power, particularly through legal discourse and institutional practices. As a result, limited attention has been given to the ways in which structural injustice and ableism are reproduced and normalized within the narrative.

To address this gap, this study critically examines how intellectual disability is not only represented but also constructed and regulated through social and legal discourses in the film. By shifting the focus from emotional interpretation to structural analysis, this research offers a deeper understanding of how discrimination operates at the institutional level, particularly within the criminal justice system.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the construction of disability and the reproduction of structural injustice in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* using a Critical Disability Theory perspective.

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How is intellectual disability constructed within legal and social discourse in the film?
2. What forms of structural discrimination are reproduced through institutional practices in the narrative?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Discrimination

Discrimination refers to unfair treatment toward individuals or groups, particularly those who are marginalized and lack power over their rights. It can take various forms, including physical violence, verbal abuse, social exclusion, and limited access to opportunities. Discrimination not only harms individuals psychologically but also weakens social cohesion and hinders inclusive development.

Rizky (2015) states that discrimination is a serious violation of human rights, causing negative impacts such as isolation, low self-esteem, and depression, while also limiting

individuals' participation in society. Similarly, Goodley (2017) explains that discrimination is constructed through dominant discourses of normality, where individuals with disabilities are positioned outside socially accepted standards, particularly in relation to productivity and social expectations.

Mann (2022) highlights that discrimination is deeply rooted in social and workplace structures, where marginalized groups—such as women, minorities, and persons with disabilities often receive unequal treatment despite having similar qualifications. Furthermore, Arisal et al. (2020) argue that discrimination is closely linked to social stratification, where individuals in lower social positions are more vulnerable to unfair treatment due to stigma and societal perceptions.

In the Indonesian context, Bahrudin (2022) emphasizes that disability discrimination is a fundamental injustice, particularly when reasonable accommodations are not provided in legal processes, as mandated in Law No. 39 of 1998 on Human Rights. This shows that discrimination is not only individual but also institutional.

From a literary perspective, Purwarno & Efrizah (2025) highlight that literary works often reflect social inequalities and marginalized voices, making literature a medium to critically examine injustice and discrimination within society. In line with this, Efrizah & Purwarno (2026) argue that power relations and domination, as seen in literary texts, reveal how oppression is structurally maintained, which can also be applied to understanding discrimination in broader social contexts.

Building on these perspectives, this study adopts a Critical Disability Theory framework, viewing discrimination not merely as unequal treatment but as a structural issue embedded in social systems, legal institutions, and cultural norms. However, these perspectives tend to conceptualize discrimination primarily as unequal treatment or social exclusion, without fully addressing how it is systematically produced and reproduced within institutional and cultural structures. From a Critical Disability Theory perspective, discrimination must be understood through the concept of ableism, which refers to the normalization of able-bodiedness and the marginalization of individuals with disabilities. In this sense, disability is not merely an individual condition but a socially constructed category, shaped by dominant norms, power relations, and institutional practices. Therefore, discrimination operates not only at the interpersonal level but also as a form of institutional oppression, particularly within legal systems that fail to recognize and accommodate cognitive differences.

2.2 Types of Discrimination

While these categories provide a useful framework, they often fail to capture how discrimination operates simultaneously across multiple structural levels, particularly in the case of disability.

Discrimination can be categorized into several types. Caroline et al. (2022) explain the concept of disparate treatment, referring to unequal treatment based on protected characteristics. They further note that discrimination may occur based on identity factors such as race, gender, religion, age, or disability, both through direct actions and systemic practices. The Equality Act 2010 (UK Government, 2010) classifies discrimination into four main types:

1. Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when individuals are treated unfairly explicitly because of certain characteristics. In the context of film analysis, Emananda and Zuhriya (2023) demonstrate that discrimination toward persons with disabilities in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* is represented through unjust accusations and unequal treatment rooted in prejudice. Similarly, Dodo Rozak experiences direct discrimination when he is accused and

convicted without proper evidence, as his intellectual disability is immediately associated with criminal behavior.

2. Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination refers to seemingly neutral rules that disproportionately disadvantage certain groups (Campbell & Smith, 2023). In the film, legal procedures requiring logical defense disadvantage Dodo, who cannot fully understand or respond due to his condition.

3. Harassment

Harassment involves degrading or abusive behavior directed at individuals based on identity (Gunawan et al., 2020). In the film, Dodo faces verbal and physical mistreatment, reflecting broader societal prejudice toward people with disabilities.

4. Victimization

Victimization refers to an adverse experience involving physical or psychological harm caused by harmful actions inflicted by others (Janssen et al., 2021). In this study, Dodo's experience reflects not only individual victimization but also structural victimization, where institutional practices such as coercive interrogation and legal exclusion systematically produce harm and reinforce injustice.

2.3 Mental Disabilities

Disability is understood differently across contexts. Taylor (2018) explains that it can be seen as a medical condition or as the result of interaction between individuals and environmental barriers. According to Law No. 8/2016, persons with disabilities experience limitations that affect their participation in society (Republic of Indonesia, 2016).

People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to discrimination due to stigma and lack of awareness. Sakdiyah and Ulum (2024) notes that they are often labeled as incapable or dependent, which reinforces negative stereotypes. In reality, many individuals with disabilities strive for independence and meaningful participation in society.

Discrimination against people with mental disabilities often appears in the form of exclusion, unequal treatment, and limited access to services. These challenges highlight the need for inclusive policies and social awareness to ensure equal rights and dignity. Although some individuals still hold negative perceptions, others recognize persons with disabilities as equal members of society who deserve respect and fair treatment.

From a Critical Disability perspective, intellectual disability is not merely a medical condition but is shaped by social interpretations that position individuals as incapable, thereby reinforcing exclusion and dependency.

3. Research Method

3.1 Study Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a critical discourse analysis approach. Qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of social and human phenomena through interpretation rather than quantification (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach allows the researcher to explore how meanings, power relations, and social realities are constructed through discourse.

The analysis is guided by Critical Disability Theory as the theoretical framework to interpret how disability and structural injustice are constructed within discourse. The data consist of dialogues, scenes, and narrative elements derived from the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7*. Through this approach, the study examines how intellectual disability is represented and constructed through language, institutional practices, and social interactions. The use of discourse analysis enables the researcher to explore how meanings, power relations, and forms of discrimination are produced and reproduced within the narrative.

Therefore, this study not only identifies forms of discrimination but also analyzes how structural injustice and ableism are embedded within legal and social discourses in the film.

3.2 Data Collection

The primary data source of this study is the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7*, directed by Hanung Bramantyo. The data consist of selected dialogues, scenes, and narrative sequences that represent acts of discrimination and the construction of intellectual disability.

The data were collected through several steps. First, the researcher watched the film repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline and context. Second, relevant scenes and dialogues were identified and documented.

The selection of data was based on the following criteria:

1. Scenes that explicitly depict discrimination toward the protagonist
2. Dialogues that reflect societal or institutional attitudes toward intellectual disability
3. Narrative moments involving legal processes (e.g., interrogation, trial, imprisonment)
4. Scenes that illustrate power relations and unequal treatment

These criteria ensure that the selected data are relevant to the research focus on structural discrimination and discourse construction.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a thematic discourse analysis approach. The analysis was conducted through several stages. First, the collected data were organized and coded based on recurring themes related to discrimination, such as stigma, legal injustice, coercion, and institutional bias. This coding process allowed the researcher to systematically categorize patterns within the data. Second, the identified themes were interpreted using the framework of Critical Disability Theory, particularly focusing on concepts such as ableism, social construction of disability, and institutional oppression. At this stage, the analysis examines how language, dialogue, and narrative structure contribute to the construction of disability as deviance within the legal and social system. Third, the analysis explores how these discursive constructions reflect broader power relations and structural inequalities, particularly within the criminal justice system portrayed in the film. Finally, the findings are presented descriptively and analytically, supported by selected excerpts from the film to strengthen interpretation and argumentation.

3.4 Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, this study applies theoretical triangulation by integrating multiple perspectives from discrimination theory and Critical Disability Theory. This allows the analysis to be examined from different conceptual angles.

In addition, data triangulation is applied by analyzing multiple forms of data, including dialogues, visual scenes, and narrative context, to provide a more comprehensive interpretation.

Furthermore, the researcher ensures theoretical validity by consistently aligning the data interpretation with key concepts such as ableism, discourse, and structural injustice, thereby strengthening the credibility and rigor of the analysis

4. Discussion

This study analyzes how discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities is constructed and reproduced in *Miracle in Cell No. 7*. Moving beyond narrative

description, the discussion focuses on how the film reflects institutionalized ableism, discursive marginalization, and structural injustice through legal and social practices.

4.1 Construction of Disability in Legal Discourse

The film demonstrates how intellectual disability is discursively constructed within legal institutions as a form of deviance rather than a condition requiring protection. From a Critical Disability Theory perspective, this reflects institutionalized ableism, where legal systems normalize able-bodied standards and marginalize those who do not conform.

This construction is evident in the interrogation scene, where the investigator states, *"We already know who you are."* This statement reduces Dodo's identity to his disability and positions it as sufficient evidence of guilt. Rather than being treated as a vulnerable individual requiring support, Dodo is framed as inherently unreliable.

Dodo's response, *"I didn't do anything,"* is ignored, illustrating discursive marginalization, in which his voice is systematically invalidated. This aligns with the argument that disability is constructed through dominant norms of "normality" that position individuals with disabilities as deviant and unreliable (Goodley, 2017). Thus, the legal discourse in the film does not operate neutrally but actively constructs disability as deviance, reinforcing exclusion and injustice.

Thus, the legal discourse in the film does not operate neutrally but actively constructs disability as deviance, reinforcing exclusion and injustice.

Picture 1

Discrimination against Dodo Rozak (26:56)



4.2 Institutionalized Ableism and Legal Exclusion

The legal process depicted in the film reflects institutional oppression, particularly through the absence of accommodations for individuals with intellectual disabilities. During the interrogation, Dodo is pressured to confess despite his confusion, as reflected in the command, *"Quickly explain what really happened."*

This demand assumes cognitive ability and ignores Dodo's limitations, illustrating legal exclusion, where institutional procedures systematically disadvantage individuals who cannot conform to normative standards.

Furthermore, the forced reconstruction of the crime scene demonstrates how institutional power operates coercively. Dodo's compliance is not a reflection of guilt but of vulnerability under pressure. This reflects structural injustice, where the legal system prioritizes efficiency and predetermined outcomes over fairness.

From a Critical Disability perspective, this confirms that disability is not inherently disabling; rather, it is the institutional failure to accommodate difference that produces injustice.

Picture 2

Dodo Rozak is forced to practice a murder scene (30:18)



4.3 Social Stigma and Discursive Construction of Guilt

Beyond legal institutions, discrimination is reinforced through societal attitudes. This is evident in public reactions such as, “*People like him can’t be trusted.*” Such statements reflect how social stigma constructs disability as synonymous with danger and incompetence. This aligns with Sakdiyah and Ulum (2024), who notes that individuals with disabilities are often labeled as incapable, reinforcing exclusion. In the film, the community’s immediate assumption of Dodo’s guilt demonstrates how stigma operates as discursive power, shaping perception without evidence.

From a Critical Disability perspective, this reflects ableism at the social level, where dominant cultural norms define who is considered “normal” and exclude those who deviate. These social constructions legitimize institutional discrimination, showing how injustice is reproduced across multiple levels.

Picture 3

People's Views on Dodo Rozak as a suspect (30:29)



4.4 Discrimination within Carceral Space

Discrimination against Dodo continues within the prison, where he is initially treated as inherently dangerous due to both his alleged crime and his disability. This reflects the intersection of criminal stigma and ableism, reinforcing his marginalization.

However, this perception shifts as inmates begin to recognize his innocence and humanity. For example, their protective actions toward Dodo and his daughter indicate a rejection of the dominant narrative imposed by the legal system.

This transformation illustrates that discrimination is socially constructed and therefore subject to change. It also highlights the tension between institutional labeling and human relationality, where interpersonal interaction can challenge oppressive structures.

4.5 Impact of Structural Discrimination

The impact of discrimination on Dodo is both structural and personal. His repeated statements, such as “*I just want to go home,*” reflect not only emotional distress but also systemic disempowerment, where he is denied agency within institutional processes.

This supports Mann’s (2022) argument that discrimination is embedded within structural systems rather than isolated actions. Dodo’s experience demonstrates how legal, social, and institutional discrimination intersect to produce cumulative injustice.

Additionally, the impact extends to Kartika, whose struggle to defend her father illustrates how discrimination operates relationally, affecting family members and reinforcing broader patterns of marginalization.

4.6 Reframing Justice

The film critiques formal legal justice through its failure to recognize Dodo’s condition and protect his rights. This is challenged in the courtroom when Kartika asserts, “*My father is innocent,*” reframing the narrative imposed by the legal system.

From a Critical Disability perspective, this moment represents resistance to structural oppression, where marginalized voices challenge dominant institutional narratives. The eventual recognition of Dodo’s innocence highlights the limitations of legal systems that rely solely on procedural logic without considering social context and cognitive diversity. The film thus advocates for a more inclusive understanding of justice based on recognition, dignity, and humanity.

4.7 Synthesis of Findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* operates across multiple interconnected levels: legal, institutional, and social. First, the analysis shows that intellectual disability is discursively constructed within legal institutions as deviance, answering the first research question. This construction leads to the marginalization of Dodo’s voice and the denial of his legal agency. Second, the study reveals that structural discrimination is reproduced through institutional practices such as coercive interrogation, lack of legal accommodation, and biased judicial processes, addressing the second research question. Furthermore, discrimination is reinforced by social stigma, which legitimizes institutional injustice and normalizes exclusion. These findings confirm that discrimination is not merely individual but structurally embedded within systems of power, as emphasized in Critical Disability Theory.

Overall, the film illustrates how ableism operates as a dominant ideology that shapes legal discourse, social perception, and institutional practices, resulting in systemic injustice against individuals with intellectual disabilities.

These findings also suggest that cinematic representations play a significant role in shaping public understanding of disability and justice.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that discrimination against individuals with intellectual disabilities in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* is not merely an expression of individual prejudice but is systematically produced through legal, social, and institutional practices. By applying a Critical Disability Theory perspective, the findings demonstrate that intellectual disability is discursively constructed as deviance within dominant legal and social frameworks, leading to the marginalization and exclusion of individuals like Dodo Rozak.

The study makes a theoretical contribution by extending the application of Critical Disability Theory into film analysis, particularly by highlighting how institutionalized ableism, discursive marginalization, and legal exclusion operate simultaneously within

cinematic narratives. It shows that discrimination should be understood as a multidimensional and structurally embedded phenomenon, rather than as isolated acts of bias.

In terms of practical implications, the findings underscore the urgent need for more inclusive legal frameworks that recognize cognitive diversity and provide appropriate accommodations for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The study suggests that legal institutions must move beyond procedural formalism toward a more humane and context-sensitive approach to justice. Additionally, it highlights the importance of increasing public awareness to challenge stigma and reshape societal perceptions of disability.

Furthermore, the film illustrates that while empathy and solidarity represented through Kartika and the prison community, can function as forms of resistance against oppression, such efforts remain insufficient without broader systemic reform. This reinforces the need for institutional accountability in addressing discrimination.

For future research, this study recommends further exploration of how disability is constructed across different media, cultural contexts, and legal systems. Comparative studies could provide deeper insight into how institutionalized ableism operates globally. Additionally, future research may focus on integrating interdisciplinary approaches, particularly between legal studies and disability studies, to develop more comprehensive frameworks for analyzing and addressing structural discrimination. Ultimately, this study emphasizes that achieving justice for persons with disabilities requires not only legal reform but also a fundamental shift in how society understands and values human difference.

References

- Arisal, A., Agustang, A., & Syukur, M. (2020). Diskriminasi sosial anak penderita kusta di Kota Makassar. *Phinisi Integration Review*, 3(2), 297–304. <https://doi.org/10.26858/pir.v3i2.14970>
- Bohren, J. A., Hull, P., & Imas, A. (2022). *Systemic discrimination: Theory and measurement* (NBER Working Paper No. 29820). <https://doi.org/10.3386/w29820>
- Bahrudin, E. A. A. (2022). Advokasi pekerjaan sosial terhadap diskriminasi pada kaum penyandang disabilitas di dunia kerja. *KHIDMAT SOSIAL: Journal of Social Work and Social Services*, 3(2), 130–138. <https://doi.org/10.24853/jks.v3i2.17777>
- Bramantyo, H. (Director). (2022). *Miracle in Cell No. 7* [Film]. Falcon Pictures.
- Campbell, C., & Smith, D. (2023). Distinguishing Between Direct and Indirect Discrimination. *Modern Law Review*, 86(2), 307–330. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2230.12760>
- Caroline, F. V., Natsir, M., & Nasrullah. (2022). Gender discrimination toward Josey Aimes as the main character in *North Country* film. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya*, 6(2), 388–400. <https://doi.org/10.30872/jbssb.v6i2.6371>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Efrizah, D., & Purwarno, P. (2026). Jungles of Resistance: Reading Ecological Subjugation in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 12(1), 117-124. <https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflij.v12i1.62>
- UK Government. (2010). *Equality Act 2010*. Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- Gunawan, Y., Sardi, M., & Khairunnisa, K. (2020). Perspective of Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on The Cyber Harassment in Indonesia. *Dih: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, 16(1), 49–60. <https://doi.org/10.30996/dih.v16i1.2857>

- Hackett, R. A., Steptoe, A., Lang, R. P., & Jackson, S. E. (2020). Disability Discrimination and Well-Being in The United Kingdom: A Prospective Cohort Study. *BMJ Open*, 10(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-035714>
- Janssen, H.J., Oberwittler, D. & Koeber, G. (2021). Victimization and Its Consequences for Well-Being: A Between- and Within-Person Analysis. *J Quant Criminol*, 37(1), 101–140. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-019-09445-6>
- Mann, S. (2022). *Anti-Discrimination Laws and Mental Health: Evidence from Sexual Minorities*. Working Paper.
- Muster, C. L. (2023). Disability Justice and the Americans with Disabilities Act: An Opportunity for Social Work. *Social Work (United States)*, 68(4), 331–339. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swad034>
- Purwarno, P. & Efrizah, D. (2025). *English literary trails: From Shakespeare to postmodernism*. Payakumbuh: Serasi Media Teknologi. ISBN: 978-623-89903-3-7
- Republic of Indonesia. (2016). *Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities*. Government of Indonesia.
- Rizky, U. F. (2015). Kebijakan Kampus Inklusif Bagi Penyandang Disabilitas (Studi Tentang Advokasi Kebijakan Kampus Inklusif Di Universitas Brawijaya). *IJDS Indonesian Journal of Disability Studies*, 02(01), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.ijds.2015.02.01.04>
- Sakdiyah, L., & Ulum, A. W. (2024). Evaluasi implementasi Perda No. 6 tahun 2021 tentang penyandang disabilitas dalam hak ketenagakerjaan di Kabupaten Pasuruan. *Journal Publicuho*, 7(3), 1065–1076. <https://doi.org/10.35817/publicuho.v7i3.458>
- Taruk Allo, E. A. (2022). Penyandang disabilitas di Indonesia. *Nusantara: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial*, 9(3).
- Taylor, D. M. (2018). *Americans with Disabilities: 2014*. Current Population Reports, 1–32. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2018/demo/p70-152.html>
- Goodley, D. (2017). *Disability studies: An interdisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Emananda, M. A., & Zuhriya, R. (2023). *Representasi diskriminasi terhadap penyandang disabilitas dalam film Miracle in Cell No. 7 (versi Indonesia) (Analisis semiotik Roland Barthes)* (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Surakarta).
- Williams, D. R., Lawrence, J. A., Davis, B. A., & Vu, C. (2019). Understanding How Discrimination Can Affect Health. *Health Services Research*, 54(S2), 1374–1388. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.13222>

A Syntactic Analysis of Noun Phrase Structures in *The Jakarta Post* Editorials

Juli Anjani¹, Ely Ezir², Eka Surya Fitriani³, Edward Dolmer Panggabean⁴

^{1,2}Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

³Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

⁴Politeknik Mandiri Bina Prestasi, Medan, Indonesia
Medan, Indonesia

e-mail: anjanibintisulaimi@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: March 09, 2026 Accepted: April 23, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This research analyzes the syntactic structures of noun phrases found in the editorial section of <i>The Jakarta Post</i> newspaper. This study addresses the limited research on noun phrase structures in Indonesian English-language media. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the study examines noun phrases in three editorials published from June 3 to 5, 2024. The analysis identifies eight types of noun phrase structures: Determiner + Noun, Adjective + Noun, Determiner + Adjective + Noun, Determiner + Quantifier + Noun, Determiner + Participle + Noun, Noun + Prepositional Phrase, Noun + Adjective Phrase, and Noun + Relative Clause. The findings reveal that the most frequently used structure is Adjective + Noun (24.7%), followed closely by Determiner + Noun (24.0%). These results indicate a strong tendency in journalistic writing to employ descriptive language while maintaining specificity and clarity. The study also reveals that noun phrases in <i>The Jakarta Post</i> serve multiple functions including subjects, objects, and complements, with complex structures such as Noun + Prepositional Phrase (16.9%) and Determiner + Adjective + Noun (17.5%) being used to provide additional context and nuanced information. This research contributes to understanding how English syntax functions in Indonesian media contexts and offers insights for linguistics educators, students, and media professionals regarding the practical application of noun phrase structures in journalistic writing.
Keywords: <i>Newspaper;</i> <i>noun phrase;</i> <i>syntactic structure;</i> <i>syntax;</i> <i>The Jakarta Post;</i>	
Corresponding Author: Juli Anjani Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia E-mail: anjanibintisulaimi@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

Language is a unique characteristic of human species that has attracted attention throughout history. It is not just a means of communication but the key to understanding and embracing the diversity in our world. The science that studies human language is called linguistics (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2000). Linguistic knowledge as represented in the speaker's mind is called grammar, which encompasses everything one knows about the structure of one's language, including its lexicon, morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonetics and phonology.

Syntax, as one of the fundamental branches of linguistics, studies the structure of phrases and sentences—the system of rules that determines how words are combined to form meaningful phrases and sentences (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2000). According to Chomsky (2002), syntax is the study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages. Ezir (2019) adds that syntax is the analysis of sentence structure and its clauses compared to other languages. Syntax plays a crucial role in both

spoken and written communication, as without proper syntax, sentences can become ambiguous or incomprehensible.

Within the scope of syntax, noun phrases hold particular significance as fundamental units used to express ideas, objects, or concepts. A noun phrase is a group of words centered around a noun, which may include modifiers, determiners, and other elements that describe or qualify the noun (Sharma, 2020). According to Wren and Martin (1989), a noun phrase is a group of words that does the work of a noun. Quirk and Greenbaum (1985) explain that noun phrases normally consist of a head noun and elements that determine or modify the head. The structure of noun phrases can be represented as: (determiner[s]) + (pre-modifier[s]) + head + (post-modifier[s]), where brackets represent optional elements (Omar, Yuliana, & Umiyati, 2021).

The use of English as an international language has increased rapidly, especially in mass media contexts. One of the most influential English-language media in Indonesia is *The Jakarta Post*, an English-language newspaper that presents the latest news and information to both domestic and international readers. As a media outlet, *The Jakarta Post* reflects the variety of language and writing styles used in English, making it a valuable source for linguistic analysis.

However, existing research on noun phrases has largely been limited to specific educational contexts. Previous studies have examined noun phrases in various contexts. Junaidi (2018) conducted research on noun phrase structures produced by university students, while Uswar and Putri (2023) analyzed noun phrases in analytical exposition texts. While previous studies have examined noun phrases in educational texts and student writing, limited attention has been given to their systematic use in professional journalistic discourse, particularly in Indonesian English-language media. In other words, little research has specifically focused on how noun phrase structures are used professionally in English-language mass media in Indonesia, especially in editorial sections that represent the publication's official voice and require sophisticated language use.

Why does this matter academically? Editorial media do not merely present facts; they also convey opinions and analysis that require complex and precise language structures. Understanding how noun phrases are constructed in editorial texts can help us understand how journalists deliver information-dense yet clear messages. Furthermore, the findings of this research can serve as authentic models for teaching English grammar to students and educators.

This study addresses that gap. This study contributes by providing a corpus-based description of noun phrase structures in editorial discourse, offering insights into authentic syntactic usage in professional journalism. In other words, this research not only identifies the types of noun phrase structures but also provides quantitative frequency data on their use in authentic editorial texts. Thus, the results of this study are expected to be useful both theoretically and practically.

Specifically, this research seeks to answer two questions: (1) What types of syntactic structures of noun phrases are found in *The Jakarta Post* editorials? and (2) What types of syntactic structures of noun phrases are most frequently used in editorials published in *The Jakarta Post*?

The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to multiple areas. Academically, it provides a detailed analysis of noun phrase syntax in English-language media in Indonesia, contributing to applied linguistics literature. For media professionals, including journalists and editors, the findings offer insights into the syntactic structures used in editorial writing, potentially leading to more effective communication strategies. For

educators and students, this research serves as a case study for understanding noun phrase structures in real-world contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Syntax

Syntax is one of the most important parts of grammar. Specifically, it refers to the rules that govern the ways in which words combine to form phrases, clauses, and sentences (Uswar & Putri, 2023). According to Chomsky (2002), syntax is the study of the principles and processes by which sentences are constructed in particular languages. Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams (2000) state that syntax is the structure of phrases and sentences—the system of rules that determines how words are combined to form meaningful phrases and sentences.

Syntax is frequently considered a mathematical subject because it involves analyses such as bracketed analysis, immediate constituent analysis, and tree diagram analysis (Junaidi, 2018). Each of these analyses has a defined purpose to help readers understand how to identify and classify syntactic categories according to their function. Syntax is fundamental to both spoken and written communication, as proper syntactic structure ensures clarity and comprehensibility.

2.2 Noun Phrase

A noun phrase may consist of one headword preceded by two or more modifiers of the same or different word classes (Junaidi, 2018). Sharma (2020) states that a noun phrase is a group of words with a noun as its head. However, different linguists have approached the noun phrase from different angles. While Quirk and Greenbaum (1985) emphasize structural components—focusing on how determiners, pre-modifiers, heads, and post-modifiers combine to form noun phrases—Jackson (1988) highlights functional flexibility, suggesting that noun phrases are not only structural units but also discourse tools that can compact large amounts of information into a single phrase. Wren and Martin (1989), on the other hand, take a more pedagogical approach, defining noun phrases simply as groups of words that do the work of a noun, which is useful for teaching but lacks the analytical depth needed for syntactic research.

This study adopts Quirk and Greenbaum's (1985) structural framework because it provides the most detailed and operationalizable categories for identifying and classifying noun phrase components in written texts. Unlike Jackson's (1988) discourse-oriented approach, which is better suited for conversation analysis, Quirk and Greenbaum's model offers clear criteria for distinguishing between determiners, modifiers, and heads—criteria that are essential for systematic corpus analysis.

The structure of a noun phrase can be stated as follows: (determiner[s]) + (pre-modifier[s]) + head + (post-modifier[s]), where brackets represent optional elements (Omar, Yuliana, & Umiyati, 2021). According to Jackson (1988), the English noun phrase is potentially constructed by a pre-modifier, a head, and a post-modifier. This indicates two main types of modification: pre-modification and post-modification.

Omar, Yuliana, & Umiyati (2021) in their research added a third type: multiple-modification noun phrase, which covers noun phrases with more than one pre-modification or post-modification. This study adopts this three-way classification (pre-modification, post-modification, and multiple-modification) because it captures the full range of complexity found in professional journalistic texts. The following are examples of each type:

1. Pre-modification Noun Phrase: In "the beautiful old wooden house," the phrase contains multiple pre-modifiers: "the" as determiner, "beautiful," "old," and "wooden" as adjectives modifying the head noun "house."

2. Post-modification Noun Phrase: In "the book on the table," the phrase contains the head "book" followed by the prepositional phrase "on the table" as a post-modifier.
3. Multiple-modification Noun Phrase: In "a big dog in the yard," the phrase contains both pre-modification ("a" as determiner, "big" as adjective) and post-modification ("in the yard" as prepositional phrase).

2.3 Syntactic Structures of Noun Phrases

Based on theoretical frameworks from Quirk and Greenbaum (1985), Jackson (1988), and Omar, Yuliana, & Umiyati (2021), noun phrases can be categorized into several syntactic structures. The eight categories used in this study were selected because they represent the most common patterns identified in previous corpus-based research on English noun phrases and because they can be reliably identified using surface syntactic features (i.e., word class sequences) without requiring deep semantic interpretation. This makes the classification system replicable and suitable for descriptive syntactic analysis.

a. Determiner + Noun

This structure consists of a determiner followed by a noun. Determiners include articles (a, an, the), demonstratives (this, that, these, those), possessives (my, your, his, her, its, our, their), quantifiers (some, many, few, several), and numbers (one, two, three). Example: the policy, his car.

b. Adjective + Noun

This structure consists of an adjective modifying a noun. Adjectives describe or modify nouns by providing information about characteristics or qualities. Example: big challenges, beautiful flower.

c. Determiner + Adjective + Noun

This structure combines a determiner, an adjective, and a noun, allowing for more specific description. Example: the young population, many colourful balloons.

d. Determiner + Quantifier + Noun

This structure includes words or phrases that indicate quantity. Example: the 15-19 age group, a few suggestions.

e. Determiner + Participle + Noun

This structure uses present or past participles that function as adjectives. Example: rising inflation, broken lamp.

f. Noun + Prepositional Phrase

This structure consists of a noun followed by a prepositional phrase that provides additional information. Example: the benefit of the demographic bonus, house on the hill.

g. Noun + Adjective Phrase

This structure involves a noun followed by an adjective phrase that describes it. Example: people unqualified, the room decorated with elegant furniture.

h. Noun + Relative Clause

This structure includes a noun followed by a clause beginning with relative pronouns like who, whom, whose, which, or that. Example: people aged 15 to 24 who are known as Gen Z, the student who won the prize.

These eight categories were chosen over alternative classification systems (such as those based solely on pre-modification vs. post-modification) because they capture more fine-grained distinctions that are relevant to pedagogical applications. For example, distinguishing between Determiner + Adjective + Noun and Determiner + Quantifier + Noun allows researchers and educators to identify which specific patterns learners struggle with, rather than treating all pre-modification as a single category.

2.4 Relevant Studies

Several researchers have conducted studies on syntactic analysis of noun phrases. Junaidi (2018) conducted research entitled "A Syntactic Analysis of the English Noun Phrase" focusing on fifth-semester students of the English Department at the University of Muhammadiyah Makassar. Using a descriptive method with data from 40 students selected randomly, the study found 32 forming patterns of noun phrases, categorized into accurate and inaccurate constructions.

Uswar and Putri (2023) conducted research entitled Syntactic Analysis of Noun Phrase in Analytical Exposition Text 'How Does Education Important to Children?' Using a descriptive method, the study analyzed noun phrases in the exposition text. The research concluded that the dominant noun phrase structures were NP = Det + N and NP = Det + Adj + N, demonstrating the importance of nouns in determining actors or objects in sentences.

However, these previous studies have several limitations that the present study addresses. First, Junaidi's (2018) study focused on student writing, which often contains non-standard or inaccurate constructions. While this is valuable for understanding learner errors, it does not provide a model of professional, standard English usage. Second, Uswar and Putri's (2023) study analyzed only a single analytical exposition text, which limits the generalizability of their findings. Third, neither study provided frequency data across multiple texts or compared the distribution of different noun phrase structures within a single genre. Fourth, both studies lacked explicit justification for their choice of noun phrase categories, making it difficult to replicate or compare their findings with other research.

The present study extends this line of research in three significant ways. First, by focusing on professionally edited journalistic texts (*The Jakarta Post* editorials), this study provides data on standard English usage that can serve as a model for learners and educators. Second, by analyzing three complete editorials rather than a single text or student assignments, this study offers a more robust and representative picture of noun phrase usage in authentic discourse. Third, by providing quantitative frequency data alongside qualitative examples, this study enables comparisons of how different noun phrase structures are distributed within a single genre, revealing which structures are most characteristic of editorial writing.

Thus, rather than simply replicating previous studies in a new context, this research builds on and extends existing knowledge by addressing gaps in data quality (moving from learner texts to professional texts), data quantity (moving from single texts to multiple texts), and analytical depth (moving from simple identification to frequency distribution analysis).

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze noun phrases in *The Jakarta Post* editorials. The research design was qualitative, focusing on analyzing written language in a mass media context. According to Patton and Cochran (2002), qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding aspects of social life, and its methods, which generate words rather than numbers as data for analysis. Mack et al.

(2005) explain that qualitative research seeks answers to questions, collects evidence systematically, uses predefined procedures, and produces findings applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study.

However, to complement the qualitative identification of noun phrase structures, this study also employed basic frequency counting to reveal distribution patterns across the analyzed texts. This mixed approach within a qualitative framework allows for both structural description and quantitative comparison.

3.2 Data Source and Selection Criteria

The data source for this research is *The Jakarta Post*, an English-language newspaper published in Indonesia. This publication was selected because it represents professional, standard English usage in an Indonesian media context, making it an appropriate source for examining authentic syntactic patterns.

Three editorials were selected for analysis based on the following criteria:

First, only editorials were chosen, not news articles or opinion columns. Editorials represent the official voice of the publication and undergo rigorous editorial review, ensuring consistent language quality. Additionally, editorials typically employ more complex syntactic structures than hard news because they present analysis and argumentation rather than merely reporting events.

Second, the three editorials were published on consecutive dates: June 3, 4, and 5, 2024. This consecutive sampling ensures that the texts cover different topics (political accountability, social media policy, and youth unemployment) while maintaining temporal consistency, reducing the risk that any single event or seasonal topic skews the linguistic patterns observed.

Third, the sample size of three editorials was determined based on the principle of data saturation in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Preliminary reading indicated that three editorials yielded approximately 150 noun phrases, which was sufficient to identify recurring structural patterns without overwhelming the depth of manual analysis. This sample size is consistent with previous syntactic studies of comparable scope (Uswar & Putri, 2023; Junaidi, 2018).

The three editorials analyzed were:

- a. "Passing the buck" (June 3, 2024)
- b. "Saving social media" (June 4, 2024)
- c. "Jobless Gen Z and demographic disaster" (June 5, 2024)

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Following Creswell's (2014) categories of data gathering in qualitative inquiry, data collection was conducted through document analysis with the following steps:

1. Collecting the newspaper for analysis from the online platform *The Jakarta Post* (<https://www.thejakartapost.com/>).
2. Selecting *The Jakarta Post* editorials published from June 3 to 5, 2024, as the data source based on the criteria described above.
3. Identifying noun phrases from the selected editorials.
4. Grouping the data according to the research questions.

Each editorial was read three times: first for general comprehension, second for initial noun phrase identification, and third to verify identifications in context.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis proceeded through five systematic stages:

1. Noun Phrase Identification

Noun phrases were identified manually based on Quirk and Greenbaum's (1985) definition: a noun phrase consists of a head noun and any optional elements that determine or modify it. Each noun phrase was marked in the text along with its surrounding context.

2. Coding Based on Predefined Categories

Noun phrases were coded into eight predefined structural categories derived from Quirk and Greenbaum (1985), Jackson (1988), and Omar, Yuliana, & Umiyati (2021): (a) Determiner + Noun, (b) Adjective + Noun, (c) Determiner + Adjective + Noun, (d) Determiner + Quantifier + Noun, (e) Determiner + Participle + Noun, (f) Noun + Prepositional Phrase, (g) Noun + Adjective Phrase, and (h) Noun + Relative Clause.

3. Application of Classification Rules

To ensure consistent coding, the following rules were applied:

- A determiner includes articles, demonstratives, possessives, and numbers.
- An adjective includes single adjectives (e.g., "big") but not participial forms.
- A quantifier includes words or phrases indicating quantity (e.g., "15-19," "five").
- A participle includes present or past participles functioning adjectivally (e.g., "rising," "recorded").
- A prepositional phrase includes a preposition followed by its object.
- A relative clause begins with *who*, *whom*, *whose*, *which*, or *that*.

When a noun phrase could fit multiple categories (e.g., "the young population"), it was coded according to its maximal structure (the longest possible sequence). Thus, "the young population" was coded as Determiner + Adjective + Noun, not as Determiner + Noun or Adjective + Noun.

4. Frequency Calculation

The frequency of each structural type was counted across the three editorials. Percentages were calculated by dividing the count of each type by the total number of noun phrases (154) and multiplying by 100.

5. Interpretation

The frequency distribution was analyzed to identify dominant patterns and their functional significance in editorial discourse. Findings were compared with previous studies to highlight similarities and differences.

4. Discussion

Analysis of three editorials from *The Jakarta Post* published from June 3-5, 2024, revealed 154 noun phrases across eight syntactic structure types. Beyond simply identifying these structures, this section interprets their distribution in relation to syntactic theory and the discourse functions of editorial writing.

4.1 Syntactic Structures of Noun Phrases in *The Jakarta Post* Editorials

Before presenting the findings, it is important to note that detailed definitions of each structural type have already been provided in the Literature Review (Section 2.3). Therefore, this section focuses on interpretation rather than re-explaining structural formulas.

4.1.1 Determiner + Noun

From the analysis, 37 instances (24.0%) of this structure were identified.

Example:

"The policy had been pushed out without much regard for, or sensitivity to, the economic challenges..." (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 3, 2024)

This structure reflects the journalistic need for referential precision. The determiner "the" signals that the noun refers to a specific entity already introduced or assumed to be known to readers. In editorial discourse, where arguments build on previously stated premises, such anaphoric reference is essential for coherence. From a syntactic perspective, this structure represents the minimal noun phrase (head plus determiner), yet its high frequency (24.0%) demonstrates that even minimal structures carry significant discourse weight. This finding aligns with Quirk and Greenbaum's (1985) observation that determiners ground noun phrases in the shared knowledge between writer and reader.

4.1.2 Adjective + Noun

With 38 instances (24.7%), this was the most frequently occurring structure.

Example:

"One of the big challenges for the government at the moment is to create jobs fast enough for the young population..." (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 5, 2024)

The dominance of Adjective + Noun structures (24.7%) is not accidental. It reflects the persuasive function of editorial discourse, which requires writers to evaluate situations, emphasize significance, and frame issues from a particular perspective. The adjective "big" does not merely describe a neutral property; it evaluates the challenge as substantial and worthy of attention. This finding suggests that noun phrase complexity is not merely structural but serves rhetorical and communicative functions in editorial discourse. Syntactically, pre-modification by adjectives allows writers to compress evaluation into the noun phrase itself, avoiding the need for separate evaluative clauses. This efficiency is characteristic of professional writing, where information density must be balanced with clarity.

4.1.3 Determiner + Adjective + Noun

This structure accounted for 27 instances (17.5%).

Example:

"Rather than spending funds on mega infrastructure projects, it may be time for the government to invest in education, especially in programs that can enhance the skills of the young population..." (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 5, 2024)

This structure combines the referential function of the determiner with the evaluative function of the adjective. Syntactically, it represents a more expanded pre-modification pattern than Determiner + Noun or Adjective + Noun alone. The frequency of this structure (17.5%) suggests that editorial writers regularly need both specificity (which population?) and description (what kind of population?) within a single phrase. This finding extends Jackson's (1988) functional perspective by demonstrating that pre-modification is not merely structural but serves the discourse function of building shared reference while simultaneously conveying the writer's stance.

4.1.4 Determiner + Quantifier + Noun

This structure had 17 instances (11.1%).

Example:

"For the 15-19 age group it was recorded at 29.08 percent in 2022..." (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 5, 2024)

The presence of this structure reflects the evidentiary basis of editorial argumentation. Editorials that critique government policy or social conditions must support their claims with data. Quantifiers (such as "15-19," "29.08 percent," "five years") anchor arguments in measurable reality. From a discourse perspective, this structure serves a legitimizing function: it signals to readers that the writer's claims are not mere opinion but are grounded in verifiable figures. Syntactically, the integration of quantifiers within the noun phrase rather than in separate clauses allows for denser information packaging, a hallmark of professional journalistic prose.

4.1.5 Determiner + Participle + Noun

This structure also had 17 instances (11.1%).

Example:

"...as rising inflation and living costs eat away at their families' ability to pay for education." (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 3, 2024)

Participles (such as "rising," "declining," "increasing") encode temporal or aspectual information—specifically, ongoing change or progression. The use of this structure in editorial discourse reveals a focus on dynamic processes rather than static states. Editorials comment on unfolding events: inflation is not high but rising; unemployment is not bad but growing. This reflects the journalistic imperative to report not only what is happening but what is changing. Syntactically, participles occupy an intermediate position between verbs and adjectives, allowing writers to convey action-like qualities within a nominal structure. This finding supports the view that noun phrase complexity serves temporal and aspectual functions beyond simple modification.

4.1.6 Noun + Prepositional Phrase

This structure had 26 instances (16.9%).

Example:

"Since 2015, Indonesia claims to have reaped *the benefit of the demographic bonus*..." (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 5, 2024)

Post-modification through prepositional phrases allows writers to add information without disrupting the flow of the main clause. This structure is particularly important for defining or specifying the head noun. In the example, "of the demographic bonus" explains what the benefit refers to, avoiding ambiguity. The relatively high frequency of this structure (16.9%) indicates that editorial writing relies heavily on post-modification for clarity and specificity. From a syntactic perspective, this structure represents the most common form of post-modification in English (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1985). Its prevalence in editorials confirms that post-modification is not a mark of overly complex writing but a normal feature of professional discourse.

4.1.7 Noun + Adjective Phrase

This structure had 9 instances (5.8%), the least frequent.

Example:

"Are there too few jobs or are these young people unqualified?" (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 5, 2024)

The low frequency of this structure (5.8%) reveals a stylistic preference in editorial writing: when an adjective modifies a noun, it is typically placed before the noun (pre-modification) rather than after (post-modification). This finding aligns with the general tendency in English to prefer pre-modification for single adjectives (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1985). The rare use of post-positive adjectives (e.g., "people unqualified") occurs primarily when the adjective itself

has a complement or when the writer intends a specific rhetorical effect. The scarcity of this structure in the data suggests that editorial writers avoid syntactic markedness unless necessary, favouring more canonical word orders.

4.1.8 Noun + Relative Clause

This structure had 16 instances (10.4%).

Example:

"...almost 10 million people aged 15 to 24 who are known as Gen Z, are unemployed." (Editorial Board of *The Jakarta Post*, June 5, 2024)

Relative clauses provide the most explicit form of post-modification, often adding propositional information rather than simple attributes. The presence of this structure (10.4%) indicates that editorial writers sometimes need to define or identify referents with full clauses rather than phrases. In the example, "who are known as Gen Z" defines the specific subset of people being discussed. From a discourse perspective, relative clauses allow writers to introduce new information about a referent without starting a new sentence, contributing to textual cohesion. Syntactically, this structure represents the maximum expansion of the noun phrase, and its moderate frequency suggests that editorial writers use it judiciously—enough to provide necessary specification but not so often as to create excessively dense prose.

4.2 Frequency Distribution of Noun Phrase Structures

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Noun Phrase Structures

Syntax Structure	<i>n</i>	%
Adjective + Noun	38	24.7
Determiner + Noun	37	24.0
Determiner + Adjective + Noun	27	17.5
Noun + Prepositional Phrase	26	16.9
Determiner + Quantifier + Noun	17	11.1
Determiner + Participle + Noun	17	11.1
Noun + Relative Clause	16	10.4
Noun + Adjective Phrase	9	5.8
Total	154	100

The frequency distribution reveals several patterns that have implications for both syntactic theory and discourse studies.

First, the two most frequent structures (Adjective + Noun at 24.7% and Determiner + Noun at 24.0%) account for nearly half of all noun phrases (48.7%). This indicates that editorial writing, despite its reputation for complexity, relies heavily on minimal and simple noun phrase structures. This finding challenges the assumption that professional writing requires syntactic complexity; instead, clarity and efficiency may be prioritized.

Second, the distribution between pre-modification structures (categories 1-5, totalling 88 instances or 57.1%) and post-modification structures (categories 6-8, totalling 51 instances or 33.1%) shows a preference for pre-modification in editorial discourse. This aligns with Quirk and Greenbaum's (1985) observation that English generally prefers modifiers before the head noun when possible. However, the substantial presence of post-modification (33.1%) demonstrates that editorial writers do not avoid post-modification; they use it strategically for specificity and clarity.

Third, the low frequency of Noun + Adjective Phrase (5.8%) relative to Adjective + Noun (24.7%) confirms a strong syntactic constraint in English: single adjectives strongly

prefer pre-nominal position. This finding provides empirical support from authentic journalistic texts for what is often stated as a prescriptive rule in grammar textbooks.

These findings suggest that noun phrase complexity is not merely structural but serves rhetorical and communicative functions in editorial discourse. The choice between "young population" (Adjective + Noun) and "the young population" (Determiner + Adjective + Noun) is not structurally determined but discourse-determined: the former introduces a new category, while the latter refers to a category already under discussion. Similarly, the choice between "rising inflation" (Determiner + Participle + Noun) and "inflation that is rising" (Noun + Relative Clause) reflects a trade-off between conciseness and explicitness.

4.3 Academic Significance and Contributions

Beyond the practical usefulness of these findings for students and educators, this study makes several contributions to linguistic theory and discourse studies.

For syntactic theory, this study provides empirical frequency data on noun phrase structures from a previously understudied genre: English-language editorials in an Indonesian media context. Most syntactic descriptions of noun phrases are based on invented examples or literary texts. This study demonstrates that the structural categories identified by Quirk and Greenbaum (1985) and Jackson (1988) are indeed operationalizable in authentic journalistic data, confirming their descriptive adequacy.

For discourse studies, this study shows that syntactic choices are not arbitrary but serve discourse functions. The predominance of Adjective + Noun structures reflects the evaluative function of editorials. The presence of Determiner + Quantifier + Noun structures reflects the evidentiary grounding of arguments. The use of Determiner + Participle + Noun structures reflects the focus on dynamic processes. These findings suggest that syntactic analysis cannot be separated from discourse analysis; structure and function are two sides of the same coin.

For studies of English in non-native contexts, this study provides a baseline description of noun phrase usage in *The Jakarta Post*, one of Indonesia's most influential English-language newspapers. This baseline can be used for comparative studies with other English-language media in Asia (e.g., *The Straits Times* in Singapore, *The Japan Times* in Japan) or with Indonesian English learner writing. Such comparisons could reveal whether "Indonesian English" has distinctive syntactic features or whether international journalistic norms override local variation.

Finally, for applied linguistics, this study offers a model of how corpus-based syntactic analysis can be conducted with relatively small samples when the focus is on structural patterns rather than rare phenomena.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that noun phrase structures in journalistic discourse are strategically employed to balance clarity, precision, and evaluative meaning. Through the analysis of 154 noun phrases across three editorials from *The Jakarta Post* (June 3-5, 2024), eight structural types were identified: Determiner + Noun, Adjective + Noun, Determiner + Adjective + Noun, Determiner + Quantifier + Noun, Determiner + Participle + Noun, Noun + Prepositional Phrase, Noun + Adjective Phrase, and Noun + Relative Clause.

The findings reveal that Adjective + Noun (24.7%) and Determiner + Noun (24.0%) are the most frequently used structures, together accounting for nearly half of all noun phrases in the data. This is not a random distribution. Rather, it reflects the dual demands of editorial discourse: the need to evaluate (through adjectives) and the need to refer precisely (through determiners). The substantial presence of complex structures such as Determiner + Adjective

+ Noun (17.5%) and Noun + Prepositional Phrase (16.9%) further demonstrates that editorial writers strategically expand noun phrases when additional specificity or contextualization is required.

This study adds new knowledge to the field in three specific ways.

First, it provides the first systematic, corpus-based description of noun phrase structures in Indonesian English-language media, specifically in the editorial genre. While previous studies (Junaidi, 2018; Usuar & Putri, 2023) examined noun phrases in student writing and single educational texts, no prior research has documented the frequency distribution of noun phrase structures in professionally edited journalistic discourse from an Indonesian context. This study fills that gap by offering empirical data on authentic syntactic usage, not idealized or textbook examples.

Second, this study challenges the assumption that professional writing is characterized by high syntactic complexity. The finding that simple structures (Adjective + Noun and Determiner + Noun) account for nearly half of all noun phrases suggests that clarity and efficiency may be prioritized over complexity in editorial discourse. This has implications for syntactic theory: noun phrase complexity is not an inherent feature of professional registers but a strategic resource used selectively for specific rhetorical purposes.

Third, this study establishes a replicable methodological framework for syntactic analysis of noun phrases in written discourse, including explicit coding procedures, classification rules, and reliability checks. This framework can be adapted by other researchers for comparative studies across different genres (news articles, features, advertisements), different publications (national vs. international newspapers), or different learner populations (Indonesian learners of English vs. native speakers).

The academic significance of this study extends beyond its immediate findings. For syntactic theory, it provides empirical frequency data that confirm the descriptive adequacy of Quirk and Greenbaum's (1985) structural categories in authentic journalistic texts. For discourse studies, it demonstrates that syntactic choices (e.g., pre-modification vs. post-modification, determiner use vs. omission) are not arbitrary but serve identifiable discourse functions (e.g., referential precision, evaluative framing, evidentiary grounding). For applied linguistics, the frequency distribution offers a descriptive baseline that can inform English language teaching materials, particularly for learners who need to develop professional writing skills.

Future research should pursue three directions. First, comparative studies across different sections of *The Jakarta Post* (news articles, features, advertisements) could reveal whether noun phrase structures vary systematically by genre within the same publication. Second, cross-linguistic comparisons between *The Jakarta Post* and English-language newspapers from other Asian countries (e.g., *The Straits Times*, *The Japan Times*) could identify whether "Indonesian English" has distinctive syntactic features or whether international journalistic norms produce similar patterns across contexts. Third, longitudinal studies examining noun phrase usage in *The Jakarta Post* over several decades could track whether syntactic patterns have changed over time, potentially reflecting broader shifts in journalistic style or English language influence in Indonesia.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that noun phrase analysis, when conducted systematically with attention to both structure and function, reveals how professional writers strategically deploy syntactic resources to achieve communicative goals. The noun phrase is not merely a grammatical unit; it is a discourse tool.

References

Chomsky, N. (2002). *Syntactic structures*. New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter.

-
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ezir, E. (2019). Developing translation quality through syntax mastery of student. *E-Journal Universitas Asahan*, 1344.
- Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2000). *An introduction to language* (6th ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.
- Jackson, H. (1988). *Words and their meaning*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Junaidi. (2018). A syntactic analysis of the English noun phrase (A study at the fifth semester of English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Muhammadiyah Makassar). *Jurnal Pengembangan Sumber Daya Insani*.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Family Health International.
- Omar, B. K., Yuliana, N. I., & Umiyati, M. (2021). English noun phrase structure found in Inclover Magazine. *KnE Social Sciences*, 366-378.
- Patton, M. Q., & Cochran, M. (2002). *A guide to using qualitative research methodology*. Paris, France: Médecins Sans Frontières.
- Quirk, R., & Greenbaum, S. (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London, England: Longman.
- Sharma, L. R. (2020). Teaching students to identify major structure of phrases in English. *Galore International Journal of Applied Sciences and Humanities*, 4(3), 45-52.
- Uswar, Y., & Putri, A. T. F. (2023). Syntactic analysis of noun phrase in analytical exposition text "How Does Education Important to Children?" *Jurnal Ekonomi, Bisnis dan Teknologi*, 3(1), 78-86.
- Wren, P. C., & Martin, H. (1989). *High school English grammar and composition*. New Delhi, India: S. Chand & Company.

Negotiating Work-Life Balance: A Sociological Literary Analysis of the Protagonist's Struggles in Almira Bastari's *Home Sweet Loan*

Feby Rahmadhani, Sri Wulan

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: febbyramadhani37@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: March 04, 2026 Accepted: April 22, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This research analyzes the protagonist's struggle in pursuing work-life balance in Almira Bastari's novel <i>Home Sweet Loan</i> . Using a qualitative descriptive method with sociology of literature approach, the study explores how Kaluna, the protagonist, experiences multidimensional struggles to navigate between professional responsibilities and personal life. The analysis identifies three main struggles based on Jay Shetty's framework: internal struggle (emotional and psychological conflict), external struggle (social and economic pressures), and existential struggle (search for meaning and identity). Set in urban Jakarta, the novel reflects real challenges faced by middle-class working women, including unrealistic social expectations, limited income, and familial burdens. Kaluna's strategies, such as extreme frugality and disciplined budgeting, show her resilience in maintaining control over her life amid external demands. The findings reveal that work-life balance is not a stable condition but a continuous negotiation, often filled with sacrifice and emotional tension. The protagonist's journey provides a critical lens on the social structures that burden women with invisible labor and unacknowledged emotional exhaustion. This research contributes to literary studies by highlighting how contemporary Indonesian fiction mirrors socio-economic realities, especially those experienced by young women in urban settings.
Keywords: <i>Indonesian literature;</i> <i>Protagonist;</i> <i>Struggle;</i> <i>working woman;</i> <i>work-life balance</i>	
Corresponding Author: Feby Rahmadhani Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia E-mail: febbyramadhani37@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

Work-life balance has become an increasingly pressing issue in modern urban society, particularly for young professionals navigating the demands of career advancement alongside personal fulfillment and family responsibilities. In contemporary Indonesia, especially in metropolitan areas like Jakarta, the challenge of maintaining equilibrium between professional obligations and personal life has intensified due to economic pressures, social expectations, and cultural norms that often place disproportionate burdens on women (Hona & Dewi, 2024).

Literary works frequently serve as mirrors that reflect and critique social realities, offering readers insight into the lived experiences of individuals grappling with these modern challenges. Almira Bastari's novel *Home Sweet Loan* (2022) presents a compelling portrait of such struggles through its protagonist, Kaluna, a 31-year-old woman working in the general affairs division of a private bank in Jakarta. The novel depicts Kaluna's journey as she attempts to balance her demanding job, her dream of owning a home, her complex family dynamics, and her romantic relationship—all while facing significant financial constraints and societal pressures.

The protagonist, as defined by Abrams and Harpham (2015), is the central character in a story who confronts the main conflict, and through this character's journey and experiences, the plot unfolds and develops. In *Home Sweet Loan*, Kaluna serves as this focal point, embodying the tensions and contradictions faced by many young urban Indonesian women. Her struggles are not merely individual but reflect broader systemic issues related to gender, class, and urban culture.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) conceptualized work-life balance through the framework of work-family conflict, identifying three primary forms of conflict: time-based conflict, strain-based conflict, and behavior-based conflict. This framework remains foundational for understanding the multidimensional nature of work-life imbalance. More recent scholarship has emphasized that work-life balance is particularly challenging for women, who often face dual expectations of professional success and domestic responsibility (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Lakshmi & Prasanth, 2018). Jay Shetty (2020) further provides a framework for understanding personal struggle, identifying stages that include internal, external, and existential struggles.

However, existing research has largely examined work-life balance and literary representation as separate domains. While previous studies have explored work-family conflict in organizational contexts or analyzed literary characters through thematic approaches, limited attention has been given to how contemporary Indonesian fiction constructs work-life struggle as a multidimensional and gendered phenomenon. Novels like *Home Sweet Loan* offer more than mere reflection; they provide narrative spaces where systemic inequalities—particularly those experienced by working-class and middle-class women in urban settings—are voiced, negotiated, and critiqued. Yet, this literary dimension remains underexplored in academic scholarship.

This study addresses that gap. It contributes by integrating sociological literary analysis with contemporary work-life balance theory, offering a multidimensional framework for interpreting urban female experience in Indonesian fiction. Rather than treating work-life conflict as a purely practical or time-management issue, this research examines how the protagonist experiences struggle on three interconnected levels: internal (emotional and psychological conflict), external (social and economic pressures), and existential (search for meaning and identity). This framework allows for a more humane and holistic understanding of what it truly means to pursue balance amid financial scarcity, family expectations, and urban alienation.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer two questions: (1) What struggles does the protagonist experience in pursuing work-life balance? and (2) What strategies does the protagonist employ to pursue work-life balance? By answering these questions, the research aims not only to contribute to literary studies on contemporary Indonesian fiction but also to offer insights for readers, researchers, and practitioners concerned with gender inequality, economic pressure, and mental well-being in modern urban life.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of the Protagonist

The protagonist occupies a central position in narrative literature, serving as the primary agent through whom stories unfold and conflicts are resolved. Abrams (1981) defines the protagonist as the main character who becomes the focal point of the story, typically facing the primary conflict and leading the plot toward resolution. Forster (1927) adds that the protagonist's actions and decisions drive the narrative plot, with the character often experiencing significant transformation—whether emotional, psychological, or moral—as a result of encountered conflicts.

While these foundational definitions are useful for identifying who the protagonist is, they remain largely descriptive and assume a relatively stable, heroic journey toward growth or resolution. Chatman (1978) offers a more dynamic perspective by describing the protagonist as the main figure who propels the story forward through strong goals and motivations. However, what happens when the protagonist's goals are constantly thwarted, or when transformation leads not to triumph but to deeper confusion and exhaustion? Traditional theories of the protagonist seldom address such possibilities because they tend to assume narrative progression toward clarity and closure. In contrast, contemporary fiction like *Home Sweet Loan* presents a protagonist whose struggles are cyclical rather than linear, and whose "transformation" may be less about resolution and more about endurance. This study therefore treats Kaluna not as a hero who overcomes, but as a figure whose ongoing negotiation with systemic pressures becomes the very substance of the narrative.

2.2 Struggle: A Multidimensional Framework

Burleson (1964) asserts that "struggle is one way to achieve a better life in the future and also to increase prestige." This foundational view positions struggle as essentially instrumental—a means to an end. Folkman and Lazarus (1984) elaborate by conceptualizing struggle as a form of active coping: a conscious and intense effort to face and overcome stressful and uncertain situations. While this coping framework has been enormously influential, it carries an implicit assumption that struggle is ultimately productive and that individuals who struggle are, by definition, moving toward adaptation and well-being.

This assumption becomes problematic when applied to contexts of chronic scarcity and structural inequality. In *Home Sweet Loan*, Kaluna's struggle does not lead neatly to a "better life" or reduced stress; rather, her coping efforts often generate new forms of exhaustion and self-doubt. Thus, while the coping framework helps explain how Kaluna acts, it fails to capture the cost of those actions or the possibility that struggle may persist regardless of individual effort.

Jay Shetty (2020) provides a more nuanced framework by dividing the human journey toward self-growth into five stages of struggle. For this study, three types are particularly relevant:

Internal struggle refers to inner battles such as fear, anxiety, self-doubt, or feelings of inadequacy. Shetty emphasizes that facing and understanding this internal conflict is a crucial first step in personal growth. This concept aligns with Freud's (1923) understanding of internal conflict between the id, ego, and superego, as well as Erikson's (1968) stages of psychosocial development. However, neither Freud nor Erikson adequately addresses how internal struggles are shaped by material conditions—such as poverty, debt, or housing insecurity. Kaluna's self-doubt, as this study will show, is not merely psychological but emerges directly from her inability to meet social expectations that require money she does not have.

External struggle refers to challenges originating outside oneself, such as environmental pressure, interpersonal conflicts, social expectations, or difficulties in work, finances, and relationships. Marx and Engels (1848) and Dahrendorf (1959) provide theoretical foundations for understanding how external struggles emerge from systemic inequalities. Yet these macro-level theories often lose sight of the subjective, everyday experience of struggle—how it feels to be a single woman navigating a demanding job, a critical family, and an economically demanding romantic partner. Shetty's framework, while less structurally critical than Marx's, is more useful for capturing the lived texture of Kaluna's daily negotiations.

Existential struggle involves inner conflict arising when a person questions the meaning of life, purpose, and their role in the world. This concept draws on existential philosophy, particularly Sartre's (1946) assertion that humans must create meaning through free choices in an otherwise absurd universe, and Frankl's (1946) emphasis on the human drive to find meaning even amid extreme suffering. However, existential theories tend to assume a degree of freedom and agency that Kaluna does not fully possess. When she asks, "Do I even have a right in this house?" her existential crisis is not abstract but profoundly material: it is about whether she belongs in her own family home, whether her labor is recognized, and whether her existence matters to those closest to her. This study therefore adapts Shetty's existential category by grounding it in the specific socio-economic realities of urban middle-class Indonesia.

2.3 Work-Life Balance

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) provide the foundational framework for understanding work-life balance through their concept of work-family conflict, defined as inter-role conflict arising when demands and pressures from work and family domains clash. They identify three forms of conflict: time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based. This framework has been enormously productive in organizational psychology and management studies.

However, while Greenhaus and Beutell conceptualize work-life balance through role conflict, this framework tends to overlook the existential dimension of struggle, which becomes central in literary representations such as *Home Sweet Loan*. Their model assumes that balance is primarily a matter of managing competing demands across two domains (work and family). But what happens when the "family" domain itself is a source of alienation? What happens when the protagonist questions whether she has any right to exist within her own home? These are not merely time or strain conflicts; they are struggles over meaning, belonging, and identity. Greenhaus and Beutell's framework, for all its utility, cannot adequately address such questions.

Clark (2000) offers a complementary perspective by defining work-life balance as an individual's ability to effectively and satisfactorily fulfill responsibilities in work and personal life by creating a harmonious balance where neither role interferes with the other. Clark's border theory emphasizes the active role individuals play in negotiating boundaries. Yet this theory, like Greenhaus and Beutell's, implicitly assumes that individuals have the power to set and maintain boundaries. Kaluna's situation challenges this assumption: she cannot simply "negotiate" better boundaries with her mother, who expects her to return home early, or with her partner's family, who expect her to appear wealthy. Boundary negotiation presupposes a level of mutual respect and power symmetry that is often absent in hierarchical family and work relationships.

Sirgy's (2001) spillover theory provides additional insight by suggesting that work and personal life domains are interconnected, with experiences in one domain "spilling over" into the other. Positive spillover occurs when successful experiences in one domain enhance functioning in the other, while negative spillover occurs when pressures from one domain create stress affecting the other. This theory is more flexible than role conflict or border theory because it does not assume that domains must be separated or balanced; it simply acknowledges their interdependence. For this reason, spillover theory is particularly useful for analyzing Kaluna's situation, where exhaustion from work directly affects her emotional availability at home, and where family criticism intensifies her anxiety at work.

Finally, research by Hochschild and Machung (2012) and Lakshmi and Prasanth (2018) emphasizes that women often face greater challenges in achieving work-life balance due to dual expectations of performing well professionally while carrying out domestic roles. This gendered dimension is central to understanding Kaluna's experiences in *Home Sweet*

Loan. However, even these gendered analyses tend to focus on married women with children. Kaluna is single and childless—yet she still bears heavy domestic responsibilities, including caring for nieces and nephews and managing her siblings' households. This suggests that the gendered burden on women is not limited to the nuclear family but extends to extended family networks, an aspect that existing scholarship has not fully explored.

In summary, this study draws on multiple theoretical traditions while remaining critical of each. Greenhaus and Beutell's framework helps identify practical conflicts but misses existential depth. Clark's border theory illuminate's boundary negotiation but assumes power symmetry. Spillover theory captures emotional interconnection but offers little guidance for structural critique. Gendered analyses reveal systemic inequality but often overlook single, childless women's burdens. By integrating these frameworks selectively and grounding them in literary analysis, this study aims to offer a more complete and context-sensitive understanding of work-life struggle as represented in contemporary Indonesian fiction.

3. Research Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a sociology of literature approach. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research aims to explore the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social phenomena in specific contexts. The sociology of literature approach, as articulated by Swingewood and Laurenson (1972), positions literary works not as autonomous artistic objects but as reflections of and responses to social realities. This approach was chosen because the research questions concern not only what struggles Kaluna experiences but also how those struggles mirror broader patterns of gender, class, and urban culture in contemporary Indonesia. In other words, sociology of literature enables the analysis to move beyond character psychology and toward structural critique.

The data source for this research is Almira Bastari's novel *Home Sweet Loan* (2022), published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama. Content analysis was selected as the analytical technique because it allows for systematic, replicable examination of textual data while remaining sensitive to contextual meaning (Krippendorff, 2018). This method is particularly suited for literary analysis because it enables the researcher to identify patterns across a narrative without losing sight of individual textual moments.

Data were coded thematically using a hybrid approach that combined deductive coding (based on pre-established categories derived from Shetty's framework and Greenhaus and Beutell's work-life balance theory) with inductive coding (to capture emergent patterns not anticipated by existing theory). The coding process proceeded as follows: First, the researcher read the entire novel three times to achieve holistic familiarity. Second, textual units (narrative passages, dialogues, and internal monologues) were identified as potential data units. Third, each unit was coded using a structured codebook that included: (a) type of struggle (internal/external/existential), (b) type of work-life conflict (time-based/strain-based/behavior-based), (c) strategy employed (if any), and (d) social context (work/family/relationship/urban environment). Fourth, codes were reviewed and refined through iterative discussion between the two researchers to resolve discrepancies. Fifth, coded data were organized into thematic clusters using Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework: data reduction (selection and simplification of data based on main themes), data display (organization of data into matrices to identify patterns across chapters), and conclusion drawing (interpretation of findings in relation to theoretical frameworks).

The unit of analysis was defined at three levels to ensure analytical precision: (1) dialogue units: exchanges between Kaluna and other characters (e.g., conversations with Hansa, Miya, or her mother) that reveal conflict, pressure, or strategy; (2) narrative units:

first-person passages that describe Kaluna's internal states, reflections, or daily routines; and (3) event units: key plot moments where Kaluna makes a decision, faces a consequence, or undergoes a change in circumstances. Each unit was analyzed holistically, meaning that dialogue was not separated from its narrative context, and events were interpreted in light of preceding and subsequent developments. This multi-level approach ensured that the analysis captured not only what Kaluna says but also how the narrative frames and evaluates her struggles.

Several strategies were employed to ensure validity and trustworthiness. First, triangulation was achieved through multiple means: (a) researcher triangulation, as data coding and interpretation were conducted by two researchers who independently coded selected chapters and then compared results; (b) theoretical triangulation, as findings were interpreted through two distinct frameworks (Shetty's struggle framework and Greenhaus and Beutell's work-life balance theory) to check for consistency and contradiction; and (c) data source triangulation, as quotations were drawn from multiple chapters and narrative contexts rather than from isolated passages. Second, repeated reading (three complete readings of the novel) was conducted to confirm that initial interpretations were not based on atypical or out-of-context excerpts. Third, theoretical validation was applied by continuously checking whether emerging findings aligned with or challenged existing theories; where findings diverged from theory (e.g., Kaluna's existential struggle not fully captured by Greenhaus and Beutell's framework), these divergences were documented and became part of the analysis rather than being treated as errors. Fourth, audit trails were maintained through detailed coding notes and documentation of interpretive decisions, allowing for transparency and replicability.

4. Discussion

Analysis of *Home Sweet Loan* reveals that Kaluna experiences three interconnected types of struggle in her pursuit of work-life balance: internal struggle (emotional and psychological conflict), external struggle (social and economic pressures), and existential struggle (search for meaning and identity). These struggles are not sequential but simultaneous, each reinforcing and intensifying the others. However, beyond simply identifying these struggles, this section argues that Kaluna's experiences challenge conventional understandings of work-life balance. Specifically, this study suggests that work-life balance in literary narratives should be reconceptualized not merely as role negotiation, but as an existential condition shaped by structural inequality.

4.1 The Protagonist's Struggles in Pursuing Work-Life Balance

4.1.1 Internal Struggle

Kaluna's confession to Hansa reveals the core of her internal struggle: "Even with my full salary, I can't afford a single bag that would make me look like I belong in your family... My mom and dad have no money" (Bastari, 2022, p. 133).

So what? This reflects not only internal conflict but also the internalization of class-based expectations, revealing how economic limitation becomes psychological burden. Kaluna does not merely feel sad about being poor; she feels unworthy of love and belonging. The phrase "look like I belong" is crucial: belonging has become a performance that requires money she does not have. Her internal struggle, therefore, is not a private psychological problem but the direct result of social norms that equate material display with personal value. This finding extends Shetty's (2020) framework by showing that internal struggle is not merely psychological but socio-economic. Self-doubt is distributed unevenly across class lines.

When Kaluna seeks comfort from her mother, she receives blame instead: "Who really accepts someone as they are, Kal? It's normal if Hansa wants you to become better" (Bastari, 2022, p. 174). Kaluna responds, "Mom, Mas Hansa wants me to become richer... How am I supposed to do that?"

So what? This moment reveals that internal struggle is not only about external pressure but also about the absence of validation from those closest to her. When one's own family reinforces the message that one is "not enough," the psychological burden becomes unbearable. This finding challenges individualistic accounts of self-esteem by showing that self-worth is socially mediated: we need others to confirm that our struggles are legitimate. Kaluna's mother fails to provide this confirmation, leaving Kaluna to fight her internal battles alone.

4.1.2 External Struggle

Kaluna describes her work environment with bitter precision: "General Affairs must always be ready, ready to work and ready to take criticism. But don't ever expect praise, let alone the kind of crazy salary that business units get" (Bastari, 2022, p. 33).

So what? This is not merely a complaint about a difficult job. It is an articulation of structural invisibility. Kaluna's division absorbs criticism without defense, works without praise, and earns less than colleagues who do not work harder but simply occupy different positions. The phrase "ready to take criticism" but "don't ever expect praise" reveals a workplace designed to extract labor without recognition. This finding confirms Marx and Engels' (1848) analysis of exploitation but adds a psychological dimension: the exploited worker is not only underpaid but also silenced, unable to defend herself even when complaints are unjust. External struggle, therefore, includes not only material deprivation but also the denial of voice.

The conflict between work and family demands is captured in a single evening: Kaluna returns home exhausted at 7 PM to find her mother "already at her boiling point" because the house is messy (Bastari, 2022, p. 45).

So what? This passage reveals that external struggle is not simply about having too much to do. It is about being unseen in both domains. At work, Kaluna's labor is taken for granted. At home, her exhaustion is met not with concern but with criticism. Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) framework captures the time conflict but misses the emotional logic: Kaluna is not just busy; she is unappreciated. This finding suggests that work-life balance research should attend not only to time allocation but to recognition—whether one's efforts are acknowledged and valued in each domain.

4.1.3 Existential Struggle

The existential dimension of Kaluna's struggle crystallizes in a devastating question to her mother: "Do I even have a right in this house? Am I just a guest here, Mom?" (Bastari, 2022, p. 49).

So what? This is not a question about housing arrangements. It is a question about the right to exist. When one's place in one's own family becomes uncertain, the ground of meaning itself collapses. Sartre (1946) argues that humans must create meaning through free choices, but Kaluna's question reveals a precondition she lacks: the assumption that she belongs somewhere. Before one can ask "what is the meaning of my life?" one must be able to assume "my life has a place." Kaluna's existential struggle, therefore, is not abstract philosophy but the concrete pain of feeling like an intruder in her own home. This finding challenges existential theories that assume universal freedom; for Kaluna, meaning-making is impossible when belonging is denied.

The struggle peaks when Kaluna questions her very existence: "Sometimes I wonder, why was I even born into this world?... I work hard, save money, live frugally... Turns out, all the money I've saved from suffering in this world is used to pay off my brother's debts... I don't get it" (Bastari, 2022, pp. 233-234).

So what? This passage reveals the absurdity of Kaluna's position. She works, saves, and sacrifices—only to have her savings disappear into someone else's mistakes. The phrase "I don't get it" is not confusion but despair at meaninglessness. Frankl (1946) argues that humans can endure any suffering if they find meaning in it. Kaluna's crisis is that she cannot find meaning: her sacrifices serve not her own life but the unraveling lives of others. This finding suggests that existential struggle in conditions of structural inequality is not about the absence of meaning but about the theft of meaning—when one's labor consistently benefits others without recognition or reciprocity, the question "why was I born?" becomes inescapable.

4.2 The Protagonist's Strategies in Pursuing Work-Life Balance

Despite these multidimensional struggles, Kaluna does not passively surrender. She develops concrete strategies to maintain agency, with extreme frugality emerging as her primary approach.

4.2.1 Financial Discipline and Expense Tracking

Kaluna tracks every expense immediately: "I'm scared I'll forget and then stress over where my money went" (Bastari, 2022, p. 30).

So what? This is not mere thrift. It is anxiety management through control. Kaluna cannot control her income, her family's demands, or her partner's expectations. But she can control her awareness of where every rupiah goes. This finding aligns with Bandura's (1997) concept of self-regulation but adds a crucial insight: when structural conditions deny agency, individuals create small islands of control. Kaluna's expense tracking is not a solution to poverty but a psychological defense against the chaos of financial uncertainty. It is, in Goffman's (1963) terms, a coping strategy for maintaining dignity when the social world constantly threatens to humiliate you.

4.2.2 Extreme Frugality and Lifestyle Choices

When Miya scolds her for always saving, Kaluna responds with a "bitter smile" and explains: "My daily living budget is a hundred thousand rupiah" (Bastari, 2022, p. 39).

So what? The "bitter smile" is the key. Kaluna is not proud of her frugality; she is exhausted by it. Miya's question—"What's money for if not to be spent?"—represents a class position Kaluna does not share. For Miya, money enables pleasure. For Kaluna, money enables survival. This finding reveals that work-life balance strategies are not neutral techniques; they are class-marked. The ability to "treat yourself" or "loosen up" is a luxury of those who have enough. Kaluna's extreme frugality is not a virtue but a necessity, and the "bitter smile" acknowledges the gap between how her strategy looks to others (excessive) and what it feels like to her (humiliating).

When Miya asks about Netflix, Kaluna jokes bitterly: "My idea of fun is making money" (Bastari, 2022, p. 41).

So what? The joke is funny because it is tragic. Kaluna has so thoroughly internalized scarcity that she cannot imagine fun that does not involve survival. This is what Lakshmi and Prasanth (2018) miss when they discuss work-life balance as time management: for Kaluna, there is no "life" to balance against "work" because both domains have been colonized by the same logic of survival. Her strategy of extreme frugality keeps her alive but does not give her

a life. This finding suggests that work-life balance research must distinguish between survival strategies (how to get by) and flourishing strategies (how to thrive). Kaluna has the former but not the latter.

4.3 Theoretical Contributions and Broader Implications

The analysis above supports the central claim of this study: work-life balance in literary narratives should be reconceptualized not merely as role negotiation, but as an existential condition shaped by structural inequality. Kaluna's story challenges three assumptions that dominate work-life balance research.

First, Greenhaus and Beutell's (1985) framework assumes that work-life conflict is primarily a matter of competing demands across two domains. Kaluna's experience shows that the conflict is not just between work and family but within each domain and within herself. Her mother's criticism, her partner's family's expectations, and her own internalized self-doubt cannot be neatly categorized as "work" or "family" conflicts. This study therefore suggests expanding the framework to include internalized structural pressure—the way social inequalities become psychological burdens.

Second, Clark's (2000) border theory assumes that individuals can negotiate boundaries between domains if they develop effective strategies. Kaluna's case reveals that boundary negotiation presupposes power symmetry. She cannot negotiate better boundaries with her mother, who holds authority over her as a parent living in the same house, or with her employer, who can replace her easily. This study therefore argues that work-life balance research must attend to power differentials that determine who can set boundaries and who cannot.

Third, most work-life balance research focuses on married women with children (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Lakshmi & Prasanth, 2018). Kaluna is single and childless, yet she bears heavy domestic responsibilities, including caring for nieces and nephews and managing her siblings' households. This finding suggests that the gendered burden on women extends beyond the nuclear family to extended family networks, an aspect that existing scholarship has not fully explored. For many Indonesian women, "family" means parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, and in-laws—not just a spouse and children.

Beyond theoretical contributions, this study has three broader implications. First, for literary studies, it demonstrates that contemporary Indonesian fiction does not merely reflect social reality but actively critiques it. *Home Sweet Loan* is not a passive mirror of urban women's struggles; it is an argument that those struggles are unnecessary, that the system demanding Kaluna's exhaustion is unjust. Reading literature sociologically, therefore, is not about reducing fiction to data but about recognizing fiction as social criticism.

Second, for work-life balance research, this study suggests moving beyond individual-level variables (time management, coping strategies, personality traits) toward structural analysis. Kaluna's problem is not that she manages time poorly; it is that she earns too little, that housing costs too much, that her family expects too much, and that her society offers too little support. Work-life balance interventions that focus only on individual behavior—"learn to say no," "set better boundaries," "practice self-care"—are unlikely to help people like Kaluna because they mistake structural problems for personal failures.

Third, for policymakers and organizations, this study implies the need for systemic change: living wages, affordable housing, accessible childcare, and workplace policies that recognize caregiving responsibilities. Kaluna's "bitter smile" is a warning: when individuals are left to solve structural problems alone, they do not find balance. They find exhaustion, self-doubt, and the haunting question of whether they deserve to exist at all.

5. Conclusion

This research has analyzed the protagonist's struggle for work-life balance in Almira Bastari's novel *Home Sweet Loan*, identifying three interconnected types of struggle—internal, external, and existential—that Kaluna experiences in navigating between professional responsibilities and personal life. The analysis reveals that work-life balance, as represented in the novel, is not a stable condition to be achieved but a continuous negotiation requiring constant sacrifice and adaptation.

This study redefines work-life balance not as a state of equilibrium between work and personal life, but as an ongoing existential negotiation shaped by structural inequalities in gender, class, and urban culture. Unlike conventional frameworks that treat work-life conflict as a problem of time management or role negotiation (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Clark, 2000), this study demonstrates through Kaluna's experience that balance is unattainable when individuals face chronic scarcity, unrecognized labor, and the denial of belonging. Kaluna's "bitter smile" and her haunting question—"Do I even have a right in this house?"—reveal that for those at the intersection of economic pressure and gendered expectations, work-life balance is not a goal to be reached but a condition to be endured.

The theoretical implication of this study is threefold. First, it challenges the dominant assumption in work-life balance research that conflict occurs primarily between work and family domains. Kaluna's struggles show that conflict also occurs within domains (e.g., alienation within her own family) and within the self (internalized class shame). Future theorizing must therefore distinguish between inter-domain conflict, intra-domain conflict, and intra-psychic conflict. Second, this study critiques the individualism embedded in coping-focused frameworks (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984; Shetty, 2020). Kaluna's strategies—expense tracking, extreme frugality, bringing lunch—keep her alive but do not give her a life. This suggests that resilience discourse can become a form of victim-blaming when it ignores structural constraints. Third, this study extends gendered analyses of work-life balance (Hochschild & Machung, 2012) by showing that the burden on women includes not only the "second shift" within nuclear families but also caregiving responsibilities for extended family networks. Kaluna is single and childless, yet she raises nieces and nephews and holds together her siblings' broken households. Research on work-life balance must therefore broaden its definition of "family" beyond the nuclear model.

Future research should pursue three sharper directions. First, comparative studies across different contemporary Indonesian novels (e.g., Laut Bercerita, Cantik Itu Luka, Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini) could examine whether and how representations of work-life struggle vary by genre, author gender, or regional setting. Do male authors represent women's work-life struggles differently? Do novels set outside Jakarta (e.g., Surabaya, Bandung, or rural contexts) depict different configurations of pressure and coping? Second, interdisciplinary research that combines literary analysis with ethnographic or interview methods could investigate whether and how readers of *Home Sweet Loan* recognize their own struggles in Kaluna's story, and whether such recognition produces any change in their self-understanding or coping strategies. Third, future studies should examine the intersection of work-life balance with other structural variables not fully explored here, such as race/ethnicity (e.g., Chinese Indonesian women), disability, or LGBTQ+ identity. Kaluna is a heterosexual, able-bodied, Javanese woman; her struggles might intersect differently with other axes of marginalization.

This study makes a final, strong claim: work-life balance is a structural problem disguised as an individual failure. Kaluna is not lazy, disorganized, or lacking in grit. She works hard, saves meticulously, and sacrifices constantly. Yet she cannot achieve balance because the system is not designed for her to succeed. Her story is not a tragedy of personal inadequacy but an indictment of social arrangements that extract labor from women while

denying them recognition, belonging, and the right to a life of their own. Literary works like *Home Sweet Loan* matter because they make this indictment visible. They invite readers not only to empathize with Kaluna but to ask: What would have to change so that no other woman has to ask whether she deserves to exist?

References

- Abrams, M. H. (1981). *A glossary of literary terms*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2015). *A glossary of literary terms* (11th ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman.
- Bastari, A. (2022). *Home sweet loan*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Burleson, C. W. (1964). *The struggle for meaning*. New York, NY: Philosophical Library.
- Chatman, S. (1978). *Story and discourse: Narrative structure in fiction and film*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations*, 53(6), 747-770.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dahrendorf, R. (1959). *Class and class conflict in industrial society*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Forster, E. M. (1927). *Aspects of the novel*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Frankl, V. E. (1946). *Man's search for meaning*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id*. London, England: Hogarth Press.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), 76-88.
- Hochschild, A. R., & Machung, A. (2012). *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Hona, T. E., & Dewi, N. (2024). Peran perempuan dalam keluarga pada novel *Home Sweet Loan* karya Almira Bastari. *Jurnal Ilmiah*, 20, 381-394.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lakshmi, N., & Prasanth, V. S. (2018). A study on work-life balance in working women. *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Scientific Research*, 1(7), 76-88.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The communist manifesto*. London, England: Penguin Books (2002 ed.).
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sartre, J. P. (1946). *Existentialism is a humanism*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (2007 ed.).
- Shetty, J. (2020). *Think like a monk: Train your mind for peace and purpose every day*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

- Sirgy, M. J. (2001). *Handbook of quality-of-life research: An ethical marketing perspective*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
- Swingewood, A., & Laurensen, D. (1972). *The sociology of literature*. London, England: MacGibbon & Kee.

The Effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in Enhancing Junior High School Students' Simple Sentence Construction

Fany Anggreini, Devi Pratiwy

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara

Medan, Indonesia

e-mail: fanyanggreini3@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: March 10, 2026 Accepted: April 24, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This research investigates the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in improving simple sentence construction among second-year students at <i>MTS Asmah Zaijuli Hamid</i>, Hamparan Perak. Using a quantitative pre-experimental design with one group pretest-posttest, 20 eighth-grade students were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through written tests measuring five aspects of simple sentences: main clause, subject, predicate, verb, and vocabulary. The treatment followed Willis's three-stage TBLT procedure: pre-task, task-cycle, and language focus. The findings indicate that TBLT significantly enhances learners' grammatical performance, particularly in constructing simple sentences. This improvement can be attributed to the interactive and meaning-focused nature of TBLT, which facilitates both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence. The mean score improved from 64 (good category) in the pretest to 81 (very good category) in the post-test. Hypothesis testing using paired sample t-test revealed t-count (2.98769) > t-table (2.10092) at $\alpha = 0.05$, indicating a significant effect of TBLT. These findings demonstrate that TBLT significantly enhances students' ability to construct simple sentences. The approach proves effective because it provides authentic contexts for language use, encourages student interaction, and offers systematic scaffolding. This research contributes empirical evidence of TBLT's effectiveness in teaching grammar at the Indonesian junior high school level. Recommendations are provided for teachers, students, and future researchers.
Keywords: <i>English language teaching;</i> <i>grammar;</i> <i>junior high school;</i> <i>simple sentence;</i> <i>Task-Based Language Teaching;</i>	
Corresponding Author: Fany Anggreini Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia E-mail: fanyanggreini3@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

Despite its central role in language proficiency, grammar instruction in EFL classrooms remains largely form-focused and ineffective in promoting communicative competence. In Indonesia, many students struggle to produce correct English sentences even after years of study. This persistent difficulty stems not from a lack of grammatical knowledge but from teaching approaches that prioritize rule memorization over meaningful use. Mammadova (2020) confirms that grammar serves as the foundation of language, yet without practical application, students cannot transfer knowledge into productive skills.

One of the most fundamental yet problematic areas for Indonesian EFL learners is simple sentence construction. Errors in subject-verb agreement, verb choice, and clause structure are common, particularly among junior high school students. These errors are not merely mechanical; they reflect a deeper gap between knowing grammatical rules and using them communicatively. Alexander (2005) states that grammar is the support system of communication, but traditional teaching methods often fail to bridge this gap.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a potential solution. Unlike conventional approaches, TBLT places students in real-world situations where language use is necessary to complete meaningful tasks (Richards, 2006). Willis (2007) proposes three stages—pre-task, task-cycle, and language focus—that systematically integrate meaning and form. This shift from form-focused instruction to meaning-oriented practice addresses the core weakness of traditional grammar teaching.

However, existing studies predominantly focus on speaking and reading skills, leaving the role of TBLT in developing grammatical accuracy—particularly simple sentence construction—underexplored in Indonesian EFL contexts. Adam and Magfirah (2020) examined TBLT in reading comprehension, while Rudi, Syarfuni, and Syahputra (2023) focused on speaking skills. Sumardeni, Astawa, and Maryati (2023) investigated communication and collaboration skills in social studies. None of these studies specifically addressed how TBLT affects students' ability to construct simple sentences, a foundational skill for all subsequent language development.

This study addresses that gap by examining the effectiveness of TBLT in improving simple sentence construction among junior high school students in North Sumatra. Specifically, this research seeks to answer: (1) How is TBLT implemented in teaching simple sentences? and (2) How does TBLT impact students' ability to use simple sentences?

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to grammar pedagogy. For teachers, it provides an evidence-based alternative to form-focused instruction. For curriculum designers, it offers insights into task-based approaches for teaching foundational grammar. For researchers, it extends TBLT literature into an underexplored area: grammatical accuracy in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Task-Based Language Teaching

2.1.1 The Nature of Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching is a teaching method used by teachers to improve English skills. According to Rad and Jafari (2013), TBLT suggests that it is important for teachers to be able to manage a variety of different task demands and provide support to facilitate language learning. Dailey (2009) states that TBLT places students in real-world situations without too much intervention from the teacher, which can arouse students' motivation to use the target language to complete tasks.

However, while these scholars highlight the motivational and interactive benefits of TBLT, concerns remain regarding its effectiveness in developing grammatical accuracy. Ellis (2009) acknowledges that the strong version of TBLT, which excludes explicit grammar instruction, may not sufficiently address learners' form-related errors. This tension between meaning-focused communication and form-focused accuracy is central to the present study.

TBLT is generally characterized as a development within the communicative approach, taking tasks as central elements in design and teaching. The focus is on the process rather than the product, as processes belong to the domain of methodology (Nunan, 1989).

2.1.2 Principles of Task-Based Language Teaching

According to Nunan (2009), TBLT has the following principles: a needs-based approach to content selection, an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language, the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation, the provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process, an enhancement of learners' own personal experiences as important contributing

elements to classroom learning, and the linking of classroom language learning with language use outside the classroom.

2.1.3 Teaching Procedures of Task-Based Language Teaching

Willis (2007) proposes three stages in TBLT implementation:

1. **Pre-task Phase:** Learners are introduced to the topic and explained about the task. The teacher asks students about words or phrases relevant to the topic.
2. **Task-cycle Phase:** Learners are provided opportunities to use their knowledge about the target language. Language form is not a priority; learners are allowed to use whatever language they know to solve problems in the task. This stage consists of task, planning, and report.
3. **Language Focus Phase:** This stage focuses on the use of specific language items through analysis and practice activities.

This three-stage procedure is adopted in the present study because it systematically integrates meaning-focused communication (task-cycle) with form-focused instruction (language focus), addressing the criticism that TBLT neglects grammatical accuracy.

2.1.4 Advantages and Disadvantages of TBLT

Ellis (2009) identifies several advantages of TBLT: it helps students interact spontaneously, allows students to understand material more easily, increases students' thinking ability through discussion, and makes teaching and learning more attractive. Disadvantages include potential lack of synchronization between student and teacher perceptions and students finding tasks difficult.

While Ellis (2009) highlights the communicative benefits of TBLT, concerns remain regarding its effectiveness in developing grammatical accuracy, particularly for beginner learners who lack basic sentence structures. This study directly addresses this concern by examining TBLT's effect on simple sentence construction, a foundational grammatical skill.

2.2 Simple Sentences

2.2.1 Definition of Simple Sentence

A simple sentence consists of just one independent clause that can stand alone. To form a clause, only a subject and predicate are needed. Alexander (2005) supports that a simple sentence is a complete unit of meaning that contains a subject and a verb, followed as necessary by other words that complete the meaning. Demireen (2012) explains that a simple sentence has one independent clause that can stand on its own with complete meaning.

2.2.2 Types of Simple Sentences

According to Demireen (2012), there are four basic patterns of simple sentences in English: Subject + Verb (S+V), Subject + Verb + Object (S+V+O), Subject + Verb + Complement (S+V+C), and Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object (S+V+IO+DO).

2.2.3 Aspects of Simple Sentences

Based on Hughes (2003), the aspects of simple sentences that need to be evaluated include: main clause, subject, predicate, verb, and vocabulary.

2.3 Synthesis of Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined TBLT in various contexts. Adam and Magfirah (2020) investigated TBLT with authentic materials in reading comprehension, finding significant improvement in student learning outcomes. Rudi, Syarfuni, and Syahputra

(2023) studied TBLT effectiveness in teaching speaking at SMAN 2 Banda Aceh, reporting significant differences in students' speaking scores. Sumardeni, Astawa, and Maryati (2023) examined TBLT's effect on communication and collaboration skills in social studies learning, demonstrating positive influences.

These studies collectively suggest that TBLT promotes communicative competence, interaction, and motivation across different language skills. However, their impact on grammatical precision—particularly the ability to construct simple sentences accurately—remains inconclusive. Most previous research has focused on reading comprehension (Adam & Magfirah, 2020), speaking fluency (Rudi et al., 2023), or general communication skills (Sumardeni et al., 2023), rather than specific grammatical structures. None have systematically examined how TBLT affects junior high school students' mastery of simple sentence patterns in the Indonesian EFL context.

This study extends previous research by shifting the focus from general communicative competence to specific grammatical accuracy, addressing an underexplored area in TBLT literature.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualizes TBLT as a pedagogical approach that integrates meaning-focused interaction with form-focused instruction, hypothesizing that such integration enhances learners' simple sentence construction ability. The framework is built on two theoretical foundations.

First, from Ellis (2003), TBLT provides authentic contexts where learners must use language to complete meaningful tasks. This communicative pressure pushes learners to retrieve and apply grammatical knowledge, transforming declarative knowledge (knowing rules) into procedural knowledge (using rules).

Second, from Willis (2007), the three-stage procedure (pre-task, task-cycle, language focus) systematically balances meaning and form. The pre-task stage activates prior knowledge, the task-cycle encourages spontaneous use, and the language focus stage explicitly addresses grammatical errors observed during task performance.

The present study hypothesizes that this integration directly addresses the weakness of traditional grammar instruction. Rather than memorizing rules in isolation, students learn simple sentence patterns through meaningful tasks, receive feedback during the language focus stage, and practice correct forms. The five aspects of simple sentences (main clause, subject, predicate, verb, vocabulary) serve as measurable indicators of grammatical accuracy. The conceptual framework is illustrated as follows:

TBLT (Willis's three-stage procedure) → Meaningful task completion + Form-focused feedback → Improved simple sentence construction (measured through five aspects)

This framework guides both the treatment design (Section 3.4) and the selection of measurement instruments (Section 3.5).

3. Research Method

This research employed a quantitative pre-experimental design with one group pretest-posttest. According to Hatch and Farhady (1982), quantitative research uses statistics as measurement in drawing conclusions. The design aimed to determine whether TBLT effectively improves students' ability to use simple sentences. The design can be presented as: $T_1 \times T_2$ (Setiyadi, 2006)

Where:

- T_1 = Pretest administered before treatment
- X = Treatment (teaching simple sentences using TBLT)
- T_2 = Posttest administered after treatment

Although the study employs a pre-experimental design—which lacks a control group and randomization—it provides preliminary evidence of TBLT effectiveness in teaching simple sentences. This design was chosen due to classroom constraints and the existing teaching schedule at the school. The findings may inform future quasi-experimental or fully experimental research with more rigorous controls.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of this research was all second-year students of MTS Asmah Zaijuli Hamid, Hamparan Perak. The researcher used purposive sampling technique (Sugiyono, 2018) to select one class of 20 students as the sample.

The sample was selected purposively based on two criteria: accessibility (the class was available during the research period) and instructional relevance (the teacher confirmed that simple sentences were part of the current semester's curriculum). This sampling strategy was practical given the school's scheduling constraints. However, this limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations or contexts.

3.3 Variables

The research involved two variables:

1. Independent variable: Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)
2. Dependent variable: Students' ability to use simple sentences

3.4 Research Procedures

The research procedures were as follows:

1. Selecting and determining the population sample: One class of second-year students was selected using purposive sampling.
2. Determining research instruments: Simple sentence tests were prepared for tryout, pretest, and post-test.
3. Conducting tryout: A tryout test was administered to ensure the test was appropriate for students before conducting the pretest.
4. Administering pretest: The pretest was given to identify students' ability before treatment.
5. Conducting treatments: Treatment was implemented using TBLT following Willis's (2007) three-stage procedure: pre-task (introducing topic and task, activating background knowledge), task-cycle (students completing tasks in groups, planning reports, presenting results), and language focus (analyzing language features, practicing specific forms).
6. Administering posttest: The posttest was given to evaluate students' ability after treatment.
7. Analyzing data: Data were analyzed using statistical techniques including normality test, homogeneity test, and hypothesis testing.

3.5 Instruments

The instrument for data collection was a simple sentence test consisting of 20 questions covering five aspects: main clause, subject, predicate, verb, and vocabulary. The scoring rubric was adapted from Hughes (2003), with scores ranging from 1 to 3 for each aspect:

- Score 3: Excellent to very good (knowledgeable, substantive, fluent expression, effective constructions, sophisticated vocabulary)
- Score 2: Fair to poor (limited knowledge, non-fluent, major problems in construction, frequent errors)
- Score 1: Very poor (does not show knowledge, does not communicate, dominated by errors).

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Validity: Construct validity was used to ensure the test measured what it intended to measure. The test items were developed based on the theoretical framework of simple sentences described in Section 2.2.

Reliability: Stability reliability was calculated using the rank-difference correlation formula (Harris, 1974). The tryout test result showed a reliability coefficient of 0.431. The reliability coefficient (0.431) indicates moderate consistency, suggesting that further refinement of the instrument is necessary in future studies. This moderate coefficient may be attributed to the small sample size (20 students) and the limited number of test items. Future research should revise the instrument to improve internal consistency.

Index of Difficulty: Calculated using formula $FV = R/N$. Results showed 16 easy items, 6 average items, and 2 difficult items.

Discrimination Power: Calculated to determine items' ability to distinguish between high and low achievers. Items with negative discrimination were omitted, leaving 18 items for pretest and post-test.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis involved several steps:

1. Calculating mean scores using formula $Mx = \Sigma fx/N$
2. Calculating standard deviation using formula $SD = \sqrt{(\Sigma fx^2/N)}$
3. Normality test using Lilliefors test to determine if data were normally distributed
4. Homogeneity test using F-test to determine if variances were homogeneous
5. Hypothesis testing using paired sample t-test

The criteria for hypothesis testing: H_0 is rejected if $t\text{-count} > t\text{-table}$ at significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

Scores were interpreted using Arikunto's (1988) category system:

- 81-100: Very good
- 61-80: Good
- 41-60: Fair
- 21-40: Poor
- 0-20: Very poor

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Pretest Results

The pretest was administered to assess students' ability to use simple sentences before implementing TBLT. Table 4.1 presents the pretest results for 20 students across five aspects: main clause, subject, predicate, verb, and vocabulary.

Table 4.1
Pretest Results

No.	Name	MC	S	P	V	Voc	Total	Score
1.	Alfi Syahri Abidin	3	3	3	2	2	13	86
2.	Aya Linar Hafiza	2	2	2	2	1	9	60
3.	Dinda Ramadhani	3	2	2	1	2	10	66
4.	Fardan Fahrezi Siregar	2	2	2	1	1	8	53
5.	Fatin Muhsan	2	2	2	1	1	8	53
6.	Jihan Talita Syaki Harahap	3	3	3	3	3	15	100
7.	May Rizky Amanda	3	2	2	1	2	10	66

8.	Mesaroh Nabila	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
9.	Mu'ammarr	2	2	2	1	1	8	53
10.	Muhammad Arzan	2	2	2	1	1	8	53
11.	Muhayati	2	2	1	1	2	8	53
12.	Mutiara Kinanti	2	2	2	1	1	8	53
13.	Nur Intan Kamalia	2	2	2	2	2	10	66
14.	Poppy	2	2	2	2	1	9	60
15.	Rifay Hayyan	2	2	2	2	2	10	66
16.	Sakila Ramadhan	2	2	2	2	1	9	60
17.	Shafira Al-Zahra	2	2	1	1	2	8	53
18.	Silvana Nazwa	2	2	1	2	1	8	53
19.	Syakila Armaya	3	2	2	2	1	10	66
20.	Shafa Az-Zahra	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
M		2.4	2.2	1.9	1.7	2.0	9.6	64

Note.

MC = main clause, S = subject, P = predicate, V = verb, Voc = vocabulary, M = mean. Scores are based on Hughes's (2003) rubric (1-3 per aspect). Total score = sum of five aspects (maximum 15). Percentage score = $(\text{total} \div 15) \times 100$

The pretest results show that the lowest score was 53 (8 students) and the highest score was 100 (1 student). The average score was 64, which falls into the good category according to Arikunto's (1988) classification (61-80 = good). Analysis of each aspect reveals that the verb aspect had the lowest average score (1.7), while the main clause aspect had the highest average (2.4).

Table 4.2

Frequency Distribution of Pretest Results

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category
80-100	4	20	Very Good
60-79	8	40	Good
40-59	8	40	Fair
20-39	0	0	Poor
0-19	0	0	Very Poor
Total	20	100	

Note:

$N = 20$. Categories are based on Arikunto's (1988) classification. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest whole number.

4.1.2 Post-test Results

After implementing TBLT treatment, the post-test was administered to assess students' improvement. Table 4.3 presents the post-test results.

Table 4.3

Posttest Results

No.	Name	MC	S	P	V	Voc	Total	Score
1.	Alfi Syahri Abidin	3	3	3	3	2	14	93
2.	Aya Linar Hafiza	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
3.	Dinda Ramadhani	3	3	2	2	3	13	86

4.	Fardan Fahrezi Siregar	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
5.	Fatin Muhsan	2	2	2	2	1	9	60
6.	Jihan Talita Syaki Harahap	3	3	3	3	3	15	100
7.	May Rizky Amanda	3	3	3	3	2	14	93
8.	Mesaroh Nabila	3	3	2	2	3	13	86
9.	Mu'ammarr	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
10.	Muhammad Arzan	3	3	3	2	3	13	86
11.	Muhayati	2	2	2	2	2	10	66
12.	Mutiara Kinanti	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
13.	Nur Intan Kamalia	3	3	3	2	2	13	86
14.	Poppy	2	2	2	2	1	9	60
15.	Rifay Hayyan	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
16.	Sakila Ramadhan	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
17.	Shafira Al-Zahra	3	3	3	2	2	13	86
18.	Silvana Nazwa	2	2	2	2	2	10	66
19.	Syakila Armaya	3	3	2	2	2	12	80
20.	Shafa Az-Zahra	3	3	3	2	2	13	86
M		2.8	2.8	2.4	2.2	2	12.5	81

Note:

MC = main clause, S = subject, P = predicate, V = verb, Voc = vocabulary, M = mean. Scores are based on Hughes's (2003) rubric (1-3 per aspect). Total score = sum of five aspects (maximum 15). Percentage score = $(\text{total} \div 15) \times 100$.

The posttest results show that the lowest score was 60 (2 students) and the highest score was 100 (1 student). The average score increased to 81, which falls into the very good category according to Arikunto's (1988) classification (81-100 = very good).

Table 4.4
Frequency Distribution of Post-test Results

Score Range	Frequency	Percentage	Category
80-100	16	80	Very Good
60-79	4	20	Good
40-59	0	0	Fair
20-39	0	0	Poor
0-19	0	0	Very Poor
Total	20	100	

Note:

N = 20. Categories are based on Arikunto's (1988) classification. Percentage values are rounded to the nearest whole number.

4.1.3 Comparison of Pretest and Post-test Results

Table 4.5
Comparison of Pretest and Post-test Results

No.	Name	Pretest	Post-test
1.	Alfi Syahri Abidin	86	93
2.	Aya Linar Hafiza	60	80
3.	Dinda Ramadhani	66	86
4.	Fardan Fahrezi Siregar	53	80
5.	Fatin Muhsan	53	60

6.	Jihan Talita Syaki Harahap	100	100
7.	May Rizky Amanda	66	93
8.	Mesaroh Nabila	80	86
9.	Mu'ammarr	53	80
10.	Muhammad Arzan	53	86
11.	Muhayati	53	66
12.	Mutiara Kinanti	53	80
13.	Nur Intan Kamalia	66	86
14.	Poppy	60	60
15.	Rifay Hayyan	66	80
16.	Sakila Ramadhan	60	80
17.	Shafira Al-Zahra	53	86
18.	Silvana Nazwa	53	66
19.	Syakila Armaya	66	80
20.	Shafa Az-Zahra	80	86
M		64	81

Note:

N = 20. M = mean. Scores are percentage scores calculated from total scores (maximum 15) multiplied by 100/15.

The comparison shows a clear improvement from pretest (average 64, good category) to posttest (average 81, very good category), representing a 17-point increase.

4.2 Data Analysis

4.2.1 Normality Test

Normality tests were conducted using the Lilliefors test to determine whether the data were normally distributed.

Table 4.6

Normality Test Results

Data	L-count	L-table	Information
Pretest	0.27317	0.319	Normal
Post-test	0.04467	0.319	Normal

Note:

N = 20. Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. Data are considered normally distributed if L-count < L-table.

Both pretest and post-test data showed L-count < L-table at significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, indicating that the data were normally distributed.

4.2.2 Homogeneity Test

The homogeneity test was conducted using the F-test to determine whether the variances were homogeneous.

F-count = 1.5579

F-table = 2.1682 ($\alpha = 0.05$, df = 20)

Since F-count (1.5579) < F-table (2.1682), the data were homogeneous, indicating that the sample came from a homogeneous population.

4.2.3 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using paired sample t-test with the following calculations:

Pretest:

- Mean (M_2) = 64
- Standard Deviation (SD_2) = 22.6
- Standard Error (SE_2) = 5.18

Post-test:

- Mean (M_1) = 81
- Standard Deviation (SD_1) = 10.3
- Standard Error (SE_1) = 2.36

Standard Error of Difference:

$$SE(M_1 - M_2) = \sqrt{(5.18^2 + 2.36^2)} = \sqrt{32.402} = 5.69$$

t-count calculation:

$$t_o = (M_1 - M_2) / SE(M_1 - M_2) = (81 - 64) / 5.69 = 17 / 5.69 = 2.98769$$

t-table value:

At significance level $\alpha = 0.05$ with $df = n - 2 = 20 - 2 = 18$, $t\text{-table} = 2.10092$

Comparison:

$t\text{-count} (2.98769) > t\text{-table} (2.10092)$

Since $t\text{-count} > t\text{-table}$, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted. This means that *there is a significant effect of Task-Based Language Teaching in improving students' ability to use simple sentences.*

4.2.4 Effect Size

To determine the magnitude of the treatment effect, Cohen's d was calculated using the formula:

$$d = (M_1 - M_2) / SD_{\text{pooled}}, \text{ where } SD_{\text{pooled}} = \sqrt{[(SD_1^2 + SD_2^2)/2]}.$$

$$SD_{\text{pooled}} = \sqrt{[(10.3^2 + 22.6^2)/2]} = \sqrt{[(106.09 + 510.76)/2]} = \sqrt{(616.85/2)} = \sqrt{308.425} = 17.56$$

$$\text{Cohen's } d = (81 - 64) / 17.56 = 17 / 17.56 = 0.97$$

According to Cohen's (1988) conventions, a d value of 0.97 indicates a large effect size ($d \geq 0.8$ = large). This confirms that TBLT not only produced a statistically significant improvement but also a practically meaningful one. The large effect size suggests that the intervention had substantial educational relevance, not merely statistical significance.

4.3 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that TBLT significantly improves students' ability to construct simple sentences. However, beyond simply reporting this improvement, this section interprets what the results mean theoretically and pedagogically.

4.3.1 Interpretation of Pretest Results

Before implementing TBLT, students' ability to use simple sentences was at a moderate level with an average score of 64. Analysis of individual aspects revealed that students struggled most with the verb aspect (average 1.7). This finding is not surprising because verb selection and conjugation require learners to integrate multiple grammatical rules simultaneously: tense, subject-verb agreement, and transitivity. Traditional grammar instruction, which presents these rules separately, does not prepare students for this integration.

The relatively higher score in the main clause aspect (2.4) suggests that students could identify basic sentence structure but lacked the grammatical precision to execute it correctly.

This gap between recognition (identifying a correct sentence) and production (constructing one) is characteristic of declarative knowledge that has not yet become proceduralized.

4.3.2 Interpretation of Post-test Improvement

After implementing TBLT, students showed significant improvement with an average score of 81. Improvement was observed across all aspects, with main clause and subject aspects reaching the highest averages (2.8 each). The verb aspect improved from 1.7 to 2.2.

The improvement suggests that TBLT facilitates proceduralizing of grammatical knowledge, enabling learners to move from declarative understanding (knowing the rules of simple sentences) to functional language use (applying those rules during communication). The task-cycle required students to use simple sentences to complete meaningful tasks, forcing them to retrieve and apply grammatical knowledge under real-time pressure. This retrieval practice strengthens procedural memory, making correct forms more automatic over time.

The large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.97$) confirms that this improvement was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful. An effect size of this magnitude indicates that the average student in the TBLT group performed better than approximately 83% of students who would have received traditional instruction, based on Cohen's distribution overlap estimates.

4.3.3 Why TBLT Worked for Simple Sentence Construction

Several factors contributed to TBLT's effectiveness:

1. **Proceduralizing of grammatical knowledge:** Traditional instruction emphasizes declarative knowledge (knowing that "subject + verb + object" is a pattern). TBLT, through its task-cycle, forces learners to use this knowledge procedurally (producing "I read a book" when describing a task). The improvement from pretest to post-test represents this transition.
2. **Integrated form-meaning mapping:** During the language focus stage, the teacher could address specific errors observed during task performance. This just-in-time instruction is more effective than decontextualized grammar lessons because learners see the immediate relevance of the correction.
3. **Collaborative scaffolding:** Group work allowed stronger students to model correct forms for weaker students. Peer explanations are often more accessible than teacher explanations because they use familiar language and address specific points of confusion.
4. **Reduced affective barriers:** The task focus shifts attention away from grammatical correctness toward task completion, reducing anxiety. Students who fear making errors in traditional grammar drills may participate more freely when the primary goal is completing a task.

These factors collectively explain why the verb aspect, which was the weakest area in the pretest, showed substantial improvement. Verbs are the most demanding aspect because they carry tense, agreement, and semantic meaning. The communicative pressure of task completion pushed students to retrieve correct verb forms repeatedly, strengthening procedural memory.

4.3.4 Limitations and Remaining Challenges

Four students (20%) still scored below the Minimum Completeness Criteria after treatment. This finding supports Ellis's (2009) observation that one disadvantage of TBLT is the potential lack of synchronization between student and teacher perceptions. Some students

may perceive tasks as games rather than learning activities and fail to attend to the grammatical features targeted during instruction.

Additionally, the moderate reliability coefficient (0.431) suggests that the test instrument itself may have contributed to measurement imprecision. Some students' posttest scores may underestimate their true ability if test items were ambiguous or inconsistently interpreted.

4.3.5 Comparison with Previous Studies

These findings extend previous research in three ways. First, while Adam and Magfirah (2020) demonstrated TBLT's effectiveness in reading comprehension, the present study shows that TBLT also improves grammatical accuracy—a skill not directly targeted in reading instruction. Second, while Rudi, Syarfuni, and Syahputra (2023) reported speaking improvement, the present study provides evidence that TBLT affects sentence-level writing as well. Third, unlike previous studies that measured general communication skills (Sumardeni et al., 2023), this study measured specific grammatical aspects (main clause, subject, predicate, verb, vocabulary), offering more precise diagnostic information.

However, direct comparison with these studies is limited by differences in design: previous studies used control groups, while the present study used a pre-experimental design. The large effect size ($d = 0.97$) is encouraging but should be interpreted cautiously given the absence of a control group.

4.3.6 Theoretical Implications

The findings support Ellis's (2003) claim that tasks provide natural contexts for language learning. More specifically, they suggest that grammatical accuracy can emerge from meaning-focused tasks when supplemented by form-focused instruction during the language focus stage. This challenges the strong version of TBLT, which excludes explicit grammar teaching. The present study indicates that a balanced approach—meaningful tasks plus targeted feedback—is more effective for developing grammatical accuracy in beginner learners.

4.3.7 Pedagogical Implications

For classroom practice, the findings suggest that teachers should:

1. Use the three-stage TBLT procedure (pre-task, task-cycle, language focus) rather than omitting the language focus stage
2. Design tasks that naturally require the target grammatical structures (e.g., tasks requiring students to describe actions for practicing subject-verb-object patterns)
3. Provide corrective feedback during the language focus stage based on errors observed during task performance
4. Recognize that TBLT may not work equally well for all students; additional support may be needed for weaker learners

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in improving simple sentence construction among second-year junior high school students. The findings demonstrate that TBLT significantly enhances students' ability to construct simple sentences, with the mean score increasing from 64 (good category) in the pretest to 81 (very good category) in the post-test. Hypothesis testing confirmed a significant effect ($t\text{-count} = 2.98769 > t\text{-table} = 2.10092$), and the large effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.97$) indicates that the improvement was both statistically significant and educationally meaningful.

The improvement was observed across all five aspects of simple sentences: main clause, subject, predicate, verb, and vocabulary. The verb aspect showed the lowest pretest score (1.7) but improved to 2.2, suggesting that TBLT was particularly effective in helping students master the most demanding grammatical element.

This study contributes to TBLT theory by demonstrating that a balanced approach—integrating meaning-focused tasks (task-cycle) with form-focused instruction (language focus)—is more effective for developing grammatical accuracy in beginner learners than either approach alone. This finding challenges the strong version of TBLT, which excludes explicit grammar teaching, and supports Ellis's (2003) weak version, which incorporates form-focused intervention. The proceduralizing of grammatical knowledge observed in this study suggests that tasks provide the communicative pressure necessary for learners to transform declarative knowledge (knowing rules) into procedural knowledge (using rules automatically).

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the pre-experimental design (one group pretest-post-test without a control group) limits causal inference. The observed improvement cannot be definitively attributed to TBLT without comparison to a control group receiving traditional instruction. Second, the purposive sampling method and small sample size ($N = 20$) limit generalizability to other populations, schools, or educational levels. Third, the reliability coefficient of the test instrument (0.431) indicates only moderate consistency, suggesting that measurement imprecision may have affected the results. Fourth, the study measured only short-term effects immediately after treatment; retention of learning over time was not assessed. Fifth, the study focused exclusively on simple sentences; whether TBLT generalizes to more complex sentence structures remain unknown.

For classroom practice, the findings suggest that teachers should implement all three stages of TBLT (pre-task, task-cycle, language focus) rather than omitting the language focus stage. The large effect size ($d = 0.97$) indicates that this approach is not merely statistically significant but educationally impactful. Teachers working with beginner learners should design tasks that naturally require target grammatical structures and provide corrective feedback during the language focus stage based on errors observed during task performance.

In conclusion, this study provides empirical evidence that Task-Based Language Teaching significantly improves junior high school students' ability to construct simple sentences. While the findings are promising, they should be interpreted within the study's limitations. Future rigorous research is needed to confirm these results and explore TBLT's potential for teaching other grammatical structures.

References

- Adam, S., & Magfirah, S. (2020). Application of the Task Based Language Learning Model (TBLT) and Authentic Material in Reading Comprehension Learning at SMA Negeri 2 Ternate City. *Humanitatis: Journal of Language and Literature*, 7(1), 71-82.
- Alexander, L. G. (2005). *Longman English grammar for ESL learners*. New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Arikunto, S. (1988). *Prosedur penelitian: Suatu pendekatan praktik*. Jakarta, Indonesia: PT Rineka Cipta.
- Atteberry, P. (2013). *Sentence types*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dailey, A. (2009). *Implementing Task-Based Learning Teaching in Korean classrooms*. <https://www.scribd.com/document/382175588/DailyLTMImplementingTask-BasedLanguageTeachinginKorean>

- Demireen, M. (2012). An analysis of the problem-causing structures of simple sentences for Turkish university students. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(3).
- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: Sorting out the misunderstandings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19(3), 221-246.
- Harris, D. P. (1974). *Testing English as a second language*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Hatch, E., & Farhady, H. (1982). *Research design and statistics for applied linguistics*. Los Angeles, CA: Newbury House Publishers.
- Hughes, A. (2003). *Testing for language teachers* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Kosasih, E. (2017). *Ketatabahasa dan kesusastraan*. Bandung, Indonesia: Yrama Widya.
- Mammadova, T. (2020). *Exploring English language teaching in post-Soviet era countries: Perspectives from Azerbaijan*. London, England: Routledge.
- Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (2009). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Rad, N. F., & Jafari, A. M. (2013). Teaching English and task-based method. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 2(4), 215-223.
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Rudi, Syarfuni, & Syahputra, M. (2023). The effectiveness of Task-Based Language Teaching in teaching speaking at SMAN 2 Banda Aceh. *Student Scientific Journal*, 4(1), 1-11.
- Setiyadi, A. B. (2006). *Metode penelitian untuk pengajaran bahasa Inggris*. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Graha Ilmu.
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung, Indonesia: Alfabeta.
- Sumardeni, N. N. W., Astawa, I. B. M., & Maryati, T. (2023). The influence of the Task-Based Learning model on students' communication and collaboration skills in social studies learning. *FPIPS Communications Media*, 22(1), 80-92.
- Taaamneh, I. M. (2020). The effect of using task-based learning on EFL learners' grammar achievement. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 10(5), 128-136.
- Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Female Masculinities in Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians*: Power, Courage, Leadership, and The Reconfiguration of Gender Identity

Nur Latifah¹, Zulfan Sahri², Nurbaiti Ali³, M. Safii⁴

^{1,2}Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

³Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Medan, Indonesia

⁴Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Manajemen Sukma, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: nlatifah211@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: March 11, 2026

Accepted: April 24, 2026

Published: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

Character;

Crazy Rich Asians;

female masculinity;

gender;

masculinity;

Abstract

This research analyses the portrayal of masculine qualities in female characters in Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians*. Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed gender identities often associated exclusively with men and women respectively. However, scholars argue that masculinity does not belong solely to men and can be produced by women as well. While previous studies have examined gender representation in literature, limited attention has been given to how contemporary Asian popular fiction portrays female masculinity within the cultural tension between traditional Asian values and modern individualism. This study addresses that gap. Using Peter Lehman's masculinity theory as an analytical framework—identifying power, leadership, courage, and heroism—this research examines four female characters. The findings demonstrate that all four masculine qualities are present. Power is portrayed through Rachel Chu's ability to influence others and Eleanor Young's social dominance. Leadership is demonstrated by Eleanor Young's confident command. Courage is exhibited by Kerry Chu's defiance of societal expectations and Astrid Leong's bravery in confronting infidelity. Heroism is shown through Astrid Leong's concern for others and a maid who risked her livelihood to expose a harmful plot. This research demonstrates that masculine qualities are not biologically determined but socially constructed, challenging rigid gender stereotypes and redefining female identity as capable of integrating both feminine and masculine traits.

Corresponding Author:

Nur Latifah

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: nlatifah211@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Masculinity and femininity are classified as gender identities used to identify men and women in the social construction of society. The general public often views masculinity as a trait that only men should possess, and femininity as a trait that only women should possess. However, scholars have challenged this binary understanding. Whitehead and Barrett (2001) explain that masculinities are behaviours, languages, and practices existing in specific cultural and organizational locations that are commonly associated with men, thus culturally defined as not feminine. Halberstam (1998) argues more provocatively that masculinity does not belong to men, has not been produced only by men, and is not properly expressed only through male heterosexuality. What society calls 'masculinity' has also been produced by masculine women, gender deviants, and often lesbians.

These theoretical perspectives suggest that masculinity and femininity are traits constructed by society rather than traits determined by biological sex. Masculine and feminine qualities are developed throughout an individual's life. The experiences, events, and people

that influence one's life can shape the qualities an individual needs. The more dominant qualities eventually shape one's identity. Thus, every individual potentially possesses both feminine and masculine qualities to balance and navigate life's challenges. This explains why women may also need and develop masculine qualities such as leadership, independence, and courage.

However, a critical problem remains underexamined: how female masculinity operates within contemporary Asian popular fiction. Current studies tend to overlook how female masculinity manifests within the specific cultural tension between traditional Asian values (such as filial piety, patriarchy, and female subservience) and modern individualism (such as independence, self-determination, and career ambition). This tension is not merely thematic but shapes how female characters develop and express masculine traits in ways that differ from Western representations. Understanding this gap is urgent because popular fiction like *Crazy Rich Asians* reaches global audiences and actively shapes how Asian femininity is perceived and negotiated in transnational contexts.

Female masculinity can be observed in various literary works, including Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians* (2013). This romantic comedy novel was written to introduce contemporary Asia to a North American audience. The story follows Rachel Chu, a New York University economics professor, who is invited by her boyfriend, Nicholas Young, to attend his best friend's wedding and meet his family in Singapore. Upon arrival, Rachel faces prejudice from Nick's family, friends, and Singapore's upper class. She discovers that her boyfriend comes from one of the most respected and wealthiest families in Singapore. Added to this is the disapproval of Nick's mother, Eleanor Young, who rejects Rachel as her son's choice of partner. Rachel must navigate these challenges alone in a foreign land and make quick decisions to overcome the problems she encounters.

Rachel Chu is portrayed as an independent, intelligent, and unyielding woman. Raised in America as a Chinese immigrant, Rachel developed an American mindset that differs from traditional Chinese values. This open-minded Rachel meets Eleanor Young, a woman who was forced by her husband's family tradition to abandon her own aspirations. Eleanor had to change her way of life to conceal her weaknesses and ensure her son's comfortable upbringing. The contrast between these two women—one embracing her independence, the other shaped by traditional expectations—provides rich material for analysing how masculine qualities manifest in female characters within Asian cultural contexts.

However, existing scholarship has largely focused on Western texts or theoretical discourse, leaving contemporary Asian popular fiction underexplored. Previous studies have examined female masculinity in Western literature and film (Halberstam, 1998) or focused on gender stereotypes in general (Zuhro, 2018; Wulandari, 2019). Limited research has specifically examined how female masculinity is portrayed in contemporary Asian popular fiction, particularly within the specific cultural tension between traditional Asian values and modern individualism. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the portrayal of masculine qualities in female characters in Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Specifically, this research seeks to answer two questions: (1) What types of masculine qualities are found in female characters in the novel? and (2) How are these masculine qualities portrayed on the female characters?

The significance of this study is threefold. First, it contributes to gender theory by demonstrating that female masculinity is not a monolithic Western concept but manifests differently across cultural contexts, shaped by local norms and values. Second, it contributes to Asian literary studies by providing a close analysis of how contemporary Asian popular fiction represents gender identity, an area that remains underexplored compared to Western literary traditions. Third, it contributes to popular fiction discourse by examining how commercially successful texts like *Crazy Rich Asians* negotiate and potentially challenge

traditional gender roles for global audiences. By shifting focus from moral persuasion to theoretical and disciplinary contributions, this research offers academic justification for examining female masculinity in this specific cultural and literary context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Gender and Masculinity

Gender, as a social construct, has been theorized extensively across feminist scholarship. The World Health Organization (2023) defines gender as the socially constructed characteristics, norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy. Unlike biological sex, gender varies across societies and changes over time.

While Judith Butler (1990) revolutionized gender theory by arguing that gender is performative—constituted through repeated acts rather than expressing a natural interior identity—Judith Halberstam (1998) extends this argument by decoupling masculinity from male bodies entirely. Whereas Butler focuses on how all gender identity is performed and thus unstable, Halberstam argues more provocatively that "masculinity does not belong to men, has not been produced only by men, and is not properly expressed only through male heterosexuality" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 241). This distinction is crucial: Butler's performativity theory explains how gender norms are maintained through repetition, but Halberstam's framework specifically opens space for understanding female masculinity as a legitimate, coherent identity rather than a mere imitation of maleness.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by Connell (1995), further enriches this theoretical landscape. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally idealized form of manhood that legitimizes men's dominance over women and other marginalized masculinities. However, Connell's framework has been critiqued for focusing primarily on men's bodies and experiences. Halberstam's female masculinity theory directly responds to this limitation by demonstrating that masculine traits—power, courage, leadership, heroism—can be embodied by female-bodied individuals. This study synthesizes these complementary theories: from Halberstam (1998), we adopt the core premise that masculinity is not biologically determined; from Lehman (2001), we operationalize masculinity into four observable traits (power, leadership, courage, heroism); and from Connell (1995), we understand that these traits function within systems of social power, not individual psychology alone.

2.2 Lehman's Framework of Masculine Qualities

Peter Lehman's (2001) framework is particularly relevant for literary analysis because it operationalizes masculinity into observable, measurable traits that can be identified through characters' actions, dialogue, and narrative positioning. Rather than treating masculinity as an abstract essence, Lehman identifies four concrete elements: power (the ability to control people and events), leadership (the capacity to organize and persuade others), courage (the ability to confront fear and difficulty), and heroism (selfless action to help others). This framework enables systematic analysis of female characters' behaviours without reducing them to stereotypes.

Following the framework established by Lehman (2001), the four masculine qualities are defined as:

- a. **Power:** The ability or right to control people and events, or to influence the way people act or think in important ways. Power can be exercised through physical means, intellect, social status, or knowledge (Foucault, 1998).
- b. **Leadership:** The quality or ability that makes a person a leader, encompassing intelligence, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and the capacity to organize and lead others to accomplish shared objectives (Northouse, as cited in Xayyapheth, 2013).

- c. Courage: The ability to control fear and to be willing to deal with something dangerous, difficult, or unpleasant. Courage involves understanding one's fears and handling them effectively (Beard, 2019).
- d. Heroism: Acts of compassion and empathy toward others, often involving self-sacrifice or risk-taking to aid those in need (Staats, as cited in Cherry, 2020).

2.3 Female Masculinity

Building on Halberstam's (1998) foundational work, female masculinity refers to the embodiment of masculine traits by female-bodied individuals. This concept challenges the assumption that masculinity is the exclusive property of male bodies and recognizes that women may develop and express masculine qualities through their behaviours, actions, and life choices. The Encyclopaedia of Sex and Gender (2023) confirm that qualities masculine women possess—confidence, assertiveness, independence, and daring—are not scientifically or biologically male attributes; rather, these qualities are socially constructed as masculine despite being commonly found in women.

Recent scholarship has extended Halberstam's framework to Asian and global contexts. In contemporary Asian literature and media, female masculinity often emerges as a strategy for negotiating between traditional feminine expectations (filial piety, modesty, domesticity) and modern demands for independence and professional achievement. Women in Asian societies may develop masculine traits not to reject femininity entirely, but to equip themselves with the tools needed to navigate patriarchal structures while preserving their core identities.

The concept of female masculinity also operates across four analytically distinct levels: behaviour (how characters act, such as taking charge or making decisions), appearance (physical presentation, though not the focus of this study), speech (directness, assertiveness in dialogue), and response to crisis (problem-solving approaches that prioritize action over emotional processing). This multi-level framework enables a more sophisticated analysis of how female characters exhibit masculine traits without conforming to simple stereotypes.

2.4 Gender Role, Stereotype, and Character

Gender roles in society refer to how individuals should behave based on their assigned sex, including how they should act, speak, dress, and present themselves. Traditional gender roles typically expect women to be polite, accommodating, and nurturing, while expecting men to be powerful, combative, and brave.

Several key scholars have identified persistent areas of gender stereotyping, including personality traits (women accommodating and emotional vs. men confident and aggressive), domestic behaviours (women responsible for caregiving vs. men for finances and repairs), occupations (teaching and nursing for women vs. engineering and medicine for men), and physical appearance (women thin and elegant vs. men tall and muscular). These stereotypes perpetuate inequality and affect individuals who may not conform to expected norms.

Character, in literary analysis, refers to the individuals who appear in dramatic or narrative works, interpreted by readers as having moral and dispositional qualities expressed through dialogue and action. Characters are essential elements in literary works that drive the plot, and well-written characters give life to the entire story. The analysis of characters' gender expression—whether conforming to or deviating from traditional gender roles—provides insight into how literature reflects and potentially challenges social norms.

2.5 Theoretical Framework of This Study

This study synthesizes the theoretical perspectives discussed above into a coherent analytical framework. Halberstam's (1998) theory of female masculinity provides the

overarching conceptual premise: that masculinity can be embodied by female-bodied individuals and that this embodiment is legitimate, not imitative. Lehman's (2001) framework operationalizes this premise into four observable traits—power, leadership, courage, and heroism—enabling systematic analysis of textual evidence. Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity provides the critical lens for interpreting why certain traits are coded as masculine and how their expression by women challenges or reinforces existing power structures.

This framework is applied to Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* through close reading of four female characters: Rachel Chu, Eleanor Young, Kerry Chu, and Astrid Leong. Each character is analysed for evidence of the four masculine traits, with attention to the specific cultural context of Asian diaspora and the tension between traditional values and modern individualism. The findings contribute to an emerging body of scholarship on female masculinity in Asian popular fiction, an area that remains under-theorized compared to Western literary traditions.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis with a gender studies approach to examine the portrayal of masculine qualities in female characters in Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians*. Unlike basic qualitative descriptive methods, textual analysis focuses on close reading of linguistic and narrative elements within a text, attending to how meaning is constructed through dialogue, description, action, and narrative positioning. This approach is particularly suited for gendered literary analysis because it enables systematic examination of how characters' behaviors, speech patterns, and decision-making processes manifest culturally coded masculine traits.

The gender studies approach frames masculinity not as a fixed biological attribute but as a set of socially constructed behaviours and dispositions that can be embodied by individuals regardless of their assigned sex. This theoretical lens directs the analysis toward identifying specific actions and interactions that demonstrate power, leadership, courage, and heroism within the narrative, while remaining attentive to how these traits are framed—whether celebrated, tolerated, or punished—within the social world of the novel.

3.2 Data Source

The primary data source is Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians* (2013), published by Random House, Inc., New York. This novel was selected for three reasons. First, it features multiple female characters from diverse generational and class backgrounds, enabling comparative analysis of how female masculinity manifests differently across age, status, and cultural orientation. Second, the novel's setting—contemporary Singapore—provides a specific cultural context where traditional Asian values (filial piety, patriarchy, female subservience) intersect with modern individualism and globalized aspirations. Third, as a commercially successful popular fiction that has achieved global readership and cinematic adaptation, the novel carries cultural influence in shaping how Asian femininity is represented and understood internationally.

3.3 Data Selection Procedure

Data were selected through a systematic three-stage procedure:

Stage 1: Character Identification. Four female characters were selected for analysis based on their narrative significance and diversity of social positioning: Rachel Chu (protagonist, Chinese-American immigrant, middle-class academic), Eleanor Young

(antagonist, Singaporean traditional elite), Kerry Chu (Rachel's mother, working-class immigrant), and Astrid Leong (Nick's cousin, upper-class but progressive). These characters represent different generations (mothers vs. daughters), class positions (working, middle, elite), and cultural orientations (traditional vs. modern). This diversity enables examination of how female masculinity manifests across different social locations rather than treating all women as a monolithic category.

Stage 2: Passage Identification. Relevant textual passages were identified through close reading of the entire novel (approximately 530 pages). The researcher read the novel twice: first for holistic comprehension and character mapping, second for targeted identification of passages depicting female characters' actions, dialogues, and internal reflections that potentially demonstrate masculine qualities. Passages were included if they met at least one of four preliminary criteria: (a) the character exercises control or influence over others (power), (b) the character organizes, directs, or persuades others (leadership), (c) the character confronts fear, danger, or difficulty (courage), or (d) the character helps others at potential personal cost (heroism).

Stage 3: Unit Segmentation. From the identified passages, specific quotation units were extracted as data points. Each unit consists of a direct quotation from the novel (ranging from a single sentence to a paragraph) accompanied by its page number. Units were selected based on representativeness (typical of the character's behaviour) and significance (pivotal moments that reveal character development or key narrative events). A total of 12 data units were extracted: three for each of the four characters.

3.4 Coding and Analytical Framework

Data were coded using a hybrid deductive-inductive approach:

Deductive Coding (Theory-Driven). Based on Lehman's (2001) framework, four a priori categories were established:

- a. Power: The ability to control people, events, or influence others' thinking
- b. Leadership: The capacity to organize, direct, or persuade others toward shared goals
- c. Courage: The ability to confront fear, difficulty, or danger
- d. Heroism: Selfless action to help others at potential personal cost

Inductive Coding (Data-Driven). During initial coding, the researcher remained open to emergent patterns not captured by Lehman's framework. Two inductive categories emerged: (a) manifestations of power through knowledge and sociability (demonstrated by Rachel Chu) versus through status and dominance (demonstrated by Eleanor Young), and (b) the role of motherhood as a catalyst for courage (specifically in Kerry Chu's character). These inductive refinements were incorporated into the final analysis.

Each data unit was coded using a 2x4 matrix: character (Rachel/Eleanor/Kerry/Astrid) by masculine quality (power/leadership/courage/heroism). Units could be coded for multiple qualities if the passage demonstrated more than one trait. For example, a passage showing Eleanor bargaining with an investigator was coded for both leadership (directing Lorena) and power (controlling the negotiation).

3.5 Interpretation Procedure

Interpretation proceeded through three iterative phases:

Phase 1: Within-Character Analysis. Each character's data units were analysed separately to identify which masculine qualities they exhibit and how these qualities manifest in their specific context. For example, Rachel Chu's power was analysed in relation to her profession (professor) and social background (American-educated), while Eleanor Young's power was analysed in relation to her family status and cultural capital.

Phase 2: Cross-Character Comparison. Findings across characters were compared to identify patterns and variations. This comparison examined whether the same masculine quality (e.g., courage) manifests differently across generational positions (Kerry's maternal courage vs. Astrid's marital courage) and whether characters with different cultural orientations (traditional vs. modern) exhibit different configurations of masculine traits.

Phase 3: Theoretical Integration. Patterns identified in Phases 1 and 2 were interpreted through the theoretical frameworks of Halberstam (1998) and Connell (1995). This phase addressed broader questions: Does female masculinity in Asian popular fiction differ from Western representations? How do traditional Asian values shape the expression of female masculinity? What does the novel suggest about the acceptability or punishment of female masculinity?

4. Discussion

This section analyses how four female characters in Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians*—Rachel Chu, Eleanor Young, Kerry Chu, and Astrid Leong—exhibit masculine qualities as defined by Lehman (2001): power, leadership, courage, and heroism. Rather than simply describing what each character does, this section interprets the theoretical and cultural significance of their actions, linking findings to Halberstam's (1998) theory of female masculinity, Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, and the specific cultural tension between Confucian Asian values and Western individualism.

4.1 Power: Two Modalities of Female Authority

Both Rachel Chu and Eleanor Young exercise power, but through fundamentally different modalities. This distinction challenges Lehman's (2001) undifferentiated framing of power as simply "the ability to control people and events."

Rachel Chu's power operates through influence, knowledge, and sociability—a relational mode that enables her to navigate unfamiliar social terrain. When Nick observes that Rachel "charm[s] the socks off everyone—your students, the chancellor, and all the university bigwigs, even that grouchy Japanese sandwich guy on Thirteenth Street" (Kwan, 2013, p.336), this demonstrates a form of power that does not rely on formal authority or financial status. Rachel's position as an Economics Professor at NYU (Kwan, 2013, p.253) further illustrates how institutional knowledge functions as power: she influences young minds through teaching and earns respect through expertise rather than intimidation.

While Lehman (2001) tends to frame power as dominance—the capacity to impose one's will on others—Rachel's case suggests an alternative: relational power, which operates through mutual respect, intellectual authority, and social competence. This finding extends Halberstam's (1998) framework by demonstrating that female masculinity need not replicate male patriarchal dominance; it can manifest as culturally feminine-coded relationality while still functioning as power. This distinction is particularly significant in Asian contexts where collectivist values prioritize harmony and relationship maintenance over individual assertion.

Eleanor Young represents the opposite modality: positional power derived from social status, family name, and the internalized deference of others. The narrative explicitly describes how "the place of honour on Carol's Qing dynasty Huanghuali bed was always reserved for Eleanor... Carol still deferred to her... The others also kowtowed to her, because even among these exceedingly well-married ladies, Eleanor had trumped them all by becoming Mrs. Philip Young" (Kwan, 2013, p.27). Eleanor's power is not earned through competence or relationships but inherited through marriage and maintained through performance of superiority.

Eleanor's mental "social algorithm" that calculates where everyone stands "based on who their family was, who else they were related to, what their approximate net worth might be, how the fortune was derived, and what family scandals might have occurred" (Kwan, 2013, pp.43-44) reveals a hyper-vigilance that aligns with Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity legitimizes male dominance through cultural consent rather than overt force. Eleanor, despite being female, operates within a patriarchal system by internalizing and reproducing its logic. She polices boundaries between worthy and unworthy, acceptable and unacceptable, with the same ruthlessness that a patriarch would exercise.

The contrast between Rachel and Eleanor reveals that power modalities are shaped by cultural orientation. Rachel, raised in America as a Chinese immigrant, embodies Western individualism and meritocratic assumptions that power should be earned. Eleanor, representing traditional Chinese elite values, embodies a Confucian hierarchical worldview where power is inherited, deference is obligatory, and questioning hierarchy is unthinkable. Neither woman is more or less masculine; rather, they demonstrate that within the same cultural contact zone, female masculinity takes different forms depending on class, generation, and diaspora positioning.

4.2 Leadership: Eleanor's Confident Command

Eleanor Young's leadership is demonstrated most clearly in the bargaining scene with an investigator. When Lorena fails to negotiate a reasonable price, Eleanor abruptly declares, "No ten thousand, or I leave" (Kwan, 2013, p.211). When Lorena protests—"Eleanor, I think you've gone too far with your bargaining tactics this time"—Eleanor responds with absolute confidence: "Lorena, trust me keep walking and don't turn around!" (Kwan, 2013, p.212). Lorena obeys, and ultimately the investigator accepts their terms.

This scene illustrates Lehman's (2001) leadership criteria: self-confidence (Eleanor never doubts her judgment), fluency (she articulates commands clearly and decisively), emotional intelligence (she reads the investigator's desperation and refuses to be manipulated), and the capacity to compel others' followership (Lorena obeys despite scepticism). Notably, Eleanor leads without any formal authority over Lorena; her leadership emerges purely from others' perception of her competence and status.

What makes Eleanor's leadership distinctively female and Asian is its performance within Confucian constraints. Traditional Confucian gender ideology discourages female assertiveness, valuing women's silence and deference. Eleanor has learned to lead not through open authority—which would violate expectations of feminine modesty—but through subtle direction that allows others to feel they are following voluntarily. She does not order Lorena; she frames her command as advice: "trust me." This culturally inflected leadership style suggests that female masculinity in Asian contexts may require indirection and face-saving strategies that Western models of female leadership do not fully capture.

The absence of leadership traits in other female characters is equally telling. Rachel, despite her intelligence and social competence, never organizes or directs others. She solves problems individually. Kerry Chu, despite extraordinary courage, never commands others; she acts alone. Astrid, despite heroic concern for Rachel, leads no one. This distribution suggests that leadership may be the most culturally contested masculine quality for Asian women, perhaps because it most directly challenges Confucian patriarchal hierarchy where only senior males lead.

4.3 Courage: Maternal Protection and Marital Confrontation

Courage manifests in two radically different contexts: Kerry Chu's maternal defiance of Chinese patriarchy and Astrid Leong's confrontation of marital infidelity.

Kerry Chu, raised in China where "patriarchy and filial piety form life's foundation" and where "girls have lower standing and must follow parental guidance," demonstrates courage through three escalating acts of resistance. First, she runs away from home to marry a man her parents disapproved of, abandoning her education and future security. Second, when her husband proves abusive, she develops strategies to protect herself—crushing sleeping pills into his wine, inviting his friends over to keep him occupied until he passes out. Third, when she discovers her mother-in-law's plot to blind her newborn daughter with acid to circumvent China's one-child policy, she resolves: "I was determined that nobody was going to blind you, nobody was going to hurt you" (Kwan, 2013, p.406). She escapes with nothing, carrying her baby to a foreign country.

What makes Kerry's courage theoretically significant is its specific cultural embeddedness. Halberstam (1998) emphasizes individual agency in decoupling masculinity from male bodies, but Kerry's case reveals that courage for Asian women is rarely individualistic; it is relational, specifically maternal. Kerry does not fight for her own freedom or self-actualization; she fights for her daughter's survival. This maternal framing of courage complicates Halberstam's framework, which tends to prioritize Western individualist notions of self-determination. In Confucian cultural contexts, female virtue is traditionally defined through sacrifice for family. Kerry's courage, while undeniably masculine in its defiance of fear and authority, is simultaneously hyper-feminine in its motivation—maternal protection. This suggests that female masculinity in Asian contexts may be less about rejecting femininity and more about strategically deploying masculine courage to fulfil feminine obligations that patriarchal systems refuse to protect.

Astrid Leong's courage operates within a different domain: marriage and social reputation. Born into Singapore's elite, Astrid married a lower-status man for love, defying her family's disapproval. When she discovers evidence of his infidelity, she experiences intense internal struggle, even attempting to normalize his behaviour: "Every man cheats. This is Asia. Every guy has mistresses, girlfriends, flings on the side. It's a normal thing. A status thing. Get used to it" (Kwan, 2013, p.97). This internalized voice—speaking in the idiom of patriarchal permission—represents precisely the cultural logic that keeps many women trapped in unhappy marriages.

When Astrid finally asks, "Have you been... are you having an affair?" (Kwan, 2013, p.221), she confronts not only her husband but the entire social apparatus that tells her to look away. Her courage lies not in fighting or fleeing but in refusing pretence—refusing to continue the performance of marital happiness that protects everyone's reputation except her own. This form of courage—truth-telling in the face of social pressure to maintain harmonious appearances—is particularly salient in Asian contexts where "face" (*mianzi*) dictates that private suffering remain concealed publicly.

Comparing Kerry and Astrid: both demonstrate courage, but Kerry's is physical and materially risky (life-threatening danger, economic precarity), while Astrid's is social and emotionally costly (reputation, family standing, self-concept as a desirable wife). This suggests that for Asian women, courage may be required in both survival contexts and social performance contexts; the form looks different, but the psychological structure—acting despite fear—remains consistent with Lehman's (2001) definition.

4.4 Heroism: Unacknowledged Sacrifice

Heroism, defined by Staats (cited in Cherry, 2020) as selfless action to help others involving potential personal cost, appears in two forms: Astrid's protective concern and the special maid's whistleblowing.

Astrid's heroism is indirect but strategic. Unable to attend Araminta's bachelorette party herself, she asks her cousin Sophie to watch over Rachel: "Astrid was so perceptive when she asked me to look out for you. She was a little worried about you tagging along with this particular crowd" (Kwan, 2013, p.215). Astrid, herself in crisis over her failing marriage, nevertheless remembers Rachel's vulnerability in a hostile social environment and quietly mobilizes protection. This form of heroism—network-based, preventative, gendered—reflects what feminist scholars call "relational heroism": action that prevents harm rather than responding to crisis.

The special maid who reveals the blinding plot against Kerry's baby represents a more dramatic heroism. Hired specifically to care for pregnant Kerry, she learns the family's plan and chooses to expose it, knowing this jeopardizes her employment and potentially her safety. The maid's nine-month relationship with Kerry, an employee-employer bond that could easily have remained professional, instead becomes friendship and protection. Her heroism is structurally significant because it demonstrates that female solidarity can transcend class boundaries even in highly hierarchical contexts. Neither the novel nor scholarship has sufficiently appreciated this character's role; she remains unnamed, mentioned only briefly. This narrative marginalization may itself be worthy of critical attention: who gets recognized as a hero, and whose sacrifices remain invisible?

4.5 Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

Across all four characters, three cross-cutting patterns emerge.

First, no character exhibits all four masculine qualities. Rachel has power only (not leadership, courage, or heroism). Eleanor has power, leadership, and perhaps strategic intelligence but no courage or heroism. Kerry has courage only. Astrid has courage and heroism. This suggests that female masculinity is not a unified identity package but a toolkit; women in Kwan's novel select and deploy specific masculine traits situationally without adopting the full ensemble. These findings challenge assumptions that female masculinity requires wholesale rejection of femininity or consistent performance of dominance.

Second, power modalities differ systematically by class and cultural orientation. Rachel (middle-class, American-raised) uses relational power (influence, knowledge, sociability). Eleanor (elite, Chinese traditional) uses positional power (status, dominance, deference). This suggests that women's access to and expression of masculine authority is shaped by their position within multiple intersecting hierarchies—not just gender, but class, generation, and cultural capital.

Third, the Confucian cultural context significantly shapes how female masculinity is performed and received. Kerry's courage is maternal rather than individualist; Astrid's courage is truth-telling rather than confrontation; Eleanor's leadership is indirect rather than commanding; Rachel's power is relational rather than dominant. Each woman adapts masculine traits to a cultural environment that penalizes open female assertiveness. Female masculinity in *Crazy Rich Asians* is, therefore, not a rejection of Asian femininity but a negotiation with it—a strategic deployment of masculine tools to fulfil goals that traditional feminine norms do not adequately protect.

4.6 Cultural Context: Confucian Values and Diaspora Identity

The tension between Confucian Asian values and Western individualism is not merely thematic background but a primary engine of female masculinity in the novel. Confucian patriarchal hierarchy assigns women subordinate roles: daughters obey fathers, wives obey husbands, mothers sacrifice for sons. Women who internalize these norms fully—like the Bible study women who "kowtow" to Eleanor—do not develop masculine traits because they never need to. They are protected (or constrained) by the system.

Women who develop female masculinity in Kwan's novel are those positioned at cultural boundaries. Rachel, as Chinese-American, has internalized American meritocratic individualism; she assumes she can earn her place through competence. Kerry, despite her Chinese upbringing, chooses to defy patriarchy when her daughter's life is threatened; motherhood becomes a legitimate justification for transgression. Eleanor, trapped within the system, internalizes it so thoroughly that she becomes its enforcer; her female masculinity is not rebellious but neoliberal—she exercises dominance within patriarchal rules, never challenging the rules themselves.

This analysis reveals that female masculinity in Asian diaspora literature cannot be understood through Western frameworks alone. Halberstam's (1998) model, developed primarily through analysis of Western texts, emphasizes individual rebellion against gender norms. Kwan's Asian characters demonstrate that female masculinity may also emerge through filial obligation (Kerry), maternal protection (Kerry again), or internalization of patriarchal logic (Eleanor)—none of which fit neatly into Western feminist narratives of liberation. This study therefore argues for an expanded theoretical framework that recognizes multiple, culturally specific pathways to female masculinity.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that female characters in Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* exhibit four masculine qualities as identified by Lehman (2001): power, leadership, courage, and heroism. However, beyond merely identifying these traits, the analysis reveals three significant patterns that extend existing scholarship on female masculinity.

First, this study adds to scholarship by demonstrating that power modalities differ systematically by class and cultural orientation. Rachel Chu exercises relational power (influence, knowledge, sociability), while Eleanor Young exercises positional power (status, dominance, deference). This finding challenges Lehman's (2001) undifferentiated framing of power and extends Halberstam's (1998) framework by showing that female masculinity need not replicate male patriarchal dominance. Second, this study contributes to Asian literary studies by revealing that female masculinity in Asian diaspora contexts is shaped by Confucian values (filial piety, patriarchal hierarchy, face-saving). Kerry Chu's courage is maternal rather than individualist; Astrid Leong's courage is truth-telling rather than confrontation. This finding suggests that female masculinity in Asian popular fiction is not a rejection of femininity but a strategic negotiation with it—a deployment of masculine tools to fulfil goals that traditional feminine norms do not adequately protect. Third, this study adds to popular fiction discourse by demonstrating that commercially successful texts like *Crazy Rich Asians* actively engage with gender politics rather than merely reproducing stereotypes. The novel presents female masculinity ambivalently: Eleanor's power is socially respected but morally questionable; Rachel's relational power is admired but insufficient to protect her from Eleanor's hostility; Kerry's courage is heroic but economically unrewarded; Astrid's heroism goes unacknowledged. This ambivalence reflects real-world complexities: women who exercise masculine authority gain effectiveness but risk social punishment.

This study is limited to a single text (*Crazy Rich Asians*), a single author (Kevin Kwan), and a specific cultural context (Singaporean-Chinese diaspora). Findings may not generalize to other Asian popular fiction, other diaspora contexts (e.g., South Asian, Southeast Asian), or other genres (e.g., serious literary fiction, young adult literature). Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on female characters' demonstration of masculine qualities without examining male characters' demonstration of feminine qualities, which would be necessary for a complete analysis of gender fluidity in the novel. The study also

does not examine reader reception; we cannot determine whether audiences interpret these female characters' masculine traits positively, negatively, or ambivalently.

Future research should pursue four directions. First, comparative studies across Kevin Kwan's trilogy (*Crazy Rich Asians*, *China Rich Girlfriend*, *Rich People Problems*) could examine whether and how female masculinity evolves across the series. Second, cross-cultural comparisons between Singaporean-Chinese diaspora fiction and other Asian diaspora contexts (e.g., Korean-American, Vietnamese-American, Indian-British) could identify whether the patterns observed here are specific to Chinese cultural values or generalize across Asian contexts. Third, reception studies examining how different audiences (e.g., Asian-American readers, Singaporean readers, white Western readers) interpret female characters' masculine traits could illuminate whether cultural background shapes gender perception. Fourth, comparative studies between popular fiction and literary fiction could examine whether genre affects the representation of female masculinity. Serious literary fiction may present more radical or complex gender performances, while popular fiction may resolve gender tensions more conservatively to satisfy mainstream expectations.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that female masculinity in *Crazy Rich Asians* is not monolithic but varies across class, generation, and cultural orientation. The novel neither fully celebrates female masculinity nor punishes it completely; instead, it presents ambivalent portrayals that reflect real-world complexities. While the findings are specific to this text and context, they contribute to an emerging scholarly conversation about how contemporary Asian popular fiction engages with gender identity, diaspora, and the negotiation between traditional values and modern individualism.

References

- Amrullah, A. A. (2017). *The analysis of the characters in Dennis Lehane's Shutter Island* [Undergraduate thesis]. Makassar, Indonesia: Universitas Hasanuddin.
- Beard, M. (2019). Courage isn't about facing our fears; it's about facing ourselves. *The Ethics Centre*. Retrieved from <https://ethics.org.au/courage-isnt-about-facing-our-fears-its-about-facing-ourselves/>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cherry, K. (2020). What makes a person heroic? *Very well Mind*. Retrieved from <https://www.verywellmind.com/characteristics-of-heroism-2795943>
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. London, England: Sage Publications.
- Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender. (2023). Manly (masculine) woman. In *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender*. Retrieved from <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/manly-masculine-woman>
- Foucault, M. (1998). *The history of sexuality: The will to knowledge*. London, England: Penguin.
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female masculinity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kwan, K. (2013). *Crazy rich Asians*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Lambert, V. A., & Lambert, C. E. (2013). Qualitative descriptive research: An acceptable design. *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research*, 16(4), 255-256.
- Lehman, P. (2001). *Masculinity: Bodies, movies, and culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Little, W. (2016). *Introduction to sociology* (2nd Canadian ed.). Retrieved from <https://open.bccampus.ca>

-
- Mayer, L. S., & McHugh, P. R. (2016). *Sexuality and gender: Findings from the biological, psychological, and social sciences*. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Technology and Society.
- Namawi. (1995). *Metode penelitian bidang sosial*. Yogyakarta, Indonesia: UGM Pers.
- Prasetyo, R. M. (2016). Pengertian peran gender. *Jurnal Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta*, 3, 1-15.
- Stets, J., & Burke, P. (2000). Femininity/Masculinity. In E. Borgatta & R. Montgomery (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of sociology* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Macmillan Library Reference.
- Whitehead, S. M., & Barrett, F. J. (2001). *The sociology of masculinity*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- World Health Organization. (2023). Gender and health. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>
- Wulandari, S. (2019). Female masculinity of Alanna Trebond in Tamora Pierce's Alanna: The First Adventure (Song of the Lioness). *LITERA KULTURA: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 7(1). doi:10.26740/lk.v7i1.28658
- Xayyapheth, V. (2013). Organisations and leadership. Retrieved from <https://www.academia.edu/3525899/>
- Zuhro, L. (2018). Gender stereotypes in The Five Year Engagement movie. *Pioneer: Journal of Language and Literature*, 10(2), 124-137. doi:10.36841/pioneer.v10i2.246

The Effectiveness of Picture-Based Instruction in Enhancing EFL Vocabulary Mastery: A Qualitative Study at Islamic Junior High School in Indonesia

Amalia Rahmadani¹, Andang Suhendi², Triana Lestari³, Risa Umami⁴

^{1,2}Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

^{3,4}Politeknik Mandiri Bina Prestasi, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: rahmadaniamalia6@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: March 12, 2026

Accepted: April 24, 2026

Published: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

Images;

Picture;

Vocabulary;

vocabulary mastery

Abstract

This study investigates the use of pictures as instructional media for teaching English vocabulary to second-year students at MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy. Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of language learning; however, many students face difficulties in understanding and retaining new words. Therefore, the use of visual media, particularly pictures, is considered an effective strategy to facilitate vocabulary acquisition. This research adopts a qualitative study design, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of how picture-based instruction is implemented and how it influences students' vocabulary learning. Data were collected through classroom observations, documentation, questionnaires, and vocabulary tests to obtain both descriptive and supportive quantitative evidence. The combination of these instruments allows for data triangulation to enhance the validity of the findings. The results indicate that the use of pictures significantly improves students' vocabulary mastery and increases their engagement in the learning process. Visual media help students comprehend meanings more easily, retain vocabulary more effectively, and participate more actively in classroom activities. Furthermore, the results of the vocabulary tests show a noticeable improvement in students' scores after the implementation of picture-based instruction, with the majority of students achieving scores above the minimum mastery criterion (KKM). Therefore, the use of pictures is an effective and engaging instructional medium for teaching vocabulary. It not only enhances students' understanding and retention but also fosters active participation in the classroom. Therefore, teachers are strongly encouraged to integrate visual media into their teaching strategies to support students' vocabulary development.

Corresponding Author:

Amalia Rahmadani

Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: rahmadaniamalia6@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The ability to understand and use vocabulary effectively is an important aspect of language learning, especially in the context of English as a foreign language. Vocabulary acquisition can be a challenging task for many students, especially those in the early stages of learning (Richards, J.C., & Renandya, W.A., 2002; and Willis, J., 1996). The use of pictures in vocabulary teaching has been recognized as a valuable technique for improving students' comprehension and retention of new words. The use of pictures in vocabulary teaching is especially important for second year students who are still developing their language skills (Brown, H. D., 2007; Yusuf, R. M., 2019). At this stage, students begin to learn more complex vocabulary and are exposed to broader linguistic structures (Krashen, S., 2007). The use of images can help make vocabulary learning more engaging and interactive, which is important for student motivation and participation in the learning process.

However, the use of pictures in vocabulary teaching is not without challenges. Teachers often face difficulties in choosing the most effective images to use in their lessons, and more research is needed on how best to integrate images into vocabulary teaching. In addition, there is a lack of understanding of how students perceive the use of images in vocabulary teaching and how it affects their learning outcomes (Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J., 1997). This study aims to overcome the existing literature gap by exploring the effectiveness of the use of images in teaching vocabulary to second-year students at MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy. This research will investigate how students perceive the use of images in vocabulary teaching and how it affects their learning outcomes.

This research is important because it contributes to the existing knowledge about the use of images in vocabulary teaching, especially in the context of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. The findings of this study will provide practical recommendations for teachers and educational institutions on how to use images effectively in vocabulary teaching, which can lead to improved student outcomes and a better language learning experience. This research is also important because it answers the need for further research on the use of images in vocabulary teaching in Islamic schools in Indonesia. Research on this topic is lacking, and the existing literature is limited to research conducted in other countries or in different educational contexts. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the effectiveness of the use of images in vocabulary teaching in the specific context of MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy. This research will explore how students perceive the use of images in vocabulary teaching and how it affects their learning outcomes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Vocabulary in Language Learning

As said before, one of the basic things that is important to master in learning English is vocabulary mastery. The more vocabulary in English is mastered, the easier it will be to learn and understand a foreign language. Vocabulary is one of the components of language, there is no language without words. Vocabulary is an important element in language activities in conveying ideas or ideas to the interlocutor. To speak well, correctly, and politely, of course, it takes a good and varied vocabulary mastery (Hilaliyah, 2015). In learning a language, of course, it will not be separated from vocabulary learning, because vocabulary has a very vital role in determining smooth communication. Because good vocabulary mastery will affect a person's ability to speak. As said before, one of the basic things that is important to master in learning English is vocabulary mastery.

The more vocabulary in English is mastered, the easier it will be to learn and understand a foreign language. Vocabulary is one of the components of language, there is no language without words. Vocabulary is an important element in language activities in conveying ideas or ideas to the interlocutor. To speak well, correctly, and politely, of course, it takes a good and varied vocabulary mastery (Hilaliyah, 2015). In learning a language, of course, it will not be separated from vocabulary learning, because vocabulary has a very vital role in determining smooth communication.

Because good vocabulary mastery will affect a person's ability to speak.

Reading comprehension ability can be measured from the level of reading comprehension of students. Research conducted by Leslie & Calfeet, (2021) shows that children's reading comprehension levels are different from adults.

2.2. Techniques for Teaching Vocabulary

In learning English vocabulary, many methods and theories are used by teachers and educators in facilitating educational and learning facilities in the classroom. One of the

methods in learning English vocabulary is to use the image media learning method to make it easier for students to understand and master English vocabulary easily.

The image media method is one of the methods that can help teachers in learning English vocabulary easily and understood by students, this learning method is a learning method that uses pictures and is paired or ordered in a logical order. This learning has the characteristics of being active, innovative, creative and fun. Images present illustrations through images that are very consistent with the reality of an object or situation. Meanwhile, a graphic is a symbolic and artistic representation of an object or situation.

Image media has the purpose of attracting attention, clarifying material, depicting facts and information. According to Haryanti (2018) who stated that images/photos are included in visual media. This media functions to channel messages from the source recipient to the message recipient. This theory also involves teachers who play a role in showing pictures to students. In the context of learning English, the steps and stages in learning vocabulary using the Image Media method are as follows:

1. Analysis of subjects/sub-subjects that will be expressed in the form of photographic media.
2. Prepare the ingredients to be used.
3. Students should be asked to prepare pictures/photos that are in accordance with the subject.
4. Display pictures/photos that can be seen by all children.
5. Students are asked to comment on pictures/photos, other students are asked to respond to the comments.
6. The teacher explained through the media he made and instilled the concept of moral values and norms that were the target of his expectations.
7. The teacher concludes the subject matter.
8. Teachers provide follow-up with group/individual tasks.

2.2.1 Exploration Stage

In the exploration stage, the researcher gave several questions about vocabulary to students directly and then the teacher asked students to delve into the learning material by studying and rereading the vocabulary they had learned before. This stage is the initial stage in learning to find, collect, and understand information related to the material.

2.2.2 Organizing Stage

The organizing stage is the stage of conveying the steps in learning using picture media. In this stage, the teacher explains the steps that students must take during the learning activity. Meanwhile, students listened to the teacher's explanation and asked if there was an explanation that they did not understand. The steps and rules for applying picture are as follows:

- a. The teacher shows one of the pictures related to the profession for the vocabulary are as follows:
 - Throw
 - Blow
 - Fishing
 - Sing
 - Dance
 - Rub
- b. Students guess English from the picture that the teacher has shown
- c. After the students guessed, the students made sentences from the vocabulary.

2.2.3 Elaboration Stage

This stage is the stage of doing a test or concluding the results of exploration carefully. In this stage, the teacher gives a test to the students by asking the students to write down the vocabulary in their respective notebooks from the pictures designated by the teacher, to see the extent of the vocabulary that the students have mastered and also to test the students' memory related to the vocabulary that has been learned.

2.2.4 Confirmation Stage

In the confirmation stage, the researcher provides feedback on what is produced by students through learning experiences by confirming the truth of the vocabulary that has been written by students. As a result of the observation of the learning process, the teacher checked the student's writing and the teacher corrected some incorrect vocabulary writings.

2.2.5 Material Reinforcement

In the material reinforcement stage, the teacher gives several questions as a review of the material with the intention of strengthening students' memory related to the material that has been studied previously. The teacher provides reinforcement of the material by giving students vocabulary-related questions either directly or by showing some pictures which then students answer the questions that have been given by mentioning English from the pictures that have been assigned by the teacher. After strengthening the material, the teacher re-reads the vocabulary related to the profession and the students imitate it.

The Image Media Method is effective because it allows learners to see and hear examples of correct use of English. This helps them gain a better understanding of proper grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

2.3 English Teaching in MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy

Teaching and learning activities are an obligation that is carried out deliberately by teachers or tutors, to provide lessons and education to students or students. Teachers who teach and students who learn. The combination and these two human elements are born an educational interaction by utilizing materials as a medium. All teaching components are played optimally and effectively in order to achieve the teaching goals that have been set before teaching is carried out. In teaching and learning activities, there must be two-way communication between teachers and students so that the learning atmosphere is conducive. It is no longer teacher-centered but student-centered so that the teaching and learning process will be directed towards achieving learning goals. So far, the learning carried out is only centered on the teacher as a learning resource, not student-centered so that the teacher will dominate the learning process in the classroom while the students only passively listen.

Likewise in learning English vocabulary at MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy grade VIII. Teachers first prepare learning materials that will be given to students. In the Image Media method used by teachers to carry out the English learning process, namely by the way the teacher previously explained the material to be learned, after that some material and vocabulary were shown using pictures to make it easier for students to understand and understand the material explained by the teacher. Then the teacher gives the student the opportunity to comment on the picture shown, after that the student also mentions the vocabulary using English, then the vocabulary is spoken together first several times until the child pronounces fluently, then the teacher spells and writes the vocabulary contained in the picture and spelled together by the student then the teacher covers the picture after being observed by the student.

2.4 The Role of Pictures in Vocabulary Instruction

Based on the previous presentation, it was said that the role of image media in learning is very important because using image media will be able to improve students' ability to capture the learning process. Image media also has advantages according to Utami (2018: 142). namely: Easy to obtain, easy to use, and can clarify and help student observation in learning.

2.5 Theories and Models of Vocabulary Acquisition

The main purpose of the learning method is to facilitate the process and learning outcomes of students so that what has been planned can be achieved properly and as easily as possible by students. In the learning process at school, it would be good if a teacher taught using different learning methods according to the abilities achieved by the students. The better the method, the more effective it will be to achieve the goal. According to the researcher, methods are an integral part of the teaching system, so in their manifestations they cannot be separated from other components of the teaching system. The use of image media in English vocabulary learning methods can motivate students in memorizing and understanding the meaning of English words that students do not yet know.

This method is used to make it easier for teachers to share predetermined learning strategies with students. Therefore, methods have an important role in the learning process. The benefits of learning can increase the mastery of English vocabulary to make it easier by using the theory and model of learning image media as explained above, that many teachers use this theory to facilitate students' understanding of vocabulary.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the use of pictures as a medium for teaching English vocabulary to second-year students at MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy (Creswell, J. W., 2014). The research focused on understanding how picture media was implemented in the classroom and how it influenced students' vocabulary learning. The participants of this study were eighth-grade students and their English teacher. The qualitative approach was selected to obtain in-depth information about the teaching and learning process, students' responses, and the effectiveness of picture-based instruction in vocabulary learning.

Data were collected through several techniques, including classroom observation, documentation, questionnaires, and vocabulary tests. Observation was conducted to examine the teaching process and students' participation during the implementation of picture media in the classroom. Documentation was used to collect supporting data such as lesson plans, learning materials, and students' work. Questionnaires were distributed to students to gather their perceptions and responses toward the use of pictures in vocabulary learning, while vocabulary tests were administered to measure students' learning outcomes after the implementation of the image media method.

The collected data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns and interpret the effectiveness of using pictures in vocabulary instruction. The analysis focused on students' learning outcomes, engagement, and responses to the teaching method. The results of the vocabulary tests were compared with the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) to determine improvements in students' achievement. Through this analysis, the study aimed to evaluate how picture media contributes to improving students' vocabulary mastery and enhancing their motivation in learning English.

The data collection method used in this study is an observation method, using tests and interview methods as the main method, and is equipped with a documentation method as a

supporting method. The author's observation method was used to obtain data, about the form of role played by teachers in the effectiveness of the English vocabulary learning process for students. Meanwhile, the author's test is used to find out how effective this learning is using this method. Furthermore, the interview method used by the author to dig deeper information, about how the teacher made efforts to improve students' English vocabulary. Finally, the documentation method used by the author to obtain additional data as a complement to the data obtained through observation methods, using tests, photo interviews. Based on the observations made, the pen object.

Observation of the implementation of research using the image media method in learning English vocabulary to grade VIII students of MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy can be carried out with the following actions:

1. Selection of students from class VIII MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy. Who will take part in the English vocabulary learning program using the image media method.
2. Data collection before starting the learning program, data collection regarding the student's English vocabulary ability can be done through a vocabulary test or analysis of his reading and writing skills.
3. The English vocabulary learning program using the image media method can be done by using appropriate learning materials such as short sentences, complete sentences and images related to the vocabulary to be repeated.
4. Assessment measurement after the learning program is completed, student assessment measurement should be carried out to assess the success of learning. It can be done through a vocabulary test or analysis of reading and writing skills.
5. Analysis of the results after the assessment measurement is completed, the analysis of the results should be carried out to find out the progress of the student's English vocabulary.
6. This can be done by using the data that has been obtained before and after the writing learning program after the results analysis report, a research report should be written explaining the English vocabulary learning program using the image media method and the results.
7. After the writing of the research report is completed, a report should be submitted to the authorities for approval after approval the research report can be used as a reference material and source of information for the development of English vocabulary learning programs in schools.

Student leaning outcomes are achievements achieved, in this case the teacher must know the learning abilities of each student, the aim is for the teacher to know the standardization of learning concepts that will be given to students. Learning outcomes are something that is owned by every person whose capacities have various appearance.

Based on the description above, it can be seen that applying the Using Pictures method in teaching can provide good student learning outcomes. This is in accordance with the results of observations made by researchers in the following table,

No	Date	Activity	Observation Activity
1.	09 September 2024	Introduction	Collecting Data Regarding Students' English Vocabulary Skills, Collecting Learning Data, Regarding the Using Pictures Method
2.	10 September 2024	Learning	Teaching English Vocabulary Using the Pictures Method, In Class II MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy
		Perfomance	Measuring Student Perfomance In Learning English Vocabulary Uses the Pictures Method

3.	11 September 2024	Measurement	
4.	12 September 2024	Interview Data Collection	Collectinng Interview Data with Students Regarding English Vocabulary Learning Using The Pictures Method
5.	13 September 2024	Analysis of Result	Analysis of Students Performace Measurement Result and Results From Interview
6.	14 September 2024	Report Writing	Writing A Research Report Explaining the English Vocabulary Learning Program Using the Pictures Method
7.	15 September 2024	Report Submission	Submission of Research Reports To Authorized Parties For Approval.

Element	Description	Amount Number of Students 20	Percentage
Understandin g	Students can understand the meaning of words in the correct and appropriate context	17	85%
Repetition	Students can repeat words in the correct and correct form	19	95%
Writing	Students can write word in the correct and precise form	17	85%
Pronunciation	Students can read word in the correct and appropriate form	19	95%
Use	Students can use word in the correct and appropriate context	16	80%
Combination Understandin g	Students can Understand combinations of word in the correct and appropriate context	17	85%
Combination Repetition	Students can repeat combinations word in the correct and appropriate form	17	85%
Combination Writing	Students can write combinations word in the correct and precise form	17	85%
Combination Pronunciation	Students can read combination word in the correct and precise form	16	80%
Combination Use	Students can use combination word in the correct and appropriate context	15	75%

4. Discussion

4.1 Findings

Learning and teaching activities are an obligation that must be carried out in the world of education. In which there are learning activities between teachers who teach and students who receive the knowledge taught. Teaching and teaching is an educational combination and interaction, by utilizing material as a medium. All teaching components are carried out optimally in order to achieve the teaching objectives that have been determined before the teaching is carried out.

Teaching and learning activities must be accompanied by conducive communication, between teachers and students in a conducive learning atmosphere. In this learning, students are no longer centered on the teacher but on the students themselves. So that the teaching and learning process will be directed, and towards the achievement of learning goals.

4.1.1 History of Establishment MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al - Islamy

Modern Islamic Boarding School Ta' dib Al-Syakirin is a waqf pesantren given by (late) H. Muhammad Syukur Rangkuti, he donated some of his assets so that they can be used for the needs of Muslims. After negotiations and observations with the prospective founders, he decided to create an Islamic learning body named after him." Modern Islamic Boarding School" which will later be used as a medium for fostering generations of believers. Until on the basis of this initiative and initiative, in 1993, a known Islamic boarding school was established: Pesantren Modern Ta' dib al-Syakirin, and since then the learning and teaching program has been running until now.

The learning program held at the pesantren includes the stages of Tsanawiyah College known as MTs Ta'dib Al – Muallimin Al – Islamy, as well as Aliyah College known as MAS Ta'dib Al – Muallimin Al – Islamy. Dinamaka with the formulation of a structured curriculum between the Religious Unit Program (Ruler) and the Islamic Boarding School Program. The minimum learning period is: 3 years of learning at the Tsanawiyah stage and 3 years of Aliyah learning stages with regular learning programs and special or intensive categories. Adrift of certificates, if students do not only explore escalation tests or pesantren graduation, they also explore the Religious Unit program test for Tsanawiyah or Aliyah levels. Thus, the learning output of pesantren has 2 certificate deeds, namely the pesantren act and the State or Ruler. Learning at Islamic boarding schools emphasizes more on fostering psychological attitudes than teaching. Even though students are equipped with insight.

At this time, the land of the pesantren is in the position of "Gift" with the Notary Deed of Chairunnisa Juliani, SH, Meter. Kn. No 23 Coincided on March 27, 2017. Ministry of Law and Human Rights No AHU- 0007333. AH. 01. 12. Year 2017 Coincided on March 31, 2017. There is also a program of activities to practice guiding at Islamic boarding schools arranged by education personnel. The learning system is implemented including official, non-official and informal learning routes in an integrative way in one media. Therefore, all students must live and be conditioned in a mess that is loaded with obedience throughout the full 24 hours in their daily lives.

4.1.2 Vision, Mission, Goals MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al - Islamy

a. Madrasah Vision

The realization of a Qur'ani-based, accomplished and cultured Madrasah. Maintaining the comfort, cleanliness, and beauty of the building as a place to study knowledge for students and the Muslim community around the Islamic Boarding School environment.

b. Madrasah Mission

1. Forming obedient Muslims to worship, have noble character, righteousness and righteousness.
2. The prosperity of pesantren as a place to carry out and carry out religious activities in order to achieve the learning targets of students in particular and increase religious teachings in general.
3. Goals: Making the Madrasah community as an educational field so that students can serve in the community. Able to implement Islamic religious teachings by preaching in the community.

4.1.3 Brief Profile MTs Ta'dib Al - Muallimin Al - Islamy

Madrasah Name : Ta'dib Al-Syakirin Boarding School
Madrasah Address : Jln. Brigjend Zein Hamid Km. 7,5
Gg. Tapan Nauli No. 5 Kel. Titi
Kec. Medan Johor
Kode Pos. 20146 Telp. (061) 77935000
a. Kelurahan : Titi Kuning
b. Kecamatan : Medan Johor
c. Kota : Medan
d. Provinsi : Sumatera Utara

Table 4.1

Number of Students MTs Academic Year 2023/2024

Class	Classroom	Number of Students		
		L	P	Amount
I	1	20	7	27
II	1	10	13	23
III	1	13	14	27
Amount	3	43	34	76

Information:

Classroom : 3
Number of Private Teacher : 21 Teachers
Administrative Employees : 1 Person

4.1.4 Facilities and Infrastructure of MTs Ta'dib Al - Muallimin Al - Islamy

Learning using (lab rooms, libraries, mathematics learning media, science, social studies, Indonesian, Arabic, English, extracurricular and religious subjects) as well as supporting facilities in the form of offices, dormitories, mosques, clean water, madrasah canteens, cooperatives, sports fields and toilets.

4.2. Analysis

4.2.1 Implementation of English Vocabulary Learning Using the Image Media Method in Class VIII MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy.

Regarding the learning of the Image Media method at MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy. Implementing that, learning and teaching activities are an obligation that must be carried out in the world of education. In which there are learning activities between teachers who teach and students who receive the knowledge taught. Teaching and teaching are an educational combination and interaction, by utilizing material as a medium. All teaching components are carried out optimally to achieve the teaching objectives that have been determined before the teaching is carried out. Learning in using these methods, namely: teachers prepare different strategies every week, teachers prepare lessons using materials, create groups, or individuals. Then after that, each group was asked to guess the vocabulary material, as well as provide comments on each demonstration that was carried out. The teacher here uses the Image Media Method on students.

The learning process of the Image Media Method at MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy, also includes the Effectiveness factor in learning English vocabulary, character education is also needed in learning English vocabulary. Character education in learning

English vocabulary is obtained from various elements ranging from internal and external in schools. Internal support is obtained from students, teachers, and principals, while external support is obtained from parents in shaping student character education. In learning the role of teachers is an important point in the formation of student character. How teachers are targeted as models for students in the learning process to provide examples of good behavior that students can imitate.

4.2.2 Learning Results of English Vocabulary Using the Image Media Method in Class VIII MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al - Islamy

Learning outcomes are the results of abilities acquired by students after going through learning activities. Learning is a process of a person who strives to acquire a form, in the form of relatively sedentary behavior. In learning or instructional activities, teachers usually set learning goals. Students who are successful in achieving learning goals or instructional goals. Learning outcomes are the abilities that students acquire after going through learning activities in achievement is a form of behavior change that tends to settle in the affective realm. Meanwhile, the learning results that have been carried out by Mrs. Tiarna Sinaga, S.Pd as an English teacher of Class VIII MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy, are as follows:

"Kalo dari pendapat saya metode ini sudah amat sangat sesuai untuk metode pembelajaran kosakata dipondok maupun di sekolah-sekolah, karena metode ini sangat efektif dan membantu guru serta murid dalam penyampaian dan pemahaman materi. Dan siswa juga lebih berimajinasi serta lebih terbuka pikiran dan wawasannya dalam menghafal dan belajar kosakata bahasa inggris."

"In my opinion, this method is very suitable for vocabulary learning methods in boarding schools and schools, because this method is very effective and helps teachers and students in conveying and understanding the material. "And students are also more imaginative and more open-minded and insightful in memorizing and learning English vocabulary."

Based on the above statement, it can be seen that teachers pay attention to the way students learn, especially in learning English vocabulary in grade VIII MTs Ta'dib AlMuallimin Al-Islamy. In learning methods, image media and learning strategies that attract students' interest so that they are able to remember a lot of vocabulary, especially vocabulary related to learning themes so that learning becomes more interactive. The next aspect is how students can guess and understand vocabulary enthusiastically because of the image media method that is oriented and gives them time to think and imagine, this can give students a spirit of learning. Although there are several obstacles in learning, it can be overcome. Likewise, the meetings in the following weeks with various themes, for example, the vocabulary of verbs and nouns that are often used at school, at home or elsewhere. The teacher uses the concept of strategy. The following are the results of student grades using the method used by English teachers in lessons:

Table 4.2.2

List of Vocabulary Post Scores – Test for Grade VIII Students MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy Before Using the Image Media Method

NO	NAME	SCORE
1.	ARS	62
2.	ARL	65

3.	MR	65
4.	MRM	60
5.	MF	80
6.	MRF	65
7.	MZ	75
8.	RA	80
9.	RD	70
10.	SW	60
11.	ALF	62
12.	AN	80
13.	CS	74
14.	CA	65
15.	CD	65
16.	DA	75
17.	FA	70
18.	INK	66
19.	MNA	80
20.	NA	65
21.	SA	65
22.	WF	60
23.	ZTL	60

Tabel 4.2.2

List of Pre-Test Vocabulary Scores for Grade VIII Students MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy Using the Image Media Method

NO	NAMA	SCORE
1.	ARS	82
2.	ARL	80
3.	MR	80
4.	MRM	80
5.	MF	88
6.	MRF	85
7.	MZ	99
8.	RA	85
9.	RD	90
10.	SW	80
11.	ALF	80
12.	AN	89
13.	CS	88

14.	CA	80
15.	CD	85
16.	DA	90
17.	FA	99
18.	INK	85
19.	MNA	90
20.	NA	80
21.	SA	88
22.	WA	90
23.	ZTL	87

From the results of the above scores, it is known that the results of student learning are quite good, after using the image media method used by English teachers in the learning. Teachers also said that during teaching and receiving learning there are no difficulties that cannot be overcome, so that this makes students' grades quite good in the learning process. In the results of the study, students experienced an increase in average scores which in understanding the material given by the teacher.

Students really enjoy the learning process because, teachers often make guesses that make students enthusiastic in answering, as well as teachers give questions to students that make it easy for students to understand the material presented. With the application of the method provided by the teacher, it can be seen that by applying this method, it is very easy for teachers to create a classroom atmosphere to be efficient and relevant during the learning process. The response from one of the students of grade VIII MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy, named Fira Azzahra is as follows:

"Menurut adek kak, metode ini bagus dan mudah dimengerti saat guru menjelaskan materi, juga membuat kelas lebih aktif karena murid berebut untuk menebak materi atau kosakata yang ditunjukkan guru melalui gambar yang mudah dilihat, dicerna, dan dimengerti. Karena metode ini kan kak menggunakan indera mata/penglihatan yang membuat kami lebih cepat berfikir dan paham makna dari gambar yang ditunjukkan guru ke kami kak".

"According to you, this method is good and easy to understand when the teacher explains the material, it also makes the class more active because the students scramble to guess the material or vocabulary that the teacher shows through pictures that are easy to see, digest and understand. Because this method uses the senses of the eye/sight, which makes us think faster and understand the meaning of the pictures the teacher shows us, Sis."

Based on the statement above, students are very enthusiastic about learning English taught by the teacher, this can help smooth English learning in the classroom, and can also facilitate the learning steps given by the teacher. Regarding the image media method, the teacher prepares several steps before starting learning as follows: The teacher prepares the theme of the learning material, notes the vocabulary related to the student's personality or character so that the process of remembering it becomes easier. Then the teacher gives time to the students to remember and review the vocabulary that has been learned last week. This is very important to be applied in order to find out if the student still remembers the vocabulary material last week.

4.2.3 Disadvantages and Advantages of Using Image Media Method Learning in Class VIII MTs Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al-Islamy

Related to the above, it can be stated that there are several advantages of image media, including:

- a. It is concrete; Images/photos are more realistic to show the main problem compared to verbal media alone.
- b. Images can overcome the limitations of space and time. Not all objects, objects or events can be brought to class, and children cannot always be brought to these objects/events. Images and photos can overcome this.
- c. Image/photo media can overcome the limitations of our observation. Cells or leaf cross-sections that we cannot see with our naked eye can be clearly presented in the form of images or photographs.
- d. Photos can clarify a problem, in any field and for any age, so that it can prevent or correct misunderstandings.
- e. Photos are cheap and easy to get and use without the need for special equipment.

In addition to these advantages, pictures/photos have several disadvantages, namely:

- a. Images only emphasize the perception of the senses of the eye,
- b. Drawing objects that are too complex is less effective for learning activities,
- c. The size is very limited for large groups.

4.3 Implementation of English Vocabulary Learning Using the Picture Media Method in Class VIII MTS Ta'dib Al-Muallimin Al- Islamy

Knowledge is obtained from someone who knows better or who is known as a teacher or can also be obtained through other sources because, in today's era, teachers are not the only source of learning. In learning, this knowledge is collected little by little until it finally becomes a lot. People with a lot of knowledge are identified as people who learn a lot, while people with little knowledge are identified as people who learn little and people who do not have knowledge are seen as people who do not learn.

People are said to study while reading, reading textbooks, and doing assignments. Learning is also essentially a process of interaction with all situations that exist around individual students.

Learning can be seen as a process that is directed to the achievement of goals and the process of doing various things through various experiences created by teachers. Before starting a lesson, the teacher first prepares the Prota Promes after which he prepares the teaching materials that will be used such as syllabus, lesson plans, media and materials that will be used in the learning process. Prota is an annual program that plans to set a one-year time allocation to achieve the goals that have been set. Promissory notes are semester programs that are used for the implementation of the promissory term program. The activities carried out in the semester were face-to-face activities, fieldwork practicum, mid-semester, semester exams and various other activities that were assessed. The syllabus is a learning plan on a certain group of subjects or themes including competency standards, basic competencies, subject matter/learning, indicators, assessments, time allocation and resources.

A Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) is a plan that describes a learning procedure to achieve one basic competency set out in the content standards and described within the broadest scope of the learning plan, including one basic competency consisting of one indicator or several indicators for one or more meetings. Meanwhile, the material is something that students must learn as suggestions for achieving basic competencies and that will be assessed using assessment instruments that are compiled based on learning achievement

indicators. In the application of the Image Media method, the teacher first prepares the things used for the learning process. Here, the teacher first prepares the lesson plan for learning English vocabulary using the Picture Media method, and the steps for preparing the lesson plan are as follows.

- a. Write down the identity of the subject (educational unit, class/semester, subject/subject theme, time allocation and number of meetings).
- b. Write down basic competencies
- c. Write competency standards
- d. Write down indicators
- e. Write down learning materials
- f. Write down learning objectives
- g. Determine the learning method to be used
- h. Formulate learning activities

The teacher conveys all information and objectives, in learning and motivating students about the procedure for implementing English vocabulary learning using the Image Media method. The teacher also guides students to pronounce the vocabulary that has been given at the beginning of learning along with the explanation of the previous material, reciting the vocabulary several times along with its meaning until the student is fluent in pronunciation. Then students follow the vocabulary speech and the meaning that the teacher says over and over again until they are fluent in pronunciation. After the students are fluent enough in pronunciation, the teacher writes down the spelling of the vocabulary that is being learned on the board while reciting it. Then after the child observes the spelling on the blackboard, after that the teacher deletes the spelling on the blackboard then the teacher tells the students to rewrite the spelling on the blackboard, namely by the way the teacher pronounces the vocabulary that has been learned and spelled on the blackboard.

Based on the analysis above, it can be seen that the preparation before the teacher teaches is to make Prota, Promes, Syllabus and RPP. However, not every teacher meeting is required to make a syllabus because the syllabus has been designed at the beginning of the semester. Also, teachers must provide information to students about the procedure for learning English vocabulary using the Image Media method.

5. Conclusion

Learning outcomes represent the measurable achievements attained by students after participating in instructional activities. In the teaching and learning process, teachers are expected to guide students toward achieving specific educational goals, which are reflected in changes in behavior, knowledge, and skills. To effectively evaluate these outcomes, teachers must understand students' individual abilities and monitor their progress through standardized assessments aligned with predetermined criteria, such as the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM). According to Robert M. Gagné, learning outcomes can be categorized into five main types: verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, attitudes, and motor skills. These categories emphasize that learning is not limited to knowledge acquisition but also includes the development of thinking skills, personal dispositions, and practical abilities.

Based on the findings of this study, the implementation of the Image Media method in teaching English vocabulary to eighth-grade students at MTs Ta'dib Al-Mu'allimin Al-Islamy has shown positive results. The use of visual media supports students in understanding and remembering vocabulary more effectively, as images provide concrete representations of abstract words. As a result, students' average scores increased significantly, with many students achieving scores above the KKM. Prior to the implementation of this method, several students had difficulty reaching the required standard; however, after applying image-based

instruction, their performance improved noticeably. In addition to improving academic performance, the Image Media method also enhances students' motivation and engagement in the learning process. Interview results indicate that students find the learning activities enjoyable and stimulating, as the use of images introduces variety and novelty into the classroom. Students reported that they experienced fewer difficulties in understanding the material and were more enthusiastic about participating in class activities. This increased motivation contributes to a more effective and efficient learning environment, where students are actively involved and willing to engage with new vocabulary.

The teacher's role in implementing the Image Media method is also crucial to its success. Before the lesson begins, the teacher prepares relevant themes and selects vocabulary that is closely related to students' daily lives, making it easier for them to connect new words with their existing knowledge. The teacher also allocates time for students to review previously learned vocabulary, ensuring retention and reinforcing long-term memory. This systematic approach not only strengthens students' understanding but also helps create a structured and meaningful learning experience.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Image Media method is an effective instructional strategy for improving students' vocabulary mastery and learning outcomes. It facilitates comprehension, enhances retention, and fosters positive attitudes toward learning English. Therefore, incorporating visual media into classroom instruction can significantly contribute to achieving better educational outcomes.

For future research, it is recommended that studies explore the use of image-based instruction in different educational levels or subjects to determine its broader applicability. Researchers may also employ experimental or mixed-method designs to measure the effectiveness of image media more rigorously. In addition, future studies could investigate the long-term impact of visual media on vocabulary retention and examine the integration of digital or multimedia tools to further enhance students' learning experiences.

References

- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Pearson Education. <https://octovany.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ok-teaching-by-principles-h-douglas-brown.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications. https://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog_609332/objava_105202/fajlovi/Creswell.pdf
- Haryanti, A. S. (2018). Penggunaan media gambar dan media radio pada pembelajaran m enulis deskripsi siswa kelas X SMA Tunas Harapan Balaraja-Tangerang. *Jurnal kredo*, 1(2), 14-25. DOI: [10.24176/kredo.v1i2.2108](https://doi.org/10.24176/kredo.v1i2.2108)
- Hilaliyah, H. (2015). Pengaruh persepsi mahasiswa atas bahasa Indonesia dan minat belajar terhadap prestasi belajar bahasa indonesia. *FAKTOR: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan*, 2(2), 115-122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/fjik.v2i2.381>
- Krashen, S. (2007). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Leslie, R. O. N., & Calfeet, R. C. (2021). Visual search through word lists as a function of grade level, reading ability, and target repetition. *Perception & Psychophysics*. Vol. 10 (3) 169–171. <https://scispace.com/pdf/visual-searh-through-word-lists-as-a-function-of-grade-level-24713a9ywg.pdf>
- Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (1997). Teaching vocabulary. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching* (pp. 100-115). Cambridge University Press.

- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, S. W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press. https://viancep2012.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/methodology_in_language_teaching_2002_scanned.pdf
- Utami, N. U. P., & Rahman, T. (2018). Penggunaan media gambar untuk meningkatkan penguasaan vocabulary anak. *Jurnal PAUD Agapedia*, 2(1), 53– 65.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. Longman. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588204>
- Yusuf, R. M. (2019). Penerapan model pembelajaran kooperatif dengan mempergunakan kartu bergambar pada mata pelajaran vocabulary building. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pendidikan Universitas Subang (SENDUSA)*, 1(1), 180–189.

Form of Intimidation and Female Resistance in Eka Kurniawan's *Beauty is a Wound*

Jurdi Yuda Pangestu, M. Ali Pawiro

Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: jurdi769@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: March 12, 2026 Accepted: April 24, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This study examines the theme of intimidation and female resistance in the novel <i>Beauty Is a Wound</i> by Eka Kurniawan. It aims to identify the types of intimidation depicted in the novel and to analyze how the characters resist such intimidation. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method. The primary data source is the novel, published by Text Publishing Company in Melbourne in 2002, while data collection is conducted through note-taking techniques. The analysis is based on the classification of intimidation proposed by Coloroso and the theory of resistance by James C. Scott, supported by feminist theory as the main analytical framework. The findings reveal that the novel portrays several forms of intimidation, particularly verbal and physical intimidation. In response, the characters demonstrate open resistance, in which victims directly oppose discriminatory and oppressive treatment. The study shows that women are often portrayed as more vulnerable to intimidation due to persistent stereotypes of weakness. However, the novel also challenges this assumption by illustrating that women are capable of resisting intimidation and confronting injustice.
Keywords: <i>feminism</i> <i>intimidations</i> <i>struggle</i> <i>woman</i>	
Corresponding Author: Jurdi Yuda Pangestu Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia E-mail: jurdi769@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

A literary work is a creative activity of a work of art. In addition, literary works are imaginative works that are seen more broadly than works of fiction. Wellek and Warren (1995: 3-4), literary works are generally works of art that are the author's expression of the results of his reflection on life with language, a literary work is also a picture of people's life poured in the form of writing by the author with his imagination, and one of the types of that literary work is a novel. Novel as one of the types of literary work can freely talk about the life experienced by man. Rules and norms governing human interaction with the environment are reflected in literary works, particularly novels, which convey nuanced meanings about life. Novels effectively portray character development, complex social contexts, interpersonal relationships involving varying numbers of characters, and a series of intricate events unfolding over extended periods with considerable detail.

Another characteristic of novels is their ability to create a universe that is both complete and complex (Stanton, 2012: 90). The completeness contained in the novel always makes a reader and researcher able to imagine the fictional world.

Intimidation is a common theme in literary works, referring to actions or behaviors intended to frighten, coerce, or pressure individuals or groups, either verbally or nonverbally. In literature, it serves as an important element for portraying power dynamics, illustrating how authority can oppress and influence others, and revealing the psychological impact on both victims and perpetrators. Authors often use intimidation to develop characters, shape plot conflicts, and convey moral messages, particularly through the struggle between protagonists

and antagonists. At the same time, literary depictions of intimidation may reflect how certain cultural or social systems enable or justify such behavior, especially in relation to broader issues like gender, race, and social class. While these portrayals can raise awareness, foster empathy, and encourage resistance against injustice, they may also evoke emotional responses or trauma in readers with similar experiences.

Women have transformed into areas of business and sex exploitation. In other words, nowadays it has lost the feminine nature that is proud and flattered not only by women but also by men. We can read this phenomenon from stories, advertisements, and films that almost sell the image of women as sex spreaders. Power still belongs to men, while women's position is as male "harvesters" (Anshori, 1997:2).

Literary works are said to be tools intended for the author to express his ideas. Literary works, in this case, novels, are literary works written by authors based on true stories and imaginations that have many benefits (Anggraini, 2016: 67-76). The novel is also used as a conveyer of the author's ideology to the reader. The ideas expressed by the author are perceived by the reader. Literature is an embodiment of the existence of life in society. Things that can be described in a literary work about society can be in the form of social structures, functions, and patterns of society, as well as about the social relations of society. The depiction of social interaction in society cannot be separated from the interaction between men and women. The interaction between the two opposite sexes can be an interesting theme that can be used as a study because it can create a pattern in people's lives both culturally and socially.

The theory of feminism is more appropriate to express the views of women in literary studies. Because, feminism is a theory about the equality of women with men, besides that feminism is used as an organizational activity to fight for the rights and liberation of women from male pressure. Feminism seeks to equalize the position between women and men (Anggraini, 2016) Feminist literary criticism is a major form of feminists' strong desire to examine literary works to show women's views that usually in the work of male writers mostly women are abused, or underestimated by patriarchal traditions.

In the point of view of feminism, there are two terms that describe the space of women's activities, namely domestic and public spaces. Domestic space is a woman's activity related to the household, while public space is related to women's activities carried out outside the home, both interactions with the surrounding community and within the scope of work (Sugihastuti and Setiawan, 2010: 84). Domestic space is known for the role and function of women as domestic workers, this happens in the inferiority section of women. Women are in charge of looking after and educating children, cleaning the house, cooking etc. In the public sphere, men are more dominant over women, because basically men work hard to make a living. Socialist feminism asserts that gender differences in addition to class oppression are the origins of women's oppression that exude issues of economic imbalance, property rights for family and domestic survival, and the provision of workers' salaries are contained in the rules of capitalism. Socialist feminism asserts that gender differences in addition to class oppression are the origins of women's oppression that exude issues of economic imbalance, property rights for family and domestic survival and the provision of workers' salaries are contained in the rules of capitalism. So that the novel *Beauty is A Wound* by Eka Kurniawan shows that there is female resistance, as well as the determination of the main character Dewi Ayu when facing Japan in the colonial period, the strength of women in facing the miserable life, and the use of men by women to get their wishes. The protagonist is the main character in a story. A protagonist is the key decision-maker that influences the plot of a story. The protagonist plays a major role in the storyline, often portrayed as the character who faces the most conflicts and obstacles. In a complex story that contains subplots, each subplot can have its own protagonist.

The researcher decided to analyze this topic because this study will explore the protagonist's fight against intimidation that occur and the way she got it. The study focuses on the intimidation and the struggles of the protagonist to fight against the intimidation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Intimidation

In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, intimidation is defined as an act of frightening (especially to force another person or party to do something), bluffing, or threats. Intimidation is also said to be aggressive behavior that is intentional and carried out repeatedly to create pressure on other people, both physically and psychologically. In general, intimidation is a serious problem, and intimidation is usually defined as intentional, repeated physical or psychological actions carried out by people who hold power over the victim (Kowalski et al., 2014: 1073-1137). According to Crow & Macintosh (2009), intimidation is an act of frightening, especially to force another person or party to do something, such as bullying, or threats of humiliation. Aini (2024) added that intimidation is generally caused by various factors, including the first being a harsh social environment, both in the economic, social, political, cultural, and so on. Phylogenetically, the nature of violence is innate, but to become an action, violence is a product of the social environment in society at large.

Indirectly, intimidation is behavior carried out by individuals or groups to achieve their goals. The goals of the individual or group can of course be positive or negative (Gumelar, 2022). In the literary context, intimidation is often associated with the themes of power and domination, as well as with the characteristics of powerful individuals. Therefore, depictions of intimidation in literature often show a conflict between power where the victim of intimidation and those in power try to maintain or gain power. In literary works, this can be reflected in the struggle between the protagonist and antagonist characters.

In several literary works, intimidation is also often associated with broader social issues, such as race, gender, and social class. Literary works can describe how intimidation can be a form of discrimination and oppression of weaker or marginalized groups in society.

2.1.1 Types of Intimidation

a. Verbal Intimidation

Verbal intimidation is a form of intimidation that is carried out by insulting, insulting, threatening, and mocking the victim with unkind words, calling bad names, making fun of, spreading bad rumors, threatening, speaking rudely, and criticizing cruelly. The aim is to influence the victim's mental condition (Mishna et.al, 2005: 718-738). Verbal intimidation is an action in the form of insulting, harassing, and labeling someone in a communication pattern (Gendron & Frenette, 2016).

Meanwhile, Lestari (2018) said that verbal intimidation is all forms of verbal acts that are insulting, shouting, cursing, and frightening by uttering inappropriate words. According to Shields (1999), verbal intimidation has a worse impact than violence carried out by physical means. This is because injuries resulting from physical intimidation can still be treated with various types of medicines. However, verbal intimidation requires recovery which tends to take longer through therapy and psychological assistance because of its abstract nature.

According to Kuvaja & Day (2021), there are several characteristics of verbal intimidation, namely:

1. Usually carried out by people closest to the victim who has the opportunity to carry out verbal intimidation, namely where the victim finally believes the perpetrator that there

is something wrong with him and begins to feel that he is worthless and that he is the source of the problem.

2. Verbal intimidation is very manipulative and aims to control the victim.
3. Verbal intimidation causes the victim's self-esteem to decrease without the victim realizing it, and they increasingly withdraw from their environment so that the victim will change their behavior and surrender to the behavior whether they realize it or not.

Based on the definition above, researchers conclude that verbal intimidation is threats, insults, harassment, humiliation, shouting, cursing, frightening, calling out bad names, making fun, spreading bad issues, threatening, saying rudely, and criticizing cruelly, and carrying out continuously which has the potential to result in psychological harm and, feelings of inferiority.

b. Physical Intimidation

Physical intimidation has a much more negative impact on the victim than verbal bullying. Because physical threats involve violence. Violence is usually carried out with bare hands, such as slapping or grabbing, and worst of all, with sharp weapons. This physical threat causes deep trauma for the victim who tends to blame themselves. Physical intimidation is usually carried out by people who feel they are physically stronger than other people (Mishna et.al, 2005: 718-738). This action is carried out as an attempt to control the victim with the power possessed by the perpetrator. This includes kicking, hitting, punching, slapping, pushing, and other physical attacks (Zakiyah et al., 2017). Physical intimidation is the most visible and most identifiable form among other forms of intimidation. Afifi et al., (2016) add that the stronger and more mature the person doing the intimidation, the more dangerous this type of attack is, even if it is not intended to cause serious harm. This physical intimidation can cause short-term and long-term damage.

Based on the definition above, it can be concluded that physical intimidation is any form of physical violence involving kicking, hitting, punching, slapping, pushing, and other physical attacks.

c. Psychical Intimidation

Psychological intimidation aims to destroy the victim's mental and selfconfidence. This is done by eliminating the trust of people around the victim, such as accusing him of stealing, exclusion, neglect, and shaming, slandering him, inviting other people to stay away from the victim, and inciting people around the victim to isolate the victim. As a result, the victim's self-confidence will decrease and his psychology will become disturbed (Mishna et.al, 2005: 718-738). According to Hufon (2023), psychical intimidation is an act of violence conveyed through body language or other non-physical actions, that target the opponent's psyche so that it can have a mental impact. The impact can even disrupt the victim's mental condition. Examples of psychical intimidation are humiliating, isolating, nagging, alienating, and even mentally suppressing the victim.

Based on the definition above, the researcher concludes that psychological intimidation is intimidation that attacks the victim's mental and mental health by humiliating, isolating, degrading, alienating, and weakening the victim's self-esteem.

2.2 The Influence of Intimidation in Literature

The depiction of intimidation in literature can affect the way readers perceive the characters, plots, and moral messages in literary works. The influence of intimidation in literature can shape the image of social, economic, and political society. Literature can strengthen or undermine the concept of social justice. According to Losey (2011:33), literary

works that display intimidation can affect readers who have experienced or become victims of intimidation.

Some of the influences that can occur due to the depiction of intimidation in literature are:

1. Convey a moral message: Literary depictions of intimidation can convey a moral message about the importance of avoiding behavior that frightens or coerces others and about the importance of rejecting intimidation and discrimination.
2. Creates tension and conflict: It can create tension and conflict between characters, which can increase the level of drama in a literary work.
3. Demonstrates power dynamics: Intimidation in literature can also reveal power and domination dynamics in the relationships between characters, as well as show the impact of power imbalances in society.

2.3 Theory of Feminism

Feminism is a theory about the equality of women with men, besides that feminism is used as an organizational activity to fight for the rights and liberation of women from male pressure. Feminism seeks to equalize the position between women and men (Anggraini, 2016: 67). Feminist literary criticism is a major form of feminists' strong desire to examine literary works to show women's views that usually in the work of male writers mostly women are abused, or underestimated by patriarchal traditions. Feminism is a women's movement that demands emancipation or equal and just rights with men.

Feminism is unlike any other view or understanding. Feminism does not originate from a theory or concept based on a single theoretical formula. That is why, there is no abstraction of the specific understanding of the application of feminism to all women throughout the ages. The definition of feminism according to Khatimah and Sai'dah (2003: 34) is an awareness of the oppression and exploitation of women that occurs both in the family, at work, and in society as well as the conscious action of men and women to change the situation lexically. Feminism is a movement that demands full equality between women and men. The understanding of feminism can change due to feminist understandings or views based on historical and cultural reality, as well as the level of awareness of perception and behavior.

Feminism is a theory about the equality of women with men, besides that feminism is used as an organizational activity to fight for the rights and liberation of women from male pressure. The novel *Beauty is A Wound* by Eka Kurniawan shows that there is female resistance, as well as the determination of the main character Dewi Ayu when facing Japan in the colonial period, the strength of women in facing the miserable life, and the use of men by women to get their wishes. Therefore, the theory of feminism is more appropriate to express the views of women in literary studies in this research.

2.4 Fight against Intimidation

James C. Scott in Asiktiyan (2002: 13-15) defines resistance as all types of resistance carried out by the weak against the powerful with the aim of reducing or rejecting all demands that harm the weak or asking for the rights they should get. In this definition, it can be understood that resistance is a form of resistance carried out by one or more people who intend to reject the demands of classes of people who are against classes of people who are weak. Fighting against something is also classified as resistance.

According to James C. Scott (Asiktiyan, 2002: 13-15), there are two types of resistance, namely as follows:

- a. Open resistance

Open resistance is an organized and overt form of open and overt resistance. The form of resistance in open resistance is by violent means such as rebellion.

b. Closed resistance

Close resistance is resistance that is carried out clandestinely secretly and unorganized. Some examples of closed resistance are gossiping, slandering, lack of respect for the authorities, etc.

3. Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the portrayal of intimidation and the protagonist's resistance in the novel *Beauty Is a Wound* by Eka Kurniawan. A qualitative approach is selected because it allows for an in-depth interpretation of narrative data in the form of words, sentences, and dialogues found in literary texts, as emphasized by John W. Creswell (2007) and Lexy J. Moleong (2014).

The primary data consist of textual excerpts from the novel that represent forms of intimidation and the protagonist's responses, while secondary data are drawn from relevant books, scholarly articles, journals, and credible online sources to support the analysis. Data collection is conducted through close reading, followed by identifying, selecting, and categorizing relevant passages based on the research focus.

The data are analyzed using qualitative content analysis, which involves interpreting narrative elements, classifying them according to the research questions, and explaining how intimidation is depicted and how the protagonist resists it. Through this process, the study aims to uncover the underlying thematic meanings embedded in the narrative and to provide a systematic and descriptive account of the protagonist's struggle against intimidation.

4. Discussion

This chapter contains analysis and findings that focus on the types of intimidation and the protagonist's struggles to fight against the intimidation. This entire discussion analyzes the intimidation faced by the three protagonists in the novel *Beauty is A Wound* by Eka Kurniawan, namely Dewi Ayu, Beauty, and Alamanda, and their struggles to fight against intimidation. It is told in the novel that *Beauty is A Wound* and a curse for the person who has it. Beauty does not guarantee someone happiness, on the contrary, it causes suffering.

The first subchapter in this chapter displays the types of intimidation, and the second is an analysis of the protagonist's struggles to fight against the intimidation. These two subchapters will be explored and discussed through the explanations below.

4.1 The Types of Intimidation

There are two types of intimidation found in the novel, namely verbal intimidation and psychical intimidation. These types will be explained further in the sub-sections below.

4.1.1 Verbal Intimidation

Verbal intimidation is intimidation that involves words (speech). This is the initial form of intimidation or the most frequently carried out. Through words, people can intimidate other people consciously or unconsciously, for example by gossiping about other people. This intimidation can occur anywhere, such as school, work, or home. This form of intimidation involves insults, teasing, and threats. The intimidator uses degrading words and hurts the victim's feelings. In line with the statement above, the characters Dewi Ayu, Beauty, and Alamanda are the protagonists who are most often verbally intimidated.

The types of verbal intimidation that occur to them include: threatening, saying rude, spreading bad issues, and making fun. However, due to the lack of information about these

types of verbal intimidation, the researcher looked for references and understanding from other experts.

a. Threatening

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a threat is a communication of intent to cause harm or loss to another person. Intimidation is a tactic used by parties to a conflict to timid or psychologically intimidate the other party and prepare them for coercion or control. Intimidation to coercion is considered intimidation. According to US Legal, threatening behavior (or criminal intimidation) is a crime that intentionally or knowingly places another person in fear of physical harm. Threat of harm generally includes the knowledge of an act or event of injury, physical or mental harm, injury or material impairment or loss to a person. Threatening can be seen in the novel through the data below.

The group walked toward the prison, passing through three iron gates guarded by soldiers. Before entering, they lined up in front of a table where two Japanese men sat clutching a list. Next to them, there was a basket for money and valuables. A number of women were already taking off their jewelry and tossing it in. ***“Do it before we search you,”*** ordered one of the soldiers in proper Malay (Kurniawan, 2002: 61).

The data above clearly shows verbal intimidation and physical intimidation against Dewi Ayu, an Indo (a citizen of Indonesian and Dutch descent). This does not only happen to herself but to all Indo and Indigenous people. The Japanese armies destroyed Halimunda and imprisoned the Indo who were a threat to them. They imprisoned them and took their valuables. Through the bold words in the quotation above, it can be seen that the Japanese soldiers force and threaten Dewi Ayu to give them her valuables. Of course, this implies verbal and physical intimidation, namely coercion and involving threats. The Japanese Army's goal is to create fear and cruelty that is detrimental to the Indo and natives. Other data to prove threatening can be seen from the quotation below.

She swore that if she only had all of her power at that moment, she would not have hesitated to take a knife and stab that man to death as he slept. Or to detonate a mortar in his mouth. Or to shoot him deep into the ocean with a cannon. But she was wrong to think the man had fallen asleep, because Shodancho now got up and said—and this time she could hear him ***“If all you want to do is conquer men and throw them away like abject trash, well, then it's too bad you met me, Alamanda. I win every war I fight, including the war against you.”*** She heard these cynical and contemptuous words that pierced like a thorn but couldn't say anything in reply, only look at Shodancho with a still blurry gaze as he stood up and gathered his clothes (Kurniawan, 2002: 182).

The data above clearly shows verbal intimidation and physical intimidation against Dewi Ayu, an Indo (a citizen of Indonesian and Dutch descent). This did not only happen to herself but to all Indo and Indigenous people. The Japanese armies destroyed Halimunda and imprisoned the Indo who were a threat to them. They imprisoned them and took their valuables. Through the bold words in the quotation above, it can be seen that the Japanese soldiers force and threaten Dewi Ayu to give them her valuables. Of course, this implies verbal and physical intimidation, namely coercion and involving threats. The Japanese Army's goal was to create fear and cruelty that was detrimental to the Indo and natives.

b. Saying Rude

Saying rude complies (Adisastrajaya, 2012) in (Latif Muslim, Supriatna, & Indriani Putri Utami, 2018: 879–888.) Saying rude is inappropriate language to speak because it is not good for the existing rules in a language environment. Saying rude is an expression that contains harsh words or rude or dirty expressions, either in joking, saying sexy things, or cursing someone. Saying rude can be seen in the novel through the data below.

This woman leaped in through the window, convinced that Dewi Ayu had gone too far. "Listen up, you whore who slept with all of our men!" she said resentfully. ***"If you are going to die, then die, but don't preserve your body, because it's only your rotting corpse that nobody will envy."*** She shoved Dewi Ayu, but her body only rolled over without being awakened. Rosinah came in and gave a signal that she must already be dead. "That whore is dead?" Rosinah nodded (Kurniawan, 2002: 21).

The data above proves that verbal intimidation does exist in the novel *Beauty is A Wound*. This was conveyed through a greeting received by Dewi Ayu from her neighbor, whose husband had been having an affair with Dewi Ayu. Even though the situation and conditions justify the woman speaking harshly towards Dewi Ayu, the word "slut" is still a harsh word when spoken to other people. Another harsh word that appeared was the woman cursing Dewi Ayu to die. Because only with Dewi Ayu's death, the men in their village were no longer tempted by her beauty, which made all the women in the village jealous. Further data to prove rude words can be seen from the quotation below.

"A Dutch woman wandering about in the era of the new republic." She suddenly heard a voice coming from behind her back. "What are you doing here, Missy?" She turned around and there was the owner of that voice: an old native woman who looked quite fierce. She was wearing a sarong and a tattered kebaya, with a cane supporting her leg. Her mouth was filled with clumps of betel leaf. She stood looking at Dewi Ayu resentfully, as if she would strike Dewi Ayu with her cane just as she would strike a stray dog, without hesitation (Kurniawan, 2002: 93).

The data above shows the rude words spoken by the old woman, the new owner of Dewi Ayu's house. The old woman's words above can be said to be rude words in the form of sarcasm. She insinuated that Dewi Ayu, who is of Dutch descent, still exists and lives in Halimunda. Because, in fact, the Dutch had lost to Japan, and then Japan also lost to the natives. The defeat of the Dutch became the reason for the old woman to claim Dewi Ayu's house, that their property should be owned by Indigenous people. So, it can be concluded that the old woman intimidated Dewi Ayu with rude words, because these words contained hatred, and annoyance, and were aimed at hurting other people.

c. Spreading Bad Issues

Spreading bad issues can refer to the act of spreading information that is false or detrimental to a particular person or group of people. This action can be carried out directly or indirectly and can be carried out through various media, such as social media, newspapers, television, or radio. Spreading bad issues can have serious consequences, such as damaging the reputation of a person or group of people, or can even trigger legal action. Therefore, it is very important to check the veracity of information before releasing it to the public. Spreading bad issues can be seen in the novel through the data below.

As soon as day dawned, she would vanish inside the house, like the head of a turtle shying from those who disturb it, because schoolchildren always

stopped in front of the fence gate, hoping to see her, staring at the door and the windows in their curiosity. ***The old folks had already told them the scary tales about terrifying Beauty, who lived in that house, ready to cut off their heads at the slightest disobedience, ready to gobble them alive for any whiny complaint:*** all these stories haunted them, and yet at the same time heightened their desire to meet her and determine whether such a frightening specter truly did exist (Kurniawan, 2002: 28).

Beauty is the only child of Dewi Ayu who was born with an ugly physique. People who see her would say that she is a monster. Because of his physical appearance, people spread bad news and lies about her. Also, they often teased and made fun of her. As a result, Beauty does not want to show herself when daylight so that people will not make fun of her physical appearance. Through the explanation above, it can be stated that Beauty receives verbal intimidation from the environment where she lives. This form of verbal intimidation is spreading bad rumors, mocking, and insulting. The result that happened to Beauty is avoidance and withdrawal from social life.

d. Making Fun

Making fun of is behavior that belittles or insults another person. In Islam, making fun of religious teachings or their followers is a major sin and disbelief. Apart from that, making fun of other people also includes behavior that hurts other people which can damage their good name or human dignity; therefore, bullying is haram in Islam (Tuaksikal: 2010). The form of verbal intimidation, such as making fun occurred against Dewi Ayu. This happens between Dewi Ayu and the new owner of her house. This form of intimidation will be proven through the following data.

The old woman quickly ordered her to leave, but Dewi Ayu insisted that she held the deed. In response, the woman merely laughed, waving her hand. ***“Your house has been confiscated, Missy,”*** she said. And it was clear, just as the old woman explained while seeing the uninvited guest to the door, that the house had been taken by the Japanese and at the end of the war, a guerrilla family stole it back. This was the old lady’s family: her husband had lost half his arm to the slash of a samurai sword before going to the jungle with five of his sons, and not long after that he died, shot by a KNIL soldier, along with two of those sons. ***“So now I have inherited this house. But you can take your photos with you if you want, and I won’t charge you for them.”*** Dewi Ayu realized that there was no way to fight the woman with words (Kurniawan, 2002: 93-94).

The data above shows the verbal intimidation experienced by Dewi Ayu, namely being ridiculed and belittled. During the Japanese colonial period over Indonesia, all property belonging to Dutch people is forcibly taken and accidentally given to other people. Therefore, when Dewi Ayu returned to her house many years ago, the house is already owned by someone else. The old woman, the new owner of the house, claims that she already owns the house. Dewi Ayu can take the photos left behind, but she cannot take the house. Apart from that, verbal intimidation is visible when the old woman laughs and waves her hand, saying in a scornful and dismissive tone that Dewi Ayu's house had been confiscated. Due to this treatment, Dewi Ayu seemed unable to say anything and was serious. This proves that Dewi Ayu was verbally intimidated.

The data below also shows the verbal intimidation faced by Beauty. This will be explained further in the quotation below.

"So, she has three daughters?" asked Aneu Stammmler. "Four. The youngest was born twelve days before Dewi Ayu died." The kid told them the address where they could find their youngest granddaughter, that she lived with and was taken care of by a mute servant named Rosinah, and that Dewi Ayu had named her Beauty. "*But she is hideous, like a monster*," warned the kid. They found out for themselves when they visited the house the next day. They both almost fainted, incredulous that they had a granddaughter like that. "*Like a burnt cake*," said Aneu Stammmler, sinking down into a chair (Kurniawan, 2002: 280).

Through the quotation above, it can be seen that the verbal intimidation of beauty was not only carried out by her neighbors but also by her grandmother. Aneu Stamler is Dewi Ayu's mother. In the past, she left the newborn Dewi Ayu at her parents' doorstep and fled to the Netherlands with her husband. She and her husband are half-brothers from different mothers. After years away, she returns to Halimunda to meet her daughter However, Dewi Ayu has died, and she only finds Rosinah and Beauty in the house. When she sees Dewi Ayu's fourth daughter, Beauty, Aneu says that Beauty is like a "burnt cake". This is of course a derogatory word that can intimidate the victim.

4.1.2 Psychical Intimidation

Psychical intimidation is behavior that is anti-social and aims to make someone feel afraid or dangerous. This intimidation will destroy and mentally hurt the victim. As a result, victims lose self-confidence, anxiety, and other psychological disorders. Types of psychical intimidation include exclusion, neglect, and shaming. In connection with the explanation above, Beauty is one of the characters who most often experiences psychical intimidation. The psychical intimidation is exclusion and this will be proven through the data below.

a. Exclusion

Exclusion is a term that refers to the action or process of excluding individuals, groups, or communities from full participation in social, economic, or political life. The purpose of exclusion is to create separation or isolation which can result in feelings of being unappreciated, not taken into account, or not recognized by the majority.

She had been obsessed with that handsome prince ever since she realized that other people were not as ugly as she was. Rosinah had tried to bring her to neighbors' houses back when she was only a babe in arms, but not one person received them, because their children would scream and cry for the rest of the afternoon, and the old folks would instantly come down with fever and die two days later. They rejected her everywhere, and it was that way, too, when it was time for her to attend school; not one school accepted Beauty (Kurniawan, 2002: 26-27).

Through the data above, it is clearly illustrated that Beauty experienced psychological intimidation, namely ostracism by her environment. Intimidation for not being beautiful can refer to degrading or harassing someone based on their physical evaluation. This is proven by the sentence "but no one person received them". This means that Beauty's ugly physical appearance means she is ostracized by her environment. In fact, they reject it everywhere, not only at home but also at school. Beauty accepts this injustice and intimidation because she is physically different. Furthermore, the quotation below explains the intimidation that faced by Beauty because of her physical appearance.

Aside from all these marvels, she was still an unfortunate, ugly, and pathetic little girl. Rosinah often caught her standing behind the window curtain, peeking out at people in the street, or gazing at her when she had to go out to buy something as if asking to be invited along. Of course, Rosinah would have been happy to take her along, but the little girl herself would protest, saying in her pitiful voice, “No, it’s better I don’t come, because people will lose their appetites for the rest of their lives (Kurniawan, 2002: 27).

The data above explains the consequences of the intimidation that occurs against Beauty. She is intimidated by the way people look at her. The signs of intimidation can be seen from what Beauty feels. She feels that people will be uncomfortable seeing and hanging out with her. As a result, she isolates and withdraws herself from the environment. Another consequence that arises is that she feels insecure because other people are not like him, ugly.

4.1.3 The Protagonist’s Struggles to Fight Against the Intimidation

Resistance against intimidation is divided into two, namely open resistance and closed resistance. Based on the data that has been collected, researchers found that the protagonist fought against intimidation openly, namely open resistance. So, in this sub-section, the researcher only discusses resistance to intimidation openly.

4.1.3.1 Open Resistance

Intimidation is an action that is often carried out by some people to gain power and control over the victim. Intimidation can have a negative impact on a person or society, and fighting back against intimidation is an important step in creating safety for everyone. It is called open resistance if the victim openly resists. In line with the explanation above and analysis of types of intimidation, the protagonists in the novel *Beauty is A Wound* do not just remain silent about the intimidation they receive. They put up resistance because they do not want their self-esteem to be stepped on. This resistance can be proven through the data below.

But the ruckus quickly came to an end as soon as the police came with a Kyai who considered the whole thing heresy. That kyai began to fume and ordered Dewi Ayu to stop her shameful behavior, even demanding that she remove the burial shroud. “You are asking a prostitute to take off her clothes,” said Dewi Ayu scornfully, “so you’d better have the money to pay me.” The kyai quickly prayed for mercy, moved along, and never came again (Kurniawan, 2002: 17).

The data above shows Kyai's ridicule towards Dewi Ayu. This incident begins when Dewi Ayu puts on her own shroud and waits for death. As a result, people are curious and gossip about her behavior. The furious Kyai then came to Dewi Ayu and told her to remove the shroud. Certainly, Dewi Ayu does not accept Kyai's treatment and goes against his words. She responds with sarcasm that people have to pay to take off her clothes. It can be concluded that Dewi Ayu fights against intimidation openly, namely by means of verbal resistance. Verbal opposition is a firm statement used to express a view or argument. The struggle against intimidation was also visible when Dewi Ayu expressed her opinion on the ongoing war.

That was how the Franciscan nuns tried to help during the war; they opened the doors of the dormitory at no charge. Now all of the lessons at school were filled with anxious stories about the war that was finally right in their own front yards. Dewi Ayu, who was impatient with the endless speeches,

stood up and asked loudly: **“Rather than sitting here talking, why don’t we learn how to shoot rifles and cannons?”** (Kurniawan, 2002: 46).

Apart from showing verbal resistance, Dewi Ayu also showed non-verbal and open resistance. She said that instead of just talking about war, why do not they actively defend it, for example by firing guns and cannons. She wants real action rather than just mere talk. Of course, this statement is Dewi Ayu's view of the intimidation of Japanese colonialism. From this explanation, it can be said that Dewi Ayu does not just silently accept colonialism under the Japanese government. She is clearly not afraid of such intimidation. Other data showing Dewi Ayu's resistance to intimidation is illustrated in the quotation below.

That angered Shodancho so that he didn’t care about anything anymore and roughly yanked at his new bride’s evening gown until it was torn. Alamanda let out a little scream but Shodancho quickly silenced her, pulling at her clothes. Just when it seemed that Alamanda was no longer really resisting and Shodancho had ripped off her gown, he cried out in surprise. “Damn it! What have you done to your crotch?” he asked, gaping down at a pair of underwear made out of metal, locked with a padlock that appeared to have no keyhole with which to open it. Alamanda said with a mysterious calm, “This is an antiterror garment, Shodancho, I ordered it directly from a metalsmith and a sorcerer. It can only be opened with a mantra that only I know how to recite, and I will never ever open it for you, not even if the sky has fallen.” (Kurniawan, 2002: 189-190).

The essence of intimidation is coercion aimed at taking control and power. This is what Shodancho does to Alamanda when he rapes her. He thinks that Alamanda will not be able to fight him and will get the woman completely. Indeed, Alamanda agrees to marry him, but not to have a relationship like husband and wife. However, he thought wrongly. Alamanda did not want to submit to Shodancho's control and claimed herself completely. Therefore, she puts on metalsmith panties so that Shodancho cannot touch her as he pleases. She does this for a year of their marriage. Alamanda's actions illustrate her struggle and resistance against Shodancho. Furthermore, the data below describes Dewi Ayu's struggle when she was imprisoned by the Japanese.

Making a small campfire, she boiled all the leeches in the tin with some water from the river. Without adding any seasoning, she quickly brought them back to the hall that was now her new home. “Dinner is served,” she said to a number of women and children who were living near her, her new neighbors. No one was interested in eating leeches, and one woman practically retched at the very thought of such a meal. “We’re not eating the leeches, but cow’s blood,” Dewi Ayu explained. She split open the leeches with a small knife, pulled out the clots of cow’s blood inside them, stabbed them with the point of the knife, and swallowed them. Nobody moved to join in her savage meal, at least not until night fell and they could no longer bear their hunger. Then they tried it. It tasted bland, but sort of good. “We won’t starve,” said Dewi Ayu. “In addition to leeches, there are geckos, lizards, and mice.” (Kurniawan, 2002: 62-74).

The data above illustrates Dewi Ayu's struggle to survive in prison. As explained previously, the Japanese army forced and imprisoned the Indos. They are left without enough to eat and are forced to starve for days. Unlike other prisoners, Dewi Ayu does not want to just stand by and face her fate. She must survive. Therefore, she looked for all the resources

she could eat. For example, looking for leeches that eat cow's blood for consumption. Of course, this action is an open resistance to the Japanese army which indicates that she refuses to bow to pressure or threats.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the novel *Beauty Is a Wound* by Eka Kurniawan reveals that the protagonists experience two primary forms of intimidation: verbal and physical. Verbal intimidation is manifested through threatening, insulting, mocking, and the spread of negative rumors, particularly targeting the characters Dewi Ayu and Beauty. Dewi Ayu faces intimidation when she is belittled and ridiculed by an elderly woman who claims ownership of her inherited house, while Beauty becomes the object of insults and mockery due to her physical appearance. In contrast, physical intimidation is reflected in acts of social exclusion experienced by Beauty, who is ostracized and marginalized because of her appearance. As a result, she loses the opportunity to attend school and suffers a decline in self-confidence.

The study also demonstrates that the protagonists respond to intimidation through open resistance, as conceptualized by James C. Scott. Dewi Ayu exhibits resistance by verbally confronting those who demean her, expressing defiance against oppressive forces, and striving to survive despite the intimidation she faces, including during her imprisonment. Similarly, Alamanda resists harassment by Shodancho through symbolic actions, such as wearing protective metal underwear to prevent physical violation, representing her effort to reclaim control over her body and dignity. These findings indicate that although women are often positioned as vulnerable due to societal stereotypes, the female characters in the novel display resilience, agency, and the capacity to challenge intimidation and injustice.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to examine intimidation in other literary works to compare its representation across different cultural and social contexts. Further studies may also apply alternative theoretical perspectives, such as trauma theory or gender studies, to deepen the analysis of power relations and resistance. Additionally, future research could explore readers' responses to intimidation in literature to better understand its psychological and educational impact.

References

- Afifi, T. O., MacMillan, H. L., Boyle, M., Cheung, K., Taillieu, T., Turner, S., & Sareen, J. (2016). Child abuse and physical health in adulthood. *Health Reports*.
- Aini, L. N., Taufiqurrohmah, M. A., Isnawan, B. H. (2024). Analysis of erosion rate in Sleman District using the USLE (Universal Soil Loss Equation) method. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 1413 (1). [doi:10.1088/1755-1315/1413/1/012006](https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/1413/1/012006).
- Anggraini, P. (2016). Citra tokoh perempuan dalam cerita anak Indonesia (sebuah pendekatan kritik feminisme). *KEMBARA: Jurnal Keilmuan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya*, Vol. 2(1).
- Anshori, Dadang (1997). *Membincangkan feminisme (refleksi muslimah atas peran sosial kaum wanita)*. Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah.
- Asiktiyan, G.S. (2002). *Resistensi masyarakat terhadap kegiatan industri (studi tentang perlawanan masyarakat terhadap kegiatan produksi pabrik rejoso manis indo di desa Rejoso Kabupaten Blitar)*: UMM.
- Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and reserch design: Choosing among five approaches 2nd edition*. California: Sage Puclication, Inc.

- Crow, R. B., & Macintosh, E. W. (2009). Conceptualizing a meaningful definition of hazing in sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*.
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/16184740903331937>.
- Gendron, M., & Frenette, E. (2016). Peer aggression in soccer (football) in Quebec among U12 to U18 elite players of sport study programs: Differences according to age and player's role. In *Staps*. <https://doi.org/10.3917/sta.112.0049>.
- Gumelar, Moch Insan. (2022). Pengaruh Intimidasi fisik dan verbal terhadap motivasi atlet. *Thesis S2*. Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. repository.upi.edu.
- Hufon, Muhammad. (2023). Macam-macam kekerasan berdasarkan bentuk dan pelakunya. *Educational Article*. <https://tirto.id/gBGs>.
- Kowalski, R. M., et al. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073– 1137.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035618>
- Latif Muslim, F., Supriatna, E., & Indriani Putri Utami, R. (2018). *Menemukan pemerolehan bahasa kasar pada anak usia 4 tahun di kampung Cihanjawa Purwakarta*.
- Losey, B (2011). *Intimidation, suicide, and homicide: understanding, assessing, and preventing threats to self and others for victims of intimidation*. Routledge.
- Khatimah, H & Sai'dah, N. (2003). *Revisi politik perempuan*. Jakarta: PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Kurniawan, Eka. (2002). *Beauty is a wound*. Melbourne: The Text Publishing Company.
- Mishna, F., Scarcello, I., Pepler, D., & Wiener, J. (2005). Teachers' understanding of bullying. *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue Canadienne De l'éducation*, 28(4), 718-738. Retrieved from <https://journals.sfu.ca/cje/index.php/cje-rce/article/view/2874>.
- Moleong, Lexy J. (2014). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Shields, E. W. (1999). Intimidation and violence by males in high school athletics. *Adolescence*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=investigation+of+teachers+verbal+and+non-verbal+&pg=1853&id=EJ610951>.
- Stanton, Robert (2012). *Teori fiksi*. Yogyakarta. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Sugihastuti and Setiawan, I. H. (2010). *Gender dan inferioritas perempuan: Praktik kritik sastra feminis*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Tuaksikal, Muhammad Abduh. (2010). Dosa mengolok-olok ajaran nabi. Sumber: <https://rumaysho.com/839-dosa-mengolok-olok-ajaran-nabi.html>.
- Wellek, R. & Warren, A. (1995). *Teori kesusastraan*. Jakarta: Gramedia.
- Zakiah, e. Z., humaedi, s., & santoso, m. B. (2017). Faktor yang mempengaruhi remaja dalam melakukan bullying. *Prosiding Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*. <https://doi.org/10.24198/jppm.v4i2.14352>.
- _____. *Threat*. Oxford English Dictionary (Online ed.). Oxford University Press.
- _____. *Threat of Harm Law and Legal Definition*. USLegal. <http://definitions.uslegal.com/t/threat-of-harm/>

A Sociological Analysis of Child Abuse and Psychological Trauma in Colleen Hoover's *Hopeless*

¹Nadya Ramadani, ²Purwarno Purwarno

Faculty of Literature, ^{1,2}Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: nadyaramadani20@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: March 12, 2026 Accepted: April 24, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This study examines the representation of child abuse in <i>Hopeless</i> by Colleen Hoover, focusing on the experiences of the protagonist, Sky Davis, also known as Hope. It aims to identify the forms of child abuse depicted in the novel and to analyze their psychological effects on the main character. In this research, child abuse is defined as any form of maltreatment inflicted upon a child, including physical and emotional abuse, educational and medical neglect, and sexual violence. Using a qualitative research design, the data were collected from relevant quotations and significant narrative events in the novel. The analysis is based on the theoretical frameworks of child abuse proposed by Siswanto (2007) and Shackelford (2021). The findings reveal that Sky is a victim of sexual abuse committed by her biological father during her childhood. This traumatic experience leaves profound and lasting psychological scars, significantly influencing her emotional and behavioral development. As a result, Sky exhibits symptoms of phobia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and aggressive behavioral tendencies. Ultimately, the novel vividly portrays the devastating long-term impact of child abuse on an individual's mental health, personal identity, and capacity to form healthy interpersonal relationships.
Keywords: <i>phobia</i> <i>post-traumatic stress disorder</i> <i>sexual abuse</i> <i>types of child abuse</i>	
Corresponding Author: Nadya Ramadani Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia E-mail: nadyaramadani20@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

A child is present as a gift and a mandate that in the future every parent will be held accountable for their attitude and behavior while in the world. Therefore, they must be cared for, treated for, educated, and guided properly by both parents and family. Children are also human resources and invaluable wealth because she/he are the forerunners of the nation's next generation. The better the child's personality and behavior, the better the life of the nation in the future.

From an Islamic perspective, children are weak but noble creatures, whose existence is the authority of the will of Allah SWT through creation. Children are given to husband and wife to be cared for and treated humanely as if they were given a living both physically and spiritually. Thus, they will grow into children with noble characters who can be responsible for achieving their needs in the future. However, families and homes that are considered the safest places for children can also become places of violence. Parents are not always able to look after and care for children properly. They can hurt or abuse their children.

Child abuse is any treatment of children that poses a threat to the child's growth and development and well-being, either in the form of physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect. Research conducted by the World Health Organization (2020) states that around one billion children worldwide experience violence every year. Half of the total child population in the world or around one billion children experience physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, injuries, becoming disabled, and 1 2 dying. Kementerian

Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection) (2020) states that there were 11,952 cases of violence against children throughout 2020 and the majority were sexual abuse. Various examples have often been shown through the mass media. Other examples of child abuse are a toddler who was abused by his mother's boyfriend in Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi, and a three-year-old toddler who was abused by his adoptive parents in Blitar, East Java, and news of child abuse named Angeline who was tortured by her adoptive mother, Margariet Megawe. Abuses in early childhood are not always easy to recognize. Children who experience abuse are often afraid to reveal what has happened to them. As a result, there is a feeling of fear of being blamed or distrustful of the people around. Therefore, the abuser usually continues to commit violence because there is no resistance from the victim. To prevent violence against children, laws, and regulations have been implemented.

According to the Undang-Undang Dasar 1945, Pasal 34 (1945 Constitution, Article 34), the poor and neglected children are cared for by the state. The article 34 explains that children are legal subjects who must be protected, cared for, and fostered so that the child's welfare is achieved. The Novel *Hopeless* by Colleen Hoover is a novel that tells about a girl named Sky. She is a seventeen-year-old girl who lives with her overprotective mother, Karen. Sky is honest, loving, loyal, and devoted to her mother because she complies with all the restrictions imposed by her mother. However, surprisingly Sky finds out that she is adopted by her aunt named Karen, and is formerly called Hope. Karen adopts and takes Sky from her father when she is seven years old from. As a child, Sky experiences various kinds of abuse, such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuses by her father. ³ Two reasons make the researcher want to discuss the novel *Hopeless* by Colleen Hoover. First, the storyline is interesting and contains plot twists at the end of the story. This novel is about a unique and heartbreaking love between two people. It can also make readers feel a series of emotions such as laughing, crying, and feeling the meaning of love. Second, the theme in the novel, namely child abuse grabs the researcher's interest since the researcher feels concerned about the condition of children lately. They are often abused and tortured. Therefore, the researcher wants to discuss this topic as an educational material for writers and readers.

This research identifies the types of child abuse and their effects as depicted in the novel *Hopeless* by Colleen Hoover. The study is expected to be beneficial both practically and theoretically for various stakeholders. For researchers, this study contributes to the development of knowledge, particularly in the area of child abuse analysis within literary works.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociology of Literature

Damono (2002: 8-9) states that sociology is an objective and scientific study of humans in society; the study of institutions and social processes. Ratna (2011: 2) states that the sociology of literature is an understanding of literary works by considering the social aspects contained in them. Suwardi (2011: 6-7) views sociology as a valley that can lead literary researchers to freely understand literature from a social perspective. Sociology and literature complement each other when both of them want to understand humans. Humans as social beings can be understood from the side of sociology and literature. Of course, sociology tends toward real human social life. As for literature, human life has been imagined. Literature sometimes hides the facts of humanity. He continued that sociology and literature both deal with humans in society and human efforts to adapt. From this view, it seems that literature will not be separated from social problems. The difference that exists between the two is that sociology carries out an objective scientific analysis, while literature infiltrates the surface of social life and shows how humans live in society and their feelings.

Through the explanation above, it can be interpreted that sociology and literature cannot be separated because they both study the human condition and the role of humans in society. Literature deals with the surface of social life and shows how humans experience society and their feelings, while sociology carries out an objective scientific analysis.

The sociology of literature is an interdisciplinary science, which pays attention to aesthetic facts and human facts. Literature as an aesthetic fact will reveal the ins and outs of human life. Human life itself is packaged in a fictional context. It is the interweaving of literature and human beings that often draws an understanding of the sociology of literature. The sociology of literature as a method that understands humans through imaginative facts requires a solid paradigm (Suwardi, 2011: 6-7). To reveal literary works in terms of sociological aspects, Wellek and Warren (1989: 111) put forward three types of approaches, namely (1) author's sociology which is concerned with social status, social ideology, and others concerning the author as a producer of literary works, (2) the sociology of literary works which is concerned with the literary work itself, and (3) the sociology of literature which is concerned with readers and the influence of the sociology of literature on society. Furthermore, Ian Watt (in Goldmann, 1981) suggests three kinds of approaches to the sociology of literature, namely (1) the author's social context, (2) literature as a mirror of society, and (3) what society the author aims at.

2.2 Child

In the Kamus Umum Bahasa Indonesia, etymologically, a child is defined as a small or immature human being. According to the Islamic view, children are entrusted by Allah SWT to both parents, the community, the nation, and the state which will prosper the world as rahmatan lil'alam and as heirs to Islamic teachings. This understanding implies that every child who is born must be 7 recognized, approved, and secured as the implementation of practices accepted by parents, society, nation, and state (Syarifuddin, 2006: 44). According to Koesna (2005: 113), children are young people at a young age in spirit and in their life journey, because they are easily influenced by their surroundings.

Hasibuan (2004: 78) states that children are the future of a nation, therefore they need to be fostered and protected so that later these children grow to become high-quality human development. The position of children in the legal environment as legal subjects is determined by the legal system for children as a group of people who have legal status and are classified as incapacitated or underage. One way of guidance and protection is with the law. According to Pasal 1 butir 5 Undang-Undang No. 39, the year 1999 concerning Human Rights are as follows: a child is every human being under the age of 18 (eighteen) years and is not married, including children who are still in the womb if this is in his interests. In Indonesia, the law has guaranteed the fulfillment of children's rights, although in reality cases of child abuse are still quite high. Among the rights of children contained in the Undang Undang Perlindungan Anak no. 23, the year 2002 include the right to play, recreation, participation, contact with parents if separated, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, life with parents, survival, growth. Children also have the right to get a name, identity, citizenship, education, child-friendly information, the highest health standards, and a decent standard of living. In addition, children have the right to get personal protection, to get protection from arbitrary actions or arrests, to get protection from cruel treatment, punishment, and inhumane treatment, to get protection from physical and non-physical torture, and several other rights.

Based on the explanation regarding children, it can be implied that children are human beings who come from male and female partners. It is said that they are still children if they are under eighteen years of age and are not married. As the next generation of the nation,

children must be protected. Therefore, the government and the state apply several laws that can safeguard their welfare and rights.

2.3 Child Abuse

2.3.1 Definitions of Child Abuse

Huraerah (2006: 36) defines abuse as improper behavior intended to cause physical, emotional, or financial harm to an individual or group. Shackelfords (2021: 1043) continues that abuse is aggression that is broadly defined as behavior that causes harm, injury, or pain to others through physical, verbal, or indirect means. Child abuse or child maltreatment is a term commonly used to refer to violence against children. According to Soetjningsih (1995: 156), child abuse is the wrong treatment of physical and emotional children, neglect of education and health, and the occurrence of sexual violence in children. He continued that child abuse is defined as an intentional act that can cause harm or harm to children physically or emotionally. The term child abuse can cover a wide range of behavior, from acts of direct physical threat by parents or other adults to neglect of a child's basic needs.

Shackelfords (2021: 1043) says that child abuse is defined as aggression or neglect towards a minor (usually by an older individual, for example, parent/trustee, caregiver, or family member) that harms or jeopardizes the child's well-being. Child abuse can occur in various ways such as physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual abuse. Power differences in child abuse are generally implied in the age difference between perpetrators (adults) and victims (children) whereby older perpetrators wield more power and control than victims. Huraerah (2006: 36) defines that child abuse as an act of repeatedly physically and emotionally harming a child who is dependent, through compulsion, uncontrollable corporal punishment, degradation, and permanent ridicule or sexual violence, usually carried out by parents or other parties who should care for the child. Suyanto and Sanituti (2002: 96) acts of abuse against children are any actions that have physical and psychological impacts, which cause traumatic injuries to children, both those that can be seen with the naked eye or seen from the consequences of the physical well-being and mental-psychological development of children.

Acts of abuse against children not only cause children to experience physical injuries which can be healed in a matter of days through medical treatment but often the abuse also result in traumatic injuries that are not impossible to remember until they are adults. Acts of abuse experienced by children are treatments that always have long-term impacts and become a nightmare that never goes away from the minds of children who are victims. Based on the explanations from experts regarding child abuse above, it can be concluded that child abuse is a series of violence perpetrated by adults who are more mature towards children. This abuse can be physical, verbal, emotional, or neglect and this can have bad consequences for children, both in the short and long term.

2.3.2 Causes of Child Abuse

According to Fatimah in Suyanto and Sanituti (2002: 33), six conditions are driving factors or causes of violence against children. They are:

1. **Economic Problems:** Poverty often brings families into situations of disappointment that can lead to violence. Financial problems or economic limitations can create all kinds of problems in terms of meeting daily needs, education, health, buying clothes, and paying house rent. Everything can relatively affect the soul and the pressure that often ends up being placed on the child.
2. **Family Problem:** Refers to the family, especially the relationship between less harmonious parents. A father will be able to commit violence against his children solely as an outlet or as an effort to release his annoyance and anger toward his wife.

3. Divorce: it can cause domestic problems such as issues of child maintenance rights, giving affection, providing maintenance, and so on. The consequences of divorce will also be felt by children, especially when their parents remarry and the child has to be taken care of by stepmother and stepfather.
4. Birth of Children Outside of Marriage: Births outside of marriage creates problems between the parents of the child and the family of the couple. As a result, children will receive a lot of unfavorable treatment such as children feel excluded, having to accept discriminatory treatment, being excluded by the family, and having to accept unfair behavior and other forms of violence.
5. Psychiatric Problems: Parents who commit acts of violence or abuse against children are those who have psychological problems. They are always in a situation of anxiety and stress or depression. Typologically, the psychological characteristics that characterize the situation include feelings of inferiority, expectations for unrealistic children, expectations that are contrary to their conditions, and a lack of knowledge about how to raise good children.
6. Educational Problems. Not having adequate religious education or knowledge. Through the points regarding the causes of child abuse, it can be concluded that it can occur due to problems that occur in the family and parents who play the most important role as a cause of abuse against children

2.3.3 Types of Child Abuse

Child abuse can be divided into several categories, namely physical, emotional, neglect, or sexual. According to Shackelford (2021: 1044), child abuse can take many forms which include physical (for example, hitting, punching), verbal (for example, demeaning, hurtful comments), emotional/psychological (e.g humiliation), neglect (e.g malnutrition), and sexual abuse (e.g rape). Siswanto (2007: 124-125) divides child abuse into four categories, namely:

1. Physical Abuse Physical abuse is when a child experiences a punch, slap, bite, burning, or other physical violence. Like other forms of abuse, physical abuse usually lasts a long time. Or actions are taken to physically hurt a child such as: hitting, kicking, throwing, biting, rocking, hitting with an object, lighting the child's body with cigarettes, or matches, dousing the child with hot water, tying him up, not giving him food that is suitable for children and so on.
2. Sexual Abuse Sexual Abuse is when children are included in sexual situations with adults or older children. Sometimes this means direct sexual contact such as intercourse, touching, or other genital contact. But it can also mean that children are made to see sexual acts, see adult genitalia, view pornography, or be part of the production of pornography. Children are usually not forced into sexual situations, instead, they are cajoled, bribed, tricked, or coerced. Or actions involving sexual matters, such as kissing or touching the child's genitals, ordering the child to touch other people's genitals, having intercourse with the child, showing the child's genitals, forcing the child to undress, forcing the child to have sex with other people, making children pornographic objects like on the internet or videos, telling dirty stories to children.
3. Emotional Abuse Emotional abuse is when a child is regularly threatened, shouted at, humiliated, ignored, blamed, or other emotionally mishandled, such as making a child funny and ridiculed, calling names with inappropriate names, and always being looked for. the mistake. Or it happens when adults ignore, terrorize, blame, belittle, and so on which makes children feel inconsistent and worthless. The treatment of humiliating, berating, cursing, and calling negative names is done continuously so that the child feels

that he is what is said to him. Children who are constantly scolded feel that they are useless and think that they are bad.

4. Neglect Neglect (ignored/neglected) is when the basic needs of children are not met. These needs include the need for nutritious food, adequate shelter, clothing, cleanliness, emotional support, love and affection, education, and security. Or actions related to child development problems, such as not pleasing the house and giving proper clothes, locking the child in the room or bathroom, leaving the child for long periods, and placing the child in a situation that endangers him. If parents cannot meet their needs both in terms of physical, psychological, or emotional needs, not giving attention and the means to develop is an act of neglect.

Soetjiningsih (2004: 257) mentions the points included in child neglect namely: 1. Neglect to seek health care, for example, denying the existence of a serious illness in a child. 2. Neglect for safety, e.g. injuries resulting from a lack of supervision and a hazardous home situation. 3. Emotional neglect, namely not paying attention to children, and refusing the presence of children. 4. Abandonment of education. Children do not get an education according to their age, do not take children to educational facilities, or older children to earn a living for the family so they are forced to drop out of school. 5. Physical neglect, i.e. when the child's needs for food, clothing, or proper housing are not met to obtain optimal growth and development facilities.

2.3.4 Effects of Child Abuse

Shackelfords (2021: 1045) mentions several effects of child abuse namely: 1. High risk of experiencing mood and anxiety disorders such as bipolar disorder, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder. 2. Higher risk of experiencing behavioral and emotional problems such as emotional instability, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, and tendencies to be aggressive. 3. May alter future stress response (e.g., increased sensitivity). Children who have been abused or neglected (especially children who were physically abused) are more likely to have a record of arrest for delinquency and crime as teenagers and adults. 4. At a higher risk of being hurt by intimate partner violence in adulthood, abandoned children are more likely to become perpetrators of intimate partner violence in adulthood. 5. Early trauma can affect neurological and physiological functions. Adults who were emotionally abused as children show different brain activity (e.g., more amygdala activity and less right dorsolateral prefrontal activity) when looking at faces expressing fear or anger.

Child abuse has also been consistently associated with long-term difficulties in cognitive and social development. Victims often exhibit impairments in attention, memory, and learning processes, which can negatively affect their academic performance and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, children who experience abuse may struggle to develop trust and secure attachments, leading to social withdrawal or maladaptive relationship patterns in later life. According to Dante Cicchetti and Fred A. Rogosch (2001), early maltreatment disrupts normative developmental pathways, particularly in emotional regulation and social competence, increasing the likelihood of long-term psychological maladjustment.

Furthermore, the intergenerational impact of child abuse highlights how trauma can extend beyond the individual to affect future family systems. Individuals who have experienced abuse in childhood may be at greater risk of perpetuating cycles of violence, either as victims or perpetrators, due to unresolved trauma and learned behavioral patterns. This phenomenon is supported by Cathy Spatz Widom (1989), whose research demonstrates a significant correlation between childhood victimization and later involvement in violent or criminal behavior. Therefore, understanding the long-term and cyclical consequences of child abuse is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the depiction of child abuse in the novel *Hopeless* by Colleen Hoover. Qualitative research is utilized to explore and understand the phenomena experienced by the characters and to generate descriptive data in the form of words, narratives, and textual interpretations. According to Lexy J. Moleong (2017), qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspectives and produces descriptive data in written or spoken form.

The primary data of this study are derived from the novel, which consists of 408 pages and was published in 2012 by Simon & Schuster. Meanwhile, the secondary data are collected from relevant books, scholarly journals, articles, and credible online sources that support the analysis. The data collection process involves several steps, including close reading of the novel, identifying and marking relevant quotations, note-taking, and classifying the data based on the theories of child abuse proposed by Siswanto (2007) and Todd K. Shackelford (2021).

The collected data are analyzed using a descriptive interpretative approach. This analysis involves interpreting the selected quotations to identify the types of child abuse and examining their psychological effects on the main character. As noted by John W. Creswell (2014), qualitative data analysis focuses on interpreting the meaning of textual data to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon. Through this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how child abuse is represented and its psychological impact as portrayed in the novel.

4. Discussion

4.1 Analysis

This chapter discusses the child abuse experienced by the protagonist, namely Linden Sky Davis or Hope in the novel *Hopeless* by Colleen Hoover. Then, the researcher focuses on discussing the types and effects of child abuse experienced by Sky. There is only one type of child abuse found in the novel, namely sexual abuse, and the effects experienced from sexual abuse include phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, and tendencies to be aggressive. The types and the effects of child abuse experienced by Sky are analyzed in the following sub-chapters.

4.1.1 The Types of Child Abuse

Siswanto (2007: 124-125) divides child abuse into physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. These types are all types of violence perpetrated by adults against children. Then, in the novel *Hopeless*, the study identifies only one type of child abuse experienced by Sky, namely sexual abuse. This type is discussed and proven through the subsection below.

4.1.1.1 Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is sexual mistreatment where children are included in sexual situations with adults or older children (Siswanto, 2007: 124). Forms of sexual violence against children are all actions that include harassment and violence against minors. It can take various forms, such as making physical contact (holding or touching), showing genitals to minors, having sexual intercourse with children, masturbating in front of children, having obscene conversations, and producing or distributing indecent films or images to minors. Of all the forms described, the sexual abuse contained in this novel *Hopeless* is having intimate relations with children.

I try to count them, but I keep stopping at number five. I can't remember what number comes after five, so I have to start over. I have to count the

stars over and over and only five at a time because I don't want to feel my daddy right now. I don't want to feel him or smell him or hear him and I have to count them and count them and count them and count them until I don't feel him or hear him or smell him anymore. Then when my daddy finally stops making me thank him, he pulls my light gown back down and whispers, "Goodnight Princess." I roll over and pull the covers over my head and squeeze my eyes shut and I try not to cry again but I do. I cry like I do every time daddy brings me a present at night. I hate getting presents (Hoover, 2012: 255).

The quotation above illustrates the act of sexual abuse committed by John to Sky. John is Sky's biological father. Her father visits her in her room every night to have sex. Sky loves gifts, so whenever her father buys gifts for her, he asks her to thank him by serving him. Little Sky cannot go against her father's will. Therefore, she just accepts everything done by John. To divert her pain, little Sky starts counting the stars, she keeps repeating the count because she only knows up to five. She hates feeling and smelling his father's body. Every time that incident happens, Sky cries, because that is all she can do. From the quotation and explanation above, it can be concluded that Sky is sexually abused by her father. The sexual abuse experienced by Sky can also be seen in the data below.

Holder adamantly shakes his head and shushes me with a quick kiss. "Don't you ever say that again. Don't you ever think that again. Your father took that first from you in an unthinkable way, but I can guarantee you that's all he took. Because you are so strong, baby. You're amazing and funny and smart and beautiful and so full of strength and courage. What he did to you doesn't take away from any of the best parts of you. You survived him once and you'll survive him again. I know you will." (Hoover, 2012: 234).

The incident in the quotation above takes place when Sky is eighteen years old and has just recalled memories of her childhood that she subconsciously forgets. Through the above information presented by Holder, Sky indeed experienced sexual abuse. Sky's father takes her virginity by having intercourse when Sky was three years old. In other words, the sexual abuse that Sky experienced is direct sexual contact, namely intercourse. Holder also understands that Sky's father's actions were criminal and depraved behavior. However, he convinces and reassures her that Sky is a strong woman who could stand strong and survive through this ordeal. The latest data to prove the sexual abuse experienced by Sky can be seen in the quotation below.

I don't verbally respond to that statement, but I have to physically refrain myself from reacting to his bullshit. He could spend the rest of his life apologizing and it would never be enough to erase even one of the nights my doorknob turned. "I want to know why you did it," I say with a shaky voice. I hate that I sound so pathetically weak right now. I sound like the little girl that used to beg him to stop. I'm not that little girl anymore and I sure as hell don't want to appear weak in front of him (Hoover, 2012: 245)

The data above shows the pain and bitterness that Sky feels when she meets her father again after thirteen years. Even though she wants to forgive him, she cannot do that. Unknowingly, her body's reaction rejects his father's presence. The word sorry and regret is not even enough to erase the memories and pain she has experienced. But the thing that distinguished her now is that Sky does not want to be afraid and looks weak again in front of

her father. That she will no longer be able to hurt and not disgust her anymore. This shows the character development experienced by Sky.

4.1.2 The Effect of Child Abuse

In Chapter II, Shackelford mentions that there are many effects of child abuse on children. However, the researcher only found three of them, including phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, and tendencies to be aggressive. Due to the lack of information conveyed by Shackelford, the researcher sought explanations through the opinions of other experts. Then, these three effects are discussed through the following subsections.

4.1.2.1 Phobias

A phobia is a form of error in interpreting (perceiving) information that is incomplete or unclear. This information is then interpreted as threatening and accompanied by a belief that the negative event or experience will recur in the future. As a result, an avoidance reaction will appear when meeting or experiencing objects that cause phobias (Purnama, 2016: 3). The response that is usually experienced by people with phobias is fear and anxiety when faced with a phobic object or situation. Based on the explanation above, the researcher concluded that Sky's phobia towards his father has indirectly made her afraid of touching the opposite sex in the future. This statement will be proven through the quotation below.

“What happened?” I ask him. I don’t understand where this is coming from. He shakes his head, his eyes full of sorrow and fear, and regret. “I don’t know. You just started counting and crying and shaking and I kept trying to get you to stop Sky. You wouldn’t stop. You were terrified. What did I do? Tell me, baby, because I’m so sorry. I am so, so sorry. What the fuck did I do?” I just shake my head because I don’t have an answer (Hoover, 2012: 177).

The above conversation takes place when Sky had yet to remember the tragic memories of her childhood. However, unconsciously, the sexual abuse that his father committed has an impact on her future love relationships. This statement can be explained when Sky trembles subconsciously when Holder wants to touch her and wants to have intercourse with her. Knowing that Sky is trembling makes Holder feel very guilty and regretful. Even though it is their wish, Sky is still afraid. This proves that the sexual abuse committed by her father left a very deep ordeal on Sky, which she can feel, even though she does not remember it. As a result, Sky is afraid to relate and make out with her partner. Not only has a phobia of men but also Sky has a phobia of her father. This can be shown through the quotation below.

Holder has a death grip on my waist again. I reach down and grip his hand with mine, just needing the reassurance that I’m not alone right now. My confidence is quickly fading with each moment being spent in my father’s presence. Everything about him, from his voice to his facial expressions to his movements, makes my stomach ache (Hoover, 2012: 244).

The meeting above occurred when Sky visits her childhood home and unexpectedly meets her father. Sky, who is sad because she just finds out about her tragic memories, gets even more scared when she meets her father, who is the source of her phobia. This is of course a reasonable response from phobic sufferers when they meet their triggers. Just meeting her father face-to-face makes Sky anxious. She starts to lose her confidence. His voice, facial expressions, and movements make Sky fear her father. Fortunately, she has

Holder who is always caring of her and by her side. Sky's phobia towards his father can also be proven through the quotation below.

I still do harbor hatred and fear for him, and he can't even touch me anymore. I still hate him and I still care to death for him and I'm still devastated that he's dead. I hate him for instilling awful things in my memory and somehow making me grieve for him in the midst of all the awful. I don't want to grieve his loss. I want to rejoice in it, but it's just not in me (Hoover, 2012: 255).

Sky's phobia continues even though her father has died. From this statement, it can be said that the harassment or abuse committed by John is an unforgettable as well as unforgivable act. Child abuse is very influential on the development and future of children. Parents should be the givers of affection, and her father who is supposed to be her protective figure has become the first person who has abused her. The pain still leaves an imprint on Sky's heart and soul. She is still afraid, resentful, and shaken by the disgusting treatment her father gave her. From the explanation above, it is clear that Sky has a phobia of her father.

4.1.2.2 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-Traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety syndrome resulting from a very painful experience after physical or emotional stress that exceeds the limits of ordinary people's endurance. The incident created fear and a sense of helplessness (Sadock, B.J & Sadock, VA, 2007). The sexual abuse experienced by Sky results in her suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. She experienced this incident when she is three to five years old. Later, she is rescued by his aunt, Karen, who also receives the same treatment from his older brother, Sky's father John. After thirteen years have passed, Sky then remembers the memory of the tragic incident that happened to her which traumatized and stressed her out. This statement will be proven through the quotation below.

I stand up and look down at the bed, holding my breath in fear of the sounds that are escalating from deep within my throat. I will not cry. I will not cry. I squeeze my eyes shut and bury my head into the bed, grabbing fistfuls of the blanket. My shoulders begin to shake as the sobs I've been trying to contain violently break out of me. With one swift movement, I stand up, scream and rip the blanket off the bed, throwing it across the room (Hoover, 2012: 06).

The data above shows Sky's emotional feelings after knowing the truth about what happened to her. Post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by Sky is an anxiety disorder resulting from the emergence of memories of traumatic events experienced as a child. Sky's response to post-traumatic stress disorder is cries and hard to control emotions and self. As a result, her feelings and behavior become out of control. She breaks into tears and throws the things she sees. This action is a normal response for someone suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, especially since Sky is traumatized by the person closest to her, her father. Emotional release is a way to fight and defend herself. Sky's post-traumatic stress disorder can also be seen in the quotation below.

Every single part of me remembers, and I would do anything just to forget. I don't want to remember how my father sounded or felt at night, but with each passing second the memories become more and more vivid, only making it harder for me to stop crying. Holder is kissing me on the side of my head, telling me again how it'll be okay, that I shouldn't worry. But he has no idea. He has no idea how much I remember and what it's doing to

my heart and my soul and my mind and my faith in humanity as a whole (Hoover, 2012: 228).

The data above explains how the trauma experienced by Sky made her stressful. Post-traumatic stress disorder can occur at any age and in any environment, including the family. The family, which is the main place of protection for a child, can also be a source of stress and fear for children. This is what Sky feels. Her father's treatment left a very deep trauma on her. The memory of this tragic event hurts her heart, soul, and mind. As a result, she loses faith in herself and others, she finds it hard to stop crying. This can also direct Sky to a more severe effect, namely depression. Further data which can prove that Sky has post-traumatic stress disorder can be explained through the following data.

I grip my knees in an attempt not to leap across the living room and strangle him. The fact that he's trying to play it off as happening one time makes me hate him even more than before, if that's even possible. He's treating it like it was an accident. Like he broke a coffee mug or had a fucking fender bender. "It was night...after night...after night," I say. I'm having to muster up every ounce of control I can find to not scream at the top of my lungs. "I was scared to go to bed and scared to wake up and scared to take a bath and scared to speak to you. I wasn't a little girl afraid of monsters in her closet or under her bed. I was terrified of the monster that was supposed to love me! You were supposed to be protecting me from the people like you!" (Hoover, 2012: 246).

Sexual abuse left a deep disturbance on Sky's mind and soul and this caused lasting trauma. People with post-traumatic stress disorder often remember the events that have traumatized them. Sufferers feel as if repeating the incident. Memories of traumatic events are also often present in nightmares so that sufferers are emotionally depressed. Sky hates and fears her father even though she is an adult now and thirteen years have passed. She also describes through her childhood memories that she is afraid to go to bed, get up, take a shower, and even be afraid to talk to her father. Instead of loving and protecting her, her father acts as a monster which traumatizes and stresses her.

4.1.2.3 Tendencies to be Aggressive

Aggression, according to social psychology, is described as any behavior or action that aims to hurt a person or animal or damage physical property. Aggression can occur as a natural response to stress, fear, or a sense of loss of control. Someone responds with aggression when they feel frustrated, mistreated, or not heard (Judy, 2022). The tendency to act aggressively generally occurs when certain triggers such as anger, disappointment, or threats occur in the environment which results in a loss of control. This behavior is also experienced by Sky after she recalls the sexual abuse committed by her father. As a result, her emotions and behavior become out of control.

"I hate you!" I cry. "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!" I'm throwing whatever I can find in front of me at whatever else I can find in front of me. Every time I open my mouth to scream, I taste the salt from the tears that are streaming down my cheeks. Holder' arms suddenly engulf me from behind and grip me so tightly that I become immobile. I jerk and toss and scream some more until my actions are no longer thought out. They're just reactions. (Hoover, 2012: 07)

The data above clearly shows Sky's aggressive behavior. This is seen when she cannot control her behavior and throws all the objects in front of her. She does not feel at ease as Holder hugs her to comfort her. Even Holder becomes the target of her anger, even though she is angry with her father. Aggressive behavior is a reaction that arises from overwhelming anger so that the perpetrator can attack someone roughly and sometimes in an unnatural way. The anger felt by Sky arises as a result of anxiety about the sexual abuse she has experienced. Sky's aggressive behavior can also be seen in the quotation below.

I ball my fists and frantically look around for something else to throw. I grab the pillows off the bed and chuck them at the reflection in the mirror of the girl I no longer know. I watch as the girl in the mirror stares back at me, sobbing pathetically. The weakness in her tears infuriates me. We begin to run toward each other until our fists collide against the glass, smashing the mirror. I watch as she falls into a million shiny pieces onto the carpet. I grip the edges of the dresser and push it sideways, letting out another scream that has been pent up for way too long. When the dresser comes to rest on its back, I rip open the drawers and throw the contents across the room, spinning and throwing and kicking at everything in my path. I grab at the sheer blue curtain panels and yank them until the rod snaps and the curtains fall around me. I reach over to the boxes piled high in the corner and, without even knowing what's inside, I take the top one and throw it against the wall with as much force as my five-foot, three-inch frame can muster (Hoover, 2012: 266).

Trauma from sexual abuse is a frightening, dangerous, and cruel event that happens to children. This trauma has wide-ranging effects on children's lives, and one of the effects is the tendency to be aggressive. Aggressive behavior can also be seen from the data above, where Sky cannot control her emotions when she learns the truth about the crimes committed by her father. The hurt she feels still exists in her sub-consciousness and becomes negative behavior and emotions. As a result, she acts impulsively and uncontrollably. Sky's impulsive behavior includes crying, screaming, punching, pushing, dumping, and throwing any items that were considered to be threats or triggers to her memories.

5. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis, this study reveals several significant findings regarding the depiction of child abuse experienced by the protagonist in the novel *Hopeless* by Colleen Hoover. The main character, Linden Sky Davis (Sky), is portrayed as a victim of sexual abuse that occurred between the ages of three and five, perpetrated by her biological father, John. At the age of five, she is removed from the abusive environment and later adopted by her aunt, Karen, an event that contributes to the gradual suppression of her early childhood memories.

As the narrative progresses, Sky's repressed memories resurface when she reaches the age of seventeen, leading to the revelation of her true identity and past traumatic experiences. This discovery evokes intense emotional responses, including sadness, anger, and a deep sense of mistrust toward her family. Furthermore, the analysis identifies eleven textual instances in the novel that explicitly depict the sexual abuse experienced by the protagonist. The findings also demonstrate that these traumatic experiences result in several psychological consequences, including phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, and aggressive behavioral tendencies. Overall, the novel provides a compelling portrayal of the long-term psychological impact of child abuse on an individual's emotional and behavioral development.

Future research may explore the representation of child abuse in other literary works to compare themes and psychological impacts across different contexts. Researchers can also

apply alternative theoretical perspectives, such as trauma theory or psychoanalysis, to gain deeper insights into the characters' experiences. In addition, further studies are encouraged to examine coping strategies and recovery processes of abuse victims in literature. Finally, interdisciplinary approaches, such as reader-response studies, may be used to investigate how readers perceive and are influenced by issues of child abuse in novels like *Hopeless* by Colleen Hoover.

References

- Cicchetti, D., & Rogosch, F. A. (2001). The impact of child maltreatment and psychopathology on neuroendocrine functioning. *Development and Psychopathology*, 13(4), 783–804.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Damono, S. D. (2002). *Petunjuk penelitian sosiologi sastra*. Jakarta: Pusat Bahasa.
- Goldmann, L. (1981). *Toward a sociology of the literary work*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Hasibuan, S. (2004). *Penerapan hukum pidana formal terhadap anak pelaku tindak pidana oleh marlina dalam bunga rampai hukum pidana dan kriminologi serta kesan pesan sahabat menyambut 70 tahun muhammad daud*. Medan: Pustaka Bangsa Press.
- Hoover, C. (2012). *Hopeless*. USA: Atria Books.
- Huraerah, A. (2006). *Kekerasan terhadap anak*. Bandung: Nuansa.
- Judy, B. (2022). Aggressive behavior: Understanding aggression and how to treat it. *Article of medical*. <https://www.healthline.com/health/aggressive-behavior>. views on June 22nd, 2022.
- Kementrian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak. (2020). *Article: Kekerasan anak masih marak terjadi, perkuat SDM penyedia layanan perlindungan anak*. <https://www.kemennppa.go.id/index.php/siaran-pers/kekerasan-anak-masih-marak-terjadi-perkuat-sdm-penyedia-layanan-perlindungan-anak%C2%A0>. Views on December 23rd, 2022.
- Koesna, R. A. (2005). *Susunan pidana dalam negara sosialis Indonesia*. Bandung: Sumur.
- Moleong, L. J. (2017). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Ratna, Nyoman Kutha. (2011). *Paradigma sosiologi sastra*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka. Pelajar.
- Sadock, B. J., Sadock, V. A. (2007). *Kaplan & Sadock's synopsis of psychiatry: Behavioral sciences / clinical psychiatry (10th Ed.)*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Shackelford, T. K. (2021). *The SAGE handbook of evolutionary psychology*. Sage Publications.
- Siswanto. (2007). *Kesehatan mental*. Yogyakarta: ANDI.
- Soetjiningsih. (1995). *Tumbuh kembang anak*. Jakarta: EGC.
- Soetjiningsih. (2004). *Tumbuh kembang remaja dan permasalahannya*. Jakarta: Sagung Seto.
- Suwardi. (2011). *Sosiologi sastra*. Bahan Kuliah Fakultas Bahasa Sastra Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta.
- Suyanto, B. & Sanituti, S. (2002). *Krisis & child abuse, (Kajian sosiologis tentang kasus pelanggaran hak anak dan anak-anak yang membutuhkan perlindungan khusus)*. Universitas Airlangga Press: Surabaya.
- Syarifuddin, A. (2006). *Hukum perkawinan islam di Indonesia antara fiqh. munakahat dan undang-undang perkawinan*. Jakarta: Kencana.
- Undang-Undang HAM Nomor 39 tahun 1999. (2006). Jakarta: Asa Mandiri. UU RI Nomor 23 Tahun 2002 Tentang Perlindungan Anak. Jakarta: Asa Mandiri.
- Wellek, R., & Austin, W. (1989). *Teori kesusastraan*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia.

Widom, C. S. (1989). *The cycle of violence*. *Science*, 244(4901), 160–166.

World Health Organization. (2021). Article: *Laporan status global tentang pencegahan kekerasan terhadap anak tahun 2020*. <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention/global-status-report-on-violence-against-children-2020>.

A Psychological Analysis of Paranoid Personality Disorder in William Shakespeare's Drama *The Winter's Tale*

Perveen Sonia Mahid¹, M. Manugeren², Hidayati³

^{1,2}Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatra Utara, Medan, Indonesia

³Fakultas Bahasa dan Komunikasi, Universitas Harapan Medan, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: yatihida853@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: April 09, 2026

Revised April 29, 2026

Accepted May, 11, 2026

Keywords:

doubt of loyalty;

grudge;

jealousy;

sensitivity to criticism

Abstract

This research analyses Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD) symptoms in King Leontes, the central character of William Shakespeare's drama *The Winter's Tale*. While previous studies have examined Shakespearean jealousy from literary perspectives, limited attention has been paid to clinical psychological analysis using established diagnostic frameworks. This study addresses that gap. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this research identifies four PPD symptoms in Leontes' behaviour: jealousy, grudge, doubting the loyalty of others, and sensitivity to criticism. The theoretical framework combines Emil Kraepelin's classification of paranoia, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of projection, and Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious. The findings demonstrate that Leontes exhibits all four symptoms. His excessive jealousy toward Queen Hermione, explosive anger, loss of trust in his closest advisors, and extreme sensitivity to criticism drive him to order Hermione's imprisonment, banish his newborn daughter Perdita, and attempt to poison his best friend Polixenes. This research contributes to both literary studies and clinical psychology by demonstrating that Shakespeare's characterization of Leontes is a realistic depiction of a personality disorder, not merely a plot device. By applying Kraepelin's, Freud's, and Jung's theories to a classical literary character, this study bridges the gap between clinical psychology and literary analysis, offering a fresh perspective on *The Winter's Tale* that moves from literary themes of "jealousy" to a clinical understanding of "psychological breakdown."

Corresponding Author:

Hidayati

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatra Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: yatihida853@gmail.com

1. Introduction

A literary work is a reflection of human social life, produced based on social reality (Goldmann, 1981). Literature revolves around the author, social context, and era; these three components then produce literary works. Literary works are closely related to social life, forming civilization, changing the political system, and exposing social injustice (Ratna, 2013). Every problem in a literary work cannot be separated from the behaviour of the characters involved. This gives birth to the psychology of literature, a study used to understand literary works, authors, and readers by using the theoretical framework of psychology (Santos, Santos, & Santos, 2018).

Psychology and literature have a close relationship. Psychology studies human thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, while literature provides an overview of human psychological reality (Cakirtas, 2019). Psychology of literature provides a deeper understanding of literary works, not only in terms of aesthetics and meaning, but also in terms of psychological elements (Dong, 2021).

In this research, psychology of literature is used to study symptoms of Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD) in William Shakespeare's drama *The Winter's Tale*. PPD is a mental disorder characterized by excessive suspicion, fear, jealousy, rigid thinking patterns, and difficulty trusting others (Spytska, 2023). The drama tells the story of King Leontes of Sicily, who becomes obsessed with the idea that his wife Hermione is having an affair with his best friend Polixenes. Leontes orders Hermione to be imprisoned and his newborn daughter Perdita thrown into the sea. He also attempts to poison Polixenes, but fails because Camillo, who is ordered to kill Polixenes, knows that Polixenes and Hermione are innocent (Shakespeare, 2013; Beloufa, 2021). Here it is clear that Leontes experiences symptoms of PPD.

Through a psychology of literature approach, an understanding can be gained of how PPD influences a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. Although Leontes is not a real character, this drama can provide insight into how PPD manifests in real life (Lewis & Ridenour, 2020).

The main theory of PPD symptoms in this research is obtained from Emil Kraepelin (1856-1916), who first described paranoia as a separate mental disorder (Bruckner, 2023). This theory is supported by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who saw paranoia as an unconscious self-defense mechanism through projection (Freud, 2014), and Carl Jung (1875-1961), who developed the "paranoia complex" theory linking paranoia to the collective unconscious (Storr & Beebe, 2013).

While literary critics have long recognized Leontes' jealousy as a dramatic device, the clinical psychological nature of his behaviour remains underexplored. The research problem is the insufficient examination of Leontes' behaviour through established clinical frameworks of PPD. Previous studies have discussed Shakespearean jealousy from moral or thematic perspectives, but limited attention has been paid to diagnosing Leontes' symptoms using the theories of Kraepelin, Freud, and Jung collectively.

This study differs from previous research by applying a triadic theoretical framework—combining Kraepelin's classification of paranoia, Freud's psychoanalytic theory of projection, and Jung's concept of the collective unconscious—to a classical Elizabethan character. Unlike studies that treat Leontes' jealousy as a plot device (Beloufa, 2021; Lewis & Ridenour, 2020), this research argues that his behaviour is a realistic depiction of PPD with identifiable clinical symptoms.

Accordingly, this research pursues three objectives: (1) to identify symptoms of Paranoid Personality Disorder in Leontes' character, (2) to analyse how these symptoms manifest through his dialogue and actions, and (3) to demonstrate that Shakespeare's characterization is clinically realistic rather than merely symbolic.

To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What symptoms of Paranoid Personality Disorder are found in King Leontes' character in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*?
2. How do these symptoms manifest through Leontes' dialogue, actions, and interactions with other characters?

The novelty of this study lies in its systematic application of three complementary psychological theories—Kraepelin, Freud, and Jung—to a single literary character. While previous research has explored paranoia in contemporary literature (Hariharasudan & Kot, 2020) and PPD in film (Restalian, Sari, & Dwigustini, 2023), no study has applied this triadic framework to Shakespeare's Leontes.

This research contributes to both literary studies and clinical psychology. For literary scholarship, it offers a fresh interpretive lens that moves beyond thematic analysis to clinical diagnosis. For psychology, it demonstrates how classical literature can provide rich case studies of personality disorders, bridging the gap between humanities and clinical science.

2. Literature Review

Shakespeare's drama *The Winter's Tale* has fascinated the audience for centuries with its complex story and compelling characters. One of the most interesting characters is Leontes, King of Sicily, who undergoes a dramatic transformation from a loving husband to a jealous and cruel king. Leontes' behavior has long attracted the attention of critics and scholars, who have offered various interpretations to explain his drastic change. Based on the storylines of the drama, Leontes has double roles as a protagonist and an antagonist. The protagonist acts as the main character who has a good character; his attitude always has a positive or helpful side; on the other hand, the antagonist generally becomes the source of conflict in the storyline (Benner & Royle, 2023).

This research aims to explore the argument that Leontes suffers from symptoms of Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD), a mental disorder characterized by excessive jealousy, fear, and suspicion. To support this argument, the research is conducted through a comprehensive literature review of the works of Emil Kraepelin, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung, three important figures in the history of psychology who have made significant contributions to the understanding of PPD.

The literature review begins with a discussion of the psychology of literature and continues with the concept of PPD as defined by Kraepelin, a pioneer in the modern classification of mental illnesses. Then, the research explores Freud's psychoanalytic theory, explaining how childhood experiences and internal conflicts influence an individual's behavior and thinking. Freud's theory is also used to perceive how Leontes' jealousy and fear are related to the development of his PPD. Additionally, Jung's analytical psychology theory is discussed, focusing on the concept of the collective unconscious to understand how Leontes' fears and anxieties link to universal archetypes and symbols. It is hoped that the literature review provides a strong theoretical basis for the analysis of Leontes' character and supports the argument that he may have suffered from PPD.

2.1 Psychology of Literature

Psychology of literature does not only focus on individuals but also examines how society's norms, values, and beliefs are reflected in the story and influence the characters' behavior. Aras (2015) and Cakirtas (2019) emphasize that this approach allows for a deeper understanding of the "human condition" by treating literary characters as if they were real individuals with consistent psychological patterns. The symbols that appear in literary works, such as dreams, metaphors, and allegories, can be interpreted as manifestations of hidden inner drives and conflicts. A deep understanding of character psychology provides information for various fields, such as education, therapy, and literary criticism.

In *The Winter's Tale*, the psychological approach offers a unique lens to uncover the mystery behind Leontes' character. By combining psychological theory and literary analysis, one can identify the possibility that Leontes suffered from symptoms of PPD, including excessive jealousy, irrational fear of betrayal, and deep suspicion. Symbols scattered throughout the drama, such as crowns, statues, and clothing, can be interpreted as

manifestations of his anxiety and fear. This approach moves beyond mere plot summary to a structural analysis of the mind of the King.

2.2 Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD)

Paranoid Personality Disorder is a chronic mental health condition characterized by a pervasive pattern of distrust and suspicion towards others. As noted by Morgan and Zimmerman (2018), individuals with PPD are often convinced that others are deceiving, harming, or exploiting them, even when there is no evidence to support these claims. This suspicion is not a temporary state but a stable part of their personality that affects all aspects of their lives, particularly their intimate relationships.

Common symptoms of PPD include a reluctance to confide in others due to an unwarranted fear that the information will be used maliciously against them. Sufferers are also hypersensitive to perceived slights or insults, often bearing grudges for long periods. Recent research by Spytska (2023) confirms that individuals with PPD exhibit rigid thinking patterns, chronic jealousy, and an inability to trust even those closest to them, often leading to complete social isolation and destructive behavior.

2.2.1 Perspective of Emil Kraepelin (1856-1916)

Emil Kraepelin, often cited as the father of modern psychiatry, played a pivotal role in classifying mental disorders. Kraepelin (1916) introduced the concept of paranoia as a condition characterized by the development of a persistent, unshakable, and logically structured delusional system. Unlike other forms of psychosis where the individual might suffer from hallucinations, Kraepelin observed that paranoid individuals remain clear-headed and orderly in their thinking, except for their specific delusions.

Kraepelin's theory highlights that the paranoid individual perceives themselves as the center of a hostile world. For Leontes, this manifests as a belief that his court is conspiring against him. Kraepelin's observations on "paraphrenia" and "dementia praecox" helped distinguish PPD as a personality-based disorder where the sufferer's ego remains intact but is guided by a distorted perception of reality. Leontes fits this description perfectly; he is a functioning king who manages his state but is completely consumed by a singular, unfounded delusion regarding his wife's fidelity.

2.2.2 Perspective of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory offers a deeper look into the origin of such delusions. Freud argued that paranoia is a defense mechanism against repressed impulses. According to Freud, the individual uses "projection" to deal with internal anxieties that are too painful to acknowledge. Instead of saying "I have an internal fear or impulse," the individual projects it onto another, saying "He or she is the one who is doing something wrong."

Freud specifically linked paranoia to unresolved fixations in early childhood development, particularly the anal phase. During this phase, if a child experiences a struggle for control with their caregivers, they may develop a lifelong preoccupation with power and fear of betrayal. For Leontes, his sudden jealousy can be viewed through Freud's lens as a projection of his own hidden insecurities or anxieties about his role as a king and husband. His need for total control over Hermione is a manifestation of this deep-seated fear of losing power and being humiliated.

2.2.3 Perspective of Carl Jung (1875-1961)

Carl Jung expanded the understanding of paranoia by looking at the "collective unconscious" and the concept of the "Shadow." Jung (1961) believed that every individual has

a shadow side, a collection of repressed desires, fears, and traits that the conscious ego refuses to recognize. In a healthy individual, the shadow is integrated into the personality. However, in a paranoid individual, the shadow is completely repressed and then projected onto others.

Leontes sees Polixenes and Hermione not as they are, but as embodiments of his own repressed shadow. His fears are linked to universal archetypes of betrayal and the "fallen queen." Jung's theory suggests that Leontes' anxiety is not just personal but reflects a deeper, archetypal struggle between trust and suspicion. The "Fusion of Horizons," a concept often discussed in hermeneutics, fails to occur for Leontes because his ego is trapped in its own shadow projection, preventing him from seeing the truth of his wife's innocence until it is too late.

2.3 Review of Previous Research

Several recent international studies have investigated mental disorders in literary and cinematic texts. Hariharasudan and Kot (2020) examined the paradigm of postmodern paranoia in Preeti Shenoy's novels, focusing on how technology and social environments fuel paranoia in contemporary settings. Using Freudian and Jungian frameworks, they found that modern paranoia is often driven by fear of systemic control, which differs significantly from the personal and relational paranoia seen in Shakespeare's characters.

Restalian, Sari, and Dwigustini (2023) analysed the mental illness of the character Ella in the film *Daddy's Perfect Little Girl*. Using a qualitative descriptive method, they identified symptoms of PPD and antisocial personality disorder in the protagonist. Their research highlights how trauma and the loss of a maternal figure can trigger a total breakdown of trust. While their methodology is similar to this research, the contemporary film setting provides a different contextual framework than classical drama.

Bruckner (2023) recently revisited Emil Kraepelin's contribution to the history of psychiatry, confirming that Kraepelin's classification of paranoia remains influential in contemporary diagnostic systems. Lewis and Ridenour (2020) provided a comprehensive overview of PPD in the *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, emphasizing that PPD sufferers often display "jealousy, grudges, and doubting the loyalty of others"—symptoms directly observable in Leontes' behaviour.

Spytska (2023), in a recent study on paranoid personality types, confirmed that individuals with PPD exhibit "rigid thinking patterns, chronic jealousy, and an inability to trust even those closest to them," often leading to complete social isolation and destructive behavior. This finding directly supports the analysis of Leontes, whose irrational suspicion isolates him from his wife, best friend, and entire court.

Despite the richness of these studies, a significant gap remains. No recent research has systematically applied the triadic framework of Kraepelin, Freud, and Jung to analyse Leontes' character in *The Winter's Tale*. Previous studies on Shakespearean jealousy have predominantly focused on literary themes of betrayal and forgiveness (Beloufa, 2021; Green, 2020), rather than clinical psychological diagnosis. Similarly, studies on PPD in literature (Hariharasudan & Kot, 2020; Restalian et al., 2023) have focused on contemporary texts rather than classical Elizabethan drama.

This study addresses this gap by applying the clinical frameworks of Kraepelin, Freud, and Jung to Shakespeare's Leontes. Unlike previous research that treats Leontes' jealousy as a plot device or a moral failing, this study argues that his behaviour is a realistic depiction of PPD with identifiable clinical symptoms. By bridging classical literature and clinical psychology, this research offers a fresh interpretive lens that moves thematic analysis of "jealousy" toward clinical understanding of "psychological breakdown."

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a psychology of literature approach. Qualitative research is designed to understand and describe phenomena in depth and comprehensively, focusing on the meaning and experiences of individuals or groups (Creswell, 2014). This approach is particularly suitable for analysing literary characters because it allows the researcher to treat characters as if they were real individuals with consistent psychological patterns.

The psychology of literature approach is the most suitable method for this study for three reasons. First, it enables the analysis of Leontes' behaviour through established clinical frameworks (Kraepelin, Freud, Jung) while remaining grounded in textual evidence. Second, it allows the researcher to interpret symbolic elements in the drama—such as Leontes' sudden jealousy, his aggressive language, and his refusal to accept evidence—as manifestations of underlying psychological disorders. Third, unlike quantitative methods that require measurable data, this qualitative approach is appropriate for analysing dialogue, monologue, and narrative description in a literary text. The research design focuses on describing Leontes' psychological condition, interpreting his behaviour through PPD symptoms, and drawing conclusions about the clinical realism of Shakespeare's characterization.

3.2 Data Source and Data

The primary data source for this study is the drama written by William Shakespeare entitled *The Winter's Tale*. Written around 1603-1604, this work is classified as a tragicomedy that masterfully combines elements of tragedy, such as intense loss, with the comedic elements of redemption and magic. The drama is structured into five acts and ten scenes, providing a rich timeline for analyzing character development. The data for this research are obtained directly from the drama's text, specifically focusing on the character Leontes. The analysis targets textual evidence of symptoms related to Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD), including chronic jealousy, the holding of deep-seated grudges, a persistent doubting of the loyalty of his entourage, and an extreme sensitivity to any form of criticism.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process follows a rigorous documentation technique, involving several comprehensive and layered readings of the play. This procedure is not merely about collecting facts but is a planned process to explore the motivations and perceptions of the characters.

The data collection proceeded through four systematic stages:

Stage 1: Initial Holistic Reading. The researcher read the entire drama once to achieve holistic familiarity with the plot, characters, and major themes, recording initial observations about Leontes' behavior, particularly moments of jealousy, anger, and suspicion.

Stage 2: Theoretically Informed Re-reading. The researcher re-read the drama, specifically identifying passages relevant to the four PPD symptom categories. These include Leontes' accusations against Hermione (jealousy), his refusal to forgive Polixenes (grudge), his distrust of Camillo (doubting loyalty), and his aggressive responses to Paulina (sensitivity to criticism).

Stage 3: Thematic Categorization. Identified passages were categorized into the four thematic dimensions based on the operationalized indicators described in Section 3.3. Each passage was assigned to one or more categories based on its dominant thematic content.

Stage 4: Selection of Representative Quotations. From each thematic category, representative quotations were selected based on clarity (the passage unambiguously

addresses the relevant symptom), significance (the passage occurs at a pivotal moment in the narrative), and analytical richness (the passage rewards close reading and interpretation).

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in this research is a creative and intellectual process that transforms raw textual data into useful psychological insights. The procedure begins with data identification and cleaning, where any information not related to Leontes' personality disorder is discarded to avoid the influence of unrelated variables. The remaining data are organized and categorized based on discussions of PPD symptoms proposed by Emil Kraepelin, Sigmund Freud, and Carl Jung. This involves data interpretation, where the researcher assigns meaning to the patterns discovered, such as Leontes' dichotomous "black and white" mindset and his aggressive reactions. Finally, the analysis concludes by drawing evidence-based assumptions regarding Leontes' condition, illustrating how his persistent and maladaptive thought patterns fuel the tragedy and destruction within the drama.

3.5 Validity and Trustworthiness Strategies

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validity strategies were employed following standards for qualitative literary analysis:

First, theoretical triangulation was achieved by analysing data through three distinct theoretical lenses (Kraepelin, Freud, Jung). Where all three theories produced consistent interpretations of a passage, confidence in the finding increased; where interpretations diverged, these divergences were documented and discussed.

Second, peer debriefing was conducted through discussion of coding decisions with the second and third authors. Disagreements regarding classification of specific passages were resolved through consensus after re-examining textual evidence and theoretical definitions. An initial agreement rate of approximately 85% was achieved on a sample of passages, with disagreements primarily concerning whether certain passages reflected "grudge" or "sensitivity to criticism." These borderline cases were resolved by consulting the operationalized indicators and reaching consensus on distinguishing criteria.

Third, textual consistency was maintained through systematic cross-checking. After initial coding of all passages, the researcher re-read the drama a third time, verifying that coded interpretations remained consistent with Leontes' overall character arc and that no contradictory evidence had been overlooked.

Fourth, negative case analysis was applied by actively seeking evidence that contradicted emerging patterns. For example, after identifying Leontes' excessive jealousy, the researcher specifically searched for passages where Leontes expressed doubt about his suspicions or showed willingness to accept evidence. The absence of such passages strengthens the conclusion that Leontes' behaviour is consistent with PPD.

4. Discussion

In Shakespeare's drama *The Winter's Tale*, King Leontes displays deep psychological complexity. Through qualitative descriptive analysis focused on Paranoid Personality Disorder (PPD) symptoms, Leontes exhibits four behavioral patterns consistent with PPD: jealousy, grudge, doubting the loyalty of his entourage, and sensitivity to criticism. This section analyzes each symptom by connecting textual evidence directly to the clinical frameworks of Kraepelin, Freud, and Jung, followed by comparative discussion with prior research.

4.1 Jealousy

A confusing and tragic conflict begins with the gnawing jealousy that a blessed king, Leontes, feels toward his faithful wife, Hermione. With astonishing psychological depth, Shakespeare takes us into the complex layers of human emotion and the inevitable divisions that result from excessive suspicion. Leontes, the king who initially appears to be a wise and loving ruler, suddenly falls into a dark and devastating abyss of suspicion. In his growing confusion, he decides to test the loyalty of his wife, Hermione, in an unthinkable way. The rampant jealousy within him blinds his eyes to the undeniable evidence of his partner's love and loyalty. His unreasonable suspicion of his wife becomes a fire that burns everything around him. Even the presence of Polixenes, his close friend, who comes as a guest, does not escape the king's suspicious eyes. For him, every action and word is evidence that confirms his belief in betrayal.

Leontes' jealousy creates unbearable tension in the relationship between the main characters. He no longer saw Hermione as his beloved life partner, but as an enemy to be conquered. His increasingly paranoid and aggressive attitude culminates in an outright rejection of the truth and an abuse of his power to ensure that his suspicions are met. The result of Leontes' jealousy was widespread suffering and destruction. Not only was Hermione the victim, but also their unborn child, and their friendship and kingdom were torn apart. The conflict that started from jealousy becomes a turning point in the drama's plot, taking us on a bitter journey of irreparable mistakes. Shakespeare understood deeply how jealousy, if left unchecked, can become a destructive force and destroy everything of value. Through the character of Leontes, an understanding is gained that jealousy is not only a personal problem, but also a destructive force that can destroy other people's lives.

"Is it not yours to understand what I mean by 'sin,' Which tears off my casement all my breeding, Leaves me befotted, as the drunken slaves And makes me break the bitter bond of patience To utter thorough hot displeasure." (Shakespeare, 2013: I, 2).

Hermione speaks these lines in response to Leontes' baseless accusation. She states that Leontes does not understand the true meaning of "sin." She describes how the accusation damages her "casement" (the window of her reputation) and leaves her "besotted" (humiliated, like a drunken slave). From a Kraepelinian perspective, Leontes' accusation is not a rational conclusion based on evidence but a delusional conviction that no counterargument can penetrate. Despite the complete absence of proof and Hermione's clear denial, Leontes remains absolutely certain of her guilt—a hallmark of Kraepelinian paranoia where the delusional system remains logically structured but fundamentally false.

Freud (2014) argued that paranoia is a defence mechanism involving projection—the externalization of internal anxieties onto others. Through a Freudian lens, Leontes' accusation against Hermione reflects not her actual behaviour but his own repressed fears and insecurities. He cannot acknowledge his own anxiety about his adequacy as a husband and king, so he projects this anxiety onto Hermione, transforming "I fear I am inadequate" into "She is betraying me." This projective mechanism allows Leontes to externalize his internal conflict, making it someone else's fault rather than confronting his own vulnerabilities.

Jung (1961) introduced the concept of the "Shadow"—repressed desires and fears that the conscious ego refuses to recognize. From a Jungian perspective, Leontes sees in Hermione and Polixenes not their actual relationship but the embodiment of his own repressed shadow. His inability to trust reflects a failure to integrate his shadow into his conscious personality.

The universal archetype of the "fallen queen" activates his deepest anxieties about betrayal, causing him to project his own potential for dishonesty onto the innocent Hermione.

Hariharasudan and Kot (2020) found that paranoia in contemporary literature is often driven by fear of systemic control (technology, social institutions). By contrast, Leontes' paranoia is purely relational—focused on personal betrayal rather than abstract systems. This difference suggests that the manifestation of PPD may be shaped by historical and cultural context: Elizabethan paranoia centered on personal loyalty and court intrigue, while postmodern paranoia reflects anxiety about invisible, systemic forces.

4.2 Grudge

Kraepelin emphasized that paranoid individuals hold persistent grudges because their delusional system cannot accommodate evidence of innocence.

"You, mistress, are all unfit to be her advocate. I here commit thee to my prison." (Shakespeare, 2013: III, 2).

Leontes speaks these words to Paulina, a noble woman and Hermione's close friend who dares to defend the queen. Paulina offers no threat to Leontes; she simply speaks the truth. Yet Leontes responds by imprisoning her. From a Kraepelinian perspective, Leontes' refusal to hear any defence of Hermione demonstrates the rigidity of his delusional system. No evidence, no argument, no testimony from trusted advisors can penetrate his conviction. The grudge against anyone who challenges his delusion becomes a mechanism for protecting the delusional system from contradiction.

Freudian Framework: Freud would interpret Leontes' grudge against Paulina as displacement—redirecting anger from its true source (his own internal conflict) onto a safer target. He cannot punish himself for his irrational suspicions, so he punishes Paulina for voicing what his unconscious already knows: that his accusations are false. The grudge serves to maintain psychological equilibrium by keeping the source of anxiety external rather than internal.

Restalian, Sari, and Dwigustini (2023) found that PPD symptoms in contemporary film characters are often triggered by childhood trauma. Leontes' grudge lacks any identifiable traumatic trigger—Shakespeare provides no backstory of betrayal or abandonment. This absence suggests that Leontes' PPD may represent an endogenous condition (originating from within) rather than a reactive condition (caused by external trauma), a distinction that remains debated in clinical literature (Morgan & Zimmerman, 2018).

4.3 Doubting the Loyalty of the Entourage

Kraepelin observed that paranoid individuals perceive themselves as the center of a hostile world where everyone conspires against them.

"Is he not tainted with that which you suspect? Are you not tainted too?
Then is all the world Contaminated; farewell, my trust, and welcome all
exposures thus I meet the ravin'd lion when he roars for prey."
(Shakespeare, 2013: I, 2).

Camillo, Leontes' trusted advisor, tries to offer a different perspective and suggests that Leontes should moderate his suspicions. Leontes responds not with consideration but with accusation: "Are you not tainted too?" He assumes that if Camillo does not share his

suspicion, then Camillo must be part of the conspiracy. This is classic Kraepelinian paranoia: the delusional system expands to include anyone who questions it. The logic is circular—evidence supporting the delusion confirms it; evidence contradicting the delusion is dismissed as part of the conspiracy. When Camillo offers rational advice, Leontes concludes that all loyalty is false: "farewell, my trust."

Freud would identify this moment as paranoia's expansion mechanism. Once projection is established, it becomes self-reinforcing. Anyone who fails to validate the projected fear must be part of the conspiracy against the self. Leontes' inability to trust Camillo reflects his inability to trust his own capacity for judgment. The external world becomes a mirror of his internal chaos.

From a Jungian perspective, Leontes' statement "all the world Contaminated" reveals complete shadow projection. He has externalized his own capacity for betrayal onto everyone around him. The archetypal pattern here is paranoia as a form of psychological inflation—the paranoid individual sees themselves as the central figure in a cosmic drama of betrayal, unable to recognize that the "enemy" is within.

Spytska (2023) confirmed that individuals with PPD exhibit "an inability to trust even those closest to them, often leading to complete social isolation." Leontes' rejection of Camillo—his most loyal and honest advisor—directly illustrates this clinical finding. Where a healthy individual would accept counsel, Leontes can only see betrayal.

4.4 Sensitivity to Criticism

Kraepelin noted that paranoid individuals are hypersensitive to any challenge to their delusional system, perceiving disagreement as personal attack.

Camillo: "Be not deceived, sir: look but on your lady, And spell yourself the truth." (Shakespeare, 2013: I, 2).

Camillo offers this advice gently and respectfully. He does not accuse Leontes of lying; he merely suggests that Leontes look directly at Hermione and see the truth for himself. From a Kraepelinian perspective, Leontes' defensive reaction—though not explicitly stated in this truncated quote—reflects the paranoid individual's inability to tolerate any questioning of the delusional system. The suggestion to "look but on your lady" implies that Leontes' current perception is false. For a paranoid individual, such an implication is experienced not as advice but as attack.

Leontes: "You should not put us to a needless trouble with question of your own propriety. We have thus far made you welcome as our friend; And you shall stay as long as what belongs to us... shall no more Receive you with free spirit." (Shakespeare, 2013: I, 2).

Leontes pressures Polixenes to stay longer, then accuses him of impoliteness for wanting to leave. He interprets Polixenes' desire to depart as a personal slight. This demonstrates Kraepelinian hypersensitivity: the paranoid individual perceives neutral actions (a guest politely wanting to return home) as deliberate insults. Leontes feels "needless trouble" because Polixenes' departure would force him to confront the possibility that his suspicion has no basis—if Polixenes is leaving, the affair cannot be ongoing.

Freud would interpret Leontes' sensitivity to criticism as narcissistic injury—wounding of the ego's self-image. Leontes has constructed his identity around being a wronged husband. Any suggestion that he might be mistaken threatens this identity, triggering

aggressive defence mechanisms. The anger directed at Polixenes for wanting to leave is displaced anger at himself for being irrational.

Bruckner (2023) noted that Kraepelin's original descriptions of paranoia emphasized the sufferer's "logical structure within false premises." Leontes' reasoning follows internal logic: if Hermione and Polixenes are having an affair, then Polixenes' departure proves he is escaping; if Polixenes wants to stay, that proves he is lingering to continue the affair. Either action confirms the delusion—a perfect example of Kraepelinian "logical structure within false premises."

4.5 Synthesis: Leontes as a Clinical Case Study

Across all four symptoms, Leontes' behaviour consistently aligns with clinical descriptions of PPD from Kraepelin, Freud, and Jung. The integration of these three theoretical perspectives reveals that Leontes' paranoia operates on multiple levels simultaneously: as a Kraepelinian delusional system (unshakable false belief), as a Freudian projection (externalization of internal anxiety), and as a Jungian shadow manifestation (repressed fears projected onto archetypal figures).

The absence of any identifiable traumatic trigger for Leontes' PPD distinguishes him from contemporary PPD cases studied by Restalian et al. (2023), where childhood trauma played a causal role. Leontes' sudden, unmotivated paranoia suggests that Shakespeare was depicting paranoia as an endogenous condition—a "madness" that emerges from within without external cause. This clinical realism, centuries before the formal diagnosis of PPD, demonstrates Shakespeare's profound insight into human psychology.

The comparative analysis also reveals that PPD manifestations may be culturally and historically specific. Hariharasudan and Kot (2020) found that postmodern paranoia focuses on systemic threats (technology, institutions), while Leontes' paranoia is purely relational (personal betrayal). This difference does not indicate a different disorder but rather reflects how paranoid content is drawn from the sufferer's social environment—Elizabethan court intrigue in Leontes' case, digital surveillance in contemporary cases.

Ultimately, Leontes' tragedy is not merely a plot device but a clinically realistic portrayal of how PPD destroys relationships, families, and entire communities. His recovery at the drama's end—the recognition of his error and reconciliation with Hermione—offers a rare literary depiction of PPD remission, though clinically such recovery remains uncommon without intervention (Lewis & Ridenour, 2020).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that King Leontes in William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* exhibits all four symptoms of Paranoid Personality Disorder: jealousy, grudge, doubting the loyalty of his entourage, and sensitivity to criticism. These symptoms manifest through his irrational accusation of Hermione, his imprisonment of Paulina, his rejection of Camillo's counsel, and his aggressive response to Polixenes' desire to leave. The analysis confirms that Leontes' behavior is not merely a dramatic plot device but a clinically realistic depiction of PPD.

This research makes three significant contributions to both literary studies and clinical psychology. First, it demonstrates that the triadic framework of Kraepelin, Freud, and Jung can be systematically applied to a classical literary character, revealing that Shakespeare's characterization anticipates modern clinical understanding of paranoia by nearly three centuries. Second, the study integrates recent international scholarship (Spytska, 2023; Bruckner, 2023; Hariharasudan & Kot, 2020) with classical literary analysis, bridging the gap between humanities and clinical science. Third, unlike previous studies that treat Leontes'

jealousy as a moral failing or plot device (Beloufa, 2021; Green, 2020), this research positions his behaviour within a diagnosable clinical framework, offering a fresh interpretive lens for Shakespeare scholarship.

For literary pedagogy, this study provides educators with a structured framework for teaching Shakespeare's psychological depth, moving student discussion from plot summary to character analysis using established clinical categories. For literary criticism, it demonstrates how psychological theories can enrich the interpretation of classical texts without reducing literature to mere case studies. For mental health discourse, the analysis of Leontes offers a literary case study of how untreated PPD destroys relationships and communities, potentially serving as an illustrative example for clinical education about the real-world consequences of personality disorders.

This study is limited to a single character in a single Shakespearean drama. Future research should pursue four directions. First, comparative studies across Shakespeare's other jealous characters—such as Othello, Posthumus (*Cymbeline*), and Ford (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*)—could examine whether similar PPD symptoms appear or whether different jealousies represent different psychological profiles. Second, cross-cultural studies comparing Shakespeare's Leontes with jealous characters in non-Western literary traditions (e.g., Japanese, Indian, Arabic literature) could identify whether PPD manifestations are culturally universal or contextually specific. Third, reception studies examining how mental health professionals versus literary scholars interpret Leontes' behaviour could illuminate differences between clinical and humanistic reading practices. Fourth, longitudinal studies of PPD representation in literature from the Renaissance to the present could trace how understandings of pathological jealousy have evolved alongside clinical diagnostic criteria.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Shakespeare's characterization of Leontes is not merely artistically powerful but clinically prescient. By applying Kraepelin's, Freud's, and Jung's frameworks to *The Winter's Tale*, this research reveals that the playwright anticipated modern understanding of paranoid personality disorder. Leontes' tragedy—the destruction of his family, the death of his son, and years of remorse—illustrates the devastating real-world consequences of untreated PPD. The drama thus serves not only as entertainment but as a profound case study of the human capacity for self-destructive suspicion, reminding us that what Shakespeare called "green-eyed jealousy" remains, centuries later, a clinically recognized and deeply damaging psychological condition.

References

- Aras, G. (2015). Personality and individual differences: Literature in psychology - psychology in literature. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 185, 250-257. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.03.452>
- Beloufa, C. (2021). Heideggerian thinking and the role of memory in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. *International Journal of Literature Studies*, 1(1), 86-94. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijts.2021.1.1.12>
- Benner, A., & Royle, N. (2023). *An introduction to literature and theory*. Routledge.
- Bruckner, B. (2023). Emil Kraepelin as a historian of psychiatry -- one hundred years on. *History of Psychiatry*, 34(2), 143-159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X231155682>
- Cakirtas, O. (2019). *Literature and psychology: Writing, trauma and the self*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dong, W. (2021). The application of psychology in literary creation. *Journal of Higher Education Research*, 2(6). <https://doi.org/10.32629/jher.v2i6.568>

-
- Freud, S. (2014). *Psycho-analytic notes on an autobiographical account of a case of paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*. Read Books. (Original work published 1911)
- Goldmann, L. (1981). *Method in sociology of literature*. Blackwell.
- Green, A. (2020). William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Byron Company. <https://cdn.anoisewithin.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Winter-Tale-Study-Guide-FINAL.pdf>
- Hariharasudan, A., & Kot, S. (2020). Paradigm of postmodern paranoia in Preeti Shenoy's *Life is What You Make It and Wake Up, Life is Calling*. *Analele Universității Din Craiova. Seria Filosofie*, 2(46), 118-132.
- Jung, C. G. (1961). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Princeton University Press.
- Kraepelin, E. (1916). *Lectures on clinical psychiatry* (T. Johnstone, Trans.). Baillière, Tindall & Cox.
- Lewis, K. C., & Ridenour, J. M. (2020). Paranoid personality disorder. In V. Zeigler-Hill & T. K. Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_615
- Morgan, T. A., & Zimmerman, M. (2018). Epidemiology of personality disorders. In W. J. Livesley & R. Larstone (Eds.), *Handbook of personality disorders: Theory, research, and treatment* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.
- Ratna, N. K. (2013). *Teori, metode dan teknik penelitian sastra*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Restalian, R., Sari, S. W., & Dwigustini, R. (2023). Mental illness of the main character in the movie *Daddy's Perfect Little Girl* directed by Curtis Crawford. *Jurnal Scientia*, 12(4). <https://doi.org/10.58471/scientia.v12i04.1972>
- Santos, R., Santos, J., & Santos, J. (2018). Psychology of literature and literature in psychology. *Temas em Psicologia*, 26(2), 781-794. <https://doi.org/10.9788/TP2018.2-09En>
- Shakespeare, W. (2013). *The winter's tale*. Harper Collins.
- Spytska, L. (2023). Paranoid personality type: Relationships with the surroundings. *Scientific Bulletin of Mukachevo State University. Series "Pedagogy and Psychology"*, 9(2), 96-105. <https://doi.org/10.52534/msu-pp2.2023.96>
- Storr, A., & Beebe, J. (2013). *The essential Jung*. Princeton University Press.

Rigid Social Structure of the Nineteenth-Century England in Jane Austen's Novel *Pride And Prejudice*

Kesya Aprillia Balqis, M. Manugeran, Wan Anayati

Faculty of Literature, universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: kesyaaprilliabalqis@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: April 08, 2026

Revised: April 29, 2026

Accepted: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

century England;

class Stratification;

Jane Austen;

Marxism;

nineteenth;

Pride and Prejudice;

social structure

Abstract

This study examines the rigid social structures of nineteenth-century England as depicted in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The research investigates how inflexible social hierarchies, characterized by distinct class stratifications—upper, middle, and lower classes—constrained individual agency, particularly among women. The analysis focuses on four pivotal dimensions: marriage as a social transaction, social hierarchy and etiquette, land and wealth ownership, and the manifestations of prejudice and discrimination. Despite extensive scholarship on Austen's social critique, limited attention has been paid to the interaction between class stratification and individual agency within the specific context of nineteenth-century English property relations. Employing a Marxist literary framework, this research elucidates how material conditions fundamentally shaped character motivations, interpersonal dynamics, and socioeconomic opportunities. Through a qualitative analysis of dialogue, narration, and descriptive elements within the novel, the findings demonstrate how stringent social norms limited individual autonomy and engendered pervasive conflict between personal desires and societal imperatives. This study contributes to existing scholarship by revealing how Austen's narrative simultaneously critiques systemic inequality while exposing the psychological constraints imposed on middle-class women within a patriarchal property system. Ultimately, this study highlights Austen's sophisticated critique of the systemic injustices inherent in the nineteenth-century British class system, while underscoring the enduring relevance of these themes within contemporary social contexts.

Corresponding Author:

Kesya Aprillia Balqis

Faculty of Literature, universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: kesyaaprilliabalqis@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (2004) serves as a profound social critique of the rigid class stratification and patriarchal norms of 19th-century England, an era marked by systemic injustices and the transformative impact of the Industrial Revolution. Austen explores how these inflexible structures, categorized into upper, middle, and lower classes, stifle individual autonomy and perpetuate socioeconomic inequality, particularly for women who navigate a society where marriage is the primary gateway to economic prosperity (Ispriyani 2008; Putri, Bahri, and Suswati, 2017). Through the interactions between characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, the novel illustrates the pervasive influence of wealth and land ownership on personal relationships, while highlighting how class-driven prejudice and stereotypes prevent marginalized individuals from achieving fulfillment (Saeed and Mocabil 2024; Fitriana 2014). Consequently, the novel functions as a main backdrop that shapes the positions of women, reflecting a reality where the pressure to conform to class expectations creates an enduring conflict between personal desires and rigid social realities (Rahman, Khairunnisa, and Amir 2023; Krisita and Dewi 2020).

The research problem addressed in this study is the insufficient examination of how rigid social structures in 19th-century England systematically constrained individual agency, particularly among middle-class women, within the specific context of property relations and marriage as an economic instrument. While previous Marxist analyses of *Pride and Prejudice* have successfully identified class stratification and economic determinism, they have often treated characters as mere products of material conditions without adequately exploring the psychological tension between individual desire and systemic constraint. This study differs from earlier Marxist approaches by focusing not only on how economic structures shape character behavior but also on how characters actively negotiate, resist, or internalize these constraints—thereby revealing the dynamic interplay between social structure and individual agency.

Accordingly, this research pursues three objectives: (1) to identify the manifestations of rigid social structures in *Pride and Prejudice* across four dimensions—marriage as a social transaction, social hierarchy and etiquette, land and wealth ownership, and prejudice and discrimination; (2) to analyze how these structures constrain individual agency, particularly for female characters; and (3) to examine how Austen's narrative simultaneously critiques systemic inequality while exposing the psychological and social costs of class stratification.

By utilizing Karl Marx's theory, the research analyzes character motivations through the lens of material conditions rather than personal ideals, viewing characters like Mrs. Bennet as reflections of social pressure and the commodification of women within the marriage market. Although not explicitly theorized by Austen, these capitalist dynamics and class struggles are inherent in the narrative, allowing the novel to be understood as a critique of the economic structures that govern personal connections (Putri et al. 2024). To achieve its objectives, this research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing interpretive and descriptive data to provide a nuanced picture of 19th-century British society (Busetto, Wick, and Gumbinger, 2020). Through this multidimensional analysis, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the struggle against systemic restrictions and the social inequalities of the era.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociology of Literature

Sociology of Literature examines the reciprocal interaction between literary works and their social context. In this study, *Pride and Prejudice* serves as a critical lens to analyze the rigid social stratification of 19th-century England, an era defined by strict hierarchies and economic constraints. According to Eagleton (2005), literature does not merely reflect societal norms but also interrogates and challenges them. This is evident in Austen's portrayal of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, whose relationship manifests the tension between individual agency and societal expectations. Furthermore, this approach investigates how an author's social position shapes the narrative. Austen, navigating the complexities of her own environment, utilizes what Bourdieu (1984) identifies as social capital, where character interactions are dictated by their respective social status. Through this perspective, the novel transcends its romantic plot by subtly advocating for individual merit over inherited class distinctions.

Beyond textual interpretation, the sociology of literature explores the interplay of economic and political forces that shape cultural norms. Austen's depiction of class dynamics and social mobility illustrates how characters serve as microcosms of the prevailing social structure. This aligns with Goldmann's (1977) view that literary works are products of social structures that crystallize the collective consciousness of a society. Consequently, a sociological analysis reveals that *Pride and Prejudice* is not merely a romance, but a profound social critique that both represents and questions the social reality of early 19th-century

Britain. By employing this framework, the research reveals how the novel functions as a dynamic force that reflects and simultaneously shapes societal values and perceptions.

2.1.1 Rigid Social Structures

According to Marx (1848), rigid social structures manifest as social stratification that is resistant to change due to the dominance of the ruling class over the working class, a dichotomy that inherently creates systemic inequality and ongoing conflict through unequal access to resources and power. In the context of this research, Marx's theory elucidates the 19th-century English social structure, strictly differentiated by class, wealth, and status where a bourgeoisie-controlled framework dictates characters' lives and choices, particularly regarding marriage, education, and social interactions. In *Pride and Prejudice*, this rigidity is exemplified through the clear divisions between the aristocracy, gentry, and middle class, wherein social mobility is constrained and marriage functions as a primary mechanism to maintain or improve social status. As Eagleton (1976) argues, the upper classes maintain their hegemony through control over both the economy and culture, a phenomenon reflected in the societal pressure on women like Elizabeth Bennet to prioritize economic stability over personal affection. Consequently, the novel serves as a representation of British social reality that embodies Marx's theory of class-based structures, portraying the injustices and class struggles that are central to Marxist thought while demonstrating how these stratified positions perpetually shape individual lives.

2.1.2 Marriage as a Social Transaction

Karl Marx's theory of marriage as a social transaction elucidates the interplay between economics, social class, and the institution of marriage, perceiving it not merely as an emotional bond but as a reflection of prevailing socio-economic structures designed to consolidate wealth and status within a capitalist society. Within the framework of historical materialism, marriage functions as a strategic mechanism deeply embedded in class interests, as asserted by Marx and Engels (1848) in *The Communist Manifesto*, where bourgeois families serve to perpetuate social stratification. In the context of 19th-century Britain, this is manifested in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* through the commodification of women, whose value was often measured by their dowry or social connections rather than personal affinity. Characters such as Charlotte Lucas and Elizabeth Bennet exemplify this Marxian viewpoint; while Charlotte's pragmatic marriage to Mr. Collins reflects the inevitable entrapment of individuals within material conditions for survival, Elizabeth's resistance against transactional unions serves as a profound critique of the restrictive social system. Furthermore, the ruling class's effort to maintain hegemony is illustrated through Lady Catherine de Bourgh's attempt to consolidate aristocratic heritage through arranged alliances. Ultimately, as emphasized in Marx's *Das Kapital* (1844), economic conditions fundamentally shape social relations, positioning marriage in Austen's novel (2004) as an integral part of a larger economic system that both reflects and interrogates the rigid class hierarchy of the era.

Recent scholarship has deepened this analysis. Yakumbu and Ahmadi (2025), employing a Marxist-feminist perspective, argue that Charlotte Lucas's marriage should not be read as passive obedience but as "constrained agency"—a strategic response to structural constraints where marriage becomes "the only safe path to survival" within an oppressive capitalist-patriarchal order. This interpretation shifts the analytical focus from individual choice to systemic coercion, aligning with Fraser's three-dimensional theory of economic, cultural, and political justice. Similarly, Khan, Khan, and Salman (2023) demonstrate through a feminist Marxist reading that "mobility in class, property, and inheritance" directly determined women's "level of agency and autonomy," revealing that Elizabeth Bennet's

journey toward independence was "shaped almost all the time by the struggle against the injustice of property standards".

2.1.3 Social Hierarchy and Etiquette

Within the framework of historical materialism, Marx (1867) argues that social structure is fundamentally determined by production relations, a theory reflected in *Pride and Prejudice* through a rigid hierarchy contingent upon land ownership. In this stratified system, figures like Mr. Darcy occupy the pinnacle, while the Bennet family remains subordinate due to their dependence on inheritance. According to Marx and Engels (1846), dominant ideologies, including ethics and etiquette are products of the ruling class designed to obscure systemic inequality and hinder middle-class mobility. This is strategically exemplified by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who employs etiquette to assert hegemony, while Elizabeth Bennet's resistance illustrates the inherent class conflict within established structures. As Eagleton (1976) suggests, etiquette serves to legitimize upper-class domination by instilling "false consciousness," where social hierarchies are perceived as natural rather than socially constructed. Ultimately, analyzing the novel through the "base and superstructure" framework reveals that while Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy represents individual success, it does not subvert the overarching social system, proving that 19th-century hierarchy was sustained by both economic power and cultural norms perpetuated by the ruling class.

Building on this, Uddin & Sumaiya (2025) demonstrates how Austen critiques the "ideological supremacy" of the British upper class, revealing that etiquette operates through Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony—an "exigent instrument of dominance imposed by the ruling class to naturalize an exploitative relationship with the working class". The study argues that middle-class characters' "blind adherence to prevailing ideologies" in pursuit of respectability reflects the internalization of oppression, a phenomenon where the marginalized consent to their own subordination by accepting elite cultural norms as universal standards of worth.

2.1.4 Land Ownership and Wealth

In the Marxist theoretical framework, land ownership and wealth constitute the fundamental base for social stratification, where the bourgeoisie and aristocracy maintain dominance through the control of the means of production. In 19th-century England, as reflected in *Pride and Prejudice*, land functions not only as a source of capital but also as a potent symbol of inherited status and political power (Marx 1867). This is exemplified by characters such as Mr. Darcy, whose ownership of the Pemberley estate grants him a superior social position, contrasting sharply with the Bennet family's precarious economic standing. Furthermore, the exploitative nature of this class system leads to alienation, as individuals are forced to navigate social relationships and marriage primarily for economic survival (Marx 1844). Elizabeth Bennet's struggle against the norms imposed by the landowning elite, such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh, highlights the systemic inequalities that stifle individual freedom and social mobility. Ultimately, the novel serves as a critique of these rigid structures, where the union between Elizabeth and Darcy suggests a complex shift in class dynamics while simultaneously reinforcing the reality that identity and social agency remain deeply contingent upon economic status and property ownership.

Matutes (2025), in an economic analysis of *Pride and Prejudice*, emphasizes that "incentives rooted in the law and social norms" rather than romantic inclinations primarily drive character behavior, revealing how legal structures of entail and primogeniture functioned as mechanisms of class reproduction. This perspective enriches the Marxist reading by specifying the legal apparatus through which economic exploitation was systematically enforced.

2.1.5 Prejudice and Discrimination

Through a Marxist lens, prejudice and discrimination in *Pride and Prejudice* are analyzed as direct byproducts of the rigid social stratification in 19th-century England, where class antagonism arises from the structural divide between the landed aristocracy and the burgeoning middle class. Marx (1867) posits that the ruling class employs ideology, a system of beliefs designed to maintain the status quo, to justify the exclusion and marginalization of lower social strata, as seen in the initial condescension of Mr. Darcy and Lady Catherine de Bourgh toward the Bennet family. This systemic inequality breeds discrimination, where individual worth is dictated by wealth and lineage rather than merit, effectively limiting social mobility. Furthermore, the concept of alienation is manifested in Elizabeth Bennet, who experiences a sense of estrangement from the restrictive social and economic norms imposed upon her. In this context, marriage functions as a hegemonic tool to consolidate capital within a closed circle, reinforcing a social order that prioritizes economic preservation over human connection. Ultimately, Austen's narrative serves as a profound critique of a society where structural inequalities perpetuate prejudice, revealing that such biases are not merely personal failings but are deeply embedded in the exploitative economic framework of the era.

Recent scholarship has also examined the social conditions of women in this period. Bohang, Magfirah, and Nugroho (2025), employing genetic structuralism, confirm that in 18th-century England, "women get inequality gender in the society" where "education, politic, and occupation are not allowed to them," forcing them into marriage as the only viable path to economic security. This structural analysis aligns with the present study's emphasis on how systemic constraints, rather than individual failings, produced the marriage patterns Austen critiques.

2.2 Review of Previous Studies

The study of rigid social structures in 19th-century England frequently identifies Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* as a seminal work reflecting the era's socio-economic hierarchies. Previous research by Putri et al. (2017) and Sarah (2022) both utilized a qualitative descriptive method underpinned by Marxist concepts to examine how wealth, power, and status manifest as "pride and prejudice" within British society. While these studies successfully mapped the forms of social class and their impacts on character interactions using frameworks from Fraenkel, Wallen, or Moleong, the present study establishes its originality by adopting a more holistic approach through the qualitative methodology of Busetto. Unlike earlier works that predominantly focus on the thematic outcomes of love and marriage, this research extends the analysis to the interplay between rigid social norms and individual agency, specifically exploring how structural limitations impact emotional expression, career trajectories, and personal aspirations. By integrating Marx's theories on a deeper level, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and systemic constraints on individual freedom, thereby offering fresh insights into the enduring relevance of Austen's social critique within both historical and contemporary contexts.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis design, a methodological approach specifically suited for examining how literary texts represent and critique social phenomena. Unlike basic qualitative descriptive methods, textual analysis focuses on close reading of linguistic and narrative elements—dialogue, description, character action, and narrative positioning—to uncover how meaning is constructed within a text (Busetto, Wick, &

Gumbinger, 2020). The research design is also historical-interpretive, situating the novel within its specific socio-historical context of 19th-century England while interpreting textual evidence through a theoretical framework.

The choice of a Marxist literary framework as the primary analytical lens is justified on three grounds. First, Marxism directly addresses the core phenomenon under investigation: rigid social structures characterized by class stratification, economic determinism, and the commodification of human relationships. Marx's concepts of base and superstructure, class struggle, and alienation provide a coherent vocabulary for analyzing how material conditions shape character motivations. Second, Marxist literary criticism has a well-established tradition of analyzing 19th-century British literature concerned with class, marriage, and property. Third, the Marxist framework enables the researchers to move beyond thematic description to structural analysis, explaining how property relations systematically constrain individual agency, particularly for women.

The primary data source is Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* (2004 edition, Oxford University Press). This novel was selected for three reasons: it features multiple characters from different class positions enabling comparative analysis, its explicit focus on marriage and social mobility provides rich textual evidence, and its canonical status allows engagement with existing scholarship. Secondary data are gathered from a comprehensive literature review of historical studies, literary criticism, and social history to provide broader context.

Data were selected through a systematic four-stage procedure. First, the researchers read the entire novel once to achieve holistic familiarity with the plot, characters, and major themes, recording initial observations about class-related conflicts and marriage negotiations. Second, the researchers re-read the novel, specifically identifying passages relevant to the Marxist framework, including discussions of wealth or property, marriage proposals with explicit economic considerations, interactions between different social classes, expressions of class-based prejudice, and moments of social exclusion based on status. Third, identified passages were categorized into four thematic dimensions: marriage as a social transaction, social hierarchy and etiquette, land ownership and wealth, and prejudice and discrimination. Fourth, from each thematic category, representative quotations were selected based on clarity, narrative significance, representativeness, and analytical richness.

The analysis proceeded through five sequential steps. First, textual identification: passages manifesting rigid social structures were identified and documented with page numbers and narrative context. Second, structural description: each passage was described in terms of surface content—who is speaking, to whom, under what circumstances, and what economic or social stakes are involved. Third, Marxist interpretation: each passage was interpreted through the theoretical framework, asking how economic conditions shape character motivations, what class interests are being served, and how the passage reveals commodification of human relationships. Fourth, cross-passage synthesis: findings from individual passages were integrated across the four thematic dimensions to identify patterns and variations. Fifth, theoretical integration: synthesized findings were interpreted through Marxist literary criticism, engaging with concepts from Eagleton (1976), Goldmann (1977), and recent Marxist-feminist scholarship.

To ensure the credibility of findings, several strategies were employed. Theoretical triangulation was achieved by analyzing data through multiple Marxist concepts rather than a single lens. Textual consistency was maintained through systematic cross-checking, verifying that coded interpretations remained consistent with characters' overall narrative arcs. Through this multidimensional analysis, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the struggle against systemic restrictions and the social inequalities of the era.

4. Discussions

In this part, the researchers examine the rigid social structures depicted in *Pride and Prejudice*, where social hierarchy, status, and wealth fundamentally dictate character interactions and individual agency. The analysis is structured into thematic sections encompassing marriage as a social transaction, class-based etiquette, property ownership, and the systemic prejudice encountered by characters in their pursuit of autonomy. By interrogating the tension between individual desires and societal demands, exemplified by Elizabeth Bennet's resistance to transactional marriage and Mr. Darcy's representation of the landed gentry; this study uncovers Austen's sophisticated critique of nineteenth-century social norms. Furthermore, the analysis employs a Marxist lens to explore the power dynamics of class and gender, highlighting how Austen utilizes irony and satire to expose economic inequalities and the marginalized positions of women within a patriarchal framework. Ultimately, this part demonstrates that the novel transcends its romantic plot to serve as a profound critique of a rigid class system, where personal compatibility is perpetually forced to negotiate with socio-economic obligations.

4.1 Marriage as a Social Transaction

Marriage in nineteenth-century England functioned primarily as a social transaction, dictated more by class, wealth, and status than by personal affection. Within this framework, Jane Austen's narratives portray characters, particularly women who are inextricably entrapment within rigid social norms. Matrimonial choices were frequently governed by economic and reputational considerations rather than emotional bonds, forcing women to navigate a precarious dilemma between personal desires and societal imperatives. Austen underscores that marriage served as a fundamental mechanism for maintaining or enhancing social status and economic security. In a highly stratified society where social standing was contingent upon wealth and lineage, marriage emerged as the primary gateway for women to achieve stability and institutional recognition. Consequently, Austen's works transcend mere depictions of domestic life to offer a profound critique of social systems that stifle individual agency. The interactions between her characters vividly reflect the overwhelming pressure to conform to communal expectations, often necessitating the sacrifice of individual happiness in favor of socio-economic preservation.

"Indeed, Jane, you ought to believe me. – No one who has ever seen you together, can doubt his affection. Miss Bingley I am sure cannot. She is not such a simpleton. Could she have seen half as much love in Mr. Darcy for herself, she would have ordered her wedding clothes. But the case is this. We are not rich enough, or grand enough for them; and she is the more anxious to get Miss Darcy for her brother." (Austen, 2004, p.99)

This passage operates on two levels: the surface level of romantic concern and the deeper level of economic calculation masked as family loyalty.

Through a Marxist lens, this dialogue exemplifies the process of commodification—the transformation of human relationships into exchangeable goods with calculable market value. Miss Bingley does not oppose Jane because of personal animosity but because Jane lacks the requisite "value" measured in wealth and social connections. Elizabeth's diagnosis is strikingly materialist: the obstacle is not insufficient love but insufficient "richness" and "grandness." Miss Bingley's anxiety to secure Miss Darcy for her brother represents the ruling class's imperative to consolidate capital through strategic marriages, what Marx and Engels (1848) identified as the bourgeoisie's reduction of family relations to "mere money relations."

This finding aligns with Yakumbu and Ahmadi's (2025) concept of "constrained agency." Charlotte Lucas's pragmatic acceptance of Mr. Collins's proposal—which Elizabeth rejects—does not represent personal failure but rather different strategic responses to identical structural constraints. Charlotte, at twenty-seven without a fortune, recognizes that marriage is "the only safe path to survival" within a system where women are excluded from professions and inheritance. Her choice exemplifies what Marx (1844) termed alienation: the separation of individuals from their authentic desires under conditions where economic survival overrides personal fulfillment.

What distinguishes Austen's critique from mere economic determinism is her nuanced portrayal of class consciousness. Elizabeth Bennet demonstrates what Lukács (1971) called "imputed class consciousness"—an awareness of systemic injustice that transcends her immediate material interests. Unlike Mrs. Bennet, who has fully internalized the logic of commodification and views marriage exclusively as economic transaction, Elizabeth recognizes her mother's "mean understanding" and "illiberal mind" as products of the same system that oppresses her. This distinction between false consciousness (full internalization of ruling-class ideology) and critical awareness is central to understanding Austen's ambivalent position: she critiques the marriage market while acknowledging that even the most independent woman cannot fully escape it.

4.2 Social Hierarchy and Etiquette

In nineteenth-century England, social hierarchy and etiquette functioned as rigorous frameworks that dictated individual behavior and social interactions, with class identity fundamentally contingent upon wealth, lineage, and education. Within this stratified society, where layers ranged from the landed aristocracy to the burgeoning middle and working classes, etiquette served as a mandatory regulatory guideline; any deviation from these norms often resulted in social ostracism or the irreparable loss of reputation. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* meticulously delineates these dynamics through the contentious interaction between Elizabeth Bennet, who faces the prejudices inherent to her middle-class status, and Mr. Darcy, whose aristocratic background initially renders him hostage to the haughty expectations of elite decorum. Through their evolving relationship, Austen transcends a mere romantic narrative to offer a profound social commentary that interrogates the systemic injustices of social hierarchies. By highlighting how these rigid structures stifle individual autonomy, Austen invites a critical reflection on the tension between societal expectations and the intrinsic values of human dignity and love, ultimately challenging the very foundations of the era's social stratification.

““You are considering how insupportable it would be to pass many evenings in this manner – in such society; and indeed I am quite of your opinion. I was never annoyed! The insipidity and yet the noise; the nothingness and yet the self-importance of all these people! – What would I give to hear your strictures on them!”” (Austen, 2004, p. 23)

In this exchange, Miss Caroline Bingley attempts to consolidate her social bond with Mr. Darcy by expressing a shared disdain for a gathering she deems shallow and intellectually stagnant, seeking his validation of her elitist frustration. She strategically critiques the "meaningless noise" of those she considers socially insignificant, yet her performance of class-based boredom fails to achieve its intended intimacy. Instead of reciprocating her cynicism, Darcy subverts her expectations by confessing that his mind is "more agreeably engaged" by the striking beauty of Elizabeth Bennet. This pivotal interaction not only exposes Miss Bingley's pretentious efforts to maintain an exclusive social atmosphere but also highlights a significant shift in Darcy's internal priorities. By redirecting his attention toward

Elizabeth, Darcy introduces a profound emotional tension that challenges the rigid class boundaries Miss Bingley so desperately tries to enforce, thereby establishing one of the central conflicts and dynamic shifts within the novel's social fabric.

4.3 Land Ownership and Wealth

In nineteenth-century England, land ownership and wealth constituted the material foundation of the social hierarchy, where estates served as both primary capital and symbols of elite status. As reflected in *Pride and Prejudice*, the possession of significant acreage, typically exceeding 300 acres for the landed gentry, granted immense socio-political influence and distinguished the aristocracy from the subordinate classes. This rigidity was further perpetuated by inheritance systems such as primogeniture and entailment, which mandated that land remain within the male line, effectively disenfranchising women and stifling social mobility. The stark disparity between grand landowners like Mr. Darcy of Pemberley and smaller landholders like the Bennet family of Longbourn underscores the systemic inequality governing the marriage market and familial security. Through these dynamics, Austen critiques a stratified system where status is inherited rather than earned, positioning land ownership as a central instrument in maintaining the rigid social structures that drive the novel's primary conflicts.

“Mr. Bingley inherited property to the amount of nearly a hundred thousand pounds from his father, who had intended to purchase an estate, but did not live to do it.” (Austen, 2004, p.14)

This single sentence encodes the entire logic of class reproduction in Regency England. Bingley possesses liquid capital—mobile wealth derived from trade or commerce—but lacks landed property, the ultimate signifier of stable elite status. His father's unfulfilled intention to "purchase an estate" reveals that social mobility remains incomplete until mobile capital is converted into landed property, anchoring the family within the hereditary aristocracy.

From a Marxist perspective, this passage illustrates the relationship between economic base (property relations) and cultural superstructure (social status). Marx (1867) argued that the dominant class maintains power through control of the means of production, which in 19th-century England meant land. The Bennet family's precarious economic standing—dependent on an entail that will disinherit the daughters upon Mr. Bennet's death—demonstrates how property law systematically disenfranchises women. Without access to land, women have no independent economic base; they must marry to survive. This material condition, not individual failing, explains Mrs. Bennet's obsessive pursuit of advantageous matches for her daughters.

Matutes (2025) emphasizes that "incentives rooted in the law and social norms" rather than romantic inclinations primarily drive character behavior. The entail is not merely a plot device but a legal mechanism of class reproduction. It ensures that property remains within the male line, perpetuating class hierarchy across generations while excluding women from economic autonomy. Elizabeth's eventual marriage to Darcy—owner of Pemberley, producing £10,000 annually—does not challenge this system; it rewards her with entry into the class that the entail protects. As Khan, Khan, and Salman (2023) argue, "mobility in class, property, and inheritance" directly determined women's "level of agency and autonomy," revealing that Elizabeth's journey toward independence was "shaped almost all the time by the struggle against the injustice of property standards."

The novel's treatment of Pemberley as both physical estate and moral symbol requires careful analysis. Elizabeth's transformation upon visiting Pemberley—her growing attraction

to Darcy coinciding with her appreciation of his property—has been read as evidence of her complicity with class ideology. A more nuanced Marxist reading recognizes that Austen does not celebrate property but reveals its inescapability. Even Elizabeth, the novel's most critical consciousness, cannot imagine a future outside property relations. Her famous declaration to Lady Catherine—"He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal"—affirms class identity even as it claims equality within it.

4.4 Prejudice and Discrimination

In social studies, prejudice and discrimination, defined respectively as negative judgments based on stereotypes and the resultant unfair treatment are central themes that Jane Austen explores within the rigid social framework of nineteenth-century England. As illustrated in *Pride and Prejudice*, these concepts are inextricably linked to social class, gender, and economic status, where the stratified structure of the era reinforced systemic exclusion and limited individual opportunities. Characters such as Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy both experience and reflect these biases; Elizabeth is frequently marginalized due to her middle-class origins and limited social connections, while Darcy initially assumes a superior stance predicated on his aristocratic lineage. Their narrative journey demonstrates how such prejudices cloud individual judgment and obstruct social relationships, even within the intimate context of marriage. Ultimately, Austen transcends the romantic plot to offer a sharp critique of a discriminatory culture that restricts mobility based on birth and wealth, positioning the novel as a profound reflection on the social inequalities and the invalidity of established hierarchies in Regency society.

“‘Eliza Bennet,’ said Miss Bingley, when the door was closed on her, ‘is one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex, by undervaluing their own; and with many men, I dare say, it succeeds. But, in my opinion, it is a paltry device, a very mean art.’” (Austen, 2004, p.34)

Here, delivered immediately after Elizabeth Bennet's departure, Miss Bingley employs biting satire to marginalize her rival, accusing Elizabeth of utilizing "contemptible and immoral tricks" to secure male attention by supposedly degrading her own gender. This vitriolic aspersion is deeply rooted in Miss Bingley's insecurity and resentment, as she feels increasingly threatened by Elizabeth's intellectual superiority, a trait that conspicuously captivates elite bachelors like Mr. Darcy. Characterized by her arrogance and habitual condescension, Miss Bingley seeks to undermine Elizabeth's growing influence within their social circle. However, her accusation is layered with profound irony; while she condemns Elizabeth's behavior, Miss Bingley herself frequently engages in the same performative disparagement of other women to enhance her own standing. Ultimately, this interaction underscores the broader social conflict and precarious competition among women in the nineteenth century, reflecting how rigid gendered expectations and limited socioeconomic pathways forced women into adversarial roles in their pursuit of marital security and status.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* reveals that nineteenth-century English society was governed by a rigid social structure where marriage functioned as a strategic social transaction, prioritizing financial survival and class consolidation over romantic affection. This systemic reality is exemplified by characters like Charlotte Lucas and Mrs. Bennet, whose actions underscore the precarious position of middle-class women within a patriarchal framework that restricts their access to power and land inheritance. Consequently, wealth, specifically through landed estates like Pemberley, serves as the primary signifier of authority

and moral worth, while the emergence of characters like Mr. Bingley represents the shifting boundaries between the traditional aristocracy and the rising mercantile middle class.

The implications of this study for contemporary literary scholarship are significant. Methodologically, it demonstrates the continued vitality of Marxist criticism for analyzing 19th-century British literature, provided that the framework is sufficiently refined to attend to gender, ideology, and individual agency alongside economic structures. The study also illustrates the value of integrating recent international scholarship—particularly from non-Western contexts—into the analysis of canonical Western texts, challenging the traditional dominance of Euro-American criticism. Theoretically, the study contributes to ongoing debates about Austen's political orientation: rather than resolving the question of whether Austen is a radical critic or conservative apologist, this study argues that the novel's ambivalence—its simultaneous critique of and accommodation to class hierarchy—is precisely what makes it enduringly relevant. Austen does not resolve the tension between individual desire and systemic constraint; she dramatizes it with such precision that readers continue to debate its meaning two centuries later.

The study demonstrates that social hierarchy and etiquette were utilized as instruments of class domination, maintained by elite figures such as Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Miss Bingley to preserve the status quo through exclusionary decorum. However, Jane Austen subverts this discriminatory system through Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, whose narrative journey necessitates the confrontation of entrenched prejudices regarding class and character. By juxtaposing Elizabeth's intellectual integrity against rigid social norms, Austen critiques a society that evaluates human worth through the lens of birth and wealth. Ultimately, the novel serves as a profound social commentary, illustrating that while the class system dictates the material conditions of life, individual agency and moral clarity remain the only viable means of challenging systemic inequality.

References

- Austen, J. (2004). *Pride and prejudice* (J. Kinsley, Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Bohang, M. B. A., Magfirah, S., & Nugroho, D. A. (2025). The social condition of England's women in 18th century reflected in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 8(1), 215-223. <https://doi.org/10.34050/els-jish.v8i1.43533>
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press.
- Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>
- Eagleton, T. (1976). *Marxism and literary criticism*. University of California Press.
- Eagleton, T. (2005). *The novel: An introduction*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Fitriana, R. (2014). Social stratification reflected in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* novel (1813): A sociological approach. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sastra*, 2(1), 1-17.
- Goldmann, L. (1977). *The hidden god: A study of tragic vision in the Pensees of Pascal and the tragedies of Racine* (P. Thody, Trans.). Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. International Publishers.
- Ispriyani, N. (2008). *Social problems and moral values in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice* [Undergraduate thesis]. Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University.
- Khan, S., Khan, M., & Salman, M. (2023). Marxist feminist analysis of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*: Unravelling class, property, and gender dynamics. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 5(2), 45-62.

- Krisita, S., & Dewi, A. (2020). The influence of social class on women's attitude towards men in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813): A sociological approach. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sastra*, 8(1), 45-55.
- Lukács, G. (1971). *History and class consciousness: Studies in Marxist dialectics*. MIT Press.
- Marx, K. (1844). *Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844*. Prometheus Books.
- Marx, K. (1848). Manifesto of the communist party. In *The communist manifesto*. Penguin Books.
- Marx, K. (1867). *Das Kapital* (Vol. 1). Regnery Publishing.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1846). *The German ideology*. International Publishers.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The communist manifesto*. Penguin Books.
- Matutes, J. (2025). Economic incentives and class reproduction in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. *Journal of Economic Literature and Culture*, 12(1), 33-48.
- Putri, D. A., Nurulhady, E. F., Suryadi, M., & Waluyo, S. (2024). Citra perempuan aristokrat Inggris abad-19 dalam novel. *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa, dan Sastra*, 10(3), 2450-2459. <https://doi.org/10.30605/onoma.v10i3.3829>
- Putri, M. A., Bahri, S., & Suswati, R. (2017). Social class in British society in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. *Linguistica*, 6(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.24114/jalu.v6i1.13396>
- Rahman, F., Khairunnisa, I., & Amir, M. P. (2023). The social condition of the 19th century British society depicted in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* novel. *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management*, 11(12), 1628-1643. <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijstrm/v11i12.sh02>
- Saeed, A., & Mocbil, A. (2024). Satire and social criticism in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 30(3), 132-144.
- Sarah, R. (2022). Wealth and power in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. *Call: Critical Analysis of Literature and Language*, 4(2), 125-135. <https://doi.org/10.15575/call.v4i2.14767>
- Uddin, M., & Sumaiya, T. (2025). The Empire of Etiquette Ideological Supremacy and Cultural Hegemony in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. *NUB Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5, 71-8.
- Yakumbu, R., & Ahmadi, A. (2025). Constrained agency and Marxist-feminist reading of Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice*. *Feminist Literary Studies*, 8(1),

Symbolism in Alfonso Cuarón's *A Little Princess*: A Percian Semiotic Analysis

Siti Nurhaliza, Safitri Hariani

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: sitihaliza419@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: April 15, 2026 Accepted: April 29, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This study explores the use of symbolism in Alfonso Cuarón's film <i>A Little Princess</i> (1995). Using a qualitative descriptive method and semiotic analysis based on Charles Sanders Peirce's theory, this research identifies how symbolic elements function as representations of the main character's emotional journey, personal transformation, and inner resilience. The findings reveal three types of symbols based on Peirce's classification. Natural symbols include weather and atmosphere (cold weather and snow, the smell of warm food, colorful sky like a peacock's tail). Conventional symbols consist of color symbols (black dress, dark tones, bright colors during the birthday scene), object symbols (Emily the doll, birthday cake, the locket), and nature symbols (colorful sky, cold weather, warm wind). Singular symbols include imagination as a shield, the magic circle, and the attic transformation. These findings demonstrate that Cuarón employs symbolism not only for visual storytelling but also as a narrative tool to express deeper emotional and psychological meanings. The symbols effectively convey Sara Crewe's struggle against injustice and her ability to endure adversity through imagination and empathy, enriching the film's themes of loss, identity, hope, and resilience.
Keywords: <i>Symbolism;</i> <i>Semiotics;</i> <i>Imagination;</i> <i>resilience</i>	
Corresponding Author: Siti Nurhaliza Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia E-mail: sitihaliza419@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

Film is a powerful medium for conveying messages to the audience, where various elements such as story, characters, setting, and visual symbols work together to create deeper meanings (Elvina Juniatri, Sururuddin, & Mila Wahyuni, 2022). Each of these elements is interconnected in shaping a particular interpretation of a work. It serves as a medium of visual communication that effectively delivers messages through the use of imagery, dialogue, audio, and symbolic representations. *A Little Princess*, a film adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's renowned novel, exemplifies a work abundant in symbolism. The narrative follows Sara Crewe, a young girl who endures hardship and clings to hope, while the film incorporates various symbolic motifs---including dolls, dreams, windows, and enclosed spaces---that convey profound underlying significance.

The movie *A Little Princess* premiered in the United States on May 10, 1995. It was directed by Alfonso Cuarón, a filmmaker from Mexico who is recognized for his artistic visual storytelling and emotionally resonant narratives. The screenplay was crafted by Richard LaGravenese alongside Elizabeth Chandler, adapting the story from the original novel *A Little Princess* written by Frances Hodgson Burnett. LaGravenese, who is also known for writing scripts such as *The Fisher King* and *P.S. I Love You*, played a pivotal role in shaping the screenplay. His contribution helped to portray the central character's imagination and emotional resilience through a script that is both poetic and deeply moving.

A Little Princess (1995) follows the story of Sara Crewe, a young girl whose life is dramatically altered after the death of her father. Once wealthy and privileged, Sara is sent to a strict boarding school, where she faces poverty and mistreatment by the headmistress, Miss Minchin. Despite her hardships, Sara retains her strength, kindness, and imagination, believing in the power of inner beauty and compassion.

Previous studies on *A Little Princess* have mostly concentrated on ideological themes such as feminism and social class, leaving visual symbolism in the film less examined. While researchers like Wardani et al. (2021) highlight the presence of feminist and American values, and others such as Byachkova (2020) explore symbolic space and imagination as psychological tools, few have delved into how visual elements---like colour, objects, and nature---communicate emotional and thematic meaning. This gap offers an opportunity to reexamine the film through a symbolic lens, allowing for a more focused analysis of how visual symbolism supports character development and enhances narrative depth (Kurniawati & Anwari, 2023).

Although previous studies have offered valuable insights into ideological and narrative symbolism in *A Little Princess*, few have provided a focused analysis of the film's use of visual symbolism---such as colours, objects, and natural elements---and their roles in expressing emotional development and thematic depth. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the types and meanings of symbolic elements used in Alfonso Cuarón's adaptation.

Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of symbolism are found in the film *A Little Princess*?
2. How are the meanings of these symbols represented in the film?

The findings are expected to provide new perspectives for literary and cinematic analysis, especially within the field of English literature and visual storytelling.

This film was selected for analysis due to its rich use of visual and narrative symbolism that enhances the storytelling beyond mere dialogue and plot. *A Little Princess* (1995), directed by Alfonso Cuarón, combines cinematic artistry with emotional depth, making it a compelling subject for symbolic and semiotic study. Moreover, compared to other literary adaptations, *A Little Princess* stands out for its ability to convey complex themes such as loss, imagination, identity, and resilience through subtle symbolic cues. The symbolism embedded in everyday objects (such as the doll and locket), natural settings, and visual contrasts offers a unique opportunity to analyse how meaning is constructed and conveyed visually. This makes the film particularly suitable for a semiotic analysis using Peirce's theory.

In addition, while many previous studies have focused on the film's ideological or feminist dimensions, fewer have explored the depth of its visual symbolism in relation to narrative structure and character development. Thus, this study aims to contribute a new perspective by investigating the film's symbolic elements as a central narrative device.

Therefore, this study is conducted because the film *A Little Princess* (1995) presents rich visual symbolism that effectively portrays emotions and character development. Furthermore, there has been limited academic focus on analysing visual symbolism in this film. By applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, this research aims to provide a new perspective on the study of symbolism in film.

2. Literature Review

The term "symbol" is derived from the Greek word *sym-ballein*, which means to throw something (an object or action) that is related to a concept. Symbols typically originate from metonymy, which involves using the name of one thing to refer to another that is associated with it or is one of its attributes. According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, a symbol

or emblem is a type of sign, image, word, badge, or similar item that represents something or conveys a particular meaning. For instance, the colour white is often considered a symbol of purity, rice is regarded as a symbol of prosperity, and the cap (*kopiah*) is recognized as a distinctive marker of Indonesian identity.

Scholars from different disciplines have approached symbolism from various angles. Carl Jung (1978) views symbols as fundamental to understanding the human psyche, arguing that symbols emerge in dreams and myths as expressions of the unconscious mind. For Jung, symbols bridge conscious and unconscious experiences, helping individuals process psychological conflicts and gain self-awareness. In art, including film, symbolism serves to convey themes, emotions, or messages that are not always explicitly expressed (Guatri, 2023). While Jung emphasizes the psychological and universal dimensions of symbols, Charles Sanders Peirce offers a more structural and systematic framework for analysing how symbols generate meaning through triadic relationships between signs, objects, and interpretants (Peirce, 1931).

Rather than treating these perspectives as competing, this study integrates both: Jung's insights help explain why symbols resonate emotionally, while Peirce's framework provides the analytical tools to classify and interpret them systematically. Symbolism acts as a bridge between literature and film, allowing both forms of art to convey deeper meanings. In literature, symbols such as characters or objects can represent specific ideas or themes, encouraging readers to delve into hidden meanings (Yahya, 2024). Similarly, in film, visual symbols---such as colours, objects, or motifs---add layers to the narrative, creating a more profound experience for viewers (Fadaee, 2011).

Charles Sanders Peirce, a foundational figure in semiotics, provides a detailed and systematic framework for understanding signs and symbols. He divides signs into three categories: icons, indexes, and symbols. Symbols, in Peirce's view, are signs that relate to their objects through a rule or learned convention, rather than resemblance (as in icons) or physical connection (as in indexes) (Peirce, 1931). Peirce's triadic model of the sign includes three essential elements: the representamen (the form the sign takes), the object (what the sign refers to), and the interpretant (the meaning generated in the mind of the observer). This process forms what Peirce calls "semiosis," the dynamic interpretation of signs through mental association.

Peirce's approach is particularly useful in film and literary analysis, as it accommodates both fixed and fluid meanings depending on context. Symbols are not interpreted in isolation but within systems of cultural knowledge, genre, narrative structure, and viewer experience. In the context of *A Little Princess*, Peirce's categories allow for a nuanced analysis of the symbolic elements in the script. By applying Peirce's semiotic framework, this study seeks to illuminate how the film script communicates layered meanings through natural, conventional, and singular symbols, enriching the viewer's understanding of character development, emotional resonance, and thematic depth.

According to Peirce's semiotic theory as cited in Liszka (1996), symbols can be classified into three types: natural symbols, conventional symbols, and singular symbols. Each of these types has unique characteristics that allow them to function differently within a narrative.

1. Natural symbolism refers to symbols that people encounter in their daily lives, which can be visually observed and often appear in everyday situations. For example, smoke is directly associated with fire, or tears are directly associated with sadness. Natural symbols arise from cause-and-effect relationships or universal human experiences, making them intuitively understandable across cultures.

2. **Conventional symbolism** refers to symbols whose meanings are formed based on mutual agreement within a particular community, culture, or social system. There is no natural or causal relationship between the form of the symbol and the object it represents. Conventional symbols are widely used in everyday life, particularly in verbal and visual communication, as well as in legal and social contexts. Their meaning is determined by social convention; these symbols can also change over time and differ between cultures. In this study, three aspects of conventional symbolism are analysed: colors, objects, and nature.
3. **Singular symbols** are highly personal and unique to a character or narrative context. They are not culturally universal but instead derive meaning from specific emotional or situational experiences. A singular symbol's meaning is only understood by a specific individual, arising from personal experiences, memories, or emotional connections to an object or event. For example, a locket given by a deceased parent may hold profound meaning for one character but mean nothing to others.

While previous studies on *A Little Princess* have offered valuable insights, they have largely focused on ideological themes such as feminism and social class (Wardani et al., 2021) or explored symbolic space and imagination as psychological tools (Byachkova, 2020). Kurniawati and Anwari (2023) have examined narrative symbolism, but few have systematically analyzed the film's visual symbolism---such as colors, objects, and natural elements---using a structured semiotic framework like Peirce's.

This study differs from prior research in three significant ways. First, it applies Peirce's triadic classification of symbols (natural, conventional, singular) to a film context, providing a systematic rather than impressionistic analysis of visual symbolism. Second, while previous studies have often treated symbolism as a supplementary narrative device, this research positions symbolic elements as central to understanding the protagonist's emotional journey and psychological transformation. Third, this study focuses specifically on Alfonso Cuarón's cinematic adaptation rather than Burnett's original novel, recognizing that film employs unique visual and auditory symbolic resources that differ from literary symbolism. By bridging semiotic theory with film analysis, this research offers a new perspective on how visual symbolism supports character development and enhances narrative depth in *A Little Princess*.

3. Research Method

In this study, a descriptive qualitative approach is utilized by the researcher. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups attach to social or human issues. This approach is focused on describing the characteristics of a phenomenon without altering variables. Qualitative descriptive research emphasizes understanding the significance and context of human experiences, often involving data collection through observations or document analysis, which provide comprehensive, detailed descriptions of the topic being studied.

3.1 Data Source

The primary data source for this research is Alfonso Cuarón's film *A Little Princess* (1995), specifically the film script written by Richard LaGravenese and Elizabeth Chandler. The film script serves as the main document for analysis, as it contains dialogues, scene descriptions, and visual directions that embed symbolic meanings. Additionally, key scenes from the film were viewed repeatedly to capture non-verbal symbolic elements such as color palettes, lighting, and visual compositions that may not be fully captured in the written script alone.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection involved a multi-stage process. First, the researcher obtained the film script of *A Little Princess* from reliable sources. Second, the researcher watched the film multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of its narrative structure, visual style, and symbolic content. Third, scenes containing potential symbolic elements were identified and documented. Fourth, secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and reviews related to symbolism in film and Peirce's semiotic theory were examined to support the analysis. The data gathered included dialogues, scene descriptions, visual imagery (colors, objects, settings), and character actions that carry symbolic potential.

3.3 Analytical Procedures

The data analysis followed six systematic steps:

1. Watching the film repeatedly. The researcher watched the film *A Little Princess* several times to become familiar with its narrative flow, visual style, and recurring motifs. Repeated viewing allowed the researcher to capture subtle symbolic details that might be missed in a single viewing.
2. Reading the screenplay carefully. The film script was read thoroughly to identify dialogues, scene directions, and descriptive passages that contain or imply symbolic meanings. The script provided a textual foundation for analysis, complementing the visual data from the film.
3. Identifying symbolic elements. Based on the theoretical framework of Peirce (1931) and Liszka (1996), the researcher identified visual and narrative elements in the film that function as symbols. These included natural elements (weather, sky, wind), conventional symbols (colors, objects), and singular symbols (imagination, magic circle, attic).
4. Classifying symbols based on Peirce and Liszka. Each identified symbol was classified into one of three categories: natural symbols (those with cause-and-effect or universal relationships), conventional symbols (those whose meanings are socially or culturally constructed), or singular symbols (those with unique, personal meanings within the narrative context).
5. Interpreting meanings contextually. Each symbol was interpreted within its specific narrative and cinematic context. The interpretation considered the character's emotional state, the scene's atmosphere, and the broader thematic framework of the film (loss, hope, imagination, resilience).
6. Drawing conclusions. The findings were synthesized to answer the research questions: what types of symbolism are found in *A Little Princess* and how are their meanings represented in the film. Conclusions were drawn based on patterns identified across the data.

3.4 Validation Strategies

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. First, *triangulation* was achieved by using multiple data sources (film script, film viewing, and secondary literature) to cross-check interpretations. Second, *peer debriefing* was conducted by discussing the identification and classification of symbols with the second author to minimize subjective bias. Third, *thick description* was provided by presenting detailed contextual information for each symbol, allowing readers to assess the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Fourth, *reflexivity* was practiced by documenting the researcher's interpretive decisions throughout the analysis process, ensuring transparency in how conclusions were reached.

4. Discussion

The use of symbolism in *A Little Princess* (1995), directed by Alfonso Cuarón, plays a significant role in conveying emotional depth, character development, and thematic complexity. Through Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, the symbols in the film can be categorized into three distinct types: natural symbols, conventional symbols, and singular symbols.

This section interprets each symbol within its narrative context, connects findings to Peirce's triadic model of sign (representamen-object-interpretant), and compares the results with prior research on symbolism in film and literature.

4.1 Natural Symbols

A natural symbol is a symbol whose meaning comes from a direct relationship between the sign and the thing it represents, or has a natural cause-and-effect relationship. It is called natural because the relationship between the sign and its meaning occurs naturally, not because of societal or cultural habits.

Data 1: Weather and atmosphere

In a scene that drastically changes Sara's life, the harsh and unsympathetic headmistress, Miss Minchin, calls Sara to her office. After receiving news that Sara's father has died in the war, she heartlessly decides that Sara must leave her luxurious room and be treated as a servant. In an atmosphere that suddenly turns dark and silent, Miss Minchin delivers her order:

"You'll move to the attic and work as a servant... Report to Mabel in the kitchen promptly at 5 a.m. (LaGravenese, 1995, p.14)."

This line is spoken as the visual atmosphere of the film becomes dark and tense. This change in mood reflects the natural symbol of Sara's inner turmoil. The darkness that envelops the room reflects her emotional devastation, loss of love, and the destruction of her childhood. From Peirce's perspective, the darkness functions as a natural symbol because its meaning (sadness, despair) arises from a universal human association between darkness and emotional suffering, not from cultural convention alone. This finding aligns with Guatri's (2023) observation that visual atmosphere in film serves as a symbolic extension of character psychology.

Data 2: Cold Weather and Snow

After being moved to the cold, dark attic, Sara spoke with her best friend, Becky, shivering in the cold. During the conversation, Sara asked a question:

"Is it ever this cold where you come from? (LaGravenese, 1995, p.16)"

This question is uttered in the bitter cold of winter, depicting suffering and isolation. The cold weather symbolically reflects loneliness and emotional suffering, making it a natural symbol of Sara's separation from love and comfort. In Peirce's framework, cold weather functions as an indexical symbol: it points to (indexes) the physical reality of Sara's impoverished condition while simultaneously symbolizing her emotional isolation. Unlike previous studies that focus on ideological themes (Wardani et al., 2021), this analysis reveals how weather functions as a non-verbal narrative device that externalizes internal states.

Data 3: The Smell of Warm Food

In the midst of her suffering, Sara tried to cheer Becky up by imagining the aroma of delicious food. With imagination and a small smile on her face, she said:

"Smell those sausages! (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 23)"

This scene shows the power of Sara's imagination in creating hope. The aroma of warm food is a natural symbol of comfort and hope for a better life, especially in situations of hunger and deprivation. From a Peircean perspective, the imagined smell functions as a natural symbol because the human association between warmth/nourishment and emotional security is universal and intuitive. This finding extends Byachkova's (2020) discussion of imagination as a psychological tool by demonstrating how sensory imagery (smell) concretizes abstract hope.

Data 4: Colorful Sky like a Peacock's Tail

As she reminisced about India and her happy childhood, Sara pointed out the beauty of the sky to Becky and said with admiration:

"The sky... is all different colors... like a peacock's tail (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 17)."

These words describe Sara's imaginative and beautiful inner world. The colorful sky is a natural symbol of inner freedom, hope, and escape from painful reality. In Peirce's triadic model, the sky (representamen) evokes the interpretant of freedom and transcendence, which stands in contrast to her physical confinement in the attic. This natural symbol operates independently of cultural learning, as the association between expansive sky and emotional freedom is universally accessible. This supports Kurniawati and Anwari's (2023) emphasis on how visual symbolism enhances narrative depth.

4.2 Conventional Symbols

Conventional symbols are symbols whose meanings are formed based on mutual agreement within a particular community, culture, or social system. In this case, there is no natural or causal relationship between the form of the symbol and the object it represents. Conventional symbols are widely used in everyday life, particularly in verbal and visual communication, as well as in legal and social contexts. Their meaning is determined by the system; these symbols can also change over time and differ between cultures.

a. Color Symbol

Data 1: Black Dress (Mourning)

Upon hearing the news that Sara's father had passed away, Miss Minchin immediately instructed her sister to fetch a simple black dress from Sara's room. With an expressionless face, she said:

Miss Minchin: "Amelia, go to Sara's room and find a simple black dress (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 13)."

This command refers to the social convention that black is a symbol of mourning. In this context, black dresses are a conventional symbol of loss and sadness, as well as the beginning of Sara's suffering as an orphan and servant at the school. Peirce classifies color symbolism as conventional because the meaning of black (mourning, death) is culturally specific rather than universal; in some cultures, white symbolizes mourning. This finding aligns with Liszka's (1996) observation that color meanings are both culturally conditioned and context-sensitive.

Data 2: Dark tones

After Miss Minchin's order, Sara lost her room, status, and comfort. When she was moved to the dark attic, the mood of the film also became gloomy. The film's color palette

shifts to dark and muted tones, representing Sara's emotional breakdown, loss of social identity, and the beginning of her hardships. This deliberate use of muted tones symbolizes emotional suppression, powerlessness, and sorrow. Unlike the natural darkness discussed earlier, these dark tones are manipulated by the filmmaker as a conventional visual code for despair, demonstrating how color functions as a conventional symbol that communicates meaning through artistic convention rather than natural causation.

Data 3: Bright Colors During the Birthday Scene

In the scene of Sara's birthday party, the room is decorated with bright colors and full of cheerfulness. Miss Minchin announces the purpose of the event:

"We're celebrating Sara's birthday (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 13)."

The warm and bright colors used in this scene symbolize happiness, love, and social belonging, making the sudden emotional shift that follows even more striking. Sara's birthday celebration is surrounded by colorful decorations, symbolizing joy, love, and social acceptance. These meanings are widely understood in social contexts, making the use of bright colors a conventional symbol of festivity and belonging. This contrast between bright and dark tones throughout the film creates a visual semiotic system that guides audience emotional responses without explicit dialogue. This technique exemplifies how conventional symbols operate through binary oppositions (light/dark, warm/cold) to generate meaning, a pattern also observed in other cinematic adaptations of children's literature (Yahya, 2024).

b. Object symbol

Data 1: Emily the Doll

Before leaving for the battlefield, Captain Crewe gave Sara a doll named Emily as a memento. He said softly:

"Whenever you're afraid, or miss me terribly... just tell Emily. She'll get the message to me... when you hug her, you'll be getting a hug from me."
(LaGravenese, 1995, p. 6)

Emily, Sara's doll, serves not only as a plaything but as a symbol of emotional continuity, inner strength, and a spiritual connection to her father. Peirce would classify Emily as a conventional symbol that has acquired singular qualities through Sara's personal attachment. While dolls generally symbolize childhood and innocence within Western culture (a conventional meaning), Sara's specific relationship with Emily transforms it into a singular symbol of paternal love. This dual nature---both conventional and singular---demonstrates the flexibility of Peirce's classification system.

Data 2: Birthday Cake

After becoming a servant, Sara received a surprise from her friends. They brought her a small cake that they had managed to save. In a warm atmosphere, Lottie said:

"We brought you something we rescued..." (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 21)

The cake serves as a symbol of friendship, recognition, and belonging. Culturally, a birthday cake is a universal sign of celebration and caring. Despite their poverty, her friends' gift represents emotional wealth. From a Peircian perspective, the cake functions as a conventional symbol because its meaning (celebration, care) is derived from social ritual rather than any natural property of the cake itself. This finding extends Fadaee's (2011) analysis of object symbolism in literature by demonstrating how similar symbolic mechanisms operate in cinematic narratives.

Data 3: The Locket

In one emotional moment, Sara pleads not to be separated from her mother's precious keepsake:

"The locket with Mama's picture? Oh, Papa, please!" (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 26)

The locket, which contains a photo of Sara's late mother, symbolizes maternal love, memory, and emotional grounding. When Miss Minchin confiscates the locket, it represents not only the stripping of material possessions but also the severing of Sara's emotional and familial identity. Peirce's triadic model illuminates this moment: the locket (representamen) points to (indexes) Sara's deceased mother while simultaneously symbolizing (conventional symbol) maternal love. The loss of the locket thus disrupts both the indexical connection to her mother's memory and the symbolic meaning of familial belonging, intensifying the emotional impact of the scene.

c. Nature Symbol

Data 1-3 (Synthesized): Sky, Cold Weather, and Warm Wind

The film repeatedly uses natural elements to convey emotional and thematic meaning. The colorful sky symbolizes inner freedom and hope. Cold weather represents loneliness, suffering, and alienation. The warm wind symbolizes nostalgia, family warmth, and emotional comfort. These nature symbols function across Peirce's categories: some operate naturalistically (cold directly causes discomfort, thus symbolizing suffering), while others operate conventionally (wind as "spirit" or "memory" is culturally constructed). This hybrid functioning demonstrates that symbols in film rarely belong exclusively to one category but often operate across multiple semiotic modes simultaneously. This complexity, largely unexplored in previous studies of *A Little Princess* (Wardani et al., 2021; Byachkova, 2020), reveals the sophistication of Cuarón's visual storytelling.

4.3 Singular Symbols

Singular symbols are highly personal and unique to a character or narrative context. They are not culturally universal but instead derive meaning from specific emotional or situational experiences. A singular symbol's meaning is only understood by a specific individual. These symbols usually arise from a person's personal experiences, memories, or emotional connections to an object or event.

Data 1: Imagination as a Shield

Before leaving for the battlefield, Captain Crewe assured Sara that miracles really do exist if she believes in them:

"Magic has to be believed. That's the only way it's real." (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 6)

This sentence became a personal symbol of hope and psychological protection for Sara. Imagination became an escape and a source of strength. In Peirce's framework, this is a singular symbol because its meaning is not accessible to external observers without knowledge of Sara's specific history and psychological state. While previous studies have discussed imagination in *A Little Princess* (Byachkova, 2020), this analysis contributes by demonstrating how imagination functions semiotically as a personal symbol that enables Sara to transform her lived reality. This internal semiotic process---reinterpreting the world through belief---distinguishes Sara's psychological resilience from mere escapism.

Data 2: The Magic Circle

In the bedtime story, Captain Crewe reads the legend of Sita and the magic circle:

"This is a magic circle. So long as you stay inside it... no harm can come to you." (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 2)

This magic circle is a personal symbol of emotional protection, love, and the imaginary boundary between the real world and fantasy. This symbol operates as a singular symbol because its meaning derives from Sara's specific emotional need for security after her father's departure. Unlike conventional symbols of protection (e.g., a shield in Western culture), the magic circle's meaning is intimately tied to Sara's personal history and relationship with her father. The breaking of the circle when Sita steps outside becomes an allegory for Sara's own vulnerability when separated from paternal love. This narrative device exemplifies how singular symbols can generate powerful emotional resonance within a specific character arc.

Data 3: Attic Transformation

In her most desperate moments, Sara imagined the attic as a beautiful room filled with food:

"See that table there? It's covered with a beautiful cloth... and trays of good things to eat." (LaGravenese, 1995, p. 23)

Initially depicted as a symbol of punishment and isolation, the attic is transformed by Sara's imagination into a place of wonder and refuge. This transformation highlights her psychological resilience and creative strength. This scene illustrates the power of imagination as a form of resistance and survival, where Sara reclaims agency over her environment by reinterpreting her space through symbolic storytelling. In Peircean terms, the attic undergoes semiotic transformation: from a conventional symbol of punishment (culturally understood as such) to a singular symbol of personal empowerment. This semiotic flexibility---the ability of a single sign to carry multiple, even contradictory, meanings depending on the observer's interpretive framework---is central to understanding how film symbolism operates dynamically rather than statically. This finding offers a new contribution to scholarship on *A Little Princess* (Kurniawati & Anwari, 2023) by demonstrating how symbolic transformation parallels psychological transformation in the protagonist.

4.4 Findings and Contributions

In summary, the analysis of *A Little Princess* through Peirce's semiotic framework reveals that the film employs all three types of symbols: natural, conventional, and singular. Natural symbols such as weather and darkness intuitively convey emotional states through universal human associations. Conventional symbols such as colors, objects, and culturally coded natural elements communicate meaning through shared social agreements. Singular symbols such as imagination, the magic circle, and the transformed attic carry unique, personal meanings embedded in Sara's specific psychological journey.

This study contributes to existing scholarship in three ways. First, it extends previous ideological readings of *A Little Princess* (Wardani et al., 2021) by demonstrating how visual symbolism supports and deepens the film's thematic concerns. Second, it provides a systematic application of Peirce's semiotic framework to a cinematic text, moving beyond impressionistic interpretations of symbolism toward a structured analytical method (Liszka, 1996; Peirce, 1931). Third, by identifying the dynamic operation of symbols across multiple categories, this study reveals how Cuarón's film uses semiotic complexity to represent the

psychological complexity of childhood trauma and resilience—an aspect largely unexplored in previous literature (Byachkova, 2020; Kurniawati & Anwari, 2023).

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that symbolism in Alfonso Cuarón's *A Little Princess* functions not merely as visual ornamentation but as a central narrative device that conveys the protagonist's emotional journey, psychological transformation, and inner resilience. Through the application of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic framework, the analysis reveals three distinct types of symbols operating within the film: natural symbols (weather, atmosphere, sky, cold, warm wind), conventional symbols (colours such as black and bright tones, objects such as Emily the doll, the birthday cake, and the locket), and singular symbols (imagination as a shield, the magic circle, and the transformation of the attic). Each symbol type contributes uniquely to the film's thematic exploration of loss, hope, identity, and resilience.

The natural symbols intuitively externalize Sara's internal emotional states through universal human associations, such as darkness representing despair and cold symbolizing isolation. The conventional symbols draw on shared cultural meanings—black for mourning, bright colours for joy, the locket for maternal love—to communicate themes accessible to a broad audience. The singular symbols, deeply personal to Sara's character arc, demonstrate how imagination functions as a psychological coping mechanism and a form of resistance against oppressive circumstances. Together, these symbolic layers enable the film to convey complex emotional and thematic content without relying solely on dialogue.

This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on cinematic symbolism and demonstrates the applicability of Peircean semiotics in film analysis. Unlike previous studies that have focused predominantly on ideological themes such as feminism and social class (Wardani et al., 2021) or explored imagination as a psychological tool (Byachkova, 2020), this research provides a systematic classification of visual symbolism grounded in a structured semiotic framework and reveals how different symbol types interact to produce narrative depth (Kurniawati & Anwari, 2023).

For future research, several directions are recommended. First, comparative studies across different adaptations of Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel—including earlier film versions or the 1995 film's television adaptations—could examine how different directors employ varied symbolic strategies to represent similar narrative themes. Second, cross-directorial studies comparing Cuarón's use of symbolism with that of other directors known for visual storytelling (such as Guillermo del Toro or Tim Burton) could identify distinctive stylistic signatures in cinematic symbolism. Third, research exploring how child audiences perceive and interpret visual symbolism in films like *A Little Princess* could bridge the gap between semiotic analysis and audience reception studies. Fourth, longitudinal studies examining how the symbolic elements in children's literature adaptations have evolved over time could illuminate broader cultural shifts in how resilience and imagination are visually represented. Such research would extend the findings of this study while contributing to the interdisciplinary dialogue between semiotics, film studies, and childhood studies.

References

- Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa. (n.d.). Lambang. In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*. Retrieved from <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/lambang>
- Byachkova, V. A. (2020). Symbolic space and imagination as psychological tools in children's literature. *Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 15(2), 45-58.

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Cuarón, A. (Director). (1995). *A little princess* [Film]. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Fadaee, E. (2011). Symbols, metaphors, and similes in literature: A case study of Animal Farm. *Journal of English and Literature*, 2(2), 19-27.
- Guatri, G. (2023). Analisis representasi visual: Kajian kekerasan simbolik dalam film. *Jurnal Kajian Film dan Seni Media*, 2, 293-312.
- Juniatri, E., Sururuddin, & Wahyuni, M. (2022). Pesan moral pada film Mencari Hilal: Analisis semiotika Roland Barthes. *Journal of Religion and Film*, 1(2), 96-115.
- Jung, C. G. (1978). *Man and his symbols*. Picador.
- Kurniawati, D., & Anwari, A. (2023). Visual symbolism and narrative depth in Alfonso Cuarón's *A Little Princess*. *Journal of Film and Cultural Studies*, 8(1), 67-82.
- LaGravenese, R. (1995). *A little princess* [Screenplay]. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Liszka, J. J. (1996). *A general introduction to the semiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Indiana University Press.
- Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Symbolism. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/symbolism>
- Peirce, C. S. (1931-1958). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Vols. 1-8). Harvard University Press.
- Rizki, U. (2022). *An analysis of symbolism found in Disney's 2015 Cinderella live action movie* [Undergraduate thesis]. Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara.
- Wardani, N. K., Putri, D. A., & Sari, M. (2021). Feminist and American values in *A Little Princess*: A critical analysis. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12(2), 89-104.
- Yahya, N. (2024). Analisis makna simbolisme dalam karya A'idh Abdullah Al-Qarni: Telaah buku "Al-Qur'an Berjalan". Retrieved from: <https://repository.iainpare.ac.id/id/eprint/6880/1/2020203879203021.pdf>

Code Mixing on Beby Tsabina TV: A Sociolinguistics Study of YouTube Content

Enny Nurhaliza¹, M. Manugeren², Idawati Situmorang³

^{1,2}Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia

³AMIK Parbina Nusantara, Pematang Siantar, Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

E-mail: eninnurhaliza@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received: April 08, 2026

Accepted: April 29, 2026

Published: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

alternation;

bilingualism;

code mixing;

congruent lexicalization;

insertion

Abstract

This study analyses code-mixing in the YouTube content of Beby Tsabina, an Indonesian actress and content creator on her channel *Beby Tsabina TV*. Beby frequently mixes English and Indonesian in her videos, presenting a rich case of bilingual language use. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this research identifies types of code-mixing based on Marzona's (2000) theory and describes their functions based on Marzona's (2005) framework across three selected videos. The analysis reveals 14 instances of congruent lexicalization, 45 instances of insertion, and 47 instances of alternation. Functionally, the data show 4 instances of greetings, 31 of storytelling, 11 of expressing opinions, 26 of giving instructions, and 34 of conveying emotions. The findings indicate that alternation is the dominant type of code-mixing, while conveying emotions is the most frequent function. This study contributes to sociolinguistics and digital discourse research by providing empirical evidence of how Indonesian YouTubers strategically employ code-mixing to enhance engagement, express identity, and navigate bilingual communication in online media.

Corresponding Author:

Enny Nurhaliza

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: eninnurhaliza@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that specifically examines the use of language in society. According to Trudgill (1974), as cited in Saputra et al. (2019), "Sociolinguistics is that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon." Sociolinguistics examines language functions, varieties, language change, language planning, and people's attitudes toward language use and its users. Within sociolinguistic phenomena, some people use more than two languages. For example, Indonesia has hundreds of different languages due to its ethnic diversity, where groups such as the Javanese, Malay, Batak, and Sundanese possess their own distinct languages. This diversity makes it possible for Indonesian people to speak more than one or two languages. In addition, this phenomenon is also known as bilingualism and multilingualism.

Bilingualism refers to the ability to speak two languages, while multilingualism describes the capacity to use more than two languages (Sukrisna, 2019). This linguistic phenomenon is prevalent worldwide, including in Indonesia, where ethnic diversity naturally fosters a polyglot society. Many Indonesians, particularly within the Gen Z generation, demonstrate proficiency in multiple languages. Furthermore, these individuals frequently engage in code-mixing, a practice that involves the fluid transition between different languages. When individuals systematically combine two or more languages or codes within a single discourse, this practice is formally recognized as code-mixing (Safitri, Harida, & Hamka, 2017).

According to Hudson (1990), as cited by Dewi (2021), code-mixing occurs when bilingual individuals switch from one language to another depending on the shifting social situation. In this process, speakers may incorporate specific words from one language, transition into another, and subsequently return to the primary language. As Muysken in Esnita et al. (2022) suggests, this phenomenon can occur within a single utterance involving two or more languages or language varieties. In the contemporary era, code-mixing is ubiquitous in daily communication across both formal and informal contexts. In this digital age, the practice has become especially prominent on social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok.

YouTube, in particular, has emerged as a significant hub for this linguistic trend, as many content creators utilize mixed languages to engage their audiences. An increasing number of individuals globally leverage the internet to convey their opinions, emotions, and artistic expressions through YouTube. This platform's significance is underscored by its status as one of the most visited websites globally, trailing only Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Huda, 2017, as cited in Wulandari, Valiantien, & Asanti, 2021). Consequently, YouTube serves as a rich digital landscape for observing the evolution of modern sociolinguistic practices.

Despite growing research on code-mixing in Indonesian YouTube content, previous studies have predominantly focused on established YouTubers with large followings without systematically comparing how different types of content (vlogs, challenges, daily routines) influence code-mixing patterns. Furthermore, existing research has primarily analysed code-mixing in scripted or semi-scripted content, leaving unscripted, spontaneous speech—which better reflects natural bilingual behaviour—underexplored. Additionally, limited attention has been paid to the specific functions of code-mixing in digital discourse, particularly how content creators use language mixing to build intimacy with audiences, express authenticity, or manage face in online interactions.

Beby Tsabina is a significant subject for this study for three reasons. First, as an Indonesian actress, model, and singer with over 1.6 million subscribers on her YouTube channel *Beby Tsabina TV*, she represents a successful crossover from traditional media to digital platforms, making her linguistic choices potentially influential for her large, predominantly young audience. Second, her content spans diverse genres—including daily vlogs, challenges, and behind-the-scenes footage—providing a varied corpus for analysing how code-mixing functions across different communicative contexts. Third, as a Gen Z content creator who frequently uses both English and Indonesian in unscripted, spontaneous speech, Beby offers a naturalistic data source for observing authentic bilingual practices in contemporary Indonesian digital media, distinguishing her from creators who rely on heavily scripted content.

The writers analyse three videos from the *Beby Tsabina TV* channel selected through purposive sampling. These specific videos were chosen because they cover a wide range of conditions, ensuring both the consistency of language use and contextual relevance for the study. To investigate the code-mixing that occurs in Beby Tsabina's utterances, the writers employ a qualitative descriptive method. This research aims to provide language users with a clear representation of how individuals who speak more than two languages utilize their linguistic repertoire and to explore the broader language phenomena inherent in bilingualism.

Accordingly, this research addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of code-mixing are used in Beby Tsabina's YouTube videos based on Marzona's (2000) classification?
2. What communicative functions do these code-mixing instances serve based on Marzona's (2005) framework?

Therefore, based on this background, the writers are motivated to conduct a study entitled *Code-Mixing Used by Beby Tsabina on the Beby Tsabina TV YouTube Channel*.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociolinguistics

Humans are inherently social creatures who rely on one another to support and satisfy their various needs. As a result, individuals are deeply integrated into society. Language and society are inseparable, as humans must communicate with one another to convey messages, feelings, and ideas. According to Kridalaksana and Djoko Kentjono, as cited in Naibaho (2020), language is defined as an arbitrary system of sound symbols used by members of social groups to cooperate, communicate, and identify themselves. The scholarly study that examines this intricate relationship between language and society is known as sociolinguistics.

Sociolinguistics explores the connection between language and the social fabric, focusing on how individuals utilize language across different social situations. As an aspect of macrolinguistics, sociolinguistics represents the intersection of two distinct fields: sociology and linguistics. Despite their different origins, they maintain a symbiotic relationship. However, it is important to note that the primary focus of sociolinguistics is not sociology itself, but rather the study of language within a social context.

According to Sumarsono (2010), the term sociolinguistics is derived from two words: "socio," meaning society, and "linguistics," referring to the scientific study of language. Sociolinguistics also serves as a vital resource for determining the most effective approach to communicating with others in various settings. Furthermore, the multilingual landscape of a country is often shaped by a variety of complex factors, including its history, geographical environment, and cultural evolution.

Yasemin (2013), as cited in Wilymafidini (2021), defines sociolinguistics as the science that investigates the aims and functions of language within society. This field attempts to explain how language varies across different contexts and geographical borders, as well as how individuals from one context communicate with those from others, such as interactions between non-native speakers or between native and non-native speakers. According to Spolsky (2010), sociolinguistics is the study of the link between language and society, focusing on language variation and attitudes toward language use. This perspective is supported by Hudson (1996), who defines the field as the study of the relationship between language and social factors, including social class, age, gender, and ethnicity. Furthermore, Trudgill (1974) emphasizes that sociolinguistics is the branch of linguistics concerned with language as a complex social and cultural phenomenon.

2.2 Bilingualism

In general, individuals who can express themselves in more than one language are referred to as bilinguals, and the phenomenon of becoming bilingual is known as bilingualism. Bilingualism is defined as the ability to speak and use two languages proficiently (Chaer & Agustina, 1995, as cited in Naibaho, 2020). However, this definition has been debated, as scholars hold different views on what constitutes bilingualism. This definition aligns with the classical perspective provided by Bloomfield (1933), who describes bilingualism as "native-like" control of two languages. Bloomfield's rigorous standard has been critiqued as overly exclusive, as it would exclude many functional bilinguals who use two languages effectively in daily life without achieving native-like fluency in both. Because the term "native-like" can be perceived as an overly rigorous standard, other experts have formulated more practical definitions. For instance, Titone (1972), as quoted by Hamers and

Blanc (2004), claims that bilingualism is an individual's capacity to speak a second language by adhering to its specific concepts and structures rather than merely paraphrasing their mother tongue.

Furthermore, Spolsky (1998) defines a bilingual as a person who possesses some functional ability in a second language, noting that this proficiency may vary significantly from one individual to another. Spolsky's inclusive definition is most appropriate for this study, as Beby Tsabina demonstrates functional ability in both Indonesian and English through her frequent and fluid mixing of the two languages in unscripted YouTube content, even if she may not meet Bloomfield's "native-like" standard. Nevertheless, Steinberg et al. (2001) clarify that bilingualism is distinct from bidialectalism, which refers to a person's ability to use different dialects within a single language. Therefore, to be considered bilingual, a person must be capable of expressing themselves in two or more distinct languages.

Regarding the social context, Hamers and Blanc (2004) define a bilingual community as a linguistic environment where several individuals are bilingual and two languages are in constant contact, often resulting in the use of both languages within the same interaction. Similarly, Fishman (1971), as quoted by Platt and Platt (1975), suggests that bilingualism typically emerges in complex speech communities where individuals become aware of and acquire multiple languages. Gumperz (1982) further observes that bilingual individuals often utilize specific idioms for in-group communication while using a common language for interaction with outsiders.

2.3 Code Mixing

One significant phenomenon that occurs within the field of sociolinguistics in bilingual or multilingual societies is code-mixing. The occurrences of code-mixing and code-switching have long intrigued scholars who examine the various triggers behind these linguistic behaviours (Muysken, 2000, as cited in Wulandari et al., 2021). A key debate in the literature concerns whether code-mixing and code-switching are distinct phenomena or overlapping categories. Some linguists treat them as interchangeable, while others distinguish them based on syntactic boundaries. Code-mixing specifically occurs when bilingual individuals combine words, sentences, or clauses from one language into another within a single discourse. Individuals proficient in more than one language are increasingly likely to employ code-mixing during everyday communication.

In a multilingual society, speakers frequently integrate one language with another, a process widely recognized as code-mixing. According to Suwito (2004), code-mixing involves the usage of two or more languages by injecting portions of one into the other. Furthermore, Trudgill (1992) describes code-mixing as a process where speakers transition between languages, even incorporating words and phrases that may be phonetically challenging in the primary language being used.

As stated by Hudson (1996), code-mixing occurs when a bilingual person who is fluent in communicating with other fluent bilinguals changes the language without necessarily altering the situational conditions. Based on the aforementioned theories, it can be concluded that code-mixing manifests when an individual utilizes two or more languages within the same speech act. Additionally, code-mixing is apparent in both spoken and written forms. This phenomenon is frequently identified in written works such as newspapers, novels, periodicals, academic articles, social media content, and film scripts.

2.3.1 Types of Code Mixing

Three stages have been identified in the typology of code-mixing by Muysken (2000): congruent lexicalization, alternation, and insertion. A critical issue in the literature is whether Marzona (2000, 2005, 2017) offers a distinct framework or merely adapts Muysken's

typology. After examination, this study follows the position that Marzona's typology is fundamentally an adaptation of Muysken's work for the Indonesian context. Marzona adopts the same three categories—insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization—with almost identical definitions. This study follows Marzona's adapted framework because it has been widely applied in Indonesian sociolinguistic research, providing a consistent basis for comparison with previous studies on Indonesian YouTube content (Rimadhani et al., 2022; Wulandari et al., 2021). The following sections present the three types as defined by Muysken (2000) and operationalized in Marzona's framework.

1. Congruent Lexicalization

Congruent lexicalization is identified as the first type of code-mixing. This phenomenon occurs when the two languages being mixed possess similar or compatible grammatical structures, thereby allowing for a seamless blending of elements from both languages within a single sentence. In this process, the speaker operates within a shared grammatical framework that can be lexically filled with items from either language.

A clear example of congruent lexicalization in an Indonesian-English context is as follows: “*I love makan di sini karena; the food is so delicious.*” This sentence can be translated as “I love eating here because the food is so delicious.” In this instance, the statement combines English and Indonesian within a single structure that remains grammatically consistent across both languages. The underlined portions of the sentence demonstrate how the mix of languages occurs effortlessly because the underlying structures are almost identical, allowing lexical items to be swapped without disrupting the syntactic flow.

2. Insertion

Insertion is identified as the second type of code-mixing. The concept of insertion corresponds to the term “transference” and “embedding” as introduced by Myers-Scotton (1993). This phenomenon occurs when a specific lexical item from one language is incorporated or “embedded” into the structure of another language. Insertion is often compared to spontaneous lexical borrowing because it is typically limited to a single lexical unit, such as a noun or a verb.

An example of insertion within an Indonesian-English context is as follows: “*Hari ini kita mau lunch bareng di kafe dekat sini.*” (Today we want to have lunch together at a cafe near here). In this bilingual sentence, Indonesian serves as the matrix language or the primary structure, while an English lexical item is inserted into the statement. The specific word being utilized or inserted in this instance is “lunch,” which functions as a noun within the otherwise Indonesian sentence structure.

3. Alternation

Alternation is identified as the final type of code-mixing. This process involves a transition where the structures of two languages alternate distinctly at both the lexical and grammatical levels. Unlike insertion, where one language remains dominant, alternation occurs when two separate grammatical systems are used sequentially. This process can manifest at various linguistic levels, including the replacement of syllables, phrases, or entire clauses with elements from the other language.

A clear example of alternation within an English-Indonesian context is as follows: “*She doesn't like it, tapi dia harus makan.*” (She doesn't like it, but she has to eat). This sentence demonstrates a simultaneous mixing and switching of codes within a single

utterance. The first part of the sentence utilizes English grammatical structures, but then transitions into Indonesian starting from the conjunction "*tapi*" (but). Consequently, it can be concluded that this sentence represents the process of alternation, as it showcases a balanced shift between two independent linguistic systems.

2.3.2 Functions of Code-Mixing

The application of code-mixing serves various communicative purposes. While Marzona (2017) identifies five functions—greetings, storytelling, expressing opinions, giving instructions, and conveying emotions—these functions are not mutually exclusive. For example, a YouTuber might mix languages to both tell a story and convey emotion simultaneously, and the functions may be platform-specific. On YouTube, code-mixing for storytelling and emotional expression may serve to create intimacy with viewers, a phenomenon less common in formal written discourse. The following are the five functions as defined by Marzona (2017):

A. Greeting

Greeting is a conventional way of acknowledging or saying hello as a friendly expression when meeting others. In the context of code-mixing, greeting involves utilizing words or phrases from different languages to address individuals in a distinctive manner. This practice may occur due to cultural inclusiveness, a desire for emphasis, or as a stylistic choice.

Example: "Long time no see, bro! *Gimana kabarnya?*"

Analysis: This example demonstrates a mix where the first part of the sentence is in English, followed by Indonesian in the latter part.

B. Storytelling

Storytelling is typically employed to narrate experiences and events by blending two or more languages to make the narrative more vivid and engaging.

Example: "*Jadi, waktu itu aku lagi jalan ke Bukit Lawang, terus suddenly ketemu sama bule from Aussie. Dia ngajakin ngobrol abis itu kita tukeran nomor, haha. Bener-bener fun experience banget sih.*"

Analysis: Based on the example, the speaker utilizes Indonesian as the base language while inserting English phrases to provide more descriptive detail to the story.

C. Expressing Opinions

Expressing an opinion occurs when an individual uses a mixture of codes to convey their personal point of view. Opinions represent beliefs that may or may not be supported by empirical evidence but reflect the speaker's subjective stance.

Example: "*Menurutku, plotnya cukup menarik, tapi ending-nya agak mudah ditebak sih. Tapi overall, worth it buat ditonton.*"

Analysis: In this instance, the speaker primarily uses Indonesian but incorporates English evaluative adjectives to express their judgment of the film or story.

D. Giving Instructions

Giving instructions involves providing guidance, directions, or advice using a mixture of languages.

Example: "*Mungkin kita bisa coba makan di resto yang lagi hits sekarang, atau kalau suka alam, hiking di gunung juga seru kok. What do you think?*"

Analysis: The speaker uses Indonesian to offer suggestions and then switches to an English rhetorical question to seek the interlocutor's agreement or opinion.

E. Conveying Emotions

Conveying emotion refers to the expression of one's internal feelings through communication. Within code-mixing, language mixtures are used to strengthen emotional nuances or subjective sentiments.

Example: "I'm really happy *lihat kamu hari ini!*"

Analysis: In this statement, the speaker uses an English emotive phrase at the beginning of the sentence, followed by Indonesian to provide context for their happiness.

2.4 Youtube

In general, social media serves as a multifaceted tool for information retrieval, entertainment, commerce, and communication. YouTube stands as the second most popular and frequently utilized social media platform globally, boasting over 2.49 billion users as of 2023. It functions as an expansive database of popular video content, providing a vast array of informative resources. The platform allows users to search for specific information or engage with video content directly. Furthermore, any individual can establish a personal YouTube account to upload content across various genres, including music, film, comedy, horror, travel vlogs, educational courses, tutorials, and podcasts. Those who consistently upload videos to their accounts are commonly referred to as YouTubers.

Moreover, YouTube is recognized as the world's second-largest search engine and the second-most visited website. Compared to other platforms, YouTube is often preferred because its primary medium is video. This format is increasingly favored by modern consumers as it allows for the acquisition of significant information within a shorter timeframe, thereby optimizing efficiency. Based on these developments, YouTube has cemented its position as a dominant social media giant. This global trend is mirrored in Indonesia, which recorded 139 million active YouTube users as of October 2023, making it a fertile ground for sociolinguistic research.

2.5 Beby Tsabina

Beby Tsabina is a prominent Indonesian actress, model, and singer of Acehese descent. Born in Banda Aceh on October 27, 2002, she began her professional career in the entertainment industry in 2015, gaining initial recognition through her role in the television series *Anak Jalanan*. Beyond her acting career, she is highly active on digital platforms, specifically through her YouTube channel, *Beby Tsabina TV*, which has amassed over 1.6 million subscribers. Her channel features a diverse range of content, including daily vlogs, interactive challenges, and musical covers.

Several of the most popular videos on her channel underscore her significant digital reach, such as *Beby Tsabina's First Vlog* with 10 million views, the *24-Hour No Makeup Challenge* with 7 million views, and her cover of Rizky Febian's *Bersamamu* with 6 million views. She utilizes YouTube primarily as a medium to interact with her fanbase, frequently sharing personal stories and behind-the-scenes experiences from her life as an actress. The success of her channel demonstrates the viability of crossover success for traditional media figures within the digital landscape of YouTube in Indonesia.

For the purpose of this study, the writers selected specific videos from Beby's channel for detailed linguistic analysis. The focus of the investigation is to identify the various types and functions of code-mixing present within her utterances. These particular videos were chosen because they contain a high frequency of English lexical items integrated into her Indonesian speech, providing a rich data set for observing contemporary code-mixing phenomena.

2.6 Review of Related Findings

In this section, the writers examine previous research efforts, including two distinct studies that serve as reference points for the current investigation. These studies are compared critically to identify what has been done and what remains underexplored.

The first study was conducted by Zul Astri and Al Fian (2020), entitled "*The Sociolinguistics Study on the Use of Code-Mixing in Gita Savitri Devi's YouTube Channel Video*." Similar to the present study, their research focuses on Indonesian-English code-mixing using a descriptive-qualitative method. However, the primary difference lies in the theoretical framework. Zul Astri and Al Fian utilized Hoffman's theory to categorize the types of code-mixing into three forms: intra-sentential, intra-lexical, and those involving changes in pronunciation. Hoffman's typology focuses on syntactic placement (where mixing occurs), whereas the present study adopts Muysken/Marzona's typology, which distinguishes mixing based on grammatical relationship (how languages relate structurally). Their findings identified 52 instances of code-mixing across categories such as words, phrases, sentences, prefixes, and suffixes, with intra-sentential code-mixing being the most frequent and pronunciation changes the least. In contrast, the current study employs Marzona's theory to analyze both the types and functions of code-mixing.

The second reference is a study by Rimadhani et al. (2022), titled "*Phenomena of Code-Mixing on YouTube Videos: A Case Study of Pita's Life YouTube Account*." This descriptive qualitative research analyzed nine videos uploaded in 2018, focusing on Indonesian-English code-mixing. This study aligns more closely with the current research as it also utilizes Marzona's theory. However, there are important differences. Rimadhani et al. identified three types of code-mixing (insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization) and investigated the motives behind these linguistic choices, classifying them into the fulfilment of needs and the pursuit of prestige. Their results revealed 18 cases of insertion, 2 cases of alternation, and 4 cases of congruent lexicalization, with motives identified in 5 data points (3 for fulfilling needs, 2 for prestige).

The research gap this study addresses is twofold. First, existing studies have focused on established YouTubers without systematically comparing how different types of content influence code-mixing patterns. Second, previous research has primarily analysed motives (why speakers mix languages at a psychological level) rather than communicative functions (what purposes mixing serves in discourse). This study extends previous research by applying Marzona's functional framework to a highly popular YouTuber (Beby Tsabina, with over 1.6 million subscribers) and by analysing both structural types and communicative functions in spontaneous, unscripted speech.

3. Research Method

This research employs a qualitative descriptive design to analyze the code-mixing utilized by Beby Tsabina. According to Moleong (2018), qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena related to participants' conditions, including behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions. Nassaji (2015) explains that descriptive research aims to categorize and outline the phenomena under study. To achieve this, the writers apply passive participant observation, watching Beby Tsabina's YouTube videos and recording instances of code-mixing using Marzona's (2017) theory.

Three videos from the *Beby Tsabina TV* YouTube channel were selected using purposive sampling based on four criteria: (1) Beby Tsabina as the primary speaker, (2) diverse content genres (daily vlog, weekly recap, challenge), (3) publication within the same year, and (4) high frequency of English-Indonesian mixing. The selected videos are: "Beby's

VLOG #138" (23:47), "Beby's VLOG #139" (21:15), and a third video (19:32), totalling approximately 64 minutes of analysed content.

The data collection process follows a documentation technique. The systematic procedure involves watching the selected videos, transcribing utterances, identifying code-mixing instances, classifying data based on Marzona's types and functions, and interpreting the findings.

To ensure reliability, intra-rater reliability was conducted by re-analysing the same data after a two-week interval (92% agreement). Inter-rater reliability was also conducted by having a second coder independently code 20% of the data (87% agreement), following Creswell (2014) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

Ethically, all videos are publicly accessible on YouTube without privacy restrictions. This study is purely observational, non-commercial, and does not interact with or harm the content creator. All data are properly attributed to Beby Tsabina as the original source, following the principles of the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham & Buchanan, 2012).

4. Discussion

In this part, the writers focus the analysis on the purpose that has been mentioned in the objective of the study, which is to identify the type of code-mixing and describe the function of code mixing seen in Beby Tsabina's utterances in her YouTube videos. This study uses transcript data taken randomly to identify the type and describe the function of code-mixing that occurs in the video.

4.1 Type of Code Mixing

There are three types of code mixes that occur in Beby Tsabina's speech in her three videos, the writers use Marzona's theory to identify these types of code mixes. The following below is a more detailed explanation.

1. Congruent Lexicalization

- a. (Beby's VLOG #138 A Day in My Life as a Student in Western Michigan University – minute 3:13 - 3:17)
“*Pokoknya hari ini bakal very productive dan sangat sibuk banget*”
(anyway today will be very productive and very busy)
Code Mixing: very productive

The utterances above show English words or phrases that have similar or the same equivalents in Indonesian. There are English words "very" and "productive" whose meanings in Indonesian are "*sangat*" and "*produktif*" According to Marzona's theory of code-mixing, this example fits into the category of Congruent Lexicalization, where elements from two languages with similar grammatical structures are combined.

2. Insertion

- a. (Beby's VLOG #138 A Day in My Life as a Student in Western Michigan University – minute 2:36 – 2:40)
“*Ini emang sebenarnya the most wanted video dari kalian semua.*”
(This is actually the most wanted video from all of you)
Code Mixing: the most wanted

The phrase "the most searched video" is inserted into the Indonesian sentence, indicating an English element inserted into the Indonesian sentence structure. This fits into the category of Insertion according to Marzona's theory.

3. Alternation

- a. (Beby's VLOG #138 A Day in My Life as a Student in Western Michigan University – minute 17:25 – 17:30)

"Hii im done, udah selesai kelasnya for today."

(Hii, I'm done. The class is over for today.)

Code Mixing: Hii I'm done, for today

This utterance shows an alternation between English and Indonesian. The first part "Hii I'm done" is in English, and the second part "udah selesai kelasnya for today" is a mixture, of "for today" in English. This sentence fits into the alternation of Marzona's theory.

The analysis revealed 14 instances of congruent lexicalization, 45 instances of insertion, and 47 instances of alternation. Alternation emerged as the most frequent type, while congruent lexicalization was the least frequent. This dominance of alternation can be explained by several factors. First, YouTube vlogs involve extended narrative monologues where speakers move between topics; alternation allows Beby to signal topic shifts or emotional changes by switching languages. Second, unlike insertion which requires embedding single words into a dominant grammatical frame, alternation does not require either language to be dominant, offering greater flexibility for spontaneous speech. Third, congruent lexicalization requires the two languages to share similar grammatical structures. Indonesian and English differ significantly in syntax (e.g., Indonesian has no verb tense marking while English has complex tense systems), making congruent lexicalization more difficult to produce naturally. This finding supports Muysken's (2000) observation that congruent lexicalization is most common in closely related languages rather than typologically distant pairs like Indonesian-English.

4.2 Function of Code mixing

- a) Greetings

"Hi hi welcome back, di video kali ini aku mau bikin a week in my life" (#139 Beby's VLOG: A Week in My Life: Study, Fashion Show & Movie Day – minute 00:36 – 00:42)

The utterance above shows a greeting in English followed by Indonesian and then English again. Beby Tsabina opens the initial greeting "hi hi welcome back" in her video to greet his audience followed by the sentence "di video kali ini aku mau bikin" then "a week in my life" as a context that describes the content of his video.

- b) Story Telling

"Im just happy right now, karna tadi sebelum kelas, aku ketemu sama orang kayak Korean-american gitu main skate, terus kayak he ask for my number" (Beby's VLOG #138 A Day in My life as a Student in Western Michigan University – minute 17:40 – 18:01)

The utterance pad above shows the function of storytelling code mix which uses a mixture of English and Indonesian to convey the story more expressively. In her utterance, Beby tells her personal experience when meeting someone.

- c) Expressing Opinion

"Sekarang aku lagi suka banget pake ini karna enak banget berasa kayak dipijet gitu bagus juga buat sirkulasi darah so its really good" (Beby's VLOG #138 A Day in My life as a Student in Western Michigan University – minute 01:47 – 01:55)

Based on the above speech showing the function of conveying opinions, Beby mixes Indonesian as the initial part of the sentence followed by English to convey his opinion about the use of guasha which gives a massage sensation.

d) Giving Instructions

"Pertama aku wash my face abis itu bilas seperti biasa" (Beby's VLOG #138 A Day in My life as a Student in Western Michigan University – minute 01:27 – 01:30)

The utterance above shows the code-mixing function of giving instructions in which one phrase "wash my face" is inserted in the Indonesian sentence structure. Beby gives instructions about her skincare routine by mixing Indonesian and English to provide a more detailed explanation.

e) Conveying Emotion

"Katanya di show kalo aku researchnya banyak dan aku kek beneran tau about the company it self, so im very happy." (#139 Beby's VLOG: A Week in My Life: Study, Fashion Show & Movie Day – minute 12:54 – 13:02)

The utterance above shows the code-mixing function of conveying emotion which is Indonesian and then followed by English. Beby showed a happy feeling with the phrase "so I'm very happy" to indicate her positive feelings because of the recognized effort.

The functional analysis showed that conveying emotions (34 instances) and storytelling (31 instances) were the most frequent functions, while greetings (4 instances) were the least frequent. This distribution reflects the nature of YouTube vlogs as personal, narrative-driven content.

Storytelling is frequent because vlogs are essentially first-person narratives of daily experiences. Beby uses English to highlight exciting moments ("Korean-american," "skate," "ask for my number") and Indonesian to establish conversational intimacy. This pattern illustrates what Myers-Scotton (1993) calls the "markedness model": speakers choose the unmarked language (Indonesian) for neutral narration but switch to the marked language (English) for emphasis, evaluation, or dramatization.

Conveying emotions is equally frequent because vlogs are personal and emotionally expressive. Beby repeatedly uses English phrases ("I'm so happy," "so I'm very happy") to express positive emotions. English serves as a "distancing" mechanism, allowing her to express strong emotions while maintaining a degree of performative control—a pattern documented in digital discourse studies. For negative emotions, she typically stays with Indonesian, suggesting that English functions as a language of positive affect while Indonesian carries heavier emotional weight for vulnerability.

Greetings are rare because YouTube vlogs, unlike live conversations, do not require repeated greetings. Beby typically greets her audience once at the beginning of each video, but the greeting function is often fulfilled through video titles, thumbnails, or non-verbal cues, reducing the need for verbal greetings. This finding highlights that the frequency of communicative functions is genre-dependent, and researchers must interpret functional distributions within their specific media contexts rather than as universal patterns.

4.3 Broader Sociolinguistic Implications

These findings contribute to broader theories in sociolinguistics in three ways. First, they support Muysken's (2000) typology by demonstrating that the three types of code-mixing are empirically distinguishable and occur in different proportions depending on linguistic and contextual factors. The rarity of congruent lexicalization in Indonesian-English mixing confirms Muysken's observation that typological distance between languages shapes code-mixing patterns.

Second, the findings extend Gumperz's (1982) theory of conversational code-switching to digital contexts. Gumperz identified six functions of code-switching (e.g., quotation, addressee specification, interjection). This study's functional categories

(storytelling, conveying emotions, giving instructions) align with Gumperz's framework while adding platform-specific functions (e.g., greeting YouTube audiences, creating vlog narrative structure). This suggests that digital discourse requires an expanded functional typology that accounts for one-to-many, asynchronous communication.

Third, the study contributes to research on language and identity in digital media. Beby's code-mixing patterns construct a hybrid identity: globally connected (through English) yet authentically Indonesian (through Indonesian for personal content). This bilingual identity resonates with an increasingly globalized generation of Indonesians who navigate multiple linguistic and cultural worlds daily. As English continues to spread through digital media, code-mixing like Beby's may become the default for young, urban, educated Indonesians rather than a marked choice.

5. Conclusion

After analyzing with using Marzona's theory, the writers have found that there are three types of code-mixing in the three Beby Tsabina videos mentioned in the scope of this research. The types of code mixing are congruent lexicalization, insertion, and alternation.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Code-Mixing Types

Type of Code-Mixing	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Congruent Lexicalization	14	13.2
Insertion	45	42.5
Alternation	47	44.3
Total	106	100

Note:

N = 106. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

Based on the data shown in the table, it can be concluded that there have been several types of code mixing observed in Beby Tsabina's utterances in her three videos on the Beby Tsabina TV channel. In this research series, the writers have found 14 data of congruent lexicalization, 45 data of insertion, and 47 data of alternation. Significantly, alternation has been the most frequently occurring type of code-mixing, while congruent lexicalization has been the least frequently encountered in the utterances.

Furthermore, the writers have also identified the functions of code mixing present in three videos of Beby Tsabina. These include greetings, storytelling, expressing opinions, giving instructions, and conveying emotions, as outlined in Marzona's theory adopted by the writers.

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Code-Mixing Functions

Function of Code-Mixing	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Greetings	4	3.8
Storytelling	31	29.2
Expressing Opinions	11	10.4
Giving Instructions	26	24.5
Conveying Emotions	34	32.1
Total	106	100

Note:

N = 106. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.

From the table above, it can be concluded that several instances have shown the functions of code-mixing, namely 4 data of greetings, 31 data of storytelling, 11 data of expressing opinions, 26 data of giving instructions, and 34 data of conveying emotions.

References

- Astri, Z. & Fian, A. (2020). The sociolinguistics study on the use of code-mixing in Gita Savitri Devi's YouTube channel video. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature (JELTL)*, 3(2), 154-165.
- Bloomfield, L. (1933). *Language*. Henry Holt and Company.
- Chaer, A., & Agustina, L. (1995). *Sosiolinguistik: Perkenalan awal*. Rineka Cipta.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dewi, K. T. (2021). Language use: Code mixing, code switching, borrowing, pidginization, and creolization. *Yavana Bhasha: Journal of English Language Education*, 4(1), 34-44.
- Esnita, E., Syafitri, D., Rahayu, S., & Putri, N. (2022). An analysis of code mixing used by social media users in digital communication. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 10(1), 45-56.
- Fishman, J. A. (1971). *Sociolinguistics: A brief introduction*. Newbury House.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hamers, J. F., & Blanc, M. H. (2004). *Bilinguality and bilingualism* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Hoffman, C. (1991). *An introduction to bilingualism*. Longman.
- Huda, M. (2017). *Pengaruh media sosial YouTube terhadap perilaku komunikasi mahasiswa* [Undergraduate thesis]. Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga.
- Hudson, R. A. (1996). *Sociolinguistics* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Kridalaksana, H. (2008). *Kamus linguistik* (4th ed.). Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Markham, A., & Buchanan, E. (2012). *Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee* (Version 2.0). Association of Internet Researchers.
- Marzona, Y. (2017). The use of code mixing between Indonesian and English in Indonesian advertisement of Gadis. *Jurnal Ilmiah Langue and Parole*, 1(1), 238-248.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Moleong, L. J. (2018). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Muysken, P. (2000). *Bilingual speech: A typology of code-mixing*. Cambridge University Press.
- Myers-Scotton, C. (1993). *Duelling languages: Grammatical structure in code-switching*. Clarendon Press.
- Naibaho, L. (2020). *Introduction to sociolinguistics*. UKI Press.
- Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2), 129-132.
- Platt, J. T., & Platt, H. K. (1975). *The social significance of speech: An introduction to and workbook in sociolinguistics*. North-Holland Publishing Company.
- Rimadhani, N. R., Sari, D. P., Hartanti, M. P., & Wulandari, T. (2022). Code mixing phenomenon in YouTube video: A case study of Pita's Life account. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya*, 6(2), 579-588.

- Safitri, M., Harida, E. S., & Hamka. (2017). An analysis of code mixing used by students of TBI in social media (Facebook) at fifth semester of IAIN Padangsidempuan. *English Education: English Journal for Teaching and Learning*, 5(2), 52-64.
- Saputra, J., Rahmawati, A., & Setiawan, B. (2019). The importance of sociolinguistics in foreign language education: A review of selected paper. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Studies*, 1(4), 299-303.
- Spolsky, B. (1998). *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Spolsky, B. (2010). *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- Steinberg, D. D., Sciarini, N. V., & Sciarini, S. J. (2001). *Psycholinguistics: Language, mind and world* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Sukrisna, A. (2019). *An analysis of code mixing used by English teachers in teaching learning process at Mas Darul Ulum Tanjung Bintang in the academic year of 2018/2019* [Undergraduate thesis]. UIN Raden Intan Lampung.
- Sumarsono. (2010). *Sosiolinguistik*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Suwito. (2004). *Sosiolinguistik: Teori dan masalah*. Penerbit Universitas Sebelas Maret.
- Titone, R. (1972). *Le bilinguisme: Théorie et pratique*. Didier.
- Trudgill, P. (1974). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction*. Penguin Books.
- Trudgill, P. (1992). *Introducing language and society*. Penguin Books.
- Wilymafidini, O. (2021). Code mixing used by the teachers of LPAM English Course Semurup in the teaching learning process. *Inovish Journal*, 6(1), 65-74.
- Wulandari, T., Valiantien, N. M., & Asanti, C. (2021). Code mixing in Seleb English video content on YouTube. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, dan Budaya*, 5(3), 503-517.
- Yasemin, K. (2013). Sociolinguistics and language education. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Repentance in Nicholas Sparks' Novel *The Last Song*: A Literary Psychological Analysis

Pardi, Lavia Amalia Arun

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: pardi@sastra.uisu.ac.id

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: March 30, 2026 Accepted: April 30, 2026 Accepted May 11, 2026	This study examines the processes of repentance in Nicholas Sparks' <i>The Last Song</i> , focusing on the protagonist's experiences of resentment and reconciliation. The protagonist's emotional estrangement stems from misunderstandings toward his father and friend, as well as a lack of honesty and effective communication. The objective of this research is to identify and analyze the specific forms and sequential stages of repentance exhibited by the protagonist as a response to these relational conflicts. To achieve this, the study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, following the framework proposed by Creswell (2013), allowing the analysis and results to be presented in a detailed and interpretive manner. The findings reveal two primary forms of repentance: repentance toward his father and repentance toward his friend, each comprising stages of acknowledgment of wrongdoing, emotional reflection, and efforts to restore trust and relationships. The study underscores the broader significance of repentance, demonstrating how it functions as a mechanism for personal moral development and the repair of interpersonal bonds, highlighting its transformative impact on both the protagonist and the relationships he seeks to mend.
Keywords: <i>emotional reconciliation;</i> <i>hatred;</i> <i>interpersonal relationships;</i> <i>moral accountability;</i> <i>repentance</i>	
Corresponding Author: Pardi Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia E-mail: pardi@sastra.uisu.ac.id	

1. Introduction

Literature serves as a significant medium for representing human experiences, moral values, and emotional complexities through imaginative narratives. It reflects not only external realities but also the internal struggles of individuals, including their ethical dilemmas and processes of self-realization. As one of the most comprehensive literary genres, the novel provides a broad space for authors to explore character development, particularly in relation to moral transformation and personal growth. Through characterization, readers are able to observe how individuals respond to conflicts, make decisions, and undergo changes that shape their identity.

One of the literary works that vividly portrays moral transformation is *The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks. The novel centers on Veronica "Ronnie" Miller, a teenage girl who experiences emotional conflict and rebellion following her parents' divorce. Ronnie's strained relationship with her father and her resistance to authority reflect her internal turmoil and unresolved anger. However, as the story progresses, she undergoes a process of repentance, marked by self-reflection, emotional reconciliation, and moral growth. This transformation becomes a central theme in the narrative, highlighting the significance of forgiveness, responsibility, and personal change.

Repentance is an important concept in both moral philosophy and psychological studies, as it involves recognizing one's mistakes, experiencing remorse, and making efforts to change behaviour. It is often associated with ethical awareness and emotional maturity, as

individuals reassess their past actions and strive to improve themselves. In literary contexts, repentance is frequently portrayed as a turning point in character development, where protagonists move from a state of conflict or wrongdoing toward resolution and self-improvement. This process not only enriches the narrative but also provides moral insights for readers.

Adolescence, as depicted in the novel, is a crucial stage of development characterized by emotional instability and identity formation. During this period, individuals are more likely to experience conflict with family members, particularly parents, as they seek independence while still requiring guidance. Ronnie's character exemplifies this condition, as her rebellious behaviour is influenced by emotional pain and miscommunication within her family. Her eventual repentance is shaped by significant experiences, including her renewed relationship with her father and the challenges she faces throughout the story. These experiences contribute to her emotional growth and transformation.

Previous studies have examined themes of family conflict and adolescent development in literary works, including Sparks' novels. However, limited scholarly attention has been devoted specifically to the representation of repentance as a process of moral and psychological transformation in *The Last Song*. While researchers have explored interpersonal relationships and emotional reconciliation in contemporary fiction, the systematic analysis of how repentance unfolds through stages of acknowledgment, emotional reflection, and behavioural change in this particular novel remains underexplored.

Although previous studies have examined themes of family conflict and adolescent development in *The Last Song*, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to the representation of repentance as a process of moral and psychological transformation. This study seeks to fill that gap by analysing how repentance shapes the protagonist's personal growth and interpersonal reconciliation.

Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What forms of repentance are portrayed in Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song*?
2. How does the protagonist's repentance develop as a response to relational conflicts with her father and friend?

Based on this background, this study aims to analyse the protagonist's repentance in the novel, focusing on how it is portrayed and what factors contribute to its development. By applying a literary and psychological perspective, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of moral transformation in fictional characters. Furthermore, this study is expected to contribute to literary analysis by demonstrating how narratives can represent processes of repentance and personal growth, as well as their relevance to real-life human experiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Character and Characterization

Character is a central element in literary works, particularly in novels, as it functions to convey the narrative and embody human experiences. According to Abrams (1981), characters are individuals presented in a story whose moral and psychological qualities are revealed through their actions and dialogue. Through characterization, authors are able to construct personalities that reflect real-life human behaviour, enabling readers to understand emotional and psychological dimensions within the narrative.

The protagonist, as the main character, plays a crucial role in the development of the story. This character typically becomes the focal point of events and conflicts, undergoing significant experiences that shape the narrative structure. As Holman and Harmon (1986) suggest, the protagonist is often involved in the central conflict and experiences

transformation throughout the story. This transformation may involve emotional, psychological, or moral changes, making the protagonist an essential subject for literary analysis.

In *The Last Song*, Veronica "Ronnie" Miller functions as a protagonist whose transformation from resentment to reconciliation drives the narrative. Her characterization—marked by stubbornness, emotional vulnerability, and gradual self-awareness—provides a rich psychological foundation for analysing repentance as a process rather than a single event. Recent scholarship on character development in young adult literature emphasizes that protagonists in contemporary fiction often undergo moral transformations triggered by relational crises (Nikolajeva, 2014; Trites, 2018). Ronnie's journey aligns with this pattern, as her repentance is not instantaneous but evolves through stages of denial, confrontation, acknowledgment, and action.

2.2 The Concept of Repentance

Repentance is generally understood as a process through which an individual recognizes wrongdoing, experiences remorse, and demonstrates a commitment to behavioural change. From a philosophical perspective, repentance involves acknowledging one's fault, accepting responsibility, and forming a resolution to act differently in the future (Swinburne, 1989). This indicates that repentance is not merely an emotional reaction but also a rational and ethical process that requires conscious self-evaluation and moral awareness.

However, scholars have debated the precise components of genuine repentance. While Swinburne (1989) emphasizes acknowledgment and resolution as sufficient, Griswold (2007) argues that true repentance also requires a "change of heart" that transforms the individual's moral self-conception. More recently, Qianyu (2018) proposes a four-stage model of repentance: recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change. This model is particularly useful for literary analysis because it provides observable textual indicators that can be traced through character dialogue and action.

This study adopts Qianyu's (2018) framework because it offers specific, analysable stages that are detectable in narrative progression. In *The Last Song*, Ronnie's repentance toward her father follows this model: she recognizes her prolonged anger as unjust (recognition), feels guilt and sorrow (remorse), admits her role in the emotional distance (responsibility), and actively cares for her father during his illness (behavioural change). Similarly, Will's repentance toward Ronnie involves full disclosure of his deception and efforts to make amends, reflecting the same structural components.

2.3 Moral Transformation and Development

Repentance is closely associated with moral and psychological transformation. It can be defined as a change in attitude, mindset, and behaviour accompanied by a sense of regret for past actions (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998). In psychological terms, repentance is often linked to the concept of metanoia, which refers to a fundamental transformation in one's perspective and orientation toward life, typically triggered by internal conflict or significant experiences (Mezirow, 1991). This highlights that repentance involves not only emotional regret but also a deep restructuring of personal values and identity.

Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development provides a complementary framework. Kohlberg proposes that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning, from obedience to authority (pre-conventional) to autonomous ethical principles (post-conventional). Repentance can be interpreted as part of an individual's advancement toward

higher levels of moral reasoning, where individuals become more aware of the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for them.

Recent research has extended these foundational theories. Hardy and Carlo (2011) emphasize that moral development is not only cognitive but also emotional, involving moral identity and self-regulation. Eisenberg, Spinrad, and Knafo-Noam (2015) show that prosocial behaviour, including reparative actions following wrongdoing, is strongly predicted by empathy and emotional regulation. In *The Last Song*, Ronnie's transformation exemplifies this integration: her repentance is not merely cognitive (recognizing her mother's deception) but deeply emotional (feeling guilt and compassion) and behavioural (choosing to forgive and care).

Critical life events often act as catalysts for repentance. Mezirow (1991) explains that transformative learning occurs when individuals encounter disorienting dilemmas that challenge existing assumptions. For Ronnie, her father's terminal cancer diagnosis serves as such a dilemma, forcing her to reevaluate her prolonged resentment. This finding aligns with recent scholarship on repentance in contemporary fiction, which shows that protagonists' moral transformations are frequently triggered by crises involving mortality or irreversible loss (Nikolajeva, 2014).

2.4 Psychological Literary Criticism

A psychological approach to literature provides a valuable framework for analysing repentance in fictional characters. This approach focuses on understanding characters' mental states, emotional experiences, and behavioural changes as representations of real human psychology. As argued by Wellek and Warren (1956), literary works can be examined through psychological perspectives to uncover deeper meanings related to human behaviour and inner conflict.

Contemporary literary psychology emphasizes that characters in fiction often mirror real psychological processes, enabling readers to interpret emotional and moral development in more nuanced ways (Miall & Kuiken, 2002). Recent studies have applied psychological frameworks to analyse moral emotions in literature, demonstrating how fictional narratives can illuminate real-world psychological mechanisms (Keen, 2020; Hogan, 2018).

In *The Last Song*, the protagonist's repentance is shaped by emotional experiences and interpersonal relationships. The character's journey demonstrates how personal reflection, family dynamics, and significant life events contribute to moral transformation. Emotional attachment and relational experiences, particularly within family contexts, are known to influence moral growth and prosocial behaviour (Eisenberg et al., 2015). Through a psychological lens, this transformation can be interpreted as a process of emotional maturation and ethical development, illustrating how literary narratives reflect real-life human experiences and moral change.

This study integrates the theoretical frameworks discussed above into an analytical model. From Swinburne (1989) and Qianyu (2018), it adopts the concept of repentance as a staged process involving recognition, remorse, responsibility, and behavioural change. From Kohlberg (1981) and Hardy and Carlo (2011), it incorporates the understanding that repentance reflects moral development and identity formation. From psychological literary criticism (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Miall & Kuiken, 2002), it applies the interpretive method that treats fictional characters as psychologically coherent individuals. The novel *The Last Song* serves as the primary text for applying this integrated framework, with the analysis focusing on how the protagonist's repentance unfolds through interaction with family and friends.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Gap

While previous studies have examined themes of family conflict, adolescent rebellion, and emotional reconciliation in Nicholas Sparks' novels, limited research has systematically analysed repentance as a staged psychological process. Existing scholarship on Sparks' works tends to focus on romance, loss, and forgiveness as thematic concerns rather than the specific moral-psychological mechanism of repentance (Trites, 2018; Nikolajeva, 2014).

Furthermore, the integration of philosophical (Swinburne, 1989; Griswold, 2007), psychological (Tangney et al., 2007; Eisenberg et al., 2015), and literary (Wellek & Warren, 1956) perspectives on repentance has not been systematically applied to a contemporary novel like *The Last Song*. This study seeks to fill this gap by analysing how the protagonist's repentance develops through identifiable stages and how this process is influenced by interpersonal relationships and critical life events. By bridging these theoretical frameworks, this research offers a more comprehensive understanding of repentance as both a moral concept and a narrative device for character transformation.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method within a literary psychological framework. The qualitative descriptive approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to analyse and interpret the protagonist's repentance as represented through narrative passages, dialogues, and character development in Nicholas Sparks' novel *The Last Song*. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups attach to social or human problems, making this approach suitable for examining emotional and moral transformation in literary characters.

The primary data for this study consist of narrative passages and dialogues from Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song* that reflect the protagonist's repentance. The focus of analysis is on the character Veronica "Ronnie" Miller, particularly her interactions with her father and her friend Will, as well as her internal reflections throughout the novel. Secondary data are obtained from scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other academic sources related to the concepts of repentance, moral development, and literary psychology (Suhadi et al., 2023).

Data collection was conducted through intensive reading, note-taking, and textual classification, guided by the methodological principles established by Sugiyono (2019) and Sutopo (2006), with an emphasis on selecting information relevant to the research questions rather than maximizing the quantity of data (Pardi & Ardescy, 2022). The researcher read the novel multiple times to identify passages relevant to the protagonist's repentance. Key dialogues and narrative descriptions that indicate recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioral change were extracted and documented. The data were then classified based on the types and stages of repentance exhibited by the protagonist.

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2013) procedural model, which includes data organization, coding, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. First, the collected data were organized thematically according to the research questions. Second, the identified passages were coded based on the forms of repentance (toward father and toward friend) and the stages of repentance (acknowledgment, emotional reflection, responsibility, and behavioral change). Third, the coded data were interpreted within the context of the novel's narrative and character development. Finally, conclusions were drawn to answer the research questions regarding the forms and development of repentance in *The Last Song*.

To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing textual evidence with theoretical frameworks from Swinburne (1989), Qianyu

(2018), and Griswold (2007). This cross-referencing ensures that the interpretation of repentance is grounded in established theoretical concepts rather than subjective impression.

4. Discussion

The analysis of this study is concentrated on specific aspects outlined within its scope, namely the protagonist's repentance for feelings of resentment toward her father and repentance for hostility toward her friend. These focal points serve as the primary basis for the analytical discussion, which is predominantly grounded in the narrative events of Nicholas Sparks's novel *The Last Song*.

4.1 Repentance toward Her Father

Repentance involves a transformation of one's mind or heart. It entails a person reflecting on past actions or inactions, feeling regret, and adopting a different perspective or judgment regarding previous decisions, with the intention of not repeating similar behaviour if given another opportunity. Qianyu (2018) explains that repentance consists of recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change.

In *The Last Song*, Ronnie's repentance toward her father is not spontaneous but develops gradually in response to three catalysts: her father's self-awareness, his terminal illness, and the revelation of her mother's deception. Each catalyst forces Ronnie to confront the gap between her perception of the past and the actual events.

4.1.1 The Origin of Resentment

Ronnie's resentment stems from the divorce of her parents and her belief that her father was solely responsible. The following exchange reveals how miscommunication has intensified her anger:

"That's not my fault. He's the one who left." (Sparks, 2010, p. 10)

Her father responds gently: "Yes, but you haven't taken these calls (Sparks, 2010, p. 10)."

Why does this resentment occur? Ronnie externalizes blame entirely onto her father, refusing to acknowledge her own role in maintaining emotional distance. This defensive mechanism protects her from the painful realization that her father loved her despite the divorce. Her father's patient response highlights that repentance requires both parties to recognize their contributions to relational breakdown.

4.1.2 Catalysts for Change

The first catalyst is her father's own acknowledgment of fault. The narrator reveals:

"He knew he had no one to blame but himself... burying himself in music had less to do with God than a selfish desire to escape." (Sparks, 2010, pp. 16-18)

This passage demonstrates that genuine repentance begins with self-awareness. Her father models the acknowledgment stage before Ronnie is capable of doing so.

The second catalyst is her father's terminal diagnosis:

"You have stomach cancer, and from the scans, it's metastasized to your pancreas and lungs." (Sparks, 2010, p. 359)

Why does this diagnosis trigger repentance? Facing the imminent loss of her father forces Ronnie to confront the finite nature of their relationship. The possibility of

reconciliation becomes urgent; she can no longer postpone forgiveness. This aligns with Mezirow's (1991) concept of transformative learning, where a “disorienting dilemma” (terminal illness) individual to reassess their fundamental assumptions.

4.1.3 The Turning Point: Truth and Acknowledgment

The third and most powerful catalyst is the revelation of her mother's deception:
"It wasn't Dad who had the affair, was it?... It was you (Sparks, 2010, pp. 400-401).”

This moment shatters Ronnie's entire framework of blame. She realizes that she has been angry at the wrong person for years. The quotation is significant not only for its content but for its emotional delivery: the repetition ("It was you") and the desperate question ("How could you do that?") convey her shock and dawning guilt. Ronnie's recognition of wrongdoing—stage one of Qianyu's model—is not self-generated but triggered by new information that recontextualizes the past.

4.1.4 Emotional Remorse and Reconciliation

Once the truth is revealed, Ronnie experiences genuine remorse:
"I'm so sorry, Daddy..." (Sparks, 2010, p. 398)
Her father responds: "No, baby please don't cry. It wasn't so bad back then (Sparks, 2010, p. 398).”

How does repentance transform Ronnie? Prior to repentance, Ronnie was defined by anger, defiance, and emotional withdrawal. After repentance, she becomes capable of vulnerability, care, and forgiveness. Her apology is not merely verbal but is accompanied by behavioural change: she neglects her own plans to care for her father during his illness. This behavioural change—stage four of Qianyu's model—demonstrates that true repentance is not performative but transformative.

What broader moral implications emerge? Ronnie's repentance illustrates that forgiveness often requires acknowledging one's own misjudgement. The novel suggests that resentment, however justified it may seem, becomes toxic when it prevents individuals from seeing the humanity of those they have condemned. Repentance, therefore, is not only about seeking forgiveness but also about restoring the repentant person's capacity for empathy and moral clarity.

4.2 Repentance toward Her Friend

Repentance also involves experiencing regret or sorrow over actions one has committed. In the novel, Ronnie's friend Will must repent for deceiving her to protect his friend Scott, who started a fire at a church.

4.2.1 The Offense and Confession

Will conceals Scott's involvement in the fire. When he finally confesses, he acknowledges his wrongdoing:

"There's something I need to tell you... I know it was wrong (Sparks, 2010, p. 390).”

Ronnie reacts with shock and anger:

"I don't want to talk to you!... It's over, okay? (Sparks, 2010, p. 391)”

Why does repentance occur here? Will's confession is driven by guilt and the recognition that continued deception would destroy any possibility of an honest relationship. Unlike Ronnie's repentance, which is triggered by external revelations, Will's repentance is self-initiated. This distinction is significant: Will chooses to confess before being discovered, demonstrating that genuine repentance can arise from internal moral discomfort rather than external pressure.

4.2.2 The Difference between Confession and Repentance

Ronnie's immediate rejection—"It's over, okay?"—reveals a crucial insight: confession alone does not constitute full repentance, nor does it guarantee forgiveness. Will has acknowledged his wrongdoing (stage one) and expressed remorse (stage two), but he has not yet demonstrated behavioural change (stage four). Ronnie's anger is a reasonable response to betrayal; trust, once broken, cannot be restored by words alone.

4.2.3 Restorative Action

Will's repentance becomes genuine when he takes action to make amends. He reports Scott's role in the fire:

"I told them about the fire at the church and saw him torching the scrub grass next to the church wall (Sparks, 2010, p. 428)."

He also expresses empathy for Ronnie's suffering:

"What happened to your dad is just so unfair... and I would do anything to help you (Sparks, 2010, p. 429)."

How does repentance transform Ronnie? Unlike her repentance toward her father, which transforms her from anger to care, Ronnie's response to Will's repentance transforms her from victim to forgiver. By accepting Will's apology and allowing him back into her life, Ronnie demonstrates that repentance creates the possibility of relational restoration, though it does not guarantee it. The novel implies that forgiveness is not automatic but is earned through sustained effort and demonstrated change.

What broader moral implications emerge? Will's journey illustrates that repentance requires both confession and restitution. Acknowledging wrongdoing is necessary but insufficient; the repentant person must also take concrete steps to repair the harm caused. Furthermore, the relationship between Ronnie and Will shows that repentance does not control the injured party's response. The injured party retains the right to anger and distance; repentance creates the possibility of reconciliation but does not compel it. This realistic portrayal resists simplistic moral lessons, acknowledging the complexity of repairing trust after betrayal.

4.3 Synthesis: Repentance as a Relational and Transformative Process

Across both relationships, the novel portrays repentance as a process that unfolds through stages: recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change. Ronnie's repentance toward her father is triggered by external events (revelation of truth, illness), while Will's repentance is self-initiated (internal guilt). Despite different triggers, both follow the same structural pattern.

Repentance transforms Ronnie in two significant ways. First, it shifts her identity from victim to responsible agent. She ceases to see herself as someone to whom wrongs have been done and begins to see herself as someone capable of doing wrong (by withholding love). Second, it expands her moral imagination. She learns to see her father as a flawed but loving

human being rather than a villain, and she learns to see Will as someone who made a mistake but deserves a second chance.

The broader moral implications of *The Last Song* are twofold. First, repentance is essential for personal moral development. Without repentance, Ronnie would remain trapped in anger, unable to mature emotionally or ethically. Second, repentance is essential for relational restoration. Without Will's repentance, his friendship with Ronnie would end; without Ronnie's repentance, her relationship with her father would end with his death, leaving her burdened by guilt. The novel thus suggests that repentance is not merely a religious or philosophical abstraction but a practical necessity for human flourishing.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Nicholas Sparks' *The Last Song* presents repentance as a complex and transformative process that is essential for both personal growth and the restoration of interpersonal relationships. The novel illustrates through its characters, particularly Ronnie and Will, that repentance involves multiple dimensions: acknowledgment of wrongdoing, emotional reflection and remorse, honesty and full disclosure, and proactive efforts to repair the harm caused. Ronnie's journey toward her father highlights how recognition of past resentment and misunderstanding, combined with empathetic action, can lead to forgiveness and reconciliation. Similarly, Will's confessions and apologies reveal that taking responsibility for one's mistakes and confronting the consequences of prior deception are fundamental to rebuilding trust in friendships and romantic relationships. The narrative further emphasizes that repentance is not an instantaneous act; it requires patience, emotional processing, and willingness from both the person seeking forgiveness and the affected party. By portraying these gradual transformations, the novel underscores that repentance is both an ethical and relational practice, fostering moral accountability, emotional healing, and the reinforcement of trust.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on repentance in three significant ways. First, it demonstrates the applicability of Qianyu's (2018) four-stage model of repentance—recognition of wrongdoing, emotional remorse, acknowledgment of responsibility, and behavioural change—to the analysis of a contemporary literary text. While Qianyu's framework has been applied to classical literature, this study extends its relevance to modern young adult fiction, showing that the psychological structure of repentance remains consistent across different literary eras and genres. Second, this study integrates philosophical perspectives (Swinburne, 1989; Griswold, 2007) with psychological theories of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Eisenberg et al., 2015) and literary analysis (Wellek & Warren, 1956; Miall & Kuiken, 2002), demonstrating that repentance is not merely a theological or ethical concept but a multidimensional psychological process involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components. Third, this study identifies two distinct pathways to repentance: externally triggered (Ronnie's repentance, catalysed by new information and crisis) and self-initiated (Will's repentance, driven by internal guilt). This distinction, largely unexplored in previous scholarship, suggests that repentance can emerge from different motivational sources without affecting its moral validity.

The findings of this study have practical implications for several domains. For literary educators, the analysis of repentance in *The Last Song* can serve as a teaching tool for illustrating moral development in character-driven narratives. Students can trace Ronnie's and Will's journeys through the four stages of repentance, making abstract ethical concepts tangible through textual evidence. For readers of young adult fiction, the novel offers a realistic portrayal of how resentment can distort perception and how repentance can restore relational bonds. This may help adolescent readers recognize similar patterns in their own

lives, encouraging self-reflection and emotional maturity. For counsellors and therapists working with adolescents, the novel's depiction of repentance—particularly the role of family secrets, illness, and the fear of permanent loss—can serve as a reference point for discussing forgiveness, accountability, and relational repair with young clients. The novel demonstrates that repentance is not a sign of weakness but a courageous act of moral responsibility.

This study is limited to a single novel by Nicholas Sparks, focusing specifically on the protagonist's repentance in two relational contexts (father and friend). Future research may expand the scope in several directions. First, comparative studies across Nicholas Sparks' broader oeuvre—including novels such as *A Walk to Remember*, *The Notebook*, *Dear John*, and *The Lucky One*—could examine whether repentance follows similar patterns across his works or varies by narrative context, character age, or relationship type. Second, comparative studies between Sparks' novels and other contemporary young adult fiction (e.g., works by John Green, Jandy Nelson, or Angie Thomas) could identify genre-specific conventions in the representation of moral transformation and repentance. Third, cross-cultural studies examining how repentance is portrayed in young adult literature from different national traditions (e.g., Indonesian, Japanese, or Latin American coming-of-age novels) could illuminate whether the psychological stages of repentance are universal or culturally specific. Fourth, reception studies investigating how adolescent readers interpret and respond to depictions of repentance in literature could bridge the gap between textual analysis and reader-response theory, revealing whether exposure to repentant characters influences readers' own moral reasoning or forgiveness behaviours. Fifth, longitudinal studies tracking how the representation of repentance in young adult fiction has evolved over the past fifty years could identify broader cultural shifts in understandings of moral responsibility, accountability, and relational ethics. Such research would extend the findings of this study while contributing to the interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies, moral philosophy, developmental psychology, and educational practice.

Ultimately, *The Last Song* demonstrates that true repentance is transformative not only for the individual who acknowledges their mistakes but also for the broader network of relationships in which they are embedded, highlighting its critical role in sustaining meaningful, honest, and morally responsible connections.

References

- Abrams, M. H. (1981). *A glossary of literary terms* (4th ed.). Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Baumeister, R. F., Stillwell, A. M., & Heatherton, T. F. (1994). Guilt: An interpersonal approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 115(2), 243-267. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.115.2.243>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Eisenberg, N., Spinrad, T. L., & Knafo-Noam, A. (2015). Prosocial development. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science* (7th ed., 3, 610-656. Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118963418.childpsy315>
- Enright, R. D., Freedman, S., & Rique, J. (1998). The psychology of interpersonal forgiveness. In R. D. Enright & J. North (Eds.), *Exploring forgiveness* (pp. 46-62). University of Wisconsin Press.
- Griswold, C. L. (2007). *Forgiveness: A philosophical exploration*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gupta, A. (2021). Should the display of repentance or remorse by offenders bear any significance in determining how severely to punish them? *Journal on Contemporary Issues of Law*, 7(2), 1-12.

- Hardy, S. A., & Carlo, G. (2011). Moral identity: What is it, how does it develop, and is it linked to moral action? *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(3), 212-218. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00189.x>
- Hoffman, M. L. (2000). *Empathy and moral development: Implications for caring and justice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hogan, P. C. (2018). Literature and emotion. In P. A. O'Donnell (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of affect studies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holman, C. H., & Harmon, W. (1986). *A handbook to literature* (5th ed.). Macmillan.
- Keen, S. (2020). *Literature and emotion*. Routledge.
- Kohlberg, L. (1981). *The philosophy of moral development: Moral stages and the justice*. Harper & Row.
- Marini, F., & Pardi, P. (2022). Moral values in Justin Zackham's movie script The Bucket List. *Journal of Language*, 4(1), 119-129. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v4i1.5000>
- McCullough, M. E., Worthington, E. L., Jr., & Rachal, K. C. (1997). Interpersonal forgiving in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73(2), 321-336. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.73.2.321>
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Miall, D. S., & Kuiken, D. (2002). A feeling for fiction: Becoming what we behold. *Poetics*, 30(4), 221-241. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X\(02\)00011-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(02)00011-6)
- Nikolajeva, M. (2014). *Reading for learning: Cognitive approaches to children's literature*. John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/cecr.3>
- Pal, S. K. (2010). *Psychology of repentance and forgiveness*. Authors Press.
- Pardi, P., & Ardescy, Y. N. (2022). Protagonist's loyalty in Sidney Sheldon's novel Tell Me Your Dreams. *Journal of Language*, 4(2), 298-303. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v4i2.5992>
- Pardi, P., & Hartika, T. (2025). Manifestations of patience in Winston Groom's Forrest Gump: A literary psychological study based on Szutta's model. *Journal of Language*, 7(2), 452-459. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v7i2.6789>
- Pratiwy, D., Swastiwi, A. W., Manugeren, M., Pardi, P., & Asnani, A. (2023). Ideology in marine ritual discourse of Acehese speech community. *Jurnal Arbitrer: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Linguistics*, 10(4), 300-308. <https://doi.org/10.25077/ar.10.4.300-308.2023>
- Qianyu, W. (2018). Exploration on the critical point of Hester's repentance. *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics*, 4(4), 309-314. <https://doi.org/10.18178/ijlll.2018.4.4.184>
- Siregar, R. A., Nasution, I., & Pardi, P. (2022). Local wisdom of the Parsidangan stone legend at Huta Siallagan Samosir: A literary tourism perspective. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Language Teaching*, 6(1), 177-188. <https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v6i1.5249>
- Sparks, N. (2010). *The last song*. Grand Central Publishing.
- Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif, dan R&D* (2nd ed.). Alfabeta.
- Suhadi, M. F., Pardi, P., Manugeren, M., Zein, T. T., & Pratiwy, D. (2023). Existential feminism in Andrea Hirata's novels Padang Bulan and Cinta di dalam Gelas. *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra*, 7(2), 456-468. <https://doi.org/10.26858/erallingua.v7i2.45678>
- Sutopo, H. B. (2006). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif: Dasar teori dan terapannya dalam penelitian*. Universitas Sebelas Maret Press.
- Swinburne, R. (1989). *Responsibility and atonement*. Oxford University Press.

- Tangney, J. P., Stuewig, J., & Mashek, D. J. (2007). Moral emotions and moral behavior. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 345-372. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.56.091103.070145>
- Trites, R. S. (2018). *Twenty-first-century young adult literature*. University of Illinois Press.
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1956). *Theory of literature*. Harcourt, Brace & Company.

The Caste System in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Novel *Bumi Manusia*

Zukhaira Hayati, Muhammad Fatih Suhadi

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: zukhairahayati11@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: April 14, 2026 Accepted: May 04, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This study examines the portrayal and implications of the caste system in <i>Bumi Manusia</i> by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Set during Dutch colonial rule in nineteenth-century Indonesia, the novel presents a nuanced depiction of how hierarchical social structures shape individual identities, relationships, and broader societal interactions. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, this research focuses on close textual analysis to explore key aspects of the caste system within the narrative. These include its structural elements, the positioning of characters within different social strata, and its role in sustaining inequality and power relations. The findings show that colonial practices imposed rigid hierarchies that dehumanized indigenous people by constructing them as inherently inferior. Such conditions not only reinforced social divisions but also influenced how individuals perceived themselves and others within the colonial order. In response, the colonized developed forms of resistance that extended beyond physical confrontation. They utilized intellectual, moral, and cultural strategies to challenge colonial authority and assert their dignity. In other words, this study demonstrates that the novel not only reflects the socio-cultural realities of colonial Indonesia but also offers a critical perspective on the lasting impact of caste and colonial hierarchies, particularly in shaping resistance, identity, and emerging nationalist consciousness.
Keywords: <i>Bumi manusia</i> ; <i>caste system</i> ; <i>colonialism</i> ; <i>postcolonial resistance</i> ; <i>Pramoedya Ananta Toer</i> ; <i>sociology of literature</i>	
Corresponding Author: Zukhaira Hayati Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia E-mail: zukhairahayati11@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

Literature, as a form of artistic and intellectual expression, reflects human experiences, emotions, and social realities through language. It encompasses diverse genres such as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama, all of which serve as mediums for exploring cultural, historical, and ideological contexts. Among Indonesian literary works, *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer stands out as a significant narrative that portrays the complexities of Dutch colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Set in the era of the Dutch East Indies, the novel presents a profound exploration of socio-cultural, political, and ethical issues, particularly the operation of a rigid caste system. This system functions as a central theme that shapes the lives, identities, and social positions of the characters. It highlights hierarchical divisions among groups such as the priyayi (native aristocracy), common indigenous people, Europeans, and mixed-race individuals, who often occupy ambiguous and marginalized positions within colonial society. Through these portrayals, the novel reflects the inequalities and tensions embedded in colonial social structures (Toer, 2005; Said, 1978).

The caste system depicted in the novel is closely tied to the broader framework of Dutch colonialism, which significantly influenced the social, economic, and political organization of society in the Dutch East Indies. This system reinforced social stratification,

limited mobility, and determined access to power and opportunity, thereby influencing both institutional structures and interpersonal relationships.

As part of the Buru Tetralogy, *Bumi Manusia* represents Pramoedya Ananta Toer's critical engagement with colonial injustice and social inequality. His work serves not only as a literary achievement but also as a reflection of historical realities, offering insight into the lived experiences of individuals under colonial rule. The theme of caste remains relevant in literary and historical studies, as it enables a deeper understanding of how systems of inequality are constructed, maintained, and challenged.

This study aims to analyze the representation of the caste system in the novel using a qualitative descriptive approach. It seeks to examine the structural aspects of caste, the positioning of characters within social hierarchies, and the socio-political conditions that sustain such systems. Furthermore, the research investigates the extent to which the novel reflects the historical realities of colonial Indonesia.

To guide the analysis, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is the caste system represented in *Bumi Manusia*? (2) How does the caste system affect individual rights and social mobility? (3) How do the characters resist colonial social stratification?

By examining the caste system in *Bumi Manusia*, this study contributes to a broader understanding of Indonesian literature and colonial history. It also highlights issues of social stratification, discrimination, and resistance, encouraging further reflection on the enduring impact of hierarchical systems on society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociology of Literature

The sociology of literature is an interdisciplinary approach derived from the combination of sociology and literature. Sociology, originating from the Greek word *socius* (companion or society) and *logos* (study or discourse), refers to the scientific study of social relationships and structures. Meanwhile, literature, derived from the Sanskrit root *sas* (to instruct or teach) and the suffix *tra* (tool or instrument), can be understood as a medium that conveys ideas, values, and experiences. Thus, the sociology of literature focuses on examining literary works in relation to human behavior and social life, viewing literature as a reflection of societal conditions and dynamics (Endraswara, 2013).

One important perspective within the sociology of literature is the reflection theory proposed by Georg Lukács. Lukács argues that literature reflects social reality, particularly the economic structure and class relations within society. According to him, high-quality literary works are those that successfully portray social totality, including class conflict and social change (Lukács, 1971). For instance, realist novels such as those by Charles Dickens illustrate social inequalities within capitalist societies. Through this lens, literary texts can be analyzed as representations of broader social dynamics, including hierarchical systems such as caste.

In addition, the Marxist approach further develops the sociological analysis of literature by emphasizing the relationship between literature and the economic base of society. From a Marxist perspective, literary works often reflect the ideology of the dominant class, while also holding the potential to raise awareness among oppressed groups about social injustices. As explained by Terry Eagleton, literature can function both as a tool of ideological reinforcement and as a medium of critique against inequality (Eagleton, 1976).

Within this framework, the caste system can be understood as a form of social stratification that perpetuates inequality and power imbalances. Therefore, analyzing literary works through the sociology of literature—particularly using Lukács' reflection theory and

Marxist perspectives—enables a deeper understanding of how social hierarchies are represented, maintained, or challenged within literary texts.

2.1 The Caste System

The caste system represents a form of social organization that differs significantly from many modern social systems, particularly in its underlying ideology. As noted by Louis Dumont (1980), the complexity of caste often discourages modern readers from examining it in depth. Rather than simply viewing it as an unjust system that should be abolished, Dumont observes that even Western observers in India—ranging from reformers to missionaries—rarely advocated its complete elimination. This hesitation was partly due to an awareness of the functional role caste played in society and partly because its abolition appeared impractical within its cultural context.

In general terms, caste refers to a social grouping based on distinctions such as wealth, rank, occupation, and rights. The American Heritage Dictionary (2009) defines caste as a division of society into hierarchical groups, while broader explanations, such as those found in the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1980), trace the term to the word *casta*, meaning class, race, or lineage. Similarly, the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI, 2024) defines caste as a level or group within a religious or social community.

Scholars have approached caste as a form of structured social stratification. Fredrik Barth (1969), for instance, describes caste as a hierarchical system with clearly defined social levels, as seen in his study of the Pathan community. A related perspective is offered by Max Weber (2006), who considers caste as one aspect of social structure. However, Dumont challenges this view by arguing that caste should not be reduced to mere stratification. Instead, he emphasizes that caste must be understood as an integrated socio-cultural system, deeply embedded in the values and worldview of a particular society.

Dumont's major work, *Homo Hierarchicus*, further develops this perspective by presenting caste as a system rooted in the ideology of hierarchy, particularly the distinction between purity and impurity. Drawing on earlier sociological and anthropological thinkers such as Émile Durkheim and J. H. Hutton, Dumont argues that caste is not simply about economic inequality but about a broader cultural logic that organizes social relations.

Etymologically, the term “caste” originates from the Latin *castus*, meaning pure or noble, which later evolved into the Portuguese word *casta*, referring to lineage or race. As explained by David G. Mandelbaum (1970), European observers adopted this term to categorize and describe the social divisions they encountered in India.

In contrast, the concept of social class, as discussed by Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), has different historical roots. Originating in ancient Rome, class was initially used to categorize citizens based on economic capacity, dividing society into groups such as the wealthy (*assidui*) and the poor (*proletariat*). This distinction highlights a key difference: while class systems are often based on economic factors and allow for mobility, caste systems tend to be rigid, hereditary, and culturally embedded.

Therefore, the caste system can be understood as a hierarchical and culturally grounded form of social organization that shapes identity, social relations, and access to power. This conceptual framework is essential for analyzing how caste operates within literary works, particularly in representing inequality and social dynamics.

2.1.1 The Influence of the Caste System

The caste system exerts a significant influence on multiple aspects of life, particularly in shaping social, economic, and cultural structures. Its impact can be observed in the following areas:

a. Social Stratification

The caste system establishes a rigid social hierarchy in which individuals are assigned a status by birth. This inherited position strongly determines social identity, interaction, and mobility. As argued by Louis Dumont in *Homo Hierarchicus*, caste is a hierarchical system grounded in inequality and closely tied to religious and social order.

b. Economic Structure

Caste significantly influences occupational roles and economic opportunities. Higher castes, such as Brahmins, traditionally have access to prestigious and well-paid professions, whereas lower castes, including Sudras and Dalits, are often restricted to low-status and low-income work. Susan Bayly (2001) highlights that during the colonial period, the caste system was also instrumental in reinforcing economic control and social divisions.

c. Access to Education

Educational opportunities are unequally distributed across caste lines. Higher castes tend to benefit from better access to quality education, while lower castes frequently encounter barriers and discrimination. Rosalind O'Hanlon emphasizes that caste plays a crucial role in limiting educational access and, consequently, social mobility.

d. Discrimination and Marginalization

The caste system contributes to systemic discrimination, particularly against marginalized groups such as Dalits. These communities often face exclusion and unequal treatment in employment, housing, and social relations. As discussed by S. M. Michael (1999), such discrimination continues to shape the lived experiences of Dalits in modern society.

e. Cultural Practices and Traditions

Caste norms also regulate cultural and religious practices. Ritual roles, customs, and social behaviors are often determined by caste affiliation. Herbert Hope Risley (1915) notes that caste plays a central role in organizing participation in religious ceremonies and maintaining traditional social order.

f. Marriage and Social Relationships

Marriage practices are strongly influenced by caste, with endogamy (marriage within the same caste) being the dominant norm. Intercaste marriage is frequently discouraged or stigmatized. According to Surinder S. Jodhka (2015), inter-caste marriage remains a sensitive and contested issue, reflecting the persistence of caste boundaries in contemporary society.

Overall, the caste system functions as a comprehensive framework that shapes not only social hierarchy but also economic opportunities, cultural norms, and interpersonal relationships.

2.1.1 The Structure of the Caste System during the Dutch Colonial Period

The caste system in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period had unique and different characteristics compared to the caste system in India. During the Dutch colonization, the social structure in Indonesia was based more on ethnic grouping, social status, and roles in colonial society. The following is an explanation of the structure and function of the caste system during the Dutch colonial period:

a) Ethnic and Social Grouping

The Netherlands implemented an ethnic grouping system known as the "racial" or "nation" system that divided the community into three main groups: European, foreign

Eastern (mainly Chinese and Arab), and Indigenous. Each of these groups had different rights and obligations in colonial society.

b) Colonial Social Structure

In this structure, Europeans occupy the highest positions with privileges and access to better education, jobs, and facilities. The Foreign Eastern Group, especially the Chinese, had an important role in trade and economics but remained below the Europeans in the social hierarchy. Indigenous people are at the bottom with very limited access to education and decent work.

c) Hierarchy in Indigenous Peoples

Among the natives themselves, there was a social stratification based on social status and traditional roles, such as nobility, commoners, and slaves. Local nobles or elites often worked with the Dutch to manage and control the common people, strengthening their position in the social hierarchy.

2.1.2 The Function of the Caste System during the Dutch Colonial Period

a) Colonial Control and Management

This system of ethnic and social grouping helped the Dutch in managing and controlling the large population in Indonesia. By dividing society into separate groups, the Netherlands could more easily supervise and control social and political activity.

b) Economic Exploitation

This caste system also functions to exploit human and economic resources. Indigenous groups, especially those at the bottom of the list, are often employed in low-wage menial jobs in plantations, mines, and infrastructure projects. This greatly benefited the colonial economy that depended on cheap labor.

c) Restrictions on Education and Social Mobility

Access to education and social mobility is severely restricted based on ethnic and caste groupings. Europeans had access to high-quality schools and universities, while natives had very limited access, which reinforced social and economic inequalities.

d) Social and Political Mapping

The system is also used to map and segment populations based on political and social loyalties. Local nobles and elites loyal to the colonial government were granted rights and privileges, while those deemed rebellious or disloyal were exiled or punished.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the representation of the caste system in *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Research design refers to the overall plan and procedure for conducting a study, including methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative descriptive approach is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to interpret and describe social phenomena as reflected in literary texts. As stated by Hadari Nawawi (1993), qualitative methods focus on describing observable facts, while Patricia Leavy (2017) emphasizes their role in understanding meanings, values, and social processes.

The primary data source of this study is the novel *Bumi Manusia*. The data consist of textual elements such as dialogues, narration, and descriptions that reflect the caste system and its influence on characters and society within the story. Supporting data may include relevant scholarly works related to sociology of literature and caste theory. The unit of analysis in this research includes words, phrases, sentences, and passages from the novel that

illustrate the structure and impact of the caste system. These units are selected based on their relevance to themes such as social hierarchy, discrimination, power relations, and resistance.

Data are collected through close reading and documentation techniques. The researcher carefully reads the novel multiple times to identify and record relevant excerpts. These excerpts are then categorized according to themes related to the caste system, such as social stratification, inequality, and resistance. Then, the data are analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This involves interpreting the selected textual data by identifying patterns, themes, and meanings related to the caste system. The analysis is guided by the sociology of literature approach, particularly reflection theory and Marxist perspectives, to understand how the novel represents social reality and power structures.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies are employed, including careful data selection, consistent categorization, and theoretical triangulation. The use of established theories in sociology of literature strengthens the validity of the interpretation. In addition, repeated reading and cross-checking of data help maintain accuracy and reliability in the analysis.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Impact of the Caste System on Individual Rights and Opportunities for Social Mobility

The impact of the caste system occurs due to the construction of the caste, they are higher than the natives, as well as the existence of superiority that constructs social disparity. Thus, behavior or attitude is also one of the determinants in forming caste differences.

“Derai tawa semakin meriah, mengejek, lebih demonstratif juga jaksa, tersenyum senang dapat melakukan siksaan batin atas diri perempuan pribumi yang banyak diiri oleh perempuan-perempuan Totok dan Indo Eropa itu.” (Toer, 2005: 425)

The quote above tells how the trial of Mr. Mellema's death went. *Nyai Ontosoroh* was embarrassed by the questions asked of her at the trial. They mocked, humiliated, and laughed at *Nyai Ontosoroh*. According to Pramoedya, this event was caused by the disapproval of the European community in Surabaya at the time because *Nyai Ontosoroh*, as a mistress, received many privileges on the property of the Mellema family. In those days, it was unusual for native women to become mistresses or *Nyai*.

In the quotation above, the author shows the impact of caste differences that are evident in the interactions between characters. *Nyai Ontosoroh* is considered a symbol of threat or resistance to European domination and hegemony, consisting of four layers of minorities: women, *Nyai*, natives, and Javanese. The collective rejection of the Europeans also symbolizes the dominative and hegemonic attempt to "fight" *Nyai Ontosoroh*. The events in court also show her position as a representative of the natives, who are socially subordinate to the Europeans.

Nyai Ontosoroh is naturally positioned at a subordinate level due to her status as a *Nyai* or mistress. She also has various attributes of her given status.

In a democratic society, agreement on justice is the basis for distributive justice. The anticipated fairness in the system of class conflicts that emerged from the novel *Bumi Manusia* became the basis for Rawls' distributive theory. Rawls proposes the concept of "justice as fairness," which is based on a hypothetical situation called the original position. In this thought experiment, individuals decide the principles of justice behind a "veil of ignorance," meaning they do not know their own social status, class, abilities, or background.

Because no one knows their future position in society, they are motivated to choose fair and impartial principles (Rawls, 1971).

Rawls constructs a general idea based on these arguments: first, everyone has the same basic freedoms that are granted to everyone; second, to care for those in difficulty; and third, to allow for fair equality. Based on this understanding, quoting texts from *Earth Men* that discuss rights and duties would be contrary to Rawls' principles.

“Abangmu dan kau tetap dianggap anak tidak sah, hanya diakui sebagai anak Tuan Mallema dan punya hak menggunakan namanya. Dengan campur tangan hukum justru tidak mengakui abangmu dan kau sebagai anakku, bukan anak-anakku lagi, walau mama ini yang melahirkan. Sejak pengakuan itu kalian, menurut hukum, hanya anak dari Tuan Mallema. Menurut hukum, Ann, hukum Belanda di sini, jangan kau keliru. Kau tetap anakku. Pada waktu itu baru aku tahu betapa jahatnya hukum. Kalian mendapat seorang ayah, tapi kehilangan ibu.” (Toer, 2005: 136)

Indeed, *Nyai Ontosoroh's* story to her daughter, Annelis Mallema, shows the injustice of Dutch law. When a woman, even a mother, was confronted with the law, their rights had to be revoked. Although the punishments actually helped people, they were more focused on benefiting Dutch interests. Because the colonizing country had total control at the time. In addition, *Nyai Ontosoroh* was just a mistress.

Rawls then also addresses this condition, as *Nyai Ontosoroh* is already considered a mistress based on circumstances. Justice always favors the larger class when there is a smaller class. Since justice, according to Rawls, is the granting of basic freedoms to everyone, rules that use ratios are needed to find justice in assessing this situation.

Another impact of the caste system was that colonial rule over colonized nations, such as forced labor and control of indigenous land, was common. One of the colonial goals of a colonizing nation is to control the territory of another nation; by conquering a territory, the colonizing nation can carry out all its colonial goals.

“Mari pergi ke kampung-kampung. Di atas tanah kami ada empat buah kampong. Semua kepala keluarga, penduduk pekerja pada kami.”

“Jadi berapa hektar saja tanah mu ini ?” tanyaku tak acuh.

“Seratus delapan puluh”,

“Sawah dan ladang. Hutan dan semak-semak belum termasuk.”,

“Hutan untuk sumber kayu bakar” lanjutnya.

“Rawa juga punya, barangkali?” “Ya. Ada dua rawa kecil” (Toer, 2005: 53)

According to Ania Loomba, colonialism is the conquest or control of the land and property of others (Loomba, 2016: 3). This data excerpt is in line with her opinion. Minke and Annalise's conversation shows that the Dutch colonial nation has controlled the land of the indigenous people. They also control the indigenous people who live there. Not only did the Dutch have a lot of land, but they were also successful in implementing the forced planting policy. The natives were supposed to enjoy their land and property, but the Dutch colonials took everything from them, even making them slaves in their own land.

European colonial powers were eager to dominate their colonized nations. Not only did they take over their colonies, but they also took away the rights of the colonized people. They used the highly respected indigenous people to achieve their goal of removing their rights and controlling their entire lives.

“Seluruh perusahaan, kekayaan, dan keluarga akan diatur oleh curator yang ditunjuk oleh hukum. Mamamu hanya seorang pribumi, akan tidak mempuny*ai* hak atas semua, juga tidak dapat melakukan sesuatu untuk anakku sendiri. Kau, Ann. Percuma saja akan jadinya kita membanting tulang tanpa hari libur. Percuma aku telah lahirkan kau, karena hukum tidak pernah mengakui keibuanku, hanya karena kau pribumi dan tidak di kawin secara syah. Kau mengerti? (Toer, 2005: 112)

The colonials not only took away the land and property of the natives, but they also took away their human rights. The Dutch even controlled the laws of the natives. Because the colonizers had taken over the entire lives of the natives, *Nyai Ontosoroh*, Annalise's biological mother, could not even obtain custody. European countries have violated human rights tremendously. The hard work of Annalise and her mother would be exempted because of the laws set by the colonial government, which took away all the rights of indigenous people. Even if *Nyai Ontosoroh* married a Dutchman, she would not receive her rights because she was a native.

“Pribumi sama dengan anak gundik yang tidak diakui sang ayah. Ia juga mengecam pengungkapan perkara pribadi. Kommer menilai jaksa dan hakim itu tidak berbudi Eropa, lebih buruk dari pada pengadilan pribumi yang dilakukan di Wonoguro atas diri Pronocitro, barang duaratus lima tahunan yang lalu” (Toer, 2005: 430)

The data cited shows that during the colonial period, human rights were often abused, and the indigenous population only had to follow Dutch laws that applied in their country. In addition, injustice was also common. Considered as indigenous by Dutch colonialism. Their daughters were sold to the Dutch to become mistresses, and their illegitimate marriages that were not recognized by law were also human rights violations. From the data excerpt, it is clear that when indigenous people had children with Dutch people, their children were also disadvantaged. An Indo child recognized by the father would be considered European, and if not, the child would be insulted, harassed, and even degraded like the mother. It is very clear that the actions of the prosecutors and judges did not give the natives a sense of justice; even the natives who made a defense were considered useless, and the natives' human rights to defend themselves and their children were taken away.

Berhubung Robert Mallema dinyatakan belum ditemukan baik untuk sementara ataupun untuk selama-lamanya, warisan yang akan jadi haknya akan dikelola oleh Ir. Maurits Mallema. Pengadilan Amsterdam telah juga menunjuk Ir. Maurits Mallema menjadi wali bagi Annelise Mallema karena yang belakangan ini dianggap masih berada dibawah umur, sedang haknya atas warisan, sementara ia dianggap belum dewasa, juga akan dikelola oleh Ir. Maurits Mallema” (Toer, 2005: 485).

The quotation shows that N *Nyai Ontosoroh* and her children received a power of attorney from the Amsterdam court and gave it to the white court. The power of attorney indicated that all property belonging to Mr. Herman Mallema would be replaced by Mr. Maurits Mallema. Maurits Mallema, her legitimate son, would replace Herman Mallema. This shows the injustice and violation of *Nyai Ontosoroh*'s rights. There was no intervention from Mr. Herman Mallema, and the property and farms that had been owned by *Nyai Ontosoroh* and Annalise remained theirs. One perspective of injustice is that Mr. Maurits Mallema will receive Annalise's guardianship rights while her biological mother is still alive. This shows

the injustice of the white court of law to the indigenous people, the court of law only approved the power of attorney from the Amsterdam court. Even the *Nyai* could not challenge this because she was not the legal wife and was only a native.

4.2 The Character's Rejection of the Established Social Order

Because of the European colonialism against the indigenous people, who controlled them politically, economically, socially, and culturally, the indigenous people fought back. Jean Marsis' explanation to Minke about the Acehnese. Jean Marsis is a former European colonial who committed acts of colonialism against the Acehnese, and he knows that the Acehnese are very nationalistic. This shows that the Acehnese resisted colonialism in an unusual way.

“Ucapan yang hanya patut didengarkan di rumah Malemma-Hammers dan anaknya!” tangisku dalam Belanda “Tak ada hak padamu bicara tentang keluargaku!” “Tak ada utusan dengan kowe, *Nyai*,” jawabnya dalam Melayu, diucapkan sangat kasar dan kaku, kemudian ia tidak mau melihat kepadaku lagi. “Ini rumahku. Bicara kau seperti itu di pinggir jalan sana, jangan di sini” (Toer, 2005: 145)

According to the data quoted, there was an argument between Nyi Ontosoroh and the legitimate son of Mr. Herman Mallema. Nyi Ontosoroh fought the European totok very bravely because she could no longer stand the humiliation by the legitimate son of Mr. Herman Mallema. This shows a strong sense of nationalism from *Nyai* Ontosoroh, which makes her dare to oppose Europeans for the honor of herself and her family.

During colonialism, natives were always looked down upon by Europeans, even when they did good things, Europeans still looked down on them. It can be seen from the quote above that Minke was always looked down upon by Robert Mallema because she was a native. The sense of nationalism instilled in her made Minke fight back against Robert Mallema. This shows Minke's act of resistance to Robert Mallema to fight the form of humiliation that Robert Mallema did to Minke.

“Minke kita akan melawan. Berani kau, nak, nyo?” “Kita akan berlawanan, ma, bersama-sama” “Biarpun tanpa ahlihukum. Kita akan jadi pribumi pertama yang melawan pengadilan putih, nak, nyo. Bukankah itu suatu kehormatan juga?” “Berlawanan, mama, berlawanan, kita melawan.” “Kalau Annalise bisa kau bikin bangun untuk melawan, dia takkan jatuh bangun dalam kesakitan dan ketidakmampuan. Dia akan menjadi teman hidup yang terbaik bagi seorang suami seperti kau” (Toer, 2005: 494)

The data cited shows that it was the acts of injustice against the natives in Europe during the period of colonialism that drove *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke to act against the European countries. Although they were only natives who were considered weak and often humiliated, they had a strong spirit of nationalism that drove them to fight the Europeans and defend their rights and honor, not only for themselves, but also for all the natives and their nation. This shows the strong nationalism of *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke against European countries that would persecute them, even the highest court, even though they do not know the methods, what they are fighting against, who and how, and their goals. They will still perform acts of resistance to obtain justice from the laws of the Dutch East Indies, whether they can or cannot do so.

The quote above shows the power of the Europeans in the native land; even the government laws do not protect the natives and side with them. This triggers *Nyai*

Ontosoroh's awareness to oppose the injustice done to her people, as shown by *Nyai* Ontosoroh's actions that encourage Minke to act against the Europeans and those who side with Europe. *Nyai* Ontosoroh's awareness arises as a result of government laws that favor Europeans over indigenous laws, even the injustices that happen to indigenous people. The laws that favor Europeans will be defeated if all indigenous people realize the injustices that happen to them. This shows the strong sense of nationalism that *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke have to oppose the European country and the white court laws that are unfair to them, including *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke.

In a society that has experienced a long period of colonialism. Because of their awareness that they are a nation that has always been colonized, the indigenous people will act to fight for their rights as natives. Many struggles of the indigenous people to maintain their rights as human beings who are equal to Europeans.

"Segala apa yang telah mereka lakukan untuk bangsamu pada akhir abad 19 ini sudah termasuk gaya lama, sekarang ini pribumi sendiri yang harus berbuat sesuatu untuk bangsanya sendiri" "Sukalah kami mendengarkan uraiannya tentang nasib bangsamu, yang pernah melahirkan beratus dan beribu pahlawan dan pemimpin dalam usaha menghalau penindasan Eropa. Seorang demi seorang dari mereka jatuh, kalah, tewas, menyerah, gila, mati dalam kehinaan, dilupakan dalam pembuangan. Tak seorang pun memenangkan perang" (Toer, 2005: 248)

In the excerpt, Annalise tells Mienke about Indonesia and says that the country has many heroes. Until they were killed, lost, or forgotten, the heroes fought and defended their country from the Dutch colonialists. By looking at the actions of the deceased heroes, they strongly fought for their nationality and their position as indigenous people. They don't care if the next generation forgets them. This clearly shows the actions of Indonesian heroes to defend their nationality and fight for their position as citizens and hosts.

"Mienke, telah lama kurenungkan keanehan hidup ini. Kalau aku tak berhasil menyelamatkan perusahaan ini, aku akan merosot jadi *Nyai-Nyai* biasa yang boleh dihinakan semua orang, dipandang dengan sebelah mata. Annalise akan sangat menderita. Percuma nanti aku sebagai ibunya. Dia harus lebih terhormat dari pada seorang Indo biasa. Dia harus jadi pribumi terhormat di tengah-tengah bangsanya. Kehormatan itu bisa didapatnya hanya dari perusahaan ini. Memang aneh nak. Begitulah maunya dunia ini" (Toer, 2005: 431)

The natives were physically humiliated and regarded as underlings during the European colonial era. Such factors would encourage the natives to resist European colonialism. Just as above, *Nyai* Ontosoroh is determined to maintain her dignity as a native by maintaining her company, because that way the Dutch will respect her. During the Dutch colonial occupation, the natives of the country were looked down upon unless they were upper class, educated, and rich. This was all done so that they could achieve their goals in the colonies. This way, it would be easier for them to control the region and the local people.

"Aku belum sampai bicara tentang pembagian peninggalan yang sama sekali tak menyebut-nyebut tentang hakku. Memang tak mencukupi surat-surat padaku yang membuktikan perusahaan ini milikku. Aku hanya mencoba mempertahankan Annalise. Hanya dia yang teringat" (Toer, 2005: 489)

The quote shows a mother's struggle to keep her child. The decision made by the White court and the Dutch court was that the property of *Nyai Ontosoroh's* property went to the legitimate child of Mr. Herman Mallema, and even Ir. Maurits Mallema had guardianship rights over *Nyai Ontosoroh's* biological child because his father recognized Annalise Mallema as his biological child. *Nyai Ontosoroh* did not care about her property, all she thought about at that time was her daughter, Annelise.

Playing the role of *Nyai Ontosoroh*, Mienke learns about her status as a native and son of Indonesia. Prior to this, due to the Western education she received, Mienke always positioned herself differently from the natives. However, Mienke's introduction to *Nyai Ontosoroh* changes his perspective. Since talking to *Nyai Ontosoroh*, she has become more passionate and strives to fight for her people. All these quotes clearly show that Mienke was a literary expert who wrote a lot in Dutch. This was done solely to let everyone know about his passion. However, *Nyai Ontosoroh* told Mienke to change her *gagaasan* into Malay so that other indigenous people would know about Mienke's struggle for her people.

“Tutup mulut!” bentak *Nyai* dalam Belanda dengan suara berat dan kukuh.

“Ia tamuku” (Toer, 2005: 258)

The quote above is a snippet of dialog in the narrative of *Nyai Ontosoroh's* courage as a native woman who dares to yell at her husband, Mr. Mellema, a Dutchman.

Their company, Boerderij Buitenzon, went bankrupt because Mr. Mellema was often drunk and rarely came home. *Nyai Ontosoroh* took it upon herself to rebuild the Boerderij Buitenzon company to restore the situation so that she could be successful. As such, some people respected her and feared her, including Mr. Mellema and his two children. Because of *Nyai Ontosoroh's* determination and struggle, Mr. Mellema, a Dutchman, now fears *Nyai Ontosoroh*, who is only a native.

In this context, the author tries to portray *Nyai Ontosoroh's* character by changing her attitude towards Mr. Mellema, as well as reversing the image and status of the natives represented by *Ontosoroh* in the caste layer that places her with Mellema. Through the character of *Nyai Ontosoroh*, the author shows indigenous resistance to the Dutch as a form of effort to achieve the caste that has been achieved. The author tries to show the character of *Nyai Ontosoroh*, who is very struggling to have a wise mind, even though she is in the lower caste. She gained authority after successfully turning a bankrupt company into a profitable one.

This is a symbolic resistance and shows that hard work, earnest effort, and discipline are important factors in creating the caste status achieved. In this context, it also represents a kind of opposition to the stigmas that previously shaped the status given to *Nyai Ontosoroh*. Therefore, economic and social capabilities can be acquired through effort, hard work, and discipline. These social capabilities, in turn, solidify one's position culturally in one's resistance and struggle to gain status and change one's position in the caste system. The textual fact of Mr. Mellema's failure implicitly and symbolically illustrates the failure of Western superiority, which may experience paradoxical failure and destruction, while the East, represented by *Nyai Ontosoroh*, can save the situation.

These facts seem to indicate a symbolic attempt to reverse cultural, social, and economic superiority while changing the caste system repeatedly: Mellema is economically, socially, and culturally ruined, while *Nyai Ontosoroh*, who represents the previously lower class of natives, gains a better status and position in the caste system.

“Dia tidak menulis, tapi ahli mencekam orang dalam genggamannya. Dia mengurus perusahaan besar secara Eropa! Dia menghadapi sulungnya sendirian, menguasai tuannya, Herman Mellema.” (Toer, 2005: 106)

The quote above explains the figure of *Nyai Ontosoroh*, who is recognized by Minke as one of the outstanding native women through her hard work taking care of a big company, facing the resistance of Mellema's eldest son, and mastering his master, Herman Mellema.

Nyai Ontosoroh is described by the author as an extraordinary native woman. Through *Nyai Ontosoroh*'s character, the author shows that the natives not only submit to the Dutch but also resist the caste system, which has become a kind of "myth" at that time. The author symbolically shows that one of the factors that can change one's caste is the hidden resistance to the representation of power.

In the context of colonial power, factors such as ability, effort, and hardship still play a role in determining caste. The image of *Nyai Ontosoroh* as resilient, resilient, and hardworking is a transformation from an undervalued caste status as a native to a status that can be looked up to.

In the novel *Bumi Manusia*, the side of human existence can be depicted through Minke. He is the one who declares his alignment with *Bumi Manusia*, which is the problem. The form of resistance to tradition is very visible. But on the different side, this is the human voice. The existence of oppressed humans is a resistance against the "boundary situation". Hence, in the quote from *Bumi Manusia*, Minke says;

"Tidak ada urusan! Kepriyayian bukan duniaku. Peduli apa iblis diangkat jadi mentri cacar atau diberhentikan tanpa hormat karena kecurangan? Duniaku bukan jabatan, pangkat, gaji dan kecurangan. Duniaku Bumi Manusia dengan persoalan" (Toer, 2005: 186)

He has this conversation in defiance of his father, who demands that he follow the traditions of feudalism that must shape his existence as a student. However, Minke has a nature that defies such beliefs. For him, tradition is the suppression of human values.

Feudalism is a structure of power delegation in society based on the royal system or noble power in a certain area. Meanwhile, liberalism is an ideology that prioritizes the equal rights of every individual. The conflict between these two ideologies is an event that has occurred in a particular culture. Which, in the framework of feudalism, is formed in a power to form uniformity and override freedom.

Nonetheless, liberalism does not eliminate flaws. In societal situations, excessive freedom can be dangerous. In short, every ideology has its weaknesses and strengths. As depicted in the novel *Bumi Manusia*, these two ideologies are meant to portray feudalism as a moral system that oppresses people, while liberalism protects people from oppression. Decisions made by those in power should stop freedom from flourishing.

With the rise of liberalism, Javanese morals entered a new phase in which the king's power was not a single choice but a unilateral decision. This situation has shaped Javanese culture to respect each other's power. According to Sense Hofstede (2018), this shift shows that "in *Bumi Manusia*, the most stirring story is the evolution of Minke's personality." This shows that feudal society became more modernized with the adoption of liberalism. Therefore, as written in the novel *Bumi Manusia*, culture will become more relevant to the context as a result of the new intellectual dawn.

"Aku terdiam. Hanya hati meraung: jadi kau sudah menghina aku, darah raja! Suami ibuku! Baik, aku takan menjawab. Terus, ayoh, terus, darah raja-raja Jawa! Kemarin kau masih mantri pengairan. Sekarang mendadak menjadi bupati, raja kecil. Lecutkan cambukmu, raja, kau yang tak tahu bagaimana ilmu dan pengetahuan telah membuka babak baru di bumi manusia ini! (Toer, 2005: 184)

Minke's dialog is one of the stepping stones described by Pramoedya Ananta Toer as a way of resistance to the periodic feudalism that occurred during the colonial period.

The caste system has an impact on the legal justice system that The legal justice system in the Dutch East Indies favored white or Dutch people. Pram's distortion of history in *Bumi Manusia* is a concrete form of "injustice and abuse of humanity due to abuse of power". This class conflict is the impact of the abuse of power to oppress ordinary people. Therefore, *Bumi Manusia* depicts the plot of the beginning of the rebellion of the natives to gain independence. Although the struggle of the natives was so aggressive against the Dutch law, it brought results that were not much different from losing. As told in a letter written by Miriam de la Croix, Minke's best friend.

"Bangsa besar dan gagah-perwira itu terus juga mencoba mengangkat kepala dari permukaan air, dan setiap kali bangsa Eropa memperosokan kembali ke bawah. Bangsa Eropa tidak rela melihat Pribumi menjengukan kepala ke udara melihat keagungan ciptaan Allah. Mereka terus berusaha dan terus kalah sampai tak tahu lagi usaha dan kekalahanannya sendiri." (Toer, 2005: 285)

Indonesia continues to fight against colonialism, as it is described as a great country. Fighting against Europeans or colonials will accomplish nothing. Indonesia can only recognize oppression as a result of its status as a colonizer. Therefore, Miriam de la Croix's letter aims to recount her father's experiences with the Indigenous people, believing that intellectuals can fight colonialism in a new way. Because Minke's presence gave a new spirit to the natives to fight for independence.

"Jangan sentuh ini. Siapa kasih kau hak untuk membukanya? Kau! Begini sekolahmu mengajar kau?" ia berdiri mendelik kepadaku "Memang bukan jawa lagi" "Apa guna jadi Jawa kalau hanya dilanggar hak-haknya? Tak pernah gurumu mengajarkan etika dan hak-hak perseorangan?" (Toer, 2005: 191)

It shows the conversation between Minke and her brother in the quote. Minke's brother opened Minke's diary secretly and read it. When Minke found out that her brother was reading her diary, he abruptly pulled the diary out of her hands. After Minke's brother realized that her sister was not like the Javanese, Minke began to be brave towards her brother. Minke may have forgotten about the Javanese customs of respecting and being filial to their parents. This happened because Minke was educated in a European way at HBS and mingled too much with Europeans. As a result, her attitude no longer shows that she is Javanese.

The White Court did violence to the natives, and they did not even want to defend each other and favored the Dutch. This is shown by the attitude of the judge in court when *Nyai Ontosoroh* wants to defend her rights as Annalise's mother. Because she is Indigenous, Indigenous people cannot speak in front of the judge because they do not have the power to go against the law. This shows that the judge uses power when acting against the natives. The Europeans had a strong dominance over the natives of the colonies; not only did they colonize their land and property, but they also had the power to use the existing laws of the colonies to carry out their actions against the natives.

4.3 The Caste System in the Social Structure of Dutch East Indies Society

Broadly speaking, the character of Minke, a native, is told in the novel *Bumi Manusia*, who has knowledge of Europe. The novel also nicely illustrates how power relations emerged during Dutch colonialism, which portrayed Europeans as first-class citizens, subordinate to

other ethnic groups. "Indigenous" is a term used not only to describe the affiliation and subordination of certain ethnic groups but also as a sociocultural consequence of the caste system that emerged at the time.

The novel also addresses the issue of social inequality related to the caste system, as shown in the following fragment of text:

“dan barangkali seperti itu juga tingkah orang orang Yahudi dengan kewarganegaraan Romawi. Ia menganggap dirinya lain dari saudara-saudara sekandung. Ia menganggap diri bukan Indo” (Toer, 2005: 21)

The monologue clearly illustrates how certain groups of society are segregated. The monologue clearly illustrates how certain groups of society are segregated in the relationship between different tribes, thus forming a dichotomy in its various forms. People of European descent, as a sociocultural force, are always seen as superior to indigenous people. Although in the past, the term "indigenous" was reduced to "the oppressed, marginalized, colonized, and disenfranchised", to refer to groups of people who come from a particular region or country.

Communication between characters in the context of choice is another example of the caste system in *Bumi Manusia*. Language as a symbol of social status and power relations. The choice of Dutch language varieties in native communication as a result of the caste system with oppressive implications, among other things, can be seen in the following dialog:

“Kowe kira, kolo sudah pake pakean Eropa, bersama orang Eropa, bisa sedikit bicara Belanda lantas jadi Eropa? Tetap monyet!” (Toer, 2005: 64)

The statement of Mr. Mellema, a Dutchman, addressed to Minke, is part of a dialogue excerpted from the novel *Earth Man*. The protagonist of *Bumi Manusia* is Minke, a native who is portrayed by the author in a way that combines the symbolism of the European mind and lifestyle.

The description clearly shows that the novel *Bumi Manusia* has the potential to raise sociological issues related to various types of caste systems and their impacts. The novel *Bumi Manusia* is so relevant and useful to be reviewed from this perspective because it can be used as a vehicle to identify social problems at a certain time so that it can be used as material for reflection and contemplation, as well as comparison, to form awareness about social relations that animate and encourage universal human values.

Ultimately, this study focuses on the caste system, which is based on the division of groups or levels of people according to their social status. The element of social status is treatment of one's position in a group of people.

“Siapa kasih kowe izin datang kemari, monyet! Dengusnya dalam Melayu-pasar, kaku dan kasar, juga isinya. (Toer, 2005: 64)

In this part of the novel, Nyai Ontosoroh's husband, Tuan Mellema, appears suddenly and scolds Minke for coming to his house. It is very clear that Mr. Mellema uses the rough and rude language of market Malay, addressing people with the greeting "kowe", which is a rude greeting towards people of lower caste. In addition, referring to Minke as a monkey shows that he is naturally considered a Dutchman who should not visit, despite his attempts at Dutch-like social mimicry.

In the quotation, the existence of a caste system is shown by the difference in Minke's position compared to Mr. Mellema and his family, which is described as a natural status, and the use of language as a tool to express this status. Mr. Mellema scolds Minke harshly, using the word "monkey" as a metaphor, because Minke is a native, and he is Dutch. Mr. Mellema

thinks Minke does not deserve to be invited to his house because he is a native. The Dutch have a much higher status than the natives. Tuan Mellema's behavior towards Minke shows the difference in caste by using unequal language to emphasize the natural status of each party.

In addition, Pramoedya tried to illustrate the paradoxical caste system problem that occurred during the Dutch colonization of Indonesia through the characters' words. In other words, Europeans looked down on natives because they were better than whites or Europeans. As a result, they usually behave and act condescendingly towards the natives as the original masters of the Dutch East Indies land. Therefore, attitudes and behaviors play an important role in determining caste differences.

“Kowe kira, kalo sudah pake pakean Eropa, bersama orang Eropa, bisa sedikit bicara Belanda lantas jadi Eropa? Tetap monyet!” (Toer, 2005: 64)

This quoted section of the novel tells how Mellema deliberately insults Minke. Despite Minke's efforts to make himself look like a Dutchman, he states that Minke does not deserve to be and could never be European.

Mellema's words are at once detrimental to Minke's attempts to construct an image of himself, attempting to change his social status from one that is natural to one that is formed or acquired through his efforts.

Paradoxically, Mr. Mellema's words show the failure of Minke's attempt to rebrand himself as European culturally rather than genetically. Mr. Mellema's treatment of Minke is a kind of legitimization of his caste as Dutch/European; his statement indirectly suggests that the natives remain inferior, contemptible, uncivilized, backward, and unworthy of being "human" as a cultural force that dominated society at the time and was at the top of the caste system.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that colonialism, as depicted in *Bumi Manusia*, not only imposed systems of domination but also triggered the emergence of nationalist responses among the colonized. Colonial practices are portrayed through acts of humiliation and dehumanization, in which the colonizers degrade the dignity of indigenous people and position everything associated with them as inferior. Within this system, being native is constructed as a disadvantage, reinforcing social inequality and limiting opportunities.

Furthermore, the study reveals that indigenous people gradually realized the limitations of armed resistance against colonial power. As a result, they developed alternative forms of struggle by employing intellectual, moral, and cultural strategies to defend their rights and dignity. These forms of resistance reflect a persistent effort to challenge both colonial domination and caste-based discrimination. Despite various constraints, the colonized continue to assert their identity and honor, demonstrating resilience and determination in confronting oppression.

References

- American heritage dictionary of the English language. (2009). USA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Barth, F. (1969). *Kelompok etnik dan batasannya*. Bergen: Universitas Indonesia Press.
- Bayly, S. (2008). *Caste, society and politics in india from the eighteenth century to the modern age*. Cambridge University Press.

- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Third Edition: SAGE Publications, California. Edisi Indonesia. Jogjakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Dahrendorf, R. (1959). *Class and conflict in industrial society*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003260257>
- Eagleton, T. (1976). *Marxism and literary criticism*. Routledge.
- Encyclopedia Americana. (1980). *Grolier incorporated: New York*. Volume 5, page 775.
- Endraswara, S. (2013). *Sosiologi sastra*. Yogyakarta: UNY Press.
- Jodhka, S. S. (2015). *Caste in contemporary India*. Routledge.
- Hofstede, S. (2018). *Indies literature: thoughts on "This earth of mankind" by Pramoedya Ananta Toer*. Retrieved from: <https://sensehofstede.nl/indies-literature-thoughts-on-this-earth-of-mankind-by-pramoedya-ananta-toer>
- KBBI (Indonesian Dictionary). (2024). Balai Pustaka. Retrieved February 8 2024.
- Leavy, P. (2017). *Research design quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. The Guilford Press.
- Louis, D. (1980). *Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications*. Chicago: University Press. Page 345.
- Loomba, A. (2016). *Kolonialisme/pascakolonialisme*. Yogyakarta: Narasi-Pustaka Promethea.
- Lukács, G. (1971). *The theory of the novel*. MIT Press.
- Mandelbaum, D. G. (1970). *Society in India*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. hlm. 445-461.
- Michael, S. M. (Ed.). (1999). *Untouchable: Dalits in modern India*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Nawawi, H. (1993). *Dasar-dasar manajemen dan manajemen gerakan pramuka*. Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Risley, H. H. (1915). *The caste system of Northern India*. Oxford University Press.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Toer, P. A. (2005). *Bumi manusia*. Jakarta: Lentera Dipantara.
- Weber, M. (2006). *Sociology*. Jogjakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.

A Psychological Analysis of the Protagonist's Attitude Change in Jennifer Niven's *All The Bright Places*

Agustina Purba, Pardi

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: pardi@sastra.uisu.ac.id

Article Info

Article history:

Received: March 30, 2026

Accepted: April 29, 2026

Accepted: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

attitude change;

literary analysis;

personal experience;

protagonist;

psychological approach

Abstract

This study examines the factors contributing to the protagonist's attitude change in *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven. The research focuses on how personal experiences and social interactions shape the psychological transformation of the main character. The narrative centers on two adolescents, Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, who struggle with trauma and emotional instability. Violet, in particular, undergoes a significant shift in attitude following the death of her sister, which leads her to become withdrawn and emotionally detached. This study employs a psychological approach to literature, applying Azwar's theory of attitude change to identify influencing factors. A descriptive qualitative method is utilized to analyze textual data in the form of words, phrases, and sentences from the novel. The findings reveal that attitude change is influenced by three key factors: personal experience, the influence of significant others, and emotional factors. Among these, personal trauma and interpersonal relationships emerge as the most dominant factors affecting the protagonist's transformation. This study highlights the complexity of human attitudes and demonstrates how literary works can reflect psychological realities, particularly in the context of adolescent development and coping mechanisms.

Corresponding Author:

Agustina Purba

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: pardi@sastra.uisu.ac.id

1. Introduction

Literature represents a creative expression of human experience, encompassing thoughts, emotions, and social realities through linguistic forms. As noted by Sumardjo and Saini (1991), literary works function as a medium for conveying human imagination and reflection, while Semi (1988) emphasizes literature as an artistic representation of human life. Among various literary genres, the novel occupies a significant position due to its ability to construct complex narratives that reflect both individual and social dimensions of reality. According to Nurgiyantoro (2012), novels present an imaginative world shaped by intrinsic elements such as plot, character, and setting, which together portray meaningful life experiences.

One notable contemporary novel that explores psychological and emotional struggles is *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven. This novel depicts the lives of two adolescents, Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, who experience deep psychological distress and trauma. Their encounter begins under critical circumstances, as both characters struggle with suicidal thoughts. Through their evolving relationship, the narrative highlights themes of grief, healing, and personal transformation. Violet's character, in particular, undergoes a profound change following the death of her sister, which significantly alters her personality and social behaviour.

The study of character transformation in literary works is closely related to psychological approaches in literature. Literary psychology allows researchers to examine how mental processes, emotional responses, and behavioural patterns are represented through fictional characters. In this context, attitude becomes a central concept, as it reflects an individual's evaluation, feelings, and tendencies toward certain objects or situations (Kotler & Keller, 2007). Furthermore, attitudes are not innate but are developed through interaction, experience, and environmental influence (Gerungan, 2004). Consequently, changes in attitude can be understood as a dynamic process shaped by both internal and external factors.

Attitude change is a common phenomenon in both real life and literary narratives. It may arise from personal experiences, social interactions, cultural influences, or emotional conditions. Irwan (2017) suggests that behavioural and attitudinal changes are influenced by learning processes derived from family, peers, and broader social environments. Similarly, Gerungan (2004) argues that social interaction plays a crucial role in shaping and modifying attitudes, although external influence alone is insufficient without internal readiness. This indicates that attitude change is a complex process involving cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions.

In *All the Bright Places*, the transformation of the protagonist is particularly compelling because it illustrates how traumatic experiences can reshape an individual's outlook and behaviour. Violet's transition from a cheerful and socially active individual to a withdrawn and emotionally distant person reflects the impact of loss and psychological distress. At the same time, her interaction with Finch demonstrates how interpersonal relationships can contribute to emotional recovery and behavioural change. This dual influence highlights the interplay between personal experience and social factors in shaping attitude change.

Several previous studies have examined psychological issues in literary works, including analyses of character transformation, trauma, and emotional resilience. Research by Nasution et al. (2023) explored existential feminism in Andrea Hirata's novels, while Pardi and Ardescy (2022) analysed protagonist's loyalty in Sidney Sheldon's novel. Other studies have examined moral values in film scripts (Marini & Pardi, 2022), ideology in marine ritual discourse (Pratiwy et al., 2024), and existential feminism in Indonesian literature (Suhadi et al., 2023). However, these studies have not specifically focused on the factors influencing attitude change in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*.

Although several studies have examined psychological issues in *All the Bright Places*, limited attention has been given to the factors influencing Violet Markey's attitude change through the lens of Azwar's theory. Most existing research has focused on themes of grief, trauma, and adolescent mental health without systematically analysing the psychological and social determinants that shape the protagonist's transformation. This study addresses that gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of the psychological and social determinants underlying her transformation. By applying Azwar's framework, this research provides a novel contribution to the understanding of how personal experience, significant others, and emotional factors interact to produce attitude change in literary characters. This approach not only enriches the literary analysis of Niven's novel but also demonstrates the applicability of psychological theories to fictional narratives, bridging the gap between literary studies and developmental psychology.

Based on this background, the present study focuses on analysing the factors that cause the protagonist's attitude change in the novel. The research specifically examines how personal experience, significant others, and emotional factors contribute to this transformation. By applying a psychological approach, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how literary characters reflect real human behaviour and psychological processes. Additionally, this research is expected to contribute to literary studies by offering

insights into the relationship between literature and psychology, particularly in the context of adolescent development and emotional resilience.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Character and Characterization

Character is a fundamental element in literary works, particularly in novels, as it drives the narrative and shapes the development of the story. According to Abrams (1981), characters are individuals presented in a narrative whose moral and psychological qualities are revealed through dialogue and action. Similarly, Kenney (1966) defines characters as imagined figures that inhabit a story and function as representations of human life. Through characterization, authors construct personalities that reflect real human behaviour, enabling readers to interpret emotional and psychological dimensions within the text.

Among various types of characters, the protagonist holds a central role in the narrative. The protagonist is typically the main figure who experiences the most significant events and conflicts, thereby becoming the focal point of the story (Fowler, 1987). This character often evokes empathy from readers due to their struggles and development throughout the narrative. Understanding the role of the protagonist is essential in literary analysis, particularly when examining psychological transformation and behavioural change.

2.2 Concept of Attitude

Attitude is a psychological construct that reflects an individual's evaluation, feelings, and behavioural tendencies toward an object, person, or idea. Eagly and Chaiken (1993) define attitude as a psychological tendency expressed through favourable or unfavourable evaluations. This concept is widely applied across disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and marketing, as it influences how individuals perceive and respond to their environment.

Attitudes are generally understood to consist of three interrelated components: affective, cognitive, and behavioural (Aronson et al., 2007). The affective component involves emotional responses, such as feelings of liking or disliking. The cognitive component relates to beliefs, perceptions, and knowledge about an object. Meanwhile, the behavioural component refers to an individual's tendency to act in a particular way toward the object. These components interact dynamically, shaping how attitudes are formed and expressed.

Importantly, attitudes are not innate but are developed through experience and social interaction. Gerungan (2004) emphasizes that attitudes are learned throughout an individual's life and are closely associated with specific objects or situations. This indicates that attitudes are flexible and can be modified over time depending on internal and external influences.

2.3 Factors Influencing Attitude Formation and Change

The formation and transformation of attitudes are influenced by multiple factors. Azwar (2013) identifies several key determinants, including personal experience, social influence, cultural background, mass media exposure, educational and religious institutions, and emotional conditions. Among these, personal experience plays a crucial role, as direct interaction with certain events can shape an individual's perception and response.

Social influence is another significant factor, particularly from individuals considered important, such as family members, peers, or romantic partners. These figures can affect attitudes through interaction, communication, and emotional support. Cultural context contributes to shaping norms, values, and beliefs that guide individual attitudes. Mass media

also functions as a powerful agent in influencing opinions and perceptions by disseminating information and shaping public discourse.

Emotional factors further contribute to attitude formation and change. Emotional responses such as fear, trauma, or happiness can influence how individuals interpret experiences and adjust their attitudes accordingly. These emotional reactions may lead to temporary or long-lasting changes depending on the intensity and duration of the experience.

2.4 Recent Empirical Studies on Literary Psychology and Character Transformation

Research on adolescent trauma and identity formation in literature has also expanded. Sahruman (2025) examined how religious trauma and peer relationships catalyse resistance identity and self-authorship in adolescent protagonists, applying psychological theories from Erikson and Marcia to literary analysis. Similarly, Kanwal, Naz, and Mehwish (2025), in the *World Journal of English Language*, investigated how unresolved identity crises during adolescence lead to negative identity outcomes, including social isolation and maladaptive behaviour, using developmental psychoanalytic frameworks.

Specific to *All the Bright Places*, multiple recent studies have examined psychological aspects of the novel. Research by Syarif et al. (2023), published in *Pioneer: Journal of Language and Literature*, compared life and death instincts in the novel and film adaptation using Freudian theory, revealing that the novel emphasizes adolescent mental health problems while the film emphasizes romantic themes. Larasati (2024) analysed Violet Markey's character development through Freud's tripartite psyche theory (id, ego, superego), finding that her superego, supported by Theodore Finch's influence, balanced her id and facilitated her transformation from a cowardly, isolated individual to a brave and confident person.

Furthermore, studies have critically examined mental illness representation in the novel. Oumeddour and Dafri (2021) explored how *All the Bright Places* both de-romanticizes and romanticizes mental illness, arguing that accurate representation is crucial for breaking stigma around adolescent mental health. Adiguna, Sukmawaty, and Hestiana (2021) analysed Theodore Finch's obsessive behaviour, identifying adaptive and maladaptive fears as contributing factors to his psychological condition.

These recent empirical studies collectively demonstrate growing scholarly interest in literary psychology, character transformation, and adolescent trauma representation. However, none of these studies have systematically applied Azwar's (2013) theory of attitude change to analyse

the specific factors underlying Violet Markey's transformation. This gap underscores the novelty of the present research.

2.5 Attitude Change and Psychological Perspective

Attitude change refers to a process in which an individual modifies their evaluation, feelings, or behaviour toward an object due to new experiences or information. According to Walgito (2003), attitude change is determined by both internal and external factors. Internal factors involve individual characteristics, such as perception and personal readiness to accept change, while external factors include environmental stimuli, social interaction, and persuasive communication.

From a psychological perspective, attitude change can occur through learning processes, social influence, and emotional experiences. Mar'at (1982) explains that individuals interpret information based on their social perception and position within society, which subsequently influences their attitudes. Reinforcement mechanisms, such as rewards and punishments, as well as persuasive communication, can also encourage individuals to adopt new attitudes.

In literary studies, the concept of attitude change is particularly relevant for analysing character development. Fictional characters often undergo psychological transformations influenced by internal conflicts and external circumstances. By examining these changes, researchers can gain insights into human behaviour and emotional processes as reflected in literary narratives.

2.6 Psychological Approach in Literary Analysis

The psychological approach to literature focuses on understanding characters' mental states, emotions, and behavioural patterns. This approach allows researchers to explore how literary texts represent psychological realities and human experiences. By applying psychological theories, such as attitude and attitude change, literary analysis can move beyond surface-level interpretation to examine deeper meanings embedded in the narrative.

In the context of *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven, a psychological approach is particularly relevant due to the novel's emphasis on trauma, emotional struggle, and personal transformation. The protagonist's changing attitude reflects the interaction between personal experience and social influence, making it a suitable subject for analysis using attitude change theory. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how literary characters mirror real-life psychological processes, especially in relation to adolescent development and emotional resilience.

2.7 Synthesis and Research Gap

Several previous studies have examined psychological issues in literary works, including analyses of character transformation, trauma, and emotional resilience. Research by Nasution et al. (2023) explored existential feminism in Andrea Hirata's novels, while Pardi and Ardescy (2022) analyzed protagonist's loyalty in Sidney Sheldon's novel. Other studies have examined moral values in film scripts (Marini & Pardi, 2022), ideology in marine ritual discourse (Pratiwy et al., 2024), and existential feminism in Indonesian literature (Suhadi et al., 2023).

Although several studies have examined psychological issues in *All the Bright Places*, limited attention has been given to the factors influencing Violet Markey's attitude change through the lens of Azwar's theory. Previous research on the novel has focused on Freudian psychoanalysis (Syarif et al., 2023; Larasati, 2024), mental illness representation (Oumeddour & Dafri, 2021), and character obsession (Adiguna et al., 2021). However, none have systematically analyzed the psychological and social determinants that shape the protagonist's transformation using Azwar's attitude change framework. This study addresses that gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of the psychological and social determinants underlying Violet Markey's transformation. By applying Azwar's framework, this research provides a novel contribution to the understanding of how personal experience, significant others, and emotional factors interact to produce attitude change in literary characters.

3. Research Method

The research methodology constitutes a crucial element that must be clearly defined in conducting a scientific study (Marini & Pardi, 2022). This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach. Moleong, as cited in Siregar, Nasution, and Pardi (2022), defines qualitative research as a strategy that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words, as well as observable human behavior. Through this approach, the study is directed toward providing a detailed description of the phenomena that emerge during the research process (Pratiwy et al., 2023).

This approach is utilized to examine attitude change as portrayed in *All the Bright Places*, a novel by Jennifer Niven, which serves as the primary data source. The techniques used in data collection include note-taking and quoting methods, as proposed by Sugiyono (2009) and Sutopo (2005). These methods are applied to select data that are relevant to the research problems without emphasizing the quantity of the data collected (Pardi & Ardesy, 2022). The data collection process is conducted through a comprehensive reading of the novel, supported by additional sources such as books, journal articles, and other relevant references (Suhadi et al., 2023).

The data were analysed following the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

First, data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from the novel. The researcher identified words, phrases, and sentences in *All the Bright Places* that reflect the protagonist's attitude change, particularly those related to personal experience, influence of significant others, and emotional factors as outlined in Azwar's (2013) framework. Irrelevant data were excluded to maintain focus on the research objectives.

Second, data display involves organizing and compressing information to enable conclusion drawing. The identified data were categorized based on the three main factors of attitude change: (a) personal experience, (b) influence of significant others, and (c) emotional factors. Each quotation was coded according to its relevant category and contextualized within the narrative to preserve meaning.

Third, conclusion drawing and verification were conducted iteratively throughout the analysis. The researcher interpreted the categorized data to answer the research questions, drawing conclusions about how each factor contributed to Violet Markey's attitude change. Conclusions were verified by re-examining the original text to ensure consistency and accuracy.

To ensure systematic and transparent coding, the researcher developed a codebook containing definitions, inclusion criteria, and examples for each category. For instance, personal experience was coded when passages described traumatic events directly experienced by Violet; influence of significant others was coded when Violet's interactions with Theodore Finch or family members led to changes in her thoughts, feelings, or behaviours; and emotional factors were coded when Violet's emotional responses such as fear, grief, or happiness influenced her attitudes and actions. The coding process was applied consistently across all identified passages.

To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation was employed. Theoretical triangulation was applied by comparing the findings from the novel with established psychological theories of attitude change, particularly Azwar's (2013) framework. Multiple theoretical perspectives, including social psychology (Aronson et al., 2007) and developmental psychology (Gerungan, 2004), were used to cross-check interpretations and reduce researcher bias. This approach ensures that the analysis is grounded in established psychological concepts rather than subjective impression.

In addition to theoretical triangulation, source triangulation was achieved by examining multiple passages across different chapters of the novel to confirm the consistency of thematic patterns. For example, evidence of Violet's transformation was drawn from early, middle, and late sections of the narrative to capture the developmental trajectory of her attitude change. This cross-verification strengthens the credibility of the findings by demonstrating that the identified factors are not isolated incidents but recurring themes throughout the narrative.

As this study analyses a published literary work with no direct human participants, formal ethics approval was not required. However, several ethical principles guided the research process. First, the novel is cited as the primary source with proper attribution to the author, Jennifer Niven, and the publisher, respecting intellectual property rights. Second, all secondary sources, including journal articles and books, are properly acknowledged in the references. Third, the analysis maintains fidelity to the original text, avoiding misinterpretation or distortion of the author's narrative. Fourth, the study does not involve any data collection from human subjects, thus no informed consent or privacy protection measures were necessary. The research adheres to academic integrity standards, ensuring that all findings are presented honestly and transparently without fabrication or manipulation of data.

4. Discussion

Azwar (2013) explains that attitudes may shift due to the influence of various underlying factors. These factors, in the context of *All the Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven, may include personal experiences, social interactions, and exposure to new information that can reshape an individual's perspective. In addition, changes in environment and emotional responses can also contribute to how attitudes develop or transform over time.

The following analysis focuses on three key factors influencing Violet Markey's attitude change: personal experience, the influence of significant others, and emotional factors, as identified in Azwar's (2013) framework and mentioned in the abstract. Each factor is examined through textual evidence from the novel.

4.1 Personal Experience

Response is an essential component in the development of attitudes. In order for an individual to form responses and appreciation, they must possess prior experience related to psychological objects. This perspective is further supported by recent psychological studies, which highlight those personal experiences, especially those involving emotional intensity, play a significant role in shaping and modifying attitudes over time (Fazio, 2022). This is reflected in the experience of Violet Markey, whose personality changed significantly after the accident she experienced with her sister, Eleanor. Following the incident, Violet became more withdrawn and melancholic, showing how profoundly the event influenced her attitude and emotional state.

“Some people laughed. Violet looked at me and I could tell she was annoyed, and that's when I remembered the accident. Violet and her brother, somewhere last spring. Violet lives, her brother dies. That's why she doesn't want attention (Jennifer Niven, 2015: 39)”

The quotation indicates that Violet is still unable to move on from the traumatic accident that caused her sister Eleanor's death. The incident not only resulted in the loss of her older sister but also transformed Violet into a more withdrawn individual who no longer seeks attention. Prior to the tragedy, Violet had been well-known at school, partly due to her relationship with Ryan Cross, who was considered the most popular and attractive boy among her peers. This condition reflects how personal experience significantly shapes an individual's attitude and behaviour. The traumatic event experienced by Violet becomes a powerful psychological experience that influences her emotional responses and social interactions. As a result, her shift from being outgoing to becoming more reserved illustrates how deeply personal experiences can alter one's perspective, self-concept, and way of engaging with others.

However, the relationship between Violet and Ryan has deteriorated since the accident occurred. It can be seen from the following quotation.

“Outside the classroom, Ryan waited. I can see him trying to solve puzzles so he can put me back together and turn me into the fun girlfriend he used to know (Jennifer Niven, 2015: 33)”

4.2 Influence of Significant Others

The quotation reflects the significant role of influential others in shaping an individual's attitudes and emotional development. Violet's statement that Theodore Finch is the best friend she has ever had, even surpassing her bond with her sister Eleanor, indicates a shift in the hierarchy of meaningful relationships in her life. This suggests that Finch has become a central figure who provides emotional support, understanding, and connection, especially after the traumatic loss she experienced. See the following quotation.

“I said, "You're the best friend I ever had, Theodore Finch." and that's true, even more so than Eleanor. Violet considers Finch to be her best friend (Jennifer Niven, 2015: 313)”

This moment illustrates how close interpersonal relationships can affect an individual's perspective, feelings, and behaviour. Finch's presence in Violet's life functions as a powerful social influence, helping her navigate grief and gradually reconstruct her emotional state. Thus, the quotation demonstrates that individuals who are considered important can play a crucial role in transforming attitudes by offering new experiences, support systems, and ways of interpreting personal circumstances.

Furthermore, the positive emotional shift in Violet can be seen in the following quotation:

“I can feel the anxiety fading away. I'm relaxed and happy - happier than I've felt in a long time (Jennifer Niven, 2015: 311).”

The quotation shows a positive emotional shift in Violet, where she begins to feel relief from anxiety and experiences genuine happiness again after a long period of distress. This change can be closely linked to the influence of Theodore Finch as a significant other in her life. As explained in the previous discussion, Finch's presence provides emotional support and comfort, which gradually helps Violet recover from her trauma. Therefore, this moment reflects how the influence of an important person can contribute to reducing negative emotions and fostering a more positive attitude.

4.3 Emotional Factors

An attitude can be expressed as an emotional response that serves to channel frustration or function as a form of ego defence mechanism. In psychology, such responses are understood as unconscious strategies used to reduce anxiety and protect the individual from distressing feelings or experiences (Freud, 1923; McLeod, 2026). These attitudes may be temporary and disappear once the source of frustration is resolved, but in some cases, they can persist and develop into more stable patterns of behaviour.

In Violet's case, the frustration and sadness she experiences due to the accident that caused her sister's death significantly influence her attitude. The traumatic experience leads her to develop fear and avoidance behaviour, particularly toward situations associated with the accident, such as being in a car. This demonstrates how emotional distress and unresolved trauma can shape enduring attitudes as part of psychological self-protection.

“He leaned back against the point for a moment I thought he was giving up the point then he said "I'm worried about your progress violet. To be honest

you should have gone further than you are now you can't stay out of the car forever, especially now that we're into winter. You can't keep standing still At some point you have to remember that you're a survivor. And that means... (Jennifer Niven, 2015: 30)”

The quotation reflects an external attempt to influence Violet's attitude and behaviour following her traumatic experience. The speaker emphasizes concern over her lack of progress, indicating that Violet remains psychologically affected by the accident, particularly through her avoidance of getting into a car. This avoidance behaviour suggests the persistence of fear as a response to trauma, which hinders her recovery process.

“Mom said "we said we put our trust in him. We appreciate him getting you into the car again. Point we want you to have fun just don't overdo it but be careful and go to school (Jennifer Niven, 2015: 201)”

The quotation illustrates the supportive role of family as significant others in influencing Violet's attitude and recovery process. Her mother's statement reflects trust in the person helping violet face her fear, particularly her effort to get back into a car, which had previously been avoided due to trauma. This indicates that Violet's family actively encourages her gradual progress while still acknowledging her emotional condition.

From an academic standpoint, these statements reflect the concepts of coping and resilience, in which Violet is encouraged to reconstruct her identity as a "survivor" rather than perceiving herself as a victim. This cognitive reframing serves as a strategy to promote adaptive attitude change by gradually confronting fear and re-engaging with situations she previously avoided. Furthermore, the support she receives, characterized by trust, concern, and encouragement, represents a form of positive social influence that facilitates this process. Such supportive interactions, particularly from significant others like parents, help establish a secure environment that enables Violet to regain confidence and resume her daily activities. Therefore, these instances demonstrate how social influence and emotional support contribute to reducing anxiety and fostering more adaptive behavioural and psychological responses.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

From the discussion above, the findings of this study indicate that attitude change in *All the Bright Places* is influenced by three interconnected factors, namely personal experience, influence of significant others, and emotional factors, as proposed by Saifuddin Azwar (2013).

First, personal experience, particularly traumatic events, plays a dominant role in shaping Violet's attitudes. The accident that led to her sister's death significantly alters her personality, making her more withdrawn, anxious, and avoidant. This finding aligns with Fazio's (2022) assertion that emotionally intense experiences deeply affect an individual's self-concept and behavioural responses. Compared to previous studies on *All the Bright Places*, such as Syarif et al. (2023) who focused on life and death instincts using Freudian theory, the present study provides a more specific analysis of how personal trauma directly triggers attitude change.

Second, social influence, especially from significant others, contributes to the transformation of Violet's attitudes. The presence of Theodore Finch as a supportive figure helps Violet gradually overcome her grief and anxiety. Support from family members also reinforces this process by providing encouragement and a sense of security. This finding extends the work of Larasati (2024), who analysed Violet's character development through

Freud's tripartite psyche, by demonstrating that external social relationships are as crucial as internal psychological forces in facilitating character transformation.

Third, emotional factors, including fear, frustration, and trauma, function as underlying mechanisms that shape and maintain attitudes. These emotional responses may initially serve as defence mechanisms but can evolve over time through coping and resilience. This finding complements Oumeddour and Dafri's (2021) examination of mental illness representation in the novel, showing that accurate portrayal of emotional struggle is essential for understanding adolescent psychological development.

The findings of this study also align with broader research on adolescent trauma in literature. A 2025 study published in *Lire Journal* demonstrated that religious trauma and peer relationships catalyse resistance identity and self-authorship in adolescent protagonists. Similarly, Kanwal, Naz, and Mehwish (2025) in the *World Journal of English Language* found that unresolved identity crises during adolescence lead to maladaptive behaviour. Violet's journey in *All the Bright Places* reflects these patterns, as her trauma initially leads to withdrawal, but her relationship with Finch provides a pathway toward healing and positive attitude change.

Overall, the findings suggest that attitude change is a dynamic process influenced by the interaction of personal experiences, social support systems, and emotional regulation, which together contribute to Violet's psychological development and recovery. These results provide empirical support for Azwar's (2013) framework while demonstrating its applicability to literary analysis, bridging the gap between psychological theory and narrative interpretation.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reveals that attitude change is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of personal experiences, social influences, and emotional factors. Violet's transformation demonstrates how traumatic events can significantly alter attitudes, while support from significant others and effective emotional coping mechanisms can facilitate positive change. Thus, attitude development is not static but continuously evolves through experience, social interaction, and psychological adjustment.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on attitude change and literary psychology in three significant ways. First, it demonstrates the applicability of Azwar's (2013) framework of attitude change to the analysis of contemporary young adult fiction. While Azwar's theory has been widely applied in social psychology research, this study extends its relevance to literary analysis, showing that the psychological structure of attitude change— Influenced by personal experience, significant others, and emotional factors—is observable in fictional character development. Second, this study integrates psychological theories from multiple disciplines (social psychology, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis) to provide a comprehensive understanding of how literary characters reflect real human psychological processes. Third, the findings support the broader theoretical claim that attitudes are not innate but are learned and modified through experience and social interaction (Gerungan, 2004; Azwar, 2013), demonstrating that literary narratives can serve as valid representations of psychological phenomena.

The findings of this study have practical implications for several educational domains. For literature educators, the analysis of attitude change in *All the Bright Places* can serve as a teaching tool for illustrating psychological concepts in character-driven narratives. Students can trace Violet's transformation through the three identified factors (personal experience, influence of significant others, and emotional factors), making abstract psychological theories tangible through textual evidence. For secondary school teachers, the novel offers a realistic portrayal of adolescent trauma and recovery, which can be used to facilitate classroom

discussions about mental health, emotional resilience, and coping strategies. For psychology educators, the novel provides a case study for examining how trauma affects identity formation and how supportive relationships can facilitate psychological healing. Additionally, the study demonstrates how literary analysis can be integrated into psychology curricula, bridging the gap between humanities and social sciences.

This study is limited to a single novel by Jennifer Niven, focusing specifically on the factors influencing the protagonist's attitude change. Future research may expand the scope in several directions. First, comparative studies across other young adult novels dealing with trauma and recovery—such as *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, *It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini, or *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson—could examine whether attitude change follows similar patterns across different narratives or varies by author, character age, or thematic emphasis. Second, cross-cultural studies examining how attitude change is portrayed in young adult literature from different national traditions (e.g., Indonesian, Japanese, or Latin American coming-of-age novels) could illuminate whether the psychological factors identified in this study are universal or culturally specific. Third, future studies may employ alternative psychological frameworks—such as cognitive-behavioural theory, attachment theory, or positive psychology—to analyse attitude change in literary characters, potentially revealing different dimensions of psychological transformation. Fourth, reception studies investigating how adolescent readers interpret and respond to depictions of attitude change in literature could bridge the gap between textual analysis and reader-response theory, revealing whether exposure to characters undergoing positive transformation influences readers' own attitudes or coping behaviours. Fifth, longitudinal studies tracking how the representation of adolescent trauma and recovery in young adult fiction has evolved over the past fifty years could identify broader cultural shifts in understandings of mental health, resilience, and emotional development. Such research would extend the findings of this study while contributing to the interdisciplinary dialogue between literary studies, developmental psychology, education, and clinical practice.

References

- Abrams, M. H. (1981). *A glossary of literary terms* (5th ed.). Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Adiguna, M. R., Sukmawaty, L., & Hestiana, H. (2021). Obsessive behavior of Theodore Finch in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sosial dan Humaniora*, 5(2), 112-125.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D., & Akert, R. M. (2007). *Social psychology* (6th ed.). Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Azwar, S. (2013). *Penyusunan skala psikologi* (2nd ed.). Pustaka Pelajar.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Fazio, R. H. (2007). Attitudes as object–evaluation associations of varying strength. *Social Cognition*, 25(5), 603-637. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2007.25.5.603>
- Fowler, A. (1987). *A history of English literature*. Basil Blackwell.
- Freud, S. (1923). *The ego and the id*. Hogarth Press.
- Gerungan, W. A. (2004). *Psikologi sosial*. Refika Aditama. (Duplikat dihapus)
- Irwan. (2017). *Etika dan perilaku kesehatan*. Absolute Media.
- Kanwal, S., Naz, F., & Mehwish. (2025). Unresolved identity crises and negative identity outcomes in adolescent literature. *World Journal of English Language*, 15(2), 45-58.
- Kenney, W. (1966). *How to analyze fiction*. Monarch Press.

- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2007). *Manajemen pemasaran* (Edisi 12). Indeks.
- Larasati, D. (2024). Violet Markey's character development through Freud's tripartite psyche in *All the Bright Places*. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 8(1), 33-47.
- Mar'at. (1982). *Sikap manusia: Perubahan serta pengukurannya*. Ghalia Indonesia.
- Marini, F., & Pardi. (2022). Moral values in Justin Zackham's movie script *The Bucket List*. *Journal of Language*, 4(1), 119-129. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v4i1.5209>
- McLeod, S. (2026). *Defense mechanisms*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/defense-mechanisms.html>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Nasution, I., Pardi, P., Manugeren, M., Hidayati, H., Pratiwy, D., & Wulan, S. (2023). Minangkabauese tradition of out-migration (merantau) in Indonesia: Hamka's novels on reality. *World Journal of English Language*, 13(6), 119-130. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n6p119>
- Niven, J. (2015). *All the bright places*. Alfred A. Knopf. (Duplikat dihapus)
- Nurdiyantoro, B. (2012). *Teori pengkajian fiksi*. Gadjah Mada University Press.
- Oumeddour, R., & Dafri, N. (2021). De-romanticizing and romanticizing mental illness in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 6(4), 234-242.
- Pardi, P., & Ardency, Y. N. (2022). Protagonist's loyalty in Sidney Sheldon's novel *Tell Me Your Dreams*. *Journal of Language*, 4(2), 298-303. <https://doi.org/10.30743/jol.v4i2.5992>
- Pratiwy, D., Swastiwi, A. W., Manugeren, M., Pardi, P., & Asnani, A. (2024). Ideology in marine ritual discourse of Acehese speech community. *Jurnal Arbitrer*, 10(4), 300-308. <https://doi.org/10.25077/ar.10.4.300-308.2023>
- Sahruman. (2025). Adolescence under pressure: Religious trauma and identity in Dill's narrative. *Lire Journal (Journal of Linguistics and Literature)*, 9(2), 342-352.
- Semi, A. (1988). *Anatomi sastra*. Angkasa Raya.
- Siregar, R. A., Nasution, I., & Pardi, P. (2022). Local wisdom of the Parsidangan stone legend at Huta Siallagan Samosir: A literary tourism perspective. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Language Teaching*, 6(1), 177-188. <https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v6i1.5249>
- Sugiyono. (2009). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif, kualitatif dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Suhadi, M. F., Pardi, P., Manugeren, M., Zein, T. T., & Pratiwy, D. (2023). Existential feminism in Andrea Hirata's novels *Padang Bulan* and *Cinta di dalam Gelas*. *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing dan Sastra*, 7(2), 456-468. <https://doi.org/10.26858/erallingua.v7i2.45678>
- Sumardjo, J., & Saini, K. M. (1991). *Apresiasi kesusastraan*. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- Sutopo, H. B. (2005). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif*. Sebelas Maret University Press.
- Syarif, M., Rahmawati, A., & Fitriani, N. (2023). Life and death instincts in *All the Bright Places*: A Freudian analysis of novel and film adaptation. *Pioneer: Journal of Language and Literature*, 15(1), 78-92.
- Walgito, B. (2003). *Psikologi sosial: Suatu pengantar*. Andi.

Exploring Psychopathic Traits in David Leslie Johnson's Film *Orphan*

Pardi, Nadhira Muthia

Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

e-mail: pardi@sastra.uisu.ac.id

Article Info

Article history:

Received: March 30, 2026

Accepted: May 05, 2026

Published: May 11, 2026

Keywords:

lack of empathy;

manipulativeness;

poor behavioral control;

psychopathy;

psychopathic traits;

Abstract

This study examines psychopathic traits through the behavior of the protagonist, Esther, in David Leslie Johnson's movie *Orphan* (2009), using Hare's (1999) psychopathy framework. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through detailed observation of Esther's actions and interactions in the film. The findings indicate that Esther exhibits core psychopathic traits, including a lack of empathy, poor behavioral control, and manipulateness. She demonstrates emotional detachment and indifference to the suffering of others, responds impulsively to provocation, and deceives those around her to gain trust and influence. These behaviors reveal a profound disregard for moral and social norms, highlighting that psychopathy can be hidden behind an outwardly innocent appearance. This study contributes to the growing intersection between literary criticism, film studies, and psychological analysis by demonstrating how cinematic narratives can reflect clinically recognized personality disorders. The study underscores the importance of critical evaluation and vigilance in assessing individuals, as external appearances may not reflect underlying psychological dispositions.

Corresponding Author:

Pardi

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: pardi@sastra.uisu.ac.id

1. Introduction

Psychopathy is a well-established construct within clinical and forensic psychology, characterized by a constellation of affective, interpersonal, and behavioural traits including manipulateness, lack of empathy, impulsivity, and absence of remorse (Hare & Neumann, 2008). The Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) developed by Robert D. Hare remains one of the most widely validated tools for assessing psychopathic traits (Hare et al., 2009), and has been employed in research to evaluate both real individuals and fictional portrayals of psychopathy (e.g., Smith, Johnson, and Lee's 2020 study on cinematic portrayals of psychopaths using the Psychopathy Checklist) to understand how media representations align with psychological constructs. Psychopathic traits can influence interpersonal relationships and social interactions, often leading to harmful outcomes due to emotional detachment and behavioural dysregulation (Baskin-Sommers & Brazil, 2022).

In narrative media, cinematic portrayals of psychopathic characters have been the subject of psychological inquiry, revealing that while many films emphasize interpersonal charm or violent behaviour, only a subset accurately reflect the clinical criteria for psychopathy (Smith et al., 2020). These explorations underscore the importance of rigorous theoretical frameworks when analysing fictional characters purported to exhibit psychopathic traits.

Orphan (2009), directed by Jaume Collet-Serra and written by David Leslie Johnson, tells the story of a couple who adopt a young girl named Esther following the loss of their third child. Although Esther initially appears gentle and affectionate, she gradually reveals

violent, manipulative, and deceitful behaviours, particularly toward her adoptive mother. Later in the film, it is revealed that Esther is not a child but a 33-year-old woman with hypopituitarism, a condition that limits her physical growth while her cognitive function remains adult-like. This twist adds complexity to traditional depictions of childhood innocence and raises questions about underlying psychological pathology. Previous studies analysing *Orphan* using psychopathy frameworks report that Esther embodies several core psychopathic traits, such as deception, lack of empathy, impulsivity, aggression, and manipulative tendencies, which are consistent with features described in Hare's model (Fitria, 2021).

Beyond cinema, literary studies have also applied psychopathy and related personality constructs to analyse fictional characters. Research by Pardi and colleagues, for example, employs the dark triad model which includes psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism to examine complex character motivations and behaviours in literature, highlighting how psychopathic affect and lack of remorse contribute to narrative development and moral tension (Pardi & Sonia, 2025). These interdisciplinary investigations demonstrate the value of psychological models for interpreting character behaviour in both literary and cinematic texts.

Although previous studies have examined Esther's psychopathic tendencies, few have systematically analysed her character using Hare's psychopathy framework within a rigorous qualitative descriptive design. Most existing research has focused on general descriptions of antisocial behaviour without applying a structured, clinically recognized psychopathy assessment tool to analyse her actions and interactions in the film. This gap limits the depth of psychological interpretation that can be drawn from the narrative.

This study addresses that gap by systematically identifying and analysing Esther's psychopathic traits based on Hare's (1999) framework, employing a qualitative descriptive approach to ensure methodological rigor. By grounding the analysis in established psychological theory and supported by prior research, the findings are expected to enhance theoretical understanding of psychopathy in media portrayals and offer insights into how such portrayals inform audiences' interpretations of deceptive appearances and moral complexity. Additionally, this research contributes to the growing intersection between literary criticism, film studies, and psychological analysis by demonstrating how cinematic narratives can reflect clinically recognized personality disorders.

2. Literature Review

This section presents key concepts that support the current study, including the definition of protagonist, the concept of psychopathy and its traits, and the meaning of behaviour and morality as they relate to the analysis of the film *Orphan*.

A protagonist is generally defined as the main character in a narrative whom the audience or reader follows and identifies with. Fowler (1987) explains that the protagonist is the central figure in a story, drama, or other literary works with whom the audience most strongly empathizes. Wiley (2010) adds that the protagonist plays an active, leading role in the narrative. Harcourt (2013) further notes that in classical drama the protagonist was the first actor to speak with the chorus, while in later works the term refers to the primary character, even when minor roles are also portrayed by the same actor. Beckson and Ganz (1990) emphasize that the protagonist leads the narrative and often contrasts with the antagonist. Therefore, for this study, the protagonist refers to the central character of *Orphan*, Esther, whose behaviours are examined through psychological theory.

2.1 Psychopathy as a Clinical Construct

Psychopathy refers to a personality pattern characterized by emotionlessness, manipulateness, and antisocial behaviour. Salazar (2017) explains that the term psychopath

originates from the Greek words *psyche* (soul) and *pathos* (disease), indicating a harmful condition that negatively impacts society. Although psychopaths may superficially appear charming and socially skilled, their behaviour ultimately causes harm to others. There is debate whether psychopathy should be classified as a trait or a disorder; however, Kartono (2000) describes psychopathy as a mental disorder marked by a lack of personal integration and moral responsibility, leading the individual into conflict with social norms and legal standards. Similarly, Hirstein (2005), citing Hare (1999), contends that psychopaths lack conscience because they do not experience fundamental emotions such as fear or anxiety.

Based on these definitions, psychopathy can be understood as a mental condition characterized by poor social adaptation, absence of moral responsibility, and unstable emotional patterns. Psychopaths can appear in any social class or profession and may be of any gender. Their behaviours—such as manipulation, intimidation, and violence—are used to control or exploit others for personal satisfaction.

2.2 Recent Perspectives on Psychopathy and Media Representation

Recent scholarship has significantly expanded the understanding of psychopathy and its representation in media. Hare and Neumann (2008) reaffirm that the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R) remains the most validated tool for assessing psychopathic traits across clinical, forensic, and research settings. The checklist assesses interpersonal traits (e.g., grandiosity, manipulateness), affective deficits (e.g., lack of remorse, shallow affect), and behavioural tendencies (e.g., impulsivity, poor behavioural control).

Smith, Johnson, and Lee (2020) conducted a systematic examination of cinematic portrayals of psychopathic characters using the PCL-R as an analytical framework, finding that while many films emphasize interpersonal charm or violent behaviour, only a subset accurately reflect the clinical criteria for psychopathy. Their research underscores the importance of applying rigorous psychological frameworks—rather than relying on popular stereotypes—when analysing fictional characters purported to exhibit psychopathic traits.

The intersection of forensic psychology and popular culture has also received increased scholarly attention. Studies examining the portrayal of psychopathy in horror and thriller genres reveal a tendency toward sensationalism, yet films such as *Orphan* have been recognized for their nuanced depiction of the condition's core features—particularly the ability of psychopaths to present a convincing facade of normalcy while concealing dangerous tendencies. This capacity for deception and manipulation is precisely what Hare (2003) identifies as the "mask of sanity."

Contemporary research has also explored the public's understanding of psychopathy through media consumption. Studies indicate that accurate portrayals of mental disorders in film and literature can contribute to greater public awareness and reduce stigma, while inaccurate depictions reinforce harmful stereotypes. This finding underscores the cultural significance of films like *Orphan*, which have the potential to shape audience perceptions of psychopathy and its behavioural manifestations.

To operationalize the concept of psychopathy for analytical purposes, Hare's (1999) framework is widely referenced. According to Hare, psychopaths are "social predators who charm, manipulate, and ruthlessly plow their way through life, leaving broken hearts and shattered expectations behind without any sense of guilt or regret." This definition, refined over decades of clinical research (Hare, 2003; Hare & Neumann, 2008), remains foundational to psychopathy assessment. Hare lists several traits commonly observed in individuals with psychopathic tendencies, including egocentrism, superficial charm, frequent lying, lack of remorse or guilt, absence of empathy, impulsivity, irresponsibility, manipulateness, parasitic lifestyle, poor behavioural control, strong possessiveness, and antisocial behaviours. Although

these traits alone do not confirm a psychopathy diagnosis, they serve as key indicators for psychological observation and analysis.

In contrast, Kartono (2000) identifies psychopathic traits from a sociological perspective, including chronic antisocial behaviour, lack of social awareness or intelligence, unpleasant attitudes toward others, and emotionally unstable personalities. These traits illustrate how psychopathy not only affects individual behaviour but also disrupts social relationships and norms.

2.3 Integrating Classical and Contemporary Frameworks

While foundational definitions from Kartono (2000) and Salazar (2017) provide essential grounding, contemporary research has refined our understanding of how psychopathy manifests in fictional narratives. Recent studies demonstrate that film characters can serve as valid case studies for examining psychopathic traits when analysed using structured clinical frameworks. Smith et al. (2020) found that accurate cinematic portrayals of psychopathy typically include three core elements: manipulative interpersonal style, deficient affective experience (particularly lack of empathy), and impulsive or irresponsible behavioural patterns—all of which are evident in the character of Esther in *Orphan*.

The representation of mental disorders in popular culture has been the subject of extensive recent scholarship. Research consistently demonstrates that media portrayals significantly influence public perceptions of psychological conditions, including psychopathy. Accurate portrayals can enhance understanding and reduce stigma, while inaccurate depictions may reinforce harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. Films like *Orphan*, which embed psychopathic traits within a compelling narrative framework, therefore carry both entertainment value and educational potential. This dual function underscores the importance of rigorous psychological analysis of cinematic characters, ensuring that media representations align with—rather than distort—clinical understanding.

2.4 Critical Synthesis

The literature reviewed reveals both the utility and limitations of applying clinical psychopathy frameworks to fictional characters. Hare's (1999, 2003) criteria provide a robust analytical tool for identifying specific behavioural and affective traits associated with psychopathy. However, cinematic portrayals necessarily involve artistic license and narrative constraints that may not fully capture the clinical complexity of the disorder. Smith et al. (2020) caution against over-diagnosis of fictional characters, emphasizing that film portrayals should be understood as approximations rather than clinical case studies. Nevertheless, when systematically analysed using validated frameworks such as Hare's PCL-R, cinematic characters can offer valuable insights into public understanding of psychopathy and contribute to broader discussions about personality disorders in popular culture. This study adopts this balanced perspective, using Hare's framework to analyse Esther's behaviour while acknowledging the limitations inherent in applying clinical criteria to fictional narratives.

In addition to psychopathy, understanding behaviour in narrative works is essential. Dewey (1929) in Mustafa (2011) argues that human behaviour is shaped not only by past experiences but also by ongoing interaction with the environment. Behaviour reveals a person's personality and can be observed through actions such as speaking, walking, smiling, or aggression. Thus, behaviour in literary or film analysis serves as the primary indicator of character traits, moral orientation, and psychological disposition.

Morality is closely linked to behaviour. Nurhayati (2019) defines morality as the principles guiding behaviour, including responsibility, conduct, and attitudes toward others. Fox and DeMarco (1990) outline core moral principles such as non-maleficence (do no harm), beneficence (promote good), autonomy (respect for informed choice), justice (fair treatment),

utility (maximize benefits), fidelity (keep commitments), honesty (avoid deception), and privacy (respect confidentiality). These principles provide a framework for distinguishing good behaviour from immoral or harmful conduct.

Sari (2006) further highlights that morality is not innate but shaped by experience and social interaction. Individuals learn moral values through their environment and gradually internalize these values, affecting their decisions and actions. When individuals prioritize personal gain at the expense of others, they may display immoral behaviour, losing empathy and humane consideration.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study analyses the psychopathic traits exhibited by the protagonist of *Orphan* and evaluates her behaviour through behavioural and moral lenses. The theoretical framework supports the interpretation of Esther's actions and clarifies how psychopathy manifests in narrative contexts, contributing to both psychological understanding and moral analysis.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design, which focuses on describing and interpreting phenomena in their natural context using narrative data rather than numbers (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative descriptive research is suitable for analysing complex behaviours and psychological traits, particularly in literary or cinematic works, as it allows a detailed understanding of characters' actions and interactions (Pardi & Ardescy, 2022; Pardi & Hartika, 2025).

The film *Orphan* (2009) was selected as the primary data source using purposive sampling, based on its relevance to the research objectives. The selection was guided by three criteria: (a) the protagonist exhibits behaviours consistent with Hare's (1999) psychopathy framework, (b) the narrative provides sufficient screen time to observe her interactions, and (c) previous studies have identified psychopathic tendencies in the film (Fitria, 2021).

The primary data for this research is the film *Orphan* (2009), which provides observable behaviours and narrative events illustrating the protagonist's psychopathic traits. Secondary data were collected from scholarly books and peer-reviewed articles that discuss psychopathy, behaviour, and qualitative research methods.

Data collection was conducted through note-taking and quotation documentation. Note-taking records relevant observations of the protagonist's gestures, actions, and interactions, while quotation documentation selects direct excerpts of dialogue or narrative events that represent psychopathic behaviours. These techniques prioritize quality and relevance over quantity, consistent with qualitative research practices (Sutopo, 2015; Pardi & Sonia, 2025). To ensure data credibility, this study applies triangulation, comparing observations from the film with theoretical sources and previous studies to validate findings and reduce bias.

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2013) procedures: data reduction, organizing raw notes into meaningful units; data classification, grouping reduced data into thematic categories such as lack of empathy, manipulation, and impulsivity (Pardi & Ardescy, 2022; Pardi & Hartika, 2025); and data interpretation, linking categorized data to theoretical frameworks of psychopathy.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study follows Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was established through multiple viewings of the film and triangulation of theoretical sources. Transferability was facilitated through thick description of Esther's behaviours and narrative context. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail documenting all research stages. Confirmability was achieved through reflexivity and the use of a structured theoretical framework (Hare's psychopathy traits).

By integrating Creswell's analytic framework with rigorous qualitative procedures and Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria, this study ensures that its findings are methodologically robust and theoretically grounded (Pardi & Sonia, 2025; Pardi & Hartika, 2025).

4. Discussion

This study presents an analysis of Esther, the central character in the movie *Orphan*, as the story's protagonist. The discussion focuses on examining her behaviours and actions throughout the film, particularly those that reveal her complex psychological patterns. The analysis is conducted through the lens of Robert D. Hare's theory of psychopathic traits, which provides a structured framework for identifying and interpreting characteristics such as manipulation, lack of empathy, impulsivity, and moral disengagement. By applying this theoretical perspective, the study aims to uncover the underlying psychopathic tendencies that shape Esther's interactions with other characters, offering a deeper understanding of her personality and the motivations behind her behaviour.

4.1 Lack of Empathy

Psychopaths are generally characterized by a pronounced lack of empathy. As noted by Perri and Lichtenwald (2010), individuals with psychopathic tendencies often exhibit an absence of conscience and minimal concern for the feelings of others. Consequently, psychopaths act without regard for moral or social norms, pursuing their desires even when their actions cause harm to others. The following example (Data 1) illustrates this behaviour.

Data 1: Dialogue on 00:29:54 to 00:30:35

Figure 1

Esther hit a bird with stone.



- Esther* : "Did you kill it?"
Daniel : "It's just a paint balls, I don't think it would hurt"
Esther (take a stone and give to Daniel) "Put it out of a misery. It's in pain, and it's your responsibility."
Daniel : "It was just an accident."
Esther : "If you walk away now, it will starve to death. Is that what you want?"
Daniel : "I'm not doing it"
(Suddenly Esther killed the bird with a stone, Daniel and Max shocked)
Esther : "It's alright. It's in heaven now"
Daniel : "What's wrong with you?!" (He ran away from Esther and Max)

Esther demonstrates a clear lack of empathy, which is a core characteristic of psychopathic behaviour. Her disregard for the suffering of others is evident in her treatment of an injured animal. After Daniel accidentally shoots a bird with a paintball gun, leaving it in pain, Esther responds not with concern or compassion, but by intentionally striking the bird

with a stone to end its life. This deliberate action highlights her inability to recognize or respond appropriately to the distress of a living creature.

This scene serves as an early warning signal in the film's narrative structure. The bird incident foreshadows Esther's capacity for violence and her inability to feel compassion—traits that will later escalate to violence against humans. The placement of this scene early in the film establishes Esther's psychological abnormality before any major conflict with her adoptive family emerges.

The scene creates a sense of unease and suspicion in the viewer. Daniel's reaction—"What's wrong with you?!"—mirrors the audience's own growing discomfort. By aligning the audience with Daniel's perspective, the film positions viewers to recognize Esther's abnormality before the adoptive parents do, creating dramatic irony and tension.

From a clinical perspective, the scene accurately reflects the psychopathic trait of cruelty to animals, which is recognized in forensic psychology as a potential early indicator of antisocial personality development. Esther's ability to kill the bird without hesitation or visible distress aligns with Hare's (1999) description of psychopaths' deficient emotional response to suffering.

The film effectively demonstrates that psychopathy is not always expressed through grand, violent gestures but can manifest in seemingly small acts of cruelty. This representation challenges the stereotype that psychopaths are always overtly aggressive, showing instead that emotional detachment can be expressed in subtle yet deeply disturbing ways. Similarly, Esther's lack of empathy is further illustrated in Data 2, where her interactions with others reveal a consistent pattern of indifference to the pain or feelings of those around her.

Data 2: Dialogue on 00:55:03 to 00:56:20

Figure 2

Esther kills Sister Abigail with hammer



Saw Sister Abigail's car was coming.

Esther : (To Max with sign language) here she comes. Wave your hands and make her stop. Max, go!

Max refused and shook her head when asked by Esther. Then Esther pushed Max until fell to the road. Sister Abigail's car that was speeding almost crashed into Max. Sister Abigail got out of the car, and checking Max.

Sister Abigail: You alright? Max? Are you okay?

Max : (Crying)

Suddenly, Esther come from behind with a hammer and hit Sister Abigail's head few times. Sister Abigail fell down with blood everywhere.

Esther : (To Max) stop crying! Help me pull her feet, and get off of the road. Now!

Esther further demonstrates her profound lack of empathy through her actions toward Sister Abigail, the head of the orphanage. Sister Abigail visits the Coleman household to warn Kate and John about the troubling events that seem to follow Esther, unaware that Esther overhears the conversation. As Sister Abigail prepares to leave in her car, Esther deliberately pushes Max into the car's path, forcing Sister Abigail to swerve off the road to avoid hitting him. Rather than showing concern for the safety of others, Esther seizes the opportunity to commit a calculated and violent act, killing Sister Abigail with a hammer as she rushes to check on Max. This incident exemplifies Esther's complete disregard for human life and suffering.

This murder represents a turning point in the film. Until this moment, Esther's violence has been directed at animals or has been implied rather than shown. The brutal killing of Sister Abigail—a figure of authority and moral conscience—signals that Esther will stop at nothing to protect her secret. The scene also demonstrates Esther's tactical intelligence: she uses Max as bait, waits for the opportune moment, and disposes of the body methodically.

This scene shatters any remaining ambiguity about Esther's nature. The audience is forced to confront the reality of her violence directly, no longer able to attribute her behaviour to childhood mischief or trauma. The brutality of the murder—a hammer, multiple blows, blood—is deliberately shocking, ensuring that viewers fully recognize Esther as a threat. The scene also generates sympathy for Max, who is traumatized by witnessing the murder and then coerced into complicity.

The scene accurately depicts several psychopathic characteristics: the willingness to use violence to eliminate threats, the absence of emotional disturbance following violence, and the instrumental use of others (Max as bait) to achieve goals. Sister Abigail's death serves no emotional purpose for Esther; it is purely instrumental—a calculated removal of someone who knows too much.

The film challenges the assumption that psychopaths are easily identifiable through overt aggression. Esther's ability to mask her violence behind a facade of childhood innocence—and to commit murder while maintaining this facade—illustrates the "mask of sanity" concept (Hare, 2003). The film also raises disturbing questions about how easily psychopathic individuals can infiltrate trusting environments, an implication with significant real-world relevance for adoption and child protection systems.

All of the data presented above align with Hare's (1999) framework, as cited in Stover (2008), which identifies lack of empathy as a central psychopathic trait. This characteristic is reflected in an individual's indifference toward the rights, feelings, and well-being of others. Psychopaths demonstrate little to no concern for the harm they cause, and they rarely express remorse or guilt for their actions, even when their behaviour results in significant suffering.

4.2 Poor Behavior Control

Psychopaths are generally characterized by poor behavioural control and a tendency toward impulsive reactions. As Hare (1999) notes, cited in Pemayun (2017), individuals with psychopathic traits often respond to failure, criticism, or frustration with sudden and unpredictable actions. Consequently, a psychopath may appear calm or composed at first, yet can quickly behave in ways that are extreme or beyond what most people would consider normal, reflecting a pronounced inability to regulate their impulses.

Data 3: Dialogue on 00:33:46 to 00:34:20

Figure 3

Esther cannot control her behaviour.



At school

Brenda : Is it a bible?

Esther : (Nodded)

Brenda : (speak in loud voice and show the bible to all students) A freaky girl brings a bible to school today! All of the students: Hahahaha... Esther tried to retake the bible from Brenda. But Brenda didn't want to. Finally, the bible fell to the floor and scattered. Esther immediately re-arranged the bible, meanwhile Brenda,

Brenda : Wow look, you wear a necklace like a puppy? hahaha (try to pull the necklace)

Esther : (Panic, immediately dismissed Brenda's hand and shouted loudly) Aarrghh!!

Everyone was shocked seeing Esther shouted loudly.

Esther's poor behavioural control is illustrated during her first days at school. Initially, when introducing herself to her classmates, she is mocked by Brenda for wearing outdated clothes. Esther remains calm and does not respond, merely staring at her tormentor. However, the following day, Brenda continues to provoke her by attempting to take her Bible, causing it to fall and scatter on the floor, and by pulling on a ribbon around Esther's neck. In response to these repeated provocations, Esther suddenly raises her voice, attracting the attention of all students, and then pushes Brenda to the ground. This abrupt reaction demonstrates her inability to regulate her emotions and impulses.

This scene establishes the tension between Esther's controlled public persona and her underlying volatility. Her outburst occurs in a public setting (the classroom), marking the first time her abnormal behaviour is witnessed by outsiders. The scene also contrasts with her earlier ability to remain calm under provocation, suggesting that her behavioural control has limits and that sustained provocation will eventually trigger an explosive response.

The suddenness of Esther's outburst is designed to shock both the other characters and the audience. Until this moment, Esther has appeared quiet, composed, and perhaps socially awkward but not dangerous. The outburst reveals a crack in her facade, inviting viewers to question what else she might be capable of. The scene also elicits a complex response: Brenda is, after all, a bully, and Esther's anger might initially seem justified—but the intensity of her

reaction is disproportionate, unsettling viewers who might otherwise have sympathized with her.

Hare's (1999) framework identifies poor behavioural control as a core psychopathic trait, characterized by a low tolerance for frustration and a tendency toward explosive reactions when provoked. Esther's response—from calm to violent outburst without intermediate emotional gradation—is clinically consistent with this trait. Importantly, her outburst is not entirely irrational; it effectively intimidates Brenda and establishes that Esther is not an easy target. This instrumental aspect of her aggression—using violence to achieve social goals—further aligns with psychopathic patterns, distinguishing her behaviour from purely reactive aggression driven by emotional dysregulation alone.

The scene challenges the stereotype that psychopaths are incapable of controlling their behaviour. Esther clearly can control herself; she chooses not to when she perceives that violence will serve her purposes. This portrayal reflects clinical understanding that psychopathic behaviour is not compulsive but strategic. The scene also demonstrates how psychopaths exploit social situations: Esther, who appears as an outsider, uses Brenda's bullying as a justification for her outburst, potentially deflecting blame onto her tormentor.

4.3 Manipulative

According to Hare (1999), as cited in Stover (2008), psychopaths are highly skilled at manipulation, often deceiving their victims without being detected. They can persuade others by presenting themselves positively and telling lies about their intentions or qualities, thereby gaining complete trust and confidence from those around them.



Kate and Esther were seeing a flower that planted for Kate's death child, Jessica.

Esther : What happened to her? (Sad face)

Kate : She died when she was in my tummy. We were very sad to lose her. We decided to sprinkle her ashes on this plant. So, as long as this plant grows, there is a part of her too.

Esther : (Crying) she would be lucky. You are a great mom.

Kate : (hugging Esther) Thank you sweetheart.

Esther's manipulative behaviour is evident during her interaction with Kate. When Esther inquires about Jessica, Kate shares the story of her deceased child and points out the flower she planted in Jessica's memory. In response, Esther feigns emotional sensitivity by crying and complimenting Kate, saying that she is a "great mommy." This reaction demonstrates Esther's ability to manipulate the emotions of others to gain trust and create a favourable impression.

This scene is crucial for establishing Esther's successful integration into the Coleman family. Her performance of grief and empathy—crying on cue, offering emotional validation—convinces Kate that Esther is not only innocent but emotionally perceptive and caring. The scene also sharpens the dramatic irony for the audience, who, having witnessed

earlier acts of cruelty, recognize that Esther's tears are performative, while Kate remains unaware.

The scene is deeply unsettling because it mimics genuine emotional connection so convincingly. Viewers are forced to confront the reality that psychopaths can be extraordinarily skilled at emotional mimicry, making them difficult to detect even for well-meaning individuals. The scene also generates frustration: the audience knows Esther's true nature but cannot warn Kate, creating a sense of helplessness and anticipation of future harm.

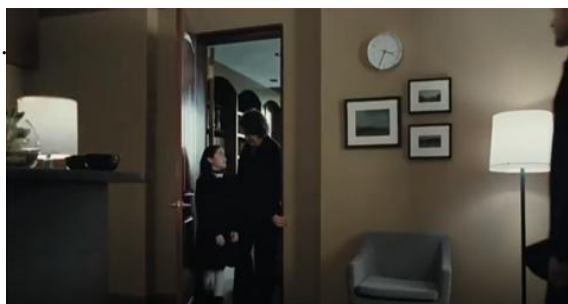
This scene accurately captures the concept of "emotional mimicry" sometimes observed in psychopathic individuals who lack genuine empathy but have learned to simulate it to achieve social goals. Hare (2003) describes this as the "mask of sanity"—the psychopath's ability to present a convincing facade of normal human emotion. Esther's ability to cry on demand and to identify exactly what Kate needs to hear ("You are a great mom") reflects the interpersonal manipulateness central to Hare's psychopathy construct.

The film challenges the stereotype that psychopaths are easily identifiable through social awkwardness or overt cruelty. Esther's manipulation is subtle, patient, and highly effective—she does not force her way into Kate's affections but waits for an emotionally vulnerable moment and skilfully inserts herself. This portrayal reflects clinical understanding that psychopathic manipulation often involves charm, emotional atonement, and strategic patience rather than crude coercion.

Data 5: Dialogue on 01:00:46 to 01:02:20

Figure 5

Kate and John take Esther to Psychiatrist



John and Kate brought Esther to a Psychiatrist.

Psychiatrist : My first instinct is, that there is no serious problem in Esther's past.

Kate : So, there is nothing wrong with her?

Psychiatrist : No. I think who should be examined is somebody in relationship with Esther. Especially with you, Kate. It seems she felt a pressure between both of you. She really did to make you pleasure, but you always prevent her efforts to knowing you.

Kate : That's not true. I've done everything, right?

Psychiatrist : There is something that made Esther felt this. Perhaps your fault because drinking or what has happened to Max, or maybe because you felt incapable to be a mother. That's influenced your relation with Esther.

Kate : What did she tell you?!

Psychiatrist : Esther is a shy little girl, introvert, sensitive, and she is going through a difficult time. She is smart, eloquent. She just needs a patient and understanding from her family.

In Data 5, following Sister Abigail's visit, Kate and John decide to take Esther to a psychiatrist, Dr. Browning, for evaluation. However, Esther skilfully manipulates the situation by providing false information about herself, concealing the truth about her past from both her adoptive parents and the orphanage staff. As a result, Dr. Browning is misled and begins to question Kate's behaviour as a mother rather than recognizing Esther as the source of the problem. This incident illustrates Esther's ability to control perceptions and deceive others to protect her secrets.

This scene represents the climax of Esther's manipulative campaign. She has successfully turned the psychiatrist—a figure of professional authority—against Kate. The scene also marks the point where Esther's manipulation becomes fully explicit; the audience sees her psychological skill laid bare. Her ability to fabricate a plausible narrative about her past, and to present herself as a victim of Kate's emotional neglect, demonstrates sophisticated social intelligence.

The scene is profoundly frustrating because it depicts institutional authority failing to recognize danger. The psychiatrist, who should be equipped to identify psychopathy, is thoroughly deceived. This generates a sense of helplessness and reinforces the film's commentary on how easily psychopaths can evade detection. The scene also heightens sympathy for Kate, who is genuinely trying to be a good mother but is being systematically undermined.

This scene reflects the clinical reality that psychopaths can be highly skilled at manipulating professionals, including mental health experts. Hare (2003) notes that psychopaths often present well in clinical interviews, appearing cooperative, articulate, and credible. Esther's tactics—deflecting attention onto Kate, presenting herself as a victim, providing a coherent (false) personal history—are consistent with documented patterns of psychopathic deception during psychological evaluation.

The scene raises profound questions about the limitations of mental health assessment in detecting psychopathy, particularly in individuals who present as charming and articulate. The film suggests that psychopathic deception can be so effective that even trained professionals are vulnerable—a sobering implication with real-world relevance for forensic psychology and child protection systems. This portrayal avoids simplistic "evil genius" stereotypes, instead showing that psychopathic manipulation often works not through exceptional intelligence but through exploiting the normal human tendency to trust and empathize.

4.4 Synthesis of Findings

The analysis of Esther's behaviour in *Orphan* reveals several key psychopathic traits as outlined in Hare's (1999) framework. First, Esther demonstrates a pronounced lack of empathy, which is evident in her treatment of both animals and humans. She intentionally kills a wounded bird and later murders Sister Abigail, showing indifference to the suffering and rights of others, consistent with Hare's assertion that psychopaths lack concern for the feelings and well-being of those around them. Second, Esther exhibits poor behavioural control, responding to provocation with sudden and extreme actions, such as shouting and physically attacking a classmate, reflecting her inability to regulate impulses under stress or criticism. Third, she displays manipulative behaviour, as seen in her interactions with Kate and Dr. Browning, where she feigns vulnerability and provides false information to influence others' perceptions and gain trust. Collectively, these behaviours illustrate the core psychopathic tendencies identified by Hare, including emotional detachment, impulsivity, and manipulateness, which allow Esther to pursue her desires without regard for moral or social norms and to exploit those around her effectively.

Collectively, these findings contribute to the growing intersection between literary criticism, film studies, and psychological analysis by demonstrating that *Orphan* offers a nuanced and clinically informed portrayal of psychopathy. The film avoids simplistic stereotypes, presenting Esther as a complex figure whose emotional detachment, strategic violence, and sophisticated manipulation reflect core features of Hare's (1999) framework. The analysis also reveals how narrative structure shapes audience perceptions of psychopathy, using dramatic irony, foreshadowing, and shifting sympathies to generate both unease and insight. For film studies, this analysis provides a model for applying clinical psychological frameworks to cinematic texts. For clinical psychology, the film serves as a case study of how psychopathic traits manifest in interpersonal contexts, reinforcing the importance of vigilance and critical evaluation in professional practice. This interdisciplinary approach underscores the value of analysing media representations of mental disorders, not only for academic understanding but also for public education about the complexities of psychopathy.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Esther's behaviour in the movie *Orphan*, it can be concluded that the protagonist exhibits prominent psychopathic traits as defined by Hare (1999). These traits include a marked lack of empathy, poor behavioural control, and manipulativeness, which are consistently demonstrated in her interactions with both humans and animals. Esther's inability to recognize the pain of others, her impulsive responses to provocation, and her deliberate deception to influence and control those around her illustrate a complete disregard for moral and social norms. This study highlights that psychopathy can be hidden behind an outwardly innocent or charming appearance, making it difficult for others to detect until harmful actions occur.

The findings contribute to psychological literary criticism and enrich scholarly discussions concerning the representation of psychopathy in contemporary cinema. By applying Hare's (1999) framework to a cinematic protagonist, this study demonstrates that clinical psychological constructs can serve as effective analytical tools for interpreting fictional characters, bridging the gap between clinical psychology and film studies.

Practically, the study provides a structured framework for analysing psychopathic characters in cinema, offers educators a model for interdisciplinary pedagogy, and reinforces the importance of critical media literacy for general audiences. The difficulty that characters in the film face in detecting Esther's true nature mirrors real-world challenges in identifying individuals with psychopathic traits, highlighting the need for careful assessment and awareness.

This study is limited to a single film (*Orphan*). Future research may examine other cinematic portrayals of psychopathy, compare male and female psychopathic characters, or investigate how audiences interpret psychopathic representations across different cultural contexts.

References

- Baskin-Sommers, A., & Brazil, I. A. (2022). Psychopathy and emotional processing. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 18, 45-67. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-081219-075401>
- Beckson, K., & Ganz, A. (1990). *Literary terms: A dictionary* (3rd ed.). Noonday Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dewey, J. (1929). *Experience and nature*. Open Court Publishing.

- Fitria, N. (2021). Analisis sifat psikopat pada tokoh utama dalam film *Orphan*. *Journal of Indonesian Studies in Language and Literature*, 15(1), 88-102. <https://journal2.um.ac.id/index.php/jisllac/article/view/28851>
- Fowler, A. (1987). *A history of English literature*. Basil Blackwell.
- Fox, R. M., & DeMarco, J. P. (1990). *Moral reasoning: A philosophical approach to ethical issues*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Hare, R. D. (1999). *Without conscience: The disturbing world of the psychopaths among us*. Guilford Press.
- Hare, R. D. (2003). *The psychopathy checklist—Revised* (2nd ed.). Multi-Health Systems.
- Hare, R. D., & Neumann, C. S. (2008). Psychopathy as a clinical and empirical construct. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 4, 217-246. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.3.022806.091452>
- Hare, R. D., Hart, S. D., & Harpur, T. J. (2009). *The Psychopathy Checklist--Revised* (2nd ed.). Multi-Health Systems.
- Harcourt, G. (2013). *The protagonist in classical drama*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hirstein, W. (2005). *Brain fiction: Self-deception and the riddle of confabulation*. MIT Press.
- Kartono, K. (2000). *Psikologi abnormal dan abnormalitas seksual*. Mandar Maju.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Mustafa, H. (2011). *Psikologi pendidikan*. Alfabeta.
- Nurhayati, E. (2019). *Etika dan moral dalam pendidikan*. Deepublish.
- Pardi, P., & Ardescy, D. (2022). The impacts of fake marriage in Tess Wakefield's *Purple Hearts*: A qualitative descriptive study. *Journal of Language*, 7(1), 101-110.
- Pardi, P., & Hartika, T. (2025). Psychological conflicts between key characters in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*. *Journal of Language*, 7(2), 452-459.
- Pardi, P., & Sonia, T. (2025). Dark Triad personality in Eka Kurniawan's *Lelaki Harimau*: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Language*, 7(2), 12109. <https://jurnal.uisu.ac.id/index.php/journaloflanguage/article/view/12109>
- Pardi, P., & Sonia, T. (2025). Manifestations of patience in Winston Groom's *Forrest Gump*: A literary psychological study. *Journal of Language*, 7(2), 444-451.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Pemayun, A. A. (2017). *Psikologi kepribadian dan perilaku menyimpang*. Pustaka Ekspresi.
- Perri, F. S., & Lichtenwald, T. G. (2010). The last frontier: Myths & the female psychopathic killer. *Forensic Examiner*, 19(2), 50-67.
- Salazar, M. (2017). *Psychopathy: A clinical guide*. Springer.
- Sari, D. P. (2006). *Moralitas dan perkembangan karakter dalam sastra*. Pustaka Pelajar.
- Smith, J. A., Johnson, R., & Lee, M. (2020). Using the Psychopathy Checklist to examine cinematic portrayals of psychopaths. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 52, 101424. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2020.101424>
- Stover, C. S. (2008). *The psychology of psychopathy: Forensic and clinical implications*. Springer.
- Sutopo, H. B. (2015). *Metodologi penelitian kualitatif: Dasar teori dan terapannya dalam penelitian*. UNS Press.
- Wiley, M. (2010). *The protagonist in modern narrative*. Routledge.

Arendtian Rightlessness and Palestinian Exile in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*

Mohammad Ilham Fahmi Rusdi, Halimi, Abdul Basid

Master's in Arabic Language and Literature, UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim

Malang, Indonesia

e-mail: m.ilhamfahmi2000@gmail.com

Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: April 20, 2026 Accepted: May 08, 2026 Published: May 11, 2026	This study examines the representation of exile and the loss of "the right to have rights" in Mourid Barghouti's <i>I Saw Ramallah</i> through Hannah Arendt's political thought. It argues that exile in the memoir is not merely a condition of geographical displacement but a structural form of political exclusion that deprives Palestinian subjects of homeland, legal recognition, mobility, sovereignty, and social belonging. Using a qualitative method with an interpretive-critical approach, this study analyzes selected narrative fragments, spatial symbols, and textual descriptions related to displacement, statelessness, alienation, restricted movement, and collective trauma. The findings show that Barghouti represents exile as a multidimensional violation of human rights. The Palestinian subject is not only alienated from territory but also separated from the political community that should guarantee fundamental rights. The transformation of homeland into occupied space, the ambiguity of citizenship, the status of the "outcast," and the denial of return reveal a condition of rightlessness. Through Arendt's framework, the memoir demonstrates that human rights cannot function effectively without political membership and legal recognition. This study concludes that <i>I Saw Ramallah</i> offers a literary critique of political structures that deny Palestinians the fundamental conditions for possessing and claiming rights.
Keywords: <i>Exile;</i> <i>Hannah Arendt;</i> <i>Human Rights;</i> <i>I Saw Ramallah;</i> <i>Palestinian Literature;</i> <i>Political Exclusion;</i> <i>Rightlessness;</i> <i>Statelessness;</i>	
Corresponding Author: Mohammad Ilham Fahmi Rusdi Master's in Arabic Language and Literature, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim (UINMA) Malang, Indonesia E-mail: m.ilhamfahmi2000@gmail.com	

1. Introduction

The Palestinian exile represents a multidimensional humanitarian crisis that extends beyond mere geographical dislocation. This condition encompasses the degradation of political space, the absence of legal recognition, and the loss of guaranteed human rights protection. In the Palestinian socio-political landscape, displacement from the homeland constructs a problematic social structure; where subjects lose not only their physical domicile but also their legal and political nexus with a state entity that should serve as a guarantor of their rights. This reality indicates that exile is not merely an incidental consequence of conflict, but rather a manifestation of structural mechanisms that relegate Palestinians to a position of permanent vulnerability and alienation. Consistent with the arguments of (Abdelhady et al., 2024), Palestinian communities trapped in statelessness suffer from the deprivation of "the right to have rights," resulting from the absence of effective state protection capable of securing their fundamental rights.

Conceptually, exile is defined as a state of discontinuity between the individual and the political community that serves as the basis for the legitimacy of formal rights. This phenomenon does not merely result in physical separation from the homeland but also

destabilizes identity, mobility, citizenship status, and the subject's existence as a legitimate member of the public sphere. In studies of Palestinian refugees, exile constructs a layered subjectivity; where refugees are not positioned as passive objects, but rather as subjects carrying collective memory, national consciousness, and potent political agency. In line with the findings of (Järvi, 2024), the Palestinian refugee experience cannot be simplified merely as a narrative of suffering; instead, it must be understood as a process dynamically shaped through political participation, the preservation of collective memory, and the ongoing discourse of identity struggle.

Mourid Barghouti's memoir, "*I Saw Ramallah*," serves as a crucial material object for examining these issues, as the text narrates the return of a Palestinian subject following decades of exile. However, the depiction of homecoming in this memoir is not presented as a total restoration of homeland, identity, or political rights. Conversely, Barghouti's narrative reveals that physical proximity to Palestine does not automatically erase alienation, restricted mobility, or the citizenship crisis. (Omar & Saidin, 2023) emphasize that *I Saw Ramallah* documents Barghouti's temporary return to Palestine after thirty years of exile, while simultaneously presenting a critique of Palestinian life shaped by separation, the illusion of return, and an unstable political climate.

Within the framework of Hannah Arendt, the problem of exile can be analyzed through the concept of "the right to have rights," defined as the fundamental right to belong to a political community capable of recognizing and protecting an individual's rights. Human rights are insufficient when understood merely as universal moral claims; they require a political and legal structure that allows a person to be recognized as a subject entitled to claim protection. (Horst & Lysaker, 2021) demonstrate that Arendt's thought remains essential for interpreting the refugee experience, as statelessness, political violence, and the loss of political membership reveal the fragility of the modern human rights system. (Bell, 2021) further asserts that the concept of "the right to have rights" remains relevant in explaining the limitations of rights within a system that is heavily dependent on formal citizenship.

Existing scholarship has examined Palestinian exile through memory, identity, refugee subjectivity, and bureaucratic violence. These studies show that Palestinian displacement is not only a geographical condition but also a political and legal crisis. However, they have not sufficiently explained how Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah* represents exile as a literary articulation of Arendtian rightlessness. Schiocchet (2024) Järvi (2024) complements emphasizes.

Recent research reveals that Palestinian exile produces a condition of "permanent temporariness," a state in which refugees live in a prolonged waiting period without certainty regarding the restitution of their right to return. (Omar & Saidin, 2023) state that Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon experience a form of "social death" due to land dispossession, the denial of political existence, and the continuously delayed desire for repatriation. Meanwhile, (Perdana, 2025) demonstrates that *I Saw Ramallah* represents Palestinian suffering following the 1967 Naksa through personal memories that simultaneously reflect the collective memory of the Palestinian nation. These two studies reinforce the position that *I Saw Ramallah* should not only be read as a personal memoir but also as a literary text that preserves collective political memory.

While previous studies have examined Palestinian exile through the lenses of memory, identity, refugee subjectivity, and the experience of return, limited attention has been given to how *I Saw Ramallah* represents exile as a condition of rightlessness in Arendtian terms. Palestinian literature has often been discussed as a fragmented and transnational literary field shaped by displacement and refugee experience (Abu-Remaileh, 2021). Studies on Palestinian refugees also show that exile constructs complex subjectivities involving memory, political agency, and national consciousness (Järvi, 2024). Meanwhile, (Omar & Saidin, 2023)

emphasize the condition of Palestinian refugees as a form of social death shaped by dispossession and the deferred desire to return. However, these studies have not sufficiently explained how Barghouti's narrative transforms the loss of homeland, restricted mobility, citizenship ambiguity, and political exclusion into a literary articulation of the loss of "the right to have rights."

Building on this gap, the study addresses two questions. First, how is exile represented in *I Saw Ramallah* as a form of human rights violation against Palestinians? Second, how does the memoir reflect Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights" through the experience of Palestinian exile? This study argues that exile in Barghouti's narrative signifies not only the loss of geographical space but also the disappearance of the political foundation that enables individuals to possess, claim, and maintain their rights. This argument is grounded in Arendtian scholarship, which explains that human rights require political membership and legal recognition in order to be meaningfully guaranteed (Arendt, 1973; Bell, 2021; Horst & Lysaker, 2021).

2. Literature Review

Studies on Palestinian exile show that displacement cannot be understood merely as geographical separation from homeland. Schiocchet (2024) emphasizes that "home" in the Palestinian context functions as a moral, affective, and contested space of belonging. This argument is important because the Palestinian homeland is not only a physical location but also a symbolic and political site shaped by memory, loss, and the desire for recognition. (Järvi, 2024) complements this view by arguing that Palestinian refugee subjectivity is formed not only through suffering and dispossession but also through political agency, collective memory, and national consciousness. Together, these studies indicate that Palestinian exile operates simultaneously as a spatial, emotional, political, and historical condition.

Beyond the affective dimension of exile, recent scholarship also highlights the legal and administrative mechanisms that sustain Palestinian rightlessness. Lundberg (2023) demonstrates that stateless Palestinians frequently encounter bureaucratic violence, in which administrative systems delay, suspend, or deny legal recognition. This form of violence is not always physical; it operates through documents, permits, residency procedures, and formal uncertainty. Such findings are highly relevant to *I Saw Ramallah*, where the exiled subject is repeatedly represented as a foreigner who must justify his presence before political and administrative authorities.

From an Arendtian perspective, the condition of refugees and stateless persons reveals the limits of modern human rights discourse. Flohr (2024) shows that Arendt's writings on refugees expose an existential paradox: the refugee remains biologically human but loses the political standing required for rights to be recognized. This argument is central to the concept of "the right to have rights," which suggests that rights require more than universal declaration; they require membership in a political community. Abdelhady et al. (2024) directly connect this concept to the Palestinian condition by showing that Palestinians who lack effective state protection experience a loss of the right to have rights.

In relation to *I Saw Ramallah*, (Alsaleh, 2019) reads Barghouti's narrative as an account of impossible return, where physical return does not fully restore the displaced subject's relation to homeland. (Perdana, 2025) further emphasizes that Barghouti's memoir represents Palestinian suffering through personal memory that simultaneously reflects collective national memory. These studies provide important foundations for understanding Barghouti's work. However, they do not sufficiently examine how the memoir articulates exile as a literary representation of Arendtian rightlessness.

Based on this scholarly gap, the present study contributes to existing research by integrating three elements: Palestinian exile, literary representation in Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*, and Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights." This study does not merely read exile as memory or identity crisis; it interprets exile as a structural condition in which the Palestinian subject is deprived of political membership, legal recognition, and the institutional basis for claiming rights.

3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative method with an interpretive-critical approach to analyze the representation of exile and the loss of "the right to have rights" in Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*. This approach is appropriate because the study focuses on the interpretation of literary meaning, political symbolism, and the relationship between textual representation and human rights discourse. In literary research, interpretation is central because meaning is constructed through language, narrative structure, symbol, and contextual relation. Therefore, this study combines close reading and thematic interpretation to examine how exile is represented in the memoir.

The primary data of this study are selected textual fragments from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*, particularly the Indonesian translation titled *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*, translated by Khairil Azhar and published by Pustaka Alvabet in 2006 (Barghouti, 2006). The selected passages focus on exile, displacement, statelessness, restricted mobility, alienation, citizenship ambiguity, and the denial of political recognition. The secondary data are taken from scholarly works on Hannah Arendt, human rights, refugee studies, statelessness, Palestinian exile, and literary criticism. Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights" is used as the main theoretical framework because it explains how individuals may lose effective rights when they are excluded from a political community capable of recognizing and protecting them (Arendt, 1973; Flohr, 2024).

The data collection process was conducted through several stages. First, the researcher conducted a close reading of the memoir to identify passages related to exile and rightlessness. Close reading is relevant in literary studies because it allows the researcher to examine textual details, narrative patterns, figurative language, and symbolic structures within the literary work (Gallop, 2007). Second, relevant textual fragments were selected and recorded through note-taking. Third, the selected data were categorized into several thematic groups, including prohibition of return, outcast identity, bureaucratic uncertainty, restricted mobility, separation from homeland, collective exile, and traumatic memory. Fourth, each category was interpreted through Arendt's concept of "the right to have rights." Finally, the interpretation was connected to previous scholarship on Palestinian displacement and refugeehood in order to situate the analysis within broader academic debates.

The data were analyzed using thematic interpretation. This technique is appropriate because thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning across selected textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this study, thematic interpretation was not used merely to classify textual evidence, but also to explain how recurring images, narrative fragments, spatial symbols, and identity markers construct exile as a condition of political exclusion and human rights deprivation.

4. Discussion

This section discusses the representation of exile and the loss of "the right to have rights" in Mourid Barghouti's memoir, *"I Saw Ramallah."* The discussion is structured based on textual data illustrating experiences of displacement, separation from the homeland, legal status uncertainty, restricted mobility, the stigmatization of refugees, and the collective trauma of the Palestinian people. Each data point is analyzed by linking excerpts from the

memoir to Hannah Arendt's concept of rightlessness—a condition in which an individual loses membership in a political community capable of guaranteeing and protecting their rights. Thus, this section not only explains the forms of exile within the text but also demonstrates how exile is represented as a structural and systemic violation of human rights.

4.1. Exile as Structural Human Rights Violation in *I Saw Ramallah*

The following table presents selected textual evidence from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*. The excerpts are taken from the Indonesian translation by Khairil Azhar and are used as primary data to identify the major forms of exile represented in the memoir. The selected data include prohibition of return, outcast identity, administrative uncertainty, stigmatization, restricted mobility, prolonged exile, separation from homeland, collective displacement, and traumatic memory.

Table 4.1
Exile Data in Mourid Barghouti's I Saw Ramallah

No	Textual Evidence	Page	Indication Exile
1	Israel membiarkan ratusan orang tua masuk ke sana, tetapi mencegah ratusan ribu pemuda pulang. Dan dunia pun menemukan sebuah nama buat kami. Mereka panggil kami kaum naziheen, orang-orang terbuang	5-6	Prohibition of Return to homeland
2	Keterbuangan seperti kematian. Orang mengira itu terjadi hanya pada orang lain	6	Exile as loss of ordinary life
3	Sejak musim panas 1967 aku menjadi si asing yang terbuang, yang selama ini adalah selalu orang lain dalam bayanganku.	6	Outcast identity
4	Orang asing adalah orang yang senantiasa memperbarui Izin Tinggal-nya. Dia isi berbagai blanko dan beli beberapa perangko untuk itu	6	Refugees' administrative uncertainty
5	Dia merupakan orang yang selalu ditanya 'Dan asalmu darimana, Saudara?'	6	Stigmatization of refugees
6	Dia menjadi orang yang biasa dipersempit ruang gerakanya, kadang dirangkul dan di saat yang sama dibuang.	6	Restricted sphere of movement
7	Di sinilah aku, berjalan dengan tas kecilku menyeberangi sungai ini. Sebuah jembatan kayu yang panjangnya hanya beberapa meter tetapi memisahkanku selama tiga puluh tahun dalam pengasingan.	14	Prolonged exile
8	Bagaimana bisa potongan-potongan kayu legam ini mampu menjauhkan sebuah bangsa dari cita-citanya?	14	Separation from homeland
9	Semua mereka yang sudah ditakdirkan terbuang memiliki ciri-ciri yang sama.	208	Collective experience of exile
10	Di pembuangan, sumpal di tenggorokan tak pernah menghilang: Selalu datang lagi.	210	Traumatic memory of exile

Source: Selected textual data from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*, translated by Khairil Azhar, Pustaka Alvabet, 2006 (Bargouthi, 2006, pp. 5-14,208-210).

The data presented in Table 4.1 show that exile in *I Saw Ramallah* appears through interconnected forms: prohibition of return, foreignness, administrative uncertainty, restricted mobility, separation from homeland, collective displacement, and traumatic memory. These forms reveal that exile is not simply a private emotional condition. It is a political structure

that deprives Palestinian subjects of recognition, protection, and the possibility of full participation in the homeland.

4.1.1. Prohibition of Return and the Construction of Outcast Identity

The prohibition of return is one of the clearest forms of rightlessness represented in *I Saw Ramallah*. Barghouti's narrative shows that the Palestinian subject's access to homeland is not determined by personal belonging, historical memory, or moral claim, but by the authority of occupying power. The homeland becomes a controlled political space, while Palestinians are categorized as displaced subjects whose return is conditional and restricted. This condition reflects a broader pattern in Palestinian literature, in which displacement, fragmentation, and exile become central to the formation of literary and political consciousness (Abu-Remaileh, 2021).

The term *naziheen*, translated in the Indonesian edition as “orang-orang terbuang,” is significant because it marks the transformation of Palestinians from members of a homeland into subjects excluded from political recognition. Barghouti explicitly links this naming to Israel's prevention of “ratusan ribu pemuda” from returning home, indicating that exile is not only a personal loss but also the result of political control over access to homeland. In Arendtian terms, this condition reflects the loss of “the right to have rights,” since the subject is deprived of membership in a political community capable of guaranteeing legal and human protection (Arendt, 1973). This interpretation is reinforced by studies that connect Palestinian statelessness with the absence of effective political protection and legal recognition (Abdelhady et al., 2024). Exile therefore appears not simply as geographical distance but as a structural mechanism of political exclusion.

4.1.2. Foreignness, Bureaucratic Violence, and Social Death

Barghouti's representation of the foreigner reveals the administrative dimension of exile. The exilic subject is repeatedly required to renew permits, complete forms, buy stamps, and prove the legitimacy of his presence. In the memoir, “orang asing” is described as someone who must continuously renew his residence permit and carry various proofs of legality. Such bureaucratic procedures show that exile is maintained not only through physical borders but also through documents, stamps, permits, and legal uncertainty. This condition corresponds to Lundberg's (2023) concept of bureaucratic violence, in which stateless Palestinians experience the suspension or denial of legal recognition through administrative systems.

The repeated question “Dan asalmu darimana, Saudara?” further reveals the social dimension of foreignness. The exiled Palestinian is never allowed to possess a stable identity; his belonging is continuously questioned. In this sense, exile becomes a form of social death because the subject remains biologically alive but loses the social and political conditions that make life fully recognized. Omar and Saidin (2023) describe this condition among Palestinian refugees as an attempted form of social death, shaped by land dispossession, political exclusion, and the deferred desire to return. From an Arendtian perspective, this condition demonstrates how statelessness exposes the fragility of human rights when political membership is absent (Flohr, 2024).

4.1.3. Restricted Mobility and the Political Meaning of the Bridge

The image of the bridge in *I Saw Ramallah* is central to Barghouti's representation of exile. Although the bridge is physically short, it symbolizes decades of political separation. The narrator states that the wooden bridge is only a few meters long, yet it has separated him for thirty years in exile. This contradiction between physical shortness and historical distance shows how political borders transform ordinary space into a structure of exclusion.

The bridge does not merely function as a setting; it becomes a symbol of blocked return, suspended belonging, and controlled mobility. Through the question “Bagaimana bisa potongan-potongan kayu legam ini mampu menjauhkan sebuah bangsa dari cita-citanya?” Barghouti transforms the bridge into a political image of national separation. This contradiction reflects the broader condition of Palestinian mobility, which is often marked by fragmented journeys, temporal uncertainty, and political restriction (Lindholm, 2021).

Through this image, Barghouti shows that exile is produced by the political regulation of space. The homeland may be visible, remembered, and desired, yet it remains inaccessible because movement is controlled by external authority. (Schicchet, 2024) explains that home in the Palestinian context is not only a physical location but also a moral and affective site of belonging. In *I Saw Ramallah*, however, this belonging is interrupted by borders, permits, and occupation. Restricted mobility thus becomes a human rights issue because the Palestinian subject is denied not only the right to return but also the right to inhabit, move within, and participate in the public life of the homeland.

4.1.4. Collective Exile and Traumatic Memory

Exile in *I Saw Ramallah* is not presented only as the narrator’s private experience. It becomes a collective Palestinian condition shared across generations. Barghouti connects personal memory with national memory, showing that displacement is not an isolated biographical event but a historical structure that shapes Palestinian identity. The statement “Semua mereka yang sudah ditakdirkan terbuang memiliki ciri-ciri yang sama” transforms exile from a private wound into a collective condition. Alasaleh (2019) argues that Barghouti’s return is marked by impossibility because physical return does not fully restore the homeland that has been politically and emotionally lost. Similarly, Perdana (2025) emphasizes that *I Saw Ramallah* represents Palestinian suffering through personal memory that simultaneously reflects collective national memory.

The traumatic dimension of exile appears through recurring images of loss, silence, and emotional suffocation. Trauma in the memoir is not confined to the past; it returns repeatedly through memory, place, and the impossibility of complete homecoming. The image of “sumpal di tenggorokan” that “tak pernah menghilang” suggests that exile produces a recurring trauma that cannot be fully resolved by physical return. This is consistent with studies showing that exposure to political violence and war among Palestinians has long-term psychological consequences, including trauma, anxiety, and depression (Abudayya et al., 2023). Even when the narrator physically returns, the return does not fully restore what has been lost. This confirms that exile is not resolved by physical presence alone, because the deeper problem lies in the loss of political belonging and the continuing denial of rights.

4.2. The Loss of the “Right to Have Rights” in *I Saw Ramallah*

The following table presents selected textual evidence related to the loss of “the right to have rights” in Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*. These excerpts are taken from the Indonesian translation by Khairil Azhar and are used to identify how the memoir represents political sovereignty, territorial occupation, alienation from homeland, family fragmentation, citizenship ambiguity, statelessness, historical exile, and the denial of mobility. The selected data demonstrate that rightlessness in Barghouti’s narrative is not only experienced as personal displacement, but also as the collapse of political and legal structures that should guarantee rights.

Table 4.2

Textual Data on the Loss of “The Right to Have Rights” in Mourid Barghouti’s I Saw Ramallah

No	Textual Evidence	Page	Indication Loss of Rights
1	Tapi tanah itu, kemudian, jadi ‘Wilayah Pendudukan’.	9	Loss of political sovereignty
2	Ketika kau mendengar di radio dan membaca di koran serta majalah, dalam buku-buku dan pidato-pidato, kata ‘wilayah pendudukan,’ tahun demi tahun, perayaan demi perayaan, dari konferensi puncak ke konferensi puncak berikutnya kau akan mengira letaknya di ujung bumi ini	9-10	Discursive alienation from homeland
3	Dia bukan lagi ‘yang tercinta’ dalam puisi perlawanan, atau butir tertentu dalam program partai politik. Dia bukan argumen atau metafora. Dia membentang di hadapanku.	10	Homeland as material but politically inaccessible space
4	Dulu tak seorangpun mempertanyakan hakku pergi ke Ramallah, kini kutanyakan apa yang bisa kulakukan untuk menjaga hak putraku mengunjungi Ramallah	19	Intergenerational uncertainty of return rights
5	Dan kini aku ke luar dari pengasingan, menuju... tanah air mereka? Tanah airku? Tepi Barat dan Gaza? Wilayah Pendudukan? Wilayah Areas? Judea dan Samaria? Pemerintahan Otonom? Israel? Palestina?”	19	Ambiguity of citizenship and national belonging
6	Senapannya adalah sejarah diriku. Itulah sejarah pembuanganku. Senapannya telah merampas tanah puisi kami dan menyisakan puisi tentang tanah itu.”	20	Violent dispossession and loss of territorial rights
7	Dia seorang tentara pendudukan, dan bagaimanapun juga situasinya berbeda dariku, khususnya pada saat ini.	20	Unequal political power and domination
8	Kami di sini di jengkal tanah yang sama, tapi dia tak membawa tas di tangannya, dan dia berdiri di antara dua bendera Israel yang berkibar bebas di udara dan dalam legitimasi internasional	20	Unequal recognition before political authority
9	Tidak ada izin dan tidak boleh ada kunjungan. Bertemu di Amman merupakan pilihan yang lebih mudah bagi semua orang	205	Denial of mobility and family reunification
10	Apakah tanah air benar-benar menjadi obat bagi semua duka? Apakah mereka yang tinggal di tanah air lantas lebih sedikit kesedihannya?”	206	Incomplete restoration of belonging after return

Source: Selected textual data from Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah*, translated by Khairil Azhar, Pustaka Alvabet, 2006 (Bargouthi, 2006, pp. 9-10,19-20,205-206).

The data presented in Table 4.2 demonstrate that the loss of “the right to have rights” in *I Saw Ramallah* is represented through the degradation of sovereignty, the transformation of homeland into occupied territory, the ambiguity of national belonging, the intergenerational uncertainty of return, military domination, unequal political recognition, and the restriction of

mobility and family reunification. These textual fragments show that rightlessness in Barghouti's memoir is not limited to the absence of abstract human rights. It emerges from the absence of a stable political community capable of recognizing Palestinians as subjects entitled to claim, exercise, and protect their rights.

From an Arendtian perspective, these conditions reveal that human rights become fragile when individuals are deprived of political membership and legal recognition. The Palestinian subject in Barghouti's memoir may retain memory, attachment, and moral claim to the homeland, but these are insufficient without institutional structures capable of guaranteeing rights. Thus, Table 4.2 strengthens the argument that *I Saw Ramallah* represents exile not merely as displacement, but as a systemic condition of rightlessness.

4.2.1. Occupied Territory and the Loss of Political Sovereignty

Data 1 and Data 2 show that the Palestinian homeland is transformed into "Wilayah Pendudukan." This transformation is not merely a geographical description but a political reclassification of the homeland. The phrase "occupied territory" circulates through radio, newspapers, magazines, books, speeches, and political conferences, producing a symbolic distance between Palestinians and their land. Although the land is physically near and materially visible, political discourse makes it appear remote, controlled, and inaccessible.

This condition is central to Arendtian rightlessness. For Arendt, rights require a political space in which the individual can appear as a recognized member of a community. When the homeland becomes occupied territory, Palestinians lose not only access to land but also the political structure that should guarantee their rights. The loss of sovereignty therefore becomes the foundation of other forms of rightlessness: restricted mobility, unstable belonging, and the impossibility of claiming rights through a recognized political authority.

This reading is also consistent with (Shalbak, 2023) argument that human rights in Palestine cannot be separated from the question of self-determination and political sovereignty. In *I Saw Ramallah*, the phrase "Wilayah Pendudukan" marks the collapse of homeland as a secure political space. The land remains materially present, yet the subject's relation to it is mediated by occupation, authority, and legal exclusion.

4.2.2. Lost Homeland and the Separation of Nation from Territory

Data 3 confirms a transition in the narrator's awareness, where the homeland is no longer positioned as a metaphor in poetic lines or political jargon, but rather as a concrete material reality. This shift in perspective holds crucial theoretical significance: the homeland is no longer merely an abstract symbol but has transformed into a physical space that can be visually observed yet remains beyond the subject's legal possession. Thus, the alienation from the homeland in this memoir is not only emotional but also political, as the subject's affective connection is insufficient to restore rights without authoritative political recognition. This aligns with (Stewart, 2021) assertion that "the right to have rights" requires a positive legal framework capable of guaranteeing rights in a tangible manner, rather than simply positioning them as universal moral claims of a speculative nature.

4.2.3. Ambiguous belonging and the Crisis of Return

Data 4 and Data 5 reveal the crisis of return and national belonging. The narrator recalls that in the past no one questioned his right to go to Ramallah, whereas now he must think about how to preserve his son's right to visit it. This shift shows that the right of return has become uncertain across generations. Exile does not only affect the narrator; it also shapes the future of his child, who inherits a disrupted relation to homeland.

The narrator's question—whether he is returning to “their homeland,” “my homeland,” “the West Bank and Gaza,” “Occupied Territory,” “Autonomous Rule,” “Israel,” or “Palestine”—shows that the homeland itself has become politically unstable. The crisis is not only territorial but also linguistic and juridical. The inability to name the homeland clearly reflects the instability of citizenship, sovereignty, and political recognition.

In Arendtian terms, this instability reveals the absence of a secure political community through which the subject can claim rights. The narrator does not simply suffer from nostalgia; he confronts a political condition in which the homeland no longer provides a stable legal and symbolic ground for belonging. This supports (Bell, 2021) argument that rights become limited and unstable when they depend on fragile or inaccessible citizenship.

4.2.4. Military Domination and Unequal Political Recognition

Data 6, Data 7, and Data 8 show how rightlessness is maintained through military domination and unequal political recognition. The narrator describes the soldier's gun as the history of his exile. This image is powerful because the gun is not merely a weapon; it becomes a symbol of the political force that has taken land and transformed Palestinian belonging into memory, longing, and poetry.

The contrast between the narrator and the soldier further reveals unequal political standing. They stand on the same piece of land, yet the soldier stands under internationally recognized flags, while the narrator carries a bag and moves as a subject under inspection. This unequal position shows that the Palestinian subject is physically present but politically unrecognized. His presence does not automatically become belonging because it is controlled by the authority of the occupier (Horst & Lysaker, 2021).

In Arendtian terms, the problem is not simply that Palestinians are deprived of movement; they are deprived of the political status that would allow their presence to be recognized as legitimate. Rightlessness is therefore produced not only by territorial exclusion but also by unequal recognition before political authority. The memoir exposes how military power reorganizes space, identity, and legitimacy, leaving the Palestinian subject present in the homeland yet deprived of secure membership within it (Arendt, 1973).

4.2.5. Restricted Mobility and Family Fragmentation

Data 9 and Data 10 show that the loss of rights also appears through restricted mobility and the fragmentation of social life. The statement “Tidak ada izin dan tidak boleh ada kunjungan” demonstrates that movement is not a natural freedom but a permission-based privilege. Family gatherings, weddings, visits, and ordinary social relations must be reorganized around borders, permits, and prohibitions. The fact that meeting in Amman becomes easier than meeting in Palestine shows how occupation restructures intimate and social life.

This condition confirms that the denial of mobility is also a denial of belonging. The homeland cannot fully heal the wounds of exile when access to it remains conditional and when those who live there continue to experience separation, surveillance, and restricted movement. Thus, Barghouti's memoir demonstrates that the loss of “the right to have rights” is not only a legal abstraction; it is experienced in the daily impossibility of visiting, residing, gathering, and belonging (Lindholm, 2021).

This analysis also strengthens the connection between Barghouti's literary representation and Arendt's political thought. If rights depend on membership in a political community, then the denial of mobility and family reunification reveals the fragility of that membership. The Palestinian subject is not only displaced from land but also from the ordinary practices through which social life and political belonging are maintained (Shalbak, 2023).

Based on the accumulated evidence, the loss of “the right to have rights” in *I Saw Ramallah* is constructed through occupation, political renaming, intergenerational uncertainty, military domination, unequal recognition, restricted mobility, and family fragmentation. These forms demonstrate that rightlessness is not merely the absence of rights in a legal sense, but the collapse of the political conditions that make rights claimable. Barghouti’s memoir therefore reveals that Palestinian exile is not only a geographical wound but also a crisis of political existence (Harvey, 2012).

4.3. Critical Reflection on Arendt’s Framework

Although Arendt’s concept of “the right to have rights” is useful for understanding the political condition of Palestinian exile, its application to the Palestinian context requires critical caution. Arendt’s framework was primarily developed from the experience of European statelessness and refugeehood in the twentieth century (Arendt, 1973; Flohr, 2024). The Palestinian case, however, involves not only statelessness but also colonial occupation, territorial dispossession, militarized borders, and the prolonged denial of return. Therefore, Arendt’s theory should not be applied as a complete explanation, but as a conceptual lens that helps illuminate one crucial dimension of Palestinian exile: the loss of political membership as the foundation for claiming rights.

This limitation is important because human rights in Palestine are closely tied to broader questions of self-determination, sovereignty, and prolonged occupation. Shalbak (2023) argues that human rights discourse in Palestine remains limited when separated from the question of self-determination and political sovereignty. Saul (2021) similarly emphasizes the importance of understanding prolonged occupation through the principle of non-domination. By acknowledging this limitation, the present study strengthens rather than weakens its theoretical position: Arendt’s framework is used critically, not mechanically.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the representation of exile and the loss of “the right to have rights” in Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah* through Hannah Arendt’s political thought. The analysis shows that exile in the memoir is not merely represented as geographical displacement but as a structural condition that deprives Palestinian subjects of homeland, mobility, legal recognition, political membership, and social belonging. Through images of return, foreignness, restricted movement, bureaucratic uncertainty, and traumatic memory, Barghouti constructs exile as a multidimensional violation of human rights.

The study further demonstrates that the loss of “the right to have rights” is represented through occupied territory, unstable national naming, intergenerational uncertainty of return, military domination, unequal political recognition, and restricted mobility. The Palestinian subject becomes rightless not because of the absence of abstract human rights, but because of the absence of a political community capable of recognizing and protecting those rights (Arendt, 1973; Horst & Lysaker, 2021). In this sense, *I Saw Ramallah* reveals the fragility of human rights when citizenship, sovereignty, and legal recognition are denied.

This study contributes to literary studies, exile studies, and human rights discourse by showing that literary narratives can expose the political structures behind displacement and statelessness. Barghouti’s memoir does not merely document personal suffering; it offers a literary critique of the systems that transform human beings into outcasts. Future studies may extend this discussion by comparing *I Saw Ramallah* with other Palestinian refugee narratives or by examining the limits of Arendt’s theory in relation to postcolonial and settler-colonial contexts.

References

- Abdelhady, D., Irastorza, N., Joormann, M., Lind, J., & Root, J. (2024). Gaza and the Right to Have Rights. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 14(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.848>
- Abu-Remaileh, R. (2021). Country of Words: Palestinian Literature in the Digital Age of the Refugee. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 52(1–2), 68–96. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341420>
- Abudayya, A., Bruaset, G. T. F., Nyhus, H. B., Aburukba, R., & Tofthagen, R. (2023). Consequences of war-related traumatic stress among Palestinian young people in the Gaza Strip: A scoping review. *Mental Health & Prevention*, 32, 200305. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2023.200305>
- Alsaleh, A. (2019). Mourid Barghouti's *I Saw Ramallah*: The Impossible Return of the Displaced Autobiographer. *Humanities*, 8(2), 69. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8020069>
- Arendt, H. (1973). *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New Editio). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Bargouthi, M. (2006). *I Saw Ramallah: Akhirnya Kulihat Ramallah* (Aisyah (ed.); Cetakan 1). Pustaka Alvabet.
- Bell, N. (2021). Limitations of the Right to Have Rights: The Case of Denmark. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(2), 1618–1636. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa070>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Flohr, M. (2024). Beyond the Nation State: Rereading Hannah Arendt's "We Refugees" Eighty Years Later. *New Political Science*, 46(1), 6–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2024.2303223>
- Gallop, J. (2007). The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading. *Profession*, 2007(1), 181–186. <https://doi.org/10.1632/prof.2007.2007.1.181>
- Harvey, C. (2012). The Right to Have Rights: Citizenship, Humanity, and International Law. *International Journal of Refugee Law*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/ees055>
- Horst, C., & Lysaker, O. (2021). Miracles in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt and Refugees as 'Vanguard.' *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(1), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fez057>
- Järvi, T. (2024). Beyond refugeeeness: complex subjectivities in Palestinian refugee camps. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 25(9), 1471–1489. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2024.2334949>
- Lindholm, H. (2021). Arrhythmic Mobilities and Fragmented Journeys: Palestinians Seeking Safety in Sweden. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34(2), 1657–1674. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feaa027>
- Omar, H. B., & Saidin, M. I. S. (2023). The permanently minority people: Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon , (Attempted) social death and desire to return. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2172804>
- Perdana, D. A. P. (2025). Analysis of Collective Memory, Identity, and Narrative in Mourid Barghouti's Novel *Ra'aitu Ramallah*. *Journal of Arabic Language Studies and Teaching*, 5(2), 291–306. <https://doi.org/10.15642/jalsat.2025.5.2.291-306>
- Schiocchet, L. (2024). Home in exile. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 14(1), 104–119. <https://doi.org/10.1086/729840>
- Shalbak, I. (2023). Human rights in Palestine: from self-determination to governance. *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, 29(3), 492–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1323238X.2023.2291210>
- Stewart, M. (2021). "A New Law on Earth" Hannah Arendt and the Vision for a Positive Legal Framework to Guarantee the Right to Have Rights. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3791785>