

EXPLORING LANGUAGE STYLE USE IN THE NOVEL *SMALL THINGS LIKE THESE* BY CLAIRE KEEGAN

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ABSTRAK

Bahasa dalam karya sastra tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat untuk menyampaikan pesan dan bercerita, tetapi juga sebagai medium representasi (ruang simbolis) yang membentuk identitas tokoh, relasi sosial, serta dinamika naratif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis gaya bahasa yang digunakan oleh para tokoh dalam *Small Things Like These*, sebuah novel karya Claire Keegan. Analisis ini didasarkan pada lima gaya bahasa yang diusulkan oleh Martin Joos: Gaya Beku (*Frozen Style*), Gaya Formal (*Formal Style*), Gaya Konsultatif (*Consultative Style*), Gaya Santai (*Casual Style*), dan Gaya Intim (*Intimate Style*). Selain itu, peneliti menggunakan teori Janet Holmes untuk menyelidiki bagaimana faktor-faktor sosial, termasuk partisipan, latar (*setting*), topik, dan fungsi, memengaruhi gaya bahasa yang dipilih oleh para tokoh. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan dengan cara membaca novel dan mengidentifikasi tuturan yang mencerminkan gaya bahasa tertentu. Peneliti berfokus pada percakapan yang menggambarkan pergeseran gaya akibat hubungan sosial dan konteks emosional. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kelima gaya bahasa tersebut muncul, dengan Gaya Santai sebagai yang paling dominan (111), diikuti oleh Gaya Intim (22), Gaya Konsultatif (17), Gaya Formal (11), dan Gaya Beku (4). Variasi ini mencerminkan pengaruh peran sosial, jarak emosional, kekuasaan, dan solidaritas di sepanjang narasi, serta bergantung pada tingkat formalitas bahasa yang digunakan.

Kata Kunci: gaya bahasa, *small things like these*, Claire Keegan

ABSTRACT

Language in literary works serves not only as a tool for conveying messages and storytelling, but also as a medium of representation (a symbolic space) that shapes the identities of characters, social relations, and narrative dynamics. This research aims to analyse language styles used by the characters in *Small Things Like These*, a novel by Claire Keegan. The analysis is based on the five language styles proposed by Martin Joos: Frozen Style, Formal Style, Consultative Style, Casual Style, and Intimate Style. In addition, the researcher employs Janet Holmes's theory to investigate how social factors, including participants, setting, topic, and function, influence the language styles chosen by the characters. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method. The data were collected by reading the novel and identifying utterances that reflect specific language styles. The researcher focused on conversations that illustrate shifts in style due to social relationships and emotional context. The findings show that all five language styles appear, with Casual Style being the most dominant (111), followed by Intimate (22), Consultative (17), Formal (11), and Frozen (4). These variations reflect the influence of social roles, emotional distance, power, and solidarity throughout the narrative, and depend on the language's formality.

Keywords: language style, *small things like these*, Claire Keegan

INTRODUCTION

Language in literary works serves not only as a tool for conveying messages and storytelling, but also as a medium of representation (a symbolic space) that shapes the identities of characters, social relations, and narrative dynamics. In a broader sense, language is a fundamental skill that is extremely important because it is a complex system created by human thought and social interaction, serving both as a way to communicate and as a reflection of the identity and culture of its speakers (Wibowo, 2001) as cited in (Lindawati et al., 2023). According to Sapir (1921) cited in (Kadek et al., 2024) language is an influential part of human life, functioning as a deliberate system of symbols that not only expresses thoughts and emotions but also reflects social and psychological realities in literary works. This view supports the idea that language works not only structurally, but also socially and culturally, to express human identity and experiences, while serving as a dynamic instrument in developing, collecting, and sharing ideas. In literary works, this function is realised through essential elements that enrich expression, shape interpretation, and add aesthetic value to convey messages effectively, including language style.

Language style is defined as the components and variants of speech that represent sentence construction in verbal communication. It reflects lexical choices and rhetorical strategies used in structuring the narrative, as noted by Jamil and Nasrum (2018), as cited in Hidayati et al. (2022). The basic concept of language style was proposed by Martin Joos, who divided it into five levels based on the level of formality: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Each level reflects the social situation and the relationship between speakers in the context of communication. Meanwhile, Keraf (1985), as cited in Anekawati et al. (2020), emphasised that language style reflects the writer's personality. Through word choice and sentence structure, a person's way of thinking and their feelings about reality are expressed. According to Pangaribuan & Marpaung (2024), Language style refers to a distinctive way of shaping an expression through the conscious and directive use of linguistic and nonlinguistic elements. Therefore, language style is understood not only as a technical aspect of language use but also as a representation of the speaker's soul, experiences, and values that shape their identity. In the context of literary works, language style plays a vital role because through the chosen style, the writer not only conveys a message but also builds depth of meaning and aesthetic characteristics that distinguish one work from another.

One of the literary works that serves as the richest medium for exploring the dynamics of language style in depth is the novel. Unlike other forms of literature, novels have a broader narrative space, allowing authors to reveal the complexity of human experience through in-depth exploration of various aspects of life. This complexity is evident in layered plots, multidimensional characterisation, and nuanced depictions of socio-cultural contexts. Novels have a broader narrative scope, allowing authors to reveal the complexity of the human experience through in-depth exploration, characterised by a layered plot, multidimensional characterisation, and nuanced depiction of the socio-cultural context. The novel offers layered narratives and realistic social representations, ideal for stylistic and sociolinguistic analysis (Kosasih, 2012:60, cited in Dewi et al., 2023). The concept of the "novel" originated from the Italian form *novella*, which means "a small new thing," and over time, the term came to be

understood as a short story in prose form (Abrams in Nurgiyantoro, 2019, cited in (Suhailanisa & Kunci, 2025)). An excellent example of a novel that reflects such dynamics is Claire Keegan's novel, "*Small Things Like These*".

Claire Keegan's novel was chosen for this study because it strongly reflects variations in language style within a complex and realistic social context. The story's setting, depicting the life of the Irish working class in the 1980s and the interactions between families, religious institutions, and social communities, creates a variety of communication situations that demand different levels of language formality. In this novel, readers can find shifts in style from casual and intimate in family settings to formal and distant in religious or hierarchical social contexts. This phenomenon is highly relevant for analysis using Martin Joos' Five Levels of Formality theory, which can reveal how language style choices reflect social identity, power relations, and the depth of emotion between characters. Although this novel has gained international recognition through its Booker Prize nomination and Orwell Prize for Political Fiction award, research specifically examining its language style from a stylistic and sociolinguistics perspective is still very limited (Claire Keegan, 2024).

Several previous studies have proven the effectiveness of this theory in revealing the relationship between language and character interaction. (Mandala et al., 2023) For example, they applied Joos' theory in their analysis of R.J. Palacio's novel *Wonder*. They found that differences in language formality reflect emotional closeness and changes in social attitudes between characters throughout the story. These findings show that shifts in language style can reflect character development and serve as a tool for shaping the narrative atmosphere. Meanwhile, Patrisia et al., (2024) Also used the same theory in their study of the novel *A Little Princess*, and the results showed that variations in the main character's language style served to describe changes in social status and power relations within the context of the story. Both studies show that Martin Joos' theory is practical for analysing the dynamics of communication in literary works and provides a deeper understanding of how language functions as a reflection of social relationships and a means of character formation.

This study focuses on understanding and analysing the use of language style in the novel *Small Things Like These* by examining how linguistic variation reflects social relationships, character development, and the emotional depth of the narrative. This study integrates two theoretical frameworks, namely Martin Joos' Five Levels of Formality theory, which includes frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate, to classify types of language style, and Janet Holmes' sociolinguistic theory, which emphasises the influence of social factors such as status, solidarity, social distance, and the context of interaction and its changes on language choice. Through the combination of these two theories, this study not only identifies forms of linguistic formality but also reveals the social motivations behind shifts in style within the text. The analysis focuses on the relationship between changes in language style, social dynamics, and character, showing how language functions both as a narrative tool and a reflection of social structure. Significantly, this study contributes to expanding our understanding of the relationship between language, character, and society in literary works and demonstrates the relevance of Joos and Holmes' theories in the study of modern literary stylistics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative methodology to analyse language styles in the novel “*Small Things Like These*” by Claire Keegan, based on Martin Joos' theory of five language styles (frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate). The method focuses on close textual analysis, in which relevant passages from the novel, including dialogues, narratives, and monologues, are systematically identified, categorised, and interpreted according to Joos' framework. The use of a descriptive qualitative method is appropriate as it allows for detailed explorations without over-reliance on numerical data or statistical testing. According to Furidha (2024), Descriptive qualitative research is a method that systematically and factually describes phenomena without extensive theoretical abstraction, making it ideal for research that aims to present naturalistic and in-depth descriptions of language behaviour. Similarly, Turale (2020) emphasises that Qualitative descriptions provide direct explanations of events or experiences, maintain closeness to the data, and avoid overinterpretation, thereby strengthening the rigour and trustworthiness of the study.

Theoretical Approach

Language Style

According to a theory known as “The Five Clocks,” Martin Joos (1959:63) cited in (Sanjaya Tanjung, 2022) The text divides language styles into five main categories based on the level of formality: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Each style is used according to specific communication contexts, ranging from highly formal situations such as State ceremonies to casual conversations between friends or family members. This classification offers a practical conceptual framework for understanding the diverse forms of language varieties that emerge in various social interactions. The following section describes each language style:

- a. Frozen Style (Oratorical Style) is the most formal and rigid form of language, usually used in formal or sacred events such as state speeches or religious ceremonies. The language in this style is very structured, using fixed expressions such as “All rise. The court is now in session,” and showing respect for the audience and context.
- b. Formal Style (Deliberative Style) is used in formal situations such as seminars or academic speeches. Communication is one-way, with sentences that are long and complex, emphasising politeness and clarity, as seen in the expression “May I introduce Mr Jimmy?”. This style is commonly used in educational settings or formal forums.
- c. Consultative Style is between formal and casual. This style is used in professional conversations and remains two-way, such as between a doctor and a patient or a teacher and a student. The language used is polite but not stiff, with short responses such as “Yes” or “I see” indicating the involvement of the other party.
- d. Casual Style is used in relaxed situations between people who are familiar with each other. Its main characteristics are the use of slang, loose sentence structure, and informal greetings. Meaning often depends on the context and shared knowledge between speakers. For example, the sentence “Did you enjoy the party?” is usually shortened to “Enjoy it?”.

- e. Intimate Style is used in very personal relationships, such as between couples or close family members. The language used is very personal and emotional, often taking the form of special greetings like “dear,” “honey,” or other terms of endearment understood only by both parties. In this style, intonation is more important than formal sentence structure.

Factors Influencing Language Style

According to Holmes (2013), cited in (Simamora & Sherina, 2022), Four main factors influence the way a person chooses and uses language style, namely participants, setting, topic, and conversational function.

- a. Setting (Situation or Place of Communication) refers to the location, atmosphere, and social context in which communication takes place. Speakers need to understand the category of place to adjust language use, including pronouns and other forms of politeness. In formal situations, such as official meetings or classroom learning, language styles tend to be more organised and careful. In contrast, in non-formal settings such as chatting at home or in a shopping centre, language use becomes more casual and less concerned with word choice. In other words, each place carries certain norms and expectations that shape the way one speaks.
- b. Participant (Participant or Person Involved in Communication) relates to who is speaking and to whom they are speaking. Holmes (2001) adds that the age and social background of the interlocutor determine the style of language used. For example, when speaking to an older person or having a higher social status, one tends to use a formal language style. However, when speaking to peers or people who are already familiar, the style used becomes more relaxed. A teacher, for example, will speak differently when teaching high school students than when speaking to children in kindergarten.
- c. Topic (Topic or Content of the Conversation) also determines the style of language used. Speakers need to adjust the language style to the content of the conversation and who the interlocutor is. Even if two people share the same age and social background and are in a comfortable setting, serious topics like national exams or legislative meetings on taxation usually encourage the use of more formal and polite language. In contrast, when discussing light-hearted or personal issues, such as holiday plans or daily life, language use can be more relaxed and not bound by formal structures.
- d. Function or Purpose of Communication refers to the reason or purpose of a person speaking. Language is not only used to convey information, but also to express feelings or emotions. Therefore, the style of language used can differ depending on the purpose of the conversation. For example, when a teacher delivers subject matter, he or she will use clear, systematic, and informative language. However, when chatting casually with students outside the classroom, the language style becomes more familiar and light-hearted. A sentence like “I apologise” serves to convey an apology, while a greeting like “Good morning!” serves as a greeting. Thus, the function of communication also shapes the way and style in which a person conveys a message.

Data Sources

The primary data for this study were obtained from the novel *Small Things Like These*. According (Ajayi, 2025) Primary data is genuine information directly collected by researchers for their studies. The data analysis for this study consists of the narrative and dialogue taken directly from Claire Keegan's novel "*Small Things Like These*" to explore how different styles of language reflect social relationships and contextual meaning.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data for this study by gathering supporting references and implementing several steps. Data collection techniques were employed to gather the information necessary to support the research objectives.

The data collection process involved the following steps:

- a. Carefully reading the entire novel multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline and context.
- b. Highlighting or underlining selected dialogues and narrative passages that are potentially relevant to the study.
- c. Identifying and organising examples in a worksheet that illustrate different types of language styles as well as the social factors influencing language choices.
- d. Selecting specific quotations from the novel to be analysed. These selections were made sequentially and chosen based on their relevance to the research focus. In analysing the data for this qualitative research, the researcher adopted the interactive model of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (2012), as cited in (Mandala et al., 2023)), which involves three main components:
 - 1) Data Condensation is an ongoing process that takes place throughout the analysis. Initially, it involves selecting, simplifying, and focusing raw data by editing, segmenting, and summarising relevant parts. As the study progresses, the researcher organises the data through coding, writing memos, and identifying emerging patterns, themes, or categories. At later stages, this process continues through conceptualisation and explanation, where abstract ideas are developed to provide a more transparent structure, thereby further reducing and refining the data.
 - 2) Data Display refers to organising and presenting the data in a structured and visual form to facilitate interpretation. Given that qualitative data is often extensive and unstructured, displaying it helps clarify patterns and relationships within the information. Various forms, such as tables, charts, flow diagrams, or matrices, may be used. These visual tools help the researcher to track the progress of the analysis and support further exploration or refinement of the data.
 - 3) Drawing and Verifying the Conclusion is the final stage, which involves interpreting the data to draw meaningful conclusions. While this process logically follows data condensation and display, in practice, it often coincides. Preliminary interpretations may emerge early in the analysis, though they remain tentative and subject to change. These early insights are refined through continued study and comparison with the complete data set. Conclusions are finalised only after the entire body of data has been thoroughly examined and validated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

In the process of analysing “*Small Things Like These*” by Claire Keegan, the researcher identified a total of 165 instances of language use that represent different language styles as classified by Martin Joos’ theory. These instances were drawn from both narrative passages and character dialogues throughout the novel.

Table 1 Frequency of Language Styles in the Novel “Small Things Like These”

No	Types of Language Style	Data Frequency	Percentage
1.	Frozen Style	4	2.42%
2.	Formal Style	11	6.67%
3.	consultative Style	17	10.30%
4.	imate Style	22	13.33%
5.	Casual Style	111	67.27%
Total Data			100%

Discussions

Types of Language Style

a. Frozen Style

Data 2:

“Opening his arms out wide, he began:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” “And also with you,” the congregation echoed.” (STLT/6/77)

This data is considered frozen language because it uses sentences directly from Catholic liturgy, recited in church services in a fixed, unchanging manner. Sentences such as “*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” are an official part of the opening prayer of the Mass and have been memorised and used for generations throughout the world. The language used is highly formal, full of religious meaning, and does not allow for any changes or improvisation. Additionally, the capitalisation of words such as *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* indicates that these terms hold a high degree of sacred significance. As explained by Martin Joos, frozen language style is used in formal or ritualistic situations, where language must be conveyed in a fixed, respectful manner without free interaction. All these characteristics are evident in this quotation.

b. Formal Style

Data 5:

“In October there were yellow trees. Then the clocks went back the hour and the long November winds came in and blew, and stripped the trees bare. In the town

of New Ross, chimneys threw out smoke which fell away and drifted off in hairy, drawn-out strings before dispersing along the quays, and soon the River Barrow, dark as stout, swelled up with rain." (STLT/1/1)

The following data from Chapter 1, page 1, indicates the use of formal language as described in Martin Joos' theory. This is reflected in the well-structured sentences, grammatical completeness, and careful choice of words. Sentences such as "*In October there were yellow trees*" or "*the River Barrow, dark as stout, swelled up with rain*" indicate that the narrative is composed in a serious style, without contractions, slang, or colloquial language typically found in casual conversation. Additionally, the narrator does not express personal feelings but instead objectively describes the atmosphere and natural conditions. The tone is calm and neutral, providing information to the reader without expecting a response. This is consistent with Joos' view that formal style is used when the writer or speaker wants to convey information clearly and systematically to the audience, especially in situations that require caution and emotional distance. This formal style also supports the novel's opening atmosphere, which is reflective and serious.

c. Consultative Style

Data 21:

"Suddenly, she dropped to her knees and started polishing-and Furlong turned to see a nun standing down at the confession box. "Sister," Furlong said.

"Can I help you?"

"I was just looking for Sister Carmel."

"She's gone across to St Margaret's," she said.

"Maybe I can help you."

"I've a load of logs and coal for ye, Sister."

As soon as she realised who he was, she changed. "Was it you that was out on the lawn, upsetting the geese?"" (STLT/4/42).

This data is classified as a consultative style because it shows a polite and purposeful conversation between two people who are not yet very familiar with each other. In this scene, Furlong speaks to a nun and immediately offers his help by saying, "*Can I help you?*", a polite question that reflects his good intentions and respect. The nun responds clearly, "*I was just looking for Sister Carmel,*" which is followed by Furlong's explanation of his arrival: "*I've got a load of logs and coal for you, Sister.*" These sentences are delivered with complete structures and polite language, which are characteristic of the consultative style. Although the nun later recognised Furlong and asked, "*Was it you that was out on the lawn, upsetting the geese?*", the tone of the conversation remained consistent and did not become casual or emotional. According to Martin Joos, the consultative style is used in situations where two people are not yet close, but are speaking with a clear purpose and maintaining ethical communication. That is why this conversation falls into the consultative style.

d. Casual Style

Data 90

““What matter,” she said. “That much is done. I don’t know why I put the cake on the long finger. There wasn’t another woman I met there this evening who hadn’t hers made.”

“If you don’t slow down, you’ll meet yourself coming back, Eileen.”

“No more than yourself.”

“At least I’ve Sundays off.”

“You have them off, but do you take them? “ is the question.””

(STLT/3/27).

This short dialogue is a clear example of casual style because it reflects a relaxed and informal conversation between people who know each other, most likely a husband and wife. The characters in this dialogue speak naturally and spontaneously, using everyday expressions and idioms commonly used in casual conversation. Phrases like “*What matters*” and “*I don’t know why I put the cake on the long finger*” are informal and culturally familiar. The idiom “*on the long finger*” (meaning to delay something) is a regional, colloquial phrase which adds to the casual tone. The back-and-forth responses, such as “*No more than yourself*” and “*You have them off but do you take them, is the question*”, are also playful and teasing in tone, something that happens between people who know each other well. These sentences do not follow strict grammatical rules and use contractions such as “you’ll” as well as informal questions without complete structures.

e. Intimate Style

Data 37:

“There’s no need to go if you don’t want, a leanbh,” Furlong told her. “Stay here with me.”

But it cut him, all the same, to see one of his own so upset by the sight of what other children craved and he could not help but wonder if she’d be brave enough or able for what the world had in store.” (STLT/3/17).

This data is categorised as an intimate style because it describes a very personal and emotional moment between a father (Furlong) and his daughter. The sentence “*You don’t have to go if you don’t want to, a leanbh,*” uses the Irish term of endearment “*a leanbh,*” which means “*my child,*” a gentle and affectionate term that immediately conveys emotional closeness and familiarity. The phrase “*Stay here with me*” is simple, direct, and warm, showing concern and comfort. Additionally, the following narrative, “*it cut him, all the same, to see one of his own so upset...*” shifts to Furlong’s internal thoughts and feelings. This shift reveals his emotional response and quiet fears as a parent, as he wonders if his daughter is strong enough to face the world. The language used is emotional, reflective, and personal, revealing a personal vulnerability that is characteristic of an intimate style.

Social factors

a. Setting

Data 19:

She glanced at the door at the foot of the stairs and lifted herself, as though

she could sense whether or not the girls were sleeping.
"They're down now," she said. "Stretch up your hand there, won't you, and we'll see what's in the post."
Furlong took down the envelopes, and together they opened and read over what was there.
"Isn't it nice to see them showing a bit of manners and not asking for the sun and stars?" Eileen said, after a while. "We must be doing something right".
"Tis mostly your doing," Furlong admitted. "Where am I ever only away all day, then home to the table and up to bed and gone again before they rise."
"You're all right, Bill," Eileen said. 'We've not a penny owing, and that's down to you.'
"Their spelling has come on rightly- but what about Loretta with her "Deer Santa"?' (STLT/3/28).

In this passage, there is a shift in style from consultative to casual according to Martin Joos' classification, influenced by the familiar and calm setting of the household. In the opening section, the conversation between Eileen and Furlong displays characteristics of a consultative style, as it still employs complete and polite sentences, such as "*Stretch up your hand there, won't you, and we'll see what's in the post,*" which reflects a conversation with a regular structure and respectful tone, while still sounding natural. However, as the dialogue continues, the style shifts to a casual tone, evident in spontaneous expressions and the use of contractions such as "*You're all right, Bill*" or "*We've not a penny owing,*" which reflect familiarity and emotional closeness. This shift from consultative to casual arises because the home setting creates an intimate and informal atmosphere, where the characters no longer maintain social distance but speak with the warmth and openness characteristic of family interactions.

b. Participants

Data 24:

This poor girl can't tell night from day sometimes.
Whatever way we are going to mind her, I don't know.
The girl stood in a type of trance, and had begun to shake.
"Come on in," the Mother Superior told him.
"We'll make tea. This is a terrible business."
"Ah, I'll not," Furlong stepped back - as though the step could take him back into the time before this.
"You'll come in," she said. I'll not have it other-wise."
"There's a hurry on me, Mother. I've yet to go home and change for Mass."
"Then you'll come in until the hurry goes off you.
Tis early yet and more than one Mass is being said today." (STLT/5/63)

In this excerpt, the shift in style is influenced by participant factors, who is speaking and the social relationship between them. The interaction between Furlong and the Mother Superior reveals a difference in social status and power, with the Mother Superior as a religious leader and Furlong as an outsider who arrives feeling awkward. Initially, Furlong's language style is consultative, marked by polite and cautious sentences such as "Ah, I'll not" and "There's a hurry on me, Mother," which show respect while maintaining distance. However, Mother Superior uses more directive and

formal language, such as “You'll come in” and “I'll not have it otherwise,” which show her moral authority and social role as a leader. The shift in Furlong's language style from consultative to a more formal and tense tone occurs because she is adjusting to a conversation partner who has a higher position. In other words, the difference in status and social role between the participants influences the level of formality in the language. It creates a dynamic shift in speech style from polite caution to obedience to authority.

c. Topics

Data 52:

“You’ve missed first Mass,” Eileen said, when he got home.
“Wasn’t I up at the convent and then they wouldn’t let me leave without going in for tea.”
“Well, it’s Christmas,” Eileen said. “Wasn’t it the proper thing to do.”
Furlong made no answer.
“What did they give you?”
“Tea,” he said. “And cake, was all.”
“But did they not give you something else?”
“What do you mean?”
“For Christmas, I mean. They never let the year pass without sending down something.”
Furlong hadn’t thought more of the envelope.
When Eileen opened it and took out the card, a fifty-pound note fell into her lap.
“Aren’t they very good,” she said. “This’ll more than pay for what’s owing at the butchers. I’ll collect the turkey and ham in the morning.”
“Show me.” (STLT/6/73-74)

In the data above at the beginning of the conversation, Eileen and Furlong talk casually about the day's activities “*You've missed first Mass,*” “*Wasn't I up at the convent and then they wouldn't let me leave without going in for tea*”, which shows a casual style because they know each other well, use short sentences, and speak spontaneously without maintaining social distance. However, when the topic turned to money and family financial responsibilities, the language style shifted to consultative. Sentences such as “*But did they not give you something else?*” and “*This'll more than pay for what's owing at the butchers*” signalled a change in the function of language from simply sharing stories to a more serious and reflective discussion. In this section, Eileen begins to ask questions in a more cautious and focused tone, while Furlong responds briefly and defensively, “*Show me*”, indicating tension and caution in communication. Thus, the shift in language style from casual to consultative occurs as the topic changes from light conversation to a discussion that demands clarity, moral consideration, and practical responsibility.

d. Purpose

Data 120:

“Did you manage?” she asked, taking the kettle.
“Aye,” Furlong said, feeling the cold of her hand in the exchange. “Many

thanks.”

“Will you take a cup of tea?”

“There’s nothing I’d rather,” he said, “but I have to get on.”

“It won’t take but a few minutes to boil it up again.”

“I’m near late as it is but I’ll get one of the men to leave over a bag of logs for ye.”

“Ah, there’s no need.”

“Happy Christmas,” he said, and turned away.

“And the same to you,” she called out, after him. (STLT/5/55-56).

In this excerpt, the change in style from consultative to casual does not arise from a change in mood, but rather from a shift in the communicative purpose between the speakers. Initially, the conversation between Furlong and the woman served an instrumental purpose, as they merely exchanged information and fulfilled a minimal social function. Sentences such as “Did you manage?” and “Will you take a cup of tea?” serve to maintain politeness and social distance, in line with the consultative style, which still emphasises complete sentences and a cautious tone. However, as the conversation progressed, the purpose shifted: Furlong began to show more personal attention with “I’ll get one of the men to leave over a bag of logs for ye,” and ended with the relational expression, “Happy Christmas.” At this point, language no longer served to regulate actions but to express warmth and build human relationships. The style of language also adjusts: it becomes more spontaneous, concise, and emotionally nuanced, which is characteristic of a casual style. This means that the change in language style is not merely due to the relaxed context of the conversation, but because the function of speech shifts from transactional to interpersonal. It is this shift in purpose that drives the change in formality: from speaking to get something done to speaking to acknowledge the existence and feelings of others.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, Claire Keegan's novel *Small Things Like These* demonstrates the use of the five styles of language according to Martin Joos' theory: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. Each style appears depending on the social and emotional context of the conversation. The frozen style appears in religious situations that emphasise traditional values, while the formal and consultative styles are used in interactions that require caution and clarity. The intimate style appears in conversations involving emotional closeness between Furlong and those closest to her. However, the casual style is the most dominant form with 111 out of 165 data points, reflecting the simple life of a small community and natural everyday communication. The dominance of this style shows Keegan's effort to present the authenticity of warm social interactions without losing depth of meaning. The shift in language style also shows the strong influence of social context, relationships between characters, and emotional situations, as explained by Janet Holmes, that style changes are not only determined by language form, but also by relationship dynamics and changes in topics that bring new nuances to each conversation.

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