

Language Styles in Biography: A Descriptive Analysis of Ernle Bradford's 'The Sultan's Admiral: Barbarossa – Pirate and Empire Builder'

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Abstract. This research aims to identify the language styles used in a biography book, 'The Sultan's Admiral.' The identification may help us see how various language styles add to non-fiction writing and are structured in a biography book. This current research is a qualitative analysis that uses a content analysis method. The data source is available from the biography 'The Sultan's Admiral: Barbarossa' written by Ernle Bradford and published in English language edition in 2008. The data comes in the form of linguistic elements such as syntax, lexis, and semantic forms of the text. The data analysis technique categorizes or determines stylish language features from the sample and the level of style related to linguistics and stylistics approaches. Lexis, syntactic and semantic level of language style is prior categories of this research. As a result, the technical terms and adjectives are used in the lexical level of style, direct quotations, and em-dashed (–) adjuncts in sentences as the structural level of style, idioms, and figures of speech are used in the semantic level of style. Those chosen styles appear with the writer's background to give extra values to the actual story. This research describes and classifies portions among several linguistic features used by the narrator/writer in the development of narrative in Barbarossa's legendary life, to demonstrate the benefits of the technique in incorporating linguistic aspects into the text. Along with the analysis, the current research makes recommendations for future investigations.

Keywords: *Language Style, Stylistics, Biography, Narratology*

<https://ojs.unm.ac.id/eralingua>



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INTRODUCTION

We need life stories to reconnect with diverse national and international experiences. As the most widely spoken language globally, English enables history to spread to more areas. People can now read about events or figures from the other side of the world in English. Specifically, reading history is to know about what happened in the past and know more about the person or the team. Many books talk about what happened during a specific time in the past. However, there are books which tell about a person's life and its course. It is called a biography. Biography is one of the oldest literary non-fiction, confirmed in all elements: characters, setting, plot. All elements come from a real person's life; the characters are real; the setting is actual; the events truly happened (Janovsky, 2015). The correlation of literature and history in a biography encourages an investigation of its language.

Writing about history, events, and figures of the past centuries needs to consider the prospective readers in style. As with the audience and format, the appropriate style takes a vital role primarily to intend writing. Some blurry distinctions between style and tone, often considered interchangeable. Style and tone give a type of personality when coupled together. Thus, analyzing style helps the reader find the message's primary purpose in writing. Referring to Keraf (2004), there are four types of language style in the linguistic area that are determined based on its (a) diction, (b) sentence structure, (c) meaning, and (d) tone of the speakers or the writers. Likewise, Leech (as cited in Setiyaji, 2012) mentioned that in analyzing style in the literary text, there are four general headings: lexical categories, grammatical categories, figures of speech, also context-and-cohesion.

Language style will vary based on non-linguistics points of view, such as writer, time, medium, subject, place, audience, and purpose (Keraf, 2004). Keraf believed that there are four language styles based on linguistic point of view: lexical choice (diction), tone of writing, structures, and semantics. Diction or lexical item covers the choice of words and involves various types of meaning which relates to the semantic parts. The lexical part focuses on word classes. The most typical for a biography, is adjective (Minden & Roth, 2012, p. 15). It contains a general description of vocabulary choice and classification, whether a pronoun, noun, verb, adjective, or adverb. Adjective, according to Wales, is a part of speech that premodifies a noun that follows the article or occurs in a predicative position following the verb as a compliment (Minden & Roth, 2012, p. 7).

According to the Dictionary of Stylistics (Wales, 2014, p. 340), stylistics in language and literature is the study of language style whose goal is not simply to describe the formal features of the text but to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text. As 'style' may vary in literary language within or between texts, several stylistic approaches exist. One of them is linguistic stylistics. It focuses on the refinement of a linguistic model which has further linguistic or stylistic studies.

Wales (2014) expresses that those general stylistics can cover the analyses of non-literary language varieties. Critical stylistic invokes the domain of critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis, recently in film. Socio-stylistics studies the language of writers considered as social groups. It is also practical or applied stylistics,

an effective teaching tool in language and literature studies for native and foreign English students to help raise their awareness of how a text works linguistically or ideologically (Wales, 2014, p. 401). Therefore, it is essential to consider the level of language that becomes the focus of analysis to make it more organized and principled. Here are the basic levels of language which can be identified to tease out in the stylistic analysis of the text (Simpson, 2004, p. 5):

- a. The sound of spoken language; the way words are pronounced (phonology; phonetics)
- b. The patterns of written language; the shape of language on the page (graphology)
- c. The way words are constructed; words and their constituent structures (morphology)
- d. The way words combine with other words to form phrases and sentences (syntax, grammar)
- e. The words used; the vocabulary of language (lexicology)
- f. The meaning of words and sentences (semantics), including lexical meaning and figure of speech (idioms, hyperbole, personification, simile)
- g. The way words and sentences are used in everyday situations (pragmatics); the meaning of words in context (discourse analysis).

Simpson insists that it is essential to consider the level of language that becomes the focus of analysis to make it more organized and principled. Therefore, this research also focuses on analyzing how words are structured (grammatical level of style). Lexical level of style concerns the word, specifically the word class, which can be noun, adjective, pronoun, adverb, verb, or other word classes. The words meaning are studied in semantics, which is another level of style. It includes lexical meaning and figure of speech (idioms, hyperbole, personification, simile). British linguists, according to Todd, use the term 'grammar' for the same level of language that is referred to as 'syntax' by many Americans. It studies the structures of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

Many studies analyzed the language style used in daily collocations, fiction books, or formal speeches. Some language style analyses about fiction literature include novels, movies, song lyrics, or poets. Besides, the language style analysis is framed chiefly in the formality level of language used in the text, for instance, the language in poetry is carefully crafted so as to convey the poet's purpose in telling a story or a message particular on the topic of their choices. Simile and metaphor often become the majority of language styles in poems (Khumaeroh & Purnama, 2020; Martono, 2013; Mukhlis, 2018; Salamah, 2016). Alliteration becomes the choice for a poet who likes to play with similar-sound vowels and consonants for the beauty of rhymes (Anggraini & Djajanegara, 2020; Yusliarti et al., 2020).

However, the study on language styles in the biography is often overlooked. Such study also often fails to see how language style contributes to narratology's discourse. In the context of Indonesian biography in newspaper language, a study shows that hyperbole and antithesis are the most often used language styles in *Kompas* daily's biographical articles in January 2007 (Fatimah, 2008). Exaggeration was prevalent since it drew the Indonesian readers' attention. While the converse

language style emphasizes a delivered point to make it more easily comprehended by the readers.

The narrative writing style contained in the biographical text is a writing style that shows the life story of a character and pays attention to the time sequence contained in the story. In another biography study, *Indonesia Bangga*, (or ‘Proud Indonesia’), [Daryanti \(2019\)](#) found that narrative writing style was more dominant than descriptive writing. It is perhaps the writer’s choice to win the narrative writing style to draw upon certain motives to the readers on 18 characters, but not the three other characters in the book ‘Indonesia Bangga.’ However, the speculation of the writer’s motive remains unknown due to no further investigations stated in her research.

The studies mentioned above suggest that Indonesian readers are often exposed to the narrative writing style in biography books. The narrative style provides a story-telling experience to the readers, resulting in a comprehensive and extensive understanding of the book’s character specifications. However, the researchers do not extend the research to clarify the reasons from the readers’ perspectives. Aside from the preference of narrative writing style by the Indonesian biography authors, it is interesting to find out hyperbolic language style draws Indonesian readers’ attention to their reading experience. Exaggeration of word choices in reading is a ‘habit’ for attracting attention. Meanwhile, language style is more than the formality level of the language used. Thus, stylistics is there to answer research questions related to language style.

As linguistics is a large scope, language style categories ([Keraf, 2004](#)) are also used in this research to distinguish the data. In addition, linguistics by [Todd \(2000\)](#) completed the specific theory about the lexical, semantical, and grammatical level of style. According to Wales, ‘style’ may vary in literary language within or between text; there are several approaches to stylistics. One of them is linguistic stylistics. [Wynne \(2005, p. 1\)](#) believes that “stylistics is a field of empirical inquiry, in which the insights and techniques of linguistic theories are used to analyze a literary text.” Leech agreed that every literary text is composed of linguistic and stylistic categories. It is natural that the categories overlap, in which the same feature may be posted under different headings (as cited in [Setiyaji, 2012, p. 14](#)).

Thus, there are questions that drive this research to be conducted, such as: how Bradford makes the biography book feel like a novel book from page to page? Are there figurative languages or idioms in the text? To avoid misunderstanding, what dictions and style did he use to explain the idea clearly to the reader? How is the idea structured in the sentence or paragraph? How does the style enrich the story but keep the story’s actual value? Therefore, to sum up all these questions into a generic formulaic goal, this paper aims to analyze the most evident language style employed in the biography ‘The Sultan’s Admiral: Barbarossa.’

RESEARCH METHOD

A descriptive qualitative approach fits the best to achieve the objectives of this research. Specifically, content analysis will be the method used in this research to study the language style of ‘The Sultan’s Admiral: Barbarossa – Pirate and Empire Builder’ ([Bradford & Freely, 2008](#)) book. The data analysis refers to the theory of

stylistics by [Wales \(2014\)](#), [Simpson \(2004\)](#), and stylistic concepts ([Montoro et al., 2010](#)). The technique is accomplished by collecting the theories and studies related to language style as the focus of this research. The sources are printed books, digital books, digital journals, published research retrieved from Google Scholar, open-source electronic database, and Google Books.

In order to be efficient, this research takes ten pages as a sample out of the 207-page-story. The number of samples was determined using Cochran Sampling Formula ([Cochran, 1977, p. 205](#)). The sample was chosen per every 21 pages, starting from the first paragraph of the story, which usually became the hook of the writing, and ended with the last page of the story to see how Bradford closed the story. The formula is $N = n \times k$ (n = number of sample; k = interval; N = total number of population). Thus, the total number of population in this current research:

$$\begin{aligned} N &= n.k \\ 207 &= n \times 21 \\ n &= 207/21 \\ n &= 9.86 \end{aligned}$$

The sample consists of 10 pages (rounded from 9.86 samples). Each number of samples is taken from every 21 pages. The first sample is the first page of Chapter 1, which is page 3, the second sample is page 24, the third sample is page 45, and so forth.

After recapping the entire sample, it is time to review the sampling material and set the unit analysis to define terms—the researchers studied each of the sentences and dictions to analyze the language style. The next step is categorizing the sample, determining, and profoundly analyzing the language style used in the biography book. After analyzing the language style of the sample, it is time to determine the language style used by Bradford in the biography book.

About the Biography

‘The Sultan’s Admiral: Barbarossa Pirates and Empire Builder’ ([Bradford & Freely, 2008](#)) tells the story of the Barbarossa Brothers, who were known as pirates in European history, but famous heroes in the history of Turkey and other Muslim countries. They are the legendary sailors and admirals from the Mediterranean seas. They become an inspiration of a captain character in the ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ movie, Captain Barbarossa is the pirate, captain of a ship of Barbary Coast.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The style is a choice and is affected by the writer's experience in real life. The first non-linguistics base that determines the language style is the writer ([Keraf, 2004, p. 55](#)). With his background as a Royal Navy volunteer, Bradford chose technical lexis in naval terms to mention each predicator or noun. The reader can imagine the specific kind of ship and get more knowledge about naval terms simultaneously, such as “*He knew that they had no chance of running for it, for a galley was much faster than a galleot*” (p.106). This lexical style gives a specific color to the biography book of Barbarossa. Indeed, to write naval topics, the writer should comprehend the navy

terms to deliver the correct information, especially for a true story delivered in a biography book.

Simpson suggested establishing an organized and shaped stylistic analysis by studying language levels (2004, p.5). One of them is the lexical level of language, which consists of words, such as nouns and adjectives. Minden stated that considering adjectives is essential in writing a biography (p.15). To describe the person and his life, adjectives are primarily used as the typical style of written language style in a biography. It applies in, for example, “those valiant gentlemen” (P. 190) the adjective ‘valiant refers to the bravery of Hassan (one of the Barbarosa’s team and his force.

Another level of style that studies the combination of words in the stylish structure of phrase, clause, and sentences is syntax. This level is essential because it has the tense and the grammatical ‘mood’ and proposition (Simpson, p.5). While adjectives or adjective phrases premodify a noun (Wales, 2004), an adjunct fills the sentence or clause as complements. Adjunct positions are primarily filled by adverb phrases or prepositional phrases in the clause or sentence.

Furthermore, a clause or a sentence can contain more than one adjunct to serve more information to the subject, predicator, or the complement, such as on page 22:

He learned, too, the worst enemy of the galley slave is the time of bad weather when the looms of the great oars jerk back against his chest, and when the stink of the stirred-up bilges rises like death into his nostrils.”(Bradford & Freely, 2008, p. 22).

It aligns with Wales' statement that adjuncts generally can be placed in several positions based on the focus or emphasis (Wales, 2014, p.9). There is no simple sentence that appears without any adjunct in the book. The adjuncts can be placed at the beginning of the sentence, with or without a comma, to begin a story, add a specific feeling to the reader, and mark a jumping story or topic. In order to dramatically begin a story, “*Majestically, the great galley drove on southward...*,” which adds a specific feeling to the reader

On the other hand, the adjuncts are served in brackets to add information related to the explained circumstances, person, or things, like such as it is found on page 148 ‘*of the famous (or infamous) Roxelana*’ and “*so that her own son Selim (ultimately Selim II, known as "Selim the Sot") might inherit the throne.*” However, to add information that might not directly relate to the story, adjuncts can be structured as interpolations in em-dash (–), which is in “*...for he--like every Moeslem ruler--wished to see ...*” (p.64). Some other times, the adjuncts are placed at the end of the sentences to avoid jamming, “*Barbarossa was in some danger of being trapped in the capacious, but narrow-mouthed, "lobster pot" of the Gulf*” (p.169). The placement of the adjuncts depends on which part of the sentence to be emphasized. Brackets and interpolations are punctuations that are specially featured in writings. However, quotation-mark is one of the essential punctuations in writing a biography.

Instead of using speech marks for conversations, the biography book used direct quotations. While non-fictions apply quotation marks or speech marks for direct conversations, the biography book used them for direct quotations derived

from an interview. Indeed, a biography book typically uses quotations from its sources to keep the actual value of the story. The direct quotations also “allow the readers to hear your subject’s voice” (Minden & Roth, 2012, p. 15). Moreover, the use of quotations from interviews is also directly highlight the sources' thoughts. The quotations applied in the Barbarossa biography are structured inside the paragraphs (p.127):

As the historian Sismondi remarked: "It is characteristic of the Middle Ages that when all their pretended discoveries are mentioned, they are always spoken of as if they were just in general use. Gunpowder, the compass, Arabic numerals, and paper---none of them are mentioned as new and original discoveries. Yet they must have effected a complete change in war, navigation, science, and education.

Sometimes, the sources are not mentioned in the paragraph. For example, “So the two ships came on, "negligently rowing along, no less than ten leagues asunder, careless, indolently supine, and according to custom, in very indifferent order” . . .” (p.1) and “All were bound, "using their own turbans," and then selected few---names” (p.64). All quotation sources, especially those not mentioned in the paragraph, are mentioned in the 'Notes,' which is placed after the bibliography and before the book's index.

The next level of style applied in the biography book is the semantic level of style. The biography book used a semantic level of style in text to make it more interesting. Semantic style relates to the lexical style, indeed. The lexis chosen by Bradford in writing the biography is more likely technical naval terms; there are synonymous words of ships that are placed in various parts of the story. To some readers, these words might appear with totally the same meaning as the others, while they might not totally synonymous. However, the synonymous words are placed in a sentence without mentioning the different specifications, emphasizing the story to be delivered, like it is mentioned on page 106, “He then warped his ships off the beach and moved his galleots under oars out into the bay.” To make them clear, sometimes information in brackets is added to state the fundamental differences of the words. For instance, Bradford mentioned different lexis terms synonymous to ship in the story, “... the Moeslem galley (technically a galleot because of her size)” to give the readers a more precise description of the ship or the difference between galley and galleot.

Interestingly, although it prioritizes facts, the biography book used figures of speech and idiom to spice up the story without getting out of the actual storyline. There are various figures of speech used in the biography book. Personifications, metaphors, and hyperbole are mainly used to describe the ships' circumstances, conditions, weather, and movements. For instance, “**the angry shore claimed them**---and the Turks waited around the foam-fringed rocks” (p.85) and “when the mountains behind Bougie shook under the summer sun” (p.43). Allegory, simile, and metonymy are also used to describe the characters in the biography book and compare them with other famous figures. One of them is “In the new kingdoms of North Africa his name is still held in the reverence as is that of Nelson in England, or John Paul Jones in America” (p.207).

Besides, an idiom describes one of the work processes in a galley or a great ship, i.e. "watch-and-watch" (p.22). The lexical, semantic, and syntactic levels of language style dramatically strengthen the plot and description of the "King of The Sea." They are combined to play an essential role in simultaneously stimulating the curiosity and felicity of the readers. They appear together as proof that the accuracy demands in telling the reality do not block the creativity of language used in writing a biography.

The researcher agrees that style is a choice and is affected by the writer's experience in real life. With his background as a Royal Navy volunteer, Bradford chose technical lexis in naval terms to mention each predicator or noun, so that the reader can imagine the specific kind of ship and get more knowledge about naval terms at the same time. This lexical style gives a specific color to the biography book of Barbarossa. Indeed, to write naval topics, the writer should comprehend the navy terms to deliver the correct information, especially for a true story delivered in a biography book.

The syntax level of style combines the words in the stylish structure of phrase, clause, and sentences. To create an interesting phrase, adjectives are mainly used as the typical style of written language style in a biography. Besides, adjuncts are primarily used in clauses and sentences. Furthermore, a clause or a sentence can contain more than one adjunct to serve more information to the subject, predicator, or the complement. There is no simple sentence that appears without any adjunct in the book.

The placement of the adjuncts depends on which part of the sentence to be emphasized. The adjuncts can be placed at the beginning of the sentence, with or without a comma, to begin a story, add the specific feeling to the reader, and mark a jumping story or topic. On the other hand, the adjuncts are served in brackets to add information related to the explained circumstances, person, or things. However, to add information that might not directly relate to the story, adjuncts can be structured as interpolations in em-dash (–). Sometimes, the adjuncts are placed at the end of the sentences to avoid jamming.

Instead of using speech marks for conversations, the biography book used direct quotations. Indeed, a biography book typically uses quotations from its sources to keep the actual value of the story. The quotations are structured inside quotation marks by mentioning the sources, inside or outside the paragraphs. All sources, especially those not mentioned in the paragraph, are mentioned in the 'Notes,' which is placed after the bibliography and before the book's index.

The biography book used a semantic level of style in the text to make it more interesting. Semantic style relates to the lexical style, indeed. Bradford chose the lexis in writing 'The Sultan's Admiral: Barbarossa – pirate and empire builder,' which is more likely technical naval terms; there are synonymous words of ships placed in various story parts. To some readers, these words might appear with totally the same meaning as the others, while they might not be lexical. To make them clear, information in brackets is added to state the fundamental differences of the words. However, the synonymous words are placed in a sentence without mentioning the different specifications between them, emphasizing the story to be delivered.

The most interesting part is that the biography book used figures of speech and idiom to spice up the story without getting out of the actual storyline. There are various figures of speech used in the biography book. Personifications, metaphors, and hyperbole are primarily used to describe the ships' circumstances, conditions, weather, and movements. Allegory, simile, and metonymy are also used to describe the characters in the biography book and compare them with other popular figures. Besides, an idiom is used to describe one of the work processes in a galley or a great ship. The lexical, semantic, and syntactic levels of language style dramatically strengthen the plot and description of the "King of The Sea." They are combined to play an essential role in simultaneously stimulating the curiosity and felicity of the readers. They appear together as proof that the accuracy demands in telling the reality do not block the creativity of language used in writing a biography.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the conducted analysis and description for this study, the writer concluded that the language style used in *The Sultan's Admiral: Barbarossa – pirate and Empire Builder* emphasized the level of lexical and semantic style, also in their combination structure in a phrase, clause, and sentence. These styles create an interesting value to the book, which might drive people to open more pages, even wonder about the story's end. Emphasizing the lexical and semantic style level and their combination structure in a phrase, clause, and sentence is prominent in this Bradford's biography. These styles create an interesting value to the book, driving people to open more pages and even wonder about the story's end. Language style in a biography can be as engaging as in a fiction story. Being authentic does not mean being boring and monotonous. Some styles can add value to the biography to make people curious and stimulate them to read the book. Deep diving the qualitative analysis of language style to find more than comparing numbers of language styles found in a text is promising research value in the future. In addition to that, to those interested in writing a biography, stylish lexis, structures, and semantics can be applied in writing to add more value to the story, but keep in mind that the initial value of a biography is the truth.

To those interested in doing a content analysis of literature, non-fiction books (such as biography) also have interesting parts to be analyzed. This type of analysis is not monotonous but rich in styles. In addition to that, this research can provoke ideas in those who are interested in writing a biography, stylish lexis, structures, and semantics can be applied in writing to add more value to the story, but keep in mind that the initial value of a biography is the truth – particularly the Indonesian writers for them to try, explore, and create new experiences of writing style, narration, and word choices to their (younger) readers.

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