

## ***Analysis of The Language Functions By The Main Characters In The Mean Girls (2004) Movie***

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Received : 14 December 2024, Revised : 06 January 2025, Accepted : 07 January 2025

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In everyday life, humans are never separated from communication. One of the tools used to communicate is language. Language has many functions that can be found in various media, one of which is a movie. When watching movie, without realizing it, most people only watch scenes and listen to dialogue conversations in the movie and do not notice how the functions of language are used. This is why this study was conducted. By choosing Mean Girls movie as the object, this study aimed to discover the types of language functions used by the main characters and how language functions were realized in the Mean Girls movie. This study used mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative methods. The data analysis technique consisted of identifying the transcribed dialogues by the main characters, Cady Heron, Regina George, Janis Ian, Gretchen Wieners, and Karen Smith, using Geoffrey Leech's (1981) theory of language functions. The results show that in Mean Girls movie, five language functions are found. Expressive function is the most used which contains 135 utterances, followed by informative function with 90 utterances, directive function with 75 utterances, phatic function with 17 utterances and the least used is aesthetic function with 2 utterances. The realization is that there are five types of language functions, namely the informative function (when the main characters provide some factual information, actions, place, and direction using language that can be understood by the interlocutors without confusion). Directive function (when the main characters asked favour, command, give order, invite, and request, so that the listeners follow the wishes of the main characters). Expressive function (when the main characters use this function to express their feelings and emotions such as amazement, judgment, anger, falling in love, and happiness). Phatic function (when the main characters use this function to maintain a good social relationship with the recipients). And finally, aesthetic function (when the main characters use the function by prioritizing the beauty of language yet the meaning is still conveyed to produce a sensory or emotional experience of the recipients). So, it can be concluded that language functions can be found anywhere, including in the movies and moreover, language functions cannot be avoided from everyday life.*

**Keywords:** Language Functions, Mean Girls, Dialogues, Movie, Main Characters.

### **1. Introduction**

Language is a tool used by humans to interact, communicate, and connect with other individuals. Language enables people to share feelings, emotions, and ideas that shape a community. Language is the most important tool used to interact as social beings which can be expressed verbally and in writing (Anggraeni & Suhartono, 2018). Language can also reflect cultural and social structures. Both roles are important in both individual and collective contexts. Related to the role of language, there is a science that studies the relationship between language and society called Sociolinguistics (Aslinda & Leni, 2007). Sociolinguistics is related to social and linguistic sciences which have many meanings for the people around us (Wea & Bram, 2022). Sociolinguistics studies how language is used and interpreted based on several factors such as social circumstances, including culture, class, gender, age, education, religion, and others.

According to Trudgill (2000), sociolinguistics is the study where language use, language variation, and its interpretation are highly influential in the context of social.

One important area in sociolinguistics is the study of language functions, which has a primary focus on how language functions in various communication contexts. Language has many roles and functions such as a communication tool that allows people to exchange information, build relationships, create expressions and feelings, persuade others, and many more. According to Halliday (1973), the function of language is identified into seven different functions: imaginative, representational, heuristic, interactional, instrumental, personal, and regulatory. These seven language functions describe that language is an important element in developing social relationships, exploring the environment, and showing individuality. Jakobson (1960) also introduced six language functions: metalingual, poetic, referential, conative, phatic, and emotive, each of which represents a unique aspect of communicative exchange. Jakobson's framework emphasizes the multifaceted nature of communication, with each function enhancing effective interaction. Jakobson's research emphasizes the communicative purpose of language in complex interactions. Meanwhile, Brown and Yule (1983), categorized language functions into two types namely transactional and interactional. Transactional language emphasizes the transmission of information and content while interactional language encourages interaction and social relationships. This classification highlights that language has a dual role in conveying knowledge and fostering interpersonal relationships, which illustrates the diverse purposes of communication.

And finally, language functions according to Geoffrey Leech (1981), which is used in this study. Leech provides a useful framework for classifying various roles and emphasizes that languages have more uses than just exchanging information. Leech divides language functions into five types: informative, directive, expressive, phatic, and aesthetic. The informative function focuses on conveying factual information using language that is easily understood by the interlocutor without confusion. This function aims to provide clear, precise, and objective data to the listener or reader, which is mostly related to events, knowledge, and situations. The directive function of language has the function to affect the mind, behaviour, or actions of the listener or reader. Its function includes commands, requests, instructions, or suggestions that are intended to direct someone toward a certain action so that they do what the speaker wants. The expressive function focuses on conveying the speaker's personal views, feelings, emotions, or attitudes. This function enables people to share their thoughts and emotional states, as well as convey the feelings they experience to others such as feelings of anger, happiness, sadness, anxiety, and more. The phatic function aims at maintaining a good social relationship between the speaker and the recipient. It also enables communication rather than conveying important information. The phatic function often encompasses greetings, polite expressions, and casual conversation to maintain a good social relationship between the speaker and the recipient. The aesthetic function is generally known as the poetic function, which emphasizes the aspects of language style and artistic. This function prioritizes the beauty of language as a whole such as rhythm, sound, and form with a focus on how word structures can make readers produce sensory or emotional experiences.

There are many studies that analysed language functions with various theories and objects. Ayu et al., (2022) discussed the lack of the speaker's awareness about the roles of language functions during communication in the daily conversations of residents in a village in the Klungkung Regency, Bali. The study used Geoffrey Leech's theory. The results indicated that the most widely used is the directive function, which is caused by the habit of people starting conversations with requests, commands, or orders. Meanwhile, the aesthetic function was the least frequent because villagers often communicate directly without paying attention to beautify the figurative language or style of their utterances. Susanthi et al., (2021) analysed the language functions in tour guide conversations with tourists in Ubud, Bali. This study identified the problem of how to improve clear communication in tourist experiences by organizing and utilizing language functions effectively in tour guide dialogues, especially in the tourism sector.

The result showed that most tour guides used informative, expressive, and directive functions, while the phatic function was used less frequently and the aesthetic function was absent in tour guide conversations. Then study from I. Susanthi (2023) found the type of language functions using Leech theory in culinary conversations on YouTube. The result showed that the YouTuber used language functions such as greeting and welcoming, giving information, inviting, thanking, and saying goodbye.

There were three other researchers who used Leech's theory such as Rini (2021) with the results showing that in WS Rendra's poem "Kecoa Pembangunan", no phatic function was found because the poem only contains figurative meanings of satire and social criticism. This study discussed the difficulties faced in contemporary poetry in literature courses. AS (2024) analysing the function of language in Indang Nagari Muaro Paneh. The results showed that in the Indang lyrics from Nagari Muaro Paneh, most of them display non-literal properties, contain connotations, and carry out directive functions. Not only acting as an oral literary, Indang from Nagari Muaro Paneh also functions as a tool of social control in society. Syukri et al., (2019) explored what language styles are found in the textual presentation of literary works and the role of figures of speech in connecting variables to create language styles in Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. The study revealed seven categories of figures of speech where the most dominant is simile and the least used is synecdoche.

The following studies used Jakobson's theory such as Mustika et al., (2023) analysed the use of language functions by the main characters' utterances in *The Last of Us Part 2* video game (2020). The study revealed that the expressive function is the most commonly used which is 37% and the least used is the referential function which is 11%. Santika et al., (2022) analysed the language function in selected Balinese songs. The study showed that the song lyrics contain all six language functions where the poetic function is the most dominant while the least appeared are the referential and metalingual functions. Lestari et al., (2024) analysed the language functions contained in "Dadung", a traditional musical art in Jembatan Mas village, Jambi. The result indicated that Dadung contains all five language functions, where the most dominant is the aesthetic function. Last but not least, there was a study by Aritonang et al., (2022) who analysed the language functions used by Donald Trump in his victory and farewell speeches. The results showed that in the victory speech, the most dominant was the conative function (40%) and the least used was the metalingual function (2%). On the contrary, in the farewell speech, the most dominant was the emotive function (46%) and the least was the phatic function (4%).

Based on several previous studies that have been elaborated, many previous studies have examined the functions of language from various theories and objects. However, not many studies discuss the functions of language in popular media such as movies using Geoffrey Leech's theory. Most previous studies only analysed real-life settings such as daily conversations, cultural activities, and speeches. The functions of language from Leech's theory are mostly applied widely in real-world conversations while scripted dialogue movies are underexplored. In addition, without realizing it, most people only watch scenes and listen to dialogue conversations in the movie and do not notice how the functions of language are used. That is why this study is very interesting to do. This study aims to discover the types of language functions used by the main characters and how language functions are realized in the *Mean Girls* movie. This study illustrates how language functions as a means of connection and competitiveness in a high-risk social environment.

This study focused on the function of language in a movie entitled *Mean Girls*. *Mean Girls* is the perfect object because it shows how language is used to negotiate a complex network of social interactions among teenagers. *Mean Girls* is an American movie that tells the story of a group called "Plastics" who was very famous and popular in the lives of high school teenagers. This movie has been around for quite a long time since it was first released in 2004. However, its popularity has never faded. Moreover, the popularity of this movie has increased since it went viral on social media such as TikTok. Many TikTokers parody several scenes played by the movie characters. They also enliven the lines spoken by the movie characters to become popular

lip sync trends. The Mean Girls movie is chosen for this study because it is an interesting object in examining how language functions in an environment full of social pressure marked by peer pressure and adolescent hierarchy. Set in high school, this movie explored the complexities of adolescent relationships and how language can be used to influence others, negotiate social status, and assert individuality. Known for the witty jokes and sharp social criticism, Mean Girls provides a rich source of materials for analysing how language functions in interpersonal relationships.

## 2. Method

This study uses mixed methods to analysing the data. Quantitative method is used in classifying the types of language functions by the main characters and qualitative method in interpreting the realization of language functions in the Mean Girls movie. Mean Girls, an American movie, released in 2004 is the object of this study. Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative research allows academics to investigate complex social interactions by examining real-world settings and concentrating on the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to their experiences. The mixed methodology is chosen for this study because it allows for a thorough investigation of the functions of language in naturally occurring dialogues in the Mean Girls Movie. The method is in line with understanding how characters use language to navigate social circumstances and describe their relationships.

This study aims to discover the types of language functions used by the main characters and how language functions are realized in the Mean Girls movie. The process of analysing the data involves presenting, analysing, and interpreting. The data is collected by downloading the movie from the Internet source and watching it to gain a deep understanding of the storyline's main character's interactions and dialogue patterns. In accordance with the title of the movie "Mean Girls", so the main characters here are five protagonist girls who dominate the high school. The main characters are Cady Heron, Regina George, Janis Ian, Gretchen Wieners, and Karen Smith. Next, selecting dialogues spoken by the main characters that contain rich language functions relevant to the study to be analysed. The selected dialogues were then transcribed and classified into the types of language functions.

The technique of analysing the data consists of identifying the transcribed dialogues spoken by the main characters using Geoffrey Leech's (1981) theory of language functions, namely informative, directive, expressive, phatic, and aesthetic. The data obtained is analysed by classifying the types of language functions used by the main characters and interpreting how language functions are realized in the Mean Girls movie. The final step is concluding the results of the study. This systematic methodology ensures that the study captures the sociolinguistic complexity of movie language, offering insight into how language functions in fictional, yet socially reflective environments.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### ***The Classification of language function types used by the main characters in the Mean Girls movie***

Based on the analysis that has been done, several types of language functions and the total number of utterances contained in the utterances of Cady Heron, Regina George, Janis Ian, Gretchen Wieners, and Karen Smith as the main characters show that the Mean Girls movie has five language functions according to Geoffrey Leech, namely informative, directive, expressive, phatic, and aesthetic. The results of the study showed that the main characters used 319 language functions in the movie Mean Girls. The frequency and percentage of each type of language function can be seen in the table presented below.

**Table 1. Types of language functions by the main characters in the Mean Girls (2004) Movie**

Classification of Language Functions	Frequency of Language Functions	Percentages
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Informative	90	28 %
Directive	75	24 %
Expressive	135	42 %
Phatic	17	5 %
Aesthetic	2	1 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>100 %</b>

The most type of language function used by the main characters in the Mean Girls movie is the expressive function, which contains 135 utterances. The results show that this function is most used by Cady Heron and Regina George. Meanwhile, the least function is the aesthetic function, which contains 2 utterances used by Regina George and Janis Ian. The following table is presented for more detailed results.

**Table 2. Classification of language functions by the main characters in more detail**

	<b>Cady Heron</b>	<b>Regina George</b>	<b>Janis Ian</b>	<b>Gretchen Wieners</b>	<b>Karen Smith</b>
<b>Informative</b>	42	12	15	14	7
<b>Directive</b>	18	26	16	11	4
<b>Expressive</b>	43	43	25	14	10
<b>Phatic</b>	9	6	1	0	1
<b>Aesthetic</b>	0	1	1	0	0

### ***The realization of language functions in the Mean Girls movie***

There are five types of language functions used by the main characters in the Mean Girls movie. The five categories are informative function, directive function, expressive function, phatic function, and aesthetic function. In the following sections, each type is discussed in depth explanation including detailed analysis of how the data is classified into different language functions.

**Table 3. Samples of the realization language functions by the main characters in the Mean Girls (2004) movie**

#### ***1. Informative function***

<b>No</b>	<b>Types of Language Functions</b>	<b>Utterances</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
1.	Informative	1. U23 Cady Heron: It's Cady. C-A-D-Y.	On Cady's second day of school, she gives clear information to Janis Ian, her new friend, about how her name is actually spelled.
		2. U111 Regina George: But let me just tell you something about Aaron. All he cares about is school and his friends.	Cady has a crush on Regina's ex, so Regina tells her what Aaron's true nature and behavior are.
		3. U19 Janis Ian: It burned down in 1987.	Janis gives Cady factual information about room G 14, the health classroom she was supposed to go to.
		4. U239 Gretchen Wieners: Regina, you're wearing sweatpants. It's Monday.	Grethen informs Regina that she has violated the group rules

		regarding the outfit she should not have worn.
5.	U51 Karen Smith: On Wednesday, we wear pink.	Karen provides new information to Cady who has just joined their group about the group rules that must be followed.

Informative function can be found in utterances (U23, U111, U19, U239, U51). In utterance (U23) when Cady tells Janis factual information about how her name is actually spelled, in utterance (U111) when Regina gives information to Cady about Aaron before going further with him, in utterance (U19) when Janis informs Cady the reason why is the room G 14 no longer exists, in utterance (U239) when Grethen conveys information about the violated group rules that has been done by Regina, and in utterance (U51) when Karen provides new information about the group rules. The realization of the informative function can be seen in the situations where the main characters provide some factual information, actions, place, and direction using language that can be understood by the interlocutors without confusion. The main characters answer questions from the interlocutors and ensure what they are going to say has clear understanding.

## 2. Directive function

2.	Directive	1. U117 Cady Heron: Hey, I'm totally lost. Can you help me?	Cady asks a favour from her crush, Aaron about the Math lesson. They are classmates.
		2. U68 Regina George: Get in, loser! We're going shopping.	Regina commands Cady to get in her car because they are going shopping at the mall.
		3. U101 Janis Ian: Cady, you gotta steal that book.	Janis gives order to Cady to steal Regina's "Burn Book" so they can expose all of Regina's crimes.
		4. U49 Gretchen Wieners: We wanna invite you to have lunch with us every day for the rest of the week.	Gretchen invites Cady to join their group for lunch every day for the rest of the week.
		5. U206 Karen Smith: Ma'am, do you have this in the next size up?	Karen gives a request to the clerk at the store if they had any larger sizes of dress that they wanted.

Directive function can be found in utterances (U117, U68, U101, U49, U206). In utterance (U117) when Cady asks Aaron a favour to teach her math, in utterance (U68) when Regina commands Cady to get in her car, in utterance (U101) when Janis gives order to Cady to steal Regina's book, in utterance (U49) when Grethen gives an invitation to Cady to sit on a table with their group for the rest of the week, and in utterance (U206) when Karen requests the clerk at the store if they have the next size up of the dress. The realization of the directive function can be seen in the situations where the main characters influence the listeners' thoughts, behaviour, or actions. The main characters use directive functions that include asking favour, command, giving order, inviting, and request, so that the listeners follow the wishes of the main characters.

## 3. Expressive function

1.	U75 Cady Heron: Wow, your house is really nice.	Cady expressed her amazement and admiration when she first saw Regina's big and luxurious house.
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3.	Expressive	2. U193 Regina George: God, Karen, you are so stupid!	Regina expressed her annoyance about Karen's stupidity who invited her to Taco Bell even though she was on a carb diet.
		3. U268 Janis Ian: You dirty little liar.	Janis expressed her anger at Cady's lie about not going to her art show. Janis' anger peaked when Cady threw a party without inviting her.
		4. U257 Gretchen Wieners: I love you.	Gretchen expressed her feelings to Jason that she loved him. She could no longer hold back her feelings for Jason. So, she openly expressed her feelings directly to him.
		5. U166 Karen Smith: That was the best it ever went!	Karen expressed her happiness after their Jingle Bell Rock dance talent show went smoothly and received thunderous applause from the audience.

Expressive function can be found in utterances (U75, U193, U268, U257, U166). In utterance (U75) when Cady expresses her amazement about Regina's house, in utterance (U193) when Regina judges Karen for being stupid, in utterance (U268) when Janis expressed her anger toward Cady for being a liar, in utterance (U257) when Gretchen expressed her feelings to Jason, and in utterance (U166) when Karen expressed her happiness for the success of their talent show. The realization of the expressive function can be seen in the situations where all the main characters use this function to express their feelings and emotions such as amazement, judgment, anger, falling in love, and happiness.

#### 4. Phatic function

4.	Phatic	1. U313 Cady Heron: Hey, what's up?	After Cady won Spring Fling Queen, Aaron approached her. To avoid awkwardness, she started the casual conversation by saying "Hey, what's up" to get Aaron's attention.
		2. U77 Regina George: I'm home! Hey, Kylie.	Regina excitedly told her family that she was home. She also didn't forget to greet her little sister.
		3. U310 Janis Ian: Hey.	Janis responds to Cady's greeting to maintain good communication with her.
		4. U319 Karen Smith: Regina.	Karen starts a good relationship by greeting Regina with a warm smile when they accidentally meet at school.

Phatic function can be found in utterances (U313, U77, U310, U319). In utterance (U313) when Cady started the conversation with Aaron to get his attention, in utterance (U77) when Regina saying hello to her little sister, in utterance (U310) when Janis greeted Cady back, and in utterance (U319) when Karen starts a good relationship with Regina after months not seeing each other. The realization of the phatic function can be seen in the situations where the main characters use this function to maintain a good social relationship with the recipients. The phatic function used by the main characters involves encompasses greetings, polite expressions, and casual conversation that help in building or strengthening interpersonal relationships. The phatic

function used by the main characters aims to foster a sense of familiarity and friendship between speakers, making it an important element in everyday interactions.

#### 5. *Aesthetic function*

5.	Aesthetic	1. U288 Regina George: Oh, my God. It's her dream come true, diving into a big pile of girls.	Regina mocks Janis by saying fake taunts stating that Janis is a lesbian. Regina arranges her words as beautifully as possible to embarrass Janis in public.
		2. U272 Janis Ian: Did you have an awesome time? Did you drink awesome shooters and listen to awesome music, and then just sit around and soak up each other's awesomeness?	Janis vents her anger by uttering sarcastic sentences and rhetorical questions to Cady for lying to her.

The aesthetic function can be found in the utterances (U288, U272). In the utterance (U288) when Regina describes the imaginative insulting utterance creatively, and in the utterance (U272) when Janis beautifies her sarcasm to mock Cady in front of her. The realization of the aesthetic function can be seen in the situations where the main characters use the function by prioritizing the beauty of language but the meaning is still conveyed so that the recipients produce a sensory or emotional experience. The dramatic imagery and tone function as aesthetic commentary on the scene.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that language functions can be found anywhere, including in the movies and moreover, language functions cannot be avoided from everyday life. The results of this study indicate that there are five types of language functions used by the main characters in the Mean Girls movie, namely informative, directive, expressive, phatic, and aesthetic functions. There are 319 total data containing language functions used by Cady Heron, Regina George, Janis Ian, Gretchen Wieners, and Karen Smith as the main characters of the Mean Girls movie. Expressive function is the most used which contains 135 utterances, followed by informative function with 90 utterances, directive function with 75 utterances, phatic function with 17 utterances and the least used is aesthetic function which only contains 2 utterances. All of these language functions are used by the main characters to communicate in the Mean Girls movie.

The realization is that there are five types of language functions, namely the informative function (when the main characters provide some factual information, actions, place, and direction using language that can be understood by the interlocutors without confusion). Directive function (when the main characters asked favour, command, give order, invite, and request, so that the listeners follow the wishes of the main characters). Expressive function (when the main characters use this function to express their feelings and emotions such as amazement, judgment, anger, falling in love, and happiness). Phatic function (when the main characters use this function to maintain a good social relationship with the recipients). And finally, aesthetic function (when the main characters use the function by prioritizing the beauty of language but the meaning is still conveyed so that the recipients produce a sensory or emotional experience).



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