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## LANGUAGE STYLE ANALYSIS IN THE *ZACH SANG SHOW*: AN INTERVIEW WITH RM

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines language styles in *The Zach Sang Show: An Interview with RM*, focusing on how they are shaped by social factors. Using Joos' (1967) theory of language style and Holmes' (2013) model of social factors, the research identifies the styles used and their links to setting, topic, function, and speaker relationship. Data were collected from a full transcript of the interview and analyzed qualitatively. The findings show that only two styles were present, namely consultative and casual, which reflect the interview's informal public setting and professional yet friendly interaction. Consultative style appeared most often in explanations and reflections, while casual style occurred in humor and emotional moments. The frequent shifts between styles demonstrate the adaptability of language to social contexts and confirm the relevance of Joos' and Holmes' frameworks in digital media discourse.

**Keywords:** interview, language style, social factors, sociolinguistics

### ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti gaya bahasa dalam *The Zach Sang Show: An Interview with RM*, dengan fokus pada bagaimana gaya bahasa tersebut dibentuk oleh faktor-faktor sosial. Dengan menggunakan teori gaya bahasa Joos (1967) dan model faktor sosial Holmes (2013), penelitian ini mengidentifikasi gaya yang digunakan dan kaitannya dengan latar, topik, fungsi, dan hubungan pembicara. Data dikumpulkan dari transkrip wawancara lengkap dan dianalisis secara kualitatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa hanya ada dua gaya, yaitu konsultatif dan kasual, yang mencerminkan suasana publik informal dan interaksi profesional namun ramah dalam wawancara tersebut. Gaya konsultatif paling sering muncul dalam penjelasan dan refleksi, sementara gaya kasual muncul dalam humor dan momen emosional. Pergeseran yang sering terjadi antara gaya menunjukkan kemampuan

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*adaptasi bahasa terhadap konteks sosial dan mengonfirmasi relevansi kerangka kerja Joos dan Holmes dalam wacana media digital.*

**Kata kunci:** *sociolinguistik, gaya bahasa, faktor sosial, wawancara*

## A. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital platforms have transformed the ways people communicate and engage with media. Among these platforms, YouTube has emerged as a central space for long-form, podcast-style interviews that promote meaningful and spontaneous conversations. Unlike conventional late-night or entertainment-driven programs, these unscripted formats allow greater conversational depth and authenticity, making them valuable objects of study for sociolinguistics.

One notable example is *The Zach Sang Show*, a U.S.-based talk program launched on YouTube in 2012. With nearly 900,000 subscribers and more than 238 million views, the show frequently features high-profile guests such as BTS, Ariana Grande, and Billie Eilish. Host Zach Sang adopts a laid-back yet professional interviewing style, using open-ended questions that encourage reflection and self-expression. This balance of professionalism and friendliness creates an ideal environment to observe how speakers adjust their language styles in real time.

Previous studies (e.g., Rizki, 2021; Hutaeruk et al., 2022; Aini & Bahri, 2022; Afriza & Martina, 2022) have examined language styles in films, television talk shows, and celebrity interviews. However, most have concentrated on identifying and categorizing language style types rather than explaining how and why these styles shift according to social dynamics. Moreover, few have addressed the influence of social factors—such as participant relationships, topic complexity, or communicative purpose—on stylistic variation within spoken interactions. In particular, little attention has been paid to *unscripted digital interviews* where speakers share familiarity and cultural hybridity, such as bilingual exchanges on YouTube.

To address this gap, the present study analyzes *The Zach Sang Show: An Interview with RM*, conducted during the promotion of RM’s solo album *Indigo*. Drawing on Joos’ (1967) framework of language styles and Holmes’ (2013) theory of social factors, this research explores how speakers strategically shift their styles in response to topic, purpose, and relationship. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to sociolinguistics by demonstrating how language in digital media serves not only to convey meaning but also to express identity, build rapport, and foster global connectivity.

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### **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **1. Sociolinguistic**

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society. Holmes (2013) defines it as the study of how language conveys social meaning and serves social functions. Yule (2010) describes it as a branch of linguistics that examines language in relation to social and cultural phenomena, often intersecting with fields like psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Similarly, Trudgill (2000) emphasizes that sociolinguistics explores how cultural and social contexts shape the way people speak. Therefore, sociolinguistics focuses on how language operates within social contexts, reflects social meanings, and is influenced by cultural norms and societal factors.

#### **2. Language Style**

Language style refers to the way people choose to speak depending on context, audience, and purpose. Wardhaugh & Fuller (2015) explain that it ranges from very formal to very informal, while Missikova (2003) highlights that style is shaped by conscious choices of linguistic and extra-linguistic means. Holmes (2013) adds that speakers adjust their style not only to the level of formality but also to the audience. Joos (1967) classifies language style into five types: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. These are influenced by the degree of familiarity and social distance between speakers.

##### **a. Frozen Style**

According to Joos (1967), frozen style is the most formal. It uses fixed expressions, long and carefully structured sentences, and allows no audience feedback. It is commonly found in speeches, ceremonies, and legal or religious texts.

##### **b. Formal Style**

Joos (1967) describes formal style as informative, polite, and impersonal. It avoids personal references, favors structured expressions such as *“May I help you?”*, and is used in situations where authority and clarity are important.

##### **c. Consultative Style**

Consultative style, as noted by Joos (1967), is semi-formal and typical of teacher–student or doctor–patient interactions. Speakers provide background information, while listeners use feedback signals like *“I see”* or *“Well”*.

##### **d. Casual Style**

Joos (1967) defines casual style as everyday informal speech among friends or insiders. It is marked by slang, contractions, ellipsis, and nicknames, with relaxed grammar and an assumption of shared understanding.

##### **e. Intimate Style**

Joos (1967) explains that intimate style is the most personal, used between close relationships such as couples or family. It often relies on private codes, endearments, and non-verbal cues, with meaning understood implicitly.

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### 3. Social Factors

According to Holmes (2013), social factors strongly influence language use and the choice of style. These include participants, setting, topic, and function, along with broader identity aspects such as age, gender, and social background. People adjust the way they speak depending on context, relationship, and emotional stance.

#### a. Participants

Participants are the speaker and listener involved in communication. Their relationship, defined by age, status, gender, or class affects how they address one another and the level of formality used (Holmes, 2013).

#### b. Setting

Setting refers to the time and place of communication. Formal settings encourage more careful and structured speech, while informal settings allow relaxed, casual language (Holmes, 2013).

#### c. Topic

The topic, or subject matter, shapes language style. Serious or sensitive topics often require more polite and respectful language, even in otherwise informal situations (Holmes, 2013).

#### d. Function

Function refers to the purpose of communication, or why people are speaking (Holmes, 2013). Holmes outlines six main functions:

- 1) Expressive: conveys emotions or attitudes, e.g., “*I’m so happy today.*”
- 2) Directive: aims to influence behavior, e.g., commands or requests.
- 3) Referential: provides factual information, e.g., “*It’s three o’clock.*”
- 4) Metalinguistic: comments on language itself, e.g., “*That’s not a common word.*”
- 5) Poetic: highlights the aesthetic features of language, such as rhymes, slogans, or wordplay.
- 6) Phatic: maintains social relationships, e.g., greetings or small talk.

### 4. The Zach Sang Show

The *Zach Sang Show* is a syndicated American radio and online talk program hosted by Zach Sang, a multimedia broadcaster and former Nickelodeon personality. Launched in 2012, it has become a prominent platform for celebrity and musician interviews, featuring figures such as Ariana Grande, Justin Bieber, and BTS (IMDb, n.d.). The show airs nightly on over 70 major Pop Radio stations across the United States, with Sang’s conversational style establishing him as a key figure in contemporary media (Saad, 2022).

Beyond radio, the *Zach Sang Show* has built a large digital presence, amassing nearly 900,000 YouTube subscribers and over 239 million views. New interviews are uploaded daily, often spotlighting artists promoting new albums and exploring their creative processes. This blend of pop culture relevance and in-

depth dialogue has allowed the show to attract a global audience and maintain its reputation as an influential media outlet.

### C. METHODS

#### 1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to identify the types of language style used by Zach Sang and RM in the *Zach Sang Show* interview and to examine how their use of language styles was influenced by social factors. Qualitative research seeks to understand aspects of social life by analyzing words rather than numbers (Patton & Cochran, 2002). A descriptive method was also applied to provide systematic explanations of the observed phenomena (Creswell, 2014).

#### 2. Data and Source of Data

The data consist of utterances from the interview titled “*RM Breaks Down His Debut Album ‘Indigo’*”, uploaded to *The Zach Sang Show* YouTube channel on December 6, 2022. The video, lasting 50 minutes and 38 seconds, was chosen because RM’s fluency in English allowed natural interaction. The interview titled “*RM Breaks Down His Debut Album ‘Indigo’*” was purposefully selected among other episodes of *The Zach Sang Show* because it best represents the characteristics relevant to this study. First, RM’s high level of English fluency enables spontaneous and nuanced expression, allowing for clearer observation of stylistic shifts. Second, his long-standing familiarity with Zach Sang creates a comfortable, low-power dynamic that reveals how social relationships influence language use. Third, this interview covers a wide range of topics—from music production and artistic identity to personal reflection—which naturally elicits varied language styles. Finally, as a bilingual artist promoting his first solo album, RM navigates both professional and emotional registers, offering rich data for examining how language adapts to different communicative functions. These features make this particular video the most suitable representation of unscripted, globally oriented interviews on digital media platforms.

#### 3. Research Instrument

The researcher acted as the primary instrument, responsible for collecting, categorizing, and analyzing the data (Birmingham & Wilkinson, 2003).

#### 4. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through a documentary technique: (1) watching the interview, (2) converting it into transcript form, (3) cross-checking the transcript for accuracy, and (4) marking utterances that contained distinct language styles.

#### 5. Data Analysis

The analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s (1994) three stages:



- a) Data Reduction: selecting utterances that clearly illustrated language styles and social factors, classified according to Joos’ (1967) five styles and Holmes’ (2013) four social factors.
- b) Data Display: organizing the data into tables with utterances, timestamps, language styles, and related social factors.
- c) Conclusion Drawing/Verification: interpreting how language styles reflected social dynamics in the interview, ensuring consistency in classification, and re-evaluating ambiguous cases against the theoretical framework.

## D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Findings

This study analyzed the language styles used by Zach Sang and RM in *The Zach Sang Show* interview, drawing on Joos’ (1967) classification of styles (frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate) and Holmes’ (2013) framework of social factors (participants, setting, topic, and function). The participants were Zach Sang as the interviewer and RM as the interviewee. The interview was conducted online, with Zach in the United States and RM in South Korea, and published on *The Zach Sang Show* YouTube channel. It lasted 50 minutes and 38 seconds. Since the participants and setting remained constant throughout, the analysis focuses primarily on the elements that varied, which are the topics discussed and the functions of the utterances.

The findings indicate that only two of Joos’ (1967) five language styles were present in the interview, namely consultative and casual. Each style is examined in relation to the relevant social factors, particularly topic and function, to show how stylistic choices shifted according to the content and communicative goals. Selected excerpts are presented to demonstrate how these language styles were used in context and how they were influenced by social factors.

#### a. Consultative Style

The consultative language style functions effectively in both formal and informal contexts, as it balances structure with accessibility. It requires relatively careful word choice and proper sentence construction, though the delivery often retains spontaneity. Joos (1967) characterizes this style by its assumption of only partial shared knowledge between speaker and listener, which prompts the speaker to provide explanations and clarifications. It is also marked by interactive elements such as back-channeling (“yes,” “oh,” “I see”) and hedging, which help ensure mutual understanding. The following excerpts illustrate how Zach Sang and RM employ consultative style throughout the interview.

#### Data 35

ZS : “Still life. What story are you telling in this song?”

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RM : “Still life is a funny song. It basically see the word ‘still life’, mostly in the museums... But you know since English is not my mother language... I suddenly realized... the flowers are all dead... But he once gave a life to the flowers through paintings when he was alive. So, it feels like it's really alive to me... And ‘still life’ is like—when I see the title, I admitted that in two ways—first, is that, and two, it's like yo... ‘still life.’ ‘I want to be still alive’... I may be just a flower or an apple in a painting, but I'm still moving forward and I'm still alive. So, that's what I'm telling about.”

(Zach Song Show, 2022, 20:25 – 22:10)

This exchange illustrates consultative style in its explanatory aim. Zach's question assumes curiosity but not full understanding, prompting RM to provide layered clarification. RM begins with a literal explanation of “still life” as an art term before expanding into metaphor and wordplay (“still life” vs. “still alive”). Though spontaneous and marked by discourse markers (“you know,” “so”), his speech maintains coherence, demonstrating audience-aware explanation of abstract ideas. Holmes' (2013) model explains this as the effect of topic complexity: discussing symbolic meaning requires more elaboration, even in an informal relational context. The function is primarily referential but enriched with poetic expression.

### Data 60

ZS : “Well, because it's—the reason ultimately is bigger than you, right?”

RM : “Right.”

ZS : “Like, going back to art living on way beyond the artist and the impact that art has—yes, in your own self-discovery, but also at the same time allowing other people to discover new parts of themselves, and—”

RM : “Right.”

ZS : “Genuinely felt very understood by this album.”

(Zach Song Show, 2022, 37:30 – 37:51)

This final excerpt illustrates the cooperative dynamic of consultative style. Zach delivers a structured interpretation of RM's art, moving from abstract (“art living on beyond the artist”) to personal (“I felt understood by this album”). RM's minimal responses (“Right”) confirm shared meaning without elaboration, which aligns with the interactive, negotiated quality of this style. Although concise, his affirmations carry referential weight by signaling agreement. Holmes' (2013) framework explains this as a balance between professional setting, relational

closeness, and topic complexity, all of which favor explanatory, reflective discourse.

In summary, consultative style in this interview appears in moments where Zach’s layered questions elicit RM’s explanatory and reflective responses. Both participants adjust their speech to bridge knowledge gaps for the audience, balancing referential clarity with expressive depth. This aligns with Joos’ (1967) framework and Holmes’ (2013) model, showing how consultative style emerges naturally in semi-formal, public conversations where expertise, explanation, and mutual understanding are central.

### 4.1.2 Casual Style

The casual language style is a conversational register typically used among friends, colleagues, or family members in informal contexts. It is marked by spontaneity, naturalness, and a strong reflection of personal feelings. Grammar is less strictly observed, vocabulary may include slang or ellipses, and pronunciation is often rapid or reduced. Joos (1967) highlights ellipsis and slang as key indicators of this style. Participants also tend to address one another with first names or nicknames rather than formal titles. The following data illustrate how Zach Sang and RM employed casual style in their interaction.

#### Data 1

ZS : “Hello, RM!”

RM : “Hey, Zach. How you doin’?”

ZS : “Dude! I’m doing pretty freaking amazing to be honest.”

(Zach Song Show, 2022, 00:00 – 00:06)

This opening exchange reflects casual style through contracted forms (“doin’”), informal greetings (“hey”), and colloquial vocabulary (“dude,” “freaking amazing”). The purpose is phatic rather than informative, aiming to establish rapport. From Holmes’ (2013) perspective, the participants’ familiarity and low power distance enable an easy, friendly tone despite the formal interview setting.

#### Data 30

RM : “I was afraid she may think of me very rude, because I wrote all the hook and lyrics and sent to her, ‘Please, sing this hook with your voice.’ And you know, it could be very offensive because she’s a damn... she’s a fucking legend, so—”

ZS : “It’s Erykah Badu.”

RM : “But, yeah—It’s Erykah Badu. I mean no explain needed.”

(Zach Song Show, 2022, 18:08 – 18:12)

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This sequence shows casual style through ellipsis (“no explain needed”), incomplete syntax, and reliance on shared cultural knowledge. The exchange is expressive rather than explanatory, with Zach and RM bonding over admiration for Erykah Badu. Holmes’ (2013) framework explains this as an instance where the topic and relationship permit informality, even in a public interview setting.

In summary, casual style in this interview is characterized by informality, spontaneity, and emotional openness. It emerges in moments where solidarity, personal topics, and low power distance shape the interaction. Through greetings, humor, cultural references, and self-disclosure, Zach and RM demonstrate how casual language style fosters comfort and strengthens interpersonal bonds, even within a public interview setting.

## 2. Discussions

This study revealed that only two of Joos’ (1967) five language styles appeared in the interview between Zach Sang and RM, namely consultative and casual. Frozen, formal, and intimate styles were absent, which is consistent with the context of the interview. Frozen and formal styles are typically used in highly structured settings such as legal proceedings, speeches, or ceremonial events where language is fixed and tightly regulated. The *Zach Sang Show*, however, is characterized by an informal and conversational atmosphere suited to digital platforms like YouTube. Similarly, intimate style is generally reserved for private interactions between close family members, friends, or partners. While Zach and RM share a warm relationship, the professional nature of the interview and the public audience restricted the use of intimate language. Consequently, the stylistic range was naturally limited to consultative and casual forms of speech.

The consultative style dominated much of the exchange. Joos (1967) describes consultative style as occurring when a speaker assumes that the listener may lack full understanding of the topic and therefore provides additional explanation. This was evident in RM’s responses, especially when he discussed his music, artistic goals, and personal reflections. His answers often contained transitions, clarifications, and illustrative examples, reflecting a careful but approachable way of speaking. Zach’s role as interviewer reinforced this style, as his questions were often detailed and thought-provoking, inviting extended responses. These moments highlight the collaborative nature of the interview, where both participants treated the interaction as an opportunity for thoughtful exchange rather than casual banter.

Holmes’ (2013) framework of social factors explains why the consultative style emerged so frequently. While participants and setting remained constant, variations in topic and function shaped stylistic shifts. When RM explored deeper subjects, such as his identity, cultural background, or creative process, his speech assumed a more informative and reflective tone. These utterances fulfilled a primarily referential function, aimed at providing clear explanations. However,

RM also embedded affective elements, such as metaphors and personal insights, which added emotional resonance to his speech. This illustrates how consultative style can accommodate both rational and emotional content, aligning with Holmes' view that communicative purpose strongly influences language use.

The casual style appeared in lighter segments of the interview, where the interaction was marked by jokes, shared memories, and moments of laughter. Joos (1967) characterizes casual style by features such as ellipsis, contractions, slang, and less formal grammar, all of which were present in these exchanges. Though seemingly less serious, these moments played an important role in building rapport and establishing a sense of comfort between the speakers. Holmes (2013) emphasizes the influence of speaker relationships on language choice, and this was clearly reflected in the familiarity between Zach and RM, which allowed casual speech to occur naturally even in a public interview setting.

Notably, the participants frequently shifted between consultative and casual styles. For instance, RM often began with a humorous or lighthearted comment before transitioning into a more detailed explanation. These fluid transitions demonstrate that language style is not rigid but adaptable to context, topic, and speaker intention. RM's ability to combine casual expressions with structured elaboration underscores the flexibility of language in unscripted interviews and highlights how speakers balance accessibility with depth for both the interviewer and the audience.

Compared with earlier research, this study adds a deeper layer of analysis. While Afriza and Martina (2022) and Hutauruk et al. (2022) also identified consultative and casual styles in interviews, their focus remained largely on quantifying occurrences. This research goes further by analyzing how and why shifts occur, emphasizing the roles of topic, function, and speaker relationship as outlined by Holmes (2013). Additionally, RM's bilingual background and global identity enrich the findings, as his speech reflects both Korean and international influences. This demonstrates how language style in interviews can also serve as a marker of cultural identity.

In conclusion, the findings show that language style in digital interview contexts is shaped by a combination of social factors, particularly topic, function, and participant relationships. Rather than adhering strictly to formal or informal categories, speakers adjusted their style dynamically in response to the flow of conversation. This supports Joos' (1967) theory of language styles and Holmes' (2013) model of social factors, while also highlighting the flexibility of communication in new media environments where conversational authenticity and audience engagement are highly valued.

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### E. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the language styles used in *The Zach Sang Show: An Interview with RM*, employing Joos’ (1967) theory of language styles and Holmes’ (2013) framework of social factors. The findings revealed that only two styles, consultative and casual, were present throughout the interview. Consultative style dominated when Zach Sang and RM discussed complex topics such as creative processes, cultural identity, and artistic philosophy. Casual style appeared in moments of humor, personal anecdotes, and rapport-building exchanges.

The absence of frozen, formal, and intimate styles reflects the nature of the interview: a public yet informal setting, conducted between participants who share familiarity but maintain professional roles. Holmes’ social factors, particularly topic and function, played a significant role in shaping shifts between consultative and casual styles, demonstrating that stylistic variation is not fixed but context-dependent. By integrating Joos’ and Holmes’ frameworks, this study contributes to sociolinguistic research by showing how language in digital interview contexts adapts dynamically to both interpersonal relationships and communicative purposes. The analysis underscores the importance of considering not only which styles appear but also why they emerge in relation to social dynamics.

In light of the findings, future researchers are encouraged to investigate language style in a broader range of digital media contexts, such as multi-guest interviews, cross-cultural conversations, or live podcast formats. Exploring different types of participants and topics could reveal further nuances in how social factors influence stylistic choices. Additionally, future studies might combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the frequency and function of language style shifts more comprehensively. Such research would deepen understanding of how language adapts to social interaction across diverse media platforms.

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