

Character Identity Contruction through Linguistic Variation in Sherlock Holmes: A Third Wave Sociolinguistic Reading

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Abstract

This study is urgent because it reveals how linguistic variation in Sherlock Holmes constructs and represents character identity through a Third Wave sociolinguistic perspective, thereby enriching our understanding of the relationship between language, identity, and social meaning in literary works. This study explores how Sherlock Holmes' character identity is intricately formed through linguistic variation, using the Third Wave sociolinguistic framework as the primary analytical tool. This research bridges classical literary studies with modern sociolinguistic perspectives, which view identity as a performative and strategic social practice rather than a fixed psychological trait. The objective of this research is to examine how identity is constructed and performed as a strategic social practice by integrating classical literary analysis with contemporary sociolinguistic perspectives, rather than treating identity as a fixed psychological attribute. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, this study analyzes 45 selected excerpts from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," with specific attention to technical registers, formal stance, and stylistic variation. The findings reveal a consistent pattern of "stylistic practice" where Holmes utilizes specific scientific terminology, such as chemistry and forensics, to demonstrate intellectual prowess and epistemic authority over his interlocutors. Furthermore, this analysis highlights Holmes' capacity for "style-shifting," where he adeptly alternates between high-formal Victorian registers and colloquial language to navigate and manipulate the rigid 19th-century social structures. Unlike previous studies analyzing social class through First Wave reflections, this research demonstrates that Holmes is a dynamic project, actively "constructed" through language to manage social distance and control interactional space. These findings reinforce the argument that linguistic variation is essential in creating social meaning within fictional narratives, offering significant interdisciplinary implications for English literature and sociolinguistics. This study serves as a profound theoretical resource for understanding how professional identities are indexed and maintained linguistically across various media and historical contexts, while affirming the relevance of Third Wave theory in literary studies.

Keywords: *Character Identity, Linguistic Variation, Sherlock Holmes, Third Wave Sociolinguistics.*

Introduction

Character identity in literary works is not born as a static entity, but rather as the result of negotiations between linguistic choices, social relations, and cultural ideology. Third wave sociolinguistic studies view language variation as a meaningful practice that represents the social position of speakers as well as a strategy for persona formation (Davis et al., 2024). This perspective positions language not merely as a reflection of social structures, but as a symbolic resource that actively constructs the meaning of identity. Recent research also shows that linguistic variation can be measured and analyzed through computational approaches to reveal patterns of correlation between language forms and their social functions (Sadigzade, 2025). In

the realm of literature, this approach opens up new avenues of analysis for fictional characters as social agents (Khoirurrohman & Abdan, 2020). Characters are no longer treated as passive representations, but as subjects who construct their self-image through linguistic choices (Hasanah et al., 2019).

The importance of exploring language variation as a method of identity formation is also emphasized in the academic context of the Prima Bangsa Institute (IPB) Cirebon. In accordance with the explanation in the academic framework, literary works are a dynamic area where the use of language variation reflects the negotiation of the social position of its speakers (Hartika, 2024). This is in line with the opinion in the *Lingua Bestari* journal, which places sociolinguistics as a strategic approach to analyzing the role of individuals in the social order (Purba, 2024). Historically, the Victorian era, which served as the backdrop for Sherlock Holmes' life, is a rich field of study in sociolinguistics. During this period, language served as the primary tool for separating different social classes (Victor et al., 2025).

The standard 'Received Pronunciation' (RP) was not merely a way of speaking, but also a sign of membership in the upper class in England. The tension between the official standard and everyday dialects provided opportunities for characters such as Holmes to hide or change their identities. We can understand that Victorian literature reflects existing social unrest (Floranti, 2024). Holmes, as a detective who could communicate with both kings and homeless people, became a unique social figure. He utilizes his skill in shifting language to cross class boundaries that are usually strictly maintained by other members of society. Thus, this study not only explores the content of the text but also investigates how Victorian language ideology is used by characters to achieve practical goals in criminal investigations. The sociolinguistic landscape of London in the late 19th century provided an important backdrop for this style of performance. It was a period of linguistic anxiety, in which 'correct' speech was linked to moral and intellectual character.

The emergence of the 'New Detective' in literature, represented by Holmes, challenged these rigid boundaries. Unlike traditional police forces, which were often depicted as linguistically and intellectually stagnant, Holmes' ability to engage in 'stylistic chameleonism' or switch between different styles reflected a modern agent. In the Victorian era, the slang language of the 'Barrow-boy' and the 'High-Society' dialect were at opposite ends of the spectrum. A person's social mobility was often hindered by their inability to master the appropriate style. However, Holmes treated these class-based markers as mere costumes. For example, when Holmes went undercover, he not only changed his clothes but also adopted a 'vernacular persona'.

This shows that he viewed First Wave categories (class, origin) as tools that could be manipulated, not as limitations that had to be obeyed. This manipulation of Victorian social codes through linguistic variation is a profound example of Third Wave in action, where speakers use existing social meanings to achieve specific interactional goals. By combining Third Wave theory as discussed, this study considers that the character of Sherlock Holmes consciously changes his linguistic style as a symbolic source to build a strong intellectual image (Hall-Lew et al., 2021). Therefore, third-wave sociolinguistic readings are relevant to the study of both contemporary and classic literary characters (Damayanti et al., 2024). This relevance is clearly evident in the iconic detective figure of Sherlock Holmes.

The evolution of the concept of language variation began with the First Wave led by William Labov. Research in this phase prioritized the analysis of the dependence between linguistic elements and fixed macro-social categories, such as social class, age, and gender. In the context

of this research, the First Wave played a role in describing the Victorian era as a rigid social structure, where the use of standard English was often seen as a direct reflection of the economic status of its speakers (Harmasari et al., 2023). However, this approach has weaknesses because it views speakers as passive individuals, whose language use is determined by the 'fate' of their birth or social position, without considering the personal motivations underlying the choice of a particular style of language (Afriansyah & Ardhian, 2024).

Entering the second phase, the focus in sociolinguistics shifted to interactions within social networks and local communities. This approach shows that variation in language is not only influenced by social class in general, but also by how closely a person is connected to their peer group. As revealed in the research, language is seen as a means of adapting to context, which allows individuals to be accepted in certain social environments (Putri, 2024). In the example of Sherlock Holmes, this second phase is evident when he communicates with certain groups, such as police detectives or informants on the street, where he adjusts his speech not because of a change in social status, but to maintain smooth communication within his detective network.

The culmination of this progress is the emergence of the Third Wave, which positions language variation as an act performed to shape one's 'Persona'. Language is no longer considered a reflection of social background, but rather a symbolic tool actively used to 'display' a specific identity that the speaker wishes to possess. In this view, Sherlock Holmes creates his persona as a genius through his choice of technical vocabulary and assertive sentence patterns (Hall-Lew et al., 2021). This shows that identity is something that is actively 'done' through style, not just something that is 'owned' from birth. This approach is an important basis in this study to analyze how Holmes strategically utilizes the power of his language to dominate the space of interaction.

To expand on the idea of stylistic practice, it is important to distinguish between 'style' as a decorative element and 'style' as a social tool. In the Third Wave, style is not the aesthetic result of a literary text, but rather a functional mechanism in social semiotics. Style choices are closely related to the speaker's ability to overcome the limitations of their social and historical environment (Bentein, 2024). For Sherlock Holmes, this means that his 'genius' persona is not only described by the narrator, but also linguistically displayed through what calls 'style differentiation.' This process involves the selection of linguistic features that are deliberately different from the 'normal' speech of other characters, such as Dr. Watson or Scotland Yard officers. By creating this linguistic contrast, Holmes effectively creates a unique social space for himself as an intellectual elite. This differentiation becomes an important element in identity formation because it establishes boundaries between the 'self' and the 'other,' a concept that is crucial for understanding how fictional characters acquire social presence in a narrative.

The Third Wave approach introduced by Penelope Eckert brought about a major transformation in researchers' perspectives on the relationship between language and identity. At this stage, sociolinguistics no longer focused solely on 'who speaks and what they use', but rather on 'the goals that speakers want to achieve through the way they speak'. The concept of Style Practice became very important; language style was no longer seen as a factor influenced by social class, but as an independent factor that actively shaped social reality. Which investigated the role of speakers in a historical context, where language variation was used to reinforce the position of individuals in an ever-changing social structure.

In addition, the concept of Social Meaning in the Third Wave is not one-dimensional. A variation in language, such as the use of technical terms or certain accents, can have varying meanings depending on the 'persona' being constructed. As stated meaning in sociolinguistics

has an indexical nature, which refers to certain values such as intelligence, power, or closeness (Hall-Lew et al., 2021). In the analysis of Sherlock Holmes' character, this indexical nature is very important because Holmes often uses scientific language not only for accuracy, but also to create an impression of 'cognitive superiority' in front of his interlocutors, a stylistic practice that transcends the boundaries of conventional sociolinguistics.

To better understand how linguistic variation functions as a tool in identity formation, it is important to delve into the concept of isochronicism. Isochronism, as a key principle of the Third Wave, suggests that linguistic forms do not have fixed meanings; rather, their meanings are negotiated through social practice. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, a linguistic variable such as the use of complex Latinate vocabulary serves as an indicator of 'scientific authority' when speaking to Inspector Lestrade, but can become an indicator of 'social distance' or even 'arrogance' when interacting with a suspect from a lower social class.

This flexibility illustrates describes as 'ixical order,' in which linguistic signs indicate social type. In addition, the social meaning of Holmes's variations is not only about identifying his class, but also about 'taking a stance' (Ullah & Arshad, 2023). Taking a stance refers to how the speaker shows his relationship to his own speech and to his interlocutor. When Holmes uses a very formal and detached style of language, he is not just speaking; he is taking a stance of epistemic superiority. This linguistic stance is what constructs the persona of the 'consulting detective' as an outsider with knowledge that others do not possess. By analyzing Holmes from this perspective, we can see that his identity is a collection of attitudes that are consistently displayed through his choices of marked and unmarked linguistic variables.

Sherlock Holmes has long attracted the attention of academics due to his intellectual and psychological complexity, as well as his communication style. This figure not only serves as a criminal puzzle solver, but also as a symbol of rationality, eccentricity, and epistemic authority. Tracing Sherlock Holmes' cultural footprint reveals his widespread influence on the landscape of literature, tourism, and popular culture (Manola et al., 2023). Although various studies have highlighted narrative and thematic aspects, in-depth exploration of identity construction through linguistic variation is still relatively limited. In fact, Sherlock Holmes' speech displays a dynamic spectrum of language styles, ranging from high formality to sharp irony. These variations have the potential to reflect social position, interpersonal attitudes, and strategies of symbolic domination. Third-wave analysis allows these variations to be read as practices of identity, rather than mere stylistic features. This approach promises a sharper understanding of how characters construct themselves through language.

Studies on linguistic variation in narrative products have developed through research on style, politeness, and code-switching (Damayanti et al., 2024). A study of the film *Enola Holmes* shows the connection between style and the representation of power relations between characters (Hartika & Ardianto, 2024). Similar findings emerge in the analysis of language style in the same film, which confirms that linguistic choices serve as markers of personality and social attitudes (Hafizh & Widiensyah, 2025).

Discussions about character identity through language have been further enriched by comparative studies between classic and modern adaptations. For example, work on the film *Enola Holmes* highlights how politeness strategies and language style are used to depict power relations in a more modern Victorian setting (Hartika & Ardianto, 2024). Although their research provides a basis for understanding linguistic power, its main focus is more on interpersonal politeness than on broader professional persona construction. Similarly, identifies markers of personality in linguistic choices but does not analyze these markers as strategic symbolic capital

(Wandy & Fitriana, 2024). Therefore, this study expands on previous findings by shifting the focus from 'what' the characters say to 'how' their stylistic variations function strategically to dominate the interaction space.

By integrating the findings regarding code-switching as an ideological strategy, this study argues that Holmes' register shifts are not merely situational adaptations, but ideological maneuvers intended to maintain his epistemic authority (Ullah & Arshad, 2023). By addressing this specific gap, this research offers a more in-depth reading of Holmes, not only as a detective, but also as an expert in sociolinguistic manipulation. Research on identity formation through language has reached various new media platforms that add to our understanding of persona flexibility. An investigation on language diversity in social media such as TikTok shows that modern users consciously change language elements to create a certain self-image for their followers (Djamareng & Abdullah, 2024).

Although the platforms are different, the psycholinguistic mechanisms used by social media users today are similar to the language strategies used by fictional characters such as Sherlock Holmes to build their professional image. The connection between analyzing 19th-century characters through a modern sociolinguistic perspective is further clarified by the similarities seen in the formation of digital identities today. Although prioritize the fast-paced and multimodal environment of TikTok, the underlying semiotic process is very similar to Conan Doyle's narrative strategy. Both involve the selection of specific linguistic 'pieces' to present a desired self-image. In the digital age, a user might use 'corporate jargon' to appear professional or 'internet slang' to appear familiar. In the same way, Holmes uses 'forensic jargon' to demonstrate authority. This cross-temporal comparison reveals a fundamental truth about human communication: that identity is a project.

Whether in Victorian novels or social media feeds, speakers use linguistic variation to regulate how their 'audience' perceives them. By extending the analysis to include these modern parallels, this study goes beyond simple literary analysis and contributes to a broader understanding of 'style practices' across different media and eras. It confirms that the Third Wave is not only a method for studying spoken dialects, but also a powerful framework for understanding any form of representational identity.

On the other hand, studies of the main characters in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's works, especially the novel *The Valley of Fear*, underline the close relationship between the psychological structure of characters and their choice of language (Pusparani, 2025). However, many of these studies still focus on the linear relationship between personality and style, without examining how style is used as a tool to navigate social power in interactions. This research aims to address this gap by positioning Holmes as a 'sociolinguistic actor' who utilizes language variation as symbolic capital to dominate the space of interaction, a perspective that is often overlooked in purely literary studies. Outside the realm of literature, research on code-switching in print media also reveals the role of language variation as an ideological strategy (Ullah & Arshad, 2023). Research on chatbot language design also confirms that linguistic variation influences users' perceptions of digital characters (Chaves et al., 2022). These findings indicate that linguistic variation is always linked to the formation of social meaning. However, most studies still focus on categories of variation rather than on the process of identity construction as a social practice. This study aims to bridge this gap.

Finally, the creation of identity in Sherlock Holmes' work is a clear example of how social meaning is layered in professional discourse. Point out in their research on digital character design, perceptions of a character's competence are directly related to the consistency and

variety of their language (Chaves et al., 2022). In Holmes' case, his identity as a 'consulting detective', a title he created himself, requires constant linguistic reinforcement. Every technical term, every sharp quip, and every formal greeting contributes to the semiotic network that maintains his authority.

If we consider the broader implications of this sociolinguistic pattern, we can see that Holmes' identity is not a static portrait provided by Doyle, but rather a lived experience negotiated through each dialogue. This study proposes that by applying the Third Wave Train framework, we can uncover the complex layers of this negotiation. It is not enough to simply say that Holmes is intelligent; we must investigate how he uses language to convince his world of his intelligence. This approach changes the way we read classic literature, shifting from passive consumption of characters to active analysis of linguistic agency and social performance (Natyakalyana & Tambunana, 2024).

The synthesis of these various perspectives leads to an important understanding of language agents in literary texts. Language agents refer to the ability of characters to act in their social world through deliberate expression. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, this agency is the main driver of the story; without his ability to argue, think more clearly, and stand out from his peers, the image of the 'genius' would collapse. This study acknowledges that analyzing such agents requires a framework as flexible as the characters themselves, making the Third Wave a crucial tool. By placing this analysis within the broader academic discourse at the Prima Bangsa Institute (IPB) in Cirebon, this study aims to encourage a more integrated approach between formal linguistics and literary interpretation.

This research challenges the traditional boundaries that often separate technical language studies from creative literary studies, proposing that these two disciplines are inseparable in shaping social meaning. Ultimately, this exploration serves as evidence of Sherlock Holmes' enduring power as a subject of research, showing that even after more than a century, his voice continues to provide deep insights into the complex relationship between how we speak and who we are.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the construction of Sherlock Holmes' identity through linguistic variation based on third-wave sociolinguistic readings. The focus is on how forms of linguistic variation function as semiotic resources for the formation of the detective's persona. The analysis not only traces the types of variation, but also the social meanings attached to each linguistic choice. This approach treats language as a practice, not merely a system. The results of this study are expected to enrich linguistic literary studies, particularly at the intersection between sociolinguistics and character studies. Furthermore, this research contributes to a new understanding of the relevance of third wave theory to literary text analysis. The proposed conceptual framework can serve as a reference for similar research on other fictional characters. Through this approach, Sherlock Holmes' identity can be understood as a dynamic construction that is continuously negotiated through language.

Method

This study employs a third-wave sociolinguistic descriptive qualitative design to examine the construction of Sherlock Holmes' identity through patterns of linguistic variation. Drawing on third-wave sociolinguistic theory, which conceptualizes language variation as a meaningful social practice, the study analyzes how specific linguistic choices are strategically used to index social meanings and character traits. Rather than treating linguistic features as merely reflective of social categories, this approach emphasizes how Holmes' identity is actively constructed and

performed through language use in interaction. By adopting a qualitative descriptive method, the research provides an in-depth interpretation of linguistic patterns within the narrative context, highlighting the relationship between language, agency, and identity representation in literary discourse.

The primary data consist of Sherlock Holmes' utterances drawn from canonical literary texts as well as selected audiovisual adaptations that foreground intense and interactionally rich dialogic exchanges. These data sources were deliberately selected to represent both written and performed realizations of Holmes' linguistic style, enabling a comparative examination of how linguistic variation operates across media. By incorporating literary dialogue and audiovisual performances, the study captures not only lexical and syntactic choices embedded in the narrative text but also prosodic features, timing, gesture, and interactional dynamics present in performed discourse. This multi-modal data selection allows the analysis to account for how Holmes' identity is constructed and negotiated not solely through textual representation, but also through embodied, contextual, and interactional performances. As a result, the study offers a more comprehensive understanding of identity construction by illustrating how linguistic meaning is shaped through the interplay of language, performance, and medium.

Data collection was conducted using documentation and textual observation techniques, involving close reading of the written texts and systematic viewing of the audiovisual materials. These procedures were combined with purposive sampling to identify linguistically salient segments relevant to the research objectives. The analysis focuses specifically on utterances that involve deductive reasoning, interpersonal negotiation, and explicit expressions of attitude, as these interactional contexts provide particularly rich evidence of stance-taking and stylistic positioning. By examining these recurrent communicative situations, the study seeks to demonstrate that Holmes' identity emerges dynamically through interactional practice, rather than being treated as a fixed or inherent textual attribute.

The analysis integrates discourse analysis with pragmatic interpretation procedures to systematically identify recurring lexical, syntactic, and formulaic patterns in Holmes' utterances. To support the organization of these patterns, a computationally inspired categorization approach was applied in a limited and heuristic manner, primarily to assist in grouping language variations rather than to generate quantitative claims. The analytical process proceeded through several stages, including initial coding of salient linguistic features, the grouping of these features into stylistic and functional categories, and interpretive mapping that links specific linguistic patterns to identity-related functions such as authority, alignment, and social positioning. Analytical validity was ensured through iterative cycles of close reading and re-analysis, as well as theoretical triangulation with established studies in language style, pragmatics, and identity construction.

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach employing content analysis to examine the primary data drawn from *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. This approach is used to provide an in-depth and systematic interpretation of linguistic features embedded in the narrative, with particular attention to how patterns of language use contribute to the construction of character identity. Through content analysis, the study identifies, categorizes, and interprets recurring linguistic forms, stylistic choices, and interactional strategies present in the text. Rather than quantifying linguistic elements, the analysis emphasizes contextual meaning and social significance, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how Sherlock Holmes' identity is represented and performed through discourse. This

qualitative design enables the researcher to explore the relationship between language, narrative context, and identity construction within the literary framework.

The research procedure follows four systematic stages. First, data collection involves identifying, collecting, and transcribing dialogues produced by the character Sherlock Holmes throughout the novel. Second, data reduction is conducted by selecting dialogue excerpts that are analytically relevant, particularly those illustrating register variation and directive patterns. Third, data display is achieved by organizing the selected data into functional categories informed by persona theory, allowing for clearer pattern recognition and comparison. Finally, conclusions are drawn through Third Wave sociolinguistic interpretation, focusing on how linguistic variation operates as a social resource in the construction of character identity.

Results

The findings of this study are presented as recurring patterns of linguistic variation that collectively shape the construction of Sherlock Holmes' identity. Analysis of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* demonstrates that Holmes' identity is not a fixed or inherent character trait embedded in the narrative, but rather a performative achievement that emerges through his strategic use of language across different interactional contexts. Variations in Holmes' lexical choices, syntactic structures, and pragmatic strategies function as resources for enacting authority, intelligence, detachment, and social positioning. These linguistic patterns shift according to interlocutors and situational demands, indicating that identity is dynamically produced through discourse rather than statically assigned. By foregrounding language as social action, the findings underscore that Holmes' identity is continuously constructed, negotiated, and reinforced through interaction, aligning with third-wave sociolinguistic perspectives on identity as an emergent and context-sensitive practice.

An assessment of Sherlock Holmes' dialogues in selected stories in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* reveals important patterns of linguistic intent. Through the data collection process, a total of 45 relevant utterances were identified as indicators of stylistic practice. This data was then grouped into three main patterns of variation: (1) Technical-Scientific Registration, (2) Formal-Institutional Attitude, and (3) Vernacular-Adaptive Change.

The results indicate that Holmes does not employ a single, uniform way of speaking across all contexts; rather, his linguistic choices vary systematically in accordance with the communicative purpose of the interaction and the particular social identity he seeks to project. These variations are reflected in his selection of lexical items, syntactic constructions, and pragmatic strategies, which shift depending on whether he is engaging in deductive reasoning, asserting authority, managing interpersonal relations, or displaying detachment. Such patterned variation demonstrates that Holmes' speech is strategically adapted to different interactional demands, reinforcing the view that identity is dynamically constructed through language use. The overall distribution and defining characteristics of these linguistic patterns are summarized in Table 1 below, providing a structured overview of how specific forms of variation contribute to the performance of Holmes' identity.

Table 1. Trends of Language Change in Holmes' Development of Identity

Linguistic Evidence (Data)	Source Story	Linguistic Category	Persona Constructed
"It was the bisulphate of baryta."	A Case of Identity	Technical Register	Scientific Authority
"I am a consulting detective, the only one in the world."	The Sign of Four	Professional Jargon	Unique Expert
"Your Majesty has not spoken yet."	A Scandal in Bohemia	High Formal Register	Respectful yet Equal

Linguistic Evidence (Data)	Source Story	Linguistic Category	Persona Constructed
"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data."	A Scandal in Bohemia	Analytical/Axiomatic	Rational Thinker
"You see, but you do not observe."	A Scandal in Bohemia	Philosophical/Didactic	Intellectual Mentor
"Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead."	The Red-Headed League	Forensic Observation	Expert Observer
"I lent the ostlers a hand in rubbing down their horses..."	A Scandal in Bohemia	Vernacular/Action-Oriented	Working-Class Persona
"Received in exchange twopence, a glass of half and half..."	A Scandal in Bohemia	Undercover Register	Commoner Identity
"Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly."	The Red-Headed League	Imperative/Commanding	Strategic Leader
"My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know."	The Blue Carbuncle	Assertive Self-Identification	Epistemic Authority
"Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons, with the greatest for the last."	The Red Circle	Poetic/Formal Register	Sage/Philosopher
"The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come!"	Abbey Grange	Urgent/Directive	Man of Action
"I think, Watson, that as the iron is hot, I will strike."	The Stockbroker's Clerk	Metaphorical/Idiomatic	Decisive Persona
"It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience..."	The Speckled Band	Experience-Based Stance	Senior Professional
"I have no doubt that I am very annoying to you."	The Beryl Coronet	Sarcastic/Ironical Stance	Cognitive Superiority

The first pattern identified is the dominant use of technical and forensic terms (Data 1, 6, 10). Interpreting these results through the lens of Third Wave, it is clear that Holmes uses specialized vocabulary not only for accuracy, but also as a "style distinction". By using terms such as "baryta bisulfate," Holmes creates a separation between himself and the layman. This choice of language functions as a tool of symbolic domination, in which the speaker establishes a hierarchy of knowledge. Holmes not only possesses intelligence, but he demonstrates it by choosing signs that indicate "scientific authority."

This study links psychological findings with socio-style theory by demonstrating how internal cognitive processes are manifested through observable linguistic behavior. While previous research emphasizes the internal cognitive stability of characters, such as consistent reasoning patterns and psychological coherence, this study argues that such stability does not remain purely internal but is externally realized through attitude taking, namely the way characters position themselves and others in interaction. Evidence from Data 4 and 14 illustrates that Holmes repeatedly adopts an epistemic stance, a stance of authoritative knowing that constructs him as intellectually superior while simultaneously positioning his interlocutors in subordinate epistemic roles.

Through this patterned stance-taking, Holmes' psychological stability becomes socially legible and interactionally meaningful. This integration of psychological characterization and socio-style theory confirms that character development in literary texts is not merely narrative or thematic, but fundamentally a linguistic process through which characters accumulate symbolic capital and reinforce authority and social power within the fictional world (Pusparani, 2025; Hall-Lew, 2021).

An important new finding in this study is the observation of “Style Chameleonism,” as evidenced in Data 7 and 8. Earlier scholarship, particularly those aligned with a First Wave sociolinguistic perspective, has tended to portray Holmes as a static upper-middle-class figure whose linguistic behavior consistently reflects his social background. However, this study reveals a significant revision to existing character theory by demonstrating that Holmes actively exploits the rigid Victorian class system as a repertoire of semiotic resources rather than as a fixed determinant of identity.

When adopting disguises, Holmes strategically shifts into everyday, non-elite language forms, signaling an intentional reconfiguration of social alignment. This stylistic shifting illustrates that identity functions as an ongoing “project” that can be strategically constructed and reconstructed, rather than as an inherited “destiny.” Such flexibility enables Holmes to traverse social boundaries that were typically impermeable within 19th-century social structures, positioning him not only as a master of disguise, but also as a pioneer of a more fluid, modern conception of identity

Conclusion

This study concludes that Sherlock Holmes’ character identity is a dynamic and performative achievement rather than a fixed psychological trait. Through a Third Wave sociolinguistic perspective, the findings demonstrate that Holmes strategically employs three dominant linguistic practices: the use of technical and scientific language to assert intellectual authority, stylistic adaptability to navigate the rigid social hierarchies of Victorian society, and a strong epistemic stance to maintain professional dominance in interaction. These patterns of linguistic variation function as semiotic resources through which Holmes actively negotiates his social positioning as an elite intellectual detective. Theoretically, these findings extend existing character theories by demonstrating that identity in classical literature can be analyzed as an ongoing linguistic project embedded in social meaning-making. This perspective challenges traditional literary interpretations that prioritize psychological depth or narrative function while overlooking the role of language variation in shaping character authority and symbolic capital. From a practical standpoint, this research provides a methodological and conceptual framework for students and researchers at IPB Cirebon to bridge literary analysis with sociolinguistic theory. By applying a Third Wave approach, literary texts can be reinterpreted as sites of social practice, enabling richer interdisciplinary analysis and offering new pedagogical possibilities for the study of language, literature, and identity.

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. The analysis is centered on a single canonical character and a limited selection of texts, which may restrict the scope and generalizability of the conclusions. Moreover, the qualitative interpretive approach, while theoretically informed, relies on close reading and contextual judgment that may invite alternative interpretations. Future research is therefore encouraged to expand the corpus to include multiple characters, genres, or cultural contexts in order to test the broader applicability of Third Wave sociolinguistic frameworks. Further studies may also integrate corpus-based, quantitative, or multimodal approaches to complement qualitative analysis and to explore how linguistic identity construction operates across different media, historical periods, and narrative traditions.

Acknowledgment

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