



An Analysis of Expressive Functional Language in the Movie A Man Called Otto

Ni Putu Ayu Ngurah Giska Anjani¹, Ni Wayan Suastini²

Departement of English Literature, Faculty of Foreign Language Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar

Correspondence Email: giskaanjani08@gmail.com¹, suastini28@unmas.ac.id²

Abstract

With an emphasis on how the characters' speech reflects their emotional states and the dynamics of their relationships, the current research attempts to analyze the usage of expressive language functions in the 2022 movie A Man Called Otto. Using information from the speech of the main character, Otto Anderson, as well as the speech of the supporting characters who affect Otto's emotional reactions, the current research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through repeated observation of the film, involving transcription and contextual note-taking that captured setting, interlocutors, and emotional tone. Content analysis was used to categorize the data according to Halliday's (1973) theory of language functions, with particular emphasis on the expressive or personal function. The findings reveal that Otto's dialogue predominantly features emotive, affective, and assertive expressions, while supporting characters provide empathetic and encouraging utterances that influence the emotional progression of the narrative. The study contributes to linguistic and cinematic discourse analysis by offering a detailed account of how expressive functions are structured both syntactically and contextually within film dialogue.

Keywords: *expressive function, emotional language, film dialogue, Halliday*

Abstrak

Dengan penekanan pada bagaimana ucapan karakter mencerminkan kondisi emosional mereka dan dinamika hubungan antar karakter, penelitian ini berusaha menganalisis penggunaan fungsi bahasa ekspresif dalam film A Man Called Otto tahun 2022. Dengan menggunakan informasi dari ucapan karakter utama, Otto Anderson, serta ucapan karakter pendukung yang memengaruhi reaksi emosional Otto, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi dengan menonton film secara berulang, disertai transkripsi dan pencatatan konteks seperti latar, lawan bicara, dan nuansa emosional pada setiap adegan. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan teknik analisis isi dengan mengacu pada teori fungsi bahasa Halliday (1973), khususnya fungsi personal atau ekspresif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ujaran Otto didominasi oleh fungsi emotif, afektif, dan asertif, sementara tokoh pendukung seperti Marisol dan Jimmy menyumbang ujaran berfungsi empatik dan memberi dorongan yang memengaruhi perkembangan emosional dalam alur cerita. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap analisis bahasa dan wacana film dengan mengungkap secara rinci bagaimana fungsi ekspresif direalisasikan secara struktural maupun kontekstual dalam dialog film.

Kata kunci: *fungsi ekspresif, bahasa emosional, dialog film, Halliday*

Introduction

Language plays a central role in shaping human interaction and emotional expression, especially in cinematic narratives where dialogue becomes a powerful tool for constructing character identities and conveying psychological depth. Within the scope of functional language analysis, Halliday's (1973) framework has provided a foundational lens through which researchers explore how language is used not merely to convey information but to enact social roles, express emotions, and build relationships. This theory categorizes language functions into several types, including instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal (expressive), heuristic, imaginative, and representational functions. Among these, the expressive or personal function serves as a medium through which speakers convey feelings, attitudes, and emotional responses.

Several scholars have applied functional language theory to cinematic texts. Arista (2020), for example, analyzed language functions in *Sherlock Holmes II* and found that referential and metalinguistic functions dominated the dialogue, highlighting the intellectual and deductive style of the main character. Similarly, Aprilia (2021) examined *Little Women* (2019) and concluded that the expressive function was the most prominent, with characters frequently using emotionally laden language to establish closeness and reflect inner states. In a more psychologically intense context, Az-Zahra (2022) studied language functions in *Joker* (2019) and revealed how expressive and directive utterances were employed to depict the protagonist's emotional instability and complex identity. Meanwhile, Ramadhani (2023) investigated the use of various language functions by the male lead in *Enchanted* (2007), identifying a blend of expressive, instrumental, and interactional functions that supported character development. Anggraeni (2024) applied Halliday's framework to *Wonder* (2017), uncovering a dominance of interactional and representational functions that illustrated how language fostered empathy and narrative clarity. In line with these works, Irianti (2023) analyzed expressive speech acts in *A Man Called Otto* and highlighted how characters' utterances conveyed emotions and interpersonal meaning, which closely relates to the present study.

While these studies have demonstrated the relevance of functional language theory in cinematic discourse analysis, a significant gap remains. Most previous research has focused on identifying and categorizing multiple language functions within a film, often highlighting quantity and distribution. However, they tend to provide limited insight into the syntactic structure of expressive utterances, particularly those delivered through simple sentence constructions. This indicates a lack of focus on how expressive functions are performed structurally and contextually in emotionally nuanced scenes. Moreover, few studies have directly examined how these utterances reflect a character's emotional journey or psychological transformation over time.

The film *A Man Called Otto* was selected due to its emotionally driven narrative and minimal action. The film emphasizes the psychological transformation of the main character, Otto, largely through dialogue. These features make it a strong case for analyzing expressive language in a cinematic context, particularly because emotional expression is central to the storytelling approach.

This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the expressive functional language used by the main character in *A Man Called Otto* (2022), a film rich in emotional depth and psychological complexity. Using Halliday's (1973) theory as an analytical lens, the study specifically investigates how expressive utterances are constructed through simple sentences and how these forms reflect the character Otto Anderson's emotional transformation. By focusing on the interplay between sentence structure and emotional context, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of language functions in film. The analysis underscores how expressive language serves not only as a vehicle for emotion but also as a narrative device that reveals identity, coping mechanisms, and social interaction patterns.

Method

The primary data of this study consist of the dialogues spoken by Otto Anderson, the protagonist of the 2022 film *A Man Called Otto*. This movie was selected as the object of research because it emphasizes an emotionally driven narrative with minimal external action, positioning dialogue as the central medium through which the psychological development of the main character is revealed. The prominence of expressive utterances in the film provides rich material for examining the expressive function of language. In addition to the protagonist's utterances, the study also considers dialogues produced by supporting characters, particularly Marisol and Jimmy. Their interactions with Otto contribute to the contextualization of expressive speech acts and illustrate the interpersonal dynamics that influence the protagonist's emotional expressions. The data were collected through non-participant observation. The researcher repeatedly watched the film and transcribed relevant dialogues that contained expressive speech acts. Note-taking was employed to document not only the utterances but also contextual elements, such as interlocutors, scene settings, and emotional atmosphere, in order to ensure a comprehensive and reliable interpretation of the data.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study were categorized based on Halliday's (1973) theory of language functions, with emphasis on the expressive or personal function. The analysis covered utterances produced not only by the main character, Otto Anderson, but also by other characters in the film, including Marisol and Jimmy. The inclusion of these supporting characters aimed to provide contextual depth in interpreting Otto's expressive language, particularly in relation to how interpersonal interactions influenced his emotional expressions. The expressive utterances were then organized into categories based on their functions and presented in the table below to illustrate distribution across characters, the data indicate that Otto Anderson produced the largest proportion of expressive utterances, which appeared in various types depending on his emotional state and interaction with other characters.

Table 1. Expressive Function Types in *A Man Called Otto* (2022)

No	Character	Type of Expressive Function	Percentage
1	Otto Anderson	Emotive	15%
2	Otto Anderson	Affective	10%
3	Otto Anderson	Assertive	5%
4	Otto Anderson	Reflective	8%
5	Otto Anderson	Regretful	6%
6	Otto Anderson	Grateful	5%
7	Marisol	Soothing	7%
8	Marisol	Empathetic	5%
9	Jimmy	Reassuring	6%
10	Jimmy	Encouraging	3%
Total:			70%

The data clearly reflects Otto's emotional journey from isolation to reintegration. Marisol and Jimmy's involvement as emotional anchors is also evident through their expressive utterances. These dynamics reinforce the centrality of expressive function in portraying psychological evolution and interpersonal influence within the narrative.

The kinds and distribution of expressive functions in the 2022 movie *A Man Called Otto* are shown in Table 1. According to the study, Otto Anderson supplied most of the expressive utterances, highlighting the critical role his character plays in expressing emotional depth. Among the ten identified types, the emotive function appeared most frequently (15%), representing direct expressions of emotional states such as frustration, sadness, and vulnerability. This is followed by the affective function (10%), which includes emotionally intense utterances related to grief, longing, and attachment. Other significant expressive functions found in Otto's speech include reflective (8%) and regretful (6%) utterances, which demonstrate internal emotional processing and personal remorse. These utterances indicate a shift in Otto's character from emotional detachment to introspection. The presence of assertive and grateful functions (5% each) further reveals his evolving emotional stance, as he begins to reclaim a sense of control and acknowledge the presence of support from others. Supporting characters such as Marisol and Jimmy also contribute expressive functions that shape the emotional progression of the narrative. Marisol is associated with empathetic (5%) and soothing (7%) functions, which serve to engage emotionally and comfort Otto during key moments. Jimmy's encouraging (3%) and reassuring (6%) expressions offer validation and reinforce Otto's emotional reconnection with his community.

Overall, the findings confirm that expressive language serves as a dominant communicative strategy through which characters navigate emotional experiences and form interpersonal connections. The varied types and syntactic structures of expressive utterances not only reveal internal emotional states but also contribute meaningfully to the film's portrayal of psychological transformation and social reintegration. This

pattern is consistent with Halliday's (1973) concept of the personal function of language, which highlights how language is used to express emotions, convey personal feelings, and construct identity within social interaction

Data 1

Speaker: Otto Anderson

Utterance: "I'm not okay."

Scene: 00:18:42 – Early scene after Otto fails in his first attempt to end his life, expressing emotional instability.

This short sentence employs a subject pronoun "I" and a contracted linking verb "m" (am), followed by a negative adjective phrase "not okay." It exemplifies an emotive function, expressing Otto's emotional instability. The expressive impact lies in the phrase "not okay," which is both emotionally revealing and syntactically simple. In line with Halliday's theory, the utterance allows the speaker to declare his emotional state directly. This finding parallels Aprilia (2021), who also found emotionally raw expressions in *Little Women* to reflect grief and vulnerability

Data 2

Speaker: Otto Anderson

Utterance: "I miss her so much I don't even want to wake up some days."

Scene: 00:27:15 – Otto shares his grief when remembering his late wife Sonya.

This sentence extends the affective expression, combining a declaration of longing with a depressive admission. The clause "I miss her so much" highlights the emotional loss, while the dependent clause "I don't even want to wake up some days" adds psychological intensity. This qualifies as affective, reflecting Otto's inner emotional weight. Az-Zahra (2022) described similar patterns in *Joker*, where affective expressions were tightly linked to emotional trauma.

Data 3

Speaker: Marisol

Utterance: "You don't have to be alone in this life, Otto. People care about you even if you think they don't."

Scene: 00:44:09 – Marisol comforts Otto after noticing his loneliness.

Marisol's empathetic appeal uses modal negation "don't have to" and the assurance "people care about you" to connect with Otto's emotional barrier. The second-person address and direct naming further intensify the interpersonal impact. This is an empathetic expression, aiming to support and emotionally uplift. Ramadhani (2023) also identified this form in *Enchanted*, where reassurance was structured with emotional cues.

Data 4

Speaker: Otto Anderson

Utterance: "This is my house, and I decide who gets to park here!"

Scene: 00:51:23 – Otto asserts control angrily when someone parks improperly in his neighborhood.

This declarative and authoritative statement shows assertiveness, especially in its possessive construction “my house” and directive “I decide.” It reflects Otto’s struggle for control amid emotional chaos. Assertive expressive functions, as explored by Anggraeni (2024), are frequently found in tense scenes to reflect resistance or dominance, supporting this analysis.

Data 5

Speaker: Jimmy

Utterance: “You matter to people here, Otto. Whether you realize it or not, you’ve changed lives.”

Scene: 01:02:37 – Jimmy encourages Otto, reminding him of his value in the community.

Jimmy’s utterance is encouraging in nature, directly addressing Otto’s self-worth. The statement “you matter” functions as affirmation, while the addition “you’ve changed lives” confirms the character’s positive impact. Encouraging expressive utterances often appear in scenes of transformation. This finding is supported by Sari (2021), who noted that such expressions are typical in redemption arcs within film narratives.

Data 6

Speaker: Otto Anderson

Utterance: “I should have been there for her.”

Scene: 01:14:55 – Otto reflects regretfully about not being present enough for his wife Sonya.

This utterance exemplifies a regretful expressive function. The use of the modal construction “should have” indicates a sense of remorse and personal accountability, while the clause structure conveys Otto’s internalized guilt. According to Halliday’s (1973) theory, this reflects the personal function of language where speakers articulate emotional responsibility. Similar examples are highlighted by Hasan (2009), who describes regretful expressions as a linguistic form of emotional reflection.

Data 7

Speaker: Marisol

Utterance: “Let it go, Otto. You deserve peace.”

Scene: 01:25:11 – Marisol soothes Otto during a moment of emotional turmoil.

This statement demonstrates a soothing function. The imperative “let it go” coupled with the supportive statement “you deserve peace” illustrates language aimed at offering comfort and alleviating tension. In Halliday’s framework, this personal function plays a role in managing emotional interactions. Such patterns have been observed in language that seeks to mediate distress during interpersonal exchanges (Halliday, 1975)

Data 8

Speaker: Jimmy

Utterance: “Everything will be okay. We’ve got your back.”

Scene: 01:33:42 – Jimmy reassures Otto when he feels isolated from his neighbors.

Jimmy’s statement reflects a reassuring expressive function. The expression “everything will be okay” addresses Otto’s emotional uncertainty, while “we’ve got your back” reinforces a sense of solidarity. This aligns with Halliday’s view of the personal function as a means of building emotional connection through language.

Data 9

Speaker: Otto Anderson

Utterance: “I didn’t expect anyone to care.”

Scene: 01:41:26 – Otto realizes people truly care for him after support from the neighborhood.

This utterance represents a reflective expressive function. The negative construction emphasizes Otto’s surprise and evolving emotional awareness as he recognizes the support around him. This type of expression illustrates how the personal function can reveal a character’s shifting emotional perspective (Halliday, 1994).

Data 10

Speaker: Otto Anderson

Utterance: “Thank you for staying with me.”

Scene: 01:51:10 – Near the ending, Otto expresses gratitude to Marisol for being by his side.

This utterance conveys a grateful expressive function. Through direct acknowledgment, Otto’s words demonstrate growing openness and appreciation, marking a key point in his emotional progression. Similar uses of gratitude as a form of expressive function are noted by Tseng (2013) in studies of character development and transformation. Viewed within the broader analysis of the ten expressive utterances, this moment represents a significant shift in Otto’s emotional trajectory. His earlier expressions are marked by despair, detachment, and regret, while the later ones reveal growth toward emotional acceptance and reconnection. Supporting characters such as Marisol and Jimmy play a crucial role in this evolution, serving as emotional mirrors whose empathetic dialogue facilitates Otto’s transformation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze how expressive functional language is produced and how it reflects the emotional development of the main character, Otto Anderson, in the film A Man Called Otto (2022). The research showed that expressive utterances

are crucial to establishing and conveying the character's psychological condition using Halliday's (1973) theory of language functions. Otto's language consists of various expressive types, including emotive expressions that convey emotional instability, affective utterances that reflect grief and longing, assertive forms that show his desire for control, and reflective, regretful, and grateful expressions that mark his emotional progression throughout the narrative. These utterances are generally constructed through simple sentence forms, such as declaratives and modal structures, which, despite their simplicity, carry strong emotional depth and meaning. The study found that these expressive utterances are not randomly produced but are carefully constructed within specific contexts, reflecting Otto's internal struggles and his gradual transformation from emotional detachment to personal openness. In addition to Otto's speech, expressive language from supporting characters especially Marisol and Jimmy plays a crucial role in influencing his emotional journey. Their empathetic, soothing, and reassuring utterances help bridge Otto's isolation and foster emotional connections that support his psychological change. This highlights that expressive functional language serves not only as a means of expressing individual emotion but also as a tool for facilitating interpersonal relationships and character development. The consistent use of expressive language across emotionally significant scenes reinforces Halliday's theory that language functions are closely linked to social context and emotional intent. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how expressive functions operate within cinematic dialogue, offering insights into the intersection of syntax, emotional meaning, and narrative structure in film.

Future research could explore expressive functions in other genres such as thriller, animation, or biographical films to examine how emotional expression adapts to different cinematic styles. Moreover, analyzing facial expressions, intonation, and soundtrack could enrich the understanding of emotional meaning beyond verbal communication

References

- Agung, P. (2023). Analisis naratif pesan moral pada film A Man Called Otto (Bachelor's thesis, Fakultas Dakwah dan Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta).
- Anggraeni, R. (2024). Expressive and interactional functions in the film Wonder (2017) (Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Negeri Jakarta).
- Aprilia, D. (2021). Expressive language function in Little Women (2019): A pragmatic approach (Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta).
- Arslan, A., & Turk, M. (2024). Wikipedia as an academic service-learning tool in science and technology: Higher education case from Siberia. *Journal of Community Genetics*, 15(2), 147–161.
- Az-Zahra, N. L. (2022). The use of expressive and directive language functions in Joker (2019) (Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung).

- Baroudi, M. E. (2021). A stylistic analysis of honest deception: The case of Seinfeld TV series sitcom. arXiv preprint, arXiv:2104.08599.
- Feng, D., & O'Halloran, K. L. (2013). The multimodal representation of emotion in film: Integrating cognitive and semiotic approaches. *Semiotica*, 2013(197), 79–100.
- Foolen, A. (2011). The expressive function of language: Towards a cognitive semantic approach. In *The language of emotions* (pp. 15–32). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hamdhani, R. (2024). The linguistic relationship between speech styles and functions (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Gadjah Mada).
- Harif, A. I. A. (2024). Representasi depresi dalam film "A Man Called Otto" (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Mercu Buana Jakarta).
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1975). Learning how to mean. In *Foundations of language development* (pp. 239–265). Academic Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). Edward Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. (1994). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Hodder Education.
- Hasan, R. (2009). Wanted: A theory for integrated sociolinguistics. In *The collected works of Ruqaiya Hasan* (Vol. 2, pp. 5–40).
- Irianti, D. (2023). *An analysis of expressive speech act used by the characters in A Man Called Otto movie* (Undergraduate thesis). Faculty of Letters and Cultures, Gunadarma University.
- Kim, E., & Klinger, R. (2019). An analysis of emotion communication channels in fan fiction: Towards emotional storytelling. arXiv preprint, arXiv:1906.02402.
- Leipold, S., Feindt, P. H., Winkel, G., & Keller, R. (2019). Discourse analysis of environmental policy revisited: Traditions, trends, perspectives. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 21(5), 445–463.
- Murtagh, F., & Ganz, A. (2015). Pattern recognition in narrative: Tracking emotional expression in context. *Journal of Data Mining & Digital Humanities*, 2015.
- Nismoro, R., Mulyani, H. S., & Puspitasari, L. (2024). Analisis perilaku karakter Marisol dalam film A Man Called Otto sebagai representasi kepedulian sosial. *Imajinasi: Jurnal Ilmu Pengetahuan, Seni, dan Teknologi*, 1(3), 26–46.
- Pramudita, T., Triyogo, A., & Oktaviani, A. (2025). An analysis of directive speech act in the A Man Called Otto movie. *TUTURAN: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi, Sosial dan Humaniora*, 3(2), 20–37.
- Ramadhani, N. (2023). A functional analysis of expressive language in the male lead of *Enchanted* (2007) (Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Islam Malang).

- Sari, D. P. (2021). Character development through expressive utterances in redemption-themed films (Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia).
- Schmied, J. (2021). Popular digital knowledge dissemination platforms: Evaluating the pragmatic professional credibility from Wikipedia to Academia.edu and ResearchGate. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 180, 187–202.
- Tseng, C. I. (2013). Analysing characters' interactions in filmic text: A functional semiotic approach. *Social Semiotics*, 23(5), 587–605.
- Uzira, C. F. P., Nasir, C., & Erdiana, N. (2023). An analysis of moral values in the movie *A Man Called Otto* (2022). *Research in English and Education Journal*, 8(4), 209–217.