

AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE DOMAIN USED BY MAIN CHARACTERS IN *THE CHILDE* MOVIE

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ABSTRACT

In a multilingual society, speakers tend to adjust their language use according to the social situations in which they interact. This study aims to analyze language domains and the factors underlying language differences in the movie *The Childe*. The data were collected from the dialogues of two main characters, Marco Han and the Childe. This research applies Fishman's (1972) language domain theory and employs a descriptive qualitative method. The findings reveal 34 utterances containing language domain features. The family domain consists of 2 utterances, all produced by Marco Han; the friendship domain includes 16 utterances, with 9 produced by Marco Han and 7 by the Childe; the employment domain contains 14 utterances, with 2 produced by Marco Han and 12 by the Childe; and the social domain consists of 2 utterances, produced equally by both characters. The analysis shows that language use in the movie varies depending on place, interlocutor, and situation. Furthermore, several factors influence language differences and domain formation, including the characters' background, setting, interlocutors, and the context and topic of interaction.

Keywords: *Language domain, Sociolinguistic, Multilingual, Movie.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Language is mostly used as a primary tool for communication among people and plays an essential role in understanding, expressing, and connecting human beings. Through language, individuals are able to convey ideas, emotions, intentions, and social identities. In everyday language use, speaking occurs more frequently than writing, as oral communication is the most immediate form of interaction in daily life. Wibowo (2001) defines language as a system of arbitrary and conventional symbols in the form of meaningful articulated sounds. This definition suggests that linguistic symbols, such as words or sounds, do not naturally represent their meanings; rather, their meanings are formed through collective agreement within a particular society or culture. As a result, language functions not only as a communicative system but also as a social and cultural construct.

In cross-cultural communication, language differences often lead to misunderstandings due to variations in social norms, values, and cultural practices. These differences can create pragmatic problems when speakers from different cultural backgrounds interact. However, such problems can be reduced by identifying and increasing awareness of pragmatic rules that govern language use in specific contexts. Language is therefore not limited to linguistic structures alone, but also involves inherited pragmatic knowledge and cultural understanding. For this reason, language is influenced by various factors, including cultural patterns, social norms, and the social background of speakers. People learn language through interaction within their immediate environment, such as family, friends, and community. For example, children generally acquire their first language at home through interaction with family members and later learn additional languages to communicate effectively in wider social settings.

In society, individuals tend to adjust their way of speaking according to the social situations they encounter. There are certain circumstances in which people carefully choose their words when interacting with specific groups or when communicating in particular places and conditions. This variation in language use reflects the speaker's awareness of social roles and relationships. In sociolinguistic studies, this phenomenon is known as language domain. Language domain refers to the context in which a particular language variety is used, depending on factors such as the participants, the setting, and the topic of communication. According to Labov (1972), domains such as home, workplace, and public spaces provide insight into how language adapts to different sociolinguistic environments. Language domains can also be understood as social groupings connected to specific situations, as language in society is always used in relation to the social roles of its speakers.

Since this research focuses on the study of language domains, limited studies have been found that specifically address this topic, particularly in the context of movies or television series. Nevertheless, several previous studies are relevant to this research. Farida and Mujianto (2020) examined the use of formal language in the educational domain and found that language choice is influenced by role relationships, place of interaction, and topic of conversation. Mawarni (2021) conducted a study in the home domain and revealed that children may use a second language more fluently than their first language due to the influence of technology and media exposure. This study also showed how children communicate with both native and non-native interlocutors using verbal and non-verbal strategies. In addition, Nahdi, Usuluddin, Irfan, and Mas'ud (2021) analyzed language ecology and domain use by comparing language resistance across different communities and found differences in language consistency within communication domains. These studies demonstrate the importance of language domain analysis while also indicating a research gap in audiovisual media contexts.

Based on the previous studies, this research is the first to examine language domains in the movie *The Childe* using Fishman's language domain theory. Although the previous studies applied qualitative approaches, they used different theoretical frameworks according to their research objects. These differences

highlight a gap that allows further exploration from an additional perspective. This study specifically focuses on language domains in a film context and examines how language is used by the main characters in *The Childe*. By analyzing language use in a movie, this research extends the application of language domain theory beyond traditional social settings.

The Childe is a 2023 South Korean neo-noir action thriller film directed by Park Hoon-jung. The story centers on a man born to a Korean father and a Filipino mother who aspires to become a professional boxer. In a desperate attempt to fund his mother's surgery, he travels to Korea to search for his father and becomes involved with dangerous individuals. The movie presents multiple perspectives through the viewpoints of two main characters, Marco Han and a mysterious nobleman known as the Childe. The film explores themes of trust, betrayal, and organized crime. The multicultural background of the main character significantly influences the storyline as well as the language used throughout the film. Marco Han is able to speak several languages, including Filipino, English, and Korean, which explains his use of different languages when interacting with different characters. This multilingual aspect makes the movie a rich source of data for sociolinguistic analysis.

This research aims to describe the language domains used by the main characters and to identify the factors underlying language differences in *The Childe*. A descriptive qualitative approach is employed in this study, using Fishman's (1972) theory of language domains, which includes the family domain, friendship domain, religion domain, employment domain, and education domain. The data are collected from conversations between characters in the movie. The utterances are then classified based on three main characteristics of language domain: location, participants, and topic. Through this analysis, the study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how language domains operate in a cinematic context.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze spoken utterances produced by the two main characters, Marco Han and the Childe, in the movie *The Childe* (2023). Qualitative methods are considered appropriate as they allow in-depth analysis of language use in its social and contextual settings (Creswell, 2013, 2017). The focus of the study is on language use, setting, and topic, which are examined descriptively using Fishman's (1972) theory of language domains. The data source is the movie *The Childe*, directed by Park Hoon-jung, with the data consisting of words, phrases, and sentences taken from the dialogues of the two main characters.

The researcher acts as the primary research instrument, collecting and analyzing data through repeated viewing of the movie and careful examination of the script. Data were collected by identifying utterances relevant to language domains and organizing them into tables. The analysis process involved grouping and classifying the utterances into five language domains based on addressee, setting, and topic, followed by interpretation using Fishman's framework. Finally,

the study identifies the factors underlying language domain differences and draws conclusions based on the findings.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study concerning language domains used by the two main characters in *The Childe* (2023), namely Marco Han and the Childe. The analysis is grounded in Fishman's (1972) theory of language domains, which conceptualizes language use as being shaped by institutionalized social contexts. The findings aim to answer the research questions regarding the types of language domains present in the movie and the factors underlying language variation across different interactions.

A total of 34 utterances containing language domain features were identified from the dialogues of the two main characters. Of these, 14 utterances were produced by Marco Han, while 20 utterances were produced by the Childe. The data are categorized into four domains: family, friendship, employment, and social domains. Although Fishman's framework originally proposes five domains, the religion and education domains were not found in the data, while an additional social domain emerged based on the interactional context of the movie. The distribution of domains demonstrates that language choice in *The Childe* is highly context-dependent and reflects sociolinguistic realities in multilingual and multicultural environments.

Family Domain

The family domain is the least frequent domain identified in this study, with only two utterances found, both produced by Marco Han. According to Fishman (1972), the family domain involves interactions among individuals who share blood relations or familial ties, and it is typically associated with domestic settings and emotionally significant topics. In *The Childe*, the family domain is represented through Marco's interactions with his biological father and half-sister, which form a crucial part of the narrative.

Both family domain utterances occur in highly emotional and tense situations, namely Marco's first encounter with his father and a confrontation with his half-sister. In these interactions, Marco consistently uses Korean, despite his ability to speak English and Filipino. The use of Korean in the family domain reflects not only the shared ethnic background of the interlocutors but also the symbolic function of language as an expression of identity and emotional proximity. The formality and seriousness of Korean usage in these scenes indicate respect, tension, and unresolved familial conflict.

The absence of family domain data from the Childe character suggests that the movie deliberately minimizes the exploration of the Childe's family background. Instead, the narrative focuses on Marco's family history as a driving force of the plot. This imbalance further supports the finding that language domains are not only shaped by social context but also by narrative emphasis within the film. This can be seen in the dialogue below.

DFM01 (Scene: 01:25:15-01:25:33)

Marco: “당신이... 아버지마자? (Dangsini-i...abeojimaja? / Are ... my father?)”

Friendship Domain

The friendship domain is the most dominant domain identified in the movie, with a total of 16 utterances. Of these, 9 utterances are produced by Marco Han and 7 by the Childe. Fishman (1972) defines the friendship domain as interactions involving non-familial relationships characterized by familiarity, solidarity, or emotional closeness. In *The Childe*, this domain includes interactions with friends, allies, and individuals who provide emotional or practical support.

The friendship domain exhibits the greatest degree of language variation. Marco Han uses Korean and English, while the Childe uses Korean, English, and Filipino. This variation indicates a high level of linguistic flexibility within friendship interactions. English is frequently used by Marco when interacting with individuals in the Philippines or in informal encounters, reflecting its role as a *lingua franca*. Korean is used when interacting with Korean interlocutors or when the setting shifts to Korea, signaling adaptation to local linguistic norms.

A notable finding within the friendship domain is the use of Filipino by the Childe when speaking to Marco in confidential or critical situations. Filipino functions as an in-group code that excludes other participants from understanding the message. This strategic language choice highlights the role of language as a tool for secrecy, solidarity, and shared identity. The friendship domain demonstrates that language choice is not merely a reflection of setting or interlocutor but also a deliberate communicative strategy. These can be seen in the dialogue below.

DFSM01 (Scene: 00:12:22-00:13:09)

Marco: "Which team.. highest?"

DFSC05 (Scene: 00:31:29-00:32:03)

Childe: "Koreans fuckin love Englishes.... Works every time"

Employment Domain

The employment domain is the second most prominent domain, with 14 utterances identified. This domain is dominated by the Childe, who produces 12 utterances, while Marco Han contributes only 2. According to Fishman (1972), the employment domain involves interactions related to work, professional roles, and economic transactions. In *The Childe*, this domain includes interactions between employers and workers, criminal associates, and individuals engaged in professional or transactional relationships.

The Childe predominantly uses Korean in employment-related interactions. This consistent language choice reflects his role as a professional operative operating within Korean-based criminal and business networks. The Korean used in these interactions is often informal and authoritative, emphasizing power, dominance, and control rather than politeness. This aligns with the Childe's characterization as a confident and dangerous figure who occupies a dominant position in his professional relationships.

In contrast, Marco Han uses English in employment contexts, particularly when interacting with non-Korean interlocutors in the Philippines. English serves as a neutral and pragmatic choice that allows Marco to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. His limited use of employment domain language also

reflects his marginal position within professional hierarchies, as he is often exploited or manipulated rather than holding power.

The employment domain highlights how language choice is influenced by professional identity, power relations, and institutional roles. The contrast between Marco and the Childe illustrates how language use reinforces character positioning within the narrative.

DEC01 (Scene: 00:04:20-00:00:05:12)

Nobleman: “오랜만입니다, ..보자고 (olaenmanida, ..bojago / long time no see, ..meet again soon)”

DEM02 (Scene: 00:08:27-00:09:10)

Marco: “You promise ...on ones”

Social Domain

The social domain is the least represented domain, with only two utterances identified one from each character. This domain involves interactions with strangers or professionals where social distance, formality, and politeness are maintained. Unlike friendship or employment domains, social domain interactions are typically brief and goal-oriented.

In this domain, Marco Han uses Korean when interacting with a Korean lawyer in a formal first-time meeting. The use of formal Korean reflects politeness and respect, as well as recognition of the interlocutor’s professional status. Meanwhile, the Childe uses English when consulting a health professional in the Philippines. English is likely chosen due to the professional setting and the assumption that it functions as a common language between individuals of different linguistic backgrounds.

These findings indicate that language choice in social domains is strongly influenced by interlocutor background, professional roles, and situational formality. Although limited in number, social domain interactions further support the argument that language use in *The Childe* is context-sensitive and socially motivated.

DSM01 (Scene: 00:23:35-00:24:04)

Marco: “괜찮아니까, ..하세요 (Gwaenchan-anikka, ...haseyo / It's okay, ..Korean)”

DSC02 (Scene: 01:53:55-01:54:31)

Childe: “It’s strange, ... you look healthy”

Factors Underlying Language Variation

The analysis reveals several key factors underlying language variation and domain formation in the movie. First, the multilingual background of the main characters plays a significant role. Both Marco Han and the Childe are Korean-Filipino individuals who are proficient in Korean, English, and Filipino. This multilingual competence enables them to switch languages strategically across different domains.

Second, the setting or place of interaction significantly affects language choice. When interactions occur in the Philippines, English is more frequently used, while Korean becomes dominant in interactions taking place in Korea. This shift reflects adaptation to local linguistic environments.

Third, interlocutors influence language selection. The characters adjust their language according to the linguistic background and social role of the person they are speaking to. Finally, context and topic play a crucial role, particularly in emotionally intense or confidential situations, where shared ethnic language is used to convey intimacy or secrecy.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of language use by the main characters in *The Childe* movie, the researcher concludes that the film exhibits four distinct language domains. Three of these—family, friendship, and employment—align with Fishman's (1972) theoretical framework, while the fourth domain, identified by the researcher as the social domain, extends beyond the original five domains proposed by Fishman. Notably, the religion and education domains were not observed, which can be attributed to the film's narrative focus on interpersonal relationships, personal missions, and action-driven plotlines rather than formal education or religious interactions. In total, 34 utterances reflecting language domain usage were identified and systematically categorized. Among these, family domain utterances were limited to two instances, both produced by Marco Han, highlighting the selective depiction of familial interactions. Friendship domain interactions were the most prominent, with 16 utterances—nine by Marco and seven by the Childe—demonstrating the central role of peer relationships in shaping language behavior. The employment domain included 14 utterances, dominated by the Childe with 12 instances, reflecting professional and transactional interactions, while Marco contributed only two. Lastly, the social domain was minimally represented, with one utterance from each character, capturing brief interactions in formal or socially distant contexts.

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