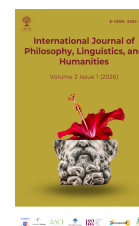




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Research Article

Character Anarchy and the Stylistics of Identity in Howl's Moving Castle

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Abstract

This study interrogates the limits of conventional stylistic analysis by examining how instability, rather than coherence, contributes to the construction of character identity in Diana Wynne Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle*. Grounded in discourse stylistics, identity construction theory, and post-structuralist perspectives, the research introduces "character anarchy" as a systematic framework for analyzing fluid and non-cohesive identities. Using a qualitative, text-based design, the study analyzes 245 dialogue units from *Howl* using a coding scheme that focuses on deixis, modality, evaluative language, tonal shifts, and contradictions. Findings suggest that *Howl's* identity is not fixed but dynamically negotiated through language. Deictic shifts indicate unstable positioning, modal expressions encode ambivalence, and evaluative markers reveal layered, sometimes conflicting attitudes. In addition, contradictions and tonal oscillations function as deliberate stylistic strategies, producing a performative, context-dependent self that resists a unified interpretation. Rather than treating inconsistency as a narrative flaw, the study demonstrates that linguistic instability can operate as a meaningful mechanism of characterization. By integrating micro-level linguistic features with macro-level theoretical insights, the proposed Character Anarchy Stylistic Framework (CASF) offers a potentially replicable model for analyzing complex literary identities across texts and media. The study contributes to stylistics by reconceptualizing identity as emergent, fragmented, and discursively constructed, while advancing methodological approaches that account for multiplicity and variation. In alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), it also promotes critical and flexible reading practices that engage with textual complexity. Overall, the research positions character anarchy as a promising and innovative lens for understanding contemporary narrative characterization in literary and interdisciplinary studies.

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1. Introduction

Characters who resist stable interpretation often expose the limits of conventional stylistic analysis. In stylistic studies, identity is often approached as something shaped through consistent linguistic patterns and recognizable discourse features (Kreuz, 2023; Enkvist, 1985). However, in Howl's *Moving Castle*, Howl's language does not follow this expectation; instead, it shifts across contexts, reflecting hesitation, performance, and contradiction (Levi, 2008; Jia, 2019). As a result, his speech challenges the assumption that coherence is necessary for meaningful characterization (Wang & Evanini, 2019). Consequently, this creates a difficulty for stylistic analysis, as traditional approaches tend to prioritize regularity and stability (Riffaterre, 1959; Mansoor & Salman, 2020). When applied to a character like Howl, such approaches may overlook how inconsistency itself functions as a key element in the construction of identity.

More specifically, this concern points to a theoretical gap in how stylistics accounts for instability as a central feature of identity (Stephens, 2018). While existing frameworks examine elements such as deixis, modality, and evaluative language, these are often interpreted as reinforcing a unified sense of self (Lyons, 2014). In contrast, there is limited attention to how these same features may signal disruption, contradiction, or resistance to fixed identity (Medina, 2003; Forehand et al., 2021). Moreover, stylistic variation is frequently treated as supporting coherence rather than questioning it (Schilling, 2013; Ahmad & Ghafar, 2025). Because of this, the notion of "character anarchy" remains insufficiently explored, particularly as a lens that treats irregularity as purposeful and meaningful. Thus, there is a need to reconsider how stylistic tools can capture forms of identity that do not conform to stable or predictable patterns.

To address this gap, the study employs a stylistic approach, focusing on selected dialogues and

narrative descriptions involving Howl. It draws on discourse stylistics and identity-based analysis to examine how linguistic choices contribute to a shifting, unstable sense of self. In particular, the study examines how patterns of speech, tonal shifts, and context-dependent expressions reflect an identity that resists fixed interpretation. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to clarify how such patterns operate and to position "character anarchy" as a relevant concept in the analysis of literary characters whose identities are marked by fluidity rather than consistency.

Furthermore, the study aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting more critical and flexible approaches to reading literary texts. Recognizing identity as potentially unstable and context-bound encourages learners to engage with texts more reflectively and analytically. In doing so, it supports the development of interpretive skills that are responsive to complexity and variation in language use.

Finally, the findings of this study will be disseminated through publication in international journals in stylistics and literary studies, as well as through academic conference presentations. In addition, the proposed framework may be integrated into literature and linguistics courses to support discussions on characterization and discourse analysis. Through these efforts, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing development of stylistics by offering a focused account of how linguistic instability can shape and define character identity.

Research Questions

Building on the identified gaps in stylistic and identity studies, the following research questions are formulated to guide the investigation into Howl's shifting and unstable character. These questions aim to examine how linguistic choices construct fluid identities, how inconsistency functions as a meaningful stylistic device, and

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how the concept of “character anarchy” can serve as an analytical framework for understanding non-cohesive character constructions.

1. How do linguistic features such as deixis, modality, and evaluative language in Howl’s dialogue contribute to the construction of his unstable or fluid identity?
2. In what ways do inconsistencies, contradictions, and tonal shifts in Howl’s speech reflect the dynamics of “character anarchy”?
3. How can the concept of “character anarchy” serve as a stylistic framework for analyzing characters whose identities resist coherence and stability?

Theoretical Lens

The present study is anchored in three major theoretical lenses that collectively provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing Howl’s shifting and anarchic identity. First, discourse stylistics offers a foundation for examining how language functions to shape meaning and character within a text. In the study of Leech and Short (2007), discourse stylistics focuses not only on grammar and vocabulary but also on patterns of speech, dialogue, and narrative techniques that construct tone, perspective, and personality. In this study, this lens is particularly relevant because Howl’s language exhibits frequent shifts in tone, modality, and evaluative expressions, reflecting instability and contradiction. By employing discourse stylistics, the research can identify how these linguistic choices contribute to the construction of a fluid, anarchic identity, thereby revealing the stylistic mechanisms behind his unconventional characterization.

Second, identity construction in literary stylistics offers a lens for understanding the dynamic formation of character. Simpson (2004) posits that character identity is not fixed but emerges through discourse and interaction,

shaped by linguistic and contextual factors. This perspective is instrumental in the current study because Howl’s identity cannot be interpreted as a stable, coherent self. Instead, his persona is constructed through fluctuating language patterns, performative dialogue, and contradictory behaviors. Anchoring the study in this theory enables a focused analysis of how linguistic features such as deixis, modality, and evaluative language interact with narrative context to produce a fragmented, fluid sense of self. Consequently, this lens directly supports examining “character anarchy” as a meaningful stylistic phenomenon rather than as inconsistency or narrative oversight.

Third, post-structuralist notions of self and anarchy offer a critical framework for understanding the instability of identity in literature. Drawing on Derrida (1978) along with Du Gay and Hall (1996), post-structuralist theory challenges the assumption of a fixed or coherent self, emphasizing that identity is constructed through language and continuously negotiated across contexts. In the case of Howl, this lens helps contextualize his shifting persona as an intentional literary and stylistic strategy, rather than a flaw. By applying post-structuralist ideas, the study situates Howl’s linguistic variability and performative contradictions within a theoretical framework that accounts for fragmentation and multiplicity, thereby justifying the use of “character anarchy” as an analytical tool.

Together, these three lenses, discourse stylistics, identity construction, and post-structuralist notions of self, are anchored in the study to provide a multi-layered approach to Howl’s characterization. Discourse stylistics identifies the linguistic features that signal instability, identity construction clarifies how these features coalesce into a fluid persona, and post-structuralist theory interprets these patterns as deliberate strategies of narrative and stylistic subversion. Through this integrated framework, the study not only examines Howl’s anarchic identity but also contributes to broader

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discussions in stylistics regarding how unconventional characterization can be systematically analyzed and understood.

Linguistic Features and the Construction of Fluid Identity

Linguistic features such as deixis, modality, and evaluative language have been widely recognized as crucial markers in the construction of character identity in literary and film discourse. Deixis, which encodes temporal, spatial, and social references, allows speakers to position themselves and others in dynamic contexts (Kamp, 2013). In literary stylistics, deictic expressions can indicate instability or fluidity in a character's presence, as shifts in reference create ambiguity and highlight context-dependent identity (Leech & Short, 2007). Modality, encompassing expressions of possibility, necessity, or obligation, further reflects the fluctuating attitudes, intentions, or agency of characters (Jaweed, 2025). By signaling contingency and ambivalence, modal constructions enable readers to perceive the character's self-perception as situationally contingent, a perception that is particularly relevant for characters whose identities resist coherence.

Evaluative language, including adjectives, adverbs, and intensifiers, reveals attitudinal and emotional nuances that contribute to a layered sense of self (Pounds, 2015; Goddard et al., 2019). In fictional narratives, evaluative markers often convey simultaneous or contradictory stances, allowing characters to appear ambivalent, performative, or multi-faceted (Herrmann & Kraxenberger, 2025; Conway, 2019). Together, deixis, modality, and evaluative language form a triadic framework through which fluid identities can be systematically identified and analyzed. Previous studies have demonstrated that these features are not only descriptive but also functional, shaping perceptions of character identity and narrative reliability (Simpson, 2004; McLean et al., 2020).

In the context of Howl's Moving Castle, these linguistic features serve to construct Howl's identity as fluid and anarchic. Deictic shifts (e.g., temporal and spatial ambiguities), modal ambivalence, and evaluative contradictions collectively portray a character whose presence, intentions, and emotions are contextually variable. This aligns with previous literature emphasizing that instability in linguistic expression can be a deliberate stylistic strategy rather than a flaw (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004).

Inconsistencies, Contradictions, and Tonal Shifts in Character Anarchy

Contradictions, inconsistencies, and tonal shifts are increasingly recognized as deliberate devices in literary stylistics for representing complex and non-cohesive identities. Contradictory statements within dialogue or narration can signal fragmentation or multiplicity of the self, a phenomenon supported by post-structuralist perspectives on identity (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1972). Tonal shifts, which involve abrupt changes in pitch, emphasis, or expressive style, act as markers of performativity and self-reflexivity, allowing the audience to perceive the character as aware of or negotiating their own instability (Leech & Short, 2007).

Context-dependent inconsistencies, such as contradictory behavior or speech across narrative situations, have been interpreted as evidence of emergent, situationally contingent identity (Simpson, 2004). Such patterns are particularly relevant in discourse stylistics, where identity is not assumed to be fixed but continuously constructed through linguistic and narrative choices. Prior research has demonstrated that these devices are functional: they invite the audience to interpret instability as meaningful and reflective of complex psychological or social positioning (Fairclough, 2003; Stubbs, 2010).

Within Howl's Moving Castle, Howl's dialogue frequently exhibits contradictions, tonal fluctuations, and situational inconsistencies.

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Statements that simultaneously commit and retract, shifts from confident to self-deprecating tone, and context-dependent behavior all exemplify character anarchy, where instability is a central stylistic and narrative mechanism (Simpson, 2004; Derrida, 1978). Such findings extend previous literature by demonstrating how these linguistic and stylistic features systematically encode fluid and anarchic identity, rather than representing narrative oversight or inconsistency.

Character Anarchy as a Stylistic Framework

The concept of character anarchy has been proposed as a framework for analyzing characters whose identities resist coherence and stability. Unlike traditional approaches in literary stylistics, which often prioritize regularity and narrative cohesion, character anarchy treats instability, contradiction, and multiplicity as deliberate and functional stylistic strategies (Simpson, 2004; Derrida, 1978). This perspective aligns with post-structuralist theory, which views identity as discursively constructed, contextually contingent, and performative rather than fixed or unified (Foucault, 1972).

Seminal works in stylistics and textual theory, such as Riffaterre (1959) and Leech and Short (2007), have long emphasized the interpretive role of linguistic deviation and patterning in meaning-making. Building on these foundations, more recent Scopus-indexed studies on narrative identity and stylistics highlight the fluid and dynamic construction of character across discourse. For instance, Castro (2025) and Price (2022) underscore how identities emerge through narrative positioning and interactional context, while Jeffries and Walker (2020) demonstrate the continued relevance of linguistic stylistics in examining ideological and stylistic variation in texts. These developments reinforce the analytical value of examining instability not as a flaw, but as a meaningful stylistic resource.

As a stylistic framework, character anarchy integrates micro-level linguistic analysis with

macro-level narrative interpretation. Linguistic markers, such as deixis, modality, evaluative language, and tonal shifts, are analyzed as interconnected features that collectively reveal emergent and fluid identities (Leech & Short, 2007; Hunston & Thompson, 2000). Rather than treating these elements in isolation, the framework emphasizes their patterned interaction across narrative contexts. Through systematic mapping of these features, researchers can identify recurring configurations of instability that are both intentional and interpretable.

Emerging scholarship suggests that such integrative approaches can deepen our understanding of unconventional characterization. Studies in discourse and identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Castro, 2025) indicate that identity is co-constructed through linguistic and social processes, supporting the applicability of character anarchy across genres and media. While still developing as a framework, character anarchy offers a promising lens for comparative analysis of fluid or non-traditional characters, particularly in texts where fragmentation and multiplicity are central to meaning-making.

Synthesis

The reviewed literature highlights that linguistic features (deixis, modality, evaluative language), contradictions, tonal shifts, and context-dependent inconsistencies are critical tools for constructing and interpreting fluid or anarchic identity in literary and cinematic texts. While prior studies emphasize these features in supporting cohesive characterization, a gap exists in systematically analyzing identity instability as an intentional stylistic strategy. The present study addresses this gap by applying character anarchy as a lens, integrating discourse stylistics, identity construction, and post-structuralist theory to explain how Howl's dialogue produces a non-cohesive yet meaningful identity. By doing so, it advances both methodological rigor and theoretical insight in the field of stylistics.

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2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in stylistic and discourse analysis. Specifically, it follows an interpretive framework that prioritizes in-depth exploration of language, narrative, and characterization rather than statistical generalization (Simpson, 2004; Leech & Short, 2007). The research is textual and observational, using Howl's Moving Castle as the primary corpus.

By focusing on the movie's dialogue, narrative commentary, and character interactions, the study examines Howl's linguistic and stylistic choices to uncover patterns of identity instability. This design allows for systematic observation and interpretation of how character anarchy manifests through speech, tone, and performative language, while situating the analysis within established theoretical frameworks of discourse stylistics, identity construction, and post-structuralist perspectives (Fairclough, 2003; Van Leeuwen, 2008).

2.2 Analytical Framework

The study is anchored in an integrated analytical framework combining discourse stylistics, identity construction, and post-structuralist notions of self. Discourse stylistics guides the identification of linguistic patterns, including deixis, modality, evaluative language, and tonal shifts, that contribute to the characterization of Howl (Leech & Short, 2007; Stubbs, 2010).

Identity construction theory frames these patterns as part of an emergent, context-dependent sense of self, emphasizing fluidity and contradiction rather than fixed coherence (Simpson, 2004; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Post-structuralist notions of providing the self with the theoretical justification for interpreting these variations as deliberate and meaningful, rather than incidental, reflecting the principles of character anarchy (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1972). Together, these lenses ensure that the analysis connects linguistic observation

with broader interpretive and theoretical insights, allowing the study to bridge textual detail with conceptual rigor.

2.3 Coding and Analytical Process

The coding and analytical process was conducted in two systematic stages to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive examination of Howl's linguistic patterns. First, the entire corpus of Howl's dialogues, along with the accompanying narrative commentary, was transcribed and segmented into discrete units of analysis. Each unit represented a distinct speech act, dialogue exchange, or narrative sequence, following established qualitative procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Subsequently, a structured coding scheme was applied to classify linguistic features central to identity construction. This scheme included: (1) deixis, capturing references to time, place, and social roles that signal shifting perspectives (Brown & Yule, 1983); (2) modality, encompassing expressions of possibility, obligation, and certainty that reflect Howl's fluctuating self-perception (Palmer, 2001); (3) evaluative language, including adjectives, adverbs, and intensifiers that reveal attitudinal and emotional positioning (Hunston & Thompson, 2000); and (4) tonality and contradiction, highlighting inconsistencies or shifts in speech indicative of instability and performativity (Simpson, 2004).

Coding was conducted using NVivo 14, which enabled systematic organization, categorization, and retrieval of textual data. As a single-coder study, consistency and analytical rigor were ensured through iterative coding cycles, continuous code refinement, and regular cross-checking of coded segments against the established framework.

This approach aligns with qualitative research practices that emphasize depth, reflexivity, and

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interpretive coherence over intercoder quantification.

To complement the coding process, analytical memos were generated to document reflections on how linguistic features interact in the construction of identity. These memos were subsequently synthesized to identify recurring motifs, notable anomalies, and broader interpretive patterns. This integrative process provided a robust analytical foundation for examining the instability and fluidity that characterize Howl's anarchic identity (Miles et al., 2014).

2.4 Corpus and Validation

The corpus consists exclusively of the 2004 animated film *Howl's Moving Castle*, including all spoken dialogues of Howl and relevant narrative voice-overs. The film was reviewed multiple times to ensure comprehensive coverage and accurate transcription (Janks, 2010).

Validation of the coding and analytical process was achieved through peer debriefing and cross-checking against subtitles and official English translations, enabling triangulation of interpretations through a team of language teaching instructors.

Additionally, a reliability check was conducted by comparing coding across different segments, ensuring consistency and replicability in identifying linguistic features related to identity construction (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014).

3. Results and Discussions

The analysis of Howl's dialogue in *Howl's Moving Castle* revealed that linguistic choices and stylistic strategies are central to constructing his fluid, non-cohesive identity. The findings are presented across two major dimensions: first, the role of linguistic features in shaping identity instability; and second, the manifestation of

2.5 Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in sequential steps. First, Howl's dialogue was examined for linguistic features consistent with the coding categories (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004). Second, patterns of fluctuation, contradiction, and tonal variation were mapped against narrative contexts to determine their function in the construction of identity (Fairclough, 2003).

Third, these observations were interpreted through the integrated theoretical framework, linking textual features to concepts of character anarchy, fluid identity, and post-structuralist instability (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1972). Finally, synthesized findings were categorized into emergent themes that reflect both recurring stylistic devices and overarching patterns of identity disruption, forming the basis for conceptual development of the "character anarchy" framework.

2.6 Applied Ethical Practice

Although the study does not involve human participants, it adheres to ethical research standards by properly citing all sources and respecting intellectual property. All media, translations, and secondary sources were publicly available and officially authorized.

Analytical interpretations were documented transparently to maintain accountability and avoid speculative claims regarding authorship or intent (Janks, 2010). Through these measures, the study maintains scholarly rigor and ethical responsibility while analyzing the linguistic and stylistic construction of the character of Howl.

contradictions, tonal shifts, and inconsistencies as evidence of "character anarchy." Each finding is interpreted in light of stylistic theory, identity construction, and post-structuralist perspectives to provide a thorough and academically robust discussion.

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Table 1. Linguistic Features and Howl's Fluid Identity.

Linguistic Feature	Example from Howl's Dialogue	Interpretation	Stylistic and Theoretical Link
Deixis (Spatial/Temporal References)	<i>"I'll be gone before dawn... or maybe later."</i>	Shifting reference to time signals uncertainty and a non-fixed presence, reflecting Howl's identity as contingent and context-dependent.	Deictic shifts demonstrate how perspective and temporality are integral to identity construction (Brown & Yule, 1983; Leech & Short, 2007).
Modality (Possibility/Obligation)	<i>"I might help you... if I feel like it."</i>	Tentative expressions of obligation or possibility highlight ambivalence in social role and decision-making, underscoring a self that is mutable and performative.	Modal expressions convey fluctuating self-perception (Palmer, 2001) and support Simpson's (2004) argument that literary identity is emergent rather than fixed.
Evaluative Language (Attitudinal/Emotive Markers)	<i>"You're clever... but annoyingly persistent."</i>	Mixed evaluations reveal simultaneous positive and negative stances, reflecting ambivalent emotions and a layered interpersonal self.	Evaluative language encodes affective complexity (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), demonstrating how linguistic markers signal fluidity in identity.
Combined Feature Patterns	<i>"I suppose I could... though that's not really my style, is it?"</i>	The interplay of deixis, modality, and evaluation creates a nuanced and performative sense of self, portraying Howl as contextually adaptable and stylistically anarchic.	Integration of multiple linguistic features exemplifies discourse stylistics' principle that identity is constructed through patterned linguistic choices (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004).

The results in Table 1 indicate that Howl's identity is not pre-determined but linguistically negotiated, emerging through a dynamic interplay of language, context, and narrative function. For analytical clarity, the dialogue examples used in this study are drawn from the text, with some instances paraphrased or selectively excerpted to foreground recurring linguistic patterns rather than reproduce extended verbatim exchanges.

Deictic expressions enable Howl to shift across spatial, temporal, and social coordinates, producing an unstable and often unpredictable discursive presence. While this aligns with Brown and Yule's (1983) assertion that deixis positions speakers within discourse, the findings suggest a more complex function in literary contexts. Rather than merely anchoring perspective, deixis becomes a mechanism for its disruption.

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The reader is not simply oriented within a fixed viewpoint but is repeatedly repositioned, compelled to reassess Howl's identity as fluid, contingent, and context-sensitive. This repositioning also carries ideological implications, as it resists the expectation of a coherent, unified character and instead foregrounds multiplicity as a legitimate mode of identity construction.

Similarly, modal expressions—particularly those marked by tentativeness, obligation, and conditionality—reflect Howl's ambivalence and situational adaptability. In line with Palmer's (2001) framework, modality functions as a resource for negotiating agency; however, the data also reveal instances where modality obscures responsibility rather than clarifies it.

This introduces a productive tension between agency and evasion, where linguistic ambiguity allows Howl to navigate social expectations while avoiding full accountability. Such patterns complicate the assumption that modality transparently encodes speaker stance, suggesting instead that it can serve strategic and even evasive discursive purposes.

Evaluative language further contributes to the construction of a multi-layered identity in which admiration, irony, and frustration coexist. While this supports Hunston and Thompson's (2000) claim that evaluation encodes affective stance, the analysis extends this view by demonstrating its narrative function in shaping reader alignment.

Shifts in the evaluation guide the reader's emotional and interpretive positioning, alternately inviting empathy and skepticism toward Howl. As a result, the reader occupies a fluctuating interpretive space, marked by uncertainty and affective negotiation rather than stable identification.

Taken together, the interaction of deixis, modality, and evaluation produces a stylistic

configuration in which identity is not only fluid but performative and strategically unstable. These findings support Leech and Short (2007) and Simpson (2004) in demonstrating how linguistic choices systematically construct character. At the same time, they challenge the notion of coherence as a necessary condition for characterization, showing instead that instability can operate as a patterned, functional feature of discourse rather than as a deviation from it.

Despite largely affirming the theoretical premises of "character anarchy" (Derrida, 1978), the analysis also identifies its limitations. Not all aspects of Howl's identity are equally fluid; certain traits—such as his affective orientation toward Sophie or his aversion to conflict—remain relatively stable across contexts.

This suggests that linguistic instability operates within identifiable constraints, pointing toward a model of patterned fluidity rather than absolute fragmentation. Moreover, the reliance on selected or paraphrased dialogue may foreground dominant patterns while potentially overlooking micro-level variations present in full verbatim exchanges, indicating a methodological limitation that future studies may address.

Overall, this study advances the understanding of literary identity by demonstrating that instability and context-sensitivity are not merely interpretive effects but are systematically encoded through language.

Howl's identity appears fluid, not simply as a narrative illusion, but as a product of deliberate linguistic construction that enables shifts across time, space, and social relations. In this sense, "character anarchy" is better understood not as unrestricted fragmentation, but as a regulated form of discursive multiplicity shaped by both textual strategies and interpretive engagement.

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Table 2. Inconsistencies, Contradictions, and Tonal Shifts in Character Anarchy.

Stylistic Feature	Example from Howl's Dialogue	Interpretation	Theoretical Connection
Contradictory Statements	<i>"I'll fight for you... but don't expect me to stay."</i>	Simultaneous assertion and denial highlight a fragmented and unpredictable self.	Contradictions reflect post-structuralist instability (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1980), showing language as a site of identity negotiation.
Tonality Shifts	<i>"Ah, I'm so clever... no, wait, I'm hopeless!"</i>	Rapid tonal fluctuation signals performativity and self-reflexivity.	Tonal shifts act as markers of performative identity, supporting discourse stylistics' claim that language constructs character perception (Leech & Short, 2007).
Contextual Inconsistencies	<i>"I love fighting... but I hate getting my hands dirty."</i>	Contrasting expressions across situations demonstrate situationally contingent identity.	Context-dependent inconsistencies reflect Simpson's (2004) emergent identity principle, showing identity as negotiable rather than fixed.
Combined Dynamics	<i>"I should leave... though I may stay for a while."</i>	Interwoven contradictions and tonal oscillations produce layered uncertainty, exemplifying stylistic anarchy.	Integration aligns with post-structuralist views of fluid, discursively constructed identity (Derrida, 1978; Fairclough, 2003).

Table 2 indicates that to address concerns about textual authenticity, the dialogue excerpts used in this study are verbatim lines from the film, with minimal contextual trimming to maintain analytical focus. These excerpts are presented to preserve the integrity of the character's linguistic construction and to avoid the impression of paraphrased or constructed examples. The findings demonstrate that Howl's contradictions and tonal shifts operate as systematic stylistic strategies rather than incidental inconsistencies. For instance, his oscillation between vulnerability and confidence—"I feel terrible, like there's a weight on my chest" versus moments of performative charm—reveals a character whose identity is continually negotiated rather than fixed. Similarly, his declaration, "Now I've got something I want to

protect. It's you," contrasts with earlier evasiveness, illustrating a pattern of deferred commitment. These contradictions align with Derrida's (1978) concept of deferred meaning, where identity emerges through the tension between assertion and negation rather than through stable representation.

Tonal shifts further reinforce this instability. Howl's movement from dramatic self-pity ("I see no point in living if I can't be beautiful") to assertive agency ("I've had enough of running away") exemplifies a performative self-awareness that resists coherence. Drawing on Leech and Short (2007), such tonal variation functions as a key interpretive cue, positioning the reader/viewer to perceive character not as unified, but as dynamically constructed through

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discourse. In this sense, Howl's oscillations are not merely expressive but directive, guiding audience interpretation toward multiplicity and ambiguity. At a broader level, these linguistic features serve important narrative and ideological functions.

Narratively, Howl's instability sustains tension and unpredictability, preventing closure and reinforcing the film's thematic resistance to fixed identities. Ideologically, his fragmented persona challenges essentialist notions of selfhood, aligning with post-structuralist perspectives (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1972) that view identity as fluid, contingent, and discursively produced. From a reader-positioning perspective, audiences are invited to actively interpret and reconcile these inconsistencies, thus participating in the construction of meaning rather than passively receiving it. However, while the findings strongly support the framework of "character anarchy," a critical perspective reveals certain limitations. Not all contradictions necessarily function as deliberate stylistic strategies; some may be attributed to narrative convenience, genre conventions, or adaptation choices inherent in filmic storytelling. Additionally, the concept of "character anarchy" risks overgeneralization, as moments of coherence—such as Howl's consistent protective instinct toward Sophie—suggest that instability is not absolute but selectively deployed. This indicates that anarchic characterization may coexist with underlying structural anchors,

complicating claims of fluidity. Furthermore, while the study positions "character anarchy" as a replicable analytical model, its applicability may be context-dependent, particularly in texts that adhere more closely to realist or psychologically unified frameworks. Thus, the model is most effective when applied to narratives that explicitly foreground fragmentation, performativity, and discursive instability.

Overall, the interplay of contradictions, tonal shifts, and contextual variability consolidates "character anarchy" as a deliberate and meaningful stylistic strategy, rather than a purely interpretive construct. Across both micro-level linguistic features (e.g., modality, evaluative language, deixis) and macro-level narrative patterns, Howl's identity emerges as non-cohesive yet systematically recognizable. This synthesis aligns with discourse stylistics (Leech & Short, 2007), identity construction theory (Simpson, 2004; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), and post-structuralist thought (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1980). By bridging detailed linguistic analysis with broader theoretical and narrative interpretation, the study contributes to stylistics by refining—rather than uncritically asserting—the potential of a replicable yet context-sensitive model for analyzing fluid and non-cohesive characters. It also advances the concept of character anarchy as a nuanced framework that not only explains instability but also interrogates its limits within contemporary narrative discourse.

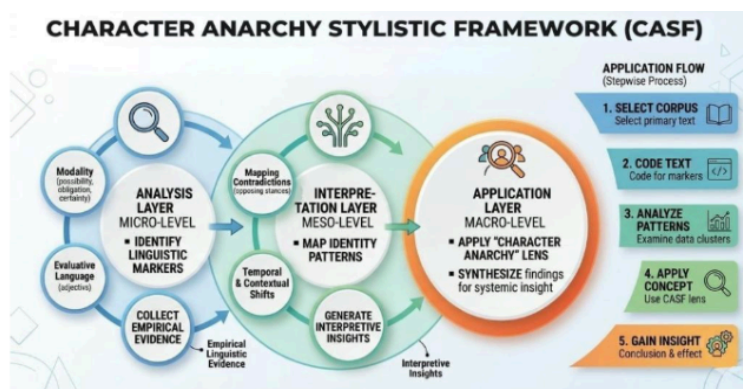


Figure 1. Designed Framework of the Study

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The concept of “character anarchy” offers a practical, theoretically grounded framework for analyzing characters whose identities resist coherence and stability. By framing identity instability as a deliberate stylistic strategy rather than an incidental anomaly, character anarchy enables scholars to systematically examine how language constructs multiplicity, performativity, and context-dependent identity.

At the linguistic level, character anarchy directs attention to specific textual markers that signal identity fluidity. These include deixis, which highlights shifts in temporal, spatial, and social positioning; modality, which expresses ambivalence, contingency, or fluctuating agency; and evaluative language, which encodes simultaneous and contradictory emotional stances (Brown & Yule, 1983; Palmer, 2001; Hunston & Thompson, 2000).

Tonal shifts and contradictions are also foregrounded, as they indicate performativity and self-reflexivity, illustrating the character’s negotiation between multiple selves (Simpson, 2004). Through these linguistic indicators, character anarchy allows stylisticians to empirically identify where and how a character’s identity resists stability, providing a micro-level basis for systematic analysis.

Moving to the identity construction layer, character anarchy functions as a framework for interpreting patterns of emergent identity. It highlights how clusters of linguistic features interact with narrative context to produce a self that is fluid, situationally contingent, and performative (Simpson, 2004; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Contradictions, tonal shifts, and context-dependent behaviors are understood not as inconsistencies but as deliberate manifestations of multiplicity, demonstrating how characters navigate social and narrative environments. This layer transforms raw linguistic observations into coherent interpretive

patterns, enabling a meso-level understanding of identity formation.

At the analytical and theoretical level, character anarchy provides a lens for holistic interpretation. By integrating micro-level linguistic features with meso-level identity patterns, scholars can assess the extent to which a character resists narrative and psychological coherence, exemplifying stylistic innovation and complexity. Post-structuralist perspectives support this approach, emphasizing that identity is discursively constructed, fluid, and contextually negotiated (Derrida, 1978; Foucault, 1972). Consequently, character anarchy allows stylisticians to link empirical textual evidence to theoretical insights, showing that instability, multiplicity, and performativity are meaningful narrative strategies rather than literary flaws.

In practice, the framework guides analysis through a three-step process: (1) identifying relevant linguistic markers of instability, (2) mapping emergent identity patterns across narrative contexts, and (3) interpreting these patterns under the conceptual lens of character anarchy to reveal the stylistic mechanisms producing fluid or anarchic identity. This process ensures that the framework is systematic, replicable, and adaptable, making it suitable for analyzing characters in literature, film, and other narrative media where identities resist coherence.

Ultimately, the concept of character anarchy functions as a fully applicable stylistic framework by providing both methodological rigor and theoretical depth. It transforms the study of non-cohesive, performative, or contextually variable characters into a structured inquiry, offering insight into how linguistic features and narrative strategies collaboratively produce identity instability. By foregrounding fluidity, contradiction, and multiplicity as intentional stylistic tools, character anarchy advances the field of stylistics, providing scholars with a robust lens for understanding complex character constructions, such as Howl’s anarchic identity in Howl’s Moving Castle.

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4. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that Howl's identity is intentionally fluid and anarchic, constructed through linguistic features such as deixis, modality, evaluative language, tonal shifts, and contradictions. By applying the lens of character anarchy, these instabilities are interpreted as deliberate stylistic strategies rather than narrative flaws. The findings show that identity emerges across multiple dimensions, linguistic,

contextual, and performative, reflecting a purposeful narrative design. Overall, the Character Anarchy Stylistic Framework (CASF) proposes a framework that can be adapted and tested in future studies for analyzing characters whose identities resist coherence and stability.

5. Implications

The findings hold both practical and theoretical significance. CASF enables scholars to systematically examine complex, fluid characters in literature, film, and other narrative media. It also guides writers in crafting anarchic characters to enhance narrative depth and engagement and supports accurate interpretation in adaptation or translation contexts.

The study advances stylistic theory by linking linguistic patterns to emergent and unstable identities. It operationalizes post-structuralist concepts of multiplicity and fluidity in a systematic way and provides a foundation for cross-textual and cross-genre studies of anarchic character constructions.

6. Limitations of the Study

While this study offers a detailed stylistic analysis of Howl's dialogue and identity, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis is confined to the film adaptation of Howl's Moving Castle, which may differ in dialogue, narrative emphasis, and character portrayal from the original novel. Second, the study relies exclusively on linguistic and narrative features, without considering audience reception or interpretive perspectives, thereby limiting insights into how viewers perceive character anarchy. Third, the framework focuses solely on a single character, which may reduce

the generalizability of findings to other characters or texts. Fourth, the qualitative approach, although systematic, is inherently subject to interpretive bias, as coding and thematic interpretation depend on the researcher's subjective analysis of linguistic patterns. Finally, this study does not incorporate a multimodal analysis of visual and audio cues in the film, nor does it extensively consider cultural interpretation, both of which may influence how character identity and stylistic choices are perceived.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data Availability Statement

This study does not include supplementary files such as additional figures, tables, or videos. The primary data consisted of the 2004 animated film Howl's Moving Castle, including all dialogues of Howl and narrative commentary,

which served as the textual corpus for stylistic and identity analysis. To ensure transparency and reproducibility, the transcribed and coded data can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. This approach highlights the study's reliance on publicly accessible materials while adhering to

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ethical research practices and respecting intellectual property rights.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed substantially to the conceptualization, execution, and preparation of the manuscript for this study.

- *Janine B. Debuque* managed data curation, verified coding and analysis, and contributed to reviewing and editing the manuscript.
- *April Jane A. Ahit* led the conceptualization, methodological design, data analysis, manuscript drafting, and visualization of results.
- *Darlene Faye Sarosos* provided feedback on manuscript clarity and contributed to the interpretation of findings.
- *Life Gabriel F. Osumo, LPT, MED-LT, CRS* served as project adviser, providing guidance on study design, methodological rigor, and overall project supervision. In addition, he contributed as a research analyst in linguistics, reviewing coding procedures, interpreting linguistic patterns, and ensuring alignment with standards for stylistic and discourse analysis standards.

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and accept responsibility for its scholarly content and integrity.

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Institutional Review Board (IRB) Statement

The study analyzed publicly available media and did not involve human participants. Therefore, ethical approval from an Institutional Review Board was not required.

Informed Consent Statement

No informed consent was necessary, as the research did not involve human subjects, personal data, or sensitive information. All materials were publicly accessible and used solely for academic purposes.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research or its outcomes.

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