

## A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY ON SPEECH STYLES USED BY TED TALKS' SPEAKERS ON EDUCATION

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Received date: 26/11/2025; Accepted date: 01/01/2026

**Abstract.** A person can use multiple speech styles at the same time and place. Social factors influence a person or group's speech style. In this study, the researchers investigated the speech styles used by TED Talks speakers of educational speech and the social factors influencing the speech styles. Documentary was used as research instrument by randomly taking TED Talks videos of the chosen speakers and the speech transcriptions. The researchers analysed the data using Martin Joos' theory of speech styles and Janet Holmes's social factors theory. The findings found three types of speech style; 1) formal style, 2) consultative style; and 3) casual style. Formal style was dominantly used in the speeches. From the results, the researchers concluded that speakers commonly use formal style in their speech to suit their academic topics.

**Keywords:** *speech style, social factors, TED talks, speech*

### INTRODUCTION

The TED Conference, founded by Richard Saul Wurman in 1984, is a renowned non-profit organization dedicated to disseminating influential ideas through education. This program event has emerged as a globally recognized platform for sharing innovative ideas, particularly in education. Speakers in TED Talks are often experts, thought leaders, or practitioners who deliver concise and engaging speeches to diverse audiences. Because the success of a TED Talk depends not only on content but also on how the message is delivered, the way speakers choose and vary their speech styles significantly affects audience engagement, comprehension, and persuasion.

In educational contexts, TED Talks on teaching methods, learning strategies, and educational reform serve as authentic models of spoken English. They demonstrate how communicative strategies, pragmatic choices, and rhetorical structures can influence the clarity and impact of educational discourse. Research on educational uses of TED Talks often focuses on learning outcomes and speaking competence, but fewer studies investigate the actual speech styles that speakers use in education-related talks and how these styles help convey meaning effectively (Saputra, 2025).

Understanding speech style variation—such as levels of formality, the use of pragmatic devices, persuasive techniques, and audience-oriented adjustments—can provide insights for educators, curriculum designers, and public speakers who wish to model effective educational communication. Such analysis can also enrich the study of spoken discourse and sociolinguistic adaptation in digital public speaking genres like TED Talks (Nguyen, 2024).

People can watch TED Talks on YouTube, which has over 25 million subscribers, or listen from Spotify, Google Podcast, and browse the TED website. As Vasilevich (2016) notes, the real magic of TED Talks lies in the speakers' ability to share their ideas in a way that inspires and motivates. And it's not just the audience that benefits - speakers hone their speaking and presentation skills through the process, according to Sailun and Idayani (2018).

Speakers of TED Talks often balance formal and informal elements—formal enough to establish credibility, yet conversational to maintain connection with a broad audience. The degree to which speakers adjust their lexis, tone, or interaction reflects strategic stylistic choices aimed at maximizing communicative impact.

TED Talks videos are valuable resources for language learners, offering a unique window into different speaking styles and techniques. Each speaker brings their own flair and personality to the stage, making for engaging and informative viewing. Speech style defines the type of language a speaker uses, which varies based on formality (Joos, 1967). They adopt different speech styles to connect with their audience and usually frame their language to fit the context. Typically, people alter their speech depending on who they're speaking with. The TED Talks audience is generally a diverse group interested in ideas, innovation, and creativity, leading speakers to adjust their language accordingly. Examples of speech styles based on Joos' theory can be found in TED Talks, where speakers present their ideas in various ways. Joos described five types of speech styles, they are frozen style, formal style, consultative style, casual style, and intimate style.

Frozen style is a formal communication style used in public speaking, characterized by careful planning, preparation, and a structured approach to language. Here are some key features and examples: 1) Careful planning and preparation for meticulous preparation and scripting to ensure a polished delivery of the speech; 2) Exaggerated intonation and rhetorical devices like metaphors, allusions, and repetition for the speakers to engage and persuade the audience; 3) Complex sentence structures with multiple clauses and formal vocabulary to perform professionalism of high of high level of skill and expertise; 4) Permanent and unchanging linguistic units which is often fixed and unchanging, with specific phrases and sentences repeated verbatim for consistent and clear information; 5) Monotone pronunciation to convey authority and gravity to keep the audience stay focused on the speech; and 6) Use in formal situations, such as: a) historical documents b) ceremonial speeches or sermons, c) formal pledges, and d) official documents. This style is "frozen" in time and content, meaning it remains unchanged and is often used by specialists, lawyers, and preachers.

Formal style is delivered in formal situations like important events or official gatherings and is characterized by: 1) Standardized format and structure to make the speech easy to follow; 2) Cold and formal tone for professional and objective speech delivery, without emotional expressions; 3) Complex and varied sentence structures showing a high level of language proficiency; 4) Extensive vocabulary often including technical or specialized terms for the audience to relate to the topic; 5) Planned language with complete sentences presented before delivery; and 6) Use in settings like: a) university lectures, b) sermons, c) judicial pronouncements, d) presidential speeches, and e) literary works.

Consultative style applies to semi-formal situations and features: 1) Careful word choice; 2) Clear pronunciation; 3) Complete but shorter sentences; 4) Constant feedback from the listener; and 5) Use in professional conversations, such as: a) doctor-patient interactions, b) teacher-student exchanges, c) lawyer-client

discussions, d) business meetings, and e) dialogues. This style relies on listener feedback and is often found in professional environments.

Casual style is used in informal settings and is defined by: 1) Relaxed and natural tone; 2) Use of slang and short phrases; 3) Free integration of background information into conversation; 4) Commonly used among friends, family, or close acquaintances; 5) Shortened language and vocabulary with regional variations; 6) Less focus on grammar and proper structure; and 7) Frequent use of slang signaling shared knowledge or assumptions. This style is usually seen in everyday interactions, such as: a) chatting with friends, b) emails to friends, c) blogs, and d) social events with familiar people. Casual style is not appropriate for formal or professional situations, and it's mainly used with close relations. Intimate style is used between individuals with very close relationships or in private settings, such as: a) family members, b) close friends, and c) loved ones (spouses, couples). This style has characteristics including: 1) Incomplete language and brief words; 2) Unclear articulation; 3) Private vocabulary and meanings shared only among a small group; 4) Intonation holds more importance than wording or grammar; 5) Lack of social inhibitions; 6) Used to convey feelings and intimate thoughts; and 7) Creates a comfortable and informal atmosphere. This style is specific to close relationships, allowing individuals to share personal thoughts and emotions without needing complete or formal language. As noted by Wardaugh (2006, p.51), people can speak in very formal or very informal ways; the choice depends on the situation. A formal setting often leads to a formal way of speaking, while a semi-formal setting can trigger a casual or intimate style.

The researchers are also interested in the social factors that influence the speakers' speech style. They found that the different words used by speakers are affected by various factors, as these speech styles reflect their social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the writer will apply Holmes' theory to gain insights. There are four main social factors that impact a speaker's language (Holmes, 1992). The first factor is participants; who is speaking and who they are speaking to. This includes aspects like social identity, age, gender, personal traits, and the relationship between participants (e.g., family, friends, boss-employee). The second factor is setting or social context; this refers to where the interaction occurs, whether it's a formal or informal setting, as well as cultural context, location, and social expectations. The third factor is the topic; what is being discussed. This includes differing views, linking ideas thematically, syntactically, or logically, and identifying a main topic for effective communication. The fourth factor is the function of the interaction; this is why people are speaking and includes expressive (sharing feelings), directive (asking someone to do something), referential (giving information), metalinguistic (commenting on language), poetic (aesthetic features), and phatic (showing support and empathy). These social factors shape language style, affecting word choice, tone, and level of formality. Understanding these factors is vital for clear communication and politeness. In this study, the researchers will examine the speech style of TED Talks speakers on education, since education is one of the topics discussed on stage. The selected topic aims to help readers understand the speech styles used by speakers when addressing education. Based on this explanation, the researchers conducted this study to explore the types of speech styles employed by selected TED Talks speakers on education topics and identify what factors shape these speech styles investigated in this study.

## **Research Design**

The researchers used descriptive qualitative in conducting this study. This study used documentary as its instrument to gather the data from the script of the speakers' speech on education available at TED Talks YouTube channel. The researchers used six videos performing different speakers. The videos were randomly chosen to represent the topics on education, age, gender, and occupation. The researchers downloaded the scripts of the speech from the website, then validated the texts by reading through the scripts while watching the videos. The researchers used the videos to find the speech styles of those TED Talks speakers and the social factors influencing them in delivering their speech. The data of this study were gathered from the script of the TED Talks speakers' speech and the background information from the description box of each speakers' video. In collecting the data, the researchers applied the systematic ways as follow:

- 1) The researchers downloaded the videos of six TED Talks speakers on education topic available at official YouTube channel of TED Talks. The videos can be accessed at the following links:
  - a) Speaker 1: Story of Our Education by Adhitya Lyer (17.42 minutes)
  - b) Speaker 2: The Future of Education by Anna Nixon (10.04 minutes)
  - c) Speaker 3: Toxic Culture of Education by Joshua Katz (17.01 minutes)
  - d) Speaker 4: Students Need to Lead the Classroom Not Teachers by Katherine Cadwell (11.31 minutes)
  - e) Speaker 5: Teaching Methods for Inspiring the Students of the Future by Joe Ruhl (17.41 minutes)
  - f) Speaker 6: Educate a Woman, Educate a Generation by Dr. Anupama K. Malaq (10.16 minutes)
- 2) The researchers took the scripts of each TED Talks speaker's speech;
- 3) The researchers watched and listened to the videos and carefully read the scripts;
- 4) The researchers categorized and interpreted the kind of speech styles used by the TED Talks speakers;
- 5) The researchers investigated the background information of the TED Talks speakers;
- 6) The last step, the researchers identified the data contains of the speech styles of the TED Talks speakers and their background information as the social factors influencing their speech style.

After collecting the data, the researchers classified the data which belong to the types of speech style, such as interrupting the utterance, editing terms, and correction and its relation to the original utterance by Martin Joos's theory (1967) and found the speech style used by the TED Talks speakers. It is used to give evidence to the application of Martin Joos's theory in the speech of the TED Talks speakers. After that the researchers investigated the social factors that influence the speakers' speech style then discussed the finding to draw the conclusion after getting the result of the analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The six speakers of TED Talks whose speech the researchers investigated have different background. The researchers believe that the backgrounds influence the speakers' speech styles. The first speaker, Adithya Lyer, is originally from India. His TED Talks performance was held in Mumbai as he completed his engineering degree from Mumbai university. He is a young engineer and a writer. Aditya was listed as

one of India's Top 30 student entrepreneurs by NEN. He delivered a speech on education entitled "The interesting story of our educational system". The second speaker, Anna Nixon, is a 17 years old girl. Anna is a co-founder of STEM4Girls, a non-profit organization that works to get more girls involved in STEM activities. Her family is originally from India and have been migrated to USA for years. The Nixons' passion for science and technology has led Anna to work with robots since she was 7 years old. She performed a topic "The future of education, a students' perspective" in her TED Talks episode. The third speaker, Joshua Katz, is a high school math teacher in Orange County, Florida. He delivered a topic "Toxic culture of education". He thinks the education system nowadays is a toxic culture because it damages students, impacts economy and threatening culture. The fourth speaker, Katherine Cadwell, is an inspirational teacher from Harwood Union High School that has been teaching for more than 30 years and has received a few rewards due to her teaching achievement. In her episode of TED Talks, Katherine shared a worth spreading topic "Students need to lead the classroom not teachers". The fifth speaker, Joe Ruhl, is a high school teacher that has received many awards. He received his bachelor and master degrees at Purdue University and has been teaching biology for 37 years. He presently teaches biology, genetics and science research courses at a school in Lafayette, Indiana. Joe brought out his TED Talks topic in this episode about "Teaching methods for inspiring the students of the future". The last speaker, Anupama K. Malaq, is an Indian academician, self-motivated with life changing ideas which stem from two decades of experience in administration and teaching and has been working to empowering woman for years. This Ted talks episode was being held in Bengaluru, India with topic "Educate a woman, educate a generation".

The researchers found that from the videos of those six TED Talks speakers, there were 266 utterances which belong to three kinds of speech styles. There are 205 utterances of formal style, 2 utterances of consultative style, and 61 utterances of casual style. The findings showed that formal style was the most common type of speech styles used by the speakers. Among the language styles listed in Joos' theory, frozen style and intimate style were not used by all speakers.

Formal style is used by the speakers in their speech for 205 by the following distribution: Speaker 1 for 27 uses, Speaker 2 for 5 uses, Speaker 3 for 68 uses, Speaker 4 for 32 uses, Speaker 5 for 22 uses, and Speaker 6 for 21 uses. Formal style is used in situations in which the speakers are very careful about pronunciation, choice of words, and sentence structure. The followings are samples of formal style utterances delivered by the speakers in their speech.

1. Speaker 1

*"However now that I am here, I am going to tell you about the world's most interesting educational story"*

This utterance is stated by the first speaker to tell the audience about the topic he is going to talk about on the stage. It indicates formal style because Joos says formal style is used in a serious situation and used standard language. As he opens his talk, he speaks seriously and uses formal language in polite manner.

2. Speaker 2

*"She told me that they never learned anything more than simple addition and subtraction but that was enough to get her hooked on computers for life"*

This utterance is categorized into formal style because she used a complete sentence that contained correct grammar and moreover the situation is formal, it can be seen from the way she talked. She also uses related terms to deliver her thoughts in her speech politely.

## 3. Speaker 3

*"So, we have to fight this toxic culture of education, we have to change the public narrative away from the curriculum, away from the schools, even away from the teachers, and we have to focus on our students!"*

This one is identified as formal style because the speaker used standard language and in a correct grammar as he told the audience about the topic; to fight the toxic culture of education and what to change. It can be considered that he talked in a serious manner.

## 4. Speaker 4

*"Our current educational system is still stuck in the dark ages despite recent efforts at school redesign many high school students are in classrooms where they are being asked to absorb mass amounts of information and then regurgitate it back on a test"*

This utterance is included formal style. This is because there were some characteristics of formal style occurred in the speaker's utterance. There is no omission or short form language and the sentence is in well structure and no grammarless.

## 5. Speaker 5

*"And I know they smiled when they put those cave paintings up on the wall because creativity is a uniquely human, pleasurable, satisfying activity"*

This utterance is considered as formal style because the speaker used well-structured sentence and not grammarless as Joos stated that formal style in speech consists of well-spoken utterances in structure and grammar. The lines delivered the speaker's thoughts using topic-related terms.

## 6. Speaker 6

*"Out of this a 32 million are in the primary school going age and another 97 million girls are in the secondary school going age."*

This utterance categorized into formal style for the speaker used certain technical terms related to the topic. It indicates a formal style because Joos says formal style is used standard language and right grammatically.

The consultative style was used two times by Speaker 1. His consultative style utterances are:

1. *"Can we do this ma'am? Can we? super let's do it".*

This utterance pronounced by the speaker is categorized into consultative because it consisted of a question which he delivered to one of the audiences as he invited the audience to play a game however the manner is polite because he used the word "ma'am".

2. *"Anyone? Oh lovely, he is right"*

This utterance is categorized into consultative because it consisted of a question. Joos stated that consultative style happened in a conversation between two people. The speaker was asking the audience to answer the game question, and one of the audiences answered him that is why he said "lovely" as he reacted to the correct answer. This proven that, a conversation has happened between the speaker and one of the audiences.

The casual style was used by three speakers for 61 times. This style was used by Speaker 1 for 31 times, Speaker 5 for 29 times, and Speaker 6 for 1 time.

## 1. Speaker 1

*"Now Who am I and why and how do I know so much, look he's laughing. He's, he's an engineer himself" (LAUGHING)*

This utterance is identified as casual since the speaker laughed to his one of the audiences that laughed in the middle of his talk. He then pointed the audience and laughed together while continued his talk although the sentence is still well structured and in polite manner.

## 2. Speaker 5

*"All right. You're going to have to bear with me. I'm going to get real goose-bumpy for a minute. One of the absolute, most exciting moments of my life, my professional life was meeting Albert Einstein just a few years ago. Changed my life, bumping into him in that wax museum. What a moment it was"*

This utterance is identified as casual style because it consists of short form and slang. the speaker used the word "goose-bumpy" which is a slang word that supposed to be used in informal situation yet the sentence is still delivered in polite manner.

## 3. Speaker 6

*"Empowerment is something much, much beyond this now how do we look at empowerment"*

This utterance is identified as casual since the speaker used non-standard language; it was the repetition of word "much". The word appeared twice in the sentence although the context is explaining about the amount but still repetition is labelled casual style.

The use of certain types of speech style has been influenced by four factors that proposed by Holmes (1992). They are the audiences or who understand or speak the language being used by the speakers, the setting or social context of interaction, the topic, and the function of interaction.

The factors that influence the speakers to use speech style in their utterances also explained by researchers. The researchers found that the three speech styles occur because of some factors. The researchers use Janet Holmes's theory about social factors influencing speech style. In TED Talks the speakers should be attention of where they are, who are they talking to, what topic is being delivered. It needed to produce the suitable utterance for the best time.

Frozen style refers to the style that is employed in a highly respectful setting or formal occasions. The speech style indicates very high standard language. This style is used in a very formal setting such as in church, mosque, ritual, and some other occasions. By this line, frozen style is impossible to be occurred in TED Talks stage and used by the speakers.

Intimate style also did not appear to be use by the speakers. It is a style among intimate members of a family or friends that do not need a complete language with clear articulation. Furthermore, intimate language is also characterized by rapid, slurred, pronunciation, non-verbal communication, and private code characteristics. Intimate style rare to be happen in TED Talks because of its degree of formality. TED Talks is a famous platform and the setting is formal which it will be weird if the speakers use intimate style to speak to stranger.

The speakers used three speech styles namely formal style, consultative style and casual style. The most speech style used is formal style. As the researchers mentioned before that TED Talks' setting is formal because it contains a speaker and a large audience, therefore formal style must be the most used speech style. Consultative style is a style which is used in semiformal communication situation. The typical occurrence of consultative speech is while one speaking at intervals the others give short responses. This rarely happen in TED Talks because of the setting

of TED Talks, however the speech style happened to be use by the first speaker. The speaker delivered questions to his audience and got responses. It shows that a conversation is happened although the speaker still using a polite manner that supposed to be use in a formal setting event. Casual style occurred to be the second most used speech style by the speakers. The speakers used non-standard language like a slang and repetition. The sentence also not well structured and contains repetition.

The whole social factors influenced the TED Talks speakers, they are the audiences or users of language, the setting or social interaction, topic and the function of interaction. The setting of TED Talks caused the speakers to use formal style. In addition, the audience factor such as age, occupation and ethnic background are affecting the speakers in using casual style. It can be seen from the first and fifth speakers, they both were using casual style. The audience became a factor influencing the first speaker is his age and ethnic background. He is a young engineer and he delivered his ideas to Indian people because the TED Talks is held in Mumbai as well. The audience were Indian same as him, that's why although the setting was formal, the speakers still use casual style in delivering his speech. Different than the first speakers before, the fifth speaker used casual style the most in his speech, it happened that he spoke calmly and used slang and short forms. He successfully made the audiences laugh through his story telling about his students yet he still managed to speak seriously as his occupation is a teacher.

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