

The Power of Words and Silence: A Language Style Analysis of *John Wick*

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Abstract

This study analyzes the language style in the action film *John Wick* (2014), focusing on the use of minimalist dialogue, silence, and non-verbal communication as key narrative tools. By examining the film through linguistic, semiotic, and narrative lenses, the research explores how the restrained use of language contributes to character development, emotional engagement, and thematic exploration, particularly the themes of vengeance, justice, and sacrifice. The results highlight how the film's sparse dialogue and strategic silences enhance the portrayal of the protagonist's emotional isolation and internal conflict. Additionally, the study emphasizes the role of non-verbal communication in conveying the protagonist's psychological state and moral dilemmas. This research fills a gap in existing literature by examining the underexplored area of minimalist language use in action cinema and contributes to a deeper understanding of how language, silence, and non-verbal cues can work together to enhance the cinematic experience.

Keywords: action cinema, character development, *John Wick*, justice, language style, minimalist dialogue, non-verbal communication, semiotics, silence, vengeance

Introduction

The film *John Wick*, first released in 2014, has become a cultural phenomenon in the world of action cinema. Known for its intense fight scenes and stunning visuals, *John Wick* also presents a unique and meaningful language style. In this film, communication occurs not only through words but also through silence and body language, creating a tense and emotionally charged atmosphere.

At its core, the language style in *John Wick* plays a role far beyond simply conveying information; it becomes an integral part of character development, especially for the protagonist, John Wick, and helps shape a gripping, suspenseful mood. The dialogue in the film is often minimalist, filled with purposeful monologues and rarely idle conversation, giving the impression that every word spoken carries weight and significance.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of language use in cinema. For instance, Neale in Labatut and Bost (2020) examined how film dialogue is used to establish character identity, while Jannidis et al. (*Elements of Cinematic Language: Exploring Narrative Structure and Artistic Dimensions in Shaping Cinematic Discourse* NourEddin Abdelwahed HADOU MoulayTahar University, Saida / Algeria NourBachir University Center, Elbayadh / Algeria HADOU NourEddin Abd, 2024) explored how linguistic choices in film contribute to the narrative structure and audience perception. Additionally, studies like those by Chion in Xu (2022) claim that soundtracks and dialogue highlight how silence and sound can deeply impact emotional responses and tension in cinematic works.

Despite these contributions, research focusing specifically on the language style of action films, particularly in *John Wick*, remains underexplored. Most studies concentrate on dialogue-heavy genres or the impact of visual elements, neglecting the subtleties of language, silence, and minimalistic dialogue in action cinema. Thus, a clear gap exists in understanding how these elements contribute to character development, narrative tension, and thematic depth in action films.

This study aims to address this gap by focusing on *John Wick* as a case study to analyze the use of language in shaping character, mood, and thematic elements. Specifically, it will explore how word choice, intonation, and the strategic use of silence contribute to the film's narrative, creating a distinctive atmosphere of suspense and intensity.

Through this analysis, this research will also explore how language functions as a tool to express the film's central themes of vengeance, justice, and sacrifice, offering a deeper understanding of how language influences action genre storytelling.

The study of language in cinema has developed significantly over the years, with various scholars analyzing the pivotal role that dialogue, silence, and non-verbal cues play in shaping narratives and emotional responses. According to Cooney and Wheatley (2025), dialogue is a crucial element in establishing character identity, providing the audience with insights into the internal struggles and motivations of the characters. Hobbs, (2019) further expanded this by focusing on the linguistic choices that films make, asserting that these choices have a significant impact on both narrative structure and audience perception. Dialogue, in this context, is not just about information exchange but is woven into the fabric of the narrative to enhance emotional resonance and deepen the thematic elements of the film.

Acosta (2020) add that the seminal work on the role of sound in cinema emphasizes the importance of silence and its capacity to heighten emotional engagement, particularly in films where tension is a key element of the narrative. Chion argued that silence, when used strategically, is just as expressive as dialogue and can amplify the suspense, making the viewer more attuned to the character's psychological states and the atmosphere of the film. Rachman et al., (2019) further explored the idea of silence in films, suggesting that minimal speech allows for the portrayal of complex emotions, often leaving much of the emotional weight to be inferred from the characters' actions, body language, and visual cues.

This concept is especially relevant in *John Wick*, where the minimalist use of dialogue creates an atmosphere of tension and suspense. Silence in the film is not just the absence of sound, but rather a critical tool in the narrative design that draws attention to the protagonist's emotional state, making every word spoken and every moment of stillness loaded with meaning.

The action genre is often dominated by fast-paced sequences and high-octane visuals, which can overshadow the use of language. However, recent scholarship suggests that even in action films, language plays an essential role in deepening the emotional complexity of characters and narratives. Friedman (2016) and Liptak (2018) studied films like *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Drive* (2011), noting how sparse dialogue enhances the emotional depth and character development. These films, while focused on intense action, use minimalistic dialogue to invite the audience to engage more deeply with the psychological undercurrents of the story.

In *John Wick*, the minimal dialogue serves to highlight the emotional isolation and inner turmoil of the protagonist. The film's focus on actions rather than words provides a unique opportunity to examine how the sparing use of language enhances the film's themes of vengeance, justice, and personal sacrifice.

The semiotic approach to film analysis, championed by Barthes in Rondhi et al., (2025), provides an insightful framework for understanding how language and non-verbal cues in film convey meaning. Barthes introduced the concept of the "filmic signifier," where elements such as dialogue, gestures, and facial expressions act as signs that carry deeper meanings within the context of the film. These signs create a complex network of meaning, where the relationship between visual and verbal elements contributes to the overall interpretation of the film.

In *John Wick*, every gesture, glance, and word spoken by the protagonist is laden with significance. The film's use of minimalist dialogue and the strategic silence can be analyzed through the lens of semiotics, where these elements serve as powerful signs that reveal not only the character's emotional state but also the broader themes of the narrative.

Jiang (2023) explored the relationship between visual storytelling and language in cinema, proposing that film language is a combination of visual and verbal elements that work together to create a cohesive narrative experience. In their analysis of film aesthetics, they suggest that dialogue and visuals can influence the pacing, tone, and rhythm of the film. This perspective is particularly relevant for *John Wick*, where the interplay between action and dialogue is used to maintain a steady narrative flow, with language serving as a complement to the film's visual style.

John Wick is a prime example of how dialogue and visuals work together to create a distinct cinematic experience. The film's visual aesthetic—its stylized action sequences, muted color palette, and slow-motion shots—serves to intensify the sparse dialogue, which becomes even more potent against the backdrop of its high-stakes action. The controlled pacing of both action and dialogue contributes to the film's unique emotional atmosphere.

While substantial research has been done on language in cinema, especially in genres that prioritize verbal communication such as drama or comedy, there remains a noticeable gap in studies focusing on the strategic use of language and silence in action films. Existing research has predominantly explored genres where dialogue is more prominent, and has often neglected the role of minimalistic language in action genres, particularly in films like *John Wick*. The gap exists

in understanding how action films can use sparse dialogue and silence not only for narrative efficiency but to create a complex emotional and psychological landscape that enhances the thematic depth of the film.

This research seeks to address this gap by analyzing how *John Wick* uses minimalist dialogue and silence as essential narrative devices. Through this analysis, the study aims to explore how language in action films can contribute to character development, emotional depth, and the portrayal of key themes such as vengeance, justice, and sacrifice.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design, aiming to provide an in-depth analysis of the language style in *John Wick* and its contribution to character development, mood, and thematic exploration. The research focuses on the film's use of minimalist dialogue, silence, and non-verbal cues as key narrative tools. The choice of qualitative research is driven by the need to explore the subtleties of language and visual storytelling in a cinematic context, where the goal is to uncover meanings and emotional undercurrents that go beyond surface-level observations.

The primary data for this study is derived from *John Wick* (2014), which will be analyzed through a close reading of the film's dialogue, character interactions, and visual elements. The analysis will focus specifically on scenes where language is minimal, silence is prevalent, or non-verbal communication plays a significant role. The film will be transcribed for detailed analysis, and specific scenes will be selected based on their relevance to the research questions. Additionally, secondary data will be gathered from relevant scholarly articles, books, and previous studies on film language, action cinema, and semiotics to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis.

The analysis will be guided by a combination of linguistic and semiotic theories. The primary theoretical lenses will be:

- 1) **Linguistic Analysis:** Based on the theories of Zhezhnych et al. (2019), this study will examine the role of dialogue in character development and its contribution to the overall narrative structure. Special attention will be given to the minimalistic dialogue used in the film, exploring how it enhances suspense, builds tension, and develops the protagonist's identity.
- 2) **Semiotic Analysis:** Rachman et al. (2019) claimed concept of the "filmic signifier" will be applied to explore how non-verbal elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language function as signs that convey deeper meanings within the film. The interplay of silence and language will be analyzed through this semiotic approach to understand how both verbal and non-verbal elements contribute to the film's thematic depth.
- 3) **Narrative and Aesthetic Analysis:** Jiang (2023) work on film aesthetics will guide the examination of how language and visual elements work together to create a distinct cinematic experience. The integration of action sequences with dialogue and silence will be analyzed to understand how both verbal and visual components influence the pacing, tone, and rhythm of the film.

The film will be viewed multiple times to allow for a comprehensive understanding of its language use and visual storytelling. During these viewings, particular attention will be paid to the instances where dialogue is minimal or absent, focusing on how the film conveys meaning through silence, gestures, and visual cues. Key scenes will be selected for a detailed scene-by-scene breakdown, where the dialogue, silence, and body language will be transcribed and coded.

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns in how language, silence, and non-verbal cues are used to develop character, mood, and themes. The analysis will also compare the film's use of language and silence with theories from previous studies on minimalist dialogue in action cinema.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, the study will follow a rigorous methodological approach, ensuring that the interpretations of dialogue and silence are consistent across the film. Additionally, the study will draw upon existing literature on language in cinema, which will serve as a point of comparison to validate the interpretations of *John Wick*. Triangulation will be employed by comparing the film's language style with similar action films, allowing for a broader understanding of how minimalist dialogue and silence function within the genre.

As the study involves the analysis of a publicly available film, there are no major ethical concerns related to the content itself. However, the study will ensure that all references to external sources are appropriately cited, and any interpretations of the film will be grounded in established academic research.

Results and Discussion

Use of Minimalist Dialogue

One of the most striking aspects of *John Wick* is its use of minimalist dialogue, which serves as a deliberate narrative tool. The protagonist, John Wick, rarely engages in lengthy verbal exchanges, often conveying more through his actions and silences than through spoken words. This restraint in dialogue creates an atmosphere of tension and isolation, which is central to the character's emotional journey and the overall narrative tone of the film.

The limited dialogue in *John Wick* contributes to the development of the protagonist's identity as a man of few words, emphasizing his stoic nature and inner turmoil. For instance, during key moments of the film, such as when Wick seeks vengeance for the death of his dog, his words are sparse, and his actions take precedence. This use of minimal dialogue enhances the film's focus on his emotional state, making the moments of speech even more powerful when they occur. These brief verbal exchanges are often direct and to the point, signifying the urgency and intensity of the character's motivations.

From a linguistic perspective, this minimalist dialogue is a departure from more conventional action films where characters often engage in witty banter or extended conversations. By contrast, *John Wick* uses dialogue not as a tool for entertainment but as a functional element that drives the plot forward while simultaneously deepening the emotional stakes. This approach highlights the notion put forth by Neale in Lin et al. (2020), where language becomes a means of

creating tension and furthering character development, rather than merely delivering exposition.

Strategic Use of Silence

Silence plays a critical role in *John Wick*, functioning not only as a narrative tool but also as a means of amplifying the tension and emotional resonance of the film. The film's use of silence is especially prominent in moments where the protagonist is alone or engaged in reflective moments. These silences allow the audience to focus on the character's internal state, which is often more telling than any spoken dialogue.

For example, in several scenes, such as when Wick is preparing for action or reflecting on his past, the absence of dialogue serves to emphasize the weight of his actions and the consequences of his quest for vengeance. In these moments, the lack of verbal communication is a visual and auditory cue that draws the audience deeper into Wick's psychological state, suggesting a man who is emotionally distant yet profoundly affected by his past.

Demina et al. (2022) state that exploration of silence in cinema is highly relevant in this context, as it shows that silence can act as a powerful emotional device. By withholding words, *John Wick* allows the audience to feel the weight of the protagonist's actions, drawing them into his emotional journey. In this way, silence becomes as expressive as language, conveying unspoken emotions that cannot be captured by words alone.

Semiotics and Non-Verbal Communication

In addition to dialogue and silence, non-verbal communication—such as body language, facial expressions, and visual cues—also plays a significant role in *John Wick*. The protagonist's body language, in particular, is a key element in conveying his emotional state and motivations. For instance, Wick's deliberate and controlled movements during action sequences, coupled with his cold, calculating demeanor, convey his emotional detachment and focus. These non-verbal cues help to build a character who is not defined by his words but by his actions and presence. Hadou and Makhoulf (2024) explain that the concept of the "filmic signifier" is particularly useful in understanding the role of non-verbal communication in *John Wick*. The protagonist's silence and minimalistic dialogue act as signs that point to deeper emotional and psychological states, which are often communicated more effectively through his actions than through spoken language. The film's reliance on visual storytelling, where the language of action is intertwined with the character's physicality, enriches the audience's understanding of Wick's motivations and inner conflict.

Moreover, the film's stylized action sequences, which often occur without dialogue, rely heavily on non-verbal communication to convey meaning. In these sequences, the use of slow-motion shots, visual contrasts, and the protagonist's stoic expressions serve as signs that signify the character's emotional state, further reinforcing the film's emphasis on the relationship between language, silence, and non-verbal cues.

Narrative Tension and Thematic Depth

The minimalist language style in *John Wick* not only shapes the protagonist's character but also enhances the film's exploration of broader themes such as vengeance, justice, and sacrifice. By using silence and minimal dialogue, the film allows these themes to unfold gradually, without the need for overt explanations. The sparse dialogue mirrors the protagonist's internal struggle,

with each word carrying emotional weight that adds depth to his quest for revenge.

The narrative tension in *John Wick* is built around the contrast between action and dialogue. The film's action scenes, which are often quick and brutal, are punctuated by moments of silence or minimalist dialogue that add emotional gravity to the high-stakes moments. This juxtaposition between action and silence mirrors the internal conflict within John Wick, who seeks justice but is also deeply affected by the violence he must carry out. This tension is a key thematic element of the film, as it explores the moral complexities of revenge and the emotional toll it takes on the individual.

In line with Yacavone (2018) argument, the film's silence amplifies the emotional impact of the action, allowing the audience to engage more deeply with the protagonist's psychological and moral journey. The minimal dialogue serves not only to heighten the tension but also to emphasize the emotional weight of the decisions Wick must make, reinforcing the film's exploration of the destructive power of vengeance.

Conclusion

This study has explored the distinctive language style in *John Wick*, focusing on the strategic use of minimalist dialogue, silence, and non-verbal communication to shape the film's narrative and thematic depth. The results demonstrate that the film's restrained language style is not just a stylistic choice, but a deliberate narrative tool that enhances character development, emotional engagement, and the exploration of key themes such as vengeance, justice, and sacrifice.

By examining the film through the lenses of linguistic analysis, semiotics, and narrative aesthetics, it becomes evident that John Wick utilizes language to create a unique cinematic experience. The sparse dialogue contributes to the portrayal of the protagonist, John Wick, as a stoic and emotionally isolated figure, while also emphasizing the emotional weight of his actions. The strategic use of silence amplifies the tension and emotional resonance of key scenes, providing the audience with a deeper understanding of the character's internal conflict. Non-verbal communication, particularly body language and facial expressions, plays a significant role in conveying the protagonist's psychological state and moral dilemmas.

Furthermore, this study highlights the gap in existing research concerning the use of minimalist language and silence in action films, particularly in the context of *John Wick*. While much has been written about the use of dialogue in other film genres, the unique blend of action, silence, and restrained language in action films has remained relatively unexplored. By addressing this gap, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how language can be used as an emotional and narrative tool in action cinema.

In conclusion, *John Wick* serves as a compelling example of how language, in its most minimal form, can be a powerful force in shaping character, narrative, and themes. This study provides a foundation for further research into the role of language in action films, encouraging a deeper exploration of how dialogue, silence, and non-verbal cues can work together to enhance the cinematic experience.

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