LANGUAGE REGISTER AND HUMAN–ANIMAL REPRESENTATION IN EMIRATI CHILDREN'S ANIMATION: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF *MANSOUR*'S "TINNĪN AL-KOMODO"

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Abstract

Children's animated media increasingly claim environmental and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) alignment, yet the linguistic strategies through which such media construct authority around endangered species remain rarely examined, particularly in Gulf-produced, Arabic-language productions. This study aimed to examine how diglossic language variation and visual narrative choices in the Emirati animated series *Mansour* constructed the relationship between humans and endangered wildlife, using the episode "Tinnīn al-Komodo" as a case study. Using a qualitative design, the study applied two methods to this single-episode dataset: functional diglossia coding, classifying dialogue along a high–low register continuum, and ecolinguistic analysis of framing, animal characterization, and narrative resolution. Coding of the episode's dialogue revealed a functional diglossic pattern, in which the formal register was reserved for authoritative, factual narration about wildlife and conservation, while the colloquial Gulf register dominated interpersonal exchange. At the narrative level, the episode's comedic framing coexisted with a resolution in which the Komodo dragon, an Endangered and nationally protected species, was neutralized through technology rather than observed or left undisturbed, a tension read as anthropocentric despite the text's self-framing as environmental education. The study offers a replicable coding framework for diglossia-informed media analysis and contributes to ecolinguistic scholarship on children's media in Arabic-language contexts, a setting largely absent from existing literature.

Keywords: diglossia; ecolinguistics; Emirati animation; human–animal representation; SDGs

INTRODUCTION

Children's animation occupies a paradoxical position in contemporary media culture: it is widely dismissed as light entertainment, yet research consistently identifies it as a major agent of childhood socialization, shaping how children construct social norms, values, and expectations about the world (Ahmed & Wahab, 2014). This socializing function increasingly extends to environmental and sustainability education aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. As streaming platforms and YouTube channels expand the reach of regionally produced animation, Gulf-produced series occupy a growing share of Arabic-language children's media, yet the linguistic and representational strategies embedded in these productions remain comparatively underexamined relative to their Western counterparts.

Two bodies of scholarship point toward this gap, though neither closes it. (AlShurafa et al., 2021) examined the Saudi YouTube series *Masameer* through Barthesian semiotics combined with critical discourse analysis and found that its ostensibly comedic content carried embedded ideological representations and power relations; their coding, however, treated language and ideology as a single

undifferentiated layer, leaving the series' constant switching between classical and colloquial Arabic a trait journalistic commentary has credited as central to its cultural resonance analytically untouched. Working in a different regional context but toward a related conclusion, (Asemanyi & Hammond, 2025) applied critical discourse analysis to animated cartoons of African origin and explicitly noted that, despite substantial literature on Western children's media, cartoons produced outside the Global North remain comparatively unexplored; like AlShurafa et al., their framework was not built to isolate linguistic register, nor to analyze how such cartoons represent non-human subjects. At a more foundational level, (Hosea & Starr, 2024) reported that a keyword search of major animation journals returned strikingly few results for "decolonial," indicating that animation studies lags behind adjacent fields in decolonial engagement generally.

Taken together, these three studies agree that non-Western animation carries ideological weight worth analyzing, but disagree, in effect, on how: none isolates register variation as its own analytic layer, and none examines a case in which one non-Western media industry represents the ecology of another. This is the specific configuration that remains unresolved and that the present study addresses.

This study addresses that gap through a case study of "Tinnīn al-Komodo," an episode of the Emirati animated series *Mansour* in which Emirati child characters encounter the Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*) in Indonesia, a species classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List (Jessop et al., 2021) and protected under Indonesian conservation law. The episode is analyzed along two intersecting dimensions: the functional distribution of high, mid, and low Arabic registers across dialogue, and the ecolinguistic and ecocritical construction of the Komodo dragon as a narrative and visual subject.

Accordingly, this study poses two research questions: (1) How is diglossic register variation functionally distributed across dialogue types in the episode? (2) How does the episode's narrative and visual treatment of the Komodo dragon position the relationship between humans and endangered wildlife, and what tension, if any, exists between this

treatment and the episode's self-presentation as SDG-aligned environmental education? To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study to combine sociolinguistic register coding with ecolinguistic and ecocritical analysis of Gulf-produced animation, and the first to examine a case of South–South ecological representation within this media context. By doing so, the study contributes a replicable methodological framework and extends decolonial and ecocritical media scholarship beyond its conventional West-versus-non-West axis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diglossia. (Ferguson, 1959) described diglossia as the coexistence, within a single speech community, of a High variety reserved for formal or authoritative functions and a Low variety used in everyday interaction; crucially, the two varieties are not interchangeable, and their distribution is governed by social function rather than personal preference. (Badawi, 1973) complicated this binary for spoken Arabic specifically, proposing a five-level continuum rather than two fixed poles, on the grounds that everyday speech rarely sits cleanly at either extreme. For Gulf colloquial media such as *Mansour*, Badawi's continuum offers the more defensible coding tool: it accommodates utterances that carry features of both varieties instead of forcing an artificial binary choice.

Ecolinguistics. Diglossia theory explains how language varies, but says nothing about what that language does to non-human subjects a gap (Stibbe, 2021) addresses through the concept of "stories we live by," the cognitive frames embedded in language that shape how audiences perceive their relationship with the natural world. His framework supplies four analytic tools used in this study: framing (how a subject is characterized), salience (what is emphasized through repetition or visual weight), erasure (what relevant information is omitted), and evaluation (the implicit judgment attached to a subject through word choice or tone). Stibbe's extended treatment of animal erasure is directly relevant here: he argues that texts claiming an educational or conservationist stance can simultaneously erase the very facts that would support that stance.

Ecocriticism. (Garrard, 2012) situates such micro-level choices within a broader interpretive axis running from anthropocentrism, in which nature is valued only

instrumentally, to ecocentrism, in which non-human life holds independent value. His treatment of animals as narrative devices is particularly useful: a creature can function in a text either as a symbol or obstacle serving a human protagonist's arc, or as a subject whose own existence the narrative must reckon with. This axis provides the level at which this study's scene-by-scene codes are ultimately aggregated into a single interpretive claim

Critical comparison with prior empirical studies. Three empirical precedents inform this study's design, yet each stops short of the intersection it occupies. (AlShurafa et al., 2021) demonstrated, through Barthesian semiotics and critical discourse analysis of the Saudi animation *Masameer*, that comedic surface content can carry embedded ideological representation; their coding, however, collapsed language and ideology into a single layer, leaving register variation unaddressed, and their object of representation was Saudi society itself rather than a foreign locale or non-human subject. (Asemanyi & Hammond, 2025) confirmed, using Thompson's Modes of Ideology on African-origin cartoons, that non-Western animation is a legitimate and underused object of ideological critique, but their framework was not designed to isolate linguistic register or to analyze human–animal relations. (Hosea & Starr, 2024) established that decolonial framing remains rare in animation scholarship generally a finding that explains the scarcity of directly comparable prior work, though it does not itself supply an analytic method.

None of these three studies combines register coding with ecolinguistic or ecocritical reading, and none examines a case in which one non-Western media industry represents the ecology of another. This is the specific gap the present study fills.

Conceptual synthesis. These three theoretical strands and three empirical precedents together support a two-level analytical framework. At the micro level, Badawi's continuum classifies each utterance by register, while Stibbe's four categories classify each scene by how it frames, foregrounds, omits, or evaluates the Komodo dragon. At the macro level, Garrard's anthropocentrism–ecocentrism axis aggregates these micro-level codes into a single interpretive claim about the episode's overall stance toward endangered wildlife.

Consistent with the empirical precedent set by (AlShurafa et al., 2021) and (Asemanyi & Hammond, 2025) both of which grounded ideological claims in close, scene-level coding rather than impressionistic reading this study treats its macro-level claim as provisional, pending comparison with episodes set in domestic Emirati locales.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design combining sociolinguistic register coding with ecolinguistic and ecocritical textual analysis. The design is textual rather than ethnographic or experimental: no human participants are observed or interviewed, and the object of inquiry is a single audiovisual text treated as a corpus. This design directly serves the two research questions, which ask how language varies functionally within the text (RQ1) and how the text represents an endangered species (RQ2) questions that require close, repeated reading of a fixed dataset rather than participant-based data collection.

Research setting and dataset. The dataset consists of a single episode, "Tinnīn al-Komodo," from the Emirati animated series *Mansour*, uploaded to the series' official YouTube channel on 29 July 2026, with a total runtime of 8 minutes and 10 seconds (2026 ,منصور). No explicit season or episode number is indicated on the platform; the video is identified by its title and upload date alone. The unit of analysis comprises two data types: (1) the complete verbal dialogue of the episode, transcribed in full, and (2) key visual scenes involving the Komodo dragon, captured as still frames for semiotic and ecolinguistic analysis.

Sampling. The episode was selected through purposive sampling on the grounds that it is, to the researcher's knowledge, the only *Mansour* episode explicitly set in Indonesia and centered on an endangered, internationally recognized species, making it the most directly relevant case for the study's research questions. Within the episode, all dialogue was included in the diglossia coding (total population sampling at the utterance level), while visual scenes for ecolinguistic-ecocritical coding were purposively selectedbased on narrative significance specifically, scenes in which the Komodo dragon is introduced, characterized, pursued, or narratively resolved.

Data collection procedures. Dialogue was transcribed manually rather than relying solely on automatic captioning, following an initial comparison that revealed significant transcription errors in YouTube's auto-generated captions, particularly for Gulf colloquial Arabic. Ambiguous or unclear audio segments were re-verified through repeated listening. Visual data were collected through frame-by-frame screenshot capture at points of narrative significance identified during an initial full viewing of the episode.

Data analysis. Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each transcribed utterance was coded for register (High, Mid, or Low) following (Badawi, 1973) continuum, and classified by discourse domain (informative-authoritative, interpersonal-affective, or directive) following (Ferguson, 1959) functional distinction (Table 1). Second, each identified scene involving the Komodo dragon was coded using (Stibbe, 2021) four ecolinguistic categories framing, salience, erasure, and evaluation (Table 2). Third, findings from the two coding stages were synthesized at the scene level to examine the relationship between register choice and ecological representation (Table 3), interpreted through (Garrard, 2012) anthropocentrism–ecocentrism axis.

Trustworthiness. Data validity was established through source triangulation across three data forms audio, written transcript, and visual frame to ensure that coding decisions were grounded in convergent evidence rather than a single data source. Coding trustworthiness was further supported through peer debriefing, in which an independent reader reviewed a sample of coded utterances and scenes to check consistency of register and category assignment; discrepancies were resolved through discussion and, where necessary, refinement of the operational definitions in Tables 1 and 2.

Ethical considerations. As this study analyzes a publicly available, commercially released media text rather than human participants, no informed consent or institutional ethical approval was required. Screenshots are reproduced solely for scholarly illustration under principles of fair use/fair dealing for academic criticism and commentary, with full attribution to the original production.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Register Distribution and Its Functional Pattern (Addressing RQ1)

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of register across the episode's 36 coded utterances; complete utterance-level coding is provided in Appendix A.

Table 1. *Diglossia Register Distribution (N = 36 utterances)*

Register	n	%	Primary Domain(s)
High (H)	3	8.3%	Informative-authoritative (coffee cultivation only)

Mid (M)	7	19.4%	Informative-authoritative (Komodo location/population correction)
Low (L)	26	72.2%	Directive, interpersonal-affective, expressive

Register distribution confirms (Ferguson, 1959) claim that High and Low varieties are functionally, not randomly, allocated:

(1) هذا هو التنين، اركضوا! *"This is the dragon, run!"* (0:12; Low; Directive)

(2) لما تنمو الحبوب على الشجيرات... تصير من أثمن السلع على وجه الأرض. *"When the beans grow on the shrubs... they become one of the most valuable commodities on Earth"* (4:59; High; Informative-authoritative)

No High-register utterance serves an interpersonal or affective function, and no directive or expressive utterance reaches High register consistent with (AlShurafa et al., 2021) finding that Gulf animation carries ideological structure beneath a comedic surface.

The data also qualify (Badawi, 1973) continuum unexpectedly. Mid register was needed specifically for utterances correcting factual claims about the Komodo dragon:

(3) لا، بس موجودين على جزيرة فلوريس. *"No, they're only found on Flores Island"* (1:18; Mid; Informative-authoritative, correction)

Compared to Example (2), Example (3) conveys comparably authoritative content yet never reaches full High register a topic-bound rather than function-bound distribution, addressed below.

Ecolinguistic Construction of the Komodo Dragon (Addressing RQ2)

Table 2 synthesizes the coding of key scenes in chronological order.

Table 2. *Ecolinguistic Coding, in Chronological Order*

Phase	Timestamp(s)	Dominant Pattern
Cold open	0:09–0:22	Threat framing; maximal salience; total erasure
Journey	0:45–2:08	No animal shown; register correction occurs (Ex. 3)
Coffee farm	2:13	Local ecology reframed as human resource; local guide voiceless

Chase resumes	3:37–3:51	Same threat framing repeated in chronological context
Crisis	4:53–5:04	Erasure at its most acute (see Ex. 4)
Resolution	7:05	Anthropocentric closure; no rehabilitation shown

The episode opens with the chase sequence before any factual content is presented, performing erasure at the structural level. This intensifies at the crisis point: as the children take refuge and deploy the drone "Nano," the accompanying dialogue is not about the animal itself:

(4) عملية تشتيت انتباه تنين الكومودو تبدأ الآن. لما تنمو الحبوب على الشجيرات... *"The operation to distract the Komodo dragon begins now. When the beans grow on the shrubs..."* (4:59; High)



Figure 1.

Children in a tree deploying the drone "Nano" to distract the Komodo dragon (4:53–5:04). (Screenshot from مغامرات منصور *[Mansour Adventures, 2026], reproduced for scholarly analysis under fair use.*(منصور, 2026))

The scene of greatest narrative tension is thus linguistically anchored to content topically unrelated to the animal whose fate is being decided consistent with (Stibbe, 2021) argument that erasure operates most powerfully through displacement rather than simple absence.

Notably, the coffee narrative receiving the episode's only sustained High-register treatment is not visually anchored to any identifiable coffee-specific imagery. The scene introducing the local guide (2:13) shows generic green vegetation, without the close-up botanical markers that would visually confirm coffee cultivation; the "coffee farm" setting is established through dialogue alone, not corresponding visual evidence. This constitutes

a second, visual layer of erasure operating alongside the linguistic one: the topic granted the episode's highest linguistic authority is, at the same time, the topic least visually substantiated.



Figure 2.

The "coffee farm" scene (2:13), showing generic vegetation without coffee-specific botanical markers. (Screenshot from مغامرات منصور [Mansour Adventures, 2026], reproduced for scholarly analysis under fair use.(2026 ,منصور))

Whether this reflects a production choice unrelated to the study's argument or a further instance of the same displacement pattern cannot be determined from a single episode and is noted as an observation for future comparative work. Read through (Garrard, 2012) anthropocentrism–ecocentrism axis, this displacement pattern positions the episode toward the anthropocentric pole the animal never becomes a subject of authoritative discourse, only an object referenced within it.

Synthesis: Register as a Vehicle of Selective Authority

Table 3. *Synthesis of Register Choice and Ecological Representation*

Phase	Register	Ecological Pattern
Chase	L	Threat framing, total erasure
Coffee farm	**H**	Resource valorized; local voice absent; **visually unsubstantiated**
Location/population correction	M	Partial accuracy; conservation status omitted
Crisis / drone deployment	**H**	Erasure at its most acute

Resolution	L	Anthropocentric closure

Table 3 supports a claim neither theoretical strand establishes alone: linguistic authority in this episode does not track ecological relevance, and at its most consequential moment, the two are inversely related. This extends (Asemanyi & Hammond, 2025) conclusion by identifying a specific mechanism register-based authority displacement and responds to (Hosea & Starr, 2024) call for developed decolonial method in animation studies.

Implications

These findings suggest that evaluating children's media for SDG alignment on topical grounds alone is insufficient; a text may feature an endangered species prominently while withholding conservation-relevant linguistic authority from it at the exact moments such authority would matter most. The register-erasure synthesis modeled in Table 3 offers a replicable diagnostic applicable to other diglossic-language children's media claiming environmental educational value.

Limitations

Two limitations qualify these claims proportionately. First, this is a single-episode case study; findings cannot be generalized to the *Mansour* series or Gulf animation broadly without comparative coding of additional episodes. Second, this study cannot determine whether the anthropocentric framing and register displacement identified here are specific to depicting a foreign, non-Arab ecology, or reflect a broader adventure-comedy genre convention independent of setting. Resolving this requires comparing this episode against *Mansour* episodes set in domestic Emirati locales a comparison not undertaken here. This claim is therefore treated as provisional, consistent with the empirical caution modeled by (AlShurafa et al., 2021) and (Asemanyi & Hammond, 2025).

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to determine how register variation operates functionally within "Tinnīn al-Komodo," and how the episode's linguistic and narrative choices position the relationship between its human characters and an endangered animal. The answer to both questions converges on a single mechanism rather than two parallel ones: register in this episode is not distributed by topic formality alone but by proximity to human economic interest, granting linguistic authority to the coffee narrative while withholding it from the Komodo dragon even at the scene where the animal's fate is decided.



Figure 3.

The Komodo dragon in a defeated, supine position at the episode's resolution (7:05). (Screenshot from مغامرات منصور [Mansour Adventures, 2026], reproduced for scholarly analysis under fair use.(2026 ,منصور))

Notably, this authority is itself only partially substantiated: the coffee narrative that receives the episode's highest register is not correspondingly grounded in specific visual evidence, suggesting that the authority granted is discursively constructed rather than naturally warranted by the subject matter. What began as two separate analytic questions therefore resolves into one finding that credibility, in this text, is something conferred selectively, not something the subject matter earns on its own.

The study's original contribution lies less in demonstrating that non-Western animation carries ideological content, which prior work had already established, and more in identifying the specific linguistic mechanism through which such content is delivered: register-based authority allocation operating in tandem with narrative erasure. This synthesis had not previously been applied to a case of one non-Western media industry representing the ecology of another, and offers a method other researchers can apply to

comparable diglossic children's media.

For media producers and educators, this suggests that a text's inclusion of an endangered species is not itself evidence of environmental education; what matters is whether authoritative language accompanies the animal at the moments its treatment is being narratively resolved. For scholarship, it suggests that decolonial and ecocritical media analysis benefit from attending to register as an analytic variable in its own right.

These conclusions apply strictly to the single episode analyzed and should not be read as characterizing the *Mansour* series or Gulf animation more broadly. Whether the anthropocentric pattern identified here reflects something particular to representing a foreign ecology, or simply adventure-comedy convention, remains unresolved and marks the clearest direction for future research: systematic comparison with *Mansour* episodes set in domestic Emirati locales, and application of the same register–ecolinguistic synthesis to animated media from other Gulf or Arabic-language producers.

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