

It's Good to Be King: Accents and Idiolects in Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties and Their Lithuanian Dubbing

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Filmmakers utilize linguistic varieties, such as regional accents and idiolects, to convey key aspects of a character's identity and background, which is particularly significant in children's and family films for storytelling and comedic purposes. This paper integrates sociolinguistic and audiovisual translation frameworks to analyze accents and idiolects of the 2006 film *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties*, directed by Tim Hill, and its Lithuanian-dubbed version *Garfildas 2*. The study focuses on the two main characters, Garfield and Prince, who look identical. Therefore, their linguistic and paralinguistic features are crucial for differentiation. A key aspect of the Lithuanian dubbing is the creative performance of the well-known voice actor who dubbed Garfield, significantly contributing to the film's popularity in Lithuania, greatly surpassing the original. The analysis reveals that accents were not always translated or localized to convey the characters' national differences. The Lithuanian version shows Garfield to be more confident and even more sarcastic than in the original, with his frequent use of colloquial phrases and additional witty remarks. Prince's idiolect was preserved and faithful to the original version. This study highlights how linguistic choices in dubbing can reshape character perception, emphasizing the impact of voice actors and translation strategies on audience reception.

Keywords: idiolect; accent; sociolinguistic variation; dubbing; synchronization

1. Introduction

In audiovisual translation (AVT), the rendering of linguistic variation is among the most challenging issues for translators. Filmmakers use linguistic varieties—such as regional accents and idiolects—to convey information about a character's background, identity, and social class and play an important role in how viewers perceive and relate to them. In children's and family films, these features often serve narrative and comedic functions, helping differentiate characters and enrich storytelling. For the present paper, the film *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties*, directed by Tim Hill in 2006, and its Lithuanian-dubbed version *Garfildas 2*, were chosen. The motivation for selecting this film is twofold.

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Firstly, there is a notable contrast in the popularity between the original version and the Lithuanian-dubbed version of the film. The original film received a largely negative critical response and was even nominated for Golden Raspberry Awards in the categories of “Worst Prequel or Sequel” and “Worst Excuse for Family Entertainment.”¹ In contrast, the Lithuanian version, titled *Garfildas 2* and dubbed by the company Garso architektūra, achieved great popularity, ranking 5th on the list of top 10 films. According to Indrė Koverienė and Danguolė Satkauskaitė (2018, 81), this remarkable success was attributed to substantial changes made to the source text (ST) dialogue during the translation into Lithuanian. Additionally, the voice talent, Vytautas Šapranauskas,² who voiced Garfield, was a well-known Lithuanian actor and comedian, famous for his spontaneous improvisations that added more humor to the Lithuanian version compared to the original.

The second reason for selecting this film is that the main characters of the film—Garfield and Prince—look identical, making their speech crucial for distinguishing between them. The paper seeks to compare the linguistic representation of the main characters of the film *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties*, Garfield and Prince, and how their accents and idiolects are rendered in the Lithuanian-dubbed version *Garfildas 2*. Since the appearance of the characters is identical, their behavior will be considered as part of the multimodal representation of their distinct social class.

This research is situated at the intersection of sociolinguistics and audiovisual translation studies. Sociolinguistics introduces the concept of idiolect, which refers to linguistic variations that stem not from geographical or professional influences but from the personal characteristics of an individual. In the realm of audiovisual translation, particularly in dubbing, one key aspect is synchronization. In addition to isochrony, lip-synchrony, and kinesic synchrony—considered core synchronies (Chaume 2014, 68; 2020, Zabalbeascoa 2025, 72)—some authors distinguish character synchrony as a distinct form of synchronization. The concepts of idiolect, as derived from sociolinguistics, and character synchrony in AVT are partially overlapping, highlighting the complexities of conveying individual speech patterns in translated media.

¹ “*Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties*. Awards,” *IMDb*, accessed April 2, 2025, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0455499/awards/?ref_=tt_awd.

² “*Garfildas 2*,” *DUBDB*, accessed April 2, 2025, https://dubdb.fandom.com/wiki/Garfildas_2.

Before delving into analysis, the key points of dubbing as an AVT mode and characteristics of linguistic variation and its translation will be discussed.

2. Dubbing and Synchronization

Technological advancements have fostered the growth of various modes of AVT. At the same time, there is an increasing ability to choose preferred languages and AVT modes for digital content to meet individual needs, including accessibility options like audio description and subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH). Despite this, countries are often categorized as either dubbing or subtitling nations based on their preferred AVT modes. For instance, Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands lean towards subtitling, while Germany, Spain, Italy, and France have a long-standing tradition of favoring dubbing. It must be pointed out that, regardless of the prevalent AVT mode in a given country, dubbing is still the primary choice for translating cartoons and films aimed at children (Chaume 2014). The main reason for this preference is that young children typically cannot read or do so quickly enough, making subtitles unsuitable for them. Lithuania, together with Poland, has traditionally been recognized as a voice-over country, often using one or two voices to revoice foreign films on Lithuanian television. In contrast, subtitling is the dominant AVT mode in cinemas, with dubbing being almost exclusively applied for films intended for children.

Dubbing is the only mode of audiovisual translation that creates an illusion for viewers, making it feel as if they are watching a local production. This aspect of dubbing has been regarded as the most important by Lithuanian viewers (Koverienė and Satkauskaitė 2018, 78). Similar relevance was attributed to another feature of dubbing, namely, the specific accents of the cast (ibid.). This is particularly important for animated characters, as they do not possess their own voices. Consequently, they must be voiced during the post-production of the original film and then dubbed by a voice actor in the target language. This is the case for the selected characters, Garfield and Prince.

The most challenging aspect of translating a dubbed film is arguably capturing the various types of synchrony expected in the final product (Whitman-Linsen 1992, 17). Scholars identify between three (Fodor 1976) and nine (Whitman-Linsen 1992) types of dubbing synchrony (see also Astrauskienė and Satkauskaitė 2022, 200). However, the most widely used

categorization is proposed by Frederic Chaume (2004), which includes lip synchrony, isochrony, and kinesic synchrony.

Lip synchrony (also known as lip sync) is perhaps the most recognized form of synchronization. It is a phonetic synchrony that ensures a match between the mouth movements of the characters and the sounds heard by the audience. In other words, when a character's mouth is visible while speaking, the translated dialogue must not only align with the original content but also use synonyms and phrasing that make it appear as though the character is actually saying the same words being heard by the audience.

Isochrony is a form of synchronization that focuses on aligning the duration of translation with the original content. It plays a crucial role in making audiovisual material realistic by ensuring that there is no dissonance between the dialogue heard by the audience and the movement of the characters' mouths on screen. In many cases, dialogues need to be either shortened or lengthened to meet isochrony standards.

Kinesic synchrony involves matching the translation to the body movements seen on screen. This is particularly important when translating cartoon characters, as they often use exaggerated gestures and facial expressions, making it essential to adhere to these synchrony principles.

The three types of synchrony are discussed in detail by several authors (Chaume 2004; 2014; 2020; Bosseaux 2018; Zabalbeascoa 2025; Szarkowska and Jankowska 2025, among others). Additionally, some scholars, starting with István Fodor (1976), identify two additional types of synchrony, namely, content and character synchrony. Although these types are important, they are not universally recognized as forms of dubbing synchrony by all researchers.

Content synchrony refers to the transfer of meaning from the source text (ST) to the target text (TT), "its aptness, fluidity, authenticity and accuracy" (Whitman-Linsen 1992, 19). There is some debate (Chaume 2014, 69) about whether the congruence between ST and TT should be classified as dubbing synchrony, as this feature is essential for all forms of translation, including documents, literary works, films, etc.

Scholars who differentiate character synchrony focus primarily on the voice characteristics of dubbing actors, which must match those of the original actors (e.g., Chaume 2014, 69; Bosseaux 2018, 51; Szarkowska and Jankowska 2025, 67). This narrower definition falls under the purview of the dubbing director and voice talents; thus, it does not necessarily

involve translators and dialogue writers. Nonetheless, the broader concept of characterization is essential in both literature and AVT. As Patrick Zabalbeascoa notes, in some films, “character portrayal may be a higher priority in the story than the presentation of events or the plot” (2025, 178). To recreate a character in a dubbed version that is similar to the original, one must consider not only the prosodic and paralinguistic features of the voice talent but also appropriate (socio)linguistic choices. In this context, Charlotte Bosseaux rightly emphasizes that

[i]deally, any changes in semantic meaning derived from efforts to secure maximum synchrony should not affect characterization, i.e. the way in which we perceive characters, or the overall meaning of an audiovisual product. One must bear in mind that certain vocabulary choices could end up having an impact on characterization if, for instance, they carry negative connotations in the target language that were not present in the source text. (2018, 51)

Meeting all specified quality standards in dubbing makes this AVT mode particularly challenging. The impact of sociolinguistic varieties, such as accents and idiolects, on AVT and its practices will be addressed in the following section.

3. Accents and Idiolects as Tools for the Depiction of Character Identity

After the film industry had transitioned to sound, filmmakers were able to use language as a tool to portray their characters. They were no longer forced to rely on just actions or mimics but could use language. Especially with the utilization of accents and idiolects, filmmakers could depict each character's unique identity.

The research of accents and idiolects falls into the field of sociolinguistics, which investigates the relationship between language and society and analyzes the way social constructs shape language. Social conditions are the only way to distinguish variations and norms in one's language. These variations can be categorized by one's style, dialect, idiolect, sociolect, and others, yet researching these variations is crucial to understanding audiovisual translation through the sociolinguistic perspective (Yau 2018, 281).

According to Vincenza Minutella, in audiovisual products, “different varieties – geographical, temporal, social, ethnic and idiolects – are used to build quick characterisation and to mould specific identities” (2021, 3). While geolects, sociolects, and other forms of language variation have received an adequate amount of attention from scholars and are often researched, idiolects have been neglected by researchers of multiple disciplines (Parra López and Teixidor 2019). Due to the scarcity of works on this phenomenon, its definition might vary

according to the scholar who tried to define it. Idiolect could be explained as a person's peculiar speech habits. However, some scholars, such as Guillermo Parra López and Eduard Bartoll Teixidor (2019), believe it is essential to distinguish idiolect and style, as idiolect is not necessarily voluntary, while style is a motivated choice. Another thing worth mentioning is that while dialects are shaped by the communities one is surrounded by and then shared with, idiolects are very peculiar to an individual as they reflect the person's identity.

When translating idiolects, it is important to establish their role in depicting characters' identity, as following this criterion, the translator can decide whether these idiolectal features should be kept or disregarded (Parra López and Teixidor 2019). Idiolect can allude to characters' social status, background, and temperament. For example, a character who always speaks in grammatically correct sentences and has a vast vocabulary can appear wise. In contrast, a character who usually talks in short sentences without much sophistication can appear more friendly.

Accents in films are used for various reasons, be it for cultural identity, to show the viewer where the character is from or social class, or to help the viewer situate characters in social standing. However, accents often remind the viewer that even though the film is in one language, the action might not necessarily occur in that land (Minutella 2021). Yet, the most prominent function of accents is triggering humor. Voice actors often play around with the script to make a scene funnier with their vocal performance (ibid.). That could mean exaggerating and thickening certain accents to create a humorous caricature of the character they are playing or even incorporating some foreign words from the language associated with the character's accent. Of course, it should be mentioned that sometimes accents are exploited to portray cultural stereotypes, as filmmakers are aware of their comedic effect on the audience.

The characters from *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties*, selected for the present analysis, represent fundamentally different social classes manifested in their speaking styles. To highlight the contrast between characters linguistically, it is not uncommon in films for children and families to use a formal British for an upper-class character and an informal, non-standard American variety for the socially lower character (Ranzato 2018; Minutella 2021). This contrast is used for characterization and plot development, but more importantly, for humorous purposes.

The rendition of linguistic varieties such as accents and idiolects is challenging for translators. However, there is greater freedom for creative translation solutions for fictive

characters, especially in comedies (Chiaro 2008; Heiss 2004; Bruti and Vignozzi 2016), as is the case with the film *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties*.

4. Contrastive Analysis of Accents and Idiolects in *Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties* and *Garfieldas 2*

Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties is a comedy sequel to *Garfield*, a live-action/animated film which was based on a popular comic by Jim Davis. Directed by Tim Hill, the film shows the main protagonist, the lazy and sarcastic cat Garfield, flying to England and, in a span of hilarious events, getting mistaken for a royal lookalike—Prince.

Based on Hartmut Stöckl (2004) and Luis Pérez-González (2014), Danguolė Satkauskaitė and Alina Kuzmickienė (2022, 22–27) developed a model of modes and sub-modes that interact to create a meaning in audiovisual products. Regarding the visual non-verbal mode, in other words, images, characters' appearance and behavior contribute to the characterization of both humans and anthropomorphic characters. Since, in our case, the appearance of the two anthropomorphic characters, Garfield and Prince, does not differ, the only visual sub-mode that is relevant for their distinction is behavior. Therefore, before starting linguistic analysis, the following section will discuss the behavior of these characters.

4.1 The Behavior of Garfield and Prince

Despite their identical appearances, the behavior of Garfield and Prince could not be more opposite from one another. Garfield carries himself in a slouched, laid-back manner while Prince's body language reinforces his nobility and his aristocratic upbringing; he moves gracefully and with poise. Garfield's little to no respect for authority and a lack of compassion. Examples of such shameless behavior are depicted in figure 1. The first is burping when John is upset about Liz leaving. The second is throwing all his clothes out after sneaking out of the animal shelter, where John originally wanted to leave Garfield and Oddy so someone could take care of them while he was gone. Garfield has continued to choose to be selfish.

Figure 1. Instances of Garfield's shameless behavior



On the other hand, Prince is always polite and considerate, always with his head held high (first image in figure 2), and when giving inspiring speeches to his subordinates, his eyes are to the sky. Prince always prioritizes his duties and obeys the rules. The only time the audience sees Prince angry and cursing, which is not ordinary like it is with Garfield, who constantly makes fun of everyone, is when he hits the hotel bedsheet with his fist (second image in figure 2) and calls John “Dunce” (in Lithuanian dubbed as “žioplys”) as he knows his kingdom is in danger. Therefore, even though that act is out of duty and accountability towards those who rely on him, his moral compass never shifts as opposed to Garfield, who arguably does not have one.

Figure 2. Instances of Prince's behavior



As the analyzed characters are not humans but personified cats, their distinct behavior could only be partially shown in the film. However, the differences in social classes between the two characters are much more strongly reflected linguistically. Besides, in translation, visual non-verbal mode, namely, the appearance and behavior of characters, is typically not changed. The only mode that is modified is the language. Therefore, the next two sections will focus on comparing the speech of the two characters and examining the differences between the ST and TT.

4.2 Garfield's Idiolect in the Source Text and the Target Text

In the source language (SL), Garfield has a somewhat unpolished New Yorker accent that his voice actor, Bill Murray, delivered to match his lazy and cynical persona. However, his idiolect shapes his identity as lazy, nonchalant, and sarcastic. He typically talks sarcastically, yet it is sometimes hard to catch because of how 'matter-of-fact' some witty remarks are made. His manner of speech is casual and informal; he frequently uses simplified constructions as he is not interested in putting much effort into his words.

Garfield is shown as very confident and laid-back in his manner of speech; sarcasm in his voice is often heard, and his idiolect features are those of a lazy cynic. He pronounces words the way he feels and not how they should be. For example, in the Lithuanian dubbing, while saying "gera būti karalium," he emphasizes the sound /u/ instead of stressing the /a/ according to standard Lithuanian pronunciation rules. Thus, he sounds unserious and cynical, as if mocking the title of a royal. There are more similar phonetic alterations in Lithuanian dubbing that the Lithuanian voice actor of Garfield, Vytautas Šapranauskas, made, as he was known for altering the script and experimenting with his vocals for the sake of comedy. Such phonological deviations from standard Lithuanian in Garfield's speech are remarkable since there were hardly any phonological alterations in the SL.

Garfield's speech in the target language (TL) deviates from standard Lithuanian and creates an idiolect that differs from other characters in this film. Regarding lexical expressions, many colloquial filler words like *tipo* (like) and barbarisms like *durnas* (stupid) are part of his daily vocabulary. Such a choice of filler words might have been the actors' choice to replicate a humorous tone and to resonate with the younger Lithuanian audience. Many derogatory words are heard throughout the film, as Garfield mocks most, if not all, of the other characters.

When comparing the accents and idiolects of the SL and TL, several differences were observed, especially in Garfield's character. While Garfield's New York accent and Prince's British one were neither maintained nor altered in a way that would clearly indicate their respective countries of origin, the idiolects were preserved. In Garfield's case, this preservation even made his persona funnier and more sarcastic. In the original version, Garfield's defining trait was his laziness. However, in the Lithuanian version, his character was depicted as more confident and cynical. Additionally, comedic intent was often more present in the Lithuanian version than in the original. As mentioned before, alterations for humorous adaptation to Lithuanian culture were a known strategy of Garfield's Lithuanian voice actor. Garfield spoke slowly in the SL as if he were too lazy to speak and did not often lose his temper. However, in the Lithuanian version, Garfield spoke faster and with more energy. His language was also tailored with incorporated phrases that strengthened the humor compared to the SL.

Table 1. Example of Garfield's idiolect

Timestamp	Source language	Target language	Back translation
00:04:08 - 00:04:12	Liz is a girl. No, worse – she's a girl vet!	Liza yra Merga! Blogiau – veterinorė!	Liz is a chick! Worse – vet chick!

For example, when John says he is proposing to Liz, Garfield responds with an utterance provided in table 1. The only funny part in the answer of the SL is that Liz is a vet girl, which is worse than just a girl. In the Lithuanian version, Garfield's response was energetic. The noun *merga* is a derogatory way of referring to a girl, which implies that it is already bad that John wants to marry her. And then Garfield adds *veterinorė*, a colloquial variant of the standard noun *veterinarė*. These lexical decisions add more humor to the line and, like other filler words such as *tipo* (like) and *nu* (well), tailor it to resonate with local audiences of certain humor norms.

All in all, it must be pointed out that neither the translation of Garfield's speech nor its performance by the Lithuanian voice actor confirms the tendency noticed by other authors. For example, Elena Di Giovanni (2010) and Vincenza Minutella (2025) point out that even though colloquial language is prioritized in STs, in dubbing, it is often rendered as a more formal register. The Lithuanian dubbing of Garfield's speech shows the opposite: there are more colloquialisms and informal language with some pejorative, derogatory phrases. Besides, additional humor is created by combining both lexical and prosodic means.

4.3 Prince's Idiolect in the Source Text and the Target Text

Prince is a character who is a typical representative of the upper class, a member of “the British aristocracy, a social group characterized by the highest level of economic, social and cultural capital” (Ranzato and Valleriani 2024, 98). Accordingly, he uses standard British English, marked by Received Pronunciation (RP) (as defined by Bruti and Vignozzi 2016; Ranzato 2018; Valleriani 2021; Minutella 2021; Ranzato and Valleriani 2024). Characters of this type are depicted as sophisticated, articulate, affluent, or belonging to the aristocracy. (Minutella 2021, 223), like Prince.

Unlike Garfield, Prince's language is flawless, and he talks calmly and respectfully despite the circumstances. His British accent was not maintained in the Lithuanian version. However, his idiolect is so different from Garfield's that it would be impossible to mix them up despite their identical appearance. Prince barely uses swear words or slang. One could argue that the Lithuanian dubbing team, including the voice actor of Prince Saulius Bagaliūnas,³ was faithful to the original perception of this character. The “It's good to be king” line was actually first heard from Prince in the film. Moreover, while Garfield said it with self-indulgence, Prince said it sincerely and with dignity, which is fit for an aristocratic cat.

Prince did not have as many alterations as Garfield did. Admittedly, there have been some instances where the honorific ‘Sir’ was omitted, as he often used it to address John. However, overall, this character was dubbed more faithfully to the original. It is evident that the voice actor Saulius Bagaliūnas did not experiment as much with the character Prince as Garfield's voice actor Vytautas Šapranauskas did. Though his tone of authority is more vivid than that in the ST, the content is almost verbatim translated from the original.

The only case where the above-mentioned tone of authority changes is when Garfield decides to stay and help the animals of the castle to get rid of Lord Dargis. As depicted in table 2, while in ST, Prince's tone is more submissive to Garfield, in the TT, his tone remains authoritative as he agreed to have two leaders rather than the plan focusing on teamwork.

³ “Garfildas 2,” DUBDB, accessed April 2, 2025, https://dubdb.fandom.com/wiki/Garfildas_2.

Table 2. Example of Prince's idiolect

Timestamp	Source language	Target language	Back translation
01:07:39 - 01:07:42	Teamwork. Oh, yes. Yes.	Du vadai! Gera mintis.	Two leaders! Good idea.

One particular example should be pointed out—an identical utterance said by both Garfield and Prince in the ST but translated differently into Lithuanian. One interesting nuance is that in the original, there was one similarity marked between Garfield and Prince, and it is how they reacted to being switched. When Smithee takes Garfield and John takes Prince, they both react to being switched with the same utterance provided in table 3.

Table 3. Different translations of the same utterance said by Garfield and Prince

Character	Timestamp	Source language	Target language	Back translation
Garfield	00:23:42 - 00:23:45	Why is it the weird ones always go for the cat, not the dog?	Nesiartink, diedukas, iš kur aš žinau, gal tu blusų turi.	Do not come close grandpa, how can I know that you don't have any fleas.
Prince	00:25:15 - 00:25:20	Why is it the weird ones always go for the cat, not the dog?	Nelieskite manęs, iš kur aš žinau, gal jūs blusų turite.	Do not touch me, how can I know that you do not have any fleas.

The choice of the Lithuanian dubbing team to make the idiolects of the two characters reflect their differences, with Garfield being direct and audacious and Prince being polite and refined, highlights their comedic dynamic. Garfield additionally called Smithee grandpa and also used the informal pronoun *tu*. In contrast, Prince kept a formal register using polite verb forms (*nelieskite*, *turite*) and the formal pronoun *jūs*, even when a stronger reaction would have been forgiven in his given situation (to his understanding, he was abducted).

In a scene where both Prince and Garfield show up as Lord Dargis is threatening the lawyers with the crossbow, the audience can see a clear distinction between those two identical cats by the way they present themselves to the viewers (table 4), with Prince sitting straight and politely asking if anyone is interested in tea and Garfield, who is resting on an armchair, complaining about running from death.

Table 4. Comparison between Garfield and Prince

Character	Timestamp	Source language	Target language	Back translation
Garfield 	01:16:12 - 01:16:16	I am bushed. All this running-for-my-life stuff.	Aš toks nusikalęs. Visas šitas lakstymas nuo mirties. Uoj.	I am so exhausted. All this running from the death. Ah.
Prince 	01:16:06 - 01:16:09	Hello, everyone. Sorry I'm late. Shall I ring for tea?	Laba diena, atleiskite, kad vėluoju. Ar pageidausite arbatos?	Good day, forgive me for being late. Would you wish some tea?

Their idiolects are so distinct that even when the accents in the Lithuanian version have been omitted, their body language and manner of speech immediately give the characters away.

5. Conclusion

Though Garfield and Prince look identical, their behavior greatly differs, as Garfield is always shown to be selfish and indifferent to the needs of others. Prince is always acting out of duty and respect, as is fit for a cat of his status. He walks gracefully, while Garfield carries himself with a hint of playfulness and carelessness.

Garfield has a mild New Yorker accent, and his idiolect is that of a lazy cynic. He is talking in a casual and sarcastic tone. His idiolect plays a central role in showcasing his irreverent persona. Prince has a British accent, and the characteristics of his idiolect are his frequent use of elevated vocabulary, a formal and authoritative tone, and refined speech. His idiolect alone gives away his royal upbringing.

Accents were not necessarily translated or localized to allow the viewer to understand that characters are from different countries, and that puts more responsibility on preserving Garfield's and Prince's contrasting idiolects. The Lithuanian version shows Garfield to be more confident and even more sarcastic than in the original, with his frequent use of colloquial phrases and additional witty remarks. Prince's idiolect was preserved and faithful to the original version.

Prince has a British accent and an aristocratic idiolect; his refined speech is always correct, and his idiolect alone reflects his royal upbringing even when he is no longer surrounded by his noble environment. His tone of authority does not change even when he is in danger; his words are always structured, sentences complete, and his vocabulary is often uplifted by such words as 'marvelous' or 'due haste.' His idiolect also highlights his sense of responsibility, as he often speaks about his duties and concern for order and the well-being of his subordinates.

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