



## THE RELATION OF POWER IN FILM 'THE JUDGE': A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Sri Wahyuni<sup>1</sup>, Yulis Setyowati<sup>2\*</sup>, Yeni Probowati<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> English Department, Faculty of Language and Literature, Universitas Wijaya Putra

E-mail: <sup>1</sup> [20071003@uwp.ac.id](mailto:20071003@uwp.ac.id), <sup>2\*</sup> [yulissetyowati@uwp.ac.id](mailto:yulissetyowati@uwp.ac.id), <sup>3</sup> [yeniprobowati@uwp.ac.id](mailto:yeniprobowati@uwp.ac.id)

Submitted: 30-01-2024

Review: 25-03-2024

Accepted: 27-03-2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22202/tus.2024.v10i1.7835>



### Abstract

*This research explores how discourse, actors, societal structures, power dynamics, and illocutionary acts play significant roles in shaping communication and influencing individuals' beliefs and attitudes. It emphasizes the importance of analyzing language and social interactions to gain a deeper understanding of how power and meaning are constructed and perpetuated in society. The researcher employed the concept of code-switching to interpret the film "The Judge" and derive insights into the dynamics of power within it. Social interaction and language were scrutinized through Communication Discourse Analysis (CDA), with van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis serving as the overarching theoretical framework, addressing core aspects such as grammar, metaphor, intonation, social cognition, and societal structures. A descriptive qualitative approach was utilized for data analysis. The film's script was referenced extensively. The researcher focused on the protagonist due to the significance of their remarks in shaping social relations and legal contexts. The investigation uncovered instances of power dynamics, including the manipulation and coercion employed by key figures. These protagonists exploited their authority within the community to dictate agendas.*

**Keywords:** *critical discourse analysis; discourse analysis; relative of power*

### INTRODUCTION

The research adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the data, using the film script of "The Judge" as the primary source. The focus was on the main character's dialogue, particularly regarding the use of power in social relations, especially in the courtroom setting. Various forms of power, such as control and threat, were identified in the conversation between the main characters. The main characters in



the film utilized power within the community to assert dominance and control during their interactions.

In a thriving society, communication serves as evidence of one's existence. Language-based communication plays a crucial role in fostering and maintaining relationships among individuals, promoting socialization (De Caeter, 2023; Hansen-Pauly, 2022; Kramsch, 2020b). Harmon and Wilson (2006:1) support the notion that language enables people to understand their world, engage socially, and establish and nurture connections with others. An individual's speech can reveal various characteristics, such as whether they are well-educated or not, whether they are considered good or bad, strong or weak (Buchanan et al., 1993; Halper, 2021). Educated individuals tend to think carefully before speaking, whereas less educated individuals may not pay much attention to their words, good people often remain restrained in their speech, while bad people may use offensive language (Hansen-Pauly, 2022; Bonyadi, 2019).

Moreover, the concept of strength and weakness in communication has evolved beyond physical appearance to include social positions, such as a judge and a lawyer, a radio talk show host and a caller, or employers and employees. For instance, in a court setting, a lawyer must respectfully seek permission from the judge before making a statement, while adhering to formal language. This interaction reflects the power dynamics between the judge and the lawyer. On the other hand, among friends who share equal positions in communication, informal language is commonly used, signifying their mutual understanding (De Caeter, 2023; Kramsch, 2020b; Roslyng & Larsen, 2021).

Language possesses the ability to control and influence people, making it a powerful tool (Gould, 2023; Parker, 2001; Ross, 2018). When individuals are influenced and controlled by language, the world becomes easier to manipulate (Kramsch, 2020a; Srivastava, 2019). Harmon and Wilson (2006:1) assert that language serves multiple functions, including the manipulation and control of the world and its inhabitants. This idea is further supported by Wagner and Cheng (2011:1), who emphasize that language proves to be a highly effective tool for seduction and manipulation in social relationships.

Language enables people to communicate and express their problems, thoughts, and emotions. It serves as a means through which individuals can interpret the meanings of words. Wareing (2004:2) suggests that language is essential in understanding the



relationship between meaning and perception. All language users have the capacity to interpret their ideas, feelings, and thoughts through the use of language. When discussing language, its connection with discourse is inevitable, as discourse refers to the language used by people. Language is employed in various settings, such as schools, hospitals, prisons, and courts of law, to engage in conversations with others (Paterson & Gregory, 2019; Astari et al., 2022). Discourse serves two purposes: conveying meaning and taking action through language, highlights the relationship between language usage, meaning, and action (Ting, 2020; Hasugian & Silvanus Alvin, 2023).

Given the concept of discourse, which allows language to be interpreted for both meaning and action, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) becomes crucial in analyzing conversations (Maruf & Tanduk, 2021; Tanduk et al., 2021). CDA emphasizes language as a social practice and action, making it essential to examine language in both spoken and written forms (Vaandering & Reimer, 2021; Van Dijk, 2016; Wang, 2021). Duchene (2008:10) adds that language is more than just a means of communication; it plays a significant role in strengthening and shaping social interactions. These theories highlight the importance of analyzing language due to its implied meaning and its connection to human life.

The researcher focuses on CDA, making discourse the central topic in this study. Discourse refers to language use in various forms, such as written texts like novels, film scripts, and poetry, as well as spoken discourse like speeches and conversations in different settings like classrooms and courtrooms (Habibie, 2016; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019; Paterson & Gregory, 2019). For this research, the film script of "The Judge" serves as the main data source. Although a work of fiction, the film's storyline reflects situations that can happen to anyone, and law becomes a major context in the film. "The Judge" is an American drama film released in 2014, revolving around the relationship between a father, Judge Joseph Palmer (JP), known for his fairness and strictness, and his son, lawyer Henry Palmer (HP), living in Chicago and estranged from his family. When HP returns home for his mother's funeral, he finds himself defending his father, who is suddenly accused of hit-and-run murder.

The courtroom discourse in the film involves jurors, who play a significant role in helping the judge make decisions by analyzing presented evidence based on the law.



Jurors contribute to the trial as responsible citizens, serving their community. The film contains numerous conflicts, particularly emotionally charged situations, often occurring in the courtroom. The conflicts between the main characters and others involve power relations. The researcher analyzes power relations as one of CDA's principles, dividing it into two types: power as control and power as threat. The film illustrates how the main characters utilize power in their words to dominate conversations and exert control or threaten their opponents. The research delves into the discourse of power relations in "The Judge" film using CDA as the theoretical and methodological framework.

## **METHODS**

In crafting the research design, Creswell (2012) delineates four qualitative data collection methodologies: observations, interviews/questionnaires, documents, and audiovisual materials. In this study, the researcher opted for film data collection, as it offers rich visual and auditory elements, aligning with Creswell's recommendation for capturing the essence of the phenomenon under examination. Obtaining the script of "The Judge" from a reputable source, the researcher primarily focused on dialogue exchanges among characters.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process involved immersing in "The Judge," meticulously identifying instances of power dynamics. Additionally, the film script underwent thorough readings to uncover implicit meanings pertaining to power relations. Specific topics featuring power dynamics were pinpointed, with detailed notes compiled accordingly.

### **Data Analysis**

The amassed data was segmented into eight excerpts based on the chosen topics. An interpretative lens was applied to discern underlying meanings. To bolster the analysis, relevant insights from diverse sources such as books, online articles, and other pertinent materials were integrated. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis, influenced by theories from Woffitt (2005) and Van Dijk (2009) concerning power discourse,



facilitated a nuanced examination of the data. The ultimate aim was to unveil the subtle implications embedded within the dialogues

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The research findings focus on eight dialogues from "The Judge" that showcase power relations in the form of control and threat. These power dynamics were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with reference to the theories of Woffitt (2005) and Van Dijk (2009). Through this analysis, the study aims to reveal the deeper meanings behind these dialogues and shed light on the power dynamics at play.

Excerpt 1: Power as Threat.

Henry Palmer: If the great state of (1) Illinois can't meet its burden of proof.

If I walk with a guilty client, it's on you! So I suggest you do your job.

Kattan. Kattan: And, and, and how does that (5) feel, Hank? Knowing every person you represent is guilty?

Henry Palmer: It's fine. Innocent people can't afford me. Burden of proof

Kattan. (10)

The first excerpt revolves around the trial involving Henry Palmer (HP), who serves as the defense lawyer for the accused, and Kattan (K), the representative of the victim, during a break in the court proceedings. In this exchange (excerpt 1), HP uses the word 'if' twice in separate clauses, suggesting that he presents compelling evidence to pressure K, leaving no room for alternative choices. This strengthens HP's self-confidence in winning the trial, as supported by the phrase 'burden of proof' in line 2. The burden of proof refers to evidence that could potentially incriminate K and his client, including blood samples, surveillance footage, security camera recordings, and other relevant evidence depending on the nature of the crime and its scene.

The conditional clauses in lines 1-3, "if the great state of Illinois can't meet its burden proof, if I walk with a guilty client," imply the possibility of these scenarios happening. If K fails to find convincing evidence that challenges HP's defense and results in HP "walking with a guilty client," then it becomes K's responsibility. It's worth noting that in line 3, HP's words "walk with" may be interpreted as a friendly association, but it actually refers to his professional duty. In his professional capacity, HP's goal is to defend his client, who is presumed to be the suspect, and secure a successful outcome in the trial.



So, "walk with a guilty client" in line 3 signifies his belief in proving his client's innocence and winning the trial. When HP says "it's on you" in line 3 with an elevated tone, it could be seen as a veiled threat, implying that K must work diligently and provide concrete evidence. If K fails to find sufficient evidence and allows the guilty client to go unpunished, the responsibility lies with K and not with HP.

From this statement, it is evident that HP exerts a higher level of power over K, as he believes that K lacks substantial evidence to counter his defense. The crucial aspect during the trial is the presentation of convincing evidence and alibis, irrespective of the defendant's guilt. HP's strong conviction in successfully representing his client establishes a power relation in his words. In this context, HP can influence K to work harder by finding the burden of proof. However, there is a situation in which HP appears to have lower power than K, which occurs after K's question in line 5, "how does that feel hank, knowing you represent is guilty?" HP responds with "it's fine," suggesting a potential vulnerability or doubt in his stance. In this instance, K's question momentarily shifts the power dynamic in the conversation.

In line 8, it is evident that HP assumes a position of lower power compared to K when he acknowledges and responds with the phrase 'it's fine.' This indicates that HP agrees with K's assertion that he represents the criminal. Despite being aware of his client's guilt or involvement in criminal activities, HP continues to handle the case because he feels obligated to secure a favorable outcome for his client during the trial. HP's statements possess a sense of power as a threat, as they instill fear in K's personal identity. Threats have the potential to induce fear in individuals, affecting their sense of self (Davies, 2001:134). K may be concerned that his client might face imprisonment due to a lack of evidence to prove their innocence. HP exploits his power as a threat through his words to unsettle K mentally and to prompt K to present evidence. Moreover, HP uses this power to uphold his professional image and career as a renowned and skilled lawyer simultaneously.

#### Excerpt 2: Power as Control

Deputy Hanson: We got a witness that (1) he puts his car on route 30 heading toward Shelby road at the approximate time of the accident.





Henry Parmer: oh boy! That's not (5) enough for his car to be at the scene. Any schmuck lawyer is gonna chew that tup and spit it out-stolen vehicle. You need him behind the wheel.

Deputy Bobby: Hank, let's go Pal. (10).

Henry Palmer: Go where? Oh Bobby, graduation night, the quarry, your grand chevy, I remember everything. You and Kevin Thompson in the back seat naked, huffing whippet. (15)

Deputy bobby: It's just a rumor.

In the above conversation, there were heated arguments between Henry Palmer (HP) and Deputy Hanson (DH) and Deputy Bobby (DB). The context was an interview about a car accident involving HP's father, Judge Palmer, who became the suspect. The setting was at the precinct. Initially, DH suggested having evidence ('got') in the police's possession, but HP was not satisfied with it as he considered it nonsensical. HP urged DH to find more meaningful evidence. HP was confident in defending his father, as he believed his father to be a respected judge who served the country well.

HP acknowledged that his father was a good person, but he couldn't ignore the fact that there was a witness who claimed to have seen his father driving his car on route 30, heading towards Shelby road, the crime scene, around the time of the accident. HP argued that merely having his father's car at the scene was insufficient proof, as anyone could have used the car for the hit and run. He used metaphors like 'schmuck' and 'chew that up and spit it out' to express that weak evidence could easily be dismantled, even by less-skilled lawyers.

DB tried to persuade HP to leave the precinct, possibly warning him against interfering in his father's interview. However, HP quickly changed the topic to counter DB's attempt. HP displayed power over DB by revealing a secret about DB's past, using it to control DB and implying that he could share this information with DB's colleagues. This assertion led DB to be silent and speechless, and HP's power appeared greater as he had leverage over DB.

This excerpt illustrates how HP employs various tactics to support his father, including dominating arguments by shifting the focus of the conversation. HP's experience as a lawyer, which equips him with knowledge to analyze cases, gives him the power to influence DH to find stronger evidence. Moreover, his awareness of DB's secret



allows him to control DB during the conversation. HP uses these sources of power to assert control in the interview, thereby demonstrating power as control to assist his father in the trial.

Excerpt 3:

Joseph Palmer: Do you have anything (1) else to say for yourself? Anything that would enlighten us concerning this?

Mr. William: What do you want to hear? Nobody's hiring. You can't get (5) spinach out of Petunia. I can't afford to pay child support.

Joseph Palmer: You can't huh? But your new truck, out front...

Mr. William: Which one? Yeah (10).

Joseph Palmer: Yeah', is not an affirmation a man uses in court.

Mr. William: Yes sir, Judge.. Sorry.

The preceding discussion centered on a legal proceeding involving a divorce and the distribution of marital assets. Joseph Palmer (JP), the judge, and Mr. William (MW), the spouse, had a talk. MW's wife filed for divorce from him while she was pregnant. JP has authority as a judge, hence he can: MW and the rest of the court. In lines 1-2, he asks MW, "Do you have anything else to say for yourself?" JP demonstrates his authority by compelling MW to offer any statement that could save his life or serve as a defense. JP's statement may come across as sympathetic, but his motivation is merely to be fair to MW and his wife. The situation would get near to resolution if there were some information that could shed light on the matter.

In lines 4 and 5, MW asks, "What do you want to hear?" He challenges the judge, claiming that he has an alibi, but no one is hiring. MW's repeated use of the word "can't" in lines 5 and 6 demonstrates his inability to secure gainful employment and meet his financial obligations. This linguistic behavior suggests that his wife's desire for a divorce is mostly motivated by his inability to pay child support due to his unemployment. JP provides substantial opposition in his judicial capacity. When MW says in lines 6-7, "I can't afford to pay child support," implying that she doesn't have much money, JP responds by saying, "You can't, huh?" Lines 8-9 begin, "But your new truck, out front..." JP interprets MW's display of a brand-new truck outside the courthouse as evidence that





MW has been dishonest about his assets. MW has a lot of money, but instead of giving it to his wife, he decides to put it on a new truck.

The other argument MW raises can be found at line 10. on response to JP's claim, MW asks, "which one?" on line 10. It seems like MW always makes up excuses. The brand new truck, however, is already sitting outside the courthouse. There's no way around that, other than to come clean. MW admits his guilt and wrongdoing by pausing for an extended period of time before responding with a simple "yeah".

Since he has the ability to exert authority over everyone in court, JP makes all the decisions and dictates all the conversation. Formal terminology is required when discussing legal matters. Participants, regardless of cultural background, are expected to use a formal lexicon grounded in American legal experience. For instance, JP corrects MW's answer by drawing on his own personal experience in his role as judge. "Yeah', is not an affirmation a man uses in court," JP says on line 11, serving as a caution. MW's use of the word "yeah" as the defendant in line 10 warrants its dismissal from court. MW instantly apologizes to JP after realizing his inappropriate affirmation.

Throughout the trial, JP exerts his dominance over all circumstances. Technically, as the judge, it is his prerogative to call any witness he chooses to testify. Power as control, as argued by van Dijk (2008:88), may be utilized to exert dominance over some groups in every given exchange, and this is true regardless of the topic of discussion. Transforms into a Fair Judge After many people have been affected negatively by his decision, JP utilizes his authority to regulate the situation and make things right. The presiding judge is the highest ranking judicial official. JP has complete mental and physical dominion.

## CONCLUSION

Human life and society are intricately connected, and people continuously interact with their surroundings, expressing their emotions and thoughts through words. These words are deeply influenced by the social context in which individuals reside. During the analysis of "The Judge" film, the researcher identified instances of power within the dialogues, particularly between Joseph Palmer (JP) and Henry Palmer (HP).

Various factors indicated the occurrence of power in the conversations between main and supporting characters, such as grammar, turn-taking, metaphors, intonations,



pauses, and hesitations. These elements played a crucial role in understanding how power influenced the conversations and, consequently, society. The film depicted power relation discourse, highlighting the dynamics of control and threat that existed in the interactions between characters.

Power, as a core principle of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), played a significant role in shaping conversations in the film. The researcher, equipped with the fundamental concept of CDA, delved into the hidden meanings within the text and discovered instances of power dynamics. The dialogues between JP and HP implicitly contained power as control and power as threat, evoking feelings of being controlled or threatened among those involved. The prevalence of power in most conversations demonstrated that conflicting thoughts between characters led to attempts to dominate or change the topic of discussion.

Characters in "The Judge" employed power as control and threat for specific reasons. For instance, HP used power as control to influence the judge, jurors, and audience in court through persuasive arguments and the presentation of evidence. He employed power as threat to intimidate those who insulted his father, aiming to protect him from murder accusations due to his prominent position as the most esteemed judge in Indiana. Such power dynamics were evident across various interactions within the society portrayed in the film.

Ultimately, the use of power to gain an advantage in conversations and interactions was not limited to specific individuals, as all human beings are equal in this regard. The film highlighted how power played a pivotal role in shaping conversations and influencing social dynamics, reflecting the interplay between individuals and society as a whole.

## REFERENCES

- Astari, D. A. M. J., Padmadewi, N. N., & Dewi, N. L. P. E. S. (2022). The Critical Discourse Analysis of Maudy Ayunda's Speech at Press Conference on the Introduction of the Government Spokesperson for Indonesia's G20 Presidency. *Linguistic, English Education and Art (LEEA) Journal*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.31539/leea.v6i1.5035>



- Bonyadi, A. (2019). Discourse analysis and language pedagogy: A review. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2019-0010>
- Buchanan, I., Bourdieu, P., Raymond, G., & Adamson, M. (1993). Language and Symbolic Power. *SubStance*, 22(2/3). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3685295>
- De Caeter, L. (2023). On Language and Power. In *Law and Visual Jurisprudence* (Vol. 9). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26855-7\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26855-7_5)
- GAO Ting. (2020). A Critical Discourse Analysis of Hedges in Chinese and American Spokespersons' Remarks at Press Conference. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 10(7). <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5836/2020.07.009>
- Gould, K. A. (2023). Embracing Inclusive Language as a Powerful Communication Tool. In *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing* (Vol. 42, Issue 6). <https://doi.org/10.1097/DCC.0000000000000611>
- Habibie, A. (2016). Comparison Between Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis from Linguistics View. *Al-Lisan: Jurnal Bahasa (Online)*, 1(2).
- Halper, T. (2021). ORWELLIAN OPINIONS: THE LANGUAGE OF POWER AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE. *British Journal of American Legal Studies*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.2478/bjals-2022-0003>
- Hansen-Pauly, M.-A. (2022). Language as Symbolic Power. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 22(4). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2022.2062168>
- Harmon, M.R., Wilson, M.J. 2006. Beyond Grammar: Language, Power and the classroom. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, Mahwah, New Jersey
- Kramsch, C. (2020a). Language as Symbolic Power. In *Language as Symbolic Power*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108869386>
- Kramsch, C. (2020b). Language as Symbolic Power in the Digital Age. In *Language as Symbolic Power*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108869386.012>
- Maruf, N., & Tanduk, R. (2021). A Cognitive Linguistics Study to Reveal the Concept of Death of Indonesian Indigenous Tribe. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v4i2.1969>



- Nartey, M., & Mwinlaaru, I. N. (2019). Towards a decade of synergising corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis: A meta-analysis. *Corpora*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.3366/cor.2019.0169>
- Parker, J. (2001). Language: A Pernicious and Powerful Tool. *English Journal*, 91(2). <https://doi.org/10.58680/ej2001843>
- Paterson, L. L., & Gregory, I. N. (2019). Corpus Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Poverty. In *Representations of Poverty and Place*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93503-4\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93503-4_2)
- Roslyng, M. M., & Larsen, G. (2021). The struggle between the power of language and the language of power. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 20(6). <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.19101.ros>
- Ross, C. T. (2018). THE MANY LANGUAGES AND POWERFUL TOOLS OF THE BODY. In *Unlocking Consciousness*. [https://doi.org/10.1142/9781786344694\\_0014](https://doi.org/10.1142/9781786344694_0014)
- Srivastava, S. B. (2019). Language: A Powerful Tool in Promoting Healthy Behaviors. In *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* (Vol. 13, Issue 4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827619839995>
- Tanduk, R., Maruf, N., & Suluh, S. (2021). Myths and Ideology in Customary Ritual of Ma'tammu Tedong for Life of Toraja People. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute (BIRCI-Journal): Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v4i2.1979>
- Tesalonika Hasugian, & Silvanus Alvin. (2023). Controversy Spokesperson of G20 Indonesia: A Critical Discourse Analysis Study. *Jurnal Multidisiplin Madani*, 3(7). <https://doi.org/10.55927/mudima.v3i7.3735>
- Vaandering, dorothy, & Reimer, K. E. (2021). Relational Critical Discourse Analysis: A Methodology to Challenge Researcher Assumptions. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211020903>
- Van Dijk, T. A. (2016). Critical discourse analysis. *Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales*, 2016(30). <https://doi.org/10.4206/rev.austral.cienc.soc.2016.n30-10>
- Wang, W. (2021). Critical Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Studies and Beyond. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 39(3). <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2021.1950555>



Wagner, A., Cheng, L. 2011. Exploring Courtroom Discourse: The Language of Power and Control. Ashgate Publishing Company, USA. Walford, B. 1985. Government of Canada.: Homicide in Canada. Canada Law Book Inc.

Wareing, S. 2004. Language, Society, and Power: An Introduction, 2 nd edition. Taylor & Francis eLibrary.

TELL US JOURNAL