



## Critical Discourse Analysis of Power Struggle and Marxism Theory in Hwang Dong Hyuk's Series *Squid Game*

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### Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the abuse of power and powerlessness in the discourse of Hwang Dong Hyuk's series squid game according to Marxism. The main focus of the paper is how powerless people are targeted through communication and are tricked to believe that they can also be rich and be able to live easy lives if they do what they are told to. It is clear that in today's society poor class has to follow every order of the elite class in order to survive. The powerlessness of the poor and abuse of power of the elite is clearly shown in this series. By CDA of the selective text it is clear that two classes are being discussed, poor class and elite class. Elite giving orders and poor following them. Abuse of power is clear where it is said by the rich person that he never forced them to play the game. You came back on your own accord. The elite living in luxury is manipulating the poor for his own entertainment. Marxism clearly fits in this situation. If they had power or money of their own, they would have never resorted to such methods. Fairclough 3D model 1992 can also be taken into perspective. As the murder was practiced by a single criminal in that game and some of them also got into doing so.

**Keywords:** power, elite and poor class, Marxism, money, critical discourse analysis

### 1. Introduction

In the critical discourse analysis of the series, it is clear struggle between elite and poor class is there. Poor class is getting their lives on line to live comfortably but the upper class is relaxing and using power abuse for fun. The critical discourse analysis studies about all the bad things on the society. The abuse of power and Marxism which struggle of poor class is clear in the discourse of the series. Fairclough work in critical discourse analysis helps in many ways to make society a better place like it deals with powerlessness, power abuse, suppression and injustice.

Critical discourse analysis is study of social issues like economic inequality discussed in Marxism. Critical discourse analysis is basically used to critically analyse a discourse for the better understanding of the audience. Critical discourse analysis is done by the analyst according to his own perspective. He is basically making the Audience understand his own point of view on something. This paper is written to understand the economic inequality and abuse of power of elite class and struggle of the poor Class to live better life. Targeting of power less people by power full people is shown here. Their struggle to live care free lives. Squid game directed by Hwang Dong Hyuk is a series based on economic inequality in which people struggle is shown. Mohsin Hamid's first novel moth smoke 2000 is also mirror to many evils in society and it reflects the abuse of power and economic inequality between rich and poor class.

Hwang Dong Hyuk, born in Seoul (Korea) on May 26, 1971, is a film director, producer and screen writer. He is known for his best work in 2011 drama film silence and in 2021 Netflix survival drama squid game. At early age, he spent his most of time in manga and emerged himself in it. After graduating from Seoul national university, he wrote many short films like *Puff of Smoke*. Then he went to Los Angeles to do M.F.A in film production in University of California. His graduation film was *Miracle Miles 2004* about a Korean American taxi driver who helps the girl to find her brother adopted by Americans 20 years ago. His film was screened over 40 international film festivals and won many awards.

His latest series *Squid Game* was directed on September 17, 2021 which was a Netflix survival drama got fame rapidly and was the top search on Netflix. It was basically about the economic inequality of the society and abuse of power by elite class and struggle of poor class to live better lives. To address these issues, Marxism can also be seen in it. Power struggle is exercised among the members of the game in which power is not maintained properly and the members are placing their lives and social norms on line to get power.

### 2. Literature Review

Fairclough and Wodak's (1997) critical discourse analysis of language is rapidly emerging. It takes discourse as social practice as it is done among people largely. That is why the discourse of the series is being studied carefully. The director has shown the main theme is about economic inequality and power struggle among people. The short review of the series is discussed in this part of the paper. The main character of the series Seong Gi Hun is from the poor class and is in a lot of debt and is in dire need of money for the operation of his mother. On the other hand, the manipulator of the series the person who arranged the game and hired people to find powerless people to play the game *Go Il Nam* is a rich person with lots of money. He is actually bored and very old and wants to have some fun in life. He has power so he uses it to lure people into playing game with him and the loser of the game will be dead. People still played the game while knowing that they can be dead next second. They were being grinded in power struggle. All the players were in debt and were in need of money. Marxism is clear here that if there was balance in power, they would not have to go to such lengths to get money for their easy life.

In these series the focus is about the main character Seong Gi Hun who is divorced and his daughter is living with her mother who had married to someone else because he has no money to raise her. It is also about the powerlessness he feels that he cannot even take care of his own daughter. The Marxism point of view is very clear here that if the status between the main character and the person, his ex-wife got married, he could have even tried to make her daughter live with him. It is clear that elite is powerful but poor class is struggling day and



night to live their lives. That is economic inequality shown in society. The person with more money or status can order poker class however he wants by only offering money or by abusing his position. This series has shown the reality of society the inequality and injustice present in it. It does not only represent the society of Korea but of all around the world that only people with status has power and are able to things however they want but poor class is struggling every day to survive. Perveen and Awan (2017) said that the rich have authority and power to run a state according to their desire.

Carl Marx gave his theory Marxism due to these reason that if the society had been fair and equal then nobody had to face such things anymore. Everyone would have been living their lives happily without worrying about trivial things like food or daily necessities. In these series the economic inequality is clear and Marxism can be applied on it. Foucault 1980 said that power is not like inheritance but it is exercised by the person through language use and common in our society. Like in selected lines the candidate had the chance to go and leave the game but with language they convinced them to play it and be a part of it. They named the whole process game. They tricked them onto thinking that it was all about gaming and stuff by just saying 'sir do you want to play a game' and that was it for people to take part as they were in debt and they will get money by only playing game.

Fairclough (1989) said that abuse of power can not only be seen in discourse but is also present in many ways. Critical discourse analysis is not basically only about power but how power is abused. Critical discourse analysis is to highlight these evils of the society. It is about the relationship between discourse analysis and social power.

### 3. Methodology

Critical discourse analysis is basically about how a person can communicate or influence other through language use and how a reader is influenced by just reading and understanding words because language is only arrangements of words that are set together orderly but convey such emotion that effect the other listener or reader and is able to convey one's thoughts and ideas. It is all about the social concerns and use of power. Van Dijk (1993) also said that the critical discourse analysis is about the analysis of the text, written and spoken talk about power imbalance and economic inequality. Through critical discourse analysis one can study the economic inequality in society, imbalance of power and misuse of it.

#### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

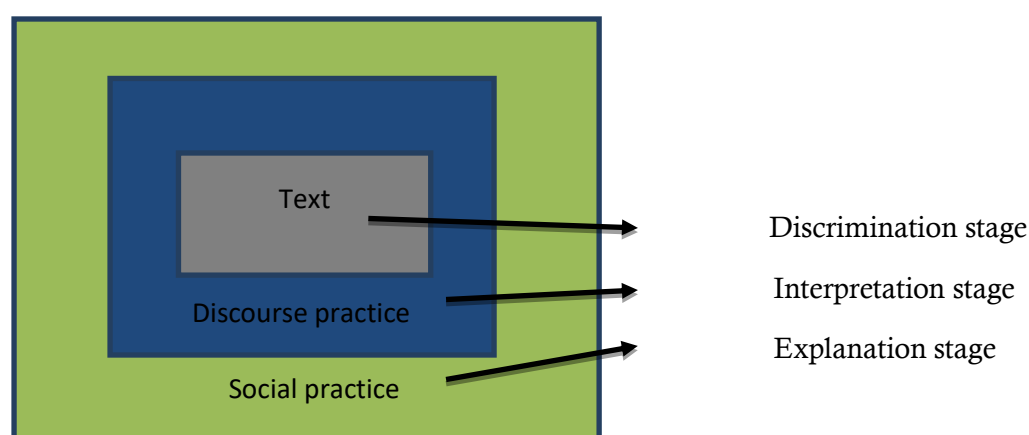
**Fairclough 3D Model:** Basically, Fairclough said that to study three dimensions of a discourse there are three methods required. These three methods critically analyse the discourse for its study.

Fairclough (1989) said that the focus of a critical analyst should not be only about text it's process and interpretation but also about interpretation among text production process and their social context.

**Description (Text):** It is mainly concern about the actual text like its vocabulary, grammar, tense and different kind of speech properties. It also concerns if the speech is formal or informal.

**Interpretation (Discourse Practice):** It is mainly about how things are done through a process, for example, writing, listening, reading and speaking. It is about who is writing for whom and who are the receiver and what is their mentality. Which process of production is used here.

**Explanation (Social Practice):** It is mainly concerns about the social and historical background on which this process is done. It is basically in-depth explanation. It is all about its role and impact on society.



### 4. Data Analysis

The present study is about the power abuse, Marxism and economic inequality which are chosen for the analysis. The analysis of squid game is done very carefully. Every line is discourse in it. And selective main are taken for the critical discourse analysis and to show audience the point of it. These lines are being critically analysed through Fairclough 3D model method and it's done not only on external meaning but meaning in depth is being studied. It also studies that how it impacts or work in a society. Roger 2005 said that analysis should be done according to CDA because it not only interprets and describe a discourse but it also tells that how a discourse effect in a society and how it works in it. Pennycook (2001) also claims that what texts 'do' in the world cannot be explained solely through text analysis or text analytic language. It thoroughly study of a discourse is needed for the understanding.

#### Example 1

I was bitten by a huge mosquito. Mosquitoes are really mean these days. (Seong Gi Hun to his daughter)

##### a) Discrimination

Discrimination is all about study of structure of text. Firstly, in the selective text it is clear that informal language is being used. Cohesion can be seen between the sentence as they are talking about same thing. Adjective is used as *huge*. First part of the selective text is past tense and the second part is present tense. The structure of the text is mainly focusing on the word mosquito as it is referring to other thing then the mosquito but author word selection here makes it clear that the speaker of the text wants the listener to believe that it was a mosquito. Metaphor is used as mosquitoes are actually the debt collectors. Adverb is used as *really*. *Mosquitoes* and *days* are noun. *By* is prepositions. *I* is pronoun. *Was, bitten, are* and *mean* are verb.

##### b) Interpretation

The selective text is taken from the film drama squid game where a father was beaten up by debt collector which case a wound on the face. When he meets her daughter, the daughter asks about the injury on the face. The father Seong Gi Hun feels ashamed about telling her daughter that her father was beaten for money so he lies to her by saying that he was bitten by a huge mosquito and the Aldo add the line that mosquitoes are really mean referring to real debt collector. The audience of this show are normal people of society in which debt

collector are present. And it is about a father trying his best not to show weak side of his to her daughter even if he has to lie. It affects the audience greatly as many of them are father and many are daughter and they understand that every father is a hero in the eyes of a daughter.

### c) Explanation

This discourse talks about today's society that due to economic inequality many people are going for the debts and when they are not able to pay it back on time they are bitten badly. It is not only present in Korean society but in many other societies. It has become a social practice for the people to take debt to fulfil their needs. Then there is irony that a father is ashamed to tell her daughter that he is a loser and has no job or a way to earn money so that he can get himself out of debt and is beaten by debt collector. A metaphor is used here referring to debt collector as mosquitoes and this is reality, they are actually like mosquitoes who suck up all the blood of a person in debt. The second line *they are really mean these days* is all about how they harass the person without any humanity and sometimes they just sell them after kidnapping or sometime their organs if they are not able to pay the debt. It is reflection of today's societies evil. It is reality of today's society. This series was written in 2021 to highlight the evil of 21<sup>st</sup> century. The difficulty of people and dark side of this era. Debt is really serious Matter that if the theory of Marxism is followed which is all about economic equality the people of a society wouldn't have to go to such lengths to take debt from loan sharks. Who are ruthless to people and even kill them by making them sign the contract that they can do anything with them if they could not pay up the debt?

### Example 2

*They are simply eliminated for breaking the rules of the game. If you follow the rules, you can leave this place safely with the money we promised (Pink suit man after first game)*

#### a) Discrimination

In the selective text conjunction is used. Suffix is also used here as *ing* in breaking *ly* in simply *s* in rules *ly* in safely *ed* in promised. First part of the selective text is past perfect tense. And in second part future perfect tense is used. *Simply* and *Safely* are adverb here. *Rule, game, place* and *money* are noun. *For, of, if, with* and *after* are prepositions. *They, you* and *we* are pronouns. *Are, eliminated, breaking, follow, can, leave* and *promised* are verbs. Version and coherence can also be seen in the sentences.

#### b) Interpretation

The selective text was taken from the series after they complete first game. Then the pink suit man who are punishing by killing those who break the rules say these words when all the player got frightened and wants to leave the game. They are using the word eliminated instead of killing they are justifying their act by the use of words that they are just being eliminated but instead they are being killed for breaking the rules. The players were not told about such thing before the game and till the end they are just using word eliminated. And next they are simply implying that if the players follow the rules, they can leave the game safely but they are just using the words cunningly to deceive them as it is clear that at the end of the game only one person can survive and all the others will be dead at the end of it. They are still not revealing the truth and just manipulating the words by making them believe that they can leave the game safely. They also add the line that says with the money we promised means they are also kind of bribing them into believing it and playing the game till the end for the greed of the money so they can give better lives back at home to those who are precious to them. They are being forced to sacrifice themselves for the gain of comfortable life.

#### c) Explanation

The discourse talks about the society that there are many people who are coned by many others by believing the good things they say that they will get if they follow them and at the end, they all go bankrupt and lose everything with nothing left. The things they had before are also gone for the want of new things. This kind of evil is common as making people believe something and then deceiving them at the end. These are present at low level and also at high level. Many people from third rate countries are shown the dreams of good life after they go to a bigger country and they also believe it but at the end they are trapped their or are being worked like slaves without giving them money and their families back at home are waiting for their return. The irony is people do this for making their own lives better. If they all could just have equal values and living necessities no one would bother to snitch or deceive other. In the selective lines the irony of the society is being shown clear cut. The writing of the series Hwang Dong hyuk also wanted to pinpoint the economic inequality and difficulties for the survival a person face in this series and he was successful in doing so. People use discourse to manipulate other that it has a lot of power to manipulate the minds of a listener if spoken carefully. All the evils in the society can be said that start with a discourse. But it also helps in pinpointing them and solving those issues.

### Example 3

*Here the players get to play fair games under the same conditions. These people suffered with inequality and discrimination out in the world. (Front man after catching the cheating player)*

#### a) Discrimination

In the selective text, *fair* and *same* are adjectives. *Here* is adverb. *And* is conjunction. *Players, game, conditions, people, inequality, discrimination* and *world* are noun. *Under, with, out* and *in* are prepositions. *Get, play* and *suffered* are verbs. Cohesion and coherence can also be seen in above selective text.

#### b) Interpretation

The selective text is taken from the series when the front man catches the cheater player and the traitor pink suit men. After catching them he speaks these words. At first it seems all nice and good that they are providing equality. The players are given equal opportunities to play the game and only the best can win the game. But the irony is they had to place most valuable thing Their life on line to get this kind of equality. What is use of it at the end of they will not even survive to appreciate it. In the second part of the text the front man says that the people suffered from inequality and discrimination in the world means they only selected those people to play the game who have faced the inequality in real life and will want to get a taste of equality even if they have to place their precious lives on line. This shows the separation of the people to get the equality no Matter what.

#### c) Explanation

In the first line text that here players get to play fair games under same conditions implies that the society they were living in was full of inequality and they didn't get same opportunities as the other people if society. It is huge criticism on capitalism that even if it is wrong but they are given same and equal atmosphere to prove themselves. The people who suffered inequality are those who can appreciate equal opportunities. It is said that the person who knows true pain can appreciate true happiness. In above lines, it's their justification for the players that they are actually doing good thing. The person who cheated in game was immediately killed for breaking the rules as it implies that society do not need those who tries to go through shortcut. It makes the society garbage. It is one of the best things they did while playing with the lives of people.

#### 4. Conclusion

The main theme of squid game is all about economic inequality in society. The director is contently in whole series shows that the society is in equal and people do not get equal opportunities in a society. In whole series, it is about the struggle of poor class to make their life better. Director has shown ironically that the poor class struggle is to be taken notice of. The people even put their lives on stake for the gain of better life and will do illegal work that it causes the birth of evildoers. Just like all the people struggling under a pile of debt are given equal opportunities for their better lives by the elite class person who has power to whatever he wants as he got money which determines one's status and power in a society. The person with power has not much going in his life and is bored so he actually started the game and make people fight each other for the money. This series is recommended for other scholars as it is good as a research topic. It will prove beneficial as it is about an important topic of the society.

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