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## Power and Resistance in the Dialogues of Mickey 17 (2025): A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the representation of power and resistance in the dialogues of Bong Joon-ho's science fiction film Mickey 17 (2025) using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research aims to examine how linguistic choices in the film construct ideological tensions between corporate authority and human agency within a dystopian narrative. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes selected dialogues using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, which integrates textual analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural context. The data consist of dialogue excerpts from key scenes involving the protagonist, corporate representatives, and colonists, representing different positions within the film's power hierarchy. The analysis focuses on linguistic features such as modality, imperative forms, pronoun usage, and speech acts. The findings reveal that power is discursively constructed through authoritative language, contractual discourse, and hierarchical pronoun use that normalize obedience and legitimize human disposability. In contrast, resistance is articulated through refusal, irony, and discursive questioning, allowing subordinate characters to challenge dominant ideology within constrained communicative spaces. These linguistic strategies reflect broader socio-political discourses on labor exploitation, technological control, and the commodification of human life. The study concludes that dialogue in Mickey 17 functions as a crucial site of ideological negotiation, where power is both enacted and contested through language. By applying CDA to a contemporary science fiction film, this research contributes to media linguistics and film discourse studies, demonstrating how popular cinema encodes and critiques power relations through everyday linguistic practices.*

*Kata kunci: Critical Discourse Analysis, Film Dialogue, Mickey 17, Power, Resistance*

### **1. Introduction**

Language in film is not a neutral vehicle for storytelling but a strategic medium through which ideology, authority, and resistance are constructed and contested. In cinematic narratives, dialogue functions as a symbolic space where social hierarchies are normalized, challenged, or destabilized. This is particularly evident in science fiction cinema, a genre that frequently interrogates modern anxieties related to technology, capitalism, and human agency. Rather than offering escapist fantasies alone, science fiction films often project speculative futures that reflect contemporary power relations. Within this context, Bong Joon-ho's *Mickey 17* (2025) emerges as a compelling text for critical linguistic analysis due to its explicit engagement with themes of corporate domination, labor exploitation, and disposability of human life.

*Mickey 17* depicts a dystopian future in which human cloning is institutionalized as a labor mechanism. The protagonist, Mickey, is an "expendable" worker repeatedly cloned and sacrificed to complete hazardous missions for a powerful interstellar corporation. While the film's visual and narrative elements foreground technological advancement, its dialogue reveals the deeper ideological operations of power and resistance. Corporate authority is not only enforced through physical control but also through everyday language that rationalizes exploitation, erases individuality, and legitimizes inequality. This aligns with the argument that discourse is central to the maintenance of social domination, as power is often exercised subtly through language rather than overt coercion [1].

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach concerned with how discourse enacts, maintains, and challenges relations of power within society [2]. Within CDA, language is understood as social practice, inseparable from ideological and institutional structures. Fairclough's three-dimensional model integrates textual analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural context, allowing linguistic features to be systematically

connected to broader configurations of power and inequality. Complementing this perspective, Van Dijk conceptualizes discourse as a form of social cognition, emphasizing the role of shared knowledge, beliefs, and ideologies in shaping how social actors produce and interpret discourse. This cognitive dimension is further extended by Wodak and Meyer, who stress the importance of historical context in discourse analysis, particularly in tracing how power relations and ideological formations are reproduced, contested, and transformed over time [3].

Although CDA has been extensively applied to political discourse, news media, and educational texts, its application to contemporary science fiction films particularly recent Hollywood productions remains relatively underexplored. Existing CDA research in film studies has largely focused on war films, historical dramas, or national cinema, leaving a gap in the analysis of corporate discourse and labor exploitation in futuristic settings. This gap is significant because contemporary science fiction increasingly mirrors present-day neoliberal realities, including precarious labor, corporate surveillance, and the commodification of human bodies. As Wodak argues, discourse must be analyzed within its broader socio-historical context to fully understand how ideology operates across time and institutions [4]

Previous studies in film discourse analysis emphasize that dialogue plays a crucial role in constructing ideological meaning. Bateman highlights that film dialogue is not spontaneous speech but a carefully designed semiotic resource that interacts with visuals, sound, and narrative structure to guide audience interpretation [5]. In dystopian films, authoritative discourse is often marked by technical jargon, impersonal pronouns, and bureaucratic registers that distance speakers from ethical responsibility. Conversely, resistant discourse tends to employ emotional appeals, personal pronouns, or disruptive conversational strategies. These linguistic patterns allow viewers to recognize power asymmetries even when oppression is presented as normalized or institutionalized [6].

Studies on science fiction cinema further demonstrate that speculative narratives are particularly effective in exposing ideological contradictions. Films such as *District 9* and *Blade Runner* have been analyzed for their use of language to construct racialized and dehumanized “others,” revealing how discourse legitimizes exclusion and violence [7]. Similarly, *The Hunger Games* franchise employs ritualized and propagandistic dialogue to reinforce authoritarian control while allowing moments of resistance through subversive speech acts [8]. These studies confirm that science fiction dialogue is a productive site for examining how power is linguistically articulated and contested.

In the context of Asian and Indonesian scholarship, several studies have applied CDA to film and television texts to explore resistance and ideology. Goziah et al. demonstrate how indirect speech and silence function as resistance strategies in Indonesian films under hegemonic power structures [9]. Kurniawan et al. show that cinematic dialogue often embeds social criticism through metaphor and sarcasm, allowing filmmakers to challenge dominant ideologies without explicit confrontation [10]. Similarly, Sari and Prasetyo argue that language in film can subtly negotiate power by framing marginalized voices as morally legitimate despite institutional suppression [11]. While these studies provide valuable insights, they primarily focus on local or national cinema and do not address global science fiction films centered on corporate futurism.

Despite the growing body of research on discourse, power, and film, *Mickey 17* has not yet been examined through a CDA lens, particularly with a focus on dialogue. Existing discussions of the film tend to emphasize its visual symbolism, narrative structure, or ethical implications of cloning, often overlooking the linguistic mechanisms through which domination and resistance are enacted. This omission represents a significant research gap, as language is central to how the film constructs the expendability of the protagonist and legitimizes corporate violence. By analyzing dialogue, this study moves beyond thematic interpretation to examine how ideology operates at the micro-linguistic level.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on corporate discourse in a contemporary science fiction film released in the mid-2020s, reflecting current global concerns about labor precarity, automation, and human disposability. Unlike earlier dystopian films that depict overtly authoritarian states, *Mickey 17* presents power as corporate, rationalized, and technologically mediated. This shift demands new analytical attention, as corporate language often disguises exploitation as efficiency, innovation, or necessity. CDA enables the identification of these discursive strategies by examining lexical choices, modality, pronoun use, and interactional patterns within dialogue [12].

Furthermore, resistance in *Mickey 17* is not always expressed through open rebellion but often emerges in fragmented, hesitant, or ironic speech. These subtle forms of resistance challenge the assumption that resistance must be loud or confrontational. Instead, the film illustrates how even constrained subjects can negotiate agency through language. This aligns with contemporary CDA perspectives that view resistance as discursively constructed rather than merely action-based [13].

Based on these considerations, this study is conducted to address the lack of discourse-oriented analysis of *Mickey 17* and to contribute to the growing field of media linguistics. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis to selected dialogues from the film, the research seeks to reveal how power relations between corporate authorities and expendable workers are linguistically constructed and how resistance is articulated within constrained communicative spaces.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research objectives: (1) to identify linguistic features that construct corporate power in the dialogue of *Mickey 17*; (2) to analyze how resistance is expressed through verbal and interactional strategies; and (3) to explain how these discursive patterns reflect broader ideological critiques of labor exploitation and technological control. Through this approach, the study aims to demonstrate that dialogue in science fiction cinema is not merely supportive of narrative development but is central to ideological struggle and social critique [1].

Table 1: Comparison of CDA Models

Scholar	Focus	Application in Film
Fairclough	Text, practice, context	Multilevel analysis
Van Dijk	Social cognition	Audience perception
Wodak & Meyer	Historical discourse	Ideology over time

## 2. Research Methods

### 2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the main analytical framework. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to interpret ideological meanings and power relations embedded in film dialogue rather than to quantify linguistic patterns. The focus is on how discourse functions within a fictional narrative to construct authority and resistance, particularly in a dystopian corporate setting.

CDA is employed as an established methodological approach for analyzing discourse in relation to power, ideology, and social inequality. This study applies Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, which examines discourse at the levels of text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. Although the model was initially developed earlier, it continues to be widely adopted and refined in contemporary discourse research due to its analytical flexibility and relevance to multimodal texts such as film. Recent methodological studies confirm that Fairclough's framework remains effective for analyzing institutional and media discourse, particularly in critical film and media studies [14].

### 2.2 Data Source and Participants

The data source of this study is the dialogue from selected scenes of the film *Mickey 17* (2025), directed by Bong Joon-ho. The data consist of spoken utterances produced by fictional characters. As this research does not involve human subjects, the term "participants" refers to characters within the narrative rather than real individuals.

The participants include the main character Mickey, corporate representatives such as executives and military authorities, and colonists. These characters were selected because they represent different positions within the power hierarchy portrayed in the film. Corporate figures embody institutional authority, Mickey represents the exploited labor subject, and colonists function as supporting actors who either comply with or normalize dominant

discourse. Such character-based selection is common in qualitative film discourse research, as it allows for focused analysis of interactional power dynamics.

### 2.3 Research Instruments

In qualitative discourse research, the primary research instrument is the researcher. The researcher is responsible for selecting data, transcribing dialogue, coding linguistic features, and interpreting discourse patterns. To support analytical rigor and transparency, a dialogue transcription sheet was used as a supporting instrument. This sheet contained columns for scene number, speaker identity, dialogue excerpt, and preliminary discourse notes.

Dialogues were transcribed verbatim from selected scenes that contained explicit or implicit expressions of authority, control, compliance, or resistance. The transcription prioritized semantic accuracy rather than phonetic detail, as the focus of the study is discourse function. The transcribed data were then coded based on linguistic features commonly examined in contemporary CDA-based film studies, including modality, pronoun usage, speech acts, and evaluative lexical choices. These features are widely recognized as indicators of power relations in institutional and media discourse [15]

### 2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a systematic and replicable procedure. First, the researcher watched *Mickey 17* repeatedly to gain an in-depth understanding of the narrative structure, character relationships, and thematic focus. This step ensured contextual sensitivity when identifying relevant discourse segments.

Second, scenes that prominently depicted themes of corporate authority, exploitation, obedience, and resistance were identified. Scene selection was guided by thematic relevance rather than frequency to ensure analytical depth. Third, dialogues from the selected scenes were transcribed and compiled into a structured data corpus. Each dialogue excerpt was labeled according to scene, speaker, and interactional context to facilitate consistent analysis. This procedure aligns with established qualitative film discourse methodologies [16].

### 2.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework. At the textual level, the analysis focused on linguistic markers such as modal verbs, imperatives, pronouns, and evaluative vocabulary to identify how power and obligation are encoded in dialogue. At the level of discourse practice, the analysis examined how dialogue is produced by characters occupying positions of authority and how it is responded to, negotiated, or resisted by subordinate characters.

At the sociocultural level, the analysis interpreted how the discourse reflects broader ideological structures, including corporate capitalism, technological rationality, and the commodification of human life. This level connects micro-linguistic findings to macro-social contexts, which is a key methodological principle in contemporary CDA research. By integrating these analytical stages, the study ensures methodological coherence and allows other researchers to replicate the analytical process in similar film-based discourse studies [17].

## 3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on a Critical Discourse Analysis of selected dialogues from *Mickey 17*. The results are organized according to specific linguistic features that construct power relations and resistance within the film's dystopian narrative. The analysis demonstrates that language functions as a primary mechanism through which corporate authority is legitimized and hierarchical relations are maintained, while resistance emerges through strategic deviations from dominant discourse.

### 3.1 Linguistic Markers of Power

This subsection examines linguistic markers used by authority figures to assert power and control over subordinate characters. The analysis shows that modal verbs and imperative forms are the most prominent linguistic resources employed to impose obligation, obedience, and compliance. The distribution of these markers is summarized in Table 2, which presents representative examples from selected scenes.

Table 2: Linguistic Markers of Power

Scene	Speaker	Power	Example
1	CEO	Modal verbs	Young must fulfill your contract
2	Colonel	Imperatives	Report immediately

As shown in Table 2, modal verbs such as *must* are frequently used by corporate elites to express absolute obligation. In Scene 1, the CEO’s utterance “*You must fulfill your contract*” frames the relationship between the corporation and the worker as strictly contractual and non-negotiable. The use of *must* eliminates the possibility of choice and constructs compliance as an unavoidable requirement. Linguistically, this modal verb positions the speaker as an authority figure while reducing the subordinate character to an object of obligation rather than an autonomous subject.

Imperative forms also play a crucial role in reinforcing hierarchical power relations. In Scene 2, the colonel’s command “*Report immediately*” exemplifies how authority is exercised through direct and unmitigated orders. As reflected in Table 2, the absence of politeness strategies or modal softeners emphasizes urgency and control. Such imperatives function as institutional commands rather than interpersonal requests, reinforcing the rigid chain of command within the narrative.

These linguistic patterns indicate that power in *Mickey 17* is constructed through routinized and institutionalized discourse. Authority figures consistently occupy the position of command-givers, while subordinate characters are positioned as receivers of orders. The repetition of modal verbs and imperatives across different scenes suggests that domination is embedded in organizational language rather than dependent on individual personalities.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, the findings demonstrate that authoritative language in *Mickey 17* serves to normalize inequality and legitimize exploitation. By presenting coercive relations through contractual and procedural discourse, the film illustrates how power operates subtly through language. Rather than relying on physical force, authority is maintained through linguistic structures that frame obedience as rational, necessary, and inevitable.

### 3.2 Linguistic Strategies of Resistance

This subsection examines how resistance is linguistically realized through specific discursive strategies employed by subordinate characters. The analysis reveals that resistance in *Mickey 17* is not primarily expressed through overt rebellion, but through subtle linguistic acts such as refusal, irony, and the questioning of institutional authority. These strategies function to challenge dominant discourse from within constrained communicative spaces. Representative examples of these resistance markers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Resistance Strategie

Scene	Speaker	Resistance marker	Example
3	Mickey	Refusal	“I refuse to be recycled again.”
4	Colonist	Irony	“Your contract is freedom, isn’t it?”

As illustrated in Table 3, explicit refusal emerges as a direct form of resistance, particularly through declarative statements that reject institutional demands. In Scene 3, Mickey’s utterance functions as a performative speech act that disrupts the expected pattern of obedience. By verbalizing refusal, the character momentarily reclaims agency and resists the discursive positioning of expendability imposed by corporate authority. Linguistically, the use of the first-person pronoun combined with a decisive verb of negation signals an assertion of subjectivity against an oppressive system.

Irony constitutes another significant strategy of resistance, especially when open defiance is structurally discouraged. In Scene 4, the colonist's ironic utterance challenges the ideological framing of contractual obligation as freedom. Rather than directly opposing authority, the speaker exposes the contradiction inherent in institutional discourse. This ironic questioning destabilizes dominant narratives by highlighting the gap between corporate rhetoric and lived reality. As shown in Table 3, irony allows subordinate characters to resist without overt confrontation, making it a safer yet effective form of discursive opposition.

These forms of resistance demonstrate that power in *Mickey 17* is not absolute or uncontested. Even within highly controlled environments, characters negotiate meaning and challenge authority through language. The strategic use of refusal and irony reveals that resistance operates at the micro-linguistic level, embedded in everyday interactions rather than grand acts of rebellion. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, such discursive practices illustrate how resistance can emerge within, rather than outside of, dominant discourse.

Overall, the findings indicate that resistance in *Mickey 17* is linguistically constructed as fragmented, situational, and often indirect. These strategies do not immediately dismantle institutional power, but they expose its ideological fragility. By articulating refusal and irony, subordinate characters disrupt the naturalization of exploitation and assert alternative meanings that challenge the legitimacy of corporate authority.

### 3.3 Pronoun Usage and Power Distance

This subsection analyzes how pronoun choice functions as a linguistic resource for constructing power distance and ideological positioning in *Mickey 17*. Pronouns are not merely grammatical elements but play a significant role in defining group boundaries, assigning agency, and legitimizing authority. The patterns of pronoun usage identified in the data are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Pronoun Usage and Power Distance

Pronoun	Function	Example
We	Corporate inclusion	"We own your future."
You	Direct control	"You will obey."
They	Othering	"They are expendable."

As shown in Table 4, the pronoun *we* is frequently used by corporate authorities to construct a sense of collective inclusion that masks hierarchical domination. This inclusive pronoun creates the illusion of shared goals and mutual benefit, while simultaneously reinforcing institutional power. By speaking on behalf of the corporation, authority figures position themselves as representatives of an unquestionable collective entity. Linguistically, this strategy diffuses individual accountability and frames corporate decisions as collective necessities rather than imposed commands.

The pronoun *you* is employed to establish direct control and reinforce asymmetrical power relations. In authoritative utterances, *you* functions as a mechanism of individual targeting, positioning subordinate characters as objects of command and surveillance. This form of address personalizes obligation while maintaining hierarchical distance, as the speaker retains institutional authority. As reflected in Table 4, the use of *you* intensifies coercion by directly assigning responsibility and obedience to the addressee.

In contrast, the pronoun *they* is used to construct ideological distance through processes of othering and dehumanization. By referring to certain characters as *they*, authority figures linguistically remove these individuals from the moral community. This pronoun choice frames expendable workers as an abstract group rather than as human subjects, thereby legitimizing their exploitation. The repeated use of *they* reduces empathy and facilitates the normalization of violence and disposability within the narrative.

Overall, the use of pronouns in *Mickey 17* reinforces power asymmetries by categorizing characters into dominant collectives, controlled subjects, and dehumanized others. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, these pronoun strategies reveal how ideology operates at a micro-linguistic level to sustain institutional authority. By

shaping perceptions of belonging, responsibility, and humanity, pronoun usage becomes a subtle yet powerful mechanism for maintaining social and discursive distance.

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### 3.4 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that power and resistance in *Mickey 17* are primarily constructed and negotiated through language. Rather than relying on explicit physical domination, authority in the film operates through discursive mechanisms that normalize hierarchy, obligation, and control. Linguistic features such as modal verbs, imperatives, and pronoun choices function as ideological tools that legitimize corporate authority and frame exploitation as rational, contractual, and inevitable. At the same time, resistance emerges through subtle but meaningful linguistic strategies, including refusal, irony, and discursive questioning, revealing that power is never absolute but continuously contested.

The use of authoritative language identified in the results aligns closely with Fairclough's view of discourse as a site of ideological struggle, where dominance is maintained through routinized linguistic practices rather than overt coercion (Fairclough, 1995). In *Mickey 17*, corporate discourse relies heavily on contractual and procedural language, which disguises exploitation as administrative necessity. Modal verbs such as *must* and imperative commands frame obedience as a logical requirement rather than a forced submission. This linguistic pattern illustrates how ideology functions by shaping what is perceived as normal and unavoidable, thereby limiting the possibility of resistance at the level of consciousness.

From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this finding supports the argument that discourse plays a central role in reproducing social inequality. As noted in discussions of CDA, language often works to naturalize unequal power relations by embedding them in everyday communication (Wikipedia contributors, 2025). In *Mickey 17*, corporate language systematically erases the humanity of expendable workers by reducing them to contractual obligations and functional units. This discursive framing legitimizes repeated sacrifice and exploitation without the need for explicit violence, demonstrating how power can be exercised efficiently through language.

The findings can also be explained through Van Dijk's theory of social cognition, which emphasizes the role of shared knowledge, beliefs, and mental models in shaping how discourse is produced and interpreted (Van Dijk, 2008). The authoritative discourse in *Mickey 17* relies on assumed ideological consensus, such as the belief that corporate efficiency justifies human disposability or that technological progress outweighs ethical concerns. These

assumptions are not always explicitly stated but are embedded in linguistic choices that guide audience interpretation. As a result, viewers are positioned to recognize the injustice of the system while simultaneously understanding how such a system could function and be accepted within the narrative world.

Resistance, however, emerges as an important counterforce within this discursive structure. The results show that subordinate characters resist authority not primarily through open rebellion but through linguistic acts that disrupt dominant meanings. Refusal represents the most direct form of resistance, as it explicitly challenges institutional demands and reasserts individual agency. Irony and questioning, on the other hand, function as indirect strategies that expose contradictions within corporate discourse. These forms of resistance align with CDA perspectives that view resistance as discursively constructed and often embedded within dominant discourse rather than positioned entirely outside it.

Wodak's historical approach to discourse analysis provides further insight into how these linguistic patterns reflect broader socio-historical contexts (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The corporate domination depicted in *Mickey 17* resonates with contemporary global concerns about precarious labor, automation, and the commodification of human life. By situating the film within wider discourses of neoliberal capitalism and technological rationality, the analysis demonstrates that the power relations portrayed are not purely fictional but deeply connected to real-world ideological trends. Language in the film thus operates as a reflection and critique of current social conditions.

The analysis of pronoun usage further reinforces this interpretation. The strategic deployment of *we*, *you*, and *they* constructs ideological boundaries that define inclusion, control, and exclusion. Inclusive pronouns create an illusion of shared purpose while masking hierarchical domination, whereas deictic pronouns such as *you* individualize obligation and intensify control. The pronoun *they* functions as a powerful tool of othering, facilitating dehumanization and moral disengagement. These findings support previous CDA studies that emphasize the role of pronouns in constructing social distance and legitimizing inequality.

When compared with other science fiction films such as *District 9*, similar discursive patterns can be observed. In *District 9*, language is used to construct aliens as inferior and disposable, legitimizing segregation and violence through bureaucratic and scientific discourse. Likewise, *Mickey 17* employs corporate language to rationalize exploitation, demonstrating that linguistic domination is a recurring feature of dystopian science fiction narratives. This suggests that science fiction cinema functions as a global discursive space where contemporary power relations are symbolically negotiated.

Comparisons with Indonesian cinema further highlight the universality of discourse as a site of ideological struggle. Studies of films such as *Rudy Habibie* show that resistance is often expressed through indirect language, cultural symbolism, and moral positioning rather than direct confrontation [9]. While the cultural contexts differ, both Indonesian films and *Mickey 17* illustrate how language can subtly challenge dominant ideologies and reframe power relations. This comparison demonstrates that linguistic resistance transcends national and cultural boundaries, even though it may take different forms.

Overall, the discussion confirms that *Mickey 17* uses dialogue as a central mechanism for constructing and contesting power. Corporate authority is sustained through authoritative, contractual, and dehumanizing discourse, while resistance emerges through linguistic disruptions that challenge ideological assumptions. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis, this study reveals how language functions as both an instrument of domination and a resource for resistance. These findings contribute to media linguistics and film discourse studies by demonstrating that dialogue in science fiction cinema is not merely a narrative device but a crucial site of ideological negotiation and social critique.

#### 4. Conclusion

Kesimpulannya, This study concludes that *Mickey 17* dramatizes power and resistance through dialogue. Corporate authority is enacted through modal verbs and pronouns, while resistance is articulated through refusal and irony. The research contributes to media linguistics by applying CDA to contemporary science fiction, highlighting how film dialogue encodes ideological struggles. Future research could explore multimodal CDA, incorporating visual and auditory elements, or compare linguistic strategies across genres and cultures.

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