

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is never a completely neutral medium. More than just a tool for exchanging information, language is an active means used to construct, represent, and maintain power relations in social life (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This perspective forms the primary foundation of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an analytical approach that positions language as a social practice inseparable from power relations. Unlike conventional linguistic approaches, which tend to treat discourse as a reflection of reality as it is, CDA questions how language is actively involved in producing domination, perpetuating inequality, and reinforcing social hierarchies (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

One of the central concepts in the CDA framework is power dynamics, that is, how power is distributed and exercised unequally among individuals and groups. This concept encompasses the processes through which authority is established, maintained, negotiated, and even challenged through the use of discourse (van Dijk, 2015; Fairclough, 2013). From this perspective, power is not something solely possessed by an individual, but rather something manifested and negotiated through language and everyday social interactions. Those in positions of authority often exercise control over communication from establishing rules to determining what is considered appropriate behavior to influence the actions, beliefs, and opportunities of others (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Thus, analyzing power dynamics through CDA opens the possibility of revealing how discourse functions as a mechanism for legitimizing authority as well as a means of reproducing social hierarchies (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2015).

This study adopts the CDA framework developed by Fairclough (1995; 2013) as the primary analytical tool for examining the representation of power dynamics in literary discourse. Specifically, the analysis focuses on two dimensions of Fairclough's model: the textual dimension and the sociocultural dimension. Through the textual dimension, this study examines how power dynamics manifest in the choice of vocabulary, grammatical structure, patterns of cohesion and coherence, and rhetorical strategies used in the text (Fairclough, 1995). These

linguistic elements serve as a gateway to understanding how relationships of authority, domination, compliance, and resistance are constructed and maintained at the linguistic level. The socio-cultural dimension, meanwhile, serves to expand the analysis to a broader, macro-level scope, namely by exploring the social context, power relations, and ideologies that underlie and are reflected in the narrative (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The combination of these two dimensions allows this study to understand more comprehensively how discourse not only shapes but is also shaped by prevailing social structures and cultural values (van Dijk, 2015).

Meg Shaffer's novel *the Wishing Game* (2023) was selected as the subject of this study because it offers a rich discursive field for examining power dynamics. The novel's narrative is built upon the intertwined themes of competition, authority, and emotional influence. The protagonist, Jack Masterson, is a renowned author who not only designs but also fully controls the course of a high-stakes competition. His position as the creator and arbiter of the game's rules places him structurally in a dominant position, while the participants are in a state of complete constraint they can only follow terms that are entirely beyond their control. Failure to comply with these rules directly results in their defeat and elimination from the competition. This situation explicitly illustrates a real power imbalance, where one party holds full authority to regulate the actions and determine the opportunities of the other. The commands, restrictions, persuasion, and emotional influence that color the interactions between characters serve as concrete manifestations of how unequal power relations are enacted and maintained through discourse. The patterns of domination, compliance, and resistance scattered throughout the narrative make this novel a highly productive object for analysis through the lens of CDA (Shaffer, 2023; Simpson, 2003).

Although CDA has been widely applied in the study of power relations across various forms of discourse, research that specifically focuses on the dynamics of power in contemporary literary works particularly *the Wishing Game* remains very limited. Previous studies on literary discourse have generally been oriented toward narrative analysis, character development, and thematic dimensions; consequently, linguistic studies that directly highlight power relations within literary texts still

require more serious expansion (Toolan, 2001; Simpson, 2003). This gap serves as both the starting point and the justification for this research. Through an analysis of vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and coherence, rhetorical strategies, social context, power relations, and ideology, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how discourse and power interact within contemporary literary narratives. Furthermore, this study is expected to demonstrate the relevance and productivity of CDA as an analytical framework for uncovering the linguistic and social mechanisms at work behind the representation and maintenance of power in literary texts (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2015).

1.2 Research Questions

This study is structured around three research questions:

1. What forms of power dynamics are represented in the textual features of *the Wishing Game*, such as vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and coherence, and rhetorical strategies?
2. What forms of power dynamics are represented through the sociocultural context in *the Wishing Game*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the forms of power dynamics represented through linguistic features in the novel *the Wishing Game*.
2. To analyze how the sociocultural context influences the representation of power dynamics in the novel.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to make a meaningful contribution, both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, this study expands the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by examining how power dynamics are represented in literary texts, specifically in Meg Shaffer's novel *the Wishing Game*. Thus, this study deepens our understanding of language as a medium of power dynamics, while also supporting the development of CDA within the field of applied linguistics. Practically, this study offers insights for readers and academics

regarding how power is constructed through texts, and can serve as a reference for future research employing the CDA approach. Furthermore, this study also seeks to bridge theoretical concepts with their concrete application in analyzing literary works as representations of power.

1.5 Scope and limitation of the Study

This study focuses on the analysis of power dynamics in Meg Shaffer's novel *the Wishing Game* by employing Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Fairclough's theory is adopted because it provides a framework for examining how language constructs, reflects, and maintains power relations within social contexts. Specifically, this study applies two dimensions of Fairclough's three-dimensional model: the textual dimension and the sociocultural practice dimension. The textual dimension is used to examine the linguistic features that represent power dynamics in the novel, while the sociocultural practice dimension is employed to explore the broader social and cultural contexts that influence and shape those power dynamics.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this study examines only one literary work, *the Wishing Game*; therefore, the findings are specific to this novel and are not intended to be generalized to other literary texts. Second, the study adopts only the textual and sociocultural practice dimensions of Fairclough's CDA framework. Consequently, the discourse practice dimension and other CDA approaches are not included in the analysis.

Another limitation concerns the data source. The data are derived entirely from the text of *The Wishing Game* without incorporating external sources, such as reader responses or information related to the novel's production and reception. Consequently, the interpretations presented in this study are textual and theoretical rather than empirical. Despite these limitations, they establish clear boundaries for the research and contribute to a focused examination of power dynamics within the selected literary work.