

LINGUISTIC CHOICES OF POWER AND IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION IN SOLO-LEVELING: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Power, identity and social hierarchy have been discussed through cultural impact lens in the concurrent anime narratives however there is limited study on the critical discourse-based analyses of anime narratives. The focus of this study is on the discourse analyses of Solo-Leveling anime, analyzing the power and identity transformation through discourse analyses. The research centers its attention on the protagonist, Sung Jinwoo and his transformation from being marginalized to a dominant power figure. The analysis involves critical discourse analyses of selected episodes through Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1995) and investigates textual elements, discursive features, and comprehensive social conventions. Furthermore, the critical discourse analysis unveils that the inequality is being normalized within the fictional world through institutional language, surveillance mechanisms and hierarchical classification, which altogether functions as discursive tools for this purpose. As Jinwoo's power increases, discursive shifts reflect the emergence of sovereign identity, marked by concealed authority, strategic silence, and legitimized dominance. The study objectives are: (i) To examine the role of language and discourse in the normalization of power and social hierarchy in Solo-Leveling anime, (ii) To highlight the power structures in Solo-Leveling anime using Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model (1995), (iii) To interpret the shifts in Sung Jinwoo's identity and social ranking in the context of evolving power hierarchies in the anime. The study puts forward the stance that Solo-leveling is presenting dominance as merit-based and inevitable and thus normalizes power asymmetry. By examining anime through critical discourse lens, the study influences the interdisciplinary studies of media, power, and identity, highlighting the role of anime in reflecting and reinforcing contemporary social ideologies.

Keywords: *Solo-Leveling Anime, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Discourse and Power, Discourse and Identity Transformation, CDA of Solo Leveling anime.*

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1. Introduction

Power and Identity transformation has been widely discussed in the contemporary literatures and discourse proves to be a valuable tool for their discussion. Norman Fairclough argues that discourse is a tool to construct identity, power and hierarchy, likewise discourse is further developed by these social constructs (1992). Anime has global influence and it presents a virtual depiction of social constraints of real world. One of the widely discussed constraints in anime narration is power such as power structures are not only exercised in political and institutional structures but they coexist with everyday discourse. Michael Foucault (1980) argues that discourse works actively in circulation of power, shaping what can be said, who can speak and identities are legitimized. Fairclough (2001) interprets that language is a mean to reproduce power and discourse is central to the analyses of dominance, marginalization, and resistance. Identity is also linked with power such as it is constructed discursively not fixed. This is further elucidated by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) identity emerges through social interactions and linguistic practices, continually shaped by context and power relations. It is evident from the strong dialogues, impactful narration, and symbolic representation of the fictional narratives which further aids in shaping characters' identities and social hierarchy.

Power hierarchy and identity shifts are significantly represented in the Solo-Leveling anime which is an adaptation of a Korean web novel by Chu-Gong. The story reflects these constraints through Jinwoo's transformative journey, from weakest to a dominant figure. The Norman Fairclough's CDA model provide a three dimensional analysis of the anime such as textual analysis of dialogues, linguistic choices and narrative structures, discursive analysis by interpreting production, construction and consumption and social analysis by providing a broader ideological and social contexts. The application of Fairclough' CDA model on anime will reveal how power structures and identity construction are presented in anime narratives and also describing anime as a meaningful discursive space for CDA.

1.1. Statement of the Problem:

Although the modern anime narratives has global influence on the ideological and cultural constructs yet its function of addressing and creating discourse of power and identity shift remains underexplored. Solo-Leveling specifically showcases a highly hierarchal world where monitoring mechanisms, institutional hierarchies and power hierarchies determines social value. However, the anime narratives are widely discussed for their artistic and gripping quality but still the studies of anime narratives based on CDA and how their linguistic and narrative structures as well as symbolic systems influence identity shifts within the anime is not noticed with much attention. The lack of application of CDA particularly through Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1995) is a hindrance in the deeper examination of such narratives and their role in normalization and

legitimization of power hierarchies. Taken together the study delves into the lack of critical discourse analysis of power and identity formation in Solo-Leveling anime and it also sets anime narratives as a substantial institution of social conditioning

1.2. Significance of the Study

The study is significant as it addresses a pivotal gap in the study of anime narratives which is the discursive practices of power construction and identity transformation in the anime narratives specifically, Solo-Leveling. The study extends the application of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model (1995) to anime narratives. It also led to the future discourse-oriented media research by demonstrating a systematic analysis of textual, social and discursive practices within the animated narratives, highlighting the methodological influence of the study. Disciplines wise, the research has furthered the media, English and cultural studies by focusing attention on anime as consequential institution of ideological and linguistic scrutiny. Moreover, the study elucidates the role of popular narratives in normalizing power, hierarchy, and identity transformation, stimulating audience for critical immersion with media depiction of dominance and authority.

2. Literature Review

Anime, Solo-leveling has caught significant attention as a webtoon as well as an anime series yet scholarly analysis employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and interpretation of power and identity construction in anime narratives is not much frequent in 2020-2025 researches alongside the studies practiced the approach to explore power in different contexts (Dilawar et al., 2022; Hassan & Shah, 2022). Few studies explaining discourse analysis of power and identity are listed below which shows how discourse can construct power and identity transformation themes. This study addresses a conspicuous gap by applying Norman Fairclough's CDA model (1995) to anime adaptation, thereby offering the pioneering discourse level account of how language, multimodal imagery and institutional practices cooperatively generate and formalize Sung Jinwoo's transformation. As Tahir *et.al* (2021) interpreted Pakistani drama "Ehd-e-wafa" and tried to analyze power distinction in Pakistani social, political and bureaucratic context. The study shows the relation between power and discourse through careful selection of dialogues and expressions of characters and tries to imply the hidden meanings. On the parallel run, Chaudhary (2022) explored the power struggle in hierarchy system in "Squid Game", Dong Hyuk's series. The study highlighted the power struggle between two classes such as elite and poor. The elite classes take advantage of the powerlessness of the poor class and exploit them for their own entertainment which can be seen in the dialogues of the series.

Another study by Muhammad et.al (2022) of "Death on the Nile" film represented the influence of social norms and practices on the gendered relations of the characters. The

study showed the role of power in marital relationships, and also in the love relationship which is often influenced by the societal concepts of ownership and control. The paper provided a base for the further study of discourse and gendered power based relationship in films. Moreover, Noor (2025) analyzed construction of power relationships, and ideologies in the political discourses through the analysis of “The Diplomat Season 2”. The study highlights the ability of Netflix series in enforcing power relations and how it can impact audience perceptions of international politics (e.g., Hassan et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2025). The topic is further expanded by the study of Kamila Andini’s *Gadis Kretek* (Cigarette girl) series. B.R Dewanto *et.al* (2025) interpreted that the power is not only limited to physical domination but also count for mind and body. The study explored the role of social values as a discursive tool by employing the Discourse Analysis and Michel Foucault’s theory that how the societal values acts as a tool for normalizing patriarchy and power relation within family business. The study offers a clear representation of how power relation works through discourse, social control and discipline.

Furthermore, the study of Hasanah *et.al* (2025) elucidated the complexities and significance of gender-base power dynamics through the analysis of Awi Suryadi’s film “KKN di Desa Penari”. The study uses Norman Fairclough’s CDA for the representation of the gender-power relations through the characters and the influence of social norms for the acceptance of these power relations. Through this approach the study showed the gender-based power dynamics in friendship, family, romantic relationships, and in workplace relationships. There are also studies about the identity construction and transformation such as in a Disney’s movie “Encanto (2021)”, the construction of voice and identity can be observed via language, culture and power. Amalia *et.al* (2025) interpreted the influence of family communication patterns on the identity formation and self-confidence, keeping in view a collectivist context. The Mirabel Madrigal character was of main focus in the study such as her defiance showcase reestablishment of voice and empowerment. The research also highlighted the way people hide their emotions and the ideological control is broken down through falling of Casita (magical house), a visual metaphor. The research showed the need of open communication and empathy for formation and healing of one’s identity.

3. Methodology

The research is carried out through Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (1995). The model is useful as it interpret the power, identity and ideology created through language and visuals. This approach connects three levels of analysis: textual analysis, discursive practices and social practice. Through these levels the study will analyze how the anime, *Solo-Leveling* reinforce power dynamics and identity transformation through Sung Jinwoo and also show how the society judges oneself based on the power dynamics.

3.1. Introduction of Solo-Leveling Anime

The anime, Solo-Leveling is based on Korean web novel by Chu-Gong. On November 4, 2016 *Papyrus*, first serialized it then on January 20th, 2023 a webtoon series was released which continued till May 31st, 2023.

The story outlines that numerous eerie magical gates open connecting the real world to a different detrimental world where hazardous magical beasts are present and can enter the real world if the gate is not closed within twenty-four hours. The hunters, human warriors possessing magical capabilities, should fight against the beats to prevent them from entering the real-world and save the mankind. The story revolves around Sung Jinwoo, who is notorious of being the weakest hunter of all mankind. After surviving a deadly mission he got the System, a game-like interface only visible to Jinwoo such as he is its only player. The system commands missions to Jinwoo and make him strong in return of blind obedience. Jinwoo completes the missions and evolves from the weakest tag. In other words, Jinwoo gets rare abilities from the system and transforms from the weakest to an overwhelmed power figure.

3.2. Analytical Framework:

The methodology follows a step-by-step analysis of dialogues used in anime and interpretation of discursive practices according to the Fairclough's three levels.

1. Descriptive Level

The focus is on the analysis of features of language and visuals.

Linguistic Features:

- a. The choice of words for Jinwoo before and after transformation.
- b. The messages of system and game-like commands such as "Daily quest", "level –up".
- c. Dialogue lines which shows obedience, power or authority.

Visual and Multimodal Features:

- a. Body language changes such as "timid" and ""dominant".
- b. This steps present how language and visuals aids in constructing the power dynamics and identity transformation within anime itself.

3.3. Interpretation Level (Discursive Practices)

This level explores how the anime adapts the meaning from a simple webtoon and creating strong textual and visual impacts. This level analysis the distribution of series to certain audiences especially Gen Z and the how it is perceived by them. It also examines the depiction of digital game interface in the anime through "the system". Similarly, it views the representation of social practices in the anime through the dialogues and visuals. Furthermore, it will explore the interpretation of the power structures in the anime and binding it with the identity shifts. On the whole the level presents that the meanings of power and identity can be built not just by visual effects but also through the interpretation of the production and consumption of the anime narratives.

3.4. Social Practices

This level takes the anime to a social context, explaining the social interpretation through the anime such as how the anime, Solo-Leveling reinforce the social practices

3.5. Data Selection

The data or corpus for analysis consists of:

- Selected episodes from the Solo-leveling (specifically 1, 4, 8, and the Shadow Monarch Transformation)
- Selected dialogues lines and system messages highlighting Sung Jinwoo' power "leveling", submission rituals, and identity change.
- Supplementary fan discourse such as YouTube analysis comments to understand how the audience interprets these themes.
- Recognizing the representation of social practices regarding these themes.
- The study uses purposive sampling because specific scenes and text represents the themes of power, identity transformation effectively.

3.6. Ideologies of Power

- i. **Meritocracy:** It is a belief that strength or power comes from hard work and individual efforts. The anime depict the clear picture of meritocracy such as pressuring Jinwoo to work very hard to rise above the low merit and achieve a higher rank to be recognized differently not as the weakest hunter of all mankind.
- ii. **Neo-liberal Self Improvement:** Constant "leveling" is presented as a metaphor for modern productivity culture. This shows that in the modern world the competition is rising and is becoming difficult to arise so constant efforts are required to level-up.

3.7. Masculinity and Identity

It shows the expectations of culture for a strong, emotionless and dominant male leader or hero. It also highlights the shift from weak masculinity to hyper-masculine leadership.

Through this level the study shows why the transformation of Jinwoo is appealing and influential in the society.

3.8. Analytical Procedure

The study follows the given below steps to ensure systematic analysis:

i. Viewing and Transcription:

- i. Selected scenes are viewed multiple times
- ii. Dialogues, system messages, and key visuals are transcribed.

ii. Coding

The selected data is coded according to the themes such as empowerment, weakness, identity shift, domination, system authority, and power dynamics such as letter "E" is used to refer to episodes for instance E 1 or E 2 with the selected dialogues.

iii. Textual Analysis

- Words, phrases, lines and visuals are analyzed using Norman Fairclough's linguistic categories.

iv. Discursive Practice Analysis

- Word choices, intertextual references, and viewer responses are examined.

v. Social Practice Analysis

- Analysis is connected with the wider discourse such as societal power hierarchy, masculinity, and identity shift.

By following these steps the study will examine how the discourses of power and identity are not limited to the screen only but move beyond the screen and represents real cultural conversations.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Discourse

The primary analytical framework of this research is Fairclough's three-dimensional model, which provides an opportunity to study discourse at various interrelated levels. According to Fairclough (1995), all discursive events serve three functions simultaneously: they can be viewed as a text, as a discursive practice, and as a social practice. The three-dimensional model allows for a deeper understanding of discursive practice by providing insight into the underlying ideological connotations associated with the language used in texts, which may not always be apparent from an examination of textual features alone. Through the application of this theoretical framework, this research will demonstrate how changes in power and identity within the storyline of Solo Leveling occur through linguistically produced and narrated discourses, and how those discourses are related to broader social hierarchies.

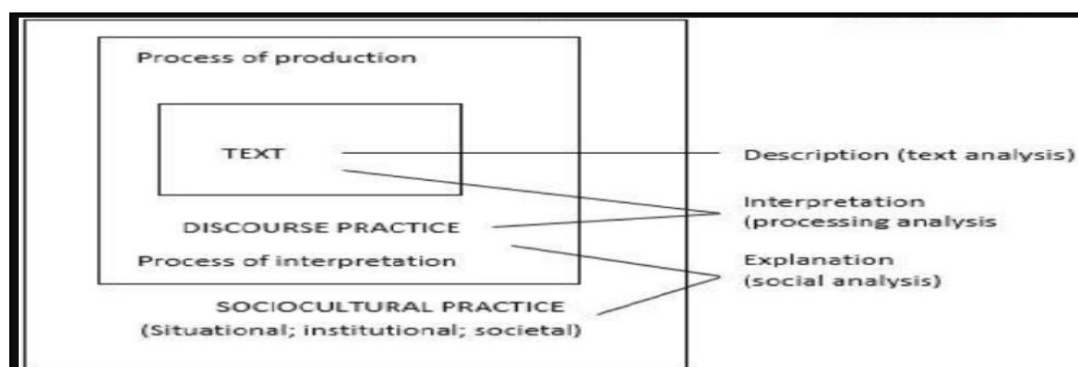


Fig: Norman Fairclough's Three Dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis Model (1995)

At the textual level (description), an examination of the linguistic and semiotic characteristics of Solo Leveling will be conducted. Linguistic and semiotic characteristics include elements such as lexical choice, modality, evaluative labels and treatment of silence. The significance of these textual features is further supported by research in corpus

linguistics. Hassan et al. (2023) demonstrated through a comparative analysis of novels how specific linguistic techniques, such as explicitation, are used to manifest underlying meanings to the reader. In the context of *Solo Leveling*, these linguistic choices—ranging from the 'System's' commands to Jinwoo's shift in tone—are the primary mechanisms through which his identity is discursively reconstructed. An individual's ranking, level of power or status, and position within the hierarchical chain of favors, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, are important factors that influence where they fall within the social hierarchy depicted in the novel through the medium of language. These textual choices contribute to constructing Sung Jin-Woo's initial marginalization and subsequent elevation. Language thus becomes a key mechanism through which power differences are articulated and made visible.

At the level of discursive practice (interpretation), attention is given to how discourse is produced, distributed, and consumed within the narrative. The recurring system-generated messages, institutional evaluations, and surveillance mechanisms function as authoritative discourses that regulate behavior and normalize hierarchy. These discursive practices reinforce the legitimacy of the "System" as an unquestioned source of power and knowledge, shaping how characters, including Jinwoo himself, internalize and respond to authority.

At the social practice level (explanation), discourse is extended to broader social context explaining how the discourse plays its role in normalizing rigid social practices and how the social practices such as power hierarchies and identity shifts are introduced and legitimized in anime narratives particularly in the Solo-Leveling anime.

Discourse has a place in larger power-related, meritocratic, and stratified social systems. It is through this system that the social order describes inequalities while providing mechanisms that reinforce the status quo of inequality. It is through patterns of discourse, that dominance and inequality are framed as natural and are justified through other ideological assumptions about success, discipline, and the value of a person on an individual level.

3.2. Power, Surveillance, and Discipline:

In this work, Foucault asserts that heaven cannot merely be defined as repression, but the concept of power in this study is informed primarily by Foucault's theory of the productive nature of power. He has identified the mechanisms through which power produces subjects who will be compliant to their respective societies as surveillance, normalization and self-discipline.

The System in Solo Leveling is a perfect example of a surveillance mechanism that continuously observes progress, gives the necessary challenges and rewards for meeting those challenges. Constant observation by the System creates the conditions for Jin-Woo to engage in self-regulation, as he learns about the expectations of The System through

constant exposure and uses what he learns about himself and others to motivate himself and regulate his behavior. Power therefore becomes intertwined with Jin-Woo's identity, changing power from the outside to self-motivation from within.

3.3. Discursive Construction of Identity

Identity has been approached here as a discursive process that is constantly evolving. In the context of this study, identity does not have a static essence, but is formed through discourse and shaped by social position. It can be seen as a fluid process that is always changing, or evolving, due to changes in social position. An example of this fluidity can be found in Jin-Woo's transition from the weakest hunter position to a position of power and dominance. An additional way to see this change in Jin-Woo's identity is through the use of language, silence and the use of narrative authority. With each level of power that he gains, the more his identity develops into a strategic and secret identity that expresses a new relationship to authority and power.

3.4. Ideology, Legitimation, and Naturalization of Power

Power must be understood as an ideology; that is to say, in order for someone or something to have authority, that power must be legitimate and accepted by all social groups and institutions. According to Fairclough (1989, 1995), an effective way of legitimizing power is to make it invisible such as through socialization, so that it becomes commonsensical to wielding power. A good example of this is found in Solo Leveling, where the hierarchical structure of society is depicted as being fair and based on merit, which obscures the ideological mechanisms that sustain the hierarchical inequality that exists within the structure. The same hierarchy is further perpetuated by a discursive repetition of the hierarchy, evaluations and higher levels of reward, leading one to believe that dominion is deserved, and not something constructed through systematic procedures. Therefore, power asymmetries are thus rationalized and normalized to the point that any form of resistance to power is either inappropriate or inconceivable to the reader within the world of the narrative.

3.5. Anime as an Ideological Discursive Space

Finally, this investigation has conceptualized the genre of anime as a legitimate and viable ideological discursive space in which to generate ideology. Anime encompasses a plethora of individual narratives across multiple cultures and representations, thereby allowing for the dissemination and representation of contemporary social themes of authority, identity, and hierarchy. Solo Leveling is an exemplar of utilitarian popular media that has both entertained and subjugated its audience through the use of individual narratives that have constructed individual success as a result of conforming to the dictates of a higher authority. Thus, the utilization of CDA as a tool to conduct research into the ideological character of visual narrative provides an avenue to expand the discourse analysis of contemporary literature.

4. Analysis and Discussion

The study represents an in-depth analysis of Solo-Leveling anime as a source of highlighting certain societal norms which are being normalized due to power dynamics. The analysis follows Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis to elucidate the discursive construction and transformation of identity and power in the Solo-leveling anime. Furthermore, the research tries to depict the impact of power hierarchy on the society and how it standardizes marginalization of the weaker. Selective episodes are analyzed for to mark the identity transformation of Sung Jinwoo from the weakest hunter of all mankind to the dominant, high-ranked, and exemplary hunter. The ideologies of discipline, control, and legitimize dominance is governed by employing the textual analysis, discursive features, and broader societal ideologies. The analysis is systematically organized episodically and thematically highlighting the major section of Jinwoo's transformative journey.

4.1. Discursive Construction of Weakness and Marginal Identity

Here it is interpreted how the protagonist, Sung Jinwoo's marginalized identity is developed in the anime by using a discourse which normalizes labeling, exclusion and criticism of inferiority. The dialogues given below further exemplify these aspects.

Instance 1: "His nickname is "the weakest hunter of all mankind." Like a trip through E-rank gate landed him into the hospital. He might be the weakest hunter there is. (E1)

So, as a rule, you can assume any raid he gets called in for, will be pretty easy-going.

(E1) Speaker: Kim-team member (to his friend)"

The dialogue is taken from the first episode in which a magic gate is shown and hunters are assembling to enter in the gate to fight the magic beasts and defeat the boss of dungeon so that the gate will be closed. Mr. Kim is having a casual talk with his friend and the protagonist, Sung Jinwoo enters and everyone starts to greet him as he was hospitalized due to a fight in an E-rank gate (lowest rank gate) and Mr. Kim's friend thinks of him as a high rank hunter and is astonished to see the chaos on his entrance and then Mr. Kim explain that its quite the opposite of what he thinks which is shown in above dialogue.

This dialogue highlights how society labels Sung Jinwoo as useless and weak. People judge him only by his failures and physical condition, ignoring his courage and effort. This societal labeling ignores the impact of external environments on an individual's growth. Just as Hassan et al. (2022) identified that external factors significantly influence the success of second language acquisition in learners, the fictional world of *Solo Leveling* illustrates how a restrictive social environment and the 'weakest' label can hinder an individual's perceived capability until an external catalyst—the System—intervenes. It

reflects how society quickly forms opinions based on outward ability rather than understanding a person's true potential.

The writer has clearly displayed the societal practices and the hierarchy built by such practices. Sung Jinwoo is called weak, neglecting the struggle he is going through. **The question arises why the writer did not provide him an edge or space to live quietly instead of marking him as the weakest.** The writer, without any cover, has highlighted the real world struggle where you need to evolve. This show the how the society is ruled by power dynamics.

Another dialogue adds more to the linguist construction of marginalized identity and shows how the society formalizes certain aspects based on power.

Instance 2: “It’s my fault for being weak”. You know, how it is with me, Johee. I’m used to it.

(E2) Speaker: Sung Jinwoo (to Johee)”

The dialogue is taken from episode one where Jinwoo is talking to his friend, Johee and telling her how he gets so injured that he ended up in the hospital. He told her that it was an E-rank dungeon (a cave which appears with the magic gate and is full of magic beasts) and all other member were of high rank, only he was an E-rank hunter so the team thought not to include a healer (a hunter having the capabilities to heal any injury hunters get from the magic beasts) with them.

The scene clearly shows how Jinwoo is being ignored by other as mentioned above, the team did not cared about him despite they know he is a low rank hunter and needs a healer but still they over looked him and enter the dungeon without a healer. Even though Jinwoo showed his determination and went with them to fight the magic beasts. As seen in the dialogue, he is not considering it as others' ignorant judgment but his fault that he is weak and is used to being treated like that. This reveals a masked aspect of society which is that the weak who is seen as he cannot survive, is ignored and they depicted that he is only capable of what he is getting and he is the one responsible of what is happening in his life such as its all his fault.

The author has presented a clear picture of judgmental aspects of the society where an identity is created based on the power a person holds in society and how society sees the person. **The writer is depicting the socially developed identity, making it hard for Jinwoo to highlight the others ignorance of his need.** Instead of providing support to Jinwoo, others are criticizing him, the writer has presented it as a typical situation on Jinwoo's end where he is being characterized and is used to of such practices.

4.2. Surveillance, Rituals, and the Emergence of Systematic Power

This examines the turning point of Jinwoo's life such as the showcases the specific dialogues or events where he stepped on a different path which changed his whole identity. It also highlights the appearance of “System” which acts as a discursive authority that

commands Jinwoo's actions using surveillance, formalized obedience and a language based on commands. The dialogue shows the tenacious attitude of Jinwoo.

Instance 1: "I've endured being mocked, and put up with a life-threatening job where the risks outweigh the rewards but even then, in order to survive, I've learned to keep my eyes open and look for opportunities."

(E, 1) Speaker: Sung Jinwoo (to himself)

The dialogue is taken from the last scene of first episode where the whole team is stuck in a high rank gate. In the beginning, it was shown as the dungeon is of D-ranked so E-rank hunter like Jinwoo can also join but after entering the dungeon the team thought as they have defeated the boss of dungeon on the contrary, they found another dungeon there. Few member wanted to go in as they were seeing it as a chance to collect more mana crystals (crystals only found in dungeons which are of high value in the real world) and some did not so the team leader, Song Chiyul, decided to vote. The result was six in favor and six against, only Sung Jinwoo was left to vote. Jinwoo thought about his family and their needs and after his dad went missing he was the only one providing for his mother and sister so he sees it as a chance to get money and votes in favor to enter the double dungeon, based on the results of voting the team entered the second dungeon. They found another gate at the end of the cave which seems dangerous to few team members but the team leader cannot do anything now as it was already decided by the voting to enter the dungeon so the team opens the gate and enters a mysterious room. The thought it was a normal room conversely the door suddenly closed by it and everyone was locked. One member tries to go out of the room but he was killed by the knight statue standing besides the gate. Everyone was terrified by the scene and they realized it was a high-rank dungeon and they were trapped in it. However, Jinwoo was the only one having a hope to leave this room alive.

This scene clearly depicts the how the weaker is able to find a chance in such a terrified situation. Jinwoo observes the room and tries to save the other members. This shows the willful nature of Jinwoo which can also be predicted from his above dialogue. The dialogue represents that the marginalized identity created by society cannot suppress the individual identity. Although he is considered the weakest hunter of all mankind, he is the only one stoic and understanding the situation. Here it is represented that he has endured such an amount of harsh treatment that the condition of this room seems not that vulnerable to him as to others so he is able to find the hope.

The author here has shown Jinwoo as a sagacious character who is able to find an opportunity in such harsh conditions. Here, another aspect of society can be noticed that sometimes a person who is considered the weak is also fighting his own battles which seen inferior to society but he is getting something out of those battles that can transform his identity.

Another dialogue interprets the perception of the others when they observe that the weak one is somehow better than others in some aspects. This shows that if a person is given a chance then he can nurture his capabilities. This can be seen in the team leader, Song Chiyul dialogue given below;

Instance 2: “I am glad my death means they can live...I have always been the weakest and I’ve been mocked for it on every term but I still try as hardest as I can. I wanted to be stronger, I tried but I never could. You cannot take it anymore. Yeah we all felt that way you were making excuses for your own selfishness. That gratitude was as empty as my wound, leaving it to a genuine piece of trash, to use me and throw me away for his benefit. I’ve got a family too. I wanted to make it out alive too. “I am glad my death means they can live” how could you think that, you stupid hypocrite. No, I don’t wanna die. I wish I had another chance.

(E, 2) Speaker: Sung Jinwoo (to himself)”

The dialogue is taken from the last scene of second episode. This dialogue is **a point where everything takes a turn such as Jinwoo got a chance to get stronger**. In this scene it is shown that the team is stuck in the mysterious room and where a big statue is sitting on a chair like a god. There are three commandments mentioned on a stone, revere to the god, praise god and prove your faith to god. The team fulfills two commandments with much difficulty and some got killed in fulfilling these two commandments. Jinwoo plays a significant role in guiding the member about how to fulfill the commandments. The third was left, for this commandment every member need to stay for a certain time but they got scared and one by one everyone left and Jinwoo was only left behind, persistent to complete the commandments and go home alive. Then he utters these lines which has a strong impact on the anime as it set the stage for the coming scenes.

Through this dialogue we can see how everyone has left him once they got a chance because he is weak. This also **reveals how people can show hollow gratitude to show sympathy but can also use the weaker one to save themselves**. At this moment Jinwoo realizes the hollow sympathy which was shown by others. This monologue is powerful as it uncovers the fake gratitude, bitterness of betrayal and the how the weak one is left behind to survive or die alone.

Here the author has chosen strong and impactful words for Jinwoo **which highlights the hidden frustration of Jinwoo**. This also represents that **how the weak one is used for the benefit of the stronger**. On the parallel run, the author also signifies the inner struggle of Jinwoo as he even being the weakest, is persistent till the last end just to survive and provide for his family while some has used family as an excuse to leave the danger and secure their lives.

4.3. Self-Discipline and Neoliberal Subject Formation

This section examines the how Jinwoo's identity is transformed into a self-regulatory subject after he accepts the system as a motivating force. The system is governing Jinwoo's actions making him a disciplined and self-optimized hunter. Moreover, this part highlights the importance of a chance to change one's identity and personality and also one being able to utilize that chance fully. Here the identity formation through an external force (the system) will be observed. The dialogue given below shows such interpretations.

**Instance 1: "My world has taken a real turn for the strange. It's like a game.
(E, 3) Speaker: Sung Jinwoo (to himself)"**

The dialogue is taken from the third episode; showing Jinwoo gain consciousness after three days of being hospitalized as he was found unconscious by the rescue team and there was no trace of double dungeon such as it was vanished, leaving all the hunters and rescue team stunned. At the end of second episode, he gets a "System" a game like interface which ask him to enter the game within 0.02 seconds or his heart will stop and Jinwoo unconsciously, accepts it. The system acts as an authority which will governs Jinwoo's action and it demands ritualized obedience. He can see some windows like a game interface which are invisible to others around him. The system assigns him daily quest which he has to complete otherwise he will get penalty.

This scene shows that Jinwoo is realizing that his life is starting to change and now he can do better than his past. He has accepted the system and started to take initiative to change the trajectory of his life. It also shows that the interference of game-like technology in real life which is helping Jinwoo to evolve from his weaker condition.

The episode shows that if a slight chance of improvement is given to weaker one then he can also evolve and utilize that chance to improve this condition. In this episode "the System" is forcing Jinwoo to be self-disciplined and he is accepting the system's orders because he thinks the system is a motivating force for him to evolve and transform his identity. Furthermore, the system is leading Jinwoo towards a neoliberal identity which can help him in removing the tag of the weakest hunter of the mankind. Jinwoo's assurance of System as a chance to get strong can be seen in this dialogue:

**Instance 2: If I can get stronger, I will gladly follow these ridiculous rules.
(E, 5) Speaker: Sung Jinwoo (to himself)**

The dialogue is presenting Jinwoo's conscious choice of obeying the system as he sees it as an opportunity to gain power and rise from the status of the weakest hunter of the mankind. Here, the narrative is shifting and emphasizing self-discipline to improve one's condition in the society. The author is trying **to focus on the probability of the change** in one's condition which can set him apart in the power structures and hierarchy of the social dynamics. The source of this probability is playing a crucial role in Jinwoo's neoliberal identity formation which is the incident of double dungeon. The unavoidable

affects of the double dungeon have left haunting imprints on his mind which has somehow leveraged his courage to face deadly risks. The dialogue below clearly portrays the undeniable impact of the terrifying event of double dungeon:

Instance 3: I shouldn't be afraid. I already know what dying is like. I'm not gonna go down easily...

(E, 4) Speaker: Sung Jinwoo (to himself)

These lines represent that **how the past experiences of hardship can impact the mind and can lead to an act which proves to be a foundational force for an optimistic and evolutionary change**. The author is now showing Jinwoo as an evolving character who is now shaped by the terrible event of double dungeon. This past experience has also made him believe on his capabilities as now he consider himself capable enough to give a tough time to the beasts of the dungeon. His transformation is now visible in his dialogues as well as in his personality.

The author here is reflecting on the **will power shaped through number of factors** such as surroundings in which one survives judgments disguised in sympathy, inner struggles, and dreadful events which haunts for the rest of the life. This will power leads to the changes in one's life which not just leverages his status in power hierarchy but also alter his personality. Similarly, Jinwoo went through the similar breakthrough which was considered impossible by his fellow hunters such as they were completely astonished to see such unpredictable variation, especially in Jinwoo-the weakest hunter of all mankind. The social narrative about change is depicted somehow through the astonishment of the upper rank hunters and the people around him. Some are predicting as he has gone mad or traumatized because of the double dungeon incident like the guild leaders while few like Johee are seeing him as an inspiration. Here, the attitude of the surroundings in a society towards the weakest is perceived especially when he tries to evolve from the position he has been accorded in the social hierarchy.

4.4. Concealed Authority and Social Re-entry

Jinwoo is seen as operating controlled and strategic functions to recognize the limits of his power and for self-actualization. In his social re-entry, Jin-woo takes on a strategically muted persona, employing silence and understatement as discursive means to regulate perception and sustain power asymmetry. In this section, concealment, silence, and understatement functions as discursive strategies that enable controlled re-entry into the social hierarchy with examining asymmetrical power relationships. This can be further interpreted through following dialogues:

Instance 1: I resented them for thinking they had a chance against me.

(Ep, 7) Speaker: Sung Jinwoo (to himself)

The dialogue is taken from seventh episode when Jinwoo is answering the question of his sister, Junhee about the mission he recently accomplished. After answering her

question subtly, he realized that he made his enemies think that they can win against him or he is weaker than them. In this mission he faced a hidden betrayal by the squad he joined for the mission. The team did not have healer (a hunter having special abilities to heal the injuries of other hunters) with them and they also required two more members to complete the team of eight member. The two members they preferred were of lower rank such as Jinwoo, an E-rank hunter and Yoo Jinhoo, a D-rank hunter. They were of C and B-rank hunters. This aired Jinwoo's suspicion for them which proved right when the higher rank hunter left Jinwoo and Jinhoo alone in the dungeon with the boss of the dungeon (the most powerful beast of the dungeon who needs to be killed to close the dungeon). Then Jinwoo defeated the boss and saved Jinhoo as well.

Jinwoo's act of appearing weak and hiding his true strength shows **the strategic social re-entry** of Jinwoo. He is keeping his powers hidden because he wants to know the limits of his powers. People who witnessed his true abilities are astonished as the situation is completely opposite from the past. Jinwoo **choose silence and understatement rather than explaining** the power changes and identity shifts he went through. This reflects the controlled social re-entry of Sung Jinwoo and recondite authority he holds in the observed social hierarchies.

The drastic shifts in identity and power of Jinwoo are very shocking for the people as Jinwoo is notorious for being the weakest hunter of all mankind. The radical changes observed in the weakest of hunter make others stunned. This is reflected in the following dialogue:

Instance 2: "Kang: Who the hell are you?"

Jinwoo: sung Jinwoo, E rank"

(Ep, 9) Speakers: Kang Taeshik (to Jinwoo)

The dialogue is from the ninth episode where Jinwoo is facing a B-rank hunter, Kang who finds solace in killing his fellow hunters (humans). Kang is aware that anything happens in the dungeon is left in the dungeon; no one is responsible for what happens inside the dungeon so he utilize this gap to fulfill his filthy desire of killing. Similarly, he kills his three fellow hunters in a D-rank dungeon and tries to kill others as well but Jinwoo proved to be a hindrance for him. Only Jinwoo was able to stop him and then Kang questioned his rank by asking Jinwoo who is he? Jinwoo's claim of an E-rank hunter was not enough for Kang to believe him as he was able to fight against a B-rank hunter. This shows the astonishment of the people around Jinwoo due to changes in his aura. They even thought that he has gone through second awakening (powers of a hunter has awakened again causing changes in his previous low rank) after the double dungeon incident.

The above dialogues showcase efforts of author to depict **the reaction of the surroundings when they observe divergence in the social hierarchies**. The narrative here is reflecting the affects of changes in the power on the surroundings including people,

their reaction and changing attitude and behavior. Here **the discursive practices are acting as a tool to examine how the social practices can be diverged and can be flexible for power structures.**

4.5. Legitimation and Naturalization of Power

In this section discourse no longer explores power but presents dominance as legitimized authority. Here Jinwoo seen as a rational and authoritative figure. His calm tone and justificatory language are functioning as discourse markers. The change in power dynamics of Jinwoo can be seen in the following dialogue:

Instance 1: “You really did it. We only survived because of you”

(E, 9) (19:21) Speaker: Kim (to Jinwoo)

The dialogue is taken from the ninth episode when Jinwoo defeats, Kang Taeshik (B-rank hunter) who tried to kill Jinwoo and his team members. It can be seen in the episode Jinwoo’s power shift is accepted rather than challenged.

The dialogue reflects **the justification of Jinwoo’s identity shift and his dominance is also legitimized.** The legitimization of Jinwoo’s hierarchal shift is evident from the justificatory language used by other hunters, specifically by those who left Jinwoo alone in the double dungeon. **The linguistic choices of authors for Jinwoo are not impeded by the moral constraints of society.** This shift in linguistic choices and societal shifts towards Jinwoo power dynamics and identity transformation represents discourse work collectively with identity, power and hierarchy and language plays a crucial role as a discursive tool.

Through this shift the author is representing the deflection of society from its developed notion when the power shift happens and new identity is constructed. Here, the power and identity shift are acting as discursive tool which are reshaping the social perception on the basis of these shifts.

4.6. Sovereign Identity and Discursive Closure

This section explores the social acceptance of overwhelming dominance and unquestioned sovereign identity shift. Sung Jinwoo’s power is not questioned but accepted. His power is now justified rather than mocked as the weakest. He has established a sovereign authority such as his short dialogues and one-word commands works as discursive tools, specifically displaying his sovereign authority. The normalization of dominance, detachment and reduced use of language of Jinwoo are acting as discursive closures which can be seen in the following dialogues:

Instance 1: “Arise”

(E, 12) Speaker: Jinwoo (to dead Beasts)

This dialogue is taken from the 18th episodes when Jinwoo completes the job change quest commanded by the system and acquires the job title of “Shadow Monarch”

(he can extract the shadows of the dead beasts and can form his own shadow army). He needs to designate a word to extract the shadows so he uses the word “Arise”.

The dialogue shows the power is not negotiated by language rather than reduce speech is working as a tool of discursive closure. Here we have Jinwoo standing upright among the defeated enemies. The battlefield is silent. No negotiation, no audience approval, and no institutional validation is necessary. The word “Arise” is said as a one-word command to the prostrate forms. The order is not queried, neither repeated nor explained. The aesthetic and storytelling backdrop here serves to visually center Jin-Woo, making him the only source of authority in this scene. The command “Arise” as no communication but sovereign speech. Reduced speech is reflecting the dominant authority and non-negotiated hierarchy.

Instance 2: “[Silent Observation/ No response]”

(E,18) Speaker: Others (to Jinwoo)

Another discursive closure observed in the anime is the “silent observation of the other hunters and people”. Their silence is a considerable response in the acceptance of the Jinwoo’s overwhelming power and it is also stabilizes the hierarchy. The behavior is observed last episodes of the anime. Jinwoo is giving commands to his shadow army while other hunters silently observe. There is no resistance whether verbal or moral and no inquiry about Jinwoo’s displays of power and authority. This scene showcase stillness and presents Jinwoo as a center of attention,

The author is revealing normalization and approval of Jinwoo’s power and identity shift, accentuating Sung Jinwoo as the central figure of the narrative structure. He is utilizing silence as a discursive consent. There is no question, moral obligation and institutional intervention observed towards Jinwoo’s identity and power shift. The absence of verbal response is working as silent legitimization. Dialogues are replaced by silence which shows that negotiation is not needed for the legitimization of the sovereign authority of Jinwoo.

The above instances elucidate how the power is normalized intrinsically. The power is naturalized without any verbal response. This represents the internalization of power by society as it any institutional endorsement and moral explanation is not needed. It is socially absorbed and reproduced through passive acknowledgment.

5. Conclusion

This research investigated power discourse and identity transformation in Solo Leveling by using Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The interpretation reveals that hierarchal classification, surveillance, selection and use of language in a certain way act as a discursive tool for the authentication and normalization of power hierarchy. Sung Jin-Woo’s awakening is thus seen as a discursive redefinition of self from subordination to dominance, and from negotiation to control.

Violence is normalized via what we justify in talk as domination that is needed and effective, and through what institutions recognize as the naturalization of hierarchical distinctions on the basis of merit. At the end of it, no language and accepted commands are displayed to plant the seed for discursive closure, thereby establishing a sovereign self and removing all resistance. The narrative structure, visual features, and display of power and identity in the anime has a subtle effect on audience especially Gen Z. The anime has caused the audience to review the definition of identity and power construction. It has made them aware of the rigorous social constraints regarding the hierarchy of power. Not only Solo-Leveling but many other anime narratives are representing aspects of society visually which is raising awareness of audience regarding social structures. Language and discourse are playing a key role in the anime narratives. By defining anime as an ideological discourse space, this investigation adds to Critical Discourse Analysis and media studies an examination of how mainstream storytelling makes power imbalances appear natural while also constructing current conceptions of self and authority.

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