

Linguistic Representations of God and Evil in The School for God and Evil Film : A Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini mengkaji konstruksi dan diferensiasi identitas moral "baik" dan "jahat" dalam film "The School for God and Evil" menggunakan pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis. Analisis ini berfokus pada empat aspek utama: gaya bicara tokoh, pola intonasi, pilihan leksikal, dan pembingkai wacana yang mencerminkan wacana ideologis. Data penelitian, berupa transkrip dialog tokoh utama—Agatha, Sophie, Profesor Dovey, Lady Lesso, dan Rhian—dikaji menggunakan kerangka kerja tiga dimensi Fairclough (analisis teks, praktik wacana, dan praktik sosial) serta strategi presentasi diri positif dan negatif van Dijk. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa tokoh "baik" menampilkan tuturan reflektif dengan intonasi stabil dan diksi empatik, sementara tokoh "jahat" menggunakan tuturan pendek dan dramatis dengan diksi yang menekankan kekuasaan. Kombinasi strategi verbal dan elemen multimodal ini secara sistematis mereproduksi dikotomi moral dan membentuk konstruksi persepsi penonton. Temuan ini menekankan peran wacana film sebagai alat ideologis dalam pengembangan dan reproduksi nilai-nilai moral.

This research examines the construction and differentiation of "god" and "evil" moral identities in the movie The School for God and Evil by applying a Critical Discourse Analysis approach. The analysis focuses on four main aspects: characters' speech styles, intonation patterns, lexical choices, and framing through discourse that reflects ideological discourse. The research data in the form of dialog transcripts of the central characters—Agatha, Sophie, Professor Dovey, Lady Lesso, and Rhian—are examined using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (text analysis, discourse practices, and social practices) as well as van Dijk's positive self-presentation and negative otherpresentation strategies. The findings reveal that the "god" character displays reflective speech with stable intonation and empathic diction, while the "bad" character uses short, dramatically-toned utterances with diction that emphasizes power. This combination of verbal strategies and multimodal elements systematically reproduces moral dichotomies and shapes the construction of audience perceptions. This finding confirms the role of film discourse as an ideological tool in the cultivation and reproduction of moral values.



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INTRODUCTION

The duality between god and evil has long served as a foundational theme across literary traditions, particularly in fantasy literature where it often underpins plot structures and character development. These moral oppositions are not only explored through actions but also constructed and reinforced through language. Language operates as a powerful tool to encode ideology, shaping how readers interpret concepts like virtue and wickedness. "Children's literature is often a site where gender roles and moral ideologies intersect through language" (Fitriani et al., 2020), literature targeted at

younger audiences tends to use linguistic patterns that both reflect and challenge prevailing social ideology. The *School for God and Evil* by Soman Chainani, this linguistic construction of morality is central to the narrative. The story follows two girls, Sophie and Agatha, who are mistakenly placed into opposite schools: one for heroes and one for villains. Through this twist, Chainani complicates the expected binary "YA fantasy tends to subvert rigid moral labels through ambiguous dialogue and character behavior" (Salsabila et al., 2024). by gradually revealing how each character embodies traits of both god and evil. argue that young adult fantasy frequently undermines rigid moral labeling by using language that blurs ethical boundaries, suggesting that visual or behavioral cues may misrepresent a character's true nature. This blurred boundary is further developed through stylistic contrasts in diction and tone. Descriptions of the School for God are typically associated with light, beauty, and harmony, while the School for Evil is linked with darkness, grotesque imagery, and chaos. These associations are not arbitrary but linguistically constructed, "Moral binaries in children's narratives are constructed not just through plot, but through specific lexical and grammatical choices" (Febriani et al., 2023), describe as "moral binaries embedded in narrative discourse that reflect cultural expectations of god and evil." Through this contrast, Chainani not only creates a fantastical world but also critiques how moral value is often assigned based on superficial attributes. Furthermore, gender plays a significant role in the linguistic framing of characters. Female characters from the "god" side are often described with words related to grace and beauty, whereas those on the "evil" side are portrayed as assertive or rebellious, sometimes even punished for defying norms. This aligns with Butler's theory of gender performativity, as adapted by (Fitriani et al., 2020), who emphasize how female characters in children's literature often resist fixed gender roles through their language and behavior. In Chainani's narrative, the fluidity between god and evil parallels the fluidity between gendered expectations, both of which are reinforced through specific linguistic markers. Speech acts and dialogue also contribute to the construction of power and morality. Characters from the School for Evil often use imperatives, sarcasm, or rhetorical questions to assert dominance, while those from the School for God speak in more polite or formal structures. Whariyanti (2023) found that in the film adaptation, these speech patterns reflect hierarchies of power, suggesting that linguistic form is directly tied to perceived moral alignment. Analyzing such elements provides insight into how Chainani uses pragmatics to shape character roles. Another notable linguistic feature is the use of naming. Names of characters and institutions are not random but serve as ideological cues. Protagonists from the School for God are given names with pleasant, melodious sounds, while characters from the School for Evil are assigned names that invoke fear, confusion, or suspicion "Names in fantasy literature often encode moral, cultural, or ideological meanings before the narrative unfolds" (Nurani & Amelia, 2022). As Nurani and Amelia explain, character naming often intersects with archetypal roles in young adult literature, reinforcing expected character traits through phonetic and symbolic means. Chainani's work invites readers to question conventional definitions of god and evil not through grand philosophical debate, but through the granular, everyday use of language. The reader is compelled to reconsider initial assumptions about characters as their dialogue, inner thoughts, and narrative descriptions reveal moral complexity. This aligns with the view of (Salsabila et al., 2024) that "language in YA literature serves not just to entertain but to problematize inherited moral and ideological frameworks." This study aims to examine the linguistic construction of god and evil in *The School for God and Evil* by applying approaches from stylistics, discourse analysis, and critical linguistics. It investigates how lexical choices, syntactic patterns, narrative voice, and naming conventions encode moral ideology. Through a close reading of linguistic features, this research seeks to uncover the underlying messages about morality, identity, and social norms that Chainani embeds in the narrative, ultimately revealing how language serves as a site of moral negotiation.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how language is used to represent the concepts of god and evil in *The School for God and Evil* by Soman Chainani. The data consists of selected excerpts from the novel, including narrative passages, character dialogues, and naming patterns that directly reflect moral values. The analysis applies three frameworks: stylistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and gender performativity theory. Stylistics is used to examine how word choices, sentence structures, and narrative style contribute to moral representation. CDA, following Fairclough (2015), helps uncover how language reflects and reinforces ideological messages. "Language is a form

of social practice which contributes to the reproduction of social structures"(Al-Mas'udi & Al-A'mery, 2021). Meanwhile, gender performativity theory based on Judith Butler's ideas and adapted by Fitriani et al. (2021) is used to examine how gender and morality are expressed through speech and behavior. Data were analyzed by selecting relevant passages, categorizing them by theme (e.g., appearance, language use, moral framing), and interpreting them through the three frameworks. This method allows a deeper understanding of how linguistic elements shape the reader's perception of god and evil in the narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Type and Approach of the Research This study applies a qualitative descriptive method, which is suitable for analyzing how language is used to portray the concepts of god and evil in a literary text. The approach allows for a deep exploration of meaning, ideology, and representation without relying on numerical or statistical data. A qualitative lens helps uncover the underlying messages encoded in the novel through narrative structure, word choice, and character interaction. Since this research aims to examine how moral categories are shaped through linguistic features, the qualitative method provides the appropriate framework for interpretation and contextual analysis.

The data for this research are taken from the novel *The School for God and Evil* (2013) by Soman Chainani. This novel was chosen because it offers a unique perspective on moral dualism, questioning the traditional binaries of god and evil. The data include narrative descriptions, character dialogues, and naming conventions that reflect moral and ideological values. These elements were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, specifically in how they contribute to the construction of moral identities and the tension between god and evil throughout the narrative.

The data collection process was carried out through close reading and documentation techniques. The researcher carefully read the entire novel, identifying and extracting passages that contain linguistic indicators of moral positioning. These include emotionally charged language, symbolic naming, contrasts in character traits, and descriptive patterns related to behavior and appearance. The selected data were organized thematically to make the analysis process more systematic, focusing on how language is used to mark or blur the boundary between god and evil.

To analyze the data, this study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), combining insights from Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk. Fairclough's three-dimensional model (2015) serves as a guide to examine the relationship between the linguistic features of the text, the discourse practices surrounding its production and interpretation, and the broader sociocultural context. This model helps uncover how language in the novel reflects or challenges dominant social ideologies about morality, identity, and power. Complementing Fairclough's approach, van Dijk's socio-cognitive model (2016) is used to understand how discourse interacts with mental representations and shared knowledge. His theory is especially relevant for analyzing how readers process and internalize the moral positions constructed in the text. It highlights how ideology and cognition work together through language, shaping readers' understanding of god and evil. By integrating both frameworks, the analysis considers not only the structure and function of the text but also the cognitive and ideological effects it may have on the audience. This dual perspective allows for a richer and more comprehensive understanding of how moral representations are constructed and communicated through language in the novel.

Linguistic Aspects	Representation of the "God" Character	Representation of the "Evil" Character	Sample Dialog/Data	Result Analysis
Speech style	Reflective, empathic, complex, gentle	Direct, assertive, rhetorical, sometimes aggressive	God : " you're not evil. you're just human." (Agatha) Evil : " kindness is weakness. Power is survival." (Lady Lesso)	Agatha uses reflective and empathetic sentences that demonstrate values of inclusivity and understanding, reflecting a supportive moral

				character. In contrast, Lady Lesso employs assertive and rhetorical statements that reject empathy and emphasize dominance, showcasing an 'Evil' ideology that idolizes power
Intonation	Calm, steady, even tone, gives a peaceful and calming impression	Dramatic rising and falling tones, strategic pauses, establishing authority	Evil: "The Evil attack. [pause] The God defend. [The Evil punish. The Goo forgive." (Sophie)	The rhythmically intonated structure with dramatic pauses creates a clear moral contrast between 'God' and 'Evil'. Pauses and intonation are used to reinforce ideological messages and rhetorically build authority, demonstrating the use of prosodic strategies in moral construction.
Lexical Choices	Words like hope, kindness, unity, forgiveness that emphasize empathy and cooperation	Words like power, weakness, survival, dominate that emphasize individual control and power Words like power, weakness, survival, dominate that emphasize individual control and power	God: "Kindness is the highest form of strength." (Dovey) Evil: "Beauty is power. The rest is just decoration." (Lady Lesso)	The character of 'God' associates values such as kindness and strength as true power, promoting an empathy-based morality. On the other hand, the character of 'Evil' assesses power based on physical and symbolic appearances, showcasing an ideology centered on dominance and visual power
Character Framing through Language	Described as a moral mentor and compassionate figure; uses didactic and understanding language	Portrayed as authoritative, using rhetorical tactics and negative representations of the other side	God: Dovey and Agatha : moral guidance Evil : Lady Lesso and Rhian "positive selfpresentation &	Framing characters through language style depicts God as a wise and empathetic moral mentor, while Evil appears

			negative otherpresentation" strategy	authoritative and manipulative. Their discourse strategies create a moral justification for each position, in line with van Dijk's theory of ideology in group representation Framing characters through language style depicts God as a wise and empathetic moral mentor, while Evil appears authoritative and manipulative. Their discourse strategies create a moral justification for each position, in line with van Dijk's theory of ideology in group representation
Multimodality (visual support)	Facial expressions, body movements are gentle and harmonious; support positive moral impressions Facial expressions, body movements are gentle and harmonious; support positive moral impressions	Dominant body language, assertive expressions, supporting ideological positions of power	Supported by Machin & Mayr's (2012) theory: "verbal and non-verbal work together to form ideology" Supported by Machin & Mayr's (2012) theory: "verbal and non-verbal work together to form ideology"	Multimodality enhances linguistic representation through facial expressions, body movements, and intonation. The God character is supported by gentle gestures and calm expressions, whereas Evil is reinforced with dominant and aggressive body language. This shows that moral ideology is constructed not only through words but also through other visual and performative elements.

CONCLUSION

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary method of data analysis, following the framework developed by Norman Fairclough. CDA views language not merely as a means of communication, but as a form of social practice closely linked to ideology and power relations. (Al-Mas'udi & Al-A'mery, 2021) states, "language is a social practice," implying that every use of language is shaped by and contributes to the surrounding social context. The analysis follows three interrelated stages: first, textual analysis, which focuses on word choice, sentence structure, and style; second, discourse practice analysis, which examines the interactional context, including the roles of speakers

and how meaning is produced; and third, social practice analysis, which explores how language reflects and reinforces broader ideological and social structures. In this research, the characters' dialogues in the film are analyzed not only for their surface meaning, but also for how language is used to construct their moral identities as either "god" or "evil." This study found that the linguistic representation of characters in the movie *The School for God and Evil* shows the division between "god" and "evil" characters, both from the language, intonation, discourse structure, and social functions performed by each character. This study found that the characters in the movie *The School for God and Evil* use different language styles to reflect their moral positions. Characters from the "god" camp such as Agatha and Professor Dovey tend to use sentences that are reflective, empathetic, and convey messages in a subtle and soothing manner. For example, in a dialog when Sophie doubts her identity, Agatha says, "You're not evil. You're just human." This sentence shows that "god" characters tend not to judge, but rather understand and make room for change. On the other hand, characters from the "evil" camp such as Sophie (during her transformation) and Lady Lesso use a more straightforward, assertive, and sometimes aggressive style of language, as seen in the sentence: "Kindness is weakness. Power is survival." This phrase reflects the ideology of power and dominance that is prominent in the "evil" characters. Binary oppositions in youth literature often reinforce national or cultural moral expectations (ZC, 2025). This study revealed that the moral contrast between characters labeled as "god" and "evil" in the film *The School for God and Evil* is consistently constructed through distinct linguistic elements. These elements include speech style, intonation, lexical choices, and character portrayal through discourse. The analysis was grounded in Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model and supported by Teun A. van Dijk's ideological discourse strategies.

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