

“LINGUISTIC CONTROL, POWER, AND POLITICS OF VOICE IN J.K ROWLING’S *HARRY POTTER* SERIES”

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Abstract:

This paper looks into the role of language as an instrument of control, power, and defiance in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series. The description of the novel uses critical discourse analysis to focus on the systematic micro-level processes of power, identity construction, and the distribution of the ‘speech’ and ‘silence’ dichotomy in the narrative and dialogue. This includes Dumbledore, Voldemort, Hermione, Draco, Kreacher, and house-elves like Dobby who become crucial in grasping the politics of listening and not listening and the real-world dynamics of enabling privilege while marginalizing folks. The telling of the history of ‘reading’ focuses on critical passages and narrative or expository methods that capture how ‘sound’ becomes a political statement; be it Parseltongue, legalist orations, abusive words like ‘Mudblood,’ or quiet defiance from those who are unfortunately left with no voice. The conclusion of the analysis illustrates that the politics of discourse within the wizarding world and their relation to the prevailing order cannot be considered as mere imagination, but rather as purposeful inventions that analyze social and political frameworks. Hence, the reason for suffering in silence becomes embedded in the Harry Potter saga as a powerful tool for ideological and discourse analysis.

Keywords: Linguistic Control, Power Dynamics, Pure-blood Ideology, Politics of Voice, *Harry Potter*, J.K. Rowling.

1. Introduction:

J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* is an epitome of creativity, with an engaging story often praised for its imaginative wizarding world filled with magical elements, and at the same time provides for rich literature to conduct critical discourse analysis. The spellbinding universe of *Harry Potter*, which was created by J. K. Rowling, is more than just a child’s novel more than a child’s novel; it serves as a sophisticated masterpiece that is ready to be analyzed post-colonially regarding power relations and control of language.

Without a doubt, language in the world of *Harry Potter* is loaded and never neutral. It is full of violence, a battleground, as it can be a boundary for domain and territory, as well as an identifier and a legitimization tool. In fact, even in the very beginning, the power of ideological struggle can be tracked because “the Voldemort naming/un-naming” dynamic serves as a primary indicator. The hermetic, dreadful taboo, and ominous silence that lie around Voldemort’s name He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is beyond a magical phenomenon. It portrays an ideological frame where custodian fear axiomatically dominates speech and overarching thought. In fact, The Ministry of Magic controls the discourse of media, education, public perception. Control, in this scope is asserted, is executed as a strategic utilization of discursive power to uphold a dominant narrative while silencing dissenting voices.

In addition, the politics of voice includes the marginalized within the wizarding world. House-elves, goblins, and even non-human beings like centaurs have their narrative voice systematically stripped off. Their erasure denotes wider social structures which are culled from pre-existing hierarchies that atavistically favor certain bloodlines, species, and magical prowess. Hermione's campaign for elf rights, albeit comical within the narrative, highlights the contradiction of voice and power in a setting defined by both magical and linguistic hierarchy, what can only be termed as deeply elitist.

This paper argues that Rowling's series, while often framed as a battle between good and evil, offers a more intricate depiction of how power operates through language. By focusing on who is allowed to speak, what speech is forbidden, and how discourse is shaped by institutions, this study aims to unpack the deeper ideological currents that run beneath the surface of the narrative. Language, in the *Harry Potter* universe, is not merely a means of communication, it is a battleground of power.

2. Literature Review:

For many, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* constitutes a monumental milestone in children's literature and reflects a deep intersection of language, power and control (Mendlesohn, 2001). The series arguably captures a vivid microcosm of power dynamics interplay, wherein the power of choice and pattern of speech acts as an instrument for oppression and identity construction an individual's identity (Mynott, 1999).

This research will aim to illustrate how language operates as an agent of power in the *Harry Potter* universe, particularly focusing on the dominators and the dominated, and the social power relations between groups in the wizarding world. Considering the magical backdrop and extensive research on sociolinguistics, the linguistics strategies employed by the characters will be scrutinized in light of authority and perception management. The construction of power will guide their action, attrition, and manipulation within relations and allow us, through the lens of dialogue and narrative voice and their socio-linguistic setting, to argue how in broad strokes power is embedded in language. The analysis focuses on relations of power between the characters and how it shapes the lives of the characters and the story. The analysis will also encompass the dominant ideologies in the text, arguing how these covert, internal or external ideologies portray significant power to the reader the most marginalized, in this case children, tend to be most exposed to (Su, 2019)

The *Harry Potter* fandom entails studying the book and analyzing the underlying power systems, control dynamics of institutions, and the politics of power and language used. J.K. Rowling's tale has received scrutiny based on his claimed attempts to reflect societal structuring and critiques by drawing comparisons with real life political and social affairs.

Dominance and subordination (Deets, 2009) mechanisms that pervade the society is blended with the magical systems in the series and its regressive culture is also bound to have some form of soft control which makes the series interesting from a sociological view (Deets, 2009). Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the primary setting, evolves as a social microcosm facing prejudice and striving for identity and carving identity which is just another representation of the post colonial world struggles. Because of its unique language and power systems grounded in wizarding world, the analysis attempts to explain the ways the *Harry Potter* book series mirrors and distorts colonial impacts upon societies through the lens of language and power (Deets, 2009). A very captivating story of Hogwarts still captures the imagination of young readers and scholars alike, nearly twenty two years after the publication of the first book (Su, 2019). In this article, I explore how control of language and the politics of voicing out operate as

power within The Wizarding World of *Harry Potter*, which in turn unveils the mechanisms of authority and conflict.

The series with a focus on the Foucault framework and points the control discipline theory that lies within the education system of Hogwarts. She believes the powers that be surveillance and normalization is exercised within the order of the school serves as society. This can be illustrated by the figure of Dolores Umbridge who represents the militant nature enacted by institutions through rule and censorship (Wolosky, 2010). In its hallowed halls and beyond, in the magical world at large, power is exercised through a spider web of institutions, traditions, and social standards that serve, often, merely to perpetuate inequality. While the power of the Ministry of Magic, which governs the country, is strong, its bureaucratic corruption suggests the tenuous power common to postcolonial countries (Schwabach, 2005). Language becomes a weapon in shaping attitudes, reinforcing the pecking order, and asserting control in the wizarding world (Bhattacharya, 2014). This apart, it implies how language is employed to generate marginalization of other certain groups to maintain domination by the set elite"--Corson 1991. The *Harry Potter* series provides fertile ground for studying how tensions surrounding the postcolonial power relations and languages manifest themselves, not only for the individual, but also the community.

Authority within the *Harry Potter* series is a multifaceted construct, deeply entrenched in tradition, lineage, and institutional power. The series subtly reinforces hierarchical structures inherent in society, favoring those with hereditary entitlement and undermining genuine agency and radicalism (Mendlesohn, 2001). Through the defamiliarization process, the book makes it easier for readers to consider moral and social issues (Mynott, 1999).

The echoes of colonialism reverberate throughout the wizarding world, subtly influencing social structures and power dynamics. The co-educational setting of Potterworld contrasts with gender-segregated training, influencing perceptions of gender strengths and power in narratives (Croft, 2009). The pure-blood families, with their obsession with blood purity and their disdain for Muggles and Muggle-borns, represent a form of racial ideology akin to colonialist notions of racial superiority (Barratt, 2012).

Furthering this analysis, (Barton, 2006) discusses the bureaucratic inefficiencies and authoritarian tendencies of the Ministry of Magic. He claims that the control of information and the ministry's punitive approach toward opposing views constitutes a liberalized suffocation of subordinate over governance which identifies risks of over control reliance as authority is deemed without limits.

3. Theoretical Framework:

The main sources of inspiration for this research are Michel Foucault's theories of discourse, power, and subject creation, especially as they are presented in *The History of Sexuality* (1978) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975). In contrast to conventional hierarchical conceptions, Foucault emphasizes power as distributed, relational, and generative. He contends that through discourse, authority creates information, subjectivities, and realities rather than just suppressing them. When analyzing the language strategies used to control or resist control of characters in the *Harry Potter* series, Foucault's concepts of docile bodies, surveillance, and disciplinary institutions are especially helpful. In the Foucauldian view, Hogwarts is similar to many

disciplinary institutions despite being a school of magic. Its policies, monitoring systems (such as the Marauder's Map, magical images, and authority figures like Dolores Umbridge), and behavioral expectations all fit Foucault's theory of standardized discipline.

Additionally, language is shown in the series as a political tool. Spells, edicts, and public statements (via Ministry proclamations or The Daily Prophet) serve as instruments of resistance or control. The most obvious example of linguistic dominance is seen in the Unforgivable Curses, in which the caster's words completely subdue the victim's will, embodying Foucault's theory of total power over the body and soul. Additionally, this essay incorporates Judith Butler's performativity theory, particularly as it relates to identity and speech. Despite having its roots mostly in gender studies, Butler's work provides important insight into how social roles and identities are shaped by repetitive language acts (such as naming, labeling, and commanding). Social inclusion and exclusion are governed by linguistic borders as well as cultural identifiers, such as the names "Muggle," "Mudblood," or even the unwillingness to say "Voldemort." Furthermore, understanding how characters' access to magical language—especially strong or prohibited spells—reflects and perpetuates social hierarchies requires a grasp of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital. Speaking particular phrases or using particular incantations becomes a sign of power, defiance, or exclusion.

This study creates a framework for a nuanced examination of how language in *Harry Potter* rules, opposes, and reconfigures power relations in addition to telling a tale by combining these theoretical stances. The analysis will highlight the political and ethical aspects of speech, silence, and linguistic agency in the wizarding world through the Foucauldian lens, bolstered by supplementary theories of language and identity.

4. Methodology:

Focusing on close readings of specific passages from J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, especially those pertaining to the use and discussion of the Unforgivable Curses—Avada Kedavra, Cruciatius, and Imperius, this study uses a qualitative textual analysis technique. Using theoretical techniques based on Michel Foucault's work on discipline and docile bodies, the aim is to investigate how language functions inside the story as a device of control, power, and resistance.

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework serves as the basis for the analysis, allowing for the investigation of the ways in which language reproduces and embeds power relations. In addition to examining The Unforgivable Curses' narrative function, scholars also examine the linguistic devices used, the social settings in which they are set, and the ideological themes they express regarding resistance, authority, and obedience. The seven *Harry Potter* books that are considered canonical are the direct source of primary data. Voldemort's use of the Killing Curse, Harry's use of Crucio, and Barty Crouch Jr.'s presentation in The Goblet of Fire are only a few examples of the key scenes where these curses are taught, performed, forbidden, or resisted. These instances were picked because they are important to the plot and offer a wealth of opportunities to examine the relationship between language, body control, and moral violation.

In order to understand the ideological and disciplinary ramifications of language control in the series, secondary data consists of academic papers, book chapters, and theoretical writings, mostly written by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Pierre Bourdieu. The issue is further contextualized by peer-reviewed scholarly works on the politics of language in fantasy and children's literature. The goal of the interpretative research is to provide a thorough, theoretically informed knowledge of particular textual instances rather than to generalize. The

study shows how Rowling's series dramatizes larger issues of voice, consent, and coercion in both magical and non-magical contexts by understanding the linguistic and ideological workings of the Unforgivable Curses.

5. Analysis:

5.1 The Unforgivable Curses as Linguistic Instruments of Power:

The Unforgivable Curses—*Avada Kedavra*, *Crucio*, and *Imperio*—are instances where language enacts physical and psychological domination. Their power is rooted in their verbal incantation, reflecting the potency of language as a tool of control.

As demonstrated in *Goblet of Fire*, these spells are used to test the boundaries of obedience. The *Imperius Curse*, in particular, is a stark example of linguistic coercion, suppressing the victim's autonomy entirely.

This aligns with Foucault's idea of language as a "technology of power." These spells aren't merely magical; they are utterances that reshape will and enforce submission. Such language operates like state mechanisms that "produce docile bodies"—silent, compliant, and void of resistance.

5.2 Social Hierarchies and Linguistic Discrimination:

Language in *Harry Potter* also encodes deep social prejudices, especially surrounding blood status. When Draco Malfoy calls Hermione a "Mudblood," he isn't just using an insult—he is weaponizing language to dehumanize her:

"It's a disgusting thing to call someone... Dirty blood, see. Common blood. It's ridiculous. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway." – Ron Weasley
(*Chamber of Secrets*, Ch. 7)

This linguistic act mirrors real-world racial slurs, revealing how dominant groups assert superiority by embedding social hierarchies in language. Hermione's reaction—silent rage and humiliation—illustrates the damage such language inflicts.

A more disturbing visualization appears in *Deathly Hallows*, when Harry, Ron, and Hermione see a statue at the Ministry of Magic:

"Harry looked more closely and realized that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans... 'Muggles,' whispered Hermione. 'In their rightful place.'"
– (*Deathly Hallows*, Ch. 12)

This reinforces the idea that language and visual symbols work together to establish and sustain a supremacist ideology. The Ministry uses these images and associated terms to legitimize a hierarchical, fascist regime.

5.3 Identity and Resistance: Parseltongue and Power:

Harry's Parseltongue ability becomes a site of internal conflict. When he discovers this ability in *Chamber of Secrets*, it prompts fear and self-doubt:

'You're a parselmouth. Why didn't you tell us?'
'I'm a what?' said Harry.
'A parselmouth!' said Ron. *'You can talk to snakes!'*...
– (*Chamber of Secrets*, Ch. 11)

This linguistic ability links him to Voldemort, creating anxiety over his identity. Yet Dumbledore later reframes this:

'It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.' – (*Chamber of Secrets*, p. 245)

Language here is not just communicative but also symbolic of deeper identity struggles—echoing Judith Butler's performativity theory, where language and repeated acts shape how identity is understood and resisted.

5.4 The Pureblood Ideology: Language as a Tool of Superiority and Exclusion

The concept of Pureblood supremacy permeates the wizarding world's discourse, establishing a clear linguistic and ideological divide between the "worthy" and the "impure." This ideology, deeply embedded in wizarding families like the Malfoys and the Blacks, relies heavily on language to preserve power structures and justify marginalization.

Terms like "Mudblood," "half-breed," and "blood traitor" function as slurs—social weapons meant to exclude, humiliate, and dominate. These words aren't just insults; they are ideological tools used to maintain hierarchy, similar to how language has been used historically to assert racial or class-based superiority in real-world societies.

Draco Malfoy, often the mouthpiece of this ideology in his youth, repeatedly asserts his status:

"You'll soon find out that some wizarding families are better than others, Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the wrong sort." – (*Philosopher's Stone*, Ch. 5)

This not only reflects prejudice but also serves as a linguistic attempt to recruit Harry into a system of power through alliance with the elite. When Harry rejects this offer, it marks his first act of resistance against institutionalized power through verbal defiance:

"I think I can tell the wrong sort for myself, thanks."

Similarly, the concept of “blood traitors” weaponizes language even against Purebloods like the Weasleys, who reject elitism. Ron’s family is insulted for associating with Muggle-borns and half-bloods:

“You hang around with Muggles and blood traitors like my brother!” – Draco, Half-Blood Prince

Bellatrix Lestrange’s language is particularly saturated with violent purity ideology. While torturing Hermione, she mocks her blood status with derision:

“You filthy little Mudblood, you are going to pay for what you’ve done to my Bellatrix.” – (Deathly Hallows)

Even the name of Voldemort’s followers—Death Eaters—reflects symbolic language. They are not just assassins; they “eat” death, suggesting dominion over life and blood. Their allegiance to Pureblood supremacy is enforced through rituals and oaths, all linguistically charged.

However, the text also subverts this ideology. As Sirius Black says:

“You might have noticed that my family tree has been cut down a little... I don’t agree with my parents’ Pureblood mania.” – (Order of the Phoenix)

Language, in this case, becomes a site of resistance. Sirius uses sarcasm and cutting remarks to distance himself from his family’s values.

In Deathly Hallows, this ideology reaches an extreme when the Ministry begins registering Muggle-borns under the “Muggle-Born Registration Commission.” Their very birth is framed as a crime, showing how oppressive regimes use language to criminalize identity.

Thus, Pureblood ideology is upheld, resisted, and dismantled through language. It mirrors fascist discourses where linguistic constructs reinforce myths of racial purity and superiority. Rowling’s portrayal is not accidental—it’s a conscious engagement with how language is used to dominate or liberate.

5.5 Institutional Oppression and the Silencing of Truth

Dolores Umbridge’s tenure at Hogwarts exemplifies institutional silencing and the suppression of dissent through language. Her enforcement of strict rules and punishments illustrates the use of language as a tool for maintaining control. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Umbridge imposes a cruel detention on Harry:

“I want you to write ‘I must not tell lies,’” she said softly.

“How many times?”

“Let’s see... as long as it takes for the message to sink in.”

This punishment, which causes the words to be etched into Harry's skin, serves as a literal manifestation of enforced silence and obedience. Foucault's analysis of disciplinary mechanisms highlights how such practices are designed to produce compliant individuals through surveillance and normalization.

Furthermore, when Harry insists:

"He's back," said Harry. "Voldemort's back."

– he is engaging in linguistic resistance. Despite official denial, Harry uses language to subvert lies and assert truth. His courage to speak Voldemort's name—something others avoid—serves as defiance:

"I'm not trying to be brave or anything, saying the name," said Harry, "I just never knew you shouldn't. See what I mean? I've got that in common with You-Know-Who. I've got Parseltongue, I've got that scar, I was in the graveyard with him."

– (*Order of the Phoenix*, Ch. 5)

5.6 Ambiguity and Shifting Identities: The Case of Draco Malfoy

Draco Malfoy's use of language often signals entitlement and inherited ideology:

"My father will hear about this!" – a phrase repeated throughout the series.

His reliance on his father's name shows how language serves as a symbol of generational privilege and institutional backup. However, by *Deathly Hallows*, his language reflects confusion and inner turmoil:

"I'm Draco Malfoy, I'm Draco, I'm on your side!" – (*Deathly Hallows*)

He pleads for recognition, distancing himself from the Death Eaters. His shifting tone reflects a loss of certainty, demonstrating how language also captures moments of transformation and fear.

Even when Ron and Harry save Draco, his betrayal is emphasized through dialogue:

"And that's the second time we've saved your life tonight, you two-faced bastard!" – (Ron Weasley, *Deathly Hallows*)

This highlights how language expresses betrayal and lingering resentment, even in moments of reluctant alliance.

That's a powerful excerpt, and it fits perfectly under the theme of "Politics of Voice" and Linguistic Control, especially the taboo of naming (e.g., "You-Know-Who" vs. "Voldemort").

5.7 Politics of Voice in the Wizarding World:

After discussing how language is used to suppress or control (like with “Mudblood” or Pure-blood superiority), you can insert this passage to show how even naming Voldemort is a linguistic form of power:

A crucial example of linguistic control lies in the taboo surrounding Voldemort’s name. Characters often refer to him as “You-Know-Who” or “He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,” reinforcing the fear and authority he holds even in absence. Harry’s early innocence disrupts this norm:

“I didn’t know anything about being a wizard or about my parents or Voldemort—”

Ron gasped.

“What?” said Harry.

“You said You-Know-Who’s name!” said Ron, sounding both shocked and impressed, “I’d have thought you of all people—”

“I’m not trying to be brave or anything, saying the name,” said Harry,

“I just never knew you shouldn’t. See what I mean?”

(Philosopher’s Stone, p. 75)

This moment reflects how deeply embedded fear and control are within wizarding discourse, and how Harry’s defiance of that norm challenges the linguistic hegemony Voldemort created.

Conclusion:

When considering the *Harry Potter* series for the first time you may view it as just a standard Odyssey populated with magical enchantments, spells, and boasts of youthful escapades. However, if you study deeper, the word “Rowling” stands for “rowling spells” as she constructed a universe adjoining and paralleling much of the ideological conflicts occurring around us—more importantly those related to language, identity, and power. In this series, language is not merely a means of communication, but becomes a method of control, defiance, and social order. The use of derogatory terms like Mudblood is far from casual. It demonstrates the invention of bigotry within the Pureblood supremacy framework that abuses Muggles and people of Muggle-born descent on systematic racism. The linguistic slurs uttered by Draco Malfoy- “Mudblood,” or ad vibrantly declaring, “My father will hear about this” serve as inexcusable witnesses evidence for clan dominion. That is not mere boasting—it is deliberate reinforcement of a social order. These ideological utterances are laden with meaning chosen on blood alone. At the same time Rowling gives language as a means of defiance and redefinition. Dobby and Kreacher once their social statuses change undergo major social transformations and disregarded characters dotted Joan transform completely to taking the reins of the language, which they had been systemically denied. Dobby’s proud declaration “Dobby is a free elf!” is a small yet powerful demonstration

of a free will that had long been suppressed. In the same way, Kreacher's change in tone after being treated kindly shows how people can soften in response to regard and compassion.

Harry's own journey is intricately bound with how he is shaped with words and coming to the realization of purposeful words. A Parselmouth, with the ability to converse with serpents, sets him apart as a peculiar and in some cases, threatening individual. But it is not the abilities he inherits that make an individual, as moral decisions shape them. As Dumbledore puts it, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." In this manner, Rowling counters essentialism and redirects the readers' attention to ethical responsibility. On the other hand, magic supervision, and more specifically the Ministry of Magic serves as the main example of how institutional language enforces power. The thumping of people marching and screaming the phrase Magic is Might together with the gruesome thunderous imagery of Muggles being hewn into thrones illustrate the terrifying reign of control unleashed by language over fame. These features focus on how institutions tend to conceal oppression behind convenient, albeit manipulative language, further exemplified in real life outside the story.

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