

A Discursive Analysis of Power Relationships in the *One Piece* Anime Series: The Sabaody Archipelago Arc Search for Theoretical Perspectives in the Sir Journal

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of power relations in the *One Piece* anime series, particularly in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc. The background of this research is based on the growing significance of anime as a global popular culture product that not only functions as entertainment but also represents social inequality, domination, and resistance. The purpose of this study is to analyze how power relations are constructed, maintained, and normalized through discourse, dialogue, and narrative interaction between characters. This research uses a qualitative approach with Michel Foucault's discourse analysis as the main theoretical framework. The data were collected through documentation by observing selected episodes of the Sabaody Archipelago Arc, transcribing relevant dialogues, and identifying scenes that represent power relations. The findings show that power in this arc operates through five main dimensions: power relations in statements, language as a tool of power, normalization of social relations, panopticon mechanisms in statements, and marginalized subjects. The domination of the Tenryuubito is not only shown through physical violence but also through verbal authority, social fear, and internalized obedience among subordinate groups. This study concludes that the Sabaody Archipelago Arc functions as a critical media text that reveals how discourse can reproduce hierarchy, legitimize domination, and normalize social inequality.

INTRODUCTION

The *One Piece anime series* is one of the Japanese animated works that has had a great influence on global popular culture. Not only known as a pirate adventure story, *One Piece* builds a complex narrative world with hierarchical social structures and inequality. In that world, there is a clear division of social class between those who have high authority and those who are in lower positions (Bourdieu, 2019; Keller, 2017; Renshon, 2017). These differences are not just the background of the story, but also the foundation of the conflict that moves the narrative flow. Through character construction, dialogue, and social interaction between characters, *One Piece* presents an overview of how power is exercised and maintained in a system. This makes *One Piece* a media text that contains explicit and implicit representations of power relations (Carah & Louw, 2015; Ravaglia, 2024).

One of the parts of the story that explicitly shows the unequal social structure is the Sabaody Archipelago Arc. The arc is set in the Sabaody Islands, a transit area before entering *the New World* that became a meeting point for various social groups. In the region, there were pirates, slave traders, government officials, and a group of world nobles known as the

Tenryuubito (Shigemi, n.d.; Zurndorfer, 2023). The interaction between these groups shows a very contrasting division of social positions. The Tenryuubito were placed as an elite group with absolute authority, while the other groups were in a vulnerable position and had no room to resist. This inequality is not only shown through visual scenes, but also through the communication structure between characters (Enck & Morrissey, 2015; Magotra & Kaur, 2018; Yuwono, Luik, & Lesmana, 2025).

In the Sabaody Archipelago arc, Tenryuubito is depicted as the highest representative of the ruling class in *the One Piece* universe. They have privileges that other groups do not have, including the freedom to treat ordinary humans arbitrarily. Their status is protected by the world system of government that exists in the story. The apparatus and the surrounding community are described as subservient to their existence (Nabben, 2021; Roy Chaudhuri & Jagadale, 2021; Smith, 2020). This structure shows that power comes not only from the individual, but also from the legitimacy of the system that supports it. This representation is the starting point to read how power relations are built in the text of this anime (Berndt, 2018; Li, 2026).

Representations of Tenryuubito domination can be seen in the scene when they walk in public spaces with escorts as well as chained slaves. The scene shows a very striking difference in social position between the elite group and the common people.

In the image, Tenryuubito is visually placed in a central and dominant position, so that the audience's attention is directly focused on his existence as a figure with power. Higher space placement, confident body gestures, and physical distance from other characters further emphasize the difference in position between them. Meanwhile, other characters are in a lower position, both in terms of gestures and spatial composition, which indicates an unequal division of roles.

However, the focus of the study in this study does not stop at this visual aspect. This research emphasizes more on how the dominant position is affirmed and maintained through dialogue spoken by the Tenryuubito character. Visuals can be understood as an introduction that shows social structure visually, but it is dialogue that directly shows how power is exercised through language. In other words, visuals construct hierarchical contexts, while dialogue becomes the primary means of affirming and reinforcing the practice of power relations in the scene.

One of the dialogues that shows the practice of domination explicitly is when Tenryuubito declares, *"Okay! I'm making you my wife!"*. The statement is not just a personal expression, but a form of speech that imposes one's will without considering the consent of the other party. This sentence shows that Tenryuubito positions himself as a party who has full authority over the bodies and lives of others.

Anime has developed from a Japanese cultural product into a global media phenomenon with significant economic, social, and cultural influence. The Association of Japanese Animations reported that the Japanese animation industry continues to publish annual industry data, showing the growing importance of anime as a creative industry and transnational media commodity. In 2023, the global anime market reached a record level, with international markets contributing strongly to revenue growth, while Reuters reported that the anime market was projected to double to approximately USD 60 billion by 2030. These data indicate that anime is no longer only an entertainment product, but also a global cultural text that shapes audience perception, identity, and social imagination. Therefore, anime is increasingly relevant as an object of academic research, particularly in communication, cultural studies, discourse studies, and media representation.

The growing influence of anime is also reflected in the popularity of **One Piece**, one of the most successful Japanese media franchises in the world. Guinness World Records confirmed that **One Piece** reached more than 500 million copies printed worldwide in 2022,

making it one of the most widely circulated comic series by a single author. This achievement shows that **One Piece** has a broad and sustained audience across countries, generations, and cultural contexts. Its popularity is not only built through adventure, humor, and fantasy, but also through complex social narratives involving injustice, slavery, class hierarchy, authoritarian institutions, and resistance. As a result, **One Piece** provides a rich cultural text for examining how social meanings are constructed and circulated through popular media.

Although anime is often consumed as entertainment, its narratives frequently contain representations of real social problems. Issues such as inequality, marginalization, domination, discrimination, and state authority are often presented through fictional worlds that resemble social realities. In this context, the **One Piece** anime series constructs a world in which power is distributed unequally among social groups. The story repeatedly displays conflicts between dominant groups and subordinate communities, making it possible to analyze how authority is legitimized, how obedience is produced, and how resistance emerges. Thus, anime can be understood not merely as an imaginative story, but as an audiovisual discourse that represents broader social structures.

The specific issue addressed in this research is the representation of power relations in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc of the **One Piece** anime series. This arc is important because it explicitly presents social hierarchy through the existence of the Tenryuubito or Celestial Dragons, who are positioned as an elite group with absolute privilege. In contrast, ordinary citizens, slaves, pirates, and marginalized racial groups are placed in vulnerable positions with limited capacity to resist. The arc shows that domination does not operate only through physical violence, but also through speech, social acceptance, fear, and internalized obedience. Therefore, the Sabaody Archipelago Arc becomes a relevant site for analyzing how power is constructed, maintained, and normalized through discourse.

Previous studies have shown that anime and popular media can function as spaces for social criticism and cultural meaning-making. Raudha, Azwarfajri, and Musdawati (2024) examined the influence of anime and Japanese culture on student lifestyles, showing that anime has social effects beyond entertainment consumption. Sastriawati and Pribadi (2025) discussed anime as a medium of social criticism through **A Silent Voice**, demonstrating that anime narratives can represent social issues such as exclusion, trauma, and moral responsibility. Meanwhile, Poorghorban (2023) emphasized the relevance of Michel Foucault's concepts of power, knowledge, discourse, and subjectivity in understanding how social subjects are shaped by dominant systems of meaning. These studies support the view that anime can be critically examined as a discourse-producing medium.

Research on power relations using Foucauldian discourse analysis has also been applied in various social and media contexts. Nasution (2024), for example, examined power relations in literary texts using Michel Foucault's critical discourse perspective, while Arfa Reyza (2024) analyzed discourse in online news through Foucault's model to reveal how institutional authority is represented through language. These studies demonstrate that Foucault's framework is useful for identifying how power works not only through coercion, but also through discourse, norms, knowledge, and accepted truth. However, studies that specifically analyze power relations in **One Piece**, particularly in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc, remain limited, especially those that focus on dialogue and verbal statements as the main site of power production.

The research gap lies in the limited attention given to how power in anime is produced through discourse rather than merely represented through visual action or narrative conflict. Many discussions of **One Piece** focus on adventure, character development, ideology, or general social criticism, but fewer studies examine how specific statements, dialogue patterns, and verbal interactions construct unequal social relations. In the Sabaody Archipelago Arc, power is not only displayed through the violence of the Tenryuubito, but also through the way

ordinary people warn one another, the way victims accept domination, and the way elite characters speak as if their authority is unquestionable. This gap creates the need for a focused discourse analysis that investigates how language becomes a tool of domination and normalization.

The urgency of this research is strengthened by the fact that anime is widely consumed by young audiences and has the potential to shape how they understand social hierarchy, injustice, and resistance. When audiences repeatedly encounter representations of dominant and marginalized groups, they may also encounter particular ways of understanding authority, obedience, and social inequality. Therefore, critical research on anime is necessary to encourage more reflective media literacy. By examining the Sabaody Archipelago Arc, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how popular audiovisual texts can reproduce, criticize, or expose mechanisms of power in society. This research is also urgent because it connects global popular culture with critical social theory in a way that is relevant to contemporary media consumption.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the discourse of power relations in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc using Michel Foucault's theoretical perspective. Rather than analyzing **One Piece** only as an adventure narrative or visual spectacle, this study positions the anime as a discursive text in which dialogue, statements, and verbal interactions produce social meaning. The analysis focuses on five dimensions: power relations in statements, language as a tool of power, normalization of social relations, panopticon mechanisms in statements, and marginalized subjects. This approach provides a more detailed understanding of how power operates through language and how domination can be internalized by those who are subordinated.

Based on this background, the purpose of this research is to analyze how power relations are represented through discourse in the **One Piece** anime series, particularly in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc. This study aims to examine how dialogue and verbal statements construct dominant and subordinate positions, how power is legitimized through language, and how social inequality is normalized within the narrative. The research contributes theoretically by enriching Foucauldian discourse studies in the field of anime and popular media analysis. Practically, it benefits students, researchers, and media audiences by encouraging critical awareness of how entertainment media can represent complex social relations. The objective and benefit of this study are therefore to provide a deeper academic understanding of anime as a cultural text that reflects, critiques, and reconstructs power relations in society.

METHOD

Research Overview

Research Subject

The subject of this study is the *One Piece anime series*, especially in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc which is used as the main source of research data. This arc was chosen because it thematically displays representations of power relations, social inequality, and the practice of domination depicted through the interaction between characters in the story. The presence of this arc is interesting to study because it shows how unequal social structures are represented in popular narratives, thus opening up a space for meaning to the issue of power in the context of entertainment media. In this study, anime is not only positioned as a spectacle, but as an audio-visual media text that produces discourse and meaning regarding power relations. Text is understood as a discursive space in which social reality is constructed through dialogue, visual symbols, as well as the storyline that is displayed.

The selection of the Sabaody Archipelago Arc as the subject of the study was based on the consideration that this section explicitly presents a picture of the dominance of the elite

over the subordinate group. Power relations in this arc are seen through dialogue between characters, actions that represent inequality, and interaction patterns that show the existence of social control and hierarchy. The narrative constructed provides a space for researchers to examine how the practice of power is constructed, executed, and normalized in the structure of the story. Thus, this arc provides relevant material to be analyzed using critical discourse analysis approaches, particularly in understanding how language and dialogue represent the position of subjects and objects in power relations.

As a research subject, the *One Piece anime series* on the Sabaody Archipelago Arc serves as a primary data source that allows researchers to trace the construction of meaning contained in dialogues and scenes. The focus of the research is not directed on the entertainment or visual aesthetic aspects alone, but on the communicative and discursive dimensions contained in the text. With these considerations in mind, this arc was chosen because it has a strong relevance to the purpose of the research, which is to examine how power relations are represented through discourse in dialogue and anime narratives.

Research Object

The object of this research is the construction of the discourse of power relations represented in the *One Piece anime series*, especially in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc. The focus of the research is directed at how power relations are formed through dialogue, narrative structure, character depiction, and representation of the relationship between elite and subordinate groups in the story. This research not only pays attention to the storyline on the surface, but also examines how the meaning of power is constructed through discursive practices that frame social inequality as part of a normalized structure in the narrative.

In this study, discourse is understood as the process of production of meaning that takes place through the use of language in a certain social context. Therefore, the object of research includes the way the text builds an understanding of power relations, including how characters with dominant positions are represented, how the dominated party is positioned, and how power relations are portrayed in interactions between characters. These representations are important to study because they are not neutral, but play a role in shaping the perspective of social hierarchy, authority, and injustice that occurs in stories.

The object of research also includes symbolic practices that appear in anime, such as the use of dialogue, language choices, as well as patterns of interaction between characters that reflect the dynamics of domination, control, and normalization of power. Through the analysis of the construction of the discourse, this study seeks to reveal how power relations are constructed and presented to the audience as part of the production of social meaning. This approach allows the text to be understood as a discursive space that not only presents the story, but also shapes an understanding of the practice of power in a broader context.

Data Collection Methods

Types of Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with Michel Foucault's critical discourse analysis method. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand and interpret how meaning and power relations are constructed through language and verbal narration in anime texts. The data is not processed statistically, but analyzed in depth based on the discursive dimensions present in the dialogue and scenes of the selected episodes.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation of the *One Piece anime series*, specifically the Sabaody Archipelago Arc in Episodes 391 and 396. The researcher watched the episodes repeatedly, transcribed all relevant dialogue and verbal narration, and selected data units that represent the five analytical dimensions of Foucault's power relations framework. A total of five scenes were selected through a two-stage reduction process: first, episode selection based on the intensity of power relation representations;

second, scene selection based on the presence of explicit dialogue that demonstrates the five dimensions of the analytical framework.

Primary Data

Documentation techniques are used as the main data source in this study. The documentation was carried out by examining *the One Piece anime series*, especially the Sabaody Archipelago Arc as the main research document. Data was obtained through tracing scenes, dialogues, and narratives that represent the relationship of power, domination, and social inequality between the characters in the story. In qualitative research, documentation serves to collect data in the form of audio-visual text which is then transcribed and analyzed systematically as a basis for understanding the phenomenon being studied.

The main document in this study is in the form of episodes in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc that contain interactions between characters, especially those that show the practice of domination of the elite group over the subordinate group. The dialogue spoken by the characters in the anime is the main focus because it is considered a form of discourse that represents the practice of power. In addition, visual elements such as character expressions, symbols, and situations shown in scenes are also part of the documentation because they help reinforce the meaning built in the narrative.

Although anime is a work of fiction, the representations shown in it cannot be separated from the broader social reality. Therefore, the documentation in this study not only serves as a collection of text data, but also as a means to understand how the discourse of power relations is constructed and normalized through audio-visual media. The data collection process is carried out by watching thoroughly, taking notes, transcribing relevant dialogues, and grouping data based on certain categories such as forms of dominance, control, and the position of subjects and objects in power relations.

Secondary Data

Literature studies are carried out by examining various written sources that are relevant to the research topic, such as books, scientific journals, academic articles, and other references related to critical discourse analysis and the concept of power relations. This secondary data serves as a theoretical foundation that assists researchers in understanding and interpreting the phenomena being analyzed.

The literature sources used in this study include Michel Foucault's theory of power relations, the concept of critical discourse analysis, and the study of audio-visual media and the representation of social inequality. Through literature studies, researchers obtained a conceptual framework used to identify and categorize the forms of power relations that appear in the dialogues and narratives of *the One Piece anime*, especially in the Sabaody Archipelago arc.

In addition, literature studies are also used to strengthen the analysis by associating research findings with relevant previous studies. Thus, secondary data not only serves as a complement, but also as a basis for building arguments and deepening understanding of the social context behind the representation of power relations in texts.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is in the form of dialogue pieces and scenes that represent the practice of power relations in *the One Piece anime series*, especially in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc. Unit analysis is understood as a specific part of an audio-visual text that contains meanings relevant to the focus of the research, so that it can be studied through a critical discourse analysis approach. In this study, anime is not analyzed as a whole story, but is elaborated into certain segments that show the practice of domination, control, and social inequality between characters in the narrative.

(1) dialogues that show power relations in the statement — verbal utterances used to assert authority and legitimize hierarchical positions; (2) language as tools of power — speech

that functions as an instrument for reproducing and maintaining social hierarchy; (3) normalization regulation of social relations — scenes and dialogues that present social inequality as a natural and unquestioned order; (4) the panopticon mechanism in the statement — verbal interactions in which subjects monitor and discipline themselves without direct external coercion; and (5) marginalized subjects — narrative parts that show how dominated subjects internalize and reproduce the dominant discourse that marginalizes them.

These criteria are used as a basis in the data selection process so that the analysis remains directed to the representation of power relations discourse. Each piece of dialogue and scene is understood as a discursive practice that not only conveys a story, but also forms a social meaning regarding power, hierarchy, and injustice. Thus, the unit of analysis in this study not only serves as data, but also as an entrance to understanding how language and narrative in anime construct and reproduce power relations in a broader context.

Analysis Method

Stages of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through the following stages: (1) Data reduction — watching all 21 episodes of the Sabaody Archipelago Arc and selecting episodes that most explicitly represent power relations through dialogue; (2) Scene selection — identifying specific scenes within the selected episodes that contain verbal utterances demonstrating the five analytical dimensions; (3) Transcription — transcribing all relevant dialogue and verbal narration from the five selected scenes; (4) Dimensional analysis — systematically analyzing each data unit according to the five dimensions: power relations in the statement, language as tools of power, normalization regulation of social relations, the panopticon mechanism in the statement, and marginalized subjects; and (5) Interpretation — synthesizing findings across scenes to identify patterns of how power relations are constructed, executed, and reproduced through discourse in the arc.

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation in this study was conducted using three sources of validation to ensure the credibility and consistency of the analysis. First, theoretical triangulation was applied by cross-referencing the findings with key theoretical frameworks: Foucault's concept of productive power (1975), his notion of the panopticon as a mechanism of self-discipline (1977), and his argument on discourse as a system of statements that produces truth (1972). Each identified dimension in the data was verified against these theoretical sources to ensure conceptual alignment. Second, source triangulation was carried out by comparing the dialogue data extracted from Netflix's streaming version of the Sabaody Archipelago Arc with secondary academic sources that discuss the same arc, including existing studies on power representation in anime and Foucauldian discourse analysis in media texts. This cross-referencing strengthened the validity of scene selection and dimensional classification. Third, analyst triangulation was conducted through peer review with the supervising lecturer, Dr. Fabianus Fensi, S.Fil., M.I.Kom., who assessed the consistency between the identified data units and the analytical dimensions applied. Any discrepancies in the classification of dialogue units were discussed and resolved collaboratively to ensure inter-analyst reliability. Through these three forms of triangulation, this study maintains methodological rigor and ensures that the findings accurately represent the power relation discourse present in the selected scenes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

This study identified five selected scenes from Episodes 391 and 396 of the One Piece Sabaody Archipelago Arc as the primary data units. The selection was conducted through a two-stage data reduction process: first, from a total of 21 episodes in the arc, Episodes 391 and 396 were selected based on the explicit presence of power relation discourse through character

dialogue; second, five scenes were identified from these two episodes based on the presence of verbal utterances demonstrating the five analytical dimensions of the Foucault framework used in this study.

The findings reveal that power relations in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc are constructed and maintained through discourse embedded in character dialogue, particularly through the utterances of the Tenryuubito as the dominant group. The analysis confirms that power relations are not constructed through a single mechanism, but through five overlapping dimensions working synergistically. First, power relations in the statement are evidenced in Hatchan's narration to Luffy explaining the genealogical legitimacy of Celestial Dragons' authority — an utterance that reproduces established truth without question (Scene 1). Second, language as tools of power is demonstrated in Saint Roswald's instruction to Saint Charlos on how to exercise dominance, transferring the system of power across generations through language alone, without physical coercion (Scene 2). Third, normalization regulation of social relations is evidenced in the collective discriminatory utterances of the auction house spectators in Scene 4, delivered with full confidence and without shame — indicating that racial discrimination has become a social norm regulating interaction in Sabaody. Fourth, the panopticon mechanism in the statement operates through the crowd's collective cry of "don't look them in the eyes!" in Scene 1, coming not from the Celestial Dragons themselves but from fellow ordinary citizens who have internalized the surveillance mechanism and now enforce it upon one another. Fifth, marginalized subjects is demonstrated most powerfully in Scene 5, where Hatchan — who has just been shot — actively restrains Luffy from retaliating, using language to defend the system that has just harmed him.

The study further identifies that power relations in the arc are constructed through three dialogic mechanisms working simultaneously. The first is explanatory dialogue, which functions to explain and legitimize existing power structures — as seen in Hatchan's explanation to Luffy about why no one is permitted to resist the Celestial Dragons. The second is performative dialogue, in which the act of speaking simultaneously enacts power — as seen in Saint Shalria's and Saint Charlos's unilateral decisions over others' lives without requiring any justification. The third is internalization dialogue, which reveals how the dominated party accepts and reproduces the logic of power against itself — most starkly demonstrated when Hatchan prevents Luffy from retaliating even after being shot. These three mechanisms operate in layers and mutually reinforce one another, making power relations in both episodes appear as something natural and unworthy of question (Asari & Febrianty, 2025).

Based on the analysis of the five selected scenes, this study concludes that power relations in the Sabaody Archipelago Arc are represented explicitly, systematically, and in layers through two simultaneous channels: verbal dialogue between characters and visual imagery that mutually reinforce one another. Power relations in both episodes are not represented as individual conflicts alone, but as a deeply rooted social structure accepted as natural by nearly all parties involved — both by the dominant group and by those who are dominated. The discourse surrounding Celestial Dragons as a group that must not be touched, the treatment of slaves as tradeable commodities, and the portrayal of fish-men as an inferior race are all actively produced and reproduced through dialogue and narration across both episodes (Asari & Febrianty, 2025).

Overall, this study concludes that the One Piece Sabaody Archipelago Arc Episodes 391 and 396 constitute a media text that actively represents how power operates in society through systematically constructed narrative. Power in this arc does not operate solely through visible physical violence, but also through discourse, norms, and processes of internalization that make social inequality appear natural and self-evident. Scene 5 is particularly significant in this regard: Hatchan — who has just been shot — actively uses language to prevent retaliation, defending the very system that has harmed him. This demonstrates that the most

effective power is not that which coerces from outside, but that which has become part of how the subject understands and articulates his own world. This is what makes the study of anime texts like this one academically and socially relevant, particularly in the context of Indonesian society that consumes anime in very large numbers (Poorghorban, 2023).

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