

A Critical Discourse Analysis: Harvey Specter's Power and Authority in the TV Series *Suits* Season 1

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how power and authority are linguistically constructed in the television series *Suits*, focusing on the character of Harvey Specter in Season 1. The study aims to identify linguistic strategies used to establish professional authority within a legal workplace setting. The data consist of selected spoken dialogues depicting professional interactions between Harvey Specter and other characters in the law firm. Employing a qualitative approach, the research applies Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, supported by theories of workplace discourse by Holmes and Stubbe and Weber's concept of legal-rational authority. Data were collected through observation and transcription of relevant scenes and analyzed by identifying utterances that reflect power relations. The findings reveal that Harvey's authority is constructed through strong modality, material processes, and direct commands that position him as the primary decision-maker. "You're not a lawyer until I say you are" demonstrates the use of high modalities that place Harvey as a determinant of professional identity, while imperatives such as "Now get to work" function as direct commands with no negotiation space, which linguistically reinforces asymmetrical power relations. Additionally, his control over conversational flow and task distribution reinforces hierarchical relations, while expectations of autonomy reflect merit-based professional values. The study concludes that spoken discourse in television series can effectively represent institutional power dynamics similar to those found in real professional environments.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Power; Authority; Workplace Discourse

INTRODUCTION

Language is more than a vehicle for communication it is a social practice deeply intertwined with structures of power, ideology, and identity. As cited from (Martika Dwi et al., 2022), language is not merely a means of communication it inherently carries ideology and functions as an instrument of power that can even serve as a tool of oppression. Through language, individuals establish dominance, negotiate authority, and sustain social hierarchies. Furthermore, language holds significant importance for individuals, groups, and states, as it enables them to exert influence, reinforce authority, and perpetuate power relations within society (Ananda &

Kuncara, 2023). (Fairclough, 1995), similarly argues that discourse both reflects and constructs social reality, meaning that linguistic choices are never neutral but ideologically charged. In professional and institutional contexts, these linguistic choices become instruments for maintaining control, shaping identity, and legitimizing authority. Therefore, the study of language and power is fundamental to understanding how communication functions within hierarchical structures.

Despite extensive applications of Critical Discourse Analysis across various audiovisual media, a significant research gap exists in examining professional workplace interactions within English-language television series. Previous studies have predominantly focused on political contexts, social inequality issues, or historical class discrimination, yet few have explored how power and authority are linguistically constructed in contemporary legal office settings through daily verbal interactions. This study addresses this gap by analyzing professional spoken discourse in *Suits*, specifically through Harvey Specter's character, to reveal linguistic strategies employed in establishing and maintaining authority within merit-based and institutionally hierarchical work environments.

The use of language as manifestation of power and authority must be occurred in real life phenomenon, especially in the world of legal law. Where discourse functions not merely to communicate but to exercise power and control. The phenomenon can be found in the YouTube video, titled "Don't Insult the Court" from the YouTube channel Caught in Providence. Featuring Frank Caprio as the judge and the Defendant named David Norton who repeatedly violated regulations and failed to fulfill his prior payment commitments. This is where judge Frank show his power and authority as the judge, as can be seen from the conversation below: Judge Caprio: "I'm going to tell you something, Mr. Norton. If you don't pay and you ever come back again, I'll waive nothing. I'm going to put all the penalties back on,"

As seen from the conversation above, Through Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, the courtroom interaction between Judge Caprio and the defendant reveals how language constructs and maintains both power and authority. At the textual level, Judge Caprio's power and authority are constructed through modality and clause structure. The repeated use of the phrase "I'm going to" expresses certainty and commitment, indicating that the judge's statements are not suggestions but binding decisions. This reflects what (Fairclough, 2001) identifies as high modality, which often signals power asymmetry in institutional discourse. The pronoun "I" positions the judge as the sole decision-maker, reinforcing his institutional identity as the representative of the court. Furthermore, the clause "I'll waive nothing" contains strong lexical choice and absolute negation, leaving no room for negotiation.

At the discursive level, this interaction illustrates how power is enacted and maintained within judicial discourse. As stated by (Dewangga et al., 2025), discursive practice examines how speech is produced, interpreted, and shaped through intertextuality and shared knowledge. By stating "If you don't pay and you

ever come back again,” Judge Caprio sets the condition of the interaction and frames the defendant’s future behavior as something under judicial control. He then continues with “I’ll waive nothing,” which functions as a decisive closure that leaves no room for negotiation or response. The follow-up statement “I’m going to put all the penalties back on” further reinforces this authority by explicitly determining the consequences. Through these utterances, Judge Caprio dominates the exchange by initiating the warning, defining its meaning, and concluding the interaction unilaterally. The judge’s directive functions not merely as instruction but as a performative act that reinforces institutional norms, illustrating how power is exercised through control of topics and turn-taking (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015).

At the social practice level, in this interaction, hierarchy is manifested through Judge Caprio’s unilateral control over legal consequences. By stating “I’ll waive nothing,” the judge establishes himself as the authority who determines leniency and punishment, reinforcing his superior position over the defendant. This hierarchy is further emphasized when he follows with “I’m going to put all the penalties back on,” signaling that compliance or non-compliance directly affects the outcome decided by the court. The defendant’s role is limited to obedience, as there is no space for negotiation or justification once the judge’s decision is stated. These utterances reflect the institutional structure of the judicial system, where authority is centralized and legitimized through formal position. Through this discourse, Judge Caprio linguistically enforces a system in which hierarchical authority grants the power to impose sanctions, demonstrating how legal authority is maintained and recognized within the broader social order.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be applied to spoken conversations in television series. They can serve as valid objects for applying Fairclough’s CDA framework. Critical Discourse Analysis goes beyond examining texts it also systematically explores the relationships between various elements within social processes (Dhiyah & Basid, 2025). There are several journal articles that have conducted research related to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in films. Each study contributes to understanding how discourse, ideology, and power relations are represented through cinematic language.

The first journal is written by (Wulansari & Mazid, 2024), the study aims to reveal the ideology embedded in the *Dirty Vote* documentary film through a transitivity perspective within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. It employs Fairclough’s CDA model to uncover the ideological assumptions expressed in the film’s discourse. The data were collected from the utterances of Zainal Arifin Mochtar (ZAM), one of the constitutional law experts featured in the film, and analyzed using Fairclough’s three-dimensional model: description, interpretation, and explanation. The study found that the opening of the film predominantly employs relational attributive, material, and behavioral processes, while the main content includes material, relational attributive, relational identifying, behavioral, verbal, mental, and existential processes. These transitivity patterns collectively represent the general election and construct the film’s ideological stance.

The next journal is researched by (Dzarna & Oktarini, 2023), this study aims to reveal the practice of power and hegemony reflected in Madurese short films, particularly in the relationship between the government and society. It emphasizes that language plays a central role in constructing and maintaining political power, thus requiring critical awareness among the public. The data were collected from Madurese short films on YouTube and analyzed using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) three-dimensional model description, interpretation, and explanation. The findings indicate that hegemony is realized through various linguistic features, including lexical processes, metaphors, declarative sentence modes, relational modalities, and personal pronouns. These linguistic choices demonstrate how the authorities use language to persuade, control, and reinforce dominance over society. The study concludes that Madurese short films serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium to sustain power and instill ideological values.

The other journal is constructed by (Aprilia et al., 2023), this study aims to describe the linguistic aspects of discourse surrounding social phenomena in the film Turah, focusing on the issue of modern social inequality from a critical discourse perspective. Using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research examines how the film represents "irregularities" in social structures through its dialogues and narrative practices. The analysis centers on subjects, objects, and social issues that reveal the persistence of inequality in society. The findings show that Turah reflects the phenomenon of social inequality through both its linguistic expressions and depictions of real-world social practices. Moreover, the film indirectly criticizes social interactions across different social strata, suggesting that collaboration and mutual understanding are essential to fostering balance and equality within the community.

The other study conducted by (Ardiani & Sulaiman, 2023), this study aims to examine the discourse surrounding child marriage practices as depicted in the film Yuni using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, which includes text, discursive practice, and social practice. Fairclough's model highlights the dialectical relationship between social context (macro) and language (micro), integrating linguistic and sociological perspectives to uncover deeper meanings in discourse. The data were collected through scene analysis, screenshot documentation of dialogues containing child marriage discourse, and library research. The findings reveal nine key scenes that illustrate various issues related to child marriage, including the persistent belief that women's education is unimportant, the lack of public awareness about Law No. 16 of 2019, the unpreparedness of children for marriage in terms of physical and psychological maturity, the influence of environment and poverty in perpetuating early marriage, and the limited role of schools in addressing the problem. The study concludes that Yuni reflects social realities and ideologies surrounding gender, education, and cultural norms that sustain child marriage practices.

The last journal is provided by (Surahman et al., 2023). This study aims to examine the linguistic representation of social phenomena in the post–World War I and II context through the audio-visual medium of the film *Peaky Blinders*, focusing on the emergence of discriminatory discourse toward lower-class groups such as ex-soldier workers. Using a critical paradigm as its analytical perspective, the research explores how social inequality manifests through language and representation in the film. The findings reveal that social hegemony and power relations emerge when the working-class population internalizes and imitates the lifestyle, mindset, and values of the dominant elite. This process leads to various forms of discrimination particularly related to profession, social position, clothing, and manners demonstrating how ideological domination operates through cultural and linguistic practices in the cinematic portrayal of class relations.

From the previous studies explained before, several similarities and differences can be identified between those studies and this research. The similarity lies in the use of the same analytical framework Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposed by Norman Fairclough which serves as the theoretical foundation for examining how language reflects and reproduces social power, ideology, and inequality. All five previous studies, similar to this one, apply CDA to uncover hidden meanings within dialogues and analyze the relationship between language and social context. However, the difference can be found in the data source and focus of analysis. The previous studies such as *Dirty Vote* and *Madurese Short Films* analyze Indonesian political and cultural contexts, focusing on hegemony, ideology, and power relations within documentary and local short films. Meanwhile, *Turah* and *Yuni* focus on social inequality and child marriage, emphasizing CDA's role in revealing moral and societal values reflected in Indonesian society. The study on *Peaky Blinders* examines post-war class discrimination and the reproduction of elite dominance over the working class.

This study is significant because it explores how language functions as a medium for constructing and maintaining power and authority within professional settings, particularly through the character of Harvey Specter in the TV series *Suits*. *Suits* is an American legal drama created by Aaron Korsh, first aired in 2011 on the USA Network. Set in a prestigious New York law firm, the series centers on Harvey Specter, a confident and assertive lawyer whose language often embodies dominance, control, and professional hierarchy. Through his interactions with colleagues and subordinates, the series provides a rich portrayal of workplace communication and institutional power relations.

This research extends the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) from written texts to spoken interactions in audiovisual media, demonstrating how fictional dialogues can reflect real-world organizational dynamics. By integrating Fairclough's CDA framework, Weber's concept of legal-rational authority, and Holmes and Stubbe's theory of workplace discourse, the study provides both linguistic and sociological insights into how discourse operates as a tool for asserting and legitimizing authority. Therefore, the central research question

guiding this study is: How are power and authority linguistically constructed in the dialogues of Harvey Specter in the TV series *Suits*? The findings are expected to help readers understand how language serves as an instrument of persuasion, dominance, and legitimacy within professional discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which conceptualizes language as a form of social practice that both reflects and shapes power relations in society. Building on this foundation, the research also connected to Holmes and Stubbe's theory of workplace discourse to explore how power is linguistically enacted, negotiated, and maintained within professional interactions. Furthermore, Weber's concept of legal-rational authority is applied to explain how institutional legitimacy and hierarchical structures underpin the exercise and acceptance of authority within organizational contexts.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a systematic analysis that examines the relationship between discourse and the objects, elements, and events it relates to, as well as the internal connections within the discourse itself (Febriyanti & Sundar, 2022). Fairclough's three-dimensional model textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice serve as the main analytical framework.

1. Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is the first dimension in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. At this level, the text is analyzed linguistically by examining vocabulary, semantics, and syntax. This stage focuses on how the structure of language such as word choice, meaning, and sentence form creates cohesion and coherence within the text. It is also called the description stage, where the analysis identifies how grammar and diction are used to construct meaning in discourse (Dewi et al., 2021).

2. Discursive Practice

Within the discursive practice dimension, the analysis focuses on how speech constructs meaning through patterns of language use and interaction. It also explores how these linguistic constructions influence and shape the audience's understanding, interpretation, and attitudes toward the reform process, reflecting the role of discourse in mediating between text and social context (Febriansyah et al., 2024).

3. Social Practice

This dimension views language as a social activity that both shapes and is shaped by the context in which it occurs. As stated by (Adebiyi, 2025), discourse is a form of language use conceived as a social practice, reflecting how media discourse operates through the actions and interactions of individuals, groups, and institutions.

Power

In discourse studies, power is understood as the capacity of individuals or institutions to influence and control others through language. According to (Fairclough, 1995), language is not a neutral medium of communication but a social practice through which power relations are constructed, maintained, and legitimized. Power in discourse emerges when certain speakers often those with institutional or social authority control topics, impose meanings, or restrict responses. (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) argue that in workplace settings, power is enacted through linguistic and pragmatic strategies that index hierarchy, such as directive speech acts, interruptions, and topic control. Thus, power is not only embedded in structures but continuously reproduced through everyday interactions and professional discourse.

Rational Legal Authority

According to (Weber, 1978) theory of authority, rational-legal authority is the form of legitimate power grounded in formal rules, laws, and institutional structures rather than personal traits or traditions. It derives its legitimacy from a system of established regulations that define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making procedures within an organization. In this type of authority, obedience is owed not to an individual but to the impersonal order of the institution itself. As discussed in (Ali, 2023), rational-legal authority dominates modern bureaucratic systems, where power is exercised through clearly defined positions and standardized procedures. In the context of this study, Harvey Specter's authority exemplifies this form his linguistic control and decisiveness stem from his institutional status and adherence to legal norms rather than personal coercion, reflecting Weber's conception of bureaucratic legitimacy and institutionalized power.

Based on the theoretical review above, while Fairclough's CDA framework, Holmes and Stubbe's workplace discourse theory, and Weber's legal-rational authority concept have been widely applied across various contexts, their application to professional television series depicting modern legal office dynamics remains limited. Previous research has primarily analysed political contexts, local social issues, or historical films, but none has specifically explored the linguistic construction of power and authority in everyday verbal interactions within merit-based and institutionally hierarchical legal work environments. Therefore, this study fills this void by integrating these three theoretical frameworks to analyze how Harvey Specter in *Suits* employs linguistic strategies to construct, maintain, and legitimize his authority in professional contexts, thereby contributing new insights into understanding the relationship between language, power, and organizational structure in contemporary audiovisual media.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the manifestation of power and authority in spoken discourse. The primary data source consisted of dialogues from the television series *Suits* Season 1, specifically focusing on interactions involving Harvey Specter. Purposive sampling was applied to select scenes that explicitly demonstrate the use of power and authority. The sample criteria included: (a) dialogues where Harvey exercises decision-making authority, (b) interactions reflecting hierarchical relationships, and (c) utterances containing clear linguistic markers of dominance. A total of 15 data excerpts were identified based on their relevance to the research objectives.

Instrument and Procedure

Following (Sudaryanto, 2015) observational approach, the researcher served as the primary instrument. The data collection procedure involved: (a) watching and documenting relevant scenes from *Suits* Season 1, (b) transcribing selected dialogues verbatim while maintaining contextual accuracy, and (c) organizing transcripts chronologically and categorizing them according to interaction types. This systematic procedure ensured comprehensive coverage of communicative contexts where power dynamics were manifested.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed Fairclough's three-dimensional framework integrated with (Creswell & Poth, 2014) methodological stages. The analytical steps consisted of: Step 1 - repeated reading of transcripts to familiarize with content and patterns; Step 2 - textual analysis identifying modality, transitivity, sentence types, and pronoun usage; Step 3 - discursive practice analysis examining turn-taking, topic control, and speech acts; Step 4 - social practice analysis connecting linguistic findings to institutional hierarchy and meritocracy using Weber's and Holmes & Stubbe's frameworks; Step 5 - synthesis and validation through cross-checking across data excerpts. This procedure enhances transparency and replicability of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study specifically identified Harvey Specter's conversations that demonstrate power and authority through discourse. A total of 15 data excerpts were selected and analysed using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, consisting of textual practice, discursive practice, and social practice. The analysis further integrates (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) theory of power in workplace discourse and (Weber, 1978) concept of legal-rational authority to explain how language functions as a tool for enacting and legitimizing institutional power within professional interactions.

Textual Practice

Textual analysis is the first dimension in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis. At this level, the text is analysed linguistically by examining vocabulary, semantics, and syntax. (Fairclough, 1995), modality and transitivity are key linguistic elements through which power relations are established and reinforced. Through these linguistic mechanisms, speakers construct authority, assert dominance, and shape the interpretation of meaning in discourse.

Data 1

Harvey Specter: *"Let's get one thing straight. You're not a lawyer until I say you are. You're nothing until I make you something."*

Mike Ross: *"I understand."*

Harvey Specter: *"No, you don't. You think this is about intelligence. This is about power. I have it, and you don't. Now get to work."*

(Fairclough, 2001), *modality* and *transitivity* are key linguistic mechanisms through which power is encoded in discourse. In this dialogue, the negative structural phrases *"You're not"* and *"You're nothing"* position Harvey as the agent of authority, constructing Mike's professional identity as dependent on his approval. The declarative structure asserts factual dominance, while the imperative *"Now get to work"* functions as a direct command that leaves no room for negotiation, reflecting what Fairclough identifies as high *modality* signaling asymmetrical power relations. Additionally, Harvey's use of the pronouns *"I"* and *"you"* reinforces the hierarchical distinction and social distance between the speakers, demonstrating how grammatical choices reproduce institutional power as theorized by Fairclough.

Data 2

Louis: *"Harvey, you can't just ignore protocol."*

Harvey: *"I'm not ignoring it, Louis. I'm just not letting it get in my way."*

(Fairclough, 2001), *modality* functions as a key resource for constructing authority by expressing degrees of certainty and obligation. In this dialogue, Harvey's statement *"I'm not ignoring it..."* shows the *modality* through the negative phrase *"I'm not..."* indicating Harvey's full control over the action and framing the decision as intentional rather than restricted by protocol. The *transitivity* pattern in *"letting it get in my way"* positions Harvey as the Actor with complete agency over whether institutional rules become obstacles, reflecting what Fairclough identifies as *material processes* that encode power relations through verb choice. Meanwhile, Louis's statement *"you can't just ignore protocol"* contains the modal *"can't"* a *modality* that attempts to impose obligation and restrict Harvey's choices. Through these contrasting linguistic choices, *modality* and *transitivity* work jointly to establish hierarchical positioning, demonstrating how grammatical structures reproduce institutional dominance as theorized by Fairclough.

Data 3

Harvey: "You're gonna go down there, you're gonna fix this, and you're not coming back until you do."

Mike: "But I don't even know what I'm supposed to say"

Harvey: "Figure it out. That's what I hired you for."

(Fairclough, 1995) argues that high-obligation *modality* and directive speech acts are central mechanisms through which institutional power is linguistically encoded. In this dialogue, Harvey's power is shown through strong *modality* and clear control of action. When he says "You're gonna go down there" and "You're gonna fix this," the use of "gonna" expresses high obligation, exemplifying what Fairclough describes as categorical *modality* that positions the speaker as having unquestionable authority. Harvey intensifies this directive force through the command "You're not coming back until you do," which controls Mike's mobility and autonomy. The imperative "Figure it out" functions as a direct order eliminating any possibility for negotiation. Through *transitivity*, Harvey assigns Mike the Actor role in *material processes* ("go," "fix," "come back") while retaining authority to define what actions are required, demonstrating how syntactic choices reproduce power asymmetry. The statement "That's what I hired you for" positions Harvey as possessing institutional authority through his capacity to hire and assign work, reflecting Fairclough's observation that professional discourse naturalizes hierarchical relations through everyday linguistic practices.

Data 4

Harvey: "I don't need you to think. I need you to do what I tell you."

Mike: "That's not how I work."

Harvey: "Then you're not going to work for me."

(Fairclough, 1995) emphasizes that negative *modality* and *material processes* are essential linguistic tools for denying agency and asserting control. At the textual level, Harvey's authority is shown through strong *modality* and *material processes*. The clause "I don't need you to think" uses negative *modality* to deny Mike's autonomy, explicitly denying Mike's cognitive autonomy, while "I need you to do what I tell you" expresses high obligation, demonstrating what Fairclough identifies as categorical commands that eliminate subordinate discretion. The *material process* "do" positions Mike as the Actor who must perform actions entirely defined by Harvey's directives. The conditional statement "Then you're not going to work for me" uses future certainty to signal finality and power, showing that Harvey controls Mike's employment status through language a pattern Fairclough describes as characteristic of asymmetrical institutional discourse where employment status is controlled through language.

Data 5

Harvey: "I don't want excuses. I want results."

Mike: "I'm doing everything I can"

Harvey: "Then do more."

(Fairclough, 1995), declarative clauses expressing wants and imperatives represent the strongest forms of linguistic authority in institutional settings. Textually, Harvey's power is constructed through *modality* and *material transitivity*. The declarative clauses "*I don't want excuses*" and "*I want results*" show certainty and control, indicating that Harvey sets the standards of evaluation. The verb "*want*" functions not as personal desire but as a modal expression of institutional authority, reflecting what Fairclough describes as the transformation of subjective preferences into objective requirements through discourse. The imperative "*Then do more*" represents the strongest form of *modality*, completely eliminating negotiation space. Through *transitivity*, Mike is positioned as the Actor responsible for achieving "results," while Harvey controls what counts as acceptable performance, demonstrating how grammatical participant roles linguistically reproduce workplace power hierarchies as theorized by Fairclough.

Discursive Practice

Within the *discursive practice* dimension, the analysis focuses on how speech constructs meaning through patterns of language use and interaction. (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) explain, power in professional settings often manifests through control of conversational flow, topic management, and decision-making authority. This aligns with (Fairclough, 1995) notion of the reproduction of power through everyday discourse practices, in which institutional hierarchies are maintained linguistically.

Data 1

Harvey Specter: "*Let's get one thing straight. You're not a lawyer until I say you are. You're nothing until I make you something.*"

Mike Ross: "*I understand.*"

Harvey Specter: "*No, you don't. You think this is about intelligence. This is about power. I have it, and you don't. Now get to work.*"

(Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) argue, power in workplace settings is enacted through control of conversational flow, topic management, and asymmetrical participation rights. At the *discursive* level, this interaction illustrates how power is enacted and negotiated within workplace discourse. By saying "*No, you don't. You think this is about intelligence. This is about power. I have it, and you don't,*" Harvey dominates the exchange by initiating, concluding, and determining the meaning of the conversation, leaving Mike with minimal space for response. This pattern exemplifies what Holmes & Stubbe describe as superior control over turn-taking and topic definition in hierarchical professional contexts. His discourse constructs a superior-subordinate dynamic typical of organizational hierarchies, where the authority figure dictates both professional roles and acceptable behavior. The speech act "*You're nothing until I make you something*" not only instructs but also socializes the subordinate into institutional norms, demonstrating how workplace discourse functions as both directive and ideological practice, as theorized by Holmes & Stubbe.

Data 2

Louis: *"Harvey, you can't just ignore protocol."*

Harvey: *"I'm not ignoring it, Louis. I'm just not letting it get in my way."*

(Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) demonstrate that interactional dominance is established when speakers reject attempts at correction and reframe issues according to their own priorities. From the conversation, it can be seen that through the utterance *"I'm not ignoring it... I'm just not letting it get in my way,"* Harvey demonstrates clear interactional dominance and control of conversational flow. His response rejects Louis's attempt to impose correction and immediately reframes the situation according to his own priorities, signalling his authority in decision-making. When Louis asserts a constraint with *"you can't ignore protocol,"* he appeals to institutional norms; however, Harvey neutralizes this by redefining the issue, shifting procedural authority to himself. This move effectively closes Louis's attempt to regulate his behavior and reinforces Harvey's superior position within the firm's hierarchy, illustrating what Holmes & Stubbe identify as asymmetrical participation rights characteristic of institutional discourse where higher-status speakers control both topics and outcomes.

Data 3

Harvey: *"You're gonna go down there, you're gonna fix this, and you're not coming back until you do."*

Mike: *"But I don't even know what I'm supposed to say"*

Harvey: *"Figure it out. That's what I hired you for."*

Power and Politeness in the Workplace: A Sociolinguistic Analysis (2nd ed.), interruption and topic control are key strategies through which superiors maintain authority and limit subordinate participation. Harvey shows his power by controlling the flow of conversation, managing the topic, and making decisions without negotiation. When Mike attempts to express uncertainty with *"But I don't even know what I'm supposed to say"* Harvey interrupts him with *"Figure it out. That's what I hired you for."* This interruption exemplifies what Holmes & Stubbe describe as dominance through turn-taking control, where a superior restricts subordinate speaking rights to maintain authority. Harvey also manages the topic by directing Mike to the task through *"You're gonna go..."* and *"you're gonna fix this."* His statement *"You're not coming back until you do"* further demonstrates decision-making authority, showing that Harvey alone determines what must be done and when it must be completed a pattern Holmes & Stubbe identify as characteristic of hierarchical workplace discourse where power is exercised through unilateral control over task definition and outcomes.

Data 4

Harvey: *"I don't need you to think. I need you to do what I tell you."*

Mike: *"That's not how I work."*

Harvey: *"Then you're not going to work for me."*

Holmes & Stubbe (2015) observe that power is manifested when superiors close interactions unilaterally, preventing negotiation and limiting subordinate agency. From the conversation above, Harvey shows his power by controlling the flow of conversation and making decisions without negotiation. When Mike responds with *"That's not how I work,"* Harvey does not engage with Mike's perspective or allow further discussion. Instead, he immediately closes the interaction with *"Then you're not going to work for me."* This response demonstrates what Holmes & Stubbe describe as conversational dominance, where a superior controls the outcome by limiting the subordinate's turn-taking and eliminating opportunities for dialogue. Harvey also manages the topic by shifting it from a discussion about working style to a decision about employment status. Through this move, Harvey reinforces his authority by showing that he alone determines acceptable behavior within the firm and that disagreement is not open for negotiation exemplifying the asymmetrical discourse patterns Holmes & Stubbe identify in hierarchical professional settings.

Data 5

Harvey: "I don't want excuses. I want results."

Mike: "I'm doing everything I can"

Harvey: "Then do more."

(Holmes & Stubbe, 2015) emphasize that rejecting explanations and redirecting conversation toward performance expectations are key discursive strategies for maintaining workplace authority. Harvey shows his power by controlling the conversational flow and rejecting any attempt at explanation. When Mike begins to justify his effort with *"I'm doing everything I can,"* Harvey interrupts him with *"Then do more."* This interruption demonstrates dominance through restricting the subordinate's opportunity to speak, a pattern Holmes & Stubbe identify as characteristic of hierarchical workplace interaction. Harvey also manages the topic by dismissing explanations through *"I don't want excuses"* and redirecting the conversation toward performance expectations with *"I want results."* His final statement *"Then do more"* demonstrates what Holmes & Stubbe describe as decision-making authority, where superiors alone define what counts as sufficient effort and acceptable performance within the professional hierarchy.

Social Practice

This dimension views language as a social activity that both shapes and is shaped by the context in which it occurs. It aligns with (Weber, 1978) concept of *legal-rational authority*, where legitimacy derives from formal rules, institutional hierarchy, and professional expertise. (Fairclough, 1995) posits, discourse is both socially shaped and socially shaping—Harvey's language reproduces the ideology of meritocracy and hierarchy that defines the legal profession.

Data 1

Harvey Specter: *"Let's get one thing straight. You're not a lawyer until I say you are. You're nothing until I make you something."*

Mike Ross: *"I understand."*

Harvey Specter: *"No, you don't. You think this is about intelligence. This is about power. I have it, and you don't. Now get to work."*

(Weber, 1978) concept of *legal-rational authority* explains how legitimacy derives from formal institutional positions and adherence to organizational rules rather than personal characteristics. From the conversation above, Harvey's language reproduces the ideology of meritocracy and hierarchy that defines the legal profession. Through the statement *"This is about power. I have it, and you don't,"* Harvey reinforces the belief that authority is earned through position, skill, and success, exemplifying Weber's notion of institutionalized authority where power is exercised through clearly defined hierarchical positions. Through the commands *"No, you don't..."* and *"Now get to work,"* Harvey linguistically performs authority through direct command and evaluative judgment, reinforcing the normative power relations between senior and associate. This demonstrates how discourse operates as both a communicative and ideological mechanism for maintaining institutional order, reflecting Weber's conception of *legal-rational authority* where obedience is owed to the office and its formal rules rather than to the individual occupying it.

Data 2

Louis: "Harvey, you can't just ignore protocol."

Harvey: "I'm not ignoring it, Louis. I'm just not letting it get in my way."

(Weber, 1978), *legal-rational authority* is characterized by hierarchical positions that grant differential decision-making power based on formal rank within the organization. In this interaction, Harvey demonstrates meritocracy and hierarchical authority as a senior partner. By stating *"I'm not ignoring it..."* he linguistically asserts his institutional power to interpret and apply protocols selectively based on his senior position. Furthermore, through *"I'm just not letting it get in my way,"* Harvey positions himself above Louis in terms of decision-making authority, signaling that procedural boundaries constrain junior partners but not senior ones a manifestation of Weber's hierarchical authority structure. Through this statement, Harvey linguistically asserts his higher rank and demonstrates his power to redefine what is necessary, exemplifying Weber's concept of *legal-rational authority* where power is exercised through clearly defined positions and where higher-status individuals possess greater institutional discretion in applying organizational rules.

Data 3

Harvey: *"You're gonna go down there, you're gonna fix this, and you're not coming back until you do."*

Mike: *"But I don't even know what I'm supposed to say"*

Harvey: *"Figure it out. That's what I hired you for."*

(Weber, 1978) theorizes that *legal-rational authority* operates through formal hierarchical structures where superiors possess institutional rights to direct, evaluate, and control subordinates' work. In this interaction, hierarchy is clearly

reflected through Harvey's direct and non-negotiable commands. When he says "You're gonna go down there..." and "You're not coming back until you do," Harvey positions himself as the authority figure, demonstrating Weber's concept of hierarchical authority where superiors exercise legitimate power through their formal positions. This hierarchy becomes even more explicit in the line "That's what I hired you for," where Harvey reminds Mike that he possesses the institutional authority to hire, evaluate, and direct, while Mike occupies a subordinate role expected to follow instructions. At the same time, meritocracy appears through Harvey's expectation that Mike should solve the problem independently. His command "Figure it out" indicates that Mike's value in the firm depends on demonstrated competence, reflecting the merit-based principles that coexist with hierarchical authority in Weber's bureaucratic model, where continued employment and advancement depend on meeting performance standards established by superiors.

Data 4

Harvey: "I don't need you to think. I need you to do what I tell you."

Mike: "That's not how I work."

Harvey: "Then you're not going to work for me."

(Weber, 1978) theory posits that *legal-rational authority* grants institutional actors the legitimate power to determine membership and enforce compliance within organizations. In this interaction, hierarchy is clearly reflected through Harvey's direct and non-negotiable control over employment decisions. When he states "I need you to do what I tell you," Harvey positions himself as the authority figure who determines acceptable conduct within the firm, exemplifying Weber's concept of hierarchical authority where superiors exercise legitimate control over subordinates' behaviour through their formal positions. This hierarchy becomes explicit in "Then you're not going to work for me," where Harvey asserts his institutional right to decide whether Mike can remain employed. Through this utterance, Harvey exercises what Weber describes as *legal-rational authority* power derived from formal organizational position rather than personal coercion. At the same time, meritocracy appears in Harvey's rejection of Mike's personal working style. By prioritizing compliance and output over individual preference, Harvey reflects a workplace culture in which value is determined by performance and alignment with professional expectations, demonstrating how Weber's bureaucratic model combines hierarchical structure with merit-based evaluation, where continued inclusion depends on meeting institutional standards defined by those in authority.

Data 5

Harvey: "I don't want excuses. I want results."

Mike: "I'm doing everything I can"

Harvey: "Then do more."

(Weber, 1978) argues that *legal-rational authority* is exercised through hierarchical positions that grant superiors the legitimate power to evaluate performance and establish standards for subordinates. In this interaction, hierarchy is manifested through Harvey's unilateral control over performance evaluation. By stating "*I don't want excuses. I want results,*" Harvey establishes himself as the authority who defines success and determines acceptable outcomes, demonstrating Weber's concept of hierarchical authority where evaluation power is concentrated in superior positions. This hierarchy is further emphasized when Harvey interrupts Mike's explanation and concludes with "*Then do more,*" signaling that subordinate effort or justification holds little weight against expectations set by senior authority. Meritocracy is evident in Harvey's focus on results rather than intention or struggle. The demand for measurable outcomes reflects Weber's bureaucratic model where value is assigned based on achievement and effectiveness rather than personal circumstances. Through these utterances, Harvey linguistically enforces a system in which hierarchy grants decision-making power while meritocratic principles govern evaluation, exemplifying Weber's *legal-rational authority* where institutional legitimacy derives from both formal position and performance-based standards.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that power and authority in professional settings are systematically constructed through specific linguistic strategies. Analyzing Harvey Specter's discourse in *Suits* Season 1 through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, supported by Holmes and Stubbe's workplace discourse theory and Weber's *legal-rational authority* concept, reveals how language functions as a primary instrument for establishing and maintaining institutional hierarchies. Harvey's consistent use of high-obligation *modality*, *material processes*, imperatives, and strategic conversational control linguistically positions him as the central decision-maker while subordinating other characters, thereby reproducing the hierarchical structure characteristic of corporate legal environments.

The findings contribute to discourse studies by confirming that fictional workplace interactions in television series can effectively represent real-world power dynamics, making audiovisual media valuable data sources for critical linguistic analysis. Moreover, the study highlights how professional discourse simultaneously enforces organizational hierarchy and promotes merit-based values, demonstrating that language operates as both a communicative medium and an ideological instrument. By integrating linguistic and sociological perspectives, this research advances understanding of how everyday verbal interactions sustain institutional power relations and legitimize authority within contemporary professional contexts. Future research could extend this approach to other professional genres or comparative analyses across different organizational cultures, further enriching the application of Critical Discourse Analysis in understanding workplace communication and power dynamics.

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