



POWER AND PERSUASION: ANALYSING LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES USED IN VILLAINS' MONOLOGUES IN 'MY HERO ACADEMIA'

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Abstract:

This study examines the persuasive language tactics employed by villains in Kohei Horikoshi's manga series My Hero Academia, analyzing how their monologues serve as tools to assert power, shape perception, and challenge heroic ideals. Through a qualitative analysis of selected chapters, the research examines how antagonistic characters utilize language to craft compelling narratives, attract followers, and blur moral boundaries. Building on Kenneth Burke's dramatism theory and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the study reveals how villainous rhetoric works symbolically and ideologically within the manga's socio-political context. Villains' speeches are not just narrative devices, but also discursive acts that reflect broader themes of resistance, identity, and authority. The analysis reveals recurring patterns of emotional appeal, ideological framing, and strategic ambiguity, demonstrating how language serves as a tool of influence and control. Additionally, the study considers how heroes respond to these rhetorical challenges, providing insight into counter-persuasion and the negotiation of values. By connecting fictional discourse with real-world communication theories, this research contributes to our understanding of how manga serves as a cultural artifact that reflects and critiques societal power structures. The findings have implications for literary analysis, media studies, and the craft of storytelling, offering creators and scholars a deeper appreciation of the linguistic intricacies embedded in villainous speech.

Keywords: *Persuasion, Villain rhetoric, Manga discourse, Critical discourse analysis, Dramatism theory, My Hero Academia*

1. Introduction:

Within the ever-changing world of manga, where heroes and villains clash in epic battles of ideology and power, language plays a crucial role. In "My Hero Academia," a popular manga series by Kohei Horikoshi, villains often take center stage, delivering speeches that use persuasive language to influence, threaten, or intimidate the heroes. These villains' speeches can be pivotal moments in the story, shaping the plot and revealing the complex dynamics between heroism and villainy.

The proposed research topic examines a unique aspect of manga discourse by closely analyzing the linguistic techniques employed in villain monologues in "My Hero Academia." This study aims to unravel the complex dynamics of power and persuasion in hero-villain interactions by examining how antagonistic characters employ language in manga. It aims to shed light on the rhetorical strategies and communication methods villains employ to achieve their goals and maintain control over others. As Snyder noted, "My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes, and beliefs..." (1974, p. 30).

1.1. Significance of the Study:

This research holds significant value as it benefits both the field of linguistics and the broader realm of manga and popular culture. By thoroughly analyzing the linguistic strategies used in villains' statements, this study aims to enhance our understanding of how speech can



be used as a tool for persuasion and authority in fictional narratives. As Kagan notes, "The greatest danger lies not in using force or avoiding it, but in failing to grasp the complex relationship between power and persuasion" (2005, p. 57). Linguistic theory can provide further insight into how villains use language to assert and maintain control, create agony, or elicit support from viewers, shedding light on the intricate connection between language, philosophy, and plot development. A study by Franklin J. Boster and Paul Mongeau found that "manipulating fear is not a straightforward task. What seems like a highly effective persuasive message to the researcher may not evoke much fear in the recipient" (1984, p. 375).

Similarly, this research has implications for understanding manga as a cultural artifact and literary form. "My Hero Academia," with its complex characters and intricate plotlines, provides a rich setting for examining how language influences the dynamics between heroes and villains. By examining villains' monologues in the manga, we can uncover underlying themes, motifs, and ideologies within the text, thereby opening up new avenues for scholarly exploration of the socio-cultural significance of manga as a storytelling medium and form of expression.

Moreover, this study's findings could have real-world implications for creators, writers, and fans of manga and other storytelling media. By revealing the persuasive techniques used by villains in "My Hero Academia," the research provides valuable insights into storytelling and character development. This can help creators make informed decisions about narrative structure, dialogue, and character portrayal. For readers and viewers of manga, gaining a deeper understanding of the linguistic strategies used by villains can also enhance their appreciation and critical thinking about the medium. They will be able to recognize and analyze the subtle language use in their favorite stories.

1.2. Justification of the Research:

There is a unique aspect to villains' monologues in manga that has not received much attention. While researchers have examined various aspects of manga and anime, such as themes, characters, and visuals, they have paid less attention to how villains employ language to persuade and how this affects the dynamic between heroes and villains. This study focuses on villains' monologues in "My Hero Academia" to fill that gap and provide a new perspective on the role of language in shaping hero-villain relationships. As Allen and O'Keefe found in their studies, two-sided messages can be more effective at influencing attitudes than one-sided messages, provided they counter opposing arguments (1998, 1999).

Furthermore, this research's relevance extends beyond manga to broader questions about the connection between language and power in today's society. In an era marked by politically charged speech, discourse, and technological persuasion tactics, understanding how language is manipulated and its persuasive power is crucial. By analyzing the villains' monologues in "My Hero Academia" through a linguistic lens, this research offers insight into how language can be used as a tool of manipulation and authority, benefiting those who study communication tactics in both fictional and real-world settings.

Ultimately, the study of linguistic approaches in villain monologues from "My Hero Academia" has significant implications for linguistics, cultural studies, and media analysis. This paper aims to expand the understanding of language, power, and persuasion in fiction by examining the complex nature of villainous dialogue in manga. It also offers practical advice for creators, academics, and fans alike.



1.3. Research Questions:

- i. How do the persuasive techniques used by villains in "My Hero Academia" compare or contrast with established theories of persuasion and language use in literature and other media?
- ii. Does analyzing the linguistic strategies in "My Hero Academia" offer insights into real-world communication tactics used in leadership, marketing, or politics, and can this help bridge the gap between fictional stories and practical applications?
- iii. How do heroes react to villains' persuasive tactics in "My Hero Academia," and what do their responses show about the interplay of resistance and counter-persuasion? What can this teach us about how influence works and how societal values and beliefs evolve?

1.4. Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative content analysis method to examine the persuasive techniques employed in the rhetoric of villains in the "My Hero Academia" manga. The research is divided into three stages: data collection, data analysis, and result interpretation. By building on existing theories of persuasion and discourse analysis, this approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic strategies employed by villains and how heroes respond within the narrative.

1.4.1. Data Collection:

For this study, the primary source of data is the "My Hero Academia" manga series, with a focus on chapters that depict significant interactions between heroes and villains. We will employ a systematic sampling method to select relevant chapters, ensuring they represent a diverse range of story arcs and character dynamics. We will also utilize supplementary materials, such as character profiles, author interviews, and fan discussions, to provide context and enrich the analysis.

1.4.2. Data Analysis:

Our analysis begins with a detailed examination of the chosen manga chapters to identify villainous monologues and hero responses. We examine each instance closely to identify the linguistic techniques used, including rhetorical devices, persuasive appeals, and discourse strategies. We then code and categorize the data based on thematic content and linguistic features, making it possible to compare systematically and identify patterns.

1.4.3. Theory Framework:

The theoretical framework guiding this study encompasses elements from Kenneth Burke's dramatism theory and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA).

Kenneth Burke's dramatism theory provides a thorough framework for understanding human communication and symbolic action. According to Burke, language serves as a form of symbolic action, where individuals use words and symbols to create meaning, negotiate their identity, and persuade others. Specifically, Hymes highlights the usefulness of Burke's dramatism and dramatistic pentad for ethnographers, and others have recommended that students of ethnography can significantly benefit from studying Burke's work (Glassie, 1982, p. 725). At the heart of Burke's theory is the concept of identification, which suggests that people seek to establish common ground with others by emphasizing shared values, experiences, and goals. As Burke noted in his book 'A Rhetoric of Motives', "You persuade a person only insofar as you can speak their language through speech, gesture, tone, order, image, attitude, and idea, identifying your ways with theirs. Persuasion by flattery is just a special case



of persuasion in general.” (1969, p. 56). Using dramatism as a lens, this study will examine how villains in "My Hero Academia" use persuasive techniques to craft narratives that resonate with their audience and advance their agendas. As Burke explained in 1969, “the distinction between act and scene, as well as their interdependence, is obscured when we are dealing with scene in the sense of the relationships among the various dramatis personae. For the characters, by interacting, could be treated as scenic conditions or 'environment' of one another; and any act could be treated as part of the context that modifies (hence, to a degree, motivates) the subsequent acts.” (p. 07) Burke's emphasis on the symbolic nature of language and the role of rhetoric in shaping social reality will offer valuable insights into the persuasive strategies used by villains within the manga narrative.

Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers a critical examination of how language is used and how power dynamics unfold in social contexts. Fairclough's approach focuses on the connection between language, ideology, and social structures, seeing discourse as a site where dominant ideologies are both reflected and reinforced. As Blommaert and Bulcaen noted, “CDA clearly views discourse as a social phenomenon and aims to strengthen the social-theoretical foundations for analyzing discourse and situating it in society” (2000, p. 451). By applying CDA, this study will examine the ideological aspects of hero-villain dynamics in "My Hero Academia," analyzing how linguistic strategies are employed to legitimize or challenge existing power relationships. Fairclough's emphasis on uncovering hidden meanings and implicit power dynamics within discourse aligns with the study's goal of analyzing the underlying ideologies embedded in the rhetoric of villains and the responses of heroes. By adopting Fairclough's critical perspective, the research seeks to explore the socio-political implications of language use in manga narratives and their relevance to broader societal issues.

2. Literature Review:

Persuasion is a crucial aspect of communication, playing a key role in both everyday interactions and fictional storytelling. In manga, where words and images combine, characters use persuasive tactics to further their goals, shape the narrative, and connect with readers. As Fairclough notes, “persuasion is a significant speech function, but it operates in a largely covert way that requires readers to do much inferential work” (2010, p. 142). Research on literature and discourse emphasizes the importance of rhetoric, symbolism, and character dynamics in persuasive communication, influencing how stories are interpreted, how readers engage with them, and how they perceive socio-cultural issues.

In the field of manga studies, scholars investigate how rhetorical devices and narrative structures create persuasive effects. As Fairclough (2010) points out, "action relies on consent between participants, and speech functions within it as persuasion” (p. 396). A great example of persuasive storytelling in the superhero genre is "My Hero Academia" by Kohei Horikoshi. The diverse characters in this series use ideological and rhetorical strategies—especially the villains, who employ persuasive language to recruit followers, express grievances, and challenge heroic values. As Litvin explains, “they transform the villain into an almost limitless source of brutality against which no revolutionary hero can prevail” (2007, p. 20). These narratives not only drive conflict but also reflect broader societal debates. Studies on persuasion in fiction also reveal similarities with real-world communication. As Fairclough notes, "For example, how politicians use various discourses of globalization to persuade the public to accept certain policies, sometimes unpleasant ones" (2010, p. 457). Future research could



examine the connections between persuasion, identity construction, and representation in manga. By combining insights from literary studies, communication theory, and cultural analysis, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how manga narratives convey ideology, evoke emotions, and influence socio-cultural discourse.

2.1 Kenneth Burke's Dramatism Theory

Kenneth Burke's dramatism provides a framework for analyzing persuasion in "My Hero Academia." At its core is symbolic action, where communication is inherently dramatic and tied to symbolic representations. As Burke noted, "It is a principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene" (1969, p. 3). By using drama as a metaphor for social reality, Burke argued that language creates interconnected identities, much like characters in a play allow each other to fulfill their roles (1967, p. 330).

The dramastistic pentad enables an analysis of how heroes and villains express their motives, shape perceptions, and engage their audiences. According to Burke, "the dramastistic analysis of motives starts with the subject of verbal action, including thought, speech, and documents" (1969, p. 33). By applying dramatism to the series, we can uncover ideological conflicts, moral dilemmas, and power dynamics, providing a richer analysis of persuasive storytelling in manga.

2.2 Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complements dramatism by examining how language reflects and reinforces power dynamics. CDA sees discourse as both a means of communication and a site of ideological influence. As Wodak notes, "CDA is interested in how linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power" (2001, p. 9). In "My Hero Academia," CDA helps reveal hidden agendas, dominant ideologies, and acts of resistance.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue that modern cultural and social changes exist as both discourses and processes, shaped by these discourses (1999, p. 4). By analyzing villain and hero discourse, CDA highlights socio-political tensions within the narrative. As they further state, CDA has shown "the discursive nature of many modern social and cultural changes" (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Therefore, CDA sheds light on how persuasive storytelling in manga reflects societal ideologies and transformations. Drawing from rhetoric, literary theory, and communication studies, interdisciplinary perspectives enrich this analysis, providing a comprehensive understanding of persuasion in manga narratives and their broader cultural implications.

3. Discussion

3.1 Language as Weapon: Persuasive Strategies of Villains in Manga Discourse

My Hero Academia's villains employ persuasive tactics that both mirror and challenge classic rhetorical approaches, particularly those outlined in Kenneth Burke's dramatism theory and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA). Burke's concept of identification is crucial to understanding how characters like Stain and Shigaraki establish ideological connections with their audience. Stain's infamous speech, "Only those who are true heroes will be allowed to stand in my presence", is more than just a threat; it is a symbolic act that redefines heroism through moral purification. His rhetoric fits with Burke's dramastistic pentad, where the act (violence) is justified by the scene (a corrupt society), and the agent (Stain) becomes a moral reformer rather than a villain (Burke, 1969, p. 3; Glassie, 1982).

Shigaraki, by contrast, employs language to undermine prevailing ideologies. His statement, "The world is already broken. I am just giving it a little push", serves as a discursive challenge



to the hero-centric narrative. From Fairclough's perspective, this speech exemplifies how language can serve as a site of ideological conflict, where dominant norms are contested and redefined (Fairclough, 2010, p. 396; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 4). Shigaraki redefines destruction as liberation, situating himself within a counter-hegemonic discourse that critiques institutional power.

Unlike traditional literary villains, these characters use emotionally charged and ideologically layered language that resembles political speeches and revolutionary manifestos. Their language is more than just expressive; it is strategic, often using ambiguity and appealing to both fear and justice. This duality aligns with Allen and O'Keefe's research on two-sided persuasive messages, which gain strength by acknowledging and refuting opposition (Allen, 1991; O'Keefe, 1999, 2016). In short, villainous rhetoric in *My Hero Academia* is a complex mix of symbolic action and ideological discourse, providing a striking parallel to real-world persuasive communication in literature, politics, and media.

3.2. Bridging Fiction and Reality: Linguistic Strategies in *My Hero Academia* and Their Real-World Parallels

Examining how villains in *My Hero Academia* use language reveals interesting similarities with real-world communication strategies used in leadership, marketing, and politics. By applying Kenneth Burke's dramatism and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA), the manga's use of language offers a fascinating example of how language can shape, mobilize, and challenge prevailing ideologies.

Characters like Stain, Shigaraki, and All For One use persuasive methods that resemble political speech and branding tactics. Stain's rhetoric, "Only those who are true heroes will be allowed to stand in my presence", acts as a form of ideological gatekeeping, similar to how populist leaders establish legitimacy by emphasizing moral purity (Burke, 1969, p. 56). His speeches connect with disillusioned citizens, creating a sense of shared identity through common grievances, much like political campaigns that target marginalized voter groups (Glassie, 1982).

Shigaraki's declaration, "The world is already broken. I am just giving it a little push", embodies a nihilistic liberation narrative, reinterpreting destruction as empowerment. This aligns with Fairclough's view of discourse as a battleground, where language challenges dominant norms and reshapes social meaning (Fairclough, 2010, p. 396). His ambiguity and emotional appeal resemble marketing strategies that induce disruption while promising change, mirroring the "brand as rebellion" approach seen in campaigns like Apple's "Think Different." On the other hand, All For One uses calm, calculated language to manipulate others, often offering power in exchange for loyalty. His approach mirrors corporate leadership strategies, where persuasion is disguised as mentorship and opportunity. As Wodak notes, "Language is not powerful on its own; it gains power from the way powerful people use it." All For One's rhetorical control is a prime example of this principle, using discourse to maintain dominance without being overtly aggressive.

These examples show how villain rhetoric in fiction can shed light on real-world persuasive tactics. Whether it is emotional resonance, ideological framing, or strategic ambiguity, *My Hero Academia*'s antagonists embody techniques used by politicians, marketers, and leaders to shape perception and behaviour. As Allen and O'Keefe argue, two-sided messages that refute opposition are more persuasive, an approach often seen in villain monologues that acknowledge societal flaws while offering radical alternatives. So, the manga serves not only



as entertainment but also as a cultural artefact that reflects and critiques the mechanics of influence. By analysing its linguistic strategies, scholars and communicators can gain a deeper understanding of how narrative persuasion operates across various domains, thereby bridging the gap between fiction and practical application.

3.3. Resistance and Counter-Persuasion: Heroic Responses to Villain Rhetoric in *My Hero Academia*

Heroes in *My Hero Academia* do not just respond to villainous persuasion with physical force; they also use rhetorical and ideological counter-strategies that reflect changing societal values. These responses shed light on the dynamics of counter-persuasion, as theorized by Kenneth Burke and Norman Fairclough, and provide insight into how influence works within contested moral frameworks. Burke's dramatism theory helps explain how heroes reframe villainous narratives by shifting the symbolic scene and redefining the act. For example, when Stain's ideology starts to resonate with pro-hero students like Izuku Midoriya and Shoto Todoroki, their response is not outright rejection; it is critical engagement. Midoriya acknowledges Stain's critique of hero society but counters it by embodying a more selfless model of heroism, one that prioritizes saving others over fame. This reflects Burke's concept of identification and re-identification, where persuasion is met with a reaffirmation of values through symbolic action (Burke, 1969, p. 56).

Similarly, All Might's confrontation with All For One is steeped in ideological resistance. All For One's calm, manipulative rhetoric, "You nurture so much hatred, All Might. That is why you are weak", is met not with verbal rebuttal but with symbolic defiance. All Might's iconic line, "I am here," becomes a discursive anchor that reaffirms heroic presence and moral clarity. Through Fairclough's CDA lens, this moment exemplifies how dominant ideologies are reinforced through emotionally resonant discourse that legitimizes authority and counters destabilizing narratives (Fairclough, 2010, p. 396).

Even Bakugo, often viewed as impulsive, shows significant growth in his rejection of Shigaraki's nihilism. In later story arcs, Bakugo expresses a more thoughtful understanding of heroism, saying, "We are not just fighting villains; we are fighting what they represent." This marks a change from simple resistance to a deeper engagement with ideas, demonstrating how heroes adapt in response to persuasive threats. These responses support O'Keefe's (2016, p. 225) claim that effective counter-persuasion involves directly addressing opposing arguments rather than ignoring them. Heroes in *My Hero Academia* do not just dismiss villainous rhetoric; they absorb it, reflect on it, and respond, often redefining their own values in the process.

At its core, the interplay between villain persuasion and hero resistance showcases a dynamic interplay of societal values. As Fairclough (1999, p. 4) points out, discourse both shapes and influences social change. The heroes' changing responses, ranging from Midoriya's empathetic critique to All Might's symbolic defiance, highlight how influence is not fixed but a two-way conversation, and how fictional stories can mirror real-world processes of ideological debate and change.

Conclusion

This study reveals that villainous rhetoric in *My Hero Academia* is more than just storytelling; it is a complex means of expressing ideas, symbolizing actions, and influencing opinions. Using Kenneth Burke's dramatism theory and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the research reveals how villains like Stain, Shigaraki, and All For One employ language to craft compelling narratives that challenge the principal heroic ideals, attract followers, and blur



moral boundaries. Their speeches mirror real-world persuasive tactics employed in politics, marketing, and leadership, effectively bridging the gap between fiction and real-world communication.

Likewise, the heroes' responses highlight the dynamics of resistance and counter-persuasion. Characters like Midoriya, All Might, and Bakugo engage with villain rhetoric not only through physical combat but also through ideological debates and symbolic reaffirmation. These interactions demonstrate how influence operates through dialogue, shaping and redefining societal values within the manga's narrative. At last, My Hero Academia serves as a cultural mirror, reflecting the complexities of persuasion in today's world. Its language reveals how words can be used to gain power, ignite change, and shape identity. For scholars, creators, and fans, this research highlights the significance of examining fictional conversations as a means to comprehend real-world communication, ideology, and social change.

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