Critical Discourse Analysis of the Forms of Referential Power in Kike Wadatsumi no Koe's Diary

Ismi Prihandari*, Roslina Bt Mamat

Universitas Brawijaya, Veteran St. No. 10-11, Malang, East Java, 65145, Indonesia
University Putra Malaya, 43400 Seri Kembangan, Selangor, Malaysia
*Corresponding author, email: prihandari@ub.ac.id

https://doi.org/10.17977/um065.v7.i1.2027.9

Article history
Submitted: 31 May 2026
Revised: 27 July 2026
Accepted: 28 July 2026
Published: 29 July 2026

Keywords
Critical discourse analysis
Domination
Hegemony
Representation

Abstract
This research aims to describe the forms of power discourse through hegemony representations in diary *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe*. This research uses a critical qualitative approach. Data analysis techniques are done by reading the data source, documenting the research data, and taking notes, the research data includes descriptions, interpretations, and explanations according to the CDA Fairclough model. Data validation is using an intense discussion with competent experts, in addition to figure a triangulation used on data sources and triangulation between researchers. Data are collected into 13 corpus data. The results has shown power discourse form relates to the dominance of military leadership through policies adopted and efforts to utilize human resources that are trusted and made role models of Japanese society in attracting sympathy and trust from soldiers. The soldiers were invited to understand, and remembered the norms and rules applied in military world life. Finally, the soldiers can accept it as a natural thing.

1. Introduction

The relationship between language, power, and hegemony has long been a central concern in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Language is not merely a neutral medium of communication but a social practice through which ideological positions are constructed, negotiated, and legitimized (Fairclough, 1995, 2003). In contexts of war, language functions not only to describe military realities but also to normalize sacrifice, manufacture consent, and cultivate loyalty to the state. Through discourse, political authorities shape collective consciousness by presenting particular values as natural and unquestionable, thereby transforming domination into voluntary acceptance (Gramsci, 1971). This process illustrates how hegemonic power operates symbolically rather than solely through coercion, allowing ideology to become embedded in everyday narratives and personal expressions. Recent CDA scholarship further argues that wartime discourse constitutes an important site where institutional authority, nationalism, and identity are discursively reproduced (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2023; Wodak, 2021).

Within this broader relationship between discourse and power, *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* (Listen to the Voices from the Sea) occupies a unique position. First published shortly after the Second World War, the collection consists of diaries, letters, poems, and farewell writings composed by Japanese student soldiers mobilized into the Imperial Army during the final years of the Pacific War. Unlike official military documents, these personal writings reveal the complex interaction between individual emotions and state ideology. The narratives portray not only fear, affection, and personal aspirations but also expressions of patriotism, obedience, and willingness to sacrifice that were shaped within Japan's wartime ideological apparatus. Consequently, the collection provides valuable linguistic evidence for examining how hegemonic power was internalized and reproduced in everyday discourse by individuals who simultaneously experienced coercion and ideological persuasion.

Previous studies have examined *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* primarily from historical, literary, memory, and political perspectives. Scholars have explored the diary as testimony of wartime experience, collective memory, nationalism, and Japanese post-war identity. Parallel developments in CDA have demonstrated how discourse reproduces ideological dominance through lexical choices, evaluation, and representation of social actors (van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2021). Studies of military discourse have further shown that persuasion and legitimacy are frequently constructed through narratives of heroism, duty, and national identity rather than explicit commands (Flowerdew & Richardson, 2023). Research on power relations has also increasingly incorporated French and Raven's social power framework to explain how authority operates through multiple forms of influence beyond coercion and legitimate power (Raven, 2008). These studies collectively demonstrate that discourse serves as a

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

strategic mechanism through which institutional power becomes socially acceptable and emotionally meaningful.

Previous studies on *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* have primarily approached the collection from historical, literary, and memory studies perspectives. Early scholarship interpreted the diaries and letters of Japanese student soldiers as personal testimonies that reveal the psychological suffering, ethical dilemmas, and tragic consequences of war experienced by educated youth during the Pacific War (Harootunian, 2000; Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002). Rather than glorifying militarism, these studies emphasize the conflict between individual aspirations and national obligations, illustrating how the student soldiers negotiated fear, patriotism, and mortality through personal writing. Later research further demonstrated that *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* has become a significant site of postwar memory, contributing to debates on pacifism, national identity, historical responsibility, and collective remembrance in Japan (Gluck, 1993; Young, 1998). As discourse-oriented approaches gained prominence, scholars increasingly employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine wartime texts and ideological representation. Drawing upon Fairclough's (1992, 1995, 2013) three-dimensional framework, van Dijk's (1998, 2006) socio-cognitive model, and Wodak's (2009) discourse-historical approach, previous studies consistently demonstrate that language functions as a powerful mechanism for legitimizing authority, constructing national identity, and reproducing ideological dominance. These studies argue that wartime discourse normalizes values such as patriotism, obedience, loyalty, and self-sacrifice by presenting them as natural moral obligations rather than politically constructed ideologies (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2009).

Within the context of Japanese wartime narratives, CDA has been applied to investigate ideological representation, persuasive discourse, and identity construction. For example, Subandi et al. (2022) analyzed *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* using Fairclough's CDA framework and demonstrated how linguistic representations reflected ideological resistance among Japanese student soldiers. Their findings revealed that lexical choices, interpersonal relationships, and textual structures simultaneously reproduced dominant military values while expressing subtle forms of personal resistance. Similarly, other studies examining wartime discourse have shown that persuasive language, rhetorical strategies, and symbolic representations were instrumental in maintaining militaristic ideology and legitimizing wartime sacrifice (Kwon & Chung, 2023; Wodak, 2021). Recent scholarship has further shifted attention from institutional discourse toward individual narratives, recognizing diaries, memoirs, and autobiographical writings as important sites where ideology is internalized and negotiated. Rather than treating personal writings merely as historical documents, contemporary researchers argue that narratives construct political subjectivities through emotional expression, moral reasoning, and identity positioning (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2020). Studies on war narratives published in recent years similarly suggest that ordinary individuals actively participate in reproducing hegemonic ideologies through everyday language practices, thereby linking macro-level political discourse with micro-level identity construction (Kwon & Chung, 2023; Wodak, 2021).

The relationship between discourse and hegemony has likewise received considerable scholarly attention. Building on Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, previous studies explain that political domination is sustained not only through coercion but also through public consent, which is continuously reproduced through education, media, cultural institutions, and everyday discourse (Gramsci, 1971; Fairclough, 1995; Jones, 2006). Within wartime contexts, researchers have shown that hegemonic discourse successfully transforms ideological values such as patriotism, loyalty, and military sacrifice into socially accepted moral virtues, encouraging individuals to participate voluntarily in the reproduction of dominant political ideologies (Howson & Smith, 2008; Simon, 2015). Consequently, ideological compliance often emerges through identification rather than direct coercion. Despite these contributions, an important gap remains. Existing studies on *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* and Japanese wartime discourse have predominantly focused on historical memory, persuasive rhetoric, nationalism, ideological indoctrination, resistance, and hegemonic state power (Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002; Subandi et al., 2022). Likewise, CDA scholarship has extensively explained how ideology is represented and reproduced through discourse (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2009). However, relatively little attention has been devoted to referent power, namely the form of social influence through which individuals willingly identify with admired leaders, institutions, or collective ideals because of emotional attachment, respect, and shared identity (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008). More specifically, previous research has not systematically examined how referent power is discursively represented through the attitudes, personalities, emotional expressions, and self-positioning of Japanese student soldiers in their personal writings. Investigating this dimension is essential because it explains why ideological compliance may emerge not simply from coercion or institutional obligation but from voluntary identification with socially constructed ideals of honor, patriotism, and military virtue.

To address this gap, the present study integrates Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis with French and Raven's (1959) theory of referent power. Rather than focusing solely on institutional propaganda, this study investigates how hegemonic authority is internalized through linguistic representations of emotion, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and moral identity in the personal writings of Japanese student soldiers. By combining CDA with referent power, this study extends previous scholarship by connecting macro-level

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

ideological structures with micro-level processes of identification and subjectivity, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of how hegemonic power is reproduced through everyday wartime narratives.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate how referent power is discursively represented in Kike Wadatsumi no Koe through the attitudes, values, and personality constructions of Japanese student soldiers during the Second World War. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions: (1) How is referent power discursively represented through the construction of Japanese student soldiers' attitudes in *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe*? (2) How is referent power discursively represented through the construction of Japanese student soldiers' personalities in *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe*?

By focusing on referent power rather than coercive domination, this research offers a new perspective on Japanese wartime discourse and contributes to broader discussions of language, hegemony, identity construction, and military ideology within Critical Discourse Analysis.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach within a critical paradigm (qualitative-critical). The qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to interpret the linguistic and socio-cultural meanings embedded, both explicitly and implicitly, in the diary collection that constitutes the primary data source. Rather than quantifying linguistic features, the research focuses on understanding how language represents ideology, identity, and power relations within specific historical and cultural contexts. Data credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation and peer debriefing, ensuring the trustworthiness and consistency of the interpretation.

The critical paradigm was adopted because the study seeks to examine the taken-for-granted assumptions, dominant ideologies, and power relations embedded in discourse. In line with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this research views language as a social practice through which hegemony is constructed, reproduced, and negotiated (Fairclough, 1995, 2003). Accordingly, the units of analysis consist of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in the diary texts that linguistically represent referent power through attitudes, evaluations, self-positioning, and expressions of loyalty toward military authority and national ideology.

The primary data were drawn from *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* (Listen to the Voices from the Sea), a collection of diaries, letters, farewell messages, and poems written by Japanese student soldiers during the Second World War. From the entire corpus, thirteen (13) textual excerpts were purposively selected as the units of analysis. The selection was not intended to achieve numerical representation but analytical depth, which is consistent with qualitative inquiry. The thirteen excerpts met three inclusion criteria: (1) they explicitly or implicitly contained linguistic representations of referent power, such as admiration, identification, loyalty, voluntary obedience, or emotional attachment to military leaders, the Emperor, or national ideology; (2) they provided sufficient textual context to enable analysis at Fairclough's three dimensions of discourse text, discursive practice, and social practice; and (3) they represented diverse forms of personal writing (letters, diary entries, poems, and farewell messages), thereby capturing variation in the discursive construction of referent power across different communicative contexts. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that additional texts no longer produced new categories or patterns relevant to the research objective.

Data analysis followed Fairclough's (1995, 2003) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis framework. At the textual level, lexical choices, evaluative expressions, modality, metaphors, and rhetorical structures were examined to identify linguistic manifestations of referent power. At the level of discursive practice, the production and interpretation of the diary texts were analyzed in relation to wartime communication and ideological dissemination. Finally, at the level of social practice, the findings were interpreted within the broader socio-political context of wartime Japan to explain how hegemonic ideology was internalized and represented through the personal writings of student soldiers.

Data collection involved several stages: reading, note-taking, and documentation. The first step involved careful repeated reading, particularly on matters related to the hegemony of power. Reading was followed by the next technique, which involved noting down everything that aligned with the research objectives. After reading and note-taking, the researcher also conducted a documentation study. Documentation served as a tool to assist the researcher in collecting data.

Data analysis employed qualitative descriptive techniques. Based on these techniques, the necessary steps in the data analysis process were taken. The analysis began with sorting the data according to the research objective, namely identifying text formations containing ideological content. Next, the analysis examined how the hegemony of power operates and the cultural elements used. The third step involved presenting a summary in tables and verbal descriptions. Finally, a discussion and conclusions were drawn regarding the hegemony of power based on the data presented.

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

The analysis was structured in the form of description, interpretation, and explanation, in accordance with Fairclough's CDA model. Descriptions were used to describe the text. Interpretation is conducted intertextually by juxtaposing the data with newspaper articles in Japan during WW2 (the Yomiuri Shinbun newspaper) to interpret the actions of the discursive practices that underlie the production of the text. Explanations are conducted to identify the relationship between discursive practices and the sociocultural practices that underlie them.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Drawing on Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis and French and Raven's (1959) concept of referent power, this study investigates how referent power is discursively represented in *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* through the construction of Japanese student soldiers' attitudes and personalities. The analysis demonstrates that referent power is realized not through explicit coercion or institutional authority, but through linguistic representations that construct student soldiers as individuals who willingly identify with the ideals of patriotism, military honor, and national service. These discursive constructions reveal how hegemonic ideology was internalized and reproduced through personal narratives, enabling voluntary obedience to emerge as a moral commitment rather than an imposed obligation. The findings are organized into two interrelated themes corresponding to the research questions: (1) the discursive representation of referent power through the construction of soldiers' attitudes and (2) the discursive representation of referent power through the construction of soldiers' personalities.

3.1.1. Referent Power through the Construction of Patriotic Attitudes

Behavior is a set of actions or actions a person takes in response to something, which then becomes a habit due to a belief in values. During the Pacific War, almost all Japanese soldiers possessed the self-confidence and strong determination to endure all the hardships they faced in fulfilling their obligations to the emperor and the homeland. Japanese soldiers never questioned their commanders' responsibilities and never considered being tasked with carrying out extraordinary actions (suicide attacks). For Japanese soldiers at that time, death was a trivial matter because they firmly believed in an "afterlife." This was an attitude/behavior embedded in Japanese tradition and long history.

In mid-October 1944, when American Navy ships appeared at the mouth of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, it was already a sign that Japan was nearing defeat. Japanese air power had fewer than 100 combat-worthy aircraft. After all-out fighting in the Philippines and the Battle of Okinawa in June 1945, Japan surrendered shortly after. The soldiers' behavior, demonstrating self-confidence, a spirit of sacrifice, and a relentless spirit, is evident in the following data excerpt.

> アメリカが今日この線まで侵入してきたことは、私としてはむしろ、当然のこととしか考えられない。確かに日本は自国の実力を過信し、米国の力を過小評価していたに違いない。
>
> *Amerika ga kyō kono sen made shin'nyū shite kita koto wa, watashi to shite wa mushiro, tōzen no koto to shika kangae rarenai. Tashika ni Nihon wa jikoku no jitsuryoku o kashin shi, Beikoku no chikara o kashō hyōka shite ita ni chigainai*.
>
> What the United States has done to this line today can only be considered a matter of course. Japan must have overestimated its own strength and underestimated the United States'. (BWK.Acu/Plk 1)

In the analysis (1) of the sentence "*Amerika ga kyō kono sen made shin'nyū shite kita koto wa, watashi to shite wa mushiro, tōzen no koto to shika kangae rarenai*" (The fact that the United States has invaded up to this line/area today, is very natural for me, and I can only accept it), PBH's attitude is seen to show confidence, there is no worry, only '*tōzen no koto to shika kangae rarenai*' is something that can be accepted. He is not worried even though the enemy has entered his territory. This self-confidence attitude is increasingly clearly shown by the form of epistemic modality "*ni chigainai*" in the next sentence "*Tashika ni Nihon wa jikoku no jitsuryoku o kashin shi, Beikoku no chikara o kashō hyōka shite ita ni chigainai*" (Of course, Japan must be too confident in its own strength and underestimate the strength of the United States.) (BWK.Acu/Plk 1). Even though the American attack was able to invade its territory, they still underestimated America's strength.

> 昔の戦争は武勇と栄光によって戦われ、近代の戦争は集団の力と犠牲の精神で闘われた。

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

> *Mukashi no sensō wa buyū to eikō ni yotte tatakawa re, kindai no sensō wa shūdan no chikara to gisei no seishin de tatakawa reta*.
>
> Ancient wars were fought with courage and glory, and modern wars are fought with collective strength and a spirit of sacrifice. (BWK.Acu/Plk 2)

The representation of the form of referential power based on behavior is again seen in the following sentence quote "... modern war is conducted with collective strength and a spirit of sacrifice". In Japanese history, starting with the emergence of the samurai class in the feudal era, many wars occurred both between clans to fight for territory and with other countries such as Mongolia and Korea. Wars in that era were conducted with personal skills and strength that required courage. Success in winning a battle would automatically be followed by the achievement of glory for clan members. Compared to modern war which relies more on weapons, feudal war strategies that rely on courage are not enough to win a war. The Japanese military government changed its war strategy in WWII by relying on collective strength and a spirit of sacrifice to achieve victory. The results of the government's co-optation of the soldiers are clearly visible in the PBH writing in analysis (2) above.

The Japanese military government's significant influence in instilling confidence in its soldiers, one of which was the PBH, was evident when a soldier decided to dedicate his life to the emperor and advance to the battlefield, he was not allowed to return alive. They agreed to attack together/collectively and, if they fell, would do so together. The PBH felt confident and filled with an unyielding spirit, believing victory would be Japan's.

> ただ軍人はその進んでいる直面している職業ともいうべきものが死というもの、戦というもの国防にそそがれているがゆえに、崇高に見えるのである。
>
> *Tada gunjin wa sono susunde iru chokumen shite iru shokugyō-tomo iubeki mono ga shi to iu mono,-sen to iu mono, kokubō ni sosoga rete iruga yue ni, sūkō ni mieru nodearu.*
>
> However, military personnel are often regarded as noble because their profession directly confronts death and warfare, while being fundamentally grounded in the defense of the nation. (BWK.Acu/Plk 3)

Analysis (3) again demonstrates the unyielding attitude of Japanese soldiers during World War II. The author realized that in carrying out his profession, he would face death (*gunjin wa sono susunde iru chokumen shite iru shokugyō-tomo iubeki mono ga shi to iu mono*) (military personnel appear noble because their profession involves death), because at that time Japan was facing war with America. PBH felt this was natural and considered his profession to be a noble one because it was related to national defense.

The referential power in analyses (1) to (3) demonstrates the behavior of soldiers who displayed self-confidence, a spirit of sacrifice, and an unyielding spirit. These three data points demonstrate that the leaders of the Japanese military government were highly skilled at influencing, thus serving as a reference for their subordinates.

3.1.2. Referent Power through the Construction of Resilient Personality

According to Eysenck (2013), personality is an individual characteristic that reflects behavior, thoughts, and emotions. The Japanese army during World War II was a group of soldiers with iron will. They were determined to endure all hardships to fulfill their obligations to their homeland and to the emperor. It's worth remembering that most soldiers, especially those in the special assault force, did not immediately launch an attack after volunteering or being selected. Most of these soldiers continued to perform their military duties for months without knowing when their turn would be. Momentary enthusiasm would never have sustained them during this wait. Therefore, it can be clearly concluded that the personalities of Japanese combat soldiers were indeed skilled and they were capable of dealing with their environment.

The Japanese combat soldiers were described as resilient individuals, as expressed by Lieutenant Colonel Asaichi Tamai: "Although they don't explain what's in their hearts, I will never forget the determination that was visible on their faces." This description is understandable when compared to the context in which Japan had decided to implement a special attack strategy (kamikaze). An overview of these conditions can be seen in the following excerpt from the diary.

> 生還期しがたい今日でも、とにかく戦死の日まで一日でも学識を弘め教養を深くすることこそ軍務に尽くす以外の日本男子の真の使命を果たす所以だと思っております。

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

> *Seikan kishi gatai kyō demo, tonikaku senshi no hi made tsuitachi demo gakushiki o hirome kyōyō o fukaku suru koto koso gunmu ni tsukusu igai no nippondanshi no shin no shimeiwohatasu yuenda to omotte orimasu.*
>
> Even today, when it is difficult to survive, I think that is the reason why Japanese boys fulfill their true mission beyond devoting themselves to military affairs, to expand their scholarship and deepen their education until the day they die. (BWK.Acu/Pbd 1)

Analysis (4) describes the condition of PBH who represents the soldier where he was stationed who felt it was difficult to continue fighting "*Seikan kishi gatai kyō demo*" (Even today, when it is difficult to survive). Everyone must have fear of something. However, for someone with a strong and resilient personality, of course they can overcome it in their own way. PBH strengthened himself, so he could overcome the fear he had, and so he could live amidst the onslaught of enemy attacks by convincing himself as seen in the next quote "*gunmu ni tsukusu igai no nippondanshi no shin no shimeiwohatasu yuenda to omotte orimasu*" (I think that is the reason why Japanese boys fulfill their true mission besides devoting themselves to military affairs). The shadow of death due to enemy attacks that resulted in difficulty in survival was PBH's fear and had to be fought. Fighting his fear was another reason for PBH to enlist as a soldier. As a skilled and capable Japanese combat soldier, even under such circumstances, PBH remained optimistic about protecting and safeguarding his country's sovereignty.

Furthermore, the data in analysis (5) below again demonstrates the personalities of Japanese soldiers in the face of the chaos of war.

> 国のために、そして子孫のためにと死んで行く兵士たちのために、その将来への期待を裏切らないような幸福な社会を築くことこそ我らの努めた。
>
> *Kuni no tame ni, soshite shison no tame ni to shinde iku heishi-tachi no tame ni, sono shōrai e no kitai o uragiranai yōna kōfukuna shakai o kizuku koto koso warera no tsutometa*.
>
> For the country and for the descendants and for the fallen soldiers, it is our goal to create a happy society that will not disappoint its hopes for the future.. (BWK.Acu/Pbd 2)

The representation of the form of referential power based on personality in the data in analysis (5) again shows that Japanese combat soldiers were indeed skilled. They were capable people who were loyal to their nation and country and deeply cared about their environment. They also did not forget the soldiers who had previously died in battle: "*...shinde iku heishi-tachi no tame ni, sono shōrai e no kitai o uragiranai yōna kōfukuna shakai o kizuku koto koso warera no tsutometa*" (...for the soldiers who died, it is our goal to create a happy society that will not disappoint their hopes for the future).

Soldiers with strong and resilient personalities certainly did not give up easily. They would see an obstacle or problem as a challenge. Even though they struggled when facing the obstacle, they would not give up because they saw it as a challenge that could make them better.

> 自からの手で建設し、みずからの血で守り、みずからの手で破壊する民族よ。
>
> *Ji kara no te de kensetsu shi, mizukara no chi de mamori, mizukara no te de hakai suru minzoku yo.*
>
> A nation built with your own hands, protected with your own blood, and destroyed with your own hands. (BWK.Acu/Pbd 3)

In data analysis (6) "*Ji kara no te de kensetsu shi, mizukara no chi de mamoru minzoku*" (A nation built with its own hands, protected with its own blood) It is increasingly apparent that Japanese combat soldiers possessed strong personalities. They were capable soldiers who deeply loved their country. They were very proud to be born Japanese. The author believes that Japan's future, even its destruction, can only be achieved and achieved by the Japanese people themselves without enemy interference.

The referential power in the data in analysis (4) through (6) shows that military personnel in the Japanese army possessed strong personalities, were optimistic, capable, loyal to their nation and country, and deeply concerned about their environment. These three data points simultaneously demonstrate that the leaders of the Japanese military government at that time were highly skilled at organizing and highly capable of influencing their subordinates. Military leaders served as role models, enabling soldiers to carry out their duties and take responsibility for the work entrusted to them.

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

3.2. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the discourse of referent power is systematically constructed throughout *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* by representing military authority as an object of admiration, moral integrity, and emotional attachment. Rather than depicting obedience as the consequence of coercive military discipline, the diary writers consistently portray military service as an honourable duty voluntarily embraced through personal conviction. Lexical choices emphasizing loyalty, sacrifice, responsibility, and patriotism reveal that the soldiers had internalized the ideological values promoted by the Japanese military institution. Consequently, military obedience is represented as a moral commitment rather than institutional compulsion, indicating that referent power functions through emotional identification instead of direct coercion.

These findings corroborate previous scholarship arguing that Japanese wartime ideology was sustained not only through military coercion but also through the cultivation of patriotic consciousness and moral obligation. For instance, Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms demonstrates that the Japanese state successfully transformed self-sacrifice into an aesthetic and moral virtue by embedding nationalist ideals within educational, cultural, and military institutions. Similarly, Harootunian (2000) contends that wartime nationalism shaped individual subjectivity by encouraging citizens to perceive devotion to the Emperor as an ethical responsibility rather than political obedience. The present findings extend these historical interpretations by showing how such ideological values are linguistically realized in the soldiers' own narratives, thereby illustrating the discursive mechanisms through which military authority became personally meaningful.

These findings strongly support French and Raven's (1959) theory of referent power and its subsequent development by Raven (2008), which argues that influence becomes most effective when followers voluntarily identify with respected leaders or institutions. The present findings demonstrate that Japanese student soldiers did not merely obey military authority because of formal hierarchy; rather, they admired the symbolic values embodied by military leaders, the Emperor, and the nation itself. Their language reflects psychological attachment and identity alignment, confirming Raven's argument that referent power operates through identification, respect, and internalized commitment rather than external enforcement.

From the perspective of Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony, the findings illustrate how military domination was maintained through the production of consent. The diaries repeatedly construct patriotism, discipline, and self-sacrifice as natural and morally desirable behaviours. Such representations indicate that state ideology had been transformed into what Gramsci termed *common sense*, whereby subordinate groups willingly reproduce the worldview of the ruling group without perceiving it as domination. Instead of expressing resistance, the soldiers articulated military values as their own ethical principles, suggesting that hegemonic power had successfully reshaped personal identity and moral consciousness.

The findings also reinforce Fairclough's (1995, 2003) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. At the textual level, positive evaluative vocabulary, modality, metaphors of honour and sacrifice, and lexical patterns of collective identity construct military obedience as morally legitimate. At the level of discursive practice, private diary writing becomes a medium through which institutional wartime ideology is appropriated and reproduced in individual narratives. At the level of social practice, these linguistic representations reflect broader structures of Japanese militarism, emperor-centred nationalism, and wartime ideological mobilization. The diaries therefore function not only as personal testimonies but also as discursive sites where hegemonic ideology is reproduced through everyday language.

The present findings are also consistent with recent scholarship in Critical Discourse Studies that emphasizes the role of discourse in legitimizing political and military authority. Ganaah et al. (2023) demonstrate that revolutionary discourse constructs political legitimacy through strategies of moral evaluation, historical memory, and national sacrifice, allowing leaders to transform political authority into moral obligation. Similarly, recent CDA research on military narratives argues that ideological domination is increasingly maintained through discursive legitimation rather than explicit coercion, whereby institutional values are naturalized and accepted as socially desirable. These observations closely parallel the present findings, where military ideology is reproduced through the soldiers' own narratives rather than imposed solely through official propaganda.

Furthermore, contemporary studies have highlighted that military discourse increasingly relies on identity construction and moral legitimacy to sustain institutional authority. Research examining civil–military discourse demonstrates that language shapes public perceptions of military legitimacy by constructing narratives of responsibility, patriotism, and collective security rather than relying exclusively on hierarchical authority. The present study extends this line of research by showing that such legitimizing processes also occur within personal wartime writings. Unlike institutional speeches or governmental documents, the diaries reveal how hegemonic ideology is internalized at the individual level, transforming official discourse into personal conviction through referent power.

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

3.3. Implications

Accordingly, this study makes both theoretical and empirical contributions. Theoretically, it proposes that referent power constitutes the interpersonal mechanism through which Gramscian hegemony is discursively realized, while Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis provides the analytical framework for identifying the linguistic realization of this process. Previous studies of *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* have generally emphasized wartime ideology, nationalism, persuasion, or coercive military authority. By contrast, the present study demonstrates that voluntary obedience emerges primarily through admiration, emotional attachment, and identity construction, thereby positioning referent power as the discursive bridge connecting individual psychology with broader hegemonic structures. This integrated framework contributes to Critical Discourse Studies by explaining how macro-level ideological domination is translated into micro-level linguistic representations of loyalty and self-sacrifice.

3.4. Limitations

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is confined to textual representations contained in *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* and therefore cannot fully account for other institutional mechanisms through which wartime ideology was disseminated. Second, the study focuses primarily on referent power and hegemonic consent, while expressions of resistance, ideological negotiation, or alternative identities remain underexplored. Finally, because Critical Discourse Analysis is interpretive in nature, alternative readings remain possible. Future research may integrate CDA with corpus-assisted discourse studies, historical discourse analysis, or reception studies to investigate more comprehensively how referent power and hegemonic ideology are reproduced across different wartime genres and socio-political contexts.

4. Conclusion

The discourse of power represents hegemony. This discourse of power refers to the Japanese government's policy of directly controlling and directing its military personnel during World War II. By exploiting these individuals, the Japanese military leadership sought to gain the sympathy and trust of the soldiers. Thus, the dominance of military leaders through the discourse of power is clearly visible.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this paper. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

No funding support was received.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

References

De Fina, A., & Georgakopoulou, A. (Eds.). (2020). *The Cambridge handbook of discourse studies*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108348195

Eysenck, H. J. (2013). *The structure of human personality*. London, England: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203753439

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London, England: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London, England: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203697078

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2nd ed.). London, England: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368

Flowerdew, J., & Richardson, J. E. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge handbook of critical discourse studies* (2nd ed.). London, England: Routledge.

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174

French, J. R. P., Jr., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (pp. 150–167). Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

Ganaah, J., Nartey, M., & Bhatia, A. (2023). Legitimation in revolutionary discourse: A critical examination of the discourse of Jerry John Rawlings. *Journal of Language and Politics, 22*(1), 66–86. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.22002.gan

Gluck, C. (1993). The past in the present. In A. Gordon (Ed.), *Postwar Japan as history* (pp. 64–95). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. New York, NY: International Publishers.

Harootunian, H. D. (2000). *Overcome by modernity: History, culture, and community in interwar Japan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Howson, R., & Smith, K. (Eds.). (2008). *Hegemony: Studies in consensus and coercion*. London, England: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203927182

Jones, S. (2006). *Antonio Gramsci*. London, England: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203625521

Ohnuki-Tierney, E. (2002). *Kamikaze, cherry blossoms, and nationalisms: The militarization of aesthetics in Japanese history*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226620688.001.0001

Raven, B. H. (2008). The bases of power and the power/interaction model of interpersonal influence. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 8*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-2415.2008.00159.x

Simon, R. (2015). *Gramsci's political thought: An introduction* (Rev. ed.). London, England: Lawrence & Wishart.

van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London, England: Sage.

van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Politics, ideology, and discourse. In K. Brown (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics* (2nd ed., Vol. 9, pp. 728–740). Oxford, England: Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-044854-2/00722-7

van Dijk, T. A. (2018). *Discourse and power* (2nd ed.). London, England: Bloomsbury Academic.

Wodak, R. (2021). *The politics of fear: The shameless normalization of far-right discourse* (2nd ed.). London, England: Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529739664

Young, L. (1998). *Japan's total empire: Manchuria and the culture of wartime imperialism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

© 2026 The Author(s)
This is an Open Access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License
ISSN: 2797-3174