

The Analysis of Social Class Conflict in Ruben Ostlund's *Triangle of Sadness* (2022): In Sociolinguistic Context

Sarti¹, Bahar², Ibnul Qayyim³, Akbar Abu Thalib⁴

¹²³⁴Fajar University

Corresponding Author:

Bahar

baharsetiawan@unifa.ac.id

Abstract

This research aims to analyze how social class conflict is represented in the film through dialogues, interactions, and language practices. The study applies a qualitative descriptive method using Marxist theory supported by a sociolinguistic perspective. The primary data consist of selected dialogues and scenes from the fashion industry setting, the luxury yacht, and the island scenario. The findings reveal that social class conflict is represented not only through economic ownership, but also through speech patterns, commands, responses, and linguistic strategies used to maintain social positions. In elite environments, language functions as a symbol of exclusivity and social status. On the luxury yacht, hierarchical relations are maintained through institutionalized politeness and obedience. In the island scenario, power shifts when control over essential resources and survival skills replaces economic wealth as the basis of authority. In conclusion, the film portrays social class conflict as dynamic and context-dependent. Language functions as an instrument for constructing, sustaining, and negotiating social hierarchy. Ultimately, the film exposes the instability of class structures under capitalism, revealing that class power is not absolute, but contingent upon control over material resources and social recognition.

Keywords: *social class conflict, Marxist theory, sociolinguistics, language and power, capitalism*

Introduction

Social class has long shaped patterns of interaction, access to resources, and the distribution of power in society. Social class functions as a system of stratification that places individuals in hierarchical positions based on unequal access to economic, social, and cultural resources. Durante and Fiske (2018) state that social class operates as a stratification system that structures inequality and shapes power relations within society. Such inequality is not accidental but structurally embedded in social institutions.

To understand social class more deeply, classical social theories provide essential frameworks. Marx and Engels (1848) argue that society is divided into two opposing classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie represent the ruling class who own and control the means of production, such as factories, land, and capital, while the proletariat refers to the working class who do not own production resources and must sell their labor to survive. This unequal relationship produces structural exploitation and continuous class conflict. Marx emphasizes that the history of society is the history of class struggles.

Furthermore, Weber (2009) explains that class position influences life chances and access to material conditions. Similarly, Wacquant (1998) argues that social success is often shaped by economic and cultural capital rather than purely individual effort.

These perspectives reinforce the understanding that inequality is structurally produced and sustained within modern capitalist systems.

Class conflict is frequently represented in various forms of literary and cultural works, including film. Film does not merely function as entertainment but also reflects and constructs social realities. Monaco (2009) states that film operates similarly to language, delivering meaning through visual and audio elements, enabling audiences to interpret deeper social messages. Likewise, Prinz (2010) argues that films can be considered works of art when they invite viewers to adopt an aesthetic stance that uncovers emotional and social meanings beyond surface narratives. Therefore, film can be analyzed as a cultural text that represents social structures, including class hierarchy and conflict.

One contemporary film that explicitly presents issues of class inequality is *Triangle of Sadness*, directed by Ruben Östlund. The film explores themes of power, wealth, labor, and social hierarchy across different settings, including the fashion industry, a luxury yacht, and a deserted island. Power is illustrated through the control of resources by wealthy characters, who receive comprehensive services and dictate social behavior, while lower-status workers must comply and adapt. Wealth is displayed through luxurious lifestyles, exclusive spaces, and economic privilege. Labor is emphasized through the invisible and emotional work performed by employees who maintain services and politeness despite unequal treatment. Social hierarchy becomes visible through spatial separation between rich passengers, managerial staff, and lower-level workers positioned below deck. These unequal relations reflect Marx's concept of class antagonism.

The film further portrays exploitation experienced by lower-class characters in everyday interactions. A dramatic class reversal occurs when Abigail, initially a toilet worker, becomes the most powerful character due to her survival skills. Her ability to find food, purify water, positions her as indispensable for the group's survival. This situation illustrates how power can shift when authority is no longer based on wealth but on control over essential material resources. The reversal of hierarchy on the deserted island reflects Marx's idea that class dominance depends on control over production and resources. Through satire and dark humor, the film critiques capitalism, privilege, and the instability of social power.

However, although *Triangle of Sadness* (2022) has been widely discussed for its satirical critique of capitalism, limited scholarly research has systematically examined the film through Marx's framework of class struggle, exploitation, and material control. Most discussions remain descriptive rather than theoretically grounded. Therefore, a Marxist analysis is necessary to understand how class antagonism and power reversal are structurally constructed in the narrative.

Based on this research gap, this research aims to examine how the struggle of class conflict is constructed and represented in the film through Marxist theory.

Research Question

How does the struggle of social conflict in Ruben Östlund's *Triangle of Sadness* (2022)?

Literature Review

Social class conflict refers to structural tensions and struggles between groups occupying different positions within systems of economic and social stratification, mainly caused by inequalities in wealth, power, and access to resources. Such conflict is a natural and unavoidable part of human life. De Genova (2008) states that conflict

occurs in every relationship because individuals do not always agree on decisions or actions. Similarly, Sayuti (2000) explains that conflict is an essential element of social interaction. These social conflicts are often reflected in literary works, as literature represents real social conditions. Without conflict, a story would not develop or progress, nor would it be engaging for the audience. Furthermore, social conflict helps illustrate how inequalities influence a person's way of speaking, attitude, and relationships with others in society, as explained by Coser (1957).

This research applies Marxism theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxism provides a critical framework for analyzing the structure of society and the operation of power within capitalist systems. As explained by Eagleton (2003), Marxism functions as a theoretical approach that seeks to understand how social relations are shaped by economic structures. Joseph (2006) further argues that Marxism is not only a theory of society but also a critical method for examining how inequality and domination are reproduced within social systems. From this perspective, society is organized through economic relations that produce hierarchical divisions between dominant and subordinate groups.

Marx and Engels (1848) stated social class is determined by one's relationship to the means of production. In capitalist society, two major classes emerge: the bourgeoisie, who own and control economic resources, and the proletariat, who must sell their labor power to survive. The bourgeoisie possess capital and decision-making authority, enabling them to control production processes and social institutions. In contrast, the proletariat depend on wages and have limited control over economic resources. This unequal relationship generates structural imbalance in wealth, authority, and life opportunities. Consequently, the interests of these classes are fundamentally opposed. The bourgeoisie seek to maintain control and preserve their dominant position, while the proletariat struggle for better conditions, fair treatment, and social equality. Therefore, class conflict becomes an inevitable outcome of capitalist social structure. Marx and Engels (1848) further emphasize that the history of all societies is fundamentally the history of class struggles. This statement highlights that conflict between social classes is the driving force of historical change and social transformation.

While Marxism explains the structural origins of class division and inequality, sociolinguistics provides tools to analyze how such divisions are reflected and negotiated through language. Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, emphasizing that language use is closely connected to social identity and social structure. Miriam Meyerhoff (2018) stated that, sociolinguistics is a broad field that studies how language varies across different social contexts and communities. It pays attention to differences in how individuals and social groups speak, and it relates these differences to larger social issues and patterns of inequality.

Meyerhoff (2018) highlights that linguistic variation is not random but socially meaningful. The way individuals speak can signal their social background, regional origin, level of education, or group membership. Moreover, people often form judgments about others based on their language use, perceiving certain ways of speaking as more prestigious, intelligent, or trustworthy. These perceptions demonstrate that language is closely linked to social hierarchy and power relations. Thus, language does not merely convey information it also reflects and reinforces social structures.

In the context of social class conflict, language can function as a medium through which power, dominance, and resistance are expressed. Differences in vocabulary choice, tone, interactional style, and conversational strategies may reveal unequal

relationships between speakers. Through sociolinguistic analysis, it becomes possible to identify how social meanings are constructed in dialogue and how class positions are represented through linguistic interaction. The film *Triangle of Sadness* presents interactions between wealthy elites and working-class characters within a luxury cruise setting, highlighting clear divisions in status, authority, and economic power. The narrative portrays tensions that emerge from these inequalities, making it a relevant object for examining how class conflict is both structurally rooted in capitalist relations and linguistically manifested through dialogue and interaction.

By combining Marxism and sociolinguistics, this research examines how class conflict is structurally rooted in inequality and how it is also manifested through language use. Marxism provides the macro-level explanation of class division and power imbalance, while sociolinguistics offers micro-level analytical tools to explore how these divisions appear in conversation and social interaction. Therefore, conflict in this research is understood not only as a structural phenomenon but also as something performed, negotiated, and revealed through language in specific social contexts. Thus, class conflict in this research is conceptualized as both a structural inequality rooted in economic relations and a discursive practice manifested in everyday interaction.

Although class conflict has been widely studied in literature and film, limited research has systematically combined Marxist theory and sociolinguistic analysis to examine how class inequality and conflict are represented through dialogue and interaction in contemporary films. The film *Triangle of Sadness* portrays explicit tensions between wealthy elites and working-class characters. The narrative presents clear representations of class hierarchy, power imbalance, and social struggle, making it a suitable object for analyzing class conflict through both Marxist and sociolinguistic perspectives. This gap highlights the need for an integrated approach to understand both the structural and linguistic manifestations of social class conflict in film narratives.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method. Qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning, interpretation, and social phenomena through non-numerical data such as words, actions, conversations, and visual representations. It seeks to explore and interpret phenomena experienced by research subjects, including their behavior, responses, desires, and experiences, in a comprehensive and holistic manner. The findings are presented descriptively in the form of words and language within a particular context, employing various scientific methods (Corte & Aspers, 2019).

The researcher applied a descriptive qualitative method by explaining words, sentences, statements, dialogues, and events in the film that reflect social conflict. In this research, the researcher employed Marxist theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to analyze how class division, inequality, and power relations are portrayed in the movie.

The main source of data in this research is the film *Triangle of Sadness* directed by Ruben Östlund. The film functions as the central object of analysis, providing material for examining the portrayal of social class conflict. The primary data include selected scenes, dialogues, character interactions, behaviors, settings, and visual representations that indicate class struggle, power imbalance, labor exploitation, and social hierarchy. These aspects are carefully examined to identify how the bourgeoisie and proletariat are represented and how their relationships are constructed within the narrative.

This research applies Marxist theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as the main analytical framework. Marxism is used to examine class division,

economic inequality, and power relations in capitalist society, particularly how class struggle between dominant and subordinate groups is represented in the film. According to Marx and Engels (1848), social class is determined by one's relation to the means of production, which creates conflicting interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

To support the analysis, secondary data are gathered from scholarly books, academic journals, research articles, theses, and prior studies discussing Marxist criticism, social class theory, class conflict, and film analysis. These sources provide conceptual clarification and academic support that strengthen the interpretation and discussion of the research findings.

There were several stages in collecting the data for this research. The first step was watching the film multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, characters, and social issues presented. The second step was identifying indications of class conflict reflected in the characters, dialogues, actions, and visual elements. The third step was listing all forms of class conflict found in the film, particularly those representing social hierarchy, exploitation, domination, and inequality between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat classes.

In analyzing the data, the researcher also followed several procedures. First, all identified forms of class conflict were compiled and classified based on the concepts of social class proposed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The data were then categorized according to key Marxist concepts such as class struggle, ownership of the means of production, labor exploitation, and power relations. Second, each form of class conflict was explained in detail by considering the context of the scenes and dialogues. The researcher interpreted how and why these elements represent class conflict within the framework of Marxist theory.

After selecting relevant scenes and dialogues, the data were coded according to Marx and Engels' theory of social class. Each identified element was categorized based on its representation of bourgeoisie or proletariat positions and their opposing interests. The selection of scenes was guided by specific criteria. First, the scene must demonstrate unequal power relations or economic disparity between characters. Second, the scene must contribute to the depiction of social hierarchy or class division in the narrative. Third, the scene must contain clear visual or verbal indicators that align with Marxist concepts of class struggle and exploitation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the researcher applied reflexivity by acknowledging personal perspectives that might influence the interpretation of the data. The coding process and criteria for selecting scenes were clearly documented to maintain transparency. Furthermore, relevant scholarly sources and academic references were used to support the analysis and strengthen the validity of the interpretation.

Result and Discussion

The film *Triangle of Sadness* is divided into three parts: Yaya & Carl, The Yacht, and The Island. This structural division shows the stages of changing relationships and class dynamics that develop throughout the storyline. Based on this structure, the analysis in this research follows the narrative development of the film to examine how social class conflict is represented through the characters' language practices. The first part becomes the starting point for the representation of class through the context of the fashion industry and the personal relationship between the characters.

Model Audition Scene: Representation of Class through Linguistic Performance

This scene shows social class conflict through the difference in speaking style when presenting two brands, H&M and Balenciaga. Lewis uses different language to describe the character of each brand.

For H&M, he uses friendly and equal language

Data:

"You can too be a part of this happy, smiling group of mixed skin colors, for not that much money! #friendship, #everyonesequal, #happylife, #stopclimatechange."

"Yeah we're just kidding, we're so cheap, we're so happy!"

Words like happy, friendship, and everyone equal create an image of openness, affordability, and closeness to everyone. This represents middle-class values.

In contrast, when presenting Balenciaga, the language becomes firm and distant:

"We are strong and tough and unapproachable!"

"We are stone cold."

"Oh my god, get away from us!"

Words like *happy*, *friendship*, and *everyone equal* create an image of openness, affordability, and closeness to everyone. This language reflects the values often associated with the middle class, where accessibility and inclusivity are emphasized.

In contrast, when presenting Balenciaga, the language becomes firm and distant. Expressions such as *unapproachable* and *stone cold* construct an image of exclusivity and superiority. This linguistic style reflects elite-class values, where distance and exclusiveness function as markers of prestige and higher social status.

The rapid switch between "Balenciaga! H&M! Balenciaga! H&M!" further highlights how class identity can be performed and constructed through language and attitude. Through this contrast, the scene represents social class conflict as a difference in values between the open and accessible middle class and the exclusive elite class.

This scene shows that the way the characters speak not only shows their social status but also reinforces differences in values and access between social classes. Exclusive language creates symbolic boundaries between the elite and the middle class.

This idea is supported by the theory of symbolic power proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that language functions as a social practice that reflects and reproduces power relations in society.

From a broader perspective, this phenomenon also reflects the concept of class ideology proposed by Karl Marx, who explains that class divisions are reproduced through social representations and ideology.

Dinner Bill Scene: Class Conflict in a Romantic Relationship

This scene shows social class conflict in the romantic relationship between Carl and Yaya when the dinner bill arrives. Their conversation shows hidden tension

Data:

Yaya: "I can tell there's something wrong. Just talk to me, what is it?"

Carl: "No, it's just, When you say 'Thank you, honey' like that, you don't really give me an option but to pay."

Carl: "Just an observation. Just something I've noticed."

Yaya: "We can split the bill if you'd like. I can whip out a calculator and."

Carl: "Of course I don't want that."

Yaya: "I think it all evens out, you know."

Carl: "Yeah, okay Mmm."

Carl: "Don't you remember last night? You said you were gonna pay for food today"

The conflict in this scene is not only about money but also highlights differences in social and economic position within Carl and Yaya's relationship. Yaya's words, such as "Thank you, honey," although seemingly ordinary, implicitly create the expectation that Carl should pay. Meanwhile, Carl's hesitant and indecisive responses, like "No, it's just" and "Yeah, okay Mmm," show his discomfort and awareness of the power imbalance in their relationship.

From this scene, I observe that everyday language can reinforce differences in social and economic positions. Yaya's seemingly ordinary words build implicit expectations, while Carl's hesitation reflects the power imbalance. This demonstrates that class conflict can emerge through everyday interactions, not just material conditions. This interaction can be explained through the concept of power relations proposed by John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, who argue that power appears when one individual influences the behavior of another.

This situation also supports the perspective of Karl Marx that economic conditions shape power relations in everyday social life.

Language as a Tool for Constructing Class Hierarchy

This scene takes place on the luxury yacht and clearly shows social class conflict through the speech of Chief Stewardess Paula to the crew before serving the upper-class guests. The language used shows a strong hierarchy between workers and wealthy passengers.

Data:

Chief Stewardess Paula:

"If we can impress them on those two occasions then the cruise will probably be a success. I don't want to hear anybody saying, 'we don't need to cover the sundeck they all leave after breakfast.' No. I want full set-up every morning. No excuses. Not even for the last hour. It's always 'Yes, sir! Yes, ma'am!' If there is an illegal substance they want or a unicorn."

Crew:

"Yes, sir! Yes, ma'am!"

Chief Stewardess Paula:

"Yes! I know, I know what it is to work for service. I know all the challenges you're facing, but at these times, I ask of you to keep that chin up. Stay strong and try to remind yourself that if everything goes well at the end of the cruise."

Sentences like "No excuses" and "full set-up every morning" show one-way commands with no space for negotiation. The phrase "It's always 'Yes, sir! Yes, ma'am!'" emphasizes that the crew must be fully obedient. Even the sentence "If there is an illegal substance they want or a unicorn" shows that all passenger requests must be fulfilled. The crew's collective response, "Yes, sir! Yes, ma'am!", shows total obedience within the luxury service system on the ship.

This interaction demonstrates that language is not just a means of communication, but also a tool to assert social hierarchy. The crew is forced to submit to the passengers, reflecting a clear power imbalance.

This situation can be explained through the concept of legitimate power proposed by John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, which states that authority can emerge from institutional roles within an organization.

This hierarchy also reflects the perspective of Karl Marx, who argues that capitalist systems organize labor in ways that maintain the dominance of the ruling class over workers.

Language, Money, and Social Status

In this scene, the dialogue between Carl and Dimitry shows the relationship between language and social class.

Data:

Carl: "So what do you do?"

Dimitry: "I sell shit."

Carl: "What, sorry?"

Dimitry: "I sell shit! Fertilizer for agriculture."

The statement "I sell shit" creates a shocking effect because it uses a vulgar word in an upper-class social setting. Carl's response ("What, sorry?") shows that the expression does not fit the politeness norms usually used in elite conversations.

However, Dimitry remains confident. He does not lose his authority even though he uses harsh language.

This shows that economic power gives him social legitimacy. In this context, money determines status more than polite language. This scene represents social class conflict through language. Language becomes an indicator of power, those who have economic capital can break linguistic norms without losing their dominant position. This phenomenon reflects the concept of symbolic authority discussed by Pierre Bourdieu, who explains that individuals with strong economic capital often gain symbolic legitimacy in social interaction.

From a broader perspective, this also aligns with the theory of class dominance proposed by Karl Marx, which states that those who control economic resources hold greater power in social relations.

Language as a Tool of Class Coercion

This jacuzzi scene shows how Vera forces Alicia to enter the water, shows social class conflict between a passenger and a crew member.

Data:

Vera: "Just change roles. You relax in the jacuzzi and I'll get the captain. Come on! Just be in the moment, like I was. Please!"

Alicia: "Yea, but"

Vera: "Come, come, I know you want to."

Alicia: "Yes, I do but there might be a problem for me if I."

Vera: "Now I have to be the authority."

Alicia: "I have my clothes on."

Vera: "Shut up, shut up! Now! I command you, enjoy the moment!"

Alicia: "Now?"

Vera: "Please"

Alicia: "No. No?"

Vera: "You say 'no' to me?"

Alicia: "No. No!"

Vera: "So it's 'yes'."

Alicia: "Yes No. Yes or no?"

Alicia: "Sorry, I'm saying. I'm saying. Yes."

Vera's repeated imperatives, such as "Shut up" and "I command you," linguistically assert her authority. The question "You say 'no' to me?" frames refusal as a violation of hierarchical order, reinforcing the expectation of obedience.

In contrast, Alicia's hesitant and fragmented responses reflect her vulnerable position as a crew member. Although she initially resists, sustained verbal pressure eventually leads her to comply. The shift from "No" to "Yes" illustrates how power operates through discourse within unequal class relations.

This scene shows that domination is exercised not through physical force but through language. The repetition of commands limits Alicia's space to refuse, making obedience appear natural and expected. This interaction can be explained through the concept of coercive power proposed by John R. P. French and Bertram Raven, which describes power as the ability to force compliance through pressure or commands.

This situation also reflects the perspective of Karl Marx, who argues that ruling groups maintain dominance not only through economic control but also through systems that normalize obedience.

Language and Class Domination in a Crisis Situation

The dinner scene during the storm shows inequality between wealthy passengers and the ship's crew. Language becomes a tool to maintain class domination even in extreme conditions.

Chief Stewardess Paula:

Data:

"If you are feeling seasick, try to eat something. Try to swallow ma'am, you will feel much better soon. As usual the staff, and in particular the Chief Stewardess, never stop smiling. Not even when the waves get so high that the china and silverware start sliding off the tables. Not even when attacks of vomiting will soon start spreading like an epidemic."

Waiter:

"So, now we are serving some hamburger with french fries for the captain. And for you we have something really special. We have grilled and smoked octopus along with some caramelized lemons, and on top, beautiful garden flowers. Please enjoy."

Paula's statement that the staff must "never stop smiling" reflects institutional discipline. The crew is required to maintain an image of luxury and composure, even when chaos unfolds around them. In this context, professional language becomes a mechanism of control, ensuring that the performance of service continues despite visible disorder.

Similarly, the waiter's elaborate and aesthetic description of the food reinforces exclusivity and refinement. The formal tone sharply contrasts with the passengers' physical collapse, emphasizing the tension between symbolic order and material reality.

The scene of widespread vomiting ultimately exposes the fragility of class superiority. Although the passengers physically lose control, linguistic formality and service etiquette persist, attempting to preserve the illusion of hierarchy.

From this scene, it can be seen that class dominance does not collapse easily, even when material conditions deteriorate. This phenomenon can also be explained through the concept of institutional power in interaction, which suggests that authority within institutional settings shapes communication patterns and expected behavior. Bertram Raven stated that institutional roles often determine how individuals communicate and how power is exercised in hierarchical environments. In the context

of the luxury yacht, service workers are required to maintain politeness and professionalism regardless of the situation, demonstrating how institutional structures regulate linguistic behavior. This also supports Karl Marx's argument that the ruling class sustains its power not only through economic control but also through ideological systems that normalize inequality. In this case, language becomes a subtle but powerful instrument to reproduce class structure, even in moments of visible breakdown.

Class Conflict through Ideological Debate

In this film, the debate scene between Captain Thomas Smith and Dmitry (a Russian oligarch) represents class conflict among the elites themselves. This conflict is not about direct economic struggle, but about ideological and discursive competition through language.

Data:

Dmitry:

"The ship is going under. Mayday. Mayday! The ship is going under. This is an emergency call. The ship is going under. This ship is not going under. The is the new owner of the ship speaking!. And as the communist captain we are now setting course for Cuba. We want to discuss politics with you."

Captain Thomas Smith:

"Stop! I am not a communist. I'm a marxist."

This dialogue shows how language is used as a tool of symbolic domination. Dmitry clearly emphasizes his economic power through his position as the ship owner, showing authority based on capital ownership. He also quotes capitalist figures like Ronald Reagan to strengthen his ideological stance.

On the other hand, the Captain builds his authority through intellectual capital by quoting Mark Twain and asserting his ideological identity. The statement "I'm a marxist" shows that he maintains his symbolic position through discourse, not economic ownership.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this scene presents class conflict as a symbolic struggle between economic capital and intellectual capital. Even in a chaotic situation on the ship, the debate continues, proving that language becomes the main arena for negotiating dominance.

Therefore class conflict in this scene appears in the form of ideological discourse. Language in this scene functions not merely as communication, but as a medium through which intra-elite power is negotiated, identities are asserted, and dominance is symbolically maintained.

This dialogue indicates, it can be seen that the debate between Dmitry and the Captain is not simply a personal argument, but a representation of ideological class struggle. Although both occupy elite positions, they rely on different sources of power to assert dominance. This situation reflects the concept of ideological struggle proposed by Karl Marx, who argues that class conflict also occurs through ideological confrontation between different worldviews.

Through this debate, language becomes a medium for expressing and contesting class-based ideologies.

Social Class Conflict through Control of Resources on the Island

In Triangle of Sadness, particularly in *The Island* section, the class structure that was previously based on wealth collapses and is replaced by power rooted in survival

skills. Abigail, formerly the yacht's toilet manager, becomes the dominant figure because she can make fire, catch fish, and control the food supply.

Her dominance is emphasized through the following interaction

Data:

Abigail: "Who am I?"

Paula: "Who are you?"

Abigail: "Who am I?"

Paula: "You're the toilet manager."

Abigail: "No. On the yacht, toilet manager. Here captain. Who am I?"

Nelson: "You're the captain."

Abigail: (throws Nelson a piece of octopus) "Yes."

Carl: "Captain."

Jarmo: "The captain."

Through the repetition of "Who am I?", Abigail compels verbal recognition of her new authority. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this repetition functions as a mechanism of hierarchical enforcement. The group's responses represent linguistic submission, signaling acceptance of the newly formed class structure.

Abigail's act of throwing a piece of octopus reinforces this authority symbolically. Control over food as a primary resource strengthens her position, demonstrating that power is no longer derived from economic capital but from practical control over survival necessities.

This scene illustrates that class hierarchy is situational and materially determined. As control over the means of survival shifts, so does social power. Language serves to legitimize this transition, while access to resources secures it in practice. The island scenario directly reflects Marx's argument that control over the means of production determines class dominance, when material conditions change, class hierarchy is consequently restructured.

From this scene, it can be understood that authority is not fixed but dependent on material conditions. This transformation of authority can also be interpreted through the sociological perspective of material conditions and power proposed by Karl Marx. Marx argues that social structures and power relations are determined by control over material resources and the means of production. When the economic system collapses on the island, traditional class distinctions lose their relevance, and new hierarchies emerge based on practical control over survival resources. Abigail's rise to power confirms Marx's idea that those who control essential resources will dominate social relations. In this context, language functions to formalize and legitimize the new hierarchy, while material control ensures its stability.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of *Triangle of Sadness* by Ruben Östlund, it can be concluded that social class conflict is clearly represented through dialogues, interactions, and language practices among the characters. The film demonstrates that class differences are not only related to wealth or economic ownership, but are also reflected in speech patterns, commands, responses, and strategies used to maintain social positions.

In the fashion industry setting, class distinction appears through language style and identity performance, which construct middle-class and elite images.

Language operates as a symbol of exclusivity, values, and social status. In the relationship between Carl and Yaya, class tension emerges subtly through the negotiation of payment and word choice, indicating that economic inequality influences power relations even within intimate relationships.

On the luxury yacht, class hierarchy becomes more explicit. The crew are required to use polite, obedient, and professional language as part of institutional discipline within a luxury service system. Even during the storm crisis, formal language is maintained to preserve the image and symbolic superiority of the upper class. This suggests that class dominance functions not only materially, but also symbolically and ideologically.

The island scenario presents a significant shift in power relations. Authority is no longer determined by economic wealth, but by control over essential resources and survival skills. This transformation highlights that class power is situational and depends on who controls the means of survival.

Overall, the film portrays social class conflict as dynamic and context-dependent. Language functions not merely as a medium of communication, but as an instrument for constructing, sustaining, and negotiating social hierarchy. Ultimately, the film exposes the instability of class structures under capitalism, revealing that class power is not absolute, but contingent upon control over material resources and social recognition.

References

- Monaco, J. (2009). *How to read a film* (with diagrams by D. Lindroth). Oxford University Press.
- Marx, Karl, & Frederick Engels. (1848). *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Liu, C. (2020). Analysis of Social Class Inequality Based on the Movie Parasite. 497 (Iclahd), 78–82.
- Nasution, A. U., Nasution, S. N., & Pohan, R. A. R. (2021). *An analysis of social classes and its impact in crazy rich asian* novel by Kevin Kwan. LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research, 2(1), 72-85.
- Wright, Erik Olin (ed.). (2005). *Approaches to Class Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). *What is qualitative in qualitative research*. Qualitative sociology, 42(2), 139-160.
- Weber, M. (2009). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Simon and Schuster.
- Nurafifah, A., Permata, D. A. M., Halimatussa'diyah, H. D., Aulia, F., Lestari, A., & Alazwa, H. V. (2025). *Ketimpangan sosial di Indonesia sebagai tantangan nyata dalam mewujudkan nilai keadilan sosial bagi seluruh rakyat Indonesia berdasarkan sila kelima Pancasila*. Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Akademik, 2(6), 217-226.
- Durante, F., & Fiske, S. T. (2017). *How social-class stereotypes maintain inequality*. Current opinion in psychology, 18, 43-48.
- Anggraini, L., Rullyanti, M., & Pradana, A. (2026). An Analysis of Social Class and Discrimination in All Day and A Night Movie. *Jurnal Penelitian Multidisiplin Bangsa*, 2(8), 1345-1354.
- Prinz, J. J. (2010). When is film art?. *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 254(4), 473-485.
- Kleinhans, C., & Lesage, J. (2014). *Marxism and film criticism: the current situation* (1977). *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, (56).

- Ismail, I., & Mohamad Ramli, Y. (2012). *Karl Marx dan konsep perjuangan kelas sosial (Karl Marx and the concept of social class struggle)*. International Journal of Islamic Thought, 1, 27-33.
- Hamadi, L. (2017). The concept of ideology in Marxist literary criticism. European Scientific Journal, 13(20), 154-167.
- Mills, C., & Gale, T. (2007). Researching social inequalities in education: Towards a Bourdieuan methodology. International journal of qualitative studies in education, 20(4), 433-447.
- Firdaus, S. U. T. (2025). Ketidakadilan Ekonomi dan Alienasi Pekerja: Kritik Terhadap Sistem Ekonomi Kapitalis. *J'CEKI: Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah*, 4(2), 615-623.
- Mutiara, G., Mulyati, S., & Manar, M. (2022). Class Conflict in Parasite Film Using Marxist Criticism. *Akrab Juara: Jurnal Ilmu-ilmu Sosial*, 7(2), 180-194.
- IKKE, N. (2025). *Class Conflicts Seen In Snowpiercer Film Using Marxist Theory* (Doctoral Dissertation, Uin Raden Intan Lampung).
- Meyerhoff, M. (2018). *Introducing sociolinguistics*. Routledge.
- Panggabean, W. (2023). *The Attitudes Towards Social Class Inequality Conflict in the Movie "Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham" by Karan Johar*. *Prologue: Journal on Language and Literature*, 9(1), 36-50.
- Bahar, O. P., & Setiawan, S. (2020). Teacher's Use of Power Bases as Perceived by ELT Students in Tertiary Education. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 3(2), 1426-1434.
- Purwati, O., & Setiawan, S. (2022). Exploring teacher power use and student silence in an EFL classroom: Evidence from Indonesia. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction*, 12(2), 157-165.
- Bauhaqi, A. (2023). *Social conflict as reflected in The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind movie*. Undergraduate thesis, English Literature Study Program, Universitas Fajar. <https://repository.unifa.ac.id/id/eprint/1318/>