**ESSENCE**

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# Critical Discourse Analysis of the Song "I'm a Girl Like You" on Barbie Movies: Princess and the Pauper

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| **Essence**, *Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Linguistics, and Literature Journal,* Vol 2(2),2025 | This study uses Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the song *"I'm Just Like You"* from *Barbie: The Princess and the Pauper*. It analyzes how language in the song reflects social ideologies, constructs identity, and engages with gender and class power relations. Through Van Dijk's model—text, cognition, and social context—the study finds that the lyrics promote emotional equality and shared identity between two female characters of different social classes. Linguistic features such as affixation, lexical choice, and symmetrical dialogue emphasize friendship, self-acceptance, and empowerment, though the critique of systemic inequality remains symbolic. The study concludes that Barbie films socialize young audiences into ideas of femininity and equality within commercially acceptable limits, highlighting the role of media language in shaping perceptions of gender and class.<br><br>***Keywords:*** *Critical Discourse Analysis; Gender; Class; Barbie; Children's Media* |

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## Introduction

A song is a form of artistic expression that has frequently become the subject of analysis due to its significant influence in society. Songs serve various purposes, such as conveying ideas, sharing information, providing entertainment, inspiring, or influencing people's perspectives (Susanti, 2016). Music is commonly regarded as a universal language that surpasses cultural and linguistic boundaries, making it accessible and meaningful to everyone. This emphasizes the essential function of music in human life, serving as a source of happiness, a means of expressing oneself, and an instrument for conveying messages and ideas (De Nora, 2013 as cited in Pratama et al., 2024). In this study, the song *"I Am A Girl Like You"* from the Barbie movie is analyzed as a representation of unity and self-acceptance, with particular attention to its use of affixation. The analysis covers aspects such as language functions, morphological structures, and affixation, along with a review of relevant literature (Mervyn 2025).

While Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to discourse analysis that focuses on how social power abuse and inequality are constructed, maintained, justified, and challenged through language in social and political contexts. As a form of engaged research, CDA scholars deliberately take a stance with the aim of understanding, revealing, and ultimately confronting -0strong political commitment in discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1995 as Wiley, et al., 2015). Therefore we will analyse the Barbie song "I'm Just Like You" using the CDA method.

According to (Pratama, 2024) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method used to explore how language both mirrors and influences ideologies, social systems, and power dynamics in society. It involves an in-depth study of spoken or written texts along with the social context in which they are produced. The goal of CDA is to reveal the underlying power relations present in language and examine how language can either uphold or challenge existing social structures. Additionally, CDA serves as a vital tool for analysing language practices that are connected to issues of power and society.

The importance of this topic is due to Children's media, including the Barbie film, has a very big role in shaping children's mindsets. By analysing how gender roles are represented in songs, we can understand how the media: Challenging or reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes, pushing the message of equality, independence and empowerment for girls. Meanwhile the lyrics in the song are not just entertainment they **construct meaning** through language that can: Empower young audiences, reflect changing societal values about gender and identity, contribute to the **normalization of feminist values** in mainstream media (Pratama, 2024).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a powerful tool for uncovering ideologies and power structures in language, but it has limitations. CDA can be too subjective, with the analyze possibly incorporating their own perception. In children's media, such as the Barbie film, analysis of the text alone without considering children's reception may limit the accuracy of the findings. CDA needs to be implement with awareness of these limitations and supported by other methods.

The song *"I'm a Girl Like You"*, written by Amy Powers for the Barbie movie *Princess and the Pauper*, highlights the themes of friendship and unity between Princess Anneliese and the commoner Erika. Performed by Julie Stevens and Melissa Lyons, who voice the two characters, the song conveys that, despite coming from different social classes, the girls share similar aspirations and inner strength. Reflecting their experience of exchanging roles, the song encourages self-acceptance and challenges societal expectations, offering an inspiring message about individuality and solidarity among girls (Richard, 2022 as Mervyn, et al., 2025). Through its lively tune and uplifting words, the song inspires confidence and connects with listeners by highlighting the power of friendship and common experiences (Mervyn, 2025).

## Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The primary data source is the lyrics of "I'm a Girl Like You" from Barbie: Princess and the Pauper, written by Amy Powers. The lyrics were cross-referenced for accuracy.

The data collection involved transcribing and identifying specific linguistic elements in the lyrics, focusing on morphological features such as affixation. The data were analyzed based on van Dijk's (1995) model, emphasizing the textual structure, cognitive processes, and social context. The analysis interpreted how language constructs ideologies and relates to broader discourses on gender in children's media.

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

This section presents the findings and discussion based on the analysis of the song "I'm a Girl Like You" from *Barbie: The Princess and the Pauper*, using Van Dijk's three-dimensional CDA model. The analysis includes textual, cognitive, and social context perspectives. The data were analyzed descriptively, focusing on affixation and the ideological implications of the lyrics. The findings are aligned with the research questions concerning how gender and class are represented linguistically.

**Table 1. Summary of CDA Analysis Based on Van Dijk's Model**

| CDA Dimension | Aspect | Findings |
|---|---|---|
| Textual | Theme and Structure | Contrast between a princess and a commoner, highlighting shared values and desires. |
| Textual | Lexical Choices | Use of words such as 'maid', 'silver tray', and verbs like 'stitch', 'fetch' to indicate roles. |
| Textual | Dialogue Structure | Symmetrical, alternating lines suggesting equal voice and emotional similarity. |

| Social Cognition | Social Representation | Mental models of both characters show aspiration beyond social roles. |
|---|---|---|
| Social Cognition | Female Identity | Shows independent thinking, breaking traditional gender roles. |
| Social Cognition | Shared Awareness | Repetition of 'I'm just like you' emphasizes commonality despite class difference. |
| Social Context | Social Structure | Class distinctions presented subtly but promoting respect and unity. |
| Social Context | Ideology and Critique | Symbolic resistance to class and gender-based constraints. |

Table 1 illustrates how the lyrics construct female identity and class awareness through contrastive lexical choices, symmetrical dialogue, and recurring affirmations of similarity. The use of symmetrical structures and emotional language supports the notion of unity while masking class distinctions under idealized empowerment.

**Table 2. Selected Affixation Patterns in the Song Lyrics**

| Word | Affix Type | Affix | Root Word | Meaning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| unfamiliar | Prefix | un- | familiar | Expresses negation; not known. |
| snuggled | Suffix | -ed | snuggle | Past tense; comfort action. |
| sleeping | Suffix | -ing | sleep | Ongoing state. |
| strolling | Suffix | -ing | stroll | Leisure activity, upper-class marker. |
| minstrels | Suffix | -s | minstrel | Plural entertainers. |
| wearing | Suffix | -ing | wear | Ongoing action. |
| responsibility | Suffix | -ity | responsible | Abstract noun, obligation. |
| truth | Suffix | -th | true | Abstract moral concept. |
| imagine | Prefix | im- | agine | Mental visualization. |

Table 2 identifies affixation in selected words that support the ideological message. Prefixes and suffixes play both grammatical and thematic roles in reinforcing concepts

of action, value, and class positioning. This aligns with Wibisono et al. (2025), who state that affixes in children's songs often reflect embedded cultural meanings.

These findings resonate with previous studies (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009) which noted how postfeminist media portray equality in emotionally satisfying ways while avoiding direct systemic critique. In this case, empowerment is symbolic, commercially safe, and framed within idealized femininity rather than structural change.

## Discussion

The analysis of "I'm a Girl Like You" from Barbie: Princess and the Pauper reveals that the song, though seemingly created for entertainment, carries deeper social messages related to female identity, gender roles, and class distinction. Through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we can uncover how language is used to reflect and reinforce particular ideologies.

Van Dijk (1995) explains that CDA seeks to uncover how language is used to produce and maintain social inequality and dominance. In the song, Erika and Anneliese represent two social classes: the commoner and the princess. While Erika must work hard to meet her needs, Anneliese enjoys luxury and privilege. Although these contrasts are highlighted in the lyrics, there is no clear rejection of the unequal structure. This aligns with Fairclough's (1992) notion that discourse often reproduces dominant ideologies by presenting social conditions as natural or unproblematic.

The recurring line "I'm just like you, you're just like me" emphasizes a message of emotional similarity and shared identity, which seems to bridge the gap between social classes. As Buckingham (2011) argues, media targeted at children frequently constructs narratives that influence how young audiences perceive identity and relationships. However, the song's message remains personal and emotional rather than political or systemic. The desire for change is framed as a fantasy, not as a form of resistance or demand for equality.

Morphologically, the lyrics show consistent use of affixation, particularly suffixes like -ing, -ed, and -s. These are used to describe ongoing actions (sleeping, wearing), past experiences (snuggled), and plural forms (minstrels). According to Wibisono et al. (2025), affixes in children's songs do more than mark grammatical function—they also embed subtle gendered meanings that reflect traditional expectations. Moreover, abstract nouns such as responsibility and truth express values like honesty and maturity, which reinforce the ideal image of femininity in the narrative.

Even though the song promotes messages of self-expression and equality, it remains within a safe and commercially acceptable frame. The message is empowering, but it does not directly challenge the power structures that sustain social inequality. Lamb and Brown (2006) note that many media products aimed at young girls use empowerment narratives that remain compatible with capitalist ideals, offering feel-good messages without advocating for real change.

In short, this discussion highlights how even a simple song in children's media can carry layered meanings. Through the combination of CDA and morphological analysis, it

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becomes evident that language functions not only to entertain, but also to shape social understanding and normalize certain ideologies, especially regarding gender and class.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the song "I'm a Girl Like You" through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals that language in children's media serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium for conveying social ideologies. The song constructs a narrative of equality, self-acceptance, and shared identity between girls from different social classes. However, this message remains largely symbolic and emotional, rather than offering a direct critique of structural inequality.

Morphological analysis highlights the use of affixation to support thematic elements—such as actions, roles, and abstract values—which subtly reinforce traditional gender expectations. While the song promotes empowerment and unity, it does so within a framework that avoids challenging dominant social and class structures, aligning with critiques of mainstream media's tendency to offer safe, market-friendly empowerment messages.

This study demonstrates how even simple children's songs can carry layered ideological meanings. CDA, combined with linguistic analysis, provides a powerful tool to uncover these meanings, emphasizing the need for critical reflection on the media consumed by young audiences.

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