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Power, dominance and discursive control in O.K. Matsepe's *Megokgo ya Bjoko*: A critical discourse analysis of the character Leilane

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Critical discourse analysis (CDA) offers a valuable lens for examining how literary discourse constructs and legitimises power relations. The article applies CDA to O.K. Matsepe's novel, *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, to show how the character Leilane produces and sustains dominance through language and interaction. Using a qualitative text-based design, the study purposively selects discourse events in which the character, Leilane, engages his wife (Mohlatša), kinship authorities, and the royal institution. Drawing primarily on Fairclough's three-dimensional model, supported by Van Dijk's view of discourse and power, the analysis traces how dominance is enacted through discursive closure (rhetorical questions and minimal responses that foreclose dialogue), legitimation strategies (reframing and blame-shifting that normalise coercion), and strategic narrative control (selective disclosure and misrepresentation when appealing to institutional authorities). The findings show that Leilane's power operates across domestic, communal and institutional spheres and is maintained not only through physical force but also through the management of meaning, accountability and legitimacy.

Contribution: The article contributes to Sesotho sa Leboa literary discourse scholarship by demonstrating how character interaction and institutional talk in the novel function as sites where patriarchy is reproduced and contested through discourse. It also contributes to literary CDA by illustrating dominance as an interactional achievement maintained through closure, legitimation and narrative control.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; language and power; discursive dominance; patriarchy; traditional authority; Sesotho sa Leboa literature; legitimation; narrative control.

Introduction

Power and dominance are central issues in literary studies and sociolinguistics, revealing how language shapes social relations, authority and control. In critical discourse analysis (CDA), power is understood as a social phenomenon constructed, reproduced and contested through language and interaction (Fairclough 1995; Van Dijk 2008). Literary texts offer fertile ground for CDA, as characters' speeches, silences and interactions often reflect broader ideological struggles and social hierarchies. In African literary scholarship, authority, gender and social order often emerge in conflicts between individual agency and communal regulation. O.K. Matsepe's *Megokgo ya Bjoko* offers a culturally and linguistically rich Sesotho sa Leboa narrative in which interpersonal violence escalates into communal and institutional disputes. Although the novel has been discussed for its moral and cultural dimensions (Masipa, Mdhluli & Mphasha 2024; Grobler 1989; Thobakgale 2005), the discursive processes through which authority is enacted in character interactions remain under-analysed. In the novel, the character Leilane serves as a central figure in exploring authority, using speech and behaviour to assert and defend dominance across domestic, communal and institutional contexts. Through rhetorical questioning, interactional closure, blame-shifting, and narrative manipulation, he controls meaning. For example, after he had thrown King Maphuthe into the chasm, Maphuthe survived and asked him why he had done that, '*E lego gona o be o tsenwe ke eng?*' Leilane answered: '*O re ke a tseba na?*' [Anyway, what was wrong with you? Leilane answered: You say I know?] (Matsepe 1968:24). He evades accountability, demonstrating that power is wielded not only physically but also through linguistic practices that silence dissent and undermine communal authority. For example, after the royal kraal had sentenced Leilane to bring three cows, he did not worry about that, '*… sefahlego sa gagwe se edile …*' […his face lit up …]. Furthermore, instead of apologising, he said, '*Beng ba ka, hle, ka boikokobetšo mpheng sebaka sa go ya go di gapa gona bjale lekgotla le sešo la phatlalla*'. [My lords, please, graciously give me a chance to go and gather them now before the council disperses.] (Matsepe 1968:100).

This portrayal of dominance reveals it as a fragile, contested achievement maintained through repetitive discursive strategies. Despite extensive scholarship on Matsepe's themes (Masipa et al. 2024; Grobler 1989; Thobakgale 2005; Mathibe 2011), there remains a gap in applying CDA to his works, particularly in examining individual characters and their use of language to enact power. Prior studies have primarily focused on moral themes or cultural values, overlooking discourse as a mechanism of domination and resistance in Sesotho sa Leboa literature. This article examines Leilane as a discourse actor whose language enacts domination across domestic, kinship, and institutional settings and asks the following research questions:

- How does Leilane use discourse to assert and maintain dominance across contexts?
- Which discursive strategies (closure, legitimation, and narrative control) normalise coercion?
- How does communal and institutional counter-discourse challenge or expose his authority?

The article argues that Leilane's dominance is not a stable personal trait but a fragile, contested achievement sustained through repeated discursive strategies that manage meaning, responsibility and legitimacy. By emphasising discourse as a site of power, the study shows that not merely is dominance in *Megokgo ya Bjoko* exercised through overt authority or violence, but it is continuously produced and contested through language, interpretation, and control of legitimacy. In this way, the analysis contributes to literary CDA and Sesotho sa Leboa scholarship by offering a discourse-oriented perspective on how patriarchy, accountability and resistance are negotiated through character interactions in an African literary text.

Literature review

O.K. Matsepe is widely regarded as one of the most influential novelists in Sesotho sa Leboa literature. Serudu and Grobler (1995) describe Matsepe as a master of Northern Sotho, whose extraordinary creativity and linguistic ingenuity enabled him to construct rich, imaginative literary worlds. They argue that his distinctive stylistic techniques and exceptional command of language enabled him to exploit a wide range of expressive possibilities communicating complex ideas and perspectives effectively. Through these strategies, Matsepe explored profound social and moral issues, including power relations, authority, social conflict, and ethical transgression, which have become defining features of his novels. *Megokgo ya Bjoko* (1968) occupies a significant place within Matsepe's oeuvre for its complex characterisation and sustained interrogation of authority and accountability. Existing scholarship has tended to approach the novel from thematic, ethical or narrative perspectives, focusing on its moral vision and cultural embeddedness. While the studies of Grobler (1989) and Thobakgale (2005) have enriched the understanding of Matsepe's literary oeuvre, they have paid limited attention to how power is enacted at the level of discourse, particularly through the speech, interactional strategies and narrative positioning of individual characters.

Existing studies on Matsepe's works

Several studies have examined Matsepe's novels from diverse perspectives. Seanego (2025), for example, analyses character-naming in *Mahlatse a Madimabe*, demonstrating how biblical intertexts shape thematic development. Masipa et al. (2024) examine the representation of Ubuntu across African literary texts, including Matsepe's work, highlighting its role as a moral framework that guides character behaviour and ethical resolution. These studies foreground the ethical and symbolic dimensions of Matsepe's writing but do not closely engage with discourse as an interactional mechanism of power. From a narratological perspective, Grobler's (1989) analysis of narrative sequence in *Lešitaphiri, Megokgo ya Bjoko,* and *Letšofalela* demonstrates Matsepe's departure from linear chronology through techniques such as analepsis and in medias res narration. Thobakgale's (2005) thesis further examines Matsepe's influence on subsequent writers, focusing on narrative organisation and thematic transmission. While these contributions are significant, they concentrate on structure, influence and moral vision rather than on how power is enacted linguistically in character interaction.

Power and authority in African literary studies

Power relations have long been central to African literary criticism, with texts often read as reflections of social hierarchies, cultural norms and struggles against various forms of domination. Achebe (1975) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) argue that African literary characters often function as social types whose actions symbolise broader ideological tensions in society. Power in these narratives is commonly framed as a negotiation among tradition and change, authority and resistance, and individual agency and communal regulation (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1997). While such readings have been valuable, they often treat power as a thematic or symbolic construct rather than as something enacted through language in interaction. As a result, the discursive mechanisms by which dominance is asserted, resisted or normalised within character exchanges remain under-theorised. This limitation is particularly evident in analyses of patriarchal authority, in which attention is often directed towards outcomes (violence, submission, or punishment) rather than the linguistic and interactional processes that make these outcomes appear legitimate or inevitable. Literary scholars have increasingly recognised that dialogue and narrative discourse are key sites at which power relations are produced and negotiated. Studies by Adegoju (2009) and Aboh (2018) show that African writers strategically use language to encode ideology, authority and resistance in character interactions. Dialogue functions not merely as a vehicle for plot progression but as a contested space where speakers compete for control over meaning, legitimacy and social positioning. This perspective aligns with sociolinguistic and discourse-oriented theories that conceptualise power as relational and interactional rather than static (Fairclough 1995; Van Dijk 2008). From this standpoint, authority is exercised through practices such as turn-taking, rhetorical closure, evaluative framing and

accountability management. These insights provide a strong theoretical basis for examining literary characters not merely as moral agents but as discourse actors whose language performs social work within the narrative.

Research gap

While Matsepe's novels have been extensively analysed for their cultural significance, ethical concerns and narrative complexity, there is a notable lack of detailed discourse-analytic studies examining how characters construct and maintain dominance through language. Most existing research has focused on themes and narrative techniques, neglecting the micro-level discursive strategies involved in negotiating authority, patriarchy and resistance. This study addresses this gap by applying CDA to Leilane's interactions in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, exploring rhetorical closure, legitimation, blame-shifting and narrative control across various contexts. This article offers a discourse-oriented perspective that deepens our understanding of power as a linguistic and social practice in Sesotho sa Leboa literature.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in CDA, a theoretical framework that examines language as a social practice through which power, dominance and ideology are produced, reproduced and contested. Central to CDA is the rejection of language as neutral; instead, it emphasises how linguistic choices sustain or challenge unequal social relations. This perspective is particularly suited to literary analysis, in which characters' speeches, silences and interactional patterns often encode broader systems of authority and social control. The analysis is primarily informed by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse, complemented by Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. Fairclough conceptualises discourse as operating across three interrelated levels: the textual level, which focuses on linguistic features; the discursive-practice level, which examines processes of production, interpretation and interaction; and the social-practice level, which situates discourse within broader social and ideological structures. This model enables tracing connections among micro-level language choices, meso-level interactional dynamics and macro-level power relations. At the textual level, this study analyses features such as lexical choice, modality, rhetorical questioning, turn-taking control, evaluative framing and narrative positioning. These features reveal how Leilane's utterances foreclose dialogue, assert epistemic authority and delegitimise alternative viewpoints. At the level of discursive practice, attention is directed to interactional dynamics, including topic initiation, control over the progression and closure of exchanges, and the discursive allocation of responsibility and blame. At the level of social practice, these patterns are interpreted in relation to broader structures of patriarchy, communal authority and traditional governance depicted in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach strengthens this analysis by highlighting how discourse draws on shared social knowledge and ideological assumptions to legitimise dominance. Power is thus exercised through control of meaning, interpretation and access to authoritative narratives. Within this framework, dominance is understood not as a fixed personal attribute but as a discursive achievement produced through repeated strategies, including discursive closure, legitimation through blame-shifting, and narrative control. Integrating Fairclough's and Van Dijk's approaches provides a nuanced understanding of how patriarchal authority is enacted, sustained and contested through language in the text. Critical discourse analysis foregrounds how language reproduces social inequality and how resistance becomes discursively visible (Fairclough 1995; Lazar 2007; Wodak 2001). Applied to literary dialogue, CDA enables analysis of the micro-mechanisms through which patriarchy and institutional legitimacy are normalised or contested. Despite increasing CDA work in African contexts (e.g. Chiluwa 2021), fine-grained CDA studies of indigenous-language literary dialogue and institutional talk remain limited. However, despite this growing body of work, CDA remains underutilised in studies of Sesotho sa Leboa literature. Where it has been applied, the focus has often been broad, examining ideology or cultural values, rather than fine-grained analyses of character-level discourse. Consequently, there is limited scholarship that systematically traces how individual characters deploy language to assert dominance, silence opposition, or manipulate institutional authority in indigenous African language texts.

Research methods and design

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:12) describe the research methodology as the overarching strategy that guides how a study is conducted, including the methods used for data collection and analysis. Essentially, it serves as a systematic plan for gathering and interpreting information.

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative, text-based research design to examine how power, dominance and authority are discursively constructed through the character of Leilane in O.K. Matsepe's *Megokgo ya Bjoko* (1968). Qualitative textual analysis examines in depth the novel's language use, interactional patterns and narrative positioning. The study is theoretically and methodologically grounded in CDA, which conceptualises discourse as a social practice and foregrounds the relationships among language, power, and ideology (Fairclough 1995; Van Dijk 2008). Rather than treating the novel as a general corpus of data, the analysis focuses on selected discourse events in which power relations are explicitly enacted, contested or legitimised. This design is appropriate for examining how dominance operates across domestic, communal and institutional contexts through character interactions and narrated actions. The primary data for this study consist of excerpts purposively selected from *Megokgo ya Bjoko* (1968), which are relevant to the study (Ahmad & Wilkins 2025:1462). Excerpts were selected for

their relevance to the study's analytical focus on discursive dominance, following purposive sampling principles (Palinkas et al. 2015:534; Patton 2015). The following criteria guided selection:

- Scenes involving direct interaction between Leilane and other characters (particularly his wife, kinship authorities, and representatives of traditional governance)
- Discourse events in which authority is asserted, challenged, or justified through language
- Passages in which violence, blame, or accountability are discursively framed or reframed
- Instances in which institutional or communal authority is invoked, resisted, or manipulated.

The selected excerpts include dialogue, reported speech and narrative description, enabling analysis of both spoken interaction and narrator-mediated discourse. These discourse events are treated as analytically significant sites where power relations are made visible through language.

Translation procedure

All excerpts cited in Sesotho sa Leboa are accompanied by English translations by the author. The translations prioritise preserving pragmatic and discursive meaning, including modality, evaluative force, rhetorical intent, and interactional positioning. When a literal rendering would obscure discourse function, a functional gloss is provided.

Analytical procedure

The data analysis employs a close textual and discourse-analytic approach rooted in CDA, drawing on Fairclough's model and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive perspective. At the textual level, the analysis examines linguistic features such as lexical choice, modality, rhetorical questions and speech acts to reveal how meaning and authority are constructed. The discursive practice level focuses on interaction dynamics, including topic control and patterns of resistance, to illustrate how Leilane navigates interactions. Finally, at the social practice level, discursive patterns are linked to broader ideological structures, including patriarchy and communal authority, thereby connecting micro-level language use to macro-level power relations. This integrated analysis shows how dominance in *Megokgo ya Bjoko* is produced and contested.

Data presentation and analysis

Discursive dominance across domestic, communal and institutional spheres: In O.K. Matsepe's novel *Megokgo ya Bjoko* (1968), the protagonist Leilane exhibits power and dominance through both his actions and strategic language, reflecting broader social struggles. His behaviour encapsulates a pattern of silencing and manipulation, which is effectively analysed through CDA, highlighting how language reinforces power dynamics. Leilane's speech and conduct showcase themes of patriarchal dominance, defiance of authority, and mockery of communal and royal figures, revealing his quest for authority and challenging societal norms.

Discursive closure and patriarchal authority in the domestic sphere: Leilane's dominance is evident in the interactional patterns that place him above other characters, particularly his wife, Mohlatša. In the exchange below, Mohlatša's repeated questions serve as moral interrogation and resistance, while Leilane's brief declaratives and rhetorical questions close the interaction and assert interpretive control.

Extract 1 (Matsepe 1968:10–11):

> Mohlatša: '*Nama ye anthe ke ya eng?*' [What kind of meat is this?]
>
> Leilane: '*Serapolotšwana*'. [Unborn calf.]
>
> Mohlatša: '*Eng?*' [What?]
>
> Leilane: '*Ke ya serapolotšwana sa kgomo yela e bolailwego ke letlema*'. [It is of the unborn calf of the cow that was killed at the ditch.]
>
> Mohlatša: '*Anthe se a jewa?*' [Is this to be eaten?]
>
> Leilane: '*Ga se nama anthe?*' [Is it not meat?]

Mohlatša's disbelief and moral unease are expressed through a sequence of interrogatives (What kind of meat is this? / What? / Is this to be eaten?). These questions challenge both Leilane's authority and his ethical judgement. In contrast, Leilane responds with short declarative statements and a rhetorical question that reframes the issue as self-evident. His utterance *Ga se nama anthe?* [Is it not meat?] reduces a morally charged concern to a closed definitional claim, effectively foreclosing further dialogue.

At the textual level, the rhetorical question trivialises ethical complexity by equating the unborn calf with ordinary meat. The linguistic economy of Leilane's responses contrasts sharply with Mohlatša's extended questioning, signalling asymmetrical epistemic authority. Turn-taking is tightly controlled at the level of discursive practice. Mohlatša's questions aim to prolong the exchange and open moral debate, but Leilane's brevity and rhetorical framing curtail her participation. By shifting the burden of justification away from himself, he frames her objection as irrational and unnecessary, thereby limiting the range of meanings negotiable in the interaction. At the level of social practice, the exchange naturalises patriarchal hierarchy. Male judgement is treated as final, while female moral concern is rendered illegitimate. Leilane's rhetorical closure functions not as engagement but as symbolic control, reinforcing gendered power asymmetries within the marital relationship. By silencing Mohlatša discursively, he establishes interpretive authority that later enables physical coercion, demonstrating the close relationship between linguistic domination and embodied violence.

Legitimation of coercion through reframing and blame-shifting: The narrative escalates from discursive closure to physical violence, but a crucial discursive move precedes the violence: Mohlatša's distress is reframed as an insult to Leilane's status.

Extract 2 (Matsepe 1968:11):

'*Gona fao mosadi a thoma go hlatša … A ka dumela Leilane?*'

[Immediately, the woman started to vomit … Will Leilane agree to that?]

Leilane: '*O hlatšišwa ke eng?*' [What makes you vomit?]

Mohlatša: '*Serapolotšwana seo o se jago*'. [That unborn calf that you are eating.]

Leilane: '*Ka mantšu a mangwe … o re ke ja dibese ee!*'

[So, in other words … you say I eat rubbish or something!]

'*Leilane ga a ka a senya sebaka … O ile a mo itia gore le be le tsharoge …*'

[Leilane did not waste time … he beat her until the stick splintered …]

Mohlatša's vomiting is an embodied articulation of moral disgust and physical distress, signalling her rejection of both the food and the symbolic violation it encodes. At the textual level, however, Leilane refuses to recognise this vulnerability and instead reframes her reaction as a personal insult, interpreting it as an accusation that he consumes rubbish. His utterance '*o re ke ja dibese ee!*' [You say I eat rubbish or something!] recasts Mohlatša's embodied distress as an affront to his dignity, thereby transforming harm into provocation. This discursive manoeuvre reassigns accountability by positioning Leilane as the aggrieved party and Mohlatša as the cause. In line with Fairclough's (1995) conception of power in discourse, dominance is thus established through control over meaning before the application of force. The subsequent beating with a stick is not an impulsive act but the material enforcement of a power relation already legitimised linguistically through an imposed discursive hierarchy. The episode involving the unborn calf further consolidates this silencing dynamic. Mohlatša's horror at finding hooves in the cooking pot marks a clear ethical boundary, yet Leilane responds with a rhetorical question that trivialises her concern and forecloses dialogue.

Such strategies exemplify what Van Dijk (2008) terms the discursive reproduction of dominance, whereby power holders impose their interpretations as unquestionable while marginalising alternative meanings. Leilane's language asserts semantic finality, and his subsequent violence reinforces this dominance at the corporeal level. From an African ethical perspective, his actions likewise constitute a communal breach. Marriage is grounded in collective responsibility rather than private ownership, and violence within it disrupts social harmony; Mbiti (1990) describes such violence as a rupture requiring communal accountability. African moral philosophy further associates masculinity with restraint and protection rather than aggression, measuring ethical masculinity by responsibility towards the vulnerable (Ramose 2002). Leilane's conduct thus signals a failure of cultural, moral and ethical leadership. Mohlatša's fear, physical distress, and attempts at resistance are repeatedly reinterpreted as provocation, a strategy Wodak (1997) identifies as central to the discursive delegitimation of women's voices in abusive contexts. Through this convergence of language and violence, Leilane secures a rigid patriarchal hierarchy in which his authority is naturalised and rendered resistant to challenge.

Communal counter-discourse: Making violence publicly contestable: Leilane's dominance is not uncontested. Morara's intervention publicly reclassifies the violence, removing it from the private sphere and re-situating it within communal governance. Instead of engaging constructively, Leilane suggested taking the matter to the palace, the chief's kraal. To make matters worse, he also beat his father-in-law, Morara, who was trying to reconcile the couple, while Leilane remained stubbornly individualistic. This is evident in the following conversation, when Morara says:

Extract 3 (Matsepe 1968:12):

'*Go ba le mokgonyana yo a swanago le Leilane ke tšhitelo lekgotla … afa ke mo go botse go dula o swaretše ngwana yo mongwe sebolao? … fela aowaowaowaa magagešo – monna yo o swanetše go ntshelologa*'.

[Having a son-in-law like Leilane is a disruption, council … is it good to keep holding a weapon to murder another child? … but no, no, my brothers, this man must be shown the correct ways.]

Morara's quoted utterance constitutes a decisive discursive intervention to restore communal authority and moral order in response to Leilane's persistent violence and defiance. At the textual level, Morara's language is highly evaluative and metaphorical. Describing Leilane as 'a disruption to the council' immediately frames him not merely as a problematic individual but as a threat to collective governance and social harmony. The metaphor of 'holding a weapon to murder another's child' intensifies the moral gravity of Leilane's actions, equating domestic violence with lethal intent and thereby stripping it of any legitimacy or normalisation. Discursively, Morara's speech functions as an act of moral condemnation and communal alignment. His repeated rhetorical question, '*… afa ke mo go botse …?*' [Is it good …?] does not seek an answer but instead exposes the ethical indefensibility of Leilane's behaviour. The invocation of '*magagešo*' [my brothers] is particularly significant, as it constructs an in-group of moral witnesses and positions the community as the rightful arbiter of justice.

The utterance foregrounds a direct challenge to patriarchal abuse by shifting authority from the violent husband back to the community within social practice. Morara explicitly rejects the notion that repeated violence can be excused or resolved privately, emphasising that forgiveness would be possible only if the abuse were isolated, in the first instance. This insistence reflects a broader cultural logic in which marriage is embedded in communal accountability rather than individual autonomy. The call that '*monna yo o swanetše go ntshelologa*' [this man must be shown the correct ways.]

invokes corrective justice rather than revenge, reinforcing the legitimacy of communal intervention. The passage challenges the privatisation of domestic violence, which often shields perpetrators. By bringing the issue before the council, Morara disrupts patriarchal views that treat abuse as an internal family matter. This aligns with Wodak (2001), who argues that resistance exposes how power operates by making violence visible and morally contestable in public spaces. Conceptually, the passage portrays language as a site of power struggle. At the same time, Leilane's discourse normalises violence through blame; Morara counters by reaffirming communal norms and accountability. This clash reveals a fracture in patriarchal authority, as male power comes under moral scrutiny.

Defiance of elder authority and taboo breach: Patriarchy as entitlement: Leilane responds to communal correction not with remorse but with a conditional threat that reframes violence as discipline and displaces responsibility.

Extract 4 (Matsepe 1968:12):

'*Mogogadi o a bolela, eupša ge a se a itokišetša go kgalema ngwana wa gagwe, ke tla mmabiša mmele nako efe le efe*'.

[The father-in-law speaks, but if he is not ready to discipline his child, I will make her body painful at any time.]

Leilane's response to his father-in-law, Morara, constitutes a profound violation of Basotho ba Leboa cultural norms governing the respectful relationship between sons-in-law and fathers-in-law. Traditionally, a son-in-law is expected to show restraint, humility and deference, especially when he has already wronged his wife. Instead of expressing remorse, Leilane speaks aggressively and defiantly, openly threatening further violence. At the textual level, the utterance stands out for its unapologetic tone and conditional threat. Discursively, it casts Morara not as a respected elder but as a failed patriarch who must be held accountable for Leilane's violence. Socially, this constitutes a taboo breach, as publicly challenging and threatening a father-in-law, especially in the presence of the abused daughter, undermines both familial hierarchy and moral order. Rather than acknowledging guilt, Leilane asserts dominance, reinforcing his self-positioning as a man above the moon, immune to shame or correction. The utterance further breaches norms of respect between son-in-law and father-in-law and reveals patriarchy as entitlement: women's bodies become sites of male-to-male governance.

Defiance of communal and royal authority: Refusal of accountability: Leilane extends his defiance beyond the household, rejecting communal judgement and pushing the matter to the royal institution but in a dismissive manner that undermines legitimacy.

Extract 5 (Matsepe 1968:12):

'*Lena ka moka le rego le mpona molato … bokaone di ye mošate*'.

[All of you who say I am guilty … better let them go to the royal place.]

Leilane's defiance extends beyond the domestic sphere to encompass the broader community and royal structures, as evident in his declaration: '*Lena ka moka le rego le mpona molato … bokaone di ye mošate*' [All of you who say I am guilty … better let them go to the royal place] (Matsepe 1968:12). At the textual level, the collective dismissal '*lena ka moka*' [all of you] renders communal voices irrelevant, casting the community as a homogeneous and insignificant mass. His flippant reference to '*mošate*' [the royal place] further strips traditional authority of its moral gravity, reducing it to a procedural inconvenience rather than a site of ethical adjudication. At the level of discursive practice, Leilane's utterance enacts a refusal of communal adjudication while simultaneously positioning him as exempt from ordinary accountability. By neither submitting to elder mediation nor expressing deference to royal authority, he discursively elevates himself above both, asserting a form of sovereign autonomy. Within the Basotho ba Leboa tradition, public disrespect towards the royal house is culturally unthinkable and potentially dangerous. Leilane's language therefore signals not courage but reckless arrogance. His stance does not reject authority outright but manipulates it, anticipating a later capacity to control institutional narratives while evading moral sanction.

At the level of social practice, this episode reveals how traditional authority is instrumentalised rather than recognised as a binding moral order. Leilane's discourse transforms communal and royal structures into arenas to be managed, delayed, or deflected, rather than sites of ethical restraint. This move anticipates and mirrors his domestic conduct, in which linguistic dominance precedes and legitimises physical violence. Taken together, these utterances demonstrate how Leilane's discourse functions as a multifaceted instrument of domination: through collective dismissal, blame-shifting, patriarchal entitlement, and the erosion of communal and royal authority, violence is normalised, accountability is suspended, and abuse is discursively legitimised.

Mockery, moral inversion and strategic narrative control: The following interaction shows how Leilane ridicules institutional authority and frames violent masculinity as a virtue.

Extract 6 (Matsepe 1968:12):

'*Mošate?*' [The royal place?]

'*Na ke mathomo o ekwa felo fao ba rego ke mošate?*'

[Is this the first time you have heard of a place called the royal place?]

'*Na o a lwa monna?*' [Are you fighting, man?]

'*Ga ke ile ntwa ke ila lethabo*'. [I'm not avoiding a fight; I avoid pleasure.]

'*Leilane, afa o a lemoga gore o ikgodišetša molato?*'

[Leilane, do you realise you are worsening your case?]

'*Ka gore ga ke godišetše yo mongwe … o tshwenya ke eng Motlema?*'

[I incriminate nobody but myself … why do you care, Motlema?]

His repeated rhetorical questions, '*mošate?*' [the royal place?] and 'Is this the first time you have heard of a place they call a royal place?' function not as a genuine inquiry but as ridicule. At the textual level, the rhetorical question trivialises the symbolic significance of '*mošate*' [the royal place], a site traditionally associated with justice, accountability, and moral order among the Basotho ba Leboa. Discursively, Leilane's language undermines institutional authority by treating it as ordinary and unworthy of reverence. Leilane performs moral inversion: violence becomes proof of discipline, while pleasure becomes moral weakness. His self-incrimination serves as defiance, individualising responsibility to refuse communal consequence. Later, when Leilane reports to the royal forum, he selectively frames events, omitting his violence while presenting himself as wronged. This is narrative control as power: controlling what counts as truth in institutional space.

Defiance of the royal house – deligitimising kingship through insult and threat: Leilane's anti-authority stance reaches its peak when he attacks the king's legitimacy and threatens violence by invoking external forces. The author explains as follows:

Extract 7 (Matsepe 1968:24):

> '*O ile ge a tloga gae a bolela phatlalatša gore go tloga tšatši leo ga a sa bušwa ke ditlaela tše di ahlolago sepitša … yo a ratago a ka no ya go botša kgošana yeo ya seota gore yena o ile go mo rapela dira tša Nthumule …*'
>
> [When he left home, he said openly that from that day he was no longer ruled by fools who judge with favouritism … and that whoever wished could tell that foolish petty chief that he would invite Nthumule's soldiers …]

Despite his father-in-law's invocation of *ubuntu*, which urges leniency for a first offence, Leilane remains unyielding and insists that the matter be referred to the king. When the king's aides subsequently find him guilty, Leilane escalates his defiance by publicly rebuking them, insulting King Lefehlo as *kgošana yeo ya seota* [foolish petty chief], and issuing threats that invoke coercive power beyond communal governance. At the textual level, this derogatory labelling constitutes direct delegitimation: authority is reduced to stupidity, and justice is reframed as bias rather than moral adjudication. The threat accompanying the insult further displaces authority from communal and customary regulation towards intimidation and force.

At the level of discursive practice, Leilane's stance marks a decisive shift from resisting judgement to attacking the institution itself. Having failed to evade accountability through procedural deferral, he redefines kingship as intellectually and morally bankrupt, thereby recording traditional justice as arbitrary and illegitimate. Rather than positioning himself as a dissenting subject within the system, Leilane discursively situates himself outside it, asserting individual autonomy against all forms of collective regulation. In Basotho ba Leboa culture, where respect for the king is foundational to social harmony, such utterances signify not mere insolence but a radical rejection of normative authority.

At the level of social practice, this utterance destabilises the ideological foundations of traditional governance, in which kingship symbolises moral order, continuity, and communal values. Leilane's discourse thus does more than disrespect authority; it actively attempts to undermine legitimacy through insult and intimidation. Viewed through the lens of CDA, his language reveals a profound tension between individual autonomy and communal ethics. By rejecting royal judgement and denigrating the king, Leilane challenges the symbolic and moral structures that sustain collective life, transforming personal defiance into an ideological assault on tradition itself.

Taken together, the analysed extracts reveal a systematic pattern in which discourse functions as a foundational mechanism for constructing and maintaining patriarchal power. Across interactions, Leilane consistently establishes dominance not initially through physical force but through linguistic strategies such as rhetorical questioning, reframing, ridicule, and semantic closure. These strategies enable him to control interpretation, redefine moral boundaries, and delegitimise opposing voices, particularly those of Mohlatša and the broader community. In line with Fairclough's (1995) conception of discourse and power, this demonstrates that domination is first secured at the level of meaning before it is enacted materially through violence. Furthermore, the progression from discursive control to physical coercion illustrates the interdependence between language and embodied power, with violence emerging as an extension rather than a rupture of discursive dominance.

From a broader socio-cultural perspective, the findings reveal that patriarchal authority is not only exercised but also normalised through everyday communicative practices. Leilane's discourse reflects hegemonic masculinity, positioning male authority as unquestionable and framing female resistance as irrational, disrespectful, or provocative. This aligns with Van Dijk's (2008) notion of the discursive reproduction of dominance, whereby power holders impose their interpretations as natural and suppress alternative meanings. At the same time, the resistance articulated through Morara's intervention highlights counter-discourses within African communal systems, in which authority is ideally regulated through collective accountability rather than individual autonomy. However, Leilane's rejection of both familial and royal authority signals a shift from culturally embedded patriarchy to a more individualised and absolutist form of dominance, thereby destabilising traditional mechanisms of social regulation.

The analysis notably shows that the text goes beyond simply depicting domestic violence; it critically reveals the discursive processes that legitimise, contest, and sustain

such violence. By emphasising the role of language in shaping power dynamics, this study contributes to broader discussions in CDA and African cultural studies. It illustrates how discourse operates as a space for both domination and resistance within gendered social structures.

Findings and discussion

This study analysed selected extracts from Matsepe's *Megokgo ya Bjoko* to demonstrate how Leilane discursively constructs dominance across domestic, communal, and institutional spheres. The findings reveal that power in the novel is treated not as a stable trait but as a discursive achievement produced through repeated interactional strategies that sustain patriarchy and erode communal moral order (Fairclough 1995; Van Dijk 2008).

Across the analysed extracts, Leilane's dominance functions as an interactional achievement sustained through three interconnected strategies:

- Discursive closure: minimal responses and rhetorical questions suppress moral questioning and limit interpretive possibilities (Extract 1).
- Legitimation through reframing and blame-shifting: distress is reframed as disrespect, and violence as corrective action; responsibility is displaced onto others (Extracts 2 and Extract 4).
- Narrative control and institutional manipulation: selective disclosure and strategic self-positioning enable Leilane to mobilise institutions while concealing culpability (Extract 6), culminating in delegitimation and threats against kingship (Extract 7).

Importantly, *Megokgo ya Bjoko* does not portray patriarchy as uncontested. Morara's communal counter-discourse (Extract 3) makes violence publicly contestable and reasserts communal accountability norms. The novel thus stages discourse as a struggle over legitimacy: dominance is produced through control of meaning, yet it is exposed through counter-framing and communal moral witnessing.

Conclusion

This article employed CDA to examine how power and dominance are constructed through Leilane's discourse in O.K. Matsepe's *Megokgo ya Bjoko* (1968), demonstrating that authority in the novel operates through language as much as through physical force. The analysis shows that not merely is Leilane's dominance enacted through acts of violence but it is discursively produced and maintained through strategies of silencing, legitimation, blame-shifting and institutional manipulation. At the domestic level, rhetorical questioning, semantic closure and linguistic brevity delegitimise Mohlatša's moral objections and normalise male judgement as final. These discursive practices create conditions for coercion, revealing language as a prerequisite to violence rather than its after-effect. Across the kinship, communal, and royal spheres, Leilane's discourse consistently manages meaning, accountability, and legitimacy. By closing down dialogue, reframing coercion as a justified response, shifting responsibility onto others, and controlling institutional narratives through selective disclosure and defiance of authority, he attempts to evade moral sanction. The novel thus foregrounds how power is sustained not only through overt acts of domination but also through control over interpretation and moral evaluation. At the same time, *Megokgo ya Bjoko* does not present patriarchal dominance as stable or uncontested. Communal counter-discourse, most notably Morara's public moral condemnation, disrupts Leilane's narrative control by naming violence morally intolerable and reaffirming collective accountability. Resistance becomes visible in the struggle to define violence, responsibility, and authority, underscoring discourse as a contested space rather than a neutral medium. Patriarchy in the novel, therefore, emerges as an unstable formation, continually negotiated through language and social interaction. Future research could extend this analysis by comparing Leilane's discourse strategies with those of other characters in Matsepe's fiction or by examining how institutional talk operates across indigenous African-language novels as a site where legitimacy, authority, and moral order are negotiated. Such comparative work would further illuminate how African literary texts mobilise discourse to interrogate power, challenge social hierarchies, and expose the linguistic foundations of domination.

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Author contributions

Francinah M. Kanyane: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Validation, Visualisation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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